
**In Search of Virtue: Ancestral Inheritance in the Testament of Qahat (4Q542)**

**Abstract:** This article analyses the intersection between the transmission of biblical tradition and the display of exemplarity in the Testament of Qahat (4Q542). How are virtues—i.e. qualities regarded as good and thus desirable—discussed in this Aramaic text found at Qumran? It is argued that the author embeds his priestly perspective in an expansion of biblical narrative and posits seven items of immaterial inheritance as virtues to be pursued and performed, including truth, justice, honesty, perfection, purity, holiness, and priesthood. He highlights the intellectual and moral dimensions of virtuous living, as well as the significance of aspirational attitude and divine-human relations in a good life. 4Q542 invites scholars to read Jewish sources as evidence of ancient Mediterranean virtue discourses. In the context of biblical studies, the writing offers a priestly perspective to the continuing conversation on ethical traditions in Jewish antiquity.

**Keywords:** virtue discourse, virtuous living, ancient ethical traditions, early Judaism, Dead Sea Scrolls, 4Q542, parabiblical literature, Qahat

**Introduction**

What did virtues—qualities perceived as good and thus desirable\(^1\)—mean for Jews who lived in Yehud/Judaea in the late second temple era? What constituted their ‘moral vocabularies’? This

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paper analyses virtue discourse in the Testament of Qahat (4Q542). This fragmentary manuscript, written in Palestinian Aramaic of the Hellenistic-Roman period, is known to us through the Qumran collection and probably originates from the second century BCE, although an earlier date cannot be excluded. Yet there is nothing to suggest an origin in the yahad movement for 4Q542.

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4 According to a carbon-14 test, the Qumran manuscript comes from the 3rd or even the 4th c. BCE, but the sample’s contamination cannot be excluded due to the result of a palaeographical analysis, which suggests a date in the 2nd quarter of the 2nd c. BCE; see G. Bonani et al., ‘Radiocarbon Dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls’, *Atiqot ‘Atiqot* 20 (1991), pp. 27–32; Puech, ‘4QTestament de Qahat’, pp.
which implies that the text may bear broader relevance for our understanding of Judaism in the second temple period. As I hope to show, 4Q542 invites us to consider the topic of virtuous living as well as the literary contexts of ethical reflection in the ancient Jewish tradition.\(^5\)

In what follows, I shall examine how the author of 4Q542 constructs moral models and paths for living by recognising virtues of biblical figures of the past. As the selected source indicates, my article signals a shift away from canonically oriented enterprises, which have largely dominated the analysis of ethical issues in the field of biblical studies.\(^6\) I argue that although scholars have


Specifically, the composition might precede the mid-2\(^{\text{nd}}\) c. BCE due to its possible influence on Jub. 45:15–16, which maintains that the patriarchs’ books were given to Levi for transmission (cf. ALD 13:4; see also Lev. 10:11; Deut. 17:18–19); Milik, ‘4QVisions de ‘Amram’, p. 97.


correctly acknowledged the function of testamentary texts and farewell discourses as ethical directives, as well as the formative aspect of wisdom in second temple Judaism, a priestly perspective should be integrated into the research on Jewish ethics, in order to grasp its breadth and multiple contexts.

Creating Qahat the Exemplary Teacher

Why discuss the Testament of Qahat in the context of ancient virtue discourses? I argue that the instruction attributed to Qahat, despite the scarce and fragmentary evidence, offers a prime source for reflecting on what virtuous living might have meant for some Jews living in late second temple Yehud/Judaea. The association between Qahat and virtue may be surprising, however, since the


Several studies have observed the practice of presenting biblical figures as exemplars. On the early reception of biblical figures, see, e.g., J.J. Collins and G.W.E. Nickelsburg (eds.), Ideal Figures in
Hebrew Bible simply mentions Qahat (Kohath), the second of Levi’s three sons and a brother of Gershon and Merari, in the context of the Levitical family’s lineage, reaching from Levi the patriarch to Aaron the first high priest. By and large, Qahat also remains a marginal character in the Jewish materials from the late second temple period. In the Aramaic Levi Document, however, Levi predicts that his son would attain the high-priesthood (ALD 11:6–7). Biblical genealogies are


confirmed in this text and Jubilees.\textsuperscript{11} The Visions of Amram (4Q543–549) further begins with a reference to ‘the vision of Amram, son of Qahat, son of Levi’ (4Q543 1:1; 4Q545 1 i 1), thus portraying Qahat as a prominent character between two generations.\textsuperscript{12}

The figure of Qahat plays a more eminent role in the text now known as 4Q542. Apart from two small pieces,\textsuperscript{13} one major fragment with remains of two successive columns is preserved. The first column is complete but the second one is damaged so that its right side remains.\textsuperscript{14} In terms of style and content, 4Q542 has been described as an instruction on proper behaviour and people’s eschatological fates.\textsuperscript{15} Qahat is not mentioned in the extant material, but the identity of the first-person speaker is evident due to the references to Amram his son (1 ii 9) and Levi his father (1 ii 11). While the Hebrew Bible presumes that the priestly lineage starts with Aaron, the Aramaic Levi

\textsuperscript{11} See ALD 11:5, 12:2; Jub. 44:14. See also T. Levi 11–12.


\textsuperscript{13} Frag. 2 alludes to darkness and light, while frag. 3 mentions precious stones and fornication.

\textsuperscript{14} On the physical appearance of the manuscript, see Puech, ‘4QTestament de Qahat’, p. 257.

Document and the Testament of Qahat refer to Levi as a priest (ALD 5:8) who passed this role on to his son Qahat (1 i 8; 1 ii 11).  

4Q542 may have formed a trilogy of testaments together with the Aramaic Levi Document and the Visions of Amram. In that case, the text would have filled a lacuna in existing literature by stressing Qahat’s role as a head of the Levite family. While an attribution to biblical figures often seeks to authorise texts, it has been suggested that 4Q542 may witness to the opposite: the attribution perhaps elevated the figure of Qahat by explicating his position in the line from Abraham to Moses and Aaron. This is possible, although Qahat, as Levi’s son and Amram’s father, evidently holds a key position, even if his life and character are not detailed in the Hebrew Bible. Be that as it may, the author of 4Q542 was free to create a new narrative that is at home in his Hellenistic milieu, for the sparse biblical account contains nothing with which to struggle. Qahat was a spotless figure available from the ancestral writings and thus suitable for portraying a model-teacher.

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16 Cf. Jub. 31:11–17 on Isaac as the one who creates the priesthood through his blessing of Levi.


19 The idea that all Judaism in the late second temple era represents Hellenistic Judaism goes back to the work of M. Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period (trans. J. Bowden; 2 vols.; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1974).
Apart from bringing Qahat to the spotlight, my analysis requires further methodological remarks. Why consider Jewish sources in the context of ancient virtue discourses?

**Jewish Sources in(to) the Context of Ancient Mediterranean Virtue**

Ancient virtue discourses—ethical reflections on good characteristics and ideal ways of living—have attracted much scholarly attention. In their explorations of the topic, scholars of philosophy and theology typically begin with Greek philosophical texts, Aristotle in particular, before moving on to Augustine and other (Christian) thinkers of late antiquity and beyond. Ancient Greek and Roman authors posit diverse ideas of virtue, but all of them, from Socrates to Epicureans and the Roman Stoics, present wisdom as the ‘master virtue’, which enables the acquisition of other virtues.

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and happiness. Aristotle famously defines virtue as the mean determined by ‘practical wisdom’ (φρόνησις), also associating it with choice and habituation (esp. *Nicomachean Ethics* II.6, 1107a). Greek and Roman sources have dominated the western scholarly discussions on ancient virtue ethics, but the interest in good qualities and the good life cannot be limited to them. On the contrary, scholars of ethics and psychology emphasise that ideas of virtues and the good life appear in all human cultures. Scholars of religious studies have also highlighted other traditions as sources for the discussion on ethical questions. Even so, two recent volumes of essays on virtue ethics, which address diverse Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian perspectives, ignore Judaism both ancient and modern. Without the inclusion of Jewish sources these studies remain limited, for they may further diversify and thus enhance our understanding of virtue ethics in the human past.

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Meanwhile, the topic of virtue has been marginal in the study of Semitic sources from Jewish antiquity. The situation is changing, however, as is shown by two recent studies that address the theme in the Hebrew Bible. John Barton, in particular, argues that although virtue was not a dominant mode of ethical reflection in ancient Israel, aspects of Israelite thought can be identified as belonging to the sphere of virtue ethics, including an idea of moral training, ethics derived from narrative, rules and values, discussion about the ends of life, and various forms of discipline. Barton’s argument regarding the (relative) relevance of virtue needs testing beyond the Hebrew Bible and, as I hope to show, the Dead Sea Scrolls offer an excellent source for doing this.

Even so, it is justified to ask whether the term ‘virtue’ should be used in the study of ancient Hebrew and Aramaic texts: it is not a native category for them, insofar as these languages do not have a direct equivalent to the Greek term ἀρετή. Taking this challenge into consideration, I suggest that reading a text such as 4Q542 from the viewpoint of virtue ethics is possible, but it requires ‘conceptual translation’; the latter is needed because 4Q542’s conceptual representation does not manifest the kind of theoretical reflection to which we may be accustomed. As such, however, the

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28 Barton, Ethics in Ancient Israel, pp. 157–184.

writing may shake our preconceptions of what virtue is and where it can be found, revealing distinctive aspects of virtuous living in late second temple Yehud/Judaea.\textsuperscript{30}

While analysing the notion of virtuous living in 4Q542, one should avoid the privileging of Greek notions that have controlled academic discussions on ancient ethics.\textsuperscript{31} To clarify, my analysis does not focus on a single concept of virtue (cf. ἀρετή in Greek or virtus in Latin) but on conceptions of virtue, for the lack of a specific term does not indicate the lack of a phenomenon.\textsuperscript{32} In other words, I regard it as part of the scholarly challenge to recognise and map virtue discourses in ancient literary sources that do not employ a single term that would be a direct equivalent to ἀρετή or virtus.\textsuperscript{33}

I consider ‘conceptual translation’—the reading of 4Q542 from the viewpoint of virtue—to be possible in the framework of descriptive/comparative ethics, the observational study of moral

\textsuperscript{30} Cf. F. Cho, ‘Ritual’, in The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics, pp. 86–93 (87), on how the lack of linguistic equivalents to ethics/morality in various religious traditions enables us ‘to enhance our moral investigations by forcing us to accept rough terminological equivalents from other cultures, with the result that new connotations and meanings of morality come into view’.

\textsuperscript{31} See note 21 above.

\textsuperscript{32} On different conceptual representations of human experience, see Mirguet, An Early History of Compassion, p. 88. Regarding other categories that are unlikely to have been distinguished in antiquity, see Schofer, Confronting Vulnerability; F. Mirguet, ‘What is an “Emotion” in the Hebrew Bible? An Experience that Exceeds Most Contemporary Concepts’, BibInt 24 (2016), pp. 442–465.

beliefs and practices among various human cultures.\(^{34}\) In this article, I can only touch upon this vast field of study. Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight a few aspects of the scholarly discussion in descriptive/comparative ethics in order to explicate my understanding of how virtue could be approached in the case of 4Q542 or another ancient Jewish text written in a Semitic language.

The debate in descriptive/comparative ethics does not concern the use of conceptual frameworks in general, but their illuminative power, for ‘[h]ardened conceptual tools may break as much as they dig out, and inappropriate tools may damage the terrain’.\(^{35}\) Thus, I define virtues inclusively and in a culturally non-specific way as good qualities\(^{36}\) that human beings are persuaded and motivated to pursue. As a category of analysis, virtue serves as a ‘thin concept’, a general idea with ‘enough content to be meaningful’, yet remaining ‘open to greater specification in particular cases’.\(^{37}\) The definition is purposefully broad, and while one might argue that such looseness of the definition decreases its usefulness, I argue that terms such as ‘virtue’ can be introduced into the analysis of ancient Hebrew/Aramaic literature only if they are broad enough to let the culture under scrutiny to speak for itself. Without doing so, we run at the risk of reading Semitic texts through Greek lenses and then simply concluding that virtue cannot be found in these texts if their conception of virtue is different from the Greek world.

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\(^{34}\) Topics of such an inquiry include norms, values, and virtues; N. Hämäläinen, *Descriptive Ethics: What does Moral Philosophy Know about Morality?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 1.


\(^{36}\) For this definition, see, e.g., Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, p. 19.

Second, to avoid wooden conceptualisations, scholars of descriptive/comparative ethics stress that modes of expressing ethical concerns should always remain ‘close to the way that the participants actually understood them’ and be situated in relation to the author’s overall worldview.38 That is, the circumstances that conditioned the ideas, beliefs, and practices under scrutiny must be considered.39 Accordingly, I insist that the elements of 4Q542’s virtue discourse must be discovered from the text itself: the fear of importing a foreign category becomes unwarranted when the textual evidence is allowed to speak in its own voice.40 Since ancient societies were neither static nor homogeneous, I do not make claims regarding Jewish virtue discourse as a whole, but only regarding the representation of one author and, to some extent, the yahad movement where 4Q542 was later read.

Finally, while scholars of religious ethics who undertake descriptive/comparative work have debated whether the primary framework of their inquiry is philosophy or history of religions,41 I wish to clarify that my approach results from disciplinary cross-pollination, yet it is firmly rooted in the latter: I try to be sensitive to 4Q542’s background and not just to look at ideas,42 to the extent


that it is possible regarding a text whose exact date and origin are unclear. This is warranted because my reading of 4Q542 ultimately seeks to understand action and practise, i.e. the (idealised representation of the) lived tradition that is mirrored by the text’s ethical discourse.\textsuperscript{43}

**Ancestral Virtue in the Testament of Qahat**

In the so-called testamentary literature, a biblical figure typically offers admonitions to his offspring at his death-bed.\textsuperscript{44} While many scholars have posed critical comments on the use of the term ‘testament’, which remains difficult to define, Henryk Drawnel specifically questions its employment regarding the Qumran texts on Levi, Qahat, and Amram.\textsuperscript{45} As for 4Q542, Drawnel is must consider the context of the author’s other writings and that of the social and intellectual forces that shaped the text.


\textsuperscript{45} H. Drawnel, ‘The Literary Form and Didactic Content of the Admonitions (Testament) of Qahat’, in F. García Martínez et al. (eds.), *From 4QMMT to Resurrection: Mélanges Qumraniens en Hommage à Émile Puech* (STDJ, 61; Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 55–73 (70–73); idem, ‘The Initial
unhappy with the designation because there are several literary forms in the text and no narrative framework for it. He reads the text as priestly lore and as the admonitions of Qahat.46

Leaving aside the debate of whether 4Q542 should be identified as a testament or not, I agree that the remaining text contains ‘testamentary tropes’.47 Like later testaments and farewell discourses, 4Q542 passes on mental capital through an ancestral figure to the offspring. In so doing, the author makes use of the first-person voice, which is a typical feature in the Aramaic scrolls from Qumran.48 The audience involves Qahat’s offspring in general (1 i 4) and Amram in particular (1 ii 9–19). At the outset, Qahat blesses his ‘sons’ so that God would make himself known to them (1 i 1–4; cf. Num. 6:24–26). His descendants are warned against giving up their heritage and against mingling with other people (1 i 4–7, 9): they should hold fast to the cross-generational teaching inherited from the patriarchs (1 i 7–ii 1) and take care of the worthy books received from Levi and Qahat (1 ii 9–13). Qahat stresses the role of both himself and his descendants in the transmission


process: he is the one who commanded (פקד) and instructed (ראה) his offspring, while they kept (食べた) the teaching and carried (-decoration) it on (1 i 11–13; 1 ii 1). 49

Let us have a closer look at lines 1 i 7–10, which refer to exemplary figures of the past:

7 So hold firm to the command of Jacob 8 your ancestor, grasp tightly the judgements of Abraham and the good deeds of Levi and myself, and be holy and pure 9 from all intermingling, holding firm to the truth, walking in honesty/integrity and not with a divided heart, 10 but with a pure heart and with a true and good spirit.

Addressing the significance of emulation, the author urges the audience to keep Jacob’s word, Abraham’s judgements, and Levi’s and Qahat’s righteous deeds (1 i 7–8; cf. 1 ii 11 on Levi). 50 The pictured lineage reaches back to exemplary ancestors and is envisioned to continue in the future, the use of the plural form stressing the communal dimension of ethical life. After reminiscing about the patriarchs and forefathers, the text delineates desirable behaviour as involving holiness, purity, truth, and honesty/integrity; the latter presupposes having a pure, undivided heart and a true, good spirit. In the next lines 1 i 10–13, this immaterial inheritance is further described through a list of virtues that echoes and slightly expands the preceding instruction:

And you will give me among you a good name, and joy 11 to Levi, joy to Jacob, celebration to Isaac, and praise to Abraham, because you have kept and 12 passed on the inheritance that your ancestors left you: truth, justice/righteousness, honesty/integrity, 13 perfection, purity,

49 Drawnel, ‘Literary Form’, p. 66.

holiness, and priesthood, according to everything that I have commanded you and according to everything I have taught you in truth, from this time forth and to all [...].

The observance of Qahat’s teaching means dedication to the inheritance (רראות) left by ancestors, including truth, justice, honesty, perfection, purity, holiness, and priesthood. The concepts of holiness, purity, truth, and honesty appear in both the preceding instruction and this list. Again, the focus is on the ongoing relevance of this inheritance that is to reach future generations.

The technique of listing supports the idea that this passage can be understood as containing virtue discourse, for virtues and vices often appear in lists (e.g., Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2; Mic. 6:8; Prov. 1:1–7; 2 En. 9; 1QS 4:3–6; 4Q298).\(^5^2\) Admittedly, the catalogue form and the consecutive lack of syntax does not reveal whether there is a narrative behind the sequence or not.\(^5^3\) Meanwhile, lists clearly

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\(^5^1\) The language of inheritance is typical of wisdom-related texts; see M.S. Pajunen and M. Marttila, ‘Wisdom, Israel and Other Nations: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible, Deuterocanonical Literature, and the Dead Sea Scrolls’, *JAJ* 4/1 (2013), pp. 2–26; E. Uusimäki, “Happy is the person to whom she has been given”: The Continuum of Wisdom and Torah in 4QSapiential Admonitions B (4Q185) and 4QBeatitudes (4Q525), *RevQ* 26/103 (2014), pp. 345–359.


manifest how languages and communities group and classify things and experiences. They indicate that, for the given culture, some common characteristics are shared by their items.\(^{54}\) As such, their creation presumes collecting, categorising, and presenting data and results in the making of order and spelling out connections that may otherwise remain ‘implicit or invisible’.\(^{55}\) That is, an author has an intention or an idea on the basis of which he or she selects items, orders them, and contextualises them within a specific medium.\(^{56}\) In 4Q542, too, the list form signals that the author meant to gather and group these items of immaterial inheritance. The argument that he regarded them as virtues is supported by the context: the list belongs to an instruction on desirable behaviour.

The recognition of truth, justice, honesty, and perfection as good qualities seems fairly universal, whereas purity, holiness, and priesthood might not be as easily identified as virtues. The fact that something does not fall into our intuitive classification, however, does not mean that the categorisation would not function.\(^{57}\) Rather, considering all the listed items reveals distinctive aspects of 4Q542’s virtue discourse, for it shows how diverse traditions are combined to create

\(^{54}\) Mirguet, *An Early History of Compassion*, p. 68.


\(^{56}\) Doležalová, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

\(^{57}\) Consider how Aristotle’s πάθη contain terms that are easily identifiable as emotions to us (e.g., anger, pity, and fear) as well as ‘less expectable terms’ (e.g., Θάρρος, confidence or courage). Grief, in contrast, is not perceived as an emotion. See D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 15–16, 244–258; Mirguet, *An Early History of Compassion*, p. 68.
something new. The integration of purity, holiness, and priesthood into ethical reflection seems like a novelty in comparison with biblical wisdom materials or lists of virtues.\footnote{58}

When contextualising the evidence of 4Q542, it is helpful to survey the Aramaic materials from Qumran, although we should not assume that they all come from the same hands. Beginning with ‘truth’ (קדש), mentioned in both the earlier instruction and the list, Armin Lange shows that the root קטש has a wide semantic range in Aramaic Jewish Literature. Its most basic meaning is ‘the straightness of a matter’, while as a noun קושט stands for truth, righteousness, and the structure of the history and the universe. The latter sense links truth with wisdom and the idea of an ethical order governing the universe (e.g., 1Q20 6:4, 6; 19:25; 4Q548 1:12); Lange even compares it to the Egyptian idea of Maat.\footnote{59} All things considered, the quality could be read not just as a moral virtue but also as an intellectual one: its connotations are not limited to the sphere of ethics, but may cover logic and/or epistemology.\footnote{60} The question may be about a meta- or primary category covering other

\footnote{58} Cf. Prov. 1:3–4 listing insight, righteousness, justice, equity, shrewdness, knowledge, and foresight; and Mic. 6:8 mentioning justice, love of goodness, and modesty. See also lists of sins in Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2; Prov. 6:16–19. Notably, Jer. 7:9 combines acts breaking the Decalogue with a ritual one (offering to Baal). Purity also appears in the list of virtues in 1QS 4:3–6.


\footnote{60} While there is overlap between moral and epistemic/intellectual virtues, moral virtues typically pertain to ideas of goodness/rightness and directly shed light on the action of agents. Epistemic virtues are intellectual qualities or other epistemic excellences of the knowing agent. See Julia Annas, ‘The Structure of Virtue’, in L. Zagzebski & M. DePaul (eds.), Intellectual Virtue:
related concepts, which could make truth somewhat akin to ἀρετή in Greek.\textsuperscript{61} Truth can indeed appear as a fundamental principle of some sort since Levi teaches his sons to regard truth as the essence of all their acts in the Aramaic Levi Document (ALD 13:2–3; par. 4Q213 1 i).\textsuperscript{62} Another supporting argument is the term’s placement in the beginning of the list, which opens the discussion on good qualities and thus makes truth a lens through which the rest of the desirable qualities are assessed.

The next two virtues are moral in nature, thus pertaining to good or right conduct,\textsuperscript{63} and they seem to concern interpersonal activity. The exact meaning of the term ניצן —‘justice’, ‘righteousness’, or ‘charity’—remains uncertain: 4Q542 refers to the good deeds of Levi and Qahat (1 i 8), but

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\textsuperscript{61} Cf. Proverbs where ‘wisdom’ covers other virtues (e.g., fear of God, knowledge, love, humility, piety, justice, generosity, honesty) that motivate one to pursue wisdom which is not a static state; M.V. Fox, ‘Ethics and Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs’, \textit{HS} 48 (2007), pp. 75–88 (77–82, 86).

\textsuperscript{62} Other Aramaic scrolls connect truth with wisdom (1Q20 19:25; 4Q548 1 i 12) and law (11QtgJob 7A:8). It also pertains to exemplarity: Noah is presented as the manifestation of ‘truth’ (1Q20 6:1–6; cf. 1Q20 19:25 on Abraham). One may also ask what ‘truth’ is not: Noah is said to avoid paths of deceit and violence (1Q20 6:3–5), and the imagery of ways suggests that he exercised moral agency. Similar idiom appears in other Aramaic texts linked with Enoch, Levi, Tobit, and Qahat; D. Machiela, “‘Wisdom Motifs’ in the Compositional Strategy of the Genesis Apocryphon (1Q20) and Other Aramaic Texts from Qumran”, in B.Y. Goldstein et al. (eds.), \textit{Hā-îsh Mōshe: Studies in Scriptural Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature in Honor of Moshe J. Bernstein} (STDJ, 122; Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 223–247 (227, 235–236).

\textsuperscript{63} See, e.g., Annas, ‘The Structure of Virtue’, p. 22.
various connotations remain possible. In the light of Dan. 4:27 and other texts from the second temple era, צדקה probably designates the social virtue of ‘almsgiving’. As for the import of ‘honesty/integrity’ (ישירו), lines 1 i 10–13 specify that it involves walking with a pure heart (cf. Ps. 24:4) instead of a divided one, and one’s spirit should be good and honest. A person’s capacity to exercise moral agency is revealed by the use of the term לֶב. The term רוח, however, may suggest the influence of spirits on human life and decision-making.

64 In other Aramaic texts from Qumran, צדקה is probably mentioned together with truth in 4Q213 1 i 7 (par. ALD 13:3) and 4Q548 1 ii–2:7, but both cases remain fragmentarily.


66 The idea of having a divided heart seems to contrast with honesty/integrity. It suggests that one should avoid unfaithfulness and fraudulence, for the HB speaks of dividing one’s heart between YHWH and Baal or other foreign gods (e.g., 1 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kgs 18:21; Isa. 29:13; Hos. 10:2).

67 The bodily organ denotes the ‘locus of the person’s moral will’; Newsom, ‘Models’, p. 10.

68 The term רוח has multiple meanings such as an animating quality, an internal inclination, or a God-sent external disposition. As for divine spirits that cause action, biblical books typically depict such as external to the autonomous self, while in the scrolls of the yahad spirits are internalised, serve as motivating forces within a person, and overpower his or her autonomy. See C.A. Newsom, ‘Flesh, Spirit, and the Indigenous Psychology of the Hodayot’, in Jeremy Penner et al. (eds.), Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature (STDJ, 98; Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 339–354 (343–346, 350, 353–354). The author’s take on the spirits’ psychological force in 4Q542 remains unclear, but since other Aramaic scrolls are aware of demons that assail humans, the stress on having a good spirit may imply their resistance. See, e.g., 1Q20 20:16–29 on the evil spirit that harms Pharaoh and prevents him from having sexual intercourse with Sarai; H. Lichtenberger,
The first three items of the list may be built on exegetical work: they occur in 1 Kgs 3:6 where Solomon describes David as having walked in ‘truth’ (בדאֶמֶּת), ‘justice’ (בִּצְדָּקָה), and ‘integrity of heart’ (בְּיִשְרַת לֵבָב). Thereafter, the author continues the list with perfection, purity, holiness, and priesthood. The term ‘perfection’ (תָּמִים) appears only here among the Aramaic scrolls, but the motif was crucial for many early Jewish and Christian authors, including the yahad movement where 4Q542 was later read. Texts written in Greek offer further interpretative aid: the pursuit of perfection means doing more than others and going beyond ‘the minimum level of morality laid down in the Torah’. Thus, perfection probably denotes the virtue of exceeding the expected level, which stresses the import of correct attitude as part of virtuous living. In terms of structure, the term


70 For the yahad perfection (תָּמִים) was to be realised in the present, but it also carried eschatological relevance; G.J. Brooke, ‘Some Issues behind the Ethics in the Qumran Scrolls and their Implications for New Testament Ethics’, in J.W. van Henten (ed.), Early Christian Ethics in Interaction with Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts (STAR, 17; Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 83–106 (103).

might close the first part of the list or serve as a link between the first and the second sets of virtue, generally contributing to the aspirational nature of the discourse.

The qualities of purity, holiness, and priesthood seem crucial for the author of 4Q542 since holiness and purity are even mentioned twice. They may sound more ‘religious’ than ‘ethical’, but such a distinction is not valid in the context of Jewish antiquity.72 ‘Purity’ (דכָּו), to begin with, addresses a particular state of being, the absence of impurity.73 The status of purity was necessary for activating holiness (Exod. 22:30) and enabling God’s holiness to stay among Israel (Num. 19:20),74 and its appearance in the list just before holiness draws attention to human-divine interaction in an ideal way of living. 4Q542 may highlight the importance of ritual and/or moral purity.75 Primarily, however, purity seems to be about preserving distinctive identity through endogamous unions, as is suggested by the extant exhortation to remain pure from intermingling (1 i 9; cf. Ezra 9:2).76 This

72 Cf. 1QS 4:3 and Tso, Ethics in the Qumran Community, p. 37. In general, it is contested whether a distinction between moral philosophy and religious ethics can be made; J.P. Reeder, ‘What is a Religious Ethics?’ Journal of Religious Ethics 25/3 (1997), pp. 157–181.


76 Drawnel, ‘Literary Form’, p. 70. The theme of endogamous unions also appears in other Aramaic writings from the late second temple era; see D. Dimant, ‘Tobit and the Qumran Aramaic Texts’, in
aspect of the text highlights an embodied aspect of Jewish ethics, or an intersection between ethics and lived religion. While the concern for purity is intrinsic to the priestly-minded author of 4Q542, it was also fostered by 4Q542’s later audience in the yahad movement. 77

‘Holiness’ (קדש), for one, designates divine energy and force coming from God. In the biblical tradition, God is the only inherently holy being while people can take part in his holiness ‘by extension’. 78 Respectively, violating commandments involves violating the exhortation to be holy as YHWH is holy. 79 By including holiness in his list, the author of 4Q542 signals that virtuous living does not emerge from the reasoning of an autonomous person, but covers engagement with the divine sphere: if holiness is regarded as emanating from God and as something in which humans partake through a relation to the divine, the idea of holiness as a virtue seems to imply a person’s participation in God’s nature. While the first audience of 4Q542 probably consisted of priests, the yahad movement also regarded itself as a ‘most holy dwelling for Aaron’ (1QS 8:8–9).


The final reference to ‘priesthood’ (כהנה) brings the list to its culmination and emphasises the role of priestly lineage in virtuous living. The last item of the list may carry special significance. Does it mean that virtue is not accessible to every human being? The inclusion of priesthood seems to bring about a sense of hierarchy and exclusivity, resisting an egalitarian idea of virtue as something that anyone can pursue under any conditions. Even so, the idea of priestliness was not restricted to a key group in early Judaism. It could be democratised so that it came to apply to all Israel: in the yahad movement, at least, members of non-priestly descent could ‘become priestly through their participation in the “sanctuary of men”’. 80 4Q542 may originate from priestly circles, therefore, but priestly roles could also be filled by the communities where it was later read.

To conclude, the list of seven items begins with truth, a kind of metacategory from which the other virtues flow. Truth is followed by two moral virtues with an interpersonal dimension (justice, honesty), then by perfection highlighting an aspirational attitude, and finally by three items (purity, holiness, priesthood) pointing to religious, practised, and communal dimensions of virtuous living. The total number is probably relevant, for seven symbolises perfection, beginning with the creation account. It seems to imply that the possession of all these virtues creates and sustains an ideal order.

More specifically, the seven qualities might stand for past exemplars including two sets of patriarchs and Aaron. Such a reading of 4Q542 would associate Abraham with truth, Isaac with justice, Jacob with honesty, Levi with perfection, Qahat with purity, and Amram with holiness. Thereafter, the list would culminate with Aaron the symbol of priesthood and, according to the

80 This implies ‘a cultic priority’ in the self-understanding of the movement’s members; Brooke, ‘Issues’, 100. On their ‘priestly orientation’ of the movement, see also M. Tso, ‘The Giving of the Torah at Sinai and the Ethics of the Qumran Community’, in G.J. Brooke et al. (eds.), The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity (TBN, 12; Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 117–127 (125).
Visions of Amram (4Q545 4:18–19), the seventh man; Émile Puech suggests that the mention of the seventh man refers to Aaron, which would imply that the other six men are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Qahat, and Amram. My reading of 4Q542 cannot be proved and must remain hypothetical due to the fragmentary context, but if it was correct, the list of seven ancestors would channel their remembrance through an exhortation to pursue the set of seven good qualities.

Even if the virtues enumerated in 4Q542 stood for biblical figures, the story told by the author both would and would not be about ancestral success: a closer examination of the list reveals that the deeds of each character manifested the reversal of the specific item attached to him, which makes the virtues unexpected. Abraham stands for truth, but he asked Sarah to lie (Gen. 12:11–13), whereas Isaac denotes justice despite his willingness to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:1–19). Jacob’s association with honesty is ironic, given how he cheated his father’s blessing (Gen. 27:1–29) and secretly escaped from Laban (Gen. 31:1–21). Levi’s act of killing Sikem’s males and robbing the city surely does not reflect perfection (Gen. 34:25–29; cf. 49:5–7), while Amram’s marriage to his aunt Jochebed (Exod. 6:20; Num. 26:59)—a deed that breaks the law (Lev. 18:12–13)—questions his holiness. Admittedly, Pentateuch does not indicate a link between Qahat and purity, but 4Q542’s concern for purity and intermingling with foreigners (1 i 5–6, 8–10, 13) may suggest that there were traditions connecting Qahat with a personal experience of (im)purity. Finally, Aaron would represent priesthood despite his shameful act of making the golden calf (Exod. 32:1–6).

To some extent, the evidence of 4Q542, if the above reading is correct, reminds one of Hindy Najman’s reflections on ‘whitewashing’ in early Jewish literature. Najman’s case study on the

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82 I am indebted to James Patrick for sharing his insights with me regarding the idea of reversal as a technique of biblical interpretation in this passage.
reception of Gen. 35:22, which tells that Reuben laid with his father’s concubine, shows how authors could treat embarrassing and awkward biblical stories. Instead of deleting them, narratives could be embellished to recover the reputation of the biblical figure. The author of 4Q542 does not retell stories that call the patriarchs’ virtue into question, yet he might also rework them through a subtle interpretative act: the author could explicate ancestors’ most undesirable deeds and worst vices through reversal, thus claiming that when the biblical story is read carefully, the vice of the figure turns out to be a lesson regarding a particular virtue. This technique, which first seems to remind one of the forefathers’ vices, would eventually cast the lives of ancestors as cases that define virtues to be pursued. As a result, biblical characters would be ‘redeemed’ and the audience would learn to see them in a more favourable light.

On the Virtue Discourse of 4Q542

Why associate 4Q542 with virtue discourses? I hope to have demonstrated that the text attests to an idea of ethical inheritance which results from cumulative traditions. The author reimagines and recreates the biblical past in his own setting. He is concerned with biblical exemplars and reimagines them as ideal figures to be followed. Similarly, many other Aramaic texts from the late

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second temple era cast figures of the past as moral models, including Noah and Abram in the Genesis Apocryphon or Tobit in the book named after him.\textsuperscript{85} The Genesis Apocryphon specifically associates many qualities featuring in 4Q542—truth, justice, priesthood, and purity—with Noah.\textsuperscript{86}

Apart from ancestors, the author of 4Q542 is concerned with good and desirable qualities. These virtues are not presented as qualities of an autonomous, secular, and rational individual, but as parts of an organic whole rooted in ancestral narrative, religious practice, and communal concerns. The idiom of inheritance is worth highlighting as it reveals that the valuable characteristics are considered to move on within a particular lineage.\textsuperscript{87} This emphasises the communal dimension of virtue discourse while imposing further criteria for participating in the transmission of virtue.

Reading 4Q542 from the viewpoint of virtue ethics requires ‘conceptual translation’, but eventually reveals distinctive aspects of how virtuous living was perceived in late second temple

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\textsuperscript{87} As set out by Reed, ‘Textuality’, p. 395, this idiom invokes the didactic tradition’s ‘transgenerational past and horizon’. Good conduct is contextualised over against selected exempla and the question of priestly succession.
Yehud/Judaea. The exhortation to take care of the books transmitted by ancestors (1 ii 12–13) discloses a sense of ‘bookishness’, highlighting the authority and writtenness of the inherited ethical tradition. Yet the overall focus of 4Q542, rich with biblical tropes, is on the ideal way of life in which one’s emulation of past exemplars and dedication to ancestral writings is expected to result. This strategy of invoking the past in order to construct paths for living in the present reminds one of how scholars of cognitive science have stressed the role of imagination in human moral understanding: moral reasoning, in essence, is ‘an imaginative activity’ built on images, metaphors, and narratives instead of universal moral laws.

It would be misleading to state that the author of 4Q542 invents the idea of virtuous living per se. Rather, something in his setting prompted him to spell out the relevance of virtues as they emerge from his own Judaean tradition, as if he wanted to say that this is our form of ethical teaching that has both a long history and a future, so long as mingling is avoided (cf. 1 i 9). His concern for virtues emerges from a particular intellectual context in the Hellenistic East and was possibly strengthened by cross-cultural ideas of the Hellenistic Zeitgeist. The latter is perhaps suggested by

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90 Mirguet, An Early History of Compassion, p. 27, argues that human phenomena never belong to any single tradition alone. To take an example, biblical Hebrew lacks the category of ‘emotion’, but one should not speak about the Hellenistic Jewish ‘invention’ of emotions, for Jewish communities constructed their ‘emotional imaginary’ by drawing on ‘various existing repertoires’.

91 Note that Hellenistic learning centres, which would have enabled the transmission of Greek ideas, were situated along the Mediterranean coast and around Galilee. Important thinkers came especially from Tyre, Sidon, and Gadara; see B.G. Wright III, ‘Ben Sira and Hellenistic Literature in Greek’,
the use of the list form, as lists are a typical feature of Hellenistic textual scholarship, and by the use of the Aramaic language, which, at least in theory, implies a broader access than Hebrew. The outcome underlines the contribution of ‘local’ voices to the learned culture of the Hellenistic era. The intellectual and ethical positions of minorities cannot always be reconstructed, but in the case of ancient Judaism we are fortunate to have materials enabling their analysis. This results in a better understanding of the pluriformity of the ancient Mediterranean milieu.

4Q542 also urges us to consider the place of ethical reflection in second temple Judaism. While literary contexts for ethical statements have typically been identified in didactic and wisdom


92 So, Cohen, ‘False Prophets’, pp. 62–66. Yet, the use of the list is not necessarily a Hellenistic feature, for lists also appear in many other texts and traditions. They are, for example, a common feature of priestly texts. This is notable considering 4Q542’s priestly orientation.


94 On the need to include materials from the ancient Levant in ethical discussions, see Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, p. 2; Newsom, ‘Toward a Genealogy’, pp. 63, 78.
materials of the Semitic tradition or in the philosophical writings composed in Greek,\textsuperscript{95} 4Q542 shifts our attention elsewhere: the author’s interpretative act expounds the gaps in the biblical account can be filled with ethical insights. The text further prompts us to add a priestly perspective to the discussion on virtue: the categories of ritual and ethical seem to overlap in it. Purity and holiness are regarded as desirable qualities that nurture a good order, while the model teacher portrayed in 4Q542 is placed in a chain of cultic personnel.\textsuperscript{96}

4Q542 is rooted in priestly circles, but its content also resonates with Marcus Tso’s observations on ethics in the \textit{yahad} movement. Tso argues that instead of inquiring how its members imagined an ideal way of life on a personal level, it may be better to ask ‘How should I (or we) respond to the presence of the (human or divine) Other?’\textsuperscript{97} While communal and metaphysical concerns permeate already 4Q542 as it is, further connotations to purity and holiness as ethical categories may indeed have been read into the text during its afterlife in the \textit{yahad}. That audience may also have stressed the cosmological dimension 4Q542’s ethics (cf. 1 ii 1–8) in the light of their dualistic thought that encourages people to be of light, but still struggle against the spirits of darkness (esp. 1QS 3–4).\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{95} See note 7 above.

\textsuperscript{96} Priestly thinking does not exclude ethics, but ideas of goodness and right order tend to intertwine in it. ‘Being moral would mean being in alignment with the universe’, as explained by M. Douglas, \textit{Leviticus as Literature} (New York: OUP, 1999), pp. 44–45. Building on Douglas, Barton also argues that impurity signals the violation of the right order; idem, \textit{Ethics in Ancient Israel}, p. 204.

\textsuperscript{97} Tso, \textit{Ethics in the Qumran Community}, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{98} J.I. Kampen, ‘Ethics’, in \textit{Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls}, pp. 1:272–276, highlights purity as an ethical category in the \textit{yahad} and argues that its ethics is supported by deterministic and dualistic beliefs.
Conclusions

For a long time, scholars have looked for the ancient roots of virtue ethics and notions of the good life in Greek philosophical texts. Even two recent volumes of essays, which consider a number of cultures, ignore the evidence of Judaism.⁹⁹ However, if the cultural diversity of ethical traditions in Mediterranean antiquity is considered, the omission of Jewish texts is not justified, given the sort of discourse identified in the Testament of Qahat. This text, for one, attests to early Jewish virtue discourse and provides us with one representative of its Semitic type.¹⁰⁰ 4Q542 offers an aspirational portrait of what virtuous living, perhaps even perfection, denoted in the mind of a Hellenistic Jewish author who was linked with priestly circles and wrote in Aramaic—and, to some extent, what it might have meant for the yahad movement.

The elements of 4Q542’s virtue discourse form a constellation consisting of the idea of inheritance, the invoking of past exemplars, and the exposition of desirable characteristics. By explicating the patriarchs’ role in the transmission of virtue, the author roots his instruction in the biblical narrative, contributing to its legitimacy and especially that of the priestly lineage. The ethical teaching involves a list of virtues—or items of immaterial inheritance—to be activated and performed by the audience: truth, justice, honesty, perfection, purity, holiness, and priesthood. An ideal way of living is emphatically presented as something communal, as the inheritance of Qahat’s offspring, and not

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as a property of an individual. Individual responses are expected from the audience, but they are set in a communal framework with two dimensions: on the horizontal level the community consists of ‘sons’ (the peer group), while on the vertical level the addressees are placed on a lineage that reaches from distant ancestors to future generations.

Practice and lived religion are stressed through references to purity, holiness, and priesthood. This is notable: while scribe-sages are often regarded as the paramount exemplars and teachers of the Jewish tradition in the Hellenistic and early Roman eras, 4Q542 highlights the role of priests as ethical models. The concern for purity signals a wish to nurture the right order, while holiness may suggest that virtuous living involves participation in God’s essence. Legal concerns relate to purity, but the account’s dominant features pertain to narrative and character formation, showing that legal issues are but one aspect of Jewish ethics and that virtue entails doing more than the law prescribes; it motivates one to activate his or her potential in the performance of good qualities.

101 The importance of tradition is acknowledged by some modern ethicists: MacIntyre, for example, explains that one’s search for good takes place ‘within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual’s life is a part’; idem, After Virtue, p. 222.

102 Brooke, ‘Issues’, p. 98, observes that legal interpretation (i.e., not ethics) has been a dominant framework for discussing questions of behaviour in Qumran studies.