

Textualizing Pauline Revelation: Self-Referentiality, Reading Practices, and Pseudepigraphy in Ephesians

Christopher S. Atkins

Yale University; chris.atkins@yale.edu

■ Abstract

This article argues for a new interpretation of Ephesians based on its self-referentiality. Taking as my starting point the standard view that Eph 3:3–4 refers to the preceding portion of Ephesians, I explore how the text works rhetorically. I argue that in Ephesians 3:3–4 the author reflexively authorizes Ephesians as a revelatory text that provides privileged access to “the mystery” and to “Paul” as its mediator figure. Eph 3:3–4 thereby commends its readers to approach the epistle as textualized revelation. I advance this thesis through a contextual examination of Eph 3:2–13 with attention to three sets of *comparanda*. First, the Pesharim and Hodayot provide relevant witnesses to the textualization of revelation in early Judaism. Second, Quintilian’s depiction of ideal reading and the reception of Eph 3:3–4 by Origen and Jerome provide an opportunity to reimagine the epistle in light of ancient readerly landscapes. Third, depictions of inspired individuals endowed with divinely granted “insight” provide a revelatory framework for understanding σύνεσις in Eph 3:4. To conclude, I suggest further avenues of research that the present interpretation of Ephesians might open, including light it sheds on Ephesians’s pseudepigraphy.

■ Keywords

Ephesians, rhetoric, self-referentiality, revelation, reading, pseudepigraphy

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■ Introduction

In Eph 3:3–4, “Paul” writes: “According to a revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I wrote to you above in brief, which by reading you will be able to understand my insight in the mystery of the messiah.”¹ Scholars have focused on determining the written referent in Eph 3:3–4, resulting in widespread agreement that it refers to (a part of) the preceding portion of the epistle itself.² As Margaret MacDonald writes, “The majority of commentators understand the phrase to be a reference back to what the author previously wrote in Ephesians.”³ Nevertheless, such focus on determining the plausible referent has led to a superficial interpretation of these verses and the epistle as a whole. In particular, the significance of “Paul’s” claim in these verses has been neglected—the rhetorical function of the claim in light of its self-referentiality.

In what follows, I offer a new reading of Eph 3:3–4—not of the written referent but of the rhetorical function of the reflexive claim. I take as my starting point the consensus view of *what* the “writing” and “reading” in Eph 3:3–4 refer to in order to explore the neglected question of *how* these references to “writing” and “reading”

¹ Κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνωρίσθη μοι τὸ μυστήριον, καθὼς προέγραψα ἐν ὀλίγῳ, πρὸς ὃ δύνασθε ἀναγινώσκοντες νοῆσαι τὴν σύνεσίν μου ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Translations of Ephesians are my own unless otherwise noted. Although I refer to the author as “Paul,” I follow the view that Ephesians is a pseudepigraphical letter. As Benjamin J. Petroelje (“Constructing Paul, (Dis)Placing Ephesians: The Pauline Book and the Dilemma of Ephesians” [PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2018]), writes and amply attests, “virtually all scholars read Ephesians as the genealogical heir of the *Hauptbriefe*” (62, with extensive bibliography at 61–111). On Ephesians as pseudepigraphical, see esp. C. Leslie Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Its Authorship, Origin and Purpose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951). See also Martin Hüneburg, “Paulus versus Paulus: Der Epheserbrief als Korrektur des Kolosserbriefes,” in *Pseudepigraphie Und Verfasserfiktion in Frühchristlichen Briefen* (ed. Jörg Frey et al.; WUNT 246; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 387–409, who argues that the author of Ephesians supplies a “salvation-historical” framework to correct Colossians. Hüneburg’s argument has led Bart D. Ehrman (*Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013] 182–90) to suggest that Ephesians can be read as a “counterforgery.” Nevertheless, on pseudepigraphy as an interpretive construct rather than forgery, see Hindy Najman and Irene Peirano Garrison, “Pseudepigraphy as an Interpretative Construct,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Fifty Years of the Pseudepigrapha Section at the SBL* (ed. Matthias Henze and Liv Ingeborg Lied; EJL 50; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019) 331–58, with bibliography. For a recent defense of Paul’s authorship of Ephesians, see Lynn H. Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020) 1–25.

² See Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1–3: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3* (AB 34; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974) 329; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990) 175; Ernest Best, *Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) 302; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 428; Timothy Gombis, “Ephesians 3:2–13: Pointless Digression, or Epitome of the Triumph of God in Christ?” *WTJ* 66 (2004) 313–23, at 318–19; Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 97; Steven Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (NLT; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012) 108. See Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Meaning of Ephesians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933) 41–42, who argued that the Pauline collection of letters was in view.

³ Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000) 262.

work rhetorically. Understanding (self-) reflexivity with Dina Stein as “an aspect of any text that comments on itself as a text and as language, or on its own processes of production and reception,”⁴ I argue that the author’s self-referential reference to reading what he has written in order to understand “Paul’s” insight into the mystery is the author’s rhetorical strategy to authorize Ephesians as a revelatory text that provides privileged access to “the mystery” and to “Paul” as its mediator figure. Additionally, “Paul’s” reflexive claim implicitly commends readers to approach the epistle as textualized revelation. In arguing thus, I build on an important insight of Michal Beth Dinkler, who writes, “Such meta-level references . . . to the textuality of texts, proffer models of both narration and interpretation; they ‘constitute the answer of a text to the question “How should we interpret you?”’”⁵ In the case of Ephesians, the author’s rhetorical operation of self-referentiality entails intra-discursive reference to the written work itself and extra-discursive reference to the performative actualization of the epistle in the setting of its reading.⁶ Additionally, in the context of this “autobiographical” portion of Ephesians, the author constructs an epistolary Pauline self and a revelatory Pauline epistle, bidding the reader not only “to identify with the *ego* of the letter,”⁷ but also with the *ego*’s revelation. In this way, “Paul” provides an answer to the question “what manner of thing is the text believed to be?”⁸ within the text itself—indeed, within the two verses upon which, according to Minna Shkul, “the legitimation of [Ephesians’s] innovative Deutero-Pauline ideology rests.”⁹ It is nevertheless worth emphasizing that my focus in the current article is not on determining Ephesians’s “ideological innovation/s” or “theological purpose/s” per se, but rather the means by which Ephesians works rhetorically to authorize its message. While I acknowledge overlap between (its)

⁴ Dina Stein, *Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash, and the Rabbinic Self* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 3.

⁵ Michal Beth Dinkler, “Interpreting Pedagogical Acts: Acts 8.26–40 and Narrative Reflexivity as Pedagogy,” *NTS* 63 (2017) 411–27, at 415, citing Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982) 126. While Dinkler focuses on narrative reflexivity and the pedagogical force of ancient narratives, especially the manner in which scenes “work rhetorically to inculcate particular kinds of hermeneutical skills in their audiences,” her discussion of Acts 8:26–40 serves as a valuable analogue to the epistolary reflexivity of Eph 3:3–4. It is worth noting that Dinkler, “Interpreting Pedagogical Acts,” 416 n. 22, cites Yael Halevi-Wise, *Interactive Fictions: Scenes of Storytelling in the Novel* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), who writes, “Interpolated self-reflexive structures exist in all ages and literary forms,” 4.

⁶ On the double dimension of deixis and self-referentiality in the context of earlier Greek poetics, see Claude Calame, “Deictic Ambiguity and Auto-Referentiality: Some Examples from Greek Poetics,” trans. Jenny Strauss Clay, *Arethusa* 37 (2004) 415–43; Anton Bierl, “Selbstbezüglichkeit und Sprechakt im performativen Kontext,” in *Der Chor in der alten Komödie: Ritual und Performativität* (Munich: Saur, 2001) 37–64.

⁷ Patricia Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 197.

⁸ I borrow the question from Blossom Stefaniw, *Mind, Text, and Commentary: Noetic Exegesis in Origen of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, and Evagrius Ponticus* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010) 59–62.

⁹ Minna Shkul, *Reading Ephesians: Exploring Social Entrepreneurship in the Text* (LNTS 408; London: T&T Clark, 2009) 157.

rhetoric and ideology or theology, I nevertheless must also acknowledge the necessarily delimited scope of the current article.

My argument depends principally on a contextual analysis of the passage itself, with a focus on its rhetorical function. Additionally, I support this reading in three specific ways. First, for the notion of a revelatory text, I contextualize Ephesians with reference to the Pesharim and the Hodayot, two valuable analogues of the textualization of revelation in early Judaism. Second, in providing a contextualized reading of the passage, I draw on two neglected bodies of evidence: the reception of Eph 3:3–4 and early Roman imperial reading practices. Looking briefly at the interpretation of these verses by Origen and Jerome and Quintilian’s depiction of ideal reading, I argue that we can constructively reimagine Eph 3:3–4 as an internal commendation of the active (re-)reading of Ephesians. Third, I look to depictions of figures who mediate divine knowledge as individuals distinguished by divinely granted *σύνεσις*, or “insight,” arguing for a revelatory framework for it in Ephesians’s portrait of “Paul” as a revelatory sage and self-positioning as a revelatory text. To conclude, I consider further avenues of research that the present interpretation of Eph 3:3–4’s rhetorical reflexivity might open, including the light it sheds on Ephesians’s pseudepigraphy.

■ Early Jewish Revelatory Texts from Qumran

We begin by establishing analogues for the textualization of revelation in early Jewish literature. In a recent article, Hanne Von Weissenberg and Elisa Uusimäki explore the concept of “sacred texts” (כתבי הקודש) at Qumran. They argue that the scrolls complicate Catherine Bell’s four-stage process of scriptural emergence (revelation, textualization, canonization, and scriptural interpretation).¹⁰ The authors write: “In ancient Judaism, the process of scripturalization took place in parallel to the textualization of revelation.”¹¹ More recently, Judith Newman has explored the specific ways in which “authority” was negotiated in early Judaism—“not simply in authorial attribution or textual claims but also in readership and communities that receive them.”¹² Newman writes:

Sacral status, and thus authority, inheres in leadership figures in the movement, in particular the Teacher of Righteousness, the presumed founding figure of the movement, and the Maskil, a chief officer, who offers inspired interpretation of earlier scripture in new compositions. The Pesharim, con-

¹⁰ Hanne von Weissenberg and Elisa Uusimäki, “Are There Sacred Texts in Qumran? The Concept of Sacred Text in Light of the Qumran Collection,” in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke* (ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Charlotte Hempel; STDJ 119; Leiden: Brill, 2017) 21–41, at 32–33. See Catherine Bell, “The Ritualization of Text and the Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy,” *History of Religions* 27 (1988) 366–92.

¹¹ Weissenberg and Uusimäki, “Are There Sacred Texts?” 41.

¹² Judith H. Newman, *Before the Bible: The Liturgical Body and the Formation of Scriptures in Early Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 15.

nected to the Teacher, and the Hodayot, connected to the Maskil, contain explicit and implicit interpretations of scripture that in turn become new revelatory sites.¹³

The concept of a revelatory site or text goes hand in hand with the perspective that “the extension of the textual legacy of early Judaism is a traditioning process, enabled by such teachers.”¹⁴ The notion of a “traditioning process”—or, in Hindy Najman’s framework, “*traditionary* processes in which both textual units and concepts of personalities are produced, redacted, and revised”—applies well to Ephesians.¹⁵ Ephesians’s pseudepigraphical character and the specific ways in which it develops Pauline traditions provide evidence of a traditioning or traditionary process that develops in reference to the persona of “Paul,” understood as the authoritative teacher and apostle to the non-Jewish peoples. However, as I argue below, the “Paul” of Ephesians is not simply the teacher and apostle to the non-Jewish peoples; he is also a steward of mysteries and seer of revelations, repackaged into a textualized visionary.

The Pesharim and Hodayot provide excellent examples of revelatory texts. Each functions as a locus of revelation that derives its sacral status from a divinely ordained figure who has privileged access to the divine will and who has been deputized to communicate it to a select group in writing.¹⁶ Given my specific interest in Ephesians, I will provide three brief examples—one from the Pesharim and two from the Hodayot—in order to demonstrate the ways in which these two bodies of writings function as revelatory texts with mediating frameworks. My argument is not that the author or audience of Ephesians knew the Pesharim or Hodayot, but rather that Ephesians bears witness to a similar phenomenon.¹⁷ Notwithstanding their differences from Ephesians, these early Jewish writings are important for my argument because they provide late Second Temple Jewish evidence for the kind of thing that I argue Ephesians reflexively attempts to authorize itself as (textualized revelation).¹⁸ My analysis of these texts thus focuses on the relationship between

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

¹⁵ Hindy Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 45–48 (emphasis mine). It is important to note that there is not one mold of a traditioning or traditionary process that all early Jewish literature fits. As it relates to pseudepigraphy in particular, see Laura Salah Nasrallah, “On History and Love,” in *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), where she writes: “The reasons for the production of what we call pseudonymous or pseudepigraphical texts are multiple” (226).

¹⁶ See Weissenberg and Uusimäki, “Are There Sacred Texts?” 32–33.

¹⁷ For a brief but important analogous treatment of Enochic writings as “revealed literature,” see Annette Yoshiko Reed, “‘Revealed Literature’ in the Second Century BCE: Jubilees, 1 Enoch, Qumran, and the Prehistory of the Biblical Canon,” in *Enoch and Qumran Origins: New Light on a Forgotten Connection* (ed. Gabriele Boccaccini; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 94–98.

¹⁸ The *comparanda* from the Pesharim and Hodayot are further justified on the basis of widespread recognition in scholarship on Ephesians that the letter bears many similarities—both stylistic and conceptual—to certain scrolls from Qumran. This scholarship—although in many ways unsatisfactorily reliant upon the early essays of Karl Georg Kuhn (“The Epistle to the Ephesians in the Light of

textuality and revelation. Also more broadly, however, I foreground Second Temple Jewish analogues on the basis that Ephesians alludes to Jewish scriptures (e.g., Ps 68:18 in Eph 4:8; Gen 2:24 in Eph 5:31) and discloses a distinctively Jewish vantage point by characterizing “gentiles” as a collective non-Jewish “other” in Eph 2:11–13.¹⁹ In other words, my prioritization of Jewish analogues should *not* be interpreted as meaning that non-Jewish Greek or Roman *comparanda* are lacking.²⁰

A. Pesharim as Revelatory Texts: 1QpHab 6:12b–8:3a

Before considering 1QpHab, a word is due about the Pesharim more generally. Robert Williamson’s brief description of peshar is helpful. He writes:

Peshar is a genre of biblical interpretation in which the prophetic passages of the Bible are viewed as mysteries of God concerning history contemporary to the author of the peshar; as such, the biblical text is understood to be prop-

the Qumran Texts,” in *Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls* [ed. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, O.P., and James H. Charlesworth; New York: Crossroad, 1990] 115–31) and Franz Mussner (“Contributions Made by Qumran to the Understanding of the Epistle to the Ephesians,” in *Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 159–79)—provides a strong basis for my own contextualization of Ephesians with reference to 1QpHab and 1QH^a. Beyond Kuhn and Mussner, see Nils Alstrup Dahl, “Ephesians and Qumran,” in *Studies in Ephesians: Introductory Questions, Text- & Edition-Critical Issues, Interpretation of Texts and Themes* (ed. David Hellholm, Vemund Blomkvist, and Tord Fornberg; WUNT 131; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 107–37; Benjamin Wold, “Apocalyptic Thought in the Epistles of Colossians and Ephesians,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition and the Shaping of New Testament Thought* (ed. Benjamin E. Reynolds and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017) 219–32, at 225–32.

¹⁹ On the latter, see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 136; Benjamin H. Dunning, “Strangers and Aliens No Longer: Negotiating Identity and Difference in Ephesians 2,” *HTR* 99 (2007) 1–16, at 10–11; J. Albert Harrill, “Ethnic Fluidities in Ephesians,” *NTS* 60 (2014) 379–402, at 397–98; Matthew Thiessen, “The Construction of Gentiles in the Letter to the Ephesians,” in *The Early Reception of Paul the Second Temple Jew: Text, Narrative and Reception History* (ed. Isaac W. Oliver and Gabriele Boccaccini; LSTS 92; London: Bloomsbury, 2019) 13–25, at 18–20. See also Adi Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Goy: Israel’s Multiple Others and the Birth of the Gentile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 147–48.

²⁰ Constraints of space preclude detailed attention to the numerous examples of revelatory texts in non-Jewish Greek and Roman sources. It is nevertheless worth mentioning one: epic poems, especially Homer’s epics, were (re)configured by some later interpreters as revelatory texts. According to some scholars, by reconceptualizing epic poems as divinely inspired and oracular, later interpreters employed allegoresis as a kind of literary divination. For this line of argument, see esp. Peter T. Struck, “Divination and Literary Criticism?” in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination* (ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck; Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 155; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 147–65, at 148–49; idem, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 77–110 and 162–203. See also Andrew Ford, *Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) 75. Homeric verses were also used for a variety of ritual purposes; for discussion, see Derek Collins, “The Magic of Homeric Verses,” *CP* 103 (2008) 211–36. The various constructions and uses of epics as revelatory texts nevertheless differ from Ephesians, given that Ephesians internally depicts itself as a revelatory text.

erly interpreted only by one specially endowed by God to unravel (פשר) its meaning.²¹

The conception so integral to the Pesharim that revelation is mediated via interpretation is captured nicely by the phrase “revelatory exegesis.”²² In this framework, the skilled interpreter is a mediator, and in 1QpHab, the mediator par excellence is the Teacher of Righteousness. Thus, the first pesher in our section reads:²³

LEMMA (Hab 2:1–2): Upon my watch I will stand and station myself upon my tower, and I will look to see what he will say to me and what [I will answer con]cerning my reproof. And the Lord answered me [and said: “Write down the vision and make it clear] upon the tablets in order that the one reading it will run.”

PESHER: And God told Habakkuk to write down the things that are to come upon the present generation, but the period to come he did not make known to him.

LEMMA (Hab 2:2d): in order that the one reading it will run.

PESHER: Its interpretation concerns the Teacher of Righteousness to whom God had made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants, the prophets (פשוו על מורה הצדק אשר הודיעו אל את כול רזי דברי עבדיו הנבאים).²⁴

In the first lemma and pesher, the pesherist positions the prophet Habakkuk as an unknowing oracular messenger—one who writes a message for a later generation to read. This initial pesher thus provides the grounds for the distinction between the ancient oracle with its unknowing messenger and the future pesher with its knowing mediator. This knowing mediator—the Teacher—is the privileged one who has insight into that which was concealed from former generations. However, 1QpHab is not simply a declaration that there is a person, the Teacher of Righteousness, who has insight into the mysteries of the words of the prophets;

²¹ Robert Williamson Jr., “Pesher: A Cognitive Model of the Genre,” *DSD* 17 (2010) 307–31, at 327. Nevertheless, it is important that Williamson’s use of “the Bible” and “the biblical text” is not construed to indicate textual singularity at Qumran or in the late Second Temple period more generally. On the pluriformity of “scriptures” at Qumran, see Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Developmental Composition of the Bible* (VTSup 169; Leiden: Brill, 2015). Additionally, for an important treatment of ways ancient Jewish scribes conceptualized written revelation—their “native theories” of (sacred) literature—see Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). For other helpful approaches to (defining) pesher, see Shani Berrin, “Qumran Pesharim,” in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran* (ed. Matthias Henze; Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 110–33; Maurya P. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books* (CBQMS 8; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1979) 229–59.

²² Alex P. Jassen, *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism* (STDJ 68; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 343–62.

²³ For purposes of visualization, I provide the lemma and pesher in consecutive block quotes.

²⁴ 1QpHab 6:12b–7:5, translation modified from Timothy H. Lim, *The Earliest Commentary on the Prophecy of Habakkuk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 93–94.

rather, it is depicted as the very performance and locus of revelation.²⁵ The things that were concealed from the prophets and thus from former generations are now being revealed in the written interpretations themselves—the Pesharim.²⁶ In this way, 1QpHab functions as a revelatory text with the Teacher of Righteousness as its mediator figure. The nature of the Pesharim as sites of *interpretive* revelation makes the comparison of them with Ephesians inexact. Whereas the Pesharim stake their claim to be revelatory texts on their “revelatory exegesis” of other written documents, the author of Ephesians internally construes his own text as revelatory without explicit reference to other written documents.²⁷ As I suggest below, this is arguably central to Ephesians’s strategy of pseudepigraphy. These differences notwithstanding—my claim is not sameness but similarity—IQpHab provides an important example of a revelatory text with a mediator figure. A similar case can be made for certain hymns in the Hodayot.

B. Hodayot as Revelatory Texts: 1QH^a 10:5–21 and 12:6–30²⁸

Although I have no intention of entering the debates regarding either the division of the Hodayot into “Teacher Hymns” and “Community Hymns” or the implied persona of the hymns,²⁹ I nevertheless maintain that the “I” of these two particular hymns occupies a distinctive role in the group as a mediator figure.³⁰ Thus, in the

²⁵ See Martti Nissinen, “Oracles at Qumran? Traces of Inspired Speakers in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Crossing Imaginary Boundaries: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Context of Second Temple Judaism* (ed. Mike S. Pajunen and Hanna Tervanotko; Helsinki: Finish Exegetical Society, 2015) 165–81. Nissinen writes: “Prophecy appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls first and foremost as inspired interpretation of sacred texts, that is, as a scribal enterprise” (165). See also Eva Mroczek, “Moses, David and Scribal Revelation: Preservation and Renewal in Second Temple Jewish Textual Traditions,” in *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; TBN 12; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 91–115.

²⁶ As Timothy H. Lim writes, the Pesharim were “understood as the authoritative expression[s] of divine intention” (*The Formation of the Jewish Canon* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013] 139).

²⁷ Those who interpret Eph 3:3–4 as referring to (an)other Pauline letter(s) and who thus locate the “mystery” outside of Ephesians (see, e.g., Goodspeed, *Meaning of Ephesians*, 41–42), may find merit in the Pesharim as *comparanda* for different reasons. For someone who interprets Eph 3:3–4 in this way, perhaps just as the Pesharim are construed as the revelatory key that unlocks the meaning of the prophets, so also this individual might interpret Ephesians as the revelatory key for the previously written letters that (according to this interpretation) are in view in Eph 3:3–4—or, if not the revelatory key, perhaps a revelation that supplements them. Nevertheless, this is not my argument, since I interpret Eph 3:3–4 as reflexive.

²⁸ The Hebrew base text is from Eileen M. Schuller and Carol A. Newsom, *The Hodayot (Thanksgiving Psalms): A Study Edition of 1QH^a* (EJL 36; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2012).

²⁹ See Christopher S. Atkins, “The Persona of the Teacher: A Qualified Endorsement of the Teacher Hymn Hypothesis,” in *Emerging Sectarianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Continuity, Separation, and Conflict* (ed. John J. Collins and Ananda Geyser-Fouché; STDJ 141; Leiden: Brill, 2022) 342–61.

³⁰ On the history of scholarship, see Michael Johnson, “Reassessing the Genres of the Hodayot: Thanksgiving Psalms from Qumran” (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2019) 1–71. For a critique of the designation “Community Hymns,” see Carol A. Newsom, “A Farewell to the Hodayot of the Community,” *DSD* 28 (2021) 1–19. Newsom now retains the designation “hodayot of the Teacher” but calls for further research into them (5 n. 22), updating her previous position in eadem, *The*

former (10:5–21), after beginning with the standard formula, “I thank you Lord,”³¹ the speaker describes the manner in which God has appointed him as both an “object of reproach” for outsiders and “a foundation of truth” for insiders. Important for us is his specific self-description. He declares: “You have made me a banner for the elect of righteousness and a mediator of knowledge in wonderful mysteries (מליץ דעת ברזי פלא) in order to test [persons of] truth and to prove those who love instruction.” Using phraseology reminiscent of the language applied to the Teacher of Righteousness in the Pesharim (especially “wonderful mysteries” and “a mediator of knowledge”),³² the speaker positions himself as a divinely ordained and uniquely privileged authority figure who not only has access to the divine will and plan but also the ability and commissioning to communicate them to the elect through hymns. Similar to 10:5–21, in the latter *hodayah* (12:6–30), the opening lines provide the key theme (God’s enlightening of the speaker) and the hymn’s grounding relationship (God and the speaker).³³ The hymnist begins, “I thank you Lord, for you have illumined my face for your covenant.”³⁴ The divine illumination depicted in 1QH^a 12:6–7 is not simply for those “in the covenant,” as can be seen more clearly when one recognizes that divine illumination forms an *inclusio* in 1QH^a 12:6–30. In 12:6–7, God illumines the speaker’s face for the covenant, but in 12:28, God illumines the face of the covenantal people *through* the speaker, thus marking the speaker as a mediator in the divine-human drama. Further, similar to the manner in which 1QpHab is not simply a declaration that there is a figure who has insight into the mysteries of the words of the prophets but is also the performance and textualized locus of revelation, 1QH^a 10:5–21 and 12:6–30 implicitly present themselves as loci of ongoing prophetic revelation and unique access into the mysteries of God via God’s divinely appointed mediator.³⁵ With these early Jewish revelatory texts in mind, we turn to Ephesians.

Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran (STDJ 52; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 287–300. See Angela Kim Harkins, *Reading with an “I” to the Heavens: Looking at the Qumran Hodayot through the Lens of Visionary Traditions* (Ekstasis 3; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012) 8–24; Johnson, “Reassessing the Genres,” 275–83. For a valuable recent discussion of scholarship on the Teacher of Righteousness, see Travis B. Williams, *History and Memory in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) 3–19.

³¹ Much of lines 5–8 is reconstructed from 4QpapH^f frg. 3 1–5.

³² 4Q171 (4QpPs^a) 1–10 i 27 interprets Ps 37:7’s “one who makes his way prosperous” as מליץ דעת.

³³ On knowledge or truth as a/the key topos, see Trine B. Hasselbalch, *Meaning and Context in the Thanksgiving Hymns: Linguistic and Rhetorical Perspectives on a Collection of Prayers from Qumran* (EJL 42; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015) 199–202; Sarah Jean Tanzer, “The Sages at Qumran: Wisdom in the ‘Hodayot’” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1986) 115.

³⁴ 1QH^a 12:6.

³⁵ See esp. Jassen, *Mediating the Divine*, 366–71; Martti Nissinen, “Transmitting Divine Mysteries: The Prophetic Role of Wisdom Teachers in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Scripture in Transition: Essays on the Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo* (ed. Anssi Voitila and Jutta Jokiranta; JSJSup 126; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 519–40, at 531.

■ Ephesians as a Revelatory Text

As with most commentators, I understand Eph 3:2–13 as a type of “autobiographical” digression.³⁶ Apart from the prescript in 1:1, this unit is the only place in the letter in which the author uses the name “Paul.” The section can be subdivided into two subsections—3:2–7 and 3:8–13—both of which contain parallel (but not identical) explanations of the formerly hidden but newly revealed mystery.

In 3:2–7, the author describes the mystery that was made known to “Paul” according to a revelation, adding, “as I wrote to you above in brief, which by reading you will be able to understand my insight in the mystery of the messiah.”³⁷ He then states that the mystery was concealed from humanity in former generations, but that it has “now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit.”³⁸ He thereafter identifies the content of the mystery as the fact that the non-Jewish peoples are “fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partners in the promise.” In 3:7, he concludes by stating that “Paul” has become a “servant of the good news according to the gift of God’s grace that was given to me,” thus echoing 3:2 and forming a mini-*inclusio*, which frames 3:2–7 with reference to his divinely endowed ministry.

By contrast, in 3:8–13, the author describes the mystery as that which was “hidden from the ages in the God who created all things.” Instead of it “now [being revealed] to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit,” he describes the purpose of “Paul’s” commissioning as “[to preach] the inexhaustible wealth of God to the gentiles and [to bring to light] what is the administration of the mystery in order to make known the multifaceted wisdom of God through the *ekklēsia* to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies.”³⁹

Taken as a whole, 3:2–13 concerns “Paul’s” ministry and, more particularly, his mediation of the mystery that has been hidden for all time.⁴⁰ The author thus asserts

³⁶ On this section as a digression, see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 171; Talbert, *Ephesians*, 95; Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2013) 81–83. See Aaron Sherwood, “Paul’s Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*: A Discourse Analysis of Ephesians 3:1–13,” *BBR* 22 (2012) 97–112.

³⁷ Although the relationship between Ephesians and Colossians is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that Eph 3:3–4’s reference to “Paul’s” writing and the audience’s reading is absent from the widely recognized parallel passage in Colossians (Col 1:25–27). On the relationship between the two letters, see earlier discussions in Mitton, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 279–315; Ernest Best, “Who Used Whom? The Relationship of Ephesians and Colossians,” *NTS* 43 (1997) 72–96.

³⁸ For an argument that the author of Ephesians reverses the order of the commissioning of “Paul” and “the apostles and prophets” as found in Acts in order to give priority to Paul in the formation of the *ekklēsia*, see Gregory E. Sterling, “From Apostle to the Gentiles to Apostle to the Church: Images of Paul at the End of the First Century,” *ZNW* 98 (2008) 74–98, at 87–88.

³⁹ Eph 3:8–10.

⁴⁰ On the use of “mystery” (μυστήριον) in Ephesians, see esp. T. J. Lang, *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness: From Paul to the Second Century* (BZNW 219; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015) 85–106. As Lang writes, “In Ephesians we find the most detailed uses of μυστήριον in the Pauline corpus” (85). Μυστήριον is formally similar in Ephesians and Colossians: in both, it is consistently singular and articular. Nevertheless, whereas in Colossians the mystery is

that “Paul’s” ministry is divinely ordained, part of the pre-cosmic plan of God that has been recently unveiled. This assertion echoes key elements of the preceding portions of Ephesians.⁴¹ For instance, the notion of a pre-cosmic plot features prominently in the letter’s opening blessing (1:3–14). There, “Paul” emphasizes God’s providence by locating “our” election “in him [Χριστῷ] before the foundation of the world” (1:4), using the language of “foreordaining” (προορίζω). He likewise uses a cluster of phrases to describe the providential nature of God’s plan that has been recently unveiled (“according to the good pleasure of his will” in 1:5, and “according to the counsel of his will” in 1:11). By elevating the emphasis on divine providence—itself essential in the Hodayot and the Pesharim—the author locates the unveiling of “the mystery of [God’s] will” (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ in 1:9) on a pre-cosmic timetable and thereby prepares the readers for his construal of “Paul’s” ministry in 3:2–13. He construes “Paul” as playing a significant role in the unveiling of the mystery—that is, as a mediator figure, “to whom grace has been given *for you*.”⁴² The final prepositional phrase, εἰς ὑμᾶς, reveals that “Paul’s” revelatory commissioning and administration of the mystery is *for the addressees*, whomever they may be.⁴³ It is against this background that we consider the function of 3:3–4.

When the author adds the modifying clause, “as I wrote to you above in brief, which by reading you will be able to understand my insight in the mystery of the messiah,” he implicitly explains the prepositional phrase εἰς ὑμᾶς in 3:2. That is, in 3:3–4, the author identifies the preceding portion of Ephesians itself as “Paul’s” communication to “you,” the implied reader, of his privileged insight into the mystery, thereby constructing it as a distinct locus of revelation—a revelatory text that grants the implied reader access to the divine will and plan. Whereas the author’s construal of “Paul” in 3:2–13 is part of the construction and elevation of “Paul” as a mediator figure, Eph 3:3–4 constitutes the author’s interpretation of

identified as the messiah (Col 1:25–27; 2:2; 4:3), in Ephesians the mystery more comprehensively entails the plan of God to reconcile all things in heaven and earth in the messiah through the (geographically undefined) *ekklēsia*, which is comprised of Jews and non-Jewish peoples alike. In Eph 1:9 the scope of the mystery is cosmic, as it is connected explicitly to the “recapitulation of all things in the messiah, being in heaven and things on earth;” in 3:3–7 it is explicitly identified with the non-Jewish peoples being “fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partners in the promise in messiah Jesus through the gospel;” and in 5:32 it is identified as the unity of the messiah and the *ekklēsia*.

⁴¹ The passage is also more basically connected to what precedes, as noted by Franz Mussner, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (ÖTK 10; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1982) 98.

⁴² On the positioning of “Paul” in Eph 3, see Shkul, *Reading Ephesians*, 142–72; Petroelje, “Constructing Paul,” 227–41. See also Yii-Jan Lin, “Junia: An Apostle before Paul,” *JBL* 139 (2020) 191–209, on Paul’s rhetorical self-positioning in the undisputed letters as the “last apostle,” the one who performs “the eschatological role of fulfilling the Christian mission as apostle to the gentiles” (206, also 205–8).

⁴³ See also Eph 1:17–18, in which “Paul” reports that he prays for the addressees, in order that God might give them “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the recognition of him (πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως ἐν ἐπιγνώσει αὐτοῦ), enlightening the eyes of [your] heart.”

the epistle itself, which is part of his rhetorical operation of crafting the epistle as a revelatory text.⁴⁴

By way of contrast, Gerhard Sellin argues that if the “reading” refers to the reading of the epistle, it is “superfluous” (*überflüssig*).⁴⁵ He thus concludes that it does not refer to Ephesians. While I agree with the consensus view that Eph 3:3 refers to the preceding portion of Ephesians and thus disagree with Sellin’s conclusion,⁴⁶ Sellin brings to light a point that those who hold the consensus view have passed over.⁴⁷ If the “reading” of 3:4 refers to Ephesians itself and thus self-referentially draws attention to the text’s own textuality, then the statement does in fact appear superfluous. Yet the fact that a statement is superfluous by no means precludes the possibility that it is rhetorically emphatic. The apparent superfluity of the reference betrays the fact that the author is doing something rhetorically significant: by reflexively referring to the epistle, the author is construing the text as more than a mere epistle. He is interpreting the epistle for them and commending it to them as a textualized locus of revelation.⁴⁸ In other words, while I agree with those who adhere to the consensus interpretation that Eph 3:3–4 does not entail “a reference to other epistles,” but rather a reference to the preceding portion of the epistle itself, I do not agree that, in the words of Stephen Fowl—here representing the consensus—“it is *simply* pointing back to his exposition of the mystery of God’s drama of salvation relative to the Ephesian Gentiles in the previous two chapters.”⁴⁹ Rather, the superfluous reference to reading is highly significant: it is part of the author’s construction of the epistle itself, his attempt to authorize the epistle—a rhetorical operation that is arguably central to the author’s pseudigraphy.

Focusing on Ephesians’s rhetorical reflexivity and the relationship between text and reader, I am primarily interested in the implied reader as a feature of the text.⁵⁰ As classically articulated by Wolfgang Iser, “There are two basic, interrelated aspects to this concept [of the implied reader]: the reader’s role as a textual structure, and the reader’s role as a structured act.”⁵¹ In our case, Ephesians pre-structures an

⁴⁴ See Michael Gese, *Der Epheserbrief* (Die Botschaft des Neuen Testaments; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2013) 74.

⁴⁵ Gerhard Sellin, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (KEK 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008) 252.

⁴⁶ See n. 2 above for a list of scholars who hold to the standard interpretation that Eph 3:3 refers to the preceding portion of Ephesians.

⁴⁷ Yet, see Goodspeed, *Meaning of Ephesians*, who, similar to Sellin, asks: “If he is simply referring to chapters 1 and 2, which the readers must have just read, to reach this point in the epistle, why must they be told to read them again?” (42).

⁴⁸ See 4 Ezra 14:22–48, in which Ezra receives divine inspiration to *write* what has been revealed to him.

⁴⁹ Fowl, *Ephesians*, 107 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁰ Nevertheless, given that literary-rhetorical and historical approaches need not compete with but rather valuably complement one another, my overall argument is multi-perspectival; although I primarily attend to Ephesians’s rhetorical reflexivity vis-à-vis implied readers, below I also consider some of the plausible social dynamics involved in the public reading of Ephesians in an *ekklēsia*.

⁵¹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns

idealized persona of its implied reader as one who is an active (re-)reader. Just as importantly, however, by means of its self-referentiality, Ephesians also rhetorically constructs a particular textual profile of *itself* as a container and even vehicle of Pauline revelation—a construction that works to guide the manner in which the implied reader (re-)reads Ephesians as revelatory. In other words, Ephesians’s construction of the addressee as an active reader and its reflexive construal of itself as a revelatory text function to constitute the implied reader qua “textual structure” and “(pre-) structured act.”

Ephesians’s reflexive self-positioning as a revelatory text commends a certain reading approach and hermeneutical disposition to the implied reader. Understanding reading as “not simply the cognitive processing by the individual of the technology of writing, but rather *the negotiated construction of meaning within a particular sociocultural context*,”⁵² we may here witness the beginning processes or antecedents of the formation of a reading community—that is, “a social mechanism that validates and valorizes particular practices concerning texts and their interpretation.”⁵³ The value ascribed to reading derives in large part from a particular reading community that “validates itself through texts deemed important to a shared sense of culture and cultural attainment.”⁵⁴ In Eph 3:3–4 the author construes “Paul” as validating Ephesians, not simply as a text important for a shared sense of community and identity but as a deposit of revelation. Further, given that Eph 1–3 is widely recognized as a kind of anamnesis, “a reminder of the readers’ calling,” which paves the way for the paraenesis of Eph 4–6, “an exhortation to live in a manner appropriate to that distinctive calling,”⁵⁵ Eph 3:3–4 is strategically located. Centrally placed, Eph 3:3–4 functions to secure the ideological framework (Eph 1–3) as grounded in divine revelation before moving on to the ensuing exhortation (Eph 4–6).

Just over a century ago, Brooke Foss Westcott wrote that “Paul’s” use of ἀναγνώσκοντες in Eph 3:4 “implies that the letter was circulated and copied and

Hopkins University Press, 1978) 35; see, more broadly, idem, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). For different applications of the notion of implied readership in New Testament studies more broadly, see Michal Beth Dinkler, *Literary Theory and the New Testament* (AYBRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019) 28–31.

⁵² William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 12 (emphasis in the original).

⁵³ John S. Kloppenborg, “Literate Media in Early Christ Groups: The Creation of a Christian Book Culture,” *J ECS* 22 (2014) 21–59, at 40.

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture*, 12.

⁵⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xxxvi. Alternatively, see Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Commentary: Ephesians* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), who divides the letter into two “main sections”—chs. 1–2 (the “messianic symbolic universe of G*d and Jesus Messiah”) and 4–6 (the “ethos and ethics of the *ekklēsia*”). Schüssler Fiorenza then construes ch. 3 as a “narrative telling” or a “connective chapter,” the purpose of which is “to make the ‘speaker’—the apostle Paul—present and audible” (lxxiv, lxxxii).

studied by individual Christians.”⁵⁶ I am yet to find anyone who has been persuaded by Westcott’s position, and perhaps rightly so; it is an assertion without supporting evidence. Nevertheless, none can deny that soon Ephesians became sacred for many, and what Westcott describes did happen, albeit in reading communities. While this does not legitimize Westcott’s specific argument, both the early reception of Ephesians and reading practices in the early Roman Empire should cause us to question whether Westcott was that far off. On the former, consider, for example, Jerome, who comments on Eph 3:3–4: “Truly if one will contemplate (*contempletur*) the preceding words of this epistle one will see mysteries revealed (*videbit ei revelata mysteria*).” He goes on to commend his readers to “pore very carefully over what [Paul] has written.”⁵⁷ Likewise, Origen comments, “In the few words which precede these it is truly possible for the one who has read carefully (*ἐπιμελῶς*) to discover the revelation of the holy mystery which has been made known (*ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνωρισμένην μυστηρίου ἁγίου*) to Paul.”⁵⁸ On the latter, consider the ideal reading practice Quintilian advocates:

Let us go over the text again and work on it. We chew our food and almost liquefy it before we swallow, so as to digest it more easily; similarly, let our reading be made available for memory and imitation, not in an undigested form, but, as it were, softened and reduced to pap by frequent repetition. . . . We must do more than examine everything bit by bit; once read, the book must invariably be taken up again from the beginning.⁵⁹

Jerome and Origen interpreted Eph 3:3–4 the way they did not simply because of the internal cues of the text of Ephesians but also within the framework of their own wider understandings of contemplative reading. Further, Quintilian’s coherent reading strategy is *explicitly* developed and theorized, unlike Ephesians. Without retrojecting Jerome’s or Origen’s interpretations or transposing Quintilian’s ideal reading practices onto the initial writing and readings of Ephesians, we can nevertheless reimagine Eph 3:3–4 in light of the ancient readerly landscapes they

⁵⁶ Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians: The Greek Text with Notes and Addenda* (London: Macmillan, 1906) 45.

⁵⁷ Jerome, *Comm. Eph.* 3.1–4, in *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (trans. Ronald E. Heine; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 143. On Jerome’s broader interpretation of Ephesians, see Andrew Cain, *Jerome’s Commentaries on the Pauline Epistles and the Architecture of Exegetical Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) 37–43.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 142. The Greek text is from J. A. F. Gregg, “The Commentary of Origen upon the Epistle to the Ephesians: Part II,” *JTS* 11 (1902) 398–420, at 408, with modified orthography for *ἐγνωρισμένην μυστηρίου*.

⁵⁹ Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.19–20 (Repetamus autem et tractemus et, ut cibos mansos ac prope liquefactos demittimus quo facilius digerantur, ita lectio non cruda sed multa iteratione mollita et velut confecta memoriae imitationique tradatur . . . per partes modo scrutanda omnia, sed perfectus liber utique ex integro resumendus). The Latin text of Quintilian is from M. Winterbottom, *Institutionis oratoriae libri duodecim* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), the translation from Donald A. Russell, *The Orator’s Education*, vol. 4: *Books 9–10* (LCL 127; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) 261–63.

reveal.⁶⁰ In this light, “Paul’s” reference to reading and writing in 3:3–4 provides a glimpse into the dynamics of authorization in the form of a reflexive commendation of a reading strategy and hermeneutical disposition. By proactively encoding a reading practice within the epistle itself and commending this practice to implied readers, Ephesians provides an early example of a trend in the late first and early second century in which “[Paul] was progressively converted into someone whose activities are intrinsically connected to high literate culture.”⁶¹ Through its operation of self-referentiality, Ephesians looks ahead to the act of reading itself—the setting in which the performance of “Paul’s” compositional operation would be actualized.

The fact that Ephesians—the epistle without an apparent occasion and perhaps without a specific destination⁶²—resists contextualization both chronologically and geographically should caution us against precluding the possibility of a *modified* version of Westcott’s account. John Kloppenborg has amply demonstrated that “literacy and literate culture were valorized” by select second-century groups, and, on the basis of early Christian papyri, that there was an “effort to produce texts that might be accessible to a sub-elite lector, created by scribes of rather middling scribal accomplishment.”⁶³ Such figures likely fit within the category of what Guglielmo Cavallo has described as “a public of new readers” in the Greco-Roman world that included “a mid-range public that even included some members of the lower classes.”⁶⁴ In this context, Ephesians’s reference to reading in 3:4, understood as part of the author’s rhetorical operation of self-referentiality, which entails intra-discursive reference to the written work itself and extra-discursive reference to the performative actualization of the epistle in the setting of its reading, constitutes an embedded performative prompt to read and carefully interpret the epistle as Pauline revelation.⁶⁵ In this way, Ephesians participates in what David Brakke has termed

⁶⁰ Peering beyond Ephesians, there is evidence as early as the early 2nd cent. that a collection of Paul’s letters merited careful reading. Thus, whereas the author of 2 Peter famously describes Paul’s letters as containing things “difficult to understand,” which “the unschooled (ἀμαθεῖς) and unstable twist to their own destruction” (3:15–16), in Polycarp’s Letter to the Philippians, the author instructs his readers that they will be edified if they “look closely” (ἐγκύπτω) at Paul’s letters (3:2).

⁶¹ Kloppenborg, “Literate Media,” 34.

⁶² Ernest Best, “Recipients and Title of the Letter to the Ephesians: Why and When the Designation ‘Ephesians’?” *ANRW* 25.4 (1987) 3247–79.

⁶³ Kloppenborg, “Literate Media,” 59. He writes: “While the elite bookroll no doubt continued to reign in elite forms of sociability, epitomizing the social world of elite reading communities, these Christian scribes and lectors also created sub-elite textual communities, in which their books could be recited and discussed.” On the social history of early Christian scribes and scribal culture, see the *status quaestionis* essay of Kim Haines-Eitzen, “The Social History of Early Christian Scribes,” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the “Status Quaestionis”* (ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes; NTTSD 42; Leiden: Brill, 2013) 479–95.

⁶⁴ Guglielmo Cavallo, “Between *Volumen* and Codex: Reading in the Roman World,” in *A History of Reading in the West* (ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier; Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999) 64–89, at 69. See Larry W. Hurtado, “Oral Fixation and New Testament Studies? ‘Orality,’ ‘Performance’ and Reading Texts in Early Christianity,” *NTS* 60 (2014) 321–40, at 334.

⁶⁵ See also Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (trans. Helen Heron; Edinburgh:

“scriptural practices.”⁶⁶ Ephesians is one example of the “creativity and diversity of the ways in which early Christians used”—and, I add, *produced*—“texts to shape themselves and their communities.”⁶⁷ In particular, Brakke posits three sets of institutional contexts for these practices: study and contemplation; revelation and continued inspiration; communal worship and edification. These three contexts are internally diverse and by no means mutually exclusive. Based on the foregoing analysis of Eph 3, I argue that Ephesians engages in the second, and I suggest that it implicitly encourages a version of the first and third. If the revelatory insight of Ephesians is meted out in its interpretation in a communal gathering, which is likely, then this would point to an “institutional context” of group edification, study, and contemplation.⁶⁸

The author’s self-authorization of Ephesians in Eph 3:3–4 can be interpreted thus: in the opening blessing (1:3–14), “Paul” emphasizes God’s providence, which thereby underscores the unveiling of the mystery. By accentuating the unveiling of the pre-cosmic mystery, “Paul” thereby stresses his mediating role in this cosmic drama. Finally, by elevating his role in administering and mediating the mystery and by referring to the preceding portion of the epistle itself as the place in which readers can understand his insight into the divine plan, “Paul” thereby magnifies Ephesians itself, interpreting it as a revelatory text and commending it to his readers as such. To understand the significance of this rhetorical strategy of self-authorization and to support this revelatory reading of “Paul’s” claim, it is necessary to consider the force of σύνεσις, or “insight,” to which we now turn.

■ Σύνεσις and Revelatory Figures

Given that σύνεσις is used only once in the undisputed letters—and there it is in a quotation of Isaiah⁶⁹—we must look elsewhere for the conceptual background of Ephesians’s use of it in 3:4, which itself is the only use of the word in the epistle. The word appears twice in Colossians, and both instances provide relevant *comparanda*. In Col 1:9 and 2:2, σύνεσις is something that “Paul” prays and wishes for the

T&T Clark, 1991) 132. The reading and eventual *rereading* of Ephesians in a communal gathering with a lector—even a “literate but not professionally-trained lector” (Kloppenborg, “Literate Media,” 46)—is one possible generic setting that does not demand “elite” reading practices, but rather, recognizes that Ephesians was primarily “consumed” communally in what were most likely “sub-elite” textual communities.

⁶⁶ David Brakke, “Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon,” in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity* (ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and David Brakke; Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 11; Frankfurt: Lang, 2012) 263–80.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁶⁸ This interpretation works whether ἀναγινώσκοντες is read instrumentally (“by reading”), as I have read it, or temporally (“while reading”). Both interpretations are attested among commentators who argue that the “reading” in Eph 3:3–4 refers to the “public” reading of the letter in an *ekklēsia* (e.g., instrumental: Barth, *Ephesians*, 326; temporal: Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 166).

⁶⁹ 1 Cor 1:19, quoting Isa 29:14.

addressees to receive or attain, along with wisdom. In the former, the “insight” is something not simply intellectual but also spiritual (hence πνευματικός in 1:9), and in the latter, it is connected to apprehension of “the mystery which is [the] messiah,⁷⁰ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.”⁷¹ Both passages are relevant to the use of σύνεσις in Eph 3:4, for in Ephesians “Paul” writes in order that the addressees may understand his privileged “insight in the mystery of the messiah.” Even so, Ephesians’s reference to “Paul’s” σύνεσις in “the mystery of the messiah,” which was made known to him “according to a revelation,” can be helpfully illuminated by the use of σύνεσις to refer to a distinguishing trait of revelatory figures who mediate divine knowledge. My argument is that, analogous to the way in which revelatory figures were commonly distinguished by their divinely granted σύνεσις in early Jewish literature, “Paul” is depicted as a revelatory figure distinguished by his divinely granted σύνεσις who mediates the “mystery” in Eph 3.

The figure of Daniel is an excellent example of a revelatory figure distinguished by his divinely granted σύνεσις. In the narrative of Daniel and the other Judean youths in the Babylonian court, we read: “The Lord gave to the young men understanding and insight and intelligence (ἐπιστήμην καὶ σύνεσιν καὶ φρόνησιν) in all written skill, and to Daniel he gave insight in every word and vision and dream and in all wisdom” (καὶ τῷ Δαυιηλ ἔδωκε σύνεσιν ἐν παντὶ ῥήματι καὶ ὄραματι καὶ ἐνυπνίους καὶ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ).⁷² What separates the four from the rest in the court is their “understanding and insight and intelligence,” but what separates Daniel even from the four is his σύνεσις in dreams and visions. A few chapters later, in Dan 5, at Belshazzar’s feast, a humanlike finger appears and writes on the wall. The king then addresses the wise men of Babylon, promising reward for one who can “read the writing and make known the interpretation.”⁷³ None is able. However, the queen informs the king that “there is a man in your kingdom, in whom is the spirit of God (πνεῦμα θεοῦ; נְיָהִלַּא הַרַר), and in the days of your father wakefulness and insight were found in him” (γρηγόρησις καὶ σύνεσις εὐρέθη ἐν αὐτῷ). In Dan 5 what separates Daniel from others is the divinely granted insight with which he is able to interpret and communicate mysteries. This is strongly reiterated again in Dan 9:22, in which Gabriel gives Daniel σύνεσις, which allows him to understand and interpret the cryptic word and vision, and in Dan 10:1, in which we read that “a word was revealed to Daniel” (λόγος ἀπεκαλύφθη τῷ Δαυιηλ), which proved true (ἀληθινὸς ὁ λόγος), and “great power and insight were given to him in the vision” (δύναμις μεγάλη καὶ σύνεσις ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὄπτασίᾳ).⁷⁴ As with the previous examples, here σύνεσις enables Daniel both to understand and to communicate mysteries that had been concealed from others.

⁷⁰ Similarly, Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (WUNT 2.36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990) 187, with comments on the textual issues.

⁷¹ Col 2:2–3.

⁷² OG-Dan 1:17.

⁷³ Dan 5:7 (OG and MT).

⁷⁴ These two instances of σύνεσις derive from Theodotion’s text of Daniel.

Daniel is but one among many revelatory figures who is distinguished as a mediator of divine knowledge by his σύνεσις. Another example is Joseph, whose ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams leads Pharaoh to say to him, "no one is so discerning and full of insight (συνετώτερος) as you."⁷⁵ Just like Daniel, Joseph's σύνεσις is divinely granted, deriving from the "spirit of God" (πνεῦμα θεοῦ; רוח אלהים) within him.⁷⁶ Insight, however, is not only ascribed as a distinguishing trait to spirit-indwelt dream-interpreters such as Daniel and Joseph; it is also ascribed to other revelatory figures like the messianic son of man of the Book of Parables (1 En. 37–71). The Son of Man who knows the "mysteries of righteousness" is described as indwelt by "the spirit of wisdom and insight" in an allusion to the description of the Davidic Shoot in Isa 11 (πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ συνέσεως; רוח חכמה ובינה).⁷⁷ In the Testament of Levi, the divine spirit comes upon Levi, and he has a vision in which the heavens are opened to him. In the account, God says to Levi, "counsel and insight (βουλή καὶ σύνεσις) have been given to you so that you might give insight to your sons (τοῦ συνετίσαι τοὺς υἱοὺς σου) concerning this."⁷⁸ Not only is Levi distinguished by his σύνεσις, but he is also commissioned by God to impart it to his sons.

Analogously, "Paul" is commissioned with the administration of the mystery into which he has privileged "insight" (σύνεσις), and he is portrayed as imparting it in Ephesians itself.⁷⁹ In addition to the foregoing examples, it is worth noting that שָׁכַל ("to understand or have insight" in the *hiphil*) and its cognates, such as the noun מַשְׁכִּיל, are often rendered by σύνεσις and its cognates in early Greek translations of Hebrew scriptures.⁸⁰ In this light, the role of the *maskil* as a mediator of divine knowledge and "mysteries" (רוֹמִים) at Qumran is likewise relevant.⁸¹ Just as the mystery that the *maskil* mediates has been concealed from humanity,⁸² so

⁷⁵ Gen 41:39. See also Gen 41:33.

⁷⁶ Gen 41:38. Joseph is the only individual singled out in Genesis as having the spirit of God within him.

⁷⁷ Isa 11:2.

⁷⁸ T. Levi 4:5.

⁷⁹ Eph 3:3–12.

⁸⁰ In addition to the common rendering of מַשְׁכִּיל with σύνεσις in Psalms (45:1 [44:1]; 52:1 [51:1]; 53:1 [52:1]; 54:1 [53:1]; 78:1 [77:1]; etc.), see, e.g., Dan 12:3, in which הַמַּשְׁכִּילִים is rendered with οἱ συνιέντες.

⁸¹ For a comparison of the *maskil* in the Hodayot and Paul in 2 Cor 3 in their role as inspired interpreters, see Judith H. Newman, "Speech and Spirit: Paul and the Maskil as Inspired Interpreters of Scripture," in *The Holy Spirit, Inspiration, and the Cultures of Antiquity: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (ed. Jörg Frey and John Levison; Ekstasis 5; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014) 241–65. Further comparative research on Paul and the *maskil(im)* will benefit from Katri Antin, "Transmission of Divine Knowledge in the Sapiential Thanksgiving Psalms from Qumran" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2019); Rony Kozman, "Ezekiel's Promised Spirit as *adam*'s Revelatory Spirit in the Hodayot," *DSD* 26 (2019) 30–60.

⁸² 1QS 11:5–6.

also the mystery that “Paul” makes known in Ephesians was “not made known to humans in past generations.”⁸³

Ephesians’s description of “Paul’s” insight with reference to a common constellation of revelatory and mediating themes makes it plausible that the author presents a persona of “Paul” as a revelatory sage, a kind of *maskil* with privileged insight into the divine “mystery” who mediates revealed knowledge.⁸⁴ This is further supported by the author’s fashioning of “Paul” as a διάκονος (“servant”) entrusted with the administration or stewardship (οἰκονομία) of the divine plan. While διάκονοι performed diverse functions in the early Jesus movement and in Greek and Roman sources more broadly,⁸⁵ by referring to “Paul” as a διάκονος in this context, the author fashions him as a “mediator . . . a courier of a divine message,” one who “broker[s] the relationship of [God] and humans, and . . . traverse[s] the middle space.”⁸⁶

■ Conclusions

Like the hymnist of the Hodayot, the Teacher of the Pesharim, and revelatory figures such as Daniel, the author of Ephesians construed “Paul” as a revelatory sage to whom God granted elevated spiritual insight into “the mystery,” as well as the divinely enabled ability and commissioning to communicate it. Yet he did not simply construct an image of “Paul,” he also constructed an image of his epistle. In Eph 3:3–4, the author reflexively commends Ephesians to the readers as “Paul’s” divinely commissioned communication, his textualization of Pauline revelation and mediation of “the mystery.”⁸⁷ The author thus construes “Paul’s” *writing* and his audience’s *reading* of Ephesians as “Paul’s” opening of a sealed book—not in the form of an apocalypse but in the form of an epistle, as is proper when writing in the name of the epistle-writer.⁸⁸ In this way, the author proactively encourages a reading practice and engages in a compositional operation that looks ahead to the text’s own actualization in the performance of reading. Strategically placed at the center of the pseudepigraphical epistle, the reflexivity rhetorically functions to secure the ideological framework of the epistle (Eph 1–3) as grounded in divine

⁸³ Eph 3:5.

⁸⁴ Shkul, *Reading Ephesians*, writes: “The factors in the legitimating function of Paul’s reputation are the divine commissioning and divine revelation” (157). Similarly, Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 176; MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, 269; Wold, “Apocalyptic Thought,” 228.

⁸⁵ See, recently, *Deacons and Diakonia in Early Christianity* (ed. Bart J. Koet, Edwina Murphy, and Esko Ryökäs; WUNT 2.479; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

⁸⁶ Petroelje, “Constructing Paul,” 221, 219.

⁸⁷ See Fiorenza, *Ephesians*, who describes Ephesians as a “‘mystery’ text that seeks to make known the multifarious Wisdom of G*d” (lxxxii).

⁸⁸ I draw the image of the sealed book from Isa 29:11–12, a passage which, while not directly related to Ephesians, provides an interesting analogue for the dynamics at play in Eph 3:3–4, not least given its concluding hope for σύνεσις (29:24).

revelation before moving on to the ensuing exhortation (Eph 4–6). Ephesians’s self-referentiality is thus central to its rhetorical operation.

By textualizing Pauline revelation, the author constructs Ephesians as a text that provides privileged access to “Paul” himself.⁸⁹ That is, Eph 3:3–4—written at a time when “Paul” was a contested figure—claims for itself an elevated position for those who wish to know “Paul” and understand his message. Eph 3:3–4’s construction of Ephesians as a revelatory text gives witness not only to the epistle’s participation in a larger milieu of revelatory texts and mediating *maskilim*—and to the rhetorical landscape of this milieu—but also to an early contestation and authorization of “Paul.” In this way, it gives witness to a time in the beginnings of the Jesus movement when “Paul’s” revelation was primarily accessible in the form of revelatory writ, to a time when “trust in writing” (πίστις γραφῆς)—that which Socrates long ago derided (*Phaedr.* 275a3)—was necessary. Considering the foregoing argument, I suggest that the author’s rhetorical construction of both “Paul” and Ephesians, including his implicit hermeneutical commendation to read Ephesians as revelatory, is central to his pseudepigraphy.

The pseudepigraphical nature of Ephesians’s attempted self-authorization as a revelatory text is what most prominently distinguishes it from the revelatory texts mentioned earlier in this article. Whereas, for instance, the Pesharim are presented as revelatory texts based in part on their *revelatory interpretation* of other written traditions, the author of Ephesians internally self-authorizes the epistle as a revelatory text via its rhetorical reflexivity. As an attempt to provide a framework for *how* the text is read, Eph 3:3–4 represents an awareness of and sensitivity to the limits of an author’s control over how a text is used. Ephesians can thus be read as an attempt to overcome this authorial limitation. Understood in light of its self-referentiality, Ephesians’s pseudepigraphy conceals but internally enacts the otherwise retroactive interpretive process of externally authorizing a text as revelatory. Ephesians’s rhetoric thus reveals the epistle’s pseudepigraphy as an interpretive endeavor devoted to reading and even rereading “Paul” for group formation and revelation.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 176–77.

⁹⁰ A fuller reconsideration of the pseudepigraphy of Ephesians in light of its reflexivity must ultimately be left as the task for a future study, as must the question of what effect Ephesians’s attempt to self-authorize itself as a revelatory text might have on the use and readings of the undisputed letters by readers of Ephesians. Such future study will have a valuable conversation partner in Annette Merz, *Die fiktive Selbstausslegung des Paulus. Intertextuelle Studien zur Intention und Rezeption der Pastoralbriefe* (NTOA/SUNT 52; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2004), who addresses both of these questions and their intersection in the context of the Pastorals. While neither topic can be given justice in the present article, both are important and deserving of renewed attention in light of the present article’s analysis of Ephesians’s rhetorical reflexivity.