

The Performance of Ancient Jewish Letters: From Elephantine to MMT

A Thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In the Faculty of Humanities

2012

Marvin L. Miller

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

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Final Word Count: 79,696

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations follow the SBL Handbook, unless otherwise noted.

Abstract

This thesis will apply performance criticism to ancient Jewish letters in order to answer two connected questions. First, how do we adequately describe the form and function of letters as they were read in antiquity in order to be able to define the genres of letters in a more precise way and second, to consider how performance theory in conjunction with other approaches can be applied to ancient letters. In order to address these concerns, we will include examples of free-standing letters from Elephantine, embedded Hebrew and Aramaic letters, and embedded Greek letters. By studying these texts, we will gain a substantial perspective on the variety of Second Temple period letters and we will be able to consider how probing the form and function of those letters may be applied for a better understanding of MMT. The intent of this inquiry is to help explain how MMT, or a section thereof, may have been performed in various situations and thereby provide a clearer view of the genre(s) of MMT.

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Preface

This thesis originated when I was completing my Master of Arts degree on the social impact of debt slavery as express in Nehemiah 5. While reading Ezra and Nehemiah, I became interested in Second Temple period Judaism, with a particular emphasis on how the communities may have communicated through the use of letters. As my research progressed, I realized that the narrative I wished to tell was far bigger than I had imagined for ancient letters served many purposes and were adapted to fit many literary forms. With a steady hand, Professor George Brooke guided me and prompted me to ask significant questions concerning the direction I could take in order to ensure that my arguments are clear. Professor Philip Alexander offered valuable direction during the early stages of my writing, but retired before the completion of my thesis and was replaced by Professor Alex Samely. Obviously, all the errors and weaknesses that remain are my own, but should not take away from the valuable insights that my mentors have offered.

Introduction

Until recently scholarship on ancient Jewish letters has been relatively scarce, to some extent due to the concerns over the authenticity of some of the letters embedded in literary texts. It seems to be time for a re-evaluation of many of these ancient letters and an opportunity to apply a new methodological perspective on Jewish letters. In this re-assessment a document from Qumran, now widely referred to as MMT, has a valuable role to play as a test case for our inquiry into the purpose and performative contexts letters may have served in ancient communities.

There are two connected questions that will be investigated in this dissertation. First, how do we adequately describe the form and function of letters as they were read in antiquity in order to be able to define the genres of letters in a more precise way? The second interrelated concern is how performance theory in conjunction with other approaches can be applied to ancient letters. In order to offer a broad spectrum of letters, I have included in my investigation examples of free-standing letters from Elephantine, embedded Hebrew and Aramaic letters, and embedded Greek letters. By studying these texts, we will gain a substantial perspective on the variety of Second Temple period letters and we will be able to consider how probing the form and function of those letters may be applied for a better understanding of MMT.

One of the key considerations in describing these texts has to be the discussion of the relationship of orality and writtenness. Orality and writtenness have often been viewed as opposites; however, this dissertation attempts to present a more nuanced treatment of them and will show how they may have interacted in the ancient world. The focus on ancient Jewish letters will attempt to show how they were written with an oral mindset. If orality and writtenness are not distinctive and opposing technologies, then consideration can be given to

the social practice of reading letters aloud, which makes it possible to demonstrate that oral performance enlivens the written text in discussion. The implications of this position are clear: ancient letters were written with an oral mindset and were performed before an interactive audience. This dissertation will examine whether letters give evidence, not only in their openings but also in the bodies of their texts, for an oral tradition—part of which gives access to the creative performance.

With this in mind, we begin our investigation with two free-standing letters from the island of Elephantine. We are looking for clues that suggest that we are indeed studying letters and we will examine how the performance of the texts may have functioned in a community. These letters have been chosen because they exhibit in a clear manner what has been long recognized by scholars as standard letter form, with which other letters can be compared. Our concern is to be attentive to important markers, such as repeated words and sounds, parallel phrases and verbal formulae that are determinative of ancient letter genre. Once we have a clear understanding of the written texts, we are then interested in the written signals, which would indicate how the letter was read aloud which in turn would show that the audience understood what was being performed. Finally, these linguistic clues can suggest the kinds of performers who read these letters and the audiences who heard them. Using a comprehensive approach to our inquiry will help determine the genre of a text and will suggest how performance theory can support other methodologies in understanding better how letters may have functioned in a community.

Following the same approach, Chapter 4 considers lengthier Jewish letters that are embedded in narratives. For instance, the letter in Ezra 5 supplies some letter structures in the surrounding narrative that are omitted in the body, and the body of the letter in Jeremiah 29 has no significant letter features, except those found in the narrative. We cannot exclude from this inquiry those borderline texts that simply do not fit a particular definition of a letter,

particularly if the designation merely considers textual indicators. The aim of this chapter is to expand on the existing discussions of Ezra 5 and Jeremiah 29 by more broadly considering the context shared by performer and audience. Performance criticism allows us to be attentive to the oral/aural features of a performance of a text in a community. This approach encourages us to extend how a letter is defined by including how a text functions in performance.

Chapter 5 continues our inquiry into understanding letters better by featuring two Jewish letters written in Greek, which appear to be later additions to existing compositions. Greek Esther supplements a tale set in a foreign court and 2 Maccabees begins with a letter that provides the introduction to an alleged historical account. These letters demonstrate that there are different purposes that letters may have served in a narrative, which when read aloud may have had particular aural effects on an audience. This chapter considers whether letter form may have been used for its capacity to act as a powerful means of bringing the personae of the participants before the audience, while at the same time fabricating the literary personae.

Reflection on the different forms and functions of letters, and consideration of how they may have functioned in a community leads us to consider MMT as a test case. Conclusions from the previous chapters of texts that in many ways exist at the boundary or on the edge of categories as commonly understood today can be applied to more complex documents. This chapter is devoted to taking into account how the ambiguity of the form of MMT may suggest that the text did not function in a uniform way, but rather may have operated differently at various times and in various settings. The conclusions are based on observations made from the formal features and language patterns of the text and by considering how the subject matter is variously discussed and by whom. These factors

combine in appreciating serially who in the performative event was affected and how the performer, through his voice, gesture and tone may have interpreted the text for the audience. The intent of this inquiry is to help explain why MMT, or a section thereof, may have been used in various situations and thereby provide a clearer view of the genre(s) of MMT.

Some brief summary conclusions will be offered at the end of the dissertation in order to draw together the discussion of formal literary features, oral/aural signals in these texts and the insights from performance criticism.

1 History of Scholarship

The purpose of presenting a history of scholarship is to give a contextualized overview of the methods scholars have used to describe the differences in the forms and functions of ancient letters and to see what issues or problems remain. Letters in antiquity seem to have a variety of structures and some scholars have felt that a distinction between the letter forms was necessary. Since it appears that Greek letters were the first to be studied in detail, we will begin with those theorists who categorize them. As the corpus of Semitic texts increased, some scholars turned their attention to analyzing the formal aspects of canonical and non-canonical Aramaic and Hebrew letters. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the scholarly attention to the analysis of the structure of Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew letters during the twentieth century as a critical method of inquiry. Using the historical context of Second Temple period letters and ancient letter definitions, specialists in Qumran Studies have endeavoured to classify 4QMMT¹ (hereafter MMT) in order to suggest how this document may have been informed by reading other letters. The review of the history of scholarship will show which issues are outstanding in the classification of MMT and how we can attempt to address these concerns.

1.1 History of Scholarship of Ancient Letters Written in Different Languages

1.1.1 Greek Letters

In 1909 Deissmann published a distinctive work, *Licht vom Osten*,² in which he concluded that literary form and social context (*Sitz im Leben*) were interrelated.³ His major

¹The text of 4QMMT has been reconstructed by Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell from fragments of six manuscripts (4Q394-399) recovered from Qumran Cave 4. The title of the document, 4QMMT is derived from the words “some of the works of the Torah,” which are found in line C26 of the composite text. Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4, V: Miqṣat Ma’āse Ha-Torah* (Discoveries in the Judean Desert X; Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994).

²Gustav Adolf Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten: Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* (trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan; 1927; as *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated from Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman Period*, repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995).

effort was to distinguish the features of rudimentary “documents of life” from the “products of literary art,” which had become canonical reading for teaching purposes. He termed the former a “letter” (*Brief*), and the latter an “epistle” (*Epistel*). He characterized letters generically as documents of many types such as a lease, application, and receipt and a host of similar documents, which are non-literary. In large measure, according to Deissmann, they are records of life, not works of art; they merely convey information.⁴ He further contends that epistles are works of literature, of writers such as Epicurus, Seneca, and Pliny, using conventions and artistic prose and composed for posterity and publication.⁵ Deissmann concluded that the apostle Paul, who argued directly from his heart on behalf of the lower classes, was the author of “real, non-literary letters. . .and not the writer of epistles.”⁶ Deissmann’s work assisted scholars in understanding the formal aspects of a letter and in considering the purpose a letter may have served in a community; a matter which is important to our understanding of the genre of MMT.

Peter Lemche has noted that nineteenth century German biblical scholarship was tied to trends in historical theory, and ultimately with German unification ideology.⁷ Deissmann was a part of the rationalist intellectual German tradition influenced by a form-critical (*Formgeschichte*) view of the text, in which the investigation of units was classified according to the character of their formal structure and their possible histories and functions in the oral tradition.⁸ Criticisms of Deissmann’s work can be leveled on three interrelated

³ The correlation between literary form and social context had been developed by Hermann Gunkel (see chapter 2).

⁴ Deissmann, *Light*, 148.

⁵ Deissmann, *Light*, 149, 229-30.

⁶ Deissmann, *Light*, 240.

⁷ John N. P. Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1998), 9. Other scholars have noted the correlation between German scholarship and unification ideology. J. Sasson, “Models for Recreating Israelite History,” *JSOT* 21(1981): 3-24; A. Oden, Jr., *The Bible Without Theology* (New Voices in Biblical Studies 4; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); R. Schwartz, “Adultery in the House of David,” *Semeia* 54 (1991): 35-55; Keith Whitelam, “The Search for Early Israel,” *Beer-Sheva* 12 (1998): 41-64.

⁸ T. A. Burkill, *The Evolution of Christian Thought* (London: Cornell University Press, 1971), 410.

fronts. One major difficulty is that his use of the letter-epistle polarity is a somewhat arbitrary distinction, which cannot be substantiated by the literature.⁹ Second, the private-friendly-letter and public-political-epistle distinction fits better in a modern era where political life is separated from private life, and may not transfer well into Hellenistic culture where the public-private dichotomy may not be as pronounced. Third, his antithesis between warm, artless, friendly letters and impersonal, artificial, literary letters may seem as a description more characteristic of nineteenth century German Romanticism than early epistolary form.¹⁰ Therefore Deissmann's dictum that "the letter is a piece of life, the epistle is a product of literary art"¹¹ appears to most recent scholars to be somewhat misguided. Nevertheless, we should not minimize the impact Deissmann had on understanding ancient letter form.

One scholar who challenged Deissmann's method of categorizing letters as "real" and "non-real" was Francis Xavier J. Exler, a Catholic priest proficient in Greek and Latin. In his classic work in 1923, Exler divided the corpus of ancient Greek letters from Greco-Roman Egypt into four major sections: familiar, business, petitions and official correspondence.¹² His most significant contribution to the study of letters is the analysis of the opening and closing formulae, as employed in his four categories. Exler claims that the internal evidence shows that the variations in the formulae could inform the reader about the purposes of the letters.¹³ He contends that Deissmann's distinction between "literary" and "non-literary" letters does not seem to hold, and prefers, rather problematically, to distinguish letters as "real" and

⁹ Stanley Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 18, states that Deissmann was criticized almost immediately by scholars for exaggerating the similarities of Paul's letters to the papyri.

¹⁰ For a more comprehensive critique of Deissmann's work, see William G. Doty, "The Classification of Epistolary Literature," *CBQ* 31 (1969): 183-99.

¹¹ Deissmann, *Light*, 230.

¹² Francis Xavier J. Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter of the Epistolary Papyri* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1923); repr., *A Study in Greek Epistolography* (Chicago: Ares, 1976), 23.

¹³ Exler, *Form*, 23-68.

“unreal,” with the understanding that neither kind is necessarily literature.¹⁴ As a result of his study on the openings of letters, Exler has determined that if a letter is addressed and destined for a definite person or a group of persons, it should be classified as a “real” letter. Although Exler recognizes that a letter destined for only a private person may fall into the hands of others, thus losing the character of a real letter,¹⁵ he still maintains that the authorial intent determines when a letter can be considered literature. Avoiding binary categories of letter-epistle made popular by Deissmann, Exler was able to provide a more nuanced approach to the understanding of ancient letters. The weakness in Exler’s approach consists of the distinction he makes between “real” and “unreal” letters based on the literary skill of the sender.¹⁶ It appears to be misleading to assume that we can determine the real or imagined expertise or intent of the sender by reading his or her letter.

The impulse to categorize epistolary literature did not disappear with the next generation of scholars. In an endeavour to explain the relationship of the sender to the receiver of a letter, Johannes Sykutris (1901-1937), a Greek born classical philologist, separated letter types into five areas: official, literary/private, philosophical/didactic, letter-in-verse and fictive.¹⁷ In Sykutris’ entry on epistolary literature, he included a large variety of letter types, both real and fictive, but still retained Deissman’s distinction between “real” or private letters and literary letters. Sykutris leaves unanswered how to detect pseudepigraphic or fictional elements in letters and, more importantly, how they function in the narrative.

¹⁴ Exler, *Form*, 16.

¹⁵ Exler, *Form*, 17.

¹⁶ Exler describes the difference between “real” and “unreal” letters in this way: “The difference lies in the fact that the latter is written by one unskilled in the literary art, whereas the former is the product of a litterateur” (Exler, *Form*, 17).

¹⁷ J. Sykutris, “Epistolographie,” in *Pauly’s Real Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Suppl. 5; Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche, 1924), 185-220. Using the writers’ relationship as criteria for his or her typology recalls Cicero’s divisions between public and private letters (*Pro Flacco* 37).

The importance of the Greek epistolary studies as a precursor for further exploration into the typology of letters can hardly be overestimated.¹⁸ In the midst of these advances a new field of inquiry was evolving—the study of Aramaic letters.

1.1.2 Aramaic Letters

Since Semitic syntax and letter form is different from Greek, it is important to include the study of Aramaic letters in our consideration of the genre of MMT.¹⁹ Although many later Aramaic letters may have been influenced by Greek culture and letter writing form, this survey will concentrate on the new discoveries in Aramaic epistolography. At the beginning of the twentieth century a discovery at Elephantine was made of ten large original documents written in Aramaic by Jews of Upper Egypt in the time of the Persian kings Xerxes, Artaxerxes, and Darius (471-411 BCE).²⁰ To these were added, in the following year, important new Aramaic documents from Elephantine, edited by Eduard Sachau.²¹ Godfrey Driver (1892-1975) was commissioned to edit a collection of Aramaic letters comprising a

¹⁸ Greek epistolary experts have endeavoured to give evidence for the evolution of the Greek language and explored the letter writing habits of the ancients. For an investigation into the content and the writers' relationship as criteria for his typology, see Heikki Koskeniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedakatemia, 1956). For a presentation of various types of letters, see Chan-Hie Kim, *The Familiar Letter of Recommendation* (SBLDS 5; Nashville, Tenn.: SBL, 1972); John Lee White, *The Form and Structure of the Official Petition: A Study in Greek Epistolography* (SBLDS 5; Nashville, Tenn.: SBL, 1972). For the letters' setting as a basis for classification of letters, see Luther Stirewalt, *Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography* (SBLSup. 27; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993). For a recent treatment of Greek letters, consult Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions*; Ruth Morello and A. D. Morrison, eds., *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); John Muir, *Life and Letters in the Ancient Greek World* (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁹ The discussion of genre is complex and beyond the scope of this chapter. The definition given in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd ed.; ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 630, will have to suffice for our present purposes: "a grouping of texts related within the system of literature by their sharing recognizably functionalized features of form and content."

²⁰ According to A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B. C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), xvi, this military settlement was a Jewish garrison of a Persian king. These texts found in 1906 were edited by a British Assyriologist and linguist, Archibald H. Sayce, *Aramaic Papyri Discovered at Assuan* (London: A. Moring Ltd., 1906). For the importance of these texts on scholarship see Th. Nöldeke, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 20 (1906): 130-35. The genuineness of the papyri published by Sachau has been questioned by L. Belléni, *An Independent Examination of the Assuan and Elephantine Aramaic Papyri* (London: Luzac & Co., 1909).

²¹ These newly found papyri consisted mostly of writings that the fifth century community deemed unworthy of preservation, such as contracts, wills, oaths, business and family letters, receipts and tax lists. Sachau, *Drei aramäische Papyrus-urkunden*. There is a handy edition by Arthur Ungnad, *Aramäische Papyrus aus Elephantine: Kleine Ausgabe unter zugrundelegung von Eduard Sachau's Erstausgabe* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1911).

bag of leather, some seals and a number of documents and fragments written on leather.²² The exact period to which this correspondence should be allocated can only be determined from internal evidence, which is enough to assign them within the fifth century BCE, possibly between 411-408. In addition to Driver's significant documents, a small corpus of eight homogeneous letters from Hermopolis Magna, written in the second half of the fifth century BCE, were discovered in 1945 and originally published by Bresciani and Kamil in 1966.²³ In the coming years a few other individual texts were published, which increased the number of Aramaic letters from the Old to the Imperial Aramaic periods (925-200 BCE) to about 100.²⁴ These discoveries provided for a new approach to ancient Aramaic epistolary literature as the sub-discipline moved from probing individual texts to the overview of comparative forms of epistolography.

In 1974 Joseph Fitzmyer surveyed Aramaic texts of various sorts, times and varying lengths in order to highlight the types, providence and contents of these letters.²⁵ In addition to the texts found in Old and Imperial Aramaic, he also included documents from the first and second centuries CE of which the Bar Kokhba rebellion in 132-35 CE is the largest sub-group. Fitzmyer's purpose was to organize the formal elements in Aramaic letters and describe the features inherent in Aramaic epistolary form. In addition to inquiring to what extent Semitic interference can be detected in the New Testament, his aim was to highlight those elements that may be of interest to the study of letters found in the Hebrew Bible.

There are several aspects of Fitzmyer's handling of the Aramaic documents that are problematic. First, the question of how the letter in Ezra fits in the overall context of the

²² Godfrey R. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B. C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).

²³ These letters were published by E. Bresciani and M. Kamil, *Le letter aramaiche di Hermopoli* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1966).

²⁴ This estimated number of texts is given by Dirk Schwiderski, *Handbuch des nordwestsemitischen Briefformulars: Ein Beitrag zur Echtheitsfrage der aramäischen Briefe des Esrabuches* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 5.

²⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Some Notes," *JBL* 93 (1974): 201-25.

Aramaic letter tradition is not adequately developed.²⁶ Second, and more significantly in the view of Philip Alexander, is the way in which Fitzmyer synchronically treated the material from widely different periods and cultures and his misguided discussion on the division of the texts according to material on which they were written, whether on skin, papyrus, wood, or clay.²⁷ Despite these concerns, Fitzmyer has contributed to Aramaic epistolography by increasing the awareness of the need for a full investigation of Semitic letter form.²⁸

The prolegomena in the field of Aramaic epistolography provided by Fitzmyer has been expanded by Alexander.²⁹ But in order to avoid the cumbersome and sometimes misleading conclusions drawn from a wide range of letters covering centuries of literature, Alexander's 1978 article concentrates on Aramaic letters from the Persian period. He has further narrowed his inquiry by excluding Aramaic letters found in Ezra and Daniel because, as he contends, the authenticity of these letters is problematic and the opening conventions obscure.³⁰ His study has advanced scholarly epistolary understanding by suggesting how regional factors, linguistic evolution, and the occasion for writing may have contributed to the variations in the letter style.³¹ From his analysis he has been able to determine what the minimum constituents of a Persian period Aramaic letter are: an opening and a body. One flaw in Alexander's approach concerns the use of a descriptive model to define a letter. When an author produces a list of necessary conditions that depends on a prior classification of a certain set of "letters," then a scholar may foreclose too quickly on a text and guarantee a

²⁶ Fitzmyer, "Notes," 205.

²⁷ Philip S. Alexander, "Remarks on Aramaic Epistolography in the Persian Period" *JSS* 23 (1978), 156.

²⁸ Fitzmyer has subsequently published two volumes with some concern for Aramaic epistolography: *The Wandering Aramean* (SBLMS 25; Missoula, Mont.; Scholars Press, 1979); see esp. 183-96; idem. *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts (Second Century B. C. – Second Century A. D.)* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978).

²⁹ Alexander, "Remarks," 156.

³⁰ Alexander, "Remarks," 157.

³¹ Alexander "Remarks," 157 cautiously states: "We shall avoid foreclosing too quickly on a definition of a letter: this must emerge from our formal study." While Alexander acknowledges the need for a cautious approach, in the end he does not supply a working definition of a letter, but merely gives the "minimum constituents" found in Aramaic letters.

particular outcome.³² By deliberately excluding the “problematic” texts of the Aramaic letters in Ezra and Daniel, Alexander may have predetermined his conclusions. Gibson and Morrison suggest that “one way of deciding where the boundary between letters and other types of text lies. . . is to consider the borderline cases.”³³ It appears from reading Alexander’s study that the boundary between letters and non-letters needs further exploration, for boundary texts may provide valuable information concerning the letters’ function, especially when applied to MMT.

In 1982 Paul Dion analysed the introductory and concluding formulae of the eight pieces of Hermopolis family correspondence, edited by Driver, and compared them with Greek, Egyptian and Akkadian letters.³⁴ Dion viewed the opening and closing as the most decisive features in distinguishing this type of correspondence from similar letters during the same period.³⁵ The Hermopolis letters dating from the second half of the fifth century BCE used the vocabulary of blood relationships very generously, beginning with the address: “to my sister.”³⁶ This collection of papyrus private letters, most likely of the common class, may offer new literary possibilities in the discussion of the features of Aramaic letters. Letters that are collected can become a means of examining a community, both by investigating the contents of individual letters and by getting the sense of the collection, whether they were meant to be read together or not.

The challenge that Fitzmyer took up was to provide a description of the corpus and the formal elements found in them, which opened the way for more scholarly investigation of

³² Roy K. Gibson and A. D. Morrison, “Introduction: What is a Letter?” in *Ancient Letters*, 15.

³³ Gibson and Morrison, “Introduction,” 4.

³⁴ Paul E. Dion, “The Aramaic ‘Family Letter’ and Other Related Epistolary Forms in Other Oriental Languages and in Hellenistic Greek” in *Studies in Ancient Letter Writing* (ed. J. L. White; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982), 58-76.

³⁵ Dion, “Aramaic ‘Family Letter,’” 60

³⁶ The use of kinship terms in the *praescriptio* is poorly attested in Aramaic letters. The question of whether these terms describe real or fictive kinship cannot be decided with certainty, though it appears probable that the terms are used literally.

epistolary form. Alexander continued the inquiry by contributing insights to the study of non-biblical letters from the Persian era and Dion analysed epistolary formulae and considered possible influences of other cultures on letter writing. What is lacking in these early investigations in letter form is a comprehensive way of understanding the different functions letters may have served in communities by exploring how they may have been read and performed in an interactive context, which appears to be an important aspect for a comprehensive understanding of MMT.

1.1.3 Hebrew Letters

Since the Hebrew letters seem to be more limited in number and type than Aramaic letters, our ability to interpret the proper use and function of each formulation is also more limited.³⁷ As more texts from antiquity became available the problems of classification needed to be addressed. A few notable scholars have endeavoured to compile, translate and supply an introduction to Hebrew letters. We will narrow the survey to Dennis Pardee, Philip Alexander and James Lindenberger. Pardee's purpose in surveying the corpus of ancient Hebrew letters was to compare the forms of Hebrew and Aramaic letters using orthographic and epigraphic evidence.³⁸ His interest in Hebrew epistolography was precipitated by the expanding extra-biblical letters in Hebrew, which, he suggests, deserves a full treatment in and of itself.³⁹ According to Pardee, the most complete Hebrew letters of the biblical period consist of address, greetings, transition to body, and body; all elements being optional.⁴⁰ In his study he concludes that there are definite discernible differences between the Hebrew letters of the seventh and sixth centuries BCE and those of the second century CE, and that

³⁷ Dennis Pardee, "Letters" in *ABD* 4:282-85; here 283.

³⁸ Pardee's publication "An Overview of Ancient Hebrew Epistolography" *JBL* 97 (1978): 321-46 was part of a larger research project, the Ancient Epistolography Group of the SBL.

³⁹ Pardee, "Letters," 323.

⁴⁰ Pardee, "Letters," states that there are some Ugaritic letters which consist entirely of formulae without the body of the text, but no Hebrew equivalent has been found. Idem., "An Overview" pp. 321-46. This work is modeled on Fitzmyer's Aramaic work "Some Notes."

there are formulaic differences between groups from different geographical regions.⁴¹ Pardee's emphasis lies in the form-critical analysis of epistolary structure and formulae in order to facilitate comparison with the Aramaic letters published by Fitzmyer. An unavoidable weakness in his analysis is that only a small sample of letters has been preserved.⁴² Until a greater diversity of Hebrew letters is discovered conclusions must remain tentative.⁴³

Philip Alexander extended the study of Hebrew texts to include all letters from 200 BCE to 200 CE.⁴⁴ He divided the corpus broadly using Deissmann's categories of literary and non-literary letters. Literary letters, according to Alexander, use epistolary form as a means of communicating moral, philosophical or religious ideas; whereas, non-literary letters have a more specific, everyday purpose and are normally meant for a very limited and precise audience.⁴⁵ A feature of Alexander's inquiry is his probe into the question concerning the authenticity of Hebrew letters.⁴⁶ These fictive letters could include embedded pseudonymous letters attributed either to important religious authorities in the distant past, or to persons of political power in the near past.

In 1994 a new presentation of the translation of virtually the complete corpus of surviving letters in Aramaic and Hebrew down to the time of Alexander the Great was compiled by James Lindenberger.⁴⁷ This volume includes the correspondence from ancient

⁴¹ Pardee, "An Overview," 342.

⁴² Pardee was actually stimulated by Ugaritic and Akkadian letters.

⁴³ Pardee has also published *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters: A Study Edition* (SBLSPS 15; Chico, California: Scholars Press), 1982, in which he presents formulaic features, and types of Hebrew letters in the extra-biblical and Tannaitic letters.

⁴⁴ Philip S. Alexander, "Epistolary Literature" in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1984.

⁴⁵ Alexander, "Epistolary Literature," 583.

⁴⁶ Alexander, "Epistolary Literature," 585. He views as certain fabrications the Epistle of Jeremiah, the letters in *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, Paralipomena Ieremiae*, and the Greek Additions to Esther, as well as the correspondence between Solomon, Hiram and Pharaoh in Eupolemos and Josephus.

⁴⁷ James M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters* (Writings from the Ancient World v. 4; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994).

Jewish writers at Yavneh-Yam (seventh century), Arad and Lachish (sixth century), and Elephantine (fifth century). Unlike Alexander's article on "Epistolary Literature," Lindenberger's compilation does not include any letters found in the Hebrew Bible. His study reignited the issue of epistolary definition. He acknowledges in his introduction that Arad 88 "appears to be a remnant of an accession proclamation of one of the kings of Judah"⁴⁸ (p. 9) and that Yavneh-Yam may not be a letter but a judicial petition (p. 96). This invites the question: Why are a proclamation of a king and a plea of a worker asking for the return of his garment, neither of which contain the usual epistolary openings, included in the list of letters? The recent entries on the subject of Jewish epistolography by Pardee, Alexander and Lindenberger, each scholar having compiled a different list of Jewish letters, shows the difficulty of defining what constitutes a letter by predominately using a description of the letters' form.⁴⁹ In order to better answer the question of what constitutes a letter, and more importantly, of whether MMT is a letter, we need to consider what strategies have been employed to understand epistolary form, especially as it applies to MMT.

1.2 Ancient Letter Writing Definitions

In delineating what counts as a letter, some scholars have produced a list of necessary conditions that need to be satisfied in order for a text to be classified as a letter.⁵⁰ It is a truism to say that the purpose of the list is to explain why we consider some documents as letters and exclude others. Trapp acknowledges that the boundary between what is a letter

⁴⁸ Although this letter is not well preserved, it still offers valuable information concerning the definition of what constitutes a letter.

⁴⁹ Several authors have been interested in literary characteristics that may be found in letters issued to the Jewish diaspora. See, for instance F. Schnider and W. Stenger, *Studium zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular* (NTTS 1; Leiden: Brill, 1987), 34-41. Irene Taatz, *Frühjüdische Briefe: Die paulinischen Briefe im Rahmen der offiziellen religiösen Briefe des Frühjudentums* (NTOA 16; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991). Lutz Doering, "Jeremiah and the 'Diaspora Letters' in Ancient Judaism," in *Reading the Present in the Qumran Library* (Atlanta: SBL, 2007). Mark F. Whitters, *The Epistle of Second Baruch* (JPSSup 42; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

⁵⁰ Michael B. Trapp, ed., *Greek and Latin Letters: An Anthology with Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

and what is not quite a letter has not been well maintained.⁵¹ Derrida's position collapses all literature into a kind of letter when he maintains that "mixture is the letter, the epistle, which is not a genre but all genres, literature itself."⁵² Considering various attempts at defining what constitutes a letter, it is a fair assumption that the activity of examining letters will be more like an exploration than an analysis. The consideration of the form of a letter may "have a wide variety of effects on the reader, from drawing attention to the imitation of or play with the letter-form, to directing the reader in the direction of a particular (epistolary) intertext."⁵³

One of the earliest self-conscious definitions of a letter comes from pseudo-Demetrius, who treats the issue of epistolary definition by stating that "Artemon, the editor of Aristotle's *Letters*, says that the letter ought to be written in the same manner as a dialogue, a letter being regarded by him as one of two sides of a dialogue."⁵⁴ What becomes immediately apparent is that pseudo-Demetrius does not appear to be concerned about the form of a letter, but rather its function. Modern epistolary definitions frequently include the formal structure, such as the requirement of stating the sender(s) and recipient(s), and the use of a limited set of conventional formulae of salutation, which specify both parties to the transaction.⁵⁵ Either pseudo-Demetrius assumed those aspects of letter writing convention, or he found them unimportant.⁵⁶ If formal aspects are not necessary to the definition, then we should broaden our view to consider any document which suggests that we are reading a letter. According to pseudo-Demetrius, a letter was merely a surrogate for face-to-face communication, which

⁵¹ Trapp explains, 1 note 3 that "the question where the boundary is to be set between 'letters' and other pieces of writing that are in various ways comparable without qualifying as members of the family is not a trivial one, but lies beyond the scope of this introduction. Much depends on one's keenness to press issues of genre and definition."

⁵² Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (trans. Alan Bass; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 48.

⁵³ Gibson, "Introduction," 14-15.

⁵⁴ *Demetrius: On Style* (ed. and trans. by W. Rhys Roberts; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932).

⁵⁵ Michael Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, 1.

⁵⁶ Although Demetrius does not state that a letter must have formal aspects, he cautions that a letter should not simply be a treatise with a greeting tacked on at the beginning and a farewell at the end, which may imply that he viewed these aspects as idiomatic.

may imply that letters foster a conversational style that facilitates communication between writer and addressee. His view does not incorporate the nuances that occur when a person corresponds in writing when verbal intercourse may have been available.

Another early definition of letters is given by the Roman philosopher and orator Cicero, writing to C. Scribonius in 53 BCE, describes this essential function of letters:

That there are many kinds of letters you are well aware; there is one kind, however, about which there can be no mistake—for indeed, letter writing was invented just in order that we might inform those at a distance if there were anything which was important for them or for ourselves that they should know (*Letters to His Friends* 2:4:1).

Although this definition is more comprehensive, Cicero only speaks of the one aspect of the function of letters, namely, the communication of information, and does not seem to consider the fact that there exist many other functions that letters perform. This “oversight” may tell us more about ourselves—many of whom insist on a comprehensive, air-tight definition that applies to all situations—than the ancients, who may not have had this insatiable appetite for exactitude. This point is made clearer when we consider that guidelines suggested by the ancient theorists, such as Cicero and pseudo-Demetrius, concerning the material, linguistic register, or length appropriate to the epistolary form are notoriously broken by many ancient authors of letters.⁵⁷ This observation seems to imply that the early epistolary theorists were more descriptive than prescriptive when defining a letter.

While these ancient definitions are insightful, they may be of limited use for our understanding of Jewish letters allegedly written in the Second Temple period. One major difficulty is that letters in the Hebrew Bible and in the books of Maccabees are all embedded in narrative passages and may not fit the ancient descriptions of free-standing letters. The ancient authors also did not distinguish between letter, epistle, and treatise, which are

⁵⁷ Morello and Morrison, *Ancient Letters*, 1. It appears that the epistolary guides, such as *On Style* by pseudo-Demetrius, were not very influential.

distinctive but overlapping categories that have been used by modern scholars when describing some letters. Nonetheless, there are some parallels between early definitions. For example, a letter is assumed to be written and sent to corresponding parties, because they are separated emotionally or physically. From pseudo-Demetrius we learn that a letter is a written means of keeping oral conversation in motion. Cicero adds that the essential purposes served by letter writing are the maintenance of contact between relatives and friends. The function of letters can have a more specific reason, namely, desiring to disclose or seek information or to request something of the recipient.⁵⁸ Dennis Pardee classifies the ancient letter with regard to its function as “a written document effecting communication between two or more persons who cannot communicate orally.”⁵⁹ In summary, it may be more helpful to define ancient Jewish letters in terms of actions that people performed by means of them.⁶⁰ But what is still missing in these definitions is the context in which letters were performed, for all three levels of analysis—form, function and context—are necessary for a proper understanding of this genre, particularly for those documents that do not fit easily into one category, but can be considered boundary texts, such as MMT.

⁵⁸ John L. White, “The Greek Documentary Letter Tradition Third Century B. C. E. to Third Century C. E.” in *Studies in Ancient Letter Writing* (ed. John L. White, *Semeia*, 22, 1981), 91.

⁵⁹ Pardee, *Handbook*, 2. A functional definition is offered by Schwiderski, *Handbuch*, 17: “So soll. . . nicht erst dann von einem Brief die Rede sein, wenn ein Mindestmaß an formalen Kriterien erfüllt ist, sondern bereits unter der Voraussetzung, daß der betreffende Text eine bestimmte *Funktion* übernimmt. Diese Funktion besteht darin, *eine aus räumlichen oder sonstigen Gründen verhinderte oder nicht gewollte mündliche Kommunikation zwischen zwei Personen oder Gruppen durch einen schriftlich verfaßten Text zu ersetzen*“ (italics original).

⁶⁰ Stowers, *Letter Writing*, 15.

1.3 History of the Scholarship of MMT

An example of the difficulty of defining the genre of a text is MMT. MMT (originally designated 4QMishn) is a document found in Cave 4 at Qumran on six fragmented manuscripts.⁶¹ Similar to other ancient documents, MMT is a text whose classification has been much debated.⁶² Qumran academics have referred to it as *Halakhic* letter, a personal or private letter, a literary epistle, a treatise or a combination of several categories. Classification becomes more difficult, because the reconstructed text consists of three distinct sections: a calendrical document (A), a polemical collection of purity laws (B), and an epilogue in the form of a concluding exhortation (C).

Space does not permit a full rehearsal of the exceedingly complex discussion of the genre of MMT, but a brief survey may be helpful. The first description of MMT, as suggested by the official editors, Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, is “halakhic letter.” They initially understood the text to be a personal letter written by a Qumran community leader—probably the Teacher of Righteousness, to his opponents—possibly Jonathan or Simon, High Priests in Jerusalem.⁶³ When considering the form and content of the document, the editors have noted that “*MMT* has few of the formal characteristics of the personal letter, and we should

⁶¹ The fragments are designated 4Q394, 4Q395, 4Q396, 4Q397, 4Q398, and 4Q399.

⁶² Other documents from the Dead Sea are also difficult to classify. New designations have been employed to describe the *Damascus Document* (CD) and the *Rule of the Community* (1QS), which were otherwise difficult to classify. For the designation “rule texts” in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Philip S. Alexander, “Rules,” *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 803. Other genres significant to scrolls research are: parabiblical texts, calendars, poetry and liturgical texts, and sectarian-sapiential materials.

⁶³ Strugnell, “An Unpublished Halakhic Letter from Qumran,” in *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, April, 1984* (Jerusalem: IES, 1985), 400. This definition of the document’s definition has been supported by Robert Eisenman and Michael O. Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered: The First Complete Translation and Interpretation of 50 Key Documents Withheld for over 35 Years* (Shaftesbury: Element, 1992), 182-200, who have divided the document into two letters: The first letter on Works Reckoned as Righteousness (4Q394-398) and the Second Letter on Works Reckoned as Righteousness (4Q397-399). Hartmut Stegemann, *Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 148-151 refers several times to the document as a letter (*Brief*). Yaakov Sussmann, “The History of the Halakha and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Preliminary Talmudic Observations on Miqsat Ma’aseh Ha-Torah; Appendix 1,” in *Qumran Cave 4. V: Miqsat Ma’aseh Ha-Torah*. DJD X. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 185 states that “the work is written as a *personal epistle*—apparently from one of the leaders of the sect to a leader of the opposing group—and is couched in relatively mild language” (emphasis mine).

probably expect parallels rather in the epistle or in the treatise, though formal descriptions of these genres are hard to make.”⁶⁴ The letter-theory has also been questioned by Lester Grabbe who reminds us that in the end we do not even know whether the “letter was sent *from* Qumran or *to* Qumran” and that “we do not know who wrote MMT or to whom it was addressed.”⁶⁵ To Grabbe’s comments can be added the question of whether Qumran was involved at all at the time of composition. It should be noted that the document is fragmentary—particularly important for our purposes is the loss of the opening section. The text also employs no known ancient Jewish or Aramaic epistolary conventions, except possibly a conciliatory tone; therefore, to label this text a personal letter can be done only with great difficulty.

An approach to MMT that regards the text as an epistle has created a number of possibilities for scholars, such as Hanan Eshel.⁶⁶ In his view, MMT is not a “real” letter, but merely a text attributed to the Teacher of Righteousness by its readers, but most likely written by someone else.⁶⁷ This view is also held by Annette Steudel, who regards MMT as a literary epistle, suggesting that the text exhibits literary features of a letter.⁶⁸ Von Weissenberg reminds us that there are difficulties in trying to analyse a specifically Jewish corpus of literary epistles, because “examples of Jewish literary epistles are not preserved as manuscripts, instead, they are all attached into other compositions.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *DJD* X, 113. Strugnell has abandoned the classification of MMT both as a letter and as a treatise in “MMT: Second Thoughts,” 57-73. A similar caution is expressed by Kampen and Bernstein, eds. *Reading 4QMMT*, 5.

⁶⁵ Grabbe, “4QMMT and Second Temple Jewish Society,” in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues*, 90, see especially n. 5.

⁶⁶ Hanan Eshel, “4QMMT and the History of the Hasmonean Period,” in *Reading 4QMMT*.

⁶⁷ Eshel, “4QMMT and the History of the Hasmonean Period,” 55, 64. He finds support for his position by arguing that MMT is the “Law and Torah” mentioned in 4QpPs^a.

⁶⁸ Annette Steudel, “4Q448—The Beginning of MMT?” in *From 4QMMT to Resurrection: Mélanges qumraniens en hommage à Émile Puech* (ed. F. García Martínez, A. Steudel and E. J. C. Tigchelaar; STDJ 61; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 247-63.

⁶⁹ Hanne von Weissenberg, *4QMMT: Reevaluation the Text, the Function, and the Meaning of the Epilogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 150.

Another possibility worth considering is that MMT is a treatise. A treatise does not need to have a specific author (it could be anonymous), but would be written with an audience in mind. The purpose of a treatise is to state or clarify beliefs and practices, and is didactic or hortatory in style.⁷⁰ George Brooke, in support of this option, suggests that MMT could be classified as a “treatise with a didactic element.”⁷¹ The advantage with this proposal is that, unlike an epistle, which requires a specific author, recipient and historical moment, a treatise bypasses these concerns and could be a compilation of several issues that led the group to form.⁷² Fraade cogently defends the view that there is nothing in MMT that prevents a reading of the text as a document with an intra-communal focus.⁷³ Such a text could have been used to train neophytes or new members to the community, or as a study-text designed to teach later generations about the origins of the group, or as a record of the central issues and dogmas of the cult. A caution when resolving the issue of genre is that the category of treatise, too, suffers from a lack of suitable or satisfactory parallel texts, which could act as a control.⁷⁴ It is easier to reject or polemicize genre categories than to suggest viable alternatives. Lindenberger has stated that MMT is “generically mixed;”⁷⁵ Brooke has pointed out that the number of preserved copies suggest that it “was always intended as an open circular, designed to be heard by a wide audience who might identify themselves with the ‘you’ of the addressee.”⁷⁶ It seems fair to say that the various classifications and their juxtapositions so far discussed—letter vs. epistle, epistle vs. treatise—have some areas of

⁷⁰ Maxine L. Grossman, “Reading 4QMMT: Genre and History,” *RevQ* 20/77 (2001), 7, 11.

⁷¹ George Brooke, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament: Essays in Mutual Illumination* (Great Britain: SPCK, 2005), 167. Gershon Brin, “Review on DJD X: Qumran Cave 4 V: Miqsat Ma’aseh Ha-Torah by E. Qimron and J. Strugnell,” *JSS* 40 (1995): 334-42, advocates that MMT may have changed its purpose to accommodate a different social setting, from being a letter sent outside the community to become a basic treatise aimed at teaching its members.

⁷² Grossman, “Reading 4QMMT,” 12.

⁷³ Steven D. Fraade, “To Whom It May Concern: 4QMMT and Its Addressee(s),” *RevQ* 19/76 (2000): 507-26.

⁷⁴ Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE – 50 CE) in his works *Everyman is Free*, *On Rewards and Punishments*, and *On Abraham* may be the best Jewish representative of this genre category.

⁷⁵ Lindenberger, “Letters,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 481-82.

⁷⁶ Brooke, “Luke-Acts and the Qumran Scrolls: A Case of 4QMMT,” in *Luke’s Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (eds. Christopher M. Tuckett; JSNTSup 116; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 81.

overlap. What has not received adequate consideration when determining the genre of MMT is the oral/aural nature of the text, which may signal how the document was performed.

In the twentieth century, much has been learned concerning the definition of ancient letters, and its implication for understanding other texts. Although definitions of what constitutes a letter are paramount to our investigation, there are issues that have been exposed from our historical investigation. First, we must be careful about making distinctions between literary and nonliterary, real and non-real, genuine and imaginary/fictive letters and consequently miss what people actually did with letters in antiquity in a communal setting. Second, questions about the form and function of letters, initially addressed by Deissmann, Exler, Sykutris and followed by others, will resurface throughout this work. To be sure, important advances in epistolary literature have been made. For instance, it appears to be significant to understand how literary form and social context inform each other. Where these treatments fall short is that they do not give enough attention to the oral context of a letter, but merely emphasize its social/historical context. And as we shall see, one is not the same as the other. Finally, authorial intent may need to be considered in order to understand the letters' function, particularly if the text may be a literary fiction. The aim of the next chapter is to clarify and define the methods we will use to understand better the form, function and oral context of letters as they may have been performed in a community and to suggest how these methods may be applied to MMT.

2 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to understand and evaluate the critical methods scholars have used to analyse ancient texts, in particular letters, in order to suggest some preferences among those methods and to suggest other approaches that will be followed in our own study of Second Temple period Jewish letters. The intention of a methodology is to legitimize the questions that are asked of a text and to serve as a way of answering those questions. The two historical-critical methods that scholars have used most frequently when describing the text of a letter are form criticism and redaction criticism. Form criticism focuses on questions relating to the identification of typical patterns of language that give shape to the structure and function of a letter and redaction criticism emphasizes the final form of a text by considering how an editor(s) may have shaped the letter to express his or her literary goals.

Recent insights into textuality consist of structuralism (semiotics), which presupposes the centrality of the text, whereby meaning is created by understanding the elements of texts, their combinations, relations and codifications. Semiotics is a method that is particularly suited to a better understanding of letters, because letters introduce the audience to a set of characters and their explicit and encoded status in relationship to each another. In analyzing the process of communication, which consists of the interplay of author/editor, text, and performer and audience, some scholars have focused on the possible stages in the evolution from orality to writtenness and possibly back to orality, and investigated the possible interaction of writtenness and orality in ancient cultures. An approach to ancient letters that has not received a full scholarly treatment is performance criticism. This chapter will look in particular at the usefulness of applying performance analysis in conjunction with other approaches to examine ancient letters. Structuralism, orality and performance theory will draw attention to the actualization of a text by considering the oral texture of a letter and the community context in which a letter may have been read. It appears that a plurality of

methods will need to be used to probe a text in order to gain a more complete perspective on the variety of Second Temple period letters and to consider how these methods may apply to MMT.

2.1 The contribution of historical critical methods

Past research on Second Temple period letters has employed several methodologies. For our study consideration is given to focusing the discussion through historical critical methods⁷⁷ used predominantly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

2.1.1 Form Criticism

The early stages of the modern method of biblical studies referred to as form criticism⁷⁸ (*Formgeschichte*⁷⁹ or *Gattungsgeschichte*) can be attributed to the works of Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), who focused on the analysis of short, self-contained literary units. His emphasis was on culturally determined patterns of the text (*Gattung*) rather than on highlighting an individual, particular text. It is largely due to Gunkel that scholarship was introduced to looking at the social location of a genre,⁸⁰ which he called *Sitz im Leben*.⁸¹ The

⁷⁷ The historical critical approach is not limited to one method but employs many ways of analyzing the text. It seeks to explore answers to issues of authorship, audience, providence, purpose, date, form, style, etc. The often complex answers to these questions require an overlap of methods, such as source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, etc. For a succinct overview of the historical-critical method, see Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

⁷⁸ For overviews of the development of form-critical method, see Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi, eds., *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Martin J. Buss, *Biblical Form Criticism in its Context* (JSOTSup 274; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form Critical Method* (trans. S. M. Cupitt; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1969); John H. Hayes, ed. *Old Testament Form Criticism* (TUMSR 2; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974); Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (GBS; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁷⁹ The German word *Formgeschichte* appears as a technical term for the first time in Martin Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*. According to Klaus Koch, *Growth of the Biblical Tradition*, 3 note 1, the German *Formgeschichte* (lit. form history) implies two things: the history of linguistic forms, as well as the historical examination of this history. The meaning of the English *form criticism* is more limited, for it is concerned only with the second of these.

⁸⁰ Gunkel's Myth-and-Ritual History-of-Religions school endeavoured to reunite history and philosophy.

⁸¹ Martin J. Buss, *Biblical Form Criticism*, 234, offers this clarification of the term *Sitz im Leben*. "The term *Sitz im Leben*, as employed by Gunkel, refers to the home—origin or normal location—of a genre, not to the context of a particular text." Bob Becking, "Nehemiah 9 and the Problematic Concept of Context (*Sitz im Leben*)" in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism*, 263, offers this caution concerning what we assume we can

contribution of form criticism reflects the view that each text, whether long or short, must be treated as a whole and therefore the meaning emerges from the complete document not from fragments that can be extrapolated from the text. Methodologically, our study of letters includes asking questions concerning the historical intended meaning of the text for which we may depend on “genre investigation” in Gunkel’s sense. Form criticism has provided the reader with a set of expectations to look for in a standard frame and to observe how those expectations may be confirmed or subverted. For instance, when a text begins with “to the governor, from the king” the listening audience and the reader would mostly likely have been familiar with this standard letter form and therefore would have had a specific outlook on the oral/aural presentation of the text. The usefulness of the form critical approach as applied to ancient letters will be to determine the extent of the passage, its beginning and end, an issue that has not been adequately addressed in previous treatments of embedded letters.⁸²

One of Gunkel’s New Testament students, Martin Dibelius (1883-1947), was concerned to overcome “the arbitrariness into which previous phase of critical exegesis—so called liberal theology—had fallen in its judgments about what was ‘historical’ and what was not.”⁸³ For this reason Dibelius sought the “pure form” of a document and endeavoured to uncover the process leading from the oral tradition to the texts. Although he worked predominantly with New Testament texts, Dibelius’ focus on “reconstructing the origin and history of the individual piece in order to illuminate the history of the preliterate tradition”⁸⁴ may offer a useful method of determining a typology of various letters. In addition to understanding the oral history of a text, we will be concerned about the letter’s performance.

know about the societal settings behind the texts. He states that “a context, or *Sitz im Leben*, should be seen as a hypothesis on the past.”

⁸² Failure to establish the boundaries of the text is a weakness of Alexander’s work (“Remarks on Aramaic Epistolography”).

⁸³ This is the view of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: On the Foundations and the Itinerary of Exegesis Today” in *Opening up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation* (eds. José Granados, Carlos Granados, and Luis Sánchez-Navarro; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 10. Ratzinger includes R. Bultmann in this concern.

⁸⁴ Blum, “*Formgeschichte*—A Misleading Category?” in *Changing Face of Form Criticism*, 36.

Performance analysis inevitably causes us to examine the form of the written remains, but from a different perspective—looking for author(s) who happened to write. By analyzing Dibelius’ work, it becomes evident that the form critical method consists of more than describing and classifying texts, including letters, according to predetermined characteristics—it considers its historical function with the intent of discovering how a culture developed. In our investigation of letters, such as the text in Jeremiah 29 that consists of prophetic oracles in epistolary form, we will consider genre distinctions by reflecting on methods that include oral traditions. Unlike form-critical analysis that frequently made assumptions about human evolution and rote repetition, using the performance approach incorporates authorial creativity that potentially (re)generates a tradition.⁸⁵ The advantage to using a form critical approach in conjunction with the performative method is that it may allow us to understand better a “letter” if we consider its form and function in addition to the effects the text may have had on a performer and his/her audience.

2.1.2 Redaction Criticism

Whereas form criticism tended to look at isolated units of texts, redaction criticism dealt with the shape of the text in its final form. A possible strength of redaction criticism for our study of letters is that this method emphasizes the creative role of an editor(s) and indicates to us the environment in the communities to which the letters were written. Redaction criticism adds to the study of texts by “pursu[ing] the question of the theological and historical relations between the various textual layers of a book or between different books and asks whether different expansions of the text can be credited to the same

⁸⁵ Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, eds. *Folklore in Context: Essays* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1982); Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1977), 3-58; John Miles Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

redactional group or school.”⁸⁶ Therefore there may be evidence in a letter that it had been edited to reinforce some issues of the community to which it was written. For instance, some letters are extant in multiple copies consisting of possible editorial changes, and others have been translated and may indicate that a different ideological agenda is being presented. What redaction criticism cannot adequately explain is how an oral tradition continues to change and develop long after a text has been written; a process which may lead to multiple versions of the same text. It appears that orality continues to be reflected in textual form long after the authors of a text in an oral society have become written.⁸⁷ It is conceivable that a reference to an older text in the midst of a performance suggests an alleged author(s) outlines an oral or written tradition with the possible intent of having it fleshed out in a performance.⁸⁸

An important recent work conducted by a team of scholars from Manchester and Durham universities created a schematic literary profile of all complete anonymous or pseudepigraphic Jewish texts from 200 BCE to 700 CE.⁸⁹ Although this approach is not a methodology whose purpose is to assist in understanding a text better, it does privilege the final written form of a text, similar to redaction criticism. The value of this work is that it identifies the structurally important features through using a text-linguistic approach to literary profiling that defines texts as a particular type of text. This inventory will be helpful in our study of ancient letters in that it helps group texts according to their text-linguistic type. The outcome of the project will be an electronic database, which will offer new text-

⁸⁶ Manfred Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (trans. by Joachim Vette; Heidelberg Germany: Ashgate), 2006. The term *Redaktionsgeschichte* (redaction history) was first used by Willi Marxsen in *Mark the Evangelist*, published in German in 1956.

⁸⁷ J. Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry: Aspects of a South African Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁸⁸ A field of study called ethnopoetics considers ways of speaking in small societies. For an application of this methodology to the American First Nations' Peoples, see Dell Hymes, "The Ethnography of Speaking," *Anthropology and Human Behaviour* (T. Gladwin and W. C. Sturtevant, eds.; Washington, D. C.: Anthropological Society of Washington, 1962); Idem, *"In Vain I tried to tell you": Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

⁸⁹ Alex Samely, Philip Alexander, Rocco Bernasconi, Robert Hayward, "Inventory of Structurally Important Literary Features in Ancient Jewish Literature (Manchester: <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/ancientjewishliterature>, 2010).

linguistic descriptions of every text. Texts do not always yield up their sense easily; therefore, issues of the letters' literary components, shape, structure, form and style will be the first part of the methodological matrix employed to understand more comprehensively the meanings of the texts.

2.2 Contributions of recent insights into textuality

In addition to form and redaction criticism there are three other types of criticisms that need to be considered: semiotics, orality and performance. One of the weaknesses of historical critical methods is that they project onto the text categories and properties that may not have been present in the mind of the original author or editor. To be sure, letters are one of the few categories that draw attention to themselves by frequently naming the text a letter, but the emergent influence of reception-history has drawn attention to how texts, including letters, are read and reread. Literary studies have refocused their analysis from the historical critical methods—the emphasis of which was on the text and its authors—to the readers who construct the text in the act of reading it. The stress on how a text is experienced by readers, real or ideal, is the paradigm followed by semiotic theory, orality and performance criticism. These three examples of reader-based criticism will be evaluated to determine their usefulness (or otherwise) as a methodology for reading ancient Jewish letters.

2.2.1 Semiotics

There arose first in France, then in the United States, Britain and Germany, a movement in philosophy and literary criticism that tested its structural approach to the study of the biblical text. This application of the text arose out of a sense of disappointment and disillusionment with the historical-critical methods apparent lack of concern for the final form of the text. Semiotics, the science of signs and communication, reached biblical studies through the scholarship of linguistics and through the structural analysis of narrative material,

with which the names of Vladimir Propp,⁹⁰ Algirdas Greimas,⁹¹ Roland Barthes,⁹² and others⁹³ are associated.

In this section I only wish to add some specific comments on the possible uses that a semiotic approach (structuralism) could offer to better understand ancient Jewish letters; in particular, when we consider letters in the context of a public performance event for an audience.⁹⁴ A feature that is suited to our study is the predominance of structural criticism's emphasis of synchronic over diachronic relations in the text. Structural exegesis has little concern for the human author "behind" the text, because, as they argue, to penetrate the hidden mind of a writer is an unachievable goal. This principle, as applied to the analysis of Hebrew letters, aids our understanding by not prescribing correct methods in order to reconstruct what the author of the letter meant, but allows the reader to study what the author actually wrote.

⁹⁰ Vladimir Propp, a Russian structuralist, wrote *Morphology of the Folktale* (2nd ed.; Austin, Texas, 1968) in which he applied his methodology to a corpus of about 100 Russian folktales. He claimed that it is possible to reduce all characters in Russian folktales to a certain number of types or roles, each defined by its relation to the other. His approach is also called "syntagmatic analysis" because it relies on the sequence of episodes, or the syntax of the plot.

⁹¹ Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (introduction by D. McDowell; trans. R. Schleifer and D. McDowell; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). An excellent introduction of the semiotic method can be found in J. Calloud, "A Few Comments on Structural Semiotics: A Brief Review of a Method and Some Explanation of Procedures" (trans. J. C. Kirby) *Semeia* 15 (1979): 51-83; Bernard S. Jackson, *Semiotics and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). For a fuller treatment of semiotic analysis applied to the Genesis, see Ellen van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2-3: A Semiotic Theory and Method of Analysis Applied to the Story of the Garden of Eden* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1989).

⁹² Roland Barthes, "The Struggle with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:22-32 in *Image Music Text* (trans. by Stephen Heath; Fontana Press, 1977).

⁹³ In addition to scholars mentioned in the footnotes above, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in T. A. Sebeok (ed.), *Myth: A Symposium* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972): 81-106; J. P. Fokkelman, "Genesis 37 and 38 at the Interface of Structural Analysis and Hermeneutics," in L. de Regt, J. de Waard and J. P. Fokkelman (eds.), *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996): 152-87; Diane M. Stone, *Patterns of Destiny: Narrative Structures of Foundation and Doom in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002).

⁹⁴ This section will refer primarily to Erika Fisher-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theatre*, (trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), which follows structuralist insights, Marco de Marinis, *The Semiotics of Performance* (trans. Aine O'Healy; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), which explains the performance from a pragmatic point of view, and Eli Rozik's *Generating Theatre Meaning: A Theory and Methodology of Performance Analysis* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), which focuses on the theatre first and foremost as a nonverbal medium.

Semiotics emphasizes the production and process of generating meaning through the use of performance codes. A workable definition of performance code suggested by de Marinis is “the convention in performance which permits the association of particular contents with particular elements in one or more systems of expression.”⁹⁵ This description requires further explanation. First, we must distinguish between meanings of codes that the alleged original author(s) and those producing the texts may have wished to convey and codes that the oral performer may have interpreted for the audience by means of analyzing the characters presented in the text. These two codes may differ because the competence and intention of the original author(s) may not necessarily be the same as the analysis of the oral performer and his/her interpretation of the text. In other words, there are two kinds of semiotics at play: “there is a semiotics of *production* and the semiotics of *reception*.”⁹⁶ Second, the performance text requires that the listening audience interpret the text; an activity that goes beyond mere knowledge of the codes.

Against this background, I would like to consider the semiotics of reception and discuss three iconic codes⁹⁷ that if understood by the audience would necessarily create certain expectations. The first code to be interpreted is the iconic recognition of the reader/performer of the text. A person most likely would have given an oral presentation of a letter in a community, followed by many other performances by other performers to a variety of audiences over time. During the reading of letters, a performer presents images from a performance-text, which aims at identifying other characters in a complex interaction—a plot. Not only does the performer convey the text to the audience, but s/he is the one who connects iconic signs by interpreting a letter according to cultural codes, which operate in the

⁹⁵ De Marinis, *Semiotics of Performance*, 98.

⁹⁶ De Marinis, *Semiotics of Performance*, 99 (emphasis original).

⁹⁷ In the context of modern theory of signification the term “icon” was first used by Charles Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (eds., Ch. Hartshorne and Paul Weiss; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 2.247, who defines this term as “...anything whatever, be it quality, existent individual, or law, is an Icon of anything, in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it.”

real world. But the influence of the readers/performers cannot be easily determined, for it depends on their relation to the audience, reading skill, perceived importance of the text and many other factors, which makes it difficult to determine what features combine in order for the readers/performers to operate as a sign.

During an oral performance a world is described by the reader. One way this world can be understood is through the reading of a letter, whether or not an original one is present. The medium of a letter is a second code that must be interpreted by the audience. This is where the complexity of semiotics of performance increases, because readers/performers participate in theatrical semiosis “both as *signs* and as *producers of signs*.”⁹⁸ They function as a sign by presenting an image of a world, and they share in the production of signs by referring to a letter and characters within the text and by releasing the symbolic meaning of these signs. These semiotic codes are culturally informed over long periods of time and have been absorbed into a community to such an extent that they frequently appear to be “natural,” not learned. At this point it is enough to note that readers/performers “not only produce themselves as signs but also, as actor/signs, produce or modify other signs around them.”⁹⁹ A text-orientated performance can easily accommodate many presentations and variations, and therefore no text can be declared to be firmly closed. The element of the oral presenter producing signs as one aspect of creating meaning is absent from most treatments of ancient letters.

The third code that is present in letters to a greater or lesser degree is epistolary conventions and self-designations. Letters generally begin by stating who supposedly wrote the text, or in the terms of Derrida, the signifier, whose importance depends on its unambiguous relations to its signified (the identity of the sender). Similarly, the receiver is

⁹⁸ Jean Alter, *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 262 (emphasis original).

⁹⁹ Alter, *Sociosemiotic Theory*, 263. Although Alter does not refer to ancient oral presentations of letters, her main thesis of actors as signs and producers of signs can be reasonably applied to our study.

identified before the body of the letter commences. In theatrical terms the opening sets the stage—either through a narrative or through the text of a letter. It is not beyond reason to suggest that the alleged ancient Jewish letters guide the selection of interpretive frames by having suggested that a letter is being read. This self-presentation and exposition is of primary importance for the comprehension of the performance-text. Letters also have symbolic structures, unrelated to the sequence of events. These structures pertain to location (rural vs. urban, domestic vs. foreign), theological position (faithful vs. unfaithful, Jew vs. non-Jew) and political situation (king vs. subject, parent vs. child). In my view, there is a relationship between particular conventions or symbolic structures and comprehension. For instance, when a narrative states “now these are the words of a letter” and a letter-text is then read, the audience’s degree of awareness of this convention or iconic code conditions their level of understanding and expectation. In the same way, if a letter is addressed from a foreign king to his subjects, the audience must contextualize the importance of each individual mentioned in the letter. Mario Lavagetto speaks of the structure of anticipation of an audience by suggesting that expectation is organized on the basis of a series of data culturally held by the addressee, genre, and text.¹⁰⁰ For instance, when a text metonymically signals a tradition by using terms, formulae, and symbols it evokes in the audience meanings that are significant and the use of structural analysis will assist in understanding better the impact that this encoded tradition may have had on an audience.

Ancient texts have a history, even as the text reaches its final form; it still becomes read and reread by various subsequent eras. Structural criticism (re)awakens the view of making and interpreting ancient letters, not only as a final text, but as a process. With at least six extant copies of MMT, structural analysis may help explain the changes that occurred as the text was read and copied for later generations.

¹⁰⁰ Mario Lavagetto, *Quei più modesti romanzi: Il libretto nel melodrama di Verdi* (Milan: Garzanti), 176-78. Quoted in De Marinis, *Semiotics of Performance*, 113.

2.2.2 Oral Processes

In approaching the issue of oral and written traditions, our first step is to make some brief comment on the terms “oral” and “written,” and then to examine various models that have been employed by linguistic researchers. When discussing the basic question of what “oral” means, Egbert states that “a more precise term might be simply ‘spoken,’ as a name for one possible *medium* for our discourse.”¹⁰¹ Although speaking and writing applies to two different ways in which language is used, the situation becomes more complex when we speak of “oral” as the conception that underlies a discourse. Oesterreicher distinguishes between orality and writtenness by suggesting that a discourse may be oral as to its conception, but written as to its medium.¹⁰²

Hermann Gunkel conceived of an Israelite oral culture in which participants enjoyed family-centred folk tales. He offers this portrait of Hebrew oral transmission:

In the leisure of a winter evening the family sits about the hearth; the grown people, but more especially the children, listen intently to the beautiful old stories of the dawn of the world which they have heard so often yet never tire of hearing repeated.¹⁰³

This romantic view of the early oral tradition presented by Gunkel, who was influenced by Brothers Grimm version of German folk tales, suggests that these oral works were simple stories predating the literary text. According to Gunkel, these oral compositions were reworked and later transformed into a section of the written text of Scripture. It appears that Gunkel considered oral texts as a period of time, which was crude or primitive, different from a later written period. There is an inherent weakness when we understand the words “oral” and “written” as two mutually exclusive and opposed processes, which consist in the danger of bestowing these concepts with cultural value. In other words, our understanding of oral

¹⁰¹ Egbert J. Bakker, “How Oral is Oral Composition?” in *Signs of Orality: The Oral Tradition and its Influence in the Greek and Roman World* (ed. E. Anne MacKay; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 29; emphasis original.

¹⁰² W. Oesterreicher, “Types of Orality in Text,” in *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Performance, Tradition, and the Epic Text* (eds. E. J. Bakker and A. Kahane; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 190-214.

¹⁰³ Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966; German original, 1901), 41.

traditions cannot be reduced to merely a primitive state of communication, which is superseded by a better, more sophisticated, written medium.

A different approach to the theory of oral-written transmission is presented by the Jesuit priest and professor, Walter Ong. His primary interest for working on orality and writtenness concerns the differences that arise when the media of communication change, such as rural African people (oral) with “Westernized” people (electronic).¹⁰⁴ According to Ong’s typology,¹⁰⁵ social advantage in an oral culture is awarded to those who can speak the best, and to those who are assigned to preserve the memory of the tribe. His method may apply to Hebrew letters because of his emphasis on how the shift from orality to writtenness engages social, economic, political and religious structures. Ong contends that post-oral societies tend to develop abstract notions of history and nature, and encourage individual reflection which leads to competition, capitalism and democracy. In those societies religious belief appears to be based on a sacred text. It may be a fruitful inquiry to observe if these systemic changes are present in letters. Ong’s study is helpful in presenting a clear and distinct typology and by pointing out the universal features of an oral culture, but his sharp distinction between orality and writtenness does not adequately distinguish between the many types of orality. Loubser cautions that “it would be a serious methodological mistake to use [Ong’s] description to identify a set of ‘oral features’ in a written document and then to assume that the documents are indicative of the conventions of a primary oral society.”¹⁰⁶

Ong’s diachronic approach to oral and written texts has also been challenged by Ruth Finnegan, who has confronted the perception that once reading and writing are available the

¹⁰⁴ This conclusion of Ong’s study is suggested by J. A. Loubser, “Moving Beyond Colonialists Discourse: Understanding Oral Theory and Cultural Difference in the Context of Media Analysis” in *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Antiquity* (Jonathan A. Draper, ed.; Atlanta: SBL, 2004), 71.

¹⁰⁵ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

¹⁰⁶ Loubser, “Moving Beyond,” 72.

oral culture is subsumed in the written “higher” culture.¹⁰⁷ Finnegan states that there is a “striking *overlap* between oral and written culture.”¹⁰⁸ She supports the view that there is interplay of oral and written literature by contending that a piece may be composed in writing, but then transmitted and performed orally; or it may be composed and performed orally but writing may be used in its transmission.¹⁰⁹ Applying Finnegan’s line of argument, we will pay attention to possible oral processes in our study of letters, but will not be seeking a pre-written sub-stratum in the texts.

The two-stage model of oral to written proposed by Gunkel and Ong, which Finnegan has called the “Great Divide,”¹¹⁰ is based on the premise of evolutionary shifts, as if orality and written documents are separable layers of human history. In exploring a typology of the oral-written continuum, Susan Niditch traces the process of some texts that may have taken shape through recitation and recording. She advances the discussion of orality and writtenness by including archaeological evidence in her scholarly review.¹¹¹ First, she distinguishes texts that represent oral performances recorded as dictation or later from notes.¹¹² Second, Niditch delineates repeated oral performances resulting in the formalization and publication of the text.¹¹³ These two models might have taken shape in live performances, with the response of the audience helping establish the contours of the performance and text. Third, her position concerns literature produced in writing with recognizable oral forms.¹¹⁴ Her model allows for and accommodates variants in texts as performances change over time and thus may alter a text. The position proposed by Niditch

¹⁰⁷ Ruth H. Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

¹⁰⁸ Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality*, 111; emphasis original.

¹⁰⁹ Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality*, 111.

¹¹⁰ Ruth H. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹¹¹ For a similar methodology using Greek archeological evidence, see Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹¹² Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 117-20

¹¹³ Niditch, *Oral World*, 120-25.

¹¹⁴ Niditch, *Oral World*, 125-27.

of considering oral and written texts may support our method of focusing on the nature of orality in terms of the text and its transmission, which may be applied to understanding better the variants in the six copies of MMT.

The value of Niditch's methodology lies in overcoming the oral-written polarity as she raises the question of where to draw the line between oral and written literature. Her work suggests that features of orality such as repetition, formulae, epithets, longer formulae, quotations of a specific text or traditional referentiality, and patterns of content can be observed in a written text,¹¹⁵ but seems to make the particularity of the material suit her model. The basic question of what distinguishes "oral" from "written" literature is still far from certain. Ruth Finnegan refines the methods for studying oral culture by contending that anyone who goes on "to take the occurrence, or a specific proportion, or repetition as a touchstone for differentiating between 'oral' and 'written' styles is . . . bound to be disappointed."¹¹⁶ In addition Jack Goody argues that repetition, rhyming and the use of formulae are "more characteristic of oral performance in literate cultures."¹¹⁷

One of the features of oral societies is that in an oral culture "everything that one learns and passes on is done in the context of conversation in a situation."¹¹⁸ In ancient Jewish communities there appears to have been a strong relationship between a written text and an oral presentation of that text.¹¹⁹ In modern literate cultures what we read and write are not generally spoken; however, in the ancient Mediterranean world, writing was understood as representing oral speech.¹²⁰ Communication in oral cultures frequently focuses on group

¹¹⁵ Niditch, *Oral World*, 13-21.

¹¹⁶ Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, 130.

¹¹⁷ Jack Goody, "Canonization in Oral and Literate Traditions" in *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 27

¹¹⁸ David Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part I," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2009), 4.

¹¹⁹ See Niditch, *Oral World*.

¹²⁰ In some instances, such as inventory and tax lists, writing was not connected with speech, but for the most part, writing was largely understood as a representation of an oral conversation. For the preference for oral

identity and individual values are generally embedded in shared beliefs and remembered and passed on by a community through social interaction.¹²¹ It is therefore likely that letters would have been composed in or for oral events, and experienced in the person of a performer, who may have also been the messenger.¹²² David Rhodes insightfully states that “the composition-as-performance is not a written text, but an oral presentation. It is a living word, with a life of its own as distinct from writing. The story is not on the page. It is in the mind and body of the performer.”¹²³

The previous discussion shows the way in which theorists have studied how orality and writtenness have shaped societies and their texts,¹²⁴ and how scholars have conceptualized both written and oral transmission in terms of their specific function. In sum, on the issue of oral and written transmission there are no simple answers or even clear-cut definitions; therefore, research into this area of epistolary literature is bound to continue. Those studies that employ a simple model of the relation between orality and writtenness, which views them as opposing technologies, are confronted by empirical evidence challenging their assumptions. A key contribution of this dissertation is to show that letters were used to communicate across distances and indicate textual activity toward the written end of the oral-written continuum.¹²⁵ One of the implications of this section is the need to understand the particular cultural contexts and systems that control them. Crucial questions concerning the letters’ distribution, usage, and the culturally generated value that was placed

delivery in the ancient world, see Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 14-16.

¹²¹ For an article devoted to social memory, see Werner Kelber, “The Generative Force of Memory: Early Christian Traditions as Processes of Memory,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2006): 15-22.

¹²² Recent studies have shown that in antiquity silent reading of letters was common. See for example, Frank D. Gillard, “More Silent Reading in Antiquity: *Non omne verbum sonat*” *JBL* 112 (1993): 689-73; A. K. Gavrillov, “Techniques of Reading in Classical Antiquity,” *Classical Quarterly* 47 (1997):56-73; M. F. Burnyeat, “Postscript on Silent Reading,” *CQ* 47 (1997): 74-76. However, it was much more common for literary texts to be read aloud. For a discussion on reading ancient texts, see Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 14-16.

¹²³ Rhoads, “Performance Criticism,” 10.

¹²⁴ By “texts” I refer to a wide range of material including oral and printed texts.

¹²⁵ According to Niditch’s typology, *Oral World*, 51.

on their reception and distribution will need to be considered. Our task now is to expand the method of understanding epistolography to include the possibility of a performance of a written text.

2.2.3 Performance Criticism

What is missing in most treatments of ancient Hebrew letters is the consideration of how a text may have been actualized in performance. Our goal is to gather evidence of the interplay of structuralism, orality and performance in order to propose a methodology that may identify a meaning and character of Jewish letters in their original historical context. If the “medium is the message” as Marshal McLuhan (1911-1980) has suggested,¹²⁶ then documents must be experienced in the original medium, which may include oral storytelling or recitation to an audience. Performance criticism addresses the possible misperception or misinterpretation that may arise from a methodology that reads back into the ancient world the documentary system of the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries, a practice called media anachronism by Tom Boomersshine.¹²⁷

The purpose for our study of performance criticism is to explain the features of ancient Jewish oral culture and to clarify the function of a letter in relation to performance. Performance criticism is a sprawling discipline that includes theatre and performance studies, social sciences and semantics and is a term that “has a wide range of meanings, from the traditional practice of critically analyzing performance histories, through the study of the presentation of theatre and drama, to the anthropological and sociological study of identity, politics and power.”¹²⁸ Despite the complexity of the category, Richard Bauman provides a

¹²⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (2nd ed.; Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1964; New York: Penguin Books, 1990). Critics of McLuhan accuse him of technological determinism.

¹²⁷ Tom Boomersshine, “Biblical Storytelling and Biblical Scholarship” NOBS Scholars Conference, Aug 2-7, 2009.

¹²⁸ Terry Giles and William J. Doan, *Twice Used Songs: Performance Criticism of the Songs of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 142.

useful definition of performance. He contends that performance mirrors our ability to (re)present what we perceive by providing “a consciousness of doubleness, through which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered model of an action.”¹²⁹ Using this definition, it becomes clear that the fundamental aspect of performance theory is that performance is an embodied enactment and is part of the meaning of a text. Precisely because performance criticism is an eclectic discipline, it allows for the integrated appreciation of form and function to underpin meaning. Therefore to analyse a letter from a performance point of view, the distinctly oral features will need to be discerned, along with the implied aural impact. It may be useful to anticipate the difference that this approach may have on understanding letters and MMT. In contrast with focusing on the meaning of words and phrases, using a performance perspective considers what is happening in the performance of a text and what effect or function the text may have had in a social context. If it can be assumed that a community is involved in the performance of a letter, then it can be said that interaction was expected and thus affected the reading and transmission of the text. One aspect of understanding the oral features focusses on the pioneering work of John Austin’s speech-act theory.¹³⁰ In short, his view is that the function of language is not merely to state things, but to do things.¹³¹ Stating things is only one function of language, and those who state things may also intend to do something with their language. The key to this clarification is that the indicative force used in letters of

¹²⁹ Cited in Carlson, *Performance*,” 14. Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 35 describes performance as “restored behaviour.”

¹³⁰ The concept of speech-act theory that has provided a methodology for considering language as performance is associated with John Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and Austin’s student, John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). For a concise history of speech-act theory, see Carlson, *Performance*,” 56-75. For the performative dimensions of language see J. E. Botha, “The Potential for Speech Act Theory for New Testament Exegesis: Some Basic Concepts,” *Hervormide Teologiese Studies* 47 (1991): 294-303; R. Briggs, “The Use of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation,” *Current Research in Biblical Studies* 9 (2001): 229-76; *idem*, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation: Toward a Hermeneutic of Self-Involvement* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 2001); but also the cautions of Anthony C. Thiselton, “The Supposed Power of Words in Biblical Writings,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974): 283-99.

¹³¹ This position is exemplified by the “I do” pronouncement during a marriage ceremony. These words carry an intention of marriage; not merely a pronouncement using words.

request or the descriptive information found in the introduction of a letter may reveal something about the intention or experiences of the author(s) or elicit a desired response from the audience—a point which may have been more clear and direct in a performance.

The oral/performance setting of the Second Temple literary culture falls into several categories or processes. First, letters may have been initially dictated to a scribe for the production of a text. This oral/aural setting may have consisted of the official writing of governmental decrees, memoranda, and treaties, or during the dictation of personal letters. Second, some letters were subsequently embedded in a narrative in which the readers and re-readers understood that the texts “were composed under the assumption that they would be read in the setting of oral performance.”¹³² This raises the question of whether performance serves to reinforce the primary assumptions and values of a culture, or to create new or alternative assumptions.¹³³ Performance theory has attempted to demonstrate the fluid nature of the relationship between the author, text, and interpretive audience, as well as between performance and life. Precisely because the manuscript was influenced by the performative context in which it was shared and adapted to match different community settings.¹³⁴

The question remains whether there is a way to find in these approaches to oral traditions a means to get access to the performative event by considering the textual remains. In order to shape a method suited for shorter works, rather than long epics, I will employ the system of Alan Dundes, who distinguishes between the text, texture, and context.¹³⁵ By text I

¹³² Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE-400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 18.

¹³³ This question was raised by Doan and Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005),” 16.

¹³⁴ See Emanuel Tov, “Scribal Practices Reflected in Texts from the Judean Desert,” in Peter Flint and J. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 1998), “When copying from an existing text, most ancient scribes incorporated their thoughts on that text into the new version which they produced. Thus they added, omitted, and altered elements; all of these changes became part of the newly created text, in which the new features were not easily recognizable since they were not marked in a special way” (p. 424).

¹³⁵ Alan Dundes, “Text, Texture and Context,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 20 (1965): 251-61, repr. in *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1980), 20-32. This method has been elaborated by Dan

refer to the specific ways in which a letter is available to us in a meaningful structure, by texture I mean the expressive choices made to read and perform a letter in language, sound, and sight, and by context I discuss the specific performance of a letter by a performer before an audience at a particular time and place.¹³⁶ Thus the analysis of each letter will follow this format: First, a synchronic study of the letters' formal features will be used to understand better how the texts may have functioned in a community as presented by a performer. In this section form criticism will be employed to identify typical patterns of language that give shape to the structure and function of a letter and redaction criticism will be useful to consider the creative role an editor(s) may have had to shape the letter to promote a particular agenda. Additionally, the way of representing the structure will follow Dell Hymes' model of "measured" verse, which stresses how oral performance can be, to some extent, embodied in a text.¹³⁷ The term "measured" verse is descriptive of how the material can be divided, not according to stress and syllable, but according to "the relation of putative units to each other within the whole."¹³⁸ The advantage of his analysis is that Hymes insists that every presentation is an interpretation of the text's structure. Using this paradigm, he divides stories of the Chinook First Nation's peoples into lines and verses. The larger units are divided according to the text's changes in people, place, time, speaker, often signaled by particles that translators ignore.¹³⁹

Second, having a better understanding of the structure of a text should suggest a cultural setting for the letters. In this section we will consider how the oral texture uses language to express traditions, through the use of signs, terms and intertexts by paying

Ben-Amos, *Folklore in Context*, 2-37. This method has been used in Jewish narratives by Antoinette Clark Wire, *Holy Lives, Holy Deaths: A Close Hearing of Early Jewish Storytellers* (Studies in Biblical Literature 1; Atlanta: SBL, 2002).

¹³⁶ This approach has been adapted from Wire, *Holy Lives*, 10-11.

¹³⁷ Dell Hymes, "In Vain". Hymes focused on the literature of First Nation Peoples from the North Pacific Coast, but his principles can usefully be applied to other forms of literature.

¹³⁸ Hymes, "In Vain", 318.

¹³⁹ Hymes, "In Vain", 142-83.

specific attention to the performers' and audience's cultural traditions. The primary methodologies that will be helpful to understand the author(s) use of expressive choices are structuralism (semiotics) and orality. Finally, the methodologies employed to understand the text and texture combine to suggest a context in which a letter may have been performed. Performance criticism concerns the performance of Jewish letter writing traditions in an oral culture. All that has been described here should remind us that performance criticism challenges us to rethink our methods from "written to oral, from private to public, from 'public readers' to performers, from silent readers to hearers/audience, from individual to communal audience, and from manuscript transmission to oral transmission."¹⁴⁰

Although this dissertation encompasses several disciplines and approaches, to identify its methodology as interdisciplinary privileges the separation of categories of study. The breath of research required to address the complexity of the social and literary world of Second Temple period Jewish letters will necessitate that the letters be analysed comprehensively in order to determine what is possible to know and what is possible to propose. The methodologies that will be employed—form and redaction criticism, semiotics, oral and performance theory—will be constructed not only from the text, but also from the historical context, in which we seek to understand the cultural codes, readers' beliefs and letter conventions. The purpose of studying ancient Jewish letters is to discover whether the methods used to understand letter genre can inform us about the text, texture and context of MMT. This model will not attempt to determine what the text "really" said, but more modestly, "what can really be said" about the worlds created by the authors, performers and audience of ancient letters. Keeping these considerations in mind, the next three chapters will aim to describe letters and their literary features and suggest how these letters may have been performed. We will begin with non-embedded free-standing letters from the island of

¹⁴⁰ Rhodes, "Performance Criticism, 6.

Elephantine, which display the clearest illustrations of epistolary form and will serve as a basis for performance analysis. The next category in chapter 4 is a selection of an Aramaic and a Hebrew Jewish letter featured in historical or fictional narratives, which require a more integrated approach. Finally, Jewish letters written in Greek and influenced by Greek epistolary form will be studied and compared with Aramaic and Hebrew letters to determine how forms and functions may have been adapted and adopted to new settings. The application of the results of these chapters will be used later in the case study of MMT.

3 Letters from Elephantine

In this chapter I intend to show that attention to performance has the potential to transform our understanding of Second Temple period Jewish letters. The examples that will be used to accomplish this task will begin with non-embedded, free-standing letters from Elephantine. These texts will serve as a standard against which other Jewish letters can be compared, because of their straightforward use of idiomatic letter form as discerned by a synchronic comparison with other ancient epistolary texts.

The first text is from a group of letters called the Hermopolis papyri, which concern family commercial interests and give us insight into family activities. This letter is a good starting point for our examination of ancient Jewish letters, because it may provide an important link between the oral performance of a personal letter that may have had only a limited audience and performance context¹⁴¹ and our investigation of texts that may have had multiple performances in many contexts. The second text, frequently called the “Passover” letter, was discovered in a communal archive in a Jewish colony on the island of Elephantine. Although the word “Passover” is not found in the text, the letter clearly concerns the celebration of Passover and is addressed to a community, rather than an individual. This document is “unquestionably the most important letter. . .for Jewish religious history,”¹⁴² and was most likely a text that was referred to from time to time as the need arose. The purpose of investigating these letters is to suggest how and under what circumstances they may have been performed by using form criticism to propose a structure and semiotic and oral

¹⁴¹ We should not assume that personal letters would have had only one reading, for as Jonathan Draper points out that “the reading of letters or scrolls over and over again would have made the written text into the living word.” Draper finds a parallel in the early colonial period in southern Africa, in which personal letters were read over and over again, with oral presentations in ancient cultures. See Draper, “Jesus’ ‘Covenantal Discourse’ on the Plain (Luke 6:12-7:17) as Oral Performance: Pointers to ‘Q’ as Multiple Oral Performance,” in *Oral Performance, Popular Tradition, and Hidden Transcript in Q* (Semeia Studies 60; ed. by Richard Horsley; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2006), 75.

¹⁴² Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*,” p. 61.

approaches to underscore the texture. The outline features the observations of Dell Hymes,¹⁴³ who represented a document in a way that points to the manner in which a performer and an audience may have experienced a text.

3.1 Form and Function of Ancient Jewish Letters

Letter conventions vary in type and in the range of topics, from a letter sent from a friend or relative to official letters sent from administrators and governments, and therefore some of the variations in form may reflect the different social relations between sender and recipient. The principal parts of Aramaic letters appear to be: opening, body, closing, and sometimes an external address that could be read from the outside without breaking the seal.¹⁴⁴ There is scholarly consensus that the fifth century BCE papyrus texts and fragments discovered at or near Elephantine adopt the formal aspects of Aramaic letter writing form. There are thirty-five Aramaic letters, with twenty-eight belonging to Elephantine¹⁴⁵ and seven found elsewhere.¹⁴⁶ Form critics have identified and classified the idiomatic conventions of these letters that would have set up the expectations for a reader and audience to know what details to look for in reading and hearing the text. For instance, the letters are introduced in one of two ways. If the sender and recipient were peers; or if the recipient was a superior the typical formula was: “To recipient; (from) sender.”¹⁴⁷ But if the sender was superior to the receiver, the formula would be reversed: “From sender; to recipient.”¹⁴⁸ Therefore the introduction serves an informative and symbolic purpose by means of the performer introducing the audience to the characters in the letter. The audience would have immediately

¹⁴³ Hymes, “*In Vain*,” esp. Part 2, pp. 79-259.

¹⁴⁴ These divisions are described by Alexander in “Remarks,” 161-70. See also Fitzmyer, “Some Notes,” 201-25; Pardee, “An Overview,” 321-46; Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 7-10.

¹⁴⁵ These letters are found in Bezalel Porten and A Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, Jerusalem, 1986-93 (hereafter *TAD A*=1986; *TAD B*=1989; *TAD C*=1993). The 28 letters from Elephantine are edited in *TAD A* 3.1-10; 4:1-10; 5.2, 5; 6.1, 2.

¹⁴⁶ The letters were found at el-Hibeh (*TAD A* 3.11), Luxor (*TAD A* 2.5-7), Saqqarah (*TAD A* 5.1) and two are unknown (*TAD A* 5.3, 4).

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, *TAD A* 2.1-7; 3.1, 4-11; 4.1-4, 7-8; 5.3; 6.1.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, *TAD A* 6.2-16.

been made aware of the social relationship between the sender and recipient, even without knowing the parties, and thus may have anticipated a particular tone or emphasis of the presentation. Unlike contracts, in which the date appears in the opening line, the two Jewish letters under review begin with an initial address.¹⁴⁹ Following the initial address in the introduction, there usually appears a greeting and blessing.¹⁵⁰ According to Porten, “the more important the recipient and/or the more serious the matter at hand, the weightier would be the greetings (cf. *TAD* A4.3, 7-8; 5.3).”¹⁵¹ Typical well-wishes cover blessings of welfare, strength, and life; usually in combination.¹⁵² Greetings frequently use the name of a god(s) or a reference to the gods, as seen in the Passover letter (“May the gods bless my brothers [always]”).¹⁵³ Finally, some letters conclude with a formula, name of a scribe, the date of writing, and a final address; either on the outside of the letter or at the end of the body of the letter.¹⁵⁴ These form critical details provide us with a standard frame for defining and understanding Jewish letters. In the performance of the text, the function served by a particular order of names in the introduction would have indicated hierarchy and authority to the reader and audience, while introducing the major characters in the exchange. The query as we move forward is whether these letters give evidence in the body of the text for an oral

¹⁴⁹ The initial address is often referred to by the Latin term *praescriptio*. A number of Hebrew letters from Lachish lack an initial address.

¹⁵⁰ Four private letters add a greeting to a local temple before the address, such as “Greetings to the temple of Bethel” (*TAD* 2.1). The temples include Bethel, the Queen of Heaven, Nabu and Banit at Syene or YHW at Elephantine (*TAD* A2.1-4; 3.3). Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 9 points out that many Hebrew letters have no greeting formulae. The preferred formula at Lachish uses the verb “hear”: “May YHWH send you [literally, ‘cause you to hear’] good news this day. (See Lindenberger no. 61; also nos. 62-63, 66-67). In number 64 the verb “see” is used: “May YHWH (יְרֵא יְהוָה) make this time a good one for you.” The letter formulae from Kuntillet ‘Ajrūd writes: I bless you by YHWH of Samaria and his *asherah*” (67a: A and B) followed by a blessing in 67a: B: “May he bless you and keep you, and be with my lord.”

¹⁵¹ Porten, “Aramaic Papyri,” *ABD* 2 (1992): 445-55; here 448.

¹⁵² See for example the letter “To a son on a journey” includes the greeting “I send you greetings and wishes for your good health” (*TAD* A3.3); the translation is from Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 36-37. For similar greetings, see also *TAD* A2.7; 3.4, 8; 6.3-7.

¹⁵³ Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 30 (*TAD* A4.1; *AP* 21). For other greetings that use the name of a deity, see *TAD* A3.5-7, 9-11; 4.2-4, 7-8; 6.1.

¹⁵⁴ For an example of the date on the outer band, see *TAD* A6.1, 2. For examples of the date at the end of the letter, see *TAD* A3.3, 8, 9; 4.7, 8; 5.1).

tradition and to determine whether there are some ways to get access to the creative performance that may have taken place.

3.2 Hermopolis Family Letter

The family correspondence represented by the “Hermopolis” papyri¹⁵⁵ consisting of a packet of seven or eight letters was written during the Persian occupation of Egypt. The Aramean family of Makkibanit wrote these letters at end of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth century BCE from Memphis to Luxor and Syene.¹⁵⁶ The documents were found in 1945 rolled up, folded in half, tied, and sealed and appear not to have been delivered, but provide valuable information about Jewish epistolary practices. Epistolary scholars have made valuable form-critical observations concerning the Hermopolis letter *TAD A2.1*, but the text is too short to observe redactional layers.

3.2.1 Text

The first question that should be asked is how this ancient family letter (*TAD A2.1*) is related to oral performance. It appears that what we have in printed form is merely a transcript or libretto of a performance. Insofar as we have been trained or habituated in print culture, it may be helpful to attend to the language patterns of a text by considering verbal forms. In order to avoid merely imposing a scholarly scheme on a text, attention must be given to important markers, such as repeated words and sounds, parallel phrases and verbal formulae. According to Hymes, “the recurrence and patterning of linguistic features thus is decisive for the organization of the text.”¹⁵⁷ If his view is correct, then it is immediately evident that the initial adverb “and now” in the body of the text plays a central role in shaping the performance. Although almost all ancient Hebrew and Aramaic letters begin the body of a

¹⁵⁵ *TAD A2.1-7*

¹⁵⁶ Seven were written by the same person and meant to be sent to Luxor (*TAD A2.5-6*) and Syene (*TAD A2.1-4*). The eighth letter was written by a different scribe and was intended for Luxor (*TAD A2.7*). For an overview of the Elephantine letters, see Porten, *Elephantine Papyrus*, 74-80.

¹⁵⁷ Hymes, “*In Vain*,” 152.

letter with this transition marker, the expression “and now” is particularly frequent in this letter and serves more than a verbal transitional purpose. In the view of Muraoka and Porten, the adverbial expression (“and now”) in the Hermopolis letter under review can have “no functional significance”¹⁵⁸ and is “probably a popularization of the officialese”¹⁵⁹ From a form-critical perspective an exegete may arrive at a similar conclusion concerning repeated words, but according to performance criticism particles are essential to shaping the presentation. Such a simple, regular pattern may have been employed to give emphasis to the items of concern, which most likely would have been stressed in a performance. By paying special attention to the manner in which these initial elements are used, we can suggest that each of the six statements can be considered verses and when grouped together form two scenes, consisting of triples. The sets of concerns—over a tunic and sending castor oil plus the care of friends—are balanced by each scene employing three occurrences of the adverb “and now.”¹⁶⁰ Emphasizing connectives provides a different analysis of texts and allows for an interaction between syntax, sound and sense; a method which stresses the narrative flow of a text, rather than viewing the connectives as optional.¹⁶¹

The introduction includes the word “peace/greetings” four times and uses “a coordinating conjunction. . .repeated ad nauseam”¹⁶² to list friends who are being greeted. Nauseous or not, the repeated use of the word “and” would have slowed the pace of a performance, while the performer may have pointed to each person who was singled out for a welcome. If the Hermopolis letter is structured according to oral patterns, then it may show much more clearly the feature of balance between scenes and presentation during a performance. The text we will be using is based on the reconstruction of the letter by

¹⁵⁸ Takamitsu Muraoka and Bezalel Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 310.

¹⁵⁹ Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 335

¹⁶⁰ There is one verse that only uses “and,” without the adverb “now.” This shortened introduction to a statement would not have taken away from the rhythm of an oral presentation.

¹⁶¹ See notes 167 and 168 below.

¹⁶² Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 320

Lindenberger, with words found in the original but left untranslated by Lindenberger given in italics.¹⁶³

I. Opening

A. Temple Greeting

“Greetings (שלם)¹⁶⁴ to the temple of Bethel and the temple of the Queen of Heaven.”¹⁶⁵

B. Interior Address

“To my sister¹⁶⁶ Nanaiham from your brother Nabusha.”

C. Initial Blessing

“I bless you by Ptah¹⁶⁷ —may he let you see me again in good health! (בשלם)”

D. Secondary Greetings

“Greetings (שלם) to Bethelnetan. Greetings (שלם) to Nikkai(?) and Asah and Tashai and Anati and Ati and Reia.”¹⁶⁸

II. Body

A. Scene 1: Concern over a tunic

1. “*And now*¹⁶⁹ the tunic you sent me has arrived. I found it all streaked.”¹⁷⁰
2. “*And I just don’t like it at all! Do you have plenty of other kinds?*¹⁷¹ If I knew I would exchange it for a *dress*¹⁷² for Ati.
3. “*And now* I do wear the tunic you brought¹⁷³ to Syene for me.”

¹⁶³ Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 31-32.

¹⁶⁴ The word שלם has the meaning of “well-being.” Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, p. 89 finds the rendering of שלם with “greeting” as inadequate, but convenient. Aramaic uses the nominal phrase with שלם; whereas, the Greek uses the verb (και) ἐγὼ αὐτὸς ὑγιαίνω, “I, myself, am in good health” (Dion, “Aramaic ‘Family Letter,’” 68).

¹⁶⁵ According to Dion, “Aramaic ‘Family Letter,’” 67, “when visiting a famous shrine, Aramaean and Greek travelers alike would take care to make obeisance (προχυνέω) to the local deities on behalf of their folk, and to ‘bless’ (ברך) their relative and friends ‘to’ the local god; hence the habit of mentioning this act of devotion among the initial greetings of private letters.” Another example of a prayer for the wellbeing (שלום) of a city (Jerusalem) and a temple, see Psalm 122:6-8.

¹⁶⁶ The addressee may have been a relative or possibly his wife.

¹⁶⁷ According to Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 193, “uttering a verb in the perfect may be like performing it or acting it out.” Another use of the perfect in this letter is: “I am sending this letter to greet you” (A2.1:12). See also A6.3:1.

¹⁶⁸ For another example of the coordinating conjunction being frequently repeated, see B2.8:3. This conjunction is left untranslated by Lindenberger, as he points out “to avoid the monotonous and un-English series of ‘ands,’ the ubiquitous conjunction is often omitted in translation” (*Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 12).

¹⁶⁹ The body of every extant Hermopolis letter begins with some form of the transitional word וכעת “and now;” left untranslated by Lindenberger, but translated by Porten. The letter uses this adverb frequently, almost beginning each sentence “in the manner of ‘and then’ in children’s diaries or letters” (Muraoka and Porten, *A Grammar*, 310; see also 335). Of the 15 lines in this letter, there are five instances of this connecting adverb.

¹⁷⁰ Or “frayed” or “ripped”

¹⁷¹ The meaning of this section is uncertain, but this is the sentence that is suggested by Lindenberger.

¹⁷² Or “pot”

¹⁷³ “You brought” is in the plural. The shift from singular to plural pronouns may indicate that these letters encompassed large family circles and they may have been performed in communities.

B. Scene 2: Concern over castor oil with internal formulae

1. “*And now* please have some castor oil sent to us,¹⁷⁴ so we can exchange it for olive oil.”
2. “*And now* don’t worry about me and Makkebanit; let us worry about you instead!¹⁷⁵ Take care of Bethelnetan;¹⁷⁶ keep Habib away from him!”¹⁷⁷
3. “*And now* if I can find anyone dependable, I will send you something.”¹⁷⁸

III. Final Greetings

“Greetings (שלם) to. . .”¹⁷⁹

“I am sending this letter to greet you (לשלמכן).”¹⁸⁰

“Greetings (שלם) to my father Psami from your servant Nabusha”

“Greetings (שלם) to my mother Mama”

“Greetings (שלם) to my brother Beti and his household”

“Greetings (שלם) to Wahpre”

IV. External Address

“To Nanaiham from Nabushezib son of Petekhnum.”

“To Syene.”

3.2.2 Texture

Most of the scholarly work on ancient Jewish letters in general, and the Hermopolis letters in particular, has been with the text. Texture seems to have been left to the interested linguists, such as Muraoka and Porten,¹⁸¹ while performative context has been almost completely ignored. So far, by using a form-critical approach, we have set the groundwork for understanding what is being said (text), so that now we can consider how the text is

¹⁷⁴ Or “Let them bring us castor oil!” This is a jussive whose function is to indicate the speaker’s will or wish.

¹⁷⁵ The formula “don’t worry about me” is also found in the Hermopolis letters nos. 3, 6 and 8. “It is you I am concerned about” is found in Hermopolis letters 3, 4 and 8. These expressions seem to be a common epistolary formula. For a similar phrase in a Phoenician letter, see KAI 50: “Are you well? I, myself, am well.” A similar concern is expressed in the Egyptian letter BM 10103 from the 28th dynasty (Abd El-Mohsen Bakir, *Egyptian Epistolography from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-First Dynasty* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1970). The formulae “Do not worry about me” and “It is about you I am concerned” appear just as frequently in Greek as in Aramaic (Dion, “Aramaic ‘Family Letter,’” 67).

¹⁷⁶ “Take care of her” is found in Hermopolis 2.17.

¹⁷⁷ Literally, “from Habib” (מן חבב).

¹⁷⁸ According to Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, p. 324 this syntagm signifies that, “should the situation indicated by the [protasis] be or become a reality, that which is indicated by the [apodosis] possibly or most likely would become a reality.” For other examples of this syntagm, see A2.1:5; A4.7:27. The apodosis in the letter under review seems to indicate a promise, pledge or commitment on the part of the speaker.

¹⁷⁹ Five people are greeted; in addition, a greeting is sent to the whole neighbourhood. Such a fulsome greeting is unique among Elephantine letters.

¹⁸⁰ “I send you this letter to greet you” is also found in Hermopolis 1.13; 2.17; 3.13; 5.9; 6.10; 7.4.

¹⁸¹ For example, Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*.

conveying a message in expressive choices (texture). According to Halliday, “a text is meaningful not so much because the hearer does not know what the speaker is going to say. . .but because he does know.”¹⁸² If that is the case, then there must be some indicators in the texture—how the letter is being told—that would indicate that the audience understood what was being said, because they most likely would have been familiar with idiomatic letter conventions. Standard letter conventions, as well as codes consisting of the performer reading the letter and the presence of a copy of the text, would have combined to create certain expectations of the audience. The introduction to this personal family letter addresses the signifier, a brother, and the signified, his sister; or possibly a husband to his wife.¹⁸³ If we can assume that the performer is not the author of the letter, then the performer is the authoritative voice of the author made effective by reading the letter.

During the reading, the performer began by presenting a four-fold introduction; elements which recur frequently in other letters, thus suggesting that the audience would have anticipated these components, or some similar variation. The private Hermopolis letters written to Syene all open with temple greetings to Banit,¹⁸⁴ Nabu,¹⁸⁵ or in this letter to Bethel and the Queen of Heaven, and all eight letters in this series bless their recipients by Ptaḥ, the name of the deity of Memphis. The pronouncement of a blessing is a significant oral device used in the letter’s introduction and was employed with the intention of the speaker expecting to produce an effect on the audience. The evaluation of Porten puts this dedication in perspective: “This blessing was in effect an intercessory prayer that may have been uttered in the shrine of Ptaḥ who held sway in Memphis.”¹⁸⁶ The speech act “I bless you by Ptaḥ—may he let you see me again in good health!” reflects the common structure: I, you, performative

¹⁸² M. A. K. Halliday, *Language and Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1978), 61.

¹⁸³ It is unclear whether the use of the term “sister” refers to a wife or a blood relationship.

¹⁸⁴ *TAD* A2.2:1 and 2.4:1.

¹⁸⁵ *TAD* A2.3:1

¹⁸⁶ Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 90 note 6.

verb. The purpose of a speech act was to affect the actual or possible state of affairs by means of the hearers' recognition of the speaker's intention to produce that effect.¹⁸⁷ Therefore it appears that the utterance of the blessing is an act of consecration, not merely words spoken. The concepts of symbolic codes and speech acts are firmly connected to a social context, whereby an audience would be required to understand letter conventions as well as the institution of blessing and recognize the one on whose behalf the blessing is spoken.

The analysis adopted here is to determine structural units by the recognition of initial elements of sentences, particularly the expression *וכעת* "and now." It appears some thirty times in the Hermopolis letters (sometimes without *ו*).¹⁸⁸ There are various reasons that have been suggested for the use of this term; it is employed as a transition marker, as a means of introducing a new subject, as well as "to introduce a new message concerning the same subject in 1.6, and to have its basic meaning 'now, at this moment' in 6.8."¹⁸⁹ To these explanations must be added the oral/aural affect that initial elements serve to regulate a performance. According to this position, lines or sentences are not the pivotal unit, but rather "verses" as described by Hymes.¹⁹⁰ Verses are recognized by repetition within a frame; a task made easier in this letter because of the repeated initial elements. The use of the conjunction "and" and the adverbial phrase "and now" are therefore not merely a tedious trivia of ancient minds that need to be "smoothed out" by linguists and modern readers because of their monotony, but rather they are markers of measure. As has been mentioned, the term "measured" verse is descriptive of how the material can be divided, not according to stress

¹⁸⁷ For a summary of how speech act theory can be applied to the textual level, see Rozik's *Generating Theatre Meaning*, 134-35.

¹⁸⁸ As another example of "and now" being viewed as "out of place, see R. Degen, who is of the opinion that *וכעת* in *TAD A2.3:3-4* should be deleted as a scribal error, since it is found in the middle of a sentence. Degen, "Die aramäischen Ostraka in der Papyrus-Sammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek," in *Neue Ephemeris für Semitische Epigraphik* (ed. R. Degen, et. al; vol. 3; Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1978), 37.

¹⁸⁹ Jan-Wim Wesselijs, "Language Play in the Aramaic Letters from Hermopolis," *Aramaic Studies* 4.2 (2006), 246-47.

¹⁹⁰ For a full description of verses and lines on which this discussion is based, see Hymes, "In Vain," 318-20.

and syllable, but according to the relation of units to each other within the whole.¹⁹¹ In the secondary greeting there are six names united by a conjunction, which makes for an awkward or unnecessary repetition according to some modern scholars, but this particle would allow the performer to build up volume, tone, and suspense as each name is recited and each person most likely pointed out. Once such patterning has been understood and employed, it can suggest how a text can be structured according to the oral/aural effect it may have had on the performer and/or audience. In the family letter it is plausible that the performer would have read the letter marking each verse by emphasizing the initial coordinating conjunctions and adverbs. Repeated words or phrases suggest that the oral profile is far from being erased in a written text.

The letter's texture is not completely recoverable from a literary source available to us only in Aramaic. But in any language short sentences using finite verbs tends to set up an accusation in sharp tones: "I found [the tunic] all streaked. I just don't like it!" The repetition of stating the need for a tunic and oil is supplied by the use of the first person singular, which allows the performer to play the part of the characters in voice and gesture. The triplet of verses in Scene 1 consists of two negative statements about a tunic that was sent but disliked by Nabusha and a positive account about another tunic that he received and enjoyed. Scene 1 is fairly straight forward in its structure and texture, but Scene 2 needs further explanation. The second scene is built on three loosely related topics, with a change in subject and the use of the expression "and now" framing each verse. The request for castor oil as a bargaining tool for olive oil is followed by two verses featuring formulaic statements. Difficult to determine is whether the internal formulae should be a separate scene or combined with the final greetings, rather than placed in Scene 2. The reasons that it seems most prudent to include the formulae in Scene 2 are as follows: First, the repetition of the phrase "and now"

¹⁹¹ See footnote 138.

suggests that the verses fit better in the body of the letter, rather than as a final greeting, even though three people are named in the formulae. Second, it is the combination of verses that constitute a scene, not one statement; therefore verses need to be joined according to linguistic and/or thematic elements. Third, it is most likely that the aural impact of hearing the adverbial repetition used to mark a verse would have combined the verses in the body of the letter as an overall structure and the change in subject matter would have separated the first scene from the second as a secondary structure. As has been shown, the organization of a text into verses and scenes is neither arbitrary nor mechanical, but governed by linguistic and narrative elements. The final greetings repeat the greeting form from the introduction, which marks an *inclusio* to this letter.¹⁹² In the final greeting the repeated word “greetings” (שלום) occurs five times, matching the five uses of the coordinating conjunction “and” employed to separate the names in the secondary greeting. What is clear is that the oral impact of repeated words is one consideration when an author(s) is composing a text. The last entry is an external address, which restates the sender and recipient, and may have been placed on the outside of the letter for easy access in an archive.

Form criticism has versed us in standard idiomatic epistolary features, and semiotics and orality have allowed us to “listen” sympathetically with the audience, but performance criticism asks how the textual dynamics may aid memory and work as structures for performance. Using an outline based on a performative perspective, we have determined that the body of the letter consists of two short, disconnected scenes that are combined by repetition, balanced verses, with each scene consisting of a triplet, and direct discourse—all characteristics of an oral register. The frequent occurrence of a transition marker is crucial in shaping the performance of this letter and understanding how texts may have been heard by

¹⁹² *TAD* A2.1-6. See also *TAD* 3.4. Another way in which a letter closes is: “Greetings to your house and your children until the gods let [me] behold [your face in peace] (*TAD* A4.4; see also A3.5).

an oral presentation. The purpose of better understanding the structure and texture of this letter is to propose when and where this text may have been read.

3.2.3 Context

The writing of letters is one indicator of literacy in the ancient world. The extent of literacy has been a matter of constant scholarly debate, but the optimistic view of widespread literacy by some scholars has been tempered by more recent surveys of the evidence, which suggest that the literacy rate is far below 50 per cent.¹⁹³ However, this is not to suggest that the illiterate majority did not have access to “professional” letter writers. In the humblest surviving letters, “the customer’s wishes are translated into writing, often with much use of clichés and conventional formulas.”¹⁹⁴ It is difficult to know if the senders of the Hermopolis letters were totally illiterate, but what is clear is that they employed a scribe who wrote at least six of the letters, “probably one after the other on the same papyrus roll, sealed with the same Egyptian seal and addressed to different women all designated as ‘sister’ and to Psami designated by Makkibanit alternately as ‘my lord’ and ‘my father’ (*TAD* A2.3, 4).”¹⁹⁵ The skill of the letter writer is evident in that the Aramaic appears to be Imperial Aramaic (*Reichsaramäisch*), which suggests that Imperial Aramaic was “not only used in more official documents, but also in everyday language by some people in Elephantine.”¹⁹⁶

It is possible that this letter had never reached its destination and therefore may never have been performed. It appears that the “bearer of the [Hermopolis] letters may have interrupted his journey in Hermopolis for some reason (illness or death?) and the letters were never carried further.”¹⁹⁷ Whether they were ever performed or not, there are several oral

¹⁹³ W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), esp. 3-24.

¹⁹⁴ Muir, *Life and Letters*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Porten, *ABD*, 448. According to Erling Hammershaimb, “Some Remarks on the Aramaic Letters from Hermopolis” *VT* 18 (1968), 266, seven of the letters (nos. 1-6 and 8) are written by the same scribe, whereas letter no. 7 is written by another.

¹⁹⁶ Hammershaimb, “Some Remarks,” 266.

¹⁹⁷ Hammershaimb, “Some Remarks,” 267.

features that suggest a performative context. By context I do not mean the social world in which the letter may have been written, or the literary setting of the letter (*Sitz im Leben*), nor even the cultural setting in which the tradition functions.¹⁹⁸ By performative context I refer specifically to a proposed venue in which a letter may have been read; a setting that may have provoked a performance of a letter and shaped its text and texture in some way. By probing the text and texture and the interplay between the two, a careful reader can notice linguistic clues that suggest the kinds of performers who read these letters and the audience who heard them, even though a text “may suggest a field of performance contexts.”¹⁹⁹ This investigative work is done through the careful observation of the introduction to letters, the use of pronouns, geographical and historical references, synchronic and diachronic comparison of idiomatic features of Jewish letters and other linguistic features. Such indicators can be explicit, such as the reference to the recipient and sender of a letter, or implicit, such as the use of verbal forms.

According to Trapp, there are three broad areas that are distinctively epistolary.²⁰⁰ First, the recognition that there is a gap emotionally or physically between the two parties in the exchange. Although this gap is not explicitly expressed in this text it does occur in another Hermopolis letter, using a pointed statement with a question: “I understand you haven’t written him. Why?”²⁰¹ According to this letter, the gap is characterized by the lack of response by the recipient. Second, letters are conceived of as fragments of a conversation. The Hermopolis family letter “reads” as if the author or performer is improvising or speaking face-to-face. For instance, the sentences are short, without dependent clauses, but connected with a recurring adverbial phrase (“and now”), similar to a casual conversation that may have

¹⁹⁸ For an explanation of what is meant by a performative context on which my analysis is based, see Wire, *Holy Lives*, 16-18.

¹⁹⁹ Wire, *Holy Lives*,” 17.

²⁰⁰ The following observations are based on Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, 38-42.

²⁰¹ Hermopolis 2.

been given by word of mouth. The body of the letter is written in a conversational style that may point to an oral context in which letter conventions were still not strongly established, or to Demetrius' standard that letters should be written as a person would speak in conversation, or it could suggest a combination of both. Third, letters play a role in creating and sustaining a social relationship between senders and recipients. Evidence of relationships and their maintenance is found in the familial terms, consisting of brother, sister, mother and father.²⁰² Friendliness is built into the opening formulae, which are comprised of a pleasant temple greeting, interior address, initial blessing, and secondary address, but the tone immediately changes in the first scene of the body: “*And now* the tunic you sent me has arrived. I found it all streaked. *And* I just don't like it at all!” In this connection mention should be made of Trapp, who suggests that

correspondents are compelled by convention to begin by wishing each other joy, courage, or well-being, and to end by wishing each other health and strength. In light of this, a letter with hostile contents risks appearing as an abuse of the medium.²⁰³

Following Trapp's observations, it is evident that this letter begins with the conventional pleasantries and then the text acknowledges the receipt of the tunic that had arrived. Near the end, according to Trapp, an author will typically give some miscellaneous items and instructions, for example “take care of Bethelnetan; keep Habib away from him!”²⁰⁴ One further feature of the gap between the recipient and the sender concerns the use of verb tenses—what is present at the time the author was writing or dictating the letter is written in the past, not the present, which is frequently called the “epistolary tenses.”²⁰⁵ For instance, the reference in the past tense, “I found [the tunic] all streaked,” is present at the time of writing and could have been written “I *find* it all streaked.”

²⁰² No Hermopolis letter is addressed to a wife, although Makkibanit calls Tashai “my sister,” when it appears that she is his wife (*TAD* A2.2:1). In another letter addressed to his “sister,” Makkibanit told her to “look after Tashai and her son” (A2.3:11-12).

²⁰³ Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, 40.

²⁰⁴ Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, 36.

²⁰⁵ Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, 36.

To return to the issue of the performative context, we can affirm from the text and texture that this document is a family letter. That seems beyond dispute, since it is addressed “to my sister, from your brother” and contains many idiomatic letter features, such as the opening and closing formulae. According to the texture, the communicative event is not limited to a request, but also includes speech acts, a fulsome greeting and a typical concern over the recipient. It appears that this letter was written with no self-conscious attempt to write in a manner that would attract attention to its style or learning. It was written by ordinary people in ordinary situations for ordinary purposes. The performative context appears to be the written response to needs that are created as a result of being away from home. The Jews and Arameans traveled back and forth between Elephantine, Memphis and Syene, frequently on military duty. The request in this letter represents an absent brother (or husband), who needs garments and castor oil, but has anxiety over the folks at home worrying about himself and Makkebanit.

The persons mentioned in the letter suggest that there was an intermingling of Persian and Egyptian cultures. Many of the males have Aramaic names—Anati, Bethelnatan, Eder, Makkibanit, Nabushezib (Nabusha), Nanaihem, Reia—but Egyptian names are well represented—Petekhnum, Pasai, Psami, Tashi and Wahpre. The letter under review is probably from the closing years of the fifth century BCE and well illustrates the mixture of cultures that may have been involved in the family life in Persian Egypt. A brother, Nabusha son of Petekhnum—whose name has both Aramaic and Egyptian components—is writing to his sister (or wife), Nanaiham—an Aramaic name. The combination of cultures is seen in other mixed patronyms—Eder son of Pasai, and Makkibanit son of Psami. There is only one Hebrew name mentioned in the letter, Shabbethai son of Shug, who, according to Porten, was

most likely not Jewish.²⁰⁶ It appears that, although Persia had military control over much of the known world, Jews in Egypt continued to maintain a family life with relative prosperity. There is no resentment expressed in the Hermopolis letters against the military control exercised by the Persians, most likely because some of the persons mentioned in the letters were soldiers receiving a government salary.²⁰⁷

In sum, the performative context consists of a letter sent by a travelling family member, most likely a military person, whose problems need to be solved and therefore instructions are issued, items are requested and concerns are expressed for the welfare of those left behind. The “author” of the letter is generous in sending something to the family back home. The letter would have been sent and read by a messenger, who would have performed the letter in the presence of a gathered extended family or community anxious to receive news about their loved one. The voice of the performer most likely reflected the personality of the “author” and offered a chance for the audience to hear “one side of a conversation” as the next best thing to the author’s presence.

3.3 “Passover” Letter

Six papyrus letters belonging to the archives of a Jewish leader Yedanyah bar Gemaryah have been discovered at Elephantine. They deal with the social and religious life of a community during the last years of the Persian domination of Upper Egypt. The most important letter concerning Jewish religious history is the text commonly known as the “Passover” papyrus.²⁰⁸ It is addressed to “Yedanyah and his colleagues” from “your brother Hananyah,” a Jew from another community, who probably held a senior position in the

²⁰⁶ Porten, “The Religion of the Jews of Elephantine in Light of the Hermopolis Papyri,” *JNES* 28 (1996), 117. For the identity of the correspondents, see Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 75.

²⁰⁷ However, the timeliness of their salaries was a concern, as expressed in Hermopolis Letter 1: “The others have received their salary here, but it can be drawn on at Syene only in their presence.”

²⁰⁸ This title was given by Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus*, 36-40, although the word “Passover” does not occur in the text.

Persian administration in Egypt.²⁰⁹ The letter is sent to Elephantine, where Jewish soldiers were stationed most likely in the service of the Persian emperor, Darius.

3.3.1 Text

Few interpreters have bothered to make a form-critical comment about this letter. It is clear that it follows idiomatic epistolary form, but includes elements that suggest an oral texture. Understanding the structure of this letter is difficult, because much of the text is damaged and irretrievably lost and what remains in the introduction appears to be condensed in order to get to the author's brief instructions. This relatively short letter begins with a three part opening; providing the reader with the names of the sender and receiver.²¹⁰ The identity of Hananyah eludes us, but what is known is that he arrived from outside Egypt and his mission was to curry favour with Arsames, a Persian satrap. The order of the initial address suggests that the sender, Hananyah, is either an equal, or more probably giving honour to the receiver, Yedanyah, in which case the familial reference "from your brother Yedanyah" does not correspond to the relation of the sender and receiver. The identity of the sender and receiver rules out a local Egyptian overlord or a Persian official and may suggest that Hananiah was a Jew with similar responsibilities in Egypt as Ezra had in Yehud (Ezra 7:25). The blessing in name of the "gods" (אלהים) could have been heard as a stereotypical formula,²¹¹ a majestic plural, or possibly represents a non-Jewish scribe's hand in writing.

²⁰⁹ Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 61. He may have been a "minister of state from Jewish affairs." David J. A. Clines, "Nehemiah," *HarperCollins Study Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 724 suggests that possibly Hanani, a variant of Hananiah, is Nehemiah's blood brother (Neh 1:2). The identification of Hanani is still a much debated topic. There is no scholarly consensus on whether he is to be identified with "Hanani," the brother of Nehemiah (Neh. 1:2; 7:2).

²¹⁰ Of the six letters from the archives of Yedanyah bar Gemaryah, the double address at the beginning and the end of the letter, also occurs in *AP* 38, *AP* 56 + 34, *AP* 30/31. The beginning is missing in *AP* 27, so it cannot be determined what the address was.

²¹¹ For a plural use of the term "gods," see also *TAD* A6.1.1:1-2 "The welfare of our lord may the gods [all of them, seek after abundantly at] all times." Or *TAD* A4.4:1, 9 "Greetings, your house and your children until the gods let [me] behold [your face in peace]."

The final entry in the introduction is the date when the letter was sent, which usually appears near the end of the letter in Aramaic correspondence.²¹²

As we have seen in the Hermopolis letter, initial particles play a central role in shaping a performance, but not in exactly the same way in each letter. In the Passover letter the transition marker “(and) now” is found only in the introduction and in Scene 1 (i.e. not in Scene 2) and separates the two verses from each other and serves to demark the body of the letter from the introduction. Following the idiomatic opening, the oral/aural impact of the adverb “now” would have prepared the audience for the transition from the introduction to the body, which begins with two statements concerning the dates for Passover and Unleavened Bread celebrations. Unlike the Hermopolis letter, the use of the adverb “now” in the Passover letter is not continued into Scene 2. In the Passover letter, there is an abrupt change from Scene 1 to Scene 2 signaled by the linguistic features. Transition markers are replaced with imperatives and commands, and counting days for proper celebrations are replaced with cultic instructions for purity. If the restored text is correct, then the text of the stipulations in Scene 2 is structured around a chiasmic form, with two imperatives forming the outside chiasm and three apodictic commands in the centre. The appeal to follow cultic regulations, as presented in three negative statements, form an internal chiasm. If the reconstruction is correct, the first and third injunctions share the feature of repeating a time frame mentioned in the introduction, but in inverse order, with the middle command consisting of a pithy “Do not drink!” This tightly formed structure suggests an oral mindset and was most likely employed as a lexical choice, as well as to aid memory.

By applying the performative principles we have recognized in the previous letter, we can suggest that the Passover letter be organized in the following manner:

²¹² For instance, *AP* 30/31 concludes with: “The twentieth of Marheshwan, seventeenth year of King Darius.” See also *AP* 26.

Opening

A. Greeting²¹³

“[To my brothers] Yedanyah and his colleagues, the Jewish [garrison], from your brother Hananyah”

B. Blessing

“May the gods bless (שְׁלָם) my brothers²¹⁴ [always].”

C. Date

“*And now* (וְכַעַתָּה)²¹⁵ this year,²¹⁶ year five²¹⁷ of King Darius, the king sent to Arshama [saying: . . .].”

II. Body

A. Scene 1: Instructions concerning the dates of festivals

1. “[...] *Now* (כַּעַתָּה)²¹⁸ you²¹⁹ shall count as follows: 1[4 days of Nisan. . .you shall cele]brate [the Passover].”²²⁰
2. “And from (וּמִן) the 15th day to the 21st day of [Nisan. . .you shall celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread. . .]”

B. Scene 2: Instructions concerning cultic practices

1. Imperative: “Be scrupulously pure (הוּוּ וְאִזְדַּהְרוּ)”²²¹
2. Command: “Do not [do] any work [on the 15th day and on the 21st day of Nisan]
3. Command: “Do not drink any [fermented drink]”²²²
2. Command: “(And) do not [eat] anything leavened. . . from the 14th day until the 21st day of Nisan.”
1. Imperative: “Bring into your chambers. . .” (הַנְּעִלוּ)²²³

III. External Address²²⁴

“[To] my brothers Yedanyah and his colleagues,²²⁵ the Jewish garrison, from your brother Hananyah son of [. . .].”

²¹³ Translation is by Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 65-67. The words in square brackets and italics are reconstructions based on biblical parallels.

²¹⁴ Literally, “Good health/peace my brothers” (שְׁלָם אַחֵי).

²¹⁵ The transition marker “and now” is left untranslated by Lindenberger.

²¹⁶ According to Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 165, שְׁנַתָּה זֹאת “this year” “may refer to a point in time near to the moment of speaking.”

²¹⁷ That is 419 BCE.

²¹⁸ Lindenberger leaves the transition markers untranslated, which are clearly in the text. Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 126 translates the transition markers as “And now” and “Now,” respectively. He also suggests the transition marker “Now” before the first imperative “Be pure.” A literal, albeit wooden, translation is: “Now, you thus count 14 days...”

²¹⁹ For the use of an independent personal pronoun preceding an imperative for emphasis in epistolary instructions and commands, see *TAD* A4.1:3, 4.3:6, 8; 6.3:7; 6.5:3, 6.9:2, 6.10:5, 6.11:5, 6.13:4, 6.14:2, 6.15:3, 6.16:1. It is also part of proverbial language (*TAD* C1.1:85 [The Words of Aḥiqar]) (Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 121).

²²⁰ “The Passover” is not supplied by the text.

²²¹ Or “be pure, and take heed,” Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 126.

²²² Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, 64, supplies this lacuna with the word “beer.”

²²³ In the original manuscript there is a vacat after the last imperative.

²²⁴ The external address appeared on the “outside” of the letter and served the purpose of an archival catalogue title.

3.3.2 Texture

Hearing the letter's texture and the performers in action are difficult. Repetitions, parallelism, transition markers and negative particles allow for the oral texture to be stressed. By being attentive to linguistic signs and to the culture from which a letter is sent and received, may give clues as to how the letter may have been performed. But first, we need to narrow the classification of this letter by observing the language that may offer a comparison with other letters that share the type of situation described in the Passover letter. One way in which meaning is determined in an oral presentation is by considering the register, which is the style of speech "associated with recurrent types of situation."²²⁶ The dedicated register is determined by the subject being discussed, the participants and their relation to each other, and the mode of discourse, such as written or oral.²²⁷

The subject of the letter appears to be the proper celebration of Passover and Unleavened Bread. There is no introduction explaining the festivals, therefore the purpose of the letter is not to inaugurate a new celebration, but presupposes that the recipients are familiar with the practices. It appears that the purpose of writing this letter is to standardize the observance of the festivals or to consolidate public opinion. Obscure is where they are to be celebrated; whether in a home, or in a temple, or at some other location. This letter may reflect a "permit from the Persian court to continue celebrating the Passover, possibly in light of local opposition,"²²⁸ or it may suggest that there was an internal struggle over when the Passover and Unleavened Bread should be held; therefore, this issue is given clarity. In order to understand the dedicated register the exegete must also consider who the participants are in

²²⁵ The colony at Elephantine was predominantly Jewish (*TAD* C3.15.1). The community at Syene appears to have been more diverse (*TAD* C3.14:32) and was referred to as the "Syenian troop."

²²⁶ Hymes, "Ways of Speaking," in *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (ed. Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer; 2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 440; emphasis original.

²²⁷ Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic*, 31-35.

²²⁸ Grabbe, "The 'Persian Documents' in the Book of Ezra: Are They Authentic?" in *Judah and the Judeans* (ed. by Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 536 suggests that the opposition may have come from the Khnum priest who opposed the sacrifice of lambs.

the exchange. In the “Passover” letter the addressees are a group of Jewish believers, most likely led by Yedanyah, who receives a letter from Hananyah, a Jewish envoy of the Persian King.

Anthropologists have suggested that societies may have many registers dedicated to various activities, such as puberty rites, political and religious involvement, and magical or curing activities.²²⁹ The oral register of the Passover letter consisting of an appeal for religious solidarity, an attempt at standardizing feasts and festivals, and a call for appropriate festal preparations suggest that the text is a festal letter,²³⁰ similar in oral register to the letters written in Greek Esther and 2 Maccabees.²³¹

In order to understand the performance context, we must be attentive to how the traditions are referenced in a letter. The more dedicated the register the more frequent a metonym is referenced, which evokes in the audience a sense of the depth of a tradition.²³² The use of symbolic terms is substantial; there are references to “blessing,” “Passover,”²³³ “(ritual) purity,” “(abstaining from) work,” “drink” and “leaven” and must be recognized and decoded as signs that are located in a tradition, and not merely as words from a text. What a register “means” depends on how it is understood in the context of a performance. This letter appears to have been a tool of instruction in the hands of a spiritual leader performing for a religious community that knows its formative stories and has a background in religious

²²⁹Richard A. Horsley with Jonathan A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1999), 165.

²³⁰For a description of the three purposes of festal letters, see Mark F. Whitters, “Some New Observations about Jewish Festal Letters,” *JSJ* 32 (2001), 273.

²³¹For examples of other festal letters, see King Hezekiah’s Passover letter (2 Chron. 30:1-9), Esther’s concern over the celebration of Purim (Est. 9:20-32) and the Hanukkah letters found in 2 Maccabees 1-2.

²³²Horsley, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me*, 165.

²³³Although the word “Passover” is not used, it is clear that the letter refers to Passover celebrations.

practices and traditions, but may not be familiar with a written Torah for a binding legal code seems to have been unknown in a community with a Yahwistic temple.²³⁴

The opening provides an idiomatic greeting and blessing. What is unusual is that the date is given in the opening, when it most often occurs in Aramaic letters in the closing. The oral impact of the transition marker “and now” in conjunction with a demonstrative pronoun,²³⁵ would have added emphasis to the date of the letter’s writing or urgency to its message and possibly to its performance. The apparent awkwardness of the verse: “And now, this year, year five of King Darius” may demonstrate clumsy dictation practices or more plausibly it may be an indicator to the performer to emphasize the significance of the date of the letter.

The first scene is signaled by the adverb “now” and concerns how to calculate the dates of the celebration of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. If we follow Hymes’ organization of a text according to performance patterns and discourse features, Scene 1 can be viewed as consisting of a duet. The first verse asks the reader and audience to count days in order to practise the celebration of Passover on the correct date. The second verse confirms that the feast of Unleavened Bread is to be celebrated for seven days beginning on the fifteenth day and concluding on the twenty-first day.

The “measured” verse analysis allows the reader of the text to suggest something concerning how the letter may have been performed. Scene 1 would have been read with an emphasis or pause after the two initial linguistic features introducing each verse, namely “and now,” and “and,” respectively. The most striking difference between the oral texture of

²³⁴ See Lisbeth S. Fried, “‘You Shall Appoint Judges’: Ezra’s Mission and the Rescript of Artaxerxes,” in *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (ed. James W. Watts; SBLSymS 17; Atlanta: SBL, 2001), 63-89.

²³⁵ For other uses of demonstrative pronouns having a deictic function, see “this letter” (A2.1:12); “this document” (B3.11:7); “this day” (B3.11:8). It may also refer to the place near the speaker: “here” (i.e. where I am) (A6.3:2).

Scenes 1 and 2 is that Scene 2 consists of pithy statements in the form of two imperatives and three commands; whereas, Scene 1 is more conciliatory in tone as indicated by its use of modal verbs. The admonitions appear to be intended for instruction to a community rather than to an individual.²³⁶ The economy of words may suggest that the performer was expected to elaborate on the “headings” provided in the letter—divided for our purposes into verses—and the chiasmic structure betrays an oral device for easy memorization and delivery. As an example, “be scrupulously pure” or “be pure and take heed,” either is a directive with a long oral tradition that has been discussed frequently and therefore only needs a short imperative statement to be understood, or more probably, this statement is a memory aid or a “heading” for the performer, who would have elaborated on what cultic purity entails. Returning again to Hymes, he states that “the best dictated texts are not in fact wholly without indication of the features” of oral performance;²³⁷ therefore, it can be said that a written record may contain evidence of an oral presentation.²³⁸

The combination of an oral presentation and a written text is also evident when comparing the allusions to the Torah as a guide for proper observance of these festivals,²³⁹ with statements that may have been shaped by local customs and practices. For instance, the numbers fourteen and twenty-one are found in Exodus 12 (see also Lev. 23:5) and the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread are frequently mentioned in the Torah. As a probable oral custom is the interpretive innovation to “bring into your chambers and seal [it] up during [these] days,” most likely referring to leaven, which is inconsistent with the biblical mandate

²³⁶ The pronoun “you” (אַתָּם) in the sentence “You shall count as follows” is in the plural

²³⁷ Hymes, “Discovering Oral Performance,” 338.

²³⁸ For the varieties of orality, see Oesterreicher, “Types of Orality in Text.”

²³⁹ The sacrifice of the Paschal lamb on the 14th of Nisan is given in Ex. 12:6. Purity when offering the sacrifice is found in Num. 9:1-14; Eze. 6:20; 2 Chron. 30:17. Eating unleavened bread is required in Ex.12:15, 18; see also Lev. 23:6; Num. 28:17. This letter does not establish whether the Passover and Unleavened Bread were celebrated together. According to Reinhard G. Kratz, “Temple and Torah: Reflections on the Legal Status of the Pentateuch between Elephantine and Qumran” in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding its Promulgation and Acceptance* (eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 85 states that “One can say this: at Elephantine, Mazzoth was probably celebrated at the temple, and Passover was a specific day of the year.”

to remove leaven from the house (Ex. 12:19).²⁴⁰ Another injunction not found in the biblical text is to refrain from drinking,²⁴¹ and the exhortation to “be pure” is found only in Ezra 6:20, which refers to the priests sacrificing the Passover lamb.²⁴² What is evident is that there is an oral and written tradition that plays a role in providing cultic standards, what is difficult to know is which presentation had greater authority.

The letter’s language is simple and concrete and points in the direction that letter form may have been chosen as a ready means of instruction for material that is written to teach with brevity cultic principles regarded as fundamental.²⁴³ It is conceivable that this letter is a condensed account of cultic matters written in letter form, which may have been viewed as a more user-friendly medium than a full scroll-sized treatment. The pretence of a letter between friends may have been viewed as an appropriate means of communication, with the understanding that additional information would have been supplied by the performer. The opening greeting serves two purposes: it recognizes the gap between the supposed sender and receiver and it creates and sustains the alleged relationship between the two Jewish groups. The oral texture resembles an extract from a dialogue by its use of short sentences, without elaboration or explanation. The symbolic language suggests that traditions have been embedded in the community and that metonyms need merely to be referenced for the

²⁴⁰ Ex. 12:19 (“For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses.”) may be in conflict with Ex. 13:7 (“...no leaven shall be seen with you.”). The injunction in this letter may have been a means of resolving the conflict between these verses by storing leaven in a jar and out of sight. The permission to put leaven out of sight, but keeping it in a house, was not allowed according to *m. Pesah*. 5b, 28b.

²⁴¹ This injunction is taken for granted in the Mishnah (*m. Pesah*. 3:1).

²⁴² Recently Reinhard Kratz voiced an intriguing theory that there were close connections kept by the Jews at Elephantine with the ruling people in Jerusalem and that it appears that in Jerusalem “the Torah of Moses did not play an important role yet—at least for major parts of Jewish society in the Persian provinces of Yehud and Samaria” (“Temple and Torah,” 87). Morton Smith, “Jewish Religious Life in the Persian Period,” in *Introduction: The Persian Period*, ed. W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein; vol. 1 of *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) holds a minority view that the letter’s intent was to warn the community at Elephantine that a Jerusalem inspector was coming to visit and the Egyptian Jews should appear to be acting in conformity with the Jerusalem regulations.

²⁴³ D. R. Langslow, “The *Epistula* in Ancient Scientific and Technical Literature, with Special Reference to Medicine,” in *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (ed. Ruth Morello and A. D. Morrison; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 228 suggests that a technical writer may choose to present his work in the form of a letter “to teach with brevity and efficiency rules and principles regarded as fundamental.”

performer to comprehend the message in order to fully explain its contents to the audience. A purpose for writing this letter may have been to fix the date of the celebrations.²⁴⁴ What is needed is to collect data provided by the context in order to explain why this letter was written in this setting, for it is not enough to know that in Jewish communities festal letters were read.

3.3.3 Context

Once we understand the point that is being made (text) and the way in which it is made (texture), we can then determine when, where, and by and for whom the letter is told (context).²⁴⁵ To explore the context, we need to consider what anthropologies have termed the “great/official” tradition and the “small/popular” tradition; what may be divided between the elite who controlled the institutions and the peasant in which life is governed by local customs.²⁴⁶ The traditions of the elite are frequently embodied in written documents, such as the Passover letter. These two worldviews cannot be conceived of as binary opposites, but must be considered as interrelated, but parallel. However, in the Passover letter there is no evidence that the two traditions are opposed to each other, or being adapted to or interactive with the other.

The social context would be enhanced if we knew whether Hananyah’s apparent arrival, assuming he was the performer of the letter, was initiated from the authorities in Jerusalem,²⁴⁷ or from the Persian administration,²⁴⁸ or possibly from the Jews at

²⁴⁴ The statement found in the Bodleian Aramaic Inscription 7, most likely written 50 years earlier (“Let me know when you will be celebrating Passover”), adds credibility to this view.

²⁴⁵ Wire, *Holy Lives*, 11.

²⁴⁶ Helpful in this regard is the comparative study by James C. Scott, “Protest and Profanation: Agrarian Revolt and the Little Tradition,” *Theory and Society* (1977), 3-32, 159-210. The official tradition is not necessarily unitary (p. 8).

²⁴⁷ This view depends largely on how extensive the cult of centralization (Dt. 12) was in the fifth century, which is by no means clear. The injunction in Dt. 16:2 centralizing the celebration of Passover in “the place where the Lord your God will choose” may have been applied only to Jews residing in Yehud.

²⁴⁸ Ingo Kottsieper, “Die Religionspolitik der Achämeniden und die Juden von Elephantine,” in *Religion und Religionskontakte im Zeitalter der Achämeniden* (ed. R. G. Kratz; Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen

Elephantine.²⁴⁹ Porten suggests that if the latter is the case, then “we may imagine that their observance of the dual Festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread was being obstructed by Egypt, who succeeded in getting the King’s authorization, and on that confirmation gives cultic instructions.”²⁵⁰

Since the formal aspects of the letter introduce two lower level officials addressed as your “brother,” a designation used between peers, one might suggest that this text was allegedly written by the petitioners themselves. As a possible support for this position, the discovery of the letters by the archaeologist from the Berlin Museum maintains that “these letters all belong to the individual archive of one man: Yedanyah bar Gemaryah, a leader of the Elephantine community.”²⁵¹ Therefore the context for the correspondence most likely was in response to an earlier conversation and request from some of the Jews who wished to have religious customs clarified in a time when cultic laws may not have been standardized. The issues were to be handled by local officials, Arsames (the Egyptian satrap), and Hananyah (the Jewish leader), who acted as mediator between the Persian administration and the Jewish colony on Elephantine. Worthy of note is the comment made by Porten, who states that it is the Jewish garrison and not the priests and religious leaders who are the recipients of the letter.²⁵² With no mention of the temple or priests, the perspective is most likely that of a performer instructing fellow Jews on conducting small rituals in their homes in daily practices and of giving guidance to the temple elite on when to celebrate festivals in

Gesellschaft für Theologie 22; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2002), 164-65; 171-72 n. 78 describes the tensions between Johanan and Bagohi, the governor of Judah. Josephus refers to this conflict in *Ant.* 11.7.1§297-301.

²⁴⁹ Kratz, “The Second Temple of Jeb and Jerusalem,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 252 states that the “destruction of the Jewish temple of Elephantine and its reconstruction must be seen within the context of the disputes between the leaders and priests of the Jewish colony on the one hand and the priests of the adjacent Chnum Temple on the other.”

²⁵⁰ Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross Cultural Continuity and Change* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 126.

²⁵¹ Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 61.

²⁵² Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 133. Although Jedaniah is the son of Gemariah, a leader of the Jewish community and “possibly a priest” (p. 125).

communal practices. If the emphasis in the letter is on the priests and their duties, although they are not mentioned, another performance context could be that this letter was used as part of a communal liturgy.

Generally, in a festal letter a parenthesis is given alongside the instructions.²⁵³ If that principle can be adapted to the Passover letter, one could imagine that the performer would have given an exhortation as part of Scene 2, or because of the brevity of the letter, possibly at the end of the text. What is clear is the terseness of the instructions suggests that elaboration and explanation was expected as well as interaction with the audience.

Let me summarize briefly the results of my investigation. It appears that the performative context of the Passover letter was directed toward those who had control over how the official traditions were practised and was employed to teach or control those who may not have been clear on these customs. The text gives evidence that the performer was expected to read the document, as well as explain its contents.

The argument developed up to this point enables us to assess letters from a performative perspective. It has been noted that transition markers and repeated coordinating conjunctions have been viewed by some form critical scholars as having no functional significance and therefore are frequently perceived as being optional. Performance criticism can lead us to a more satisfying conclusion. One purpose of the repeated use of “(and) now” is to signal to the performer and audience that a transition is occurring; another is to indicate a change in volume, tone and/or suspense by the speaker. Understanding the oral/aural impact of initial particles, words, sounds, and phrases and the interaction between them has allowed us to construct a performative structure of the letters by employing Hymes’ use of

²⁵³ For instance, in the festal letter in 2 Maccabees 1:9 the Jews are exhorted: “And see that you keep the days of the feast of tent pitching...” See also 2 Chronicles 30:1-9 where an explanation is given for having not celebrated the Passover: “for they could not keep [the Passover] at that time because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient numbers” (v. 3).

“measured” verse. Using his method, both letters can be divided into two scenes. The family letter consists of two balanced scenes, each containing a triplet, and the Passover letter can be separated into a duet and a chiasmic form consisting of five verses.

In order to determine the performative context, the reader must understand the oral register. Both texts are coded with epistolary conventions and self-designations, which consists of a formulaic opening, body and conclusion. Further refinements can be made. The first letter uses familial terms and can be classified as a personal family letter and the second is addressed to a community and contains cultic language and therefore can be considered a festal letter. The situations to which these two letters pertain can be describe as a private letter that captures real life of ordinary citizens in ancient Egypt and a cultic communication intended to teach rules and principles succinctly to another group. Epistolary form appears to have been the medium of choice for both these texts, because the “authors” were writing to an individual or community known to themselves; employing a friendly form to sustain a social relationship with the addressee(s). The texture of these letters retains much of their orally derived simple language and repetition and allows the performer to assume the “character” behind the lines, complete with emotions and passions. In performance these transcripts of fragments of conversations would have been interpreted and expanded by the performer, as interaction with the audience required.

To be fair, these observations do not vastly alter our understanding of these letters, but may make the reader more sympathetic to the importance of a performative reading of a text. However, the principles applied to these letters may have greater implications to our understanding of other letters, particularly those that are embedded in a narrative.

4 Two Embedded Jewish Letters Written in Aramaic and Hebrew

The last chapter considered two relatively short, free standing letters written to a community at Elephantine. Performative concepts such as “measured verse,” “oral register” and “texture” were applied in order to understand the placement and function of these letters in their oral context. Methods employed to arrive at our conclusions were form criticism, orality and semiotics. This chapter considers lengthier letters that are embedded in a narrative, which supply some epistolary features omitted in the body of the letter, thus may add another level of complexity to the analysis of the text.

The first text to be considered is an Aramaic letter embedded in Ezra 5 allegedly written by local officials to the ruling Persian monarch concerning the building of the temple. The letters in Ezra serve as apt transitional texts from non-embedded to embedded Jewish letters, because they have significant similarities to the Passover letter found at Elephantine. They both are marked by concerns surrounding the temple and cultic activities, and they both appear to be using diplomatic efforts to curry favour with the Persian administration. The centrepiece of the negotiations is found in Ezra 5:6-17, where the “elders of the Jews” must justify the progress on the temple’s construction to the Persian authorities. The oral texture and symbolic language in Ezra 5 is the richest of the Ezra letters, and therefore a study of this text may advance our understanding of performance theory as applied to epistolary literature. The second letter for consideration is a Hebrew document embedded in Jeremiah 29. Because there is some verbal overlap between this letter and MMT, a performative analysis of the features found in both texts may inform our strategies for better understanding the letter genre and MMT.

The aim of this chapter is to expand our use of performative critical methods by more broadly considering the nature of a performance of a letter, with particular emphasis on how a

change in participants may affect a presentation, how rhythm, sound and repetition may be used to frame a scene and how letters may be embedded in a narrative to serve as plot development. Similar to the last chapter, we will be following the outline consisting of examining the text, texture and context of each letter.

4.1 Aramaic Letters in Ezra: An Overview

The structural analysis of Jewish letters indicates that the typical opening lists the name of the sender, the recipient and provides a greeting.²⁵⁴ The form of the Aramaic letters embedded in Ezra consists of an idiomatic introduction, which employs the formula: (to) sender: (to) recipient.²⁵⁵ The introductions to letters fulfill a very important function. As with other Aramaic letters, these texts tell the readers about the genre, provide an introduction, and, above all, they introduce the audience to the sender and receiver of a letter. The introduction to the letter begins with an objective perspective and serves to create a set of expectations and assumptions that may govern the readers' approach to the material. Helpful in profiling letters according to their type is *The Literary Structures of Ancient Jewish Literature*.²⁵⁶ The first category in this inventory concerns how the literary features are defined. Unambiguously, these documents take notice of themselves as letters, as verbal

²⁵⁴The preposition "to" is usually ל, but ו is sometimes found. For examples of opening formulae, see Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, "To my brother Paltī, your brother Hosh'y(ah)" (40:1); and Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, "To my lord Psami, your servant Makkibanit" (Hermopolis 3:1). These are both expanded versions of the parties' formula. Expanded forms of the formula "to recipient, from sender" on occasion has terms added to the sender and recipient, for example "To my sister Ra'yah, from your brother Makkibanit" (Hermopolis 1: 1); "To my lord Yashebyah, your servant Mannuk" (Hibeh 1-2).

²⁵⁵ There are four Aramaic letters embedded in the narrative. Here is a summary of the structural elements found in the introduction of these letters: Ezra 4:6-16, "To sender: recipient"; Ezra 5:6-17, "To Sender: 'All peace'"; Ezra 7:11-20, "Sender: To recipient, 'Peace(?)'." In the second instance in which the addressee is introduced in Ezra 5:6, the preposition ל is employed (לדרייש), which Schwiderski, *Handbuch des nordwestsemitischen Briefformulars* argues came into use only in the Hellenistic period. Schwiderski's arguments have been refuted by Jerome A. Lund, "Aramaic Language" in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books* (Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson, eds.; Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2005), 50-60. Lund sights Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook*, D 7.33 as a fifth-century example of the use of ל to introduce the addressee. For further arguments against Schwiderki, see also Hugh Williamson, "The Aramaic Documents is Ezra Revisited," *JTS* 59 (2008), 57-62; R. Steiner, "Bishlam's Archival Search Report in Nehemiah's Archive," *JBL* 125 (2006), 679-83; Andrew Steinmann, "Letters of Kings about Votive Gifts," *JHS* 8 (2009), 5.

²⁵⁶Samely, et. al., "Inventory," 1.1.1 profiles this type of document as a text which "refers to itself using a genre term, speech act term, verb or other term implying verbal constitution."

entities. For instance, the texts refer to themselves as a “letter” (אגרה)²⁵⁷ (4:8, 11; 5:6), (נשתון)²⁵⁸ (4:7, 18, 23), and (כתב)²⁵⁹ (4: 6, 7); an “official correspondence” (פתגם)²⁶⁰ (Ezra 4:17; 5:7, 11; 6:11); a “decree” (תעם)²⁶¹ (Ezra 4:19); or a record kept in memory of some event or administrative measure (זכון)²⁶² (Ezra 4:15; 6:2). By means of an introduction, the author(s) of the canonical book of Ezra introduces the readers and audiences to a set of characters and the circumstances of their actions. Typically, after the name of the sender and recipient is given, a greeting offers a wish for health and prosperity or invokes a blessing on the recipient.²⁶³ One embedded Aramaic letter concludes the introduction with a greeting of peace: “all peace” (שלמא כללא)²⁶⁴ (Ezra 5:7). The boundaries of the texts are explicit²⁶⁵ and follow common patterns that fall into a specific order and yet allow for variety among the texts. The diligent profiling of texts resulting in the *Literary Structures* inventory was intent to offer text-linguistic descriptions of ancient Jewish texts according to their structurally important literary features. The performance method privileges approaches to oral traditions and draws in text-linguistic work in order to help decide if two texts belong together and to

²⁵⁷ Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (6th ed.; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), 62, contends that אגרה is an Akkadian loan word, which has been adopted from the political and financial administration. Dion, “Aramaic Words for ‘Letter,’” *Semeia* 22 (1981), 78-79 contends that אגרה refers to official and private letters; it is a generic term for all kinds of communication in epistolary style. אגרה in the emphatic (אגרתא) is found in 4QEnGiants^a 8:3, but only the first two letters are preserved [אגרתא]. The restoration appears to be beyond reasonable doubt.

²⁵⁸ This term can be understood as a “written order.” It may reflect the phraseology of written communication of Persian influence (Rosenthal, *Grammar*, 62). Dion, “Aramaic Words,” 80-81, observes that the usage of נשתון refers to an official document, often styled as a letter. He further states that this usage is only found in Ezra, above all in the narrative framework.

²⁵⁹ See *BHS*, which suggests deleting כתב.

²⁶⁰ This term may be an Iranian loan-word from *pati-gāma* meaning “message, word” (Rosenthal, *Grammar*, 63). For the use of this term, see also 1QGenAp 22:27; 4QprHab:2; 11QtgJob 9:2; 29:4; 30:1; 34:3.

²⁶¹ In Ezra 5:5, the emphatic תעמא is best understood as a “matter” (Dion, “Aramaic Words,” 80).

²⁶² For the use of this term, see also 11QJN ar 14:1 (11Q32).

²⁶³ See for example, E. G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) (hereafter *BMAP*) “The welfare of my lord/brother etc., may the gods seek at all times” (13: 1; see also *AP* 39:1; for expanded forms see *AP* 38:2-3; 30:1-3). Also common in the Arsham letters is the greeting, “Much peace and prosperity I send you” (Arsham 3:1; see also *AP* 42:1, 3; Arsham 5:1-2; Hermopolis 3: 5; 7:1). As has already been shown, common in the Hermopolis letters is the greeting: “I bless you before Ptaḥ, that he may cause me to see your face (again) in peace” (Hermopolis 3:1-2; 1:2; 2:2; 4:2; 5:1-2; 6:1-2). Common in Greek letters from Ptolemaic Egypt is the *formula valetudinis*: “If you are well, it would be good; I myself am well.” Several letters begin with a salutation to the temple of a god,” see chapter 3.

²⁶⁴ The difficulty of the syntax of כללא has been reasonably settled by Fitzmyer, *Wandering Aramean*, 205-17, as the emphatic state of כל used as an appositive following a definite noun.

²⁶⁵ It appears that according to Samely, et al., “Inventory,” 1.1 these letters fall under the heading, namely “The text refers to itself as a verbal entity; its boundaries are implied or explicit.”

assist in understanding cultural situations by means of its texts. According to the text-linguistic approach, the letters in Ezra belong under the same category as bounded texts by referring to themselves as a verbal entity.

4.2 An Embedded Aramaic Letter: Ezra 5

According to the canonical book of Ezra, the central concern of the first six chapters is the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The narrative introduction or the letter's opening supplies the social setting of the letter. Unlike the letters at Elephantine, which involved low level officials, the texts in Ezra are correspondences between Persian monarchs on the one hand and provincial governors and high officials on the other.

4.2.1 Text

When considering the letters in Ezra, a key textual element important to our understanding of performance concerns the translation of texts. A comparison of the canonical Hebrew text of Ezra with the Greek text found in the Septuagint (LXX) reinforces the impression that the narratives, including the embedded letters, were not fixed, but subject to redaction.²⁶⁶ A few examples of the differences between the two versions will have to suffice. For instance, the Jewish formulation of the letter found in Ezra 5 ("To Darius the king, *all peace* [v. 7]) is adapted to standard Greek letter form ("To King Darius, greetings!" [1 Esdras 6:8]). As an example of material that has been amended, we can consider 1 Esdras 4:47-63, which includes the reference to letters written by the Persian King Darius on behalf of all the Jews who are returning to Judea.²⁶⁷ Letters can also be abridged or expanded,²⁶⁸ as

²⁶⁶ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the process of translation, revision and retranslation of the Septuagint. For a comprehensive introduction to the topic see Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000). For a summary of the translation of the Septuagint see, Emanuel Tov, "Jewish-Greek Scriptures," in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (eds. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg; Atlanta, GE: Scholars Press, 1986) ; and Melvin K. H. Peters, "Septuagint" *ABD* 5:1093-1104.

²⁶⁷ The content of the letters is given in summary form, mainly by using the infinitive of indirect speech, for example μη ἐπελεύσεσθαι (v. 49), ὑπάρξειν (vv. 50, 53), δοθῆναι (v. 51) and δοῦναι (vv. 55, 56). A ἵνα clause is also used to summarize the content of the letter (vv. 47, 50).

seen in the answer to the king's servants given in letter form in Ezra 4:17-22, but in Greek Artaxerxes' answer is introduced in summary form rather than in quotation.²⁶⁹ These variations, consisting of changes in formulations, additions and summaries, are surely not simply quaint peculiarities of ancient copying, by partly symptomatic of an oral culture in which texts were adapted as the occasion and audience demanded.²⁷⁰ It is possible that the similarities between the canonical Ezra and Esdras (LXX) rests not only on literary dependence but on shared traditions, transmitted and redacted through performances in public and private gatherings. It is the achievement of form criticism to have focused attention on the oral nature of texts and it reasonably can be concluded that "while an oral text may have gained circulation (or re-circulation) through a written text, once in circulation it could take on a life of its own."²⁷¹ The changes in texts may support the view that the tendency of live performances is to contemporize and to interact with the presence of hearers,²⁷² and that the translators may have had a performance mindset as they were making choices about words and phrases, when recreating and redacting a letter in a new context and possibly while making changes to support a particular perspective. If this view is sustainable, then writing, copying and translating texts would include performance awareness, which suggests that letters were written and revised for ongoing oral/aural events to be presented through

²⁶⁸ This is Artaxerxes' answer, according to *NETS*: "Then the king wrote back the following to Raoumos the recorder of events and to Beelteemos and Samsaios the scribe and to the rest associated with them and living in Samaria and Syria and Phoenicia. . ." (1 Esdras 2:17). Then the Greek departs from the Aramaic, replacing the word "letter" (vv. 18, 23) with φορολόγος, which according to Greek lexica (LEH, LSJ) could mean "The tax-collector whom you sent," instead of "The letter which you sent." The Greek translator may have understood φορολόγος as a "word carrier" and therefore a "letter carrier" (Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* [Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006], 236

²⁶⁹ For a summary of the differences between the canonical letters found in Ezra and Esdras, see Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, 233-38. Jeremiah 29 is considerably shorter in the LXX than in the Hebrew Bible.

²⁷⁰ The problem of translation and /or interpretation is significant, as expressed by George W. E. Nickelsburg *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2005), 192-93, who states that "the text of the Hebrew and Aramaic Bible was not fixed in the pre-Christian era and in the first century C. E."

²⁷¹ Holly E. Hearon, "The Implications of Orality for Studies of the Biblical Text," in *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark* (eds. Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, and John Miles Foley; Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2006), 9.

²⁷² Kelber, *Oral and Written Gospel*, 108.

performance. Therefore we reasonably can conclude that ancient letters were written, copied and translated to be presented through a performance.

The audience would have been introduced to the letter in Ezra 5 by a performer noting that a “copy of the letter” is being read (5:6), which would consist of a duplicate of a transcript. The mention of a letter being sent and read suggests that there may have been a high level of sophistication in the administration of archival letters in the Achaemenid period. The standard features of the address consist of the name and place of the sender followed by the name of the recipient. The letter was sent by Tattenai, whom some scholars believe is known from cuneiform sources to have been an actual Persian official,²⁷³ and sent to King Darius. This structure complies with standard Aramaic letter writing practice. The opening is concluded with the unparalleled greeting “all peace” (שלמא כלא) (5:7). When addressing a king, a more elaborate greeting may be expected and a fuller form may have been originally present.²⁷⁴ It is not beyond reason to consider that the greeting has been abbreviated by the author(s) of Ezra when it was incorporated into the narrative.²⁷⁵

In both Hermopolis letters we have reviewed, the transition from the opening to the first scene in the body of the letter employs the idiomatic “and now.” But in Ezra 5:8 the scene is introduced with the jussive form of the verb “know” (ידיע להוא), replacing the formulaic “and now” common in Aramaic letters. Hoffner argues convincingly that when the information in a letter is important or urgent, “it may be verbally highlighted through the use

²⁷³ A Babylonian cuneiform tablet from year 20 of Darius (502 BCE) contains the reference to *Tattannu piḫāt Ebir Nāri*, which is strikingly similar to “Tattenai the governor from Across-the-River.” However, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 120 is cautious about linking the two.

²⁷⁴ For instance *TAD* A6.3 has the greeting: “I send you abundant (greetings of) welfare and strength.”

²⁷⁵ Salutations have been abbreviated to a single word (שלמ) in composing letters on ostraca. As Alexander (“Remarks,” 156) has stressed “the material on which a message is written is not strictly germane to the question of whether or not it is a letter.” The proposal that an abridged form of the introduction has been employed in Ezra 5 has been suggested by Eduard Myers, *Die Entstehung des Judentums: Eine historische Untersuchung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1896), 53. For a similar view, see also Alexander, “Remarks,” 157 and Porten, “The Address Formulae in Aramaic Letters: A New Collation of Cowley 17,” *RB* 90 (1983), 396.

of either an imperative or a jussive form of the verb ‘know.’”²⁷⁶ The elimination of the transition marker “and now” and beginning the letter with a jussive may either be another example of abbreviation, particularly since some of the material stated in the letter (5:6, 9-10) had already been mentioned in the narration (5:3-4), or possibly the result of the emphasis the author(s) of Ezra placed on the urgency of the matter. Some common Aramaic epistolary elements that are missing in the opening of the letter in Ezra 5 are the date and the customary list of senders followed by the addressee, omissions which appear to be cases of editorial reworking.

Following the idiomatic epistolary opening, the body of the letter begins with a report of the work of Tattenai’s commission. Using the “measured” verse approach, the body of the letter can be divided into three scenes by considering the transition markers and the change in participant, that is, the change in focus from Tattenai addressing the king, to receiving a reply from the elders, to making a recommendation to the king. Scene 1 consists of a report that is given in a matter-of-fact way without any opinion expressed or any apparent embellishments recorded, but details the actions and findings of the commission in three parts. In the background to the report, the letter states that Tattenai and his associates arrived in Jerusalem (5:8a) and they examined what was happening at the building site and how well the building project was progressing (5:8b). The next two functions of the committee consist of requesting information concerning the legality of the project and endeavouring to get the names of the builders (5:9-10).²⁷⁷ These two questions asked of the Jewish elders deal with

²⁷⁶ Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom* (Writings from the Ancient World 15; ed. Gary M. Beckman; Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 33. Hoffner states that this use of the jussive is attested from the earliest to the latest period of Mesopotamian letter writing, as well as Mari (“may my lord know”), Neo-Assyrian (“lord, should know”), Ugaritic and Hittite letters.

²⁷⁷ The investigation is defined in Scene 1 by two questions. Question 1: “Then we asked (שאלנו) these elders and we said (אמרנו) to them” (5:9). Question 2: “We asked (שאלנו) their names to inform you” (5:10). According to Joseph Fleishman, “The Investigating Commission of Tattenai: The Purpose of the Investigation and its Results” *HUCA* 66 (1995), 90, the root שאלנא reflects a legal demand; whereas the root אמרנא expresses a neutral question. He finds further support for this view in Darius’ instructions to the investigating commission to

the legitimacy of carrying out the project and acquiring the names of the persons who were leading the construction. Considering a performative perspective, the pace of the first scene appears to be brisk and pressing, with the first verse beginning with the urgent “be it known to the king” and the next two verses seem to continue that determination to fulfill the commission’s tasks by marking the verses with “and,” “then” and “and we also.” The letter in Scene 1 is presented in two oral layers—the actions of the commission are relayed to the king in verse 8 and the questions posed to the Jewish elders are given in reported speech in verses 9 and 10. This oral layering is common in Aramaic letters and is consistent with a conversational style of writing.²⁷⁸

The commission then submits the report of the Jewish leaders’ response to the king (5:11-16). The reply to the second question occurs first and is presented in three parts, divided into three “verses.” The previous actions of the commission in Scene 1 given in the past tense are replaced by the present emphatic “we are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.” After the identity of the leaders in verse 11 has been given, the background to the building project is supplied by stating that they are not building a new structure, but merely restoring a previously existing temple. Finally, in verse 12 the reason for the destruction is said to have occurred because God delivered his people to the enemy. It appears that the answers are carefully constructed to allay any fears the Persians may have had concerning the Jewish commitment to the crown. Similar to the “Passover” letter, Ezra 5 desires to maintain

“stay away from that place” (6:6), which may mean that they are to leave the Jews alone for they are innocent of all charges. This position requires special pleading in order to give common words special meanings.

²⁷⁸ This layering also occurs in the reply to interview question 1. For another example of rhetorical layering found in the Hebrew Bible, see Gen. 32:4: “...instructing them, ‘Thus, you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now.’” The authorization of a boat repair found in the Hermopolis letters (A6.2) uses even more rhetorical layers:

And now, [...] to us, saying,

Mithradates the boat holder thus says:

Psalmineit. . . and Carians, thus said:

The boat which we hold-in-hereditary-lease—time has come it needs to do.

a positive relationship with the Persian administration in order to sustain a Jewish vision for cultic activities.

The second section of Scene 2 answers the first question posed by the commission concerning who may have given the elders a decree permitting them to build. It was none other than King Cyrus, who approved the temple's restoration. The reply to the commission's question appears to need further explanation. The background to the king's authorization is set in a historical situation in which Sheshbazzar, appointed governor by Cyrus, is said to be given articles from the royal treasury, which were initially taken from Jerusalem. Especially important is the phrase "[a man] named Sheshbazzar" (שִׁשְׁבַּצַר שְׁמָה), who was not only governor but also began laying the foundations of the temple (5:14). Kutscher states that this construction "appears at the first mention of a proper name which is supposed to be unknown to the reader."²⁷⁹ The significance of this point is that it implies that the author(s) of Ezra was writing at a time or in a place removed from the events and believed that the addressees no longer had knowledge about the occurrence—how far removed is a question of much scholarly debate. Aramaists have studied the syntactic construction of this phrase and some have concluded that according to the documents we have available "the construction is unattested after the Achaemenid period."²⁸⁰ Alluding to Sheshbazzar as "a man named Sheshbazzar" and "this (person) Sheshbazzar" (5:16) may not have been meant as complimentary, but may reflect the apologetic intent of the elders' perspective.²⁸¹ If an apology is being made in the name or the character of Sheshbazzar, it may place him within

²⁷⁹ E. Y. Kutscher, "New Aramaic Texts," *JAOS* 74 (1954): 241, reprinted in *idem, Hebrew and Aramaic Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977), 45.

²⁸⁰ Steiner, "Bishlam's Archival Search Report," 645. For an example of this verbal construction see Israel Eph'al and Joseph Naveh, *Aramaic Ostraca of the Fourth Century BC from Idumaea* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 92 no. 201. Another example can be found in an Aramaic ostrakon from the first half of the fifth century BCE.

²⁸¹ Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, (Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 87-88 has observed that both expressions are used of slaves in papyri (*AP* 28:4, 11; *BMAP* 5:2; 8:7-8).

the collective memory of the listening community.²⁸² If that is the case, then editorial reworking or redaction to the text would have taken place as a later process of which we have few clues.

With the report completed, the commission is ready to make recommendations. The request formula is introduced by the idiomatic transition marker *וּכְעַן* (“and now”), and employs the formula “if it seems good to the king” (5:17). The commission makes two recommendations: to search the archives (5:17a) and to report their decision (5:17b). Some scholars maintain that the Jews placed these requests²⁸³ and others feel that Tattenai was the author of these requests.²⁸⁴ In any event it appears that the Jews did not have access to the documents, possibly because the edict had been proclaimed orally, and that they were certain that the written decree would be found and thus the building project would not be stopped by King Darius.

We have been exploring various ways in which the text in Ezra 5 has used elements that mark verses and scenes. Unlike other letters we have observed, this letter uses a wide variety of initial particles employed as markers of measure, translated as “and” (*ו*) “then” (*אָדִין*), “and also” (*וְאִף*), “and this” (*וּכְנִמָּא*), “but because” (*לְהֵן מִן־דִּי*), “however” (*בְּרַם*), “if” (*הֵן*) and “therefore” (*וּכְעַן*); with only three particles being used more than once *ו* (“and” is used frequently as a coordinating conjunction), *אָדִין* (5:9, 16 [twice]) and *וְאִף* (5:10, 14). The overall pattern enables one to recognize that the initial elements organize the material according to an oral presentation. The discovery of such a pattern is not arbitrary, but is governed by the rhetorical outline that controls the letter. The first scene involves three “verses,” which establishes the letter’s purpose; namely, to interview Jewish elders

²⁸² According to Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Old Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1998), 131, this document is most likely authentic.

²⁸³ Loring W. Batten, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 133, 138

²⁸⁴ F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 85.

concerning a building project. We have observed in the Hermopolis letters that a change in scene can be signaled by transition markers. Understanding the oral/aural effect of a text on an audience, suggests that a change in participants can also signal a change in scene.²⁸⁵ For instance, the statement that introduces Scene 2 is “and this is *their* reply to us” (5:11), which would prepare the audience for a change in participants, from the king to the interviewees, and thus marks the scene as a unit. The same can be said for the statement “Therefore, if it seems good to the king” beginning Scene 3, which indicates that the interviews with the Jewish elders are complete and therefore the change in participant is signaled. In an oral performance the change in scenes would most likely have been emphasized by a change in voice, gesture or pace. The manner in which the action unfolds validates this pattern.

Scene 1 initiates and prepares the audience for the unfolding of events. The scene can be divided into two parts, with each employing a triplet. Each part follows the same pattern: an introduction, with two supporting statements. After the scene has been set—or in performance terms, the onset of the action—Scene 2 carries the events forward by the Jewish elders providing answers to the questions. The occurrence of the particle “then” (אָדאָ) in Scenes 1 and 2 contributes to mark off the verses in each scene, but also adds to its expressive force. In the first scene it is employed to introduce the interview questions and in the next scene it is employed twice to state the result of the Sheshbazzar’s mission. Scene 2 can also be divided into two parts; each question is introduced and then supplemented with a two-part answer. However, in reply to the second question the triplet is increased to a quartet. It appears that statement “from that time until now. . .” is a summary statement that concludes the interview.

²⁸⁵ Kenneth Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957) refers to the change of scene in either location or lapse of time, and indication of change among participants in the action as the “scene-agent ratio.” Quoted in Hymes, “In vain”, 319.

The final outcome of Scenes 1 and 2 is given in the final scene in the form of a recommendation; also using a triplet consisting of an introduction and two statements. Unlike the Hermopolis letters that close in a final greeting, this letter uses a summary statement as a conclusion. The combination of the action can be described as onset, outgoing, and outcome, coinciding with the three scenes, which is a rhetorical pattern that pervades many oral texts.²⁸⁶ The use of the jussive to introduce Scene 2 and the wide variety of initial elements in combination with the length of the sentences²⁸⁷ may have set a hurried pace for the performer that moves the action quickly from one verse to another and from one scene to the next. The use of a triplet, consisting of an introduction and two statements (and summary), would have aided memory for the performer. In addition, the arrangement of the text would have an aural impact of drawing the audience's attention from the king ("Be it known to the king") to the elders ("Then we asked those elders") in Scene 1, and from the elders ("and this is their reply to us") back to the king ("However in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon") in Scene 2.

Having discussed how scenes can be organized according to oral patterns, we are now ready to propose a structure of the letter controlled by performative elements, using a measured verse format.²⁸⁸

Narrative Introduction

"This is a copy of the letter (אגרתא) that Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River...sent to Darius the King" (5:6)

"They sent him a report (פתגמא),²⁸⁹ in which it was written as follows:" (5:7a)

²⁸⁶ Hymes, "In Vain," 318-20 describes this pattern found among many Chinookan texts, as well as in other oral cultures. Another set of terms that are used for literature that has a plot with beginning, middle and end consists of situation, complication and resolution. I have chosen to use Hymes' terms, because they are more descriptive of an action than many other terms and are less likely to have concepts of modern literature applied to an ancient text.

²⁸⁷ Scene 1 can be translated as one long sentence. Except for the introduction to the speakers in Scene 2 (i.e. "and the elders spoke thus" and "and he said to him"), it is difficult to determine how to divide the text into sentences. Scene 3 can be understood as one sentence.

²⁸⁸ The translation is from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossways Bibles, 2005).

²⁸⁹ The semantic range of the term "report" can include "an accounting, a report, implying a response to a prior situation" (James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* [Electronic Version; Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1997]).

I. Opening

A. Address

“To Darius the king,

B. Greeting

“All peace” (5:7b)

II. Body

A. Scene 1: Actions of the commission

1. Background to the commission’s report

- a. “Be it known (ידיע להוא) to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God.
- b. (And) it is being built with huge stones, and timber is laid in the walls
- c. (And) this work goes on diligently,²⁹⁰ and prospers in their hands²⁹¹” (5:8)

2. Interview questions

- a. “Then (אדין) we asked those elders and spoke to them thus,”
- b. ‘Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?’ (5:9)
- c. ‘(And)²⁹² we also (ואף) asked them their names, for your information,²⁹³ that we might write down the names of their leaders’ (5:10)

B. Scene 2: Commission’s report to the king

1. Reply to interview question 2

- a. “And this (וכנמא) is their reply to us” (5:11)
- b. ‘We (אנחנא) are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding (ובנין) the house that was built many years ago, which (ומלך)²⁹⁴ a great king of Israel build and finished’ (5:11)

²⁹⁰ The Persian loan word אספרנא (“with diligence”) does not so far appear to be attested in later phases of Aramaic (Grabbe, “The ‘Persian Documents,’” 558).

²⁹¹ Unlike the previous letter (Ezra 4:6-16), which includes both chronologically earlier and later forms of the pronominal suffix, the letter in Ezra 5 contains only early grammatical forms. Attestations of *-km* (second person masc. pl.) and *-hm* (third person masc. pl.) are: בידהם “in their hands” (5:8); להם “to them” (5:9, 10); לכם “to you” (5:9); שמהתהם “their names” (5:10); בראשיהם “at their heads” (5:10). Examples of earlier forms in Ezra 7 are: אלההם (7:17), אלהכם (7:18), עליהם (7:24). Examples of late forms in the same chapter are: ונסכיהון, ומנחתהון (7:17), ושאלנכון (7:21). According to Foley, *Singer of Tales*, 52-59, 82-92 the use of late and earlier forms is part of the “dedicated register” of an oral performance. See also, Niditch, *Oral World*, 8-38. Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art*, 3-58 lists archaic speech or other special codes, figurative language, parallelism or other foregrounded regularity, special formulae at beginnings and ends, unusual pitch, stress, rhythm or pauses, and appeals to or disclaimers to be speaking tradition, as indicators that a speech is underway. Hymes, “*In Vain*,” 223-51 adds direct discourse and back-channeling (audience participation) to the list of indicators that a performance was underway.

²⁹² The word “and” is missing in the translation by Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 81.

²⁹³ Lund has observed that the Aramaic of this letter retains early orthography and morphology, and therefore does not appear to reflect significant later updating of the language. For example, the Aramaic of Ezra retains the spelling with *ṣ*, whereas later Aramaic dialects replace it with *s*: שניאן “many [years]” (5:11). Also, he suggests forms where the primitive *h* has not been elided as in later forms: להודעותך “to make known to you” (5:10) (Lund, “Aramaic Letters,” 54-55). Concerning morphology, Lund observes that the form of the infinitive לבנא “to build” (5:13) does not have the *mem* preformans, and thus may reflect a more primitive form (“Aramaic Letters,” 65).

²⁹⁴ The ו could be translated with “and,” but it does not make for idiomatic English.

- c. ‘But because (להן מן־ידי) our fathers had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylonia’ (5:12).

2. Reply to interview question 1

- a. ‘However (ברם),²⁹⁵ in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt (5:13)
- b. ‘And (so/also) (ואף) the gold and silver vessels of the house of God...were deliver to the one named Sheshbazzar, whom he made governor’ (5:14).
- c. ‘And he said to him (ואמר־לה)²⁹⁶
- i. “Take the vessels, go and put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site” (5:15)
- ii. ‘Then (אדין) this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation of the house of God that is in Jerusalem,
- d. and from that time (ומן־אדין) until now it has been in building and it is not yet finished’ (5:16).

2. Scene 3: Commission’s recommendations

- a. ‘Therefore (וכען),²⁹⁷ if it seems good to the king,
- b. Let search²⁹⁸ be made in the royal archives there in Babylon, to (הן)²⁹⁹ see whether a decree was issued by Cyrus the king for the rebuilding of this house in Jerusalem.
- c. And let (ורעות) the king send us his pleasure in this matter” (5:17).

4.2.2 Texture

The texture of this letter uses a simple and patterned structure, which would have helped facilitate attention and ease of communication. For instance, the opening is abbreviated, the questions in Scene 1 consist of one direct quotation and one reported speech, and Scene 2 supplies the answers in inverse order; also employing direct quotation. The language used in the letter to question by whose authority the building programme was initiated and the request for the names of those involved is very similar to the wording of the narrative in 5:3-4. From a text-critical point of view, this repetition may suggest that one text

²⁹⁵ This transition marker is missing in Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 81.

²⁹⁶ Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 41 omits the word “and,” as does Fensham, 81 and Blenkinsopp, 119.

²⁹⁷ This transition marker is missing in Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 81.

²⁹⁸ According to Lund, “Aramaic Language,” 54, the *pa’el* infinitive (יתבקר) means “to make an investigation.”

²⁹⁹ Lit. “if there is [it is true] that from Cyrus the king, he has issued forth a decree to build this house of God in Jerusalem.”

has borrowed from the other,³⁰⁰ but from a performative perspective this reiteration may have been used to add emphasis as part of a retelling of the events in letter form. From this perspective, one text is not being “borrowed” from another as if to seek an “original” text, but rather we must consider the fluidity between the letter and the narrative and that an oral mindset is an integral part of its composition. The texture of the sentences features many dependent clauses, with repetitions consisting of “God of heaven”³⁰¹ (vv. 11, 12) and “house of God (in Jerusalem)” (vv. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17)—the duplications suggesting that these texts are remnants of an oral performance.

The texture suggests that the letter is presented predominately for its symbolic value.³⁰² For instance, during an enacted event, that is, when a letter is read, the text immediately places the audience on notice by stating who the referents are, for example: “To Darius the king: All peace” (Ezra 5:7).³⁰³ If, as Hindy Najman has suggested, that “writtenness became a sign of authority,”³⁰⁴ then the introduction of letters symbolically communicates the authority of writing, making the persona the most powerful person in the Persian Empire present to the reading or listening audience. In terms of semiotic analysis, the reader (re)presents the letter by giving human testimony to authenticate the text, which may have had the effect of giving credibility to the temple’s construction. It seems significant that Ezra does not record an oracle of the Lord mediated through a prophet to initiate the building

³⁰⁰ So Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 22-23.

³⁰¹ This expression may have been used to appeal to the Persians, since Ahuramazda, the Persian god, was also regarded as the “god of heaven” (Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 45; Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 83).

³⁰² Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, see esp. chapter 3, refers to the symbolic mode of presentation as iconic, as opposed to dialectic. According to Beckerman, a dialectic mode of presentation is dominated by tension struggle, change and a risk that frequently occurs to the characters and audience. For an example of this method being applied to ancient Hebrew songs, see Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 99-100.

³⁰³ Other referents in Ezra are: “To Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of the associates who live in Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River” (Ezra 4:17); “Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest” (7:11); and more obliquely, “Cyrus the king issued a decree” (6:3).

³⁰⁴ Hindy Najman, “The Symbolic Significance of Writing in Ancient Judaism,” in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman; JSJSup. 83; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 145.

project,³⁰⁵ but authority for temple construction came supposedly from archival letters stored in a foreign palace. It appears that, at least symbolically, the letters may have been viewed as having permanence and presented as having survived even the absence of the alleged original author(s) and could be consulted at a later time in history, whether or not they were genuine. The ongoing performance of these letters may have functioned as a permanent testimony of the transformational power of letters in which foreign monarchs are said to give written consent to the building of a Jewish temple. It could be said that the series of letters in Ezra are an anticipatory realization of what it symbolically signifies—giving power to the event it names—just as the temple is an anticipatory realization of the authority it will hold.³⁰⁶

It seems plausible that the purpose of presenting the letter was to promote group identity. Support for this position includes the way in which the people are being questioned by using an emphatic “*we* are the people of the God of heaven and earth, and *we* are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago” (5:11). It is plausible that upon hearing this statement the audience would have understood the text to include them, and thus celebrate past achievements and “transform the audience and spectators from a group of individuals into a community—a ‘we’ with a shared identity.”³⁰⁷

Ezra 5 projects a sense of unity in another way. It creates its own space and time, which means that each time a text is read, or multiple copies are produced, they provide distinct moments of performance, which need description and analysis.³⁰⁸ For example, the statement “they sent him a report” (5:7) is being enacted in real time by a performer

³⁰⁵ Although the prophets Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned (Ezra 5:1), they do not have a major role in the process of getting approval for construction or overseeing the gathering of material for the building.

³⁰⁶ Najman makes this application concerning Isaiah’s prophecy. She writes: “Isaiah’s prophetic writing is something like an *anticipatory realization* of what it symbolically signifies, just as the prophetess’s pregnancy is the anticipatory realization of the child that will be born” (emphasis original) (“Symbolic Significance,” 148).

³⁰⁷ Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 21. Although Giles and Doan are applying the principle iconic presentation to songs, this rule can reasonably be applied to letters.

³⁰⁸ Julia Kristeva views the reading process as involving the projection back of the speaking “author,” so that each new reading involves a new “performance” by new set of voices (Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* [Leon Roudiez; trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine, and L. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980], p. 75).

concerning a former time and place. Therefore many years after the original “text” was composed, the letter is given “life in the present,” in Doane’s terms,³⁰⁹ as the audience experiences the performance in the here and now, with each performance having an immediate historical context. The repeated public performances most likely resonated with the audience and created “an atmosphere of confidence and solidarity.”³¹⁰ In this situation, the audience would have been confident because the oral testimony of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, supported by documents from the king, had been fulfilled.³¹¹ The feeling of solidarity may have been the result of completing the building project without the help of others and against opposition (Ezra 4:2-5). It is possible that with each new retelling and rereading of this letter group identity is further enriched by a performance and by “the strategies of highlighting the moment of *we-now-here* in the performative act.”³¹²

The previous chapter introduced the significance of understanding the dedicated register of a letter as a tool for performance criticism. The register concerns the way in which an oral texture highlights the subject, the relation of the participants and the mode of discourse. The importance of this aspect of analysis is that when a performer performs a text in a dedicated register s/he evokes in the audience the depth of a tradition. The tradition that is being expressed in Ezra 5 is beyond dispute for the letter plainly states in the first question “Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?” (5:9) that the central concern is the construction of the temple. The letter’s performer may have stood with those in Ezra, who present the temple as divinely ordained and recounts the breakthrough of reconstruction against internal opposition described in a previous letter (4:7-16). Not only is the letter dedicated to a particular activity, it involves a specific group of people. The text is

³⁰⁹ A. Doane, “The Ethnography of Scribal Writing and Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Scribe as Performer,” *Oral Tradition* 9 (1994): 420-39.

³¹⁰ Oesterreicher, “Types of Orality,” 214.

³¹¹ One characteristic of oral traditions consists of referring to authority figures, such as the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who prophesied to the Jews (5:1), which appears to have added credibility to Ezra’s building programme.

³¹² Oesterreicher, “Types of Orality,” 213; emphasis original.

addressed to King Darius and the addressee, according to the narrative, is Tattenai and his team of inspectors (5:8-10), with the Jewish elders and Sheshbazzar, the governor, being mentioned in the body of the letter. The primary purpose of the investigation is stated in the commission's recommendation to search the royal archives for a decree that was issued by King Cyrus (5:17). The author(s) of this letter couched the text in the oral register of the social elite, which has the oral/aural effect of inviting the listening audience to eavesdrop into conversations between kings, governors and elders. The literary purpose that may have been served by having a letter presented as a dialogue between two parties is that it offers the listening audience another (outside) perspective on the history and value of their tradition. It also has the psychological and aural effect of drawing the audience(s) into a conversation, while at the same time creating distance by using epistolary form. In the context of a performance, an audience is invited to embrace the tradition of temple construction as their own and identify with their past heroes in the form of a letter. It can be said that the author(s) of Ezra "conditions how these characters should be perceived by the audience."³¹³

Taking a wider view of the whole series of letters found in Ezra, it appears that letters are a useful means of communication that can effectively compress material from various time periods and include a variety of sources and writers. The letters seem to have been tailored by the author(s) along thematic lines rather than chronological³¹⁴ to allow for a compressed plot, while still maintaining persuasive power.³¹⁵ Rather than understanding time

³¹³ Rozik, *Generating Theatre Meaning*, 113.

³¹⁴ There is much scholarly debate on the reverse chronological order of the letters. Steiner, "Bishlam's Archival Search Report," 650-65, notes that it was not uncommon for ancient Near Eastern archival reports to proceed in reverse chronological order. According to Steiner, the archival search began with the most recent documents and moved backwards to the oldest. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 134 is more pointed when he states: "The author of the narrative clearly has not the faintest idea of the relationship of the Persian kings to one another, and has placed his documents to produce what in his opinion is the best argument without being aware that it makes nonsense of Persian history."

³¹⁵ The letters cover an accusation lodged at the time of Xerxes (486-465 BCE) (4:6) and a letter is written to Artaxerxes (465-424 BCE) (4:11-16) with a reply (4:17-22). The next letter refers back to the time of Darius (550-530 BCE), with an order being issued (6:3-14). Geographically, the plot moves from a confrontation and response written from the province of Beyond the River, to an on-site investigative report, then to an archival

on a continuum from past-present-future as we have been conditioned to do from a historical-critical perspective, we need to consider that from the performers' point of view every event is present and the audience is called upon to freely move from one time period to another. Additionally, the letter in Ezra 5 is part of a series of letters that serve to advance the narrative plot of how the temple construction was sanctioned by the Persian administration. This is accomplished by supplying the audience with a letter of opposition (Ezra 4), construction inspection (Ezra 5) and finally a decree by Darius that sanctions the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 6). This observation suggests that one of the functions of embedded letters is to make an important contribution to a story-line that the editor(s) of the book of Ezra wish to develop.

In sum the rhetorical aim of presenting material through narrative and letter-form may have been to serve performative functions by offering plot development, distance and proximity—allowing the audience to fill-in-the-blanks between episodes.³¹⁶ The cumulative effect of mixing oral communication with written archival proof would have been to celebrate the collective support of Jewish elders, interviewing governors, and the Persian king for the building of the temple. Thus the performer would have given meaning to the letter by taking a particular point of view, presented in the persona of high ranking officials, and by developing a rich oral texture of the characters implied by the text's rhetorical layering.

4.2.3 Context

What the text and texture indicates is that the letter in Ezra 5 must have been performed to those who viewed the temple as central to their cultic practices. The letter takes place in a world where God and foreign authorities work in tandem. Telling the success of the

memorandum found in the capital city of Ecbatana. The resolution comes in the form of a letter by Artaxerxes to Ezra the scribe, who arrived from Babylonia to Jerusalem with the hand delivered letter.

³¹⁶ For a Greek example of putting letters together to prompt the reader to construct a narrative, see Jason König, "Alciphron's Epistolarity," in *Ancient Letters*, 257-82.

temple building supports the communities they serve by fostering temple loyalty. Community leaders could have performed this letter—as well as the whole collection of letters in Ezra—as both symbol and presenter of symbols giving human testimony to the permanence and authority of the temple.³¹⁷ Letters issued by absent authors do not appear to have the authority of the sender diluted; but the presence of a text seems to exert direct power on the recipients. Thus an authorized official letter combined with an oral presentation would have added potency to the presentation.

It appears that the letters in Ezra testify to a social context, where authority is vested in those who could read and write or had access to those who could read and write, and changes to construction policy appear to happen through written texts.³¹⁸ The list of social elites, from whom the letters in Ezra are sent and received, is impressive: kings, governors, commanders, scribes, judges, prophets and officials; missing is the mention of women, children, farmers, and other non-elite—common in the Hermopolis private letters. Although a wide range of individuals is introduced, the letters emphasize their roles rather than giving a character study. Cultural anthropology offers many insights into the dynamics of the performance context by drawing attention to the class division in a society between rulers and ruled;³¹⁹ additionally, performance criticism considers how a performance event may have affected different communal audiences. For instance, the text and texture suggests that the audience to whom the letters in Ezra were read was different from the audience at Elephantine. It appears that the performer recognizes that the “elders of the Jews” do not have to resort to intrigue or bribery to get imperial authorization to build their temple—a method

³¹⁷ We see in Ezra a change in context of performance from the Passover letter, where temple and Torah are not combined, to Ezra “skilled in the Law of Moses” (7:6, 12), having the priests and the Levites purify themselves to celebrate the Passover and Unleavened Bread in the temple.

³¹⁸ For the importance of documents in Ezra 1:7-6:22, see Tamara Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBLMS 36; Atlanta, GE: Scholars Press, 1996), 58-60.

³¹⁹ The concern over the relation between orality, textuality and imperialism is developed by Richard A. Horsley, “The Origins of the Hebrew Scriptures in Imperial Relations,” in *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Antiquity* (ed. Jonathan A. Draper; Semeia Series 47; Atlanta: SBL, 2004).

used on the island of Elephantine. This technique is the practice of their opponents, whereas the text claims that the Jews received unsolicited, generous gifts from the Persians (6:8-12). The reconstruction effort received official approval from all the proper channels of negotiations with various political authorities. Part of the process was the inspection of the temple's progress, which was completed by Tattenai and his colleagues in consultation with the Persian king and apparently received the royal nod. Similar to the Elephantine correspondences, the letters in Ezra appeal to the people's loyalty to the crown and give evidence of the Persian administration's former support to build the temple.³²⁰ In Ezra 5 the decrees of God and Persian kings are presented on the same level, supported by Jewish elders and prophets. Another consideration that may suggest the context of the letter is stated by Kratz, who contends that "the remark in Ezra 5:16 that the temple has been under construction since Sheshbazzar laid the foundation in the first year of Cyrus is not made to demonstrate obedience to the royal order but primarily to show loyalty to God, whose name 'dwells' in the temple."³²¹

Therefore the context for reading this letter may begin with the literati and interested hearers who would have known the prophets and their message. It is possible that this letter was performed because the religious elite felt that their words concerning the importance of the temple and the history of its construction were not enough and that the written documents of their ancestors inserted in a narrative provided more certain proof. A performance may have had the effect of preparing the audience to see the significance of foreign acknowledgement and promotion of their temple through instructions that needed to be followed (or are reported to have been followed) and a request for actions that should be

³²⁰ Ezra 6:14 summarizes the major players in the construction effort: "And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia."

³²¹ Kratz, "Second Temple of Jeb and Jerusalem," 263.

taken.³²² The letter in Ezra 5 makes the theological assumption that God will intervene through decrees and documents, foreign potentates and local leaders, prophetic words and oral reports in order to have the “temple that is in Jerusalem” (5:15) constructed. The oral texture suggests that the narrative and letter do not constitute a text with commentary or “borrowing,” but a fluid interweaving of verbal echoes, most likely employed for emphasis.

The relationship between the narrative introduction and the letter vary from text to text, as well as the function the letter may have served as an embedded text. Jeremiah 29 serves as an example of how a longer letter, with more participants, may have affected how the text was performed and how it may have functioned in the narrative.

4.3 An Embedded Hebrew Letter: Jeremiah 29

Not all ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Jewish texts are well-defined by genre designations. Some documents quote letters that include the formal aspects in the narrative; therefore, they do not meet the minimum requirement for a letter, according to Alexander,³²³ and others include a mixture of genres in their presentation. The aim of this section is to reflect on the Hebrew text³²⁴ of Jeremiah 29 and apply our knowledge of performance theory to this text. This document is important because it introduces three new elements in our inquiry, which may have affected their performance. 1) The idiomatic epistolary form is absent, but the formal features are included in the narrative; 2) the genre is not clear, because there appears to be a mixture of epistolary types; and 3) new methods of adding texture are introduced, which may indicate different contexts for performances.

³²² See for example Arsham 7, 8, 10. For an example of this pattern in letters of petition see *AP* 30, and for letters of recommendation, see *AP* 38.

³²³ Alexander, “Aramaic Epistolography,” 168, defines the minimum requirement for a letter as consisting of an opening and a body.

³²⁴ There is much scholarly debate on the relationship between the Hebrew and Greek texts. Louis Stulman, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah* (SBLDS 83; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 89-94 states that the LXX is 37 percent shorter than the Hebrew text.

4.3.1 Text

Seldom are prophets said to write letters. Apart from Elijah, who supposedly wrote a letter to King Jehoram of Judah (2 Chron 21:12-15), Jeremiah is the only other prophet in the Hebrew Bible associated with letter writing.³²⁵ The combination of epistolary form and prophetic utterance can be found in the corpora of Mari,³²⁶ and Amarna³²⁷ and in several texts from Assyria³²⁸ and Babylon.³²⁹ The tellers and hearers of the prophetic text found in Jeremiah 29 most likely identified with the diaspora community to whom the “letter” was written by considering the message of future deliverance, while reflecting on their present situation. If we are correct in using the arrangement of the chapters as presented in the Hebrew text,³³⁰ then Jeremiah 29 follows the chapter that is concerned with Hananiah the false prophet and has verbal ties to this issue in the second oracle (“Do not let your prophets and your diviners deceive you” [29:8-10]). In Jeremiah 29 the prophet is said to have written a letter to the exiled Jews in Babylon and it appears that the placement of the letter contributes to the narrative plot by giving a counter argument to Hananiah’s view that the exile will be short (Jeremiah 28). Jeremiah encourages the exilic people to prepare for a long stay in captivity, and not to listen to false voices for God will eventually restore their bad fortunes.

³²⁵ A. S. van der Woude, “Book of Nahum: a letter written in exile,” in *Instruction and Interpretation* (eds. H. A. Brongers, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1977) has suggested that Nahum may have been originally mediated by letter. His arguments have not been advanced by others.

³²⁶ S. B. Parker, “Official Attitudes toward Prophecy at Mari and Israel,” *VT* 43 (1993):50-68. J. M. Sasson, “The Posting of Letters with Divine Messages,” in *Florilegium marianum II: Recueil d’études à la mémoire de Maurice Birot* (eds. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand: MNABU 3; Paris: Société pour l’étude du Proche-Orient ancien, 1994), 299-316.

³²⁷ Martti Nissinen, “Spoken, Written, Quoted, and Invented: Orality and Writtenness in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy” in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy* (SBLSymS 10; eds. Ehud Ben Zvi and Michael H. Floyd; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 258-59.

³²⁸ S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Part 2. Commentary and Appendices* (AOAT 5/2; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983).

³²⁹ Karel van der Toorn, “Old Babylonian Prophecy between the Oral and the Written,” *JNSL* 24 (1998): 55-70.

³³⁰ The arrangement of the chapters of the Greek version (LXX) is different from the Hebrew. Some modern commentaries also rearrange the placement of Jeremiah 29.

In Ezra the narrative introduction states that a copy of the letter is to follow and then includes elements characteristic of ancient Jewish letters in the body of the text; however, Jeremiah 29 states that a letter has been written, but does not include common epistolary features. Therefore according to the text-linguistic inventory, this text may not necessarily be placed in the same category as other letters found in Ezra,³³¹ because the genre is far from clear and the self-designation is only found in the narrative.³³² Lundbom, who represents those who call the text a “letter,”³³³ claims that the letter was “written on papyrus, rolled into a scroll, and sealed.”³³⁴ According to this view, the genre could be classified as a general letter sent to the Jewish community to both leaders and followers living in Babylon. But a close reading of this text shows that Jeremiah 29 does not display the characteristic epistolary formulae found in other letters, for example in the Hermopolis letters and Ezra, therefore further investigation needs to take place.

A place to begin to determine the genre of Jeremiah 29 is to apply to the text the three broad areas that are distinctively epistolary, according to Trapp.³³⁵ First, the messenger formula makes it clear that the recipients of the document are physically distant from the senders, for the text states: “to all the exiles whom I have deported from Jerusalem to

³³¹ Samely, et. al., 1.1.1.1. The *Inventory* does not concern itself with genre designations as much as it describes the literary features of a text.

³³² To be clear the word “letter” is not found in the epistolary text, but is transferred into the narrative report. Our first difficulty is defining what is meant by the word ספר (“letter”). Lexicons have variously understood this word to mean missive, document writing, book (*BDB*); writing; a writing; a letter; a book (*GHCLOT*); inscription; writing, document, scroll (*CHALOT*). Some commentaries prefer the generic word “document.” See for example, Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52* (WBC 27; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1995), 60, 64, 69; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 552. For instance, Scalise writes “it is better to characterize the documents in chap. 29 as representing a ‘booklet,’ which contains a collection of prophecies” (65). Some scholars use the more specific term “letter.” See for example, Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 131; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 542; John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 204; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 342. *NETS* translates the LXX οἱ λόγοι τῆς βίβλου as “the words of the letter.” For indicators that confirm that Jeremiah’s writing was perceived as a letter, see Doering, “Jeremiah and the ‘Diaspora Letters,’” 48.

³³³ The word ספר is a general word for any kind of document; it is used in Jer 3:8 for a “bill (of divorce)” and in 25:3 for a scroll of Jeremiah (Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 140).

³³⁴ Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 348.

³³⁵ Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, 38-42; see also section 3.2.3.

Babylon.” Therefore there is a gap between the sender and receiver, which is characteristic of letters. Second, letters generally use a conversational style, which “read” as if they are fragments of a conversation on which a performer is called upon to improvise, as seen in the Hermopolis letters. But the texture of Jeremiah 29 is oracular in tone, similar to other prophetic texts, such as Amos. It is difficult to conceive of reading and/or hearing Jeremiah 29 as part of a (casual) conversation. Third, the function of a letter is to create or sustain a relationship. There seems to be a concern over the (mis)perception that the captivity of the exiled Jews would be short and their return to Jerusalem near. This view is corrected by Jeremiah, and a promise and hope for the future is given. Therefore a case possibly can be made that the text plays a role in maintaining a relationship. By applying these three criteria to Jeremiah, the case for determining that the text has characteristics of a letter is not very strong, therefore another approach may be more helpful—a method that includes a wider application that embraces both Jeremiah 29 and MMT.

Unlike the Hermopolis letters, Jeremiah 29 is embedded in a narrative, which states that “these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent,” and includes the sender, Jeremiah, and the recipients, the surviving exiles. Determining a genre is more difficult when a tradition identifies a text, but the text itself lacks the idiomatic formal features characteristic of the genre. From a historical critical perspective, the issue is not solved by stating that the narrative introduction contains epistolary elements, for the text still has few formal epistolary features, such as transition markers, date, greetings, blessings, conclusion, and does not use a conversational style. The only explicit marker that this text uses letter form is in the narrative introduction. However, if the introduction to the “letter” is authentic, then it is conceivable that Elasah and Gemariah, the two messengers of the letter, would have mentioned to the recipients that the text is a letter from Jeremiah. This statement would have prepared the audience for a particular type of presentation. However, instead of beginning with the sender

of the letter, presumably Jeremiah, Scene 1 begins with an oracular formula “Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel,” but does state who the recipients are: “to all the exiles.” The messenger formula is repeated in Oracle 2, but does not include the addressee and Oracle 3 is the most abbreviated. Oracle 4 begins a new scene and therefore states who the addressees are (“to the king and to all those who did not go into exile”) along with a messenger formula. The final oracle includes the messenger formula as well as the recipients.

We have argued in the letter in Ezra 5 that through the use of narrative and letter-form an author may allow the audience to fill-in-the-blanks between episodes during a performance. The same performative principle can apply to how an audience may respond to an embedded text within a narrative. Hearing the name of the writer and addressee at the beginning of the narrative would have affected the performance by guaranteeing that the text was identified by the audience as a letter, and may have contributed to “hearing” the presence of an epistolary feature, namely the mention of the recipients, in the midst of an oracle of the Lord. Another option is that the letter originally included the sender and recipient, but was dropped from the text as book of Jeremiah was transmitted. This position would not change the way in which subsequent audiences may have “heard” the text as a letter, but would add credibility to the view that once in circulation a text can take on a life of its own; a point which has been noted when discussing the translation of the Ezra letters.

We have mentioned above, that in defining what a letter is, we must not only consider the form of a text, but also how the text may have functioned in a community. This document purportedly offers access to the authentic prophetic voice of Jeremiah. The use of letter form seems to have been practised to signal to the audience from an objective perspective that a particular type of literature was being read. The symbolic power of a text sent by the messenger of a prophet would have received a proper “hearing” by an audience, and through each subsequent reading the text would have been applied to a new social setting. It may be

best to characterize the form and function of the document contained in chapter 29 as a mixture; possibly as a collection of prophetic oracles presented through an epistolary persona.³³⁶ If my analysis is correct, then letter form may have been used as a disguise or costume for the purpose of teaching or admonishing an audience, which would imply that the letter was no longer a two sided conversation, but flowed from the sender to the recipient in the form of instruction. This perspective may be usefully applied to understand better the genre of MMT.

In the letter in Ezra we have considered that a change in participants is an indicator of a change in scene. Using this standard, the text in Jeremiah 29 can be divided into two parts—one section is addressed to a group in Babylon and the other to those in Jerusalem. The first scene can be divided further into three oracles and the second into two—all introduced by some variation of the messenger formula: “Thus says the Lord.” A comprehensive structural analysis of this letter is complex, but time and space does not allow for a detailed analysis. I will simply highlight the manner in which the text is structured by its use of rhythm, sound and repetition.

Marcel Jousse has argued that oral performances feature a careful structuring of “units of sound and sense uttered or chanted in a single breath,”³³⁷ a structure that facilitates memorization and performance in oral communities. As an example of rhythmic balancing of small units, we can observe this technique in the use of imperatives in the first oracle: “Build houses and live in them/ and plant gardens and eat their fruits// Take wives and father sons and daughters/ and take for your sons wives and your daughters give to men.”³³⁸ The pattern of a statement followed by an explanation, a parallel structure common to many Hebrew

³³⁶ Pardee, *Handbook*, 177 calls Jeremiah 29:4-23 “a series of prophetic oracles stated. . .to have been sent as a letter.”

³³⁷ For a model of “rhythmography,” which is concerned with how the overall structure of a text can be stressed through the performative balance of small units, see Marcel Jousse, *Anthropology of Gest and Rhythm* (ed. and trans. by E. Sienaert and J. Conolly; Durban: Centre for Oral Studies, University of Natal, 1997).

³³⁸ The verbs “build,” “plant” and “marry” are found in Dt. 20:5-10; 28:30-32; Isa. 65:21-23.

psalms, continues throughout the first oracle, and suggests a measured verse presentation. Unlike the imperatives in the Passover letter, these imperatives do not appear to be headings requiring an explanation by a performer, but rather seem to be pithy self-explanatory statements encouraging the Jewish residence to plan to stay in a foreign land for the long haul. The short two-part rhythm that has been established in Oracle 1 is repeated in Oracle 3 in two places: “Plans for wholeness/ and not for evil// to give you a future/ and a hope” and “And you will seek me/ and you will find me// when you seek me with all your heart/ and I will let myself be found by you.” Another rhythmic feature found in the first and third oracle is the use of the first person singular, thus giving the performer the role of speaking for (or as) the Lord God of Hosts by using the emphatic *I*. The formula consists of the first person pronoun + a verb + the second person pronoun, for instance, “*I* will visit *you*,” “the plans *I* have for *you*,” “*I* will hear *you*,” “*I* have driven *you*,” in Oracle 3 and “*I* have deported *you*” in Oracle 1. A rhythmic pattern and verbal repetition to be noted in Scene 2 occurs at the beginning of each announcement of judgment: “I am going to send them,” “And I will make them” [twice] and “And I will pursue after them.” The use of rhythmic blocks suggests that after each “idea unit” a performer would pause before presenting the next rhythmic unit and thus may have had the aural effect of emphasizing each line.

Another way in which the oracles in Scene 1 are emphasized is through the use of repeated sounds, which are lost in English translation. Not only is there syntactical dependence of the second half of the line on the first, but the sound patterns with which the line opens is also continued into the second part of the line.³³⁹ More specifically, the “u” sound (as in *rule*) produced by the use of imperatives³⁴⁰ is a sound that begins each “verse” and is found in both parts of the “verse,” forming an alliteration. A duet of “verses” is

³³⁹ I have indicated a scene by the use of bold upper case letters (**A**, **B**), stanzas by numerals (1, 2, 3 etc.), and verses by lower case letters (a, b, c, etc.), which can also be subdivided into lines (i, ii, iii, iv).

³⁴⁰ Imperatives are found in prophetic speech in 1 Kgs 22:12, 15; 2 Kgs 5:10, 13; Jer 27:12, 17. See also the Passover letter.

increased to a triplet in the stanza (a combination of two or three verses) that refers to marrying and having children. The purpose of the triplet may have been to include an echo of the creation imperative in Genesis 1:28 (“God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’”), in addition to words found in Jeremiah 30:19 (“I will increase (רבה) them; they will not decrease (מעט).” According to Holladay, the expression “increase and do not decrease” are covenantal words,³⁴¹ which may have augmented the prophetic tone of the verse. In sum, the pattern of rhythm, sound and syntax that is followed throughout the first oracle would have set the pace for the text by using short rhythmic blocks or “idea units” signaling to the performer to pause before the next line. In addition, this repeated rhythm would have aided memorization and classification of these “idea units” and hence would have made their retrieval easier.³⁴²

The use of repetition of words serves a number of purposes in Jeremiah 29. 1) Repetition is used as an aural device to emphasize parallel statements, such as the repeated use of word “welfare” in the last stanza of the first oracle.³⁴³ 2) It provides an inclusio for Scene 1. The word “Babylon” is found in the messenger formula at the beginning of Oracle 1 and at the conclusion of Oracle 3, thus framing this scene. 3) A messenger formula is given to introduce each oracle and the apparent voice of God is affirmed by the repeated use of “declares the Lord.” 4) Oracles 3 and 4 contain a refrain, such as the promise that “I will bring you back to the place” in Oracle 3, which occurs at the beginning of the exhortation and as a refrain at the end of the oracle. What is clear is that Jeremiah 29 reflects rhythmic and

³⁴¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 141.

³⁴² For a position that suggests that storage or memorization of texts is mimetic, rhythmic and bilateral, see E. Sienaert and J. Conolly, “Marcel Jousse on ‘Oral-Style,’ ‘Memory,’ and the ‘Counting-Necklace’” in *Orality, Memory, and the Past: Listening to the Voices of Black Clergy under Colonialism and Apartheid* (ed. Phillipe Denis; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2000), 69.

³⁴³ This verse may reflect the prayer for Jerusalem in Psalms 122:6-9. Repetition is employed in a single verse, such as the recurrence of “sons and daughters” in verse 6, or scattered throughout the text, such as “I carried you” (vv. 4, 7, 14); “I have (not) sent” (vv. 9, 19, 20); “I will bring you back” (vv. 10, 14) and “in my name” (vv. 9, 21, 23).

verbal patterns in which parallel units are balanced in terms of sound and word repetition, and reinforced by alliteration; an oral texture that provides an element of internal cohesion.

Having considered some of the oral patterns of individual oracles, it is important to reflect on how the oracles relate to each other as a whole. Each oracle is linked by using a form of the verb “send” (vv. 7, 9, 14, 19, 20), coupled with similar words, such as, “bring back” (vv. 10, 14) and “deliver” (v. 21), which emphasizes a central focus of the prophecy. There are verbal correspondences between the first and last oracles. They both are introduced by the place names “Jerusalem and Babylon,” and include the motif of getting married, having children and enjoying blessing, on the one hand, and committing adultery and being cursed, on the other. The only other place where Babylon is mentioned is in the closing to the middle oracle. The first and third oracles share the motif of welfare (שְׁלוֹמִים) (vv. 7, 11) and prayer (vv. 7, 12) and do not conclude with the refrain “thus says the Lord.” The second and fourth oracles share the theme of prophets; in the one case they should not be listened to but are, and in the other they are not being listened to and should be. These two oracles are also the only ones which close with “thus says the Lord.” To my mind, these observations suggest that this prophecy has a thematic unity and may have been organized using a chiasmic frame.

If the “letter” has internal cohesion, then consideration of historical critical views of the third oracle must be given attention. According to some scholars, Oracle 3 represents a later redactional development,³⁴⁴ or includes interpretive additions,³⁴⁵ or is inserted in the text where it does not belong,³⁴⁶ or belongs in the context of the document, but has been misplaced.³⁴⁷ Performance criticism can offer a more satisfying position. The verbal links

³⁴⁴ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 557.

³⁴⁵ G. Wanke, *Untersuchungen zur sogenannten Baruchschrift* (BZAW 122; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), 50

³⁴⁶ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 221.

³⁴⁷ Albert Condamin, *Le Livre de Jérémie* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1936) places verses 16-20 between verses 9 and 10; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT 12; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968; see Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 557, who quotes Rudolph and appears to hold the same position and states that verses 8-9 belong after verse 15; Friedrich Giesebrecht, *Das Buch Jeremia* (HKAT 3,2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907) places verses 16-20

between and among scenes have already been discussed. Additionally, there is a thematic link between the first two “verses” of Oracle 1 concerning the exhortation to settle in the land and to marry and have children and the assurance that when their time of exile is complete God will bring them back to Jerusalem. There is also a link between the concerns for prayer in the two oracles. In the first instance the people are called upon to pray for Babylon and in the second they are assured that their prayers will be answered. Furthermore, the messenger formula in the first oracle states that God has deported the people from Jerusalem to Babylon (v. 4) and the last statement in the third oracle appears to form a conclusion to the first three oracles by thematically linking to the opening phrase by employing the statement “from which I deported you from there” (v. 15); thus forming an *inclusio*. Therefore the historical critical view of moving verse 15 after verse 20 is weakened, when one considers the aural importance of having a conclusion to act as a cadence before beginning another scene. The organization of the first scene can be understood in the following manner: Within Oracle 1 the onset of the action is presented by God deporting the people from Jerusalem to Babylon, and serves the aural purpose of preparing the audience for the unfolding of events. In Oracle 2 the ongoing action of living in the land is complicated by false prophets who may wish to dissuade the landed immigrants from viewing Babylon as their new home. The outcome of the action and its continuation is stated in Oracle 3. God will bring them back to Jerusalem when seventy years are completed; moreover God will be with them through these troubling times and is available to them throughout the whole exilic period. This pattern allows for mnemonic fluency and provides an internal oral logic to the placement of the oracles.

The purpose of providing a structural outline is to emphasize the oral texture that creates a pattern of increasing and decreasing activity. What are usually discarded in modern translations are the so-called “nonsense” words, those initial particles that are frequently

between verses 14 and 15. This is the arrangement of the Lucian rescension of LXX and the position of Holladay.

repeated and are left untranslated. These words are in fact of fundamental importance as a structural cue for a performance; therefore I offer my own translation. I have chosen to propose a literal translation, which at times is somewhat stilted and the grammar awkward, because I am attempting to reflect a far more faithful translation of the Hebrew syntax and thereby give a sense of the rhythm and cadence of the language.

Narrative Introduction

“These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets and to all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had deported from Jerusalem to Babylon...saying:” (29:1-3)

I. Body

A. Scene 1: Oracles Addressed to the Exiles in Babylon

1. Oracle 1: Exhortation to take wives and settle in the land

Messenger Formula: “*Thus (כה) says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel*

Addressee: *To all the exiles whom I³⁴⁸ have deported³⁴⁹ from Jerusalem to Babylon: (v. 4)*

- a. Settle in the land
 - i. ‘Build (בנו) houses and live (ישבו) (in them);
 - ii. And plant (ונטעו) gardens and eat (ואכלו) their fruit’ (v. 5)
- b. Marry and have children
 - i. ‘Take (קחו) wives and father (והולידו) sons and daughters;
 - ii. And take (וקחו) for your sons, wives and your daughters give (תנו) to men
 - iii. And they may bear (ותלדנה) sons and daughters and multiply there (ורבו-שם) and do not become few (ואל-תמעטו)’ (v. 6).
- c. Pray for the city
 - i. ‘And seek (ודרשו) the welfare (שלום) of the city where (אשר) I have deported you there,
 - ii. And pray (והתפללו) to the Lord on its behalf for (כי) in its welfare (בשלומה), there will be for you welfare (שלום)’” (v. 7)

³⁴⁸ According to Pardee, “An Overview,” 331 n. 47, the change from “Yahweh” to the first person singular attests to a mixture of prophetic and epistolary styles. See Bright, *Jeremiah*, 208, who states that shifts from third to first person are frequent in prophetic address.

³⁴⁹ *BHS* suggests emending הַגְּלִיתִי to the hophal הִגְלִיתָ “have been exiled” following Syriac. According to Pardee “An Overview,” *JBL* 97 (1978): 321-46, the emendation is not necessary because this expression is a prophetic form and not an opening of a letter.

2. Oracle 2: Exhortation to ignore false prophets

Messenger Formula: “*For thus* (כי כה) *says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel:*

- a. Prohibition: Do you trust their prophets
 - i. ‘Do not let them deceive you (אל־ישיאו), your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners,
 - ii. And you must not listen (ואל־תשמעו) to your dreams that (אשר) you cause to dream,’ (v. 8)
- b. Reason for the warning
 - i. ‘For (כי) it is lie³⁵⁰ (that) they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them,’
declares the Lord’ (v. 9).³⁵¹

3. Oracle 3: Assurance that God has their welfare in mind

Messenger Formula: “*For thus* (כי־כה) *says the Lord:*

- a. Proclamation of salvation
 - i. ‘When³⁵² (כי) seventy years are completed³⁵³ for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise³⁵⁴ to bring (להשיב) you back to this place (v. 10).
 - ii. For I (כי אנכי) know the plans that I (אשר אנכי) am planning concerning you’
declares the Lord
 - iii. ‘Plans for wholeness (שלום) and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope’ (v. 11).
- b. The Lord’s response to prayer
 - i. ‘And when³⁵⁵ you will call me (וקראתם) and you come and you pray to me³⁵⁶ and I will hear you (v. 12).
 - ii. And you will search for me (ובקשתם אתי) and you will find me (ומצתם) when/if (כי) you seek me (תדרשני) with all your heart (v.13), and I will let myself be found (ונמצאתי) by you³⁵⁷
declares the Lord
 - iii. ‘And I will turn back (וישבתי) your fortunes and I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where (אשר) I have driven you (from) there’
declares the Lord

³⁵⁰ Lit. “in a lie.”

³⁵¹ *BHS* suggests placing verses 8-9 after verse 15.

³⁵² Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 141 prefers “only when.” So also Bright, *Jeremiah*; Rudolph, *Jeremia*, JB.

³⁵³ Lit. “the mouth of being full.”

³⁵⁴ Lit. “I will see to you and I will fulfill to you my good word.”

³⁵⁵ NIV and NRSV translate this word with “then,” which makes verses 10-14 future. NEB and NASB leave this word untranslated.

³⁵⁶ Jeremiah was commanded not to pray for the welfare of the people in 7:16; 11:14; 14:11.

³⁵⁷ NRSV translates the hip‘il as “I will let you find me”; NAB “you will find me with you.”

4. Conclusion to Scene 1

‘And I will bring you back (והשבתי) to the place from which (אשר) I deported you from there’ (v. 14).

Because (כי) you have said,

‘The Lord has raised up³⁵⁸ prophets for us in Babylon (v. 15)’”

B. Scene 2: Oracles Addressed to those who live in Jerusalem

1. Oracle 4: Announcement of coming judgment³⁵⁹

Messenger Formula: “*For thus (כי כה) says the Lord*

*Addressees: To the king the one who sits (היושב) on the throne of David and
To all of the people the ones who live (היושב) in this city, all the
brothers who did not go out with you into exile. (v. 16)*

Thus says the Lord of hosts:

a. Announcement of judgment

i. ‘Look! (הנני) I am going to send³⁶⁰ (משלה) on them the sword, the famine and the plague

ii. And I will make (ונתתי) them like the figs that are rotten that (אשר) cannot be eaten because of (their) bad quality (מרע) (v. 17)

iii. And I will pursue (ורדפתי) after them with the sword, with the famine and with the plague

iv. And I will make them (ונתתי) a terror to all of the kingdoms of the earth as a curse and as a horror and as (an object) of hissing³⁶¹ (ולשרקה) and as a disgrace among all the nations where (אשר) I have driven them away (from) there’ (v. 18).

b. Reason for the judgment

i. ‘Because (תחת) they did not hear my words’

declares the Lord

ii. ‘When (אשר) I sent (שלחתי) to them my servants the prophets again and again and sending (ושלח) they did not listen’

declares the Lord (v. 19)

c. Conclusion

And hear (שמעו) the word of the Lord all (of the) exiles whom I sent away (שלחתי) from Jerusalem to Babylon’ (v. 20)

³⁵⁸ This hip’ il with “prophets” as the object is only found here and in Deut. 18:15, 18.

³⁵⁹ Verses 16-20 are not found in the LXX (except for G^L which has the order vv. 14, 16-20, 15, 21-23).

According to Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 554 this omission is not due to homoioteleuton, because the section is too long.

³⁶⁰ This form of שלח is intensive, that is, in the pi’el (“let loose”); whereas, in verse 6 the verb is in a simple form (“send”).

³⁶¹ This is in contrast to the welfare of those in exile.

2. Oracle 5: Announcement of judgment on two prophets

Messenger Formula: “*For thus (כי כה) says the Lord of Hosts the God of Israel*

Addressees: *To Ahab the son of Kolaiah and*

To Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah

who are prophesying a lie to you in my name

a. Announcement of judgment

i. ‘Look! (הגני) I am going to give (נתן) them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,

ii. and he shall strike them (והכם) before your eyes (v. 21)

ii. and it shall take up (ולקח), because of them, a curse by all (לכל) the exiles of Judah who are in Babylon, saying,

‘May the Lord make you (ישמר) like³⁶² Zedekiah and like Ahab whom (אשר) the king of Babylon roasted them in the fire (v. 22)

b. Reason for the judgment

i. because (יען אשר) they have done (עשו) a willful sin in Israel

ii. and they have committed adultery (וינאפו) with the wives of their neighbours

iii. and they have spoken (וידברו) words in my name, lies that (אשר) I did not command them’ (לוא צויתם)

3. Conclusion to Scene 2

*and I am he who knows and (I am) a witness³⁶³
declares the Lord”* (v. 23)

4.3.2 Texture

We have noted in the analysis of the structure that the addressee changes from the diaspora to the Jerusalemites, and that the text consists of five oracles, three addressed to those in Babylon and two to those remaining in Jerusalem. Here I note three language choices, or methods of adding texture that support the conclusions of the previous section and suggest why this type of text was selected, and with what aims. The first language choice is that Jeremiah 29 is shaped by a messenger formula of prophetic speech, “this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says. . .” (vv. 4, 8, 10, 16, 17, 21) and includes the refrain “declares the Lord.” The oral/aural impact of these two declarations represents a transformation from Jeremiah the prophet speaking, to Jeremiah speaking on behalf of the

³⁶² This expression in the jussive is also found in Gen. 48: 20: “May the Lord make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.”

³⁶³ For an example of a witness to a letter, other than the sender, see Murraba’at (papMur 42). For a witness as a deed of sale, see Jeremiah 32:12.

Lord, and finally resuming to Jeremiah's own words. By writing in this way, the prophet makes a connection between the "real" world in which the audience lives and hears the message and the performance world. In performance the reader would assume the role of the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel in a moment of high intensity as he expresses the Lord's oracle by using the first person singular (i.e. "I carried into exile. . ." ³⁶⁴). And then would move away from that intensity and take on the role of a narrator, when the statement "declares the Lord" is uttered. The rising and falling action of each oracle would have been imagined, at least partially, by the performers of the text as they increased and decreased narrative tension through variations in voice and gesture, thus alerting the audience to a change in referent. The performer becomes the link between the fictive world presented by the characters in the letter and the "real" world of the audience. If this view of the prophetic performance holds, it can be conjectured that in the process of experiencing this text, the intended, as well as future, audiences would have taken over the function of the referent. In other words, the letter can be viewed by the audience as having been written to them.

Secondly, and closely related to the first language choice, is that the performer is the key actor speaking for (or as) God in the communication. Unlike in Ezra 5 where the building project is mediated through texts, Jeremiah 29 uses oracles to give an aura of divine speech and a rhythmic power that allows the performers to speak in the voice of the Lord Almighty. The first oracle expresses that the people should make the best of their experience in the foreign country, which allows the performer to begin the reading by being a spokesperson for God, who addresses the hearers. This is most dramatically and explicitly stated by the words, "I have deported you there." In the exhortation against the false prophets, with every new recitation, the performer again warns the community not to listen to fabricated prophecies, but heed only those sent by God. The role of the performer as the speaker for (or as) God is

³⁶⁴ The first person singular referring to God is used some 29 times in these oracles, "me" five times, "my" four. This emphasis confirms who the author of the oracles is said to be.

particularly poignant in the oracle that uses performative speech or speech acts. For instance, the performer employs a speech act as a mechanism to renew the covenant each time the words in Jeremiah are spoken that “[God] will fulfill to you my promise” (v. 10) and “[God] will turn back your fortunes” (v. 14).³⁶⁵ With every performance of the announcement of judgments against those who remained in Jerusalem and against the two prophets, the performer again enacts a judgment against those who do not hear or listen to God’s words, or who commit willful sins, or are adulterous, or lie against God. The performer symbolically brings to life, or re-presents the oracles of God, which become present again in performance. Therefore it can be said that the texture implies that God continues to speak with authority, not merely through human testimony as in Ezra, but through the voice of God expressed through the performers of the oracles.

The third language choice consists of the way in which the text frames each oracle, not only through employing a messenger formula, but more importantly, through the texture of the body of the oracle. The first oracle uses short, pithy statements and is set apart from the others by its quick action sequence, exemplified by the use of imperatives, with only one subordinate clause. The texture changes significantly in the next oracle by its use of two prohibitions, namely, “Do not let them deceive you,” and “And you must not listen.” A change in texture in the next oracle is signaled by the use of “when” (כִּי), which, according to Allen, reflects redactional activity,³⁶⁶ but more probably served the communicative purpose of alerting the performer or audience that a change in subject is about to happen. The positive exhortation in Oracle 1 and the negative exhortation in Oracle 2 culminate in Oracle 3 in the form of an assurance that God has their welfare in mind. The two announcements of

³⁶⁵ Jeremiah 29:10-14 is closely linked to Deuteronomy 4:29-31, where God promises that he will not forget the covenant he made with their fathers. See the speech-acts “I will come to you” (v. 10), “I know the plans I have for you” (v. 11); “I will listen to you” (v. 12). “I will be found by you” (v. 14), “I will gather you” (v. 15), “I will send the sword” (v. 17), etc.

³⁶⁶ Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, (OTL; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2008), 323.

judgment in Oracles 4 and 5 are introduced by a messenger formula and then begin with an exclamation “Look!” to alert listeners to what is about to happen. This interjection may have been retained precisely because it unequivocally marks off these oracles.

If this letter is authentic, that is written or dictated by Jeremiah, the motivation for sending an oracle in letter-form may have been necessitated by distance, not by choice, that is, Jeremiah may not have been able to travel to Babylon to deliver his message in person.³⁶⁷ Therefore it can be said that the prophet may have been using a prophetic form that he was familiar with and framed it as a letter being sent through a messenger from Jerusalem to Babylon, thereby entrusting that the power of the word of the Lord will do its work by using letter form, or implying that a letter is being used.³⁶⁸ However, if the text is a later addition to the book of Jeremiah, including an alleged letter may have been a means of expressing a provocative view of limited cooperation with a foreign power by using the authority of a well-known prophet offering a perspective written at arms-length. Whichever view is taken, it is clear that the type of communication presented in the text is a prophetic message consisting of covenantal language and would have been decoded by the audience as a text written or dictated by the prophet sent as a letter. Similar to Ezra, Jeremiah’s letter is sent as a symbol of authority to promote group identity, but uses the dedicated register of an oracle to speak for (or as) God to exhort and warn the people of Israel. A question that remains is in what context would an oracle be performed as a letter that oscillates between the voice of a narrator and the voice of God?

4.3.3 Context

The text and texture of this early Jewish diaspora letter gives us important clues about who read the document and how it may have been performed. Jeremiah 29 invites the

³⁶⁷ Assuming that this letter is a historical record of an actual letter is problematic. It cannot be verified either way, but for our purposes it makes little difference whether it was an actual letter or a literary construct.

³⁶⁸ Jeremiah, we are told, wrote many prophetic messages through Baruch and had links to scribal families (Jeremiah 30:2; 36:2-32; 45:1; 51:60-64).

performer and audience into the very common world of village dwellers building houses, planting gardens, and having children during a long waiting period, when life might be difficult and hope may be in short supply. These positive domestic images are contrasted with negative descriptions of destruction, such as “rotten figs,” “(an object) of hissing,” “being struck before your eyes” and “sword, famine, and plague.” The juxtaposition of contrasting images can offer an opportunity for a reader to consider how prophetic forms were used in Israelite tradition. It appears that speaking against kings and those who did not go into exile would have been significant to ordinary people living out of the popular tradition in exile.³⁶⁹ The stratification by residence expressed in each scene (rural exiles in Scene 1 vs. urban Jerusalemites in Scene 2) and social status (all those in exile in Scene 1 vs. kings in Scene 2) are compounded by the prophetic voice that influenced each group.³⁷⁰ These differences suggest that there was a gap between the practices of the religious elite in Jerusalem and the concerns of the common people in exile. Additionally, each oracle and each scene is structured in a way that exhibits internal cohesion as well as being framed as individual units. These observations can lead to a general historical context in which Jeremiah 29 may have been performed.

There is little question that this text was recited or read in a communal setting as an oral/aural event intended for enactment or embodiment. It can be said that the oracles came to have significance only in performance in particular relational contexts—never exclusively individually read, nor as a one-time event. The performers for (or as) God would have been cast into the role or persona of a prophet, serving in a prophetic office with each new performance and would have used a text that takes on the persona of a letter. Therefore the letter is given life via a somatic and semiotic ritual of (re)iteration in order to bind a covenant

³⁶⁹ In another letter included in chapter 29, Jeremiah recites God’s sending and the ruling class’s rejection of the prophets (vv. 17-19).

³⁷⁰ The motif of sending and rejecting God’s prophets is a common theme in the Hebrew Bible. See Ezra 9:6-15; Neh 1:5-11; Ps. 106:6-46; Dt 4:25-31; 28:45-68; 30:1-10; 1 Kings 8:46-53. See also Tob. 3:1-6

community together in a shared experience that far exceeds the authority of the written text.³⁷¹

The texture of Jeremiah 29 gives us a glimpse into the social history of the exilic people. Both scenes display a different emphasis. There is no cause and effect relation specified in the destruction oracles of Scene 2 according to which the announcement of judgment brings repentance and a change in lifestyle as is found in the assurance that “if you seek me, I will be found by you” in Scene 1. Difficult to grasp is why oracles would be repeated that had been fulfilled because time cancels their predictive power. It appears that the reenactment of Scene 1 would have been performed not in terms of their immediate prediction, but in terms of how it may have kept the audience focused on what is worth hoping for. The repeated mention through performance that God has their welfare in mind suggests the possibility that some of these oracles were being enacted during long periods of domination by foreign systems. The question that may have been considered is whether deliverance from an imperial power is by military revolt, apocalyptic act of God and/or the repentance of the people. On this score the performance of a text allegedly written by Jeremiah suggests that prophets could be conceived of as a threat to foreign rule for they hold a key to survival and possibly advancement in the midst of imperial might.

In contrast, Scene 2 has slated Israel’s own kings, prophets and those living in Jerusalem for destruction, because of their alleged disobedience. The oracles of judgment against Israel’s oppressive and exploitative rulers state that the temple institution and their elite will be destroyed. According to Jeremiah 29:17, the sentence of doom had been pronounced ahead of time (“I am going to send on them the sword, the famine and the

³⁷¹ James Miles Foley, “The Riddle of Q: Oral Ancestor, Textual Precedent, or Ideological Creation” in *Oral Performance, Popular Tradition, and Hidden Transcript in Q* (ed. Richard Horsley; SBL Semeia Studies; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 139 uses the terms “somatic” and “semiotic” to refer to the prophetic iteration of the Q material.

plague”), which implies that a decision had already been made in the heavenly court, before it came to pass on earth. The prophetic oracle of judgment over Jerusalem and its leaders would have resonated in the ears of the hearers as the fulfillment of Israel’s yearnings, with the tables finally being turned on the ruling house of Jerusalem.

After attaining a clearer sense of how each oracle is structured as individually framed units, we can now consider whether these oracles may have been performed individually as part of a longer discourse. Each scene reveals a different social conflict and gives the stance in these struggles. Scene 1 is a conflict reflected in a home and neighbourhood against a foreign world power and takes the position that God offers hope, salvation and a return of fortunes for those who seek the Lord. The context for the performance of this scene may have been regular community meetings in which they celebrated the renewal of the covenant of Israel over against foreign rulers they viewed as oppressive and unjust.³⁷² The second type of conflict found in Scene 2 is internal and includes Israel’s own religious leaders. The stress in the text falls on God’s judgment on the religious elite and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. An argument can be made, albeit cautiously given the lack of first-hand evidence, that the second scene may have been performed separate from the first. The rationale for this position is that a change in participants, coupled with the change in tone and conflict, may suggest a change in context. If that is the case, then the oracles of destruction could be told as a judgment against the ruling religious leaders, but also as a sign of deliverance for those who see themselves as listening to God’s “true” prophets. The audience would have expected a change in their situation through divine acts, not military might; therefore a rural community setting seems most probable, where the urban elite may have been viewed with suspicion. To have full effect in overcoming despair and offering hope for the future, these two scenes, either individually or collectively, would have been read and discussed in times and places of

³⁷² For other texts that deal with the future restoration of Israel, see Isa. 42: 5-6; Zech. 2:10; 8:7-8; *Pss. Sol.* 11:2-3; Ps. 107:3; Bar. 4:4; 5:5; *1 Enoch* 57:1.

exploitation and need. In this way the age-old longings of a renewed Israel would have been (re)enacted as the community heard the “word of the Lord of Hosts” and God became present again in their midst, through the words of the prophet, and by extension their performers. Thus the performance sustains the prophetic tradition, which may have provoked new prophetic voices.

I have argued that the inclusion of Ezra 5 and Jeremiah 29 in an embedded text adds to the plot development of the narratives in which they are found. However, the relationship between the narrative and the text of the letter varies, and thus may extend how we understand the definition of “letter.” Ezra 5 contains standard Aramaic letter form, consisting of introduction, transitional words and conversational style; whereas, none of these features are present in the body of the “letter” found in Jeremiah 29. If we expand the meaning of the term “letter” to include how a text functions in a community, we can say that the narrative introduction that states that a letter is to follow allows the performer to identify the participants in the text, and places an expectation on the performer and listening community that a particular type of text is being read, and thereby allowing the document to function as a letter. A letter, in this case, serves the purpose of giving instructions that are intended for a wider readership. In our investigation, Jeremiah 29 is the first document that does not follow letter form, and yet may have functioned as a letter. This development may force us to re-evaluate how a letter is defined—particularly as it relates to MMT. Another consideration concerning how a text functions in a community is the oral/aural impact of a performance. We have proposed that the “borrowing” of material in Ezra 5 or the “awkwardness” of Jeremiah 29 may not be the result of redaction, reworking, or mistakes, but rather it may suggest that the text reflects an oral mindset. By being attentive to the performative elements consisting of a change in participants, and aural cues such as rhythm, alliteration, and repetition, Jeremiah 29 can be viewed as a cohesive unit, consisting of two scenes, and Ezra 5

can be divided into three scenes. In Ezra 5 we have proposed that the change in participants suggests a change in scene; additionally, that that shift can suggest a change in performance context, such as in Jeremiah 29. This is a significant observation when considering a much longer work, such as MMT, which include many participants. The purpose of choosing to represent a text as a letter may be its symbolic value, which may have offered the performance a sign of authority, particularly if the performer spoke for (or as) God. One important element that is distinctive to letter form is that a performance immediately brings the persona of the participants in the letter present to the listening audience and thus sets them up for a particular type of presentation.

These observations will form a backdrop for the next two texts. We have observed in the translation of Ezra 5 from Aramaic to Greek that Greek epistolary form offers another perspective on how ancient letters were written and may offer new insights on the diversity of letters and how they may have functioned in a community.

5 Two Embedded Greek Letters

We have learned in the previous chapter that an embedded letter may serve the purpose of advancing the storyline of a narrative, but this may not always be the case. The letters in Greek Esther³⁷³ and those in the prologue to 2 Maccabees support the narrative, but are designed to do something quite different from the Hermopolis letters and those in Ezra and Jeremiah. This chapter will suggest different purposes letters may have served in a narrative, which may suggest a different aural effect they may have had on the audience. The inclusion of a letter within a narrative account is well attested in the ancient Near East. Our inquiry will survey examples of letters that appear to be a later addition to an existing composition. Two letters in Greek Esther serve to supplement a tale set in the court of a foreign king, a novella³⁷⁴ that tells the story of a righteous Jewish courtier who experiences an adventure while serving in the king's court.³⁷⁵ Another addition to an existing text, but serving a different literary purpose are the two letters that provide the introduction to an alleged abridged historical account on the work of Jason of Cyrene on Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers (2 Macc. 2:19-23).³⁷⁶ It is worth considering whether letter form may have been

³⁷³ The Greek version of Esther includes six additions, which are not found in the Hebrew text. Additions B and E claim to be copies of royal edicts dictated by Haman and Mordecai, respectively. Greek Esther has long been noted for its liberal divergence from the Hebrew text. There is another Greek version of the book, traditionally called the Alpha-Text, most likely a secondary revision to the LXX. For a critical edition of the Alpha Text, see Karen H. Jobes, *The Alpha-Text of Esther: Its Character and Relationship to the Masoretic Text* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1996). For an analysis of the Alpha-Text as an example of "rewritten Bible," see also Emanuel Tov, "The 'Lucianic' Text of the Canonical and Apocryphal Sections of Esther: A Rewritten Biblical Book," *Textus* 10 (1982): 1-25; Kristin De Troyer, *The End of the Alpha Text of Esther: Translation and Narrative Technique in MT 8:1, LXX 8:1-17, and AT 7:14-41* (rev. ed.; trans. B. Doyle; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2000); eadem, *Rewriting the Sacred Text: What the Old Greek Texts Tell Us about the Literary Growth of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 62-66.

³⁷⁴ For a brief overview of Jewish novellas, see Lawrence M. Wills, "Jewish Novellas in the Greek and Roman Age: Fiction and Identity," *JSJ* 42 (2011): 141-65.

³⁷⁵ Other Jewish texts that share the characteristics of a "court narrative" are: Genesis 37-50; Daniel 1-6, Bel and the Dragon, and 1 Esdras 3-4.

³⁷⁶ The fact that the opening letters in 2 Maccabees were not part of the original text, but were later additions is well attested among scholars. See for example Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees* (CEJL; eds. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, et al.; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), who concludes that "the same author added (although not necessarily composed) both [letters] and was aware of the book and even edited it in a most central way, namely, by adding in the Hanukkah story (10:1-8)" (p. 529). John R. Bartlett, *The First and Second Books of the Maccabees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 219 suggests that festal letters may have been sent annually, which would imply a separate circulation for these letters in Maccabees.

used for its capacity to act as a powerful means of bringing the persona of the participants before the audience, while at the same time fabricating an epistolary persona.

This dissertation has argued that letters are textualized social performances, using a set of conventions that were recognized by the performer and audience alike. This chapter builds upon the conclusions advanced by performance criticism's application to the texts already discussed in the previous chapters; additionally, we will provide a platform to investigate more fully the performer/audience relationship by considering the contribution these letters make to an iconic mode of presentation, which refers to an element in a performance that calls upon the audience to respond.³⁷⁷

5.1 An Embedded Letter in Greek Esther

One purpose of the Hebrew book of Esther is to offer hope to the exilic people, apart from returning to Jerusalem.³⁷⁸ The message of hope is rooted in loyalty of the people to the community, and a sense of security the text is meant to foster—concerns which are affirmed through writing and receiving correspondence. Esther 3:12-15 describes the drawing up of an edict, its translation into the language of each province, and dispatching the express couriers to deliver the message of destruction. The inclusion of a “copy” of Artaxerxes’ decree is encompassed in the narrative of Greek Esther, traditionally called Addition B, and the tensions that result are resolved in another follow-up letter, called Addition E. It appears that these additions deepened for the ancient performer and audience the impression of the

³⁷⁷ Bernard Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation: Performer, Audience, and Act* (ed. Gloria Brim Beckerman and William Coco; New York: Routledge, 1990).

³⁷⁸ For the dating of Hebrew Esther in the Persian period, see Joseph Naveh and Jonas C. Greenfield, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the Persian Period,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 1: *Introduction: The Persian Period* (eds. W. D. Davies and L. Finkelstein; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 120-21; Joshua Ezra Burns, “The Special Purim and the Reception of the Book of Esther in the Hellenistic and Early Roman Eras,” *JSJ* 37 (2006):1-34, traces the “composition of MT Esther to the late Persian period or shortly following the onset of the Hellenistic rule over the Near East (ca. 400-300 B.C.E),” (p. 5). Adele Berlin, “The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling” *JBL* (2001): 3-14 prefers to date Esther in the Persian period; however, Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 96 dates Esther in the Hellenistic period and sees it belonging to the novel genre prevalent at that time.

narrative's historicity and authenticity by supplying alleged verbatim copies of those royal edicts composed by Haman and Mordecai, respectively.³⁷⁹ These letters, more specifically Addition E, will form the basis of our analysis of the text.

5.1.1 Text

There are several literary approaches that seemed to have been used by ancient authors to shape their message. One possible option is that the embedded letters serve to authenticate a work rhetorically, irrespective of whether the letter existed. According to this position, letters included in a document are part of a rhetorical strategy to strengthen the credibility of a narrative in which it is mentioned rather than to serve a predominantly historical function.³⁸⁰ Nickelsburg is one scholar, among many, who contends that the decrees in Esther are included to add a note of authenticity to the narrative.³⁸¹ Another possibility is that a letter could be designed to authenticate information that the author(s) wishes to develop, that is, the embedded text serves an ideological or theological purpose of a community. In applying this option to Greek Esther, the significance of the embedded letter may have been to shape the message of the wider text concerning the persecution and rescue of the Jewish people.³⁸² An option that is not given much consideration is that the letter may have been added for its artistic beauty; serving merely as a grandiose flourish incorporated into a narrative. These three views are not exclusive, but when placed in tandem, strengthen the position that a performance of this text demonstrates and celebrates “past and present, the

³⁷⁹ Carey A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1977), 159.

³⁸⁰ As an example of a narrative that quotes a document in order to bolster the credibility of the story within which it appears occurs in two works by Xenophon: *An Ephesian Tale* and the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyrii*. For a discussion of these two documents as authenticating devices see, W. Hansen, “Strategies of Authentication in Ancient Popular Literature,” in *The Ancient Novel and Beyond* (eds. S. Panayotakis, M. Zimmerman, and W. Keulen; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 309. See also a work attributed to Philo: *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos*.

³⁸¹ Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 204; see also Moore, *Additions*, 153.

³⁸² For examples of alleged “discovered” texts serving an ideological purpose see Pausanias, *Descriptions of Greece*, Plutarch, *De genio Socratis* and Livy, *History of Rome*. For a description of these works that support an ideological agenda see, Katherine M. Scott, *Why did they write this way?* (LHBOTS 492; New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 98-103.

past glory, suffering, and achievements of the people, together with their present unity and idealism. In that sense the [performance] confirms established values, and it does so by mere demonstration.”³⁸³ What Beckerman is describing are iconic modes of presentation, which are rituals and performances that involve “the status quo, a moment frozen in time that celebrates identity.”³⁸⁴ In contrast, the narrative in Esther uses dialectic elements that serve to engage the audience into the emotional and psychological world of the conflict experienced in the life of Esther and the rising and falling tension that results—its purpose is to draw the audience into the story. Adding an iconic letter to a dialectic narrative effectively allows each mode of presentation to stand in stark relief. In this taxonomy, the narrative advances the storyline, while the letter reinforces that Purim is to be celebrated “with all good cheer as a holiday among your commemorative feasts” (E22). Iconic texts are used for persuasion or celebration and produce a kind of “showing,” or performative structure.³⁸⁵ Unlike Ezra 5 and Jeremiah 29 in which the performative structure was organized by the change in participants, the letters in Greek Esther have no internal dialogue and only address directly those participants mentioned in the opening; features which may suggest that a performance of this text served a different function and possibly had a different oral/aural impact.³⁸⁶

The narrative introduction to Addition E of Greek Esther states that a letter (ἐπιστολῆς) is to follow, the opening address follows idiomatic Greek letter writing form (sender, to recipient) and the greeting is typical of Greek letters (χαίρειν).³⁸⁷ These elements indicate that this text is clearly presents itself as a letter. However, following the opening, there is no transition marker; an element that is evident in the Ezra and Hermopolis letters.

³⁸³ Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, 43.

³⁸⁴ Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 20.

³⁸⁵ Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, 81.

³⁸⁶ Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, 55 suggests three distinguishing features of iconic presentations: 1) a stress of being over becoming, 2) ritual enactment, and 3) illumination over catharsis.

³⁸⁷ For examples of idiomatic Greek letter form, see Charles Bradford Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period: A Study of Greek Epigraphy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934). According to the *Inventory*, Samely, et. al., these literary features support the view that this document can be classified in the same category as the Hermopolis and Ezra letters.

Unlike the letters studied up to this point, which are addressed to a specific person or group, the letter in Greek Esther is addressed to the widest possible audience; namely, to the governors and to the whole kingdom.³⁸⁸ This would suggest that the purpose of the letter was to serve a wide audience and therefore was broadly circulated.³⁸⁹ The broad appeal or the “widespread sharing” of this circular letter is supported by the warning given in the conclusion that “every city and country, without exception that does not do according to this shall be consumed with wrath.” Additionally, the redaction of the letter into other forms, such as the Alpha-Text, may be evidence of a dialogue between a redactor and an “authoritative” text,³⁹⁰ or more likely that the versions were competing editions of a popular tale.³⁹¹ What is clear is that the letter in Greek Esther had a wide distribution and was subsequently redacted for continued use in new contexts. This letter was not written predominately to get a response from the recipient, but rather as a one-way conversation to the satrapies. The extensive circulation of a text will be further developed when considering the possible function and oral/aural impact of MMT.

There are several features in this letter that are frequently found in iconic modes of presentation. The first feature, according to Beckerman, is that the performer stresses being over becoming.³⁹² By that he asserts that a written text can be used by a performer to reinforce the ideological values of the audience. One way of achieving this goal is by presenting a problem or dissatisfaction a person or group may be experiencing and then providing a solution. For instance, in the performance of Addition E, the performer would stress the evil intent of Haman by attacking him for his many offences: he betrayed his office,

³⁸⁸ This is in contrast to Addition B, which is only addressed to the officials.

³⁸⁹ This position is reinforced by the fact that there is another source for the Esther story, namely the Alpha-Text, which was originally written in Greek, but includes distinctive material. For a discussion of the transmission history of Esther, see David Clines, *The Esther Scroll*, (JSOTSup30; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984).

³⁹⁰ This is the position of Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1991).

³⁹¹ Wills, *Jewish Novel*, 130.

³⁹² Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, 55.

he was disloyal to the king's friendship, his behaviour was destructive, he was false, and finally the charges he laid against the Jews were false. Each new accusation is clearly marked off by the coordinating conjunction "and/but" (δέ) or the preposition "for whereas" (ὡς γάρ). However, the division of each stanza into verses and lines is not nearly as well defined.³⁹³ The length and structure of each accusation varies; with no two stanzas organized in the same way. The purpose of an apparent random distribution of the length of stanzas in Greek Esther will need to be considered when we reflect on the various lengths of the scenes in MMT.

If my structure is sustainable, then accusations 1 and 2 use an objective point of view, referring to a general group of people, using the terminology "many people" and "and often many." This performance perspective is substantiated in the conclusion to the first accusation by reporting that "*they* [still] assume *they* shall escape justice." The extent of the problem with Haman is validated in the next two accusations by a change in focus—from Haman's evil actions against the king's office and his friendship, to his evil character in contrast with the king's benevolence. Scene 1 is brought to a conclusion by using the emphatic "but we were betrayed" and then enumerates the positive attributes of the Jews' laws and of the greatness of their God.

One purpose for embedding a letter in a narrative is to position the audience at a distance from the scene. This literary device is greatest in Greek Esther for it is addressed to the rulers of 127 satrapies and others who share the king's interests, and is allegedly written by a foreign king. The distance between the performer and the audience is accentuated by being composed in highly stylized Greek and by presenting the characters as mere objects to observe, without leading the audience to have a subjective experience of the characters.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Similar to the previous letters, I have indicated a scene by the use of bold upper case letters (**A**, **B**), stanzas by numerals (**1**, **2**, **3** etc.), and verses by lower case letters (a, b, c, etc.), which can also be subdivided into lines (i, ii, iii, iv).

³⁹⁴ Wills, *Jewish Novel*, 126-27.

Although an idiomatic transition marker is absent, the letter uses a wide range of initial particles that serially argue against Haman and his character in order to set up the request formula. The complimentary relation between the background and the request is evident in Scene 2 by using the sentence connector “therefore” (οὖν).³⁹⁵ The four background explanations, with a conclusion, recite the circumstances that necessitated the petition and are climaxed by the most commonly used request formula: καλῶς ποιήσετε + a participle (προσχησάμενοι).³⁹⁶ The petition verb “do not put to use” expresses the action desired by the king; however, there is no request for a reply common among letters of request. Although Jeremiah 29 also represents a one-sided letter, whereby the letter flowed from the sender to recipients in the form of instruction, this letter is not meant primarily for instruction, but for a celebration of victory over the evil pursuits of Haman.

Returning to elements that suggest an iconic mode of presentation, it appears that the performer would have used the letter to “pause” the narrative in order to heighten the importance of celebrating Purim. The performer’s climactic moment is emphasized by the connectors “And you therefore” (καὶ ὑμεῖς οὖν) and “and now” (καὶ νῦν), which introduce the purpose for the ritual enactment of the celebration, accompanied by a warning to those who do not honour this special day. The letter represents an iconic presentation in that the text was first embodied in the performer by the use of movements, tonal quality and emotions. The ritual enactment is supported by the letter’s simple structure, consisting of the background to a request, request formula and results of the request. Additionally, the naming of familiar characters, such as Artaxerxes, Mordecai, Esther and Haman and the use of common transitional phrases engage the audience, facilitate attention, and create an ease of communication. The letter also generates a “we” feeling of solidarity by encouraging its community celebration and by pronouncing Purim as a day of deliverance. Beckerman notes

³⁹⁵ White, *Form and Structure*, 15.

³⁹⁶ Kim, *Familiar Letter*, 65.

that the iconic mode of presentation “seeks to concretize itself, to resist change, to make itself into a permanent emblem.”³⁹⁷ In short, his letter suggests an iconic mode of presentation by reinforcing the value of being a part of the Jewish community, by extending participation through creating solidarity with the performer, and by projecting a sense of unity for the future. Through the performance of this letter, the audience is prepared to celebrate the winning of a struggle and to substantiate what the audience already believes about itself.

The following structure will include my own translation. As much as possible, I have attempted to reflect the word order of the Greek in order to provide the best representation of the original language. At times this makes for awkward English, but allows for a “measured” verse approach that has been patterned in previous letters.

Narrative Introduction

“The following is a copy of a letter (ἐπιστολῆς):” (E1)

I. Opening

A. Address

“The Great King Artaxerxes”

“To the rulers of the one hundred twenty-seven satrapies from India to Ethiopia and to those who share our interests,”

B. Greeting

“Greetings” (χαίρειν) (E2)

II. Body

A. Scene 1: Background to the Request

1. Haman betrays his office (E3-4)

- a. “Many people (πολλοί) who are frequently being honoured with the greatest generosity [of their] benefactors are presumptuous
- b. And not only (καὶ οὐ μόνον) our subjects do they seek to harm,
 - i. and (τε) not being able (οὐ δυνάμενοι) to bear success,
 - ii. and (καί) their benefactors, they endeavour to plot against.
- c. And (καί) the gratitude, not only (οὐ μόνον) of the people are they abolishing,
 - i. but also (ἀλλὰ καί), those who are strangers to goodness,
 - ii. boast of being carried away by all [these] things.”

³⁹⁷ Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, 46.

- d. *Conclusion:*
 “[Despite] God who always sees the evil-hating, they [still] assume they shall escape justice.”³⁹⁸

2. **Haman betrays the king’s friendship (E5-6)**

- a. “And often many (πολλάκις δὲ καί)
 i. have been appointed to offices entrusted to handle the affairs of friends,
 ii. have encouraged [and are] responsible for the shedding of innocent blood.
 b. Having made [them] involved in fatal circumstances
 i. by (τῷ τῆς) malevolence, lying deception,
 ii. they have led men astray—
 iii. those who govern [with] innocence [and] goodwill.”³⁹⁹

3. **Haman’s Behaviour is Destructive (E7-8)**

- a. “And it is possible (δὲ ἔξεστιν) to observe this⁴⁰⁰
 i. not (οὐ) so much from the more ancient accounts,
 ii. which (ὧν) we have handed down,
 iii. as it is (ὅσα ἐστίν) close at hand,
 b. You (ὕμῃς), when you observe wickedly
 i. what has been accomplished through those who rule unworthily,
 ii. [perpetrated by] pestilent behaviour”

c. *Conclusion:*

- “And to make (καὶ προσέχειν) for the future of the kingdom, [every effort] to be quiet for all people,
 i. we shall offer peace, [when] dealing with the changes
 ii. and (δέ) always discerning what comes to our attention with (μετ’) a more considerate response.”

4. **Haman was false (E9-14)**

- a. “For whereas (ὡς γάρ) Haman son of Hammedatha, a Macedonian,
 i. who was in truth a foreigner to the blood of the Persians
 ii. and (καί) quite devoid of our kindness,⁴⁰¹
 b. [although] he received hospitality⁴⁰² from us,

³⁹⁸ The Alpha-Texts reads, “Outwitted by the praise of the foolish, they thought to escape the just judge who hates evil and who holds sway over all” (Moore, *Additions*, 232)

³⁹⁹ This sentence is awkward to translate into English. *NETS* suggests this translation “by the malicious lie of an evil disposition of the people who misconstrue the sincere goodwill of their sovereign.”

⁴⁰⁰ It is difficult to know whether the infinitive “to observe this” (σκοπεῖν) fits better with the previous sentence or introduces the following sentence. If, as my structure indicates, it introduces the next sentence the literal translation would be “to observe [this], and it is possible,” which makes for very awkward English. The placement of the verb at the beginning of the sentence should not alter the impact of the performance or the structure as I have presented it.

⁴⁰¹ Lit. “and standing apart from our kindness.”

- i. benevolence which we extend to every nation,
- ii. to such an extent that he was publicly proclaimed as our Father,
- iii. and (καί) he was worshipped by all as second to the royal throne,
- c. But (δέ) being unable to restrain his arrogance, he attempted from the beginning to deprive us even (καί) of our spirit
 - i. of both our saviour and perpetual benefactor, Mordecai,
 - ii. and (καί) the blameless partner in our kingdom, Esther
 - iii. together with (σύν) the whole nation
- d. *Conclusion:*
 - For by (διὰ γάρ) these methods
 - i. he thought that he could catch us defenseless
 - ii. [and] could transfer the dominion of the Persians to the Macedonians.

5. Conclusion to Scene 1: Haman’s charges against the Jews were false (E15-16)

- a. “But we (ἡμεῖς δέ) were betrayed by the thrice-sinful man,
 - i. to annihilate the Jews,
 - ii. who are not criminals
- b. but (δέ) are being governed by the most righteous laws
 - i. and (δέ) are the sons of the most high, the greatest, living God,
 - ii. who guides us both and (καί) our forefathers of the kingdom in the most excellent order.

B. Request

1. Do not act upon the letters (E17-18)

- a. Well, therefore do not put to use (καλῶς οὐκ ποιήσετε) the letters sent off by Haman son of Hamadathos,
- b. Because (διὰ) he who worked out these things at the gates of Susa was crucified
 - i. with [his] whole household,
 - ii. [since] God who rules over all things, has repaid him swiftly [with] judgment.

2. Post a copy of the letter (E19-20)

- a. And (δέ) post a copy of this letter (ἐπιστολῆς) in every place
 - i. to permit the Jews
 - ii. to use their own laws
- b. And (καί) join in helping them
 - i. in order that (ὅπως) those in a time of oppression,
 - ii. they may defend themselves
 - iii. against those who attack them,
 - iv. on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month Adar, on that same day

⁴⁰² Lit. “having been hospitable to us”

- c. For (γάρ) God who rules over all things,
 - i. in the place of the destruction [of his] elect race,
 - ii. has made for them a time of merriment.
- 3. Celebrate this special day (E21-23)**
- a. And you therefore (καὶ ὑμεῖς οὖν) among your named feasts, a notable day,
 - i. with all good cheer
 - ii. shall celebrate
 - b. And now (καὶ νῦν) and (καί) afterward this day of deliverance it may be for us
 - i. and for those who are favourable to the Persians,
 - ii. but (δέ) for those who contrived against us, a memorial, of destruction.
- 4. Results of not following this order (E24)**
- a. And (δέ) every city and country, without exception
 - i. that does not act accordingly by spear and fire
 - ii. shall be consumed with wrath,
 - b. Not only (οὐ μόνον) shall [it be made] impassable for people,
 - i. but also (ἀλλὰ καί) for beasts and birds for all time,
 - ii. it shall be rendered hateful.

5.1.2 Texture

The analysis of the oral texture of the dramatic story of Esther has opened up significant new ways of approaching the literature commonly referred to as a “court tale.”⁴⁰³ Scholars have focused their attention on the wisdom motif,⁴⁰⁴ on sociological analysis,⁴⁰⁵ on literary carnivalesque,⁴⁰⁶ on parallels with folk literature⁴⁰⁷ and court novellas.⁴⁰⁸ What has been

⁴⁰³ The genre designation “court tale” was used by Walter Baumgartner, *Das Buch Daniel* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1926), 6-10; H. Louis Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1948), 27, but there was little comparative discussion.

⁴⁰⁴ Gerhard von Rad, “The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom,” in *The Problem of the Pentateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966); Shemaryahu Talmon, “Wisdom in the Book of Esther, VT 13 (1963):419-55. Talmon compared, what he called “historicized wisdom-tale,” with parallels in Ancient Near Eastern literature.

⁴⁰⁵ W. Lee Humphreys, “A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel,” *JBL* 92 (1973):211-23 introduced the distinction between court “contests” and “conflicts.” This distinction was carried on by John J. Collins, “The Court-Tales in Daniel and the Development of Apocalyptic,” *JBL* 94 (1975), 218-34. George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (HTS 26; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1972), 49-57 analyses the theological content of the court conflict stories.

⁴⁰⁶ Kenneth Craig, *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnavalesque* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

⁴⁰⁷ Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

missing is probing the oral texture for clues that suggest a performative context. The two letter additions to Esther (Additions B and E) “exhibit a much more developed Greek rhetorical style than do the other additions, or indeed, than *any* part of *any* Jewish novella.”⁴⁰⁹ It is possible that the two additions were written by the same author, but not likely the person who penned the others. If this position is sustainable, then it would be a worthy inquiry to determine what performative function these letters may have served.

The oral texture is rich with superlatives and exaggerations that suggest a self-mocking style. The first line of the body of the letter sets the tone for the rest of the text by providing a grandiloquent flourish: “Many people who are frequently being honoured with the greatest generosity. . .” (E3). The Persian embellished benevolence is extended “to every nation,” in addition their peace is offered when dealing with changes and their consideration is present when issues come to their attention (E8-9). Even with such administrative finesse, the king accuses Haman of “attempting from the beginning to deprive us of our spirit [or kingdom]” (E12-14).⁴¹⁰ It appears that Haman is manipulating events in order to gain or usurp the kingdom. In a performance, the developed Greek and inflated style would have most likely been performed in a manner that supported the ridicule of the pompous Persians.

The main purpose of this letter appears to be to lend support to the celebration of Purim. This view is substantiated by the statement in the text: “Therefore you shall celebrate this holiday with all good cheer” (E21). However, the letter may also have been composed to report a tidbit of gossip that gave the audience access to a particular moment in the past, similar to the letter in Ezra 5 that allowed the audience to eavesdrop into a conversation with high ranking officials. This insider information serves to make explicit the many nefarious ways of Haman. The story telling device consisting of mixing the inauguration of a special

⁴⁰⁸ Wills, *Jew in the Court*.

⁴⁰⁹ Wills, *Jew in the Court*, 162.

⁴¹⁰ The view that Haman is asking for kingship is reflected in Josephus, *Antiquities* 11.6.12.

festival within the context of a king's (exaggerated) testimony of the affairs of the kingdom would have made the boundaries between history and literary invention less defined.⁴¹¹

Previously we have discussed the importance of understanding the dedicated register of a text. We have determined that the Passover letter is a festal letter that is concerned with standardizing the celebration of a festival and calls for appropriate festal preparations. Addition E emphasizes the commemoration of a festival in response to the overthrow of Haman and his evil pogrom, which would position this letter in the same dedicated register as the Passover letter in that they both are concerned with the proper celebration of a festival. However, there are differences in the oral texture between the two. Whereas the letter written to and for the Jewish community at Elephantine was created to establish a Jewish festival by distinguishing themselves from Egyptian religious practices, the tension in Esther is to live a life parallel to the Persian hegemony by affirming a religious identity without being erased by the larger community. The way in which the letter achieves this perspective is by presenting the letter from an objective point of view of the foreign king. In this way the audience is positioned to “hear” the king declaring that the Jews are peaceful citizens, and are allowed to live according to their own precepts and uphold their religious practices. The oral technique of placing a whole nation's future on one person allows the audience to focus on the gravity of the situation. The scope of the action is limited and swift and therefore not protracted over a long period of time; the point of the conflict is sharp and the target of the punishment involves one person. Most importantly, the main focus of the letter, and also of the narrative, centres on the results of one pious person who is the salvation of a whole nation—Esther,

⁴¹¹ The issues concerning the historicity of Esther are well presented by Berlin, “Book of Esther.” She concludes that “Esther typifies storytelling about Persia from the Persian period. It takes some of its motifs from biblical literature, and it partakes of many others from the broader literary world of its time, preserved for us most abundantly in the Greek writings. We should, therefore, use these Greek writings in connection with Esther for literary purposes, not for historical purposes” (p. 14). See also Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995), who states that “definitions that emphasize the scientific nature of history, its fundamental difference from literature, or the intention of the author, are problematic” (p. 12). He defines history as “a narrative that presents the past.” According to this definition, Esther would be considered history.

who is willing to sacrifice her life to save her people.⁴¹² The oral texture consists of a strait forward third party report, with little symbolic language or metonymic references, which require a community to have special knowledge or long-held traditions. A performance of this letter would have served as a symbolic means of heightening the purpose for the celebration of Purim by introducing the audience to “new” information about the background to the festival.

If we consider the performance of the Hebrew text, in addition to the two Greek readings, then it is best to hear the text at three stages, or better, three performance contexts.⁴¹³ It appears that new performers with different political and theological interests seem to have retold the narrative. A fresh approach was brought to Greek Esther by including the text of the counter edict rescinding the judgment of the first. In this retelling Haman is blamed for the destructive policy against the Jews; Mordecai is described as “our saviour and perpetual benefactor”⁴¹⁴ and Esther is portrayed as the blameless partner in the kingdom. Haman’s background is said to be Macedonian (that is, Greek) and not Persian, therefore the text insists that is he is a foreigner in a Persian court. As has been shown, textual changes may not necessarily be the result of scribal redaction, but rather may give

⁴¹² According to Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays* (ed. Michael Holquist; trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), 106 the Greek novel is a “test of the hero’s integrity,” specifically in regard to chastity and faithfulness. This also seems to be the case in the book of Esther. Froma Zeitlin, “Religion,” in Whitmarsh, ed., *Cambridge Companion*, 91-108, contends that Jewish and Christian novelistic texts lack the literary sophistication of the Greek novels and therefore would not be included with Greek novels. According to her they take up “many similar motifs, but the major difference is that all these motifs and conventions are deployed expressly in the service of religious ideology with none of the irony, ambiguity, authorial sleight of hand and opportunism that may be read in a typical specimen of prose fiction. For Jews, these works (such as *Esther*, *Daniel*, *Tobit*, *Susanna*) offer affirmations not just of personal identity, but also of communal support and salvation” (p. 107). For a response to Zeitlin, see Wills, “Jewish Novellas,” 154-55.

⁴¹³ Understanding the redactional history of the book of Esther has been the topic of much scholarly debate. For the redaction history of the book of Esther, see Clines, *Esther Scroll*, who considers the differences among the versions of the story and hypothesizes five stages of the Esther story. Fox, *Redaction*, is in agreement with Clines’ outline, but focuses on the purpose and goals of those who worked on earlier versions of Esther. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Legends* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1990) uses a source critical approach to isolate the bottom layers of the story. Charles V. Dorothy, “The Books of Esther: Structure, Genre, and Textual Integrity” (PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1989) uses conclusions from structural, redactional, and canonical analysis to conclude that the LXX and the Alpha-Text are the work of two different communities.

⁴¹⁴ Saviour and benefactor (*soter* and *euergetes*) were common terms for the role of the patron of a city.

evidence of several oral performances. Applying this principle to Esther, it can be said that in response to the popularity of the celebration of Purim different communities structured their festival in different ways, which lead to the scripting of Purim for performance in many forms. This position allows for a much more fluid movement between oral and written texts and suggests that there may be no *Urtext* or primary text, from which others are derived. Performance theory advocates that each time the tale was told it was performed from the beginning with the personality of the community being adapted by the performer and changed with each new presentation as each performer brought the tale to life again.

If, indeed, a community was reinterpreting Greek Esther, we must assume that they had reasons for including the letters, and the reasons were not for plot or narrative development. When the performer tells the Esther story and “reads” the letter and the audience hears it, the experience allows the community to investigate the treasured past as a “symbolic realization of a desire.”⁴¹⁵ If our contention is correct, that there are several performance contexts, each with its own oral and written text and each serving a different purpose, then David Carr’s statement is informative, “Indeed, the past is never ‘past’ in the way we might conceive it but stands in the ancient world as a potential realizable ‘present’ to which each generation seeks to return.”⁴¹⁶ Therefore Addition E has the possibility of supporting the realization of a valued tradition by expressing a perspective of why Purim became an important festival.

It is difficult to determine the historicity of the events, from the oral remains that we presently have, partly because the written texts tend to accentuate the wonder of how Purim began, whereas we wish to downplay it. It appears that the purpose of this letter is to provide continuity of Jewish practices in the face of the crushing dislocation of a diaspora community. As Berlin apply suggests, “a good way to provide this continuity is to link the

⁴¹⁵ Paul Zumthor, *Oral Poetry: An Introduction* (trans. by Kathryn Murphy-Judy; Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 38.

⁴¹⁶ Carr, *Writing on the Tablet*, 11.

present with the past, and the new literature of the Diaspora with older, traditional literature.⁴¹⁷

5.1.3 Context

The context for telling the Esther story, with the added letters, must have been one where the audience knew the outcome of the tale; that Haman would hang, and that the Jewish people would be saved. This story is most likely a literary response to the rigors of living in the diaspora. It addresses the issue of living parallel lives with an all-powerful empire. One way to resolve this tension is by (re)establishing the boundaries in order to disempower the influential. By using a court tale, the performer presents a situation that needs to be addressed and provides a model for overcoming the difficulty. Zumther suggests that the purpose of using folk tales in a community is that they offer “the community an experimental field when it tries out all possible and imaginable confrontations in the voice of the storyteller. Its function as social stabilizer comes from that experimentation.”⁴¹⁸ The experimentation with folk tales as a means of social stabilization can be seen in the commonalities in the language and structure of each of the three major versions of the story of Esther, which suggest that there were performers who wished to keep alive the tradition of Esther and the celebration of Purim. The performance involves many people, both within the written text, and those who listened to the tale. In order to get the full impact of the story, it must be heard from beginning to end as an entire performance. It is doubtful that the letter would have been performed separately, that is, out of context from the whole narrative.

The text of the addition to Greek Esther makes clear that the letter is set in foreign places; that is in the presence of the king and in administrative offices of the 127 satrapies, as well as in the everyday marketplace where edicts and letters are posted and villains are

⁴¹⁷ Berlin, “Book of Esther,” 7.

⁴¹⁸ Zumther, *Oral Poetry*, 38.

hanged. It involves the contrasting images of salvation and crucifixion, and festival and judgment. The people mentioned in the body of the letter consist of Esther, a former peasant girl, Mordecai, the sensible and courageous hero of the story, and Haman, the most developed character. The texture of the letter is concrete without the use of mystical language and is presented in the form of a report from a king giving an objective point of view. The main characterization of Haman is through reports in letters, which has the oral/aural effect of conveying to the audience privileged information. Although the texture of the letter is formal and written from an objective point of view, it does include the perspective of a community, when it states “They [still] assume they shall escape justice” (E4) and by presenting the standpoint that “the Jews are governed by the most righteous laws” (E16). When Haman is hanged with his family, a comment is made that “God who prevails over all things has recompensed him quickly with the deserved judgment” (E17). It can be said that Addition E gives both new information and confirms views that would have produced nods of approval from an audience affirming that “God has made this a day of joy” (E 21).

The information about the people and places in the letter is only suggestive, but we cannot ignore the fact that the letter’s introduction refers to people and places that may have been threatening and unknown to the majority of common folk, such as Artaxerxes and the rulers from India to Ethiopia. This “strangeness” adds potency to the tale as new performers and listeners had to adapt to life in exile, as kingdoms were overthrown and replaced by new overlords. This raises the possibility that the Esther story was initially performed in homes as a response to life in exile. According to Craig, “Purim is the only festival that Judaism has that deals explicitly with exile.”⁴¹⁹ Festivals are generally adapted from folk customs and are subsequently shaped by cultural factors. This holiday is a celebration for every city and country, without exception, and had become corporate in nature. As the festival increased in

⁴¹⁹ Craig, *Reading Esther*, 157.

popularity it most likely was adapted and adopted in new settings with new aspects being added. The victory celebration does not merely belong to Esther and Mordecai, but to all the victims of the previous edict.

Our investigation of Greek Esther has shown that the letter uses an iconic mode of presentation, and was written with a wide audience in mind. Not only is the broad appeal evident in the opening address, but also in the body in which it is stated that “every city and country, without exception” must follow the directives of the edict. Comparing the texture of Greek Esther with the Passover letter suggests that they both include a dedicated register that is consistent with festal letters. Unlike any letter that has been analysed so far, Greek Esther features no internal dialogue and reports the edict predominately from an objective point of view. It is possible that Greek Esther was included in some presentations of the Esther tale for its entertainment value, which included “historical” data as well as literary embellishments. It appears that this letter was adapted from folk customs and eventually was included as a national festival.

This study has yet to be supplemented by a letter that functions as a preface to a larger text in order to investigate further the purposes letters served in a community.

5.2 An Embedded Letter in 2 Maccabees

The two letters that provide an introduction to 2 Maccabees (1:1-10a and 1:10b-2:18) are documents associated with the feast of Booths or Hanukkah.⁴²⁰ They bear witness to political realities of displaced peoples who struggled to maintain the ethnic and religious identity of their homeland. These letters contain religious themes and appear to be addressed to an observant community. They feature an announcement of a coming festival, a call to

⁴²⁰ Eyal Regev, “Hanukkah and the Temple of the Maccabees: Ritual and Ideology from Judas Maccabeus to Simon,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 13 (2006): 1-28 contends that “at the time [of the writing of 2 Maccabees] the festival did not yet have its own name, and that apparently Sukkot was the festival mostly closely resembling it” (p. 4). See also VanderKam, “Hanukkah: Its Timing and Significance according to 1 and 2 Maccabees,” *JSP* 1 (1987): 23-40.

repentance, and an exhortation to the recipients to follow the commandments (2 Macc. 1:2-6; 2:1-3). Since both letters consider the observance of the same feast, the first letter, which is the shorter of the two, will form the bulk of our analysis.

5.2.1 Text

The issues that need a fresh observation from a performance perspective are the connection the letters may have had with the greater work and purposes they may have served in a performance of these letters as a preface to 2 Maccabees. There is strong evidence to suggest that the letters are an attachment to the central narrative and may have been adjusted to fit the main theme of the book, for they have only a modest relevance to the main text. The most obvious connection between the second letter and the book of Maccabees is the purification of the temple described in chapter 10:1-8 (cf. 2:19). A rhetorical tie appears to be the exceptional use of the word “become reconciled” (καταλλαγή), which is peculiar to 2 Maccabees in the Septuagint and is, according to Schwartz, “central to the entire historiographical scheme of our book, for ‘reconciliation’ is one of its central motifs.”⁴²¹ But the general lack of interconnectedness and the apparent personal preface of the book found in 2:19⁴²² have lead scholars to conclude that the two letters found at the beginning of 2 Maccabees have been secondarily added to the main text.⁴²³ These insights are made explicit by Harrington who contends that these letters are extraneous to the main story in 2 Maccabees and he argues that Hanukkah was controversial among Diaspora Jews.⁴²⁴ Although the *Sitz im Buch* is difficult to substantiate, the addition of letters before a work

⁴²¹ Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 138. See also 5:20; 7:33; 8:29 for other forms of the word “reconciliation.”

⁴²² 2 Macc. 2:19 begins a new section by stating: “In five books Jason of Cyrene has set out the history of Judas Maccabeas and his brothers, the purification of the great temple, and the dedication of the altar” (Bartlett’s translation).

⁴²³ Victor Parker, “The Letters in II Maccabees: Reflections on the Book’s Composition,” *ZAW* 119 (2007), 388. Jonathan Goldstein, *II Maccabees, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 25-26) believes that this letter circulated freely before it was incorporated into 2 Maccabees.

⁴²⁴ D. J. Harrington, *The Maccabean Revolt: Anatomy of a Biblical Revolution* (Old Testament Studies 1; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 38.

may give the reader clues as to how to understand the meaning of the text, and thus suggest how it may have been performed.

The performance context is further complicated by the suggestion that the first letter is most likely translated from a Hebrew or Aramaic original and the second seems to be written in idiomatic Greek.⁴²⁵ The frequent use of the paratactic Semitic style suggests that the translators were working from a Semitic text and used non-idiomatic Greek expressions and form to reflect more closely the original text. The difference between the syntax of the two languages has been noted frequently, but what has not been adequately considered is whether a Greek translated text would have been performed differently from a non-translated text. Whether the text was translated or not, we will discuss the text as it has come to us, assuming that a performer would not remove the alleged non-idiomatic Greek aspects for a “smoother” approach.

The distinction between the letters in Ezra and Jeremiah and those placed at the beginning of 2 Maccabees is found in that the letters in Ezra and Jeremiah are part of the narrative plot; whereas, those sited in 2 Maccabees appear to be a preface to a larger work. The fact that the letters serve as a preface indicates that they most likely feature an iconic mode of presentation. By that I mean that the letter has a call to action; something the audience is to respond to. The emphasis of the letter is on the nature of the crisis that occurred as a result of the rebellion of Jason and his followers, but then the community is called upon to celebrate. An observation that has been made when discussing the letter in

⁴²⁵ Scholars point to the paratactic Hebrew or Aramaic style beneath the Greek as evidence for a Semitic *Vorlage* in the first letter (Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 132). The original language of the second letter is still strongly debated by scholars. Bickerman maintains a Greek original, as does Bartlett (*Maccabees*, 215); Goldstein (*II Maccabees*, 164-67) finds evidence for a Semitic *Vorlage* (1:1, 2, 18, 36). See also Schwartz, who states that “the first epistle is plainly a Semitic document, and to interpret it according to the standards of Greek letters. . . would seem to be a mistake” (p. 522).

Greek Esther is that an event that showcases celebration and glorification features an iconic mode of presentation.

There are several famous examples of ancient Greek letters functioning as prefaces to prose, scientific and technical works that can be found on a wide range of topics.⁴²⁶ These include both books of Archimedes' (ca. 287-212/11 BCE) *On the Sphere and the Cylinder*, which were dedicated to Dositheus of Pelusium a Greek mathematician, who was probably Hebrew-born, but active in Alexandria. A further example is the first two books of Apollonius of Perge (ca. 262 – ca. 190 BCE) *Conics*, which were written to Eudemus of Pergamum.⁴²⁷ Following the death of Eudemus, Apollonius dedicated the fourth book to Attalus. According to Langslow, if we include texts that do not include a formal opening and closing, but may include a dedication, preface or a vocative(s) in the opening and possibly the closing section(s) “we increase very significantly the size of our corpus, and we considerably stretch the chronology.”⁴²⁸ At this point, it is enough to state that the comparative evidence suggests that letters have been used in Greek texts to preface a larger work. The letters prefacing Maccabees appear to serve the audience by introducing the performers and audience to the book.

An obvious purpose of including a preface in the form of letters is to communicate to their readers the importance of solidarity in observing the Festival of Booths. But more importantly, according to Eyal Regev, the aim of the letter was “to shape the festival as an expression of identification with th[e] Temple ideology, which in turn bore the seeds of

⁴²⁶ For further examples of prefatory letters in both Greek and Latin, see Langslow, “Scientific and Technical *Epistula*,” 218-30.

⁴²⁷ In the preface to the second edition of *Conics*, Apollonius addressed Eudemus by using epistolary style: “If you are in good health and things are in other respects as you wish, it is well; with me too things are moderately well. During the time I spent with you at Pergamum I observed your eagerness to become acquainted with my work in conics.”

⁴²⁸ Langslow, “Scientific and Technical *Epistula*,” 216. This principle may also be expanded to include Jewish letters that have an epistolary introduction or dedication, but do not include and other evidence of idiomatic letter form.

messianic hopes for the restoration of the holy fire, an event that would signify the ultimate return of the Divine Presence to the Temple.”⁴²⁹

But a performer may wish to emphasize other interests according to the audience’s needs. A view of the letter’s purpose may be expanded to include how the audience should remember God’s covenant with his faithful servants (v. 2), or that despite their present difficulties there is still value in personal piety (vv. 3-6), or to express the heinousness of sin (vv. 7b-8a) and God’s willingness to forgive (v. 8b). If these issues are included in the letter’s call to attention, then the monochrome imperative to observe the festival is expanded to include the readers’ identification with the past, both good and bad, and serves as a lesson to the performers and audience about themselves. The collective memory of the readers and re-readers would be reminded of a covenant made centuries earlier and would have prepared them for the hopeful conclusion of the book, when Judas Maccabaeus wins a victory over Nicanor, because “Judas and his men joined battle with invocations and prayers” (2 Macc. 15:26). What needs to be considered is that each performance is a new performance, with possibly a new emphasis.

As we have previously indicated, the structure serves to give cues to the performer and audience concerning how the text may be understood. In the case of the first letter in 2 Maccabees, the opening follows neither idiomatic Greek (“Sender, to Recipient, greeting”) nor Semitic (“To Recipient, Sender, peace) epistolary form. Moreover, the recipient is listed after a typical Greek greeting (χαίρειν) and is followed by a common Hebrew or Aramaic formula “peace and good[ness]” (εἰρήνην ἀγαθὴν), thus separating the addressees from the addressor. The wording of this unusual opening has been considered by some scholars to be

⁴²⁹ Regev, “Hanukkah,” 18.

“strange and clumsy to readers ancient and modern.”⁴³⁰ However, as has been previously noted, the awkwardness of a text signals to a careful reader that the unusual wording may indicate a remnant of an oral performance.⁴³¹ After the opening, the text begins with a prayer of the Judean Jews for their Egyptian brothers. This is the earliest known text of a prayer used in the Jewish liturgy called *Q^e duššâ d^e sidrâ*.⁴³² The prayer is composed of general benedictions, all framed in the optative.⁴³³ The prayer is also similar to the prayer of Paul in his opening thanksgiving in the letter to the Philippians. The long opening prayer takes up half the document and one is struck by the thirteen uses of the word “and”; nine of which begin a new unit. This repetition is given as evidence of a Semitic *Vorlage*; however it also suggests that the translators may have been considering the rhythmic presentation of a list of elements in a text. Each wish is short, without a hint of admonition or reproach, and displays a clear oral patterning consistent with a “measured” verse presentation.

The oral signal that there is a shift from the prayer to the supplication is supplied by the typical transition marker “and now” (καὶ νῦν), followed by the date. The rhythmic arrangement of the text is extended to the next section. The “measured” verse presentation shows much more clearly the feature of balance and parallelism. For instance, “And we burned the gateway [to the temple]/and shed innocent blood” is parallel in structure to the next statement “And we prayed to the lord/and we were heard.” The balance extends not just between “verses” but also in relation to the scenes. The prayer and the supplication may have

⁴³⁰ Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 139. Later Goldstein calls the opening a “monstrosity” (p. 140). He suggests that the “and” which once connected “peace” and “good” now stands, in most witnesses to the text, at the head of the prayer, contrary to Semitic usage (p. 140).

⁴³¹ Although the paratactic Hebrew style may give evidence of a Semitic *Vorlage*, we have also observed in the Hermopolis letters the repeated use of the conjunction “and,” which may have served as indicators of a performance.

⁴³² For the use of *Q^e duššâ d^e sidrâ* in Jewish liturgy see Ismar Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst* (3rd ed.; Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1931), 79. Goldstein (*II Maccabees*, 142) states that “no single manuscript of the Jewish prayer book has a text identical to the one here, but in the various manuscripts word for word equivalents for each phrase can be found.”

⁴³³ Other grammarians call this mood the optative of obtainable wish or the volitive optative, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics an Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 42.

had an oral effect of being connected by stating the desire in Scene 1: “And to hear your prayers” and then by presenting the result of prayerful piety in Scene 2 “and we prayed to the lord, and we were heard;” likewise, “and to do his ordinances and peace” (Scene 1) is taken up later by stating that the laws were followed and peace offerings given: “And offered a sacrifice and finest wheat flour” (Scene 2). The point is that not only are there thematic links, but also rhythmic and oral/aural, which the performer may have emphasized through tone and gesture. In terms of repetition of the particle “and” and the use of rhythmic patterns, a “measured” verse presentation shows clearly the way in which parallel units are balanced and reinforced by a performance. The final transition marker “and now” (καὶ νῦν) signals to the audience that the letter is coming to a close. The closing consists of setting the date for the festival and supplying the date of the letter.

The following is my translation of the text according to a “measured” verse presentation.

I. Opening

A. Address I

“To the brothers from Egypt
To the Jews”

B. Greeting I

“Greeting” (χαίρειν)

C. Address II

“[From] the brothers the Jews in Jerusalem and in the land of the Jews”

D. Greeting II

“Good peace” (εἰρήνην ἀγαθήν) (v. 1)⁴³⁴

II. Body

A. Scene 1: A Prayer Consisting of a List of Eight Supplications

1. A blessing and a promise

- a. “And may God give you goodness” (καὶ ἀγαθοποιήσαι)
- b. “And may he remember (καὶ μνησθεῖη) his covenant from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, his slave of faith” (v. 2)

⁴³⁴ Verse divisions are according to Goldstein.

2. An exhortation

- a. “And may he allow (καὶ δόη) your heart to worship him
And do (καὶ ποιεῖν) his will with a great heart and a willing soul” (v. 3)
- b. “And to open (καὶ διανοίξαι) your heart to his law
And to do (καὶ ποιήσαι) his ordinances and peace” (v. 4)

3. God hears and responds

- a. “And to hear (καὶ ἐπακούσαι) your prayers
- b. And may (καὶ...καταλλαγείν) you be reconciled

4. Conclusion: A Warning

“And may you not (καὶ μὴ...ἐγκαταλίποι) be left behind in an evil time” (v. 5)

B. Scene 2: Cultic Renewal

1. Transition

“And now (καὶ νῦν) we are exceedingly praying before all others for you” (v. 6)

2. Date

“[In the reign] of Demetrius, Year 169”

3. Purpose for writing the letter

- a. “We (ἡμεῖς), the Jews, we wrote to you in the persecution
and (καί) in the crisis that came to us in those years”
- b. “Since the time when Jason revolted from the holy land
 - i. and the kingdom (v. 7)
 - ii. and (καί) burned the gateway [of the temple]
 - iii. and (καί) shed innocent blood”

4. Cultic Matters

- a. “And (καί) we prayed to the lord, and (καί) we were heard”
- b. “And (καί) offered a sacrifice, and (καί) finest wheat flour”
- c. “And (καί) lit the lamps, and (καί) we set out the bread” (v. 8)

C. Closing

1. Setting of the date of the feast.

“And now (καὶ νῦν), you are to keep the days of the setting up of the tents in the month of Cheseleu” (v. 9)

2. Date

“188.”⁴³⁵ (v. 10a)

5.2.2 Texture

The language that is chosen and the gestures that are employed to communicate these early Jewish letters are crucial indicators of who performs the text and why. We have already discussed that the manner in which a work is framed has a crucial influence on the way the

⁴³⁵ That is 124 BCE.

individual signifiers are understood as well as how the total meaning of the performance is perceived. The significance of preliminary devices is stated by Martin Esslin, who contends that these framing mechanisms “belong to a higher order of signs than any individual signifiers, as they set the initial mood, the level at which all other signs are to be ‘decoded.’”⁴³⁶ It can be said that a semiotic function is produced by the prologue that sets the scene for the rest of the book and the level of expectation, and the epilogue completes the frame and serves to affect the audiences’ recollection of the message.⁴³⁷ The use of letter form and the choice of vocabulary and content establish that the intention of the work is serious and that the actions should be read in a certain way; that is, at a high level of significance.⁴³⁸ The symbolic meaning of the temple is beyond dispute, but the real aim of including the letters is not explicitly stated. If the original text resembles what we now have, “the authors were content to outline their religious ideology, only implicitly indicating that they were upholding the tradition of *millu'im* [ordination of priests⁴³⁹] ceremonies and the quest for holy fire.”⁴⁴⁰

It appears that the emphasis here is on two letters, not so much as a source, but as an authenticating device. When these documents are viewed as a literary mechanism, then the objective is not to seek to understand the letters from a referential perspective; that is, to reconstruct their origin and historical development, but to understand what purpose they

⁴³⁶ Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage & Screen* (Great Britain: Methuen Publishing Limited, 1987), 55. Esslin includes programmes, pre-publicity newspaper reports, reports by friends, etc. as preliminary or framing devices (pp. 55-56).

⁴³⁷ The author(s) completes the frame of 2 Maccabees by concluding with these words: “At this point I will bring my work to an end. If it is found well written and aptly composed, that is what I myself hoped for; if cheap and mediocre, I could only do my best. For, just as it is disagreeable to drink wine alone or water alone, whereas the mixing of the two gives a pleasant and delightful taste, so too variety of style in a literary work charms the ear of the reader. Let this then be my final word” (Bartlett’s translation).

⁴³⁸ For instance, the opening of the first letter consists of covenantal language (2 Macc. 1:2) in the midst of a prayer (1:2-6). The theme is the celebration of the Feast of Booths. The second letter quotes scripture and former events, like the dedications of the temple by Nehemiah and Solomon. The new feast of purification is connected to the fire which burnt the sacrifices on the former temple altar.

⁴³⁹ The term *millu'im* is related to the term used in Ex. 29:9 for the ordination of priests: “and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them. And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.”

⁴⁴⁰ Regev, “Hanukkah,” 19.

served in the narrative, regardless of whether they existed or not in the “external world.”⁴⁴¹ From a performance point of view the treatment of the oral testimony of the patriarchs were used to bolster the authority of the broader text of 2 Maccabees. The movement from letter-form in the prologue to a supposed extended historical account at 2:19 signals to the audience that there is a shift in mood or “key” from an alleged letter to a personal account.⁴⁴² This transition is signaled by the frequent use of first person plural (“we”) in the letters to the first person singular (“I”) in the prologue.⁴⁴³

A few matters regarding how oral texture is used to add meaning to the text are worth mentioning. The original hearers would have most likely recognized that these texts represent standard letter-writing form. The use of the archaic optative voice may have been viewed as more “prayerful” or elevated, similar to modern prayers that use Elizabethan English.⁴⁴⁴ The opening is connected with the beginning of the prayer by the repeated use of the term “good[ness] and goodness” (ἀγαθὴν καὶ ἀγαθοποιήσαι). The prayer is framed by a contrastive inclusio consisting of the word “goodness” (ἀγαθοποιήσαι) at the beginning of the first line, and concluding with the word “evil” (πονηρῶ) at the end of the prayer. As we have discussed in the letter in Jeremiah 29, assonance and rhythm are important aspects of a performance and are used frequently to aid memory. An example of this mnemonic device can be observed by the repeated use of the term “heart” and by connecting this word with the verb “to do.” For example, “and may he allow your heart to worship him and do his will. . .”

⁴⁴¹ These insights are made explicit by Stott, *Why did they write this way?*

⁴⁴² This prologue is similar to those found in Ecclesiasticus and Luke’s Gospel.

⁴⁴³ “We” is found in the first letter at 1:7, 8 [3 times]; and in the second letter at 1:11, 18, 2:16 [twice], 18. In the prologue “I” is found seven times.

⁴⁴⁴ For a similar use of the optative in the NT see 2 Tim 1:16: δὴ ἔλεος ὁ κύριος τῷ Ὀνησιφόρου οἴκῳ (“May the Lord grant mercy on the house of Onesiphorus!”). In the NT there are 1858 subjunctives and less than 70 optatives (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 42). This archaic form was replaced by the more common subjunctive, such as in Jeremiah 32:39 (Gk 39:39); Jeremiah 33:8-9 (Gk 40:8-9); Leviticus 26:42; Deuteronomy 4:29-31; 1 Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 49-50 and 1 Chronicles 28:9. The paucity of use of the optative in Koine Greek and its unusual frequency in this text suggests that the structure is either formulaic or the author consciously used an archaic form. The word ἀκμῆ (“point,” “edge,” “culminating point,” “ripe time,” “prime,” “vigor”) may also be archaic (Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 148).

is followed by “And to open your heart to his law and do his ordinances.” Scene 2 also follows a two-part rhythmic pattern “And we prayed to the lord, and we were heard/And offered a sacrifice, and finest wheat flour/And lit lamps and we set out the bread.” This rhythmic pattern is not made explicit by many modern translations, but becomes evident when organizing the letter according to a “measured” verse structure and by considering how this text may have been performed.

The prayer makes explicit reference to an ancient covenant with the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is no explicit mention of a covenant being made with Jacob in the Torah (Gen. 28:10-22); therefore this reference may reflect an oral tradition.⁴⁴⁵ The call to remember is a frequent motif in prayers (1 Macc. 4:10), and this formulation echoes prayers attributed to Moses (Deut. 9:27; Ex. 32:13), and recalls passages where the covenant with the patriarchs introduces the end of an exile (Ex. 2:24; Lev. 26:42). This prayer also echoes the Priestly Blessing based on Numbers 6:24, where the Lord commanded Moses to say to Aaron and his sons, “The Lord bless you and keep you.”⁴⁴⁶ This authoritative reference may have been employed to strengthen the influence of the letter on its hearers and to gain support for the author’s request to commemorate the festival of tents, or booths.⁴⁴⁷ To further add weight to the text, the performers and audience would most likely have been able to

⁴⁴⁵ The book of *Jubilees* (19:16-29; 22:10-30; 23:1-3) emphasized Abraham’s special love for and blessing of his “son” Jacob.

⁴⁴⁶ For an example of an addition to the Aaronic Blessing, see 1QS which adds the words “with all good” and “from all evil” to the blessing, thus it states: “May the Lord bless you with all good and keep you from evil.” Incidentally, this addition uses similar words to the letter in 2 Maccabees. For an exposition of the blessing in 1QS, see Bilhah Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

⁴⁴⁷ Although George Brooke’s article “Controlling Intertexts in the Thematic Commentaries from Qumran” in *Between Text and Intertext: International Symposium on Intertextuality in Ancient Near Eastern, Ancient Mediterranean, and Early Medieval Literatures* (ed. M. Bauks, W. Horowitz and A. Lange; Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplement 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming) Eschatological Commentaries from Qumran concerns the intertextuality of two sectarian *Eschatological Commentaries*, his concept of controlling intertexts can reasonably be applied to 2 Maccabees. He suggests five hierarchies of intertextuality: 1) authority based text selected by the author; 2) explicit reference to other authoritative texts; 3) echoes of authoritative traditions; 4) intertextual echoes of other literary traditions; and 5) echoes of possible textual worlds. This section of the letter falls under the second layer of the intertextual hierarchy adapted by Brooke.

recognize the echoes from other authoritative texts.⁴⁴⁸ Additionally, the covenant reference may have been understood as a speech-act and functioned to incorporate a blessing in the midst of a prayer. The impact of this speech-act may have been to impress upon the audience that if they do not accept this letter then they would be cursed or excluded from the community. The prayer's conclusion substantiates this view by warning the audience to beware so that they "may be left behind in an evil time."

In order to appreciate and understand the purpose that this letter may have served in a community, we must consider how meaning was evoked by the traditional use of references to symbols, formulae and phrases. The first person mentioned in the prayer is Abraham, who had significant symbolic meaning "in official Jerusalem tradition during Hasmonean and Herodian times."⁴⁴⁹ The mention of Abraham should be read against the background of the Jerusalem ruling elite who emphasized their lineage as coming from Abraham.⁴⁵⁰ References to the "law" and "ordinances" and cultic practices, suggested by the terms "sacrifice," "finest wheat flour," lighting lamps" and "setting out bread" metonymically speak to a tradition that would have been familiar both to religious elite and to many non-elite.

In sum this letter symbolically sets the tone for 2 Maccabees and acts as an authenticating voice to the rest of the book. The oral texture consists of rhythmic patterns, mnemonic devices and metonymic references. All these features combine to suggest a performative context.

⁴⁴⁸ Brooke's third layer of the intertextual hierarchy ("Controlling Intertexts"). See above.

⁴⁴⁹ Horsley, *Whoever Hears You*, 118.

⁴⁵⁰ Doron Mendels, *The Land of Israel as a Political Concept in Hasmonean Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987).

5.2.3 Context

An oral performance of this letter would require that the audience would identify with Jewish prayers, the importance of the patriarchs, Jewish law and cultic practices. The letter is sent by a collective group of Jews from Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, but lacks any reference to the Hasmonean high priestly families or even a council of Elders.⁴⁵¹ This omission is worth stressing, because the intended performers and audience are asked to observe the festival made possible by Hasmonean military successes. The request to commemorate this event becomes even more pointed when we realize that the recipients of the letter would have been conscious of the ideological importance of the Jerusalem temple. God had chosen Jerusalem as the only legitimate place in Israel at which to worship and offer sacrifice,⁴⁵² but later he seems to have rejected it by allowing foreigners to destroy the structure in 586 BCE. It appears that there existed a tension between the temple in Jerusalem, where a proper relationship with God was maintained, and a competing temple constructed in Egypt. Since there was no miraculous sign that God had again chosen Jerusalem, the schismatic temple was allowed to operate, albeit not without its opponents.

Considering the historical background, the metonymic referencing and the rich tradition of covenant language, it should now be possible to discern how the performance would have resonated with the audience. Both the structure, consisting of a prayer and cultic material, and the contents of the two scenes suggest that a context for performing the letter would have been as part of a covenant renewal. The renewal would have consisted of a community that believed that the Jerusalem temple had again been chosen by God and during a performance this concept would have been reinforced. The performer would have emphasized the point that although a portion of the temple was burned in response to the

⁴⁵¹ A council of elders is mentioned in 1 Macc 12:6 and 2 Macc 1:10.

⁴⁵² God's choice of Jerusalem as the sole legitimate place of sacrifice is expressed in Dt 12:2, 4-18, 26-29. It was sanctioned by acts of God in 2 Chron 7:1-2 and Ezra 6:16-18.

terrible sins of Jason the Oniad, God's pardon was extended. This legitimizing action of God may have been viewed as proof of his renewed commitment to the temple at Jerusalem, and thus added credence to the celebration of festival of Booths.

If this perspective is sustainable then the performer who enacted this letter would have pronounced a blessing in the form of a speech-act, encouraged the audience to open up their hearts to the law, exhorted them to continue to pray, and urged them to keep the days of the setting up of the booths. This observation implies that the keeping of the law and ordinances are partly related to the keeping of the festivals, especially the festival of Booths. This letter also provides an interesting window into the possible limits of the power of the religious elite (no mention is made of Jonathan the High Priest or John Hyrcanus), and may have intended to substitute or enhance their authority with texts and ancient heroes of the faith.

Even though Greek Esther and 2 Maccabees concern the celebration of festivals, the narratives and the inclusion of these letters appear to have different purposes. Although they both lend themselves to an iconic mode of presentation, it appears that the function of the performance of Greek Esther would have been to bind the audience to the social and religious institution of Purim. On the other hand, the Maccabees account connects the readers to a memory of past heroes, a Jewish cultic heritage, now to be re-embodied by the performer and listening audience in the form of covenant renewal. The iconic mode of presentation implies that these letters were not sent to get a reply from the recipient, but rather as a one-way communication intended for a wide audience. The opening to the letter in Greek Esther includes foreign rulers; an oral texture that would have created a distance between the author(s) and the audience. It can be said that letters serve to create both nearness and distance between the participants.

A performance perspective suggests that these letters are textual remains of performances and were adjusted to each new situation and adaptable to many types of literature. In Greek Esther a tale is told that includes letters, which possibly fabricate an epistolary persona and may have been added for its entertainment value; whereas in 2 Maccabees 1 a historical account is introduced by employing letters and they set a serious tone for an extended work.

In our short survey we have considered a wide variety of letters, consisting of family letters, festal letters, and official letters. Some texts push the boundaries of what some scholars would consider constitutes letter form, while other letters use an idiomatic epistolary structure. The reason the investigation of the text and the genre of MMT can be most profitably conducted on the basis of our study of performance theory is because we have not restricted our examination merely to the wording of individual texts—as has been perhaps too frequently done in the past—but have endeavoured to determine how a text functioned as a performance in a community.

The goal of our investigation is to apply the principles learned thus far concerning performance criticism to MMT. We will use the concepts developed in the previous chapters to help determine how MMT may have functioned in a community in an effort to advance the scholarly debate concerning the genre of MMT.

6 A Case Study of the Performance of MMT

Thus far this dissertation has argued that text, texture and context combine in a performance to give meaning to a letter. In what follows, I want to consider MMT as a test case to apply the principles learned from the previous chapters to a document that in many ways exists at the boundary or on the edge of categories common today. This text is not embedded in a narrative, such as Greek Esther and Ezra, and does not contain epistolary features found in the free-standing Hermopolis letters. Scholars have found it difficult to determine the genre of MMT, because it contains few features that are generally recognized as elements of idiomatic letter form. The situation is further complicated by the fact that this document is damaged and we have little material evidence that connects the two or three distinct, yet complementary, sections of the text. One reason MMT is difficult to classify concerns the way in which many scholars have construed what ancient letters are and how they functioned and have not given adequate consideration to how letters may have been performed in a community. As part of this dissertation, we will take into account how the ambiguity of the form of MMT may suggest that the text did not function in a uniform way, but rather may have operated differently at various times and in various settings. As has been shown in previous chapters, understanding performative context by reviewing oral texture adds an important aspect to our understanding of a letter and its genre. By employing a performance critical method to MMT, we will be able to illuminate the formal devices used in the text in order to discern where and when the document may have been performed.

The aim here is to consider how performance criticism may be applied to MMT and how this emerging methodology may help shape questions that guide our investigation. In order to come to our conclusion about how the designation “letter” may variously apply to MMT, as in previous chapters we will consider the text, texture and context.

6.1 Text

The text of MMT has been reconstructed by Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell from fragments of six manuscripts (4Q394-399) recovered from Qumran Cave 4.⁴⁵³ The title of the document, MMT, is derived from the words “some of the works⁴⁵⁴ of the Torah” (מקצת מעשי (התורה), which are found in line C26 of the composite text in Discoveries in the Judaean Desert X (DJD X). Before continuing with discussing the text, we need to be clear about the outstanding issues with the texts as we now have them. First, it is problematic to consider the composite text, when no such text exists in any manuscript. Qimron and Strugnell have carefully reconstructed a text from fragments and other sources, but we cannot assume that their reconstruction reflects the actual ancient document at any one stage. Second, we are not certain how the calendrical section (Section A) fits with Sections B and C, or if it has anything at all to do with the rest of MMT. We have only one fragment that includes the calendrical section and until further evidence is available, we need to be cautious about the nature of the composition of MMT.⁴⁵⁵ With those caveats in mind, we can proceed to work with the material that is available to us.

The exploration of the written and oral texts of the letters previously discussed has produced a set of criteria against which MMT can be tested. First, we have discussed how a document uses formal features to present itself as a text in respect to its narrative plot, persona and point of view. Second, we have used a “measured” verse approach to understand

⁴⁵³ Qimron and Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4, V: Miqṣat Ma‘aṣe Ha-Torah* (DJD X; Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994). For an examination of the problems of the composite text by considering the manuscript evidence, see Hanne von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, especially pp. 31-104. For the ongoing debate on the nature of the text, see Émile Puech, “L’Épilogue de 4QMMT Revisité,” in *A Teacher for all Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. Vanderkam* (ed. Eric F. Mason; JSJSup 153; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2011).

⁴⁵⁴ The Hebrew word מקצת has been translated either “precepts” or “works.”

⁴⁵⁵ Early on Strugnell raised concerns about the calendar and its relationship with 4QMMT. Strugnell, “MMT: Second Thoughts,” 61-62; *idem*. Appendix 3 in DJD X, 203; See also James C. VanderKam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Measuring Time* (London: Routledge, 1998). According to Qimron and Strugnell (DJD X, 109), one or more “sections could theoretically have stood before the first surviving part,” that is, preceding the calendric section. It appears to be significant, when considering the relationship between the calendar and sections B and C, that calendric issues are not mentioned in either section.

how a text expresses itself in rhythm, sounds and language patterns; which has been used to suggest a performance structure. Third, we have observed how some texts have been adapted to fit new situations. These three areas will be used as a basis for our investigation of the text of MMT.

6.1.1 Formal Features

A feature of all the letters that we discussed so far is that they open with an objective point of view by identifying the sender and recipient. In the opening the performer can serve to create a sense of nearness between the sender and audience, as seen in the Hermopolis family letter, or a sense of distance can be created, such as the letter in Greek Esther, which is addressed to a foreign king and 127 satrapies. A letter can be addressed to a specific person or group (i.e. Passover letter, Ezra 5, 2 Maccabees 1) or be intended for a wide distribution (Greek Esther). We have observed that a text can have few epistolary features, and yet act with the persona of a letter, without any expectation that the recipient(s) will respond in writing or orally to the contents (Jeremiah 29, Greek Esther, 2 Maccabees 1). This variety of epistolary forms has caused us to reexamine what a letter is by considering how it functions in a community. Some of these formal aspects need to be considered, when reflecting on the text of MMT. In our analysis we wish to build on the text critical work of other scholars, who have noted the idiomatic features of letters, but where the text lacks these structures we will look for other features that may suggest how the text was performed. But the first issue concerns where the text and therefore the performance of MMT would have begun.

It appears that the calendrical section was attached to only one manuscript, and it seems that the calendar was a later addition and did not belong originally to the halakhic section. Putting a calendar before a legal text is a highly unusual structure for there is no

example of this arrangement in the Hebrew Bible,⁴⁵⁶ although the Passover letter begins with a calendric section and includes dates for the proper observance of Passover in the legal section. A possibility worth considering is proposed by Sarianna Metso, who suggests that calendrical documents could be attached to other documents and/or replaced by other textual components.⁴⁵⁷ If calendrical texts were fluid and thus could potentially be passed from one document to another, then nothing within the calendar necessitates its application to only MMT. However, worthy of note is the suggestion of von Weissenberg, who proposes that the purpose for attaching a calendar to the beginning of MMT is “because of the importance of the calendar reckonings to the community, and to the covenant theology as reflected by the Book of Jubilees.”⁴⁵⁸

Although there is little material evidence to suggest that the calendrical section was always (or ever) performed in conjunction other sections of MMT, there is evidence to indicate that the memorization and performance of lists of people and events were part of the social memory of some oral cultures. As part of the oral tradition of the Mi’Kmaq and Miliseet First Nations people, they “were taught to memorize their genealogy and this data was recited at marriages, funerals, and other feasts and ceremonies.”⁴⁵⁹ The Hermopolis letter had a list of people to be greeted, and the Passover letter had a list of special days, whether

⁴⁵⁶ During times of reformation, festivals and calendars were adjusted to align with the cultic changes. Deut. 16:1-17 may be an example of a programme of cultic centralization, but this short festival calendar is part of a legal section, unlike MMT which appears to be annexed to a text. For how festivals are transformed as a result of cultic centralization, see Jon Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 53-97.

⁴⁵⁷ Sarianna Metso, *The Textual Development of the Qumran Community Rule* (STDJ 21; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 119, 126-29, 142. As an example of a calendrical text which originated from a separate source, Metso suggests 4QS^e.

⁴⁵⁸ Von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 133. She views the calendar as significant to covenant theology in the Book of Jubilees, CD and 1QS (p. 130-31). Although MMT does not explicitly mention the covenant, according to von Weissenberg, the scriptural source texts and the references to blessings and curses reflect covenantal theology. As a possible example of a text from Qumran that was annexed to a larger work, scholars have suggested that 4QOtot-calendar (4Q319) was attached to 4QS^e. For the textual development of the Community Rule containing calendrical references, see Metso, *Textual Development*, 129, 126, 128-29 and 142.

⁴⁵⁹ Canada Heritage, www.genealogyfirst.ca/research/genealogy-in-general, Sept. 15, 2012

these lists were memorized can be debated.⁴⁶⁰ If the calendar was performed separately or in conjunction with other texts, it served to frame a set of expectations concerning festivals, that is, a cultural memory of events. Cultural memory, according to Jan Assmann, “comprises that body of re-useable texts, images and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image.”⁴⁶¹

Insofar as we have been trained to read texts, it is frequently hard to imagine how MMT may have sounded in an oral performance. If the calendar was the first, or only, text to be heard, then the performance would have begun with a rhythmic repetition of days and months, frequently following the pattern: the date = a Sabbath (i.e. “the twenty third of it is a Sabbath” [col. i]). This metrical form is cadenced at the end of each column by the name of a festival (i.e. “The fifteenth of it is the Festival of Weeks” [col. i]). The goal of rehearsing a calendar is not merely to retrieve data but more importantly to re-create and re-live an experience and reassert an identity. Through an oral performance, the cultural identity is reaffirmed and concretized and the Qumran community “becomes visible to itself and others.”⁴⁶² From the letters in 2 Maccabees 1:1-9 and the addition to Greek Esther, we have considered that a purpose for writing a festal letter is to help form the hope for social unity in the community’s commemorative celebrations, which appears to be a motive behind listing special days and festivals in MMT. If the calendar was performed on some occasions with the halakhic section, then it may have served the purpose of setting the tone for a larger work, similar to the festal letter in 2 Maccabees. It can be said that the performance of the calendar provides the performer with an opportunity to embody and give voice to establishing dates and times of Sabbaths and festivals, which suggests an iconic mode of presentation. If this

⁴⁶⁰ The genealogy in Matthew chapter 1 is arranged in three sets of fourteen generations; most likely to aid memory.

⁴⁶¹ Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” in “Cultural History/Cultural Studies,” special issue, *New German Critique* 65 (trans. John Czaplicka; 1995), 132-33.

⁴⁶² Assman, “Collective Memory,” 133.

view is sustainable, the performance would have invited the audience to respond to a festival or cultic activity, or possibly affirmed the date or festival they were already celebrating.

More probably a performance began with the halakhic section, which opens with a vague deixis, “these are some of our rulings.” According to *Literary Structures Inventory*, this opening establishes MMT under the same general heading as letters found in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁶³ The opening “these are the words” is found in both a legal text in Deuteronomy 1 and in an editorial introduction to a letter found in Jeremiah 29.⁴⁶⁴ This initial structural element is not merely a useful way to begin a text, but may evoke the “fecund totality of the entire tradition.”⁴⁶⁵ In performances in predominantly oral cultures meaning depends much more heavily on traditions expressed frequently through metonym, “a mode of signification wherein the part stands for the whole.”⁴⁶⁶ Applying this concept to MMT, this incipit would have set a serious tone for the performance of MMT, generated by a reference to the historical prologue to Deuteronomic law and an introduction to a prophetic letter.⁴⁶⁷ However, on the basis of the formal aspects found in the opening of MMT, there is little evidence to determine the genre of MMT. The incipit does not contain a date, a formal address, a response mechanism, or an indication of the document’s distribution. As with the text found in Jeremiah 29, we will have to consider other factors in order to define better how this text was used in a community.

⁴⁶³ Samely, et. al., “Inventory,” 1.1.1 profiles this type of document as a text which “refers to itself using a genre term, speech act term, verb or other term implying verbal constitution.”

⁴⁶⁴ Jeremiah 29:1 begins with “These are the words of the letter. . .” This introduction is comparable to Deut. 1:1: “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel. . .”

⁴⁶⁵ John Miles Foley, *Imminent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 7.

⁴⁶⁶ Foley, *Imminent Art*, 7.

⁴⁶⁷ There are a total of 33 Deuteronomy scrolls, of which 30 were discovered at Qumran. Next to Psalms (39 scrolls), Deuteronomy appears to be the most popular book at Qumran. There are six Jeremiah scrolls found at Qumran. Portions of chapters 25-27 and 30-33 have been found, but no extant copy of chapter 29. It appears that the Qumran community placed importance on Jeremiah, as seen by the fact that the copies cover approximately 200 years, and next to Isaiah and Daniel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel seemed to have been copied most frequently among the prophets. Jeremiah is the only canonical prophetic book referenced in MMT (B75-76 [Jer. 2:3]).

6.1.2 Language Patterns

In order to aid visualizing a performance, I have attended to key markers of oral-derived texts by noting language patterns, by that I mean, repeated phrases, changes in pronouns, parallel lines and sets of lines. The method of representing the structure follows Dell Hymes' model of "measured" verse, which stresses how oral performance can be, to some extent, embodied in a text.⁴⁶⁸ As the previous chapters have made clear, this method of organizing a text is not primarily concerned with metre, which is exhibited by phonological or grammatical regulation of lines, but rather by recognizing repetition within a segment, and the relation of units to each other within a whole. Adapting this model to MMT, the halakhic section can be organized by the recurring term "and concerning." If that expression is understood as a framing device, then it can be said that the favourite pattern for the legal section is a couplet. For instance, the two parts of the duet can be plainly seen in Scene 6: "And concerning liquid streams (part 1): we are of the opinion that they are not pure. . ." (part 2). This device is increased to a triplet or quartet, by including a priestly admonition (B12, 17, 27, 48, 82), or "it is written" (B66), or "you know" (B38 [restored]), which may signal that the performer should emphasize the last phrase by pausing, gesturing or changing pace or volume. This clear pattern reflects an oral mnemonic structure, which would have aided the performance and the aural reception of the material.

Verses have been determined most frequently by pronouns, but also by finite verbs, connecting particles, and by their sense. Most of the material can be combined into larger sections, which I have labeled "scenes" to emphasize the performative element of the text.

⁴⁶⁸ Hymes, "In Vain". 318. Hymes focused on the literature of First Nation Peoples from the North Pacific Coast. What Hymes does not consider is that the demarcation of segments are not confined to merely verbal cues, but performers also used voice modulation and bodily gestures to mark off segments. The discourse markers are so pronounced in MMT that they would have been reinforced by a performer. For the difficulties involved in Hymes' representation of verse, see Anna Bonifazi and David F. Elmer, "Composing Lines, Performing Acts: Clauses, Discourse Acts, and Melodic Units in a South Slavic Epic Song, in *Orality, Literacy and Performance in the Ancient World* (ed. Elizabeth Minchin; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 90-91.

The oral features that have been considered in determining scenes consist of internal thematic unity (i.e. Scene 1), rhythm (i.e. Scene 2) and tone (i.e. Scenes 1 and 2 in the Exhortation Section). The clearest boundary between scenes is between the Legal Section and the Exhortation Section. The scenes fall into sets of one to six rulings. To establish the division of the exhortation or epilogue (section C) is more difficult, but still seems to prefer couplets and triplets. In sum, it appears that MMT is couched in simple sentences, arranged in couplets and triplets, with longer sequences used for emphasis.⁴⁶⁹

There is a structural connection between the halakhic and exhortation sections in that they both begin with violations of social norms and include the strongest indictment against a group. In the legal section the Gentile grain is brought into the sanctuary and their sacrifices are considered to be “like a woman who whored with them” (B9) which is similar in tone to Section C’s comment about malice and fornication that caused “some places to be destroyed” (C5-6). There appears to be an inadequate response in the legal section by the priests concerning eating cereal offerings for they are admonished to “take care so as not to cause the people to bear punishment” (B12). In contrast the exhortation section claims that a group, most likely the religious elite, has separated themselves from the multitude and “you know that no treachery or deceit can be found in us” (C8-9).

Closings are an integral aspect of an audience’s expectation and generally unite all aspects of a text. When a text is coming to a close, the performer holds together the text, on the one hand, and the performance on the other. If sections B and C were performed as one unit then the ending “consider all these things” (C28) would have been a fitting conclusion to “these are some of our rulings” (B1), but if the exhortation section was a solo piece the ending could have been viewed as tying together the performance of Section C. It appears that the closing serves a double duty of concluding an entire text or merely a portion of it.

⁴⁶⁹ Hymes, “Ways of Speaking.”

But an issue that has not been adequately resolved by using historical critical methods is why some scenes are significantly longer than others and why the rulings fall into the present order. Performance criticism may offer a partial explanation by exploring the performance context of MMT. Although much of the document is irretrievably lost, there remains enough material to make provisional comments about the specific way this document presents its rules.

We begin by considering the formula “and concerning” (ועל), which can be found in other legal texts at Qumran, and resembles the “and now” (וכען) structure in the letters of Ezra and $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \delta\acute{\epsilon}$ + the genitive in the letters of Paul.⁴⁷⁰ The pattern “concerning X...the evaluation is Y” or “concerning X. . .we think that Y” places the dependent clause before the main clause, which sets the pace for the text by using short rhythmic blocks or “idea units” signaling to the performer to pause before the next unit, or to stop the reading altogether.⁴⁷¹ This distinct structure is a key indicator that each unit is a “speech” or “discourse” and may have been performed on particular occasions to which it was appropriate.

To add further support to the view that section B of MMT is not merely a “series of special rules,”⁴⁷² which is rooted in a literary analysis of texts, is the helpful research of Marcel Jousse, who suggests that an oral performance is marked by “units of sound and sense uttered or chanted in a single breath.”⁴⁷³ In Jeremiah 29 and the Passover letter, we have shown how a rhythmic structure can facilitate memorization and performance in oral communities. Additionally, it has been suggested that a rhythmic pattern can be an indicator

⁴⁷⁰ For the use of על in legal texts in the Qumran corpus, see the Damascus Document (CD and 4QD), 4Q159 (Ordinances), and 4QHalakhah A. For Ezra’s use of וכענת, see Ezra 4:10, 11; וכען Ezra 4:13, 14, 21. For Paul’s use of $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \delta\acute{\epsilon}$ in his letters, see 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1.

⁴⁷¹ This view of rhythmic blocks is supported by W. L. Chafe, *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time: The Flow and Displacement of Consciousness Experience in Speaking and Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); J. P. Gee, *Social Linguistic and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (2nd ed.; London: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

⁴⁷² Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 220.

⁴⁷³ Jousse, *Anthropology of Gest and Rhythm*. According to Jousse, verbal units are rhythmically balanced in terms of bodily movement called “cradling” (rocking side to side) or “lifting” (moving back and forth).

of a change in scenes and perspective. If this position can be applied to MMT, then the rules may have been arranged according to “units of sound” based on finite verbs, connectives, repeated words and parallelism. Therefore the halakha can be viewed not so much as individual rules, but rather as short speeches on various halakhic topics that had been collected for or during performative events. This conclusion is further supported by the comments of Jonathan Draper, who states that “important acts of oral re-membering, where content is especially significant, will be ritualized.”⁴⁷⁴ It appears that the metrical form of MMT supports the view that the oral presentation was performed as small units of sound related to a “measured” verse, which is a rhythmic structure signaled by repeated phrases.

Another linguistic marker that occurs in orally-derived texts is the use of quotations, which is indicated at least eleven times in MMT by the citation formula “it is written.”⁴⁷⁵ The ways in which biblical quotations are used is at least potentially an important structural feature in any text that so clearly deals with biblical material. According to George Brooke, “nearly all the phrases which follow כתיב [‘it is written’] can be identified as citations of scripture, even if in somewhat adjusted forms.”⁴⁷⁶ It appears that the “adjusted forms” of scripture suggests that a scriptural quotation is not so much a citation formula as a means of “pointing to an authoritative cultural tradition fixed in writing which was accepted as the basis of God’s covenant with Israel and to which the people of the covenant were accountable.”⁴⁷⁷ It is likely that sacred texts were characterized by a sense of the holy that appealed to the communities’ understanding of the mysterious, even (or especially) for those

⁴⁷⁴ Draper, “Jesus’ ‘Covenantal Discourse,’” 80.

⁴⁷⁵ Von Weissenberg’s warning should be considered: “It is not unproblematic to use MT as the main source of comparison for scriptural citations found in Qumran texts... it has become increasingly clear that the text form of the Hebrew Bible was not fixed when the texts found at Qumran were authored” (*4QMMT*, 170).

⁴⁷⁶ Brooke, “Explicit Presentation of Scripture,” 71. See also Bernstein, “Employment and Interpretation, of Scripture in 4QMMT” in *Reading 4QMMT*, 29-51. The Community Rule also gives evidence that the Qumran community drew upon scriptural tradition creatively.

⁴⁷⁷ Draper, “The Announcement and Testing of the Prophet,” in *Whoever Hears You Hears Me*, 257. As possible support for the different ways the laws are used in MMT, see von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 131, who states that “despite the covenantal structure of the law collections adopted and adjusted by the author/redactor, 4QMMT is not, generically speaking, a ‘pure’ collection of laws.”

who could not read. A possible example of a use of the term “it is written” (כתוב), which supports the view that these rulings can be understood as discourses or speeches that introduce topics but need further explanation, is at line B38, which “introduces a single word which makes summary reference to the preceding rulings which are based in scriptural passages.”⁴⁷⁸

This summary reference is “very awkward”⁴⁷⁹ and it cannot be precisely determined which scriptural text or previous ruling it refers to, but would have been made clear in performance.⁴⁸⁰ Apparent awkwardness in written texts has taken various forms, such as “unnecessary” particles (Hermopolis), “clumsy” diction (“Passover” letter), repetition or borrowing from the narrative (Ezra 5), “displaced” texts (Jeremiah 29), lack of transition markers (Greek Esther) and unidiomatic forms and expressions (2 Maccabees). The frequency of “clumsiness” of ancient authors should alert the careful reader to the possibility that an ancient written text was composed with an oral mindset and that the text may have been expected to be explained by the performer and interacted with by an audience.⁴⁸¹

It seems plausible that the use of the formula “it is written” supports the position that individual blocks of speeches become significant as textualized social performances, that is, in performance within relational and interactive contexts. The structure of each ruling without a connecting narrative is similar to some letters found in the New Testament,⁴⁸² or to debates found later in the Mishnah,⁴⁸³ or to collections of sayings presented in other types of

⁴⁷⁸ Brooke, “Explicit Presentation of Scripture,” 73.

⁴⁷⁹ Moshe’s term, “Employment and Interpretation,” 41.

⁴⁸⁰ Martin Abegg Jr., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg, Jr., and Edward M. Cook; San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2005), 458 translates the word עכרה as a possible heading: “You know that this is correct, for the matter is written: a pregnant animal.”

⁴⁸¹ Not all ancient oral works exhibit such “clumsy” features, such as the polished works of Homer; however, awkwardness is a feature that some scholars have noted in the letters under review.

⁴⁸² Other texts that catalogue directives without a substantial narrative are *Gospel of Thomas* and the epistles of James and 1 John in the NT.

⁴⁸³ This is the position of Charlotte Hempel, “4QMMT and Comfortable Theories” in *Dead Sea Scroll: Text and Context* (ed. Charlotte Hempel; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 291, who views the bulk of MMT as “written in the ‘register’ of legal debate that later found its way into the Mishnah.”

literature.⁴⁸⁴ Form criticism was on the right track to look for life situations of particular types of texts, but looked too narrowly at the *Sitz im Leben* without considering the impact the audience may have had on the text during a performance.

The argument developed up to this point enables us to suggest a possible setting in which the rulings may have been performed, namely, in teaching situations, where “the teacher often read from a text and interspersed the reading of the text with exposition of its meaning.”⁴⁸⁵ This position is advanced by Steven Fraade, who contends that MMT was composed for “members or potential members of its own community, most likely neophytes or candidates for membership,”⁴⁸⁶ but what he has not considered is the possibility of the performance context of each individual unit, which may have changed over time. Although Fraade’s insight is very welcome, my contribution attempts to advance his emphasis on the community’s use of MMT by suggesting how a performance of the text may have reinforced a ritual experience, regardless of whether the document is an intramural study or extramural polemic, or how it may have been (re)textualized to accommodate new social performances.⁴⁸⁷

The observations of the structure of the text of MMT suggest that the origins of the text may have been oral and that MMT consist of speeches or discourses arising out of common concerns and that the texts were publically performed on a regular basis and not merely individual texts read by or to individuals.⁴⁸⁸ The implications of this part of the study is that if MMT is composed of smaller or larger complexes of speeches or discourses, then the function of these clusters may be crucial to understanding MMT as a whole and may suggest a way forward to better understand its genre. The next step is to consider the function

⁴⁸⁴ For example, *Gospel of Thomas*, hypothetical sayings of Q and the *Didache*

⁴⁸⁵ Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 48. Although Shiner is referring to the Gospel of Thomas and the hypothetical sayings of Q, his principles can reasonably be applied to MMT.

⁴⁸⁶ Fraade, “To Whom It May Concern,” 525.

⁴⁸⁷ 4QMMT may reflect a liturgical setting similar to 1QS 1 and 2.

⁴⁸⁸ These two observations have been adapted from Horsley, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me*, 7-8.

of a performance by observing the oral texture, which refers to the manner in which language is used to convey a message.

A few explanatory notes need to be made concerning how I have formatted the structure.⁴⁸⁹ Bearing the concerns over a composite text in mind, for argument's sake I have chosen to use the text from Qimron and Strugnell as the basis for my analysis.⁴⁹⁰ Recognizing that because of the fragmentary state of the text, the document can only with great difficulty be sufficiently reconstructed to allow for a definitive flow of argument from one unit to another.

Calendrical Introduction (?)⁴⁹¹

The calendar lists the Sabbaths, the feasts and the thirty-first day at the end of each quarter.⁴⁹²

I. Opening

“These are some of our rulings [...] which are [*some of the rulings according to*]⁴⁹³ [*the*] precepts (*of the Torah*)...” (B1-3a)

II. Legal Section

A. Scene 1: Unacceptable Offerings and Sacrifices

1. Ban on offering Gentile gifts of grain

- a. “[*And concerning the sowed gifts of the*] new wheat grains. . .” (B3b-4a)
- b. do not eat it or bring it into the sanctuary⁴⁹⁴ (B4b-5a)

2. Ban on Purification offerings boiled in (Gentile? copper?) vessels

- a. “[*And concerning the sacrifice of the purification-offering*]” (B5b)
- b. “that they cook in a [*copper*] vessel and that they [...]” (Lev. 6:19-21)⁴⁹⁵ (B6-8a)

⁴⁸⁹ In order to allow for alternative reading strategies, I have noted when scholars have challenged Qimron and Strugnell's reconstruction. I have underlined the pronouns in order to emphasize the change in focus.

⁴⁹⁰ Qimron and Strugnell, DJD X, 46-57.

⁴⁹¹ The calendar is found only in one fragment (4Q394) and, according to von Weissenberg, it is clear that at least one of the copies of 4QMMT contained a calendrical section” (4QMMT, 38). For biblical, post-biblical and Qumran calendars, see VanderKam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls*.

⁴⁹² According to Qimron and Strugnell (DJD X, 45), there are five or six columns missing in the calendrical text.

⁴⁹³ The restored text is placed in italics.

⁴⁹⁴ It is difficult to determine the topic of this halakha because of the poor state of the manuscript.

⁴⁹⁵ In order to see the extent to which the Hebrew Bible has been alluded, possible references that have been directly quoted or at least seem to echo a passage, have been included in the analysis. For the central role the Hebrew Bible plays as a source for 4QMMT, see Bernstein, “Employment and Interpretation of Scripture; Brooke, “Explicit Presentation of Scripture.” For another structural analysis see von Weissenberg, 4QMMT, 106-10.

3. Ban on sacrifices by Gentiles

- a. “And concerning (וְעַל) the sacrifice of gentiles:” (B8b)
- b. “[*we are of the opinion that they*] sacrifice to the [...] that is like (*a woman*) who whored⁴⁹⁶ with him.” (8c-9a)

4. Ban on eating cereal offerings on the fourth day

- a. “[*And concerning the cereal-offering*] of the sacrifice of well-being” (B9b)
- b. i. “which they (*the opponents*) leave over from one day to the following one:” (B10a)
 - ii. but [*it is written*⁴⁹⁷] that the cereal offer[ing is to be eat]ten...” (Lev. 7:11-18; Deut. 24:14) (B10b-11a)
- c. Priestly Exhortation:
“*For the sons of*] the priest[s] should take care concerning this practice so as not to cause the people to bear punishment” (B11b-13a)

B. Scene 2: Unacceptable Offerings and Sacrifices

1. Ruling on preparing the cow of purification

- a. “And concerning (וְעַל הַבְּרִיאָה) the purity-regulations of the cow of the purification-offering” (B13b)
- b. i. “he who slaughters it and he who burns it and he who gathers its ashes and he who sprinkles the [*water of*] purification—(Lev. 9:1-10; Num. 19:2-10) (B14-15a)
 - ii. “it is at sun[set] that all these become pure so that the pure man may sprinkle upon the impure one”(B15b-16a)
- c. Priestly Exhortation:
“For (כִּי) the sons of Aaron should [. . .]”⁴⁹⁸ (B16b-17)

(The next four rulings are too fragmentary to make a decision about their content.)

C. Scene 3: Rulings on the remains of sacrifices

1. Ban on bringing hides of cattle in the sanctuary

- a. “[*And concerning*] the hides of cattle...”⁴⁹⁹ (Lev 11: 24-25, 27-28, 31-32) (B18-19)
- b. “[*bring*] them to the sanctuary [... ...]” (B20)

2. Ruling on hides and bones to make handles

- a. “[... ...]And concerning” (וְעַל הַבְּרִיאָה) the hi[des and bones of unclean animals]” (B21a)
- b. “*It is forbidden to make*] handles of [*vessels from their bones*] and hides. (B21b-22)

⁴⁹⁶ This reading is uncertain. See DJD X 1.2.3.2.1 (p. 9). Eibert Tigchelaar, “4Q397-399,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library (Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Reference Library CD-ROM)* (rev. ed.; edited by Emanuel Tov; Brigham Young University; Leiden: Brill, 2006) translates this term as “perversion (?)”

⁴⁹⁷ Bernstein, “Employment and Interpretation of Scripture,” 38-39 finds this reconstruction of the term כְּתוּב by Qimron and Strugnell (as well as at B77) superfluous. Brooke, “Explicit Presentation of Scripture,” 71 is also reluctant to restore כְּתוּב here.

⁴⁹⁸ This passage is extremely fragmentary; therefore reconstruction is tentative.

⁴⁹⁹ Qimron cautions that “the text is so fragmentary that we can do little more than guess what it may have said” (Qimron and Strugnell, DJD X, 154). His reconstruction is largely based on the Temple Scroll (11Q19 LI 1-6, XLVII 7-15).

3. Ban on those entering the temple after contact with hides of a carcass

- a. “[*And concerning*] the hide of the carcass of a clean [*animal*].” (B22b-23a)
- b. he who carries such a carcass [*shall not*] have access to the sacred food. . .” (Lev. 11: 25, 39) (B23b)

4. Ruling on those who are fit to eat of the holy gifts

- a. “[...] And concerning the [...]”⁵⁰⁰ (לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ) that they [*use to*]” (Lev. 22:10-16) (B24)
- b. Priestly Exhortation: “[... *for the sons*] of the priests should [*take care*] concerning all [*these*] practices, [*so as not to*] cause the people to bear punishment.” (B25-27a)

D. Scene 4: Rulings on Sacrifices

1. Ruling on the place of sacrifice⁵⁰¹

- a. “[*And concerning*] that it is written: [*if a person slaughters inside the camp, or*] [*slaughters*] outside the camp ...” (Lev 17:3-9; Deut. 12:5) (B27b-28)
- b. i. “And we are of the opinion that the sanctuary [*is the ‘tent of meeting’*]
ii. and that Jerusalem is ‘the camp,’
iii. and that ‘outside the camp’
- c. “[...*For Jerusalem*] is the place which [*He has chosen*] from among the tribes [*of Israel... ...*]” (B29-35)

2. Ruling on sacrificing pregnant animals

- a. “[*And concerning pregnant (animals)*]”⁵⁰² (B36a)
- b. “we are of the opin[ion] that the mother and its foetus...” (Lev. 22:27-28) (B36b)

3. Ruling on eating a foetus

- a. “[... ..*And concerning*] eating (*a foetus*).” (B37a)
- b. “we are of the opinion that the foetus...” (B37b-38a)
- c. [*And you know that it is*] so, namely that the ruling refers (*to*) a pregnant animal” (B38b)

E. Scene 5: Rulings on who can enter the congregation and the sanctuary

1. Ban on those unfit to enter the congregation

- a. “[*And concerning the Ammonites*] and the Moabite and the mamzer...” (Deut. 23:2-4; Gen. 2:24; Ezra 9:1-2; Neh. 13: 1, 23) (B39-41)
- b. “We are of the opinion...[*that one must not coha*]bit with them...” (B42-46a)
- c. “[*And you know that*] some of the people [... ..] and become uni[*ted*]” (B46-47)
- d. Priestly Exhortation:
“[*For the sons of Israel should beware*] of any forbidden unions and be full of reverence for the sanctuary.” (48-49a)

⁵⁰⁰ Lines 24 and 25 are too fragmentary to reconstruct.

⁵⁰¹ Temple Scroll, text 155, 52:13-21

⁵⁰² It is not easy to determine the exact nature of this ruling. For the difficulties of reconstructing this text, as well as others in MMT, see Ian Werrett, “The Reconstruction of 4QMMT: A Methodological Critique,” in *Northern Lights on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the Nordic Qumran Network 2003-2006* (eds. Anders Klostergaard Petersen, et. al. Leiden: Brill, 2009).

2. Ban on the blind and deaf entering the sanctuary

- a. i. “[*And concerning*] the blind who cannot see so as to beware of all mixture
ii. and cannot see a mixture that incurs [*reparation*]-offering” (Lev. 21:7-23) (B49b-51)
- b. “And concerning (ול) the deaf who have not heard the laws and the judgments...” (B52-53a)
- c. i. “since he who has not seen or heard does not know how to obey the law:
ii. nevertheless they have access to sacred food.” (Lev. 21: 7-23) (B53b-54)

F. Scene 6: General Purity Rules

1. Ruling on liquid streams

- a. “And concerning (ול) liquid streams:” (B55a)
- b. we are of the opinion that they are not pure. . .” (Lev. 11: 34-38?) (55b-58a)

2. Ban on dogs in the Holy Camp

- a. “And one must not let dogs enter the holy camp...” (Deut. 12:5) (B58b-59)
- b. “For Jerusalem is the camp of holiness and is the place which He has chosen...”
- c. “For Jerusalem is the capital of the camps of Israel.” (B60-62a)

3. Ruling on Priestly Gifts

- a. “And concerning (ול) (*the fruit of*) the trees for food planted in the Land of Israel:” (Lev. 19:23-24; 27:32) (B62b-63a)
- b. i. “they are to be dealt with like first fruits belonging to the priests.
ii. And (*likewise*) the tithe of the herd and the flock should be given to the priests.” (B63b-64a)

4. Ruling on the cleansing of lepers

- a. “And concerning (ול) (*healed*) lepers” (B64b)
- b. we are [*of the opinion that they may not*] enter (*any place*) containing sacred food...” (Lev. 4:13-14, 27-28; 13:46; 14; Num. 15:30) (B65-66a)
- c. “And it is (*indeed*) written that after he (i.e. *the leper*) shaves...” (B66b-68a)

5. Ruling on unintentional sin

- a. “And you know [*if someone violates a prohibitive commandment unintentionally*]” (B68b-70a)
- b. “[*And concerning him who purposely transgresses the precepts it is writ*]ten that he ‘despises and blasphemes.’” (B70b)
- c. [*Moreover, since they have the*] impurity of leprosy, one should not let them (*the lepers*) eat of the sacred food until sunset of the eighth day” (B71-72a)

6. Ruling on contact with the dead

- a. “And concerning (ול) [*the impurity*] of the [*dead*] person” (72b-73a)
- b. “we are of the opinion that every bone...” (Num. 19:16-18) (B73b-74)

G. Scene 7: Unclean Unions

1. Ruling on unclean marriages

- a. “And concerning (ול) the practice of illegal marriage that exists among the people. . .” (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9, 11; Lev. 21:13-15) (B75)

b. “As it is written, Israel is holy.” (Jer. 2:3) (B76a)

2. Ruling on animals crossbreeding

a. “And concerning (וְעַל) his (i.e. *Israel’s*) [*clean ani*]mal (B76b)

b. it is written that one must not let it mate with another species” (B77a)

3. Ruling on the unclean mixtures

a. “And concerning (וְעַל) his clothes: (B77b)

b. [*it is written that they should not*] be of mixed stuff” (B77c-78a)

c. “And he must not sow his field and vine[*yard with mixed specie*]s” (78b)

4. Ruling on the intermarriage of priest with the people

a. “Because they (*Israel*) are holy and the sons of Aaron are [*most holy*]. (79)

b. “But you know that some of the priests. . .unite with each other and pollute the [*holy*] seed...” (B80-82a)

c. “Since [*the sons of Aaron should...*] (82b)

(The first three lines in section C are badly damaged and cannot be retrieved.)

5. Ban on polygamous marriages (?)

a. “And concerning (וְעַל) the women [. . .]

b. and the treachery [...] (Deut. 17:17; 1:15-16) (C4)

III. Exhortation Section⁵⁰³

A. Scene 1: Admonition

1. Concerning Malice and Fornication

a. “for in these [*...because of*] malice and fornication [*some*] places were destroyed (C5-6a)

b. “[*And it is*] written [*in the book of Moses*] that you should [*not*] bring any abomination [*into your home, since*] abomination is a hateful thing” (C6b-7a)

(The amount of text missing between lines 6 and 7 is uncertain.)

2. We have separated ourselves⁵⁰⁴

a. “[*And you know that*] we have separated ourselves from the multitude of the people [*and from all their impurity*]...” (Deut. 7:26; 12:212:31) (C7b-8a)

b. “And you [*know that no*] treachery or deceit can be found in our hand. . .” (C8b-9)

B. Scene 2: First Exhortation

1. We have written to you

a. “And we have [*written*] to you so that you may study (*carefully*) the book of Moses and the book of the Prophets and (*the writings of*) David [*and the*] events of ages past.”⁵⁰⁵ (10-11a)

⁵⁰³ We have no material evidence of the transition from section B to section C; therefore, we do not know how much text is missing. Because of the fragmentary state of Section C, this structure is tentative at best.

⁵⁰⁴ The placement of 4Q397 (d) 14-21 and 4Q398 (e) 11-13 is still being scrutinized. Von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 88-89 places the “separation passage” in the body of the epilogue not at the beginning. Where the exhortation section (section C) begins is also a matter of scholarly debate. According to Bernstein, “Employment and Interpretation,” 46-47, the “separation statement” is the transition between the laws and the epilogue.” This is also the position of Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 227. Fernandez, “4QMMT: Redactional Study,” *RQ* 18 (1997), 196-97 understands the separation passage and the following two lines as part of the legal section. For a discussion on these issues, see Hempel, “Context of 4QMMT,” 281-83.

b. “And in the book of (*Moses*) it is written [. . .] not [...] and former days [...]” (C11b-12a)

2. You will stray but you will return at the end of time

a. “And it is written that [you will stray] from the path...and calamity will meet [you]” (C12b)

b. “And it is written ‘and it shall come to pass, when all these things [*be*]fall you at the end of days...and you will return unto Him with all your heart...’” (C12c-16)

(Several lines seem to be missing between lines 16 and 17.⁵⁰⁶)

3. Blessings and curses have come

a. “[*It is written in the book*] of Moses...that there will come [...]” (Deut. 4:29-30; 30:1-2; 31:29) (C17-18a)

b. i. [*the blessings have (already) befallen in...*] in the days of Solomon son of David.

ii. And the curses [*that*] have (*already*) befallen from the days of Jeroboam...” (C18b-20a)

4. Blessings and curses have been fulfilled

a. “And we know that some of the blessings and curses have (*already*) been fulfilled as it is written in the bo[*ok of Mo*]ses. (C20b-21a)

b. And this is the end of days when they will return to Isra[*el*] [*forever...*] and not be cancelled, but the wicked will act wickedly, and [...] and [...]” (21b-22)

C. Scene 3: Second Exhortation

1. Think of the kings

a. “Think of the kings of Israel and contemplate their deeds...and these were the seekers of the Torah whose transgressions were [*for*]given (C23-25a).

b. “Think of David who was a man of righteous deeds who was (*therefore*) delivered from many troubles and was forgiven” (C25b-26a)

2. We have sent you the Torah

a. “We have (*indeed*) sent you some of the precepts of the Torah according to our decision, for your welfare and the welfare of your people.” (C26b-27a)

b. “For we have seen (*that*) you have wisdom and knowledge of the Torah” (C27b-28a)

D. Closing

1. Exhortation

a. “Consider all these things

b. and ask Him that He strengthen your will

c. and remove from you the plans of evil and the device of Belial.” (C28b-29)

⁵⁰⁵ Von Weissenberg, “4QMMT—Some New Readings,” in *Northern Lights*, 220 contends that there are serious difficulties in the composite text provided by Qimron and Strugnell on lines C 10-12. She suggests that one should present both manuscripts in parallel columns, rather than combining 4Q397 and 4Q398 and thus creating a reading that is not materially possible.

⁵⁰⁶ Von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 110 suggests three lines are missing.

2. Rejoice

- a. “So that you may rejoice at the end of time
- b. finding that some of our practices are correct” (C30)

3. This is a virtuous deed

- a. “And this will be counted as a virtuous deed of yours...
- b. for your own welfare and for the welfare of Israel.” (C31-32)

6.2 Texture

Having considered the structure of MMT, we are now able to consider how the form of the text may give us clues to its function through observing the oral texture. Since we no longer have access to a performance of MMT, we need to reflect on the expressive choices available to us through the text by analyzing the way in which characters are described and by considering verbal signals, such as symbols, formulae and forms of speech. Text performances constitute for the outside observer “the most concrete observable units of the cultural structure”⁵⁰⁷ and appear to provide access and observation into their tradition. From a performance perspective, the performers of MMT embody several oral strategies. We will work from analogies from other letters and consider how a performance may have reinforced group identity by reflecting on the text’s oral register and by understanding how the message may have resonated out of a cultural tradition in which the performer and audience were situated. The method of analysis of the texture of MMT will focus on a few oral features in Sections B and C.

6.2.1 Oral Register

As we have observed in previous letters, the oral register consists of the subject matter being discussed, who is participating in the communication, and the mode of communication.⁵⁰⁸ We have noted that letters are “dedicated” to a certain communication setting by using language, tone and gestures that set up certain expectations in an audience.

⁵⁰⁷ Milton Singer, *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959), xiii.

⁵⁰⁸ Horsley, *Oral Performance*, 47.

How a dedicated register affects an audience's "hearing" of a text has been demonstrated by the use of idiomatic letter form, by understanding the oral texture of friendship (Hermopolis letter) and festal letters (Passover, Greek Esther, and 2 Maccabees 1) and by the use of oracles (Jeremiah 29). In order for the performer to engender group identity the text must be read in the right context, using the right register, in a repeated performance.

The subject matter of MMT consists of ritual practices and opinions known from the priests' and scribes' own world. It represents a community's effort to correct some of the practices that occurred in the Jerusalem Temple so that when God judges the people at the "end of days," his temple will be purified and not defiled and the people will rejoice rather than suffer because of wickedness. Scenes 1-5 concentrate on the temple and who should have access to the holy place, and consequently who can offer sacrifices and how these rituals must be practised. General purity rules are combined in Scene 6, with the greatest amount of commentary reserved for the leper, an "outside" group. Priestly payments and purity issues concerning liquid streams, stray dogs and contact with the dead seem to have been contemporary topics that needed to be addressed. Absent are domestic or agricultural rulings, laws about women and children or concerns over the exploitation of the poor.

The last scene of the halakhic section returns to priestly concerns over unclean mixtures, including intermarriage. Illustrations from the agricultural world and the world of textiles are used as examples of purity standards. The point being made is clear: mixtures are bad, purity of kind is good. Although each scene may have been performed individually, I would like to propose how the oral texture, which connects different scenes in the halakhic section, may have been combined according to topic and community concerns. For instance, Scenes 1, 5 and 7 may have been linked by the way in which they voice a polemic against a

group and therefore express how expectations or social roles have been violated.⁵⁰⁹ In the first scene Gentiles violate purity standards by cooking their sacrifices in inappropriate ways and places and thus their sacrifices are viewed like “a woman who whored with him” (B8-9). The image of a whoring woman, or at least of an illicit relationship, is carried forward to two other scenes. In Scene 5 foreigners must be avoided and some Jews are condemned for having married them and in the last scene some of the priests have married women with whom they are forbidden. The way in which these laws are framed appears to fit into the pattern of groups that “seek to alter the social order on a fundamental, systemic level.”⁵¹⁰ This view is supported by the structure of the text, which states that values have been violated, and, more importantly, that places the priests as key “actors” in each scene—actors, who can fundamentally alter the social order. If Scenes 1, 5, 7 were performed together, these discourses would have had the aural effect of moving the audience from a ruling on Gentile offerings and Jewish involvement with Gentiles in their community, to a potentially more serious ruling on Jewish marriages to foreigners, to a condemnation of priestly intermarriage—a pattern roughly parallel to the concentric circles of holiness expressed in Scene 4. What can be said is that these scenes performed individually or collectively offer a social critique of the present historical situation and is a basis for a hope for a better life.

Sometimes a speaker does not have the time for a full performance or cannot take responsibility for the outcome of a discourse; therefore a reference to a previous performance or document can be given. “We have (*indeed*) sent you some of the precepts of the Torah according to our decision” (C26-27) may be an example of a shortened performance, referencing most likely the halakhic section, but not necessarily reading the whole section in all performances. In a performance of the exhortation section, C26-27 in conjunction with the

⁵⁰⁹ For a description of texts which feature social norms that are upheld or violated and responses that are adequate or inadequate, see Hymes, “*In Vain*”, 288-91.

⁵¹⁰ Michael Gordin, ed., et. al., *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 2.

statement that the audience has “knowledge of the Torah” (C27-28) can be considered as a summary statement occurring before the final closing. These statements allows for the view that a curtailed performance that merely references a longer section may have been one reading option, along with reading the full text.

The discourse comes to a conclusion by using performative verbs (“consider all these things,” “ask Him that He strengthen your will,” “remove from you the plans of evil”), repeating concepts (“end of time,” “our practices,” “virtuous deeds”) and using a conventional formula (“for your welfare and for the welfare of Israel”) to mark the end of the text. Similar to the speech-acts employed in 2 Maccabees to extend a blessing and a promise, the repeated speech-act “for your welfare” would have served the purpose of extending the experience of peace to the audience.

Determining the dedicated register by observing who the audience is, is much more difficult than understanding the subject matter of MMT. We have observed that letters create an immediate relationship to the audience through listing the sender and receiver, frequently including their position. Kings, rulers and governors may have served to generate a symbolic distance, whereas mentioning sisters, brothers and mothers would have produced a sense of nearness. The oral texture of the first extant line of the halakhic section is ambiguous as to whether it was meant to create nearness or distance. “These are some of our rulings” (B1) implies that the rulings are collected by the religious elite to be performed by individuals within the group and require explanation, studying or pondering (C23-30) in order to understand their meaning. If the text was performed to the religious elite it may have produced a sense of nearness, but if it was a directive of the leaders to followers it may have been perceived as generating distance. What is unclear is whether the letter was performed in the late second century to an individual or to a group and to which group it was performed. The ambiguity of the letter may suggest other performance contexts that may include an

outside group. We will come back to this topic when we discuss the historical context of the use of the letter.

One means of creating nearness or distance is through the use of pronouns, which imply distance from self—that is, psychological distance of degrees of potential availability and concern. *I/We* are always here and nearest to the speaker, *you* are there and a little farther and *he/she/they* are even more remote.⁵¹¹ This positioning device is used in a letter in Greek Esther to refer to the Jews who are said to have been hostile to the Persian Empire,⁵¹² it is used in Jeremiah 29 to designate the enemies of Jeremiah, who did not listen to the word of the Lord,⁵¹³ and it is used in 2 Maccabees to emphasize who was writing the letter (2 Macc. 1:7).⁵¹⁴ In performance pronouns are an effective means of creating distance between the performer and the audience (for example, Scene 1; Greek Esther), producing empathy (Exhortation Section, Scene A2; Jeremiah 29), and/or calling for a response (Exhortation Section, Scene 3; 2 Maccabees 1). In Greek Esther, Jeremiah 29 and 2 Maccabees 1, the person in opposition is stated in the text and the referent of the pronoun is clear. In MMT a clear division is made by the use of the pronouns “they/their,”⁵¹⁵ but identifying the group represented by these pronouns is difficult, because the text is too fragmentary to arrive at a

⁵¹¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 47. “Here” is where I am and there or yonder is called “that.” The demonstratives “this” and “that” perform the function of the German “dies,” “das,” and “jenes” (Tuan, *Space and Place*, 47).

⁵¹² “[S]o that those who have long been hostile and so remain, when *they* in one day have gone down to Hades by force, may in time hereafter render the matters of state completely tranquil and untroubled for us” (Esther B7, *NETS*).

⁵¹³ “I will pursue them with sword, famine and pestilence...because *they* did not pay attention to my words,” declares the Lord” (Jer. 29:18-19).

⁵¹⁴ “When the leader and his army, which seemed irresistible, reached Persia, *they* were cut to pieces in the temple of Nanea by a deception employed by the priests of the goddess Nanea” (2 Macc. 1:13, *NETS*).

⁵¹⁵ The clearest example of the use of pronouns to define another group is: “of the sacrifice of well-being which they (*the opponents*) leave over from one day to the following one” (B10). Other examples include: “and let their” (B4), “that they cook” (B6), “and that they” (B7), “with the broth of their sacrifices” (B8), “on the day when they are sacri[iced] (B11). Reconstructed examples are: “[*gentiles which they ...*]” (B3), “[*and that they...*] in it the flesh of their sacrifices” (B6b-7), [*and that they...*] it with the broth of their sacrifices” (B7b-8). At B35 the text reads “[... ..] they do [*not*] slaughter in the sanctuary.” The pronoun “they” is also used at B54 obviously referring to the blind and deaf and not to an opposing group.

definitive conclusion.⁵¹⁶ What can be said is that “they/their” are used in all these examples as a positioning device to establish group identity by using another group as a boundary marker.⁵¹⁷ As an example of a group used as a boundary marker, the Gentiles (הגויים) are mentioned as a group to be avoided, because contacts with them or their sacrifices pose a danger of defilement.⁵¹⁸ These positioning devices have meaning only inside the imagined world of the performer and audience.

We have discovered in our analysis of Ezra and Jeremiah that a shift in content or scene is not in relation to time or place, but relation between participants.⁵¹⁹ In MMT what has been labeled as Scenes 1 and 2 and Scene 4 coincide with a change in relationship: Scenes 1 and 2 refers to a group as “they” and “he,” pronouns that express characters farthest from the speaker, and Scene 4 speaks predominately of “we” and “you,” pronouns that may include the performer and audience.⁵²⁰ The statement “we are of the opinion” at B27-29, 36, 37 is a clear example of the fluidity of oral and written texts, especially when the opinion is based on

⁵¹⁶ Scholars have suggested many candidates for the opposition, but the caution of Lester Grabbe is well stated: “there are still too many unanswered questions about MMT to make a clear identification of the different parties within it” (Grabbe, “4QMMT and Second Temple Jewish Society,” 105).

⁵¹⁷ For the application of social identity theory to the Psalms Peshet, see Jutta Jokiranta, “Social Identity Approach: Identity-Construction Elements in the Psalms Peshet,” pages 85-109 in *Defining Identities*.

⁵¹⁸ For texts expressing concern over defilement through contact with Gentiles, see Hempel, “The Laws of the Damascus Document and 4QMMT,” in the *Damascus Document: A Century of Discovery* (STDJ; Leiden: Brill, 2000). For the notion that Gentiles are impure and their sins pollute Israel and her sacrifices, see Hannah K. Harrington, “Keeping Outsiders Out: Impurity at Qumran,” in *Defining Identities: We, You and the Other in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Edited by Florentio Garcia Martinez and Mladen Popovic; Leiden: Brill, 2008). The pronoun “they” is also used at B35. CD 12:10-11 implies that Jews kept Gentile slaves, “who entered the covenant of Abraham,” and that they participated in communal meetings (CD 14:4-6). Contra J. C. Lübke, “The Exclusion of the *Ger* from the Future Temple,” in *Mogilany 1993: Papers on the Dead Sea Scroll Offered in Memory of Hans Burgmann* (ed. Z. J. Kapera; QM 13; Krakow: Enigma, 1996), 181-82. See also Harrington, “Keeping Outsiders Out,” 196, who references CD 11:2; 12:10-11 as part of Qumran’s view of foreigners. Different texts offer different views on the status of Gentiles, for instance Lev. 17:15-16 implies that the Gentile is obligated to maintain ritual purity and that rituals are effective in shedding the contagion. Numbers 15:16 states that purification offerings can atone for the sins of Gentiles. 4QFlorilegium envisions a future when Gentiles will not be admitted into the sanctuary (4Q174 4). According to 11Q19 39:5-7 the Gentiles are barred from entering the centre court of the Temple until the fourth generation.

⁵¹⁹ Hymes, “*In Vain*,” 171; emphasis original.

⁵²⁰ To be sure there is a reference to “they” in Scene 2: “[... ..] they do [*not*] slaughter in the sanctuary” (B35), but this reference is too fragmentary to confirm the topic being discussed. As has been shown in the letter in Jeremiah 29, a change in relationship in a document can be accompanied by changes in tone, such as from encouragement to condemnation. The change in person is also significant in the letter in Daniel 4.

a written text.⁵²¹ As mentioned above, there is no parallel in the ancient Near East or biblical laws for the formula found in the halakhic section stating “we say”⁵²² (אנחנו אומרים) or “we are of the opinion”⁵²³ (אנחנו חושבים), but von Weissenberg finds an equivalent use of “we” in the halakhic section in Deuteronomy 1-3 where “we” refers to both Moses and to the people referred to as “you” in the plural. . .in other words, the “we”-group referred to by the 1st person plural includes the “you”-group, the people addressed in the 2nd person plural and singular.⁵²⁴

If her view is correct, then the use of the phrase “we are of the opinion that the sanctuary...” (B27) may be considered a community dialogue whereby “we,” the voice of the community, seeks to include “you,” the addressees, instead of polemicizing against them.⁵²⁵ This change in oral texture from the previous scenes, signaled by the change in pronouns, suggests a change in performative event. In Scenes 1 and 2 the discourse is based on who, where and how sacrifices should be offered; whereas, Scene 4 features opinions about the application of Scripture, which resulted in a structural plan concerning the various grades of holiness—incidentally, without any priestly warnings. The oral density represented by the multiple opinions that are offered in this scene is greater than in any other scene, which may have functioned to create solidarity or a “we” feeling in a community to which the performance is directed.⁵²⁶ The performance context may have involved all rulings mentioned thus far (even possibly the calendar) or merely this scene, including the ruling on sacrificing

⁵²¹ This is subject to the accuracy of Qimron and Sturgnell’s reconstruction: “[*And concerning*] that it is written... And we are of the opinion that the sanctuary. . .”

⁵²² See B55, 64-65 [partially restored], and 73.

⁵²³ See B29, 36 [partially restored], 37, and 42. Models of this argumentative style have been advanced citing the similarities with the historical prologue in Deuteronomy, the use of the first person plural in Nehemiah 9-10, the expression “you have heard. . .but I say” from the Sermon on the Mount and Mishnaic use of the phrase “we cry out against you Pharisees. . .” No view is definitive.

⁵²⁴ Von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 134-35.

⁵²⁵ This is the view of Fraade, “To Whom it May Concern,” 511. See also von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 135. Joseph M. Barmgarten, “The Pharisaic-Sadducean Controversies about Purity and the Qumran Texts,” *JSS* 31 (1980):163-64 has taken these phrases a polemical.

⁵²⁶ According to Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 116 “recitation in groups helps bind members of a group together in common ritual action and deeper emotional appropriation of the sacred text.”

pregnant animals and eating her foetus. If I am correct in using the restored text of Qimron and Strugnell, then the last ruling increases the duet to a triplet, most likely for emphasis (“[*And you know that it is*] so, namely that the ruling refers (to) a pregnant animal”) (B38).⁵²⁷ The structure of this ruling placed at the end of a “stanza” and the awkwardness of the statement “that the ruling refers (to) a pregnant animal”⁵²⁸ (והדבר כתוב עברה) may suggest that an exegetical discourse was expected or needed and is therefore placed in a position of emphasis.⁵²⁹

If the whole of Section C can be considered an epilogue,⁵³⁰ then this would be the place to trace various “actors.” The actors called “the Gentiles,” also called “they,” disappear between sections B and C. However, the group called “we” is developed from a static position of merely giving an opinion in Section B to separating themselves from the multitude (C7). The second person plural “you” appears in both sections, but only in the particular phrase “and you (pl.) know,”⁵³¹ but a new actor “you” singular is introduced to the reading and listening audience.⁵³² It is to this group represented by the second person singular that the text states that “we have [*written*] to you so that you may study (*carefully*) the book of Moses” (C10). According to this statement, it is the vision of the reading community that members “study,” particularly the book of Moses and the Torah,⁵³³ which are referred to several times (C10, 11, 17, 21, 24, 27, 28). In addition, Scene 2 stresses the authority of other

⁵²⁷ The rhythmic structure of doublets and triplets generally includes a quartet for emphasis; whereas, in this “stanza” the emphasis falls in the triplet. In orally derived texts more than one feature needs to be considered in order to suggest a performance context or strategy. An emphasis is created in this case by employing only doublets in the previous two “verses” and by the awkward structure that needs further explanation in this “verse.”

⁵²⁸ Qimron and Strugnell, DJD X, 51 state that the “syntax here is awkward and the phrase is difficult to translate.”

⁵²⁹ Brooke, “Explicit Presentation of Scripture,” 72-73 states that עברה could either be understood to mean “the pregnant one” or “it is a transgression.” Bernstein, “Employment and Interpretation of Scripture,” 40-41 points out the syntactical difficulties with this phrase.

⁵³⁰ This is the position of von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*.

⁵³¹ This phrase is used at B68-70, B75-80 and C15-16. In addition it is reconstructed by Qimron twice in section B and once in section C.

⁵³² The reference to “you” in Section C has contributed to some scholars attempting to identify MMT as a personal letter or as an appeal to an individual leader, ruler or royal figure.

⁵³³ The word תורה is not found in the Halakhic section, where the terms חוק, טהרה, משפט, are used.

texts, such as the book of the Prophets, the writings of David⁵³⁴ and makes references to the book of Deuteronomy by using the phrase “it is written.”⁵³⁵ Thus the oral texture reveals a dialogue on two levels: between the performer and audience (“you”) and between the performer and texts.

Scholars have used the conciliatory oral texture of MMT to suggest that this document was written early in the community’s withdrawal from the wider society,⁵³⁶ or as a rhetorical device prompted by the letter genre,⁵³⁷ or to seduce the audience into a mood of acceptance of their rulings.⁵³⁸ But there are other options. As has been shown, the oral texture suggests that MMT describes a community centred around reading the Torah, discussing priestly practices, quoting Scriptures, and giving “professional” opinions on the interpretation of laws and cultic standards. All these activities are undertakings of the priestly literate elite and are emphasized by references to texts and covenant making that need explanation, study and consideration (B1, C23-30). The interest in elite issues and priestly traditions that are signaled by their choice of metonyms suggests that an illiterate community is not a major concern of MMT. If the oral texture of MMT supports the view that this document concerns a hoped-for future of the priestly elite, then Brett’s thesis that the dominant classes reinforce

⁵³⁴ This line is a composite of three documents; therefore caution must be exercised when making decisions about this text. There is enough text to conclude that works of David, the prophets and Moses are mentioned in the Exhortation section and must have had an influence on the community. Much has been written on the possibility that this line reflects three divisions of the Hebrew canon. See Eugene Ulrich, “The Non-attestation of a Tripartite Canon in 4QMMT,” *CBQ* 65 (2003): 202-214; Brooke, “Explicit Presentation of Scripture,” 85-87; von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 67, 92-93.

⁵³⁵ In the C section the formula “it is written” occurs 5 times; 3 times quoting Deuteronomy, once in a badly damaged text, and once to refer to the “blessings and curses” that have occurred “as it was written in the book of Moses.”

⁵³⁶ See von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 145; Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 149; Daniel R. Schwartz, “MMT, Josephus and the Pharisees,” in *Reading 4QMMT*, 67-80. According to this reasoning, MMT could represent a time before the community established firm sectarian boundaries and were still willing to share their views with outsiders.

⁵³⁷ Høgenhaven, “Rhetorical Devices in 4QMMT,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10 (2003), 202.

⁵³⁸ Bruce McComiskey, “MMT and Rhetoric in 4QMMT,” *Rhetoric Review* 29 (2010), 235. McCominkey counters this view by stating that the conciliatory tone and reasoned argument are “also part of a larger communicative climate in which religious authority is divine and thus beyond question” (p. 235).

their own social cohesion rather than control the subordinate classes needs to be considered as a context for MMT.⁵³⁹

It seems plausible that, since at least six copies of this document were written, multiple performances were recorded and multiple images of a shared and construed past were created. Therefore the function of MMT could have been a “lens for interpreting the present and as a mental refuge for a literate elite that searches for an alternative world.”⁵⁴⁰ However, as we have discussed in our treatment of other letters, particularly Greek Esther, that each time the text was performed it was adapted and changed with each new presentation as a textualized social performance. In other words, the fact that there are at least six copies of MMT suggests that each performance included different features and that the performers may have assumed a different function. Most scholars are willing to date the performance of the “original text” at the end of the second century BCE. If that is the case, then the use of the text and the symbolic “voice” of the performers of the second century surely would have been different from the kind of authority of a priest or teacher at the end of the first century, the date of the first extant copies of MMT. If a text was rehearsed as a (re)performance of an earlier generation and reflecting on an earlier tradition, then the “voice” of the performer would have been different from the other two social performances. What is being suggested here is that the multiple copies of MMT represents three categories of performances—when the text was first written, when the first extant copies were preserved, and when later generations reflected upon different aspects of their tradition.

⁵³⁹ M. G. Brett, “Literacy and Domination: G. A. Herion’s Sociology of History Writing,” *JSOT* 37 (1987), 27. See also N. Abercrombie, S. Hill, and B. S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 94, 128 who state that “[h]istorical evidence of feudal societies does not allow us to claim that religion was a dominant ideology which had the consequence of successfully incorporating the peasantry.”

⁵⁴⁰ Kåre Berge, “Literacy, Utopia and Memory: Is there a teaching in Deuteronomy?” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 12 (2012), 15. Although Berge is referring to Deuteronomy, his position can reasonably be applied to MMT.

If that is the case then we need to consider the multiple roles of the performer. As we have considered the text and texture of MMT, we have attempted to eavesdrop into a discourse that may have taken place between or among the religious elite and possibly with other members of the community. We have been interested in the function of this text as it was performed in a community setting, not as imagined words and phrases taken out of the context of community performances. As sympathetic listeners we need to also consider the social role of the performers in order to overhear better their conversations. The oral texture of MMT suggests that the performer is most likely a priest or religious leader.⁵⁴¹ With every recitation the performer issues a new warning to the priests stating that they should take care so as not to cause the people to stumble, that the priests should be judicious concerning the person they marry, and that blessings and curses are still active and should determine behaviour. Insofar as the performer is a spokesperson for the priests, bringing life to the rulings, discourses, and covenant, the MMT performers are cast into the role of a prophet. A close reading of the oral register of the warnings and bans and of the use of covenantal terms indicates that the vocabulary and tone is similar to Moses, the original prophet, who was “understood in Israelite tradition as the prototype of all later prophets.”⁵⁴² Not only did ancient Israelite prophets proclaim oracles, but they also established renewal movements.⁵⁴³ It can be said that the performers who brought these discourses before the audience were enacting the role of Moses in reciting the rulings and giving the exhortation.⁵⁴⁴ Thus the regular reading of these discourses would have been shaped by the performers as they assumed a prophetic role, fashioned according to the example of Moses, and perceived as words of authority. We have suggested that with each new performance of Jeremiah 29, the

⁵⁴¹ This is the position of Lawrence Schiffmann, “The New Halakhic Letter (4QMMT) and the Origins of the Dead Sea Sect,” *BA* 55 (1990): 64-73; See also Hempel, “Laws of the Damascus Document,” 74-75, who states that “both texts [CD and 4QMMT] reflect inner-priestly disputes.”

⁵⁴² Horsley, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me*, 304.

⁵⁴³ See the Community Rule for an example of a renewed covenantal community assuming the role of a new Moses.

⁵⁴⁴ The “book of Moses” is mentioned several times (C6 [restored], 10, 11, 17 and 21).

“voice” of the prophet speaks using covenantal terms to warn the community not to listen to fabricated prophecies and heed only those sent by God. A weakness of Strugnell’s analysis of MMT is his lack of consideration of biblical quotations. This oversight has been corrected by Brooke and Bernstein by recognizing that there are frequent indirect quotations, and by demonstrating their importance to understand better MMT.⁵⁴⁵ Understanding the way in which Scripture is used can offer us a more precise sense of the performance of MMT by considering that the performer was speaking for (or as) Moses.

Our study of the oral register has allowed us to propose how scenes can be linked or performed individually by considering their texture and the shift between participants. A performer can be the spokesperson who creates a sense of nearness or distance by emphasizing the text’s use of pronouns. We have suggested that the performance context of MMT was not standardized over many generations, but reflects opinions of a newly developed community and was used as a text that reflected upon the opinions of a previous generation. Thus, performance criticism contributes to the understanding of this text by considering that the performer (re)presents the authoritative voice of Moses with each new presentation. This symbolic prophetic role may have served a purpose similar to the function of rewritten Scripture, which also was aimed at re-voicing Moses to fit a new social setting.⁵⁴⁶

To bring these concepts together, the oral texture consists of temple and cultic matters, presented by priests or religious elite using the voice or symbolic authority of Moses. What still remains in order to determine the oral register is the mode of communication, that is, the genre of MMT. The clues to the register and the context in which this document may have

⁵⁴⁵ Brooke, “Explicit Presentation”; Bernstein, “Employment and Interpretation of Scripture.”

⁵⁴⁶ The term “rewritten Bible” was coined by Geza Vermes in 1961. See idem, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (2nd ed.; StPB 4; Leiden: Brill, 1973). For a recent treatment of Rewritten Bible, see Molly M. Zahn, *Rethinking Rewritten Scripture: Composition and Exegesis in the 4QRevised Pentateuch Manuscripts* (STDJ 95; Leiden: Brill, 2011).

been performed are indicated in the way the text references its cultural traditions, which are frequently evoked through metonyms.

6.2.2 Cultural Traditions

Ancient oral performers depended on strategies familiar to their audience by using conventional structures and verbal associations that evoke an inherent meaning. An example of a conventional connotation is demonstrated by von Weissenberg, who suggests that “the structure of 4QMMT is an adjustment of the covenantal pattern (*Bundesformular*) known from the legal and treaty texts of the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East.”⁵⁴⁷ In order to establish her argument, she points to the blessings and curses in the exhortation section as a guarantee for the covenantal obligation as well as the development of covenantal theology coming from the quoted scriptural passages.⁵⁴⁸ Høgenhaven finds parallels between the covenantal language found in 2 Maccabees 1:1-5 and MMT. According to him, the letter in Maccabees includes an extended wish for peace, a promise of a God-fearing heart and obedience to his law, and a commitment that God will preserve the addressees in the time of evil. He concludes by stating that

[t]his brief parenetic discourse, cast in the form of a wish for the addressees, with its explicit reference to biblical history with its Deuteronomic language and its emphasis on the themes of obedience to the law in the Deuteronomic sense, of God’s faithfulness and mercy in the past and hope for his help in the future (or present) affliction, echo rather closely the language of the parenetic C section of 4QMMT.⁵⁴⁹

Baltzer has noted that the covenant structure of the Qumran documents commonly called the Community Rule and the Damascus Document gives evidence for the use a covenantal pattern to govern a whole text.⁵⁵⁰ What this brief survey makes clear is that covenant form

⁵⁴⁷ Von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 181

⁵⁴⁸ Von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 180-181.

⁵⁴⁹ Høgenhaven, “Rhetorical Devices in 4QMMT,” 200.

⁵⁵⁰ Klaus Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular* (WMAT 4; Neukirchen: Neukircher Verlag, 1964). He states that in the Community Rule, the section 1QS 3:15-4:26 includes components of a historical prologue, stipulations, and blessings and curses (pp. 99-107). The Damascus Document 1:1-7:10 contains a lengthy prologue, a brief

has been adapted to fit various genres and provides an appropriate tradition from which the language of MMT would have been recognized by a listening audience.

Additionally, the discourse of the exhortation section of MMT develops the covenantal structure in three scenes and a conclusion. The performer first declares the concern that as a result of malice and fornication places were destroyed and according to the book of Moses, “You should not bring an abomination into your house” (Deut. 7:26).⁵⁵¹ Providing a historical introduction of transgressions that brings destruction may have served as a “historical prologue” in the covenantal structure. The next scene, the First Exhortation, betrays a deuteromistic relationship by repeating covenantal terms like “return,” “blessings and curses,” and “end of days,” and by referencing the book of Deuteronomy by stating “the book of Moses” and “it is written.” Some of the conditions to fulfilling the covenant consist of studying the Book of Moses (C10), returning to Him with all your heart and soul (C15-16), and fearing the Law (C24). The third scene is paraentic in tone and concerns how kings were forgiven by fearing the Torah and how David was forgiven through righteous deeds. In Moses’ speech in Deuteronomy 29-30, he emphasizes that the people must remember God’s deliverance, which is parallel to the conclusion of MMT, where the audience is called upon to “consider all these things” (C28). Thus the exhortation section is structured around three key covenantal components consisting of prologue, stipulations, and blessings and curses. The texture of Section C supports the view that the author(s) of this section had a covenantal pattern in mind, which would have been articulated by a performer.

section of stipulations, and declaration of long life and God’s salvation for those who keep the covenant and retribution for those who fail to keep the covenant (pp. 112-17). For the use of blessings and curses in the Temple Scrolls, Community Rule and War Scroll, see Fraade, “Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Miqṣat Ma’āse ha-Torah (4QMMT): The Case of the Blessings and Curses” *DSD* 10 (2003): 150-61. The language of blessings and curses is also found in later Christian texts such as the *Epistle of Barnabas* 21:1 and *Didache* 6:2 as well as in the Sermon on the Mount, Sermon on the Plain, and in the book of Galatians.

⁵⁵¹ This quotation is not in quotation marks in Qimron and Strugnell, but see, Brooke, “Explicit Presentation of Scripture,” 76, who points out that this is a direct quotation from Deut. 7:26. Although in Deut. 7:26 the term “house” refers to one’s home, “in light of the halakhic section discussing the purity of the Temple cult, it could be understood as referring to the Temple” (von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 196-97).

Communication from a tradition also depends on references to symbols, phrases and formulas, which signal a tradition shared by performers and audiences. One example of figurative language used in orally derived texts is metonym. In MMT place names such as “temple” and “Jerusalem” and terms like “camp” and “tribe” provide clues for how this text should be understood. One of the symbols used to set boundaries for the community in MMT was to speak of its members living in “camps” (B28-31, 60-62), with concentric circles of division.⁵⁵² A structural model is given in answer to the question concerning where the ashes from the altar should be taken.⁵⁵³ The document gives three areas that appear to be different levels of holiness: “And we are of the opinion that the sanctuary [*is the ‘tent of meeting’*] and that Jerusalem is the ‘camp,’ and that ‘outside the camp’ [*is outside of Jerusalem*], that is, the encampment of their settlements” (B29-31). Not only were Jerusalem and its temple the cultural and religious centre for Judaism in the Second Temple period, but Jerusalem was the paradigmatic place associated with the reign of King David (C18, 25). Next to the holiest place was the city of Jerusalem.⁵⁵⁴ MMT several times selects this place for special mention as “the camp of holiness” (B60),⁵⁵⁵ the “place which He has chosen from among all the tribes of Israel” (B61), and as the “capital of the camps of Israel” (B61-62). The purpose for having a spatial distribution of holiness, extending out from the sanctuary to Jerusalem and concluding with the encampments of their settlements, most likely, was to ensure that the right person with a reverential state of mind was prepared to enter certain parts. One

⁵⁵² Camps are mentioned in the Damascus Document (CD-A 7:6; 15:13-14; 9:11; 12:22b-13:21; 14:3-12; 17; CD-B 19:2; 20:26; 4QD^a 11 17) as well as in the War Scroll (1QM 3:4-5, 14; 7:1, 3; 4QM^a 1-3 9, 19).

⁵⁵³ Kratz, “The Place which he has chosen:”The Identification of the Cult Place of Deut. 12 and Lev. 17 in 4QMMT” in *Meghillot: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls V-VI: A Festschrift for Devorah Dimant* (Edited by M. Bar-Asher and E. Tov. Jerusalem: Haifa University Press, 2007), 61-62 views the author(s) of MMT as equating the reference to “camp” in Lev 17:3 with the “place he has chosen” of Deut. 12. The author(s) of MMT takes a remarkably strict position and commands that all slaughtering, both sacral and profane, should be concentrated at the temple; a position which finds a parallel in the Holiness Code (Lev 17:3-7).

⁵⁵⁴ MMT applies to all of Jerusalem the greatest degree of holiness, which the Rabbis applied only to the temple courts (Eyal Regev, “Reconstructing Qumranic and Rabbinic Worldviews: Dynamic Holiness vs. Static Holiness” in *Rabbinic Perspectives: Rabbinic Literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (STDJ 62; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 94.

⁵⁵⁵ 2 Maccabees 2:12 calls Jerusalem the “holy city.” Jeremiah 29:16 refers to Jerusalem as the “throne of David.”

performative function may have been to encourage (or coerce) the audience to acquire the right state of mind in order to fulfill the various temple functions. It appears that this three-camp pattern reflects the gradations of holiness in the wilderness—a view which symbolically sets the sanctuary as a counterpart to the tabernacle in the desert period.⁵⁵⁶ Depending on the performative context, a reader could express a yearning for the desert years, or give a sense of how the idealized past can become present in Jerusalem, the “camp,” in order to give the audience hope for the present.

In connection to metonymic referencing mention should be made of the position put forward by Horsley that “when the audience hears the message in the register appropriate to the communication context, they then resonate to the message out of the cultural *tradition* in which they and the performer are grounded.”⁵⁵⁷ The density of symbolic language supported by (priestly) opinions that are more stringent in their views of holiness than the Torah suggests that this is not a picture of the way in which the illiterate majority lived, but rather that the message of purity would have resonated with a hoped-for programme presented by the priestly and scribal circles.

The vision I offer of the performance of MMT arising out of its oral texture can be briefly summarized. When readers performed the oral and written texts, they displayed to the audience a (symbolic) authority by speaking in the “voice” of Moses. This perspective is confirmed by the frequent use of indirect quotations of Moses, the use of covenantal form in Section C, and by the employment of metonyms that reference cultic traditions. So far we have been able to determine through considering the oral register and the cultural traditions that the temple and cultic material being discussed is directed toward the religious elite, more so than the non-elites within the community. The text as a compilation is most likely the

⁵⁵⁶ According to Schiffman, *Qumran and Jerusalem: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 131, this pattern differs in some respects to the *Temple Scroll*.

⁵⁵⁷ Horsley, *Oral Performance*, 48, emphasis original.

result of various performances summarized for easy access and may have been performed on some occasions. It is performance criticism that encourages and even enables us to consider different performance contexts, such as when the text was first performed at the end of the second century, which would have been a different performance than a century later represented by the first extant texts, and different again would be a performance on the reflections on an earlier tradition. I turn now to an application of the text and texture to suggest a performative context, which will further illuminate our understanding of the genre of MMT.

6.3 Context

In the letters we have reviewed, the texts belonged to (or are said to belong to) a recognizable genre—a letter—which would have guided the audience for a particular type of performance. MMT, however, is a distinctive composition in that the text does not offer many idiomatic features that would set up the early audiences for a particular kind of literature. We have shown that its form and contents demonstrate some similarities with other biblical texts, but nothing resembles MMT as a whole. So we cannot answer the question of what kind of performance MMT may have been by invoking its genre. What we are in a position to do is to propose how the text and texture combine to indicate under what conditions a performance may have been presented. Consideration of the context of MMT is more difficult than many other forms of literature, because the discourses of MMT did not follow one standardized performance over many generations. We have shown that the performer assumes a certain role that is appropriate to the performance context. For instance, in a letter in Greek Esther the performer may have added a pompous tone to accentuate how the Persian administration is portrayed as self-important, or in Ezra various voices may have been used to emphasize the change in characters within one letter and between letters. Likewise, we shall use cues indicated by the manner in which traditions are referenced and

shared by the performer and audience through quoted texts and metonyms in order to suggest how MMT may have been performed.

In order to accomplish this task, we shall divide the topic into three categories, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. First, we shall consider the document as it may have been performed at the end of the second century BCE, possibly when a group decided to separate from the Jerusalem establishment. Second, we shall reflect on the time of the texts themselves, that is, at the end of the first century, and third, we shall consider how MMT may have been performed by later generations as they may have reflected on its earlier uses.

6.3.1 Late Second Century BCE Performance

In the context of the original hearers, the performance of MMT would have been perceived as “real” speech, which means that the illocutionary acts of warning or blessing were exactly what they claimed to be. When the priests were warned that their actions could lead some community members to bare punishment, or when a blessing was pronounced, there was barely a gap between the performance-act and the speech-act. The performer could perform and warn at the same time, since the audience of the text-as-performance and the addressees of the messages overlap.⁵⁵⁸ Likewise, the cultic regulations and the purity laws would have referred to a shared context concerning both the performer and the audience. In the here-and-now performative context the religious elite, speaking with the “voice” of Moses, may have found it necessary to use polemical language to establish group identity.

The performance text has recognizable markers that suggest an original setting. The internal unity of the scenes and of the whole in relation to each other consists of priestly concerns over matters of purity and the temple cult. The context of a performance of a series of discourses, or the complete text of MMT, appears to be periodic community meetings,

⁵⁵⁸ The modes of performance have been adapted from Ruth Scodel, “*Works and Days as Performance*,” in *Orality, Literacy and Performance*, see esp. 114-15.

possibly elite movement assemblies of priests and scribes as they work through their views on various matters. Several contexts can be suggested for individual scenes. The oral texture of the calendar and the first scene is not elaborate. The performer recounts the days and special seasons, and on some occasions would have followed the calendric section with the incipit “these are some of our rulings.” As a possible context, the ban on who could participate in grain and peace offerings, and the ruling on the purity of those who prepare the red cow offering (B3-17) may have been read on holy days and on some occasions in conjunction with the calendar; texts that are linked by their concern with proper timing of special days and festivals, and by extension with the purity of the participants.⁵⁵⁹ This performance context may have been a polemic against those who are viewed as celebrating festivals improperly or as a guide for how the holy days are going to be celebrated, and thus use the text as an iconic mode of presentation.

The oral texture, consisting of the use of pronouns and the term “Gentiles,” suggests that a special circumstance to discuss purity may have been occasioned when the threat of Gentiles became more acute—either through intermarriage or through outside oppression. Gentiles represented foreign rule and oppression and so symbolized a possible physical or emotional threat. The performance of this text would have been one method of reinforcing that “insiders are connected with the God of holiness and life while outsiders are hopelessly trapped in the realm of death.”⁵⁶⁰ In performance the pronoun “they,” referring to Gentiles, could have been used to signal a distinction from “we,” which could further be emphasized by a hand gesture, change in tone, or verbal pause. It would be a feature of a performer to accentuate the change in pronouns according to the audience and performance context. As a possible textual support for the view that different contexts resulted in different

⁵⁵⁹ For instance, B9-11 is concerned with the timing of eating the cereal offering. The offering is to be eaten on the day that they are sacrificed, that is, on the third day.

⁵⁶⁰ Harrington, “Keeping Outsiders Out,” 201.

performances, it appears that only one text overlaps slightly with the calendar and therefore it is not beyond reason to suggest that the calendar may have been included in one reading context, but may not have been read in others.

It appears that in the calendrical section as well as in Scene 1 the priests are controlling the agenda concerning when festivals and special days can be celebrated and regarding who can be admitted in the community (cf. Scene 5). The rhythm and the change of focus in Scene 2 set it apart from the previous scene and discuss when a person becomes pure after preparing a sin offering and Scene 3 most likely concerns the products of sacrifices and therefore may have been addressed to artisans who pick up the residue of sacrifices. Concerning the question of “who is speaking to whom,” it appears that the leadership are addressed in different performative contexts and challenged about questions of festivals, sacrifices and their remains. The oral texture referencing cultic matters and cultural traditions in both Sections B and C suggests that its early reception must have taken place in a performance. This approach is very different from that of Miguel Pérez Fernández, who concludes that “given the differences in style, lexicon and content, it does not seem likely that the halakhic and exhortative parts are the work of the same person,”⁵⁶¹ which implies that MMT was from the start composed for circulation as a written text. Using a performative investigation of MMT, not only between Sections B and C but also between scenes, requires that the exegete includes broader and more complex ways in which the written and oral text may have been performed and understood by the audience.⁵⁶² This perspective includes the

⁵⁶¹ Fernández, “4QMMT: Redactional Study,” 191-206, esp. 199, 202-203. Fernández also finds in the epilogue two redactional stages. To my mind, an analysis based on the assumption that the clue to understanding the text lies in reconstructing a prior source or stage will distort the interpretation.

⁵⁶²The illustration suggested by Horsley of how the hypothetical Q sayings became fixed in oral tradition in the early church is a valuable paradigm for what MMT represents (*Whoever Hears You Hears Me*, 61-93). Horsley suggests that Q is similar to the Homeric epics in how it became fixed in oral tradition (p. 168). It is evident that other texts in the Qumran communities cultivated similar discourses on similar issues to MMT. CD 12, 6b-11 gives a list of restrictions in dealing with Gentiles; 4QD^a 5 ii 5-6 seems to refer to the impurity of priests taken captive by Gentiles; 4QD^d 8 ii 1-3 refers to the dangers of defilement through Gentile sacrifices (Hempel, “Laws of the Damascus Document”).

possibility that “notes” were discussed by the religious elite which later became a written text.

A function of the exhortation section in a performance most likely was to encourage the audience to observe the laws that had been presented in the previous section (C26-27) and follow the covenantal stipulations. The exhortations (Scenes 2 and 3) are not framed in the oral register of laws, but fall under the rubric of covenantal teaching, similar to Deuteronomy 15:1-11. The context in which a covenantal instruction seems most likely to occur is during times when the covenant is in danger of being breached. What is required when a person has broken the covenant is to confess wrongdoing and plea for forgiveness as the kings of Israel and King David had done (C23-26). The reenactment of the covenant, albeit altered from the deuteronomic form,⁵⁶³ and the confession of sin, is not complete until the closing encouragement to “consider all these things. . .so that you may rejoice at the end of time...and this will be counted as a virtuous deed of yours” (C28-31). The purpose of bringing together a performer and an audience in the context of a re-enactment of the covenant was most likely to invoke the collective memory of former kings, especially King David. The strategy of reestablishing the covenant would have created identification between those priests, who were separating from the Jerusalem establishment, and their interpretation of the law. A performance of the speech-act “for your welfare and the welfare of Israel” (C32) would have been relevant to a concrete life-situation assuring the audience of God’s action in addressing their concerns and protecting them from “the plans of evil and the device of Belial” (C28-29).

In this context, as well as others, the discussions consist of their words (דברינו) (B1, C30), rulings (מעשים) (B2, 52, 53) and judgments (משפט) (B52), and various texts, such as,

⁵⁶³ In Deuteronomy 27-28, Leviticus 6:3-46 and MMT the blessings and curses follow the collection of laws, thus reinforcing the sanction of these laws. See Fraade, “Rhetoric and Hermeneutics,” 152.

book of Moses (ספר מושה) (C10, 11, 17, 21), books of the Prophets (ספר הנביאי) (C10), (*writings of*) David (בדוריד) (C10) and the Torah (תורה) (C24, 27, 28), in addition to purity traditions. The instructions could have been discussed or lectured from time-to-time as the need arose and/or in regular intervals. The digest of seemingly unrelated rulings in Scene 6 could have also been performed in response to immediate issues or questions. As an example of the specificity of a performance context, we have considered Greek Esther and the celebration of Purim being performed during times of foreign occupation when hope may have been in short supply, which has a very different tone and context from the family Hermopolis letters, which concern domestic issues such as oil and garments and may have had only one performance.

In sum MMT may have been initially composed as a response to topics that were discussed or that needed further explanation. If that is the case, the order and length of the rulings may reflect performance contexts, as texts were written and rules were added as the need arose, similar to the additions to the book of Esther.⁵⁶⁴ In this scenario, MMT may have been a text that was used for an external audience as a polemic against the practices of the Jerusalem priests and religious elite. These texts were a means of communication through time and space and were written down “as a way to save time for new knowledge construction.”⁵⁶⁵ As the knowledge accumulated and became standardized, MMT would have been (re)performed outside the original context, a situation which may have occurred at the end of the first century.

⁵⁶⁴ As possible support for this view, von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 65, states that the “there seems to be passages in the manuscripts that contain so much variance that one could legitimately question whether the composite text actually corresponds to the evidence provided by the individual manuscripts.”

⁵⁶⁵ Patrizia Marzillo, “Performing an Academic Talk: Proclus on Hesoid’s *Works and Days*,” in *Orality, Literacy and Performance*, 221.

6.3.2 Late First Century BCE Performance

Although we do not know for certain that MMT was first composed at the end of the second century and reflects the separation from the Jerusalem elite, we are fairly certain that the text was available to a community at the end of the first century. The fact that we have at least six copies of MMT suggests that this document was important to the community, since significant texts are frequently brought back and given life again in a new context. As has been shown, the text and texture suggests different performance contexts for some of the rulings. Performances that are (re)performed outside the initial context are in some way imitating the “original” performance. Even so, each performance is distinctive and later performances in no sense became a previous performance. Later audiences may have been made aware that when the words were spoken “and this is our opinion” that the views represent those of a previous generation. It appears that the text would have been a part of a didactic programme of the priestly elite for ongoing teaching and for promoting their positions.

The text implies that there was tension within the priesthood, which necessitated that some priests separated themselves from the mainstream Jerusalem elite and that priests were in danger of causing people to bear punishment,⁵⁶⁶ which may indicate that there existed an abuse of priestly powers. This historical context could refer to the first century, but more probably to the end of the second century and thus these concerns would have been reapplied to a new situation. Performance criticism extends static categories of rhetorical situations into

⁵⁶⁶ Lines B25-27 in the composite text reads: “[... .. *for the sons*] of the priests should [*take care*] concerning all [*these*] practices, [*so as not to*] cause the people to bear punishment. [*And concerning*] that it is written...” These lines all occur on 4Q394 frg. 8 col ii, lines 13-18 with 4Q397 frg. 3, which adds credibility to the view that the warning directly precedes the quotation. For a different view, see Fernandez, “4QMMT: Redactional Study,” who regards this formula as secondary. He states that these formulae are “editorial comments directed at the priests” (p. 202).

a more dynamic world of social and historical discourse.⁵⁶⁷ The didactic use of MMT is suggested by the two interwoven styles of speech—that of the narrator and that of the interpreter. The narrator performs the bulk of the material, but the interpreter’s voice is predominantly in a position of emphasis, giving priestly warnings, opinions, biblical quotations, blessings and curses, and exhortations. The change in the style of speech would have been emphasized by the performer to intensify the priestly warnings or biblical quotations or some other feature in order to provoke the audience to identify with the performance. The perspective presented here allows for authorial creativity in organizing the text and performative resourcefulness in its reading, which broadens the scholarly debate beyond whether the community was inclusive or exclusive,⁵⁶⁸ and permits each reading to have a different performative context, which changed over time. It is worth considering that the six different texts of MMT represent different performances of an oral text, which vary in wording and content according to the audience and performer, similar to the different “versions” of the Esther tale.

Understanding the text of MMT consists of more than rhetorical analysis, but must include the shifting social relations among religious groups of Second Temple Judaism. For example, when the words: “And this is the end of days when they will return to Isra[el]” (C21) were performed, they would have been more than an effective way of adding urgency to an argument concerning works of the law, but rather they would possibly have been “the product of shifting power structures in Jerusalem Temple and anxieties about ritual impurity and priestly corruption.”⁵⁶⁹ The social structure in the first century before the turn of the era consists of a combination of Roman occupation of Israel, imposition of Herodian rulers on the people and obligations required by the temple elite, which most likely created a social

⁵⁶⁷ McComiskey, “MMT and Rhetoric,” explores the rhetorical situation of MMT as well as the rhetorical ecology surrounding the text.

⁵⁶⁸ Gudrun Holtz, “Inclusivism at Qumran,” *DSD* 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 22-43.

⁵⁶⁹ McComiskey, “MMT and Rhetoric,” 235.2

and/or theological crisis. The oral texture suggests that the temple elite and possibly much of Jerusalem was in danger of breaking the covenant seems to be an underlying current that runs through the Exhortation Section.⁵⁷⁰ Understanding the text as situational and communal, affects our perspective of an encouragement like “you will return to Him.” This statement would have been fraught with associates from Jeremiah, and other prophets, who encouraged God’s people that “[God] will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (29:14). In performance this statement could have served as a didactic opportunity to encourage the audience to renew their commitments to the community and to appropriate the covenant. This position is supported by the fact that calamity was predicted (C12) and the text states that curses had already come to pass (C18-20; 20-21).

MMT provides an insight into how the curses and blessings may have been (re)enacted in the Qumran community. These statements are in the oral register of a prophetic condemnation, similar in tone to the criticism of the king and the inhabitants of Jerusalem expressed in Jeremiah 29. Direct discourse in its voice and gesture allows the performer to play the role of Moses as a medium for divinity that speaks in sharp or subtle ways and provides a context for an audience to hear instruction or a warning enacted in the midst of an exhortation of ultimate hope. The audience would have most likely participated in the renewal of the covenant, similar to the way in which the audience verbally responded to the voice of Moses in Deuteronomy 29. The interest in teaching about reenacting the covenant may have been “as a substitute for the actual participation in the Temple cult.”⁵⁷¹

The didactic use of the text would have been employed to encourage group solidarity as the community was reassured that they will realize that “some of our practices are correct.”

⁵⁷⁰ A possible break of the covenant may be associated with the greed of the ruling class, which is criticized in the Psalms of Solomon and the *peshirim* from Qumran.

⁵⁷¹ This is the position of von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 235.

Another use of MMT is conceivably as a reflection on how the text may have been used by earlier generations.

6.3.3 A Performance Reflecting on an Earlier Tradition

The difference between the previous two performances separated by about a century is not so much in content, but in the kind of relationship between the performer and audience. In the here-and-now of the first century BCE, the performers may have indicated that the text concerns rulings from other times and therefore made an appeal to the text's own authoritative "voice" of tradition. In Greek Esther the audience would have most likely known the Esther tradition and the outcome of the tale, likewise in the reenactment of MMT the audience would have known that they were among the blessed and would anticipate their blessed status with nods of agreement. From the performance perspective of later generations looking back at previous times, the audience is "transported" to a former time and is called upon to understand a text from former decades, which may have been perceived as an ancient text having great authority. The statement concerning "our rulings" is in later generations a representation of a ruling and not the ruling of the here-and-now performer. The (dis)advantage that the later groups of performers had over the performers is that the written laws could now be consulted by any literate person, "which promises to put an end to inconsistent application of the rules, given that all parties are able to verify them."⁵⁷²

In the previous two performance scenarios, we have considered generally two kinds of relationship between the performer and the audience. In the second century there was barely a gap between the original performance and the message that was being performed, since the performance and message overlapped. In subsequent generations when the opening frame was spoken ("these are some of our rulings"), the audience would have understood the

⁵⁷² Mathilde Cambon-Goulet, "The Criticism—and the Practice—of Literacy in the Ancient Philosophical Tradition," in *Orality, Literacy and Performance*, p. 215.

performer as a narrator, who was speaking about other times and places. But in this third type, the performer speaks or reflects on how the text was used as a polemic against a group or as a didactic text. We have suggested that the re-performance of Greek Esther allows the community to examine the past as a symbolic realization of its desire. An occasion when this may occur in MMT is when the community is (re)establishing their cultural traditions. In this speaking situation the performer is engaging, not so much in a performance or even a didactic discussion, as recreating an event whereby the audience is an active participant in reflecting on how the text may have been applied by previous generations.

As part of the reflection of the past, the community is called upon to “think of the kings of Israel and contemplate their deeds. . .and think of David who was a man of righteousness. . .and was delivered from many troubles and was forgiven” (C23-26). It is possible to consider that former generations in the community were viewed as not giving due consideration to how the actions of the kings of Israel were evaluated. The here-and-now audience would have known that the blessings in the days of Solomon and the curses that had befallen the people from the days of Jeroboam (C18-20) were viewed as God’s just actions as a result of covenantal adherence or disobedience. However, the unification of the priestly administration with a central temple inaugurated by Solomon was beginning to break down in the late Second Temple period.⁵⁷³ The phrase “and this is the end of days when they will return to Israel” (C21-22; see also C12-16) suggests that some of the priests may have reflected on former generation’s suffering as being the result of their disobedience, and therefore a warning not to act wickedly was provided (C22). It is not beyond reason to propose that some of the religious elite, who seemed to have continued to cultivate obedience to the Mosaic covenant, served their interests in promoting a particular view of cultic observance and supported their assessment of the temple.

⁵⁷³ McComisky, “MMT and Rhetoric,” 227.

We have determined that the oral texture, consisting of covenant language and the way in which metonyms is used suggests the “voice” of the text is that of Moses. The blessings and curses found in Deuteronomy “were also used in interpretation of the people’s subjection to foreign rulers and other suffering as well as their own rulers’ disobedience of the covenantal requirements.”⁵⁷⁴ It seems conceivable that a performer would have encouraged the audience to recall and reflect on what they already knew, and add precision to what was remembered by using the authority of the text from an earlier generation. In considering the ways in which the audience may have resonated with this speech, there is evidence to suggest that the here-and-now audience would have perceived that at least some of the people had failed to keep the covenant or possibly heed the warnings presented in MMT.

If MMT represents a sub-group within a wider movement, it is conceivable that the community was sustained by a regular performance of MMT (or a portion thereof), as well as other texts. It may have been used initially as a polemic against the “outsiders” and those priests, who were in danger of leading others astray. This use of the text may have been necessary as the community began to separate from the temple establishment. As time passed it is plausible that a reading from one or more texts was performed from time-to-time when the need arose and was used for didactic purposes. During this stage of the community’s life, the blessings and curses may have served as sanctions assuring loyalty to the covenant, but more importantly were a means of encouraging community unity, by reenacting the covenant and reaffirming their blessed status and by employing a iconic mode of presentation. As a reflective text, MMT may have been engaged to consider how previous generations used the text as a symbolic realization of their desires.

⁵⁷⁴ Horsely, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me*, 218.

If my analysis is correct and MMT was performed and heard as discourses devoted to various topics of concern of the Qumran community, then MMT represents a more complex picture of the religious-social conflict in Judea in the last half of the first century BCE to the first five decades of the new era. Rather than considering MMT as a monolithic text that polemicizes against an outside group or as an internecine priestly argument,⁵⁷⁵ a more precise picture is one that regards this document as a discourse conducted over time about who should be a part of the community, what cultic standards should be maintained, what priestly principles should be implemented, and how a covenant community should live.

It has been shown that performance theory offers a closer scrutiny of the text beyond grasping the meaning of words, but attempts to appreciate who in the performative event was affected and how the performer, through the use of his voice, gesture and tone may have interpreted the text for the audience. The intent of this inquiry is to help explain why a particular text is used in various situations. It was suggested that some texts may have been read during festivals, others from time-to-time as the need arose, and others to ensure unity, and by reading these texts again and again over time it creates multiple images of a shared past.⁵⁷⁶ These are obviously overlapping motives and should not be considered as mutually exclusive.

Returning to our discussion of letters, we have determined that one of the functions of using letter form was to add authority to a text, which suggests that the written text was more a symbolic object than merely a written text. Letters immediately set the stage for a particular type of literature by stating the sender and recipient followed by the alleged voice of the sender requesting something of the recipient, giving information or declaring a position on a

⁵⁷⁵ Grabbe's conclusion that "we do not know who wrote MMT and to whom it was addressed" is well stated ("4QMMT," 90). For an evaluation of MMT and the "Sadducean" teaching, see idem, esp. 98-104.

⁵⁷⁶ Ehud ben Zvi, "The Memory of Abraham in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Yehud/Judah," in P. Carstens and Niels-Peter Lemche (eds.), *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2011), 13-60 deals with the topic of cultural and social memory in relation to Abraham.

matter. It appears that the oral impact of hearing the refrain “we are of the opinion” may have been perceived by the audience as speaking on behalf of, and in concert with, an authority—similar to the aural impact of a performance of a letter.

It is time to draw up the balances with regard to the genre of MMT. Høgenhaven associates MMT’s use of “we” and “you” with a “conscious use of rhetorical features associated with the letter genre.”⁵⁷⁷ Others regard MMT as a treatise and suggest that the text may be using the first- and second-person as a literary device to provide “a *record* of the community’s founding moments,”⁵⁷⁸ which include a listing of “the legal concerns that have caused the membership to separate from the mainstream.”⁵⁷⁹ It is far from certain that MMT displays formal features of the treatise or letter genre, but appears to list a selection of legal topics and exhortations that are being discussed with religious ideas and practices of another Jewish group in mind.⁵⁸⁰ However, it has been proposed in the analysis of the Passover letter that letter form is a ready means of instruction for cultic material written at a “low level of technicality,”⁵⁸¹ which fits the description and function of MMT. There is also an overlap in the prophetic tone, phrases, and function of MMT with the letter in Jeremiah 29.

As has been shown, letters perform a wide range of functions. Letters can be used for public or private correspondence, they can promote a habit of behaviour, request a favour, tell a tale, give advice, report events, cause a group to have renewed hope and serve many other

⁵⁷⁷ Høgenhaven, “Rhetorical Devices,” 203. He states that “viewing the letter form employed in 4QMMT as a central part of the rhetorical strategy of the text allows for an interpretation that takes into account both the epistolary situation of sender and addressee which the letter establishes, and the equally important function of the document within the historical community which eventually received and preserved it” (p. 204).

⁵⁷⁸ Grossman, “Reading 4QMMT,” 12; emphasis original. Strugnell, “MMT: Second Thoughts,” 63 has abandoned the designation of MMT as treatise, since “the treatise is, at least in the Hellenistic literature, a very ill-defined genre.”

⁵⁷⁹ Grossman, “Reading 4QMMT,” 12.

⁵⁸⁰ Von Weissenberg, *4QMMT*, 161.

⁵⁸¹ This term is used by Langslow, “Scientific and Technical *Epistula*,” 228 to replace the term “scientific communication.” The term “low level of technicality” refers to “teaching with brevity and efficiency rules and principles regarded as fundamental.”

functions.⁵⁸² The diversity of the functions of letters is “too great to yield a tidy set of categories, and further problems are created by the stubborn refusal of actual letters to confine themselves neatly to just one communicative function apiece.”⁵⁸³ If we move beyond the idiomatic structure of letter form for our definition of what constitutes a letter, and consider more broadly how the text affects the performer and audience, then we would have an unlimited series of gradations.⁵⁸⁴ We have determined that some advantages to using letter form is to express a thought that one could not or would not say in person (i.e. Jeremiah 29; 2 Maccabees), to persuade the addressee of something (i.e. Hermopolis letters; Ezra; 2 Maccabees), or to convey crucial or secret information (i.e. 2 Maccabees; Greek Esther) or to communicate from a distance (most letters).⁵⁸⁵ It appears that MMT is exploiting many of the functions of letter form in order to act as a powerful vehicle to express the author(s) views and add authority to their priestly programme. Letters frequently use an oral texture consisting of the interchange of the first- and second person and the use of conversational particles.⁵⁸⁶ The effect of creating a dialogue in MMT is generated by the frequent use of “now concerning” and by the imagined suggestions using the first person pronoun, as in the expressions “we are of the opinion” and “we say.” Arguably, this creates, if not a dialogue, at least a sympathetic engagement of the audience.

It has been established that the relationship of the professed author(s) of MMT and of the intended recipient appears to be social equals, or more specifically, religious elite. Much more frequent, however, are letters addressed by a superior to a subordinate, or vice versa, such as, from King Darius to the governor (Ezra), from the prophet Jeremiah to the people in exile (Jeremiah 29), from King Artaxerxes to the rulers (Greek Esther). It has been argued

⁵⁸² For other examples for the use of letters, see Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 15-16.

⁵⁸³ Trapp, “What is a Letter?” 5.

⁵⁸⁴ This is the position taken by G. O. Hutchinson, “Down among the Documents: Criticism and Papyrus Letters,” in *Ancient Letters*, 35.

⁵⁸⁵ These advantages of using letter form are given by Hodkinson, “Better than Speech: Some Advantages of the Letter in the Second Sophistic” in *Ancient Letters*, 288-95.

⁵⁸⁶ Langslow, “Scientific and Technical *Epistula*” 231 gives Latin epistolary examples of the use of *enim*.

that letters are a textualized social performance carried out by a performer and that letters serve to complement the performance, whether as a preface to a larger work (2 Maccabees), or as part of a prophetic oracle (Jeremiah) or as a request (Greek Esther).

The author(s) of MMT may have been influenced by recognizable features of “real” or alleged letters (Jeremiah, 2 Maccabees)⁵⁸⁷ in combination with other genres as models,⁵⁸⁸ just as a “real” letter can include proverbs, meditations, treatises, prophetic pronouncements and tales. The approach to understanding the genre of MMT that seems most appropriate is to consider it as a collection, or digest, of discourses written using the characteristics of a letter in order to reach a wider audience. The complexity of the text and its refusal to fit neatly into one genre may suggest that MMT was the result of a text being used in different contexts and adapted to fit the different performer-audience relationships that occurred over time. The purpose of using certain characteristics of letter form seems to be because letters are a kind of literature in which the author(s) can experiment with miniature correspondences and discussions, thematic relations, and intertextual and intratextual allusions.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁷ The textual overlap between Jeremiah 29 and MMT consists of: “these are the words of the letter” (29:1)/ “these are some of our rulings (words)” (B1); “and bring you back to this place” (29:10)/ “when they will return to Israel” (C21); “seek the welfare of the city” (29:7)/ “for your welfare and the welfare of Israel” (C31-32; cf. C27); “committed adultery with their neighbours’ wives (29:23)/ “malice and fornication” (C4-5; cf. B42-47); “plans for wholeness and not for evil” (29:11)/ “plans of evil and the device of Belial” (C29); “seek me with all your heart” (29:13)/ “return to me with all your heart and soul” (C16). For a comparison of the covenantal language in 2 Maccabees and MMT, see Høgenhaven, “Rhetorical Devices in MMT,” 200-201.

⁵⁸⁸ Jens Schröter, *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte: Studien zur Rezeption der Logienüberlieferung in Markus, Q und Thomas* (WMANT 76; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997), 461 states “Eine derartige Partizipation an zwei Gattungen ist durchaus nichts Ungewöhnliches.”

⁵⁸⁹ Hodkinson, “Better than Speech,” in *Ancient Letters*, 287 suggests that epistolary collections are a kind of literature in which the author can experiment. Although Hodkinson’s reference is dealing with collections of fictional letters, I have applied his concept to a collection of discourses in MMT that may allow for the same experimentation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me summarize briefly the results of my investigation. The perspective that this dissertation has taken is that the new emerging discipline, referred to as performance criticism, is a method of inquiry in conjunction with other methodologies that can provide a useful means for understanding the text, texture, and context of ancient Jewish letters. Previous treatments of ancient letters have not given enough attention to their oral contexts; however, the foundation for our argument has been that a performance provides an embodied enactment of a text and is therefore a part of its meaning. I have attempted to show that in order to analyse a letter from a performance point of view the distinctly oral features will need to be discerned, along with the implied aural impact. If the printed form of the text can be considered by the author(s) merely as a transcript or libretto for a performance, then the text does not remain on the page, but is given life through performance. Performance criticism has prompted us to give attention to important markers, such as repeated words and sounds, parallel phrases and verbal formulae and has allowed us to “listen” sympathetically with the audience. Additionally, we have considered how the textual dynamics may aid the memorization of the text and work as structures for performance.

Applying these principles to the two letters from Elephantine has suggested three significant differences that this approach makes, vis-à-vis the standard critical approaches. First, we have employed Dell Hymes’ “measured” verse method to describe how the material can be divided, not according to stress and syllable, but according to the relation of units to each other. Using this approach, we have been able to observe how initial particles can be

perceived as markers for performance, rather than understanding them as awkward and monotonous repetition. Accordingly, the Hermopolis family letter can be viewed as consisting of two balanced scenes, each containing a triplet, and the Passover letter can be separated also into two scenes, one consisting of a duet and the other can be represented as a chiasm consisting of five verses. This approach is crucial, not merely to divide a text into its components, but rather in understanding the shape that the performance may have taken and the manner in which it may have been heard in an oral presentation. Second, we have been able to narrow the classification of the letters under consideration by observing the oral texture. One way in which the meaning of a text is determined is by being attentive to the subject being discussed, the participants and their relations to each other and the mode of discourse. These factors have been noted by observing how traditions are referenced, how speech-acts are used and how metonyms are employed—all characteristics of an oral register. Using these principles, the oral register of the Hermopolis letter consists of familial terms and can be classified as a personal family letter and the Passover letter is addressed to a community and contains cultic language and therefore can be considered a festal letter. Third, the purpose of understanding better the structure and oral texture of these letters is to propose how the letters functioned in a community. For instance, the situations to which these two letters pertain can be closely specified: a private letter that captures real life of ordinary citizens in ancient Egypt and a cultic communication used to teach succinctly rules and principles to another group of religious leaders.

Chapter 4 has expanded our understanding of letters by considering what purpose letters may have served in embedded texts. We have indicated in Chapter 3 that a change in scene is signaled by initial particles; however, in this chapter we have considered the oral/aural effect of a text on an audience and have suggested that a change in participant can also signal a change in scene. This implies that in the letter in Ezra 5 each scene is marked off

by a change from the king to the interviewees and in Jeremiah 29 from those addressed in exile to those addressed in Jerusalem. This observation opens a way for the possibility that Jeremiah 29 may have been performed as two scenes, either collectively or individually, with each performed at different times to different audiences. If that is the case, then each time a text is read it provides distinct moments of performance, which need description and analysis.

There are several purposes that embedded letters may have served. The texture of Ezra 5 and Jeremiah 29 suggests that these letters may have been performed for their symbolic value. For instance, when a letter was read from a governor to a king or a (well-known) prophet, the text immediately symbolically communicates the authority of writing, taking on the persona of the sender of the letter. This view is a significant development because the performer is then perceived, no longer merely as a narrator, but as playing the role of (or as) as prophet or leader. Therefore, when the first-person singular pronoun is read in a pronouncement of judgment, or blessing, or speech-act, the “voice” of the prophet or king is realized by the performer. In this case, the letters would have functioned, not as a friendship letter between family members, but as an authoritative text with the performer authenticating the letter.

Another purpose I have suggested that embedded letters may have served is that they contributed to the narrative plot, which in both Ezra 5 and Jeremiah 29 consists of instilling a feeling of solidarity in a community. It is possible that with each performative retelling of the completion of the building project, or of the endurance of life in exile, group identity would have been further enriched. Strategies of highlighting insider information of a building programme from a foreign perspective would have given credibility to the temple’s construction and deepened an audience’s solidarity to the community.

I have tried to emphasize in chapter 5 that each reading of a letter is a textualized social performance, which helps to round out the perspective that we have been developing—especially in the area of the function of letters in a community. Both Greek Esther and 2 Maccabees 1 are additions to a text, which suggests that they may have had an independent circulation or that they were written with the larger composition in mind. Either way, the performative function of the letters as part of a larger work would have been to “pause” or “hold off” the narrative in order to heighten the importance of celebrating a special day. Since Esther is extant in at least three significant “versions,” we have concluded that it gives evidence that different communities celebrated their festivals in different ways, which lead to the different scripts of Esther. This position allows for a more fluid movement between written and oral texts and suggests that communities adapted and adopted performances with each new presentation as a social event. In this case, letters functioned as an expression of a treasured past as a symbolic realization of a desire, which was expressed in a community.

The significance of our investigation of Greek letters is that we have been able to examine a text that had a wide distribution and was used to position the audience at a distance from the scene, whereas many other letters endeavoured to bring the author(s) and audience closer together through performance. These two letters use an iconic mode of presentation, a feature that does not advance the plot of the narrative but gives the audience something to respond to, which suggests that a tale and a covenant renewal document are presented as a persona of a letter.

Finally, we have been able to bring the perspectives of earlier chapters into fruitful conversations with a range of other disciplines or modes of enquiry to provide the analysis of MMT as a test case. We have applied Hymes’ method of arranging a text according to the “measured” verse approach, which is based on finite verbs, connectives, repeated words and parallelism. Using this method we have concluded that the halakha can be viewed not so

much as individual rules, but rather as short speeches on various halakhic topics that had been collected for or during performative events. We have learned from our analysis of Ezra and Jeremiah that a shift in scene is not in relation to time or place but between participants; that has prompted us to consider how various scenes may have been linked in a performance. Additionally, our treatment of Greek Esther has emphasized how each time a text is performed it was adapted and changed with each new presentation as a textualized social performance and has stimulated us to reflect on the social role of the performer. These elements suggest that performances of MMT varied in topic and length and that the performer was most likely a priest or a religious leader. One reading option is that the performer was cast into the role of a prophet, similar to Moses.

In addition, it is performance criticism that encourages and even enables us to consider different performance contexts. We have suggested several performance categories, such as were realized in the late second and late first centuries and as a reflection on an earlier text. As we have determined by studying other letters, the difference in context suggests a difference in function. For instance, when the text was first composed it may have been used as a response to topics that were discussed or needed further explanation from the religious elite and functioned as a polemic against “outsiders.” In this scenario the community was sustained by regular performance of MMT (or a portion thereof) as a means of unifying them as they began separating from the temple establishment. As time passed the function may have been to read portions of the text during festivals or from time-to-time as the need arose. The position of this dissertation is that MMT may have then been used as discourses devoted to various topics of concern of the Qumran community as a text for those “inside” the community. As a text for reflection, the performer would have encouraged the audience to recall what they already knew, and add precision to what was remembered. This

multi-scenario position helps explain why MMT has gathered these particular rulings in the order and with the emphasis in which they are now extant.

This dissertation has taken us beyond merely considering the structure of letter forms for our definition of what constitutes a letter to considering more broadly how the text affects the performer and audience. We have determined that MMT has referred to various authoritative traditions, some of which are in letter form, in order to authorize its priestly programme. We have concluded that the use of MMT cannot be restricted to either an internal or external audience, but may have been employed in many ways and performed to various audiences depending on the social context. Similar to other texts, such as Jeremiah which uses a mixture of forms, MMT can be considered as a combination of genres. The complexity of the text and its refusal to fit neatly into one genre suggests that MMT is a collection of discourses written with some characteristics of a letter and therefore had the flexibility to serve different purposes in different performative contexts. Letters are a ready means of communication that lends itself to creating a “shared virtual space,” which is the function that MMT variously serves.

This consideration of letters under the headings of text, texture and context has allowed us to take a fresh approach to letters and to clarify in a comprehensive way how MMT should be best understood.

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