In Search of Virtue: Ancestral Inheritance in the Testament of Qahat

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This paper analyses the intersection between the transmission of biblical tradition and the display of exemplarity in the Testament of Qahat (4Q542). How is virtue—i.e. human activity regarded as morally valuable and thus desirable—discussed in this Aramaic text discovered at Qumran? It is argued that the text partakes in the variety of eastern Mediterranean discourses on how to practise a good, ethically sustainable life. 4Q542 challenges the modern idea of virtue as a characteristic of an autonomous individual and spells out the relevance of divine-human relations in the formation of a virtuous person. The text invites scholars to integrate Jewish sources into the study of virtue ethics in the Mediterranean antiquity and, in the context of second temple studies, it offers a priestly perspective to the continuing conversation on ethical traditions in Jewish antiquity.