CHAPTER 5

The Dead Sea Scrolls

5.1 Introduction

We continue our study of the interpretative traditions of these important restoration narratives by turning to the Dead Sea Scrolls. The texts found in the caves near Khirbet Qumran appear at once promising and perplexing. Promising because of the sheer number of scrolls that engage with Israel's scriptural heritage; perplexing because of the questions and debates that continue to surround these documents. Who wrote the scrolls and what relationship do they have to the community that lived at Khirbet Qumran? How should we identify this community and where do they fit on the landscape of Second Temple Judaism? It was initially assumed that the manuscripts belonged to a sectarian, essene community living by the caves. While this hypothesis has been challenged at various points throughout the years, the view that the scrolls were the property of an essene-like sect that lived at Qumran remains the most accepted hypothesis, questions and difficulties notwithstanding.1

To assume that this community was sectarian, however, does not mean that it was completely isolated or utterly unique. Studies on the Damascus Document and the Community Rule prove illuminating in this respect. It is generally assumed that the Community Rule, which governs the Yahad, served the Qumran community itself, while the Damascus Document applied to people living in camps that stretched throughout Judea (CD 7:6–7; 12:19–23). Be that as it may, the Damascus Document's presence amongst the scrolls, along with textual and thematic similarities between it and the Community Rule, implies that there is a strong relationship between the Qumran community and communities living throughout Judea.

A connection between the Qumran community and other groups is strengthened when we consider the textual history of the Community Rule. Alison Schofield has recently argued that multiple and somewhat contradictory

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1 For a different perspective, see Norman Golb, Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?: The Search for the Secret of Qumran (New York: Scribner, 1995); see also Lawrence H. Schiffman, Qumran and Jerusalem: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of Judaism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).
versions of the Rule seem to have existed and been copied contemporaneously.\(^2\) While some have wondered how contradictory versions of the Rule could have simultaneously functioned in a single community, perhaps a better way forward is to assume, as Schofield argues, that the various editions of the Rule were being preserved and developed by distinct but related Essene communities and brought to Qumran under duress. While it has long been assumed that the Damascus Document was used in multiple settlements, John Collins has argued that the Community Rule also functioned beyond the Qumran settlement.\(^3\) While one could assume the Rule comes from the Damascus Document and that its mention of multiple settlements is an obsolete holdover from its parent text, this evidence may well suggest that the Yahad was an association of multiple communities networked across Judea.\(^4\) Whether or not Collins’s proposal is correct, it does seem that the community at Qumran and the texts associated with it represent the thought of a larger body of Jews living at the time. While recognising that further research may modify this approach, I cautiously proceed on the assumption that the scrolls were written or copied for the purposes of sectarian, Essene-like communities, represented by the community that resided at Qumran.\(^5\)

The hypothesis that the Qumran community was sectarian and connected to a wider movement throughout the land, of course, does not entail that every scroll originated in the sect or was sectarian in nature. Obviously some texts, like the biblical manuscripts, were neither. Our relatively sparse knowledge of the various Jewish groups living at this time, however, makes it difficult to determine the precise boundary between sectarian and non-sectarian literature.\(^6\) This study therefore examines both those works which are clearly

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\(^3\) See 1Qs 6:1c–8a; also attested in 4Qs4.

