CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORIGINS OF THE DAMASCUS COVENANT

4.1 Introduction

One of the problems that all too often attends studies of Qumran origins is a lack of clarity about which entity in any given case is being studied. That is to say, scholars have a tendency to conflate entities such as the “new covenant in the land of Damascus,” the “Qumran community,” and the “Essenes.” Thus, for example, Talmon has purposed to write on the history of the “(Community [ Yahad ] of those who entered into the Renewed Covenant [ יאמא חמשה`],” or the “Community of the Renewed Covenant,” of which he considers the Qumran community to have been the motherhouse. Thereby he presupposes what must first be demonstrated, namely, that the Yahad (at Qumran) understood itself to be (part of) the “new covenant.”¹ But this presupposition is, as I demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, quite doubtful. It should also be noted that the word יאמא never appears in conjunction with the term “new covenant” in Qumran literature. Stegemann assumed a hereditary relationship between the “new covenant in the land of Damascus” and the “Essenes,” without considering more carefully the exact relationship between these two entities.² To make matters more complicated, another scholar has recently proposed that the “Essenes,” among whom he includes the Qumran community, were an offshoot of “Enochic Judaism”; the Damascus Document (D), which stands at the juncture of Enochic Judaism and the Qumran community, thus represents in

² Hartmut Stegemann, Die Entstehung der Qumrangemeinde (Bonn: published by the author, 1971) 248–50; idem, The Library of Qumran: On the Essenes, Qumran, John the Baptist, and Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 150: the Essenes developed out of the “new covenant” (among other groups of the pious).
some way Enochic Judaism. Does that mean that the “Damascus covenant” is also to be included within “Enochic Judaism”? It is not possible to treat in this chapter all of the problems that the previous paragraph raises. The purpose of this chapter is to build on the work of the previous three chapters and to try to uncover the origins of the “new covenant in the land of Damascus” without presupposing its identification with Qumran, Essenism, or Enochic Judaism. In the first step of my work in Chapters 1 and 2, consisting of a two-part literary analysis of CD XIX–XX, I argued that “the new covenant in the land of Damascus” was a forerunner of the Qumran community (yahad), with which the Qumran community understood itself to be in continuity, but with which it did not identify itself; in fact, the Qumran community distinguished itself from the new covenant as an entity other than itself. In a second step, in Chapter 3, I attempted to uncover the biblical and theological foundations of “the new covenant in the land of Damascus.” That work led to an initial attempt to determine the historical relationship between the Damascus covenant and the Qumran community. Now, in a third step, I shall attempt to uncover more fully the historical roots of the Damascus covenant in the post-exilic period, drawing upon evidence mainly from D. In order to do this, I shall establish three “coordinates” within the social, political, and religious history of Second-Temple Judaism that will enable us to put the Damascus covenant on the “map” of this period. These coordinates will form a matrix, out of which, I shall argue, the rise of the Damascus covenant makes sense.

Before I begin, I wish to explain (1) why the evidence will come mostly from D; and (2) why I focus on the entity known as the “new covenant in the land of Damascus.” As for the first question, I agree with those scholars who have argued that D (at least in its oldest parts) comes from the pre-Qumran period. Most of the other major DSS give us excellent insight into the origins, beliefs, and practices of the Qumran community, but with few exceptions little information on the

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3 Gabriele Boccaccini, Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

4 I shall use the terms “the Damascus covenant” or simply “the new covenant” interchangeably for “the new covenant in the land of Damascus.”