1. Introduction

The Dead Sea sect has long been viewed by scholars as an example of a ritual, study, and observance-based community, which provided for its members a new corporate identity surpassing (or even supplanting) natural kinship ties. According to this view, the Dead Sea community forged a new identity based on commonality of spiritual aspirations and halakhic observances. It pushed aside the traditional framework of allegiances to the people of Israel or one’s natural family. Instead, “the children of light” isolated themselves both physically (by moving into the Judean desert) and spiritually (by lumping everyone else into the category of “children of Belial,” destined to eternal damnation). The new community was formed around the combination of elaborate purity laws, study of sacred texts (of which the group claimed unique understanding), and regular public gatherings for meals, decision-making, or ritual ceremonies. The entire lifestyle of the community served to actualize sanctity here and now, although its members were eagerly expecting the final days when the entire universe would be transformed in accordance with their vision of the sacred. For the meantime, however, they withdrew to the desert to embody as a community the realm of purity and true understanding otherwise abandoned by the rest of Israel.¹

At least some rule books found at Qumran seem to corroborate this picture. The Community Rule (1QS) portrays a group of people existing in relative isolation from the surrounding world.² In the course of their acceptance into the community, individuals gradually

merged their property with that of the community. It remains unclear how much of private ownership was retained during this process, but the communal use and sharing of property was clearly perceived as the norm. The communal sharing of possessions reflected the centrality of corporate identity within the group. Public sessions held to study and interpret sacred writings and public meals also served to cement ties among the members of the community and to develop a common identity different from natural kinship ties. Interestingly, the *Community Rule* contains no references to celibacy (but neither does it mention marriage or regulate for married couples). Unlike other texts produced by the sect, such as *Damascus Document* or *1QSa Messianic Rule*, *1QS* does not envision the family as the basic building block within the community. Instead, as John Collins has observed, membership “is achieved by a free act of adults.”3 The community of *1QS* is composed of adult (male?) individuals, not families. Individual members exercise free will in joining the community and take upon themselves obligations and restrictions that come with their choice. Natural kinship ties are absent throughout the document. They are replaced by ties forged and maintained among individual members of the community. These members form a new corporate entity designed to embody and preserve sanctity and true knowledge in expectation of the last days. Moshe Weinfeld correctly noticed the profoundly Hellenistic nature of the group portrayed in the *Community Rule*, when he compared its structure and functioning to those of Hellenistic voluntary associations.4 Despite its explicit particularism, the group portrayed in *1QS* represents a profoundly Hellenistic phenomenon.5

On the other hand a series of texts describes the sect as essentially an alliance of families wedded to a particular interpretation of the Torah. This group includes such documents as *4QMMT*, *Damascus Document*, the *Rule of the Congregation*, and sectarian sapiential composi-

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