BEYOND THE SECTARIAN DIVIDE: 
THE “VOICE OF THE TEACHER” AS AN 
AUTHORITY-CONFERRING STRATEGY IN SOME 
QUMRAN TEXTS 

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For John J. Collins, a friend of many years and a true 
“Teacher” from whom I have learned so much.

1. Putting the Paper in Context

The biggest difference in the approach to the collection of manuscripts from the caves around Qumran between now and twenty years ago is that now we can consider the collection as a whole.\(^1\) Of course, our view of the collection is totally partial and accidental since we cannot even fathom what the collection as a whole was like at the moment it was deposited in the caves. The stories of previous discoveries (in the times of Origen,\(^2\) of the Patriarch Timotheus I,\(^3\) the Karaites,\(^4\) etc.), as well as the enormous amount of “jarres à manuscrits” found in the caves,\(^5\) whole or broken, is a caveat we should never forget and which makes all our speculations tentative.\(^6\) Nevertheless, we can now

\(^1\) This is a well known truism whose consequences I have tried to explore in Florentino García Martínez, “Qumrán, 60 ans après la découverte,” The Qumran Chronicle 15 (2007): 111–138.

\(^2\) As reported by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6:16:1.

\(^3\) In his letter to Mar Sergius, metropolitan of Elam, edited by O. Braun in Oriens christianus 1 (1901): 299–313; see Paul Kahle, Die hebräischen Handschriften aus der Höhle (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1951), 56–61.


\(^5\) According to Roland de Vaux, more than fifty in Cave 1 (DJD 1:8), and a total of 106 in the caves of the cliff (DJD 3:14), of which 35 in Cave 3 (DJD 3:8).

\(^6\) De Vaux, DJD 3:34, after referring to the reported discovery alluded to in the letter of Patriarch Timotheus, comments: “La grotte de Thimotée peut être l’une de celles où des fragments ont encore été découverts récemment; elle peut être aussi l’une de celles où nous avons recueilli de la poterie mais pas d’écrits, si l’on suppose que les Juifs venus de Jérusalem ont emporté tous les manuscrits qui s’y trouvaient. On peut songer particulièrement à la grotte n° 29, cette chambre ronde où l’on accède par un
consider the remains that have come to us as a whole, and this view is not without consequences.7

The collection as a whole appears to me (with the exception of a few documentary texts of uncertain provenance)8 as formed by religious texts (in Hebrew, in Aramaic and a few in Greek)9 whose formation has been influenced by other religious texts (Scripture) considered more or less authoritative by the collectors. The same authority-confering strategies we can discern in these authoritative texts are used in all other religious texts of the collection.

The pluriformity of the so-called “biblical texts” and the fact that this pluriformity was perceived not as a problem, but as opportunity for interpretation, has led scholars who deal with the so-called “biblical texts” from the collection to realize that in the historical context of the collection, we are clearly at the other side of the “Great Divide” of which Talmon speaks,10 and that, therefore, speaking of “Bible” is a complete anachronism.11 In the collection we do find scrolls, many scrolls, which later will become “biblical books” (Scripture) in many different forms, be it in clearly different textual forms (short, long, revised, reworked, abstracted, versions) or different editions, or rewritten in the form of new compositions, and all of them used