QUMRAN MESSIANISM,
MELCHIZEDEK, AND THE SON OF MAN

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The problem of defining the historical relationship between the Qumran Community and the Essenes of the classical and Judeo-Hellenistic sources has been at the center of the debate on the Dead Sea Scrolls since they were first discovered. It has become even more vigorous after the formulation of the so-called “Groningen Hypothesis”\(^1\) and, especially, after Gabriele Boccaccini’s proposal to trace back to Enochic Judaism the ideological roots of the Qumran sectarian literature.\(^2\) The analysis of those texts presenting superhuman eschatological protagonists, such as the Enochic Son of Man of the Book of Parables and the Qumranic Melchizedek of 11QMelch (11Q13), can certainly provide new and interesting elements to the discussion.

1. Messianic Figures in the Sectarian Literature

The eschatological and apocalyptic orientation of the Qumranic ideology is an issue on which contemporary scholarship generally agrees.\(^3\) Within such a theological framework, however, expectations centered on one or more positive eschatological protagonists appear to be of secondary

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\(^3\) See for example F. García Martinez, Qumran and Apocalyptic: Studies on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran (STDJ 9; Leiden: Brill, 1992); J.J. Collins, Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls (London: Routledge, 1997); Boccaccini, Enoch and Qumran Origins; J. Frey and M. Becker, eds., Apokalyptik und Qumran (Einblicke 10; Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2007).
relevance.4 Often the few texts in which such characters are referred to5 provide very little information about them. This fact significantly reduces our possibilities of reconstructing a coherent and detailed picture of Qumran messianism as a whole. The majority of scholars, however, maintain that the Qumranians expected two distinct Messiahs, one with royal attributions and the other with some priestly features.6 Possibly a third prophetic figure was part of the messianic expectations in Qumran, perhaps characterized as a sort of eschatological pair of the historical Teacher of Righteousness.7 Such ideas, however, stand on hypothetical foundations, mainly as a result of the difficulty in the relative dating of the composition of those texts that can with some certainty be acknowledged as the product of the sect that occupied the site of Qumran.8 Paleography can definitely aid in formulating a hypothesis about the latest stage of the redactional development of each text, the only one that is actually


5 In a recent article in which he presents contemporary agreement about Qumran messianism, Craig Evans lists thirteen sectarian texts containing “messianic material”: CD, 1QS, 1QSa, 1QSh, 1QM, 4QPsalmsa(4Q161), 4QFlor (4Q174), 4QTest (4Q175), 4QCommGen A (4Q252), 4QSefer ha-Milhamah (4Q285), 4QapocrMoses? (4Q376), 4QNarrative A (4Q458), 4QMessianic Apocalypse (4Q521). He treats all these texts as sectarian (see Evans, “Messiah,” 88). Xeravits adds 4QapocrDan ar (4Q246), 4QExod/ Conq. Trad. (4Q374), 4QapocrPent. B (4Q377), 4QPrayer of Enosh (4Q369), 4Qapocr-Levi? ar (4Q541), 4QVisions of Amram (4Q543–548), 4QapocVision (4Q558), and 11QMelch (11Q13). With the exception of the latter, all these texts, along with 4QNarrative A (4Q458) and 4QMessianic Apocalypse (4Q521), also mentioned by Evans, are considered non-sectarian: see G.G. Xeravits, King, Priest, Prophet: Positive Eschatological Protagonists of the Qumran Library (STDJ 47; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 10.

6 Evans, “Messiah,” 94.
