WHAT KIND OF SECT WAS THE YAHAD?
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

Eyal Regev

This article presents the Yahad, its ideology and social life, in light of the sociological concept of sects, as well as comparisons with other (and much later) sects of the same type. The article summarizes some of the ideas developed in my book Sectarianism in Qumran: A Cross-Cultural Perspective, incorporating several fresh insights and more recent scholarship on the Yahad and the Community Rule.

1. WHO WERE THE YAHAD? THE GROUP AND ITS WRITINGS

Although the term Yahad is commonplace in scholarship, its meaning is not always clear. Common use of terms such as “the Qumran community,” “the Qumran sectarians,” and “the Qumran Essenes,” obscure the relationship between the group(s) represented in documents found in the Qumran caves, the identity of the inhabitants at the archaeological site at Khirbet Qumran, and the classification of these groups as the Essenes. Even more confusing is the exact identity of the groups in the scrolls themselves. It is clear that Serekh ha-Yahad (1QS) and Serekh ha-'Eda (1QSa) are related to the group called Yahad. But what about the scrolls other than 1QS and 1QSa?

Given that the Yahad is a designation of a certain social organization, it is important to recognize that not all of the so-called sectarian documents found at the Qumran caves pertain to the Yahad. There were other related groups, perhaps very similar to the Yahad. One of them identified itself as the members of “the new covenant in the land of Damascus” (CD 6:19; 8:21; 19:33–34; 20:12). Many texts, such as MMT and the so-called wisdom texts, do not mention a specific

---

designation and thus it is impossible to identify the group or organization to which they may relate.

Scholars have related to the term Yahad (as a noun or as an adverb) using two main approaches. The noun Yahad itself has been explained as meaning a biblical designation for a community, council or covenant,3 or as a Hebrew designation for the Greek to koinon, that is, a community or association.4 Recently, several scholars have tried to understand the organization and internal structure of the Yahad, namely—to which social entity the term refers, be it an entire group or, in some cases, only certain parts of it.5 Yet, scholars neglected the questions: what documents from Qumran apart from 1QS and 1QSa represent the Yahad, and what was the historical and social relationship between the Yahad and the other groups or factions which are represented in the other so-called sectarian scrolls.

These questions require a much broader discussion. For the present purpose of clearing the way for my comparative analysis, I will focus specifically on identifying the Yahad and its writings. Documents related to the Yahad can be identified according to the use of the Yahad as a noun, that is, the group’s designation. These include the Community Rule, the Pesharim (1QpHab, 4Q161–174, 4Q177, 4Q181), and the Hodayot.6 It also more than probable that texts which contain multiple references to the Yahad as an adverb were also related to the Yahad; thus, in the War Rule, 4Q502Ritual of Marriage, Songs of Sabbath Sacrifices, 4QInstruction and 4Q525Beatitudes as well as in the Community Rule, the Hodayot, 4Q171Ps, 4Q174Florilegium and 4Q177Catena A, but not in CD!7

---