DOGS AND CHICKENS AT QUMRAN

Jodi Magness

Do not give what is holy to dogs…. (Matt 7:6)

1. The Animal Bone Deposits at Qumran

One of the most puzzling discoveries at Qumran are deposits of animal bones that were placed between large potsherds or inside jars, either flush with or on top of the ancient ground level and covered with little or no earth. The bones belonged to adult sheep and goats, lambs or kids, calves, and cows or oxen. Roland de Vaux noted that the bones must be the remains of meals, since all were clean but some were charred, indicating that the meat was boiled or roasted on a spit. The suggestion made by some scholars that the community wanted to keep scavengers away from the bones is contradicted by the fact that it would have been easier to dump the bones into Wadi Qumran and by the absence of analogous deposits at other sites; are we to assume that scavengers were a problem only at Qumran? Therefore de Vaux’s association of the animal bone deposits with religious or ritual meals that were eaten by the community still seems most likely.

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3 For the suggestion that the bones were buried to keep them from scavengers see Magen and Peleg, “Back to Qumran,” 96; Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 338.

It is interesting to consider the animal bone deposits at Qumran in light of sectarian purity concerns. Lawrence Schiffman notes that the author of 4QMMT was opposed to dogs scavenging the bones of sacrificed animals in Jerusalem because according to sectarian law bones are a source of impurity:

And one should not let dogs enter the holy camp because they might eat some of the bones from the temple with the flesh on them. Because Jerusalem is the holy camp, it is the place which He has chosen from among all the tribes of Israel, since Jerusalem is the head of the camps of Israel. And concerning the uncleanness of a corpse of a man, whether stripped of flesh or complete is subject to the law concerning a dead or murdered person. (4Q397 frags. 6–13)

Yigael Yadin remarked on the polemical nature of a passage in the Temple Scroll which requires that “whoever carries any part of their bones, or of their carcass, skin and flesh and nail, shall wash his clothes and bathe in water…” (11QT 51:4–5), thereby expanding on

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5 I identify the group that settled at Qumran and the wider movement of which it was a part with Josephus’ Essenes; see for example Todd S. Beall, Josephus’ Description of the Essenes Illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988); Jodi Magness, The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). Other members of the wider movement lived in Jerusalem and elsewhere around Palestine but have not left identifiable remains in the archaeological record. In my opinion it is accurate to describe the Qumran community and the larger movement of which it was a part as a sect. For a recent discussion see Eyal Regev, Sectarianism in Qumran, A Cross-Cultural Perspective (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), especially 15–29, 34–93, who defines the Qumran “sects” (plural) as an example of “introversionist sectarianism.” Also see Cecilia Wassen and Jutta Jokiranta, “Groups in Tension: Sectarianism in the Damascus Document and the Community Rule,” in Sectarianism in Early Judaism, Sociological Advances (ed. David J. Chalcraft; London: Equinox, 2007), 205–45, who conclude that the communities associated with the Damascus Document and the Community Rule were sectarian.

6 Schiffman, Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls, 338; also see Magness, Debating Qumran, 96. Elaine Adler Goodfriend, “Could keleb in Deuteronomy 23:19 Actually Refer to a Canine?” in Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom (ed. David P. Wright, David N. Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 395–96 observes, “That canines were associated in the Israelite mind with the indiscriminate consumption of blood (a forbidden substance even if its source was a permitted animal) seems to have been the main element that led to their expulsion from anything related to sacrifice and sancta.”

7 See Ian C. Werrett, Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls (STDJ 72; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 196–97, for a critique of Elisha Qimron’s reconstruction of this passage.