The title of this paper is “Marriage and Marital Life in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” and not “Marriage and Marital Life at Qumran” or “in the Yahad Community.” I will not address the question of whether or not there were women living at the site of Qumran; I will attempt to describe briefly the marriage and family life of men and women in the world envisioned by the scrolls. The paper will begin with matchmaking, and then proceed to weddings. The third section will focus on marital life.

1. Matchmaking

There is no explicit reference in the halakhic material from Qumran to the legal aspects of the creation or dissolution of marriage. The scrolls, usually following the Bible, describe men simply taking wives or divorcing them. The term “marriage” — נישואין is unknown in the scrolls: in one, perhaps two, places the institution is described as “ברית קדש” (covenant of holiness). Furthermore, in the scrolls, the biblical assumption that it is the father who gives his daughter’s hand to a man in marriage is essentially unchanged. This differs from the picture which emerges from the tannaitic literature. Though the Mishnah acknowledges the father’s prerogative to sell his young daughter to another for marriage, the Tosefta, when recording the various formulas of קידושין to be pronounced by the bridegroom, presents them as

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1 For this question see The Essenes According to the Classical Sources (ed. Geza Vermes and Martin D. Goodman Sheffield: JSOT, 1989); Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel, “Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls, the contention of twelve theories” in Religion and Society in Roman Palestine (ed. Douglas Edwards; London: Routledge, 2004), 162–69. See also Pliny, Historia Naturalis V.15.73.

2 See, e.g., the list of forbidden marriages in 4Q251. See also a fragment of the Damascus Document (4Q271 3:10–11; in Joseph M. Baumgarten, Qumran Cave 4.13: The Damascus Document [4Q266–273] [DJD XVIII; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996], 175) which the editor reads as describing the marriage as ברית קדש. See below, the fragment from מוסר לומדים.
directed to the wife herself, not to her father: “you are consecrated to me, you are engaged to me, you are my wife” (לי מקודשת את; רבי אשת לרי, t. Qidd. 1.1; ed. Lieberman, 276). Adiel Schremer correctly pointed out that this is an indicator of a shift in the conception of marriage, which took place in the first two centuries C.E., from an essentially economic agreement between men and fathers-in-law, to an agreement which emphasizes personal relationships between men and their wives.3

4QD (4Q271, 3) includes some instructions for fathers looking for matches for their daughters.

If [a man gives his daughter to a man], let him disclose all her blemishes to him, lest he bring upon himself the judgment [of the curse which is said] (of the one) that ‘makes the blind to wander out of the way’.

Moreover, he should not give her to one unfit for her, for [that is kil’ayim, (plowing with)] ox and ass and wearing wool and linen together.4

The first clause begins, typically, with a biblical formula “if a man gives his daughter,” and instructs the father to disclose to the prospective husband any blemishes from which the daughter might suffer. The second clause warns the father not to give his daughter to someone who is “unfit for her.” From a parallel to this instruction found in 4QInstruction we can learn that this “unfitness” concerns the couple’s spirits. Fragment 11 line 5 read: כי לפני רוחות תכנות הביה “For according to the spirits will they be assured.” The verb הביה means to weigh or to measure, as discerned by Menahem Kister; in Qumran theology it relates to the creation and to the portion allotted to every individual by God.5 The knowledge of divine measurement

3 See Adiel Schremer, Male and Female He Created Them (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2004), 322–26; 337–45 (Hebrew).
