5. PURITY AT QUMRAN: CULTIC AND DOMESTIC

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Most scholars are still accustomed to relating the remains of about eight hundred scrolls from caves 1-11 near Khirbet Qumran to a “Qumran community” that lived in and around the installations excavated at Khirbet Qumran. While a connection between the materials from the caves and these installations seems highly probable, the assumption of a “Qumran community” is only a hypothesis based on the identification of the people behind the texts with the Essenes, as they were described by Flavius Josephus. The main presuppositions rest on the impression given by the earliest published texts, particularly 1QS (named “Manual of Discipline”), which has been believed to contain the order of that “Qumran community.” But the publication of the fragments from caves 4 and 11 requires a more differentiated view.

First of all, it is now clear that the texts cannot be regarded as a “sectarian” literature of a strictly separated community at Qumran alone. A number of texts, biblical and non biblical, are older than the alleged “community” installations at Khirbet Qumran, which were established during the first decades of the first century B.C.E., not between 130-100 B.C.E. as generally assumed during the first decades of Qumran research. The oldest literary layers of 1QS are certainly of an earlier date than the installations at Khirbet Qumran,¹ the date of the copy itself, according to the current paleographical method, is 100-75 B.C.E., but may be older by about twenty-five years. At least one of the 4Q fragments of variant texts (4Q255-4Q264)² may be dated between 150-120 B.C.E. One of the copies of


the 4Q versions of CD (4Q266-4Q273) also antedates the “community” installations. Both texts (S and D) reflect organizational patterns of older origin but still of interest during the last two centuries before 68 C.E., as the number of copies demonstrates. They represent the actualized legal traditions of an elitarian priestly group, a tradition that had its roots in the Persian and early Hellenistic period, attested also by a number of other Qumran texts, for instance, 4Q159+ 4Q513-514 (4QOrdinances), 4 4Q249 (Midrash Sefer Moshe); 5 4Q251 (4QHalakha A); 6 4Q264a (4QHalakha B); 7 4Q265; 8 4Q274-4Q283 (4QTeharot); 9 4Q284 (Purification Liturgy), 10 4Q284a (Harvesting); 11 4Q414 (Ritual of Purification A); 12 4Q472a (4QHalakha C); 13 4Q512 (4QRitual of Purification B); 14 4Q524; 5Q13; the Temple Scroll (11Q19; 11Q20; 11Q21; 4Q524); 4QMMT, extant in fragments of six exemplars. 15 An important source is, finally, the Book of Jubilees of which Hebrew fragments from sixteen exemplars have been found in the caves near Qumran. A good part of these rules concern matters of purity and impurity.16


7 J.M. Baumgarten in ibid., pp. 53-56

8 Ibid., pp. 57-78.

9 Ibid., pp. 79-122.

10 Ibid., pp. 123-129.

11 Ibid., pp. 131-133.


13 T. Elgvin in ibid., pp. 155-158.

