Editing a text and make a critical edition are unique occasion for scholar to show his/her proficiency and knowledge. Across the process of edition, scholar gathers the highest skills and improves them. In one word, editing gives spurs to the scholar. During the last centuries, many methodological issues raised: is the stemmatic or genetic approach the most appropriate for each text attested by numerous manuscripts? If not, could we override today? The case of the Community Rule is a good example to firmly answer negatively to the first question and positively to the second one. The so-called textual fluidity across the preserved manuscripts related to the Community Rule leads to think about new editing features which cannot be summarized in a genealogical tree. The digital edition may be one of them. We propose to draw some perspectives applied to the manuscripts related to the Community Rule.

The Community Rule or Rule of the Community is one of the famous Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1947 inside a cave close to the Dead Sea shore.1 After the later discovery of ten other caves with manuscripts, the cave with the Community Rule was named Cave 1. The ancient (original?) name of the text differs from the modern title given by scholars. Indeed, the Hebrew words serekh ha-yaḥad are preserved on the reverse side of the first column of the scroll; they mean “Rule of the Community.” The title seems to have been sewn in order to be legible when the scroll was closed. Only one year after the discovery, the eleventh of April 1948, a report of the American School of Oriental Research announced that it had identified “a manual of discipline” for a kind of sect or monastic order. The report spoke about a possible identification with the Essenes, i.e. the ancient Jewish group known primarily from the writings of Flavius Josephus, Philo of Alexandria and Pliny the Elder. The new text was deciphered, translated and published for the first time in 1951 (Burrows 1951). It received the number 1Q28 or 1QS, with “S” standing for serekh ha-yaḥad. The whole text is preserved except few words at the end of the columns.

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1 For recent overview of general context and issues, see VanderKam 2010; and Collins 2009.
1 Not One Document but a Cluster of Documents

However, the manuscript 1QS related to the Community Rule was not the only one discovered. Indeed, many other manuscripts close to the text of 1QS have been excavated from other caves. As they do not seem to precisely contain the text of 1QS, they raise a basic question of terminology: are they only (significative) variants or versions? The use of both words focuses on the text and the clear boundary between them is often difficult to ascertain in fragmentary manuscripts and thus in tiny and incomplete texts. Therefore, we propose to re-evaluate the use of the descriptive terminology in order to clearly distinguish the “text” and its support, here named the “manuscript” or the “scroll” when the manuscript is better preserved and attests to have been rolled. One example of confusion in scholarship is the use of the expression Community Rule to name the scroll and the text. The first step in the process of edition is to understand the issues of such a distinction.

The piece of leather containing the so-called title sewn on the back of the scroll is not complete, because three letters before a textual lacuna can be read after the title: “and from...” They may indicate other information about the scroll or the name of two other texts copied in another scroll rolled up inside the first one. Indeed, the second scroll contains two other texts: the Rule of Congregation according to the first Hebrew words corresponding to a title, “This is the rule for the whole congregation of Israel,” then the Blessings according to the first Hebrew words, “Words of blessing for the instructor.” The first scholars postulated a strong link between these three texts because they gave the number 1Q28a or 1QSa for the Rule of Congregation and the number 1Q28b or 1Qsb for the compilation of blessings. Both texts were published in 1955 (Milik and Barthelemy 1955, 107–130). Thus, the usual classification of the Qumran manuscripts presumes a textual trilogy. However, the presence of two different scrolls rolled up together continues to query, because a scribe would have sewn all the sheets of leather in order to make only one scroll.

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2 J.T. Milik, in Milik and Barthelemy 1955, 107; and Tov 2004, 105 n.149, and 114, noted that the right margin of the first sheet of leather of 1QSa I appears not to have been sewn with the left margin of 1QS XI. However, 1Qsb may have been stitched after 1Qsa. This information means that 1Qsa-1Qsb were not copied after 1QS, because two (independent) scrolls are attested. As 1Qsa and 1Qsb are damaged, the first scholars could only have seen one scroll. Although two scrolls are attested, the presence of the one scroll inside the other must be explained, because it cannot be by chance.