More than forty years ago, the French geographer Henri Lefebvre inaugurated a new line of inquiry into the conception of space. Rather than merely defining a more or less circumscribed area, space, he argued, is above all a perception formulated by societies, groups, or persons. Perception thus plays a role in the process of apprehending a place beyond its physical limits and functionality. While some, for example, might perceive an industrial area as a site of innovation, for others it conjures up the image of pollution. Shaping these differing perceptions are a variety of factors, including one’s standpoint, personal history, and living standards, a group’s norms and values, and even the society to which an individual and his or her group belongs. In developing his theory, Lefebvre identified “perceived” space, “conceived” space, and “lived” space as three fundamental concepts. In this way, he understood “space” as a social construct born out of a subtle combination of thought and action. Since then, geographers, landscape architects, and even elected representatives have applied his theory in determining a course of action at a given location.

Long before Lefebvre, a Jewish text had already displayed the same understanding of “perceived” and “conceived” space. Probably written during the second century BCE, 1QS was discovered in 1947 in Cave 1, next to the Qumran site, on the shores of the Dead Sea. The version of the Rule of the Community con-
tained in this document translates its perception of the Temple at Jerusalem into a conception of the community of Qumran, called the *yaḥad* according to the Qumran texts, i.e., the Jewish Essene community. The community’s internal organization was thus defined by the archetype of the Temple. By examining three excerpts from 1QS, we will attempt to characterize the Essene conception of community space.


5 I have left aside 1QS xi 5–9, even if it contains the expression “foundation of construction of holiness.” It raises an issue deserving a separate exposition, namely the use of the Temple’s architecture and the imagery of the Garden of Eden for the community’s self-description. For the fusion of both motifs in this passage, see C. Wassen, “Do You Have to Be Pure in a Metaphorical Temple? Sanctuary Metaphors and Construction of Sacred Space in the Dead