WHOM DOES THE TERM YAHAD IDENTIFY?

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At the heart of the question regarding the social structure and organization of the Essene movement lies the problem of the relationship of three central documents found among the Dead Sea Scrolls: the Damascus Document (D), the Community Rule (S), and the Rule of the Congregation (Sa).

Fairly early in Qumran scholarship, a sort of consensus was formed—no doubt influenced by Josephus’ and Pliny’s reports on the Essenes—that the Community Rule describes the life of the community at Qumran, identified with the yahad, whereas the Damascus Document was addressed to the members of the larger Essene movement living in the mahanot, or camps, in towns and villages throughout Palestine. The relationship of the third document, the Rule of the Congregation, to these two, has been perplexing, for its regulations, while seemingly describing a future, messianic time, bear uncanny resemblance to rules for everyday practice included in both the Damascus Document and the Community Rule. To complicate the picture further, a more recently published manuscript, 4Q265, “Miscellaneous Rules,” dealing with ordinary legislation, similarly combines features from both the Damascus Document and the Community Rule.

Introduction

In this paper, I seek to find clarity regarding the identity and organizational structures of the groups behind the Dead Sea Scrolls, and more

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1 This article was originally prepared to honor Michael Knibb, and is first published in his Festschrift, Biblical Traditions in Transmission: Essays in Honour of Michael A. Knibb (eds. C. Hempel and J. Lieu; JSJSup 111; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 213–35.
2 Acknowledging that this statement presupposes that these three documents are products of the Essene movement, the following discussion takes place within the broad framework of the Essene hypothesis. It needs to be emphasized, however, that the relationships between these documents and the historical realities behind them are highly complex, as I point out below under “Methodological reservation.”
specifically, regarding the identity of the *yahad*. The special impetus for this paper was given by John Collins’s recent article “Forms of Community in the Dead Sea Scrolls.” Collins deals with the question of how the term *yahad* should be understood within the context of the Essene movement and the Dead Sea Scrolls and, engaging in discussion with studies indicating significant parallels between the communities described in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hellenistic voluntary associations, argues that the term *yahad* should not be identified with an individual community such as the Qumran settlement, but should be understood as an umbrella term for smaller groups, such as those of ten members referred to in 1QS 6:3. The specific community centered at Qumran, in his view, should be viewed not as the *yahad* but as an elite group within the *yahad*—a “council of holiness” who withdrew to the desert to walk in perfection of the way” (cf. 1QS 8:10–14). Although the relationship between the Community Rule and the Damascus Document is not at the center of Collins’s discussion, he postulates within the Essene movement yet a third form of community organization, that comprising the *mahanot* described in the Damascus Document. He has elaborated his theory in a forthcoming article. To be sure, the type of a characterization of the *yahad* he suggests is not totally novel; similar ideas with varying details have been presented, e.g., by Hartmut Stegemann and Eyal Regev.

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7 I want to thank professor Collins for kindly sending me a copy of his “The Yahad and the ‘Qumran Community,’” now published in Biblical Traditions in Transmission: Essays in Honour of Michael A. Knibb (eds. C. Hempel and J.M. Lieu; JSJSup 111; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 81–96, and for his helpful comments on this paper.