RECENT PERSPECTIVES ON JOHANNINE DUALISM
AND ITS BACKGROUND*

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Of all the links that scholars have proposed between Qumran and the New Testament, the idea of a close relation between the Scrolls and the Johannine literature is one of the earliest suggestions and certainly one of the most debated ones.1 Put forward already in 1950 by Karl Georg Kuhn,2 the Qumran hypothesis was then advocated with more or less caution by scholars such as Millar Burrows,3 William F. Albright,4 Raymond E. Brown,5 and James H. Charlesworth.6 It was adopted in


1 Cf. the survey of the earlier literature in H. Braun, Qumran und das Neue Testament (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1966), 2:118–44.
commentaries on the Johannine literature; e.g., the works of Raymond E. Brown,7 George Beasley-Murray, and D. Moody Smith, from whom we learn of “close contacts”8 and “remarkable similarities”9 between the Scrolls and the Gospel, or even between the Essene sect and the Johannine author.

While Kuhn only claimed to have found the “mother soil” of Johannine thought in Palestinian Judaism of a nonorthodox, or—as he thought—gnostic, type,10 other scholars such as Frank Cross and William Albright went even further and drew consequences regarding the authenticity and historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel. Whereas the historical value of the Fourth Gospel had been heavily disputed by critical scholarship since the 19th century,11 the parallels in the Scrolls now appeared as a proof of “authentic historical material which first took form in an Aramaic or Hebrew milieu.”12 The Scrolls were taken as a confirmation that the Fourth Gospel contained no less than “the memories of the Apostle John” himself.13

9  D. M. Smith, John (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 34.
11 Cf., on the critical consensus from the end of the nineteenth century and its implication that John should be excluded from the quest for the historical Jesus, J. Frey, Die johannische Erschlogologie 1: Ihre Probleme im Spiegel der Forschung seit Reimarus (WUNT 96; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1997), 38–39; see, e.g., E. Schürer, “Über den gegenwärtigen Stand der johannischen Frage,” Vorträge der theologischen Konferenz zu Giessen (Giessen: Ricker, 1889), 5:41–73; reprinted in Rengstorff, Johannes und sein Evangelium, 1–27.
13 Cf. Albright, “Discoveries,” 170–71: “That the needs of the early Church influenced the selection of items for inclusion in the Gospel we may readily admit, but there is no reason to suppose that the needs of that Church were responsible for any inventions or innovations of theological significance…we may rest assured that it [sc. the Gospel of John] contains the memories of the Apostle John.”