Book Reviews


Studies on liturgy and prayer in the Dead Sea Scrolls have so far focused on a few texts at a time. Russell Arnold brings together several texts that can illuminate liturgy and ritual. He seeks to go beyond pure textual analysis, to understand the social role of the practices to which these texts bear witness. Liturgy, prayer, ritual, and rite are the main concepts of the book. According to the author, “liturgy is a verbally enacted ritual that serves as part of the religious life of the individual or community performing it” (9). Thus, liturgy is a narrower concept than ritual, but we have access to the kinds of rituals the Qumran communities may have practiced mainly through liturgical texts and references to liturgies and prayers. Arnold discusses not only verbal forms of liturgies but also the rituals in general, e.g., the ritual of purification and the act of reproof. Yet, the relationship between the verbal act and other activities in the ritual are not elaborated. Ritual theories and Speech Act Theory are referred to in the beginning (6–15). These theoretical perspectives and various levels of meaning of liturgy (16–17) could have been more fully incorporated in the course of the study to understand the dimensions of the liturgies and their symbolic value.

Not all liturgical texts were composed by the “Qumran community.” Arnold first defines his view of the provenance of the texts. Qumranic orthography, specific terminology, formal characteristics, adherence to certain ideas, and rhetorical polemic are all considered as potential—but not self-evident—markers of sectarian texts. Arnold is optimistic in believing that liturgical texts would also show some sectarian markers if composed by the Qumran community. However, some assumptions are problematic, e.g., “texts whose paleographical features pre-date the settlement of Qumran should not be considered Qumranic in origin” (21), if “Qumranic” here also means “sectarian.” Overall, Khirbet Qumran is given a central role in Arnold’s sketch of the community. He restricts his study to the community that lived at Khirbet Qumran and takes the *Serekh ha-Yahad (S)* material as the primary witness for it. This is one traditional approach and justified in the eyes of many, but a number of scholars will also find it too straightforward. Arnold does not discuss the fact that the S material is most probably composed before the settlement at Qumran and how this dating affects the
understanding of the community. He sees a close connection between the Damascus Document (D) communities and the Yahad at Qumran: “Members of the Yahad may have ventured out to serve as priests among the meetings of those in the camps, and/or members from the camps came to assemble at Qumran on some specific occasions,” such as the annual covenant renewal liturgy (35). Thus, he is also able to study material from D as a witness to Qumran practices, but this relationship is of course uncertain and probably not quite this direct.

The main chapters of the book study rites in six blocks, following Catherine Bell’s classification: Rites of Passage; Feasts and Fasts; Calendrical Rites; Rites of Affliction; Political Rites; and Rites of Communion. In each chapter, Arnold introduces the main textual evidence for the kinds of rites in question, assesses the provenance of the texts and their liturgical context, and discusses the significance of the rites in the Qumran community.

Arnold reads 1QS 1–6 as referring to one ceremony, a rite of passage (initiation and covenant renewal), although he recognizes the compositional and redactional character of S. The picture that arises is harmonistic, and does not always satisfy a reader who looks at the Qumran movement in terms of multiple traditions, practices and developments. However, Arnold provides one possible scenario of how parts of 1QS 1–6 could have functioned in a ceremony, and as such, it works well and raises valid suggestions. Yet, to read 1QS 1:1–15 together with parts of 1QS 5 as a preparatory phase of initiation seems to me to be forced. Arnold places repentance in the preparation phase of initiation, and argues that the actual initiates and the full members were not taught to show repentance and plead for forgiveness and deliverance due to the deterministic worldview of the community: their pleas would not make a difference since God had already chosen them. Public confession of sins was preserved only as a sign of obedience. However, repentance as an attitude is almost completely absent in all of S, and it is difficult to locate it in a separate phase in the initiation process. If the S material is read as a memorandum of various traditions rather than a manual and mirror of one actual ceremony, we arrive at a much more complex scenario and area of uncertainties. Arnold seems to assume that the transformation of initiates was complete (59) and that full members were expected never to break the Law (191), but even the distinction between unintentional and intentional sins in S suggests that the situation was not that simple.

In the chapter on Feasts and Fasts, Arnold discusses communal meals. He interprets tohorat ha-rabbim to mean that only full members were allowed to participate in the Qumran meals. Although 1QS 6:1c–8a is often considered to speak about the larger (Essene) movement or the earlier phases of the Qumran community, Arnold interprets this passage as reflecting practices at Qumran, “designed to assure that gatherings outside of Qumran maintained something of the character of the Qumran meals, that is an ordered, communal gathering led by a priest” (87). Without this passage, we would indeed have much less specific