THE FEAST OF THE FIRST FRUITS OF WINE
AND THE ANCIENT CANAANITE CALENDAR

by

JOHN C. REEVES

Rock Hill, South Carolina

A description of a festival termed the Feast of (the First Fruits of) Wine encompasses practically two complete columns (XIX 11-XXI 10) of the so-called Qumran Temple Scroll (= 11QT). This festival possesses no historical antecedent in the biblical cultic calendar, although allusions to vintage festivals and ritual drinking activity in certain passages have attracted attention from time to time (notably Judg. ix 27, xxi 19-21; 1 Sam. i 3-18). This particular feast can happily be pinpointed upon the sectarian cultic calendar, thanks to information supplied within the scroll itself combined with corroborating evidence gleaned from some calendrical fragments which were published by J.T. Milik. The Feast of the First Fruits of Wine forms the middle portion of a one hundred and fifty day festal cycle devoted to the presentation of agricultural first fruits. The initial festival in this cycle, the Feast of the First Fruits of Grain, corresponds to the biblical Feast of Weeks (Shabbatot).

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2 According to 11QT’s Temple Scroll (= 11QT) XI,III 7-8, the name of the festival was mūyd ḫyrwaṭ. Its character as a first-fruits celebration follows from the description supplied by the text. All citations from the text of 11QT rely upon Y. Yadin, The Temple Scroll (E. tr., Jerusalem, 1983).


4 11QT XI,III 6: ḫg ḫkkwt lm n ḫītīm.

5 11QT XIX 9: ḫg ḫh w ḫw ḥw ḫkw rm ʾṣkr n ḫm (ywm ḫkw rm) ḫw ḫw ywm (ywm ḫkw rm). Cf. also Rockefeller 43.366 line 2 (apud Yadin, II, p. 160). Compare Num. xxviii 26; Jub. vi 21; Perush Da’at Zeqenim nībbā’alē hattosafot to Deut. xxvi 11: ḥm n qnr ḫh w ḫw ywm ḫkw rm ...
and in accordance with biblical prescription is celebrated on the fiftieth day after the priestly waving of the šomer (Lev. xxiii 15-16). The Feast of the First Fruits of Wine occurs fifty days after the grain festival, and the final festival of the cycle, the Feast of the First Fruits of Oil takes place when fifty additional days have passed after the dedication of the wine.

Actual calendar dates can be computed for these holidays on the basis of information contained within the book of Jubilees and the Qumran calendrical fragments published by Milik. From the former we learn that the initial first-fruits festival for the grain harvest was fixed upon the fifteenth day of the third month (Jub. xlv 4-5; cf. also xv 1). It is of course well known that the Jubilean method of reckoning is based upon a 364-day calendar which is at variance with other modes of calendrical computation practiced at that time. It is also certain that the Qumran sectarians endorsed the 364-day calendar advocated by the author of Jubilees. It is hence of particular importance that the Milik fragment confirms the authority of the 11QT cultic calendar at Qumran when it mentions a “Feast of Oil” being celebrated on the twenty-second day of the sixth month, a date which can be derived only by using the 150-day counting scheme of 11QT in conjunction with Jubilees’ identification of the first feast in the cycle with the fifteenth day of the third month. Such a correlation can hardly be a coincidence, and thus one can calculate that the 11QT dating of the Feast of the First Fruits of Wine was the third day of the fifth month.

The festal offering itself is described in considerable detail. Each of the twelve tribes of Israel contributes one-third hin of “new wine” (yyn ḫds) to represent the year’s vintage. This wine is presented in sacrifice along with twelve rams. Next a burnt-offering of two bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs takes place, together with a sin-offering consisting of one male goat, all of which are

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6 11QT XLIII 9: ḫwṣhr μvym μv’dw ..., XLIII 10: μv’d yym hqrh ḥmn ḫds. According to a calendrical fragment published by Milik (see n. 8 below), the name of the festival was μv’d ḫmn.

7 Note 11QPs col. XXVII, line 6 and the remarks concerning the yet unpublished 4QMMT by E. Qimron and J. Strugnell, “An Unpublished Halakhic Letter from Qumran”, in Biblical Archaeology Today (Jerusalem, 1985), pp. 400-7. According to CD XVI 2-4, the Jubilees calendar was authoritative for the Damascus sect.

8 bṣyym Ṝvym hw μv’d ḫmn (Milik, SVT 4, p. 25); Vogt (n. 3), p. 76.