

The Debate on the Sectarian Movement in the Dead Sea Scrolls Continues

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Abstract

This article reviews the debate concerning the sectarian movement in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The consensus that the movement described in the Damascus Document and Community Rule originated in a dispute over the high priesthood in the mid-second century BCE has broken down in the last two decades since the unveiling of more texts, especially those from Cave 4. The scope of this debate and the ensuing developments are vast; therefore, the article only briefly discusses the main arguments and the more contemporary discourses, focusing on the five main aspects with their associated topics. These aspects are the Righteous Teacher, the Wicked Priest, the possible schism, the socio-historical context, and the sectarian movement.

Keywords: Dead Sea Scrolls; Qumran community; sectarian movement; Righteous Teacher; Wicked Priest

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Introduction

The first approximately 50 years of Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) scholarship was dominated by a consensus that the movement described in the Damascus Document (D) and Community Rule (S) originated in a dispute over the high priesthood in the mid-second century BCE. This consensus has broken down in the last two decades, especially since 4QMMT became known. Scholars increasingly acknowledge that the formation of the sectarian movement involved a longer and more complicated process than was formerly realised.¹

The debate has many facets. One concerns the archaeology of Qumran and the date of the settlement. Another involves the nature of the sectarian movement described in the rule books and its relation to the development of sectarianism in late Second Temple Judaism. Yet another concerns a range of other texts that contain potentially relevant information to the question. These include, but are not limited to, the Hodayot and the question of the Teacher hymns, the pesharim and the identity of the Wicked Priest, as well as 4QMMT and the dispute about halakhic issues.

The debate about the possible origin, the reason for the inception, as well as the nature of the sectarian movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls depends on a few key aspects, which all contribute to the conversation(s). The first conversation is a literary conversation involving studies on texts like the Damascus Rule (CD), the Community Rule (1QS/Serek ha-Yahad, 4QS), the Messianic Rule (1QSa), the *Miqsat Ma'ase Ha-Torah* (4QMMT), the pesharim (Habakkuk, Psalms, Micah, and Nahum) and the Hodayot (1QH). The second conversation is the evidence provided by archaeology. It entails excavations and developments in the quality of radiocarbon tests, palaeographic studies, and the material construction of texts. The third conversation concerns socio-historical aspects and includes historical evidence from the works of Josephus, Philo, Pliny, and others, but also social identity concerning sectarianism, apocalypticism, and mysticism. All three of these conversations are interwoven, so that it is almost impossible to discuss them separately. They all touch on mutual aspects related to the larger debate, but each is a debate on its own. The aspects involved are the debate on the (or a) Righteous Teacher, who might or might not also be the Interpreter of the Law; the ideas concerning the (or a) Wicked Priest, who might or might not also be “the man of the lie” and (or) “the scoffer”; and the relationship between the Yahad, the “new covenant,” the sectarian movement, and the Qumran community whose remains were found at Khirbet Qumran. Another aspect is the roles that different groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Zadokites,

1 To understand the development of theories about the origin of the sectarian movement and the paradigm shifts that happened with the publication and disclosure of texts like the Temple Scroll and 4QMMT, it is important to know the history of the scholarship on the scrolls and the disclosure of the texts. It is not possible to address these matters in this essay. The following sources can be referred to in this regard: VanderKam and Flint (1998), Fields (2009), Collins (2013).

Essenes, and even scribes) from the Second Temple period played in the formation of the movement.

The debate's scope stretches beyond the tolerance and capacity of a single paper. To give an overview of the development of this debate, I will only discuss the main arguments and the more contemporary discourses briefly but will refer as thoroughly as possible to renowned scholars' work concerning all the related aspects. Since keeping the three conversations apart is impossible, I will focus on the five main aspects with their associated topics. These aspects are the Righteous Teacher, the Wicked Priest, the possible schism, the socio-historical context, and the sectarian movement.

The Righteous Teacher

The Teacher of Righteousness or the Righteous Teacher is the only member of the movement mentioned explicitly in the Scrolls. He is, therefore, a crucial character in the debate concerning this movement (cf. Jeremias 1963). Early Qumran scholarship held that:

Qumran was the main (if not the only) Essene settlement, founded about 150–135 BCE because of Essene opposition, led by their founder the Teacher of Righteousness, to the Hasmonean takeover of the Jerusalem high priesthood in the mid-second century BCE ... Because of the antagonism between the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest, the Essenes left Jerusalem. ... [T]he Essenes continued to reside at Qumran, following the rule of the Serek Hayahad, until Qumran was threatened with attack by the Romans during the Jewish Revolt against Rome (66–72 CE). The Essenes then deposited their library in the caves surrounding the site and fled, never to return. (Crawford 2019, 3–4)²

The consensus on the sect's origins and their leader incorporated the idea that this Teacher was probably a priest, or even a high priest, who played a role in the controversies with the Wicked Priest and the "Man of the Lie." However, this supposed consensus started being questioned in the last decades with the unveiling of more texts, especially those from Cave 4.³

The former consensus turned into uncertainties, so much so that some scholars preferred referring to both sobriquets (Righteous Teacher and Wicked Priest) as literary stereotypes (Babota 2020). Charlotte Hempel (2013) typifies the Teacher as an idealised founder figure, while Reinhard Kratz characterises him as a literary stereotype with different attributes. According to Kratz (2020), he is in D an interpreter of the Torah, and in the pesharim, he is the interpreter of the prophets, while in CD, it differs—he is

2 See also Collins (2010b).

3 See Collins (2017) for a discussion on the consensus and the problems associated with it. See also Baumgarten (2002) and Schofield (2009).

the founding figure (CD 1), a dead one (CD 6), and an eschatological one (CD 19–20). Kratz refers to “allusion” and says that this concept is found “in the literary development of the biblical books and is used in the service of ‘inner-biblical’ exegesis. 4QMMT, in turn, reveals how this technique lived on in the ‘extrabiblical’ interpretation of scripture” (Kratz 2020, 93).⁴ Jutta Jokiranta (2013, 219) utilises the social identity approach and describes the Righteous Teacher as a prototype:

The image maximizes the difference with out-groups and minimizes the differences within the in-group; in other words, it provides the members the idea of an ideal member who clearly fortifies the boundaries of this group and shows why those boundaries are legitimate and must remain the way they are. Such an ideal member is not uncertain about his/her commitment and status, not confused by the hostility of his/her adversaries and their success, and not in danger of joining other, more attractive groups. Persecution of the righteous is shown to be condemned in the scriptures, and the fate of the wicked guilty of such is evident, even if not yet fulfilled.

George Brooke argues that the Teacher of Righteousness was a historical figure whom he places in the second century BCE; his most obvious feature was being a priest who either left the temple or was expelled. His priestly role concerned mostly interpreting the tradition and the law, including revealing the hidden aspects of the law (Brooke 2010, 44–47). With reference to 1QpHab 7:4–5, he states, “The interpretative activity of the priestly Teacher has a prophetic quality, a quasi-mantic divinatory tone” (Brooke 2010, 47).⁵ The Righteous Teacher was the centre of the group’s emerging identity. Besides his role as a priest, he also had other functions which emerged from the responsibility of interpreting the hidden aspects. These roles included priest, prophetic interpreter, lawgiver, mantic diviner, poet, and wisdom teacher (Brooke 2010).

According to Timothy H. Lim, it is unexpected that the role of the Teacher of Righteousness is not elaborated in the Peshar Habakkuk. He highlights the evidence (Lim 2020, 32–33):

He was pursued by a Hasmonean priest, called the wicked priest, to his “house of exile”, at Qumran or elsewhere, but nothing is said about what he actually did in response to this hostile incursion (11:2–7). He was the object, and not the subject, of that encounter. The only action that he took was in reprimanding the men of the house of Absalom for not having supported him against the Liar in a dispute over the interpretation of the law (5:8–12). His was a primarily hermeneutical role (2:2–3, 6–10; 7:1–5; 8:1–3). Through the revealed knowledge that he received, the sectarians could understand, should they choose to follow his teachings, all the mysteries of the prophetic oracles, including those matters that passed through the prophet Habakkuk without his cognizance. He was a priest whose form of fulfilment interpretation (peshar) established one important strand

4 See also Kratz (2017).

5 Brooke also states that although this Teacher mostly had priestly features, there were some prophetic characteristics that can also be linked to him (Brooke 2009).

of sectarian scriptural exposition (2:8–10). His authority is derived from God (“from the mouth of God”) and belief in his words is tantamount to remaining faithful in the covenant of God (2:1–10). So important is the Teacher of Righteousness’ role that those who suffer for his sake and have faithfulness in him will be delivered from the house of judgment (8:1–3). As he is portrayed in Peshar Habakkuk, the Teacher of Righteousness is a sacerdotal pedagogue whose distinct form of scriptural interpretation uncovered the meaning of the enigmatic prophetic oracles of old for the sectarian community. There is no sense that he once held the office of the high priest and there is no need to identify him as a figure who held that office in the second century B.C.E., after the death of Alcimus and before the reign of Jonathan.

John J. Collins (Collins 2020b, 177–78) also refers to the role of the Righteous Teacher and says that it “remains something of an enigma.” He mentions that the Teacher only appears in the Damascus Document and the pesharim. Although some scholars believe that the supposed “Teacher Hymns” in the Hodayot (1QH^a IX, 1–XVIII, 14) were written by the Teacher,⁶ others have a different opinion.⁷

More scholars believe that the Righteous Teacher was a historical figure but also discern a development in the perspective of the Yaḥad concerning the Teacher’s teaching authority and his collective memory. Adjustments and elaborations were made to his teachings⁸ to such an extent that even the sobriquets underwent a process of development (Collins 2009). The reference to “teach righteousness in the end of days” (6:11) in CD 6 has led to confusion and added to the idea of a literary and a historical Teacher (Brooke 2010, 35–36). In discussing this text, Collins (2010a, 37) remarked:

A consensus developed, however, that the figure expected at the end of days cannot be identified with the Teacher who played a role in the beginning of the community. Rather, that Teacher is referred to in this passage as the Interpreter of the Law, and the eschatological figure remains in the future.

Collins emphasises that the Damascus Rule is elusive about historical information, but it is clear that the movement had existed a while before the Teacher of Righteousness appeared on the scene. Although the Teacher is not mentioned in the Serek, the Yaḥad is clearly described in the Serek, and surely both the Yaḥad and the Teacher are related in the pesharim (Collins 2010a). Vasile Babota discusses the texts that refer to both the Yaḥad and the Teacher and highlights that 4QpPs^a 1–10 iii, 15–17 is the only text “that clearly and directly describes the important role played by the Righteous Teachers in relation to the sectarian movement.” According to his understanding of this text, the “Teacher founded the עדה ‘Congregation’ and not the קהל ‘Community,’ but according to CD 1, he also did not found it, but God raised (קם) him twenty years after the origins

6 Collins (2020b); see also Collins (2010b) and the argument that these hymns can reflect historical events from the Teacher’s experiences by Davies (1987).

7 He refers to Newsom’s (2004) discussion in this regard.

8 See, inter alia, Garcia Martínez (2010), Stuckenbruck (2010).

of the movement.” The Teacher’s involvement in the forming of the movement is apparent, but the movement that evolved into the Yaḥad moved to Qumran only decades later (Babota 2020, 133–34).

The Wicked Priest

The Wicked Priest is mentioned in the Damascus Document and several times in Peshar Habakkuk (1QpHab), but also in some other pesharim: 4QpPs^a (4Q171) 1–10 iv, 8 and probably in 4QpappIsa^c (4Q163) 30,3 (Babota 2020).⁹ Lim mentions that this figure appears in Peshar Habakkuk for the first time in col. 8, line 8, but the fact that the pesherist started in the previous column with an interpretation of Hab 2:4, referring to two groups, one that will be punished and one that will be delivered from judgement, is an indication that the first group is seen as wicked and the second as righteous (Lim 2020).

According to the early consensus, the initial stages of the movement should be dated to the time of the Maccabean crisis. The coming of the Teacher was consequently seen as a reaction to the usurpation of the high priesthood by Jonathan Maccabee in 152 BCE, which made Jonathan the most probable person to be identified as the Wicked Priest.¹⁰

Lim supports the idea that there might have been more than one “wicked priest”:

The scholarly consensus holds that the epithet of “the wicked priest” (הכהן הרשע) is a play on the similar sounding biblical title “the high priest” (כהן הראשון; 2 Kgs. 25:18; Jer. 52:24; Ezra 7:5; 2 Chr. 19:11; 24:11; 26:20; and 31:10; cf. Bailey 1951; Elliger 1953:266). With a few exceptions (e.g., Dupont-Sommer 1950; Brownlee 1952; van der Woude 1982; Charlesworth 2002:36–37), most scholars understand this title as a reference to a single individual. But there is good reason to think that the grammatically singular title of “the wicked priest” applies to more than one Hasmonean priest. There must have been more than one figure in view, since “the wicked priest” comes to an end in different ways (Brownlee 1982:4–6; Lim 1993:424).¹¹

Lim thinks “wicked priest” is a sobriquet used to describe various priests. According to him, it refers to the last three high priests at the end of the Hasmonean dynasty, Aristobulus II, Hyrcanus II, and Mattathias Antigonus. He bases his argument on how the pesherist imitates the style of the biblical Habakkuk and allusive speech, as well as

9 Collins (2010b, 22) emphasises that “the Hodayot provide no basis at all for speaking of a ‘Wicked Priest.’ It is surprising, to be sure, that this figure never appears outside of the pesharim, but the allusions in the commentaries presuppose that the readers knew of a figure who could be so labelled.”

10 Collins (2010a); see also Burrows (1955), Callaway (1988), VanderKam (1998–1999).

11 Lim (2020, 25). See also his discussion on the usage of *mšl* and *mlk* in Peshar Habakkuk (Lim 2020, 26–27); see also p. 113.

the scholarly agreement that the “Kittim” in Peshar Habakkuk are the Romans (Lim 2020).

Babota (2020, 117) mentions the Hasmonean high priests who might be identified with the Wicked Priest:

Jonathan (152–142 BCE), who was captured and killed by the Seleucids (1 Macc 13:22–23); Simon (142–136 BCE), the brother of Jonathan, who was killed together with his wife and two of his sons by his domestic enemies (1 Macc 16:11–22 // Josephus, *J.W.* 1.54–60); Aristobulus II (67–63 B.C.E.), who was imprisoned in 63, exiled to Rome in 61 B.C.E., and later poisoned while his son was beheaded by Pompey’s supporters (*J.W.* 1.183–184 // *Ant.* 14.123–124); Hyrcanus II (76–66 and 63–40 B.C.E.), who was captured by the Parthians, had his ears mutilated by his nephew Antigonus II, and was later executed by Herod the Great (40–4 B.C.E.; *Ant.* 14.366; 15.183); Antigonus II Mattathias (40–37 B.C.E.), who was executed at the order of the Roman general Mark Anthony (*J.W.* 1.357; *Ant.* 14.490). There is nowadays no significant support in scholarship in favour of Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 B.C.E.) probably because there are other sobriquets in the D.S.S. that fit him better.¹²

The opponents of the Teacher of Righteousness and his followers are mentioned in different texts. The pesharim refer to someone called “the man of the lie.” This figure is also present in the Damascus Document (CD I, 14–21), where he is called “the scoffer,” and his followers are portrayed as those who “seek smooth things.” In Peshar Nahum, these “seekers of smooth things” are exposed as the rivals of Alexander Jannaeus (the Lion of Wrath). They are also named “Ephraim.” It is generally accepted that these persons should be identified with the Pharisees (Collins 2020b). “There is no good reason, then, to conclude that the Teacher and the Man of the Lie were members of the same community. Rather they were leaders of two different parties or sects” (Collins 2020b, 175).

To identify the Wicked Priest, Babota addresses the question of the possible enemies of the Wicked Priest and indicates two possibilities, namely, Jonathan or Hyrcanus II. He concludes that the cumulative evidence points to Jonathan. By referring to the Pharisees’ opposition to Alexander Jannaeus and John Hyrcanus, as well as the fact that the latter urged his widow Salome Alexandra to make peace with the Pharisees, Collins (2020b, 179) concludes that Hyrcanus II might be a possible identification:

We should expect that this reversal of royal favor [Salome Alexandra’s restoration of the Pharisees] did not pass without protest from the other sects. This occasion provides a plausible setting both for MMT and for the confrontation between a sectarian leader and a “wicked priest,” who, in this case, would have been Hyrcanus II, who served as High Priest until 67 B.C.E. and also a second term from 63 to 40.

12 For an extended discussion on the high priest since the exile, refer to Vander Kam (2004).

Collins (2017) and Babota (2020) conclude that any identification of the Wicked Priest remains tentative and that this debate will continue. This debate involves discourses on whether there was only one wicked priest and, if so, who it might be. Or were there a procession of wicked priests? Or is the reference to “wicked priest” a collective name for the Hasmonean priests? The period during which this “wicked priest” operated depends on the complicated dating of texts and communities.

The Possible Schism

From the early days of DSS scholarship, there has been a consensus that the movement developed out of a dispute about the succession of the high priests when members of the movement separated themselves from the rest of Judaism. This consensus was based on the quarrel between the Righteous Teacher and the Wicked Priest, described in the pesharim (Collins 2010a; see also VanderKam 1998–1999). For decades scholars thought that the separation of the movement from the rest of Jewish society could be linked to the time and events surrounding the Maccabean revolt and the disruption of the succession of the high priests. The scholarly assumption was that the Wicked Priest was named “wicked” because he was an illegal appointment. This consensus was put in question with the late release of 4QMMT, which only became public in 1984. “This text states explicitly that the reasons for the separation concerned the interpretation of religious law (halakha) and calendric differences. There is no mention of any dispute about the high priesthood” (Collins 2010a, 9).

Babota confirms that most scholars agree that the catalyst for the split was halakhic and probably also calendric in nature. He proposes the process of Hellenizing and the subsequent Hasmonean revolt as a possible context for the disputes (Babota 2020). Jonathan Ben-Dov highlights the role that the calendar played in the separation. In 4Q394, the scribe copied the calendrical list before the halakhic section of MMT. Ben-Dov emphasises that it was done intentionally to highlight that the calendar was a defining element for both the identity of the sect and the reason for the schism (Ben-Dov 2020). Sidnie White Crawford also refers to the paradigm shift that happened when 4QMMT was revealed: “It is now clear that what separated the sect from the rest of Judaism were primarily differences in legal practices, in particular the practice of purity regulations associated with food and drink, sexuality and the temple cult” (White Crawford 2019, 7).

An interesting contra-voice in this debate is that of Albert I. Baumgarten. He critiques what he calls the “new consensus” and asks: “If the members of a small community cannot agree on terms of admission and on who exercises supreme legal authority in their group, yet they apparently remain a united community, could legal disagreement have been the cause of sectarian schism?” (Baumgarten 2000, 307). He also addresses the calendar and highlights that Karaites and Rabbinites compromised on both legal and calendar disputes. He proposes that studying social and cultural circumstances might bring better insights. These circumstances can include aspects like the “eschatological

temperature,” “political arrangements,” and “regionalism” (Baumgarten 2000, 307–15). He suggests that focusing on the context will be a better strategy “for understanding the flourishing and waning of Jewish divisiveness in its historical variation” (Baumgarten 2000, 315).

Despite the debate on the initial separation of the movement and Judaism, there are also discussions regarding a “split” or “schism” within the movement itself. This notion is based on the idea that the movement was an Essene movement and the Teacher and his followers broke away from this group at a certain stage (Collins 2010a). The “Groningen Hypothesis” formulated by Florentino García Martínez and Adam van der Woude in 1990 is one of the theories that emphasises this notion. According to this hypothesis, the Essene movement was the original group from which the Qumran group originated, and they were ideologically founded in the apocalyptic tradition (see Garcia Martinez and Van der Woude 1990). Another voice claiming a split is that of Gabriele Boccaccini. According to him, the parent group from whom the Qumran Community separated was “Enochic Judaism” (Boccaccini 1998, 16).

According to White Crawford, the weakness in the master narrative of the Qumran-Essene hypothesis was that it was a too simplistic reading of the texts and the archaeological evidence. She argues that these texts are “ideological constructions,” not literal historical accounts (White Crawford 2019, 4). Lim mentions that it is evident that an intra-communal dispute took place between the Teacher of Righteousness and the Man of the Lie and that this dispute was about the interpretation of the halakha, but he (Lim) is not convinced that it should be described as a “schism.” Nevertheless, it was important enough to be mentioned in the pesher (Lim 2020). Collins mentions that there is very little evidence in the texts for such a split (Collins 2010a), but he also states that the group did not come suddenly into being. It was a “gradual process which probably went through several ‘separations’” (Collins 2020a, 168–69). Carol M. Newsom refers to the debate on whether there was a schism in the Essene movement concerning interpretive issues and says that a dispute does not need to be a “formal, public debate. A symbolic act ... may be enough to signal the existence of a dispute to the whole community.” She mentions that a dispute in this context “may have developed as a kind of culture of argumentation, a way of producing knowledge” and should not be presumed to refer to a factional splitting (Newsom 2004, 64–65).

The difficulties in the debate on a possible schism are closely related to the difficulties in defining “a community,” “a sect,” and “a movement” that can relate to this movement. It touches on questions like: What was the origin of the movement? How is this movement related to the Yaḥad, to Khirbet Qumran, and to the texts that were found in the caves?

Socio-Historical Context

The socio-historical context may be addressed by archaeological findings and consequent interpretations. Early scholarship relied much on the work of Roland de Vaux (1973), but it seems that he has “stretched the archaeological evidence to fit the emerging historical narrative ... [D]e Vaux pushed the foundation of the settlement at Qumran (his Period IA) back into the last half of the second century B.C.E. so that it fits into the supposed timetable of CD 1:5–8” (White Crawford 2019, 5).¹³ The more contemporary voices on archaeological findings are Jodi Magness (2004, 2010, 2011, 2012), Dennis Mizzi (2010), Rachael Hachlili (2010), Eric M. Meyers (2010), Mark A. Chancey (Meyers and Chancey 2012), and Jurgen K. Zangenberg (2013).

According to Jodi Magness, “there is no clear or convincing evidence for de Vaux’s Period Ia” (Magness 2002, 63) She redated the formation of the Qumran site and stressed that the numbers reflected in CD are not to be taken literally because they are clearly symbolic, with biblical allusions. She states that according to the current evidence, there is no worthy indication “for dating the establishment of the sectarian settlement at Qumran earlier than ca. 100 B.C.E.” (Magness 2002, 66). Mizzi (2018, 21–23) refers to “the seven major models of Qumran’s architectural development” and highlights the main challenges:

First, we lack good, datable material excavated from critical contexts, such as foundation trenches; and secondly, coins and pottery typology are either ambiguous or imprecise for the narrow range of dates proposed in the various Qumran chronologies. Consequently, one must acknowledge the fact that all the proposed hypotheses are highly speculative, with little or no proper archaeological basis; this is particularly the case with those parts of the models that deal with the Hasmonean Period occupation.

Another archaeological debate concerns how many of the Qumran area’s numerous finds should be linked. There are also opposing viewpoints about the “function of the site and the identity of the inhabitants” (Mizzi 2018, 26). Mizzi states the two paradigms: “that Qumran was a sectarian settlement related to the group(s) behind the Scrolls or that it was anything *but* a sectarian settlement” (Mizzi 2018, 26).

Certain aspects that can be addressed with archaeological evidence are, *inter alia*, questions like: When was the settlement at Khirbet Qumran established? What initiated the establishment of the settlement? Who inhabited it? Another aspect that can be linked to archaeology but is more focused on the physical aspects of the textual findings is palaeography, mainly used to classify scribal hands (see *inter alia* Cross 2000; Tigchelaar 2020). Palaeography can assist in establishing the possible dating of fragments and the material construction of texts. Although this aspect can assist in

13 See in this regard Magness (2002).

identifying and connecting texts, it also has its imperfections, as Eibert Tigchelaar (2018, 531) has indicated:

Shared scribal features indicate a shared scribal culture transmitted through schools, education or close contact. However, in spite of commonalities between copies of texts generally deemed sectarian, the scribal features of the manuscripts themselves do not indicate a common provenance or a specific scribal school. Rather, the collection as a whole, as described in many details by Tov, exhibits at the same time a large variety of manuscripts with different scribal practices, and a cluster of texts that reveal more conformity, and may reflect the scribal culture of its period.

White Crawford does not focus on the relationship of the different communities as portrayed in the different texts, but rather on “Qumran, its library, and the activities taking place there during the Second Temple period” (White Crawford 2019, 1). According to her:

Qumran served as the central library and scribal centre for the Essene movement of Judaism, that it was established to serve that purpose in the first quarter of the first century BCE, and that continued in that function without interruption until its destruction by a Roman legion during the First Jewish Revolt against Rome in 68 CE. (White Crawford 2019, 1)

The social identity of the sectarian movement is based on sociological studies (cf. Grossman 2010; Newsom 2004) pertaining to sectarianism (Baumgarten 1997; Jokiranta 2001, 2010, 2013, 2020; Regev 2007), apocalypticism (Brooke 2010; Collins 1990, 1997), and mysticism (Regev 2007).

The fundamental concern in discussing something like the social identity of the sectarian movement has to do with the words “social” and “sectarian.” Both these words refer to sociological aspects, which are not necessarily included in literary compositions. First, it is necessary to discern to which social group we are referring by utilising the term “sectarian”; second, we need to understand that sociological aspects touch on factors that are not clearly mentioned in texts, such as ideology, religious practices, social-psychological aspects, spirituality, political hotspots, conflicting interpretations, the tension between communities, and historical links to specific communities.

Jokiranta mentions that “identity is defined in relation to others. Sociology of sectarianism is found useful for depicting groups in general terms. The concepts of ‘sect’ and ‘sectarianism’ can be applied in a controlled manner ... Beliefs and practices can be placed on a continuum, which shows the degree of tension with the surrounding society” (Jokiranta 2013, 1). She mentions further that identity functions on different levels. There are individual levels, as well as collective levels. She defines social identity as follows: “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 1). In defining a social identity,

one distinguishes oneself as part of a certain group, unlike another. This involves comparisons and makes identity dynamic and reliant on circumstances. A group might have continuous features which might define such a group, but certain aspects might be dynamic and changeable. Jokiranta (2013) emphasises that identity is part of a constructing development, which involves the margins of a group being continuously reformed.

The concept of “sect” is difficult to define. Jokiranta uses “the theoretical framework by Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, and their three elements of tension in particular.” This approach is described as follows (Jokiranta 2013, 215):

According to this approach, a sect is a religious movement that is at the high-tension end on a continuum that reflects the relationship of the religious group to the wider socio-cultural environment. It is crucial that, according to this model, a sect does not have a specific set of characteristics but is a relative concept, moving on the continuum and dependent on the context in which it is viewed. Tension, or deviance, is further defined by three elements, difference (deviant norms and practices), antagonism (particularism and claim for unique legitimacy), and separation (control and restriction of social relations). These three elements are also to be seen on three continuums, the average of which will define the tension of the group. In this way, a group of people is always to be seen on a continuum, not as a fixed entity.

Although Jokiranta identifies limitations in this approach, especially in connection with the Hasmonian context, understanding what a “sect” involves opens new opportunities to study this movement. One of her observations is that “too much has been made of the differences between D and S on the social level” (Jokiranta 2013, 215). She highlights that social identity can change and transform over time and that these changes depend on the changing context. Some groups can become more or less extreme, which indicates that a group’s social identity can differ in different stages of its development. Therefore, a group needs to be aware of continuity in its social identity. This awareness links with collective memories and the content of such memories. In this regard, she identifies the Righteous Teacher as part of this movement’s collective memories, “to which the group assigns special importance and whose prototypical character it promotes as the content of the shared social identity” (Jokiranta 2013, 220).

Eyal Regev applied Wilson’s general typology of “introversionist” sects in his study of the Qumran sectarians. He refers to the dualistic framework according to which this group believed that all humans are sinful and doomed except if one is elected and justified by God. He says that this worldview has two social consequences. It defines the outside world as everything sinful, immoral, and in rebellion against God, and the other side as the ones who overcame the temptation of sin, those who are elected by God. The elected group keep themselves separate from the possible penetration of evil by a set of boundaries as “expressed through a discourse of moral purity and impurity, interwoven with rules of ritual purity and impurity” (Regev 2007, 378). Regev reached the following conclusion:

The application of the social theory of sectarian ideology and especially comparisons with other introversionist sects underline the differences between the two groups represented by the Community Rule and the Damascus Covenant. These differences demonstrate that the two are distinctive sects, and although they share many literary and ideological points of resemblance, they vary in many significant religious and social characteristics. (Regev 2007, 79)

Regev describes the differences that he identified between the Yahad and the Damascus Covenant. These are, *inter alia*, differences concerning their social boundaries, their structure and organisation, life in these sects, their recognition of revelations, mysticism, other spiritual notions, as well as their structure concerning overseers, priests, and other religious regulations (Regev 2007; see also Regev 2011).

Albert I. Baumgarten, regarded by both Jokiranta and Regev as the pioneer of the sociological study of the Jewish sects, discusses the various Jewish sects that thrived in the Maccabean era. He highlights three shared aspects that need to be considered: All sects have a voluntary and a protesting nature, which they define with purity rules. This means that an individual voluntarily joins a sect, that all sects protest some practices in their society that they do not support, and that sects define themselves through purity rules. He defines a sect as follows: “a voluntary association of protest, which utilizes boundary marking mechanisms—the social means of differentiating between insiders and outsiders—to distinguish between its own members and those otherwise normally regarded as belonging to the same national or religious entity” (Baumgarten 1997, 7).

White Crawford also emphasises that these texts cannot be read “as if they were historical narratives, presenting a straightforward picture of the sect’s origins” (White Crawford 2019, 4). Instead, they should be considered as texts brimming with symbols, metaphors and the “classical scriptural texts of Israel, which made them ideological constructions instead of literal historical accounts” (p. 4).

It is clear that sociological approaches, whether through the study of sociological identities pertaining to sectarianism, apocalypticism, or mysticism are important in socio-historical studies of the sectarian movement of the DSS. It opens questions concerning the kind of sect, what is involved in the studies of sectarian movements, and how much transformation happened in the development of the movement. What is considered historical, and what is part of collective memories?

The socio-historical context in which the movement lived, and the political and related circumstances can all become clear in studies of the historical evidence from the works of Josephus, Philo, Pliny, and others.¹⁴ These historical writings can add some background on the Jewish movements which existed and the differences between them.

14 The classical works can be studied as well as translations of and publications on them. See, *inter alia*, Mason (2008) and Taylor (2007, 2010, 2012).

This information can assist in discerning which movement corresponds the most with the one described in the Scrolls (see Collins 2010a).

Regarding the socio-historical context of this movement, there are still more questions than answers, such as: When was the settlement at Khirbet Qumran established? What initiated the establishment of the settlement? Who inhabited it? Which social group are we referring to by discussing the “sectarian movement of the DSS”? How are they related to Khirbet Qumran, the “new covenant,” and the Yahad? What kind of sect was it, how much transformation happened in the movement’s development, what can be considered historical, and what is part of collective memories?

The Sectarian Movement

A discussion on the sectarian movement touches on almost every aspect that has been discussed above, as well as on aspects like the “New Covenant” in the Damascus Document (CD, 4QD), and the Yahad in both the Serek ha-Yahad (1QS) and the pesharim. This aspect is included in a discussion on the relationship between S and D and the paradigm shift that happened with the release of 4QMMT. The sectarian movement also links with discussions about the roles that different groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Zadokites, Scribes, and Essenes) from the Second Temple period had in forming the movement, as well as the discernment between sectarian and non-sectarian documents.

The Relationship Between the Community Rule (S) and the Damascus Document (D)

Different debates originated because the texts did not intend to give a historical record and consequently contradict each other. Hempel confirms that the once distinctive, unique, and confident picture of the “Qumran community” has faded (Hempel 2010). Hempel considers the points of contact between S and D and reflects “that the reason we witness so-called parallels between S and other compositions, chiefly D and 4Q265, is because they are based on some of the same source material” (Hempel 2010, 129). She states that most of the intricate literary constructions are the result of scribal activity, but it does not mean that there were no real events that can be linked to the final literary creations. The fact that a large portion of the material that eventually formed S originated outside of Qumran makes one wonder how much of the tradition it upholds might correspond to similar information elsewhere. She does not support the idea that 1QS can be assigned to an educated elite. According to her, these texts create a “fluid picture of literary activity with influences and material shared in some remarkable ways between D and S as well as other compositions” (Hempel 2010, 131).

Collins (2009, 351) gives a compressed description of the challenges that these texts create in discerning “a” Community:

The Dead Sea Scrolls refer to different kinds of communities. The *Damascus Document* speaks of people who live “in camps” throughout the land and marry and have children. The *Rule of the Community*, in contrast, does not speak of women or children at all. It does, however, speak of small communities with a quorum of ten, as part of the *yahad*. The *Rule of the Community* also speaks enigmatically of twelve men and three priests, who are supposed to go into the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. It is possible but not certain that these were the founders of the Qumran settlement. Qumran was surely a sectarian settlement in Roman times. It is possible, but not proven, that it was a Hasmonean fort before the Romans came.¹⁵

The relationship between the Community Rule (S) and the Damascus Document (D) forms most of the grounds for an endeavour to understand the sectarian movement. It is clear that the S tradition evolved, but scholars are still debating the direction of its development. Some (Alexander, Tov, cf. Dimant 1995, 2011) explain it as “from earlier manuscripts to later ones,” others (Vermes, cf. Metso, 1997, 2000) “from short to long,” and others “from ‘the many’ to ‘the sons of Zadok’” (Hempel 2010, 116).

Alison Schofield mentions that the Community at Qumran certainly formed part of the audience of S, but earlier equations of the *Yahad* with the Community living there restricted the understanding of the movement at large as well as the development of S. She encourages a broader heuristic model, outside the pattern of reading Qumran into the sectarian texts. She states that it is clear that the traditions in S deviated early and that this can be the product of multiple scribal circles which were not restricted to Qumran. She bases this argument mainly on the different versions of the penal code, which she believes points to different socio-historical contexts (Schofield 2009).

As Regev has noted, the terminology for the sectarian movement can be confusing. The term *Yahad* is generally used in scholarship without a clear meaning. The use of terms such as “the Qumran Community,” “the Qumran sectarians,” and “the Qumran Essenes,” leads to an ambiguous connection “between the group(s) represented in documents found in the Qumran caves, the identity of the inhabitants at the archaeological site at Khirbet Qumran, and the classification of these groups as the Essenes.” The precise identity of the groups in the scrolls is also confusing and unclear. “It is clear that Serekh ha-*Yahad* (1QS) and Serekh ha-‘Eda (1QSa) are related to the group called *Yahad*. But what about the scrolls other than 1QS and 1QSa?” (Regev 2011, 41).

15 See also Collins (2010a).

4QMMT

With the publication of 4QMMT, it became clear that the debate broadened.¹⁶ MMT reinforced the idea that this movement diverged from other parties, primarily because of halakhic issues (Collins 2020a; Hempel 2020). The pronouns in this text have led to a number of debates. The earliest argument was from Elisha Qimron, who argued that there was a “we” group with the Righteous Teacher as their leader, a “you” group that was led by the Wicked Priest, and a “they” group which constituted the opponents of the “we” group (Qimron and Strugnell 1985). The “they” group was also identified with the Pharisees, while the author’s halakhic position was associated with that of the Sadducees (see Hempel 2020).

Gareth Wearne responds to the traditional view of 4QMMT, which held that it was a letter sent from the founders of the movement at the time of the schism with the Jerusalem authorities. Wearne proposes that this document might not have originated with the Yahad or its founders. According to him, the irenic tone does not suit the portrayal of the addressees as opponents, and there is also no indication of a schism between the authors and the Temple authorities. The concept of MMT as a communication between two parties sympathetic to one another opens the possibility that the Yahad, or its founders, were the addressees of MMT, receiving a letter from a group that also opposed certain halakhic practices but without refusing to worship at the Temple. Wearne reasons that this hypothesis also explains why this document was preserved at Qumran (Wearne 2019). Steven D. Fraade originally argued that 4QMMT was addressed to the Yahad. He says, “We need to reframe our view of 4QMMT from extramural polemic to intramural parenesis” (Fraade 2000, 526).

Hempel states that “the halakhic discourse we find in 4QMMT is part and parcel of a continuum that has left its mark on other texts from the corpus of the Scrolls.” She says that the irenic tone in this work might be explicable as follows: “The recognition of the halakhic debate of 4QMMT as reflecting *internal discourse* as much as engagement with outsiders also offers an appealing and innovative explanation” (Hempel 2020, 136). In this regard, Collins (2020a, 168–69) also remarks about the development of the group as well as their halakhic issues as follows:

There is no need to assume that the author’s group has just come into being. On the contrary, the authors present an elaborate set of halakhic issues, which must have taken some time to develop. Whether the author’s group has separated from the rest of the people or not, it must have been in existence for some time. The emergence of a sectarian movement, such as we find in the Scrolls, was a gradual process which probably went through several separations in the course of its history. In the case of the community of

16 Unfortunately, it will not be possible to give a thorough discussion of this text in this essay. The following sources can be consulted: Qimron and Strugnell (1994), Kratz (2020), Drawnel (2020).

the new covenant, the formation of a community, with procedures for admission and expulsion, probably preceded the decision to separate from the Temple.

Jewish Groups

Another aspect that adds to the debate concerning the movement is the role that different groups played in the formation of the group. This comprises arguments that the reference to “sons of Zadok” indicates that they were Zadokites;¹⁷ the idea that the movement’s halakah was polemically against that of the Pharisees (Lim 2020); the indication that their halakah corresponds with that of the Sadducees;¹⁸ and then the major question of whether it was an Essene movement or not (see in this regard Collins 2010a).

The origin of the Community as well as the origin of the sectarian movement is a much-debated issue. Some scholars claim it to be an outgrowth of the Sadducee movement; others lay it at the door of the Pharisee movement, but the position taken most strongly since the discovery of the writings is that the group owes its origin to the Essene movement. As the Essene movement disappeared without a trace, it was assumed that they were the inhabitants of Qumran. The position became so strong that the Essenes were later equated with the Qumran inhabitants and vice versa (Talmon 1994). Talmon emphasises the unique character of this Community (Talmon 1994, 17):

The Community of the Renewed Covenant should be viewed as a socioreligious phenomenon *sui generis* which cannot be identified with any subdivision of Second Temple Judaism of which the classical sources speak. Similarities of the yahad’s ritual laws with Zadokite or Sadducee halakha, of its communal structure with that of the Essenes, of the Covenanters’ legalistic outlook with that of the Samaritans, or of their religious vocabulary which at times overlaps with the creedal terminology of primitive Christianity—these similarities resulted from a common fund of traditions rooted in the Hebrew Bible, which was the heritage of all or most configurations of Judaism at the turn of the era.

17 Collins addresses this argument as follows: “It is quite possible that the insertion of ‘sons of Zadok’ into the *Serek* does not reflect the rise to power of a particular priestly group, but is an honorific title, similar to the usage in the *Damascus Rule*” (2010a, 64).

18 See Schiffman (1992, 1993); Collins (2010a); see also the “Groningen Hypothesis” in this regard in García Martínez (2007). It seems that in all the debates on whether this movement was an Essene movement or whether the Essene movement originated from this sectarian movement, the one point of agreement is that the sectarian movement was not equal to the Essenes, in the sense that the one movement did not absorb or encompass the totality of the other movement.

Sectarian or Non-Sectarian

The dichotomy between sectarian and non-sectarian works is a major concern in the endeavour to discern a possible sectarian movement. Florentino García Martínez has argued that this distinction should no longer be acknowledged (García Martínez 2010a, 2010b). The primary endeavour in this regard is to discern between documents adopted by the movement and documents that originated from the movement itself. Devorah Dimant has gone into detail to clarify different texts accordingly (Dimant 2000, 2014).

Although this discernment seems to be helpful, discerning is not that simple. It involves a judgment between which documents were copied by the Community and the whole scribal freedom and interpretation process, on which White Crawford (2019) elaborates. Mladen Popović emphasises that we should remember that the production and formation of texts and the transmission of traditions were dynamic processes (Popović 2010). The contemporary voices want to argue for a complex movement and a continuum, part of a continuous changing and adjusting movement.¹⁹ Discernment between sectarian and non-sectarian also involves a judgement between documents that were authoritative for the movement or not (Popović 2010).

The difficulty of this endeavour and the sensibleness and value of such a distinction led to a contentious debate. It opens questions like: What does “sectarian literature” mean today? Does “sectarian” refer to the community that lived at Khirbet Qumran, or does it mean the *yahad*? Is sectarian another word for the movement called Essenes? Is the term “sectarian” satisfactory to describe the group presented by the scrolls? Is it possible to equally judge all the genres included in the scrolls on religious practices and historical, ideological, and sociological evidence? How much scope should one give to the possibility of the development of thoughts, ideologies, and sociological identity in the scrolls?

Concluding Remarks

In this overview of the debate, it has become clear that there are still more questions than answers.²⁰ In particular, there is the question of the identity of the Teacher of

19 See, inter alia, Jokiranta (2010); Collins (2020a); Regev (2011).

20 An attempt was made to address some of these questions during the international virtual Qumran conference that was hosted by the Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria between 11 and 13 May 2021. The theme of this conference was *The Origin of the Sectarian Movement in the Dead Sea Scrolls*. The lively conversations prompted all the conference contributors to rethink their papers. The thoroughly reworked and, in some cases entirely new, contributions with their origin in the conference on the sectarian movement(s) of the Dead Sea Scrolls were compiled in *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* vol. 144 (Collins and Geysers-Fouché 2022).

Righteousness, and the question of which textual references can be regarded as historical and which rely on the memory and changing ideology of the authors.

Further questions are: Was there only one wicked priest, and if so, who was it? Or were there a procession of wicked priests? Is the reference to “wicked priest” perhaps a collective name for the Hasmonean priests? The period in which this “wicked priest” operated depends on the complicated dating of texts and communities.

The difficulties in the debate on a possible schism are closely related to the challenges involved in defining “a community,” “a sect,” and “a movement.” It touches on questions like: What was the origin of the movement? How is this movement related to the Yahad, to Khirbet Qumran, or to the texts found in the caves?

About the socio-historical context of this movement, there are questions like: When was the settlement at Khirbet Qumran established? Who inhabited it? Which social group are we referring to by discussing the “sectarian movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls”? What kind of sect was it? How much transformation happened in the development of the movement? What can be considered historical, and what is part of collective memories?

Concerning the sectarian movement, all the above questions are relevant as well as a few others, namely: What does “sectarian literature” mean today? Is the term “sectarian” fitting to describe the group that the scrolls present? Is it possible to equally judge all the genres included in the scrolls on religious practices and historical, ideological, and sociological evidence? Finally, how much scope should one give to the possibility of a development in thoughts, ideologies, and sociological identity in the movement and the scrolls?

The most suitable concluding remark might be that the debate continues. As much as that is true, so much does one want to get to some decision on what can and what cannot be discerned. The old, supposed consensus has proved to not be that simple. The study of the sectarian movement of the DSS has proved to be a complex undertaking that encompasses a range of aspects.

Contemporary voices argue for a complex movement and a continuum. George Brooke suggests that it might be better to cease looking for a single result (2010, 39–40):

To my mind there has for too long been a tendency in Qumran scholarship to look for the single point answer to many of the problems with which scholars are faced when considering the Scrolls. To suggest that the Qumran community emerged out of a movement which had a single point of origin in the complexities of the third century B.C.E. or even earlier, and that the chief characteristic of that origin was apocalyptic or apocalypticism is to undermine the complexity of the data and to focus on one aspect alone.

Mladen Popović emphasises that we should remember that the production and formation of texts and the transmission of traditions were dynamic processes (Popović 2010).

The tendency of scholars to compartmentalise texts is an anachronistic exercise. Perhaps one should make peace with the nature of texts; these texts are intertwined and interwoven with theologies, ideologies, politics, history, symbolic language, and biblical stereotypes. The sectarian movement of the DSS was not a constant and stagnant community that came into being at a set time and remained the same. It was constantly changing and adapting by being influenced by different currents of thought. Its members still stood with one foot in traditional Judaism as they began to listen to the voices of their time until, later, they could not help but start moving.

The scribes never intended to retell history but to send a message to their community. The endeavour of having texts say the same thing is almost like expecting the Bible to have one message or one theology. The socio-historical aspects are important for reconstructing the context in which the writings were written, but this may restrict the texts and deprive them of their real intention. The rich diversity in these texts reflects the forms of Judaism of that time, and by studying them from different perspectives and methodologies, we will keep honouring their diversity as long we never again arrive at a consensus.

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