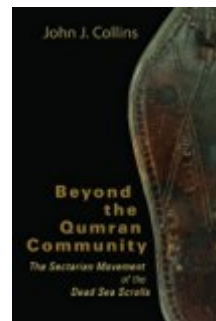


John Joseph Collins. *Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectarian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010. xii + 266 pp. Illustrations. \$25.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8028-2887-3.



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Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars, pseudo-scholars, journalists, and laypeople alike have all debated the question of the identity of the mysterious community of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This debate has reached a fevered pitch in recent years. Many continue to reaffirm the traditional Essene hypothesis while others have argued for new approaches to framing the debate of origins and identity. Still others maintain that the entire search for a community is misguided and that the scrolls do not represent a collection of a unified group.

Like the Essene hypothesis, the identification of Khirbet Qumran as the settlement of the sectarian community of the Dead Sea Scrolls was affirmed in the earliest days of scholarly research and remains the dominant theory. Yet, recent years have witnessed the re-identification of Qumran as everything from a *villa rustica*, pottery production site, or military fortress, to some modified version of a sectarian settlement. One further variable in each of these conversations is the present availability of the entire corpus of (al-

beit fragmentary) Dead Sea Scrolls. Whereas scholars working prior to the 1990s had a very incomplete set of data, scholars now can reassess old theories and propose new ones and definitively assert that they have examined all of the preserved textual data. At the same time, we still lack complete excavation reports for Khirbet Qumran. Sixty years of research on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran--and a frenetic past twenty years--has produced a seemingly endless stream of theories and approaches.

Into this fray enters John J. Collins's new book *Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectarian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. The bulk of its pages carefully assess the merits and drawbacks of many of the prevailing theories on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran. At the same time as Collins deftly critiques sixty years of scholarship, he offers his own vision for the origins of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their relationship to the site of Qumran. Collins is well positioned to undertake both tasks, having long been active in the study of the scrolls. His sobering approach to the material

allows the evidence to speak for itself—rather than the phenomenon Collins observes far too often, of scholars speaking for the text (and, of course, saying far too much). In this sense, a good deal of this volume consists of a careful deconstruction of other approaches, many of which are rendered speculative at best by the textual or archaeological evidence. His analysis of the textual evidence is restrained, perhaps too restrained for many. But, in the end, this judicious approach often leaves the reader in agreement with Collins versus the alternatives.

Following an Introduction, the volume consists of five core chapters, each devoted to a central area of inquiry. A bibliography and indices (modern authors, ancient names and sobriquets, ancient sources) conclude the volume. It is unfortunate that the volume lacks a subject index.

Chapter 1 examines the community that stands behind the Damascus Document, identified by Collins as the “New Covenant.” In chapter 2, Collins turns his attention to the *yahad*, the self-identification for the community that emerges in other texts (especially the Rule of the Community). Collins’s treatment of these two social groups and their respective literary record separately represents an important shift in thinking about what it means to consider the unity of the Dead Sea Scrolls corpus. This approach avoids the harmonizing tendencies among much past and present research on the scrolls. In chapter 1, Collins argues for a new understanding of the core identity of the New Covenant. It was fiercely devoted to the proper observance of the law, though there is clearly an eschatological urgency involved in this religious piety. Yet, there is no evidence to indicate that the community withdrew from the center of Jewish life. At the same time, the historical context is unclear. He rightfully rejects any rigid chronology based on the opening column of the Damascus Document, which he identifies as interested in the internal development of the community, not history. Rather, he

takes a much more conservative approach by arguing that the best we can do is suggest that the New Covenant began sometime before the first half or middle of the second century BCE, the date of the earliest manuscript of the Damascus Document (4Q266) (p. 36).

Chapter 2 shifts attention to the Rule of the Community, which has often guided reconstructions of the Dead Sea Scrolls community. Collins reiterates what seems patently clear from the text: the Rule of the Community represents a distinct and well-defined sectarian community that calls itself the *yahad*. After discussing the nature of relationship of the *yahad* to the New Covenant, Collins searches after its elusive social setting. Perhaps Collins’s most ambitious argument in this chapter is to sever the exclusive association of the Rule of the Community with a singular *yahad* (pp. 65-69). Rather, he observes that passages such as 1QS 6:1-8 seems to reflect a *yahad* scattered throughout different dwellings. Thus, he suggests: “*yahad* was an umbrella term for several communities of variable size” (p. 67). This phenomenon, argues Collins, helps us understand why the Rule of the Community is preserved in multiple recensions. The diverse versions were not copied alongside one another in the same community (i.e., Qumran), but rather multiples communities, and were brought together at Qumran only in anticipation of coming crises (pp. 68-69). This attempt to rethink the origins of the collection is an important first step in understanding the relationship of other texts and the corpus as a whole.

Chapter 3 wades into the murky historical context for the emergence of the New Covenant community. Collins rejects many long-standing consensus. As in chapter 1, he denies the possibility that the opening column of the Damascus Document—long employed to locate sectarian origins in the second century BCE—contains a historically reliable chronology. He also embraces Jodi Magness’s re-dating of the sectarian settlement of Qumran to the first part of the first century BCE

(pace Roland de Vaux's second century dating, long assumed to be an attempt to agree with the presumed chronology of the Damascus Document). The bulk of the chapter focuses on Collins's rejection of the long-held view that the community was forged on account of a dispute over high-priestly succession in the Hasmonean period and the implications of this new perspective for rethinking the identity of the Wicked Priest. As observed by Collins, debate over Jewish law and ritual is at the core of sectarian origins, a point made clear by 4QMMT. The cumulative effect of this evidence is to free the discussion of historical origins from the restraints of the second century BCE and debate on priestly legitimacy.

Chapter 4 moves to the main stage of discussion of the identity of the community--its presumed Essene character. This chapter is a mix of arguments for methodological refinement in reading the evidence of the Essenes in the classical sources and re-evaluating the many similarities in geographic setting, thought, and practice between the scrolls and the presentation of the Essenes in these sources. While the latter approach has been the hallmark of all such discussions, the former has been sorely lacking. Collins spends considerable space treating questions such as the relationship between the presentation of the Essenes in Josephus and Philo, Josephus's knowledge of the Essenes, and possible literary sources upon which these writers drew. Ultimately, the evidence long adduced to support an Essene identity for the scrolls, argues Collins, remains compelling. If anything, we should rethink our confidence in the ability of Philo and Josephus to preserve the full Essenes of history.

In chapter 5, Collins explores the many theories on Khirbet Qumran. He argues that the evidence still supports the dominant theory that identifies the site as a sectarian settlement. For example, the many stepped pools are best explained as ritual baths (*miqva'ot*), rather than the forced suggestion that they were used to collect sediment

for pottery production. Furthermore, the large number of *miqva'ot* points to a group of inhabitants very clearly focused on ritual purity. Yet, our notion of the sectarian character of the site is changing. For example, he agrees with Magness in locating the beginnings of sectarian settlement in the first century BCE, while following other scholars in seeing the site in the earlier period as possibly a fortress. Moreover, Collins earlier severed the absolute connection of Qumran and the *yahad*, so it is not surprising that he allows for the possibility of even limited sectarian settlement at Qumran.

This book advances considerably our understanding of the origins and identity of the communities of the Dead Sea Scrolls, while also revealing much of what we cannot uncover. Yet, with so much emphasis on the communities, Collins never quite places the Dead Sea Scrolls corpus as a whole in context. To be sure, he does explain several curiosities in the collection, such as the ongoing copying of the Damascus Document in the *yahad* or the multiple recensions of the Rule of the Community. But, we never get a sense of what all the texts are doing together in the caves, or where they were before they got there. This question is rendered even more urgent by Collins's identification of multiple groups in the scrolls and a decentralized *yahad*. What was the function of these texts for these various groups? He twice suggests that the Qumran caves were a destination for sacred scrolls in anticipation of coming crises (pp. 68-69, 210). But, this type of mere speculation hardly does justice to the complexity of the placement of the scrolls in the caves. In particular, it is surprising that the Copper Scroll receives no mention in the entire book. The presence of a text with apparent connections to the first century CE Jerusalem temple establishment surely deserves attention in light of the *yahad*'s rejection of the present temple as polluted. Notwithstanding these limitations, this book is a remarkable achievement both in content and accessibility. It is highly

recommended for all students and scholars of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism.

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