

Constructing Ancient Judaism from the Scrolls

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Abstract and Keywords

Most of the Dead Sea Scrolls can be classified as religious documents of one kind or another, and all the studies since 1947 that have been devoted to their significance can be characterized as attempts to construct some aspect of ancient Judaism from them. Where agreement has been harder to achieve is on the centrality of the role to be accorded to the evidence from the scrolls in constructing a picture of Judaism in the last centuries BCE and the first century CE. Although the scrolls provide reason to believe that some sectarians believed that much was wrong with the Temple in Jerusalem, no text actually states that sectarians should avoid the Temple altogether. The question for the historian is whether the evidence from such texts should be enough to encourage the view that sectarian Jews with such beliefs would cut themselves off from the Temple.

Keywords: Dead Sea Scrolls, religious documents, Judaism, Dead Sea sectarians, Temple in Jerusalem, Second Temple, sectarian Jews

MOST—if not all—of the Dead Sea Scrolls can be classified as religious documents of one kind or another, and all the studies since 1947 that have been devoted to the significance of the scrolls can be characterized as attempts to construct some aspect of ancient Judaism from them. It is generally agreed that the result has been an increase in the understanding of long-known elements of Judaism in antiquity, such as bible interpretation, mysticism, law, and the calendar, and that the scrolls have also raised a host of new questions, such as the identity and role of the Teacher of Righteousness who played such an important role in the history of the *yahad* as understood by the members of the community. Where agreement has been harder to achieve is on the centrality or marginality of the role to be accorded to the evidence from the scrolls in constructing a picture of Judaism in the last centuries BCE and the first century CE.

Normal historical method would require the scrolls, along with other archaeological finds, to be themselves the main basis of historical reconstructions of the period when they were composed and copied, since all other evidence was either composed or preserved by later writers and thus may reflect the preoccupations and presuppositions of

later periods. In practice, however, the lure of later Jewish (p. 82) and Christian traditions has generally proved too strong for the scrolls to be allowed to speak for themselves. In part this is simply a function of language, since terms such as ‘bible’, ‘apocalyptic’, ‘wisdom’, and ‘messianism’ inevitably carry over into the study of the scrolls some of the meanings and resonance that accrue to them in the later traditions. Thus, for instance, the collection of authoritative texts at Qumran collected by Martin Abegg, Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich, and published as *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich 2000), imports from outside the scrolls themselves both the notion that the sectarians would have recognized a specific identifiable collection of authoritative texts—that is, a biblical canon—and the assumption that Qumran fragments of literary works known from later biblical manuscript traditions can be assumed to come from those biblical works unless there is evidence to the contrary—this assumption indeed underlies the reconstruction of most of the fragmentary texts which survive. Such assumptions may often be correct, but they should always be recognized as what they are (i.e. assumptions), so that deductions based upon them can only be provisional at best. And occasionally such assumptions may mislead, as the study which follows, most of which was composed originally for a conference devoted to putting the Dead Sea Scrolls into their historical context and focused on the specific issue of the relationship of the Qumran sectarians to the Temple in Jerusalem (Goodman 2010), may illustrate.

It is commonly asserted by specialists in the scrolls that the Qumran sectarians turned their back on the Temple in Jerusalem and constructed for themselves a new Judaism in which the life and prayers and sacred meals of the community took the place of the sacrifices performed by the priests (e.g. Schürer 1979). Such a separation is indeed taken so much for granted by many scholars that texts that profess a more positive attitude to the Temple are sometimes deemed to belong to an early period in the history of the sect simply for this reason (e.g. Schiffman 2000; Hempel 2010). This standard view is not, of course, without a basis in the scrolls themselves. Passages in sectarian scrolls refer to a time in the past when the (or a) community, or its leader (the Teacher of Righteousness), broke with a wicked priest (1QpHab 11: 4–6), and other texts refer to a time in the future when a corrupt priest or priests will suffer for their sins (1QpHab 11: 10–15; 12: 2–6). The texts also in some places describe the community as being itself in some sense now a sacrifice offered to God in atonement for sin (1QS 8: 4–6; 4QS^e; 4QS^e 2: 11–15). Plenty of texts suggest dissatisfaction with the way that the Temple is run (Gärtner 1965). Peshar Habakkuk suggests a radical disagreement over how the calendar should be fixed, which many have argued prevented the sectarians from acknowledging the validity of what the Temple priests did and encouraged their separation from the mainstream (1QpHab 11: 6–9; cf. Campbell 2002: 106–7). But although the scrolls provide much reason to believe that some sectarians at least believed that much was wrong with the Temple in Jerusalem, no text actually states that sectarians should avoid the Temple altogether. The question for the historian is whether the (p. 83) evidence from such texts should be enough to encourage the view that sectarian Jews with such beliefs *would* cut themselves off from the Temple.

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At the heart of any answer to this question is the much wider question of the model of Second Temple Judaism against which the Qumran evidence should be interpreted. It is familiar that scholars on the scrolls occasionally complain that their colleagues stress too much either the Christian aspects of the texts (such as messianism, cf. Schiffman 1994), or the rabbinic (by describing sectarian rules as *halakhah*, cf. Strugnell 1994: 65–6), but if, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, historians should start with the contemporary evidence from before 70 CE, in principle neither Christianity nor rabbinic Judaism should provide the obvious model, since both religious systems developed out of earlier Judaism only during the first century CE, after the composition and writing down of many of the scrolls. Clearly the Dead Sea sectarians may have had a great deal in common with both Christians and rabbinic Jews simply because they shared texts which they all treated as in some sense authoritative, but, as is obvious from the differences between rabbis and Christians, the sectarians also might have evolved in quite different ways in the interpretation of those texts. In the study of other ancient religions, it is taken for granted that the use of later material to interpret earlier data is unhelpful—it is commonly recognized, for example, that there is no good reason to read into the archaeological and epigraphic evidence for Mithraism in the late first century CE, when it first started to spread through the Roman world, any of the sophisticated philosophical and syncretistic notions to be found among worshippers of Mithras in the fourth century CE (see e.g. Beck 1998; Claus 2000)—and in principle the same should be possible for the scrolls.

My suggestion, then, is that one should try to study the scrolls in the light of the evidence which has not been affected by either Christianity or rabbinic Judaism. This is not all that easy to achieve, but it is worth, as an experiment, asking what would be known about Second Temple Judaism if the only data available were archaeological and epigraphic remains, the comments of pagan authors who wrote before c. 100 CE, and (of course) the scrolls themselves. I shall take for granted that, although the evidence to be taken into account in this experiment will naturally include not only the scrolls themselves but the caves where they were found and the site of Qumran itself, it will be appropriate, in light of continuing uncertainties about the relationship between the scrolls, the caves, and the settlement site, to seek to understand each of these types of evidence separately before they are considered in the light of each other. It should not be controversial to argue that the site at Qumran needs to be examined in its regional context to see which aspects of the site encourage an interpretation as a settlement of religious sectarians; that a variety of explanations of the archaeological continuities between the site and the caves need to be explored before it can be assumed that they demonstrate that the people who used the caves lived on the site; and that arguments that the scrolls could have been brought from elsewhere before being (p. 84) deposited in the caves need to be taken seriously (Golb 1995). That is to say: an attempt needs to be made to understand the scrolls without archaeological as well as without historical preconceptions.

The rationale for attempting in this way to escape rabbinic and Christian categories in understanding the scrolls rests not simply on basic principles in the study of ancient religions but also, and more precisely, in the history of the interpretation of Judaism in this period. It is sobering to realize that even the Judaism of Philo was unknown to the world

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of rabbinic Judaism until the sixteenth century, when it was first published by Azariah de Rossi (Azariah de Rossi 2001); that most of the Jewish pseudepigrapha preserved in the Christian tradition either in Greek or in translations from the Greek were only recognized as what they are in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Charlesworth 1976); that the revolution in knowledge of early medieval Judaism brought about by the discovery of the Cairo Genizah occurred only at the end of the nineteenth century (Reif 2000); and that the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves have of course been known only for sixty years (VanderKam and Flint 2005). We can now be certain that if, for instance, a learned rabbi like Rashi believed, before the Renaissance, that he knew the nature of Second Temple Judaism from the rabbinic texts, he will have been wrong, but it would be just as naive for us now to believe that we have a full set of data from which to understand the nature of Judaism in this period. It is perfectly possible that new evidence will turn up, not least through investigations in the Judean Desert itself (Eshel 2005), and in the meantime it is essential for historians to recognize how much there will always be that we cannot possibly know.

It is crucial, for example, to recognize that one thing we do not know is the number of Jewish religious groups that were found in Judaea in this period (Goodman 2007a: 33–46). If only the rabbinic texts survived, we would know about Pharisees and Sadducees but not Essenes. If we relied only on the writings of Philo, we would know about Essenes but not about Pharisees or Sadducees. The New Testament texts say nothing about Essenes, but do refer to Pharisees and Sadducees. Only Josephus referred to all three groups, but there is no reason to suppose that he gave a full account of the extent of religious variety in his time: in his *War* and *Antiquities*, where he described the three ‘philosophies’ of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, he was writing history, not ethnography (Jos. *BJ* 2.119–61; *AJ* 18.11–22); and in his apologetic work *Against Apion*, he actually claimed that there are no divisions within Judaism of any kind, since all Jews (so he alleged) enjoy total unanimity in their notions both about God and about correct worship (Jos. *C.Ap.* 2.179–210, esp. 178–81). In light of this it is more probable than not that the sectarian scrolls were produced by a group or groups of Jews unattested in any of these later sources, and that any and all similarities between groups are to be explained through their common origin in early forms of Judaism.

From these remarks it will be clear that I think it particularly unwarranted to prejudge the meaning of the scrolls by reading them in the light of the Greek and (p. 85) Latin sources on the Essenes, as is still common in contemporary scholarship despite the legitimate concerns that have been raised about this procedure by a variety of historians in recent years (see Goodman 2007a: 137–43). This caveat is especially important in discussion of relations to the Temple, since passages in Josephus and Philo have been taken as evidence that Essenes either avoided the Temple or avoided sacrifices altogether, and if this were true, and if the Qumran sectarians were Essenes, this would naturally have a major influence on the way the sectarian scrolls are understood (Jos. *AJ* 18.19; Philo, *Q.o.p.* 75). As an aside, it is worth noting that in fact these passages in Josephus and Philo about the Essenes are ambiguous, and that it is in any case uncertain whether Essenes avoided the Temple (J. Baumgarten 1977; A. Baumgarten 1994; Taylor 2007: 11–14), so

that the standard conflation of evidence about the Temple from the scrolls with evidence about the Essenes is doubly uncertain, but even in cases where the classical evidence about the Essenes is clearer, such as the accounts of their communal lifestyle, it seems to me that conflation with the evidence from the scrolls is unhelpful.

So, what happens to our picture of the Qumran sectarians if the later Jewish and Christian traditions are ignored? It is worth recognizing at the start that if none of the data preserved by later Jews and Christians had been preserved and we relied on pagan *testimonia* alone, we would have no hint of any variety of any kind at all within Judaism at this time: it is true that Pliny and Dio Chrysostom referred to Essenes, but they did so without any suggestion that these religious enthusiasts espoused any sort of Judaism (Pliny, *NH* 5.17.4 (74); Dio Chrysostom ap. Synesius of Cyrene, *Dio* 3.2), and pagan authors, who were well aware of the origins of *Christus* in Judaea, did not therefore seem to consider Christianity a type of Judaism—on the contrary, Christianity was accused by pagan Romans specifically of novelty (Tac. *Ann.* 15.44; cf. Beard, North, and Price 1998, vol. 1: 226). We would also be ignorant of the importance within Judaism of *halakhah* and *midrash* (since for pagan authors Moses was generally seen as the sole founder of all Jewish customs, cf. Gager 1972), and we would find quite baffling the Theodotos inscription from Jerusalem (Frey 1936, no. 1404), with its references to the synagogue as an institution, since the distinctive character of synagogue worship—its reliance on the reading of a text as the central liturgical action rather than sacrifice—seems (curiously) to have made no impact on the classical pagan writers who refer to the Jews (see Cohen 1987). Even the Jewish emphasis on eschatology would escape us: Roman authors knew that the Jews had an oracle which predicted that the ruler of the world came from Judaea, but they seem to have been unaware that this notion belonged to a much larger framework of Jewish expectation for the end of time, which explains the ease with which Jewish expectations were interpreted as divine foreknowledge of the accession to the principate of Vespasian while engaged in Judaea as commander of the Roman army in the war against the Jews (Suet. *Vesp.* 4.5; Tac. *Hist.* 5.13.2).

(p. 86) Of the characteristics of Judaism which *would* be familiar from the pagan evidence and the archaeology, most obvious would be the distinctive customs of the Jews (primarily their diet, their observance of the Sabbath—interpreted either as evidence of a philosophical bent or of indolence—and of male circumcision), and their obstinate refusal to worship the gods of others and to depict the divinity to whom their own worship was directed (see Goodman 1998: ch.1). But at the centre of Jewish worship would quite clearly be placed the Jerusalem Temple. Numerous pagan authors attested the significance of the Temple for Jews and the role of the High Priests and the priestly caste: worship through sacrifices and offerings by priests in a sanctuary was one of the aspects of Judaism which outsiders found quite easy to accept, since it accorded to the normal religious behaviour of others in the Hellenistic and Roman world (Goodman 1998: 10). What particularly distinguished the Jewish Temple was, as Hecataeus remarked in the early third century BCE (Stern 1974: 26–9), primarily its size and magnificence (a result, although pagans did not note this themselves, of the centralization of Jewish cult in one place, so that the Jerusalem building and its liturgy were financed not just by locals but by offerings from

all over the extended Jewish world; Goodman 2007a: chaps. 4–5). And the impression that the Jerusalem shrine far surpassed other temples in the Hellenistic world in size and magnificence would be amply confirmed by the archaeological discoveries in the city (Avigad 1984).

Now, if this had constituted all our knowledge before 1947 of Judaism in this period, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls would not have challenged the impression of the centrality of the Jerusalem Temple to Jews but would have confirmed it. Prescriptions for sacrifices and references to the Temple are scattered widely through the biblical texts from Qumran (Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich 2000). There are to be found sixty-three references to Jerusalem in the non-biblical texts (and few references to other cities) (Tov 2002: 232). Detailed rules are given in the Temple scroll for the Temple cult, building, and furnishings (11QT^a46–47 and passim). Calendars for the priestly courses are found in the *Mishmarot* (4Q320–330). There are frequent references in a variety of texts to priests and Aaron (e.g. 1QS⁸: 8–9; 4QS^d 6: 2–3; 4QS^e2: 16–18). And by no means of least significance would be the list of (apparently) Temple treasures to be found in the enigmatic Copper Scroll (3QCopper Scroll 11: 7).

From all of which evidence the obvious conclusion might seem to be that the Jews who produced the scrolls were indeed as much committed to the Jerusalem cult as other Jews. The helpful advice to be found in MMT on how to run the Temple undoubtedly reflects disputes among Jews as to how this should be done, but does not read like the polemic of a group which has cut itself off from the Temple altogether (4Q395: 3–9, and passim). It was perfectly possible to interpret the sacrifices symbolically without thereby implying that the sacrifices should not also be carried out in practice, as Philo insisted in his attack on extreme allegorists for suggesting the contrary (Philo, *De Migr. Ab.* 92): in a world in which sacrifices (p. 87) on altars were seen as the natural way to worship the gods (Petropoulou 2008), and within a religious system which relied on a sacred text which not only enjoined all Jews to perform such sacrifices but gave precise instructions, based on a divine mandate, as to how this was to be done (e.g. Lev 23: 1–21), the Temple cult was not lightly to be abandoned. The *Yahad* might see itself as pure and separate from sin, and its prayers as like sacrifices in the eyes of God (1QS 8: 4–6; 4QS^e2: 11–15; 1QS 8: 10; 4QS^d6: 4; 1QS9: 3–6; 4QS^d7: 4–6), but adoption of such imagery did not obviously encourage abandonment of the sacrifices which the Torah so explicitly enjoined.

It had of course proved perfectly possible for Jews in earlier generations to criticize a reliance on sacrifices by those who did not care also to keep the rest of God's commandments, without therefore advocating abstention from the sacrificial cult (Anderson 1987). Thus Amos declared that in his displeasure with Israel God would refuse the offerings brought to the altar because justice and righteousness mattered more (Amos 5: 21–4), and Isaiah, whose book was preserved in multiple copies at Qumran, asserted that the Lord does not delight in the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats when the hands of the people are full of blood (Isa 1: 11–15). But neither Amos nor Isaiah thereby implied that sacrificial offerings were irrelevant or to be shunned. Deuteronomy, the most frequently attested book of the Pentateuch among the biblical Dead Sea scrolls (Tov 2002: 167–70), pro-

vides the most explicit injunctions to participate in the pilgrimage festivals (Deut 16: 1–16; cf. 4QDeut^c for Deut 16: 2–3, 6–11, 21–2, and Tov 2002: 189–91). Similar injunctions are found, in detail, in the Temple Scroll (11QT^a 13–29). It may well be possible to find a number of different attitudes to the Temple expressed in the sectarian scrolls, and to suggest that these reveal either different stages in the development and changing use of Temple ideology and language about the Temple by sectarians or a number of different groups which related to the Temple in different ways (Brooke 2005; Kapfer 2007), but none of these attitudes should necessarily be taken to indicate the withdrawal from the actual Temple and Jerusalem which has so often been assumed.

I should stress that I do not mean to imply that those who wrote the scrolls were happy with the way that the Temple was being run in their day. We have already seen that there is much evidence for criticism of the Temple. But there are reasons to suppose that such dissatisfaction with the Temple was widespread in the late Second Temple period without dissatisfaction leading to withdrawal from Temple worship. According to Josephus, the priests in the Temple will have followed the rulings of the Pharisees with regard to prayers and sacrifices, since the Pharisees had greatest influence among the people in such matters (Jos. *AJ* 18.15–17). If this is true, a Sadducee High Priest like Ananus son of Ananus (Jos. *AJ* 20.199) will have presided over a cult in which the priests followed a process of purification which he himself viewed as invalid (m. *Parah* 3: 7). If the rabbinic sources which record the dispute between Pharisees and Boethusians on the counting of the *omer* are to be (p. 88) believed (m. *Menahot* 10: 3), and if Boethusians here are to be identified with Sadducees, and if Josephus was right, the pilgrimage festival of Shavuot will have been celebrated in the Temple on a day which Sadducees believed incorrectly calculated. And if Josephus was wrong, and the Temple followed Sadducean rulings, Pharisees will similarly have believed that the wrong calendar was being followed; so the Pharisees will have been peeved instead. But there is absolutely no reason to suggest that either Pharisees or Sadducees ever boycotted the Temple, and much evidence to the contrary: when, for instance, Jerusalem was on the verge of revolt in 66 CE, leading Pharisees were among those who urged the continuation of loyal sacrifices on behalf of the Roman empire (Jos. *BJ* 2.411–16); and Josephus' own career showed that it was possible to be both a Pharisee and a priest (Jos. *Vita* 1.10–12). The Sadducee Ananus had been High Priest only a few years before 66 CE (Jos. *AJ* 20.197).

It is right to imagine the Temple as a public arena for the expression of strong disagreement between different groups of Jews, not least about the conduct of the cult itself as, for instance, in the very public demonstration by Pharisees that in their view the stringency demanded by Sadducees in the purity of the priest who carried out the red heifer sacrifice was excessive (cf. Goodman 1994: 171–2). The Qumran sectarians will undoubtedly have become very upset by such issues—after all, the Damascus Document explicitly asserts that ‘no-one should send to the altar a sacrifice, or an offering, or incense, or wood, by the hand of a man impure from any of the impurities, so allowing him to defile the altar’ (CD 11: 18–21), and that those who have been brought into the covenant ‘shall not enter the Temple to kindle his altar in vain’ (CD 6: 11–12), but the emphasis of this latter passage, which cites Malachi 1: 10, is precisely the need to take care to worship

properly as the law requires (CD 6: 13–7: 4), and the same must be true of the Dead Sea sect. No sectarian text threatens sectarians that they will suffer in some way if they enter the Temple, and, as has been seen, it would have been bizarre for any group of Jews to turn their back on the Temple in its magnificence unless, like the exiled High Priest Onias in Egypt in the second century BCE, they sought to set up a rival Temple cult elsewhere (Jos. BJ 7.426–32, esp. 431), of which the scrolls from Qumran give no hint whatsoever: the notion (still found quite frequently in the scholarly literature) that animal bones found on the Qumran site provide evidence of an alternative sacrificial practice is not at all plausible (Magness 2002; cf. Brooke 2005: 429–30).

If the notion that the Dead Sea sectarians cut themselves off from the Temple would seem to us bizarre if we only had the pagan evidence and archaeology as the background to our understanding of the scrolls, and if such a reading is not required by a simple reading of the texts, it is not difficult to see why it has nonetheless enjoyed such widespread acceptance for so long. Both rabbinic Judaism and Christianity have evolved ways to worship God while professing to take seriously the sacred texts in which sacrifices are enjoined but without actually performing those sacrifices. Indeed Christians quite early in their history, and (p. 89) rabbinic Jews at a rather later stage, even managed to claim their lack of sacrifices as a virtue (Petropoulou 2008). But these developments, in both cases, occurred after the destruction of the Temple by Rome in 70 CE, and especially after it became increasingly and devastatingly apparent that the Romans would not allow the Temple to be rebuilt (Goodman 2007b, ch.12). Such a disaster would be impossible to imagine while the Temple was still standing—after all, although there had indeed been a catastrophic destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, it had in due course been rebuilt, and if disaster struck again, Jews might reasonably believe that it would again be rebuilt. To understand the Dead Sea sectarians through a perspective based on what was to happen after the sect had (so far as we know) ceased to exist is deeply misleading, and the analysis of sectarian attitudes to the Temple offered here may serve as a general warning about the dangers inherent in reading the scrolls through a rabbinic or a Christian lens.

Suggested Reading

Good studies of Second Temple Judaism which take account of the Dead Sea Scrolls include Sanders (1992), Schiffman (1991), and Cohen (2006). For a series of studies of the scrolls in their historical context, see Lim et al. (2000) and Hempel (2010).

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