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Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?

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Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?

Stephen D. Ricks

Like desert dust storms, controversy continues to swirl about the scrolls discovered near Khirbet Qumran by the Dead Sea, arguably among the best known archaeological finds of the twentieth century. As a result of these controversies, attention has been directed away from their content and themes, which remain unknown to many despite the availability of several good translations of many of the scrolls into English and other languages. Among the disputed questions is the authorship of the Dead Sea Scrolls (I will be using the term "Dead Sea Scrolls" interchangeably with "Qumran Scrolls"). In my remarks, I would like to address the questions: (1) what major writings are found in the Dead Sea Scrolls? (2) who were the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls? and, finally (3) what are some of the major themes in the Dead Sea Scrolls?

I. What Major Writings Are Found in the Dead Sea Scrolls?

A. Community Rule Books

1. The *Community Rule* (1QS)

The central organizational document among the Dead Sea Scrolls is the *Community Rule*, designed for a faithful "remnant" of Israel preparing the "way in the desert" for the Kingdom of God and for his triumph over the forces of evil. This document contains a preamble explaining the purpose of the group and sets forth its basic constitution, the requirements and procedures for entrance into the community, the various classes or ranks within the community, the regulations governing the relations among the members of the community, the Council of the Community, military service, study, eligibility for office, and communal meals.

The Community Rule also provides a list of penalties for various types of infractions that suggests something of the strictness of the group. These range from loss of table fellowship to expulsion from the community:

Whoever has deliberately lied shall do penance for six months.

Whoever has deliberately insulted his companion unjustly shall do penance for one year and shall be excluded.

Whoever has deliberately deceived his companion by word or by deed shall do penance for six months.

...

Whoever has borne malice against his companion unjustly shall do penance for six months/one year; and likewise, whoever has taken revenge in any matter whatever.

Whoever has spoken foolishly: three months.

Whoever has interrupted his companion while speaking: ten days.

Whoever has lain down to sleep during an Assembly of the Congregation: thirty days. And likewise, whoever has left, without reason, an Assembly of the Congregation as many as three times during one Assembly, shall do penance for ten days. But if he has departed while they were standing he shall do penance for thirty days.¹

¹ 1QS 7:3-5, 8-12, in Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 71. Vermes's volume is perhaps the best, most comprehensive, and most accessible currently available in English of writings unique to the Dead Sea. In addition, Michael Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), is also an excellent volume containing translations of several of the writings from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The *Rule* further includes a brief discussion of the doctrine of the "Two Ways," the two instincts in men and women for good and for evil, and mentions rewards and punishments for each of them.

[God] created man for dominion over the earth; and he set in him two spirits for him to set his course by them until the set time of his visitation. They are the spirits of truth and of perversity. In a dwelling of light are the generations of truth and from a well of darkness come the generations of perversity. In the hand of the prince of lights is the dominion of all children of righteousness: in the ways of light they will walk. In the hand of the angel of darkness is all the dominion of the children of perversity and in the ways of darkness they will walk.²

The rewards of the children of light are "healing and abundance of peace with length of days, fruitfulness of seed with all eternal blessings and joy in eternity with everlasting life, a crown of glory with a garment of majesty in eternal light," while the rewards of the children of darkness are "a multitude of blows at the hand of all the angels of destruction . . . everlasting terror and continuous reproach."

In many respects the *Community Rule*, unique in Judaism of the period, displays parallels to community regulations for other groups such as the *Didache*, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the *Didascalia*, and the *Benedictine Rule*, all products of the early Christian centuries. Like the *Community Rule*, these writings are concerned with providing a constitution for their communities as well as a pattern for daily living.³

2. The *Rule of the Congregation* or the *Messianic Rule* (1QSa)

Appended to the same scroll as the *Community Rule* is the *Rule of the Congregation* or the *Messianic Rule*. Where the *Community Rule* seems more devoted to the real-life organization and management of the affairs of the community, the *Rule of the Congregation* is primarily intended for "all the congregation in the last days"—it is a *Rule for a Community* that is designed for the exigencies of a messianic war against the nations; it mentions the Council of the Community at which the Messiah would be present, and describes the meal for the Council and the Messiah.

B. Biblical Texts

Biblical texts also compose a large and important part of the Dead Sea Scrolls library. By far the best preserved of the biblical texts found there is the Isaiah scroll, now prominently displayed in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem. Fragments of all of the other books of the Old Testament have also been found (except, apparently, the book of Esther). Many of the materials that have not been published until now include fragments from these various books of the Old Testament. The prominence of copies of biblical texts should come as no surprise, since the *Community Rule* makes clear the importance attached to the study of the Law: "And where the ten are, there shall never lack a man among them

² 1QS 3:17-21; translation from A. R. C. Leane, *The Rule of Qumran and Its Meaning* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 144; on the idea of the "Two Ways," see Margaret Mary McKenna, "The 'Two Ways' in Jewish and Christian Writings of the Greco-Roman Period: A Study of the Form of Repentance Parenthesis," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1981; Jan Bergman, "Zum Zwei-Wege-Motiv: Religionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Bemerkungen," *Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok* 42 (1977): 27-56.

³ See Angelo Penna, "Il reclutamento nell'Essenismo e nell'antico monachesimo critiano," *Revue de Qumran* 1 (1959): 345-64 for a discussion and comparison of the *Community Rule* with the early Christian rules; and on the ascetic tendency at Qumran generally see id., "L'ascetismo dei Qumranici," *Rivista biblica italiana* 6 (1958): 3-22.

who shall study the Law continually, day and night, concerning the right conduct of a man with his companion. And the Congregation shall watch in community for a third of every night of the year, to read the Book and to study Law and to pray together.”⁴

In addition to the large number of biblical texts, there are also fragments of texts that are generally referred to as the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, including such works as the books of *Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *Tobit*, and the *Testament of Levi*. These works—as well as the documents unique to the Dead Sea Scrolls—may provide us an important insight into what their canon of scripture was. While nothing is specifically stated in the Qumran Scrolls themselves about the canon, the existence of these (from our perspective) noncanonical writings among the canonical documents is a fact that should not be ignored.

C. Biblical Interpretations

Besides copies of the various books of the Old Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls include a number of commentaries on individual books of the Old Testament, including Isaiah, Habakkuk, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, and the Psalms, that reveal a striking method of biblical interpretation. In these commentaries, after the passage of scripture is quoted, it is generally interpreted as referring to the “last days” rather than to the period in which the scripture was originally given, and is often seen as referring to the Dead Sea Scrolls community itself.

For example, a passage on Psalms 37 in the *Commentary on Psalms* reads, “A little while and the wicked shall be no more; I will look towards his place but he shall not be there.” This passage is interpreted in this way, “At the end of forty years the wicked will perish and not an evil man shall be found on the earth.”⁵ In a passage in the *Commentary on Habakkuk* the interest in the last days can also be seen: “And God told Habakkuk to write down the things that are going to come upon the last generation, but the fulfillment of the end-time he did not make known to him. . . . The interpretation of it concerns the Teacher of Righteousness to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets.”⁶ Who is the “Teacher of Righteousness” referred to in this passage?

He is identified as a priest—possibly the High Priest—in the *Commentary on Habakkuk*, who appears to have played an important role in the founding, or refounding, of the Dead Sea Scrolls community. He was sent into exile and was persecuted by the “Wicked Priest,” whom many identify as Jonathan Maccabeus, who was High Priest in the middle of the second century B.C. Although the “Teacher of Righteousness” did not refer to himself as a “prophet,” he functioned as a prophet, providing inspired interpretation of the scriptures (1QpHab 2:2-3), being taught their meaning by God himself. To the “Teacher of Righteousness” (as we read above) “God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets.” In the Qumran Scrolls, as in early Christianity, prophecy was related to the interpretation of scripture and to the community’s concern with the last days.⁷

Is the “Teacher of Righteousness” ever identified by a given name? Unfortunately, no, since the writers of the Scrolls seem to prefer code names—such as “Priest,” “Wicked Priest,” “Liar,” or “Teacher of Righteousness”—to given names, or at least they avoid using given names.

⁴ 1QS 6:6-8.

⁵ 4Q171(Ps^a) 2:5-8, on Psalm 37:10.

⁶ 1QpHab 7:1-2, 4-5.

⁷ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “Teacher of Righteousness,” in David N. Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:340-41; id., “The Essenes and Their History,” *Revue Biblique* 81 (1974): 215-44.

In addition to these short commentaries on books of the Old Testament, the Qumran Scrolls include the *Genesis Apocryphon*, a retelling of events recorded in Genesis. Much of the scroll is lost. The best preserved columns retell, or enlarge upon, the story found in Genesis 12:8-15:4—Abram's departure for Egypt, his dream indicating that Sarai would save his life by claiming that she was his sister, Pharaoh's passionate interest in Sarai, the affliction of the Egyptians who were afterwards miraculously healed by the laying on of hands, the defeat of the four kings, and the promise of descendants, with a description of the land to be inherited by Abram's descendants.

D. Hymns and Liturgies

1. *Thanksgiving Hymns* (1QH)

The Dead Sea Scrolls include a scroll known as the *Thanksgiving Hymns*, so called because of their frequent repetition of the phrase, "I thank thee, O Lord." The *Thanksgiving Hymns* also include God's works of creation and his saving actions. In these hymns—as in many of the Psalms—God's mercy, truth, and righteousness are emphasized. Typical of the *Thanksgiving Hymns* is the following passage:

I thank thee, O Lord
 [for] thou hast placed me beside a fountain of streams
 in an arid land,
 and close to the spring of waters
 in a dry land
 and beside a watered garden
 [in a wilderness.]⁸

E. Eschatological and Apocalyptic Texts

1. *The War Rule* (1QM)

The *War Rule* describes a coming war between the forces of good and evil in which the wicked will be completely destroyed, followed by an age of peace. The Dead Sea Scrolls writers, who constitute the true, restored Israel, compose the righteous army. The *War Rule* begins by designating the righteous with the title "the children of light," who are also described as "the children of Levi, Judah, and Benjamin, the exiles in the desert." They are opposed by the "children of darkness," who include Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, the Kittim of Assyria, and the "transgressors of the covenant." The Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, and Assyrians were all traditional enemies of Israel in the Old Testament. The "transgressors of the covenant" are most likely Jews who would not accept the views of the Dead Sea Scrolls writers, since they believe that other Jews were living in a state of apostasy, or were violating the covenant of the law of Moses.

Angelic beings, good and evil, will also take part in the conflict. The *War Rule* describes the organization of the army of Israel in great detail and prescribes prayers, hymns, and exhortations to be spoken by the priests and Levites in the course of the war (interestingly, the work appears to be modeled on Roman military manuals, and the deployment of the army of God follows in some measure Roman patterns of warfare). Ultimately, it is God who will in his mercy give victory to the righteous, and who will usher in a golden age of light for the faithful.

F. Works on Practice and Precept

1. The *Temple Scroll*

The *Temple Scroll* is concerned with outlining an ideal temple and temple society. But the temple described in the *Temple Scroll* is not the temple of the last days: it is, according to the *Scroll* itself, "the temple on which I will settle my glory until the day of blessing on which I will create my temple and establish it for myself for all times." The temple of the last days would be built under direct divine control.

Much of the *Temple Scroll* is concerned with various aspects of the temple—its construction, the measurements of the Sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, the chambers and colonnades, a description of the mercy seat, the cherubim, the veil, the table, the golden lampstand and other objects, the altar and the various sacrifices in the Temple, the Temple courtyards, and the purity regulations for the Temple. But the *Temple Scroll* goes beyond the physical features of the temple to describe the ideal temple society, with a covenant between God and Israel; purity regulations concerning the cities of Israel; judges and officers; laws relating to idolatry and to sacrificial animals; vows and oaths; laws against apostasy; laws relating to priests and Levites and detailed statutes of the Jewish king; laws regarding priestly dues, idols, witnesses, the conduct of war, the rebellious son, and crimes punishable by "hanging."

But the *Temple Scroll* does not simply repeat these laws on temple and society as they appear in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, but blends them into a new, harmonious whole, sometimes adding new materials, such as the festivals of oil and wine. In addition, many of the statements that are made in the third person in the Old Testament are given in the first person, eliminating Moses as an intermediary and presenting the *Temple Scroll* as a revelation given directly from God to Israel. Perhaps we may see in this a sense that the people felt no need for an intermediary as had been the case with Moses.⁹

G. Miscellaneous Works

1. *Copper Scroll*

Perhaps the most puzzling of all the Qumran documents is the *Copper Scroll*. Two scrolls were discovered which appear to have originally comprised a single plaque of copper-based metal. On this was inscribed a list of 64 deposits of gold, silver, aromatic spices, and manuscripts. Because of the enormous quantities of valuables—perhaps as much as several dozen tons—buried in locations in and around Jerusalem, many are convinced that the document is fictional. Others, however, have argued that the list records the disposition of the treasures of the Jerusalem Temple.¹⁰

2. Horoscopes

Two documents from cave 4 of the Qumran caves contain fragments of horoscopes suggesting a belief in a correspondence between a person's features and destiny. According to Geza Vermes, "As far as physical characteristics are concerned, shortness, fatness, and irregularity of the features are associated with wickedness, and their opposites reflect virtue."¹¹

In a horoscope of an ideal or messianic figure, we read:

⁹ The most comprehensive study of the *Temple Scroll* is that of Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983).

¹⁰ An important study of this perplexing work has been made by John Allegro, *The Copper Scroll* (New York: Doubleday, 1960).

¹¹ Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 305.

And his hair will be red . . . and small birthmarks on his thigh. In his youth, he will be like . . . a man who knows nothing until the time when he knows the three Books. . . . His wisdom will reach all the peoples, and he will know the secrets of all the living. And all their designs against him will come to nothing and his rule over all the living will be great.¹²

H. Recently Released Materials

1. 4QMMT

One of these new documents, 4QMMT (from the Hebrew *Miqsat Maase ha-Torah*, meaning "Some of the Precepts of the Law"), identified by its editors as "a letter from a leader of the Qumran sect (possibly the Teacher of Righteousness himself) to the leader of its opponents," sets out precepts where the Dead Sea Scrolls group differed from its opponents, including the religious calendar, practices relating to ritual purity (especially in connection with the temple and sacrificial cult), and laws on marital status. This letter argues that the differences in practice and precept between its writers and the rest of Judaism were the cause of their separation from other Jews. Most of the laws mentioned in the *MMT* deal with the temple, and most are related to biblical laws as understood by the group. The precepts mentioned in the *MMT* include:

1. The purity of those preparing the red heifer.
2. Gentile grain should not be brought into the Temple.
3. The place of slaughtering and offering sacrifices.
4. Slaughtering pregnant animals.
5. Dogs should not enter into Jerusalem.
6. The fruit of the fourth year is to be given to the priest.
7. The impurity of human bones.
8. The purity of the streams of liquids poured from a pure vessel into an impure one.

At the end of the letter the writers encourage those Jews to whom the letter was addressed to join with them in their practices and warn them in the event they fail to do so.¹³

2. The *Messianic Apocalypse* (4Q521)

Interest has recently been directed to the so-called *Messianic Apocalypse*, parts of which have been provisionally translated:

Let [the heav]ens and earth obey His Messiah
[The sea and all that is] in them. He will not turn from the commandments of the Holy Ones.

Take strength in his mighty work, all you who seek the Lord.

At this [time], shall not all those who hope in their heart thereby find the Lord?

For the Lord will visit the Pious and will call the Righteous Ones by name

And over the poor His Spirit will hover and the Faithful he will restore by His strength.

. . . His] holy [Messiah] will not be slow [in coming.]

And as for wonders that are not the work of the Lord, when he (i.e., the Messiah) [come]s

¹² 4QMessAr, translated in Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 306.

¹³ A good study of this text, which has yet to appear in a definitive edition, is to be found in Elisha Qimron, "Miqsat Ma'aseh HaTorah," Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:843-45.

He shall heal the wounded, restore the dead to life, and bear good tidings to the poor.¹⁴

The *Messianic Apocalypse* is important since it may shed further light on the Qumran Scrolls' view of the Messiah, a subject that has been hotly debated. Some scholars interpret the writings from the Dead Sea as indicating a single messianic figure, while others understand two messiahs, one priestly and one royal. While the majority of references to a messiah that have been found to date in the Dead Sea Scrolls are clearly singular in form, there is one example where the word "Messiah" is plural and appears to refer to two separate messianic figures (1QS 9:11). Given the stress placed on priestly matters in the Dead Sea Scrolls, it should not be surprising that their messianic picture contains priestly elements. Further, while in Qumran we have no evidence of any royal aspirations, it seems likely that they clung to the tradition of a Davidic Messiah who would eliminate foreign rule and also anticipated the coming of a priestly figure who would liberate them from their spiritual predicament. In addition, the *Messianic Apocalypse* describes a figure who has the supernatural power to raise the dead to life (may we understand by this resurrection?) Still, any reconstruction of messianic belief at Qumran must be made with care, since it is based on texts and textual fragments that are generally focussed on some aspect of ritual or belief, and are only secondarily concerned with the Messiah.¹⁵

II. Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?

Josephus describes a large number of Jewish groups active in the last centuries B.C. and the first centuries A.D., including the Boethusians, Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots. From contemporary and near-contemporary accounts of the beliefs and practices of these groups, scholars have noted similarities between certain of these groups and the materials in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Two groups, in particular, have received attention: the Sadducees and the Essenes.

A. Were the Writers of the Qumran Scrolls Sadducees?

Several scholars see the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls as Sadducees. This judgment is based on similarities between the Sadducees and the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially material found in the letter 4QMMT mentioned before. However, others have pointed out that only a few of the points of law or practice correspond precisely with what is known of the Sadducees and that there are other precepts and practices in the Qumran Scroll that do not compare favorably, if at all.

B. Were the Writers of the Qumran Scrolls Essenes?

What are the similarities between the Essenes, as they are described in some detail by the ancient Jewish writer Josephus, and the community reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls? Recently, a scholar has written a book comparing Josephus's description of the Essenes with the Qumran scrolls that are currently available. He notes twenty-six statements about the Essenes made by Josephus that parallel the writings at Qumran, more than twenty that

¹⁴ For provisional translations and studies of this important fragment, see Michael Wise and James Tabor, "The Messiah at Qumran," in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18:6 (November/December 1992): 62; Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1992), 23, and Gaye Strathearn, "A New Messianic Fragment (4Q521) from the Dead Sea Scrolls," Masters Thesis, BYU, 1992, 38-39. On Messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls in general, and on the *Messianic Apocalypse* in particular, I have been greatly helped by Gaye Strathearn's thesis, as well as in personal discussions.

¹⁵ Strathearn, "A New Messianic Fragment," 26-38, 81-84.

probably do, ten statements by Josephus for which there is no known Qumran parallel, and only six apparent discrepancies between Josephus's description of the Essenes and Qumran.¹⁶ Among the parallels between the Essenes described by Josephus and the Qumran Scrolls the following may be noted:

1. According to Josephus, those that become Essenes must be Jews by birth, a statement that also finds support in the *Community Rule* (J. W. 2:119/1QS 6:13-14).

2. "They despise riches," Josephus reports of the Essenes, "and their sharing of goods is admirable; there is not found among them any one who has greater wealth than another. For it is a law that those entering the group transfer their property to the order; consequently, among them all there appears neither abject poverty nor superabundance of wealth, but the possessions of each are mingled together, and there is, as among brothers, one property common to all" (J.W. 2:122; cf. *Ant.* 18:20). Several passages in the *Community Rule* also reflect the ideal of a community of goods and contempt for wealth (1QS 1:11-12; 5:1-2; 6:17-22; 9:21-4; 10:18-19; 11:1-2).

3. According to Josephus, the Essenes replace neither clothing nor sandals "until they are altogether torn to shreds or worn out with age" (J.W. 2:126). The members of the Qumran Scrolls community were so given to wearing their clothes to tatters, it appears, that the *Community Rule* provides for stiff penalties for a member of the group accidentally exposing himself through immodestly thin garments (1QS 7:13-14).

4. Josephus tells us that "the Essenes are careful not to spit into the midst of the company or to the right" (J.W. 2:147). In a passage with strikingly similar language, we read in the *Community Rule*, "A man who spits into a session of the many shall be fined for thirty days" (1QS 7:13).

5. Josephus says that the Essenes were always dressed in white (J.W. 2:123/1QM 7:9-10). In the *War Rule* we read that "Seven priests of the sons of Aaron, clothed in garments of fine white linen: a linen tunic and linen trousers, and girded with a linen girdle." According to an editor of the *War Rule*, the addition of "linen" to every item, including the girdle, plus the special emphasis on "white" may indicate an Essene preference for white garments.

6. Particular interest has focused on marriage practices described in Josephus's account of the Essenes and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Josephus indicates in one passage that the Essenes "regard marriage with contempt" and that "they neither bring wives into (the community) nor do they seek to acquire slaves, since they consider that the latter leads to injustice and the former inclines towards causing factions," but he also states that there are Essenes who do marry. Elsewhere he also says: "They do not reject marriage and the propagation that comes from it, but they guard themselves against the licentious allurements of women." Thus, taken together, these passages suggest that there was some variation in the practice of marriage among the Essenes—some marrying and others refraining from doing so—but that all of them took a fairly narrow and restrictive view of it.

The *Community Rule* says nothing about the subject of marriage. Yet the *Rule of the Congregation* includes women and children among the new arrivals (1QSa 1:4), and in that same document (1QSa 1:9-12) a young man is prohibited from marriage until he is twenty. It seems more appropriate to say that, though marriage was permitted in the Qumran scrolls, a fairly strict view of its function is taken.

C. Where Were the Dead Sea Scrolls Written?

Some of the difficulties of using ancient sources to identify the location of the Qumran Scrolls community—whether at the site of Khirbet Qumran or elsewhere—can be seen

¹⁶ Todd S. Beall, *Josephus's Description of the Essenes Illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). This volume contains an immense amount of useful information concerning the Essenes, Josephus, Philo, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

from the varying interpretations of a statement made about the Essenes by Pliny the Elder, a Roman scholar and scientist, who wrote in his *Natural History*

To the west [of the Dead Sea] the Essenes have put the necessary distance between themselves and the insalubrious shore. They are a people unique of its kind and admirable beyond all others in the whole world without women and renouncing love entirely, without money, and having for company only the palm trees. Owing to the throng of newcomers, this people is daily re-born in equal number; indeed, those whom, wearied by the fluctuations of fortune, life leads to adopt their customs, stream in in great numbers. Thus, unbelievable though this may seem, for thousands of centuries a race has existed which is eternal yet into which no one is born: so fruitful for them is the repentance which other feel for their past lives! Below the Essenes was the town of Engada [Engedi], which yielded only to Jerusalem in fertility and palm-groves but is today become another ash-heap. From there, one comes to the fortress of Masada, situated on a rock, and itself near the lake of Asphalt.¹⁷

This brief passage contains several important details about the Essenes: they live on a lonely site near the western shore of the Dead Sea, renounce marriage and property, experience increase in numbers through conversions, and have been in existence as a group since time out of mind. But questions arise when we try to associate the people spoken of here with a particular location and group: if Pliny is describing Qumran and the community mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls, why does Pliny claim that the group is celibate, when the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls accept marriage and the archaeological evidence of Qumran indicates that both women and children were living there? If Qumran was not the place described by Pliny, then where is that place? Is there any archaeological evidence for other places that would be a suitable site for the Essene community mentioned by Pliny? What of the evidence that Qumran was a fortress and not a civilian settlement? These and numerous other questions need to be asked and thoroughly and thoughtfully examined before anything like a consensus on the question of location can, or should, emerge.¹⁸

D. Do the Writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls Belong to Another Group?

Could the Qumran scrolls have been written by members of an Essene group such as those described by Josephus and other ancient authors? The Qumran *Community Rule*, in any event, would appear to be describing an Essene group, since that document shows numerous points of contact with the ancient descriptions of the Essenes. The other Qumran texts show relatively fewer similarities with these ancient descriptions, but also—with the exception of the document found at Qumran known as the *Damascus Document*—show no substantive contradictions with them either (and even the apparent discrepancies in the *Damascus Document* can be reconciled).

¹⁷ Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* V, 17, 4 (73); translated in Geza Vermes and Martin T. Goodman, *The Essenes: According to the Classical Sources* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 32-33.

¹⁸ Many of these questions have been very insightfully explored by Norman Golb in "The Problem of Origin and Identification of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 124 (1980): 1-24; id., "Who Hid the Dead Sea Scrolls?" *Biblical Archaeologist* 48 (1985): 68-82; id., "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Perspective," *The American Scholar* 58 (1989): 177-207; id., "Khirbet Qumran and the Manuscripts of the Judaean Wilderness: Observations on the Logic of Their Investigation," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 49 (1990): 103-14; id., "The Freeing of the Scrolls and Its Aftermath," Lecture Delivered at the Huntington Library, San Marino CA, June 14, 1992. Responses to Golb's work include F. Garcia Martinez, "Qumran Origins and Early History: A Groningen Hypothesis," *Folia Orientalia* 25 (1988): 113-36; F. Garcia Martinez and A. S. van der Woude, "A 'Groningen' Hypothesis of Qumran Origins and Early History," *Revue de Qumran* 14 (1989): 521-41.

Is it possible that all of the Qumran Scrolls could have been produced by a single community of Essenes, and not by several different denominations? I think so, but I say this with a full awareness of contradictions among the various Qumran documents that would have to be reconciled. However, I think it is still somewhat premature to say anything too confidently about who wrote the scrolls or whether they were all written by the same group until the remaining scroll fragments—including what was only recently published in photographs—have been thoroughly studied and compared to what we have already. Otherwise, we are a bit like the blind men and the elephant, certain of what we are dealing with from a very limited exposure to the subject. Has anyone yet been able to sift through all of the evidence carefully and methodically? Is there anyone who has looked at everything in the Qumran corpus with sufficient care that we can feel assured and confident when they claim—as some have been claiming of late—that there is nothing new or groundbreaking in the until recently unpublished materials? In fact, some of the new materials, such as the *Messianic Apocalypse* and 4QMMT suggest that there are plenty of new insights yet to be had.

E. Reflections

But what's in a name? Even if we could confidently identify the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls as members of one group or another, the value of that identification would still be somewhat limited since the only things that we could say with any certainty about the Dead Sea Scrolls community would come from the scrolls themselves (the ancient sources on the Essenes are, after all, themselves not perfectly consistent about the character of the Essene communities). Though there are relatively few discrepancies between what Josephus and other ancient authorities say about the Essenes and what we find in the Qumran Scrolls, can we be certain that this will continue to be the case as new materials are made available? Further, if calling the Qumran Scrolls "Essene" makes us more inclined to ignore or gloss over differences they may have with other ancient sources about the Essenes, then we may be advised to reflect on the benefit of using such a label. If by calling the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls "Essenes" we become less sensitive to differences within the Essene movement itself, we may have lost more than we have gained.

But there may be further dangers in using a label—"Essene," "Sadducee," or any other—to identify the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls. If calling them "Essene"—and a "sect"—is going to dispose us to pay less attention to their ideas, beliefs, and practices (because, after all, both terms designate groups out of the mainstream), then we ought to use such labels with the greatest hesitancy. For this reason, too, I suggest that we drop the use of the term "sect"—and probably also "sectarian"—altogether with reference to the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls, since these are implicitly—if also unintentionally—pejorative (the beliefs and practices of someone who belongs to a "sect" cannot, after all, be taken all *too* seriously. After all, nobody refers to himself or herself as belonging to a *sect*.) In fact, I have noticed in recent literature about Qumran a tendency of some scholars to use the words "group" or "denomination" when referring to the community of the Qumran Scrolls, since these terms are not judgmental and carry no negative connotation. The religious life mirrored in the Dead Sea Scrolls is important no matter whether it is the religious life of Essenes, Sadducees, or another group or groups altogether.

III. What Are Some of the Major Themes of the Dead Sea Scrolls?

Ultimately, the identity of a group is less important than the characteristics of that group. While the specific emphases in belief and practice of the writers of the Qumran Scrolls may be unique, many of their beliefs and practices are also to be found in the writings of other groups from the same period of time. It is to the themes of the Dead Sea

Scrolls that I would like to turn now. Among the characteristics of the Dead Sea Scrolls community, the following may be mentioned:

1. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal a strong sense of being a covenant people. They saw themselves as a continuation of the "True Israel." Entrance into their community, as outlined in the *Community Rule*, was entrance into the covenant of Israel.

2. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls insist on strict observance of the law, including a particular concern for the time and manner of observing the festivals. Members of the Dead Sea community desired to live according to all that had been "revealed from age to age, and as the Prophets had revealed by His Holy Spirit" (1QS 8:14).

3. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls display a vivid sense of living in the last days. According to one eminent scholar, "like the early Christians, the Qumran Scrolls community lived in the belief that the end of time was at hand and that its struggle was with 'principalities and powers,' and understood the scriptures in that context. Theirs was a church of anticipation."¹⁹ The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls not only considered themselves to be the "remnant" of their time, but the "remnant" of all time, the final "remnant."

4. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls stress the importance of priesthood and temple. Priests and Levites played a crucial role in the organization and operation of the community. Although the Temple in Jerusalem was seen as corrupt, the writers of the Qumran Scrolls had a vision of a purified interim temple as well as a temple of the end-time.

5. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal strong messianic expectations, as mentioned above. The Messiahs of the Qumran Scrolls are royal and priestly, and the messianic figure in the *Messianic Apocalypse* is possessed of superhuman powers, including healing the sick and resurrecting the dead.

6. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls believe that a war was being waged between good and evil, but have an equally strong sense that good will prevail. As "children of light" and soldiers in God's army, they were "all enlisted 'til the conflict is o'er." The members of the Qumran Scrolls community were not free to desist in their battle with the "children of darkness" until the final victory was won.

7. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls believe that members of their group have the gift of inspired interpretation of scripture. They are convinced that the Spirit of God is present and active in their midst.²⁰

The twentieth century has been fortunate in yielding discoveries of ancient documents that have allowed us to hear the voice of the insider. At Ugarit, in western Syria, tablets were discovered that give us the first detailed view of Canaanite religious belief and practice from the perspective of the "true believer." From Nag Hammadi, in Egypt, we have a veritable library of writings by Gnostics and not merely *about* them. Now, in the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran we have hundreds of scrolls, or fragments of scrolls, of a group of people who saw themselves as a remnant of True Israel living in the last days when they

¹⁹ See Frank M. Cross, Jr., "Dead Sea Scrolls: Overview," in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:362-63.

²⁰ Cf. David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 340-43; Cross, "Dead Sea Scrolls," 362-63. It is interesting—and not insignificant—that most of these points resonate with doctrines of the Latter-day Saints.

expected the coming of the Messiah (or Messiahs), who valued inspiration, priesthood, and temple, who believed that they were locked in mortal combat with powers of darkness but that they would eventually be victorious, and who desired to walk humbly before God, obedient to all of his commandments. This provides us with insight into the rich diversity and religious ferment of Judaism at the turn of the era. As it provides a mirror of those days, it may cause us to reflect on ourselves and our own times as well.

I see the recent publication of previously unpublished material as possibly the dawning of a new day of serious and focused energy on the Dead Sea Scrolls. I trust that it will generate discussions, working groups, seminars, symposia, conferences, notes, articles, monographs, and books—but especially editions and studies of previously unpublished texts. I hope, too, that all serious proposals, hypotheses, and theories concerning the Qumran Scrolls will be discussed and considered in the spirit in which they are offered. Much heat has been generated over the scrolls. In the future, I hope that we will continue to see light shed on the writings of these “children of light.”