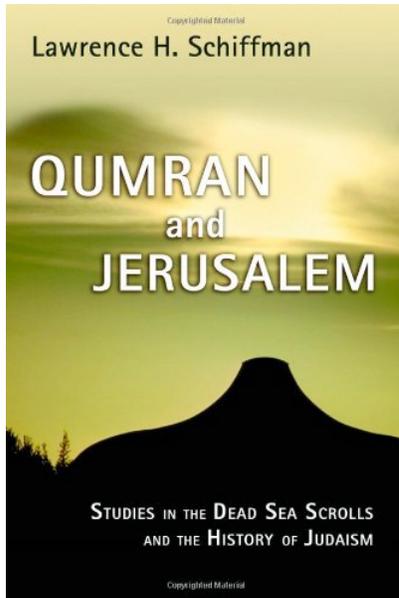


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Schiffman, Lawrence H.

Qumran and Jerusalem: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of Judaism

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This new volume by Lawrence Schiffman represents, in his own words, “a cross between a book of collected studies and an independently written volume” (x). All of the chapters have been previously published, but the author has extensively revised them so that they flow together, organized by subject and historical chronology. The result constitutes Schiffman’s latest thinking on the impact the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has had on the study of Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism. The volume, consisting of twenty-five chapters, is divided into six parts: (1) “The Scholarly Controversy”; (2) “History, Politics, and the Formation of the Sect”; (3) “Jewish Law at Qumran”; (4) “Religious Outlook of the Qumran Sectarians”; (5) “Qumran Sectarians and Others”; and (6) “Language and Literature.”

Schiffman has devoted his academic career to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the depth of his knowledge is evident here. He moves easily between historical overview chapters such as “Literary Genres and Languages of the Judean Scrolls,” through more narrow discussions, including “The Early History of Jewish Liturgy and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” and to contemporary issues, for example, “Inverting Reality: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Popular Media.” The volume’s real strength, however, lies in Schiffman’s explication of his area of expertise, the centrality of Jewish law to the study of the Dead

Sea Scrolls. Schiffman argues that questions concerning the practice of Jewish law is what separates various sects or groups in the Second Temple period from one another: “we see halakhic issues at the center of Jewish sectarianism in the Second Temple period” (5). Accordingly, the majority of the chapters in this volume deal with some issue of Jewish law illumined by the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Using the law as his central theme, Schiffman casts his net widely. First, he does not limit himself to the Qumran scrolls, as many scholars tend to do. Rather, he argues for an integrative approach when considering the various corpora of text found in the Judean Desert. As an example, he notes that, when considering Jewish legal questions in the Second Temple period, the Wadi Daliyeh papyri and the Babatha archive from Nahal Hever shed considerable light on actual practices in the Persian and Roman periods, respectively.

Second, Schiffman does not believe that the Qumran scrolls merely reflect the views of an isolated sect on the shores of the Dead Sea. He sees the Qumran scrolls as reflective of the wider debates in Judaism at that time and uses them accordingly. For example, chapter 19, “The Pharisees and Their Legal Traditions according to the Dead Sea Scrolls,” takes as its starting point new evidence from the scrolls pertaining to the Pharisees but incorporates that evidence into the previously known evidence from Josephus, the New Testament, and later tannaitic sources.

Third, he argues convincingly that the Judean Desert scrolls demonstrate more continuity than discontinuity with rabbinic Judaism, and the theory of radical discontinuity between Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism that has become the norm in recent years should be abandoned. He lists the following shared traits: the centrality of Jewish law, some notion of extrabiblical law, substitutions for the sacrificial ritual of the temple, the development of a nontemple liturgy, the extension of ritual purity into daily life, messianism, and mysticism (10). Thus, in Schiffman’s eyes the Dead Sea Scrolls should no longer be treated as an esoteric subfield of Second Temple Jewish studies but as the primary source from which all future studies should depart, a position with which this reviewer heartily concurs.

Because of Schiffman’s emphasis on legal issues, much in this volume concerns the larger legal documents from the Qumran collection: the Temple Scroll, 4QMMT, and the regulations found in the Damascus Document. He is particularly interested in the light these texts can shed on trends in Jerusalem during the Hasmonean and Herodian periods, especially the control of the temple and its ritual (hence the book’s title). Because of this emphasis on these particular texts and what they tell us of the Qumran sect’s legal stance,

Schiffman has developed a theory of Qumran origins that departs from the majority-held Qumran-Essene hypothesis.

Schiffman notes that many of the legal interpretations found in Qumran literature, especially 4QMMT, align with those attributed to the Sadducees in later rabbinic literature. Schiffman extrapolates from this to argue, “apparently, Sadducean-type law lies at the roots of both the schism between the Dead Sea sectaries and the Jerusalem establishment and the laws of the sectarian documents” (76). He sees in the Dead Sea sect a group of breakaway Sadducees who separated themselves both from the Sadducees who continued to participate in the temple cult under the Hasmoneans and from the Pharisees, whose legal interpretations they vehemently opposed (82). Therefore, the roots of the Dead Sea sect are to be found in solidifying legal positions in the Hellenistic period, legal positions embraced, on the one hand, by the Zadokite priesthood in control of the temple, and the newly forming Pharisees, on the other. Schiffman says concerning the Essene identification: “Those holding this theory might now argue that the term ‘Essene’ came to designate the originally Sadducean sectarians who had gone through a process of radicalization until they became a distinct sect. Alternatively, they might broaden their understanding of the term to include a wide variety of similar groups, of which the Dead Sea sect might be one” (32).

Thus far I am in almost complete agreement with Schiffman, accepting his argument that legal disputes were the cause of the rupture that led to the formation of the Qumran community and that that community had its origins in a group of Zadokite priests and their followers in the Hellenistic period. However, I find his emphasis on those legal issues causes him to overlook or dismiss parallels between the Dead Sea sect and the Essenes as described by Josephus, Philo, and Pliny, which led to the Essene identification in the first place. These parallels include, but are not limited to, the communal nature of the archaeological remains at Qumran (acknowledged by Schiffman on p. 102) as well as some of the sectarian texts such as the Community Rule and the special initiation procedures outlined in the Damascus Document and the Community Rule. These parallels still hold force and should not be overlooked, any more than Schiffman’s Sadducean (better, Zadokite) parallels should be. It seems the mystery of the identification of the Qumran community remains unresolved.

Even if that particular mystery has not been solved in this volume, Schiffman’s collection of essays does much to cast light on many aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their centrality for the study of the Second Temple period and the roots of rabbinic Judaism. It belongs on the shelf of every serious student of Second Temple Judaism.