

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications, Classics and Religious Studies
Department

Classics and Religious Studies

2001

Review of *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, edited by John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler.

Sidnie White Crawford

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, scrawford1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/classicsfacpub>



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Crawford, Sidnie White, "Review of *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, edited by John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler." (2001). *Faculty Publications, Classics and Religious Studies Department*. 106.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/classicsfacpub/106>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Classics and Religious Studies at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, Classics and Religious Studies Department by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Published in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 322 (2001), pp. 95-96.
 Copyright © 2001 American Schools of Oriental Research.

Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls, edited by John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.
 x + 167 pp. Paper. \$18.00.

This volume is part of a series entitled *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature*, edited by P. Flint, M. Abegg, Jr., and F. García Martínez. The aim of the series is to make "available to readers at all levels the best of current Dead Sea Scrolls research." The collection of essays gathered in this volume succeeds in that goal admirably.

The volume grew out of a conference at Trinity Western University on April 24, 1999 (the editors are thus to be congratulated on bringing the volume to publication rapidly). The introduction, written by John J. Collins, gives an overview of scholarship on the religion of the Scrolls beginning with the publication of Helmer Ringgren's 1963 book *The Faith of Qumran: The Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Fortress Press; Swedish edition 1961). According to Collins, discussion of the religious ideas of the Dead Sea Scrolls up until the early 1990s centered on a few texts: the Rule of the Community, the Damascus Document, the Hodayot, the Pesharim, and the War Scroll. With the publication of the majority of the fragmentary texts from Qumran in the early 1990s, the textual landscape changed; new questions began to be asked and new solutions proposed. The most far-reaching of the changes was a new appre-

ciation for the relationship of the Dead Sea Scrolls with other strands of Judaism, which gave the rabbinic evidence a new prominence. This prominence sometimes worked to the detriment of the Scrolls' previously observed ties to early Christianity. As we begin a new decade and a new century of Qumran research, Collins argues that scholars must "do justice both to [the Dead Sea sect's] continuity with Jewish tradition and to its distinctive innovations; to its affinities both with early Christianity and with rabbinic Judaism" (p. 5). Collins sees the affinities with early Christianity in the areas of messianic expectation, judgment after death, and apocalyptic thought, while the Scrolls' religious ideals and ethical values are closer to rabbinic Judaism. The essays in this volume tackle all of those topics and more.

First, a note about the scholarly presuppositions of the contributors. All of the contributors to this volume agree with the consensus position that the scrolls from the eleven caves surrounding Khirbet Qumran form a coherent collection representing a particular strand of Palestinian Judaism, and that these scrolls belonged to the inhabitants of Qumran in the latter half of the Second Temple period. Further, most if not all of the contributors identify that community with the Essenes.

The contents of the volume may be usefully divided into four topics: (1) Understanding of divinity: John J. Collins, "Powers in Heaven: God, Gods and Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls," and Eileen Schuller, "Petitionary Prayer and the Religion of Qumran"; (2) Halakhic issues: Hannah K. Harrington, "The Halakhah and the Religion of Qumran," and Robert A. Kugler, "Rewriting Rubrics: Sacrifice and the Religion of Qumran"; (3) the question of Hellenistic influence: Martin Hengel, "Qumran and Hellenism," and Timothy H. Lim, "The Qumran Scrolls, Multilingualism, and Biblical Interpretation"; and (4) apocalypticism and messianism: James C. VanderKam, "Apocalyptic Tradition in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Religion of Qumran," and Craig A. Evans, "Qumran's Messiah: How Important Is He?" The book also contains a selected bibliography.

Collins's article surveys various texts from Qumran to determine the Qumran sect's views regarding angels and other divine beings. He concludes that the religion of the Scrolls is not monotheistic: God is supreme, but surrounded by subordinate heavenly beings (p. 27). Given the interest in angels and the divine realm evinced by many Second Temple texts, this conclusion is not controversial. What is more controversial is his statement on p. 24: "While no text states explicitly that the sectarians were celibate, sexual activity would be difficult to reconcile with the angelic life." While it is true that the literature from Qumran is strict about matters of sexual purity, and some of that strictness stems from the presence of angels (War Scroll 7:3-7), nowhere do the texts embrace celibacy as an ideological position. Harrington, however, in her excellent contribution argues that "according to Qumran reasoning, greater holiness is obtained if sexual intercourse is simply avoided" (pp. 82-83). Perhaps it is better to avoid the loaded term "celibacy," with its ideological implications, and discuss sexual abstinence (whether temporary or permanent).

Schuller's article asks the question, "What is the interplay between a strongly deterministic theology such as is generally recognized in the Scrolls and specifically petitionary prayer?" In her survey of the liturgical texts, she notes that much of the material involves praise, but petition also exists. The petitions ask for the things for which they customarily give thanks. She concludes that much of the language is a reuse of older, traditional forms. I wonder as well whether the petitioner is asking for wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in order to be reassured that he is part of the elect.

Martin Hengel and James VanderKam, writing about different topics, reach similar conclusions re-

garding some of the seeming contradictions in the Qumran literature. Hengel characterizes the community as "a movement of strict opposition against the expansion of Hellenistic civilization in Jewish Palestine" (p. 46). Yet he notes myriad examples of Hellenistic influence at Qumran, including the presence of Greek scrolls in Cave 7 (Timothy Lim argues from this and other evidence that the Qumran community, or at least some of its members, knew Greek). He attributes this influence not to direct adaptation, but to the *Zeitgeist* of the period. VanderKam notes that the Qumran community was an eschatological and apocalyptic community that did not write apocalypses, but rather preserved and copied them (p. 114). The texts that they did preserve, however, exercised a "demonstrable influence" on their literature (p. 132). He concludes that Qumran emphasized Torah along with apocalyptic themes, putting it most in the tradition of Jubilees. Both of these essays demonstrate the lack of isolation of the Qumran group from the rest of Judaism and indeed the world.

Craig Evans's conclusion points in the same direction. He notes that less than 2% of the nonbiblical scrolls are concerned with messianism, but those that are are sectarian (p. 138). He discusses the fact that Qumran seemed to be awaiting two messiahs, a royal messiah and an anointed priest, and points out that this idea occurs at least as early as Zechariah 1-8. He concludes that Qumran's messianism is not distinctive in any significant way from the messianism of other Jewish groups of the period.

One thing readers of *BASOR* will miss in this collection of essays is any discussion of the archaeology of Qumran and the light it might shed on its religious or ritual practices. For example, the mysterious bones left covered by ceramic sherds in various locations around the site have never been fully explained. Kugler states in a footnote, "the evidence of animal bones under ceramic remains may not be taken as evidence that animal sacrifice was performed at the site" (p. 90, n. 1). Given the lack of remains of an altar or other sacrificial accoutrements at Qumran, I agree with Kugler, but what do the bones evince? A full treatment of the religion of Qumran must take into account the archaeological as well as the textual evidence.

Sidnie White Crawford
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
scrawford1@unl.edu