Reflections on Literacy, Textuality, and Community in the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls

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As the varied contributions in this volume amply demonstrate, the Dead Sea Scrolls have offered an unparalleled lab for scholars on textuality in antiquity. Given the fulsomeness of its evidence pride of place is held by the Community Rule tradition. The significance of those eleven at times quite different manuscripts produced over the space of almost two centuries goes far beyond the particularities of their equally fascinating contents. Initially scholars worked for a number of formative years only with the best preserved manuscript of the Community Rule (1QS) which was considered the “manual” or constitution of an ancient Jewish group hidden for millennia in a cave in the Judean Desert. The publication of ten additional manuscripts (MSS) from Cave 4 in 1998 has opened up a much wider horizon of scholarly interest in these manuscripts. While a large proportion of their contents overlapped with 1QS, some of the witnesses preserved in Cave 4 diverged markedly from what was said in 1QS. The manuscript tradition of the Community Rule (S) thus offers precious first hand-evidence of textual growth and inter-textual relationships also with the Damascus Document and 4QMiscellaneous Rule (4Q265).

The paradigmatic place of 1QS in discussions of the nature of the so-called “Qumran Community” has also influenced investigations of the genre of rules. Here Ben Wright’s analysis of the issue of genre in wisdom and apocalyptic—where he argues for a move away from the proto-type approach—is illuminating also for the S tradition. In light of the full manuscript picture we are dealing with a selection of proto-types or at least challenges to the

1 It is a great pleasure to dedicate these reflections to my colleague George Brooke who has accompanied my career from its earliest days. His exemplary standards as a scholar, colleague, and friend are an example many of us struggle to emulate. His own meticulous, wide-ranging, and often adventurous contributions to scholarship alongside the enormous generosity he has extended to so many colleagues across the globe continue to have a huge impact on the field of Qumran and associated disciplines.
proto-type of 1QS and are being forced to re-draw the genre map of what constitutes a Rule text or even a Serekh manuscript.\(^6\)

**A Theory of Local Rule Texts**

The literarily complex picture of the growth of the S tradition, in turn, led to a period of reflection on how best to square this evidence with some kind of “life on the ground.” A number of attempts have been made to propose a series of distinct realities behind the various S MSS.\(^7\) Thus, John Collins has proposed an identification of the Yahad with “an association dispersed in multiple settlements” rather than a single community that resided at the Qumran site.\(^8\)

Here he is in agreement Alison Schofield’s suggestion that different copies of the Community Rule should be associated with a variety of related settlements that were eventually brought to Khirbet Qumran at a time of crisis.\(^9\) Schofield put forward a radial model to account for the spread of S MSS at Qumran. In particular, she conceives of a provenance in Jerusalem for the earliest stages of the Community Rule, a text that was eventually revised at Qumran and in outlying related communities.\(^10\) For Schofield 1QS holds a special place, and she observes, “It may be that 1QS was the authoritative text of Qumran, the product of the activity of the hierarchical and exegetical center of the movement.”\(^11\) Schofield further proposes that the Cave 4 manuscripts of the Rule are depositories of the S traditions that originated in a number of communities outside of Qumran. This results in a clear distinction between the Qumran centre and peripheral communities. Schofield’s

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\(^8\) Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community*, 68.


\(^10\) Schofield, *From Qumran to the Yahad*.

\(^11\) *From Qumran to the Yahad*, 279.
hypothesis is reminiscent of the “local texts” model championed to account for the plurality of biblical texts attested at Qumran by Frank Moore Cross. According to this theory the text of the Samaritan Pentateuch originated in Palestine, the proto-MT goes back to Babylonia, and the proto-LXX is associated with Egypt. As with Cross’ “local texts” hypothesis the model proposed by Collins and Schofield is difficult to uphold in view of the presence of multiple text types (of what was to become biblical and non-biblical material) all in one place, the deposits at and near Qumran. Rather than posit a crisis which provoked outlying communities to bring their texts to Qumran, it is preferable, in my view, to account for the pluriform textual picture without such an assumption. Just as recent scholarship on the history of the biblical text has abandoned a geographical explanation based on “local texts,” it is time to appreciate the geographically densely attested pluriform textual picture to have emerged from the vicinity of Qumran both for the emerging Bible and the Rule texts.

Schofield’s suggestion of the elevated standing of 1QS which she associates with the community hub at Qumran as opposed to copies that were brought from outlying communities is also reminiscent of the theory of Saul Lieberman who posited the presence of a master copy of the Torah deposited in the Temple with more “popular” versions circulating elsewhere. In fact, a model of thinking in terms of a centre and a periphery (akin to Schofield’s “radial model”) has been pervasive in research on the history of the text of the Hebrew Bible including in the work of Emanuel Tov, as has been critically reviewed by Andrew Teeter recently.

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Dynamic Living Traditions

The implicit sub-text of a conversation with research on the history and pluriformity of the emerging biblical text holds the key to another explanation of the evidence of the Rule manuscripts. As I have argued elsewhere, the textually pluralistic picture attested for the Rule texts is part and parcel of the mind-set that gave us a pluriform picture of other Second Temple literature, not least of which the manuscripts of the emerging Bible manuscripts from Qumran. Moving even closer to the beating heart of textual authority we note complexity and pluriformity already within the Hebrew Bible such as between Exodus and Deuteronomy.

The big picture that emerges from the study of Jewish texts from the Second Temple period is one of complexity and development both in the material that was to become the Hebrew Bible and, I would argue, also the Rule texts. Both of these findings came as a surprise to us—people immersed in a printing culture’s sense of the normativity of texts. It would seem as if at this particular period in Judaism striving with the tradition was an endeavour that was comfortable with different versions of a text without “privileging” a particular exemplar. Here Hindy Najman’s account of the vitality of scripture in ancient Judaism where a hallmark of a text’s authoritativness was the generating of new texts is helpful. Along similar lines George Brooke has shown that it is precisely the creative engagement with the tradition that conveys authority at this period. It is worth reproducing his argument in his own words here,

All of this copying, revising, editing and rewriting indicates the authority of the tradition in general [...], a kind of accrued authority, rather than the authority of any particular form of text. Somehow it is the process that is authoritative rather than the product. It is this view of authority that must come to dominate any discussion of the

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21 The terminology of “privileging” goes back to Brooke, “What is a Variant Edition?,” 617.
22 See Hindy, Najman, “The Vitality of Scripture Within and Beyond the ‘Canon’,” *JSJ* 43 (2012): 497-518, 516. See also the contribution by Judith Newman in this volume.
processes of transmission and which should contribute most to the discussion of multiple editions of scriptural works.\textsuperscript{23}

It would appear on the basis of the evidence in front of us that it was precisely this level of “accrued authority” that also emerges from the pluriform witnesses of the Community Rule tradition. To what extent the movement’s “life on the ground” was hampered by such a complex textual picture of Rule texts is a question to which we will turn below.

\textbf{The Turn from “Reality Literature”}

The complexity of the S tradition which prevents us from jumping from text to life and back again has been stressed by a number of recent studies. In particular, the idea of a straightforward connection of the Community Rule tradition to life on the ground near Khirbet Qumran was seriously challenged by the widely accepted re-dating of the communal occupation of the site. Unlike the original chronology proposed by Roland de Vaux,\textsuperscript{24} a reassessment of the archaeological evidence, especially the coins, suggests the site of Qumran began to be used as a communal settlement no earlier than the beginning of the first century BCE.\textsuperscript{25} Given 1QS, the well preserved early manuscript of the Rule, was copied in 100-75 BCE and reflects a complex literary creation including references to a well-established community, the account of communal life given in the text can no longer be associated with incipient communal life at the site.\textsuperscript{26} As a consequence recent scholarship is emphasizing the significance of these manuscripts as complex literary artefacts.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{23} Brooke, “What is a Variant Edition?,” 620.
\textsuperscript{24} Roland de Vaux, \textit{Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Schweich Lectures 1959} (Oxford: OUP; The British Academy, 1973).
\textsuperscript{25} Jodi Magness, \textit{The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), esp. 47-72.
The question arises, then, what is the point of a huge amount of economic, manual, and intellectual investment in the production of multiple MSS of the Community Rule only for them to be stored in the same complex of caves? Here we need to temper our evidence base somewhat by acknowledging that it is debatable whether 5Q11 (5QS) and all of the ten Cave 4 manuscripts are, in fact, copies of the Community Rule.\footnote{On 5Q11 see Alexander, “Literacy Among Jews in Second Temple Palestine,” 6; on the possibility that 4Q262 (S\textsuperscript{b}) and 4Q264 (S\textsuperscript{f}) include excerpts from S rather than copies of the Community Rule see Philip Alexander and Geza Vermes, DJD 26: 11-12, 190, 201. For recent pertinent methodological reflections see also Jokiranta, “What is ‘Serekh ha-Yahad (S)’?”} However, the evidence for Cave 4 manuscripts that cover material from the core constitutional columns parallel to 1QS 5-9 is, nevertheless, noteworthy: 4Q256 (S\textsuperscript{b}); 4Q258 (S\textsuperscript{d}); 4Q259 (S\textsuperscript{e}); 4Q261 (S\textsuperscript{g}); and 4Q263 (S\textsuperscript{i}). We may thus ask, in terms coined by Stanley Fish: what do the multiple Community Rule manuscripts “do” as opposed to what do they “mean”?\footnote{Stanley Fish, \textit{Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 25. The focus on what texts “do” is also explored by Carol Newsom in the context of her analysis of the Hodayot, cf. Carol Newsom, \textit{The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran}, STDJ 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 191-286; see also Fraade, \textit{Legal Fictions}, 4.} In what follows I hope to shed fresh perspectives on the intense debate of the significance of the evidence of the Rule MSS from Qumran by drawing on the work of a number of scholars who have shed light on the social significance of texts in the Second Temple period.

The Social and Cultural Significance of Texts in the Second Temple Period.

Moshe Halbertal locates the emergence of text-centeredness and the rise of the scholar to the Second Temple period.\footnote{Moshe Halbertal, \textit{People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority} (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 10, though Halbertal credits Moshe Weinfeld with suggesting this notion goes back even earlier to Josiah’s reform and intensified after the destruction of the First Temple (149, n. 18). For engagement with the work of Halbertal see also the contribution by Philip Alexander in this volume.} His insights shed light on the Dead Sea Scrolls which offer evidence of a complex and fluid set of texts with which a text-centered movement associated itself.

The concept of textual communities was developed by Brian Stock as a challenge to the dominant concept of literacy in the context of his research on the 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} centuries CE. According to Stock textual communities attract “groups to study” texts even though not all members of such communities are necessarily literate and some may rely on interpreters to access the texts.\footnote{Brian Stock, \textit{The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 522. See also Popović, “Qumran as Scroll Storehouse in Times of Crisis?,” 591.} Elsewhere he speaks of,
… “textual communities,” that is, … groups of people whose social activities are centred around texts, or, more precisely, around a literate interpreter of them. The text in question need not be written down nor the majority of auditors actually literate.32

The symbolic significance of ancient literary compositions and the social standing of those able to promulgate them in a largely oral culture comes into play here.33 The evidence for the personal ownership of valuable literary texts that were taken into refuge caves in the Judean Desert at a time when their owners were facing destitution and death is a powerful indication of the cultural and economic value attached to such possessions.34 Some owners of such treasures may have been unable to access them in their written form.35 The fact that the possession of prestigious literary works led people in fear of their lives to carry these works ultimately to their deaths further indicates the immense cultural significance of those involved in the production of such material.36

Popović has rightly stressed the “scholarly context” of the Qumran holdings of mainly literary texts.37 I have argued that within that broader context Cave 4—which lies at the heart of the pluriform picture for the Rule MSS—reflects a particularly eclectic and learned repertoire that may have been intended for an elite among the movement.38 A consideration that has not received sufficient attention to date is that the scholarly mind-set applies as much to the production of literary texts, including the Rules, as it does to the collection and ownership of such material.39 What Chris Keith describes as the “tremendous amount of social esteem held by the relatively small slice of the population capable of reading and

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32 Implications of Literacy, 522.
36 See also Chris Keith, Jesus’ Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee, LNTS (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 87 (“Sometimes, then, the importance of a text derives from the absence of a widespread readership rather than its presence”).
37 Popović, “Qumran as Scroll Storehouse in Times of Crisis?,” 590, 592.
38 Hempel, Qumran Rule Texts in Context, 303-37.

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copying the Holy Scriptures” would have applied equally to those drafting and copying the Rule MSS.

Apart from the inconsistencies between and within various manuscripts of the Community Rule the literary phenomena we observe here are entirely compatible with other literary traditions preserved at Qumran, including the emerging Bible. Rather than trying to offer a utilitarian approach to the complex literary evidence of the Rule MSS—it is more likely that their production and complex transmission was powered by the same literary and scholarly motivations that drove the engagement with other texts.

The physicality of the Rule scrolls—mostly valuable leather scrolls—implies a desire to promote the significance of this literature and the self-presentation of those responsible for it. Moreover, Philip Alexander has drawn attention to the fact that papyrus (cf. 4Q255 [S]) and 4Q257 [S]) had to be imported from Egypt and was by no means a cheap alternative to animal skin. It is further important to remember that the Rule MSS were produced analogously and by the same people as scriptural scrolls with the scribe of 1QS also responsible for 4QSAm and corrections in 1Qlsa.

While it seems unlikely that the Rule texts were in any way applied as handbooks—recipe book fashion—this is not to question some kind of function of the various MSS in the life of the movement. As far as the movement’s day to day life was concerned, authority is said to rest very much with leading individuals at whose word affairs were managed (e.g. 1QS 5:2; 4Q256 [Sb] 9 3; 4Q258 [Sd] 1 2). Members were expected to contribute in deliberation verbally in hierarchical order (e.g., 1QS 6:8b-13a where the root dbr

40 Keith, Jesus’ Literacy, 88. See also his observations on “craftman’s literacy,” ibidem, 110.
41 For examples of manuscript internal inconsistencies see Hempel, Qumran Rule Texts in Context, 28-31, 109-19.
42 Cf. Hayim Lapin, “Dead Sea Scrolls and the Historiography of Ancient Judaism,” in Rediscovering the Dead Sea Scrolls: An Assessment of Old and New Approaches and Methods, ed. Maxine Grossman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 108-27, 118-19. See also Morton Smith, Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament (London: SCM, 1987), 7 who observes “... copying a text is a long, tedious job which is not done without some strong motive. Therefore, of the texts produced by any one generation, only a few were copied by the next, and the motives for copying those few were also the motives for editing or ‘correcting’ them.”
45 For the analogy used with reference to pagan worship see Robin Lane Fox, “Literacy and Power in Early Christianity,” in Literacy and Power, 126-48, 126.
46 On function as important consideration for differences between texts see also Teeter, Scribal Laws, 254-57 and 260.
Nuancing Notions of a Socially Monolithic Scribal Movement

Johnson, like Stock, stresses the cultural value of elite texts and notes that they were more often than not disseminated orally to those unable to access the material immediately.55 While

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48 An administrative application of written records is attested also in the Damascus Document in the specific context of the overseer’s role of recording rebukes brought forward by members. Something akin to such a record appears to have survived in 4Q477.

49 Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 112.


51 William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities*, Classical Culture and Society (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 22

52 Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert*, STDJ 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 125-29. Tov does, however, identify 1QSa as a possible deluxe edition based on its distinctive dimensions. Tov has argued, against prevailing opinion, that 1QSa was not part of the same scroll as 1QS, *Scribal Practices*, 111 n. 149. However, I was able to identify definitive photographic evidence showing that 1QSa was indeed stitched to 1QS 11. For details see note 52 in Charlotte Hempel, “Wisdom and Law in the Hebrew Bible and at Qumran,” forthcoming in *JSJ* 48 (2017).

53 See Alexander, “Literacy among Jews in Second Temple Palestine,” 17, where he describes 1QS as “an expensive manuscript, by far the biggest and most impressive of all our exemplars of the Serekh.”

54 Wise, *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea*, 304.

leading members of the movement must have been intimately involved with the transmission and production of the literary wealth to have reached us via Qumran, there is no reason to assume that others, possibly the majority, relied on the former to mediate key messages. This is not to say that for members unable to access the texts directly their association with the literature was not a central aspect of their identity as members of a “textual community” in the sense outlined by Stock.\(^{56}\)

Related to this is the standing of the written word in a predominantly oral culture. Thus, in the context of her work on Roman religion, Mary Beard challenges the utilitarian notion that writing chiefly serves communication that cannot, for practical reasons, be delivered orally. Like Stock and Johnson, she recognizes that the impact of a written religious tradition on the sense of identity of those attached to the literature is effective beyond those who are able to access the material independently.\(^{57}\) Thus, she observes,

> Even for those who were completely illiterate, the existence of a written tradition—written representations of the religious “system,” its rules and rituals—determined the nature of their religious experience and their perception of religious power.\(^{58}\)

Is it reasonable to assume, as we commonly do, that the gatekeepers of the literature from Qumran did not also attract a substantial number of members unable to read and write given literacy was limited to an elite in antiquity?\(^{59}\) Even if there was something of a spike in literary proficiency in the second century BCE, as argued by Baumgarten, this is unlikely to have reached more than an enlarged minority.\(^{60}\) After all, there would have been plenty to contribute to the life of the movement in terms of agricultural production, food preparation, building and maintaining facilities, tending animals, manufacturing pottery, and preparing animal skins for scroll production. Just as people of limited literacy gained considerable social capital from the ownership of prestigious literary texts as mentioned above, so others would have achieved a similarly elevated standing by virtue of the proximity and affiliation

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\(^{56}\) Stock, *Implications of Literacy*.


\(^{58}\) Beard, “Writing and Religion,” 58.

\(^{59}\) Albert Baumgarten acknowledges as much before pulling back, rather, when he notes, “…literacy need not have been an absolute requirement for membership; nevertheless, it would certainly have been useful, and at Qumran it was more or less assumed.” Albert I. Baumgarten, *The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era: An Interpretation*, JSJSup 55 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 48.

with a scribal elite anywhere; and Khirbet Qumran is unlikely to have been different. In other words, it is time to challenge the notion that the doubtlessly dominant scribal elite responsible for the literary outputs were not also accompanied and supported by a second tier of illiterate or semi-literate members to form a “textual community.” I offered a comparable challenge of the assumption that “making dinner” was the responsibility of established members who would serve the newly admitted once the latter were granted access to “the purity.”61 One can only imagine the symbolic significance for a member of limited literacy of having their name registered in the membership—and equally the unsettling experience of appearing in the overseer’s record of offenders. Note in this context Beard’s observation that private religious inscriptions found in pagan contexts invariably focus on the name of the worshippers. As she puts it, “Presence is fully defined only by naming.”62

These observations sit well with the fundamentally hierarchical vision of the community as outlined in the Rule texts—new members, or those recently re-admitted after temporary exclusion, sit in rank order (cf., e.g., 1QS 5:23-24; 6:2b, 4, 8-10, 22, 26; 8:19; 9:2). Alongside what we may call a peer hierarchy is another layer of often priestly leadership. It seems inevitable that the top-tier scribal and intellectual elite did not start out in the back row. We have to be aware that the training to become a top level scholar was inter-generational and required years of study. It is hardly conceivable that anyone would be able to join the movement and work their way up along the lines of “living the Qumran dream” from washing dishes to millionaire.63

It is in 1QS 6:2 // 4Q258 (S\(^d\)) 2:7 // 4Q263 (S\(^i\)) 3 where we might have a reference to work and duties to be performed in a communal context: “Those of inferior rank shall obey (their) superiors in matters of work and money.”63 This particular passage has been much debated since it lays down rules to be adhered to in “all their dwelling places.” Whether or not this passage envisions life at Qumran or elsewhere—an issue I have dealt with at some length elsewhere64—the key point for our present purposes is the reference to duties that were largely unremarked upon in daily life. The largest number of references to מלאכה in the sense of “work” occur in material dealing with prohibited work during the festivals and the Sabbath which also implies work being carried out on other days.

63 4Q258 and 4Q263 7:2 and 4Q263 3 read (יָנִיהָ) whereas 1QS 6:2 has (יָנֵיהָ).
64 See Hempel, Qumran Rule Texts in Context, 79-105, and further bibliography cited there.
Granted that the popular vision of a community of elite scribes sustained by their faith and erudition alone is illusory, we need to allow for a less monolithic social and cultural environment in the “textual community” responsible for the literary riches unearthed at and near Qumran. As Michael Wise has recently noted, “Hebrew literacy also served to fashion and sustain elites, as literacy did elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world.”65

Conclusion
We began by challenging the long-established sense of the textual particularism represented by the Community Rule tradition. Instead we stressed the need to acknowledge the social and cultural continuum of textuality across different kinds of literature attested at Qumran. As so much else that survives from this exciting period in Jewish history, the Qumran Rule texts are complex scribal artefacts produced by literary elites in the Second Temple period. They share a plurality of texts preserved alongside each other as hallmarks of a dynamic literary tradition.

Having stressed the shared milieu of cultural production shared by the Rule texts and other Second Temple literature,66 we ended with a reconsideration of the social make-up of the movement responsible for the production, transmission, and collection of the Qumran Scrolls. While affirming the determinative leadership of a stratum of elite scholars and scribes, we noted the inevitable though largely unrecognized presence of a significant proportion of the membership who were illiterate or semi-literate while nevertheless identifying themselves as part of the same textual community.

65 Wise, Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea, 303, see also 309-10.