Voluntary Associations and the Qumran Community

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The Qumran community possesses a unique identity expressed through the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as the built structure of Qumran. This community functioned in the Second Temple period on the coast of the Dead Sea. Within the Dead Sea Scroll library, sectarian texts exhibit the Hellenizing influences of Greco-Roman and Ptolemaic voluntary associations, as seen in the *Rule of the Community* (1QS). Greco-Roman associations were located in nearly every town in the Hellenistic world, and their influence permeated Jewish culture and affected the nature of the Qumran community.[1] Voluntary associations are defined as groups formed through the free and deliberate joining of its members. This is contrary to an involuntary association whose membership is based on birth, conscription, or compulsion, such as some military organizations.[2] Hellenistic voluntary associations, known from the fifth century B.C.E. in Greece, and slightly later in the Roman world, served a number of social roles including funerary, religious, and professional functions.[3] The Qumran community's parallels to Hellenistic voluntary organizations can be seen in the sect's structure and leadership, initiation rites, social functions, terminology, and voluntary language. This paper discusses these similarities, and expands on previous literature by applying the work of John Kloppenborg and others to specifically address columns three and five the *Rule of the*

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[1] Torrey Seland, "Philo and the Clubs and Associations of Alexandria," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World,* ed. John S. Kloppenborg and S. G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 110.

[2] Richard Ascough, "Greco-Roman Philosophic, Religious, and Voluntary Associations," in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today,* ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2002) 3.

[3] John S. Kloppenborg, "Collegia and *Thiasoi:* Issue in Function, Taxonomy and Membership," in Kloppenborg and Wilson, 18, and Wayne O. McCready, "*Ekklēsia* and Voluntary Associations", in Kloppenborg and Wilson, 61.

Community. In the past, the *Rule of the Community* has been cited as evidence for

Qumran's voluntary nature; however, columns three and five have failed to be addressed

in previous discussions. This paper's analysis of these additional columns aims to create a

more complete analysis of the *Rule of the Community* in regards to Qumran's relationship

to Hellenistic voluntary associations, encompassing parts of the text previously omitted.

COMMUNITY STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

The Qumran community exhibits some of its closest parallels to Hellenistic

voluntary organizations through its internal structure and organization. In particular, the

community's structure resembles that of Roman religious associations.[4] Wayne

McCready states that most of these Greco-Roman associations contained between twenty

to forty members and rarely exceeded 100 members.[5] According to Stephen Wilson, all

these voluntary associations were organized into hierarchies.[6] These hierarchies,

constructed of superiors and inferiors, are evident in column three of the *Rule of the*

Community: "*(14)* all the ranks of their spirits."[7] Organizations' sizes were often

constrained by their meeting locations, environments, or supplies. In the Hellenistic

world, voluntary associations were organized to supplement the role of the government

and provide services not rendered by the state. They were often structured to include

people denied access to the wider political arena giving them opportunities to lead and

organize groups outside formal state institutions. Many voluntary organizations used

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[4] Carsten Claussen and Michael Thomas Davis, "The Concept of Unity at Qumran," in *Qumran Studies: New Approaches, New Questions,* ed. Michael Thomas Davis and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 241.
[5] McCready, 61.
[6] Stephen G. Wilson, "Voluntary Associations: an Overview," in Kloppenborg and Wilson, 10.
[7] *Rule of the Community*, 1QS III 14

ranking systems to facilitate social exchange.[8] Qumran shares organizational aspects with the Greek *ekklesia*, or assembly of people, which functioned as the principle democratic popular assembly in Greece. Both the *ekklesia* and Qumran community are marked by their high levels of internal governance. The *ekklesia* was similar to Qumran in stressing the equality of members with respect to entrance requirements and membership.[9] This link is affirmed in the fifth column of Qumran's *Rule of the Community* which states that those who "*(1)* freely volunteer" may be admitted into the community.[10] This demonstrates that membership was not restricted by socio-economic class, but rather personal devotion to God. In this manner, both the *ekklesia* and the Qumran community were open to all strata of society who agreed to obey association standards and rules. Patterns of social organization in Roman associations and the Qumran community are closely linked, which Fuglseth argues is evidence for Hellenistic organizational patterns' influences on Qumran.[11] As shown in the *Rule of the Community*, Qumran's community consisted of a mobile ranking system constructed of superiors and inferiors. The language in column five supports this connection between Hellenistic associations and the Qumran community through its discussion of Qumran's social hierarchy: "*(23)*…each one obeys his fellow, junior under senior."[12] Social hierarchies may be seen in the physical layout of Qumran, in which large rooms, such as locus 77, show the communal nature of the sect, and smaller more isolated rooms reflect its social hierarchy, with physical separations

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[8] Wilson,11.
[9] McCready, 61.
[10] *Rule of the Community*, 1QS V 1.
[11] Kåre Fuglseth, *Johannine Sectarianism in Perspective: A Sociological, Historical, and Comparative Analysis of Temple and Social Relationships in the Gospel of John, Philo, and Qumran.* Supplements to *Novum Testamentum,* v. 119 (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 337.
[12] *Rule of the Community*, 1QS III 14, V 23.

between different social and purity tiers.[13] In this manner, the socially constructed hierarchy at Qumran was physically reinforced through the community's physical design. In both Qumran and religious voluntary associations, priests occupied the highest ranks within the social hierarchy and every member acknowledged their societal position. In both Hellenistic associations and the Qumran community, priests presided over meetings and assemblies.[14] While this may be in part due to organizations' religious nature, it remains an important similarity between groups. Qumran and Greco-Roman associations share many common titles within their social hierarchies such as priest, manager, and examiner, all of who played vital roles in the maintenance of sect social culture.[15] Additionally, Roman collegia and Qumran were both ruled by councils consisting of laymen and priests. These councils, which in Qumran consisted of officials such as the *mevaqqer* and the *paqid*, had both judicial and deliberative powers over the wider community. The council of fifteen, mentioned in *Rule of the Community,*[16] consisted of fifteen members and was a reflection of social structure within Greek guilds and associations, e.g. the Labyads in Delphi.[17] Significantly, councils of Hellenistic associations and Qumran had similar numbers of members and fulfilled comparable functions, demonstrating the diffusion of Hellenistic ideals into Qumran's social structure.

Association founders assumed integral functions in both Qumran and Hellenistic groups. Founders played key roles in maintaining associations and creating a shared

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[13] Eyal Regev, "Access Analysis of Khirbet Qumran: Reading Spatial Organization and Social Boundaries," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 355 (2009): 85.

[14] Moshe Weinfeld, *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect: A Comparison with Guilds and Religious Associations of the Hellenistic-Roman Period,* Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus, 2 (Fribourg, Suisse: Editions Universitaires, 1986) 19.

[15] Ascough, 14.

[16] *Rule of the Community*, 1QS VIII 1.

[17] Weinfield, 19.

history and identity.[18] Qumran's putative founder, the Teacher of Righteousness, prominent in much sectarian literature within the Dead Sea Scrolls, is emphasized as the messenger of God as well as the sect's influential leader.[19]

Maintenance of communal funds and treasuries is another structural marker common to both Greco-Roman associations and the Qumran community. Members of Roman collegia were required to contribute dues to the association in order to upkeep the organization.[20] Similarly, but to a more extreme degree, Qumran's members shared in communal property and were required to transfer personal property to the community upon entry.[21] In return for these personal costs, the community was responsible for attending its members' material well being.[22] Both Qumran and many voluntary associations were egalitarian in that membership brought about opportunities of participation and benefits within the community.[23] In Qumran, the community was charged with caring for the sick and elderly, as were Hellenistic associations. For example, the Roman collegia were often responsible for care of the poor, elderly, or needy within their group.[24] Through their social support, both associations achieve similar functions, diverging only in that the collegia attended to the poor, whereas Qumran did not. This is a logical deviation, however, as caring for the poor was unnecessary in Qumran, where communal property resulted in a more socialist form and negated the influence of personal wealth, which was scorned.

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[18] Ascough, 14.
[19] For example CD 1: 10-11 or IQpHab 7:4-5
[20] Sandra Walker-Ramisch, "Graeco-Roman Voluntary Associations and the Damascus Document: A Sociological Analysis," in Kloppenborg and Wilson, 134.
[21] *Rule of the Community,* 1QS I 11-12.
[22] Claussen and Davis, 243.
[23] Ascough, 14.
[24] Walker-Ramisch, 134.

INITIATION RITES AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Hellenistic voluntary associations and the Qumran community each practiced initiation rites and maintained distinct social functions. Through these, Qumran reflects many of the precedents set by these Greco-Roman and Ptolemaic associations, exhibiting the Hellenizing influence on the sect. Qumran experienced a high degree of tension with the outside world and other Jewish sects within Second Temple Judaism. This distinct insider identity was reinforced through initiation rites' admittance of new members into a selective covenant between the community and God. Only those within the covenant were redeemed by God through their righteous and moral conduct.[25] Column five of the *Rule of the Community* speaks to this revelation in those who "*(10)* freely volunteer together for [the] truth and to walk according to [God's] will."[26] This revelation was shared by some of the Roman collegia, whose texts and inscriptions speak of their closely guarded secrets revealed to them by God.[27]

The intensive procedure through which Qumran membership was achieved, a multi-step and multiple year process, shows that joining the sect was a deliberate act, as the process required high levels of intent and commitment. Therefore, only those who volunteered themselves to obey the rules, regulations, and processes of the sect would become members. John Collins posits that Josephus' description of Essene initiates as 'eager to join their sect' is a striking parallel to the initiates into the Qumran community described in the *Rule of the Community*.[28] Like the Greek *ekklesia*, Qumran community

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[25] Cecilia Wassen and Jutta Jokiranta, "Groups in Tension: Sectarianism in the Damascus Document and the Community Rule," in *Sectarianism in Early Judaism: Sociological Advances* , ed. David J. Chalcraft (London: Equinox Pub, 2007) 222.

[26] *Rule of the Community* 1QS V 10.

[27] Walker-Ramisch, 134.

[28] John Joseph Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectarian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 144.

members joined through individual free will.[29] This requirement of volunteerism is seen in the *Rule of the Community*, which states that members have the choice to decline entry into the sect, evidence that even after passing examination, members must voluntarily submit themselves to the community.[30] Central to the admittance process was the "*(8)* swear[ing of]…a binding oath" of the covenant overseen by the *mevaqqer* and detailed in column five of *Rule of the Community*.[31]

Together, the rigorous process, the required depth of scriptural knowledge, and swearing of an entry oath demonstrate the voluntary nature of the Qumran community.[32] These aspects parallel Hellenistic association's initiation rites, which had procedures and initiating oaths similar to the Qumran community. These similarities are evident in column five of *Rule of the Community*: "*(7)…*Whoever enters the council of the Community *(8)* enters the covenant of God in the presence of all who freely volunteer. He shall swear with a binding oath to revert to the Law of Moses with all that it decrees, with whole *(9)* heart and whole soul."[33] Dionysian societies' inscriptions reveal that they shared similar initiation procedures, as well as covenant renewal ceremonies.[34] These renewal ceremonies occurred in Qumran, as seen in column five of *Rule of the Community*: "*(24)* And their spirit and their deeds must be tested, year after year."[35] Dionysian societies' covenants consisted of admissions of guilt, priestly blessings, and curses, all of which are reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls' sectarian texts.[36] Covenant

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[29] McReady, 61.
[30] *Rule of the Community* 1QS II 25.
[31] *Rule of the Community* 1QS V 8 ff.
[32] Collins,7.
[33] *Rule of the Community* 1QS V 7-9.
[34] See, e.g. Weinfeld, 51-54, Claussen and Davis, 242-243.
[35] *Rule of the Community* 1QS V 24.
[36] Claussen and Davis, 241. See also Michael A. Daise, "The Temporal Relationship between the Covenant Renewal Rite and the Initiation Process in 1QS," in Davis and Strawn, 151-153.

renewals are also present in demotic codes of Greco-Roman associations as well as codes of Ptolemaic guilds.[37] Ptolemaic organizations were influenced by Hellenizing aspects of the Greco-Roman world and correspond to the initiation rites of Qumran through five elements. These groups shared the examination, registration, decision by lot, oath, and the submission of private property, all five of which are phases of Qumran's initiation process.[38] These similarities may reflect either that both Qumran and Ptolemaic voluntary associations were directly influenced by Greco-Roman organizations, or that Qumran's initiations rites were indirectly influenced by Greco-Roman associations through the intermediary of Ptolemaic organizations. Roman collegia also share similar initiation procedures with the Qumran community in their priestly examination of new members and the approval or rejection by the "Many."[39] Probationary or partial membership based on length of loyalty to the group or sect is seen in Qumran as well as its preceding Greco-Roman associations.[40] In addition, entry into a Hellenistic association or the Qumran community came with a price. While most Greco-Roman associations required the payment of entrance fees, Qumran called for personal property to be transferred to community property.[41] While different in scale, both processes reflect a payment of personal property upon entry.

Josephus, Philo and Pliny state that the Essenes, the group still widely thought to have inhabited Qumran, espoused celibacy.[42] This implies that the community would be

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[37] Weinfield, 31.
[38] See e.g. Daise, 150-160 and Weinfield, 22-23.
[39] Walker-Ramisch, 134.
[40] Weinfield, 43 ff.
[41] Walker-Ramisch, 134.
[42] Josephus, *The Jewish War,* II, 120-121, Philo, *Hypothetica,* 11.14, Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 5.73.

unable to self-perpetuate, and would need to obtain members from the outside world.[43]

Again, this demonstrates that the community could not have been based on birth, but

rather through the voluntary joining of outside individuals. In addition, the sect was

highly selective; Jews unversed in Torah were barred from membership.[44] Pliny, in

Historia Naturalis 5.73, stated that many of these new Essene recruits came to the

community as refugees seeking a new life, which they voluntarily sought in the

community on the shores of the Dead Sea.[45] Like the community at Qumran, many

Hellenistic religious associations arose due to individuals' needs. These groups held

particular appeal for those uprooted or dispossessed, not unlike refugees seeking new

lives in Qumran. In this manner, similar sets of people constituted the membership in

both Greco-Roman voluntary associations and Qumran. Albert Baumgarten further

suggests that as Greco-Roman voluntary associations were 'instruments of religious

innovation' and a means for solving a collective problem, the contemporaneous Jewish

sects served the same function.[46]

       Hellenistic associations and Qumran also fulfilled broad social roles including

holding a communal banquet or meal, which were integral both to the structure and

function of each group. Qumran is thought to have held daily communal meals,

contrasting Hellenistic voluntary associations that usually ate together once a month.[47]

The guild of Zeus Hypsistos in Egypt in the first century B.C.E. dined together once a

month, as did the Greek Iobacchi, who shared meals once a month in addition to festivals

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[43] See Collins, 122-165, for a discussion of the scholarship on the case for celibacy and the absence of women and children in the scrolls and at Qumran.

[44] *Rule of the Community* 1QS V 1-10.

[45] Albert Baumgarten, "Graeco-Roman Voluntary Associations and Ancient Jewish Sects," in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World,* ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 107.

[46] Baumgarten, 109.

[47] *Rule of the Community* IQS VI 2.

and anniversaries.[48] Eating clubs in Hellenistic Syria and a larger number of associations also shared the practice of communal meals.[49] Communal eating as a reinforcement of an intimate community was also practiced by the Greek *ekklesia*.[50] Qumran's tradition of daily communal dining is best paralleled, however, in the Iambulus group, a Greek association which, like Qumran, shared all meals as well as sharply divided the community from the outside world, making numerous distinctions regarding levels of purity.[51] Another dining practice difference between Qumran and voluntary Hellenistic associations was Greco-Roman associations' meals were often voluntary and members elected to dine with their associations. This contrasts Qumran, where communal meals were compulsory as it was the single dining locale. Despite this difference, common meals as social functions are important connections between Qumran and Hellenistic associations, as both served as bases for the social nature of the groups and were highly ritualized and integrated into their practices.[52]

In addition to meals, Hellenistic organizations often provided burial for their members, thereby performing another valuable social function.[53] Qumran also buried their members, as can be seen through archaeological excavation of the site. However, funerary practices and mourning requirements are absent from sectarian scripts, which Weinfield argues may be a reflection of Jewish reservation towards funerary sacrifices, or

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[48] Baumgarten, 96.
[49] Ibid.
[50] McReady, 61, *Rule of the Community* IQS VI 4.
[51] Baumgarten, 106.
[52] Baumgarten, 94.
[53] Brian Muhs, "Membership in Private Associations in Ptolemaic Tebtunis," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol. 44, No. 1 (2001): 4+ff.

based on the fact that a tightly knit community such as Qumran required no mourning promotion.[54]

TERMINOLOGY AND VOLUNTARY LANGUAGE

Voluntary terminology and vocabulary indicating a common identity are prevalent throughout sectarian texts (*Rule of the Community* IQS) as well as codes and steles inscribed by Hellenistic voluntary associations. These words help associations create a sense of identity, and may reveal aspects of the group's self-understanding, internal organization, and world perspective. These defining terms are integral in creating a sense of unity among associations and the words "togetherness" and "unity" are commonly found throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls.[55] Indicators of this sense of shared identity are common in columns three and five of the *Rule of the Community* as seen by the repetitive use of the word "*(1)* Community," represented as a formal and united group.[56] Group identity is also evident in defining the community as the "*(9)* sons of Zadok," representing a brotherhood and close bond.[57] This manner of self-definition and use of unifying language is also present in Greco-Roman associations, which are often defined by a homogeneous nature.[58] In addition, *thiasos* is often used throughout the Greco-Roman world to define religious associations such as the Bacchic/Dionysian cults; Philo uses this term to describe the Essene sect.[59] Philo and Josephus use terminology based on the Greek stem *koinos* to describe both the Essene communities as well as

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[54] Weinfield, 31.
[55] Claussen and Davis, 233.
[56] *Rule of the Community* IQS V 1-2, 5-7, 16, 21-22; III 2, 6, 12.
[57] *Rule of the Community* IQS V 9.
[58] Claussen and Davis, 241.
[59] Claussen and Davis, 241.

Hellenistic associations, which, if we allow the Essenic nature of Qumran, demonstrates Qumran's strong similarities and associations to these Greco-Roman voluntary organizations.[60] Common names for groups or sects in both Qumran and Hellenistic associations include "the multitude," "the people," "the community," "tie," "bond," and "adherence."[61] These words represent not only the unity of these organizations, but also the close terminology linkages showing the Hellenizing influence on Qumran. Additionally, according to Hans Bardtke, much of Qumran's terminology used throughout the scrolls was coined to substitute Hellenistic terms for association and thereby create a unique Jewish vocabulary while renouncing Hellenizing influences.[62] However, this influence pervades through these close translations despite the sect's efforts to erase its presence from their organization and literature.

CONCLUSION

Qumran's organizational structure, role of its leadership, initiation rites, social function, terminology, and voluntary language all parallel its preceding voluntary organizations in the Greco-Roman world. These links are evidenced in both columns three and five of *Rule of the Community*, exhibiting that the discussion of the sect's volunteerism and Hellenistic nature is not confined to columns previously analyzed in literature, but rather, encompasses the *Rule of the Community* on a broader scale. These close similarities represent the large influence Hellenistic culture played on the formation of the Qumran group and its definition as a voluntary association. Qumran's voluntary

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[60] Claussen and Davis, 239-240.
[61] Weinfield, 14.
[62] Hans Bardtke, *Die Handschriftenfunde am Toten Meer* (Berlin: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft, 1961).

nature, as well as evidence of outside influence on the sect, is important to a broader

understanding of the sect's function and character.

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