



William R. G. Loader. *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Sectarian and Related Literature at Qumran.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009. ix + 439 pp. \$44.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8028-6391-1.

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Gender Roles and Sexual Rules in the Dead Sea Scrolls

This volume is the second one of a planned series on attitudes toward sexuality in Judaism and Christianity of the Hellenistic era. The author states in his introduction, “By sexuality I mean all matters pertaining to sexuality, rather than the narrower sense of sexual theory and gender formation, on the one hand, and acts of sexual intercourse, on the other” (p. 1). This broad definition means that there is much in this volume that concerns gender roles and boundaries. As such it should appeal to anyone attempting to construct a portrait of the Dead Sea Scrolls community. By “Dead Sea Scrolls” Loader really means the Qumran scrolls, the collection found in the eleven caves near the site of Khirbet Qumran. Since his previous book dealt with *Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and *Aramaic Levi*, those works are not included in the present volume. He also excludes those books which later became canonical in Judaism or Christianity. The focus is on those documents that were for the most part unknown before the Qumran discoveries, and as such widen our knowledge of Second Temple Judaism.

The first three chapters deal with major documents that contain substantive amounts of material related to Loader’s theme, i.e., the *Temple Scroll*, *4QMMT*, and the *Damascus Document*. In each chapter Loader moves through the text systematically, pulling out each reference to sexuality and discussing it. Each chapter has its own conclusion. Regarding the *Temple Scroll*, he notes that much of its material on sexuality concerns states of

impurity, since one of the major concerns of the *Temple Scroll* is preserving the holiness of the ideal temple. Most of the *Temple Scroll*’s regulations extend the provisions of the Torah to create more stringent purity requirements. Loader also notes that some of the positions taken by the *Temple Scroll* coincide with positions found in other Qumran scrolls (e.g., the prohibition of uncle-niece marriage). Concerning *4QMMT* in chapter 2, Loader notes that the document seems chiefly concerned with intermarriage with Gentiles and issues of purity. These dual concerns reflect the document’s overall concern with the relationship of Israel with the Gentile nations.

The longest and most detailed chapter is chapter 3, on the *Damascus Document*. This is not surprising, since the *Damascus Document* contains the most extensive references to women, marriage, and family of any of the Qumran scrolls. Loader deals with the *Damascus Document* in two sections. The first section, “The Admonition,” finds basically literary/theological references to sexuality. “The Laws and Community Regulations,” on the other hand, finds specific regulations concerning male and female discharges, adultery, and marriage rules. Loader does not find anything in the *Damascus Document* that suggests a negative attitude toward sexual relations “in their proper context” (p. 181). The emphasis is on that proper context, legislated by the *Damascus Document*.

The remaining chapters discuss different groups of texts. Chapter 4 deals with legal texts, including the *Com-*

munity Rule, the *Rule of the Congregation*, and the *War Scroll*. I found it a bit odd to find the *War Scroll* in this category. Chapter 5 concerns liturgical and related material, including the *Hodayot*. Chapter 6 looks at texts engaged in “biblical exposition,” including the *pesharim*, *4QFlorilegium*, and the *Genesis Apocryphon*. Chapter 7 discusses the very interesting “wisdom texts,” including *4QInstruction*, *1/4QMysteries*, and the *Wiles of the Wicked Woman*. In these chapters each document is dealt with separately, and no overall conclusions are reached.

In the last chapter Loader draws his final conclusions, with subsections entitled “Conflict and Sexuality,” “Purity Laws, Human Embodiment and Discharges,” “Sexuality and Order,” “Sexuality in Time and Space,” “A Place for Sexuality?” and “Sexuality, Self-Deprecation, and the Demonic.” Since the question of whether or not the Qumran community was celibate has been controversial almost since the discovery of the scrolls, I will focus on Loader’s conclusions on that topic.

Loader first discusses the evidence of the three classical authors, Josephus, Philo, and Pliny, whose witness concerning the Essenes are thought by most Dead Sea Scrolls scholars to describe, more or less, the Qumran community. As Loader notes, “While all three accounts are blatantly idealistic and bizarre, they do provide sufficient evidence that some Essenes did not marry” (p. 372). Since that is the case, if the Qumran community is identified with the Essenes or some subset thereof, it raises the

expectation that some trace of celibacy should be found in the Qumran documents. Loader makes the following observations. First, the documents never address the issue directly. The evidence is at most indirect. Temporary abstinence, in holy space and holy time, is certainly envisaged. Also, some sectarians may have chosen abstinence in order to lead a life of more stringent ritual purity. Loader also notes that Khirbet Qumran itself appears to be a predominantly male settlement, with an absence of anything suggesting family housing or family life. Loader concludes that, while many questions remain unanswered, the best reconstruction would be to accept Josephus’s account of two orders of Essenes, one celibate and one marrying, but to reverse Josephus’s emphasis and conclude that the majority of Essenes did, in fact, marry. This is a sensible solution with which the present reviewer agrees.

William Loader has put together an excellent synthetic volume on a subject of deep interest to scholars of Second Temple Judaism. His reach is broad yet detailed, and he has an impressive command of the secondary literature. I recommend this volume highly. It is a welcome addition to the growing library of works devoted to Second Temple Judaism, because it deals with a topic (sexuality) that is not usually the topic of a full-length monograph. Scholars interested in gender roles, rules concerning male and female sexuality, and purity regulations in Second Temple Judaism will find much that is rewarding in Loader’s book.

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