

Hearing the Unsung Voice: Women in the Qumran Community

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One of the major issues in the study of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* (DSS) is the morphology of the Qumran community, an unknown sect of Jews, called “the Essenes”. The aim of this paper, as a sub-concern, is to analyze the existence of women in the community. Were women dwelling in the Qumran community? If so, what was their socio-religious status in the life of this isolated group? Were they able to have a voice in the community? There are many negative perceptions on the feminine perspective of the ancient religious community within the context of a Jewish celibate monastery. However, this article, based on the sectarian testimonies of Roman historians, writings of *the Rule of the Congregation* (1QSa), *the Damascus Document* (CD), *the Temple Scroll* (11QT), *Wiles of the Wicked Women* (4Q184), and 4Q502 as well as archaeological traces, applies a multi-methodology of the historical, textual, and archaeological approaches to argue a certain identity of women in the eschatological community and an alternative tendency of Qumran-women studies.

From the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* (DSS), the gender issue of the community was not the major concern with Qumran scholarship.¹ Most of them regarded about the provenance of the 850 documents in relation to the unique life of the Essene sect.² The evaluation that the authors of the Cave 1 scrolls were commonly connected with the religio-culture of the male celibate Essenes, drew the overall picture of the community identity in the context of the social gender. While one of the first manuscripts (1 QS) describes no feminized terms of sexual relations, marriages or family, there is no specific account about the nature of women except a name called Queen Shelamzion in the Calendrical text (4Q 320 2). The entire manuscripts were not also published together soon after the discovery, rather it took such a long time (five decades) to be individually available to scholars.³ Meanwhile, no interest of the first archeologists⁴ on women and children directly impacted the basic concepts of their archeological readers. However, most of the texts have been published and is newly revealed that there are many textual traces of women. If one also focuses on the community cemeteries, the single gender perspective is no more definite archeological conclusion. Thus, the traditional theory that there were no women in the Qumran community should be reconsidered.

Historical Voice from Roman Testimonies

Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) in *Natural History* presents a short description of the Essenes in which women were represented as unacceptable human beings in the ascetic community: “The solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all other tribes in the whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, ...” (5.17.4).⁵

¹ Gruber argues that the women studies in ancient societies and religions were unconsciously ignored until 1970s and the women of Qumran were not excluded from the tendency. Mayer I. Gruber, “Women in the Religious System of Qumran,” in Alan J. Avery-Peck, Jacob Neusner, and Bruce D. Chilton (Ed.), *Part Five: The Judaism of Qumran: A System of Reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Judaism in Late Antiquity*, Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2001, 173-175.

² Lena Cansdale, *Qumran and the Essenes: A Re-Evaluation of the Evidence*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck, 1997. 49.

³ Eileen M. Schuller, “Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Peter W. Flint and James C. Vanderkam (Ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Year*, Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 1999, 117-120. Gruber, 2001. 175.

⁴ For more stories of the first archaeological discovery, see C. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine*, London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1896, 2 & 15-16. James L. Kelso, “the Archaeology of Qumran,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol. 74, No. 3 (Sep., 1955) 141-146. Joan E. Taylor, “the Cemeteries of Khirbet Qumran and Women’s Presence at the Site,” *Dead Sea Discoveries*. Vol. 6, No. 3 (Nov., 1999) 285-323.

⁵ H. Rackham (Trans.), *Pliny: Natural History*. Cambridge: The Loeb Classical Library, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1942. 277.

The source of the Roman patrician, which was collected through personal experience travelling in the region of Judea (in particular, the west of *Asphaltites*), reflects the initial policy of the community population that “this people eternally prolong(ed) its existence, without a single birth taking place there” for “their numbers (were) fully recruited by multitudes of strangers that resort to them.”⁶ Philo of Alexandria (30/15 BCE-45 CE) also describes women who were rejected by men because of their low opinion of women. While the text of *Every Good Man is Free*⁷ does not mention women,⁸ the *Hypothetica: Apology for the Jews*⁹ shows a negative picture of marriage within the Essene community. They avoided marriage because it was an obstacle for their common life as well as their practice of continence (8.11.14). They recognized women as selfish, jealous, and disturbing the religious life (8.11.14-15). If they had children, women became even more “hostile to the life of fellowship” (8.11.16-17). They thought that a man bound to his wife (and children) “has become a different man and has passed from freedom into slavery” (8.11.17).

Nevertheless, Philo’s view of women in *The Contemplative Life*,¹⁰ is progressively changed in saying that their sanctuary is divided by a wall in two parts, one for men and one for women:

This common holy place ... is a twofold circuit, being separated *partly into the apartment of the men*, and *partly into a chamber for the women*, for women also, in accordance with the usual fashion there, form a part of the audience, having the same feelings of admiration as the men and having adopted the same sect *with equal deliberation and decision...* (III. 32-33).

The females were given a socio-religious right to be involved at a community feast (VIII. 68).¹¹ There was also a community order that during the meal, men sit by themselves to the right and women to the left (IX. 69).¹² After the meal both men and women stand up, “form themselves” into two choirs and sing hymns to God (XI. 83-84, X. 80 and III. 29). Later the two choirs unite and sing together in imitation of the choir of the Israelites after having been saved through the Red Sea (XI. 85-88). In this text, Philo shows that the Essenes (*Therapeutae*¹³) permitted social equality of women with men in the community, in particular women’s rights to participate and practice worshipping the God of Israel with men.

Another Jewish oriented Roman historian, Josephus (37/38-100 CE) describes the Essenes as a well-organized religious community.¹⁴ According to Atkinson and Magness, Josephus’ account of the community at Khirbet Qumran closely matches with the lifestyle described in the *Community Rules* (1QS), but not identical to the first century B.C.E sectarian community, only was part of the broad Essene movement.¹⁵ In *The Antiquities of the Jews*,¹⁶ he describes the Essenes’ negative relations to women and family life: No women were allowed among the Essenes because they may cause division in their community (18.1.5(21)).

⁶ Pliny the Elder and Dio Chrysotom awarded the geographical details of the community located at the west of the Dead Sea. *Ibid.*, 1942. 278. Joseph E. Zias, “The Cemeteries of Qumran and Celibacy: Confusion Laid to Rest,” *Dead Sea Discoveries*. Vol. 7. No. 2 (2000) 220-223.

⁷ C. D. Yonge (Trans.), “Every Good Man is Free,” in *The Works of Philo*, USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, 688-697.

⁸ “The statute of Nature, who mother-like has born and reared all men alike” (XII 79 and 84).

⁹ C. D. Yonge (Trans.), “Hypothetica: Apology for the Jews,” in *The Works of Philo*, USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, 742-746.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, “The Contemplative Life,” in *The Works of Philo*, USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, 698-706.

¹¹ “And the women also share in this feast, the greater part of whom, though old, are virgins in respect of their purity”.

¹² “And the order in which they sit down to meat is a divided one, the men sitting on the right hand and the women apart from them on the left”.

¹³ Philo in *The Contemplative Life* describes *Therapeutae* as a strange Jewish group living near Alexandria. Philo brings them into connection with the Essenes(1). Yonge, 1995, 698.

¹⁴ Lee I. Levine, “Josephus’ Description of the Jerusalem Temple: War, Antiquities, and Other Sources,” in Fausto Parente and Joseph Sievers (Ed.), *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period*, Leiden, New York and Köln: E.J. Brill, 1994, 233-243. Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective*, London: Collins, 1977. 125-130.

¹⁵ Kenneth Atkinson and Jodi Magness, “Josephus’ Essenes and the Qumran Community,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol 129, No 2 (2010) 317-342.

¹⁶ William Whiston A M (Trans.), “The Antiquities of the Jews” in *The Works of Josephus*, USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996. 27-342.

However, Josephus in *The Wars of the Jews*¹⁷ contradicts himself about the position of women in the community, when claiming that women are accepted in the community by reason of marriage. The Essenes held marriage in contempt: “They do not absolutely deny the fitness of marriage, and the succession of mankind is thereby continued” (2.8.2 (121)). Yet, their esteem of women was low because men had uncertain confidence in the faithfulness of women. In the same book, Josephus informs his readers that he was aware of a separate group of Essenes that differed from the main group by its positive view of marriage:

There was another order of Essenes, who agree with the rest as to their way of living, and customs, and laws, but *differ from them in the point of marriage* (2.8.160-161).

Josephus indirectly says that women became a part of the community, even though it was only for propagation. The Essenes took care to show that their interest in marriage did not stem from carnal lust, but only from their wish to beget children. Furthermore, the Essenes' optional concept of marriage depicts a fair-minded community in which some Essenes married, while some did not. These Jewish-Roman authors had limited resources describing women in the Qumran community. Even when they mention women, the descriptions were written in many negative and indirect ways.¹⁸ However, “their knowledge”¹⁹ and experience (perhaps for Josephus) of “the community women”²⁰ still prove that women dwelled as part of the community through their social activities and marriage relations.

Textual Voice from the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Qumran community is generally presented as being celibate. The members called themselves various symbolic titles – זאדוק של ילדים ('sons of Zadok': 1QS 9.14), צדק של ילדים ('sons of justice': 1QS 3. 20), של גברים (‘men of the community’: 1QS 5.1), and ‘sons of Light’ (אור של ילדים: 1QS 3. 25). These names indicate that the apocalyptic Jewish sectarian group was characterized only by males.²¹ The textual fact that there is no copy of the book of Esther in the Qumran Biblical manuscripts and that Esther is only the one not included in the Hebrew canon discovered from the Qumran caves, depicts the “group of male celibates who withdrew to the desert wilderness to live without women”.²² Nevertheless, the common view among contemporary readers²³ is not conclusive for nowhere in the *Dead Sea Scrolls* (DSS) is there the slightest reference to celibacy.²⁴ Not even any equivalent of the title ‘Essene’ has appeared in the scrolls. Rather, the literal trace, for the social position of feminine figures, is clearer than any other ancient writings. Many scrolls have not only identified the presence of women, but also demonstrated the active life of women who participated in the community meetings as well as in marriage, divorce and remarriage.

¹⁷ Ibid, “The Wars of the Jews” in *The Works of Josephus*, USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996, 450-542.

¹⁸ Bailey critically explains the reason why Josephus' view of women was so negative. He argues that it originated from his family background (not describing family (women) members' name) as well as the era's influence (in the Hellenistic milieu). James L. Bailey, “Josephus' Portrayal of the Matriarchs,” in Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Ed.), Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987, 154-157. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Philadelphia, 1994. 129.

¹⁹ Pliny and Philo were never a part of the Essene community. They wrote about them from their own knowledge and perspective on the Essenes without considering women as part of the community. However, Josephus is different from these two authors because his writings were more detailed. Because of this, scholars assume that he was in the community for a period of time.

²⁰ Women, according to the authors, are treated as a subordinate character to the men of the community. Per Bilde, “The Essenes in Philo and Josephus” in Frederick H. Cryer and Thomas L. Thompson (Ed.), *Qumran Between the Old and New Testaments*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 290. 32-68.

²¹ Vermes gives detailed support for this view with the etymology of “Essenes” in relation to some ancient writings and modern approaches by R. De Vaux, Dupont-Sommer, M. Black, J.T. Milik, I. M. Grintz, H. Kosmala and J. –P. Audet. Geza Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies*, Leiden: E J. Brill, 1975. 8-19.

²² See Eileen M. Schuller, “Evidence for Women in the Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls” in John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (Ed.), *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, London and New York, 1996. 252-257.

²³ Such as M. Wise, L.H. Schiffman, Linda Bennett Elder, Tal Ilan, Eileen M. Schuller, etc.

²⁴ See Hartmut Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran: On the Essenes, Qumran, John the Baptist, and Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Leiden, New York and Köln: E. J. Brill Academic Publishers, 1998. 199–201.

While *the Community Rule* (1QS) makes no appearance of women except for the biblical idiom “one born of a woman (1QS 11: 21),” the author of *the Rule of the Congregation (the Messianic Rule; 1QSa)* obviously includes women to be instructed in the Law: “They shall assemble all those who join (the sect), women and children...” (1: 4). One of the rules is that a young man under twenty years of age should not have sexual congress with a woman of the community (1: 8). Further, 1QSa reflects that women were not only members of the community, but also had some kind of obligations and rights: “She shall be received to give witness against him (about) the precepts of the law and to take his place in the proclamation of the precepts (1: 10-11).” Baumgarten²⁵, Vermes, and Schiffman²⁶ deny that women could give evidence against their husband, but why could women not be called as a witness as to their spouse’s conduct with regard to the sect’s laws, since they (women) were accepted as members of the scroll community?²⁷ Davies and Taylor see that there is a certain following group for the text of 1 QS while 1QSa (and CD) was for another group of the ancient society. For this, they confess difficulties of reconstructing the place of women in the Qumran corpus, but still consent that women clearly play a role in the community canons.²⁸ Schuller likewise argues that if one considers all published and unpublished Qumran texts, Qumran is a community in which marriage was the norm.²⁹

The Damascus Document (CD), both in the sections known from the Cairo Genizah copy (called “the Zadokite Fragments”)³⁰ and in the multiple (ten) copies from Cave 4, 5, and 6, describes women and their family life in the regulations of the community. The identified women servants are introduced twice (CD 11:12; 12:10), in both cases in conjunction with menservants. One in 4Q271 refers to women in the category of *הַאֵלֶּמֶן* (‘widow’: CD 3. 12), CD 14:15 (and 4Q271.3.13) in the category of *בַּת* (‘girl’) and *אֶחָיוֹת* (‘sisters’) (4Q266. 5.i.1). Also, references to *מִיִּנְקָה*; *לְהַנִּיךְ* (‘wet nurse’) (4Q266 6 ii 11), and *אִם* (‘mother’) (4Q270.i.14) parallel to *אָב* (‘father’) are in the text. In this regard, the post-1990s readers theoretically presumed the position of *The Damascus Document* (CD). In particular, Wassen in *Women in the Damascus Document*³¹ identify CD as a foundational Essene text at their early stage of sectarian formation. Grossman in *Reading for Gender in the Damascus Document* pointed out that “the Damascus covenant community may have included both men and women as active participants”.³² The evaluation of gender-equality issue is geared with the view of Schuller who argued for the full membership of women within the community.³³

The following laws that specify men’s relations with women also strongly imply women’s rights: a man is not allowed to marry with close relatives, in particular with his niece (CD 5: 10); a man must be careful in the city of the Sanctuary, not to lie with any women (12: 1); and a man is prohibited to take a second wife while his first wife is alive (4: 21). In detail, ‘taking two wives in their lifetime’ has been interpreted in many ways, but all have implications for women. While some insist this passage is a prohibition against ‘polygamy,’ the other scholars concede this as a prohibition against ‘divorce’³⁴ or ‘remarriage after divorce’.³⁵

²⁵ Joseph Baumgarten, “On the Testimony of Women in 1QSa,” in *Studies in Qumran Law*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977, 182-186.

²⁶ Schiffman, 1994. 134-135.

²⁷ Ilan and Cansdale consider the concept as they admit the author’s intention in it. Tal Ilan, “The Attraction of Aristocratic Women to Pharisaism During the Second Temple Period,” *Harvard Theological Review* 88:1 (1995) 1-33. Lena Cansdale, *Qumran and the Essenes: A Re-Evaluation of the Evidence*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1997. 53.

²⁸ Philip R. Davies and Joan E. Taylor, “On the Testimony of Women in 1QSa,” *Dead Sea Discoveries*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Dec., 1996) 223-235.

²⁹ Schuller (1996) 252-254.

³⁰ There are two medieval copies. Fitzmyer explains it well. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992. 28-30.

³¹ See Philip R. Davies, “Women in the Damascus Document by Cecelia Wassen,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Vol. 128. 2 (2008) 391-392.

³² Maxine Grossman, “Reading for Gender in the Damascus Document,” *Dead Sea Discoveries*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2004) 238.

³³ Eileen M. Schuller, “Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Michael O. Wise, Norman Golb, John J. Collins, and Dennis G. Pardee (Ed.), *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences Volumes 722; New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1994. 123-124. *Ibid.*, “Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls” in Peter W. Flint and James C. Vanderkam (Ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years*, Leiden, Boston, and Köln, 1999. 123-131.

³⁴ See Gershon Brin, “Divorce at Qumran,” in Moshe Bernstein, Florentino García Martínez and John Kampen (Ed.), *Legal Texts and Legal Issues; Proceedings of the Second Meetings of the International Organization for Qumran Studies Cambridge 1995*, Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1997. 231-244. John Kampen, “The Matthean Divorce Texts

Gruber supports that the text of CD reflects the picture of monogamy. The reason is not simply the issue of finance or social custom, but was by divine decree, even if royalty and wealthy and authorized social classes of ancient Near East were allowed of practicing polygamy based on the economical ability.³⁶

The Temple Scroll (11QT) contains laws pertaining to women. The text compels readers to assume women are involved in marriage³⁷ and sexual relations by which women are protected by the laws of the community. 11QT 66: 15-17 (like CD 5: 10) prohibits marriage between a man and his niece which is stricter than the legislation of the Torah (*Lev.* 18: 12-13): “a man may not marry his brother’s daughter or his sister’s daughter, for it is an abomination.” The scroll also deals with the various ritual purity rules and their relevance to women. In instructing laws of the new temple, women should not enter the second courtyard but a third courtyard (39: 7). The scroll of 48: 14-17 is another strict rule separating menstrually impure women from the community. 11QT allows a soldier to bring home a (beautiful captive) woman from the enemy and to marry her, the woman may then obtain clothes as well as some kind of freedom (63: 10-15).³⁸ The scroll known as law of king (57: 15-19) maintains strict marital regulations for the king: He may not marry more than one woman. She must be a Jewish woman of his own clan. He may not divorce her and remarry as long as she lives. He may remarry only if his wife dies.³⁹ This is the same concept as the *Damascus Document* of ‘monogamy’. 11 QT 65:7-66:4 shows a woman’s right of remaining in marriage, when she proves the evidence of virginity or was attracted by a man.⁴⁰ The man cannot divorce her for any reason. Women were also involved in incest laws: a man may not marry the wife of his father, nor may he uncover his father’s skirt (66:11-12). These laws of the community, in a sense, protect women from unexpected and harmful events, by keeping their purity and holiness. Bernstein does not disregard the treatment of women in these pentateuchally-based regulations of the *Temple Scroll* (11 QT), but sees that it “is sufficiently innovative that it sheds light, theoretically at least, on whatever community composed them (women)”.⁴¹

A few poetic texts found in the DSS portray women in erotic contexts. The poems like *Wiles of the Wicked Women* (4Q184), *Thanksgiving Hymns* (3: 6-10), *Psalms Scrolls* (21: 11-17) and *Genesis Apocryphon* 20 show how women were portrayed and understood in the community. Women were imagined as seductresses, leading men astray, as symbols of sophia, women as birth mother of the messiah, and women as a beautiful erotic partner. In particular, through reading the text of 4Q184 that is a sapiential poem Aubin draws a community picture of women that “even though the 4Q184 poet indeed used women to think with, or used femininity to encode religious difference, we must be reminded that the document is a cultural produce that functioned in a gendered society”.⁴² In the same contact, Wright admits that the wisdom texts (the Cave 11 *Psalms Scrolls* (11Q5), 4Q185, 414, 415, 416, 502, and 525) themselves cannot provide answer for women, but “we cannot, ultimately, keep the wisdom literature completely isolated...”.⁴³

Reexamined,” in George J. Brooke and Florentino García Martínez (Ed.), *New Qumran Texts and Studies: Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris 1992*, Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1997. 149-167.

³⁵ Schuller, (1994) 118-120. and Ibid, “Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Peter W. Flint and James C. Vanderkam with the Assistance of Andrew E. Alvarez (Ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment (Volume Two)*, Leiden, Boston and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1999. 123-131.

³⁶ Gruber, (2001) 187-190.

³⁷ See Joseph M. Baumgarten, “The Qumran-Essene Restraints on Marriage,” in Philip R. Davies (Ed.), *Behind The Essenes: History and Ideology in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987. 13-23.

³⁸ A law of *The War Scroll* (1/4QM) forbids women to enter the war camps from the time the soldiers leave Jerusalem until they come back (7: 3) which is adopted from *Deuteronomy* 23: 10-15.

³⁹ More details in Lawrence H. Schiffman, “Laws Pertaining to Women in the Temple Scroll,” in Devorah Dianat and Uriel Papport (Ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Leiden, New York and Köln: E. J. Brill; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1992. 212-218.

⁴⁰ The death penalty is applied to both the woman and man for committing adultery (66:7-8).

⁴¹ Moses J. Bernstein, “Women and Children in Legal and Liturgical Texts from Qumran,” *Dead Sea Discoveries*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2004) 195.

⁴² Melissa Aubin, “She is the beginning of all the ways of perversity: Femininity and Metaphor in 4Q184,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* Vol. 2: 2 (Spring, 2001) 23.

⁴³ Wright supports that women is an important figure in the texts of the CD (*the Damascus Document*) and 11QT (*the Temple Scroll*). Benjamin G. Wright III, “Wisdom and Women at Qumran,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2004) 259, 241-261.

The scroll of 4Q502 (4QRitual of Marriage) is generally known as a wedding ceremony scroll⁴⁴, revealing the involvement of women of all age groups in the community. The text clearly presents to the readers the view that women were functioning well in an equal position in the community, even though all writings about women are formulated in the masculine genre (from the men's perspective of women). It's not that obvious to recognize, but some of the laws of the so-called *halakhic letter* (4QMMT: 4Q394-399) pertains to women in the context of marriage, that 4Q159 and 4Q513 contain regulations regarding women, and that 4Q251 (4QHalakhah A) contains a various socio-religious laws including forbidden marriages. 4QTohorot A and B, 4QPurification Liturgy (4Q274, 4Q277, 4Q284), and the *War Scroll* (1QM) also include laws to women and children in relation to its purity. These legal and liturgical texts of Qumran undeniably reveal that women and children of the era were protected or guided by the laws or standard of the society.⁴⁵ Such a result of handling the DSS texts⁴⁶ indicates not only that women were very much a part of the community as different ranking members compared with the men, but also refutes the assumption that the Essenes were celibates only.

Socio-Cultural Voice from Archaeological Sites

The archaeological evidence does not oppose the textual views of the Qumran community. Rather it supports the hypothesis of women's existence by several visual and tangible facts. When the ruins of the Qumran site ("Ein el-Ghuweir"⁴⁷) were first excavated in the 1950s (in 1949, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1955, and 1956), Roland de Vaux and his team (after Clermont-Ganneau of 1873)⁴⁸ found the size of the large assembly/dining hall to be approximately 100 square metres, 700 bowls in the pantry and the absence of multiple small dwellings. The result of this discovery immediately implied that the residents of the site lived communally rather than in nuclear or extended family units. The initial archaeologist presumed no hope of women at Khirbet Qumran.⁴⁹ The view of the community became a crucial clue to some who thought the site was the home of male celibate Essenes.

However, further excavation of the main cemetery (1200 graves) that lies to the east of the site and two small cemeteries to the north and south, weakened the celibacy view by the possibility of women's survival.⁵⁰ Initially, three female skeletons were excavated from the main cemetery (T.7, 22, and 24). The two females of T.22 and 24 were discovered with male skeletons. Six other graves of women (T.32-37) were found in the extensions of the main cemetery in which there were eleven female skeletons as well as a child around 6-7 years old (at T.36).⁵¹ From two of these female graves (T.32 and 33), many women's belongings were discovered such as pieces of jewelry, beads and ear-rings. Zias once mentioned that it is rare occasions to see such jewelries from Jewish tombs.⁵²

⁴⁴ Baillet, Baumgarten and Satlow differ in their view of marriage, yet they agree that 4Q502 is a marriage ceremony of the community. James R. Davila, *Liturgical Works*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. 181-207.

⁴⁵ Bernstein, (2004) 198-210.

⁴⁶ Women were envisioned in various guises such as wives, servants, sisters, temptresses and beautiful captives, and possessing purity or impurity, wisdom or guile. They also strictly legislated women's ritual purity in their law.

⁴⁷ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran*, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney and Auckland: Doubleday, 1995. 37-61.

⁴⁸ Clermont-Ganneau (1896) 2. 15-16. Kelso, (1955) 141-146.

⁴⁹ Kugler and Chazon based on the initial work of de Vaux also presume that "the entire known archaeological record" shows "only the slimmest of physical evidence for women having been at Qumran". Rob Kugler, and Esther Chazon, "Women at Qumran: Introducing the Easays," in *Dead Sea Discoveries*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2004) 167-173. "The Schweich Lectures, 1959", in *L'archéologie et les manuscrits de la Mer Morte*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961. from Eileen M. Schuller, "Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Peter W. Flint and James C. Vanderkam (Ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years*, Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 1999. 118-119.

⁵⁰ Linda Bennett Elder, "The Women Question and Female Ascetics Amongst Essenes," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Dec., 1994) 225-227. Stegemann (1998) 48. Magen Broshi, "The Archaeology of Qumran – A Reconsideration," in Devorah Dimant and Uriel Rappaport (Ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Leiden, New York and Köln: E. J. Brill; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1999. 103-113. Zdzislaw Jan Kapera, "Some Remarks on the Qumran Cemetery," in Michael O. Wise, Norman Golb, John J. Collins, and Dennis G. Pardee (Ed.), *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences Volumes 722)*, New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1994, 97-111.

⁵¹ R. De Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, London: the Oxford University Press, 1973. 46-47. Taylor has undated the recent date of skeleton numbers. Joan E. Taylor, (1999) 306-309.

⁵² Zias, (2000) 225-228.

For the case, Cansdale assumed that women and children's graves are related only to some 'married Essenes,'⁵³ but there is no certain evidence for this. In contrast, the late result that there was another female skeleton found from northern cemetery and that two females with three children (less than ten years old) were discovered from four graves of southern cemetery, proved that the female skeletons were spread throughout the whole Qumran cemeteries.⁵⁴

In 1966-67, Steckoll also excavated nine graves of the main cemetery. From them he discovered two adult women and two young women from three graves (G.6, 7, and 8). The middle twenty woman of G.6 was with a two year old female baby. A teenage girl (between 14-16(7) years old) was buried at G.7 herself.⁵⁵ The last archaeological discovery was at Ain El-Ghuweir in 1977. Although the geographical location was six or seven kilometers away to the south from Qumran, it is important for the site has features similar to those of the Qumran site.⁵⁶ Bar-Adon found six (or seven) women (18-35 years old) buried with men.⁵⁷ According to such results of the archeological excavation, "thirty percent of the excavated tombs at Qumran contain remains of women and children"⁵⁸. The age of the most females was between twenty three to forty years old and children are between two to ten years old. Vermes in 1970s inferred that "the women were outsiders, who may have died at Qumran while attending covenant renewal ceremonies there".⁵⁹ However, the argument that women dwelled in the community would be hard to be denied if one sees the archaeological proof that various accessories from the sites of Qumran and its cemeteries show a community that honored women as members. In particular, Taylor, through an eye of 'engendered archaeology', argued that the association of Qumran women with combs, mirrors, cosmetics, and jewelry (beads, necklaces, earrings, and nose-rings) reflects specific women's domestic lifestyle. The use of bone spindle whorls with bronze needle defines a symbolic life of women in the community.⁶⁰

Then, how did women become members of the community? One of the three possible approaches is that there were many Essene communities in the era (1st B.C.E. – 1st BC). Among them the community Josephus mentioned was the one who allowed marriage for the sake of propagation of life (*War* 2.8. 160-161).⁶¹ Another way of understanding women and children is through the process of adoption. Brownlee, Qimron, Marx, Coppens, and Guillaumont presumed the reasons "celibacy might have been adopted: the desire for a high degree of ritual purity, a preparation for the eschatological holy law, or prerequisite to receive special prophetic inspiration."⁶² In the third case of celibate Essene women, Kraemer predicts that "women, who decided not to marry and came there to live in complete chastity, like Christian nuns (1989: 365)".⁶³ The text of 4Q502 has applied the terms of 'מינקת; להניק (elderly women)', 'אחיות' (sisters)', and 'שלו החרב' (his companion)'. Among these theories which one would be the case for the Qumran community? The post-1990s readers are still standing in the mist of mystery for the origin of the community women. Nevertheless, there are no certain indications written in the texts or discovered from the archeological sites that any of the above methods would not be inapplicable to the ancient religious society. Rather, there would not be only one way that women and children could be part of the sacred community, but could be through all these various circumstances with very strict conditions and commitments.

⁵³ She points out "*the Wars of the Jews*" 2: 160, written by Josephus. Cansdale, (1997) 165-173.

⁵⁴ See Taylor, (1999) 306-309.

⁵⁵ Solomon H. Steckoll, "Preliminary Excavation Report in the Qumran Cemetery," in *Revue de Qumran* 6: 23 (1968) 324, 328 and 335. Elder, (1994) 225-227. Taylor, (1999) 307-309.

⁵⁶ Ein Feshkha was like Ein el-Guweir, the site like Qumran, but there was no evidence of women discovered. Jodi Magnes, "Qumran Archaeology: Past Perspectives and Future Prospects," in Peter W. Flint and James C. Vanderkam with the Assistance of Andrew E. Alvarez (Ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment (Volume one)*, Leiden, Boston and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1998, 47-77.

⁵⁷ Pessah Bar-Adon, "Another Settlement of the Judean Desert Sect at En el-Ghuweir on the Shores of the Dead Sea," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 277(1977) 1-25. Elder, (1994) 224-225.

⁵⁸ While there were some female's graves in the main cemetery, the major female and children were located at the secondary cemetery or extension places. One might presume the social position of women and children, but that does not been proved yet. Taylor suggests a peculiar circumstance of "warfare". Bennett Elder, (1994) 232. Taylor, (1999) 314-315.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 291-292.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 317-323.

⁶¹ See Schuller, (1996) 253-255.

⁶² *Ibid.* 255.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 256.

One could not even exclude the case that they were initially composed as a male celibate brotherhood, but gradually allowed the feminine residents.

Conclusion

Ultimately, although women of the Essence community were always objective rather than subjective, one can recognize that the voice of women was still echoing throughout the socio-religious context of the Qumran community. The evidence of women's involvement maintains that women were not only part of the community, but also that they were given fair human rights and some roles in the community. This challenges the traditional theory that the community who wrote the DSS had only male members; there was no opposite sex in the religious movement. This theory is now less certain. Pliny⁶⁴, Philo⁶⁵, and Josephus' writings⁶⁶ of views of women, though in a negative way, support women's relation with the community men. If there were no women in the community, why did they even mention the community rules of women?

The historical existence of female characters has become more detailed in many scrolls of the Dead Sea, even though one may refute that not all the texts support the view that women were included.⁶⁷ The authors of the DSS have described marriage laws with sexual attitudes. The men of the community were controlled by sexual laws. The laws given that protect women from illegal events, reflect that women were respected by the rules of the apocalyptic community. The archaeological evidence revealing that women were buried with men and children in the cemeteries, likely identifies that there was a custom for women. Therefore, the feminine gender issue of Qumran is no more controversial topic, even though the socio-religious method on how women became part of the Essene community could be more developed with a new combined perspective of textual and archeological evidences.

⁶⁴ Pliny the Elder provides a short but invaluable statement on women. It implies that Pliny knew an Essenes group in the general area of Qumran without a deep consideration of women.

⁶⁵ Philo's wordings in the whole context suggest no ordinary marriage among the Essenes. He, however, proves the fact that there were women existing in the community. Phillip R. Callaway, "The History of the Qumran Community," in *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 3*. 71.

⁶⁶ His negative attitude toward women is not only for the Essene women, but also reflected through his personal life. Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus' Interpretation of the Bible*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998. 188-192. Geza Vermes, (1977) 125-130.

⁶⁷ It also does not mean that all the texts support the view that the Essenes were celibates only. Rather, many texts of the Dead Sea obviously show the social traces of women in various ways of the community life.