

A Synchronic Approach to the Serek ha-Yahad (1QS)

From Text to Social and Cultural Context

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A Synchronic Approach to the Serek ha-Yahad (1QS): From Text to Social and Cultural Context.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the social and cultural contexts of 1QS (*Serek ha-Yahad*) by means of a textual study. The analysis of the text is performed in a synchronic perspective. This means that lexical choices, grammatical forms, references, topics, themes, and intertextuality are analyzed text-internally. By doing so, this study sheds new light on old questions of textual cohesion and coherence, questions that until now have been dealt with mostly from a diachronic perspective. The text analysis entails investigation in view of three interrelated dimensions of language function: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These imply language as transmitting information, creating and sustaining relations, and functioning to organize itself into cohesive units. Although applying some of the terminology from the field of text linguistics (SFL), the focus in this study is on *what* a text means rather than *why*. This means that the semantic-pragmatic aspects of language are of foremost interest here. The analysis is performed from bottom and up, then from top down again. Words, phrases, and sentences are investigated up to the broadest linguistic level, namely, to the semantic discourse itself. With an understanding of the larger discourse at hand thanks to this analysis of textual cohesion and coherence, textual details are once again revisited and interpreted anew. In this work, 1QS is analyzed from beginning to end—chronologically, so to say. Then, at the end of each major section, the discourse is analyzed overall. Following the text analysis, conclusions of the investigations are presented. The conclusions argue that the hierarchal structure of the community and its stringent regulations are to be understood as a corrective in response to corrupt society. It is also argued that language in 1QS has a performative function. Rather than describing the way things are, it aspires to evoke the ideal society. Instead of understanding 1QS and the community mirrored in it as a deviant group with little or no contact with the surrounding world, it is then understood as a potent contribution to late Second Temple Jewish discourse concerning how to create a just society and a sanctifying cultic practice. In the final chapter, the insights gained from textual analysis of 1QS are brought into encounter with the theoretical framework posited by French historian and philosopher René Girard (1923–2015). In light of Girard’s philosophy, the hierarchal organization of the community (the *Yahad*) as well as its regulations can be interpreted as an effort to prevent a mimetic crisis. The function of the scapegoat in 1QS is discussed in light of Girard’s grand theory of the mechanisms of scapegoating in all societies. The study closes with the tentative hypothesis that the community in 1QS deconstructs the scapegoating mechanism by taking the role of the scapegoat upon itself.

Keywords

1QS, Serek ha-Yahad, Serekh, Yahad, Text linguistics, synchronic, Qumran, Dead Sea Scrolls, Rule texts, René Girard, Scapegoat, social context, cultural context, Hebrew, Second Temple, hierarchy, mimetic violence, discourse analysis, discourse, serek, serekh, covenant, truth, falsehood, text, Micah 6:8, wilderness, community, messianic, law, atone, judge, intertextuality, allusions, quote, echo, intertext, apocalyptic, Hebrew bible.

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