

# **Qumran, Unchecked Parallelomania, and Pseudonymity in Academic Publication**

Review Article of

**Kenneth Silver, Alexandria and Qumran. Back to the Beginning**

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This monograph has a promising premise – which is to situate Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls within the socio-political and cultural milieu of the Graeco-Roman world – but a deeply flawed execution. Its many problems can be summed up into four main points: 1) methodological and interpretative shortcomings; 2) unchecked parallelomania; 3) factual errors; and 4) the use of pseudonymity in academic publication. In the following pages, I will explore each of these issues in some detail. But first, I start with a brief overview of Kenneth Silver’s main arguments and hypothesis<sup>1</sup>.

## **1. Overview**

Silver traces the birth of the Qumran-Essenes, as he calls them, among the Jerusalem priestly elite of the early 2nd cent. BCE. These were priests within the Oniad clan who supported the Hellenizing policies of Jason the high priest. In the gymnasium that Jason set up in Jerusalem, these priests were inculcated in Greek philosophy. However, the proposed reforms were met with significant opposition, and Jason was eventually deposed by Menelaus. This forced the Oniad clan to seek refuge first in Transjordan and then in Egypt. Here, the migrant priests built a temple in Leontopolis to rival the one in Jerusalem. They also picked up Pythagorean philosophy and formed a movement modelled on the structure and organization of Hellenistic associations. The group’s ideology, social structure, ritual praxis, and religious ethos were heavily indebted to Pythagoreanism (as well as Orphism and other oriental mystery religions), to such an extent that the nascent Essenes, while ethnically Jewish, »in their religion ... had converted to Greek and Pythagorean philosophy« (p. 263). The founder and leader of the Essene movement, »[t]he author and father of the ascetic philosophic Pythagorean-based brotherhood« (p. 71), was none other than Jason, the deposed high priest.

Subsequently, the Essenes returned to Judaea and set themselves up at Qumran. According to Silver, the settlement was established sometime in the first half of the 2nd cent. BCE, and its architectural layout was influenced by Pythagorean numerical symbolism and followed specific astronomical orientations. The site functioned as the locus of Qumran-Essene rituals, and it was also a sort of temple for their »solar and astral worshipping religion based on

1 At this stage, it should be noted that Kenneth Silver is apparently a pseudonym of Kenneth Lönnqvist. This notwithstanding, in the following pages I refer to the author as Silver. The ethical implications behind pseudonymity in academic publication are discussed in Section 5.

Pythagoreanism« (p. 382). Silver identifies the Qumran-Essenes with the group(s) depicted in the Dead Sea Scrolls, found in caves adjacent to the settlement, and he draws myriad parallels between Pythagoreanism and the practices, ideology, and worldview described in the scrolls. In his view, the latter have been completely misread owing to the persistent scholarly tradition of situating the texts in a Jewish, rather than a Pythagorean, milieu.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first discusses the Alexandrian setting, which Silver sees as the socio-cultural milieu from which the Essenes emerged. Indeed, Alexandria, as the centre of culture and learning par excellence, is seen as the missing link and conduit between Pythagoreanism and the Essenes. Furthermore, Silver contends that the city must have been »the main source for the old documents in general and the peculiar genre of literature found in the Qumran library,« seeing that it was »the site of the religions and religious literature, and worldwide philosophical ideologies – from Judaism to Zoroastrianism, including all the Oriental religions« (p. 57). Alexandria was also home to Philo's Therapeutae, who shared the same Pythagorean roots as the Essenes, according to Silver.

The second chapter provides a detailed overview of Pythagorean philosophy and communal organization. The third is a short chapter focusing on the organization of the Qumran-Essenes in the context of Graeco-Roman associations. This is followed by the longest chapter in the book, which is almost two hundred pages long (pp. 114–302). Here, Silver discusses a host of parallels and similarities between the Dead Sea Scrolls and Pythagoreanism on issues such as communal structure and organization; the nature of oaths; calendrical observance; attitudes to clothing, food, and drink; aspects of ritual and daily life; the centrality of reading, meditation, and study; views on women; and various concepts such as dualism, truth and justice, purity and impurity, angels and demons, and many more.

The fifth chapter explores the daily life and religious beliefs of the Qumran-Essenes, focusing in particular on initiation rituals; the social hierarchy of the group; their dualistic and eschatological worldviews; and their ›religion‹, which is characterized as a »solar-astral mystery religion« (p. 316). Silver portrays the Qumran-Essene movement as both a philosophical system and a mystery religion on account of the similarities it shares with other such systems and religions in the Graeco-Roman world. The following chapter, which is co-authored by Minna Lönnqvist, Kenneth Lönnqvist, and Reino Anttila and which includes a short appendix by the latter author, comprises a study of the Qumran sundial, which is seen as a critical element of the Qumran-Essene solar religion. The seventh chapter, which once again includes sections co-authored by Minna and Kenneth Lönnqvist, presents a detailed outline – from Silver's perspective – of the history of the Qumran-Essenes, the foundation of the Qumran settlement, and aspects of the site's archaeology. A synthesis of the main arguments makes up the final chapter.

## 2. Methodology and Interpretation

Silver's hypothesis is hampered by a number of methodological shortcomings, which ultimately cast serious doubts on his various arguments and interpretations. Perhaps the most glaring of these, if not the most outlandish, is his contention that the non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls are essentially ›un-Jewish‹. For example, he states that the interpretation and rewriting of biblical material we see in the scrolls does not represent »the Jewish way of authoring texts. It was, however, very much the Pythagorean way« (p. 314). This is truly baffling in view of the rich interpretative traditions which existed in early Judaism, some of which are also attested in the Qumran collection<sup>2</sup>. In a similar vein, Silver seeks to disassociate the purity laws in the scrolls from their Jewish context. According to him, the purity texts found at Qumran were written in Egypt and »were directly modelled on the rules and regulations of the Hellenistic religious associations and guilds that existed in Ptolemaic Egypt. As such, they have hardly anything to do with the Jewish Halakhah« (p. 183). Here, Silver uses the term ›halakhah‹ in a

2 The literature is vast. For a general overview, see the recent collection of papers in HENZE 2012.



very specific manner to refer to rabbinic law, but in the process, he ignores the biblical basis which underlies purity legislation in the scrolls<sup>3</sup>. Arguments of this sort – which abound in this monograph – fly in the face of evidence. In fact, one wonders: if the Qumran-Essenes were as Hellenized as Silver purports them to be, how come they composed their texts in Hebrew or Aramaic and not in Greek? The manner in which the scrolls are decontextualized from their socio-cultural milieu – which certainly does include Persian, Greek, and other cultural influences, but which remains, nonetheless, Jewish in its essential character (see further Section 3) – means that Silver is playing an entirely different game than the rest of the scholarly community.

Archaeological evidence is divested of its context in a similar manner. For example, in connection with the stepped water installations at Qumran, which are commonly interpreted as Jewish ritual baths<sup>4</sup>, Silver states that »the non-Jewish architectural design with cosmic orientations of the ritual baths at Qumran excludes directly their religious association with Jewish miqveh-baths« (p. 185; and cf. p. 256). However, a rich dataset comprising no less than eight-hundred-fifty comparable stepped water installations concentrated in areas in ancient Palestine known to have been inhabited by Jews clearly suggests otherwise<sup>5</sup>. In the end, Silver does not really explain what is so particular about the Qumran stepped pools, nor does he prove that their orientation is unique among the hundreds of known exemplars. Thus, he fails to meet both of the crucial criteria necessary to make a strong archaeological argument. As Michael Smith notes,

[archaeological] arguments need a *warrant* or principle that justifies the links among claims, reasons, and evidence....

The two primary types of archaeological warrant are theory and comparative data. Arguments should be justified on the basis of one or more theoretical principles, and they should not violate accepted theoretical precepts. Arguments should also be justified by citing comparative data that establish at least the plausibility of the reason and claim<sup>6</sup>.

Silver ignores the cumulative knowledge which has been generated on Jewish ritual baths in the past couple of decades and provides no comparative data to justify his argument. We see a pattern emerging here – the problems underlying Silver’s thesis are more than just informal fallacies or reasoning errors; rather, they stem from inbuilt methodological flaws.

The chronology of Qumran, which is critical for Silver’s entire argument to work, is another case in point. The chronology and development of the site during the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods remain much debated<sup>7</sup>. However, scholars almost unanimously agree that, centuries after the site had been abandoned at the end of the Iron Age II (6th cent. BCE), Qumran was first reoccupied sometime in the first half of the 1st cent. BCE. Silver, in contrast, places the foundation of the Hellenistic settlement a full century earlier – that is, in the first half of the 2nd cent. BCE, »or even somewhat earlier« (passim, but esp. pp. 456–471; quote on p. 471). For the most part, Silver relies on Minna and Kenneth Lönnqvist’s chronology (i.e., his earlier co-authored work [see Section 5])<sup>8</sup>, and his main pieces of evidence

3 Again, the literature is vast. For some general overviews on the subject, which also highlight the biblical basis for much of the halakhic material in the scrolls, see HARRINGTON 2004; WERRETT 2007.

4 See, for example, MAGNESS 2003, 134–162; REICH 2013, 164–175; REICH 2015, 414–424.

5 ADLER 2014, 67–76. And see the corpus published in REICH 2013; ADLER 2011, 319–343.

6 SMITH 2015, 19–20.

7 MIZZI 2015, 1–42.

8 LÖNNQVIST – LÖNNQVIST 2011, 471–487; LÖNNQVIST – LÖNNQVIST 2002, 147.

are the so-called Qumran scroll jars (a class of cylindrical, holemouth storage vessels)<sup>9</sup> and some oil lamps (specifically, types 041.2, 042, 043, and 044 of Młynarczyk's typology)<sup>10</sup>. Silver claims that the scroll jars should be dated to the early 2nd cent. BCE on account of similar jars discovered at Deir el-Medina, Egypt. He is referring to two sealed cylindrical jars – discovered in a house – which contained the archive of one Totoes, a priest of Hathor<sup>11</sup>. Nonetheless, the Deir el-Medina jars, while similar, are certainly not identical to the Qumran exemplars, and one need not postulate a typological link between the two types. More importantly, however, there are absolutely no grounds to date the Deir el-Medina jars to the early 2nd cent. BCE. Details on the specific archaeological context in which the two jars were found is lacking, but the papyri inside them date to between 194 and 100 BCE<sup>12</sup>. The latter provides the terminus post quem for the sealing (and, possibly, the deposition) of the jars. It does not, however, serve as the terminus ante quem for their production (pace Silver) since the papyri could have been stored in the jars several years after the latest dated document. What matters, in this case, is the date of the archaeological context of the jars rather than the dating formulae in the papyri. Even if we were to accept 100 BCE as a terminus ante quem for the jars' production, we have no way to determine how much earlier the jars were manufactured, given the absence of other parallels from well-dated contexts. Silver argues that »[t]his jar type had been developed for storage of scrolls in private archives long before the youngest documents were deposited at the end of the 2nd century BC, represented by the closing date of the private archive« (p. 466), but he does not substantiate this claim. We do not know whether the papyri were gradually deposited inside the jars throughout the course of the 2nd cent. or whether they were put there at one go close to 100 BCE. Moreover, while there is considerable literary and archaeological evidence from the ancient Near East which attests to the use of jars for archival purposes<sup>13</sup>, this cannot be brought to bear on the dating of the Deir el-Medina jars. In those cases where papyri are reported to have been found in jars, we have little to no information regarding the jars' typology. More importantly, the wide diachronic span of the practice of archival storage in jars – which ranges from as far back as the first half of the 1st millennium BCE down to the 2nd cent. CE and possibly later – renders Silver's point somewhat moot.

The same problem characterizes Silver's use of oil lamps for dating purposes. The lamps he refers to are the so-called delphiniform lamps, which occur with some frequency in 2nd and 1st cent. BCE contexts in Palestine<sup>14</sup>. Accordingly, the lamps cannot be used to make an argument for a 2nd-cent. occupation at Qumran, either. In fact, to base an entire chronology on two classes of pottery without considering the complete assemblage is methodologically problematic. It is typical for a ceramic assemblage from a specific period to comprise »a small quantity of vessels from earlier production traditions of types towards the end of their existence in the repertoire; a majority of the vessels of consolidated types; and a smaller number of vessels in forms that have only recently appeared and will become the dominant ones in the coming period«<sup>15</sup>. This is exactly the picture we get from the Qumran corpus. The

9 For examples of cylindrical jars, see DE VAUX 1953, fig. 2, 4; DE VAUX 1954, fig. 5, 3–4. 7. 9; DE VAUX 1955, figs. 2, 10–12; 3, 9–11; DE VAUX 1962, figs. 2, 1–6; 3, 7–9; DE VAUX 1977, figs. 5, 3; 6, 12. A related class of storage vessels are ovoid jars, for which see DE VAUX 1953, fig. 2, 7; DE VAUX 1954, figs. 1, 3. 5; 2, 8; DE VAUX 1956, fig. 2, 10; DE VAUX 1962, figs. 3, 10; 6, 5; DE VAUX 1977, fig. 5, 1–2. Further examples of both types have been published recently in HUMBERT ET AL. 2016, passim; EISENSTADT 2018, 184–186 (see references to the various plates there).

10 MŁYNARCZYK 2016, 447–521; MŁYNARCZYK 2013, 99–133.

11 For the jars, see VANDORPE 2011, fig. 10.3.

12 LANCIERS 2014, 105. For further details about the archive, see <https://www.trismegistos.org/archive/248>.

13 See the survey in MILIK 1950, 504–508; LÖNNQVIST – LÖNNQVIST 2011, 476–482.

14 See BAR-NATHAN 2002, 105–110 (and references there); MŁYNARCZYK 2016, 506–510 (and references there).

15 GEVA 2003, 147–148.



sealed loci and dumps containing the earliest material from the late Hellenistic period have yielded a majority of 1st-cent. pottery and a very small number of vessels reflecting earlier or later traditions. Importantly, the few possible 2nd-cent. vessels, such as the aforementioned oil lamps, belong to types which remained in circulation in the 1st cent. BCE. These seemingly late-2nd-cent. vessels, then, are actually 1st-cent. specimens on their way out of the ceramic tradition. Furthermore, taken as a whole, the pottery excavated from the earliest contexts at Qumran looks nothing like the ›classic‹ 2nd-cent. assemblages in Palestine<sup>16</sup>. It is very telling that Hillel Geva remarks that the Qumran corpus is »clearly different from and later than those of Areas W and X-2« in Jerusalem<sup>17</sup>, which is highly significant considering that the latter assemblages are among the best representatives of the Hellenistic ceramic repertoire for the region of Judaea in the late 2nd cent. BCE. The numismatic evidence reveals the same picture. The handful of 2nd-cent. coins were found in contexts containing coins from the 1st cent. BCE, suggesting prolonged circulation<sup>18</sup>. Silver's chronology, then, is fundamentally flawed, and this puts a serious dent in his overall thesis.

Equally problematic is Silver's notion that the orientation of the Qumran settlement as well as the tombs in the adjacent cemetery follow specific astronomical measurements. For Silver, this is a critical facet of the site and it is directly related to the settlement's function as a »temple« for the practice of the solar-astral religion of the Qumran-Essenes. Furthermore, Silver sees the earliest architectural phase of Qumran as a peristyle building – following Jean-Baptiste Humbert's reconstruction<sup>19</sup> – and argues that the layout of the site's plan and the dimensions of the various rooms and spaces were all based on Pythagorean mathematical principles (pp. 428–455). Both arguments favour unfounded speculation at the expense of tangible archaeological evidence. The late Hellenistic building at Qumran was built over the blueprint of the Iron Age II settlement<sup>20</sup>, and thus the orientation of the walls does not reflect the concerns of the late Hellenistic inhabitants. This is not an appeal to coincidence – it truly is a matter of coincidence. Furthermore, for such an argument to hold water, Silver would have to show that Qumran is unique in the way its architecture is oriented. As for the layout of the settlement, Humbert's reconstruction is purely conjectural, and there is no archaeological evidence to support it<sup>21</sup>. In contrast, Roland de Vaux, the original excavator of the site, found incontrovertible evidence of a much simpler settlement with a very different architectural layout than the one proposed by Humbert<sup>22</sup>.

The use of primary sources is largely uncritical as well. While Silver acknowledges that our information on Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism dates to 3rd cent. CE or later, he does not undertake a critical analysis of the respective texts and neither does he ever question their accuracy or reliability. How do we know what is original and what are later accretions in the traditions about the Pythagoreans? Therefore, hypothetically speaking, what kind of

16 See, for example, the corpora published in BERLIN 1997, 2–51 (esp. 44–47); BERLIN 2015, 629–671, 744–745.

17 GEVA 2003, 149.

18 MAGNESS 2003, 50.

19 HUMBERT 2003a, 419–440; HUMBERT 2003b, 467–482.

20 See DE VAUX 1973, 1–3 pl. III. Pace MAGEN – PELEG 2018, 104, who conclude, without evidentiary support, that »[i]n light of the renewed excavations at Qumran, we *assume* that the Iron Age settlement was composed of clay huts and wooden sheds that rested, in part, on fieldstone building foundations« (emphasis mine).

21 MIZZI 2015, *passim*.

22 DE VAUX 1973, 3–5 pl. IV. This is his Period Ia. The dating of this phase of occupation to the second half of the 2nd cent. BCE is incorrect, however, as MAGNESS 2003, 63–66, has demonstrated. This does not mean that Period Ia, as an architectural phase, did not exist, only that it should be placed somewhere in the first half of the 1st cent. BCE. See further MIZZI 2015.

Pythagorean writings would Silver's Qumran-Essenes have been exposed to<sup>23</sup>? Is it possible that some of these late traditions were influenced by descriptions of the Essenes, especially given Josephus's explicit identification of the group with the Pythagoreans? The same holds true for our knowledge on the Essenes. There is no critical reading of Philo, Josephus, or Pliny, or of any of the later sources that mention this Jewish group, and so Silver takes the descriptions of the Essenes largely at face value. (In this context, a glaring omission in the bibliography is Joan Taylor's monograph on the Essenes, which is the most up-to-date and authoritative study on the subject<sup>24</sup>.) What is fact and fiction in these accounts? Could the supposed parallels between the Qumran-Essenes and the Pythagoreans be nothing more than literary fictions created by the ancient authors for whatever apologetic reasons they may have had? Silver never ponders over these questions. But see, for example, Yonder Gillihan's comprehensive study on the groups depicted in the scrolls and Graeco-Roman civic associations, in which he highlights the heightened interest in Pythagoreanism among the Romans during the 1st cent. CE, pointing out that

Josephus' presentation of the Essenes as full-fledged Pythagoreans accomplished at least one apologetic goal: it affirmed that Jews shared the same ideals as Romans. But it may have been intended to accomplish another. If Josephus knew of Roman Pythagoreanism as a disorganized, idealized, eclectic and sporadic practice, he may have presented Jewish Pythagoreanism in Essene form as a full realization of the ideals, doctrines, and practices that the Romans favored but failed to put into practice. Josephus implied that the Jews bested the Romans in the Pythagorean virtues of piety, discipline, and purity – and thus in the virtues that lay at the very foundation of Roman history and identity<sup>25</sup>.

There are several other examples I could cite, but the above should suffice to show that the many difficulties with Silver's argument stem from data misuse and mishandling – in other words, this is not simply a matter of interpretation. In the end, these are fundamental methodological problems which taint every aspect of Silver's hypothesis.

### 3. Unchecked Parallelomania

The core argument of this monograph is based on a series of parallels drawn out between practices and beliefs attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the classical sources on the Essenes on the one hand, and descriptions of the Pythagoreans on the other. Silver is not the first to draw attention to some of these parallels. In fact, in the most recent systematic treatment of the subject, Justin Taylor reaches a conclusion very similar to Silver's, arguing for real Pythagorean influence on the Essenes – without, however, implying that the Essenes ›converted‹ to Pythagoreanism, as Silver does – and that Alexandria was the conduit through which this knowledge was transmitted<sup>26</sup>. (Incidentally, this is another work not cited by Silver.) The following critique remains centred on the monograph under review, although the points raised are certainly applicable to the general question at hand: what do we do with this ostensible Pythagorean-Essene link?

Any comparative study of this sort risks falling into the vicious trap of parallelomania, which Samuel Sandmel defines »as that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes

23 There are strong indications that Pythagoreanism had ceased to exist as a social entity during the 4th cent. BCE, although the 1st cent. BCE witnessed a possible resurgence of the phenomenon. See the overview in COLLINS 2010, 82–84 (and further references there). Consequently, knowledge of Pythagoreanism in 2nd-cent. Alexandria is likely to have come through the existence of a literary tradition rather than direct contact with actual Pythagoreans.

24 TAYLOR 2012.

25 GILLIHAN 2012, 32–37 (quote on p. 36).

26 TAYLOR 2005.



the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction<sup>27</sup>. The manner in which Silver handles the evidence can be described as nothing other than an extreme case of parallelomania. In Silver's case, however, the influences he perceives are not only literary in nature but also socio-cultural.

When is a parallel a parallel, and how are presumed parallels to be explained? Parallelomania, in particular, manifests itself when excerpts are divorced from their contexts. In the words of Sandmel, »[t]wo passages may sound the same in splendid isolation from their context, but when seen in context reflect difference rather than similarity«<sup>28</sup>. This is precisely the problem with Silver's study, which decontextualizes the data on two levels. On the one hand, Silver makes connections between Qumran-Essene thought and practices and Pythagoreanism, all the while ignoring – without justification – the Jewish background to many of the supposed Pythagorean influences. Some examples have already been mentioned in Section 2. Here, it suffices to refer to just one other example. Silver links the symbolic structure of the Qumran-Essene community into units of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens with the importance of the number 10 in Pythagoreanism (pp. 123–124), despite the fact that the terminology has biblical precedent. In fact, the symbolic structuring of the group along biblical lines appears to have been intended to define it as a microcosm of the true Israel, echoing the ›golden age‹ of the wilderness camp when Israel received its original revelation at Sinai<sup>29</sup>.

On the other hand, Silver overlooks the larger Graeco-Roman ›Zeitgeist‹ that permeated across the Mediterranean and the Near East. This is the global context. The Graeco-Roman world was characterized by heightened interconnectivity, which resulted in the creation of various far-flung exchange networks through which flowed people, goods, and ideas<sup>30</sup>. By drawing direct links between the Qumran-Essenes and Pythagoreanism or between Qumran and Alexandria, Silver ignores everything else in between. The challenge of any comparative study is to determine whether a presumed parallel reflects direct influence from one tradition or social entity to another or whether it merely echoes the general spirit of the period in question. For example, Gillihan underlines the fact that the many similarities between the groups depicted in the scrolls and Graeco-Roman associations owe more to the larger cultural milieu than to direct forms of contact. Many associations based their structural organization on that of the state, and thus, given the preponderance of the polis as a political entity in the ancient Near East, including Jerusalem to an extent, the structural similarities they shared between them is unsurprising<sup>31</sup>. Other parallels between the Qumran-Essenes and Pythagoreanism were widespread enough »that there is no need to posit a specifically Pythagorean influence«<sup>32</sup>.

In addition to globalization, there is also the concept of glocalization to consider, or the phenomenon of glocalism, which refers to the interplay between global trends and local permutations<sup>33</sup>. Humans are not passive agents who borrow ideas uncritically; rather they tend to adapt global practices to suit specific local needs. A good example of glocalization among Jews in early Roman Palestine is the adoption of stone ossuaries for secondary burial, which was obviously influenced by the widespread use of cinerary urns across the Roman Mediterranean. Since Jews could not practice cremation, they opted for secondary burial

27 SANDMEL 1962, 1.

28 SANDMEL 1962, 2.

29 See, for example, COLLINS 2010, 54.

30 That the ancient Mediterranean was characterized by significant human mobility is now considered a truism. See especially HORDEN – PURCELL 2000. And see also MALKIN 2011; DE LIGT – TACOMA 2016; PITTS – VERSLUYS 2017.

31 GILLIHAN 2012.

32 GILLIHAN 2012, 36. And see HENGEL 1974, 243–247.

33 See ROUDOMETOF 2016. For the application of the concept to the Graeco-Roman world, see, for example, WHITMARSH 2012; VLASSOPOULOS 2016.

instead<sup>34</sup>. Pieter Hartog approaches the Qumran pesharim in similar fashion, concluding that they represent »glocal phenomena that intricately combine global practices (the production of systematic commentaries) with local aims and interests (the development of a narrative historical memory for the movement to which the Peshar commentators belonged)«<sup>35</sup>. Many other examples can be cited. In his seminal work on Judaism and Hellenism, Martin Hengel proclaimed that »[f]rom about the middle of the third century BC all Judaism must really be designated Hellenistic Judaism«<sup>36</sup>. Considering the interplay with other, non-Greek, cultural elements, »glocal Judaism« would perhaps be a better characterization<sup>37</sup>.

The corollary is that not only is it difficult to make the interpretative leap from presumed parallels to actual historical links between two specific social entities, but apparent similarities may be less significant than they are made out to be. This accentuates the need to explore analogous traditions in great detail in order to distinguish real flows of influence from perceived ones as well as to highlight shared commonalities and local differences. This element is sorely missing in Silver's analysis, which is completely bereft of a theoretical framework. Thus, the perceived parallels between the Qumran-Essenes and the Pythagoreans – Silver lists numerical symbolism, eschatology, interest in astrology and veneration of the sun, wisdom or sapiential traditions, purity practices, initiation rites, sharing of property, oaths, social organization, and many others – can also be explained by looking at local traditions (biblical and/or Jewish), general cultural influences (i.e., globalization, which facilitated the widespread diffusion of ideas in the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean), or the synthesis of different traditions (i.e., glocalization)<sup>38</sup>. Not only does this weaken the presumed Pythagorean origin of various parallels, let alone the notion that the Qumran-Essenes essentially became Pythagoreans, but it lays the burden of proof squarely on whoever wants to establish this direct correlation.

In this regard, Silver's thesis faces great hurdles. Surely, as many scholars have shown, there were close contacts between Egypt and Palestine in the Hellenistic period, and this facilitated the exchange of knowledge and information<sup>39</sup>. While this creates a plausible framework within which to see a potential Alexandrian-Qumran connection, it is a far cry from proving it. A historical conclusion of the kind advocated by Silver (as well as others, such as Justin Taylor) requires more explicit evidence. In fact, Silver has a hard time finding such support, and he ends up clutching at straws. He argues that ceramic links between Qumran and Alexandria provide us with a »very strong« connection between the two places (pp. 306. 375; and cf. pp. 469–471). He is referring to the same jars and oil lamps mentioned above, in Section 2. I have already highlighted the difficulties with the proposed relationship between the Deir el-Medina and Qumran jars. As for the delphiniform lamps, while it is true that Alexandria could have been a major production centre, Silver fails to make the distinction between imports and local imitations. Whereas imported exemplars tend to have a grey fabric and a coating of grey slip, locally produced specimens have a grey, yellowish, or light red fabric and a coating of red slip<sup>40</sup>. The lamps found at Qumran (i.e., Młynarczyk's types 041, 042, 043, and 044) are clearly local imitations. All of them are red wares, except one, which is grey, unslipped, and with a beige surface (KhQ5102)<sup>41</sup>. The lamps, then, do not provide a

34 See MAGNESS 2011, 151–155 (and further references there).

35 HARTOG 2017, 293.

36 HENGEL 1974, 104.

37 See also HARTOG 2017, 19–20.

38 Note, for instance, Hengel's astute observation that »the essential thing is not the supposed ›Pythagorean‹ influences, but the fact that Hellenistic observers like Josephus – or Nicolaus of Damascus – could present them as Jewish ›Pythagoreans‹ « (HENGEL 1974, 247).

39 See HARTOG 2017, 21–26 (and further references there).

40 BAR-NATHAN 2002, 108.

41 See MŁYNARCZYK 2016, 506–509 pls. 110–111.





direct link with Alexandria, and the fact that these lamps are not unique to Qumran but are prevalent in the southern Levant is a further weakness in Silver's argument.

The other pieces of evidence Silver adduces are likewise specious. Note, for instance, Silver's contention that the »burial form in shaft graves at Qumran ... was alien to local Graeco-Roman funerary customs whereas it was common in Egypt« (p. 275), which of course does not hold water in view of the local evidence<sup>42</sup>. For Silver, it is also significant that there is a high degree of overlap between the scrolls found in Qumran Cave 4Q and the Cairo Genizah in Egypt, which is »compelling evidence for the origin of the Qumran-Essene community in Egypt« (p. 65; and cf. also pp. 110, 229). The link is tenuous at best, and it is not clear how this could corroborate a potential Egyptian origin for the Qumran-Essenes.

Eventually, parallelomania becomes a tool for circular argumentation. There are several instances where Silver not only interprets vague similarities as meaningful parallels attesting to direct Pythagorean influence, but uses these presumed connections as justification to interpret archaeological evidence within a Pythagorean framework – usually leading to highly questionable conclusions. For instance, Silver claims that wounds and traces of superficial burning attested on some of the individuals interred in the Qumran cemetery may have been self-inflicted and that these may reflect trials by »fire and sword« echoing certain Pythagorean rituals (pp. 247–249)<sup>43</sup>. The »drink of the many«, which is a technical term in the scrolls referring to pure liquids consumed by members of the group(s) mentioned therein<sup>44</sup>, is interpreted narrowly as a special drink which was the source of wisdom and knowledge (pp. 145–146). Silver suggests that this drink was likely a concoction of wine and honey – »mentioned in the Pythagorean treatise« (p. 146) – and it »may have been used as part of religious rituals and sacred offerings to the divinity, which was a normal Pythagorean practice« (pp. 146–147). This is one of the reasons why date honey was produced at Qumran, according to Silver, and thus he gives this industry a Pythagorean twist as well. Silver also speculates that the Qumran-Essenes may have practised bird-catching, which was a common Pythagorean exercise. Birds were released from their cages and this »may have symbolically perhaps represented the liberation of the soul from the body... Hypothetically, this may have been a possible ritual at the initiation ceremonies among the Qumran-Essenes« (pp. 141–142). The only evidence he draws upon are a few lead weights, which could have been used as net weights<sup>45</sup>. Once again, therefore, Silver imposes a Pythagorean interpretation on a mundane activity without any further evidentiary support. The discovery of oil lamps in connection with the animal-bone deposits in L130, which likely represent the remnants of sacred or ritualized meals at Qumran<sup>46</sup>, is explained through comparison with the sacred meals of various mystery religions, which were carried out during the night (pp. 474–484). However, Silver does not explain the absence of oil lamps in the other areas where similar animal-bone deposits were discovered. Likewise, the use of the surrounding caves and the presence of oil lamps in some of them are related to Pythagorean cave rituals, which also took place at night (pp. 117–118), and all the while, the practical need of light in many of these caves, even in daytime, is ignored.

Undoubtedly, as many recent studies have demonstrated, there is much to learn and many insights to be gained from (re)reading the scrolls within the larger Graeco-Roman milieu. The question is what to do with the presumed parallels or similarities, and for this we need sound theoretical frameworks. Ultimately, the problem is that unchecked parallelomania

42 See, for example, BAR-ADON 1977, 12–17; ZISSU 1998, 158–171; POLITIS 1999, 128; POLITIS 2006, 213–219. And see MAGNESS 2011, 155–164 (and further references there).

43 The skeletal data is largely gleaned from Solomon Steckoll's excavations, which scholars regard with some scepticism owing to Steckoll's lack of archaeological credentials and the questionable quality of his reports. See STECKOLL 1968, 323–336; STECKOLL 1969, 33–40; STECKOLL 1974, 199–244.

44 See, for example, HEMPEL 2012, 57–62 (esp. 61–62).

45 See YUZEFOVSKY 2018, 390.

46 For an overview of the phenomenon, see MIZZI 2016, 51–70.

of the sort displayed in this monograph results in an overly reductive approach which tries to explain everything within the framework of one phenomenon. In other words, Silver's hypothesis explains too much.

#### 4. Factual Errors

Several factual errors compound the problems of method and interpretation outlined above. Once again, I limit myself to a few examples. For instance, it is not true that cotton and hairnets were found in the caves of Qumran (pp. 152. 202). In fact, the cotton comes from the so-called Christmas Cave, which is not related to Qumran<sup>47</sup>, whereas the hairnet (not hairnets) is unprovenanced<sup>48</sup>. Silver is also wrong to state that the method of burial at Qumran was »highly irregular in antiquity« (p. 275), when in fact burial in shaft graves must have been the most common method of interment among the poorer classes<sup>49</sup>. This type of burial seems rare only because it is less likely to survive in the archaeological record. For this same reason, Silver is incorrect when he claims that Jews »systematically practiced secondary burials in ossuaries« (p. 275). Silver also speaks of large quantities of luxury goods, particularly »Roman glass and expensive terra sigillata pottery« (p. 160). However, the glass from Qumran is not luxurious<sup>50</sup>, and only a very small number of terra sigillata vessels have actually been discovered<sup>51</sup>. In an accompanying footnote, Silver alludes to the fact that »Roma-jars« are reported (p. 160 n. 716), implying that these are Roman luxury vessels. However, there is only one so-called ›Roma jar‹, and this refers to an ovoid jar found in Cave 7Q bearing the double inscription רומא (RWM')<sup>52</sup>. This a common jar, and it has nothing to do with imported Roman pottery.

There are also several inaccuracies concerning the history of research. For example, Gloria Moss is not »the only one who has counted the pools« at Qumran (p. 433 n. 2085)<sup>53</sup>. Similarly, Silver is mistaken when he states that »[i]t appears to have passed unnoticed that there is a certain number of so-called pairs of opposites in the DSS« (p. 328). Countless articles and volumes on dualism in the scrolls say otherwise. Silver's claim that »[t]he names or the appellations that the Qumran-Essene community applied to itself are a subject that has received relatively little scholarly attention« is inaccurate also (p. 100).

Some errors stem from a lack of full understanding of the data. In connection with the Qumran Community Rule (1QS), Silver says that »[i]t is illuminating for the attitude of Qumran research that another significant text dealing with Qumran-Essene cosmic belief and the syncretistic solar calendar has been systematically deleted from popular translations of the DSS, such as G. Vermes 2004 or T. H. Gaster 1976« (p. 126). Here, Silver is talking about the so-called hymn of the maskil at the end of 1QS, which seemingly refers to three Hebrew letters – aleph, mem, and nun – as symbolic entities, linked by Silver with analogous symbolism in Pythagoreanism (pp. 126–128). However, Silver ignores the fact that the text in 1QS is defective, either because of a scribal error or due to difficulties with the reading of the source text(s) by

47 See SHAMIR – SUKENIK 2011, 210–212.

48 The hairnet is mentioned by SHAMIR 2006, 292, fig. 6, who claims that it comes from Qumran without, however, providing further details or corroboration. The hairnet is not even mentioned in Shamir and Sukenik's 2011 publication, which deals specifically with the textiles and garments of Qumran's inhabitants (see previous note). Like other items mentioned in Shamir's 2006 article, the hairnet may be part of the textile corpus from Christmas Cave, although this cannot be confirmed at present.

49 MAGNESS 2011, 155–164.

50 MIZZI 2010, 99–198.

51 See, for example, EISENSTADT 2018, 210.

52 See DE VAUX 1962, 30 fig. 6, 5.

53 See, for instance, REICH 2013, 164–175, whose work is based on his doctoral dissertation which dates back to 1990. And see also GALOR 2003, 291–320.



1QS's scribe(s). This much can be discerned from the parallel passages in 4QSB and 4QSD – which is why modern editions of the scrolls omit reference to these letters in their translation<sup>54</sup>!

There are many other errors, but it would be petty to list them all. The point I want to stress here is the fact that this lack of attention to detail raises questions about the general quality of the volume and the reliability of its claims. I am not a specialist of Pythagoreanism, but seeing these many errors does not inspire much confidence in Silver's presentation of that data.

### 5. Pseudonymity in Academic Publication

Now comes the bombshell. Apparently, Kenneth Silver is none other than Kenneth Lönnqvist<sup>55</sup>. A google search confirms as much, and this explains the consistent references to Minna and Kenneth Lönnqvist's work, particularly their 2002 monograph<sup>56</sup>, as well as Silver's knowledge of certain ›behind-the-scenes‹ information<sup>57</sup>. Needless to say, this raises serious concerns regarding ethical practices in publication. When reading an academic work, readers expect honesty and transparency, both of which are critical pillars of the scientific or scholarly process. The use of pseudonyms, especially when this goes undisclosed, erodes trust between authors, editors, publishers, and readers. Moreover, it creates a situation where an author can remain unaccountable for his or her views<sup>58</sup>. It also deprives readers from situating an author's work within their general scholarly output. Furthermore, pseudonymity can be used to promote one's own research, written under a different name, thus giving the impression of wider scholarly support than is in fact the case.

This is exactly what Silver does. He never discloses his identity, and he consistently speaks of Minna and Kenneth Lönnqvist in the third person. There are even chapters or subsections of chapters credited to the two authors. In the preface to the book, Silver describes his monograph »as a continuation of the first archaeological monograph written by Minna Lönnqvist and Kenneth Lönnqvist in 2002« (p. xvii), without hinting that he is one of these co-authors. Repeatedly, Silver cites the Lönnqvists's various publications while ignoring other, more authoritative, works. Critically, he consistently boosts their work, with statements such as the following: »The best general theory is the one by Lönnqvist and Lönnqvist, which applies to all contextual facts relating texts with archaeology. Magness, for example, never studied the actual archaeological material from Qumran for her work *The archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*« (p. 451). The volume is full of such statements, which are frequently employed to state that one point or another has been argued conclusively and persuasively by the Lönnqvists. Silver even states that the Lönnqvists's hypothesis on Qumran is one of five major theories on the archaeology of the site (pp. 428–433), when their 2002 monograph has largely been panned by the scholarly community and it is rarely cited in the field.

54 See ALEXANDER – VERMES 1998, 115–116. 121. 123.

55 See also MACADAM 2017, 163–169.

56 LÖNNQVIST – LÖNNQVIST 2002.

57 See, for example: »However, Humbert said in 2003 ... that he had not been aware of the research published on the topic by Steckoll in the 1960s, and the work of Lönnqvist and Lönnqvist 2002 where the same conclusions already had been presented. Unfortunately, this is not true as Humbert was hand-delivered a copy of the book of Lönnqvist and Lönnqvist in September 2002 to the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem. At that time on September 14th, 2002, the former also commented upon the theory of solar worship at Qumran, as demonstrated in the dedicatory writing on the title page of this book. Unfortunately, the continued presenting of alternative facts by the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem regarding the research undermines the credibility of the final archaeological reports on Qumran as well« (p. 322 n. 1595; and cf. p. 354 n. 1746).

58 See also TEIXEIRA DA SILVA 2017, 1807–1810.

## 6. Conclusion

What happened during the peer-review process? This is the question I consistently asked myself while reviewing this volume. Publication ethics aside, Silver's book is beset with highly speculative statements and questionable conclusions which are either unsupported by factual evidence or else based on a misreading and misuse of published data. It cannot be emphasized enough that the problem, here, is not so much the interpretation than it is the deeply flawed methodology.

Indeed, the aim of this review article was expressly to address what I deem to be an important issue in Qumran studies – namely, the plurality of interpretations which populate the field. New ideas and approaches, including ones that challenge the so-called consensus, are always welcome, but these have to be based on a sound and sensible methodology. Hypotheses cannot be built on mere speculation, however plausible they may seem, but need to be grounded with hard evidence and strong arguments. Otherwise, little actual progress can ever be made, and the discipline risks becoming a free-for-all.

Some of the parallels between Pythagoreanism and the Qumran-Essenes may be intriguing, and I harbour no doubts about the intellectual networks which must have existed between Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Qumran, not to mention the wider Mediterranean world. This is not enough, however, to sustain the specific historical deductions made in this book. The evidence is simply not there. In the absence of evidence, do we proceed with unwarranted historical speculation – and, here, I am not forgetting that our discipline deals only with degrees of probability – or do we be measured and judicious, acknowledging the limits of our knowledge while sticking to strict parameters of interpretation? Counterintuitive as it may seem, I strongly believe that the latter is the more fruitful option in the long term.

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