

Civic Ideology, Organization,  
and Law in the Rule Scrolls

# Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah

*Edited by*

Florentino García Martínez

*Associate editors*

Peter W. Flint

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# Civic Ideology, Organization, and Law in the Rule Scrolls

A Comparative Study of the Covenanters'  
Sect and Contemporary Voluntary  
Associations in Political Context

*By*

Yonder Moynihan Gillihan



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## PREFACE

Given the length of this monograph, I have provided aids to make its contents more accessible, and its comparative analysis more useful. The first aid is the Table of Contents. Its organization reflects my thesis: the Covenanters' alternative civic ideology motivated their development of organizational and regulatory patterns along the lines of a state. Evidence in support for the thesis often comes in the laws of the Rule Scrolls themselves, which reflect state-like concerns (e.g., capital punishment, proper conduct during warfare, authority over the Jerusalem priesthood and temple cult, registration of native-born citizens, comprehensive care for the vulnerable); much evidence also comes in analogies to contemporary political literature and practices. Complementary to the TOC, and probably more immediately useful, are the synoptic tables at the end of the Conclusion and Synopsis (Chapter Six). These tables list the following:

- 1) Features of the Covenanters' origins, organization, and regulation, esp. those related to their civic ideology
- 2) Scriptural sources from which the features may have come or by which they may have been justified
- 3) Analogies in contemporary associational and political literature and practice
- 4) Analogies in other contemporary sources, including the New Testament and Rabbinic literature
- 5) Numbered sections of the book where the reader will find the most important discussion.

I should note here that while I have attempted to reconstruct the Covenanters' civic ideology as fully as possible, the reader will find on these pages only a sketch. I have not treated the laws of the Rule Scrolls, especially D, comprehensively, nor have I surveyed all possible analogies in contemporary political thought and practice. While I argue that the Covenanters' civic ideology was a rather direct response to Has-monean state civic ideology, I have not, in this volume, described the latter in detail. Another topic that I have left aside is sectarian "mysticism": clearly the Covenanters engaged in practices that put them in

touch with divine agents. How did mystical practices relate to political ambitions? I hope, then, that this monograph will provoke further investigation into a few areas:

- 1) What is the political significance of sectarian halaka not directly related to sectarian life? Does it reflect early, pre-sectarian dissent that led to the Covenanters' movement, as many have argued? Or, does it reflect sectarian deliberation on the proper way to govern restored Israel, or both?
- 2) General familiarity with conventional political practice is evident throughout the Rule Scrolls, along with striking analogies to the habits of Greek and Roman philosophical and legal schools. How did the sect assimilate them? Through familiarity with Judean political habits? Through political philosophy, as taught among Judean intellectuals? Through exposure to Greek and Roman scholastic institutions, teachers, or even texts?
- 3) How should we describe the literary genre of the Rule Scrolls? Is it possible to identify a single genre behind their form, or is it sufficient to state that they reflect general conventions for writing texts to regulate societies, from the bylaws of voluntary associations to state constitutions and laws?
- 4) If it is accepted that the Covenanters crafted an "alternative civic ideology" in response to the civic ideology of the Hasmoneans and Herods, what were the contents of that state ideology? This may best be answered by a political-ideological analysis of 1 Maccabees and Josephus' account of Hasmonean rule and propaganda.
- 5) What was the role of mysticism in the sect's political ideology? Did the Covenanters commune with the angels who would aid them in warfare? Was the mystical life an end of its own?
- 6) Did mysticism prepare sectarians for regular human life in restored Israel, lived in unprecedented holiness and intimacy with God, or for a different form of life altogether—something like the completely remade heaven and earth described in Paul's letters and 2 Peter?
- 7) Did the "earthly nucleus" that Charlotte Hempel and others have identified at the origins of sectarian life remain central to sectarian civic ideology? Is restored Israel, as sketched in the *Rule for the Congregation*, the ultimate end for the sect, or is it an intermediary step between earthly life in covenantal relationship with God, and a final, perfected, immortal, otherworldly existence?

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