

THE THEME OF APOCALYPTIC WAR IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

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The theme of apocalyptic war was widely developed in Qumran literature. The main source of information about the apocalyptic war can be found in 1QM, which Sukenik named “The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness.”¹ According to Paolo Sacchi, “The word ‘apocalyptic’ is a modern invention, deriving from the wish to conceptualize the field of research on the affinities between the Apocalypse of John and other works of its time.”² In other words, apocalyptic literature has to have two characteristics: a two-dimensional picture of the world, with heavenly and earthly dimensions both present, and symbolic representation of the main personages.

The “War Scroll” seems to comply with these characteristics. The entire content of the scroll is dedicated to the planning of the war between the “faithful” Sons of Light and their enemies. The heavenly realm is constantly projected upon the earthly dimension.

Some elements of apocalyptic war are also present in the Pesharim, commentaries found at Qumran that interpret the prophecies about the destiny of the enemies of Israel. The Pesharim can apply these prophecies either to the present reality or to future events.

The goal of the present research is to investigate the ideology of apocalyptic war presented in the DSS. In order to gain a better understanding of the nature of this apocalyptic war, and of the character of the Qumran community as well, the present research will focus on the question of the identification of the enemy in the apocalyptic war. The answer to this question will help to explain the ideology of the community of Qumran in comparison to other Jewish and early Christian communities of that time.

The Enemy of the Qumran Community

The war described in 1QM definitely has an offensive character. God orders the Sons of Light to attack his and their enemies. According to Yigael Yadin, the war has three phases.³ In two of these phases, different groups of foes are to be attacked. The offensive against the first two groups is local, while

¹Yigael Yadin, ed., *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 3.

²Paolo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, vol. 20, JSPSup (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 26.

³Yadin, 21-33.

the third stage of the war definitely becomes universalized.

The first column of the scroll provides a list of the “local” enemies of the Sons of Light.

ראשית משלוח יד בני אור לההלל בנורל בני חושך בהיל בליעל בנורוד אדום ומואב ובני עמון וחי [ל יושבין] פלשת ובנדודי כתיי אשור ועמהם בעזר מרשיעי ברית.

The enemy is the army of Belial, sons of darkness, hordes of Moab, Edom, Ammon, the Philistines, and the Kittim of Ashur. Davies points out that the terms “sons of darkness” and “army of Belial” “seem to be general in application and to define all following groups.”⁴ In other words, Davies takes עמון וחי [ל יושבין] פלשת ובנדודי כתיי אשור ועמהם בעזר מרשיעי ברית etc. as in apposition to בליעל בהיל בליעל ובני עמון. This interpretation makes Moab, Ammon, and other nations to be the incarnated army of Belial, thus projecting the heavenly figure upon the earthly dimension.

Based on the type of weapons and other military terminology used in the scroll, Yadin dates this scroll to the second half of the first century B.C.E.⁵ The text definitely does not refer to past events. It rather presents a manual for the warfare that was to be launched in the near future.⁶

The author of the scroll takes the images straight from the prophetic books. Moab, Ammon, Edom, and the Philistines were ancient enemies of Israel. Most of the prophetic books pronounce woes on them and announce their destruction by God as retribution for their mistreatment of his people. The geopolitical situation in the first century B.C.E. is certainly different compared to the time of the Hebrew prophets, which suggests that the names of the nations may be used symbolically. In order to find support for this idea, it is necessary to trace the occurrences of these names in the DSS corpus.

The information about Moab, Ammon, Edom, and the Philistines is scarce. In fact, Ammon and Edom⁷ occur only once in the DSS—in this text. The Philistines appear once in the War Scroll, two times in the Pesharim on Isaiah as a part of the biblical text, and in the fragment of 4Q462, where the context is not clear. Moab occurs as a part of the biblical text in Peshar Isaiah 4Q165; in the fragment 4Q175 as part of the text of Num 24; and twice in the War Scroll, in columns 1 and 11.

The usage of Moab, Ammon, Edom, and the Philistines in the DSS does not provide the answer about the purpose of the rhetoric of the author of the War Scroll. However, in the army of Belial these nations seem to be secondary. The main thrust of the war is to be directed against the Kittim. In the Hebrew Bible, the Kittim do not appear together with the neighboring foes of Israel. According to the Tanakh, the Kittim were the sons of Javan (Gen 10:4; 1 Chron 1:7), which

⁴Philip R. Davies, *1QM, the War Scroll from Qumran: Its Structure and History*, *Biblica et Orientalia*, 32 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), 114.

⁵Yadin, 245.

⁶Ibid., 4-6.

⁷Edom, together with Moab, occurs also in 4Q434 (*Barkai Napshi*) in the context of prayerful adoration.

means that they were descendants of Japheth. In the prophetic oracles, the Kittim appear in connection with Tyre and Sidon (Isa 23; Ezek 27), as dwellers of the coastal land distant from Israel (Dan 11:30; Jer 2:10).

The Identity of the Kittim

Two questions arise from 1QM col. 1.

1. What is the meaning of כתיי אשור and כהכתיים במצרים? Yadin notes an obvious contradiction between the fact that Ashur is the descendant of Shem, while the Kittim are the descendants of Japheth.⁸ Why would the Kittim live in Ashur and Egypt if they are the dwellers of the western coast lands?

2. Why are the Kittim associated with the neighboring foes of Israel, since they have never been described in the Bible as the enemies of Israel?

Regarding the first question, A. Dupont-Sommer suggests that the Kittim of Ashur may be related to the Seleucids. However, another version of the answer to this question may be derived from Num 24:24, which Yadin considers to be very difficult to understand.⁹

וְצִים מִיַּד כְּתִים וְעָנוּ אֲשֹׁר וְעָנְרָ עֵבֶר וְנִסְדָּהוּא עָרֵי אֲבָד

It is possible that the author of the War Scroll alludes to this passage, using it in two ways: first, he sees that the land of Ashur was conquered by the Kittim; second, he could apply to the “Sons of Light” the role of the destroyers of the Kittim, those who bring the Kittim “to destruction.”

Davies has addressed the question concerning the presence of the Kittim in Egypt. He reconstructs the broken text in the following way: “And after this battle the king of the north shall come up hence with the Kittim in Egypt.”¹⁰ In other words, the two expressions do not mean that there are Kittim from Ashur or Egypt, but they could also mean that the Kittim conquered these territories.

This conclusion is consistent with the picture of the Kittim elsewhere in the DSS. The word occurs fifty-seven times in the DSS. The majority of occurrences are in different manuscripts of the War Scroll (1QM, 4Q491, 4Q492). But the remaining occurrences are distributed among the Pesharim on Habakkuk, Nahum, Isaiah, and Psalms. The commentators of the Pesharim tend to make “Kittim” an allegorical representation of different evil things: e.g., in 1Q16 the beast in the reeds is “Kittim.”¹¹ In the Peshar Habakkuk, the Chaldean conquerors are allegorically attributed to the Kittim.

Peshar Nahum’s allegorical approach in the interpretation of the lion in

⁸Yadin, 22.

⁹Ibid., 23.

¹⁰Davies, 116-117.

¹¹There is a break in the text between the word כתיים and כתיים, but it is likely to be something such as “hordes of Kittim.” Martinez sees ה before כתיים, which, if true, can support the statement.

Nah 2:12 serves as the basis for determining the identity of the Kittim.¹²

אשר הלך ארי לבוא שם נור ארי []
 [ואין מחריד פשרו על דמי] טרום מלך יון אשר בקש לבוא ירושלים בעצת דורשי החלקות
 [ולא נתן אל את ירושלים] ביד מלכי יון מאנתיכוס עד עמוד מושלי כתיים ואחר תרמס
 [העיר ונתנה ביד מושלי הכתיים - -] ארי טורף בדי גוריו ומחנק ללבויתיו מרף.

This is the clearest indication that Peshet Nahum uses “Kittim” as a code word for the Romans. Dupont-Sommer gives a detailed discussion about the usage of “Kittim” in Peshet Habakkuk. He concludes that even in spite of some indications that “Kittim” could refer to the Seleucids,¹³ the majority of the arguments favor a reference to the Romans.¹⁴

Even if some arguments about the Seleucid identity of the Kittim in Peshet Habakkuk could be based on the early pre-Roman date of the composition of the commentary,¹⁵ these arguments could not be applied to the War Scroll, which was written after the Seleucid period. If a Roman identification of “Kittim” is valid for the War Scroll, then it clearly indicates that the goal for the first stage of the war of the Sons of Light against the army of Belial is to defeat the Romans.

The defeat of the Kittim seems to be the major concern of the author of the War Scroll throughout the whole book. Since the scroll was written during the Roman rule, the author wanted to hide his intentions from Roman censorship and make the content of the scroll understandable only to the group that would be familiar with other Qumran materials. Therefore, he was using the code word. However, the code word would still betray the author's intentions. Therefore, he included other nations, such as Moab, Edom, Ammon, and the Philistines, to make his work look more biblical and, thus, more misleading to the readers outside the sect. This is a possible answer to the second question presented above.

Global Dimensions of the War

At the third stage of the war, the Sons of Light were to fulfill the task of defeating the nations living “outside the territory promised to Abraham.”¹⁶

בשנה הראשונה ילחמו בארם נהרים ובשניה בבנר לוד ובשלישית
 ילחמו בשאר בני ארם בעוף וחול חוגר ומשא אשר בעבר פרחביעה
 ובחמישית ילחמו בבני ארפכשד

This seems like a plan to conquer the world. In addition to the nations mentioned above, col. 2 also mentions Elam, the sons of Ham, Ishmael, and

¹²Yadin, 23.

¹³A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Jewish Sect of Qumran and the Essenes: New Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2d ed. (London: Valentine, Mitchell, 1953), 26-30.

¹⁴Ibid., 20-23.

¹⁵Ibid., 28.

¹⁶Yadin, 27.

Ketura. All these nations occur only once in the DSS. In the Hebrew Bible, they occur together only in the genealogy lists of Gen 10 and 1 Chron 1. Names such as Tohar, Mesha,¹⁷ Arpachsad, and Ham¹⁸ never occur outside of the genealogies. Lud and Uz occur elsewhere, but not as primary enemies of Israel. The only enemies of Israel mentioned in the text are Ashur and the sons of Ishmael and Ketura. Only Ashur is mentioned elsewhere in the War Scroll, besides the text in col. 2. It is noteworthy that in all remaining occurrences in the War Scroll, Ashur is mentioned in connection with the Kittim. In phrases such as 1 QU 11:11, Ashur serves as a symbolic representation of the Kittim.

ומאז השמעתינו מעוֹדֵךְ גְּבוּרֵי יָדְכָה בְּכַיִּים לְאֹמֹר
וּנְפֹל בְּשֵׁרֵב לֹא אִישׁ וְחָרֵב

In other words, it appears that in spite of the different nations mentioned in cols. 1 and 2, the Kittim are the main focus of the War of the Sons of Light. The Kittim seem to be the core of the army of Belial.

According to Yadin, the war has three stages, the last of which is the war against these distant nations that represent the whole world. Davies approaches the structure of the War Scroll differently. He believes that col. 1 does not serve as an introduction to 1QM.¹⁹

Davies's conclusions can be supported by the fact that there are apparent similarities between the content of cols. 1 and 19. These two columns mention Japheth and place the Kittim, Ashur, and the sons of Japheth together. As has been demonstrated above, biblical Ashur serves an allegorical counterpart for the Kittim. The Kittim are also the sons of Japheth. This may mean that there is only one enemy, the Kittim, who are the Romans. If Davies's conclusions about the place of col. 1 in the text of 1QM are correct, this means that the structure of the war is different than the one proposed by Yadin. Then the second column serves as an introduction, where the plan of the global war is laid out. This could be a general mission statement that all the nations mentioned in col. 2 have to be subdued for the eternal kingdom. The war is then directed toward the main enemy, the Kittim or Romans, who pose the major threat and resistance, and whose destruction actually hastens the eternal redemption (1QM 1:12).

Conclusion

If this conclusion about the sequence of the war is correct, the global war and the war against the neighbors could function as the coverup for the planned offensive against the occupying Romans. Iosif Amusin, in his book about the Qumran community, states that in the early stage of the development of DSS research, the Qumran community was believed to be Zealots.²⁰ Based on the

¹⁷BHS spells these names differently.

¹⁸In Pss 78, 105, and 106, Egypt is called "Ham."

¹⁹Davies, 112.

²⁰I. D. Amusin, *Kumranskaya Obschina* (Moscow: Nauka, 1983), 20.

use of “Kittim” in the DSS, this confusion is understandable. Unfortunately, scholars do not possess literary documents of the Zealots to compare their ideology with that of Qumran. Apocalyptic war in Qumran is led by priests, who are directed by God. The goal of the war is not to reach independence for Judea, but to bring eternal redemption and victory over the forces of evil.

Many scholars have noticed the similarity between the ideology of the early Christian community and Qumran.²¹ Stephen Goranson makes a detailed comparison between the themes raised in the DSS and the book of Apocalypse.²² One additional detail is important in comparing the Apocalypse of John with the War Scroll. Both books use symbolic apocalyptic language in order to be understood only by the community and not by the Romans. The writers of the Midrash and Talmud used the same method for hiding certain issues from Christian censors.

However, with regard to the location of the war and the community’s role in relation to the enemy, the Apocalypse of John takes a different approach. The war is waged in the heavenly realm. God is fighting for the Christian community and the community is not allowed to fight. Thus DSS and the Apocalypse of John use symbolic language with the same purpose—to conceal the content. However, their views of the war differ.

²¹Ibid., 201-223.

²²Stephen Goranson, “Essene Polemic in the Apocalypse of John,” in *Legal Text and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Cambridge 1995*, ed. Moshe Bernstein, Florentino Garcia Martinez, and John Kampen (New York: Brill, 1997), 453-460.