The War Scroll

∵

Text, Timing and Terror: Thematic Thoughts on the *War Scroll* in Conversation with the Writings of Martin G. Abegg, Jr.

George J. Brooke

Let me have war, say I; it exceeds peace as far as day does night; it's spritely, waking, audible, and full of vent.[1]

1　Introduction

My purpose in this short essay in honour of Marty Abegg is to take a look at some aspects of the *War Scroll* through the lens of some of his various writings.[2] Marty Abegg's doctoral dissertation was entitled "The War Scroll from Qumran Caves 1 and 4: A Critical Edition"; it was submitted to the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1992.[3] If my own experience is anything to go by, then I suspect that directly and indirectly the topics of their

---

1　William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, Act IV, Scene 5 (First Servingman).

2　By *War Scroll*, I refer primarily to the Cave 1 version of the composition, but several of the points in this study depend upon recalling that the composition had a complicated transmission history and was available in several versions.

3　Martin G. Abegg Jr., "The War Scroll from Qumran Caves 1 and 4: A Critical Edition, Parts I & II" (PhD. diss., Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1992). The readers for the dissertation were Ben Zion Wacholder and Lawrence H. Schiffman. I am very grateful to Jason Kalman for facilitating access to this dissertation. Sadly, this work is too often omitted from both popular and technical works referring to the *War Scroll*. For its absence from popular works see, e.g., Jean Duhaime, "War Scroll (1QM)," in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. J.J. Collins and D. Harlow; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 1329–30. For its absence from technical works see, e.g., Giovanni Ibba, *Il "Rotolo della Guerra": Edizione critica* (Quaderni di Henoch 10; Torino: Silvio Zamorani editore, 1998); and also Elisha Qimron, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew Writings Volume One* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2010). Though already present in some places (see n. 4 below) it is to be hoped that some more of the insights in Abegg's dissertation, suitably adjusted in light of more recent scholarship, will nevertheless feature explicitly in his commentary on the *War Scroll* yet to appear as volume 12 in Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

dissertations stay with scholars throughout their careers, even if other sub-
jects are more immediately in the forefront of their minds. Given the extensive
achievement in Marty Abegg's dissertation, I am inclined to think that this is
all the more likely to have been the case for him. So, whether it is the pro-
duction of concordances[4] and tagged computer texts or the writing of learned
articles for journals and books, his initial work on the *War Scroll* seems to lie in
or behind much of what he has thought about subsequently.

2   Text

As the topic of his doctoral dissertation Marty Abegg presented a critical text
of the Cave 1 version of the *War Scroll* based on the "re-examination of all
the known textual witnesses."[5] Chapters 1 to 6 of the dissertation present the
evidence of the Cave 4 versions of the *War Scroll* and discuss their relation-
ship with 1QM. There is then discussion of four additional manuscripts: (a)
4QTohorot B[a] (4Q276), which Abegg suggests is a remnant of the same work as
4QM[c] (4Q493); (b) 4QSM (4Q285); (c) 4QWar Scroll-like Text B (4Q471); and (d)
4QWar Scroll-like Text A (4Q497). Several of Abegg's insights into the character
of the text and textual development of the *War Scroll* and closely related com-
positions have become available in Abegg's publications, sometimes as direct
developments of his textual work,[6] and some as indirect developments of the
insights of his reflection on that same textual analysis.[7]

---

4   See, e.g., Martin G. Abegg, Jr., with James E. Bowley and Edward M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Srolls
     Concordance, Volume One: The Non-Biblical Texts from Qumran* (in two parts; Leiden: Brill,
     2003).

5   Abegg, "The War Scroll," iv.

6   See especially from 2002 onwards his contribution to *Qumran Sectarian Manuscripts*
     (Altamonte Springs: Oaktree Software [database for the Accordance computer software]).
     See also for the use and reuse of the Hebrew texts and their component parts: Martin G.
     Abegg, Jr., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance, Volume One: The Non-Biblical Texts from Qumran*
     (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Martin G. Abegg, Jr. [with others], "War Rules," in *Texts Concerned with
     Religious Law* (ed. D.W. Parry and E. Tov; Dead Sea Scrolls Reader Part 1; Leiden: Brill, 2004),
     208–91; reprinted as "War Rules," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader, Second Edition, Revised and
     Expanded: Volume 1: Texts Concerned with Religious Law, Exegetical Texts and Parabiblical
     Texts* (ed. D.W. Parry and E. Tov in association with G.I. Clements; 2 ed. revised and expanded;
     Leiden: Brill, 2014), 240–313.

7   See especially Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "4Q471: A Case of Mistaken Identity," in *Pursuing the
     Text: Studies in Honor of Ben Zion Wacholder on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (ed.
     J.C. Reeves and J. Kampen; JSOTSup 184; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 136–47;

This is not the place to discuss the editions of the *War Scroll* that are in the dissertation. However, it is important to draw attention to the number and variable texts of the manuscripts that Abegg considered. The implications of both the number and the variation of the manuscript evidence for the *War Scroll* is that this was not an obscure text, produced for esoteric purposes by some marginal element in a sectarian movement. This composition had a long and lively transmission history, in part or as a whole, and should be imagined to be as much a part of sectarian ideology as any other work in the collections in the caves at and near Qumran. This is not a new point, and it has been made clearly and well at the end of a summary appreciation of all the various versions of the *War Scroll* by Devorah Dimant:

> In any event, like 1QS and 1QHᵃ, 1QM also certainly enjoyed special status in the Qumran community since it too is a copy executed with particular care, written on a large, well-prepared scroll, and hidden carefully in a jar in cave 1. . . . the well-developed versions of 1QS, 1QHᵃ, and 1QM were not fortuitous, nor were they necessarily the final outcome of their editorial processes. They seem to have originated in the early stages of the group. Later copies appear to be abbreviations, often made for personal use. By virtue of their ancient and full versions, these cave 1 specimens appear to have been manuscripts of special importance, perhaps the venerated copies of earlier authoritative models of the major sectarian works.[8]

The point is that the numerous versions of compositions like the *War Scroll* and the special character of the Cave 1 version in particular, allow scholars to see the significance and longevity of these literary works. They were indeed important as texts.

Something of that importance as text can be seen in a remarkable *tour de force* by the contemporary historian Simon Scharma of Columbia University. He has recently offered a survey of various forms of classical Judaism, all the while challenging the very category itself. In a section questioningly entitled

---

idem, "The War Scroll. 1QM, 4Q491–496," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (ed. M.O. Wise, M.G. Abegg, Jr., and E.M. Cook; San Francisco: Harper, 1996; 2d ed., 2005), 150–72 (2d edn, 146–70); idem, "Who Ascended to Heaven? 4Q491, 4Q427, and the Teacher of Righteousness," in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. C.A. Evans and P.W. Flint; SDSSRL; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 61–73.

8 Devorah Dimant, "The Composite Character of the Qumran Sectarian Literature as an Indication of Its Date and Provenance," in *History, Ideology and Bible Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Collected Studies* (FAT 90; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 183.

"The End of Days?" he describes the scrolls found in the eleven caves at and near Qumran, remarking eloquently about how they bring into the central frame what had seemed like marginal issues in the Judaism of the two centuries before the fall of the temple.[9] Perhaps surprisingly struck by the amount of text that has survived, Scharma has noted how the tone of the sectarian compositions amongst the collection is towards wordiness. In fact for him,

> Some of it is mesmerisingly, crazily, wordy. The *War Scroll*, for example, would not have helped much as a manual of arms against the Romans since it spends an inordinate amount of space detailing exactly what must be inscribed on trumpets, banners and even weapons in the battle array of the Sons of Light. 'On the point of their javelins they shall write "Shining Javelin of the Power of God"...and on the darts of the second division they shall write "Bloody Spikes to Bring Down the Slain by the Wrath of God".' We are going to write the enemy into capitulation! Surrender to our verbosity or else! Precise measurements are issued for the size of the polished bronze shields, and the spike of the spear 'made of brilliant white iron, the work of a craftsman, in its centre, pointing towards the tip shall be the ears of corn in pure gold'.[10] If the Ultimate Battle could only be decided by literary excess and sumptuous schmeckerei it would be a cakewalk for the Sons of Light.[11]

This is an insightful approach to the *War Scroll*. It offers an appreciation of how the text might have been perceived by its authors as a forceful speech act, which, even if it was not effective for defeating the opposition physically, was at least able to create a sense of anticipated victory involving God and his angels, a victory far more powerful than any likely or imminent defeat. The enemy will be written into capitulation, texted into defeat.[12]

---

9   Simon Schama, *The Story of the Jews: Finding the Words 1000 BCE–1492 CE* (London: The Bodley Head, 2013), 161–70.

10   Translations are cited from Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 170.

11   Scharma, *The Story of the Jews*, 165–66.

12   With respect to the different slogans written on the banners something of this is anticipated by Russell C.D. Arnold, *The Social Role of Liturgy in the Religion of the Qumran Community* (STDJ 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 198, n. 32: "This description shows the importance of writing as a means of bringing into reality the situation they desire. It is difficult, however, to imagine the banner carrier, or more likely the priest for that tribe, taking out a marker and re-inscribing the banner at each stage in the battle. It may have been a way of informing the troops what they were to do. Perhaps they were not being written at that

And it is here that the work of Abegg on the texts of the *War Scroll* comes in to its own, because it shows attention to the multiple versions of the composition that indicate that its verbosity mattered in multiple ways. Fresh versions of the text were the means to re-equipping the forces of light. The latest text was a new weapon in the arsenal of those who appeared marginalized in the circumstances in which they found themselves. The very creation of new editions of compositions is a security system, a set of reassurances that all will be well in the end. Though many of the sectarian compositions appear to go through somewhat similar rewriting processes over the decades that they seem to belong to, it is only in the case of the *War Scroll* that such textual developments can be so clearly construed as an aid to a sense of security.

Alongside the multiple studies of the techniques of rewriting processes evident for so many authoritative compositions, both scriptural and sectarian, there is room for students of the Dead Sea Scrolls to consider the psychological and emotional benefits of rewriting practices and how those might be discernible to modern readers. Such benefits might be discernible in minutiae. For example, it could even be the case that there are particular, relatively small linguistic preferences in the *War Scroll* that indicate some of these psychological benefits. One can recall the concluding remarks by Søren Holst: "In a few cases ... the accumulation of subject-first clauses also seem to have the function of marking a discourse 'peak', creating 'dramatic pause' by employing an inordinate number of clauses with a word order different from what might otherwise be expected."[13] Such benefits might be discernible in much larger matters such as the compilers' selection of major themes for the work[14] or the adjustment of the composition in major ways, as lies at the heart of the debates

---

moment but that a new banner is raised." Writing about the writing, text about text, is what is important.

13 Søren Holst, *Verbs and War Scroll: Studies in the Hebrew Verbal System and the Qumran War Scroll* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Studia Semitica Upsaliensia 25; Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2008), 144. In most respects the Hebrew of the War Scroll manuscripts straightforwardly reflects what is also discernible in other texts; see Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (ed. P.W. Flint and J.C. VanderKam; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1998–99), 1:325–58. The *War Scroll* is also fully integrated into the study of the palaeography, orthography, phonology, morphology and syntax of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "The Linguistic Analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls: More Than (Initially) Meets the Eye," in *Rediscovering the Dead Sea Scrolls: An Assessment of Old and New Approaches and Methods* (ed. M.L. Grossman; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 48–68.

14 The emotional significance of such themes might be assessed in terms not unlike those applied to disgust, empathy, fear, and a sense of justice by Thomas Kazen, *Emotions in*

about the redactional processes that might explain the present configuration of the Cave 1 version of the *War Scroll*.[15]

The problematic textual character of the *War Scroll* is also reflected in the multiple proposals concerning its genre.[16] Two observations are worth making here. The first concerns the insights to be derived about the profile of the *War Scroll*, at least in its Cave 1 form, from the research project carried out in recent years at the University of Manchester under the leadership of Alexander Samely.[17] That project seeks to identify in the form of an inventory the principal aspects of several texts from the Jewish literature of antiquity. Most of the compositions evident in the Dead Sea Scrolls are omitted from the inventory because they are simply too fragmentary to bear the weight of descriptive analysis that would make them valuable comparative contributors to the project. However, the Cave 1 form of the *War Scroll* is included and many pertinent observations made, mostly by Samely himself concerning the voice

---

Biblical Law: A Cognitive Science Approach (Hebrew Bible Monographs 36; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011).

15   These are most readily discernible in the writings of Johannes P.M. van der Ploeg, *Le rouleau de la guerre: traduit et annoté, avec une introduction* (STDJ 2; Leiden: Brill, 1959); Philip R. Davies, *1QM: The War Scroll from Qumran: Its Structure and History* (BibOr 32; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977); Giovanni Ibba, *Le ideologie del Rotolo della Guerra* (*1QM*)*: Studio sulla genesi e la datazione dell'opera* (Associazione Italiana per lo studio del Giudaismo Testi e Studi 17; Firenze: Giuntina, 2005 [he sees four redactional layers]); and Brian Schultz, *Conquering the World: The War Scroll* (*1QM*) *Reconsidered* (STDJ 76; Leiden: Brill, 2009); idem, "Compositional Layers in the War Scroll (1QM)," in *Qumran Cave 1 Revisited: Texts from Cave 1 Sixty Years after Their Discovery. Proceedings of the Sixth Meeting of the IOQS in Ljubljana* (ed. D.K. Falk et al.; STDJ 91; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 153–64. Care needs to be taken in the inclusion of col. 19 in this debate, since it might not be integral to the Cave 1 copy of the *War Scroll*: see Rony Yishay, "Column 19 of the War Scroll (1QM)," *Meghillot* 8–9 (2010): 175–92 [Hebrew].

16   The inventory described in this paragraph suggests at its point 12.1 a sampling of genre labels: "rule"; rule book; apocalypse; liturgy; allegorical-dramatic-liturgical composition; script for celebration of the covenant; (tactical or military) manual; (utopian) tactical treatise. Suitable reference is made to the survey and discussion of genre in Jean Duhaime, *The War Texts: 1QM and Related Manuscripts* (CQS 6; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 53–60. Cf. the title in Num 21:14: "Book of the Wars of the Lord."

17   The overall character of the project is described in detail in Alexander Samely in collaboration with Philip Alexander, Rocco Bernasconi and Robert Hayward, *Profiling Jewish Literature in Antiquity: An Inventory, from Second Temple Texts to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); part of the project was also undertaken through the auspices of the University of Durham (in the person of Robert Hayward), but the inventory website, which is the most enduring legacy of the project, is located on a server at the University of Manchester.

of the text, its narrative pace, its progression from topic to topic, its temporal order, thematic correspondences. Those can be consulted online and should be taken into account by all those who work on the *War Scroll* in the future, even if only to act as a control over what might fairly be said.[18]

A second matter concerning the genre of the *War Scroll* is worth mentioning explicitly. Most genre labels seem to be derived from the comparative analysis of the form and content of texts. For the *War Scroll* such analysis has usually begun with the discussion of the opening words of the Cave 1 form of the composition, words that sadly have to be partially reconstructed.[19] Whether ספר (*book*) or סרך (*rule*) is read at the start of the composition, there can be immediate discussion about what such terms might mean for the composer or compiler of this distinctive work. If סרך is reconstructed and read, then, as Giovanni Ibba has concluded, echoing the thoughts of many, "non è una 'regola' in senso stretto."[20] To my mind this surely indicates an impasse, if only form and content are taken into account. So where might scholars look for assistance in understanding and defining the genre of this composition?

In addition to form and content, some texts require a consideration of function in order to be suitably understood. Indeed, in some cases function might be the determining factor for the best understanding of a text, whether that is, for example, a "sentence" in a court of law or a "command" on a parade ground. Functional understandings of texts are intimately associated with the way words work and so they concern, sometimes in complex ways, those matters that make speech effective for particular audiences.[21] The text of the *War Scroll* appears to be about more than just the way words work in themselves, perhaps as a means of forcing surrender by verbosity. The *War Scroll* seems to

---

18   See   http://literarydatabase.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/SearchMultiPoints.aspx?Book Id=21&OrganonId=13. To the list there can be added the idea that because of its eschatological-apocalyptic perspective the *War Scroll* might be expected to be pseudepigraphic: Moshe J. Bernstein, "Pseudepigraphy in the Qumran Scrolls: Categories and Functions," in *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the* [*Second*] *International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead sea Scrolls and Associated Literature* (ed. E.G. Chazon and M.E. Stone; STDJ 31; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 25.

19   In his edition and commentary on the text Yigael Yadin*, The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 3–4, noted that "we do not know the name of the author of this scroll, or what its readers called it. One may assume that its title comprised its opening word or words, as was the custom."

20   Ibba, *Il "Rotolo della Guerra": Edizione critica*, 51 ("It is not a 'Rule' in the strict sense.")

21   Some of this approach is attached to reflections on the work of John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2d ed., 1975).

be encouraging or reflecting the ritual enactment of what it portrays. Its over-
all priestly perspective encourages an understanding of the text as concerned
with the liturgical deployment of troops.[22] On the one hand, exegetically, the
text is a neat harmonised realisation in one literary form of the parallelism
between the kinds of purity required in the cult and in military activity. On the
other hand, the ritual enactment indicates that performance criticism might
have much to offer for the better understanding of the text and its purpose.[23]
The text realizes a theatre of war; it encourages a performance whose partici-
pants and observers might cathartically cope with the conceived crisis of their
situation.[24] It is not simply a spiritualization of war, the depiction of the com-
bat between good and evil as an internal spiritual struggle; it is a ritual cam-
paign manual for those who have to fight an external enemy other.

---

22   Despite paying attention to the fixed liturgical speech of scripture, including the address
        of the priest who was anointed for battle when he spoke before the troops (Deut 20:2–7),
        somewhat surprisingly Abegg does not include the *War Scroll* in any of its forms within
        the taxonomy he offers of liturgical texts from the Qumran caves: see Martin G. Abegg,
        Jr., "Liturgy: Qumran," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (ed. C.A. Evans and
        S.E. Porter; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 648–50. This is all the more sur-
        prising since he has made some astute observations on the possible significance of the
        formula, "And they shall answer and say," as part of an enduring sequence of ritual prac-
        tice with particular linguistic significance running from scripture (Deut 27:14) through to
        m. Sotah 7:1 and including 1QM 13:1; 15:4–9; 16:13–16; 18:6–7; 19:13; 4Q491 10 ii 13–15:
        Martin G. Abegg Jr., " 'And He Shall Answer and Say . . .'—A Little Backlighting," in *Studies
        in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich* (ed. P.W. Flint,
        E. Tov and J.C. VanderKam; SVTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 203–11.

23   On performance criticism see, e.g., the introductory survey articles by David Rhoads,
        "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—
        Part I," *BTB* 36 (2006): 118–33; idem, "Part II," *BTB* 36 (2006): 164–84; idem, "Performance
        Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Biblical Studies," http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/
        pdfs/rhoads_performance.pdf. It should be noted that Rhoads pays little explicit atten-
        tion to liturgical texts, perhaps because his focus is mostly on the New Testament; he por-
        trays performance criticism as emerging from various aspects of other standard critical
        approaches, such as rhetorical criticism and audience/reader response approaches. For a
        wider perspective see the overview by Marvin Carson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*
        (London: Routledge, 2d ed., 2004).

24   Despite its concerns with liturgy and ritual, the most extensive recent discussion of the
        War Scroll from such a perspective is concerned only with the political implications of the
        authority of the priesthood in the text: see Arnold, *The Social Role of Liturgy in the Religion
        of the Qumran Community*, 197–99.

3 Timing

Readers of the scholarly literature on the Dead Sea Scrolls soon come to appreciate the dry wit of the titles of some of Marty Abegg's several contributions. One such item is entitled "Does Anybody Really Know What Time it Is? A Reexamination of 4Q503 in Light of 4Q317."[25] In some other studies he has also been concerned with calendrical time, whether this is organized in annual, triennial, six year, forty-nine year, or two hundred and ninety-four year cycles.[26] But he has also been concerned with eschatological time, a periodisation of history that creates an end-time. Two aspects of this eschatological time have featured in Abegg's work. The first is the demarcation of the eschatological period itself; the second concerns some of the figures who populate eschatological time, especially messiahs.

For thinking about eschatological time, Abegg has drawn attention to the way in which the *War Scroll* speaks of the return from the wilderness. For him at the time of the war between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, "the Sons of Light return from the wilderness of the peoples to camp in the wilderness of Jerusalem" (1QM 1:2–3). As an adaptation of the thought of Ezek 20:35, as identified by Yadin,[27] the *War Scroll* understands the beginning of the eschatological campaign as the re-occupation of Jerusalem and the temple, the time when the movement actually comes out of exile in the wilderness.[28] This indicates that, despite all the problems in trying to understand it correctly, the *War Scroll* attests to a spatial transition out of liminality that is temporally marked. The start of the campaign is the start of a new period of community identity and self-understanding. That is the period at the end of the age, when "Israel would finally become coincident with the sectarian community,"[29] when the

---

25   Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "Does Anybody Really Know What Time it Is? A Reexamination of 4Q503 in Light of 4Q317," in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues* (ed. D.W. Parry and E.C. Ulrich; STDJ 30; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 396–406.

26   See, e.g., Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "The Calendar at Qumran," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part 5. The Judaism of Qumran: A Systemic Reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. A.J. Avery-Peck, J. Neusner and B.D. Chilton; HOS I Near and Middle East 56; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:145–71.

27   Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*, 257. The idea was elaborated by Shemaryahu Talmon, "Between the Bible and the Mishna," in *The World of Qumran from Within: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989), 42.

28   Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "Exile and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (ed. J.M. Scott; JSJSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 124.

29   1QSa and 1QM are the eschatological compositions that make explicit the exclusive identification of the movement as Israel; for that observation see Martin G. Abegg, Jr.,

movement could call itself Israel without any qualification. Abegg has under-
stood one feature of that period of coming out of exile as a looking forward
to a time of salvation and all its blessings.[30] This has led him, for example,
to wonder whether 4QTime of Righteousness (4Q215a) might fit more closely
with sectarian understanding informed by the *War Scroll* than some scholars
might be willing to admit.[31]

Many scholars have been able to summarize the significance of the *War
Scroll* and related texts in a general way, such as can be seen in the following:

> Many of the sect's writings are characterized by a dualistic apocalypti-
> cism according to which the end of days was near. Divinely inspired lead-
> ers (or messiahs) would soon appear to lead the final battle between the
> Sons of Light (the Qumran sectaries) and the Sons of Darkness (their ene-
> mies), and the righteous remnant would be restored. The sectarians read
> the prophetic books of the Bible as coded references to these historical
> events, as predictions that the dawning of the Last Day was imminent.[32]

However, Abegg's contributions in various studies that have similarly inte-
grated the *War Scroll* with other sectarian compositions have been able to
highlight some key aspects of the composition that indicate more precisely
what the work stands for, notably the movement as Israel in the eschatological
period.

Abegg's concern with who might be the leading figures that might populate
the eschatological period has resulted in some astute observations, some of
which are worth reflecting on further. In his review of the evidence for Messiah
figures in the scrolls from Qumran, Abegg has concluded that it is possible to
read many compositions as describing only one Messiah, a kingly or Davidic

---

"The Covenant of the Qumran Sectarians," in *The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period* (ed. S.E. Porter and J.C.R. de Roo; JSJSup 71; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 97; Schulz, *Conquering the World*, 363–65.

30   Whether consideration of the good outcome of the battles should be considered in the light of just war theory to help understand what the *War Scroll* signifies has yet to be asked; on recent uses of the theory and its priorities in Christian tradition see Joseph E. Capizzi, "War and International Order," *Comm* 31 (2004): 280–301.

31   Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "The Time of Righteousness (4Q215A): A Time of War or a Time of Peace?" in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in Honor of Eileen Schuller on the Occasion of Her 65th Birthday* (ed. J. Penner, K.M. Penner and C. Wassen; STDJ 98; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 11.

32   Christine Hayes, *The Emergence of Judaism: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 86.

Messiah along the lines of Gen 49 or Isa 11. He is prepared to admit that messianic hopes in the Qumran literature were not always or only singular; a significant priest could stand alongside an anointed prince or Davidic king and possibly be understood as providing messianic priestly balance.[33] In the *War Scroll* the presence of a high priest (1QM 2:1; 7:12; 10:2; 15:4, 6; 16:13; 18:5) but the absence of an obvious leading eschatological priestly Messiah is his preferred reading strategy. The absence of a leading messianic priest from the *War Scroll* is all the more noteworthy since, as Abegg himself has observed, "the covenant of the 'eternal priesthood' is mentioned at least once in the Qumran corpus. The authority of the priesthood is rehearsed in the *War Scroll* in one of the high priestly prayers during the final battle of the clash between the sons of light and the sons of darkness."[34] The *War Scroll* is clearly written from a priestly perspective but that perspective is an attempt to realize the military roles of priests, even the high priest, as discernible in scripture, rather than the assertion of distinctive priestly agency in the last battles.

The playing down of human agency is also at least part of the explanation for why there is little attention in the *War Scroll* to the kingly Messiah. In 1QM there is indeed mention of the "Prince of the Congregation" (1QM 5:1),[35] but nothing much is made of his activity or role. There is no sense that the Prince is a hero of high mimetic mode.[36] In 4Q285 the depiction of the Prince of the Congregation is based largely on Isa 11; he slays someone in a battle involving the Kittim. The virtual absence of a leading lay figure seems to indicate that human leadership roles are somewhat redundant. The implication of those observations is that while the various forms of the *War Scroll* do indeed mention priestly and lay leaders, the thrust of the dramatic presentation of the composition is to stress divine competence for the defeat of darkness. As Raija

---

33   Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "The Messiah at Qumran: Are We Still Seeing Double?" *DSD* 2 (1995): 125–44. In a further study Abegg considers that only 4Q541 frg 9 clearly refers to a Priest Messiah: see Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "A Messianic High Priest in the Scrolls?" *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 44 (2005): 43–51.

34   Abegg, "The Covenant of the Qumran Sectarians," 83, referring to the allusion to Num 25:1–13 in 1QM 17:2–3.

35   Abegg translates this as "the Leader of the whole nation" in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (ed. M.O. Wise, M.G. Abegg, Jr., and E.M. Cook; San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 155, but as "The Prince of the Whole Congregation" in the 2005 revised edition of the same book (152).

36   To use the category from the first essay on a theory of modes in Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

Sollamo has concluded, "[t]he supreme leader and hero of the eschatological war is Yahweh himself (1QM XII,7–12)."[37]

Two other points need to be made. It is all too easy for modern Western readers of the *War Scroll* to assess the composition as an eschatological text and to assert that it might form the very heart of the construction of the Essene movement's eschatology. Perhaps in that respect it is no accident that amongst those who have written short studies of the eschatology of the sectarian compositions found in the caves at and near Qumran should be Philip Davies whose doctoral work on the *War Scroll* has certainly influenced some aspects of his own long-term interests in history. However, a composition such as the *War Scroll* demands more sophisticated attention from its readers than might be restricted to a temporal analysis alone. Any worldview is constructed from attitudes towards space as well as time, as well as towards energy and matter, and all four dimensions are worth considering. So, alongside a temporal reading of the composition there is certainly room for a spatial analysis, not least because of the cosmic symmetry reflected in the texts and because priestly compositions very commonly are marked by very clear spatial demarcations: where the various troops are located matters, if purity is to be maintained and the hoped for outcome achieved satisfactorily.[38] Liturgical performance requires attention to the dynamics of sacred space. Furthermore, the cosmic mirroring that is apparent in the text is suggestive of the divine energy that the text seeks to tap into and re-present somehow. In addition the inscribed marking of the weapons, for example, is a material indication of how such divine energy is visible in an object as described. There is more going on in the *War Scroll* than eschatology alone.

Another aspect of the *War Scroll* that too much attention to eschatology might distort concerns the actual political circumstances, particularly of the later forms of the composition that can be dated to the Roman period, perhaps after 63 BCE. Here it is important to reckon with the problem of stereotypes. The eschatological rhetoric of the *War Scroll* barely leaves room for any nuance in the way the ancient reader or enactor of the text might have understood the political or military identification of the Kittim. Providing nuance

---

37   Raija Sollamo, "War and Violence in the Ideology of the Qumran Community," in *Verbum et Calamus: Semitic and Related Studies in Honour of the Sixtieth Birthday of Professor Tapani Harviainen* (ed. H. Juusola, J. Laulainen and H. Palva; StudOr 99; Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2004), 351.

38   This is reflected in the dualism of the composition: see Philip R. Davies, "Dualism in the Qumran War Texts," in *Dualism in Qumran* (ed. G.G. Xeravits; LSTS 76; London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 8–19.

in the discussion of Rome in the variety of depictions in the New Testament and other early Christian writings has become important in New Testament studies.[39] It is time for such nuance to be introduced into the study of the *War Scroll*, so that sobriquets are not reduced to eschatological slogans, but appreciated as carrying some political resonance and weight.[40]

4   Terror

That there should be a composition in the sectarian collection from the eleven caves at and near Qumran as militaristic as the *War Scroll* has been recognized as intriguing, even problematic, from the outset. Scholars who have identified those responsible for the sectarian compositions as Essenes of some sort have had to offer some kind of explanation for the apparent discrepancy, and resulting cognitive dissonance, between the depiction of the Essenes as pacifists in Philo (*Every Good Man is Free*, 87) and the presence of the militaristic *War Scroll* in Caves 1 and 4 in particular.[41] After all, the composition was not given and has not earned the title of *Defence Scroll*, permitting a non-violent approach to the end times unless an attack should be initiated by others.[42]

---

39   See, e.g., the nuances in the studies in Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed, eds., *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (SBLWGRW 5; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). For violence in particular see Pieter G.R. de Villiers and Jan Willem van Henten, eds., *Coping with Violence in the New Testament* (Studies in Theology and Religion 16; Leiden: Brill, 2012), especially the study by Jeremy Punt, "Violence in the New Testament and the Roman Empire: Ambivalence, Othering, Agency," 23–42.

40   On sobriquets in the sectarian scrolls see Matthew A. Collins, *The Use of Sobriquets in the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls* (LSTS 67; London: T&T Clark International, 2009). For some reason Collins does not engage with the use of sobriquets in the *War Scroll*.

41   This enigma of this kind of cognitive dissonance is all the more striking in some sections of Buddhism; the Shaolin monastery's monks have been perfecting their fighting skills for centuries, not always just for mental self-discipline, despite the Buddhist proscription of violence; see Meir Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

42   Gordon M. Zerbe, *Non-Retaliation in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts* (JSPSup 13; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 106–35, esp. 129–34 on "The Essenes: Pacifistic or Militaristic?" I know of no attempt at locating the *War Scroll* in the context of debates in antiquity about vengeance and anger in the face of aggression; as an introduction to such topics see Petra von Gemünden, "Anger and Aggression as Dealt with in Classical Antiquity and in the Sermon on the Mount," *AJBI* 32 (2006): 127–96, who also discusses Ben Sira.

From the perspective of the modern liberal West, violence in religion is an embarrassment.[43] Some attempts have been made to consider the character of the *War Scroll* in the light of recent thinking on violence and war, especially violence and war as those seem to be motivated and justified by arrogant religious traditions. For example, Alex Jassen has wondered whether "scarce resources" theory and other more general sociological approaches to sectarianism might lead to a better understanding of the sectarian imagination.[44] While we await Abegg's comments on war and peace,[45] for the *War Scroll* it is possible that two other recent theological reflections on violence in biblical texts can contribute something to the parameters that might enable a better appreciation of the violent sentiments that the text reflects.

In his Presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2002 John Collins considered questions, highly pertinent to the time of his writing, about the Bible and the legitimation of violence.[46] For any reader of the *War Scroll* it is worth keeping in mind his suggestion that "the line between actual killing and verbal, symbolic, or imaginary violence is thin and permeable. The threat of violence is a method of forceful coercion, even if no blood is actually shed."[47] Perhaps the thinness of the line enabled some members of the movement associated with the site of Qumran to turn to actual violence in

---

43   Against such liberal romanticism it might be necessary, however, to assert what some have identified as the underlying "ontology of violence" in the created order; it may be perhaps that such violence is what is reflected in the *War Scroll*. See the perceptive comments and analysis by J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 152–55.

44   Alex P. Jassen, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Violence: Sectarian Formation and Eschatological Imagination," *BibInt* 17 (2009): 12–44. Perhaps some aspects of social psychology, such as Terror Management Theory, might yield similarly fruitful results for the better understanding of the *War Scroll* in particular.

45   Abegg, "The Time of Righteousness (4Q215A): A Time of War or a Time of Peace?" 1–12, offers some aspects of his thinking in the area.

46   John J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phineas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *JBL* 122 (2003): 3–21; reprinted in a revised form as *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* (Facet Books; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

47   Collins, *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* 3. It seems to me that this a more realistic approach than the proposal offered by Reginald Askew that "the Way to deal with what is atrocious and unthinkable (like the messengers bringing Job news of the death of his children) is to put it in the religious library, which also contains awe and holiness"; Reginald J.A. Askew, *Muskets and Altars: Jeremy Taylor and the Last of the Anglicans* (London: Mowbray, 1997), 121.

TEXT, TIMING AND TERROR

association with some zealots in the first century CE or most likely during the First Jewish War (66–74 CE).

In discussing eschatological vengeance Collins has this to say of the *War Scroll*. "The *War Scroll* from Qumran is written in anticipation of human participation in the final conflict, but this is compatible with the pledge to avoid conflict with 'the men of the pit' until the Day of Vengeance (1QS 10:19)."[48] In this way Collins differentiates the *War Scroll* from other similar apocalyptic literature in which he sees the dominant tendency as "quietistic, encouraging endurance and even martyrdom in the present era." For Collins it seems as if the ethos of the *War Scroll* lies in a different trajectory in the Second Temple period and beyond; it seems to belong with those who have taken up arms to bring about the particular understanding of earlier authoritative texts that they wish to endorse. In this respect the *War Scroll* is a delaying tactic, allowing in its immediate present the view of a strict and somewhat literal adherence to particular scriptural promulgations of destruction, violence and the ban (which might even encourage a kind of human sacrifice in the total destructive offering of the enemy),[49] but putting the moment of violence and vengeance in God's hands and at God's time.

In an equally accessible form, Thomas Römer has considered the biblical depictions of God as a militaristic despot and as violent and vengeful.[50] Römer is an expert on the Deuteronomistic writings and sees those writings as the location of the overwhelming majority of the biblical statements concerning military violence.[51] In the light of such an insight immediately a question arises in relation to the sectarian manuscripts found in the eleven caves at and near Qumran. In those sectarian compositions Deuteronomy is used as a theological

---

48   Collins, *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* 23.

49   "There shall be no survivors of the Sons of Darkness" (1QM 1:6–7).

50   Thomas Römer, *Dieu obscur: Cruauté, sexe et violence dans l'Ancien Testament* (Essais bibliques; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2009); published in English as *Dark God, Cruelty, Sex, and Violence in the Old Testament* (trans. Sean O'Neill; New York: Paulist Press, 2013).

51   Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Divine Presence Amid Violence: Contextualizing the Book of Joshua* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), who similarly engages in seeing how the much more explicit violence of the sources of Joshua, especially Josh 11, are tempered and extensively qualified by its context in the book as a whole. The adjustment of the Joshua traditions in a priestly direction has been proposed in the detailed analysis of all the relevant fragmentary compositions by Ariel Feldman, *The Rewritten Joshua Scrolls from Qumran: Texts, Translations, and Commentary* (BZAW 438; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 194–201, esp. 199–200.

underpinning of much of the theological approach of the movement.[52] This can be discerned in such quasi-sectarian compositions as the *Temple Scroll* in which a large section (cols 51–66) is a rewritten form of extensive parts of Deut 12–23, or in the opening of the Cave 1 version of the *Rule of the Community* which resonates with Deut 6:4–5:

> that they may seek God with a whole heart and soul, and do what is good and right before Him as He commanded by the hand of Moses and all his servants the prophets; that the may love all that he has chosen and hate all that He has rejected; that they may abstain from all evil and hold fast to all good.[53]

Römer understands the militarism of Deuteronomy and the subsequent Deuteronomistic writings as in part a reaction to the military might of Assyria.[54] It is not surprising then that the *War Scroll* rehearses such militarism in its opening columns: Assyria is the type of the arch-enemy. It is intriguing to note that the technical term that sums up the approach of Deuteronomy, ברית (*covenant*), occurs in the Cave 1 version of the *War Scroll* in col. 1 and cols 10–18. Just as the Deuteronomistic writings adapt the Assyrian vassal-treaty in order to provide a counter-history, so such material is taken forward within the sectarian movement of which the Qumran group was a part in order to provide a counter-history to the apparent impending brutalisation by the Romans and their Jewish collaborators.

Römer continues his analysis by suggesting that the warrior God depicted in some texts for polemical reasons is nevertheless "counterbalanced by other passages that modify or critique it."[55] For Römer the text of Josh 1:8 ("This book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night") turns Joshua from a military leader into "a conscientious rabbi" and "it is respect for the Torah, and no longer for military exploits, that is the deciding factor in the lives of the people in the land."[56] Such a transformation seems

---

52   It has often been noted that of the five books of the Torah Deuteronomy is the most represented in the Qumran collection: there are 30 copies according to James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 3.

53   G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 98.

54   The most recent analysis of the topic in the Assyrian period is Carly L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* (BZAW 407; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

55   Römer, *Dark God*, 80–81.

56   Römer, *Dark God*, 81.

to indicate a concern in the Deuteronomistic writings to disarm the people, a tendency that is taken forward elsewhere in 1 and 2 Chronicles from which all the references to the conquest of the land are omitted. "When Judah is threatened by her neighbors, a prophet exhorts King Jehoshaphat and the people saying: 'Do not fear or be dismayed . . . for the battle is not yours but God's. This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the Lord on your behalf' (2 Chron 20:15–17)."[57] For Römer "this concept will be taken up again by the community of Qumran in a writing that is called the 'scroll of war'; it will also influence the New Testament."[58]

There might indeed be a way of reading the *War Scroll* that puts it on a literary trajectory that actually disarms the people in the sense that they might never be deployed in actual combat. Nevertheless the depictions in the *War Scroll* of actual weaponry and the imitation of actual military tactics indicate the identification of the movement with the standard military means of expressing power and control over others. Furthermore, the attitude towards the enemy is in line with the kind of overall defeat of other nations that is depicted in texts such as Deut 7:1–6, a text probably alluded to in the designation "seven nations of vanity" (1QM 11:8–9). If performance criticism might be of help in the better understanding of the genre and purpose of the composition, then this acknowledgement of the antagonism of the text towards all outsiders might be understood as a way of expressing sentiments that could never be put into practice, but which through being expressed could give a renewed sense of confidence to those who felt beleaguered. Römer concludes his consideration of the divine warlike despot by noting how universalism characterizes both the opening of the Torah and the end of 2 Chronicles; in the latter there is invocation of "the same universal God who is God of both the Persian kings and the Jewish people (2 Chron 36:21), a God who promises a future of peace around the building of the temple."[59] However, no such universalism is present in the *War Scroll* or its related texts: the presence of God in his holy temple (Hab 2:20) can only be interpreted so that "on the Day of Judgement, God will destroy from the earth all idolatrous and wicked men" (1QpHab 13:2–3).[60]

By juxtaposing the *War Scroll* with some reflections on the violence of certain biblical traditions, it becomes possible to value the *War Scroll* as a repeated expression over several decades for the need for delay. Its Deuteronomistic flavour, indeed its overall use of scripture, has yet to be analysed in depth to

---

57   Römer, *Dark God*, 84–85.

58   Römer, *Dark God*, 85.

59   Römer, *Dark God*, 92.

60   Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 516.

discover whether the tendency in the *War Scroll* is towards rigorous exclusiv-
ist destruction or qualified disarming through putting all in the hands of God.
The application of some recent theories from the social sciences might also
assist in raising suitable questions that need to be asked of this perplexing
composition.

5   Conclusion

Yigael Yadin, in his principal edition of the Cave 1 version of the *War Scroll*,
defined the composition's purpose as consisting in "supplying the members of
the sect with a detailed set of regulations and plans in accordance with which
they were to act on the day of destiny appointed 'from of old for a battle of
annihilation of the Sons of Darkness' (i, 10)."[61] That is a very straightforward
descriptive statement. Several scholars have wrestled with this strange com-
position since and this collection of essays in honour of Marty Abegg contains
some further instances of such wrestling.

    In this essay I have tried to indicate that Abegg's work on the *War Scroll* has
prompted me to think in three directions. First, his work on the text of the
various versions of the *War Scroll* and related compositions has highlighted for
me the very fact of the composition's textuality. Some significance needs to be
given to its detailed verbosity, the ways in which its words might work emo-
tionally and performatively, to endorse and control all manner of destructive
aspirations. Second, Abegg's work on eschatological time and messianic fig-
ures leads to consideration of what it is to come out of exile, retake Jerusalem,
and live with God alone as hero. Third, as we await Abegg's definitive com-
mentary on the *War Scroll*, I have looked for some help amongst those who
have recently written on war and violence in the Hebrew Bible to see whether
anything can be learnt from them about how best to approach this difficult but
fascinating composition. It cannot be explained away as catharsis for quietists.
Nevertheless, it is a text that permits the delay of divine vengeance and pro-
vides some kind of compensation in the immediate present of its performance
for those who take a more literal view of authoritative tradition, those who
insist on the introduction of the prescriptions of Deuteronomy for the purifi-
cation of the land, those who are destructive particularists.

---

61   Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*, 4.