

Aaron in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Whitewash or Criticism

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Abstract:

This essay considers the way in which the collection known popularly as the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in the areas around Qumran in modern day Israel, depicts the biblical figure of Aaron. Aaron was Moses' elder brother and the first high priest, yet in the Hebrew bible there are remarkably few instances of his own words. And because of the stigma attached to him in connection with "The Great Sin" which resulted from Aaron's central involvement in creating the golden calf found in Exodus chapter 32, it is not easy to objectively evaluate him. As in the Hebrew scriptures, personal accounts of Aaron are remarkably few in the Dead Sea Scrolls, even though much more is written about him in his official capacity as high priest. The distinguishing evaluative mark of this biblical figure must be in the way he is treated by the authors, specifically determining whether their intent was to exalt and preserve Aaron's relative stature by exalting the deeds of his descendants or whether their intent was to strictly censure him.

Keywords:

Dead Sea Scrolls, Aaron, Qumran Community, Priest/High Priest, Exodus

1. Introduction

This essay considers the depiction of Aaron within the Dead Sea Scrolls. Aaron is a controversial figure owing to the fact that, while on the one hand he was the brother of Moses and the first high priest, he is intimately associated with “the Great Sin,”¹ that is, the creation of the golden calf.² Despite his participation in the incident with the golden calf, Aaron is portrayed as worthy of his role as high priest in Jewish commentaries,³ and in Christianity Aaron’s frequent representation as a type of Christ⁴ indicates the tendency to rectify his reputation, irrespective of his participation in “the Great Sin.”

What kind of presence was Aaron in the eyes of the comparatively distinctive Jewish Qumran community⁵ of the ancient world? The answer to this question will provide a missing link in the exegetical scholarship on this biblical figure. Conversely, it will also facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the Jewish community; and it is the goal of this essay to tease out an answer to the greater question of whether it is possible to distinguish various communities through their interpretations of this biblical figure known as Aaron.

2. Aaron in the Bible

Before commencing an analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls, let us verify the biblical passages which feature Aaron. The first mention of Aaron in the Hebrew bible (Exodus 4)⁶ is by God when God appears to Moses in Midian where he makes a living tending sheep. God refers to Aaron as Moses’ elder brother. Subsequently, Aaron is urged by God to meet Moses in the wilderness and the two present themselves before the elders of Israel (v. 27-31). Scripture does not explicitly state this, but it is widely believed that Moses and Aaron were already acknowledged by the people of Israel as leaders. Moses’ and Aaron’s geneology is recorded in Exodus 6, verses 16-20, where they are identified as the descendents of Jacob, Levi, Kohath, and Amram, who married Jochebed who gave birth to Moses and Aaron.

Shortly after God’s appearance before Moses, Moses and Aaron go down to Egypt to seek the release of the Hebrews from Pharaoh who stubbornly refuses. Because of Pharaoh’s stubbornness, ten curses befall the Egyptians, which leads to the eventual release of the Hebrews. The subsequent flow of time is not stated clearly in scripture, but it is probable that before the incident with the golden calf, Aaron was appointed and anointed high priest by God. The next context in which Aaron is mentioned is in connection with the golden calf rebellion. After that, he is almost never mentioned again aside from certain brief citations in connection with the law. Aaron’s name comes up in connection with the law in the following

books of Leviticus and Numbers, where Aaron is recorded as earning the hot anger of the Lord for speaking against Moses for marrying a Cushite woman (Numbers 12). In Numbers chapters 14 and 16, Moses and Aaron become the targets of a popular rebellion, and in chapter 17, Moses and Aaron are found making intercession to the Lord for the sin of rebellion. After the rebellion over the lack of water, Aaron (and Moses) are prohibited by God from entering the Promise Land of Canaan and Aaron dies on Mount Hor (Numbers 20: 22-9). In the following book of Deuteronomy, reference to Aaron drops precipitously and the only other times his name appears in scripture are as the progenitor of the priestly tribe and with reference to historical events as partner to Moses.

Looking at the data, the word Aaron appears 347 times in the bible.⁷ The name appears 115 times in Exodus, 110 times in Numbers, 80 times in Leviticus, and 17 times in Chronicles. Of the 347 times Aaron's name is mentioned, 110 times it is in conjunction with Moses and 47 times it is mentioned in conjunction with his descendents ("Aaron and his descendents..."). Aaron is referenced 66 times as progenitor/patriarch ("sons of Aaron," "descendents of Aaron," "children of Aaron"). Aside from these references, if we leave out personal references to Aaron, there are approximately 100 other references. Most of these are in connection with conversations with either God or Moses, and the triad of God, Moses, Aaron constitute the core actors in the records mentioning Aaron. The places where Aaron is referenced solely occur mostly in Leviticus and Numbers where he is recorded giving instructions to the people for rituals, and there is a clear association of Aaron with the office of high priest. Incidentally, Aaron's name is mentioned 8 times in connection with the golden calf incident.

In summary, then, it would be accurate to state that Aaron's life, vocation, and blood line are important topics taken up in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, but that aside from these points, Aaron is virtually disregarded in the remainder of the Hebrew bible.⁸

3. Aaron in the Dead Sea Scrolls⁹

With the image of the biblical Aaron spelled out above in mind, I will now examine references to Aaron in the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁰ As it is possible to broadly categorize the scrolls into three types¹¹ which are completely extraneous to either the original Hebrew bible and its Aramaic translation, or to Hebrew and Aramaic language apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, I will differentiate my analysis according to the type of codex: biblical and non-biblical.

3-1. Biblical Codices

Among the roughly 900 codices unearthed in the Qumran caves, approximately 200 of them discuss biblical accounts.¹² According to the concordance of Martin Abegg, et al, Aaron's name appears 97 times.¹³ Aaron is mentioned 59 times in Exodus, 15 times in Leviticus, 16 times in Numbers, 5 times in Psalms, and twice in texts considered to be biblical but which are impossible to classify. There are repetitions in some of the passages, but Aaron is mentioned in conjunction with Moses 36 times, while his name is mentioned in conjunction with his progeny (for example, "with his children," "with his descendents," etc.) 16 times. It is clear, then, that there is considerable overlap with biblical iterations of Aaron's name. It is believed that over half of the Pentateuch contained in the Dead Sea Scrolls is Masoretic text (hereafter referred to as MT),¹⁴ but there are places where citations about Aaron do not conform to the MT, and so I will take up and analyze one of those instances.

3-1-1. 4Q22 (=4QpaleoExod^m)

Even though it is generally considered that this codex is part of Exodus, certain places do not conform to the MT. For reference, these codices are juxtaposed below alongside the MT, and passages containing Aaron's name are quoted.

MT Exodus 32: 10-11 (reformatted for ease of comparison with the codex)

י ועתה הניקה לי ויחר אפי בקם ואכלם ואעשה
אוהב לגוי גדול.

יא ויחל משה את פני יהוה אלהיו ויאמר למה יהוה יחרה אפי
בעמך אשר הוצאת מארץ מצרים בלח גדול וביד חזקה.

Now leave Me alone, so that My anger may burn against them and consume them. Then I will make you into a great nation." But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God, saying, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people, whom You brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?"

4Q22, col. 38, l. 1–4¹⁵

און[תך] לגוי גדול [ובאהרון התאנף יה]וה מאד להשמידו
ו[יתפלל משה בעד א]הרון
י[ח]ל משה את[פנ]י [ויאו]מר למ[ה] [יהוה יחר א]פך
בעמך אשר הוצאת[את] ו[בזרוע חזק]ה

...I will make you into a great nation. Then the hot anger of the Lord burned against Aaron and tried to destroy him. Then Moses prayed for Aaron... Moses sought the favor of the Lord, saying, "Lord, why does your anger burn? Against the people your strong arm led out..."

It is clear from this excerpt that the context is Exodus chapter 32, yet the underlined part does not exist in the MT. Curiously, however, passages which resemble the underlined part appear in Deuteronomy, chapter 9.

MT Deuteronomy 9: 19-21

יט כִּי יִגְרַתִּי מִפְּנֵי הָאֵף וְהַסַּחַם אֲשֶׁר קִצַּף יְהוָה עָלֵיכֶם לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶתְכֶם וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֵלַי גַּם בַּפֶּעַם הַהוּא. וּבִאֲהָרֹן הַתְּאֲנָף יְהוָה מְאֹד לְהַשְׁמִידוֹ וְאֵתְפַלֵּל גַּם בְּעַד אֲהָרֹן בְּעַת הַהוּא. כֹּא וְאֵת חַטָּאתְכֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם אֶת הָעֵגֹל לְקַחְתִּי וְאֲשֶׁרְרָף אֹתוֹ בָּאֵשׁ וְאָצַפְתִּי אֹתוֹ טָחוֹן הֵיטֵב עַד אֲשֶׁר דַּק לְעֹפֵר וְאֲשַׁלֶּף אֶת עֹפְרוֹ אֶל הַנַּחַל הַיָּרֵד מִן הַהָר

For I was afraid of the anger and wrath that the LORD had directed against you, enough to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me this time as well. The LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I also prayed for Aaron. And I took that sinful thing, the calf you had made, and burned it in the fire. Then I crushed it and ground it to powder as fine as dust, and I cast it into the stream that came down from the mountain.

This passage from Deuteronomy is where Moses alludes back to the notorious incident with the golden calf, first recorded in Exodus, chapter 32, and the first person subjective case refers to Moses. It appears that 4Q22 works Deuteronomy 9: 20 in to Exodus 32, but it is not a word-for-word incorporation; rather, there is a visible effort to reconcile text with context through adding the grammatical subject and changing the personal case of the verb.

At a formal level, it is possible to provisionally conclude that this text from Exodus contained in 4Q22 is not MT but rather closely resembles the Samaritan Pentateuch.

Samaritan Pentateuch, Exodus 32: 10-11¹⁶

י ועתה הניחה לי ויחר אפי במ ואכלם ואעשה
 אתך לגוי גדול ובאהרן התאנף יהוה מאד להשמידו
 ויתפלל משה בעד אהרון
 יא ויחל משה את פני יהוה אלהיו ויאמר למה יהוה יחר אפך
 בעמך אשר הוצאת ממצרים בכח גדול ובזרוע נטויה

In this way, Exodus 32: 10-11 of the Samaritan Pentateuch mirrors 4Q22 in its incorporation of a slightly altered version of Deuteronomy 9:20 as contained in MT. As stated above, over half of the biblical codices of the Dead Sea Scrolls are MT, and research has revealed that 6.5% coincides with the Samaritan Pentateuch¹⁷ For that reason, though this is not a commonplace example, it is not unnatural that original biblical manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls coincide with the Samaritan Pentateuch. On the contrary, in the era when the Dead Sea Scrolls were finalized, there is reason to think that there was still no common biblical canon, and that there were rather a number of variant editions which were in circulation.

Putting aside for the moment the formal considerations, from the angle of pure content, this is the occasion in which the Lord's anger over the great sin involving the golden calf was focused on Aaron and in which Moses is recorded as making intercession. In the MT as well, God is similarly recorded as burning with anger, and as contained in the quotation above, Moses intercedes to ameliorate God's anger. It is clear that God is indignant toward the entire Israelite community, including Aaron, and later Moses rebukes Aaron directly. But the ninth chapter of Deuteronomy and the Samaritan Pentateuch, resolutely specify Aaron's responsibility as the occasion for God expresses anger and record Moses' intercessory prayer for Aaron. It is possible to interpret this content as denigrating Aaron so as to accentuate Moses' virtue and rectitude. If we turn our attention to the manner in which the bible became canonized, it is possible to conceive that Deuteronomy 9 was constructed by D Source.¹⁸ For that reason, it is possible to imagine that there was a motivation to denigrate the priesthood in general through strongly censuring Aaron who was the first high priest, yet this theory falls outside the purview of this essay's main purpose, so it will not be further elaborated here.¹⁹ The hypothesis of this essay is that, while acknowledging the fact that there may not have been freedom to pick and choose from the canonical scripture or to make alterations, there is a reasonable possibility that the language of the canonized bible in which Aaron's name is specified and in which he is rebuked was intentionally utilized by the Qumran community, in accordance with Deuteronomy 9 and the Samaritan Pentateuch. Codices which would become the basis for the MT were likely widely circulated at the time; and if we surmise that it was not the wording of the 70 translators which scarcely differs, but rather the texts which most resolutely excoriate Aaron which were used, then it is reasonable to assume that there was some particular motivation behind this selection. At any rate, it would be safe to say that the Qumran community found textual censure of Aaron in connection with the golden calf incident to be a matter of course.²⁰

Because the extant sources are incomplete, it would be a mistake to jump to conclusions; yet at the very least, within the contemporary state of scholarship, it is not

possible to determine a tendency by the Qumran community to pay particular attention to specific words and actions of Aaron, yet it is possible to state that in comparison with the MT anyway, Aaron's sinfulness with regard to the golden calf incident recorded in Exodus is more strongly emphasized.

3-1-2. Comparison with Contemporary Literature²¹

There is a reason for dwelling on the golden calf incident in the previous section. It is not the case that the emphasis on Aaron's sin and responsibility in contrast with the MT is a particularly noteworthy feature. Comparing the Qumran language with multiple writings from the period of the Second Temple, which is considered to be contemporary to the Dead Sea Scrolls, reveals a significant difference. As will be demonstrated in detail below, writings from the Second Temple Period which mention Aaron generally tend to go easy on him by judging him guiltless and playing down the severity of the sin. Of course, each individual piece of literature possesses a unique background and motivation in the writing's composition; but it is certain that at the very least, some of the writings from the Second Temple Period demonstrate such a tendency.

I will now look at a few specific examples. The first piece of literature is a work of Flavius Josephus who lived in the Roman empire in the 1st century C.E. In his chronicle of Jewish history entitled, *Antiquities of the Jews*, he spells out an historical narrative based upon biblical accounts. In *Antiquities*, he refers to the story of Exodus, yet he omits the account of the golden calf. (III, 5.7–8 [95–99])²² Josephus' account parallels the biblical one up to the point at which, after forty days of tarrying at the foothills of Mt. Sinai, the Israelites were becoming anxious about Moses' trek up the mountain and not returning. After that, Josephus mentions how the leaders of the Israelites debated what to do about Moses' failure to return and emphasizes the variety of positions taken by the leaders and the grandeur of Moses as a patriarch. And even after that, there is absolutely no mention of the "Great Sin" but only a simple recognition that Moses returned. In other words, the peoples' response while Moses was absent resembles that during the golden calf incident,²³ yet Josephus omits this from his chronicles. What this omission means, then, is that Aaron's role in the incident is also neglected. In other sections of *Antiquities*, Josephus, who also descends from the priestly class, occupies significant space in describing God's selection of Aaron as high priest, including the motivation and propriety in doing so. With this in mind, Josephus is paying respect to Aaron's position as chief priest; and it is surmised that Josephus deliberately avoids including biblical passages which are unfavorable toward Aaron.²⁴

As an approximate contemporary of Josephus, the *Book of Biblical Antiquities* (Lt.

Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum) was completed a little after the year 70 C.E., and in contrast to Josephus, the author includes an account of the golden calf which closely resembles that of the bible.

Ch. 12, v. 2. But while he was in the mount, the heart of the people was corrupted, and they came together to Aaron saying: Make us gods that we may serve them, as the other nations also have. For this Moses by whom the wonders were done before us, is taken from us. And Aaron said unto them, Have patience, for Moses will come and bring judgement near to us, and light up a law for us, and set forth from his mouth the great excellency of God, and appoint judgements unto our people. 3. And when he said this, they hearkened not unto him, that the word might be fulfilled which was spoken in the day when the people sinned in building the tower, when God said: And now if I forbid them not, they will adventure all that they take in mind to do, and worse. But Aaron feared, because the people was greatly strengthened, and said to them: Bring us the earrings of your wives. And the men sought every one his wife, and they gave them straightway, and they put them in the fire and they were made into a figure, and there came out a molten calf.²⁵

What is mentioned here at the outset is not the peoples' concern and uncertainty during Moses' absence but their corrupt hearts. This is the same assessment of Exodus 32, verse 7, and the reason for the peoples' assembly before Aaron is mentioned prior. Aaron does not straightway concede to the throngs pressing in upon him, ordering them to collect the golden earrings from their wives, but rather tries to appease them by insisting that Moses will return shortly. But because the people were implacable and would not listen to Aaron, he acquiesced to their wishes and ordered the earrings to be collected. The earrings which were collected were not thrown into the fire by Aaron but by the people, and out came a golden calf. Exodus records that Aaron "took the gold from their hands, and with an engraving tool he fashioned it into a molten calf." Even if Aaron's reply to Moses' rebuke contained in verse 24, "So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, let him take it off,' and they gave it to me. And when I cast it into the fire, out came this calf!" is true, it was still Aaron who is recorded as throwing the earrings into the fire. Even in Exodus 32 of the Septuagint, in which the subjective person changes frequently in other verses, in verse 24 the subject is Aaron, clearly signifying the strong possibility of an intentional alteration. To summarize, in the commentary in the *Book of Biblical Antiquities*, Aaron does not immediately accede to the demands of the people but rather tries to placate them. When that fails, fearing the multitudes, he acquiesces and orders the people to collect their gold earrings. Moreover, it is

not Aaron who throws the earrings into the fire, but the people. In contrast to Josephus who deliberately avoids mentioning the incident with the golden calf in order to preserve Aaron's reputation, the *Book of Biblical Antiquities* straightforwardly articulates the event, but matter of factly absolves Aaron of responsibility.²⁶

Moreover, Philo of Alexandria (cir. 20 B.C.E. —50 C.E.) who wrote during approximately the same time and who is representative of Hellenistic Judaism also fails to mention Aaron in his rendition of the golden calf incident.

The Life of Moses II : 161 "...When Moses was on the mountain talking closely with God, certain Israelites who were of unstable character took advantage of Moses' absence to blindly pursue impious customs. As though Moses' authority had come to an end. Abandoning any reverence for the Self-Existing One, they became fervent followers of Egyptian fables and folklore. 162. Then they crafted from gold an image of the most sacred Egyptian animal, a male cow, and offered up false sacrifices and formed false sacred chorales and sang dirges for hymns. And having their fill of strong drink, they were overcome by the double stupors of intoxication and stupidity."²⁷

The unfolding of the incident here quoted can be said to follow the flow of Exodus 32: 1-6, but Aaron does not even make an appearance. Instead, responsibility is squarely pinned on "people of unstable character." It is possible to assert that Philo, at least on this occasion, is concerned about protecting the reputation of Aaron.²⁸

From the above, it becomes clear that Josephus, The *Book of Biblical Antiquities*, and Philo, at least with regard to their representation of the golden calf incident, respect Aaron (as priest) and attempt to protect his reputation. The picture of Aaron in 4Q22 contrasts with that of Exodus and that of the Samaritan Pentateuch, with which Exodus shares common features; and the picture of Aaron among these writings of the Second Temple Era can be said to be sympathetic.

3-2. Extrabiblical Codices

So can it be said about Aaron's depiction in the Dead Sea Scrolls that he is consistently criticized? The answer is an emphatic "no." As an example, I will examine how Aaron is treated in nonbiblical codices of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here too, according to Abegg et al's concordance, Aaron's name appears 76 times.²⁹ Among these 76 instances, only 3 times is Aaron mentioned in conjunction with Moses, in contrast to the very frequent juxtapositions of "Moses and Aaron," and "Aaron and Moses" of the Bible. "The descendents of Aaron" is

mentioned twice and “the house of Aaron” is mentioned once. “The sons of Aaron” is mentioned 31 times and “Aaron's messiah,” which does not appear at all in the Bible, appears 7 times. Among these extrabiblical codices of the Dead Sea Scrolls, much more is said of Aaron's descendents than of the activities of Moses and Aaron, which constitute the numerically overwhelming majority of Biblical references to Aaron. I will specifically consider those examples below.

3-2-1. “The Sons of Aaron”

As the words denote, the expression, “the sons of Aaron” is used to signify Aaron's children and descendents. On this point, the extrabiblical codices of the Dead Sea Scrolls are in grammatical agreement with the Bible. And as is true with the grammatical usage in the Bible, this expression also signifies the priestly lineage. Yet in establishing this point, scholars disagree on whether there is any difference with, for example, the seemingly analogous expression “the children of Zadok³⁰” or whether both of them share the connotation of “priest/priesthood.” Gary A. Anderson and colleagues are of the opinion that the two expressions are simply analogous³¹; while Charlotte Hempel maintains that, because references to “the sons of Aaron” and “the sons of Zadok” are not always cited together, but are in fact sometimes cited alone (such as in 4Q394-9=4QMMT), there is a nuanced difference in meaning or implication. This, coincidentally, is the position this author takes³²; but because this point is not central to this essay, it will not be discussed further here.

This expression “sons of Aaron” is understood to mean that only they are qualified to hand down judgments regarding legal and financial decisions (Ordinances of the Community : 1Q28=1QS IX,7), which shows that they have a comparatively great authority in their communities as priests in the Bible. This expression focuses principally on the geneology of priests and accompanying roles, and does not find other meanings in Aaron than that he is the first chief priest.

3-2-2. “Aaron's Messiah”

It is principally the expression recorded as, “Aaron and Israel's messiah,” which is absent in the Bible. It might well be an expression particular to the Qumran community's concept of the messiah and is considered to imply “the messiah who emerges from Aaron's descendents and the messiah who emerges from the people of Israel.” This idea is premised upon the belief that in the last days, these two messiahs will arise and bring salvation.³³ It is believed that this juxtaposition of Aaron and Israel derives from the frequent juxtaposition in the Bible of Aaron and (the people of) Israel.³⁴ As indicated in Solomon's anointing as King

by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet in 1 Kings 1: 34, it is possible to interpret the priesthood as higher in rank than the kingship. Because of this, it is the view that “Aaron’s messiah” stands above in rank the other messiah, that is to say, the descendent of David who rules over secular affairs.³⁵ As Craig A. Evans asserts, it is plausible to interpret the emphasis upon two messiahs rather than one as a strategic rectification of the integration of the roles of high priest and king during the Hasmonean Dynasty; but as this point also is not central to this essay’s thesis, it will not be discussed further.

3-2-3. Other Points

Because, in the first place, of the vast number of partial codices, even if it is possible to confirm Aaron’s name, details are often unclear. Nonetheless, I will take up one last point regarding citations involving Aaron.

Codex Damascus (hereafter, CD) 5.17–19³⁶

מלפנים עמד משה ואהרן ביד שר האורים ויקם בליעל את יחנה ואת אחיהו במזמתו בהושע ישראל את
הראשונה

When Moses and Aaron had previously been raised up by the hand of the King of Light³⁷, Belial reared Johanna and his brother according to his plans. When Israel was first saved/delivered.

Moses and Aaron who are with the King of Light are contrasted with Johanna and his brother who were reared by Belial. Belial is not portrayed in the Bible as an autonomous being; but in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and assorted other sources, Belial is interpreted as a type of devil. Johanna and his brother are also absent from the Bible, but in various Jewish writings, even in Christian literature, including the New Testament, this pair frequently appears and are principally used as pronouns for evildoers.³⁸ In other words, Moses and Aaron are taken together as a pair and understood as embodiments of good, in contrast to the embodiments of evil. It is important to establish this point as a rare personal mention of Aaron.

Above I have outlined a rough sketch of the way in which Aaron is depicted in the extrabiblical codices of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here too, as in the Bible, the expression “the sons of Aaron” signifies the priestly lineage, and the explanation of their roles and responsibilities stood out. For that reason, it is perhaps fitting that personal details of Aaron are remarkably sparse. But as can be seen in the expression “Aaron’s (and Israel’s) messiah,” it is thought that the messiah who emerges from among Aaron’s descendents will stand over

and above the messiah who emerges from the line of David. The following is also not a personal reference of Aaron, but it is reasonable to point out the emphasis on Aaron's lineage and bloodline as opposed to textual (Biblical) portrayals. As one of the few personal citations of Aaron, it is noteworthy that in the context of the contention between good and evil, Aaron is paired with Moses and manifestly cast in the light of the good.

4. Conclusion

A portrait of Aaron as contained in the entirety of the Dead Sea Scrolls will here be considered in light of the information reviewed thus far. I must strongly reemphasize the fact that the body of literature commonly referred to as the Dead Sea Scrolls is really nothing more than a collection of codices which have been unearthed. A complete picture of the body of literature that was circulated and preserved internally by the Qumran community continues to be uncertain. This being the case, despite the fact that much research and critical analysis of various aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls continues (including this critical essay), even if the probability of a particular analysis is high, most cases lead to a provisional conclusion at best.

With that in mind, I will herewith attempt to make a cogent argument regarding the citations of Aaron in the Dead Sea Scrolls. To begin with, in the Biblical codices—though it depends upon the degree of importance accorded each particular book by the Qumran community—citations containing Aaron's name occur overwhelmingly in the book of Exodus. Yet most of those are not personal in nature but rather are in conjunction with Moses, typically of the following sort: "Moses and Aaron..." Further, it is quite remarkable that citations of Aaron in Exodus, chapter 32 coincide not with MT but with the Samaritan Pentateuch. It is probable that this scene in which God becomes furious with Aaron and in which Moses subsequently intercedes with God on behalf of Aaron is designed to extol Moses's virtue and censure Aaron. If we consider that the authors of the literature of the Second Temple Era—which is almost perfectly contemporaneous to the Dead Sea Scrolls—clearly demonstrate an intention to shield Aaron from censure and blame, we see how this fact is quite exceptional and how it was, in contrast, the desire of the Qumran community to highlight Aaron's sin and blame. It is reasonable to conclude that Aaron is targeted for unequivocal censure, both in the language prohibiting worship of foreign gods in the prologue of the Temple Scroll and from the fact that, even prior to revealing Aaron's status as the elder brother of Moses and as priest, the authors introduce Aaron with a pronounced stigma of guilt as instigator of the abominable golden calf incident.

By comparison, in apocryphal codices, the expression "the sons of Aaron" is used to

explain the roles and responsibilities of the priest, and at the same time to reinforce the idea that “Aaron’s (and Israel’s) messiah” is superior to the messiah who arises out of King David’s lineage. And as is sketched out in CD, Aaron is portrayed, in conjunction with Moses, as the epitome of goodness within the context of the epic battle between good and evil. This being the case, it can be said that, despite personal citations of Aaron being few in number, the community of Aaron’s descendents as represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls vis-a-vis that in the Bible is of significantly greater prestige. Predictably, then, it would be fair to say that Aaron’s personal reputation in the Dead Sea Scrolls is correspondingly higher than it is in the Bible.³⁹

As indicated above, the depiction of Aaron within the Dead Sea Scrolls does not fundamentally differ so greatly from that of the Bible. Many of the citations are not personal in nature but rather corporate, typically in conjunction with Moses or Aaron’s descendents. The significance of the priesthood within the community is very apparent, yet it never singles out Aaron for any grandeur. Yet unlike the contemporary literature, it does not especially exonerate Aaron; rather, on occasion it is even harsher on Aaron than is biblical text. In contrast, the expectation upon Aaron’s descendents in the Dead Sea Scrolls is unmistakably higher than it is in the Bible, and Aaron’s personal reputation can be said to be relatively higher. In other words, the text transitions back and forth between censure and exoneration and praise of Aaron. Always underlying these alternative evaluations, however, is an acknowledgement that Aaron is responsible for “The Great Sin.” The textual appraisals of Aaron are neither monolithic nor straightforward, but rather ambiguous, leaving room for a spectrum of reasonable interpretations. If other scrolls or communities which share similar Aaronic appraisals with the Qumran community and the Dead Sea Scrolls are uncovered, or if a critical breakthrough in theoretical analysis occurs, then it would be worth making a comparative judgment. With this as my conclusion, I express my hope that new documents will be discovered and advances in critical analysis will occur.

Notes

- ¹ It is an expression which is used only 5 times in the Hebrew Bible, and 3 of those times are in reference to the incident of the golden calf in Exodus 32.
- ² He collected the gold earrings from the people and crafted an image of a calf. (Exodus 32: 1-6)
- ³ For Example, Sifre on Deuteronomy 307
- ⁴ The New Testament letter to the Hebrews is mentioned as a concrete example. But in that passage, Jesus is identified not as of the Aaronic lineage but of the lineage of Melchizedek. For an exposition

on the difference between the Aaronic priesthood and the Melchizedek priesthood, see Moshe Reiss, “The Melchizedek Traditions,” in *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 26.2 (2012), 259–265. In any event, there is no room to doubt Jesus’ somber evaluation of the priestly duties.

- ⁵ This phrase is used to distinguish one particular group which preserved and utilized the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls, but one must be careful about using this phrase, including the phrase Dead Sea Scrolls. In other words, generally speaking, the name Dead Sea Scrolls refers to the collection of scrolls discovered in multiple caves in the area of Qumran along the Dead Sea, but strictly speaking, other scrolls which were discovered in areas like Waji Murabat, Nahal Hebelu, Masada, etc., ought to be included. If that is the case, then it would be more appropriate to expand the geographic area from merely the Qumran to the entire Judean Desert (see Oxford University Press’ anthology of the Dead Sea Scrolls entitled *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*). Furthermore, it is a mistake to understand the Dead Sea Scrolls as some sort of complete opus which was methodically circulated, or even as a particular set of writings; and because a comprehensive picture of the scrolls has been lost, it is not possible to provide an accurate assessment of the percentage that remains. At the very least, however, it is certain that a portion of the Dead Sea Scrolls is a reproduction which was used by a different community in a different region. Moreover, even granting for the moment that certain original language was included in the extant scrolls, the possibility that this language actually originated in a community outside of the Qumran community cannot be completely dismissed. This essay adopts the position articulated by Emanuel Tov who identifies the “Dead Sea Scrolls” as “a multitude of texts found in the Judean Desert.” (See Emanuel Tov, “The Biblical DSS as Representing Variety in Judaism and Early Christianity,” October 6, 2018 Workshop by the same name at Dōshisha University, Japan. The expression in footnote #1 has been juxtaposed without compromising the grammatical meaning) and utilizes the moniker “Qumran Community,” while acknowledging all the multitudinous issues proceeding from the various terms associated with this body of writings. In recent years, superb surveys and translations of the entire Dead Sea Scrolls corpus have appeared in Japanese. In this essay, what follows is only an analysis of a particular text dealing with the Dead Sea Scrolls; therefore, for an outline of or background to the Dead Sea Scrolls, I recommend the following texts: Toki, Kenji. *Shikai Shahon: Saiko no Seisho wo Yomu*. (En. *Dead Sea Codices: Reading “The Oldest Bible”*): Tokyo, Kodansha Gajujutsu Bunko, 2015; Translation Committee’s Translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls. *Dead Sea Scrolls* (tentatively 12 vol.): Puneuma Co. Ltd., 2018 to present, preface to each volume, pp. 1-12. With regard to the history of research on the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Geza Vermes’ *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press 1977, translated by Akio Moriya. The 2011 edition is particularly informative.
- ⁶ Moses repeatedly rejects God’s command to return to Egypt to lead the people of Israel out. God, who says the following to Moses: “The anger of the Lord burned against Moses, saying, ‘Do you not have an elder brother, the Levite Aaron? I know that he speaks well. And behold, he is already on his way to see you. He will see you and rejoice in his heart.’” (Exodus 4: 14; unless required, all following translations of the Bible and primary sources into Japanese will be the author’s). In the Bible, in the structure of biblical time, and in the ordering of books, there are no mentions of Aaron prior to this sudden introduction.
- ⁷ Of course, there are many pronominal references to Aaron, so this number does not represent the actual number of references, but it does serve as a good benchmark. For sake of reference, there are

175 mentions of Abraham and 770 mentions of Moses.

- ⁸ As a reference, there are only 5 citations of Aaron in the New Testament: Luke 1: 5; Acts 7: 40 (explanation of the golden calf incident); Hebrews 5: 40 & 7: 11 (explanation of the priesthood); Hebrews 9: 4 (mention of Aaron's staff). Not counting citations in connection with the relationship between Jesus and the priesthood, the New Testament is even less interested in Aaron's personal life than the Hebrew Bible.
- ⁹ Hereafter, I refer to the number of times the word Aaron appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls, as in the Bible. Unlike the Bible, however, the citation index of the Dead Sea Scrolls covers only those codices which have been discovered and therefore is not necessarily representative of the degree of importance assigned to Aaron by the Qumran community.
- ¹⁰ The citation index hereafter includes the reconstructed spelling of Aaron's name by modern scholars.
- ¹¹ Kenji Toki. *Dead Sea Codices*, pp 82-3.
- ¹² Kenji Toki. *Dead Sea Codices*, p 202.
- ¹³ Martin G. Abegg et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance, volume 3: The Biblical Texts from the Judaean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
- ¹⁴ Kenji Toki. *Dead Sea Codices*, p 205.
- ¹⁵ Eugene Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 99.
- ¹⁶ Abraham Tal & Moshe Florentin, *The Pentateuch - The Samaritan Version and the Masoretic Version* (The Haim Rubin Tel Aviv University Press: Tel Aviv, 2010).
- ¹⁷ Kenji Toki. *Dead Sea Codices*, p 205.
- ¹⁸ Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View into the Five Books of Moses* (New York: HarperOne, 2003).
- ¹⁹ Friedman footnotes here the fact that, while Aaron's name appears close to 300 times in the three books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, it appears only 4 times in Deuteronomy (twice in connection with the golden calf incident and twice upon Aaron's death). Friedman identifies the particularities of the Deuteronomy historians and the priesthood sources (Aaronic sources) here. (Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, 326)
- ²⁰ Regarding the treatment of the golden calf incident in the Dead Sea Scrolls, because mention of the incident in the unearthed scrolls is very sparse, it is difficult to make firm judgments. Even in the one place where it might be inferred that mention is made of the incident (4Q159: 4Q Ordinances A), because the scroll is fragmentary, the context cannot be clearly ascertained. It is possible to attribute the mention of sin and redemption in this fragment to the golden calf incident, but the omission of Aaron's name makes it somewhat dubious. F. D. Weinert links this reference to the passage in Leviticus 4: 13-21 where there is language about offering sacrifices. (F. D. Weinert, "4Q159: Legislation for an Essene Community Outside of Qumran?" in *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 5 (1974), 179-207, 184) John M. Allegro and Nozomi Abe connect this same passage with the golden calf incident, as does this author. (John M. Allegro, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert V, Qumran Cave 4, I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 7; Abe, Nozomi. *Some Suggestions Concerning Research Methodology in Judaic Annotative History*. Book Review presented on June 6, 2018 at Tokyo University.)
- ²¹ For more on this point see author's publication *Interpretive History of the Golden Calf Incident: Biblical Interpretation in Judaism and Syrian Christianity of Late Antiquity*. Kyōbun-kan: 2018,

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- pp68-72 in which an abbreviated and re-edited version is provided.
- ²² The Greek original and English translation were used as reference. H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus, vol. IV* (London: William Heinemann, 1930)
- ²³ Note, however, that Exodus 32: 1 records, “When the people saw that Moses was tarrying on the mountain they came to Aaron and assembled around him, saying, ‘Stand up and make for us gods who will walk before us, because we do not know what has become of this Moses who led us out of Egypt.’” but says nothing about the people’s psychological condition or about their intention to create a golden calf. For that reason, it is possible to interpret this text as implying a widespread state of anxiety among the people.
- ²⁴ C. T Begg attributes to Josephus’s writings the motivation of creating respect and empathy for his kinfolk (Jews) among non-Jews and states that were Josephus to have included an account of the golden calf incident, that goal would be compromised. (See “The Golden Calf Episode according to Pseudo-Philo”, in *Studies in the Book of Exodus* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 577–594, especially 592) On the other hand, Hata holds that there were three likely reasons Josephus did not include an account of the golden calf incident: 1) in order to preserve Aaron’s blameless reputation of subsequent passages, 2) in order to observe the prohibition contained in the Mishna on translating Exodus 32: 1-2, 3) in order to respond to the aspersion cast on the Jews as donkey worshippers. (See *The Rewritten Bible*, Kyoto University Press: 2010, pp 214-15) L. H. Feldman builds on Hata’s theory by adding that Israel’s image and Aaron’s behavior were problematic in that the Aaronic priestly class, to which Josephus himself belonged and which was a rival of the Levitical priestly class, were implicated in the golden calf incident. In Josephus’ time, the political might of imperial approval frequently got intertwined with Jewish law and priestly regulations. (For example, see *Jewish Scrolls of Antiquity*, 20. 216-18) . The incident in which Aaron is rebuked and the Levites, in contrast, follow the divine will, can be seen as a significant embarrassment for Josephus.
- ²⁵ Isaka, Tamiko and Toki, Kenji. *Book of Biblical Antiquities*. Kyōbunkan, 2012, pp. 275-7.
- ²⁶ Regarding this point, F. J. Murphy states the following: “the Book of Biblical Antiquities does not convey an air of criticism toward the reputation of the priestly hierarchy.” (*Pseudo-Philo. Rewriting the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 265). Begg points out the author’s intention to try to free Aaron from any wrongdoing at the expense of the people.
- ²⁷ This is a Japanese translation from an English translation, which also made reference to the Greek original.
- ²⁸ So, with regard to the question why Philo mentioned this incident, Feldman asserts that it was to criticize idolatry. Philo was a leader of the Jewish community in Egypt and saw in the Egyptian way of life of those times something which appealed to Jews. For that reason Feldman boldly decided to include the incident in which the idolatrous Israelites garnered God’s anger by worshipping the image of the golden calf, which template was Apis, who/which was viewed as the holiest of gods by the Egyptians. (See L. H. Feldman, “Philo’s Account of the Golden Calf Incident,” 247ff)
- ²⁹ Martin G. Abegg et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance, volume 1: The Non-Biblical Texts from Qumran* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Abegg et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance, volume 2: The Non-Qumran Documents and Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).
- ³⁰ A priest who served David and who is thought to be a descendent of Aaron’s son El’azar. He is mentioned 52 times in scripture.

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- ³¹ Gary A. Anderson “Aaron,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea scrolls* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1–2.
- ³² Charlotte Hempel, “The Sons of Aaron in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez* (2007), 202–224.
- ³³ Pertaining to the eschaton, XHev/Se6 2,8, which was discovered outside Qumran and which is a collection of eschatological praise songs, mentions Aaron’s name. Because it is too fragmentary, however, it is not useful in establishing literary intent.
- ³⁴ Exodus 16: 9, 18: 12, 34: 30; Psalms 115: 9-10, 115: 12, 118: 2-3, 135: 19. The perspective below is also that of Evans. Craig A. Evans, “Messiahs,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea scrolls*, 537–542.
- ³⁵ Erik Eynikel, “Moses or Aaron, Who Is the Most Important Figure in the Dead Sea Scrolls?,” in *Mosebilder* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 63–76.
- ³⁶ Philip R. Davies, *The Damascus Covenant* (Sheffield: JSOP Press, 1982), 244–247.
- ³⁷ The English translation for this term is typically “Prince of Light.” Appropriate phrasing in Japanese has not yet been found.
- ³⁸ With regard to this pair, see Albert Pietersma, *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), Koji Osawa, “The Role of a Pair of Magicians in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Literature” in *Studies on Jewish Life and Culture* vol. 24. Japanese Society for Jewish Studies, 2010, pp 1-12, and Koji Osawa, “A Look at the Development of Transmission and Propagation in Jewish Literature: the Case of Jannes and Jambres,” *Studies on Jewish Life and Culture*, vol. 26. Japanese Society for Jewish Studies, 2012, pp 24-39.
- ³⁹ Erik Eynike concludes after comparing Moses’ and Aaron’s roles in the Dead Sea Scrolls that Aaron was a more significant person than Moses. (See Erik Eynikel, “Moses or Aaron,” 75–76)