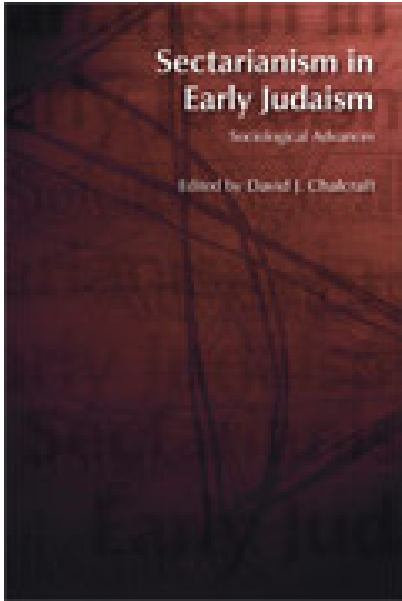


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**Chalcraft, David J., ed.**

***Sectarianism in Early Judaism: Sociological Advances***

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Within the past decades social-scientific methodologies have gained enormous ground in biblical studies. They have contributed enormously to our understanding of the ancient texts. Yet occasionally one also finds terms bandied about that remain hazy in their precise meaning or that are used in so many different ways that it is hard to discern any meaning at all. The use of “sect” in the description of various early Jewish and Christian movements is certainly an example of this terminological fuzziness. The present volume tries to rectify this situation by offering an in-depth analysis of Max Weber’s theory on sects as sociological phenomena and by collecting a number of essays that work with more stringent sociological definitions of “sect” and try to see whether these are helpful in putting “flesh on the bones” (8). The essays collected in this volume are the fruit of a special symposium held at the 2004 SBL International Meeting at Groningen. Indices of ancient sources and modern authors are included.

The first part of the book consists of three studies by David Chalcraft of Weber’s definition of sects. The first describes the place of the study of sects in Weber’s thought, the second deals with the particular example of Pharisees and Essenes in Weber’s *Ancient Judaism*, while the third applies the Weberian model to the modern study of the Qumran group. Chalcraft maintains that the reception of Weber has been rather simplistic in its

typological separation of “church” and “sect.” Chalcraft draws attention to Weber’s definition of a sect in terms of its voluntary membership after undergoing examination for admittance. This definition lets Weber explore ramifications beyond the original “church-sect” antinomy and its culture-bound connotations. Chalcraft argues that the profundity of Weber’s definition has yet to be discovered in the study of sects.

The second part of the book consists of several essays that concern themselves directly or indirectly with the description of the Qumran community as a sect. The first of these is Lester Grabbe’s survey of movements in Second Temple Judaism and their descriptions in the sources. He states that such a survey must be guided by a critical principle of a terminology that encompasses both their similarities and differences, and he chooses the term “sect” for this, basing his definition of the term on the work of Bryan Wilson, which is based on various groups’ responses to the world and the resulting description of “ideal types” of different sects. For Grabbe, the limited amount of source material means that each one of the movements of early Judaism could be placed under Wilson’s ideal type of thaumaturgical sect.

Philip Davies looks at “Sect Formation in Early Judaism” and begins by defining a sect as schismatic and socially separate from the “parent world.” This is a definite step away from Weber and Wilson, yet this definition serves as a tool to consider the social phenomena under investigation. Obviously, the definition and its application to the movements of early Judaism hinge on the elusive definition of the parent world that sects are rejecting. Davies evades this to some extent by drawing attention to the fact that the parent world imagined or created by the sect and the historical parent world might be quite different. As an example Davies offers the constructions of a history of origin by such sects and finds in different redactional layers of the Community Rule evidence for not one but two different sects.

Pierluigi Piovanelli draws on Wilson’s ideal-typical definition of sects, yet he finds enough distinctions to apply different ideal types to different Jewish groups. He argues that, even though some of the movements may share a number of characteristics in common, their differentiation as sects lies in the emphasis given to one or another feature. But Piovanelli goes a step further to include the ethical behavior of a group as constitutive of a sect. By this he means the sectarian processes prevailing in a group and the identity-forming issues underlying them. In this context he considers not only the Qumran group but also the Elephantine Jewish community, the Enochic groups, and others. Thus Piovanelli searches for the point in the history of a community where toleration from a parent body ceased. For him, the Enochic writings bear witness to a group that is proto-sectarian. Finally, Piovanelli turns to the place of such sects within the

wider Mediterranean history and at least implies that the search for sect-forming processes have a direct implication within the globalizing culture of today.

Eyal Regev returns to the Qumran group with a focus on their negative attitude to the world around them and their expression of a need for atonement. For him, the “tension with the world” is the defining feature of a sectarian worldview; for the Qumran group, this led to a separatist and revolutionary attitude that stressed strict moral behavior and observance of the law. Regev traces these features through the Temple Scroll, the Damascus Document, and the Community Rule.

Cecilia Wassen and Jutta Jokiranta suggest that the difficulties in applying ideal-typical traits of sects to the Qumran group are rooted in the process of the development of a sect and witnessed by various redactional layers in the Damascus Document and Community Rule. Arguing for a concept of sects founded on deviance and tension with the wider society, they find that the documents in question offer different and at times conflicting answers to the perceived evil in the world. Criteria for the various degrees of deviance are difference, antagonism, and separation that might be expressed symbolically or physically.

The concluding study, by Albert Baumgarten, begins by pointing out that the application of sociological tools to Second Temple Judaism might be an experience in failure. There is a distinct possibility that the models of modern research might not apply or function at all. In particular, he points to the fact that the Qumran documents exhibit little if any traces of information processing because of the strictly egalitarian nature of the group.

The present volume serves several purposes. It includes a wealth of information concerning the modern development of the concepts of sects. It lays down several possibilities for defining sects and methodologies of verifying possible sectarian candidates along those definitions and should hopefully prevent students of ancient texts from applying this label all too generously in the future. Furthermore, the variety of definitions and working hypotheses offered in this volume point to the precariousness of any one of them and illuminate the danger, but also the possibilities, of applying modern sociological concepts to ancient groups that are only present to us through texts whose evidence is at times scarce. Since the book is mainly concerned with the methodologies of sociological approaches to sectarianism, the reading is not easy going, though it is rewarding. Specific mention should be made of the very careful editing that this volume exhibits. This becomes apparent in the introduction by David Chalcraft, which not only introduces the various contributions but discusses and critiques their methodologies at some length in a very appreciative manner. Thus the reader does well to return to it after perusing the individual contributions.

With the three contributions of part 1 on the theory of Max Weber and its development, a question nevertheless arises. While these are highly informative and lay out some of the ground rules for the essays to follow, it is also noticeable how little the contributions of part 2 in fact refer to Weber's theories but instead build on the more recent developments of Bryan Wilson, Rodney Stark, and William Bainbridge, to name but a few, or indeed offer their own definitions of a sect. This bears witness to developments building on and refining Weber's approach. It would have been helpful had these developments been laid out more systematically in part 1, with Weber as their starting point. As it is, this information can be gleaned piecemeal from the various contributions of part 2, and Chalcraft's assertion that Weber still has much to offer modern research of sects remains somewhat unsupported by the following studies.

There is much to be learned from this volume, and while it might not serve as a textbook for an undergraduate course, it is to be recommended to all who have an interest in community formation visible behind ancient texts, whether Jewish or Christian.