This volume is a Ph.D. dissertation analyzing one aspect of the Damascus Document. Partly known from several leaves of two Genizah manuscripts (=CD), ten fragmentary copies of this work were later discovered among the scrolls from Qumran. The Damascus Document is therefore recognized as one of the literary products of the community related to the Qumran scrolls. The full publication of Cave 4 copies by Joseph Baumgarten ten years ago permitted a fresh examination of this unique work, and several studies on specific aspects of the Damascus Document have been produced. The present volume belongs to this type of study, addressing the issue of women. The choice of this theme determined the major concern of the volume, namely, analysis of the halakic laws and the communal rule set out on pages IX–XVI of the Genizah version and in various passages from the Qumran copies. The author should be complimented on her concise and clear exposition. Besides succinct and well-informed introductions, the analyses of the pertinent text units are properly organized with comments, surveys of scholarly discussions, and useful conclusions. The volume renders a valuable service to students of the Scrolls and helps to focus the discussion on several important issues.

In a short introduction (1–17) the author explains her reasons for adopting the approach developed recently chiefly by Charlotte Hempel, namely, the division of the legal material
in the *Damascus Document* into two types: (1) halakic laws, assembled in CD IX–XII, 18 and various passages from other Qumran copies and compared with the *Temple Scroll* and other Qumran documents; and (2) community ruling, found in CD XII, 20–XVI and compared with similar material of the *Rule of the Community* and the *Rule of the Congregation* (1QSa). Such a division is certainly justified by the distinct literary character and content of each type of material, and it has been generally accepted for many years. Regrettably, Wassen also embraces, albeit with some modification, the more controversial part of Hempel’s analysis, her chronological interpretation of these literary data (of which more will be said below).

The second chapter (19–44) offers a survey of scholarly opinions on the literary character of the *Damascus Document*. Wassen favors the approach that detects several literary layers in the *Damascus Document*, represented in research mainly by the work of Jerome Murphy-O’Connor and Philip Davies. This has an important bearing on Wassen’s approach and conclusion. No one will deny that the *Damascus Document* reworks a variety of sources. However, the existence of literary layers and redactors (cf., e.g., 126–27) is disputable. It is regrettable that Wassen did not consider more seriously the view, expressed in print by the present reviewer (briefly mentioned by Wassen on 32), that in its present form the *Damascus Document* displays a single overall framework.

The first substantial chapter (45–106) deals with the halakic material. Labeled by Wassen “The Early Law Code,” it discusses the various halakic laws pertaining to women, such as cases of zavah, nidah, and childbirth; sotah and intercourse with slave women; marital arrangements; women’s oaths and the like. Not surprisingly, Wassen concludes this part with the statement that the halakic laws in the *Damascus Document* “display an androcentric perspective, whereby women are viewed as other than male.… This perspective parallels the general tendency in biblical literature” (102–3). But she notes that on three issues the *Damascus Document* halakah “constitutes a clear improvement of women’s legal position compared to biblical law”: men are allowed to annul women’s oaths only when the oaths may lead to transgression; the application of the ordeal of sotah is more difficult; and the inspection of a bride under suspicion not being a virgin is conducted before rather than after the wedding. However, as noted by Wassen herself, in regard to the second and third issues a more lenient approach to women is evinced in rabbinic halakah as well (64–65, 85–86). Therefore, the “improvement,” in Wassen’s terms, of women’s status in Qumran halakah may reflect an earlier, more general halakic development in early Second Temple times, not a specific feature of the Qumran group or a parent circle. As for the oath, Wassen herself observes elsewhere (121) that it is based on a gender-inclusive understanding of the biblical law, as is the prohibition to marry a niece (CD V, 7–11). Consequently, the law of oath does not aim at “improving” women’s status but at the application of a certain exegetical rule. Wassen briefly discusses items concerning
women in the so-called Catalogue of Transgressors, found in 4Q270 2 i 16–19; ii 15–17 (pp. 107–12), and reaches similar conclusions. Yet this catalogue is sprinkled with sectarian terms and occurs in a sectarian context (cf. below).

In a separate chapter (113–29) Wassen discusses two laws pertaining to women in the admonition section: the prohibition of polygamy and marrying a niece; and defilement through menstrual blood (CD VII, 7–11, 20–21). She rightly concludes (128) that the marital laws in this section distinguished the community that practiced them from Israel at large. This approach, and the specific style and terminology of these laws, reveals the restrictive and separatist character typical of the Qumran community.

In the largest chapter (31–205) Wassen discusses the various rulings concerning women incorporated into the communal rule of the Damascus Document. She stresses the extensive control by the Examiner over the life of the community and the families therein, and in her conclusion she likens this system to a family, a simile used, in fact, by Josephus to describe the Essene community (War 2.120). Yet some particular facets of the community that emerge from Wassen’s analysis merit special attention. The first is that there was a measure of equality between men and women within the communal structure. Such an equality is implied, for instance, in the initiation into the community (155–56) and in the equal education enjoyed by both boys and girls (CD XIII, 17–18; see the discussion on pp. 165–66). Based on her analysis of the terms “fathers” and “mothers” in 4Q270 7 i 13–15, another significant fact transpires from Wassen’s discussion, namely, that women performed leading roles in the community (184–88). Here Wassen proposes an interesting interpretation of the term rwqmh (= “embroidery”), which the “mothers” are said not to possess (4Q270 7 i 14–15). Making the connection with the mystical embroidered cords given to the daughters of Job, according to T. Job 46:7, Wassen suggests that rwqmh designates specific garments that functioned in some sort of mystical activity within the Qumran community (194–96).

To conclude, I should point out that the overall picture drawn by this volume has important consequences. Significant is the fact that the halakic section represents the traditional, more “androcentric” view, while the communal rule shows tendencies toward some improvement of women’s position. In itself this is an important conclusion that carries several implications meriting further study in the wider context of the sectarian organization system. However, interpreting these literary data in chronological terms, attributing the halakic laws to a different, earlier priestly group, is to miss the particular character of the sources. First, the halakic law of the Damascus Document is sprinkled with specific sectarian terminology, a fact that points to a sectarian adaptation of this material. Second, several sections pertaining to halakah (e.g., the Catalogue of Transgressors; see above) are sectarian even by content. In several places Wassen herself
admits the separatist and sectarian character of a given halakah (e.g., the marital laws in the admonition section; see above). In addition, the definition of certain sectarian passages as “interpolation” (e.g., 126–27 in CD VII, 6–9) by a sectarian redactor is open to criticism. The accumulating effect of these aspects of the halakah point to their sectarian nature. They belie the label “general” given to the halakic section, as opposed to the communal law. The literary character and genre of the halakic section in CD may represent early literary conventions applied to halakic materials as such. Perhaps they stem from the main halakic tradition, based on biblical law and adhered to by all the groups active in Israel in Second Temple times. The distinction between the various groups resided in the interpretation of this major halakic tradition, hence in its practical application, but not in its essential character. What we really have in the halakic section of the CD, as well as in other halakic material from Qumran, is the specifically sectarian adaptation of the “general” halakah, an adaptation effected by particular interpretation of the biblical law and by the use of sectarian terminology.

Thus, there is no room to interpret these literary data in historical and chronological terms and to deduce from them the existence of a “pre-Qumranic” group different from the Qumran community. If there was such a “pre-Qumranic” group, and I believe there was, its existence must be argued on the basis of other types of evidence.