
A table of contents for *Epworth Review* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_epworth-review-01.php

BOOK SECTION

Literature on the Qumran Texts

F. F. BRUCE

WHEN the discovery of the Qumran texts (the 'Dead Sea Scrolls') was first announced in 1947 and the following years, there was a rapid output of books purporting to explain their significance — good, bad and indifferent. When my own publisher tried to persuade booksellers to take a few copies of the first edition of *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1956), their regular reaction, he told me, was 'Oh no, not another!' Happily, the passage of time has consigned the majority of them to oblivion. This makes it easier to concentrate on works which have proved their value.

The publication of the original texts is not yet complete. In particular, a good part of the fragmentary material from Cave 4 remains unpublished. The delay has been due in some measure to political changes in the Near East, but also to more ordinary forms of human weakness. Most, but not all, of the material is being published by the Clarendon Press in a series of folio volumes entitled *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert:* the first of these appeared in 1955 and the seventh in 1982. There are still more to follow.

But what of translations? The best English translation known to me is the Pelican Book by Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English,* first published in 1962. Here a trustworthy rendering of the main non-biblical texts is presented, with a helpful introduction. Two other volumes of translation may be mentioned. One is Theodor H. Gaster's *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (English translation with introduction and notes); the first edition appeared in 1956, the third (revised and enlarged) in 1976 (Anchor Books, Garden City, N.Y.). The other is *The Essene Writings from Qumran,* by A. Dupont-Sommer, translated from the French by Geza Vermes (Blackwell, 1961). Some of Dupont-Sommer's interpretations are eccentric, but I find his translation useful in one practical respect: the numbering of the columns and lines of the original text is indicated clearly, so that when occasion arises to check his translation, the corresponding passage in the original can be located without delay.

Of the books telling the story of the first discovery and identification of the scrolls, probably the best one is John C. Trever's *The Untold Story of Qumran* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1966). It was Dr Trever who first photographed some columns of the complete Isaiah scroll from Cave 1 in the Syrian Monastery of St Mark in Jerusalem and sent them by air mail to W. F. Albright, receiving by return of post a letter congratulating him on 'the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times'.

The archaeological side of the discovery was dealt with authoritatively by the late Roland de Vaux, O.P., in the Schweich Lectures for 1959. The lectures were first published in French, but a revised edition in an English translation appeared in 1973: *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford University Press). The published text of the lectures carries an appreciative foreword by Sir Godfrey Driver — a characteristically noble gesture on his

part, for Driver's interpretation of the evidence differed radically from de Vaux's.

Driver himself produced a *magnum opus* on the subject in *The Judaean Scrolls* (Blackwell, 1965). This work of over 600 pages is full of learning, bearing testimony to the wide range of the author's reading and the lively originality of his thought. But his interpretation of the material depends on the identification of the Teacher of Righteousness (or the Rightful Guide), the organizer of the Qumran community, with Judas of Galilee, who led a rising against the Romans in A.D. 6, when Judaea first became a Roman province and its population became liable to pay tribute to Caesar. The community would then be equated with the 'fourth philosophy' which, according to Josephus, was first propounded by Judas. This interpretation is difficult enough to square with the data of the texts, and it involves the rejection of the evidence of palaeography and archaeology. That interpretation will be most acceptable which accords with the data of the texts *and* with the palaeographical evidence as presented by the palaeographers *and* with the archaeological evidence as presented by the archaeologists. And in fact there *is* a line of interpretation which satisfies all three criteria.

When the discovery of the scrolls was quite recent, and the wildest theories of their meaning were being ventilated, Millar Burrows of Yale University put us all in his debt by his sober and scholarly account in *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, followed by *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1955, 1958). These volumes were designed for non-specialist students, and the interpretations were based on trustworthy translations of the texts. A little later came a work which has not received the publicity and attention it deserved: *The Monks of Qumran*, by Edmund Sutcliffe, S. J., of Heythrop College (Burns & Oates, 1960). This was a careful study of the organization and tenets of the community. The same subjects were dealt with by A. R. C. Leaney in *The Rule of Qumran and its Meaning* (SCM Press, 1966), a detailed and masterly study of one of the community documents found in Cave 1: the 'Rule of the Community' (also sometimes called the 'Manual of Discipline'). One of the most important features of this study is its account of the essential part that the calendar played in the life and thought of the men of Qumran. The Qumran calendar was quite dissociated from the phases of the moon (its months were 'calendar months' of thirty days each); the community was therefore unable to observe the festivals along with the rest of the Jews, whose sacred year was regulated by the principle that each new moon marked the start of a new month. In the eyes of the Qumran community the lunar calendar was a high-handed departure from divine order.

Another interesting document from Cave 1, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*, was the subject of a study by Yigael Yadin (Oxford University Press, 1962). The community looked forward to a time when the godly in Israel would give battle to the Gentile oppressors of their nation and other ancestral enemies: victory in this war, which would last for forty years (sabbatical years excepted), would be followed by the establishment of everlasting righteousness. Anyone who has heard Jehovah's Witnesses describe what they believe the battle of Armageddon will be like would find affinities to their expectation in this

document. More recently Professor Yadin has published another important Qumran document, the 'Temple Scroll', which he secured in 1967; but until an English edition of his Hebrew exposition apears, the readership of his study will be limited.

One of the first scholars to publish an appraisal of the scrolls was Geza Vermes: this appraisal first appeared in French in 1953. Thirty years after the first discovery of the scrolls he made a fresh appraisal in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (Collins, 1977; 2nd edition, SCM Press, 1982). Dr Vermes propounds no revolutionary theories, but gives a well-balanced account of the community, its library, its religious beliefs and ideals. The community, he holds, was an Essene group; its organization is dated in the high-priesthood of Jonathan the Hasmonaean (died 143 B.C.), who is stigmatized in its literature as 'the wicked priest.' It was dispersed when the Romans (the 'Kittim' of the Qumran texts) destroyed its headquarters shortly before A.D. 70. This is the most probable outline of the history of the community.

As is well known, many of the scrolls and fragments are copies of books of the Hebrew Bible; in fact, all the books of the Hebrew Bible are represented among them (some of them several times over), with the exception of Esther. (The absence of Esther may be significant, or it could be accidental.) There are also many commentaries on biblical books or parts of books, in which the text is quoted, piece by piece, before being expounded. Since these documents provide direct evidence for the text of Hebrew scripture a thousand years earlier than anything previously known, the value of this evidence must be assessed. One book which presents such an assessment is *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, by Frank Moore Cross of Harvard (2nd edition, Doubleday, 1961; reprinted with new preface, Baker, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980). It is possible to distinguish three types of text among the biblical manuscripts: (1) the ancestor of the traditional (Masoretic) text, perhaps representing a Babylonian recension; (2) the type of text which was used as a basis for the Greek version commonly called the Septuagint, an Egyptian type; (3) the type of text represented by the Samaritan Pentateuch, which (apart from its sectarian features) is basically a popular Palestinian text. Of these three it is the ancestor of the Masoretic text that may be regarded as the most reliable.

There is more work to be done on the bearing of the scrolls on the textual history of the Old Testament, but it is held up pending the publication of the biblical fragments from Cave 4. There are fragmentary commentaries, too, from the same cave whose publication is awaited; indeed, Dr. Vermes is well justified when he says that the delay in publishing this material bids fair to become 'the academic scandal *par excellence* of the twentieth century'. If a personal note may be obtruded, I should like to bring up to date my *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Tyndale Press, 1960), but there is not much point in undertaking this task until all the exegetical material is available.

Since most of the Qumran texts must be dated, on grounds of palaeography and content, before the beginning of the Christian era, we shall not expect to find in them any direct reference to Christian origins or the New Testament writings. But they do provide a background against which the history of Christian beginnings and many of the New Testament documents can be read with increased understanding.

Many articles in journals have dealt with one aspect or another of the relationship between the scrolls and the New Testament; from time to time some of these have been collected and republished in symposia. One of the earliest was *The Scrolls and the New Testament,* edited by Krister Stendahl (SCM Press, 1958), in which fourteen essays by well-known scholars were gathered together. More recently we have had nine essays on *Paul and Qumran,* edited by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor (Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), and nine on *John and Qumran*, edited by J. H. Charlesworth (Geoffrey Chapman, 1972).

Of the essays in the Paul volume, two draw attention to specially close affinities which are held to exist between the Qumran texts and the letter to the Ephesians. If these affinities can be established as really significant, they call for an explanation. The problem of the relation of Ephesians to the other letters in the Pauline collection might then be given a solution along fresh lines. In his opening essay in the volume, Père P. Benoit says that 'the only explanation . . . is that either Paul or a disciple, who was entrusted under his direction with the final redaction of the epistle, had a first-hand knowledge of the writings of Qumran' (p. 17). Well, perhaps.

As for the John volume, affinities between the Qumran texts and the Fourth Gospel were pointed out by a number of scholars (not least by W. F. Albright) in the earliest days of the study of those texts. The late Henry J. Cadbury remarked on this that every new discovery in the history of Near Eastern religion has been hailed in its day as providing the solution to 'the problem of the Fourth Gospel', and that it was not surprising to find the Qumran texts so hailed. But Dr Charlesworth has gathered together nine essays (including two of his own) in which the relation of the Qumran texts to the Gospel and the First Epistle of John is examined from various points of view. The one positive conclusion to which the authors come is that there is no longer any need to look to Hellenistic influences for the style and thought of the Johannine writings.

In 1956 Matthew Black delivered the Morse Lectures in Union Theological Seminary, New York, which were published under the title *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (Nelson, 1961). The central thesis of this work is that there was, in both the north and the south of Palestine, a long-standing strain of nonconformist Judaism with which historians for the most part have never reckoned adequately, and that this nonconformist Judaism supplies the background both of the Qumran community and of the early church. The thesis is worked out in careful detail and, while more Qumran texts have been published since Professor Black's volume appeared, nothing has been produced since 1961 to supersede it as a scholarly and reliable discussion of the subject expressed in its title.

It is a good thing that the Dead Sea Scrolls no longer hit the headlines of the popular press as they did in earlier years. Those who give themselves to the study of these documents can now get on with their work without feeling obliged to turn aside from time to time to refute sensational claims of the kind which used to gain easy publicity.

The list of works in this survey could have been augmented if reference had been made to some written in other languages and not translated into English. For purposes of the *Epworth Review* it seemed wise to confine it to works accessible in English.