

Texts, Scribes and Scholars: Reflections on a Busy Decade in Dead Sea Scrolls Research

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*Texts, Scribes, Caves, and Scholars. Reflections on a Busy Decade in Dead
Sea Scrolls Research**

In what follows I would like to outline and reflect upon the ways in which the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls has seen some momentous transformations during the last decade or so leaving us currently in a period of scholarship that is both exciting and humbling at the same time. I will move from the texts and the scribes to the caves, and finally the community of scholars. My aim is to give a flavour of some of the milestones, challenges, and little triumphs we have encountered over the course of the last ten years rather than attempting anything like a systematic let alone comprehensive overview.

The Texts

Starting with the texts, the first and most obvious transformation we have witnessed is that we are at long last able to see the big picture. The texts are published and accessible, as are a number of remarkable tools.¹ Amongst the scholarly tools now available Martin

* This article is a revised version of a plenary lecture delivered at the SBL Annual Meeting in San Diego in 2007. I would like to thank Profs. Moshe Bernstein and Maxine Grossman for the invitation as well as Prof. Michael E. Stone for his comments on a draft of this lecture. I also gratefully acknowledge the support of the British Academy in the form of an Overseas Conference Grant.

¹ For an overview over the official publication series see now E. Tov, 'The *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series: History and System of Presentation*', in E. Tov *et al.*, *The*

Abegg's two-volume Concordance takes pride of place.² Thus, despite the fact that 2007 marked the 60th anniversary of the discovery of the scrolls, during the first four to five decades of this period scrolls scholarship was simply a different world. On the one hand, the first generation of scholars are rightly recognised today for their brilliance as epigraphers and palaeographers who paved the way for much of the scholarship that is produced today and beyond. During the last decade we also lost some of these fathers of the discipline, most recently Josef Milik (1922-2006) and Hartmut Stegemann (1933-2005). The task of deciphering and identifying fragments is, however, by no means complete. Even the DJD editions, like so many Second Temple texts, do not necessarily represent a fixed text, and the ongoing work of paleographers such as Emile Puech and Eibert Tigchelaar is a frequent reminder of this.³ On the other hand, the first generation scholarly community was rather stagnant by today's standards. Because of the huge amount of progress made in terms of publishing the texts in the last two decades or so, to

Texts from the Judaean Desert. Indices and an Introduction to the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series (DJD 39), Oxford, Clarendon, 2002, pp. 1-25. See also E. Tov (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library. Revised Edition*, Leiden, Brill, 2006 and E. Tov and D. Parry (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*. 6 volumes, Leiden, Brill, 2004-2005.

² Martin G. Abegg, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance. Volume One: The Non-Biblical Texts from Qumran [Parts 1-2]*, Leiden, Brill, 2003.

³ On ongoing work of paleography and epigraphy see also the booklet accompanying the CD ROM in E. Tov, *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library*, p. 11.

a large degree thanks to the quiet and capable authority of the Editor-in-Chief Prof. Emanuel Tov, it is almost as if, for the majority of scholars, the discovery of the texts happened much more recently. In other words, we recently celebrated the 60th anniversary of the discovery of the scrolls, full access to all the unpublished texts for the last seventeen years had, in practical terms, a huge impact on scholarship, comparable almost to the impact of the initial discoveries.⁴

As far as the big picture painted by the texts themselves is concerned, I would like to focus on a number of areas where the impact of the recent publications has transformed the field:

The first significant consequence of beholding the full spectrum of texts is the way in which *the sectarian component is now dwarfed by two thirds of scriptural and non-sectarian writings* as spelt out very clearly by Devorah Dimant in 1995.⁵ If one asked a group of scholars to compile a list of the sectarian compositions, the resulting lists are

⁴ For an excellent overview over the controversial publication history of the Scrolls see J.C. VanderKam, 'Scroll Wars', in J. C. VanderKam and P. Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity*, London, T&T Clark, 2002, pp. 381-403.

⁵⁵ D. Dimant, 'The Qumran Manuscripts: Contents And Significance', in D. Dimant and L. H. Schiffman (eds.), *Time To Prepare The Way In The Wilderness. Papers On The Qumran Scrolls By Fellows Of The Institute For Advanced Studies Of The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1989-1990* (STDJ, 16), Leiden, Brill, 1995, pp. 23-58.

likely to have a number of core texts in common, such as the Community Rule, but each list would almost certainly differ slightly around the edges. This situation is not at all unlike what we now think of as the scriptural ‘canon’ at this period.⁶ Not unlike the notion of a canon of scriptural texts, so also the notion of a ‘canon’ of sectarian texts is an issue that occupies modern scholars rather more than Late Second Temple Jews. The attitude of this conservative Jewish group to texts, including also such treasured and valued texts as the scriptures and the rule texts, is surprisingly tolerant and open-minded by our standards. The fluidity of textual traditions across the board at Qumran is one of several areas where scholarship gained as much from ‘unlearning’ old preconceptions as it did from learning new things.

Another area where the amount of new material has raised the stakes of its *centrality* is that of *Jewish law*. Some of the halakhic issues raised in this literature burst the narrow confines of Qumran. See for instance the important overlap between some of the scrolls and some of debates recorded in the Mishnah noted some time ago by Joseph Baumgarten and Larry Schiffman and most recently addressed in a volume entitled

⁶ See, e.g., E. Ulrich, ‘The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures Found at Qumran’, in P. W. Flint (ed.), *The Bible at Qumran. Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001, pp. 51-66; J. C. VanderKam, ‘Questions of Canon Viewed Through the Dead Sea Scrolls’, in L. M. McDonald und J. A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate*, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2002, pp. 91-109; and most recently S. White Crawford, ‘The Fluid Bible’, in *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Washington DC, Biblical Archaeological Society / Society of Biblical Literature, 2007, pp. 52-61.

Rabbinic Perspectives. Rabbinic Literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls edited by Steven Fraade and others.⁷ The now much larger corpus of legal texts from Qumran leaves us in little doubt that it was legal debate rather than a clash of two alpha males that lies at the heart of the differences between Jews at the time.⁸ I was struck by an interesting recent argument between two Jewish scholars on this point with Ben Zion Wacholder referring to Joseph Baumgarten's work as characterised by a 'nomistic approach' and preferring instead what I would call a maximalist eschatological interpretation of the Damascus Document.⁹ I am sure the nomistic approach is the right one, mainly because of the dominant place of law in the texts rather than simply in the scholarly approach.

Sapiential texts have emerged as a major new player on the Qumran stage. The last decade saw the publication of two volumes in the DJD Series of Sapiential Texts¹⁰ as

⁷ (STDJ, 62), Leiden, Brill, 2006.

⁸ See also J. J. Collins, 'The Origin of the Qumran Community: A Review of the Evidence', in M. P. Horgan and P. J. Kobelski (eds.), *To Touch the Text. FS J. A. Fitzmyer*, New York, Crossroad, 1989, pp. 159-178.

⁹ B. Z. Wacholder, *The New Damascus Document. The Midrash on the Eschatological Torah of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Reconstruction, Translation and Commentary* (STDJ 56), Leiden: Brill, 2007, p. 138. See also J. M. Baumgarten, *Qumran Cave 4. XIII. The Damascus Document (4Q266-273)*, (DJD 18), Oxford, Clarendon, 1996.

¹⁰ Cf. T. Elgvin *et al.*, *Qumran Cave 4. XV. Sapiential Texts, Part 1* (DJD 20), Oxford, Clarendon, 1997 and J. Strugnell, D. J. Harrington, and T. Elgvin, *Qumran Cave 4. XXIV. 4QInstruction (Mūsār lē Mēvîn): 4Q415ff.* (DJD 34), Oxford, Clarendon, 1999.

well as a very large amount of scholarly interest in this new material examining its intrinsic significance and meaning as well as its place in the context of the scrolls and in the wisdom tradition beyond.¹¹ Like so many recent developments this new material has burst boundaries. On the one hand, the new texts, especially 4QInstruction, challenge our understanding of what made the communities tick and provide some curious and subtle evidence of links to the sectarian material.¹² These texts further emerged just at a time when the boundaries between wisdom and apocalypticism were being challenged and probed. I am thinking here of the SBL Symposium Volume edited by Benjamin G. Wright and Lawrence M. Wills entitled *Conflicting Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*.¹³ How apt that a bombshell like 4QInstruction with its wonderful amalgam of instruction and revelation should have become new essential reading for anyone working on these questions just as they were beginning to be re-formulated.

¹¹ Cf., inter alia, J. J. Collins, G. Sterling and R. Clements (eds.), *Sapiential Perspectives. Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (STDJ 51), Leiden, Brill, 2004; F. García Martínez (ed.), *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition* (BETL 168), Leuven, Peeters, 2003; M. J. Goff, *Discerning Wisdom. The Sapiential Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (VTSup, 116), Leiden, Brill, 2007; D. J. Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*, London, Routledge, 1996; C. Hempel, A. Lange, and H. Lichtenberger (eds.), *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought* (BETL 159), Leuven, Peeters, 2002.

¹² See C. Hempel, 'The Qumran Sapiential Texts and the Rule Books', in Hempel, Lange, and Lichtenberger (eds.), *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*, pp. 277-295.

¹³ Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Matthew Goff's contribution ('Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and the Pedagogical Ethos of 4QInstruction') to the collection just referred to fleshes out this point.

Equally important transformations were inaugurated by the publication during the last decade of *additional Cave 4 copies of a number of long known texts*. I will focus here in particular on the Damascus Document (D) and the Community Rule (S). In trying to assess the significance of these texts I will stand back from the finer points of numerous scholarly cruxes that they pose. The inter-relationship of both texts has long been recognized as a major crux in the study of the Scrolls. Perhaps the single most telling piece of new evidence is a substantial amount of penal code material now attested in both documents.

Like two talented and charismatic primadonnas, the Damascus Document and the Community Rule have managed to stay in the limelight for most of the last 60 years (and more in the case of CD). Each primadonna has her own charms, and the reasons why both texts have managed to hold as well as recapture our attention more recently are quite different in each case. The publication of the full text of the Cave 4 manuscripts of the Community Rule by Philip Alexander and Geza Vermes in 1998 and the earlier work by the editors themselves and Sarianna Metso in particular have presented us with a rich picture of an evolving ancient textual tradition that is almost growing in front of our eyes

as we study the differences and similarities between the different manuscripts of the Community Rule.¹⁴

In the case of the Damascus Document the publication of the full text of the Cave 4 copies by Joseph Baumgarten has equally transformed the study of this text, but in quite different terms. Here we are not faced with breathtaking variants between one manuscript and another, but rather with a large amount of new text, largely, though not exclusively legal in character. Although the various manuscripts of the Damascus Document from Qumran show very few signs of development, some portions of their text are so close to the Community Rule that they almost look like variant manuscripts of the same text. This is the case, for instance, with the penal code traditions mentioned briefly already, and this important and curious phenomenon has been called ‘synoptic intersections’ by Steven Fraade.¹⁵

Both for the Rule and for the Damascus Document as well as for the corpus of Qumran manuscripts as a whole, the full publication of the texts has not only disclosed a vast

¹⁴ See esp. P. S. Alexander and G. Vermes, *Qumran Cave 4. XIX. Serekh Ha-Yaad and Two Related Texts* (DJD 26), Oxford, Clarendon, 1998 and most recently C. Hempel, ‘The Literary Development of the S Tradition – A New Paradigm’, *RQ* 22 (2006) 389-401 and S. Metso, *The Serekh Texts*, London, T&T Clark, 2007.

¹⁵ S. Fraade, ‘Ancient Jewish Law and Narrative in Comparative Perspective: The Damascus Document and the Mishnah’, in A. Edrei and S. Last Stone (eds.), *Dine Israel. Studies in Halakhah and Jewish Law* 24 (2007) 65-99, esp. p. 93.

amount of new and significant evidence, but the new evidence in turn has transformed the study of the familiar material as well. Thus, from the more distanced vantage point that I tried to adopt, I am struck by the way in which the study of D and S *mirrors* the study of the larger corpus in some remarkable ways. The important new light shed by more recent developments on the old was recently consciously and explicitly addressed in a meeting of IOQS in Ljubliana earlier this year as well as a recent Orion symposium - meetings which attempted to look back to the finds of Cave 1 or 'Old Texts' respectively in the light of recent developments.¹⁶ These meetings point towards an extremely fruitful avenue for reflection, namely, the re-visitation of material that is by now fairly familiar with a view to question whether what we thought we knew still holds up to scrutiny.

Prior to the boom of publications from Cave 4 over the course of the last fifteen years or so, the corpus of the Qumran texts may be likened to a pool of water, relatively calm and relaxing. We are now still sitting in the same water, but the pool has been substantially enlarged, more water has poured into it at a steady pace, and a powerful jacuzzi has been switched on mixing the water in new ways. What we have is new material of such scope and significance that it also radically challenges the ways in which the long familiar texts are read. It is true to say, therefore, that even though now we celebrate and mark the 60th anniversary of the discovery of the DSS, it is as if we have only just begun – again. This

¹⁶ For *The Tenth Annual Orion Symposium: New Perspectives on Old Texts*, cf. <http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/symposiums/10th/main.shtml> and the 2007 IOQS meeting in Ljubliana, cf. http://www.iosot2007.si/temp/index_03_3.html.

is not to say that the significance and value of the work of our elders is in any way diminished but the complexity and richness of the full spectrum of texts has injected a large dose of humility into our once confident scholarly ethos.

The Scribes

We saw already with reference to the Community Rule manuscripts how the Scrolls are providing fascinating insights into the ways in which ancient texts grew. A little over ten year ago Geza Vermes recognized the significance of this when he wrote,

“If one had to single out the most revolutionary novelty furnished by Qumran, the choice of its contribution to our understanding of the genesis of Jewish literary compositions would surely be justified.”¹⁷

During the last decade scholars have rightly begun to reflect very seriously on the role of the scribe. First and foremost to be mentioned here is the magisterial volume by Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert*¹⁸, which offers us a treasure trove of information on the practical aspects of writing. Related to this, George Brooke has recently published a stimulating paper entitled ‘The Qumran Scrolls and the Demise of the Distinction between Higher and Lower Criticism’ where he argues, as the title of his paper suggests, that the distinction between higher and lower criticism is severely challenged by the evidence of the

¹⁷ G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls. Qumran in Perspective*, London, SCM, rev. third edn. 1994, p. 23.

¹⁸ (STDJ 54), Leiden, Brill, 2004

scrolls.¹⁹ Almost at the same time Emanuel Tov wrote an important article entitled ‘The Writing of Early Scrolls. Implications for the Literary Analysis of Hebrew Scripture’.²⁰ Both Brooke and Tov emphasize the important insights gained by the Scrolls about creative writing and creative copying. These issues were in the air already as indicated by Shemaryahu Talmon’s wonderful coinage ‘insufficiently controlled copying’ with reference to the scrolls, and Geza Vermes who refers to ‘scribal creative freedom’ in a similar context.²¹

These very recent discussions shed light on the much bigger question of what it means to speak of an author in antiquity. It may be worth noting in this context that the role of the redactor or editor in Hebrew Bible scholarship has recently been subjected to a critical

¹⁹ In J. G. Campbell, W. J. Lyons, und L. K. Pietersen (eds.), *New Directions in Qumran Studies*, London: T&T Clark, 2005, pp. 26-42.

²⁰ In D. Böhler, I. Himbaza and Ph. Hugué (eds.), *L’Écrit et l’Esprit. Etudes d’histoire du texte et de théologie biblique en hommage à Adrian Schenker* (OBO, 214), Fribourg/Göttigen: Academic Press/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005, pp. 355-371. A slightly shorter version of this article also appeared under the same title in *DSD* 13 (2006) 339-347.

²¹ S. Talmon, ‘The Textual Study of the Bible – A New Outlook’, in F. M. Cross and S. Talmon (eds.), *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 321-400, esp. p. 380 and G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Forty Years On. The Fourteenth Sacks Lecture*, Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1987, p. 14.

analysis by John van Seters.²² He goes so far as to speak of “the myth of the ‘redactor’ and redaction criticism”²³ and prefers instead to think of those responsible for the pentateuch as historians. Whether or not we like the labels ‘redactor’, ‘redactional’ or ‘editing’ with reference to ancient Hebrew literature, it is quite clear from the crucial evidence of the Community Rule manuscripts in particular that the *kinds of processes* scholars refer to with this terminology did take place.

The Caves

Another consequence of being in a position to look at the bigger picture that has produced a number of stimulating discussions most recently is the work being done on profiling the collection. We have already referred to the ways in which the classification of the texts into sectarian and non-sectarian as well as pre- or proto-sectarian and scriptural texts is ongoing. Another avenue of recent research has been attempts to draw up a profile of the contents of the caves. A recent article by Daniel Stoekl-Ben Ezra reviews the debate thus far and offers his own analysis.²⁴ Two papers read in the autumn of 2007 by Florentino García Martínez and Jodi Magness at an international conference at the University of Birmingham can now be added to this growing list of studies.²⁵

²² *The Edited Bible. The Curious History of the “Editor” in Biblical Criticism*, Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 2006.

²³ *Edited Bible*, p. 335.

²⁴ ‘Old Caves and Young Caves. A Statistical Reevaluation of a Qumran Consensus’, *DSD* 14 (2007) 313-333.

²⁵ See <http://www.theology.bham.ac.uk/scrollsconference/index.htm>.

The Community of Scholars

One of the themes that emerged repeatedly in the course of the last decade or so is one of fluidity and burst boundaries. Another burst boundary is also evident in the make-up of the scholarly community today compared to the early decades of Qumran studies. After a fairly uncommunicative four decades the last two decades have witnessed some enormous transformations. In 1993 Florentino García Martínez was instrumental in the creation of the *International Organization for Qumran Studies* which bi-annually brings scholars together. Moreover, the *Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature* at the Hebrew University founded by Michael Stone and currently headed by Steven Fassberg has recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. The work of the Center has enriched our field by offering a first class website which I am sure has a fuller bibliography of scholarly publications than some of the authors keep themselves of their own work.²⁶

The religious allegiances of the original team of editors are regularly discussed, and the absence of Jewish members from the original team of editors for several decades is still baffling. As someone who entered the field just at the right time (I started my doctoral work in 1991), I relish the fact that what we have today is a community of scholars made up of Jews, Christians, atheists, agnostics, men and women who are united by their passion for trying to understand the texts as best we can. We are studying texts that predate the ‘parting of the ways’ but it took us far too long to come together as a scholarly community. It looks as if we may perhaps be achieving this now. George

²⁶ See <http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il>.

Nickelsburg wrote a very perceptive paper to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery, which was celebrated in San Francisco some ten years ago.²⁷ He reflected at some length on the place of Jewish and Christian scholars in the field, largely as a response to and inspired by Lawrence Schiffman's provocative book on the topic, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*.²⁸ Given the many new challenges the most recent phase in the study of the Scrolls has opened before us, the jacuzzi effect I described earlier, I sense a demise in the sectarianism in the scholarly community. Most recently there is a sense that the immense challenges posed by this remarkable collection of manuscripts are finally producing genuine dialogue and conversations between scholars of different faiths, backgrounds, genders, and generations. The nineteen nineties were an exciting decade in Qumran Studies, but in many ways the last ten years have been even more fulfilling from a scholarly point of view simply because we have been in a position to gaze at the big picture in all of its dazzling complexity.

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²⁷ 'Currents in Qumran Scholarship: The Interplay of Data, Agendas, and Methodology', in R. A. Kugler and E. M. Schuller (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Fifty*, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1999, pp. 79-99.

²⁸ Philadelphia: JPS, 1994.