INTRODUCTION

Recent emphasis on the later period of Hebrew psalmody and the final form of the Biblical text has been given fresh impetus by the new texts discovered at several sites in the Judaean desert. These manuscripts provide solid documentary evidence for the later formative stages of the Book of Psalms, as preserved in the Masoretic Text and in other collections used in the Second Temple period. The present study is ambitious in scope and twofold in purpose: to present in a systematic manner several types of primary data contained in the Dead Sea Psalms scrolls (PART I + the Appendices), and to address the pertinent issues arising from analysis of this material (PART II).

1. Background Description of the Psalms Scrolls

Between 1947 and 1956, eleven caves were discovered in the region of Khirbet Qumran, about 1.6 km inland from the western shore of the Dead Sea and some 13 km south of Jericho and 30 km east of Jerusalem. These caves yielded various artifacts, especially pottery, and almost 900 manuscripts written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Although a few are well-preserved, most of the scrolls are very fragmentary; a fair estimation is 100,000 pieces, with many no bigger than a postage stamp. Over 200 manuscripts are classified as “Biblical scrolls,” since they contain material found in the canonical Hebrew Bible, and constitute our earliest witnesses to the text of Scripture. Many of the 600+ “non-Biblical” documents are of direct relevance to early Judaism and emerging Christianity, since they anticipate or confirm numerous ideas and teachings.


2 The distance from Jerusalem is between 25 and 32 km, depending on the road that is travelled (see the Map preceding the Introduction).

3 Hartmut Stegemann previously indicated that “about 814 scrolls . . . came to the museums” from Qumran (“Methods for the Reconstruction of Scrolls from Scattered Fragments,” in Lawrence H. Schiffman [ed.], *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The New York University Conference in Memory of Yigael Yadin* [JSPSup. 8; JSOT/ASOR Monographs 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990] 189–220, esp. 190, 208–209 n. 12). However, Stegemann has since pointed out that some manuscripts were listed together under a single Q number in certain editions, and now estimates the total number as closer to 900 (*Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus* [4th ed., Freiburg: Herder, 1994] 115). My colleague Martin Abegg (personal communication) arrives at a figure of 864 manuscripts for the Qumran material, which confirms Stegemann’s higher estimate.

4 According to Stegemann, “little more than twenty percent of all these Qumran manuscripts represent biblical books *sensu strictu* (“Reconstruction from Scattered Fragments,” 190). Eugene Ulrich (Chief Editor of the Cave 4 Biblical Scrolls) suggests (personal communication) a number of “just on 200,” while James VanderKam (*The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: SPCK, 1994] 30–31) estimates the number at 202 biblical scrolls, with 19 more found at other sites in the Judaean desert.
found in the New Testament and in the Mishnah. The Qumran manuscripts, which were copied (many composed) between the third century BCE and 68 CE\(^5\) in the Holy Land itself, have generated intense debate among scholars and wide interest among the general public. It is no exaggeration to state that the Dead Sea Scrolls constitute the most important archaeological find of the century, at least from the perspective of Judaism and Christianity. In addition to the finds at Khirbet Qumran, several manuscripts were discovered at locations in the vicinity of the Dead Sea: Wadi Murabba‘át (1951–52), Nahal Hever (1951[?]-60),\(^6\) and Masada (1963–65).\(^7\)

At least thirty-nine of these are Psalms scrolls or manuscripts containing Psalms; thirty-six were discovered at Qumran, two at Masada, and one at Nahal Hever. No other book is represented in as many of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which underscores the importance of the Psalms for the Qumran community.

2. Previous Scholarship on the Psalms Scrolls

It would be helpful to begin with a brief overview of previous research on the Psalms scrolls. Scholarly literature may be divided into two general areas: the editing and publication of these manuscripts, and the issues that emerge from analysis of their contents.

2.1 Publication of the Psalms Manuscripts

While bibliographical details and technical data concerning the Psalms scrolls themselves are provided in Chapter 2, here I offer a brief overview of their publication—not in strict chronological order, but according to the locations where they were found. It should be pointed out that the first scholar to publish Psalms material was apparently John Allegro, with his preliminary edition of 4QPs Ps\(^a\) (4Q171) in 1954.\(^8\) However, as a pesher or commentary, this does not qualify as a true Psalms manuscript.

Cave 1 and the Minor Caves at Qumran. Cave 1 yielded three Psalms scrolls and one Psalms pesher: 1QPs\(^a\), 1QPs\(^b\), 1QPs\(^c\) and 1QPs, published in 1955 in the official series “Discoveries in the Judaean Desert” (DJD or DJD)\(^9\) under the editorship of D. Barthélemy and J. T. Milik.\(^10\) Five of the minor caves at

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\(^5\) The terminus ad quem is the apparent destruction of the Qumran settlement by the Romans in the late Spring (April?) or early Summer (June?) of 68 CE.

\(^6\) It was initially thought that some of this material came from Wadi Seiyal (Nahal Se‘elim); however, these manuscripts were almost certainly found at Nahal Hever (Wadi Khabra). See Chapter 2.5 ("Psalms Scrolls Found at Other Locations").

\(^7\) See the Map preceding the Introduction.


\(^9\) For vols. III (1962), IV (1965) and V (1968) the series was titled “Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan.” In this volume I shall follow the accepted scholarly convention of “DJD.”