CHAPTER THREE

THE TEMPLE SCROLL AND THE NATURE OF ITS LAW:
THE STATUS OF THE QUESTION

To assess the current state of research on a document known to the scholarly world for less than thirty years is at best a daunting challenge. One lacks the perspective of time to make possible a realistic and fair evaluation of where matters stand. To do so when the document is 60 columns long and has attracted so much well deserved attention is doubly difficult. To do so fairly when one is himself the author of so large a part of the research to be summarized may make this task virtually impossible. Nonetheless, a serious attempt will be made here to present a sense of where research on this scroll has been going, taking into account the studies of the many scholars working on this important text.

In many ways this discussion will proceed in encyclopedic fashion, beginning with text and manuscripts, then moving to contents, sources, dating, theology of law, connection with other scrolls and finally historical significance. Along the way, I hope to trace the debate that has ensued since the exciting announcement of the existence of this scroll in the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967. For me, research on this document has occupied much of the intervening years, and I hope to convey at least some sense of what it is that has led me to devote so much energy to what Yadin has termed “the hidden law of the Dead Sea Sect.”

---


The Zohar tells us that "everything is dependent on fortune, even a Torah scroll in the ark."\(^4\)

It was the good fortune of this Torah scroll, known to us as Megillat Ha-Miqdash, the Temple Scroll, to have come into the hands of Yigael Yadin, Israel’s leading scholar of Judean Desert documents. It was his dogged determination to marshal all the forces at his disposal to produce the finest possible edition and commentary on this scroll that provided the launching pad for all later research.\(^5\) There can be no question that we are all indebted to his great work, even where, as we will see, scholarship continues to proceed in new directions.\(^6\)

**Text and Manuscripts**

The Temple Scroll (11QT\(^6\)) was first brought to the attention of Yadin in 1960 by Joseph Uhrig, a Virginia minister, who claimed it was in the hands of a Jordanian antiquities dealer.\(^7\) After two years of negotiations and a loss of $10,000, Yadin had little more to show than a small fragment proferred as a sample, and he gave up hope of recovering the scroll. Some of us recently heard Frank M. Cross relate that he traveled to Beirut in early 1967 where the well known scrolls dealer Kando, who passed away in 1993, involved him in negotiations for the purchase of what later turned out to be the Temple Scroll. In the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967, Yadin located Kando and the scroll, and it was eventually purchased for the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem for $105,000.\(^8\)

The scroll was in poor condition when it reached Yadin. It had been kept under the floor of the antiquities dealer’s home in a shoe box. In addition, other fragments were in a cigar box and some had

---

\(^4\) Zohar 3.134a. The actual meaning of this statement, as opposed to the popular usage which led us to include it here, is that everything is dependent for its sanctity on the flow (from the root זל) of divine effulgence from above, even the Torah scroll which only derives its holiness from that divine emanation.


\(^6\) Cf. my review in *BA* 48 (1985) 122–126 in which I surveyed the outlines of the debate as it had then taken shape.
