CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ANDRÉ DUPONT-SOMMER AND THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

I am, perhaps, one of those rare people in this illustrious assembly not to have had either the honour or the pleasure of having met Professor André Dupont-Sommer while he was still alive and whose memory we are celebrating today. The invitation to speak to you on this occasion is for me, certainly, a great honour. But I also ascribe a certain symbolic meaning to the fact that it is precisely me (a Spaniard, working in the Netherlands and in Belgium, and secretary of the International Organization of Qumran Studies) who has been entrusted with commemorating here the significance of the late lamented Master in research on the Dead Sea Scrolls. There is no lack of French scholars who could have done this with equal competence and with a great deal more facility in respect of the beautiful French language (so sparing you from suffering a pronunciation that even after twenty-five years still makes my wife suffer). If, in some way, I find my presence here significant, it is because the first characteristic of Dupont-Sommer’s work on the Dead Sea Scrolls that I am keen to emphasise is the influence of his work outside the French-speaking world. The second element that I would like to mention is his fundamental contribution to the perception of the Qumran texts as Essene documents. I will end with a third aspect of his work: the importance of the manuscripts for understanding the origins of Christianity.

1. THE INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE OF HIS RESEARCH

From the very beginning, the international influence of his research was tremendous and Dupont-Sommer was universally acknowledged to be the Master in Qumran studies beyond the walls of the Sorbonne and the Collège de France. In my opinion, three elements were determinative.

1. First of all, the direct influence outside France due to the very rapid translation of his major works. His *Aperçus préliminaires sur les manuscrits*
which appeared in Paris in 1950, was translated into English in Oxford and New York in 1952. His *Nouveaux aperçus sur les manuscrits de la mer Morte* of 1953 came out in English in London and New York as early as 1954. And his magnum opus, *Les Écrits esséniens découverts près de la mer Morte* of 1959, appeared in German in Tübingen in 1960 and in English in Oxford in 1961 and in New York in 1962. This book was very successful in bookshops in France (a second edition would already be necessary in 1960, a third in 1964, a fourth in 1980, which, like the other editions, was to be reprinted several times, and even a fifth edition in 1996, with a preface by Monsieur Philonenko).

In France also, the translations of the principal sectarian texts from Qumran which comprised the heart of Dupont-Sommer’s œuvre have found a second life in the third volume of *La Bible de la Pléiade*, the collection of intertestamental writings edited by Monsieur Philonenko, which includes the translations by Dupont-Sommer supplemented by the translations of Monsieur Caquot of some important Qumran texts that had not been translated by Dupont-Sommer.

The impact of the translations of the books by Dupont-Sommer can be explained first of all by the fact that, for the general public, these books were their first direct access to the recently discovered manuscripts.

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9. The copy I am using dates to 1983.
12. I.e. the *Temple Scroll*, 11QMelchizedek and Mysteries.