The twelve essays in this rich collection record presentations given at a conference at the University of St. Andrews (Scotland) in 2001 which have been organised by the volume's editor. Rather than focus exclusively or primarily on the Scrolls, the collection is framed as a broader discussion of the Scrolls as “background” to post-biblical Judaism and early Christianity. Both the introduction and the essay by Timothy Lim defend the proper place for treating a single corpus of texts, such as the Scrolls, as background to other literary corpora. Post-biblical Judaism and early Christianity, which are both covered in the volume, stretch well into the rabbinic and patristic periods, and all of the essays of this volume shed light both on the Scrolls themselves and on the subjects to which they act as background.

The first two essays treat the relationship between the Dead Sea Scrolls and Rabbinic Literature. Lawrence Schiffman discusses the various ways that legal material in the Scrolls illuminates the pre-history of rabbinic halakhah with respect to the theology underlying legal debates, the close interrelationship between midrash and Mishnah, the continuities of perspective on sacrifice and liturgy between the Scrolls, and the post-70 C.E. situation of the rabbis and questions of purity. Steven Fraade examines the way the law of the king (Deut 17:14–20) is interpreted in the Temple Scroll and later rabbinic texts (Mishnah, Tosefta, and Sifre to Deuteronomy). He resists the modern inclination to a historicizing approach to decoding of the Temple Scroll’s passage. Rather, he highlights the complex ways in which the interpretation of Scripture reflects the ideological and rhetorical cultures in which reading takes place.

The section on Early Christianity in this volume includes two essays with radically different views on the relationship between Jesus and his followers and on the relationship between the Qumran community and its movement. Richard Bauckham theorizes that there exists direct influence from the Essenes or from members of the Qumran community on earliest Christianity. There may well have been contact between the two through a community of Essenes based in Jerusalem. However, judging by the language the respective communities use for self-identification, there was no real substantive contact and influence, only shared interest in similar biblical texts. If there was contact, then the earliest Christians have formulated their theology in a conscious polemic against Esseneism. By contrast, Brian J. Capper draws together the primary sources—from Qumran and the classical accounts of the Essenes—and archaeological evidence to reconstruct a picture of Essene communities spread throughout Palestine,
which offer a dynamic and well-organised welfare system to others. This community network system must have been alluring to Jesus who was also interested in the welfare of the poor. Capper finds specific support for these proposals in a fresh and intriguing reading of the story of the woman’s anointing of Jesus in Bethany (“the house of the poor”) in Mark 13:3–9. The second section of the volume concludes with an essay by Maxine Grossman reflecting on the ways in which various New Testament texts (esp. Luke–Acts and Hebrews) and the Damascus Document present competing claims for communal self-definition through scriptural interpretation over against existing and established priestly institutions.

The third section of the volume is also devoted to the relationship between the Scrolls and (Deutero-)Pauline literature. Timothy Lim adopts something of a mediating position between the positions by Bauckham and Capper in regard to the relationship between the scrolls and earliest Christianity. With Bauckham, Lim rejects the arguments of those who have seen a close connection between Paul and Essenes through, for example, John the Baptist. Alleged parallels of theology and language appear on close examination to have essential differences as well as similarities—a point Lim illustrates with new evidence from 1/4QInstruction in regard to the Jewishness of Paul’s doctrine of unattainable righteousness. However, there are sufficient similarities to suggest that both earliest (especially Pauline) Christianity and the authors of the Scrolls belonged to a shared world of sectarian Judaism. George Brooke examines the difficult word ruwqmh in 4Q270 7 i 13–15 and suggests it might help us understand the rather difficult Pauline statement that Christian women should have an exousia on the heads (in 1 Cor 11:10). Sidnie White Crawford finds in the Scrolls (including the text discussed by Brooke) evidence for defined offices of women’s leadership and seniority: “mother,” “female elder,” and “sister.” These function as part of a fictive kinship group mentality, not unlike the one described by Capper and comparable to what can be found in early Christian literature and the wider Greco-Roman Jewish evidence.

The fourth and final section is devoted to the relationship between the Scrolls and Jewish and Christian liturgy, mysticism and messianism. Bilhah Nitzan considers the ways in which the liturgical material in the Qumran Library, especially in Dibre Hamme’orot, anticipates later forms of rabbinic liturgy and suggests that “the Qumran liturgy reflects an early step towards the creation of a complete systematic liturgy” (211). Qumran texts provide a bridge between the biblical and Tannaitic material, particularly in respect to the idea that prayer can substitute for the usual forms of sacrifice. Ra’anan Abusch compares a distinctive feature of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice—the use of a complex sevenfold structure in hymnody—to a similar phenomenon in later hekhalot literature. Abusch makes the interesting and novel suggestion that the Sabbath Songs structure includes an anticipation of the movement in the later half of the thirteen-week cycle within