BOOK REVIEWS


To say that this volume is long awaited would be a gross understatement. In a postcard postmarked on January 27, 1954, Chaim Rabin wrote to “Major General Y. Yadin” as follows [my translation from the Hebrew]:

Dear Mr. Yadin: ... They have informed me from Al-Quds [East Jerusalem—LHS] that recently there were found among the new material from Khirbet Qumran fragments paralleling the following parts of the Damascus Covenant: i.l-ii.3; iii.7-11; v.18-vi.2; xi.4-11; xi.18-21; xiv.9-20; xv.20-xvi.13. Publication of the fragments is in the hands of Father Milik. We will see what they will contribute to correction of the [genizah] text [of CD]. Yours, Ch. Rabin.

This postcard was written while Rabin was still at Oxford, before his move to the Hebrew University in 1956, to Yadin who was then in London. Rabin had only recently completed his edition of the Damascus Document (also termed the Zadokite Fragments or Damascus Covenant) which soon became the standard scholarly edition (C. Rabin, The Zadokite Documents [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954]). His edition was based on a fresh examination of the genizah fragments of what had originally been published under the title “Fragments of a Zadokite Work” by Solomon Schechter in 1910 (Documents of Jewish Sectaries I [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910]). Rabin’s edition would remain standard for many more years than he would have liked due to the delays that occurred in the publication of the Qumran manuscripts of this text. Only recently, Elisha Qimron reedited the genizah fragments of this text (in M. Broshi [ed.], The Damascus Document Reconsidered [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992] 9-49). It was this very text, the only document of the Qumran sect to be found in the Cairo genizah, which inaugurated the debate about what we know of as the Dead Sea sect decades before
the infamous bedouin boy entered cave 1. After his initial examination of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Eleazar Sukenik recognized the relationship of the new documents to the Damascus Document, and since then scholars have studied them together. It was especially unfortunate that a delay of 42 years took place before the full publication of the fragments alluded to by Rabin in his postcard to Yadin. Indeed, both of these giants of Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship died before the publication of the texts about which they had corresponded in 1954 and for which they waited so long.

To be sure, a few Qumran fragments of the Damascus Document from Caves 5 and 6 did appear over the years, but these did little more than to tantalize scholars with the realization of how significant these manuscripts would be, not only for the understanding of the Damascus Document but for research on ancient Jewish sectarianism, exegesis and law. Milik’s report that the publication of these documents would indicate that the order of pages in the first edition was incorrect, as well as his survey of the numerous topics of Jewish law included in the additional fragments, further indicated how significant this material would be for Qumran research.

The volume before us, consisting of a general introduction and detailed publication of these important fragments in their entirety, more than justifies the expectations raised as scholars awaited their publication. Joseph Baumgarten, known for so many studies of aspects of Qumran halakhah, has provided translation, commentary and notes on all of the fragments. His transcriptions are based on those Milik had prepared in the 1950’s, which appeared without his approval and without his receiving credit in preliminary form under the editorship of B.Z. Wacholder and M. Abegg in 1991. Baumgarten wisely realized that speedy publication of the material was more important than exhausting every possible avenue of interpretation. For some texts, which he regarded as especially important, Baumgarten has provided more detailed studies as part of his extended commentary. Accordingly, readers will find here a first edition which provides the necessary tools for further research on these important texts.

The Introduction sets forth many of the basic issues with which Baumgarten deals throughout his commentary and with which he has dealt in many other publications. He notes that the investigation of the new fragments has required a reordering of the pages of manuscript A of the genizah text, such that folios 15 and 16 must be placed before folio 9. At the same time, it is the genizah text of the Damascus Document which has made possible the ordering of the fragments of the