Devorah Dimant, with the Assistance of Ingo Kottsieper


This is an ambitious volume, with twenty seven essays on the history of research, almost all written by the most senior scholars in the field, each having made important contributions to the topics they address. The editor could not have chosen better. The goals of these essays, as set by the editor, were dual: (A) to trace the contributions of the earliest generation of scholars, while their memory was still alive among their students (xi), and then to address the process as a result of which the turn in scholarship, the whole new profile of the scrolls, became both inevitable and crucial with the publication of all the finds that emerged from the caves (6); (B) to assess the significance of the geopolitical location of scholarship and the special contribution of the place where scholars lived and worked on their understanding of aspects of the Qumran finds (1). Each of the three major sections of the book—Scholarship in North America, in Israel, and in Europe—was organized according to this principle.

The essays are extremely successful at meeting the first objective. Indeed, considering the distinction of the authors invited to contribute, that is not surprising. This volume is an excellent survey of the history of scholarship on crucial issues concerning the Qumran finds, from the identification of the community, sectarian scrolls, Biblical scrolls, “Rewritten Bible,” non-sectarian texts, Jewish law, Aramaic texts, the scrolls and Christianity, and archaeology. In many instances, the authors of the essays wrote about their own contributions in the third person. This is a distinguished historiographic tradition, going back at least as far as Thucydides. On the other hand, it may sometimes remind the reader of Churchill’s quip that “history will be kind to me, as I intend to write it myself.” From that perspective, it may not be an accident that one of the most impressive essays, “American Scholarship on Jewish Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls (101-54)” was written by Alex P. Jassen, and dealt exclusively with the work of other scholars.

In addition, the essays offer a number of wonderful anecdotes about the first generation of Scrolls scholarship, from Omar, the cook at the American Schools in Jerusalem, who took the first phone call from Mar Samuel’s assistant, Butros Sowmy in 1947 (51), to Harry Orlinsky masquerading as “Mr. Green” to verify the authenticity of the scrolls purchased by Yigael Yadin (52 and 223). I was pleased to learn that I. D. Amussin, in his student days in St. Petersburg,
belonged to the literary circle of Anna Akhmatova, bringing Hebrew poetry to the group (632).

Concerning the second goal, the essays illuminate the significance of scholarly filiations—who taught whom. This is especially important for indicating the importance of the contributions of Frank Cross M. Jr. and John Strugnell and the many American students they taught at Harvard University. Much the same is true for the roles of Eliezer Sukenik, Yigael Yadin, and David Flusser in Israel.

However, the geographical distribution is sometimes arbitrary and does not reveal as much as one might want. Many Israeli scholars were frequent visitors at Harvard, where they collaborated with the faculty, including writing co-authored articles, such as Esther Eshel and Frank M. Cross Jr., “Ostraka from Khirbet Qumran,” *IEJ* 47 (1997): 17-28, which discussed one ostrakon with significant implications for the nature of the Qumran community (for the heated discussion this text evoked see the late Hanan Eshel’s essay in the volume under review, 394-95). In which geo-political or cultural context would this collaborative work fit?

At the same time, that so many of the authors wrote about their own work or about that of their teachers, left me feeling that an opportunity was missed. Many essays sound so calm and objective, as if no theological, political, or ideological commitments were ever in play in Qumran scholarship. For example, Burke Long wrote *The Planting and Reaping of Albright*, outlining the neo-orthodox outlook of William F. Albright and his students, their conviction that archaeological finds confirmed the truths of faith. This perspective was the object of fierce criticism by Morton Smith, who dubbed it pseudorthodoxy (*Studies in the Cult of Yahweh* 1.37-54). Frank M. Cross Jr. was one of Albright’s most devoted students. One would like to know how, if at all, neo-orthodoxy found its expression in his work on Qumran. Even if one concludes that this neo-orthodoxy was absent from Cross’ scholarship on the scrolls, that is a conclusion worth exploring and explaining.

Along similar lines, the role of the scrolls in closing the gap in Jewish texts written in the Land of Israel between the Mishnah and the Bible has a place in the Zionist narrative, as one more support for the claim of on-going and unbroken Jewish presence in the Land of Israel so central to Zionist ideology. Yet, aside from the mention of the fact that Eliezer Sukenik read the scrolls for the first time on November 29, 1947, the day the UN called for the creation of the State of Israel (237), this connection is not exploited. Indeed, quite the opposite: Dimant, following Tov, and against Nickelsburg (237, n. 2) insists that this fact had no impact on the objectivity of research. And this, despite the fact