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Chronicle: Recent Literature on Qumran

F.F. Bruce

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There was a time when the only books in English which could be recommended to inquirers who wished to be guided to literature on the Dead Sea Scrolls were Professor H. H. Rowley's excellent study, *The Zadokite Fragments and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Blackwell, 1952), and translations of two books by Professor A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Blackwell, 1952) and *The Jewish Sect of Qumran and the Essenes* (Vallentine, Mitchell & Co., 1954). Professor Rowley's book had all the marks of scholarship and good judgment which characterize his work; Professor Dupont-Sommer's books were also marked by fine scholarship, but judicial qualities were not so much in evidence, and the second volume presents a skilfully conducted 'phased withdrawal' from an untenable position taken up in the earlier book, where he suggested that the Servant Songs in Isaiah might actually have been composed in the light of the experiences of the Teacher of Righteousness, who (he was disposed to believe) suffered a martyr's death shortly before 63 B.C. The palaeographical evidence for dating the manuscript Isaiah A in the 2nd century B.C. would be sufficient to put this theory out of court. Still, the cause of learning has often been advanced by scholars who were prepared to take a risk and expose a brain-wave to the public scrutiny of others.

More recently, however, books on the Scrolls have been appearing ever-increasing abundance, and there is no doubt that there is a public appetite for them at present. This appetite was largely whetted by the appearance of Edmund Wilson's *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (W. H. Allen, 1955). Mr. Wilson is a well-known literary critic, and his book (an expanded version of a long article which he contributed to *The New Yorker* of May 14, 1955) provides a vivid account of the exploration of the caves and the finding of the scrolls, with vigorous pen-pictures of such personalities as Father de Vaux and the Syrian Archbishop Athanasius Yeshue Samuel. When he comes to an interpretation of the discoveries, he shows a decided preference for the views of Professor Dupont-Sommer, but agrees that the criticism of scholarly theories must be left to scholars. He has, however, a firm suspicion that scholar who are committed to the Christian or the Jewish faith (especially ministers) are beset by inhibitions which make it very difficult for them to appraise the significance of the discoveries objectively, and he has a curious

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notion that the subject is boycotted by New Testament scholars. It may be mildly suggested, however, that secular humanists can have their own inhibitions no less than committed Jews and Christians.

The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls, by A. Powell Davies (Signet Key Book, The New American Library, New York, 1956), has the weaknesses of Mr. Wilson's book without its merits (which are very real). Mr. Davies, formerly an English Methodist, is now pastor of a Unitarian church in Washington; and

his personal position in gospel studies may be inferred from the fact that the illustrations in his book include a photograph of Albert Schweitzer. But we do not hold the author responsible for the publishers' blurb, which describes the discovery of the Scrolls as 'the greatest challenge to Christian dogma since Darwin's theory of evolution'!

In reply to the 'tendency' of such books as these, a Marist priest, Father Geoffrey Graystone, has written a brief and unpretentious book entitled *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Originality of Christ* (Sneed and Ward, 1956). He concludes, quite rightly: 'The perusal of the scrolls side by side with the gospels and the New Testament does but bring into greater relief the uniqueness of Christ and the transcendence of the religion which he founded.' But Christians should remember that the uniqueness of Christ resides in His Person and work, whereas parallels to His sayings are forthcoming both before and after His time. Whatever affinities may be traced between the biblical interpretation current in the Qumran community and that which the early Church took over from her Founder, we may underline the real distinctiveness of Christianity by simply asking if anyone has ever found peace with God through the death of the Teacher of Righteousness, as millions have found it through the death of Jesus.

It is a pleasure to turn to a book which is not concerned with the presentation of a particular viewpoint, but, with a reliable statement of the facts about the discovery, contents and meaning of the Scrolls. This is Dr. Millar Burrows' *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Seeker and Warburg, 1956). Of all the works on the subject which have been published thus far, this is the one which can most confidently be recommended to -the general reader. It contains as an appendix a selection of some of the most significant Qumran texts in translation, and has a useful bibliography. Unfortunately, it has no index — a sad omission in a volume of 435 pages.

Mr. John M. Allegro of Manchester University, a member of the international team of scholars engaged in piecing together and deciphering the fragmentary documents in the Palestine Museum, had already hit the headlines by his provocative broadcasts on this subject before the appearance of his Pelican book *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Penguin Books, 1956). This is a most readable work, which brings out clearly the genuinely romantic element both in the discovery and acquisition of the Scrolls, and in their decipherment and significance. Mr. Allegro has had to take some hard knocks for running ahead of the documentary evidence, for example in his picture of the crucifixion of the Teacher of Righteousness at the hands of Alexander Jannaeus. He is probably right in identifying the Teacher's enemy, the 'Wicked Priest' of the Qumran texts, with Alexander Jannaeus (king of Judaea 103-76 B.C.), but it must be said that none of the documents thus far published gives us any information about the manner of the Teacher's death.

A member of the staff of Princeton Theological Seminary, Dr. Charles T. Fritsch, has reconstructed the life and history of the sect to which we owe these documents in *The Qumran Community* (Macmillan, New York, 1956). He identifies the community with a branch of the Essenes. He relates, the archaeological evidence for the abandonment of the community headquarters at Qumran during Herod's reign to the evidence in the *Zadokite Work* that the community migrated for some years to the neighbourhood of Damascus. In

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this connection reference should be made to a work which, while not directly concerned with Qumran, is very relevant to these studies — Professor Chaim Rabin's splendid edition of *The Zadokite Documents* in Hebrew text and English translation (Oxford, 1954).

A translation of a wide selection of the Qumran texts has been prepared by Dr. Theodor H. Caster: *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (Doubleday, New York, 1956). We understand that a British edition of this useful book will be published soon by Seeker and Warburg.

Dr. Hugh Schonfield, well known as historian of Jewish Christianity and

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New Testament translator, has expressed some original views in *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Valentine, Mitchell & Co., 1956). He propound an unusual time-sequence in dating the documents and the stages of the community's residence at Qumran; he snakes use of the principle of 'atbash as a key to unlock some of the mysteries contained in the texts, and he suggests that the reason for storing the manuscripts in the caves shortly before AD, 70 was not so much to protect them from the Romans as to make sure that the elect in the coming age of consummation might have all their disposal books which would give them all necessary enlightenment for the days in which they would live.

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