The Dead Sea Scrolls Today

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## CONTENTS

### Articles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zdzisław J. KAPERA, Józef Tadeusz Milik: The Scrollery's Fastest Man with a Fragment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre AUFFRET, Souviens-toi de ton assemblée! Étude structurale du Psaume 74</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geza VERMES, Reflections on Jesus the Jew, His World and His Religion</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krzysztof CIAŁÓWCZYK, Le plus ancien témoignage de la tradition du beb-sed?</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewa DZIURZYNSKA, Sources for the History of Oriental Studies in Poland in the Collections of the Cracow Branch of the Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henryk JANKOWSKI, Tama and Tamaq in Crimean Place Names</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witold MAŃCZAK, L'habitat primitif des Indo-Européens se trouvait-il vraiment en Arménie?</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara MICHALAK-PIKULSKA, Unembellished Reality: A View of Contemporary Life through stories by Walid ar-Rujayyib</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marek OLBRYCHT, Vardanes contra Gotarzes II: Einige Überlegungen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches ca. 40-51 n. Chr.</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara OSTAFIN, Adab Influences on Medieval Geographical Arab Literature</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrzej PISOWICZ, Frequency and Irregular Sound Change in Colloquial Persian</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dariusz ROZMUS, Marek SKOCZEK, So-jutische Realisken im kyrghischen Ajyl. Biographische Notizen über C. T. Ajmatov</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gábor TÁKÁCS, Note on the Name of King Narmer of the Egyptian Predynastic Period</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gábor TÁKÁCS, Materials for the Semantic Opposition in Egyptian and Alphabetic</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Review Essays:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bruno W. W. DOMBROWSKI, Notes on the Memorial Volume for Jan Safirewicz</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno W. W. DOMBROWSKI, Concerning Names and Numbers: On Articles in Centenary Volume I for Jerzy Kuryłowicz 1895-1978</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno W. W. DOMBROWSKI, Qumranologica IV</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno W. W. DOMBROWSKI, Qumranologica V</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reviews:

Alexander Demandt, Antike Staatsformen (by Bruno W. W. Dombrowski) 223
Bernd Wander, Trennungsprozesse zwischen Frühem Christentum und Judentum im 1. Jahrhundert u.Chr. (by Jürgen Zauggrenberg) 224
Marek Stachowski, Studien zum Wortschatz des altjüdischen Übersetzungsneuen Testaments (by Marzanna Pomorska) 227
Talat Tekin, Mehmet Ölnes, Türk Dilleri - Les Langues Turques (by Marek Stachowski) 229
Gilbert Lazard, Dictionnaire persan - français (by Barbara Mekarska) 233
Władysław Dulęba, The Cyrus Legend in the Šahname (by Dorota Opel) 234
James C. VanderKam, The Dead Sea Scrolls Today (by James F. McGrath) 235
Talal Tekin, Mehmed Ölnes, Turk Dilleri - Les Langues Turques (by Marek Stachowski) 229
Gilbert Lazard, Dictionnaire persan - français (by Barbara Mekarska) 233
Władysław Dulęba, The Cyrus Legend in the Šahname (by Dorota Opel) 234
James C. VanderKam, The Dead Sea Scrolls Today (by James F. McGrath) 235
Chronicle:

Magdalena RUTA, Bericht über die krakauer Konferenz „Juden und Judaismus in der modernen polnischen Forschung“ 241
The second part of the book is an attempt to explain the origin of some names which refer to people and places. W. Dulčba was trying to find some historical and sometimes mythical prototypes of some Sahnème characters. The author compared the Ferdousi’s genealogy of the Kayānī dynasty with the genealogies given by Bundahīs and Tabari. Many scholars agreed that Kayānī was a legendary dynasty and that Cyrus is a protoplast of Kay Xosrow in the epos.

These hypotheses and many others proposed by W. Dulčba or other scholars are quoted in *The Cyrus Legend in the Sahnème*. They are confirmed or denied by numerous quotations from the Sahnème and scientific sources.

The book is good review of ideas referring to historical and mythical motives in the Ferdousi’s Sahnème. It also tries to answer the question of whether and in which part legends about Cyrus the Great influenced Iranian epic and especially Sahnème.

Dorota OPEL


Hopefully, those who have felt a bit overwhelmed by the huge number of similar-sounding titles which have been published in recent years about the Dead Sea Scrolls will resist the urge to say, ‘Oh no, not another one’. For this book is neither another technical, detailed study of one or more documents or aspects of life at Qumran, nor another unscholarly sensationalist attempt to market some new conspiracy theory. Rather, VanderKam’s book fills a gap in the growing literature on Qumran, providing an up-to-date introduction to the scrolls, beginning with their discovery in 1947 through to the more recent scandals and controversies surrounding their publication, and providing a useful summary of their contents and their relevance to the study of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

VanderKam’s latest book is written specifically with students in mind, and it is thus not only lucid in its style of writing, but also unencumbered by footnotes or Hebrew and Greek scripts, and full of helpful photographs and diagrams. He begins his book by providing an account of the discovery of the scrolls and of the complicated and intriguing story which eventually led to the recognition of their significance to scholars of early Judaism and Christianity. Included in this section (pp. 1-27) is also a description of the manuscripts, artefacts and various archaeological finds uncovered in connection with the discovery of the scrolls, together with a useful summary of the different methods (such as palaeography and accelerator mass spectrometry) used to date the scrolls, and a list (provided on p. 18) of the (sometimes divergent)
results reached through them. Students are too rarely provided with this sort of background information concerning how conclusions are reached about the data of these and other documents, and VanderKam’s concern for such detail and background information assures that this book will be of lasting value.

The next section of the book is an overview of the contents of the scrolls, describing briefly the Biblical, apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts found in the Qumran caves as well as the other documents which appear to be the community’s own compositions. The student will find here helpful descriptions of the finds, with a summary of their contents and some discussion of their importance. The frequent inclusion of segments of text from the manuscripts under discussion enables the book to stand on its own, without the need for constant reference back to a separate translation of the scrolls. This section strikes a healthy balance, providing neither texts in isolation nor detailed verse-by-verse commentary, but a selection of the most important and interesting texts coupled with a brief discussion of possible historical allusions in the text, their probable setting in history and an explanation of any phrases which are particularly important or difficult to understand.

VanderKam then proceeds to a discussion covering two chapters (pp. 71-119) of the nature of the Qumran community. Like the majority of scholars, VanderKam upholds the view that the Qumran community were a group of monastic Essenes, but he does not assume that his reader will share his view, and takes the time to discuss the matter in reasonable detail, presenting a number of parallels between the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves and other ancient authors, such as Pliny, Josephus and Philo. The apparent differences are also mentioned, but are put in perspective in relation to the very large number of similarities and exact parallels. However, other theories concerning who the scrolls’ authors may have been and concerning the relationship between the settlement at Qumran and the scrolls which were found in the caves are not ignored but are given a fair treatment. The community’s beliefs are also discussed, under the headings: ‘Predeterminism’, ‘The Two Ways’, ‘The Community of the New Covenant’, ‘Scriptural Interpretation’, ‘Worship’ and ‘The End and the Messiah’.

VanderKam’s two remaining chapters are devoted to a discussion of the relationship between the scrolls and the study of the Old and New Testaments. In connection with the former, the discussion of the importance of the scrolls for the textual criticism of the Old Testament is particularly helpful. In connection with the New Testament, the relationship between the scrolls and Christianity is given a fair, balanced discussion, with such recent allegations as that the Qumran community were a group of Christians following their crucified Davidic Messiah carefully and honestly evaluated and debunked.

Scholars looking for new and ground-breaking suggestions are likely to be disappointed; scholars looking for a balanced and thorough textbook to recommend to their students, on the other hand, will be delighted and will probably feel (as a number of prominent reviewers have already stated in no uncertain terms) that VanderKam has, if not going looking for this. It is not to say that there is no number of instances, such as the question of Similitudes of Enoch, the Book of Giants, and the student and lecturer alike will probably wish had been provided than the brief treatment in paragraphs on p. 38). However, any mention of such oversimplified discussions of most important subjects, p. shows VanderKam to be a master of summary of information and, without assuming any knowledge of the most important foundation for the Scrolls. Students (and their lecturers), in related fields who are in need of a brief reference work, will all welcome the book and his attempt to do so. can only be deemed


In his preface to the third edition of Ludwig Koehler’s and Walter Baumgartner’s Lexicon zum Alten Testament, Kohler-Reymond (E. J. Brill, Leiden· New York 1990) again expresses his view that the aim of the work is “an orderly account of the scrolls” (p. xi) and his attempt to do so can only be deemed

1 Originally having been published as a bilingual text (hence HAL) was subsequently split into versions in German and Latin under the supervision of Prof. J. J. Stamm and Prof. K. T. Galling. The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon to the Old Testament in English is the same as for the German version (E. J. Brill 1990).
The student will find here helpful de­
scription covering two chapters (pp. 71-
237) of the community. Like the majority of scholars.
uncertain terms) that VanderKam has provided just what they have been
looking for. This is not to say that the book is without shortcomings. In a
number of instances, such as the question of the relationship between the
Similitudes of Enoch, the Book of Giants and the rest of the Enochian corpus,
student and lecturer alike will probably wish that something more substantial
had been provided than the brief treatment given by VanderKam (in this
particular case, for example, his treatment covers less than two short
paragraphs on p. 38). However, any minor failings one might detect are
overshadowed by VanderKam’s lucid style and generally useful and fair
treatments of most important subjects, provided in a way that on the whole
shows VanderKam to be a master of summary, providing just the right amount
of information and, without assuming any prior knowledge, brings the reader
to the most important foundation topics in the study of the Dead Sea
Scrolls. Students (and their lecturers), interested laypeople, and scholars in
related fields who are in need of a brief but thorough introduction and
reference work, will all welcome the arrival of VanderKam’s book. His
expressed aim (p. xi) is to follow in Luke's footsteps and provide his reader
with “an orderly account” of the scrolls’ discovery, contents and publication,
and his attempt to do so can only be deemed a great success.

James F. McGrath