

# Introduction: Dead Sea Scrolls Research in Oxford

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The study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, of the history and literature of ancient Judaism, and of the New Testament and early Christianity was dramatically energized by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls shortly after World War II. Certain areas of research in these three fields of inquiry changed out of all recognition. In other areas, however, perhaps particularly within biblical studies, the disciplinary gains in understanding were not always consolidated, and have sometimes appeared in recent years to give way to a renewed balkanization of subdisciplines and specializations.

To counteract this perceived loss of dialogue and awareness, the essays in this collection bear witness to a fruitful and sustained interdisciplinary collaboration on the Dead Sea Scrolls that took place in Oxford during the academic year 2018-2019. An important additional aim of the collaboration was to refresh and energize Oxford's long-standing traditions of excellence in the interdisciplinary study of the Scrolls. The project actively involved three of the University's weekly research seminars – in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (Najman), Jewish History and Literature in the Graeco-Roman World (Goodman), and New Testament (Bockmuehl) – and culminated in a shared day conference in June 2019. Numerous Oxford graduate students as well as senior local and international speakers contributed to the success of this initiative. We are delighted to be able to gather some of the fruits of our collaboration in this special issue of *Revue de Qumran*, thanks to a generous invitation from its Director Prof. Jean-Sébastien Rey and his Editorial Board.

The remainder of this Introduction provides an overview designed to place the essays in this collection in their context of conversation. This overview in turn is followed by Martin Goodman's reflections on the intellectual impact of Scrolls research in Oxford over the 40 years or more of his own involvement here – a personal note complementing the history of scholarship represented in the first main article by George J. Brooke.

Although it has not been possible to include all the papers presented over the course of the project, the present half-dozen do offer a flavour of its distinctive achievement. They include the exciting voices of key early-career scholars along with two long-standing external friends of Oxford Scrolls research, whose papers contribute the disciplinary perspective of senior statesmen in the field. At a time when biblical scholars too often opt for safety behind conventional (and what Martin Goodman below calls “self-referential”) disciplinary boundaries and competences, these essays venture forth on a wider intellectual canvas – engaging the resonant and nuanced relationships of texts and traditions across the Scrolls with the Hebrew Bible, Philo of Alexandria, apocalyptic literature, the New Testament, the Tannaitic rabbis, and more.

### **George J. Brooke, Dead Sea Scrolls Scholarship in Oxford: Past, Present and Future**

First delivered at the concluding day conference in June 2019, George Brooke’s paper opens this collection with a magisterial survey of Oxford’s contribution to the history of Dead Sea Scrolls Scholarship. Beginning with Godfrey R. Driver, Chaim Rabin and Cecil Roth in the late 1940s and 1950s, Oxford scholars contributed to preliminary and often experimental attempts to narrow down the Scrolls’ likely period of origin and ideological home. Might they belong to the period of late antiquity (Driver)? Were they the product of a previously known Jewish group like the Zealots or Zadokites (Roth, Driver), Pharisees (Rabin) or perhaps the Essenes, as increasing numbers of scholars preferred? Among Driver’s students of this period who went on to influential work in the Scrolls was Preben H.C. Wernberg-Møller (initially appointed to a post at Manchester before later returning to Oxford). Driver also nominated his young students John M. Allegro and John Strugnell for the editorial team working on the Scrolls at Jerusalem’s Palestine Archaeological Museum, where they went on to exercise positions of influence and prominence for several decades.

Oxford’s other major involvement with the Scrolls in the 1950s came through the commitment of Oxford University Press to the definitive *editio princeps* of the Scrolls through its series Discoveries in the Judaean Desert (40 vols, 1955-2009).

Moving on to what he calls the ‘middle period’ of Dead Sea Scrolls study in Oxford, Brooke rightly highlights the towering influence of Geza Vermes, both in post for nearly a quarter of a century (1965-1991) and continuing for many years in retirement. Aside

from his influential but largely unconnected series of books on the historical Jesus and his role in the comprehensive revision of Emil Schürer's *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (4 vols 1973-1987), Vermes became best known for successive editions of his translation (*The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*) and of an Introduction to the Dead Sea Scrolls. He joined the official editorial team for the Scrolls in 1991. Distinguished collaborators on the “the revised Schürer” included Martin Goodman and Philip Alexander, both of whom continued to pursue and support relevant research in Oxford after Vermes's retirement. Two of his doctoral students, Jonathan Campbell and Timothy Lim, went on to build influential careers around the study of the Scrolls. The same was true for George Brooke and Daniel Falk, who worked at the Oxford Centre of Hebrew and Jewish Studies as Kennicott Fellows in the 1970s and 1990s, respectively.

After a temporary ‘lull’ in study of the Scrolls, Brooke discerns at present a fresh stimulus to Oxford Scrolls scholarship dating from Martin Goodman's collaboration with more recently appointed colleagues Markus Bockmuehl, Jan Joosten and Hindy Najman. The resulting stimulus of work on the Scrolls has benefited from their distinctive interests in tradition and commentary in early Christianity, the history of Hebrew lexicography and the text of the Hebrew and Greek Bible, and the interpretative processes of scriptural production and transmission in the Second Temple period.

This newly energized enterprise has been further strengthened in important ways by associated postdoctoral scholars including Arjen Bakker, Yael Fisch, Daniel Schumann and John Screnock – who contribute the following four studies to the present collection. These essays by early career scholars exemplify something of this joint project's interdisciplinarity in related but distinctive ways. Each one highlights a case study of scriptural interpretation and appropriation in the Scrolls by relating this to one or more bodies of cognate biblical, Jewish or Christian texts.

### **Arjen Bakker, Pursuit of Wisdom and Cultivation of the Self in Ancient Judaism**

While the characterization of ‘wisdom literature’ in ancient Israel and early Judaism has become newly controversial in recent years, a pre-occupation with literary genres may miss the philosophical and theological characterization of wisdom as a fruitful and productive area of inquiry. Arjen Bakker's contribution draws attention to the pursuit of divine wisdom as a way of life in the Dead Sea *Yahad* (particularly in 1QS and

4QInstruction) and in Philo's account of the life of the Therapeutae near Alexandria (in *On the Contemplative Life*). Both communities engage in daily ascetical study of the deeper meaning of the Scriptures in order to obtain knowledge, seeking the fellowship of the angels in their quest for holiness. They share a concern for Torah, ritual and ethics as an integral concern for holiness, education and separation from the multitude.

### **Yael Fisch, “Midrash-Pesher”: A Shared Technique of Interpretation in Qumran, Paul, and the Tannaim**

The project's rich interdisciplinary potential is further illustrated by Yael Fisch's comparative study of the distinctive hermeneutical technique that she proposes to designate by repurposing the term “midrash-pesher”. She sees here a tool of biblical interpretation that is shared both with Paul's letter to the Romans and especially with at least 50 rabbinic texts of the Tannaitic period. For each of these instantiations, the lemmatization of the scriptural verse is linked by repeated demonstrative pronouns to an interpretation that is thereby typically interlaced throughout the citation.

Although the designation “midrash pesher” was in the past rightly rejected by scholarship as an implausible hybrid between a rabbinic genre and a feature of the so-called pesher commentaries, Fisch argues that in fact the associated rhetorical form functions effectively both in the Damascus Document and in the Nahum Pesher. The use of an analogous technique for the interpretation of Deut 30.12-14 in Romans 10.6-8 has been discussed more widely by Lim and others.

Fisch draws particular attention to the frequency of examples with similar demonstrative pronouns in Tannaitic literature. What she calls “midrash-pesher” may (as at Qumran or in Paul) or may not (as typically in Tannaitic literature) have an eschatological point of reference. What matters more in this regard is that in each case the proposed interpretation is comprehensive in its constitution of a fully sympathetic and harmonious relationship between the text and its “contemporized” scriptural meaning. Unlike at Qumran or in the New Testament, In Tannaitic discourse this meaning is no longer depicted as univocal. These and other contrasts illustrate that this same “midrash-pesher” tool can be put to different uses in these three bodies of literature.

### **Daniel Schumann, The Eschatologization of the Exodus Narrative in *1 Enoch* 1–5**

Noting the extent to which prophetic texts like Isa 43-44, Hos 11 and Ezek 20 redeploy aspects of the Exodus narrative in eschatological terms, Daniel Schumann finds a similar exegetical appropriation in play for the Book of Watchers, in *1 Enoch* 1-5 (seen here as marked by the turmoil of the Ptolemaic era). He locates this redeployment particularly in the initiation of a new exodus associated with the language of a call to the wilderness and the eschatological renewal of the cosmic theophany at Sinai. Linking this to *1 Enoch*'s earliest identifiable reception history in the Qumran community, Schumann documents the extent to which members of the *Yahad* construed their identity around the notion that they were called to a period of exile in the wilderness in advance of the promised redemption in Jerusalem. With or without the context of an eschatological battle along the lines of Ezek 38, this textual re-appropriation of the Exodus expresses the conviction that God would once again deliver Israel from oppression by foreign nations.

### **John Screnock, A Reading of Psalm 104:1–13 according to the Text Contained in 4QPsalms<sup>d</sup>**

John Screnock's study develops a close philological reading of Psalm 104, based for this purpose not on the Leningrad Masoretic manuscript but on the text represented in 4QPsalms<sup>d</sup>. Traditional interpretations of this Psalm tend to foreground its role primarily as reprising the creation account in Genesis 1. By contrast, Screnock underscores the Qumran text's apparent concern to move the frame of reference from the past to the present. On this account, the reader is repeatedly invited to reflect on the possibility that the Creator exercises an abiding and all-pervasive role in *creatio continua*: that is to say, God not only created the world in the past but continues at all times to exercise his creative power in sustaining and establishing it. As Screnock notes, this is a point made more explicit in 11QPs<sup>a</sup> 26 ('Hymn to the Creator') and indeed in several later Jewish and Christian liturgical expressions.

### **Eibert Tigchelaar, The Hodayot: Scrolls, Compositions, and Collections**

In his concluding essay, Eibert Tigchelaar supplements the relative breadth and *longue durée* of George Brooke's survey of Scrolls research in Oxford by critically engaging contemporary scholarship on one set of texts in particular: the Qumran Hymns or

*Hodayot*. Tigchelaar begins by analyzing different models of their interpretation in publications since the work of Stegemann, Puech and Schuller in the 1990s as well as Harkins since the mid-2000s. His critique of these and other more recent attempts to reconstruct the composition and collection of the *Hodayot* stresses the need for further research (not least on the reconstruction of 1QH<sup>a</sup> 2-8), before going on to illustrate the extent to which contemporary interpretation of these Hymns has been a function of particular models and assumptions about the composition and collection of texts.

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→ Insert Martin Goodman, “Oxford and the Dead Sea Scrolls”