Review of The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation, edited by Peter W. Flint

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This volume is another contribution to the Eerdmans series Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature. The essays are loosely gathered around the topic “The Bible at Qumran,” and the editor has divided the articles into two groups. Part 1, “The Scriptures, the Canon, and the Scrolls,” includes articles by J.A. Sanders, B.W. Waltke, E. Ulrich, C.A. Evans, and the editor, P.W. Flint. The contributors to Part 2, “Biblical Interpretation and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” are J.C. VanderKam, C.A. Evans, J.E. Bowley, J.M. Scott, M.G. Abegg, and R.W. Wall. Unlike other volumes of collected essays in this series, which have highlighted the work of a single author or published the proceedings of a particular conference, this collection has a more disparate origin. Some contributions were given as papers at the Dead Sea Scrolls Institute of Trinity Western University (Bowley, Ulrich, VanderKam and Wall), one (Waltke) is reprinted from The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), and the rest (Abegg, Evans, Flint, Sanders and Scott) were invited for the volume.

There are several excellent individual contributions to this volume. In particular the articles of Flint, VanderKam and Abegg stand out. Flint’s essay, “Noncanonical Writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Apocrypha, Other Previously Known Writings, Pseudepigrapha,” argues cogently for new definitions of the terms “Apocrypha” and “Pseudepigrapha” in light of the Qumran discoveries. His proposed definition of “Apocrypha” is especially sound: “Jewish works of the Second Temple period that are excluded from the Hebrew Bible but are included in the Old Testaments of some, but not all churches” (p. 86). Flint goes on to an excellent discussion of which texts, whether canonical now or not, had scriptural status and authority in the Qumran community. The article by VanderKam, “The Interpretation of Genesis in 1 Enoch,” does a good job of exploring its topic in a semi-popular mode, and would be an excellent assignment in an undergraduate classroom. “4QMMT, Paul, and ‘Works of the Law’,” by Abegg, makes use of 4QMMT to illuminate the thought of the Apostle Paul. Abegg’s conclusion is that in 4QMMT obedience to the Law is not “the entrance into a relationship with God,” but is the consequence of that relationship and the way it is maintained. Further, 4QMMT’s position is essentially in
agreement with Paul’s in Galatians. Abegg illustrates how the Qumran discoveries are (or should be) changing the face of NT scholarship.

The chief weakness of this volume is that the essays do not hang together as a collection. Some address the topic of the book, the Bible at Qumran, squarely (i.e., Ulrich, Flint, Bowley, Scott and Abegg), while the others make little or no mention of the Qumran literature (i.e., Sanders, Waltke, Evans, VanderKam and Wall). Several of the articles (i.e., Sanders, Waltke, Wall and Evans’ first article) have a strong Christian theological bias, jarring in a volume that purports to focus on Qumran. Perhaps a better title would have indicated the wider scope of the essays, which really encompass the Bible and its shape and interpretation from second temple times through the second century CE.

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These volumes mark a re-release which is intended, firstly, to be a paperback edition of the volumes that originally appeared in 1997–1998 (despite the dates of publication, the paperback of both volumes was released in 1999) and, secondly, to incorporate corrections of errors in the hardback edition that had been noted by the editors and brought to their attention by colleagues and reviewers. As the present reviewer has already commented on the basic format, structure, and purpose of _The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition_ (hereafter _DSSSE_; see the review in _DSD_ 6 [1999] 204–215), it bears at the outset to reiterate that the paperback _DSSSE_, as its predecessor, remains a most useful and helpful tool for scholars and students alike.

It remains in this review (a) to note corrections and other improvements that the editors have made; (b) to ascertain the degree to which errors in the text still exist; and (c) to offer some reflections about the translation, both in its correspondence to the text and in its inherent quality.

(a) Corrections and Improvements Made. The paperback edition has