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Review of: Solving the Mysteries of the Dead Sea Scrolls: New Light on the Bible, by Edward M. Cook

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BOOK REVIEWS

Solving the Mysteries of the Dead Sea Scrolls: New Light on the Bible, by Edward M. Cook. Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994. Pp. 191. \$12.99; £6.99. ISBN 0-310-38471-0 (Zondervan); 0-85634-542-6 (Paternoster).

Edward M. Cook's new book makes an excellent addition to the growing list of "introductions" to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Aimed primarily at a Christian lay and clerical audience, it succeeds admirably in leading its readers through the labyrinthine world of Scroll scholarship and controversy.

The book divides itself into two uneven parts. In the first part, chapters 1-4, Cook deals with the discovery of the Scrolls in 1947 and the subsequent history of their decipherment and (often delayed) publication. Cook's treatment of this controversial topic is the most fair and even-handed I have ever read; he has done meticulous research, reading many accounts of the Scrolls, from Edmund Wilson's in the 1950's to the latest journal articles from 1993. The result is a highly readable account of the finding and purchase of the Scrolls, the appointment of an international team of scholars to decipher and publish them, the delays in publication (including the results of the Six Day War in 1967, when most of the Scroll fragments fell into Israeli hands), and the controversy surrounding then editor-in-chief John Strugnell and the release of the photographs in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Cook is objective and fair throughout, but particularly striking is his sympathetic portrayal of the original seven member editorial team. Cook praises the enormous amount of work done by these men in deciphering and identifying the 15,000 fragments from Cave 4, particularly acknowledging the brilliance of Milik, Strugnell, and Cross. Nevertheless, he questions the extraordinarily slow pace of publication in the 1960's and 70's that led to the storm of controversy in the 1980's.

In the second part of the book (chapters 5-8), Cook outlines the various theories concerning the community of the Scrolls and their origins, and then elucidates several connections between the Scrolls and the New Testament. On the subject of "who wrote the Scrolls?", Cook describes the major theories identifying the authors with the Essenes, the Sadducees, and the Zealots, and connects these theories with the archaeological finds at Qumran as well as the Scroll data (there has recently been renewed interest in the interpretation of the site of Qumran, and unfortunately Cook is here already outdated; for example, the work of Jean-Baptiste Humbert, de Vaux's successor, is not included). In the

end, Cook adheres to the high probability of the Essene hypothesis, nuanced by new readings from the Scrolls.

It is in the last section, the connection of the Scrolls to the New Testament, where Cook is at his weakest. This is less because of his treatment of the Scrolls than of his treatment of the New Testament, which he tends to approach uncritically. While he does an excellent job of discussing (and refuting) the theories of various scholars such as Thiering, Eisenman, and O'Callaghan, his own discussion of the connections between the evidence of the Scrolls and that of the New Testament does not take into account current New Testament scholarship. For example, Cook claims that since the Scrolls provide us with evidence of trilingualism in 1st century CE Palestine, it is therefore "plausible" that Mary may have composed the hymn in Luke 1:46-55! This statement ignores the complexities of current Lukan scholarship.

The last paragraph notwithstanding, this book would be an excellent reference for the non-specialist, and also for the undergraduate library. I have one suggestion for future editions: the presentation of the book would be improved by the inclusion of a bibliography, obviating the necessity of searching through the footnotes for Cook's copious references.