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Introduction to *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran and the Concept of a Library*

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Introduction

In the early years following the discovery the manuscripts in the eleven caves in the vicinity of Khirbet Qumran many scholars casually used the term “library” when referring to the Qumran Scrolls. F.M. Cross, for example, entitled his 1958 survey *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, while J.T. Milik named chapter two of his *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* “The Qumrân Library.”¹ More recently authors have shied away from the word “library,” preferring the more neutral terms “corpus,” “collection,” or simply “scrolls.”² However, the question of whether or not the corpus of manuscripts unearthed in the Qumran caves constitute a library has ramifications for how those scrolls are understood, the purpose of the settlement at Qumran, the identity of the inhabitants of Qumran, and when and why the scrolls were deposited in the caves. Therefore, the aim of this volume is to examine the question of whether or not the Qumran corpus constituted a library through a variety of lenses, taking into consideration historical, literary and archaeological/material evidence in an attempt to arrive at a conclusion. But any reader hoping to find a definitive answer will be disappointed, since it will become apparent that not all the scholars represented in this volume agree. This is, we feel, as it should be with any question for which the available evidence is so partial and fragmentary, as is the evidence of the Qumran scrolls.³

The volume opens with two programmatic essays, by Devorah Dimant and Årstein Justnes. Dimant, who was the first to attempt a survey of the entire Qumran corpus,⁴ here pays special attention to the differences between sectarian and non-sectarian texts, arguing that the sectarian texts can no longer be seen as reflecting a small sect on the fringes of Jewish society. Justnes approaches the question posed by this volume from the perspective of modern

1 Frank Moore Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958). J.T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* (trans. J. Strugnell; Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1959).

2 Emanuel Tov, e.g., in his *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (STDJ 54; Leiden: Brill, 2004) writes, “For most aspects discussed below, it is probably immaterial whether or not the Qumran corpus as a whole or the texts from cave 4 alone should be considered a library” (p. 4).

3 Another drawback to arriving at a definitive conclusion is the fact that all the evidence from de Vaux’s 1950s excavations at Qumran has not been fully published, although progress has been made in that direction.

4 Devorah Dimant, “The Qumran Manuscripts: Contents and Significance,” in D. Dimant and L.H. Schiffman, *Time to Prepare the Way in the Wilderness* (STDJ 16; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 23–58.

library science. He analyzes the effect that the classification system used to label the manuscripts from the Judean Desert, reified in the series *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*, has had on the understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls as ancient Jewish artifacts.

The next section examines the Greco-Roman context of the Qumran scrolls. Monica Berti provides an overview of libraries in the Hellenistic world, concentrating especially on the Library at Alexandria. Her article provides a backdrop for the papers of Corrado Martone and Ian Werrett, who compare the Qumran corpus to libraries from the ancient Near East and Mediterranean. Werrett's article begins with the material evidence from sites such as Pergamum and Ephesus, where buildings clearly identified as libraries have been excavated; he goes on to investigate the classical sources describing the Essenes, and finally describes the physical features of the site of Qumran to determine if anything there resembles a known Greco-Roman library. Martone goes farther afield, taking into consideration ancient Near Eastern collections such as Assurbanipal's library in Nineveh and the Ebla corpus, as well as Alexandria. He also considers Second Temple written evidence, such as 2 Macc 2:13–14 and the Letter of Aristeas, for the existence of a Temple library.

The next group of papers studies the Qumran collection as a whole with an eye to determining if it should be classified as a "library." Sidnie White Crawford examines the evidence for scribes and libraries in the ancient Near East, including post-exilic Judah, and then uses that data to defend the notion that the Qumran collection forms a coherent entity deserving of the "library" label. Stephen Pfann, on the other hand, focuses on the differences among the corpora found in the various caves, especially the calendar texts, and argues that there is not one "Qumran collection," but several. Stephen Reed's article calls attention to the fact that the Qumran scrolls are found in three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and uses sociological method to suggest that the linguistic diversity of the Qumran scrolls points to different collections. Finally, Mladen Popović investigates the scroll deposit at Qumran from a rural and regional perspective, comparing it with other text deposits found in the Judean Desert, arguing for the "scholarly or school-like" quality of the Qumran collection.

Helen Jacobus and Daniel Machiela, in the third section, investigate specific subsets within the collection as a whole, teasing out the implications of these "collections within the collection" for our understanding of the corpus as a whole. Finally, in the last article, Armin Lange contends that the evidence of the "biblical" manuscripts in the Qumran library (a label that he accepts) points to a process of textual standardization for the Hebrew Scriptures taking place in the late Second Temple period.

The majority of these papers were presented at a special session of the International Society of Biblical Literature meeting in Amsterdam in 2012. We would like to thank the Society of Biblical Literature, especially Charles Haws, for facilitating such a productive meeting. We owe our thanks to George Brooke for accepting this volume into the series *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*, and we have benefitted greatly from his editorial advice, as well as that of Mattie Kuiper of Brill.

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