

THE HABAKKUK SCROLL AND A CONTROVERSY

There is no need to retell the story of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in a cave to the northwest of the Dead Sea, or to recount the bitter dispute which has raged over the dating of the manuscripts. As to the latter, a greater serenity is noticeable in the articles appearing at the present time and the limits of debate seem generally to have been brought down to those suggested by the C¹⁴ radioactivity tests on the cloth with which the Scrolls were wrapped.¹ When we add to the results of this experiment the data of archaeology, which strongly favors a Hellenistic dating, and palaeography, which points in the same direction, any further skepticism on the great antiquity and value of the Scrolls is wholly unwarranted.

It is also clear by now that the Scrolls which have been recovered form but a part of a larger collection, much of which may be lost forever. On the basis of a thorough excavation of the Cave of Ain Feshkha and a careful assemblage of the pottery fragments, Père de Vaux estimates that the original cache contained, at the minimum, fifty jars stored with manuscripts. The numerous literary fragments scattered about the Cave lend weight to this opinion.² Though all agree that some of the manuscripts and fragments are older than others, there is no reason for postulating a radical chronological difference between them. The material belongs, within certain limits, to one chronological period and to one religious sect. The exact nature of this sect is now the subject of many studies, with the weight of scholarly opinion favoring some form of Essenism.³ So much for the general picture presented by those who are working on the new material.

A gratifying feature of this great discovery has been the effort to acquaint the general public with the importance of the Scrolls for both Old and New Testament studies. To the credit of the American Schools of Oriental Research, special lectures, exhibits, and news releases have provided trustworthy information on the Scrolls for the American public. The large and

¹ For the report of O. R. Sellers on the results of the tests made at the University of Chicago, see *Biblical Archaeologist*, XIV (1951), 29. On January 9, 1951, Professor Libby, who has developed the new method of radiocarbon dating, submitted the following report to the Director of the Oriental Institute: "We have completed a measurement on the linen wrapping from the Scrolls which you furnished us on Nov. 14, 1950. . . . The date obtained is 1917, plus or minus 200 years, or 33 A.D., plus or minus 200."

² Roland de Vaux, *Revue biblique*, LVI (1949), 586-609. It is regrettable that Harding and de Vaux were anticipated by unauthorized and clandestine visitors to the cave sometime in 1948.

³ See W. H. Brownlee in *Biblical Archaeologist*, XIII (1950), 50-72. A comparison is made between the tenets of this sect and those of pre-Christian sects which are known to have existed in Palestine.

cultivated French reading-public has never wanted for scholars capable of presenting scientific results in a clear and attractive style. The Dead Sea Scrolls are no exception; hardly had the American Schools published the first volume of texts⁴ than Professor Dupont-Sommer of the Sorbonne issued a preliminary study of the Scrolls which was aimed at the popular level.⁵

Its purpose was twofold: to introduce the Scrolls and their discovery to the French public, and to propound a theory which the author was led in one place to characterize as *hallucinant*, not a very happy adjective in the present context. The first part of the little brochure is of no special interest to us, since the work of orientation has been done as well if not better by American scholars who have enjoyed immediate contact with the Scrolls and who have taken the lead in their publication and interpretation. In the second part, however, the author offers an altogether novel interpretation of the sect on whose library the bedouin stumbled five years ago, an interpretation which no student of Christian origins can let pass unnoticed. For this reason few were surprised when, several months ago, M. Delcor published a popular essay on DSH in the well-known *Lectio divina* series of monographs.⁶ M. Delcor is to be ranged among those who have from the beginning vigorously challenged the hypothesis of Dupont-Sommer, and the importance of the question has given to his little volume both a note of urgency and an apologetic slant. The enthusiastic reception accorded to the startling views of Dupont-Sommer by a part of the French public more than justified Delcor's book. Nor has he been alone in riding to the attack. A swelling number of articles and reviews criticising the position of Dupont-Sommer has supplemented the work of Delcor. From all this it is to be hoped that the weight of sound critical judgment will redress the balance which was upset by a hasty work of popularization.

What is the picture given us by Dupont-Sommer? Its keystone is DSH, a midrashic commentary on certain passages of Habakkuk, the Minor Prophet.⁷ This Scroll forms the hard core of Dupont-Sommer's historical

⁴ *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery*, I (American Schools of Oriental Research; New Haven, 1950). In keeping with the now commonly accepted terminology it will be useful to note the following abbreviations: DS = Dead Sea Scrolls; DSD = The Sectarial Manual of Discipline; DSH = The Habakkuk Commentary; DST = The Thanksgiving Psalms; DSIa = The St. Mark's Isaias Manuscript; DSIIb = The Hebrew University Isaias Manuscript.

⁵ A. Dupont-Sommer, *Aperçus préliminaires sur les manuscrits de la mer morte* (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1950), 125 pp.

⁶ M. Delcor, *Le midrash d'Habacuc* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1951), 83 pp.

⁷ For the hermeneutical principles employed or presupposed in DSH, see W. H. Brownlee in *Bibl. Arch.*, XIV (1951), 54-76. Delcor prefers to call the Scroll a midrash because

reconstruction, together with the striking parallels which he presumes to detect between this Jewish sect and Christianity. After giving a general summary of his views we will examine a few of the reasons he assigns for his conclusions, with special attention to the translation on which all conclusions must necessarily be based. In Dupont-Sommer's opinion the Jewish sect flourished in the first century before the Christian era, and the sect is Essenian. Its founder is the Teacher of Justice, met many times in DSH, and it is in this Teacher that Dupont-Sommer sees a most amazing likeness to our Lord, so amazing in fact that Christianity can be said to depend to a great extent on the former, from which it has borrowed much in its portrayal of Christ. It is easy to see that the originality of Christianity is jeopardized by such a position, which also recalls the old thesis of Renan that Christianity is but a derivative of Essenism.

This Teacher of Justice would have been put to death in 65-63 B.C., just before the taking of Jerusalem by Pompey on the Feast of the Atonement, in 63. The Commentary would have been redacted around 41 B.C.; the sect, after the death of its founder and the flight to Damascus, would have returned to Judea around 37 B.C., where it was finally dispersed at the time of the Jewish War and final destruction of Jerusalem in 66-70 A.D. This Teacher of Justice, whose passion and death (even to the stripping of his garments) so resembles that of our Lord, leads Dupont-Sommer to affirm that he was, without any doubt, thought of as a divine being who became incarnate in order to live and die as a man. He had returned once, after his death, to "visit" Jerusalem; he would return a second time to judge all the nations. Furthermore, the sect looked upon him as the Messiah who preached penance, poverty, chastity, humility, the love of our neighbor, and salvation by faith in him. Even the central act of his cultus would have been a Supper. In view of all these astonishing parallels, where the direction of the borrowing can scarcely be in doubt, Dupont-Sommer would invite scholars to reconsider the problem of Christian origins, and he has duly warned them to be prepared for what he calls a *cascade de révolutions*.

The general historical reconstruction of Dupont-Sommer should be considered first. As is clear from the summary above, he places the events in the life of the sect and the Teacher of Justice in the Roman period. This brings us to the internal evidence of DSH and the question of the *Kittim*, mentioned so many times in the short commentary and providing one key to the historical background of the work. Can we identify these *Kittim* and put them in a definite historical context? A typical passage in which they

of the exegetical method which characterizes this work. Others refer to it simply as a commentary or as the Interpretation Scroll.

appear is found in column iii of DSH where verses six and seven of the first chapter of Habakkuk are interpreted. The translation runs as follows: "To inherit dwellings which are not his; he is dreadful and frightful, his justice and his honor depart from him. Its interpretation concerns the Kittim, the fear and dread of whom are upon all nations and whose purpose is to work evil inasmuch as they walk with all people with wiliness and deceit."⁸ M. Dupont-Sommer believes that the *Kittim* of this passage can only be the Romans, and for confirmation he refers to the Septuagint version of Dan. 11:30 where the *Kittim* are identified as Romans. But H. L. Ginsberg has already pointed out that, in the Daniel passage, the Septuagint translation of *Kittim* as "Romans" is simply a Roman-age identification or, better, interpretation of the word.⁹ This late Septuagint equation does not prove that, at the time of the composition of Dan. 11:30, the Romans were called *Kittim*. The strange word clearly allows a good deal of elasticity in interpretation. Thus we have the Jews of the Hellenistic period naturally construing *Kittim* as Macedonians, two examples of which are found in I Macc. 1:1 and 8:5. In the second of these texts the *Kittim* (Macedonian Greeks) are contrasted with the Romans as conquered and conqueror!

Dupont-Sommer was quite willing to admit that the *Kittim* in the Hebrew University Scroll, *The Wars of the Children of Light etc.*, were the Seleucid and Ptolemaic Greeks. In fact, he went so far as to date the manuscript in the Hellenistic period precisely because of this chronological indication. Why not the same for DSH? His answer is that the *Kittim* in DSH are described with certain characteristics which put their identity with the Romans beyond doubt. There is, for example, the mention of the *Kittim* coming from the "isles of the sea." It is true that, in the third column of the Scroll, we read: ". . . its interpretation refers to the Kittim who trample the land with their horses and with their cattle; and from afar they come, from the isles of the sea, to consume all the peoples like an insatiable eagle." We must not forget, however, that the Hebrew word for "island" also means "sea-coast,"¹⁰ and that the latter meaning is almost certainly intended in such passages as Is. 11:11 and 24:15; Esther 10:1. When we find the expression "isles of the Kittim" in Jer. 2:10 and Ezech. 27:6, we can hardly suppose that the authors are referring to Italy. But other marks of identification are

⁸ This and other translations depend very much on those given by W. H. Brownlee in *BASOR*, no. 112, p. 15, and no. 114, p. 10. I have also consulted the translation of DSH by J. van der Ploeg in *Bibliotheca orientalis*, VII (Jan., 1951), 2-11.

⁹ H. L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1948), p. 78, note 21.

¹⁰ A. H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), I, 202*.

given the *Kittim*. And we must concede that the later reference to the sacrifices offered to their standards and their weapons of war undoubtedly fits a Roman background better, since the Roman worship of the *signa* is well attested. Yet it is still possible that a similar practice was followed in the ancient East, even though we have as yet no clear evidence for it. Such a practice could easily have taken place in Egypt where the word for "standard," *i3t*, denotes a banner on which the figure of a god was borne and which was carried by a priest.¹¹ Evidence is wanting but the possibility must be left open.

M. Dupont-Sommer then goes beyond his general reconstruction of the period and comes down to details. His exegesis, e.g., of several columns of DSH permits him to see in the Teacher of Justice a divine being become incarnate, suddenly appearing in a splendid theophany at the moment when Pompey is taking Jerusalem. The passage relating to this "return" should be cited. After quoting Hab. 2:15, the following explanation is offered by our ancient commentator: "Its meaning concerns the wicked priest who has persecuted the Teacher of Justice in order to swallow him up in the vexation of his wrath, wishing to uncover (exile?) him. So, at the time of the festival of repose, the Day of Atonement, he appeared unto them to swallow them up and to make them stumble on that fast day, their sabbath of rest." In order to justify his exegesis Dupont-Sommer must assume that it is not the wicked priest who appears but the Teacher of Justice. This seems contrary both to the plain statement of the quoted text and to the biblical passage in Habakkuk which is the object of the interpretation.¹²

Elsewhere in the Scroll Dupont-Sommer finds two statements which have satisfied him that the Teacher of Justice is looked upon as a divine being become incarnate. In a previous column (9:1,2) mention has been made of his (the Teacher's?) "body of flesh," upon which have been heaped various acts of vengeance. It is little more than fanciful to see in this expression, "body of flesh," the assertion of a divine being's incarnation. The phrase occurs in the Old Testament in Ecclus. 23:17 where it is applied to the "fornicator in his physical body." Père Bonsirven had already pointed out that the phrase merely referred to the material part of the human composite.¹³ We are not even certain that the body in question is that of the Teacher of Justice. In fact, if one consults the commented passage in Hab. 2:7, 8, he will find good reason for supposing that the body in this case is that of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹² See P. R. Weiss in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, II (1950), 152, for a severe criticism of Dupont-Sommer's exegesis.

¹³ J. Bonsirven, *Etudes*, CCLXVIII (Feb., 1951), 217.

the "wicked priest." The alleged parallel to the passion of Christ can scarcely rate as a sound conjecture.

A second argument, to which he attaches some weight, is derived from the word "to appear" as it occurs in column 11:7 of the Scroll. Dupont-Sommer claims that the verb *yp'* bears the same exclusive meaning it has in the Old Testament, to describe a theophany. Accordingly, the one who appears (and again he assumes that the subject of the verb is the Teacher of Justice) is a divine person, come in the flesh. As to the uses of the verb *yp'*, it suffices to run down a list of occurrences in any standard dictionary to see that the verb may mean simply "shine forth," as found twice in Job (3:4 and 10:22), where the subject is not Yahweh but light. That the verb is used of theophanies is undeniable; but it is quite a different matter to restrict it exclusively to that meaning.

More time has been spent on this little volume than its intrinsic merit deserved. Only the popular appeal which it has enjoyed in certain French circles, and may enjoy in our own country, has justified this criticism of a few of its weaknesses. Not every point in Dupont-Sommer's reconstruction has been taken up, but only some of those which have already been challenged by his critics, notably M. Delcor. In all probability the verdict of scholarship will be that the reconstruction and interpretation have been too hasty and ill-advised and that they do little credit to the excellent reputation of M. Dupont-Sommer. This does not mean that the Scrolls will not help us immensely in the study of early Christianity and its records. The parallels in vocabulary, modes of expression, and even practices, will be brought out, gradually and unsensationally. But none of these parallels will impair the profound originality of the Christian fact. For here, despite an acknowledged continuity with the past, there is something which is discontinuous, even revolutionary—something which is able to renew the face of the earth.

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