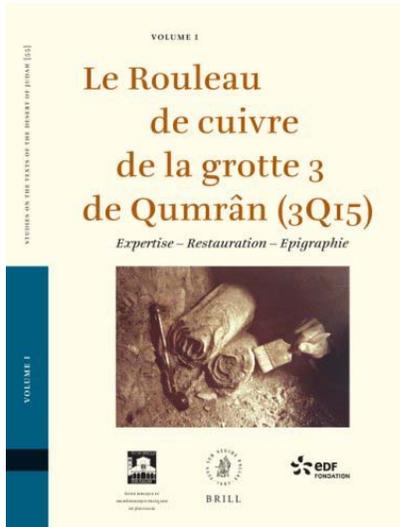


RBL 07/2008



Poffet, Jean-Michel, Daniel Brizemeure, Noël Lacoudre, and Émile Puech

Le Rouleau de cuivre de la grotte 3 de Qumran (3Q15): Expertise - Restauration - Epigraphie

Studies on the Text of the Desert of Judah 55

Leiden: Brill, 2006. Pp. xxii + 227, xxvi + 424 (2 vols.).
Cloth. \$254.00. ISBN 9004140301.

Brian Schultz
Fresno Pacific University
Fresno, California

This monumental two-volume, large-format work (37 x 28.5 cm) documents the restoration process that the Copper Scroll (3Q15) underwent in the years 1994–1996 at the laboratories of Électricité de France (EDF), accompanied by a full “revised edition of the text” (177) complete with commentary. The first and thinner volume of 227 pages (including 134 figures and illustrations) is complemented by a second volume with no less than 383 accompanying plates. The contents are divided into two sections (“livres”), and it could be suggested that each has its own, if not mutually exclusive, audience: the conservationist and the epigraphist (see ix). The first section (1–168; pls. I–CCCXXXII) deals with all aspects pertaining to the restoration of the scroll, and while only two authors are named, Daniel Brizemeure and Noël Lacoudre, they are careful to note that the text is really the combined effort of over thirty individuals listed on page v. None are Dead Sea Scrolls scholars, but lab scientists and attendants who devoted their energies to halting the obvious degradation of the Copper Scroll over the past fifty years. The second section (169–227; pls. CCCXXXIII–CCCLXXXIII), which examines not the physical object per se but its inscribed text, is the fruit of Émile Puech’s work.

Chapter 1 of section 1 reviews the journey of the scroll up to the beginning of restoration work. It begins with a very brief review of its discovery in Cave 3, the cave’s surroundings and geology, an analysis of the scroll’s composition, and a description of how the scroll had been preserved since 1955, when it was cut into twenty-three segments, until its

arrival in France. The bulk of the chapter is then an in-depth analysis of each segment's condition upon arrival. Although it is rather technical, even the lay person can learn that what was probably considered inconsequential forty years ago—and possibly still trivial today—may in fact have had its share of negative impact. For example, even the purple cloth lining the wooden base in which the segments had been displayed in the Amman museum may have contributed to a certain kind of ongoing corrosion (29)!

More important to the study of the content of the scroll is that the segments were X-rayed for the first time (pls. LIII–CIX). The curvature of the metal necessitated up to four different shots, but usually no more than three, for a single segment. Thus most segments have a D(roite) [right], C(entre) [middle], and G(auche) [left] plate. One quickly notices that segments 9, 12, and 16 were for some reason placed upside down (as noted on 12) and that the photographs are not presented in the order one would want when trying to read the scroll. Nevertheless, the manner in which such a procedure reveals the inscribed letters is quite stunning and would have undoubtedly been an immense help in further deciphering the text, even if no further work would have been undertaken.

Chapter 2 systematically documents the procedure used on each segment to clean and restore it. The condition of each before and after application of the chosen procedure(s) is documented in writing (43–54; tables 3.1–6) and in computerized “graphical transcriptions” (pls. CX–CLXV). Visually, the result of such work can be seen by comparing plates VII–XXIX to plates CLXVI–CLXXXVIII. Such careful work made it possible to add, reorder, or adjust the placement of numerous fragments (a list of examples is given on 54) and even identify signs of wear from when the scroll was in use. For the epigraphist, this is a much welcome contribution.

Chapter 3 deals with the need to devise a new system to display and transport the newly restored segments. All the parameters taken into consideration are discussed, accompanied by explanations justifying the choices made. Not only are the manufacturing procedures for the various components described in detail, but instructions for the cleaning and dismantling of the cases are given, for such a time when further maintenance and/or handling will be necessary (84–86, 93–94). These may prove useful to the scholar who may have need to study the scroll outside of its present casing.

Chapter 4 documents the challenges EDF faced in attempting to make a flat facsimile of the entire Copper Scroll by galvanoplasty. The benefits of having such a modern artifact, be it for illustrative purposes in a museum or for scientific reasons, are obvious. But its realization was far from simple, as this chapter makes clear by describing the various tests conducted to determine which would be the most efficient and precise method. The chosen procedure and its carrying out are detailed in chapter 5. In the end, six copies

were produced, of which two were sent to Amman, one to Jerusalem, and one to the Louvre. It is suggested that these copper reproductions are exact to less than a tenth of a millimeter to the original as it is preserved today (138). In volume 2, each column of text is photographed (pls. CCXCVI–CCCVII) as a further aid in better deciphering the text.

The last chapter of section 1 crowns the accomplishments of the restoration team in providing the scholarly community with yet another tool with which to read this ancient document. Earlier I mentioned that the X-ray photographs of the scroll made the letters stand out in an astonishing way. This chapter discusses how the photos were subsequently digitized and assembled so as to provide a second kind of reconstructed view of what the document would have looked like when laid out flat. Two sets of these digitized and reconstructed photographs are presented in volume 2: the first (pls. CCCXI–CCCXX) showing the various columns as reconstructed by using portions of the G, C, and D plates of each section, and the second (pls. CCCXXI–CCCXXXII) using various filters that help further draw out the inscribed letters. Thankfully, this time the plates are ordered in the same way one reads the text.

Section 2 offers a new study of the contents of the Copper Scroll done with the help of the new tools now available as a result of the restoration work, principally the X-ray photographs (both the original and the digitized ones) and the flat facsimile. The late J. T. Milik, who first deciphered the text, was originally assigned the task, but shortly after being asked he had to decline due to ill health, so that it was then assigned to Puech. In what could possibly be considered poetic justice, his new investigation helped confirm, in spite of recent allegations to the contrary, that Milik’s reading had remained the best overall to date (171–72 nn. 13, 17).

The opening pages describe Puech’s opinion of the composition as a whole, and while it is informed by his new readings, one must not assume that all his ideas are dependent upon them. In summary, he considers the list of sixty treasures (possibly 61; see p. 179) to be real indeed, belonging to the Essenes, who withdrew, at least in part, to Qumran when feeling compelled to separate themselves from temple worship in Jerusalem. Sometime in the middle of the first century C.E., the text was copied from a previously existing and more complete list (176 n. 59, 178) by a single scribe (172 n. 11, 178) onto the three copper sheets that constitute our extant scroll. It was eventually hidden together with other scrolls from the Qumran Community just before the Romans’ arrival to the Jericho area in 68 C.E. (177).

Historical considerations aside, the primary objective of section 2 is to provide a “revised edition of the text,” now that it can be determined that only five to six words plus two numbers are missing from the entire composition (177). Even so, certainty of meaning

remains elusive because of the many mistakes and confusions of the copyist, not to mention the uniqueness of the composition. In all, Puech suggests about seventy readings different from what Milik had put forward (171 n. 8). Here is not the place to list them but to highlight that the commentary is lengthy and attempts to interact with most if not all the readings scholars have suggested to date, before justifying the choice made. The commentary is organized according to the scroll's twelve columns. In typical fashion, the commentary follows a Hebrew transcription of each column and its French translation. Both the transcription and French translation are given again on pages 207–16, this time without commentary but with an English translation in parallel to the French one.

While the text of section 1 may be of limited value in helping the scholar better decipher and understand the enigmatic Copper Scroll, and one could contest that the *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* series was not the most appropriate for such a report, still, one cannot but be grateful for such a detailed record of how the conservation work was carried out. Furthermore, many of the plates accompanying the text are now an indispensable component for any serious study of the scroll's content, so that this reviewer at least is grateful that they are packaged together with those of section 2 as a kind of prolegomena. Because of the contributions these offer in deciphering the text, the “revised edition” found in section 2 should now be preferred over Milik's excellent work. In the end, *Le Rouleau de cuivre* now forms much of the foundation upon which all subsequent work on the Copper Scroll will have to be built.