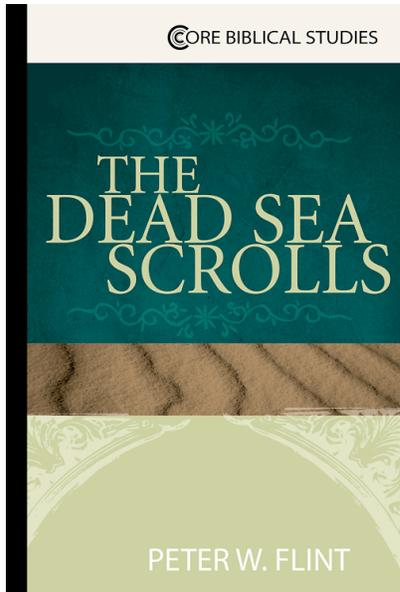


RBL 06/2014



Peter W. Flint

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Core Biblical Studies

Nashville: Abingdon, 2013. Pp. xxiv + 212. Paper.
\$29.99. ISBN 9780687494491.

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The best adjective to describe this book is “useful.” Peter Flint has assembled in an introduction and twelve chapters what reads like a set of extremely clear lectures. In fact, anyone who has heard Peter Flint give a popular lecture on the Dead Sea Scrolls will be able to hear his voice as they read this book. They will also know that he packs his presentations with lots of information. The book should prove very helpful for those wanting to give popular talks themselves, for those teaching introductory classes on the Scrolls, and for those coming in search of information about the Scrolls and those who collected them together in antiquity.

The introduction is characteristic of the book as a whole. Flint outlines five points as to why the Scrolls are the greatest find of our times: (1) they were found in the Holy Land; (2) they are in the three languages of Scripture; (3) they include our oldest biblical manuscripts; (4) they offer us new information about early Judaism; and (5) they provide new information about early Christianity. QED. In this and in almost every chapter I found myself saying “Yes, but...”. The enthusiasm of the book’s author is infectiously discernible on almost every page, but the presentation often seems to require nuance both in terms of its overall structure and also in terms of several details. Perhaps it is to ask too much of an introductory book of this size, but things could be expressed more subtly and

perhaps more suitably. For example, for (2) above the point could be made that before the Scrolls were discovered all that we had in Hebrew from ancient Palestine were a few brief inscriptions on seals, jars, coins, ossuaries and the like; now there is an overwhelming amount of Hebrew manuscripts, and the situation has changed far beyond what any scholar might have expected nearly seventy years ago.

The first chapter is a brief overview of the principal discoveries of Scrolls: those from the eleven caves at and near Qumran and those at three other sites. There is no mention of where the Scrolls now are, but a concluding section lists four recently acquired collections of small Scrolls fragments.

The description of the archaeology of the Qumran site in chapter 2 is generally reliable. It contains three sections. The first covers the caves, the second the Qumran buildings, and the third the Qumran cemeteries. The description of the Qumran buildings is introduced by a list of early surveys and descriptions of the site from F. de Saulcy (1850) to S. Husseini (1946). There follows a summary of R. de Vaux's periodized reconstruction and a section on how that needs to be modified in one way or another. An airing of minority readings of the evidence merely highlights the ongoing need for those at the École Biblique to make available all the evidence as soon as possible, so that a full appraisal of de Vaux's impressions of the site can be undertaken. The chapter concludes with the assertion that the site and buildings "were used by a sectarian movement known as the *Yahad* Essenes, even if it initially served as a road station and pottery was produced there (by the *Yahad* Essenes). This group also hid all or most of the scrolls in the caves, most likely before Qumran was destroyed by the Roman troops in 68 C.E." (27). It needs to be made clear, however, that there is now considerable agreement that there were so-called *Yahad* Essenes both before and in other places than Qumran, though that is, of course, not an archaeological point.

The third chapter, on the dating of the Scrolls found at Qumran, covers the context, the internal evidence of the Scrolls themselves, palaeography, and the use of radiocarbon/AMS dating techniques. Those four approaches to dating are more than adequate, but I think it is worth mentioning that there was yet another confirmation of date that is usually omitted from introductions. That was provided by Ronald Reed, a leather expert from the University of Leeds, whose knowledge of the processes of collagen deterioration correlated with measurable patterns of shrinkage led him and his co-workers to the same conclusion concerning date when they looked at several dozen fragments sent to them by those working on the Scrolls (see *Nature* 184 [August 1959]: 533–34).

Three chapters are devoted to the Bible, clearly showing where Flint's own major interests lie. Chapter 4 describes the Bible before the Scrolls. This is informative but also somewhat

unfortunate, because by rehearsing the paradigms of the understanding of the Bible before the Scrolls were discovered Flint risks the long-standing problem of subsequently fitting the new evidence into the existing paradigm rather than letting it speak for itself, albeit in relation to evidence that has long been known. As Flint rightly acknowledges in the chapter's opening comments, even the very term *Bible* is inappropriate for what he is trying to discuss. Chapter 5 describes some of the evidence of the so-called "biblical Scrolls." This is updated material from some of his other publications. Not surprisingly, given the paradigm of chapter 4, there is no mention of the text that some are now calling 4QTorah, the former Reworked Pentateuch. Chapter 6 discusses the Scrolls and the "biblical text." Here the discussion raises significant questions about collections of scriptural books, the numbers of scriptural scrolls, the challenge of explaining abbreviated or excerpted texts, the place of papyrus, paleo-Hebrew, and scrolls in Greek and Aramaic. A second part of the chapter considers the development of the texts of the Hebrew scriptures in which the concern is overwhelmingly to argue that the scriptural Scrolls must be categorized somehow in textual families. However, an explanation for why such categorization might be important is never offered. I am sure that both beginners and others, including myself, would like to know why.

The rehearsal of old paradigms continues in chapter 7, on the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and in chapter 8, on the shape and contents of the Scriptures used at Qumran. In chapter 7 Flint states that the "*Yahad* viewed *1 Enoch* as Scripture, at least in the earlier part of their history" (85). In addition "Jubilees was most likely viewed as Scripture by the *Yahad*" (86), and in chapter 8 he states precisely that the "term [canon] belongs to the post-biblical period, and should not be used for collections of sacred books, whether Jewish or Christian, before the third century C.E.; thus there was no canon of books used by the *Yahad* Essenes at Qumran" (94)—or by any Jews, then, for that matter. With the benefit of such comments, it is a pity that things were not put together in another fashion in the earlier chapters of the book without the anachronistic categories of much later times.

Chapter 9 is a useful list of seven categories of "nonbiblical" compositions: rules, legal texts, commentaries, poetry and prayer, wisdom, eschatology, and some miscellaneous texts. This chapter is a rapid survey of what is now available, virtually none of which was known before the discoveries of 1947–1956. The range of literary compositions is fascinating, but Flint sticks to brief description, rather than any evaluation of what this literature might signify. It is somewhat regrettable that the balance of his book is devoted in five chapters to the scriptural and closely related scrolls that represent about a quarter of the manuscripts, whereas the remaining three-quarters of the manuscripts have a single chapter of twenty-two pages assigned to them. (In some ways this means that Flint's book is something of a suitable complement to Philip R. Davies, George J. Brooke,

and Phillip R. Callaway, *The Complete World of the Dead Sea Scrolls* [2nd ed.; London: Thames & Hudson, 2011], in which there are far superior color pictures throughout but only a little discussion of the so-called biblical Scrolls.)

Another helpful listing of options and possibilities with regard to the identification of the movement associated with Qumran is provided in chapter 10. The Essenes emerge as the victors, and there is a consensus view of their history provided with aplomb, though it is now widely appreciated that *Yahad* must refer to more than just those at Qumran.

Chapter 11 describes and discusses six aspects, another list, of the religious thought and practice reflected in the Qumran scrolls: the concept of God, explanations for good and evil, principles and law, scriptural interpretation, the experience of the divine, and eschatology. Here the emphasis on ideas is entirely acceptable, but it would have been excellent if the shaping of such ideas had been contextualized with reference to some of the theoretical approaches now coming to the fore in Scrolls scholarship. What social dynamics give rise to particular formulations and why?

Chapter 12 treats the New Testament and the Scrolls. The chapter opens on a rather negative note with suitable dismissal of the ideas of O'Callaghan on the identification of fragments from Cave 7 as parts of New Testament books and of various theories as proposed by Dupont-Sommer, Eisenman, Thiering, and Allegro. Then there are more lists: key scrolls on nine issues for studying messianism and Jesus' life and teaching, two more issues in further detail (Isa 40:3; Jesus as royal and prophetic messiah), fourteen issues for studying Acts, Paul, and the other letters. All these lists are just that, collections of references in certain Scrolls and in various New Testament passages with little or no discussion. The chapter closes with a valuable five-page discussion of the Scrolls and the book of Revelation. Overall the reader needs to keep firmly in mind Flint's opening remarks that "[m]ost scholars view the scrolls as not directly related to Jesus and early Christianity, but still illuminating several aspects of his life and teaching, and other events and passages in the New Testament" (183).

Packed with information as this book is, full indexes are available only online on Abingdon's website. The reader is promised that there are other resources there, too, but those have yet to be uploaded. In a short volume with so much detail, it is not surprising that there are also a few minor slips. Among them are, for example, the following: *Review Biblique* is written for *Revue Biblique* (14); without any explanation the Aleppo Codex is described as copied in Israel (38); Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus are located in the British Museum (47–48) rather than the British Library; CD should be used as an abbreviation only of the Cairo versions of the text, not also of those from Qumran (106); 4Q380–381 are described as "four scrolls" (115); the quotation of CD 14:18–19 (180)

needs correcting, as does the reference to CD B lines 1–82 (192). These minor matters are mentioned only so that adjustments can be made in the reprintings of this book that are certainly to be required by a thirsty readership.