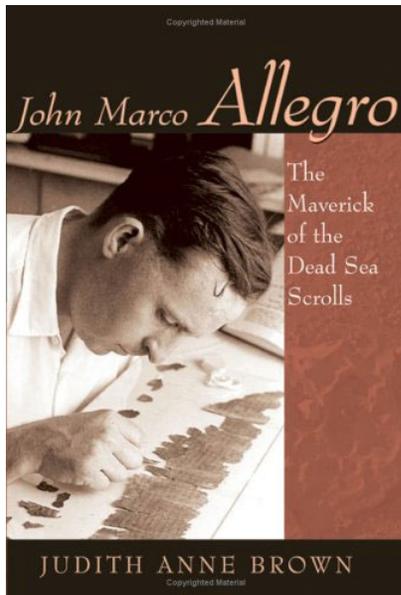


RBL 01/2006



Brown, Judith Anne

John Marco Allegro: The Maverick of the Dead Sea Scrolls

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. Pp. 304 + 47 black-and-white photos + maps. Hardcover. \$25.00. ISBN 0802828493.

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This volume is a biography of John Marco Allegro written by his daughter, a freelance writer. It is the eighth book to appear in the series *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature* and is, by most accounts, an unusual addition. The mission of the series is to provide a response to the current state of the field in which:

New proposals and competing hypotheses, many of them of an uncritical and sensational nature, vie for attention. Idiosyncratic and misleading views of the Scrolls still abound, especially in the popular press, while the results of solid scholarship have yet to make their full impact. At the same time, the scholarly task of establishing reliable critical editions of the texts is nearing completion. The opportunity is ripe, therefore, for directing renewed attention to the task of analysis and interpretation.

Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature is a series designed to address this need. In particular, the series aims to make the latest and best Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship accessible to scholars, students, and the thinking public. (from the publisher's online catalog at <http://www.eerdmans.com/sdss.htm>)

Given this aim, the inclusion of Brown's volume is simultaneously appropriate and inappropriate, a result, in no small part, of the book's two goals. Approximately half of the book is devoted to providing a biography of Allegro based on personal recollections and correspondence between him and his family, friends, and colleagues. The other half consists primarily of the author's summary and evaluation of the contents of her father's publications. There can be little doubt that Brown is among the most appropriate people to write about Allegro the man, but her knowledge of the field of Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship is lacking, and, as such, one must wonder why she needed to devote so much space to evaluating his academic contributions. Certainly scholars currently working in the field could have been more effective in this regard. Since Allegro, more than any other, was responsible for the "idiosyncratic and misleading views of the Scrolls" that the series was designed to examine, a biography is an important addition; an evaluation of his scholarship by his daughter, a journalist, is not.

Perhaps because of the public's awareness of Allegro and his "imaginative" theories, this is the only volume in the series in which the editors felt the need to provide an extended introduction (ix–xiii). They, too, seem to have recognized the book's strange fit in both the series and among the offerings of a Christian publisher. Conceivably Eerdmans' general readers might be concerned about this publication whose subject argued that Christianity developed from an ancient drug cult and that the Gospels were an elaborate hoax. In the introduction the editors assure the readers that they continue to harbor reservations about Allegro's conclusions but acknowledge that the volume is important for what it tells us about the early years of scroll research—the history of the field—and helps address some of the imbalances in previous presentations of Allegro's role.

The first nine chapters provide an overview of Allegro's life and scholarly pursuits. Their greatest value lies in Brown's descriptions and citations of letters that provide behind-the-scenes access to the editorial committee and the diplomatic agents involved in preserving and publishing the Dead Sea Scrolls. They provide an insider's view of the day-to-day activities in the scrollery and, perhaps most interesting, discussion of how the scrolls were to be kept and cared for while the work of editing them continued. The final seven chapters are little more than a synopsis of Allegro's major books, focused primarily on the *Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, and Allegro's response to the largely negative reception they received. It is clear from his letters that, although he expected the volumes to be controversial, he also expected that they would be critiqued as scholarly works (e.g., his letter of 26 May 1970 on p. 205).

The book begins with a short description of Allegro's youth, his stint in the British military, his courtship of his wife Joan, and his consideration of life in the Methodist ministry. Allegro, released from military service, began to study for the ministry but also

began to question his faith. The questions raised then would shape many of his later pursuits. His distaste for the church, and authority more generally, began at that point. “John could not think of trying to reassure people anxious or doubtful about their faith without being wholehearted about his own. He felt he would be propping up a moral edifice cracked at its foundations. And he did not like being told what to do, what to think, or when to marry by men in black frocks” (20). Given his distaste for the ministry from his own experience pursuing it, can there be any question about his difficulty working later with the members of the editorial team who were, for the most part, members of the clergy and committed Christians?

Because of his doubts, he withdrew from this pursuit and decided to study Semitics at Manchester University. He completed his M.A. in 1951 and then transferred to Oxford to work on his doctorate with G. R. Driver. It was Driver who was contacted about joining the editorial team; he recommended his young student Allegro. He began work at the Jerusalem scrollery in January of 1953. From the perspective of Dead Sea Scroll scholarship, chapters 2–6 may prove to be the most interesting in the book. Therein Brown uses Allegro’s correspondence to describe the work at the scrollery and the process of arranging manuscript fragments, storing material and preparing it for publication, life in Jerusalem in the 1950s, and the relationships that developed among the members of the editorial team. The major rift between Allegro and the team stemmed from his desire to make the material public as quickly as possible and the team’s reluctance to move swiftly. The main problem with Brown’s description arises from her need to defend her father from the charge of being a publicity hound. Brown often comments that her father did all that he did because he “believed that everyone had the right to get information, ask questions, discuss freely, make up their own minds” (282). However, the volume is replete with material that shows him to be a publicity seeker. In a letter dated 8 July 1954 Allegro wrote about the great prestige attached to being a member of the editorial team. Later, Brown herself writes that, while working on his Ph.D. in English at Manchester in the 1980s, Allegro “needed cash. And publicity. Before long, the English project turned his mind from an orderly intellectual pursuit to an opportunity to inspire, bedazzle, entertain, and make money” (257–58). This tendency seems to have been at play during much of Allegro’s writings about the Scrolls and early Christianity. As well, Allegro’s own negative experience with the church seems to have made him more inclined to see the refusal of the editorial team to move more quickly to release the materials to the public as a “Catholic conspiracy.” This challenge to the team seems to have satisfied both of Allegro’s needs, to simultaneously gain him publicity and to take a swipe at the religious authorities he detested. Brown’s description of Allegro’s interaction with the chief editor, Roland de Vaux, parallels closely his interaction with the Methodist ministry earlier on. That same distaste for religious authority seems to have

underlain at least some of Allegro's criticism of the team, of the church, and of Christianity more generally. When a BBC program he participated in was preempted, he wrote a vicious letter arguing that de Vaux, his cronies, and the Vatican were responsible. "My patience is exhausted," he stated, "I will not have a French Priest interfering in this way with British TV" (159). While the materials provided by Brown for understanding these interactions are enlightening, they are very much one-sided. One wonders if attempts were made on the part of the author to talk to members of the Dead Sea Scroll editorial team who knew and worked with her father or to explore the archives of the Palestinian Archaeology Museum/Rockefeller Museum.

The second part of the book is devoted to surveying Allegro's published works. Here the apologia is expressed most fully. One cannot imagine that Eerdmans would have published a volume summarizing Allegro's publications if it had not come in this context. Brown is not really in any position to evaluate the material. Although she offers frequent comment on it, and its critics in particular, her bibliography references only four books written for academic audiences and a handful for public consumption. Concerning Allegro's views on the *Copper Scroll*, Brown writes, "Many later scholars agree with him, though they reach varying conclusions on who wrote the scroll and who hid the treasure" (133). She does not provide a single example of a scholar who substantially agrees with her father, although she does note one point of agreement between him and Judah Lefkovits (133). She then refers the reader to additional sources, "Further studies on the scroll are brought together in *Copper Scroll Studies*, by George J. Brooke and Philip R. Davies" (133). There is no indication of the content of this volume or its value in assessing Allegro's theory. A brief survey of Al Wolter's article on the *Copper Scroll* in the *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* would have helped substantiate her claim, but it is absent from her bibliography.

With regard to *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, Brown challenges those who have questioned Allegro's conclusions based on philological grounds:

Philology is a difficult science to pin down: You can pull apart long words and analyze the syllables to suit almost any purpose. It allows too much speculation and imprecise chronology. John saw mushroom references everywhere; he may have been right, but the very weight of evidence that he thought conclusive made the theory suspect, because it left readers breathlessly struggling for something they could understand. (209)

This highlights at least one of the problems with Brown's presentation. Her defense of her father, in certain cases, has her challenging the field and its methods, rather than their

misuse by him. Brown ultimately accepts her father's argument that people with open minds would see the value of his work. Scholarly critique of his efforts, particularly with regard to the Scrolls, is often presented as stemming from professional jealousies. Further, Brown uses newspaper reviews rather than those in academic journals to judge the quality of her father's publications.

A great debt of gratitude is owed to Brown and her family for making Allegro's private correspondence available. While the material has certainly been edited, Brown does not shy away from sharing even the most intimate family details. Although in most circles Allegro came to be seen as foolish and as one who deliberately misguided the public, the early part of the volume does much to counter this perception of him. His theories may have been flights of fancy, but Allegro did make some significant contributions to the study of the Scrolls (and certainly preserving his letters was one of them). Brown attempts to set three things right: she tries to remind the public of Allegro's actual contributions to Dead Sea Scroll scholarship, to correct the image of him as little more than a publicity hound, and to present his more notorious books as less fantastic than they have previously been viewed. In the case of the third, she often allows that they were far-fetched but tries to show that her father truly devoted a great deal of time to researching them, even though his methods and conclusions were somewhat peculiar. The book is certainly apologetic, but it contains much that is useful and thus deserves to be read.

As an early member of the editorial team, Allegro participated in the process of sorting the materials and was the first to publish his allotment. Brown shows that Allegro was aware of the imperfections of the volumes but argues that he was more concerned that the material be made public than that it be perfectly edited and thoroughly commented on. He made the arrangements for the opening of the *Copper Scroll* and was instrumental in excavating a number of related sites. Interestingly, Allegro's letters demonstrate that, in contrast to the accusation leveled against him—that he rushed his edition of the *Copper Scroll* to beat the official one—he actually delayed its release with the hope that Milik would complete the authorized edition first. In fact, Milik's preliminary edition appeared in advance of Allegro's. Most important, and perhaps self-destructively, Allegro single-handedly made the Dead Sea Scrolls a *cause célèbre*. His comments in public lectures about the relationship between the Scrolls and Christianity, between the Teacher of Righteousness and Jesus, made him a popular public speaker but raised the ire of his colleagues. Brown's volume successfully reminds the reader of these feats, but she also recognizes that her father was both a scholar and a sideshow barker of sorts.

To conclude, Allegro lived a fascinating life, and readers will benefit from having Brown's book available. She has provided us an important window into the early life of the field of Dead Sea Scroll studies. In the end, though, readers will certainly need to

heed the series editors' warning that the views expressed by Allegro, and, one might add, Brown, need to be carefully weighed.