reviews


In each case the text is discussed in detail, with priority given to the Hebrew text where it has survived, and a retroversion into Hebrew offered where it has not survived. (The introduction includes an explanation and justification of this practice, which will arouse scepticism from some, but is certainly defensible.) Full text-critical notes are provided, with the author’s own translation, attention to the poetic structure of each passage and consideration of its context, and then finally detailed exegesis, with full attention given to possible links with material from the Hebrew Bible, Greek authors and the Ancient Near Eastern world more generally. I hope that this brief outline will show that this work has the characteristics one would expect from a good doctoral thesis: careful textual analysis, detailed attention to possible links with other relevant literature, and full and fair assessment of the work of other scholars where it impinges on Dr Corley’s own study. The old reviewer’s cliché, that all those working in this field in the future will have to take account of this study, is certainly applicable here.

Such reservations as I have concern two related issues. There is no doubt that Sirach makes very frequent reference to friendship. It might have been helpful, however, if Corley had given fuller attention to just what that implied in the Hellenistic world of the second century BCE. Who in practice might be friends with whom? (The usual dating of Sirach is accepted in this study.) A number of recent sociological studies have included Sirach in their examination of that world; the most recent known to me, Horsley and Tiller, ‘Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple’, will have appeared too late for Corley to have been aware of it, but the whole area of debate opened up by scholars such as Hengel and Grabbe might perhaps have received more attention.

This leads on to my other uncertainty. Is Sirach to be seen primarily as an interpreter of older Israelite traditions, or as part of the rich literary tradition of the Hellenistic world? The controversy between Middendorp, who saw Sirach as mediating between Judaism and Hellenism, and Kieweler, who set him much more firmly within Jewish tradition, is mentioned here and is clearly relevant. In the end I was not quite clear about Corley’s own position; for example, he frequently refers to the story of David and Abigail in 1 Sam. 25, suggesting an inner-Jewish context, whereas elsewhere references to Theognis and other Hellenistic authors seem to imply rather a different reading. These criticisms must not, however, be regarded as anything more than marginal, a recognition that Dr Corley’s work provides an excellent foundation for further study in this important area of Judaism in the Hellenistic world.

Lymington

RICHARD COGGINS


Every good book deserves a warm welcome, all the more so an excellent one shedding light in a field which suffers often from confusion. The study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the site they were discovered in has been involved for more than half a century in fierce controversies in which only few scholars could find their hands and feet. Hardly a month passes by when the reviewer does not run into some bizarre theory concerning Qumran, the manuscripts and their owners.

It is more than thirty years since the English version of de Vaux’s classic, which carries a similar name to our book, appeared. Though the main conclusions of the
original excavator of Qumran are still valid, much has been added since, primarily due to Jody Magness. The author is certainly the most important, original and prolific student of Qumran since de Vaux. If we may be allowed an aside, it is interesting to note that the early study of the Dead Sea Scrolls has reached amazingly accurate conclusions in spite of the fact that they had at their disposal very few manuscripts (but fortunately pretty well preserved). Works published in the 1950s by F. M. Cross, D. Flusser, J. T. Milik, G. Vermes and others are still valuable. Now that we have at our disposal 900 scrolls, the picture is far richer and the details are sharply drawn with greater certainty, yet the results of the pioneer research have been proven to be correct.

The qualities of this book are of two kinds: on the one hand a clear, precise and authoritative prose based on full mastery of the data, on the other important, well-based innovations about Qumran and its environs. First must be mentioned Magness’s sensible suggestions concerning the chronology of the site. She is of the opinion that the site was settled some time in the first half of the first century BCE and existed to the end of this century. This is Stratum I which, in spite of a short gap in its occupation, due probably to the earthquake of 31 BCE, is homogenous. This stratum must have come to a violent end in the disturbances that followed King Herod’s death in 4 BCE. Stratum II started at the turn of the Era and was terminated, as already concluded by de Vaux, in 68 CE by the Roman legions that captured Jericho.

In the opinion of the reviewer the most important chapter is the fifth: ‘What Do Pottery and Architecture Tell Us about Qumran?’ It is possible to prove on the basis of the archaeological finds alone, even without the use of the 900 manuscripts, that in the last 150 years of the Second Commonwealth Qumran was occupied by a monastery. From the evidence of Pliny the Elder we learn that it was the seat of an Essene Community. Magness’s clear, lucid and well-informed discussion ought to lead the reader to reach a similar conclusion. The building of the Qumran complex was done with extreme simplicity: undressed stones, almost without mortar (and the Qumranites were able to produce excellent mortar, as they did for their cisterns), almost without proper paving, almost total lack of decoration or any sign of luxury. No dormitories were found here, and even if they existed they must have been too small to accommodate all the members of the community. Most of them, perhaps all, resided in nearby artificial caves. The troglodyte residences were not chosen on account of ascetic tendencies but from practical considerations: in this part of the world the caves’ microclimate is by far superior to regular constructions. The small finds are also utilitarian, and constitute a limited repertoire. The pottery, at least the majority of it, was produced on the site which, in all the time of its existence, had two potters’ kilns. It ought to be kept in mind that there are no sources of proper clay in this neighbourhood, and wood for heating the kilns is quite scarce. Only strict purity rules could have dictated such activity.

In the huge cemetery with its 1200 graves were found mostly male burials. Recently Joe Zias has argued convincingly that the few female and children skeletons unearthed belong to Moslem inhumations. This chapter and others like the one dealing with women (or rather their absence) in the miqvaot, the immersion pools which are the largest and of the greatest density ever found, indicate that the Qumran compound was indeed a monastery, the first of its kind in the western world. The majority of Dead Sea Scrolls students agree that the site was occupied by an Essene community, but some non-consensual theories are still alive, alluring and misleading. Our book is meant not only to instruct but also to caution against those theories.

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