certainly wish to acquire them. The editors deserve our warm thanks for this bold venture, which will certainly become a fixed point of reference in all future work on the Judaism of the Second Temple period.

DAVID LINCUM
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This book presents itself not as a common-or-garden introduction or handbook, but as a ‘biography’ of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and it joins a growing series of relatively short, small-format volumes intriguingly titled ‘The Lives of Great Religious Books’ beautifully produced by Princeton University Press. Collins acknowledges at the outset that the Scrolls are far from being a book or even anything approximating to a book. Rather, they are a miscellaneous collection of texts, with uncertain coherence. Some are sectarian, many are not; and their dates cover a time span of a century or more. We might add that they vary also in their provenance: they were found deposited, as Collins explains, in eleven different caves, whose locations are crucially varied in relation to the Qumran site, even though all are in the vicinity; while a few come to us from other locations, both near, such as Masada, and distant, for a famous document, the so-called Damascus Document (CD), was even discovered in the Cairo Geniza by Solomon Schechter at the turn of the twentieth century.

But the Scrolls certainly have biography in large measure to make up for this. Their process of creation (we can only guess), deposition (still puzzling), discovery (famous), acquisition (shady), publication (scandalously delayed), and impact on many fields of knowledge (very diverse and still evolving) each offer remarkable stories, irresistible puzzles, memorable personalities and sensations enough to keep the reader on the edge of his or her seat. In this perspective they are a gift to a talented author, and Collins, a renowned scholar here operating with a light touch, makes the most of his subject. The book is neatly framed by an arresting opening chapter on the discoveries, and a wonderfully gossipy (though never indiscreet) final chapter on ‘The Battle for the Scrolls’. Those two chapters are backed up by a splendidly informal appendix on ‘Personalities in the Discovery and the Subsequent Controversies’.

The entire book is skilfully structured to reflect its theme. After a chapter of exposition of the ancient sources on the Essenes and their linkage to the finds, we get in chapter 3 a fairly detailed account of the site of Qumran, its excavation and interpretation history, distinguished by the extraordinary clarity with which tangled questions are presented and the striking fair-mindedness with which
scholarly opinions of every complexion about the chronology, the nature and the purpose of the buildings (except those view deemed quite beyond the pale) are given their due, while the downside of each is perceptively pinpointed. Only in passing is the author’s own broad support revealed for what is still the consensus view, namely connecting the site with the texts, and the texts with a community of mainly men who were concerned, alongside more practical pursuits, with the reading and production of texts; and these men with a fair degree of certainty with the stylized descriptions of the Essenes in Josephus and Pliny.

Then come chapters on the ways in which the Scrolls have been received and debated in different scholarly communities, and the way they have changed understanding and continue to divide opinion, and also to create frissons. Christianity is allowed to come first, with the longest of the chapters, on the evident basis that this is where the first strong reactions were evinced, with the Teacher of Righteousness even in some quarters identified with Jesus, or at least the community as being the direct precursor of early Christian groupings. While Collins’s profound knowledge is patent throughout the book (and, apart from the wider background, he is the author of a fairly recent longer work on Qumran and the Scrolls), here he seems particularly at home, and writes with relish and refreshing honesty. The following chapters perform the same task in other areas, explaining the impact of evolving understanding of the Scrolls on our knowledge of Second Temple Judaism and of the formation of the text of the Hebrew Bible, and singling out the key contributions of the major players in the field. These are substantial and informative accounts, if a little less colourful. More might have been said, perhaps, about the possible significance of the priestly (Zadokite) dimension of the community according to the sect’s own self-understanding, though the vexed question of its attitude to sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple is neatly summarized earlier on.

In relation to different chronologies, an assessment of the value and potential contribution of such carbon dating as has hitherto been attempted would have been welcome. Some puzzles that have elicited ample discussion get more or less squeezed out. Why might the documents have been deposited in jars? How, when and why might a handful have made their way to Masada? It is of course not the author’s brief to cover the terrain, and in hewing his own path there are bound to be omissions. For all that, anyone seeking a short introduction to the Scrolls could do a lot worse than to look in this direction. They will learn an enormous amount quite effortlessly in a small space of time, being thoroughly diverted in the process. They will be assisted by excellent indices and judicious short bibliographies. In the centre of the book they will find a helpful selection of pleasant black-and-white photographs, as well as a map of the Dead Sea region showing the fortresses with which it was dotted in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. These illustrations do not seem to appear in the list of contents, even though
the map is once referred to in one of the chapters, which leaves the reader perplexed. This odd omission in an otherwise exceptionally error-free text could easily be rectified in a subsequent edition.

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This learned volume defines a challenging and important topic and investigates it from a fresh and original angle. Maren Niehoff looks at affinities between the way the Bible is handled in Hellenistic Jewish writing, so far as this can be ascertained, and the scholarship of the surrounding culture; that is to say, the Alexandrian civilization of the third century BCE to the first century CE, the culture that in its earliest manifestation brought to the West the very idea of scholarship. Embedding the Jews within this wider canvass – with complete justification – she sets herself the task of disentangling and explaining in terms of direct influence specific similarities on the level of textual study and exegesis between biblical and Homeric interpretation. This is a tricky enterprise for a number of reasons. On the one hand, scholarship, in the ancient world as today, tends in its nature to be a closed world and its methods and language are often technical and abstruse. Popular presentations do play a part in Niehoff’s study, but mainly as spin-offs from the high scholarship. On the other hand, academic reasoning generally rests upon the standard principles of logic and inference, so that to spot a kinship of method between disparate scholarly enterprises is not necessarily to demonstrate dependence. Niehoff presses hard on the commonality of arguments from inconsistency and implausibility, but these would seem to be near universal measures of the veracity or otherwise of a story.

All this becomes even trickier here because of a dearth of evidence on both sides. We have entirely lost key Hellenistic works, even the famous Pinakes of the Alexandrian poet-librarian Callimachus, widely regarded as the first library catalogue. A central figure in Niehoff’s intellectual gallery is Aristotle (at least in terms of his literary criticism), and yet we know more, perhaps, than she would admit about how this wide-ranging and foundational philosophical and scientific giant was received in Alexandria. As for the Jewish side, Philo is the only Alexandrian-Jewish exegete to have reached us in the shape of complete tracts rather than short fragments, and he comes near the end of the tradition, well into the Roman period. Parts 2 and 3 of Niehoff’s book are in fact largely about Philo, leaving just three chapters for the earlier literature, one of which is centred on a rather different kind of