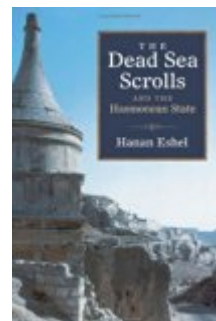


Hanan Eshel. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008. Plates. xii + 208 pp. \$28.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8028-6285-3.



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It is rare to read a book in its original language and then read it in translation and to say that the translation is a much better book than the original. This is the case with the new updated version of the book originally titled *Megilot Qumran vekaMedinah HaHashmonit* that was published by Yad Itzhak Ben Tzvi in 2004. This 2008 reworked book in English translation by multiple translators reads well in English and is an excellent addition to any Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) collection. It is also rare to read a book constructed from a variety of academic articles published with wholly different missions over a long period of time and to have the arguments of chapters flow one to another as if they were written with one single academic agenda.

This work is a testament to Hanan Eshel, who has pursued a long-term scholarly agenda, which is revealed to English readers here for the first time. The chapters, arranged chronologically from the earliest arguments of how the Hasmonean state began in the second century BCE (chapter 1)

until the end of the composition of the *pesharim* period that Eshel dates to before 31 BCE (chapter 9), present a cogent argument about the nine decades of Hasmonean rule and how they affected the entire Qumran enterprise. Eshel's assessment of his goal is that "the pseudonyms in the *pesharim* and in the Damascus Document refer to historical figures" who he identifies in the book (p. 4). Ancient writing that employed pseudonyms to either give a measure of protection to the writers from the wrath of religious and political leaders or to give it greater antiquity is a well-known device. While Eshel does not fully explore this question in his book, he attempts to identify the motivations of the writers and scribes who wrote and preserved many of these texts. Books like Eshel's will probably be the norm in the future as the DSS have now been fully translated and are available to the fruitful minds of historians and text scholars.

The outstanding parts of the book are the introduction, the afterword, and chapter 2, "Ques-

tions of Identity: The 'Teacher of Righteousness,' the 'Man of Lies' and Jonathan the Hasmonean." In the introduction and afterword, Eshel sets up and then clearly repeats his conclusions from the other chapters that are devoted to interpreting the scrolls in light of specific historical events and individuals. Almost from the beginning of DSS research, scholars attempted to read the scrolls in the context of specific historical events. Few early scholars had access to all of the scrolls (even through the 1980s) and few were trained in Jewish history and historiography as well as archaeology. Eshel has had access to almost all of the scrolls' readings and is trained in Jewish history and archaeology. He has a distinctive research agenda that allows him to place the scrolls into very specific contexts. In this book, we are the beneficiary of his unique training.

There are five unique elements to Eshel's presentations about the scrolls. First, he is more exacting than most every other scrolls' researcher in identifying people, events, and dates in the scrolls. Next, he uses the most up-to-date readings/variants in his argumentation. Third, he uses his keen analysis and textual criticism to make his point. Fourth, he integrates a fairly critical analysis of the comparative literature that is contemporaneous with the scrolls (especially Apocrypha, Philo, and Josephus references). Finally, he has a distinct viewpoint of the ebb and flow of Jewish history in this period and makes comprehensive arguments that attempt to draw on all of these elements to reach a conclusion.

Eshel lays out his precise reasoning and interpretation and then dates a text to a specific person, place, or event in a fragment or scroll. His presentations rely on discerning historical allusions in each text as earlier researchers attempted to do (with varying results) but which he does with singular results. In the first chapter, for example, he starts by identifying the unnamed Greek king in 4Q248 as Antiochus IV and dating the manuscript to the time (168 BCE) "just after

Antiochus' second Egyptian campaign but before his anti-Jewish measures" (pp. 14, 18). Very few other researchers on Qumran texts (or other ancient texts for that matter) are as forthright in the "exact" dating of a text and the identifications therein.

Eshel is simultaneously a historian and text critic throughout each chapter. For one to accept his historical analysis, it is often necessary to accept his reading and interpretation of the texts. Some may find a number of his readings and interpretations as forced into the historical contexts he sees, but most of the time he presents an argument that answers more questions than other researchers do. A large part of the book is dedicated to Eshel's interpretations of scrolls' materials that point to the identifications of the Teacher of Righteousness, the Wicked Priest, and the Man of Lies as part of a set of events that began with the appointment of Jonathan, the son of Mattathias as the High Priest by a Seleucid king, Alexander Balas, in 152 BCE. He places the genesis of the main Qumranite settlement and controversy squarely in the middle of the second century BCE. He implies that the Teacher of Righteousness is Onias III or IV, based on a reconstructed reading of 4Q425, and that the Wicked Priest and the Man of Lies were also products of the middle of the second century BCE. The Wicked Priest is Jonathan the Hasmonean. Eshel further identifies two later Hasmonean rulers in the scrolls: Jonathan's nephew, John Hyrcanus (chapter 3), who is the scrolls' Man of Belial; and John Hyrcanus's son, Alexander Jannaeus, is the scrolls' Lion of Wrath (chapter 6). For Eshel, most of the sectarian texts are an ongoing alternative telling of Hasmonean history. Eshel is not the first to identify Jonathan as the Wicked Priest. Geza Vermes and Jozef Milik identified the Wicked Priest as Jonathan some forty years ago. He is not the only one to associate John Hyrcanus with the Man of Belial. Nor is he the first to associate Alexander Jannaeus to the scrolls' Lion of Wrath.

It is not that his identifications are unique, but it is how Eshel arrives at his conclusions that make this book so intriguing. Eshel's mix of the most recent text critical scholarship (and often his original interpretations of readings) and his historical conclusions makes the identifications unique. An example of this mix is demonstrated in chapter 3 where Eshel identifies John Hyrcanus as the scrolls' Man of Belial. He begins with a well-known scrolls text, 4QTest, which, according to paleographic considerations, he dates to the first quarter of the first century BCE. Then, by comparing references in Josephus's writings, he is able to connect references in 4Q379 (which, according to paleographic considerations, is dated to the middle of the first century BCE) to the construction of the winter palace of the Hasmoneans in Jericho during the reign of John Hyrcanus before his death in 104 BCE. In between, Eshel notes missing lines, scribal errors, and a whole host of textual problems but always connects the pieces of his argument which direct him toward the conclusion that John Hyrcanus is the subject of the derision meted out in these scrolls. By the end of the chapter, he weaves a fragmentary reading in 4Q339 (against *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* editors) into his argument and adds the name of John Hyrcanus to a list of false prophets, as if to demonstrate just how despised he was. It is a tour de force that is rarely seen in historical analysis or Qumran studies. It is audacious and highly speculative, but if you follow his reasoning he convincingly leads you to his conclusion.

For some, this will be a journey that is far too speculative to manage. For others, this type of historical agenda and methodology may seem too contrived. But one cannot debate that Eshel draws clear and unequivocal conclusions that are lacking in most books on the scrolls. Some examples follow. In chapter 6, he analyzes how the Pesher of Nahum "leads to the identification of the Lion of Wrath as Alexander Jannaeus" (p. 123). In chapter 7, he identifies a little-known character of

the scrolls, Potlaid of 4Q468e, as "Peitholaus, a Jewish officer who in 57 BCE joined Gabinius ... in his war against Alexander, the son of Aristobulus II" (p. 143). In chapter 8, he identifies Pompey in 4Q386 as both the Wicked One and the "son of Belial" (p. 155). In chapter 9, he analyzes 4Q247 in search of the mysterious "Kittim." His incisive analysis of the different scrolls texts leads him to three conclusions. First, he comes to the conclusion that "the king of the Kittim should be identified in 4Q247 as one of the Hellenistic kings" (p. 166). In the same chapter, he recognizes that in the *War Scroll*, Kittim refers to the Seleucids yet in two of the *pesharim* they are clearly Romans. Finally, he concludes that "it is impossible to identify them" (p. 172). This is a courageous statement given his penchant to make an identification and stick with it. It is a testament to his scholarly motivation.

The strength of this book is that it has so carefully identified named individuals in specific time periods and found good textual readings and interpretations of passages in Josephus, Philo, and the Apocrypha to support the identifications. Another strength is that Eshel has developed an overarching view of the Hasmonean families as a part of Second Temple history. One hopes that Eshel will write a full social history of the Hasmoneans that incorporates his conclusions into a full, flowing account. This having been said, if one of the strengths of this book is its ability to put identification and name to specific time periods and events, one of its weaknesses is the inability to recognize how other scholars reached other conclusions that may be equally valid. It is clear that he is unable to accept the identifications of other scholars that argue for different time periods and events. I was surprised, for example, that Michael Wise's meticulous analysis in "Dating the Teacher of Righteousness and the *Floruit* of His Movement," published in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (2003) (where he dates the Teacher of

Righteousness to the first century BCE), is placed with “far fetched hypotheses” (p. 43n35).

Throughout the book, Eshel weaves his careful reading of the comparative literature (Apocrypha, Philo, Josephus, etc.) into his reading of the scrolls. This is different than most other publications on the scrolls that quote a sentence or two from Josephus or the Apocrypha but rarely present entire passages with direct connections to the DSS. Eshel’s book has good indices of modern and ancient scholars and names and a few relevant photographs. A general index of topics and a bibliography (what Eshel would suggest for further reading) would have been helpful. The book overall will be serviceable for specialists and non-specialists of DSS literature but would be equally relevant for Jewish historians of the Second Temple period, and Philo and Josephus researchers, as well as Hebrew Bible and New Testament scholars.

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