

REVIEW ARTICLES:

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SOME RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF THE DEAD SEA DOCUMENTS

Two recent publications enrich our store of prime documents from the Dead Sea area and contribute to our understanding of Jewish traditions, especially as they refer to the history of the Biblical canon. By happy coincidence, both volumes shed light on the enigma of the Book of Ben Sira and its position in normative Judaism. And since the fate of that book is significant for all marginal or apocryphal literature, any new lights shed on it will always be welcome as a major contribution to Jewish scholarship.

When the Dead Sea Scrolls were first reported to the world at large, some of the first publications discounted their inter-relationship with Ben Sira. The present reviewer traced, however, already sixteen years ago striking affinities in style and terminology between Ben Sira and certain Dead Sea

documents. When shortly thereafter a few extremely small fragments of original Ben Sira texts were discovered in Cave 2, the present reviewer stated: "It can be predicted with almost complete certainty that additional Ben Sira texts will appear in the Dead Sea area."¹ The two publications under review here amply justify, in retrospect, this confidence, for they offer major portions of the earliest Ben Sira texts known, committed to writing merely a few generations after their composition.

The widely publicized Masada excavation near the Dead Sea a few years ago yielded, in its second season, on April 8th, 1964, in the ruins of the fortifications a cache of leather fragments which were quickly identified by Prof. Yigal Yadin as parts of the Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew. The seven readable columns in these fragments

* *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada* by Yigal Yadin, (Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem, 1965), *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave II (II Psa)* by J. A. Sanders, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

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were expertly prepared for publication within record time, the Hebrew-English volume being published exactly 12 months after the historic discovery. The text covers the section chapter 39 verse 27 to ch. 44 v. 17, dealing with praise of God's works; life's toils; life's joys; death; timidity; the education of girls; the greatness of creation; history of the Patriarchs (partial). The importance of this discovery can properly be evaluated if we consider that, outside of the Ben Sira quotations in the Talmudic literature and, occasionally, in medieval Jewish works, no Hebrew text of Ben Sira was known 70 years ago. The problem of identifying the Hebrew original of the work has, therefore, occupied scholars for generations, especially after the discovery of a partial medieval Hebrew text in the Cairo *Geniza* in 1896. While most scholars held that the Cairo text was a retranslation into Hebrew from the extant Greek and/or Syriac versions, the minority believed it to be based on the original Hebrew text of the author. The recent appearance of the Dead Sea literature can be welcomed as massive support of the minority view. The Masada text now crowns the arguments in favor of the known Hebrew text as being the original, and the Greek and Syriac versions as being secondary translations, since the Masada document can be dated about 150 BCE, with an absolute downward historic limit of 73 CE, the year of Masada's destruction.

The discovery of the Masada text contributes to our knowledge

of the supreme faithfulness with which sacred and semi-sacred texts were handed down through the generations. We can now compare the Ben Sira texts as they appear in the Masada original, in the Talmud and, later, in the medieval Cairo text. It is apparent that the originality of the text was conscientiously safeguarded and preserved in the centuries between the Hasmonean and Amoraic periods, a span of some 500 years, while certain corruptions crept into the text in the post-Talmudic period after the work had been demoted from its earlier prominence.

It has long been known that Ben Sira was at one time practically considered part of the Biblical canon; this can be demonstrated by the numerous instances where the Talmud introduces Ben Sira's quotations with terms reserved for Biblical passages: משולש בכחובים (*Bava Kama* 92b; Ben Sira 13:15); כתוב (*Chagigah* 13a, *Yevamot* 63b etc.); כדכתיב (*Bava Batra* 98b, *Niddah* 16b, etc.). It must be against this background that we must view the Tannaitic injunctions against the work. The most severe of these is found in *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* X:1 where, according to Rabbi Akiva, the reading of Ben Sira is said to cause one to forfeit one's share in the world to come. Milder in tone, yet definitive, are the following pronouncements: *To-sephta Yadaim* II excludes Ben Sira from the laws of purity attached to sacred Books; *Kohelet Rabbah* XII:13 eliminates Ben Sira from books approved for profound study.

This negative attitude undoubt-

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edly underwent a marked change in the post-Tannaitic period. Already in the discussions reported in *Sanhedrin* 100b, the Amoraim find it difficult to discover the justification for a ban on Ben Sira and, finally, Rav Joseph concludes: "The worthwhile portions of the book may be subjected to interpretation." Later commentaries (e. g. *Ritva* on *Batra* 92b; *Shearey Korban* on *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* X: 1) also rule that the prohibitions against Ben Sira are only directed against full-time dedication to the study of Ben Sira, while one may peruse the work to find wisdom and moral lessons.

The crucial question arises: why was Ben Sira at one time subjected to the severity of a complete ban? Many fanciful answers have been given by such historians as Geiger, Graetz, and Weiss, but these have never been genuinely satisfactory. The newly found Scrolls offer perhaps the true perspective of the evolution in Ben Sira's position in Jewish literature.

The Masada document shows that the scribe ruled his lines with a stylus and suspended the letters from these lines, according to the Halakhah of *Shirtut* applying to sacred Scrolls. Furthermore, the Ben Sira text is divided into hemistichs similar to chapter 32 in Deuteronomy (a Psalm Scroll found at Masada likewise is written in hemistichs), and exactly this division and composition of the columns is preserved in the Cairo document. Coupled with the literary evidence in the Talmud, these features show that the work at an early stage was afforded a

similar classification and treatment as the books of the Bible. But the new documents also show a further penetration by Ben Sira: they prove that Ben Sira material was widely used in liturgical texts, intermingled with the Biblical Psalms. Prof. Yadin points out (p. 3 op. cit.) that the Greek letter *Psi* which appears on top of one Masada page may be an abbreviation for the Greek word *Psalmos*, since the page contains a Psalm-like chapter on the mighty acts of God. The Oxford Press volume (see below) lends powerful support to this assumption, for there Ben Sira material is used together with Biblical and Apocryphical Psalms evidently for liturgical purposes, to such a degree that the border line between Ben Sira and the Psalms can hardly be discerned. The *Psi* symbol in the Masada document may thus be an indication that the respective portion was to be used liturgically together with canonical Psalms. It can easily be understood that the Rabbinic authorities, intent on preserving the sanctity of the approved canon, and observing the crumbling of any differentiation between inspired and un-inspired writings, felt compelled to take drastic steps to draw a line around the authorized portions of the Bible. This must have taken place at the same time as various Books of the Bible were also subjected to close scrutiny, e.g. Ezekiel, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes. The Tannaitic ban against Ben Sira was effective indeed, and its exclusion from the canon was assured for all times (likewise in the

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Protestant canon, however the Latin *Vulgata* based on the Greek versions, includes not only Ben Sira, but also the other Apocrypha). It was when the outline of the approved canon was firmly established and the danger of giving Ben Sira equal status with the Biblical Book of Psalms had gone forever that the ban could be modified. The reading of Ben Sira as a source of the personal wisdom and moral lessons of one wise man could, therefore, be permitted without any misgivings. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Ben Sira remained the inspiration to a few famous liturgical works, especially in the Yom Kippur service.²

The Yadin publication abounds with useful and relevant references to cognate sources, including Talmudic references and, of course, comparisons with the Cairo text. While not claiming to be an exhaustive and definitive study of the Scroll, the publication, despite the short time available to the editor, is a masterly and highly competent work which will be the basis of further important studies on the subject. The English and Hebrew sections of the book are equally important, and neither should be overlooked by the student. It is only to be regretted that the plates reproducing the text are not enlarged enough to allow careful examination of the original.

The Oxford Press volume entitled *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11* is not intended by its Editor primarily as a contribution to the study of Ben Sira. The slow rate of publications of prime ma-

terial uncovered in the caves in Jordan was commented on by this reviewer in *Tradition*, Vol. 7, No. 1. It was, therefore, no surprise that the fourth volume of the Oxford Press series, which appeared in early 1965, was not dedicated to the all-important and partly controversial material from Cave 4 discovered in 1952, with its vast material bearing on the "inter-testamental" period. Instead, it contains but one single Scroll of the perhaps equally rich eleventh Cave, discovered ten years ago. This is a departure from the character of the previous volumes of the Oxford Press series which till now have contained the complete inventories of various caves and areas. This was perhaps the result of a special private grant given the American School of Oriental Research in 1961 to purchase the publication rights to the Psalms Scroll alone, although we cannot free ourselves from the feeling that the "inter-confessional" committee in Jordan, primarily made up of Catholic priests, were not unhappy over the delays in the publication of more "controversial" material from this and other caves. (Our misgivings in this regard, expressed in *Tradition* Vol. 7, No. 1, have meanwhile been widely echoed in an article published in *The Sunday Times* of London of November 21, 1965, p. 13, entitled "The Scrolls and Christianity.") Be it as it may, the present volume comprises only 99 pages and 17 plates, all printed with the usual clarity and precision in the tradition of the Oxford Press. The Editor, Prof. J. S. Sanders of Colgate Rochester Divinity

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School, explains in the Preface that he had only a "comparatively short period of time" (thirteen months, a little more than the time allowed Prof. Yadin for the Masada volume) to prepare the publication of the Scroll and thus apologizes for "oversights and errors" which the work contains. It would seem to us, however, that the shortcomings are rooted in the fact that the editor, while giving credit to a long list of scholars and clergymen, did not consult any Jewish scholars or men with a background in the Talmudic literature of the period in question.

The Psalms Scroll contains portions of various chapters in the canonical Psalms in the following order: 136, 118, 145, 139, 137, 138, 93, 141, 133, 144, 142, 143, 149, 150, 140 and 134. But the significance of the Scroll lies undoubtedly in the non-biblical material interspersed here and there within this series of Psalms. Besides the presence of three chapters of the so-called Syriac Psalms, previously known in their Syriac translations only, there are totally new apocryphical sections entitled by Prof. Sanders "Plea for Deliverance," "Apostrophe to Zion," "Hymn to the Creator" and "David's Composition." Finally, there is a substantial section of Ben Sira's chapter 51, sometimes described as a canticle.

Unfortunately, the editor devotes valuable space to such idle topics as the "Orphic" elements in the personality of David, based, at best, on a very questionable interpretation of Syriac Psalm I, also called Psalm 151. Serious scholars would not search for traces of Or-

pheus in Biblical personalities. On the other hand, he fails to note the highly intriguing problems offered by "David's Compositions," a text listing a total of 4,050 Davidic compositions, including 364 songs for the daily Tamid sacrifice, 52 songs for the Sabbath sacrifices of the year and 30 for the sacrifices of the *קורבן ראשי החודשים ולכול ימי המועדות וליום הכפורים* (sic!). The term *המועדות* (mistranslated by the editor as "Solemn Assemblies"), are of course the Festivals and the total number of 30 arises from adding up 12 New Moons, 1 day of *Rosh Hashanah*, 1 day of *Yom Kippur*, 7 days of *Sukkot*, 1 day of *Shemini Atzeret*, 7 days of *Pesach* and 1 day of *Shevuot*. It follows that *Rosh Hashanah*, falling on the first day of the month, was also signified as a New Moon.³ The editor fails to note any significance from the point of view of Halakhah in this list, for example the celebration of 1 day of *Rosh Hashanah*, or of a 364 day and 52 week year.

The rendition of Psalm 145 also offers interesting features which the editor ignores. Each verse is followed by the refrain *ברוך ה' וברוך שמו לעולם ועד* which may hint at the Talmudic saying that the faithful reading of Psalms 145 brings eternal life as a reward, cf. *Berakhot 4b*) which may indicate that the Scroll was not intended as a faithful copy of the Biblical text, but was part of liturgical work. The fact that the chapters do not follow the accepted order, as found in other Qumran Psalters as well as in the Massoretic text, may also bear this out. Therefore, the inclusion of a verse

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commencing with the letter Nun—absent in the Massoretic text (see *Berakhot* 4b) — may not offer a problem of Biblical exegesis.

While Prof. Sanders correctly identifies parts of Columns XXI and XXII as Ben Sira 51:13-30, he remarks: "It is now quite clear that the canticle is totally independent of Sirach. If Jesus, son of Sira, of Jerusalem, had penned the canticle it would not be found in QPsa which claims Davidic authorship. That neither David nor Sira wrote it needs no comment. What is interesting, is that in Palestine it could be considered Davidic while contemporarily in Alexandria it became related to the later 'Jerusalem' sage" (p. 83 *op. cit.*) We must wholly disagree with these remarks, as we have shown that Ben Sira was widely drawn upon for use in liturgical contexts. In fact, Sanders has failed to recognize several additional Ben Sira passages within the other non-Biblical portions of the Psalms Scroll. Thus line 2 in "Please for Deliverance" חַי חַי יוֹדָה לִכְהָ is a quotation from Ben Sira 17:20 חַי חַי הוּא יוֹדָה לָהּ. Lines 16, 17 in "Apostrophe to Zion" קָחַי חֲזוֹן דּוֹבַר עֲלֵיךְ draw on Ben Sira 20:21. Compare likewise Col. XVIII:12 and Ben Sira 39:1; Col. XXII:1,2 and Ben

Sira 24:10,11; Col. XII:17,18 and Ben Sira 36:19; Col. VII:9 and Ben Sira 35:8. Furthermore, dozens of instances can be cited where similar terminology and phraseology is used in both documents. In short, it seems certain that Ben Sira material was widely used by the authors of the Syriac Psalms as well as the new apocryphal texts. Under these circumstances, the presence of Ben Sira 51 within the Psalms Scrolls is no reason to deny the canticle the authorship of Ben Sira. Similar terminology and phraseology is used in most documents (e.g. תּוֹרַת עֲלִיּוֹן).

Ben Sira's stature as a towering literary figure in the early Second Commonwealth is greatly enhanced by the newly discovered texts and we now better appreciate the severity of the task undertaken by the Rabbis in delegating his book to the secondary realm in our religious literature. The newly found material should now be subjected to further study as to its position in the history of Wisdom Literature, the position of the Apocrypha in relationship to the Talmud, the development of the liturgy, the canonization of the Bible, and many other areas of essential value to the student of Jewish traditions.

NOTES

1. "Ben Sira and the Qumran Literature", *Revue de Qumran*, No. 9, February, 1961, p. 104.
2. See the writer's "Yom Kippur in Qumran", *Revue de Qumran*, No. 9, February, 1961, pp. 117-124.
3. Cf. *Betzah* 16a, *Tosaphot ad locum*.