

Prof. Scott B. Noegel
Chair, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization
University of Washington

Book review:

Martinez, Florentino Garcia. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English.* Wilfred G. E. Watson, trans. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994.

First Published in:

Digest of Middle Eastern Studies 4/4 (1995), 78-85.



T

he Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English

Florentino García Martínez
Translated by Wilfred G. E. Watson

Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994, lxvii, 513 pages. \$80 cloth (ISBN 90-04-10088-1), \$30 paperback (ISBN 90-04-100482), LCCN 94-017429.

Review by
Scott B. Noegel, Ph.D.
University of Washington, Seattle

It is with great pleasure that we welcome Florentino García Martínez's *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, a translated and revised version of his *Textos de Qumrán* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1992). For the first time since their discovery, the English-reading public now has access to 270 of the most important non-biblical Dead Sea manuscripts (from a total of more than 800 including biblical works), as well as an up-to-date list of the manuscripts, including the biblical and unpublished materials.

In addition, we can appreciate Martínez's effort to provide the complete picture of Qumran. He not only establishes a clear context for the scrolls by summarizing their findspots and providing a concise history of their discovery and publication, but he also devotes attention to the dispute over the authenticity and antiquity of the scrolls. Before moving to the translations, which comprise the brunt of this work, Martínez concludes his introduction by discussing the various theories concerning the identity and origins of the Qumranites.

The author's aim to provide the public with access to the scrolls (p. xxv) explains why there are no footnotes (except in the introduction) and why he gives simpler titles for the manuscripts alongside



the more cumbersome scholarly *sigla* of the official publication. While the author admits that the lack of notes potentially could prevent the student from grasping "the literary, historical, and theological problems" (p. xxviii) which the scrolls present, the benefits of this volume to the interested reader will outweigh by far any drawbacks. Other English versions of the scrolls pale in comparison (cf. the now out-of-date Gaster [1956] and the incomplete Vermes [1995], the latter of which translates only 70 manuscripts).

This book has many positive attributes. The line numbering informs the reader exactly where words appear in the texts. In addition, we may thank Martínez for keeping restorations to a minimum, despite the fragmentary nature of many of the scrolls. Excessive restoration of any ancient text almost always leads to a misunderstanding of that text. Compare, for example, the recent edition of some of the scrolls by Eisenman and Wise (1992), wherein restorations appear far too frequently and carry too much interpretive import.¹

The book's organization also successfully reflects the homogeneous nature of the Qumran materials. Martínez remarks:

The material has been set out systematically, which enables the internal relationships among the different manuscripts to be perceived and highlights the homogeneity of content of the Qumran library (p. xxvii).

Martínez also is sensitive to contradictions in theology and practice represented in the various scrolls, for which he accounts by positing a gradual theological transformation within the Qumran community.

Clearly, a group that persisted for centuries could not have maintained a monolithic uniformity throughout its whole history. It must have undergone intense development in its theology, its halakhah, and in its very organization (p. 1).

The group with which Martínez identifies the people of Qumran is the Essenes, and it is here, in this reviewer's opinion, that a few critical remarks are warranted.

While the debate on Qumranic origins has been raging for some time in scholarly circles, the general public has had little access to the scrolls and the complex issues involved with interpreting them other than through sensationalist tabloids and non-scholarly books.



As a result, old theories concerning the origins of the Qumran community, which should be discarded, continue to impress the popular media. Thus, it will be worthwhile to summarize briefly the competing theories.

The first is the claim that the scrolls are Christian writings. While the manuscripts do provide some background for the emergent Christian movement, they do so only within the context of ancient Judaism. They never mention Jesus, John the Baptist, or any other New Testament figure and, in fact, with few exceptions, the scrolls antedate the rise of Christianity.

Another theory is that the Qumran library belonged to the Jerusalemite Temple whose priests hid the scrolls from Roman invaders. However, this too is unlikely because the Qumran texts, especially the *Halakhic Letter* (4QMMT), suggest that the legal practices of the Qumranites were in opposition with those of the Jerusalemite priesthood. For this same reason, the hypothesis that the Qumranites were a Pharisaic or Pietist (i.e., Hasidic) faction also is untenable.

The dominant theory, and one to which Martínez subscribes with some modification,² is that the inhabitants of Qumran were Essenes. However, this theory can no longer be maintained unless we admit that the portrayals of the Essenes' way of life by Philo Judaeus, Josephus Flavius, and Pliny the Elder are not entirely commensurate with the practices of the group at Qumran.³ Alternatively, we may posit that within the Essene movement were various subgroups.

However, these looming issues do not seem to trouble Martínez, who insists on portraying the Qumranites as an Essene splinter group.

The Qumran community, instead, has its origin in a rift which occurred within the Essene movement. This rift was to cause those siding with the Teacher of Righteousness to set themselves up with him in the desert, until 130 BCE (p. liii).

As mentioned above, the enigmatic origin of the Qumran community cannot be explained so easily. Indeed, the name "Essene" appears nowhere in the scrolls. Moreover, in a series of articles, Lawrence H. Schiffman has demonstrated convincingly that the *Temple Scroll* (11QT) and the *Halakhic Letter* (4QMMT) reflect a Sadducean approach to Jewish law. Martínez' theory of theological development cannot account for this. Thus, Schiffman argues:



In the aftermath of the [Maccabean] revolt, a small, devoted group of Sadducean priests probably formed the faction that eventually became the Dead Sea sect. Unwilling to tolerate the replacement of the Zadokite high priest with a Hasmonaean, which took place in 152 B.C.E., they also disagreed with the Jerusalemite priesthood on many points of Jewish law. Recent research indicates, as we shall see, that soon after the Hasmonaean takeover of the high priesthood, this group retreated to Qumran (Schiffman [1994]).⁴

If we add to this the linguistic connection between the famous Teacher of Righteousness (*sedeq*), the Jerusalemite priestly name Zadok (*šādōq*), and the name Sadducees (*sedōqīm*), an Essene origin becomes less plausible, and a Sadducean origin all the more likely. Moreover, the sectarians at Qumran frequently refer to themselves as the "Sons of Zadok" (*bēnē šādōq*).

Perhaps it is Martínez's view that the Qumran community was comprised of Essenes that persuaded him to title manuscript 4Q414 as a "Baptismal Liturgy" (p. 439). This is far too confessional a label, and a close examination of this text suggests that it has much in common with 4Q512 which Martínez more objectively titles a "Ritual of Purification" (p. 441).

At times Martínez's efforts to convey the homogeneity of the Qumran materials and community also gloss over the complexities which the materials present. Regarding the so-called "scriptoriums" (scribal writing rooms), for example, Martínez avers: "these show that it was a place intended for the preparation and copying of the manuscripts discovered in the caves" (p. xl). Though this reviewer also feels the rooms could have been used for this purpose (and the scrolls probably were copied somewhere in the compound) the evidence is not as clear as Martínez portrays it. In fact, besides two inkwells and a plaster-covered table discovered there, little evidence exists for interpreting the room as a scriptorium.⁵ Also, scribes in this period did not use tables but rather sat with their legs folded with the manuscripts on their laps. Furthermore, the table stands only 50 centimeters high; too short, it would seem, for writing.

There also are a few mistranslations worth noting. For example, one finds the Hebrew *yad* translated as "hand" where one should read it as the well-known euphemism for "penis." In particular, I have in mind the *Rule of the Community* (e.g., pp. 11, 26, 31) wherein the Qumran initiate is commanded: "And whoever takes out his 'hand' from under his clothes, or if these rags are clothes that



allow his nakedness to be seen, he will be punished thirty days." "Hand" in this case is too literal and makes little sense. Moreover, that Martínez does not shy from employing the word "penis" in another text (p. 78) makes the translation "hand" in the aforementioned pericope even more glaring.

Another mistranslation occurs in the quotation of Deut 32:33, "their wine is serpent's venom and the head of cruel, harsh asps" (pp. 38, 45), where Hebrew *rôš* does not mean "head," but rather "poison."⁶

In addition, there are a few stylistic inconsistencies. For example, the author informs us that he will translate the sacred name "Yahweh," commonly called the tetragrammaton, as **** (p. xxxvi). However, frequently one finds the name's transliteration "YHWH" (e.g., pp. 241-243, 281-287, 303-316). Furthermore, as many English Bible translations prefer to translate the name Yahweh as "Lord" out of reverence, one wonders whether the Hebrew personal name "Yahweh" or the noun "Adonai" (lit. "Lord") lies behind the translation "Lord" on pp. 361, 366, 394, and others. Similarly inconsistent are abbreviations for biblical books. Compare, e.g., "Dt" (Deuteronomy) on pp. 137-139, but "Deut" elsewhere; "Is" (Isaiah) on p. 185, but "Isa" elsewhere.

Martínez also translates copies of the *Damascus Document* that were discovered in the famous Cairo *genizah*, a storehouse for manuscripts found in the Ben Ezra synagogue in Fustat, Old Cairo (pp. 33-47), but does not include a discussion of these extremely important documents in the introduction, where all other Qumran-related finds are outlined (pp. xxxii-xxxv).

In a tome this large, typos are unavoidable, and it is only with respect for the author and for his major accomplishment that I list the following.

- p. xxxii "Alexander the Great in 331 BCE" lacks a period.
- p. xxvii-xxviii "bible" should be capitalized.
- p. lxiii, n.39 "alexander the great, bar Kohkba" should read "Alexander the Great, bar Kokhba".
- p. xxxix "well into the second half of the second century BCE" should read "well into the first century BCE".
- p. xlv "text to be known It would be also" lacks a period between sentences.
- p. xlvi "However it did establish" lacks a comma.
- p. xlvi "4th c BCE" should read "4th century BCE" as elsewhere (cf. p. xlvi).
- p. l "halakhah" should be italicized as it is on p. xlix. (The same



oversight appears on pp. li, lxvi, liii, liv, 76, 142.)

- p. li "after 70 CE It achieves no more" lacks a period between sentences.
- p. lxvii contains an upside down question mark before "Judas Macabeo."
- p. lv "Pharisees and Sadducees There is an" lacks a period between sentences.
- p. lvi "effected" should read "affected".
- p. 2 "but its is impossible" should read "but it is impossible".
- p. 64 "And how, listen to me" should read "And now, listen to me".
- p. 82 "[not] enter [the pur]" should read "[not] enter [the pure]".
- p. 88 "Unclean, unclean, he will shout" lacks inner quotation marks.
- p. 94 "pesharim" should be italicized (cf. second time it occurs on p. 94 where it is italicized).
- p. 112 "he will the covenant of Israel shine with joy" lacks the verb "make".
- p. 131 "Adom and Moab" should read "Edom and Moab".
- p. 167 "shall not enter my temple which their soiled impurity" should read "shall not enter my temple with their soiled impurity".
- p. 196 "He will hate them and loathes them" should read "He will hate them and loathe them".
- p. 246 "God, who lives [for eternity. has made all these works." should read "God, who lives] for eternity, has made all these works."
- p. 247 "They become pregnant by them. and [gave birth" should have a comma and not a period.
- p. 303 "a prophets' dream" should read "a prophet's dream".
- p. 315 "Man will not be prevail" should read "Man will not prevail".
- p. 325 "because you done all this." should read "because you did all this."
- p. 478 "conatins" should read "contains".
- p. 357 "if you not steady my feet." should read "if you do not steady my feet."
- p. 360 "presumptious" should read "presumptuous".
- p. 370 "and those who fall to earth" lacks a period.
- p. 372 "shame of ones face" should read "shame of one's face".
- pp. 377-378 "it will not make reach you" should read "it will not reach you".



- p. 429 "and their is the uproar" should read "and there is the uproar".
- p. 449 "and in it he lives since eternity." should read "and in him he lives for ever." Cf. translation of text duplicate on p. 448.
- p. 466 Pagination of *Henoch* 11 (1989) is not 149-132 but rather 149-232.

Finally, I offer two suggestions for future editions. The first is to supply the reader with a few photos of Qumran and with maps, both of its archaeological layout and of the several Qumran-related discovery sites. The second is to provide a glossary of terms to aid the "reader, without any knowledge of the original language" (p. xxv) for whom this book was intended. Few non-scholars will understand the terms *midrash*, *shekinah*, *gamul*, *debir*, *sikkut*, *pesharim*, *hodayoth*, *brontologion*, or several others which are given without explanation.

Let me state clearly, however, that I do not want to give the impression that this work is seriously flawed. On the contrary, the translation of this vast corpus of Qumran materials is a veritable *tour de force*, one that certainly will become useful in classrooms. Moreover, Martínez has undertaken this monumental project with sensitivity and expertise. The public now can join the scholarly world in fascination of these most intriguing documents.

Select Bibliography

- Eisenman, R. and Michael O. Wise. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (Shatesbury: Element, 1992).
- Gaster, T. H. *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1956 [3rd ed. 1976]).
- Golb, N. "Khirbet Qumran and the Manuscripts of the Judean Wilderness," *JNES* 49 (1990), 103-114.
- Koehler, L., and W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*. Vol. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990).
- Martínez, Florentino García. "Notas al margen de *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered*," *Revue de Qumrân* 61 (1993), 123-150.
- _____. "Qumran Origins and Early History: A Groningen Hypothesis," *FO* 25 (1988), 113-136.
- Schiffman, Lawrence H. *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: the History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994).



- _____. "Sacral and Non-Sacral Slaughter according to the *Temple Scroll*," in *Time to Prepare the Way in the Wilderness: Papers on the Qumran Scrolls*. Devorah Dimant & Lawrence H. Schiffman, eds. (*Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*, Vol. XVI; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 69-84.
- Vermes, Geza. *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin, 1987).

Footnotes

1. For a similarly critical review, see Martínez (1993).
2. See Martínez (1988) for a more thorough expression of his views on this subject.
3. For a more detailed argument, see Golb (1990), especially p. 108.
4. Schiffman (1994), p. 75.
5. For an elongated, yet unconvincing argument, see Golb (1990), especially p. 109.
6. See, Koehler and Baumgartner (1990), p. 1089. Some polysemy doubtless was intended.