

## Informed Scholarship

*LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls.* Edited by Donald W. Parry and Dana M. Pike (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1997).

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RECENT YEARS HAVE SEEN A REVIVAL of interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) among Latter-day Saints, prompted in part by the appointment of several BYU faculty (Donald W. Parry, David R. Seely, Dana M. Pike, and Andrew W. Skinner) to the international team of DSS editors and by publicity surrounding the creation of the FARMS-BYU Dead Sea Scrolls electronic database. In response to this increased interest, BYU's College of Religious Education and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) co-sponsored a one-day public conference at BYU on 23 March 1996 entitled "LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls." The presentations made at this conference form the basis for all but one of the chapters in the volume under review.

This collection begins with a brief but useful introduction that includes a discussion of DSS terminology, a timeline describing recent LDS involvement in DSS research, and a list of selected LDS and non-LDS publications on the DSS. This is followed by an excellent beginning chapter specially prepared for this volume by Andrew W.

Skinner in which he provides a thorough, well-written introduction to the majority opinion regarding the DSS and the people who created them. One wishes that Skinner had spent more time discussing the issues raised by the small group of serious scholars who question various aspects of this majority opinion, such as those who place the origin of the DSS in Jerusalem or Ein Gedi, but this is a minor quibble. In fact, if the small number of LDS specific passages were removed, this chapter would be a serious candidate for inclusion in any textbook on the DSS no matter the publisher or the intended audience. The same can be said for chapter 2, a discussion by Donald W. Parry of the contribution of the DSS to biblical scholarship. This concise, well-written chapter makes its points clearly and concisely without overwhelming the reader with unnecessary detail.

Chapter 3, by Dana M. Pike, focuses on a topic of more direct interest to Latter-day Saints. Pike examines the DSS in order to discern if their ancient authors' belief system included elements of the LDS "Plan of Salvation." Readers hoping to find a positive answer to this question will be disappointed; the DSS show little evidence to support such a claim. In fact, many central elements of the LDS view are not found at all, while others appear in the form of what Pike claims to be "... corrupted echoes of true doctrines..." (90).

In the next chapter, David Rolph Seeley summarizes the nature of wor-

ship among the people of the DSS. The approach is less LDS-centric than the previous chapter; in fact, it comes close to the same level of generality as do the chapters by Skinner and Parry. The Old Testament origin of ritual among the DSS community is clear, as are the comparisons to LDS practices of similar origin.

Chapter 5 represents a major change of direction. It is the only chapter contributed by a non-LDS scholar, Florentino García Martínez of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. It is also the longest chapter and the one that will be of greatest difficulty for the vast majority of LDS readers. Paradoxically, it is also the chapter that makes perhaps the greatest contribution to DSS scholarship. Martínez examines in great detail the corpus of texts that contains traces of what he refers to as the "Messianic Hopes of the Qumran Writings." He identifies at least five distinct messianic figures, none of whom correlates well with the LDS view of the true Messiah. The texts Martínez examines do not provide a coherent view of the community's messianic beliefs and even raise the question as to whether a single, consistent viewpoint ever existed in the community. While this might be disturbing to some LDS readers, it highlights the difficulties that arise when we approach ancient documents with present-day preconceptions.

The next chapter returns to an overtly LDS perspective. This short paper by Stephen Ricks explores several similarities between the DSS and the Book of Mormon, both from an historical and a theological perspective. While the similarities presented are interesting, none is terribly surprising or enlightening, although some readers might find them faith-promoting. As Ricks points out, most of the parallels

seem to reflect a common origin in ancient Hebrew culture. Unlike the scholarly tone of the earlier chapters that incorporate a distinctive LDS theme, I found that this chapter reads more like an extended passage from a Sunday school manual or the transcript of a fireside talk. But the original conference was directed to the LDS public, so this is perhaps understandable. Perhaps the previous chapter on messianic hopes would have found a better fit in this collection if Martínez had reworked it with the non-specialist character of this book's audience in mind.

The final chapters are practical instead of topical. In chapter 7, Scott R. Woodward, Associate Professor of Microbiology at BYU, discusses his experiments with DNA typing for piecing together the hundreds of parchment fragments which make up the vast majority of the DSS that are yet to be translated. At the time of the conference, this project was just beginning, although preliminary results were encouraging. Finally, Donald W. Parry, Steven W. Booras, and E. Jan Wilson describe their work on the FARMS-BYU Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Database. There is no doubt that this database will become a productive tool for serious scholarship on the DSS.

In conclusion, given the title of the volume, it seems a little odd that there is not all that much that is uniquely LDS about these papers. Paradoxically, this oddity may, in fact, increase the value of this collection for LDS readers. What we need is more informed scholarship on the DSS such as this collection provides and less uninformed speculation such as still can be found on the fireside circuit. Although not a major contribution to DSS scholarship, this volume does fill an important gap in LDS literature on this fascinating and important subject.