

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the discovery of the first manuscripts from the Qumran Caves, and to celebrate the occasion Geza Vermes has written this book. It is intended to serve as a general, up-to-date survey of learned work on the Scrolls, and is directed towards the educated public, university students, and specialists on the Scrolls. Such a book Dr. Vermes is eminently qualified to write. Not only has he been closely involved with the Scrolls since the early days of their discovery, but he writes with clarity and lucidity. The more abstruse aspects of the documents—and there are a good many of these—are explained in a non-technical language which is at once comprehensible for the general reader. The detailed notes which follow each chapter, with their important bibliographies, make the book into a valuable source of information for the scholar as well.

After re-telling the story of the Scrolls' discovery, Vermes spends a chapter discussing their authenticity and dating. He reminds us that scepticism about the age of the texts was common immediately after their discovery: the great Shapira scandal of the 1880's had not been forgotten in the world of Semitic scholarship. Archaeological and palaeographical researches, however, have combined to demonstrate the antiquity of the Scrolls to the satisfaction of all the experts, with the notable exception of Solomon Zeitlin, who to the last clung tenaciously to the view that they are mediaeval documents. Most scholars are now agreed that the Scrolls must be dated from pre-Hasmonean to Herodian times.

Chapter Three, The Qumran Library, marks a significant new departure in work on the Scrolls. Vermes has written a concise but detailed Introduction to each non-Biblical document, adding thereto a useful bibliography for each separate item. Fragmentary material which may be unintelligible is omitted, but Vermes is careful to inform the reader where these fragments may be found. This chapter will surely be warmly welcomed by all who work with the Scrolls.

Chapter Four deals with the life and institutions of the Dead Sea Sect. Dr. Vermes' interpretation of the Scrolls at this

point will be familiar to readers of his *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. Here he elaborates his point of view, setting it alongside the opinions of other scholars. The identity of the sect is discussed in the next chapter. Due consideration is given to those who dissent from Vermes' view that the sect is to be associated with the Essenes (he understands this Greek term to derive from the Aramaic *asayya*, healers) as described by Philo, Josephus, and Pliny. Vermes' skilful handling of the evidence from these Greek writers, evidence which is at times self-contradictory, is admirably clear. But opposing theories, which see the sect as Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, or Judaeo-Christians, are examined, and in some detail.

More controversial is Chapter Six, on the history of the sect. Attempts to identify the personalities concealed in the cryptic references of the Scrolls are bound to produce many different results. Vermes identifies the Kittim of the Habbakuk Commentary and other documents with the Romans; the Scoffer, Liar, Spouter of Lies, and Wicked Priest he refers to the same individual, namely Jonathan Maccabaeus, who, with his brother Simon, is one of the "two instruments of violence" described in the Messianic Anthology. The "last priests of Jerusalem" are the later Hasmoneans, and the "furious young lion" of the Nahum Commentary is Alexander Jannaeus, whose crucifixion of the "seekers of smooth things" (according to Vermes, the Pharisees) is recorded also by Josephus, *Antiquities* xiii. 380. The Teacher of Righteousness, the now famous organiser of the sect, still remains an enigma. Vermes is not prepared to proffer identification, although others have done so, and their views are recorded here. Once again, Vermes is careful to list theories of identification which differ from his own.

Vermes is likewise already well known for his work on the life and worship of the sect, and their biblical interpretation, which in the last two chapters receive well deserved attention. Important for students of Christian origins are his remarks (pp. 211-221) about the common matrix from which Essenism and Christianity emerged. Both movements are seen as sharing a common background in their methods of