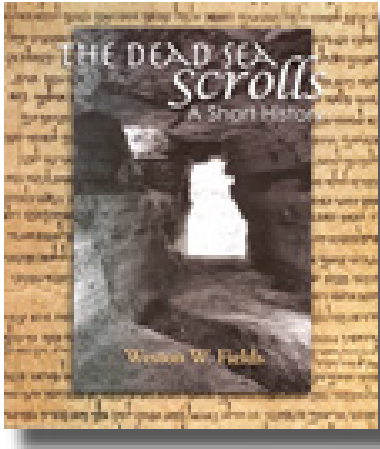


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**Fields, Weston W.**

***The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Short History***

Leiden: Brill, 2006. Pp. 128. Paper. \$26.00. ISBN 9004157603.

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Weston W. Fields, Executive Directory of the Dead Sea Scrolls Foundation (Jerusalem) since 1991, has written an informative and visually appealing introduction to the history of the discovery and study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The subtitle, “a short history,” reflects the relationship between this volume and Fields’s forthcoming two-volume history of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Fields notes in the preface that this book is intended to provide “non-specialists a convenient and updated summary of the history of the scrolls, their relationship to Judaism and Christianity, and their importance for understanding how the Bible was passed down from generation to generation.” He further notes that “it is meant to supplement the small amount of information it is possible to convey in an exhibition, a magazine article or a television program,” while also providing a broader introduction to the world of the scrolls (13).

Indeed, the book most resembles a museum exhibition guide, both in its format (a broad, thin paperback) and layout (double-column text, heavily illustrated). The major difference, however, is that this volume’s text emphasizes the discovery and scholarly work on the scrolls, not descriptions of specific manuscripts, as an exhibition guide

normally would. That said, the book yields nothing in terms of its photographs, boasting numerous excellent images of the caves, important scholars in the field, and various individual scrolls. Fields comments in his acknowledgements that he conducted numerous interviews with key figures in the history of scrolls research and had access to extensive personal and institutional archives for both textual and pictorial sources. The abundance of photos distinguishes this volume from most of the standard introductions to the scrolls, and occasionally details in the text increase one's anticipation of the more expansive, fully documented publication to come.

The book consists of five chapters, a timeline, a glossary, and suggestions for further reading. The first chapter, titled "Discovery and Purchase of the Dead Sea Scrolls," accounts for a third of the book's total pages and is the most appealing chapter. Writing with a general audience in mind, Fields provides a readable account of the discovery of scrolls in various locations in the Judean desert and the adventures of the eventual acquisition of most of these manuscripts for scholarly study. Here his information is relatively detailed compared to similar discussions in the standard introductions to the scrolls, yet it is written in a conversational, sometimes folksy style (occasionally punctuated with phrases such as "one can only imagine..."), lacking footnotes or other documentation of sources. His wealth of insider information is evident in his anecdotes about manuscripts that have disappeared due to theft, others in the possession of antiquities dealers that were viewed once by scholars but never again emerged, and even a fragment of the Peshar Habakkuk that was misplaced but subsequently forwarded to its buyer via the postal system.

The second chapter, "Study and Publication," surveys in only seventeen pages the fifty-plus-year history of the team of scholars assigned to edit the scrolls, the origin and publication progress of the series *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, and the controversy that flared in the 1980s over wider scholarly access to the manuscripts. Whereas the earlier chapter contained much information not normally present in introductory volumes, here it is especially important to remember that Fields is addressing a popular audience and clearly has no interest in polemics. While empathizing to an extent with those who criticized the team for a slow pace of publication and restrictions on access to the texts, overall Fields is sympathetic to the translation team. He briefly notes certain conflicts within the team itself (especially involving John Allegro) and seeks to dispel conspiratorial accusations that scrolls were suppressed for theological reasons. Whereas critics of the team accused members of hoarding various Cave 4 manuscripts for personal benefit, Fields explains that this "proprietary feeling attached to documents one has reconstructed, and in some case discovered or helped to purchase" evolved rather innocently from the early categorization and division of the fragmentary manuscripts by genre, subject, language, and/or script. Fields notes, however, that "in hindsight this

development was ... not entirely felicitous” (65). Similarly, Fields writes with appreciation for the contributions of each of the successive heads of the translation team; the controversy that resulted in the removal of John Strugnell as editor in chief is summarized discreetly as “personal and professional struggles” (69).

Fields’s third chapter is titled “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible.” It includes very brief comments about textual variants in the Qumran biblical scrolls compared to the Masoretic tradition (“the differences are neither theologically nor historically important” [80]), the status of the Hebrew Bible canon in the Second Temple period, and the variety of nonbiblical manuscripts found at Qumran. The fourth chapter addresses “The Dead Sea Scrolls, Judaism, and Christianity.” Fields surveys several possible similarities and differences between the Qumran community and early Christianity, concluding that they share a common Jewish background but that an “organic connection or direct influence” is unlikely (91). Again, one must remember the intended audience when evaluating the text, but a few broad statements in these chapters (concerning the translation of the Septuagint, the circumstances of the Jerusalem council of Acts 15, and messianic expectations at Qumran) are questionable.

The final chapter addresses “Qumran and the Essenes.” Fields summarizes descriptions of the Essenes from Josephus, Philo, and Pliny the Elder (unfortunately, without citing book and paragraph numbers in the original sources), then compares certain aspects of those portraits with data in the Qumran texts. Oddly, much more attention is given to descriptions of the Essenes in the other sources than in the Dead Sea Scrolls, although admittedly a brief survey of Qumran thought appears in the previous chapter.

The volume concludes with a timeline, glossary, and list of books for further study. At fifteen pages, the timeline is longer than most of the book’s chapters. It chiefly repeats information from the first two chapters but occasionally has items not covered elsewhere. The glossary includes twenty-eight entries; the list of recommended books has a few surprises, given Fields’s intended readership, but most entries are for standard English translations and introductions. Some books are not cited in their revised editions, and in these concluding sections (as elsewhere) there is inconsistency with use of the abbreviations BCE/BC and CE/AD.

Overall, Fields’s book succeeds as a supplement to museum exhibition guides and media presentations. Though not intended for academic purposes, professors nevertheless might use it as a supplementary text in courses on the Dead Sea Scrolls for the information in chapter 1 and the excellent photographs. The book is available in Spanish translation as *Los Rollos del Mar Muerto: Una Historia Breve* (Brill, 2008).