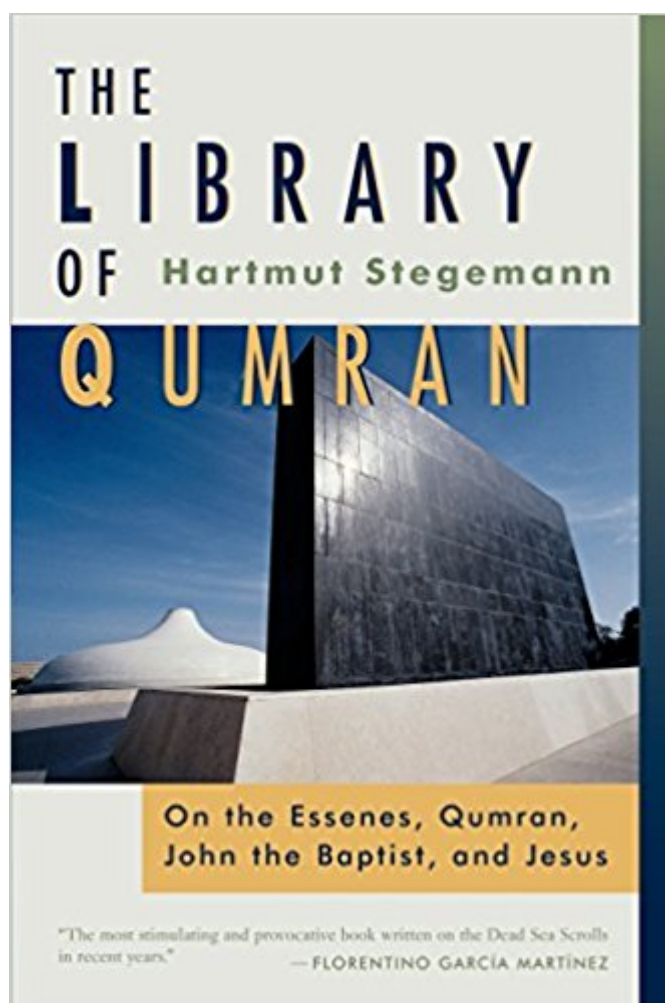


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The Library Of Qumran: On The Essenes, Qumran, John The Baptist, And Jesus



Synopsis

The incredible discoveries at Qumran are unveiled in this compelling volume by one of the world's foremost experts on biblical archaeology and the ancient Qumran community. Drawing on the best of current research and a thorough knowledge of all the Dead Sea Scrolls, Hartmut Stegemann analyzes the purpose of the Qumran settlement, paints a picture of how daily life was carried on there, explores the relation of the Qumran community to John the Baptist, to Jesus, and to early Christianity, and uncovers the true nature of the Qumran writings, which continue to have a profound impact on biblical studies today

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Customer Reviews

Westminster Theological Journal "Occasionally a book is published that dominates the course of scholarship for some time. Witness, for example, the effect that E. P. Saunders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* has had on discussions about Judaism as well as Pauline studies. Whether Stegemann's book will do the same with regard to Qumran studies no one can say, of course, but it certainly has the potential. Some of his positions may turn out to be dead-ends, but others may well be the beginning of major new avenues in Qumran scholarship. . . Qumran scholars have more than enough here to keep the debate lively and the research ongoing."

Text: English (translation) Original Language: German

The book was well done. Very thorough and informative. Sometimes it dragged a little but all things considered it kept my interest. Not sure that I agree with some of his conclusions. It seems fairly obvious to me that members of the first century Church were more than a little influenced by the Essenes.

...but much of the book seems to be a diatribe on the politics of allocating study materials. It does not convincingly make the point that Jesus had little to do with Essenes.

Too long to review quickly and briefly, this book dates from 1997, well after the most significant findings on new discoveries/documents reached the public domain. Thus nothing of consequence is left out of the considerations and analyses here which include comprehensive information suitable for the lay person who has an interest. The chapters at the end on the Essenes, John the Baptist, and Jesus were the most interesting to me. Essentially nothing directly about John and Jesus was found in the ruins. Nevertheless much can be concluded using the New Testament and general scholarship. Many theories of various writers are discussed and comparisons are made. Most of the scrolls were copies of the books of the Old Testament, and in fact are the oldest copies in existence. This book does not contain the text of these, or of the other unfamiliar books, but quotes a bit where necessary. Full texts are readily available elsewhere. Sadly, so much of what was stored was nearly completely lost. Many 'documents' or 'scrolls' are merely fragments, some smaller than a 3x5 file card. The author presumes that some of the material was saved in caves by the residents of Qumran (a rough walled compound in the desert near the Dead Sea, about 35 miles from Jerusalem, with normal living space for about 50 people) likely in preparation for the Roman incursion into the area as that army marched to Jerusalem to curb the rebellion of AD66. This material was packaged carefully with attention to detail, the jars sealed for protection of the contents. In the other caves, some hastily dug, signs were clear that most of the material was only dumped quickly, almost surely by people fleeing the Romans. Thus the Library consisted of manuscripts/books which had been at the site presumably for years and for newly dumped materials belonging to Jerusalem members of the Sect who headed south to escape the Romans. Archeological excavations show the place was burned in AD66, Burnt timbers and Roman arrowheads tell the tale. Thereafter no one returned for manuscripts - the people there were either killed or completely driven away. The large adjacent cemetery excavated shows unusual burials had taken place over decades - the persons there had unusual views, clearly a sect of Jews who separated themselves from the temple crowd in Jerusalem. This fact, and the documents

themselves, point to the place as a refuge for those of the Essene Cult. The author uses his scholarship to describe the many ways John and Jesus differed from the Essense, eliminating the likelihood of their ever belonging to the sect - contrary to many speculations in some books. The author takes the early conclusions of the first excavators, that dwellers at Qumran copied or edited manuscripts because it explains the leather works and other elements in the remains. A later study concluded that it was essentially a pottery factory, and this later theory does not explain all the findings. However, the Library itself is the issue, not what else the Essenes may have done at the site. Most appealing is the pulling together of history, early writings known from various sources, the text of the new documents, the archeology, the New Testament, and other sources into a coherent and very full picture which is clearly and expertly presented.

I am not sure how valuable my assessment of the material will be in light of the fact that this is my first introduction to Qumran. I can say that as reader who has little to no background in this material I found it to be informative and engaging. Dr. Stegemann gives a great introduction to the finds themselves and sets up the story for analysis. As a historian with a minor in anthropology I appreciate the way that he moves through the story with a very level-headed approach to the subject. He really lays out the nuts and bolts of the finds in a meticulous way. While it can be a little dry in parts he does keep short for the most part. There is a principle in archaeology called "Occam's razor" which means that the most obvious answer is likely the correct one. Stegemann employs this in dealing with some of the conspiracies that surround these finds and I found his arguments to be convincing. He gives some great insights into how the community functioned as whole. He does not jump to conclusions about the involvement of the Essenes at Qumran but does not deny it either. The process that the Qumran community had for making scrolls is very interesting as well as the mode of living. He shows the importance of the community in the production of scrolls and much of what has been found indicates that we have faithful translations of the books of the Old Testament. For example: One of the caves in Qumran contained a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah that was 800 years older than anything we previously had. What we found was a book that was for the most part faithful to the one we have with some very small alterations which were insignificant. His dealings with the history of the Essenes was very intriguing and he gave some background stories and postulates who the "Teacher of Righteousness" is. He shows the connection the Essenes had with Herod and with the other religious institutions. He claims that they were more or less most similar to the Saducees than the Pharisees, and he thinks that they may be the scribes that Jesus spoke about in the gospels. He does a good job showing that while there

were similarities between the Essenes and in the way that John the Baptist or Jesus spoke, the distinctions are more vast than the likeness. Jesus' concept of the reign of God is so unique that it is not reflected in any of the thoughts found at Qumran. I thought that the book gave me a solid introduction and I look forward to looking into the subject as I go. I have been studying the gospel of John and gathering ideas about the language found in this book. What I found here was helpful in giving me a portal into this period of history. I definitely recommend this to anyone interested in studying the Life of Christ or are just interested in learning more about the dead sea scrolls.

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