

Devorah Dimant's Scholarship: An Overview

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Professor Devorah Dimant fits the paradigm of the broad, interdisciplinary scholar, whose work encompasses several fields of research. Well versed in various literatures and even distant disciplines, Professor Dimant possesses the rare ability to bring them into closer proximity. Moreover, on reading Devorah's academic biography, one cannot but envy the ease with which she moves between branches of study and with which she learns new areas. Her mastery of new tools and topics continues, and her fields of knowledge range from Jewish philosophy, to Kabbalah, to the Qumran scrolls, and languages, such as Ge'ez.

Devorah began her academic studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in a field far removed from her current work – Jewish philosophy and Kabbala. Her unpublished master's thesis, supervised by Professor Gershom Scholem, treated Shabbetai Zvi's prophet, Nathan of Gaza. Inspired by Professor David Flusser's scholarship and charisma – encountered in her first classes on Qumran literature – Devorah turned to ancient Jewish literature for her doctoral dissertation. The influence of her exposure to Flusser's profound knowledge of Qumran, rabbinic, and Christian literature is still visible in her choice of research topics, which has since encompassed nearly every aspect of Scrolls studies.

In the late 1960s Devorah began writing commentaries to several scrolls, an activity that she still pursues. Her initial attempt, a commentary to the *Genesis Apocryphon* as her doctoral dissertation topic, did not come to fruition not because of academic difficulties, but because of the publication of Joseph Fitzmyer's comprehensive commentary to this scroll. Devorah ceased writing her commentary and instead utilized some of the material she had already gathered for her dissertation: "The Fallen Angels' in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic Books Related to Them" (1974).

Although never published in its entirety, parts appeared as articles, such as, “Sons of Heaven: Angels in the Book of Jubilees in Light of the Qumran Community’s Writings”, in *Tribute to Sara: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Kabbala Presented to Professor Sara O. Heller Wilensky* (Hebrew; 1994; no. 28).¹ Other topics covered in her dissertation that Devorah continues to pursue are the Book of Enoch (6, 9, 11, 12, 47, 51) and the parabiblical nature of some of its parts (Enoch 6–11; items 6, 47), alongside the closely related Qumran “Book of Noah” (1Q19), dealt with extensively in additional studies (42, 60). In a groundbreaking study on a different subject (68), Dimant was the first to identify links in the editing and transmission of three sectarian scrolls – the community rule, the thanksgiving scroll, and the war scroll. Her main contention is that the Cave 1 copies of these works are the official, original (or almost original), and oldest extant copies of these compositions. Dimant suggests that the Cave 4 fragments of these works are later revisions, and sometimes abbreviated versions, of the Cave 1 compositions. She postulates that the Cave 4 scrolls were personal copies of Yahad members. The comparative analysis of the Cave 1 and 4 copies also sheds light on the development of sectarian notions.

The Qumran scrolls represent multifaceted genres. Some scholars specialize in particular genres, such as apocalyptic, halakhic, or calendrical literature. Professor Dimant, on the other hand, is conversant with most of the literary genres represented in the Qumran corpus as well as with their non-Qumranic parallels. In an impressive succession of studies, beginning in 1979, she not only addressed most aspects of this literature but also published new texts. Her study of the Qumran literature integrates the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, both the compositions found in the Qumran corpus as well as those that are not. Dimant maintains that the study of the Scrolls and the Apocrypha necessitates proficiency in the languages in which these books have been preserved, including Aramaic, Syriac, Greek, Latin, and Ge’ez. In her view, Qumran literature and the Apocrypha represent distinct aspects of Second Temple literature; nonetheless, she and other scholars continue to use the conventional terms Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha to describe

1. The numbers refer to items in the bibliography.

the main Jewish literature of this period known prior to the discoveries at Qumran. Devorah's 2006 survey of all the fragments found at Qumran that can be classified as Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha – "Old Testament Pseudepigrapha at Qumran" (59) – uses this terminology. Some of these works belong to previously known apocryphal books; others have been classified as such by virtue of their literary features. This survey clarifies the relationship between the Qumran corpus and the previously known bodies of literature. Although aware of inadequacy of the terms Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Dimant continues to use them, as does VanderKam, whose contribution to the Charlesworth volume in which Dimant's article appeared was on a similar topic.²

Dimant treats other aspects of the Apocrypha, including the Testament as a literary genre (10). Another is the use and exegesis of the Bible in the Apocrypha (17). This study, like item 16, which preceded it, exemplifies Dimant's methodology: she first locates and classifies all the relevant passages in the Apocrypha, and then develops models for their use of biblical writings, ranging from explicit biblical quotations, to references to people and events, to implicit allusions. She shows how varied needs fuel the different books' use of allusions – rhetorical and exegetical, among others. Her studies of the contents of the scrolls in each cave (36) and her classification of the Aramaic Qumran scrolls (69) utilize a similar methodology. In the latter, Dimant offers a preliminary classification of the Aramaic texts according to six themes: the flood and the patriarchs (the majority), visions, legends and court tales, astronomy, magic, and miscellaneous topics.

Devorah's philological studies as well as her role in the Hebrew University Bible Project produced several textual studies of the Septuagint and the Aramaic Targumim (4, 5, 8, 16, 26). Devorah participated in the Bible Project at the highest level of data analysis, and edited the critical apparatus of the ancient targumim alongside the late Professor Moshe Goshen-Gottstein (120).

2. J. VanderKam, "The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha at Qumran", in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran Community*, vol. 2 of *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), 469–91.

Devorah's interest in Qumran literature also produced many profound studies of individual texts, such as her work on 4QFlorilegium (15).³ Of these, the most extensive studies are the ones devoted to the text known as the *Apocryphon of Joshua* (49, 53), which provide a detailed commentary to the document and to its biblical exegesis. In study 49, which deals with this apocryphon, Dimant maintains that the dichotomous classification of the scrolls into sectarian and nonsectarian be expanded to include an intermediate category: semisectarian texts. To this category, she ascribes the *Apocryphon of Joshua*, the *Temple Scroll*, and the book of *Jubilees*.⁴ The *Apocryphon of Joshua*, claims Dimant, reflects the ideas of the Yahad and their calendar but does not employ sectarian terminology.

Devorah's long-standing interest in the book of Daniel is closely related to her work on the *Community Rule*, on which she intends to write a commentary. She has so far published several studies of this book (27, 37). Item 27 analyzes the "Seventy Weeks" prophecy in Dan. 9:24–27 not only in light of the peshar technique but also in light of the Qumran and Jubilean calendars.

Among Professor Dimant's outstanding achievements are her surveys of Qumran literature (13, 36, 44). The first survey (13) appeared in 1984 as part of the *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum* series, and its seventy pages provide a detailed description of all the serakhim, pesharim, eschatological, hymnic, liturgical, and halakhic texts at Qumran. It should be noted that her categorization of "sectarian literature" includes some nonsectarian texts, such as the *Copper Scroll* and "New Jerusalem". In another, no less important, survey (36), Dimant both lists all the sectarian and nonsectarian scrolls and attempts to establish their interconnections. Dimant was the first scholar to sketch the interrelationship between the sectarian and nonsectarian scrolls, which are itemized in detailed lists by cave (1995). In broad terms these lists are still valid today. One aim of this research was to demonstrate the Qumran corpus' internal unity. Dimant shows, among other things, that the ratios between the scroll types – biblical and non biblical as well as other scrolls – are similar for all the caves. Similarly, every cave contains

3. See items 7, 23, 24, 33, 35, 39, 48, 50, 55, 57, 61, 63.

4. See item 49, pp. 106–7.

at least one scroll also found in Cave 4, the cave that housed the central depository.

In Hebrew, English, and French studies Dimant reviews the state of Scrolls research as well as everything related to the Yahad and to the archeology of the Qumran site (38, 43, 54). In other studies, she discusses the religious views of the Yahad. The first discussion of this type was part of a review of Qumran literature (13); others dealt with dualism (40), the perception of time (59), resurrection (46) and the evil forces opposing Israel (56).

The crowning achievement of Dimant's academic work is her publication of new texts from Qumran (4Q385–390), initially in scattered studies,⁵ and eventually in an impressive volume issued by Oxford University Press in 2001. Unpublished texts require unique skills and methodologies. The researcher must classify and decipher dozens of fragments. Physical difficulties hamper this process: indecipherable handwriting, blackened leather, fragmentary preservation of the text, and so on. In this case, compounding the difficulty was the fact that these Pseudo-prophetic texts were also *terra incognita* at the time of their discovery. The researcher who publishes such texts must make some basic decisions: determination of their literary genre, and the number and relationship between the copies, on the basis of only a few fragments. Devorah mastered these techniques, first in conjunction with John Strugnell, the editor-in-chief of the international research team in the 1980s, and then independently. Devorah's work on these texts produced a dozen preliminary studies as well as the final edition – vol. 30 of the prestigious *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* series, an edition that will serve the next generation of researchers well.⁶

DJD 30 substantially enriches our knowledge of parabiblical texts, particularly those related to the prophetic books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Devorah titled the two texts in question *Pseudo-Ezekiel* and the

5. Items 18, 19, 24, 25, 29, 32, 41, 45, 52, 65. Item 46 deals with the resurrection at the End of Days in light of the Pseudo-Ezekiel texts. Item 27 deals with the prophecy in Dan. 9:24–27 in light of 4Q390.

6. *Qumran Cave 4.XXI: Parabiblical Texts, Part 4: Pseudo-Prophetic Texts* (DJD 30; Oxford: Clarendon, 2001).

Apocryphon of Jeremiah. The difference in terminology reflects the fact that former attempts to imitate the style of biblical Ezekiel, whereas the latter elaborates on the book of Jeremiah, often quoting it and Deuteronomy. Also, *Pseudo-Ezekiel* is nonsectarian, whereas Dimant finds traces of sectarian terminology in the *Apocryphon of Jeremiah*. The volume includes an accurate transcription of the fragments, reconstructions of unpreserved parts, and a discussion of the relationship among the various fragments. Photographic plates of the fragments support these reconstructions and proposed relationships. The volume includes an English translation of the fragments, an introduction to the literary genre and to the texts, a detailed commentary, and a concordance. Professor Dimant maintains that these are two separate compositions, each preserved in several copies, which draw on Ezekiel and Jeremiah in different ways. Minimally preserved, these texts, more than other Qumran scrolls, demonstrate our limited knowledge of the essence, contents, and number of copies of the complete compositions. Indeed Devorah changed her mind regarding the number of compositions and copies several times, moving fragments from one copy to another and revising her opinions regarding their content. It is therefore likely that other researchers will have different views as well. Indeed, some hold that Devorah's fragments are part of a single text, in line with her original view.⁷

Much remains unknown regarding these fragments. We do not know if they make up twenty percent (or more) or only five percent of the original compositions or exactly where to place each fragment. Much more than other texts, these fragments justify the image of the researchers of the scrolls as engaged in solving a puzzle without knowing how many of its parts were preserved and without a frame in which to place them. The uncertainty regarding the nature of the fragments and of the

7. See M. Brady, "Prophetic Traditions at Qumran: A Study of 4Q383–391" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2001); idem, "Biblical Interpretation in the 'Pseudo-Ezekiel' Fragments (4Q383–391) from Cave Four", in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran* (ed. M. Henze; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 99–109; B. G. Wright III, Review of *Qumran Cave 4.XXI: Parabiblical Texts, Part 4: Pseudo-prophetic Texts*, by Devorah Dimant, DJD 30, Oxford: Clarendon, DSD 9 (2002): 249–54.

compositions is so overwhelming that researchers often await a revelatory moment. I still recall the telephone conversation in which Devorah triumphantly informed me that she had finally solved the puzzle. Once she had seen the light, she also glimpsed the light at the end of the tunnel.

Professor Dimant has edited numerous books (87–96). Anyone who has submitted a manuscript to her knows how penetrating and beneficial her comments are. This is especially true for *Meghillot*, the annual that she enthusiastically and astutely co-edits with Professor Moshe Bar-Asher. Her critical sense is also evidenced in her numerous book reviews (97–119).

I cannot relate here to as yet unpublished works, but I do know from her biographical sketch that Devorah has numerous projects planned: a Hebrew edition of all the nonbiblical scrolls (with D. Parry), a commentary to the nonsectarian scrolls (with the support of the Israel Science Foundation), a study of the patriarchal traditions in the Qumran Scrolls (with R. Kratz), a study of the conception of time at Qumran (with F. Schmidt), the editing of a book on the history of Scrolls scholarship (with A. Steudel), and commentaries to Daniel, Tobias, and Enoch 1–36. In addition, she will, of course, continue to edit *Meghillot*.

In conclusion, Professor Dimant is an exceptionally gifted philologist, who “mines” the texts in order to extract everything they hold, no more but no less. Her studies display her awareness not only of minute details but also of theological and exegetical paths. She has broad expertise in Qumran literature, and learns and internalizes each and every new text. She is a superb analyst. Both her past work as a news editor and her present academic pursuits testify to her outstanding scholarly ability.