Title

Author(s) Dana M. Pike


ISSN 1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)


Reviewed by Dana M. Pike

As a Latter-day Saint involved in work on the Dead Sea Scrolls, I was anxious to read and review *Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection*. Real progress has been made in the last decade toward publishing the large number of yet-unpublished fragments of scrolls. Many people around the world have become (re)interested in learning about these 2,000-year-old documents found about fifty years ago in caves surrounding a site called Qumran near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. An up-to-date summary of what is known about the scrolls and a competent discussion of possible parallels between Latter-day Saint doctrine and practice and the contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls are needed to help Latter-day Saints understand the value of these documents and the issues involved in analyzing their religious content and significance.

I would love to say that the book under review is just such a book, but it is not. *Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection* is filled with so many editorial and factual errors and the writing is at times so distracting (to me at least), that I was quite frustrated as I read it. Furthermore, the unsubstantiated statements, the incomplete documentation, and the relative absence of a clear explication of the authors' actual views only added to my dismay.

Before offering support for these criticisms, I will make some general observations about the authors and the book. Although I know neither Terry nor Biddulph, I infer from their writing that they are Latter-day Saints who are well-acquainted with the scriptures of the restoration. Furthermore, while I do not believe the authors have academic training relating to the scrolls, they demonstrate a genuine interest in and a certain familiarity with the scrolls. The cover of *Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection* announces in large print at the top: “Keith Terry,” and then in smaller print beneath his name, “Best-Selling Author of *Out of*
Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection (PIKE) 89

Dar kness & Into the Light.” Below this is what appears to be a computer-generated graphic of a scroll set against a desert landscape with electronic circuit paths superimposed on the sand (clever!). Below this graphic is the title, in the same size font as “Keith Terry,” and beneath the title, again in smaller print, is found, “Created by Keith Terry and Stephen Biddulph.” This arrangement struck me as odd. Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection is the first book I have ever read for which the attribution created by was used, and its significance is still not entirely clear to me. I first thought that the cover was meant to imply that Terry and Biddulph had originated the idea of the book together but that Terry was the actual author. However, their names are listed together on the title page and on the book’s spine in traditional fashion (no “created by”), implying that they are joint authors. I have written this review under that assumption. Concerning the book itself, little bibliographic information is provided. Only two lines appear on the copyright page: “Copyright 1996” and “Maasai.” The latter term is apparently the name of the publishing company, which is unfamiliar to me (perhaps the authors self-published the book). The book is published as a paperback. It contains twelve chapters in which the authors introduce the discovery and contents of the scrolls, highlight some of the problems encountered in making them available in published form, consider possible connections between ideas and practices in the Qumran community and those of Latter-day Saints, and highlight recent activity by Latter-day Saints relating to the study and publication of the scrolls.

Moving now to significant problems with this book, it is readily apparent that a thorough, quality editorial review of the manuscript was not a part of the production process of Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection. The following examples should illustrate this point.

Examples of Editorial Slips

“Manuscripts of Murabba” and “Wadi Murabba” (p. 24; read: “Murabba’at” both times; the same name is written “Wadi Murabba ’at,” with a space after the second “a” on pp. 18, 54).
“Pseudo-epigraphy” (p. 35; read: “pseudepigraphy” with no “o” and no hyphen; similarly misspelled on pp. 69, 70, 74, 75 [2x], 82, 83, 92, 128, 139; sometimes appearing correctly).

“John Allegro, a British agnostic, Assigned Biblical commentaries . . . and ‘wisdom literature’ (dept 29)” (p. 49; read: “assigned”; I do not know what “dept 29” means).

“What have been termed ‘secular’ documents” (p. 59; read: “sectarian” for secular; this error is repeated on pp. 60, 61, 62).

“Other interesting hypotheses have surfaced. We enumerate but a few of the more poignant ones” (p. 66; read: “pertinent” for poignant?).

“Rabbi saw Melchizedek as Shem” (p. 78; read: “Rabbis”; more accurately it should read “Some rabbis,” since they did not all share this view).

“We also see in the Christian era, around 1st century, the introduction of proselyting baptism” (p. 88; read: “around the 1st century,” which is vague at best, and presumably means “in the 1st century A.D.,” since the previous sentence deals with Christians; since baptisms do not proselyte, the expression proselyting baptism apparently refers to the baptism of proselytes or converts).

“(Q1I Melch)” (p. 95; read: “11Q Melch”).

“The reality of Jesus Christ as the Creator, Savior, and Redeemer is crystal in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (p. 138; read: “crystal clear”?; it is not clear to me what the authors are trying to say here).

Sadly, I could list another 30 examples of this lack of editorial rigor. While such editorial deficiencies detract from the book, a greater concern is the occurrence of numerous errors made in relating factual information. Such errors not only mislead the less-informed reader but are apt to be repeated in other contexts. The following examples illustrate the types of factual errors found throughout Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection.

Examples of Factual Errors

“Qumran . . . sits upon the Marly Plateau” (p. 32; actually Qumran is located on a marl plateau, “marl” being a geological term, not a proper name; a similar error is found on p. 60, where
the authors claim that "Qumran . . . sits in stony silence atop the Marl Plateau").

"Also included [among the documents discovered in Qumran Cave 4] is a collection of the Beatitudes" (p. 38; actually a short text [4Q525] contains beatitude-like statements that in form are reminiscent of the Beatitudes in the New Testament ["blessed are those who"], and with which a partial thematic overlap occurs; however, the authors' statement makes it sound as if the exact set of Beatitudes taught by Jesus as recorded in Matthew 5 has been found at Qumran; it has not).

"The Dead Sea Scrolls found in the caves near Qumran . . . scholars say that over 800 different texts are represented in Aramaic, Arabic, Hebrew, paleo-Hebrew, Greek, and Latin" (p. 59; yes, portions of about 800 texts were found in the Qumran caves, but none in Arabic or Latin, although texts in these languages have been found elsewhere in the Judean Desert; paleo-Hebrew is not a language but an older form of Hebrew script in which a few of the Hebrew language Dead Sea Scrolls were written; see a similar misrepresentation on p. 24).

"[The book of Abraham] was discovered by Frenchman Antonio Sebolo in 1831 and given to his nephew Michael Chandler in 1833 upon Mr. Sebolo's death" (p. 82; although the History of the Church [HC 2:126–7] spells his name "Sebolo" [not "Sebolo"], it has long been recognized that the correct spelling is Lebolo, the form of the name used by Chandler, Oliver Cowdery, and others in the 1830s; since Lebolo was born in the area of northwestern Italy known as the Piedmont he is generally considered Italian, not French, although the French conquered the Piedmont when Lebolo was 15 and he had association with the French;¹ note that on page 27 Terry and Biddulph indicate that "the Book of Abraham . . . was discovered by Michael Chandler."

"The temple was not only a place for Jewish sacrifice upon the altar, but also a place for Roman sacrifice as well. The Levitical priesthood officiated in both sacrifices" (p. 93; I know of no evidence that supports this assertion).

“Even before the Babylonian captivity of 572 B.C.E.” (p. 108; the Babylonians destroyed much of Jerusalem, including the temple, in 586 B.C., and while another group of Jews was exiled to Babylon in 582, the captivity was well under way by 572).

“Carbon-14 dating (radio-carbon) is the process of determining dates of parchments from carbon build-up on parchment or papyrus” (p. 120; actually the date of an object containing organic matter is determined by measuring the ratio of decay of the carbon-14 isotope in relation to regular carbon, not by measuring the “build-up” of carbon).

“El and Yahweh are shown as the Father and Son, respectively, in the Ras Shamra tablets dating ca. 400 B.C.E.” (pp. 125-6; first, the tablets from ancient Ugarit or Ras Shamra, as it is now called, date to about 1400-1250 B.C., not 400; second, if the name Yahweh is found at all at Ugarit [not likely in my opinion], it is in one poorly preserved tablet in the shortened form Yw, and never in association with El, who, even though he was the head god of the Ugaritic pantheon, was vastly different from a Latter-day Saint’s perception of Heavenly Father—there is much more to this scenario than the seemingly similar terminology might suggest).

“Other members of the [FARMS] board with ties to BYU are ... Dana Pike ... and Andrew Skinner” (pp. 132-3; neither Pike nor Skinner have ever been on the FARMS Board of Trustees, while the names of others who are serving on the board were omitted by the authors.)

“A ... building to house F.A.R.M.S. facilities is under construction on BYU-owned land” (p.133; actually, the foundation’s offices are presently located in renovated homes owned by FARMS on property adjacent to BYU, and while plans have been announced for a FARMS building, construction is not underway).

“F.A.R.M.S. presented a conference at Brigham Young University in April 1996 dedicated to the Dead Sea Scrolls” (p. 135; actually BYU’s College of Religious Education and FARMS co-sponsored a conference entitled “LDS Perspectives on the Dead

2 Every issue of the FARMS newsletter, Insights, which is published six times per year, contains a current list of the organization’s officers.
Sea Scrolls” on 23 March 1996; the proceedings of that conference were published by FARMS in July 1997).

“God led away prophets and peoples from Jerusalem to different lands. . . . One of those was Mahonri Moriancumer. . . . A record was caused to be kept among these Israelites—now called Jaredites, Nephites, and Lamanites” (p. 140; first of all, the Jaredites did not leave on their journey to the Americas from Jerusalem; and secondly, the Jaredites were not Israelites, since they lived before Abraham and Sarah, who were the grandparents of Jacob/Israel; see Ether 1–2).

Other examples could be added to this sampling of inaccurate statements.

**Additional Concerns**

Editorial lapses and errors in reporting factual material are not the only deficiencies that need to be addressed in this review. What may have been intentional, but to my mind are unfortunate, authorial decisions regarding *Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection* include the lack of a table of contents and the absence of any indexes. In this type of book it is helpful to provide the reader with not only a quality subject index, but also indexes of the Dead Sea Scroll passages and the scriptural passages quoted or mentioned in the text. The omission of such indexes is extremely frustrating, but probably not surprising since the authors often make statements such as, “two Messianic figures are noted in [sectarian] writings” (p. 60), “the Manual of Discipline calls for ritual cleansing” (p. 87), “the Dead Sea Scrolls also teach” (p. 106), or “Paul states that” (p. 113), without providing any specific reference for those statements. Similarly, a major lack of documentation is evident when the authors refer to other published works. Examples such as, “described by Joseph A. Fitzmyer as ‘a sort of prayer book’” (p. 43), “according to Joseph Fitzmyer” (p. 55), and “Upton Ewing introduces the concept . . . he states . . . Ewing concludes” (pp. 92–3), commonly occur without even a book title provided. Basic research and writing practices include documentation for quotations from and references to other published works. Sometimes Terry and Biddulph provide book titles along with the author’s names, but only rarely
is a page number also given. I imagine that the authors were attempting to maintain a “popular” orientation in their book; however, endnotes or citations in the body of the text that include title and page number (as they did provide once in a while) are very helpful to any reader who is interested in pursuing a certain topic.

Before undertaking a discussion of the conceptual orientation of the book, I will examine two other matters that deserve comment. First, Terry and Biddulph sometimes use jargon with which the reader may not be familiar. Examples include: (1) the regular use of the abbreviations B.C.E. [Before the Common Era] and C.E. [Common Era] for dates, rather than B.C. [Before Christ (meaning before his birth)] and A.D. [anno domini (meaning the year of our Lord’s birth)]; (2) scholarly abbreviations of names given to Dead Sea Scrolls, such as 1QIsaα (p. 36, see also pp. 95, 111), which in this example is designed to indicate that this document was found in Cave 1 at Qumran, and that it was the first Isaiah text (thus the “a”) found in that cave; and (3) the term yahad, anglicized as yahad or Yahad, which means “community” and was a term of self-designation used by the Jews who gathered to Qumran (p. 87, “the Yahad group”; p. 99, “the Council of Yahad”). Since the book is aimed at a nonacademic audience, the authors are responsible to make its language as accessible as possible.

Second, I often found the writing style to be cloying, an artificial attempt at eloquence or for dramatic effect. Examples of this include: “While the Jewish Kingdom was being pounded into the dust of the threshing floor” (p. 7); “A trickle of missionaries began to flood the earth to gather in the Jew and Gentiles. This peculiar little pebble in the shoe of established Christianity grew and spread” (p. 10); and “Such a revelation could send the world whirling into a mass depression that would make the dark ages seem like a momentary dimming of the lights” (p. 19). This type of expressiveness may appeal to some readers; it bothers me.

Space does not permit comments on other points such as what seems to be an uncritical acceptance of a recently popularized, sensational conspiracy theory in which Roman Catholic scholars are said to be in league with the Vatican to conceal Qumran documents considered dangerous to the church (see p. 52 and
elsewhere; I know of no reputable scrolls scholar who believes this theory); a marked pro-Jewish/Israeli bias (see pp. 12, 47, 54, and elsewhere); and a venomous portrayal of Père [= Father] Roland de Vaux, excavator of Qumran and former head of the École Biblique in Jerusalem (see pp. 46–68).

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection

Having leveled these criticisms against Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection, my greatest disappointment and concern is that Terry and Biddulph do not clearly assert what their own views are on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon connection. Is there a connection? If so, what is it? The authors refer to seeming parallels as “common threads” (see the title of chapter 8 and elsewhere). How does one evaluate such possible parallels? There is too much implication and not enough explication in their work for my taste. Enough misunderstanding already exists about what the Dead Sea Scrolls are and what their relation to Latter-day Saint teachings is. I fear that this book will only exacerbate the problem. The following quotations and my comments on them will illustrate this.

Part of my concern is that, methodologically, terms and practices must be evaluated in their own contexts before comparisons with seeming similarities in other contexts can be discussed. This happens rarely, if ever, in Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection. Terms such as baptism, sacrament, preexistence, and others are used loosely in relation to Qumran and Latter-day Saint belief and practice. Consider the following statements found on pp. 86–7: “Ritualistic bathing was a common practice in ancient Judah, within the Dead Sea Scrolls [presumably meaning among the people who composed and studied the scrolls], in the time of Christ and in the latter days.” Are they equating the ritual bathing practiced by the Qumran community with baptism as practiced by the church in these latter days? “Scholars point out [which ones? where?] . . . that baptism by immersion for the remission of sins was a solidly established practice [when?, where? among whom?].” “Ancient religions practiced ritualistic washing and bathing. . . . In other words, one was baptized to cleanse oneself. . . . Qumran texts heavily stressed baptism or ritual bathing. . . .
Nevertheless, baptism is seen as an important rite among the Yahad group” (p. 87). It sounds as if Terry and Biddulph equate the ritual washings involving immersion that were practiced at Qumran with baptism. But do the authors really mean that within the Qumran community legitimate priesthood holders performed baptism as a one-time ordinance for those entering the covenant community? I am not sure what they think, but no evidence anywhere in the Dead Sea Scrolls supports the idea that the Qumran community practiced baptism the way Latter-day Saints practice and view baptism. That the oft-repeated ritual washings among the Jews at Qumran and elsewhere were a “corrupted echo” (my expression) of a former, legitimate practice is quite likely, but a clear delineation of this is lacking in the book. The same problematic approach is apparent in their treatment of most of the other topics dealt with in chapters 8 and 9 in which “common threads” are discussed.

A last and related point is Terry and Biddulph’s use of leading, unsubstantiated statements, which left me wondering exactly what they thought on other key issues of comparison or contrast between the Qumran community and Latter-day Saints. For example, on page 114 the authors report that “most of the Dead Sea Scrolls are fragmentary [true] . . . however, far from puzzling in content, they, along with other sacred writings, weave beautiful threads of truth.” What do they mean when they include the Dead Sea Scrolls in the category of “sacred writings?” Are they scripture like the Book of Mormon? A few pages later the authors mention that “everything in ancient writing is not holy scripture, and that includes the Dead Sea Scrolls” (p. 117). Does this imply that they think some of the contents of the scrolls are “holy scripture?” They continue, “plain and precious things get lost in interpretation, or removed as foolishness by others. Notable exceptions are those writings that have been hidden from man: the Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, Dead Sea Scrolls, and other discoveries” (p. 118). Do Terry and Biddulph consider the Dead Sea Scrolls to contain “plain and precious truths” such as Latter-day Saints find in the Book of Mormon? Apparently they do. In their last chapter the authors observe that “God led away prophets and peoples from Jerusalem to different lands and places at significant times. One of those was Mahonri Moriancum . . . ;
another was Lehi, who lived at Jerusalem; so perhaps was the Righteous Teacher and others” (p. 140). We are left to wonder, although this time their statement is qualified with a “perhaps,” whether Terry and Biddulph consider it likely that the Teacher of Righteousness, the original leader of the Qumran community in the second century B.C., should be considered a prophet in the same way that Lehi and others are considered legitimate prophets of the Lord. It seems as if the authors want to depict the Qumran community as an authentic church of the Lord, functioning just prior to the mortal ministries of John and Jesus. Consider this statement: “Literally, this organization [the Church of Jesus Christ] is believed to extend back to the time of Adam and any time the church has been organized upon the earth. The early Dead Sea Scroll writings [what “early” means here is not clear] indicate a belief that the Church, as a body of saints, formed a living oracle and a temple for the pure in heart” (p. 113). This statement seems to be saying that the community at Qumran was a “true church” of Jesus Christ in the last two centuries B.C.! However, elsewhere they observe that the Jews at Qumran “did not seem to recognize Jesus as the Messiah any more than the mainstream Jews” (p. 83). So what do Terry and Biddulph really think? I am not exactly sure, but I am not comfortable with the suggestive and vague nature of many of their statements, especially since I consider the direction of such assertions to be wrong.

My position, as I have written elsewhere, is that from a Latter-day Saint perspective, the Jews as a people, including those Jews living at Qumran, were living in at least a partial state of apostasy during the last few centuries B.C. and into the new Christian era (A.D.). Therefore, on the one hand, we should not expect to find pure forms of theological concepts or practices attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other documents of this time period. However, we should not be surprised, on the other hand, to find what I refer to as “corrupted echoes” of true doctrines and practices preserved in these documents, since these people were heirs to the prophetic legacy that is partially preserved in the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament). Although the Qumran community had separated themselves from
what they considered to be corrupt Jewish authorities in Jerusalem and were anticipating and preparing themselves for the coming of a messiah or messiahs, it is clear that they were not a divinely legitimized community of saints with a complete or accurate understanding of who the true Messiah was and what conditions would prevail at his first coming.3

Given the criticisms I have raised concerning what is in many ways the careless preparation of this book and the number of vague and potentially misleading remarks contained in it, I am obliged to designate Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection as a flawed and amateur attempt at providing a quality resource for Latter-day Saints interested in studying the Dead Sea Scrolls. True, it provides some background on the discovery and content of the scrolls and it highlights some recent Latter-day Saint involvement with them (usually with too much hyperbole). However, I cannot recommend this book to anyone in its present form. Reader beware!

---

3 Dana M. Pike, “Is the Plan of Salvation Attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls?,” in LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. Donald W. Parry and Dana M. Pike (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 74–5. Some of the reasons that the inhabitants of Qumran can not be viewed as so-called “primitive Christians” anticipating the true Messiah include: they seem to have believed in multiple messianic figures with different functions, especially royal and priestly ones (i.e., from a Latter-day Saint perspective, they fragmented the various roles of the true Messiah among separate individuals); their messiahs were not imagined to be divine; their messiahs would come with power and bring a new order to the earth (not unlike what we expect Jesus to do at his second coming); they would live the pure form of the law of Moses after the coming of their messiahs; these people made no claims to be prophets authorized to speak for the Lord; no prophetic reference in the scrolls mentions Jesus or John the Baptist, whose names had been prophesied long before this time, according to Latter-day Saint belief; nor is the ministry of John the Baptist or any of the apostles described, although they were active during the last three decades of Qumran’s existence.