

MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS INTENSIFY CONTROVERSY OVER DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Norman Golb**

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Ethics of Museology

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Dr. Norman Golb, a world-class scholar, has written an extraordinary letter (which follows) that concerns the way the Dead Sea Scrolls are presented in museums. Golb's many studies and reports on his historical discoveries have appeared in learned journals in the United States and overseas. His new book, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls? -- The Search for the Meaning of the Qumran Manuscripts*, will be published by Scribner's in the late autumn of 1994.

Dr. Golb has been for many years in the thick of a dispute with a team of international scholars who not only exerted a monopoly control over access to the Dead Sea Scrolls, but reached the view originally formulated by the late Eliezer Sukenik, Andre Dupont-Sommer, Yigael Yadin (a noted archeologist and hero of the Israeli war of independence) and others that the people who wrote the Scrolls were Essenes, an ascetic Jewish sect living in pre-Christian Palestine.

In the early 1990s, Golb took a leading role in freeing the Dead Sea Scrolls for study by the scholarly community, and in organizing an international congress on the Scrolls in New York under the auspices of the Oriental Institute and the New York Academy of Sciences. In 1980, however—a decade earlier—Golb published an article that advanced the hypothesis that the Dead Sea Scrolls did not originate with a sect living in the Qumran area of the Dead Sea; they were rather the products of several sects and parties in ancient Judea, and were removed from Jerusalem libraries by Jews and hidden in the Qumran caves on the eve of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. He offered more evidence in support of this hypothesis when he published an important article in *The American Scholar* in 1989.

With other of the Scrolls available for study, more scholars questioned Essene authorship, and began moving in the direction of Golb's views about the origins of the Scrolls and how they came to be hidden where they were found. However, they still have had to contend with the hand reaching out from the grave of the original team of scholars in shaping the way museum exhibitions present the Scrolls to the public. Thus, when a U.S. exhibit of 12 fragments of the Scrolls was held in 1993, first in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and then in the New York Public Library, the descriptive material on the placards conformed to the traditional view that the Scrolls originated with the Essene sect.

During the move of the exhibit from New York to the de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco, Golb wrote to Harry S. Parker III, the director of the de Young Museum, detailing what he believed were the errors of commission and omission in the text of the placards that had been used in Washington and New York. To the same end, he offered to make available for sale in the museum store—at cost and with no personal profit—copies of his *American Scholar* article. His letter was sent by overnight mail to the museum on January 14, 1994.

Five weeks passed and Golb received no acknowledgment. So on February 21, a few days before the exhibit was due to open, he wrote Parker to express his regret that he had received no reply to his letter, and to ask a question: Did the fact that his letter went unanswered mean that the museum portrayal of the Scrolls would not take into account the information he had supplied?

Matters then took a turn on February 23, when the *San Francisco Chronicle* published a story by its religion writer who reviewed the controversies over the Scrolls and quoted Golb as saying that the “de Young

exhibit and its accompanying catalogue are designed to offer a defense of the traditional Qumran-Essene theory” and that this presented “an entirely misleading picture of current interpretation both of the texts and the site.” A letter from Parker to Golb then quickly followed (February 24) making two points. First, that he had taken note of Golb’s letter of January 14 and that Golb would receive a reply from Melissa Leventon, the curator of the exhibit. Second, that he had also taken note of Golb’s “critical remarks to the San Francisco Chronicle and wish that these had not appeared without equal time for other qualified scholars who differ from you.”

In the upshot, as of March 1st, the museum officials had neither included copies of Golb’s American Scholar article for sale in the museum store, nor included critics—who were among the participants in the symposia that were held in connection with the exhibit—of the theory that a sect inhabited Qumran. This stonewalling had the effect of giving comfort to the very groups that had for decades suppressed access to the Scrolls.

Golb has authorized use of his letter of January 14 by The Aspen Institute Quarterly. While a more extensive critique of the American exhibitions of the Scrolls and of traditional Scroll scholarship will appear in Golb’s forthcoming book, we believe the case he makes in his letter merits a fair hearing. The Aspen Institute Quarterly is publishing the letter as written, subject only to slight editing.

Dear Ms. Leventon and Mr. Parker,

Dr. William Fleming, who was present at my lecture on the [Dead Sea] Scrolls at the IBM Almaden Research Center last month, was kind enough to forward to me copies of the correspondence he recently had with you. It is most generous of you to plan to include my views on Qumran origins in the forthcoming exhibit.

The main problem that concerned me in the case of the earlier Scroll exhibitions, however, is not (contrary to what has been suggested in the press) the degree to which my own views have or have not been included in those showings, but rather the *scientific accuracy of the descriptions* of the individual manuscripts and of the Khirbet Qumran site that were posted during the exhibitions. In the case of both the Washington and New York exhibits, the descriptions were taken mainly from the catalogue prepared by the Israel Antiquities Authority. The demonstrable purpose of this catalogue, however, was to offer a defense of the traditional Qumran- Essene theory. The actual content of the catalogue is in marked contrast with Dr. James H. Billington’s statement in his foreword, where he writes that “*We explore the various theories concerning the nature of the Qumran community, its identity and theology; and discuss the challenges facing modern researchers as they struggle to reconstruct the texts and contexts from the thousands of fragments that remain.*” (Italics mine.) There is no such exploration or discussion at all in the catalogue, and it is clearly for this reason that the Library of Congress issued a brochure of its own which in effect attempted a more balanced picture of the problem of Qumran origins.

The Library of Congress did *not*, however, carry out the intent of Dr. Billington’s statement in its *posted descriptions of the manuscripts and of the site*, which instead closely followed those of the catalogue; and this was all the more the case in New York. The result was an entirely misleading picture of current scholarly interpretation of both the texts and the site. There can be no reason for the demonstrable misstatements and purposeful omissions in the catalogue other than the effort to convince the public of the truth of the old Qumran-sectarian theory—which, despite documented advances in knowledge, is the one that continues to be posted at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem and the Khirbet Qumran site itself. Here are some of the misleading or otherwise objectionable statements (based for the most part, but not entirely, on the catalogue) that were presented in the recent New York exhibition:

- At the entrance to the NYPL exhibition, a large explanatory placard posed the question, “Who were the people who produced the scrolls?”—and then responded by stating, *inter alia*:

Early scroll researchers identified as the Essenes the inhabitants of Qumran and the religious community reflected in some of the scrolls because Pliny locates an Essene settlement near the western shore of the Dead Sea, north of En Gedi, his writing has been an especially important part of the evidence in support of the Essene hypothesis.

This statement, while not directly responding to the question posed, led uninitiated viewers to endorse the particular theory being championed. It failed to explain on what critical grounds many scholars, including even the official continuators of Pere de Vaux's archaeological dig at the Kh. Qumran site, now reject this theory, or what major alternative interpretations have come to the fore in recent years. The entire placard, while faithfully endorsing the position laid down by the Israel Antiquities Authority in the official catalogue of the exhibit, egregiously misled the public. The Library of Congress exhibition softened the claim, but still left the impression on viewers that it endorsed the view that the site was inhabited by a sect.

- Section II of the exhibit, "The Scrolls as Texts," was divided into three subsections—"The Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and Sectarian Writings." However, by now most Qumran scholars, among them even some of the most traditional, recognize a substantial body of texts among the Qumran finds that can only be classified as "Other Writings of the Jews of Intertestamental Times"—writings, that is, which are neither biblical, nor pseudepigraphic, nor sectarian. Ironically, a number of such writings were included among the twelve scroll fragments on exhibit, but in each case the wording of the accompanying descriptions did not allow one to learn this fact. Instead, only such information was divulged about the texts in question as to induce the viewer to believe in the Qumran- Essene theory. For example, in describing the "Prayer for King Jonathan," the accompanying placard stated:

In the light of predominant theories about the Qumran sect, it is unexpected to find among the scrolls a prayer for the welfare of a Hasmonean king, since the sectaries are thought to have vehemently opposed the Hasmoneans. Alexander Jannaeus is the king alluded to in the Nahum Commentary as having clashed with the Pharisees. It is possible that unlike the other Hasmonean rulers, he was favored by the Dead Sea sect, at least during certain periods.

This statement was based on the one appearing in the catalogue, which includes an edition and translation of the "Prayer" by H. Eshel and others—i.e., those who identified the manuscript and published an article on it in the Hebrew quarterly *Tarbiz*. Their original statement in that article, however, was to the effect that this text

is the only (Qumran) composition published until now where the world-view of its author opposes that of the people of Qumran who hated the Hasmonaeans.... In our opinion many of the scrolls discovered at Qumran are the *creative fruits of extensive Jewish groups in the Second Temple period* that were by chance brought to Qumran...[Italics mine.]

However, because it was the overriding purpose of the authors of the catalogue to support the Qumran-Essene theory at all costs, they first altered the original statement of the editors of this text pertaining to the putative sect's hatred of the Hasmonaeon kings, and then suppressed the statement about creative fruits of extensive Jewish groups. In view of the findings of the actual editors of this valuable manuscript, it was obviously inappropriate of the curators to adopt the version offered by the Antiquities Authority in its catalogue. The placard was notably misleading to the public and should obviously not have been allowed to remain in place. The library's curators were, by such statements, explicitly taking sides in a scholarly struggle, and in so doing preventing viewers from gaining a possibly more significant humanistic understanding of the Scrolls than that encouraged by the statement they posted.

In describing the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, the accompanying placard stated:

The headings of the various songs reflect the solar calendar of the Qumran sect. Although the songs bear no explicit indication of their source, the phraseology and terminology of the texts are similar to those of other Qumran works. It appears, therefore, that the *Songs* is a sectarian work.

It is true that those who originally identified the fragments of this work believed it to be of a sectarian nature, and this position was reflected in the edition of the work published in dissertation form by Carol Newsom, a student of traditional Qumranologists at Harvard. However, following my criticism of this view in 1989, and that of a European scrolls scholar, Dr. Newsom retracted her original position in 1990, stating then that the text had no notable sectarian characteristics.

Now the statement in the catalogue of the exhibition refers to the earlier *dissertation* of Dr. Newsom and asserts that the text is of a sectarian nature, but is silent regarding the editor's own retraction of her earlier view. The NYPL exhibition placard repeated the catalogue's statements without further comment, leading viewers to believe that this is simply another work of the putative "sect" rather than a work of imaginative religious poetry that Jews of various parties could have written or recited.

One of the scrolls on exhibit and thus also in the catalogue contains a text of various biblical psalms as well as some hymns previously unknown in the Hebrew Book of Psalms. The accompanying placard in the exhibit reflected the description given in the catalogue. The catalogue refers to the publication of this work by J. A. Sanders—without mentioning, however, that Sanders explicitly stated that it reflected the thinking of a *hellenized Jew*, and hardly that of an Essenic sectarian. Sanders writes:

[The author] was adept in writing archaizing classical Hebrew. But through that medium he reflected hellenistic ideas all the while taking his basic material directly from I Sam 16 and 17. We must manifestly acquaint ourselves with a hellenized Jew of the Palestine area. It is highly doubtful, however, that the Qumran community, in its fight against the hellenism of the Jerusalem priesthood, would have knowingly permitted distinctively hellenistic ideas to shape its essential theology....

Thus in all three of the above cases the NYPL exhibit refrained from referring to the current views of those scholars who have most studied these particular texts—views that hold the texts in question to be disconnected in origin from the claimed "sect." Instead, it improperly led the viewing audience into believing that these texts are sectarian and that they offer no challenge to the old Qumran-Essene theory—in so doing concealing the testimony that proves the opposite. The evidence of the texts and the current opinion of most scholars about them clearly show that a fourth category of scrolls—i.e., non-sectarian and non-pseudepigraphic literature of the Palestinian Jews of intertestamental times—is represented among the scrolls, and it is impossible to understand how the library could, barring outside pressure, have refrained from stating as much during the course of the exhibition.

In addition to the efforts described above, others were expended to insure the public's leaving the exhibition hall with the idea firmly in mind that the writings were all those of a sect. One could readily perceive this in the descriptions of further scroll fragments on display:

- In describing the *phylacteries* found at Qumran, the accompanying placard stated little more than that, although the custom [of wearing phylacteries] is mentioned in sources from the Second Temple period, Qumran has provided us with the earliest remains of *tefillin* (=phylacteries).

The description omitted precisely the most important information that scholars have been able to derive from the phylactery fragments, namely, that they show the use of *diverse and disparate Pentateuchal texts* for the composition of the phylacteries rather than uniform ones. This was demonstrated in all three of the basic publications of these texts, i.e., those of J. T. Milik, K. G. Kuhn, and Y. Yadin. A detailed examination of all of the phylacteries published has led the person who has most fully studied them, David Rothstein, to conclude that the precise identification of the practitioners...during the late Second Temple period remains uncertain, though it appears probable that these circles constituted a *broad spectrum of Palestinian (and diaspora) Jewry*. [My italics.]

The NYPL display placard was remarkable for its failure to refer to this significant finding and for its studied silence concerning the phenomenon itself. In harmony with the catalogue, the library was clearly avoiding encouraging viewers of the exhibition to draw conclusions about the nature of the Qumran writings

at variance with the idea that they obviously sought to champion. Omitting such important details from the exhibition was hardly fair either to the many scholars who today disagree with the old theory of Qumran origins, or to the public.

- Concerning the *Leviticus Scroll in Palaeo-Hebrew script*, the accompanying placard (again taking its cue from the catalogue) stated that:

It is written in paleo-Hebrew script, which here seems to be just one manifestation of conservative traits that survived through generations and surfaced in the Hasmonean era. Hasmonean coinage of the first century B.C.E. bears similar script....

In the context of the exhibition's other statements, the implication of this passage was that a special group—i.e., conservative sectarians—were responsible for the reappearance (“surfacing”) of this ancient script. In point of fact, however, the assertion was baseless. There is evidence for wide use of palaeo-Hebrew script in Judaea during the entire intertestamental period, and nothing shows that it ever surfaced after first falling into disuse. This exhibit would have been enriched, and better enlightened the public, if other examples of palaeo-Hebrew script from that period had been given, instead of the curators endorsing a theory that merely gave comfort to the old Essene fixation.

- In discussing the *Calendrical Document*, the accompanying placard described “the solar calendar to which the Qumran community adhered” and stated that the calendrical rosters were intended to provide the members of the New Covenant with a timetable.... In contrast, rabbinic tradition puts a premium on the moon's bright phases....

This idea of a special solar calendar adhered to by the “sect of Qumran” originated in the 1950s, long before other texts from the caves became known that have *different* calendars. Some of these are luni-solar and at least one, that preserved in the Aramaic Book of Enoch, is a lunar calendar. All one can legitimately say today about the calendars found in the caves is that they reflect different trends of thinking about the subject among the Palestinian Jews. The members of the “New Covenant” who migrated with their leader to the region of Damascus (as described in the *Damascus Covenant*) did endorse the calendar espoused by the Book of Jubilees, but the effort to place these Damascene covenanters also at Qumran is an artifice of traditional Qumranologists to maintain the theory of a unified Qumranic sectarianism. That is why one of the most traditional of Qumranologists, Frank M. Cross, was obliged to state:

The scholar who would “exercise caution” in identifying the sect of Qumran with the Essenes places himself in an astonishing position: He must suggest seriously that two major parties formed communalistic religious communities in the same district of the desert of the Dead Sea and lived together in effect for two centuries, holding bizarre views, performing similar or rather identical lustrations, ritual meals, and ceremonies....I prefer to be reckless and flatly identify the men of Qumran with their perennial house guests, the Essenes.

One can well understand why some traditional Qumranologists have been forced to adopt a reckless path of interpretation in defending the old theory, but that was hardly a reason for the New York Public Library to do so. The placard accompanying the exhibition's display of a fragment of the Book of Enoch should, by the same token, at least have added the statement that the *lunar* calendar espoused by the author shows that the work derives from a group other than those that produced the solar calendars. Even though the catalogue produced by the Antiquities Authority hid this fact, that surely should not have caused the library to do so.

- Concerning the work that the catalogue calls *Some Torah Precepts*, the placard accompanying the fragment on display stated that:

This scroll is a sectarian polemical document....On the basis of linguistic and theological considerations, the original text has been dated as one of the earliest works of Qumran.... The identities of both the author of the letter and the addressees are missing. However, a commentary (peshet) to Psalm 37 relates

that the “teacher of righteousness” conveyed a letter to his opponent the “wicked priest.” This may well be a reference to this document, which is addressed to “the leader of Israel.”

This description, based almost verbatim on that appearing in the catalogue (which was authored by employees of the Antiquities Authority, not Qumran scholars) was misleading and fallacious in all but its first seven words. The work is certainly a sectarian or separatist writing, but cannot be shown to have any intrinsic connection with the *Manual of Discipline* or related texts that scholars most often refer to when they speak of the “sect of Qumran.” The several articles written by E. Qimron, J. Strugnell, and others on this text advanced no linguistic or theological arguments whatever showing this text to be of early date. These authors acknowledged the affinities between the Hebrew of this text and the earliest rabbinic or proto-rabbinic Hebrew, which is of the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. at the earliest. In order to maintain their claimed antiquity for this text, they merely invented the theory that rabbinic Hebrew was a special dialect spoken precisely by the “sect of Qumran” in the 2nd century B.C. This is not a “linguistic consideration,” but an untenable hypothesis flying in the face of the linguistic data. The authors swelled the importance of the document, and thus of their work on it, by *claiming*, without any probative evidence to support their view, that the text was written by the Teacher of Righteousness himself. There is no evidence in the world that would warrant the view that such Hebrew as is contained in the text was already used in the 2nd century B.C., when this Teacher lived, and reference to him is found nowhere in the manuscript fragments of this work. So flimsy is the claim that this text was written by the Teacher of Righteousness that John Strugnell, one of the above-mentioned authors and the first scholar to study these fragments seriously before he turned to E. Qimron for aid, himself disavowed the idea in a lecture given by him at Notre Dame University in April 1993. There are relatively few scholars who today support the several above-described specious claims about this text -- although it is indeed a valuable work, showing the thinking of a Palestinian Jewish separatist group at approximately the turn of the era.

The failure of the curators to take note, in their description of the scroll, of the published opposition to the unusual theory about this text that they championed, deprived viewers—directly against Dr. Billington’s expressed intention—of the opportunity to consider other interpretations of the origins of the Scrolls, even those that might possibly be superior to the traditional monolithic theory. This treatment was basically unfair to the general community of Qumran scholars, and notably misled the public. This text, as others in the exhibition described above, clearly provides additional evidence for the origin of the scrolls in multiple streams of ancient Palestinian Judaism. (I stated as much in a 1989 article, but the NYPL library personnel not only refused to describe this interpretation or give the grounds for it, but also attempted to prevent having that article offered for sale to the public attending the exhibition.)

- Among the various printed works on display in the exhibition, at least one dealt with the Copper Scroll, where the NYPL curators’ accompanying comment was to the effect that the text is a record of places where treasure is hidden. Whether it refers to a real treasure such as, for example, the treasure of the Jerusalem Temple, is not clear. An attempt to dig at some of the easily identifiable spots yielded no results.

• This statement was highly misleading, and obviously colored by the curators’ overt efforts to support the Qumran-Essene theory. As I pointed out in several publications, when the original team working at Qumran discovered this document and realized what its implications were, they immediately declared it to be a forgery or work of whimsical imagination. For it in effect would have constituted a crushing blow to the Qumran-Essene theory if its authenticity had not been challenged. By normal standards of manuscript investigation, the text is an authentic autograph document that describes the burial of both treasures *and scrolls* in various hiding-places in the Judean Wilderness. This fact has by now come to be acknowledged by the *preponderance* of scholars who have been working on the manuscript, including A. Wolters, P. Kyle McCarter, P. Muchowsky and others. I fail to understand why the curators did not note that the text mentions the actual hiding away of *scrolls* as well as treasures, or why they asserted that “it is not clear” whether it refers to genuine treasures—unless this was for the selfsame reason that they set out to protect

and bolster the old Essene theory at the expense of other explanations of Qumran origins. There are, moreover, no “easily identifiable spots” mentioned in the manuscript as places where treasures and/or books were buried. The fact that the scroll was discovered in Qumran Cave 3, which contained other manuscripts, and that it actually mentions the hiding away of scrolls, is a most telling piece of evidence; why, then, was the public deprived of just this information?

- The treatment of the *Khirbet Qumran site* displayed at the exhibition was likewise calculated to encourage viewers to accept the truth of the old theory, at the expense of most of the facts now known about this archaeological locus. Abetting the suggestions made at the entrance to the exhibition, the placards surrounding the very impressive model of the site put on display stated, *inter alia*, that:

The connection between the site and the caves containing the scrolls is based on the evidence of pottery, coins and other artifacts. Furthermore, the assertion that it was an Essene settlement is supported by Pliny’s account.

Why the NYPL curators should have been so willing to accept this mendacious line of reasoning is most puzzling. Pottery of the kind discovered at Khirbet Qumran has been found elsewhere in the Judean Wilderness as well. Given the non-discovery of any manuscript fragments at Khirbet Qumran itself, the most that can be reasonably learned from the finding of similar pottery in the caves is that the Jerusalem inhabitants who engaged in the hiding of the Scrolls prior to the Roman siege on the city would have asked the Jews who inhabited the area near the caves for help in the hiding of the texts, saving themselves the impossible task of lugging the scrolls in jars all the way from the capital. No *coin* evidence whatsoever supports the idea that the scrolls originated at the Khirbet Qumran site. The evidence adduced from Pliny only shows that Essenes inhabited an area above En Gedi approximately when he wrote his account—i.e., circa 75 A.D. (Pliny also mentions the destruction of Jerusalem and other events that could only have been described by him after 70 A.D.) During this period, Khirbet Qumran itself was in the hands of Roman soldiers, who had captured it from the Jews formerly inhabiting it in a pitched battle that was fought shortly before or shortly after the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans. Pliny’s Essenes were located elsewhere than at Khirbet Qumran. The Essenes he describes were, as he specifically states, celibate—whereas not a single one of the over eight hundred manuscript texts discovered in the caves near Khirbet Qumran espouses or encourages celibacy. How then could the NYPL curators legitimately have asserted in a public exhibition that Pliny’s account supports the Essenic identification of Kh. Qumran?

WE MAY FURTHER NOTE the message of the late president of the New York Public Library regarding the Scrolls’ significance: Dr. Timothy Healy states in the official catalogue of the exhibit that the Scrolls “were written for and by a religious commune situated outside Jerusalem....[It] appears to have lived in total isolation, with heavy apocalyptic expectations.” Healy approvingly quotes Robert Alter of the Comparative Literature department at UC Berkeley as saying that the authors of the Scrolls “withdrew from the teeming city to a rock-strewn desert, hearkening to the voice of their master and awaiting the destruction of their enemies.” Healy goes on to state that “the scrolls are dearly the work of a small sect...essentially withdrawn from the vibrant concomitant beginnings of Rabbinical Judaism and Christianity,” and he once again quotes Professor Alter, this time as saying that such an orientation toward history joined to a removal from the give-and-take of daily life encourages “megalomaniacal self-importance and a contempt for others as well as a kind of hallucinatory relation to present events.” It is paradoxical that these statements expressed or conveyed by Dr. Healy, which show the ultimate consequences of the Qumran-Essene fixation, were made immediately following his assertion that “In no sense did the NYPL wish to involve itself in the learned vendettas....Any research library as inclusive as this one has a catholicity of view that renders it immune to the ebb and flow of even the most learned venom.”

The exhibition presented at the NYPL did not go so far as to quote Dr. Healy’s endorsement of the traditional theory at its most extreme, but its spirit and the message it conveyed to the public were much along the same lines: The Scrolls were presented as the writings of a small and virtually irrelevant sect

living on the outskirts of Judaism, self-exiled on a plateau in the Judaeen Wilderness. This theme was developed throughout the exhibit: the view of traditional Qumran scholars holding that the putative sect wrote its manuscripts in the wilderness near the Dead Sea shore was expanded on at length, and the reasons behind this view carefully described. But while the exhibit occasionally acknowledged that other interpretations exist, and even tersely mentioned a few of them in several sparse sentences, no explanations were offered of the grounds on which the new interpretations of Scroll origins have come to the fore in recent years. This made the exhibit a highly biased one, characterized by zealous championing of the old theory despite modern developments in Scroll scholarship that yield an entirely different picture.

The library's lack of objectivity and its zeal to champion the traditional theory were further shown by statements in other publications put out in connection with the exhibit: In an "Educator's Guide," for example, the students were supposed to respond to the educator's question, "Why do you think the people of the scrolls lived in Qumran?" In the corresponding "Student Guide," the answer was built in: "The Community Rule"—that is, the Manual of Discipline -- tells us about the sect that we believe lived in the Qumran area, very likely the Essenes." (Italics mine.) The young people who were the objects of the library's pedagogical effort were thus being indoctrinated with old ideas without being offered the chance to think about the alternatives to them.

The examples given above, and many others which I will not burden you with in this letter, make all too clear that the exhibit as a whole attempted to inculcate within visitors of all ages the idea that the old theory is true and that others are either mere falsehoods or the whims of speculators on the fringes of research and scholarship. Corresponding to this effort, the one brief paragraph in the catalogue making casual reference to the views of scholars who did not accept the Qumran-Essene theory characterizes them as being "vehemently" opposed to that interpretation. All of this constituted a serious assault on the concept of freedom of inquiry, and an effort to conceal the very lesson that people should most have learned from an exhibition on the Scrolls: that historical scholarship consists in an uncertain groping for truths about the past, and that those truths are arrived at, if ever, only after long and arduous investigation by scholars who must constantly test their ideas by mutual debate and criticism.

The Antiquities Authority, for its part, did indeed manage to demonstrate by the particular kind of catalogue it produced for the exhibit that, despite its own earlier disavowals, its efforts in 1990 and 1991 to keep the scrolls from the eyes of independent scholars were not merely in order to protect rights of members of an "official" editorial team, but, far more than this, were designed to prevent the spread of new ideas on the origin of the Scrolls and the identification of their authors. The catalogue constitutes a potent instrument in the Authority's persistent effort to achieve this goal. The Antiquities Authority has sought, through the American exhibitions of the scrolls, to protect the expressed beliefs of long-departed scholars whose memory the Authority holds to be sacred: a choice of action that remains today, as in the past, inimical to the spirit of free inquiry. The New York Public Library, in acquiescing in this policy, regrettably made a mockery of the principle of custodial impartiality and laid waste to the ideal of fair and open debate as an essential ingredient in the enlightenment of the public and the search for truth.

Many years ago, John Stuart Mill observed that:

it is not on the impassioned partisan, it is on the calmer and more disinterested bystander, that [the]...collision of opinions works its salutary effect. Not the violent conflict between parts of the truth, but the quiet suppression of half of it, is the formidable evil: there is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides; it is when they attend only to one that errors harden into prejudices, and truth itself ceases to have the effect of truth, by being exaggerated into falsehood.

I have attempted to show in the preceding pages how fundamental principles of honesty and fair play were not honored in the New York exhibition; but have done this only in the hope that the information conveyed in this letter regarding current thinking on the Scrolls—not by any means my own particular views alone—will be of help to you in presenting a fair exhibition to the public. If, as you stated in your letter to Dr. Fleming, your exhibition is to be "a version of the one that was at the Library of Congress," it will not be

able to accomplish this goal insofar as—all good intentions aside—most of the library’s placards describing the individual manuscripts were based directly on the Antiquities Authority’s catalogue, which demonstrably misled the public. I went through the Washington exhibition in some detail with Ms. Burnham just a few days prior to its opening; they could no longer do anything about the matter, given the late date, and settled for public distribution of the aforementioned brochure which they produced. However, that brochure also—despite its good intentions—did not correct the unfairly misleading posted descriptions of the individual manuscripts. Since your own exhibition will not be opening until the end of February, I trust that you will still be able to improve the posted descriptions, either by corrections or additions or both, so as to reflect custodial objectivity on your part and to give the many visitors that will attend the exhibition the opportunity to draw their own conclusions about the nature of the Scrolls and the current scholarly controversy concerning them.

Sincerely yours,

Norman Golb

P.S. While I was pleased to learn from your letter that the museum bookshop apparently intends to carry my forthcoming book on the Scrolls, it will, alas, not be in print before the end of April. I can, however, offer for sale copies of my *American Scholar* article (“The Dead Sea Scrolls—A New Perspective”). This publication can be made available to you at cost—i.e., with no personal profit whatever accruing to me. I enclose a copy herein, and would be grateful to you for the name of your bookshop manager so that I can deal directly with that person about the matter.

** A member of the University of Chicago faculty since 1963, Norman Golb is professor of Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic studies in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and the Oriental Institute. He also is the first holder at the university of a named professorship in Jewish history and civilization; is a founding member of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies; is an elected life member of Clare Hall at Cambridge University in England; and is a member of France’s *Societe de l’Histoire de France*. Upon the publication in 1985 of one of his books, *Les Juif de Rouen au Moyen Age*, Golb was awarded the Grand Medal of the City of Rouen; two years later was granted the degree Docteur Honoris Causa (Histoire) by the University of Rouen, and the Medal of the Region of Haute Normandie. Golb’s article is an attempt to shed some light on a controversy about the Dead Sea Scrolls that many would prefer remained in the shadows.

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