

TACITUS, *HIST.* 5. 13. 2 AND THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AGAIN

J. Gwyn Griffiths rightly points to the Dead Sea Scrolls as a possible source for the ambiguous prophecy cited in Tacitus, *Hist.* 5. 13. 2¹). In support of this view he refers to *Benedictions*, the Zadokite Fragments and above all, the *Scroll of the War*, notably I. 9ff., I. 17, XII. 7, XV. 14 and XIX. 1f.

There is one passage in the *Thanksgiving Hymns*, however, namely III. 35-36, which seems to accord particularly well with the prophecy cited by Tacitus:

The host of heaven shall utter its voice and the foundations of the world did melt and quake and the battle of the mighty ones of heaven shall be waged abroad in the universe. And it shall not turn back, until the extermination is wholly determined and there shall be nothing like it²).

This single passage embodies all of the characteristics ascribed by Griffiths to one or other of the seven different passages he examines: the theme of a Messianic conflict is well to the fore; the date of the *Thanksgiving Hymns* is generally believed to be the first century B.C.³); the reference to warring hosts of angels could easily be transferred to a military context when the source is used other than at first hand.

On the other hand, the *Thanksgiving Hymns* contain no specifically anti-Roman elements whatsoever, so that anyone wishing to interpret the passage as referring to Vespasian and Titus could do so without the need for diplomatic subterfuge. There seems no reason either why such an interpreter should not choose to identify "the mighty ones of heaven" with Vespasian and Titus. Above all, the passage is strongly akin to Tacitus in its portrayal of natural phenomena in sympathy with the awe-inspiring and unprecedented events that are taking place.

Could this have been the ultimate source of Tacitus's *ambages*? The suggestion seems by no means impossible.

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1) Rhein. Mus. f. Philol. N.F. CXIII, 363-368.

2) The translation is that of Menahem Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns* (Leiden, 1961), 121.

3) See the discussion in Mansoor, *op. cit.*, 7-10.