

*John Marco Allegro, The Maverick of the Dead Sea Scrolls.* By JUDITH ANNE BROWN. Grand Rapids, Mich.: WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING CO, 2005). Pp xvi + 288. Illus. \$25

This is an extremely exciting and fascinating book of the type one reads in one sitting. It tells the story of John Marco Allegro (JMA), ‘the maverick of the Dead Sea Scrolls,’ not in the form of a conventional biographic essay, but primarily in the words of JMA himself from his publications and the letters he received and sent. The book is authored by his daughter, freelance writer and author Judith Anne Brown, with the express purpose of “restoring the balance” (p. xvi) in favor of JMA regarding the infamy surrounding his name.

This negative judgment was probably not unjustified, as JMA himself admits that he was seeking fame, was an iconoclast, and was in favor of quick and therefore necessarily shallow text editions. In retrospect, it seems that he often had the wrong instincts. However, in another area he was ahead of his time in criticizing the delay in the publication of the DSS (pp. 153–6), the lack of an open approach towards them (158–64), and their inadequate conservation (165).

The book is extremely well written. It is precise in its wording and quotations from the letters and other sources. The style is beautiful, at times even poetic (see the description of the life of the Allegro family on the Isle of Man on pp. 213-5).

The reader will undoubtedly be amazed by the enormous energy expended by JMA on his letter writing of and by the professional quality of the Allegro archive that must contain hundreds or thousands of pieces of correspondence. received and sent. The archive documents not only JMA’s work on the scrolls, but also his overseas posting as a young sailor in the Royal Navy during WW2, and the years of his courtship. While we don’t hear JMA’s explanation as to why he actually held on to all these documents, he must have had an intuition (for which we are appreciative) that one day these letters would be significant. That the archive has remained intact is due to the efforts of his ex-wife, Joan.

JMA’s story is about the meteoric rise and gradual descent of a scholar and scholarly entrepreneur. His star began its ascent when G. R. Driver of Oxford sent his aspiring young student to Jordanian Jerusalem in order to participate in the decipherment and publication of the newly discovered cave 4 documents. When on the rise, JMA foresaw a bright future both in scholarship (“To have taken a big part in the publication of these exciting finds, however, will be worth half a dozen doctorates to me, and will be the big bump-up I need for a future chair”; letter to Joan A., 28.2.1954) and in public life (“I bear

in mind popular lectures in the future on the scrolls”; letter to Joan A., 2.3.1954). Regarding one of the texts allotted to him, he writes: “And if I do publish it separately it will be the most widely read article of any to do with the scrolls” (12.4.1955). In his letters, JMA described in detail how he promoted himself extensively by turning to the “media,” rather than to professional journals.

Soon after JMA became known internationally, he discredited himself due to his greed for fame, his shallow publications, especially *DJD* vol. V, and the controversy over the opening of the Copper Scroll. In most letters, JMA complains bitterly about the attitude toward him of his colleagues in the international publication team, the Jordanian establishment, and the Church (not least because of his book, *The Cross and the Sacred Mushroom*), to whom he continued to write insultingly. As a result, JMA was ridiculed and demonized by just about every scholar, journalist, and museum establishment.

JMA himself left these *testimonia* of his behavior for posterity, although we are not informed whether he agreed or would have consented to their publication. His daughter is to be greatly admired for her courage in sharing the archive, as well as her views, with the public. She did so not without pain and soul-searching; she mentions time and again how difficult JMA’s behavior was for the family (pp. xvi, 228, 229). Without being an expert in her father’s scholarship, as is evident from time to time (e.g., p. 25 and the use of the term ‘translations’ for ‘text editions’ *passim*, e.g. pp. 153, 156), she skilfully, critically, and sympathetically summarized his scholarly actions and writings. JMA’s views on the supposedly close connection between the scrolls and Christianity is reviewed sympathetically (p. 55). Like her father, she stresses John’s appeal to “free speech.” Indeed, JMA was much in touch with several groups of “freethinkers” in the USA (one of these groups went as far as establishing a “John Allegro Society” [p. 262]). She is also sympathetic towards JMA’s hasty publications, considering J. Strugnell’s critical review of *DJD* V (amounting to 113 pages, but quoted by Brown on p. 155 as containing a mere 8 pages), virtually tantamount to a re-edition, as not pertaining to the gist of the edition. In this review, I limit myself to reviewing Brown’s book, without referring to other sources that shed light on this controversial figure (these could include analyses of JMA in other books, other archives, testimonies by surviving members of the international team, and a professional analysis of JMA’s writings, etc.). Within the limitations of Judith Brown’s sources, she did a remarkably good job.

I warmly recommend this book to anyone who has heard the name of John Allegro, as well as to anyone who enjoys reading biographies of remarkable scholars. This book is a masterpiece, for which the author, the editors (see the foreword by P. W. Flint and M. G.

Abegg), and the publishers must be congratulated. This is a book about John Allegro, renamed Fortissimo by *The Spectator* (see p. 175).

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