

strivings toward civil society and participatory government in Russia during the last years of Soviet rule. In this eminently readable history, he asks whether Russia has always been an eccentric country doomed to its own peculiar fate or whether it can follow a path similar to that of other nations. Without pressing the point, Hosking implies that, despite its uniqueness, Russia has much in common, if not with the United States, then with Germany, Austria, even Turkey.

Hosking highlights the supporting evidence. The Russian press on the eve of World War I was notably free and independent, he emphasizes, while the legal system instituted by Alexander II at the time of the American Civil War really did open the way toward the law-based society that Mikhail Gorbachev (who knew this history well) called for six score years later. Hosking also shows that in its waning decades the tsarist regime instituted “sweeping guarantees” of private property, in effect dissolving the patrimonial state that had ruled the land for centuries.

In such tsarist reforms, Hosking finds the underpinnings for optimism about Russia’s future. Yet these reforms were swept away when the Communists seized power and in effect restored the ancien régime in a new

guise. How was this possible? On this question Hosking is tentative. He argues that the new parliamentary system never really linked up with the emerging mass public and that the privatized economy was too young and fragile to survive the upheaval of World War I. Then too, the champions of the waning patrimonial order never gave up, effectively preventing the post-1905 system introduced by Nicholas II from functioning as a proper constitutional monarchy.

Underlying these failures is Russia’s history of empire, a theme emphasized in Hosking’s title and introduction but only sparsely developed in his text. A bolder historian, one more inclined to state a grand thesis, might have dug deeper. The logic is as simple as it is implacable: empire requires a large army, which in turn requires strict control of the population, including the serfs. Freedoms granted to some Russians will be demanded by others, not to mention by other nationalities under Russian rule. The preservation of empire is, therefore, the main impediment to reform. It is too bad that Hosking does not place the imperial experience at the very heart of his story, for it rings with solemn familiarity today.

—S. Frederick Starr

Religion & Philosophy

THE COMPLETE DEAD SEA SCROLLS IN ENGLISH.

Edited by Geza Vermes. Viking Press. 688 pp. \$34.95

Only a humorous God could beget such a tale: in 1947 a Bedouin shepherd, Muhammad edh-Dhib, discovers an ancient scroll while exploring a remote cave in the Judean desert south of Jericho. The find is reported, experts are summoned, and the news travels around the globe. During the next several years, 10 other caves are found, yielding some 4,000 fragments of ancient Ara-



maic and Hebraic texts. A team of scholars sets about deciphering the bits and pieces.

An anxious world waits for news of what the scrolls might contain. And waits.

Only now, 50 years later, is the full text of the Qumran scrolls (as they are more properly called) appearing in English. The scholarly squabbling and other maddening interruptions in the work—including the occasional Mideast war—are now the stuff of legend, ably retold by Vermes, who, as professor emeritus of Jewish studies at Oxford’s Wolfson Col-

lege, has long been recognized as one of the world's foremost Dead Sea Scroll scholars. With skill worthy of a spy-thriller writer, Vermes recounts the "revolutionary" action taken in 1988, when the *Biblical Archaeology Review* published a computer-aided reconstruction of various smuggled fragments circulating among privileged scholars. With the scrolls thus effectively "liberated" from the clutches of the Israel Antiquities Authority and the official scroll editors, the pace of translation increased exponentially, leading to this present volume.

Are the scrolls worth the wait? Biblical scholars will no doubt be disappointed. With no sure way to establish the scrolls' provenance, questions regarding the biblical canon remain unresolved, even though the Cave I version of the Book of Isaiah predates the oldest previously known version by a thousand years. The Qumran scrolls quote freely from a variety of Scriptural sources and thus shed little light on what constitutes the "true" or original Scripture. The value of the scrolls lies more in the tantalizing glimpses they yield of the Qumran community that created them.

Included among the documents is an elaborate codex of laws known as the Community Rule, describing the hierarchy of the society from the Master or Teacher of Righteousness (at one time mistakenly thought to be Jesus of Nazareth), to the lesser Guardians or Teachers (who interpreted liturgical matters and maintained discipline and order), and finally to the Disciples, who strove to follow the holy way of the community. Other scrolls deal with the scheduling of daily events in the community temple, liturgical calendars and lists of prayers, and a wealth of scriptural writings and attendant commentary. There are many fragments of Scriptural text not found in present-day bibles (Vermes calls them "Biblically Based Apocryphal Works"), as well as a badly deteriorated document known as the War Scroll. The War Scroll either describes a battle that has already taken place (perhaps the final battle of the Israelites against the Kittim from the Book of Daniel) or prophesies a battle yet to come; in either case, it includes intriguing descriptions of contemporary war tactics similar to those used by the Romans.

The massive work of translating this material clearly signals only the beginning of scholarly engagement with the contents.

Vermes sides with those who think the scrolls community was an Essene sect, described in the First Book of the Maccabees as having been led into the Judean wilderness by the Teacher of Righteousness after a clash with the "Wicked Priest or Priests." The Essenes, says Vermes, were "devoted to the observance of 'perfect holiness'" but "lacked the pliant strength and the elasticity of thought and depth of spiritual vision which enabled rabbinic Judaism to survive and flourish." Sometime during the first century C.E., the Maccabean Essene community was reported to have been wiped out by the Romans. Of the creators of the scrolls, says Vermes, only one thing can now be said with certainty: "No one of the original occupants of Qumran returned to the caves to reclaim their valuable manuscripts."

—James Carman

**FIVE LOST CLASSICS:
*Tao, Huang-Lao, and Yin-Yang
in Han China.***

By Robin D. S. Yates. Ballantine Books. 464 pp. \$27.50

In 1973, Chinese archaeologists excavating tombs at a site named Mawangdui in Changsha, Hunan, made an incredible discovery. Along with many exquisite works of Han dynasty art and craftsmanship, the archaeologists found a large cache of manuscripts written on bamboo and silk. These included versions of the *Laozi* and the *Yi jing* (or *Book of Changes*). Evidently the tomb was sealed in 168 B.C.E., making these the oldest extant versions of two seminal works of Chinese philosophical literature.

The unearthing of the Mawangdui manuscripts not only revolutionized the international study of ancient Chinese philosophy and history; it sparked a renaissance in Chinese archaeology. Excavations at other sites have yielded a flood of new material that has set off major scholarly debates. To bring the texts to a broad audience and to allow English-speaking readers a window onto these debates, Ballantine Books began publishing translations of the recently discovered texts in 1989. The latest in this series is a translation of five key Mawangdui texts by Yates, a professor of East Asian studies at McGill University.

Four of the texts, written on silk and appended to *Laoze B* (the second version of the *Laozi* found at Mawangdui), promise to