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 NEW TITLES
 

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*History***THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS  
AND THE CHRISTIAN  
MYTH**

by John M. Allegro  
Prometheus, 1984  
252 pp. \$18.95



Toward the end of the second century B.C., some 4,000 members of a messianic Judaic sect, the Essenes, withdrew from the Orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem. At Qumran, on the sun-scorched cliffs above the Dead Sea's western shore, they engaged in ascetic communal living and awaited the advent of a messiah to usher in the Kingdom of God. In 88 B.C., their beloved Teacher of Righteousness was crucified. Still, until A.D. 68, when Roman forces crushed the Qumran community, its members continued to expect their Teacher to return in triumph. Their sacred writings (Old Testament books and commentaries) remained hidden in caves until 1947, when a Bedouin lad chasing a goat chanced upon them. Related discoveries ensued over the next several years. Onto this scene, as a member of an international team of editors formed in 1953, came British religious historian Allegro; his present book points out similarities between the Qumran faith and "that even more unorthodox Jewish faith we call Christianity." Allegro's bias is evident in his choice of a title—and in his charge that the editing team's slowness in publishing the documents stems from their perception of the scrolls' "potentiality for undermining the uniqueness of Christianity."

**THE MEMORY PALACE  
OF MATTEO RICCI**

by Jonathan D. Spence  
Viking, 1984  
350 pp. \$19.95

"The biographer truly succeeds," wrote Leon Edel, himself a master of the genre, "if a distinct literary form can be found for a particular life." By this standard, Spence has succeeded. Eschewing a straightforward chronology, he reconstructs the remarkable life of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), an Italian-born Jesuit missionary who spent close to 30 years in China, around eight evocative images. Four are wood engravings of Biblical scenes used by Ricci to describe his faith to the Chinese; the other four are images from Ricci's "memory palace"—a pictorial mnemonic system used by European scholars

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since antiquity for organizing and retaining vast stores of information. (Ricci hoped his memory palace would so impress the Chinese that they would be tempted by its religious furnishings.) Using each image as a frame for anecdotes about Ricci and his times, Spence, a Yale historian and prize-winning China scholar, guides readers through the rigors of Jesuit education, the dangers and discomforts of 16th-century sea travel, the intricacies of the Far East silk trade, and, above all, Ricci's spiritual and intellectual labors. The heart of the story is the conflict between Western ideas (specifically, Ricci's Christian humanism) and the Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist doctrines of the Chinese scholar-gentry. Many of the Chinese scholars were impressed by Ricci's mental power—on one occasion, he recalled a list of some 400 Chinese ideograms after looking at it only once—but few were convinced that Christianity was preferable to their own beliefs. The Buddhist Zhuhong dismissed the Jesuit's arguments: "[His] kind of sophistry is a clever play on words. How can it harm the clear teaching of the Great Truth?"

**THE LOST SOUL OF  
AMERICAN POLITICS:  
Virtue, Self-Interest, and  
the Foundations  
of Liberalism**  
by John P. Diggins  
Basic, 1984  
409 pp. \$23.95

"How can America understand itself?" To answer his own question, Diggins, a University of California historian, turns to early 19th-century American thought—and, specifically, to what he perceives as a fundamental dilemma within the "liberalist" tradition. There he sees "two incompatible value systems struggling for the soul of America: the liberal idea of labor, competition and self-help and the Christian idea of sin, atonement and redemption." Incompatible though they were, liberalism, the child of John Locke and others who preached the primacy of self-interest, existed in tension with Calvinist notions of moral responsibility. That tension, Diggins holds, was most palpable during the mid-19th century. Its most dramatic embodiment in politics was Abraham Lincoln; in literature, Herman Melville. During the post-Civil War era, however, when commerce