

## JOSEPH M. BAUMGARTEN (1928 – 2008)

*Moshe Bernstein*

The first time that I heard Joseph M. Baumgarten lecture, about thirty years ago, he punctuated his discussion of some legal material in the Temple Scroll from Qumran with a reference to something “we learned in *dafyomi* a couple of weeks ago. . . .” I remember how pleased I was to hear a scholar who could casually mention in the course of his presentation to a learned academic group that he was an active participant in the traditional, but not-yet-wildly-popular, cycle of Talmudic study. In the course of our increasingly close acquaintance over the ensuing three decades, I was to learn that this was quite characteristic of Joe. His two ostensibly disparate personae—Orthodox congregational rabbi and college professor and researcher into Qumran halakhah—were not hermetically sealed off from one another. It may not have always been obvious to some of his congregants and colleagues in the academy who observed him in only one context that he had “another side,” but the two professions were thoroughly integrated within him. Those of us who knew both sides of him appreciated the whole man.

Born in Vienna in 1928, Joseph Baumgarten received his classical rabbinic education at Mesivta Torah Vodaas in Brooklyn and was ordained in 1950. He then went to Baltimore intending to do graduate work in mathematics at Johns Hopkins University, while living and learning at the Ner Israel Yeshiva. Had it not been for a chance encounter with the great biblical scholar and Semitist William Foxwell Albright, he might have become a rabbi cum mathematician, but



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once having been drawn to the academic study of Judaism and the then-recently-discovered Dead Sea Scrolls, there was no turning back. He was one of the very first American scholars to concentrate on the Scrolls, and he continued to write about them for more than a half century. During this long period of time he did pioneering work on the legal texts found at Qumran, creating and shaping the academic field of Qumran halakhah.

It was his profound knowledge of rabbinic literature in the classical mode that enabled Joe to be the trailblazer that he was in the study of postbiblical legal material, antecedent to that of the rabbis. He published article after article on specific points in the Qumran legal corpus, all the while developing and refining the methodology requisite to the analysis of such texts and formulating an approach now accepted and practiced virtually universally in the field. In what may be considered his chef d’oeuvre, he applied his mature talents to the editing of the Cave 4 fragments of the Damascus document, *Qumran Cave 4. XIII: The Damascus Document (4Q266-273)* (Clarendon, 1996), in the official publication series of the *Scrolls, Discoveries in the Judean Desert*. Joe served as professor of rabbinic

literature at Baltimore Hebrew College (later University) and held fellowships at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University (twice) and the Annenberg Research Institute (now the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Pennsylvania). He was a visiting professor at several institutions. While he never assumed a permanent professorship at a major American or Israeli research university where he could have devoted more time to scholarship, this did not perturb him. The life of a congregational rabbi who had the time to publish a good deal of scholarship “on the side” was a source of great contentment to him.

The high regard in which his peers in Qumran studies held Joe can be seen from their decision to publish in his honor the proceedings of the second meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies (IOQS), held in Cambridge, England in 1995. *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Cambridge 1995. Published in Honor of Joseph M. Baumgarten* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 23; Brill, 1997) contains twenty-four fine scholarly essays, as well as a remarkable appreciation of Joe written by Professor Daniel R. Schwartz of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem to honor his teacher both as a person and as a scholar.

Joseph Baumgarten was a *rara avis* in the Orthodox rabbinate in America: a congregational rabbi who was also a leading scholar in academic Jewish studies. His passing deprives us not only of a good friend and an outstanding scholar but of a model whom we could hold up to our students as genuinely worthy of emulation.

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