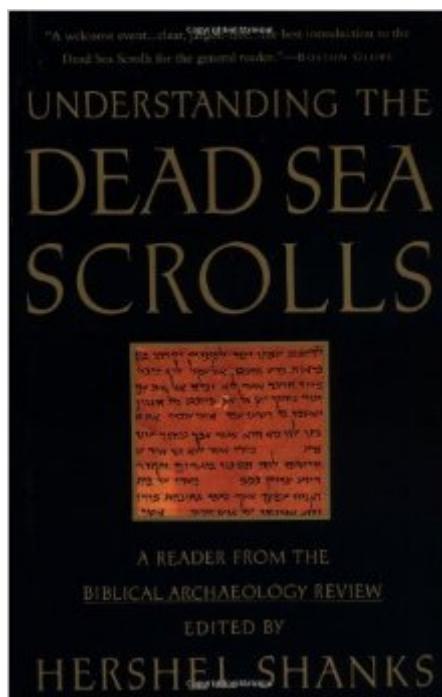


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Understanding The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reader From The Biblical Archaeology Review



Synopsis

A groundbreaking anthology that demolishes the myths -- and reveals the true significance -- of the greatest archaeological discovery of our time. Ever since their initial discovery in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls have aroused excitement, jealousy, and not a little dread among some who feared their contents might undermine the foundations of Judaism and Christianity. For more than 35 years the majority of scroll texts remained the intellectual property of an exclusive coterie of scholars.

Recently, however, the Biblical Archaeology Review succeeded in breaking that monopoly. This path-clearing volume is an illuminating assessment of what these texts reveal about a lost era in the history of two world religions, Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. Were the Dead Sea Scrolls written by the Essenes, an ascetic sect of Jews that may have included John the Baptist among its members? Is the Copper Scroll a secret map to the treasures of the Jerusalem Temple? In what way do these books prefigure the teachings of early Christianity? Additional chapters address the controversies surrounding the Scrolls' discovery and their long suppression -- including the possible role of the Vatican and charges of anti-Semitism on the part of a former chief editor of the official scroll publication team.

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Customer Reviews

The Dead Sea Scrolls have been the focus of controversy since their discovery in 1947. Recently, a collection of articles from [Biblical Archeology Review](#) have been published by Hershel Shanks in [Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls](#). This work illuminates the material unearthed by people

from different walks of life and interpreted by scholars from around the world. The articles contained in this book tell the discovery stories of scrolls and fragments, as well as some of the different conclusions reached by historians and critics on their origin and meaning. Most scholars maintain the opinion that the bulk of the written material unearthed in the caves near Qumran along the Dead Sea and other related sites were the collection if not the actual work of the Essenes--sectarian Jews who differed from the Pharisees in observance of the law, and from the Sadducees in authority over the temple. Many of the texts are biblical, such as the most famous and best preserved Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa) displayed in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem. Others, such as *Serekh ha-yahad* or the Manual of Discipline (1QS)--unknown before its discovery--gives new insight into the community at Qumran. Some items, such as the Copper Scroll (3Q15) present puzzling anomalies that will occupy scholars for years to come. The scrolls complete many gaps in our knowledge of the scriptures. For example, in I Samuel 11, The Scroll provides another early Israelite document which complimented the Pentateuch, though was perhaps excluded from canonization by Ezra after the return from Babylonian exile. The *Miqsat Maâ- aseh ha-Torah* or "Some Rulings on the Torah" (4QMMT) illustrates Essene doctrine and theology, com-paring point by point their disagreements with their religious adversaries. Speculation has been made that John the Baptist began his ministry out of the Qumran community, "Some Rulings on the Torah" (4QMMT) illustrates Essene doctrine and theology, com-paring point by point their disagreements with their religious adversaries. Speculation has been made that John the Baptist began his ministry out of the Qumran community, and that Paul and the apostle John incorporated phrases and theological arguments stemming from Essene writings. However in other articles, Jesus is interpreted to have criticized the Essenes, referring to them as Herodians (Mark 8:15) because of the support they enjoyed from Herod the Great. From the scrolls we learn about certain Jewish practices and their implications. For example, when Jesus stayed in Bethany on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem, his visit there scandalized the Pharisees and Essenes because Bethany was unclean--an area designated for lepers. We learn of the controversies surrounding access to the Qumran literature. Scholars initially given the responsibility to study and publish the texts have not released the material in their custody with the alacrity anticipated. Preservation of the material has also become a concern as deterioration has transpired even while under study. The anti-semitic comments from the former Chief Scroll Editor John Strugnell are also discussed. Recent attacks on the Vatican have charged suppression of evidence from the scrolls speculated to be unfavorable to Christianity. These spurious polemics are skillfully dispatched in the article, which addresses the historical and theological implications surrounding the Qumran literature. In short, this brief digest from *BAR* will

enable laypersons to gain new insight into the intrigue of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as the excitement surrounding their interpretation by biblical scholars. We can thereby gain a more complete awareness of the political and religious milieu into which our Lord and Savior lived during his sojourn on earth.

Hershel Shanks, editor of Biblical Archaeology Review, has compiled in his book, *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, a collection of some of the most important articles on the Dead Sea Scrolls to appear in the magazine and its companion, *Bible Review* in the half-century since they were discovered. The FindScholars Harry Thomas Frank and Frank Moore Cross discuss in this section the initial discovery of the scrolls, the political intrigue surrounding their sale and acquisition, the difficulties of ascertaining what in fact had been found, and some of the historical context behind the scrolls, including dating the scrolls. This is a tale of Bedouins, an antiquities dealer (not always on the up-and-up) named Kando, dealings with the Orthodox and Roman Catholic clergy hierarchies, the British Mandate administration, and the newly-formed Israeli and Jordanian administrations. Sometimes the history takes bizarre twists -- the astute reader of the *Wall Street Journal* would have first seen reference to the scrolls in the classified, for sale. *Where They Came From* In this section, articles by noted scholars Lawrence Schiffman, James VanderKam, Raphael Levy and Hershel Shanks discuss the possible origins of the scrolls. Were they developed by the Essenes, a shadowy sect that might have encamped at Qumran? Were they written by another minor group of Sadducees? Were the Essenes an off-shoot of the Sadducees? Of course, not a lot of people realise that the first discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls occurred fifty years prior to the discovery in the caves near Qumran, and hundreds of miles from the Dead Sea, in a genizah in Cairo. There, in the repository for worn-out holy texts, a text was found that scholars have grouped with the Dead Sea Scrolls in paleographic and content terms. This is the *Damascus Document* (try explaining that a Dead Sea Scroll entitled the *Damascus Document* was in fact found neither in Damascus nor near the Dead Sea, and you begin to understand the confusion that has always surrounded the scrolls!). *The Temple Scroll* In this section, the longest of the scrolls is addressed by none other than the legendary Yigael Yadin, together with Magen Broshi, Shanks, and Hartmut Stegemann. This scroll has an intriguing history, too, having been negotiated for by a Virginian clergyman who gives a very different account of the 'return' of the scroll to the Israeli officials than does Yadin. According to Yadin, this scroll represented the Torah of the Essenes. Stegemann addresses the question of 'how can you tell if a document is sectarian or biblical?' With this question, he opens up the possibility that his book belonged as part of the Bible, or even the Torah, for Judaism at the time of the Roman

occupation. A startling conjecture! The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible, Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism

These sections are perhaps the heart of the matter for most people who have an interest in the scrolls. While archaeological discovery and intrigue might make for entertaining and even educational reading, the true value in the scrolls lies in what they do to enlighten us in our knowledge of religion. Scholars Frank Moore Cross, Ronald Hendel, VanderKam, Otto Betz, Schiffman, and Shanks explore matters of textual accuracy and variation with current Bibles, address a few particular passages that held particular meaning or insight in variation from the current texts, address questions such as 'was John the Baptist an Essene?' The Copper Scroll IIP.

Kyle McCarter discusses the Copper Scroll, a piece unique in substance as well as content. The scroll was inscribed on thin sheets of copper, thus obviously a piece of great importance. It is written in a variety of Hebrew different from all other scrolls, and does not fit into any of the scroll categories (biblical, sectarian, etc.). Through political vicissitudes, the scroll is in fact in Jordanian ownership, who prize it highly, rather than the museums in Jerusalem. McCarter discusses the meaning of the scroll, which may be a treasure guide (not a map, but rather an accounting) of the Temple treasures and other religious holdings during the period between the first and second revolts against Rome (the years 70-130 CE). Reconstructing the Scrolls

Stegemann discusses here the time-consuming and nearly-impossible task of reconstructing the scrolls. Unlike the Temple scroll, most of the Dead Sea Scrolls in fact consist of fragments and bits of parchment, that have been worn away by time, rodent-chompings, water and fire damage, and mis-handling damage. Sometimes the text left a mirror-impression on the opposite side of the rolled scrolls -- sometimes this mirror-impression, highlighted by photographic technique, is easier to read than the actual text.

Controversy and the Scrolls

Controversy has followed the scrolls since the day they were discovered. The bedouins who found them wondered what in fact they were, and what to do with them. The newly forming state of Israel was at odds with much of the world; they did not have resources to track all of the scrolls (in fact, Kando and other antiquities dealers maintained that there might be more scrolls being hidden, but not recoverable due to heavy-handed tactics used to recover the scrolls to Israeli ownership).

Given that most of the Dead Sea area was in Jordanian administration, the task of scroll scholarship was turned over to a predominantly-Christian academic establishment; in fact, it was problematic to include Jewish scholars, given the political situation. More recent scroll developments have both put Jewish scholars at the head of research teams, and opened the scrolls for all to see, albeit, not without lawsuits and claims of academic and intellectual property theft, as if the scrolls 'belonged' to particular scholars. Given the lack of progress of release of the scrolls for decades, speculation arose that the church (most scholars working on the scrolls in the early years were Roman Catholic

clerics) was suppressing information that would be damaging or embarrassing to the church.

Readable to the armchair scholar, the essays contained in this book avoid the extremes of esotericism that many books on the subject fall victim to. One is introduced to the story of the scrolls, their exciting discovery, and their contribution to our understanding of the history surrounding the Jewish nation and culture - as well as some of the challenges and controversies that have attended the handling of the scrolls by an elite group. Almost every scholar who has anything to say about the scrolls has indulged in a little over-interpolation or over-extrapolation, which is to say, reading more into the scrolls than is actually there. Examples of this are the sensational claims made by some that the scrolls contained evidence that John the Baptist was an Essene, or that Christianity was based on Qumran doctrines - all unfounded speculation, of course. You'll find a little of that in here, but the discerning reader can filter it out, if you keep in mind that scholars are just people, and they like to gossip, speculate, and run off at the imagination as much as the rest of us do. And you'll find an equal dose of myth-debunking here too, exposing the folly of some of the sensationalism. I like this collection of essays, and consider it a valuable window to the mysterious world of Qumran and its hidden scroll collection. Recommended.

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