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# The Mystery And Meaning Of The Dead Sea Scrolls



## Synopsis

Fifty years have passed since the world-shaking discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls in a desert cave by bedouin shepherds. Now, after decades of controversy surrounding their dissemination and interpretation, here is the fullest possible account of what they reveal--how they challenge our understanding of the origins of Christianity, shake the authority of the Hebrew Bible, and provide a new perspective on Judaism at the time of Jesus. Although almost everyone has heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls, few people can explain what they say or why they are significant. In *The Mystery and Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Hershel Shanks, the distinguished editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, gives a vivid account of their religious and historical context and their dissemination, meaning, and implications. Of the eight hundred manuscripts that were eventually found, fewer than a dozen were more or less intact. The rest were mere fragments, many no bigger than a fingernail. The scrolls contain a vast array of bewildering new material: unknown psalms, biblical commentaries, calendrical texts, and apocalyptic manuscripts, many of which seem to foreshadow Christian doctrine. Over two hundred biblical manuscripts were hidden in the Qumran caves, some dramatically different from accounts in the Bible. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide unique insight into the turbulent religious world at the time of Jesus, when Jewish society was richly varied and hotly contentious--so much so that some scholars now refer to Judaisms, rather than to a single Judaism. This is a clear, definitive account, from beginning to end, for the layperson as well as the scholar, of the mystery and meaning of the scrolls--a model of insight and understanding.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Here is an excellent overview of the history and mystery surrounding the scrolls. In a methodic and easy-to-comprehend manner, Hershel Shanks describes the evolution of scholarly conjecture on several of the individual scrolls and the Qumran community itself. I found the book absolutely tantalizing because of the many key questions about the scrolls that remain unanswered. The author also provided what I consider to be an incisive overview of the impact several of the scrolls have had on Judaism and Christianity during the last four decades. I highly recommend "The Mystery & Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls" to those seeking a broad, layman's understanding of this incredible archeological find, the peculiar trail of the scrolls since their discovery, and the often contradictory religious conclusions the scrolls have provoked.

This book is one stop shopping for an overview of the content within the scrolls as well as the politics and egos involved in getting the complete translations released with commentary. While it doesn't contain the greatest amount of direct translation, what book could? Thousands of scroll fragments sort of get in the way. This book is a GREAT place to start. The author presents an unbiased view that isn't slanted to Anti-Zionist, Anti-Christian, or even Anti-Liberal viewpoints. I enjoyed it very, very much. Hats off!

Herschel Shanks and his publications, primarily Biblical Archaeology Review, are deserving of great credit in the effort to break the small, scholarly monopoly on access to the Dead Sea Scrolls. To this end, Shanks has collected in a few volumes key articles and essays on the Scrolls from leading interpreters (including occasionally one or more of the original enclave of scholars who fought so hard to maintain strict control on access to the majority of the scrolls). Shanks was one of the first to dare to break the stranglehold by publishing previously unpublished scroll fragments; by pulling his finger out of the dike, others also began to publish and reconstruct texts, so that eventually there was no point to maintaining a rigid control on access, both for research and for publication. This story is one of great interest of itself, and shortly I shall be reviewing books which talk in greater detail of the intrigue behind the Scrolls. The current volume under review, however, takes us in a different direction. This volume, 'The Mystery and Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls', concentrates primarily on context (both religious and historical), meaning and implications of the Scrolls. Among the Scrolls were biblical texts (some of which differ slightly, others radically from the biblical texts which have come down to us today), accounting scrolls, commentaries, calendars, and, perhaps the most mysterious and 'juicy', apocalyptic texts, with characters flamboyant even by current celebrity

standards, the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest. The first few chapters do talk about the Scroll history, including some of the intrigues. However, the bulk of the book examines theories about the proto-Christian and Essene teachings found in the scrolls (and whether or not these labels are even appropriate to apply to the scrolls), illumination on Judaism, especially the complexity of Judaism to be found in the generation around the destruction of the Temple, and looks forward to future research and meaning from the scrolls. 'The scrolls emphasise a hitherto unappreciated variety in Judaism of the late Second Temple period, so much so that scholars often speak not simply of Judaism, but of Judaisms.' Among the various controversies surrounding the scrolls is the determination of the nature of the location where the scrolls were found. Scroll fans know that the first scrolls were found near Qumran, a desert and deserted building complex near the north shore of the Dead Sea. Was this place a villa, a religious outpost, a trading centre, an ancient travel-lodge, a scriptorium? The latter idea was popularised by Roland de Vaux, one of the original enclave of scholars, and an archaeologist who, being a Roman Catholic priest, was more inclined toward the medieval monastic model with which he was more familiar, than with other interpretations (which have been advanced by others, particularly see Norman Golb), but the popular conception and possibly the plurality if not majority of scholars continue to believe that the Essenes were the inhabitants of Qumran, and that the scrolls (or at least most of them) comprise part of their library. However, Shanks cautions against jumping to premature conclusions. 'We must be careful not to read into the ancient sources or the scrolls something that isn't there. For example, neither Josephus nor the scrolls say that Essenes lived in the wilderness. Though they separated themselves from other Jews, they did not necessarily leave Jerusalem or other towns where they lived.' Coupled with the lack of self-identification in the scrolls, the original authorship of them remains in doubt. This is a book accessible to even the most novice of persons interested in the scrolls, and yet provides new detail and insight that will please the veteran scroll follower.

In The Mystery and Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls biblical historian Hershel Shanks lifts the veil over the Dead Sea Scrolls. Discovered over 50 years ago, the Scrolls have been clouded by academic competition and political intrigue. What these Scrolls say, and more importantly what they mean to early Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism and the history of the Near East has been hotly debated. Shanks provides historical context to the Scrolls themselves as well as needed background surrounding the academic dissonance of their significance. Part of the controversy surrounding the Scrolls is the time period they were written: early in the first century CE, contemporaneously with the historical Jesus. As Shanks writes, "For those who want to understand

the history of Christianity, the scrolls are exciting and enriching. For those who see Christianity and Christian doctrine as something entirely new and unrelated to its Jewish milieu, the scrolls are threatening." This is exacerbated by the fact that many of those who did the earliest work on the Scrolls (and the archaeological site at Qumran) were priests by avocation. In fact, much of the initial scholarship around the Scrolls was downright shady - parts of the Scrolls became the exclusive academic domain of a single scholar who held access to it and lay claim to first publication rights. These "rights" were in turn bequeathed to students upon their retirement or death. Such behaviour is contrary to the spirit of scholarship not to mention ethically questionable. Fortunately the monopoly on the Scrolls was broken in the late 1970's and early 1980's with the publication of photographs of the Scrolls from when they were first discovered. The question of who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls is given considerable attention by Shanks who, to his credit, presents a variety of historical interpretations in answering this. Similarly the historical meaning of the Scrolls is detailed. The similarities between Christian stories of Jesus and the dogma of the writers is striking, although maddeningly elusive in providing a definitive answer of whether one is directly related to the other. Shanks argues convincingly that in the time of Jesus, there were many versions of Judaism; only two survived the Roman destruction of the Temple: what would become Christianity and what would become Rabbinic Judaism. I found Shanks easy to read and authoritative on the time period as well as on the scholarship. For those interested in the history of the early Church in general, or the Dead Sea Scrolls specifically, this would be the place to begin.

missing pages of the life and end of civilization marring the old and new testament, hidden by the first church and their wealthy family's Rothchithis is why they are pushing to end mankind eliminate the population use these scrolls offer advise to a longer life happier life, healthier life on earth. All revealed by Valiant Thor must look him up

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