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# Dead Sea Scrolls.

**The Dead Sea scrolls comprise roughly 825-872 documents, including texts from the [Hebrew Bible](#), discovered between [1947](#) and [1956](#) in eleven [caves](#) in and around the Wadi [Qumran](#) (near the ruins of the ancient settlement of Khirbet Qumran, on the northwest shore of the [Dead Sea](#)). The texts are of great religious and historical significance, as they are practically the only known surviving Biblical documents written before [AD 100](#).**

## Date and contents

According to [carbon dating](#), [textual analysis](#), and handwriting analysis the documents were written at various times between the middle of the [2nd century BC](#) and the [1st century AD](#). At least one document has a carbon date range of [21 BC–61 AD](#). The [Nash Papyrus](#) from [Egypt](#), containing a copy of the [Ten Commandments](#), is the only other [Hebrew](#) document of comparable antiquity. Similar written materials have been recovered from nearby sites, including the [fortress](#) of [Masada](#). While some of the scrolls were written on [papyrus](#), a good portion were written on a brownish animal hide that appears to be [gevil](#). The scrolls were written with feathers from a bird and the ink used was made from carbon black and white pigments. One scroll, appropriately named the [Copper Scroll](#), consisted of thin copper sheets that were incised with text and then joined together. <sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

About 80% to 85% of the Dead Sea Scrolls are written in one of three dialects of [Hebrew](#),<sup>[1]</sup> [Biblical Hebrew](#) (also known as Classical Hebrew), "[Dead Sea Scroll Hebrew](#)" (on which see [Hoffman 2004](#) or [Qimron 1986](#)), or proto-Tannaitic Hebrew, as in the Copper Scroll and the MMT text. Biblical Hebrew dominates in the Biblical

scrolls, and DSS Hebrew in scrolls which some scholars believe were composed at Qumran. Also some scrolls are written in [Aramaic](#) and a few in [Koine Greek](#).

For the view that the scrolls are the remnants of Jerusalem libraries and that there is no organic connection between the scrolls and Qumran, see below, section 2.3. Even according to those scholars who believe that there was scribal activity at Qumran, only a few of the biblical scrolls were actually composed there, the majority being copied before the Qumran period and coming into the ownership of the claimed Qumran community (Abegg et al 2002). There is, however, no concrete physical evidence of scribal activity at Qumran, nor, *a fortiori*, that the claimed Qumran community altered the biblical texts to reflect their own theology (Golb, 1995; cf. Abegg et al 2002). It is thought that the claimed Qumran community would have viewed the [Book of Enoch](#) and the [Book of Jubilees](#) as divinely inspired scripture (Abegg et al 2002). The biblical texts cited most often in the nonbiblical Dead Sea Scrolls are the [Psalms](#), followed by the [Book of Isaiah](#) and the Book of [Deuteronomy](#) (Abegg et al 2002).

Important texts include the [Isaiah](#) Scroll (discovered in [1947](#)), a Commentary on the [Habakkuk](#) ([1947](#)), the so-called Manual of Discipline (= [Community Rule](#)) (1QS/4QSa-j), which gives much information on the structure and theology of a sect, and the earliest version of the [Damascus Document](#). The so-called [Copper Scroll](#) ([1952](#)), which lists valuable hidden caches of gold, scrolls, and weapons, is probably the most notorious.

The fragments span at least 801 texts that represent many diverse viewpoints, ranging from beliefs resembling those of the [Essenes](#) to those of other sects. About 30% are fragments from the [Hebrew Bible](#), from all the books except the [Book of Esther](#) and the [Book of Nehemiah](#) (Abegg et al 2002). About 25% are traditional Israelite religious texts that are not in the canonical Hebrew Bible, such as the [Book of Enoch](#), the [Book of Jubilees](#), and the [Testament of Levi](#). Another 30% contain Biblical commentaries or other texts such as the [Community Rule](#) (1QS/4QSa-j, also known as "Discipline Scroll" or "Manual of Discipline"), the [The Rule of the Congregation](#), [The Rule of the Blessing](#) and the [War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness](#) (1QM, also known as the "War Scroll") related to the beliefs, regulations, and membership requirements of a Jewish sect, which some researchers continue to believe lived in the Qumran area. The rest of the fragments (about 15%) remain unidentified.

## Frequency of books found

### Books Ranked According to Number of Manuscripts found (top 16) <sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

Books	No. found
<a href="#">Psalms</a>	39
<a href="#">Deuteronomy</a>	33
<a href="#">1 Enoch</a>	25
<a href="#">Genesis</a>	24
<a href="#">Isaiah</a>	22

<a href="#">Jubilees</a>	21
<a href="#">Exodus</a>	18
<a href="#">Leviticus</a>	17
<a href="#">Numbers</a>	11
<a href="#">Minor Prophets</a>	10
<a href="#">Daniel</a>	8
<a href="#">Jeremiah</a>	6
<a href="#">Ezekiel</a>	6
<a href="#">Job</a>	6
<a href="#">1 &amp; 2 Samuel</a>	4

## Interpretations

### Essenes

According to a view almost universally held until the [1990s](#), the scrolls were written by a sect known as the [Essenes](#) who (according to this theory) lived at Kirbet Qumran. They hid the scrolls in the nearby caves during the Jewish Revolt in AD 66 before being massacred by the Roman troops. This is known as the Qumran-Essene Hypothesis. A number of arguments are used to support this theory. 1) There are striking similarities between the description of an initiation ceremony of new members in the Community Rule and Josephus' (a Jewish-Roman historian of the time) account of the Essene initiation ceremony. 2) Josephus mentions the Essenes as sharing property among the members of the community and so does the Community Rule. (It should also be noted that there are differences between the scrolls and Josephus' account of the Essenes.) 3) During the excavation of Kirbet Qumran two inkwells were found, giving weight to the theory that the scrolls were actually written there. 4) Long tables were found that Roland de Vaux (one of the original editors of the Dead Sea Scrolls) interpreted as tables for a 'scriptorium'. 5) Water cisterns were discovered which may have been used for ritual bathing. This would have been an important part of Jewish (and Essene) religious life. 6) A description by Pliny the Elder (a geographer who was writing after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70) of a group of Essenes living in a desert community close to the ruined town of Engedi was seen by some scholars as evidence that Kirbet Qumran was in fact an Essene settlement.

However, there is strong evidence against this hypothesis as well. Kirbet Qumran is a tiny settlement which could only house about 150 persons at any one time. Since several hundred different scribal "hands" have been identified in the material, with only about a dozen repetitions of handwriting found, the available population doesn't seem large enough to account for the diversity of handwriting. Since the custom at the time was for scribes to write sitting crosslegged with a board on their lap, the "writing" tables in the assumed scriptorium have come into question. Finally, Pliny's description isn't specific enough to be definitely tied to Kirbet Qumran.

In view of rising opposition to this hypothesis, it can no longer be stated with certitude that the opinion that the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls were Essenes is the most prevalent view among scholars (Golb 1995; Hirschfeld 2004; Magen and Peleg

2006; cf. Abegg et al 2002). Since the 1990s a version of this theory, which can also no longer be said to be prevalent among scholars, stresses that the authors of the scrolls were "Essene-Like" or a splinter Essene group rather than simply Essenes as such. This modification of the Essene theory takes into account some significant differences between the world view expressed in some of the scrolls and the Essenes as described by the classical authors. Together, the two theories may be called the "Qumran-sectarian theory".

## Origins

### Theory of Sadduceean Origin

Another variation on the Qumran-sectarian theory, which has gained some popularity, is that the community was led by Zadokite priests ([Sadducees](#)). The most important document in support of this view is the "Miqsat Ma'ase haTorah" (MMT, 4Q394-), which states one or two purity laws identical to those attributed in rabbinic writings to the Sadducees (such as concerning the transfer of impurities). However many more purity laws differ. This document also reproduces a festival calendar which follows Sadducee principles for the dating of certain festival days. However, these similarities are not considered sufficient to support a definite conclusion.

Florentino Martinez in a 2000 article in *Near Eastern Archaeology* dates composition of the Temple Scroll to the times of Hasmonean power consolidation, long before the existence of the Essenes and states that this is only the date when this material was reduced to writing; the notions expressed must be older. This tends to undermine the idea of an Essene-Sadducee connection.

Other theological considerations count against the idea. [Josephus](#) tells us in his *Jewish War* and in his *Antiquities of the Jews* that the Sadducees and the Essenes held opposing views of predestination, with the Essenes believing in an immortal soul and attributing everything to fate, while the Sadducees denied both the existence of the soul and the role of fate altogether. The scroll authors' belief that the soul survived beyond death (and this belief included resurrection) and their complex world of angels and demons engaged in a cosmic war was contrary to the Sadduceean belief that there is no resurrection, no angel or spirit. For the Sadducees every man had the right to choose between good and bad, and this life was it. For the Essenes, God ruled all and man lived for the hereafter soon to come. It is difficult to imagine how such disparate beliefs might evolve into one another or even be reconciled. This tends to undermine the idea of a strong connection between the Essenes and Sadducees.

### Jerusalem libraries

In 1980 [Norman Golb](#) of the [University of Chicago's Oriental Institute](#) published the first of a series of studies critical of the Qumran-sectarian theory, and offering historical and textual evidence that the scrolls are the remains of various libraries in Jerusalem, hidden in the Judaeen desert when the Romans were besieging Jerusalem in 68-70 A.D. In broad terms, this evidence includes (1) the [Copper Scroll](#) found in Cave 3, which contains a list of treasures that, according to Golb and others, could only have originated in Jerusalem; (2) the great variety of conflicting ideas found

among the scrolls; and (3) the fact that, apart from the [Copper Scroll](#), they contain no original historical documents such as correspondence or contracts, but are all scribal copies of literary texts -- indicating that they are remnants of libraries and were not written at the site where they were found. Golb's theory has been endorsed by numerous scholars, including the prominent Israeli archaeologists Yizhar Hirschfeld, Yahman Jamaca, Yitzhak Magen and Yuval Peleg. Hirschfeld believes that Qumran was the country estate of a wealthy Jerusalemite. Magen and Peleg believe that the site was a pottery factory and had nothing to do with any sect. Golb believes that it was a military fortress, part of a concentric series of such bastions protecting Jerusalem. Thus, while one can no longer speak of any consensus regarding Qumran, what can be said is that current scrolls scholarship appears to be polarized between the traditional Qumran-sectarian theory and a growing movement towards the view that the site was secular in nature and had no organic connection with the parchment fragments found in the caves (see below). The scrolls are increasingly held to have come from a major center of intellectual culture in Palestine such as only Jerusalem is known to have been during the intertestamentary period. According to this theory, the scrolls are in fact more important than they were previously thought to be, because of the light they cast on Jewish thought in Jerusalem at that time

### The Temple library

In 1963 [Karl Heinrich Rengstorf](#) of the [University of Münster](#) put forth the theory that the Dead Sea scrolls originated at the library of the Jewish [Temple in Jerusalem](#). This theory was rejected by most scholars during the 1960s, who maintained that the scrolls were written at [Qumran](#) rather than transported from another location (a position then thought to be supported by de Vaux's identification of a room within the ruins of Qumran as a probable [scriptorium](#) -- an identification that has since been disputed by various archaeologists). Rengstorf's theory is also rejected by [Norman Golb](#), who argues that it is rendered unlikely by the great multiplicity of conflicting religious ideas found among the scrolls. It has been revived, however, by Rachel Eilior, who heads the department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

### Christian connections

[Spanish Jesuit José O'Callaghan](#) has argued that one fragment (7Q5) is a [New Testament](#) text from the [Gospel of Mark](#), chapter 6, verses 52–53. In recent years this controversial assertion has been taken up again by German scholar [Carsten Peter Thiede](#). A successful identification of this fragment as a passage from Mark would make it the earliest extant [New Testament](#) document, dating somewhere between AD 30 and 60. Opponents consider that the fragment is tiny and requires so much reconstruction (the only complete word in Greek is "καί" = "and") that it could have come from a text other than Mark.

[Robert Eisenman](#) advanced the theory that some scrolls actually describe the early [Christian](#) community, characterized as more fundamentalist and rigid than the one portrayed by the [New Testament](#). Eisenman also attempted to relate the career of [James the Just](#) and [Paul of Tarsus](#) to some of these documents.

### Other theories

Because they are frequently described as important to the history of the [Bible](#), the scrolls are surrounded by a wide range of [conspiracy theories](#). There is also writing about the [Nephilim](#) related to the [Book of Enoch](#). Other theories with more support among scholars include Qumran as a military fortress or a winter resort (Abegg et al 2002).

High resolution images of **all** discovered material are not available online for public examination.

## Discovery

The scrolls were found in 11 caves near a settlement at Qumran. None of them were found at the actual settlement. It is generally accepted that a [Bedouin](#) goat- or sheep-herder by the name of Mohammed Ahmed el-Hamed (nicknamed edh-Dhib, "the wolf") made the first discovery towards the beginning of [1947](#).

In the most commonly told story the shepherd threw a rock into a cave in an attempt to drive out a missing animal under his care. The shattering sound of pottery drew him into the cave, where he found several ancient jars containing [scrolls](#) wrapped in linen.

Dr. [John C. Trevor](#) has carried out a number of interviews with several men going by the name of Muhammed edh-Dhib, each relating a variation on this tale.

The scrolls were first brought to a Bethlehem antiquities dealer named Ibrahim 'Ijha, who returned them after being warned that they may have been stolen from a synagogue. The scrolls then fell into the hands of Khalil Eskander Shahin, "Kando", a cobbler and antiques dealer. By most accounts the Bedouin removed only three scrolls following their initial find, later revisiting the site to gather more, possibly encouraged by Kando. Alternatively, it is postulated that Kando engaged in his own illegal excavation: Kando himself possessed at least four scrolls.

Arrangements with the Bedouins left the scrolls in the hands of a third party until a sale of them could be negotiated. That third party, George Isha'ya, was a member of the [Syrian Orthodox Church](#), who soon contacted [St. Mark's Monastery](#) in the hope of getting an appraisal of the nature of the texts. News of the find then reached Metropolitan Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, more often referred to as [Mar Samuel](#).

After examining the scrolls and suspecting their age, Mar Samuel expressed an interest in purchasing them. Four scrolls found their way into his hands: the now famous [Isaiah Scroll](#), the [Community Rule](#), the [Habakkuk Peshar](#) (Commentary), and the [Genesis Apocryphon](#). More scrolls soon surfaced in the antiquities market, and [Eleazer Sukenik](#), an Israeli archaeologist and professor at Hebrew University, found himself in possession of three: The [War Scroll](#), [Thanksgiving Hymns](#), and another more fragmented Isaiah scroll.

By the end of 1947, Sukenik received word of the scrolls in Mar Samuel's possession and attempted to purchase them. No deal was reached, and instead the scrolls found the attention of Dr. John C. Trevor, of the American School of Oriental Research

(ASOR). Dr. Trevor compared the script in the scrolls to the [Nash Papyrus](#), the oldest biblical manuscript at the time, finding similarities between the two.

Dr. Trevor, a keen amateur photographer, met with Mar Samuel on [February 21, 1948](#), when he photographed the scrolls. The quality of his photographs often exceeded that of the scrolls themselves over the years, as the texts quickly eroded once removed from their linen wraps.

In March of that year, violence erupted between Arabs and Jews in Israel, prompting the removal of the scrolls from the country for safekeeping. The scrolls were illegally removed to Beirut.

## **Cave 2**

Bedouins discovered 30 fragments of other scrolls in Cave 2, including Jubilees & ben Sirach in the original Hebrew.

## **Cave 3**

One of the most curious scrolls is the Copper Scroll. Discovered in Cave 3, this scroll records a list of 64 underground hiding places throughout the land of Israel. According to the scroll, the deposits contain certain amounts of gold, silver, aromatics, and manuscripts. These are believed to be treasures from the Temple at Jerusalem that were hidden away for safekeeping.

## **Cave 4**

Since the late fifties, about 40% of the Scrolls, mostly fragments from Cave 4, remained unpublished and were inaccessible.

## **Caves 5 and 6**

Caves 5 and 6 were discovered shortly after cave 4. Caves 5 and 6 yielded a modest find.

The June 1, 1954, issue of the Wall Street Journal contained an advertisement reading, "The Four Dead Sea Scrolls: Biblical manuscripts dating back to at least 200 BC are for sale. This would be an ideal gift to an educational institution or religious institution by an individual or group."

## **Caves 7–10**

Archeologists discovered caves 7 through 10 in 1955 but did not find many fragments. Cave 7 contained seventeen greek documents (including [7Q5](#)) which would cause a controversy in the following decades. Cave 8 only had five fragments and cave 9 held but one fragment. Cave 10 contained nothing but an [ostrakon](#).



## Cave 11

The Temple Scroll, found in Cave 11, is the longest scroll. Its present total length is 26.7 feet (8.148 meters). The overall length of the original scroll must have been over 28 feet (8.75m).

## Publication

Some of the documents were published in a prompt manner: all of the writing found in Cave 1 appeared in print between [1950](#) and [1956](#); the finds from 8 different caves were released in a single volume in [1963](#); and [1965](#) saw the publication of the Psalms Scroll from Cave 11. Translation of these materials quickly followed.

The exception to this speed that the documents from Cave 4, which represented 40% of the total material. The publication of these materials had been entrusted to an international team led by Father [Roland de Vaux](#), a member of the [Dominican Order](#) in [Jerusalem](#). This group published the first volume of the materials entrusted to them in [1968](#), but spent much of their energies defending their theories of the material instead of publishing it. [Geza Vermes](#), who had been involved from the start in the editing and publication of these materials, blamed the delay—and eventual failure—on de Vaux's selection of a team unsuited to the quality of work he had planned, as well as relying "on his personal, quasi-patriarchal authority" to control the completion of the work.

As a result, a large part of the finds from Cave 4 were not made public for many years. Access to the scrolls was governed by a "secrecy rule" that allowed only the original International Team or their designates to view the original materials. After de Vaux's death in [1971](#), his successors repeatedly refused to even allow the publication of photographs of these materials, preventing other scholars from making their own judgments. This rule was eventually broken: first by the publication in the fall of [1991](#) of 17 documents reconstructed from a concordance that had been made in [1988](#) and had come into the hands of scholars outside of the International Team; next, that same month, by the discovery and publication of a complete set of [photographs](#) of the Cave 4 materials at the [Huntington Library](#) in [San Marino, California](#), that were not covered by the "secrecy rule". After some delays these photographs were published by [Robert Eisenman](#) and [James Robinson](#) (*A Facsimile Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, two volumes, Washington, D.C., [1991](#)). As a result, the "secrecy rule" was lifted, and publication of the Cave 4 documents soon commenced, with five volumes in print by [1995](#).

## Vatican conspiracy theory

Allegations that the [Vatican](#) suppressed the publication of the scrolls were published in the [1990s](#). Notably, [Michael Baigent's](#) and [Richard Leigh's](#) book [The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception](#) claim that several key scrolls were deliberately kept under wraps for decades to suppress unwelcome theories about the early history of Christianity; in particular, Eisenman's speculation that the life of [Jesus](#) was deliberately mythicized by [Paul](#), possibly a Roman agent who faked his "conversion" from Saul in order to undermine the influence of anti-Roman messianic cults in the region.

However, the complete publication and dissemination of translations and photographic records of the works in the late [1990s](#) and early 2000s effectively undermined these ideas, since the 'new' Scroll material did not include anything which connected the Scrolls to early Christianity and certainly did not contain anything about the Catholic Church or anything the church would want to 'suppress'. As a result, most scholars discredit this conspiracy theory.

## Significance

The significance of the scrolls is still somewhat unclear due to the uncertainty of their date and origin.

In spite of these limitations, the scrolls have already been quite valuable to [text critics](#). Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible were [Masoretic](#) texts dating to [9th century](#). The biblical manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls push that date back to the [2nd century BC](#). Before the discovery, the oldest Greek manuscripts such as [Codex Vaticanus](#) and [Codex Sinaiticus](#) were the earliest extant versions of biblical manuscripts. Although some of the biblical manuscripts found at Qumran differ significantly from the Masoretic text, most do not. The scrolls thus provide new variants and the ability to be more confident of those readings where the Dead Sea manuscripts agree with the Masoretic text or with the early Greek manuscripts.

Further, the [sectarian](#) texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls, most of which were previously unknown, offer new light on one form of Judaism practiced during the [Second Temple](#) period.

## Trivia

In the anime and manga series [Neon Genesis Evangelion](#), the Dead Sea Scrolls (known in the series as the "Secret Dead Sea Scrolls") are frequently named as texts revealing the coming of the Angels and of Third Impact, the time when all life on Earth would be reborn as a single entity.

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