

# The Temple Scrolls

*One of the three copies of this scroll is the longest of the Qumran scrolls and covers different themes relating to the Temple in Jerusalem and Deuteronomy. Several sources were revised and new material added, but who composed it and when?*

*By Florentino García Martínez, Director of the Qumran Institute, University of Gröningen (Holland)*

One of the better-preserved and most interesting compositions that has surfaced among the scrolls found at Qumran is the so-called Temple Scroll. It has come down to us in three copies, two coming from Cave 11 (11Q19 and 11Q20) and a third found in Cave 4 (4Q524). 11Q19, which at 28 feet is the longest of the preserved Qumran scrolls, was apparently discovered in 1956 with the other Cave 11 scrolls, but remained in the possession of an antiquities dealer in Bethlehem until its confiscation by the Israeli army in 1967. Ten years later, Yigael Yadin produced a sumptuous edition of the manuscript and a complete commentary in modern Hebrew that really began a new era in Scroll research. 11Q20, a more fragmentary but nevertheless substantial copy, was part of the lot of manuscripts acquired by the Dutch Royal Academy and has been published in the DJD Series. 4Q524 is formed by a few fragments found in Cave 4, but it is extremely important because of its age and other characteristics, such as the substitution of four dots for the Divine name. It has also been published in the DJD Series. While the two copies from Cave 11 can be dated roughly to the end of the first century BCE or the beginning of the first century CE, the writing of 4Q524 is more than a century older and proves that the composition was already extant around the middle of the second century BCE.

The *Temple Scroll* is a compilation of various sources thoroughly edited and revised by an author/redactor who added new material of his own to them. He has grouped different laws around four main themes. The first is the construction of the Temple, with the relevant rules concentrated in two blocks: one concerning the construction of the sanctuary and the altar, and another concerning the construction of the Temple's courtyards and various buildings there. Between these two blocks, he has inserted a description of the cycle of festivals throughout the year with the sacrifices that correspond to each festival, including the festivals of new wheat, new wine, and new oil,

and the festival of the wood offering, which were not part of the biblical (or of the later rabbinical) cycle. The calendar followed in this festival cycle is the same 364-day calendar we know from other Qumran compositions.

The third theme consists of the purity rules for both the temple and the holy city, as well as other general purity rules; many of these rules are clearly different from the purity rules that will become standard in Rabbinic Judaism and represent the legal approach followed by the group to which the author of the *Temple Scroll* belongs.

The fourth theme occupies the last part of the manuscript and comprises a rewriting of Deuteronomy 12–23, with the same diversity of contents that characterizes the biblical text: rules regarding judges, idolatry, the slaughter of animals, curses, false prophets, rights of priests and especially of Levites, witnesses, the slave taken in war, the rebellious son, crimes of betrayal, the defamed virgin, and incest. It also includes a very long treatment of the rights and obligations of the King, which develops the short notice of Deuteronomy 17:14–20.

## A New Torah?

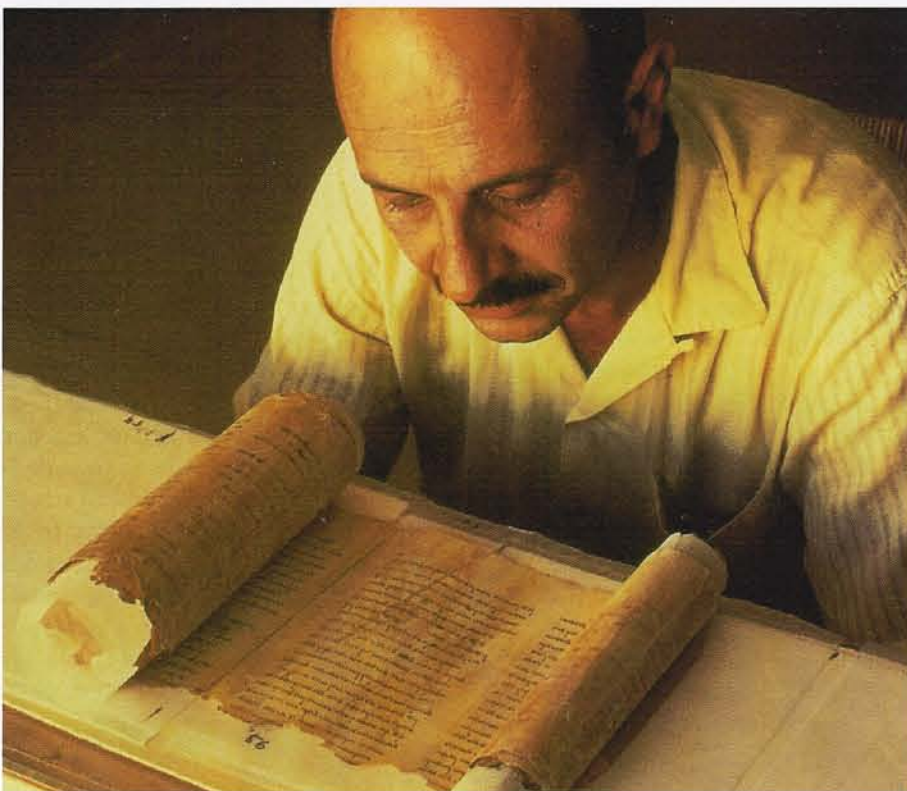
One of the most notable features of the *Temple Scroll* is that its author has recast the biblical idiom from the third to the first person, thus transforming Deuteronomy's message from Moses to the people into a direct discourse from God to the people. He thereby presents his work as a divine word, a new Torah for the entire nation of Israel coming directly from the mouth of God. The *Temple Scroll*, as a new Deuteronomy, systematically integrates the various laws concerning the temple and its sacrifices as found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. At times these are reproduced in a literal manner, but more often they are presented in a modified form with numerous additions not found in the biblical text.

It is clear that the intention of the author was to unify, homogenize, and resolve the difficulties encountered in the biblical text in order to create a more straightforward and consistent text. For this reason, the *Temple Scroll* has been viewed by some as a new Torah intended to complete the existing Pentateuch, or even designed to replace it. But in my opinion the *Temple Scroll* is neither an alternative nor a complement to the Mosaic Torah; it is its only valid interpretation, one that was considered revealed and thus normative. In spite of its visionary character and the extraordinary dimensions of the temple it describes (the third of the courtyards of this temple has dimensions that would have covered the whole extension of the city of Jerusalem), the *Temple Scroll* is not intended for the eschatological future but for the present. At one point it specifies that the same magnificent temple it is describing in detail will be replaced by another one, created directly by God (11Q19 19:9–10).

If the *Temple Scroll* does not describe the present reality, it certainly indicates what the present reality should be. Until this future moment of the direct divine intervention, all the prescriptions of the *Temple Scroll* are thought to be operative.

The detailed description of the temple and all its buildings, of the sacrificial system, the purity laws and the laws of the polity, according to the will of God as it should be understood, painfully shows the inadequacy of the situation of the time of its author and creates a powerful instrument for reform. By presenting this program as directly revealed at Sinai, the author underscores the urgency of implementing it. The present reality (and the present temple) does not correspond to the will of God. To live according to the will of God will require changing the present reality, building a new temple, and organizing the life in the country according to the purity laws (for example, constructing outside the cities burial places for the dead; residences for lepers, people who suffer gonorrhea and women during their menses, and even latrines [at 3,000 cubits from the city]; building a structure on the roof of the temple to prevent any unclean birds from flying over it, and banning all sexual relations in the temple).

Because the author of the *Temple Scroll* does not describe the reality he knows but what this reality should be, he does not give us many clues to determine the time in which he redacted his work. As a result, the *Temple Scroll* has been dated as early as the fifth century BCE or as late as the first century CE. The few concrete details that can be extracted from the “King’s Law” points to a time when it was necessary to reformulate the biblical data with respect to royalty. This means that the most



*The late Prof. Yigael Yadin with the Temple Scroll. Yadin, then a general in the Israeli army, retrieved this document, which had fallen into the hands of a Bethlehem dealer, in 1967 during the Six Day War.*

#### **King’s Law**

Compulsory monogamy for the King, division of powers between the King and the High Priest, subordination of the King to the High Priest, structure of the King’s council and army.

likely time of the composition of the *Temple Scroll* would be the period when the Maccabees attained national independence and united for themselves secular and religious power, a date to which the oldest copy found (4Q524) also points. That the redactor belongs to the priestly class seems certain. His mastery of the biblical text, his interest in the architectural elements of the temple, the temple rituals, and the polemics regarding the details of the sacrificial system and of the purity levels, lead us to the priestly circles (for whom these were the most important issues at hand) as the most likely creators of the composition.

#### **The Origins of the Redactor**

Some of the elements present in the *Temple Scroll* are only known from writings generally acknowledged as specific to the Qumran community. No wonder, then, that many authors, starting with Yadin, think that the redaction of the *Temple Scroll* took place within the community of Qumran. Although these

## An Essene Identity at Qumran

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The people who frequented Qumran did not call themselves Essenes, as historians did. The name Essene is not mentioned in the manuscripts. Today we can deduce that Qumran was Essene by combining three elements: the ancient authors, the manuscripts, and the site. The manuscripts speak of “saints” and the “pious.” Ancient authors call them “pious,” “Essenes,” “the Essenians.” The Essenes were an influential branch of ancient Judaism, separated from the Jerusalem hierarchy. References to them in the ancient sources are often contradictory. It seems that they were a conservative political-religious movement, diversified and scattered in a number of communities all over Palestine and probably beyond. The Essenes are found not only at Qumran. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus noted that their life style was rooted in study, self-denial, and generosity. Pliny the Elder tells of their retreat from the world and seems, for reasons of literary composition, to have spoken only of the communities installed along the Dead Sea.

Philo, Pliny the Elder, Flavius Josephus, and Dio Chrysostomus agree that the Essenes were those who would be later called Utopians. Today, they would be called Ecologists. They preferred to live outside the cities being shepherds and farmers who enjoyed the “company of palm trees” (Pliny).

The content of certain manuscripts illustrates magnificently the religious exacerbation typical of the Jewish sects and the “pious” at the turn of the first century. From the texts emerges the outline of the mystical and ideological conflict that everyone recognizes as the dramatic secession of the Essenes. We see the imprint of a community of men rigorously organized into a hierarchy.

*A large number of manuscripts had been hidden in the caves close to the site, and there is no reason to believe that these manuscripts had nothing to do with the Qumran settlement. The caves have the same pottery, especially the famous oblong jars made to hold the scrolls.*

similarities are impressive and make highly unlikely the position of those authors who deny any relationship between the *Temple Scroll* and the community of Qumran, it falls short of proof. Other elements, equally present in the *Temple Scroll*, prevent us from concluding that it was composed when the community was already founded and installed at Qumran after breaking away from the Jerusalem temple. Among other features, the interests evident in the sectarian scrolls are very distinct from those of the *Temple Scroll*; its method of Scriptural interpretation is equally distinct; the major Qumran festival (the renewal of the covenant) is missing from the *Temple Scroll*; not to mention the different position vis-à-vis the temple and the authorities.

In my opinion, all these apparently contradictory observations can nevertheless be reconciled if we assume that the *Temple Scroll* arose from the emerging community, but was composed prior to the community's installation at Qumran. It belongs, therefore, to the community's formative period. This implies that the composition of the *Temple Scroll* is more or less contemporaneous with 4QMMT (*Some of the Works of the Torah*), which shows us that a well-defined group existed within these priestly circles and can be placed within the same priestly circles in which 4QMMT originated—the same priestly circles from which the Qumran community was later to emerge. This solution explains the similarities and differences by allowing us to take into account the inevitable evolution, the modifications imposed due to the break from the Jerusalem temple, and ideological and halakhic developments that arose in the new situation. This solution also enables us to understand the surprising parallels in vocabulary, content, and *halakhot* between the *Temple Scroll* and 4QMMT. Whatever the case, the anonymous person who redacted the *Temple Scroll* around the middle of the second century BCE, using earlier written sources, succeeded in creating one of the most interesting documents for understanding the Judaism of his period.

