

**Scrolls From the Dead Sea:  
The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Scholarship**

## **THE WORLD OF THE SCROLLS**

In 1947, young Bedouin shepherds, searching for a stray goat in the Judean Desert, entered a long-untouched cave and found jars filled with ancient scrolls. That initial discovery by the Bedouins yielded seven scrolls and began a search that lasted nearly a decade and eventually produced thousands of scroll fragments from eleven caves. During those same years, archaeologists searching for a habitation close to the caves that might help identify the people who deposited the scrolls, excavated the Qumran ruin, a complex of structures located on a barren terrace between the cliffs where the caves are found and the Dead Sea. Within a fairly short time after their discovery, historical, paleographic, and linguistic evidence, as well as carbon-14 dating, established that the scrolls and the Qumran ruin dated from the third century B.C.E. to 68 C.E. They were indeed ancient! Coming from the late Second Temple Period, a time when Jesus of Nazareth lived, they are older than any other surviving manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures by almost one thousand years.

Since their discovery nearly half a century ago, the scrolls and the identity of the nearby settlement have been the object of great scholarly and public interest, as well as heated debate and controversy. Why were the scrolls hidden in the caves? Who placed them there? Who lived in Qumran? Were its inhabitants responsible for the scrolls and their presence in the caves? Of what significance are the scrolls to Judaism and Christianity?

This exhibition presents twelve Dead Sea Scroll fragments and archaeological artifacts courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority as well as supplementary materials from the Library of Congress. It is designed to retell the story of the scrolls' discovery; explore their archaeological and historical context; introduce the scrolls themselves; explore the various theories concerning the nature of the Qumran community; and examine some of the challenges facing modern researchers as they struggle to reconstruct the scrolls from the tens of thousands of fragments that remain.

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