

A selection of voices from the community, nation and world

## Christians likely wrote the fabled Dead Sea Scrolls

*Red ink proves manuscripts aren't as old as once thought*

By Nell Aitman

Since the discovery in the late 1940s of a huge cache of scrolls in caves near the Dead Sea, a tight-knit community of secretive scholars has stubbornly insisted they were written by a Jewish sect long before the birth of Jesus Christ.

But evidence is steadily mounting that this collection of supposedly ancient manuscripts, said to be the earliest version of the Old Testament, were, in fact, the work of Christians.

At stake is the credibility of the original eight-member team of Dead Sea Scroll scholars and the thousands of books and papers they and others have written to advance careers at universities around the world.

A long line of Dead Sea Scroll scholars has asserted that the

name of God. But no Jew would blot out the divine name of God by simplifying it with dots, said Chaim Sheynin, an expert in Hebrew paleography and medieval Jewish literature at Gratz College in Philadelphia.

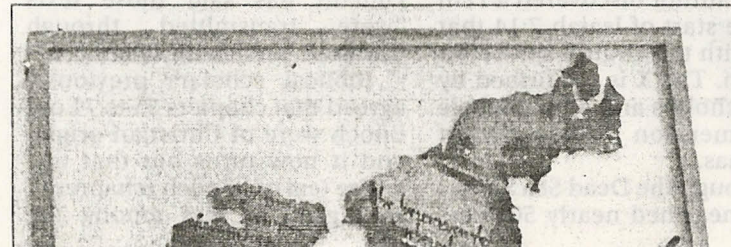
Corrections of words within the text of the Isaiah Scroll offer other evidence that it was transcribed in Christian times. Jewish scribes made their corrections in the margins of biblical texts.

"Christian copyists usually made the change in the text itself," said Richard Nysse, an Old Testament professor at Luther Seminary in St. Paul.

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A long line of Dead Sea Scroll scholars has asserted that the manuscripts belonged to the Essenes, conventionally thought to be a minority Jewish sect that existed before the time of Christ.

From St. Epiphanius, a fourth-century AD scholar and church father, we learn, however, that the name "Essene" was used to designate early gentile followers of Jesus. The actual writers of the scrolls never called themselves Essenes, but referred to themselves in Christian terms, such as "the poor" or "poor in spirit."

Christianity today is generally unaware of its Jewish roots and influences, which existed well into the medieval period (300-1600 AD). If the scrolls are not relegated to being mere Essene productions, they have much broader significance. They become a link in showing how much Judaism influenced medieval Christian thought.

This author found new evidence in the most famous of all Dead Sea Scrolls, the Isaiah Scroll, to indicate a medieval origin at the earliest. The scroll shows sentence separation — most evident in Chapters 49 and 50 — a practice unknown in Hebrew texts before the sixth century AD.

The Isaiah Scroll offers examples of how Christians, rather than Jews, penned the scrolls. Jews, for example, spell the word "Immanuel" ("God with us") as two words. But in the Isaiah Scroll, it is spelled as one word, as we find in Christian Bibles.

Scholars such as James Charlesworth, head of Princeton's Dead Sea Scroll Project, have found that in some of the manuscripts, four dots replace the four Hebrew letters that make up the

testament professor at Luther Seminary in St. Paul.

Ironically, scholars tell us that because of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we know a great deal about Judaism and Jewish customs in the period from 300 BC to 50 AD. When we examine the religious codes contained in scrolls like the Zadokite Document — the "catechism" of the scroll writers — we see aspects that do not conform to Judaism then or now.

Neither the Torah nor the Talmud forbids the sale of clean animals, birds or grain to gentiles. Yet it is a rule in the Zadokite Document. So is the koshering of fish: "Fish are not to be eaten unless they are ripped open while still alive and their blood poured out."

Jews do not kosher fish. Nor does the koshering process itself inflict undue pain on or cruelty to the creature.

Since 1950, it has been acknowledged that there are 11 Xs on the Isaiah Scroll. The late Prof. J.L. Teicher of Cambridge held that the X was an abbreviation for "Christos."

This author discovered that the Xs also correspond to passages widely recognized as prophecy about the coming Messiah, lending credence to the theory that those marks were made in the Christian era.

"Isaiah chapters 42:1 and 42:6 are clearly messianic passages that speak of Jesus, and the Xs here relating to him are an extremely important discovery," said Phillip Comfort, professor of Greek and New Testament at Wheaton College and senior Bible editor at Tyndale Publishing.

This author discovered a 12th X at the start of Isaiah 7:14 that deals with the virgin birth of the Messiah. The X is confirmed by other scholars and adds a whole new dimension to the event of Christmas.

Although the Dead Sea Scrolls were unearthed nearly 50 years



Parchment fragments bearing the text of Daniel 1.10-17 and 2.2-6. The reverse side contains a small part of Daniel 3.22-30.

Star Tribune File Photo

In photo at top, dark holes mark the openings of the caves of Qumran, Jordan, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Above, these parchment fragments from the scrolls were part of a 1976 exhibit. The scrolls were found by Bedouin shepherds in the late 1940s in cylindrical pottery jars of the type shown at right.



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ago, we only recently have learned that red ink was used on some of the biblical texts found at Qumran. But University of Pennsylvania scholars say the earliest use of red ink in biblical manuscripts, such as the Codex Sinaiticus written by Christian monks, was the third to fourth century AD.

Equally compelling is the revelation in the September-October issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* that nine apocryphal texts — among them, I Enoch and Tobit — have turned up at Qumran.

Yet scrolls scholar Deborah Dimant has said those texts "were transmitted through Christian, not Jewish, channels."

Biblical scholars previously agreed that chapters 35 to 71 of I Enoch were of Christian origin, and it now turns out that one entire text of I Enoch (chapters 1 through 106) was among the

Qumran scrolls. How can a scroll containing Christian chapters be found among scrolls that are supposedly pre-Christian?

Along with the internal evidence is an archaeological discovery about the Isaiah Scroll by Harvard paleographer Frank Cross. He described the scroll as being made of sheepskin and sewn with linen.

But, based on the Old Testament Book of Leviticus 19:19, Jews eschew the mingling of species, even to the point of refusing to yoke an ox and ass together — or mixing wool with linen.

"I think the mixing of wool-sheepskin with linen thread shows (the scroll) to be non-Jewish in composition," said Stephen Reynolds, professor emeritus of Hebrew at Gordon-Conwell University and Faith Theological Seminary.

Orthodox rabbis who have

been consulted agree from a Talmudic point of view.

What we see is that the scrolls' writers were not a small Jewish sect devoted to the study of Torah, but a Christian group that practiced quasi-Jewish customs.

We have St. Epiphanius' historical note to set the record straight about the identification of the Essenes as gentile Christians, and we have the scrolls themselves to show the remarkable vestiges of Jewish thought in Christian writings.

The Xs on the Isaiah Scroll, like the other Christian elements, mark their spot on the calendar of time.

— Neil Altman is a Philadelphia-based writer. David Crowder and Ron Grossman assisted with this article. Distributed by *New York Times Special Features*.