



The Shamanic Essenes, Keepers of the Dead Sea Scrolls And Other Secrets

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On the fourth floor of the Museum of the Bible in Washington DC, there is a permanent exhibit that many thousands of people have gladly paid more than \$20 to visit in order to gaze with rapt attention at fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Carefully sealed in climate-controlled glass cases, protected from the hands of an adoring public, they are considered the most prized portion of the museum's extensive collection. Visitors read the story of their discovery and translation and are duly impressed by this precious example of archaeology at its finest.



The Isaiah scroll contains almost the whole Book of Isaiah. (Public Domain)

Unfortunately, in early March of 2020, the museum was forced to announce that the entire collection, every one of the fragments so lovingly protected with high-tech equipment, financed by the entry fees of the multitudes of adoring fans, was fake. Sixteen fragments form the heart of the exhibit. Each one is a forgery, some produced as late as the 20th century. They fooled even the most careful collectors.

According to museum staff, there was no fraud involved. Despite many legitimate scholars who studied them, and pronounced them all authentic, they are all forgeries. To the museum's credit, as soon as the facts became known, they admitted it right away. *"The Museum of the Bible is trying to be as transparent as possible,"* said CEO Harry Hargrave. *"We are victims. We are victims of misrepresentation. We are victims of fraud."*



*Museum of the Bible Washington DC.
(Farragutful/ CC BY-SA 4.0)*

Part of the problem is the fact that David Green, an evangelical Christian who founded the multi-billion-dollar Hobby Lobby chain in 1972, had written of the *Bible*: “*This isn’t just some book that someone made up. It’s God, it’s history, and we want to show that.*” Skeptics tend to be concerned when large amounts

of money are spent to verify a deeply held belief in the name of scholarship, and Green funded the museum.

Despite the forgeries, the Dead Sea Scrolls continue to fascinate everyone from professional scholars to the general public. Someone knew there was a fortune to be made from this interest. Only an extremely skilled forger could have pulled it off. Someone went to a lot of trouble, and it worked. They must have been in contact with the genuine fragments, for only the real articles could have served as models to this brilliant forgery.

The Real Dead Sea Scrolls

Nevertheless, the authentic fragments do still exist. They offer fascinating clues to curious scholars. Take, for instance, what is called the *Copper Scroll*. It has been described as an ancient treasure map, listing information about 64 caches of gold and silver, supposedly buried to prevent the first century Romans from discovering them. None of the caches have officially been found, so they are presumably awaiting discovery to this very day. The possibility always exists, of course, that the treasure has already been discovered and the caches looted long ago. Most of the *Dead Sea Texts* are written in ink on parchment or animal skins, but the *Copper Scroll* consists of Hebrew and Greek letters chiseled onto metal sheets. Some scholars believe this was to better preserve the messages, but this, of course, is only theory.



Part of Qumran Copper Scroll. (Public Domain)

In May of 2016, another discovery shocked the academic community. In the 1950s, some scrolls were discovered and stored in boxes to be later sorted or deciphered. They were very small in size and extremely delicate, so they went unexamined for more than 60 years, resting quietly in a storeroom in Israel. But in 2016, as part of a project by the Israel Antiquities Authority designed to digitize the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, they were pulled out of storage and examined using new equipment that was not available to the original finders. To everyone's surprise, when NASA-inspired technology was employed, hidden out of sight to the naked eye was a Paleo-Hebrew manuscript that indicated there were more scrolls yet to be found.

A view of part of the Temple Scroll that was found in Qumran Cave 11. Israel Museum (Public Domain)



Oren Ableman of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was credited with the discovery. It was, indeed, a significant piece of research. Fragments from the books of *Deuteronomy*, *Leviticus*, and *Jubilees* appeared, but what was most interesting was a fragment from what was called the *Temple Scroll*. It contained text describing directions for how to properly conduct services in what was called 'The Ideal Temple'. This was unknown prior to the discovery. The fact that it was written in Paleo-Hebrew, a very early Hebrew script, indicates that the information was very, very old. But the

complete manuscript remains lost, perhaps forever. There is no doubt more information yet to be deciphered. The work of translation is an on-going task. But what is even more exciting is the very real possibility that hidden away in the mountains of the Dead Sea are more scrolls and texts awaiting discovery. Who knows what mysteries are yet to be found?



Scholars assembling Dead Sea Scrolls fragments at the Rockefeller Museum (formerly the Palestine Archaeological Museum). (Public Domain)

The Essenes

This raises a very important point. The Essenes, who buried these texts, obviously put great value on them. They were also a very secretive society. What did they know that was so important that they risked life and limb and went to such pains to preserve them? And even more mysterious, has their true identity and ideology been deliberately censored from the public? The story is a fascinating one, with many twists and turns.

In the first century of the common era, a Roman historian known as Pliny the Elder wrote a book entitled *Natural History*. He was the first to refer to the Essenes in print. According to his book, the Essenes possessed no money and their priestly class practiced a strict celibacy. But he also said the group had existed for thousands of generations, scattered in communities throughout Israel while living amongst the general population. Their main geographical center was somewhere above Ein Gedi. That is near the Dead Sea.



Discussion between the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes; Majestas Domini (background); Mozes with the Tables of the Law (background); Sun (background). (Public Domain)

In 75 AD the great Jewish historian Josephus wrote massive accounts of the period. His books, *The Jewish War*, *Antiquities of the Jews*, and *The Life of Flavius Josephus* are still studied today. He divided the religious community of Judaism into three groups, called Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The Pharisees and Sadducees are both mentioned in the *New*

Testament, but there is no mention of Essenes. Josephus wrote that the Essenes lived a communal existence, ritually immersed themselves in water every morning, and kept a strict observance of the Sabbath. They ate communally and devoted themselves to a rigorous life of prayer. But he also revealed that they had a cult-like devotion to studying religious texts and preserved secrets they would not reveal to anyone outside their number. One of the most startling revelations of Josephus, however, was that the Essenes kept a systematic list of angels, by name, and claimed to converse with them.



The romanticized woodcut engraving of Flavius Josephus appearing in William Whiston's translation of his works. (Public Domain)

In summary, early writers tell of the Essenes:

- The Essenes were a highly secretive, extremely religious, cult that kept to themselves, the better to practice their spiritual lives in isolation.
- They believed themselves to be an elite group of Jews, as opposed to other Jewish believers.
- In isolation, they prepared themselves to be God's chosen people as they awaited the coming of Messiah and the building of a sacred Temple on earth. Their writings reveal that the current priesthood in Jerusalem were apostate, kept the wrong calendar, had forsaken the rules of purity, and were improperly officiating the laws of God.

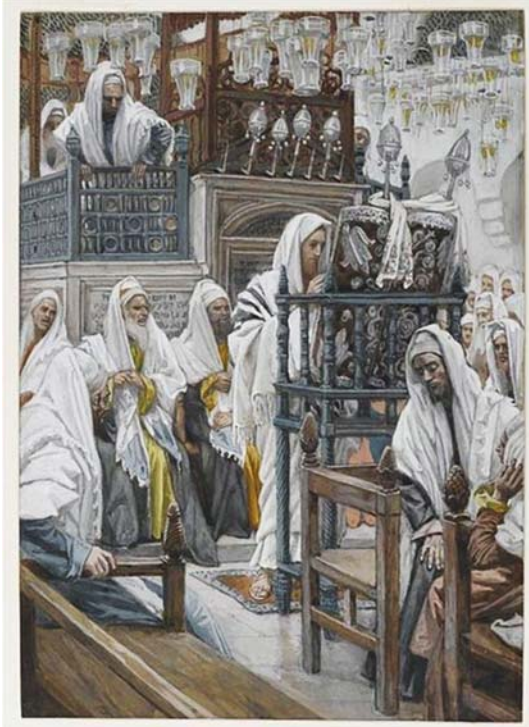
Remains of part of the main building at Qumran. (Public Domain)



One of the most intriguing texts found at Qumran is a scroll called *War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness*. This is the text that most clearly expressed the Essenes' dualistic belief system. The 'Sons of Light' were, of course, the Essenes. Apparently the 'Sons of

Darkness' were everybody else. At some point, according to this scroll, there will be a great and final war, a cataclysmic battle between good and evil. This belief is echoed in the final book of the Christian *New Testament*, the book called *Revelation*. The battle will be fought on earth, but its ramifications will be felt throughout the cosmos. Apparently, Planet Earth has the bad fortune of being Ground Zero in a truly epic war being played out in the Spiritual Realm between God and Satan. In this way, the beliefs of the Essenes are not much different than many other monotheistic systems of eschatology, or the study of the end times.

For years scholars have wondered about the term 'Son of God'. That was the title Jesus took upon himself, but apparently it was in use way before Jesus was born. It goes all the way back to the book of *Genesis*, but there it was used to describe fallen angels who in no way could have been confused with the Second Person of the Trinity. The Essenes also refer to a 'Council of Twelve', reminding the reader of the 12 Disciples of Jesus. They practiced baptism, reminiscent of John the Baptist who baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. They also talked about healings, recalling the miracles of Jesus, and, most important, a communion meal. These are all analogous to Christian teachings, but occurred long before Jesus was born. This has prompted some scholars to wonder if Christianity as it is known today is actually a continuation of a Jewish sect called the 'Cult of the Essenes'.



Jesus Unrolls the Book in the Synagogue by James Tissot (1886 and 1894) Brooklyn Museum (Public Domain)

Was Jesus actually the Messiah for whom the Essenes were waiting? Was he the real 'Son of God' and 'Teacher of Righteousness'? Can the reason that Essenes are not mentioned in the *Bible* be attributed to the fact that they never disappeared at all, but eventually morphed into the official state religion of the conquering Roman Empire? Did the Essenes, in effect, really win the war, while the apostate Pharisees and Sadducees were killed or carried off into the great Diaspora?

Sacred Mushroom Eucharist

John Marco Allegro, who died in 1988, was an archaeologist and *Dead Sea Scrolls* scholar. His most famous, some might say infamous, book was entitled *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East*. It was a book that cemented his popularity and ended his career. From his work with the *Copper Scroll* and other *Dead Sea Texts*, he put forth the theory that when the Essenes gathered to share their communal meal - later ritualized in the Christian celebration of the Eucharist, or Last Supper – where the main course consisted of psychedelic mushrooms. He believed this was the basis for the Christian sacramental meal. In that sense, the Essenes, above the Dead Sea, take on the appearance of an ancient, shamanic sect that surpasses the Hebrew religion and traces its roots way back to ancient shamanic rituals that may have taken place in the great painted caves of western Europe as much as 40,000 years ago. Indeed, this may even mark the beginning of religion.



The Last Supper, depicted by Juan de Juanes, (c. 1562) (Public Domain)

In his book, *Supernatural Gods*, the current author puts it this way: “When the first humans crawled back into those great painted caves 40,000 years ago, or gazed in wonder at the night sky and wondered where they came from, the human race had finally evolved to the point where the real work of discovery could begin. We were able to think symbolically. We had religious thoughts — spiritual inclinations. We were off to the races and haven't stopped since. We had glimpsed our Grail and were off on our quest for Supernatural Gods.”

Some anthropologists believe that it was by consuming hallucinogenic mushrooms that the first shamans learned to communicate with the gods. They experienced out of body travel, and for the first time surveyed landscapes that were beyond the perceptual realm. Many Christians believe they will go to heaven when they die. Heaven is the abode of God. But is Heaven not just a word that describes a place outside of this dimension and man's plane of existence? For countless thousands of years shamans have used psychedelics to achieve visions of such realms. Many report talking to spiritual entities that resemble what the *Dead Sea Texts* call angels. The Essenes even kept lists of the names of these beings. Were they practicing an ancient, indeed, even *the* most ancient, religion, in the world? Were they a continuation of the original tradition of shamanism?

The first known mention of the word abracadabra was in the third century AD in a book called Liber Medicinalis by Quintus Serenus Sammonicus, physician to the Roman emperor Caracalla, who in prescribed that malaria sufferers wear an amulet containing the word written in the form of a triangle. (Il Dottore/ CC BY-SA 3.0)



Abracadabra

This is why John M Allegro (1923 –1988) archaeologist and *Dead Sea Scroll* scholar, lost his job and was banished from the company of accepted scholars. (Allegro was he editor of some of the most famous and controversial scrolls published, the *pescharim*, a group of interpretive commentaries on scripture). He was, in effect, censored because he proposed a radical explanation for something that is, to the very day, still not understood. He put forth the theory that Jesus, who was ‘The Teacher of Righteousness’, was introduced to the world because of the psychedelic experience of Essenes — shamans who practiced their religion in the region of the Dead Sea.



The Pesharin on Habakkuk Scroll written in Hebrew (Public Domain)

Their communal meal of mushrooms is now kept alive each and every Sunday morning whenever Christians gather to celebrate the last supper. Wine has replaced the *amanita muscaria* mushroom. Allegro went a lot further than this, however. He believed that in order to confuse the Romans, the early Essenes sect, who might have morphed into mystical Jewish Gnostics, used code when referring to their meal. They juxtaposed Hebrew with Aramaic, two languages known and used in Israel at the time. He might have a point. Take the famous words, "Our Father, Who Art in Heaven," transliterated to Aramaic, the phrase becomes "Abracadabra".

Allegro also speculated about the Christian doctrine concerning consuming the body of Christ. Whenever the sacrament of communion is celebrated, the priest repeats the words of Jesus: "This is my body, broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you. Take it in remembrance of me."

Does this refer to the fact that the sacred mushroom was actually a form of divinity? Allegro's career ended with the publication of his book. According to the academic world he was henceforth an outcast — a pariah. He had dared challenge the church's well-known narrative, and for that he was censored. But reading his well-thought-out and convincingly presented arguments, it makes one wonder.



Mosaic of red mushrooms, found in the Christian Basilica of Aquileia in northern Italy, dating to before 330 AD (Public Domain)

Pliny the Elder, the first to write about the super-secret world of the Essenes, said the sect was thousands of years old. He might have underrepresented their age. They might go all the way back to the most ancient human religion, first practiced some 40,000 years ago. And their presence might be seen, in, albeit modified and garbled form, every Sunday morning when Christians gather to drink wine and consume the "body of Christ". In this sense, there might be much more to the *Dead Sea Scrolls* than meets the eye.

*This is an excerpt adapted from Jim Willis' book, **Censoring God: Lost Books of the Bible and Other Suppressed Scriptures**, Published by Visible Ink Press, for release in 2021.*

Top Image: Morning Prayers' (circa 1936) by Otto Pliny. The Essenes were thought to have had specific prayers related to the sunrise. Source: Public Domain

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