

Non-Biblical (Secular) Texts at July-September Exhibition

4Q271 Damascus Document

Date: Late 1st century BCE (30-1 BCE)

Language: Hebrew

Discovered: Cave 4, 1952

The text of the Damascus Document addresses a community which fled from Judea to the "Land of Damascus," a possible reference to the city in Syria or symbolic of exile in general. The text urges the "sons of light" to be separate from the "sons of darkness" and warns of the three nets of Belial (fornication, wealth and defilement of the sanctuary.) It outlines legal rules and rituals for the community to observe by quoting and then interpreting biblical texts.

4Q258 Community Rule

Date: 1 CE (paleographic dating), 95 BCE-122 CE (carbon dating)

Language: Hebrew

Discovered: Cave 4, 1952

The Community Rule, or "Manual of Discipline," defines the rules that govern the community, referred to as the yahad (Hebrew for unity). This scroll addresses their questions: Where do we fit in God's plan? How should we live our lives? How will the world end? What will happen to us?

The caves held 13 copies of this document, which served as a constitution and contained guiding principles and details regarding religion, conduct of members, justice, and punishment. It includes rules for entry into the community, physical and moral requirements of potential members, and the selection and probation period for new members.

The Community Rule prescribes the details of daily life, when and how to work, bathe, eat, speak, pray, and study. Explanation of a social hierarchy—priests, members, and new initiates—reinforces their rules, focused on physical and spiritual purity. The text defines their belief in predestination, that God had already determined who was good or bad, and how events would unfold—the great paradox in light of their strict practices. This document led many scholars to equate the Qumran community with the Essenes, an ascetic Judaic group, described in historical accounts by Josephus and Philo.

11Q14 Book of War

Date: 1st century CE (20-50 CE)

Language: Hebrew

Discovered: Cave 11, 1956

Based on this fragment, scholars believed the scroll contained the text of a blessing, until they discovered more. Other caves held multiple copies of the Book of War, which included this ceremonial blessing to be recited over the surviving community of Israel after the final battle at the end of time.

The blessing describes how God will cause the universe to produce fertility and will prevent disease and destruction by wild animals and plagues. The blessing weaves in familiar quotes from the Bible, including a paraphrase of Numbers 6: 24-25, "May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face to shine upon you."

The Book of War describes in detail the apocalyptic war between the forces of good and evil, "the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness," presumably the members of the Qumran community and possibly the Romans or those in Israel not in the Qumran community. Angels, both good and bad, join the fight. After 40 years and seven battles, God tips the balance at a predetermined time initiating a new world order. "His exalted greatness shall shine eternally to the peace, blessing, glory, joy, and long life of all the Sons of Light."

Commentary on Nahum 4Q169

Date: 1st century CE

Language: Hebrew

Discovered: Cave 4, 1952

Nahum 2:12-134

This scroll contains excerpts from the biblical book of Nahum, followed by an interpretation or commentary. The word *peshet*, which means "its interpretation concerns," links the excerpt with the commentary. The community at Qumran believed the Bible contained hidden messages concerning their future that their righteousness empowered them to reveal. They wrote biblical interpretations relating to events of their time, hence these commentaries (Hebrew *peshetim*, plural of *peshet*) provide important information from the era of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The book of the prophet Nahum describes the last days of the Assyrian Empire. Nahum speaks of the destruction of Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, and the downfall of the Assyrian king. In this commentary, the writer draws a connection between Nineveh and the Pharisees, considered by the author(s) to be false interpreters of Torah, the five books of Moses.

The text mentions "Demetrius," a Greek King who waged war against Jerusalem and the "lion of wrath," possibly a Jewish ruler (103–76 BCE). The text also uses the term *Kittim*, possibly referring to the Romans. From these and other references, we learn how the author(s) understood biblical prophecies as relating to their own time. They considered their commentaries as authoritative as the original biblical prophecies.

4Q511 Songs of the Sage

Date: 1st century BCE

Language: Hebrew

Discovered: Cave 4, 1952

The Songs of the Sage are prayers of exorcism. The community responsible for their composition seems to believe that by engaging in the act of praising God, the power of demonic beings could be thwarted; by praising God one could instill fear in the demons.

5/6Heb 44 Papyrus Bar Kokhba 44—the Alma Scroll

Scroll type: Simple deed

Date: 28 Marheshvan, Year 3 of Revolt (134 CE)

Language: Hebrew

Discovered: Cave of the Letters, Nahal Hever, 1961

This scroll demonstrates that people outside the Qumran community also hid scrolls in the mudstone caves. It is a lease agreement, which dates to 134 CE, after the destruction of the Qumran settlement by Roman soldiers. It describes a transaction for land previously owned by the government of Simeon Bar Kosiba (Bar Kokhba); leader of the second Jewish Revolt against the Romans (132-135 CE). The document mentions Bar Kokhba by name and as the "Prince of Israel," a historical reference to his brief tenure as leader in this period.

Latter-day Saints find this scroll of particular interest, because it specifies "Alma son of Judah" as one of the people involved in the agreement on the fourth line and at the bottom of the document. This text contains the oldest known occurrence of the name "Alma" outside of the Book of Mormon.