

## **An Ancient Copper Treasure Map**

The accidental discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, by a Bedouin goat-herder from Qumran near Jerusalem, gave archeologists a window into the past and religious scholars important clues to the creation of the Bible. Excavations eventually revealed some 850 documents, including portions of the Old Testament written on leather and papyrus, dating back to the second century BC.

One scroll stands out from the rest. In cryptic language inscribed on a thin copper sheet, this scroll contains what many experts believe to be a treasure map, complete with detailed directions to where a fortune in gold and silver are hidden.

The copper scroll was discovered in 1952 in what it is now known as Cave 3 at Qumran. Analysis showed that it is composed of copper alloyed with a small amount of tin. Researchers initially thought there were two separate scrolls, but after cutting the scroll apart for examination, they now believe the thin metal snapped two centuries ago.

### **THE SECRETS OF THE SCROLL**

Mystery surrounds this scroll and its contents, as scholars cannot agree on the translation of the text. The scroll is written almost entirely in Mishnaic Hebrew, although it includes several entries written in Greek. A further complication is that the text contains words and references the experts simply don't understand. Most early Hebrew texts are religious in nature and contain a distinct vocabulary.

The copper scroll is not religious and includes words and phrases not found in any other ancient text, making an accurate translation difficult and leaving the door open to wide interpretation.

Scholars have identified 63 separate entries on the copper scroll that describe the location of what is estimated to be more than 160 tons of hidden gold and silver. However, the translations are vague and unspecific. One entry describes a treasure to be found "In the gutter in the bottom of the tank." Another entry refers to 65 gold bars located "In the cavity of the Old House of Tribute, in the Chain Platform." Historians do not recognize these reference points and don't know where to begin searching for the treasure.

According to Theodore Gaster, author of *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, there are four prevailing, but contested, theories behind the treasure of the copper scroll:

- The treasure was the property of the residents of Qumran. However, some scholars believe that the community was a religious cult that would have shunned material wealth.
- The treasure represents the antiquities recovered from the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Josephus, a first century historian, states that those treasures were still in the building at the time of its destruction and were not removed for posterity or safekeeping.
- The copper scroll refers to the treasures recovered from the First Temple of Jerusalem, destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. This is also questioned because the Temple was destroyed 500 years before scholars believe the text was written.
- The copper scroll is a hoax and there is no lost treasure waiting to be found.

### **SCROLLS TO BE EXHIBITED HERE**

Portions of the Dead Sea Scrolls, including the copper scroll, will soon be on display in the United States. The San Diego Natural History Museum will show them from July until early 2008, and other cities including San Francisco will host the exhibit through 2009.

Intrigued by a map traced on a metal sheet, archaeologists, scholars and treasure hunters have searched for the copper scroll's lost gold and silver, but they have yet to discover the key that will help them find it — if the treasure even exists. Still, a half-century after the first clue was unearthed, excitement continues to grow over what may be hidden in the desert north of Jerusalem.