



TEMPLE, SCROLLS, AND DIVINE MESSENGERS: ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL IN ROMAN TIMES AN EXHIBITION FROM THE ISRAEL MUSEUM, JERUSALEM 4.11.2014 – 25.1.2015 Resource Guide

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This Resource Guide is developed in conjunction with the project on the Sustainability of Memory and Artifact (SOMA) at City University of Hong Kong.

THE GABRIEL REVELATION STONE

At just over one meter tall, the limestone tablet dates from the same era as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The 87 lines of prophetic Hebrew text are ink written on stone, rather than carved into the rock. As with the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars have been focused on distilling information about religious beliefs from around the late Second Temple era (the Herodian era), including the time of Jesus' birth.

Much of the ink has been eroded in key passages—only about 40 percent of the text is legible—which has resulted in a wave of interpretations. Individuals generally agree that the Stone details a vision of an attack on Jerusalem. Gabriel, the first angel in the Hebrew Bible, announces himself as the author of the text. Controversy surrounding the tablet concerns its connections between early Christianity and Jewish groups.



The Gabriel Revelation

Hebrew inscription
Dead Sea region
1st century BCE – 1st century CE
Ink on limestone

Photo courtesy of Bruce Zuckerman

Discussion

- 1 Why is the Stone referred to as a Dead Sea Scroll on stone and how did scientists authenticate its origin?
- 2 What was happening in the Jerusalem of the time that might give some context to the apocalyptic story in the Revelation Stone?
- 3 How do the other texts contained in the exhibition help to give a fuller picture of the Stone?
- 4 How do multiple translations complicate our thinking about the original texts and who wrote them? Some Biblical scholars incited controversy by first translating a smudged out word in line 80 as “to live” so that the line might read: “By three days–live, I Gabriel command you.” In the related interpretation, the line was seen as being an example of a Messiah rising from the dead, which would have predated the Biblical story of Jesus' resurrection. Why was this interpretation so controversial?

Activities

- Hand each group a paragraph of text with all of the vowels removed. Ask each group to fill in the blanks and interpret the text based on the remaining writing.
- Ask students to search for below common Hebrew characters on the Stone and copy them down.

ל	מ	ש	י
Lahmed (L sound)	Mem (M sound)	Shin (SH sound)	Yod (Y or I sound)

Resources

http://hartman.org.il/SHINews_View.asp?Article_Id=162&Cat_Id=303&Cat_Type=shinews

THE GREAT ISAIAH SCROLL AND THE WAR SCROLL

The Dead Sea Scrolls represent the oldest evidence for the text of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) and are often referred to as the greatest cultural treasure of Israel and the Jewish people. The scrolls featured in this exhibition are replicas of the original seven discovered in the Qumran caves in 1947. Since their initial discovery, individuals have poured over the collected writings in order to gain better insight into the foundations of the Jewish and Christian faiths as well as the socio-political structure of the time.

Besides including nearly every book in the Hebrew Bible, the scrolls contain “apocryphal” and “pseudepigraphical” writing. The Apocrypha (“Hidden Books” in Greek) are those works not included in the Tanakh, but which appear in the Latin and Greek versions of the Old Testament. Pseudepigrapha are works attributed to writers who did not actually create them, which was a common literary technique of the time.

Facsimile of Isaiah Scroll, based on the original



War Scroll (left)

Qumran
1st century BCE – early 1st century CE
Paper

Photo Courtesy of Israel Museum,
Jerusalem
(Image: Detail)

The Great Isaiah Scroll (above)

col. 28-30
Qumran Cave I
1st century BCE – early 1st century CE
Paper

Photo Courtesy of Israel Museum,
Jerusalem

Discussion

- 1 What is it about these Scrolls that make them a “cultural treasure”?
- 2 Like a majority of the uncovered scrolls, they are made up of Hebrew characters written in ink on parchment. Why are the texts written on scrolls and what is parchment? Is it important that the texts were written in Hebrew?
- 3 For a variety of reasons, exhibitions often need to include replica items rather than the real objects. Why are the scrolls in this exhibition replicas, and how were they made?

Activities

- Play a game of telephone around the room as a way to highlight how messages shift through transmission from individual to individual.
- Make your own scroll by following the directions provided by your teacher.
- Research text forms and materials used in China around 125 BCE and compare them to the content and materials of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Resources

The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library
<http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il>

The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls
<http://dss.collections.imj.org.il>

About Parchment and early book forms
<http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/videoDetails?segid=372>

STONE OSSUARIES

Ossuaries are small chests in which the bones of the dead are placed after the flesh has decayed. An ossuary might be reserved for the bones of a single individual or for several bodies. They were commonly used from c. 40 BCE to c. 135 CE. Ossuaries first appeared in the rock-cut tombs of Jerusalem during the reign of Herod, with the earliest dating to c. 20 BCE.

Some ossuaries were made from clay, though a majority were carved from limestone found around Jerusalem. The three ossuaries displayed here were carved from stone, all with flat lids. They include stylized rosettes and one of the ossuaries contains inscriptions in Aramaic, which was the lingua franca of the region.

Ossuary and lid with stylized rosettes

Unknown provenance
1st century BCE – 1st century CE
Stone



Discussion

- 1 For whom were the ossuaries made? Base your response on the size, shape and other features of each ossuary.
- 2 Discuss the possible meanings of the carved decorations.
- 3 What do you think led to the appearance of ossuaries in the rock-cut tombs of Jerusalem and their increased popularity during the Herodian period?

Activities

- Identify three different types of decoration found on the ossuaries.
- Work in groups to research the burial customs of the Chinese during the period 100 BCE–100 CE and compare the customs with those of groups living around the Dead Sea from the same period. Share and discuss findings.

Resources

Jewish Virtual Library

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0015_0_15249.html

Patheos.com

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/godandthemachine/2012/10/burial-in-ancient-israel-part-6-ossuaries/>

Jewish Virtual Library

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/HerodsCoins.html>

Jewish Encyclopedia

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/>

BRONZE AND SILVER COINS

The production of coins serves the purpose of facilitating trade and they reflect a civilization and its historical developments over a particular era. Silver coins minted by the Jewish population were struck during the time of rebellions, including the silver shekels from the Great Revolt (66–70 CE) and the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135 CE) coins. Designs on the coins reflect the national and religious sentiments of the Jewish people. The Herodian coins, on the other hand, were made of bronze.



Obverse



Reverse



Obverse



Reverse

Shekel of the Great Revolt

67/68 CE
Silver

Obverse: A cup surmounted by a date "Year 2" and surrounded by Paleo-Hebrew inscription "Shekel of Israel"

Reverse: Stem with three pomegranates surrounded by Paleo-Hebrew inscription "Jerusalem is holy"

Coin of Herod the Great

23/22 – 12 BCE
Bronze

Obverse: Anchor surrounded by a Greek inscription that reads "of King Herod"

Reverse: Double cornucopia with caduceus

Discussion

- 1 What was the main purpose of producing silver coins during the time of revolts?
- 2 Herod the Great was a Roman client king of Judea. The coinage issued during his reign, however, tended to follow the Jewish tradition. Compare the Herodian coins to other coins exhibited, suggest some characteristics of Herodian coins.

Activities

- Some coin collectors regard the Bar Kokhba Revolt coins as the most interesting Jewish coins produced in ancient times, due to their high historical and artistic significance. Make a detailed sketch of one of the coins (both the obverse and reverse).
- Work in groups to research the specific meanings of the designs of the sketched coins. Share and discuss your findings with other groups.

Resources

Arden Heights Boulevard Jewish Center

http://www.ahbjewishcenter.org/lulav_symbolism.htm

The British Museum

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/cm/s/silver_shekel_of_the_first_jew.aspx

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/cm/b/bronze_coin_of_herodnbs.aspx

The Flavius Josephus Page

<http://www.josephus.org/coins.htm>

Numismatic Guaranty Corporation

<http://www.ngccoin.com/news/viewarticle.aspx?IDArticle=2494&The-Coinage-of-Bar-Kokhba>

Wulkan, Reba, *"The Grape and the Vine: A Motif in Contemporary Jewish Textiles"* (1998). Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings. Paper 217.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/217>

Suggested answers for discussion

THE GABRIEL REVELATION STONE

- 1 The Gabriel Revelation Stone is comprised of ink written on stone, rather than lines of text inscribed into the tablet. The language on the stone dates to the same period as the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a similar calligraphic Hebrew script is used.
- 2 Dating to the Second Temple, the tablet was created in the Herodian era, during a time of great revolts in response to the Roman conquest of the area. This time period saw significant discussion about the authority of religious texts and numerous apocalyptic visions for an uncertain future. The Second Temple was destroyed in 70CE.
- 3 The historian Flavius Josephus' accounts from the time are generally regarded as being the most complete and authentic retelling of events from that era. Complementary texts such as Josephus' historical volumes are viewed as being more authoritative and unbiased than religious tracts. These and related writings also have been used to confirm the location of numerous archaeological sites and historical events. The iconography on the coins and ossuaries also relays vital information as to the socio-political structure of the day.
- 4 Because much of the ink has faded, at most only 40 percent of the 87 lines of text are legible. In this exhibition, scholars have presented just one of multiple possible readings. Much of the controversy revolves around one faded line, and whether the Christian belief and Biblical story of Jesus' resurrection after three days was actually a common device found in earlier Hebrew literary traditions. If true, this would both tie more closely the Christian and Jewish traditions, as well as to call into question the "authenticity" of the resurrection story.

THE GREAT ISAIAH SCROLL AND THE WAR SCROLL

- 1 Prior to the discovery of the Scrolls in 1947, all Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were known to scholars only through translations in medieval Christian manuscripts. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in an established archaeological context grounds the work more solidly in time and place, which is key to a greater understanding of the creation of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Taken together, the Scrolls are a fascinating statement about Jewish thought and culture at the end of the 1st century CE, as well as an excellent context for studying the origins of Christianity.
- 2 Scrolls made of parchment or papyrus were common book forms of the time, varying between Hebrew and Aramaic text. Parchment is a general term for any thin material made from animal skin; and has been used primarily as a writing medium. Parchment differs from leather in that it is not tanned, which means it is not waterproof and highly susceptible to humidity. DNA testing and x-ray processes have been employed to figure out the type of animals used to make the parchment for the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as to locate precisely where the parchment was produced. After the skins are processed, it is difficult to tell the exact animal used. Preliminary studies point to goat as the most likely source, and results from the x-ray testing suggest that the parchment was created nearby with water from the Dead Sea.
- 3 Based on the preservation requirements of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it is necessary to keep them in environmentally controlled storage areas so as not to do any further damage. Even full Scrolls regularly exhibited at the Shrine of the Book are generally facsimiles, while a majority of the original Scrolls are kept in storage on the campus of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Since the early 1990s, the Dead Sea Scrolls have traveled to over thirty venues around the world. However, any Scroll that is put on display for up to three months must then rest back in storage for a full year before again being exhibited.

In 2006, the company Facsimile Editions was contacted to make replicas of three of the Scrolls. Photos of the Scrolls taken by John Trever in 1948, just after their discovery, made it possible for the company to reproduce the Scrolls prior to the significant amount of damage that transpired between 1947 and the early 1990s.



STONE OSSUARIES

- 1 Many of the ossuaries were found in the rock-hewn tombs owned by wealthy Jerusalem citizens. A typical ossuary for adults is about 2.5 feet long to accommodate the thighbones, which are the longest bones in the human body.

Names are sometimes inscribed on ossuaries to help reveal the identity of the deceased. For instance, the Aramaic inscription “Mariam and Simon, sons of Saul” appears in one of the displays.

- 2 One common decoration on the ossuaries is the double-rosette motif. Each rosette usually contains six leaves and each is carved inside a square frame formed by wavy and straight lines. One suggestion is that the motif belongs to a symbol that is used to invoke cherubim, a winged angelic creature involved in the worship and praise of God. Other variations of decorations include the representations of plants and building components such as columns and capitals.
- 3 Cutting a rock tomb was expensive and time consuming. The tombs were therefore reused by families over generations. After the flesh has decayed, bones of the deceased were removed to make way for new bodies.

In early practice, bones were simply placed in shallow depressions beneath the benches where the dead bodies were laid. Such practice was, however, gradually replaced by the use of ossuaries. Archaeologists have different views concerning this cultural shift. One suggestion is that there was a growing belief among the Jews in the resurrection of the dead. For this to happen, remaining body parts such as the bones, had to be kept as intact as possible. Decomposition of the flesh implied an atonement for the sins of the deceased.

BRONZE AND SILVER COINS

- 1 The silver coins were produced by rebel leaders to pay their soldiers. The coins struck during the Great Revolt were the first Jewish coins produced in silver.
- 2 Only bronze coins were issued during the reigns of Herod the Great and his successors. Unlike the Roman coins, Herodian coins do not include graven images.

Some consider the designs of the Herodian coins as innovative, or unusual. Features include various apparatus used in religious ceremonies and military equipment. One Herodian coin on display contains these features—a helmet on the obverse and a tripod holding a ceremonial bowl on the reverse.

