Part III:  
Translation and Publication Information  

23. Who pieces together the scroll fragments?

Soon after the discovery of the scrolls, translators and scholars Roland de Vaux, Josef T. Milik, and Maurice Baillet began the process of sorting through the thousands of scroll fragments. Their goal was to piece together as many of the fragments as possible. The task was so large that other scholars were invited to help, including John M. Allegro, assistant lecturer at the University of Manchester; Frank Moore Cross, then a professor at McCormick Theological Seminary and annual professor at the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem; Patrick W. Skehan, a professor at the Catholic University of America; John Strugnell of Jesus College, Oxford; and Jean Starcky and Claus-Hunno Hunzinger. While most of the sorting and piecing of the scroll fragments was completed in the 1950s, some fifty years after the first discovery of scrolls in Cave 1, approximately sixty scholars are involved in sorting, editing, and translating the fragments.

24. How are the scroll fragments pieced together?

Most of the scrolls are very fragmentary—there are thousands of pieces of leather, parchment, or papyrus in various sizes and shapes. Because of the enormous challenge of sorting and piecing the fragments together, the scholars working on the scrolls developed the following approaches to help them determine which fragments belong to a specific text:

1. **Types of materials.** The fragments are first sorted into groups of leather parchment or papyri. Then the thickness and the color of the leather of each fragment are evaluated, thus continuing the sorting process.

2. **Scribal handwriting styles.** The scribes who copied the texts on the scrolls each had a unique handwriting style, just as people do today. Paleographers study the bookhand (shape and size of written characters) and are able to identify different scribes’ styles and, to a great extent, determine which fragments belong together.

3. **Horizontal lines.** Scribes or copyists prepared the leather scrolls for inscription by creating horizontal lines on the leather, similar in some respects to the lined paper of modern times. The horizontal lines served to guide the hand of the scribe as he copied down the characters. The space between lines often varied, a characteristic that has helped scholars determine which fragments belong together.

4. **Scribal markings.** Many scribes placed various unique markings in the margins of the leather or between the lines of the text. Such scribal markings provide additional clues to how the fragments should be pieced together.

5. **Textual clues.** The words on a fragment may facilitate its identification and positioning among related fragments, especially if the words belong to a previously known text. For instance, a fragment with the words “every tree of the garden” (from Genesis 2:16) alert the scholar to place the fragment with other fragments belonging to the Old Testament book of Genesis.

6. **Material join.** A “material join” is (1) when two fragments have complementing edges (like two adjoining pieces of a jigsaw puzzle) or (2) when one fragment has half of a single word (such as Melchi-) and a second fragment has the
other half of the same word (such as -zedek). Scholars are able to join the two fragments together to read Melchizedek.

The sorting process is often a painstaking and tedious task. As Professor Frank Moore Cross explains, "A single fragment may require many hours of study before it receives exact identification and is placed in a slowly growing column of a manuscript." However, the results of joining one fragment with another provide great satisfaction to the scholar.

25. Who is translating the scrolls?

The Dead Sea Scrolls translation team began as a small group of scholars in the early 1950s but expanded to approximately sixty members by the mid-1990s.

Under the direction of Roland de Vaux, a Dominican priest and biblical scholar who was director of the École Biblique in Jerusalem in the 1950s, assignments were made to prepare, sort, and publish the scrolls and fragments. Those asked to do so included de Vaux's Catholic associates at the École Biblique: Pierre Benoit, Josef T. Milik, and Maurice Baillet. Later, because of the enormity of the task, a small team was formed from Christian institutions, so that four Catholics and four Protestants became the official team of editors. Over the decades the team expanded, especially under the leadership of Editor in Chief John Strugnell in the late 1980s, followed by Editor in Chief Emanuel Tov in the 1990s. Under the direction of Tov, the official team expanded to some sixty translators, where it remains at the time of this writing.

26. Are members of the LDS Church translating the scrolls?

Until the early 1990s, the role of Latter-day Saint scholars in Dead Sea Scrolls research was modest, although Brigham Young University professor Hugh W. Nibley produced valuable studies on the scrolls. Since 1994, however, BYU scholars have been much more active in scrolls research.

In January 1994 Professor Emanuel Tov, editor in chief of the Dead Sea Scrolls project, invited Donald W. Parry of BYU’s Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages to become a member of the international team of editors working on the scrolls. Parry was assigned to work with Professor Frank Moore Cross on the biblical books of Samuel. Later that same year, Tov invited BYU professors Dana M. Pike, David Rolph Seely, and Andrew C. Skinner (all from the Department of Ancient Scripture) to join the international team. Pike and Skinner were assigned to work on miscellaneous fragments, and Seely was invited to work with Professor Moshe Weinfeld on selected hymns. The translations of Parry, Pike, Seely, and Skinner will be published in the official publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a series titled Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, published by Oxford University Press.

27. How are the translations controlled or reviewed for accuracy?

The scholarly community has rigid controls in place to ensure the quality of work conducted on the Dead Sea Scrolls. These controls include careful review, editing, and proofreading of manuscripts before they are published.
in the authoritative Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series. Editors in chief of the series oversee the work of the scholars and translators so that high standards of excellence remain at all stages of production.

28. Where can I find accurate English translations of the scrolls?

Recently two fine English translations of the nonbiblical scrolls have been published: Geza Vermes, The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English (New York: Penguin, 1997), and Florentino García Martínez, The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English (2nd ed., Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994). Designed and priced for the lay reader, both volumes are priced under $30.

The official transcriptions and translations of the scrolls appear in the official series Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, published by Oxford University Press. The individual books in the series, however, are designed and formatted for scholars and advanced researchers and are quite expensive, sometimes selling for as much as $150 per volume.

29. When will the scrolls be translated and made available to the public?

All of the nonbiblical texts of the scrolls have been translated into English and are available to the lay reader in single-volume works, such as those identified in question 28. Most of the scholarly editions of those same texts appear in the series Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, often abbreviated to DJD (see question 28). The scholarly editions of the remaining texts will be published in the DJD series in the next two or three years. Many of the biblical texts have been or will be published in that series as well.

30. Why has it taken so long to release and publish the scrolls?

Since the last of the Dead Sea Scrolls was discovered in 1956, the question is often asked, Why has it taken so long to publish the scrolls? Many people have responded to this question. A summary of their reasons follows.

1. Lack of scholarly access to the scrolls. Geza Vermes, an eminent scrolls scholar, cites "scholarly mismanagement and irresponsibility" as the reason behind a half century of delays in publishing the scrolls. He faults Father Roland de Vaux, the one-time leader of the translation team, for imposing "rules of secrecy on the project that limited access to the manuscripts to the members of the international team, and prevented other scholars from working on them." Most scholars generally were not permitted access to the scrolls until the early 1990s, at which time the pace of the translation and publication of the scrolls increased at an accelerated rate.

2. Limited access to the scrolls. A number of the scholars assigned to translate the scrolls were distracted by university assignments and other scholarly projects that limited the time they could work on the scrolls. Moreover, limited access to the documents meant that professors could work only in the summer, when their teaching assignments allowed them to spend time in the Middle East.

3. Enormity of the task. The great number of manuscripts and fragments, combined with their poor condition, created a task of gigantic dimensions, which included the identification and piecing together of thousands of small
scroll fragments. The original members of the translation team underestimated the amount of work required to translate the scrolls, a matter of too much being expected of too few.

4. Inadequate funding. Dead Sea Scrolls translators and scholars often lack adequate financial support to carry on their work. They usually are required to finance their own work and travel to Jerusalem, often with an extended stay in that city. Such economic challenges create hardships and delay the publication of the scrolls.

5. Scroll conspiracies. Some publications have claimed that the Vatican, the Great Rabbinate, the Council of Churches, other religious institutions, or certain authorities have suppressed the publication of the scrolls because of the fear that the scrolls had the potential to undermine the faith of Christians or Jews. Such claims are untrue, founded on sensationalism or misinformation. Florentino García Martínez describes two versions of this inaccuracy that have prevailed in the last few years:

The content of this myth in its crudest form can be expressed as follows. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls there are many texts the publication of which would pose a great danger for the established religions, Judaism as well as Christianity. These alleged texts would allow the falsehood of both Christianity and Judaism as a religion to be demonstrated. For this reason, the religious authorities (Jewish and Christian alike) have prevented their publication until now. In another version of the myth, the religious authorities (the Great Rabbinate, the Vatican or the Council of Churches) are not involved. Instead, the actual research scholars responsible for publication (some of whom are priests or ministers) willingly censored certain texts which offended their religious sensibilities or delayed their publication to prevent the harm they could do to the faithful.³³

The real explanations for the delay in the publication of the texts are many and varied. Our strong inclination is to accept all of the reasons except the last one, the sensationalist rumors concerning the content of the scrolls.

Notes


31. See Schiffman, Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls, 11.


33. García Martínez and Barrera, People of the Dead Sea Scrolls, 194.