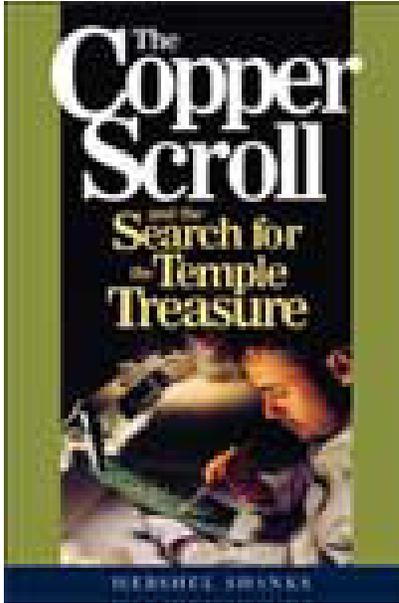


RBL 05/2008



**Shanks, Hershel**

***The Copper Scroll and the Search for the Temple Treasure***

Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2007.  
Pp. xii + 112. Hardcover. \$24.95. ISBN 0979635713.

Kenneth Atkinson  
University of Northern Iowa  
Cedar Falls, Iowa

This entertaining book by Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, tells the fascinating story behind the finding and decipherment of the mysterious Copper Scroll. Using newly available archival material and archaeological data, Shanks examines the history of this document from its discovery to the present day, with a particular focus on the scholarly controversies surrounding the interpretation of this puzzling text. Written for the general reader, Shanks's book is an ideal volume for undergraduates. However, even seasoned scholars will find much to enjoy in this popular work, particularly P. Kyle McCarter's provisional translation of the Copper Scroll prepared for a forthcoming edition of the Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project. The book contains numerous photographs, maps, and drawings. Shanks's extensive endnotes cite the most important academic and popular works on the Copper Scroll to help the interested reader seeking additional materials on this fascinating text.

The first chapter of Shanks's book recounts the finding of the Copper Scroll. Taking us back to the discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls, Shanks recounts the race between the Bedouin and scholars to locate additional scroll caves. It was, fortunately, the scholars who discovered the Copper Scroll in Cave 3, which they explored 14–25 March 1952. Shanks does an excellent job profiling some of the significant personalities from this period,

especially Roland de Vaux. Some interesting comments from Frank Moore Cross, made during an interview by Shanks, provide some insight into the question of why the original excavators did not explore the marl terrace, within site of Khirbet Qumran, containing Caves 4 and 5.

In chapters 2–4 Shanks recounts the unrolling of the Copper Scroll and the ensuing controversy over its contents and publication. He begins by describing how, in the spring of 1953, Karl George Kuhn used mirrors and photographs to decipher some 220 letters of this document, comprising more than fifty words. His proposal that the text contains a listing of buried treasure immediately excited the scholarly world and set about a controversy over the meaning of this text that continues to the present.

After describing this initial effort to read the visible portion of this text, Shanks recounts the actual decipherment of the Copper Scroll. This section is perhaps the most fascinating portion of the book. Shanks describes how John Marco Allegro, a member of the official scroll publication team, convinced Roland de Vaux and G. Lankester Harding, the British head of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, to ship one of the rolls to his hometown of Manchester, England, for unrolling. After several unsuccessful attempts to find an expert willing to undertake the task, Allegro eventually located Henry Wright Baker of the Manchester College of Science and Technology. Baker decided to open the document by cutting it into strips. Shanks's account of how Baker constructed a rather unusual device from spare parts to perform this operation is quite entertaining and one of the many amazing stories surrounding this text.

Shanks next describes the aftermath of Allegro's initial decipherment of the Copper Scroll and the controversy that followed. Unwilling to wait for J. T. Milik to complete his official edition, Allegro, with assistance from David Noel Freedman, published his controversial *The Treasure of the Copper Scroll: The Opening and Decipherment of the Most Mysterious of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a Unique Inventory of Buried Treasure* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960; 2nd ed., 1964]). Shanks's account of the storm that followed the appearance of this book greatly benefits from several new publications on the Copper Scroll, the release of Allegro's archive of photographs and letters, and the recent biography by Allegro's daughter Judith Anne Brown (*John Marco Allegro: The Maverick of the Dead Sea Scrolls* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005]). Shanks skillfully weaves together an account of scholarly acrimony and infighting over the rights to the publication of the Copper Scroll's Hebrew text and English translation. Based on the available evidence, Shanks sheds some light regarding Allegro's intentions. Allegro apparently tried to obtain some sort of clearance from the official team and delayed the release of his book in the hope that Milik's official publication would appear. Only after waiting some time did Allegro finally decide that the text of the Copper Scroll was too

important to delay any further and therefore went ahead and published his own book containing a facsimile drawing and English translation. Shanks's account of this controversy, and the debates surrounding the writings of the American literary critic Edmund Wilson, is a remarkable tale that proves that truth is often stranger than fiction in the field of Qumran studies.

In chapter 5 Shanks recounts the debate between Allegro and his colleagues, especially Milik and Cross, as to whether the treasure of the Cooper Scroll is real. While Allegro was convinced that it actually existed, his colleagues believed that it was a myth. Shanks takes a neutral stance in this debate but explores the likelihood that it may have existed. He uses the most recent scholarship to discuss the problematic topic of calculating ancient weights in antiquity and attempts to determine the amount of the treasure described in this text. His discussion of the problematic translation of the Hebrew letters "bet" and "kaph," and whether they refer to talents or something else, is concise and well-written for laypeople. In his discussion of possible parallels to this enigmatic scroll, Shanks notes that only the most important documents, such as Roman *diplomata militaria*, were considered worthy of being inscribed on copper in antiquity. Based in part on this observation and the Copper Scroll's apparent importance, Shanks cautiously suggests that it likely described a real treasure that probably came from the Jerusalem temple.

Shanks explores the efforts to locate the Copper Scroll's treasure in chapter 6. He begins with fairly sound identifications, such as the likely mention of Absalom's Monument in Location 50 of the text, to more problematic identifications to show the difficulty in understanding this document. The most interesting portion of this chapter recounts Allegro's 1960 expedition to find the buried treasure mentioned in the scroll, particularly in the ruins of Hyrcania, where he believed the first three caches of treasure were buried. Here Shanks could have greatly enhanced his account by incorporating more material from Allegro's rather fascinating, and often amusing, report of this expedition (*Search in the Desert* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964]). This expedition, with its fascinating participants, deserves a chapter of its own.

In chapter 7 Shanks recounts the current exploration of the mysterious tunnels of Hyrcania that were discovered during Allegro's expedition. He tells the remarkable story of a pilot named Bob Morgan, who undertook a clandestine excavation of one of these tunnels beginning in October 1986. Shanks's account is a fascinating story full of numerous dangers, as Morgan faced the threat of collapsing tunnels and marauding Bedouin. Eventually he came into contact with Hebrew University graduate student of archaeology Oren Gutfeld, who agreed to undertake a proper scientific excavation and exploration of the site. Shanks's account of Gutfeld's efforts to reach the end of this tunnel is a tale that is reminiscent of the early days of biblical archaeology, when British engineers

and surveyors such as Charles Warren and Charles Wilson undertook similar, and equally dangerous, underground excavations. (For a fascinating account of this period, see Neil Asher Silberman, *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799–1917* [New York: Knopf, 1982].) Although Gutfeld's excavation is still underway and has yet to make any definitive findings, Shanks's account of his work is perhaps the most enjoyable portion of this book. It leaves the reader hoping against all odds that Gutfeld will find some definitive proof that the Copper Scroll's treasure existed.

Shanks concludes with an insightful chapter on modern efforts by the Électricité de France to preserve the Copper Scroll from further deterioration. This short section contains several photographs that help to illustrate this complicated technical process and the methods used to make new replicas of the Copper Scroll for study.

Shanks's book is well worth the price for anyone interested in learning more about this fascinating scroll. Although intended for laypeople, Shanks consulted the most important academic publications on this text, all of which are listed in his endnotes. It is an academically sound and well-written book that would make an excellent text for an undergraduate course on ancient Judaism or the Dead Sea Scrolls.