



In 1947, the handful of scholars who laid eyes on the first Dead Sea Scrolls understood immediately their monumental significance. They spent sleepless nights poring over the writings and countless days analysing the texts, carefully considering who could have written these 2,000-year-old manuscripts. As more and more were discovered, these ancient documents touching on the origins of Judaism and Christianity would also capture the imaginations of millions around the world.

Where did the scrolls come from? How were they authored? What do they tell us about the formative years of Christianity and Judaism? These were the primary questions that scholars and the general public eagerly sought—and seek—to answer.

Approximately 930 scrolls were found between the late 1940s and the mid-1950s in

a series of 11 caves surrounding the site of Khirbet Qumran on the northwestern shores of the Dead Sea. Qumran was an unremarkable site—a common phenomenon of a large mound covering ancient ruins in the Middle East—that grew in importance because of the discovery of the scrolls nearby. In fact, some of the caves where scrolls were discovered could be accessed only from the site of Qumran.

The excavation of Qumran in the early 1950s revealed some unusual features. For example, the site held a large number of pools with steps, which were widely identified as ritual baths (*miqva'ot*) used by ancient Jews for purification. The large quantity of pottery pieces found suggested a sizeable community had lived there. Inkwells were found as well, presenting the possibility of scribal activity.

Immediately after the scrolls were discovered

Khirbet Qumran, the archaeological site closest to the caves in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered PHOTO © DUBY TAL, ALBATROSS