

THE ANGEL SCROLL¹

New Report by Andrew Collins

News comes of the discovery of a hitherto unknown Dead Sea Scroll that scholars believe, if genuine, could be 'the archaeological discovery of the century', according to the 11 October 1999 edition of the JERUSALEM REPORT. Known as the 'Angel Scroll', it is apparently loaded with Jewish mystical imagery, descriptions of angels and detail which shows that it could provide the missing link between the Dead Sea community and the teachings of the Jerusalem Church, the earliest form of Christianity. It is potentially more important that any of the other scrolls so far examined and is thought to be around 2000 years old. It is composed of 1000 lines in Hebrew, with a splattering of words in Aramaic and Greek.

The story goes that it was found by Bedouin not on the Israeli side of the Dead Sea like the other scrolls, but in Jordan on the steep western slopes of the mountains descending to Wadi al-Mojab, south-east of the Dead Sea. Here it was uncovered inside a jar in a cave alongside pieces of shard, glass and coins. The various fragments of the text are said to have been purchased clandestinely in Amman during the 1970s by a team of Benedictine monk-scholars who had been searching for just such a scroll for several years. They are alleged to have illegally spirited it out of Jordan and taken it to a monastery on the German-Austrian border. Here it has remained to this day, a vow of silence being imposed on all those who have worked on its translation for over a decade.

By all accounts, the text describes a 'tour of the heavens' undertaken by its author in the company of an angel named 'Pnimea', who is unquestionably the Watcher Pênêmûe of the Book of Enoch (Enoch I, compiled c. 165 BC-AD 100). Like Enoch in the Book of Enoch, the author of the Angel Scroll is taken on a journey during which he is shown the 'secrets of the universe' and is taught 'to contemplate signs in the sun and the stars and through them forecast events'. Furthermore, he is shown 'the signs which are in the raging of the waves and the sea, and in the clouds in the heavens', as well as 'how to use medical plants and stones to cure disease and predict the future'. Remember that Pênêmûe in I Enoch is said to have taught mankind 'the bitter and the sweet', in other words the use of herbs and spices in foods, as well the use of 'ink and paper'. In the Angel Scroll, Pnimea even enables its author 'to journey back in time', so that he might 'witness creation'.

According to the JERUSALEM REPORT one of the monks, a 'Father Gustave Mateus' carefully made photographs of entire transcriptions of the text and decided to share knowledge of the scroll with a trusted colleague, a German-born Israeli. When the monk died in 1996, at the age of 70, a lawyer informed the confidant that Father Mateus had bequeathed to him a package of material that included the photographs showing the transcriptions, along with sections of the text translated into English and German and extensive handwritten notes. These eventually came into the possession of two Israelis, both professionals, who knew Father Mateus but said that he had never discussed the existence of the scroll with them. They studied the text for three years before deciding to bring it to the attention of the magazine.

Father Mateus apparently considered the Angel Scroll to be 'one of the most important and thrilling documents of all time' and one of 'the earliest sources for both the Jewish and Christian esoteric and mystic literature. In fact, I discovered in it the source for the beginning of Christianity, and the point of contact between it and the Jewish sects'. He wanted the knowledge it contained to be revealed to the world and this is now what a secretive group of Jewish scholars intend to see happen.

Yet there are some major problems in accepting the authenticity of the scroll, not least of all its apparent dedication. At the beginning of the text it reads: 'To Yeshua, son of Pedia the priest, the holy one'. Yeshua is the Hebrew form of Jesus, a fact that will instantly raise eyebrows among Jewish scholars. However, as we shall see after the publication of Graham Phillips' remarkable new book THE MARIAN CONSPIRACY (published by Simon and Shuster, March 2000), this dedication makes perfect sense of what we know about the true parentage of Jesus.

Netty C. Gross is the author of the article on the Angel Scroll which appeared in the JERUSALEM REPORT during October 1999. After being shown both its transcription and Father Mateus' original notes, he provided copies of these to Stephen Pfann, a member of the 55-strong team currently studying the Dead Sea Scrolls in the possession of Israel. He is also the editor of the forthcoming COMPREHENSIVE CONCORDANCE OF THE DEAD SEA

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SCROLLS. Although Pfann remains sceptical about the authenticity of the scroll, since no one has been allowed to see it, he says that if it is a hoax then 'it's a very, very good one.' If it is genuine, he says, it could be 'the discovery of the century' and could have 'profound implications for historians of both Judaism and Christianity.' He is heartened by the fact that it contains many, what he calls, 'Qumranisms' in that, like the known Dead Sea Scrolls, it uses Aramaic and Greek words as well as terms such as 'Sons of light' and the 'new' or 'renewed covenant'. It also names Yahweh as 'El' and Satan as 'Belial'. More pointedly, it uses terms familiar to the 'languages and concepts reminiscent of the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the apostle Paul', suggesting that its authors were familiar with the concepts of the Jerusalem Church. The scroll also contains sections similar to existent Dead Sea texts such as the 'Rule of the Community' and 'The War Scroll'. In addition to this, other sections are also reminiscent of the Third Book of Enoch, a text of the third or fourth century AD, seen as a precursor to the medieval mystical teachings of the kabbalah. One main theme is knowledge of something called the 'divine throne', a subject that crops up in I Enoch, the Book of Ezekiel and the Book of Daniel. Finding it in a Qumrân text Pfann says 'would mark the first time we see a fully developed 1st century text on Jewish mysticism. That would be very significant'.

This realisation is bound to be derided by orthodox Jews since it is clear that the Essenes, the sect regularly identified as the Dead Sea community, who were previously considered to be an isolationist, separatist sect, now appear responsible for the development of mainstream Jewish mysticism.

Other Jewish scholars so far consulted on the existence and authenticity of the Angel Scroll remain non-committal. It has even been suggested that it could be an elaborate hoax 'designed to heighten Christian sensibilities on the eve of the new millennium'.

From my own point of view, and not having seen any part of the text, I can only comment on the statements made in respect to the author's journey to heaven in the company of the angel 'Pnimea', Pênêmûe of the Book of Enoch. The angel's role as revealer of the secrets of heaven is here exemplified. Yet in the Secrets of the Book of Enoch (2Enoch), a Greek text of the first century AD derived from a Hebrew original, we find Enoch being transported to the Seven Heavens in a manner similar to that of the author of the Angel Scroll. Here, however, the angel who accompanies Enoch is not Pênêmûe, one of the 200 rebel Watchers, but Raphael, a Watcher who remained loyal to heaven after the time of the fall. This subtle alteration is greatly significant, since it indicates that when the Greek form of 2Enoch was being compiled this important role played in the original Hebrew text by a fallen angel was considered blasphemous enough to be expiated from the revised text. The role would appear to have been transferred at some later point to the more respectable Raphael, who evolved into one of the principal archangels in later Christian mysticism and iconography. This might therefore be an example of how the original importance played by the rebel Watchers, or fallen angels, as the givers of heavenly knowledge to mortal kind, was gradually expiated from later Enochian texts, such as 2Enoch.

This is just a suggestion, and in time hopefully we shall all learn more about the contents of the Angel Scroll. Yet if it does turn out to contain new material on the role played by the Watchers in the exposure of heavenly matters to human kind, then it could add dramatically to our understanding of their development in earliest Jewish literature.

Account taken from Gross, Netty C., 'The Mystery of the Angel Scroll: Find of the Century or Elaborate Hoax?', JERUSALEM REPORT, 11 October 1999.

Quotes from the Book of Enoch taken from R. H. Charles, THE BOOK OF ENOCH OR 1 ENOCH, OUP, 1912. See also Morfill, W. R., trans., and edit. and intro. R. H. Charles, THE BOOK OF THE SECRETS OF ENOCH, Clarendon Press, Oxford/OUP, 1896.

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