

Researcher offers fresh insights into the Dead Sea Scrolls

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New research conducted by a Trinity College academic in Jerusalem offers new insights into one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which is concerned with the mystery of existence.

Dr Benjamin Wold, Assistant Professor in New Testament at the Department of Religions & Theology, has been conducting research on the Dead Sea Scrolls known as "4QInstruction" which is believed to have been composed around the mid-2nd century BC. Despite considerable efforts to reconstruct this scroll from multiple copies, experts believe that only about 30 per cent of the document remains. Found in the remaining passages are frequent admonitions to understand the "mystery of existence."

Research conducted at the Israel Museum consulting individual fragments of the document has allowed Dr Wold to offer several new reconstructions of the document and confirm others.

"The character of this document is unusual in that it offers teachings about mundane matters in daily life such as finances and marriage and intertwines these with ideas about concealed, heavenly knowledge, angelic beings and future judgment. This unexpected combination of ideas raises serious questions about how scholarly categories have been established, leaving scholars with the task of constructing meaningful conversations, having only recently abandoned assumptions built up over generations. Coupling this-worldly ideas with other-worldly ones is seen by many to be as impossible as mixing oil and water."

"My research forces interpreters of religion to take seriously that individuals in antiquity, just like in the present time, do not act in the compartmentalized way in which one would like them to act. Studies on this [document](#) have often been shackled by perceptions of particular genres, and yet even after it has been recognized that our categories are in conflict, there has been little done to break away entirely from an approach that is tethered to this beginning point."

The research project entitled, "The Mystery of Existence: The Construction of Authority in the Dead Sea Scroll," has been funded by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, one of the largest funders of humanities research in the United States. The research will feed into a book *The Mystery of Existence: The Construction of Authority in 4QInstruction* which will be published by E.J. Brill in 2014.

Dr Wold has been in Jerusalem since January of this year and his research concludes at the end of August. He is looking forward to sharing his research in the classroom this coming semester in a Senior Sophister module entitled "Sects and Sages: The Dead Sea Scrolls & the New Testament".

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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