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The Last Battle of the Great Dead Sea Scrolls War
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The last battle of the Great Dead Sea Scrolls War of the 1990s has finally ended. The right side won the war, a different right side won this last battle, and that is how it should be. To be more specific, the Israeli Supreme Court awarded Professor Elisha Qimron of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the winner of this last battle, copyright protection over his reconstruction of a key ancient text on Aug. 30.

The losers in this suit were Hershel Shanks, the editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review* and two prominent California professors, Robert Eisenman and James Robinson. All were important warriors on the winning side of the war to liberate the scrolls for public access and scholarly study.

In case you don't recall all the details, let me remind you. In 1947, a cache of ancient scrolls was found in a cave near the Dead Sea. Over the next decade, many more scrolls and scroll fragments were found in nearby caves. Many were dated to the first century, the time when Jesus lived, while others came from the previous two centuries. Over the following decade or so, nearly all the complete or nearly complete scrolls were published and thus made available to the scholarly world and the general public.

By the early 1970s, most of what remained unpublished was in a fragmentary state, thousands of pieces of hundreds of different scrolls. Although most of the fragments had been arranged into their respective scrolls, publication ceased at this point, with access restricted to fewer than 20 people. Despite regular calls for publication and access, matters remained this until the 1990s. This treasure trove of information about our heritage was denied to the world.

Then the Great Dead Sea Scrolls War began. Although the details of the many battles of words, agreements and betrayals, and general skullduggery are too numerous to tell, one important salvo occurred in 1991. Hershel Shanks somehow obtained photographs of all the unpublished scroll fragments,

and he turned to Eisenman and Robinson for scholarly help in editing them. Together they published all the photographs in a two-volume work, *"A Facsimile Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls."* This volume, in essence, made all the scrolls available and basically won the war, although it still took some time before disengagement terms were agreed upon.

If the *Facsimile Edition* had contained only the scroll photographs, the war would have ended there. But Shanks decided to include, without permission, a copy of Qimron's private essay in which he reconstructed an important Dead Sea text called 4QMMT. The scroll's odd name belies its importance, for the document reveals much about who the writers of Dead Sea Scrolls were, and what they thought of the priesthood in Jerusalem. Qimron had not only assembled the text from its fragmentary remains, but also used his expert knowledge to fill in some of the missing blanks. This last battle was thus no longer about access to the scrolls, 40 years after their discovery, but about another important scholarly value, the ownership of one's intellectual property, i.e., the right to be recognized for one's ideas and hard work. Qimron's victory in this last battle upholds this scholarly principle.

In the end, then, it seems the victors are two scholarly principles: the one allowing access to important discoveries and the other supporting people's rights to the fruits of their intellectual labor.

A longer version of this essay was written for a new Web site bringing news about the archaeology of ancient Palestine and about biblical interpretation to the general public. It is called *Bible And Interpretation*, and can be found at <http://www.bibleinterp.com>