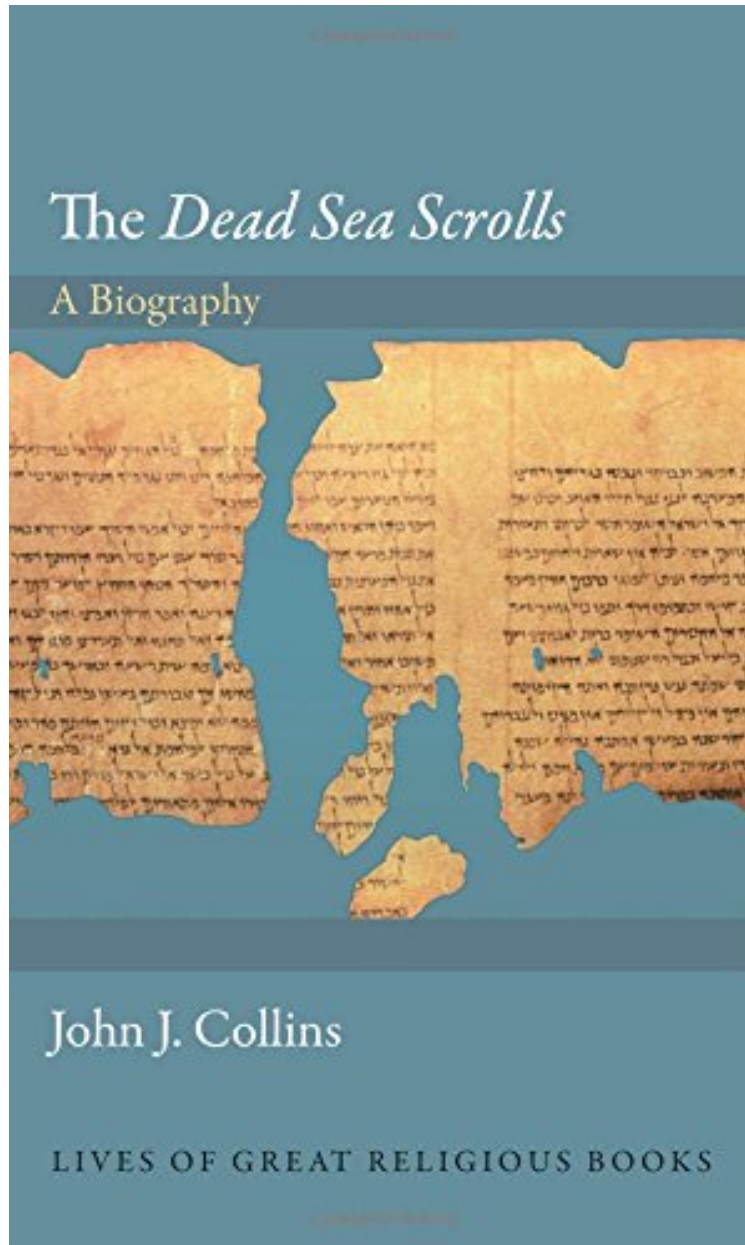


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The "Dead Sea Scrolls": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books)

John J. Collins

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John J. Collins : The "Dead Sea Scrolls": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The "Dead Sea Scrolls": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books):

21 of 21 people found the following review helpful. Excellent overview
By Dr. Karen M. Gray
Collins does a particularly good job of handling with remarkable objectivity the many controversial issues related to the scrolls and their interpretation. Where he has an opinion, he is clear in stating that it is his opinion. I was particularly struck by the way in which he addressed John Strugnell's situation. This is the best overview of current scholarship on the DSS that is available to the general public in my opinion.
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Possibly the Best and Most Succinct Book on the Dead Sea Scrolls Written Thus Far
By classicalsteve
Collins' book covers two stories. There is the story as portrayed in the scrolls themselves, the history and secrets contained within the fragmented manuscripts. For example within its texts are some of the earliest Jewish writings, stating laws about diets, the clean, and the unclean. Prophecies written 2000 years before Stephen King's "The Stand" chronicle the wars between the Children of Light and the Children of Darkness. While these texts have been translated in other books, Collins' work also offers a history of the discovery of the scrolls themselves. While most of the general populace believes the texts exist as one large document discovered in one cave at a single moment in time, Collins reveals that many texts resided in many different areas apart from the cave where the first was unearthed, Some ancient manuscripts believed to be related to the texts found in the first cave were in fact hiding in other areas several miles away in some instances. Collins goes on to relate the first scholars who studied the texts, and in particular how Jewish scholars were excluded from examining the manuscripts because of political reasons. These original scholars published their findings and theories about the texts in the late 1950's and early 1960's, some of which have been debunked by contemporary and later scholars. New realizations have been revealed even as late as the 1980's and 1990's. Overall a very enjoyable and insightful look at one of the greatest archeological finds concerning religious literary tradition.
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Very Educational
By Retiree
In retirement, I have become an amateur theologian--trying to educate myself on the bible and religious scholarship. Collins has become one of my favorite authors. He is scholarly, a very good writer, and a clear thinker. He has many fields of expertise, and one is the Dead Sea Scrolls. I found this book very educational on the history of the discovery of these important manuscripts and the tangled history of their availability to scholars. It is a short and very readable book. I would have preferred a little more of the contents of the various manuscripts, but that is much too broad a topic for Collins and his expertise for such a short book. If you know little of the discovery and availability of these important biblical manuscripts, as I did, this is a great place to start.

Since they were first discovered in the caves at Qumran in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls have aroused more fascination--and more controversy--than perhaps any other archaeological find. They appear to have been hidden in the Judean desert by the Essenes, a Jewish sect that existed around the time of Jesus, and they continue to inspire veneration and conspiracy theories to this day. John Collins tells the story of the bitter conflicts that have swirled around the scrolls since their startling discovery, and sheds light on their true significance for Jewish and Christian history. Collins vividly recounts how a Bedouin shepherd went searching for a lost goat and found the scrolls instead. He offers insight into debates over whether the Essenes were an authentic Jewish sect and explains why such questions are critical to our understanding of ancient Judaism and to Jewish identity. Collins explores whether the scrolls were indeed the property of an isolated, quasi-monastic community living at Qumran, or whether they more broadly reflect the Judaism of their time. And he unravels the impassioned disputes surrounding the scrolls and Christianity. Do they anticipate the early church? Do they undermine the credibility of the Christian faith? Collins also looks at attempts to "reclaim" the scrolls for Judaism after the full corpus became available in the 1990s, and at how the decades-long delay in publishing the scrolls gave rise to sensational claims and conspiracy theories.

From Booklist
This compact book is not so much about what the Dead Sea Scrolls are but, rather, how the arguments around them have impacted Christianity, Judaism, and the wider world. Collins writes engagingly about the history of the scrolls and examines the debates and conclusions that various scholars have put forth about who wrote the scrolls, what the location of their discovery means, and the way the wide-ranging writings have been used to promote various positions. One distracting element is the way Collins sets himself up as an arbiter of which of these positions are valid. While presenting more than one side, he does take stances with which others will disagree. Still, for a lay audience just coming to the Dead Sea Scrolls, this is a solid introduction that offers plenty of information without getting lost in the weeds. Those who want to know more will appreciate the lists of other sources that appear at the end of each chapter. --
Ilene Cooper "One could scarcely imagine a better concise guide to the Scrolls than John Collins's *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Biography*. Collins, who teaches at Yale, writes with clarity and liveliness, and throughout his account exercises great judiciousness, a quality that has not always been prominent in discussions of this subject."--Robert Alter, *London of Books*
"This compact book, part of the *Lives of Great Religious Books* series, is not so much about what the Dead Sea Scrolls are but, rather, how the arguments around them have impacted Christianity, Judaism, and the wider world. Collins writes engagingly about the history of the Scrolls and examines the debates and conclusions that various scholars have put forth about who wrote the Scrolls, what the location of their discovery means, and the way the wide-ranging writings have been used to promote various positions. . . . A solid introduction that offers plenty of information."--Ilene Cooper, *Booklist*
"This is a very readable description of Dead Sea Scrolls' story, from their

discovery at an archaeological site in the West Bank to recent events inspired by them."--Devorah Benu, GrrlScientist "[Collins] brings clarity and acuity to a subject that has often attracted myth-makers and special pleaders. . . [He] also allows us to see that the acrimonious debates about the origin, meaning and significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls are actually quite consequential to any reader who wonders how the Bible itself and the Bible-based religions actually entered the world."--Jonathan Kirsch, Jewish Journal "Offers insights into the passionate debates that have swirled around [the Dead Sea Scrolls] since their startling discovery. One of the topics he explores is the extent to which they broadly reflect the Judaism of that era."--Sheldon Kirshner, Canadian Jewish News "In his short, sharp, snappy 'biography', [Collins] rehearses all the various theories on the scrolls, separates the wheat from the chaff, and brings light to the darkness. This is not simply a digest. Collins takes our hand and guides us to oh-so-reasonable conclusions."--Peter Stanford, The Independent "The scrolls have had the experts fighting over them like cats in a sack, but for the rest of us, they are of curiosity value only. . . . These stories of backbiting and backstabbing make Collin's book a feast for the eyes."--Nigel Nelson, Tribune (U.K.) "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Biography is an important contribution because Collins analyzes and summarizes the essence, content and problematic aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their scholars. . . . In today's politicized world of academia, unfortunately, the Jewish context and content of the Scrolls and the site and the Jewish world of Jesus and his disciples must be restated and demonstrated constantly. Accordingly, John Collins' book contributes to debunking fraudulent political claims against the presence of Jews and the very essence of Jewish history and Jewish religion in the Land of Israel."--Rivkah Fishman-Duker, Scholars for Peace in the Middle East "Collins writes in a clear and precise style. . . . Here he addresses the different interpretations presented by scholars, providing a good summary of historical debate about the Scrolls."--Choice "This series contains the latest scholarship about a specific subject, gives great opportunity for acquiring a limited but significant amount of knowledge, and entuses readers to go into it in much more detail."--Charles H. Middleburgh, Charles Middleburgh Blog "In sum, this is an excellent introduction to a complex subject, lucid and remarkably irenic."--Roger S. Bagnall, Bryn Mawr Classical "[A]nyone seeking a short introduction to the Scrolls could do a lot worse than to look in this direction. They will learn an enormous amount quite effortlessly in a small space of time, being thoroughly diverted in the process. They will be assisted by excellent indices and judicious short bibliographies."--Tessa Rajak, Journal of Jewish Studies "The entire book is skillfully structured to reflect its theme. . . . [Collins] seems particularly at home, and writes with relish and refreshing honesty. . . . [Readers] will learn an enormous amount quite effortlessly in a small space of time, being thoroughly diverted in the process."--Tessa Rajak, Journal of Jewish Studies From the Back Cover "This is a marvelously readable, informative, and reliable general introduction to everything associated with Qumran, and provides valuable insights into the impact of the scrolls on the Bible, ancient Judaism, and budding Christianity. It is highly recommended as one of the best guides for anyone wishing to approach the greatest Hebrew manuscript discovery of modern times."--Geza Vermes, professor emeritus of Jewish studies, University of Oxford "This up-to-date and concise handbook introduces readers to profound discussions of theological, historical, and canonical issues, and to the savory details and gossip surrounding the discovery and publication of the scrolls. Written in Collins's original, witty style, the book is a must for anyone who wants to learn about the scrolls, novice and specialist alike."--Emanuel Tov, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, former editor in chief of the Dead Sea Scrolls Publication Project "This book is right up to date, and is written by a scholar who has been at the very center of scrolls scholarship for several decades. What sets it apart is Collins's expert and sensible analysis of the theories scholars have crafted about the Dead Sea Scrolls in the sixty-five years since they were first discovered."--James C. VanderKam, author of The Dead Sea Scrolls Today "This is an excellent introduction to the scrolls and a great read. Collins has a distinctive perspective and voice, and writes lucidly and engagingly. His well-known scholarly judiciousness is everywhere in evidence--a virtue in short supply in some areas of scrolls study. There is no other volume that does quite what this one does."--Philip Alexander, author of The Mystical Texts: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts