

1QISA^A (THE GREAT ISAIAH SCROLL): AN ANCIENT OR MEDIEVAL SCROLL?

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In recent years Neil Altman, a Dead Sea Scrolls specialist based in Philadelphia, has conducted research on the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a), discovered in Qumran cave 1, 1947. Altman has made a number of controversial claims about this scroll:

- a) The Great Isaiah Scroll belongs to the medieval period, not the late Second Temple period, as many scholars have proposed;
- b) This scroll belonged to one or more Christians, as evidenced by marginal scribal symbols (multiple examples of an “X”) that may have had a special meaning for Christians;
- c) The Masoretic text of Isaiah 7:11 reads, “Ask for a sign from the Lord thy God”, but the Isaiah Scroll reads, “Ask for a sign from the mother of the Lord thy God.” Mention of the mother of the Lord is a reference to Jesus Christ’s mother;
- d) An Arabic numeral “3” followed by an “X” is written interlinear in the scroll. The 3 X, Altman proposes, refers to the “Christian trinity—God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” This 3 X serves to mark “a Christian interpretation of the Old Testament passage.”

Altman has made these and other claims to support his thesis that the scroll did not belong to the Essene Jews, but to a community of Christians. His findings have been published in *Lutheran Partners* as well as in the popular press (e.g., *The Kansas City Star*, *Toronto Star*, *The Times*, *The Washington Post*).

Based on my long-term study of the Great Isaiah Scroll (see Parry and Qimron, *The Great Isaiah Scroll [1QIsa^a], A New Edition*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), I will respond to Altman’s claims. I will examine the book hand of the Isaiah scroll’s copyist with the intent of determining the correct reading of Isaiah 7:11. I will also review the multiple X shaped symbols and the 3 X symbol to consider if these were indeed Christian symbols.