

Biblical archeologist Hershel Shanks dies at 90

by [Yonat Shimron](#) in the [March 10, 2021](#) issue



(Screengrab)

He was not a household name, but in the sometimes arcane world of biblical archaeology, Hershel Shanks was a star—and often a rabble-rouser.

Shanks, the founder and longtime editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, died February 5 at the age of 90.

In 1975, he founded the magazine as a way to bridge academic scholarship with the lay public's appetite for answers to questions about key archaeological and historical events from the Bible: Was the Jews' exodus from Egypt a historic event? Which parts of Jesus' life as recounted in the Gospels are historical and which parts apocryphal?

Shanks's biggest contribution may have been his decades-long advocacy for public access to the Dead Sea Scrolls, considered among the 20th century's greatest archaeological finds. The scrolls, which were unearthed in 1947, became the purview of a key group of experts who controlled access to them.

In 1991, he announced the publication of 1,787 photographs of Dead Sea Scroll fragments never before seen outside of research libraries. He was sued for breach of copyright, a battle he lost.

He would go on to publish other archaeological scoops, often drawing the ire of professional archaeologists and academics who considered his tactics sensationalist.

From 1987 to 2004, Shanks edited and published *Moment*, a magazine that bills itself as a Jewish take on news, ideas, and culture.

*Moment* editor in chief and CEO Nadine Epstein called Shanks "a towering presence, a true force of nature" and said, "His legacy of opening up the field of biblical archeology was a testament to his sense of justice and transformed not just biblical archeology but the trajectory of both the Jewish and Christian worlds. He will be greatly missed." —Religion News Service