

Oldest complete scroll of Torah found in Italy

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An Italian university professor says he has found what is believed to be world's oldest complete Torah scroll.

Mauro Perani, professor of Hebrew at the University of Bologna, said the scroll originally was believed to be no more than a few hundred years old. But new studies and carbon-dating tests suggest it was written around 850 years ago, Perani said on May 29.

The scroll had been stored for centuries in the university's archives, but had been mislabeled in 1889 as dating from the 17th century.

When Perani reexamined the scroll, he realized that it used a script of the oriental Babylonian tradition, hinting that it must be extremely old.

The professor then had the scroll carbon-dated by laboratories at Italy's University of Salento and at the University of Illinois. Both tests confirmed that the scroll dated from the second half of the 12th century to the first quarter of the 13th century.

"This was a scroll for liturgical use in the synagogue, with just consonants spelled out," Perani said.

The scroll is made up of 58 sections of soft sheep leather. It is 36 meters long and 64 centimeters wide.

Ancient Torah scrolls are rare because when they are damaged they stop being used for liturgies and are buried. —RNS