

Tunisian Torah FAQs

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How old is the scroll?

This Torah scroll is dated to the 18th century, making it around 300 years old.

What country does it come from? How do we know its origin?

This Torah originated in Tunisia, and was owned and used there by a community of Sephardi Jews (who trace their lineage back to the Babylonian captivity). We can tell this by the style of the writing on the scroll, and from the preparation method of its skins.

How big/long is the scroll?

Unrolled, the scroll measures over 120 feet long.

Do we need to use gloves when we handle it?

While many people and organizations who work with these scrolls use gloves; contact with clean hands on the edges and back of the scroll will cause no damage. In fact, the natural oils from clean hands can help preserve it by keeping the leather supple.

What is it made out of? Skins, Ink?

Our Torah is made from 55 calfskins, selected and prepared by a kosher butcher. The skins (*gvil*) are stitched together with sinew, and the ink is vegetable-based.

What are the errors/corrections that I see?

No Torah is completely perfect when it is first scribed onto the skins. As it is used weekly in a synagogue, errors are noted and quickly corrected. It is through the sustained, faithful efforts of a loving and diligent community that God's word is preserved complete and without error.

What is the damage I see on the edges? Is it falling apart?

Our Torah is in excellent condition for its age! The damage that can be seen on the top or bottom of some of the skins is called, "worming," and occurred after the time that the scroll was retired from synagogue use and before it came into the hands of the collector who purchased it in Israel.

How are the skins fastened together?

After the writing was complete, the 55 calfskins ("*gvil*") were stitched together with sinew.

Can I touch it? How can I get access to it?

The door to the viewing room remains locked, so that we can correctly preserve and honor this treasure that has come to us. However, our professors and other researchers are granted access once they have been trained in how to correctly handle the scroll. To gain access, you should take a Hebrew, Jewish Studies, or Old Testament class from a professor who will incorporate it into the curriculum!

We also have a digital copy of the scroll, which will soon be made available on the library website.

Who wrote it? How long did it take?

Every page of our scroll is the work of one scribe ("*sofer*"), working for over a year to complete the entire Torah.

What does the writing in the wood say?

It can be translated, "The very word of the Lord."

What does the scroll say?/What books of the Bible are included?

This is the Torah, which is the first five books of the Christian Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Why isn't it in a Synagogue?

This scroll is no longer "kosher," meaning that it no longer meets the high standard of physical condition necessary to be used liturgically. We are grateful to be chosen to host this Torah in its next stage of honored use.

Is it pointed? (aka, are there vowel points?)

Vowel points were not widely in use at the time of the creation of this scroll. There are, however, decorative marks at the top of some of the letters, called "crowns."

Can I take a picture of the Torah?

Please do not use your camera's flash. Also, we ask that you be respectful in any way that you speak about the scroll on social media.

How did they make the lines?/Why is it lined?

As part of the preparation of the skins, pinholes were made down the edges and were linked by lines scored into the skin by a dull knife. This was to keep the writing straight and to ensure that there are always the same number of lines in a column.

Why is a Tunisian Torah on rollers and not in a box? Why is it folded?

Torahs that originate in Sephardic Jewish communities are usually displayed in a special box called a "tic;" this results in the folds visible on the body of the scroll. However, ours is on rollers because of the wish of the donors that the scroll be easily visible to each person in the Moody community.

Why isn't it in a covering (mantle) like I've seen in a synagogue?

The donors of the scroll wish for the Moody community to see the scroll clearly and completely, that they may come to learn from it and to love it. They wished for it to remain unshrouded here, and gave us, instead of a mantle, a beautiful viewing room designed by their architect son.

How many Torah scrolls are in existence?

There are an estimated 20,000 Torahs in existence today.

How did it come to Moody? Why do we have a Torah?

This Torah was scribed in Tunisia in the 1700s. It was used in the synagogue of the community which commissioned it for nearly three hundred years. Sometime in the 21st century, the Jewish community that owned this Torah emigrated to Israel and took all of their valuable possessions with them. They would never leave the Torah behind. In Israel they sold it to a collector. This collector has the largest Torah collection in

Israel and the second largest in the world; from it, the Larsons purchased this Torah and gave it to Moody Bible Institute.

How do the Jewish people feel about Moody having a Torah?

According to the donors and to scholars who have worked for decades with the sale and collection of similar scrolls, the reaction they have received from Jewish people in Israel is surprise that Christians would be so interested in the Torah, and gratitude that they value these scrolls and give them new lives as revered objects, worthy of study.