

The Hidden Scroll: An Archeological Adventure

A.Y. Anouchi

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The history of the Hebrew people, the courageous and ingenious Maccabees, the Holocaust, and the never-ending conflict in Palestine provide the backdrop for Avraham Y. Anouchi's multi-generational novel.

The Hidden Scroll follows two families—one Islamic extremist and the other Jewish—beginning in 1929 as their lives overlap while they pursue separate missions through 2015.

On the Jewish side is Dr. Avner Amram, whose credentials as a Harvard-educated scientist with a lifelong passion for archaeology closely mirror the author's life. Their artist wives (Elaine and Iris Elaine) also bear striking resemblances.

Because of his interest in Jewish history, Avner embarks on a lifelong search for an ancient parchment scroll that will help validate Jewish claims to Palestine.

On the Arab-Muslim side are members of the Ibn Najad family, who are determined to thwart Jewish efforts to find the scroll by creating false parchment documents. The Muslims are also responsible for murders, kidnappings, and thuggery as they attempt to drive the Jews from Palestine and cause mayhem around the world.

As a brilliant young man, Ibn Najad is recruited by Haj Amin Al-Husseini, to lead Bismillah, a new, so-called non-violent organization formed to drive the Jews out of Palestine. Later, under Ibn Najad's son Bashir's leadership, the organization becomes more violent and radical, especially as Avner and his associates get closer to locating information about the scroll.

Surprisingly, and seemingly improbably, Bashir's wife is Jewish. Her background has been kept from their son Farid, who has always had a closer relationship to his mother than to his violent Muslim father. That pull provides a dilemma for Farid as his father expects him to take part in Bismillah.

Anouchi's passion for history and archaeology are clear, but he has difficulty working them into a novel without resorting to long lectures and discourses by the characters. They give presentations (even a slide show), attend them, and offer lengthy explanations to each other. Unfortunately, talk replaces action.

The characters often lack substance and are stereotypical; for example, Anouchi writes of "hot-blooded young Arab volunteers" and someone who looks like a neo-Nazi because he is blond and wears a leather jacket and high black leather boots. They pop in and out of the story, with updates on what happened to them added seemingly as afterthoughts. In the last scene of "action," Avner learns that his namesake grandson has been kidnapped. The senior Avner has a brief confrontation with the messenger who is quickly handcuffed by a security guard. Avner says, "You will tell us where my grandson is held and where the stone and parchment are hidden." Curiously, there is no further mention of what happened to young Avner, and the book then concludes with pages of speeches by the senior Avner.

Although the book has weaknesses as a novel, it does show the excitement of archaeological discovery, and its thorough historical elements are reminders of what the Jewish people have had to contend with since the Maccabees bravely fought against the Greek Army.

LINDA SALISBURY (June 28, 2010)

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