



Vicinity of the Qumran caves and plan of Qumran (inset).

an expedition led by G. Lankester Harding and Father Roland de Vaux, sponsored by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, the Palestine (Rockefeller) Archaeological Museum, and the École Biblique et Archéologique Française of Jerusalem, excavated the first cave, which yielded parchment fragments. This remarkable find set off a frantic search for additional scrolls among the hundreds of caves that pock the limestone and marl cliffs along the western shore of the Dead Sea by both the Bedouin and scholars. Caves two through eleven (2Q–11Q) were discovered between 1952 and 1956, with the majority of the caves being initially discovered by the Bedouin. Beginning in 1951 and from 1953 to 1956 an expedition led by de Vaux on behalf of the École Biblique excavated the site of Khirbet Qumran (the 1951 excavations were co-directed with G. Lankester Harding, who represented the Jordanian Department of Antiquities; Broshi 2000:734), which was situated adjacent to the caves. Subsequent excavations and surveys of the site of Khirbet Qumran and the caves surrounding the site have yielded no

further scrolls, but have brought to light information on the life of the community that inhabited Qumran in the late Hellenistic and Early Roman eras.

C. Clermont-Ganneau excavated the first grave of the necropolis of Qumran in 1873 (Clermont-Ganneau 1899:15–16); he recognized that the grave could not be Muslim because of its north-south orientation as opposed to the typical Muslim practice of burial in Palestine, which places the body in an east-west orientation. Apart from de Vaux's work on the cemetery, in which he estimated that there were about 1,100 tombs (de Vaux 1973:45–58), S. H. Steckoll excavated ten graves in 1967–1968 (Steckoll 1968:323–336). The necropolis of Qumran contains about 1,200 burials; of the 1,053 whose orientation can be determined, 999 are oriented north to south; 54 are oriented east to west and are most likely Bedouin (Zias 2000:220–253; Broshi and Eshel 2004:321–331; Eshel, Broshi, Freund, and Schultz 2002:135–165). Subsequent excavations and surveys were conducted on the necropolis of Qumran in 2001 and 2002 yielding further information upon the Qumran

cemetery and the burial practices of the community of Qumran (Broshi and Eshel 2004:321–331; Eshel and Broshi 2003:61–73; Jol et al. 2002:91–95).

Two other excavation projects, initially carried out by de Vaux, which are related to the “Community Center” of Qumran, bear mentioning. In 1958, de Vaux excavated the site of ‘Ain Feshkha located 2 miles (3 km) from the site of Khirbet Qumran. De Vaux unearthed a building complex contemporary with the site of Qumran, apparently established in 31 BCE, which was violently destroyed in 68 CE (de Vaux 1959:225–255; Magness 2000:237–238). De Vaux suggested that ‘Ain Feshkha served as the farm and industrial area of the Qumran community. Concurrently with his excavations of the site of Khirbet Qumran, de Vaux excavated eight artificial dwelling-caves cut into the soft marl to the west and south of the compound of Khirbet Qumran. In the winter of 1995/96, Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel excavated two more residential caves located to the north of the site of Qumran (Broshi and Eshel 1999:328–348). These caves were connected to the “Community Center” of Qumran by a network of ancient paths, which when surveyed yielded sixty iron sandal nails. The caves themselves, whose ceilings had collapsed, produced about 400 potsherds dating from the first century BCE to the first century CE.

The library of scrolls discovered among the eleven caves around Qumran preserved invaluable works for the study of the Hebrew Bible and Judaism of the late Second Temple period. The library of scrolls contains biblical works (all books of the Hebrew Bible apart from Esther and Nehemiah have been discovered), Jewish works previously known apart from Qumran (e.g., *Jubilees*, *Tobit*, and portions of *1 Enoch*), and Jewish works previously unknown, some of which came from the Qumran Community (e.g., 1QS, 1QM, and 1QH) and others which do not appear to have been composed by the group at Qumran (e.g., 1QapGen, 4Q542, and 4Q543–548). If one assumes that Ezra and Nehemiah were a combined work in the Qumran library, then only Esther is not represented in whole or fragmented form among the scrolls (VanderKam 1994:30–32). The documents discovered at Qumran were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek (7Q), although those documents identified as having been composed by the Qumran sect are all composed in Hebrew (Dimant 1995:27–35).

While scholarship continues to debate the meaning and significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls, one of the most contentious issues is the identity of the Congregation (היחיד) referred to in some of the writings discovered within the caves: “That every Israelite may know his place in the Congregation of God, an eternal society” (1QS 2:22). Although every imaginable affiliation has been suggested, the identification of this group as the Essenes first suggested by E. L. Sukenik of the Hebrew University continues to represent the opinion of most scholars. The thought and practice exhibited in the scrolls most closely approximate the movement of Jewish pietists referred to by ancient classical witnesses as the Essenes (Ἐσσηνοί: Ant. 13:171–172, 371–379; War 2:160–161; cf. VanderKam 1994:71–98).

Indeed, the location of Khirbet Qumran on the western shores of the Dead Sea corresponds to the location of an Essene (*Esseni*) community described by Pliny.

On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all the other tribes in the whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm-trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of persons tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt their manners. Thus, through thousands of ages (incredible to relate), a race in which no one is born lives on forever; so prolific for their advantage is other men's weariness of life! (Pliny Nat. Hist. 5.73)

The religious, communal nature described by Pliny parallels the archaeological remains of the community



The Qumran caves. (photo Garo Nalbandian)

located at Qumran: a common dining hall, kitchen, pantry, corn mill, potter's shops and kilns, and ten immersion pools (cf. Broshi 2000:737).

De Vaux's excavations of the site of Khirbet Qumran uncovered several levels of settlement at the site. The earliest settlement dates from the Iron Age (eighth century BCE), and it may be the biblical עִיר הַמֶּלַח (City of Salt), one of six cities in the wilderness mentioned in Joshua 15:61–62 (de Vaux and Broshi 1993: 1236). According to de Vaux the site was abandoned at the close of the Old Testament period and resettled in three phases in the last centuries of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, which de Vaux identified as Phase 1 (which he subdivided into 1a and 1b), 2 and 3.

De Vaux suggested that Phase 1a began in the last third of the second century BCE, during the reign of John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE). The remains of this phase are quite modest. Phase 1b, which marks the beginning of the building of Qumran into its distinct form, dates to about 100 BCE. Phase 1 came to a close, according to de Vaux, as a result of a violent earthquake in 31 BCE (War 1:370–380; Ant. 15:121–147), whose effects are still visible at Qumran. De Vaux thought that the site was uninhabited until 4 BCE when it was resettled, and Phase 2 began. Phase 2, which marks the apex of the Qumran Community, came to an end in 68 CE in connection with Vespasian's campaign in the Judean wilderness that year and his occupation of nearby Jericho in June 68 CE.

One of the difficulties in dating the stratigraphy of Qumran is the continued use of buildings and walls from one phase to the next. The absence of destruction layers until the site's destruction in 68 CE does not permit a clear demarcation between the various phases of settlement. In the absence of epigraphic materials, de Vaux relied heavily upon numismatic evidence; however, numismatic finds are notoriously hazardous for fixing stratigraphical dates:

De Vaux's over-reliance on numismatic evidence often led him to incorrect conclusions. For example, a coin of John Hyrcanus cannot be used as proof that the site was settled during his reign—coins can be used only as a *terminus a quo* but not as a *terminus ad quem*. Likewise, the scarcity of coins minted by Herod the Great does not point to an abandonment of the site; Herod's coins are notoriously scarce everywhere.

(Broshi 2000:737; cf. also Magness 2002:49–50)

The absence of de Vaux's unpublished excavation reports makes any comprehensive discussions regarding the archaeology of Qumran tentative (cf. now Humbert and Chambon 1994; Humbert and Gunneweg 2003). Jodi Magness has offered a reassessment of de Vaux's chronology, which seems justifiable. Magness, like de Vaux, identifies two strata of occupation for the main

site of Qumran: Stratum 1, she suggests, is not subdivided, but reflects one continuous homogeneous level that did not begin in the second century BCE but sometime in the first half of the first century BCE. Moreover, an earthquake did not end the occupation of Stratum 1; rather, the end of this stratum dates to the very end of the first century BCE, possibly in the wake of the death of Herod the Great. Stratum 2 begins early in the first century CE and comes to a violent conclusion in 68 CE (Magness 1995:58–65; idem. 2002: 47–72). A third phase reflects the presence of a small garrison of Roman soldiers following the destruction of the site by Vespasian's forces on only the northeast corner of the Qumran compound. The site, however, was abandoned after several years, most likely after the fall of Masada in 73 CE.

Whether one accepts de Vaux or Magness' chronologies of the site of Qumran, the significant building phase of the site that provided its distinct form dates from the early to mid-first century BCE; so also, a large number of the works belonging to the Qumran library (e.g., 11QT, 1QIsa^a, 4Q400–407, 11Q17), particularly those works identified as originating with the Qumran Community (e.g., 1QS, 1QH, 4Q428, 4Q266), were copied in this period (VanderKam 1994:107). The reasons for the increased population—like other aspects of the Congregation's history—are unknown. The growth of the site of Qumran during this period, particularly the early part of the first century CE, could be connected, however, to the tumultuous events of the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (War 1:92–98; Ant. 13: 376–383), which the Qumran Community interpreted as acts of impiety (4Q167 5:13–14, 4Q169; cf. Flusser 1970:133–168).

The first individual Josephus identifies as an Essene appears in connection with the episode of the murder of Antigonus the brother of Aristobulus I (104–103 BCE). Josephus comments concerning Judas the Essene, who lived in Jerusalem during the brief reign of Aristobulus I, that he was a man attributed with the gift of prophecy and taught his pupils to understand the words of the Prophets (Ant. 13:307–313; War 1:78–80; cf. also War 2:159; 1QpHab 7:2–5; Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1979: 2:574, 587; Flusser 1970:133–168; idem 1989:22–27).

The relationship of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in eleven nearby caves and the site of Khirbet Qumran remains a question for some, since no scrolls were found at the site itself. Yet, it is difficult to imagine that such a large collection of written documents could have existed within sight of Khirbet Qumran and had nothing to do with those who occupied the settlement. Indeed, access to Caves 7–10 was possible only by passing through Khirbet Qumran. It seems implausible that those who placed the scrolls in the caves had no relationship with the religious

Congregation that gathered at Khirbet Qumran.

Equally compelling, the description of communal life in the scrolls corresponds to the installations and the physical settings of Qumran. For example, the Congregation's emphasis on ritual purity detailed in the scrolls corresponds to the sophisticated water-collection system and the abundance of *miqua³ot*. Even the physical setting of Khirbet Qumran within the Wilderness of Judea is an expression of the Congregation's interpretation of Isaiah 40:3—voiced in the Community Rule found in caves 1, 4 and 5—that their presence in the wilderness (בְּמִדְבָּר) served a redemptive purpose.

And when these become members of the Congregation in Israel according to all these rules, they shall separate from the habitation of unjust men and shall go into the wilderness to prepare there the way of Him; as it is written, Prepare in the wilderness the way of . . . make straight in the desert a path for our God (Isa 40:3). The (path) is the study of the Law which He commanded by the hand of Moses, that they may do according to all that has been revealed from age to age, and as the Prophets have revealed by His Holy Spirit. (1QS 8:10–16)

Moreover, the sectarian quality of those scrolls originating from the יחד (e.g., 1QS and 1QH) reflects the attitudes of a community separated from its society.



A page from the Great Isaiah Scroll, Qumran.

The Qumran library remains one of the most important archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century. It provides a treasure trove for biblical scholars and others interested in the developments of Jewish thought in late antiquity, as Sukenik observed, "in the field of Biblical studies proper, the find is also of incalculable value" (Sukenik 1955:27). Of inestimable value are the writings that reflect the sectarian thought of the Congregation at Qumran. These documents of biblical interpretation (e.g., 1QpHab and 4Q174) and apocalyptic speculation (e.g., 11Q13 and 1QM) shed light on the spiritual life and thought of the Congregation. Moreover, their similarities and differences with other contemporary groups and individuals assist us to better understand the varieties of religious expressions and streams of Jewish thought in the late Hellenistic and early Roman eras, including nascent Christianity. Furthermore, the ideology and vocabulary of the Qumran sectarian scrolls provides an important, yet often overlooked, theological repository for the developing ideas and expressions of the Hellenistic Christian communities (Flusser 1965: 215–266; Benoit 1990:1–30).