

The State of the Archaeological Debate at Qumran

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Abstract

This article surveys the present state of archaeological research at Qumran. The article first examines those explorers who came to Qumran prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and interpreted the site without the influence of the scrolls. It then examines how the interpretation of the site changed following the discovery of the scrolls and the excavation of the site by Roland de Vaux. The article then offers a survey of recent contributions by those who excavated the site after de Vaux, as well as contributions made by those whose scholarship has influenced the interpretation of Qumran despite not having excavated there. The article concludes with a discussion of why the interpretation of Qumran weighs so heavily on our understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Keywords

archaeology, Dead Sea Scrolls, history, interpretation, Qumran

Introduction

Qumran has been the source of rigorous scholarly debate for over six decades. Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls beginning in 1947, scholars have argued about the nature of the site, the origin of the scrolls, and what the competing interpretations mean for biblical scholarship. While the lion's share of scholarship has been reserved for the interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the context of their discovery weighs heavily on their interpretation. Some have argued vociferously for the traditional 'Qumran-Essene Hypothesis', which states that an esoteric sect of Jews called the Essenes built the settlement at Qumran, composed and copied the Dead Sea Scrolls there, and hid them in

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nearby caves during the Roman suppression of the Jewish Revolt of 66–70 CE. Others have argued that the scrolls originate from some place other than Qumran, most likely Jerusalem, and were hidden in the caves near Qumran by Jewish refugees fleeing Jerusalem on their way to Masada and regions farther south. This latter theory leaves the structures at Qumran open to alternative interpretations, ranging from fortress to pottery factory to country estate.

Over the past two decades, several excavations and scholarly publications have resurrected the once marginalized suggestion that the earliest phases of the Qumran settlement may have been established as a fort or some other form of defensive fortification and not a simple sectarian settlement. New scientific evidence and data visualization techniques, new proposals concerning the origin of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a renewed spirit of open dialogue among Qumran scholars ironically resulting from anonymous and now notoriously criminal attempts to harass and silence many Qumran scholars have thrust the archaeological interpretation of Qumran back into the spotlight. Therefore the status of the archaeological debate concerning Qumran warrants review.

Qumran Before the Scrolls

Many do not realize that Qumran was a known site attracting several explorers before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Qumran has a well-documented history of explorers and scholars who have visited the site, some of whom excavated various portions of it. Interestingly, the pre-scrolls history of Qumran is strikingly similar to most recent studies and claims made about the site, specifically, that it was initially a fort, fortress, fortlet, or some form of fortified structure at its beginning. Joan Taylor provides a helpful history of many of these early travels in her research on the etymology of the name of Qumran (Taylor 2002). What follows is a brief history of some of the early explorers at Qumran, who published their impressions of the site.

Flemish explorer Louis-Félicien Caignart de Saulcy explored the Dead Sea in the winter of 1850–51. De Saulcy described the remains of Qumran as ‘the foundations of a tolerably extensive square enclosure’ (de Saulcy 1853: 55). He described the outer walls of the Main Building (Magness 2002: 22) and also made note of a cave in ‘the side of the mountain lying between us and the great range’, which was most likely a reference to Cave 4 (de Saulcy 1853: 55).

Explorer Henry Poole visited Qumran in 1855 joined by Elijah Meshullam and led by the sheikh Abu Dahuk. He found the remains of an aqueduct, walls, pools, and some buildings, and says ‘the main wall was close to the side of the large pool on the sea side, between which and the sea were a number of graves’. He also stated, ‘The ruins were 238 ft. above the Dead Sea’ (Poole 1856: 69).

Albert Isaacs visited Qumran in December 1856 along with British counsel James Finn and photographer James Graham. Regarding the tower, Isaacs stated,

'It can hardly be doubted that this formed a tower or stronghold of some kind. The situation is commanding, and well adapted for defensive operations' (Isaacs 1857: 66). Isaacs also noted the filled-in pools of Loci 117 and 118 and the south-eastern pool of Locus 71. James Finn later described 'wadî Gumrân' as 'a hill with some ruins upon it', suggesting it was 'some ancient fort with a cistern' (Finn 1868: 416). Isaacs and Finn were therefore the first explorers to identify the ruins at Qumran as those of a defensive structure strategically located on a plateau overlooking the northwest shore of the Dead Sea.

In 1858, Emmanuel Guillaume Rey visited Qumran. Rey seems to have understood the main feature of the site as being a pool or reservoir (Taylor 2002: 153). He also made note of the cave previously noted by de Saulcy (Rey 1859: 223). Rey made specific mention of pottery sherds strewn across the surface (Rey 1859: 221). He also noted approximately 800 tombs.

Lieutenant Claude Reignier Conder of the British Engineers and Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener came to Qumran in 1873. They noted the western wall of the Main Building and described the northwest tower as the remains of ruined buildings amongst heaps of rough stones (Conder and Kitchener 1883: 210). Conder and Kitchener also noted a small pool with a flight of steps leading down the sides (Conder and Kitchener 1883: 210).

Also in 1873, French archaeologist Charles Clermont-Ganneau located Qumran. Clermont-Ganneau was unimpressed with the ruins, but noted a cemetery that included approximately 1000 graves (Clermont-Ganneau 1874: 83). Clermont-Ganneau excavated the area to the east of the Main Building, including one of the graves (Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 14-16).

The British scholar Ernest William Gurney Masterman visited Qumran and 'Ein Feshkha on several occasions between 1900 and 1901. Masterman made specific observations about the positioning of the site atop a plateau overlooking the 'Ein Feshkha Springs. He said,

The whole of these ruins stand on a commanding position, surrounded on all sides, and especially to the south, by steep declivities; at one point at the north-west corner, however, a narrow neck connects it with the plateau to the west, where Cave 4 is located. From this site, every point of the 'Ain Feshkhah oasis and all its approaches can be overlooked; it is, also, a fresher, healthier station than any spot in the plain below (Masterman 1902: 162).

Masterman's description of Qumran's location is consistent with the requirements of a fortified settlement. It is therefore no surprise that he concluded the ruins 'may have very well been once a small fortress' (Masterman 1902: 161). Masterman also made note of the cemetery. He noted his bewilderment regarding a cemetery containing 'upwards of a thousand well-arranged graves' next to what he understood to be a fortress (Masterman 1902: 162). He concluded that

the cemetery was not of Bedouin or other Muslim origin, based upon the north-south orientation of the graves. Masterman left his question of why such a small fort would require a graveyard of over one thousand tombs unanswered (Masterman 1902: 162).

Gustaf Dalman visited Qumran in 1914. Dalman explicitly identified Qumran as a *burg*, or fort (Dalman 1914: 9-11). He made this claim based upon the elevated location of the settlement overlooking the northwest shore of the Dead Sea and the presence of a water catchment system at the site. For Dalman, the conditions were ideal for a fortified structure that could observe the northwest shore of the Dead Sea.

Archaeologist Michael Avi-Yonah agreed with Dalman's identification of Qumran as a fort. Avi-Yonah published a map that identified the remains at Qumran as part of a string of fortresses along the southeastern Judean border (Avi-Yonah 1936: 164). This string of fortresses was designed to guard against incursions by Transjordanian and southern foes.

However, with the discovery of the scrolls, de Vaux and Lankester Harding changed their interpretation of the site from that of a Roman era fortress to that of a sectarian settlement established by the Essenes. Avi-Yonah gradually became influenced by de Vaux's interpretation as a sectarian settlement and later blended the two views of Qumran, referring to it as the 'fort of the pious' and the 'monastery' of the Dead Sea Sect (Avi-Yonah 1976: 80, s.v. 'Mezad Hasidim').

Thus, prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many of the published reports understood Qumran to be a fort or fortified structure. This fort possessed a complete water catchment system, and was strategically perched upon a defensible plateau. The presence of the large cemetery was problematic, but it can be concluded that prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the site appeared to have been interpreted as a self-contained, strategically placed fortress, possessing means by which to procure and store water.

Qumran After the Discovery of the Scrolls

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls radically changed the interpretation of Qumran. In 1949, the Director of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, Gerald Lankester Harding, and the Head of the Dominican École Biblique et Archéologique Française of Jerusalem, Father Roland de Vaux, began excavations near Qumran in Cave 1, where the initial seven scrolls were discovered (Lankester Harding 1949: 112-15). Cave 1 also produced several artifacts including linens, pottery, and additional scroll fragments (Crowfoot 1951: 5-31). Because the fragments from Cave 1 matched portions of the original seven scrolls, de Vaux and Lankester Harding could confirm that the seven original scrolls had indeed come from Cave 1 (Lankester Harding 1949: 114).

But despite confirming their authenticity, de Vaux and Lankester Harding initially concluded in 1949 that there was not enough evidence to link the Dead Sea Scrolls to the ruins at Qumran (Lankester Harding 1952: 104; Magness 2002: 27). Based upon the visible ruins at Qumran, de Vaux and Lankester Harding concluded what those explorers and researchers who came before them had concluded: that the site was most likely a Roman fort dating to the second or third century CE (Lankester Harding 1952: 104). That is to say, since de Vaux and Lankester Harding allowed the Dead Sea Scrolls no influence upon the Qumran settlement as an interpretative lens, they understood the remains at Qumran to be that of a fortified structure.

However, as the contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls began to be interpreted and as excavations continued at Qumran, Lankester Harding and de Vaux altered their initial interpretation of Qumran. After the initial soundings at Qumran in 1951, Lankester Harding stated in 1952:

The quality of work is very poor, and in no way resembles that of a Roman fort which we first took it to be (Lankester Harding 1952: 104).

After abandoning the fortress theory, Lankester Harding and de Vaux began to look for another explanation for the settlement. After the first interpretations of the Dead Sea Scrolls began to be published, and after their first few seasons digging at Qumran, Lankester Harding and de Vaux favored an interpretation of Qumran as a site constructed and inhabited by Jewish sectarians (Lankester Harding 1958: 15).

It should be noted that the sectarian settlement theory was derived after the excavations at Qumran. While it is certainly true that it is better to draw conclusions after one has done excavations, the issue for many scholars is whether Lankester Harding and de Vaux's interpretation of the excavated site was based upon the archaeological remains alone, or was skewed by their growing knowledge of the contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their desire to see the remains of a religious, Jewish, sectarian community that could explain the scrolls' presence in the caves near Qumran.

Combining the discovery of similar pottery types at the site and in the caves where the scrolls were found, the discovery of inkwells and other possible writing implements in Locus 30, descriptions of a distinct community described in several of the Dead Sea Scrolls from different caves, and statements by the Roman geographer Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 5.73), Roman Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (*War* §2.119-161; *Antiquities* §18.22), and Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (*Every Good Man is Free* 72-91; *Hypothetica* 11.1-18), Eleazar Sukenik proposed what has come to be known as the 'Qumran-Essene Hypothesis' (Sukenik 1948; de Vaux 1973: 128). Comparing information gleaned from the scrolls with additional archaeological discoveries

at Qumran, namely, the presence of several Jewish *miqve'ot* (ritual baths), de Vaux concluded that Qumran was established by a sectarian group of Jews seeking isolation in the desert (de Vaux 1973: 112). De Vaux argued that these residents were responsible for the documents discovered in the nearby caves. As a result, subsequent years of research on Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls centered on the relationship between this now 'sectarian' establishment and the documents discovered in the nearby caves.

It appears that the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered near Qumran appear to be the factor that ultimately caused de Vaux and Lankester Harding to reinterpret the site as a sectarian settlement at the initial stages of their excavation. It would be through this lens of the scrolls and their sectarian contents that de Vaux would go on to interpret the remainder of the site. This lens of a sectarian settlement would continue to dominate Qumran archaeology for the next forty years, until later archaeologists began to reexamine the remains of the site on their own merits.

Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Debates

Since de Vaux's excavation of Qumran, several scholars have weighed in on the debate over the nature of the Qumran settlement, questioning de Vaux's conclusions concerning the site. These more recent scholarly studies can be grouped into four categories: (1) studies by scholars who excavated at Qumran, (2) studies by scholars who did not excavate at Qumran, but have produced noteworthy or widely accepted studies on the site, (3) studies by archaeologists and others who believe the site served multiple purposes at different times, and (4) those scholars who have proffered intriguing, albeit speculative, theories that have either not gained widespread support or have been rejected outright by most scholars.

Scholars who have Excavated Qumran

Jean-Baptiste Humbert assumed leadership of the *École Biblique* after the death of Roland de Vaux. Along with Alain Chambon, Humbert published de Vaux's original field notes, which had yet to be made public (Humbert and Chambon 1994; 2003). Humbert was one of the first scholars to propose a reoccupation model as a solution to the debate surrounding Qumran (Humbert 1994: 175). Humbert argues that the site was originally established as a Hasmonean *villa*, but that it was abandoned and reoccupied by Essenes in the late first century BCE, who used it as a cultic site. However, in Humbert's opinion, the Dead Sea Scrolls came from somewhere other than Qumran and were deposited in the caves near Qumran because of the authors' familiarity with the cultic site (Fothergill 2010). The acknowledgment that the site may have been abandoned and reoccupied was a great step towards explaining the differences between the highly defensive

nature of the original structure and the apparent lack of concern for similar defensive measures in the site's expanded areas.

Solomon Steckoll of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan performed some excavations upon tombs in the cemetery. From 1966–1967, Steckoll excavated eleven skeletons and ten tombs at Qumran (Steckoll 1968).

Joseph Patrich and Yigael Yadin excavated the caves near Qumran from 1983 to 1987 (Kapera 1994; Patrich 1994; Norton 2003). From 1986–1991, Patrich excavated an additional five caves, discovering in one of them a Herodian juglet wrapped in palm fibers (Patrich and Arubas 1989). Patrich argued that the pottery remains in the caves provided evidence of an itinerant residential presence in the caves.

Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel conducted excavations from 1995–1996 in the hillside caves nearest the north and west of the site (Broshi and Eshel 1999a, b). They concluded that the residents of Qumran were Essenes, but like Patrich and Yadin, argued that the residents actually dwelled in the caves surrounding the site (Broshi 1992; Eshel and Broshi 1997). Broshi and Eshel concluded that the site served as more of a community-gathering site for meals, community prayers, and the transmission of documents (Broshi and Eshel 1999a).

James Strange conducted a survey on the Qumran plateau in 1996 (Strange 2006). During the survey, Strange uncovered an ostrakon that bore an inscription, which Cross and Eshel read as containing the word '*yaḥad*' (Cross and Eshel 1997a; 1997b). The term is significant because it is the name used within several of the Dead Sea Scrolls to denote the community addressed by the scrolls. Allison Schofield (Schofield 2009) discusses the relationship between the *yaḥad* community and the *Serekh ha-Yaḥad* ('Community Rule'), which appears to have been retained in redacted versions (1QS differs slightly from fragments in caves 4 and 5) (Alexander and Vermes 1998). While nearly all scholars agree the ostrakon preserves the text of a deed of gift, Ada Yardeni and other scholars have questioned the palaeographic reading of the word *yaḥad* in this ostrakon, positing different letters and therefore different interpretations of the inscription, thereby eliminating the potential connection between the site and the scrolls in the ostrakon (Yardeni 1997; Golb 1997; Cryer 1997).

Gen. Amir Drori and Yizhak Magen, both of the Israel Antiquities Authority, participated in small-scale excavations at Qumran. During the excavations dubbed 'Operation Scroll', a large number of date pits were discovered in Locus 76, next to a date press previously discovered in Locus 75. Drori and Magen concluded that the residents of Qumran used the press to produce date honey on a large scale (Rabinovich 1994; Kapera 1998).

Magen later teamed with Yuval Peleg and conducted additional seasons of excavations at Qumran until 2004. Magen and Peleg recently published the preliminary results of their renewed excavations at Qumran (Magen and Peleg 2007), arguing that the site was established as a 'forward command post' during

the Hasmonean period (Magen and Peleg 2007: 62). However, Magen and Peleg argue the site was later repurposed as a pottery production facility that retained the unemployed soldiers as laborers. Given the site's industrial function as a pottery-manufacturing center, Magen and Peleg conclude that the Dead Sea Scrolls could not have been a product of Qumran, but were brought to the Qumran caves from elsewhere.

Notable Studies Regarding Qumran

Humbert invited the Belgian team of Robert Donceel and Pauline Donceel-Voûte to publish the final reports of the Qumran and 'Ein Feshkha excavations. The team focused their research on the small finds from Qumran, including glassware, metal wares, pottery, and coins. Based upon the wealth of the assemblage of small finds, and contrary to the belief that the inhabitants of the site were ascetic Essenes, Donceel and Donceel-Voûte suggested that the residents were wealthy traders, and that Qumran was actually a *villa rustica*, or wealthy manor house, that may have been a winter or year-round second home to a wealthy family from Jerusalem (Donceel-Voûte 1994). The Donceels were among the earliest archaeologists after de Vaux's excavations to argue that the Dead Sea Scrolls may not have originated with the residents of Qumran and that Qumran had not been established as an Essene settlement.

Karl Rengstorf and Norman Golb also disagreed with the Qumran-Essene Hypothesis, arguing instead that the Dead Sea Scrolls came specifically from Jerusalem (Rengstorf 1963; Golb 1995). Rengstorf proposed that the Dead Sea Scrolls were not the product of the residents of Qumran, but of the library of the Jerusalem Temple (Rengstorf 1963). Rengstorf based his conclusion on the several different scripts used to write the scrolls and the fact that the scrolls come from different periods (Rengstorf 1963: 10). He also pointed out that copies of the same book, specifically, the Isaiah scrolls from Cave 1, are substantially different, and asked why a sectarian community would copy two different versions of the same biblical book. Golb offered a nuanced version of Rengstorf's Jerusalem library theory, arguing that the Dead Sea Scrolls are not the product of the Jerusalem Temple library, but of multiple libraries in Jerusalem (Golb 1995: 158). Dismissing the scrolls' relationship to Qumran, Golb accepted that Qumran was established as a fort and remained one throughout its existence until its destruction (Golb 1995: 39-41). After examining a small sample of the scrolls, Golb used mathematical extrapolation to suggest that over 500 scribal hands were used to write the scrolls. However, Yardeni has suggested that at least 50 scrolls and fragments discovered in caves 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 11 can be shown to be the work of a single 'Qumran scribe' (Yardeni 2007), thereby offering a consistent scribal link between the documents.

Jodi Magness accepts both that Qumran was established as a sectarian settlement, and that the Essenes wrote some of the Dead Sea Scrolls there. One area in which Magness differs from de Vaux is her dating of the initial Second Temple phase of Qumran. According to Magness, De Vaux and others (Cross 1995: 97) argued for a mid-second century BCE origin of the Essene sect in a deliberate attempt to intercalate the rise of the Essenes with the 390 + 20-year period from the destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE to the advent of the Teacher of Righteousness described in the Damascus Document as the founding moment of the Damascus Covenant (CD 1.3-11). This cyclical argument, according to Magness, may have adversely influenced de Vaux's interpretation of the establishment of the settlement at Qumran in the middle Hasmonean Period (Magness 2002: 64-66). Magness counters that there is no distinction between the pottery of de Vaux's Period Ia and Ib. Thus, while de Vaux dated the establishment of Qumran to around 140–130 BCE, Magness concludes, 'It is reasonable to date the initial establishment of the sectarian settlement to the first half of the first century BCE (that is, some time between 100–50 BCE)', thereby eliminating de Vaux's Period Ia (Magness 2002: 65).

Alan Crown and Lena Cansdale argued that the settlement at Qumran was an official customs station. Despite Masterman's 1902 claim that the Dead Sea was at such a height that the coastal road south from 'Ein Feshkha toward 'En Gedi was 'an exceedingly rough ascent' that is 'almost impassible for led horses' (Masterman 1902: 162), Cansdale claims the fortified settlement overlooked the intersection of a well-traveled north-south trade route along the western shore of the Dead Sea from Jericho to 'En Gedi. For Cansdale, Qumran was an international port supervising the transport of merchandise on the Dead Sea (Crown and Cansdale 1994).

British archaeologist David Stacey argues Qumran was a tannery and that the jars discovered by de Vaux were actually for the collection of urine necessary to process skins. Stacey argues that Qumran's location away from populated areas, but between trading cities such as Jericho and 'En Gedi, was an ideal location for a tannery, which may have been a part of a Jericho estate (Stacey 2007).

Reoccupation and Dual-Use Theories

Some scholars have argued for reoccupation models at Qumran. They argue there is no reason to limit the settlement at Qumran to a single occupant or even a single purpose, especially given the obvious evidence of expansion during the site's existence. Humbert's reoccupation model of Hasmonean *villa*-turned-sectarian center and Magen and Peleg's model of a fort-turned-pottery production factory have already been discussed. Two other reoccupation models have also been suggested.

Yizhar Hirschfeld disagreed with sectarian interpretations of Qumran that understood the site in a communal, religious context. Hirschfeld embraced the idea that Qumran was initially a military fort that later changed hands and was converted into an agriculturally based, fortified estate manor during the Herodian era (Shanks 1998; Hirschfeld 2004: 24-37). Hirschfeld therefore rejected the argument that the Dead Sea Scrolls were a product of the residents of Qumran. He described the site in a consistently secular manner, referring to de Vaux's Locus 30 'scriptorium' as an 'office' and understanding de Vaux's Locus 77 'refectory' as a common dining room.

Finally, the present author's research concluded that Second Temple period Qumran was established as one of a string of fortresses around 140–130 BCE (Bar-Adon 1981, Cargill 2009b: 35). The poorly constructed fortress was later abandoned after the expansion of the Hasmonean Kingdom to the south, and the military assets from Qumran were redeployed to newer forts on the expanding southern frontier. The site of Qumran was later reoccupied and expanded in a communal, non-military fashion by other Jewish settlers, who possessed a keen concern for self-sufficiency and ritual purity. These sectarians were ultimately responsible for the collection of many of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the adjacent caves (Cargill 2009a: 195).

Lesser Accepted Theories Regarding Qumran

Other scholars have offered additional theories about Qumran that have not garnered as wide an acceptance among scholars. While many scholars see some general similarities between the early Jewish sect of the Essenes and the early Christians (Charlesworth 1992), most scholars have categorically rejected any association between Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Qumran, and the Essenes. The scrolls make no mention of Christianity or Jesus, and the expectation of two messianic figures at Qumran differs sharply from the understanding of Jesus as a singular Messiah in Christianity (Collins 1995). Likewise, Christianity's disregard for many Jewish ritual purity laws stands in sharp contrast to the Scrolls' insistence upon strict observance of purity regulations.

Despite these differences, Robert Eisenman was an early and outspoken proponent of the theory that the Essene community living at Qumran was associated with the origins of Christianity (Eisenman and Wise 1992). Eisenman understands the biblical figure James, the brother of Jesus, to be the Teacher of Righteousness mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Eisenman sees a direct link between the teachings of the Christian New Testament and those found within the scrolls (Eisenman 1996).

Barbara Thiering also links Jesus to the Dead Sea Scrolls, but does so in a manner different from that of Eisenman. Thiering argues that Jesus was married, divorced, remarried, and a father of four. She concludes that early tensions

mentioned in the New Testament between John the Baptist and Jesus (cf. Mt. 9.14) are reflected in the scrolls; she understands John the Baptist to be the Teacher of Righteousness and Jesus to be the Wicked Priest (Thiering 1981: 11).

Minna and Kenneth Lönnqvist proposed that the occupants of Qumran were part of an ancient sun cult (Lönnqvist and Lönnqvist 2002). They base their conclusions upon the layout of some of the longer rooms at Qumran, and the fact that passages within some of the Dead Sea Scrolls follow a solar calendar, rather than the more typical Jewish lunar calendar (Ben Dov and Saulnier 2008). An object that some interpret as a sundial was also discovered at Qumran, and this interpretation is often used to support their claim (Glessmer and Albani 1999: 408). Others reject this interpretation and identify the disc-shaped limestone object as a potter's wheel used in throwing pottery (Hirschfeld 2004: 149, 151-52).

From here, the theories become increasingly diverse. Recently, Rachel Elijor went so far as to suggest that the Essenes did not even exist (Ilani 2009). Elijor argues that Philo simply made the sect up, and that Josephus, Pliny, and other historians perpetuated the fabrications. She argues instead that the Sadducees, or 'Sons of Zadok', are responsible for the scrolls. This theory has been advanced by NYU Professor Lawrence Schiffman for over a decade, although Schiffman does not deny the existence of the Essenes (Schiffman 1995b: 529). Schiffman believes that a group of priests broke from the Temple when the ineligible Hasmonean kings also assumed the role of High Priest in Jerusalem, a theory further detailed by the late Hanan Eshel (Eshel 2008: 59-61). This dissident group continued its love for the Temple and their priestly ways, while condemning what they considered to be a corrupt and illegitimate Jerusalem priesthood (Schiffman 1995a; 2010: 81-97). Other scholars, like John Collins, disagree, arguing that there is no need to understand the community at Qumran as a break-away sect from the Temple (Collins 2010: 51).

Digital Qumran Resources

The rise of the digital age has produced several resources for the study of Qumran archaeology. The present author's research with UCLA's Qumran Visualization Project produced a 3D digital model of Qumran (Cargill 2009b; <http://virtualqumran.com>), which allows viewers to experience a virtual reality reconstruction of multiple phases of Qumran's development. The model also provides a methodology by which to test and compare new proposed reconstructions. The Orion Center (<http://virtualqumran.huji.ac.il/>), Stephen Pfann and the University of the Holy Land (<http://www.uhl.ac/Qumran3D/Qumran3D.html>), and the Katholische Universität Eichstätt (http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/KTF/qumran/simu/sim_d.htm) have also produced digital reconstructions of Qumran that provide reconstructions and information about the site, each with different interpretations of the site. On the digital photography front, Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg

at USC's West Semitic Research Project (<http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/wsrp/>) have produced hundreds of high-resolution digital photographs of a number of the scrolls that are available to the public for scholarly study free of charge.

Why Qumran Matters

Regardless of which interpretation or combination of interpretations regarding Qumran is correct, the debate is sure to go on. This is because in archaeology context is everything and interpretations depend on what archaeologists consider part of a particular context. Regarding Qumran, the central issue is whether or not to consider the Dead Sea Scrolls as part of the context of Qumran.

If the scrolls are part of the context, then we have evidence of a literate community—perhaps even a scribal community—that greatly values texts. These texts are too numerous and possess too many differences in handwriting to be the product of a single scribe. Therefore, if the scrolls are considered part of the context of Qumran, we have additional support for an interpretation of the site as one inhabited by a community, and not merely a few individuals. Because of the sectarian nature of a large number of the scrolls, as well as the congruency of the anti-Jerusalem Temple priesthood stance contained within these sectarian scrolls taken from various caves, we must then identify this community as a sectarian community. And, if Qumran was the settlement for a sectarian community, and if the Dead Sea Scrolls were deposited in the caves near Qumran because the inhabitants of Qumran placed them there, then we have additional evidence that the Dead Sea Scrolls were a library of documents speaking to a small sectarian group of Jews that held biblical texts in high regard, and who wrote documents containing their own rules and hopes and expectations for the world to come as they understood it within their Jewish worldview. We can understand how this Jewish sect interpreted prophecy, how they interpreted the law, and how they lived together in community. While these same conclusions might be drawn from the scrolls alone, the context of a sectarian settlement at Qumran makes this interpretation much more likely.

However, others argue that we can derive many of these same conclusions without understanding Qumran as a sectarian settlement. Those who feel that the Dead Sea Scrolls are a disparate group of Jewish texts strewn among caves southeast of Jerusalem by Jews fleeing the Roman suppression of the Jewish revolt argue that these documents speak to the beautiful diversity of Jewish thought. Thus, Qumran is not important for some, because they either do not understand the scrolls to be a single collection, or they want Qumran to have a secular interpretation for whatever reason, including, perhaps, modern political reasons, as Qumran lies within the borders of the modern West Bank.

However, those who seek to distance the scrolls from Qumran have difficulty explaining how documents containing highly congruent sectarian thoughts and ideas—different from our accepted understanding of Pharisaic or priestly/

Zadokite ideas—would end up in different caves near an isolated place like Qumran. They have difficulty explaining how so many manuscripts and fragments critical of the occupants of the Temple, following a non-standard calendar, and mentioning the same characters like the Teacher of Righteousness, the Wicked Priest, and others would be scattered in different Jewish homes throughout Jerusalem while hardly any of the scrolls have anything positive whatsoever to say about the Jerusalem priesthood. The diversity of scripts might mean many different scribes over the years wrote and copied the manuscripts, or that the inhabitants of Qumran might have collected these documents over time. Regardless of how they got there, the similarity of thought, especially of the expectation of two messiahs (Collins 1995), the strict rules in the multiple copies of the manuals of discipline from multiple caves, the reliance on Jubilees, and the Damascus Document all speak to a congruency of a sectarian group distinct from anything else scholarship had known prior to the discovery of the scrolls.

Those who argue that Qumran has nothing to do with the scrolls have literally offered dozens of alternatives, from forts to vacation villas to agricultural compounds to tanneries to trade centers to pottery barns. The interpretations are so diverse that it seems if one forcibly removes the scrolls from Qumran, its interpretation is up for grabs. However, if one allows the scrolls to be a part of their rightful context, then the site appears to become a small home for a group of observant Jews, seeking to live in community with one another and away from others.

One theory that has gained some traction in recent years is that both groups may be partially correct. While Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra has suggested that different caves may represent different libraries from different time periods of the Qumran community (Stökl Ben Ezra 2007), Stephen Pfann argues it is possible that some of the caves may contain the remains of a library or *geniza* belonging to a sectarian community residing at Qumran, while other caves may have contained the remains of other groups fleeing Jerusalem (Fothergill 2010). Pfann has found some statistical correlation between the contents of the caves and their distance from the site (Pfann 2007). This theory, which was the focus of a recent National Geographic documentary, explains both the similarities and the differences of the scrolls. Simply put, some of the scrolls could be the product of a sect following their own *serekhs* (1QS, 1QSa, 1QSB) within a greater alternative Jewish movement following the Damascus Covenant (Collins 2010: 78-79), which resided at Qumran, while other scrolls may be the product of other, various groups that hid scrolls in caves near Qumran while fleeing Jerusalem. This explains the congruency of sectarian ideology *and* the diversity of the scrolls, as well as their presence in caves both in Qumran's backyard (Caves 7-9, 4-5) and those some distance from Qumran, as well as explaining the nature of the archaeological expansions made to the site of Qumran, which appear to be in a communal, non-military fashion.

While the state of the archaeology of Qumran may at times appear combative and scattered, I should like to argue that it is finally becoming what it should be: a place where all of the evidence is treated fairly, where different sides talk to and

collaborate with one another as professionals, where new ideas and interpretations are heard and debated publicly and not snuffed out in peer review or criticized by armies of anonymous sock puppets. The study of Qumran is finally growing up, as are its scholars.

Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls are important because they offer to us a glimpse of the incredible diversity within late Second Temple Judaism. Judaism was a vibrant socio-economic and cultural mix of people, accepting and rejecting various foreign influences such as Hellenism, which were working their way into the minds of the faithful. In addition, the Dead Sea Scrolls allow us to peer back into this world—into the minds of Jews experiencing occupation and oppression at the hands of foreigners, political upheaval, socio-economic instability, and uncertainty about the future. Perhaps the greatest appeal of the Dead Sea Scrolls is that they show us how this community clung to Scripture for comfort and to one another for hope in their collective future.

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