

Chapter Title: INTRODUCTION

Book Title: Back to Qumran

Book Subtitle: Final Report (1993-2004)

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Published by: Israel Antiquities Authority / תוקיִתְעָה תוֹשֵׁר, Staff Officer of Archaeology
— Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria. (2018)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1t8cdq.5>

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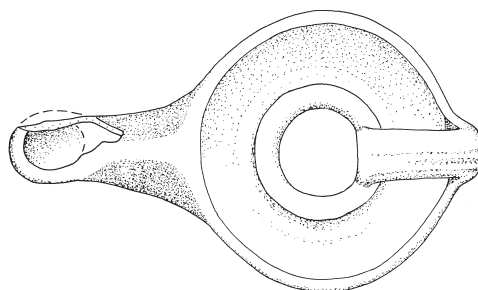


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PART I

THE RENEWED EXCAVATIONS AT QUMRAN

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INTRODUCTION

Qumran is located at the foot of the eastern slope of the fault scarp, on a marl shelf. The site is bounded by Naḥal Qumran to the south and by deep streambeds to the north, east, and west. The ruin is surrounded by valleys that impede its approach and protect it from water flowing down the hillslopes west of the Dead Sea. Runoff water reaches the site through a narrow marl strip that connects it with the fault scarp's eastern slopes and moderates its flow. Runoff channels drain excess water from the site. The establishment of the settlement at this site in the Iron Age indicates that it was the only area suitable for settlement along the fault scarp that would not be inundated. This fact is important for understanding settlement continuity from the Iron Age to the Second Temple period, and also explains the cemetery's location east of the site.

The site was first excavated following the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1947. Soundings were initially conducted in the caves in the fault scarp and in the marl stratum in the vicinity of the site, and excavations at Qumran were conducted from 1951 to 1956. The excavations were based on the assumption, still accepted to the present, that the sect that wrote the scrolls and concealed them in the surrounding caves in the wake of the Great Revolt lived at Qumran. The excavations were first headed by G. Lankester Harding, on behalf of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, and by Fr. R. de Vaux, on behalf of the French *École biblique*, and then solely by de Vaux, who published the excavation findings. Archaeological and epigraphical research of Qumran has been impeded because to the present, only preliminary rather than final reports were published by the excavator (de Vaux 1953; 1954; 1956; 1973) and the plethora of scholarly opinions and various theories advanced since then regarding

the nature of the site are a direct consequence of this. The presumed final publication by J.-B. Humbert and A. Chambon does not give answers to many questions raised by the excavation findings, and is nothing more than a collection of photographs and excavation notes made by de Vaux (Humbert and Chambon 1994). Following our renewal of the excavations in 1993 and the completion of the publication of the scroll fragments that remained in the storerooms of the Israel Antiquities Authority, the debates concerning the nature of the site resumed, along with recurring requests, some from outside the field of archaeology, to conduct soundings (Magen and Peleg 2006; 2008).

De Vaux divided the phases of the site into a number of periods based more on historical distinctions and the finds than on firm stratigraphic data. Many sought to confirm de Vaux's determinations, while others attempted to rewrite the archaeology, history, and periods of the site. Yet others rejected de Vaux's final conclusions regarding the site's character and offered new theories, regarding both the nature of the site and the presence of the Dead Sea scrolls in the surrounding caves.

De Vaux divided the history of the site into the following periods:

1. The first period is dated to Iron Age II. Finds from the eighth and seventh centuries BCE were revealed both in de Vaux's and in the renewed excavations. Most of the vessels from this period were found in the conflagration strata, which included few wall remains. Apparently, this was a temporary settlement consisting mainly of wooden structures, shelters, and tents, used when it was possible to collect runoff water from Naḥal Qumran and the fault scarp. The site was destroyed in the Babylonian conquest, along with several others along the Jordan Valley.



Fig. 2. Qumran, view from the north.

2. Period Ia—after a lengthy hiatus, settlement at the site was renewed in the late second to early first century BCE (Hasmonean period). De Vaux hesitatingly dated this period to 143–134 BCE, the time of Simeon the Hasmonean, or to the time of his predecessor, Jonathan the Hasmonean (160–143 BCE).
3. Period Ib—dated to the time of Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE). According to de Vaux, in this period the structures reached their final form.
4. Period II—dated to the first century CE, until 70 CE.
5. Period III—the settlement of a Roman garrison force, dated to 72–73 CE. A number of coins from the time of Bar-Kokhba (132–135 CE) were revealed, as well.

De Vaux's division into periods was a puzzling combination of three elements: stratigraphy, history, and chronology. While different stratigraphic phases at the site can be dated, and the chronology can be based on the stratigraphy, the three parameters cannot be combined without firm archaeological or historical



Fig. 3. Qumran, view from the east.

INTRODUCTION

grounding. De Vaux based his conclusions solely on doubtful historical events and numismatic data. Changes occurred in the structure, which stood for some 170 years, including additions and renovations. It was not always possible to date the changes, even if the stratigraphic data were clear. Consequently, the determinations occasionally made by de Vaux in his publications—that some entrance or wall belong to a certain period—cannot be accepted as verified and unequivocal facts. We will attempt below to simplify the stratigraphic determinations of Qumran, and place them in two main periods: A and B.

It is noteworthy that there was no settlement at the site in the Persian and early Hellenistic periods, nor any attempt to establish a monastery in the Byzantine period. This testimony clarifies that the settlement was renewed by a governmental rather than a civilian body, due to economic and settlement advantages. Settlement at the site could not be explained by natural advantages that would attract settlers like farmers. The source of the water supply at the site is dependent on precipitation rather than from a spring. The site is not situated at a crossroads that would facilitate trade, etc. Apparently, a temporary settlement that utilized runoff water was established at the site in the Iron Age. During the Hasmonean period a structure of a governmental-military nature was erected, which in the second phase served as a center for pottery vessel production. Settlement at the site, excluding in the Iron Age, was due to governmental needs rather than to the site's advantages.

In 1993, about forty years after de Vaux completed his excavations and published his preliminary report, excavations at Qumran were renewed as part of a large scale project initially called "Operation Scroll," which included extensive surveyal of all the caves from north of Jericho to 'En-Gedi ('Atiqot 41 [1–2], 2002). We began excavations free of any scientific agendas, and at the outset we, too, reiterated the accepted statements about the Essenes' settling at the site and writing the scrolls. It was only when we expanded the excavations, which continued for about ten years, that we began having doubts about the nature of the site and questioned the conclusions drawn by de Vaux and those following in his footsteps (Magness 1997; 2002; 2013). For ten years, parts of the southern plateau and of the southern refuse

dump were excavated, and limited soundings were conducted throughout the built area.

Excavations were renewed once again in 1996 and continued until 1999. During these years the area north of the site was excavated and the northern refuse dump revealed, alongside which was an overflow channel to prevent the site from flooding. Excavations also uncovered an aqueduct installed in the fault scarp plateau to channel runoff on its eastern slopes. The excavations also unearthed a paved square south of Hall L77, which de Vaux and other scholars had called the "refectory" of the Essene sect; along with remains in the southeastern wing of the site, which yielded Iron Age finds.

Excavations were renewed in 2001–2002, following a request by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority to erect sheds on the east of the site, beyond the surrounding stone wall. This excavation continued uninterrupted for more than six months, covering an extensive area along the bounding eastern wall that yielded numerous finds dated from the First Temple to late Second Temple period, including animal bones. The area east of pool L48–L49, as well, was excavated in this season.

Excavations were renewed in 2003 to 2004, this time independently initiated, focusing on pool L71, whose excavation was not completed by de Vaux. Excavation of the pool bottom was meant to confirm a theory that had begun being formulated in that period, which will be discussed at length below. According to this theory, in the first century CE Qumran was a center for the collection of clay brought to the site by runoff water during floods, and for pottery vessel production. Indeed, excavation of the pool bottom revealed about three tons of fine clay. Pool L91, excavated in 2014, also contained fine clay. It is worth noting that de Vaux mentioned the existence of fine material for pottery manufacture in his excavation notes.

The main difficulty faced during the new excavations and their publication was how to relate to an archaeological excavation conducted a generation earlier, for which the excavator had not published a final report, but which over the years had become a focal point for (mainly theoretical) intensive research, and the battleground for disagreements between scholars. The difficulty raised by the Qumran excavations does



Fig. 4. Qumran, fault scarp above the site, view from the east.



Fig. 5. Qumran, with Dead Sea in background, view from the west.

INTRODUCTION



Fig. 6. Nahal Qumran and caves 4-5 and 7-10.

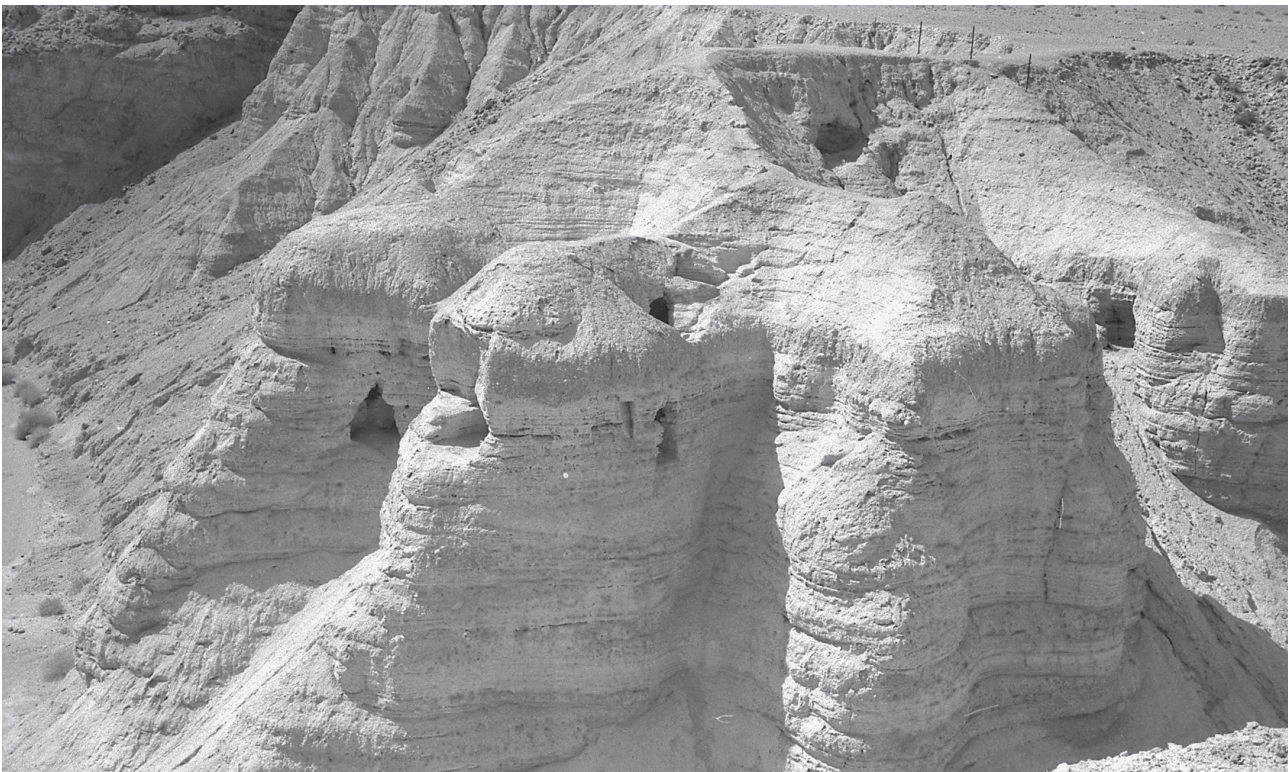


Fig. 7. Qumran caves 4-5.

not result only from de Vaux's preliminary reports and the absence of a final publication; it also ensues from the long time that had elapsed between the completion of his excavations and the deluge of articles on the site published with no solid scientific basis by scholars. At the conclusion of our excavations we drew revolutionary conclusions regarding the nature of the site and its use, which received wide coverage in the media and generated extensive activity in the scientific community.

During the course of the renewed excavations the entire site was measured, sketched, and photographed. Detailed plans were drawn up, despite the objective limitations faced after the preservation and reconstruction of the site, and the absence of useful original plans. Additionally, the considerable time that had passed since the initiation of the first excavations, as well as the site being a tourist site, with paths, a lookout point, signs, and visitors, impeded the excavations and their documentation.

We continued to use the site description, the loci numbers, and the descriptions given by de Vaux, to afford continuity between the old and new excavations. In the 1993 excavation season, when an excavation was conducted in the area of one of the loci that de Vaux had excavated, the new locus was given a similar number (e.g., L10/1 in room L10), while new loci numbers were given in the new excavations conducted after that season. The new loci numbers were incorporated in those assigned by de Vaux. We numbered walls, which de Vaux had not done, to facilitate the readers' identification of the parts of the excavation. Since we saw no reason to reiterate de Vaux's site description, we are including a complete list of the loci, including those neither appearing in the plans nor mentioned in the site description, with a short description of each (see "List of Loci," in this volume).

Qumran was not a settlement inhabited by many generations of families that had expanded, with the consequent addition of structures and streets. It was established as a governmental structure of military nature, and later became a center for the production of clay and pottery vessels. Some changes made were due to deterioration over the course of time, but most resulted from changes in the structure's function. The site might have been abandoned for a short period

between the two phases. Residential structures were not established in and around Qumran, although some of the workers might have lived there with their families.

We will attempt to prove the theory that emerged from our new, mainly stratigraphic, division of the site into phases A and B.

Phase A is the first phase of the establishment of the structure, in the Hasmonean period (late second to early first century BCE). The governmental-military structure was established either by Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE), or by his father, John Hyrcanus I (134–104 BCE), and continued to exist in the reign of Herod (37–4 BCE). The structure was built in the Hellenistic style, to the accepted standard in governmental construction of the time. The original plan of the Phase A structure, built in the Hasmonean period by the authorities for military purposes, consisted of: a courtyard, surrounded by rooms built with straight plastered walls, with two towers located at the front; doorposts and thresholds of ashlar construction (many ashlars were found at the site, at times in secondary use); a round cistern; and a planned cemetery, in which the graves were dug in an orderly manner, in straight rows. The absence of arches and vaults is indicative of the period when the structure was erected.

Phase B, the second phase of the structure, is to be dated from the first century CE until the destruction of the Second Temple (this phase might have begun earlier, in the late first century BCE). The governmental military structure lost its military importance due to historical events that occurred in Judea, and might have been abandoned for a short period. Subsequently, it could have been taken over by the government, or possibly by civilians, becoming a center for clay production and for manufacturing pottery vessels. The renewed excavations definitely show that pottery vessels were manufactured at the site, and some of the clay might have been sold to Jericho or other locations. This conclusion is based on the large number of firing ovens, the production refuse, and the numerous pottery vessels uncovered in the excavations; no other reasonable explanation can be offered for their presence in such a small site.

Thus we have two distinct stratigraphic phases. In the Summary we will discuss the periods listed by

INTRODUCTION

de Vaux and those who accepted his division, but the architectural description will relate solely to the two phases we discerned, A and B. At times we will mention de Vaux's opinion concerning a specific detail in the description of the finds, but not his chronological, historical, and stratigraphic division.

The Qumran site contains two structures, the central building and the western one. In Phase A the central structure, Hellenistic in style, consisted of a courtyard with surrounding rooms; and the western one was apparently a service structure, possibly a stable for horses and mules used by soldiers garrisoned at the site. In Phase B, the structure's shape changed: pools were installed in its rooms for the collection of the raw clay material used in the production process. The western structure similarly changed: it became part of the pottery center, and small pools were installed there for soaking the clay.

Two additional elements characteristic of Qumran that gave it its architectural and archaeological

distinctness led scholars to view it as the center of a Dead Sea sect, whose bodily purification and burial practices presumably were different from that of other Jewish groups: tremendous pools installed at the site that, according to the prevalent scholarly opinion, were used by the Essenes for purification; and the cemetery. The discovery of scrolls in caves around the site, its location in an area lacking water sources and settled sites, its singular structure, the water system, the distinctive cemetery, and the large number of graves, led most scholars to accept the theory that this was the settlement of the Essene sect, with its ritual and cultural distinctness mentioned by Josephus (*War* II, 119–161) and others.

In the site description and mainly in the following discussion, we will offer different explanations for the discoveries revealed at Qumran that were incorrectly understood, based on the initial conception that a sect whose religious rite diverged from normative Judaism lived at the site.

