

Three seasons of excavations at Qumran

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Three seasons of excavations were conducted at Khirbet Qumran in 1995-96, 2001, and 2002. The first two seasons have been published elsewhere and will only be summarized; the third, published here for the first time, will be treated in greater detail.¹ The various areas of our excavations are indicated on fig. 1.

Two new artificial caves (1995-96)

The primary purpose of the 1995-96 season was to search for hitherto-unidentified artificial caves in the marl terrace north of the compound of Khirbet Qumran, which most scholars believe to have been the home of a Jewish, Essene, and monastic movement between c.100 B.C. and the year 68 of the present era.² Between 1952 and 1955, R. de Vaux excavated 8 artificial dwelling-caves, five to the west and three to the south of the compound. These caves, which had been dug in the soft marl, were quite spacious, well ventilated, and had level floors, quite unlike natural caves in the nearby limestone cliffs which are uninhabitable. In de Vaux's caves were found remains of pottery vessels used for storage and cooking as well as tableware; also present were food remains, a mat, and possibly even mezuzah (parchment with pentateuchal texts, to be attached to door-posts of Jewish houses), all of which testify to the caves being used for habitation.³

This is in contrast to the compound proper where no living quarters have been positively identified,⁴ it is possible that sleeping quarters may have been on a second floor, attested by the remains of a stairway (13), but even if that upper storey served as a dormitory it could not have been used by more than about 10 persons.⁵ Another staircase leading to a second floor, locus 113, served probably a dining-hall.⁶ As we estimate the community of Qumran to have numbered c.120-150, there can be no doubt that most resided in caves. If a dormitory did exist within the compound, it may have served the elderly and incapacitated. The small lavatory in locus 51 may have been made specifically for the feeble members, while the remainder were required to defecate at a minimum distance away from the compound, using the mandatory mattock (Jos., *BJ* 2.147-49).⁷

A network of paths, which we believed and which were shown to be ancient, led to what appeared to be collapsed caves. They had not been mentioned in the previous archaeological literature although all had been dug clandestinely by Bedouins. Due to the precarious state of these caves, the floor could not be reached in most. On the floor of Cave C, located c.200 m north of the compound (fig. 1), we found 280 potsherds. In the débris of Cave F, we found 110 potsherds. All the pottery from those caves belongs to the last century before and the first century after the turn of the era. These two caves prove that there existed to the north a 'troglodyte' residential quarter, like the one to the south and west. Despite the danger of collapsing walls, further work in this area would be rewarding.

About 100 m north of the compound and in the vicinity of these caves, we found several half-buried vessels: 4 bowls and 1 goblet, along with 3 coins from the 1st c. of the present era. We also found a tent pole,

1 M. Broshi and H. Eshel, "Residential caves at Qumran," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 6 (1999) 328-48; H. Eshel and M. Broshi, "Excavations at Qumran, summer 2001," *IEJ* 53 (2003) 61-73. We wish to thank again all those who generously aided our work in those seasons, with special thanks to John and Carol Merrill (Standardville, VA) and the Frankel Foundation.

2 M. Broshi, "Was Qumran, indeed, a monastery?" in id., *Bread, wine, walls and scrolls* (Sheffield 2001) 273; M. Broshi and H. Eshel, "Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls: the contention of the twelve theories," in D. Edwards (ed.), *Religion and society in Roman Palestine: old questions and new approaches* (forthcoming).

3 Broshi and Eshel 1999 (supra n.1) 332-34.

4 J. Patrich, "Did extra-mural dwelling quarters exist at Qumran?" in L. H. Schiffman, E. Tov and J. C. VanderKam (edd.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls fifty years after the discovery* (Jerusalem 2000) 720-27.

5 The putative area of this dormitory is 70-80 sq. m (above loci 1, 2, 4 and 30). Taking into consideration the average standards for modern prisons (e.g., Canada and the UK, 7 sq. m. per prisoner; France and Denmark, 12 sq. m.), there seems little reason why the density in the hot climate of the Rift Valley should have been higher.

6 J. Magness, *The archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI 2002) 125-26.

7 J. Magness, "Two notes on the archaeology of Qumran," *BASOR* 312 (1998) 37-40; ead. (supra n.6) 105-13.