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### THE 1990 SURVEY OF QUMRAN CAVES

The first survey of the cliffs near Qumran was primarily a search for more Dead Sea Scrolls<sup>1</sup>. In February of 1952 bedouin tribesmen uncovered a second cache of scrolls in a cave less than 100 meters from where the first scrolls had been discovered nearly 5 years earlier. Now that it was apparent that other caves might contain scrolls, a search of the caves near Qumran was undertaken by archaeologists. The March 1952 survey (including brief follow-ups in subsequent years)<sup>2</sup> covered an 8-kilometer range of cliffs. Among the 43 loci which showed traces of human utilization was a third scroll cave which yielded the Copper Scroll and various fragments of other works on parchment. The survey was called to an end due partly to illness among the bedouin workers and the intense heat, but it was apparent that much remained to be done. Some follow-up work was done by R. de Vaux et al., but this entailed further soundings in some of the more promising caves.

Several subsequent developments underscored the need for a broader survey or series of surveys that would cover the same territory as the 1952 survey and then continue south. First, the area of the first cave survey continued to yield caves well after

<sup>1</sup> Roland de Vaux, "Archéologie", *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan III* (1962), pp. 3-36; idem., "Revue Biblique", 60 (1953), pp. 83 ff., William Reed, *The Qumran Caves Expedition of March 1952*, "Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research" 135 (1954), pp. 8-13.

<sup>2</sup> R. de Vaux, *DJD III*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

the '52 survey, including 8 more scroll-bearing caves near Qumran. Second, the area south of the survey limit was shown to be very active in antiquity at Khirbet Mazin, 'En el-Ghuweir, Wadi Murabba'at, 'En-Gedi, and elsewhere<sup>3</sup>. Third, excavations at Khirbet Qumran and its dependency at 'En Feshkha, as well as 'En el-Ghuweir revealed that these buildings were used for many things, but not as domiciles. Qumran, for example, was a center for pottery production, fresh water storage, common meals, etc. But it was in the caves scattered throughout the cliffs that the community lived. Pessah Bar-Adon worked extensively in this southern region, excavating some important sites such as 'En el-Ghuweir, but to our knowledge an extensive survey concentrating on the caves in the extremely rugged hills and cliffs had not been attempted in any systematic way.

With this in mind, a group of volunteers from the United States, Australia, and England under the direction of Professor Robert Eisenman of California State University, Long Beach and Professor James Battenfield, also of CSULB, set out in January 1990 to survey a wide section of the Dead Sea coastline. Four teams, each comprised of a leader and three of four trained volunteers, searched the terrain along the Dead Sea coast, locating and searching caves, and examining surface potsherds or other artifacts, but conducting no soundings. The teams described what they found as thoroughly as possible, noting the caves' locations, dimensions, and classifying the caves in terms of their possible utilization. They also provided other information such as the caves' accessibility, their position in relation to water sources, and of course, the presence of pottery fragments. This method of surveying proved to be a quick and

<sup>3</sup> For 'En el-Ghuweir, see P. Bar-Adon, *Another Settlement of the Judaean Desert Sect at 'En el-Ghuweir on the Shores of the Dead Sea*, "Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research" 227 (1977), pp. 1-25. For Khirbet Mazin, see H.-E. Stutchbury and G.-R. Nicholl, *Khirbet Mazin*, "Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan", VI-VII (1962), pp. 96-103, pls. XVIII-XXIII. For Murabba'at, see R. de Vaux, "I. Archéologie" in *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert. II: Les grottes de Murabba'at*, (1961), pp. 3-36. For En-Gedi, see B. Mazar, T. Dothan and E. Dunayevsky, *En-Gedi: The First and Second Seasons of Excavations 1961-1962*, "Atiqot" V (1966).

efficient way to gather worthwhile data and still cover a very wide area.

A 24-kilometer range was surveyed, from an area 5 km. north of Khirbet Qumran to Wadi Murabba'at in the south. A total of 137 proper caves were noted by the survey teams, 85 of which showed signs of human utilization in the past. These caves have been in use at various times, from the Chalcolithic period to this century. By "proper" cave, we mean a cave of sufficient size to have been used by humans. This total does not include "blind" caves (which appear to be caves from a distance but prove to be rather shallow) or deep holes or crevices. Over 200 blind caves and crevices were counted by the survey teams.

But our search through the hills and cliffs yielded far more than caves. Painstakingly built aqueducts high in almost inaccessible areas, a dressed-stone cave entrance, several ancient gravesites, traces of an ancient road, the presence of datable potsherds, and more enabled us to piece together a picture of an amazing area that is yet to be fully understood.

The caves were classified in the following ways:

1. *Caves with evidence of human utilization.* Ceilings blackened by smoke from fires, potsherds, terraced or otherwise modified entrances were some of the signs of utilization. There was a total of 85 caves of this type, with a few possibly used as storage areas. Note: "Utilization" does not necessarily mean "habitation".

2. *Caves that were large enough for habitation, but lacked evidence of this on the surface* (no soundings were made during the survey). There were 42 of this type. A good example of this kind was found two kilometers north of Wadi Murabba'at. Although it was 10' high, 25' deep and about 6' wide and had a level floor and a good entrance, we could not find conclusive proof that the cave was inhabited or otherwise utilized in antiquity.

3. *Caves that looked promising but that could not be reached by our survey team.* There were 10 of this type.

4. *Caves that were too small for humans; crevices; "blind" caves.* There were approximately 200 of this type, and they were not included in our total of proper caves as previously

stated. Some of this type have been used as temporary shelter from rain or sun by bedouin.

Within the geographical limits of the 1952 survey we were able to chart some additional caves. This includes Scroll caves 4Q—11Q, as well as 12 others showing signs of human utilization, 14 of type 2, and 3 uninvestigated. There were 77 caves in that 8-kilometer range.

Between the southern limit of the 1952 survey and Wadi Murabba'at there were 60 caves: 25 of type 1, 28 of type 2, and 7 of type 3.

The number of caves per kilometer is highest adjacent to and just north of Qumran. This area obviously accommodated the most people, and in areas where there were more caves, there is a higher percentage of type 1 caves. There were no proper caves beyond the northern limit of the survey because here the limestone hills are considerably smoother and there are few crevices and no caves, thus forming a natural northern limit to the survey.

While high-density areas had a higher percentage of type 1 caves, we were struck by the number of quite isolated caves that had been utilized. In fact, Second Temple potsherds were fairly evenly distributed the length of the survey.

Just outside the mouths of the caves, one could quite easily find potsherds either on the ground or perhaps by rummaging through a pile of rocks. This is not generally true of the cave interiors, which for centuries have accumulated bat-dung and other debris. The potsherds could usually be classified quite easily into general groups: Chalcolithic, First Temple or Iron Age, Second Temple, which of course includes Roman and Qumran-style pottery, Byzantine, and later (Medieval, Mamluke, other Arab, etc.). Archeologist Dan Bahat instructed the teams in pottery identification.

Potsherds were found in 35 different areas. 24 of these areas yielded Second Temple sherds. First Temple or Iron Age potsherds were found at 12 loci, and there were occasional Chalcolithic, Early Bronze, Byzantine, late Medieval, Mamluke, and Arab potsherds. The potsherd evidence fits well with the archeological evidence from the ruins in the area. Together they

suggest a bustling and widespread population during the turbulent Second Temple period.

Many caves occupied in this period seem to have been chosen primarily for their defensive advantages. Crude aqueducts were found in 3 places besides the one above Qumran, and in two of these places the choice of locations is notable for its inaccessibility. In fact, some of the best Second Temple caves were visible neither from the plain below nor the hilltops above. Many of these caves have entrances so small that they can only be crawled through, and thus can be very difficult to locate. But once inside, the cave may open up into a large room with side chambers or an upper room. Clearly, this type of rugged terrain with hidden caves would have made an ideal haven for guerilla-style fighters during the revolts which marked the Second Temple period, from the Maccabean revolt to the Bar Kochba revolt. One can easily imagine the Romans fearing to engage the Jews in these rugged areas, where the terrain can be labyrinthine to anyone that had not lived there for some time.

What is clear is that the coastline was populated as far south as our survey ventured, and the range of occupied area almost certainly continues further still. The picture that is emerging is of an entire region that supported a population from just north of Qumran to at least as far south as Wadi Murabba'at. The relation of the buildings at 'En el-Ghuweir with Qumran and 'En Feshkha is clearer after this survey; they are probably closely related, not just by coin data, pottery styles, and destruction layers, but also by the fact that many caves all along the 10-or-so kilometers of cliffline between them were occupied.