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THE SITE OF QUMRAN AND THE SECTARIAN COMMUNITIES IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

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The first batch of scrolls discovered in 1947 near Qumran, by the Dead Sea, famously included the Rule of the Community, or Serek Hayakhad, also known as 1QS.1 The press release issued by Millar Burrows on behalf of the American Schools of Oriental Research on April 11, 1948, said that this text “seemed to be a manual of discipline of some comparatively little-known sect or monastic order, possibly the Essenes.”2 The idea that this “monastic” sect lived at Qumran did not arise immediately. Initially the ruins at Qumran were thought to be the remains of a Roman fort. But when Roland de Vaux and Lankaster Harding began to excavate the site in November–December 1951, they found a jar, identical to the ones in which the first scrolls had been found, embedded in the floor of one of the rooms. They inferred that the scrolls were related to the site after all. In his account of the excavation, Harding wrote:

it would appear, then, that the people who lived at Khirbet Qumran deposited the scrolls in the cave, probably about A.D. 70. The situation fits in well with Pliny the Elder’s account of the Essenes, who had a settlement “above Engeddi,” and the ruin itself, with its peculiar cemetery which is without parallel in other sites in Jordan, is clearly not an ordinary defensive or agricultural post.3

The association of the scrolls with the site was cemented in 1952, when the Bedouin discovered Cave 4, with a trove of more than five hundred manuscripts, at the edge of the marl plateau, literally a stone’s throw from the ruins. Several other caves containing scrolls were discovered in the immediate vicinity.

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Once the connection between the scrolls and the site of Qumran had been established, it became customary to refer to the community described in 1QS as “the Qumran community,” and to suppose that Qumran was the sectarian settlement *par excellence*. According to J. T. Milik, this rule was the work of the Teacher and “gave its special character to Qumrân monastic life in the first strict phase of Esseneism.”4 Frank Moore Cross argued that “the term *yahad*, ‘community,’ seems to apply to the community *par excellence*, i.e., the principal settlement in the desert. The Qumrân settlement is probably unique, not only in being the original ‘exile in the desert,’ the home of the founder of the sect, but also in following a celibate rule.”5 Cross allowed that it was “possible, but not probable . . . that more than one community could be termed the *yahad*.”6 Thus the tendency developed to regard Qumran as the setting for all the scrolls, or at least for the community described in 1QS.

**Another Rule Book**

Almost from the beginning, however, it was realized that the situation was more complicated than that. It was immediately apparent that there was some relationship between the newly discovered Community Rule and a text that had been discovered in the Cairo Geniza in 1896, which had come to be known as the Damascus Document (or CD, Cairo Damascus) because of references to a new covenant in the land of Damascus. This document also described a sectarian movement. Not only were there similarities in the organization of the communities described in the two rule books, but also CD contained several code names that now reappeared for the first time in the scrolls. These included “Teacher of Righteousness,” “sons of Zadok,” and “man of the lie.” The relationship was subsequently confirmed when fragments of the Damascus Rule were found in Qumran Cave 4.7 In 1955, Burrows wrote:

> The form of the organization and its rules are found in the Damascus Document and the Manual of Discipline. We have seen that these two documents have a great deal in common, though there are sufficient differences to show that they do not come from exactly the same group. They may represent different branches of the same movement or different stages in its history, if not both.8

Milik supposed that the Damascus Rule was a secondary development, drawn up by “a fairly important group” who “left the community at Qumran and settled in the region of Damascus, without, however, abandoning the priestly charac-

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6 Ibid.
ter of the movement’s theology, and remaining in communion with the ‘mother house.’” Cross also supposed that 1QS was the older rule and that CD was a secondary development.

More recent scholarship, however, has generally favored the priority of CD. The Damascus Rule preserves the older, simpler form of community structure, while the Community Rule, or Serek, is more developed. In CD, the admission process requires only a simple oath. This simple process is also found in 1QS 5:7c–9a, but it is followed by a much more elaborate, multiyear process in 1QS 6. The Damascus (D) community required the contribution of two days’ salary per month. The Serek requires full community property. The D rule places restrictions on sexual activity. The Serek does not speak of women or children at all. The Damascus Rule is critical of the Jerusalem temple. The Serek imagines the community as an alternative temple. Each of these cases suggests that the line of development was from the more primitive kind of organization found in the D rule to the more elaborate provisions of the Serek. It is not the case that one rule simply superseded the other. Both were copied throughout the first century BCE. Equally, there is no evidence that the differences between the two rules were due to a schism. Rather, it appears that within one broad movement some people opted for a stricter, more demanding form of community life.

**Multiple Settlements**

The yahad, however, cannot be identified simply with one settlement in the wilderness, “the Qumran community.” We read in 1QS 6:

In this way shall they behave in all their places of residence. Whenever one fellow meets another, the junior shall obey the senior in work and in money. They shall eat together, together they shall bless and together they shall take counsel. In every place where there are ten men of the council of the community, there should not be missing amongst them a priest . . . And in the place in which the ten assemble there should not be missing a man to interpret the law day and night, always, one relieving another. (1QS 6:1c–8a)

“The council of the community” cannot be distinguished from “the community” or yahad. The plain meaning of this passage is that the yahad consists of multiple communities, with a minimum of ten members. Some scholars have tried to deny this by arguing that the passage refers to members traveling outside of

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9 Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery*, 90.
12 The passage is attested in 4QS4, although the text is fragmentary.
community or that the “places of residence” are temporary structures. But multiple settlements are just what we should expect if the movement in question is identical with the Essene sect, as most scholars suppose. Josephus writes of the Essen:

“They have no one city, but many settle in each city; and when any of the sectarians come from elsewhere, all things they have lie available to them.” Josephus clearly assumes that Essenes, apparently of the same order, live in many cities. Similarly, Philo says that the Essenes “live in a number of towns in Judaea, and also in many villages and large groups.” Scholarship seems to have lost sight of these statements about the Essenes when it focuses exclusively on the site of Qumran.

The view that that the yahad was an association dispersed in multiple settlements may also shed light on one of the more puzzling aspects of the Qumran rule books. The fragments of Cave 4 show that both the D rule and the Serek existed in different recensions and that both were copied repeatedly during the first century BCE. Sarianna Metso has made a convincing argument that some later copies of the Serek preserve earlier redactional stages, while the most developed edition, in 1QS, is found in the earliest manuscript. Philip Davies has questioned whether the rules reflect actual community practice: “If the ‘rule’ is a rule, there can be only one version in effect at any one time. The paradox obliges us to reconsider our premises: is 1QS a ‘community rule’ at all?” But as Metso has argued, “it was not academic interest which motivated the Qumranic scribes in their editorial work but rather the changes which had taken place in the life and practices of the community.” If we bear in mind that there were many settlements of the yahad, however, a new explanation becomes possible. Not all the scrolls found at Qumran were copied on site. Some may have been brought there from different settlements, which may have been operating with different editions of the Community Rule. In short, the different forms of the Serek may not have been copied side by side in the same community but may have been in effect in different communities at the same time. (This possibility also undercuts the question raised by Davies as to

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15 Josephus, J.W. 2.124.


whether the Serek was a community rule at all.) Scrolls from various communities would have been brought to Qumran for hiding in time of crisis.

Reference to Qumran?

Do the DSS, or the Serek in particular, ever refer to a settlement at Qumran? Needless to say, the text never indicates a specific location. It does, however, speak of a group that is to go to the wilderness to prepare there the way of the Lord. From the early days of scholarship on the scrolls, scholars have seen here a specific reference to the settlement by the Dead Sea.

The passage is found in 1QS 8. The opening section (8:1–4a) announces that there shall be “in the council of the community twelve men and three priests, perfect in everything that has been revealed from all the law” (8:1). This section is followed by three paragraphs, each of which begins with the phrase “when these are in Israel.” The first of these, beginning in 8:4b, claims for the sectarian group the function of atonement, which was traditionally proper to the temple cult. The second paragraph begins in 8:12b: “when these are a community in Israel21 . . . they shall be separated from the midst of the dwelling of the men of iniquity, to go to the wilderness to prepare there the way of Him, as it is written, ‘in the wilderness prepare the way of *** . . . ’ This is the study of the law, which he commanded by the hand of Moses.” The third paragraph, beginning in 9:3, reads, “when these are in Israel in accordance with these rules in order to establish the spirit of holiness in truth eternal.” This passage is not found in 4QS\$, which lacks 8:15–9:11. The paragraph beginning in 9:3 seems to duplicate 8:4b–10 and may be a secondary insertion.22

In the early days of scrolls scholarship, the twelve men and three priests were understood as an inner council.23 It is not apparent, however, that they have any administrative role. In an influential article published in 1959, E. F. Sutcliffe dubbed them “The First Fifteen Members of the Qumran Community.”24 In this he was followed by Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, who labeled the passage “an Essene manifesto.”25 This view has been widely, though not universally, accepted. Michael Knibb spoke for many when he wrote:

This material thus appears to be the oldest in the Rule and to go back to the period shortly before the Qumran community came into existence; it may be regarded as

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21 The word ליחד (“a community”) is inserted above the line and appears to be missing in 4QS\$.
23 So Milik, Ten Years of Discovery, 100.
reflecting the aims and ideals of conservative Jews who were disturbed by the way in which the Maccabean leaders were conducting affairs, and whose decision to withdraw into the wilderness was motivated by the desire to be able to observe strictly God’s laws in the way that they believed to be right. It probably dates from the middle of the second century BC.²⁶

This view does not withstand a close analysis of the text.

The text of 1QS 8:1, “In the council of the community (there shall be) twelve men and three priests,” can be read in either of two ways. The twelve men and three priests can be taken to constitute the council of the community or to be a special group within it. It is possible to take the verse to mean that the twelve men and three priests are a special subgroup within the council of the yahad. (The council of the yahad is simply the yahad itself). This is in fact how they are understood in 1QS 8:10–11: “When these have been established in the fundamental principles of the community for two years in perfection of way, they shall be set apart as holy within the council of the men of the community.” They are not, then, a council in the sense of an administrative or executive body. Rather, they are an elite group set aside for special training. The establishment of such a group is necessary for the completion of the yahad: “when these exist in Israel the council of the community is established in truth” (8:5). The group in question cannot be taken to constitute the whole yahad, at any stage of its existence.²⁷ Rather, as Leaney already saw, “the community or movement out of which it arose must have been represented by groups dispersed throughout the land.”²⁸ The elite group does not break away from the yahad, nor does it found a separate organization. It may be said to found a new community, but it is a community that is an integral part of the broader yahad. The text (1QS 8:10–11) says quite clearly that certain people who have been established in the community for two years will be set apart as holy in its midst. In the extant text, the antecedent is the group of twelve men and three priests.

Unfortunately, we do not know what part this group played in the history of the movement. The numbers have symbolic significance, referring to the twelve tribes and three priestly families,²⁹ and we cannot be sure that this group ever came to be. Moreover, the command to prepare in the wilderness the way of the Lord is taken from Scripture and is interpreted allegorically in the text:

As it is written: In the desert prepare the way of ****, in the wilderness make level a highway for our God. This is the study of the law which he commanded through the hand of Moses, in order to act in compliance with all that has been revealed from age to age, and according to what the prophets have revealed through his holy spirit.³⁰

²⁶ Knibb, Qumran Community, 129.
²⁹ Milik, Ten Years of Discovery, 100.
Symbolism does not preclude literal enactment, and the fact that this text was found beside an inhabited site in the wilderness is hard to dismiss as mere coincidence. Accordingly, the suspicion persists that the retreat of this pioneering group to the wilderness marked the beginning of “the Qumran community.” If so, it should be noted that it did not arise from a schism in a parent group and did not by itself constitute the *yahad* but was part of a larger whole. It would also, of course, have to have grown in size. But while the identification of this group with the founding of the Qumran community is attractive, it is by no means certain.

If the passage in 1QS 8 does indeed refer to the beginnings of the settlement at Qumran, then that settlement would appear to be an offshoot of the main association, or perhaps a kind of retreat center where people could devote themselves to the pursuit of holiness to an exceptional degree. There is nothing to suggest that this settlement would become the headquarters or motherhouse of the sect. Neither, it should be noted, is there any mention of a motherhouse in the Greek and Latin accounts of the Essenes. Pliny writes about an Essene settlement near the Dead Sea because he happens to be giving an account of that geographical region. He does not indicate any awareness of other Essene settlements. Philo and Josephus, however, emphasize that the Essenes live in multiple locations, with no indication that any one took precedence.31 The passage in 1QS 8, in any case, is too enigmatic to allow us to deduce much about a settlement in the wilderness, and its historical and geographical value remains uncertain.

### The Date of the Movement

In light of what we have seen, the attempt to correlate the ruins of Qumran with the life of the sect known from the scrolls appears hazardous. The common assumption in older scholarship that the Teacher “led his flock to the desert” is unsubstantiated. If 1QS 8 is indeed a reference to “the move to the desert,” then presumably the *yahad* had been in existence for some time before that happened. The only clue to the date of this passage is provided by the paleographic date of the manuscript of 1QS, which has been estimated at 75 BCE, plus or minus twenty-five years, and falls within the same range as Jodi Magness’s date for the founding of the settlement at Qumran.32 This coincidence, however, only keeps open the possibility of a reference in 1QS 8. It does not establish its probability.

For more than fifty years there has been a consensus that the sectarian movement described in the scrolls developed in the middle of the second century BCE.33 This consensus has rested on two main considerations. One is a brief and elliptic


narrative of sectarian origins in CD 1, and the other concerns the conflict between
the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest, described in the biblical com-
mentaries or *pesharim*.

The passage in CD 1 reads as follows:

> He left a remnant to Israel and did not deliver it up to be destroyed. And in the age of
wrath, three hundred and ninety years after He had given them into the hand of King
Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, He visited them, and caused a plant root to spring from
Israel and Aaron to inherit His Land and to prosper on the good things of His earth.
And they perceived their iniquity and recognized that they were guilty men, yet for
twenty years they were like blind men groping for the way. And God observed their
deeds, that they sought Him with a whole heart, and He raised for them a Teacher of
Righteousness to guide them in the way of his heart.

It is universally acknowledged that the figure of 390 years is symbolic. (It is derived
from Ezek 4:5, where the prophet is told to lie on his left side and bear the punish-
ment of the house of Israel for 390 days, representing the years of the punishment
of the house of Israel.) Nonetheless, most scholars have accepted the number as
approximately correct. This would point to a date in the early second century BCE.
Some twenty years then elapsed before the coming of the Teacher. The decisive
break is usually thought to have been a reaction to the usurpation of the high
priesthood by Jonathan Maccabee in 152 BCE. Jonathan is then identified as the
"Wicked Priest" mentioned in the *pesharim*, or commentaries, on the prophets.
The archeology of the site of Qumran, as explained by de Vaux, was thought to
lend support to this reconstruction of the history. This consensus was formulated
with minor variations by Milik, Cross, and Geza Vermes.\(^3^4\)

But in fact there is no reason to think that the 390 years of CD is any more
reliable than Dan 9, which calculates the period from the destruction of Jerusalem
to the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes as 490 years (70 weeks of years; in
fact the period in question was only about 418 years). As Vermes has pointed out,
“all the extant evidence proves that Jews of the early post-biblical age possessed no
correct knowledge of the length of the duration of Persian rule.”\(^3^5\) The 390 years of
CD 1 is a symbolic number for the period of time between the destruction of Jeru-
salem and the beginning of the last times. It is probably safe to say that a consider-
able time had elapsed since the destruction, but the number cannot be pressed to
yield even an approximate date.

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\(^{16}\) The World of Jesus and the Early Church

\(^{1988}\), 11–27. The consensus view has been defended recently by Hanan Eshel, *The Dead

\(^{34}\) Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery*, 44–98; Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, 88–120;
Penguin, 2004), 49–66. Cross identified Simon Maccabeus, rather than Jonathan, as the
Wicked Priest.

\(^{35}\) Geza Vermes, “Eschatological Worldview in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the New
Testament,” in *Emanuel: Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in
Honor of Emanuel Tov* (ed. S. M. Paul et al.; VTSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 482 n. 4. Compare
It has been widely assumed that the usurpation of the high priesthood by the Maccabees was a decisive factor in the formation of the sect.\(^\text{36}\) The high-priestly succession, traditionally within the Zadokite line, had been disrupted during the so-called Hellenistic Reform by Jason (who was from the high-priestly family) and Menelaus (who was not), as reported in 2 Macc 4. After the death of Menelaus, Alcimus held the office for some three years (162–160 or 159 BCE).\(^\text{37}\) After this, there was a period known as the intersacerdotium, when the office of high priest was vacant, until Jonathan Maccabee was appointed high priest by the Syrian king Alexander Balas.\(^\text{38}\) The members of the \textit{yahad} are often called “sons of Zadok” in the scrolls, and the Teacher of Righteousness is sometimes called “the priest.” Many scholars have assumed that the Teacher and his followers, as Zadokite priests, objected to the usurpation of the office by the Maccabees. This is thought to be the basis for the enmity between the Teacher and the “Wicked Priest” in the \textit{pesharim}. But in fact the scrolls never claim that the ruling high priests were illegitimate. The reasons for separation given in the Damascus Document and 4QMMT concern the cultic calendar and matters of legal observance. At no point is any mention made of the legitimacy of the high priest. Neither can the use of the sobriquet “the Wicked Priest” in the \textit{pesharim} be taken to imply that the high priest was illegitimate. The \textit{pesharim} often qualify the wickedness of the priest in question, but at no point do they accuse him of usurping the high priesthood.\(^\text{39}\) It seems highly unlikely that this issue would go unmentioned, if it were a major reason for the formation of the sect.

If the usurpation of the high priesthood was not a causative factor in the formation of the sect, this removes one of the major reasons for dating the origin of the sect to the middle of the second century BCE. It also opens up the possibility that the conflict between the Teacher and the Wicked Priest was not the original rift that caused the separation of the sect, but may have occurred some time later.

New light was shed on the question of the origins of the sect by the text called “Some of the Works of the Torah,” 4QMMT, a fragmentary text found in six manuscripts in Qumran Cave 4 (4Q394–399). The first public presentation of this text, at a conference in Jerusalem in 1984, led to a revolution in the study of the scrolls, as it states explicitly that the group represented by the author “have separated ourselves from the majority of the people” because of halakic disagreements.\(^\text{40}\) The issues in question are primarily ones of holiness and purity (the holiness of Jerusalem and the “camp,” the purity of liquid streams, sacrifice and tithing, forbidden


\(^{37}\)See J. C. VanderKam, \textit{From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 226–44.

\(^{38}\)Josephus, \textit{Ant.} 13.146. See VanderKam, \textit{From Joshua to Caiaphas}, 244–50.

\(^{39}\)Compare Alison Schofield and J. C. VanderKam, “Were the Hasmoneans Zadokites?” \textit{JBL} 124 (2005): 73–87: “while the community opposed Hasmonean ruler-priests, there is no surviving indication that they considered them genealogically unfit for the high priesthood” (83).

\(^{40}\)Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, eds., \textit{Qumran Cave 4: V. Miqsat Ma’ase Ha-Torah} (DJD 10; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 59 (Composite text, C 7).
sexual unions, etc.). Some twenty issues are cited. A whole section of the text is devoted to laying out the solar calendar, although this may be a separate document annexed to 4QMMT secondarily. While the scriptural basis of the disputed issues is not made explicit, it is evidently assumed throughout. The issues raised are “precepts of the Torah.” They are presented by juxtaposing opposing arguments; “we say” as opposed to “they do.” In all cases the views of the “we” group are stricter than those of their opponents. The views of the opponents generally correspond to those attributed to the rabbis in the Mishnah and are consequently thought to be those of the Pharisees. The text concludes:

We have written to you some of the precepts of the Torah according to our decision, for your welfare and the welfare of your people. For we have seen (that) you have wisdom and knowledge of the Torah . . . so that you may rejoice at the end of time, finding that some of our practices are correct.

Most scholars have accepted the editors’ suggestion that this text, which may be viewed as a halakic treatise, was addressed to an individual leader of Israel, most probably a Hasmonean high priest. The conclusion reads:

and also we have written to you some of the works of the Torah which we think are good for you and for your people, for we have seen that you have wisdom and knowledge of the Torah. Reflect on all these matters and seek from him that he may support your counsel and keep far from you the evil scheming and the counsel of Belial, so that at the end of time, you may rejoice in finding that some of our words are true. And it shall be reckoned to you as justice when you do what is upright and good before him, for your good and that of Israel.

Most scholars believe that the addressee in this passage must have been a ruler of Israel. In any case, the text provides the author’s understanding of the reasons for separation from the rest of Israel.

There is evidence that the Teacher at least once reached out to his opponents in an attempt to persuade them. According to 4QpPs fragments 1–10, col. 4:8–9, the Wicked Priest sought to murder the Teacher “and the Torah which he sent to him.” Most probably, this was the same “Torah” that was rejected by the Man of the Lie. Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell made the attractive proposal that the document

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43 See, e.g., Regev, *Sectarianism in Qumran*, 104.
45 The initial suggestion of the editors that this text was a letter is widely rejected. See already Qimron and Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4*, 113–14.
46 Qimron and Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4*, 121.
47 4QMMT C 26–32.
48 See, e.g., Regev, *Sectarianism in Qumran*, 104.
in question is none other than the text we know as 4QMMT,\(^4^9\) and the proposal has been taken up by such diverse scholars as Michael Wise and Hanan Eshel.\(^5^0\)

It is generally agreed that the interpretation of the Torah found in 4QMMT is opposed to that of the Pharisees.\(^5^1\) In the words of Lawrence Schiffman, “When mishnaic texts preserve Pharisee-Sadducee conflicts over the same matters discussed in the Halakhic Letter, the views of the letter’s authors match those of the Sadducees.”\(^5^2\) We need not conclude that the authors were Sadducees,\(^5^3\) but at least they were anti-Pharisaic. The Pharisees were embroiled in conflicts especially in the early first century BCE. They clashed especially with Alexander Jannaeus, the Hasmonean king who ruled from 103 to 76 BCE. At one point the Pharisees led a revolt against him, on the grounds that he was not fit to be high priest, and he responded by having some six thousand people killed. He later crucified around eight hundred of his opponents. On his deathbed, however, he advised his queen Salome Alexandra to make peace with the Pharisees. She did so, and entrusted them with the government. According to Josephus “she permitted the Pharisees to do as they liked in all matters, and also commanded the people to obey them; and whatever regulations, introduced by the Pharisees in accordance with the tradition of their fathers, had been abolished by her father-in-law Hyrcanus, these she again restored. And so, while she had the title of sovereign, the Pharisees had the power” (Ant. 13.408–409). She appointed Hyrcanus II high priest, and he served in that capacity until 67 BCE. He later had a second term (63–40). We should not be surprised if the reversal of royal attitude toward the Pharisees and their rulings provoked a protest from the other sects. This is perhaps the time in Hasmonean history when a high priest was most likely to take action against people who were contesting the Pharisaic halakah. Josephus says that the Pharisees tried to persuade the queen to kill those who had urged Alexander to put the eight hundred to death, and that they themselves assassinated some of them. This struggle for sectarian hegemony provides a plausible context for the conflict between the Teacher and both the Wicked Priest and the Man of the Lie.\(^5^4\) In contrast, we have no evidence

\(^{4^9}\)Qimron and Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4*, 175.


\(^{5^3}\)Other factors besides halakah would have to be taken into account. See the comments of J. C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 250–52.

for sectarian conflict in the time of Jonathan Maccabeus. Even though Josephus introduces the three schools of thought in the time of Jonathan (Ant. 13.171), it is only at the end of the long reign of John Hyrcanus (135/4–104 BCE) that sectarian affiliation becomes an important issue for the high priest (Ant. 13.288–298).

Qumran

Roland de Vaux had proposed that the settlement at Qumran had been established in the mid-second century BCE, but he admitted that the earliest phase was poorly attested. The small amount of pottery from period 1a is indistinguishable from that of 1b, and there are no coins associated with it. Magness points out that neither the pottery nor the coins provide evidence for any settlement before 100 BCE and concludes that “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).” It should be noted that the yahad was not a single settlement, at Qumran or elsewhere, and there is no hard evidence linking the Teacher to the site of Qumran. The beginnings of the yahad, and the activity of the Teacher at least in part, should be dated to a time before the settlement of the site (assuming that Qumran was a settlement of the sect). But in any case, the archeological evidence does not provide any solid support for the second-century dating of the Teacher or the community.

There has been raging controversy as to whether Qumran should be considered a sectarian site at all. The sheer proximity of the caves, especially Cave 4, to the site, weighs heavily in favor of the view that the scrolls were related to the site, as does the fact that a jar identical to the ones in which the first scrolls were found was embedded in the floor of one of the rooms. It seems overwhelmingly likely that Qumran was a sectarian settlement at the time when the scrolls were hidden. This does not necessarily require that it was always a sectarian settlement. Several archeologists have tried to reconstruct the development of the site from its architecture. They regard the roughly square structure in the center of the complex, with the tower at its northwest corner, as the original nucleus. Jean-Baptiste Humbert regards this structure as a residence; Yitzar Hirschfeld and Magen and

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59 Jean-Baptiste Humbert, “Reconsideration of the Archaeological Interpretation,” in *Khirbet Qumrân et 'Ain Feshkha: II Études d’anthropologie, de physique et de chimie*, Stud-
Peleg regard it as a fortress.60 All these scholars assume that the nature of the site changed after the Roman conquest, when the Hasmoneans were no longer in a position to fortify the area. Humbert allows that it became a sectarian settlement in the later phase of its occupation. Whether the square structure was the original nucleus of the site, however, remains hypothetical.

While some of the suggestions about the original nature of the site (rustic villa, pottery factory) border on the ridiculous, the idea that it might have been a fortress is not inherently implausible. It is agreed that there was a fort there in the pre-exilic period. The site was evidently destroyed by military assault in 68 CE. De Vaux believed that the Romans maintained a small garrison there after the site was destroyed in 68 CE. He noted that “from the plateau of Qumran the view extends over the whole of the western shore from the mouth of the Jordan to Ras Feshka and over the whole southern half of the sea.”61 In the Hasmonean era there was a chain of fortresses in the general area of the Dead Sea. Most of these were built in the wake of the expansion of the Hasmonean state under John Hyrcanus, Aristobulus, and Alexander Jannaeus. The northern end of this chain was Alexandrion-Sartaba and Dok, near Jericho.62 The fortress of Kypros protected the main road to Jerusalem. There were fortified docks at Rujm al-Bahr and Khirbet Mazin, south of Qumran. Inland from Qumran was Hyrcania. Far to the south stood Masada. On the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea was the fortress of Machaerus, built by Alexander Jannaeus as a bulwark against the Nabateans. It would be surprising if the Hasmoneans had allowed a group that was bitterly critical of them to build an establishment in the middle of this area. The cemetery with predominantly male burials could conceivably be explained on the hypothesis that the site was a military fort. It would be more difficult to explain the great number of stepped pools, assuming that these are correctly identified as miqvaot. The viability of the fortress hypothesis depends on the date at which the pools were dug. At least some of them were evidently in existence before the earthquake, which is still most plausibly identified as the one in 31 BCE. But the earthquake was fully three decades after the Roman conquest. The problem is that clear stratigraphic evidence of the date of construction of the pools is lacking.

The idea that Qumran was originally a fortress or early warning station, as part of the Hasmonean chain of defenses, and that it became a sectarian settlement only after the Roman conquest, is attractive in some respects. But it is an a priori


61 De Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 42.

62 The fortress of Dok was in existence before the Hasmoneans rose to power. See 1 Macc 9:50; 16:11–17; Josephus, *Ant.* 13.6, 230–234. This is where Simon Maccabeus was murdered by Ptolemy, son of Abubus.
hypothesis that lacks empirical archeological data to support it. No evidence has yet been adduced to show that the stepped pools were constructed late, or indeed that the square building was the original core of the settlement. Moreover, we do not know what the Hasmoneans thought of the yahad. The conflict between the Teacher and the Wicked Priest surely loomed larger from a sectarian than from a Hasmonean perspective. The rulers may not have perceived the sect as a threat at all. In short, there is enough uncertainty about the history and nature of the site to cast doubt on the long-established view that the site was constructed by the Teacher and his followers, but there is not enough evidence to establish the view that it was a Hasmonean fortress that underwent a major change after the Roman conquest. If the site was a military outpost or served some other non-religious function in the Hasmonean era, then the famous passage in 1QS 8:13–14, about going to the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord, could not be a reference to the settlement at Qumran.

Conclusion

Much remains uncertain about the archeology of the site, although de Vaux’s interpretation, as modified by Magness, has not by any means been discredited. The site was surely a sectarian settlement in the first century CE, and it is probably still easiest to suppose that it was already such in the Hasmonean period. But in any case the interpretation of the scrolls should not be tied too closely to that of the site. At most, Qumran was one settlement of the yahad. It was never the yahad in its entirety. There is no good evidence that it was the headquarters or motherhouse of the sect. The fact that the scrolls were hidden there is due to the remote location, not necessarily to the primacy of the settlement. Even the Community Rule (Serek Hayakhad) was not written specifically for a community at Qumran, although it may have applied to that community among others. The yahad, and still more the new covenant of the Damascus Rule, was not an isolated monastic community, as has sometimes been imagined, but was part of a religious association spread widely throughout the land. Despite the lure of convenience, it is time we stopped referring to it as “the Qumran community.”
The Dead Sea Scrolls—comprising more than 800 documents made of animal skin, papyrus and even forged copper—deepened our understanding of the Bible and shed light on the histories of Judaism and Christianity. Among the texts are parts of every book of the Hebrew canon—what Christians call the Old Testament—except the book of Esther. If that’s the case, then Qumran was likely a secular—not a spiritual—site, and the scrolls reflect not just the views of a single dissident group of proto-Christians, but a wider tapestry of Jewish thought. Far from being a lonely and distant community of religious nonconformists, Qumran was a valuable piece of real estate—a day’s donkey ride to Jerusalem, a two-hour walk to Jericho and a stroll to docks and settlements along the sea.