

The Dead Sea Scrolls: an Introduction

Sixty years after their discovery, the Dead Sea Scrolls are still a major field of research for Old Testament scholars, epigraphists of ancient Oriental languages and specialists in religion. This tentative introduction will refer to the fundamental work of F. M. Cross Jr (1980) *'The Ancient Library of Qumran'*, the stimulating monograph of I. Knohl (2000) *'The Messiah before Jesus'*, the problematic interpretation of J.-B. Humbert (1994) regarding the community of Qumrān and, finally, to the controversial significance of the cemeteries. However, the main objective of this introduction is to introduce Jordanian specialists to a hitherto neglected field of research for students of the history of Near Eastern religions and Semitic languages, mainly Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew. It is regrettable that for the sixty years during which the Dead Sea Scrolls have attracted global attention, including near-continuous conferences, meetings and colloquia, Jordanian participation has been almost non-existent. This unusual situation was recently acknowledged by H.E. Khaled Touqan, former Minister of Education and Higher Education. He encouraged the creation of a scientific committee, under the presidency of Prof. 'Omar al-Ghoul of Yarmuk University, and the allocation of an office University of Jordan by Prof. 'Adnan al-Bakhit, in order to follow up recent developments in Dead Sea Scroll studies and to build up a specialized library in this new centre. These decisions are highly appreciated and will hopefully stimulate student interest in the discoveries of Qumrān and its sectarian regulations.

This contribution will deal with the following items:

1. The circumstances of the discovery.
2. The excavation of Khirbat Qumrān.
3. The Congregation of Qumrān and its sectarian

rules.

4. The Expectation of the Messiah.
5. The Copper Scroll.
6. The Cemeteries.

1- The Circumstances of the Discovery

The best accounts of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery are by Trever (1948), who was Director of the American School of Oriental Research and invited the Syrian Orthodox Convent in Jerusalem to bring the four scrolls to the School to be photographed by him (Trever 1948: 3-24). Burrows published the different readings of the Isaiah Scroll (1948: 16-24). De Vaux, who was at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, published detailed accounts of the discovery (1956: 73-84, 1967: 319-358). The story of these fascinating discoveries was widely circulated amongst scroll researchers and specialists in the archaeology of Qumrān.

At the beginning of 1947, a young shepherd, Muhammad adh-Dhib of the Ta'amra tribe of Bethlehem (FIG. 1a), was pasturing his flock of sheep and goats around the Dead Sea cliffs *ca.* 12km. south of Jericho. He was searching for a lost animal around 1300m. north of Khirbat Qumrān, when he discovered a cave in the cliffs with jars containing leather scrolls, carefully wrapped in linen tissue. Three scrolls were carried away by Muhammad adh-Dhib and were subsequently bought by Sukenike E.L. of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. These were the War Scroll (IQM), the Thanks-giving Hymns (IQH) and the Isaiah Scroll (I QIsab). Five other scrolls, which were collected by Muhammad and his cousin were acquired by the Bishop of the Jacobite community of Bethlehem through Khalil Iskandar Shahin, an antiquities dealer (known as Kando). These were the Isaiah Scroll, Manual of Discipline, Habakkuk Commentary, Lamech



1a. Muhammad adh-Dhib, after Lapp, P. and N. Discoveries in the Wadi ad-Daliah, 1974: Pl. 102a.

Apocalypse and some large fragments of Daniel (Charlesworth 1992: 36). The Bishop traveled to the U.S.A. with the scrolls and sold them in New York for \$250,000 for the benefit of his community, building a church in Holland with the money. These scrolls were later acquired by the Hebrew University and are exhibited at the Shrine of the Book in west Jerusalem.

The hostilities between the Arabs and the Israelis during 1948 made exploration of the Dead Sea area very hazardous. Fortunately in 1949 — after the truce — Capt Lippens, a Belgium UN observer stationed at Ramallah on the West Bank of Jordan, commissioned the late Capt ‘Akkash az-Zabn of the Arab Legion to investigate the Dead Sea area and search for the cave where the scrolls were first found. Az-Zabn was interviewed by the author in 1981 at his villa in north ‘Ammān, when he stated that he went down to the Dead Sea and spent a week exploring the cliffs until he found a cave with

broken jars. He took some sherds to the Palestine Archaeological Museum (PAM) and showed them to de Vaux, who was Director of the Ecole Biblique, and to Harding, then Director of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The sherds proved to be of the same type as the jars in which the scrolls were found. De Vaux and Harding then organized a campaign between 15 February and 5 March 1949 in order to excavate Cave I (de Vaux 1967: 219-221). They discovered the remains of about 50 jars with their lids and no less than 600 inscribed leather fragments, belonging to about 70 manuscripts (Laperrousaz 1961: 9). Cave Q4 (FIG. 1b) was rich in inscribed fragments but very poor in pottery. Similarly, Cave Q5 yielded inscribed material but not a single sherd (*op.cit.*: 337). In all, 11 caves were explored; five were found by bedu and six by the archaeologists.

2- A Summary of the Excavation Results

The first excavations were carried out in November and December 1951 under the supervision of Harding and de Vaux. The Department of Antiquities of Jordan invested 10.000 JD for the excavations and, subsequently, 15.000 JD to buy the two batches of scrolls stored in the Palestine Archaeological Museum. This generosity on the part of Jordan, despite budgetary constraints, was praised by the scholarly world (Field 2006: 46). Six campaigns were subsequently conducted by de Vaux alone, because of Harding’s administrative responsibilities elsewhere.

The excavations were carried out on a marl terrace north of Wādī Qumrān. The western part of this terrace was a residential area, whereas the



1b. Cave 4, Qumrān (Photo courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan).

area during the second century BC. The reasons for this migration are not clear, but it was assumed that a group of fundamentalist Jews and priests left Jerusalem under the leadership of a priest, the Teacher of Righteousness. The motives for this retreat were inspired by the prophecy of Isaiah (40: 3): “A voice cries out: Prepare in the wilderness a road for the Lord! Clear the way in the desert for our God”. Other reasons for their migration were 1) to follow their own schedule of feasts, using a solar calendar (IQS 10: 1-3) (see Charlesworth 1994: 3) rather than the lunar calendar of the Temple of Jerusalem, 2) to observe the regulations of purity and, most importantly, 3) to devote themselves to the study of the Law of Moses. According to the Rule of the Congregation (VIII: 12-15), “When the times will come, they will depart away from the wicked men and will retire in the desert where they will prepare the way of the Lord”. However, Cross has surmised that “the origin of the Essene movement must be sought for in the struggle of rival priestly houses, the one hyperorthodox and presumably legitimate, the other less orthodox but successful in gaining control of the high priesthood and the Jerusalem *cultus*” (1980: 129). This assumption is credible, given the fact that the Hasmonaean prince John Hyrcan (135-105BC) usurped the high priesthood and persecuted the Righteous Teacher, who was a Sadokite of the legitimate class, obliging him to migrate to Damascus.

3- The Sectarian Regulations of the Community

According to the testimony of classical authors, the community of Qumrān belonged to a group of Essenes. The earliest references are by Philo of Alexandria (30BC-45AD), Pliny the Elder, who devoted a paragraph (5: 73) in his *Natural History* (ca. 70AD) to the subject (see Magness 2002: 40) and Fl. Josephus, who describes how he joined the Essene community (*Life* 10 02: 40) and discusses their activities after 80AD in *Jewish Antiquities XII* (V: 9) and *War II* (VIII: 2) (see Vidal-Naquet 1977: 117-1630).

According to these authors, the Essenes were identified with a group of fundamentalist Jews. Philo of Alexandria derived their name from the Greek *osioi*, meaning “saint” or “pure”, but another etymology was proposed by Dupont-Sommer (1967: 43), who derived the name from the Hebrew *‘ezah*, meaning “party” or “council” (1980: 31,

n. 3), equivalent to the Greek *essennoi* or *essaioi* (1967: 43). This term appears several times in the Scrolls, with the Essenes identifying themselves as “men of the council or of the congregation”, i.e. the ‘yahad’. Alternatively, according to Puech (1998: 283), the name of the Qumrān community derives from *ḥsyn*, *ḥs*’, meaning “pious” (1989: 283).

It is clear that the Essenes practiced a communal way of life; de Vaux insisted that the Qumrān group lived as a community and that the residential buildings of Qumrān belonged to a “congregation”. He emphasized this aspect of the Qumrān group and, as a result, his enemies accused him of comparing the Essenes to Christian monks. However, de Vaux asserted in his response to Driver that he never used the word “monastery” when writing about the Qumrān community (see Puech 1998: 283; Avi Yonah (1936) was the first scholar to use the term “monastery” in relation to the Dead Sea sect). It is true that they refused marriage in order to avoid “physical passions”, but they were able to adopt young children, who were then able to receive their teaching. They considered themselves as the “real Israel”, replacing the discredited high-priesthood of Jerusalem and extending the regulations of the Sanctuary to their members.

An important practice was the precept of purity. This was an obsession they followed strictly; according to Fl. Josephus “the Essenes purified themselves by immersion in cold water before the communal meal. Then after working without interruption to the fifth hour (11H a d.), they reassemble in the same place and girded with linen loin cloth, bathe themselves in cold water. After this purification, they assemble in a special building to which no one is admitted who is not of the same faith. As soon as they sit in the refectory the baker distributes the bread in order and the cook helps with one bowl full of one meal. The priest recites a prayer and no one is allowed to taste the food before the end of the prayer. After the meal they recite another prayer, take off their pure and sacred clothes and return to their respective jobs until the evening. They return to the refectory and take their meal in the same manner” (*War* 2: 129). These instructions are laid out in two documents: *The Rule of the Congregation* and *The Damascus Document*. According to these documents, membership of the congregation was open to any volunteer of Israel, following examination of his intelligence and aptitude to follow the discipline. If selected, he spent one year as

a novice after which, “*he draws closer to the way of life and partakes of the purer waters of Purification*” (War II: 138), the council would examine his case. If it was decided that he was close to the congregation, his possessions and revenue would be placed in the hands of the community’s inspector, who registered them to his account. He would not participate in the communal meal before the second year, after which — subject to examination by the council — he would sit regularly amongst his brothers.

4- The Expectation of the Messiah

After the Babylonian exile of 587 to 538BC, the population of Palestine expected a Messiah to deliver them from oppression at the hands of hostile invaders. This expectation became more pronounced during the Seleucid and Roman occupations of Palestine. Before Jesus of Nazareth, other Messiahs had appeared. The most famous was Menaḥem the Essene, who was a leader of his community during the reign of Herod the Great (30-4BC) and was a friend of this king. After Herod’s death, Menaḥem revealed his messianic character (Knohl 2000: 58-66). He was excommunicated by Hillel, leader of the Pharisees, and Menaḥem organized a revolt under the reign of Archelaus. However, the “new king sent his cavalry against the rebels and three thousand people were killed” (Knohl 2000: 67). Menaḥem was most probably killed in this revolt. In his above-mentioned monograph, Knohl (2000) analysed the so-called *Messianic Hymns* of Qumrān Cave 4. In two of them, 4Q491 and 4QHe, the so-called *Self-Glorification Hymn* attributed to the Teacher of Righteousness, the writer “sees himself as possessing divine attributes” and “claims to be elevated above the angels and to sit on a throne in heaven”, whilst at the same time viewing himself in the person of the “suffering servant” of *Isaiah* 53. This combination of the two Messiahs was unprecedented in Jewish religious tradition; according to Knohl, there is evidence “that the speaker in the hymn was a leader of the Qumrān sect who saw himself as the Messiah and was so regarded by his community” (*eod.loc.* 20).

Jesus of Nazareth was born in 4BC and crucified in 30AD. It is suggested by Knohl that Jesus identified himself with the “hero of the hymns” (*eod.loc.* 24-26). He combined the two concepts of the “suffering servant” and the one who was resurrected after three days (Knohl *eod.loc.* 26-29). This

hypothesis of Knohl sheds significant light on the emergence of the early Christian church. The fact that the idea of a suffering and rising Messiah was unknown in the Biblical tradition but referred to in the above-mentioned *Messianic Hymns* “bear(s) witness to a messianic movement in the Qumrān community” (*eod.loc.* 86). Jesus of Nazareth was born a generation after Menaḥem the Essene. The Hebrew meaning of Menaḥem is equivalent to the Greek *paraclete*, or “comforter”. When Jesus told his disciples at the Last Supper that he would send them another *paraclete* (John 16: 7), he was identifying himself as a second Menaḥem (Knohl *eod.loc.* 71). The supposed uniqueness of Christianity is therefore seriously undermined by the Qumrān messianic hymns.

In response to this assumption of Knohl’s, it is admitted that Jesus identified himself with the “suffering servant” of *Isaiah* 53, who was raised from death. However, he also demonstrated that he was invested with supranatural authority when he healed a paralytic, telling him “your sins are forgiven” and informing the amazed Jews that he had authority to forgive sins on earth (*Mark* 2: 5-10). Knohl also suggests that the New Testament was influenced by the Roman eschatology, which believed that Emperor Augustus was *divi filius* or “son of god” (Knohl *eod.loc.* 100). This may have been so, but Augustus as “son of god” had no aspirations to be a Messiah, or savior of mankind.

The Essenes anticipated the arrival of two Messiahs, 1) a king-Messiah, descendent of David and 2) a priest-Messiah, heir of the prophet Aaron (Collins 1998: 3-37). The arrival of these Messiahs were to have been presaged by 40 years’ war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness. They, of course, considered themselves to be the sons of light, whose victory was predestined by God, because they believed in predestination, resurrection and the immortality of the soul (Humbert and Villeneuve 2006: 50). However, according to Starcky (1963: 455-481) who published a major article on the “Four Stages of Messianism at Qumrān”, the Teacher of Righteousness was a persecuted priest who considered himself as restorer of the law, but who never claimed to be a savior of mankind or a Messiah.

5- The Copper Scroll (3Q15) (FIG. 2)

This is the most enigmatic of the Qumrān scrolls. It was discovered in Cave 3Q on 20 March 1952



2. The Copper Scrolls in Cave 3Q15 at the time of their discovery (Photo courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan).

by the joint expedition of the Palestinian Archaeological Museum, Ecole Biblique and American School of Oriental Research. It was made of three sheets, each measuring 28-30cm. high and 80cm. wide, with the total width being 240cm. according to Kuhn (1954: 194), who was able to examine the scrolls in September 1953 whilst they were exhibited at the PAM. He deciphered part of the text and recognized that it dealt with hidden treasures of the Essene community (Kuhn 1954: 204).

Two sheets were originally riveted, whereas the third was rolled up (FIG. 2). They were completely oxidized, so much so that it was impossible to unroll them (Garcia Martinez 1994: 460). A decision was made to cut them into 23 cylindrical segments. The operation was successfully carried out at the University of Manchester by Wright-Baker (1962: 203-210), who invented a special saw and cut the sheets into strips. The procedure was supervised by Allegro J. M, who had been asked by the scientific team to prepare a transcription of the text in case of accident. He copied the text, made a translation and sent it to Harding. Later, he published a monograph on the Copper Scroll (Allegro 1960), but was severely rebuked by de Vaux (1961: 146-47) because he had not been authorized to publish the translation. Allegro believed that the treasures were genuine and belonged to the Qumrān community, or were a tithe offered to the Temple. Following the destruction of the Sanctuary, so Allegro's argument went, they were hidden, waiting for better days (1960: 68). With the help of a British newspaper, he organised a campaign to discover the hidden treasures but failed to find them. He was a free-thinking scholar who wrote anti-Semitic (1972)

and anti-Christian books (1979) which ruined his career because he was discharged from the international team as a result. He retired to a British Isle, where he died in isolation in 1988.

Subsequently, the Copper Scroll was worked on by J. T. Milik, who published a preliminary translation in *ADAJ* 4-5 (1960: 137-155) and a final translation in Baillet, Milik and de Vaux (1962: 203-211). The 60 caches are described in detail. The quantities of precious metal involved are enormous: 4630 talents, equivalent to *ca.* 63 tons. De Vaux and Milik regarded the caches as legendary folkloric fantasies; the author of the Scroll was not experienced and made many linguistic and orthographic mistakes. It is unlikely that the resources of Palestine could have accumulated such an enormous quantity of precious metal in the 1st centuries BC-AD. For example, the fortune of Herod the Great at the time of his death in 4BC was equivalent to 760 talents, almost 4000 talents less than the treasures referred to by the Copper Scroll (Baillet *et al.* 1962: 283).

A more probable explanation for the riddle of the treasures of the Copper Scroll is that they were symbolic. After the Babylonian Exile (586-538BC), it would have been necessary to comfort the population of Palestine. By stating that the treasures of the Temple were hidden and that nothing was lost, it would have given them hope that normal life would start again and that the Temple could recover its ancient splendor (Humbert and Villeneuve 2006: 111-12).

In 1993-94, the Copper Scroll was restored by experts at the EDF Valectra laboratory in France and published in two volumes. Volume 1 deals with the technical analysis of the metal, the conservation methods employed and the production of a copy using galvanometry by the engineers Bizeure and Lacoudre (2006). Volume 2, by Puech (2006) provides a new transliteration, translation and commentary in both English and French. The scrolls were returned to the Jordan Archaeological Museum where they are currently exhibited.

Interpretation of the Copper Scrolls and the Archaeology of Qumrān

In his interpretation of the Copper Scrolls, Puech (2006) argued that the treasures belonged to the Essenes. His arguments can be summarized as follows:

1) The treasures were hidden in the middle of the

- first century AD, before the occupation of Palestine by Titus in 66-73AD.
- 2) The quantities of precious metal referred to are 1672 talents of silver, 362 talents of gold and 1504 talents of unspecified metal, possibly bronze.
 - 3) The quantities of golden and silver bars are unspecified.
 - 4) If the weight of a talent at this time was 5.7 grams, the total amount of precious metals amounts to 63 tons, rather than the 120 tons estimated by Milik and de Vaux (Puech 2006: 176ff).
 - 5) According to Josephus (*Ant.* 18: 20), the number of the Essenes was around 4000 persons, amongst whom were priests. The Teacher of Righteousness himself was a priest, probably the son of Onias III. The priests received part of the tithe given to the Temple by each adult Jew. It is unlikely that they departed empty-handed when they left Jerusalem for Qumrān.
 - 6) The localities mentioned in the Copper Scrolls are near Jerusalem or in the area of Jericho and Qumrān, which is mentioned four times in the Copper Scroll as Secacah (Magnez 2002: 25) or Sokokah (Puech 2006: 175). Since Palestine was occupied by Titus in 66-73AD, only the Essenes could have access to those sites. The discovery of inscribed leather fragments with the Copper Scroll is another proof that they were hidden by the Qumrān community. The conclusion of Puech is that the treasures of the Copper Scrolls were genuine and belonged to the Essene community of Qumrān.

It is however surprising that Puech, who worked on the final publication of the Copper Scroll at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, disregarded the above-mentioned statements of Milik and de Vaux (1962: 283) concerning the resources of Palestine. In the opinion of this author, the most reasonable interpretation of the Copper Scroll treasures is that they were only symbolic, as argued above.

6- The Cemeteries

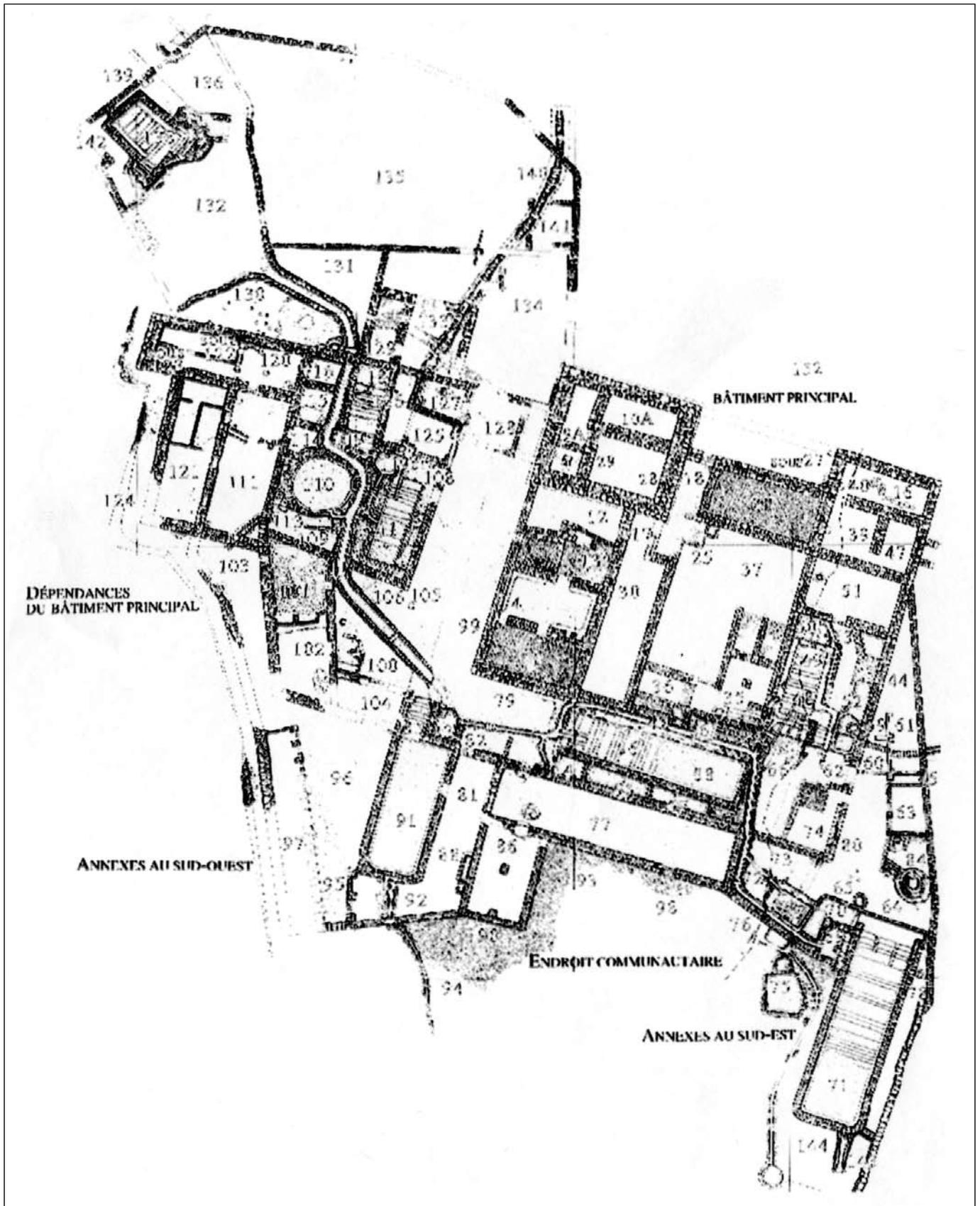
The cemeteries have been the subject of controversial debates. First, the number of the tombs has been reduced from somewhere between 1000 and 1200 down to around 700 (Kapera and Konik 2000: 35-49). They were located 50m. east of the settlements and were well-organized in quarters separated by alleyways. The graves were marked by stone heaps or cairns, delineated by a standing stone at head

and feet (Humbert 1994: 181-82), and consisted of rectangular cists, with an internal shelf on which to place the body. At the south-western edge of the cemeteries, de Vaux discovered five tombs containing bones of women and children. They were buried east-west, with head facing south, whereas the adult men were buried north-south, with head facing south. The logical conclusion was that the graves of women and children belonged to *bedu* buried within the last 100 years, whereas the graves containing the men belonged to the Essenes, who were celibate and “*had the palm trees only, as company*” (Pliny 5. 73; Zias *op.cit.*: 49). However, according to Josephus (*War* 11: 160-61) there was an order of married men amongst the Essenes (Magnez *op. cit.*: 163-167; Schuller 1994: 115-131).

General Conclusions

This last assertion of Josephus was not taken into consideration by Golb (1995: 34), who affirms that the tombs “are obviously better interpreted as the graves of the warriors who fought at Qumrān”. According to his hypothesis, the residential area of Qumrān was the centre of the Zealot resistance during the first Jewish revolt, of 66 to 73AD, and the tombs belonged to these warriors (*eod. loc.* 35-38). For him, the Scrolls were brought to the caves of Qumrān by fighters from Jerusalem. He did not take into account the scrolls most characteristic of the Essene community, e.g. *Rules of the Community*, *Damascus Document* or *Habakkuk Commentary*, in which the Essenes developed their doctrine.

This article will conclude with the hypothesis of Humbert (1994). He assumed that Qumrān was the cultic centre of the Essenes and that no more than 10 to 15 people lived on the site, arriving occasionally to offer libations and sacrifices. Locus 120 (FIGS. 3, 4) faced Jerusalem and could have been an Essene equivalent of the “holy of holies” in the Jerusalem Temple (1994: 195-96). In addition, long walls were noticed on the sea shore at ‘Ayn Fishkha and east of the Qumrān esplanade (Humbert 1994: 207-09; Pls Ia-IIIa) which were interpreted as delineating the holy space. It is possible that sacred enclosures were built at Qumrān and ‘Ayn Fishkha, but one should bear in mind that the whole Dead Sea depression, the so-called “Oriental Sea” or “Sea of Siddim” (Abel 1967: 498-505) was considered sacred in the Bible. It was in this depression that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrha perished (*Genesis* 14: 10). It is also the place to which God will send



3. Plan of the excavated settlement of Khirbat Qumrān during de Vaux's Period Ib (After Humbert and Chambon 1994: Pl. IV).

the vanguard of invaders from the north to be exterminated (*Joel* 2: 20). In his recent monograph with Villeneuve, Humbert (2006: 73-78) modified this hypothesis and referred instead to a communal centre at Qumrān. However, he proposed a new interpretation, i.e. Qumrān was originally a Hasmonaean villa and only became Essene during the reign of Herod the Great, not before 37BC (Humbert and Villeneuve 2006: 79). The cemetery is Essene, but was not used solely by the community of Qumrān, because some secondary burials were discovered. The cemetery could therefore be interpreted as the burial place of pious Essenes who wished to be laid to rest close to their sacred site (Humbert 1994: 182). This hypothesis does however suffer from several weaknesses. It has been demonstrated that Qumrān was not a villa belonging to some noble residents of Palestine (Magnes 2002: 90-100). On the other hand, if Qumrān was indeed the cultic residence of the Essene community, the excavators should have uncovered more objects relating to the cult. The hundreds of pottery vessels discovered by de Vaux suggest that more than 10 to 15 people lived permanently at the site. The same objection applies to the various plastered basins, or *miqivaot*. Finally, one cannot but accept the interpretation of de Vaux, quoted by Magnes (2002: 71): “Khirbet Qumran is not a village or a group of houses; it is the establishment of a community. We must be still more precise: this establishment was not designed as a community residence but rather for the carrying on some communicative activities”. Those activities were probably related to the study of the Law of Moses, copying of Biblical texts and their interpretation according to the doctrine of the Essenes. Other religious activities, such as libation and sacrifice, were also practised by the Essenes at the site, but it is difficult to conclude that it was only a meeting place for the cult.

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