

EXCAVATIONS AT 'AIN FESHKHA

During the last campaign at Khirbet Qumrân in 1956, the remains of a buried building were recognized near the source of 'Ain Feshkha, 3 km. south of Khirbet Qumrân. A sounding revealed that the building contained the same pottery and the same coins as Khirbet Qumrân, that the two installations were contemporary, and that they ought, then, to belong to the same community. It was imperative that this building be excavated; but, as nothing on the surface indicated the precise limits of the building, which could have been extended over a relatively vast area, it was decided to spend an entire season on the work.

This campaign took place in 1958, from January 25 to March 25. This expedition was a joint effort of the *Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, the *Ecole Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem*, and of the *Palestine Archaeological Museum*, just as the excavations at Khirbet Qumrân had been. The work, which employed 50 workers in all, brought to light an extremely interesting installation. It consisted of a rather large building, situated a hundred metres north of the spring and flanked by two enclosures, one to the southeast, and the other to the north. Each of these enclosures contained a number of smaller constructions (Pl. I, 1). The study of the architecture, the pottery, and coins revealed several periods, which have, except for the last one, their equivalent at Khirbet Qumrân. Period II is the best preserved, and, hence, the easiest to ascertain. We should, then, begin our description with this period.

Period II

1. The building (Pl. I, 2).

The building possessed two doors facing towards the east, leading onto a courtyard in the interior surrounded by room on three sides. One long room, occupying the whole north side and divided off by low partitions, must have been a storage room; two rooms along the south wall may have been used for the same purpose; two rooms along the western wall were better constructed, and must have served for lodging or administration. At one corner of the courtyard, there was a staircase leading up to the roof, and eventually to a second storey built over the two rooms along the western wall.

The earthenware is identical to that of Period II at Khirbet Qumrân; the coins cover the period from Herod Archelaus (4 B.C. to 6 A.D.) to the second year of the First Jewish Revolt (67/68 A.D.). Therefore, this building corresponds to the same epoch as Period II of Khirbet Qumrân, which has been dated from the reign of Archelaus to the year 68 A.D.

2. The south enclosure.

From the southwest corner of the building, a low wall marks the limits of an enclosure 40m square; however, the section of this low wall which should extend to the south part of the building has disappeared.

The only constructions in this enclosure are to be found against the north wall, where there was located a shed-like construction, which was supported by pillars and which had a

well paved floor. At the extremity of the shed, near the building, there was a small, square room with a door facing the east (Pl. II, 1). It would seem that this shed was destined for the drying of some sort of produce, or as a place of storage where this produce could be kept dry. Several hypotheses concerning its exact usage can be suggested. It is possible that it was used to dry dates, or better still, to allow the dates that had been taken in while yet green to ripen. Mr. Mansur Nashashibi, the Director of Agriculture at Jerusalem, saw the installation. It is his considered opinion that this hypothesis is probable. Date-palms are, in fact, the sole produce cultivated to any large extent in this locality, since the soil is salty, even where the many small springs issue forth. There are yet other proofs that the date-palm was cultivated in the region of Qumrân: trunks of palm trees, palms, and dates were found in the ruins of Qumrân, and in the neighboring caves. The rest of the enclosure, which is quite close to the springs, could well have been used as a pen in which to corral and bed down the flocks.

3. The north enclosure.

To the north of the building, a wall marks the limits of a large courtyard, half of which is taken up with a system of basins and canals (Pl. II, 2). From a main vat there flow two narrow canals. One of these canals feeds first into a rectangular and shallow basin, on whose plastered floor was found a deposit of lime; at the bottom of the basin there is a drain through which the water flowed to the outside and into a well-made pit, lined with plaster. Another branch of the same canal makes a turn around the basin, and brings the water into a second, and bigger, pit, that had been dug alongside of the first one. These two pits are sunk in a paved area, to which one descends at two places by means of steps. A second canal leaves the main vat and runs directly to another rectangular basin, found at the east end of the whole installation. This basin is larger and deeper than the first one. A well-paved platform is set between the basins. It is necessary also to speak of several large stones, crudely cut in the form of a cylinder, in connection with this system of basins.

This elaborate system is certainly not a water system that supplied water to the nearby building, for the basins can in no way be called cisterns. It is rather a very elaborate installation for some sort of industry; a material of some kind had been put through various stages of treatment and processing in these basins and pits.

The most likely explanation is that it was an industry for the preparation of leather. In the main vat, where the water was first gathered, and from which the canals lead to the two basins, the hides were washed. In the first basin, where the deposit of lime was found, the hides were next allowed to soak in a lime solution. This would be the preliminary operation for the removal of hair and pieces of flesh. The next stage in the process is performed today by rubbing the hides on tree-trunks; therefore, the cylindrical-shaped stones found near the basins must have served this same purpose. The paved platform would have been used for stretching, drying, and softening the hides. The last basin, and one of the pits, would have served for the tanning baths. In order to prove this hypothesis, samples have been taken from the canals and basins, and were submitted to the Ministry of the National Economy at Amman, and to the Department of Leather Industries of the University of Leeds in England for analysis. We thank these two organizations for their lively interest in, and quick response to, our questions, and for the help that they have given us. Their analyses revealed that there

are no traces of vegetal tan; however, the question remains undecided, since all traces of tan could have disappeared from these pits, filled as they were for so long a time with water and sediment. Besides, antiquity made use of other chemicals than those extracted from plants for their tanning processes. At any rate, two specialists who visited the ruins of Feshkha — Dr. Halilovic, an expert from the United Nations to the Jordanian Government, and Mr. Hisham M. Pharaon, an expert from the Ministry of the National Economy — have stated as their opinion that these basins and canals are well explained if this installation was a tannery.

We should, however, reject any interpretation which is suggested by the relation between 'Ain Feshkha and Khirbet Qumrân on the one hand, and between Khirbet Qumrân and the manuscripts found in the neighboring caves on the other. Even if the hypothesis proposed here is exact, it does not mean that this industry had for its purpose the preparation of parchment used for the writing of the manuscripts of Qumrân. Indeed, except for the preliminary operations of the washing of the hides and the removing of hair from the hides, the vellum used in writing was not tanned, and had, in fact, to undergo a special preparation and treatment. Moreover, this industry is developed on too large a scale to have served merely for the needs of the Qumrân *Scriptorium*. It was an industry that treated leather for almost any use, and would have afforded the community an added profit from the flocks that they raised.

The water that was necessary for this industry poses another problem: just exactly where did it come from. Water was brought to the main vat by a canal well preserved under the north well. But this canal is at a much higher level than any of the sources that are known today. This water was not brought in from elsewhere by means of an aqueduct, since there are absolutely no remains of an aqueduct. It could not have been only rain water; another source is called for. The only hypothesis left is that at a former period there was a spring at a higher level than any of the present ones. The configuration of the terrain suggests that just such a spring did have its source only a short distance from the northwest side of the building. This fact has another interesting consequence: at that level, the ground is less salty, which would mean that the spring itself was less salty than the sources we know today. Hence, conditions for living and farming in this region would have been more favorable. Two geologists who have examined these places believe that this is a probable explanation.

Period I

The period which has been described up to this point was not the first installation. The study of the buildings, the pottery, and the coins show that there was an earlier period. The plan of the building was already the same as that described above, with these two exceptions: no staircase ascended to the terrace, and there were no rooms which would constitute a second storey. The south enclosure was limited to the south end of the building, and did not extend towards the west; the shed did not exist at all. There was no courtyard to the north, and, therefore, no industrial installation in this locality. At this earlier period, the source to the northwest of the building flowed directly to the south, and even yet it is possible to discern the bed of this small brook, running under the north wall of the enclosure that belongs to Period II, to the southwest of the building.

The pottery attached to this period is scarce and quite broken; but it is easily recognizable as identical with the pottery of Period Ib of Khirbet Qumrân. The coins also are less numerous and in an advanced state of oxidization, but there are some few pieces dating probably from the time of the Hasmoneans; one certainly belongs to the period of Antigonus Mattathias (40 - 37 B.C.), and another one to the third year of Herod the Great (34 B.C.). Period I of Feshkha is, therefore, contemporary with Period Ib of Khirbet Qumrân, extending from about 100 B.C.. In the year 31 B.C., the buildings of Qumrân were damaged by an earthquake, and the site was abandoned. There is no trace of this earthquake at Feskha, which is explained by the nature of the different terrains. But the building at Feskha, which was an annex to those at Qumrân, was abandoned at the same time as the main site: there exists the same interval in the dates attached to the coins; and the building, which had been left unoccupied for about 30 years, was thoroughly cleaned out and reinhabited. This is evidenced by the fact that a part of the pottery of Period I was thrown in a dump outside the building with some other debris.

Period III

It was said that Period II ended at the same time as Period II of Qumrân, that is 68 A.D.. The buildings of Qumrân were destroyed by the Roman army during the Jewish War. There are also traces of a destruction and a fire at Feshkha at the end of Period II. At Qumrân the Romans had set up a police force, which occupied the site until the end of the first century A.D.. At Feshkha there are also signs of an occupation during this period: the north part of the building was the only section in use. Rooms were built over the ruins and a new door opened up in the wall. In these rooms there were found coins belonging to the end of the first century after Christ, and special mention must be made of a collection of 18 coins pertaining to the time of Agrippa II. A stone weight, with the inscription *LEB*, gives an interesting confirmation of these conclusions: the only provenance of such a weight could have been from a Roman military administration.

The Second Revolt

We know that Qumrân served as a place of refuge, or a point of resistance, for the Jewish insurgents during the Second Revolt under Hadrian (from 132 to 135 A.D.). They had also hidden themselves in the ruins of Feshkha, for several of their coins had been found there; but it is impossible to speak of this as a real occupation during this period.

The Byzantine Hermitage

Until now the history of Feshkha is exactly the same as that of Qumrân; but Feshkha has yet another chapter added to its history. During the Byzantine period - the 5th and 6th centuries after Christ - the little room attached to the one extremity of the shed in the south enclosure was rebuilt and reinhabited. A literary testimony throws light on this discovery. The

Byzantine writer, John Moschos, tells us that the monks of Mardes possessed a garden that was close to the sea, and which was situated at a distance of 6 miles from their monastery. They had trained a donkey to go alone to this garden in order to pick up the vegetables that they had need of; it used to knock at the gardener's door with its head. The gardener would then load up the donkey, and it would wend its way back to the monastery at Mardes Now, Mardes is actually Khirbet Mird in the Buge'a, at a distance of 9km from 'Ain Feshkha (the equivalent of 6 miles). The little room that was excavated proved to be the house of the Byzantine gardener.

The character of the building and the installations excavated at Feshkha leave no room for doubt: this is an annex to Khirbet Qumrân, where those who were deployed in the work of directing the farming for the community lived; it was also the dwelling place of the caretakers of the palm trees and the sheep herders. It was these same who tried to draw a certain amount of profit for the community by means of agriculture, sheep-raising, and connected industries. This establishment has the same history as the principal centre at Qumrân. Its discovery helps us to understand better how this group of men were able to make a living, and how they tried, as much as possible, to supply for their own necessities without dependence on outside help.

These excavation seem to have unearthed everything that is of any archaeological interest near 'Ain Feshkha. It is still possible, however, that there remain some small installations that are entirely covered by recent alluviations, between Feshkha and Qumrân, but it is impossible to locate these sites, and, as a matter of fact, they would add nothing essential to what is already known. We can say with confidence that no other important installation ever existed in this region. Archaeology seems to have brought to light all that it could have in order to help us reconstitute the community which had left us the famous manuscripts of the Dead Sea in their own proper setting.

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