

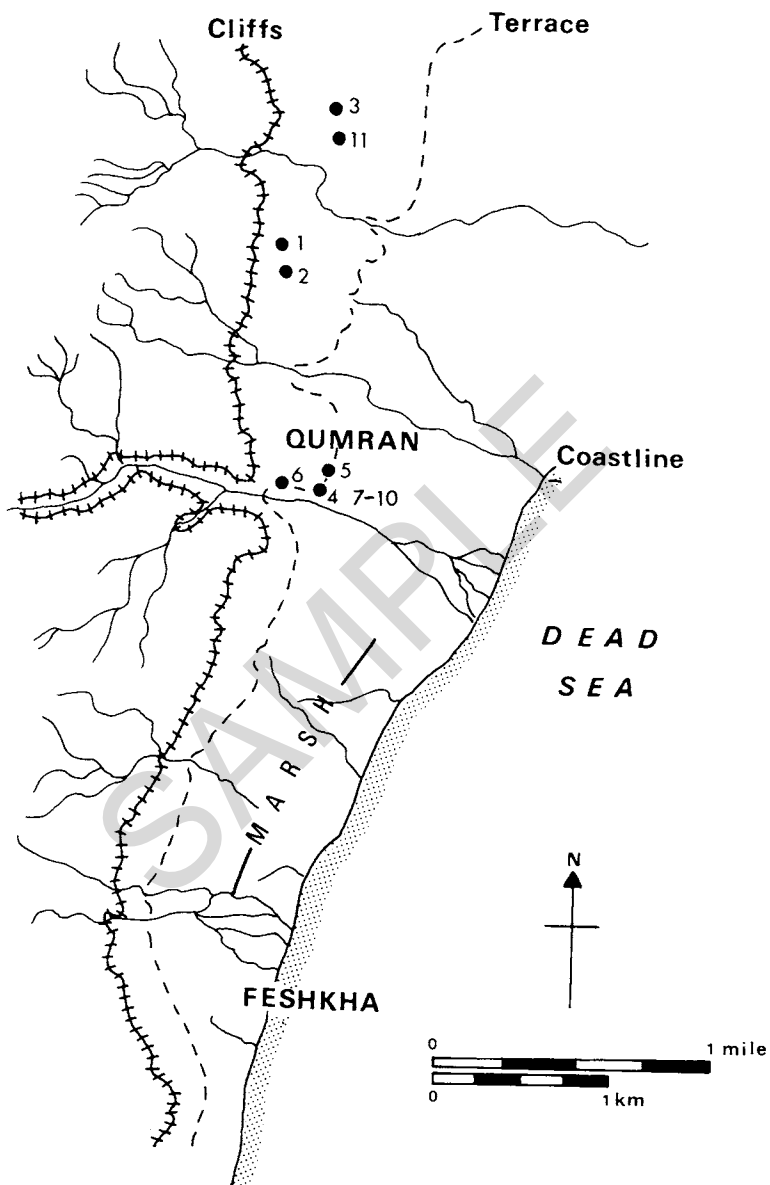
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Uncovering the City

The ruins of Qumran are just over half a mile to the south of the cave where the manuscripts were first found. All that was visible at that time were a few piles of stones, a cistern, some traces of an aqueduct system near the wadi and a rather extensive cemetery covering the eastern part of the outcrop and stretching down to the coastal plain. Several eminent travellers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had visited and described these remains. F. de Saulcy, in 1861, suggested that they were the remains of the biblical city of Gomorrah.

In 1873 C. Clermont-Ganneau, another Frenchman, made a brief survey of the ruins, and excavated one of the tombs in the cemetery, concluding that the site was insignificant. Between 1902 and 1913 Dr. E. W. G. Masterman, commissioned by the Palestine Exploration Fund to measure the level of the Dead Sea at 'Ain Feshkha, took the opportunity to explore the surrounding region. He described the tombs and the aqueduct at Qumran, but drew no conclusions. In 1914 G. Dalman, who had recently visited the ruins, declared that they were the remains of a Roman fort, and in 1938 M. Noth proposed to identify the site with the biblical City of Salt mentioned in a list of Judaean towns in Joshua 15:61–2. Noth later withdrew his suggestion; but it has turned out that he was quite probably correct, and Dalman too. But both were still far from the whole truth.

It is as if Qumran was destined to keep its secrets. For even after the whereabouts of the scroll cave had been officially ascertained by a Jordanian expedition in 1949, its connection with Qumran was dismissed. The Director of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, G. Lankester Harding, and Fr. Roland de Vaux of the École Biblique in Jerusalem, who jointly conducted the official examination of the cave, concluded from a brief survey of the Qumran ruins that they were the remains of a Roman fort from the third or fourth century AD, whereas the manuscripts and the pottery from the cave were (wrongly) placed in the second century BC. But as the contents of the scrolls became more widely known, there grew a demand from scholars on all sides that the Qumran ruins should be reinvestigated. Several experts had realised that the scrolls could well belong to a Jewish sect which, according



Map 2 This map of the Qumran region illustrates the topographical features. The numbers refer to the 11 caves which contained manuscripts.

to the Roman writer Pliny the Elder, had a settlement near the shore of the Dead Sea. In November 1951, therefore, Harding and de Vaux conducted a preliminary excavation of the Qumran ruins, under the auspices of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, the École Biblique and the Palestine Archaeological Museum (also known as the Rockefeller Museum), and almost immediately it became clear that the cave and the ruins were after all connected. Identical pottery types came to light, including a 'scroll jar', and among the coins unearthed were some which dated from the first century AD and earlier. This dating corresponded with the period to which the palaeographers – not without protests from those who still regarded the finds as a hoax – were assigning the manuscripts. It became clear that Qumran was, after all, the home of the community which had written the scrolls.

Excavations were interrupted by news of more sensations. Another hoard of manuscripts was in the possession of the Beduin, and the origin of the finds was traced to the Wadi Murabba'at, twelve miles south west of Qumran (see map p. 19). Although of great importance, these manuscripts turned out to have no connection with the discoveries at Qumran, but the excavations were abandoned as de Vaux scurried off in pursuit of the new finds. Not so the Beduin explorers! With the archaeologists away and aware of the financial rewards which manuscript discoveries could bring them, they again turned their attention to the region of their original finds. Close to the first cave they discovered a second. It had apparently occurred to no one but the Beduin that the first cave might not be an isolated instance. The discovery of Cave 2 brought back the archaeologists and provoked a full-scale official search of all caves in the cliffs, extending over a stretch of five miles. This search revealed Cave 3, the most northerly of the caves which yielded manuscripts, and its prize was two scrolls which caused a great stir (Plates 22, 23). They were both made of copper, and formed a single manuscript. Although the contents were not published until 1956 it had become clear from an early stage that they had to do with hidden treasure – as it turned out, sixty treasure stores and their locations. Among the speculations was the suggestion that this list referred to the temple treasures smuggled from Jerusalem during the war of AD 66–70 with the Romans. But despite more than one expedition in search of this lost wealth nothing turned up. It is now widely suspected that not only the hiding places but the treasures themselves are legendary. If this is the case, it is not the only product of the imagination to emerge from the scrolls. Fact and fantasy seem to have intermingled at Qumran, and drawing the line between them is not an easy task for the modern investigator. How far the men of Qumran themselves drew a line is not always easy to discover.

Responding to the discovery of Cave 3 as if to a challenge, the Beduin

brought to Jerusalem, in the next six months, more manuscripts from an unidentified cave in the Naḥal Hever south of En-gedi, and from Khirbet el Mird, five miles west of Qumran (see map p. 19). The Beduin scroll-hunt was undoubtedly being conducted on a massive scale, and it bore fruit yet again at Qumran. For while they had carefully surveyed all the caves in the cliffs, the archaeologists had ignored those in the limestone terrace and the outcrop on which the Qumran ruins stood. Right under their noses, the Beduin excavators came across the biggest haul of all, from Cave 4 on the southern edge of the outcrop and easily visible from the bed of the Wadi Qumran (Plate 4). This cave proved to contain the remains of some four hundred manuscripts. The archaeologists once again moved in to complete the excavation, and also discovered, close to it, Cave 5. Cave 6 was traced by the Beduin, near the waterfall of the Wadi Qumran.

These events took place between February and September 1952. It was not until February 1953 that the second season of excavations commenced at the Qumran ruins. By now, of course, the scale of the settlement and its literary remains had become much clearer. No more manuscript caves were found until the fourth season in 1955, when numbers 7–10 were revealed on the eastern slope of the Qumran outcrop. The contents of these caves, whose discovery is credited to the official excavators, did not prove to be particularly important. But the eleventh cave, a mile north of Qumran and close to Cave 3, was found and emptied by the Beduin who were able subsequently to sell their spoils to the officials. The final score in cave discovery was therefore six to the official parties and five to the Beduin. The trade in manuscripts was rather brisk as the Beduin had much to sell. They exhausted the funds of the various Jordanian institutions, and foreign institutions were invited to purchase lots on the condition that the texts remained at the Palestine Archaeological Museum for editing. An official standard price was set for manuscripts, roughly £1 per square centimetre of written surface. This policy succeeded in keeping the scrolls together and avoided many other dangers which would otherwise have threatened their preservation. In addition, de Vaux employed some of the Ta'amireh Beduin as workmen in the official excavations of Qumran. Few would deny that they had earned it!

It must be made clear that the numbered caves to which we have just referred represent only those in which manuscript material was found. Numerous other caves in the vicinity yielded other finds. The caves in the cliffs, all of which were natural cavities, included forty from which pottery and other objects were recovered, twenty-six containing pottery identical with that found in the Qumran ruins – mainly jugs, bowls and lamps. From this it seemed that the caves had been inhabited, usually by individuals who were presumably members of the Qumran community; a few caves were

apparently used as stores. The density of occupation of these caves increased in the vicinity of Qumran, and one interesting feature of the distribution is that the inhabited caves tend to form groups separated by stretches where no occupied caves occur. De Vaux has suggested that this may simply be due to variations of contour in the terrain or ease of access, but it may be rather that the community of Qumran was divided into groups; there is some evidence in the scrolls for such an organisation.

The caves in the terrace and the outcrop, by contrast, are all artificial. Of these, Cave 4 is the most interesting. It was densely packed with scrolls, stored without jars in such a way as to suggest that its contents were hastily concealed. Its position makes it extremely difficult to enter, and the excavators had to cut steps in the side of the terrace to gain access. It has been suggested that this cave housed the community library, but this accounts for neither the disarray of the contents nor the traces of human habitation.

A total of some thirty caves, extending over two miles north and south of Qumran, seems to have been occupied at the same time as the ruins. Together with the ruins, these give a picture of a settlement consisting of a community centre (Qumran) used by people who actually dwelt either in the caves or in tents or huts. Five wooden posts, two of them forked at the end, were found hidden in a crevice together with fragments of pottery which, de Vaux suggests, are the remains of the supporting posts of a tent or hut and the utensils used in it. As we shall see, no living quarters have been identified in what remains of the Qumran buildings themselves. Unless, then, we are able to conceive of a city without houses, we ought to include the area containing the inhabited caves within the 'city limits' of Qumran.

Qumran was excavated in five seasons, in 1951 and 1953–6. A further season of excavation in 1958 took place at the associated site of 'Ain Feshkha which, it emerged, also belonged to the Qumran complex. The progress of all the excavations was fully and promptly reported in the *Revue Biblique*, the journal of the École Biblique, and a summary of the findings was issued in 1961 (in French) by the Oxford University Press, being in fact the text of the 1959 Schweich Lectures delivered by de Vaux at the British Academy. In 1972 a revised text was translated into English and it remains the definitive account of the work done and of the author's considered conclusions. Despite one or two lapses during the early stages of excavation which we have already noted, Roland de Vaux's work at Qumran was that of a brilliant scholar and a thoroughly competent archaeologist. He combined to an unusual degree the gifts of imagination and common-sense. In presenting the results of the excavations at Qumran, I make no apology for relying, in common with many other scholars, almost exclusively on de Vaux's reports; and where I disagree it is with great caution.