



Archaeologists Oren Gutfeld & Ahiad Ovadia survey cave

Excitement as Additional Qumran Cave is Discovered

THE FASCINATING SAGA OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS CONTINUES

The recent announcement by archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) and the Hebrew University that a 12th cave had been found at Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, raises hope that it may be possible to eventually recover additional texts from the Judean Desert.

Explorations by Bedouin and archaeologists between 1947 and 1956 led to the recovery of scrolls or manuscript fragments from 11 caves in the immediate vicinity of Qumran on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. The new cave has been numbered Qumran Cave 12. All of the caves are adjacent to the ruins of an ancient sectarian settlement inhabited between about 100 BCE and 68 CE. This site was apparently the communal and ritual center for a group of sectarian Jews, identified by many scholars with the Essenes described by the first-century CE Jewish historian Josephus. This group lived a life of purity and religious devotion and gathered the more than 900 scrolls that in their present fragmentary condition constitute the collection we term the Dead Sea Scrolls. The scrolls are divided more or less evenly between Biblical texts (including parts of every book of *Tanach* except *Megillas Esther*), apocryphal compositions (*Sefarim Chitzoniyim*—books about the *Tanach* or resembling the *Tanach*), and sectarian

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compositions including *halachah*, Biblical commentary, *Targum*, *tefillah* texts, poetry and wisdom texts.

Despite the widespread identification of the ancient sectarians with the Essenes, I have argued in a series of books and articles that the *halachah* of the Qumran sect follows the approach of the *Tzadokim* (Saducees). The Dead Sea sectarians came into existence in about 152 BCE when Yonasan, the brother of Yehudah Hama-cabi, ascended to rule over the nascent Hasmonean state. In my view, a group of *Tzadokim*, disagreeing with the *Chashmonaim* (Hasmoneans) and the *Perushim* (Pharisees—*Chazal*) who supported them, left the Temple in Jerusalem and established a settlement at Qumran in the Judean Desert. We know that these *Tzadoki kohanim* objected to the Hasmonean policy of following the halachic rulings of the *Perushim* from a Dead Sea Scrolls text called “*Miktzat Maaseh HaTorah*” (“Some Rulings of the Torah”). In it, the sectarians set out 22 objections wherein they differed from the *Perushim*. Furthermore, numer-

ous halachic texts found among the scrolls indicate the affinity of the sectarians to the *Tzadoki* approach. This approach was also followed by the Samaritans (termed *Kusim* by *Chazal*) and by the medieval Karaites.

Actually, Cave 12 did not yield any new written materials. So why all the excitement? News reports regarding the excavations, conducted by Dr. Oren Gutfeld and Ahiad Ovadia from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with Dr. Randall Price and students from Liberty University in Virginia, indicated that scrolls had originally been stored in the cave, but that they were stolen by illegal Bedouin excavators in the 1950s. The evidence included so-called scroll jars of the type in which the famous Bedouin boy found the seven original scrolls located in Cave 1 in 1947. However, the jars in question were actually made for the purpose of storing food, as they are much larger than is necessary for scrolls. So the existence of such jars does not necessarily testify to the presence of scrolls. Nonetheless, blank animal skins that had been prepared for writing

Fault cliff and cave entrance
(center left)



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Remnant of scroll removed from a jar



Seal made of carnelian stone found in cave



were found in the cave, so the possibility that actual scrolls had been hidden there is certainly a reasonable claim. Also, the fact that the jars were broken supports the notion that the cave was looted in modern times. The excavators found two pick-axes of the type that were in use in the 1950s in the cave. In addition to the large number of broken storage jars, cloth used for wrapping scrolls and string for tying a scroll closed were found in this cave as well.

This excavation is part of a project of the IAA called *Mivtza Megillah*, Operation Scroll. Similar operations took place in 1994 in preparation for handing over the area of Jericho to Palestinian rule. At that time, some documents hidden during the period of the Bar Kochba Revolt (132-5 CE) were recovered. The current project hopes to search for additional materials from the Qumran area, but is also investigating other Judean Desert sites in which it is hoped that antiquities from the period of Bar Kochba will be found. In the 1950s and '60s, several Judean Desert caves yielded texts that today are classed as Bar Kochba documents. These featured *Tanach*, contracts including land sales, *kesubos* (marriage contracts) and *gittin* (divorce documents), as well as letters from Shimon bar Kosiba, the real name of Bar Kochba, to his local commanders at Ein Gedi, on the shore of the Dead Sea. All these documents were left in caves along

the Dead Sea by Jewish residents of the area fleeing the Roman forces during the Bar Kochba Revolt. Generally, they follow the *halachah* we are familiar with from the *Chazal*. Some documents, however, are written in Greek and follow Roman law, since they had to be enforceable in Roman courts, given that the Romans ruled Judea starting in 63 BCE. Recently, archaeologists returned to the Cave of the Skulls, located in Nachal Tze'elim, also used as a refuge during the Bar Kochba Revolt. It had been excavated many years ago, but they reported finding some undecipherable written material.

The discovery by the Bedouin boy of seven scrolls was just the beginning of the story of the Dead Sea Scrolls in modern times, some 20 centuries after they were first copied. Many of us have had the opportunity to see these scrolls exhibited in the Shrine of the Book (*Heichal Hasefer*) of the Israel Museum. By 1954, the scrolls were all in possession of the State of Israel, and the Shrine of the Book was built to house them in 1965.

In 1948, the British abandoned the Mandate they had been granted in the aftermath of World War I for the express purpose of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. The Arab nations immediately attacked the newly-declared State of Israel, and when the War of Independence was over, Jordan had conquered Judea and Samaria, including the area of

the Judean Desert from which the first seven Dead Sea Scrolls had come. In the 1950s, while archaeologists working under Jordanian auspices were excavating the ruins of Qumran, the Bedouin continued to explore the caves and brought out enormous amounts of scroll material. Through an intermediary, these materials were sold to the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and placed in the Palestine Archaeological Museum (now the Rockefeller Museum) in East Jerusalem for safekeeping. The cave with the largest yield was Cave 4, in which terribly damaged remains of more than 550 scrolls were found. Indeed, these fragments constituted a massive jigsaw puzzle that had to be reassembled; it is these texts about which there was a huge public uproar in the 1990s because their publication was so delayed. Today, every single fragment has been published. It is assumed that the newly discovered Cave 12 must have been looted during this same period of intense Bedouin activity.

When the archaeologists realized the extent of the Bedouin explorations, they decided to mount a search of their own. The total number of caves examined reached 40. Some of these caves had pottery similar to that in the caves where the scrolls were found, indicating that the same religious community that assembled the scrolls had used the other caves as well. But this systematic exploration was



Cloth that was used for wrapping scrolls



too late, as numerous caves showed evidence of having already been visited by Bedouin in search of salable antiquities.

Not long ago, I wrote on these very pages about the fact that since 2002 a number of Dead Sea Scroll fragments had appeared on the antiquities market, a substantial group of which seem to be forgeries. But the amazing thing was that the almost certainly forged fragments had been carbon-14 dated to the first century B.C.E. We all wondered how this could be. Now we know from the discovery of Cave 12 that blank parchment of the kind used by ancient Jewish scribes may have been recovered by the Bedouin from this or similar caves.

It would be wonderful to know whether or not Cave 12 was one of those explored by the archaeologists working in Jordan in the 1950s. Unfortunately, the full reports of the excavation of Qumran and the nearby caves have never been published. Nor are the excavators' notebooks available to archaeologists.

In 1967, as a result of the Six-Day War, the Rockefeller Museum with its Dead Sea Scrolls came under the control of the Israeli government. Unfortunately, it took until 1994 for the Department of Antiquities, in response to an organized press campaign and demands of scholars, to reorganize the publication project and take the scrolls out of the hands of the Jordanian-appointed Publication Team. Nonetheless, the exca-

vation reports still remained in the hands of the same scholars who had failed to publish them over the course of so many years. To date, only parts of the notebooks and reports have been published; it is a lingering scandal. So we cannot know if the newly-named Cave 12 was among those previously explored by the archaeologists.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to participate in excavations in the area of Qumran as well as further south in the Judean Desert. Just being in these historic places gives one a feeling of unbelievable closeness to our brethren in ancient times. The recent excavations and efforts that the IAA is putting into the renewed Operation Scroll hold out the possibility for expanding our understanding of Jewish society and history in the Judean Desert.

"Zechor yemos olam, binu shenos dor vador—Remember the days of eternity, study the years of every generation" (Devarim 32:7). Let us hope that the continued exploration of the Judean Desert, which has yielded so much for the study of Jewish history and archaeology, will continue to help us in our quest to understand our glorious past. □

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