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FACT AND FICTION IN CURRENT EXHIBITIONS OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

— A Critical Notebook for Viewers —

Six decades after their discovery, the Dead Sea Scrolls are still being treated in many quarters as merely the writings of a small sect that once inhabited an austere desert location near the area where they were discovered. Nowhere is this effort being more ardently pursued than in the present series of Scroll exhibitions taking place here in the States.

This series, while rooted in showings of previous decades, was developed and formulated only during the past few years, beginning with the exhibit that took place in Charlotte (N.C.) in the spring of 2006. This one was passed on to Seattle's Pacific Science Center (Autumn 2006). From there it traveled to Kansas City's Discovery Place (Winter and Spring 2007), and it is now moving to San Diego's Natural History Museum, with an opening planned for the end of June 2007. It must be noted that the wording of the descriptions in the exhibit plaques has been formulated in consultation with and subject to the approval of the responsible curators at the Israel Antiquities Authority in Jerusalem.

While variations in wording can be found in each of the exhibitions, the basic idiom and associated message remain the same: they have in common an effort to convince the public of the truth of the old theory, created in the infancy of Scroll scholarship, that these manuscripts were written in whole or at least in large part by a Jewish sect of Essenes supposedly living at a site — Khirbet Qumran — located in the Judean Wilderness near the Dead Sea shore.

These claims contradict the presently known accumulation of evidence, adduced by growing numbers of text scholars and archaeologists, demonstrating that the Scrolls are of Jerusalem origin, that Khirbet Qumran was a secular site with no connection to a religious sect, and that the Scrolls lack any organic relation to that site. (On the San Diego museum's announced plan to minimize the significance of the recent findings of Israeli archaeologists relative to these conclusions, in a "virtual reality" film to be projected on a giant screen, see **Appendix** below.)

The current exhibitions exclude from their presentations virtually all of the salient evidence pointing towards the Jerusalem origin of the Scrolls, while manifestly distorting that particular portion of the evidence which they do adduce. In addition, the actual descriptions of the manuscripts are often slanted in ways that obscure the historical understanding of these texts.

Having recently studied the Kansas City exhibit in detail, I here offer the most problematic examples of the claims being made — both for the possible benefit of those who have visited the past exhibits, but also for the consideration of the San Diego public and all other future viewers of this traveling show, in whatever incarnations it might take.

The claims include the following:

- Soon after introductory panels present the basic themes of the exhibit, visitors are informed that the famous Copper Scroll of Cave 3 **“preserved two oxidized rolls of beaten copper... containing a lengthy list that claimed the existence of hidden treasures. Whether this treasure is real or imaginary remains a tantalizing enigma to this day.”**

Next to this statement is a replica of the scroll, but *no translation* of any part of it is given. This is done despite the fact that the Copper Scroll describes the hiding of (a) Temple vessels, (b) large amounts of gold and silver ingots, and (c) scrolls (*sefarin*) and other texts (*ketabin*), as well as various localities where the sequestration has taken place. Most of the hiding-places are in the general area of the Judaean Wilderness where the Dead Sea Scrolls were eventually discovered in eleven caves. Perceiving the contradiction between the contents of this scroll and the theory that a sect of wealtheschewing Essenes lived at Qumran and wrote the scrolls there, Father de Vaux, upon confronting this text in the mid-1950s, declared it a fiction. Had the curators, however, allowed samples of this text to be presented in translation, and had viewers been informed that it has been held to be authentic by the great majority of scholars who have actually researched it during the past three decades, a better understanding of the growing perception that the Scrolls are of Jerusalem origin would have been gained by visitors to the exhibit. The above facts are withheld from the exhibit.

- **“Cave 11 ... provided extensive documents, including ... the Temple Scroll.”**

The futuristic Temple Scroll was handed over to Yigael Yadin by an antiquities dealer in Bethlehem, who removed it from under the floorboards of his house. Until today, the correctness of Yadin’s belief that this scroll derives from Cave 11 has been proven by no one.

- **“(Scroll jars) ... are unique to the Qumran area.... It seems that the Qumran community preferred these cylindrical jars because of the laws of purity.... The jars served as storage containers for ritually pure goods....”** Compare **“Pottery in Qumran”** plaque: **“The ceramic pottery found in Qumran are simple, unadorned vessels, typical of the Judean sites of the Second Temple Period.”**

These statements at first seem to be mutually contradictory, until it becomes apparent that what the curators are suggesting is that the so-called “scroll” jars were unique to Qumran, whereas all the other pottery types found within Kh. Qumran are typical of Judaean sites in general. (The display of “ceramic pottery” is so presented as to exclude the “scroll” jars.) What archaeologists have demonstrated in recent years,

however, is that the so-called “scroll jars” have been found also at other sites besides Kh. Qumran, and could well have been utilized for other purposes besides storing scrolls. The curators fail to divulge this information, just as they have failed to include pertinent writings of recent archaeologists (notably those of Dr. Rachel Bar-Nathan of the Israel Antiquities Authority) in the lists of recommended readings accompanying the exhibits.

The curators’ pottery claim, as their claim regarding the Copper Scroll, represents only the view of traditional Scroll scholars who still believe that a radical Jewish religious community lived at Kh. Qumran and wrote or at least collected scrolls there.

In view of the growing controversy over these and other artifacts (cf. below), the curators in charge could easily have presented a balanced description depicting both views, but they once again opted not to do so.

• **“A number of inkwells [were] found at Qumran.... Three ... were found in the central hall together with the remains of plastered tables and benches. According to some scholars, this hall served as the center of scribal activity; therefore it was named the ‘Scriptorium’.”**

The “some scholars” who identified the construction referred to as a scriptorium were those who believed the Qumran site they were excavating was a monastery of celibate Essene monks. Other scholars have for good reason opposed this identification. The structure is not a “central hall” but a two-story building, of which the second story collapsed, sending debris down to the ground floor. *Two* inkwells were found in this debris; a *third* was found in another Kh. Qumran locus, while a possible *fourth*, in the private Schuyen collection, is claimed to come from Qumran as well. As archaeologists have pointed out in their writings, such inkwells have been found in other archaeological sites on both sides of the Dead Sea and in Jerusalem, and writing materials were also needed for commercial or military purposes. The presence of inkwells at Qumran cannot reasonably be meant to imply, in the absence of any cogent evidence of religious scribal activity within that site, that either of the two rooms in question served as a monk-like scriptorium.

In this regard, archaeologists have shown by careful measurement that the remains of the so-called “plastered tables” found in the debris cannot legitimately be characterized as such. Traditional Qumran scholars claim that scrolls were copied in the upper story of that structure, but until now *not a single scroll or fragment* has ever been found in the debris there or anywhere else within Khirbet Qumran. The curators of the exhibition, however, fail to mention this fact as well.

As for the statement regarding the “scriptorium” belief, it could easily have been extended by a single sentence: namely that, on the basis of the actual evidence, other highly reputable scholars, including (e.g.) Robert Donceel and Pauline Donceel-Voute of the University of Louvain and the late Yizhar Hirschfeld of the Hebrew University, do not agree with the traditional claim, but rather assign entirely different purposes to these rooms having no connection with sectarians. Depending on the precise age of the

inkwells, they could have served the needs either of a military settlement or, after the Romans conquered Judaea in 63 BC, the requirements of the pottery-manufacturing enterprise of which strong evidence has been unearthed during the past decade by the Israel Antiquities Authority's own officially appointed archaeological team led by Dr. Yitzhak Magen and Dr. Yuval Peleg.

Given the combined indications described so far, it would appear that the curators — paradoxically also affiliated with the Antiquities Authority — have chosen, wittingly or not, to keep from the viewing public certain material facts supportive of the view that the Scrolls came from Jerusalem libraries. Other statements made in the exhibit make it all the more evident that the curators have been arbitrarily one-sided in the choice of facts presented or omitted by them. *Viz.:*

- Close on the heels of the above statements, one finds the assertion that **“Jerusalem and the Second Temple were destroyed by Titus, and the people were again sent into exile, marking the end of the Second Temple period.”**

It is impossible to understand how the curators could allow such a misleading statement to appear in the exhibitions. While Jews taken captive during the war were indeed enslaved and sent to Rome, the great majority of the Jewish population of both Galilee and Judaea remained in Palestine and after a brief period were once again allowed their internal autonomy. The process of rebuilding both their commerce and culture has been detailed by many historians who invariably describe the role of the several generations of early rabbinic figures (*Tannaim*) in establishing academies of learning and stabilizing the study of Jewish law in Palestine during this period.

However, instead of describing this remarkable sociocultural phenomenon of the first three centuries of the Common Era, the curators appear to nullify it. A graphic time-line is presented in the exhibit that makes no mention of Palestinian Judaism's survival and reconstruction, but instead *leaves blank* this entire part of the history of the Palestinian Jews, including even the Bar Kokhba revolt and the establishment of the Palestinian Patriarchate, and offering only the casual statement (3rd century CE timeline box) that “Rabbi Judah the Prince edits the Mishnah.” How many viewers of these exhibitions can derive even the barest understanding of the Palestinian Jewish history of this period from such a sorry presentation — particularly when it is accompanied by an accurately presented time-line of general historical events during the same period?

- According to the same time-line, the **“3rd Century B.C.E... [marked the] Completion of the Septuagint”**; in the **“2nd Century B.C.E. ...a group settles in Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls are discovered”**; in the 1st Century CE occurred the **“Canonization of the Ketuvim”** (=the Biblical Writings or Hagiographa); and in 68 CE **“Roman legions destroy the Qumran settlement.”** To which series of misstatements one is obliged to respond:

- (a) that only the Greek translation of the Torah, or Five Books of Moses, and by no means the Septuagintal translation of the entire Hebrew Bible corpus, was completed during the 3rd century BC;

- (b) that until the Roman conquest of 63 BC there is no material evidence Khirbet Qumran was held by any other “group” than Jewish Hasmonaean military forces just as they held various other fortresses of Judaea, and that, once again, *scrolls have never been discovered* within Khirbet Qumran;
- (c) that the canonization of the Hagiographa (or third main section of the Hebrew Bible) could not have been completed before the 2nd century CE, at which time the holiness of such writings as Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes was still being debated by the Tannaitic authorities; and
- (d) that the year of destruction of Khirbet Qumran by Roman forces, considered by Father Roland de Vaux, on the basis of the dating of some coins found there, to have been 68 CE, is more likely to have been after the Romans had taken Jerusalem in 70 CE, according to Josephus’ own account of the direction of movements taken by the Roman forces after their conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE (*Jewish War*, VII, 163 ff.).

In the above group of citations, those referred to in (b) and (d) are based upon views expressed in the 1950s by Father Roland de Vaux, which the curators apparently insist upon championing without citing any of the contradictory evidence that has emerged during the past three decades. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the curators have been disregarding basic rules of fairness in museum presentations.

- Under the rubric “**Jewish Sects of [the] ...2nd Temple period**”, the curators state that **Josephus** speaks of “**three sects**” and then continue: “**The Essenes were separatists and had several different communities, according to Josephus.... They were ascetic (self-denying) and lived in remote locations in order to escape the corruption of the cities.**” Under another rubric (“Diversity of Opinion”) the authors nuance the latter statement: “**Flavius Josephus wrote that (the Essenes) ... were scattered in various settlements.**”

This treatment appears to hark back to Josephus’s *Jewish War* but not also to his *Antiquities*, where a “Fourth Philosophy” (taken by some scholars to allude to the Zealots) is described in addition to Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes.

The treatment moreover misstates the description of Josephus who, instead of suggesting that the Essenes “had several different communities” that were “scattered,” states that “they occupy no one city, but settle in large numbers in every town.” Nor does Josephus ever indicate that Essenes “lived in remote locations ... to escape the corruption of the cities,” which remark is, instead, a distorted version of Pliny the Elder’s description of a *single group* of celibate Essenes living above En-Gedi after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Josephus explicitly mentions a “Gate of the Essenes,” presumably in the area where Essenes were living, in (pre-destruction) *Jerusalem*, which was certainly a large city not devoid of corruption. The omission of this fact by the curators is consonant with an apparent effort to convince viewers of the cogency of the idea that Essenes once actually lived in the desert, at the Khirbet Qumran site.

- In describing a number of small stone measuring cups on display, the curators state that the **“use of stone vessels in purification can be found in the story of the transformation of water into wine in Cana, Galilee,”** thereafter quoting John 2:6.

The John passage does speak of large vessels holding thirty or forty gallons of water being used for purification purposes, but the curators do not explain what this has to do with small stone cups; they offer no proof that the displayed cups were used for purification rather than simply for drinking or measuring water or other liquids. Associating the cups with purification is nothing more than a rhetorical ploy aimed at encouraging the belief that a purity-loving Essenic sect could really have lived at Khirbet Qumran; nowhere in the exhibit do the curators cite specific archaeological proof that would support such a belief. The attempt to connect these cups with the John passage can only confuse serious viewers.

- Under the rubric **“Qumran Inhabitants”** the curators first indicate that **“Qumran was founded in the second half of the 2nd Century BCE”** and thereafter that it was **“abandoned a century later ... during the Jewish War.”** They assert this, however, without indicating that a sizeable body of material evidence has led various archaeologists, during the past few decades, to conclude, in published books and articles, that Kh. Qumran was originally *an early Judaean fortress expanded and strengthened by the Hasmonaeans during the 2nd century BC* and held by them until the Roman conquest of Judaea in 63 BC. It was not simply “abandoned” during the First Revolt, but according to certain evidence — already cited even by Father de Vaux — was, during the revolt, seized from Jewish defenders by Roman troops who then used it as a fortress of their own during at least the next several years.

Without mentioning any of this, however, the curators segue into the assertion that the **“location of the sect is assigned to the Dead Sea area by Pliny the Elder”** and go on to say that **“in most cases, the principles of the Essene way of life and beliefs are described by contemporaneous writers in language similar to the descriptions found in the scrolls.”**

Pliny the Elder, however, only states that below the site of the celibate Essenes was En Gedi, which like Jerusalem had become a heap of ashes. The use being made by defenders of the Qumran-Essene theory of his innocent remark that there was a group of non-marrying Essenes living above En Gedi after Jerusalem’s destruction must have poor Pliny writhing in his grave. The curators refrain from acknowledging in their posted description that *no text advocating celibacy* has ever been found among the Scrolls. The brotherhood group described in the Manual of Discipline and several other Scrolls does show similarities with some Essenic ideas described in antiquity by Josephus, but by no means is this true of the great majority of Scrolls as now fully published.

The above assertions of the curators, which read simply as reincarnations of early beliefs about the Scrolls, are clearly in need of correction and up-dating. This is equally the case with still other statements in the exhibits. For example:

- (“Diversity of Opinion” plaque): **“The De Vaux evidence is accepted by the majority of scholars as identifying the Essenes with the manuscripts found in the caves.”**

This claim is surely valid if it refers to all of the many Qumranologists and other scholars who wholeheartedly (and uncritically) supported de Vaux in his Qumran-Essene theory, unstintingly committed themselves to the theory in myriad books and articles, and are now in large measure deceased.

By any other definition of the term “scholars,” however, it is entirely uncertain whether the claim still holds true today. If “scholars” refers to traditional Qumranologists trained by disciples of de Vaux and by followers of his ideas, then the statement certainly remains valid. But if “scholars” refers to independent researchers of the Scrolls who have parted company with de Vaux’s line of interpretation, as well as historians, philologists, manuscript specialists and others who have in their writings never committed themselves to the de Vaux theory, the statement is certainly unwarranted. Only a professional survey by trained statisticians concerned with the sociology of scientific and historical theories might shed light on this matter. At the present time, an assertion such as the one made by the curators in the above citation, the clear purpose of which is to justify what can only be termed an entirely one-sided presentation, is obviously improper and out of place in public exhibitions of the Scrolls.

- (“Ritual Purity in Qumran” plaque): **“Ten of the 16 pools discovered at Qumran are considered to be *miqva’ot*” (= ritual baths).**

At the height of enchantment with the Qumran-Essene theory in the 1950s through the 1970s, traditional scholars outdid one another in identifying the number of Khirbet Qumran reservoirs that they believed could have served as ritual baths. During the last few decades, however, archaeologists have given more limited appraisals of the number so identified. In summarizing their decade-long excavations of Kh. Qumran — which included for the first time a complete excavation of the reservoirs — the archaeologists Y. Magen and Y. Peleg of the Israel Antiquities Authority drew the conclusion that “the only pool that may ... conceivably have served as a ritual bath is Pool I-138.” The curators of the exhibits omit mention of this conclusion, while using words that appear designed to convince viewers of the believability of the Qumran-Essene theory by describing only the traditionalist position in what for at least the past few decades has been a controversy regarding the function of these reservoirs.

“The Qumran community strictly interpreted and applied laws of ritual purity. Thus, if a member transgressed a regulation or law he was considered ‘impure’”.

By conjoining the expression “the Qumran community” with the rubric “Ritual Purity in Qumran,” the curators once again appear intent on inducing the public to believe that an Essenic sect actually lived at Khirbet Qumran and practiced a high degree of ritual purity there. For this they rely on descriptions of activities of the brotherhood

described in the Manual of Discipline, one of the most interesting of the Dead Sea Scrolls. No statement in this scroll, however, encourages members of this particular brotherhood to live in the desert or in so-called “scattered communities” of Essenes that the curators misleadingly attempt to pin on Josephus. If certain purity laws were observed by inhabitants of Kh. Qumran, this can hardly be made to signify more than that Palestinian Jews inhabiting the site hoped to observe well known Biblically ordained purity rules. The curators appear to be so enamored of the view they are defending that they show signs of being unwilling to describe any objections to it — the very opposite of what one should expect of museum presentations.

“The community at Qumran divided its members according to their degree of initiation in the sect.” (Compare in “Community Rule” plaque the following statement: **“The Community Rule ... comprises a set of rules according to which members of the Judaean Desert sect conducted their lives.”**)

“The community at Qumran” and “members of the Judaean Desert sect” are mental constructs that enable traditional Qumranologists to imagine the factuality of the Qumran-Essene theory. What the curators describe in other parts of these two passages are statements in the Manual of Discipline (alternatively known as “The Community Rule”). This work contains, as indicated above, a highly important description of a Jewish brotherhood group whose members did indeed have degrees of initiation, but they have never been shown to have inhabited the fortress-like Khirbet Qumran or any other desert location. The text of this work does state that “wherever there are ten members of the Yahad (Unity) council, there shall not cease to be a *kohen* (Aaronic priest) ... (and) a man expounding the Torah day and night...,” implying the conception of a widespread movement. Not a single artifact or Scroll passage, however, supports the curators’ effort, gradually increasing in intensity as viewers pass each posted statement, to induce belief in the narrowly-focused traditional theory, which only detracts from the historical appreciation of the Manual of Discipline.

• **“Daily Life in Qumran” plaque): “An Essene’s day began before dawn with the recitation of prayers.... Phylacteries found in the excavations were probably worn during prayers. Meals were communal.... ‘They shall eat in common and bless in common and deliberate in common (Community Rule 6: 2-3) — outlining a life reminiscent of a monastic community.”** “Leather” plaque: **“In the Second Temple Period, it was established that phylacteries would include four scriptural passages inscribed on parchment. Qumran has provided the earliest remains of the leather containers and the inscribed parchments.”**

Here we have a yet more full-blown defense of the original Qumran-Essene theory in its most pristine form. However, while Josephus describes the Essenes’ pre-dawn prayer habits, he does not also say that they lived in the desert, and he never refers to their wearing of phylacteries.

On the other hand, many Jews in antiquity did indeed wear phylacteries. The curators refer to “phylacteries found in the excavations” — as though unaware that they

were found *not* within Khirbet Qumran itself but only in some of the eleven scroll caves extending three kilometers northward. The curators refrain from stating that the wording of the approximately thirty discovered phylacteries is not only of “four scriptural passages,” but — directly opposite to the view of group uniformity expressed in the Manual of Discipline — *has wide variations from text to text*, showing that the phylacteries reflect views of different groups within Palestinian Judaism in antiquity.

The phylacteries themselves prove the very opposite of what the curators claim about them. For this reason alone (and leaving aside all the other reasons) there is no warrant for the curators’ inference, from the passage concerning eating, blessing and deliberating in common, that a *monastic* community is reflected in these words. The Manual of Discipline never states that the described members of the brotherhood were to *live* together or practice celibacy. (If there remain scholars who still want to believe such claims, they at all events have never demonstrated that such living together of a sect actually occurred at the Khirbet Qumran site.) Some Palestinian Jewish groups continued to practice brotherhood-style discipline at least into the 2nd or 3rd century CE as did other, non-Jewish, Hellenistic groups, without resort to monasticism. According to the texts we possess, there were regular brotherhood meetings, members shared their wealth in common, and they held ceremonial repasts. It is certainly possible that early Christian monasticism grew out of some such brotherhood concept. However, in the history of the Jews — i.e., what we know of it from ancient sources including the Scrolls — no texts espousing monasticism are known.

- The curators present various interesting Scrolls in their exhibit, together with descriptions of them. However, they curate only three categories of texts, which they designate, respectively, as “**Biblical Scrolls**,” “**Apocryphal Scrolls**,” and “**Sectarian Scrolls**.” No additional section on *other* scrolls — i.e., those that are neither Biblical, nor apocryphal, nor sectarian, but which have become abundantly known with the publication of over twenty new volumes of Scroll texts during the past decade — are presented or mentioned by the curators. (See the variety of genres represented, e.g., in M. Wise et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls – A New Translation* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2005).)

The curatorial descriptions appended to the claimed three categories of manuscripts amply indicate the curators’ ostensible purpose. Whereas the general statement concerning the “apocryphal scrolls” is to the effect that a “**considerable number of apocryphal and pseudepigraphic texts ... are preserved at Qumran ...**”, a more specific statement (“**Aramaic Apocalypse**” plaque) is that “**Extraordinarily rich and extensive apocalyptic literature appears in the library of the sect of Qumran.**” This is followed (“**Sectarian Scrolls**” plaque) by the yet bolder assertion that “**Sectarian writings apparently written by and for the sect represented at Qumran and elsewhere in the Judaean Desert, were practically unknown until their discovery among the Dead Sea Scrolls.**” In descriptions of the individual manuscripts that follow, the curators make further efforts to attribute authorship of the Dead Sea Scrolls not to the Palestinian Jews but rather to a small heterodox segment of that people — never once showing, however, in what way the cogency of their claim is apparent.

From the sequence of these assertions, unsuspecting viewers will clearly be encouraged to believe that scrolls were found in Khirbet Qumran (which is of course untrue), that a sect inhabited Kh. Qumran and possessed a library there (which remains an unproven claim), and that the theorized sect was located not only in Kh. Qumran but also in other localities of the Judaean Wilderness (for which there is not an iota of genuine evidence). There is no reason to think that Pliny's description of a celibate Essene group living above En-Gedi after the destruction of Jerusalem is anything but authentic. However, the Scrolls found in the eleven caves stretching northward from Kh. Qumran can far more reasonably be attributed to inhabitants of Jerusalem — including heterodox groups who were certainly among them — who urgently needed to sequester their scrolls and (as the Copper Scroll makes clear) other treasures, as the Roman siege of 70 CE became an impending reality.

This latter interpretation of the Scrolls' origins is, unlike the original theory, based on the totality of evidence as now known, and is presently supported by growing numbers of scholars. It has, however, been virtually suppressed from the current exhibits. One may observe in passing that a professional knowledge of the history of the Jewish people during the period at issue cannot be perceived in the wording of these exhibits. Would it not have been a matter of simple intellectual honesty to present both sides of the growing controversy over the Scrolls to the thousands of viewers who have placed their trust in the hands of the curators of these exhibits?

Appendix: Observations on the Forthcoming Exhibit in San Diego

No doubt sensitive to the likelihood of criticism resulting from a failure to include the findings of the Israel Antiquities Authority's own archaeological team in its exhibit of the Scrolls, the San Diego Natural History Museum has attempted to incorporate some of those findings in a "virtual reality" film of Khirbet Qumran. According to the museum's website, this is to be projected in a "giant-screen theater" and is being produced in cooperation with a team of traditional Qumranologists affiliated with UCLA. Under the rubric "**New Findings,**" we read that the film "**suggests some important findings that weigh in on the debate of the nature of the Qumran settlement.**" Most importantly, the film is to make it "**obvious that the original structure was a fortress — possibly Hasmonean ... defended on the west and south by a sharp precipice and defended in the northwest corner by a massive tower.**"

This finding is, of course, not "new," but was recognized by scholars much earlier on who by studying the site and the objects excavated there were obliged to reach this conclusion — and the difficulties it poses for the Qumran-Essene theory have been emphasized by that theory's opponents (see pertinent details in my 1995 book on the Scrolls). The museum's website, however, does not mention any such difficulty; rather, it casually seeks to *reconcile* the military nature of the site with the idea that a sect lived at Kh. Qumran and wrote scrolls there. Thus we are told (a) that the "virtual tour" will present what the museum calls "**substantial evidence indicating that the site was abandoned, and then reoccupied, expanded, and repurposed by some other group, possibly the 'Yahad' of the scrolls;**" (b) that the same film "**has shown**" that the "**nature of the newer, expanded areas were communal and non-militaristic,**" and (c) that its "**inhabitants were involved in some agricultural activities and some industrial activity, including pottery making.**"

This “communal” interpretation of Qumran is precisely what is disputed by the IAA team and other scholars, who have demonstrated by the actual archaeological discoveries, as known today, that Kh. Qumran had a principally military, and at other times an industrial, function, that no material evidence exists that it was ever inhabited by a communal sect or “group,” and that the Dead Sea Scrolls were not written at Qumran but are the remnants of Jerusalem libraries.

The museum, however, does not mention any of this, but asserts, in a remarkably illogical statement that “**these findings**” [by which is actually meant the speculations put forth in the virtual reality movie] “**support many aspects of the new theories**” [viz., those of the recent Israeli archeologists] “**surrounding Qumran, while maintaining**” [sic!] “**that the site did in fact manufacture scrolls, and is ultimately responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls found in nearby caves.**” In other words, the San Diego museum authorities have taken it upon themselves to promote the claims being made in the virtual reality movie to the status of “findings” which in turn entitles them to “maintain” that scrolls were actually written at Kh. Qumran. The curators tangled argument, mirrored in their confusing syntax, clearly distorts the significance of a major archaeological team’s discoveries made over a ten-year period. By this token the museum, instead of guiding viewers towards an understanding of the controversy over the origin and significance of the Scrolls, manifestly undertakes to manipulate the layman’s comprehension of them through the ostensible harmonization of mutually opposing theories.

It is difficult to believe that the intelligent San Diego viewing public will allow itself to accept such treatment. To some extent that will depend, of course, on whether or not the film itself, as opposed to the museum’s website description of it, will similarly mislead the public.

It should be noted, however, that the San Diego museum, just as other exhibiting institutions, has apparently failed to invite any representative of the Israel Antiquities Authority archaeological team, as well as all other scholars who in their writings oppose the aforementioned theory, to participate in the lecture series accompanying the exhibit. The museum has furthermore, to the extent implied by its website descriptions, also apparently suppressed from the exhibit virtually all those pieces of manuscript and archaeological evidence leading to the conclusion that the Scrolls originated in Jerusalem libraries.

These facts speak for themselves, and raise basic questions regarding the scientific policy of the museum in respect to its forthcoming exhibit of the Scrolls.

Chicago, 1 June 2007

<http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/projects/scr/>