

This article examines a series of efforts initiated over the past decade by traditional Dead Sea Scrolls scholars in defense of the original Qumran-Essene theory of Scroll origins. These efforts notably include: (1) declarations to the press concerning DNA analyses, the results of which were thereafter never released; (2) unverifiable claims concerning an ostrakon found at Qumran, repeated in several publications and never retracted; (3) a series of Scroll exhibits that appear designed to lead the public towards acceptance of the Qumran-Essene theory as factually correct; and (4) a recently organized press campaign also appearing to encourage the public, on the basis of parasitological organisms found near Khirbet Qumran, to acquiesce in the truth of that theory. The author argues that the totality of these efforts raises serious concerns regarding the treatment of archaeological and manuscript discoveries and their public presentation.

Norman Golb
The University of Chicago

20 February, 2007

THE QUMRAN-ESSENE THEORY AND RECENT STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN ITS DEFENSE

1

Most readers, whether of scholarly or popular literature, by now know that during the first four or five years after the original seven Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, a theory was created to the effect that they, and others found afterwards, had been written by a sect of pious Essenes. These people, it was claimed, lived at a site known as Khirbet Qumran, located near the discovered scrolls. During the past few decades this theory has become widely known as the Qumran-Essene or Qumran-sectarian theory of Scroll origins. In recent years, with growing awareness of the probable origin of the Scrolls in Jerusalem, scholarly opposition to the original theory has intensified. In return, however, its defenders have engaged in a series of efforts to fortify their traditional position — efforts that reveal much about the current state in which that theory now finds itself, and that cast new light on the struggle over the basic issue of origin and significance of these unique manuscripts.

One milestone in the direction of protecting the original theory was already reached in 1995, when it was divulged to the international press that a study of the DNA of the scroll parchments had begun earlier on under the direction of Dr. Scott R. Woodward, a microbiologist of Brigham Young University. According to a report by Philip J. Hilts in the *New York Times* of 28 March 1995, Dr. Woodward had, beforehand, given a lecture in Egypt concerning the extraction of DNA from mummies, and had on that occasion been asked by Joseph Zias (at that time a curator at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem) whether DNA could also be extracted from parchment skins. Afterwards, Dr. Woodward had collaborated with scientists at the Hebrew University to extract DNA from Dead Sea Scrolls; by 1995 samples from twelve scrolls had been extracted, and the intention was to garner further ones from fifty more scrolls. It was hoped, according to the *Times* article, to “resolve the relationship” between one Scroll fragment and another, and even to “identify specific animals” and the herds from which they came, which in turn might indicate “the relative locations of the herds, and their attendant scribes.” This, the article went on, might be

a crucial piece of information in helping to determine whether the ancient Essene communities of the desert wrote all or only some of the scrolls — whether the works

reflect the parochial habits and thoughts of a relatively isolated group of scribes or of scribes from different times and places, whose works were eventually collected at Qumran.

The researchers who expressed these ideas to the reporter were clearly indicating their belief that the claimed “Qumran sectarians” *wrote* and/or *copied* scrolls at that site. However, by 1995 a good number of traditional Qumranologists had shifted the original paradigm: it now included a concession that various scrolls, even those not directly connected with the “Sect of Qumran,” might merely have been *collected* by the latter in their claimed laura. The article entirely omitted mention of the possibility that the DNA examination might, in the end, contradict both of these two forms of the Qumran-Essene theory while supporting the then emerging view to the effect that the Scrolls came from Jerusalem and were hidden by Jews of that city in caves of the Judaeian Wilderness as the 70 A.D. Roman siege on Jerusalem was being prepared.

According to the article, the DNA analysis would hopefully be finished by “the end of the summer” of 1995. There has, however, been no follow-up to the *Times* article. Instead, nine years later, under the headline “DNA to reveal source of Dead Sea Scrolls,” the *Jerusalem Post* reported on 17 August ’04 that “Authorities are hoping that DNA testing of animal bones discovered in excavations at the Qumran plateau will reveal the origins of the Dead Sea Scrolls.” The article states that the deposits are of “mules eaten and buried ...by the Qumran community in the 1st century BCE” and quotes one of the investigators as saying that “if the bone deposits ...match with the scrolls, we will be able to resolve one of the greatest debates of the archaeological world today....”

While by today it might surely be inferred that these DNA analyses have been completed, no report on any of the scientists’ conclusions has, to the best of my knowledge, been published. It would seem obvious that the investigators, after all this time, should at least announce some basic elements of their findings. Having made their claims public, they now clearly owe it to the public to state whether the DNA extracted from the Scrolls and/or from the donkey bones indicates that the parchment skins show evidence either (a) that the herds from which they were taken were from the vicinity of Qumran or (b) that, as has been rumored, they show no such characteristic.

The **Israel Antiquities Authority**, which curates the Scrolls for the purposes of preservation and exhibition, has an obvious interest in making the results of these investigations known, just as its officials took an active role — i.e., by appointing a committee of scholars expert in several disciplines — in seeking to determine whether or not the so-called “James Ossuary” contained a genuinely authentic ancient inscription. While the case of the DNA investigations involves no implication of forgery, the claims announced so boldly in 1995 and 2004, and the subsequent lengthy silences, clearly now require an explanation, and that has yet to be offered by the parties involved.

The DNA case, however, is not the only one involving large claims regarding the Scrolls and Qumran that have been followed by lack of scientific substantiation. Probably the most interesting of them was promulgated by the **Israel Museum** in 1997, on the eve of a golden anniversary International Conference on the Scrolls held at the

museum and attended by large numbers of scholars. The claim was based on the discovery of a 14-line fragmentary Hebrew ostrakon which had been found outside the walls of Khirbet Qumran by Prof. James Strange and Dr. Gary Kolat early in the winter of 1996; Prof. Strange had shortly afterwards been quoted as saying that the discovery “was likely to add important knowledge about the Qumran sect, and especially about the daily lives of the sectarians....” (*Haaretz*, 9 Feb. 1996). After being studied by Dr. Esther Eshel and Prof. Frank Cross, with added input from Prof. Hanan Eshel, this team reported its findings to the museum, which issued a news release (14 April '97) asserting that the ostrakon “constitutes *the first archeological proof* for the traditional claims of Scroll researchers who are of the view that a connection exists between the Qumran site and the Scrolls found in nearby caves.” (My translation and italics.) The ostrakon was subsequently placed prominently on view in the Shrine of the Book exhibition curated in honor of the impending 50th anniversary celebration.

The ostensible basis for the claim was a passage in the ostrakon supposedly containing a phrase that included the Hebrew word *yahad* (“unity”) — a word which, in the scroll known as the *Manual of Discipline* and certain other scroll texts, is used to designate the pious brotherhood (“unity”) group described there. Traditional Qumranologists have always claimed that Khirbet Qumran was inhabited in antiquity by the *Yahad* group — for them merely a synonym for Essenes. Were it the case that the *yahad* designation in fact appeared on the ostrakon, the discovery would indeed have been the first archaeological proof indicating a connection between the scrolls and Khirbet Qumran. There is, however, no such word as *yahad* in the ostrakon.

While in Jerusalem for the anniversary conference, I examined good bromide prints of the ostrakon as well as another print magnifying the line containing the crucial word. Anyone can observe that the second consonant of the word in question (see Fig. 1) — which according to the team’s claim, championed by the museum, is the consonant *y* of the word *yahad* — contains a vertical but slightly bent stroke on the right and a bottom horizontal stroke, the combination of which cannot, in Hebrew script, designate the consonant *y*. (I presented this image to the audience during my lecture at the conference.)

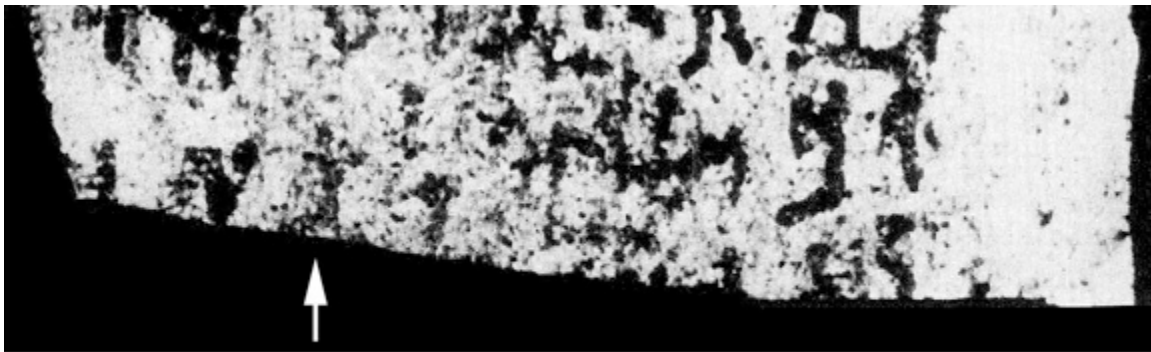


Figure 1. Magnification of line 8 of so-called “Yahad ostrakon,” showing consonant (arrow) claimed by Eshel and Cross to be the consonant *yod* (*y*) of the word *yahad*.

If, however, one compares the magnification of this word of the ostrakon with the same word as it appears in the *transcription* of Cross and Eshel (*Israel Exploration Journal* 47 [1997] , p. 19; *Qadmoniot* 30 [1997], p. 134 , cf. below, Fig. 2, a and b)), it can be observed that their transcription does not accurately follow the original, for (1) the

clearly visible bottom horizontal stroke of the photograph is entirely missing in their transcription; and (2) a vertical but slightly diagonal stroke appears in their transcription on the left, although there is no such stroke in the actual photograph of the text. In this way a new consonant has coalesced in their transcription faintly resembling a rare archaic form of a *y*. By this means alone were they able to claim a discovery of the word *yahad* in the ostrakon. (These facts too I pointed out to the audience during my lecture at the museum, urging at the same time that the curators correct their presentation of this ostrakon in the Scrolls exhibition.)



Figure 2. (a) Photograph of line 8 of ostrakon showing right diagonal and bottom horizontal strokes of same consonant (*right arrow*) plus transcription by Eshel and Cross of same line, showing addition of a left diagonal stroke and absence of bottom horizontal stroke (*left arrow*), as per *IEJ* article of Eshel and Cross.



Figure 2. (b) Photograph of same line (*right arrow*) with transcription by Eshel and Cross, showing same addition of a left diagonal stroke and absence of the bottom horizontal stroke (*left arrow*) of the crucial consonant, as per *Qadmoniot* article by aforementioned authors.

That same year Dr. Ada Yardeni, the well known specialist in ancient Hebrew palaeography, published her transcription and interpretation of the same ostrakon (*Israel Exploration Journal* 47, pp. 233 ff.), and it will be observed (cf. Fig. 3) that, unlike Eshel and Cross, she presents a magnification of the crucial word as well as a transcription that faithfully portrays the extant strokes of the consonant. In her interpretation of that line of text, the forced reading of Eshel and Cross gives way to the phrase *vekhoh ilan ah[er]*, viz., “and every other kind of tree” — an integral part of the deed preserved on the ostrakon, in which a certain individual in Jericho endowed various items including fruit trees to someone named El‘azar. (There still remains room, however, for further reflection on the wording of parts of this text.) Unlike the Eshel/Cross study, Yardeni’s was not published in Hebrew form in the aforementioned *Qadmoniot* issue, guest-edited by Magen Broshi and exclusively containing articles protective of the traditional Qumran-Essene theory to the exclusion of any studies opposing it.

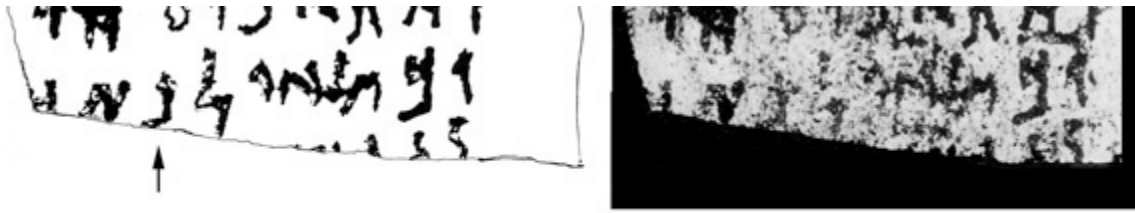


Figure 3. Magnification of same line and transcription by Yardeni, showing crucial consonant with bottom horizontal line restored (arrow) and minus a left diagonal line, as per her *IEJ* article.

Even though there is no palaeographical evidence whatever that the term *yahad* appears in the ostracon, the Israel Museum has continued to present it to the public as a text significant for the history of the claimed “sect of Qumran,” which belief it perseveres in championing in its exhibits of the Scrolls. A few years after installation of the exhibit featuring the ostracon, Vol. XXXIII (2000 A.D.) of the Oxford *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* series appeared with a new discussion of the ostracon by Cross and Eshel that, in essence, attempts a justification of their original reading of the text and a refutation of the decipherment of Yardeni.

Most of their argumentation — not relevant to the present discussion — is strained, but that is as nothing compared to their renewed effort to situate the crucial word *yahad* in the ostracon’s text. In an “Excursus,” Cross draws attention to the (genuine) consonant *yod* (*y*) appearing in lines 1 and 2 of the text, but then (p. 507) asserts, concerning the claimed word *yahad* of line 8, that the “*yod* that we see is not greatly different” from those two earlier (and genuine) occurrences of the consonant. He writes that, when he originally examined what he refers to as earlier pictures and the ostracon itself, he could actually *see more* of the claimed *y* consonant, and states “I suspect that the repeated wetting of the ostracon to aid in its photography has in fact faded the ink here.” If there are earlier and clearer photographs than the one shown by Dr. Eshel at the meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature in November of 1996 — which was supposedly the clearest photograph then available — they were at all events not used in any of the three publications by Cross and Eshel concerning the ostracon, and one must certainly ask the authors for greater clarity on this enigmatic matter.

Yet more germane to the issue is the fact that the photographs of the ostracon appearing in their publications, as in Dr. Yardeni’s, clearly show the aforementioned *bottom horizontal stroke* as part of this consonant. Dr. Yardeni reasonably transcribes and explains this as the bottom stroke of the letter *nun* (*n*). (Cf. Fig. 3.) However, the careful reader will notice without fail that this bottom horizontal stroke — which in itself vitiates any claim that the word *yahad* appears in the ostracon — has simply *disappeared* from the latest Eshel/Cross transcription of the text (found on Plate XXXIII of the aforementioned Oxford volume, cf. Fig. 4 below), as it has in their earlier publications. I had pointed out the omission, both in my museum lecture as well as in a 1997 article (*The Qumran Chronicle*, 7, no. 3/4, pp. 171-173) on the basis of the earlier two Eshel and Cross publications, but the latter, far from correcting the transcription or referring to my criticism or that of Yardeni and others, is silent in his “Excursus” with respect to this notably absent penstroke — an elision that hardly exemplifies cutting-edge scholarship. Once is a mistake, but the recurrence isn’t. What has happened to the bottom horizontal portion of the consonant so clearly shown in the photographs of the ostracon is a question

obviously calling not for silence or a repetition of the elision, but for the authors' candid explanation of it.

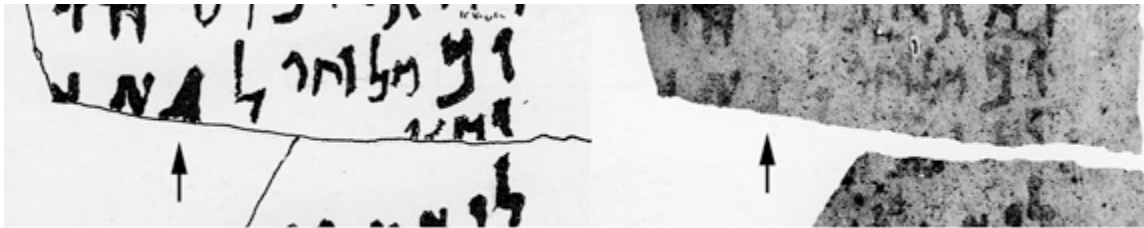


Figure 4. Same line of ostracon in 2000 A.D. *Discoveries* volume, plate XXXIII, with later transcription of Cross and Eshel repeating the characteristics (arrow) of their transcription of crucial consonant of the text.

The history of this discovery may be considered emblematic of the effort to force upon the public seemingly scientific information about the Dead Sea Scrolls and Khirbet Qumran that eventually proves to be unsustainable. Only a short time elapses before the discoverers of the ostracon inform the press that their find will likely “add important knowledge about the Qumran sect...” (Compare the advance DNA announcement of 1995 to the press.) The discoverers hand the ostracon over to a local scholar deeply committed to the Qumran-sectarian doctrine whose spouse, Dr. Hanan Eshel, likewise committed to the doctrine, suggests to her that the term *yahad* is found in the text (*Israel Exploration Journal* 47, 1997, p. 25, note 38). The scholar then flies to the States to secure “much improved images,” (ibid., p. 17, note 2), and to work on the decipherment of the text with Prof. Cross, a leading exponent of the Qumran-Essene hypothesis. Dr. Eshel eventually announces in public forum (Nov.1996) the sensational discovery of the word *yahad* in an ostracon found near Khirbet Qumran. These developments are reported to officials at the Israel Museum who on 14 April 1997, just a few months prior to an international conference on the Scrolls to take place at the museum, issue their auspicious press release. The officials also place the ostracon on display in the Shrine of the Book with a translation and discussion of its alleged importance. Thereafter an enlargement of the crucial word is projected on the screen of the auditorium filled with conference attendees, showing the inadmissibility of the claimed reading; distinguished palaeographers are quoted as being opposed to the decipherment; articles are published showing the erroneous nature of the reading — but the museum holds steady to its course, continuing to display the ostracon and refusing to describe the opposing views. No retraction is offered to the press, but at the same time no further press release is issued by the museum. (Compare the DNA saga now muffled in silence.)

3

As regards the Israel Museum announcement of 1997, it is not difficult to understand the apparent reason for the museum's mode of behavior. Since the opening of the Shrine of the Book, its curators have unilaterally allowed to be displayed there only those exhibits of the Scrolls that favor and espouse forms of the Qumran-Essene theory. Yet the museum in its aforementioned press release did assert that the ostracon was “the first archaeological proof... [that] a connection exists between the Qumran site and the Scrolls found in nearby caves.” Were the museum authorities to acknowledge that the ostracon did not in fact furnish such proof, this would also signal their admission that there is indeed, until now, no archaeological proof of a connection between the Scrolls and the Qumran site. The museum authorities apparently feel that, for reasons of their

own, they cannot make that acknowledgement, and the public awaits an explanation of this reticence in vain.

One must also note that the earlier quoted press announcement continued with the statement that “in consonance with the decipherment of the text contained on the surface of the ostrakon, it may be concluded that this discovery contravenes the opinion of researchers...who opine that there is no connection between Khirbet Qumran and the Scrolls, and that the Scrolls are the archive of a library that was brought from Jerusalem at the end of the Second Temple period...” (My translation.) This latter view, which a continually increasing number of scholars have been developing during the past decade, would also have taken on new meaning with a bona fide acknowledgment by officials of the museum that there is not a shred of archaeological evidence placing Essenes or any other scroll-copying religious sect at Khirbet Qumran. Prolonged investigations of Khirbet Qumran over the past fifteen years by several archaeologists — most recently including members of the Israel Antiquities Authority archaeological staff itself — have by now resulted in determined opposition to the Qumran-sectarian model and candid support for the theory of Jerusalem origin of the Scrolls. Given the present state of affairs, it would seem clear that the Israel Museum authorities should reconsider their hastily assertive press announcement of a decade ago and issue an appropriate retraction. There is no sign, however, that this is about to happen.

Thus, given the highly questionable claims about the ostrakon’s crucial passage, the actual content of that passage should now also be clarified through a scientific investigation sponsored by the Israel Antiquities Authority, just like the one earlier carried out in the aforementioned “James Ossuary” case.

The DNA statement issued in 1995 and the publicly disseminated assertions concerning the ostrakon are examples of claims that beg the fundamental question and, today, urgently require explanation. Regrettably, they take their place in a sequence of numerous press releases and statements made to journalists over five decades, in which traditional Qumranologists have treated and described aspects of their theory as though they constitute demonstrated fact. Other exaggerated assertions include (e.g.) the claims published as fact in news stories to the effect that the radiocarbon dating of Scroll texts prove the accuracy of datings arrived at empirically by early Scroll scholars in the 1950s (cf. my *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 241 ff., 249 ff.).

All of these misguided public relations efforts constitute a sad commentary on the consequences of wedding claimed but unproven scientific theories to institutional power structures. For purposes of the present discussion I focus here on two of the most recent manifestations of this phenomenon.

One of these has to do with exhibitions of various Dead Sea Scrolls being presented at American science centers and other venues. From press announcements about one of these exhibits, in the **Discovery Place** center (Charlotte, N.C.) from 17 February to 31 May ’06, it was clear that the public was being conditioned to accept the ideas of the most traditional and unrepentant of the Qumranologists. Its website press announcements misleadingly assert, for example, that the Scroll known as the

“Community Rule” (i.e., the *Manual of Discipline* or *Serekh hayahad*) is the “set of rules according to which the people of Qumran conducted their lives.” That is merely a belief — unproven until today — of those scholars who claim that the authors and/or followers of the *Manual*’s rules actually inhabited Khirbet Qumran. An identification of this kind is neither stated nor implied in that text or any of the other writings found in the eleven manuscript caves. It must be emphasized that not a single scroll has ever been found within Khirbet Qumran — but to the best of my knowledge the Charlotte exhibit never signaled that fact.

Instead, according to the exhibit’s descriptions placed on the Internet, an effort was made to reinforce the idea of a sect living there by referring, for example, to “the Qumran community” and to “the extensive collection of apocalyptic literature *in the library of the sect at Qumran*” — a “library” that remains a figment of metaphysical yearnings and nothing more. But perhaps otherworldly sublimity is precisely what the exhibitors were striving for when they described the exhibit as linking “the spirituality of the ... Scrolls with the archeological mysteries.”

Some interesting artifacts were put on display at the Charlotte exhibit that had indeed been excavated at Qumran: they included bowls, pots, jars, hair combs, Roman coins, and fragments of baskets and clothing. These items failed to prove that a radical Jewish sect lived at that site, but one can find no evidence of any acknowledgement of that fact on the part of the exhibitors. In their use of this so-called evidence, the exhibitors were merely following the determined practice established by the curators of the Shrine of the Book, where, in an earlier exhibit, an ancient sandal found near Khirbet Qumran was put on display and described as typical of those worn by Essenes.

Hailing the “huge success” of the exhibit in a news release at the end of May, the exhibitors indicated that its team was “dismantling the exhibit for package and shipment” to the **Pacific Science Center** in Seattle, where it opened in September ’06 with much the same fanfare as had attended the Charlotte event. Readers will find my detailed evaluation of the Seattle exhibit, and of its censored list of “recommended readings”, at http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IS/GOLB/dead_sea_scrolls.html. Suffice it to say that in its main thrust it repeated the Charlotte exhibit, most notably in its total suppression of all the evidence that has by now led various scholars to the view that the Scrolls are of Jerusalem origin and have nothing to do with a Jewish sect purportedly living at the Judaeian Wilderness site of Khirbet Qumran. Certain changes and additions were, however, introduced into the Seattle exhibit — themselves apparently meant, in essence, to further encourage viewers towards the belief that the theory of an Essene-like sect living at Qumran in antiquity was rational and supported by scientific evidence and experiments.

It is remarkable that the news media in Charlotte and Seattle accepted this treatment. Consider how absurd it would be if these science centers exclusively championed one side in the current intense debate over the status of Pluto. More remarkable still is the fact that no questions were raised either in Seattle or Charlotte when, during the course of the Pacific Science Center exhibition, a claim issued forth from Charlotte to the effect that a scholar in that city had been instrumental in discovering “new bioarchaeological evidence” linking Khirbet Qumran and the Essenes.

This claim was carried in a news release of the University of North Carolina (Charlotte) and headlined “Remote Latrine Reconfirms the Presence of Essene Sect at Qumran....”

The report was to the effect that Prof. James Tabor, chair of the Department of Religious Studies at that university, author of such unusual books as *The Jesus Dynasty* and *Why Waco?*, and a collaborator in archaeological projects with Prof. James Strange (above, Part 1), had suggested to Joseph Zias (cf. Part 1), here described as an Israeli paleopathologist, that a site “500 meters to the northwest of the settlement” be investigated for evidence that it was an ancient latrine area. Mr. Zias did so in cooperation with a French parasitologist, and thereafter asserted, in communication with Dr. Tabor, that fecal remains were indeed found *precisely there* and indeed showed the site was used as an area of that kind. In further cooperation with Zias, Tabor thereupon drew the conclusion that this area was used, two millennia ago, by none other than the “Essenes of Qumran” and in effect was a proof of Essene habitation of the site. The report described other views of the investigators, indicating that the team’s article on the subject could be found “in the next issue (winter ‘06/’07) of *Revue de Qumran*....” The release does not mention that Tabor and Zias had already taken up this matter in 1996, and that Zias and others had broached the subject in 2004 (*Revue de Qumran* 84, 579 ff.)

Judging by the American arrival dates of this periodical in the past, the implication of this notice is that the team’s actual article on this subject may well not be in the hands of American readers on these shores until the summer of ’07. However, their claim has by now been circulated widely in the popular press throughout the world, leading to the conclusion of some journalists that the new development even proves the correctness of the Qumran-Essene theory. (Cf. e.g. the *Los Angeles Times* of 14 Nov. 2006.)

Fortunately for puzzled readers, however, the five-page news release by Tabor’s university contains the main contours of the reasoning that has informed production of this new Essenological finding; as it happens, this is more than enough, particularly absent the eventual article, to show the specious nature of the claim being made.

We may first observe that the area near Qumran described in the report is located “some five hundred meters to the northwest of the settlement.” This dimension is equivalent to approximately 750 or 800 cubits. We note that the ancient texts on which the writers rely are (a) a passage from Deuteronomy (XXIII.13-14), (b) another from the *Temple Scroll*, and (c) a third from the *War Scroll*, the latter two being Dead Sea Scrolls describing, respectively, an idealized Holy Temple of the future and an apocalyptic battle between good and evil forces. The *Temple Scroll* ordains that a latrine be placed “three thousand cubits” beyond the precincts of the imagined Temple, while the *War Scroll* requires a latrine being placed “two thousand cubits” beyond the confines of the encampment of the (Israelite) forces of good. Tabor is described in the report as indicating that the claimed Essenes of Qumran rigorously observed such rules, adding: “*in one text it says go 1000 cubits and in another 2000 cubits.*” (Italics mine.) The “one thousand cubits” statement is *an error* (the true figures are as given above), but this misleading claim, if taken as a fact by unsuspecting readers, would bring the figure reasonably close to the distance between Khirbet Qumran and the area investigated by the team and thus lend a top-of-the-head plausibility to their assertions.

The phrase “one thousand cubits” appears in the Book of Numbers (XXXV.4), but only in connection with the dimensions of idealized future cities of the Levites, *not of latrine practices*; the latter are the subject of the Deuteronomy passage, where however no distance from the city is mentioned. Alluding to the *Deuteronomy* text, the news release describes Tabor as “explaining that the ancient practice appears to have been revived at Qumran.” This becomes one more of the wonders of Qumran still being created by traditional Qumranologists. It is not known if or when the practice ordained by Deuteronomy was ever halted in rural communities of pre-Christian Jewish Palestine where Biblical law prevailed.

The fecal remains dug up by Zias are not datable. This fact is not stated in the five-page news release, but one or more reporters apparently were able to see the authors’ unpublished paper. For example, the AP report by Matti Friedman of 3 Jan. ’07 states: “...*there is no way to date* the fecal parasites, which could have been left by Bedouin who are known to have inhabited the area. *To counter this, the [forthcoming] paper* quotes a Bedouin scholar as saying the nomadic tribespeople do not bury their feces.” (My brackets and italics.) The problem of undatability is hardly countered by simply pointing to the practices of certain Bedouin. In actuality, the fecal remains could have been deposited virtually any time during the past few thousand years by troops of soldiers, 19th-century archaeologists, and still others — with survivability rates of the specimens gradually diminishing with age.

The efforts of Zias and Tabor to connect these specimens with the putative “Essenes of Qumran” are clearly based only on their prior assumption — one often expressed by them — that Essenes or a related Jewish sect *actually lived there and literally followed the imaginings of the apocalyptic texts of Qumran*. The “Essene latrine” claim thus constitutes one more embarrassing episode in the continuing search for an archaeological proof that would sustain this belief. Father de Vaux, in a similar way, deeply believed he had found the very laura of the Essenes when he dug there, identifying one room as a “refectory,” another as a “scriptorium,” etc., in the spirit of medieval monkly orders. Father de Vaux conceived of the inhabitants as celibate monks, and many traditional Qumranologists still assent to this idea today — even though not a single Dead Sea scroll has ever been shown to espouse celibacy.

The work of the team described in the Charlotte news release fits in well with the thrust of the current museum exhibits featuring the Scrolls, and is only the latest of the efforts, always begging the fundamental question, to shore up the traditional theory of Scroll origins. The authors do not, according to the release, indicate that, in the course of their dig or afterwards, they consulted as to the nature of their finding with parasitologists and other scientists in Jerusalem — a relatively short drive from the site. Why this is so remains a mystery confounded by the appearance of the Charlotte news release precisely during this latest spate of Dead Sea Scroll exhibits in America.

5

Those exhibits, (and others that preceded them, as well as still more that will be following hard on their heels) were quite evidently planned out well in advance as a major effort to convince the American public of the verisimilitude of the Qumran-sectarian theory. The Israel Antiquities Authority, in conjunction with the Dead Sea

Scrolls Foundation and possibly other groups or individuals, carried out the initial planning. It would appear that, by the turn of the millennium, supporters of that theory had awakened to the fact that a decisive effort would be needed to turn the tide of public opinion in favor of their view.

One need not look very far to discern the probable complex of causes behind a growing awareness of the difficulty in which the traditional theory has been finding itself. The primary element was clearly a series of new researches by archaeologists and text-scholars. Already in the early nineties, Prof. Robert Donceel and Dr. Pauline Donceel-Voute of Louvain, then formally attached to the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem and in the process of researching the unpublished results of Pere de Vaux's 1950's excavation of Khirbet Qumran, had parted company with the latter's disciples there by opposing, in published articles, the identification of Qumran as a sectarian religious site. At the same time, Dr. Matthias Klinghardt (now a professor at Technische Universität Dresden) had demonstrated that the *Manual of Discipline*, claimed to be the unique founding document of the "Essenes of Qumran," shared many of its statutes with those of other Hellenistic associations and in essence described a type of pre-rabbinic synagogue community that may have been widespread in 1st-century B.C. Palestine.

Simultaneously, Prof. Kyle McCarter of Johns Hopkins University described the inventory of the Copper Scroll as an authentic list of treasures, stating: "Was it the Temple treasury itself, hidden in the wadis east of Jerusalem in anticipation of the Roman assault on the city at the time of the First Revolt? The extraordinary magnitude of the listed deposits of gold and silver favors this assumption...." Papers by these and other scholars addressing the fundamental issue were read at a 1992 conference sponsored by the New York Academy of Sciences and the Oriental Institute (published in book form in 1994). Slightly later in the same decade, the archaeologist Prof. Yizhar Hirschfeld of the Hebrew University, in a series of studies cut short by his untimely death in 2006, rejected the sectarian identification of Qumran and further argued that the Scrolls could only have come from Jerusalem.

Thereafter, archaeologists attached to the Israel Antiquities Authority reported new findings. Drs. Yizhak Magen and Yuval Peleg had been engaged in a prolonged excavation at Qumran on behalf of the Authority since 1993. Their evolving conclusion, already becoming known by word of mouth during the mid- to late 1990s, was to the effect that Khirbet Qumran showed no archaeological evidence of use or habitation by a pious religious brotherhood such as the Essenes, but rather, by the nature of its construction and archaeological artifacts unearthed there by them, was evidently a secular site originally built as a fortress and eventually coming to be used as an establishment for the manufacture of pottery. It was, however, only at a conference held at Brown University in November of 2002 that they would first publicly report their results, in the form of a major scientific paper read to participants at that time. (The theme and title of the conference was "*Qumran — The Site of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Archaeological Interpretations and Debates*," issued in book form by Brill early in 2006.)

Although the paper of Magen and Peleg was the most detailed one read at the conference, and the most far-reaching in its conclusions, several other archaeologists who read papers there likewise expressed the view that Khirbet Qumran had never been a sectarian site housing scrolls. The fundamental conclusions — that Khirbet Qumran had

been a fortress, that the Copper Scroll was a genuine Jerusalem document describing the efforts to hide away precious items prior to a siege, and that the Scrolls had been hidden away by Jerusalemites on the eve of or during the Roman siege on the city of 70 A.D. — had earlier been proposed by me in articles published between 1980 and 1993 and in my *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?* (Simon and Schuster, 1995/96).

After the conference, a report on it by John Noble Wilford, who had been in attendance, was published in the *New York Times* (24 Dec. 2002). The report focused particularly on the new trend in thinking among archaeologists. Emphasizing that it was being increasingly argued that “there is no firm archaeological evidence linking the Qumran settlement to the scrolls found in the nearby caves,” it characterized the Brown conference as evincing a “crumbling consensus” on the question of identification of Khirbet Qumran. The *Times* article, however, also foreshadowed the future contours of the debate over Qumran and the Scrolls in a single passage: “So contentious is the entire subject of Qumran, Dr. Galor said, that some scholars who were invited agreed to attend only if some others of opposing schools of thought were excluded.”

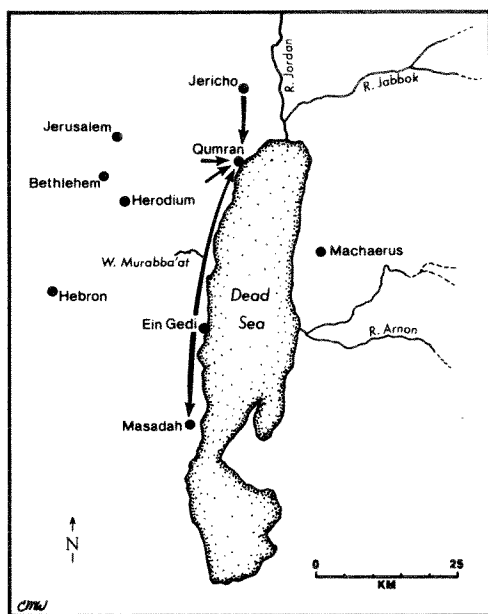
A detailed news story, focusing particularly on the findings of Magen and Peleg, appeared on pages 1 and 4 of the *Haaretz* daily on 30 July 2004. It had the effect, especially in Israel, of raising anew the fundamental question of Qumran origins. In response to the surge of interest that followed publication of this article, Jerusalem’s Van Leer Institute and Chicago’s Oriental Institute jointly sponsored a conference at Van Leer (July ’05) in which proponents of the theory of Jerusalem origin of the Scrolls debated the issue with defenders of the Qumran-Essene theory. Hundreds of participants attended this conference and, by their own questions posed to the speakers, revealed not only their understanding of the basic issues involved in the controversy, but also appreciation that they were finally able to hear, in a single forum, both sides of the story.

Both sides of the debate were, later on, also clearly represented in the published proceedings of the Brown conference. A disagreement on the very significance of the conference, however, played itself out in the forward and introduction to that volume. The author of the *foreword* to the volume — a traditional Qumranologist whose role in the actual conference appears unclear — asserts (p. vii) that “it does not appear that any new consensus has emerged, nor indeed that the main lines of de Vaux’s interpretation have been disproved.” The quixotic nature of this claim is shown by the fact that in the *introduction* to the volume, the organizers of the conference state (p. 4): “All 15 articles published here are not only evidence of the increasingly controversial debate about the nature of Qumran but, more importantly, also demonstrate the potential of new investigations using both traditional and innovative tools.”

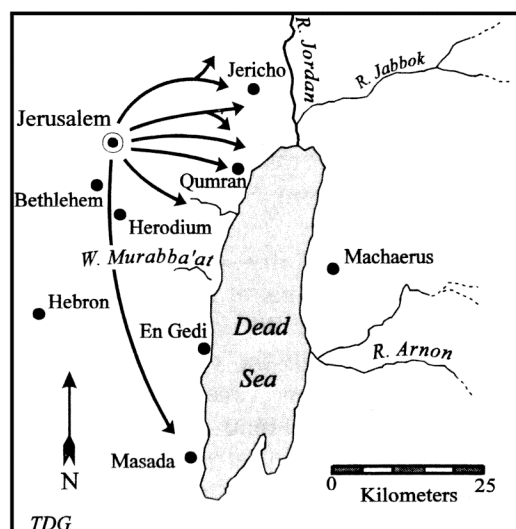
By that time, however, those in the chain of curatorial authority had already cast their die. The developments described above, resulting in constantly growing pressure on the community of traditional Qumranologists to explain and protect their position, in the end only hardened the resolve of proponents within the institutional structure responsible for exhibits of the Scrolls to carry on and intensify the battle against the new ideas — not by combating them in open forum, but by excising from the exhibits all evidence and all arguments favoring the theory of Jerusalem origin of the Scrolls. We see the results in the disingenuous exhibits presented in Charlotte and Seattle.

Whether the American public will continue to accept the increasingly dubious treatment of the Scrolls in ostensibly scientific writings and in museum exhibits without pressing for fundamental change cannot be foretold. Now, however, is surely the time to consider whether these efforts, so contrary to the spirit of fair play and openness that are the very trademarks of a healthy society, in any way result from the exercise of financial influence either here or abroad. There are those who know the answer to this question; should they not finally give the public a truthful account instead of hiding behind a Qumran-like wall of silence?

All the more remarkable is the resounding silence of traditional Qumranologists in the face of these recent efforts. Why have they failed to express a single objection to the one-sided exhibitions, the slanted rosters of speakers, and the censored lists of recommended readings? As in the case of many other discoveries of modern times, serious debate now prevails regarding the question of origin and identification of the Dead Sea Scrolls. By long-established custom in the world of learning, the manifest obligation of scholars is not to condone the stifling of that debate, but to encourage it in consonance with traditional scientific criteria of candor and transparency. As always in the past, censorship only exposes a weakness in the system that imposes it.



Geographical representation of Qumran-Essene hypothesis: The Scrolls found in the caves near Khirbet Qumran, as well as those found at Masadah and in earlier centuries near Jericho, in whole or in large part derive from a settlement of Essenes or some related Jewish sect that was living at Khirbet Qumran in antiquity.



Geographical representation of Jerusalem hypothesis: The Scrolls found near Khirbet Qumran and Jericho, as well as those found at Masadah, represent remnants of literature hidden by the Jews before and during the Roman siege on Jerusalem of 70 A.D. Khirbet Qumran was a strategic Hasmonaean fortress reused by Jewish fighters during the First Revolt against Rome (66-73 A.D.).