

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 24, Archeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Part 2

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon in his teaching on biblical archeology. This is session 24, Archeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Part 2.

Okay. I have here on this PowerPoint, an excellent aerial photo of the site of Khirbet Qumran after it's been excavated and partially restored. And we'll just look at this and just say a few words. This is, again, the road, the modern road that leads down along the Western shore of the Dead Sea and the escarpment up to the Valley of Acre above the site.

And then the Wadi Qumran comes down this direction here through this wadi and out. And this is where, again, the Essenes or the Dead Sea Scroll community constructed dams to capture the water and then bring the water via an aqueduct to the various cisterns in the site. And, of course, those were used.

There's a long wall here that was excavated, and I'm uncertain if they ever determined the reason for that. Again, down to the South is a site of Ein Feshkha, which is a spring, and there were other activities and structures there at the same time. Notice, too, that this corner of the complex is a tower, and it is my contention that this tower, because of its shape and style, may not necessarily have been constructed during the Second Temple period or rather by the Essenes or Dead Sea Scroll community, but may actually be older and date to the Old Testament period.

Here's an artist's drawing or reconstruction of the site. Again, the tower and the various buildings and rooms of the site were used as a religious community during the first century BC and the first century AD. Again, looking south again, you can see the Dead Sea Plain here and the shore of the Dead Sea.

Again, in antiquity, even in modern times, the Dead Sea would have been much closer, but because of the continual lowering of the water level of the Dead Sea, it continues to shrink. Again, these are individual rooms, and they've been interpreted in various ways by the excavators and those who have studied the site consequently. Here's one of the water channels, again, bringing water from the captured water behind the dams below the escarpment down here into the various reservoirs, pools, and mikveot, one of which is here.

You can see the stairs going down, and those, of course, are ritual baths or baptisms that the community used to ritually purify themselves. Another picture here of a

mikveh and you can see some of the plaster on the walls that has survived. Now, there's been a lot of argument and debate on how to identify the site.

It's been debated whether it will fit various uses and so different scholars believe it in different ways. The first question is, is Khirbet Qumran related or linked to the scrolls found in the nearby caves? That's been debated as well. In fact, one Israeli scholar had argued that the Essene community, which is mentioned by a Roman historian, actually did not live at Qumran at all but rather south at Engedi because the Roman source says that the community lived above Engedi.

He interpreted that as elevation rather than in a northern direction, but that has not been widely accepted. There are too many connections, I believe, between this site and the caves to dismiss it, leaving no connection with the caves and the scrolls. I believe the two are very, very well connected.

They were occupied at the same time. Many of the caves' buried manuscripts are adjacent to the Qumran community or the Kirbe. The pottery jars recovered in the caves again match pottery jars found at Qumran.

Perhaps not quite as strong evidence, but there is evidence of scribal activity, pottery production, and communal living at Qumran, especially, I think, as important as aen mikveot or the ritual baths. There have been inkwells, which we'll see in a future slide, but earlier on, scholars suggested that they had found tables and chairs, and those don't seem to jive with use for writing or transcribing texts. Pliny the Elder again mentions that the Essene community lived along the shore of the Dead Sea.

This is again what that one Israeli scholar identified as above Qumran in small cells or caves rather than at Qumran. Finally, the sectarian literature among the scrolls does generally fit what we know about the Essenes, so linking that Roman historian and his statement with the Qumran community seems to be a good fit. Other scholars suggested that Qumran was kind of an elite villa, and you've got here some evidence of some nice column bases that really seem out of place in a monastic aesthetic community, but nevertheless, there they are.

These two were actually working on the final report of the excavations for a while before they were replaced or left that job, but there is some evidence for elite-type furnishings and again architecture such as these column bases. So that's also a consideration, though I don't think too many people support that either. Qumran is a fortress or caravanserai.

This is proposed by University of Chicago scholar Norman Golbe, and again, you've got this tower here, and this is again reconstructed with the Glacis. The rest of the settlement doesn't seem to be built for defensive purposes. Now, one could look at that tower and say that that was some sort of redoubt or keep or strong point that

the community could retreat to if there was a threat, but again, there's other evidence there that doesn't seem to fit that type of an idea of a fortress or any kind of military purpose for the site.

Moreover, during the New Testament period, the site of Qumran was not a strategically important site, other than the fact that it did sit near the road that went along the shore of the Dead Sea. However, in the Old Testament period, this often would serve as perhaps a border post for the kingdom of Judah in its last years. In the 7th century and early 6th century, the border of Judah was right along the Jordan Valley along the Dead Sea and north.

Later or earlier, that was not necessarily the border, but at this time, it was, so this could have been occupied during that time, during the late monarchy, as a border post or military installation. The lack of scrolls and scroll fragments at the compound is expected. However, several inkwells attest to scribal activity beyond that of a garrison military post. Qumran had a cemetery slightly to the east, and 1,200 grave mounds were identified, and several were excavated, but these were not casualties of war.

They apparently died peacefully from the graves that have been, the bodies that have been studied and looked at. So yeah, there are issues with this interpretation as well. DeVos, when he excavated Qumran, identified what he called a scriptorium or a manuscript center for the production of scrolls, and this is a reconstruction of it here.

Again, these tables and tabletops were used, parts of which were identified and excavated; it is debated whether those were actually used in that regard. More importantly, though, were these inkwells, and some of these again came from the antiquities market. It's a bronze one here; some were ceramic, and that certainly is an important find that relates the site to the scrolls.

So, unfortunately, again, those were not necessarily found in situ, but they did come from the site. There was quite a lot of excitement when an ostrakon was found, not a scroll, but an ostrakon found at the site by James Strange, an archaeologist from Florida, and it was studied both by Frank Moore Cross and Esther Eshel and ironically, this reading was disputed by Ada Yardeni, another Israeli epigrapher, but looking at it more, the script does not really match the skilled scribal hands that we see on the scrolls. So again, there's not, unfortunately, a whole lot of information that could be gleaned from this, though it's an important find.

I mentioned before that when Deveau and his team were excavating the site of Khirbet Qumran, they enlisted the help of the local Bedouin to help with the excavation to do the manual labor, and so when Deveau and his team would drive back to Jerusalem for the evening, the Bedouin just changed into swing shift and graveyard shift and began excavating caves along the terrace behind the site. The

most famous of these was cave number four, where we would say the mother lode was discovered. Most of the scrolls were thrown in cave four, apparently in a haphazard fashion, quickly before we assume the Romans entered or approached the site.

And it wasn't until the cave was 90% excavated illegally, improperly, that the staff or Deveau and his staff realized what was going on, and so they were only able to excavate the very lower levels of the cave. Even then, they got some prized finds. Most of the scrolls again were in horrible shape, fragmentary with bat droppings and urine on them as well as 2,000 years of dust.

The ceiling of the cave continued to crumble and so there were various levels of debris above the scrolls. But again, this was the mother lode of caves for the scrolls from the community. Finally, we come to the Dead Sea Scrolls and a manuscript called the Nash Papyrus.

This was discovered decades before the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Fayum of Egypt. It is the marshy depression to the west of the Nile Valley, connected to the Nile by a canal called Bar Yosef. There are interesting connections to Joseph of the Bible.

Well, the name is much, much later, so I can't really make that connection. But it was discovered in 1893, and it is a slightly abbreviated form of the Decalogue and Shema. Albright wrote this and published it back in 1937.

He dated this from the text, the letters, and the orthography, from about 150 to 100 BC. Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, this was considered the oldest biblical text. This text was very important because it was used to compare with the scripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Of course, a lot of work on this was done by Frank Moore Cross. They were able, partially on the basis of this earlier Nash Papyrus, to recognize the dating of these Dead Sea Scroll texts, which would be contemporary with the Nash Papyrus or perhaps even earlier. Thank you very much.

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