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**THE 1988-92 CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
DEAD SEA WALKING CAVE SURVEY
AND RADAR GROUNDSCAN OF THE QUMRAN CLIFFS**

California State University Long Beach undertook three expeditions to the Qumran cliffs and the shores of the Dead Sea between 1988 and 1992. The philosophy behind these expeditions was that since the monopoly over the publishing and editing of Qumran manuscripts we still in effect, we would attempt to find new manuscripts.

What astonished us was that no complete survey of the caves along the Dead Sea had ever really been done. Roland de Vaux had conducted his survey in 1952 from one or two kilometers north of Cave 1 to just south of the Qumran cliffs, but this was hardly very exhaustive as the discovery of Cave 4 by beduin four months after the survey was completed proved. Therefore, it was clear from the beginning that if we were really looking for new manuscripts, we would have to conduct our own survey.

The first year of our expedition was undertaken in conjunction with Dr. Joseph Patrich of the Hebrew University. He wanted to excavate a cave a kilometer or two south of the Qumran plateau with indications of Iron-Age habitation (labeled in most maps Cave 37). Though we found two Iron-Age burials, one a child, what seemed to be an ancient ploughshare, and one of the finds made by our team from this dig – an almost perfectly preserved Iron-Age arrow shaft with notch, iron point, decorative painted ringlets, and feather indications still extant – went into the Israeli Museum; these results did not really interest the student members of our team who had come to look for, as it were, ‘new scrolls’.

The next year, three weeks before our scheduled arrival and before he had obtained any permits, Patrich precipitously withdrew from our expedition claiming he was too busy or it was not worth his while to work with us. Since participants had already paid their money and been issued airline tickets, we decided to come anyhow and changed the point of our expedition to a walking survey or, as we henceforth referred to it, "a nature walk".

We had made legal enquiries and were informed that these areas were still theoretically under Jordanian Law being part of "the Territories" as they were then called. That law was different than the Israeli and just so long as we 'did not touch anything', we would not need an official Israel Antiquities Authority permit — which would have been impossible to obtain at such short notice anyhow. This caveat we fastidiously observed.

This walking survey took us from approximately five kilometers north of Qumran to twenty kilometers south of it. The next year 1990-91, we were unable to mount an expedition owing to the whole issue of Dead Sea Scrolls controversies; but in 1991-92, having been assured in Kansas City by those in authority in Israel that recriminations over the freeing of the Scrolls were over, we again planned to come. We were encouraged to do so by a permit issued on October 17th, 1991 albeit belatedly by Yitzhak Magen, the officer in charge of Judea and Samaria, in the Israel Antiquities Authority. This authorized us to continue our survey and to undertake the first radar groundscan of the Qumran plateau and cliffs (see attached article).

In view of being served with the Qimron lawsuit over the publication of MMT at the end of this three-week stay in January, 1992, which owing to my presence in Israel gave courts there jurisdiction; I have since come to view the last-minute issuance of this permit as a mechanism to make sure I actually came to Israel in order to serve me with this lawsuit and establish Israeli court jurisdiction in the affair (though I may be wrong and too paranoid here).

However this may be, the several expeditions from 1988-92 to the vicinity of the Dead Sea shores as far south as Ein Gedi and the former "Green Line" had as a goal the following activities:

- 1) to conduct a comprehensive walking survey of all caves from five kilometers north of Qumran to outskirts of Ein Gedi and the former "Green Line" in the south and
- 2) to look for and locate new scrolls in either overlooked or previously inaccessible areas where cave-ins might have occurred

or where artificially hollowed-out spaces not unlike Cave 4, but not immediately visible to the human eye, might exist.

Since our survey had necessarily to be done without heavy equipment of any kind, nor climbing ropes or the like, it encompassed only those caves accessible by foot or normal climbing means. This was not as great a hindrance as it might at first appear, as early inhabitants of these same cliffs would have operated under similar constraints and caves inaccessible to us would more than likely have been equally inaccessible to them. As it turned out, like many of the efforts we undertook between 1988 and 1992, including Facsimile Edition, radar groundscan, and calls for AMS carbon dating, this project was later co-opted primarily by the Israelis but this does not detract from its initial originality.

In the two three-week exploration periods undertaken in December-January, 1989-90 and December-January, 1991-1992, some 485 caves and/or depressions were entered or catalogued. These were classified in the following manner:

- 1) caves showing some surface evidence of human habitation or use, including terraces, modified entrances, sherds, or fire markings,
- 2) caves large enough for such surface indications but lacking any,
- 3) caves appearing large enough from a distance, but inaccessible to our team, and
- 4) blind caves, depressions, or crevices too small for human habitation.

The most impressive results were achieved between the southern limit of de Vaux's 1952 survey to Wadi Deragot /Wadi Murabba'at and inland from the effluence of the Kedron River five kilometers below Qumran. The area north of Ein Feshka had basically been surveyed in February of that year in de Vaux's 1952 survey. In February, 1952 beduin tribesmen had discovered a second manuscript cache less than a hundred meters from where Cave 1 had been found five years earlier. This survey was conducted by 24 beduin with de Vaux, Milik, Barthélemy, Lankaster Harding and others serving in a supervisory capacity. Not only was it surprising that such a small area was surveyed by such a large team, it was also astonishing that it missed the most important cave of all, Cave 4, traces of which could literally be seen from the site of the ruins on the plateau. This

was 'discovered' some six months later by presumably these same beduin.

This single oversight resulted in the beduin removing all but a thousand of the approximately 40,000 fragments seemingly originating from there and the source of a good deal of the controversies surrounding Qumran studies. In fact the marl terrace was not subjected to a thorough search for another three years when Caves 7-10 were discovered. The reason de Vaux gave for not surveying the marl terrace in any systematic way was that in his view it lacked "natural caves suitable for human use", insisting "all we had noticed were cavities eroded by water and archaeologically barren."¹ Also missed in the area of the survey was Cave 11, though this was obscured by a certain amount of rockfall. Cave 3 only a few meters distant, which yielded the Copper Scroll, however was found – though attempts have continued ever since to divorce it from Qumran.

In any event, the March, 1952 survey (including brief follow-ups in subsequent years) noted some 43 loci showing traces of human utilization. In our survey of the same area, we were able to identify some 77 caves, including 12 more showing signs of human utilization and fourteen of type 2 showing no signs of human utilization. Three others could be seen but not reached.

Between the southern limit of the 1952 survey and Wadi Murabba'at, we were able to locate some 60 caves, 25 showing signs of human habitation, 28 showing no signs though large enough, and seven apparently large enough but inaccessible. Altogether, therefore, we were able to 'identify' in this 25 kilometer range some 137 real caves, 85 exhibiting some trace of human utilization. There were also some 200 depressions, crevices, or blinds of the fourth type.

Also discovered high in almost inaccessible areas were painstakingly-built water channels, ancient grave areas, and at least one dressed-stone cave entrance replete with lintel and doorposts.² Potsherds were found in 35 different areas, 24 of which yielding Second Temple remains. Iron Age potsherds were found in 11 loci and there were occasional Chalcolithic, Early Bronze, Byzantine, and Islamic remains scattered throughout the range. We were also struck by the number of quite isolated caves that had been utilized.

¹ R. de Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Oxford, 1973, p. 52.

² See Fig. 2.

It is interesting that the 10 kilometers or so of cliff-line between 'Ein el-Ghuweir and 'Ein Feshka contained caves that were largely inhabited, thus fleshing out the picture of a close link not just in coin data, but pottery styles and destruction layers between Qumran, 'Ein Feshka, and 'Ein el-Ghuweir (excavated by Bar-Adon). In other words, what was revealed was that there was much greater habitation over a much wider area than had previously been thought and the area going south from Qumran to Ein Gedi was neither isolated or uninhabited.

Another striking feature of the caves we inspected was that in almost all cases the beduin had been there before us. This increased our determination to utilize the radar groundscan not only to inspect the area of the Qumran plateau itself, but also to look for additional hollowed-out areas in the marl itself.

Another interesting possibility we were unable to investigate under the terms of our permit was the material spill in the Wadi Qumran below the collapsed portions of Caves 4-6 along the marl terrace. Our reasoning was that some of the documents in the caves might have spilled out into the wadi as well. Theoretically such fragments should still be located underneath the debris. Therefore we proposed to cut a shaft into the debris pile beneath the cliffs. This project still awaits completion.

Perhaps the most striking results of our walking survey was the discovery by one of our high-climbing parties of a precisely-built, though rough stone complex of structures and walls above the effluence of the Kedron looking out towards Jordan.³ The complex some two hundred meters up blended into the cliff face and was not visible from the road along the Dead Sea shores at all, but it and the ledge upon which it stands is covered with pottery remains, much of which from the Second Temple Period. It consists of a large terrace-type wall approximately four meters at its highest point and directly above that a large room about seven meters by three meters with a walled entrance and exit. Some fifteen meters back along the cliff-face is a somewhat smaller room. Though our parties were unable to determine the date of the structure with any precision, it certainly has the character, strategically located as it is, of an observation post of some kind and we are now applying for permission to do

³ See pictures on the front cover, Fig. 3 & Fig. 5.

further on-site, analytical and archaeological work concerning it.⁴

Finally, since the beduin had basically been to every location accessible to us before us, the only hope for discovering any new manuscripts was either to find areas such as cave-ins they had either missed or been unable to uncover, or use equipment unavailable to them. For the latter reason we determined to bring in ground-penetrating radar to do this; but since the logistics of lugging heavy equipment to locations inaccessible to the beduin were rather formidable, we decided to concentrate our efforts on the Qumran plateau and the cliffs surrounding it, in particular the marl terraces where other artificially hollowed-out caves like Cave 4 had been found. Ours was the first expedition in the field in Israel in Dead Sea Scrolls study to use such equipment.

The radar groundscan was conducted with equipment flown in from England by the GSSI Company, experienced in both archaeological and oil surveying. The engineers conducting the survey were Tony Wood and Greg Mills, both employees of that company with years of experience. Many areas both in, adjacent to, and outside the ruins at Qumran were scanned, including both North and South-east corners of the locale, presently under excavation by 'official'

⁴ Though much Second Temple pottery was found in its environs and it was a pottery trail of this kind that originally led our climbing parties to it, the site was apparently 'rediscovered' during "Operation Scroll" three years later by Israeli teams and reports are that numerous coins from Year 2 and one from Year 3 of the Revolt were found at the site. If this is so, it would confirm that the whole area from the Nahal Hever caves and Masada in the South to this look-out/outpost and Qumran in the North were part of a resistance network of some kind, since Qumran really cannot be separated from this locale.

The finding of a coin from Year 3 is particularly significant. Again if true, it supports the writer's position originally expressed in *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran* (Leiden, 1983), that the *terminus ad quem* for the abandonment of Qumran had to be 70-73 CE and not 68. Additionally, the Romans did not take full control of the area or clear all resistance groups out of it until the fall of the Temple in 70 CE or thereafter.

The site may be referred to in Pesah Bar-Adon's survey as site no. 115 in *Judea, Samaria, and the Golan: The Archaeological Survey of 1967-68* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1972, p. 126, but his description of "three circular structures ... 2-2.5 meters in diameter" is so cursory and does not really describe the installations pictured that it is impossible to say. Nor did we come upon it by following his descriptions as we were searching for caves not archeological remains *per se*.

Israel Government teams and individuals attached to our teams as "observers" (some even recipients of our reports).

The most interesting results were connected to de Vaux's "earthquake hypothesis", a mainstay of Qumran theorizing for four long decades now. Attached to this report is another done with author Michael Baigent, who arranged for, helped conduct, and kept a careful log of the results of this groundscan.

In loci 129-141 of de Vaux's 1952 survey map and areas further East, now under excavation by Israel teams in conjunction with the Antiquities Authority, Magen Broshi and Itzhak Magen, solid remains were discovered some several meters in depth. These included what appeared to be walls, cisterns, solid stone floors, and even steps, which led us to conclude that de Vaux's excavations had not gone far enough in uncovering the complex water system and his northern border was not the end of the ruins at all.

In the area of the so-called "tower", stone foundations were detected beneath the surface, as well as what appeared to be, in the words of the surveyers, "a curious subsurface anomaly". Directly under the center of the tower, it had the appearance of a circular underground structure, which may have been a well or the beginning of a shaft of some kind.

For me the most interesting result of the groundscan — apart from refuting de Vaux's "earthquake hypothesis" — was the detection of 1-2 hollow cavities in the marl terraces not far from the Cave 4-6 complex.⁵ This had been the primary object of the expedition and the funds expended to bring the groundscan equipment to Israel from overseas. Unfortunately the work to exploit this find was interrupted by the Qimron lawsuit over the Facsimile Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁶

Our hypothesis had been that it might be possible to find more cavities or artificially hollowed-out areas in the marl itself similar to those constituting the Caves 4-6 complex, which had either been covered over by rainfall or purposefully concealed. We found such

⁵ See the groundscan of the Qumran cliffs: Fig. 11, 12, and back cover.

⁶ We have now applied for a permit to probe these empty hollows and this work is scheduled to be conducted this summer [2001] under the sponsorships of the John and Carol Merrill Foundation and the Biblical Archaeology Society in conjunction with the Multi-site Expedition and Probe being conducted by Prof. Richard Freund of Hartford University.

areas in two locations, one in particular just west of the Cave 4-6 complex and another just south of the ruins themselves.

We immediately requested permission to sink a test probe into the former, as well as do further work around the wall and water complex north of the boundary of de Vaux's excavations and study the fort-like complex overlooking the Kedron effluence. All were denied for the 'official' reason that "we did not have an archaeologist with us" though we did, James Battenfield, and even though the Antiquities Authority had made it a condition of granting us our permit that Israeli archaeologist Dan Bahat be dismissed from our team in favour of their own *desigrée*.

When we agreed to this under pressure, they assigned Itzhak Magen to us, who in turn sent out his own assistant to operate in a kind of match-dog capacity – a Catch 22-situation that would have done even Joseph Heller proud. These are some of the same areas that would appear to be under excavation today. Such are the pitfalls of doing archaeology in Israel in this field today.