

“QUMRAN, KHIRBET,” by J. Murphy-O’Connor from *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (Doubleday, 1999). Volume 5, pp. 590-94.

A settlement near the NW shore of the Dead Sea which was associated with the people who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. Although noted in various explorations of the area around the Dead Sea since 1851 (de Vaux 1953: 89), Khirbet Qumran attracted the attention of archaeologists only because of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in caves in the nearby cliffs. See also DEAD SEA SCROLLS.

The area W of the N end of the Dead Sea is given a triangular shape by the convergence of the cliffs and the coast, which come together at Ras Feshkha. About 500 m N of Ras Feshkha, an aquifer surfaces, producing brackish springs, which today nourish reeds, brushwood, and tamarisks. Near the biggest spring, Ain Feshkha, are the ruins known as Khirbet Feshkha. Three km further N, the plain is cut by the Wadi Qumran, which drains the Buqeia, the great valley at the top of the cliffs. The ruins are located on the N bank of the wadi where it cuts through a marl terrace below the cliff, whence the name Khirbet Qumran, “the ruins at Qumran.”

The first scrolls were found in early 1947 (de Vaux 1973: vii), but the area from which they came was pinpointed only at the end of January 1949. Official negligence is excused by the turmoil that preceded and followed the withdrawal of British forces in May 1948. But when Captain Philip Lippens, a United Nations Observer from Belgium, approached Major General Lash of the Arab Legion in January 1949, the response was immediate. With the approval of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, troopers of the legion were sent to the probable area, and within two or three days Captain Akkash el Zebn had found the cave (Harding 1955: 6).

Cave 1 was excavated shortly afterwards by G. L. Harding and R. de Vaux. At that time a surface examination of the nearby ruins indicated no relation to the cave, but the developing controversy regarding the authenticity of the scrolls made it imperative to determine whether the ruins threw any light on the documents, and a thorough investigation was authorized. Responsibility for the excavation was given to de

Vaux, who completed the project in five seasons: 1951 and 1953–56. The hiatus in 1952 is explained by the need to follow up new manuscript discoveries by the bedouin. From January 21 to March 3, de Vaux excavated the caves in the Wadi Murabbaat. During March 10–29, he directed a systematic search of the caves in the cliffs 4 km N and S of the Wadi Qumran. Finally, between September 22 and 29, he conducted a careful survey of the marl terrace on which the ruins stand. The last item in the program, the excavation of Khirbet Feshkha, was undertaken in 1958. During these years preliminary reports appeared regularly in *Revue Biblique*, but the closest to a final report that de Vaux produced was his 1959 Schweich Lectures at the British Academy in London. These appeared as *L’archéologie et les manuscrits de la mer Morte* (1961). Just before his death in 1971, de Vaux completed a thorough revision of this book, which was published as *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1973).

Three km S of Ras Feshkha, R. De Langhe excavated Khirbet Mazin in December 1960 and January 1961 (Stutchbury and Nichol 1962). It appears to have been erected in the Roman period, and was reoccupied in the Byzantine period. There is no evidence that it was related to the installations at Qumran or Feshkha (de Vaux 1973: 88). Some 9 km further S at Ain el-Ghuweir, P. Bar-Adon in 1969 made the first Israeli contribution to the problem of Essene settlement on the coast of the Dead Sea. He brought to light a rectangular building (19.5 m x 43 m), and the pottery of the two levels of occupation showed similarities to that of Periods I and II at Qumran. Some 800 m to the N was a small cemetery. The mode of burial and tomb types were the same as those of the cemetery at Qumran (Bar-Adon 1977). The precise relationship of this settlement to Qumran is still undefined (de Vaux 1973: 89).

## A. The Caves

Of the 270 caves, crevices, and holes examined in 1952, 40 contained material ranging from the Chalcolithic to the Arab periods, while 26 of the latter furnished pottery identical to that of Cave 1 (de Vaux 1973: 50–51). The suspicion that the bedouin had planted manuscripts in the caves was negated by the archaeologists' independent discovery of fragments in every cave in which the bedouin reported finds (Caves 1, 2, 4, 6, and 11). The archaeologists themselves discovered Caves 3, 5, and 7–10, which contained manuscript fragments of the same type (de Vaux 1973: 95–97). The pottery found in the scroll caves is of the same type as that found at Qumran (de Vaux 1973: 54), and in one case a manuscript fragment was found still attached to a piece of its linen wrapper and adhering to the neck of a jar (Harding 1955: 7). The scrolls, therefore, must have been placed in the caves when the 1st century A.D. pottery was in use and the settlement occupied. The conclusion that the documents belonged to the inhabitants of Khirbet Qumran is inescapable.

## B. Khirbet Qumran

The stratigraphy of Khirbet Qumran revealed eight phases ranging from the 8th century B.C. to the Second Jewish Revolt (Table 1):

	<i>Qumran</i>	<i>Feshkha</i>
<i>700–600 BC</i>	Israelite	∅
<i>150–100 BC</i>	Ia	∅
<i>100–31 BC</i>	Ib	I
<i>4 BC–68 CE</i>	II	II
<i>69–74 CE</i>	III	
<i>74–132 CE</i>	∅	III
<i>132–35 CE</i>	Second Revolt	∅

□

**1. Israelite Period.** The oldest structure at Qumran is a rectangular building. See Fig. QUM.01. A row of rooms bordered the courtyard on the E; there may have been others along the N and S walls. Outside the W wall, but protected by its own enclosure, was a round cistern fed by runoff from the terrace to the N. The pottery shows it to have been in use from the 8th century to the 6th century B.C., when it suffered a violent destruction that is naturally associated with the fall of the kingdom of Judah in 586 B.C. A wall in the plain running S to Ain Feshkha is also dated to this period.

There is general agreement that this structure must be one of the six cities in the wilderness mentioned in Josh 15:61–62. The majority of scholars identify it with Ir-hammelah, the “City of Salt,” (references in de Vaux 1973: 91–94), but it has been suggested that the Iron Age buildings near Ain el-Ghuweir (Blake 1966: 565–66) should be identified with the “City of Salt,” in which case Qumran would be Sekaka (Bar-Adon 1977: 22–23). This latter hypothesis, however, leaves out of account one of the three Iron Age sites in the Buqeiya—Khirbet Abu Tabaq, Khirbet es-Samra, and Khirbet el-Maqari—which were explored by Cross and Milik (1956). These farming installations could have been set up by Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:12), but Uzziah (2 Chr 26:10) seems a more likely candidate.

**2. Period Ia.** Sometime in the 2d century B.C., Qumran was settled by a new group, whose identity is considered in the entry ESSENES. Two rectangular cisterns were dug beside the round cistern, which was brought back into service. Water intake was increased by the provision of two feeder channels that collected runoff from the terrace. The purpose of the small rooms around the cisterns is not clear, but the function of the two kilns in the SE corner is obvious. The pottery of this phase is virtually identical with that of the subsequent period (de Vaux 1973: 5). Hence, the date of the beginning of this settlement cannot be determined with any precision. But if the buildings of Period Ib were occupied from about 100 B.C., the beginning of Period Ia must be placed sometime in the second half of the 2d

century B.C. (de Vaux 1973: 5), but exactly when is a matter of some debate (Laperrousaz 1978: 748–52). The number of occupants was small.

**3. Period Ib.** An influx of new occupants made a building program imperative, and it is in this phase that Qumran acquired what was to be virtually its definitive form. See Fig. QUM.02. The round cistern and the two adjoining ones were retained in service, but the water system was expanded by the addition of two ritual baths and four large new cisterns. The terrace catchment area was too small to fill all of these, so a dam was built across the Wadi Qumran in the cliffs. This directed winter flash floods into an aqueduct that fed the system. The main building block was dominated by a tower that had no entrance at ground level; in times of danger from nomadic mauraders it would have served as a refuge for some of the inhabitants and as a secure place to store essential foodstuffs. The tower was entered via a wooden bridge from the two-story building to the S. The upper floor of this building, which had collapsed into the room below, contained two inkwells plus a plastered table and bench (de Vaux 1973: 29). These suggest a scriptorium, and provide an important link with the manuscripts found in the nearby caves. The bench around the walls in an inner room on the ground floor suggests that the room was an assembly chamber.

The refectory was easy to identify. Not only was it linked to the water system to facilitate cleaning, but the adjoining room contained over a thousand vessels, plates, bowls, beakers, small jars, and jugs (de Vaux 1973: 12). Deposits of bones, carefully buried under potsherds in most of the open areas, indicate that some of the meals had a religious significance that has not yet been adequately explained. The bones also reveal something of the occupants' diet, which consisted of mutton, lamb, goat, beef, and veal (de Vaux 1973: 12–15). The rest of building was given over to a kitchen and workshops, one containing a corn mill. The best preserved of the workshops was the pottery in the SE corner, with its washing basin, storage pit, wheel position, and kilns. It was here that the distinctive pottery found in the ruins and caves was made (de Vaux 1973: 54).

The building contained very few rooms that might have served as living quarters, yet the cemetery indicates a sizable population, which has been estimated at about 200 (de Vaux 1973: 86). The area could certainly have sustained such numbers (de Vaux 1973: 84–86). The inhabitants lived in caves, in tents on the marl terrace, and in underground chambers carved into the marl (de Vaux 1973: 56–57).

The pottery of Period Ib can be dated only very roughly, to the end of the Hellenistic era. The coins, however, permit greater dating precision. According to de Vaux (1973: 18–19), the buildings were certainly occupied during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 B.C.) and possibly during that of John Hyrcanus (135–104 B.C.). They were destroyed by an earthquake and a fire, after which the site was abandoned for a generation. De Vaux (1973: 20–23) opted for the simplest hypothesis—the fire was caused by the earthquake—and identified the earthquake with that recorded for the year 31 B.C. by Josephus (*JW* 1.370–80). Others, however, claim that the earthquake merely gave the coup de grace to a building that had already been destroyed by enemy action, but they cannot agree on a date. Laperrousaz (1978: 760) placed it in the context of the struggle between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II (67–63 B.C.), whereas Milik (1959: 94) preferred the Parthian invasion of 40 B.C. Neither of these authors has offered an explanation of why a settlement of no strategic importance and far from the war zone should have been the object of military action. Neither do they explain the absence of any destruction level at Khirbet Feshkha. Nonetheless, their hypotheses explain why Qumran was abandoned, whereas de Vaux's does not. Since the majority of the population lived and worked outside the edifice, which had not been badly damaged, it would have been natural for them to rebuild the community center, were the earthquake the only catastrophe.

**4. Period II.** Continuity both in pottery types and in the function of rooms indicates that the site was reoccupied by the same group that had abandoned it (de Vaux 1973: 24). Rooms that were too badly damaged were left untouched or partially cleared and walled off, while others were

brought back into use. The loss of space was compensated for by roofing over, or building in, what had previously been open spaces. The tower was reinforced with a sloping stone girdle. The silted-up decantation basin was abandoned, and the water channel extended to a new smaller decantation pool, which received the periodic flow from the aqueduct.

The beginning of this period is dated by de Vaux (1973: 33–36) to the early part of the reign of Archelaus (4 B.C.–A.D. 6) on the basis of a complex argument based on the coins. It ended in a violent destruction, which is dated to the third year (A.D. 68/69) of the First Revolt by the end of the coin series of this phase (de Vaux 1973: 36–37). The buildings at Qumran would have been visible from the N end of the Dead Sea, which Vespasian visited in the spring of A.D. 68 to test whether the unusually salty water would support bound nonswimmers (*JW* 4.477), and the tower might have suggested a military post. The claim of Laperrousaz (1978: 764–66) that Period II should be divided into two phases separated by another abandonment around A.D. 6 does not seem to rest on solid evidence.

**5. Period III.** Roman arrowheads found in the destruction level of Period II, and Roman coins discovered in the new occupation level, show that Qumran was occupied by a Roman garrison, presumably until Masada fell in A.D. 74 (de Vaux 1973: 41–44). During operations against this fortress and Machaerus, it was essential for the Romans to control traffic on the Dead Sea. Only the tower and the adjoining areas on the E and S were refurbished for use. The water channel from the aqueduct was modified to serve only the large cistern in the SE corner.

**6. Second Revolt.** Coins attest the occupation of Qumran by resistance elements during A.D. 132–35, but it must have been of short duration for no structures can be attributed to this level (de Vaux 1973: 45). If Milik (1960: 163–64) is correct in his interpretation of a letter found in the Wadi Murabbaat, the name of the site at this period was Mesad Hasidin, “Fortress of the Pious.”

**7. Cemetery.** The main cemetery of Periods I and II is located 50 m E of the buildings

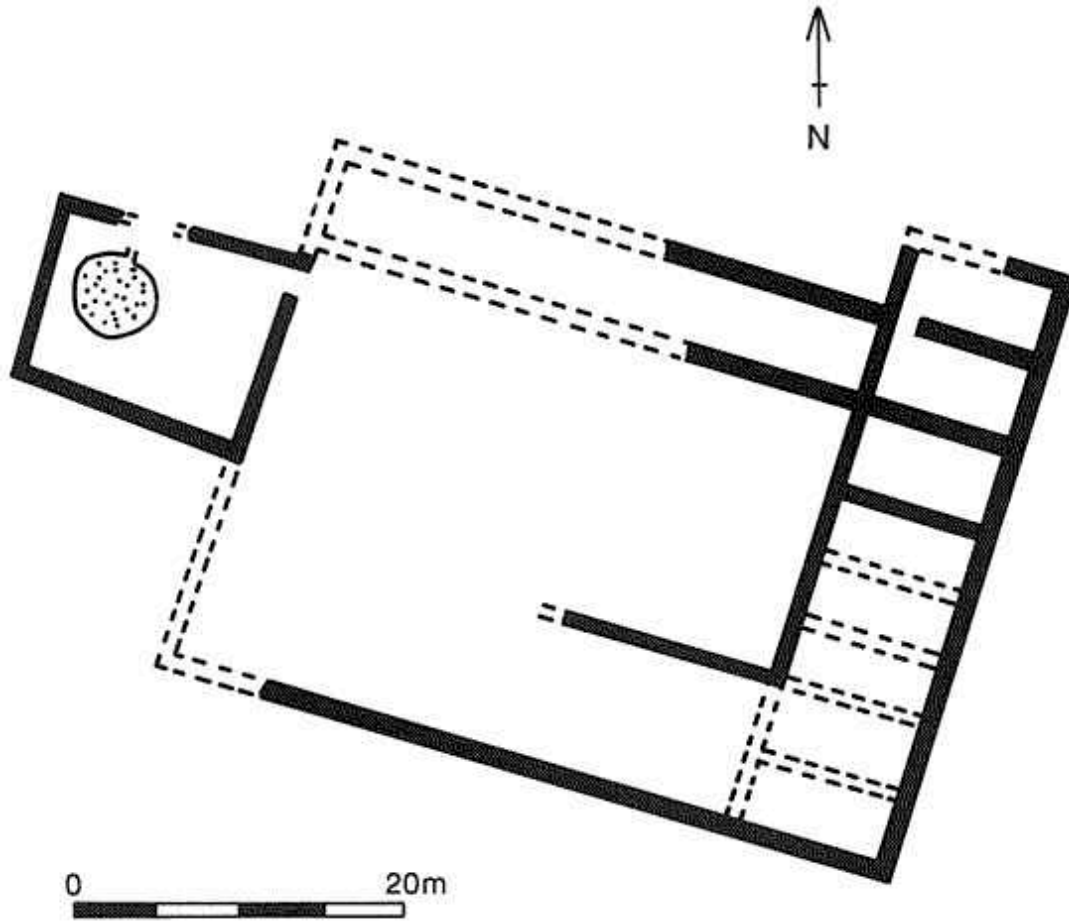
and contains about 1,100 tombs, 26 of which were excavated by de Vaux (1973: 45–48). The bodies were placed with their heads to the S in a cavity under the E wall of a trench, which was 1.2 m to 2 m deep. The tombs in the well-planned section nearest the buildings all contained male bodies, but some of those located in the extension of the cemetery over the hillocks to the E contained bodies of women and a child. Small secondary cemeteries on the terrace N of the buildings and at the foot of the terrace S of the wadi contained about 15 and 30 tombs, respectively. These contained male, female, and infant bodies (de Vaux 1973: 57–58). Very few of the individuals buried in these three cemeteries had passed their fortieth year (de Vaux 1973: 47).

### ***C. Khirbet Feshkha***

In terms of pottery and architectural style, the two main occupation levels correspond to Periods Ib and II at Qumran. The period of abandonment between the two phases, however, was marked by neither fire nor earthquake, whereas the end of this settlement was as violent as that of Qumran. Once again Laperrousaz (1978: 773–85) has disagreed with de Vaux’s conclusions, and has equated Feshkha I and II with the two subdivisions he discerned in Qumran II, but his reasons are no more convincing. In contrast to Qumran, Feshkha was not reoccupied immediately after Period II, but parts of the ruins were reused in the late 1st century A.D. and early 2d century A.D., and again in the Byzantine period.

The central building, consisting of a series of rooms around a central courtyard, is of less importance for determining the function of Feshkha than the adjoining installations. The principle feature of the enclosure to the S is a long cobble-floored, roofed building which opens to the S; it would have been suitable for ripening dates (de Vaux 1973: 73). Palms were certainly cultivated in this area in antiquity, as the presence of their wood, leaves, and dates at Qumran and in its caves confirms (de Vaux 1973: 74).

The installation to the N is more complex. From a water-control box are run two channels separated by a paved area. The W channel first serves a large basin, and then skirts its edge to serve two smaller ones, whereas the E channel ends in a rectangular pool. All that can be said with certainty is that this complex served an industrial purpose. The initial suggestions that it was used for the preparation of leather or parchment are excluded by the complete absence of any traces of tannin or organic residue (de Vaux 1973: 78–82). Zeuner's hypothesis (1960) that it was a fish farm has encountered no such decisive objections, but in that case one would have expected the installation to have been designed differently. Despite this uncertainty, it is clear that Khirbet Feshkha was a dependency of Qumran, to whose industrial and agricultural needs it catered (de Vaux 1973: 84). The inhabitants also farmed in the Buqeia at the top of the cliffs, to which ancient paths lead from both Qumran and Feshkha.



**QUM.01.** Plan of oldest structure at Qumran—Israelite Period (Iron II). (*Redrawn from de Vaux 1973, pl. III*)



**QUM.02.** General site plan of Qumran—Hellenistic Period.

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