

QUMRAN

A HUB OF SCRIBAL ACTIVITY?

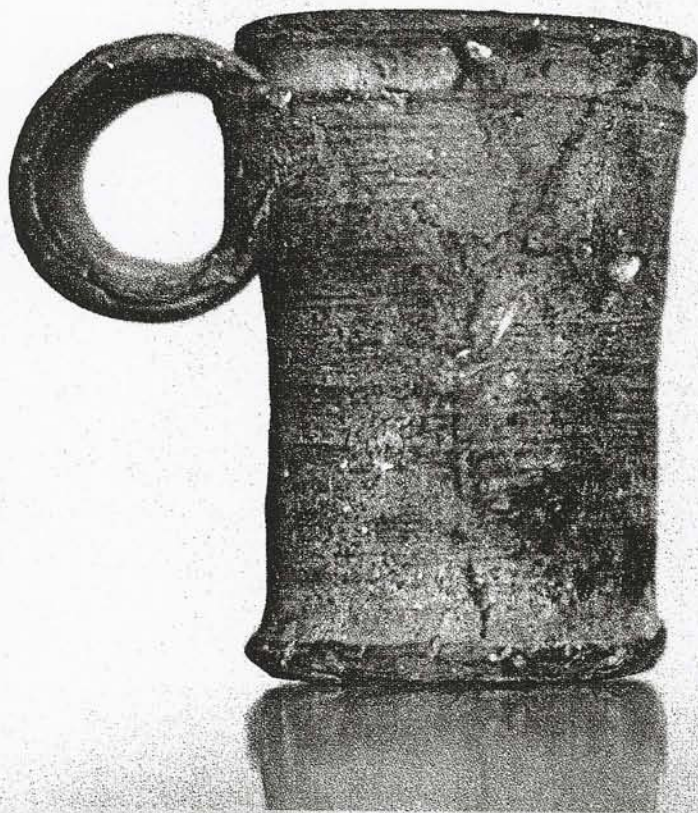
STEPHEN GORANSON

THE LATEST INKWELL FROM QUMRAN, brought to public attention for the first time in this article, was actually one of the first discovered at the Judean Desert outpost. Uncovered by Bedouin around 1950, before archaeologists began excavations at the site, this unusually beautiful bronze inkwell was sold by the Bethlehem antiquities dealer Kando to a Norwegian collector who has made it available for scientific study.

With a rounded pot, pedestal base and folding, basket-type handles, the inkwell, measuring about 3 inches (8 cm) high by 3 inches (8 cm) in diameter, differs in shape from the other four—possibly five—other inkwells from Qumran (see photos, pp. 38-39). The “new” inkwell bolsters the identification of Qumran as the residence of prolific writers and scribes.

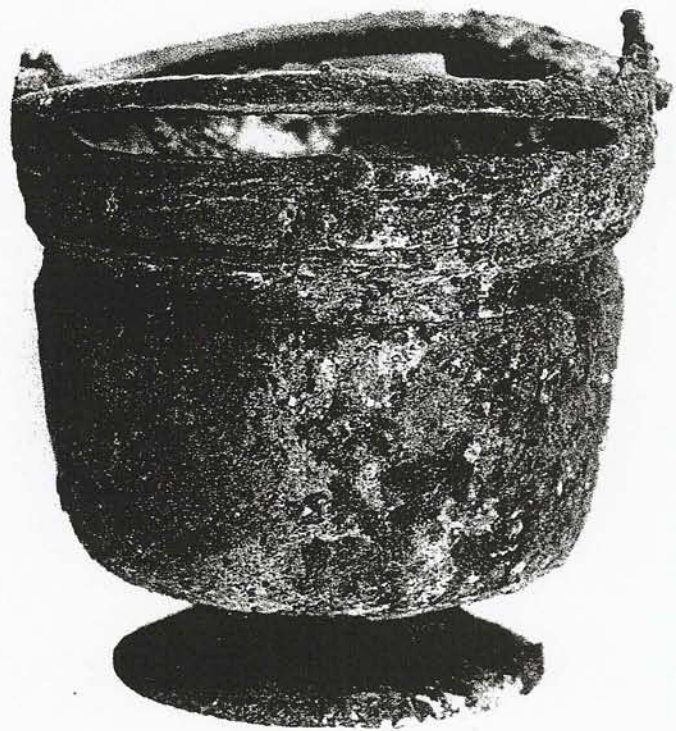
Inkwells from Qumran are of more than insouciant interest. These inkwells bear intimately on several important questions—whether Dead Sea Scrolls were written at Qumran, the nature of the Qumran settlement (religious community, winter villa, military fortress or commercial entrepôt), the relationship (if any) between the Qumran settlement and the scrolls, and, ultimately, the nature of the library itself. That is why the “discovery” of another inkwell from the site is important. In this case, the new inkwell is also very beautiful and quite unusual.

Until now, photographs of five inkwells attributed to Qumran have been published.¹ Knowing of my special interest in these inkwells, BAR editor Hershel Shanks alerted me to a possible sixth, which he noticed in a catalogue of a private collection owned by Martin Schøyen of Oslo. In this catalogue, Mr. Schøyen wrote that “[e]ven if it is private, scholars are always welcome to do research and to publish material” from his collection.² Mr. Schøyen was as good as his word; he has been most



DRIED INK discovered inside this Qumran inkwell may prove important for future research, especially if the ink matches that on any Dead Sea Scrolls. Solomon H. Steckoll, working on behalf of the Antiquities Department of Jordan, discovered this unbroken inkwell at Qumran in the 1960s. The inkwell measures about 2 inches (5.5 cm) tall and 1.5 inches (3.9 cm) in diameter.

BOUGHT FROM A "BEDWIN" in the West Bank of Jordan, this inkwell displays the same unusual shape and folding handles of the inkwell on page 36, although it measures only about 2 inches (4.9 cm) high and 2 inches (5.4 cm) in diameter. While the provenance of this pot remains a mystery, the similarity to the inkwell on page 36 suggests that it too may have come from Qumran.





ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

THE EVIDENCE OF THE INKWELLS (above) encouraged Roland de Vaux, who identified the site as home to an isolated religious community of Essenes, to conclude that many of the Dead Sea Scrolls had been written or copied at Qumran. His conclusions have since been challenged (see article, p. 24). De Vaux, excavating at Qumran between 1951 and 1956, discovered two of these inkwells in a room he called the "scriptorium," while the third came from a neighboring room. The bronze inkwell, center, and the two ceramic inkwells display the typical cylindrical form and flat base of inkwells from the turn of the era.

helpful in providing information and a superb picture of the inkwell.

According to information supplied by Mr. Schøyen, this inkwell was discovered in the Qumran ruins by Bedouin of the Ta'amireh tribe in about 1950, after the Qumran Cave 1 scrolls had come to light, but before Roland de Vaux began excavating the ruins in 1951. (Of course, had the inkwell been excavated scientifically, we would have further information about its specific findspot at Qumran; but that is no reason to ignore what information this find does provide.) The Bedouin took the inkwell to Kando, the antiquities dealer who was involved in several transactions of Qumran discoveries. When the Bedouin returned to Qumran, the site was being excavated by de Vaux. Kando confirmed this account in 1993.

The inkwell is made of bronze and has two handles on top that turn in opposite directions. It is a little over three inches (8 cm) high and the same in diameter. Its shape, however, differs from the other known Qumran inkwells.

In a fine article on Roman Period inkwells in Jordan, Professor Nabil I. Khairy, now head of the Department of Archaeology and director of the University Museums at the University of Jordan in Amman, published two bronze inkwells of types that "are not documented at any classical site or attested to in the literature."³ Both of these inkwells had two basket-type handles, and one is quite similar in shape to the Schøyen inkwell, including its pedestal base and concave top with incised lines.⁴ Though there is insufficient evidence for certainty, the striking similarity of the Schøyen inkwell to one of those published by Khairy raises the question whether they too came from Qumran. The inkwells published by Khairy were owned by Mr. E. Krueger, now deceased, who wrote that he bought his inkwells "in 1970 from a bedwin in the West Bank of Jordan."

In any event, this "new" inkwell provides further evidence that writing indeed took place at the Qumran settlement. This writing or copying most likely produced some—though surely not all—of the Qumran manuscripts. □

¹ See my "Further Qumran Archaeology Publications in Progress," *Biblical Archaeologist* 54 (1991), pp. 110-111 (which includes photographs of these five inkwells). See also "Qumran—The Evidence of the Inkwells," *BAR*, November/December 1993, p. 67, and the letters column, *BAR*, May/June 1994, pp. 76-77.

² *The Schøyen Collection: Checklist of Western Manuscripts 1-1721*, 10th ed., 1993. The inkwell is designated as the Schøyen Collection MS 1653/2 (Oslo/London).

³ Nabil I. Khairy, "Inkwells of the Roman Period from Jordan," *Levant* 12 (1980), pp. 155-162, and plate XXV. Six drawings of the inkwell parallel to the Schøyen inkwell appear in fig. 5a (page 160) and a photograph (taken from a different angle from that printed here) on plate XXV-D.

⁴ I thank Professor Khairy, who very kindly provided photos, permission to publish and additional information on its provenance.