

38 Qumran

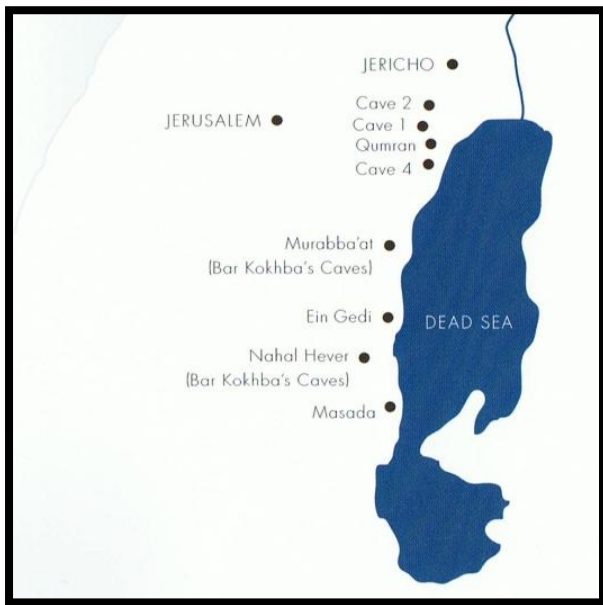
Names (also known as)

Goumran, Gumran, Kumran, Mesad, Oumran, Qumeran

Etymology

Derived from the Arabic ‘*qamar*’ – “moon”.

Location/Description



Qumran is situated between En-gedi and the northern point of the Dead Sea 21 kms (13 miles) north of En Gedi and 16 kms (10 miles) south of Jericho.

In ancient times, the level of the Dead Sea was higher and most likely reached the foot of the cliffs. There was no coastal road along the western shore. Qumran was thus on a "dead-end street," providing a perfect location for those who sought isolation (especially the Essenes, an isolationist sect).

Scriptural references

Old Testament

May have been one of the desert cities listed as part of the Judah tribe villages (Josh. 15:61-62, 'City of Salt')

Brief history

Qumran's settlement history goes back to 8th-7th century BC). A cistern was found from the time of Uzziah. It may have been one of Uzziah's towers in the wilderness (2 Chron.

26:10). It was a good caravan stopping point. This may also be the City of Salt mentioned in Josh. 15:62; 16:61). Salt was precious for cooking and sacrifices.

In the period 131-31 BC many people moved here during John Hyrcanus' reign (134-104 BC), but the community was destroyed by a fire and earthquake. Josephus wrote that this earthquake was in the spring of 31 BC and killed 30,000 people.

It was uninhabited during the time of Herod the Great, but was later rebuilt during the time of Archelaus. The Romans destroyed it during the Jewish Revolt.

Archaeology Findings

Since the Dead Sea scrolls were found there, many excavations have taken place. Before that time it was an area difficult to access.

The Qumran Dam has been discovered. Since they required vast amounts of water for their daily purification rites, the inhabitants of Qumran channelled water from the wadi, which flowed during the infrequent winter storms. This dam helped to divert the water into an aqueduct, which then led toward the inhabited areas. The water filled dozens of cisterns, mikvot, and pools.

Qumran was excavated by the Catholic priest Roland de Vaux from 1953-56. More recent excavations of the site have taken place under the direction of Hanan Eshel.

In the 1950s and 60s, thirty caves of Qumran were found with remains of human occupation. Of these, 11 yielded documents. Bedouins found caves 1, 2, 4, 6, and 11. The three important caves in terms of finds are 1, 4, and 11. (see Dead Sea Scrolls).

Additionally, excavations have identified: a cemetery, a prayer hall, and a watchtower.

The area around the Qumran caves was under the control of Jordan, however after the Six Day War, became the control of Israel.

The Scriptorium

On the basis of inkwells and "writing benches" which were found in the second-story room of this building (see image below), archaeologists have suggested that this was where scrolls were copied.

The benches were wooden desks that were covered with a plaster coating. Some of these were destroyed in fighting during the 1967 war while stored at the Rockefeller Museum.

No scrolls were found in this room or in the ruins of the site itself. However, the same type of unique pottery was found both on site and in the caves with the scrolls. This has helped to connect the caves with the site.



The Scriptorium at Qumran

Sources:

Bro. John Martin, Pictorial Library of Bible Lands
The Qumran Library, www.ibiblio.com
www.bibleplaces.com/Qumran
www.biblewalks.com/sites/qumran

(Compiler – Stephen Macfarlane)