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## Miszelle.

### **A Postscript to "The Economic Basis of the Qumran Community".**

Subsequent to writing the article on "The Economic Basis of the Qumran Community" which was published in the July-August issue of *Theologische Zeitschrift* 11 (1955), it has been my good fortune to visit Qumran, and to explore the area for further indications of how the community might have solved its problem of economic survival in the desolate wilderness of Judah.

First let me speak about the possibilities of agriculture at the Ain Fashkha oasis. The presence of agricultural implements in the Qumran buildings<sup>1</sup>, taken together with what Philo and Josephus tell us about the agricultural activities of the Essenes would lead us to expect that the Qumran community had some interest in the agricultural potentialities of the Ain Fashkha oasis. Having examined the area first hand I now think it unlikely that there was much if any cultivation of the immediate "slopes leading up to and surrounding the Qumran site". There appear to be no indications that water from the community cisterns was used for this purpose.

But the land south of Wady Qumran is quite another story. In the area designated on the maps as Bassat Fashkha there are a number of springs. Some of these could have been utilized for irrigation purposes. Even today the water from one of these springs is being channeled into ponds which are being used as experimental fisheries. In exploring the area I came across one small parcel of land which had been cultivated and planted within recent months. Though the soil is poor, there is no doubt that the land is capable of sustaining vegetation, for even now it is covered with grass, reeds, small bushes and in some places dense undergrowth. Near the fish ponds I found some small palm trees. These I presume have been planted within recent years.

It is highly significant that there are in the northern section of this area some well-defined remains of what appear to have been at one time stone walls. One can trace at least two of these walls for well over one hundred yards. The two walls of which I speak converge somewhat like the arcs of irregular circles upon a strange mound which produces no surface sherds. The most probable explanations of these strange walls will no doubt connect them in one way or another with some ancient agricultural exploitation of the area. I suggest that they might have served as retaining walls in a rather extensive plan of cultivation. There are signs of at least two small stations along one of the walls, and remains of a small building at its northern end.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these implements, including iron pruning hooks and what appears to be some kind of hoe, are now on display in the Palestine Archaeological Museum.

Do we have any idea what kind of agriculture might have been carried on in this area by the members of the Qumran Community? Yes we do. For example we have good reason to think that they cultivated date palms. The evidence though not conclusive is impressive. First, Pliny reports that the Essenes near the Dead Sea dwelt amid palm trees. Second, small palm trees are now growing in the Ain Fashkha area. Third, mature date palms are now growing in isolated spots a few miles north in the same kind of soil. And fourth, the archaeologists have found pruning hooks and significant quantities of date seeds in the buildings they have excavated at Qumran. They have also found charred pieces of trunks of palm trees which were evidently used in the construction of the Qumran buildings. Thus does evidence from historical, topographical, and archaeological sources converge to throw light on questions concerning the economic basis of the Qumran community.

To the list of economic activities which might have been carried on within the confines of the Qumran buildings should be added that of manufacturing pottery for commercial purposes. The archeologists have uncovered and tentatively identified the following: (1) Pits for washing and levigating clay, (2) Potters' kiln, and (3) Pottery storeroom.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the number of members in the community I would make the following observation: The extent of the building complex in the industrial and domestic areas of Khirbet Qumran, taken together with the highly developed system of water-works, including twelve large cisterns suggest to this observer that the community must have numbered in at least one period of its life no less than 200 active members. This figure is conservative, and there is no reason to doubt that on special occasions for brief periods of time the number of people who were at Qumran might have been much greater.

Finally I would like to report on the very close connection between Khirbet Qumran and the Bukeia to which Masterman draws our attention in his reports.<sup>3</sup> The built up road which runs up the north side of Wady Qumran is traceable all the way to the top of the cliff. From there one follows the track westward for about two miles and then finds himself in sight of Masterman's "Khurbet Abu Tabak". Just a few hundred feet west of this site one comes upon the main road connecting Bethlehem and Jericho. At this point one stands near the northern end of a long broad plain, which even today is cultivated by semi-settled shepherds who live in the Behlehem area.

The actual date and significance of Abu Tabak is so closely tied up

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<sup>2</sup> See illuminating photographs in *London Illustrated News*, Sept. 3, 1955, pp. 380—381, in connection with article by G. Lancaster Harding, F.S.A., Director of Antiquities, The Hashamite Kingdom of Jordon. This pottery storeroom is thought by some to be a pantry.

<sup>3</sup> See especially E. W. G. Masterman, Notes on some Ruins and a Rock-cut Aqueduct in the Wady Qumran: *Pal. Expl. Fund, Quart. Stat.* 35 (1903), pp. 264-267.

with the whole history of occupation in the Bukeia that I am constrained at this time to refer only to those facts having direct bearing on the question of the economic ties between this area and the Qumran community.<sup>4</sup> The ruins of Abu Tabak are pre-Roman in date and therefore cannot be Essene. But the presence of pottery from the Roman period at Abu Tabak indicates that in the same general period when the Essenes were flourishing at Qumran only a few miles to the east, there was some human activity going on in this part of the Bukeia. One does not have to look far to see one feature of this area which would have been of the greatest importance for the agriculturally minded Essenes. There are hundreds of acres of tillable land all around this site. In fact, the earth is cultivated right up to within a hundred yards of the ruins. Though no one lives in the Bukeia today, still the land is sufficiently fertile that people travel here from their homes several miles to the west, to plant and harvest wheat every year.

There is no reason to doubt that this area was being tilled in the days when the Qumran community was flourishing. And it is quite possible that it was being tilled by the members of that community. At any event the Bukeia was the nearest source of grain for the Essenes, and the road from Qumran made this area easily accessible. In this connection it is important to note that the Qumran community was prepared to grind its own wheat. The archeologists have uncovered the place where the flour was milled, and have found basalt mill stones. One of these basalt mills, in a perfect state of preservation, is on display in the Palestine Archeological Museum. Two broken mills have been left at Qumran.

Professor Millar Burrows, in his well-balanced study, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, with regard to the activity of the members of the Qumran community, writes: "The covenanters must have been farmers too [like the Essenes of Philo and Josephus], though one cannot but wonder what kind of agriculture was possible in the desolate vicinity of Khirbet Qumran."<sup>5</sup> It is hoped that the above observations on the very real agricultural possibilities in the Ain Fashkha area, and in the nearby Bukeia, may shed some light on this perplexing question.

Madison (N.J., U.S.A.).

William R. Farmer.

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<sup>4</sup> A forthcoming report on exploration and excavation in the Bukeia will be made by Dr. Frank Cross and Abbé J. T. Milik, under whose direction an expedition to this area was made August, 1955.

<sup>5</sup> M. Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (1955), p. 289.