

1

What are the Dead Sea Scrolls?

Setting the Scene

The ‘Dead Sea Scrolls’ is the name given first and foremost to a unique collection of nearly 900 ancient Jewish manuscripts written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Roughly two thousand years old, they were discovered by chance between 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves around a ruined site called Khirbet Qumran on the north-western shore of the Dead Sea.¹ Many important texts were published early on, but it was only after the release of fresh material in 1991 that most ordinary scholars gained unrestricted access to the contents of the whole corpus.

The aim of this book is to explain to the uninitiated the nature and significance of these amazing manuscripts. For over fifty years now, they have had a dramatic effect on the way experts reconstruct religion in ancient Palestine.² Cumulatively and subtly, the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) from Qumran have gradually transformed scholars’ understanding of the text of the Bible, Judaism in the time of Jesus, and the rise of Christianity. In the chapters to follow, therefore, each of these subjects will be looked at in turn, while a further chapter will deal with some of the more outlandish proposals made about the documents over the years. First of all, it will be fruitful to clear the ground by defining more carefully just what the DSS from Khirbet Qumran are.

Discovery of the Century

The DSS from the Qumran area have rightly been described as one of the twentieth century’s most important archaeological finds. To begin

explaining why, it is best to report how and when the contents of the eleven caves concerned were found.³ The story has been recounted many times, of course, and it is not always easy to disentangle the facts from legendary accretions. Nevertheless, even though the numerous accounts that exist are difficult to harmonize in every detail, we can get a reasonably accurate overview of what took place from the recollections of several individuals.⁴

In early 1947, three young shepherds from the Ta'amireh Bedouin tribe were in the vicinity of the springs of 'Ein-Feshkha. This site, two miles south of Khirbet Qumran, sits on the narrow coastal plain between the western shore of the Dead Sea and the limestone cliffs marking the edge of the Judaean hills. The three were grazing their flocks on the patches of greenery which here and there break the barren monotony of both the plain and the hills. One evening, while searching for a lost animal, the shepherd known as Jun'a casually threw a stone into one of the hundreds of caves among the surrounding cliffs. An unexpected crashing noise emanated from it and, because it was nearly dark, the young men determined to investigate further the next day. In the morning, Muhammed edh-Dhib was the first to enter the cave and, in one of a number of stone jars, each about two feet high, he found three manuscripts, two of them wrapped in linen cloth. The Bedouin soon brought their unusual booty to the nearest town, Bethlehem, in the hope of a sale. Unsuccessful, they left them with a cobbler-cum-antiquities dealer called Khalil Eskander Shahin, also known as Kando.

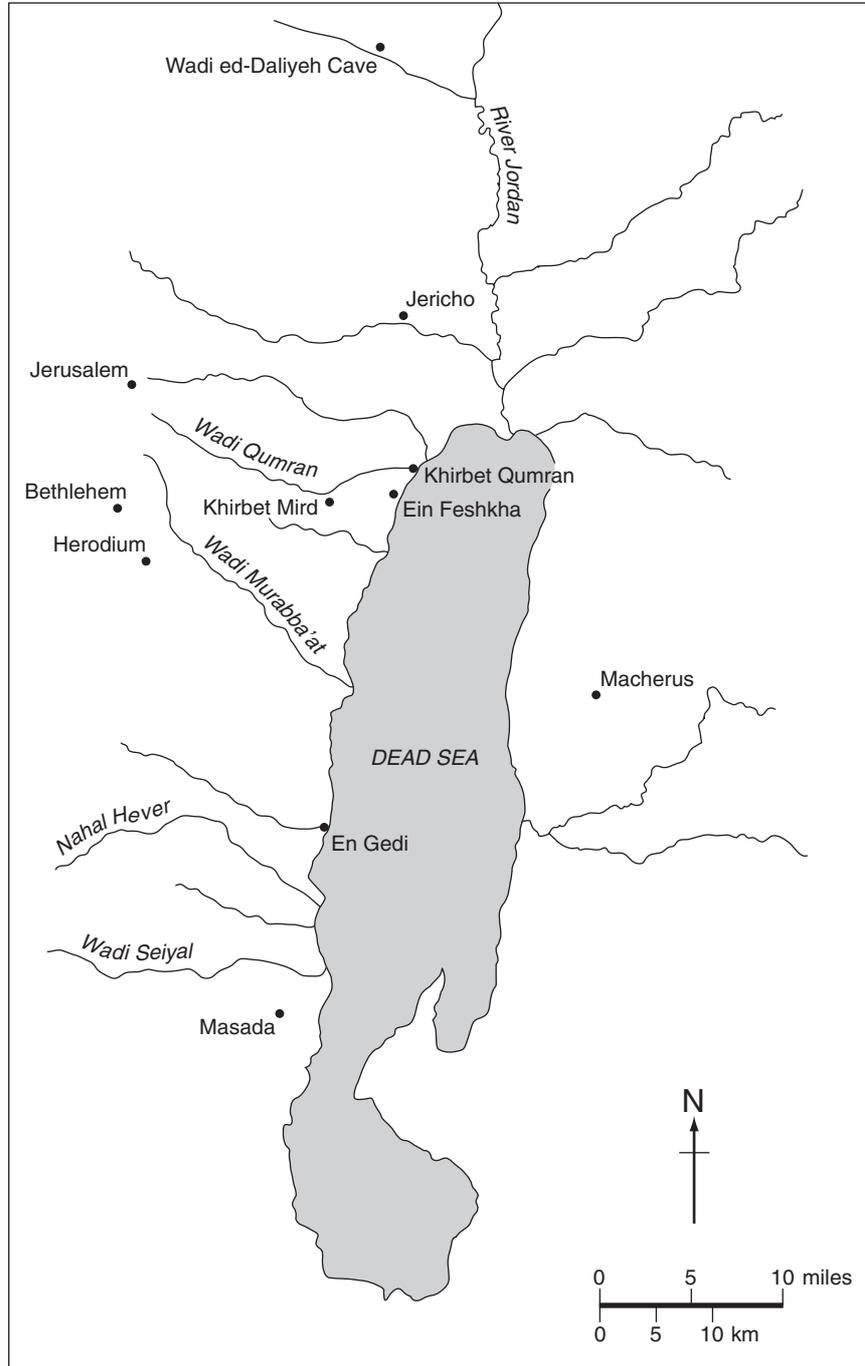
We now know that the cave where the scrolls were found – subsequently dubbed Cave 1 to distinguish it from other manuscript caves in the same area – is situated less than a mile north of Khirbet Qumran and some nine miles south of Jericho. Four further scrolls were retrieved from it by the Bedouin and lodged with the same antiquities dealer. Kando, however, was unsure of the age or value of the seven manuscripts in his care. Because they looked to him as though they might be written in the Syriac language, he contacted the Metropolitan Athanasius Yeshue Samuel of St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Monastery in Jerusalem.⁵ In mid-1947, the Metropolitan decided to purchase four of Kando's texts, and these were later identified as a near-complete copy of the biblical book of Isaiah, a previously unknown religious rule book, a similarly distinctive commentary on the biblical book of Habakkuk, and a badly preserved paraphrase of Genesis. Impatient to learn more about the documents, especially how much they might be worth, he investigated several possible avenues of further inquiry.

Eventually, the Metropolitan approached scholars at the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. One of the staff there, John

Trever, took photographs of three of the compositions which, it transpired, were written in Hebrew; not long afterwards, the results were published in two volumes.⁶ The fourth scroll, containing an Aramaic paraphrase of Genesis, had decomposed and was difficult to unravel.⁷ This problem was compounded by the way the document was manufactured in ancient times, for all the lengthy Qumran DSS originally consisted of leather or papyrus strips sewn or pasted into a single piece, inscribed in sections or columns, and then rolled up into scroll form. After nearly two millennia, it was not surprising that compositions like the Aramaic Genesis paraphrase had deteriorated or that its internal layers were stuck together.⁸

In the course of 1947, Professor E. L. Sukenik of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem heard rumours of a manuscript discovery. Despite civil unrest over the United Nations resolution to partition Palestine (then under British control) into an Arab state and a Jewish state, he managed to buy the other three scrolls from Kando in November and December of that year. The three compositions were all in Hebrew, and they consisted of a collection of hitherto unattested hymns, a dramatic work about an eschatological cosmic battle, and another, less well preserved, copy of Isaiah. Sukenik quickly realized that the scrolls were very old and of momentous significance – he was, after all, an expert in burial inscriptions from the first centuries BCE and CE.⁹ So widespread was his reputation that, soon after he had acquired his own documents, an intermediary sought his opinion on the four Cave 1 manuscripts belonging to the Metropolitan. Sukenik was allowed to examine them briefly, risking life and limb by venturing under difficult political circumstances from Jewish Jerusalem to Arab Bethlehem to collect them. But then, much to the professor's disappointment, the Metropolitan unexpectedly opted to submit the four scrolls to the expertise of Trever at the American School of Oriental Research, as observed earlier. As for Sukenik himself, like Trever, he published his material fairly rapidly.¹⁰ And today, these seven substantial Cave 1 manuscripts are in Israeli hands, housed in Jerusalem's specially built Shrine of the Book.¹¹

Both the American scholars and Sukenik issued separate press releases in April 1948, describing their documents in brief. So it was that, almost a year after the shepherd had disturbed the jars in Cave 1, the world at large came to hear about the remarkable discoveries that had been made.¹² It took some time for the news to sink in, however. Even experienced scholars were reluctant to believe that ancient documents could have survived in the Judaeian desert, for received wisdom held that the conditions were too harsh. Only when further excavations got under



Map 2 *The Dead Sea and Surrounding Area*

way, despite the region's ongoing political tensions, was it possible to demonstrate conclusively just how old the DSS were.

When the British relinquished their mandate on Palestine, David Ben-Gurion immediately declared the establishment of an independent state of Israel on 14 May 1948. In the ensuing military struggle, Israel took possession of the land allotted to it under the earlier partition plan. It also took West Jerusalem, while the state of Jordan annexed East Jerusalem and the West Bank. It was within the latter's boundaries that military officials determined the exact location of Cave 1 in early 1949. Anxious not to lose any DSS to the black market or abroad, the Jordanian Government had authorized the Arab Legion to comb the area, and the site was found by Captain Philippe Lippens of the United Nations Armistice Observer Corps. The soldiers had carried out their laborious task without the aid of the Bedouin who, hoping to find other valuable manuscripts for themselves first, were reluctant at this stage to cooperate with the authorities.

Once its identity had been established, two scholars set about thoroughly excavating Cave 1. They were G. Lankester Harding (director of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan) and Roland de Vaux (director of Jerusalem's famous Dominican college, L'Ecole Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem). In addition to the documents removed earlier, they retrieved various other artifacts, including pieces of text that had broken off several of the seven large manuscripts, as well as fragments of what were obviously other compositions – including the remains of two appendices to the religious rule purchased earlier by the Metropolitan. All such fragments were published in the first volume of an official series with Oxford University Press: 'Discoveries in the Judean Desert', or DJD for short.¹³ Then, in 1950, the antiquity of the manuscripts and the fragments was dramatically confirmed, when the results of Carbon-14 tests on the linen wrappings from two of the scrolls gave an approximate date of 33 CE. We shall look at carbon dating more closely in Chapter 3, but, even allowing for the two hundred-year margin of error inherent in the process at the time, the ancient origin of Cave 1's literary contents was now beyond doubt.

Surprisingly, in the initial phase of their work, Harding and de Vaux did not link the Cave 1 manuscripts to the nearby old buildings of Khirbet Qumran, perched above the coastal plain on an outcrop from the cliffs overlooking the Dead Sea.¹⁴ In fact, a preliminary survey led them to conclude it was unconnected to the scrolls. A fuller investigation took place in late 1951, however, and the archaeologists came to a different conclusion. The remains of a cylindrical jar like those found in Cave 1 were retrieved from the Qumran site and this important artifac-

tual connection, along with other distinctive pottery items, convinced them that the cave and the ruins were related.

In the ongoing search for new caves and new texts, local Bedouin were at a distinct advantage. Although their interest was financial, their familiarity with the Judaeian desert meant they tended to be the first to discover literary deposits, which they would then sell to the archaeologists working under the Jordanian Government's auspices. In this way, the latter was prepared to spend considerable sums acquiring scrolls from the Bedouin and, by preventing their entry into the black market, keep the documents in Jordan under the jurisdiction of the Palestine Archaeology Museum of East Jerusalem. Some of the manuscripts bought from the Bedouin turned out to have no direct connection with either Khirbet Qumran or Cave 1 – such as the finds in caves further south at Wadi Murabba'at and Nahal Hever (described at the end of this chapter). More positively, Cave 2 was discovered in 1952 and, over the next few months, several other sites were located – Caves 3, 4, 5 and 6. Their contents, like those of Cave 1, seemed to be linked with Qumran's ruined buildings. Indeed, Cave 4 is situated right next to Khirbet Qumran and provided particularly rich literary pickings.

In view of the strong link with the caves established by a common pottery style, three further excavations of the ruins took place. During one of them, Caves 7, 8, 9, and 10 were discovered by the archaeologists, who then embarked on a final examination of the Qumran buildings in 1956. On the basis of coins and pottery, as well as distinct layers within the ruins themselves, the excavators concluded that Qumran had undergone two main periods of habitation. In the seventh and eighth centuries BCE, a small town had stood on the site – perhaps the City of Salt mentioned in the Bible at Joshua 15:62. Then, after a break of several centuries, the evidence pointed to a second occupation from some time after 150 BCE until 68 CE. Although the site could have provided up to two hundred people with communal facilities for eating, ritual bathing, and worship, the group's members must have lived elsewhere, probably in tents pitched roundabout or in those surrounding caves which, though bereft of manuscripts, contained various items linking them to the Qumran ruins. Life would certainly have been harsh, for, at 1,300 feet (some 400 metres) below sea level, the Dead Sea region gets very hot and humid and receives under four inches (10 centimetres) of rainfall per annum. However, it was possible to collect runoff water in pools during the rainy season, as the system of channels and cisterns among the buildings testifies, while local springs such as 'Ein-Feshkha – where excavations in 1958 revealed a small satellite settlement connected to Qumran – would have allowed a limited amount of farming. The remains



Plate 1 *Man with Scroll Jar in Cave 4.* © Estate of John M. Allegro, courtesy of The Allegro Archive (The University of Manchester)

of pottery kilns and other facilities at Khirbet Qumran, moreover, provide further evidence that a subsistence lifestyle was indeed feasible in this hostile environment. And as hinted already, those using Qumran during this second period presumably busied themselves collecting, copying, composing, and studying the manuscripts found in the surrounding caves almost two millennia later.¹⁵

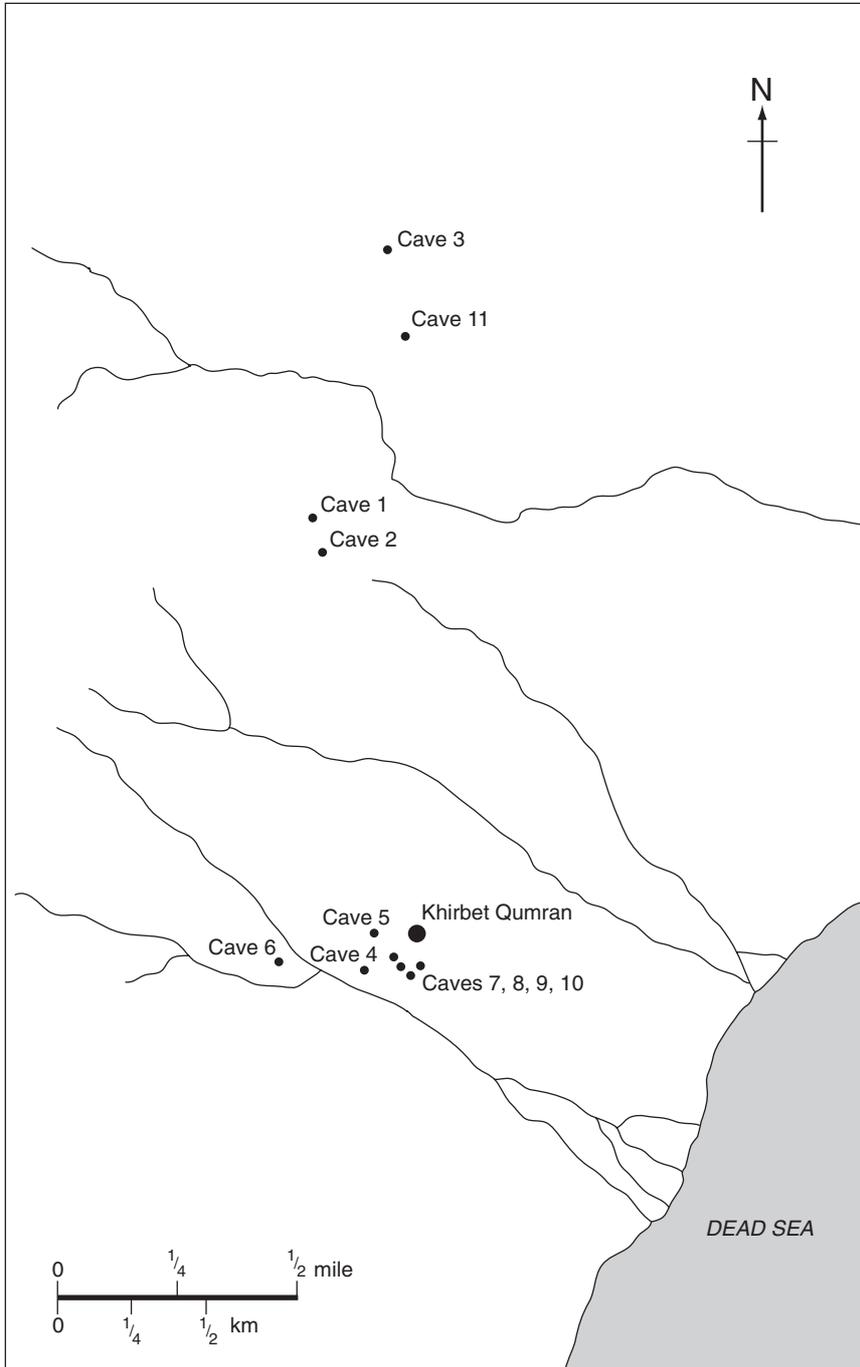
The last cave, Cave 11, was discovered by the Bedouin in early 1956. It contained several lengthy texts, including a collection of canonical and non-canonical psalms all ascribed to King David, an Aramaic paraphrase of the biblical book of Job, as well as a copy of Leviticus written in Old Hebrew script.¹⁶ Because the Palestine Archaeology Museum

was experiencing funding problems by this stage, these scrolls were entrusted for publication to Dutch and American scholars whose institutions bought the documents from the Bedouin. As for the Temple Scroll, the longest of all the DSS at nearly 27 feet (over 8 metres), it was not acquired until 1967. As early as 1960, though, rumours were circulating that it had been hidden by Kando, the antiquities dealer who had earlier supplied Sukenik and the Metropolitan. The document was eventually retrieved by the scholar-cum-politician Yigael Yadin with the help of Israeli military intelligence during the Six-Day War of 1967, when Israel occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank.¹⁷ By then, the DSS were becoming symbolic of Israeli identity, providing a tangible link between the new state and the last time the Jewish people inhabited their own land as a nation some two thousand years earlier. The fortress of Masada, which will feature later on, had taken on a similar status.

Scrolls in Abundance

The results of archaeology and carbon dating soon showed that the Qumran DSS stemmed from the last two or three centuries BCE and the first century CE. Certainly, they had lain in the caves undisturbed for centuries, notwithstanding reports of manuscript finds in the third and ninth centuries CE.¹⁸ We shall see later that the texts probably belonged to a religious community with links to the Essenes which flourished at Qumran for nearly two hundred years. This community apparently disbanded in the late 60s CE when Roman legions marched past Qumran on their way to Jerusalem to quash what modern scholars call the First Revolt of the Jews against Rome.¹⁹ Fortunately for us, its members left behind a collection of literature which is vast by any standards. It encompasses both complete manuscripts, like the lengthy Isaiah Scroll from Cave 1, as well as thousands of minute fragments. Among the latter, many were recovered from the caves under layers of sand and bat dung, while Cave 7, for example, had collapsed long before the archaeological excavations. Surprisingly, even such tiny scraps often yield small amounts of legible text, as in the case of a Cave 1 commentary on the biblical book of Micah. In between these extremes are many other manuscripts in varying states of preservation.

With all these manuscripts, fragments, and caves, it is easy to get confused. A system of letters and numbers has been devised, therefore, as a simple way of referring to individual Qumran DSS. Thus, the long Isaiah scroll just mentioned is usually referred to as 1QIsaiah^a. Here, 1 =



Map 3 *Khirbet Qumran and Caves 1-11*

Cave 1, Q = the site of Qumran, and ^a = the particular copy concerned (to distinguish it from IQIsaiah^b, the other Isaiah text recovered from the same site). Acronyms of this sort have likewise been apportioned to the other five well-preserved manuscripts of Cave 1:

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|------------------|---|
| 1QS | Community Rule (S = <i>serekh</i> , Hebrew for ‘rule’) |
| IQpHabakkuk | Commentary on Habakkuk (p = <i>pesher</i> , ‘interpretation’) |
| 1QH ^a | Hymns Scroll (H = <i>hodayot</i> , ‘hymns’) |
| 1QM | War Scroll (M = <i>milhamah</i> , ‘war’) |
| 1QapGenesis | Genesis Apocryphon (‘ap’ stands for apocryphon) ²⁰ |

The two messianic appendices to 1QS, removed from Cave 1 by Harding and de Vaux, were naturally dubbed 1QSa and 1QSB. More generally, fragments from Cave 5 and Cave 6 of a work known as the Damascus Document can be referred to as 5QD and 6QD, respectively, while eight Cave 4 copies of the same piece are called 4QD^{a-h}. As for 4QAgos of Creation A–B, the ‘A–B’ in such cases represent compositions which, though not identical, contain parallel or overlapping material.

In addition, a numerical system has been constructed in which all but the seven major Cave 1 manuscripts have been given numbers in sequence. According to this scheme, the commentary on Micah noted above may be designated simply as IQ14, while 4QD^{a-h} can be dubbed 4Q266–273. However, we shall opt for the lettered system whenever possible, because it normally provides clues for the uninitiated reader as to a document’s content. Alternatively, it is sometimes best to employ a work’s full name – as in ‘Community Rule’ or ‘Damascus Document’ – especially when it was found in more than one cave. Only a few of these titles, it ought to be pointed out, derive from ancient times, most being invented by modern scholars as a handy way of referring to individual texts.²¹

Altogether, almost nine hundred manuscripts were brought to light from the eleven caves. Caves 9 and 10 yielded only one item each. At the opposite extreme, Cave 4 was the richest of all, providing scholars with well over five hundred documents, although some are very scrappy.²² To keep these numbers in perspective, it should be remembered that they include duplicate copies. The biblical book of Deuteronomy, for instance, was attested in some thirty manuscripts found variously in Caves 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 11. Taking such duplication into account, around four hundred distinct compositions have been preserved in all.

To try and make sense of this mass of literature, it is helpful to divide the manuscripts into three broad categories. First, we have writings which were already known before the Qumran DSS were discovered. In

such cases, the main contribution of the finds has been to provide specimens much older than anything which had come to light beforehand. By way of illustration, we can turn to IQIsaiah^a again, for it predates all complete copies of Isaiah in Hebrew by a thousand years. And nearly all the other scriptural books common to Jews and Christians turned up in the caves as well. To put it more concretely, thanks to the Qumran DSS, we now have specimens of biblical books which were actually being read by Jews when Herod the Great ruled Palestine (37–4 BCE), and when Jesus walked and preached in the Galilean hills (around 27 CE).²³ Alongside these biblical texts were several works from the so-called Apocrypha. This term was coined by the ancient scholar Jerome (*circa* 340–420 CE) to designate a number of books, like Tobit and Ecclesiasticus (or Ben Sira), which Christians in his day regarded as part of the Old Testament, though Jews by then had excluded them from their Bible. Similarly, two fascinating books now called 1 Enoch and Jubilees belong to this first class of Qumran DSS material. Although authoritative for many Jews before 70 CE, they subsequently failed to enter into either the Jewish or mainstream Christian Bible; their text was, however, preserved through the centuries by the Ethiopian church before turning up at Qumran. In fact, 1 Enoch and Jubilees are part of a large body of Jewish texts from the last few centuries BCE and the first few centuries CE which scholars dub the ‘Pseudepigrapha’. This term will be explained in the next chapter, when the overall significance of the first category of DSS literature – biblical, apocryphal, and pseudepigraphical works – will be unpacked in more detail.

The second category of Qumran DSS consists of compositions which no one knew about before their chance discovery in the caves around Qumran. Like the first category, though, they were probably widely read in Palestine during the late Second Temple period, either by the Jewish population as a whole or by various sub-sections of it with certain common concerns. Only after 70 CE, when Jews and Christians ceased to preserve them, were they lost to posterity. An example is the interpretative paraphrase of Genesis known as IQapGenesis which, translating some of the biblical stories about Noah and Abraham into Aramaic, fills gaps in the narrative along the way, often rather imaginatively. Since it refers to none of the distinctive practices and beliefs linked to the Essenes, it was probably in use beyond the confines of the Qumran group, although perhaps mostly among others of a similar religious disposition. In any case, the DSS have revealed a large number of similar writings which, although scholars had previously been unaware of their existence, must likewise have been circulating widely in Palestine during the last two centuries BCE and the first century CE. Included here, for

instance, are 4QApocryphon of Moses^{a-b} and 4Qpseudo-Ezekiel^{a-c} and, as we shall see in the next chapter, many such works were probably treated as scripture by those with access to them in Second Temple times.

By far the greatest sensation was caused by a third category of Qumran DSS, all but one of which were also completely unknown before 1947. The Damascus Document is the exception here, for it was first discovered fifty years earlier in an old Cairo synagogue and dubbed 'CD' (C=Cairo, D=Damascus), before subsequently turning up in a longer edition in the Qumran caves.²⁴ Still, all the works in this category, including CD, comprise writings which, given their content, must have been composed by the religious group to which those who lived around Qumran were affiliated. As such, they are often referred to as the 'sectarian DSS' and consist of a mixture of legal and poetic texts, as well as pieces of Bible interpretation and narrative. We shall examine some of the most important so-called sectarian documents in Chapter 4. For the moment, it is worth repeating that they almost certainly represent the beliefs and practices of a branch of Essenes – one of several religious parties at the time, alongside the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others. Before 1947, the only substantial information we had about these Essenes was contained in the accounts of two first-century CE Jews, Philo and Josephus, neither of whom were Essenes themselves. Now, to the delight of scholars, the sectarian DSS from Qumran function as a unique window into the world of an actual community with Essene links. In fact, as the only surviving first-hand material from any Jewish group prior to 70 CE, their value is inestimable in all kinds of ways.

The Scrolls and their Times

Just where the value of the Qumran DSS lies will emerge as subsequent chapters unfold. Beforehand, it is a good idea to sketch their general historical background, for all serious scholars now relate the DSS from Caves 1–11 to Palestine during the last two or three centuries BCE and the first century CE. However, it was not always so. Although right from the start Sukenik and Trever thought that the texts were ancient, others disagreed. The main proponent of a medieval date, for instance, was the American scholar Solomon Zeitlin who, right up to his death in 1976, maintained that the Qumran DSS were a forgery.²⁵ But, in reality, it became increasingly clear that they were ancient. Among the mounting evidence, we have already noted the results of carbon dating, coupled with archaeological study of the Qumran ruins. Later on, we shall see

that allusions to people and events contained in some Qumran DSS further corroborate their antiquity.

The three centuries concerned, roughly 250 BCE to 70 CE, are part of what historians call the Second Temple period.²⁶ This designation covers Jewish history from the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem in the late 500s BCE until its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE. These six centuries, as many readers will realize, partly overlap with the Biblical period, for the Old Testament – also called the Hebrew Bible or Hebrew Scriptures – deals with Israelite and Jewish history up to 400 BCE and beyond.²⁷ Obviously, such a vast time span is beyond the scope of this introductory study, and we shall focus on the last three hundred years of the Second Temple period in subsequent chapters.²⁸

Here, though, it is worth placing the Second Temple period in its broader historical context. Strictly speaking, it began in 515 BCE or shortly thereafter with the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem on the site of the sanctuary that had been constructed in the tenth century under King Solomon.²⁹ Those responsible for its re-establishment were members of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin who had been given permission in 537 BCE to return to their homeland from exile in Babylon – although it is important to remember many chose to remain behind, while large numbers had never left Palestine in the first place. By this time, of the original twelve tribes of Israel, Judah and tiny Benjamin were the only ones left and, as such, it is not wrong to go on referring to their members as Israelites. More normally, whether in Babylon or in Palestine, they are called Judahites or, better still, ‘Jews’, while the term ‘Judaism’ designates their religion.

Unfortunately, the sources for the first half of the Second Temple period are sparse. Nonetheless, on the basis of late Old Testament books and some other writings, it appears that the Jewish community was fairly autonomous. The Persian authorities were content to let it regulate its own affairs, albeit normally under the watchful eye of an approved governor, as long as taxes were duly paid. This arrangement made sense, for, from the imperial viewpoint, the Jews lived in a far-flung and relatively unimportant corner of the Persian empire. Indeed, the small province of Judah or Yehud, as it was called, consisted only of Jerusalem and its immediate environs. As for the Jews themselves, life probably focused on the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as on the High Priest and other officials in charge of both worship and the people on a day-to-day level. At the same time, relevant late biblical books – like Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi – reflect considerable religious and political tensions between factions of this early Jewish community, although it is now difficult to be precise about their nature and extent.

Nevertheless, central to the culture of all Jews was the belief that God, although creator of the whole world, had a special relationship with the Jewish people in view of the covenant or agreement he had made with their ancestors long ago. The terms of that relationship were laid down in the Law of Moses (the biblical books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). This Law or Torah, also called the Pentateuch by modern scholars, contained the guidelines for regulating the community, ostensibly in the form of a divine revelation given to Moses centuries earlier on Mount Sinai. A range of other scriptural books also began to circulate during this period broadly in the form in which we would still recognize them today – Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve Minor Prophets, and many individual Psalms. Yet, how to interpret this diverse body of scriptural writings increasingly became a matter of contention for Jews during the second half of the Second Temple period, as we shall discover.

With the conquest of Judah by Alexander the Great in 333 BCE, things started to change. Although Greek culture had already made in-roads into Palestine by then, it slowly began to permeate the Jewish community at large. As long as this influence was superficial, touching merely on language or commerce, it remained unproblematic. But Greek religion and philosophical ideas were another matter and, by the second century BCE, those aspects of Greek culture were causing serious strife within Jewish society. Some rejected any religious assimilation at all; others preferred to see Jewish and Greek religious ideas as essentially compatible. But with the outright prohibition of traditional Judaism by the region's main political force, the foreign king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, probably in response to fighting between rival claimants to the High Priesthood in Jerusalem, outright rebellion erupted in 167 BCE. It was led by a certain Mattathias and then by three of his sons, the so-called Maccabee brothers. Under their successors, the Hasmoneans, Judah – or Judea, as it was called in Greek – expanded as a more-or-less independent Jewish state between 142 and 63 BCE.

Notwithstanding their new-found independence, as well as a concomitant reassertion of traditional identity, the Jews remained divided. Various religious parties came into being from the middle of the second century BCE onwards, including the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes mentioned earlier. Although we shall see in Chapter 5 that it may also make sense to envisage an overarching 'Common Judaism', these groups vied with each other for the attention of the Jewish masses, offering them alternative interpretations of Judaism for the age in which they lived. This complex state of affairs continued after the Romans took control of the area in 63 BCE. In fact, discontent increased under their

rule, especially in the first century CE. The Emperor Caligula (37–41 CE) did not help matters when, in search of divine honours, he decreed from Rome in 40 CE that a statue of himself was to be erected within the Jerusalem Temple. The turmoil that would have been sure to accompany such sacrilege was only averted by Caligula's timely death in early 41 CE.³⁰ The Roman administration on hand in Palestine, however, was little better. The ineptitude of a succession of Roman governors merely aggravated Jewish exasperation, particularly during the 50s and 60s CE. Eventually, armed revolt broke out in 66 CE, but the superior strength of the Roman forces in the region inevitably proved decisive. This First Revolt of the Jews against Rome was quashed in 70 CE and culminated in the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, bringing the Second Temple period to a close.³¹

The above account is a brief overview of the Second Temple period; we shall have an opportunity to unpack it further in Chapter 3. Hopefully, enough has been said to show that the six centuries concerned had a distinctive history and identity, especially during the last three hundred years. In other words, Judaism in Second Temple times was different both from what preceded and what followed. As implied already, the exile of the sixth century BCE and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE constituted turning points of momentous historical and religious significance.

Second Temple Judaism should not, therefore, be viewed simply as a continuation of the religion of Israel which had existed before the sixth-century exile to Babylon. To help maintain this distinction, experts usually refer to the latter as the 'religion of Israel' to differentiate it from the 'Judaism' of the Jews after 515 BCE. Although many Jewish and Christian readers of the Bible today would not be familiar with this distinction, there can be no doubt that the exile caused the religious traditions of Israel to undergo substantial transformation. For example, it is almost certain that the Torah did not exist before the exile in the form in which it circulated afterwards – even though Jews from Second Temple times onwards came to believe that it had been revealed *en bloc* to Moses on Mount Sinai. Likewise, it is highly probable that, contrary to the perception of Second Temple Jews, many Israelites before the exile were not strict monotheists; only in the Second Temple period did monotheism emerge clearly as one of Judaism's distinguishing traits.³²

In a similar way, it would be wrong to assume that Judaism as it developed after 70 CE was a straightforward continuation of what had gone before. In reality, the loss of the Temple and priesthood required Jewish religion to change in important respects. This process culminated in the publication of the Mishnah (200 CE) and, later still, in the

compilation of the Babylonian Talmud (*circa* 550 CE). Both writings place obedience to the Torah at the heart of Judaism. Of course, Jews had kept to the Law of Moses before 70 CE, but that had been only one element in their religious culture. Now, the Torah became the very essence of Judaism. For the Jews of the Mishnah and the Talmud, moreover, the Torah did not simply denote the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). It also came to include what is dubbed the Oral Torah – additions to the written Law which, it was believed, had also been revealed to Moses and could now be found in the Mishnah and Talmud themselves. This distinctive belief in the Oral Torah became characteristic of Judaism after 70 CE but seems not to have been a feature of Jewish religion in Second Temple times.

Second Temple Judaism, then, was not the same as the religion of Israel before 587 BCE or Judaism as it evolved after 70 CE. The distinctions involved here may at first seem perplexing to modern Jews and Christians, not least because both ancient and modern religious authorities prefer to emphasize elements of continuity. Such elements are real enough – before and after the exile, for example, the Temple was important, while prior to 70 CE and afterwards the Law played a vital role. Nevertheless, only by highlighting discontinuity and change can we appreciate the distinguishing characteristics of Judaism in Second Temple times, especially during the last three hundred years. It is that distinctive context, moreover, within which we shall discover the full significance of the Qumran DSS themselves.

Conspiracy or Complacency?

At the start of this chapter, we noted that it is only in the last ten years that all scholars have been given free access to the whole Qumran DSS collection.³³ At first, this might seem a little incongruous, for we saw that the Cave 1 manuscripts were published in the 1950s, while the contents of the so-called ‘minor caves’ (Caves 2–3 and Caves 5–10) appeared in 1962.³⁴ But, in contrast, relatively little of the Cave 4 material was published between the early 1950s and the end of the 1980s. Such a delay seems lax, to say the least. Back in 1977, after nearly twenty-five years of waiting for their appearance, Professor Geza Vermes of Oxford University rightly described the situation as ‘the academic scandal *par excellence* of the twentieth century’.³⁵ Nevertheless, there are no grounds for positing a conspiracy to withhold Cave 4 texts damaging to Judaism or Christianity, as some have alleged. Claims along these lines made over

the decades since 1947 are sensationalist nonsense and will be dealt with in our final chapter.

The real causes of the delay are disappointingly mundane and, with hindsight, three stand out. First, there has long been a tradition of ‘finders keepers’ within the world of archaeology. In other words, it is assumed that, when ancient texts are discovered, they are the property of the excavators concerned until official publication has taken place. This way of thinking explains the reluctance of those entrusted with the Cave 4 documents to share their work with anyone outside the team. Unlike Trever and Sukenik, their insistence on producing definitive studies of every scrap in their care slowed down the process by many years.

Second, in retrospect, the vast amount of material disgorged by Cave 4 was simply too much for the small team put in charge of the thousands of fragments – some of them no bigger than a postage stamp! Back in 1952, Roland de Vaux was made editor-in-chief of all the finds in the Judean Desert. He was assisted initially by three colleagues from the Ecole Biblique – M. Baillet, P. Benoit and J. T. Milik – who worked with him in the Palestine Archaeology Museum. When the sheer quantity of Cave 4 texts became apparent, de Vaux decided to draw on a wider band of international scholars. In the decades that followed, J. M. Allegro, F. M. Cross, C. H. Hunzinger, P. W. Skehan, and J. Strugnell were each given a portion of manuscripts to work on. But even this enlarged team was not up to the enormity of the task.

A third impediment explains why, inasmuch as most of these academics had other jobs at the same time as working on the DSS. We may imagine that their enthusiasm waned as the years rolled on and, not surprisingly, the first volume of Cave 4 material did not appear until 1968. Even then, it received bad reviews from other scholars for its sloppiness and inaccuracy, and a further nine years elapsed before a second volume was completed.³⁶

During the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel seized control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan. Automatically, jurisdiction over the Qumran region and over the Palestine Archaeology Museum – renamed the Rockefeller Museum – fell into Israeli hands. Sensitive to any external criticism, however, the Israel Antiquities Authority decided not to interfere with existing arrangements for the publication of the Qumran DSS. As a result, the status quo under de Vaux continued. Even when P. Benoit succeeded him in 1971, he was no more successful in expediting progress.³⁷ The same applies to John Strugnell, who, taking the reigns in 1987, increased the editorial team to twenty. As Vermes recalls, when he confronted Strugnell at a London conference that same

year and asked for the photographic plates of the remaining Cave 4 material, his request was flatly refused.³⁸

Things only began to improve significantly in 1990 when the Israel Antiquities Authority accepted Strugnell's resignation after an Israeli newspaper reported that he had made uncomplimentary remarks about Judaism.³⁹ Strugnell was replaced by Emanuel Tov, Professor of Biblical Studies at Jerusalem's Hebrew University and the first Jewish scholar in charge of the DSS. Although he continued to restrict access, he reallocated the unpublished DSS among a much larger body of scholars – over fifty-five in total. Goaded by ongoing pressure from Herschel Shanks, editor of the widely read *Biblical Archaeology Review*, this alone would probably have speeded up publication to an acceptable rate.

Yet, the situation soon changed beyond all recognition. In 1991, two scholars issued a computer-based reconstruction of seventeen unpublished Cave 4 manuscripts.⁴⁰ They had used as their basis a copy of the Preliminary Concordance, a list of key words in the Qumran DSS, issued privately in twenty-five copies under the auspices of the official editorial team in 1988. Then, the Huntington Library of San Marino, California, one of a few institutions with a complete photographic record of DSS for safekeeping, announced it would give scholars working in the field access to them; it was able to do so because, by historical accident, it alone had never signed up to an agreement preventing people from seeing its photographs. At first, the Israel Antiquities Authority opposed this development, but by the autumn of 1991 it was fighting a losing battle. As a result, all restrictions were lifted. Any scholar with a legitimate interest was allowed to view the photographs at Huntington, as well as the duplicate collections stored at the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center in Claremont, California, in Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, and in the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. In November of the same year, an edition of the photographs was published in book form by Eisenman and Robinson.⁴¹ And there is now a microfiche edition of all the DSS, prepared under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority itself, while a CD-ROM version has also been issued.⁴²

As a result of these dramatic changes, publication of those Cave 4 texts which had been kept under lock and key for over forty years has moved apace since 1991.⁴³ Included among them are important biblical manuscripts, in addition to sectarian works such as the text known as 'Some Precepts of the Law' (Hebrew, *Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah*), or 4QMMT^{a-f} for short. Most scholars outside the editorial team had hitherto only heard rumours about such documents – although a few had been circulating semi-secretly at conferences or between individuals over the

years. In Chapters 3 and 4, we shall return to the impact of these newly released compositions, while Chapter 2 will examine the impact of the Qumran DSS on our knowledge of the Bible.

Competing Discoveries in the Judaean Desert

The basic contours of the corpus of DSS from Khirbet Qumran will hopefully be clear by now. But before moving on, it is worth introducing four other bodies of ancient manuscripts discovered in the same broad vicinity.⁴⁴ Indeed, over many centuries the Judaean desert to the west of the Dead Sea was utilized by all kinds of religious zealots and political refugees. Its sparsely populated and inhospitable terrain provided the sort of environment conducive to 'religious experience', while the wilderness helped dissidents requiring anonymity to remain elusive to the authorities. Despite the geographical connection, however, these other collections of literature, significant as they are in their own right, do not link up directly with the DSS we have just described. Yet, as we shall see, there are some important indirect links.

The first to mention is a body of texts, coins, and seals found at a site known as the Abu Shinjeh Cave in the Wadi ed-Daliyeh region, some nine miles north of Jericho.⁴⁵ The documents, written in Aramaic and dating from around 375 to 335 BCE, are mostly of a legal nature. They were the property of nobles from the city of Samaria who, recently conquered by Alexander the Great's army, had to flee after unsuccessfully rebelling against their new overlords in 331 BCE. The rebels were pursued and massacred under siege in the cave where their skeletal remains, along with the documents they left behind, were recovered during archaeological excavations in 1963 and 1964.⁴⁶ Although fascinating, these writings from Wadi ed-Daliyeh are quite distinct from those found in the caves around Qumran, notwithstanding the fact that some of the material has been published in the DJD series.⁴⁷

A second collection comes from the impressive fortress of Masada, south of Qumran, originally built by the Hasmoneans. It was also home to some rebels of the First Revolt against Rome until 73 CE and, not surprisingly, a number of texts from that occupation were found by excavators during two periods of archaeological activity between 1963 and 1965.⁴⁸ Among them were the remains of biblical, apocryphal, and pseudepigraphical books, as well as more mundane works.⁴⁹ Among them also was a fragment of a document identical to one found in Caves 4 and 11 at Qumran, known as 'Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice' (Hebrew, *Shirot 'Olat ha-Shabbat*) – or 4QShirShab^{a-h} and 11QShirShab for short. This

interesting overlap has led some to propose that, when the Qumran community abandoned its settlement in 68 CE, a proportion joined the Masada rebels, only to be defeated with them in 73 CE. Although possible, this is speculation and depends on identifying the composition concerned as clearly sectarian. Equally feasible is the proposal that Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice circulated more widely in late Second Temple times and that its presence at both Qumran and Masada was little more than coincidental.

Thirdly, numerous documents in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek were discovered in caves around Wadi Murabba'at and Nahal Hever during the same period that the Qumran discoveries were being made and again in the early 1960s.⁵⁰ Once more, as is only to be expected, the remains of some biblical books were found.⁵¹ But the most fascinating texts relate to the Second Revolt of the Jews against Rome which took place between 132 and 135 CE. That uprising's leader, Simeon bar Kosba, is actually mentioned by name in several letters.⁵² Nevertheless, all the documents from Wadi Murabba'at and Nahal Hever clearly post-date even the youngest manuscripts from the Qumran caves, although some, as in the case of Wadi ed-Daliyeh, have been published in the same official series.⁵³ Like the Wadi ed-Daliyeh material, moreover, a number of texts can be precisely dated. Accordingly, a comparison of works from the Qumran caves with those from Wadi ed-Daliyeh and from Murabba'at and Nahal Hever has allowed scholars to work out a general picture of the way Jewish handwriting developed between the fourth century BCE and the second century CE. The technical term for this kind of academic research, to be considered more fully in Chapter 3, is palaeography.

Finally, a cache of texts in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic was retrieved from Khirbet Mird, midway between Bethlehem and Qumran, during 1952 and 1953. The location turned out to be a ruined Christian monastery, founded in 492 CE on a site on which a fortress called Hyrcania had been built in the second century BCE. As such, the documents uncovered are all Christian, dating from no earlier than the fifth century CE. They obviously have no connection with the Qumran finds.

All four of these collections of literature from the Dead Sea vicinity can be called DSS – alongside the documents from the Qumran caves – in view of their common geographical origin. However, despite the perplexing link just mentioned between one Qumran composition and one Masada fragment, as well as the useful palaeographical information to be gleaned by comparing the handwriting at Qumran with that from other sites, they do not relate directly to the contents of the eleven caves around Khirbet Qumran, as should be clear by now.

For the sake of convenience, in the chapters to follow, we shall adopt the shorthand ‘Qumran DSS’ for the manuscripts of Caves 1–11, even though, strictly speaking, no literary texts were recovered from the Khirbet Qumran site itself.⁵⁴ Without further ado, therefore, let us turn to the impact of these Qumran DSS on our understanding of the Bible, Apocrypha, and Pseudepigrapha.