

The Excavated Fragments from Qumran: Steps Toward A Reappraisal

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After a brief survey of the early history of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery from the perspective of the provenance of archaeological artifacts, this article offers a table of the so-called “E” series fragments from Qumran, that is to say those PAM photos containing only fragments coming from controlled excavations. What remains to be done is to identify each fragment of each text contained in the “E” series photographs.

1. Introduction

The problem of the provenance of archaeological artifacts is often debated nowadays,¹ and the Qumran discoveries have been involved in such discussions (see Tigchelaar 2017).

Two recent volumes devoted to the so-called post-2002 Qumran fragments have provoked controversy mainly because of the impossibility of tracing the provenance of these findings (Elgvin, Davis, and Langlois 2016; Tov, Davis, and Duke 2016; Tigchelaar 2016, 2017; Martone 2017). The museum where they have been displayed has issued a press release informing the public that at least five of the fragments are modern forgeries, as reported by Christina Caron, “Museum of Bible Removes Dead Sea Scrolls It Suspects Are Fake” (*The New York Times*, October 23, 2018).² This is not the place to discuss this matter, nor the rather odd fact that among those disputing the authenticity of the fragments is one of the editors of the Brill volume that published the fakes (Davis et al. 2017), let alone the general issue of the reliability of today’s fashionable “blind” peer review, which is the object of a recent *open letter* to Brill,³ the publisher of one of the volumes in question.

¹ See e.g. Cuno (2009); for a different viewpoint see Porten and Yardeni (2007).

² Accessed December 20, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/23/arts/design/bible-museum-fake-scrolls-dead-sea.html>.

³ See <https://facesandvoices.wordpress.com/2018/11/05/open-letter-to-brill-fake-and-unprovenanced-manuscripts/> accessed Nov 17th 2018, it should be noted that the letter is also signed by some collaborators to the volumes quoted above (fn. 1).

2. Provenance and Unprovenanced Artifacts

To begin with, the present short note will focus on some traits of the first discoveries and acquisitions of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the provenance of which is — to say the least — debatable when measured against today's standards for evaluating archaeological artifacts.

A few examples will suffice. As is well known, one of the first scholars to learn of the Dead Sea discoveries was John Trever.⁴

Trever recounts that on February 16, 1948, a priest from St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Convent in the Old City of Jerusalem phoned him to inquire about some "Ancient Hebrew manuscripts." Although skeptical, Trever agreed to speak with him. The priest then informed him that while working in the convent's library he had come across five scrolls in ancient Hebrew on which their catalogue had no information. He had thus decided to call the American School of Oriental Research for assistance. The next day, the priest came to the School and, opening a small leather suitcase, showed Trever five scrolls wrapped in newspapers as well as a small fragment. Thereupon, he unwrapped one of the smaller ones "which has since proved to be a part of the Sectarian Document" (Trever 1948: 46).⁵

The situation of the first discovery is reaffirmed in 1950 by Millar Burrows in his *General Introduction to the editiones principes* of 1QpHab and 1QIsa^a (Burrows, Trever, and Brownlee 1950: ix.):

The full story of the discovery and the transactions which followed it cannot even yet be told: details have been gradually coming to light but some points are still and may always remain obscure.

⁴ For a more detailed account see Trever (1965, 1977).

⁵ This is the opening line of his report, that deserves to be quoted in some detail: "Sunday morning, February 15, 1948, Dr. Millar Burrows, Director of the Jerusalem School, his wife, and Miss Ann Putcamp left by taxi for a two-week trip to Iraq. [...] Wednesday afternoon Omar, the cook, came to my room saying that someone was calling for the Director to inquire about some "ancient Hebrew manuscripts." A bit skeptical of the expression "ancient Hebrew," I went to the telephone to find that Father Butros Sowmy, a priest of St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Convent in the Old City of Jerusalem, was on the wire. He said that while working in the library of the Convent, cataloguing the books, he had come upon five scrolls in ancient Hebrew about which their catalogue carried no information. He added that he remembered receiving a cordial welcome at the American School of Oriental Research some ten years earlier, and hence had decided to call the School for help on the scrolls. Since we had been avoiding visits to the Old City, I asked him if he would come to the School the next afternoon at 2:30, assuring him that I would do everything possible to secure the information he desired. Promptly at 2:30 the next day, Father Sowmy appeared with his brother, Karim Sowmy, a customs official at Allenby Bridge. [...] Opening their small leather suitcase, they showed me five scrolls wrapped in newspapers and a small fragment (4 x 6 cm.). Carefully they unwrapped one of the smaller ones, which has since proved to be a part of the Sectarian Document."

As can be seen, the problem of the provenance of these fragments, was neither noted nor mentioned. The very fact that some fifteen years later Trever wrote an article entitled *When was Qumran Cave I discovered* is telling in this regard (Trever 1961). In other words, it indicates that we do not know for certain when the first Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, as one can also deduce from the words of another pioneer of the Scrolls' discovery, Eleazar Lipa Sukenik, who opened the introduction of his *editio princeps* of 1QM and 1QH by stating that the precise time of the discoveries was unclear (Sukenik 1954: 13).

A similar account of the negotiations over the scrolls was offered by Frank Moore Cross.⁶ When in Beirut, he received an anonymous call, followed by a rather frightening meeting aimed at purchasing some fragments from “a silver-haired gentleman who spoke French-accented English”.

Examples could be multiplied: it is hardly necessary to recall the unclear steps of the acquisition of the *Temple Scroll* (see Collins 2013: 19),⁷ or the fact that we simply do not know anything about the provenance of the *codex optimus* of the Hebrew Bible, the famous *Leningrad codex* penned by the Ben Asher scribal school.⁸

Be that as it may, we can conclude this quick survey on the first discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls from the perspective of today's standards for authenticating unprovenanced archaeological artifacts as voiced by D. Barthélemy's ingenuous statement on the Greek Minor Prophets scroll from Nahal Hever (8HevXII gr) in his seminal monograph, *Les devanciers d'Aquila* (Barthélemy 1963: 163):

⁶ “Later in the day the same person, who remained nameless, called and said they were satisfied I was who I claimed to be and proposed that I meet them that night at 11 p.m. under an arch in the Old Suq of Beirut—alone. I argued that my associates should come along. To no avail. So I found my way by cab to the designated rendezvous, where the cab driver left me after asking if I really wished to be left alone in such a place. After he left, I debated with myself. Should I stand in a shadow or in plain view on the street? It occurred to me that the person or persons whom I was to meet might figure that I had come prepared to pay the \$1 million or more asked per scroll and that they might take unpleasant measures to extract money from me. The place was perfect for a robbery. So I thought. No one was to be seen. It was very dark. Garbage littered the walkways under the arches. One body more or less might not be noticed for days. After a very long time passed—perhaps ten minutes—a Mercedes came into sight, rolled past me standing in the archway, and circled out of sight again. A few minutes later it came back into view and paused in front of me. A door was opened, and I was invited into the back seat by a silver-haired gentleman who spoke French-accented English. I immediately noticed a man with his head hidden under the dash sitting to the right of the driver. His brachycephalic skull was familiar. So I said, “Greetings, O Kando, how are you?” (*Marḥaba ya-Kando, kēf elḥâl?*). He rose, grinning, thanked God several times, asked me about my health, and shortly ran out of Arabic I understood” (Cross and Shanks 1994: 135-36).

⁷ The opening of Yadin's edition of the Temple Scroll is more than telling in this regard: “[t]he long and tortuous path which culminated in the acquisition of the scroll began with a letter sent to me on 1 August 1960 by a resident of Virginia (U.S.A.), to whom, since he must for the present retain his anonymity, I shall refer as Mr Z”; see Yadin (1983: 1).

⁸ “We do not know where Firkovich found the Leningrad Codex, nor precisely when” (Freedman, Beck, and Sanders 1998: XV). As a sidenote, we may add the the situation of the Christian Greek manuscripts is not so different, see Nongbri (2018).

La plupart des fragments de ce rouleau ont été apportés à l'École Biblique Française de Jérusalem (Jordanie) par des bédouins en deux livraisons au cours de l'été 1952. Ils nous ont été présentés comme provenant d'une grotte située plus au sud que celles du wadi Murabba'ât.

3. From Unprovenanced to Provenanced

8HevXII gr offers us the opportunity to turn to the second part of this contribution and focus on how to correct this situation.

In fact, the new edition of the same scroll appeared in 1990. In this publication, Emanuel Tov gives us some new pieces of information on the actual site of the discoveries, that is, Nahal Hever and not wadi Murabba'ât (Tov, Kraft, and Parsons 1990: 1). More importantly, Tov notes that this site has been identified thanks to a subsequent discovery of fragments of the same scroll during controlled excavations at the location (Tov, Kraft, and Parsons 1990: 1; see also Barthélemy and Milik 1955: 14). In other words, fragments discovered during controlled excavations, if identified as parts of the same manuscript as unprovenanced fragments may confirm the provenance of the latter.

This problem, and a possible way to resolve it, were likewise clear to Frank Moore Cross, who, in fact, stated in an interview with W. Fields that

...the material acquired from the Bedouin was taken out of the many small boxes in which it was stored and combined with what the archaeologists had dug from Cave 4 with all the material bought by the museum and the Antiquities Department and then filled up that room with plates of fragments. I had worked for the summer, for about four months, in a little side room with just the excavated material. *So I at least knew perfectly well where that stuff came from.*⁹

In fact, in September 1952, Qumran cave 4 was discovered and excavated by unauthorized people, who, incidentally, confused the fragments coming from what had originally been two caves (caves 4a and 4b). To avoid further illegal and potentially damaging excavations, a team lead by Roland De Vaux went to the site to begin controlled operations. About 600 manuscripts were identified as 4Q manuscripts, and about 150 of them were identified as coming from controlled excavations. In addition, photos were taken of these fragments and filed in the PAM (Palestine Archaeological Museum) tables under the serial number sequence 40.962-985 (Tov and Pfann 1993: 114; see also Reed 2007: 206-07). This is the so-called “E” (excavated) series, whose photographs contain only fragments coming from controlled excavations.

⁹ As reported in Fields (2009: 196); emphasis mine.

In order to provide a clearer view of this situation, we present here a table of the Qumran texts contained in those PAM photos, based on the microfiche catalogue (Tov and Pfann 1993: 20-72; Reed 2007: 207, fn. 33);¹⁰ what remains to be done is to identify each fragment of each text contained in the “E” series photographs.¹¹

Thus, the identification of manuscript fragments found during controlled excavations will allow for the identification of unprovenanced fragments belonging to the the same manuscript.

In other words, this survey will make it possible to establish the provenance of fragments found in uncontrolled excavations, as it is clear that if fragments of a given manuscript come from controlled excavations, other fragments of the same manuscript, even if unprovenanced, may be considered authentic. In addition, it is hardly necessary to note that such a survey will allow for a revised assessment of the statistics on the provenanced and unprovenanced Qumran fragments.¹²

The Fragments of the “E” Series¹³

4Q number	Title	PAM Number
4Q1	Gen-Exod ^a	40.968 ; 40.983
4Q22	paleoExod ^m	40.970
4Q24	Lev ^b	40.968
4Q26	Lev ^d	40.976
4Q26a	Lev ^e	40.967
4Q27	Num ^b	40.963 ; 40.978 ; 40.979 ; 40.982
4Q30	Deut ^c	40.968
4Q34	Deut ^g	40.967
4Q37	Deut ⁱ	40.967
4Q39	Deut ^l	40.978

¹⁰ It should be noted that some titles and serial numbers have changed over time: an update in this regard will be focus of a further study. On the complex and somehow confusing history of the titles of the Qumran texts see Najman and Tigchelaar (2014).

¹¹ I am grateful to Eibert Tigchelaar for informing me about his ongoing project in this regard.

¹² Marcello Fidanzio and his team will offer further assessment for the Cave 11 fragments, see Fidanzio (2017: 165-67; Fidanzio, forthcoming). I am grateful to Marcello Fidanzio for providing me with a pre-print of this essay.

¹³ Each photo is linked to the the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library archive (<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/home>).

4Q51	Sam ^a	40.967 ; 40.971 ; 40.978 ; 40.984
4Q52	Sam ^b	40.967
4Q62	Isa ^h	40.967
4Q63	Isa ^j	40.964
4Q68	Isa ^o	40.967
4Q72	Jer ^c	40.963
4Q74	Ezek ^b	40.967 ; 40.968
4Q80	XII ^e	40.967
4Q84	Ps ^b	40.967
4Q94	Ps ^m	40.962
4Q103	Prov ^b	40.967
4Q109	Qoh ^a	40.967
4Q112	Dan ^a	40.965
4Q115	Dan ^d	40.975 ; 40.985
4Q121	LXXNum	40.970 ; 40.975 ; 40.976
4Q127	pap paraExod gr	40.977
4Q151	Mez C	40.976
4Q163	papIsa ^c	40.972
4Q165	Isa ^e	40.978
4Q179	apocrLam A	40.962
4Q204	En ^c ar BE	40.965
4Q217	papJub ^b	40.974
4Q227	psJub ^c	40.985
4Q248	Acts of a Greek King	40.962
4Q249	pap cryptA MSM	40.974
4Q255	papS ^a	40.972
4Q258	S ^d	40.962
4Q261	S ^g	40.962

4Q270	D ^e	40.969
4Q276	Tohorot B ^b	40.962
4Q289	Ber ^d	40.962
4Q321	Calendrical doc B ^a	40.966
4Q334	Ordo	40.962
4Q362	Unidentified	40.982
4Q365	RP ^b	40.968
4Q365	RP ^c	40.963 ; 40.967
4Q367	RP ^e	40.963
4Q378	Psalms of Josh ^a	40.964 ; 40.969
4Q381	Non-Canonical Psalms B	40.962
4Q384	pap apocrJer B?	40.974
4Q385	psEzek ^a	40.975
4Q387	psEzek ^c	40.962
4Q387a	psMos ^b	40.962
4Q387b	apocrJer D	40.962
4Q391	pap psEzek? ^e	40.972
4Q395	MMT ^b	40.964
4Q412	Sap Work	40.963
4Q418	Sap Work A ^a	40.962 ; 40.964
4Q422	of Gen and Exod	40.966
4Q432	papHod ^f	40.972
4Q440	Hodayot-Like Text	40.969
4Q485	papProph	40.977
4Q487	papSap ^b	40.974
4Q489	pap Apocalypse ar	40.974
4Q491	M ^a	40.976
4QM127a	Unclass frg	40.964

4Q496	papM ^f	40.981
4Q497	papMg?	40.981
4Q499	papHymPr	40.980
4Q502	papRitMar	40.977
4Q503	papPrQuot	40.980
4Q506	papDibHam ^c	40.981
4Q508	PrFetes ^b	40.975
4Q509	PrFetes ^c	40.974 ; 40.980
4Q512	papRitPur	40.981
4Q518	papUnclass	40.980 ; 40.981
4Q519	papUnclass	40.980 ; 40.981
4Q525	Wisdom Text with Beatitudes	40.969
4Q529	Words of Michael ar	40.965
4Q532	Book of Giants ^d ar	40.965
4Q545	Visions of Amram ^c ar	40.965
4Q558	papVis ^b ar	40.972
Mur 6	Unclass text	40.975 ; 40.978 ; 40.981

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