

## THE PROBLEM OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AUTHORSHIP IN THE THEORIES AND HYPOTHESES OF MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

### Introduction

The Dead Sea Scrolls, as we know, is a series of manuscripts mostly dated to the last two centuries B. C. E., which were found between 1947 and 1960-s at several sites on the north-western shore of the Dead Sea in Israel. These scrolls contain passages from books of the Hebrew Scriptures and from apocryphal biblical books, as well as sectarian writings.

The *research purpose* of this paper is to present the leading points in modern Qumran studies concerning the problem of the Dead Sea Scrolls authorship and to make a complex characteristic of theories and hypotheses of the Dead Sea scrolls and analysis of advantages and disadvantages of each of them.

The *practical importance* of this research is that its results (1) provide the opportunity for the Qumran studies to be continued in Ukraine; (2) may be used in the time of academic process, teaching or preparation of specialized text-books by textologists, paleaepographers, historians, archaeologists, researchers on historiography, etc.

The *urgency* lies as well in the fact that till 1990s the researchers had no free access to the scrolls (with the exception of first seven manuscripts), because of existence of long-term scrolls monopoly, established by quite narrow, international team. Therefore Dr. Golb, for instance, had to adjourn his research of these texts and turn to other ones.

At present Qumran studies are full of variety of versions and visions, and we can mark both separate versions and whole groups of them. In that way the main groups of the *versions* that reveal the problem of the Dead Sea Scrolls authorship are (1) Qumran-sectarian theories; (2) hypotheses of Jerusalem origin, and (3) other, more marginal, versions. However, the principal discussion mostly takes place between two versions — Qumran-Essenean [1] and of Jerusalem libraries. The Qumran-Essene theory states that the Dead Sea Scrolls are written/rewritten by the Essenes, one of the religious groups in Judaism of those times. The Jerusalem theory, on the other hand, argues that these manuscripts belonged to all groups (not only to the Essenes) of the Jewish society and were a product of their spiritual and intellectual work. Moreover, the problem of the Dead Sea Scrolls authorship was raised by researchers that presented other versions such as Sadduceean and of Christian connections, or various conspiracy theories.

### Methods

In this part it is necessary to refer to methodology, materials and procedures used in this research. Historico-comparative and retrospective *methods* basically belong to our methodology. Among the *materials and sources* of the research, we can mark such groups as (1) the Dead Sea scrolls texts; (2) the evidence by ancient authors Josephus Flavius, Philo and Pliny the Elder that mentioned the Essenes as hypothetical authors of the manuscripts and (3) scholars memoirs and publications, mostly of those who personally took part in the archaeological excavations near the Dead Sea. The procedures of research process can be formulated in the following way: review of the leading theories and hypotheses, their strong and weak sides; analysis of key points and discrepancies between them; comparison and conclusions.

### Discussion

The discussion that follows is based on the literature comparison and presents various points of view on the problem of the Dead Sea Scrolls authorship and how it is highlighted in contemporary historiography. The *key points* of the modern dispute concerning the origin of the Dead Sea scrolls are the following: (1) identification of Qumran objects (monastery, fortress or center of pottery?); (2) possibility of celibacy among the Essenes; (3) 'scriptorium'; (4) 'the Qumran library' and its content (original or copied scrolls?); (5) the Copper Scroll; (6) identification of Masada findings.

As we said preliminarily, the main groups of the versions on the Dead Sea scrolls authorship are Qumran-sectarian theories, hypotheses of Jerusalem origin, and other, mostly marginal, versions.

#### Qumran-sectarian theories

The Qumran-sectarian theory holds that the scrolls were written by the Essenes, or perhaps by another sectarian group, residing at Khirbat Qumran.

### Qumran-Essene hypothesis

The prevalent view among scholars, almost universally held until the 1990s, is that the scrolls were written by a sect known as the Essenes who (according to this theory) lived at Khirbet Qumran. They hid the scrolls in the nearby caves during the Jewish Revolt in 66 AD before being massacred by Roman troops. This is known as the Qumran-Essene Hypothesis. A number of arguments are used to support this theory.

1. There are striking similarities between the description of an initiation ceremony of new members in the Community Rule and Josephus' (a Jewish-Roman historian of the time) account of the Essene initiation ceremony.

2. Josephus mentions the Essenes as sharing property among the members of the community and so does the Community Rule. (It should also be noted that there are differences between the scrolls and Josephus' account of the Essenes.)

3. During the excavation of Khirbet Qumran two inkwells were found, giving weight to the theory that the scrolls were actually written there.

4. Long tables were found that Roland de Vaux (one of the original editors of the Dead Sea Scrolls) interpreted as tables for a 'scriptorium' [2].

5. Water cisterns were discovered which may have been used for ritual bathing. This would have been an important part of Jewish (and Essene) religious life.

6. A description by Pliny the Elder (a geographer who was writing after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD) of a group of Essenes living in a desert community close to the ruined town of Ein Gedi was seen by some scholars as evidence that Khirbet Qumran was in fact an Essene settlement.

Since the 1990s a variation of this theory has developed, stressing that the authors of the scrolls were «Essene-Like» or a splinter Essene group rather than simply Essenes as such. This modification of the Essene theory takes into account some significant differences between the world view expressed in some of the scrolls and the Essenes as described by the classical authors.

### Qumran-Sadducean theory

Another variation on the Qumran-sectarian theory, which has gained some popularity, is that the community was led by Zadokite priests (Sadducees). The most important document in support of this view is the «Miqsat Ma'ase haTorah» (MMT, 4Q394-), which states one or two purity laws (such as the transfer of impurities) identical to those attributed in rabbinic writings to the Sadducees. This document also reproduces a festival calendar which follows Sadducee principles for the dating of certain festival days. However, the MMT contains other purity laws different from those attributed to the Sadducees, and the similarities in laws and calendar are not considered sufficient to support a definite conclusion.

Florentino García Martínez, in his article in *Near Eastern Archaeology* [3], dates composition of the Temple Scroll to the times of Hasmonean power consolidation, long before the existence of the Essenes, and states that this is only the date when this material was reduced to writing; the notions expressed must be older. This tends to undermine the idea of an Essene-Sadducee connection.

Other theological considerations count against the idea. Josephus tells in his *Jewish War* and in his *Antiquities of the Jews* that the Sadducees and the Essenes held opposing views of predestination, with the Essenes believing in an immortal soul and attributing everything to divinely-determined fate, while the Sadducees denied both the existence of the soul and the role of fate altogether. The scroll authors' beliefs in the soul's survival beyond death and in the resurrection of the body, and their complex world of angels and demons engaged in a cosmic war, were contrary to the Sadducean belief that there was no resurrection, and that there were no such beings as angels or spirits. For the Sadducees, every person had the right to choose between good and evil, and the scope of humankind's existence was limited to this life. For the Essenes, God ruled and foreordained all events – including every person's ultimate choice to follow after good or after evil – and the significance of each human life would culminate in the soon-to-come Hereafter. It is difficult to imagine how such disparate beliefs might evolve into one another or even be reconciled. This tends to undermine the idea of a strong connection between the Essenes and Sadducees.

### **Hypotheses of Jerusalem origin**

#### *Background*

Some scholars posit that there is strong evidence against the Qumran-sectarian theory.

Khirbet Qumran is a tiny settlement which could only house about 150 persons at any one time. Since several hundred different scribal «hands» have been identified in the material, with only about a dozen repetitions of handwriting found, the available population does not seem large enough to account for the diversity of handwriting. Advocates of the Qumran-sectarian theory respond that the Scrolls date over a period of centuries and therefore, over time, the settlement could have housed a large number of scribes.

Even according to those scholars who believe that there was scribal activity at Qumran, only a few of the biblical scrolls were actually made there, the majority having been copied before the Qumran period and subsequently having come into the hands of the claimed Qumran community [4]. There is, however, no concrete physical evidence of scribal activity at Qumran, nor, *a fortiori*, that the claimed Qumran community altered the biblical texts to reflect their own theology [5]. It is thought that the claimed Qumran community would have viewed the Book of 1 Enoch and the Book of Jubilees as divinely inspired scripture [6].

Opponents of the Qumran-sectarian theory also note that the custom at the time was for scribes to write sitting cross-legged with a board on their lap, whereas the «writing» tables in the assumed scriptorium would not be suited to this purpose. Qumran-sectarian advocates respond that the existing scroll could sit on the table while the newly written scroll would reside on the scribe's lap.

Finally, Pliny's description is not specific enough to be definitely tied to Khirbet Qumran. And Pliny describes the Essenes of the Dead Sea area as celibate, yet remains of women were found in the cemetery at Qumran.

#### Temple library

In 1963, Karl Heinrich Rengstorf of the University of Münster put forth the theory that the Dead Sea scrolls originated at the library of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem [7]. This theory was rejected by most scholars during the 1950s, who maintained that the scrolls were written at Qumran rather than transported from another location (a position then thought to be supported by de Vaux's identification of a room within the ruins of Qumran as a probable scriptorium – an identification that has since been disputed by various archaeologists). Rengstorf's theory is also rejected by Norman Golb, who argues that it is rendered unlikely by the great multiplicity of conflicting religious ideas found among the scrolls. It has in large measure been revived, however, by Rachel Elior, who heads the department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

#### Jerusalem libraries

In 1980 Norman Golb of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute published the first of a series of studies critical of the Qumran-sectarian theory [8], and offering historical and textual evidence that the scrolls are the remains of various libraries in Jerusalem (perhaps including, but not limited to, the Temple library), hidden in the Judean desert when the Romans were besieging Jerusalem in 68-70 AD. In broad terms, this evidence includes (1) the Copper Scroll found in Cave 3, which contains a list of treasures that, according to Golb and others, could only have originated in Jerusalem; (2) the great variety of conflicting ideas found among the scrolls; and (3) the fact that, apart from the Copper Scroll, they contain no original historical documents such as correspondence or contracts, but are all scribal copies of literary texts – indicating that they are remnants of libraries and were not written at the site where they were found. Golb's theory has been endorsed by a number of scholars, including the Israeli archaeologists Yizhar Hirschfeld, Yahman Jamaca, Yitzhak Magen and Yuval Peleg, Rachel Elior (chair of the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who emphasizes the connection between the Scrolls and the Temple) and others. Hirschfeld [9] believes that Qumran was the country estate of a wealthy Jerusalemite. Magen and Peleg [10] believe that the site was a pottery factory and had nothing to do with any sect. Golb [11] believes that it was a military fortress, part of a concentric series of such bastions protecting Jerusalem. Thus, it can be said that current scrolls scholarship includes a school that challenges the traditional Qumran-sectarian theory and supports a growing movement towards the view that the site was secular in nature and had no organic connection with the parchment fragments found in the caves. The scrolls are increasingly held, by this group of scholars who have emerged since 1990, to have come from a major center of Jewish intellectual culture such as only Jerusalem is known to have been during the intertestamentary period. According to this theory, the scrolls are in fact more important than they were previously thought to be, because of the light they cast on Jewish

thought in Jerusalem at that time.

In a series of editorials and articles, historian Norman Golb criticized the San Diego Natural History Museum's 2007 exhibit of the Scrolls, suggesting that the museum is inappropriately taking sides in a bitter and widening academic dispute by presenting a slanted interpretation of the Scrolls and of the archaeology of Qumran. This ongoing dispute is only the latest sign of the «polarization» of Scrolls studies between defenders and opponents of the traditional theory of Scroll origins, a controversy that has gathered steam during the past decade.

### Other versions

#### Christian connections

Spanish Jesuit José O'Callaghan [12] has argued that one fragment (7Q5) is a New Testament text from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 6, verses 52–53. In recent years this controversial assertion has been taken up again by German scholar Carsten Peter Thiede [13]. An identification of this fragment as a passage from Mark would make it the earliest extant New Testament document, dating somewhere between 30 AD and 60 AD. Opponents consider that the fragment is tiny and requires so much reconstruction (the only complete word in Greek is «καί»= «and») that it could have come from a text other than Mark.

Robert Eisenman [14] advanced the theory that some scrolls actually describe the early Christian community, characterized as more fundamentalist and rigid than the one portrayed by the New Testament. Eisenman also attempted to relate the career of James the Just and the Apostle Paul (Saul of Tarsus) to some of these documents.

#### Conspiracy and other theories

Because they are frequently described as important to the history of the Bible, the scrolls are surrounded by a wide range of conspiracy theories. There is also writing about the Nephilim related to the Book of Enoch. Theories with more support among scholars include Qumran as a military fortress or a winter resort; see above [15].

### Results

Since the subject of the present research is already discussed, it is possible to draw some essential conclusions: (1) modern historiography of the Dead Sea scrolls (as well as Qumran studies) has no consensus today in the question of their origin; (2) all theories and hypotheses include a quite number of contradictions, especially the Qumran-sectarian; (3) the problem of the Dead Sea scrolls authorship remains unsettled and requires further special research. According to our thinking, the prospect and success of such studies will depend on a careful analysis of sources and considered position in data interpretation.

1. The hypothesis appeared right away the first manuscripts were found. It was formulated/supported by eminent researchers of those times mostly in Israel and Europe. Rather rapidly it became a standard, unconditionally accepted, version in the scholar world.
2. *De Vaux R.* Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls. London, 1973.
3. *García Martínez, F.* The Temple Scrolls // *Near Eastern Archaeology*, vol. LXIII, no. 3 (Sept. 2000), pp. 172–174.
4. *Abegg M., Flint P., Ulrich E.* (eds.). *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Leiden, 2002.
5. *Golb, N.* Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls? The Search for the Secret of Qumran. New York, 1995; Abegg et al.
6. *Abegg et al.*
7. *Rengstorff, K.-H.* Hirbet Qumran und die Bibliothek vom Toten Meer. *Studia Delitzschiana* 5. Stuttgart, 1960; *Rengstorff, K.-H.* Hirbet Qumran and the Problem of the Dead Sea Caves. Leiden, 1963.
8. *Hirschfeld, Y.* Qumran in Context: Reassessing the Archaeological Evidence. Peabody, Mass., 2004.
9. *Golb N.* The Problem of Origin and Identification of the Dead Sea Scrolls // *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. CXXIV, no. 1 (Feb. 1980), pp. 1–24.
10. *Magen Y., Peleg Y.* Back to Qumran: Ten Years of Excavation and Research, 1993-2004 / *Qumran: The Site of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Archaeological Interpretations and Debates*. Leiden-Boston, 2006, pp. 55-113; *Magen Y., Peleg Y.* The Qumran Excavations 1993-2004: Preliminary Report, JSP 6 (Jerusalem, 2007).
11. *Golb N.* The Problem of Origin and Identification...; *Golb, N.* Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls...
12. *O'Callaghan J.* Los primeros testimonios del Nuevo Testamento: Papirología neotestamentaria. En *los orígenes del cristianismo* 7. Córdoba, 1995.
13. *Thiede C.* The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Jewish Origins of Christianity. Oxford, 2000.
14. *Eisenman, R.* The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians: Essays and Translations. Rockport, Mass., Shaftesbury, Dorset, and Brisbane, Queensland, 1996.
15. *Abegg et al.*