

HISTORY AND ARCHEOLOGY AND THE DEBATES OF THE QUMRAN MANUSCRIPTS

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Abstract

In the year 1947, in a region in the Judean Desert near the shores of the Dead Sea, was found one of the most important collections of ancient manuscripts, known as the Qumran Manuscripts. Some of the caves in which the manuscripts were discovered are close to an old settlement and early researchers deduced that these manuscripts had been written in those facilities by a Jewish religious group. Subsequent investigations, starting from Archeology, would come to question this initial thesis defended mainly by historians and a current debate would be established until today. This article makes a historiographic reconstruction that presents the main points of this debate and proposes that the maintenance of it and the difficulty of reaching a consensus between History and Archeology are related to the epistemological field of these disciplines, with emphasis on the role attributed to the textual and material sources.

Keywords

Qumran Manuscripts; Qumran settlement; History; Archeology; textual sources; material sources.

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Resumo

No ano de 1947, em uma região no deserto da Judeia próxima às margens do mar Morto, foi encontrada uma das mais importantes coleções de manuscritos da Antiguidade, conhecida como Manuscritos de Qumran. Algumas das cavernas em que os manuscritos foram descobertos são próximas de um assentamento antigo e os primeiros pesquisadores deduziram que esses manuscritos haviam sido redigidos naquelas instalações por um grupo religioso judaico. Investigações posteriores, partindo da Arqueologia, viriam a questionar essa tese inicial defendida principalmente por historiadores e se instauraria um debate corrente até os dias atuais. Este artigo faz uma reconstrução historiográfica que apresenta os principais pontos desse debate e propõe que a manutenção dele e a dificuldade de se chegar a um consenso entre a História e a Arqueologia estão relacionadas ao campo epistemológico dessas disciplinas, com destaque ao papel atribuído para as fontes textuais e materiais.

Palavras-chaves

Manuscritos de Qumran; assentamento de Qumran; História; Arqueologia; fontes textuais; fontes materiais.

The Qumran Manuscripts: between History and Archeology

One of the main debates between the History and the Archeology today is related to one of the most important findings of ancient texts in history: the Qumran Manuscripts. The discovery occurred in 1947, in 11 caves in an area known as the Qumran Valley (*Wadi Qumran*), about 30 kilometers southeast of Jerusalem, between the Judean Desert and the head of the Dead Sea.² There are more than 900 manuscripts of religious nature with varied literary styles: exegetical, halachic, poetic, liturgical, among others.³ All of them are Jewish texts, written in Hebrew (with few exceptions), which prove to be related due to the style of writing and, based on this, are generally dated between the second century BCE to the first century CE.

The importance of the Qumran Manuscripts is inestimable. They make up the broadest documentary *corpus* of that period. They contributed to reduce the lack of textual sources, being associated with other texts such as the Hebrew Bible, the Mishnah, those of contemporary historians Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, those of the first Judeo-Christian groups and others, in the search for a greater understanding of internal dynamics and external relations of Jewish society under the dominance of the Seleucids and Romans between second century BCE and the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE and the social role played by the writing of the manuscripts. It must not forget the impact produced by these texts on the history of the construction of the biblical canon. They brought to light unknown traditions of the period, showing that the political-religious diversity was much wider than was known from historiography until 1947. Furthermore, it was possible to resize the temporality of the evolution of the Hebrew Bible, since these manuscripts are at least a thousand years older than the Masoretic text used as the basis for modern versions of the Bible – which made it possible to return to a more “original” moment of textual elaboration.⁴

The vast majority of research on the Qumran Manuscripts has its objects extracted from the content of the texts. The hundreds of manuscripts have been used for the elaboration of a myriad of themes and the bibliographic

² The set of diverse collections found in the region of the Dead Sea receives the generic name *Dead Sea Scrolls*. For an introduction to these collections see García Martínez, 1995: 15-20.

³ On textual traditions and styles, especially from the Qumran Manuscripts, see Francisco, 2017.

⁴ The oldest and most complete medieval text known is the Leningrad Codex, used for current Hebrew Bibles. For examples showing the variants of the biblical text, see García Martínez, 2017 and Francisco, 2017.

production in the world continues to be heated even after these findings have completed 70 years of modern life.⁵ However, among all these themes, none has generated more controversy in the historiography of the manuscripts than what concerns the relationship between them and a settlement near the caves in which they were found. This area of research deals little with the content of the manuscripts and has the greatest concern to understand them as supports for writing and contextualize them based on the material culture of the period.

Let us briefly summarize the history of this settlement and its relationship with the manuscripts. The set of buildings is known by the Arabic name *Khirbet Qumran*, which can be translated as *Ruins of Ashes*. The records of human presence around the buildings are very old, dating from prehistoric periods. The nearby caves were used sporadically in all periods – a fact linked to the occupation of areas not so distant and better consolidated in the region, such as Jericho and 'Ein Gedi (Mizzi, 2017: 66). The first buildings in Qumran were probably built at the end of the eighth century BCE or the beginning of the seventh century BCE and remained, with few changes, until the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem in the sixth century BCE. The chosen area was very favorable, with a topography reasonably flat and elevated that provided natural protection and in which water was collected relatively easily (compared to other areas in the region) and close to the important date palms, characteristics of the Dead Sea region, which formed a natural source for production industrial (Magen, Peleg, 2007: 24).

⁵ A project to survey this bibliography is conducted by professionals from the Orion Center, linked to the Jewish Studies Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The collection relies mainly on publications produced since the 1990s, when there was an exponential increase in the bibliographic production on the Dead Sea Scrolls in general. With the data made available in this project, it is possible to follow part of the pace of publications and the topics covered. Available at <http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/resources/bib/current.shtml> (last accessed: January 22th, 2020).



Figure 1: Panoramic image showing the Qumran ruins in the center. Below are caves 4-5 (left), 7-10 (right), the ones closest to the settlement, and at the bottom the Dead Sea (personal archive).

The establishment of the “village of Qumran” during this period was linked to a land occupation movement south of Jerusalem, in the Judean Desert and in the Jordan valley, resulting from the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, with capital in Samaria, promoted by Assyrians in 720 BCE (2 Kings 17:24). A population contingent came to settle in these regions as refugees (Jeremiah 41: 5; 2 Chronicles 30: 10-11, 34: 9, Finkelstein, 2018: 206).⁶ The displacement of these populations from the north to the southern regions left important cultural marks, with northern traditions that were incorporated into the biblical canon that we know (Schniedewind, 2011: 110-115).

Later, in the sixth century BCE, Qumran had part of its structure destroyed during the conquest campaign of the Babylonians against the Jews and the village was uninhabited for centuries, until it would be reoccupied and its original structure expanded in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, during the second century BCE and the beginning of the first century BCE. This

⁶ Between the end of the eighth century BCE and early seventh century BCE there was a significant change in the occupation of these regions, evidenced by the establishment of a series of settlements with similar characteristics, with emphasis on the possibilities of using rainwater and rapids. According to Magen and Peleg, none of these settlements was officially colonized, nor military, commercial or farmer (2007: 24).

phase of regular occupation would last until 68 CE, when its facilities were again destroyed, this time by the Romans, during the First Jewish Revolt (66-74 CE). However, the presence of material remains shows that the site was occupied for short periods and visited during the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods. Explorers of the nineteenth century left information about the buried site. Finally, the site is “rediscovered” due to the interest created shortly after the discovery of the manuscripts in the Qumran caves in 1947.



Figure 2: Aerial view to the east of the settlement. Note the cave 4 on the left, nicknamed by some researchers as “Qumran library” for housing almost 600 manuscripts (photo by Elyahu Valdman; courtesy of the Archaeology Department of the Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria).

From the condition of being ignored by researchers until then, the Qumran site emerges as a key piece for understanding the history of the manuscripts. The connection between the site, the caves, the manuscripts and the identity of its authors is made first by the Israeli archaeologist Eleazar Lipa Sukenik in 1948, after having access to some manuscripts sold by Bedouins clandestinely. The comment that best summarizes your idea is this:

[...] I have found some indication that has encouraged me to offer a hypothesis on this subject. When I looked at the scrolls ... I found in one of them a type of

regulation book for the conduct of members of a brotherhood or sect. I am inclined to the hypothesis that this deposit of manuscripts originally belonged to the Essene sect, as it is known from different literary sources, the place of settlement of this sectarian group being on the western side of the Dead Sea, near Engedi (1948: 16).

Sukenik was aware of the so-called “classical sources”, a small synoptic set of literary records that describes the religious behavior of a Jewish group known as “Essenes” (from the Greek *essenoi*). These sources are texts by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (*The Jewish War* 2.119-161; *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.18-22), by the Jewish-Egyptian historian and philosopher Philo of Alexandria (*Every Good Man is Free* 75-91; *Apology for the Jews* 11) and Roman historian and naturalist Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 5.73). Sukenik compared a manuscript found in cave 1, called the *Community Rule* (1QS), with the classical sources and concluded that the manuscripts had belonged to those Essene Jews. More than that, he also stated that they were the ones who inhabited the Qumran facilities and deposited the manuscripts in the caves.

Among the descriptions of the classical sources considered by Sukenik, the most “objective” is the small note that Pliny makes when describing the Dead Sea region:

On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all the other tribes in the whole world, as it has no woman and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm-trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of persons tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt their manners. [...] Lying below the Essenes was formerly the town of Engedi, second only to Jerusalem in the fertility of its land and in its groves of palm-trees [...] (*Natural History* 5.73).

The Plinian pericope not only records the existence of a group of Essene Jews, but also locates it between the cities of ‘Ein Gedi, south of the western shore of the Dead Sea, and Jericho (which was to be located somewhere between about 39 kilometers of waterfront). Adding this description with other parallels between the classical sources and the manuscripts, Sukenik builds a thesis that will serve as an epistemological paradigm in the research of the manuscripts from then on: the junction between the Qumran Manuscripts, the identity of its authors (Essenes) and the physical space they had occupied (Qumran). Although Sukenik was the most prominent Israeli archaeologist of his day, he came to that conclusion

based only on textual sources, before any orderly investigation was carried out on the site or in the caves.⁷

The first extensive series of excavations of the settlement took place between the years 1951 and 1956, commanded by the French archaeologist Roland de Vaux (of the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem) and the British archaeologist Gerald Lankester Harding (of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan). De Vaux, the most prominent of them, also knew the Essenes from classical sources and, according to the historiography of the excavations, he was already convinced that Qumran had been the dwelling place of the community of the manuscripts.⁸ In the excavations, de Vaux found a cylindrical jar similar to those that housed the manuscripts in the Qumran caves (1953: 105). With this material evidence, “independently” of the relationship previously established based on textual sources, there was now archaeological evidence of the relationship between the manuscripts, the caves and the Qumran site. From then on, through two “fronts”, that is, through textual and material sources, a common synthesis was reached.

De Vaux used classical sources and manuscripts as guides for his excavations. He concluded that that place was occupied by a sectarian, ascetic, celibate and austere religious group, even promoting a kind of “sectarian archeology”, considering, for example, that the lack of opulence of the buildings would be an indication that the group was detached from ideals of wealth or luxury (as described in some manuscripts) and by naming one of the settlement’s rooms as *scriptorium*, where, supposedly, the manuscripts were written and/or copied by the Essenes (1973).

Finally, in a period that spanned a decade, the explanatory hypothesis about the Qumran site was canonized and seemed sufficient for researchers, whether they were archaeologists or (mainly) historians. In 1958, the biblical historian Frank Moore Cross, perhaps the most respected scholar in the historiography of manuscripts, was already fully convinced by this hypothesis (1958). Later, he elaborates the maxim that would be repeated numerous times by the following generations of researchers:

⁷ Others, historians like William Hugh Brownlee and André Dupont-Sommer, who were directly linked to the manuscripts in their research institutions, defended the same thesis of Sukenik shortly afterwards (1950).

⁸ Although in 1949 the two archaeologists carried out a minor excavation and concluded that the Qumran buildings were from a Roman fort from the second century CE or third century CE.

The scholar who would “exercise caution” in identifying the sect of Qumran with the Essenes places himself in an astonishing position: he must suggest seriously that the two major parties formed communistic religious communities in the same district of the desert of the Dead Sea and lived together in effect for two centuries, holding similar bizarre views, performing similar or rather identical lustrations, ritual meals, and ceremonies. He must suppose that one, carefully described by classical authors, disappeared without leaving building remains or even potsherds behind: the other, systematically ignored by classical authors, left extensive ruins, and indeed a great library. I prefer to be reckless and flatly identify the men of Qumran with their perennial houseguests, the Essenes (1973: 331-332).

If the knowledge is an end that can be constructed from different perspectives, the hypothesis unveiled to explain the relationship of the manuscripts with Qumran is an example that presents History and Archeology as means, sciences that were able to provide mutual aid to reach a common conclusion. However, the development of these scientific fields caused this harmonious relationship to be shaken not long after.

Archeology at the forefront of challenges

What I use to call the “triad of Qumran”, a concept that closes the interdependence between the Qumran Manuscripts, the identity of its authors and the place where they lived,⁹ has remained an unquestionable paradigm for just over a decade both for History as well as for Archeology. This consenting coexistence would suffer its first groove in 1960, starting from Archeology. The German archaeologist Karl Heinrich Rengstorf was responsible for the first dissenting thesis, stating that the manuscripts could not have been written in Qumran, but that they had been brought from the Jerusalem Temple library before the destruction by the Romans and deposited in the Qumran caves (1960).¹⁰

After Rengstorf, several theses were developed by archaeologists to explain where the manuscripts came from and what Qumran was. Here are some examples. Pauline Donceel-Voûte and Robert Donceel believe that Qumran was a kind of “village”, similar to the Roman villages used periodically by wealthy families in Jerusalem. For her and him, the material evidence present in the settlement does not correspond with that

⁹ For the Archeology, this concept can be resized. The question of the Qumranite identity is overlooked, while the caves assume a prominent position. Thus, the triad of Qumran for Archeology would comprise the relationship between the manuscripts (as supports for writing), the settlement and the caves.

¹⁰ This opinion will be known in Brazil through the theologian Gaudêncio Gratzfeld (1961: 417), who will agree with Rengstorf’s central idea.

of a religious group that despised wealth (1994: 1-38). Yizhar Hirschfeld claims that Qumran was a fortress during the Asmoneean period (140-37 BCE), and then, with the Roman presence in the region and the loss of sense of its military function, it became an agricultural property (2004).¹¹ Magen and Peleg, who conducted the most extensive excavation campaign in Qumran (1993-2004) after de Vaux, concluded, like Hirschfeld, that the site was initially an Asmoneean garrison that aimed to protect the region from infiltrations by rival neighbors across the southeast of Judea (a tower in the settlement would explain the military function), but that after the direct intervention of the Romans in the political power of Judea (37 BCE) the place would have become a center producing ceramics (2006: 49). Their conclusion, after 11 years of excavations in Qumran, is very challenging:

The association between Qumran, the caves and the scrolls is thus a hypothesis lacking any factual archaeological basis, although it is very convenient for all parties concerned, historians as well as archaeologists. Whoever severs the link between the site, the Essene community there, and the scrolls found in the caves, of necessity also undermines all previous ideas about the nature and the provenance of the scrolls. Qumran scholarship is not yet ready for such a revolution, [...]. The theory linking site and scrolls has survived for so long only because it is so convenient (2007: 64).

In addition to these, several other hypotheses are present in the historiography of Qumran and the manuscripts (Mizzi, 2017).

¹¹ The author will have a series of disaffections with a professional companion, the archeologist Jodi Magness. Its points of friction are related to the investigative method and the conclusions. Unlike Hirschfeld, the archaeologist believes that an Essene ascetic community inhabited the Qumran settlement.



Figure 3: In the background, northwest tower of the settlement. Note that its base follows a tilt pattern used in military structures. Ahead, cistern that was part of the supply system of the complex (personal archive).¹²

The initial criticism of archaeologists lies in the methodological field. The conclusion that a Jewish religious group resided in Qumran and wrote at least part of their manuscripts there anticipated any archaeological investigation, being built exclusively on the basis of textual sources and, according to them, compromising subsequent research. The first researchers (among them, archaeologists) took the existing agreements between the classical sources and the great manuscripts of cave 1, as the idea of an ascetic group in the desert, social isolation, and the set of disciplined practices, as elements that would suit the layout of the buildings and the placement of the settlement.

There are other more punctual questions. With regard to this architectural plan mentioned above, some archaeologists insist that it definitely does not match that of an ascetic community, as its structure would be similar to that of other settlements of the period created for military or industrial purposes. Another idea, usually associated with that of asceticism, is that

¹² For a virtual reconstruction of the entire site, see: virtualqumran.huji.ac.il (last accessed: January 22th, 2020).

of male celibacy. The cemetery adjacent to the site, on the contrary, does not collaborate with the conclusion drawn from the textual sources about a celibate group,¹³ as graves with bodies of women and children. Also the thousands of ceramic objects, the clay, the various pools and ovens on the site, do not contribute to the thesis of a literate religious group in those facilities.¹⁴ The most important textual evidence used to defend the group of the manuscripts hypothesis in Qumran is the description of Pliny. It has also errors that have been pointed out by archaeologists. His work, *Natural History*, was written during the 70s CE, when the Qumran settlement had already been destroyed. His account is in first person and in the present tense. That is, Pliny spoke of something he did not know.¹⁵

¹³ In fact, the textual sources are also not unanimous in this regard (*The Jewish War* 2.8.13).

¹⁴ The jar discovered by de Vaux in the settlement, similar to those found in the caves (and therefore called “jar of manuscripts”), raised a debate that remains today, particularly in the field of Archeology, but which divides archaeologists (Magen, Peleg, 2007; Mizzi, 2017).

¹⁵ Pliny makes a mistake in his description, confusing the city of Jericho with Jerusalem. This misunderstanding by Pliny and his description as a secondary source are, for some researchers, the proof that the most objective textual source is corrupted.



Figure 4: Cemetery, east of the settlement (in the background). There are more than a thousand tombs. Those from the manuscript period have skeletons of women and probably war soldiers (personal archive).

The Archeology, unlike to the History, has promoted a much more intense and productive debate about the material context of the Qumran Manuscripts. If among archaeologists there is a diversity of hypotheses to explain the manuscripts and the settlement, historians did not venture to discuss in depth the set of material sources, nor did they take advantage of these debates since the first challenges to the triad of Qumran. It is much more common to find among them the assertion that Qumran was a product of a Jewish-Essene religious group that wrote manuscripts and deposited them in the nearby caves when aware of the imminent conflict with the Romans. At other times, the strategy employed by historians is to simply move away from such a controversial topic in investigations. It is quite common, in the introduction of their works, to see: “we started from the position that the sect of the Essenes, who wrote the manuscripts, resided in Qumran” (a resource that the present author admits to have already used). Thus, without detailed consideration, their theses are based on this paradigm.

What would explain this neglect by historians towards this debate? Finally, is it, for historians, fundamental to position geographically the place where

the manuscripts were produced and the group that detained them? Many themes explored by historians focus only on textual sources and relegate another type of contextualization. Others, in fact, would make little or no contribution if they resorted to studies on material culture. For example, research that deals with paleography between the second century BCE and first century CE or the evolution of the Hebrew Bible text basically uses the literary context of the manuscripts. Even research that is dedicated to analyzing the social role of Jewish political-religious groups, can, as long as the appropriate methodological tools are used, abstain from the need to place the manuscripts in the hands of a group and in specific places. However, the possibility of avoiding the discussion about the geographic location of the manuscripts and of Qumran is restricted to a limited number of topics. Those dealing with the economy, internal legislation, political-religious frictions, the historical formation of the group of the manuscripts, and so many other common themes in historical studies, can hardly give up a support base and end up resorting to the triad of Qumran.

If there was any repositioning of spatial views on manuscripts and Qumran by historians, it was due more to the development of literary studies than to the contributions of archaeologists. Studies on two of the most famous manuscripts found in Qumran, the *Community Rule* (1QS) and the *Damascus Document* (CD), show that there was not just one group that was under the authority of the manuscripts, but several and dispersed across different locations during the same historical period. Cross, on the basis of these texts, had outlined the first sketches on the fragmentation of the Essenes even before Rengstorf promoted the first challenge (1958). Decades later, this opinion would be better elaborated and canonized among historians. The biblical historian Geza Vermes, for example, claimed that Qumran was an “Essene center”, which brought together all Essene camps at times of festivities (1997: 72-73). Among its effects, this epistemological effort over time promoted a remodeling of the concepts used to refer to the authors of the manuscripts, such as *yahad* and *’edah* (proper names, found respectively in 1QS and CD), or “community of the manuscripts” or “group” (a very neutral term, of socio-anthropological orientation) – concepts that, in general, weaken the need to associate manuscripts with a specific location (although they do not abdicate the triad of Qumran).¹⁶

¹⁶ Another result that discreetly brought historians and archaeologists closer together was the certainty that at least part of the manuscripts were produced in unknown places and taken to the “Qumran community” (Schofield, 2009: 42-47).

Epistemological problems between Archeology and History

At this point, I point out what I believe to be the highest obstacle to the conjugation of the hypotheses about the manuscripts and Qumran: the overvaluation of the sources that would be “private” to each field of study – the textual sources as something exclusive to History and the materials sources as exclusive to Archeology. These two documentary sets seem to guide archaeologists and historians in the opposite direction. This theme shared by these disciplines reproduces the opposition framework of the second half of the nineteenth century and which survived for decades in the twentieth century, in which both for History and Archeology, the sources could only be read and interpreted by those who would be professionals in their respective disciplines (Funari, 2008).

From the point of view of a historian, I use the particular case of the discipline History to understand the parsimony of historians regarding the selection of sources. Material sources are often used as a resource when there is no textual material. This practice was so intense until the last century that until today we have witnessed the remains of the postulate “Archeology as an auxiliary discipline in history”. History ignored the scientific advances of Archeology for decades and even after historians became aware of the importance of using material sources, they lacked knowledge of methods, techniques and particular approaches to Archeology. The changes with post-positivist independent researchers and *Annales* would positively modify this scenario and promote advances in the researches of the historians (Funari, 2008: 84-93).¹⁷

The interdisciplinary dialogue that promoted this reformulation of sources also resulted in the sharing of many objects, since, as the objective of the two sciences is mainly to understand the societies of the past, one can be used to complement or ratify the conclusions of the other (Guarinello, 2011: 161). I take a purposeful digress that can illustrate this, taking as an example an Israeli tradition, considered for a long time exclusively by historians. Israeli culture is the result of a mixture of diverse cultural elements and that is why it is widely said that such elements coexisted for centuries, but that they would not have been recorded in writing by the priestly elite because it performed a broad political-religious reform in the

¹⁷ It was *annale* Marc Bloch who contributed to this mark with the maxim *everything that man says or writes, everything he manufactures, everything he touches, asks for and must inform about him* (2001 [1949]: 79). Such perspectives would be widely applied already by the next “generation”, with emphasis on the monumental production carried out by Fernand Braudel.

service of the monarchy (in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, mainly). The idea of syncretism, correctly defended by historians, was applied to practically all aspects of this society, mainly in culture and religion. This idea made that part of the biblical tradition such as the abstention on the consumption of pork (food taboos) was also relativized, since the biblical text would only represent the bias of the political monopoly power that stated, at the time of the reform, that it should not be consumed. In other words, pork could be consumed by certain segments of the population, but textual sources, in the service of the monarchy, omitted this practice. The Archeology would later confirm that the biblical tradition present in literary sources was correct and demonstrated to the historians that the principle of cultural syncretism should not be applied to all aspects of that society. Pork meat consumption was common among Canaanite groups, but with the gradual takeover of their territories by the Hebrews (eleventh and tenth centuries BCE), no more traces of pork breeding are found in those regions. In this example, the convergence between textual and material sources made History and Archeology go hand in hand, with information completed between them.

If in many cases the textual and material sources converged, promoting a consensual relationship between historians and archaeologists in the analysis of certain objects, in others, this relationship was dissonant – especially when Archeology proved that conclusions common to historians were wrong because they did not have material correspondences or be inconsistent with the historical contexts pointed out. This is what happened when Archeology stated that Flavius Josephus well-known account “Massada’s suicide”, does not have any material evidence to prove that it occurred – which shows yet another excesses of Josephus possible in literature (*The Jewish War* 7.389-406). This also happened when Archeology pointed to the anachronisms in the Hebrew Bible. There are several: narratives that mention the creation of animals in places that do not have material evidence, of cities or populated areas that did not yet exist at the time when the textual sources refer, that the Hebrews, as a people, were not formed outside of what it would be the Land of Israel, but within its own territory and miscegenation with local populations, etc. (Finkelstein, 2018).

No different from the cases mentioned above, the initial procedure for obtaining a convergent hypothesis about the manuscripts and Qumran was correlated the textual and material sources. A disproportionate valuation of a documentary set, however, has been a problem (most evident among historians). For the American archaeologist Jodi Magness

(who is convinced by the triad of Qumran), one of the great problems of archaeologists is an excessive prioritization of materials over textual sources. Questioning her own field, she says that all sources must be analyzed together following a complement:

[...] without the scrolls the archaeological remains are ambiguous enough to support a variety of possible interpretations: that Qumran is a villa, manor house, fort, commercial entrepot, pottery manufacturing center, and so on (2005:3).

Finley had already warned us that *the issue is not simply to correlate archaeological and literary evidence, but to use archeology to assess whether, and to what extent, literature has any value* (1989: 97). This advice is in line with what many archaeologists say when they point out that Archeology is also present to correct the “excesses” of literary sources, *providing an important contrast to the idealized (and ideological) world of texts, presenting an image that has not been altered by flourishing or dynamics of cultural memory* (Mizzi, 2017: 86).

In the case of the Qumran Manuscripts, the complementation between the sources was made even before the site was excavated and, for those who criticize the initial hypothesis, this made the excavations and interpretations about material culture aligned with the interpretations extracted from textual sources. Hirschfeld claims that

the interpretation of archaeological findings in agreement with only the manuscripts, without any comparison with an archaeological study, could mislead the scholar within an interpretive vicious circle in which the manuscripts explain the findings and the findings explain the manuscripts (2006: 225).

Like Hirschfeld, others who disagree with the triad of Qumran voluntarily neglect to correlate the sources. On the contrary, they propose that the study of a documentary set should be done without the interference of another and that only in a second moment the conclusions drawn from both should be compared. Whether or not this procedure is correct for the studies of the manuscripts and Qumran, the fact is that if this complementation between the sources does not take place at any point in the research, the result will be the decrease in the possibilities of creating joint methods and approaches also recedes to the central zone of each disciplinary field – that is, to a space of incipient epistemology from an interdisciplinary point of view.

These discrepancies between History and Archeology cause both to depart and reduce the possibilities for dialogue when dealing with the social

history of the manuscripts and Qumran. Given the current framework of interpretations, we can ask: is it possible to expect that there will be a convergence between the two disciplines? As research has been conducted, with a strong concentration on sources, it is possible that it has not. It seems, therefore, that a change will only be possible if new discoveries are made, be they of texts or artifacts, bringing complementary material. But this, we know, is very difficult to happen!

Other researchers, aware of the limits of interpretation of the sources, suggest that the alternative is to change methods and approaches. Jean-Baptiste Humbert, for example, suggests that one should look for what religious or secular characteristics are present on the site based on principles of anthropology (2006: 19). Dennis Mizzi has highlighted the importance of taking the manuscripts “back to the caves”, so that the archaeological context is recreated and can be analyzed as part of a whole, without being more prioritized than the artifacts (2017: 93) – or that is, “transform” the manuscripts into artifacts, belonging to that archaeological site. I defend the idea that some concepts that are used to think about the social context of the manuscripts make interpretations difficult, such as, for example, the concept “sect”, used by both archaeologists and historians. The word is quite inadequate to refer to a religious group of the period (and perhaps any other from any other period), as it is negatively charged by principles constructed by historical Christianity. Applied to the manuscripts, it reinforces the idea that the group was separated from relations with society and that Qumran would thus be a place removed from social and material culture that could present common features, for example, in its buildings. That is, if there was a religious group there that wrote the Qumran Manuscripts, why couldn’t it use the same architectural elements available from that society? Why couldn’t it have been a religious group that had an industrial activity? If we think of the group of manuscripts as a sect, it is very possible that we will conceive them as ascetics, celibates, inhabitants of the desert, materially poor and with a life of austerities.

In the end, we realize that there is a region of disciplinary boundaries in which relations are insufficient due to the textual and material sources exert a centripetal force, which makes it difficult to create common methods and approaches – resulting, in the end, in the creation and maintenance of “rival scientific paradigms” (using the principle of Cardoso [1997]). I think that, unless the methods and approaches are reviewed, it will be impossible to commune the efforts of History and Archeology. It would not be absurd to think about the possibility of creating a specific

method, derived from the research of the manuscripts and Qumran. On their own, the studies of the manuscripts forced the creation of (more than methods) specific sciences, such as ancient Codicology (which comprises the study of parchments or papyrus in codex format) and the deepening of others, such as Paleography. If we manage to overcome the “dialogue of the deaf” (redirecting the Braudelien debate to History and Archeology) that remains today in the studies of manuscripts and Qumran, we will be able to advance even more in this extremely fruitful field of research in Antiquity.

Conclusions

My objective here was modest in face of the magnitude of the problem: to produce a historiographic work with the main landmarks of the clashes between History and Archeology about the relationship between the Qumran Manuscripts and the settlement in Qumran and, in the end, to propose a small contribution that locates in the epistemological field. In no way I think of drafting a conclusion for a debate so wide that it has been going on for decades and that involves countless researchers from different sciences.

We see in the historiography of the manuscripts that historians and archaeologists have remained overly dependent on the sources they are best qualified to consider. The absence of a supposed “key source”, which could be considered “definitive” (which seems to exist, however, is not recognized by the other), is the reason that makes them retreat in the interdisciplinary dialogue, preventing the elaboration of new methods and complementary new approaches. The opposition was so well maintained over time that the theoretical and methodological advances, sponsored by several historiographical currents, and the development of new technologies that pushed for changes in the construction of scientific knowledge, were little shared in the field of the manuscripts and Qumran studies for having been used in a restricted way by each discipline.

Finally, although it is difficult to establish accurate quantitative data for more than seven decades of bibliographic production, an overview of the main proposals since the discovery of the manuscripts and the excavations at Qumran shows that the vast majority of historians are convinced by the triad of Qumran. Among archaeologists there is a plurality of hypotheses – in addition, there are more archaeologists who were convinced by textual sources than historians who were convinced by material sources. This

disproportionate conviction, on the one hand, and the problem considered unfinished and continually revisited, on the other, make up the key to the most expensive clash in the 70 years of historiography of the Qumran Manuscripts.

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