

A SCROLL IN ONE HAND AND A MATTOCK IN THE OTHER:  
LATRINES, ESSENES, AND KHIRBET QUMRAN

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In the fall of 2006 dozens of mainstream media outlets began reporting on the discovery of a purportedly ancient latrine to the northwest of Qumran, which, according to an article in *Revue de Qumran* by Joe Zias, James Tabor and Stephanie Harter-Lailheugue,<sup>1</sup> proves that the individuals who lived at the site of Qumran during the Second Temple period were none other than the Jewish sect known as the Essenes. Based upon the witness of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the writings of Josephus and newly acquired parasitological evidence from the Qumran plateau, Zias *et al* conclude: "This important new evidence bolsters the Essene hypothesis by corroborating the descriptions of this distinctive toilet regimen in both the Scrolls and Josephus."<sup>2</sup>

By the spring of 2007, Zias *et al*'s theory had, in the eyes of many non-specialists, become an undisputable fact. Take, for example, the following quote from *Archaeology* magazine:

An ancient latrine near the ruins of Qumran follows the unusual and stringent guidelines in both the Dead Sea Scrolls and historical accounts of the strict Jewish Essene sect – directly linking the sect, the scrolls, and the settlement as never before. The latrine was required to be hidden a specific distance northwest of the city, but it may have been unsanitary, thus contributing to the poor health of Qumran's ancient residents.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joe E. Zias, James D. Tabor, and Stephanie Harter-Lailheugue, "Toilets at Qumran, the Essenes, and the Scrolls: New Anthropological Data and Old Theories," *RevQ* 22/4 (2006): 631-40.

<sup>2</sup> Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Lailheugue, "Toilets at Qumran," 631.

<sup>3</sup> "World Roundup," *Archaeology* 60/2 (2007): 10-11.

Although the Qumran/Essene hypothesis is, by far and away, the most convincing explanation for textual and archaeological evidence that has been recovered from the region in and around Khirbet Qumran, one of the great drawbacks of this theory is that it has so completely dominated the landscape of Dead Sea Scrolls research that we are frequently unable to see beyond the shadow that it casts. This is particularly true in regards to the work of Zias *et al* [hereafter Zias] who, rather than allowing the archaeological and literary evidence to speak for itself, have attempted to validate the Qumran/Essene hypothesis by actively searching the Qumran plateau for evidence that supports the witness of Josephus and the Scrolls. This criticism is confirmed by the authors themselves when, in describing the rationale behind their study, they note:

In the summer of 1996 Dr. Tabor and Joe Zias performed a walking survey of the northwest area [of the Qumran plateau], based on the descriptions in both the Scrolls and Josephus. Dr. Tabor pointed out several places at which more permanent [toilet] facilities may have been present, but the random sampling indicated that the entire northwest area, regardless of any remaining facilities, appears to have been used by the community for defecation. <sup>4</sup>

Beyond the observation that the authors have, to date, not presented any artefacts or definitive archaeological evidence to support their claims, one is struck by the overwhelmingly subjective nature of their approach. Not only have their preconceived notions about the scrolls and the Qumran/Essene hypothesis affected the way in which they have interpreted the material culture and geographical features of the Qumran plateau, but their interpretation of the geographical features and material culture has, in turn, been used to verify the Qumran/Essene hypothesis and the witness of the scrolls.<sup>5</sup> This form of circular argumentation is both unproductive and misleading. In the following discussion we will challenge Zias' theory by examining the relevant literary evidence and the archaeological data from

<sup>4</sup> Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Laiheugue, "Toilets at Qumran," 634n.10.

<sup>5</sup> "[A]rchaeology," as Phillip Davies has noted, "needs to work as far as possible without certain preconceptions. In particular, it should never set out to prove a previously held theory, for my impression is that one can make archaeology prove so many things. Preconceptions lead to overinterpretation, which is much worse than underinterpretation. When observation and theory become mixed up in the process of describing a site, the uninformed reader will likely be misled." Phillip Davies, "How Not to Do Archaeology: The Story of Qumran," *BA* 51/4 (1998): 206.

the Qumran plateau.

According to Zias, “the Scrolls tell us that the sect was forbidden to go to the toilet within the city walls of Jerusalem.”<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, there are several problems with this interpretation. First, it is gross overstatement to say that the Scrolls (pl.) prohibit relieving oneself in the city of Jerusalem. In point of fact, only the Temple Scroll prohibits the act of defecating in the city of Jerusalem:

(11Q19 46.13-16a)

ועשיתה להמה מקום יד חוץ מן העיר אשר יהיו יוצאים שמה	13
לחוץ לצפון המערב לעיר בתים ומקורים ובורות בתוכמה	14
אשר תהיה הצואה יורדת אל תוכמה ולי <sup>א</sup> תהיה נראה לכול רחוק	15
<i>vacat</i> מן העיר שלושת אלפים אמה	16a

13	And you will make for them a place of the hand outside of the city where they shall go;
14	outside to the northwest of the city - houses with beams and pits in their midst
15	into which excrement shall drop and shall not be visible to anyone at a distance
16a	from the city of three thousand cubits <i>vacat</i>

Second, in contrast to the rather emphatic interpretation offered by Zias, who states that the members of the sect were “forbidden to go to the toilet within the city walls of Jerusalem,” the Temple Scroll’s prohibition on defecation is not explicit. Rather, the author/redactor of this document implicitly prohibits individuals from relieving themselves in Jerusalem through his call to construct permanent latrines 3,000 cubits to the northwest of the city. Third, the Temple Scroll never specifies that only those who were members of the “sect” were prohibited from relieving themselves in the city of Jerusalem. On the contrary, this legislation, as well as the remainder of the Temple Scroll’s rulings, appears to have been intended for everyone within the city, regardless of which group they might have been affiliated with. Forth, no permanent toilet facilities matching the Temple Scroll’s description (i.e., “houses with beams and pits in their midst” - 11Q19 49.14b)

<sup>6</sup> Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Laiheugue, “Toilets at Qumran,” 632.

have been discovered in the area to the northwest of Khirbet Qumran. Finally, Zias' reading of the Temple Scroll ignores both the question of document's authorship and its seemingly utopian genre. If, as many have argued, the Temple Scroll is a protosectarian document that describes a state of affairs that is at odds with the world in which it was written, then one wonders how these factors might impact Zias' interpretation of the document and his subsequent use of the Temple Scroll to prove the existence of a latrine to the northwest of Khirbet Qumran.

The second document that Zias appeals to in order to prove that the Qumran community built latrines to the northwest of Khirbet Qumran is the War Scroll:

(1QM 7.6b-7)

	ורוח יהיה	6b
בין כול מחניהמה למקום היד כאלפים באמה וכול ערות		7
דבר רע לוֹאִירָאָה סביבות כול מחניהם		

6b		And there shall be a distance
7		between all of their camps and the place of the hand two thousand cubits. And any immodest nakedness shall be seen around any of their camps.

According to Zias, “the *War Scroll* (7:6-7) specifies that the distance between the latrines (literally, “place of the hand”) and the camp should be two thousand cubits.”<sup>7</sup> Although this is an accurate reading of the passage above, Zias subsequently misrepresents the War Scroll when he claims: “the *Temple Scroll* and the *War Scroll* speak of permanent roofed facilities.”<sup>8</sup> As you can see above, however, the War Scroll says no such thing about a roofed structure. Moreover, given that the war camp would have been mobile rather than stationary, it stands to reason that the latrines envisioned by the author/redactor of the War Scroll would have been temporary rather than permanent.

Beyond the issue of permanent versus temporary latrines, the most notable differences between the Temple Scroll and the War Scroll's rulings on latrines involve the lack of agreement concerning their location (i.e., to the northwest of Jerusalem or outside the war

<sup>7</sup> Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Laiheugue, “Toilets at Qumran,” 632.

<sup>8</sup> Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Laiheugue, “Toilets at Qumran,” 633n.7.

camp) and the distance between the latrines and the city or camp (i.e., 3,000 cubits or 2,000 cubits). Regarding the issue of location, it is interesting to note that the author/redactor of the Temple Scroll frequently applies the concept of the war camp to Jerusalem, which suggests that a similar ideological framework has been embraced by the authors of both documents (i.e., that God was thought to be present in both the war camp and the city of Jerusalem and that God should not be exposed to any kind of indecency that might cause him to turn away from his people; cf. Deut 23:13-15).

As for the difference in distance between the latrines and the city or camp, it is difficult to determine why the Temple Scroll demands a greater distance than the War Scroll. While it is possible that the Temple Scroll's ruling may have been based on a detailed understanding of Jerusalem's elevation and topography, (i.e., information that may have necessitated a greater distance between the city and the latrines so as to prevent God or anyone else from "seeing" anything indecent), it is equally possible that the distances are different due to the uniqueness of each situation. As Jodi Magness has suggested: "[the Temple Scroll] and the War Scroll added a distance regulation because of the state of purity required in the ideal holy city or during the war at the end of days."<sup>9</sup>

For Zias, the distances between the latrines and the city or camp in the Temple Scroll and War Scroll are relevant in that they (1) support his notion that there was a latrine beyond the walls of Khirbet Qumran and (2) they verify Josephus' claim that the Essenes refrained from defecating on the Sabbath.<sup>10</sup> Concerning the latter, Zias cites a Sabbath regulation in the Damascus Document that prohibits individuals from walking more than 1,000 cubits outside of their city of residence (CD 10.21). This ruling, argues Zias, supports the notion that Josephus and the Scrolls are in agreement on the issue of relieving oneself on the Sabbath. According to Zias:

<sup>9</sup> Jodi Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 109.

<sup>10</sup> "[On the Sabbath the Essenes do not] even go to the stool. On other days they dig a trench a foot deep with a mattock – such is the nature of the hatchet which they present to neophytes – and wrapping their mantle about them, that they may not offend the rays of the deity, sit above it. They then replace the excavated soil in the trench. For this purpose they select the more retired spots. And though this discharge of the excrements is a natural function, they make it a rule to wash themselves after it, as if defiled" (*War* 2.147-149).

If the latrines were placed at a distance of 2,000 to 3,000 cubits, then on the Sabbath day a community member, in order to reach the latrine, would be required to walk farther than the permissible distance, thereby transgressing Sabbath law.<sup>11</sup>

The problem with this interpretation is that it assumes that the rulings in the Temple Scroll and the War Scroll were applied directly to Khirbet Qumran. Beyond the observation that the geography of the Qumran plateau does not allow for the building of latrines 2,000 to 3,000 cubits to the northwest of Khirbet Qumran,<sup>12</sup> there is nothing in either the Temple Scroll or the War Scroll to indicate that their toilet legislations should be applied to anything other than the idealized city of Jerusalem or to the war camp at the end of days. If, as some have argued, the Qumran community eventually came to see themselves as being a replacement for the Temple in Jerusalem, then it is theoretically possible that the community may have tried to apply the rules of the Temple Scroll to themselves. However, if this is the argument that Zias has in mind when he assumes that the scrolls' latrine regulations were binding at Qumran, he fails to provide any evidence to support such a position.

Although Zias attempts to sidestep the "variations in practice" exhibited by the Temple Scroll and the War Scroll by claiming that he is more interested in focussing on "Josephus' reports about the Essenes," his conclusion that the "parasitological evidence regarding Qumran toilet practices ... clearly confirm the textual evidence in the Scrolls and Josephus for an Essene identification" would seem to suggest otherwise.

Yet another difficulty with Zias' argument involves the presence of what appears to be a toilet within the complex of buildings at Qumran. Although Yizhar Hirschfeld has argued against the installation in Locus 51 being understood as a latrine,<sup>13</sup> both Roland de

<sup>11</sup> Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Laiheugue, "Toilets at Qumran," 632.

<sup>12</sup> "Yet at Qumran," notes Zias, "due to geological constraints such as cliffs and steep ravines, it would be impossible to apply this rule of distance." Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Laiheugue, "Toilets at Qumran," 634.

<sup>13</sup> According to Hirschfeld, L.51 cannot be a toilet as it is a "fixed installation lacking the water channels needed for flushing." Hirschfeld continues: "It seems unlikely that the occupants of the main building would have tolerated the nuisance caused by the location of such a toilet within the structure." Yizhar Hirschfeld, *Qumran in Context: Reassessing the Archaeological Evidence* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 100.

Vaux<sup>14</sup> and Jodi Magness<sup>15</sup> have interpreted L.51 as being representative of a toilet. Surprisingly, Zias has also embraced the idea that L.51 is a toilet and, in an article written in 2004, Zias, Stephanie Harter, Françoise Bouchet, and Kosta Mumchuglu claim to have verified L. 51's status as a toilet through the examination of soil samples containing the eggs from a parasite that is only "excreted from the [human] body during defecation."<sup>16</sup> In an effort to deal with this seemingly contradictory evidence, Zias claims that the toilet in L.51 was only used for "faecal emergencies."<sup>17</sup> The difficulty with this interpretation, beyond the fact that it is an *ad hoc* argument that can neither be confirmed nor denied, is that it contradicts the very evidence that Zias uses to support the notion that latrines were built beyond the walls of Qumran. Specifically, if the rationale for building latrines 3,000 cubits outside of Jerusalem in the Temple Scroll and 2,000 cubits outside of war camp in the War Scroll was to prevent God from being exposed to any kind of indecency that might cause him to turn away from his people (cf. Deut 23:13-15), then the presence of a toilet within the walls of the Khirbet Qumran, regardless of whether it was used for "faecal emergencies" or not, would have violated this concept. In short, the presence of a toilet inside the walls of Khirbet Qumran contradicts both the witness of the scrolls and Josephus.<sup>18</sup>

Returning once again to Josephus' statement that the Essenes refrained from relieving themselves on the Sabbath, Magness notes: "If this regulation was observed at Qumran, the inhabitants presuma-

<sup>14</sup> Humbert, J.B., and A. Chambon, *Fouilles de Khirbet Qumran et de Ain Feshkha*. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1994), 309.

<sup>15</sup> As Magness has observed: "De Vaux identified one of the installations he excavated as a toilet. This installation was located in L.51, a large room on the eastern side of the main building to the north of the miqveh in L48-49. A terracotta pipe set into a conical, mud-lined pit that was filled with thin layers of coarse dirty earth was embedded in the floor of this room. Comparisons with toilets in the ancient Mediterranean world suggest that de Vaux's identification is correct." Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 105-06; idem, "Two Notes on the Archaeology of Qumran," *BASOR* 312 (1998): 37-40.

<sup>16</sup> Stephanie Harter, Françoise Bouchet, Kosta Mumchuglu, and Joe Zias, "Toilet Practices Among Members of the Dead Sea Scrolls Sect at Qumran (100 BCE – 68 CE)," *RevQ* 84 (2004): 579-85.

<sup>17</sup> Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Laiheugue, "Toilets at Qumran," 633-34.

<sup>18</sup> According to Magness: "The location of the toilet in L.51 on the eastern side of the main building suggests that the distance regulations mandated for the toilets in the War Scroll and in the Temple Scroll did not apply to the settlement at Qumran." Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 109.

bly refrained from using the toilet in L.51 on the Sabbath.”<sup>19</sup> Although displaying far more caution than Zias, Magness’ hypothesis would appear to be similar to Zias’ argument that the latrine in L.51 was only used for “faecal emergencies” in that it cannot be confirmed nor denied. In response to Magness’ hypothesis, Albert Baumgarten notes:

If there was a latrine at Qumran, its implications for the identity of the group should not be averted by the intellectual acrobatics of the sort attempted by Magness ... there is no reason to think that defecation in this toilet was prohibited on the Sabbath. Its use [in contrast to the witness of Josephus and the scrolls] required neither carrying a shovel, nor digging a hole, nor walking beyond the limit permitted on the Sabbath.<sup>20</sup>

While the presence of a toilet in L.51 may well have a bearing on the issue of the Qumran community’s identity, Baumgarten’s comments regarding the rationale for prohibiting the act of defecation on the Sabbath are more directly related to the topic at hand. In particular, the observation that the permanent toilet in L.51 did not require an individual to carry a tool, dig, or walk beyond the Sabbath limits suggests that the Sabbath regulations would not have applied to those wishing to relieve themselves in this installation. Once again we are confronted by the fact that the archaeological evidence from Qumran would appear to contradict the witness of Josephus and the scrolls.

In an effort to clarify her hypothesis concerning the relationship between the toilet in L.51, the witness of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Josephus’ description of the Essenes, Magness offers the following synthesis:

Because the toilet in L.51 could not have served the needs of the entire community, most of the members must have relieved themselves outside the settlement, either in built facilities or in the manner described by Josephus. If built facilities existed outside the settlement, they may have been located to the northwest.<sup>21</sup>

Not unlike Zias, Magness has attempted to create an all-

<sup>19</sup> Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 110.

<sup>20</sup> Albert Baumgarten, “Who Cares and Why Does it Matter? Qumran and the Essenes, Once Again!” *DSD* 11/2 (2004): 186.

<sup>21</sup> Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 113.

encompassing theory in order to account for both the archaeological and textual evidence at our disposal. In truth, it is not easy to distinguish between Magness' hypothesis and that of Zias. For example, both agree that (1) there was a toilet in L.51, (2) that the majority of the Qumran community would have defecated outside of Khirbet Qumran in semi-permanent facilities or in accordance with Josephus' descriptions, and (3) that the communal latrines, if built, would have been situated to the northwest of settlement. Moreover, both Zias and Magness have attempted to account for all of the relevant information in such a way so as to make it all fit within the confines of the Qumran/Essene hypothesis.

Beyond the criticisms mentioned above, such as the fact that the presence of a toilet in the settlement of Qumran would have gone against both the Temple Scroll and the War Scroll's stance on not offending God with any of the indecencies that accompany the act of defecation (cf. Deut 23:13-15), one notes a unwillingness on the part of Zias and Magness to acknowledge that the archaeological and textual evidence is problematic and difficult to reconcile. In point of fact, these difficulties are actually compounded by Magness who argues that "because the sectarians viewed themselves as a replacement for the temple and created by means of the sect a substitute for the sacrificial cult, temple purity laws were transferred to the lives of the members."<sup>22</sup> Although a valid argument in its own right, one wonders how it would have been possible for a group who considered themselves to be a physical replacement for the Temple could have tolerated a toilet in their midst (i.e., an installation that the Temple Scroll explicitly prohibits within the "city of the temple"; cf. 11QT 46.13-16).

Before offering a theory of our own to account for the evidence discussed above, one final observation regarding Magness' hypothesis is in order. In an attempt to strengthen the relationship between the Qumran community, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the witness of Josephus, Magness enlists the witness of a document know as 4QHalakha C:

(4Q472a 1-5)

] ooooo [ 1

<sup>22</sup> Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 113.

]למבטי צו אים לוא[ 2  
 ]ול שליש על פי נש[ 3  
 ]ל על מעש[ה 4  
 ]ל[ 5

1 ] [  
 2 ] to cover excrements. If he does not[  
 3 ] a vessel according to [  
 4 ] regarding a dee[d  
 5 ] [

According to Magness, “[this] fragmentary but significant halakhic (legal) scroll from Cave 4 at Qumran mentions the same practice of covering excrement that Josephus singled out for description.”<sup>23</sup> Magness continues:

The reference in line 2 to covering excrement recalls Josephus’ Essenes, who dig a trench in the ground and, after defecating, ‘they then replace the excavated soil.’ Similarly, the Temple Scroll makes a point of mandating that the toilets be pits ‘into which excrement will descend.’ In other words, all of these sources – Josephus, the Temple Scroll, and 4Q472 – document or legislate the unique sectarian concern that excrement be concealed by being buried in a pit.<sup>24</sup>

The responsibility for transcribing and translating 4Q472a was given to Torleif Elgvin, who published his findings in *DJD* 35 in 1999.<sup>25</sup> Some six years after its publication, Egvin and I had the opportunity to re-examine 4Q472a under the infrared camera in the IAA’s scroller. After much discussion we determined that the readings of 4Q472a in *DJD* 35 were in need of correction and, at our request, new infrared images of this document were requested and obtained from the IAA. Our new readings of 4Q472a, which were subsequently published in the winter of 2007 in *Revue de Qumran*,<sup>26</sup> are reproduced here:

<sup>23</sup> Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 110. Cf. Hannah Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 106-107.

<sup>24</sup> Magness, *Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 110.

<sup>25</sup> Torleif Elgvin, “4QHalakha C,” in *Qumran Cave 4 XXV Halakhic Texts* (*DJD* 35; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 155-56.

<sup>26</sup> Torleif Elgvin and Ian Werrett. “4Q472a in Infrared Light: Latrine Manual Down the Drain.” *RevQ* 23/2 (2007): 261-268.

]וֹרֹצַ עִוְרָרְ]	1
י[אסור שְׁבִטֵי נועם לטַעַם]תם ב	2
כ[ול מְלוֹשׁ עִוְסָתוּ נב]	3
ל[ ]וּ עַל כֵּן עֲמָו]	4
]ל[	5

1		] ... and hasten, awake(?) [
2		He ]will gather (the) tribes of (his) delight, to pla[nt them in
3		]all his kneaded dough will be ea[ten(?)
4		] ... therefore his peo[ple
5		] [

As the transcription and translation above suggests, 4Q472a has nothing to do with excrement or ritual purity. Although not entirely clear, the new reading of 4Q472a would seem to suggest that this fragment is representative of an eschatological work of salvation. Based upon this new evidence, Elgvin and I have argued that this text should be removed from the category of *halakhic* texts and re-assigned to the category of parabiblical material. It goes without saying that our new readings will greatly affect Magness' observations regarding 4Q472a and severely limit the amount of weight that can be placed on the notion that the scrolls are in agreement with Josephus on the issue of defecation.

Even the most committed supporter of the Qumran/Essene hypothesis must admit that the presence of a toilet in the site of Qumran presents us with a significant challenge. Although de Vaux claims to have found evidence that L. 51 was protected from the elements by a wooden roof,<sup>27</sup> a fact that would appear to parallel the description of the latrines in the Temple Scroll, it is important to note that none of L. 51's remaining features agree with the relevant literary material, such as the location and the distance regulations mentioned above.

One possible way around this impasse involves a piece of evidence that we have yet to discuss. According to de Vaux, the toilet in L. 51 and the adjoining *mikveh* in L. 48-49 were destroyed by a massive earthquake in the year 31 BCE. After this disaster, much of the eastern portion of the site, including both the toilet in L.51 and

<sup>27</sup> Humbert and Chambon, *Fouilles de Khirbet Qumran et de Ain Feshkha*, 309.

the *mikveh* in L.48-49, were left in ruins and never rebuilt.<sup>28</sup> Added to this, one notes that de Vaux failed to find any definitive archaeological evidence of a replacement latrine being built within the site from 31 BCE until the Romans destroyed the site in 68 CE. Based on this evidence, or lack thereof, it would appear that the site Khirbet Qumran failed to contain a toilet for nearly 100 years. Without a toilet on site, the residents of Qumran would have had to relieve themselves beyond the walls of their settlement. While this does not necessarily solve all of the problems raised thus far, it does suggest that a diachronic approach may be of some use in this discussion.

### Conclusions

As the above discussion has shown, the evidence from Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the archaeological site of Khirbet Qumran do not agree on the issues of latrines and defecation. Moreover, Zias' contention that he has found the remains of the Qumran community's latrine to the northwest of Khirbet Qumran cannot be confirmed. The complete absence of any material culture from the so-called Qumran latrine places us in the unfortunate position of not being able to date Zias' discovery or to connect it to the site of Khirbet Qumran. Although we concede that the parasitological evidence recovered by Zias would seem to confirm that the area in question was used as a latrine, it is impossible to determine whether this evidence is two years, two hundred years, or two thousand years old.

To Zias' credit, he does acknowledge that the dating of the parasitological evidence is problematic:

Since we cannot rely on other archaeological evidence (e.g., ceramic or architectural) from Area A, the question of dating these particular parasites is certainly valid, especially since the Bedouin are known to have periodically inhabited the region. However, according to Araf Abu-Rabia, Professor of Anthropology, Ben Gurion University, himself a Bedouin, the Bedouin do not bury human waste after going to the toilet. They simply leave the waste on the surface and subject to rapid desiccation in the desert.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Humbert and Chambon, *Fouilles de Khirbet Qumran et de Ain Feshkha*, 72-73.

<sup>29</sup> Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Laiheugue, "Toilets at Qumran," 636-37.

Unfortunately, this argument is highly tenuous. With all due respect to Professor Abu-Rabia, it is impossible to speak for all Bedouin at all times on this matter. Furthermore, in no way does Professor Abu-Rabia's statement address the issue of dating the parasitological evidence recovered from the Qumran plateau. Even if the statement above concerning the Bedouin's toilet practices were completely accurate, we would still have to account for any number of individuals who have lived and operated in this region over the last two millennia. In particular, the Roman garrison that took up residence at Qumran after its destruction in 68 CE and the various archaeological teams that have worked in this area since the late 1940's would need to be accounted for and removed from the pool of possible candidates. In short, the issue of dating the parasitological evidence recovered by Zias will remain an unresolved problem until a thorough excavation of the area in question is conducted and an official field report is published.

Contrary Zias' claim that the parasitological evidence from the Qumran plateau "bolsters the Essene hypothesis by corroborating the descriptions of this distinctive toilet regimen in both the scrolls and Josephus,"<sup>30</sup> we find no evidence to support such a conclusion. Although we agree that the area in question seems to have been used for the disposal of human waste, it is premature at best to conclude that this evidence corroborates the witness of the scrolls or, for that matter, Josephus' descriptions of the Essenes. As Davies has noted: "When observation and theory become mixed up in the process of describing a site, the unformed reader will likely be misled."<sup>31</sup> In the case of the Zias' study, theory has become virtually indistinguishable from observation and only a complete excavation of the area in question will enable us to discern whether or not we have been misled or enlightened.

<sup>30</sup> Zias, Tabor, and Harter-Laiheugue, "Toilets at Qumran," 631.

<sup>31</sup> Davies, "How Not to Do Archaeology," 206.