CHAPTER 10

The Distribution of Tefillin Finds among the Judean Desert Caves

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Preface

Since the publication of the final remaining texts from Qumran Cave 4Q, scholarship has debated the relationship between the manuscript corpora from the eleven caves near Qumran in which scrolls were found. Did all of these assemblages derive from a single library, or should the corpus from each cave be viewed as reflecting a distinct collection? Can the corpora from the various caves be distinguished on the basis of chronology, subject matter or perhaps religio-ideological orientation? Closely related to these problems is the debate regarding the nature of these collections; are some or all of these scroll assemblages the result of emergency concealment? Should any of these collections be viewed as "genizah" repositories? Did some of these caves serve as active, functioning libraries? Do any of these corpora represent the personal collections left behind by individuals who may have utilized these caves for human habitation?

When dealing with these questions, scholars have usually focused on the texts themselves, and more infrequently on archaeological artifacts, such as pottery, found together with the texts. The present article seeks to contribute to the discourse regarding the enigmatic nature of the various Qumran manuscript corpora and their depositional backgrounds by focusing on one specific type of artifact found in some of the manuscript caves but which has often been overlooked: tefillin (phylacteries). As tefillin are manifestly ritual objects which fulfilled a specific function, their very presence in any particular cave may potentially reflect both on the nature of the textual deposits found in the same cave together with the tefillin, as well as on the motivations of the people who made these deposits in antiquity. Recognizing the existence of typological differences between the tefillin exemplars allows us to go one step further, and to examine how the distribution of the various types of tefillin among the caves may shed light on differences in the nature of the associated textual assemblages found in these caves in terms of chronology and possibly religio-ideological orientation as well.

Our study opens with a survey of all of the tefillin find-spots among the caves, both at Qumran and elsewhere in the Judean Desert. The investigation will proceed by identifying two typological classifications within the corpus of tefillin found in these caves—one relating to the morphology of the leather tefillin cases and the other involving the choice of texts included on the tefillin slips and their arrangement—with the aim of mapping out the distribution of distinct tefillin types according to find-spot among the various caves. Our study concludes with an analysis of how these data may contribute to our understanding of the functions each of various caves may have served at the time when the scrolls were placed in them, as well as the nature of the diverse scroll assemblages themselves, especially with regard to chronology and the possibly diverse religio-ideological backgrounds of the individuals who deposited the scrolls in the each of the different caves.

A cautionary note regarding the provenance of the material to be discussed in the present study is in order here. While a large number of the finds which are the focus of our investigation were discovered by archaeologists, many were purchased from Bedouin clansmen or their middlemen after having been clandestinely looted from Judean Desert caves. While the scholars who purchased these materials certainly tried to the best of their...
abilities to determine the true provenance of the materials through questioning the Bedouin finders or their middlemen, caution must always be exercised whenever dealing with finds which were not uncovered within the framework of scientific archaeological excavations. Experience has proven that not all of the provenance claims of the Bedouin finders or their intermediary dealers are reliable. The only way to be sure that a purchased find was discovered where it was alleged to have been found is if fragments of the same document were subsequently uncovered at the reported site within the framework of controlled scientific excavations. To the best of my knowledge, such was never the case with purchased tefillin finds. With this in mind, I have been careful here to note clearly which tefillin finds were uncovered through proper archaeological excavation (I refer to these simply as having been “found” at a certain location) and which of these finds were purchased from the Bedouin or their intermediaries.

2 Overview of the Tefillin Find-Spots

In discussing “tefillin,” we are actually referring to artifacts composed of two distinct components: (1) leather cases, intended to house (2) rolled-up slips made of thin skins inscribed with biblical texts. In only a limited number of instances were inscribed slips found in-situ inside of a leather case; usually tefillin slips were found unassociated with any case, while cases were typically found empty of any contents.

Twenty-three leather tefillin cases have been reported upon from the caves near Qumran: four were found in Qumran Cave 1Q, three were found in Cave 4Qa and another eleven cases which were purchased from Bedouin are attributed to “Cave 4Q,” one was found in Cave 5Q, three in Cave 8Q, and one purchased from Bedouin was said to derive from an unspecified cave at Qumran.

4

Qumran Cave 1Q: Gerald L. Harding, “Introductory, the Discovery, the Excavation, Minor Finds,” in Qumran Cave 1 (DJD 1; ed. D. Barthélemy and J. T. Milik; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 7, Pl. 15–7. Aside from the four cases which appear in the report, Harding noted that remains of at least two other cases similar to those shown in Pl. 16–7 were found in Cave 4Q; as no other description is provided and no record of these cases could be located, they are not counted here. Qumran Cave 4Q: Thirteen cases (only the first three of which were discovered in situ in Cave 4Qa, the remainder having been purchased from Bedouin who claimed to have found them in “Cave 4Q”) were reported upon in: Józef T. Milik, “Teffilin, Mezuza et Targums,” in Qumrân Grotte 4.II: I. Archéologie; II. Tefillin, Mezuza et Targums (4Q128–4Q57) (1956; 6; ed. R. de Vaux and J. T. Milik; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 33–35, Pl. vii:13–13. An additional case attributed to “Cave 4Q” (it is unclear if it was purchased or if it was discovered during excavations) was brought to the University of Leeds for analysis in 1958 along with other unpublished inscribed skins from Qumran, and was assigned the internal serial designation “4Q45” [John B. Poole, The Nature, Origins and Techniques of Manufacture of those of the Dead Sea Scrolls which are Made from Animal Skins [Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds, 1955], 100–2, 115–16, Pl. xi; Ronald Reed and John B. Poole, “A Study of Some Dead Sea Scroll and Leather Fragments from Cave 4 at Qumran: Part I—Physical Examination,” Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society [Scientific Section] 9/1 (1962): 1–13; [7, 9, Fig. 1, 13]; Ronald Reed, Ancient Skins, Parchments and Leathers [London: Seminar Press, 1972], 299–300, Fig. 11; this exemplar has gone completely unnoticed in all previously published treatments of the Judean Desert tefillin, probably due to the specialized nature of the publications where it was reported upon. Another purchased fragment allegedly from “Cave 4Q” which might derive from another tefillin case appears in the upper right-hand side of an archival