A RESPONSE TO D. STACEY, “SOME ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE AQUEDUCTS OF QUMRAN”

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David Stacey provides a dense and detailed analysis of the water system at Qumran. An experienced field archaeologist who served as a senior staff member on Ehud Netzer’s excavations at Herodian Jericho, Stacey deserves to be taken seriously. He attempts to demonstrate that the water system—including the numerous miqva’ot—was not established until the end of the first century BCE (Period II). Stacey concludes that Qumran was not a sectarian settlement in the Hasmonean period but instead was part of the Hasmonean “Jericho estate.” In my response I hope to show that many of Stacey’s observations about the relationship of elements of the water system to other architectural or stratigraphic features are highly speculative, unfounded, or erroneous. This means that Stacey’s far-reaching conclusions are untenable and are unsupported by the archaeological evidence. Because it is impossible to address all of Stacey’s observations on architecture and stratigraphy, I comment on selected points as examples of the broader methodological and interpretive problems.

Floors associated with the aqueduct in the area of the mill on the western side of the settlement (L100)

Stacey begins his analysis with the complex of rooms on the western side of the site, surrounding the circular cistern (L110) that de Vaux assigned to the Iron Age phase of the settlement. Stacey claims that the earliest post-Iron Age phase of the aqueduct and water system, including the pools in L117 and L118, was established after the earthquake of 31 BCE. In contrast Roland de Vaux assigned the establishment of the aqueduct to Period Ib (which he dated ca. 100–31 BCE), describing the development of the water system at this time as “the most
striking feature” of Qumran’s plan.1 The crux of Stacey’s argument is that the floors associated with the aqueduct—that is, the floors that abut and connect with the top of the aqueduct’s walls—are associated with de Vaux’s Period II (late first century BCE to 68 CE). According to Stacey the walls of the aqueduct were not meant to be free standing and did not project above the settlement’s floors. He therefore concludes that the aqueduct and the pools it fed were not established until Period II.

Stacey cites the stone pavement associated with the mill in L100 as an example of a Period II floor associated with the top of the aqueduct’s walls. However, in the excavation photographs published by John-Baptiste Humbert and Alain Chambon this stone pavement can be seen overlying (rather than abutting) the top edge of the channel (the “main” aqueduct).2 Another photograph shows an earlier floor (below the stone pavement) that is associated with the bottom of two column bases and connects with the top edge of the channel.3 This is apparently the whitish floor in L100 that de Vaux described as “linked to one of the column bases.”4 This floor is also represented on the Period Ib plan of L100, contradicting Stacey’s association of the aqueduct with the latest floor (the Period II stone pavement).5 De Vaux did find an early beaten earth floor (which he associated with Period Ia) under the other floors in L100 (and in some of the other loci in this area, including L106 and L109), which ran under the “main” aqueduct as well as the large east-west wall delimiting the southern end of the western sector (between L109 and L101).6

Floors associated with the aqueduct and the staircase in L113

Stacey states that, “The staircase in L113 was clearly built to a later floor associated with the building of the aqueduct and the raising of

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3 Humbert and Chambon, *Fouilles I*, 142, Photo 294.
4 Humbert and Chambon, *Fouilles I*, 323; “Sous la base du moulin, existait un autre pavememt associé à un sol blanchâtre, lié à l’une des bases de colonne.”
5 Humbert and Chambon, *Fouilles I*, 132, Plan (XXII).
6 Humbert and Chambon, *Fouilles I*, 323, 325, 326.