

Do Qumran Inscriptions Show Hellenization of Qumran Residents?

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Abstract

The epigraphic corpus of Qumran has been known completely since the publication of André Lemaire in *Khirbet Qumrân et 'Aïn Feshkha, II*, by Jean-Baptiste Humbert and Jan Gunneweg in 2003. The publication of all the inscriptions in Khirbet Qumran, the associated caves and 'Aïn Feshkha have shown something strange: Qumran residents might have been more Hellenized than the usual picture given by Qumran scrolls. Most of the inscriptions are personal names (or nicknames). Some of them have been written by members of the Qumran community. We propose to compare these inscriptions with contemporaneous epigraphic corpora discovered around the Dead Sea and with personal names noted in the Qumran nonliterary texts.

Among the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the corpus of Qumran is probably the best known. The manuscripts of Qumran were discovered in the North-West of the Dead Sea, in eleven caves between 1947 and 1967. These scrolls are now often reduced to a fragmentary state; almost 930 manuscripts were copied between the third century B.C. and the middle of the first century A.D., according to the paleographic features (Cross 1961: 133–202; Doudna 2001: 675–682), and confirmed by the Carbon 14 dating (Taylor 2003: 201–205; Rasmussen 2006: 139–163). Many scrolls were deposited in jars inside caves. Recently, the chemical analysis of the scroll jars has shown the same features as present in the jars discovered in the archeological site of Qumran named *Khirbet* Qumran (Gunneweg 2003: 3–57). Therefore the residents of *Khirbet* Qumran present a link with the caves, the scroll jars and the scrolls. Who were the residents of Qumran? In 1948, the content of the first unrolled scroll encouraged the scholars to propose the existence of an Essene community because Essenes were described principally in notices written by Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria in the first century A.D. Although many theories tried to challenge the Essene hypothesis in the 1990's, now a consensus prevails to say the residents of Qumran were indeed members of an Essene community, the second order (*tagma* in Greek) living in the desert reported by Josephus in the *Jewish War* II 160. Essenes constitute a sect in Judaism characterized by rigorous views, in particular the strict application of the *Torah*. The documents excavated give the cultural and religious Jewish background around C. E. They allow us to better understand the change from Biblical Judaism into Rabbinic Judaism, and the birth of Christianity inside Judaism.

While the studies on the Qumran scrolls are numerous and well known, very few studies have been done on the epigraphic corpus of Qumran. In fact, this corpus has only been available since 2003. André Lemaire (2003: 341–388) has published all the inscriptions discovered during the excavations in *Khirbet* Qumran, the associated caves, and the site of 'Aïn Feshkha, 4.5 kilometers to the South of Qumran, which is linked to *Khirbet* Qumran, i.e., with 77 inscriptions.

To complete the corpus, we add three inscriptions published by Emile Puech (1984: 525–535), coming from private collections. And we add also deed or gift from 67/68 A.D., written on pottery at Jericho and discovered in the rubbish in *Khirbet* Qumran, 1996, with two other *ostraca*

(Cross 1997: 17–28; Yardeni 1997: 233–237; Doudna 2004; Puech 2007: 1–29) and the ten inscriptions excavated by the Israeli team of Yitzhak Magen and Yuval Peleg during one excavation in 2001–2002 (Magen 2007: 21–22). To sum up, the catalogue of Qumran inscriptions amounts to 93 inscriptions. Unlike the scrolls written on skin or on papyrus in the library of Qumran, the inscriptions, often short, are *ostraca* on pottery or on stone, weights, seals or flags. The inscriptions could be incised (before or after the firing of pieces of pottery) or written with ink. During the excavations of *Khirbet* Qumran, directed by Roland de Vaux, a catalogue of inscriptions was established but a few incisions, drawings or marks of potters are probably not real inscriptions. I propose to study only the Greek inscriptions. In fact, the residents of Qumran are recognized today mainly through their library. They seem to be eager defenders of Jewish identity without foreign corruptions. The inscriptions allow us to understand not what the residents would like to be, but what they were. The inscriptions excavated are not intended to convince anyone, but they do show aspects of daily life. André Lemaire writes in French — my translation: “The number of Greek inscriptions is somewhat surprising in sites so far as *Khirbet* Qumran and ‘*Ain* Feshkha. The use of the Greek language seems proportionally more important in the documents of practical life than in the literary manuscripts.” (2003: 381) Next, I propose to examine the hellenization of Qumran residents.

Overview of Greek inscriptions

First, I shall give an overview of the 21 inscriptions in Greek; of these, I exclude the inscription marked Fesh. 255a. This *ostrakon* comes from the vicinity of ‘*Ain* Feshkha, and on it, we can read two lines: 1. *agè* [probably a variant attested in the Greek inscriptions of Beth She‘arim (Lifshitz 1967: VII–VIII) for *agiè*, ‘saint’, followed by a lost personal name of the saint, and 2. *b]oètèso<n> èmas* which shows the local pronunciation of ‘save us’. But this kind of large *pithos* with a combed decoration and the paleography may date the inscription from the Byzantine period. Indeed, R. de Vaux has found traces of a Byzantine occupation at ‘*Ain* Feshkha (1973: 74–75) and a text of Jean Moschos named *Pratum Spirituale* reports that monks of Mardes, i.e., *Khirbet* Mird, had a “garden” near the Dead Sea, probably the site of ‘*Ain* Feshkha. Therefore I choose to keep apart this inscription; it was written after the occupation of *Khirbet* Qumran and ‘*Ain* Feshkha by an Essene community, after A.D. 68.

As for the other inscriptions, they are dated from the last period of the Essene occupation named Period II by R. de Vaux, i.e., the first half of the first century A.D. Unfortunately, most of the Greek inscriptions are short. For example, the inscription marked KhQ 192 discovered in the tower of *Khirbet* Qumran is read *]ta .kól[* with a vertical stroke of separation before the article *ta* and before the following word. It is probably an influence of Latin epigraphy. After the article, it is difficult to recognize an anthroponym unless you recognize a nickname. A. Lemaire (2003: 342) proposes to read *ta kola* from the Greek word *kôlon* meaning a ‘corpse of man’ or a ‘carcass of animal’. The word translates the Hebrew word *pégêr* in the *Septuagint*. I propose another interpretation. It could be a transcription of the Hebrew word *kól* meaning the totality. The small jar may contain all the contents inside.

Many of the Greek inscriptions note a personal name. For example, the inscription KhQ 387 contains the end of a personal name incised on the neck of a jug: *]tôn*. Numerous Greek names of Jews end with these letters like *melitôn* or *aristôn*. Many reconstructions are possible if we follow the *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity* written by Tal Ilan in 2002. More complete, the inscription KhQ 979 comes from a jar discovered with a “herodian” oil lamp dating from the first half of the first century A.D. The reading of the inscription is difficult. We can read the three last letters which are the best preserved: *nu, iota, sigma: nis* could be ‘son of’, *nios* written defectively. The following personal name is in the lacuna. The first word ends clearly with *on*. Before this ending, I propose to read: *mu, lambda* (two times), *iota, to* then *-on*. The first *lambda*

may be corrected by an *alpha* to read *maliton*. Another possibility is to substitute the sequence *lambda-iota-to* for *iota-psi-iota*. The word may be *lmipsion*, a variant for *salamipsion*, a transcription for the Hebrew name Shelamtzion, a popular name around C. E. according to the ossuaries.

Another name is read completely on the object marked KhQ 439. This one looks like a coarse pyramid in limestone. Beneath the dark base, we read two lines for one personal name: *iôsèpos*, 'Joseph'. The last letter of the first line is clearly an *èta*, which is a little bit damaged. The paleography of the *omega* and the *pi* date the object from the first century A.D. The name *iôsèpos* is the Greek transcription of the Hebrew name *iôséf*. The personal name is well known during our era. It represents 15% of the personal names of Second Temple period according to Rachel Hachlili (1984: 188–211). For example, we find the Greek name of Joseph in the Greek papyri of the Judaean Desert (Benoit 1961: 299; Cotton 1999: 362; Morgenstern 2000: 220–222), on a lamp excavated from Masada (Barag 1994: 61, n°111), in the work of Flavius Josephus whose personal name it is, and in the New Testament with the indeclinable form *iôsèf*. We find also the Latin name *Iosepu(s)* printed on a whitewashed wall (locus 1139) of the Masada fortress (Cotton 1989:211, n°936).

The object mentioned earlier (KhQ439) looks like a coarse seal-stamp. Gustav Dalman (1903: 20) published this kind of seal in 1903 with the Greek name *iogdas* on it. It may be a kind of so-called bread-stamp which could be compared to an example found in Masada and another one made from wood discovered in the caves of Murabba'ât, near the Dead Sea (de Vaux 1961: 35–36, 42). The seal-stamp of *Khirbet* Qumran comes from the locus 30 named by R. de Vaux the "Scriptorium" because he found several inkwells and some pieces of stucco which he thought of being tables and benches used for the duplication of scrolls (de Vaux 1973: 29–31, 104–105). However, the last studies on the objects excavated from the locus 30 cannot confirm this function (Hamidović, forthcoming). Two inkwells were found in the locus, but several more inkwells were discovered in a herodian house of the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem by Nahman Avigad (1983: 127). It is difficult to identify a workshop for copying scrolls according to the other data collected; an activity of writing is only attested in the locus 30. The room is situated in the middle of the *Khirbet*, near the locus 4 which has benches all around the wall, i.e., a room for sitting. I propose to interpret the locus 30 as a room where administrative materials were deposited. Therefore the seal-stamp with *iôsèpos* may have been used to mark something. It may be pottery (but none was found with this print) or food, if we think about the application of bread-stamp. The use of a personal name is strange because all the members of the community, defined as a *yahad*, have given away their goods and properties. Therefore the personal mark seems curious. In the preserved library of Qumran, there is no evidence of a self definition of the community as a particular filiation with Joseph or sons of Joseph.

I have tried to show in an article on the story of Anania and Sapphira in Acts 5 (Hamidović 2005: 407–415) that the community of goods in the first Jewish-Christian community of Jerusalem and in the community of Qumran does not prohibit the conservation of the usufruct. Unlike the explanation of Philo of Alexandria (*Quod omnis probus liber sit* 76–77) and Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* V 17:4) on the rejection of money by Essenes, the site of Qumran presents a proto-industrial complex in the northwestern part. Besides, the Essene manifesto contained in the *Damascus Document* (CD IX 10b–16a; XII 8b–11a; XIV 12b–13; XVI 13–18) attests to an individual use of common property, probably because the full members keep the usufruct of their past possessions. I propose to interpret this seal-stamp with a personal mark as the sign of a preserved usufruct by an Essene member named *iôsèpos*. Another object in *Khirbet* Qumran may also be a seal-stamp. Marked KhQ 2145, it has been discovered in the locus 121, in the proto-industrial complex. The small squared block of limestone has deep incisions. It is possible to read two letters, perhaps in Greek: *to*. The explanation of this object and the inscription is very

difficult but as we have seen with the last inscription, it may be a seal-stamp. The sense of the inscription is totally conjectural but it may be the Greek article. Another lost seal-stamp may give the following name to indicate the product inside the marked jars.

In the Qumran corpus of Greek inscriptions, my selection includes four inscriptions of measures and weights. The inscription KhQ 635 on an *ostrakon* could be read *log*, possibly a transcription of the Hebrew word *log*, a measure of capacity, generally for oil in Leviticus 14, i.e., 0.3 liter. The same measure is attested in Hebrew on a jar excavated in cave 6 (6Q1). Inside the same cave, a large inscription 6Q2 on a cylindrical jar has only one letter in Greek: *mu*. It could be the initial of a personal name or a measure of capacity. If we choose the last explanation, we know several measures beginning with a *mu*: *medimnous*, a measure of cereals, *metrètès*, a measure of liquids, i.e., 39 liters, *modios*, a measure of grains, or *metron*, a measure for solid and liquid according to the *Septuagint* version of Exodus 16:36 and Isaiah 5:10. It is equal to one *seah*. This is a preferable solution. If the *seah* around C.E. is almost seven liters, the jar was half full because the capacity of the jar is 16.6 liters (Lemaire 1987: 823; Shchrori 2001: 105). In the proto-industrial complex of Qumran, many weights have been found. One of them (KhQ 2124) is incised in Greek. On the top of the disk, we can read three letters:]*rjo*. André Lemaire (2003: 358) proposes to reconstruct *ma]rjo* for ‘Marion’ attested in Latin on one ossuary. In the site of ‘*Ain Feshkha*, a weight marked Fesh. 71 has three letters engraved on the top: *lambda*, *epsilon* and *beta*. R. de Vaux (1973: 67–69) thinks the *lambda* indicates the year in Greek epigraphy; the *epsilon* may be the number five and the *beta*, the number two. But weights excavated near the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem show the *beta* could be an abbreviation for *basileòs*, ‘king’. These weights refer to King Herod Agrippa (Meshorer 1970: 97–98; Mazar 1971: 19; Avigad 1983: 129–130). Therefore the weight of ‘*Ain Feshkha* could date from A.D. 42.

Contributions of the Greek inscriptions

Out of 93 inscriptions collected in *Khirbet Qumran*, the caves linked with it and ‘*Ain Feshkha*, 21 are Greek inscriptions, i.e., 23%. André Lemaire was surprised by this proportion (2003: 381), the surprising fact being the small number of Greek inscriptions. If we compare this with the other sites in the Judaeen Desert around C.E., the share of the Greek language in inscriptions and in literary texts at Qumran is low. The other sites have from 25% up to 50% of manuscripts and inscriptions in Greek. In the library of Qumran, 27 manuscripts are written in Greek, i.e., 3% of the preserved library. The Greek of the texts from the Judaeen Desert, both literary and administrative, is the *koinè*, a common language which replaced the diversity of classical Greek dialects. Since Alexander’s conquests in the Near East, Greek had supplanted official Aramaic as the political language; even after Rome had conquered the Hellenistic kingdoms in the first century B.C., Greek became the language of business around C.E. in the Dead Sea area, that is, in the Greek and Roman provinces of Syria, Judea and Arabia. Thus, the discovery of Greek manuscripts and inscriptions in Qumran is not surprising and their small number must be explained.

The Greek manuscripts of Qumran are not mainly administrative texts, as they are in the other sites of the Judaeen Desert, but literary texts. We could thus doubt a daily use of Greek in the Qumran community. However, the publication of the Qumran inscriptions shows that the Greek language is used to weigh products, to seal or to stamp merchandise; and Greek anthroponyms were used, as *iòsèpos* on the seal-stamp shows. Other Greek inscriptions could also attest to the use of Greek personal names inside the Qumran community. Most or several inhabitants knew the Greek language to read and to copy the Greek texts of the *Septuagint* according to the manuscripts marked 4Q119 up to 4Q122: respectively two manuscripts of *Leviticus*, one of *Numbers* and one of *Deuteronomy*. Then, in the Qumran community, Hebrew manuscripts of the *Torah* are close to texts with the same stories translated into Greek. Other

apocryphal texts are also written in Greek, like 4Q127, a paraphrase of *Exodus*. Another manuscript gives information on the status of the Greek language in the Qumran community. The manuscript 4Q460 is an opisthograph scroll, i.e., it is written on both sides. On the recto marked 4Q460, a fragmentary text written in Hebrew intermingles a narrative and prayers which are difficult to recognize. On the verso of the fragment 9 marked 4Q350, there is an administrative account written in Greek. It is possible that the verso in Greek was written by an inhabitant of Qumran. Nevertheless, a secondary use of the manuscript 4Q460 is also possible but this hypothesis raises the question about the access to cave 4 after the destruction of *Khirbet* Qumran in A.D. 68. Therefore I prefer a first use of fragment 9 rather than a second use. The script of the tetragrammon in 4Q460 9 i 10 perhaps shows a first use of a leather sheet to note a list of cereals, then a second use to write a literary text, because the blank leather sheets may go missing when copying. This manuscript testifies to the knowledge of the Greek language by the residents of Qumran.

As stated before, the Qumran library has only 3% of manuscripts that are in Greek. This is explained by the religious characteristics of the library. The Jewish religion around C.E. and in this region privileges Hebrew and, at a lower rate, Aramaic as religious languages. Thus, the low rate of Greek in the Qumran library is not surprising. Greek manuscripts, however, confirm the use of Greek by Qumran residents. A third fragment, discovered in cave 11 and published by E. Puech (1984: 532–535) and now in a French collection, attests to the alternate use of Hebrew and Greek, because the fragment presents both languages on two inscriptions close to each other.

According to Esther Eshel (1997: 39–52), we note that in the corpus of the Qumran inscriptions, in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek, personal names appear in general in very limited numbers. But they do exist. Therefore we cannot explain this small number by the specificity of the community in Qumran. We have discussed the name *iôsepos* on the seal-stamp. Tal Ilan adds “personal names are almost nonexistent in the Qumran literature” (2000: 596), “the documentation of names for the Qumran covenanters is extremely limited” (2000: 598). It is difficult to locate the place of writing for all the inscriptions. For example, a brick has a stamp of the Xth Roman Legion Fretensis (Fesh. 174). It is the sign of a Roman presence at *Khirbet* Qumran at the beginning of the second century A.D. A few inscriptions on pottery, but not all of them have been tested by neutronic analysis (Gunneweg 2003: 389–394). Nevertheless, the information given is essential in order to understand the Greek inscriptions. The short inscriptions with a personal name ending with *-tôn* (KhQ 387), with *log*, a measure of liquid capacity (KhQ 635), with perhaps the Greek transcription of Shelamtsion (KhQ 979), and with a possible consonantal transcription of Aramaic or Hebrew in Greek or Latin (KhQ 2609) are on pottery from Jericho. Therefore we can assume these Greek inscriptions present a link with Jericho. It is difficult to say if the inscriptions have been made in Jericho or in *Khirbet* Qumran but one thing is sure, all of them stayed inside *Khirbet* Qumran. All these incisions have been done after the firing, thus it is difficult to recognize people who came to Qumran with their personal goods, even if these inscriptions are on small pottery, but it is not impossible. For example, two Hebrew inscriptions before firing on a bowl and a jar from Jericho noted two personal names *‘Ele‘azar* and *‘Ely‘azrah*.

Unlike the small but careful Hebrew inscription *Hônih* (KhQ 1313) on a jar which shows the work of a professional scribe, one of the scribes who copied the scrolls, no Greek inscriptions show a skillful scribe who could have copied the Greek scrolls. Who could write in Greek in Judea around C.E.? Aside from Greeks living in Judea, Catherine Hezser demonstrates in a book *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (2001: 90–94) that the Jewish elite knew both spoken and written Greek. The authors of these inscriptions may be members of the educated Jewish society around C.E.

After a study of each inscription, André Lemaire (2003: 383) distinguishes three groups of personal names; probably those of the Qumran residents. The first group has popular names like *'Ele'azar* or *Yôhanan*. The second group has singular names often linked to sacerdotal families like *Hônyh*, *Pinhas*, *Shet*, *Yshm'a'el*. I agree with R. Hachlili's statement (1984: 194) when she says the typically sacerdotal names do not exist but we can also say names are more frequent in sacerdotal families than in other families. Therefore this second group can exist. A third group is composed of personal names attested only in Aramaic (including Nabatean and Palmyrenian) and in North Arabic onomastics like *Zimri* or *Rôma'*. This last group exists probably because *Khirbet* Qumran is near Nabatene, Moab and Idumea. The personal names attested in Greek at Qumran, such as *Iôsêpos*, *Maliton* or *Salamipsion*, correspond to transcriptions of popular Hebrew names. They can be placed in the first group. Therefore they seem to be Greek names of community members.

Signs of hellenization?

These results raise the question about hellenization in the Qumran community: Do the Qumran inscriptions show the hellenization of Qumran residents? We could conclude negatively because the number of Greek inscriptions is low in comparison with other sites in the Judaean Desert. But the preserved Greek inscriptions attest to the use of the Greek language in the Qumran community with weights inscribed in Greek, Greek measures of capacity on jars, and one or two seal-stamps. They attest also probably to the Greek names of Jews, who were members of the Qumran community. The picture of a conservative and rigorous Jewish milieu, the Essenes, who produced and/or copied the Qumran library, must be moderated by the view of the Greek scrolls and now the Greek inscriptions.

Actually, hellenization was a much slower process based on the imitation of the culture of the elite. The Greek control of political and economic activities created an enormous incentive for the higher echelons of the native populations to adopt the Greek lifestyle. Another aspect of Hellenistic culture was that the Greek language was used by non-Greeks who wanted to preserve their ethnic and cultural uniqueness. Thus, native populations could tell their national story in Greek to be understood by others. For example, the translation of the *Torah* into Greek at Alexandria in Egypt can also be understood in this way, and not only to be understood by the hellenized Jews of Alexandria. A third aspect of Hellenistic civilization is the great influence of Greek even on those individuals who never learned the Greek language: numerous Greek words entered into the vocabularies of all other languages. For example, there are loanwords in the Book of *Daniel* or in the Copper Scroll excavated in cave 3. A characteristic of Qumran scrolls is the general lack of Greek loanwords and Hellenistic ideas or practices. Therefore the classical picture of the Qumran community is the strict rejection of Hellenism. But the Greek scrolls in caves 4 and 7, and the 21 Greek inscriptions excavated in *Khirbet* Qumran and *'Ain Feshkha* lead us to distinguish the rejection of Hellenistic ideas and practices because cosmopolitan tendencies, the inherently polytheistic outlook, the emphasis on the human body and on physical images were seen as irreconcilable with the Jewish way of life. But the second aspect of Hellenism, the use of the Greek language to preserve their own culture and ideas, could explain the use of the Greek language in the Qumran community. This use was very low if we compare it with their contemporaries because the possible confusion exists between both positions: both assimilated Hellenistic ideas and practices and used the Greek language to keep Jewish culture alive.

Another hypothesis is possible. A few members of the Qumran community came from Jericho, if we follow the neutronic analysis of some jars. Before they came, they were Hellenized Jews and they chose to become Essene at Qumran. They would have communicated in Greek by way of family tradition; they brought to Qumran their personal goods (with their names or measures of capacity on top), their weights, their seal-stamps, and perhaps their scrolls. Some of

them were scribes and continued to copy scrolls in the Greek language at *Khirbet Qumran*. We note that none of the Greek inscriptions dates from Period I, the period of the community's settlement in *Khirbet Qumran*. Therefore we can suppose the first members used exclusively the Hebrew language and did not adopt the Hellenized culture. Around C.E., Jews with the Greek culture were allowed to become full members in the Qumran community. We know this from the historian Flavius Josephus who, according to his *Autobiography*, was initiated to Essenism when he was between 16 and 18 years of age. Thus Qumran inscriptions show hellenization of a few Qumran residents.

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