

New Testament Fragments amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls



Bill Cooper

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**The Authenticity of the New Testament Fragments from
Qumran.**

This is for my daughters
Rebecca and Josephine
mothers of the most
wonderful grandchildren
that a man was ever
blessed with.
Thank you both!

About the Author

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Cover illustration and Text composition

Text composition and cover design by L. Davey. The cover picture is of Qumran fragment 7Q4.1. It contains a portion of Paul's first letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:16-4:3).

Contents

Introduction		P. 07
A Note on Textus Receptus and the Fragments of Cave 7		P. 09
Chapter One:	7Q4.1 & 7Q4.2 – 1 Timothy 3:16-4:3	P. 11
Chapter Two:	7Q5 - Mark 6:52-53	P. 17
Chapter Three:	7Q6.1 – Mark 4:28	P. 27
Chapter Four:	7Q6.2 – Acts 27:38	P. 33
Chapter Five:	7Q7 – Mark 12:17	P. 37
Chapter Six:	7Q8 – James 1:23-24	P. 41
Chapter Seven:	7Q9 – Romans 5:11-12	P. 45
Chapter Eight:	7Q10 – 2 Peter 1:15	P. 47
Chapter Nine:	7Q11; 7Q12; 7Q13; 7Q14	P. 51
Chapter Ten:	7Q15 – Mark 6:48	P. 55
Chapter Eleven:	7Q16; 7Q17; 7Q18	P. 57
Chapter Twelve:	7Q19 – A Commentary on Romans?	P. 59
Chapter Thirteen:	What Happened to Cave 7?	P. 65
Chapter Fourteen:	Conclusion	P. 69
Appendix: Report on the forensic examination of the fragment 7Q5 in Jerusalem		P. 71
Bibliography		P. 75

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Introduction

In 1955 there were discovered several papyrus fragments in Qumran Cave 7. The unusual – and unexpected – feature of Cave 7 was that all of its fragments were in Greek, as opposed to the exclusively Hebrew and Aramaic scrolls that had been found in the other caves. Apart from two of the fragments which were from the Greek version of the Old Testament (Exodus and the apocryphal Letter of Jeremiah), the rest of the fragments from Cave 7 were all catalogued as unidentified, and were considered indeed to be unidentifiable.

That's how things remained until 1972, when the papyrologist, Dr José O'Callaghan, thought that he would try to identify them. They were housed at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, and in April 1972 he was able to do a hands-on examination of each of them and to take a series of infra-red and other photographs. ¹ What he discovered concerning them was to shock the academic world – the fragments belonged to books of the New Testament.

Why that should have shocked the world of academe was this. The cave and its fragments were sealed up in the year AD 68 when the Roman 10th Legion overran the area. This means that these New Testament books had been written out before that year, and were indeed copied out of earlier exemplars. It means that the New Testament had been written out and was in circulation well inside the Eyewitness Period of AD 30-70. In other words, it undermines everything - and I mean everything! - that the Bible critics have been saying for the past couple of hundred years or so. It means that the Gospels had not after all been a collection of oral traditions handed down over nigh a hundred years, growing all the while with the telling, as the critics have always claimed. It means that they were accounts that had been written out by eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry, and even of His resurrection. They had heard His words and had written them down. It was just too much for the critics to swallow.

The howls of execration lasted for years. Nothing but ridicule and scorn was poured on O'Callaghan's head (it still is in fact), and he became the sniggeringstock of the academic world. The voices that supported him were very few indeed, and they soon found themselves drowned out by the din of protest. And yet O'Callaghan yielded not an inch. He knew the truth of what he had discovered, and issued numerous rebuttals of his critics (see Bibliography).

The main problem that the critics faced was that O’Callaghan knew more about his subject than they did, which is why he was able to rebut their every objection. So the critics did what they always do best. When your argument is weak, then shout longer and louder, and once your opponent can no longer be heard, then simply ignore him as if he had never been. It was a time-honoured strategy, and sometimes it worked. But not this time.

Here we will examine these fragments afresh, and we will consider all that O’Callaghan said about them. The critics have had their say. Since 1972, they have howled their protests and have cowed any and all who would dare to contradict them and their abysmally low view of the Scriptures. That will all come back to bite them one day. Meanwhile, we will consider the evidence which tells us so richly that our New Testament is no collection of fables written out so late that they are worthless, but a thoroughly authentic eyewitness account of the Man Christ Jesus, the Son of God. It is time for the fragments from Qumran Cave 7 to speak for themselves once again.

Bill Cooper

Footnotes to Introduction

1. O’Callaghan, ‘The Identifications of 7Q’, p. 287.

A Note on Textus Receptus and the Fragments of Cave 7

Textus Receptus, the Received Text, was long regarded among scholars – and rightly so - as the original Greek text of the New Testament. Afterwards exonerated by more than 5,000 early manuscript witnesses, it was published in print by Robert Stephens in 1550, and was the text from which all the Reformation Bibles of England and Europe up to the King James Bible were translated. Under the Hand of God, it went around the world, and is still loved and cherished by millions today.

Since the year 1881, however, Textus Receptus has faced a challenge – a serious worldwide effort to replace it with another text altogether, the Alexandrian or ‘Critical’ text. This ‘Critical’ text owes its origins to the Alexandrian Gnostics who, after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, altered the text of the Scriptures to such a degree that hardly two of their texts ever agreed with each other. This seriously undermined the Authority of the Bible in the ancient world, just as it seriously undermines it today. It has been given its modern voice by all the discrepant versions that have been issued since the Revised Version of 1881, the brainchild of Westcott and Hort, and after them Nestle and Kurt Aland et al. In other words, confusion has reigned over what is the Word of God – if there truly is such a thing – and what are the later additions, amendments and omissions that have been made by those whose agenda has been to undermine that Word.

But herein lies the value of the New Testament fragments from Qumran Cave 7. They are all, without exception, from Textus Receptus. There is a very good reason for this. They were all sealed in Cave 7 by the year AD 68, that is two years before the destruction of Jerusalem and hence some years before the invention of the Alexandrian distortions of the Scriptures. In other words, the fragments represent the New Testament in its original state.

Ironically, O’Callaghan, who first identified the fragments as belonging to the New Testament, and Thiede who defended O’Callaghan’s identifications throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, used the Critical Text, as they called it, and not the Textus Receptus as the basis of their reconstructions. Perhaps they thought that scholars wouldn’t listen to them if they used the Received Text. The irony here, however, is the fact that their identifications were entirely correct, although it did lead to one or two minor errors in the

stichometry of their reconstructions. Where these occur, we have nitpickingly corrected them by supplying the stichometry from Textus Receptus, which is always an improvement in accuracy.

So, we have in the New Testament fragments from Cave 7, not only vital witnesses to the early writing and publication of the Books of the New Testament during the Eyewitness Period of AD 30-70, many decades before the critics would have us believe they were written, but witnesses also of the sheer antiquity and originality of the Received Text. It wasn't something dreamed up centuries later as Aland and colleagues have always taught, but was there at the beginning, written out during the Eyewitness Period, the very Words of God which inspired and were given to the New Testament writers. That is why these fragments are worth studying and preserving. They simply could not be more important.

Chapter One: 7Q4.1 & 7Q4.2 - 1 Timothy 3:16-4:3

The Discovery

When, in April 1972, Dr José O'Callaghan arrived in Jerusalem, he had no idea of the storm that was about to break over his head. He thought that he was going to the Rockefeller Museum in that city to try to identify the Old Testament books to which certain scraps of papyrus belonged. The scraps had been recovered in 1955 from Qumran Cave 7. There were nineteen of them altogether (one of which - 7Q19 - was actually an imprint in the floor of the cave of a papyrus that had dissolved away, leaving the ink behind to stain the soil), and two of them had already been identified ten years before as having belonged to the Book of Exodus and to an Old Testament apocryphal book called the Letter of Jeremiah. There was every expectation, therefore, that these remaining fragments would also be identified as belonging to certain Old Testament books, albeit they were all in Greek and not in Hebrew or Aramaic. All O'Callaghan had to do was to find out which ones they belonged to.

Their Greek raised no suspicions at all. It was assumed that the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version of the Old Testament would be the tree they fell out of. But he was soon to learn that that was not the case. The fragments could not be fitted into any Old Testament book at all, canonical or apocryphal, so O'Callaghan did the only thing he could think of. He tried to see if any of the books of the New Testament could accommodate them.

It was an unheard of procedure which went against the grain of everything that he'd been taught. The caves of Qumran, including Cave 7, had all been sealed shut in the year AD 68 to hide their contents from the Romans who were then flooding the area to hunt down Jewish rebels, and according to the critics, no New Testament books had been written out that early. What he found, therefore, came as a profound shock to him. No less than nine of the identifiable fragments could be shown to belong to no less than six New Testament books. It was impossible, but nonetheless true, and he now had a serious choice to make.

Dr O'Callaghan was an internationally esteemed member of academe. He was a leading papyrologist and founder of the Seminario de Papirología, and of the journal *Studia Papirologica*. Yet he knew that all he stood to gain from publishing his findings at the Rockefeller Museum would be ridicule from just about every branch of academe there is. That is a forbidding prospect for any man to face, and yet he was too honest to deny what he had discovered. His integrity would not allow that. So he took the bit between his teeth and he did publish what he found, and went on to defend what he found for many years to come against all kinds of assaults and challengers. But not once did he give in to them. In his mind there was absolutely no doubt about what he had discovered.

The immensity of his discovery's importance is too rarely appreciated, and these days it is even more rarely publicised. Only one champion of note ever laid his career and reputation on the line to defend O'Callaghan's work, and he is Dr Carsten Peter Thiede. The critics savaged him for doing it. In fact, they still savage him years after his untimely death.¹ Thiede was a world-class papyrologist who towered head and shoulders above his peers, and his defence of O'Callaghan's work was stoutly performed. We will be referring to much of Thiede's work as we progress, because he throws a great deal of light on areas which would otherwise go unnoticed.

In this present study, we will examine all the New Testament fragments from Cave 7, including the reverse-image imprint, 7Q19, that remained behind in the floor of the cave long enough to be photographed. This is the first occasion in a good many years on which the fragments have been examined in depth together in the same volume - in fact, it comes as a surprise that no one has ever dealt with all the fragments from Cave 7 before, not even O'Callaghan. Starting with the first in numerical order, we will begin with 7Q4.1 & 7Q4.2, in which are preserved a portion of Paul's First Letter to Timothy - 1 Timothy 3:16-4:3.

7Q4.1 & 7Q4.2 - 1 Timothy 3:16-4:3



Fig.1: 7Q4.1



Fig.2: 7Q4.2

7Q4 is a papyrologist's delight. Usually, fragments of texts on papyrus come from the middle of a page, a paragraph, or a line, and then the one deciphering its contents has a lot of work to do. How many letters were there to a line, what letters were they, and how many lines were there to a page? While he is occupied with that, he has to work out, if he can, what literary work the text is a fragment of. He has to make a note of all the surviving letters that can be discerned, and then try to reconstruct all the letters of which only parts or traces remain. To do this, he has to be something of an expert in the language and even dialect that the text is written in, as well as all the nuances and foibles of its calligraphy, and so on. In short, it can be a mammoth task just trying to offer a reconstruction that makes any sense. He knows that waiting in the wings are a whole tribe of scholars whose only interest in life seems to be to question and preferably undo all the work he has done, and hopefully ruin his reputation as a scholar while they're at it. The scholars of academe can be vicious when they want to be. They will pounce on any uncertainty as a disproof and will milk that for all it is worth, even long after their objections have been answered. They have to. There is a great deal at stake, and it's a lot more than just their own reputations and professorial chairs.

That is why 7Q4 is such a satisfying find. It doesn't come from the middle of a page. It comes from the outside edge, the very end of the scroll, preserving beautifully the last words of each line. That makes the papyrologist's work so much more straightforward. The stichometry (line and letter-count) that he has to work out is simplified immensely, because he knows exactly where each line terminates. That is an enormous plus.

In Figures 1 & 2 above, we can see the fragment almost exactly as it was found. Figure 2 constitutes the last line of text (Line 9), but there was another tiny scrap, now lost by all accounts, which constituted Line 8 of the fragment and which contained two letters,]??. When these fragments were first published in 1962 in what came to be known as the *editio princeps* of the Cave 7 fragments, not one of them was identified as belonging to the New Testament, and this particular tiny scrap was transcribed by the editors with simply two dots]..[, indicating that its letters were unidentifiable.² O'Callaghan identified them both though.

Here is O'Callaghan's initial transcription of 7Q4's surviving letters (given in Greek cursive rather than the uncial or capital letters of the fragment):

1.]η
2.]των
3.]ονται
4.]πνευ
5.]ημο
6. []
7. []
8.]ντ[
9.]Οθε[

... and here is his reconstruction of the fragment's stichometry, showing how the letters are remnants of Paul's first letter to Timothy:³

1. [σινεπιστευθηενκοσμωνανελιμφθ]η.....28 letters
2. [ενδοξη τοδεπνευμαρε]των.....21 letters (with 7 letter gap)
3. [λεγυστεροισκαιροισαποστης]ονται.....31 letters
4. [τινεστησπιστεωσπροσεχοντες]πνευ.....30 letters
5. [μασινπλανησκαιιδιδασκαλιαισδ]ημο.....30 letters⁴
6. [γιωνενυποκρισειψευδολογωνκε].....27 letters
7. [καυστηριασμενωντηνιδιανσουνει].....28 letters
8. [δισινκωλιο]ντ[ωνγαμεινσπεχεσθαι].....29 letters⁵
9. [βρωματωνα]οθε[οσεκτισενεισμετα].....28 letters

There was only one brave attempt of any note to disprove the Pauline provenance of 7Q4, and that was collectively made by Nebe, Muro and Puech, each of whom tried to show that it was in fact from the apocryphal Book of

Enoch.⁶ They all failed, and they failed dismally, mainly because they had to stretch the stichometry of the fragment to breaking point, and had to invent oddities of grammar and vocabulary entirely unknown in ancient Greek literature. Thiede explains how they went astray textually,⁷ but we show how they went astray in a more amusing way in Chapter Nine below.

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Footnotes to Chapter One

1. I had the honour and privilege of talking with Dr Thiede on two occasions; once at a Tyndale Society Conference at Hertford College, Oxford, and later at Lambeth Palace shortly before he tragically died of a heart attack at his home in Paderborn, Germany, aged just 52. Bible apologetics lost one of its most able champions that day.
2. Baillet, M, Milik J, & Vaux R (eds.). 'Les Petites Grottes de Qumran.' Discoveries in the Judaean Desert. Vol. 3. (issued in 2 vols: Textes et Planches). 1962. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
3. O'Callaghan, Los Papiros Griegos de Cueva 7 de Qumran, p. 42.
4. Both O'Callaghan (Los Papiros Griegos de la Cueva 7 de Qumran. p. 42), and Thiede, (Dead Sea Scrolls, p. 157), give a letter-count for line 5 of 31 letters. It seems they had forgotten that Baillet's 1962 editio princeps of the fragment, which gave '????' for the line's surviving letters, had already been corrected by O'Callaghan to '??', which reduces the line to one of 30 letters.
5. It seems that the tiny scrap remaining of line 8 was either lost or deteriorated to nothing sometime after O'Callaghan's examination of the Q7 fragments at Jerusalem.
6. Nebe, G. '7Q4 - Möglichkeit und Grenze einer Identifikation.' Revue de Qumran. vol. 13 (1988). pp. 629-633.
7. Thiede, The Earliest Gospel Manuscript? pp. 50-52.