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THE ESSENE HYPOTHESIS AFTER FIFTY YEARS: AN ASSESSMENT

We have separated from the majority of the people and from mingling with them in these matters and from being in contact with them in these matters.

MMT, C.7-8

1. Introduction (Allegretto capriccioso)

The Essene Hypothesis, the theory that the Essenes were the people who lived at Qumran and who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, appeared at the very beginning of Qumran studies when E.L. Sukenik espoused the notion (first considered by the monks at the Syrian Monastery in Jerusalem), which was then actively supported and developed by Dupont-Sommer, and followed by such notables as J.T. Milik, F.M. Cross, John Allegro and Pere de Vaux. In the early 1950s it seemed a reasonable idea: there were a few large documents that were at variance with what was known of Judaism of the basic era and there were interesting similarities between the group described by Josephus and the beliefs found in the scrolls. By the 1960s, despite literally hundreds of documents having come to light, it had become the only functional scenario for the texts, endorsed by the members of the international team, who had come to have complete control of the scrolls.

Although other approaches to the scrolls were envisaged, nothing was seriously able to challenge the Essene Hypothesis, which totally dominated the following thirty years. Until the release of control on the scrolls, perhaps 95% of all scholarly literature concerning them paid homage to the scenario, yet, during this period, the hypothesis did not provide any new insight into the understanding of the texts.

In 1992 J.H. Charlesworth¹, cautiously articulating the consensus opinion regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls, wrote:

Either the Qumranites were a previously unknown group within early Judaism .. that was strikingly similar to the Essenes, or they are to be identified with the strict group of the Essenes described by Josephus.

Charlesworth adds in a note to this, the slightest wind of change: The reader deserves to know that some excellent scholars are questioning the attribution of Essene to Qumran.

2. Perennial houseguests (Sostenuto)

In contrast to Charlesworth's caution, the following defiant statement written by F.M. Cross, essentially arguing the same point, appeared in BAR in 1977 and was republished in 1993:

'The scholar who would "exercise caution" in identifying the sect of Qumran with the Essenes places himself in an astonishing position: He must suggest seriously that *two* major parties formed communistic religious communities in the same district of the desert of the Dead Sea and lived together in effect for two centuries, holding similar bizarre views, performing similar or rather identical lustrations, ritual meals, and ceremonies. He must suppose that one, carefully described by classical authors, disappeared without leaving building remains or even potsherd behind; the other, systematically ignored by classical sources, left extensive ruins, and indeed a great library. I prefer to be reckless and flatly identify the men of Qumran with their perennial houseguests, the

¹ James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Doubleday, New York 1992, pp. xxxiv - xxxv. The note (#14) is p. xxxvii.

Essenes.²

This is a remarkable and indeed reckless statement of belief. Cross has definitely imbued it with rhetorical force, and it would be quite an appealing argument if the premises were sound, but in fact very few are, as can be noted in the following analysis of his underlying assumptions.

* Assumption 1: the writers of the scrolls lived at Qumran.

Nothing of course in the scrolls indicates this. They were found in a number of caves, a few near the settlement, others kilometres away. No scrolls whatsoever were found in the ruins. The infamous "writing tables" — still on display as such — have been analysed and found more suitable for contortionists than for scribes³.

And, as there seems to have been several hundred different scribal hands involved in the copying of the scrolls (of whom fewer than twenty seem to have worked on more than one text, and then only two or three), there is no possibility of there having been a scribal school at Qumran which produced them all: assuming occupation of the site for a full two hundred years, there would have been a turn around of at least three scribes per year, each touching one text. The implications of the vast numbers of scribal hands have in fact caused a change in more recent analyses: it seems now, for many, only the "sectarian" scrolls were produced at Qumran and all the rest were imported, though, regarding just how one can identify one of these sectarian scrolls, your guess is as good as mine!

I have argued elsewhere that the scrolls were brought to Qumran (almost certainly from Jerusalem and deposited in the caves at one time in 63 BCE).⁴

² F.M. Cross, *The Historical Context of the Scrolls*, [in:] *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Hershel Shanks, Vintage, New York 1993, p. 25. Zdzislaw Kapera has pointed out that the original was even earlier: *The Early History of the Qumran Community*, in the MCCORMICK QUARTERLY vol. 21, No. 3, March 1968, pp. 249-264, here page 254, so it seems this statement has had a long life.

³ Bruce Metzger, *The Furniture in the Scriptorium at Qumran RQ 4* (1959), pp. 509-516; Kenneth W. Clark, *The Posture of the Ancient Scribe*, BA 26 (1963), pp. 63-72.

⁴ Ian Hutchinson, *63 BCE: A Revised Dating for the Deposition of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, QC Vol.8, No.3 (Nov. 1999), pp. 177 - 194. The basic idea of

* **Assumption 2: the writers were from a "bizarre" sect.**

The scrolls are the earliest Hebrew religious texts we have. People who want to retroject rabbinical ideas onto the Judaism of the period of the scrolls are simply being anachronistic. It is difficult to make claims about texts when the context for their production hasn't been ascertained. I would argue however that *we* have no way to separate the writers of the Qumran texts from mainstream Judaism of the time.

Lawrence Schiffman, commenting on one of the tefillin found at Qumran, said, "Since it contains additional biblical material not required by the later rabbinical tradition, these can be considered sectarian tefillin."⁵ This is interesting in that we have no examples of what Schiffman might call non-sectarian tefillin from the era. He retrojects later rabbinical tradition into the Qumran period, expecting it to be in some way valid. However, there are various different texts to be found in the Qumran tefillin, making one think that the form had not as yet been stabilized, indicating not that the tefillin demonstrated sectarianism, but the development of tefillin. His analysis here reads as though he knew that the writers were sectarians, so the tefillin must be as well.

* **Assumption 3: the people who lived at Qumran were a "bizarre" sect.**

From the archaeology of Qumran there is *absolutely* no evidence to support this. The idea of a religious community migrated from an analysis of the scrolls to an analysis of the site, yet P. Bar-Adon has shown evidence that Qumran was part of the Hasmonean defence system.⁶ It was clearly built as a state project, for, as there were no natural water sources at the site, a costly aqueduct was built to allow the establishment at that precise point. To enter the establishment one has to pass two sides of a defensive tower, which was

scrolls from Jerusalem is that of Norman Golb; see *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Scribner, New York 1995.

⁵ Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Doubleday, New York 1994, p. 309.

⁶ P. Bar-Adon, *The Hasmonean Fortresses and the State of Khirbet Qumran, "Eretz-Israel" 15* (1981), English summary, p. 86.

initially built without access on the ground floor. This was a military post. What happened after it was abandoned at the end of period IB has not been ascertained, in that there are a number of divergent views as to the significance of the site in period II.⁷

An ostrakon found at Qumran which was initially analysed by Cross and Eshel⁸ as representing a deed of gift to the yachad has been used to argue for the presence of a religious community at the site. Ada Yardeni has also written on the ostrakon concerned showing that the word yachad is simply not present on the item and Fred Cryer has argued that it was not a deed of gift, but a deed of sale.⁹

The 39 separate burials of animal bones in open spaces in the compound at Qumran have been used to point to sectarian meals.¹⁰ This however is highly unlikely. First, de Vaux points out that, unlike those found at Qumran, the remains from sacrifices should be burnt according to Lev7:17 and that no altar for sacrifices was found at Qumran.¹¹ F.E. Zeuner, who examined the bones, indicated that amongst the animals represented there were 16 examples of beef, which excludes the possibility of a Passover meal. He also says, "If the bones are the remains of meals, as is probable, the meals consisted usually of one animal only which implies a comparatively small company."¹²

⁷ Beside the religious establishment, I've heard it was a Roman type villa, a fortified farm, a centre for the collection of bitumen, a factory for the production of perfume, or papyrus etc.

⁸ F.M. Cross and Esther Eshel, *Ostraca from Khirbet Qumran*, IEJ 47 (1997), pp. 17-28.

⁹ Ada Yardeni, *A Draft of a Deed on an Ostrakon from Khirbet Qumran*, IEJ 47 (1997): 233-237. See also F.H. Cryer, *The Qumran Conveyance: A Reply to F. M. Cross and E. Eshel*, SJOT 11 (1997): 232-240. Regarding the "Yachad" reading, one could also see Norman Golb, *Qadmoniot and the 'Yachad' Claim*, QC 7 (1997), pp. 171-174, which has been placed on the web at <http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/PROJ/SCR/Yahad.html>. (In the same issue, Phillip R. Callaway, *A Second Look at Ostrakon No. 1 from Khirbet Qumran*, QC 7, pp. 145-170, argues credibly that the ostrakon, written not in the first person as would be expected, was probably not a deed at all and would not have been accepted as such given its wording; he also tentatively places it during the Second War.)

¹⁰ F.M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed., (1961), pp. 69-70 & 101-102.

¹¹ Roland de Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Oxford 1972, p. 14.

¹² F.E. Zeuner, *Notes on Qumran*, PEQ 1960, pp. 28-30. Citation from p. 29.

(One could also include an argument here that the cemetery at Qumran is evidence for a religious sect, but, as a number of similar graveyards have been found over recent years, it would seem that such burials were in fact relatively common.)¹³

Philip Davies once asked, regarding the monastery scenario applied to Qumran — which could be extended here to the Essene Hypothesis in general —, "Had the scrolls not been found in the nearby caves, would the Qumran ruins have been interpreted as such?"¹⁴

* **Assumption 4: the site was inhabited for (most of) two centuries.**

While this is an attempt to give some notion of continuous communal life for the inhabitants, the archaeology is so ambivalent on

| Reign | Period | Qumran | | Masada | |
|----------------|----------|--------|------------------------|--------|---------------------|
| | | Coins | Coins per year | Coins | Coins per year |
| J. Hyrcanus I | -104 | 18 | - | | |
| Alex. Jannaeus | 103-76 | 143 | 5.5 | 91* | 1.4 |
| Hyrc. II | 63-40 | 5 | 0.2 | | |
| Antigonus | 40-37 | 4 | 1.3 | | |
| Herod | 37-4 | 16 | 0.5 | 395 | 12 |
| Archaeus | 4BCE-6CE | 15 | 1.5 | 177 | 17.7 |
| Procurators A. | 6-14 | 10 | 1.25 | 109 | 13.6 |
| Procurators T. | 14-37 | 49 | 2.1 | 189 | 7.3 |
| Agrippa I | 41-44 | 83 | 27.7 | 114 | 28.5 |
| Procurators N. | 53-66 | 51 | 3.9 | 223 | 17.2 |
| | | | Percentage (total 394) | | Percentage of total |
| | | | 4.5 | | 7 |
| | | | 36.3 | | |
| | | | 1.2 | | |
| | | | 1.0 | | |
| | | | 4.0 | | 30 |
| | | | 3.8 | | 13.5 |
| | | | 2.5 | | 8.3 |
| | | | 12.4 | | 14.4 |
| | | | 21.0 | | 9 |
| | | | 12.9 | | 17 |

Periods of the Procurators: A. = Augustus, T. = Tiberius, N. = Nero

* The 91 coins is the total of Hasmonean coins as no individual breakdown was available.

¹³ See, for example, Juergen Zangenberg, *The 'Final Farewell': A Necessary Paradigm Shift in the Interpretation of the Qumran Cemetery*, QC Vol. 8, No. 3 (Nov, 1999), pp. 213 - 218. Zangenberg cites the work of Konstantine Politis, who found an enormous cemetery of 3500 graves, of which "all the graves closely resemble the burials found at Khirbet Qumran" (Zangenberg's reading) at Tell Qazone in Jordan.

¹⁴ Philip R. Davies, *How Not to Do Archaeology*, BA 51 (1988), p. 205.

the matter, that it doesn't support the attempt. Yet the coin distribution at Qumran so eloquently speaks about the usage of the site. The following table shows the distribution of coins by years¹⁵ at the site for periods IB and II (excluding the two hoards of Tyrian coins from locus 120). Included for comparison are the distributions for the same period at Masada.

As can be seen from the table above the Qumran coins indicate very little, if any, presence between the period of Alexander Jannaeus and the Procurators, yet the Masada coins show that there was an intense presence at the time of Herod. One would expect a similar distribution as Qumran, given the quantity of coins minted by Herod, if the site were occupied during that period. Why should Masada, which according to Josephus was built by Alexander Jannaeus as it would seem Qumran Ib was, have the coin distributions which are so extremely different?

The "Coins per year" column simply indicates the number of coins for each period divided by the length of the period. If we assume for the moment that the coins were only dropped during the period of their minting and that the coins attributed to Hyrcanus II were actually his¹⁶, in the seventy-two years between the death of Alexander Jannaeus and that of Herod, an average of 0.42 coins were dropped each year. (During the period of Herod one coin was dropped at Qumran on average every two years, ten times fewer than during the period of Alexander Jannaeus, while the contrary appears to be true at Masada.)

¹⁵ The basic data is taken from Robert D. Leonard Jr., *Numismatic Evidence for the Dating of Qumran*, QC 7, p. 231, who was working from a German publication of de Vaux's notes (see Leonard for bib.), though I have attempted to break down the Hasmonean figure he provides, using information from James Vanderkam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, Eerdmans/SPCK, 1994, p. 22., for Hyrcanus II and Antigonus, and de Vaux's original reports in RB (1954, p. 230; 1956, p. 565) for the John Hyrcanus I data, though the John Hyrcanus I data may have been subsumed by the current figure for Alexander Jannaeus, in which case it should be added to it. (Leonard only cites a total number of coins as Hasmonean.)

¹⁶ The coins attributed to Hyrcanus II may in fact have been issued by John Hyrcanus I. The use of the name Jehochanan by Hyrcanus II has not been confirmed. It is only through supposition based on Judaeic coins. He is simply called "Hyrcanus" in MishC, while Alexander Jannaeus is called by the Hebrew name, Jonathan in 4Q448.

Coins may circulate long after their issue¹⁷, and this fact could easily explain the presence of low numbers of coins pertaining to certain periods found at Qumran, ie these coins weren't deposited in the period related to their minting, but perhaps well after that period. It is clear, however, that the period of Alexander Jannaeus is indicated as one of the periods of habitation at Qumran. There is no tangible indication of habitation of the site again until procuratorial times. (One should add here that the two hoards of Tyrian coins were not buried beneath the archaeological layer in the IB period level but above it, and therefore it doesn't belong to the IB period¹⁸.)

Assuming an analogous distribution of Hasmonean coins at Masada as at Qumran, a likely scenario to deal with the data is that both sites were inhabited at the time of Alexander Jannaeus, then abandoned at the arrival of Pompey¹⁹, but, while Masada became important to Herod and was reoccupied, Qumran lay in virtual disuse until the time of the Roman Procurators. Yadin reports that there were no constructions at Masada certainly attributable to Hasmonean times nor pottery matching recognizably pre-Herodian types, but adds, on consideration of the coins, that "any building and cisterns, which were constructed on this site before King Herod, were the work of King Alexander Jannaeus"²⁰. In a survey of the archaeology of Qumran, Gregory Doudna argues that the absence of certain distinctive ceramic types at Qumran points to a relatively substantial period of abandonment between periods IB and II.²¹

It has also been quibbled that, due to the finding of a late coin (issued by Archelaus) in a rubble fill of an early period (Trench A, from IB), that coin indicates there was little or no gap in habitation,

¹⁷ Note for example, de Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 23: "a coin of Herod was found with four coins of Alexander Jannaeus, and one of Antigonus associated with a group of eight coins of Alexander Jannaeus but also close to a coin of the Procurators."

¹⁸ De Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 34: they "were buried beneath the level of Period II and above that of Period IB."

¹⁹ See Josephus AJ 14.3.4 and BJ 1.6.5 for Pompey requiring Aristobulus to yield up his fortresses.

²⁰ Yigael Yadin, *Masada*, London 1966, p. 203.

²¹ Gregory L. Doudna, *Redating the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran: the case for 63 BCE*, QC 8:4 (Dec 1999), pp. 31-33.

but de Vaux explains this coin as having been dropped by one of the workers moving the debris.²²

* **Assumption 5: the indications from the scrolls are extremely similar to those of Josephus's Essenes.**

While one can expect there to be many similarities between them — they are after all both reflections of Judaism of a roughly similar period —, this is basically an argument from silence. How can one say that the Essenes were more like the scrolls people than were other groups within Judaism? We simply don't know what the beliefs and practices of the others were, to be able to make such a comparison, yet we know, because they are Jewish groups, that they also will have similarities. (The problem only arises when we reject Rabbinical Judaism into the period of the Dead Sea documents with some notion of it being normative, as it would seem with some of the analysis of Lawrence Schiffman. It is only natural that the scrolls will seem outside post-Yavneh orthodoxy. Compare the Christianity of Augustine with that of Clement of Alexandria to see what a few hundred years can do.)

So as not to go through all the assumptions, let me mention just one more:

* **Assumption 6: the Essenes lived at Qumran (& were the scroll writers).**

Pliny the Elder's "Natural History", 5.73, is dragged to support this assumption as the only reference which can conceivably place the Essenes in the basic area of Qumran. The analysis is, however, based on the use of a single word — translated without sufficient contextual justification — to support an a priori assumption that the text refers to Qumran.

This a priori approach to Pliny's text is typified in Roland de Vaux's "Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls".²³ First he eliminates the more obvious reading "below them [the Essenes] was the

²² De Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²³ De Vaux, *op. cit.*, pp 134-135.

town of Engada" ("*infra hos Engada oppidum fuit*"), by taking the space to show that there was nothing known to be above En Gedi. (However, with the recent excavations of Yizhar Hirschfeld, a small village of numerous single person habitations has been found above En Gedi.²⁴) De Vaux then tells us that the key word "*infra*" can mean "to the south of" or "down stream". (It also has other meanings, such as "below" and "within".) Referring to "to the south of", de Vaux writes, "If this usage is contested, we still have the frequent use of the term *infra* in the sense "down stream of" in relation to a valley or a river." De Vaux is covering his bets and showing that his interest is in justifying his use of "*infra hos Engada oppidum fuit*" to place the Essenes at Qumran: "to the south of/down stream of them was the town of Engada". He is not talking about what the text says, but what he can get it to say, by hook or by crook.

But if we examine the text under question we will find that neither translation of "*infra*" is satisfactory. If we read the text in context we see that Pliny describes the Jordan at the beginning of 5.71, saying how it flows into the Dead Sea (Asphaltitis). Leaving the Jordan he goes back and mentions some of the places in central Palestine before moving on in 5.72 to give more description of the sea and to deal with places on the east side of the Dead Sea, telling us that Machaerus, in the mountains of Moab, was the second strongest fortress in the land and that Callirrhoe's waters were beneficial. His description then crosses the sea to deal with the Essenes and other interests on the western shore until he runs out of material at Masada. As can be seen Pliny's is an itinerary not following some cardinal direction, but simply trying to cover all the stops available to him from the literature he is working from.

One can see that there can be no notion of "down stream" here, especially considering that we have crossed from the mountainous Machaerus down to and over the sea to En Gedi. We are not following the Jordan at all, but an itinerary that Pliny has cribbed together, so a notion of "down stream" cannot be supported from the text. Further, when one used "*infra*" to mean "down stream", a conducting medium, a valley or river, is invariably close at hand. There

²⁴ The information comes from a paper posted by the Israeli archaeologist, Yizhar Hirschfeld, "Ein Gedi 1998". The URL is: <http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/orion/programs/Hirschfeld98.html>.

doesn't seem to be anything in the text to suggest what En Gedi was "downstream of" — the Jordan was finished with at the beginning of 5.71 so cannot be related as downstream, the Dead Sea does not allow the notion "down stream" at least from a reader's point of view, and there is no indication of any valley in the text —, so a translation of "*infra*" as "down stream" does not arise from the text, though without a context it is a possible reading.

The suggestion of "south of" has even less credibility, when you think that the progress of Pliny's description follows the river south, then goes north again, then goes east, then goes west to arrive at where the Essenes were. It could still mean "south of" although there is nothing in the text to suggest it. Yet, in his description of Judaea Pliny does actually use a term that means "south" — twice — in 5.71 "*ab oriente Iulidae et Hippo, a meridie* [ie "to the south"] *Tarichea...*, *ab occidente Tiberiade*", and in 5.72 "*ab oriente Arabia Nomadam, a meridie Machaerus*". These are expressions that Pliny may be using from the hypothesized source, M. Vipsanius Agrippa, when he wants to refer to the south. So, not only are there no contextual clues for a reading of "*infra*" indicating "to the south of", but the writer already uses a word meaning "south" twice in the description of Judaea in which some would like "*infra*" to take on that meaning as well. (This reading of "*infra*" is that supported by James VanderKam: "Some have argued that Pliny's words "lying below" [the Loeb's translation of "*infra*"] imply that the settlement should be sought on the hills above En-gedi, but his words appear to mean "to the south of." Furthermore, these hills have no trace of communal occupation."²⁵ It's interesting to note VanderKam's last statement here in retrospect, given the Hirschfeld excavations in the hills above Ein Gedi.)²⁶

The only conclusion that I can come to is that those who need Pliny try to make the text mean what they would like it to rather than dealing with what Pliny actually says. However, without contextual clues, the simplest reading, the one that de Vaux attempted to discredit, ie that "*infra*" meant "below", should be strongly con-

²⁵ VanderKam, *op cit.*, p 72.

²⁶ There was an interesting debate in 1962 in RB about whether "south of" or "downstream of" were the appropriate translation here for *infra*. Obviously the simple "below" was not in consideration: this was high season for the Essene Hypothesis. See RB 1962, p. 380 for R.M. Laperrousaz's conclusions.

sidered, especially given the existence of a communal settlement above En Gedi.²⁷

There are other difficulties with the use of this text not covered here. However, let me finish with Pliny by saying that the most conciliatory approach is that no-one can build a case either way on Pliny's passage, yet the "south of/down stream" reading of "infra" in N.H. 5.73 is a necessary condition of the Essene Hypothesis. Without "infra" being thus translated there is nothing substantial at all to link the Essenes with Qumran.

3. Essenes? (Scherzo)

The points indicated above show Cross's statement of the Essene Hypothesis to be reckless and assumption riddled. If the scrolls were produced in Jerusalem (as indicated by the vast number of scribal hands involved and the fact that very few scribes are ever used more than once), then the basic structure of Cross's argument falls apart. If the Essenes cannot be shown to have inhabited the settlement at Qumran, Cross's conceit falls apart a second time. We are left with the evidence for the Essene Hypothesis like the new clothes of the Emperor. But can we eliminate the Essenes from the Qumran scene once and for all?

Cecil Roth looked at a number of conflicts between the Essene descriptions found in Josephus and Philo as compared with the contents of the scrolls.²⁸ His first conflict is that amongst the scrolls is the "Roll of the War of the Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness", whereas the Essenes were against war. He argues that "one (ex?) Essene who fought in the War" doesn't reflect on any general tendency of the group as described in the sources. He also mentions Josephus's account of their "passive resistance" to Roman torture

²⁷ The case for the simple reading of *infra* as "below" is strengthened by a 4th century writer, C. Julius Solinus, who seems to be using the same source as Pliny and gives "*Engadda oppidum infra Essenos fuit*" in his "Collectanea rerum memorabilium", XXXV, 12; cited in Christoph Burchard, *Solin et les Esseniens*, RB 1967, pp 392-407. Pliny's slightly more compact wording allows the doubt. (If in fact Solinus is using Pliny, then his less ambiguous reading indicates an ancient understanding of Pliny 5, 73.)

²⁸ Cecil Roth, *Why the Qumran Sect Cannot Have Been Essenes*, RQ, 3 (Feb 1959).

aimed at making them "abjure their faith". (This is also the approach taken a few centuries earlier by Antiochus IV who forceably attempted to convert ordinary Jerusalem Jews.) It in no way implies that those tortured were warlike. In fact the only response that has been mooted is that Josephus's Essenes did use arms to protect themselves — from bandits!

Roth goes on to list a number of other reasons for his case, the first being the predominant celibacy of the Essenes indicated in the ancient sources, yet the scrolls have many rulings about women, marriage, childbirth and sexually transmitted disease.²⁹ We are obviously not dealing with the vast majority of Essenes when we look at the scrolls. Josephus alone was even aware that there were Essenes who did not reject marriage. On the other hand, nothing in the scrolls points to a community of celibates. Other problems include the differences regarding ideas on slavery, animal sacrifice and property. His arguments deserve reconsideration. But let me add a few other reasons to doubt the Essene link with the Dead Sea Scrolls.

If my analysis showing that the scrolls were deposited in 63 BCE is correct³⁰, then they were written well before the documented activities of the Essenes who seem to have come to a certain prominence at the time of Herod.

Norman Golb points out that Pliny the Elder, who died at the time of the eruption of Vesuvius, wrote paragraph 5.73 of his Natural History with a post-Jewish War perspective, talking of the destruction of Jerusalem: new adherents to the sect arrive day by day though En Gedi below them was in ruins as was Jerusalem.³¹ This means that Pliny was writing under the idea that the Essenes were still practising where they lived. While this is an impossibility for the

²⁹ For those still contemplating that the cemetery at Qumran was in some way sectarian, it should be remembered that the remains of a discrete number of women were found there. On this see, Joan Taylor, *The Cemeteries at Khirbet Qumran and Women's Presence at the Site*, DSD 6, pp. 284-323. Taylor criticizes what she considers to be false divisions between "main" cemetery and secondary "extensions" and talks of attempts to "marginalize women in the cemetery and therefore argue for a male celibate Essene hypothesis." See also Assumption #3 and footnote #9 on the cemetery. For a recent contrary view, in favour of the Essene Hypothesis, there is Emile Puech, *The Necropolises of Khirbet Qumran and 'Ain el-Ghuweir and the Belief in the Afterlife*, BASOR 312 (Nov 1998), pp. 21-36.

³⁰ See my article cited in footnote #4.
³¹ Golb, *op. cit.*, pp. 18f.

site of Qumran, it's quite in accord with the Hirschfeld finds at Ein Gedi. (This leads critics to ignore the post-war present tense and refer to a hypothesized source, from M. Vipsanius Agrippa, who Pliny was simply rewriting. Granted that Pliny did use Agrippa, there is no mention of Agrippa here, the style is quite different from that which is demonstrably his, and he was long dead at the time Jerusalem was destroyed.)

The texts are for the most part strongly in favour of the temple; one need only consider MMT, the temple rosters (mishmarot), the Copper Scroll with part of its treasures being accoutrements from the temple, liturgies, psalms, and visions from the temple (Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifices). This is consistent with the fact that the leadership mentioned in some scrolls were the sons of Zadok, though not consistent with the fact that the Essenes had been excluded from the temple because of their non-standard practices.

It is also very difficult to envision that an egalitarian group which elects its officers by show of hand could also support such a hereditary leadership as the sons of Zadok.

4. "We have separated" (Allegro con spirito)

While there are similarities between the Essenes and the scrolls people, there are quite obvious differences, which seem to me to be enough to indicate, contra Cross, that the Essenes cannot be related to the scrolls. I think it is time to contemplate what new information, what new insights that the Essene scenario has provided since it was first introduced fifty years ago. I fear we will find that it has given us nothing at all. The theory has given us nothing; we can't connect the Essenes to Qumran or the scrolls, and it would seem that the descriptions of them conflict on important issues with what we know of the writers of the scrolls.

But, if the Essenes cannot be connected to the scrolls, where in fact are the signs of this important group? Josephus named it the third Jewish sect, so where are they? Strangely, no-one seriously asked for such signs before the Qumran texts were discovered. Everyone was resigned to the fact that we don't have all the information we'd like about the past. We are simply fortunate to have re-found the scrolls. It would, however, be unpalatable to remove this

Essene morsel and not provide the taste of some other treat to savour.

I have already indicated that one cannot go by the religion of the rabbis to say what the first or second century BCE religion should have been like: two wars, the deaths of many of the leading proponents of various religious positions, a lot of hardship and a forced reorganization of the religion all intervene. I have also noted the strongly temple-oriented content in the scrolls and the leadership of the sons of Zadok. Can the religion in the scrolls simply be the temple-centred religion in all its heterogeneity from the Hasmonean era and before?

At this point, some readers will protest: "but the scrolls are in fact against the priests in Jerusalem!" Although this is against the grain of much of what the scrolls show about the temple, there are a few instances of anti-priestly rhetoric whose significance needs to be accounted for. We can in fact see two circumstances in which such a situation may have been relevant: consider the time when Menelaus and his brother Lysimachus were in charge of the temple and many of the priesthood had escaped into the wilderness or joined with Judas Maccabaeus³². Obviously in that situation those priests in the temple were wicked. However, when the priests returned to Jerusalem with the triumphant Judas, they continued the old temple cult. The other circumstance to consider regards those who were forced to flee Jerusalem at the time of the reign of Salome Alexandra and Pharisaic ascendancy. Some of these went to the various fortresses around Judea³³, and obviously those in charge of the temple were wicked, though with the aid of Aristobulus II, the exiles returned to Jerusalem.

We should also remember, that, in that most "sectarian" of documents, the "War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness", it is the high priest who gives the troops the pep talk before battle. He is there with his brothers, the priests, and the Levites. It is the priests who blow the trumpets. Here in the "sectarian heartland" of the War Scroll, the organization known from the temple is given pride of place.

I see no reason why the scrolls could not have been written from in, or around, the temple. In fact, I read MMT to have been pro-

³² *I Maccabees* 3:49,54.

³³ *Josephus, A.J.* 13,16,2.

duced by the temple conservative priesthood, hence the criticism of some of the less conservative sons of Aaron, and the Sadducee-like positions of some of the rulings³⁴. It is a staunch defense of temple purity and the Sadducee-like rulings are only to be expected, if the Sadducees were a later reflection of the old temple cultus.

The temple-centredness however is generally brushed aside — as are the other things that don't fit one's theories, becoming labeled metaphors or code-words and then redefined³⁵ — and the text is taken to have been written by a group opposed to the temple, a group who had abandoned society to go and live at places like Qumran. We see, however, in IQS that the members of the yachad were not to discuss the Law or legal matters with non-members, or to take anything from them unless paid for (IQS 5:15-17). The separation talked of here is not the isolation imagined for Qumran, but a separation within the society at large.

In MMT specifically, it is the priesthood which has separated itself from the majority of the people and their impurity (MMT C.7-8): one need only consider the dividing wall in the temple, there to maintain temple purity, and the furor caused when Alcimus removed

³⁴ Lawrence Schiffman provides a good analysis of these rulings. See, for example, *Reclaiming...* op. cit., pp. 86f, and *The Sadducean Origins of the Dead Sea Scrolls Sect.* [in:] *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Hershel Shanks, Vintage, New York 1993, pp. 35-49.

³⁵ For example, when the texts talk about the *kittim*, most people take the term as a codeword for "Romans", but why can't the *kittim* actually have been *kittim*, ie from Cyprus as the Jews called those people? It is only the secondary interpretations based on the Essene Hypothesis which presupposes the Roman era and therefore the villains were Romans. Besides, who else worshipped their standards (*otot*)? Unfortunately, the Romans didn't worship their standards, although they made sacrifices before them. However this idea from Peshet Habakkuk 6, 3-4 seems to have convinced many people that the sacrificers before the standards must have been Roman. This is another argument from silence, for we don't know the behaviour of other armies in such matters, yet we know from Ps 74:4 that standards (*otot*) were placed in the temple by the enemies of the Jews — "for what purpose?" one wonders. The significance of Ps 74:4 and its relationship with pHab was pointed out to the community by H.H. Rowley in *The Kittim and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, PEQ 1956, pp. 92-109. There is nothing tangible to press us to accept the equation. Let me just add that the first hostile Seleucid troops that the Jews encountered were Cypriot mercenaries who helped install Menelaus (2Mac 4:29b). At the same time we hear that Damascus of course isn't Damascus. And the sons of Zadok are not the sons of Zadok. And on goes the story.

it — at least in Hasmonean propaganda³⁶. This notion of the separation between clean and unclean is integral to mainstream Judaism, as espoused by the priestly prophet Ezekiel in v44:23. There is, even in the more "sectarian" of the scrolls such as IQM and MMT, a strong priestly content.

"A plant in the land of Israel is like the first-fruits, it is for the priests."

MMT, B.62-63

If the foregoing is correct, then both Cross and Charlesworth have overlooked the prime candidate for the writers of the scrolls. Both assume that the choice is between the Essenes and some previously unknown group, not even considering the possibility that the texts should be taken more literally as having been produced by the sons of Zadok and thus coming from the Jerusalem temple. The texts may have been heterogeneous and may have dealt with diverse historical contexts ranging from the Seleucid period through to the arrival of the Romans, but the obvious contender is embodied in the scrolls' support for a temple centred religion.

Theirs is an argument based on the elimination of a straw man — a hypothetical and historically unheard of group — in favour of a well-attested entity, the Essenes, completely ignoring the cited and attested sons of Zadok, who, as Ezekiel 44:15 tells us, "kept charge of my sanctuary when the people went astray from me."

Our examination of the candidate put forward by Cross and Charlesworth causes the following doubt: unless we can get past the assumptions by means of positive evidence and produce solid responses to counteract arguments such as those of Roth, should the Essene Hypothesis — which has dominated the analysis of the scrolls for the last fifty years — be seen as anything other than a dead-end side-street in Qumran studies in which we find ourselves? I don't think we can and I don't think it should.³⁷

³⁶ *JMacc* 9:54.

³⁷ In March 2000, I was accused by a person on the internet email list ANE of

With no sign of those perennial houseguests lurking at Qumran, is there really any reason to believe that first or second century BCE Judaism is not reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls?

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HOW MANY TOMBS IN QUMRAN?

Introduction

If somebody in the 21st century studies the story of the Qumran archaeological research of the 1950s, he will certainly be surprised by a series of 'improvidential accidents' dogging two eminent archaeologists, Father Roland de Vaux of the École Biblique and Gerald Lankester Harding, Director of the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; and their team. The two and their fifteen workers spent full three weeks (from Nov. 24th to Dec. 14th, 1951) digging up the Khirbet Qumran site¹ and they did not discover Cave 4, which was just within a stone's throw to the west of the plateau with their tents, on the other side of a small torrent bed. They missed the cave even though it must have been visible. It is easily recognized in a 1920s photograph published by Frank Moore Cross² and a photograph of April 25, 1946 from the collection of the Palestine Archaeological Museum³. It was certainly the bad luck

attempting to "erase the history of (Essene) Jews", because of the types of arguments presented here. (Stephen Goranson, "anc "case for 63 BCE," Doudna, Qumran Chronicle", Mon, 27 Mar 2000 14:08:46 -0500 (EST). ANE archives: http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/ANE/OI_ANE.html)

I hope that this phrase, with its subtext of Nazi solutions, is no reflection of any but the few staunchest adherents of the Essene Hypothesis.

¹. R. de Vaux, *Fouille au Khirbet Qumran*, "Revue Biblique" 60 (1953), pp. 83-106.

². F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, 3rd Edition, Sheffield 1995, fig. 1 (after p. 128).

³. Cf. E. Tov, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Microfiche* [...] *Companion Volume*, Leiden 1993, p.75, PAM negatives 35.569-570.