



The Woman Question and Female Ascetics Among Essenes

By *Linda Bennett Elder*

Despite recent studies on Jewish women in the Greco-Roman world (e.g., Levine 1992; Kraemer 1993), little scholarly

attention has been directed to women's experience in Early Judaism of the Late Second Temple period. The present study is part of a larger project which is interested in establishing the social location of Jewish women within these chronological parameters (ca. 180 BCE – 70

CE). Social location is defined as the subject's relationship to external aspects of reality within her community that shape, determine, and define her status and influence within that community.

A marked increase in religious piety was characteristic of several



Priestesses in the Greco-Roman World.

Although the priestess of Arsinoe Philopater held office for life and was not obliged to be a virgin (Pomeroy 1984:57), asceticism is characteristic among permanent religious functionaries from the Hellenistic period forward (Kraemer 1993:90–91) and may have had its genesis as early as the Old Babylonian period among the Naditu of Sippar (Harris 1962). A strict asceticism characterized the religious praxis of permanent members of the Isaic priesthood in the Greco-Roman world (Witt 1971:91). These religious func-

tionaries also received extensive training toward the execution of their sacred duties. A Prophet/ High Priest(ess) received training in philosophy, astronomy, mathematical science, medical arts, and mystical theology (Witt 1971:89–90). Although female priests were never as numerous as male priests in the Isis tradition, from 200 BCE the evidence of inscriptions suggests increasing numbers of women as permanent priests of Isis (Heyob 1975:97). Beginning at the far left, are here depicted: *Myrina (Eolide) Faithful Priestess of Isis* (terra cotta, second half of second

Century CE, Louvre MYR. 2499; photograph from Dunand 1973:pl. XI.1); *Priestess of Isis Playing the Harp* (terra cotta, Museum of Alexandria; photograph from Dunand 1973: pl. XL.1); *Priestess of Isis with Tambourine* (terra cotta, Museum of Alexandria; photograph from Dunand 1973:pl.XL.2); *Priestess of Isis Playing the Tambourine and Singing* (terra cotta, photograph from Dunand 1973: pl.XLI.1); *Priestess of Isis with Tambourine* (terra cotta, Museum of Cairo; photograph from Dunand 1973:pl. XLI.20.



sectarian movements of Late Second Temple Period Judaism, including, among others, Hasideans, Essenes, and Therapeutae. Considering the apparent pervasiveness of these sectarian movements and elements of asceticism evidenced in the three mentioned above, I include religious asceticism as an element of social location.

When appraising various models for female ascetics in Late Second Temple Judaism, I consider Philo's female Therapeutae (*Philo Vita Contemplativa*) as paradigmatic and the fictional Judith (Judith 8:5,6; 9:1; 10:3; 11:17b; 12:6–8; 16:21, 22) and Anna the prophetess (Luke 2: 36–38) as provisional.¹ In light of this evidence advanced for the existence of female ascetics,² the question of the existence of female Essenes becomes increasingly significant. Both textual and archaeological data indicate that women were integral to Essene communities. Complexities in interpretation of these data occur as a result of scholars' assumption that Essenes at

Qumran were celibate males.

Despite recent acknowledgments (Schuller 1992) by some Qumran scholars that women were present at Qumran (Schiffman 1983:12–13, 214; Stegmann 1985:410), this perspective has not previously been sanctioned in the literature. Many scholars who may have interests in early Judaism, but whose areas of concentration are outside the purview of Qumran scholarship, are reluctant to challenge a status quo that assumes ascetics at Qumran were celibate males. So pervasive is this view that contradictory evidence has largely been dismissed as inconsequential. Philip

Aerial view of Khirbet Qumran: The fringe of the main cemetery is visible at the upper left corner of this aerial view of Qumran, beginning about fifty meters from the architectural ruins. *Photograph courtesy of R. Cleave.*

Davies' 1988 article "How Not to Do Archaeology: The Story of Qumran" demonstrates that "dangers of over interpretation" are inevitable when "preconceptions shape analysis"

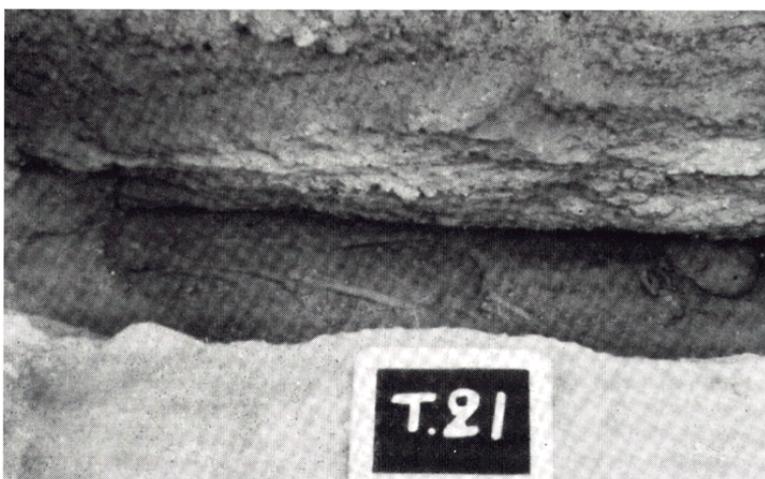
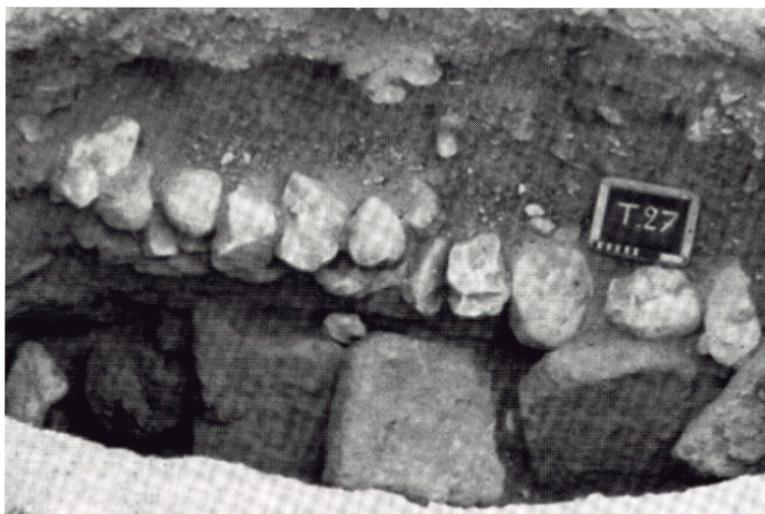
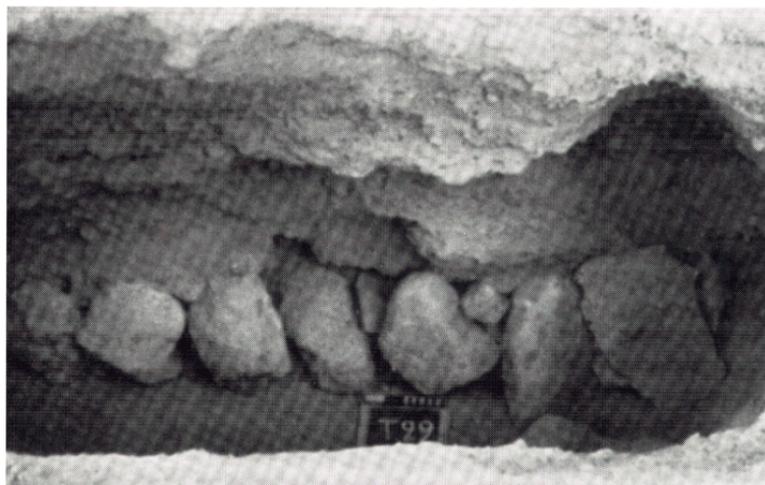


(1988:203–208). Such analyses undergird theories which presently enjoy “canonical” status in Qumran studies. Current concern among scholars to re-visit previous interpretations of Qumran research demands that scholars seriously consider evidence for female ascetics among the Essenes. The present analysis offers an interpretive framework that permits openness to evidence for female presence at Qumran. It is my contention that such evidence needs to be factored into future research as well as current re-visiting of the Qumran corpus.

Archaeological Evidence

The question of female remains in the cemeteries at Qumran elicits a number of typical responses. Helmut Koester notes concerning the cemeteries of that desert community: “the one large and two smaller cemeteries of about twelve hundred graves [accommodate] full members of the sect who lived permanently at Qumran, namely celibate males” (1983:236). In contrast, G. Vermes in 1975 affirmed that marriage was the general custom among Essenes. In discussing cemeteries at Qumran, however, he remarked that “archaeologists working in the large cemetery have uncovered on the fringes of the graveyard a few female and child skeletons” (emphasis mine; 1975:30). In 1978 Vermes similarly declared that “of the twenty-six tombs opened so far all contained adult male skeletons; however, the archaeologists have uncovered on the peripheries of the cemetery the bones of a few women and children”

Tombs from the cemetery at Qumran in various stages of recording and excavation: (left): Tomb in the main cemetery before the excavation; (top to bottom): Tomb 29 opened up: the loculus covered with stones; Tomb 27 opened up: the loculus covered with mud bricks; Tomb 21 with the skeleton exposed after clearing. De Vaux excavated only forty-one of the twelve hundred graves in the cemeteries of Qumran. *Photographs from De Vaux 1973: pls. 25A–26b.*





Steckoll added nine tomb excavations to bring the total number of exposed graves to fifty, a mere four percent of the cemetery population. The nine women and six children among their number comprise over thirty percent of the known Qumran burials. Tomb 20 (top right) contained the skeleton of a male; Tomb 21's occupant (top left) was female. *Photographs from Revue Biblique 60 (1953):pl. 5.*

(1978:97). Yet close examination and careful tabulation of the excavation reports of archaeologists Roland De Vaux (1973:110) and S. H. Steckoll (1967–68:323) indicate that of the fifty graves excavated in the main and secondary cemeteries at Qumran, over thirty percent of the excavated graves contained remains of women and children.

In his summary of information concerning Qumran cemeteries, as presented in the Schweich Lectures (delivered in 1959 and published in 1973), Roland De Vaux implies for the main cemetery a general align-

ment of some eleven hundred graves and posits as “different from the rest” the singular grave from this “main” cemetery which is the grave of a female. He then remarks that six other tombs of females and four of children are situated either in the secondary cemeteries or the extensions to the “main” cemetery (1973:110). On the face of it, one untrained as an archeologist supposes that the irregularity of the female grave in relation to what is presented as a highly ordered, consistently and systematically arranged group of 1099 exclusively male graves indicates some sort of anomalous relationship. This perception begins to shift as the data are examined more carefully.

Of twelve hundred graves in the main and secondary cemeteries, only forty-one were excavated by De Vaux. S. H. Steckoll conducted nine more excavations in the main cemetery in 1966 and 1967 (Steckoll 1967–68). This total of fifty out of

twelve hundred means that only a little more than four percent of the total number of graves have been excavated as of the present writing.

Despite De Vaux's account of a consistent regularity in the descriptions of the graves, a close reading of grave contents indicates numerous differences. De Vaux's insistence that “these graves conform to a type which is constant throughout” is contradicted by his citations of several exceptions to the stated constant conformation (1956:570–572).

De Vaux's and Steckoll's published materials attest to a total of fifty tombs with thirty-six male, nine female and six children (one child buried with its mother) whose remains have been excavated at Qumran.³ Evaluated in terms of percentages, over thirty percent of the excavated remains are women and children. With the exception of the western section, both male and female remains have been discovered in each site. It is also interesting to

Cumulative Results of Published Excavation Reports for Cemeteries at Qumran by Roland De Vaux O.P. and S.H. Steckoll

(De Vaux 1953, 1954, 1956; Steckoll 1967–68)

	Main Cemetery		
	Male	Female	Child
De Vaux:	25	1	
Steckoll:	6	2	2 (1 w/Mother)
West Section of Main Cemetery (Graves arranged differently from Main)			
De Vaux:	3 (Early report shows 2 + 1 uncertain)		
East Section of Main Cemetery (Graves arranged differently from Main)			
De Vaux:	1 (Early report=uncertain)	4	1
Secondary Qumran Cemetery (A) (Graves arranged like Main Cemetery)			
De Vaux:	1	1	
Secondary Qumran Cemetery (B) (Graves arranged with varying orientations)			
De Vaux:	1	1	3
Totals:	36	9	6 (1 w/Mother)

Of fifty excavated graves at Qumran in which gender designation has been determined, over thirty percent are women and children. Except for the three tombs of the western cemetery, both genders have been unearthed at all sites. The population interred at Qumran hardly constitutes the membership of an exclusively male celibate community.

note the implicit and unfounded assumptions that all female graves have by now been excavated and that the earliest remains were interred at the center of the main cemetery.

Finally, De Vaux's discussions of excavations at Ain El Ghuweir (1973: 88–89; Bar-Adon 1971), which is some seven kilometers south of Qumran, do not make definitive the connection of this settlement with Qumran. De Vaux's assessments do, however, reveal coins and pottery sherds with counterparts at Qumran, especially during Period II (early first century CE–68 CE). Excavations of a small cemetery there revealed that "with one exception all these tombs were oriented from south to

north...and are identical in form with the tombs of the main cemetery at Qumran" (1973:89). Some twenty tombs from this site were excavated. The remains included twelve males, seven females and one child, thus disclosing that forty percent of these burials are women and children.

Textual Evidence

Analyses of texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls that refer to women have largely been rendered in the context of an ongoing debate concerning issues of marriage and celibacy among members of the communities for whom the texts were written. It is now important that textual evidence for the presence of female ascetics at Qumran be acknowledged and evaluated from the point of view of women's experience. What, we need to inquire, do these texts tell us about women's participation within the *yahad* (community)? As the present inquiry proceeds, I advance two texts, 1QSa I. 4–11 and 4Q502, for consideration in this regard. First, however, a brief excursus identifies

Qumran texts associated with claims of celibacy and marriage.

A myriad of unresolved questions prohibits a definitive assessment of marriage among Essenes. Necessary criteria for evaluation would include: 1) dates for various codal formulations; 2) the branches of the community to which particular codes applied; and 3) the changes in the codes based upon changes in the community's self-understandings over time. Nevertheless, it is important to note that no published text from Qumran mandates celibacy! Six texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls are usually advanced to support theories for celibate males at Qumran: 1QM 7.4–6; 1QS 1.6, 4.9–10; CD 2.16, 4.15–18 and "The Wiles of the Wicked Woman" (4Q 184). Only classical sources from the first century CE explicitly describe the Essenes as celibate, e.g. Philo (*Hypothetica* 11.14–16), Josephus (*J. W.* 2.8.2. 120–121; *Ant.* 18.21–22), and Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 5.17.4). These authors could only have had personal experience of the community at Qumran during Qumran Period II,

Excavated graves at Qumran

Grave#	Orientation	Gender	Age	Excavated Yr.
De Vaux: Main Cemetery				
T.1.	North/South	Male	20–40 yrs.	1949
T.2.	East/West	"	"	"
T.3.	North/South	"	"	"
T.4.	"	"	"	1951
T.5.	"	"	"	"
T.6.	"	"	"	"
T.7.	Not Aligned Head/South	Female	"	"
T.8.	North/South	Male	"	"
T.10.	"	"	"	"
T.11.	"	"	"	"
T.12.	"	"	30 yrs	1953
T.13.	"	"	uncertain	"
T.15.	"	Male(?)	ca. 16 yrs.	"
T.16.	"	2 Male	ca. 30, 30–40 yrs.	"
T.18.	"	Male	ca. 30 yrs.	"
T.19.	"	"	30–40 yrs.	"
T.20.	"	"	30 + yrs.	1956
T.21.	"	"	ca. 30 yrs.	"
T.22.	"	"	ca. 30 yrs.	"
T.23.	"	"	ca. 49 yrs.	"
T.24.	"	2 Male	1 ca. 25–1 uncertain	"
T.25.	"	Male	ca. 50 yrs.	"
T.26.	"	"	30–40 yrs.	"
T.27.	"	"	ca. 30 yrs.	1956
T.28.	"	"	ca. 22–23 yrs.	"
T.29.	"	Male (?)	30–40 yrs.	"
T.30.	"	Male (?)	30–35 yrs.	"
T.31.	"	Male	25–30 yrs.	"

from early in the Common Era to 68 CE when that site was destroyed.

On the other hand, published Qumran texts indicating or implying the presence of females and children among the Essenes are found in 1QS V.7; 1QSb III.2, 4–5; 1QSa I. 4–11; CD IV 20, V 1–2, 6–9, 11, VII 4–9, XI 12, XIV 4, 15, XVI 10–11; IQH Hymn C 14–15; 4Qp Ps 37 II.1; IIQ Temple 9 57.15–19, 63.10–15, 64.2–4; 4Q502. The ongoing work of Joseph Baumgarten on 4QD texts (see below) will, as they are published, provide further and more specific references to the presence of females at Qumran.

1QSa I. 4–11

Although scholars have yet to inquire what might have been the

experience of female Essenes, critical discourse pronounces no argument against the presence of women among Essenes in camps or villages throughout Palestine and Syria. The prospect of females as active participants at Qumran, however, elicits considerable controversy. Among texts cited to argue for the presence and participation of women at Qumran, 1QSa I.4–11 and 4Q502 are the most persuasive (Elder 1991). The two columns that comprise 1QSa are referred to as the Rule Annex (the title designated by Dupont-Sommer 1964) or as the Messianic Rule (Vermes 1987). They are interpreted variously by exegetes as a “messianic” document pertaining to the community in an age to come, as relating to Essenes

in the settlements in Palestine and Syria, or as an addendum to the Community Rule and thus applicable to the community at Qumran.

The particular relevance of 1QSa I.4–11 to the present discussion is unmistakable.

(4) On their arrival, they shall gather them all together, including children and women, and shall read into [their] ea[rs] (5) all the precepts of the Covenant and shall instruct them in all their ordinances lest they stray in [their] st[ray]ing. (6) And this is the rule for all of the hosts of the Congregation, concerning every native in Israel. From [his] you[th] (7) [he shall be instructed in the Book of

Excavated graves at Qumran *(continued)*

Grave#	Orientation	Gender	Age	Excavated Yr.
S. H. Steckoll: Main Cemetery And Extensions				
G.2.	North/South	Male	65 yrs.	1966/67
G.3.	"	"	"	"
G.4.	"	"	40 yrs	"
G.5.	"	"	22 yrs.	"
G.6.	"	Female & child	25 yrs.-2 yrs	"
G.7.	"	Female	14-16 yrs.	"
G.8.	"	"	23 yrs.	"
G.9.	"	Male	65 yrs.	"
G.10.	East/West	"	25/26 yrs.	"
De Vaux: Extensions To Main Cemetery				
Western Extension				
T.17.	? Very damaged	Male		1953
T.18. (?)	Wooden coffin Head/South	Male	30 yrs.	"
T.19. (14?) ?	Very damaged	Uncertain (later Male ?)		"
Eastern Extension				
T.32.	East/West	Female	30 yrs.	1956
T.33.	"	"	under 30	"
T.34.	"	"	25 yrs.	"
T.35.	"	"	30-40 yrs.	"
T.36.	"	Child	6-7 yrs.	"
T.37.	North/South	Uncertain (later Male ?)	"	"
De Vaux: Secondary Cemetery				
North				
No Number	North/South	Female	30-35 yrs.	1955
No Number	North/South	Male	50 + yrs.	"
South				
T.1.	Vague	Female	30 yrs.	1956
T.2.	North/South	Child	6 yrs.	"
T.3.	East/West	Child	7-8 yrs.	"
T.4.	"	Child	8-10 yrs.	"
Gender not determined: Main Cemetery = 3; Western Extension 1 (later = Male T.19 [?]); Eastern Extension 1 (later = Male T.37 [?])				

Meditation and shall be taught the precepts of the Covenant in accordance with his age, and [shall receive] (8) his education in their ordinances for ten years [from] the time of entry into the children's [class]. Then at the age of twenty [he shall be subject (9) [to] the census: he shall enter into the lot in the midst of his clan [to live] in community in the holy Congregation. And he shall not [approach] a woman to know her sexually un-

less he is twenty years old when [she] (follows Dupont-Sommer 1962:104) knows [good] and evil (10); and this being so, she shall be admitted to invoke the ordinances of the Law against him, and to take her place at the hearing of the ordinances...(11)

Notice that women and children (l. 4) are included among those assembled to have read to them (l. 5) the precepts of the Covenant. There

are references to a gender inclusive children's class (l. 8) and expectations that a young woman will know "good and evil." The agency of a young married female (l. 9-10) is mentioned in the context of her admission to invoke ordinances of the Law against her husband and in the expectation that she will take her place in the community assembly during juridical proceedings (l. 11).

D. Barthelemy, the original translator of 1QS^a (Barthelemy 1955), con-

tends that this document was intended for a different group of Essenes, e.g., early Essenes or Hasidim, and not the Essenes at Qumran who were addressed by the Rule of the Community (1QS). Among the reasons cited by Barthelemy for distinguishing the communities to which 1QS and 1QSa were directed is his presupposition that the Rule of the Community (1QS) related exclusively to the “quasi monastic” congregation at Qumran. 1QSa, on the other hand, clearly relates to a large assembly of men, women, and children, and thus, on the basis of his presupposition, would not pertain to Qumran (1955: 108). Concerning 1QSa I. 9–11 and the woman’s responsibility to invoke ordinances of the Law against her husband, Barthelemy proposes that within the Essene congregation “considering the influences of Hellenism

prevalent at the time, the naturally more fervent, more traditionalist young women were charged by their elders to denounce married offenders to the authorities” (1955:113).

On the basis of 1QSa I. 4–11 and evidence for females in the cemeteries at Qumran, H. Neil Richardson affirms the presence and participation of females in the desert community (1957:108–122). The references to children and marriage presuppose the existence of families among Qumran Essenes (1957:119). He challenges scholars who object to the translation of 1QSa I.11 which brings the wife of the young man into the assembly as a witness. Richardson questions arguments which appeal to secondary sources such as Josephus, Philo, and Rabbinic texts to argue against the possibility of women testifying at Qumran when we have the primary sources in hand (1957:119).

Considering the acknowledged misogyny of both Philo and Josephus, the question raised by Richardson is particularly relevant for scholars engaged in the retrieval and reconstruction of women’s history. In a recent publication Ross Kraemer elucidates the significance of chronology and primary sources in relationship to texts concerning Jewish women in the Greco-Roman world (1992:93–94). The dangers of the practice of giving precedence to secondary sources in studies of Early Judaism of the Late Second Temple period have also been addressed by Shaye J. D. Cohen (Cohen 1987).

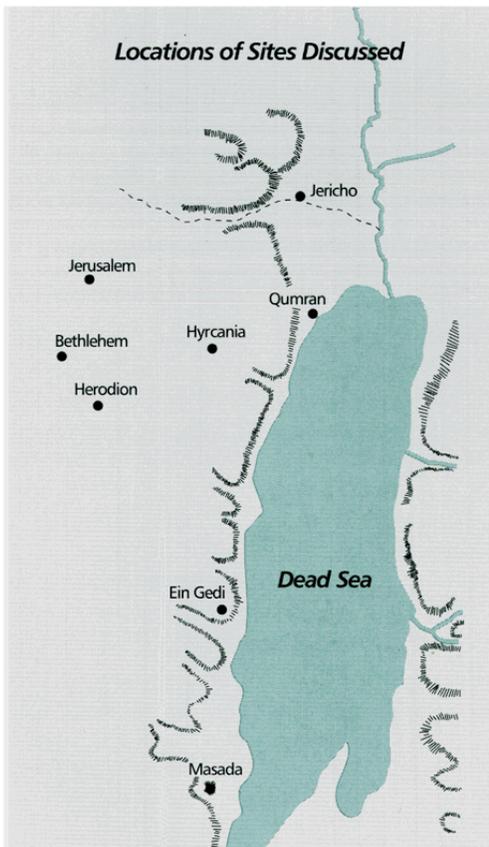
Joseph Baumgarten’s response to Richardson questions whether we can assume that this group would give to *women* the dominant function of participating in juridical

proceedings of the community and acting as witnesses against their husbands (1957:266–269). Based upon his interpretation, Baumgarten solves the “gender gap” by intentionally emending the primary text of 1QSa 1.11 to read “and *he* shall be received to testify in accordance with the Laws of Torah and to *his* place in hearing judgments” (1957:268).

A fourth interpretation of the text by A. Dupont-Sommer contributes a gender inclusive perspective (1962: 80). Dupont-Sommer argues against placing the Rule and its Annex in contradistinction and questions any intention to differentiate between the two. The texts concerning women in 1QSa are applicable to female Essenes at Qumran, an observation affirmed in his commentary (1957:104). His translation of 1QSa I.10 renders “...to know her sexually unless he is twenty years old when *she* knows good and evil.” Dupont-Sommer agrees that a married woman possessed the right to invoke the law against her husband and to assist at community assemblies (1957:104).⁴

To approach the issues in question from the point of view of women’s experience, the following arguments obtain. 1QSa 7–11 presents the chron-

Evidence for the ability to give legal testimony by female ascetics is demonstrated among Vestal Virgins. According to Plutarch (second century CE), Vestal Virgins were instituted at Rome in the seventh century BCE by Numa Pompilius (715–673) (Plutarch Life of Numa Pompilius IX–X). The numerous privileges allocated to Vestal Virgins included exemption from guardianship (Twelve Tables of Rome ca. 450 BCE), administration of her own affairs (Plutarch Life of Numa Pompilius IX–X), and the ability to give legal testimony (Plutarch Life of Publicola VIII.4; Aulus Gellius VII 7.2). Greek marble, height 1.2 m. Forum Romanum, House of the Vestals, Rome, Second half of second century CE, Museo Nazionale Romano. Photograph from Zinseling 1972 pl. 91.



ology of a young man's journey, specifically in his relationship to *women*. It also presents instructions to a young woman who intends to marry. The counsel in 1QSa designates the qualifications for both the young man who is to be twenty years of age and his potential bride. She will know good and evil and will assume her readiness for responsibility as a participant in the community. 1QSa I.10–11 is written in the context of a particular sectarian movement whose eschatological emphases place primacy on obedience to the laws of the community and severe punishments for transgressions. The impossibility for Baumgarten of

women as capable of being charged with ethical judgment ignores the analog of both Therapeutrides and

ascetic Pythagorean women living in community with males. Pythagorean women were encouraged by the Sage specifically for their embrace of a personal ethic and moral excellence (Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorum* 54).

Let us return briefly to 1QSa I.8 and the gender inclusive "children's class."⁵ There is an increased emphasis upon education among the Jews in the Hellenistic period (Hengel 1974). The author of Sirach indicates

What do Josephus, Pliny, and Philo Know about Celibacy at Qumran?

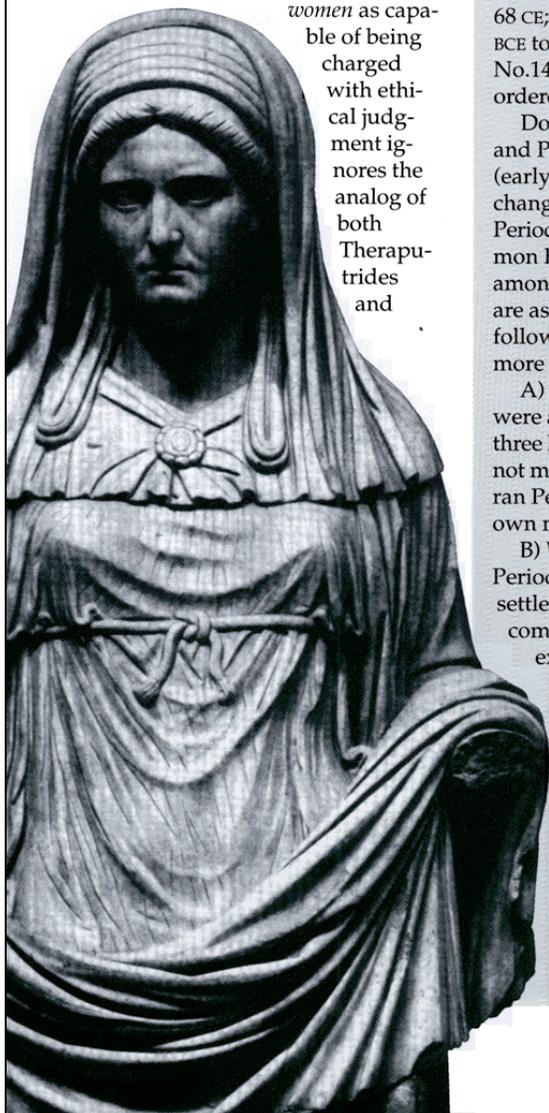
To the numerous attempts by scholars to reconcile accounts of Josephus, Pliny, and Philo that Essenes were celibate males as well as Josephus' account of married Essenes, the following is submitted: Concerning chronology: 1) De Vaux advances three strata of habitation of the settlement at Qumran by Essenes: Period IA—second half of second century BCE.; Period IB—soon after second century BCE to 31 BCE; Period II—early years of CE to 68 CE; 2) Dates for Josephus, Pliny and Philo extend from late first century BCE to late first century CE.; 3) Eusebius quotes Philo's *Apologia pro Iudaeis* No.14 that they (Essenes) banned marriage at the same time as they ordered the practice of continence.

Documentation based upon the personal experience of Philo, Josephus, and Pliny is only possible for these authors in De Vaux's Qumran Period II (early first century CE to 68 CE). The social/cultural realities in Palestine changed radically from the beginning of Period IA (Maccabean revolt) to Period IB (Hasmonean Dynasty) to Period II under Roman Rule in the Common Era. Transitions in the self-understandings of Jews in Palestine and among the Essenes cannot fully be determined until proper chronologies are assigned to particular Dead Sea documents. Meanwhile each of the following hypotheses can reasonably be posited for testing when and if more information becomes available.

A) As faithful adherents of tenets of Hasidic piety, women and children were among family members of the community at Qumran in each of the three habitation periods. Josephus, Pliny, and Philo (i.e., sources who were not members of the community and were alive only during and after Qumran Period II) relied upon insufficient information and/or indulged their own misogyny in interpreting available information.

B) Women and children were members of the community at Qumran in Periods IA and IB. Following the earthquake and abandonment of the settlement in 31 BCE, they were not included in the reformation of the community. When Palestine was under Roman rule and eschatological expectations were heightened, members of the community at Qumran "banned marriage" (for those at the desert community) and ordered the practice of perfect continence.

C) Hypothesis B with the following emendation: celibate male inhabitants of Qumran Period II lived in caves and huts adjacent to the community buildings at Qumran. The settlements at Ain el Ghuweir and Ain Feshka are associated by De Vaux with Period II. Excavations of 20 tombs at Ain el Ghuweir revealed 40 percent were women and children. It is possible to suggest that male and female Essenes and their children inhabited separate quarters at nearby settlements like Ain Feshka and Ain el Ghuweir in period II. Each of the three classical authors is accommodated in this hypothesis.





Educated female members of Pythagorean communities, probably as early as the fifth century BCE (Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorum* XXXVI; Alic 1986:123–124) may be precursors for educated female women and children living the ascetic lifestyle of the Qumran community. In the Greco-Roman world asceticism is characteristic for permanent religious functionaries. Permanent members of the priesthood of Cybele practiced a stringent religious asceticism and received comprehensive education in preparation for their respective duties (Vermaseren 1977:96–112). At Rome female priests were equally sanctioned by the state as male priests. As a new Priestess, Laberia Felicia would have been recommended for nomination to the College of the Decemviri who supervised the Greek and Oriental Cults at Rome (Vermaseren 1977:107). Upon her approval she would have received a diploma signed by the deputy chairman (*promagister*; Vermaseren 1977:107). *Rome first century CE*; photograph from Vermaseren 1977:pl. 41.

the presence of a Wisdom Academy in Jerusalem as early as 180 BCE, and in 175 BCE a Hellenistic gymnasium was established at Jerusalem (I Maccabees 1:14). Later references attest to the institution of Jewish elementary schools in Palestine by Simeon ben Shetah (*J.T. Keth* VIII. 11) in the first century BCE, and by Joshua B. Gamala (*B. Baba Batra* 21a) in the first century

CE. Considering the literary orientation of the desert community, and thus the significance of education, a “children’s class” at Qumran would not have been anomalous. If, like earlier female Pythagorean children, female Essene children were students, they, like all community members, would have been instructed in the Two Spirits of Truth and

Falsehood (1QS I–IV; see especially IV). A young woman of marriageable age at Qumran would know “good and evil” as defined by the teachings of the community. As a bearer of this knowledge she would be equally capable of making judgments as a male counterpart.

4Q502

The most convincing textual evidence for female participation at Qumran proceeds from 4Q502, published by Maurice Baillet in 1982 (1982:81–105). This document describes liturgical praxis at Qumran and consists of over three hundred fragments. The largest preserved section consists of seventeen lines which appear to be a celebration including both females and males. Scholarly debate pertains principally to questions of seasonal context and specific function. Baillet submits the text as a celebration of marriage. He proposes that along with blessings and praises addressed to the God of Israel, hymnic passages are recited in the midst of a ceremony characterized as joyous (1982:81). To Baillet, 4Q502 is reminiscent of an Israelite ritual which includes betrothal, marriage, circumcision, and confirmation and exhibits striking parallels with the treatment of marriage in the Book



of Tobit (1982:81).

In “4Q502: Marriage or Golden Age Ritual” (1983:125–136), Joseph Baumgarten challenges Baillet and proposes that 4Q502 is a fixed feast to celebrate venerable men and women of the community at Qumran. Baumgarten establishes the presence and primacy of the older members of the community. My interest here is in the wide *variety* of persons who participate in this feast:

- the man and his wife (F[ragment]. 1 l[ine].3)
- his female/beloved (F.1 l.7)
- the Daughter of Truth (F.2 l.3)
- their venerable ones and some young people (F.9 l.4)
- sons and daughters (F.14 l.6)
- The man and his female companion seated in the assembly of the Righteous Ones... (F.19 l.1)
- ...old men and old women and young people (F.19 l.2)
- and virgins, boys and girls (F.19 l.3)
- her husband, the man who gives blessing to his wife/the woman (F.24 l.2)



Male and female priests and religious devotees of both genders participated in liturgical celebrations as iconography from religions of the Greco-Roman world illustrates. Examples from the Cybele and Isis traditions include an Isis Cult Procession in which the priestess of Isis, lotus flower on her brow, walks at the head of the procession. She holds the situla and the holy Uraeus serpent winds around her left arm. She is followed by a scribe with a book-roll, a male priest carrying holy water, and a young girl bearing the sistrum and the ladle for the holy water. *Rome second quarter of second century CE, the Vatican; photograph from Zinslerling 1972:pl. 106.*

- [the woman’s] numerous lineage, Daughters of Eve...among eternal people (F.24 l.3)
- the woman who gives blessing to her husband/the man...while standing in the assembly of the venerable men and the venerable women... (F.24 l.4)

- pronounces a blessing of peace... (F.24 l.5)
- in the midst of the old men [women] (F.24 l.6).⁶

Despite the variety of categories of females described in 4Q502, Baum-



Group II
Fragment 19



Group III
Fragment 24

4Q502: three among the many groups of fragments pieced together by M. Baillet. The document describes liturgy involving women. (Photographs from Maurice Baillet 1982: pls. 29–30.)

garten focuses on the older venerable females, but with some rather astonishing implications. He finds in Philo's female Therapeutae an analog for the venerable women at Qumran (1983:125–136). In contrast to his position in 1QSa 4–11, Baumgarten now discusses The Daughter of Truth from 4Q502 F.2, L.3, asserting:

if this is descriptive of the female partner to the marriage it would seem that she is portrayed as a mature person possessing the spiritual qualities considered vital for participation in the religious life of the Community. Among these are listed "intelligence and understanding in the midst" (F.2 L.4)...and among the rewards associated with the Way of Truth is the gift of long life. The theme of longevity is found throughout 4Q502 which refers repeatedly to elderly men and women. (1983:128)

Despite considerable evidence in 1QSa 1.4–11, 4Q502, and in the cemetery remains, Baumgarten's reading of 4Q502 wants children to be "spiritual" in nature (1983: 132). In conclusion, however, Baumgarten affirms that "what is certain is the presence of aged women within the Qumran establishment. Just as the early virgins of the Therapeutae took part in the religious life, so the Essenes had a female order of aged *ahayot* [sisters], the distaff counterpart of the mature *ahim* [brothers]" (1983: 135). It is unfortunate that Baumgarten's androcentric myopia prevents factoring into his interpretation the *variety* of female participants described in 4Q502. We note with interest and enthusiasm, however, Baumgarten's reference to an Order of Mothers at Qumran in his recent translation of 4Q 270 I.13–15 (1993:268–276). This text from Cave 4 relates to penalties and infractions in the Qumran Penal Code and was discussed by Baumgarten at the Qumran Section of the Annual Meetings of the SBL in San Francisco in November of 1992.



Liturgical celebrations across lines of gender were characteristic of Therapeutae (mid-first century BCE–first century CE; Philo Vita Contemplativa VIII, IX, X) as well as Essenes (first century BCE–first century CE.) according to the evidence of 4Q502. In this second example of a liturgical celebration, a sacrifice to Cybele with flute player and drummer, a woman approaches the altar and sprinkles incense on the fire. She is accompanied by male musicians. Roman marble relief, Rome Villa Albani [in situ]; Photograph from Zinslerling 1972:pl.97.

Conclusions

Evidence advanced in the preceding arguments militates against interpretations that suggest Qumran was a bastion of male celibacy and sanctity. Excavation reports reveal that thirty percent of the excavated tombs at Qumran contain remains of women and children. 4Q502 attests to female participants in liturgical celebrations at Qumran. 1QSa 1. 7–11 provides instructions for a young woman of marriageable age concerning her responsibilities within the community. J. Baumgarten advances evidence for an Order of Sisters and Brothers and an Order of Mothers and Fathers at Qumran. Eileen Schuller considers that these parallel constructions may indeed indicate women's full membership in the community (1993:8–9). Yet, despite Schuller's potent suggestion, at this time no available text describes female initiation into the community or female status in the

complex hierarchy of the Essenes. Both texts and archaeological evidence, however, do affirm among Essenes at Qumran female infants, female children, females of marriageable age, females with children, females as wives, older "venerable" females who may or may not be married and may or may not have had both spiritual and material offspring. The self-understanding of these ascetic women like that of Essene women "in the camps" would have been shaped by the theological perspectives, ascetic praxis, and doctrinal proscriptions of the Dead Sea Scrolls as adapted by their respective communities.

Acknowledgments

"Female Ascetics Among Essenes" (with slight modifications) was read at the Qumran Section of the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in November, 1991 at Kansas City, Mo.

Notes

¹ Scholarly consensus places a date for authorship of Luke's Gospel at ca. 80–90 CE. The author of this Gospel, however, describes Anna the prophetess as eighty-four years of age in Jesus' infancy. Anna was "of great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day" (Luke 2:36–37). This chronology suggests that (whether or not Anna is a fictional character) Anna's "dates" coincide with Essenes, Therapeutae, and a late date for Judith (e.g., Hasmonean period and possibly as late as 63 BCE).

² Asceticism is defined for the present study as a mode of life characterized by voluntary self denial for the purpose of spiritual discipline. This rudimentary definition permits new parameters for asceticism other than traditional Christian models in which celibacy is considered implicit.

³ Laperrousaz (1976) also mentions that only fifty out of twelve hundred graves have been excavated; however, he does not note percentages. Alfred Marx ("Les racines du Celibat Essenien," *Revue de Qumran* 7[1970]:323–342) also considers the number of graves that have been opened and says that male graves relative to female graves would be important. He cites no figures, however, from which to derive percentages. Marx then proceeds to note the importance of children's graves as the only means for our conclusions about marriage. Otherwise he suggests we could be in the same situation as the Therapeutae or the women around Jesus (335). Despite his attention to the excavation reports Marx concludes this section by noting that one is surprised by the small number of female graves (and he is apparently convinced that by now all of the female graves have been excavated) and that they provide means for favorably presuming that the majority of the inhabitants of Qumran at a certain time were males living in celibacy (335).

⁴ Heth's investigation of this issue explores evidence from the Qumran texts and argues in some depth for marriage and the presence of women among the Essenes (1986:48–87 and esp. 58–62, 64, 66, 71).

⁵ I am indebted to John F. Priest, Professor of Religion at Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida for the following clarification of the interpretations of this line by Barthelemy and Dupont-Sommer. Two words in the middle of line eight constitute a problem for the translator/interpreter. The first has a lacuna at the beginning and the second has a disputed final letter. Priest notes that Barthelemy proposed the follow-

ing transcription [] *bw^ob^ob* and suggested that the lacuna contained either a yodh or waw + yodh. He read *b^ob* as a defective or Aramaic form of *twb* and translated "and if he goes well [progresses]." Richardson accepts this reconstruction. Dupont-Sommer differs. He translated the words as " [from] the time of entry into the children's class." The Hebrew underlying this translation must be something like this: [m] *bw btp*. (It should be noted that "class" has no basis in this text but is inserted to clarify what Dupont-Sommer takes to be the implicit meaning.) The significant issue here is whether the use of *btp* may indicate that education was for all the children and not for males alone. In biblical Hebrew, the word refers to boys and girls alike. The text does not demand this interpretation, but it seems to allow it.

⁶ There is at present no published translation of this text in English.

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