

Origins and Early History

To understand the schism that gave birth to the Dead Sea sect, we need to frame it against the background of Jewish history and sectarianism in the Hellenistic period. But we now have even more specific information about the particular conflicts, mostly over sacrifices and ritual purity, that led the sectarians to break away and form a distinct group. Indeed, we will see that the origins of the sect are to be traced to the internal priestly turmoil associated with Hellenistic reform, the Maccabean Revolt, and the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty and high priesthood.

EVIDENCE OF THE HALAKHIC LETTER

A Qumran text, today known as the *Halakhic Letter*, demonstrates quite clearly that the root cause that led to the sectarian schism consisted of a series of disagreements about sacrificial law and ritual purity. The full name of this document is *Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah* (some legal rulings pertaining to the Torah). The writers of its text list more than twenty laws that describe the ways their practices differed from those prevailing in the Temple and its sacrificial worship. But even more important, the document reveals more precise information than we have previously had about the origins of the sect.

The *Halakhic Letter* begins with a statement about its own intent:

These are some of our [legal] rulings [regarding God's [Torah] which are [some of the] rulings of [the] laws which we hold, and all] of them are regarding [sacrifices] and the purity of . . . (HALAKHIC LETTER B1-3)

Information on this and all texts quoted or cited in this book is found in the Guide to Dead Sea Scrolls Texts Cited in the back of the book. All translations presented here are by the author, except for biblical texts, which for the most part follow the New Jewish Publication Society translation. Square brackets are used to indicate restorations made by scholars to fragmentary scroll texts. *Parentheses* are used to indicate explanatory material added to the translation.

The first sentence announces that what follows are some of "our [legal] rulings" that "we hold." Throughout the letter the authors refer to themselves in the plural. What then follows is a list of twenty-two halakhic matters over which the sectarians disagree with the addressee of the letter. For most of these, the text includes both the view of the writers as well as that of their opponents. Such phrases as "but you know" and "but we hold," indicate the polemical nature of the text. Later we will look at one of the document's specific laws, which demonstrates unquestionably that this group adhered to the Sadducean trend in Jewish law.

The second part of the letter returns to general principles, presenting the writers' general views on the schism now under way. The authors state:

[You know that] we have separated from the mainstream of the people and from all their impurities and from mixing in these matters and from being involved with them regarding these matters. But you know that there can not be found in our hands dishonesty, falsehood, or evil.
(HALAKHIC LETTER C7-9)

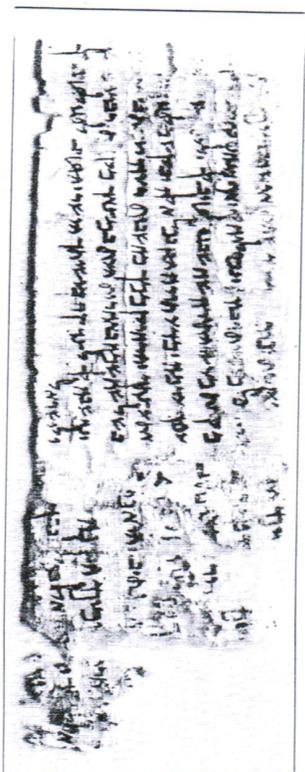
The writers here state that in accepting the aforementioned rulings, they had to withdraw from participation in the rituals of the majority of the people. The purpose of this document was to call on their erstwhile colleagues in Jerusalem and the Hasmonean leader to effect a reconciliation that would allow them to return to their role in the Temple. Needless to say, reconciliation meant accepting the views this document puts forth. Accordingly, the authors make the general statement that the addressees know that the members of this dissident group are reliable and honest, meaning that the list of laws is indeed being strictly observed as stated by the authors.

At this point, the letter plainly explains its purpose:

[For indeed] we have [written] to you in order that you will investigate the Book of Moses [and] in the books of the Prophets and of David . . . , in the deeds] of each and every generation. (HALAKHIC LETTER C9-11)

The sectarians have written to the addressee (now for the first time in the singular) in order that "you" will examine the words of the Torah, the Prophets, and David (presumably the biblical accounts of the Davidic monarchy), as well as the history of the generations.

The text now turns to what is to be found in those particular documents, that is, the Scriptures that the sectarians want their opponent to search. The addressee is told (again in the singular) that it has been foretold that he would turn aside from the path of righteousness and, as a result, suffer misfortune. The text of the *Halakhic Letter* then predicts that in the End of Days, the ruler will return to God. All of it is in accord with what is written in the Torah and in the



Halakhic Letter The announcement of the existence of a foundation document of the Qumran sect, now known among scholars as MMT, helped to trigger the campaign for release of the scrolls. The document, shown here in one of its six manuscripts (E), is an epistle purportedly sent to the Jerusalem Temple leadership by the founders of the sect. Its positions on matters of Jewish law demonstrate that the founders of the sect were Sadducees in origin. *Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.*

Prophets. This time the authors do not mention the Writings, probably because the relevant blessings and curses do not occur there.

The text now returns to the discussion of the kings, recalling the blessings fulfilled during the time of Solomon, son of David, and the curses visited on Israel from the days of Jeroboam, son of Nebat (c. 922-901 B.C.E.), through the time of Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.E., last King of Judah).

Next the writers state that in their view some of the blessings and curses have already come to pass:

And we recognize that some of the blessings and curses which are written in the Book of Moses have come to pass, and that this is the End of Days when they will repent in Israel[!] forever . . . and they will not backslid[e].
(HALAKHIC LETTER C20-22)

Here the authors reveal their belief that they are currently living on the verge of the End of Days, a notion that later became normative in Qumran messianic thought. It is also clear that they considered their own age the period foretold by the Bible as the final repentance of Israel.

In light of these beliefs, the authors exhort the addressee (singular) to recall the events surrounding the reigns of Israel's kings, to examine their deeds, and to note that those who observed the laws of the Torah were spared misfortune, their

transgressions forgiven. Such was the case with David, whom the addressee is asked to remember.

The authors then sum up why they sent this text to the addressee:

And indeed, we have written to you some of the rulings pertaining to the Torah which we considered were good for you and your people, for [we have seen] that you have wisdom and knowledge of the Torah. Understand all these [matters] and seek from Him that He correct your counsel and distance from you evil thoughts and the counsel of Belial, in order that you shall rejoice in the end when you find some of our words correct. And let it be considered right for you, and lead you to do righteousness and good, and may it be for your benefit, and for that of Israel. (HALAKHIC LETTER C26-32)

Here the phrase *Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah* (some of the rulings pertaining to the Torah) appears. The authors state that the letter is intended for the benefit of the addressee and the nation. The addressee is credited with being wise and having sufficient knowledge of the Torah to understand the halakhic matters presented in the letter. The writers call on him to mend his ways and renounce all of his incorrect views on matters of Jewish law. Doing so will lead him to rejoice at the end of this period (the End of Days), for he will come to realize that the writers of the letter are indeed correct in their views. His repentance will be judged a righteous deed, beneficial both for him and for all Israel.

One of the interesting features of the *Halakhic Letter* is the way the grammatical number of addressees shifts. In the introductory sentence, the letter is addressed to an individual, but in the list of laws, the authors engage in a dispute with a group ("you," plural). When the text returns to its main argument—at the conclusion of the list of laws—it shifts back to the singular. We will see later that the plural sections are addressed to priests of the Jerusalem Temple, and the singular to the Hasmonean ruler.

To understand the nature of this text, we will consider an example of one of its halakhic controversies—the law regarding liquid streams:

[And even] regarding [poured out] liquid streams, we say|] that they do not have [purity]. And even the liquid streams do not separate between the impure [and the] pure. For the moisture of the liquid streams and [the vessel] which receives from them are both considered one identical moisture. (HALAKHIC LETTER B56-58)

This enigmatic rule refers to questions of ritual purity in the pouring of liquids from one vessel to another. In a case when the upper vessel is pure and the lower one is not, the question in our text concerns whether the upper vessel—the source of the liquid stream—can be rendered impure when the stream itself links the two vessels together. The text of the *Halakhic Letter* asserts that the entire entry is "one moisture," that is, that the impurity does rise back up the stream, against the direction of the flow, so as to render the upper vessel impure.

This law has a close parallel in the Mishnah. There, in reporting a number of disputes between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the Mishnah states:

The Sadducees say: "We complain against you Pharisees. For you declare pure [the poured out] liquid stream." (M. YADAVIM 4:7)

In contrast to our text and the Sadducean view implied in the Mishnah, the Pharisees ruled that in such cases the stream did not impart impurity to the pure vessel from which it was being poured. To them, the impurity of the lower vessel could not flow up, against the flow of the stream, to render the upper vessel impure. Because the Sadducees, in this and many other cases, share the same positions we find in the *Halakhic Letter*, we can convincingly show, using this and other Qumran texts, that the Qumran sect had a substratum of Sadducean halakhic views.

It appears that this letter was written to the head of the Jerusalem establishment, the high priest. The comparisons with the kings of Judah and Israel must have been particularly appropriate to someone who saw himself as an almost royal figure. In the letter, the ruler is admonished to take care lest he go the way of the kings of First Temple times. Such a warning could be addressed only to a figure who could identify, because of his own station in life, with the ancient kings of biblical Israel.

The *Halakhic Letter* makes no mention of the Teacher of Righteousness or any other leader or official known from the sectarian documents. Because the sect's own official history, presented in the *Zadokite Fragments*, claims that their initial separation from the main body of Israel took place some twenty years before the coming of the teacher, we can conclude that the *Halakhic Letter* was written by the collective leadership of the sect in those initial years. This explains why the teacher does not appear in this text.

HISTORICAL RAMIFICATIONS

The *Halakhic Letter* has wide ramifications for our understanding of Jewish history in the Hasmonean period. In the letter, the views ascribed to the opponents of the emerging sect are the same as those usually attributed in rabbinic literature to the Pharisees or the early Rabbis. When mishnaic texts preserve Pharisee-Sadducee conflicts over the same matters discussed in the *Halakhic Letter*, the views of the letter's authors match those of the Sadducees.

(Only one possible explanation can be offered for this phenomenon: The earliest members of the sect must have been Sadducees unwilling to accept the status quo established in the aftermath of the Maccabean revolt. The Maccabees, by replacing the Zadokite high priesthood with their own, reduced the Zadokites

to a subsidiary position for as long as Hasmonaean rule lasted. Even after leaving Jerusalem, the Dead Sea sect continued to refer to itself or its leaders as the "Sons of Zadok." Our text makes clear that the designation "Sons of Zadok" is to be taken at face value. These were indeed Sadducees who protested the imposition of Pharisaic views in the Temple under the Hasmonaean priests.

That interpretation explains why the writers of the *Halakhic Letter* constantly assert that the addressees know the authors' views to be correct. The founders of the sect aimed their halakhic polemics (addressed to a plural opponent) at their Sadducean brethren who continued to serve in the Temple and accepted the new reality. It was these remaining Jerusalem Sadducees who now followed views known to us from Pharisaic-rabbinic sources and who, in the view of the authors of this letter, knew very well that the old Sadducean practices were otherwise than what they were now observing.

Although it may be hard for us moderns to conceive that a schism of such magnitude could occur over what appear to be minor aspects of ritual law, we must remember that to the various factions in the Jerusalem priesthood and to the Jewish people in ancient times, the correct conduct of sacrificial worship was the primary guarantor of their welfare. Indeed, they regarded the sacrificial system as the prime connection of the people of Israel to God, the source of blessing for the land and its inhabitants. Had not many Jews only recently risen up in arms in the Maccabean Revolt in order to ensure the purity of that worship against foreign, pagan influence? Now, in the aftermath of that rebellion, no one was willing to accept easily the conduct of this worship in any way inconsistent with his own particular views.

Thus, when Temple worship was entrusted to a usurper—the Hasmonaean high priest who acted according to already existing Pharisaic views—some pious Sadducees formed a sect and seceded from participation in the ritual of the Jerusalem Temple. At first the sect sought a reconciliation. When that failed, the members experienced disappointment and confusion.

The dissonant Zadokite priests increasingly saw themselves as a sectarian group. We can date the true beginnings of our sect to the moment the Qumran Zadokites' moderate attempts at reform failed, convincing them that Hasmonaean succession was not temporary but permanent.

Some have challenged this theory of the sect's Sadducean origins, arguing that it does not explain the group's more sectarian or radical tendencies, especially the animated polemic and xenophobia so often found in later sectarian texts. But those later texts reveal the eventual effects of the earlier schism. After they failed in their initial attempts, exemplified by the *Halakhic Letter*, to reconcile and win over the Hasmonaean and the remaining Jerusalem Sadducees to their own system of Temple practice, the Qumran Zadokites gradually developed the sectarian mentality of the despised, rejected, and abandoned outcast. Accordingly,

they began to look upon themselves as the true Israel, condemning and despising all others.

Another challenge to this theory is the incongruity between some of the beliefs of the sect in its heyday with teachings Josephus attributes to the Sadducees. However, Sadducean priests were not uniform in their degree of Hellenization nor in all their beliefs. Josephus's descriptions concern only the somewhat Hellenized Sadducees of the Roman period. Moreover, I am not claiming that the Dead Sea sect as we know it is Sadducean, only that its origins and the roots of its halakhic tradition lie in the Sadducean Zadokite priesthood.

The *Halakhic Letter* is a sectarian document from the earliest stage in the sect's development, when its members still hoped to return to participation in Temple worship. It is not even certain that the letter postdates the beginning of the self-imposed exile of the sect. In this document we learn of the disagreements about Jewish law that led to the formation of the sect. It was only later that the teacher of Righteousness and other leaders, most probably priestly, developed the group that was to produce the complete corpus of sectarian texts. Another Qumran text—the *Temple Scroll*, essentially a rewritten Torah into which the author has inserted his own views on Jewish law—is also composed of sources deriving from the Sadducean tradition. Indeed, the finds at Qumran are now providing us with insights into this tradition never before available.

The revelations contained in the *Halakhic Letter* demand that we reevaluate some of the older theories identifying the sect with known Second Temple groups. First, the theories that seek to link the sect and its origins with the Hasmidim (pietists) must now be abandoned. Other theories tying the emergence of the sect to some subgroup of the Pharisees are certainly no longer tenable. The dominant Essene hypothesis, if it is to be maintained at all, requires radical reorientation. Those holding this theory must now argue that the term "Essene" came to designate the originally Sadducean sectarians who had gone through a process of radicalization until they became a distinct sect. Alternatively, they must broaden their understanding of the term to include a wide variety of similar groups, of which the Dead Sea sect might be one.

The notion that the collection of scrolls at Qumran is not representative of a sect but is a balanced collection of general Jewish texts must also be rejected. There is by now too much evidence proving that the community that collected those scrolls emerged out of sectarian conflict and that that conflict sustained it throughout its existence. The *Halakhic Letter* characterizes the conflict as disagreement over points of Jewish law with those in control of the Temple in Hasmonaean Jerusalem. Further, the nature of the collection, even if it contains many texts not explicitly sectarian, which might have been acceptable to all Jews in Second Temple times, is still that of a subgroup with definite opposition to the political and religious authorities of the times.

THE EXODUS TO QUMRAN

When the group who composed the *Halakhic Letter* decided to move to Qumran, the members took a decisive step in their own evolution. They now defined themselves as a dissenting group struggling against an unsympathetic majority. This was not a sudden step, however. It seems likely that the Qumran center was established after a period of groping that lasted about a generation. Only then did the sect retreat to Qumran. The Teacher of Righteousness, whose leadership had been established sometime after composition of the letter, probably influenced the decision.

How can we determine the nature and date of the exodus to Qumran? Our conclusions must rest on the archaeological finds at Khirbet Qumran and on the literary evidence of the sectarian texts. And central to an understanding of the event is familiarity with the text known as the *Zadokite Fragments*, the first scroll discovered by Solomon Schechter among the manuscripts of the Cairo *genizah*. Today, we know of at least nine additional manuscripts of this text, which were found at Qumran. Affinities in language and ideology indicate that this document belonged to the Qumran sectarians. Further, other sectarian texts contain excerpts from that text, indicating that it indeed was a document central to the thought of the Qumran sect. Modern scholars refer to this text also as the *Damascus Document* or *Damascus Covenant* due to its symbolic reference to Damascus as the land of the sect's exile.

The text is divided into two parts: the Admonition and the Laws. (Our discussion focuses first on the Admonition. We will return later to the Laws when we discuss the subject of Jewish law in the Dead Sea Scrolls.) Although the Qumran manuscripts of this text indicate that there was additional material at the beginning of the *Zadokite Fragments*, they preserve very little significant material from that section, which must at one time have been part of a much longer passage. The text of the *Zadokite Fragments* as preserved in medieval manuscripts begins by declaring that in ancient times, Israel went astray. As a result, God "hid His face" and allowed the destruction of the First Temple (dated in modern scholarly chronology to 586 B.C.E.). Yet a remnant of the defected people remained, and it was they who ultimately formed the sect. In this narrative, the sectarians regard their way of life and belief as a direct continuation of biblical tradition, claiming to be the tradition's true recipients.

The text presents its understanding of the formation of the sect as follows:

And in the period of wrath, three hundred ninety years after He had handed it [the Temple] over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, He remembered them [Israel] and caused to grow from Israel and Aaron the root of a plant [i.e., the sect]. (*ZADOKITE FRAGMENTS 1:5-7*)



Qumran Manuscript of the *Zadokite Fragments* The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls made it immediately clear that the *Zadokite Fragments* (or *Damascus Document*), which had come to light previously in two medieval manuscripts, was closely related to the new documents. Subsequently, nine fragmentary manuscripts of this composition were found at Qumran, and they have greatly increased the extent of the preserved text. Shown here is a portion of a late-first-century B.C.E. manuscript, which discusses marriage, among other things. Note the stitches at the left where this sheet of parchment was connected to the next. *Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.*

This official chronology, written by the sectarians themselves, poses problems for scholars. If we calculate from the modern scholarly dating of the destruction of the First Temple, we arrive at 196 B.C.E. for the founding of the sect. This dating does not square with the archaeological data, however. Further, based on evidence in the *Halakhic Letter*, the sect must have formally separated itself after the Maccabean Revolt of 168–164 B.C.E.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that ancient Jews did not have a chronology that matches ours for dating the destruction of the First Temple. Because of a vast gap in the chronology of the Persian period, it is doubtful whether ancient Jews could have made such a calculation with any degree of accuracy. Therefore, we can only assume that we have approximate information from the period. We therefore must be content to date the founding of the sect sometime in the second century B.C.E.

The text of the *Zadokite Fragments* then tells about a period of confusion followed by the rise of the sect's leader, the Teacher of Righteousness:

Then they understood their transgression and knew that they were guilty.

They were like blind (men) groping on the road for twenty years. Then God paid attention to their deeds for they sought Him whole-heartedly, and He set up for them a Teacher of Righteousness to direct them in the way of His (the teacher's) heart. (ZADOKITE FRAGMENTS 1:8-11 = D^a 2112-15)

It appears that during an initial period—perhaps of twenty years—the sect was leaderless and perhaps even formless until the Teacher of Righteousness established his leadership over it. Only with the teacher's emergence and his assumption of control did sectarian teachings and a distinctive way of life take shape.

From what we learned earlier from the *Halakhic Letter*, we can accept as reliable the account in the *Zadokite Fragments* that describes this initial period between the schism and the emergence of the teacher's leadership. It was during that period, most probably, that the *Halakhic Letter* was sent and a reconciliation attempted. After their failure to win over the Jerusalem Sadducees and the Hasmonaean high priest the sect became a permanent entity, no longer expecting to rejoin the Jerusalem establishment.

The Teacher of Righteousness assumed leadership of the sect and introduced his teachings; at that time or shortly thereafter the sect moved to its site in the wilderness at Qumran. Both the archaeological dating of the site and the literary materials about Damascus confirm the fact.

The *Zadokite Fragments* has a portion that has become known as the "Well *Midrash*" (6:3-11), which prominently features the Damascus imagery. It is an excellent example of *pesher* interpretation, a form of biblical interpretation that reads biblical verses as prefigurations of contemporary events. Here a verse from Numbers is interpreted: "A well which the officers have dug, which the notables of the people have dug. . . ." (Numbers 21:18).

The *Zadokite Fragments* explains:

The well is the Torah and those who dig it are the returnees (or: penitents) of Israel who leave the land of Judea and who live in the land of Damascus. (ZADOKITE FRAGMENTS 6:4-5)

On the face of it, this text seems to refer to an exodus of the sectarians from Judea to Damascus, where they settled, at least for a time. Below this, on the same page, the sectarians are described as:

those who enter the new covenant in the land of Damascus. (6:19)

Again this text refers to an exodus to Damascus.

Before continuing, I would like to comment on the expression "new covenant." In several texts the sectarians term themselves "those who have entered

the covenant," referring to the new covenant they entered when they constituted or joined the sect. This idea derives from Jeremiah 31:31-32, which speaks of a renewal of God's covenant with Israel in the End of Days. The term as it is used in this text must be sharply distinguished from the Christian concept of a new covenant, that is, a New Testament, which will replace the old covenant (so-called Old Testament) with a new scripture.

In another *pesher*-type exegesis, the text interprets Amos 5:26-27, "And you shall carry . . . the star of your God which you have made for yourselves, and I will exile you beyond Damascus." There we find:

And the "star" (Amos 5:26) is the interpreter of the law (the sectarian official who interprets Torah for the sect with divine inspiration) who comes to Damascus. (ZADOKITE FRAGMENTS 7:18-19)

A literal reading of this passage would suggest that the interpreter of the law left Judea and joined his fellow sectarians at Damascus. Later on, in describing sectarians who ceased to live according to the ways of the sect, the *Zadokite Fragments* speaks of:

those people who had entered the new covenant in the land of Damascus and have turned away and rebelled, and turned aside from the well of living waters. (ZADOKITE FRAGMENTS 19:33-34)

The "well of living waters" is God's Torah as correctly interpreted by the sectarians. The Damascus theme is continued further on when the text describes those:

. . . who have despised the covenant and the agreement to which they swore in the land of Damascus, which is the new covenant. (ZADOKITE FRAGMENTS 20:11-12)

Writing before the *Halakhic Letter* was known, many scholars deduced from these passages that after the initial schism, there was an actual exodus to Damascus. This theory further claims that in Damascus the sect took shape and set down the foundation of its teachings. From there, it is assumed, the group moved on to the sectarian settlement at Qumran. Some have actually sought to locate a historical event that might have led to that exodus. Others have suggested excavation of modern-day Damascus in an attempt to find the remains of this group.

What then is Damascus? Is it a real place or a metaphorical term? We know that the sectarians, especially in the *Zadokite Fragments*, often spoke in code words. We find all kinds of pseudonyms for actual personages, yet almost never a personal name that would allow a definite identification. The Jewish sects of the day are never mentioned by name even though we see numerous references to them designated with code words in the sectarian texts. Why then should we fall

into the trap of taking place names literally? Rather it is more likely that "Damascus" is a code word for Qumran.

The notion is strengthened even more by the use of Damascus as a symbol in other texts of the period. The New Testament pictures Paul receiving a vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6). It is likely that the symbolic meaning of Damascus as an eschatological stopover would have led to its use here. Indeed, even in Amos 5:27 it is connected with the destruction of syncretist Israelites—those who had mixed worship of the God of Israel with pagan ways—in the End of Days.

In addition, we should mention the suggestion that Damascus was actually at one time the name of the toparchy (administrative district) in which Qumran was situated. This suggestion assumes that Qumran, even though it is located on the western shore of the Dead Sea, was at one time part of the same administrative unit as Damascus and could, therefore, bear its name.

In any case, these possibilities all taken together allow us to regard Damascus as a symbol. Accordingly, we need not seek any specific exodus to Damascus. Rather, we can assume that the desert settlement of Qumran was the Damascus to which the sectarians referred and that it was there that the sect established its settlement at about the same time as the Teacher of Righteousness (perhaps the very same first interpreter of the law) came to the fore.

It is indeed curious that the sectarian texts from Qumran contain no mention of the name of the site; Khirbet Qumran is the Arabic name. Some scholars have theorized that it may be the biblical place Secacah (Joshua 15:61), although this is probably an iron age site located 4 miles (7 kilometers) southwest of Qumran. In any case, it was to Qumran, not to Damascus, that the sect migrated.

There is one additional text, *Rule of the Community*, that must be considered here because it makes the connection between the sectarians' separatism and the desert. *Rule of the Community*, also known as *Manual of Discipline* (a Christian monastic term imposed on the text), was one of the first seven scrolls discovered in cave 1. This almost intact document lays out the basic theology of the sect as well as its rules of admission and initiation and its code of punishments. At one point, the scroll speaks of the separation of the Qumran sectarians from the main body of Israelites:

When these form a community in Israel, according to these rules they shall be separated from the midst of the settlement of the people of iniquity to go to the desert, to clear there the road of the Lord, as it is written, "In the desert clear the road of the Lord, straighten in the wilderness a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3). This is the interpretation of the Torah [which] He commanded through Moses to observe, according to everything that is revealed from time to time, and as the prophets have revealed by His holy spirit.
(*RULE OF THE COMMUNITY* 8:12-16)

The passage appears to refer directly to the exodus to the desert. But in fact, this separatism is to be understood symbolically as fulfilling the command of Isaiah 40:3 to prepare a way through the wilderness as part of the preparations for the End of Days. The passage then goes on to tell us how to interpret that preparation. To prepare the way in the desert means to interpret the Torah, specifically to explain it according to sectarian interpretations.

Despite its mention of the wilderness, the text makes no direct connection between the sect and the desert region. Nonetheless, it is only against the background of the sect's settlement at Qumran that such desert imagery makes sense. In fact, the desert motif is extremely prominent in sectarian literature. The sectarians saw themselves as living a pristine life like that of the Israelites in the period of desert wandering. Further, they saw themselves as having gone into the desert to receive the Torah, just as Israel had in the period of the Exodus. All this is to be expected from a group that had left the more thickly settled areas of Judea to relocate in the wilderness, there to maintain its own standards of sanctity and purity.

The sect came into being, then, after the Hasmoneans had taken over the high priesthood, about 152 B.C.E. Thereafter, they attempted, as we can see from the *Halakic Letter*, to reconcile with their Zadokite-Sadducean brethren who continued to serve in the Jerusalem Temple, as well as with the Hasmonean leaders. When this failed, they still were leaderless until, at some point, the Teacher of Righteousness arose to lead them. It was he who gave the sect shape and direction. Eventually he led the group from its Sadducean origins toward its intensely apocalyptic, sectarian mentality and toward the many beliefs that differentiated the sect from the Sadducees. Probably during the early years of the teacher's career—within a generation or so after the founding of the sect—the members of the group established the sectarian center and library at Qumran. The next chapter discusses what kind of community ultimately developed there.

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MAGEN BROSHI

ESSENES were members of a Jewish sect existing from the second century BCE to the end of the first century CE. This sect is described by various Greek and Latin writers, the most important of whom are Philo, Josephus, and Pliny. These ancient testimonies provide an enlightening and sometimes contradictory account of the customs and beliefs of the Essenes. Following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, most scholars have identified the community responsible for the scrolls as Essene. If that identification is correct, then the sectarian texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls provide much additional information about the Essenes at Qumran and elsewhere.

Etymology. The name of the sect is given variously in the classical sources. In Greek the group is called *Essenoi* (by Josephus [fourteen times], Dio, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius) or *Essaioi* (by Philo, Hegesippus, and Josephus [six times]); in Latin it is called *Esseni* (by Pliny). Epiphanius also mentions a group he called the *Ossenoi*, but the relationship of this group to the Essenes is unclear, especially because Epiphanius also mentions a different group he calls the *Essenoi*. [See Epiphanius.]

The etymology of the name remains difficult, although there have been many proposals. Philo himself suggests that it may be related to the similar-sounding Greek word *hosiotēs*, "holiness," and later calls the group *hosioi*, "holy ones" (*Every Good Man Is Free* 12.75; 13.91). But it is more likely that the name had a Semitic origin. Others (for example, Cross, 1995) regard the name as derived from the Aramaic *ḥasayya*, the equivalent of Hebrew *ḥasidim*, "pious ones." If this identification is correct, it might indicate that the Essenes are related to the Hasideans (*ḥasidim*; Greek *asidaioi*) mentioned in *1 Maccabees* 2.42, 7.13, and *2 Maccabees* 14.6. One problem with this pro-

posal is that the root *ḥsy* does not generally mean "pious" in the Palestinian dialect (although a passage in the Aramaic *Levi*^b [4Q213a] does contain the word with this sense). [See Hasideans.]

Many suggestions for the etymology of "Essene" have been proffered in light of the Qumran material. Although none is without difficulties, three of the more possible are as follows:

1. It has been derived from the Hebrew word *'etsah* meaning "council" or "party" in Qumran literature. The Essenes would thus be "Men of the Council" (so Dupont-Sommer). But the linguistic derivation is problematic, and it seems more likely that the sect would rather have chosen *yaḥad* ("community").
2. It has been linked to the common Hebrew verb *'asah*, meaning "to do, bear, bring forth," with the idea that the Essenes are the "doers" of the Law (e.g., Peshet Habakkuk [1QpHab vii.11]) who will "bring forth" redemption (Goranson). Though ingenious, there is no explicit evidence for this linkage.
3. Others have suggested that the term is derived from the Aramaic *asayya*, "healers" (so Vermes, 1978), which would fit with Josephus's statement that the Essenes sought out medicinal roots and stones for healing diseases (*The Jewish War* 2.136). This might also tie in nicely with Philo's description of the Therapeutae (lit., healers) and his statement that the Essenes are especially devout in the *therapeutai* of God (*Every Good Man Is Free* 12.75). But in the context *therapeutai* probably means "service" rather than "healers," and as mentioned above, Philo himself gives a quite different explanation of the meaning of "Essene." Furthermore, healing does not appear to be so characteristic of the group that it would provide the basis for its name. [See Therapeutae.]

Sources. Unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament or in Talmudic literature. Information concerning the group is limited to the classical sources, possibly supplemented by the Dead Sea Scroll material if the Qumran community was, in fact, Essene. Since this identification is not accepted by all scholars, it is best to consider first the information about the Essenes from the classical sources and then to compare that with the data from Qumran.

The earliest mention of the Essenes comes from Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, in two works written prior to 40 CE: *Every Good Man Is Free* (12-13.75-91) and *Hypothetica* (11.1-18, preserved in Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*). [See Philo Judaeus.] Philo does not appear to have firsthand knowledge of the group, and he presents a somewhat idealized picture of the Essenes with frequent favor-

able comparisons to Greek thought and practice. Philo also speaks in a third work (*The Contemplative Life*) of a group in Egypt called the Therapeutae, who are similar to the Essenes, but live a more contemplative life.

A second important early reference to the Essenes comes from the Roman writer Pliny. In a section of his *Natural History*, completed in 77 CE, Pliny describes the topography of Judea (5.15.73). He speaks of the Essenes to the west of the Dead Sea, then 'Ein-Gedi below the Essenes, and Masada south of 'Ein-Gedi. The location of the Essenes in the same area as Qumran is most intriguing.

In a brief testimony, Dio Chrysostom (c.40–112 CE), a Greek orator and philosopher, also locates the Essenes by the Dead Sea. In words similar to Pliny, Dio's biographer Synesius (c.370–413 CE) speaks of Dio's praise for the Essenes, "who form an entire and prosperous city near the Dead Sea, in the center of Palestine, not far from Sodom" (*Dio* 3.2).

The most detailed ancient description of the Essenes comes from the Jewish historian Josephus (ca. 37–100 CE). Josephus mentions the Essenes thirteen times in his works, including two major passages: one in *The Jewish War*, written circa 73 CE (*The Jewish War* 2.119–161) and one in *Jewish Antiquities*, completed in 94 CE (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.11, 18–22). Josephus claims to have spent time with the Essenes when he was sixteen, but from the chronology he presents of his life he probably spent no more than six months with them (*Life* 1.10–12). Still, the fact that Josephus was a Palestinian Jew who probably had some direct contact with the group makes his detailed accounts of unique importance among the classical sources. As with Philo, however, Josephus's apologetic purpose to explain Judaism in a favorable light to a Greek-speaking world undoubtedly resulted in some idealization and accommodation to Greek thought in his depiction of the Essenes. [See Josephus Flavius.]

Brief mention of the Essenes is also made by Hegesippus, a second-century Christian historian, fragments of whose work is preserved in Eusebius. Hegesippus lists the Essenes in a group of seven Jewish sects.

The Roman bishop Hippolytus (c.170–236 CE) provides a description of the Essenes in his *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (9.18–28). This account is similar to Josephus (*The Jewish War* 2.119–161), and may be dependent upon him or derived from a common source. One interesting difference is that Hippolytus describes the Essenes as believing in a bodily resurrection. Hippolytus is the first of many later Christian writers to view the Essenes as a heretical Jewish sect (*Refutatio* 9.17) rather than simply as one of several mainstream Jewish sects.

As noted above, Epiphanius (c.315–403 CE) mentions

both the Essenes (as a sect of the Samaritans) and the Ossaeans (a sect of Judaism that denies the Mosaic Law), but gives little information about either group. [See Epiphanius.] The later Christian writers provide no new information about the Essenes.

Customs and Beliefs of the Essenes According to the Classical Sources. The following brief summary of the major customs and beliefs of the Essenes is derived largely from the writings of Philo, Pliny, and Josephus.

Location. Philo and Josephus both agree that the total number of Essenes was over four thousand, and that they lived in many cities in Palestine (*The Jewish War* 2.124; *Hypothetica* 11.1). Elsewhere, however, Philo contradicts himself by saying that they lived in villages and avoided the cities (*Every Good Man Is Free* 12.76). Pliny puts them by the Dead Sea. Thus there appears to have been a major settlement in the Dead Sea region with other, smaller groups elsewhere in Palestine.

Admission. Josephus describes a three-year initiation period. During the first year, while the novice remained outside, he was required to follow the sect's way of life. In the second and third years, he was permitted to join in their purificatory baths, but could not partake of the common meal. Finally, after taking "awesome oaths," he was admitted as a full member into the community (*The Jewish War* 2.137–42).

Organization and authority. The sect was highly organized. Josephus states that nothing was done "except by the order of their overseers" (*The Jewish War* 2.134). One of the oaths of the initiate was trustworthiness to all, especially to those in authority (*The Jewish War* 2.140). In addition, the teachings of the sect were to be kept secret from nonmembers (*The Jewish War* 2.142). Obedience to the elders was stressed (*The Jewish War* 2.146), and in the case of disobedience or other matters of justice, at least one hundred members constituted the court. Severe offenses resulted in expulsion from the order (*The Jewish War* 2.143–145).

Communal property. All three first-century sources stress that a major tenet of the Essenes was communal property. Those entering the sect transferred their property to the order, so that no one was richer than another (*The Jewish War* 2.122; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.20; *Hypothetica* 10.4; *Every Good Man Is Free* 12.77; *Natural History* 5.15.73). Even food and clothing were held in common (*Hypothetica* 11.12). Hatred of riches is stressed by both Josephus and Philo (*The Jewish War* 2.122; *Hypothetica* 11.11). Josephus reports that, as a result of their frugality, the Essenes did not replace clothing or sandals until they were completely worn out (*The Jewish War* 2.126). Overseers of the common property were elected by the members (*The Jewish War* 2.123; *Hypothetica* 11.10).

Celibacy. Pliny states that the Essenes renounced love entirely and were without women (*Natural History* 5.15.73). Philo likewise states that “no Essene takes a wife” (*Hypothetica* 11.14–17). Josephus also notes the Essenes did not marry because wives caused factions. They did, however, adopt other peoples’ children at an early age (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.21; *The Jewish War* 2.120). In contrast, Josephus later mentions another order of Essenes who *did* marry.

Daily work. Josephus states that Essenes worked entirely in agriculture (*Jewish Antiquities* 1.19), while Philo adds that they were also shepherds, beekeepers, and craftsmen in different trades (*Hypothetica* 11.8). Commerce was forbidden because it led to greed. They did not make any implements of war, nor did they own any slaves (*Every Good Man Is Free* 12.78–79). However, Josephus depicts John the Essene as leading in war at Ascalon (*The Jewish War* 3.9–12).

The daily routine consisted of prayer before sunrise, work until midday, participation in a purificatory bath and a common meal, work until evening, and a second common meal (*The Jewish War* 2.128–132).

Rituals. The Essenes were very concerned with ritual purity. Philo states that they demonstrated their love for God by their continual purity (*Every Good Man Is Free* 12.84). Josephus speaks of a daily purificatory bath taken by all Essenes except novices prior to the midday meal (*The Jewish War* 2.129). He also mentions that senior Essenes touched by juniors “must wash as if they had been in contact with a stranger” (*The Jewish War* 2.150). They were always dressed in white clothing (*The Jewish War* 2.123).

Both Philo and Josephus mention the Essene common meal, Josephus saying that they went into the dining room “even as into some holy shrine.” The priest would pray before and after the meal, which was eaten in relative silence (*The Jewish War* 2.129–133).

The Essene attitude toward sacrifice is unclear. Philo states that the Essenes “have shown themselves especially devout in the service of God, not by offering sacrifices of animals, but by resolving to sanctify their minds” (*Every Good Man Is Free* 12.75). This statement may mean that the Essenes did not sacrifice at all, but it also might simply mean that sacrifice was not the focal point of their worship. The Epitome and Latin versions of Josephus state that the Essenes did *not* offer sacrifices, but the Greek text (probably to be preferred on the basis of slightly superior external evidence) omits the negative. According to the Greek text, Josephus says that while the Essenes offered sacrifices, they were excluded from the common court of the Temple because of a difference in their purification rites, and thus offered sacrifices by themselves (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.19).

Josephus describes the ritual morning prayers of the Essenes: before the rising of the sun they “direct certain ancestral prayers towards it, as if entreating it to rise” (*The Jewish War* 2.128). The reference is probably to the direction the Essenes faced as they prayed (i.e., eastward), rather than to worship of the sun.

The Essenes were devoted to the law and thus were strict observers of the Sabbath. Josephus says that they held Moses in greatest reverence (after God; *The Jewish War* 2.145), and he writes that “they were stricter than all Jews in not undertaking work on the seventh day” in that they did not cook, move a vessel, or even relieve themselves (since to do so they would need to dig a pit; *The Jewish War* 2.147; so also Philo, *Every Good Man Is Free* 12.81–82).

Other beliefs. The Essenes were deterministic in their outlook. Josephus states that they “like to leave all things to God” and believe that “fate is the ruler of all things” (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.18; 13.171–172).

The Essenes were also very interested in the study of “holy books” and “the writings of the ancients” (*The Jewish War* 2.136; 2.159; see also Philo, *Every Good Man Is Free* 12.80–82). Certainly this would include the biblical books, but might encompass other books as well, because Josephus states further that the Essenes used these writings to “search out medicinal roots and the properties of stones” to heal diseases (*The Jewish War* 2.136).

Also important to the Essenes were angels. The person joining the community had to swear to preserve “the books of their sect and the names of the angels” (*The Jewish War* 2.142).

Josephus also mentions that some Essenes professed to foresee the future. He adds that “rarely, if ever, do they err in their predictions” (*The Jewish War* 2.159). Elsewhere Josephus gives three examples of Essene prophecy. One involves an Essene named Judas in the time of Aristobulus I, who “never erred in his predictions” (*The Jewish War* 1.78–80; *Jewish Antiquities* 13.311–313); in another case Simon interpreted the dream of Archelaus correctly (*The Jewish War* 2.111–113; *Jewish Antiquities* 17.346–348); and in the third example Menahem made several accurate predictions concerning Herod. Josephus notes that it is because of the virtue of Menahem in particular and the Essenes in general that they were “thought worthy of this acquaintance with divine things” (*Jewish Antiquities* 15.371–379).

Finally, Josephus speaks at length on the Essene teaching of the immortality of the soul. The body was regarded as a prison house of the soul, but once the body died the soul was set free. Good souls went to a refreshing place “beyond the ocean,” while evil souls went to a gloomy place “filled with incessant punishments” (*The Jewish*

War 2.154–158). Josephus mentions that this doctrine is similar to that of the Greeks. One wonders how much of the Greek flavoring of this Essene teaching is the author's own invention. Similarly, when treating the Pharisees, Josephus speaks of their doctrine of the immortality of the soul, but does not mention their belief in a bodily resurrection (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.14; *The Jewish War* 2.163). Hippolytus goes beyond Josephus at this point and states that the Essenes believed in a bodily resurrection (*Refutatio* 9.27). It is uncertain whether Hippolytus is simply adding a Christian slant to the Essenes' beliefs, or whether his account here is more trustworthy than that of Josephus.

Relationship of the Essenes to the Dead Sea Scroll Community. Ever since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many scholars have identified the Dead Sea Scroll community as Essene. It is still the most widely held view among scholars today. Since a full description of the Qumran community and alternative identifications of the community are treated elsewhere, the focus in this section will be the evidence for the identification of the Qumran community as Essene.

Chronology. Chronologically, Josephus's first mention of the Essenes is in connection with Jonathan Maccabee in the mid-second century BCE (*Jewish Antiquities* 13.171). In addition, he attests to the presence of Essenes during his lifetime (*Life* 1.10–12). This fits with the archaeological and paleographic data, which confirm the existence of the Qumran community from the mid-second century BCE to 68 CE.

Location. The geographical reference by Pliny makes the identification of the Qumran community with the Essenes somewhat compelling. In describing the western side of the Dead Sea, Pliny speaks of the Essenes to the west of the Dead Sea, then 'Ein-Gedi below them (*infra hos Engada*), and then Masada further south. Although some have objected that Pliny (writing in 77 CE) could not be talking about Qumran in the present tense because it was destroyed in 68 CE, it is probable that he used earlier source material. Pliny also notes that the Essenes live among palm trees, which would fit the region between Khirbet Qumran and 'Ein-Feshkha, the spring just south of their farm area.

Communal life and practice. There are many similarities between the practices of the Essenes as described by the ancient sources and those presented in the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly the Rule of the Community (1QS) and the Damascus Document (CD). While there are other fragmentary copies of both works from the Qumran caves, the most complete copies, 1QS and CD, will be referenced here.

Admission. Admission into the sect is described in a

lengthy section in the Rule of the Community (1QS vi.13–23), which is quite similar to that described by Josephus. While there is some difference in details, both sources agree on the following: a period of time spent outside the sect; a two-year period of initiation within the community itself; participation in the common meal denied to the novice; and a solemn oath made prior to full acceptance into the community. We know of no other group in ancient Judaism that had such an elaborate multi-year process of admission.

Organization and obedience to authority. As in Josephus's account of the Essenes, order within the community and obedience to authority were stressed in Qumran. Those who joined the community had to submit to the authority of the leaders (1QS v.2–3), obey those of higher rank (1QS v.23, vi.2, 25–26), and respect the authority of the community (1QS vii.17).

Communal property. Sharing of property is also evident in Qumranian literature. New members transferred their property to the community, and the full member mingled his property with that of the community (1QS i.11–12, v.1–2; vi.17–22). But in 1QS vii.8–9 the requirements for a person to reimburse the community for damage to communal property imply that some members had personal property. In the Damascus Document property could be lost or stolen from its owner (CD ix.10–16; see also CD xiv.12–13). The archaeology of Qumran confirms pooled possessions: hundreds of coins were found in the administration building, but not a single coin in the living quarters. Also an ostrakon found by excavators in 1996 at the base of the eastern perimeter wall may record the gift of a man's property, including a slave, to the community. If the Cross/Eshel reconstruction (disputed by A. Yardeni) is correct, it would provide further evidence from archaeology of a new member's transfer of his property to the community.

Celibacy. The Dead Sea Scrolls do not speak of a prohibition of marriage (as Philo and Josephus do), although the Rule of the Community is silent on the subject, not mentioning women at all. But the Damascus Document does speak of marriage (in a prohibition of polygamy, CD iv.19–v.2; in other contexts, CD v.6–7, vii.6–7, xii.1–2, xvi.10–12), as does the Rule of the Congregation, where a young man was prohibited from sexual relations with a woman until he was twenty (1Q28a i.9–12).

The archaeology of Qumran may shed light on this important question, as all the skeletons excavated in the main, planned part of the cemetery were male, while skeletons of women and children were found only on the outskirts. This may indicate that there was both a celibate group as well as a married group (who lived elsewhere?) among the sectarians, which would fit well with Josephus's

statement that there was both a celibate group of Essenes and another group of Essenes who married.

Daily work. Archaeology of the Qumran area indicates that the inhabitants were occupied in both agriculture and craft work. This fits well with the statements of Josephus and Philo concerning the Essenes.

Rituals. Purificatory washings, mentioned by Josephus, were apparently practiced at Qumran. Archaeologists have found seven large cisterns with steps that might have been used for this purpose. Both the Rule of the Community (e.g., 1QS v.13–14) and the Damascus Document refer to purificatory washing (CD xi.21–22), although neither refers to the daily washings mentioned by Josephus.

Josephus notes that the Essenes avoid oil because it is a defilement (*The Jewish War* 2.123), and the Damascus Document says that substances with oil are impure (CD xii.15–17). In 4QMMT (4Q394–4Q399) the reason for the impurity of oil is that liquids transmitted ritual impurity from one item to the next.

Avoidance of spitting is also mentioned by Josephus as a practice of the Essenes (*The Jewish War* 2.147). The Rule of the Community contains a similar prohibition (1QS vii.13).

The common meal spoken of by Josephus is well attested at Qumran, both by the archaeological evidence (with a pantry containing more than one thousand vessels for eating adjacent to a large room) and direct statements in the scrolls. The Rule of the Community states that “they shall eat together and they shall bless together” (1QS vi.2–3) and goes on to describe the common meal (1QS vi.4–5; cf. 1QS v.13, vi.16–17, 22, 24–25, vii.19–20 and viii.16–18).

The evidence concerning sacrifice in the Dead Sea Scrolls is not much clearer than Josephus’s testimony on the same subject. Although the evidence, notably CD vi.11–14 and xi.17–22, could be interpreted in different ways, it is probable that both Josephus and some Qumranian literature permitted Temple sacrifices, but with a great concern for ritual purity in the process.

Devotion to the law and strict observance of the Sabbath, both emphasized by Josephus, are likewise mentioned often in the scrolls (1QS viii.22; cf. 1QS i.1–3, v.8; CD xv.8–9, 12–13, xvi.2). With respect to the Sabbath, the Damascus Document contains a long list of activities prohibited on the Sabbath; this list is sometimes even more strict than rabbinic law (CD x.14–xi.18; so also CD iii.14, vi.18, xii.3–6).

Other beliefs. The deterministic outlook mentioned by Josephus as characteristic of the Essenes is also evident throughout the scrolls. For example, the Hodayot states that “before You created them You knew all their deeds forever and ever. [Without You no]thing is done, and

apart from Your will nothing ever can be known” (1QH^a i.7–8; so also 1QH^a vii.31–32, xv.12–15, 17; 1QS iii.15–16, ix.23–24; the War Scroll [1QM] xvii.5).

The Essene interest in the study and use of books, as mentioned by Josephus, is overwhelmingly evident at Qumran. Biblical, deuterocanonical, and pseudepigraphical books are well attested, as are many sectarian works. Interest in healing may also be seen in the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen xx.19–20) as well as in the numerous copies of Jubilees and Enoch, both of which speak of healing.

Interest in angels is another point of agreement between Josephus’s testimony about the Essenes and Qumran. Not only are angels abundantly mentioned in Enoch, but they are likewise referenced in the rule books, the Hodayot, the War Scroll (see especially 1QM ix.14–17, xii.1–5), and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice.

Josephus’s statement concerning Essene interest in the prophets and in prophecy is seen in the Qumran texts. There are direct statements concerning the importance of the prophets in the Rule of the Community and the Damascus Document (1QS i.2–3, ix.11; CD vii.17–18), as well as numerous copies of the biblical prophetic books and a large number of citations from these books in the rest of Qumranian literature. Furthermore, the *pesharim* (“commentaries” on biblical passages) found at Qumran contain reinterpretations of prophetic texts in which the fulfillment is found in the contemporary situation of the community (see, e.g., Peshar Habakkuk [1QpHab]).

Finally, concerning the afterlife, there is mention of everlasting life (1QS iv.6–8; CD iii.20; see also Rule of the Blessings [1Q28b] iv.24–26), and several passages may speak of bodily resurrection, although the evidence is not clear (see 1QH^a iii.10–22, iv.34 [“they that lie in the dust raise the banner and the worms of the dead raise the standard”]; xi.12; 1QM xii.1–4; and especially Messianic Apocalypse [4Q521]). The ancient sources on the Essenes and the scrolls agree on eternal life for the soul, but the sources disagree on the Essene view of the fate of the body (Hippolytus asserts resurrection of the body, but not Josephus), with the data from the sectarian scrolls inconclusive.

Possible discrepancies. Aside from the areas where either our sources concerning the Essenes or the Qumranian documents contain internal disagreements within themselves (for example, Philo’s assertion of celibacy versus Josephus’s statement that there is a marrying group of Essenes), there are surprisingly few disagreements between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the accounts of the Essenes. There are small differences in entrance procedure and oaths, but overall there is more similarity in the two descriptions. In some cases, both the Essene accounts and the scrolls are unclear (for example, the issue of sacrifice or the belief in a bodily resurrection).

While some correspondences between the Essenes and the scrolls could characterize any Jewish group, many agreements, even in minutia such as avoidance of spitting, or the priestly praying before the common meal, are impressive.

Still, there are some areas where the scrolls do not appear to line up with the Essene identification. The scrolls speak of the importance of priests and of prominent figures such as the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest. In addition, the scrolls highlight the group's messianic expectation (with dual messianic figures) and their unusual solar calendar. Yet, with the exception of a brief mention of priests in Josephus, none of these areas is discussed in the classical descriptions of the Essenes.

With the recent publication of *Miqtsat Ma'asei ha-Torah* (4Q394–4Q399), some scholars have revived an earlier proposal that the Qumran community originated as a group of Sadducees. *Miqtsat Ma'asei ha-Torah* contains some agreements in a few legal matters with the Sadducees over against the Pharisees. One of these is the view that a stream of liquid conveys impurity from one item to the next. But this document supports Josephus's statement about the Essene avoidance of oil, and contains no inherent contradiction with any known Essene position. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that the Qumran sect was Sadducean, since the scrolls teach the non-Sadducean doctrines of the existence of angels and the importance of fate.

In any discussion of the identification of the Qumran group or the movement of which it was a part, it is important to remember that works such as the Rule of the Community and the Damascus Document may represent different stages in the community's development, and this may well account for some of the discrepancies between the Qumran documents as well as between these documents and Josephus. Overall, Josephus's description of the Essenes more closely parallels the Rule of the Community than the Damascus Document. With respect to matters that are reflected in the scrolls but not mentioned by the ancient sources, Josephus and Philo may have thought that these matters (messianic expectation, solar calendar) were not important or relevant to their purpose—making this Jewish sect appealing to the Greek mind. While there is still much that is not known about either the Essenes or the writers of the scrolls, on balance it is still likely that the identification of the Qumran community as Essene in some form is correct.

History of the Group. The ancient sources say little about the history of the Essenes. Josephus notes that the three philosophies among the Jews were “inherited from the most ancient times” (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.11) and Pliny states that “for thousands of centuries a race has

existed which is eternal” (*Natural History* 5.15.73). Neither statement helps identify the beginning of the Essenes.

Josephus first speaks of the Essenes during the rule of Jonathan Maccabee (160–43 BCE) (*Jewish Antiquities* 13.171). He mentions three Essene prophets by name: Judas, during the reign of Aristobulus I (104–103 BCE) (*The Jewish War* 1.78–80; *Jewish Antiquities* 13.311–313); Menahem, who made two predictions concerning Herod the Great (ruled 37–4 BCE) (*Jewish Antiquities* 15.371–379); and Simon, who in 4 BCE interpreted a dream of Archelaus, ethnarch of Judea (4 BCE–6 CE), to mean that his reign would last for ten more years (*The Jewish War* 2.111–113; *Jewish Antiquities* 17.346–348). In his autobiography, Josephus mentions spending some time with the Essenes when he was about sixteen years old (ca. 53–54 CE).

Finally, Josephus speaks of the Essenes during the time of the first Jewish Revolt against the Romans (66–70 CE). In particular he mentions John the Essene, one of three generals who led an abortive attempt to take Ascalon in 67 CE (*The Jewish War* 2.566–568; *The Jewish War* 3.9–21).

Josephus records the Essene fearlessness in the war with the Romans in a remarkable passage in the *The Jewish War*. He says that this war “tested their souls in every way.” Although tortured horribly, they did not “blaspheme the lawgiver or eat something forbidden”; instead, “they gave up their souls cheerfully, confident that they would get them back again” (*The Jewish War* 2.152–153). That is the last historical reference to the Essenes in Josephus.

Thus, from our ancient sources we have verification of the Essenes from c.150 BCE to the war against the Romans in 66–70 CE.

If, as was argued above, the Qumran community is Essene, then there is further information both from the archaeology of the Qumran site and from the scrolls themselves that may assist in establishing an outline of the history of the Essenes. Unfortunately, the scroll data are cryptic, and scholars do not even agree as to which of the scrolls were written by the sect. And once again various documents may have been written at different stages of the community's existence. All of this complicates the attempt to come up with a history of the Essenes and the Dead Sea Scroll sect. Several hypotheses are discussed briefly below.

One theory of the origin of the Essenes (held by Vermes, 1978; Cross, 1995; and many others) sees the group as springing from within Palestine, possibly from the Hasideans, in the mid-second-century BCE during the Maccabean period. *I Maccabees* states that the Hasideans first supported the Maccabean revolt, but later broke with them (*I Mc.* 2.42; 7.13–14). Some of these Hasideans

may have become the Essenes (note the possible etymological link between the two names discussed earlier). The Damascus Document speaks of a period of twenty years of blind groping (CD i.9–10), which may be the period of support for the Maccabees. There arose a man called in the scrolls the Wicked Priest, who as a non-Zadokite usurped the high priesthood (see Peshar Habakkuk [1QpHab] viii.8–13, ix.9–12, xi.4–6, xii.7–9). The Wicked Priest has been identified as either Jonathan, when he was appointed High Priest in 152 BCE, or (less likely) Simon, when he and his house were given the high priesthood by decree in 140 BCE. It is noteworthy that Josephus's first mention of the Essenes is during the rule of Jonathan. The Wicked Priest was opposed by the Teacher of Righteousness (the leader of the group, and a priest himself according to Peshar Psalms^a, 4Q171 1, 3–4.iii.15), who led his group to the desert of Qumran.

A second theory of Essene origins (championed by Murphy-O'Connor, 1974) traces the beginning of the sect to Jews deported to Babylon in 586 BCE. The idea is that some of these Jews returned to Palestine after Judas Maccabee's victory, which created an independent Jewish state. But they became quickly disillusioned with Hellenistic tendencies they found there, so as a result a group of Essenes retreated to the desert of Qumran. Support for this theory comes from the beginning of the Damascus Document, which speaks of God causing a root of planting to spring up "390 years after He delivered them into the hands of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon" (CD i.5–8). In addition, the Damascus Document speaks of "the returnees of Israel who went out from the land of Judah and were exiled in the land of Damascus" (CD vi.5). Damascus may be symbolic for Babylon (another place of exile; see *Am.* 5.27, cited in CD vii.15; cf. *Acts* 7.23), although others see it as referring to Qumran or to Damascus itself.

A third theory (called the Groningen Hypothesis) has emerged recently from Florentino García Martínez and A. S. van der Woude. They argue that the Essene sect is Palestinian with ideological roots in the apocalyptic tradition of the late third century or early second century BCE. According to this view, there was a rift in the Essene movement dealing with calendar issues (and the corresponding cycle of feasts), temple worship, and purity. When other Essenes resisted the Teacher of Righteousness's attempt to push these issues, he led a break-off group to the desert retreat of Qumran in the days of John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE). According to this theory, the Wicked Priest refers to a succession of high priests from Judas Maccabee (164–160 BCE) to Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE).

Whatever the precise origin of the Essenes, it is clear from our ancient sources that they existed in numerous places other than Qumran. Josephus speaks of Judas as

living in Jerusalem (*Jewish Antiquities* 13.311). He also refers to a "Gate of the Essenes" in Jerusalem (*The Jewish War* 5.145), which has apparently now been excavated (Pixner, 1997). [See Essene Gate.]

The history of the Essene (?) settlement at Qumran is described elsewhere. [See Qumran.] The site was occupied until 68 CE when the Romans conquered it. Some believe that the Zealots joined the group during this last phase of occupation prior to Roman conquest.

What happened to the Essenes after 68 CE is not known. Although the destruction of the Qumran site itself did not extinguish the Essenes who lived elsewhere, the effect of the war and the Roman occupation probably caused the Essenes to dissolve as an independent sect. Some Essenes may have joined the resistance at Masada until its capture in 74 CE (a copy of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice was found there). There is no solid evidence of their existence after this time.

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