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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 *hosiotes*, "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 first-hand 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 Ossaeanes (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 You 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. *1 Maccabees* states that the Hasideans first supported the Maccabean revolt, but later broke with them (*1 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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TODD S. BEALL

ESTHER, BOOK OF. As is well known, only two of the books of the Hebrew scriptures as it now stands were not found among the fragments of the Judean Desert corpus, the books of *Esther* and *Nehemiah*. However, since the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are often found together on one scroll, and fragments of the *Book of Ezra* are found in one manuscript from Qumran, Cave 4, it is considered that *Nehemiah* was most likely present at Qumran as well. *Esther*, therefore, is unique as the only biblical book not found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Several reasons have been advanced for this anomaly: First, since the book is short, it is merely an accident or chance that no fragments have been preserved (after all, the book of *Chronicles* survived in only one fragment). Second, the all-male community at Qumran did not wish to possess a book in which a female was the heroine. Since the notion of an all-male, celibate community at Qumran has been seriously challenged, this argument appears to be groundless. Third, the community at Qumran, with its stringent rules concerning purity, was opposed to *Esther*, in which the Jews mingled freely with gentiles and did not observe the dietary laws. Fourth, the *Book of Esther*, written in the Diaspora, was not known in Palestine prior to the destruction of the Second Temple, and its festival, Purim (which would have been celebrated on a Sabbath in the 364-day calendar), was not celebrated there. Fifth, some scholars date the Hebrew version of *Esther* as late as the second century CE, making it too late for inclusion in the Judean Desert corpus. The first and fourth explana-

tions appear to be most likely, depending upon one's dating of the book.

However, there is one text among the Dead Sea Scrolls that resembles the *Book of Esther* in style and setting. This text, Proto-*Esther*^{a-f} 4Q550, was published by J. T. Milik in 1992 and entitled by him "4QprotoAramaic-*Esther*," although subsequent commentators have suggested that the title "Tales from the Persian Court" would be more apt. The manuscript, which is written in Aramaic (a language closely related to Hebrew), consists of six fragments which date approximately to the second half of the first century BCE. Although very small, they seem to recount the adventures of a group of Jews in the court of the Persian kings Darius and Xerxes. In general setting, the parallel to *Esther* is clear. However, the parallels are more particular than simply the setting. Fragments a-c describe the possible rivalry between a high functionary of the Persian court and a minor servant of the royal wardrobe. Within the fragments, the Persian king, identified as the son of Darius and thus Xerxes, has the royal annals read aloud to him, as in *Esther* 6.1. However, there are also clear differences: The protagonists are not clearly Jewish, and there is little evidence of a court conflict as is seen between Mordecai and Haman in the *Esther* story.

In addition to parallels to the Hebrew *Book of Esther*, fragment d of Tales of the Persian Court contains parallels to the Greek Additions C and D found in the Septuagint version of *Esther*. These Septuagint Additions are particularly important for their inclusion of religious elements, such as the prayer missing in the Hebrew version of *Esther*. The fragment opens with a prayer of a Jew to God, which has certain similarities to *Esther's* prayer in the Septuagint, Addition C. Other parallels to the *Book of Esther* follow: There is evidently a power struggle between a non-Jew and a Jew, in which the Jew emerges victorious; there is a dialogue between the Persian king and a female protagonist, and at the end of the fragment the king makes a proclamation praising God, as in the Septuagint, Addition E. However, there are also important differences (for example, the protagonist's name is Bagasraw, and his presumed enemy is Bagoshe) which make it impossible to posit a direct relationship between these Aramaic fragments and the Hebrew or Greek versions of the *Book of Esther*. Fragments e and f of Tales of the Persian Court are small and do not give much information, although fragment f contains a quotation of *Isaiah* 14.31-32, again a startling difference from the *Esther* corpus, which shows no awareness of other biblical texts. The conclusion that must be drawn concerning Tales of the Persian Court, therefore, is that it is not directly related to the *Esther* corpus as it has been preserved. However, it is possible that these fragments