

CHAPTER 1

Lakeside Galilee and the Essene Caves Hypothesis

Introduction

This research began with a simple question concerning the apostolic authorship of the Book of Revelation: How could the apostle John, a fisherman born by the Sea of Galilee around 10 CE, ever have become the writer of an apocalypse like the Book of Revelation, or of a gospel such as the Fourth Gospel? The explanation has been so elusive that many scholars nowadays assert that “this Gospel cannot come from a Galilean fisherman”,¹ and that “While the final author-editor of Revelation was named “John”, it is not possible to identify him with any other early Christian figures of the same name, including John the son of Zebedee or the shadowy figure of John the Elder”.² With these denials by some of the most prominent biblical scholars of the 20th century, the subject needs to be reviewed in a new way.

A new direction is suggested by looking at works of the same genre that may have been known by the author of the Book of Revelation. George Nickelsburg affirms that one work stands out among the rest: “In its form as an apocalypse in which the seer is taken to heaven to see the events relating to the coming judgment, this work [the Book of Revelation] offers the closest first century Christian analog to the Parables of Enoch. A number of other Enochic elements are present as

¹ Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, Eng. Trans John Bowden, London/Philadelphia: SCM Press/Trinity Press International, 1989; 130.

² David Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary, Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997; Vol 1, lvi.

well”.³ A dedicated study has also recently confirmed that, of all the pre-Christian apocalypses, the author of the Book of Revelation was closest to the collection of writings called *1Enoch*, and especially to the book at the centre of that collection called the Parables of Enoch (*1Enoch* 37-71).⁴

Quite separately, over the last 20 years, the Parables of Enoch has been the subject of intense research and discussion by scholars from around the world. At a meeting at Camaldoli, Italy, in 2005, forty-four specialists met to discuss this work⁵ and out of their discussion came general agreement that it was written towards the end of the first century BCE. James Charlesworth goes so far as to suggest that it was composed in eastern Galilee and was known to Jesus and his early followers.⁶ Charlesworth published his thesis in greater detail in 2013⁷ and, in the same book, the local Israeli archaeologist, Mordechai

³ ‘Where is the Place of Eschatological Blessing’, *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honour of Michael E. Stone*, eds. E. Chazon, D. Satran and R. Clements, Leiden: Brill, 2004; 70.

⁴ ‘The Apocalypse of John, I Enoch, and the Question of Influence’, by Loren Stuckenbruck and Mark Mathews, *Die Johannesapokalypse*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2012; 191-234. The authors conclude that apart from Exodus, Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel, whose importance for the Book of Revelation is the greatest, the influence of *1Enoch* is comparable to that of the other canonical books of the Bible. Regarding the relation between *1Enoch* and the Book of Revelation they write: “The largest number of significant parallels (...) suggesting the possibility of Enochic influence on Revelation has to do with the *Book of Parables* (six). This signifies an affinity that can be explained by the relative contemporaneity of the *Book of Parables* with Revelation or by the use of one by the other, with the direction of influence most likely being from the *Book of Parables* to Revelation” op. cit. 233.

⁵ The 3rd Enoch Seminar on the topic “Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man”, whose proceedings were later published in “*Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*”, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2007.

⁶ James H Charlesworth, ‘Can We Discern the Composition Date of the Parables of Enoch?’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 450-68.

⁷ James H. Charlesworth, ‘The Date and Provenience of the Parables of Enoch’, *Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and James H. Charlesworth, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013; 37-57; id. ‘Did Jesus know the Traditions’, *Paradigm Shift*, 173-217.

Aviam, argued that its birthplace was the ancient town of Magdala, or Tarichaea in Greek.⁸

At this point, it is difficult to ignore a spatial and temporal connection with the early life of John the son of Zebedee, future apostle of Jesus Christ. As the owner of at least one fishing boat, Zebedee would have sent his surplus fish for processing in Magdala, and so it is more than likely that his sons, John and James, made regular and frequent crossings to that town. There, they certainly would have come to know and discuss religious matters and one of the more important matters would have been the Parables of Enoch. This was a messianic prophecy that had been written only a generation before, either in Magdala itself or, more likely, in the vicinity—for the large population, the constant industrial activity and the strong smell of fish in Magdala itself would have deterred all but the briefest of visits by the contemplative scribe or scribes who wrote this book.

So, if not in Magdala itself, the 'birthplace' of the Parables of Enoch was somewhere in the vicinity, at a place that remains to be identified with greater precision.

Arbela, Mount Arbel and the Caves

In the *Book of Enoch* (*1Enoch*), the Parables of Enoch (*1Enoch* 37-71) are preceded by an older work called the Book of Watchers (*1Enoch* 1-36), whose narrative is set on top of, and at the foot of, Mount Hermon in north-eastern Galilee, a mere 50-60 kms due north of Magdala. However, because of its low level by the lake, Mt. Hermon is barely visible from this town. Nevertheless, wonderful views of Mount Hermon can be seen only 2 kms to the west of Magdala, from the summit of the mountain with a very distinctive profile, aptly called Mount Arbel. This mountain is famous for its long range of cliffs, which tower 300 meters above the ancient route (a side branch of the *Via Maris*) that runs along Wadi Arbel (נהל ארבל), before entering the Ginnosar plain and arriving at Magdala by the Sea of Galilee.

The name Arbel is derived from the biblical 'Beit Arv'el' (בית ארבאל; Hos 10,14), composed of the word 'arav' which means 'a place of ambush' and 'El' who is God. So Arbel literally means 'a place where

⁸ Mordechai Aviam, 'The Book of Enoch and the Galilean Archaeology and Landscape', *Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, 159-69.

God waits in ambush' or, in other words, 'a place of divine judgment'. As divine judgment for some means divine redemption for others, it is surely no coincidence that an ancient tradition claims that divine redemption will begin on the plateau above the mountain, called the 'plain of Arbel' (בִּקְעָת אַרְבֵּל). On this plain, a few hundred meters southwest of the northern-most tip of Mount Arbel, a town called Arbela in Aramaic (Arbel in Hebrew) was established in ancient times, sometime between 120-100 BCE. The town had an impressive synagogue at its centre and grew to a population of about 2,500 souls, until it was destroyed by a powerful earthquake in 747 CE. It is now an archaeological site (חֹרֶבַת אַרְבֵּל) adjacent to a modern farming community, or 'moshav', of the same name.

An archaeological investigation of the area from 1987-1989, conducted by the archaeologist Dr. Zvi Ilan, included a survey of the innumerable caves etched into Mt. Arbel's range of cliffs, a few hundred meters to the north and east of Arbela.⁹ The topography is important because the archaeologist concluded that there appeared to be a temporal relationship between the ancient town above and the caves in the cliff, which he calls a "cave-village". Noting that some of the caves were hewn and adapted for human inhabitation at about the same time as the town was built, sometime during the Hasmonean era (167-63 BCE), he wrote: "The archeological finds indicate that the built and hewn settlements existed simultaneously: the built settlement may have been founded a short time prior to the cave village, and its inhabitants may have been the hewers of the stone shelters".¹⁰ In all, he found evidence of human habitation in about 100-120 caves along the cliffs of Mt. Arbel, dating from the Hasmonean era and continuing up until the early 17th century, when the Druze overlord of Lebanon and Galilee, Fahr a-Din II, built many of the previously inhabited caves into a walled fortress known as Qala'at Ibn Ma'an.

The archaeologist reports two striking discoveries in his survey of the 'cave-village'. The first was the finding of at least "twenty plastered structures: most of them were used for storing water, but at

⁹ The survey is amply described by Zvi Ilan, in English, in 'Reviving a 2,000-Year-Old Landmark', *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/1989; 61-69, and briefly also in *Excavations and Surveys in Israel*, 1989, in Hebrew:

"ארבל- סקר בכפר המערות", חדשות ארכיאולוגיות צד, ירושלים, 1989, 14-15.

¹⁰ *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/1989; 68.

least three of them were *mikva'ot*, ritual baths, furnished with steps".¹¹ Analysis of the plaster and the style of the cisterns and ritual baths confirm a Hasmonean dating, which matches the finding of a Tyrian coin that was in use between 138-96 BCE. Plaster fragments and structural modifications found in the Druze fortress point to the previous existence of more cisterns and ritual baths within the many caves incorporated into the fortress, when it was built in the early 17th century.

The second striking discovery was described by Dr. Zvi Ilan as follows: "East of the caves, near the beginning of the main trail leading down to Nahal Arbel, were the remains of another cave fortress; to the best of our knowledge, this fortress had never been mentioned before in any of the archaeological literature or historical accounts".¹² He goes on to describe a massive hall carved into the cave, 75 meters long, 14 meters wide and 10-12 meters high, with the remains of a wall built to cover the entrance of the cave, and including several hewn rooms on different levels in its middle part.¹³ Apart from noting a resemblance between the remains of the wall and the fine masonry of fortresses from the Hasmonean and Herodian periods, the archaeologist is at a loss to identify and even to date this structure, as pottery finds range from the Iron Age through to the early Arab period.

¹¹ *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/1989; 67. A more recent survey by a cave research team (Shivtiel and Boslov, 2005-7) has increased the number of cisterns to 50, and *mikva'ot* to 5 (cf. Reported in Yinon Shivtiel and Amos Frumkin, "The use of caves as security measures in the Early Roman Period in the Galilee: Cliff Settlements and Shelter Caves", *Caderno de Geografia*, vol.24, no.41, 2014; 81-94, accessible at academia.edu). We know that several more *mikva'ot* were destroyed when a large number of caves were incorporated into the 17th century Druze fortress, so the total number of *mikva'ot* may have been around 10 or even more. Curiously, 10 *mikva'ot* were also found at Qumran, prompting John J. Collins, who was echoing the archaeologist Magen Broshi, to write that "the abundance of *mikva'ot* is highly compatible with the view that the site was inhabited by a religious sect" and is "the strongest archaeological reason for defining Qumran as a religious site", *Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectarian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2010; 205. I suggest we can already say the same about the findings in the Arbel cave-village.

¹² *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/1989; 68 col 2.

¹³ It is very probable that Josephus had this gigantic cave in mind when he refers to the cave-village as the 'village of the Cave of Arbela' (*Life* 188; cf. *Jewish War* 2.573), suggesting that this Cave gave its name to the cave-village. He refers to Arbela on the plateau above the cliff as the village of Arbela (*Life* 311).

Interestingly, the author feels it necessary to stress that there was no sign of Christian occupation from the Byzantine period and there were no finds from the Crusader period. "Therefore, we do not accept the possibility that the complex was a church or a monastery", he concludes, implying that these are what it most resembles.¹⁴

With plans to go back and excavate the second fortress, Dr. Ilan's survey ended in 1989 and the next year, in February 1990, he died at the age of 53. The archaeological work to determine the origin and use of this mysterious cave-building has never been completed. Nevertheless, the theory that he advanced to explain the existence of this building, and indeed the entire cave-village, has remained the accepted doctrine: "Recent research has revealed that several settlements prepared refuges for themselves in nearby caves in times of war. In Ein Gedi and Jericho, for example, documents were found which belonged not only to refugees from distant places, but also to local residents".¹⁵ To support this hypothesis, he then lists the finding of hewn refugee caves shielded by front walls in several other parts of Galilee, before relating these findings to the report by Josephus that he himself had fortified several caves around the Sea of Galilee including those at Arbel. Dr. Ilan concludes "It seems that every settlement in the area around the Sea of Galilee had hewn refugee caves, protected by their very location on cliffs and by front walls which blocked the openings." And regarding the mysterious second fortress, he has already stated "At the moment, however, we should not rule out the possibility that the fortress was built as part of the preparations for self-defense at the site at the end of the Second Temple period, perhaps with subsequent changes and additions".¹⁶

Dr. Ilan's theory has been widely adopted and further developed by later investigators, being well articulated by the speleologists Yinon Shivtiel and Amos Frumkin, in a recent article entitled 'The use of caves as security measures in the Early Roman Period in the Galilee: Cliff Settlements and Shelter Caves'.¹⁷ They sum up their survey of the

¹⁴ *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/1989; 68 col 3. He may have been thinking of the ancient Byzantine monasteries in the Judaeian desert, such as Mar Saba in Wadi Kidron, St. George of Koziba in Wadi Kelt, and the Mount of Temptation.

¹⁵ *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/1989; 68-69.

¹⁶ *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/1989; 68.

¹⁷ Yinon Shivtiel and Amos Frumkin, 'The use of caves as security measures in the Early Roman Period in the Galilee: Cliff Settlements and Shelter Caves', *Caderno*

Arbel caves with the words “The elaborate network of this cave shelter system, together with its excellent state of preservation, reveals a clear picture of planning for times of trouble.”

However, when the authors come to their ‘Final Considerations’, the theory that these cave systems were built purely as defence from besieging armies takes a tumble, especially regarding Arbel. Not only does this theory fail to explain the laborious remodelling and installations within the cave system at Arbel, but it also fails to explain how the occupants could expect to be saved from a determined army. The authors admit that hiding in caves would offer little defence against the Romans: “Knowing or assuming that the Roman army would not leave an unliquidated enclave behind, the Galileans could presume that their chosen method of defense would only delay the Roman invaders, blocking their progress until they had eliminated the last of the defenders in the shelter caves. Perhaps their goal was merely to put obstacles in the way of the invading army, and to delay it as long as possible from advancing on further targets—the main one being Jerusalem”.¹⁸

Furthermore, from the time Galilee was conquered by the Hasmoneans in 104 BCE, there was no external military threat until the first Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66 CE. Regarding the caves of Arbel, which show clear signs of occupation by Jews from at least 100 BCE, there is only one recorded episode of an army besieging the caves and that was in 39 BCE, when King Herod’s army cleared them of the rebel supporters of his rival to the throne, Antigonus II.¹⁹ The defenders were sheltering temporarily from Herod’s forces, whom they had just attacked on the open plain of Arbel and, in the event, the caves offered little safety. On the contrary, they became a trap. In the war against the Romans from 66-70 CE, Josephus does indeed mention his fortification and supplying of the Arbel Cave village, in case of need, but there is no report of any fighting around the caves

de Geografia, vol.24, no. 41, 2014; 77-94, accessible at academia.edu. The section on the Arbel caves can be found on pp. 81-84 (corrected page numbers). Shvitzel has also written a useful summary of his recent work entitled ‘Artificial Caves Cut into Cliff Tops in the Galilee and Their Historical Significance’, in *Hypogea 2015–Proceedings of International Congress of Speleology in Artificial Cavities, Rome, 11-17 March 2015*; 67-75 (via academia.edu).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 91-93.

¹⁹ Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.305-315; *Antiquities* 14.415-430.

when Titus and the Roman army arrive.²⁰ Instead, the defenders of Magdala attempted to escape by sea. It would seem that they already knew the caves offered little or no defence against the Romans. It is quite likely, though, that unarmed civilians from the nearby villages did use the caves for shelter during the two revolts against the Romans (66-70 and 132-135 CE), but this would have been for short periods only, whilst military forces were passing through their area.

It is clear, therefore, that another theory is needed to explain the existence of the Arbel 'cave-village' from the time of its first occupation by Jews around 120-100 BCE. Without denying that some of these caves were sporadically occupied by robbers, rebels and refugees, the evidence of the extensive remodelling of so many caves, with in-built cisterns and ritual baths from this early date, indicates their permanent occupation by a relatively large number of people, evidently members of a religiously observant Jewish community. Yinon Shivtiel edges towards the same conclusion: "Perhaps we may attribute the preparation of *mikvas* to groups of *cohanim* (priests) who were living in the Galilee before the Great Revolt, or to a group for whom questions of defilement and purification were an inseparable part of their lives".²¹

The Essene Cave Residents

In addition to the low level of protection afforded to cave-dwellers from a besieging Roman army, the caves would also have been an inhospitable and dangerous home for raising children. Due to the mortal danger of falling from the cliff-face, as well as the difficulty of access and of obtaining supplies of food and water, routine family life in this environment can be discounted. This was not a suitable living space for women, children, the elderly or infirm. The presence of *mikva'ot* and cisterns not only confirms the occupants were religiously observant Jews with a preoccupation for ritual purity, but also that they were long-term residents rather than transient refugees, robbers or rebels, who would certainly not have been so concerned with ritual purity. The installation of cisterns and *mikva'ot* implies the need for

²⁰ Josephus, *Life* 188; *Jewish War* 2.573; 3.461f.

²¹ Shivtiel in his contribution to *Hypogea 2015–Proceedings of the International Congress of Speleology in Artificial Cavities–Rome, 2015*; 75.

frequent and regular ritual bathing by members of this community, from which it can be inferred that they were either temple priests, or that they had applied priestly purity norms to their own daily lives.

From various late third century CE sources, literary and inscrip-tional, scholars have reconstructed an ancient list of the heads of the twenty-four priestly courses (corresponding to the list at 1Chron 24,7-18) with the names of Galilean villages attached to each course. The town of Arbel is linked to the priestly course of Jeshua, the ninth of the twenty-four courses. Although of uncertain origin and signifi-cance, scholars have suggested that the list represents the settlement of priestly families in Galilee after the first or second Jewish revolts. This interpretation of the list is now widely accepted. However, it has recently been challenged on logistical grounds by Uzi Leibner and on historico-literary grounds by Richard Bauckham, with the conclusion that the list was either an exercise in nostalgia and historical imagina-tion (Leibner) or that the arrival of the priests in each village coin-cided with the Hasmonean conquest of Galilee (104 BCE) and involved one or two families at the most (Bauckham).²² So, if indeed there was a priestly migration to Arbel, it was either too late (post 70 CE) to match the occupation date of the cave-village around 100 BCE, or too small to explain its extent and complexity at that early date. Further-more, as representatives of the ruling powers, there would have been no need for them to construct an elaborate priestly refuge in the cave-village in the cliffs below the town. They would have been free to live in peace, and in security, alongside the other religiously observant Jews in the town of Arbela, which had a flourishing *Beit Midrash* by this time.²³

Having rejected the proposal that a community of temple priests were the main occupants of the cave-village, the only other possibility is a 'priestly community'—a group of Jewish males living in an orga-nized religious community that had adopted, for its members, purity regulations of a kind that normally applied to priests. At this point, it

²² Thanks to Prof. Richard Bauckham for directing me to his analysis of this list in ch. 10 of *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, ed. Richard Bauckham, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018; 287-305; also Uzi Leibner, *Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Galilee*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 127, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009; 404-19.

²³ *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Ephraim Stern et al, Israel Exploration Society/Carta, Jerusalem, 1993, Vol 1; 87.

is no longer possible to ignore the Essene party,²⁴ one of the three main organizations of Jewish religious life in second temple times, about whom both Josephus and Philo wrote detailed accounts.²⁵ In particular, both accounts estimate their total numbers at 4,000, living in towns and villages throughout the country, while at Qumran there was space to accommodate only 100-150 male members on a permanent basis. All the spatial and temporal features of the 'cave-village' at Arbel considered so far would support the identification of the occupants with a community of male Essenes, including the date of foundation around 100 BCE, the ritual installations found in the caves, the laborious modelling of the cave environment, and also the large community hall at the eastern end, in the second as yet unexcavated and unidentified fortress.

It hardly needs to be said that these caves, with their splendid views over the Plain of Ginnosar, the Sea of Galilee and of Mt. Hermon in the distance, would have provided perfect conditions for study and contemplation, being relatively isolated from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Although the cave-dwellers would have lived an extremely austere and ascetic life, there was no risk of nutritional deficiency, as the surrounding country and nearby lake produced an abundance of fresh food all the year round.²⁶

There is another feature of the location that would have made it ideal for a male Essene community, who were known not only for their study and contemplation, but also for their writings. Only a few miles to the north of Mt. Arbel lies Lake Huleh, a large swampy lake that was the only place outside Egypt where the papyrus plant grew abundantly. This could have been easily harvested, stored and made into papyrus scrolls for the scribes to write upon. As yet no evidence of papyrus manufacture or use has been uncovered in the caves, but if ever this can be found, it would be the first time that papyrus writing material has been shown to be manufactured outside Egypt.²⁷

²⁴ Josephus tells us the Essenes had to take a ritual bath twice a day before meals, *Jewish War* 2.129, 132.

²⁵ Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.119-61; *Antiquities* 18.18-22; Philo of Alexandria, *Quod Omnis* 75-91 and *Hypothetica* 11,1-8.

²⁶ Although there was a famine in the year 25 BCE, causing great hardship among the local population.

²⁷ Cf. Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000; 25.

So, having considered how theoretically suitable this location would have been for occupation by a male Essene scribal community, it is time to focus on the historical facts. What are the historical indications that an Essene community ever resided in this area?

Further Evidence of Essene Presence

For more evidence of an Essene presence in the 'cave-village', further archaeological investigation would be necessary, as planned by the late Dr. Zvi Ilan, but with the addition of tests specifically aimed at detecting hidden recesses, scribal writing materials, or heavily degraded papyrus. However, there is another reliable source of evidence, based upon Dr. Ilan's observation, stated above, that "The archeological finds indicate that the built and hewn settlements existed simultaneously: the built settlement may have been founded a short time prior to the cave village, and its inhabitants may have been the hewers of the stone shelters".²⁸ If, as it certainly appears from these findings, the earliest inhabitants of Arbela were the founders and builders of the cave-village, it is reasonable to assume that they belonged to the same Essene community that, soon after, settled in the cave-village they helped to build. It is a small step to suggest that members of the Arbela community continued thereafter to serve and maintain those members who had moved to the cave-village. In practice, the cave-village residents would have received their supplies of food and clothing, and any other necessities of life, from the community dwelling above the caves, in the town of Arbela. In brief, the cave-dwelling community was dependent upon the inhabitants of Arbela for the basic necessities of living, and both communities belonged to the Essene party. This being so, evidence for an Essene presence in the town of Arbela would go a long way to confirm Essene presence in the caves as well. Various pieces of evidence for an Essene presence in Arbela are presented below, in order of increasing weight.

Reflecting ancient farming practices, Arbela became known in late Roman times for its cultivation of flax and production of linen, reported in only one other place in the whole country, Beit She'an. It can therefore be no coincidence that linen was the fabric used by the Essenes for their clothing. It could also have been used to make the ropes

²⁸ *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/1989; 68.

that were needed to reach some of the caves from above or below. Although nowadays linen is also used as a writing medium, there is no evidence of it being used as such in antiquity.

The large two-story synagogue recently excavated at Arbela has been dated to the 4th century CE and is unusual in several respects:²⁹ it was erected at the centre of the settlement and not at the highest point; the southern wall is crammed up against higher ground, suggesting that the building has been secondarily enlarged and extended to give it a north-south axis facing Jerusalem; although built of pale limestone there are many dark basalt elements in its construction indicating secondary use; the internal arrangement of benches is unique; in the north wall there is a charity chest carved out of a single stone and accessed from the outside; finally, and most significantly, the frame of the main entrance is not only exceptionally carved out of a single rock, but is also located on the east side, close to the back of the present building and facing onto an ancient paved courtyard. This monumental entrance may originally have served a smaller transverse edifice, with an east-west orientation. Such an orientation would suggest Essene influence and design, for their early morning prayers were not directed towards the temple in Jerusalem, but rather to the sun rising in the East.³⁰

It is said that Nittai (or Mattai) the Arbelite (*m. Pirke Avot* 1:6), vice-president of the Sanhedrin during the high priesthood of John Hyrcanus, resided in Arbela from c.130-120 BCE where he is said to have established a *Beit Midrash* and brought to the area a reputation for Torah study and learning. It is claimed by some that he was born in Arbela, but this is unlikely as the region was ruled by pagans until conquered by the Hasmoneans in 104/3 BCE. As a prominent member of the Pharisee party, mentioned in the Mishnah, it is almost certain that he found shelter in Arbela after being expelled from Jerusalem when the ruler and high priest, John Hyrcanus, turned against the Pharisees, cancelled their rulings and expelled them from Jerusalem.³¹ According to Josephus, Hyrcanus reacted in this way when a certain

²⁹ *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, 87-89.

³⁰ Cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.128.

³¹ Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.288-296; Roland Deines, in *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods, Vol 1: Life, Culture, and Society*, Eds. Fiensy and Strange, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014; 83-84.

Pharisee raised doubts about his legitimacy. Now under threat of persecution, Nittai and the Pharisees would have found themselves allies of the Essenes, whose rejection of the Hasmonean claim to the high priesthood defined their stance from the outset. They would have had no objection to an Essene presence in Arbela and may have actually encouraged it. Indeed, the saying for which Nittai the Arbelite is remembered in the Mishnah has a very Essene ring to it: "Keep thee far from an evil neighbour and consort not with the wicked and lose not belief in retribution" (*m. Pirke Avot* 1:7, cf. *The Community Rule*, 1QS V,10-19). It would appear that Arbela numbered both Pharisees and Essenes among its inhabitants and could therefore have represented an attempt to repair the rupture, just a few decades previously, between the *Hasidim* who became Pharisees and recognized the Hasmonean high priesthood of Jonathan Maccabee, and those who did not and were known as Essenes.³²

For the same reason that Nittai and the Pharisees found Arbela a suitable location following their expulsion from Jerusalem and Judaea in the days of John Hyrcanus, the Essenes may also have taken advantage of this location as a political safe-space, being inveterate critics of the Hasmonean high priesthood. As Roland Deines puts it, this border territory of Galilee "became attractive for those who wanted to stay below the radar of the Hasmoneans in Jerusalem", those who "needed or wanted to escape the political hornet's nest of Jerusalem and its surroundings without going abroad".³³

According to Josephus, Herod and his army fought a battle in Arbela in 39-38 BCE, against supporters of his rival, Antigonus II, the last Hasmonean king, who ruled from 40-37 BCE, with Parthian support.³⁴ It is often imprecisely stated that Herod was fighting "Hasmonean

³² One could even propose an old friendship between Nittai and the Essene leaders, according to the historical setting elaborated later in this essay: if the original split between the Essenes and Pharisees took place in 152 BCE and the expulsion of Pharisees took place fairly early (130-125 BCE) during the reign of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE), then it is clear that only 25-30 years had passed since the two groups had been united in the same community of *Hasidim* in Jerusalem. This meeting between Nittai and the Essene leaders from Damascus could indeed have been a joyful reconciliation and restoration of friendship.

³³ *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, 83-84.

³⁴ Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.305-315; *Antiquities* 14.415-430.

loyalists [who had] fortified themselves in Arbela”,³⁵ but it is clear from Josephus’ account that, far from attacking these rebels at Arbela, he actually sent an advance party to establish a camp there, from which his army could then remove the rebels from the caves nearby. However, when Herod and the rest of his army arrived at Arbela 40 days later, the rebels attacked them there in force—probably aiming to drive them over the cliff. Instead, the rebels were routed by Herod’s army and expelled from the area. What this account shows is that the residents of Arbela provided hospitality to Herod and his army for many weeks. As most of the local people despised Herod and supported his Hasmonean rival Antigonus II,³⁶ the support of the Arbela residents for Herod was exceptional and goes a long way to confirm they were Essenes, with whom Herod already had a good relationship.³⁷ For their hospitality on this occasion, it appears Herod rewarded them with the Essene Quarter in Jerusalem (at the back of his Palace) and other privileges, when he finally deposed King Antigonus II in 37 BCE.

The support of the Arbela community for Herod on this particular occasion may also help to explain why the Essenes became known pejoratively as ‘Herodians’ among the local Galileans, which in turn explains this use of the term for the Essenes in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, both based on the accounts of local Galileans (Peter and Matthew).³⁸ These New Testament sources are also good evidence of the presence of Essenes in Capernaum (Mk 3,6; Mk 8,15 in P⁴⁵) and in Jerusalem (Mk 12,13; Mt 22,16), describing them as working together with the Pharisees to entrap Jesus.

According to Josephus’ reports, soon after Herod had defeated the rebel attack on open ground, on the plain of Arbel, he stayed there

³⁵ *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, 87.

³⁶ Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.450.

³⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 15.372-379; cf. Philo of Alexandria, *Quod Omnis* 90-91; Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans*, First Fortress Press edition, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999; 256-59.

³⁸ Anyone who doubts that the Herodians refers to the Essenes should read Joan Taylor’s cogent analysis in “*The Essenes, the Scrolls and the Dead Sea*”, Oxford: OUP, 2012; 109-30. Evidence comes from other sources too: on the basis of the Essene ordination ceremony described in the *Temple Scroll* (11QT), Yigael Yadin perceptively relates the “yeast of the Herodians” (Mk 8,15 in P⁴⁵) to the teaching of the Essenes and to Jesus’ feeding miracles (*The Temple Scroll: The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985; 80-83).

longer to direct his troops in the removal of the rebels sheltering in the Mt. Arbel caves below, despite other important commitments.³⁹ It is difficult to comprehend Herod's almost obsessive concern to clear out the rebel occupation of the Arbel caves with his somewhat merciful attitude towards the rebel cave-dwellers, as it appears in Josephus' *Jewish War* and especially in his *Antiquities*.⁴⁰ On the one hand Herod invests a disproportionate amount of time, resources and effort to remove the rebels from the caves, and on the other hand he is willing to offer them clemency if they leave voluntarily.⁴¹ If Josephus is accurate about this, it would appear that Herod's main aim is not so much to eliminate or punish the rebels, as to clear the caves for their normal occupants, and this would only make sense if the normal occupants were his friends the Essenes. It is not too farfetched to suggest they had requested help from Herod to clear the caves, so they could continue their scribal activities in peace. Indeed, Josephus hints at this when he writes that Herod "then started on a campaign against the cave-dwelling brigands who were infesting a wide area and inflicting on the inhabitants evils no less than those of war".⁴²

Finally, there is an ancient tradition that some less familiar biblical personalities are buried in the cemetery at Arbela, namely Seth, the son of the first Adam, and Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and several of her brothers.⁴³ It may not be a coincidence that these figures are protagonists in two popular pseudepigrapha, written towards the end of the first century BCE and attributable to the Essenes: the *Life of Adam and Eve* (or *Apocalypse of Moses*), in which Seth is one of the main characters, and the *Testament of Levi* (one of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*), in which Dinah's brother, Levi, ascends to the throne of God and receives a divine commission to take revenge on the local Canaanites for raping her. Both these works seem to be based on the personal account of the biblical protagonists, so the legend of their burial and presumed prior residence at Arbela could have arisen in order to explain how these writings came to be written there.

³⁹ He not only had to depose his rival Antigonus II from the seat of power in Jerusalem, but also to fulfil a request to help Mark Anthony at the siege of Samosata, cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.439-447.

⁴⁰ *Jewish War* 1.305-15; *Antiquities* 14.415-17; 421-30.

⁴¹ *Antiquities* 14.427; 430.

⁴² *Jewish War* 1.304, Loeb Classical Library translation by H. St. J. Thackeray et al.

⁴³ Cf. *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, 87.

The mention of the literary output of the Essene scribal community living in the Arbel cave-village brings us back to the question about the provenance of the Parables of Enoch, with which this enquiry began. It is widely known that the Parables became the central work in the *Book of Enoch (1Enoch)*, and that this collection of writings was a foundational text for the Essene party, so it is a simple step to identify the author of the Parables with an Essene community. Accepting the arguments of James Charlesworth and Motti Aviam that this author wrote Parables of Enoch in an area of eastern Galilee, in or close to Magdala,⁴⁴ at the end of the first century BCE, then it is another simple step to identify him as a member of the Essene scribal community dwelling in the Arbel cave-village at this time. The question of provenance is solved and there is no need to look any further. However, it does raise the larger historical question of how the Essenes arrived at Arbel, and how they came into being in the first place.

Before moving on to give an outline of the history of the Essenes, it is necessary to extinguish a potential cause of confusion. The scholars were aided in identifying the Parables of Enoch with this region of north-eastern Galilee by its frequent repetition of thinly disguised criticism of Herod, his unjust policies and his wealthy Roman patrons and clients. The Parables repeatedly denounces the ruling class for oppressing the local farmers, seizing not only their income through heavy taxation, but also their land, forcing them to become tenant farmers or day-labourers. They are sternly warned of future retribution, “when the Son of Man comes” in judgment.⁴⁵

These prophetic denunciations of the ‘mighty’ rulers and landowners have caused the same scholars to label the Parables as an ‘anti-Herodian polemic’,⁴⁶ implying the author was ‘anti-Herod’ and engaged in a campaign against him. This would then contradict the evidence, presented above, that the author was an Essene, for the

⁴⁴ James H. Charlesworth, ‘The Date and Provenience of the Parables of Enoch’, *Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and James H. Charlesworth, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013; 37-57; Mordechai Aviam, ‘The Book of Enoch and the Galilean Archaeology and Landscape’, *Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, 159-69.

⁴⁵ Cf. James H Charlesworth, ‘Can We Discern the Composition Date of the Parables of Enoch?’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 459-465 and id. ‘The Date and Provenience of the Parables of Enoch’, *Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, 48-53.

⁴⁶ E.g., James H Charlesworth, *Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, 53.

Essenes supported Herod and were nicknamed 'Herodians' for good reason, as we saw above. However, the assertion that the author must be 'anti-Herod' is a confusion of politics and prophecy. The author wrote this denunciation because it was divinely inspired and not because of his own, or his community's, political affiliation. His work is not a polemical or political statement against Herod or anyone else, but a religious message exhorting faith in divine justice and judgment. The Essenes may indeed have supported Herod politically, but they saw no contradiction between this support and their obligation to correct his injustices and warn of the spiritual consequences.

Nevertheless, the author seems to be realistically aware of political repercussions, for he writes under the pseudonym of a biblical figure who lived in the distant past (Enoch) and couches his denunciation in general terms and expressions, never identifying individuals. Furthermore, the writings of the Essenes were closely guarded by the community.⁴⁷ With all these layers of camouflage, the author did not have to worry unduly about painful reprisals from the 'mighty ones' he is denouncing.

Writing from his cave set high in the cliffs of Arbel, the author of the Parables of Enoch only had to raise his eyes to north and he would see the snow-capped Mt. Hermon in the far distance, glowing majestically in the rising or setting sun.⁴⁸ This entrancing view of Mt. Hermon took him back, day after day, to contemplate the Book of Watchers, to which his Parables of Enoch became a sequel. However, the Book of Watchers had been written around 250 years previously by an author sitting 'by the waters of Dan' at the foot of that sacred mountain, on which the rebellious angels had descended in order to plant evil and corruption among men (*1Enoch* 6:6;13:7,9). This spiritual and literary

⁴⁷ However, this does not mean they had to be kept secret from non-members. The oath taken by the new members, to keep the Essene teaching secret (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.139-142), does not mean that their books also had to be kept secret. *4Ezra* 14:44-47 indicates that the seventy non-canonical books (which surely included the *First Book of Enoch*) could be given, with discretion, to the 'wise among the people', i.e. to those outsiders considered worthy and responsible. The Essenes were clearly not just writing for themselves.

⁴⁸ Both Charlesworth (*Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, 184-5, 189) and Aviam (op.cit. 159, 168-9) understand the mystical power of Mt. Hermon, and the memory of its former associations, to connect the author to his spiritual forerunners, the original authors of the writings in *1Enoch*.

affinity, skipping over two-and-a-half centuries, prompts us to consider, in outline, the religious and historical background of this Essene scribal community.

Known Religio-Historical Background

Following the return of the Jews to Judaea from their exile in Babylon and Mesopotamia (c. 520 BCE), there were many literate priests and scribes who did not acknowledge that the exile had come to an end. They were strongly inspired by the eschatological visions of divine redemption prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezek chs. 40-48) and could not see the realization of these visions in the return of the Jews to their homeland under Persian governance. Therefore, many of these priests did not return to the homeland, but remained in Mesopotamia, at the head of their communities, or they made the journey as far as Damascus and settled there. They would have been deterred from returning to Jerusalem, not only by the stressful hardships facing the returning community, but also by the shameful poverty of the newly rebuilt second temple on Mt. Zion. To make matters worse, the leading body of priests in Jerusalem ruled that only those priests who could prove their priestly lineage could serve there. So, unable to prove their priestly credentials, the undocumented priests remained in exile and, from afar, they disputed the legitimacy of the second temple and its priesthood. Over subsequent years, they were joined in their dissent by other priests who had, for one reason or another, been rejected by the ruling authorities at the temple in Jerusalem. Wherever they were, in Egypt, Mesopotamia or in Damascus, they meditated over the Scriptures and looked forward to the ideal restoration of the Jewish commonwealth, as they thought it *should* be.⁴⁹ They were the religiously

⁴⁹ The historical outline given here agrees largely with that of G. Boccaccini (*Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism*, Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 1998; 70-79), except in one point: it is unrealistic to suppose that the priestly dissent group, identified as Enochian Jews, lived in Jerusalem along with the ruling priestly group, the Zadokites (op. cit. 77-78). Religious tensions would have been high enough to cause bloodshed, not forgetting that criticism of the temple and God's holy things was blasphemy—a capital offense. If there were no signs of conflict in Jerusalem at that time, it is because the dissenting group continued to live in exile, in Damascus or in Mesopotamia.

observant anti-Zionists of their time, not unlike so many of the Anti-Zionist *Haredim* in the world today.

In the 4th century BCE, the Ptolemaic Greeks replaced the Persians as overlords of the temple state of the Jews. In 260 BCE approximately, King Ptolemy II of Egypt restored the ancient Israelite temple at Dan, which was at the foot of Mt. Hermon and at the northern limits of his territory. Damascus and all the land to the south were under Ptolemy's control at this time, but in order to prevent the territorial encroachments of the Seleucids from the north, he needed to increase his presence in this fertile northern border area, probably in the form of a military garrison. By restoring the temple at Dan, he may have had in mind something like the former frontier settlement of the Jews at Elephantine/Jeb, in Upper Egypt. As this would have been anathema to the temple priests of Jerusalem, he naturally turned to the members of the dissenting priestly community in exile. The proximity to Mt. Hermon makes it entirely possible that they were based in or near Damascus, which was under Ptolemy's control at the time.⁵⁰

While sitting 'by the waters of Dan' in the mid-3rd century BCE, one of these priests wrote a section that was to become part of the Book of Watchers (*1Enoch* 6-16). It was an explanation for the origin of evil that bore some relation to a passage in the Book of Genesis (Gen 6,1-4), and together with the Astronomical Book written earlier in Mesopotamia, it forms the most ancient part of a collection that developed over the next 250 years, through the editing of the original texts and the addition of new ones, into the collection of writings that is nowadays called *1Enoch*.⁵¹ The Parables of Enoch is one of the last of these writings to be added. In retrospect, then, *1Enoch* is regarded as the foundational text of the loosely affiliated scribal movement that is

⁵⁰ For the geographical sites and their significance, see George Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 100/4 (1981), 575-600; and David Suter, 'Why Galilee? Galilean Regionalism in the Interpretation of 1Enoch 6-16', *Henoah*, Vol XXV, 2003; 167-212. Suter also examines the connections of the text with local mythology and spiritual practices in the early 3rd century BCE, and is the first to propose this section of *1Enoch* could have been a foundational text for the newly restored Israelite temple at Dan, established by priests who did not qualify for service in the Jerusalem temple.

⁵¹ For *1Enoch* as the constitutional document of Enochic Judaism, see Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 12-15.

known as 'Enochic Judaism', aptly described as giving voice to "groups of priests and scribes who feel marginalized and even disenfranchised vis-à-vis the ruling priests in Jerusalem",⁵²

One of the main issues distinguishing this dissenting group from its priestly rival in Jerusalem was its dispute over the modalities of temple restoration. It was a dispute that dated back to the Babylonian exile, and in particular to the prophet Ezekiel's plan of restoration (chs. 40-48), which the dissenters wanted to realize as written, but the Jerusalem priests did not or could not do, saying it contradicted the Torah of Moses and must await the Messiah.⁵³ Mindful of the continued absence of God's glory in the earthly temple (cf. Ezek 43,1-7), not to mention the corruption of the ruling priests, the dissenters focused their attention on the heavenly temple, which had been revealed to some members along with the gift of divine knowledge and instruction received directly from God's throne. In this way, the Enochic movement came to embody the ancient Israelite prophetic tradition at a time when the ruling priestly authorities had declared prophecy to have ceased and been replaced by priestly and scribal functions.⁵⁴ These differences in relating to God, the source of all authority, lay at the root of the tense rivalry that developed between the visionary Enochic and pragmatic Zadokite movements.

A century later, after Seleucid rule had replaced that of the Ptolemies in all of Judaea (198 BCE), the Seleucid kings gradually implemented a policy to Hellenize Jerusalem along with its priesthood and temple. This activity reached its peak during the reign of Antiochus

⁵² G. Boccaccini, *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History from Ezekiel to Daniel*, Grand Rapids MI/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2002; 99, quoting Benjamin G. Wright III.

⁵³ Cf. Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 76: "The disagreement and therefore the emergence of two distinctive parties would occur only later, after the return from exile, and would concern the modalities of the restoration. While the Zadokites claimed that God's order had been fully restored with the construction of the second temple, the Enochians still viewed restoration as a future event and gave cosmic dimensions to a crisis that for the Zadokites had momentarily affected only the historical relationships between God and Israel."

⁵⁴ Cf. Martin Hengel, 'The Scriptures and Their Interpretation in Second Temple Judaism', *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, Eds. D.R.G. Beattie and M.J. McNamara, JSOT Series 166, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994; 161-64; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Louisville/London: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1996; 222-26.

Epiphanes IV (167 BCE), when the ruling priesthood gave way and the temple was used for pagan worship for three years, from 167-164 BCE. Not surprisingly, the pagan desecration of the temple met with widespread opposition among the Jewish population and provoked the Maccabean revolt led by Judas Maccabee (a nickname meaning the 'Hammer'). With the departure of the traditional family of priests (the Oniads), other religiously observant groups, broadly called the Pious, or *Hasidim* (1Macc 2,42-43), joined forces with Judas Maccabee and successfully fought to remove the pagan incursions. *For those who had been critical of the temple institution, there was now a rare opportunity for reform.* The main leadership positions were taken, in turn, by the surviving leaders of the revolt, all members of the priestly, but not *high*-priestly Hasmonean family, nicknamed the Maccabees. Over the next 50 years, using a combination of diplomacy and warfare, they succeeded in establishing Judaea as a strong and independent theocratic state, extending its borders, towards the end of the 2nd century BCE, by conquering new territories, including Idumaea in the south, Samaria in the centre and Galilee in the north.

After the deaths of Antiochus Epiphanes IV and Alcimus, his appointed high-priest, but before the subsequent appointment of Jonathan Maccabee as the high-priest and leader of the Jews (i.e. from 159-152 BCE), there is hiatus in the list of high priests which has not been satisfactorily explained. According to the wording of the last letter of King Demetrius to Jonathan at this time, it appears there was a high priest during this period (1Macc 10,32.38), but his name has since been lost or scrubbed. This is also precisely the time to which Josephus refers when he introduces the three main 'factions' in Judaism: the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes. It is the first time we hear of the Essenes, but apart from four exceptional Essenes profiled by Josephus,⁵⁵ they are barely mentioned again in the historical records. However, in their accounts of the Essenes, both Josephus and Philo describe their beliefs and communal way of life in the present tense, at the time of writing, thus testifying that they continued to exist until at least the end of the first century CE.⁵⁶ The only other source of

⁵⁵ Judas (*Antiquities* 13.311-13), Menahem (15.373-8), Simon (17.345-8) and John (*Jewish War* 2.567).

⁵⁶ On the question of Essene survival after 70 CE, 'lack of evidence is not evidence of non-existence' is the stance of Martin Goodman, who then writes: "If the

information about them, and about their history, comes from the often cryptic writings found from 1948-1956, in caves near Qumran and named the Dead Sea Scrolls. Most scholars now agree that the ruined buildings discovered at Qumran were occupied by a community of 100-150 male Essenes, from about 100 BCE until 68 CE, when they were killed or dispersed by the Romans during the first Jewish revolt.⁵⁷

Hidden away in some of the caves in the cliffs near the Qumran buildings, the Dead Sea Scrolls are thought to have been community's working library, containing their own writings as well as those composed in their formative period, before their arrival at Qumran. A remarkable feature of the collection of scrolls and fragments is that, after about 100 BCE, the estimated time of their arrival at Qumran, none of the more important works attributed to the Essenes are to found (e.g., *Epistle of Enoch*, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Parables of Enoch*) and, reciprocally, none of the works composed by the Qumran community are to be found outside of the caves (*Pesharim*, *War Scroll*, *Thanksgiving Hymns*, *Temple Scroll*, etc.).⁵⁸ Between the Qumran community and other non-Qumran communities, there appears to have been no exchange of writings in either direction, as one would have expected among members of the same religious movement. This total

hypothesis is correct that the sages after 70 just chose to ignore other Jewish groups, Sadducees and Essenes after 70 may have flourished just as much as the sages did, each group turning in on itself, unconcerned about the others. I do not see that anything prevented such groups from continuing to exist in the land of Israel or elsewhere until the end of the second century, or even the third, until the time when Epiphanius in the fourth century explicitly declared them a phenomenon of the past. In the intervening centuries, Sadducees and Essenes will have cropped up in the world of the rabbis only intermittently, to be classified under the general heading of *minim* (as I suggested above may have been the case of *b. Sanh. 91a*), in 'Sadducees and Essenes After 70 CE', *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder*, Eds. S. Porter, P. Joyce and D. Orton, Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1994; 347-356.

⁵⁷ The most recent and reliable archaeological evaluation dates the construction of the main communal buildings at Qumran to around 100 BCE (Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2002; 63-9); for a fulsome account of the archaeological work at the site and the history of its interpretation, see John J. Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community*, 166-208.

⁵⁸ Cf. G. Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 129-149 (for the books missing); 156-159 (for the non-appearance elsewhere).

freeze on the exchange of literature, into and out of Qumran, is strong evidence of schism: the Qumran community had separated from the other 'mainstream' Essene communities and was charting its own course in intellectual and physical isolation. This evidence is reinforced by the uniquely rigid determinism and extreme dualism expressed in the Essene literature from Qumran, marking a clear and irreversible divergence from the teaching of God-given human freedom and responsibility expressed in the writings of non-Qumran Essenes.

Although the destruction of the second temple and the Qumran community by the Romans in 68-70 CE was devastating, most of the mainstream, non-Qumran, Essene communities would have survived, with the notable exception of the Essene quarter in Jerusalem, which became the camp of the Roman 10th Legion garrison. A great many of these non-Qumran Essenes would have become Christians and, judging from their writings (*4Ezra, Apocalypse of Abraham*), those who did not were forced to reflect deeply upon Jerusalem's destruction, while continuing to await messianic restoration and reconstruction. What is clear, though, is that none of the surviving Essenes returned to rebuild and inhabit Qumran, or reclaim its vast library, showing again that their ties with Qumran had been broken long before. Qumran had been a marginal, minority sect, isolated and cut off by their own extreme ideology, not only from the Jewish people and temple, but also from the main body of their own Essene party.⁵⁹

Returning now to the Parables of Enoch and other works not found at Qumran, Gabriele Boccaccini observes: "But no evidence has been found in the Qumran library of the three most important documents of Enochic Judaism written in the first century BCE (the Epistle of Enoch, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Similitudes of Enoch). The absence 'suggests that the [Enochic] corpus was transmitted and developed in at least one context other than Qumran'."⁶⁰ This 'one other context', we propose, is the Essene scribal community residing in the Arbel cave-village, near to Arbela, in eastern Galilee.

⁵⁹ Cf. Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 150-156; a reading of Boccaccini's entire book *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis* is highly recommended for those who wish to go more deeply into the issues.

⁶⁰ Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 131, quoting G.W.E. Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, First Book of', in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 2.515. The 'Similitudes of Enoch' is a synonym for the 'Parables of Enoch'.

Not surprisingly, the accepted 'mainstream' history presented above does not explain how the Essenes came to Arbel. Our main sources from this period are the two books of the Maccabees and the writings of Josephus, both of which are written by authors who were patriotically loyal to the ruling powers, whether the Maccabees, the ruling Hasmonean dynasty or indeed the Romans. The Essenes were not only a semi-secret religious movement, largely detached from the ruling powers, but at times they even became victims of those rulers, condemned to execution, execration or expulsion. We should expect, therefore, a somewhat different picture to emerge from their own writings, especially those of the Dead Sea Scrolls. With the help of the scholars, we will proceed to identify the main historical allusions in the Scrolls before going on to reconstruct, with some reading between the lines, what happened to the Essenes before and after the Maccabean Revolt.

Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Damascus Document (CD) provides the starting point for this enquiry, because the greater part of this rule-book was written before the final break in the Essene movement, as it regulates for members in monastic communities as well as for those 'lay-members' living in contemporary society.⁶¹ In the opening section it is related how the community began 'in the age of wrath, three hundred and ninety years after God had given the Israelites into the hand of the King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon'. At this time, God called a group of pious Jews, priests and laymen, to a holy life of repentance and 20 years later sent them a leader called the 'Teacher of Righteousness' (CD [A], I, 5-12). After a while, the 'Teacher' was deserted by a substantial faction of these pious Jews, who are then described as 'seekers of smooth things' and accused of religious laxity and infidelity to the law. In fact, it appears they turned away in order to follow another leader variously called the 'Scoffer', 'Liar' or 'Spouter of Lies'. The increase of tensions between the two groups caused the 'Teacher' and

⁶¹ All the references, translations and much of the historical commentary in this section are from *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 50th anniversary rev. ed. by Geza Vermes, London: Penguin, 2011. The evidence so far suggests that the Essene community that finally settled in Qumran engaged only very minimally with Essene lay-members (*pace* Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 43-45).

his faithful followers to go into exile 'in the land of Damascus' where they entered into a 'new covenant', and where the Teacher eventually died. His justification for going to Damascus was the counter-intuitive interpretation of a prophecy of Amos (5,26; CD [A] VII,15),⁶² in which God promises to send Israel into exile 'beyond Damascus', as a punishment for their idolatry. The deliberate alteration of 'beyond Damascus' in the citation (i.e. to Nineveh/Babylon/Mesopotamia) to 'Damascus', as if to explain why they came there, persuades us that Damascus should be interpreted literally in this context, and not figuratively as Babylon or any other exilic location.⁶³

Meantime, the group that had followed the other leader kindled the anger of God, led Israel astray and profaned the temple in Jerusalem. The text then expresses several stern warnings to those who abandon the new covenant, 'who again betray it and depart from the fountain of living waters' (CD [B] I,1), before giving the impression that a further departure of the teacher's followers had already occurred, among other things because 'they returned again to the way of the people in small (or 'a few') matters'. Here the departure of 'the house of Separation (*Peleg*)', as the parting members are called, is still fresh, for these individuals are invited to appear before the council and be reconciled or judged, before the Glory of God returns to Israel and it will be too late (CD [B] II, 8-12; 23-27, cf. 4Q169 IV,1). The stated reasons for the internal division are various: rejecting or criticizing

⁶² The interpretation is counter-intuitive because the previous paragraph makes it clear that the prophecy is not understood here as a punishment, as in the original context, but as a 'protection' from 'the sword': "When the two houses of Israel were divided, Ephraim departed from Judah. And all the apostates were given up to the sword, but those who held fast escaped to the land of the north." The extreme manipulation (reversal) of the sense of these citations from the prophets indicates that they must have come from someone in authority in the community, most likely from the Teacher himself.

⁶³ The literal interpretation of 'in the land of Damascus' is not new, but dates back to the time when the Damascus Document was the only literary evidence of the sect (cf. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1st edition, Jerusalem: Keter, 1972; Vol 5, cols 1238, 1248 and 1249). It has been revived recently by Michael Wise in *The First Messiah*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999. Nevertheless, most scholars nowadays take it as a code word for either Qumran or Babylon. For a brief overview, cf. John J. Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community*, 29-30. The importance of Damascus as a base for the 'anti-Zionist', 'anti-second temple' Enochic tradition has been mentioned above. The Teacher's decision to stay 'in the land Damascus' suggests an intention to get closer to this Enochic Jewish community.

the precepts, having idolatrous desires and 'walking in stubbornness', but in the context of so much regulation on 'departing from the people', 'separating from the sons of the Pit', 'distinguishing between the clean and unclean, the holy and profane', 'keeping apart from every uncleanness according to the statutes relating to each one', the charge against those who 'returned again to the way of the people' is redolent with disagreement on matters of purity and avoidance of fellow Israelites (the people).⁶⁴

Following the death of the 'Teacher' in Damascus, about 40 years would pass before the demise of all those who originally deserted the 'Teacher' and became violent enemies of his followers (CD [B] II,14-15). Interestingly the period of 40 years appears again in the Commentary on Psalms (Ps 37) as the time remaining until final judgment: 'Interpreted, this concerns the wicked. At the end of the 40 years they shall be blotted out and no evil man shall be found on the earth' (4Q171 II,10).

More detailed allusions to the same events and characters are given in *Pesher Habbakuk*, where specific mention is made of three groups of people who show unfaithfulness to the 'Teacher': those who 'were unfaithful together with the Liar' in Jerusalem, those 'unfaithful of the new covenant' made in 'the land of Damascus', and those who will be unfaithful at the end of days, 'who will not believe when they hear what will happen to the final generation from the 'Priest', to whom God has given the understanding to interpret all the words of his servants the Prophets' (1QpHab I,1-10,). If this does indeed refer to the 'Teacher of Righteousness' (cf. 1QpHab VII, 5), then it helpfully informs us that the 'Teacher' was a priest, a fact that is stated even more explicitly in the Commentaries of the Psalms (Ps. 37; 4Q171 III,15).

Pesher Habbakuk has much to say about the Priest's, i.e. the Teacher's, chief antagonist who is here called the 'Wicked Priest', in addition to his other epithets (Scoffer, Liar and Spouter of Lies). Implying that he was at first friendly to the Teacher and his disciples, the

⁶⁴ Gabriele Boccaccini states it thus: "The Damascus Document also reveals that the catalyst of the schism between the parent movement and the teacher of righteousness was his decision to call for stricter segregation from the rest of Israel, whom he considered under the dominion of Belial" *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 150.

Pesher states the Wicked Priest 'was called by the name of truth when he first arose' to rule over Israel, but then 'his heart became proud and he forsook God and betrayed the precepts for the sake of riches', robbing everyone and 'heaping sinful iniquity upon himself' (1QpHab VIII, 8-13). The finding of some fragments of a Poem to 'King Jonathan' in the Scrolls (4Q448) indicates that the ruler of Israel called the Wicked Priest may have been Jonathan Maccabee, who led the revolt after the death of his brother Judas in 160 BCE and was appointed high priest by the Greek ruler Alexander Balas in 152 BCE.

One dramatic encounter in 'the land of Damascus' is mentioned in the *Pesher* Habbakuk, when the Wicked Priest 'pursued the Teacher of Righteousness to the house of his exile that he might confuse him with his venomous fury', confusing his community and causing them to stumble while they fasted on the Essene Day of Atonement (1QpHab XI,6-8). On that occasion, it is recalled that 'the House of Absalom and the members of its council were silent at the time of the chastisement of the Teacher of Righteousness and gave him no help against the Liar who flouted the Law in the midst of their whole congregation' (1QpHab V,9-12). Because of his wickedness against the Teacher and his elect, the Wicked Priest was later delivered into the hands of his enemies 'to be humbled by means of a destroying scourge, in bitterness of soul' (1QpHab IX, 9-12), by 'inflicting horrors of evil diseases and taking vengeance upon his body of flesh' (1QpHab IX, 2-8). 'As he himself plotted the destruction of the Poor, so will God condemn him to destruction' (1QpHab XII,5). Two important historical details are added by the Commentary on Psalms (Ps 37): firstly that the Wicked Priest planned to slay the Teacher of Righteousness, 'because of the ordinance and the Law (Torah) which he sent to him', and secondly that he was himself delivered 'into the hands of the nations, that they may execute upon him judgment' (4Q171 IV,5-11). The same work refers to the opponents of the Priest (the Teacher) and his Council as the 'wicked of Ephraim and Manasseh', who appear in a later work, the *Pesher* Nahum, in contexts that identify the House of Ephraim as the Pharisees and the House of Manasseh as the Sadducees. The Essenes frequently identify themselves as the glorious House of Judah.

In the much later work, *Pesher* Nahum, neither the Teacher nor the Wicked Priest are mentioned, for attention shifts to the 'furious young lion', a leader of the Jews who took revenge and hanged alive

(crucified) the Pharisees who conspired to invite King Demetrius of Greece to be the ruler in Jerusalem (4Q169 I,1-8). However, 'from the time of Antiochus until the coming of the rulers of Kittim, God did not permit the city to be taken by the Kings of Greece' (4Q169 I,3-4). Both here and in *Peshar Habbakuk*, the Kittim refer to the Romans as the agents appointed by God to despoil and punish the 'last Priests of Jerusalem' (1QpHab IX,5-7; II,10-14; III,1-13; 4Q169 I, 3-4).

Mention should finally be made of the Temple Scroll (11QT), which displays several features signifying it had a special or 'canonical' status in the community of the Teacher, who was probably its original author. Above all, it presents itself as a compendium of Law concerning the Temple, given by God to Moses, thereby providing a much-needed reference for the building and regulation of a new man-made temple, for the messianic age. With near certainty it can be identified as the 'Book of Meditation (*Hagu*)' to be studied by the priests and judges in this age (CD X,4-6; XIII 2-3; XIV 6,7) and by all the community in the messianic age (1QSa I,6-8) and as the Law, or Torah, that the Teacher sent to the Wicked Priest, prompting him to plan the Teacher's murder (4Q171 IV, 5-11). As a work of major religious significance and provocative impact, the Temple Scroll should be considered a document of some historical importance.⁶⁵

Postulated Reconstruction of Essene History

Most will agree that there are many historical allusions in the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially in the Damascus Document (CD) and in some Commentaries (*Pesharim*). In fact, at first glance, the *Pesharim* appear to be more of a commentary on contemporary affairs, from the Essene point of view, than on the original Scripture. Having said this, though, the allusions are often opaque and need to be deciphered.

⁶⁵ Its role in the events described in this essay has been seriously underestimated, I suggest. For a re-evaluation of its religious significance, Yigael Yadin is an excellent guide in *The Temple Scroll: the Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985; esp. 112-117, 218-232. "Whatever the origin and the prompting, the fact remains that we have here in the scroll an extraordinary Temple Torah in which God the law-giver speaks as a master-architect, providing precise instructions on the design of each unit and article", op.cit. 117. See also Molly M. Zahn, 'New Voices, Ancient Words: The *Temple Scroll's* Reuse of the Bible', in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed John Day, London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2005; 435-54.

With the help of the late Geza Vermes in particular, we will attempt to reconstruct the history of the Essenes with an interpretation of events and characters that, although based on facts in some respects, is highly speculative in others.

The origin of the Essenes is traced to an 'age of wrath' 390 years after the exile in 586 BCE, which comes to 196 BCE (cf. Ezek 4,5). All the scholars agree that this is inaccurate, but only by a few years. The 'age of wrath' places the origins squarely during the 'Hellenistic crisis' when the Greek rulers, in concert with the high priests, were imposing their Hellenizing policy on the Jews. A fair estimate would be around 185-180 BCE. The Pious (*Hasidim*) predecessors of the Essenes were leaderless for 20 years until they were joined by the Teacher of Righteousness around 160 BCE. This date corresponds well with the period (159-152 BCE) for which there is a gap in the record of high priests, suggesting the Teacher may have been the serving high priest when he became the leader of the Pious. As observed above, 'for those who had been critical of the temple institution, there was now a rare opportunity for reform', following the successes of the Maccabean revolt. The Teacher attracted a large number of *Hasidim* around him, because he appears to have had an ambitious plan for religious reform. It is likely, in my view, that this plan is represented by the contents of the Temple Scroll (11QT), which would have created a temple institution worthy of Ezekiel's vision of restoration yet, at the same time, observant of the Mosaic Torah. Not only would this have reconciled the dissenting 'Enochic' group, who remained in exile, with the central 'Zadokite' authority in charge of the temple institution, but on completion it would also have led to the appointment of a high priestly 'Messiah of Aaron' and a princely 'Messiah of Israel'. In brief it was a plan for the messianic age, which Daniel had prophesied for 490 years (seventy weeks of years) after the exile, i.e. around 90 BCE. If implemented in 160-150 BCE, when the 'Teacher of Righteousness' presented it to the *Hasidim*, it could have been completed in time for Daniel's prophetic date to become true (i.e. 60-70 years later).

With such an ambitious plan, it is highly probable that the Teacher presented it also to the leader of the revolt at that time, Jonathan Maccabee. In view of the opening praise for the Wicked Priest (1QpHab VIII, 9) and the Poetic Eulogy mentioning his name (4Q448), it appears that Jonathan initially responded positively towards the Teacher's plan. But sometime before Jonathan was appointed high

priest by the Greek ruler in 152 BCE, he evidently changed his mind (1QpHab VIII, 10-13) and subsequently became the Teacher's most virulent enemy, no doubt because the latter was now a serious rival for the office of high priest.⁶⁶ Jonathan's hostility is then reflected in the Scrolls with the ubiquitous and derogatory titles Wicked Priest, Scoffer, Liar and Spouter of Lies. But Jonathan's change of mind, and his acceptance of the high priesthood from the Greek ruler Alexander Balas, is entirely comprehensible as a response to the details of the Teacher's plan, especially the extreme purity regulations it proposed⁶⁷ and the Essene solar calendar it endorsed, which conflicted irreconcilably with the luni-solar calendar imposed by the Greek king.⁶⁸ Jonathan's rejection of the Teacher's plan then brought about the first division among the Pious, or *Hasidim*, into those who 'separated' in order to be loyal to the high-priest and were called Pharisees (פרושיין from פרוש, to separate), and those who remained faithful to the 'Teacher of Righteousness' and continued to be called *Hasidim* in Hebrew, *Chasin* in Aramaic, or *Essenoi/Essaioi* in Greek.⁶⁹ This is indeed the time indicated by Josephus for the formation of the three main factions amongst the Jews (Essenes, Pharisees and Sadducees).

As Jonathan's prime competitor for office of high priest, and with a large following of those retaining the name of *Hasidim*, the Teacher's life was in danger. He had to flee to a place that was outside Jonathan's realm at that time, but not so far that he could not return if the

⁶⁶ There is a serious possibility, according to the narrative presented here, that the Teacher was the high priest in this period between the death of Alcimus (159) and the appointment of Jonathan (152 BCE). If he is indeed the author of the Temple Scroll, the knowledge of the temple and its laws would strongly support such a case. As noted already, 1Macc 10,32.38 denies that the position of high priest was vacant at this time, implying the name of the office holder from 159-152 has been scrubbed, perhaps by John Hyrcanus after his break with the Pharisees/*Hasidim* around 130-125 BCE. For further discussion, see James C. Vanderkam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Measuring Time*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998; 113-116.

⁶⁷ For a sketch of the extreme purity laws it embraced, see Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, 170-91.

⁶⁸ For a fuller explanation of the calendar conflict, see Vanderkam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 113-5.

⁶⁹ The etymology of the names of these groups appears to be a reflection of the split: the Pharisees are those who 'separated' from the Essenes, which is Greek for 'Pious' in Aramaic/Hebrew (*Chasin/Hasidim*). This implies that the Teacher took with him to Damascus the original group of *Hasidim* minus the Pharisees.

situation were to change. Damascus was ideal, not only because there was a substantial Jewish community there already, but also because many of those Jews were enthusiastic about his cause. Looking forward to the true post-exilic restoration of their people, they were the original dissenters of the temple institution, the founders of Enochic Judaism. The loss of the Pharisee party to Jonathan's side was suddenly more than compensated by the entry of the Enochians of Damascus. Accompanied by his followers, the Teacher settled in 'the land of Damascus' in the period immediately after Jonathan's appointment as high priest, around 152-151 BCE, and he remained there until his death, at unknown date.

The date of the Teacher's death can, however, be estimated approximately from the curious information that 'after the death of the Teacher, about 40 years will pass before the demise of all those violent men who originally deserted him' (CD [B] II,14-15). Elsewhere 'the period of the 40 years' is identified as the time remaining until final judgment (4Q171 II,10). Evidently, the Teacher's community recognized a timetable of events up to the judgment, seemingly based on the Danielic 490 years, putting the estimated time of the final judgment around 90 BCE.⁷⁰ 40 years before this year would date the death of the Teacher to c.130 BCE.⁷¹

Interestingly enough, towards the end of his high priesthood, Jonathan's military campaigns against King Demetrius (II Nicator) took him twice to Damascus (1Macc 11,62; 12,31), around 144-143 BCE. One of these visits could have been the occasion for the infamous

⁷⁰ I was alerted to this 'eschatological timetable' and its baneful effects by Kenneth Atkinson's excellent article 'Understanding the Relationship Between the Apocalyptic Worldview and Jewish Sectarian Violence: The Case of the War Between Alexander Jannaeus and Demetrius III', *The Seleucid and Hasmonean Periods and the Apocalyptic Worldview*, Eds. L. Grabbe, G. Boccaccini, and J. Zurawski, London and New York: T&T Clark, 2016; 45-57. For an overview of the diachronic interpretation of the 70 'weeks' of Dan 9:24-27, see William Adler, 'The Apocalyptic Survey of History Adapted by Christians: Daniel's Prophecy of 70 Weeks', *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, eds. J. VanderKam and W. Adler, Assen: Van Gorcum/Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996; 210-238.

⁷¹ According to the Damascus Document (CD), the history of the Teacher's community is tidily summarized as a final 100 years before the final judgment: 390 years after the start of the Babylonian exile, they wander without a leader for 20 years, then for 40 years the Teacher is with them, before he is 'gathered in' 40 years before the final judgment.

meeting between high priest Jonathan and 'the Teacher' (1QpHab), which seems to have marked the beginning of the division within the members of the new covenant, as described in the Damascus Code (CD). Again, as stated above, the main cause seems to have been the extreme purity regulations, which must have been especially impractical and burdensome for those members of the new covenant, the original Enochians, who had joined the Teacher's community in the land of Damascus. The death of Jonathan is then mentioned with *scha-denfreude*, but also recognizable fidelity to the facts recounted in the first book of Maccabees, describing how he was captured, imprisoned and killed by a foreigner, the Greek general called Trypho (1Macc 12,39-13,30).⁷²

Following the Teacher's death around 130 BCE, it appears that internal strains and divisions within his community increased until a profound and enduring schism became inevitable.⁷³ The breakaway group may have started to make moves, at this stage, towards a rapprochement with the Pharisees, who were by now being expelled from Jerusalem and expunged from high-priest's administration, because of an accusation that he, John Hyrcanus, was conceived in rape while his mother was imprisoned by the Greeks.⁷⁴ Despite their popularity, Hyrcanus never reconciled with the Pharisees, leaving us to imagine they would have welcomed the restoration of ties with the more moderate Essenes, who in the 130-120's were about to break away from the hard-line followers of the Teacher, and were looking for a place to settle.

At exactly this time (c.130-120), most probably as a direct result of the ruler's expulsions, we hear that the vice-president of the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Nittai the Arbelite, takes up residence in Arbel in Galilee. Undoubtedly many Pharisees accompany him and he establishes a *Beit Midrash* in that place. Within a few years the breakaway Essenes arrive and establish their community in the same town

⁷² A comparison between this version and that of the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrates the hostility that had grown between the two figures and their respective followers. Seeing that the Hasmonean legacy was so great and admired, it is really not surprising that, if the Teacher was the high priest from 159-152 BCE, his name was scrubbed from the official list of office holders.

⁷³ Again, see Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 150-156 for a penetrating analysis of this Parting of the Ways.

⁷⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.288-296.

and set to work on preparing the caves for their scribal community. In the meantime, around 100 BCE, Galilee is conquered by Aristobulus I (104-103), the successor of John Hyrcanus, enabling the immigration of the entire Essene scribal community and their colonization of the Arbel cave-village. Here, they would have become more contemplative, abandoning the Teacher's plan of temple restoration (11QT) and seeking God in his heavenly temple instead, just like the ancient Enochians 250 years before.⁷⁵ The views of Mt. Hermon must have helped them to restore their link with these spiritual predecessors. Their creativity and literary output became a phenomenon in itself, witnessing to the spiritual fecundity of their new conditions, nurtured no doubt by their newly restored relationship with the Pharisees, with whom they may have cooperated to produce the *Targumim*, the complete translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Aramaic. During the first century BCE, the cave-village became the birthplace of innumerable pseudepigrapha and apocalypses, including the important Essene works that never entered the Qumran library. Towards the end of that century, contemplation of Daniel's Son of Man prophecy in the Enochian tradition produced the Parables of Enoch, the work that did most to prepare the ground for the missions of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. It was certainly no coincidence that Jesus' messianic mission began right here, within sight of the Essene cave-village of Mt. Arbel.

Although we have closed the circle and arrived at a factually consistent, though very speculative, reconstruction of the presence of the Essene scribal community at Arbel, we have not yet considered the fate of the group they left in Damascus, the group that remained faithful to the Teacher.

As a group with a mission and a plan to bring about the radical restoration of the temple institution (11QT), the Teacher's loyalists in exile would have had a particular focus on the dating of the final judgment to around 90 BCE, according to Daniel's 490-year prophecy. They had to be ready and close to Jerusalem to seize any opportunity to enact their messianic plan. Quoting Isaiah's proclamation "to

⁷⁵ It would appear that their contact with the Enochian Jews of Damascus, and with their literature, gave the Arbel Essenes a very satisfactory 'way out' of their failed attempt to bring about a worthy restoration of the temple institution, based upon the Teacher's Temple Scroll (11QT). They flourished as a result.

prepare in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a path for our God" (Isa 40,3; 1QS VIII,15), they built their community at Qumran around 100 BCE and settled there, within one day's journey of Jerusalem.⁷⁶ Their writings show a detached awareness of the bloody civil war stirred up by the Pharisees in Jerusalem, during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus, king and high-priest, which included a conspiracy with Demetrius III, the king of Syria, to attack and depose Jannaeus. As planned, the invasion went ahead in 90/89 BCE and the armies of Demetrius, which included a few thousand renegade Jewish troops (according to Josephus), completely demolished the forces of Jannaeus at Shechem (Nablus), but instead of entering Jerusalem to take power, he went back to Syria. Josephus explains this curious denouement by saying that the Jews that were fighting with him felt pity for their defeated King Jannaeus and changed sides, making it risky for Demetrius to proceed. In an important article on this invasion, Kenneth Atkinson argues that this is an implausible explanation. In the light of numismatic finds and other sources, he suggests that Demetrius got news of the death of Antiochus X Eusebes (89/88 BCE) and returned to fight his brother Philip over possession of the late king's territories.⁷⁷ More importantly, Atkinson proposes a connection between this devastating civil war, which is said to have started at the water pouring ritual on a feast of Tabernacles,⁷⁸ and the apocalyptic worldview of the Pharisees, especially their adherence to the Danielic 490 years with its expectation for messianic intervention at precisely that time (90/89 BCE). Clearly the apocalyptic component has been airbrushed out of the story by later historians, including Josephus. Whatever the truth of the matter, the Pharisaic conspiracy with Demetrius to bring about a regime change in Jerusalem, not to mention the chaotic conditions that may have allowed a fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy, were unsuccessful. The messianic age had to be postponed yet again. Instead, the furious judgment of the nearly-deposed King Jannaeus fell upon the hundreds of Pharisees and their

⁷⁶ Perhaps it is no coincidence that they seem to have settled in Qumran more or less at the same time (100 BCE) as the breakaway community settled in the Arbel cave-village.

⁷⁷ Kenneth Atkinson, *The Seleucid and Hasmonean Periods and the Apocalyptic Worldview*, 45-57.

⁷⁸ Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.88-95; *Antiquities* 13.372-9; *M. Sukkah* 4:9.

families accused of treason, as narrated by Josephus and snidely mentioned in the *Peshar Nahum* of the Qumran community.

Reading the Qumran commentaries, or *Pesharim*, one finds a community that has become entirely self-referential and surrounded by enemies, one that looks into the ancient prophecies and sees only its own reflection there, its own detachment from reality.⁷⁹ When the Romans took control in 63 BCE, there was still a glimmer hope that God had sent them to judge those who had opposed their Teacher's plan for temple restoration. Only later, towards the turn of the millennium, did they realize the Romans were not the solution, but the problem. Far from being God's agents of revenge and retribution, they were allies of the devil, Beliar; they were the Sons of Darkness who would be defeated in the final battle by the armies of the Sons of Light (1QM).⁸⁰ The Qumran Community had become isolated, marginalized and ignored, even by their former community members, flourishing now at Arbela and in the Arbel caves.⁸¹ Finally, in 68 CE during the first Jewish revolt, they were an easy prey for the Roman army; it is not known whether they were killed or just dispersed.⁸² A few fragments of their writings were discovered at Masada, making it likely that some of the community managed to escape there. Perhaps others

⁷⁹ Boccaccini captures the mood well: "At the root of the Qumran community was a double frustration. In the aftermath of the Maccabean revolt, the Qumranites' parent movement failed in its political attempt to replace the Zadokite leadership. Internally the followers of the teacher of righteousness failed to gain the leadership of their movement. The double experience of failure brought about, along with a sense of impotence, an outburst of fanaticism", *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 155-6.

⁸⁰ Pointed out by Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 56.

⁸¹ But see Vermes (*Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 43-45) for the contrary view, and the sparse evidence of 'a living relationship' between the desert and town sectaries (monastic communities and Essene lay members), at the prescribed annual gatherings at Qumran. The evidence for a sustained relationship between these two forms of Essenism is not convincing in my view. At most, it may suggest a few mixed annual celebrations with lay members from a few neighbouring towns such as Jericho, Ein Falasha or Ein Gedi, but the numbers involved were small and do not contradict the overwhelming evidence for an enduring schism with the mainstream non-Qumran Essenes at Arbel, Jerusalem and many other towns and villages throughout the country.

⁸² But see the report of Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.152-3, quoted by Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 66, which could be a description of the fate of the community at Qumran.

managed to cross to the other side of the Dead Sea and later move south into Arabia, for the ear that is tuned to their writings will hear more than a few echoes of their doctrines in the Quran, the Sacred Book of Islam.

Summary, Acknowledgments and Conclusions

It would be premature to attempt to come to any conclusions about the Arbel/Essene Caves Hypothesis, presented above in substantial detail. At most, it can be recommended as providing a coherent narrative for many hitherto unexplained findings, literary, historical and archaeological. My feeling is that its capacity for explaining so many loose ends raises it almost to the level of historical fact, but again that claim would be premature and even presumptuous. Scholars from a variety of specialties will want to consider, criticize and correct the picture that emerges. Undoubtedly many of the details will need to be 'tweaked' and refined. Archaeology still has a great contribution to play in confirming, or indeed refuting, the Essene presence in the Arbel caves. A re-reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the light of this narrative may bring further adjustments. But the case has been made and a new level of comprehension has been reached.

Perhaps a word or two is needed on how we got there. At this point I have to acknowledge my debt to the devoted work of many scholars, but in particular that of Geza Vermes, Yigael Yadin and Gabriele Boccaccini. The works of these three scholars are the pillars which support the reconstructed historical narrative of the Essenes presented above: Vermes for his clear historical correlation of the various personalities and events mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Yadin for his perceptive elucidation of the religious significance of the Temple Scroll, and Boccaccini for his truly transforming analysis of the internal schism that tore apart the Essenes into a moderate (Arbel) and a radical branch (Qumran).⁸³ I have followed the work of these three scholars closely, welding them together with an interpretation resurrected from the early days of Scroll research: the literal interpretation of 'the land of Damascus'—the place of the Essenes' exile—as Damascus, or somewhere near. This has the virtue of explaining the newly-

⁸³ The works of these scholars, and those that follow, are the ones referenced in the text.

formed Essene party's contact with the Enochian Jews, who had been based in Damascus since the Persian times, according to my estimation. And perhaps more significantly, the exile in Damascus fills the chronological gap of about 50 years between the central conflict (Teacher versus Wicked Priest, around 152 BCE) and the Essene settlement of both Qumran and the Arbel cave-village (around 100 BCE, according to archaeological data). The Damascus exile was indeed a formative period for the Essenes, when they merged with the Enochians, adopted their literature and developed a healthy openness to direct religious experience. However, the period ended with a schism into two factions, moderate and radical, which was permanent to all intents and purposes.

The only other adjustment I have made, thanks to Yigael Yadin, is to give to the Temple Scroll the central role that it deserves in the conflict between the Wicked Priest and the Teacher of Righteousness, its likely author. This leads directly into a subject that has only recently come to the attention of scholars: the role of religion, biblical texts and messianic prophecies (apocalypses) in the events of this and subsequent periods. For introducing this topic into current scholarly discussion thanks are due to Kenneth Atkinson.

I must also acknowledge with gratitude the insightful works of James Charlesworth and Mordechai Aviam, who, through their ground-breaking studies on the Parables of Enoch, have created a firm theoretical basis for locating the non-Qumranic Essene scribal community in the Arbel caves. Credit is also due to the archaeologist Zvi Ilan for his survey of the caves in 1989, when he was the first to draw attention to the *mikva'ot* and cisterns inside, but whose untimely death in 1990 prevented him from following up on these findings.

I will conclude simply by saying that, if accepted more or less as presented above, this hypothesis places the Arbel cave-village at the centre of one of the most creative and prolific religious movements in Israel, and possibly in the world, at that time (first century BCE). One can expect this conclusion to have repercussions in many fields, extending well beyond the history of the Essenes and into Second Temple Judaism and the foundations of Christianity, not to mention its contribution to contemporary Galilean history and the origins and social setting of the Pseudepigrapha and Apocalypses. We can venture to assert that lakeside Galilee in those days would have been alive with biblical discussion and religious ferment, and was certainly not

the backwater of uneducated peasants it is often pictured to have been.

Final Word

This last statement returns us to the starting point of this enquiry: How could the apostle John, a fisherman born by the Sea of Galilee around 10 CE, ever have become the writer of an apocalypse like the Book of Revelation, or of a gospel such as the Fourth Gospel? The simple answer is that he was a bright young Jew, with a biblical education and raised in an environment where messianic prophecies were written in the form of apocalypses and often discussed. It was a local tradition, originally associated with Mt. Hermon, and resumed in the first century BCE by the local Essene scribes. John, the son of Zebedee was brought up in this tradition, but of course that is not the whole story. An interest accompanied him throughout his life, which was reinforced by John the Baptist (a non-Qumran Essene, rather than an ex-Qumran Essene, in my view), transformed by faith in Jesus of Nazareth, deepened in the light of this faith while studying with a converted Essene scribe in Jerusalem, and then finally challenged by the post-70 CE Essene writings that were circulating in Ephesus, towards the end of his life (e.g., *4Ezra*).⁸⁴

The Book of Revelation, which John wrote, but is more accurately called 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ' (Rev 1,1), can be understood as the divinely revealed fulfilment of the ambitious Essene attempts to write the transtemporal story—the past, present and future—of God's eschatological judgment and salvation. It was the culmination of John's early exposure to the Essene influence among the Jews of lakeside Galilee. John's Gospel and Letters are also an enduring witness to this influence. Paul's Letters, too, are similarly imbued with Essene resonances and contrasts, most probably acquired from his Christian formation in Damascus, where Essene influence was also strong.

Returning to the times of Jesus, Yigael Yadin relates another striking example of the diffusion of Essene influence.⁸⁵ At his Sermon

⁸⁴ John's scribal education will be proposed in ch. 2 of this volume, and his challenge by popular prophecies (including *4Ezra*) will be considered in ch. 4.

⁸⁵ In addition to the situation described in Mk 3,6, where we find the Essenes (pejoratively called Herodians) present outside the synagogue in Capernaum.

on the Mount, Jesus proclaimed to the lakeside crowd that followed him "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." (Mt 5,43-44). The command 'to hate your enemy' exists nowhere in Jewish law except in the Community Rule (1QS I,9-11; II,4-9) of the Essenes, and so Yadin aptly concludes "it is my opinion that the people he [Jesus] was addressing were familiar with this Essene injunction, having perhaps been close to the Essene sect and believed its doctrines, but who had now converted or were about to convert to the views of Jesus, and follow him".⁸⁶ The Essene influence was evidently strong in this area, even among the common people.⁸⁷

So, there is no need to speculate that the apostle John, or Paul, ever became an Essene novice or took the 'oath of the new covenant'. In places where the Essenes associated with the Pharisees (e.g., Mk 3,6), and where Essene lay members were living 'in the villages', as in this area of Galilee, their writings and teachings became diffused and well-known even among the general public. The influence of their teachings had prepared the faithful to receive a heavenly 'Son of Man' Messiah, and this may explain why Jesus chose to base his mission here. And precisely because of this strong Essene influence in the birthplace of John, the son of Zebedee, those who say the Fourth Gospel or the Book of Revelation could not have been written by a fisherman apostle from Galilee should think again.

⁸⁶ Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, 241-2.

⁸⁷ In view of the oath taken by the new members of the Essene party, to keep their teaching secret (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.139-142), one wonders how the teaching of the Essenes became so widespread. In fact, the oath probably applied just to certain intimate teachings of the community, such as the discernment of Spirits (CD III, 13-28). In note 47 above, we saw that the secrecy oath did not forbid the Essene writings from being read by 'the wise among the people' (*4Ezra* 14:44-47) and it would have been an odd development of the Torah if the oath had applied to the laws governing the daily life of Essene lay members. The strong Essene influence among the general public therefore indicates a thriving Essene lay membership in the towns and villages of the area, including Capernaum (cf. Mk 3,6).