

New Light on the Origins and History of the Essenes: Implications of the Essene settlement at Mt. Arbel in Galilee

Introduction

In an essay on the Provenance of the Parables of Enoch (*1Enoch 37-71*), I argue from a chain of historical, archaeological and literary findings that 1) it was an Essene work, 2) that there was a settlement of Essenes at Mt. Arbel in Galilee and 3) the author of the Book of Parables lived in this community.¹ Although this Arbel/Essene hypothesis is consistent with the available evidence, it has to be admitted that the evidence is thin at several points. Criticism has rightly focussed on the need for further archaeological work to strengthen the evidence and technically this would not be difficult to achieve. However, at the present time, there is little enthusiasm for this project among local archaeologists. Until such a time, we have no choice but to look for other ways to make the hypothesis more compelling and better known.

In his recent book *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, John Bergsma points a way forward: “Oftentimes the best proof of a theory is its explanatory power, and when in scholarship one can advance a single theory that suddenly unites and makes sense of a lot of data that otherwise seemed unrelated and inexplicable, it’s often an indication that one has hit upon the truth”.² If our theory of an Essene presence at Mt. Arbel is correct, one would expect this conclusion to shed more light on the origin and history of the Essene movement as a whole. So, rather than “zooming in” on the detailed evidence base of our hypothesis, which only the archaeologists can do, we here propose to “zoom out” and examine whether it fits into the larger historical narrative of those times, noting especially whether it has explanatory power and can shed more light on the history of the Essene movement.

Back in 1997, John Collins wrote “After five decades of study, the origin of the Qumran community is still the subject of widely diverse hypotheses. The reason is, of course, that the evidence of the scrolls is very elliptic on this subject”.³ The same observation rings true two decades later. In the meantime, some scholars have moved away from the search for historical context altogether. Following the reflections of Philip Davies, Robert Kugler and others, they reject historicizing approaches to the interpretation of Dead Sea Scrolls, and to the *pesharim*, the Damascus Document and the Community Rule in particular. In their view, the information conveyed in these documents represents imaginary realities and constructs rather than historical or social realities. So, they allege these texts should first be studied as the ideological projections of their authors, and only after this has

¹ John Ben-Daniel, “Mt. Arbel, the Essenes and the Book of Parables (*1Enoch 37-71*)”, available at www.academia.edu. Various synonyms are used for the Parables of Enoch, including Book of Parables and Similitudes of Enoch. The same place is sometimes called Arbel (Hebrew) and at other times Arbela (Aramaic).

² John Bergsma, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 108.

³ John J. Collins, “The Origin of the Qumran Community: A Review of the Evidence”, 239.

been done can the true nature of the authors be determined and their imaginary constructs be interpreted historically with precision.⁴

Another way is to continue to build on the scholarly work that has already been published, adding new insights and information as they emerge.⁵ This is what we propose here. Upon the groundwork laid by ancient sources such as the two books of Maccabees, and the writings of Josephus, Philo and Pliny the Elder, we present a historical reconstruction based on the works of three scholars in particular: Geza Vermes, a pioneer of the traditional Qumran/Essene hypothesis,⁶ Gabriele Boccaccini, the architect of the Enochic/Essene hypothesis,⁷ and Yigael Yadin, the first to realize the great religious significance of the Temple Scroll (11QT).⁸ On the framework erected by these three scholars, the work of other modern scholars has been added where appropriate, especially that of Kenneth Atkinson,⁹ and within this increasingly complex structure our Arbel/Essene hypothesis has also found its place. After an account of the historical and chronological framework produced from these sources ('Known Religio-Historical Background'), we then give a brief survey of the enigmatic historical references in the Dead Sea Scrolls ('Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls') and finish by interpreting them within the given historical outline ('Postulated Reconstruction of Essene History').

The work of historical reconstruction begins where our essay on the Provenance of the Parables of Enoch (*1Enoch* 37-71) ends: with the Essene author of that work writing from a cave set high in the cliffs of Mt. Arbel in Galilee, around the end of the first century BCE.¹⁰ He only had to raise his eyes to the north to see the snow-capped Mt. Hermon in the far distance, glowing majestically in the rising or setting sun.¹¹ This entrancing view of Mt. Hermon took him back, day after day, to contemplate the Book of the Watchers (*1Enoch* 1-36), to which his book—the Book of Parables—became a sequel (*1Enoch* 37-71). However, the Book of the Watchers had been written around 250 years previously by an author sitting 'by the waters of Dan', at the foot Mt. Hermon, onto whose summit the rebellious angels had descended in order to plant evil and corruption among men (*1Enoch* 6:6; 13:7,9). The spiritual and literary affinity between these two authors, skipping over two-and-a-half centuries, prompts us to consider, in outline, the religious and historical background of the Essene scribal community to which the author of the Book of Parables belonged.

⁴ E.g., Joseph L. Angel, *Otherworldly and Eschatological Priesthood in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 14-16.

⁵ This method is on display in Gabriele Boccaccini's *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 191-96.

⁶ Geza Vermes, Editor and English translation, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 2011.

⁷ Gabriele Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*.

⁸ Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, 1985.

⁹ Kenneth Atkinson, "Understanding the Relationship Between the Apocalyptic Worldview and Jewish Sectarian Violence", 45-57.

¹⁰ See note 1.

¹¹ Both James Charlesworth (*Parables of Enoch: A Paradigm Shift*, 184-5, 189) and Mordechai Aviam (op. cit. 159, 168-9) attest to the mystical power of Mt. Hermon, and the memory of its former associations, to connect the author to his spiritual forerunners and to the original author of the Book of the Watchers (*1Enoch* 1-36).

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.¹² They were the religiously observant anti-Zionists of their time, not unlike so many of the Anti-Zionist Haredim in the world today.

In the late 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. Proximity to Dan and Mt. Hermon makes it entirely possible that they were based in or near Damascus, which was under Ptolemy's control at the time.¹³

¹² The historical outline given here agrees with that of G. Boccaccini (*Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 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 offence. 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.

¹³ For the geographical sites and their significance, see George Nickelsburg, “Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee”, and David Suter, “Why Galilee? Galilean Regionalism in the Interpretation of 1 Enoch 6-16”. 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 *1 Enoch* 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.

Based on his experience 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 the Watchers (*1 Enoch* 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, over the next 250 years, developed through the editing of the original texts and the addition of new ones, into the collection of writings that is nowadays called *1 Enoch*. The Parables of Enoch was one of the last of these writings to be added. In retrospect, it appears that the earliest writings of *1 Enoch* were kept together and preserved by a loosely affiliated scribal movement that is known today as ‘Enochian 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”.¹⁴

One of the main issues distinguishing this dissenting group—the ‘Enochians’—from its rival priestly group in Jerusalem—the ‘Zadokites’—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, claiming it contradicted the Torah of Moses and should await divinely inspired interpretation.¹⁵ 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 in Jerusalem, 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 precisely the time when the ruling priestly authorities had declared prophecy to have ceased and been replaced by priestly and scribal functions.¹⁶ These differences in relating to God, the source of all authority, lay at the root of the tense rivalry that developed between the visionary Enochian and the 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 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; 7,13; 2Macc 14,6), joined forces with Judas Maccabee and successfully fought to remove the pagan incursions. *For those who had*

¹⁴ G. Boccaccini, *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism*, 99, quoting Benjamin G. Wright III.

¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁶ Cf. Martin Hengel, “The Scriptures and Their Interpretation in Second Temple Judaism”, 161-64; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 222-26.

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 his appointed high-priest, Alcimus, but before the subsequent appointment of Jonathan Maccabee as the high-priest and leader of the Jews (i.e. in the period 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 precisely the time to which Josephus refers when he introduces the three main ‘factions’ in Judaism, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes, and then proceeds to write much more about the Essenes than all the others.¹⁷ Philo of Alexandria also writes about them,¹⁸ but neither Josephus nor Philo describe their historical origins. These are the only ancient authors to speak about the Essenes in any detail and apart from four exceptional Essenes profiled by Josephus,¹⁹ they are rarely 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, thus testifying that they continued to exist until at least the end of the first century CE.²⁰

Both Philo and Josephus report that the Essenes numbered more than 4,000 and lived in communities, some all-male, others mixed, in towns and villages throughout the land of Judaea. Philo adds the intriguing information that they were also to be found in Syria and that they “derive their name from their piety (*hosios*), though not according to any accurate form of the Grecian dialect”.²¹ Along with many others, we therefore take the view that the name ‘Essene’ comes from the Greek transliterations, *essēnoi* and *essaioi*, of the Aramaic words *ḥasin* and *ḥasayya*’ respectively, which are cognates of *ḥasidim* in Hebrew and mean the ‘pious’, or ‘holy ones’ (plural). This theory about the derivation of the name ‘Essene’ supports the ‘Hasidic hypothesis’, which views the Essenes as the successors of the Hasidim, or *Asidaioi*, who were the Judaeans supporters of the Maccabean revolt mentioned in the books of Maccabees (1Macc 2,42; 7,13; 2Macc 14,6). It was, in fact, the most broadly accepted theory

¹⁷ Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.119-61; *Antiquities* 18.18-22.

¹⁸ Philo of Alexandria, *Quod Omnis* 75-91 and *Hypothetica* 11,1-8.

¹⁹ Judas (*Antiquities* 13.311-13), Menahem (15.373-8), Simon (17.345-8) and John (*Jewish War* 2.567).

²⁰ 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 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”, 354.

²¹ Philo, *Quod Omnis*, 75.

until Vermes and others pointed out that the Aramaic forms *hasin* and *hasayya*’ are attested primarily in Syriac and not in Western Aramaic, which was the common language in Judaea.²² However, far from disproving the link between the Essene movement and the Hasidim, this observation resonates with Philo’s comment that the Essenes were also found in Syria, and indicates the name may indeed have originated there. There is therefore no need to discard the ‘Hasidic hypothesis’, which explains the Hasidic origins of the Essenes, simply because the Aramaic roots *hasin* and *hasayya*’ were not current in Judaea. On the contrary, it should prepare us to accept this group was first named ‘Essene’ during their sojourn in Syria.

The only other source of information about the Essenes, and about their history, comes from the often-cryptic writings found, between 1948 and 1956, in caves near Qumran and named the Dead Sea Scrolls. Most scholars now concur with the Qumran/Essene hypothesis, which identifies the ruined buildings discovered at Qumran as the head-quarters of a community of 75–100 male Essenes, from about 100 BCE until 68 CE, when they were killed or dispersed by the Romans during the first Jewish revolt.²³ This identification is heavily based on the short but unmistakable description of an Essene community living along the north-western shores of the Dead Sea in Pliny the Elder’s first-century (c.77 CE) description of Judaeian geography.²⁴

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 not only a variety of biblical and para-biblical works, but also their own writings and those composed in their formative period, before their arrival at Qumran. Close study of the diverse contents of the library and the character of the scrolls, especially those of the Qumran community itself, has given rise to the remarkable observation that the Qumran community had not only separated from the rest of Israel, but also from the rest of the Essene movement. Despite the outstanding similarities between the Essenes and the Qumran community, there are also significant differences impeding the identification of the two. From the many attempts to explain these differences, two stand out among the rest: the Groningen hypothesis of Florentino García Martínez (1988) and its later variant called the Enochic/Essene hypothesis of Gabriele Boccaccini (1998).²⁵

Boccaccini has focussed his investigation of the differences in the literary output of the Qumran and the non-Qumran Essenes.²⁶ After the establishment of the Qumran community in about 100 BCE, there appears to have been no exchange of writings between themselves and the other Essene communities, whose existence throughout Judaea and southern Syria was reported by both Philo and Josephus. This total absence of any exchange of literature, in either direction, is strong evidence of

²² Cf. John Kampen “A Reconsideration of the Name “Essene” in Greco-Jewish Literature”, 64-66. For an update see John J. Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community*, 157; and Simon J. Joseph, *Jesus, the Essenes and Christian Origins*, 32-34.

²³ 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*, 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.

²⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Nat. Hist.* 5.73.

²⁵ Cf. Wido Van Peursen, “Qumran Origins: Some Remarks on the Enochic/Essene Hypothesis”, who also explains the small difference between these two hypotheses, *op. cit.* 248-49.

²⁶ Cf. G. Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 129-149 (for the books missing from Qumran); 156-159 (for the non-appearance elsewhere).

schism: the Qumran community appears to have separated from the other 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 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 non-Qumran Essene communities would have survived, with the notable exception of the 'Essene quarter' in Jerusalem, which became the head-quarters and garrison of the Roman army's 10th Legion. A great many of the non-Qumran Essenes would have become Christians and, judging from their later writings (*4Ezra*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*), those who did not join the early Church 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 by their own extreme ideology and cut off not only from the Jewish people and their temple, but also from the main body of their own Essene movement.²⁷

Returning to the literary works not found at Qumran, 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)".²⁸ Commenting on this, George Nickelsburg writes "The absence of the Book of Parables in the Qumran library suggests that the [Enochic] corpus was transmitted and developed in at least one context other than Qumran".²⁹ This 'one other context', we have proposed, is the Essene scribal community residing at the Arbel cave-village, carved into the cliffs of Mt. Arbel, in eastern Galilee.³⁰

Not surprisingly, the historical outline presented above does not explain how the Essenes came to be at Mt. Arbel. Our main sources from this period are the two books of Maccabees and the writings of Josephus, both of which were 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.

²⁷ Cf. Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 150-156.

²⁸ Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 131. The 'Similitudes of Enoch' is a synonym for the 'Parables of Enoch'.

²⁹ G.W.E. Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, First Book of', in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2.515.

³⁰ See note 1.

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.³¹ 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, this ‘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 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 (5,26-27; CD [A] VII,15),³² in which God promises to send Israel into exile ‘beyond Damascus’, as a punishment for their idolatry (i.e. to exile in Nineveh/Babylon/Mesopotamia). The deliberate alteration of ‘beyond Damascus’, in the citation (Am 5,27), to ‘Damascus’, explaining why they came to be there, persuades us that Damascus should be interpreted literally in this context, and not figuratively as a reference to Babylon or any other exilic location.³³ This literal interpretation resonates with Philo’s observation that, a century and a half later, the Essenes are to be found not only in Judaea, but also in Syria, where it appears that the name ‘Essene’ was first applied to them.³⁴

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

³¹ All the references, translations and much of the historical commentary in this section are from *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls* by Geza Vermes. 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).

³² 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 (Amos 5,26-27), 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” (CD [A] VII,15). 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.

³³ 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, 1972; Vol 5, cols 1238, 1248 and 1249). It has been revived recently by Michael Wise in *The First Messiah*, 135-138. 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’ Enochian tradition has been mentioned above. The Teacher’s decision to stay ‘in the land Damascus’ suggests an intention to get closer to this Enochian Jewish community and unite with them in a ‘new covenant’.

³⁴ Philo, *Quod Omnis*, 75; for the discussion on this, see above, in the previous section ‘Known Religio-Historical Background’.

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 recent internal division are various: rejecting or criticizing the precepts, having idolatrous desires and 'walking in stubbornness'. Above all, in the context of so much regulation on disengagement from society (colourfully expressed as '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).³⁵

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). Significantly, 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 what will happen to the final generation, when they hear from the Priest, to whom God has given the understanding to interpret all the words of his servants the Prophets' (1QpHab I,1-10.). As this divine gift of interpretation qualifies the 'Teacher of Righteousness' elsewhere (cf. 1QpHab VII, 5), then it helpfully informs us that the 'Teacher' was also 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').³⁶ Implying that he was at first friendly to the Teacher and his disciples, the *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 eulogizing 'King Jonathan' in the Scrolls (4Q448) indicates that the ruler of Israel called the 'Wicked Priest' may have been Jonathan Maccabee, who

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ The 'Wicked Priest' is a translation of 'hacohen harasha' (הכהן הרשע) which is a pun on 'hacohen harashi' (הכהן הראשי), meaning the 'head priest'.

lead 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 *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, *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 *Pesher 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). It may also have been 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.³⁷

³⁷ 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*, esp.

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 and *Pesharim*. At first glance, these expressions do not appear as fictional, but as being charged with emotion and often with resentment. In fact, 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. 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 quite 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 ‘Enochian’ 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

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”, 435-54.

was now a serious rival for the office of high priest.³⁸ 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 proposed³⁹ and the Essene solar calendar it endorsed, which conflicted irreconcilably with the luni-solar calendar imposed by the Greek king.⁴⁰ 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 פָּרַשׁ, to separate), and those who remained faithful to the 'Teacher of Righteousness' and continued to be called *Hasidim* in Hebrew, *Hasin* in Aramaic, or *Essenoi/Essaioi* in Greek.⁴¹ 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 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 Enochian 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 vicinity of this city, in the period immediately after Jonathan's appointment as high priest, around 152-151 BCE, and he remained there until his death, at an 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,

³⁸ There is a serious possibility, according to the narrative presented here, that the Teacher was the high priest, or at least one of the leading priests, 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 around 130-125 BCE. For further discussion, see James C. Vanderkam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 113-116.

³⁹ For a sketch of the extreme purity laws it embraced, see Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, 170-91.

⁴⁰ For a full explanation of the calendar conflict, see Vanderkam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 113-5.

⁴¹ 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 a Greek transliteration of the word for 'Pious' in Aramaic (*hasin*), itself cognate with the same word in Hebrew (*hasidim*). This implies that the Teacher took with him to Damascus the original group of Hasidim minus the Pharisees.

putting the estimated time of the final judgment around 90 BCE.⁴² 40 years before this year would date the death of the Teacher to c.130 BCE.⁴³

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 meeting between high priest Jonathan and 'the Teacher' (1QpHab), which seems to have marked the beginning of the division among 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 during their sojourn in the land of Damascus. The death of Jonathan soon after is mentioned with *schadenfreude*, but also with recognizable fidelity to the facts recounted in the first book of Maccabees, describing how he was indeed captured, imprisoned and killed by a foreigner, the Greek general called Trypho (1Macc 12,39-13,30).⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

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 (or Mattei) the Arbelite, takes up residence at Arbel in Galilee⁴⁸. Undoubtedly many Pharisees accompanied him, prompting him to establish a *Beit Midrash* in that village. We suggest that within a few years the breakaway Essenes arrive from their place of exile near Damascus. Establishing a community in the same town, they started to prepare the nearby caves for the rest of their scribal community. In the meantime, around 100 BCE, Galilee was conquered by Aristobulus I (104-103), the

⁴² I was alerted to this 'eschatological timetable' and its baneful effects by Kenneth Atkinson's article "Understanding the Relationship Between the Apocalyptic Worldview and Jewish Sectarian Violence". 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", 210-238.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ Again, see Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, 150-156 for a penetrating analysis of this 'Parting of the Ways'.

⁴⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.288-296.

⁴⁷ Only a few years earlier, before 152 BCE, they had lived and fought together in Judaea.

⁴⁸ M. Pirke Avot 1:6-7.

successor of John Hyrcanus, enabling the immigration of the entire Essene scribal community and their settlement 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.⁴⁹ Their views of Mt. Hermon must have helped them to connect with these spiritual predecessors. Their rapprochement with the local Pharisees would have helped to moderate the extreme purity regulations and isolationist policies of the Teacher of Righteousness, but without changing the other rules and ceremonial regulations that served to maintain their Essene identity. Nevertheless, over time, and through lack of contact, it appears their doctrines diverged in important ways from those of the Essene community at Qumran.

At Mt. Arbel, Essene 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 Arbel cave-village became the birthplace of innumerable extrabiblical writings, 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 community's 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 behind in 'the land of Damascus', the group that remained faithful to the program and extreme purity regulations of 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 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.⁵⁰ 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

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ 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.

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.

However, in his important study 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.⁵¹ 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,⁵² 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 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.⁵³ 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).⁵⁴ The Qumran Community had become isolated, marginalized and ignored, even by their former community members, flourishing now at Arbela and in the Arbel cave-village.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Kenneth Atkinson, "Understanding the Relationship Between the Apocalyptic Worldview and Jewish Sectarian Violence", 45-57.

⁵² Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.88-95; *Antiquities* 13.372-9; M. Sukkah 4:9.

⁵³ 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.

⁵⁴ Pointed out by Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 56.

⁵⁵ But see Vermes (*Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 43-45) for the contrary view, and the 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 scant and 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.

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.⁵⁶ A few fragments of their writings were discovered at Masada, making it likely that some of the community managed to escape there. Perhaps others 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 and Conclusions

It would be premature to attempt to come to any conclusions about the Arbel/Essene hypothesis, presented by this author in a previous study. While a final assessment of that hypothesis awaits the results of further archaeological investigation, we have attempted in this essay to see whether it fits into a historical reconstruction based on available historical information to date. By identifying the geographical location of the Essene community that broke away from the Teacher and his most loyal followers, this hypothesis presents itself as a further development of the Enochic/Essene hypothesis of Boccaccini. Few would deny that it gives material endorsement to that hypothesis by describing the establishment of an Essene scribal community at Mt. Arbel in eastern Galilee, immediately after their separation from the group that settled at Qumran at about the same time, c.100 BCE.⁵⁷ From that time onwards, contact between the separated groups was minimal. Although Essene identity was maintained in both groups by common ritual, customs and regulations, their respective doctrines and literary output inevitably diverged, with the northern, Arbel branch remaining more moderate and mainstream and the southern, Qumran branch becoming extreme and marginal when compared with contemporary norms. A discussion of the quality of the relationship between these two communities would be an interesting subject of future research.

However, the positive contribution of our Arbel/Essene hypothesis to the Enochic/Essene hypothesis is only a small product of the historical reconstruction that emerges from this review. Just as the Enochic/Essene hypothesis expanded upon the Qumran/Essene hypothesis and gave it a broader view of Essene origins and history, we suggest that the Arbel/Essene hypothesis has opened up the possibility for a further extension of the horizon. It seems to have achieved this by identifying an Essene community in geographical proximity to Damascus, thus tipping the scales in favour of a literal interpretation of the 'land of Damascus', as the refuge of the nascent Essene movement in the period before the separation.

So, combining the insights of Geza Vermes with those of Gabriele Boccaccini, we have been able to locate the formative period of the Essene movement to the environs of Damascus. This has the virtue of explaining their union with the Enochian Jews, who had been based in Damascus since Persian times, according to our reading of the evidence, and then sealing it in a 'new covenant'. More significantly, the exile of the Essenes near Damascus fills the chronological gap of about 50 years between the central conflict of the 'Teacher' and 'Wicked Priest' (around 152 BCE) and the return from exile and settlement of both Qumran and the Arbel cave-village (around

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ A more suitable title for this essay might have been: "Even Further Beyond the Essene Hypothesis".

100 BCE, according to archaeological data). Lasting from c. 150–100 BCE, the Damascus exile was indeed a formative period for the Essenes, when they merged with the Enochians, adopted their literature, shared their love of the Mosaic Torah and other biblical works, and developed a healthy openness to direct religious experience. However, the period ended with a schism into two factions, moderate (Arbel) and radical (Qumran), which was complete and permanent to all intents and purposes.

The other main contribution to the expansion of our view of Essene origins comes from Yigael Yadin, whose work compels us to recognize the central role of the Temple Scroll 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, including Kenneth Atkinson: the role of religion, biblical texts and messianic prophecies (apocalypses) in the events of this and subsequent periods.

I will conclude simply by saying that the Arbel/Qumran hypothesis appears to have significantly enhanced our understanding of Essene origins and history. Readers can judge for themselves whether it meets the criteria, defined by John Bergsma and mentioned above in the Introduction, for a theory that has explanatory power. Whatever the verdict, it places the Arbel cave-village, along with Qumran, at the centre of the most creative and prolific religious movement in Israel, and possibly in the world, at that time—the first century BCE. If confirmed by further archaeological findings, this conclusion will 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.

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John Ben-Daniel,
Old City, Jerusalem
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