

History and the Essenes

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Pliny on the Essenes

Why are the gospels silent about the Essenes and the Zealots, though they introduce us to the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians? Could it be that the people at the center of the story were Essenes? Neither Paul nor any of the other writers of epistles in the *New Testament* mentions the Essenes—they might as well have not existed. But we know they did. Three writers from the first century AD describe the Essenes—Pliny, Josephus and Philo. We now also have the evidence of the excavations at Qumran and the *Dead Sea Scrolls*.

The clue that the Qumran might have been a home of the Essenes is in Pliny's *Natural History*. Pliny was a Roman naturalist who wrote in about 70 AD, after the destruction of Judaea by the Romans putting down the four year uprising they called the Jewish War. Pliny is describing the region around the Dead Sea and says that on the western shore, where they had been for thousands of centuries, live the Essenes, a solitary people who renounce women and money. They maintain their numbers by accepting those driven by the vicissitudes of fortune and weariness of life. "Below" them are the ruins of En Gedi and "beyond" is the fortress of Masada.

By the western shores [of the Dead Sea], but away from their harmful effects, live a solitary people, the **Essenes**, wonderful besides all others in the world, being without any women and renouncing all sexual desire, having no money, and with only palm trees as companions. Their assembly is born again day by day from the multitudes, tired of life and the vicissitudes of fortune, that crowd thither for their manner of living. So, for thousands of ages—strange to say—a people, in which no one is born, is eternal, so fruitful for them is the repentance of others for their life! Lying below (infra) these was the town of En Gedi, once second only to Jerusalem in fertility and groves of palm trees, but now like the other, a ruin. After that (inde), Masada, a castle on a crag, itself not far from the Dead Sea, is the end of Judaea.

| *Natural History 5:18:73*

Pliny's statement that the Essenes existed so long because they benefited from "the repentance of others for their life," links them directly with Jesus and John the Baptist who required people's repentance.

Pliny's comparison of En Gedi with Jerusalem is a mistake, suggesting that he was working from sources that he either misunderstood or were not quite accurate. Steven Gorenson of Duke University suggests Pliny's source was Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, a governor of Syria and a friend of Herod the Great, who described Qumran and other sites, including En Gedi, in c 15 BC while making a military survey. Recent archaeology, contrary to de Vaux, shows Qumran was occupied at the time of M. Agrippa, who died in 12 BC. Jerusalem is on the top of a range of hills, and though it is not infertile, mountains are not noted for fertility. Not far from En Gedi is Jericho, a fertile oasis and the comparison of the oasis of En Gedi with that of Jericho is surely intended. However, the area was wetter then than now, as de Vaux and other excavators more recently have noted from the presence of date palm wood, palm leaves, and date pits at Qumran.

Pliny's "thousands of ages" is an exaggeration but one which might suggest an association between this community and a much older one. Josephus, who gives us the most complete account of the Essenes, puts the rise of the community in the previous century, during the first century BC. It might also however come from a misunderstanding of his source. Thus, Pliny's choice of words is noteworthy because he uses expressions typical of an Essene or proto-Christian community like "assembly," "born again" and

"repentance," and even speaks of them being "eternal," a likely misunderstanding by Pliny of a source which said their expectation was eternal life. This might have led to the confusion about the "thousands of ages." Joseph Amusin thinks the reference to an eternal people comes from descriptions of themselves (CD 7:6; 19:1-2; 20:22) as people who "live for a thousand generations." Joseph M Baumgarten has also noted, in 4Q502, blessings "in the midst of an eternal people." Otherwise, most translators astonishingly do not make anything of these obvious parallels in their ignorance, their search for literary variation or their deliberate attempts to mislead.

If the words "below" and "beyond" or "after that" imply direction towards the south as they must, since it is only by looking south that Masada lies "beyond" or "after" En Gedi, then the Essenes lived at the most northerly of the three sites mentioned. There is a ruin and caves just at this spot, where the scrolls were found, and although nowhere in the Dead Sea discoveries are the curators of the scrolls called Essenes, from the content of their manuals, there is no doubt who they are. In the Dead Sea Scrolls they know themselves variously as the the righteous, the elect, the poor, the holy or the saints, the keepers of the covenant, the new covenanters, the remnant of Israel, the perfect of the way and the sons of light. If Pliny indicated relative altitude when he wrote "below", the Essene community was in the hills behind En Gedi from the Dead Sea but there is no sign of any such community there, other than traces of about twenty simple huts discovered early in 1998.

Yizhar Hirschfeld, an Israeli archaeologist, found in these hills, twenty small plain rectangular huts, each large enough to house one man, which had been inhabited in the first and second centuries. The huts were too small to be houses and were really simple monk's cells. Their situation fits Pliny's geographical description, but Pliny's description of the numbers of people crowding to the site prove that it is too small to be the one he is describing. This will have been one of the wilderness camps of the Essenes, alone too small to have been a community worth noting by Pliny.

Philo on the Essenes.

Another account of the Essenes by Philo of Alexandria (born in Alexandria in 20 BC and died about 60 AD; probably an Essenian Jew himself) written about 20 AD broadly matches Josephus's but sometimes he disagrees and occasionally adds something new. Thus he says that only mature men were admitted. He agrees with Josephus that the Essenes lived all over Judaea but maintains that they preferred to live in villages not towns. They avoided towns because of the contagion of evils rife within them. The sick and elderly were cared for—the scrolls tell us that the infirm and the sick were already spiritually saved under the guardianship of the angels of holiness.

Josephus tells us they practise husbandry but Philo enlarges saying they are farmers, shepherds, cowherds, beekeepers, artisans and craftsmen, but they did not make weapons, would not engage in commerce and were no sailors. They rejected slavery, believing brotherhood to be the natural relationship of men but that it had been spoiled by covetousness. Though they read a great deal they were not interested in philosophy in general but only morals. They ignored the weather and never used it as an excuse not to work. They returned from work rejoicing, as if they had been partying all day.

Contentment of mind they regarded as the greatest of riches. They make no instruments of war. They repudiate every inducement to covetousness. None are held as slaves, but all are free, and serve each other. They are instructed in piety and holiness, righteousness, economy, etc. They are guided by a threefold rule: love of God, love of virtue, and love of mankind. Of their love of God they give innumerable demonstrations, which is found in their constant and unalterable holiness throughout the whole of their lives, their avoidance of oaths and falsehoods, and their firm belief that God is the source of all good, but of nothing evil. Of their love of virtue they give proof in their contempt for money, fame, and pleasures, their continence, easy satisfying of their wants, their simplicity, modesty, etc. Their love of man is proved by their benevolence and equality, and their having all things in common, which is beyond all deception. They reverence and take care of the aged, as children do their parents. They do not lay up treasures of gold or silver but provide themselves only with the necessities of life.

Paul afterwards, in the same spirit, advises: *Having food and raiment, therewith be content.* Note also the threefold rule of the Essenes. Christians like to think that the great revelation that came to the world via Christ was *love* but here we find it is the central belief of an old Jewish sect, and curiously, one which Jesus shows every indication of having been a member of.

Philo: Every Virtuous Man is Free 12:75

Palestine and Syria too are not barren of exemplary wisdom and virtue, which countries no slight portion of that most populous nation of the Jews inhabits. There is a portion of those people called Essenes, in number somewhat more than four thousand in my opinion, who derive their name from their piety, though not according to any accurate form of the Greek dialect, because they are above all men devoted to the service of God, not sacrificing living animals, but studying rather to preserve their own minds in a state of holiness and purity.

These men, in the first place, live in villages, avoiding all cities on account of the habitual lawlessness of those who inhabit them, well knowing that such a moral disease is contracted from the associations with wicked men, just as a real disease might be from an impure atmosphere, and that this would stamp an incurable evil on their souls. Of these men, some cultivating the earth, and others devoting themselves to those arts which are the result of peace, benefit both themselves and all those who come into contact with them, not storing up treasures of silver and of gold, nor acquiring vast sections of the earth out of a desire for ample revenues, but providing all things which are requisite for the natural purpose of life.

For they alone of almost all men having been originally poor and destitute, and that too rather from their own habits and ways of life than from any real deficiency of good fortune, are nevertheless accounted very rich, judging contentment and frugality to be in great abundance, as in truth they are.

Among those men you will find no makers of arrows, or javelins, or swords, or helmets, or breastplates, or shields, no makers of arms or any employment whatever connected with war, or even to any of those occupations even in peace which are easily perverted to wicked purposes, for they are utterly ignorant of all traffic, and of all commercial dealings, and of all navigation, but they repudiate and keep aloof from everything which can possibly afford any inducement to covetousness.

Least of all is a single slave found among them, but they are all free, aiding one another with a reciprocal interchange of good offices, and they condemn masters, not only as unjust, inasmuch as they corrupt the very principles of equality, but likewise as impious, because they destroy the laws of nature, which generated them all equally, and brought them up like a mother, as if they were legitimate brethren, not in name only, but in reality and truth. But in their view this natural relationship of all men to one another has been thrown into disorder by designing covetousness, continually wishing to surpass others in good fortune, and which has therefore engendered alienation instead of affection, and hatred instead of friendship.

And leaving the logical part of philosophy, as in no respect necessary for the acquisition of virtue, to the word-catchers, and the natural part, as being too sublime for human nature to master, to those who love to converse about high objects (except indeed so far as such a study takes in the contemplation of the existence of God and of the creation of the universe), they devote all their attention to the moral part of philosophy, using as instructors the laws of their country which it would have been impossible for human mind to devise without divine inspiration.

Now these laws they are taught at other times, indeed, but most especially on the seventh day, for the seventh day is accounted sacred, on which they abstain from all other employments, and frequent their synagogues, as they called these places, and there they sit according to their age in classes, the younger sitting under the elder, and listening with eager attention in becoming order.

Then one, indeed, takes up the holy volume and reads from it, and another of the men of the greatest experience comes forward and explains what is not very intelligible, for a great many precepts are delivered in enigmatical modes of expression, and allegorically, as the old fashion was, and thus the people are taught piety, and holiness, and justice and economy, and the science of regulating the state, and the knowledge of such things as are naturally good, or bad, or indifferent, and to choose what is right and to avoid what is wrong, using a threefold variety of definitions, and rules, and criteria, namely, love of God, love of virtue, and love of mankind.

Accordingly, the sacred volumes present an infinite number of instances of the disposition devoted to the love of God, and of a continued and uninterrupted purity throughout the whole life, of a careful avoidance of oaths and of falsehood, and of a strict adherence to the principle of looking on the Deity as the cause of everything which is good and nothing of which is evil. They also furnish us with many proofs of a love of virtue, such as abstinence from all covetousness of money, from ambition, from indulgence of pleasures, temperance, endurance, and also moderation, simplicity, good temper, the absence of pride, obedience to the laws, steadiness, and everything of that kind; and, lastly, they bring forward as proofs of the love of mankind, goodwill, equality beyond all power of description, and fellowship, about which it is not unreasonable to say a few words.

In the first place, then, there is no one who has a house so absolutely his own private property, that it does not in some sense also belong to everyone. For besides that they all dwell together in companies, the house

is open to all those of the same notions, who come to them from other quarters. Then there is one magazine among them all, their expenses are all in common, since they all eat in messes, for there is no other people among which you can find a common use for the same house, a common adoption of one mode of living, and a common use of the same table more thoroughly established in fact than among this tribe—and is not this very natural?

For whatever they, after having been working during the day, receive for their wages, that they do not retain as their own, but bring it into a common stock, and give any advantage that is to be derived from it to all who desire to avail themselves of it. And those who are sick are not neglected because they are unable to contribute to the common stock, inasmuch as the tribe have in their public stock a means of supplying their necessities and aiding their weakness, so that from their ample means they support them liberally and abundantly, and they cherish respect for their elders, and honour them and care for them, just as parents are honoured and cared for by their loving children, being supported by them in all abundance both by their personal exertions and by innumerable contrivances.

Such diligent practices of virtue does philosophy, unconnected with any superfluous care of examining into Greek names render men, proposing to them as necessary exercises to train them towards its attainment, all praiseworthy actions by which a freedom, which can never be enslaved, is firmly established.

And a proof of this is that, though at different times a great number of chiefs of every variety of disposition and character, have occupied their country, some of whom have endeavoured to surpass even ferocious wild animals in cruelty, leaving no sort of inhumanity unpractised, and have never ceased to murder their subjects in whole troops, and have even torn them to pieces while living, like cooks cutting them limb from limb, till they themselves, being overtaken by the vengeance of divine justice, have at last experienced the same miseries in their turn.

Others again having converted their barbarous frenzy into another kind of wickedness, practising an ineffable degree of savageness, talking with the people quietly, but through the hypocrisy of a more gentle voice, betraying the ferocity of their real disposition, fawning upon their victims like treacherous dogs, and becoming the causes of irremediable miseries to them, have left in all their cities monuments of their impiety, and hatred of all mankind, in the never to be forgotten miseries endured by those whom they oppressed.

And yet no one, not even of those immoderately cruel tyrants, nor of the more treacherous and hypocritical oppressors was ever able to bring any real accusation against the multitude of those called Essenes (Essaion) or Holy (Hosion). But everyone being subdued by the virtue of these men, looked up to them as free by nature, and not subject to the frown of any human being, and have celebrated their manner of messing together, and their fellowship with one another beyond all description in respect of its mutual good faith, which is ample proof of a perfect and very happy life.

Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, 12:75-91, Trans C.D. Yonge

Josephus suggests he was initiated into the Essene brotherhood so one assumes he knows what he is talking about. In his two famous books the *Jewish War* and the *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus, describes in some detail the cult ignored in the gospels—the Essenes.

He agreed that the Essenes, all Jews by birth, did not marry though they were not against marriage in principle—they realized it was necessary for the continuation of mankind—but propagated the sect by adopting other people's children. Another order of Essenes accepted marriage though maintaining strict rules about intercourse. There were about 4000 Essenes altogether, constituting a closely knit brotherhood with similarities to the Pythagoreans, devotees of Orpheus. They regarded pleasure as evil and disciplined themselves in continence and self control. They wore white garments just as did the priests.

In the Quran the followers of Jesus—the Nasrani—were called the people in white. The Manichaeans who derived from the Mandaean—or Nasoraean—followers of John the Baptist were called white robes. All took their habit of wearing white from their ultimate founders, the Essenes, who called themselves Lebanon, which means white, because they habitually wore sparklingly white robes of fine linen.

Essenes loved each other more than others, renounced riches (they were the Poor) and kept no servants, ministering to one another, eating only the simplest food and wearing their clothes and shoes to shreds. They held their goods in common yielding their possessions to the order when they joined and contributing all their earnings. Failure to do this was a grave dishonesty and was severely punished. In return they received all that they needed. Their lives were fully regulated by guardians or bishops who directed their daily duties leaving them able to do only two things of their own free will—to assist those in need and to show mercy, the pre-eminent characteristics of the Nazarenes of the gospels.

They settled in all towns in Palestine living apart in organized communities based on a centre where they congregated for meals. When travelling, they never needed to carry anything with them except weapons to protect themselves against robbers because wherever they lived someone was appointed to look after visitors—they offered hospitality to any visiting brother Essene just as if he were part of the family. There was no commerce between them, everything being given willingly to brothers who had need, once the guardian approved.

Their first act in the morning, before dawn, was to pray as if in supplication for the sun's rising. They took to their tasks until the fifth hour (11 am) whereupon they returned, clothed themselves in delicate white raiments, bathed in cold water and assembled in a room into which only the initiates were allowed for a sacred meal. Following grace said by the priest they partook of bread and a single type of food and concluded with another prayer in praise of God as the provider of the food. They then changed back into their working clothes and resumed their labours until the evening. Sweating through exertion was not considered impure and they would not sanitize themselves by using fragrant oil as a cosmetic—oil was a defilement used other than functionally, for medicine or cooking. Philo adds they never used the weather as an excuse not to work and each day they returned from work rejoicing, as if it had been a great pleasure. Then they repeated the cleansing ritual in preparation for the evening meal after the same manner. Conversation at the meal was orderly, each speaking in turn, otherwise silence prevailed, and they ate and drank only what they needed thus maintaining their "perpetual sobriety".

Having sworn the solemn ritual oaths of their initiation they were bound then no longer to swear oaths believing that those who were untruthful were condemned by God. Thus they were faithful, peaceful and restrained. They spent much time studying the writings of the ancients, the scriptures, taking from them what was good for their body and soul including medicinal knowledge based on roots and stones.

To be admitted, a proselyte had to first live in the manner of an Essene for a year to prove he was capable of it. Then he was baptized but was still not admitted to the order—he had to continue to live in their fashion for two more years to prove his worthiness. It was at this stage that he took solemn oaths to become a full member and participated in the sacred meal. He had to swear piety toward God, justice toward men, not to harm anyone of his own accord or at the command of another, to hate the wicked and assist the righteous, to show faith to all men especially those in authority but not to abuse his own authority or try to outshine others in garments or other finery, to love truth and reprove those who lie, not to steal or covet, not to conceal from others in the sect nor divulge their doctrines to others on pain of death, to pass on the rules to proselytes just as he received them, and to preserve the books of the sect and the names of the angels.

Having discovered the scrolls after almost 2000 years we know they successfully preserved their books, but the names of the angels? The scrolls show us that they were a secretive community. Evidently the allusion is to the mysteries which they were taught and had to keep.

Their judgements were just, not being passed by a court of less than a hundred, and usually permanent. If anyone was guilty of sin he was cast out eating only grass since he could accept no succour from anyone without the permission of the guardian and thus he wasted away to die of starvation. Excommunication therefore meant death because no Essene would forgo his vows even though excommunicated. In practice the community accepted them again when they felt they had been punished enough. They obeyed their elders and accepted majority decisions.

Josephus writes that, after God, they revered most the name of their legislator, it being a capital offence to blaspheme him. Scholars naturally have assumed this to be Moses but, since all Jews revere Moses, it is tempting, in the light of the scrolls, to wonder whether Qumran's Teacher of Righteousness was meant. They avoided spitting in public and were stricter than other Jews in observing the sabbath, preparing all their food on the day before and not even defaecating on the sabbath. On workdays they carried with them a small hatchet to dig a pit as a latrine which they refilled when they had finished. While in the act of defaecating they wrapped themselves with their white robe so that they did not offend, not simply other people because their toilets were well away from habitation, but the divine rays of light. Afterwards they washed themselves thoroughly.

The full members were split into four classes. Seniors considered junior members to be as unclean as a gentile and had to undergo purification if they touched one. Their regular and simple lifestyle and diet made them long lived, often living to over a hundred years old.

They believed in an immortal soul locked in a corruptible body. The body was a prison for the soul which rejoiced when freed of it. This sounds like a contradiction of the Pharisaic, and presumably Christian ideas, of resurrection—the resurrection of the physical body. However some scroll fragments use the bones passage of Ezekiel to signify resurrection which seems to imply physical resurrection.

The Essene view sounds contradictory but we cannot assume that it seemed so to them. Essenes believed that the righteous would be resurrected in the kingdom of God on the third day of the kingdom (Hosea 6:2). Essenes were to be resurrected into an ideal world because they were God's perfect. Everything would seem as it was, but things would be perfect—the kingdom would be on earth but it would be free of sin. Since sin and corruption were synonymous, the kingdom was free of corruption. They would live for ever in incorruptible bodies—the same bodies that they had always lived in but rendered free of corruption by God, their reward for being righteous.

The significance of the Christian myth of the resurrection of Jesus is that it proved the kingdom of God had arrived. Modern Christians believe in a spiritual resurrection of the soul in heaven rather than a physical resurrection of the body, but the point about the Essene kingdom of God was that it was a coming together of heaven and earth—the physical body was resurrected on earth, but only when it had become part of heaven.

For the Essenes, heaven had no storms, snow or intense heat but was refreshed by a cool breeze always blowing gently from the ocean. Hell was a dark and stormy pit full of torments. These were inducements to men to be good in life for fear of being punished after death. Unlike other Jewish sects they did not offer sacrifices at the temple, indeed were excluded from it contradicting Josephus's statement that they were favoured by Herod. Some Essenes foretold the future and were rarely wrong.

Josephus: Antiquities (Whiston) 18:1:2

2. The Jews had for a great while had three sects of philosophy peculiar to themselves, the sect of the Essens, and the sect of the Sadducees, and the third sort of opinions was that of those called Pharisees, of which sects, although I have already spoken in the second book of the Jewish War, yet will I a little touch upon them now.

5. The doctrine of the Essens is this: That all things are best ascribed to God. They teach the immortality of souls, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for. And when they send what they have dedicated to God into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices because they have more pure lustrations of their own. On which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves. Yet is their course of life better than that of other men, and they entirely addict themselves to husbandry. It also deserves our admiration, how much they exceed all other men that addict themselves to virtue, and this in righteousness, and indeed to such a degree, that as it hath never appeared among any other men, neither Greeks nor barbarians, no, not for a little time, so hath it endured a long while among them. This is demonstrated by that institution of theirs, which will not suffer any thing to hinder them from having all things in common, so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all. There are about four thousand men that live in this way, and neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants, as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust, and the former gives the handle to domestic quarrels, but as they live by themselves, they minister one to another. They also appoint certain stewards to receive the incomes of their revenues, and of the fruits of the ground; such as are good men and priests, who are to get their corn and their food ready for them. They none of them differ from others of the Essens in their way of living, but do the most resemble those Dacae who are called *Polistae*.

Polistae are those who dwell in cities. It is interesting that, as Whiston himself points out, Josephus's *Polistae* are called *Christae* by Strabo. The *Dacae* were Pythagoreans, many of whom lived alone like ascetics in tents or caves but others lived together like monks in purpose built "cities" like monasteries and therefore might have been called *Polistae*. The discovery of the ruins at Qumran are just the sort of city meant, but the Essenes who dwelt there actually lived in the surrounding caves or in a tented city. The ruins were functional not dormitory.

Josephus: Jewish War (Whiston) 2:8:2-13

2. For there are three philosophical sects among the Jews. The followers of the first of which are the Pharisees, of the second, the Sadducees, and the third sect, which pretends to a severer discipline, are called **Essens**. These last are Jews by birth, and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects have. These Essens reject pleasures as an evil, but esteem continence, and the conquest over our passions, to be virtue. They neglect wedlock, but choose out other persons children, while they are pliable, and fit for learning, and esteem them to be of their kindred, and form them according to their own manners. They do not absolutely deny the fitness of marriage, and the succession of mankind thereby continued, but they guard against the lascivious behavior of women, and are persuaded that none of them preserve their fidelity to one man.

3. These men are despisers of riches, and so very communicative as raises our admiration. Nor is there any one to be found among them who hath more than another; for it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have be common to the whole order, — insomuch that among them all there is no appearance of poverty, or excess of riches, but every one's possessions are intermingled with every other's possessions, and so there is, as it were, one patrimony among all the brethren. They think that oil is a defilement, and if any one of them be anointed without his own approbation, it is wiped off his body, for they think to be sweaty is a good thing, as they do also to be clothed in white garments. They also have stewards appointed to take care of their common affairs, who every one of them have no separate business for any, but what is for the uses of them all.

4. They have no one certain city, but many of them dwell in every city and if any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own, and they go in to such as they never knew before, as if they had been ever so long acquainted with them. For which reason they carry nothing at all with them when they travel into remote parts, though still they take their weapons with them, for fear of thieves. Accordingly, there is, in every city where they live, one appointed particularly to take care of strangers, and to provide garments and other necessaries for them. But the habit and management of their bodies is such as children use who are in fear of their masters. Nor do they allow of the change of clothing or of shoes till be first torn to pieces, or worn out by time. Nor do they either buy or sell any thing to one another, but every one of them gives what he hath to him that wanteth it, and receives from him again in lieu of it what may be convenient for himself, and although there be no requital made, they are fully allowed to take what they want of whomsoever they please.

5. And as for their piety towards God, it is very extraordinary for before sun-rising they speak not a word about profane matters, but put up certain prayers which they have received from their forefathers, as if they made a supplication for its rising. After this every one of them are sent away by their curators, to exercise some of those arts wherein they are skilled, in which they labour with great diligence till the fifth hour. After which they assemble themselves together again into one place and when they have clothed themselves in white veils, they then bathe their bodies in cold water. And after this purification is over, they every one meet together in an apartment of their own, into which it is not permitted to any of another sect to enter, while they go, after a pure manner, into the dining-room, as into a certain holy temple, and quietly set themselves down. Upon which the baker lays them loaves in order, the cook also brings a single plate of one sort of food, and sets it before every one of them but a priest says grace before meat and it is unlawful for any one to taste of the food before grace be said. The same priest, when he hath dined, says grace again after meat and when they begin, and when they end, they praise God, as he that bestows their food upon them. After which they lay aside their garments, and betake themselves to their labors again till the evening; then they return home to supper, after the same manner; and if there be any strangers there, they sit down with them. Nor is there ever any clamour or disturbance to pollute their house, but they give every one leave to speak in their turn, which silence thus kept in their house appears to foreigners like some tremendous mystery, the cause of which is that perpetual sobriety they exercise, and the same settled measure of meat and drink that is allotted them, and that such as is abundantly sufficient for them.

6. And truly, as for other things, they do nothing but according to the injunctions of their curators. Only these two things are done among them at everyone's own free-will, which are to assist those that want it, and to show mercy, for they are permitted of their own accord to afford succor to such as deserve it, when they stand in need of it, and to bestow food on those that are in distress but they cannot give any thing to their kindred without the curators. They dispense their anger after a just manner, and restrain their passion. They are eminent for fidelity, and are the ministers of peace. Whatsoever they say also is firmer than an oath but swearing is avoided by them, and they esteem it worse than perjury for they say that he who cannot be believed without God is already condemned. They also take great pains in studying the writings of the ancients, and choose out of them what is most for the advantage of their soul and body; and they inquire after such roots and medicinal stones as may cure their distempers.

7. But now if any one hath a mind to come over to their sect, he is not immediately admitted, but he is prescribed the same method of living which they use for a year, while he continues excluded, and they give him also a small hatchet, and the fore-mentioned girdle, and the white garment. And when he hath given evidence, during that time, that he can observe their continence, he approaches nearer to their way of living, and is made a partaker of the waters of purification. Yet is he not even now admitted to live with them, for after this demonstration of his fortitude, his temper is tried two more years, and if he appear to be worthy, they then admit him into their society. And before he is allowed to touch their common food, he is obliged to take tremendous oaths, that, in the first place, he will exercise piety towards God, and then that he will observe justice towards men, and that he will do no harm to any one, either of his own accord, or by the command of others, that he will always hate the wicked, and be assistant to the righteous, that he will ever show fidelity to all men, and especially to those in authority, because no one obtains the government without God's assistance, and that if he be in authority, he will at no time whatever abuse his authority, nor

endeavour to outshine his subjects either in his garments, or any other finery, that he will be perpetually a lover of truth, and propose to himself to reprove those that tell lies, that he will keep his hands clear from theft, and his soul from unlawful gains, and that he will neither conceal any thing from those of his own sect, nor discover any of their doctrines to others, no, not though anyone should compel him so to do at the hazard of his life. Moreover, he swears to communicate their doctrines to no one any otherwise than as he received them himself, that he will abstain from robbery, and will equally preserve the books belonging to their sect, and the names of the angels. These are the oaths by which they secure their proselytes to themselves.

8. But for those that are caught in any heinous sins, they cast them out of their society, and he who is thus separated from them does often die after a miserable manner, for as he is bound by the oath he hath taken, and by the customs he hath been engaged in, he is not at liberty to partake of that food that he meets with elsewhere, but is forced to eat grass, and to famish his body with hunger, till he perish. For which reason they receive many of them again when they are at their last gasp, out of compassion to them, as thinking the miseries they have endured till they came to the very brink of death to be a sufficient punishment for the sins they had been guilty of.

9. But in the judgments they exercise they are most accurate and just, nor do they pass sentence by the votes of a court that is fewer than a hundred. And as to what is once determined by that number, it is unalterable. What they most of all honour, after God himself, is the name of their legislator, whom if any one blaspheme he is punished capitally. They also think it a good thing to obey their elders, and the major part. Accordingly, if ten of them be sitting together, no one of them will speak while the other nine are against it. They also avoid spitting in the midst of them, or on the right side. Moreover, they are stricter than any other of the Jews in resting from their labours on the seventh day, for they not only get their food ready the day before, that they may not be obliged to kindle a fire on that day, but they will not remove any vessel out of its place, nor go to stool thereon. Nay, on other days they dig a small pit, a foot deep, with a paddle (which kind of hatchet is given them when they are first admitted among them) and covering themselves round with their garment, that they may not affront the Divine rays of light, they ease themselves into that pit, after which they put the earth that was dug out again into the pit; and even this they do only in the more lonely places, which they choose out for this purpose, and although this easement of the body be natural, yet it is a rule with them to wash themselves after it, as if it were a defilement to them.

10. Now after the time of their preparatory trial is over, they are parted into four classes, and so far are the juniors inferior to the seniors, that if the seniors should be touched by the juniors, they must wash themselves, as if they had intermixed themselves with the company of a foreigner. They are long-lived also, insomuch that many of them live above a hundred years, by means of the simplicity of their diet. Nay, as I think, by means of the regular course of life they observe also. They contemn the miseries of life, and are above pain, by the generosity of their mind. And as for death, if it will be for their glory, they esteem it better than living always and indeed our war with the Romans gave abundant evidence what great souls they had in their trials, wherein, although they were tortured and distorted, burnt and torn to pieces, and went through all kinds of instruments of torment, that they might be forced either to blaspheme their legislator, or to eat what was forbidden them, yet could they not be made to do either of them, no, nor once to flatter their tormentors, or to shed a tear; but they smiled in their very pains, and laughed those to scorn who inflicted the torments upon them, and resigned up their souls with great alacrity, as expecting to receive them again.

11. For their doctrine is this: That bodies are corruptible, and that the matter they are made of is not permanent, but that the souls are immortal, and continue for ever; and that they come out of the most subtile air, and are united to their bodies as to prisons, into which they are drawn by a certain natural enticement, but that when they are set free from the bonds of the flesh, they then, as released from a long bondage, rejoice and mount upward. And this is like the opinions of the Greeks, that good souls have their habitations beyond the ocean, in a region that is neither oppressed with storms of rain or snow, or with intense heat, but that this place is such as is refreshed by the gentle breathing of a west wind, that is perpetually blowing from the ocean; while they allot to bad souls a dark and tempestuous den, full of never-ceasing punishments. And indeed the Greeks seem to me to have followed the same notion, when they allot the islands of the blessed to their brave men, whom they call heroes and demi-gods and to the souls of the wicked, the region of the ungodly, in Hades, where their fables relate that certain persons, such as Sisyphus, and Tantalus, and Ixion, and Tityus, are punished, which is built on this first supposition, that souls are immortal, and thence are those exhortations to virtue and dehortations from wickedness collected whereby good men are bettered in the conduct of their life by the hope they have of reward after their death, and whereby the vehement inclinations of bad men to vice are restrained, by the fear and expectation they are in, that although they should lie concealed in this life, they should suffer immortal punishment after their death. These are the Divine doctrines of the Essens about the soul, which lay an unavoidable bait for such as have once had a taste of their philosophy.

12. There are also those among them who undertake to foretell things to come, by reading the holy books, and using several sorts of purifications, and being perpetually conversant in the discourses of the prophets and it is but seldom that they miss in their predictions.

13. Moreover, there is another order of Essens who agree with the rest as to their way of living, and customs, and laws, but differ from them in the point of marriage, as thinking that by not marrying they cut off the principal part of human life, which is the prospect of succession. Nay, rather, that if all men should be of the same opinion, the whole race of mankind would fail. However, they try their spouses for three years, and if they find that they have their natural purgations thrice, as trials that they are likely to be fruitful, they then actually marry them. But they do not use to accompany with their wives when they are with child, as a demonstration that they do not marry out of regard to pleasure, but for the sake of posterity. Now the women go into the baths with some of their garments on, as the men do with somewhat girded about them. And these are the customs of this order of Essens.

Though the Essenes are admitted by Josephus not to swear vows, they are described as doing so at their initiation. Obviously there is no contradiction, the initial vows being to God are all that are needed. Thereafter the Essene should tell only the truth so no further swearing on oath is necessary. In Matthew's gospel, in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:34-37), Jesus has exactly the same rule for his converts.

Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

James in his epistle (Jas 5:12), possibly one of the earliest books of the New Testament, has exactly the same advice:

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

The Jerusalem Church, of which James, the brother of Jesus, was the head, was an Essene community in Jerusalem. It is natural that both he and Jesus, as Essenes, would teach the same rule on swearing.

Regarding the art of foretelling the future, there is no doubt that the Essenes as shown in the Scrolls thought this their most important function, and considered themselves prophets. They were trying to read from the scriptures clues to the coming End Time. Jesus was convinced that the End was imminent and based his actions upon his judgement, but he was wrong. Josephus, however, gives several examples in ordinary history of Essenes seers being correct. In the Jewish War 1:3:5, the old Essene, Judas, foretold the death of Antigonus at Strato's tower. In The Jewish War 2:7:3, Simon the Essene foretold from the Ethnarch's vision of nine ears of corn eaten by oxen, that Archelaus, son of Herod would rule for only nine years. Archelaus had already ruled for nine years and within days was called to trial by the Romans and banished to Vienna. And in Antiquities 15:10:4-5, where we are told that the Essenes live like the Pythagoreans of the Greeks, the Essene, Menehem, told the schoolboy Herod that he would be king of the Jews and would reign for not ten or twenty but thirty years. Josephus tells us that the success of this prophecy is the reason that the Essenes, like the Pharisees whom Herod admired, were relieved of swearing an oath of fealty to him.

There is a strange imbalance in the space allocated by Josephus to the different sects that is not found in the citations from his works in Porphyry and Eusebius. Furthermore the descriptions of the after-life beliefs of the Pharisees and Essenes are odd. The Pharisees seem to believe in reincarnation and the Essenes in the immortal soul dwelling in bliss in the Islands of the Blessed. If Jesus was an Essene with the belief of those in Josephus, he could never have been resurrected. In the gospels, the Pharisees agree with Jesus on resurrection of the body, so they cannot have believed in reincarnation. Josephus claimed to have been a Pharisee, so quite why he should have spent so much space on Essenes and apparently got the views of the Pharisees wrong is peculiar. Possibly Josephus wrote more about Pharisaic beliefs but Christian editors excised much of the account because they were too favourable to the Pharisees, the arch enemies of the Christians. Alternatively Josephus did not want to admit to his Roman captors that he was really an Essene whom the Romans thought of as the true fanatics, or Zealots and tortured to death after the Jewish war.

Though Josephus and Philo give the impression Essenes were pacifist adherents of the law, Josephus belies it when he says that in the war with the Romans they were above pain and could not be broken though they were racked and twisted, burnt and broke. If they were pacifist why did the Romans need to torture them? Though they were tortured, they did not shed a tear, indeed laughed at their tormentors rather than blaspheme their legislator or eat forbidden food, and gloried in death rather than the misery of life. They sounded tough—more like Zealots!

Much of the account of the Essenes by Josephus has been remarkably confirmed by the discovery in the Judaeen wilderness of the Dead Sea Scrolls, nothing less than the library of the Essenes, comprising 600 documents including parts of every book of the Hebrew Bible except the book of Esther. The pots in which the scrolls had been stored were of a type unknown in Palestine but of a recognized Egyptian pattern suggesting a link with Egypt, the home of the Therapeutae, with whom Philo had associated the Essenes. Nearby was a ruin which proved to be the monastic headquarters of the Judaeen Essenes during the life of Jesus.

Their priestly caste had the name, the sons of Zadok. Zadok, in Jewish legend, was the noble priest of David and Solomon suggesting they claimed historic credentials, but the sons of Zadok were really the priests of Ezekiel's ideal temple (Ezek 40:46ff)—they were ideal priests, God's own priesthood building the kingdom of God on earth. So, the Essenes were a dissident priestly order. Objecting to the debasement of the Temple and the venality of the Sadducees, they had left them to adopt a largely frugal and monastic life uncorrupted by the scandal of collaboration. Their purpose was to keep themselves ritually pure because they were expecting the apocalypse when God would endow a Messiah to purge and judge the world.

Josephus on the The Galilaeans or Zealots

Josephus in *Antiquities 18:1:1* gives a sort of equivalent of Mark 13, a potted history of the Jews in Jewish apocalyptic style, from about 1 AD to the destruction of the temple by the Romans. Cyrenius is the Quirinius of Luke's gospel who called the census supposedly at Jesus's birth. So Luke is associating Jesus with the census, but is the real association more subtle? The movement founded by Judas of Galilee, the Galilaeans, is plainly identified as the cause of all the troubles of the Jews and the Jewish War. Galilaeans are Zealots, though Josephus calls them neither at this point, restricting himself to saying that they were founded by Judas of Galilee and that they were zealous.

Josephus: Antiquities(Whiston) 18:1:1

1. Now Cyrenius, a Roman senator, and one who had gone through other magistracies, and had passed through them until he had been consul, and one who, on other accounts, was of great dignity, came at this time into Syria, with a few others, being sent by Caesar to be a judge of that nation, and to take an account of their substance. Coponius also, a man of equestrian order, was sent together with him, to have the supreme power over the Jews. Moreover, Cyrenius came himself into Judea, which was now added to the province of Syria, to take account of their substance, and to dispose of Archelaus's money. But the Jews, although at the beginning they took the report of a taxation heinously, yet did they leave off any farther opposition to it, by the persuasion of Joazar, who was the son of Boethus, and high priest. so they, being over persuaded by Joazar's words, gave an account of their estates, without any dispute about it. Yet there was one Judas, a Gaulanite, of a city whose name was Gamala, who taking with him Sadduc, a Pharisee, became jealous to draw them to a revolt, who said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty, as if they could procure them happiness and security for what they possessed, and an assured enjoyment of a still greater good, which was that of the honour and glory they would thereby acquire for magnanimity. They also said that God would not otherwise be assisting to them, than upon their joining with one another in such counsels as might be successful, and for their own advantage, and this especially, if they would set about great exploits, and not grow weary in executing the same. So men received what they said with pleasure, and this bold attempt proceeded to a great height. All sorts of misfortune also sprang from these men, and the nation was infested with this doctrine to an incredible degree. One violent war came upon us after another, and we lost our friends, who used to alleviate our pain. There were also very great robberies and murders of our principal men. This was done in pretence indeed for the public welfare, but in reality for the hopes of gain to themselves, whence arose seditions, and from them murders of men, which sometimes fell on those of their own people (by the madness of these men towards one another, while their desire was that none of the adverse party might be left), and sometimes on their enemies. A famine also coming upon us reduced us to the last degree of despair, as did also the taking and demolishing of cities. Nay, the sedition at last increased so high, that the very temple of God was burned down by their enemy's fire. Such were the consequences of this, that the customs of our fathers were altered, and such a change was made, as added a mighty weight toward bringing all to destruction, which these men occasioned by thus conspiring together. For Judas and Sadduc, who excited a fourth philosophic sect among us, and had a great many followers therein, filled our civil government with tumults at present, and laid the foundations of our future miseries, by this system of philosophy, which we were before unacquainted withal, concerning which I shall discourse a little, and this the rather, because the infection which spread thence among the younger sort, who were zealous for it, brought the public to destruction.

Judas of Galilee and a Pharisee, Sadduc, according to Josephus, combined to resist the numbering of the

people by the Romans when they conducted their census of 6 AD. Since the Essenes called themselves "the Sons of Zadok", and Pharisees disdained the priesthood, this association of Galilaeans and Zadok in the founding of the Zealots should be noted. (Sadduc and Zadok are the same word rendered respectively the Greek way and the Hebrew way in our alphabet.) Their "zeal for the Law of Moses" and veneration of the *Torah* led them to hate foreigners, whence their leading role in the war against the Romans.

So, the Galilaeans were obviously not Pharisees as Josephus tells us, but this is either a misunderstanding by the amanuensis or perhaps even more likely, a deliberate alteration by Christians who wanted to associate trouble with the enemies of Jesus, the Pharisees, and remove it from the Essenes who some clever people might have remembered in the fourth century, were the original Christians.

The troubles described here are troubles which occurred decades after Judas founded his movement, which was at first a worthy and pious attempt by righteous Jews to protect their heritage and traditions. Later many other less worthy people joined, as the exploitation got worse and bitterness spread. In the gospels the seditionists were called robbers, because many of them turned to highway robbery to finance their guerilla war and, like many a revolution, it spawned banditry. However, at the time of Jesus there is no reason to think that the motives of the Galilaeans were any the less grand than those described by Josephus of the original Judas, and the nature of the members were essentially that of his description below.

Further strangeness occurs in Josephus's account in the *Jewish War*:

Josephus: Jewish War (Whiston) 2:8:1-13

1. And now Archelaus's part of Judaea was reduced into a province, and Coponius, one of the equestrian order among the Romans, was sent as a procurator, having the power of death put into his hands by Caesar. Under his administration it was that a certain Galilaeans, whose name was Judas, prevailed with his countrymen to revolt, and said they were cowards if they would endure to pay a tax to the Romans, and would, after God, submit to mortal men as their lords. This man was a teacher of a peculiar sect of his own, and was not at all like the rest of these leaders.

Curiously at this point, Josephus tells us nothing more about the Galilaeans of Judas but relates in huge detail, as given above, the account of the Essenes, "who pretends to a severer discipline". Apparently, the Galilaeans were a branch of this "severer discipline", contradicting Josephus, in *Antiquities*, saying Galilaeans were Pharisees!

Josephus: Antiquities(Whiston) 18:1:6

But of the fourth sect of Jewish Philosophy Judas the Galilaeans was the author. These men agree in all things with the Pharisaeic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty; and they say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kinds of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man Lord; and since this immovable resolution of theirs is well known to a great many, I shall speak no further about that matter; nor am I afraid that any thing I might have said of them should be disbelieved, but rather fear, that what I have said is beneath the resolution they show when they undergo pain; and it was in Gesius Florus's time that the nation began to grow mad with this distemper, who was our procurator; and occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority, and to make them revolt from the Romans.

These descriptions of how the Galileans were inured to pain match the descriptions given in the *Jewish War* of the Essene attitude to pain and death. Again we have confirmation that Galilaeans were a branch of the Essenes not the Pharisees.

The Zealots, first mentioned by Josephus as the fighters against the Romans in the Jewish rebellion of 66-73 AD, apparently were of major significance in Palestine during the whole of the period of the gospels so the single reference to them (Simon, the Zealot) looks suspicious. The failure of the gospels to feature either the Zealots or the Essenes while mentioning the other Jewish parties suggests that Essenes and Zealots have deliberately been left out of the story. Is it because the Nazarenes were a branch of the Essenes or the Zealots? Hyppolytus, writing about 230 AD, confirms that the Zealots were indeed a branch of the Essenes. The Galilaeans of the gospels were members of the same sect, not just people from Galilee.

Josephus often uses the word "robber" as equivalent to "zealot". For Josephus, Zealots became gangsters, killing for personal gain, killing Jews rather than gentiles and fighting amongst each other. It transposed, like the Mafia, from a liberation movement into gangs of criminals. Zealots became robbers. *John* describes Barabbas as a robber. Are the gospels narrating, in a distorted or coded way, a sequence of Zealot incidents! The Zealot leader—none other than Jesus Barabbas!

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