

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA ON THE ESSENES:
A CASE STUDY ON THE USE OF
CLASSICAL SOURCES IN DISCUSSIONS
OF THE QUMRAN-ESSENE HYPOTHESIS

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The issue of whether the site of Kh. Qumran, on a plateau by the Dead Sea, was occupied by Essenes during the late Second Temple period continues to divide scholars. Archaeologists and historians both for and against the Qumran-Essene hypothesis appeal to the classical sources in support of their arguments, the important evidence being that of Philo of Alexandria, Josephus and Pliny the Elder.

Fundamental in terms of making the association between the site of Qumran and the Essenes has been the evidence of Pliny. Pliny writes (*Hist. Nat.* 5.15, 4/73): *ab occidente litora essenii fugiunt usque qua nocent, gens sola . . . socia palmarum*, “in the west [of the Dead Sea] the Essenes flee all the way from the shores which are harmful, a type of people alone . . . in the company of palms”; *infra hos engada oppidum fuit . . . inde masada*, “below them was the town Engedi . . . from there Masada.”¹

While in modern scholarship questions have been raised as to whether Pliny has been read correctly,² it is worth remembering that already in the 19th century

¹ The connection between the Dead Sea and the Essenes was also made by Synesius (c.400 c.E.), citing Dio Chrysostom (c. 100 c.E.): the Essenes were “a whole happy city by the Dead Water (παρὰ τὸ νεκρὸν ὕδωρ), in the interior of Palestine, [a city] lying somewhere close by Sodom” (Synesius, *Dion* 3.2). Solinus (fl. 230–240 c.E.) in his *Collectanea* 34.9–12, reflects Pliny, while Epiphanius (c. 375 c.E.) places Ὀσσαῖοι on the other side of the Dead Sea within the regions of Nabataea and Peraea (*Pan.* 19.1.1; 19.2.2; cf. *Pan.* 53.1.1. See also Martianus Capella, c. 400 c.E., *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii (Satyricon)* 4.679.

² The usual understanding is that Pliny situates Essenes in terms of a movement from the source of the Jordan to the south, see Roland de Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 133–137; Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman, eds., *The Essenes according to the Classical Sources* (JSOT Press: Sheffield, 1989), 3 n. 19; John J. Collins, “Essenes,” *ABD* 2, 619–626, at 620. For the argument that Pliny refers to the Essenes as being physically above and west of Engedi see Jean-Paul Audet, “Qumrân et la notice de Pline sur les Esséniens.” *RB* 68 (1961): 346–387 and the eloquent response

the region west of the Dead Sea and north of Engedi could be associated with the Essenes on the basis of his text; it was not identified as such *only* after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. For example, in 1864 Christian D. Ginsburg wrote in his essay on the Essenes that “the majority of them settled on the north-west shore of the Dead Sea.”³ William Hepworth Dixon, who visited the area, stated in 1866 that the “chief” seats of this sect [of the Essenes] were pitched on the western shores of the Dead Sea, about the present Ras el Feshka.”⁴ The question for 19th-century explorers of the region was about the *extent* of Essene settlement within this region: that is, whether it extended far into the Buqei`a or to the edge of Engedi. Felicien de Saulcy situated Essenes as far west as Mar Saba monastery,⁵ while Lieutenant Lynch wondered about them in the Wadi Sedeir just north of where ancient Engedi was located.⁶

It was therefore inevitable that when the site of Kh. Qumran was excavated and understood to date from the 2nd century B.C.E. to 1st century C.E.⁷ the

by Christian Burchard, “Pliny et les Esséniens: à propos d’un article récent.” *RB* 69 (1962): 533–569, but see also Robert A. Kraft, “Pliny on Essenes, Pliny on Jews.” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 8 (2001): 255–261, esp. 258. Pliny of course may have been wrong; he places Machaerus south of the Dead Sea, perhaps confusing it with Zoara.

³ Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Essenes: Their History and Doctrines; The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development and Literature* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1955), 26, reprint of *The Essenes: Their History and Doctrines* (London: Longman and Green, 1864).

⁴ William Hepworth Dixon, *The Holy Land*, 2nd ed., I (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866), 279–80, cf. Joseph B. Lightfoot, “On Some Points Connected with the Essenes,” in id. *The Epistles of St. Paul iii. The First Roman Captivity. 2. The Epistle to the Colossians, 3. Epistle to Philemon* (1875), 114–179, at 146: “The home of the Essene sect is allowed on all hands to have been on the eastern borders of Palestine, the shores of the Dead Sea, a region least of all exposed to the influences of Greek philosophy.”

⁵ Félicien de Saulcy, *Narrative of a Journey Round the Dead Sea and in the Bible Lands in 1850 and 1851*, 2 vols. (ed. Edward de Warren; London: Richard Bentley, 1853), I, 152–6: “Pliny informs us that the Essenians inhabited the western coast of the Asphaltic Lake” (155–6). De Saulcy found near Mar Saba a cave and pieces of mosaic tesserae he associated with the Essenes.

⁶ William F. Lynch, *Narrative of the United States Expedition to the River Jordan and the Dead Sea* 7th ed. (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 294, reports of a party from Jerusalem “creeping like mites along the lofty crags descending to this deep chasm. Some of our party had discovered in the face of the precipice near the fountain, several apertures, one of them arched and faced with stone. There was no perceptible access to the caverns, which were once, perhaps, the abode of the Essenes. Our sailors could not get to them; and where they fail, none but monkeys can succeed. There must have been terraced pathways formerly cut in the face of the rock, which have been worn away by winter torrents.” Lynch appears to call the spring Ein Sedeir the fountain of “Ain Jidy,” and writes of part of the “Wady Sedeir” being “below Ain Jidy,” 289, with the wadi going down towards the Dead Sea.

⁷ Prior to excavation, the site of Qumran had not been associated with the Essenes because it was thought to date from a later time and to be military in character, e.g. Charles W. M. Van der Velde, *Memoir to Accompany the Map of the Holy Land* (Gotha: Leipsic, 1856), 257: “The ruins called Ghomran are those of a small fortress which has been built to guard the pass above; and around it, on the E. and S., a few cottages have stood, which probably afforded shelter to the soldiers, the

question of whether it was in some way associated with the Essenes would be raised. With the classical sources at hand, Roland de Vaux, excavator of Qumran, noted that peculiarities of the site—large rooms suitable for communal eating, sizeable pools that would fit the requirements of ritual purification baths, a cemetery with largely adult male skeletons, and so on—seemed to match an identification that the complex was occupied by Essenes.⁸

However, as is well known, the identification of the site as Essene has been both bolstered and complicated by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These immediately pointed scholars in the direction of an Essene identification, prior to the excavation of the site. Key sectarian texts, particularly the Serekh (1QS), were found to fit with what appeared in the classical descriptions of the Essenes, though this also created conventions on how the classical sources were read.⁹ The Essene identification was made almost instantly the scrolls arrived in Jerusalem: Millar Burrows recorded in his diary for March 19, 1948 that he worked on the “Essene manuscript” at the American School.¹⁰ The Essene hypothesis was most persuasively explicated by André Dupont-Sommer, and became the standard view.¹¹

The union of Qumran, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Essenes can seem harmonious, but some—such as Florentino García Martínez—have sought to account for differences between the classical sources on the Essenes and the Dead Sea Scrolls by suggesting a separation between a hypothetical Qumran group and the wider Essene school.¹² Similarly, Gabriele Boccaccini concludes that the Dead Sea Scrolls community was “a radical and minority group within Enochic Judaism,”¹³ but that also this type of Judaism was itself essentially Essene by 200 B.C.E. This may well be so, but to what extent has a coherent and holistic Essene identity been established on the basis of what is written in classical sources?

whole having been surrounded by a wall for defence.” The comment by Lena Cansdale that “[b]efore the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 no connection had been made between the sect of the Essenes and the ruined, ancient settlement of Qumran” (*Qumran and the Essenes: A Re-Evaluation of the Evidence* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1997, 19) is therefore misleading.

⁸ De Vaux, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 126–138.

⁹ Up until the discovery of the Scrolls, these sources could be read in diverse ways. For an examination, see Siegfried Wagner, *Die Essener in der wissenschaftlichen Diskussion vom Ausgang des 18. bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: A. Töpelman, 1960).

¹⁰ Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956), 279.

¹¹ André Dupont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings from Qumran*, transl. by Geza Vermes of *Les Écrits esséniens découverts près de la mer Morte* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1961).

¹² Florentino García Martínez, “Qumran Origins and Early History: A Groningen Hypothesis.” *Folio Orientalia* (1988): 113–136.

¹³ Gabriele Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 162.

Scholars who have challenged the identification of Qumran as an Essene site have done so also by using the classical sources as the benchmark for establishing the true identity of who the Essenes were.¹⁴ For example, in a recent examination of the archaeology, Yizhar Hirschfeld has stated:

Another important point concerns the presence of animal bones at what is purported to be an Essene site. Josephus (*Ant.* 15: 371) says that the Essenes lived “a Pythagorean way of life,” which was ascetic and characterised mainly by vegetarianism. It is absurd to think that the inhabitants of Qumran, who were obviously meat eaters, could also have been Essenes.¹⁵

Josephus states in *Ant.* 15.371 that the way of life practised by the Essenes was introduced to Greece by Pythagoras, but can one extrapolate from this that Josephus thought that the Essenes were entirely identical to Pythagoreans and therefore vegetarians,¹⁶ any more than one can extrapolate that the Pharisees really were Jewish Stoics on the basis of Josephus’ comments in *Life* 12?

As every ancient historian well knows, the writing of current affairs or history in antiquity could be openly polemical, propagandistic, selective or exaggerated, and not intended to provide a coolly comprehensive, impartial body of evidence that can be used to create a coherent identity for a group. One need only look at Strabo’s summary of Jews and Judaism (*Geogr.* 16.2.35–9) for an example: all Jews are vegetarians and practice both male and female circumcision. Strabo wished to show the Jewish rulers and law as having a fundamentally tyrannical nature, and elements of his description are subsumed into this rhetorical end. Alternatively, in terms of positive rhetoric, when Josephus writes of the Essenes that “they have longevity, as most of them live over a hundred years” (*War* 2.151) this should alert us to other hyperbolic elements of his description, but it cannot be used to argue against the Qumran-Essene hypothesis on the basis of the entirely non-centenarian skeletons excavated in the cemetery.¹⁷ In this case Josephus’ apparent creation of a feature of Essene

¹⁴ For a review of alternative theories see Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel, “Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Contention of Twelve Theories,” in Douglas R. Edwards (ed.), *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine : Old Questions, New Approaches* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), 162–169.

¹⁵ Yizhar Hirschfeld, *Qumran in Context: Reassessing the Archaeological Evidence* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), 111.

¹⁶ Pythagoras himself was said to have sacrificed a hecatomb after discovering his theorem of the right-angled triangle, see Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 8.12 though Laertius goes on to report the common view that Pythagoras eschewed the eating of meat, see also Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 10, cf Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 3.36. Ginsburg, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 19–20 and others long ago refuted the Pythagorean-Essene proposition. Importantly, Josephus considered the influence to have gone from Jews to Pythagoreans, not the other way around, see *Apion* 1.165, 2.168.

¹⁷ While the sample size in the cemetery of Qumran is small and inconclusive, the majority of the excavated skeletons are of adult males. However, they are not generally old. In the north-

identity—they all live past a hundred years—reflects a notion that longevity accompanies a healthy and good lifestyle. Recent studies on Josephus' description of the Essenes in *War* 2 by Steve Mason have made the rhetorical dimensions of his work abundantly clear.¹⁸

As was pointed out by de Vaux, none of our classical authors was Essene; each witness is located in the position of an outsider in relation to the group he describes.¹⁹ The only contemporary writer who claimed to have had more intimate knowledge of the Essenes was Josephus, who apparently undertook instruction by all the Jewish philosophical schools while he tried to choose which of the three schools he should accept as authoritative for rulings in his own life (*Life* 10–11). However, he did not support the Essene rulings, but conducted himself in public office according to the rulings of the Pharisees (*Life* 12). His description of Essene life in *War* 2.119–61 may not have derived entirely from his own observations but rather from sources.²⁰ As a non-Jew, Pliny must have been

south oriented graves de Vaux excavated in the regimented part of the cemetery, universally agreed to be contemporaneous with the Qumran settlement and most likely of any part to be Essene (Periods I–II), of 27 N-S graves opened randomly (tombs 1–3, 5–8, 12–31), where age could be determined, there was one skeleton of 15–16 years (15), two in their twenties (24: 2, 28), eight or nine in their thirties (6?, 12, 16: 1, 16: 2, 20, 23, 26, 27, 30), five or six in their forties (5, 6?, 7, 8, 13, 31) and only four who were fifty or over (21, 22, 24: 1, 25), see Jonathan Norton, "Reassessment of the Controversial Studies on the Cemetery" in Jean-Baptiste Humbert and J. Gunneweg, *Khirbet Qumrân et `Ain Feshkha II* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 2003), 107–27. None of these are young children, but two may be female (22, 24.1).

¹⁸ Steve Mason, "What Josephus Says about Essenes in his Judean War," in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson* (ed. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins; Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2000), 434–467. Mason explores matters further in "What Josephus Says about the Essenes in his Judean War," online at <http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/orion/programs/Mason00-1.shtml> and <http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/orion/programs/Mason00-2.shtml>. He concludes that Josephus' rhetoric on the Essenes is deeply Josephan and bound to his rhetoric on the Judaeans in general, so it would preclude him using a group as apparently evidenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which Mason reads as being anti-Jerusalem priesthood, dualistic, apocalyptic and so on. While in 1QS and other texts the priests feature as a key group, Josephus makes nothing of any priestly hierarchy in terms of the Essenes. Since Josephus should have mentioned this, given his own priestly interests, Mason's conclusion is that the Essenes of Josephus and the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls are not to be equated.

¹⁹ De Vaux, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 138.

²⁰ As proposed by Roland Bergmeier, *Die Essener-Berichte des Flavius Josephus: Quellenstudien zu den Essenertexten im Werk des jüdischen Historiographen* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993), though, for critique, see Mason, "What Josephus Says about the Essenes in his Judean War: Part 1" at <http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/orion/programs/Mason00-1.shtml>. The proposition that Josephus and Hippolytus (*Haer.* 9.18–28) used the same source independently, as argued by Morton Smith, "The Description of the Essenes in Josephus and the Philosophumena." *HUCA* 29 (1958): 273–313, and Matthew Black, "The Account of the Essenes in Hippolytus and Josephus," in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* (ed. William D. Davies and David Daube; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 172–182, was refuted by Christoph Burchard, "Die Essener bei Hippolyt, REF. IX 18, 2–28, 2 und Josephus, Bell. 2, 119–161." *JSJ* 8 (1977): 1–41.

dependent purely on what he had heard or read about Essenes, and it has been suggested that Pliny's source was possibly a lost work by Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa.²¹ While Philo of Alexandria may have had contact with Essenes when he visited Jerusalem, verbal and substantive correlations with Josephus, *Ant.* 18.18–22 indicate that Philo and Josephus may both have used a common Hellenistic Jewish source.²²

Be that as it may, excavation of sources is not a means to establish better "facts" for an Essene identity, since the sources themselves may have been constructed from anecdotal evidence and what today would be termed "urban myths." Later authors could insert more reliable information into unreliable sources, rather than modify reliable sources for the sake of their own rhetoric. In addition, as I have argued elsewhere, the rhetorical can also be historically true.²³

In 1997 Martin Goodman asked for a careful defence of the Qumran-Essene hypothesis to be made: "it is up to proponents of the Essene hypothesis to make their case."²⁴ However, arguments both for and against the Qumran-Essene hypothesis both equally depend on determining who the Essenes actually were. We need to read and interpret the classical texts, which are helpfully collected for our use by Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman,²⁵ soundly. Moreover, it is a prerequisite in the exercise that we accept that these can tell us something historically true about the Essenes, or else there is no point in engaging with them at all. We cannot reject any part of the information they provide (including the longevity of the Essenes) without careful argument which would explain how an author came to present them in a certain way inconsistent with historical reality. More importantly, it is fundamental to recognise that we are not in the realm of simple truth or falsehood; the truth our authors tell need not be whole. In other words, I would predicate a discussion on Essene identity with a conditional statement: if what the classical authors say is true, yet partial (selective) and shaped by their rhetorical interests, then what can we say about Essene identity?

²¹ Stephen Goranson, "Posidonius, Strabo, and Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa as Sources on Essenes." *JJS* 45 (1994): 295–298.

²² So Smith, *op. cit.* (n. 20), 278–279 and Randal A. Argall, "A Hellenistic Jewish Source on the Essenes in Philo, Every Good Man Is Free 75–91 and Josephus, Antiquities 18.18–22," in *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Randal A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow and Rodney A. Werline; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 13–24. Given that Philo wrote about Essenes in a missing treatise preceding *De Vita Contemplativa* (see *Contempl.* 1), Josephus' source may have been this, for all we know.

²³ Joan E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria – Philo's "Therapeutae" Re-considered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7–20.

²⁴ Martin Goodman, "A Note on the Qumran Sectarrians, the Essenes and Josephus." *JJS* 46 (1995): 161–166, at 164.

²⁵ Vermes and Goodman, *op. cit.* (n. 2).

In addition there is a problem in understanding the texts. Each author had his own idiosyncratic use of language and his own rhetorical interests that cannot easily be recognised without knowledge of the whole work in which such material lies. In order to explore these points, the present discussion focuses on the earliest of our three main witnesses: Philo of Alexandria, who wrote a good 30 years before Josephus.

Philo of Alexandria

As one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Alexandria during the late 30s and early 40s, Philo was contemporary to the Essenes and in a position to obtain accurate information about them.²⁶ In two surviving portions of treatises, Philo deals with the Essenes in some detail.

The passages are found in *Quod Omnis Probus liber sit* "Every Good Man is Free," 75–91, and the *Apologia pro Iudaeis* (in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* 8.11.1–18), a work usually considered part of the *Hypothetica*. Philo mentions the Essenes briefly also at the beginning of *De Vita Contemplativa* as being the subject of a lost, preceding treatise on the active life of philosophy.²⁷ Philo notes at the beginning of *Probus* that it was originally the second part of a work, the first part being titled "Every Bad Man is a Slave." The issues here are philosophical, the paradoxical propositions Stoic.²⁸ From the internal evidence of the treatise, Philo seems to have intended the work for a largely Greek-educated audience: there are only five references to Scripture, but a large number to Greek literature, which is highly esteemed.²⁹ On the very first page, there is a reference to "the most sacred company of Pythagoreans" (*Prob.* 2) and later "the most holy Plato" (*Prob.* 13). Sophocles' words are "as any from the Pythian god" (*Prob.* 19). Moses gets a mention as "the law-giver of the Jews" (*Prob.* 29), but—strangely—without quite the same dazzling compliments, and one senses that Philo is trying to impress, by wit, language, intelligence and erudition, a largely non-Jewish

²⁶ For a survey of the life and treatises of Philo, see Jenny Morris, "The Jewish Philosopher Philo," in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–AD 135)*, (new English version rev. and ed. by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Martin Goodman, III/2; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1987), 809–870, and for Philo as a leader of the Jewish community in Alexandria see Ellen Birnbaum, "A Leader with Vision in the Ancient Jewish Diaspora: Philo of Alexandria," in *Jewish Religious Leadership: Image and Reality*, I (ed. Jack Wertheimer; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004), 57–90.

²⁷ See Taylor, *op. cit.* (n. 23), 68–72.

²⁸ See the introduction to the work in PLCL IX, 2–9; Morris, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 856.

²⁹ Morris, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 856.

audience skilled in Stoic philosophy, who hide behind the ostensible addressee “Theodotos” (*Prob.* 1).

The *Hypothetica* is very fragmentary and the rhetorical dimensions are therefore difficult to ascertain, but as a whole it seems to have been designed to make a case for the Jews against the “Greek” lobby in Alexandria who were determined to present Alexandrian Jews—and Judaism—in the foulest light. Both the “Greeks” and the Jews of Alexandria sent delegations to Gaius Caligula, in 39 c.e., and then again to Claudius, in 4 c.e., in which they presented their cases before the emperors.³⁰

In both cases, the Essenes are not shown as some peculiar sect that is unrepresentative of what most Jews think, but as a kind of apogée of excellence within the Jewish *philosophia*. As such, while it is important to Philo that his claims be true, more or less, he has no interest in giving us a warts-and-all introduction to the Essenes, but rather he presents them in ways that will strike positive chords of recognition in terms of the philosophically-educated audiences he seems, in both works, keen to impress.

Quod Omnis Probus liber sit

Probus on the whole does not contain many references to Essene particularities that are not immediately recognisable as examples of philosophical perfection within the Greek tradition.³¹ Therefore we would expect to hear that the Essenes love virtue, do not care about money or reputation or pleasure, that they are pious, ascetic, controlled, orderly, enduring, frugal, simple-living, content, humble, respectful of the law, steady and humanity-loving (77, 83–4). We would also expect that they spurn property-ownership and hoarding of money (*Prob.* 76), and had a sense of community. The pooling of possessions was not an uncommon philosophical ideal: Plato advocated it already for the guardians of the city in his *Republic* (3.416d, 5.462c), and the Pythagoreans apparently practised this (Iamblichus, *De Pyth. Vita* 167–9). There is also the sense that Philo is describing what he knew of all pious Jews: going to synagogue on the Sabbath, studying the law, practising virtue, and so on (*Prob.* 80–81).

Still, there are a few points to note within Philo’s glowing resumé where Philo is drawing some attention to peculiarities. A number of these are strongly

³⁰ Morris, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 866–8. The *Hypothetica* may have formed part of a dossier meant to counter the accusations of scholars such as Apion (see Josephus, *Ant.* 18.259–60; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* 2.5.2–5).

³¹ Cf. Doron Mendels, “Hellenistic Utopia and the Essenes.” *HTR* 72 (1979): 207–222, who has argued that the Essenes themselves may have modelled their society on Hellenistic utopia.

related to material in Josephus. The Essenes do not own slaves (*Prob.* 79; cf. *Ant.* 18.21). They practice allegorical exegesis, according to an ancient tradition (*Prob.* 82; cf. *Ant.* 18.11, 20). The Essenes do not swear oaths (*Prob.* 84 cf. *War* 2.135). They are particularly concerned with purity (*Prob.* 84 cf. *Ant.* 18: 19; *War* 2.129). They live by themselves in separate communes (*Prob.* 85; *Hypoth.* 11.1, 5; *Ant.* 18.21). They have common clothes and meals (*Prob.* 86, cf. 91; *Hypoth.* 11.4–5, 10, 12; *Ant.* 18.20; *War* 2.122, 129–32). They look after the sick and elderly as parents (*Prob.* 87; *Hypoth.* 11.13, cf. *Ant.* 18.21). Overall there is nothing particularly problematic in terms of reading Philo's text concerning these features. Elsewhere, however, Philo's language can be ambiguous.

At the very beginning of the description of the Essenes, for example, Philo has pointed out a common observation that philosophical goodness is found all over the world. He then notes:

And also not devoid of goodness is Syria Palaestina, which is inhabited by no small part of the populous nation of the Jews. They refer to certain people among them, over 4000 in number,³² by the name of Ἐσσαῖοι. According to my opinion this is not an accurate form of Greek language, but it would derive from ὁσιότης,³³ "holiness," because with them they have become above all attendants of God (θεραπευταὶ θεοῦ) not by sacrificing animals, but by being worthy to render their minds holy (ιεροπρεπεῖς τὰς ἑαυτῶν διανοίας κατασκευάζειν ἄξιοντες) (*Prob.* 75).

At certain points in *Probos* Philo anticipates reaction: for example, regarding a statement of Zeno's, Philo describes certain (non-Stoic?) people jeering and laughing (*Prob.* 54). In terms of the name of the Essenes, it is the Stoics in Philo's audience who might well have chortled at the understatement regarding the "imprecise" Greek etymology of the word "Essene." Diogenes Laertius notes that there were five excellences of language: pure Greek, lucidity, conciseness, appropriateness and distinction, and that among the vices of usage "barbarism is the violation of the usage of Greeks of good standing" (*Vitae* 7. 59). To get from

³² The same number is given by Josephus, *Ant.* 18.20.

³³ The two words at the end of the sentence, παρόνυμοι ὁσιότητος are slightly problematic: παρόνυμοι may be an adjective meaning "derivative" or "formed with a slight change from a word," but it appears in the masculine plural, and it does not really work to think that Philo is reflecting Ἐσσαῖοι in the plural: "they are derivative of holiness." It is usually translated, however, as if the word appears in Greek as a masculine singular, so the Loeb edition has: "a variation . . . of ὁσιότης" to indicate that the word Ἐσσαῖοι derives from the word ὁσιότης. The alternative reading of παρόνυμοι is as an Optative Active form of the verb παρωνυμῶ, third person singular, with the meaning of either "it is synonymous with" or "closely deriving from." We find this very verb used elsewhere in Philo's corpus in the same way at *Her.* 97 where the Chaldeans' name in meaning "is synonymous with equability" (ὁμαλοτεες) or in *Abr.* 271 where the names are almost identical in sound. In the case of the Essenes, the Optative would have been used by Philo to indicate hesitancy, introduced by the expression κατ' ἐμὴν δόξαν, "according to my opinion," and hence I have translated it "it would derive from."

ὁσιότης, “holiness” or “piety,” to Ἐσσαῖοι, with only a sigma and an iota shared by both words, would have indicated some barbaric deformity, regardless of a similarity in pronunciation: the true form would have been ὅσιοι, “holy ones.” Philo uses precisely this word later on, when he writes of “τὸν . . . τῶν Ἐσσαίων ἢ ὁσίων ὄμιλον,” “the throng of the *Essaioi* or “holy ones” (*Prob.* 91).³⁴

Philo seems to subvert negative reaction by stating his true opinion couched in ironic understatement. At first sight it is a very poor card to play rhetorically to introduce a perfect example of goodness with a note that Jews got their Greek wrong. But Philo cleverly uses precisely this point again towards the close of his description of the Essenes. He writes: “In such a way philosophy without over-exactness of Greek names turns out athletes of virtue” (*Prob.* 88). Philo then makes a virtue out of his concession to the Jews’ laxity of Greek language; he turns an apparent negative into a positive, accepting a lack of Greek exactness in the name of the group only to emphasise that substance is more important than mere superficiality of language.

In the *Hypothetica* Philo does not even begin to go down this route. There he writes that the *Essaioi* are called (καλοῦνται) by this name “in my opinion” (παρὰ . . . μοι δοκῶ) because of their exceeding holiness (8.11.1).³⁵ The point about inexact Greek is avoided, though it may be implied. His rhetorical strategy here is simply to pass over the problem in silence. He could have done the same in *Probus* but he chose to make the issue explicit, and address it defiantly in the face of potential critics.

Philo clearly thought the name was garbled Greek, but here he was probably wrong. In the later Aramaic dialect of Christian Syriac there existed a fairly common word which could reflect Jewish Aramaic usage of the preceding centuries (lack of attestation being accounted for by the fact that the surviving sources for Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the appropriate time are thin). In Syriac a holy person may be called a *hasya*” (emphatic).³⁶ This word translated Greek ὅσιος in the Syriac Peshitta (Acts 2: 27; 13: 35; Titus 1: 8), and would explain the usage of Epiphanius, who called Ἐσσαῖοι by the name of Ὁσσαῖοι.³⁷

³⁴ Stephen Goranson, “Others and Intra-Jewish Polemic as Reflected in Qumran Texts,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, ii (ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1999), 534–551, has suggested that the authors of the sectarian scrolls called themselves: *osei ha-torah*, “doers of the Torah,” but see Lightfoot, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 126–8.

³⁵ Note that Philo’s Essenes do not call themselves Ἐσσαῖοι as a self-reference. In *Prob.* 75 it is the Jews in general that call “certain people among them by the name”: λέγονταις τινες παρ’ αὐτοῖς ὄνομα Ἐσσαῖοι. Likewise in *Hypoth.* 11.1 they “are called,” καλοῦνται, Ἐσσαῖοι, cf. Jos. *War* 2.119: Ἐσσηνοὶ καλοῦνται.

³⁶ Robert Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 150.

³⁷ Lightfoot, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 118. According to Epiphanius the Ὁσσαῖοι—so-called—were Jews in Nabataea, Ituraea, Moabitis and Arelitis and regions on the other side of the Dead Sea who

Accordingly, it has been suggested that perhaps there was an equivalent Jewish Palestinian Aramaic form, even though it is not attested.³⁸ If this were the case, then Philo would have heard an explanation of the *meaning* of the word Ἑσσαιῶν and—being unfamiliar with Aramaic—assumed it was an explanation of Greek etymology.³⁹

For Philo, in *Probus*, the Essenes are worthy of a designation related to holiness “because with them they have become above all attendants of God (θεραπευταὶ θεοῦ) not by sacrificing animals, but by being worthy to render their minds holy (*Prob.* 75).

The term θεραπευταὶ θεοῦ is absolutely key in understanding the meaning of Philo here. In Philo’s writings this term repeatedly refers to cultic attendants of a deity, generally to priests and Levites in the Jerusalem Temple (*Det.* 160, *Leg.* 3.135, *Sacr.* 13, 118–19, 127, cf. 120, *Ebr.* 126, *Contempl.* 11; *Fug.* 42, *Mos.* 2.135, 149, 274, cf. *Mos.* 2.67).⁴⁰

Philo also uses the word ironically. When Gaius Caligula decks himself in the regalia of the Roman god Mars, Philo scoffs at how his minions had to be “the θεραπευταὶ of this new and unknown Mars” (*Legat.* 97).⁴¹

This language is by no means unique to Philo, though, interestingly, it is not paralleled in the LXX. In epigraphy, literature and papyri this terminology is

became influenced by “Elchasai” at the time of Trajan (*Pan.* 19.1.1–19.5.4; 30.1.3), after which some became known as Σαμψαῖοι (*Pan.* 19.2.2), a sect that continued to live in Nabataea and Peraea.

³⁸ For discussion see Marcel Simon, *Jewish Sects at the Time of Jesus* (1967), transl. by James H. Farley of *Les sectes juives au temps de Jésus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 49–50; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–AD 135)*, (new English version rev. and ed. by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Matthew Black, ii; Edinburgh 1979), 558–559. Geza Vermes, “The Etymology of ‘Essenes.’” *Revue de Qumran* 2 (1960): 427–443, has supported the suggestion that the word derives from Aramaic *ʿasayya*, “healers,” but against this proposal see Frank M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1961), 51–52 and, long ago, Lightfoot, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 116–117.

³⁹ Josephus also uses this term (*Ant.* 13.311; 15.371; 17.346; *War* 1.78; 2.113, 567; 3.11). His alternative usage of Ἑσσηνοί (*Ant.* 13.171–72; 298; 15.372; 18.18–22; *War* 2.119, 158, 160; 5.145; *Life* 10–12;) may derive from knowledge of the same word being used as a designation of the priests of Artemis of Ephesus, who had to observe strict rules of purity for a year (cf. Pausanias 8.13.1, *SIG* 352.6, 363.10; British Museum inscription 578c7; *Arch. Delt.* 7.258), see the discussion by John Kampen, “A Reconsideration of the Name “Essene” in Greco-Jewish Literature in Light of Recent Perceptions.” *HUCA* 57 (1986): 61–81 = id. *The Hasideans and the Origin of Pharisaism: A Study in 1 and 2 Maccabees* (SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series 24; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), Chapter 4, and id. “The Cult of Artemis and the Essenes in Syro-Palestine.” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10 (2003): 205–220.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *op. cit.* (n. 23), 55–9.

⁴¹ He can use the term to mean “ministers” symbolically: the θεραπευταὶ of the intemperate and incontinent soul”: gluttonies (*Ebr.* 210). The θεραπευταὶ of the sun, moon and planetary powers are in grave error (*Decal.* 66).

attested as far back as Plato.⁴² On the basis of this meaning of “[cultic] attendant” or “minister”—with a specific reference at times to priests and Levites—Philo can use the word *θεραπευτής* symbolically to refer to someone who “attends” God by means of a good, ascetic, wise and devoted life, one which (using the double-entendre) “heals souls” (cf. *Plant.* 60; *Ebr.* 69; *Mut.* 106; *Congr.* 105; *Fug.* 91, *Migr.* 124, *Sacr.* 127, *Contempl.* 1; *Spec.* 1.309; *Virt.* 185–6; *Praem.* 43–4).⁴³

As such, the Essenes are immediately placed in a category that Philo deems ultimately good in terms of the human relationship to the Divine: the true cultic attendants of God who are deemed worthy to prepare their minds as sacrifices. This activity does not take place exclusively in the Temple, as does the activity of the attendants of God there, but can take place anywhere, as a result of the dedication of the mind to God.

Such a comparison makes a rhetorical point, but are we to read from it that the Essenes as an entire group spurned animal sacrifices as a theological policy? It is frequently interpreted to mean precisely this.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, already some time ago a note of caution was voiced by Ralph Marcus, who noted that Philo’s words did not mean that the Essenes disapproved of animal sacrifices at all; such a reading was based “upon a fundamental misunderstanding of the two ancient sources which deal with the problem.”⁴⁵ Frank Moore Cross has written of Philo here: “This may be taken to mean that the Essenes repudiated the sacrificial system. It need not be. The conviction that ‘obedience is better than sacrifice, hearkening (to the voice of the Lord) than the fat of rams’ (1 Sam. 15: 22) is shared by prophet and priest in old Israel, and might have been expressed by a pious Jew of the later period, whatever his party.”⁴⁶

⁴² For examples, see Taylor, *op. cit.* (n. 23), 57–9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 59–61. It should be noted that Philo’s *θεραπευταί* living near Lake Mareotis, outside Alexandria, are very unlikely to be related to the Essenes. Both the Essenes and the people of the Mareotic group are “attendants of God,” by Philo’s definition of philosophical excellence, but there are various features of Philo’s Mareotic group that are distinctively different from what he states about the Essenes: theirs was a contemplative rather than an active life, they are situated in a completely different place to the Essenes of Syria Palaestina, and they are characterised by having women participants in the school, when Philo believed that the Essenes did not allow women, for which see below. As I have argued, they are more likely to be an extreme, ascetic offshoot of the allegorical school of exegesis in Alexandria.

⁴⁴ For example, Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, rev. 4th ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 21; Vermes and Goodman, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 5; Simon, *op. cit.* (n. 38), 74–5; Per Bilde, “The Essenes in Philo and Josephus,” in *Qumran between the Old and New Testaments* (ed. Frederick H. Cryer and Thomas L. Thompson; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Suppl. Series 290; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1998), 35; Cansdale, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 29.

⁴⁵ Ralph Marcus, “Pharisees, Essenes and Gnostics.” *JBL* 63 (1954): 157–61 at 158, and see also Todd Beall, *Josephus’ Description of the Essenes illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 118.

⁴⁶ Cross, *op. cit.* (n. 38), 100–101.

If we look at Philo's text closely, it is apparent that the contrast that is made here is between two types of service offered by attendants of God. Philo distinguished between what priests do in the Temple (offer animal sacrifices) and what Essenes do in terms of their service (preparing their minds for God). This dichotomy differentiates Essenes as better servers of God, in Philo's esoteric view, but it does not invalidate the need for sacrifices in the Temple, nor in fact does it mean that no Essenes were priests (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.22; *War* 2.111, 131). We are here in the world of Philo's poetic imagery: the Essenes are not in their daily living behaving as priests offering animal sacrifices to God in the Temple, and yet they are truly God's attendants by continually offering the spiritual sacrifice of their minds.

Reading this from the perspective of rhetoric, it is also clear that Philo, in creating the Essenes as an example of "the good," would have been highly unlikely to state at the outset that this pinnacle of goodness within Judaism spurned the entire sacrificial system of the Jerusalem Temple, if not the Temple itself. While Philo agreed with much of the exegesis of the extreme allegorisers of Alexandria who really did spurn Temple sacrifices and festivals, he did not accept their practice. Instead, Philo believed there should be a balance between outward action and inner meanings and advocated both: "we shall be ignoring the sanctity of the Temple and a thousand other things, if we are going to pay heed to nothing except what is shown us by the inner meaning of things" (*Migr.* 92), he wrote, against the extreme allegorisers.⁴⁷ The Temple system was necessary as a kind of training (*Her.* 123), and one should participate in it so as not to cause any offence to others (*Ebr.* 87), even though Philo accepted that the real and true sacrifice was bringing oneself to God (*Spec.* 1.269–72) by piety (*Mos.* 2.107) because "God takes pleasure from altars on which no fire is burned, but which are visited by virtues" (*Plant.* 108). Philo's words in *Probus* 75 are therefore consistent with what we find elsewhere in his work, where true spiritual sacrifice is emphasised, but Philo never accepted that this meant invalidating the need for actual sacrifice.

Additionally, an anti-animal sacrifice reading sets up an unnecessary dissonance with what Josephus writes in regard to the Essenes. In the most likely reading of *Antiquities* 18.19⁴⁸ Josephus states that "while sending votive offerings (ἀναθήματα στελλοντες) to the Temple, they [the Essenes] perform sacrifices with very different⁴⁹ purifications (θυσίας ἐπιτελοῦσιν διαφορότητι ἀγνειῶν), which

⁴⁷ See David Hay, "Putting Extremism in Context: The Case of Philo, De Migratione 89–93." *SPA* 9 (1997): 126–142; Taylor, *op. cit.* (n. 23), 143–145.

⁴⁸ Greek manuscripts of Josephus do not have οὐκ here, despite the Latin version and epitome. For discussion, see Beall, *op. cit.* (n. 45), 115, 164; Boccaccini, *op. cit.* (n. 12), 183, n. 21.

⁴⁹ Note the comparative intensification which can be read as superlative "most different."

they hold as a custom (ὡς νομίζοιεν), and because of this they perform the sacrifices by themselves, keeping away (εἰργόμενοι)⁵⁰ from the common precincts (τοῦ κοινοῦ τεμενίσματος).⁵¹ Additionally, the Essenes are conspicuous by their presence in the Temple at certain points of Josephus' narrative (*War* 1.78–80; 2.562–7; *Ant.* 13.311–13).⁵² The sending of special gifts to the Temple indicates that, for Josephus, they wished to honour it (and had the money to do so in terms of sending votive gifts). In his view the Essenes kept away from the common precincts, τοῦ κοινοῦ τεμενίσματος—which would refer to the Court of the Gentiles where most people were permitted—but nevertheless not the Temple proper, and one is therefore led to imagine that Essene priests engaged in Essene sacrifices separately to one side of the altar.⁵³ The main point was that the Essenes had particular practices of purification/purity (ἀγνεία) that entailed some kind of separation from others.

Randal Argall has argued that whereas Josephus reflects the source he probably shares with Philo quite accurately at this point, Philo in *Probos* simply avoids the question of how the Essenes perform sacrifices separately “since it reflects negatively on the group he seeks to commend,” and points out that Philo, like Josephus, insists on the importance of purity for the Essenes at a later point in his treatise.⁵⁴ In *Prob.* 84, when Philo lists how the Essenes demonstrate their love of God by many proofs he lists as the first example: “by continuous and repetitive purification (συνεξῆ καὶ ἐπάλληλον ἀγνείαν) the whole of life.”

⁵⁰ Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus Antiquities XVIII–XX* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 17, translates the word εἰργόμενοι as “excluded,” which means reading a passive rather than the perfectly appropriate middle form. There appears no reason to read a passive when this would mean that the Essenes were excluded by others on account of their particular concern with purity, when fastidiousness with purity would mean that the Essenes themselves must surely have wanted to keep away from those who did not share their customs for fear of being rendered impure.

⁵¹ As Beall has concluded from his examination of this passage, “both Josephus and Qumran literature present a picture of a group that did offer sacrifices, though with a greater concern for ritual purity in the process,” Beall, *op. cit.* (n. 45), 119. See also Kenneth A. Matthews, “John, Jesus and the Essenes: Trouble at the Temple,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1988): 101–126 at 105–114; Joseph M. Baumgarten, “The Essenes and the Temple: A Reappraisal,” in *id.* *Studies in Qumran Law* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 59–62.

⁵² As noted by Matthew Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins: Studies in the Jewish Background of the New Testament* (London: T. Nelson, 1961), 40.

⁵³ How this may relate to Josephus' mention of an Essene Gate in Jerusalem (*War* 1.144–5) remains elusive, cf. Bargil Pixner, “An Essene Quarter on Mount Zion,” in *Studia Hierosolymitana in onore di P. Bellarmino Bagatti* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1986), 245–287; Yigael Yadin, “The Gate of the Essenes and the Temple Scroll,” in *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968–1974* (ed. Yigael Yadin; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1976), 90–91; Boccaccini, *op. cit.* (n. 12), 28–29; Albert I. Baumgarten, “Josephus on Essene Sacrifice,” *JJS* 45 (1994): 169–183.

⁵⁴ Argall, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 20.

Philo's language seems to stress a certain never-ending repetition of ablutions for the sake of this purity that would distinguish the Essenes from the practices of pious Jewish Alexandrians like himself.

The comment of *Prob.* 75 is not the only place in which Philo's language is easily misunderstood. When Philo launches into a list of armaments that Essenes did not manufacture (*Prob.* 78) it is easy to assume that Philo means to indicate that Essenes did not themselves carry any weapons, or engage in war, i.e. that they were pacifists.⁵⁵ However, this is not what Philo says and it contrasts with Josephus, who writes that on their journeys Essenes carried arms to protect themselves against robbers (*War* 2.125).

Probus 78 reads:

You would not find one maker of arrows, spears, daggers, a helmet, breastplate, or shield among them, nor on the whole an armourer or engineer or one making business of anything for war, but the [professions listed] do not slip towards evil as much as [one making business] of those things for peace. For the [Essenes] do not dream of a trading market or retail business or ship-owning, eliminating the starting-line towards greed.

The verb that governs all this is ἐπιτηδεύοντα "one making business." Philo is in full rhetorical mode here, in stating that the Essenes have nothing to do with making instruments of war,⁵⁶ but even less to do with products for peace, because they avoid the latter as inducements towards what seems to be a greater evil than war, namely greed. The starting-line, ἀφορμή, of the race towards greed they remove entirely, ἀποδιοπομπούμενοι (cf. *Post.* 72). There is a certain wit or irony here. While many might expect an ascetic philosopher beyond worldly concerns to spurn associations with war, these philosophers also spurn associations with peace. Philo makes war and peace counter-balance each other in dualistic imagery that is actually designed to emphasise the fact that the Essenes are not commercial businessmen. The point of all this is that they are disengaged from acquiring wealth. They are ignorant of commerce, they would not even dream of it (*Prob.* 78), literally, because it induces greed, which is the true enemy in the minds of the attendants of God.

Read with an awareness of Philo's rhetoric, sure evidence for Essene pacifism evaporates. Philo is making a different point, that the Essenes did not engage in any manufacturing industries for profit because they are entirely alienated from

⁵⁵ So Beall, *op. cit.* (n. 45), 144, n. 80, and see Simon, *op. cit.* (n. 38), 62–65, who wondered if Essene teaching changed on this point. Josephus mentions an Ἐσσαῖος named John who was a military leader in Galilee (*War* 2.567; 3.11), but Mason has pointed out that this may mean "a man from Essa" (*Ant.* 13.393 = Gerasa, *War* 1.104), "What Josephus Says," *op. cit.* (n. 17), 428.

⁵⁶ As noted by Vermes and Goodman, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 4 n. 34. Philo creates a visual image of a man decked with armour and weapons, using plural for the multiple weapons and singular, appropriately, for his helmet, breastplate and shield.

the world of commerce. In Philo's rhetoric in *Probos* they are detached from the world of money just as they are detached from the world of the city (*Prob.* 76), and yet one senses the hyperbole at work. Philo also indicates that the individual Essenes earned money, which they would then deposit into a communal fund (*Prob.* 86; *Hypoth.* 11.4, 10). We do not need to limit Essene work here very much in Philo's treatise, only Essene interest in the struggle for profit-making *per se*.⁵⁷

Philo notes that the Essenes labour in agricultural and artisanal work (*Prob.* 76). In the *Hypothetica* Philo mentions cultivators, shepherds, and bee-keeping (11.8) as well as artisanal crafts (11.9). This coheres with Josephus, who would write, just after his comment that the Essenes have a different ritual of purification for their sacrifices in the Temple: "βέλτιστοι δὲ ἄλλως [οἱ] ἄνδρες τὸν τρόπον καὶ τὸ πᾶν πονεῖν ἐπι γεωργία τετραμμένοι: "Otherwise, best are [the] men who have directed their way and all to work hard in agriculture" (*Ant.* 18. 19). It is as if Josephus is announcing a truism, and he has characterised all good Jews as doing precisely this at the end of *Against Apion*: what could be better than "to attend to crafts and agriculture" (2.294)?⁵⁸ Josephus tries to balance a possible negative concerning the Essenes' peculiar Temple practice by emphasising they are best among men, by reference to an ideal of simple labour in agricultural cultivation. Hyperbole aside, Josephus did not think all Essenes everywhere were farmers and had no other occupations. He sees Essenes earning money (*Ant.* 18.22), and in *War* 2.129 he mentions τέχνηαι—crafts, artisanal skills—in which the Essenes were proficient. He cannot have imagined the Essenes living within "every city" (*War* 2.124) as farmers, and when Josephus writes of individual Essenes they are teacher-prophets (*War* 1.78; 2.113; *Ant.* 13.311–13; 15.370–9; 17.346–8). In *War* 2.140 he notes their humility and honesty in public office. Both Philo and Josephus place information about Essene occupations within rhetorical structures in which the main emphasis is on the simplicity of the Essene lifestyle, uninvolved in the world of commerce, trade and gain.

In *Prob.* 76 Philo states that the Essenes live in villages and shun cities because of the iniquities found in city life, but Philo in the *Hypothetica* writes that the Essenes live in "many cities of Judaea and many villages" (11.1), which coheres with Josephus, *War* 2.124. The isolated setting of the Essenes in *Probos* adds to their characterisation as being very focused on the spiritual life, avoiding any distraction.⁵⁹ Philo's personal view is expressed in *De Vita Contemplativa* 19:

⁵⁷ Likewise, there is no reason to doubt that Philo thought that the Essenes could have been collectively quite prosperous.

⁵⁸ Plutarch (*Cato the Elder* 2.1; 3.1–4) defines agriculture as the ideal Roman pursuit, as noted by Mason, "What Josephus Says," Pt. 1, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 5.

⁵⁹ There is no mention of isolation specifically in *Ant.* 18, but, in contrast to what he wrote in *War*, the work of the Essenes is here identified by Josephus as agricultural, which would

“For every city, even the best governed, is full of noise and innumerable disturbances which no one who has ever once been led by Wisdom can endure.” Therefore, Philo is satisfied in *Probus* to situate Essenes away from the city in order to confirm their concentration.

Finally, in the passage, Philo describes at length how the Essenes never got into trouble with any vicious rulers in Syria Palaestina (*Prob.* 89–91). The favour of kings is a point he stresses in the *Hypothetica* 11.18, where great kings give them many honours. This is not at all a case of Philo’s ambiguity, but curiously his point is frequently overlooked. In Josephus also Herod the Great honours the Essenes by exempting them from a vow of loyalty imposed on his subjects, after an Essene prophet named Menahem predicted that Herod would rule over the Jews (*Ant.* 15.371–9; 17.345–8). In other words, both Philo and Josephus describe the Essenes as favoured by the Herodian dynasty. The reception of royal favours would have marked the Essenes out as the chosen school of rich and powerful rulers: people who were rewarded for their support of the Herodian dynasty. The suggestion that the Essenes could be the school dubbed the “Herodians” in the Gospels (Mark 3: 6; 12: 13, cf. 8: 15; Matt. 22: 16) is then, on the basis of both Philo and Josephus, very plausible.⁶⁰

It is at the end of Philo’s description of the Essenes in *Probus* also that we get some sense of a Jewish identity that does not quite fit with the Graeco-Roman model of a philosophical school of thought that both Philo and Josephus both use to present the excellent Essenes to their non-Jewish audiences. Philo writes of the Essenes as being *αὐτονόμος* (*Prob.* 91). Where Philo uses this word elsewhere in his writings (*Somn.* 2.100, 293; *Jos.* 136, 242) it carries the sense of “self-governing” or “independent of outside rule” and it is a strong word to employ. This reminds us that—in contrast to Graeco-Roman philosophical schools of thought—in Judaism the focus of philosophical discussion and exegesis is the Law (Torah) and how it should be practised in everyday life. The Mosaic law was not only a guide for belief or morality or for what took place in the Temple but the judicial basis of the law of the Land of Israel in operation throughout countless village and town courts.⁶¹ Likewise, Josephus presents the Essenes as having an independent jurisdiction: the Essenes had their own court made up of

normally imply that they lived in rural settlements. As such, it may be a motif found in a common source which Philo modified in the *Hypothetica*.

⁶⁰ Hartmut Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran: On the Essenes, John the Baptist and Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 1998), 267–268.

⁶¹ See Shemuel Safrai and Moriz Stern, eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life* (*Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad novum Testamentum*; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 377–419, and the discussion of private law 504–533.

no less than 100 men (in Jerusalem?) to decide verdicts, and they could even pass a sentence of death for blasphemy (*War* 2.143–5).

Such attestations may caution us against imagining that there were very many other groups of a similar nature that could claim the same kind of judicial autonomy.⁶² While in terms of theology there may have been a vast multiplicity of “sects,” in terms of recognised legal interpretation it seems surprising that there were as many as three (Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes), and it may be then that we should then arrange our possible heterodox “sects”—all 24 of the *minim* according to Rabbi Yohanan (*ySanh.* 29c)—into these three legal paradigms rather than positing unknown judicially independent schools of thought unmentioned by ancient authors.⁶³ Even when Josephus forces a Fourth Philosophy out of the zealous Pharisees tending towards insurgency, they do still follow Pharisaic judgements, γνώμαι (*Ant.* 18.23). After all, it is the Pharisees who “are considered the most accurate interpreters of the law” by the populace (as opposed to the Herodian dynasty?) and therefore hold the position of the leading school (*War* 2.162; *Ant.* 18.17).

Had the Essenes then marked out areas of jurisdiction separate from the dominant school? In the region of Syria Palaestina as a whole each πόλις had its own legal code and civil administration that governed also the villages in its territory. If Philo is right, then recognition of Essene legal independence might well explain why Synesius (reflecting terminology in Dio Chrysostom?) used the word πόλις to describe an Essene settlement by the Dead Sea: i.e. it was a place with its own law. For models of comparison with the Judaeian schools of law, the Graeco-Roman philosophical schools may provide only partial correspondences, despite the efforts of both Philo and Josephus to fit them into these conceptual boxes. We may be better served by looking forward in time to the schools of law within Sunni Islam—Maliki, Hanifi, Shafi`i and Hanbali—which impact not only on jurisprudence but also lifestyle, including consumption of food. Greek and Roman law had no comparable phenomena; the two schools of Roman jurists—the Sabinians and the Proculians—provide no real comparison.

⁶² Cf. Goodman, *op. cit.* (n. 24), and *id.* “Josephus and Variety in First-Century Judaism.” *The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities Proceedings* 7/6 (2000): 201–213.

⁶³ As I have argued elsewhere, John the Baptist may well have been close to the Pharisees; he need not be considered independent of their legal tradition, see Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (1997), 155–211.

The Hypothetica

In the *Hypothetica*—or the *Apologia*—Philo emphasises the same virtues of frugality and asceticism and repeats some of the features of the Essenes noted above in *Probus*, with particular emphasis on κοινωνία, the “life in common” or “fellowship.” Apart from its apologetic dimension, the rhetorical context of *Hypothetica*—which would furnish a reason to explain why this is important—is only partially understood. The extant work is fragmentary, comprising at most only two short extracts from a bipartite treatise.⁶⁴ It seems that various features of Mosaic law were identified, and illustrated, hence the relevant section begins: “Our lawgiver prepared (ἤλειπεν)⁶⁵ many of the pupils towards community life/fellowship (κοινωνία)” (11.1). Given this emphasis there are a few idiosyncrasies in terms of the identity of the Essenes that appear here alone.

While the Essenes are identified as being part of a tradition so ancient as to trace its origins to Moses (i.e. fundamental Judaism), Philo notes that new members come into an Essene community because of “a zeal for virtue and philanthropy” (11.2). They are not born into it: “for them the choice of life is not by birth—for birth is not of free will.” There are, therefore, no children or young men among them, but rather all are τέλειοι—mature—and, more than that, ἄνδρες καὶ προς γῆρας ἀποκλίνοντες ἤδη, “men indeed already inclining towards old age” (*Hypoth.* 11.3).⁶⁶ There may well be something historical in this, but

⁶⁴ See the introduction by Colson, *op. cit.* (n. 28), 407–413. For an exploration of relationship between Josephus and the *Hypothetica*, see Gregory E. Sterling, “Universalizing the Particular: Natural Law in Second Temple Jewish Ethics.” *Studia Philonica Annual* 15 (2003): 64–80. Sterling identifies a common ethical tradition reflected in the *Hypothetica*, Josephus’ *Against Apion* and in the *Sentences* of Pseudo-Phocylides. The similarities between the *Hypothetica* and *Against Apion* have been noted by several authors, see John Barclay, *Flavius Josephus, Against Apion. Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), Appendix 5, who suggests that the section on the Essenes in fact comes from a different work altogether, the *Apologia*. Porphyry (*De Abstemio* 4.11) ascribes to Josephus a description of Essenes found in the second part of a work he names πρὸς τοὺς Ἕλληνας, *To the Greeks*. However, alternatively perhaps Porphyry here wrongly attributed Philo’s *Apologia* (= *Hypothetica*) to Josephus; Philo’s account of the Essenes (i.e. *Hypoth.* 11.1–13) is in the second part of the work Eusebius refers to as ἡ ὑπερ Ἰουδαίων ἀπολογία (*Praep. Evang.* 8.10.19) and adding πρὸς τοὺς Ἕλληνας to this title would not be inappropriate.

⁶⁵ The verb ἀλείφω literally means “to anoint with oil” but in Philo’s usage (e.g. *Prob.* 111, *Flacc.* 5) it may be translated as “prepare” or “train.” This metaphorical use of the word is derived from the fact that gymnasts would be anointed with oil in preparation for a contest. For the full list of instances of ἀλείφω in Philo’s extant work, see Peder Borgen, Kåre Fuglseth and Roald Skarsten, *The Philo Index: A Complete Word Index to the Writings of Philo of Alexandria* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 15.

⁶⁶ Philo reinforces their elderliness when he states: “For they take whatever exercises they practice to be more useful and sweet to soul and body than those of [athletic] contests, not quite being in the prime of the body’s youth” (*Hypoth.* 11.7). This also continues athletic/gymnastic language already signalled by the word ἀλείφω. Like Philo, Pliny would imply that the men who

Philo's reasons for insisting on the advanced age of Essenes fits with his own interests. Philo himself was suspicious of people who endeavoured to live ascetic lives at an early age. In *De Fuga et Inventione* (30–38) Philo insists that you have to first prove yourself in business and ordinary life, noting that Levites have to work until they are 50 years old. People who are youthful and unready for a spiritual life will fail: “we arrive at the court of divine service and turn away from this austere way of living more quickly than we came, for we are not able to bear the sleepless observance, the unceasing and relentless toil” (*Fug.* 40). Therefore, in *Hypoth.* 11.3 Philo links the Essenes’ sublimation of the body’s desires with this advanced age, not with exceptional virtue, whereby “they are no longer inundated (κατακλυζόμενοι) by the flood of the body nor led by the passions.”

Philo then discusses the community life in terms of how it is manifested in an Essene group: “None by any means continues to possess (ὑπομένει κτήσασθαι) his own things altogether—neither a house, nor a slave, nor a plot of land, nor herds (of cattle or sheep), nor anything other provided and furnished by wealth—but all things are placed publicly⁶⁷ in common at once, everyone reaping the benefits (*Hypoth.* 11. 4). Philo then provides an image of an older man who has acquired considerable wealth and property giving his possessions to the community for the entire body to benefit.⁶⁸

The community lives together, with common meals, serving the good of everyone there, and they delight in various diverse occupations as much as gymnasts in competitions (11.5–7); specific occupations Philo identifies (11.8–9) having been discussed above. All wages are given to a treasurer, who buys whatever is required (11.10). Commonality is stressed strongly (11.11), which also includes common clothing (11.12) and the common expense of caring for the sick (11.13).

At this point during this eulogy of ideal *κοινωνία* Philo makes a grand exception, signalled by the word ἔτι, “however, yet,” with the strengthening particle τοίνυν.

become Essenes and live without any women (*sina ulla femina*), are reasonably mature, already having endured the fluctuations of fortune (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 5.17.4 (73)).

⁶⁷ Here μέσον, literally “in the middle.” Perhaps Philo is indicating a declaration in an assembly, as in Acts 5: 1–11; for further see Justin Taylor, “The Community of Goods among the First Christians and among the Essenes,” in *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. David Goodblatt, Avital Pinnick and David R. Schwartz, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2001), 147–61.

⁶⁸ What happens to any slaves is passed over here.

However, most sharply seeing the very thing, alone or great, that was certain to shatter the community life, they beg off marriage (γάμον παρήτήσαντο)⁶⁹; by means of this indeed to fashion self-control most excellently. For none of the Essenes has (lit: leads) a wife (“Εσσαιών γὰρ οὐδεις ἄγεται γυναῖκα) . . .”⁷⁰

The sense is that even with the pooling of possessions for the sake of the community life, previously stated, women are not included. The Essenes do not have wives, but it is not stated by Philo that these older men who have acquired property have never had wives. Their alienation from married life is presented as positive, while the situation of a married man with children is presented in very negative terms. Women are selfish, jealous, and distracting. Because of the importance of community life in this piece, the essentially problematic issue of women’s objection to this life is stated: when women have children they object to *κοινωνία*, so that men become slaves rather than free (11. 16–17). This notion of the slavery of a man to a woman is found also in *Probus*, where a male master of a pretty little slave girl ends up fawning on her and being, for all intents and purposes, her slave (*Prob.* 38–40), thanks to her beauty and charming speech, which become weapons of mass destruction (ἐλεπολεις⁷¹) against weak souls, “mightier than all the machines which are constructed for the overturning of walls” (*Prob.* 38).

In *War* 2.121 Josephus comments that Essenes are trying to protect themselves against women in a different way. The problem here is women’s licentiousness, since women are generally adulterous. While such gynophobia may indeed have been Essene, or in sources used by our extant authors, both Philo and Josephus may be imposing their own rationale for Essene celibacy.⁷² It should be noted also that all the authors configure Essene identity as only applying to men: the androcentrism is a given.

If we turn to Josephus for comparison it is striking how Josephus’ language is considerably more ambiguous than either Philo’s or Pliny’s. In *War* 2 he presents two types of Essene men: one type is not married, and the other is married for procreation purposes. Josephus begins by stating that since the Essenes strongly reject any pleasure and passion, they view marriage with disdain⁷³ In place of their own children they choose out (ἐκλαμβάνοντες, does not mean “adopt”) other people’s children, to teach them, treating them as their own

⁶⁹ The verb *παραιτέομαι* in Philo indicates that there is something one is released from by entreaty, e.g. *Flacc.* 31.

⁷⁰ “For no Essene takes a wife,” translates Colson.

⁷¹ “City-destroying.”

⁷² The Christian author Hippolytus writes that the Essenes “do not trust women in any way” (*Ref. Haer.* 9.18). For comparable comments in Josephus, see Mason, “What Josephus Says,” *op. cit.*, (n. 17), 434–435.

⁷³ See discussion in Beall, *op. cit.* (n. 45), 111–112.

kin; this reflects the closeness of the teacher-student relationship in antiquity, since students, having been accepted for instruction, could co-habit with a teacher and serve his needs.⁷⁴ Josephus then insists that marriage is accepted by Essenes as a whole: “marriage and what succeeds from it is not abolished (ἀνατιροῦντες)” (*War* 2.121). There is no indication he means it is only acceptable only for other Jews who are not Essenes, but rather this bald comment is a signal at the start of his discussion of a topic he would return to, namely that the Essenes reject *passion*, but one order is married: “there is also another order of Essenes, alike in mode of living, customs and law with the others, differing in opinion concerning marriage” (*War* 2.160). This group of men marry to continue the human race. They insist that the girls they marry have already had three menstrual periods, to show they can conceive children, and they do not have sex with them when they are pregnant (cf. *Apion* 2.199, 202). In every other way, they are the same as the Essenes who are not married.⁷⁵ However, we are not told the ages of the two orders, nor are we told that all the Essenes who spurn marriage and teach students have always been celibate and unmarried. Josephus simply does not give the information that would create a holistic picture.

What Josephus tends to do in his description is establish the marriage-disdaining Essenes as the prototype, with the other group a kind of modification. He focuses on the unusual (celibate males) as the standard model, which coheres with what we find in other classical sources.⁷⁶ Taken independently, nowhere does Josephus in *War* state anything in terms of which order is the larger or prototypical one, but rather, in putting them first, Josephus identifies the

⁷⁴ In a Q saying, “the sons of the Pharisees” appear to be students of the Pharisees (Matt. 12: 27; Luke 11: 19), see Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1969), 177; Taylor, *Immerser*, *op. cit.* (n. 63), 102–103.

⁷⁵ Mason has argued that Josephus reflects his own ideas in the ideal behaviour of his married Essenes, see “What Josephus Says,” *op. cit.* (n. 17), 435. It would follow that men left their wives for a marriage-disdaining order once the women were past the age of child-bearing, since if marriage is only justified for the necessity of procreation, how would they have justified it after this was no longer possible?

⁷⁶ Mason, on the other hand, suggests that Josephus may have invented the marriage-endorsing type of Essenes, “What Josephus Says,” *op. cit.* (n. 17), 447–450. He does not read *War* 2.121 as a preliminary tag to alert the reader to a further discussion, but as a note that Essenes accepted marriage only outside the Essene school (447–8). However, it would have been surprising for Josephus to invent something that complicates his description without adding anything to his rhetoric on the Essenes. Additionally, according to Mason’s reading, Josephus would contradict something he has stated earlier. Rather, the minimisation of the married Essenes—with an acknowledgment of their existence—may well reflect Josephus’ recognition that the simple male celibate model of Essenes he found in Philo or elsewhere did not adequately reflect the Essenes he had surely encountered. In *War* 2 Josephus provides more material on the Essenes than we find anywhere else. Details such as the exact type of wrap the women wore in the purification bath (*War* 2.161) could hardly be expected in a fantasy.

marriage-rejecting order as more important. When Josephus states that the marriage-endorsing Essenes are “like-minded on way of life, and customs and law” (*War* 2.160) with the others, does he really mean they lived in communities with shared possessions, or is he meaning to imply an adoption of Essene law—even an education and entry process—without the entire communal package? Did they send their children to the marriage-rejecting Essenes for education? How did the two orders relate? We are left with partial truth from which we can create a variety of models.

In *Antiquities*, completed some 15 years after *War*, Josephus describes women not being included among communal male Essene groups in terms very similar to Philo. He writes that they “do not bring wives into their [shared] possessions (κτήσιν)” (*Ant.* 18.21), because of the discord (στάσις) this may produce. In Philo’s *Hypothetica*, the verb κτάομαι is used in preference to the noun: the Essenes do not continue to possess (ὑπομένει κτήσασθαι) private items (11.4), but he discusses women later on, and at length, as a qualification.

However, what both Philo and Josephus actually insist on here is that the Essenes did not have a “community of wives,” a frequently-repeated motif in Greek philosophical systems, including Stoicism (Diogenes Laertes, *Vitae* 7.131), ever since Plato advocated that there should be a community of wives and children held in common in the ideal philosophical city (*Rep.* 423e; 457d; 458c–d; 460b–d; 540; 543). This ideal appears also in the utopian description of the “children of the sun” by Iambulus (Diogenes Siculus, 2.58.1), where sharing of wives fits in with a sharing of property, eschewing of slavery, common meals, frugality and uniformity of dress.⁷⁷ It is therefore important to state categorically in the case of the Essenes that women are not shared in the possessions of the community or kept individually by a member of a community. It is this, then, that the Essenes reject, despite their communal life, because of the discord or strife it may produce, which would “shatter the community life.” Josephus states that the Essenes “live by themselves,” not implying a location in the wilderness but rather that any wives are excluded. Nevertheless, the apparent reading is that there were men who had wives among their “possessions” already before choosing the celibate, communal lifestyle with other men who do the menial tasks women would normally do, like preparing bread and other food (*Ant.* 18.22). For Josephus, this may seem at first sight inconsistent with what he wrote in *War* 2, but given that Josephus refers readers back to his fuller treatment there (*Ant.* 13.171–2; 13.298; 18.18) it is unlikely that Josephus himself thought he was being inconsistent at all. A model which would have the option of married male Essenes—or others—separating from wives to embrace a celibate and communal lifestyle *after* having children would not clash with his previous description, but

⁷⁷ Mendels, *op. cit.* (n. 31), 211–215.

one of a married Essene who was also living in a commune would do so. Josephus' married Essenes are therefore unlikely to have been commune-dwellers but men in normal societal contexts, presumably following Essene law applicable to these contexts.

In directly addressing the issue of celibacy in a life of ascetic philosophy, Philo appears to have an eye to a current debate in which the value of celibacy was increasingly advocated in Stoic circles.⁷⁸ However, for Philo—as a Jew—it was a qualified good.⁷⁹ Given the argument about the practice taking place in Graeco-Roman philosophy it was no wonder that a Jewish group might have been called upon as an illustration of how Judaism had anticipated the phenomenon and exceeded all, but while Philo could use the Essenes to illustrate self-control, ἐγκράτεια, Philo himself believed strongly that it was important for men to fulfil the commandment of God to multiply (*Det.* 147–8, cf. *Gen.* 1: 28; *m.Yeb.* 6:6; *b.Yeb.* 63a). He states outright in *Praem.* 108–9 that “all genuine attendants (θεραπευταί) of God will fulfil the law of Nature for the procreation of children.”

In the specific case of the Essenes, that most of them had produced children prior to a life of celibacy is implied in a conditional clause to address the case of certain men who may not have managed to do so: “Even if (κἂν εἰ) the older men, however, happen to be (τύχοιεν) childless . . .” they are looked after as if they were fathers to the others in the community (*Hypoth.* 11.13). Practically speaking, all the Essenes he portrays live as if they are childless, in that they do not rely on their physical children but on others in the community for care. In his description of the group of celibate Jewish ascetics usually known as the “Therapeutae” (literally “attendants”) in *De Vita Contemplativa*, Philo implies that the men who have joined this community have already fulfilled their divine duty to procreate, in that—on going off they “abandon their belongings to sons or daughters” (*Contempl.* 13), and leave “brothers/sisters, children, wives, parents . . .” (*Contempl.* 18). Likewise in the *Hypothetica*, read on its own terms, Philo means to provide a picture of men who have properly fulfilled their roles in the world—acquiring property in its fullest sense (including women and children)—prior to a celibate

⁷⁸ The first-century Stoic Musonius Rufus would not recommend marriage or the bearing of children for the ascetic life of philosophy (*On Training*, Discourse 6); sexual activity was allowed purely for production of offspring (*On Sexual Indulgence*, Discourse 12), a view expressed also by his fellow Stoic Epictetus, in *De Natura*. This position seems to have been arrived at after a long debate with the Cynics, who could advocate eschewing marriage altogether, see Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47–104. Pythagoreans could be equally renunciate; the Pythagorean Apollonius of Tyana, according to Philostratus, vowed lifetime celibacy and, in a late tradition, Pythagoras expresses the view that sex was not conducive to health (Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 8.9). This particular ascetic practice can be traced back to Plato's later work (*Laws* 838a, 841b–c).

⁷⁹ See Taylor, *op. cit.* (n. 23), 258–9.

life in community with other males alone. In other words, the comment of *Hypoth.* 11.14, that “none of the Essenes has/leads a wife,” is relative to the community into which the man comes, in his maturity. For Philo, any married life (configured as appallingly fraught) these men tending to old age may have had prior to their celibate life in community is not classified as “Essene” at all, as is the case also with Pliny and with the Essenes of Josephus’ *Antiquities*. New members join this *κοινωνία* as mature adults tending towards old age by choice, not by birth; it is not a case of raising up children within the *κοινωνία*, within a family, but this does not imply that no Essene ever had children prior to being an Essene. Josephus presents a more complex picture, but it is ambiguous.

Philo’s model creates a paradigm of the extraordinary (exemplary mature/aged celibate men devoted to community life and self-control) within the milieu of the wider Graeco-Roman world. It links the description of the Essenes in both Philo and his source material to a particular genre in antiquity Philo knew well. Graeco-Roman philosophers pointed to exceptional philosophers in other traditions to show that virtue, self-control and philosophical excellence were found among the “Barbarians” outside Graeco-Roman culture (*Contempl.* 21, *Prob.* 73–4, 92–7). These extraordinary models of excellence could include the Persian magi, the gymnosophists (“naked wise men”) of India, the Sarmanae (Buddhist monks), Babylonian and Assyrian “Chaldeans” and Celtic and Gallic Druids, the ultimate source discussion on these being Aristotle’s lost *Magicus* and Sotion’s *Succession of the Philosophers* (Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 1.1–11, cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1), and Megasthenes’ *Indika* (cf. Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.59–60). Porphyry, in *De Absteminitia* 4, would gather together a collection of extraordinary ascetics, from Egyptian priests (from Chaeremon, *On the Egyptian Priests*) to Indian Brahmins and Sarmanae, including the Essenes of Josephus’ *War* 2 as part of the illustrative package. The tendency for authors to simplify descriptions of the Essenes into the celibate type alone is clearly demonstrated by Porphyry (4: 11–12), who omits the marriage-endorsing Essenes despite their appearance at the end of his source. In none of these summaries of ideal philosophers do we get a holistic or even necessarily very accurate description of the groups in question.⁸⁰

In other words, Philo’s paradigm of “entirely mature male celibate” Essenes is not a complete picture, and we can turn to Josephus for a more nuanced though ambiguous view. Philo’s Essenes are detached from their context within Judaeian society, and from any sector of that society that may have followed

⁸⁰ Note that Burchard, *op. cit.*, (n. 2), 560–64, does not think Pliny’s description, by contrast, situated the *gens* of the Essenes within this paradigm, but rather within the context of other people identified by the word *gens* in his work, such as the Hyperboreans, a *gens felix* (*Hist. Nat.* 4.12.89–91).

Essene law and philosophy, which is not considered by Philo as part of the Essene category. As I have argued elsewhere, Philo's "Therapeutae" are likewise detached from their intellectual and social context within the allegorical school of exegesis in Alexandria and are presented as living a separate existence.⁸¹

Philo, in his extant texts on the Essenes, gives no evidence of knowing an association between this school and the Dead Sea, but there is in fact a very powerful reason for him to have avoided noting any Essene settlement at such a place: the Dead Sea was considered a noxious locality because of its air.⁸² Strabo has sooty smoke coming out of the lake and tarnishing metal (*Geogr.* 16: 2: 42). In order to compliment the Essenes, Pliny specifically stresses that they "flee all the way from the shores which are harmful" (*Hist. Nat.* 5.15, 4/73). Philo was particularly conscious of the need to breathe good air (*Gig.* 10) and in the case of the "Therapeutae," Philo extols the group's chosen locality at length precisely because of its health-giving breezes, which blew from both the Mediterranean Sea and Lake Mareotis (*Contempl.* 22-3).⁸³ While Philo is content to characterise his Essenes as living healthily away from city life in *Probus*, he does not situate them in any place exactly. If he ever did situate some Essenes by the Dead Sea in any writing now lost, Philo would have had to insist, as Pliny did, that they were a fair distance away from the shores, so as not to imply that they lacked good judgment concerning air. Mention of their wide distribution was clearly an easier course; there is no reason for Philo to focus on any one specific community.

Philo also creates an image of a great number of (celibate, aged, male) Essene communes. When Philo gives the number of Essenes as being over 4000 (*Prob.* 75, as also *Ant.* 18.20), the emphasis is on just how very many of them there were. The word he uses in *Prob.* 91, ὄμιλος, "crowd" or "throng," implies this, and we find large numbers very strongly emphasised in *Hypoth.* 11.1: Moses trained μυρίους "multitudes" of his pupils for a life of community, namely the Essenes, and "they dwell in many cities of Judaea, and many villages, and in great and much-populated throngs" (*Hypoth.* 11.1, cf. 11.5).

In conclusion, Philo's Essenes are numerous, autonomous, old, male, celibate and representative of the goodness and truth of the fundamental principles of Jewish law and philosophy. Philo does not see the Essenes as a small, isolated

⁸¹ Taylor, *op. cit.* (n. 23).

⁸² This is a view that persisted until modern times, see Daniel the Abbot (1106–8), 27; 38, transl. William F. Ryan, in John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099–1185* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1988). In the 15th century Father Felix Fabri was told that no one should visit the lake because the stench from the sea makes you vulnerable to infection, sickness and death: Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti peregrinationem*, ii (ed. C. D. Hassler; Stuttgart: Stuttgart.-Literarischerverein, 1843), 236a.

⁸³ See Taylor, *op. cit.* (n.23), 75–81.

and marginal pacifist sect out of step with mainstream Judaism, or even alienated from the Temple; rather they are the very opposite. They are favoured by the Herodian dynasty (and perhaps other rulers)—therefore in league with the rich and powerful—and they represent an important legal school, whose laws are binding within their areas. The mature-to-elderly men of the Essene school in Philo's treatises are assumed to have had children prior to their joining Essene communes, thus fulfilling their proper obligation to multiply according to Mosaic law. After this, they pool possessions and embark on an austere, hard life of artisanal or farming labour of various types (e.g. including shepherding and bee-keeping)—not for material gain—while they focus their minds on God. They are also concerned with continual purifications. They do not allow wives to enter into the fellowship of their communes, and spurn the "community of wives" concept even though all possessions are shared.

Philo's texts on the Essenes need to be read with close appreciation of his language and his rhetoric. We can probe the text and arrive at some aspects of Essene identity and clues to aspects of this identity, but we need to do this with a careful understanding of the rhetorical packaging of the information. We can probably glean no more than a few details about the historical Essenes, details that are curious and largely related to how they behaved rather than what they actually believed. This gives us a basic framework only. Absence of any mention of a group of people governed by Essene law—Josephus' "married Essenes"—does not by any means indicate that such people did not exist. Given the education of newcomers and the agedness of Philo's actual Essenes, his discussions presuppose there were at least Essene-friendly others in the wider context of Judaeae society from which the new commune-dwellers were drawn. However, the presentation of a wider social context is simply not useful in the rhetoric. Likewise, Philo's lack of specific mention of the Dead Sea as a locality for Essenes—if he knew of their existence there—can be explained also by considering his rhetorical concerns.

Philo used the Essenes as a rhetorical tool. He did not intend to give a completely comprehensive view of Essene life, nor did he necessarily have access to accurate details about every aspect of their identity. While it is axiomatic in this discussion that Philo presented truth, broadly defined, it is also the case that he also used common models of philosophical excellence, with a dusting of the extraordinary, to cause his Roman and Hellenistic audiences to wonder at the excellence of Judaism as a whole.

In terms of the arguments regarding the Qumran-Essene hypothesis, this discussion demonstrates that archaeologists and historians wishing to understand Philo's presentation of the Essenes cannot read a translation of Philo's texts on this group in isolation, without a clear knowledge of his language, rhetoric and his works as a whole. The quarrying of snippets of Philo's discussions—in

which he is at times ambiguous or very strongly rhetorical in his language—has resulted in false apprehensions about what he has written. Small bits of Philo's works are claimed as arguments by proponents of theories either for or against the Qumran-Essene hypothesis, without due care. While it remains sparse, there is very interesting and important information embedded in Philo's descriptions of the Essenes, material that can cohere quite well with Josephus. This needs to be looked at with fresh eyes.⁸⁴

Place

⁸⁴ This paper was read in the Tuesday seminar series at the Oriental Institute, Oxford; at the Department of Biblical Studies, Sheffield University; and at Trinity College, University of Melbourne. I am grateful to Martin Goodman, Jorunn Øklund, David Runia, David O'Brien and Andrew McGowan for their invitations and to all the participants in the seminars for stimulating questions and comments. I would also like to thank Steve Mason and John Barclay for generously sharing information and ideas, and Steve Mason in particular for a critique of this paper prior to its submission