

Khirbet Qumrân: Scrolls, Sectarians, Subversives and Scepticism

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Abstract: This paper re-visits the popular Qumrân-centric narrative as first formulated and introduced by Roland de Vaux in the 1950s. Although not totally implausible, the primary claims of this currently, leading hypothesis seem to be scientifically falsifiable on a number of counts. In addition, other important and seemingly underestimated evidence, better assists in describing an alternative reconstruction of Khirbet-Qumrân's last days. As its point of departure, this paper employs a working precis of Roland de Vaux's initial conjectures. Then, based on the more reliable data gained thus far, an attempt is made to corroborate or refute its claimed truth-value, step by step. As this learned narrative has been augmented and enhanced during the past 70 years, where relevant, the import of these refinements is dealt with in a similar manner. Here, the paper makes special reference to the seemingly undervalued yet pioneering work of Norman Golb, Yizhar Hirschfeld, Yitzhak Magen and Yuval Peleg. It also makes careful reference to any available data that may shed light on this problematic issue. Consequently, reference is made to ancient reports, known religious practices, historical records or material culture, in an attempt is made to suggest a more plausible hypothesis as regards the presence of both scriptural and sectarian literature in the Qumrân region. Accordingly, based on the available evidence, this paper confirms that there is simply insufficient substantiation to firmly place an Essene community at Khirbet Qumrân for any significant amount of time, let alone wishful claims of this once being the "mother" community in Judea.

Keywords: Khirbet Qumrân, Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, Philo, Pliny, *Yahad*, Sicarii, Zealots

1. Introduction

The popular Khirbet Qumrân Essene Community narrative is well-known and indeed, still dominates almost every research output concerned with the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and related material since this speculation was first made fashionable in the early 1950s.

It is obvious that from a purely scientific perspective [1] this research terrain has become somewhat muddled. Too often subjective bias—even fervent religious conviction—creeps into the various arguments. Certain facts are either quickly skimmed over or held up as epiphanies; classical authors¹ who were intimately aware of the religio-political scene at the time, are either misrepresented or have contemporary worldviews foisted onto their writings—all in

an effort to validate and preserve a preferred narrative.

It is accepted that "Hypotheses are nets: only he who casts will catch".² However, Karl Popper reminds scientists that their intention should be to consistently undermine empirical statements contained in an hypothesis by attempting to falsify them in the light of the available evidence [2]. Here, falsifiability or refutability is the capacity for a statement, theory or hypothesis to be contradicted by hard evidence and not by hunches, consensus of opinion or religious faith. On this issue, Popper expands:

According to my proposal, what characterizes the empirical method is its manner of exposing to falsification, in every conceivable way, the system to be tested. Its aim is not to save the lives of untenable systems but, on the contrary, to select the one which is by comparison the

¹ When a reference is made to classical authors, this implies Philo, Pliny and Josephus.

² Attributed to Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg (2 May 1772–25 March 1801).

fittest, by exposing them all to the fiercest struggle for survival. [3].

Of course, even with the sincerest of intentions, attempting to reconstruct the distant past in any way that might be considered infallible is pure wishful thinking. All that one can do is apply a scientific methodology to the available substantiated data and make a rational, deductive hypothesis based solely on its import. However, when new evidence comes to light and/or elements of prejudice are uncovered and removed from the equation, then that hypothesis will either be strengthened, modified or totally disregarded.

In this paper, based on the available evidence, be it ancient reports, known religious practices, historical records or material culture, an attempt will be made to demarcate a truly non-partisan, dispassionate, objective working hypothesis conditioned upon verifiable data and which has been corrected for bias. The current, popular and more time-honoured narrative has practically ossified into a dogma. Accordingly, its key tenets have received such publicity that it has seemingly become an undisputed fact in many people's minds. Consequently, any working hypothesis presented here that dares to examine some small aspect of the status quo opinion is in danger of being dismissed before it can be evaluated more dispassionately.

2. Methodology

This paper adheres to an interpretivist/constructivist approach—a research episteme that has the intention of better understanding the world of human experience because it accepts that reality is socially constructed. Here, it is assumed that the constructed worldviews of all role-players reviewed in a research project (including the researcher), will impact on the research findings. This approach also allows a researcher to make use of, where relevant and applicable, a wider range of scientific methods which, when triangulated, may better assist in establishing greater validity of interpretation.

In this context, this paper will take as its point of departure, a working precis of Roland de Vaux's initial conjectures. Then, based on the more reliable data gained thus far, an attempt will be made to corroborate or refute its claimed truth-value, step by step. As this learned narrative has been augmented and enhanced during the past 70 years, where relevant, the import of these refinements will be dealt with in a similar manner.

When an individual's argument is presented for critical review, it is always respected as a sincere contribution to this ongoing debate. When such an opinion is rejected or questioned based on the quality of the available evidence, it is not the intention of the analysis to demean the individual who made that particular contribution. Rather, the emphasis, at all times, must focus on the validity of the proffered argument. Thus, when a specific scholar is mentioned by name—their name is employed merely to identify a particular claim or point of view. Regardless, all contributions by scholars will be treated with the same healthy scepticism and

where an argument can be safely refuted or discredited, attention will be drawn to that fact without apology.

3. The Standard Qumrân-Centric Hypothesis

According to the standard de Vaux hypothesis [4], Khirbet Qumrân is an archaeological site which reflects four distinct periods of occupation, viz.: Period Ia (ninth–seventh century BCE) [5], Period Ib (c. 132–31 BCE), Period II (c. 6–68 CE) and Period III (68–c. 73 CE). During Period Ib the site became more fully developed and was occupied for nearly a century by a group of Essenes.³ Their occupation came to an abrupt end in 31 BCE when the site was devastated by an earthquake. During Period II the site was partially repaired and re-occupied by Zealots (who de Vaux erroneously conflates with the Sicarii) [6]. De Vaux maintains that after some 30 years the Zealots were attacked by the Romans and the buildings at Khirbet Qumrân were, once again, seriously damaged (c. 68 CE). The Romans then subsequently occupied the site for about another five years.

It must be accepted that without the discovery of the scroll material in a number of relatively nearby caves, the site would never have been excavated at the time. The assumption was made from the very beginning, that there was a *direct* connection between the Khirbet Qumrân ruins and the remains of both scriptural and sectarian manuscripts, deposited in the surrounding caves.⁴

Of course, there have been attempts to offer alternative hypotheses, but these do not seem to have been well received and/or were not very convincing. In 2002, Ann Putz provided scholars with an excellent, blow by blow account of the various interpretations that had been proffered up until that time but did not express an opinion herself as to which scenario had the most merit [7].

4. Sicarii, Zealots and Romans

By c. 70 CE, there were at least four loose groupings of dissident Jews who were either militant, theocratic nationalists, religious charlatans⁵ or murderous thieves.⁶ Here, one is often tempted to automatically compare two of the groups (Sicarii⁷ and Zealots [*biryonei*]⁸) to members of contemporary militant Sunni factions such as Al-Qaeda⁹ [8]

3 Although not conclusive, it is assumed that "Essene" is a useful term to describe an offshoot of Judaism that may have manifested in any number of ways. In this sense, "Essene" may equally refer to sectarians who described themselves as "Holy", "Sons of Light", "Remnant of Israel", *Yahad* etc.

4 One might want to interject here and point to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls—a topic that will be dealt with in the following section. As will be confirmed there is no proven link between Khirbet Qumrân and the writers of the sectarian literature.

5 Cf. information on charlatans in *Ant.* 20.160 and 20.188.

6 Earlier in his *War* 2.256–257, Josephus refers to murderous robbers as Sicarii. In *Ant.* 20. 160–166; he only refers to murderous robbers.

7 Cf. *War* 4.398–409 and *Ant.* 20.185–187.

8 Cf. *War* 7.268–274 and b. Gittin 56a–b.

9 I.e. "The Foundation"—a militant Sunni Islamist multi-national organisation

or ISIS/ISIL¹⁰ [9]. Indeed, such militaristic fundamentalists continually trample on the rights of the individual and employ irrational religious dogma as the justification for politically motivated actions that contradict even the most basic tenets of their faith. They also tend to mindlessly destroy anything that they perceive threatens any aspect of their arrogant conviction.

On the flip side, they tend to vehemently protect the symbols, icons and exemplars of their fervour. Here, in the context of Sicarii and Zealots, one might well imagine, without direct evidence, that such fanatics would want to preserve religious manuscripts and artefacts. They might also protect esteemed spiritual leaders and priests who were in some way politically aligned.¹¹ It is even possible that some of these groups were prepared to give their own lives to defend, *inter alia*, the Jerusalem temple.¹² However, according to Josephus and the *Talmud Bavli*, Jewish extremists, more normally, made other fellow Jews take the real risks whilst they operated, largely in the background.¹³

4.1. The Sicarii

The Sicarii seem to have entered history in c. 59 CE. They are recorded as being violent murderers, who both robbed and set fire to villages in Judaea. They also mingled in crowds at festivals and knifed prominent individuals that they wished to eliminate.¹⁴ In c. 66 CE, taking advantage of the anti-Roman unrest in Jerusalem, they set fire to the archives so that all records of debt were erased.¹⁵ They also attacked the fortress of Antonia and massacred the Roman soldiers stationed there.¹⁶ They engaged in kidnap and ransom.¹⁷ One of their leaders (Menahem ben Judah) even claimed to be a messianic king.¹⁸ Another, Simeon bar Gioras, due to his extreme and extensive terrorist activities and his aggressive role in the defense of Jerusalem (69–70 CE), merited him being considered the principal enemy of Rome.¹⁹ They were responsible for the capture of Masada sometime before c. 70 CE. From this location they carried out acts of violence and outrage against their own people for several years²⁰ [10].

4.2. The Zealots

Based on multiple sources, it is accepted that in Jerusalem

(c. 66–70 CE), the Zealots or *biryonei*,²¹ were initially composed of rival political factions.²² An assumption is often made that Josephus considered Judas (a Gaulonite) and a Pharisee called Saddouk to have been their founder in c. 7 CE when they compelled the Jewish nation to refuse to pay taxes to the Romans. Some would even have the Zealots as members of a Jerusalem priestly party [11]. Here, one should not be naïve. Militant religionists may have indeed professed their benign spirituality for purely political purposes but their actions did not fit their claims [12]. It should also be remembered that Josephus does not speak of a fourth *religious* sect in his earlier history detailing the Jewish Revolt (i.e. *Judaean War*). He limits his discussion solely to three religious sects: Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes.²³ Josephus once again discusses the topic of Jewish religious cliques, some 25 years later in *Judaean Antiquities*. Here, he introduces his subject with reference to the past existence of *three* denominations of Jewish religious practice and belief.²⁴ Only, after briefly describing these three “philosophies” does he unexpectedly—but pointedly—mention a fourth “philosophy”. Here, he explains that certain political fanatics (albeit who agree with the basic tenets of the Pharisaic doctrine), vehemently oppose Roman oppression in the name of the Jewish God. The emphasis here is that they do not accept any authority—which technically, makes them a law unto themselves, if not being lawless.²⁵ Here, in c. 94 CE, Josephus is trying to explain in a very simplistic and generalistic way to an uninformed Greek-speaking audience, the once extant range of Jewish belief systems. The earlier *War*, written in direct context to the horrors of the period it deals with (c. 66–70 CE), does not associate zealotry of any kind with a specific religious sect. Indeed, Josephus clearly shows that Jewish fanaticism (especially during the siege of Jerusalem [66–70 CE]) did not, in any way, uphold any benevolent spiritual and/or humanistic allusions. Quite the opposite is recorded. Any idealistic worldview that may have informed the actions of the so-called Zealots was totally undermined and negated by their violent and inhumane actions. Here, more pressing realities—such as the need for total political hegemony in Jerusalem—took precedence.²⁶ Josephus’s comments in his later *Antiquities* do not dissuade one from this basic interpretation.

4.3. Jerusalem Under Siege

Through vicious infighting (c. 66–70 CE), Jerusalem ended up being controlled by a huge faction of Sicarii (featuring Simeon bar Gioras) as well as a faction of so-called Zealots (led by John of Gischala).²⁷ These two groups became uncomfortable allies and were in almost total control of Jerusalem and the temple before its ultimate destruction by

(founded in 1988).

10 I.e. the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (founded in 1999), a fundamentalist, Sunni jihadist group with a markedly aggressive dogma—one that sanctions it to claim religious authority over all other Muslims.

11 For example, the Zealots ensured that Phannias b. Samuel was elected as High Priest in c. 70 CE (*War* 4.155).

12 Cf. *War* 5.30; 7.323; and *Ant.* 18.23–24.

13 Cf. *War* 5.101–104; and b. Gittin 56a–b.

14 *War* 2.254–255; and *Ant* 20.185–187.

15 *War* 2.425–429.

16 *War* 2.430–432 and 7.253–262.

17 *Ant.* 20.208–210.

18 *War* 2.433–448.

19 *War* 4.503–544, 557–558, 564–565, 573–579, 584; 5.11–13, 21–24, 104–105, 169, 248–249, 266–267, 278–279, 423, 439–441, 455–456, 473, 527–540, 6.378–381, 433, 7.26–36, 118, esp. 153–157.

20 *War* 4.398–409.

21 b. Gittin 56a–b.

22 *War* 5.22.

23 *War* 2.119.

24 *Ant.* 18.11.

25 *Ant.* 18.23–25.

26 Cf. *War* 7.263–274.

27 Cf. *War* 5.105.

Titus in c. 70 CE.²⁸ In addition to these armed thugs, the Jerusalemites had to endure bands of robbers who took every opportunity to rape, loot and despoil. These opportunistic thieves also happily worked alongside the so-called Zealots if it was in their best interests.²⁹

Together with the Sicarii, the militaristic *biryonei* literally held the Jerusalemites captive and barricaded the city, refusing to negotiate with the Romans. The last stage of the bloody siege lasted some five months³⁰ [13]. At about the same time, many towns, villages and important centres (like Khirbet Qumrân)³¹ must have been occupied and defended by well-armed, nationalistic, religiously superstitious, fundamentalists who were vehemently opposed to Roman occupation and any fellow Judaeans whom they believed had colluded in any with their oppressors.³² These groups also coerced local Jews to join in the struggle—by force, if necessary.

4.4. Roman Retaliation

After the Romans had captured Jerusalem in c. 70 CE, they deliberately burned the archives.³³ In this context, it makes absolute sense that such things as scrolls and revered sacred objects—many made of precious metals—would have been hurriedly removed and hidden well *before* they were destroyed or stolen.³⁴ On this point, highly reminiscent of the recent actions of ISIL [9], Josephus mentions, that religious artefacts that had been donated by foreign powers were happily destroyed, melted down and abused by the thugs because they were considered an affront to their beliefs.³⁵ We also know that both during and after the bloody destruction of Jerusalem³⁶ the Romans started to remove the threat of strategic fortified areas of Jewish resistance in the south, including the fortresses of Herodium,³⁷ Machaerus³⁸ and Masada.³⁹

In this context, an unknown Jewish militant group took over the fortress at Machaerus and typically, forced the local inhabitants to receive the brunt of the Roman attack whilst they remained in relative safety within a citadel on higher

ground.⁴⁰ They were ultimately subdued in c. 72 CE. In the same vein, a very large group of piratical and murderous⁴¹ Sicarii (including their families) were garrisoned at the Masada fortress until their subsequent demise in c. 74 CE.⁴² In this context, thanks to Pliny, it is now known that cities like 'En Gedi were razed to the ground in the same period⁴³ [10].

5. The Evidence of the *Talmud*

It would seem that certain scholars consider the practices of the Zealots and Essenes to be somewhat similar in nature [14–16]. It should be understood that based on what is written about the Essenes, Zealots and Sicarii by Josephus (the primary source for information on these groups), neither the Zealots nor the Sicarii can be likened philosophically or theologically to a peaceful, religious sect like the Essenes.⁴⁴ Josephus is quite clear on this issue. For example, he recounts how the Sicarii massacred 700 fellow Jews at 'En Gedi⁴⁵ [10]. Josephus also points out that the Zealots were no better than the Sicarii (despite what they may have believed and preached). In short, their conduct is considered to be mostly piratical and brutal.⁴⁶ To assume that the Zealots would even want to maintain a life-style normally associated with supposedly aesthetic Essenism is simply not provable and based on the limited evidence, highly unlikely.

If at this point, one would want to argue that one need not believe everything that Josephus tells his reader, then consider that the only other source of information (except for the mention of Simon the Zealot in Luke⁴⁷ is to be found in the *Talmud*.⁴⁸ This source pretty much confirms what Josephus tells his reader: Indeed, the *Talmud* describes the *biryonei* (translated as “zealots”) as “thugs”. The *Talmud* specifically condemns them for the following actions:

- 1) They barricaded themselves and the people of Jerusalem in c. 70 CE;
- 2) They refused to make peace with the militarily superior Romans;
- 3) They desired only to wage war with the Romans;
- 4) They wanted to force the inhabitants of Jerusalem to fight the Romans; and
- 5) They burned down the granaries which led to their starvation.⁴⁹

In the *Talmud*, the Zealots are compared to snakes and are

28 Cf. variously *War* 5.5–38; 422–423; 439–441; 527–533; 6.321–350; 363; 370–373; 409–413; 416–417; and b. Gittin 56a–b.

29 Cf. *War* 5. 424–426 and 515–517.

30 *War* 5.99 and 6.435.

31 Cf. *War* 4.405–409; 438–439 and 588 for details of both Jewish and Roman atrocities and destruction to centres near to Jerusalem, including the Dead Sea region in c. 69 CE.

32 Josephus also confirms the attack on collaborators in *War* 5.30; 53; and *Ant.* 20.186–187.

33 Cf. *War* 6.353.

34 *War* 7. 114–115.

35 *War* 5.562–566.

36 According to Josephus, both the Zealots and the Romans were ultimately responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths at Jerusalem alone. For example, 600,000 corpses are recorded in the latter part of the siege (*War* 5.569) and by the end of the engagement, mention is made of 97,000 slaves and 1,100,000 dead (*War* 6.420).

37 *War* 7.163.

38 *War* 7.163–170

39 *War* 7.163–215 and 252.

40 *War* 7.190–193.

41 *War* 2.141–142.

42 Cf. *War* 7.275–409. According to Josephus, 960 men, women and children were in the Sicarii group (*War* 7. 389–398). Cf. also specifically *War* 2.254; 425; 431; 4.504; 5.30; 20.186 and 210 where the Sicarii are clearly equated to murderers, brigands, pirates, insurrectionists, revolutionaries or partisans and never as righteous Jews. Josephus reports that the Romans allowed Jewish tyrants and their families to leave Jerusalem after the destruction in c. 70 CE: *War* 6.351–355.

43 *HN* 5.15.73.

44 Cf. *War* 2.141–142.

45 *War* 4.402–409.

46 *War* 7.267–274.

47 Luke 6: 15.

48 b. Gittin 56a–56b.

49 This is confirmed in *War* 5.24.

cited as the very reason why Jerusalem and its temple had to be destroyed by the Romans, namely: the Zealots were barricaded within the city and needed to be destroyed.⁵⁰ Their leader is given the nickname *Abba Sikkara*, which roughly translates to “father murderer” or “chief of the thugs”.⁵¹

Of course, the *Talmud* may well be prejudiced against the Zealots. But that is not really the issue. If, for any reason, both Josephus and the *Talmud* are proven to be unreliable sources, then historians are left with no reliable point of reference as far as the Zealots or *biryonei* are concerned. Furthermore, the fact that these two independent sources display many points of correspondence, cannot be easily dismissed as being in any way irrelevant.

6. The Archaeological Evidence

6.1. Kilns and Ovens

Khirbet Qumrân was once the site of a fairly extensive pottery workshop, as firmly corroborated by many archaeologists [17, 18]. Although there are ruins of many kilns, it should be seen as most significant that there are few remains of cooking ovens [19]. If one wants to accept the claim that a sect lived at Khirbet Qumrân for about 170 years, substantiation of large numbers of cooking and baking ovens as well as thousands of cooking pots should be evident at the site. In actuality, no such quantities of pots were found, and only a small number of ovens. As a consequence, Yitzhak Magen and Yuval Peleg confidently claim that based on the archaeological evidence it would be impossible for a large group of people to have lived at the site: In order to provide two meals a day for 250 adult men, an enormous amount of foodstuffs, ovens and cooking ware would be needed. For baking and cooking a single meal, some 30 cooking and baking ovens would have been needed [20].

6.2. Aqueducts, Cisterns and Clay

As is well known, the Khirbet Qumrân site shows evidence of a very sophisticated aqueduct-based system designed to capture and retain as much of the sparse annual rainfall as possible. In this regard, Magen and Yuval point out that the majority of water comes from Flow Basin A situated to the north-west of the site. This silt-rich water is captured, via two aqueducts, in a series of stepped water cisterns and soaking pools. The largest of these cisterns is the one known as L-71 which has a capacity of 310m³ [21]. In his day, de Vaux was correctly cautious, not to claim that all of these cisterns were devoted to ritual purification. However, he knew that the Essenes, as described by Josephus, took daily ritual baths and obviously did not rule out that at least some of the cisterns might have served admirably as *miqwa'ot*. Wisely, he did not commit himself on this issue [22].

However, many authors since his time, have happily expressed this possibility. In this context, assuming there are

so many *miqwa'ot*, they presuppose that the number of devotees at the site was quite large—upward of 200 to 500 men. These unverified estimates are often trustingly repeated by various scholars [23-25].

It has now been confirmed that most of these cisterns and pools more likely had functions directly related to the collection of potable water and, as has been discussed already, some modest manufacture of pottery—many have all the features of clay settling tanks. Magen and Peleg's excavation of the cisterns yielded some three tons of clay strongly suggesting that the entire site was related to pottery manufacture [26]. They, unlike de Vaux, successfully made pottery (albeit very low grade) employing the marl clay that they found there [27].

Amongst the pottery types found at the site include so called “Scroll Jars” because some of them were employed to protect the scrolls found in the nearby caves. Magen and Peleg have suggested that these were originally intended for the storage of dried dates or figs [28].

Jan Gunneweg and Marta Balla have identified the clay recipe favoured by Qumrân potters as Group-I at Qumrân X2 .40, EuD .35. However, as should be expected, the site also yielded examples of pottery which came from other sites. In this context, pottery has been found that hails from both Jericho and Jerusalem. Another important finding was that very similar shaped pots need not come from the same pottery workshop [29].

6.3. The *Miqwa'ot* Issue

It has been confirmed that certain unknown individuals (possibly militaristic Jews and/or Romans) made use (however temporary) of certain of the infrastructure at the site at a time *after* the pottery-making inhabitants deserted the site. In this context, the water system has been altered and modified—making it difficult to assess its “original” and possibly halakhic suitability for capturing water intended for ritual immersion [30, 31].

Space will not allow for a full exposé on the finer points of constructing a valid *mikweh*, but suffice it to say, they come in many designs. Their primary purpose is to provide a large enough collection⁵² of *natural* source water to obviate the need to employ a river or sea for ritual immersion [32, 33].

The *halakhot* governing the use of water for ritual purity are quite complex. Fundamentally, full body immersion is required (*tevilah*) in a natural collection of water. Seminal emission (*keri* and *zav*) required that the water be “living”. In short, the water had to be natural (well, spring, perennial river or sea). Here a seasonal river was quite invalid and a rain-filled *mikweh* would not have sufficed for *zavim*.⁵³

A *mikweh* could not be a container—even if that container was placed in the ground. Only a reservoir made in the earth like a cistern, pool or even a large hole in the ground would suffice. It also needed to contain no less than 40 se'ah (c. 575

50 b. Gittin 56b.

51 b. Gittin 56a.

52 The minimum volume must be 40 se'ah. To ensure this minimum, modern *miqwa'ot* are designed to contain at least 80 se'ah (about 1,500 litres).

53 Mishnah Mikvaot 1.

litres) of water. If it could not be filled with a *natural* source, it was permissible to employ rainwater as long as the means by which that rainwater arrived in the *mikweh* were valid.⁵⁴ There were six degrees of *miqwa'ot* and a rainwater *mikweh* was of the lowest grade.⁵⁵ According to the *Mishnah*:

1. Natural water (well, spring, perennial river or sea) was always superior to the water of a *mikweh*;
2. Grades of water increased from stagnant water to “smitten waters” to “living waters”;
3. ONLY “living waters” could be employed for *zavim*.⁵⁶

Given the binding religious prescriptions and the excessive evaporation rates, to make and maintain a valid *mikweh* at Khirbet Qumrân would have been extremely problematic. Very importantly, rivers that did not flow throughout the year (e.g. Nahal Qumrân) were unacceptable sources for a *mikweh*. For a river to be a valid source it had to be connected to a spring or be perennial. Still water *correctly* collected in the right quantity and from live rainfall was valid but the manner in which it had to be collected was quite convoluted [32, 33]. In a similar context, Magen and Peleg stress that only cistern L-117 could possibly have served as a *mikweh* [34]. It should also be remembered that it was not even necessary for a specific religious sect to be in residence to necessitate the existence of a *mikweh*. By Hasmonean times, ordinary Jews made regular use of *miqwa'ot*. Indeed, many Second-Temple period archeological sites possess at least one *mikweh* [35–38]. Thus, most importantly, even if a single valid *mikweh* is proven to have existed at Khirbet Qumrân, being merely circumstantial evidence, it cannot be employed in and of itself as the absolute proof of sole occupation by a single, discreet, Jewish religious sect—let alone a large Essene community.

6.4. Animal Bones

De Vaux, Magen and Peleg unearthed *deliberately* buried animal bones interspersed between large sherds of pottery. In addition, they found animal bones placed inside pottery jars with lids [39, 40]. Most of the bones reveal that they were cooked by boiling—very few revealed signs of roasting. De Vaux was convinced that these deposits were somehow related to a “religious preoccupation” [41]. Considering that these buried and protected remains of meals are common to both Period Ib and Period II seriously reduces the chance that this practice was related to a specific sect’s common religious rites. A more logical and quite obvious explanation is the one proffered by Magen and Peleg, viz.: the remains of meals were buried deep inside pots to prevent predators (e.g. hyenas, jackals, lions and leopards), from being unduly attracted to the living areas [42].

Despite this most obvious solution to the supposed “mystery” of the buried pots, many scholars still insist that the boiled bones are the remains of animal sacrifices. Here, even the celebrated archeologist Jodi Magness still supports

the notion that the buried, boiled bones are somehow solely related to animal sacrifice [43]. The irony here, is that despite both Philo (*Quod Omnis Probus Liber*) and Josephus (*Judaean Antiquities*) clearly spelling out that the Essenes never made animal sacrifices, researchers insist on finding evidence of sacrifices to prove that the Essenes were at Khirbet Qumrân!⁵⁷ If indeed, anyone actually finds evidence of a typical Jewish sacrifice at Khirbet Qumrân, based on what classical authors and certain sectarian texts have reported, it would strongly suggest that the occupants were *not* Essenes. In this context, Magen and Peleg confirm that based on wide-ranging excavations conducted at Mount Gerizim, hundreds of thousands of bones of proven sacrificial animals were found. In all cases, the bones were burnt (not boiled) and encased with a thick layer of ash [42].

6.5. Military Engagement

Norman Golb is well known for his hypothesis that Khirbet Qumrân was primarily a strongly fortified Jewish outpost and that it was mostly occupied by military personnel. More importantly he advocated that the scroll material found in the nearby caves, was originally created and stored in a large centre like Jerusalem [44–51]. However, based on the available evidence, it is unlikely that Khirbet Qumrân was always intended to be a military stronghold—certainly not from the outset. It is far more likely, that this site originally boasted some long term commercial function. Within this primary context, this hamlet/trading post may well have served as a military observation post.

Regardless, whatever its original purpose, it may well have been occupied by a militant Jewish group in the period c. 66–68 CE. It should also be remembered that the militant Jews were not only fighting Roman oppressors but each other as well. Indeed, there was civil war in Judaea at this time. Villages and towns were being destroyed by both criminal Jewish elements as well as by the Romans.⁵⁸

Here, the archeological evidence reveals that certain walls were quickly fortified at Khirbet Qumrân—an action, that strongly suggests that previously, this site lacked adequate defenses. In addition, after this ad hoc, reinforcement, the occupants witnessed at least one military attack. This siege or sieges definitely occurred *before* 74 CE because Josephus informs his reader that—except for the Sicarii incident at Masada—all Jewish opposition had ceased by that time.⁵⁹ The date of this attack (or attacks) may be narrowed down because it has to be assumed, based on the coins found at the site, that no Jewish groups lived there *after* 68 CE. Of the 1411 coins found at the site, 18 non-Roman coins (dated 67–68 CE), were found just below the evidence of destruction. However, certain Roman coins, dated to 67–73 CE were found *above* the layer of destruction. Here, one must be persuaded by de Vaux who confirmed that this finding is good evidence for an attack in mid-68 CE, when a Jewish

54 b. Eruvin 4b; b. Yoma 31b.

55 Mishnah Mikvaot 1.

56 Mishnah Mikvaot 1.

57 *Prob.* 12.75; *Ant.* 18.18.

58 Cf. *War* 4.535–537, 545, 588.

59 *War* 7.163–215 and 252.

group was defeated and replaced by a Roman group [52].

It might also be assumed, that if Khirbet Qumrân had been occupied by kindly pacifists, the Romans would not have needed to attack the site—certainly not by means of a formal military engagement. Josephus clearly reports that all the destruction that occurred at this time in Judaea was as a consequence of overtly pugnacious Jews refusing to negotiate or compromise in the face of a force they had absolutely no hope of overcoming.⁶⁰

Thus, as is backed up by archaeology and Josephus, at the same time the Romans were taking military counter-measures against wide-spread Jewish rebellion (c. 66–70 CE), a group hostile to the Romans could easily have been repurposing the infrastructure at Khirbet Qumrân. During this relatively brief process, the kilns no longer served any dedicated function and the aqueduct system was altered. In addition to the fortification of certain walls, a defensive ditch was dug along the western wall of the main structure [53].

The remains of a number of weapons have been found at the site, many in relation to Period III. These include numerous arrow heads, javelin or spear points [54, 55].

6.6. The Caves of the Judean Desert

Radiocarbon dating techniques have provided largely variable dates for the corpus of the Qumrân cave scroll material. Here, dates ranging anywhere from the fourth-century BCE to the fourth-century CE have been recorded. Conservative wisdom largely accepts dates ranging from between c. 250 BCE to c. 70 CE [56, 57]. Based on similarities of writing style, paleographers have shown good evidence that *some* of the scrolls were written by the same scribes [58]. For example, Ada Yardeni, claims to have identified the same scribal hand in some 54 manuscripts (about 6% of the material recovered) [59]. However, as Aristotle warned: “one swallow does not a summer make, nor one fine day...”⁶¹ In addition, none of this data confirms where the scribes (who definitely wrote over a period of centuries) were once living and/or working. All this evidence suggests is that a small percentage of the scrolls may have come from a common source, *including* a sectarian library in a major centre like Jericho or Jerusalem.

Moreover, early dates for certain of the sectarian material clearly indicates the existence of a period *before* the assumed foundation of the Qumrân religious community. Here there is clear evidence for an evolution of a Jewish sect referred to variously (depending on the source and the period of its evolution) as Essene, *Yahad* or Sons of Light etc. [60-62]. There is also evidence for proto-Essene origins for documents like 11QT [63, 64].

Apart from the standard biblical material, caves 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 contained various quantities of obvious sectarian literature. Cave 2 contained apocryphal material that could equally apply to other Jewish sects. Caves 7, 8 and 9 are claimed to only be accessible by passing through the Khirbet

Qumrân site itself—an important consideration. However, compared to the other caves, these three did not yield very much material—certainly no sectarian literature. Cave 10 contained an ostrakon and cave 11—which is situated the furthest from Khirbet Qumrân—contained the famous “Temple Scroll” which according to Hartmut Stegemann is not mentioned in any sectarian material [65]. Lastly, there exists the enigmatic “Copper Scroll” from Cave 3, which most agree has its origins in Jerusalem [66-68].⁶²

Certainly, Khirbet Qumrân is not the only site for hastily deposited scroll material. There are many sites in the Judean desert to consider, including the Wadi Al-Murabba‘ât site some 18 km north of ‘En Gedi. This material seems to have belonged to fugitives who once fought for Bar Kokhba, during the Second Jewish Revolt (132–135 CE) [69]. Again, there are the Nahal Hever sites near ‘En Gedi [70, 71] as well as the Nahal Ze‘elim (Wadi Seiyal) location nearer Masada [72, 73]—all of which yielded a wealth of secular and scriptural literature from the Bar Kokhba period.

The fact that similar archaeological remains survived the military occupations by the Sicarii at Masada and numerous caves in the Judean desert following the Kitos War (115–117 CE) and the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–136 CE) supports both this traditional practice and inherent strategy of militant Jewish resistance.

7. The Import of Ancient Sources

Geza Vermes, one of the acknowledged experts in this field made a number of statements (1995) that have a direct bearing on this investigation. They also underpin the kinds of arguments employed by dedicated Qumrân-centric exponents:

Today, the Essene [Qumran-centric] theory is questioned by some, but usually for unsound reasons. They adopt a simplistic attitude in comparing two sets of evidence, namely the classical sources (Philo, Josephus and Pliny the Elder) and Qumran, and any disagreement or contradiction between them is hailed as final proof against the Essene thesis. Yet, if its intricacies are handled with sophistication, it is still the best hypothesis today, and I remain unrepentant in upholding it. [74]

The facts are, that only the scroll caches lend a modicum of *support* to the coveted, long-term existence of Essenes at Khirbet Qumrân. Much more evidence exists to refute this possibility. Even de Vaux gives the impression that it was the Zealots who were composing texts at this site [6].

Nevertheless, most seem happy to accept a Khirbet Qumrân origin for all the literature (both sectarian and religious). Assuming “Essenism” to be a useful collective term to identify members of an evolving Jewish sect that wrote (over time) all the literature found in the caves near Khirbet Qumrân is perfectly conceivable. However, assuming that a) this sect (whatever they called themselves) was living and working in full conformity to their *halakhot* in

60 Cf. *War* 1.pr.29; 2.264; 4.509–513, 588.

61 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a18.

62 There is still debate as regards whether the “Copper Scroll” was deposited before or after the other material.

a desolate desert without even access to a natural spring, b) was also *the* national headquarters of the entire movement in Judaea, c) was not based anywhere else in Judaea, and d) wrote all the scroll material found in the caves whilst living in the desert, is quite improbable. Indeed, even if “Essenes” had ever lived at this site, they would have left, together with their valuable belongings and scrolls, before or by c. 31 BCE.

In short, as uncomfortable as this might be for anyone, nothing is conclusive or absolute at this stage (2022). Most importantly, whilst focused on maintaining a Qumrân-centric narrative other findings are definitely being marginalised and overlooked. For example, even if one could prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Essenes lived and worked at Qumrân for any length of time, this would still not automatically make Qumrân the one and only example of such a community in the entire land of Judaea, let alone being hailed as the “mother” community [75]. This automatic bias makes it difficult to engage in any meaningful debate. Closer attention needs to be given to what classical sources are claiming—especially if they verify each other:

7.1. Philo of Alexandria: *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 12:75–87

If Philo and Josephus had been the only extant historical sources no-one would have expected to find any Jewish sect residing exclusively in the middle of a wilderness.⁶³ In this context, a distinction needs to be made between a group of like-minded individuals who (for whatever reason) try to eke out an existence far from civilization in a totally barren desert and say, a community of very observant and relatively sane, religious Jewish men who ensure the following minimum conditions necessary to enjoy an isolationist experience:

- 1) A readily accessible, natural, valid, water supply suitable for the practice of halakhic ritual purity and to irrigate crops for sustenance (here a spring or perennial river would be absolutely essential for halakhic reasons);
- 2) Agriculturally suitable soil;
- 3) Access to readily available building material, like stone; and
- 4) Reasonably close proximity to a major centre like a village, town or city.

Philo makes it very clear that the *Essaioi*, who numbered some 4,000, resided exclusively in villages, because they wanted to avoid the bigger cities filled with their associated vices.⁶⁴ Living in a smaller centre or a short distance away from non-Essenes would also allow the community to be free from direct association with people they considered to be irreligious as well as the many vices they wanted to avoid. Based on what Philo records, the tenets of *halakhah* and plain common sense, it is highly unlikely that a *large* group

of Essenes would have trekked out into the middle of a barren desert, far from civilization, with no access to fertile soil or a natural water source.

If Khirbet Qumrân was the site of some limited commercial enterprise, and/or a military, forward observation post (i.e. not a fully-fledged fortress) surveying the road to Hyrcania it would have attracted relatively large numbers of temporary visitors and traders from all walks of life [76, 77]. That fact alone would not have been very comforting to an exclusionist group who wanted to separate themselves from the defilement of persons whom they considered irreligious.

Philo tells his reader that the *Essaioi* did not “hoard silver or gold”⁶⁵ yet de Vaux found six silver coins, three of them positively dated to between 132–129 BCE which corresponds precisely with his Period 1b [78]. In addition, de Vaux discovered a hoard of 561 pieces of silver, stored in three pots and dated to between 126–128 BCE [79]. The hoard was most likely secreted away after Period 1b (i.e. after 31 BCE) but would have certainly been present during Period II. Regardless, in total, de Vaux unearthed 1231 silver and bronze coins at the Khirbet Qumrân site, to which Magen and Peleg added another 180 between 1993–2004 [80]. Considering the great passage of time, the presence of such a large amount of datable coinage, is far better explained, if Khirbet Qumrân witnessed some level of commercial activity right up to the first-century CE. If so, the possibility of habitation by a large group of Essenes must again be viewed with a great deal of circumspection. These sectarians were forbidden to engage in commercial transactions or trade.⁶⁶

7.2. Josephus Flavius: *Judaean War* 2.119–161; *Judaean Antiquities* 18.22

Josephus confirms Philo’s accounts of the Essenes and also states for the record, that the then extant 4,000 *Essenoi* could be found in many cities. Josephus claims that whilst engaged in their religious rituals these sectarians made use of “an apartment of their own” and a “dining-room”—structures which are normally associated with city-dwelling.⁶⁷ Indeed, Josephus spells out that *none of them* “differ from others of the *Essenoi* in their way of living, but do the most resemble those Dacae who are called Polistae [dwellers in cities]”.⁶⁸

Josephus informs his reader that even after the destruction of Jerusalem, both Jerusalemites and Romans were still recovering buried valuables in the ruins.⁶⁹ In addition, the Sicarii leader, Simon bar Giora, fortified many places in Judaea, Idumea and Galilee shortly before 69 CE. He also, enlarged many caves as well as making use of existing ones in the Araba valley (south of the Dead Sea). He employed these caves for the storage of treasures that he had accumulated on his raids. Members of his group also lived in

63 It is true that Josephus mentions his spiritual teacher (Banus) teaching him in the wilderness for three years. However, at no time does he clarify which sect Banus belonged to. The assumption is made, based on the context and Josephus’ description of his mentor, that he was an Essene hermit of some kind. It should be noted that, based on his reported activities, Banus still needed regular access to water (*Vit.* 2.11).

64 *Prob.* 12.75–76.

65 Cf. *Prob.* 12.76. This issue is fully supported by Josephus in *Judaean War*, cf. *War* 2.122.

66 *Prob.* 12.78; and *War* 2.127.

67 *War* 2.129; this more normal situation of living in town-dwellings is backed up by Philo, *Prob.* 12.85–86. Cf. *War* 2.119–161; and *Ant.* 18.11, 18–22.

68 *Ant.* 18.22.

69 *War* 7. 114–115.

caves at this time.⁷⁰ What is being described here, is a typical practice of Jewish resistance and survival. Indeed, this strategy was employed as far back as c. 360 BCE and would also be repeated later, during the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 CE) [81].

7.3. Pliny the Elder: *Historia Naturalis* 5.15.70–73

Pliny clearly states that a group of Essenes was living in a settlement directly overlooking the city of 'En Gedi, shortly after c. 70 CE.⁷¹ This is plausible for a number of reasons:

- 1) The Romans did not waste time attacking compliant Jews in this period; but an aggressive, militaristic group at sites such as Khirbet Qumrân, Machaerus⁷² and Masada would have been fair game;
- 2) Shortly before this passage, Pliny refers to Jerusalem (*in qua fuere Hierosolyma*)⁷³ in the *past tense*, clearly indicating that Jerusalem no longer remained. Both Jerusalem and 'En Gedi⁷⁴ are described as heaps of ash (*nunc alterum bustum*) at the time of writing. Thus, the text was clearly composed sometime after c. 70 CE;
- 3) Pliny's Essenes were living away from the western shores of the Dead Sea near the city of 'En Gedi. Despite many convoluted and misleading attempts to try and claim the contrary [82]⁷⁵ the Latin phrase: "*infra hos Engada oppidum fuit*" can only mean that the city of 'En Gedi was close by and, in terms of altitude, lay immediately below the settlement. It should also be understood that before the destruction of the city, this communal settlement may well have been based on seasonal activity and was not permanent, per se. These possibilities are supported by the archeological discoveries of Yizhar Hirschfeld [83, 84].

Because certain scholars are so caught up in the Qumrân-centric narrative, they do not seem to accept the possibility that the some 4,000 Essenes (and/or similar sects) once lived in or near a number of cities and towns throughout Judaea and possibly beyond. In short, even if it is ever substantiated by hard evidence, that the Essenes (or their ilk) ever lived at the Khirbet Qumrân site, it cannot possibly rule out similar and much larger communities at, inter alia, 'En Feshkah, 'En Gedi, Jericho or Jerusalem.

8. A Proposed Working Hypothesis

Based on the archaeological evidence and that which is unambiguously reported by Philo, Pliny, Josephus and the

Mishnah it is perfectly possible to propose the following scenario which has its genesis in the work of scholars such as Golb:

- 1) In around 66 CE a group of Sicarii and/or Zealots occupied the buildings of what, is known today, as the Khirbet Qumrân site. This scenario allows for both a forced takeover from more legitimate Jewish forces or a simple re-occupation of an old abandoned commercial station/hamlet, replete with an observation tower. The Sicarii or Zealots quickly fortified the site as best they could, employing whatever materials were available in the immediate area.
- 2) By or before 68 CE, with the threat of a final Roman offensive looming in Jerusalem, apart from the other fleeing city-dwellers, certain mandated sectarians, transferred their city-based library or libraries to the Khirbet Qumrân site and cave region. The Essenes undertook this mission under the protection of sympathetic militant Jewish forces. The arrival of both scriptural and sectarian texts did not necessarily occur at exactly the same time but might well have occurred over the course of several days or even weeks.
- 3) As the scrolls and perhaps other religious paraphernalia arrived, some of the material was randomly secreted into certain caves, even whilst journeying into the Qumrân region. Regardless, initially, a portion of the material arrived at the now recently reinforced Khirbet Qumrân site. This would have only been a temporary situation. It is quite feasible that the individuals mandated to hide the scrolls⁷⁶ helped themselves to some of the available clay pots. Certainly, these individuals did not waste precious time manufacturing special, unique jars.⁷⁷ In due course, this collection was more carefully transferred and hidden in more inaccessible caves (e.g. Caves 4a and b).
- 4) In the short term, certain artefacts (especially those made of precious metals) were eventually stolen/removed. A portion of the scroll material was also removed/disturbed. Eventually, over time, the location of the various deposits was forgotten and theft/removal of cave deposits became increasingly random and accidental.

9. Conclusions

Based on the available evidence it is only possible to be impartially certain of the following information:

A good portion of the Qumrân scroll material has sectarian connections. However, without more evidence, it cannot be absolutely confirmed that this remnant only came

⁷⁰ War 4.511–513.

⁷¹ HN 5.15.73.

⁷² Cf. War 7.163–215.

⁷³ HN 5.15.70.

⁷⁴ Pliny refers to 'En Gedi as "Engada".

⁷⁵ Ernest-Marie Laperrousaz's claim in 1962 that Pliny *habitually* uses the term *infra* to mean "downstream" is in fact erroneous. A survey of Pliny's writings shows that he is always referring to a location that is lower in altitude. Here, occasionally, he uses the flow of a river to indicate the direction to the lower region.

⁷⁶ Josephus intimates that no-one but a member of the Essene community would have been allowed to touch one of their sacred books (cf. War 2.142).

⁷⁷ Some scholars point out that because similar jars were employed to store scrolls, it proves that the manuscripts all came from the same library. Although this is possible, it is equally plausible that fleeing refugees simply "borrowed" the same pottery type from Qumrân before depositing their various scrolls into the 12 different caves.

from one library, let alone one owned by only one distinctive group. Certainly, there is not enough proof to then build on that understandable assumption and then claim that this material was both created and stored solely, at Khirbet Qumrân.

Based on the known historical context for the destruction of towns and cities throughout Judaea between 66 and 68 CE, it is just as likely that the scrolls discovered in 1947 were all that remains of a much larger collection of artefacts. These scrolls could have hailed from any number of libraries situated in major centres such as Jerusalem, Jericho and even 'En Gedi.

If key aspects of Golb's original hypothesis (outlined previously) are to be preserved, then the fleeing city-dwellers must have known, well in advance, where they were headed for—i.e. very specific cave territory in the vicinity of what is today called Khirbet Qumrân.

The archaeological evidence clearly shows that the settlement at Khirbet Qumrân had been rapidly fortified, which indicates a necessary and urgent re-purposing. Golb speculates that there was both a strong military presence and fortress at Khirbet Qumrân well before c. 68 CE. The archaeological evidence does not wholly support this conjecture. Indeed, the buildings had to be fortified as from 66 CE onward. However, given that the site does have a tower—a structure that would not have been that critical for a hypothetical peaceful religious community—it could well have served for certain years as an important forward observation post. In this regard, it would have once been partially occupied by, *inter alia*, military personnel as well as “civilians”. It is not unreasonable to postulate that in Hasmonean and Herodian times it had even been occupied by a small group of soldiers. However, the large remnant of coinage, the pottery kilns and certain cisterns, also indicates at least some long term commercial activity.

Given the fact that the Zealots and Sicarii had hijacked the political and military situation between 66 and 70 CE, and given the coins and nearby caches of scrolls it is quite plausible that the Khirbet Qumrân site was occupied by one of these two forces in this period. In addition, these occupants reinforced the site. It is plausible to consider that with their protection, they assisted in the process of allowing sectarians to conceal both important sacred artefacts as well as scrolls, previously located in a major religious centre like Jerusalem, Jericho or 'En Gedi. This specific deposit of important artefacts was organised well in advance of any direct Roman threat. The rebel Jewish force may well have provided temporary protection for the sectarians whilst they secreted their scrolls. Regardless, it was this militaristic force and not peaceful “monks”, that was evicted forcefully by the Romans. This most likely occurred around the time of the final destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 CE.

Based on what Josephus states concerning the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 CE and the archaeological evidence of military action at Khirbet Qumrân in the first-century CE it makes sense that there was an

engagement between two armed forces—again ruling out the presence of peaceful “monks”.

In order to make meaningful progress in the ongoing attempt to more accurately ratiocinate what happened at Khirbet Qumrân in antiquity, all emotion and personal belief needs to be removed from the equation. Only then will there be some chance of obtaining a more scientific and objective appraisal of the available data.

There is simply insufficient evidence to firmly place an Essene community at Khirbet Qumrân, let alone wishful claims of this being the “mother” community. That is not to say that on occasion, Essenes and indeed other religious Jews, did not try to disassociate themselves from mainstream society. Apart from the metaphoric and symbolic associations of numerous scriptural texts that speak along the lines of “going into the wilderness” in order to “prepare a way”⁷⁸ it is certain that a few might have done this in actuality. Here, both individuals and small groups most likely removed themselves a short distance from towns and villages in order to live a more spiritual and non-materialistic lifestyle. However, most importantly, they would have carefully ensured that they were close to natural water sources, both for essential halakhic reasons as well as for basic survival. One cannot grow crops, raise livestock and operate valid *Miqwa'ot* in the middle of an arid desert. One needs to be near a reliable oasis, permanent river or spring. Khirbet Qumrân had none of these things. It only allowed for its occupants to access water that had been sourced through means of human ingenuity and technology. Thus, as matters stand currently, the Qumrân-centric hypothesis remains unproven for the following reasons:

- 1) The lack of an overall order in the way the scrolls were hidden in the various caves, some located nearly two kilometres from the Khirbet Qumrân site. Many of the caves are inaccessible and would only be known to trusted individuals who had carefully scoured the area ahead of the majority of scroll deposits.
- 2) The caves in the Qumrân region are not unique. Similar scroll deposits have been found in other caves throughout the Judaeian deserts including very close to 'En Gedi which is given a direct and more plausible Essene association by Pliny.
- 3) Whatever its subsidiary functions may have been over the centuries (including a possible military observation post/commercial centre), pottery was obviously one of the main industries at Khirbet Qumrân in both Hellenistic times and well before. Both architectural and ceramic-related remains have been found that date as far back as the ninth century BCE [85].
- 4) If there ever was a peace-loving, religious community at Khirbet Qumrân they had left long before the site was re-purposed and employed to defend the occupants against a direct Roman threat. In this scenario, the hypothetical Essenes would have already removed their sacred and sectarian literature when

78 E.g. Isa 40:3, 43:9; and Jer 31:2.

they returned to major centres at some time by or before 31 BCE. In this regard, the dates of certain of the scroll material clearly postdates such an occurrence by many decades.

- 5) A reading of Philo, Pliny and Josephus completely disallows for Essenes to be living in a large community far away from cities and towns and halakhic water sources. Most importantly, Philo and Josephus (both of whom possessed detailed information, if not insider knowledge)⁷⁹ are referring to a scenario that describes the practices of the Essene sects *before* the destruction of Jerusalem. In the case of Josephus, apart from having originally trained as an Essene,⁸⁰ he was living in Rome after c. 70-71 CE and would not necessarily have had any intimate insight into what was happening in his homeland after that date. Pliny, by contrast, is clearly recording an event, relating to but one specific group of sectarians then living near the city of 'En Gedi, *after* c. 70 CE.

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⁷⁹ *Hypo.* 11.1–18; *Prob.* 12.75–87; *War* 2.119–161; *Ant.* 13.171–173; 15.371–372, 378; 18.11, 18–22.

⁸⁰ *Vit.* 10–12.

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