

A Summary Description of Social Groups in 1st century BC Judea

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The Essenes

Philo, Josephus, Pliny, Hippolytus and Dio Chrysostom wrote over 145 paragraphs about a group known as the Essenes. These writers agreed on many aspects of Essene practices and beliefs:

- 1 Farming ability
- 2 Love of Ancient wisdom
- 3 Copying scrolls
- 4 Purity Laws
- 5 Inward motivation as well as outward obedience

Rabbinic literature refers to a group called the *baytusim* or *beit sin* which some scholars argue is best understood as another name for the Essenes. The Essenes were one of a tripartite division of the society into Pharisees, Saducees and *baytusim*; a division that is a common feature of sources from that period. It has been questioned whether the Essenes should be identified with the *yahad* ('community' often mentioned in Qumran scrolls) although many of the practices of the *yahad* agree with what we know about the Essenes. According to our sources, the Essenes

were not limited to the Qumran community but existed in villages and towns throughout Israel. Pfann has suggested that the Essenes originated from a group of Hasidim that chose self-imposed exile in response to strong Hellenistic after Palestine was made a Seleucid province in 198 BC. The Damascus Document (CD) provides an internal narrative of the origins of the movement. It describes how God caused 'a root of planting' to spring up from Israel and Aaron 390 years after Judah was delivered into the hand of Babylon. This was likely a schematic period of time (a tally of the years in CD gives us 490 years or 7 weeks of 7) and gives us a ballpark date of late 3rd to early 2nd century BC. Based on the palaeographic evidence from the Cryptic A scrolls, the communities earliest documents must base to the first half of the 2nd century. This would agree with the ballpark date found in CD. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Qumran settlement was founded in the second half of the 2nd century BC, probably during the reign of John Hyracnus (135-104) It is generally agreed that the 'Teacher of Righteousness' was the main figure behind the founding of the Qumran sect. CD suggests that a group had already separated themselves from Israel before his arrival to form a covenant community. This group may properly be referred to as a sect because they did not intermarry with other groups or worship with them in the temple. This in contrast to bit Shammia and bit Hillel that did share life together despite theological differences. The Essenes opposed the priestly aristocratic Sadducees politically and the Pharisees halachly.

A clue to the origin of the Essenes is found in the Community Rule (1QS). Jerome Murphy O Connor believes that 4 stages of redaction can be discerned in 1QS. The first stage represents the formation of the community, in which twelve men representing the twelve tribes of Israel together with three priests "separated from the midst of the habitation of ungodly men in order to go into the desert." The coalition between priests and laity may have been initiated by the *More*

HaTsedeq (Teacher of Righteousness) who joined together with the exiled Zadokite priests to form the *Yahad*. This combination of Lay and Priestly segments of Qumran society is evident in Qumran sectarian documents. For example, the CD requires that a quorum must include at least one priest "learned in the Book of Meditation." The CD makes reference to a covenant that was formed with a group of 'repentants' which O'Connor argues were 'returnees' to the Land.

Essene *pesharim* refer to a "the wicked priest" who "betrayed the statues for the sake of wealth" (1QpHab 8:9-13) He is the leader of a community that was "not faithful to the covenant of God." (CD 2:3-4) Some scholars have argued that "the wicked priest" may have been a rival within the Essene community and that the Qumran sect represents a further schism. It seems more likely that this was a broader separation from the Hasmonean priesthood and a difference of opinion on matters of *halakah*.

The books of the Pentateuch and Job have been found written in the paleo-Hebrew script, a script considered sacred, thus affirming their primary place in the Essene canon. The Prophets are quoted regularly alongside the Pentateuch in Qumran literature (ie. Florigelim 4Q174). The CD cites the *Apocryphon of Levi* and the book of *Jubilees*. Although there is not sufficient evidence to make a case that these books were canonical, it is notable that a similar number of copies of *Jubilees* were found as Isaiah or Ezekiel. There is some debate over whether some of the apocryphal psalms contained in the *Psalms Scroll* were considered canonical. Saunders has argued that the literary structure of the scroll argues for their inclusion. Skehan disagrees and believes that the collection of Psalms were a liturgical collection. All of the books of Enoch have been found at Qumran except for the *Similitudes*, probably because its authorship was too late. The *Book of Giants* may also have been considered a part of the Enoch 'pentateuch'.

These pseudopigraphical books clearly had some kind of authoritative status among the Essene

community. Notably absent from the caves is 1 Maccabees, likely because of its praise of the Hasmoneans, who were identified by the Essenes with the corrupt priesthood.

The AB of Enoch and Jubilees provides detailed astronomical observations that support a 364 day solar calendar, perhaps explaining why they are prevalent at Qumran. According to Pfann, the Yahad's Calendar is found in *The Community Rule* which includes only those feasts commanded in the Torah. This contrasts *Jubilees* or the *Temple Scroll* which contain the pentecostal feasts and the Days of Remembrance. Talmon gives a word of caution, noting that none of the early sources mention that the Essenes adhered to a different calendar from other Jews.

Caves 1Q and 6Q contained scrolls that are best identified with the Yahad theologically and halachy. The scrolls in 1Q are mostly written on parchment while the scrolls in 6Q are mostly written on papyrus. The discovery of phylacteries in 1Q and a pocket scroll in 6Q and the liturgical nature of the scrolls in 1Q would indicate that 1Q belonged to the priestly Essene group whereas 6Q belonged to the lay Essene group.

The Sadducees

Information about the Sadducees must be derived from the writings of their enemies. Thus it is difficult to get a clear picture of what they believed. The generic label 'Sadducee' was applied to opponents of the Pharisaic interpretation of the Torah. A distinction should be made between the stringent halakah of the Sadducees, which seems to also have been adopted by sectarian groups, and the Sadducees who formed the social and political elite in Jerusalem.

Like the Pharisees, the Sadducees came into existence some time during the Hasmonean period. Their name is likely derived from Zadok, the high priest during the time of David and Solomon. The Zadokian priesthood was shattered by the ousting of Onias III by his brother Jason. Those Zadokites that chose to remain in Jerusalem and continue to serve in the temple likely led to the formation of the Sadducees. According to Josephus, Sadducees denied 1) the bodily 2) the resurrection, 3) determinism and 4) the Oral Law. Josephus states that the Sadducees only accepted the Torah although it is not clear to what extent they rejected the Prophets.

Josephus states that the Sadducees did not have the support of the masses but only, "the confidence of the wealthy." The Sadducees are consistently linked with the aristocracy although not necessarily with the priesthood. Josephus only states that Ananus was a Sadducee. Some scholars believe they were either the most Hellenized or the most nationalistic of the Jewish groups, or both.

It has been suggested that the *Temple Scroll* should be associated with the Sadducees. The *Temple Scroll* contains more stringent halakah which the Pharisees attributed to the Sadducees. Furthermore, it gives favourable treatment to the Zadokite priesthood and places emphasis on temple service. Several of the laws found in the *MMT* are unique to the Sadducees and also correspond with the *Temple Scroll*. However, the *Temple Scroll* supports a 364 day calendar and the pentacontad feasts while there is no record that the Sadducees followed a different calendar from the Pharisees. (??)

The Temple Scroll was found in 11Q, a cave that contained other scrolls from Jerusalem. The *MMT* was found in Cave 4Q, a cave that contains diverse material. It is not possible to identify any cave as representative of Sadducee material.

The Zealots

The Zealot tradition may be traced back to the Hasidim supporters of Judas Maccabeus who formed a company of “mighty warriors of Israel, every one who offered himself willingly for the law” (1 Macc 2:42)

The Zealots are mentioned in the New Testament (Simon the Zealot was a disciple of Jesus) but it was Josephus who provides us with the most information. According to Josephus, in the *Jewish War*, they were a small group of radicals responsible for dragging the nation into war and causing incalculable human suffering. They first appear in the *Jewish War* in the short lived rebellion of Judas the Galilean. Judas the Galilean called for non cooperation with the Romans after they turned Judea into a province and conducted a census in preparation for tax collection. According to Judas, the census implied ownership of the land by the Romans and compliance with the census was therefore idolatry. Josephus identifies the teaching of Judas and Zadok, a priest and Pharisee, as the '4th Philosophy' which was the same as the teachings of the Pharisees except for their more stringent interpretation of the 1st commandment, making resistance against Rome a religious duty. Menahem, grandson of Judas, would become a leader of the Sicarii.

Scholars have tried to get past the bias inherent in Josephus' account and have come to the conclusion that the 'zealots' were one of several revolutionary groups that received widespread support from all quarters. This widespread support was due to Roman abuses such as the attempt by Rome to extort tribute money from the temple and the transfer of the political power of Caesarea to her Hellenized Greek citizens. These abuses catalyzed in the seizure of the temple and the halt of the sacrifice on behalf of Caesar by a group of lower priests led by Eleazar, son of the High Priest Ananias. This act of rebellion against Rome sparked a civil war. Refugees,

bandits and local militia came to the support of the rebellious priests and coalesced into a group that became known as the Zealots.

Caves 11Q and 3Q likely contained scrolls brought from the libraries of Jerusalem. Pfann has suggested that caves in the northern cluster were occupied during the 1st revolt and it is possible that scrolls were brought from Jerusalem by the Zealot general Yehudah ben Yair. Josephus relates that the zealots made their last stand at Macherus, to which the road from Jerusalem lay in the vicinity of these caves. Neutron activation analysis results show that the clay used to make the jars found in these caves came from Jerusalem. Bleached white textiles with blue stripes found in 11Q are distinct from textiles found in 1Q and 4Q. The 1st century script reveals a high degree of skill, possibly indicating the scrolls were copied by the scribal schools in Jerusalem. The only languages used for the scrolls was Greek and Aramaic. The pottery found in the caves dates to the mid to late first century AD further bolstering the theory that these caves were occupied briefly during the Great Revolt. The commentaries, 11QMelchizedek and 3QIsaiah and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice seem to originate from Jerusalem rather than the Yahad. The discovery of the Copper Scroll in 3Q also supports the Zealot nature of these caves.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees sought a renewed Judaism through a more rigorous adherence to purity law, marriage laws and tithing. The name 'Pharisee' seems to be derived from the Hebrew and Aramaic root, "to separate or interpret." Their name may be attributed to their separation from society to fulfill the law more completely - a separation which was viewed in either a positive or a negative light depending on the observer. The New Testament also plays off of their name by

implying that the Pharisees had their own interpretation of the law. Much of our information about the origins of the Pharisees is gleaned from Josephus. Josephus recounts how the Pharisees and the Sadducees competed for influence during the reign of John Hyrcanus. The Sadducees gained the upper hand after some Pharisees questioned the birth of John and his claim to the priesthood. Peshar Nahum, a Qumran manuscript, mentions a group of individuals who were "seekers of smooth things" and opposed Alexander in favour of the Seleucid Demetrius. If this is a reference to the Pharisees, then they likely composed the majority of the 800 crucified by Alexander after Demetrius was defeated. After the death of Alexander Jannaeus, the Pharisees exercised greater influence over Queen Alexandra but seem to have withdrawn, (or were excluded) from political involvement during the struggle for power between Aristobolus and Hyrcanus. The Talmud gives us some information about the schools of Hillel and Shammai during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC although much of this material is heavily edited and redacted. Herod favoured the Pharisees and gave them tax exempt status. The New Testament describes the Pharisees as the main opponents of Jesus and negatively portrays the importance they placed on purity and food rules. Josephus describes the Pharisees as the leading 'sect' or 'school' in the 1st century AD of which he was a member.

The Pharisees were mainly a lay movement although Josephus tells us that some were priests as well. They accepted the Prophets together with the Torah and are known for their emphasis on oral tradition. They do not seem to have accepted many of the apocryphal or pseudopigraphal books except for *Ben Sira*, a book that supports a luni-solar calendar. *Ben Sira* is cited in later Rabbinic literature. The *Psalms of Solomon* are also thought to be Pharisaic.

Later Rabbinic literature preserves their opposition to the Sadducees on matter of Halakah. The involvement of the Pharisees in disputes over the calendar is found in a midrash on Psalm 28:5.

It states, "Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands, he shall destroy them and not beuild them up"... "the operation of His hands," these are the new moons, as is written, "And God made the two great luminaries" (Gen 1:16); it is also written, "He appointed the moon for seasons" (Ps 104:19). These are the heretics, who do not reckon either appointed days or periods; "He will destroy them and not build them up"; He will destroy them in this world and He will not build thm up in the world to come."Midr. Ps. 28:5 (Talmon, 168)

No Pharisaic material has been found in the caves, except for perhaps *Ben Sira*.