

# The Economic Basis of the Qumran Community

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*Richterswil (Kt. Zürich).*

*Oswald Eggenberger.*

## The Economic Basis of the Qumran Community.

In all the excitement over the discovery of the rich manuscript treasures from the Ain Fashkha region of the Dead Sea, followed by the connection of these literary remains with the site of Khirbet Qumran and the identification of this site as that of an Essene-like community, one important question has remained unanswered. How could such an established commun-

<sup>76</sup> Verheißung des Vaters, Okt./Nov. 1947, S. 1.

ity have maintained itself in so desolate an environment? How did these people subsist? How did they obtain food, clothing, writing material, cooking utensils, etc., which were necessary for their community life? The fact that their dress was simple, and their food rationed, would ease the problem of economic survival, but would not solve it.

The extent of scribal activity, the size of the cemetery, the water-works, and the refectory with its over eleven hundred dishes, all point in the direction of a large community, numbering perhaps several hundred members. "Today," writes Professor Muilenburg, "Khirbet Qumran is a lonely region, wakened only by the occasional cry of shepherds leading their flocks along the tortuous paths of the cliffs which tower to the west."<sup>1</sup> The land is barren and eroded, suggesting no answer to the question:—What was the economic basis for life in the Qumran community? It is clear that no large community could have subsisted at Qumran without some practical provisions being made to meet their continuing every day needs.

What do we know that will help us understand this mystery? In the first place, we know that *the location of this community was much more favorable than might at first be supposed*. It was not more than two miles north of an abundant source of fresh water which has never been known to fail. Indeed the Ain Fashkha oasis is second only to the famous springs of Ain Jidy among the fertile spots along the west shore of the Dead Sea. To the European traveler unused to an arid climate the rich green canes which seem almost to choke the springs do not appear very promising as a source of life for a large community like Qumran. But we shall see that this surface impression is deceiving. Furthermore, less than ten miles to the north of Qumran, over terrain which rises less than two hundred feet in elevation, lies Jericho, rich in food and supplies. Jerusalem itself was easily accessible by two of the best traveled routes up from the Jordan valley. It is only a seven or eight hour trip by horseback from Ain Fashkha to Jerusalem via Mar Saba. An Essene working in Bethlehem or Bethany could leave Friday morning and going by foot arrive at Qumran in time to bathe and make all preparations for the Sabbath observance well before sundown. Moreover, the Qumran site is a healthier and fresher situation than any spot in the plain below. Often when it is hot and still on all the lower ground there is a fresh breeze here among these ruins. Surrounded on all sides by steep declivities, but connected with the plateau to the west by a narrow neck of land, this site occupies a commanding position which overlooks every part of the Ain Fashkha oasis with all its approaches, and which, from a military point of view, must have been quite advantageous. This is by no means a Massada, but it is an ideal location for a semi-monastic community,—a community which, while it did not love the world or the things in the world, still had the problem of living in the world until that day when the world would pass away with all its lusts.

The second fact that we know about the community which will help

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<sup>1</sup> *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol. X, no. 2, January 1955, p. 28.

us understand its economic basis is that its *incoming members turned over all their wealth and property to the community*.<sup>2</sup> No doubt this practice provided a significant source of income for the community. But even if we were to suppose that this accumulated wealth would have been sufficient to meet all their economic needs, which is not likely, we would have to contend with the third fact about this community which has a bearing on our problem.

Unlike the Therapeutae who were apparently content to spend the day in contemplation, *the Essenes believed in manual labor*.<sup>3</sup> They worked long hours and would not shirk the most menial task. They were employed in various ways and delighted in their work. Some tilled the soil, some served as herdsmen, some engaged in agriculture, while others worked at handicrafts. The Essenes believed in mutual aid<sup>4</sup>, and no doubt they were able to cut their expenses considerably by division of labor and various forms of cooperation. But the presence of coins at the Qumran site, coupled with what we are told by Philo, indicates that the members of his community might also have gone out and worked for wages.<sup>5</sup>

All income, whether from the sale of property contributed by newly initiated members, or the sale of whatever might have been produced within the community, or the sale of labor outside the community, was turned over directly to the community treasurer, who was charged with the responsibility of providing food and clothing and other necessities for the members.<sup>6</sup>

We have seen that the Qumran community was favorably located with reference to a perennial source of fresh water, and also for trade. We have also noted that as a community they were prepared to take measures to meet their every day needs. They had some money which came into the community as new members were admitted. Furthermore, they were a community whose members were ready and willing to work at anything.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Manual of Discipline* i. 9, 13; v. 2; vi. 19; 22. Jos. *B.J.* 2.8.3 (122). Philo, *Hypothetica*, 11.4.

<sup>3</sup> *Manual* ix. 22. *B.J.* 2.8.5 (129-130). *Ant.* 18.1.5 (19). Philo, *Q.O.P.L.*, xii (76). *Hypothetica* 11, 6-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Q.O.P.L.* xii (79). *B.J.* 2.8.4 (127). *Ant.* 18.1.5 (21). Cf. *Zadokite Work* 14: 12-16.

<sup>5</sup> *Q.O.P.L.* xii. (86); *Hypothetica* 11.10. Cf. *Manual* v. 14; and ix. 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Ant.* 18.1.5 (22). *Hypothetica* 11: 10. Cf. *Manual* vi. 19; *Zadokite Work* 14: 12-16.

<sup>7</sup> The one possible exception was war industry. Cf. *Q.O.P.L.* xii (78) where Philo makes them out to be absolute pacifists. But *vid.* Josephus who tells us the Essenes carried weapons for defense *B.J.* 2.8.4 (125), and that they produced a general for the Jewish armies in the war against the Romans. *B.J.* 2.20.4 (567); 3.2.1 (11-12); 3.2.2 (18-21). Hippolytus classifies the Zealots and Sicarii among the Essenes (9.4.26 manuscript p. 464). We have further to contend with *War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness*. It is not at all certain that the Qumran community was pacifist.

The next question we need to ask is this: What kind of work was available to members of the Qumran community? We will treat this question under three headings; first, work connected with products of the Dead Sea; second, work connected with the Ain Fashkha oasis; and third, work which could have gone on within the community buildings.

### 1. The Dead Sea.

Pausanias in the second century of the Christian era has referred to this lake as the Dead Sea. But it may be doubted whether the Essenes had ever heard this name. To them this beautiful body of water was far from dead. True, they could not drink its water, but neither could their brothers in Joppa drink the waters of their life-giving Mediterranean Sea. They could not draw fish from its waters as could the disciples of Jesus from the waters of the Sea of Galilee, but they could draw from their beloved lake valuable products which were in demand throughout Palestine, and perhaps as far away as Syria and Egypt.

Their scriptures sometimes referred to this lake as the Salt Sea.<sup>8</sup> And until this day the salt pans at the north west end of the sea serve as an important source of salt for Palestine. These pans are only a few miles from Qumran.

But far more important than salt was the bitumen which this lake produced. Indeed, the lake was famous throughout the ancient world for this valuable substance known to the Greeks as *asphaltos*. For this reason they called this body of water Lake Asphaltitis.<sup>9</sup> Josephus tells us that great black clods of bitumen were cast up in many parts of the lake. Whenever this happened the laborers that belonged to the lake, οἱ τῆς λίμνης ἐργάται went out in ships and brought the bitumen ashore.<sup>10</sup> Diodorus and Strabo, both of whom are probably dependent upon Posidonius, give essentially the same account.<sup>11</sup> Thus we have very good testimony that precisely in the period with which we are concerned, 100 B.C. to 100 A.D., the asphalt industry along the shores of the Dead Sea was flourishing. Josephus tells us that this product was used for caulking ships, and for medicinal purposes.<sup>12</sup> Pliny testifies to its widespread medicinal use. He tells us that it is astringent, dispersive, contractive, and agglutinating. It was used in connection with the cure of gout, toothache, dysentery, diarrhoea, and quartan fevers. It was useful in cases of epilepsy, and certain female illnesses. He also mentions certain practical uses to which bitumen was put.<sup>13</sup> Both Strabo and Diodorus say that bitumen was used by the embalmers in Egypt.<sup>14</sup> But there is some question about this since there is no mention

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 14: 3; Num. 34: 12; Deut. 3: 17; Josh. 3: 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Diodorus of Sicily* 2.48; 19.98. Josephus, *B.J.*, 4.8.4 (476-481). Pliny, *Natural History*, 5.15.71.

<sup>10</sup> *B.J.* 4.8.4 (478-490).

<sup>11</sup> Diodorus 19.99, Strabo, *Geography*, 16.2.42.

<sup>12</sup> *B.J.* 4.8.4 (481).

<sup>13</sup> *Natural History* 35.51. 180-182.

<sup>14</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, 18.2.45. Diodorus, *ibid.*

of the use of bitumen in the descriptions of Egyptian embalming given by the ancient writers, nor has chemical analysis of mummies by modern scientists found any traces of bitumen. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the Dead Sea did provide the inhabitants of its shores with an important source of income in those days when the Qumran community was flourishing. Tacitus, who is acquainted with what others before him have written about the asphalt industry at the Dead Sea, adds this interesting bit of information gathered from eye-witnesses,—the floating masses of bitumen are driven to the shore by winds or drawn there by hand.<sup>15</sup> In whatever manner it may have been recovered we can be sure that those who labored in the intense heat would have needed that fortitude which Philo testifies the Essenes possessed.<sup>16</sup> But more important than that, such laborers would have needed fresh water in which to bathe. (This includes those men engaged in recovering salt from the sea.) For all who come into contact with the waters of the Dead Sea find their bodies covered with a greasy deposit of salt which is very irritating to the skin, especially where there is the slightest scratch. The springs of Ain Fashkha would have provided an abundant supply of fresh water for this purpose. And if for any reason the Essenes did not choose to bathe in those springs, their large cisterns would have supplied a limited amount of fresh water for such purposes. It is worth mentioning, before we turn to a consideration of the oasis itself, that just a little farther south, at Ras Fashkha, Tristram reported finding a large vein of bituminous stone. From this stone many of the ornaments sold to pilgrims at Jerusalem are manufactured.<sup>17</sup> And just before reaching Wady Derejeh, which is midway between Ain Fashkha and Ain Jidy, he found the shore lined with a mass of bitumen.<sup>18</sup> In modern times there do not seem to be many instances of large masses of bitumen coming up out of the Dead Sea except after earthquakes. Robinson gives what seem to be reliable reports of such a phenomenon after the earthquakes of 1834 and 1837.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. The Ain Fashkha Oasis.

In the description given above of the location of Khirbet Qumran, and especially in the following remarks concerning the Ain Fashkha oasis, I am very much in debt to the most valuable Dead Sea Observation reports of E. W. G. Masterman.<sup>20</sup> For a period of thirteen years, 1900-1913, Dr. Masterman and his assistants made regular trips to the Dead Sea to observe its

<sup>15</sup> *Histories* 5.6.      <sup>16</sup> *Hypothetica* 11.6.

<sup>17</sup> *The Land of Israel*, a Journal of Travels in Palestine, 1865, p. 254.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* pp. 277-8.

<sup>19</sup> *Biblical Researches in Palestine*, a Journal of Travels in the Year 1838, 1841, vol. II, pp. 229-230. Carl Ritter in vol. III, chapter v., discussion 8, of his *Comparative Geography of Palestine*, gives an informative treatment of the whole question of bitumen in the Dead Sea, with some interesting references to medieval authors.

<sup>20</sup> These reports have been published in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statements* covering the years 1901-1917.



exact level. There was at that time some evidence that the Dead Sea was rising, and the Palestine Exploration Fund commissioned Dr. Masterman to make a scientific study of the question. Fortunately for those of us interested in the Qumran community he chose Ain Fashkha as the site for his observations. And why not? From Jerusalem Ain Fashkha was the nearest point of contact he had with the Dead Sea, and there he could always find fresh water. (This is a matter of extreme importance to any traveler on foot or horseback who sets out to cross the Judean wilderness.) In his reports Masterman went far beyond the call of duty. He recorded not only pertinent meteorological data, but year after year set down in writing exactly what he saw going on at the Ain Fashkha oasis. The information he gives us is invaluable for our purposes. He records the condition of the springs, giving their temperature. He tells about the animal life at the oasis, about the bird life, and about the fish in the pools. He tells about the vegetation, and the activities of the Bedawin who frequented the oasis. This went on year after year, for thirteen years. Fortunately these observations were made before the advent of motor travel in Palestine, and before the radical transformations which are now under way in that part of the world. Masterman's reports put us in close touch with a vital part of the environment of the Qumran community, a part of the environment which has probably changed far less during the past two thousand years than the site at which our archeologists are digging.

Having made twelve separate visits to Ain Fashkha over an eighteen month period, Masterman sat down to make his first and most important report on the oasis itself. From this report I extract the following eye witness account:

Turning our attention now to the land, it will be most convenient to describe the oasis as it is viewed from the road traversing it from north to south... The springs and the surrounding marshes are marked out by the great clumps of reeds growing from them. In the northernmost group are two springs... These rise in the midst of a thick marsh overgrown with reeds... Between this first clump and the next the reeds become a thin fringe skirting the lagoon, the ground between them being stony and dry... The great mass of the watered area to the east of the road consists of a reedy marsh, recently partially cleared where the ground is solid, in which rises Ain Ghuzal, and an open area, in which rises the most important spring of the whole group, Ain Mabneyeh. This spring rises in a small pool about four feet across and three feet deep, whence the water runs as a fresh, limpid stream along the north edge of the cleared area... The "cleared area" was once largely overgrown with reeds, but these have been destroyed by the Bedawin. From time to time other places, where the ground is moderately solid, are cleared by burning the reeds, *the young sprouting shoots that spring up offering excellent fodder for the cattle*. A considerable section has been so treated since I first visited Ain el-Feshkhah. The water of Ain Mabneyeh is slightly tepid, and brackish, but not disagreeable to drink... *The Ain itself offers a delightful bath*... Between this Ain and the next there is about a quarter of a mile of a slightly elevated, exceedingly rough ground—the mouth of a rift in the mountains, known as Wady Semak. *In this Wady is a cave, partially artificial I think, in which potash has been made from time to time by burning plants growing in the district. The floor is thick with ashes and the walls quite black*...

The spring we now approach is that usually described as Ain el-Feshkhah... It is a little difficult to know to what one should apply this name, because there are so many springs arising at this spot. They all empty themselves into a pool about 60 feet across, surrounded two thirds of its circumference by tall reeds. First, there is a considerable spring rising at an open spot (*trampled hard by goats and cattle*) to the west and some feet above the pool. Secondly, at the south east corner of the pool a stream about a yard across flows with considerable force from among the reeds. Thirdly, there are several springs in the pool itself... The salt water of the pool is full of currents of warm, fresh water from the springs. Near the western end *the water is only slightly salt, and there are many fish*. The pool is considerably larger after the rains—rising and falling with the Dead Sea with which it is in direct connection. I found a difference of 2 feet and 4 inches in the depth during the year as measured on the rock in the center.

From this pool the reeds extend in a thinner and thinner line... for about a mile towards Ras el-Feshkhah. They are kept alive by numerous small springs which burst forth just at the waters edge. Some indeed can be seen rising under the sea itself. One of the most considerable of these submarine springs is close to our observation place. Under the observation-rock itself there rises a spring known as the spring of the gazelles... *It is quite drinkable water and perennial in supply*. Even beyond the fringe of reeds there are many small springs, so that taking all together the amount of fresh water running here into the Dead Sea must be very considerable.

The district around Ain el-Feshkhah is deserted for the greater part of the year. I have ridden from Jericho to the Ain and back again without encountering a single person or any sign of human presence... Early in the year, in January and February, Bedawin descend into this part of the plain, and flocks of goats and sheep and also camels may be seen on all hands. The Bedawin at this time inhabit caves in the hills around. *The Ain el-Feshkhah oasis itself has been tenanted for some eight months now by two men... who are in charge of a large herd of cattle*, belonging to the Sultan, *which thrive in the reeds. The men collect and dry rushes, which are sold for basket work*. As regards animal life, one of the men told me there are wild boar in the marshes, which is probable. *There are storks, kingfishers, hawks and many small birds. Jackals, conies, and gazelle are found on the hills around, and the ibex has been seen in the neighborhood. The fish I have seen caught in the pool were Chromis niloticus*: there are also varieties of Cyprinodontidae.<sup>21</sup>

The observations recorded on the trips which were made biannually to Ain Fashkha during the next ten years only serve to substantiate the main points covered in this report. At the close of 1903 Masterman made another rather lengthy report from which we may profitably abstract the following:

In March 1902, a *very large flock of sheep* belonging to the Ta'amereh Bedouin *was being washed in the Ain Feshkhah pool* when I was there.

The Sultan's herd of cattle from Jericho, which were at the Ain Feshkhah oasis during the year 1902 are not there this year. Some people from Abu Dis come at times to cut the rushes and dry them for mats and baskets; *I have seen long lines of these grasses drying*, but have only once come across the people themselves.

The most interesting workers in this region are the salt smugglers, whom I have several times encountered... Salt is a government monopoly... *The salt is brought up by hand from the bottom of the shallow pools along the north shore, the Bedouin having to stand in the water and plunge head and arms into the saturated brine to seize the crystallised masses from the*

<sup>21</sup> P.E.F.Q.S. 1902, pp. 164-166. All italics mine.



*bottom.* They were now removing the results of all this labour to their encampment with a view to running it into Jerusalem, and elsewhere, in small quantities at night...

A word may be added in conclusion with regard to the animal and vegetable life of this corner of the Dead Sea... Sand and rock partridges were found abundantly on every visit, and Tristram's grackle, grouse, quail, large owls, storks, flamingoes, hawks, wild duck, rock and wood pigeons, and many smaller birds have been noticed on various occasions. *Indeed, this corner of the Dead Sea shore teems with bird life...*

The reeds and most of the succulent shrubs of the oasis are in most vigorous growth in midsummer...

Visit made September 11, 1903.

...reeds brilliantly green; oasis from distance looks most refreshing and beautiful. Almost all the reeds south of the Pool for a mile towards the Ras—practically up to the Observation Rock—burnt down by the men in charge of the cattle...

Sultan's cattle again at the Ain in great numbers. We encountered three Abu Dis men in charge of them; *they were collecting reeds for basket work. One of these men had been shooting coney—a delicacy much appreciated...* men denied the report of there being any wild boars at the Ain, but they confirm what I have stated, that *the rocks towards the Ras swarm with coney.*

Visit made October 17, 1903.

Ain reached at 8 a.m.... Very hot, close, and still... On the way felt occasional puffs of wind from west on passing mouths of Wadies... Atmosphere brilliantly clear... Reeds in active growth. *The patches which last time had been cleared by fire are now covered over with young green sprouts over a foot high...*<sup>22</sup>

These reports have been quoted at some length in order to correct the widespread impression among scholars interested in the Qumran community that the Ain Fashkha oasis is not very promising as a source of economic support. It is clear from these scientific observations of Masterman that this oasis must have played a very important role in the economy of the Qumran community. We have no reason to doubt that it offered to the members of this community the opportunity for at least the following types of productive labor: (1) Herding of cattle and goats which grazed on the "young green sprouts" which sprang up after the ground was cleared by the burning of the reeds. (2) Fishing—on a small scale no doubt. (3) Hunting and trapping wild life—especially birds. (4) Washing the communities' flocks of sheep in the Ain Fashkha pool. (5) Cutting and drying reeds—to be used in weaving mats and making baskets. (6) Burning plants, from the ashes of which potash was made.

From the cattle and goats would have come fresh milk, cheese, fresh meat, and leather goods—including manuscript materials for the scriptorium. From fishing would have come food, from hunting and trapping would have come food, and possibly some useful skins. From the dry reeds would have come mats, baskets and other useful things. The potash may have been useful as a cleansing agent, or in the production of a soap used in

<sup>22</sup> *P.E.F.Q.S.* 1904, pp. 91-95. All italics mine.

washing the white garments worn by the members of the community. No doubt some agriculture could have been undertaken on a limited scale. But most of that probably took place on the now badly eroded slopes leading up to and surrounding the Qumran site.

### 3. The Qumran Community.

Having examined the economic potentialities of the Dead Sea and the Ain Fashkha oasis, we are now in a position to turn to the community itself to see what kind of productive labor could have been carried out there.

In one of the shops which our archeologists have uncovered some members could have been employed in the weaving of mats, making of baskets, and other useful things. There may have been a market for such articles in Jerusalem and other places where reeds were less plentiful than at Ain Fashkha.

In another shop one or two men might have been employed in the manufacture of useful objects out of the asphalt stone which could have been mined at Ras Fashkha.

Philo indicated that the Essenes had a special concern for any of their members who fell ill, and made provision for their being nursed back to health.<sup>23</sup> We learn from Josephus that the Essenes made a special study of the treatment of diseases and even carried on investigations into the making of medicines.<sup>24</sup> When we remember the wonderful medicinal properties with which bitumen was believed to have been endowed in antiquity<sup>25</sup>, we should be quite prepared to think that somewhere in the ruins of Qumran is a room which was used as a pharmacy, in which were produced medicines that might have been used all over Palestine—first of all in the other Essene communities, and then possibly to some extent outside these communities.

Both Philo and Josephus concur in ascribing to the Essenes a concern for tilling the soil. We may be confident that men who were not afraid of hard work would be able to produce considerable amounts of vegetables and fruits in places which now are absolutely barren. All the waste water from the wash rooms of the community would be used for irrigating purposes.<sup>26</sup> The actual extent of vegetation at Qumran would, of course, be limited by the amount of water available for this purpose. But we ought not to minimize what could have been done by the careful and conservative use of the water stored up in the community cisterns. Pliny, upon whom

<sup>23</sup> *Hypothetica* 11.13.

<sup>24</sup> *B.J.* 2.8.6 (136).

<sup>25</sup> Josephus explicitly tells us that the bitumen from the Dead Sea was mixed in a great many medicines—εἰς πολλὰ γοῦν τῶν φαρμάκων παραμίσγεται 4.6.4 (481).

<sup>26</sup> My colleague Dr. Howard Kee tells me that the gardener at the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem produces delicious vegetables with wash water, which is poured around the plants soap and all.

we are largely dependent for locating the Essenes at Qumran, specifically mentions their dwelling among palm trees.<sup>27</sup>

Closely connected with the fruit trees of Qumran and the flowers which bloom in that region in the spring of the year would be the superintending of swarms of bees for which the Essenes were noted.<sup>28</sup>

Thus we see that many of the products needed by the community in its daily living could actually have been produced by the community itself. The kitchens at Qumran could have received as home grown products fresh vegetables and fruits, milk products and fresh meat, fish and wild game, honey for sweetening and salt for seasoning. With the money realizable from the sale of products produced in the shops of the community, and with the wages turned in by members working along the shores of the lake, needed products not produced by the community could have been purchased in Jericho, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.

It is clear, therefore, that there was a solid basis for the economic life of the Qumran community. But how large a community could this economic substructure support? Could it have supported a community of several hundred? This is difficult to say. There are so many variable factors. We should be prepared to think, however, that the number of members who regularly lived at Qumran, year in and year out, was somewhat smaller than the number which might have lived there at particular times and seasons. Even in modern times the waters of the Dead Sea have been thought to possess healthful properties. And when we consider the warm baths available in the springs, we are led to say that Qumran would have made a wonderful winter health resort for the aged Essenes who were given such preferential treatment by their younger brothers.<sup>29</sup> Not all who are buried in the cemetery at Qumran need necessarily have lived there regularly. Nor did the large refectory of the community always need to be filled to capacity. It would have been well if its spacious dimensions and extensive equipment could have provided for the accommodation of a considerable number of guests from other Essene communities on certain special occasions. Perhaps there were no more than a few hundred *regular* members at Qumran.

While we are dealing with the special vocations which the Qumran community might have fulfilled within the collective life of the larger Essene community which spread throughout Palestine, let us consider that activity of the community which until now has dominated the attention of scholars to the exclusion of all others, namely its scribal activity.

#### 4. Scribal Activity at Qumran.

The scriptorium at Qumran, with its plaster top writing table over fourteen feet long, corresponds in size with the magnitude of the manuscript finds in the surrounding caves. But need we think that so large a scripto-

<sup>27</sup> *Natural History* 5.15.73.

<sup>28</sup> Philo, *Hypothetica*, 11.8.

<sup>29</sup> Philo, *Hypothetica*, 11.13.

rium was required to meet the needs of this one community? That there were times when the scribes at Qumran copied manuscripts to be used in other Essene communities becomes highly probable when we consider the special advantage this particular Essene community had over brother communities in such places, let us say, as Bethlehem or Nazareth.

We know that in both the Seleucid and Roman periods, when the conflict between the Hellenists and those zealous for the Torah became most intense, the Seleucids and Romans desecrated and destroyed Torah scrolls.<sup>30</sup> The Essenes, zealous as they were for the Torah, were not excluded from the persecuting activity of the Romans. This is clear from what Josephus tells us in his account of the war of the Jews against the Romans, where he relates that the Essenes were tortured by the Romans in order to get them to renounce the Torah.<sup>31</sup> During these periods of persecution when Torah scrolls were being destroyed, it would have been dangerous to be caught in the act of making new scrolls. And yet it would have been precisely in such times that the demand for new scrolls would have been greatest. You do not put out a fire by fanning it. And this is precisely the effect produced by such barbarous acts as "Bible burning". Where could new scrolls be produced? Where else but in places of seclusion, far removed from those evil men who wished to destroy them. Qumran would have provided just the kind of security demanded by such a situation. Of course, it would have been necessary to have some convenient nearby storage space for the newly copied scrolls. It would not do to have them lying around the scriptorium or stored anywhere in the buildings where the Roman authorities might find them if and when they paid a surprise visit to inspect this possible source of seditious activity. Cave Four would have provided exactly the kind of quick, convenient, and secret storage space needed.

It may be that the thousands of manuscript fragments which have been found there do not all belong to a particular group of manuscripts hidden there at some particular moment of crisis. Some of these fragments may have come from a multitude of manuscripts which were carried in and out of the cave over an extended period of time while it was being used as a storage place for exemplars, and new Torah scrolls—as well as other sacred writings—in and following a period of intense persecution.

These suggestions may be of some use to those charged with the heavy responsibility of trying to fit together all these thousands of fragments. They might also cast some light on the puzzling fact that no manuscript fragments have been found in the ruins of Qumran.

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<sup>30</sup> *I Macc.* 1: 56-57. Cf. *I Macc.* 3: 48 which may refer to the practice of defacing the Torah scrolls by the heathen. The manuscript evidence is not uniform. See the discussions of question by Fairweather and Black, *The First Book of the Maccabees*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, Cambridge, 1936, and Abel, *Les Livres des Maccabées*, second ed. Paris, 1949. For the Roman period see *B.J.* 2.12.2 (229) and parallel passage in *Ant.* 20.5.4 (115). <sup>31</sup> *B.J.* 2.8.10 (152).

### 5. The Abandonment of Qumran.

The archeological evidence seems to point to a destruction of the Qumran buildings during the war of 66-70 A.D.<sup>32</sup> But it is difficult to believe that the Essenes did not occupy the Qumran site after the war. Both Josephus and Pliny write about the Essenes after the war, and both refer to them as if they were still flourishing. Indeed, Pliny (writing some time before 77) speaks of the thriving condition of the Essene community on the west side of the Dead Sea, presumably at Qumran, and in the very next sentence goes on to speak of the town of Engedi, just down the coast from Qumran, as a heap of ashes.<sup>33</sup> Qumran could have been destroyed about the same time as Engedi. But if so, from what Pliny tells us it would appear that Qumran was reinhabited by the Essenes within a few years. For at the time he writes (less than ten years after the war), he seems to be under the very clear impression that the Essenes are still going strong among their palm trees on the west side of the Dead Sea, not too many miles from the ruins of Engedi. One may question the reliability of Pliny's account. But if so, then on what grounds? Is there really any sound basis upon which to rest such scepticism?

The final abandonment of Qumran by the Essenes could have been occasioned by some later catastrophe—and it need not have been at the hands of the Romans.

We have seen that the Qumran community would have been very much dependent upon the Ain Fashkha oasis. Any major change at the oasis would have occasioned serious repercussions at Qumran. For example, if the level of the Dead Sea rose so high as to submerge the oasis, this might have been cause enough for the Essenes to order a temporary abandonment of Qumran. There is some indication that the Dead Sea has within the historical period actually reached such a level.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> R. de Vaux, *Fouilles au Khirbet Qumran*, Revue Biblique, April, 1954, pp. 206-236.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> "These raised beaches, produced not by land rising but by the sea-level falling, are worthy of attention, and are, I think, *clear evidence of changes of level in the Dead Sea within no very distant period*. During the last 50 years the level must have been raised a good deal over 20 feet, and it is highly probable that if such a change can occur during so short a time, *these beaches may mark old sea-levels within historic times* . . .

When the sea was up to the first beach almost the whole of the present oasis of Ain Fashkhah must have been below the sea, but in the lower ground between the beach and the cliffs there may have been a smaller oasis. *At the level of the second beach there could have been no oasis at all at the present situation of Ain Fashkhah.*" (E. W. G. Masterman, *Dead Sea Observations*, P.E.F.Q.S., 1904, pp. 166-167.) It would be interesting in this regard to revisit Masterman's Observation Rock at Ain Fashkha to see what the present level of the sea is compared to what it was 50 years ago. It may be that the sea has been continuing its encroachment on the oasis and that

Or if during a period of prolonged drought following the war, at a time when little or no military protection was being afforded the Jews in this area, with Arab groups pressing in from the desert areas east of the Jordan, the Ain Fashkha oasis became a prize of war between rival Arab tribes, then the Essenes might very well have been driven off. For whoever commanded the site of Qumran dominated the oasis below.

From a study of the economic basis of this community one fact becomes clear. The Romans need not be made a scapegoat. There are other possible explanations for the final abandonment of Qumran by the Essenes to be considered, and until we have more evidence one way or the other we ought to suspend our judgment in this matter.

#### 6. Khirbet Qumran and Khirbet Abu Tabak.

One of the most striking features of the picture we have of the Qumran community is the communal meal.<sup>35</sup> It now appears that the two columns which were originally regarded as the lost beginning of the Manual, may actually constitute an independent document, which gives an ideal picture of the eschatological Israel as a whole. This document, called *serek ha'eda*, includes a reference to a communal meal which is analogous to the communal meal as depicted in the Manual. The expressions are very similar.<sup>36</sup> It would appear, therefore, that the communal meal of the Essenes was not only a sacred meal, but that it had eschatological references.

After the table has been set, when the meal is about to begin, the priest stretches out his hand and invokes a blessing upon the bread and wine. When one considers the character of this meal, it is not difficult to imagine that the Essenes would have been concerned about the purity of the ceremonial wine used. It is quite possible, therefore, that they not only supervised the production of this wine, but also cultivated their own vineyards.

But where would these vineyards have been located? According to Masterman there are signs of what may have been a former vineyard a few miles up the Wady Qumran near some ruins which he calls Khirbet Abu Tabak. It is highly significant that Masterman further reports that there are traces of a road which once ran from Khirbet Abu Tabak down the Wady Qumran to Khirbet Qumran.

This road, however, is not the only connecting link between Khirbet Qumran and Khirbet Abu Tabak. Masterman reports that there is at Khirbet Abu Tabak "a small cemetery evidently of antiquity, the appearance of the graves being very similar to those at *Khurbet Kumran* (sic)." At the time Masterman made this report, in 1903, he was already well aware of the unique character of the cemetery at Qumran. In his report on Khirbet

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this explains in part the report of recent observers that the Ain Fashkha oasis is not much of an oasis. All italics in the above quotation from Masterman is mine. <sup>35</sup> *Manual* vi. 4-6.

<sup>36</sup> *serek ha'eda* 2. 18 ff. Cf. K. G. Kuhn, "Die beiden Messias Aarons und Israels", *New Testament Studies*, vol. I, no. 3, p. 169.



Qumran, made in 1902, he had written: "Here are upwards of a thousand well-arranged graves, each one covered by carefully-ordered stones. They are much more carefully made than ordinary Bedawin graves; the orientation is not that of Moslems..." If the cemetery at Khirbet Abu Tabak has the same kind of graves as have been found in the cemetery at Khirbet Qumran, then it would seem highly probable that Khirbet Abu Tabak is the site of another Essene-like community, closely related to the community at Qumran. Masterman's report suggests that they might be the same. Only a careful examination of the arrangement and contents of some of the graves will settle the question.

In describing the descent from Khirbet Abu Tabak down the Wady Qumran Masterman writes: "...there are evidences that at one time much labour has been expended on making a mountain road suitable for horses and mules." This suggests that there might have been important economic ties between these two communities. Therefore, until Khirbet Abu Tabak has been carefully explored and we have more information than is now available, there will be important aspects of the economic basis of the Qumran community which must remain obscure.<sup>37</sup>

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## Rezensionen.

**Cornelis van Leeuwen, *Le développement du sens social en Israël*, Assen (Holland), Verlag van Gorcum, 247 S.**

Es handelt sich hier um eine genaue, bis in alle Details gehende Untersuchung, die der Pfarrer der Hervormde Kerk in Maarsbergen im Dezember

<sup>37</sup> All the above information about Khirbet Abu Tabak, which Masterman assumes to be identified with the Kurm Abu Tubk of the P. E. F. Memoirs, vol. iii, p. 213, is taken from a report by Masterman found in the *P.E.F.Q.S.*, 1903, pp. 264-267. This report also contains a valuable description of the rock-cut aqueduct in the Wady Qumran. It is worth mentioning that Masterman mentions a cave at Khirbet Abu Tabak. His description of this cave reminds one very definitely of Cave Four at Qumran—from which so many valuable manuscripts have been recovered. This cave at Khirbet Abu Tabak, dug out of soft rock, lies in the side of a low isolated hill, on top of which are located the main ruins of Abu Tabak. It is 116 feet long, 17½ feet wide at its widest and about 20 feet high throughout. Masterman writes: "At the extreme inner end there is a hole at the top of the accumulated dirt which may lead into an inner part. My man put his gun in as far as he could without touching rock." That was over 50 years ago. Meanwhile, Masterman's report seems to have remained unnoticed by contemporary archeologists. We can only express the hope that the full length of the Wady Qumran with its major tributaries will be carefully combed by competent archeologists as soon as this is practicable.