

**Zeitschrift:** Theologische Zeitschrift  
**Herausgeber:** Theologische Fakultät der Universität Basel  
**Band:** 13 (1957)  
**Heft:** 5

**Artikel:** The Essenes and Temple Sacrifice  
**Autor:** Wallace, David H.  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-878956>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 07.03.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## The Essenes and Temple Sacrifice.

In the continuing discussion concerning the Dead Sea Documents and the Essenes, the disputed passage in Josephus' *Ant.* 18 : 1 : 5 takes on new significance. The controversy turns on the word οὐκ. If it is properly in the text, the Essenes do not offer sacrifice, which agrees with Philo's statement<sup>1</sup>, but if it is not well attested, the issue of the Essenes and their attitude to sacrifice becomes more complex.

The passage in question reads as follows: εἰς δὲ τὸ ἱερόν ἀναθήματα στέλλοντες θυσίας (οὐκ) ἐπιτελοῦσι διαφορότητι ἀγνείων ὡς νομίζοιεν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο εἰργόμενοι τοῦ κοινοῦ τεμενίσματος ἐφ' αὐτῶν τὰς θυσίας ἐπιτελοῦσι.

The matter is discussed fully with respect to grammar, internal and external evidences by J. Thomas.<sup>2</sup> His discussion is followed closely herein. Niese omits the negation from his edition of the Greek text of Josephus, and his reading is followed by W. Bauer and M. J. Lagrange.<sup>3</sup> Thomas argues principally against Lagrange's reasons for omitting the negation.

The first clause may mean that the Essenes avoided going into the Temple, but sent offerings instead. This is supported by the later statement that they avoided the common sanctuary. Therefore, it is inferred that they sent offerings, for if it was their habit to go themselves to the Temple, they would not have sent offerings. Further, the whole sentence makes no sense unless στέλλοντες and ἐπιτελοῦσι are in opposition, that is, it would be meaningless to say "they send...they offer".<sup>4</sup> A third argument for keeping the negation asserts that a participial form when used in preference to a finite verb indicates subordination which is either causal, temporal, or adversative. In this context στέλλοντες cannot be temporal because no time reference is given, and it cannot be causal because another cause is stated. Thus, it must be an adversative participle

---

<sup>1</sup> Philo, *Quod omn. prob. lib.*, 75.

<sup>2</sup> J. Thomas, *Le mouvement baptiste en Palestine et Syrie* (1935), pp. 12-19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12, n. 1.

<sup>4</sup> This argument is seconded by Mosbech, *viz.*, that the negation should be retained in order to give coherence to the sentence: H. Mosbech, *Essæismen* (1916), p. 264.

which requires the negation. Further, the δέ is probably to be read as an adversative in conjunction with the following οὐκ. Thomas' fourth argument states that the antithesis between ἀναθήματα and θυσία is accentuated by the movement of the sentence. On the other hand, if the negation is omitted, the sentence reads: "sending consecrated objects, they offer sacrifices"; this is not meaningful. Also, the anarthrous use of θυσία suggests a negation. If Josephus had meant ordinary Jewish sacrifices he probably would have used the article. Thomas' argument is partially modified by the fact that ἀναθήματα is a generic word and may include θυσία.

All the foregoing is internal argument against Lagrange's case for dropping the negation. As to external evidences, Lagrange explains the negation was added in the translation from Greek to Latin because the translator failed to understand the phrase without it. (Lagrange assumes, of course, that the original did not have the negation.) Thomas answers this hypothesis in three arguments. There are extant only three secondary Greek MSS without the negation; they are not the prime MSS of Josephus' writings. Secondly, the *Epitome*<sup>5</sup> contains the negation. The *Epitome* preserves a pre-Latin Greek MS, so its negation could not have come in through a translation. Thirdly, the negation agrees with Philo's testimony.

Having posited external evidences against Lagrange's hypothesis explaining how the negation appeared, Thomas proceeds to show how the negation was dropped, assuming, contrary to Lagrange, that the original did contain the οὐκ. Two hypotheses are advanced. Some translator failed to comprehend Josephus' thought and did not reckon with the possibility that some Jews, in this case the Essenes, would *not* offer sacrifices in the Temple. A second tentative theory states that some scribe saw οὐκ θυσίας on one line and simply θυσίας on the next, thought it was a contradiction, and for the sake of consistency dropped the negation.

The use of θυσία a second time in this passage presents a problem: how is it to be understood? These second sacrifices are ἐφ' αὐτῶν suggesting that they are not regular Temple sac-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Thomas (n. 2), p. 12, n. 1.

rifices but something peculiar to the Essenes. These may be the sacred meals which Josephus describes as cultic ceremonies. Thus when Josephus speaks of *θυσία* in reference to the Essenes he used the word as the Essenes used it. Lagrange maintains that they were willing to offer sacrifice but were unwilling to risk contamination in the common court. (Lagrange takes *κοινός* to mean "impure", not "common".) Thomas argues against this position, asserting that there is no point in calling the Temple impure. The text sets up a contradistinction between *κοινός* and *ἐφ' αὐτῶν*. Therefore *κοινός* is to be read as "common". According to Thomas *τεμένισμα* is understood to mean the Temple itself, because it is opposed to *ἐφ' αὐτῶν*, the private place where the Essenes had their own private worship. The *τεμένισμα* was common to all Jews. Further, if Josephus had wanted to say that the Essenes thought the *τεμένισμα* was impure, he probably would have reported this unusual fact more fully. As it stands, he reports the Essenes as holding the Temple to be merely common, or inferior, i.e., inferior to their own idea of sacrifice.

Lagrange suggests that the Essenes had been assigned a special room in the Temple to execute sacrifices according to their concepts of purity. This was the room, according to Lagrange, of *השאים*, *ḥasá'a'im*, "the Silent". It was a place where timid people deposited their offerings in secret and the poor helped themselves to these offerings. Thomas rejects this theory on several grounds. This room is spoken of in the Mishnah<sup>6</sup>, but it was used only for offerings, not for sacrifices as Lagrange holds. If the Essenes are designated by *Ḥassaim*, the reference would be to the *ἀναθήματα* they sent but not to the *θυσία*. Secondly, it is scarcely conceivable in the light of what is known of the Temple and the priestly prerogatives that a separate place of sacrifice would have been allowed where the regular priests did not perform the sacrifices. Lagrange admits that the Essenes did not burn sacrifices and did not pour out libations; they only killed animals and ate them. Lastly, concerning *ἐφ' αὐτῶν*, it is difficult to justify a reference to a special room, especially when it is in opposition to staying out of the *κοινὸν τεμένισμα*. That is to say, it is easier

<sup>6</sup> *Sheqalim* 5 : 6.

to read ἐφ' αὐτῶν as meaning they stayed at home rather than meaning a special room in the Temple.

Lagrange theorizes that the negation may have been inserted to harmonize this passage with Philo.<sup>7</sup> It is known that Philo was prejudiced against external ritual and instead favors spiritual religion. Thomas recognizes this prejudice, but he states that Philo reports Essene doctrine at this point because they supported his view. If they had not supported his view, there would have been no reason for him to misrepresent them in order to enlist their support. Further, Philo himself, even though he inclined toward spiritual religion, was not consistent enough to oppose sacrifice. So even if he attributed to the Essenes, falsely, a spiritual religion like his own, he would not have said that the Essenes rejected animal sacrifices. Thus, in resumé, the only reason for his reporting this fact about the Essenes was that it was true.

In summation, it is reasonable to accept the concerted witness of Philo and Josephus: the Essenes abandoned the Temple sacrifice. They attributed to their own ablutions and sacred meals a cultic value. Josephus may be believed when he says they replaced the sacrifices by their baths and meals. Why did they substitute baths and meals for the Temple sacrifice? It may be that they were excluded from the Temple precincts by the priests and found compensation in their own rites. In this case the participle εἰργόμενοι is understood as a passive: they were excluded. Or perhaps they simply preferred their rites to Temple sacrifice, in which case the participle is read in the middle voice, i.e., they stayed away from the Temple of their own accord. The text of Josephus tends to support the second hypothesis. Thus, they avoided the Temple because of disagreement with the regular priests in the Temple.<sup>8</sup>

*Duarte, Cal.*

*David H. Wallace.*

---

<sup>7</sup> Philo (n. 1), *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. R. Marcus, *Pharisees, Essenes, and Gnostics: Journ. of Bibl. Lit.*, 73 (1954), p. 158, where he touches briefly on this problem.