

Some Traces of the History of the Qumran Sect

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Some Traces of the History of the Qumran Sect.

To share in honouring Professor Baumgartner is itself an honour. His work has been familiar to me from the beginning of my own academic career, though he is but little my senior. His friendship has been my privilege for many years, and increasingly in the years that followed the Second World War. His learning is wide and deep, and all that comes from his pen is marked by a stimulating thoroughness and precision. In Britain he is highly esteemed, and for many years he has been an Honorary Member of the Society for Old Testament Study, which closely limits the number of its Honorary Members. At its meeting held in York in July 1957, the Society charged me, as one of its secretaries, to convey its affectionate greetings and congratulations to Professor Baumgartner on the attainment of his seventieth birthday. To these I would add my own warm and sincere good wishes.

When the *Zadokite Work* first became known early in the present century, there was much discussion as to the character of the sect to which it introduced us. Amongst the suggestions made were that they were the Sadducees¹, or the Pharisees², or the Zealots³, or the Dositheans⁴, or that they should be called the Zadokites and regarded as a hitherto unknown sect.⁵ Since the Dead Sea Scrolls became known, the view that the sect of the *Zadokite Work* and the Scrolls was the Essene sect has taken root, and it is often stated as though it were beyond question. A few scholars still challenge it, and quite recently there has been a renewed attempt to identify it with the Zealots.⁶ To the present writer this seems out of the question. The *Battle Scroll* shows a fierce hatred of foreign powers and an eager desire to establish the Kingdom of God by force that could hardly be exceeded by the Zealots, and

¹ Cf. R. Leszynsky, *Die Sadduzäer* (1912), pp. 142 ff.

² Cf. L. Ginzberg, *Mon. Gesch. Wiss. Jud.* lvii (N.F. xxi) (1913), pp. 289 ff., 676; W. Staerk, *Die jüdische Gemeinde des Neuen Bundes* (1922), p. 97.

³ Cf. M.-J. Lagrange, *Rev. bibl.* xxi (N.S. ix) (1912), p. 345.

⁴ Cf. S. Schechter, *Fragments of a Zadokite Work* (1910), pp. xxi f.

⁵ Cf. S. Schechter, *ibid.*, p. xviii; R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseud-epigrapha*, ii (1913), p. 790.

⁶ Cf. H. E. del Medico, *L'Enigme des manuscrits de la Mer Morte* (1957). This view has also been advanced by Cecil Roth, *Evidences*, No. 65 (Juin-Juillet 1957), pp. 37 ff., and by G. R. Driver in an unpublished paper read to the Society for Old Testament Study.

it is very probable that at the time of the Jewish War the sect of the Scrolls was allied with the Zealots. Yet it is hard to suppose that the Zealots belonged to such an organization as is described in the *Manual of Discipline*.

On the other hand, any simple equation of the sect of the Scrolls with the Essenes, as they are described to us by Philo and Josephus and Pliny, is equally difficult. Some of the things we are told about the Essenes by these ancient writers agree fairly closely with what we read in the Scrolls; but some of the things do not. They can be the Essenes only if a substantial period of development separates them, as we see them in the Scrolls, from the Essenes, as we see them in the first century writers.⁷ The present writer is persuaded that the Essenes described by Josephus were the occupants of the Qumran centre at the time of its destruction in A.D. 68, and that it was they who hid the Scrolls in the caves at some time before that destruction. The Scrolls themselves, however, and also the *Zadokite Work*, show us the sect at a much earlier stage of its existence. It is the purpose of this paper to see if we can define in any way the relative points in the history to which the various works which tell us of the life and organization of the sect belong.

According to Josephus the Essenes already existed in the middle of the second century B.C.⁸ Between that time and the destruction of the Qumran centre, there is therefore a period of some two centuries, during which there could have been considerable development in the life of the sect. Josephus depicts the Essenes as a pacific body of people.⁹ But he tells us that an Essene became a general in the army that fought the Romans¹⁰, and since he tells us that the Romans tortured many of the Essenes¹¹, it would appear that they actively opposed

⁷ The view above referred to, that the sect is the sect of the Zealots, places the composition of some of the texts of the Scrolls in the period of the Jewish War, and does not allow for a long period of the history of the sect between its founding and the Jewish War.

⁸ *Ant.* XIII v, 9 (xiii. 171).

⁹ *B. J.* II viii, 6 (ii. 135).

¹⁰ *B. J.* II xx, 4 (ii. 567).

¹¹ *B. J.* viii, 10 (ii. 1952).

the Romans in the Jewish War. This would well harmonize with the fact that the Qumran centre appears to have been destroyed by Roman soldiers. We then recall that the sect of the Scrolls treasured the *Battle Scroll*, with its dream of a great apocalyptic war. It is therefore likely that a sect which began with warlike dreams passed through a period of contemplation and study, during which it still cherished the hope of the dawn of the apocalyptic day of battle, until the time came when it believed the day had dawned and plunged into disaster. In other respects there may have been change in the course of its history, though less dramatic than this.

Let us see first what we can learn about the sect from the *Manual of Discipline*. Here we read that the members were divided into three categories, the priests, the Levites, and the lay members.¹² All of the members were not in the Qumran district, for we read that wherever there were ten members there could be a group of the sect, under the leadership of a priest.¹³ That the total numbers of the sect were large is clear from the fact that they were divided into thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.¹⁴ Each member of a group had his own particular place in the meetings of the sect, and each took part in their deliberations according to his position and seniority. None must speak out of his turn, and none must interrupt another.¹⁵

The sessions of the sect were presided over by an Inspector, or Overseer, but its affairs were managed by a council consisting of twelve men and three priests.¹⁶ It is probable that here the meaning is twelve men, of whom three should be priests. This is in accordance with the general principles of the sect, which accorded prior status to the priests. In the meetings the priests had to take their seats first, before the rest were allowed to sit.

The members formed a brotherhood in the fullest sense. It was not merely that they met together for worship and spiritual discussion. They lived together, and ate together, and they appear to have pooled their resources and had all things in common. The Manual lays it down that they shall eat together,

¹² *Manual* ii, 19 ff.

¹³ *Manual* vi, 3.

¹⁴ *Manual* ii, 21.

¹⁵ *Manual* vi, 8 ff.

¹⁶ *Manual* viii, 1.

and bless together, and take counsel together.¹⁷ They were required to bring all their knowledge, their strength and their wealth into the community, and to give it their complete loyalty.¹⁸ They were also enjoined to live in fellowship and humility, bearing themselves towards one another as the sons of a holy society, and to show zeal for righteousness.¹⁹

One who wished to join the community was first examined by the Overseer, to see if he appeared likely to be able to conform to the strict standards of the sect, and if the Overseer was satisfied he was admitted to the covenant, but not yet to membership of the sect. He had to undergo a long period of probation, in the course of which his property was turned over to the sect, though it was kept separately until his probation was completed, and not incorporated in the property of the sect. After an unspecified period of initial probation his case was considered by the 'Many', which appears to mean in a general meeting of the sect, and a decision was taken as to whether he should be received or not. If it was decided to admit him, he entered on a further year's probation; but he was still not allowed to touch 'the purity of the many', or to share in the wealth of the community. Here it is probably meant that he must not share in the purificatory rites of the sect. At the end of this year he was examined again before the Many as to his understanding of the Law and as to his way of life. It was at this point that his property was handed over to the sect, to be kept separately, but he was still not allowed to share in the communal meals of the sect for a further year, after which he was again examined. If he now proved satisfactory, he became a full member of the sect, and was given his own particular place in its organization.²⁰ Admission was therefore a long process, and if the first period, whose length is unspecified, lasted for a year like the others, it took three years to attain full membership, when the new member's property became incorporated in the property of the sect, and he shared in the communal meal and the common possessions. The initiation ceremony was a solemn one, involving the commemoration of

¹⁷ *Manual* vi, 2.

¹⁸ *Manual* i, 12.

¹⁹ *Manual* v, 1 ff.

²⁰ *Manual* vi, 13 ff.

the gracious acts of God, confession, the priestly blessing, and a solemn oath by the new member.²¹

Once a year there was a review of the whole community, when each member came under scrutiny, and when the covenant was renewed.²² This could lead to promotion to a higher place in the ranks of the society, or to relegation to a lower place. It might even lead to excommunication from the sect. Any man who lied about his wealth would have his food ration reduced, while one who spoke impatiently, or who did not treat his senior in the sect with proper deference would be punished for a year. Punishments are laid down for various offences against his fellows including false dealing or malicious speaking. Foolish laughter or gesticulation with the left hand also brought down punishment. Any evidence that a member was wavering in his fundamental loyalty to the principles or teaching of the sect could lead to partial suspension for two years, during the first of which he would be forbidden to share in the lustrations, and during the second of which he would be forbidden to share in the communal meals of the community, and during both of which he would be seated below all the members of the community. It is clear that there was stern discipline within the sect.²³

Wherever there were ten members of the sect the continuous study of the Law, day and night throughout the year, was enjoined.²⁴ Apparently there was to be a relay of members, so that there might be a constant vigil, and it is laid down that every member must devote one night in three throughout the year to study the Law and to invoke blessing on the community. It is clear that the members of the sect took seriously the words of Psalm 1, where the godly man is presented as one who meditates on the Law of God day and night. The fragments of so many books of the Old Testament found in the caves show the importance the sect attached to the sacred books, and the finding of the *scriptorium* has suggested that the vast library of the sect, both of biblical and non-biblical books, was probably largely copied here by the members. Clearly membership of this sect was a strenuous business. The livelihood of the whole community had to be earned in some way in the

²¹ *Manual* i, 16 ff.

²² *Manual* ii, 19 ff.

²³ *Manual* vi, 23 ff.

²⁴ *Manual* vi, 6 ff.

hard terrain around Qumran, and in addition time had to be found for some to copy these many books, and for all to devote long hours to their study, under a stern and relentless discipline that was quasi-military in character. Luxury, even by ancient Jewish standards, must have been a stranger to these men. One of their names for themselves was 'the poor', and their life must have been a very simple one. It is quite incredible that all the wealth recorded on the Copper Scroll belonged to these people, and if it did they could have got little profit out of it.

We may turn now to the *Zadokite Work*. That there is a clear and close connexion between the *Manual* and this work is widely recognized, though there are differences between them which require our attention. Here four categories of persons are mentioned, as against the three of the *Manual of Discipline*. These are the priests, the Levites, the children of Israel, and the proselytes.²⁵ There is no real difference here, since the *Manual* tells us about those who were in process of admission to the sect, and these are probably the same as the proselytes of the *Zadokite Work*. The requirements for admission to the sect are here more simply defined. It is said that the candidate for membership was examined by the Inspector as to his works, his understanding, his might, his strength, and his wealth²⁶, after which he took the oath of the covenant and was enrolled as a member of the sect. There is nothing about the long probation, or about the submission of the case on more than one occasion to the votes of all members.

There is nothing in the *Manual of Discipline* about women, but amongst the graves excavated in the Qumran area some have been found to be the graves of women. The *Zadokite Work* makes clear and explicit provision for marriage, and lays it down that wives and children must walk according to the ordinances of the Law.²⁷ Further, in a fragment related to the *Manual of Discipline* there is mention of women and children.²⁸

In the *Zadokite Work* there is less rigid regulation of the

²⁵ *Zadokite Work* xiv, 3 f.

²⁶ *Zadokite Work* xiii, 11 f.

²⁷ *Zadokite Work* vii, 6 ff.

²⁸ 1QSa i, 4 ff. (*Qumran Cave I*, ed. Barthélemy and Milik, 1955, pp. 109 f.).

communal property of the sect in the *Manual of Discipline*. There is no mention of the handing over of the property to the common stock, but simply the provision that each of the covenanters must pay two days' wages every month to the common fund for the relief of the poor and needy.²⁹ It is therefore not without significance that there is no mention of the common meal in this text. It has been suggested that this may be accounted for by the incomplete state of the text, but this does not seem sufficient. Where all was handed over to the community, it was natural that all should be maintained by the community, but where only two days' pay a month was handed over, it would not seem to have been envisaged that all members would be fed at a common table.

In the *Zadokite Work* there is a reference to ritual ablution with water, but with an important provision that none should cleanse himself in the waters of a vessel, and that even a pool which contained but little water, which had been touched by an unclean person, was forbidden to the covenanters.³⁰

Again, the *Zadokite Work* indicates that the covenanters regarded the Jerusalem Temple as their legitimate sanctuary³¹, though the priests were not to share in its ritual unless it all conformed to the standards of the sect.³² In the *Manual of Discipline*, however, there is no reference to the Temple or to sacrifice, save the spiritual sacrifice of godliness and devotion.

Writing in the first century of our era, Philo tells us that the Essenes lived holy lives, avoiding the cities, and that they did not offer animal sacrifices. They did not hoard silver or gold, but lived frugally, and were unconcerned with weapons or with war. He says that in their services they sat in rows according to their ages, and that they lived in communities which had a single treasury and had all things in common. They fed together, and even their clothes were held in common.³³

Josephus, writing towards the end of the same century, tells us of the affection of the Essenes for one another, and says they neglect wedlock, while not condemning it absolutely. They

²⁹ *Zadokite Work* xiv, 13 ff.

³⁰ *Zadokite Work* x, 10 ff.

³¹ *Zadokite Work* xi, 18 ff.

³² *Zadokite Work* vi, 11 ff.

³³ *Quod omnis probus liber*, xii (75 ff.).

despise riches, and have all things in common, their affairs being managed by stewards.³⁴ He speaks of their great piety, and of their worship daily before sunrise, before they enter on the labours of the day.³⁵ They labour till the fifth hour, when they assemble, clothe themselves in white veils and bathe the body in cold water, and then repair to their refectory, where the meal is eaten in reverence and quiet, being preceded and followed by grace, which is said by a priest. They then return to their work until the evening, when they eat after the same manner.³⁶

Of the admission of new members to the sect Josephus says that if anyone desired to join them he must go through three periods of probation, each of a year's duration. After the first year, if he gave satisfaction, he was allowed to be a partaker of the waters of purification. After this he had to wait two further years before he became a full member, and before he was allowed to touch the food of the society he was required to take the most tremendous of oaths.³⁷

In a final paragraph, Josephus notes that there is another order of the Essenes who marry, though not out of regard to pleasure, but for the sake of posterity.³⁸ Some writers have suggested that the sect of the Scrolls was really this special branch of the Essenes, because of the references to wives in the *Zadokite Work*. But it must be remembered that in the *Manual of Discipline* there is no reference to wives, and this question ought not to be examined without reference to other considerations.

In a passage elsewhere, Josephus summarizes in a single paragraph what he has to say about the Essenes, but here he adds the information that they sent gifts to the Temple, but did not offer sacrifices, since they attached greater significance to their lustrations.³⁹

There are some who think that the *Manual of Discipline* may have been composed by the Teacher of Righteousness, and that it is therefore older than the *Zadokite Work*. This seems to the present writer on every ground improbable. For in a

³⁴ *B.J.* II viii, 2 f. (ii. 119 ff.).

³⁵ *B.J.* II viii, 5 (ii. 128).

³⁶ *B.J.* II viii, 5 (ii. 129 ff.).

³⁷ *B.J.* II viii, 7 (ii. 137 ff.).

³⁸ *B.J.* II viii, 13 (ii. 160).

³⁹ *Ant.* XVIII i, 5 (xviii. 18 ff.).

number of respects the *Manual* stands nearer to the account of the first century writers than does the *Zadokite Work*. When the Qumran centre was excavated, the room that appears to have been the refectory of the sect was uncovered. The communal meal, which appears in the *Manual of Discipline*, but not in the *Zadokite Work*, was therefore maintained to the end of the sect's existence, as it was maintained amongst the first century Essenes. It is less likely that it was established, then abandoned, and then re-established than that it did not date from the earliest history of the sect, but was later developed and then continuously maintained.

Again, the Qumran centre provides evidence which points to ritual ablutions in vessels or cisterns within the centre itself. This would be contrary to the practice as set forth in the *Zadokite Work*. There are some who think that Qumran is the Damascus of the *Zadokite Work*, and that therefore the establishment of the Qumran centre preceded the writing of that work. In that case we should expect the practice of the centre to be reflected in the *Zadokite Work*. It would seem more natural to suppose that before the sect lived in monastic settlements rules were prescribed to ensure that the water would be clean from the sect's point of view, and hence bathing in a vessel was forbidden, whereas when the sect lived in communities, as at Qumran, where running water was not at all times available, and where access by the unclean to the vessels of the community could not be had, its practice could be modified accordingly.

Similarly in the matter of the community of goods. It would be conceivable that a sect would begin with rules which were more rigid than practicable, and that it would be forced to relax them. But if our sect is to be historically linked with the Essenes, this would not seem to have been the case with them. Hence again it would seem more natural to suppose that they started with a less rigid organization, and that after the establishment of the Qumran centre and the monasticizing of their life, they developed this. Hence the common meal, and the pooling of the property of the members became the rule, and continued thereafter to the end of the community's existence. But this would once more suggest that the composition of the

Zadokite Work antedated the founding of the Qumran centre, and that therefore Damascus was not Qumran—since the migration to Damascus preceded the composition of the *Zadokite Work*.

So, too, in the matter of marriage. In the early days of the sect, before the members had all things in common, and when each contributed only a proportion of his earnings to the common chest for the relief of the needy, marriage was permitted; but later, when the sect was organized in such communal settlements as that of Qumran, celibacy was imposed and continued to be imposed down to the end of its existence, and so is reflected in our sources from the first century A.D. It is possible that some of the more conservative members were not ready to conform to this new demand, and so there was a continuing section in which celibacy did not prevail. But the simpler practice would seem to have been the earlier. Here it is not without significance to note that the editor of the fragment related to the *Manual of Discipline*, in which reference to marriage is made, points out that it appears to be older than the *Manual*, with a more military flavour than the *Manual*.⁴⁰

Again, it is more likely that the provision for a continual relay of members to study the Law, day and night throughout the year, came from a period after the establishment of the communal centre than from the beginnings of the sect, before the members had entered on a communal life.

Here, then, are a number of pointers which suggest that in the history of the sect the *Zadokite Work* stands earlier than the *Manual of Discipline*, and that we have an intelligible line of development from the *Zadokite Work* to the *Manual* and from the *Manual* to the first century, which we find reflected in the references to the Essenes which have been so long known. Since the Teacher of Righteousness was already dead when the *Zadokite Work* was composed, this would mean that the *Manual of Discipline* could not have been written by the Teacher. The practice reflected in the *Manual* harmonizes with the situation in the Qumran centre, as exposed by the excavations, where the refectory, the cisterns, and the *scriptorium* where the copies of the Scriptures appear to have been made,

⁴⁰ Cf. *Qumran Cave I* (n. 28), p. 108.

have been found. On the other hand the practice reflected in the *Zadokite Work* seems to be simpler in all these respects. If the suggestion that celibacy was not at first required, but was later introduced, is correct, then this would seem to have been introduced at some time after the establishment of the Qumran centre, since the graves of women have been found there. If the suggestion that the *Zadokite Work* was written before the establishment of the Qumran centre is correct, then its composition would have to be placed before the reign of John Hyrcanus, during which the Qumran centre appears to have been founded. This would carry with it the corollary that the Teacher of Righteousness lived and died somewhat earlier in the second century B.C. This would accord with the statement of Josephus that already in the middle of the second century B.C. the Essenes existed. Decisive weight could not be attached to these considerations alone, but as supporting considerations they are not unimportant.⁴¹

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⁴¹ For a study of some other considerations which point to this period for the life of the Teacher of Righteousness, cf. the present writer's paper 'The Teacher of Righteousness and the Dead Sea Scrolls' in *Bull. John Ryk. Libr.* xl (1957), pp. 114 ff.