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**The Judaeen cultural context of community of goods in the early Jesus movement: Part III. The distribution of Essene community of goods in Southern Palestine and its poverty-relieving macroeconomic significance at the time of Jesus**

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**THE JUDAEAN CULTURAL CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY OF GOODS  
IN THE EARLY JESUS MOVEMENT**

Part III

**III. The Distribution of Essene Community of Goods in Southern Palestine  
and its Poverty-relieving Macroeconomic Significance at the Time of Jesus.**

This paper considers the extent and importance of the practice of community of goods as a component of the culture and economic structures of Judaea (i.e. southern Palestine) at the time of Jesus. This evaluation is important for the historical assessment of the appearance of community of goods within the early Jesus movement after his arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection in Jerusalem, as presented in the Acts of the Apostles (2:44–45, 4:32–5.14 and 6:1–6) since the region forms the immediate, original purported historical context of this account. The previous two parts of our investigation have reached three conclusions which confirm that we must seek to delineate as accurately as possible the extent and

economic importance of Essene ‘virtuoso religious group’ community of goods in Judaea at the time of Jesus’ public activity, about which each raises a question:–

1) We have shown that the community of goods of Acts 2–6 is best understood as attesting a form religious life (or ‘virtuoso religion’) that is correctly taken to anticipate and provide Scriptural precedent for later forms of Christian monasticism, rather than, for example, as a pattern of state organisation or determining monolithically the life of the whole Christian religious community. Did Jesus expect that the life of full property-sharing would always be the practice of only a sector or echelon of the community which would arise through his public activity and training of disciples?

2) We have seen that Jesus’ own practice of living from a shared purse with his disciples bears comparison with both the socially set apart early Hebrew prophetic social role (Elijah, Elisha, Samuel and the ‘schools of the prophets’) and, most significantly, with the contemporary, essentially Essene form of virtuoso religious life of Jesus’ own historical context. Is there evidence suggesting that Jesus actually interacted closely with groups of Essene property-sharing religious virtuosi in the region around Jerusalem?

3) We have seen that the economic life of fully property-sharing groups such as Jesus' own provided a platform for the exhortation of wider society to greater material sharing and could even offer social-organisational structures which provided a trusted means of redistributing needed economic resources from allied members of the virtuoso religious group's wider society, including wealthy patrons, to the needy poor. Was an effect of Jesus' teaching and training of disciples to leave after him followers who would seek to follow organised property-sharing after an Essene or Essene-like model?

The present study will examine the number, scale and distribution of the property-sharing community houses of Essene 'New Covenant' in Judaea and seek to assess their macroeconomic role and impact in alleviating poverty amongst the population of the region. Searching investigation of the ancient sources will show that it is highly probable that the Essene property-sharing covenant in southern Palestine at the time of Jesus proved an effective means of alleviating poverty across this region. Anticipation of this conclusion, of course, provokes from the outset articulation of various possible linkages between the movement of Jesus and the organised Judaeian Essene covenant which may help to explain the appearance of property-sharing phenomena of a seemingly Essene type early in the story of the Jesus movement early in Acts. By the end of the present study we will

have established evidence which supports the following four proposals concerning the aims of Jesus and the Judaeen Essene practice of community of goods:–

- 1) Jesus, known for his occasionally searching critique of the wealthy, considered it possible to integrate the Essene form of full property-sharing into his own group.
- 2) Jesus sought to insinuate a group of his long-serving Galilean disciples into the structure of Essenism in Jerusalem and rural Judaea.
- 3) Jesus, because of mutually shared values and goals, sought to achieve leadership over the community houses of the Essene New Covenant of southern Palestine.
- 4) Elite Jerusalem patrons of the Judaeen Essene covenant sought to install Jesus as the leader of the alliance of charitable Essene community houses which extended throughout this region.

All of these factors suggest a coalescing of the movement of Jesus with elements of the Judaeen Essene covenant after his death, resurrection and ascension. These

historical circumstances help to explain the appearance of apparently Essene-like communal property-sharing under the leadership of the immediately subsequent movement of the first followers of Jesus.

### **1. Discovering the extent of the New Covenant network of Essene community houses in the Judaeen heartland at the time of Jesus.**

Jesus' parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) shows that there was a numerically significant, virtually floating population of underemployed in Galilee at the time of his public ministry, and that Jesus endorsed generosity towards these potential or actual members of the socioeconomic 'underclass' and related care for them to the expression of God's will and Kingdom Rule. This study will show, through the combination of evidence for the density of settlements in the Judah hills from Avi Ofer's archaeological survey of the region with close reading of the ancient literary sources related to Essenism, that there existed at the time of Jesus a network of Essene community houses in southern Palestine which offered succour to the needy of the Judaeen villages. Economic analysis will show that the productive and fiscal strength of this well-organised network of Essene 'poorhouses', which extended to most, if not all, of the villages and towns of the Judaeen heartland, was sufficient to substantially alleviate, if not

eliminate entirely, destitution in this region. The supporters and staff of these community ‘poorhouses’ had entered a relationship of mutual social and economic support which they called the ‘New Covenant’. This extensively organised social movement associated a large proportion of the both religiously and economically, constituting in economic terms a kind of financial ‘friendly society’. The Essene ‘New Covenant’ offered social security to, and was deeply rooted in, the poorest classes of the region. It drew large numbers of members from the labourers and artisans who worked in the agricultural economy of rural Judaea. This socially and economically collaborative movement also had patrons from amongst the wealthy elite. This study will also show that some of this movement’s Jerusalem patrons were interested to see Jesus installed as the Messiah and leader of the people, constituted as a covenanted organisation of congregations which cared for the society’s needy.

The present author has argued in published work beginning in 1983 that the early community of Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem embraced organised structures of poor-care similar to those employed by the Essenes (cf. Acts 2:42–47, 4:32–5.14, 6:1–6).<sup>1</sup> This part of our study gives the wider socio-economic context for

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Brian J. Capper, ‘The Interpretation of Acts 5:4’, *JSNT* 19 (1983), pp. 117–131; ‘Community of Goods in the Early Jerusalem Church’, *ANRW*, II.26.2, 1995, pp. 1730–1774; ‘The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods’ in



understanding the appearance of these structures within the post-Easter community of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem. It will show that the activities of one of the village poorhouses of Judaea, at Bethany near Jerusalem, are reflected in an event of the Gospel passion narratives, the anointing of Jesus as Messiah by his supporter from the Jerusalem elite Mary (Mark 14.3–9; John 12.1–8). The etymology of Bethany will be shown to derive from *beth* 'anyâ, 'house of the poor' or 'poorhouse', confirming the village's important role in providing alms and assistance to the poor of the Jerusalem area and to pilgrims. This poorhouse sought to acknowledge Jesus as the hoped-for Messiah, and many of its clientele accompanied Jesus on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as Messiah of the Poor (John 12.12–19). The attempt by Jesus' supporters in and around Jerusalem to install Jesus as the leader of the New Covenant network of the Judaeian heartland contributed to the Sadducean authorities' actions against him. This study thus seeks to show that new insights into the aims of Jesus and into events in his life can be won through the combination of archaeological evidence with the close reading of literary sources.

Social approaches to the Dead Sea Scrolls prior to my earlier published work had not utilised comparative socio-economic knowledge of agrarian societies, but focused exclusively on typologies of sectarianism. This is surprising, since the Scrolls attest the self-designation ‘the Poor’,<sup>2</sup> and because a bifurcated

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<sup>2</sup> *Ebhyôn*, 1QH<sup>a</sup> 10[2].32; 11[3].35; 13[5].18; 4Q434 i.1.1 (all singular); 1QH<sup>a</sup> 13[5].22; 1QM 11.8–9, 13; 13.14; IQpHab 12.3, 6, 10 (all plural); 4Q171 2.9–10 and 3.10 (*Psalms Pesher*, ‘community of the poor’); ‘*Anî*, 1QH<sup>a</sup> 9[1].36; 10[2].34; 13[5].13; 4Q434 i.1.1. Possible self-designations for the community using these two terms together occur at 4Q501 i.1.9 and 4Q171.16; cf. CD-A 6.21 and 14.14. *4QInstruction*, which dates from c. 200 BC and is usually classified as ‘pre-sectarian’, evidences both material hardship and manual work, locating the document’s use amongst a hard-pressed working agrarian population. The phrase ‘wisdom of the hands’, (*chokhmah yadhîm*), i.e. ‘manual skill’, appears with reference to the addressee (4Q418 frag. 81.15 and 19). Uniquely within literature of the Jewish Second Temple period, this collection of instruction addresses the tutee repeatedly with the phrase ‘You are poor...’, using the Hebrew terms *rosh* and *ebhyôn*, suggesting the real poverty of those who worked the land in Judaea but held little or no land themselves (i.e. they were *ebhyôn*, ‘poor and landless’), and associated artisans. The term ‘need’ (*machsôr*) appears eight times (this contrasts with only five appearances in the whole Hebrew Bible). A previously unattested Hebrew phrase appears, *terem machsôrcah*, ‘the food of your need [i.e. the food which you need, your subsistence diet]’: 4Q417, i.1.17; cf. the appearance of the phrase ‘money of your need [i.e. for your needs]’, in the wisdom fragment 4Q424, i.1.8. Otto Betz suggested that this phrase is related to the cooperative economic structures of Essenism, and points forward to the principle of distribution according to need in the descriptions of the community of goods of the early Jerusalem church in Acts 2:45 and 4:35, ‘Kontakte zwischen Christen und Essenern,’ in Bernhard Mayer, ed., *Christen und Christliches in Qumran?* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1992), pp. 157–175, see p. 165. Matthew J. Goff observed that ‘The

social structure dividing between rich and poor (understanding the ‘poor’ to include also the constantly endangered underclass) is characteristic of agrarian society.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, sects often recruit most successfully amongst the poorer elements of society. Overpopulation, land shortage and a limited food-supply typified ancient agrarian society. Most lived at subsistence level, and many fell below it. Hence Jesus taught his disciples to pray for their ‘daily [requirement of] bread’ (Matthew 6:11/Luke 11:3), and the issues of wealth and poverty loom large in his teaching. As noted above, a floating Galilean population of underemployed and undernourished figure in his parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20.1–16).

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undisputed literature of the Dead Sea group occasionally associates the elect status of its members with poverty’ and notes that the claim of poverty is much more prominent in 4QInstruction, *The Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom of 4QInstruction* (STDJ 50, Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 167. Cf. Leander E. Keck, ‘The Poor Among the Saints in Jewish Christianity and Qumran’, *ZNW* 56 (1966) 54–78; Catherine Murphy, *Wealth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Qumran Community* (STDJ 40, Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 211–261; Eyal Regev, *Sectarianism in Qumran: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 346–347; Johannes Unsok Ro, *Poverty, Law and Divine Justice in Persian and Hellenistic Judah* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), pp. 189–210.

<sup>3</sup> P. Hollenbach, ‘Defining Rich and Poor Using Social Sciences’ in Kent Harold Riches (ed.) *SBL 1987 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 50–63.

This study offers a socio-economic analysis of Essenism and argues that it yields important results, not least in highlighting significant social and even political factors in Jesus' Judaean ministry. The married Essene order reflected in the *Damascus Rule* was a friendly society of artisans and day-labourers, and ran a network of poor-care centres throughout rural Judaea that cared for the destitute both within and outside its 'New Covenant'. The celibate male Essene order of rural Judaea was based on these communal centres, and seems to have drawn many of its members from the destitute who were adopted into these houses as children, or otherwise assisted by these institutions. These poorhouses disposed over resources more than sufficient to eradicate destitution in rural Judaea, a matter that must have interested Jesus and his disciples. Jesus appears to have stayed, with his disciple-group, as a welcome pilgrim and teacher at the Jerusalem poorhouse of the 'New Covenant', known as Bethany in the Gospels. The attempt by his supporters in and around Jerusalem to install him as royal Messiah, champion of the poor and leader of the New Covenant (the anointing of Mark 14:3–9), contributed greatly to the actions of the Sadducean authorities against Jesus.

## **2. The Distribution of the Essene Covenant in rural Judaea**

Our first step towards understanding the social character and role of the Essenes of Judaea will be to explore the distribution of the celibate male Essene population. Josephus is quite clear that there were over four thousand celibate male Essenes. He writes: ‘...they hold their possessions in common...the men (*andres*) who practise this way of life number over four thousand. They do not bring wives into the community...’<sup>4</sup> Josephus states that these celibate male Essenes live ‘in no one town (*polis*), but settle in large numbers in every one.’<sup>5</sup> This statement of Josephus has led some modern interpreters to assume that the Essenes at the time of Jesus were distributed throughout the towns of all Palestine,<sup>6</sup> but this is probably an incorrect deduction. Philo explicitly links these male celibate Essenes to Judaea. He writes that they live ‘in many towns of Judaea, and in many villages in large and numerous societies.’<sup>7</sup> It seems likely that Philo’s account, which is the earlier, gives a true impression of the distribution of Essene celibates, occupying many of the villages and towns of the Judaeian heartland. Josephus’ account, written after the massive upheaval of the revolt

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<sup>4</sup> *Antiquities*, 18.1.5 §§20–21, cf. Philo, *That every good man is free*, §75, where the number of four thousand is also given for the celibate male Essenes.

<sup>5</sup> *Jewish War*, 2.8.4 §124.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Black, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clarke, 1979) p. 563.

<sup>7</sup> *Apology for the Jews*, (= *Hypothetica*), 11.1.

against Rome (AD 66–70), which led to large movements of population, probably accommodates the description (possibly drawn from a common source) to the later situation.

Since Philo's description suggests the presence of celibate male Essenes in most, if not all, of the villages and towns of the Judaeian heartland, it is useful to enquire about the number of villages and towns in this region in the early Roman period. If we exclude the essentially unpopulated wilderness of Judaea and the only sparsely populated Beersheba–Arad valley (the Biblical Negeb), the number of villages and towns in the remaining, densely populated parts of Judaea can be estimated, with some confidence, to around two hundred. A useful starting point for reflection on this question is the information that Josephus gives us concerning the number of villages in Galilee, which covered an area similar area to that of the Judaeian heartland. Josephus tells us that there were two hundred and four villages in Galilee in his day.<sup>8</sup> E. W. G. Masterman, who lived in Palestine for many years,<sup>9</sup> estimated the area of Galilee as enclosed by the borders which Josephus describes at nine hundred square miles (2,300 square kilometres).<sup>10</sup> Roughly, we

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<sup>8</sup> *Life*, §235.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. C. C. McCown, 'The Density of Population in Ancient Palestine', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 66 (1947), pp. 425–436, see p. 426.

<sup>10</sup> *Studies in Galilee* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909) pp. 131–134.

can think of every piece of terrain of about eleven square kilometres, or about two miles by two miles, containing a village or town ( $2,300/204 = c. 11.3$ ).

Interestingly, a density figure of one village or town to about every eleven square kilometres of countryside can also be deduced from analysis of Avi Ofer's archaeological survey of the hills of Judah.<sup>11</sup> Ofer found in his survey of the Judah hills, an area by his reckoning of some 1,000 square kilometres, ninety village or town settlements from the early Roman period.<sup>12</sup> His figures imply a density of one village to about every eleven square kilometres of terrain ( $1000/90 = c. 11.1$ ). It thus appears that around the time of Jesus villages in Judah and Galilee were distributed across the countryside in very similar density. One could suggest that this is a quite natural result, as the key socio-economic factors determining the distribution of villages across the countryside would have been largely the same in both regions. On the one hand, the rural population gathered for society and safety in settlements, but on the other, few wanted to live far from the farmland on which most work was done. A journey of much more than a mile to work in local fields seems to have been considered impractical or excessive.

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<sup>11</sup> Avi Ofer, 'The Highland of Judah during the Biblical Period.' Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1993 (Hebrew with English summary).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Avi Ofer, 'Judah' *OEANE*, Vol. 3, pp. 253–257, see p. 256. The estimates used above for the area of the Judaeian heartland are taken from this article, see p. 253.

Water sources were common enough in both regions to allow villagers the convenience of always living reasonably close to their fields. Even though the density of the rural population seems to have varied somewhat between the two regions (Josephus emphasises that the agricultural fertility of Galilee led to a denser population<sup>13</sup>), this variation appears not to have been sufficient to have led to a noticeably denser coverage of settlements in Galilee than in Judaea.

We can obtain a reasonably reliable estimate for the number of villages and towns in the semi-fertile regions of the Judaeian heartland by extrapolating from Ofer's result for the Judah hills. The Judaeian heartland consisted of the Shephelah, the Benjamin and Judah hills, and the Jerusalem 'saddle'. By Ofer's reckoning these covered a total area of some 2,250 square kilometres. Ofer's figures suggest that in the early Roman period there were perhaps a little over two hundred villages in the region ( $2,250/11.1 = c. 203$ ). This is about the same number of villages and towns as reported by Josephus for Galilee, which covered an almost identical area. The extrapolation is given in tabular form below. A breakdown is given of the area of the basic constituent parts of Judaea, with an estimate for each region based on the density of settlements given in Ofer's survey of the Judah hills. The final estimate is rounded to 200, a

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<sup>13</sup> *Jewish War*, 3.3.2 §§42–43, 3.10.8 §518.



figure which the present author would suggest is accurate to better than plus or minus 20%. The rounded figure of c. 200 villages for the Judaeian heartland gives an average density of settlements largely identical to that suggested above for ancient Galilee (c. 1/11.3 square kilometres).

<i>Region</i>	<i>Area (sq. km.)</i>	<i>No. of sites of settlement over 1000 sq. metres</i>	<i>One village or town per x sq. kilometres</i>
Highlands of Judah	c. 1000	90 (survey, Avi Ofer)	1/c. 11.1 sq. km.
Benjamin hills and Jerusalem 'saddle'	c. 500	c. 45 (estimate assuming same density)	1/c. 11.1 sq. km.
Shephelah	c. 750	c. 68 (estimate assuming same density)	1/c. 11.1 sq. km.
Totals	c. 2,250	c. 200 (rounded estimate)	1/c. 11.25 sq. km.

*Table: Estimating the Number of Settlements in the Heartland of Judaea*

A figure of around two hundred villages and towns in the Jewish heartland coheres with the data from other sources. Dio Cassius states that the Romans destroyed 985 villages and 50 fortresses in Palestine in the Bar-Kokhba war.<sup>14</sup> The Jewish guerrilla forces, holed up in caves, proved a difficult enemy. They used underground tunnels from which to attack Roman patrols, and were able to obtain a constant supply of food from the peasantry. The Romans, whose forces were almost disastrously sapped in their initial campaign, were forced to denude the countryside, driving off the Jewish peasant population, in order to achieve lasting victory. Dio Cassius figure is therefore likely to include most of the significant sites of settlement in Palestine. A figure of around two hundred villages and towns for Judaea corresponds well with his information that there were something over a thousand in all of the area which revolted, which included parts of Transjordan. The Jewish heartland of the Judah hills, the Benjamin hills, the Jerusalem ‘saddle’ and the Shephelah is similar in size to both Galilee and Samaria. The coastal plain occupies a similar area again. The wilderness and Negeb regions, while covering a large area, had a much lower

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<sup>14</sup> *Roman History*, 49.12–14.

density of settlements. In all, literary sources record some 675 place-names for the whole of Palestine;<sup>15</sup> it would appear that the names of around two thirds of all villages and towns have left a mark in literary sources.

The next step towards understanding the distribution of celibate male Essenes across rural Judaea in the early Roman period is to consider what would have been the minimum size for a functioning group or association in any particular village or town. There are several indications in the sources that celibate male Essenes would have been very unlikely to live together in groups of less than ten. The first source to consider is the *Rule of the Community* from cave one at Qumran. This document regulated the lives of celibate male Essenes and was found multiple copies. In it we find this stipulation: ‘In every place where there are ten men of the Council of the Community, there should not be lacking amongst them a priest. And every one shall sit before him and in this way they shall be asked for their counsel in every matter.’ (1QS VI.3–4) This stipulation strongly implies that it would have been unacceptable for communities of celibate Essene males located in any of the villages and towns of Judaea to have numbered less than ten.

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<sup>15</sup> Gottfried Reeg, *Die Ortsnamen Israels nach der rabbinischen Literatur* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1989) p. vii.

The second source to consider is the account of the Essenes given in Josephus' *Jewish War*. When Josephus emphasises the orderliness of Essene communal behaviour, he uses a group of ten as his example of a small gathering: 'If ten sit together, one will not speak if nine desire silence.'<sup>16</sup> In both of these sources, we have to do with the *minyan* of ten adult males which constitutes the quorum for liturgical purposes in later Judaism.<sup>17</sup> The ideal of the *minyan* of ten was clearly based on the smallest subdivision of the people of God employed by Moses in the wilderness wanderings.<sup>18</sup> Thus scripture enjoined that the smallest possible subdivision of the ideal people of God was the group of ten men. The Essenes certainly saw themselves as the reconstituted, ideal people of God, so we must assume that the smallest acceptable size for a locally-based group of celibate males was ten. A third source, the 'Messianic Rule' (1QSa = 1Q28a) also divides the people into groups of ten: 'These are the men appointed to the council of the community... all the wise of the congregation, the understanding and knowledgeable, who are blameless in their behaviour and men of valour, together with the chiefs of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Jewish War*, 2.8.9 §146.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. art. 'Minyan' in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and G. Wigoder (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 468.

<sup>18</sup> Exodus 18:21, 25; Deuteronomy 1:15.

tribes, all judges, magistrates, captains of thousands, hundreds, fifties, tens, and the Levites...’ (1Q28a I.27–II.1) According to this *Rule* a man aged thirty was eligible to be a leader of a group of ten (1Q28a I.13–15).

As the period of Roman occupation progressed, a military factor seems to have begun to dominate thinking about Essene organisation, if it had not done so before. Moses’ subdivision of the people into thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens had been, in fact, at once both military and judicial. From the time of the writing of a further source to consider on this theme, the *War Rule* (1QM),<sup>19</sup> many Essenes must have seen their organised movement as a holy army preparing for the eschatological conflict against the Romans for which this document plans. The squad of ten is the smallest military subdivision of the *War Rule*, in which appear careful prescriptions concerning the commanders of tens and their subordinates.<sup>20</sup> For those Essenes who looked forward to such military endeavours, the smallest acceptable size for a community of celibate Essene

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<sup>19</sup> The *War Rule* is probably to be dated to the late first century BC or the early first century AD, cf. Philip R. Davies, ‘War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness’, in Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 965–968, see pp. 966–967.

<sup>20</sup> 1QM IV.3–6. Cf. 2 Kings 25:25 (a military squad of ten).

males, whose celibacy marked the readiness of their squad for holy war, was undoubtedly ten.

There may have been sectors of the Essene movement which were not war-like in intent. Philo, with probable exaggeration, claims that all Essenes were pacifists, for none took any interest in the manufacture of weapons, armour, or any instruments of war.<sup>21</sup> The basic smallest subdivision of ten was always appropriate, however, as the ideal organisation for the people of God, not only to those Essenes who sought to assume a war footing, but also for those who shunned the possibility of revolt against Rome.

Roland De Vaux, the excavator of Qumran, estimated that from one hundred and fifty to two hundred people could have lived in huts and caves associated with the desert site.<sup>22</sup> Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel concurred with his estimate, though noting that evidence for huts and tents is very slight, while Joseph Patrich sought to reduce the figure of inhabitants to from fifty to seventy.<sup>23</sup> The substantial

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<sup>21</sup> *That every good man is free*, §78.

<sup>22</sup> Roland De Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 24–27.

<sup>23</sup> Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel, 'How and Where did the Qumranites Live?', in Donald W. Parry and Eugene Ulrich (eds.), *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 267–273; Joseph Patrich, 'Khirbet Qumran in Light of New Archaeological Explorations in the Qumran Caves', in Michael O. Wise et

majority of the over four thousand celibate male Essenes clearly lived in the villages and towns of the semi-fertile heartland of Judaea. The descriptions of Philo and Josephus can be satisfied if there were Essene community houses accommodating, say, between ten and twenty celibate males in many of the towns and villages of the densely populated regions of Judaea. Only *three* thousand celibate males would have been enough to provide a group of fifteen celibate Essene males as part of the staff a community house in most villages and towns, or a community of twenty celibates in about three quarters of the centres of settlement in the region. There were probably communities of up to one or two hundred celibate males Essenes at different periods in Jerusalem and at Qumran,<sup>24</sup> and further small groups in the lower Jordan valley, at other points on the Dead Sea, in the Beersheba–Arad valley, and perhaps in further flung areas of Jewish settlement.<sup>25</sup>

Most of the celibate male Essenes in the region will have found employment outside their community houses in the local rural economy, as

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al. (eds.), *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1994), pp. 73–94.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Brian J. Capper. “‘With the Oldest Monks...’ Light from Essene History on the Career of the Beloved Disciple?”, *JTS* 49 (1998), pp. 1–55, see 19–29, 47, and 54–55.

emphasised by Philo.<sup>26</sup> They brought home their wages each evening and shared them with each other and those they supported through their common purse (we will look more closely at this evening meal gathering below).<sup>27</sup> Since celibate male Essenes found employment in the local rural economy, and would have to travel to and from work each day, we should expect a fairly even distribution of small communities throughout the region. Moreover, we may surmise that it may have been wise for celibate male Essenes to avoid large concentrations of their number in particular areas, since such concentrations might distort the rural economy, causing resentment. Celibate males could afford to work for less than married agricultural male workers. Excessive local numbers of celibate male Essenes, not personally responsible for families, might force down the

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<sup>25</sup> Bargil Pixner has suggested that there was an area of Essene settlement in Batanaea, related to Herod's settlement of Jews in this region, *Wege des Messias und Stätten der Urkirche* (Giessen: Brunnen, 1994), pp. 159–169.

<sup>26</sup> Philo emphasises the rural occupations of the male Essene celibates in his description in *Apology for the Jews* (= *Hypothetica*) 11.8. All the occupations mentioned by Philo were typical of the day-labourer in the agricultural economy of Palestine, cf. Arye Ben-David, *Talmudische Ökonomie* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1974), pp. 65–69.

<sup>27</sup> Philo emphasises the daily receipt and pooling each evening of wages by the celibate male Essenes in his description in *Apology for the Jews* (= *Hypothetica*) 11.10. On this passage see also Brian J. Capper, 'The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods' in Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. IV, *Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 323–356, see pp. 331–332.



rates paid to other workers. A widespread, thin distribution of Essene celibate male communities is also likely since they ardently claimed to lead the ancestral Jewish covenant and so probably saw found, in their comprehensive 'occupation' of the villages and towns of rural Judaea, the ancient tribal land of Judah, symbolic demonstration of their own claim to be the re-founded Jewish nation. We may also surmise that these widely distributed communities of celibate male Essenes, whose disciplined and devoted lifestyle was visible to all the populace, had immense influence on the religious and social life of the peasants, artisans and labourers of rural Judaea. We shall see below that their social works to the benefit of the rural populace are also likely to have caused them to be held in great esteem their esteem by especially the poorer elements of the rural population, leading to substantial Essene influence over the rural Judaeian population. These widely distributed communities of celibate male Essenes must have had an immense influence on the religious and social life of the peasantry, artisans and labourers of rural Judaea. Their unusually disciplined and devoted lifestyle must inevitably have become a topic of frequent interest, discussion, interest and examination. All Judaea must clearly have had a good understanding of Essene ideas and community practices. Indeed, especially in view of the high level of commitment and social cohesiveness involved in belonging to the Essene 'New Covenant', as articulated in the principal Essene

*Rule* documents,<sup>28</sup> our statistical deductions thus far alone suggest that the Essenes were the dominant religious and social force in rural Judaea.

### **3. The social level of the celibate male Essenes of rural Judaea**

In order to understand the social role and impact of Essenism in the rural environment, it is important to come to an assessment of the social level of the majority of those celibate male Essenes and their supporters who lived in the villages and towns of rural Judaea. The present author would take the view that the physically isolated Qumran community is not a good guide for understanding the social character of Essenism in rural Judaea. While clearly somehow connected with the more broadly distributed Essene identity and movement, the Qumran community seems to have been somewhat *sui generis*. The intensity of scholarly activity at the desert site may suggest that it housed what was in effect an Essene ‘university’, a centre of learning where the most able members of the Essene movement might aspire to receive a higher training in the context of a virtually enclosed religious community. It is plausible that some of the aristocratic youth of Jerusalem may have been sent to the Qumran community for a course of discipline and study. Josephus himself, who came from a wealthy priestly family and who

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<sup>28</sup> The term ‘New Covenant’ appears at *Damascus Rule* (CD) VI.19; cf. *Rule of the Community* (1QS) I.16–II.18.

clearly received a high quality Graeco–Roman education, claims also to have pursued the Essene training,<sup>29</sup> which he says lasted three years.<sup>30</sup> He did not, himself, go on to join a community of celibate Essene males. Josephus' claimed involvement with the Essene training may typify ways in which the Qumran community served the interests of at least some elite families of Jerusalem, a journey of only some sixteen miles away.

Philo describes celibate male Essenes who are clearly non-elite, who work in the rural Judaeian economy around them and who, after the fashion of poor day-labourers, bring home their wages at the end of the working day and share them to enable the purchase and consumption of a common meal.<sup>31</sup> Josephus describes more tightly communal arrangements, including communal bathing before a shared midday meal.<sup>32</sup> Josephus may be describing in this aspect of his account the Qumran community, which was able to pursue, on its own estate, a more

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<sup>29</sup> *Life*, 2 §§10–11.

<sup>30</sup> *Jewish War*, 2.8.7 §§137–142. We know from 1QS VI that the procedure probably lasted between two and three years. Cf. James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 137–139.

<sup>31</sup> *Apology for the Jews* (= *Hypothetica*), §§8–11. See below for quotation of this passage and further analysis of it.

<sup>32</sup> *Jewish War*, 2.8.5 §§129–131.

communal daily regime than was possible for Essenes who worked outside their communities in rural Judaea, on whose lifestyle Philo's account is based.

Josephus may have been personally acquainted with the daily regime of the Qumran community. It is possible that the highly regularised, scholarly life of the Qumran community may have had more regular connections with the social elite than had the associations of celibate male Essenes who lived in the villages and towns of rural Judaea, and who worked daily on local farms and estates. While Philo describes workers in the rural Judaeian economy, who return home only as the sun sets,<sup>33</sup> Josephus reports a break from the fifth hour for a ritual bath and common meal in the routine of the Essenes whom he describes.<sup>34</sup> This feature of Josephus' account may derive from knowledge of the Qumran community, where work was performed on the community's own estate, allowing it fully to determine its own daily schedule. Work in the extreme mid-day heat by the Dead Sea was deliberately, perhaps necessarily, avoided.

It appears that the Qumran community, presently thought by many scholars even to have been a breakaway part of the broader Essene movement, may have been led by elements drawn from a much higher social level than that of the village Essenes of rural Judaea. Both the involvement of a Zadokite high priestly

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<sup>33</sup> *Apology for the Jews*, 11.8–11.

clan<sup>35</sup> and the very high quality of the buildings at Qumran point in this direction. We have noted above how the intensity of scholarly activity at the desert site may suggest that housed what was in effect an Essene ‘university.’ Some of the aristocratic youth of Jerusalem may have been sent to the Qumran community for a course of discipline and study. Josephus himself, who came from a wealthy priestly family, claims to have pursued the Essene training.<sup>36</sup> While there are historical difficulties with Josephus’ claim to have enjoyed such a course of education personally,<sup>37</sup> his boast may reflect opportunities for training at Qumran which were available to youths from the Jerusalem elite, of which others had taken actual advantage. It is unlikely that elite youths would have sought training in small communities of village celibates, but plausible that such might have sought education under elite teachers in the grander setting of Qumran. It is possible, when relations within the Essene movement permitted, that the most able recruits of the rural Essene communities, though of humble origins, may have been elevated to the Qumran community, where they received a higher training in legal study, manuscript production, and esoterica.

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<sup>34</sup> *Jewish War*, 2.8.5 §§129–131.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. 1QS V.9, etc.

<sup>36</sup> *Life*, 2 §§10–11.

Philo's accounts of the Essenes give strong indications that the majority of celibate male Essenes, domiciled in their many communities in the villages of rural Judaea, belonged to the ordinary mass of labourers and artisans employed in the rural Judaeian economy. Five features of the Essene life he describes point powerfully in this direction:—

1) *Daily receipt of wages.* In his tract *That every good man is free*, Philo explains that the unique Essene form of association involved a common roof, a common life together and a common table (*homorophion, homodiaiton, homotrapezon*). This high degree of social integration was realised by the daily collection and sharing each evening of the *misthos*, the 'pay' or 'wages'<sup>38</sup> which each working member had received during the day: '...for whatever they receive as wages (*epi misthō*) for their day's work is not kept to themselves, but is deposited before them all, in their midst, to be put to common employment...'<sup>39</sup> The Greek term *misthos* is cognate with two words used to denote the day-labourer, *misthion* and

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. L. H. Feldman, 'Josephus', in William Horbury et al., *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 901–921, see 901–902.

<sup>38</sup> W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 523.

<sup>39</sup> Philo, *That every good man is free*, §85.

*misthôtos*.<sup>40</sup> Day-labourers constituted the lowest employed group economically. It is apparent that the celibate male Essenes described by Philo worked on a daily basis outside their communities in the local economy of rural Judaea as labourers and artisans and were paid on a daily basis. This is a strong pointer to their social position within the numerous class of artisans and day-labourers. It is well known that day labourers were amongst the economically weakest of ancient Palestine. Since they did not possess land, they were at the mercy of fluctuations in wage rates and demand for labour. Jewish law had long sought to protect this vulnerable class.<sup>41</sup>

2) *Engagement in agricultural occupations and crafts*. In his *Apology for the Jews* (alternatively known as *Hypothetica*), Philo reports on the kinds of work the celibate male Essenes undertook each day, such as working the soil, shepherding, bee-keeping and crafts (11:4–9). All these activities are typical of the day–

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<sup>40</sup>Leviticus 19:13 [LXX] legislates that the *misthos* of the *misthôtos* may not be retained until the following morning.

<sup>41</sup> Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14–15; cf. James 5:4. In Deuteronomy 24:14 the day-labourer (*sacîr*) is ‘poor’ (’*ebhyôn*) and ‘needy’ (’*anî*). On the meaning of ’*ebhyôn* as ‘landless’ see G. J. Botterweck et al., *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1. art. ’*ebhyôn*.

labourer in the agricultural economy of Palestine, and confirm the social location of the rural celibate male Essenes within the class of day-labourers and artisans.<sup>42</sup>

3) *Dependence on the daily wage for survival.* Labourers were characteristically dependent upon their daily wage for survival. Hence the Mosaic Law demanded that they be paid their wages at nightfall, when the working day came to an end. It was prohibited to hold over the wages of the labourer until the following day, since this meant labourers might not eat at all after a hard day's work — an unjust imposition on this vulnerable class (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:15). Philo's description of the daily evening meals of celibate male Essene labourers and artisans reveals this characteristic of dependence on the daily wage for survival: 'Each member of the group, when he has received the day's wages (*ton misthon labontes*) for these different occupations, gives it to the person who has been elected as treasurer. As soon as he receives this money, the treasurer immediately buys what is necessary and provides food in abundance as well as whatever else human life requires. Thus having each day a common life and a common table they are content with the same conditions, lovers of frugality who shun expensive

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Arye Ben-David, *Talmudische Ökonomie* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1974), pp. 65–69.



luxury as a disease of both body and soul.<sup>43</sup> Philo is quite clear that the groups of celibate Essene males in the towns and villages of rural Judaea pooled their daily wages to purchase food each evening. This shows that they lived the hand-to-mouth existence common to so many labourers and artisans of ancient Palestine. Indeed, Philo's description even suggests that this daily pooling of what each had received for his work during the day was a survival strategy, by which the success of some in finding work during the day could eke out the plight of others who had not been as successful.<sup>44</sup> The frugal consumption which characterised the celibate

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<sup>43</sup> *Apology for the Jews* (= *Hypothetica*), 11.10–11 (cited in Eusebius, *Preparation of the Gospel* 8.6–7), translation largely based on those of F. H. Colson, *Philo* IX (Loeb Classical Library, 1941), p. 441 and G. Vermes & M. D. Goodman, *The Essenes according to the Classical Sources* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1989) p. 29. It is important to note that at the beginning of this passage *hekastô* refers to 'each man' or 'each member' rather than 'each branch' of the Essene organisation. The text does not support this occasionally found assumption of common production. The present author would suggest that large-scale common production amongst the Essenes was only found on the estate at Qumran, whose residents had a more socially integrated day than that of the village and town communities of Essenes, where celibate male Essenes worked outside their communities in the local agricultural economy.

<sup>44</sup> It is important not to be misled by Philo's enthusiasm for Essene frugality, which expresses his own ascetic enthusiasm. The meagre diet of the Essenes reflects the problems of the subsistence existence common to the peasant and artisan class, as does Jesus' prayer for 'daily bread' (Matthew 6:11 and Luke 11:3).

Essene, and indeed the celibate male Essenes' communal lifestyle, thus appears to have arisen out of real economic necessity.

4) *Work from sunrise to sunset.* Philo points in the *Apology* to the fact that Essenes labour with athletic virtue from before sunrise to near sunset: 'Performing their accustomed tasks from before sunrise, they do not leave them till the sun has almost set, devoting themselves to them with no less joy than those who train for gymnastic combat.'<sup>45</sup> We may compare how in Jesus' parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) those who were able to find work early in the day laboured throughout the daylight hours, including the scorching mid-day heat. The Babylonian Talmud informs us that workers in Palestine were conventionally taken on as dawn brightened the sky before sunrise, indicative of the full working day demanded of them.<sup>46</sup> Thus the celibate male Essenes of rural Judaea described by Philo worked the full day typical of the day-labourer.

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<sup>45</sup> *Apology for the Jews* (= *Hypothetica*) 11.6.

<sup>46</sup> bBM 83b offers the restraint that work should not start till the sun rises; bYoma 28b records that when the eastern sky was bright as far as Hebron, all were already on the way to work.

5) *Willing acceptance of any kind of work (multiple occupations each day)*. Philo remarks that the Essenes ‘...have to suffer no privation of what is indispensable to essential needs, and they never defer until the morrow whatever serves to procure for them blameless revenue.’<sup>47</sup> This description of Essene willingness to pursue a life of constant labour may appear to the modern reader merely a rhetorical, unrealistic flourish, designed to attribute impossible, superhuman virtue and intensity of labour to the labouring Essene male celibates. However, it actually informs us of fact and gives us important insight into the socio-economic level of the Essenes of rural Judaea. It is important not to be misled by Philo’s rhetorical vaunting of the hard-working Essene lifestyle into perceiving it only as a claim of ‘athletic’ virtue.<sup>48</sup> It would be naïve to assume that men of a high social level voluntarily, and to no necessary practical end, applied themselves to unceasing harsh labour throughout the sunlight hours. Such labour was a mark of poverty, a characteristic of those who, with the ordinary working mass of the population, needed to work throughout the day in order to feed and clothe themselves and those for whom they assumed responsibility. It is frequently characteristic of those in greatest economic insecurity in every culture and age to seek two or more different employments in a single day in order to garner a sufficient wage. The

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<sup>47</sup> *Apology for the Jews* (= *Hypothetica*), 11.9.

celibate male Essenes described by Philo habitually worked for the whole day, even in several employments, in order to secure the economic life of their communities.

## **6. The work of the Essene ‘houses of the community’ in rural Judaea**

Josephus concludes his account of the Essenes in his *Jewish War* by noting that there also existed an order of marrying Essenes. Unsurprisingly, the more striking and unusual life of the celibate male Essenes drew the attention of the ancient authors. Neither Philo nor Pliny the Elder<sup>49</sup> even mention the marrying Essenes. Josephus’ short reference to the marrying Essenes figures almost as an afterthought.<sup>50</sup> However, it is again important not to be misled by the rhetorical interests of the ancient authors. Far more Jews of Judaea were probably attracted to, and able to abide by, the code of the marrying Essene order than joined the more rigorous life of the celibate male Essene order. The marrying Essene order was probably at least several times larger than the celibate male order, and may have numbered tens of thousands. There were almost certainly groups of families

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Apology for the Jews* (= *Hypothetica*), 11.6–7.

<sup>49</sup> *Natural History*, 5.15 §73.

<sup>50</sup> *Jewish War*, 2.8.13 §§160–161.

in most, if not all, of the villages and towns of Judaea, incorporated into the Essene ‘New Covenant’<sup>51</sup> and linked to local groups of celibate male Essenes.

The way of life of the marrying Essenes is given in the *Damascus Rule*. Recent scholarship has tended to see the *Damascus Rule* as giving the legislation of a parent Essene movement out of which the Qumran community later formed.<sup>52</sup> However, fragments of eight manuscripts of the *Damascus Rule* are extant with scripts dated palaeographically to the first century BCE and the first century CE,<sup>53</sup> as well as the early mediaeval fragments of the ‘Cairo Geniza’. It is apparent that what may have been the earlier community form in evolutionary terms nonetheless persisted throughout the history of Essenism. Central to the life of these marrying Essene communities was the institution of the *beth-hacheber*, or ‘community house’, where each local community cared for those who received inadequate support within local kinship structures. For these needy, the Essene ‘community

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<sup>51</sup> CD VI.19; cf. 1QS I.16–II.18.

<sup>52</sup> F. Garcia Martinez ‘Qumran Origins and Early History: A Groningen Hypothesis’, *Folia Orientalia* 25 (1988), pp. 113–136; F. Garcia Martinez and A. S. van der Woude, ‘A “Groningen” Hypothesis of Qumran Origins and Early History’, *RQ* 56 (1990), pp. 521–541; Gabriele Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 119–129; Charlotte Hempel, *The Laws of the Damascus Document* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Joseph M. Baumgarten et al., *Qumran Cave 4. XIII* (DJD XVIII, Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

houses' constituted substitute families or 'fictive kinship groups'.<sup>54</sup> The *Damascus Rule* stipulates the tasks and means of support of these community houses:

'(12)...And this is the rule of the Many, to provide for all their needs: the wages (13) of at least two days each month they shall place into the hands of the Overseer and of the judges. (14) From it they shall give to the injured and with it they shall strengthen the hand of the needy and the poor, and the elder (15) who is bowed down, and to the afflicted and to the prisoner of a foreign people, and to the girl who (16) has no redeemer, and to the youth who has no teacher, and for all the works of the community, and (17) the house of the community (*beth-hacheber*) shall not be deprived of it means.'<sup>55</sup>

Designation of monthly contributions in terms of the daily wage shows that this is a friendly society of day-labourers and artisans, not of landowners, since landowners would have been required to give a proportion of crops. The 'New Covenant' was a mutually supportive friendly society which drew its membership from the ordinary mass of the population, from the same social level as the

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<sup>54</sup> S. Scott Bartchy, 'Community of Goods in Acts' in B. A. Pearson (ed.) *The Future of Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 309–318, explored sharing of property in relation to the concept of the 'fictive kinship group'.

<sup>55</sup> CD XIV.12–17.

celibate male order of rural Judaea. The compulsory contributions of ‘at least’ two days’ pay per month represented a minimum; in hard times greater contributions may have been raised, on a voluntary basis.

What was the attitude of these rural Essene groups to the destitute whom they encountered on the rural scene? It would be false to deduce from the harsh attitude towards outsiders of the ‘two spirits’ teaching of 1QS III.13–IV that the Essene community houses of rural Judaea would not exercise compassion for the local poor. The claim of rural Essene groups to be the pious of Israel could not be sustained if they neglected the local destitute, since the Law demanded care for such, a tradition forcefully emphasised in the prophets.<sup>56</sup> It is most likely that the rural Essenes, like many groups with sectarian tendencies since, swelled their ranks by successfully recruiting into their movement the destitute when these took advantage of their charity. Along with physical salvation, the destitute probably received teaching which enabled them to obey the Law according to Essene *halakhah* and to be incorporated as members of the New Covenant. While the rural Essene ‘community houses’ would have been careful to distribute alms

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<sup>56</sup> Exodus 21:7–11, 22:21–27, 23:11; Leviticus 19:9–10, 33–34, 23:22–23, 25:35–38; Deuteronomy 10:17–19, 14:27–29, 15:1–11, 23:19–20, 24:6, 10–15, 17–22, 26:12–15; Cf. Isaiah 1:23, 2:16–24; 3:13–15, 5:8, 23, 10:1–4; Jeremiah 7:5–7; Amos 2:6–7, 3:15, 4:1–3, 5:7–13, 6:4–6, 12, 12:7; Hosea 13:4; Micah 2:1–3, 3:9, 6:9, etc.

wisely, a text from Josephus' description of the celibate male order shows that alms were given to the deserving poor:

‘Two things only are left to individual discretion, the giving of assistance and mercy.

Members may on their own decision help the deserving, when in need, and supply food to the destitute; but gifts to relatives are prohibited, without the permission of the managers.’<sup>57</sup>

The individual celibate male Essene was thus allowed discretion to give alms from his daily wages before aggregating these to community resources in the evening.<sup>58</sup> Since such latitude was allowed to the individual celibate male, who lived under considerable discipline, especially in financial matters,<sup>59</sup> we can be sure that communities of celibate male Essenes aided local destitute. Celibates probably formed the principal staff of the local community houses to which family groups made contribution, and which aided the destitute of rural Judaea. These local destitute, who fell under the rubric of the ‘needy and the poor’ (CD XIV.14), probably included the wandering poor. Wanderers who left home and hearth to find work and sustenance were common in antiquity. The landless, wandering

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<sup>57</sup> *Jewish War* 2.8.6 §134.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Philo, *Apology for the Jews* 11:10–11.



poor were a problem in Greece as early as the fourth century BCE. Their troublesome readiness for mercenary service, which contributed to the instability and constant warfare of the city-states, caused Isocrates to argue that they should be recruited into a great army for the conquest of Persian domains, under the leadership of Macedonia, a programme fulfilled by Alexander.<sup>60</sup> Such invaders from the west, who later included the Romans, succeeded in transferring many of their own problems of land shortage and a multiplying, destitute underclass to their subject peoples. Hence desperate workers walk from village to village seeking employment in Jesus' parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16). The generous vineyard owner rescues those who find work only late in the day with a wage sufficient to feed their families. The Mishnah required the local synagogue to collect food on the 'tray' (*tamchuy*) for the wandering poor.<sup>61</sup> At the time of Jesus, the network of Essene community houses in rural Judaea helped secure the lot of the wandering poor. These community houses also cared for the sick (the 'afflicted', CD XIV.15).<sup>62</sup> Since sickness would have been a

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. 1QS VI.24–25.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Alexander Fuks, 'Isocrates and the Social-economic Situation in Greece', in his *Social Conflict in Ancient Greece*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), pp. 52–79.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Münich: Beck, 1924) Vol. 4, pp. 644–647.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Philo, *Apology for the Jews*, 11.13; *That every good man is free*, §87.

frequent cause of destitution, Essene care for the unwell probably extended to those outside the immediate community of the New Covenant, in order to fully address the issue of local social fragmentation through destitution.

Josephus noted that the celibate male Essenes ‘...adopt the children of others while yet pliable and easily disciplined, and regard them as their own kin and shape them in accordance with their own principles.’<sup>63</sup> The problem of too many mouths to feed is common to all agrarian societies.<sup>64</sup> Many infants, and older children too, who could not be supported by the families of poorer artisans, labourers and farmers of small land lots were adopted by the Essenes. The danger for the ‘girl who has no redeemer’ (CD XIV.16) was that she would end in slavery, prostitution, or both. Essene activity in dispelling this extremely common consequence of poverty in the ancient world<sup>65</sup> bears direct comparison with Jesus’ concern for the poor and his social interaction with prostitutes in Galilee (cf. especially Luke 7:34–50). Jesus must have viewed with approval the Essene structures of organised poor-care in rural Judaea, which by taking unsupported girls into protective communal centres prevented the fall of many into prostitution.

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<sup>63</sup> *Jewish War*, 2.8.2 §120.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, pp. 189–296.

The ‘youth who has no teacher’ (CD XIV.16) might easily find his way to a bandit group;<sup>66</sup> the community house offered him a training so he could make an honest living. Such ‘adoption’ was probably both the principal route by which the community houses helped eradicate poverty in the region, and the method by which the Essene New Covenant gained its most loyal members. Essene care, which created an effective social security net, must have led to great esteem for the movement in rural Judaea.

Support for the ‘elder who is bowed down’ (CD XIV.14–15) corresponds with Philo’s description of the activities of the highly supportive celibate male Essenes:—

‘The old too, even if childless are treated as parents of a not merely numerous but very loving family and regularly end their days in an exceedingly happy and comfortable old

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<sup>65</sup> Compare Herodotus’ picture of poor Lydian women earning money for their dowries by prostitution, *Hist.*, 1.93; further B. E. Stumpp, *Prostitution in der Römischen Antike* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1998).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985); Richard A. Horsley with John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), pp. 48–87; Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 37–39; John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 168–206.

age, honoured with privileges and with the esteem of so many children who care for them...<sup>67</sup>

‘To the elderly is given the respect and care which natural children give to their parents, and they receive from numerous hands and minds full and generous maintenance for their latter years.’<sup>68</sup>

The penal code of the *Damascus Rule* defines penalties for speaking rebelliously against groups called the ‘mothers’ and ‘fathers’ of the community:

‘[If he has murmured] against the Fathers, he shall leave and not return again. But if he has murmured against the Mothers, he shall do penance for ten days...’<sup>69</sup>

The present author would suggest and that these otherwise undefined groups of ‘mothers’ and ‘fathers’ are elderly men and women cared for in the communal Essene centres. In the context of a subsistence economy, those too frail to work may starve unless supported by their kin. When times are hard, even family may balk at feeding an extra mouth. We are reminded of Jesus' censure of the abuse of

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<sup>67</sup> *Apology for the Jews*, 11.13.

<sup>68</sup> *That Every Good Man is Free*, §87.

<sup>69</sup> 4Q270 7.i.13–14.

*korban* (Mk 7:9–13). It would have been easy and consonant with ancient practice to locate accommodation for males and females in different parts of a building or complex,<sup>70</sup> perhaps separated by an open courtyard. The elderly men were probably cared for especially by youths in their tutelage. The elderly women probably constituted an order very much like the widow orders of early Christianity,<sup>71</sup> and were probably cared for by the young girls who were taken in and other unattached women who formed part of the staff of the community centres. Though these elderly women may not have held the same authority in the community houses as the male community officers, some (if not all) probably had significant roles in the tutelage of young girls taken in by the centre. Since the inner space the Essene ‘house of the community’ would have been considered domestic and private, the authority of these women within the walls of the community may have been considerable.

This new form of voluntary, covenanted social organisation provided an effective vehicle for the expression of the ancient Israelite ideal of care for the

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Susan Walker, ‘Women and Housing in Classical Greece. The Archaeological Evidence’, in Avril Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), pp. 81–91; Cornelius Nepo, *Lives of Famous Men*, *Preface*, 6–7.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: a women’s ministry in the early church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

poor, enshrined in the Mosaic Law. It functioned through a system of community houses, where special orders of members resided, both male and female, and where the destitute could be taken in and cared for. It offered social security in a period of great extremes of wealth and poverty. Its membership was essentially drawn from the lower levels of the rural populace. In view of the centrality of care for the poor to the teaching of the artisan Jesus, we should expect that he took an interest in this organised poor–care network when he travelled in the south. One must ask if Jesus himself, and many of his fellow artisans from Galilee, availed themselves of assistance at the community houses when travelling in Judaea. We shall see below that Jesus appears to have received support from an Essene ‘poor-house’ near Jerusalem (known in the Gospels as *Bethany*) when travelling as a wandering teacher, healer and pilgrim.

### **7. The social impact of the Essene ‘houses of the community’ in rural Judaea**

It has already become clear from the above studies that Essenism had a considerable socio-economic impact in rural Judaea. A statistical method will allow us to gain a good impression of just how important Essenism was for the welfare of the region's poorest.

Magen Broshi estimated the maximum possible population of Western Palestine to 1,000,000, arguing that this figure was probably only reached in the

Byzantine period. He based his estimate on the total food resources that the region could produce. He noted that for the early Roman period the ceramic intensity index is somewhat less than in the Byzantine period.<sup>72</sup> This perhaps suggests that between 500,000 and 750,000 people were fed on locally grown food in the early Roman period. Broshi's method is unreliable for establishing the population of the coastal areas, where grain could be cheaply imported by sea. The high cost of overland transportation, however, means that the inland populations of antiquity had to be fed largely on locally grown food.<sup>73</sup> Thus Broshi's method is reliable for estimating the population of inland regions. The heartland area of Judaea, some 2,250 square kilometres, constitutes about a quarter of the easily habitable areas of western Palestine (the areas of Samaria, Galilee, and the coastal plain are each of a similar order). If we assume a population of some 650,000 supported on locally grown food at about the time of Jesus, some one quarter of this, or about 165,000, will have lived in Jerusalem and Judaea. Jerusalem in this era probably had a

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<sup>72</sup> 'The Population of Roman Palestine in the Roman-Byzantine Period', *BASOR* 236 (1979), pp. 235–237.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. article 'trade, Roman', in S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 1537–1538.

population of around 60,000 to 80,000.<sup>74</sup> Most of the population of Jerusalem were fed from food grown within Judaea, placing a limiting factor on the population remaining in rural Judaea. The population of the Jewish heartland of the Benjamin hills, Judah hills, and Shephelah is unlikely to have risen above around 100,000 in the early Roman period. As we have seen, this region contained some 200 villages and towns. Thus the average population of a settlement in the region, with any associated farmhouses, will have been of the order of around 500, or less, including children.

As we have seen, most if not all of the villages and towns will have contained a community house, run by a group of perhaps fifteen celibate male Essenes. These central houses were supported by local family groups making their regular contributions of at least two days' pay per month, or about a tenth of their income. The Essene poorhouses may have received an important third stream of income. Pious patrons, perhaps often local wealthy women, may have supported the houses. We may compare the wealthy women who supported Jesus as a travelling healer and teacher (Luke 8:1–3) and the expensive gift of perfumed oil brought by Mary of Bethany (Mark 14:3–9). A further source of income may have

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Reinhardt, 'The Population Size of Jerusalem and the Numerical Growth of the Jerusalem Church', in R. Bauckham (ed.) *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 237–265.



arisen from crafts pursued in the community houses such as pottery, rope-making and basketwork, as in later Christian monasticism.<sup>75</sup> Even elderly members might undertake basketwork. The unattached girls and women resident in the centre probably worked in spinning, weaving, and clothing manufacture.<sup>76</sup>

We possess good information about the labourer's wage, and the cost of living, in the period. The wage paid to vineyard workers in a parable of Jesus is one denarius per day (Matthew 20:1–16). The daily wage paid to the angel in the book of Tobit (5:15) is the same (one drachma). Hillel, reckoned very poor, survived on one *victoriatu*s (half a *denarius*) per day.<sup>77</sup> Fritz Heichelheim, who gathered the evidence available for prices, calculated that the living cost of a single adult was a little under half a denarius per day.<sup>78</sup> According to the Mishnah,

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Joseph Patrich, 'The Monks' Work in His Cell', *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism: A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), pp. 210–213; Alain Delattre, art. 'Hermits', in Roger S. Bagnall et al., *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. the clothing made by Tabitha in Acts 9:36–43.

<sup>77</sup> bYoma 35b.

<sup>78</sup> Fritz Moritz Heichelheim, 'Roman Syria', in Tenney Frank (ed.), *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, Vol. IV, *Africa, Syria, Greece, Asia Minor* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), pp. 121–257, see 180. See also the development of Heichelheim's survey of ancient prices and estimates for the cost of living made by Daniel Sperber, 'Costs of Living in Roman Palestine' in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 8 (1965), pp. 248–

a denarius would buy twelve loaves weighing around 550 grams each at the baker's shop.<sup>79</sup> Arye Ben-David discovered, from personal experience, that an agricultural worker in Palestine might find work for only two hundred days in the year because of weather conditions.<sup>80</sup> Cato the Elder noted that while a slave working on an estate ate four to five pounds of bread per day and cost 312 *sesterces* (78 *denarii*) to maintain annually, a free worker and his family cost 1000 *sesterces* (250 *denarii*) per year.<sup>81</sup> Thus a Judaeen labourer earning a typical wage was probably only able to keep a small family in essentials. If his family grew, they might easily suffer want.

A valuable impression of the socio-economic impact of the poor-care work of the Essene 'house of the community' in a typical Judaeen village can be gained in the following way. Of the group of perhaps fifteen male celibate Essenes living in the village, some will have been aged, and at any time there may also have been

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271; 9 (1966), pp. 182–211; 11 (1968), pp. 233–274; 13 (1970), pp. 1–15. For further comments see Gildas Hamel, *Poverty and Charity in Roman Palestine: The First Three Centuries CE* (University of California Near Eastern Studies, 23; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 2–3, and S. J. Bastomsky, 'The Great Divide in Ancient Rome and Victorian England', *Greece & Rome* 37 (1990), pp. 37–43.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Gildas Hamel, *Poverty and Charity in Roman Palestine*, p. 40.

<sup>80</sup> Arye Ben-David, *Talmudische Ökonomie*, (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1974), pp. 65–69, 292.

<sup>81</sup> *On Agriculture*, 56.

unwell brothers<sup>82</sup> who could not contribute to the income of the house. One brother may have been permanently employed in the centre as the Overseer.<sup>83</sup> A fair estimate would be that through the year the wages of the working celibates of a typical community house amounted to the wages of at least ten men. The substantial surplus over the needs of the male celibates themselves could be spread thinly, when necessary, to support those in need at the centre. We should note the emphatic thread of extreme frugality running through the classical accounts of the Essenes. Josephus writes that the Essenes ‘do not change their garments or shoes until they are torn to shreds or worn threadbare with age’, and of ‘the limitation of their allotted portions of food and drink to the demands of nature’.<sup>84</sup> Beneficiaries of charity at the Essene poorhouses certainly received only a subsistence diet and simplest shoes and garments.

A married labourer could support at subsistence level a family of perhaps five or six, including himself. Hence the surplus income of ten working male celibates at a typical Essene poorhouse might in hard times be spread thinly enough to feed and clothe another forty-five souls or more, some of whom would

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<sup>82</sup> Philo emphasises Essene care for the sick, *Apology for the Jews*, 11.13; *That every good man is free*, §87.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Philo, *Apology for the Jews*, 11.10–11.

<sup>84</sup> *Jewish War*, 2.8.4 §§126–127, 133; cf. Philo, *Apology for the Jews*, 11.11.

be other male celibates who were sick or old. Thus the surplus generated by the working male celibates could, when necessary, support through the community house some forty destitute children and adults from the local area.

As we have noted above, the influence of the Essenes on the religious and social life of the rural populace, grounded in their poor-care work and exemplary lives, lived out before the eyes of all, must have been very substantial. It would hardly be surprising if, over time, between a fifth and a third of the families of the village, at least, became incorporated into the Essene covenant. Some one hundred and fifty souls in a typical village could have belonged to families which contributed to the local Essene community house. In view of the high infant mortality typical of antiquity, the average size of a nuclear family may have been perhaps five or six. Thus some twenty-five to thirty nuclear families, in a typical village of about five hundred inhabitants, may have belonged to the Essene covenant. Their contributions were about a tenth of their annual income, and could have supported, in difficult times, the equivalent of close to three whole families, or a further fifteen souls or more, at the poorhouse.

As we have noted, the poorhouse may have received donations from wealthy patrons (especially in hard times), and derived further income from craft activities. It is thus quite likely that fifty to sixty souls or more, or more than ten percent of the population of an average Judaeian village of about five hundred

people, could be supported at the village's Essene poorhouse in hard times. In good times, especially in view of its culture of frugality, the house might easily accumulate a surplus.

In his classic study of agrarian society, Gerhard Lenski sought to calculate the typical size of the 'expendable' or destitute class as a proportion of the population. He concluded:

'Probably the best estimate we can make of the situation in agrarian society is that in normal times from 5 to 10 per cent of the population found itself in this depressed class, with the figure rising as high as 15 per cent on some occasions and falling almost to zero on others.'<sup>85</sup>

It is thus probable that the Essene poorhouse network had grown to a sufficient scale by the early Roman period to support the destitute class of Judaea. The 'New Covenant' was, in fact, pre-eminently a co-operative economic movement that alleviated the key socio-economic problems of agrarian society. It represented an effectively reformed Judaism, which by voluntary association largely eradicated the problems of poverty that had repeatedly appeared in Jewish history. Part of the economic secret of this innovative and effective form of voluntary association was

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<sup>85</sup> Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, p. 283.

the high value placed on temporary or permanent celibacy, which functioned as a population limiting mechanism. The figures given in the ancient sources of over four thousand celibate male Essenes, and of contributions of two days' pay per month from associated families, were sufficient to create a socio-economic equilibrium in rural Judaea. The high number of males removed from child-producing, but enlisted in the support of the destitute and, especially, in the rearing of the children who could not be fed in poorer families, achieved a population balance without resort to infanticide (common in the Graeco-Roman world). The Essene system eradicated the destitution that might force young girls into prostitution or cause youths to take to banditry. Thus the Essene work kept Judaea, the territory of the Temple, holy, making atonement for the land through works of righteousness.

### **8. The Essene 'House of the Poor' (Bethany) near Jerusalem**

As we have seen, the Essenes established their 'houses of the community' which undertook care for village children who could not be well fed locally, the unwell, and infirm elderly in most, if not all, of the towns and villages of Judaea. How did the Essenes apply their poor-care system in the Jerusalem area? Did they found any special house or houses with poor-care facilities within or near the city? To approach this question, it is important first to emphasise that the Essene

community houses of rural Judaea cared for the sick as well as other needy. Since the holy city raised special issues of ritual purity, it is likely that the Essenes would have founded any community house in the Jerusalem area intended to care for the sick outside the city. A passage of the *Temple Scroll* allows us to approach the question of the precise location in the Jerusalem area of the Essene houses which might attend to this aspect of the Essene system of social care:

‘You shall make three places, to the East of the city, separate from each other, to which shall come the lepers and those afflicted with a discharge and the men who have an emission...’ (11Q19:17–18)

The passage immediately in advance of this prescription defines a radius of three thousand cubits around the city within which nothing unclean shall be seen (11Q19:13–16). Thus we should expect that an Essene care-centre would be located at a greater distance than three thousand cubits (about fifteen hundred yards) from the city. Three villages to the East of Jerusalem correspond well with the prescription of the Temple Scroll: Bethany, Bethphage, and En-shemesh. The Benedictine scholar Bargil Pixner emphasised that information from the Gospels suggests that Bethany was the place where the Essenes cared for lepers. It is striking that Jesus is found, at Mark 14:3–10, dining in the house of Simon the

leper at Bethany.<sup>86</sup> The correspondence with the prescription of the *Temple Scroll* shows that the story of this particular Essene care-centre in the Jerusalem area, Bethany, is continued in the Christian Gospels. It is also significant that Lazarus, a very close friend of Jesus about whom we learn from John's Gospel, was cared for at Bethany while he was ill with an unknown disease which proved terminal (John 11:1–12:11). John's Gospel notes that Bethany is fifteen stadia (about two miles) distant from the holy city (11:18). The village was invisible from the city and Temple since it lay on the further slope of the Mount of Olives. Its location was thus well suited to fulfilling Essene purity requirements. Matthias Delcor argued that the *Temple Scroll* influenced the design of the Herodian Temple.<sup>87</sup> James R. Davila has pointed to the dialectic relationships that existed between ideal conceptions of the Temple and their earthly counterparts.<sup>88</sup> It is possible that the

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<sup>86</sup> B. Pixner, *Wege des Messias und Stätten der Urkirche*, (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, second edition 1994), pp. 208–211.

<sup>87</sup> 'Is the Temple Scroll a Source of the Herodian Temple?', in G. J. Brooke, *Temple Scroll Studies* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), pp. 67–90.

<sup>88</sup> 'The Macrocosmic Temple, Scriptural Exegesis and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice', *Dead Sea Discoveries*, 9 (2002), pp. 1–19.



prior existence of a care-centre at Bethany influenced the ideal scheme of the *Temple Scroll*, rather than vice versa.<sup>89</sup>

The name Bethany itself confirms the village's function as a principal poor-care institution of Jerusalem. Jerome's *Onomasticon* defines its meaning as *domus afflictionis*, 'house of affliction'.<sup>90</sup> Jerome understood the name to be derived from the Hebrew *beth 'anî* or the equivalent phrase in Aramaic, *beth 'anyâ*, 'house of the poor' or 'house of affliction/poverty'. The Christian Palestinian and Syriac versions of the New Testament both give the Aramaic version of this name and confirm Jerome's understanding. Unfortunately, many modern commentators have rejected Jerome's explanation, preferring most often to suggest a derivation from the personal name Ananiah (Nehemiah 8:4 and 10:22).<sup>91</sup> However, the Greek transliteration found in the New Testament, *Bêthania*, precludes this possibility,

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<sup>89</sup> The objection has been raised that we have no evidence that any attempts were made to implement the plan of the Temple Scroll. This objection must deal with Delcor's study cited above, and at best argues from silence. Moreover, the presence or absence of comparative cases cannot prove or disprove the correspondence under discussion.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. F. Wutz, *Onomastica Sacra. Untersuchungen zum Liber Interpretationis Nominum Hebraicorum des hl. Hieronymus* (= *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, Vol. 41), Part I (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1914), p. 557.

<sup>91</sup> E. Nestle, *Philologica Sacra* (Berlin, 1896) p. 20; cf. G. Dalman, *Sacred Sites and Ways. Studies in the Topography of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1935), p. 250. A sometimes mooted contraction from Ananiah, which appears as a village of Bethel in Nehemiah 11:32, is possible but unattested.

since no *alpha* appears directly before the *iota*, implying that none appeared before the *yodh* in the semitic name. Rather, a consonantal *yodh* followed directly after the letter *nun*, as in the Aramaic form *beth* ‘*anyâ*. Derivation from the Hebrew *bêth-te’ênah* (‘house of the fig tree’), sometimes suggested, is likewise to be rejected because of the *alpha* which follows the *theta* in the Greek *Bêthania*, which cannot be accounted for thus. An untenable derivation from the Talmudic place-name *Beth hînî*, (or *Beth hênê*) taken to mean ‘house of dates’ (assuming a shortening of ‘*ahînê* to *hînî/hênê*) has been very often referenced as fact because the name of the nearby village *Bêthphagê* derives from *bêth phagê*, ‘house of unripe figs’.<sup>92</sup> However, the proposed etymology still fails since the Greek *Bêthania* clearly demands an a-vowel in the first syllable of its second component word, for which the assumed shortening of ‘*ahînê* offers no correspondence. The Christian Palestinian and Syriac versions were undoubtedly correct to render Bethany as *beth* ‘*anyâ*, ‘House of the Poor’. The explanation of the expert semitic philologist Jerome, who spent the last thirty four years of his life as abbot of the monastery at Bethlehem, only about six miles to the south southwest, was

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<sup>92</sup> *Beth hînî*, an unknown location, appears in the Babylonian Talmud, Chullin 53a; its relevance was rejected by G. Dalman, *Grammatik des Jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905) p. 419.

correct.<sup>93</sup> I would suggest that the modern semantic equivalent of *beth* ‘*anyâ*, ‘Bethany/bethany’, is close to ‘Poorhouse/poorhouse’ rather than simply ‘house of the poor’ or ‘house of the poor man’.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The present author came to reject, on the grounds explained above, the common etymology ‘house of dates’ while researching as *Gastprofessor* at the University of Tübingen, 1996–1998, included this research result in his paper ‘Essene Community and Jesus’ Early Community’ at the Princeton Seminary Millenium Jesus and Archaeology Colloquium, Jerusalem in 2000, and first published this conclusion in his ‘Two Types of Discipleship in Early Christianity’, *JTS* n.s. 51,1(April 2001), pp. 105–103, see 121 n. 43. The colloquium paper was published in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 472–502, see p. 496–498. Subsequently the present author became aware of the extensive discussion of William Hepworth Dixon (1821–1879) in his *The Holy Land*, Vol. 2 (London: Chapman and Hall, second edition 1866), pp. 203–219. A visitor to the Holy Land, Dixon rejected, on seeing the site of Bethany, the derivation of its name from dates since he observed that the ‘dry and rocky’ topography was clearly unsuited to date palms: ‘It seemed pretty safe to say that no date palm had ever grown upon that rock’ (p. 214); Dixon preferred the meaning apparently obvious to him from the identity of the Greek with the Syriac — ‘Bethany (Bethanyah, House of the Poor)... is still the abode of poverty’ (p. 205, cf. p. 203). Dixon included in his lengthy ‘Note’, pp. 214–219, the valuable etymological discussion of Emanuel Deutsch (= Immanuel Oscar Menahem Deutsch, 1829–1873, assistant at the British Museum) conveyed to him in a letter of 1865 (see pp. 217–219). Deutsch attributed the origin of the interpretation of Bethany as ‘house of dates’ to the rabbinical scholar and one-time Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University John Lightfoot (1602–1675). Deutsch’s reference is clearly to Lightfoot’s discussion in his *A Chorographical Century...* (1658); for this see John Rogers Pitman (ed.), *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot, D.D., Master of Catherine Hall, Cambridge*, Vol. X (London: J. F. Dove, 1823), pp. 85–86. Lightfoot’s treatment is brief and combines philological mistakes with an indefensible, loose associative argument. He assumes both the equivalence of *Beth hênê* in the Talmud with

Galilean pilgrims avoided potential conflict with Samaritans by travelling south on the eastern side of the Jordan. Bethany was the last station on their route to Jerusalem after crossing the river and taking the road through Jericho up into the highlands. The Essene choice of Bethany as a place for care of the poor and sick is completely intelligible. A respectful distance from the city and Temple, and on the pilgrim route, Bethany was a most suitable location for a charitable institution. Jewish pilgrims who had made the greatest overland journey (from Galilee) could be intercepted and cared for. The location was also suitable for a centre which cared for the sick, who were best ministered to out of view of the

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Greek *Bêthania* and of *hênê* with *'ahînê* without consideration of the lack of correspondence of the Greek *alpha* with the Hebrew vowel-letter *yodh*, which cannot represent an a-vowel (*aleph* or *he* is required). Deutsch correctly insists that '*Bêth 'Ahînê* ('House of Dates') could only have been transcribed in Greek *Bêthainê* or *Bêthaanê* or *Bêthênê*; and even assuming the A to have been dropped, no other Greek form could have been adopted than *Bêthinê* or *Bêthênê*, for there is some method in these transcripts, however manifold their apparent irregularities.' Deutsch urged the irrelevance of the Talmudic *Beth hini* passages and gave weight to the Syriac translation tradition's rendering of Bethany as 'house of poverty'. He concluded that "Bethany means, according to all reasonable etymology, nothing but 'House of Misery', 'Poor-House'", determining the common derivation from 'dates' (*'ahînê*) "contrary to all linguistic laws" (see Dixon, pp. 217 and 219.)

<sup>94</sup> I note that I was anticipated in this conclusion by Deutsch (see previous note), for whom of course the poor-houses (work-houses) of England, Ireland and Scotland were a contemporary social institution already of long standing and recently made more severe by the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act.

temple, and at a distance great enough to preclude any possible ritual affront to the Temple and holy city. We have noted that Josephus records that even the individual celibate Essene was allowed to offer assistance and alms to the destitute without reference to his superiors.<sup>95</sup> It is not surprising that a communally organised Essene care-centre had been established at Bethany on the Mount of Olives to care for pilgrims at the end of a long and potentially arduous journey from Galilee. The house naturally combined this work with care for the sick and destitute who drifted towards the city of Jerusalem. Thus Bethany received its name because it was the Essene poorhouse *par excellence*, the poorhouse which alleviated poverty closest to the holy city. No contradiction was felt between providing isolated accommodation for lepers and ritual purification for pilgrims within the same village; all the poorhouses of the Judaeian network arranged their accommodation to cope with the complexities of ritual purity while also caring for the sick and offering refuge to women.

We would expect the Essene poorhouse known as Bethany to have received important support from pious patrons belonging to the wealthy Jerusalem elite. We now turn to examine the actions of one of these patrons as they are recorded in the Gospel Passion narratives.

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<sup>95</sup> *Jewish War*, 2.8.6 §134, cited above.

**9. Mary of Jerusalem announced Jesus as Messiah to the poor by anointing him at the Essene ‘House of the Poor’ (*Bethany*) near Jerusalem**

According to the Passion narratives of all the Gospels, Jesus made his place to stay Bethany, travelling into the city each day to teach in the Temple, returning at night across the Kidron valley (cf. Mark 11:1, 11, 12–14, 20–21; 14:1–9). A Galilean artisan who had often made the long pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast, Jesus had probably always made use of the guest facilities at Bethany. He had a lifelong association with those who administered hospitality in the village. Several features of Jesus’ association with Bethany suggest that he received considerable recognition from the Essene alms-administrators there. He was able to billet his whole travelling party in premises in the village, and continued to receive hospitality at Bethany even after his provocative action against the money-changers of the Temple (Mark 11:15–19). During the week of his Passion he was even honoured at Bethany with a celebratory feast (John 11:2), at which he was anointed king.

We have already suggested that Jesus’ interest in the poor and the outcast, which typify his Galilean activities, would probably have led to an interest in the type of covenanted social organisation through which Essenism addressed the problem and consequences of poverty in Judaea. We must also ask how the Essene

poorhouse with which Jesus had associations at Bethany responded to Jesus' inspiring and effective ministry of teaching and healing, which had already created a huge following amongst the ordinary mass of the population in Galilee.<sup>96</sup> The Gospels record an event that probably answers this question for us. At the feast made in his honour at Bethany, Jesus was anointed with costly perfumed oil by his disciple Mary (Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8). When objections were raised on the grounds of expense, Jesus defended Mary's action. His concluding remark in Mark's account gives us the key to understanding the significance of Mary's action: 'Truly, I say to you, wherever the Gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her' (14:9).

In the cult of the emperor, the term *euangelion*, 'gospel', had attained high significance. *Euangelion* indicated joyful tidings such as were associated with the birthday, attainment to majority and accession to power of the Roman emperor. A calendar inscription of around 9 BC from Priene in Asia recorded, concerning the emperor Octavian (Augustus): 'the birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of joyful tidings (*euangelion*) which have been proclaimed on his account.'<sup>97</sup> Jesus was anointed by Mary as the hoped-for king of Israel and of the world. Only this explanation of Mary's anointing of Jesus can account for the

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Mark 1:32–34, 45, 2:12, 3:7–12, 20, 4:1, 5:21, 24, 31, 6:30–34, 53–56, 8:1, 34.

universal significance Jesus ascribed to her action, and the universal fame which Mary herself gained by it. The proclamation of the Christian Gospel is that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), the hoped-for universal Lord and redeemer of all oppressed. Mary had made the first public declaration of this Good News for the world.

Mary's high intent, to proclaim Jesus as Messiah and universal lord, accounts for her use of such a large quantity of expensive perfumed oil. At least one embarrassed onlooker commented that it could have been sold for three hundred *denarii*, a good annual income for a labourer (Mark 14:5). The high value of her perfumed oil shows that Mary was a wealthy woman, a member of the Jerusalem elite and patron of Bethany, the poorhouse nearest to Jerusalem. Her action suggests that at least some members of the Jerusalem elite were eager for Jesus to be declared openly as the royal Messiah.<sup>98</sup> The most extensive expression of the hope for a royal Messiah in writings prior to Jesus' ministry is found in the Psalms of Solomon, which some have suggested 'originated in an Essene-like community in Jerusalem that stood in opposition to the Sadducees and in contrast

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. G. Friedrich, *TDNT*, Vol. II, pp. 724–725.

<sup>98</sup> Others were Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who took care to bury Jesus' body honourably (John 19:38–42), Martha and Lazarus (cf. Frederick W. Bartz, *Lazarus and the Fourth Gospel Community* [Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995]) and the Beloved Disciple (cf. Capper, *JTS* 49 [1998], pp. 1–55).



to the Pharisees'.<sup>99</sup> In these writings, which probably date to c. 50–40 BCE, a non-militant Davidic Messiah is expected who will rule over Israel as the ideally pious and obedient king. He will achieve the return of the dispersion and the obedience of the nations by 'the power of the spirit, not the power of the mailed fist', as Klausner wrote.<sup>100</sup> It is likely that Mary intended by her action to declare Jesus as such a royal Messiah.

The danger inherent in Mary's action was obvious. Jesus had already openly challenged the Sadducean authorities by overturning the moneychangers' tables in the Temple (Mark 11:15–18; John 2:13–22). A severe reaction from the Temple authorities was all the more certain since Mary seems to have sought to engage the staff, supporters and guests of Bethany, the poorhouse nearest to Jerusalem, possibly the most important of all the Judaeen poorhouses, in open support of Jesus' Messianic claim. Mary had sought to make Jesus the Messiah of the whole people by anointing as the leader of the highly organised New Covenant network of Judaea.

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<sup>99</sup> R. B. Wright in J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985) p. 642; cf. O. Eissfeldt, 'The Psalms of Solomon', in his *The Old Testament. An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), pp. 610–613 and A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings from Qumran* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), p. 296.

Jesus was aware of the inevitable consequences of Mary's action. We know this from his response when objection was made to the expense of the oil with which she anointed him (Mark 14:5; John 12:4–6). The words with which he chose to refer to his inevitable death, however, first addressed the immediate problem of the objection made against Mary's generosity. Rich women such as Mary, who associated themselves with Bethany, were expected to perform good works on behalf of the poor, such as ensuring that any destitute who died in the Jerusalem area were given proper burial. Jesus declared that Mary had indeed performed such a good work: 'She has done a beautiful thing to me... she has anointed my body beforehand for burial' (Mark 14:6–8).<sup>101</sup> The deeper meaning of Jesus' words, however, is clear: 'By anointing me thus, Mary has signed my death warrant. The Sadducees will now see me as a declared political rival and have me killed.' Commentators who attend only to the immediate rhetorical function of Jesus' remark, his exoneration of Mary, have assumed that anointing for burial was the real significance and intent of her action. This reading of the incident wrenches the act of anointing from its larger context, the faith of those supporters

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<sup>100</sup> Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 317–324, see 324; cf. M. de Jonge in *TDNT*, Vol. 9, p. 514; J. H. Charlesworth, 'The Concept of the Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha', *ANRW*, II.19.1, pp. 188–218.

<sup>101</sup> David Daube suggested that 'beautiful work' is a technical term for a charitable work, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Arno Press, 1973), pp. 315–316.

of Jesus who had come to regard him as the yearned for King of Israel and hoped to see him recognised as such. It is evident from the Gospel narratives that none of the disciples and supporters anticipated his coming death. Jesus' characterisation of Mary's action was his device to exonerate her before her detractors, not a description of what she understood herself to be doing.

The role of Bethany as the poorhouse closest to Jerusalem is confirmed by the hubbub of objection caused by Mary's use of such an expensive gift. Some witnesses to Jesus' anointing (Mark 14:3–4) including Judas (John 12:4–6), felt intense embarrassment that such wealth had been poured away. How could witnesses to the scene not feel embarrassment when Mary had chosen as the location for her action a poorhouse where the destitute of the Jerusalem area (always numerous) gathered at a respectful distance from the city to receive alms? Jesus referred to the poor who constantly gathered at Bethany for alms in his response: 'For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them' (Mark 14:7, cf. John 12:8). Many among the crowds who acclaimed Jesus on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as royal Messiah (Mark 11:1–11; John 12:12–19) were undoubtedly drawn from the destitute who received support from the Essene poorhouse of Bethany and saw Jesus as their champion. The possibility of Jesus' anticipation of his own death has been accepted by scholars unwilling to see Jesus' saying about anointing for his burial (Mark 14:8)

as a retrojected reference to the crucifixion. The absence of Mary's name from Mark has been taken as a form-critical indication of an early and authentic tradition. Earlier commentators found greater historical difficulty with Jesus' subsequent saying on the reputation which Mary would gain (14:9), finding in the terms 'Gospel' and 'proclaim' the vocabulary of the Gentile-Christian mission.<sup>102</sup> This saying has fared well in more recent criticism, perhaps because of feminist interest in Mary.<sup>103</sup> The present study's illumination of the historical context of the events of the Marcan pericope as a royal anointing intended to win for Jesus as a power-base the Judaeen network of poorhouses provides historical confirmation of many aspects of the passage, and explains historically the Sadducean authorities' actions against Jesus. Jesus went from Bethany to celebrate his last meal with his disciples at the 'Upper Room' on Zion, the south-west hill of Jerusalem, where he associated with an Essene-like group, and where covenanted structures of property-sharing closely similar to those of Essenism continued amongst his followers.<sup>104</sup> The further parts of this investigation will undertake close exegetical

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. the survey of Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 532–534.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (London: SCM, 1994), p. xliii.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Brian J. Capper, 'The Palestinian Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods' in Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 323–356;

examination of the evidence for legal-social structures of community of goods in the account the earliest community of Jesus followers' in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:42–47, 4:32–5:14 and 6:1–6) and demonstrate their origins from within the Essene property-sharing Covenant of Judaea.

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'Community of Goods in the Early Jerusalem Church', *ANRW*, II.26.2, pp. 1730–1774; *JTS* 49 (1998), pp. 1–55; *JTS* 52 (2001), pp. 105–123.