It is undoubtedly rash for one of Geza Vermes’s pupils who has not specialized in the interpretation of the Dead Sea scrolls to offer in his honour a suggestion about the origins of the Qumran community directly opposed to the view that Geza himself has championed for most of his scholarly career.\(^1\) I do so primarily because I believe that the question should be resolved not by considering afresh the scrolls themselves but by a different appreciation of the writings of Josephus.\(^2\) As a result of this reconsideration, I shall suggest that the Essene hypothesis of Qumran origins is much less probable than is usually proposed.

The basis of the Essenes hypothesis lies in the similarities between the communal life laid down in the sectarian rules and the communal life ascribed to the Essenes by some of the Greek and Latin authors who referred to them.\(^3\) The site of Qumran can also be made, more or less, to correspond to the location of the Essenes.

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1. I am grateful to Emanuel Tov and especially to Geza Vermes for their helpful, if skeptical, comments on this short paper. I have kept references to modern discussions to a minimum, in the belief that extensive bibliographical information will not be needed for readers of this Journal, since the wise editorial policy of Geza Vermes over many years has ensured that new scholarship on the Dead Sea scrolls has frequently featured on its pages.

2. Most discussions of the relationship of Josephus’ writings to the Qumran scrolls take for granted that the sectarians were Essenes. Cf., for example, T.S. Beall, *Josephus’ Description of the Essenes illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1988). Many of the points that I am making in this brief study have been raised before as a possibility by scholars ever since Louis Ginzberg, *An Unknown Jewish Sect* (original German edn. 1922; rev. English edn. 1976). The case seems to me to be worth restating because even those scholars most acutely aware of the dangers of parallelomania in other fields, such as the comparison of the New Testament to rabbinic literature, seem to drop their guard when they come to consider the identity of the Dead Sea sect.

asserted by Pliny,\textsuperscript{4} and one period of occupation of the site coincides with the efflorescence of Essenes in the late Second Temple period.\textsuperscript{5} Acknowledged discrepancies, such as the emphasis on common ownership of property and on celibacy, which rank high in some of the classical descriptions of the Essenes but are not found in every group depicted in the scrolls, can be explained away by a number of plausible strategies: the differences may reflect different groups of Essenes, or different stages of the development of the sect, or the differing viewpoints of ‘insider’ compared to ‘outsider’ accounts.\textsuperscript{6} Above all, it is averred, the Essene theory ‘is to be preferred to theories linking Qumran with the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Judaeo-Christians, not to mention the medieval Karaites’.\textsuperscript{7}

It is not my intention to dispute the plausibility of any of this hypothesis as it stands, but simply to draw attention to one crucial pre-supposition which underlies it. Arguments about which of the Jewish groups known from the extant literary sources to have existed in late Second Temple Judaea should be identified with the Qumran sectarians take for granted that the extant sources provide, between them, a full list of such groups. If that were so, it would indeed be the task of scholarship to adjudicate between the claims of different groups to be identified with the Qumran sectarians. But it seems to me demonstrably unlikely that such a full list survives.

It is easy to show that all the extant literary sources apart from Josephus provide only a partial picture of first-century Judaism. If only the New Testament and the rabbinic tradition survived, modern scholars would know about Pharisees and Sadducees but not Essenes; since at least one amoraic rabbi asserted that there were no fewer than twenty-four groups of heretics within Judaism before 70 CE, that rabbi, if he thought at all about the implications of his assertion, must have assumed that most such groups had names which later Jews no longer recalled.\textsuperscript{8} If only the voluminous write-

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Sanh} Cf. \textit{ySanh}. 29c: ‘R. Yohanan said, “Israel did not go into exile until there had been made twenty-four sects of minim”,’ I do not suggest that this tradition should be taken as a serious reflection of Second-Temple times, since the number 24 is
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