ANTI-ESSENE TRAITS IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

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The essence of scholarship is to make the indefinite definite, to find a place for the unknown in the realm of the known. It is therefore rather unpleasant to try to demolish a theory unless one suggests a better in its place. Still, the very fact that one has not an axe to grind might at least enhance one's objectivity.

My present undertaking is even more unpleasant, since I am venturing outside the field of my main interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls (= DSS) — almost outside my main field altogether. The only excuse which I can offer for this presumption is that this is precisely what most of the scholars engaged in the study of the DSS are doing. No scholar can be expected to possess expert knowledge of all the different problems involved, and when linguists, archeologists etc. begin to speculate upon religio-sociological phenomena, their views are not necessarily authoritative.

In their search after a sect known from our history books to whom the DSS (and the Damascus covenant) might be attributed, scholars are divided into four main groups ¹). Those who maintain the scrolls are of Essene or almost Essene origin — the first two groups — are in the majority by far ²). The differences between these two opinions are unimportant: Both concede that there are certain divergences between the Dead Sea Covenanters (= DSC) and the Essenes as depicted by Philo and Josephus, and both agree that certain characteristics are mentioned only as belonging to one of them. But whereas some scholars are cautious and prefer to speak of the DSC as a group closely allied to the Essenes — a sister sect, as it were ³) — a great number make light of the differences ⁴) and explain them as historical developments within one sect.

²) Vide VAN DER PLOEG, VT ii [1952], p. 172.
³) The so-called marrying Essenes are mentioned as an example of such a sister sect.
⁴) The differences brought to light until now are, indeed, not very striking.
The third group consists of scholars, each of whom has put forth a different theory as to the identity of the DSC, none of whom, however, advance further evidence of improbability. According to these theories the DSS are attributed to any period between that of the early Assideans and the mediaeval Karaites.

Very few scholars accept none of these theories, neither do they advance any of their own. None of them, however, have marshalled new evidence against the Essene theory. The present paper will therefore attempt to show that there are such grave religious divergences between the Essenes and DSC as to render this theory highly improbable, unless we are prepared to allot to the name "Essenes" a meaningless indefiniteness.

Our first problem is of course to find out, whether the identity between the Essenes and the DSC has been proved. All the points of affinity can be found in the studies of Burrows, Brownlee, Dupont-Sommer, Schubert and Grinz, who have assembled the relevant material and advanced almost the same points. If we take, however, the trouble to scrutinize these assertions more closely, it will soon become clear that they have proved one thing only: *The DSC, like the Essenes, were a religious monastic sect.*

Going through all these studies, what is the evidence in favour of the identification? Both groups were monastic in organisation, possessions were pooled (*vide infra*), a rigorous discipline was main-

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1) Thus a scholar who has gone to great lengths to prove his own theory is content to remark that the Essenes are ruled out by the fact that we know of no persecution of the Essenes. He adds: "The Essene theory on the origin of the Dead Sea Scrolls has, in any case, been exploded by Burrows' detailed study" (Teicher, JJS ii [1951], p. 92). As far as I can make out, most scholars have attributed to Burrows' study neither this aim nor this result.


3) *Loc. cit.*

4) B.A xiii [1950, 3], p. 56 sqq.

5) CRAIBL, 1951, p. 190 sqq.; The Dead Sea Scrolls [1952], p. 86 sqq.


7) Sinai xxxii [Sept. 1952], p. 11 sqq. [in modern Hebrew].

8) One is reluctant to allow the argument of Dupont-Sommer and Grinz that we are bound to identify the DSC with one of the movements known to us from our history lessons: "It would be quite impossible to connect the Pharisees in any way whatsoever with the sect of the New Covenant ... It can only be, therefore, that the sect of the New Covenant is to be identified with that of the Essenes" (Dupont-Sommer, p. 88). Cf. Grinz, p. 12.