

JOHN BEN-DANIEL
Old City, Jerusalem
Israel

THE CAVE-DWELLERS OF MT. ARBEL

Abstract: During the first century BCE, there were hundreds of people living in caves in the cliffs bordering the Plain of Ginnosar, northwest of the Sea of Galilee. This cave-dwelling phenomenon began around 100 BCE and continued until the third century CE. Current theories view these cave-dwellings as cliff-shelters for use in times of trouble, but do not explain why the caves were inhabited continuously, even at other times. This article draws on known historical reports and local archaeological findings to propose a new explanation for this presence and cautiously identify one large collection of caves as the home of an Essene community.

1. Introduction

The Sea of Galilee lies in a basin, surrounded by mountains on three sides. To the east, the ground rises sharply onto the Golan Heights; to the north the hills ascend steadily up to the swampy Huleh Valley, and on the West the mountainous walls are interrupted at the northwestern corner of the lake by a fertile alluvial plain, 5.5 x 2.5 kms, called the Plain of Ginnosar. Except for the lakeside, this plain is also bounded by mountains. In the mountains to the south and north of the plain, there are tall cliffs made of limestone and etched into the cliffs are hundreds of caves.

What is so unique about this region is that dozens, rising to hundreds, of people inhabited these caves from the start of the first century BCE. The caves showing evidence of occupation are to be found mainly in the long ranges of cliffs skirting Mts. Arbel and Nittai, on either side of Wadi Arbel, whose stream empties into the Plain of Ginnosar from the south. From about the same period (100 BCE), there is also evidence of occupation in the numerous cave complexes high in the cliffs of Wadi Amud and Akhbara Rock, to the north (Fig 1).

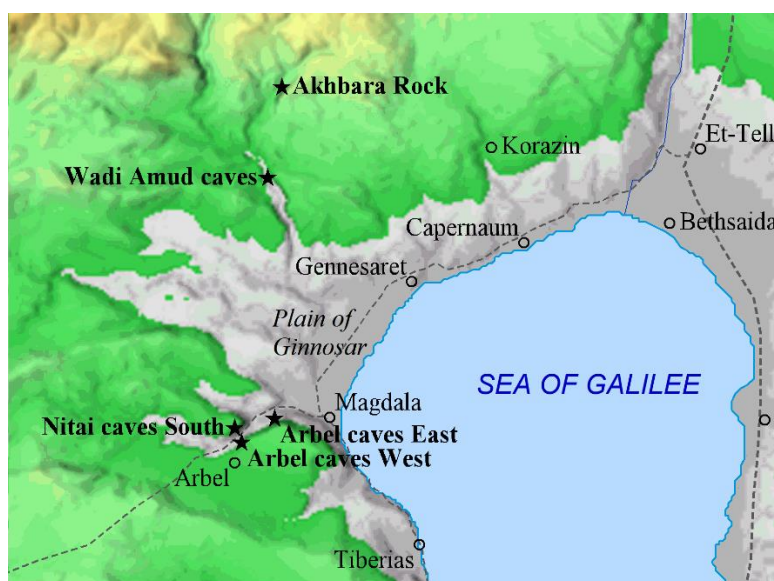


Fig 1: Map of the Plain of Ginnosar with the cave sites to the north and south (created using Bible Mapper 5.0)

The dating of this cave-dwelling phenomenon to the start of the first century BCE, according to the archaeological finds, coincides with a widespread ethnic shift in the Galilee region, from a pagan Syrophenician population that had previously migrated eastwards from the coastal cities of Acre and Tyre, to a predominantly Jewish population immigrating from Judaea in the south. Judaea's borders were expanding rapidly northward at this time, as a result of a campaign of military conquest and occupation led by the ruling high priest and ethnarch of the Hasmonean dynasty, John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE) and by his sons and successors, Aristobulus (104–103 BCE) and Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE). The dating and archaeological finds confirm that the caves at these sites were prepared and occupied by Jews.

The cave-dwelling phenomenon lasted at least three centuries, from 100 BCE until 250 CE, when it began to decline. The cave population was flourishing in the early first century CE, when Jesus and his apostles preached the Gospel on the shores of the lake, just a few kilometres away. Although some of the more inaccessible caves were used sporadically as shelters from attack during the Civil War (40–37 BCE), and again during the two Jewish revolts (67–70 CE and 132–135 CE), the majority of the caves were inhabited continuously until the third century CE. Due to the paucity of historical documentation about the caves and their residents, most of what we know comes from archaeological surveys, excavations and explorations of the caves in question. The findings from these investigations can then be matched with the available records of local historical events, in order to piece together the nature and purpose of this extraordinary, Hasmonean-era 'housing project'.

2. The Caves in Question

Thanks mainly to the work of the archaeologists Zvi Ilan and Uzi Leibner, and to the cave exploration of Yinon Shivti'el, we now know the precise number, distribution and contents of the caves in the mountains to the south and to the north of the Ginnosar plain.¹ In the cliffs of Mts. Arbel and Nittai to the south, on either side of Wadi Arbel, there are 530 caves, of which at least 400 show signs of human modification and occupation in the past, many of them dating from around 100 BCE.² For at least 150 of these caves, access is possible only by rope or rope ladders, and the remaining 250 can be reached on foot from the base of the cliff, although the climb is sometimes difficult and dangerous. Most of the cave-dwellings have been fashioned in separate clusters of 4 to 12 caves, at intervals along the cliffs, except for two particular sites in the Arbel range, where there are dense concentrations: one at the eastern end (Arbel caves East) and one at the western end (Arbel caves West), about two kilometres apart. The collection of cave-dwellings at the eastern end was called a 'cave village' by Zvi Ilan, the first archaeologist to investigate it.³

¹ Most of the archaeological information in this paper is taken from the works of these three investigators: Ilan, Z., 'Reviving a 2,000-Year-Old Landmark', *Eretz Magazine*, Winter 1988/1989, 60–69; Leibner, U., *Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Galilee*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 127, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009; Shivti'el, Y., *Cliff Shelters and Hiding Complexes in the Galilee During the Early Roman Period: The Speleological and Archaeological Evidence*, *Novum Testamentum Et Orbis Antiquus—Series Archaeologica*; Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht GmbH & Co, 2019, and *ibid.* 'Artificial Caves Cut into Cliff Tops in the Galilee and their Historical Significance', *Proceedings of International Congress of Speleology in Artificial Cavities*, Hypogea 2015, Rome, March 11/17, 67–76.

² Shivti'el, *Cliff Shelters*, 53.

³ "It was amid this lack of consensus that we began our exploration of the caves on Mount Arbel in 1987. Since then, we have amassed so much information that we can now say with certainty that we

In the mountains to the north of Ginnosar Plain, Yinon Shivti'el has counted a total of 304 caves at three separate sites in the cliffs of Wadi Amud, of which 250 show signs of occupation from the first century BCE, and a little further to the north, in the cliff of Akhbara Rock (at 130m it is the highest vertical cliff in Galilee), there are 127 caves in total, of which a few are accessible only by rappelling down from the top of the cliff. In summary, there are about 400 caves with signs of occupation in the Arbel/Nittai cliffs to the south of the Ginnosar plain, and about 350 in the Amud/Akhbara cliffs to the north. Of these, a substantial minority (up to 35% in Arbel/Nittai cliffs) are accessible only by professional rock climbers using sophisticated climbing equipment.

Before considering the historical background for the cave-dwelling phenomenon in this region, a brief description of the cave contents and archaeological findings is needed. The cave-dwellings have all been laboriously carved, to a greater or lesser extent, large enough to accommodate a person standing upright. Shivti'el discerns a difference in construction style between those carved in the early first century BCE and those in the later part of that century: "Based on the pottery finds, the caves were divided into two main periods. Small natural caves with signs of rough, undressed hewing that probably date from the Hellenistic period, and a second group of larger caves, all man-made and cut with straight sides, dated to the early Roman period. A few of the rock-hewn caves contain two or more chambers, some of which are long and narrow. In various cases passages were found between caves on different levels and some had shafts cut in them to move from one to another. Access ladders were probably erected inside chambers that were completely hidden from the outside".⁴

Within the caves, plastered cisterns have been found, fed by carved channels running from the cliff-face, or from internal seepage, and at each site at least one stepped-pool has been discovered and identified as a *miqveh* (a ritual bath for purification). Both cisterns and *miqva'ot* are particularly numerous in the cave collection at the eastern end of the Arbel cliff range (Arbel caves East), where 35 cisterns and 5 *miqva'ot* have been identified to date. Mention should also be made of the two fortress-like structures at this site, the first is a large cave with an ancient wall at its entrance, dating to the Hasmonean era (more will be said about this later), and the second is a much larger, walled construction on three levels with guard towers, in the making of which most of the original cave-dwellings and water installations in that part were erased. It was built in the seventeenth century by the Druze overlord Fahr a-Din II and is called the Qala'at Ibn Ma'an fortress.

Many of the cave-dwellings have carefully carved fittings, such as wall niches for oil lamps, floor pits for storage jars and carved slits at the entrances to attach ropes for hauling and climbing. Outside the entrance, some caves have a hewn ledge likely used as an observation point. Findings from the caves and their ledges include ceramic sherds, coins and the occasional Roman-army arrowhead. Study of the ceramics from all the sites show similar patterns, indicating occupation from the late Hellenistic, or Hasmonean, period (110–50 BCE), increasing through the early Roman period (50 BCE– CE 135), and declining towards the end of the mid-Roman period (135–250

have found the "Arbel cave village", which was first built in Hasmonean times, and continued to function in the Great Revolt against the Romans, the Byzantine period, and all the way up to the eighteenth century, the time of the Ma'an dynasty, which built the fortress. We learned that about one hundred caves were hewn or adapted on the cliff for residential purposes..." Ilan, 'Reviving', 66–67.

⁴ Shivti'el, *Cliff Shelters*, 57.

CE). In some sites, there appears to have been temporary reoccupation during the mid and late Byzantine times. The coins found in or near the caves confirm the chronological range of ceramic fragments, with a preponderance of coins from the reigns of the two Hasmonean rulers, John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE) and Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE).

Finally, it should be noted that the cave-dwellings described here were all built in the vicinity of a town or village. The two cave-dwelling sites in the cliffs of Mt. Arbel, Arbel caves East and Arbel caves West, as well as the southern caves on Mt. Nittai, are all built within a three-kilometre radius of the ancient town of Arbel, which, according to good archaeological data, was established at about the same time, in the late Hellenistic period, or to be more precise, during the reign of John Hyrcanus. The caves at the northern end of Mt. Nittai are dated a little later, to the start of the Early Roman era (50–40 BCE), and coincide with the establishment of the village at the foot of Mt. Nittai (Horvat Vradim or Hamam). At the other sites, north of the Plain of Ginnosar, the caves in the cliffs of Wadi Amud were connected by a path to the ancient village of Kur (Kahal) and were also close to other settlements in the vicinity (Huqoq, Shuna and Nashi). Similarly, the cave-dwellings in the Akhbara Rock are adjacent to the ruins of the ancient village of Akhbara.

2. The Purpose of the Caves

There is a wide scholarly consensus that the cave-dwellings at these sites were constructed by the neighbouring villagers as shelters and refuges in times of trouble, and were actually used for this purpose during the Civil War against Herod (40–37 CE) and during the two Jewish Revolts against Rome (66–70 CE and 132–135 CE). After investigating the Mt. Arbel caves in 1989, the archaeologist Zvi Ilan was the first to propose this explanation for their construction, arguing from similarities to the ‘refuge caves’ that had just been discovered in Judaea. This explanation has been endorsed and developed in the last decade by the courageous work of Yinon Shivti’el, who has surveyed the most inaccessible cave-dwellings in the region, and termed them ‘cliff shelters’⁵ to distinguish them from the other types of shelters described to date, namely the isolated, rocky ‘refuge caves’ and the urban, subterranean ‘hideout complexes’. He writes “The phenomenon of preparing cliff shelters and the findings discovered in them... indicate that they were meant for survival and in a collective organization around the need to defend and safeguard the living in a situation of deep distress. This was true during the Hellenistic period and, even more, during the period of the Great Jewish Revolt against Rome”.⁶

However, by focusing on the use of these caves in times of distress, the ‘cave shelter’ explanation proposed by Ilan and Shivti’el overlooks the intense and continuous use of the majority of caves at other times too. This objection is most clearly stated by Uzi Leibner, “The significant Early Roman finds might support the assumption that these caves indeed served as places of refuge for rebels during the First Jewish Revolt, however, this cannot be proven and there is a considerable amount of pottery from other periods as well”.⁷ Arguing from the results of his Eastern Galilee settlement

⁵ Shivti’el’s definition of ‘cliff shelters’ was adopted by scholars of the Cave Research Center in Israel, as follows: “caves occurring naturally near the top of steep cliffs in Galilee, close to settlements and with signs of human adaptation for use as shelters and hiding places. Cliff shelters had links with the fugitive’s home settlements” (Shivti’el, *Cliff Shelters*, 47).

⁶ Shivti’el, ‘Artificial Caves’, 74–75.

⁷ Leibner, *Settlement*, 240.

survey, Leibner admits that although “these cave assemblages are not similar in terms of their function to ordinary civilian settlements,” he nevertheless includes them in his estimates of settlement size, precisely because “the archaeological evidence indicates continuous settlement here through several periods and the finds attest to the caves having served as permanent dwellings during certain periods”.⁸ Leibner’s survey evidence directly contradicts the theory that the caves were used only in times of trouble.

Because of the difficult living conditions in the caves at Wadi Amud, and the extremely difficult access, Leibner also challenges the assumption “that the settlement caves during this period pertained to a civilian population from the nearby abandoned villages that remained to work their lands. There is no unequivocal proof regarding who inhabited these caves at that time”.⁹ In summary, we may know when and for how long the cave-dwellings were inhabited, but the question about who inhabited them, and why, is not adequately answered by the prevailing ‘cliff-shelter-in-times-of-trouble’ hypothesis.

3. Matching Archaeological Findings with Local History

Clearly, living in caves is not everyone’s preference, and those who did must have had a compelling reason. This reason may indeed have been to ensure personal security, but insecurity comes in many forms, not just with invading armies. In this respect, it is significant that the Mishnah mentions a renowned Torah scholar by the name of Nittai (or Mattei) the Arbelite (m. Avot 1:6–7; m. Hagigah 2:2), who is said to have been the vice president of the Sanhedrin during the reign of John Hyrcanus, c.120 BCE.¹⁰ It is not known how he came to live in the town of Arbel, which was just coming into existence at this time, but it must have been no coincidence that precisely at this time, the ruling ethnarch and high priest, John Hyrcanus, expelled all members of the Pharisee party from their positions of authority and also from Jerusalem. According to Josephus, this was collective punishment for suspecting Hyrcanus was an illegitimate high priest, based on the allegation that his mother was once imprisoned and raped by the Greeks (*Ant* 13.288–296). True or not, the exile and persecution of the Pharisees continued for the next forty-five years, until the end of the reign of John’s son, Alexander Jannaeus, in 76 BCE, when Queen Salome Alexandra readmitted them to positions of authority in the ruling institutions of the State (*Ant* 13.398–415).

Expelled from Jerusalem around 120 BCE, we can assume Nittai took up residence at Arbel and continued to study and teach Torah. Many more Pharisees would have followed him there. Within a short time, John Hyrcanus had conquered Samaria and Scythopolis (Beit She’an), opening the way for large-scale immigration of Jews to Galilee, and putting Arbel within range of the king’s reprisals and persecution. Now the caves not only offered some protection against royal retaliation, but also obliged their residents to adopt the ascetic practices most fitting for Torah study. So, the exiled community of Pharisees set about adapting the caves nearest to Arbel for semi-

⁸ Leibner, *Settlement*, 241; cf. 146, 214, 239.

⁹ Leibner, *Settlement*, 146.

¹⁰ Lauterbach, J. Z., ‘Nittai of Arbela’, in Singer, I., Adler, C., Deutsch, G., Hirsch, E., Kohler, K., and Popper, W. (eds.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia* in 12 vols, New York and London: Funk and Wagnell, vol IX, 1905; 318.

permanent inhabitation, at least until their fortunes might change and persecution cease.

Although this explanation of the origins of the cave-dwelling phenomenon at Arbel is somewhat speculative and incomplete, it is corroborated not only by the dating of the foundation of Arbel (c.120–110 BCE) and the earliest cave-dwellings (c.100 BCE), but also by a curious reduction in the population of the Arbel West cave-dwellings (Fig 2), those closest to the town of Arbel, at the end of the Hellenistic period, c.70–50 BCE.¹¹ This would indeed coincide with the return of many Pharisees to Jerusalem, following their rehabilitation under Queen Salome Alexandra.



Fig 2: View of the Arbel caves West, the caves closest to the town of Arbel on the plain above.

Having put forward the case for religious persecution as the original motive for the cave-dwelling phenomenon in this area, we must allow local history to complete the picture. Informed by Roland Deines when he reports that this border territory of Galilee became attractive for those who “needed or wanted to escape the political hornet’s nest of Jerusalem and its surroundings without going abroad”, and also for those who “wanted to stay below the radar of the Hasmoneans in Jerusalem”,¹² we should not be surprised if other persecuted religious groups or individuals sought refuge in this corner of Galilee at the same time as the Pharisees, around 100 BCE. With the return of many Pharisees to Jerusalem from 70–50 BCE, the other religious group or groups would have been left in the majority.

Concerning the identity of this majority, there are clear historical footprints of an Essene presence on Mt. Arbel by the time that Herod appeared on the scene. Josephus informs us that Herod and the Essenes had a close and deeply respectful relationship, which he dates to Herod’s earliest years, when an Essene prophesied to Herod that he would be king (*Ant* 15.372–379). The Essenes would therefore have viewed Herod’s push for the throne during the Civil War (40–37 CE) as divinely willed and worthy of

¹¹ Leibner, *Settlement*, 241.

¹² Deines, R., ‘Religious Practices and Religious Movements in Galilee: 100 BCE–200 CE’, in Fiensy and Riley Strange (eds.), *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, vol. 1: Life, Culture, and Society, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014; 83–84.

their wholehearted support. Against this background, it is highly significant that, in 38 BCE, at the height of the Civil War, Herod chose to establish a base for his army at Arbel, while conducting his lengthy Galilean campaign against the supporters of his Hasmonean rival, King Antigonus II (Josephus, *JW* 1.305–316; *Ant* 14.415–431).

At the start of this campaign, Josephus reports that Herod set up a camp for his army at Arbel: “Having sent in advance three battalions of infantry and a squadron of cavalry to the village of Arbela, he joined them forty days later with the rest of his army” (*JW* 1.305; cf. *Ant* 14.415–416; Fig 3).¹³ The plain meaning of this statement is that the advance party (about 750 men and 30 cavalry) took 40 days to set up the camp, before Herod arrived and stayed there with his whole army (about 3000 infantry and 600 cavalry). Soon after his arrival, Herod and his army were attacked by a rebel army on the Arbel plain and successfully routed them. The subsequent clean-up campaign continued intermittently over the next 9–10 months, during which time the camp at Arbel would have served as the base for Herod’s army.

It is often asserted by scholars that Herod came to Mt. Arbel to fight against the town, because it was a Hasmonean military settlement, a ‘hotbed of Hasmonean resistance’.¹⁴ However, this does not tally with the account of Josephus, where it is clear that the advance party met no resistance whatsoever when they arrived at Arbel, nor for the next 40 days until Herod arrived with the rest of his army, at which point they were indeed attacked by a formidable military force (*JW* 1.305). As there is no historical or archaeological record of fighting in the town of Arbel at this time, it would appear the combatants had approached Herod’s camp from elsewhere. Furthermore, the initial deployment of an advance party indicates that Herod had coordinated the arrival of his army at Arbel with the residents. In the wording of Josephus’ account, there is even a hint that Herod undertook this campaign in response to their request for help against some ‘brigands’ occupying the caves nearby: “he... then started on a campaign against the cave-dwelling brigands, who were infesting a wide area and inflicting on the inhabitants evils no less than those of war” (*JW* 1.304).

¹³ Quotations from the works of Josephus Flavius (*Jewish War, Antiquities, and Life*) are taken from *Josephus in Nine Volumes*, translated by Thackeray, H., et al., Loeb Classical Series, London: Heinemann, Cambridge MA/Harvard University Press, 1926–1965. ‘Arbela’ is the Aramaic name for the place that is called ‘Arbel’ in Hebrew. The precise site of Herod’s camp has not yet been confirmed, but surface features were identified by the archaeologist Zvi Ilan in 1987–89, who wrote “Before closing I would like to add that in the flat area near the cliff of Mount Arbel, we have found the remains of what may be a Roman way-station or military encampment. The remains are comprised of walls enclosing an area which was cleared of rocks. They have not been identified with any certainty at this stage, and they are not crucial to the identification of the Arbel cave village. But if they are indeed what we think they are, they will add another aspect to our knowledge of Arbel and the battle fought there” (Ilan, ‘Reviving’, 69). This is the site that we have indicated on the map in Fig 3. It is the best information available, until further investigation can be done.

¹⁴ For example: in 1989, Shimon Applebaum postulated that the people of Arbel were “either military settlers who had been placed in the fertile Arbel Valley by the Hasmoneans, or perhaps a Hasmonean garrison from a nearby fortress”, cited by Leibner (*Settlement*, 254); Zvi Ilan and Avraham Izdarechet also have the rebels firmly established in the town of Arbel: “... when Herod fought the Galilean Zealots, the Hasmonean loyalists fortified themselves in Arbela” (in ‘Arbel’, ed. Stern, E., *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 1, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society/Carta, 1993; 87); more recently, Shivti’el has the entire population of Arbel escaping to the caves when Herod arrives: “During the suppression of the Jewish rebellion against Herod (in 37 BCE), the population of Arbela hid in the caves...” (*Cliff Shelters*, 34). All these statements presume that the townspeople of Arbel were enemies of Herod.

In brief, Herod established his army camp at Arbel in order to defend its inhabitants from attacks by an enemy, whom Josephus calls ‘brigands’. This enemy was also Herod’s enemy, thus confirming that Herod and the residents of Arbel were on the same side in this Civil War against the Hasmonean king and his supporters, who seem to have included the local ‘brigands’. In this context, Herod would have relied on the Arbel residents to support him and provide food and supplies for his troops, while they expelled the brigands from the Arbel caves.

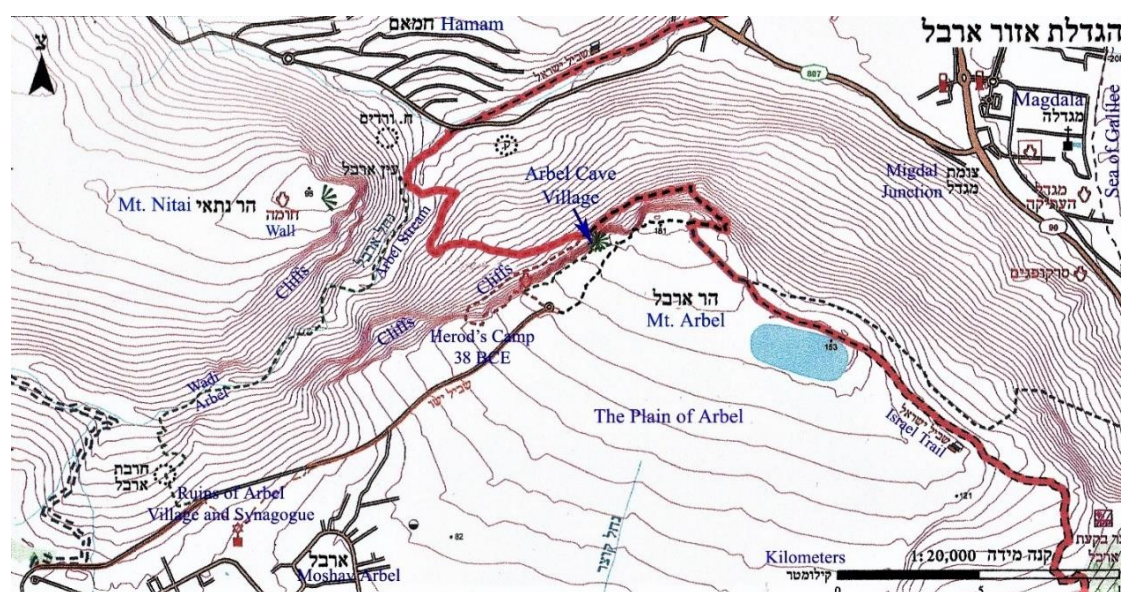


Fig 3: Enlarged map of Arbel Area: adapted from the Galilee and Israel Trail Map, no. 2 in the ‘Touring and Hiking Map’ series of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), 2018 Edition, reproduced with kind permission from the society’s Israel Trails Commission.

As noted, the Essenes were Herod’s main supporters among the Jews at this time, so it is reasonable to infer that there was a large community of Essenes in the town of Arbel. As most of the surrounding population sided with Herod’s Hasmonean rival, Antigonus II, the Arbelites’ support for Herod would have been unpopular and provocative. This may explain why the Essenes were henceforth called ‘Herodians’ by the local people (cf. Mt 22,6; Mk 3,6; 8,15 in ρ^{45} ; 12,13),¹⁵ who remained Hasmonean loyalists for many years to come. It may also explain why King Herod gave the Essenes, as a reward for their support at Arbel, the land behind his palace in Jerusalem, which then became known as the Essene Quarter.

4. The Brigands of Josephus

It is worthwhile pausing to identify the pro-Hasmonean enemy whom Josephus calls ‘brigands’ (ληστές). Important details emerge from his operational account of Herod’s encounter with a family of brigands—father, mother and their seven children—who were all killed by their father, who then killed himself rather than surrender to Herod, in spite of Herod’s appeals and offers of clemency. Even Herod seems to have been shocked to the core by their extremism (*JW* 309–313; *Ant* 14.429–430).

¹⁵ For many other arguments identifying the Herodians with the Essenes, see Taylor, J., *The Essenes, the Scrolls and the Dead Sea*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012; 109–30.

Josephus had previously related how Herod, as governor of Galilee in 47 BCE, had captured and summarily executed a leader of these brigands called Hezekiah, along with a band of his men, because they were raiding villages on the other side of the Syrian border (*JW* 1.204–211; *Ant* 15.158–167). For this action, Herod was praised by the Roman governor of Syria, as these men had sorely afflicted his people, but for this same action, Herod found himself under judgment before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and avoided punishment only through the intervention of the Syrian governor. Clearly the brigands had powerful allies among the authorities in Jerusalem. However, it appears that in every other respect they were outlaws, living in deserted locations, surviving by robbing and pillaging the property of others, as the name suggests. Referring to the time of Herod's campaign in 38 BCE, Josephus says 'they infested a wide area' in the vicinity of Arbel (*JW* 1.304). In fact, eastern and northern Galilee appear to have had such a serious problem with these brigands that Herod committed a large military force, based at Mt. Arbel over several months, to deal with it (*JW* 1.314–316, 326; *Ant* 14.431–433, 450).¹⁶ Without doubt, 'brigandage' was the main social problem facing Herod in Galilee during his reign.

Since ancient times, the deserted areas of Gaulanitis, Trachonitis and Batanaea, to the north and east of the Sea of Galilee, had sheltered brigands, who survived by robbing traders traversing the desert routes between Damascus and Arabia. But these brigands were not Jews. The Galilean brigands, on the other hand, were Jews residing within Jewish territory and having allies among the ruling elite in Jerusalem.¹⁷ The profile presented by Josephus shows they had strong political opinions, preferring death to captivity under Herod, using violence against Syrians living in a Roman Province, as well as 'inflicting on the inhabitants [of Arbel] evils no less than those of war' (*JW* 1.304). In brief, they were rebellious, often violent, anti-Herodian, anti-Roman Jews. More significantly, they appear to have been destitute and dispossessed of home and land, and for this reason they had installed themselves and their families in the caves of Mt. Arbel, and probably in other caves of the region. Apart from identifying them as supporters of the last Hasmonean ruler, Antigonus II (40–37 BCE), and as forerunners of the extremist Zealot party, which formed around Judas, the son of Hezekiah, at the turn of the era, scholars have puzzled over their origin. As the problem began several years before Herod's reign, Herod's taxation and land patronage systems cannot be held responsible.

Richard Horsley, an expert on Galilean 'brigandry', or 'banditry' as he calls it, describes it as a symptom "of the difficult economic conditions and the impact of political military violence in the mid-first century BCE and the mid-first century CE... Oppressive economic pressures could leave desperate peasants no alternative but to 'rob the rich' in order to survive".¹⁸ So, referring to the situation during Herod's reign, he writes "repeated military invasion and destruction appear to be what produced the banditry in Galilee that Herod suppressed... such "brigands" were indigenous Galilean villagers waging guerilla warfare".¹⁹ There can be little doubt

¹⁶ For a summary of Herod's operations against the brigands, see Richardson, P. and Fisher, A. M., *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans*, 2nd Edition, London/New York: Routledge, 2018, 341.

¹⁷ Seán Freyne suggests that the leaders were members of noble Hasmonean families (*Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323 BCE to 135 CE*, Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1998; 63).

¹⁸ Horsley, R., 'Social Movements in Galilee', in Fiensy and Riley Strange (eds.), *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, vol. 1: Life, Culture, and Society, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014; 167–8.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

that difficult economic conditions could have led to desperate conduct such as ‘brigandage’, but to suggest that Herod’s ‘repeated military invasion and destruction’ intensified the ‘brigandry’ ignores the fact that Herod’s military campaign against the ‘brigands’ was relatively successful, in Galilee at least. Following his military interventions, there is certainly no evidence of an increase in ‘brigandry’.²⁰

The origin of Jewish brigandry, however, can best be explained by the findings of the comprehensive archaeological survey conducted by Uzi Leibner in this part of Eastern Galilee.²¹ Leibner carefully documents a doubling of the estimated population, settlement area and number of settlements in the period between 50–1 BCE.²²

Although more accurate dating is difficult, Leibner stresses that small amounts of late Hellenistic pottery were found in the new settlements he surveyed, indicating that they were established right at the start of, or even slightly before, the formal onset of the Early Roman period in 50 BCE.²³ It is doubtful that this sudden rise in the population between 60–50 BCE could be explained by a natural rise in birth rate and/or infant survival, for which a gradual and continual rise over the previous 50 years would be expected, dating from the first Jewish influx and settlement around 100 BCE.

Instead, the dramatic rise in population around 50 BCE is best explained by another influx of Jewish inhabitants from outside the area. The date coincides precisely with the humiliating geopolitical changes imposed after 63 BCE, by Pompey, the Roman governor of Syria, and by Gabinius, his successor, which effectively restored pagan Greek rule and identity to the predominantly pagan cities and lands that had been forcefully conquered and colonized by the Hasmoneans half a century before.

All of a sudden, under the terms of this ‘Judaean land settlement’, the Jewish state lost vast tracts of territory, including the whole coastal zone, with its fertile plains and access to the sea. Jerusalem was made to pay tribute, her walls were demolished and Judaea was confined to her pre-Hasmonean boundaries with the addition of Galilee, parts of Idumaea and Peraea, thus shrinking to about a third of her former size.²⁴ As Seán Freyne observes “Such a settlement of the Jewish question was not likely to be accepted without a struggle and resistance crystallized around the ousted Aristobulus and his sons, Antigonus and Alexander”.²⁵

²⁰ Freyne, *Galilee*, 66–67; Richardson and Fisher, *Herod*, 340–342.

²¹ “The area selected for research is located in the northern part of the Eastern Lower Galilee, between longitude 185–200 and latitude 242–261, an area of some 285 square kilometers. It extends from the Tiberias–Sepphoris route in the south to the foothills of the Upper Galilee in the north, and from the Sea of Galilee basin in the east to the eastern margins of the large Central Galilee valleys in the west” (Leibner, *Settlement*, 1).

²² Leibner, *Settlement*, 307–338.

²³ Leibner, *Settlement*, 332. In a personal communication on 04.06.2021, Uzi Leibner explained: “The reason the rise in the number of new settlements is dated to 50 - 0 BCE, is because the earliest substerial pottery-types collected in them were Early Roman, which first appears around the mid-1st century. In the past few years there were some developments in the dating of these types, and today we know they first appeared a bit earlier, perhaps around 70 BCE. In any case, the sharp rise in population, and the establishment of many new sites ex-nihilo, point in my opinion to immigrants arriving from outside the region. This, together with the abundant Hasmonean-Jerusalemite coins found in many of these sites and the strong connection to Judea implied by the sources, points in my opinion to a population arriving from Judea.”

²⁴ Cf. Gabba, E., ‘The Social, Economic and Political History of Palestine 63 BCE–CE 70’, in Horbury, W., Davies, W.D., and Sturdy J., (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol 3, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999; 95–98.

²⁵ Freyne, *Galilee*, 59.

Scholars differ over the immediate social effects of the Judaeen land settlement, but some do speak of widespread expulsion of peasants from the areas that were given back to the newly restored Greek cities.²⁶ Uzi Leibner's archaeological survey in Eastern Galilee offers objective evidence of the influx of displaced Jews at precisely this time, 50–1 BCE, when “numerous settlements were established; unsettled or sparsely settled areas, such as the eastern portion of the region or hilly areas with limited agricultural potential, experienced a wave of settlement; and the size of the settled area doubled. During this period the number of sites reached its height. This settlement map remained stable until about the mid-third century when an abandonment of sites and decline in settlement began”.²⁷

Leibner's data shows that a peak of settlement was reached from 50–1 BCE, which extended into areas of ‘limited agricultural potential’ and remained at the same level for the next 250 years. In other words, the data indicate that rural settlement reached a ‘saturation level’ soon after 50 BCE. If, as we suggest, this was mainly the result of migration from the surrounding areas of Gaulanitis, Ituraea, northern Transjordan and Scythopolis, or from further afield, then it is quite possible that, at the same time, the flow of migrants exceeded the capacity of rural Galilee to absorb them. A social crisis would have developed, with destitute, dispossessed migrant families unable to find shelter, food or income. These are precisely the conditions leading to the kind of brigandage that Josephus describes in Galilee, in the period 47–38 BCE and beyond.

After listing Herod's many operations against the brigands in and around Galilee, according to Josephus, Richardson and Fisher conclude: “The disparate accounts cohere in viewing Herod's problems as ‘social brigandage’ at the beginning of his reign, in the unsettled days of the 40s and 30s BCE. The brigands had families, close connections with towns, and religious or upper-class support. The descriptions are mainly of uprooted peasants who maintained connections with neighbors and social superiors, those who suffered social dislocation from economic change and consequent hardship. The dispossessed survived by preying on those who had more, maybe the same persons who had taken the little they had”.²⁸ Richardson and Fisher's conclusion requires only one qualification: that the socio-economic change leading to brigandage was the displacement caused by the land settlement imposed by the Romans during the 50s BCE, and leading to a massive influx of uprooted Jewish landowners and peasants into Eastern Galilee. They rightly continue “Herod was not the cause of the social problems, but it is no surprise that he sided with Judean upper-class needs and Roman political aims”.²⁹ Herod therefore had little sympathy for the plight of these ‘social brigands’, whose experience of dislocation and religious indignation had turned them against his authority and against Rome, and then into militant supporters of the Hasmonean resistance.³⁰

²⁶ This is the position taken by Shimon Applebaum and Richard Horsley among others. It is summarized by Morten Hørning Jensen as follows “According to Applebaum, Pompey's decision to strip Jerusalem of its many conquered city-states was nothing less than a game-changer that must have meant the creation of a very considerable class of landless Jewish peasants” (‘The Political History in Galilee from the First Century BCE to the End of the Second Century CE’, in Fiensy and Riley Strange, eds., *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, vol. 1: Life, Culture, and Society, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014, 57).

²⁷ Leibner, *Settlement*, 333.

²⁸ Richardson and Fisher, *Herod*, 341.

²⁹ Richardson and Fisher, *Herod*, 341.

³⁰ For insight into the spiritual and religious distress provoked by the Judaeen land settlement, see Mendels, D., *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism: Jewish and Christian Ethnicity in Ancient*

The violent hostility of the cave-dwelling brigands towards the inhabitants of Arbel, which was the reason Herod and his army initially came to Arbel (*JW* 1.304), is inexplicable without a political motive. Though the residents of Arbel were neighbours and fellow Jews, the brigands treated them violently, just as they did to the Syrians over the border. This only makes sense if they regarded the Arbel residents as political enemies, as allies of Herod and Rome, which is an inference that further supports their identification as Essenes.

Whatever pertained during the Civil War from 40–37 BCE will have changed over time, so it is entirely possible that within a generation the so-called brigands settled down, and for lack of other options, carved suitable homes for themselves and their families in the vacant areas of Mt. Arbel cliff, close to the cliff base, where access was easier and less dangerous than the higher reaches of the larger cave concentrations (Arbel caves East and Arbel caves West). It is tempting to think, but hard to prove, that these refugee families were the builders and occupiers of the numerous cave clusters, spaced out at intervals along the cliff-face, between 4–12 in number, separated from each other by rocky projections, and all dated to the Early Roman period (50 BCE–150 CE). The number and arrangement of these small cave clusters gives the impression they were domestic units, which could be extended to accommodate family expansion in future generations. This conjecture has the virtue of explaining the origin of a large number of the separate cave clusters in this area, at the same time indicating the refugees' adoption of a more settled lifestyle and a move away from 'brigandage'. More we cannot say, except that the ex-brigands of Josephus should not be overlooked in the identification of the more permanent cave-dwellers of the Arbel cliffs.

5. The Village of the Cave of Arbel

Returning to the town of Arbel, we find other footprints of an Essene presence:

1. Apart from its *Beit Midrash*, Arbel also became known for its flax cultivation and linen production (the only other source for linen at this time was at Beit She'an).³¹ This industry was essential for the Essenes, as they were only permitted to wear clothes made of linen.³² The ropes used in the caves, and in the ships on the lake, would also have been made from the flax plant.
2. There are many cist tombs in the Arbel cemetery with an unusual north-south orientation. This is also the orientation of the tombs at Qumran and at other cemeteries thought to have been used by Essene communities (e.g., 'En el-Ghuweir,³³ Beit Safafa³⁴).

Palestine, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1997; 246–247. Historical evidence suggests that their resistance developed, around the turn of the era, into the formation of the Zealot party.

³¹ Cf. Leibner, *Settlement*, 256–7, especially footnote 120: "It should be noted that examinations of pollen from the recently published Bethsaida excavations (Geyer 2001: 233) show that flax was an important element in the region's crops by the beginning of the first century CE. This is in contrast to the accepted view that flax only became an economically important crop from around the mid-second century (Safrai 1986: 36–38)."

³² Magness, J., *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002; 193–202.

³³ Bar-Adon, P., 'Another Settlement of the Judaean Desert Sect at 'En el-Ghuweir on the Shores of the Dead Sea', in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 227, 1977; 1–25.

³⁴ Zissu, B., "'Qumran Type' Graves in Jerusalem: Archaeological Evidence of an Essene Community', *Dead Sea Discoveries*, vol 5, no. 2; 1998; 158–71.

3. The monumental main entrance of the remains of the fourth century synagogue in Arbel is orientated to the East, where it opens onto an ancient courtyard. This unusual feature may indicate the original plan of an earlier, smaller synagogue in which an opening to the East was liturgically important. Josephus notes that the Essenes directed their morning prayers towards the sunrise in the East (*JW* 2.128), as did the Therapeutae described by Philo (*Vita Contemplativa* 27, 88–89).

Needless to say, the presence of Essenes in the town of Arbel gives grounds for suspecting they might have been present elsewhere in the area. In his profile of the Essenes, Josephus reports the existence of two orders of Essenes, who disagree only over the importance of marriage and procreation (*JW* 2.160–161). Those who chose to marry lived in a mixed community with their wives and children and worked to support them. If it is granted, on the evidence presented above, that there was an Essene community in the town of Arbel, it is likely to have been a mixed community of this sort, working together to cultivate the fields and provide for all its members.

There is now growing evidence that only 2 kms away, in the dense collection of caves at the eastern end of the cliffs of Mt. Arbel, there was another Essene community (Arbel caves East). The ruins of a huge fortified cave, at its eastern limit, help to identify this ‘cave village’ with the ‘village of the Cave of Arbela’ mentioned by Josephus in the list of villages he fortified before the Great Revolt (κώμας δὲ Ἀρβήλων σπήλαιον ...) and “stocked with ample supplies of corn and arms for their future security” (*Life* 188). In the parallel account in his *Jewish War*, this village corresponds to “the caves in Lower Galilee in the neighbourhood of the lake of Gennesaret” (*JW* 2.573). Indeed, this Arbel Cave village, carved into a 250-metre section of cliffs at the northeastern part of the Mt. Arbel range, is only 2½ kms from Migdal (Magdala) and the shores of Lake Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee).



Fig 4: View of Arbel Cave village:
the remains of the great cave span the base of the massive cliff on the left

Foremost among the Essene features of the village of the Cave of Arbel (Figs 4 and 5) are the following:

Because of the Essene law prohibiting lifting or moving cooking vessels on the Sabbath (Josephus, *JW* 2.147), especially between buildings (CD 11:7–9), it was imperative that the kitchen and dining room were under the same roof.³⁶ A similar arrangement has been documented at Khirbet Qumran³⁷ and 15 kms to the south at ‘En el-Ghuweir.³⁸

2. In the most ancient section of this cave village (c.100 BCE), the large number of closely packed cave-dwellings, here, contrasts with the well separated and numerically limited clusters of caves elsewhere in the area, and reinforces the impression that the occupants at this site were members of a close-knit community. On the same note, many of the caves are connected by internal tunnels, hewn horizontally and vertically on many different levels, allowing passage from one cave to another. In this short 250-metre section of cliff, the cave entrances are carved in long rows up to 7 levels high, looking much like a modern high-rise apartment block (Fig 6). Calculating one person per cave in this section of cliff-face, we can estimate a population of 100–120 people in the community. This may be related to the number of members needed to serve in the Essene high court, reported to be ‘no less than one hundred’ by Josephus (*JW* 2.145). If we assume the whole community was involved in judging offences, then this particular community was large enough to have been the regional administrative center of the Essene party. One of the cave-dwellings on the lower level stands out for its large size (5x4x3m), as well as its regularity, centrality, ease of access and commanding view. It is also divided in an upper and a lower level. It is not difficult to see this cave as the dwelling of the head of the community, the *mebakker*.

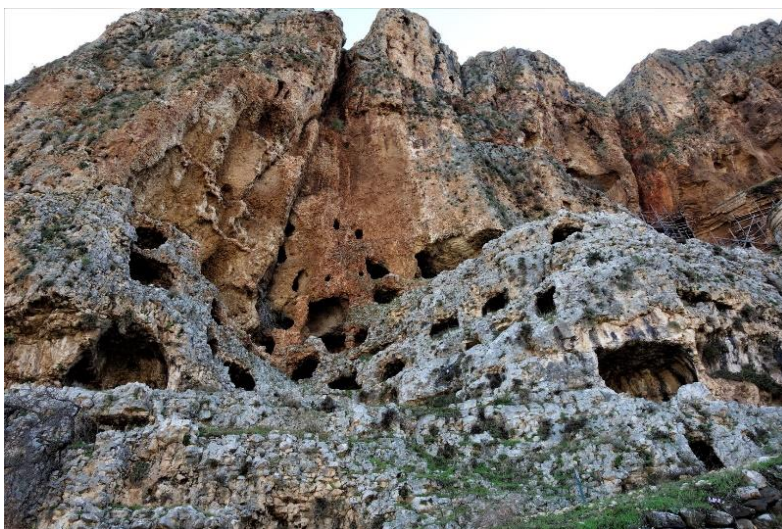


Fig 6: Close up of the original accommodation block at Arbel Cave village. The cave with outstanding features can be seen at the bottom right corner.

³⁶ Cf. Atkinson, K. and Magness, J., ‘Josephus’s Essenes and the Qumran Community’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 129, no. 2, 2010; 333–34.

³⁷ A communal-meal complex can be recognized at Khirbet Qumran, if we take the ‘pantry’ (L86 and L89), adjacent to the large assembly room/refectory (L77), to have served also as a kitchen, as currently indicated on the placards at the Qumran site itself.

³⁸ Bar-Adon, ‘Another Settlement’, 1–25.

3. Compared with the other cave-dwelling sites in the Ginnosar area, an exceedingly large number of water installations have been found in the Arbel Cave village, including the 35 cisterns and 5 *miqva'ot*³⁹ excavated to date (Fig 7). These totals do not include the many cisterns and *miqva'ot* that were destroyed in the building of the Druze fortress, when dozens of the original caves were obliterated to create large chambers. Fragments of plaster recovered from these chambers are of the same type and antiquity as that used in the surviving water installations. If those that were destroyed could be counted and included, the totals would increase substantially. As at Qumran, the large number of *miqva'ot* indicates the presence of a religious community with concerns about purity.⁴⁰ This finding is entirely consistent with the Essene practice of twice-daily immersion before meals, as described by Josephus (*JW* 2.129–133; cf. *1QS* 3:4–5; 5:13–14).



Fig 7: A *Miqveh* within the 17th century Druze fortress, Arbel Cave village

4. The harshness of the physical environment made it unsuitable for raising children and caring for the infirm, which means that family life was excluded and that women would have found no place in this particular cave-village community, in its original organization. It would be reasonable to conclude that this was an all-male community.

³⁹ Totals from the other sites: Arbel caves West: 2 cisterns, 1 *miqveh*; Mt. Nittai caves: 1 cistern, 0 *miqva'ot*; Wadi Amud: 25 cisterns, 1 *miqveh*; Akhbara Rock: 5 cisterns, 1 *miqveh*.

⁴⁰ Invoking Magen Broshi on the large number of *miqva'ot* found at Qumran, John J. Collins writes “As Broshi has argued, the existence of ten *miqva'ot* in an area no larger than an acre is the strongest archaeological reason for defining Qumran as a religious site. Even allowing for the fact that all ten may not have been in use at the same time (...), the concentration is unparalleled outside Jerusalem” (*Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectarian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010; 205).

5. The harsh and ascetic life-style imposed on the Arbel Cave village residents is outwardly similar to that of the Qumranites, and the rocky surroundings are comparable. The similarity of population size and sex, and the approximate dates of foundation of the two communities, around 100 BCE, are also noteworthy. The profusion of water installations and *miqva'ot* is a feature of both sites, indicating a common discipline, and the absence of a synagogue at either site is significant, virtually ruling out all contemporary religious communities except those that kept the Essene rule.⁴¹ As of yet, the cemetery of the cave-village has not been found, but if and when it is located, the burial style and orientation will help to determine the closeness of the relationship between the Arbel community and that of Qumran.⁴² The many similarities to the Qumran scribal community, identified so far, raise the question as to whether the residents of the Arbel Cave village were also scribes, writing and interpreting Scripture as at Qumran. This is an important question for further research, but it may be aided by the fact that the largest natural habitat of papyrus outside the borders of Egypt was growing only 35 kms away, in Lake Huleh (Lake Semechonitis).

Subject to verification by further archaeological investigation, these are the main indications that the Arbel Cave village was an Essene settlement, or ‘monastery’, similar to Qumran in size and way-of-life. The co-existence of Pharisees and Essenes in this small geographical area, at a time (c.110–65 BCE) when they were both needing to avoid contact with the ruling Hasmonean authorities, reinforces the suggestion that the original motive for the cave-dwelling phenomenon was not shelter from military attack, but rather refuge from religious persecution.

The proximity of these two religious groups may not have been coincidental, for only 30–40 years had passed since they separated from each other: according to our reconstruction,⁴³ the Pharisees separated from the other followers of the ‘Teacher of

⁴¹ In a *Ha'arets* article, on 27.04.2012, reporting the discovery of the fifth *miqveh* in the Arbel Cave village, Shviti'el attributes the installation of the *miqva'ot* there to a group of priests who fled to Galilee following the first or second Jewish Revolt. Shviti'el's proposal alludes to an ancient list of the heads of the 24 priestly courses (as in 1Chr 24,1–17) paired with 24 Hasmonean-era settlements in Galilee, suggesting that the living members of these families settled in Galilee at an undetermined time in the past. Richard Bauckham interprets the lists to be historically true, and argues that the priestly families arrived c.103 BCE, at the time of the Hasmonean conquest of Galilee (‘Magdala in the List of the Twenty-Four Priestly Settlements’, in *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, Richard Bauckham ed., Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018; 287–305). However, even if it were true that priestly families settled in Galilee villages at some stage (including Arbel), it is inconceivable that they and their families would have occupied the caves in this dangerous, difficult and desolate environment. On the other hand, Uzi Leibner has convincingly disputed the historical veracity of the priestly lists and the presence of priestly families in the Galilean villages (*Settlement*, 404–419). The list appears to have been composed from 135–290 CE, in an attempt to keep alive hopes for national restoration following the catastrophe of the second Jewish Revolt. In the sixth century CE, it was adopted into the synagogue liturgy as a liturgical poem, or *piyyut*.

⁴² There are at least four criteria identifying Essene burial practice, according to Joseph E. Zias: “... orientation, tomb architecture, demographic disparity and few if any personal grave goods” (‘The Cemeteries of Qumran and Celibacy: Confusion Laid to Rest’, *Dead Sea Discoveries*, vol 7, no. 2; 2000; 220–53). Because of the steep gradient and rock-scattered surface, there are only three areas of level ground in front of the Cave Village, where burial would be possible. The lowest and largest of these is adjacent to the present-day cemetery of the town of Hamam, at the base of the slope leading up to the cliffs.

⁴³ Our reconstruction is shaped by the work of Geza Vermes (trans. and ed., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 50th Anniversary Edition (revised), London: Penguin Classics, 2011; 49–66), Yigael Yadin (*The Temple Scroll: The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson,

Righteousness' in 152 BCE, after the appointment of Jonathan Maccabee to the high priesthood.⁴⁴ The Pharisees accepted Jonathan as the high priest and remained in Jerusalem, while the Teacher and his other followers went into exile in 'the land of Damascus', literally understood. In the 'land of Damascus', they entered into a 'new covenant' with the community of dissenting priests, Levites and scribes, known for their pseudepigraphal writings in Enoch's name (the 'Enochic Jews'), and the members of this new-covenant group became known as Essenes. Following the death of their Teacher around 130 BCE, they divided again into the loyal followers of the Teacher, who migrated to Qumran around 100 BCE, and a more moderate branch, who appear to have settled at Arbel at about the same time, where they were reconciled with the Pharisees and became their neighbours.⁴⁵

With the rehabilitation of the Pharisees by Queen Salome Alexandra in the 70s BCE, and their return to Jerusalem, the Essenes of Arbel became the predominant religious group in the area. For those Pharisees, Essenes or non-denominational individuals who wished to live a more independent and solitary way of life, not to mention the ex-brigands and their families, and those who had been expelled from Essene fellowship (Josephus, *JW* 2.143-145), there were many other caves in the same area where they could live. The housing needs of these marginalized individuals could explain the occupation of the outlying caves, such as the solitary caves and the smaller cave clusters along the cliffs of Mt Arbel, Mt. Nittai, Wadi Amud and Akhbara Rock.

6. Summary

Throughout the first century BCE and well into the new millennium, the Essenes appear to have lived in two communities on Mt. Arbel: 1) a mixed, married community living in the town of Arbel and farming the fertile land on the plateau above the cliffs of Mt. Arbel, and 2) an unmarried community of 100 to 120 males living in a large concentration of cave-dwellings in the cliff-face, 2 kms to the northeast, which Josephus referred to as 'the village of the Cave of Arbel'. It is more than likely that the mixed, farming community supplied the other, all-male community with their physical needs, which is why no agricultural artefacts have been found in the vicinity of the cave-dwelling community. One of the more important products grown by the farming community, apart from food, was flax. This provided linen clothing for both communities, as well as rope for scaling the cliffs to access their caves and for hauling products up and down the cliff-face.

1985) and Gabriele Boccaccini (*Beyond the Qumran Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism*, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1998), and rests upon the literal interpretation of the 'land of Damascus' in the *Damascus Document* (CD 6:5,19; 8:21=19,34; 20,12). It therefore refers to a literal exile in the second half of the 2nd century BCE, which ended with a schism within the new-covenant group, known as Essenes, as indicated in the *Damascus Document* (CD 8:21; 19:33–20:30) and further described in *Peshar Habakkuk* (1QpHab 5:9–12; 11:6–8).

⁴⁴ This original 'separation' would explain why they came to be known as Pharisees, i.e., 'separatists'.

⁴⁵ Among the various passages in the Dead Sea Scrolls indicating a division among the Essenes, there is one passage in particular that hints (post-factum) at a reconciliation of the moderate group (those accused of laxity) with the Pharisees: "They shall be judged in the same manner as their companions were judged who deserted to the Scoffer. For they have spoken wrongly against the precepts of righteousness, and have despised the Covenant and the Pact—the New Covenant—which they made in the land of the Covenant" (CD 20:10–13, trans. Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 137). The 'Scoffer' refers to Jonathan Maccabee, elsewhere called 'the Wicked priest', whom the Pharisees joined after separating from the Teacher in 152 BCE. The accused Essenes (the moderates) are now described as their companions.

The convergence of so many devout and educated people in the same area, far from the corrupting influence of political power, had the potential to bring about a blossoming of religious piety, scholarship and creative literary activity, on such a scale as to rival Qumran in originality and intensity. Awaiting further research, this site may indeed have been the source of the Essene writings that were not found at Qumran (i.e., the *Parables* and *Epistle of Enoch*, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the *Life of Adam and Eve*), as well as many other first-century-BCE works.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The arguments for locating the author of the *Parables of Enoch* (*1Enoch* 37–71) within the cave-dwelling community of the village of the Cave of Arbel, high up in the cliffs of Mt. Arbel, are the subject of another paper, currently in preparation.