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REVIEWS

Ben-Daniel, John. *The Essenes of Mount Arbel and Jerusalem: Origins, History, and Influence*. [=QM, vol. 20], Kraków-Mogilany: The Enigma Press, 2023, pp. VIII, 240. ISBN 978-83-86110-88-9

In the present book, John Ben-Daniel explores the cave-village within the Arbel National Park to propose that the site once housed a non-Qumranic community of Essenes. He uses archaeological discoveries, historical accounts, literary sources, coupled with an extensive review of Essene origins and history, to support his thesis. Ben-Daniel also explores the origins of the Essenes after the Babylonian Exile to the First Jewish Revolt to suggest that they provide a “missing link” between Second Temple Judaism and Christianity. The book consists of seven chapters with numerous photographs, plates, and drawings, many of which are in color, that greatly enhance the volume. The chapters contained in the book are: Chapter One, “The Arbel Cave Village: Remains of an Essene Commune” (pp. 7-35); Chapter Two, “The Essenes and Jerusalem,” (pp. 37-72); Chapter Three, “Recent Discoveries on Mt. Zion, Jerusalem” (pp. 73-88); Chapter Four, “The Parables of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 37-71): Provenance and Social Setting” (pp. 89-120); Chapter Five, “The Rise and Fall of the Parables of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 37-71): John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth and John of Patmos” (pp. 121-170); Chapter Six, “Damascus is Damascus: Revisiting the Birthplace of the Essenes,” (pp. 171-194); Chapter Seven, “Origins and History of the Essenes: Implications of the Essene Settlement at Mt. Arbel in Galilee,” (pp. 195-220). The book is well-researched and includes the latest publications on Second Temple Judaism, the history of ancient Israel, and archaeology. The author, a family physician in Jerusalem, has spent more than 30 years researching the historical and archaeological background of the Scriptures. He is a member of the influential Enoch Seminar and has published several articles on his findings in the *Qumran Chronicle*, some of which form chapters in the present volume.

Ben-Daniel provides the reader with an extensive description—the most detailed and unique available—of the cliffs of Mt. Arbel in the Lower Galilee, which consists of over one hundred caves carved into a 250-meter section of the cliff face. He explores their likely relevance for understanding Second Temple Judaism and its literature. The author identifies the great cave there as the “cave of Arbela,” and proposes it is the same cave village mentioned by Josephus among the sites he fortified on the eve of the First Jewish Revolt (*Life* 188). Noting the parallel account in Josephus’ *War* 2.573, Ben-Daniel suggests referring to the site by the name Josephus gave it, which was “the village of the cave of Arbel,” or, more briefly, the “Arbel cave village.”

Ben-Daniel offers a detailed description of the Arbel cave complex which is now part of the Arbel National Park and Nature Reserve. Unfortunately, as Ben-Daniel highlights, this important site has received scant archaeological study. The first to investigate it in modern times was the archaeologist Zvi Ilan, who explored it between 1987-1989 as part of a project to expose and preserve the remains of the nearby town of Arbel. Ilan’s premature death prevented him from completing his project; unfortunately, no further excavation has been undertaken on the remains of the great cave, known as the “cave of Arbel,” which has become a shelter for local cows. The present reviewer had the pleasure of working on his first archaeological excavation with Ilan at the Meroth synagogue in the Galilee which Ilan discovered, and which contains a famed mosaic of King David with the weapons he took from Goliath. Ilan’s death was a great loss to the field as he was not only an expert scholar but a wonderful person. It is fitting that the present book highlights some of Ilan’s neglected findings and the importance of his work on the Arbel region.

Ben-Daniel explores in depth Ilan’s discoveries and supplements it with the findings of Prof. Uzi Leibner’s archaeological survey of the Eastern Galilee (1999-2004) to propose that the Arbel Caves once housed an Essene community from the beginning of the first century BCE, and that the origin of the Arbel cave village dates to 100 BCE and lasted for over 200 years. Ben-Daniel supports this intriguing hypothesis by noting that the village of the Cave of Arbel contains a communal dining room with adjoining kitchen/pantry that is similar to the one discovered at Khirbet Qumran. Through a close reading of Josephus’ accounts and the events of Herod the Great’s reign, Ben-Daniel proposes that the residents of the Arbel caves supported Herod during the civil war that took place at the start of his reign, and that some of the caves

may have been occupied temporarily by “brigands” during the social crisis caused by Pompey’s’ Judaean land settlement. Ben-Daniel offers what is perhaps the most detailed examination of the caves in the Arbel cliff complex and their fascinating contents, suggesting that they were not merely places for refuge as many authors believe. Rather, their archaeological remains suggest that some sectarian group likely occupied them. This is perhaps the major contribution of his volume, which he highlights in greater depth in his chapter on the possible relationship between the Arbel cliff remains and the author of the Parables of Enoch.

Ben-Daniel builds on the recent understandings of the Essenes as a group that was not restricted to Khirbet Qumran, as many scholars in the early days of Dead Sea Scrolls research believed but were widely dispersed throughout the country as Josephus and a close reading of the Scrolls, particularly the sectarian works such as the Community Rule and the Damascus Document, reveal. This raises the likelihood that Essenes may have lived at the Arbel Cave as Ben-Daniel believes. To support this thesis, he examines likely Essene remains in Jerusalem, with a focus on Josephus’ reference to the “Gate of the Essenes” (*War* 5.145), which Bargil Pixner, Rainer Riesner, and others over the past four decades have used to identify what they believe is an Essene quarter in the southwestern corner of Jerusalem during the Herodian period. Ben-Daniel proposes that the Essenes who lived there were not from Qumran but came from a rival community of Essenes based at Mt. Arbel. They supported King Herod and practiced a more moderate version of the Essene rule. Ben-Daniel uses archaeological evidence, coupled with a close reading of the Scrolls, to show that the Essenes were quite diverse, both religiously and politically. In this regard, we should not forget that when the First Jewish Revolt erupted in 70 CE an Essene named John served as a commander of the rebel faction and was responsible for Tamna, Emmaus, Lidda, and Jaffa: he was killed in the siege of Ascalon (*War* 2.568; 3.9-12). Josephus also testifies that the Romans tortured many captured Essenes (*War* 2.150-53), showing that some members of this movement were active soldiers in the revolt. Consequently, Ben-Daniel’s reconstruction of a diversity of Essene beliefs, and his emphasis that some were involved in politics by supporting Herod, has a precedent in Josephus’ accounts of the Essenes, which show that the movement was quite widespread and diverse.

Ben-Daniel builds on his discussion of the archaeological and historical evidence for a diversity of Essene beliefs to offer an original and insightful reconstruction of the remains uncovered on Mt. Zion.

He particularly focuses on the findings of the excavation of the area by the Israel Antiquity Authorities in 2020-2021 at the abandoned Shulhan David restaurant. Ben-Daniel offers a series of unique color photographs, and his own reconstruction of the Herodian era remains, including two public *miqva’ot*. He compares these with Josephus’ account in *War* 5.144-45 of the Essene Gate and *Bethso* to propose that the site contained an upper and lower wall, which contributed to the defense of the region around Herod’s Upper Palace. Ben-Daniel suggests, in light of his interpretation of these findings, that the area housed an Essene community within walls planned by Herod to accommodate their spiritual needs and which restricted access to those who had undergone ritual purification.

The largest portion of Ben-Daniel’s book examines the provenance and social setting of the Parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 37-71). He connects its author with the non-Qumran Essene community at the Mt. Arbel cave complex and places its date of composition sometime during Herod the Great’s reign, likely after the Civil War of 40-37 BCE that brought him to power. Through a comparison with the Damascus Document, Josephus’ writings, and the archaeological survey of Eastern Galilee conducted by Leibner, Ben-Daniel seeks to reconstruct this turbulent period during which “brigandage” occurred on a wide scale. In the process, he builds on the work of previous scholars who connect portions of Enoch to the Galilee and trace its later use among Jews and Christian. Ben-Daniel suggests there is a direct contact between the Parables of Enoch, John the Baptist, and Jesus of Nazareth, as well as early Christian leaders such as the apostle John. He discusses how later communities of Christians adapted the content of the Parables to their own interests, including John’s Book of Revelation. Ben-Daniel shows that the Parables was suppressed during the latter half of the first century CE, which accounts for its absence except of the Ethiopian version. In his discussion, moreover, Ben-Daniel connects the origin of the Essenes to the city of Damascus, as mentioned in the famed Damascus Document—a conclusion long espoused by many scholars.

Ben-Daniel has written a stimulating and original volume that sheds significant light on a little explored region of Israel, namely the Arbel caves, that contain archaeological evidence suggesting the presence of a sectarian community. Building upon the extensive body of research on the Book of Enoch and its connection with the region, Ben-Daniel offers a bold and original thesis that connects Enoch and the Arbel caves with non-Qumran Essenes, some of whom supported Herod the Great and

lived in Jerusalem. His original reconstructions of recently discovered archaeological remains makes this volume essential reading for anyone interested in this time period, as well as the Book of Enoch, particularly the Parables of Enoch.

KENNETH ATKINSON

Collins, John J. and Ananda Geysler-Fouché, eds. *Emerging Sectarianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Continuity, Separation, and Conflict*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, 141. Leiden: Brill, 2022, pp. XVIII; 464. Hardbound. ISBN: 978-90-04-51711-0.

This book contains papers presented at an international conference titled “The Origin of the Sectarian Movement in the Dead Scrolls,” organized by the Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. The first exclusively international Qumran conference hosted in the country, this event was originally planned for May 2020. Due to the Covid 19 outbreak the event was postponed for one year and turned into a virtual conference held between May 11-13, 2021. As noted in the preface (p. vii), this change in venue allowed many scholars who work in Qumran studies, including the present reviewer, to attend this wonderful event. As Ananda Geysler-Fouché comments in the preface and introduction to the volume (“Emerging Sectarianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Continuity, Separation, and Conflict,” pp. 1-10), the organizers turned disappointment over the cancelation of an in-person event into a successful international conference that attracted over a hundred virtual attendees.

Part 1: Community. In the first paper in this portion of the volume, Esther G. Chazon (“Sectarian or Not: What is the Question?,” p. 13-32), examines methods for determining whether texts found at Qumran are nonsectarian, a distinctively *yahad* work, or somewhere on the range from most to least like the sectarian writings, and which works are similar. Focusing on the Words of the Luminaries, she examines its paleographical date, the absence of sectarian terminology and ideas, and its dissonance with *yahad* ideology and identity. Believing the work predates the Qumran settlement, Chazon proposes that the *yahad* adopted it early in its formation because of the community’s practice of prayer at “appointed time” as an “offering of the lips.”

Michael R. Jost, in his contribution (*Sectarian and Non-Sectarian Literature: What Does it Mean and How Does This Distinction Work Today?*, pp. 33-54) argues that it is essential to maintain the distinction between “sectarian” and “non-sectarian” literature to understand the *yahad*. He highlights mixed forms, namely non-sectarian texts that originated outside the community but were taken over in modified form. Using the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice as an example, Jost proposes that its unique liturgical self-understanding of the *yahad* shows that it originated within that movement.

Gideon R. Kotzé (“The Transmission of Greek Translations in Judea and the Origin of the Qumran Sectarian Movement,” pp. 55-77) explores what we may learn about the beginnings of the Qumran sectarian movement by looking at the transmission of Greek translations in Judea during the centuries before and after the turn of the era. He proposes that the Qumran sectarian movement originated, developed, and came to an end within an environment where scribes actively transmitted into Greek versions of literary writings. This suggests that scribes with a proficiency in multiple languages were likely among the earliest members of the Qumran sectarian movement.

Jacobus N. Naudé and Cynthia L. Miller Naudé (“Unity and Diversity in Qumran Hebrew: Evidence from Quantification,” pp. 78-116), seek to determine if Qumran Hebrew is unique or distinct and, if so, in what manner. After noting the problematic nature of the extant evidence, which is not as extensive as those linguists use to study modern languages, the authors use “Complexity Theory” to that emphasizes four principles to study the Scrolls: complexity, interconnectedness, dynamism, and emergence. Focusing on the use of “absolute,” or “bare,”

כּל in the Scrolls, the authors propose that Qumran Hebrew demonstrates a trajectory of change and diffusion from earlier varieties, as well as a retention of some earlier features found in later texts.

Part 2: Separation. In the first essay in this section, Charlotte Hempel (“Community Formation in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Beyond the Watershed Paradigm,” pp. 119-44), challenges the traditional alignment of the date of the Community Rule from Cave 1 (1QS), copied around 100-75 BCE, and the move to Qumran, to argue that the origins of the movement occurred elsewhere, as indicated by passages such as 1QS 7:22-24. She proposes that we are dealing in this text with an inter-elite schism from another influential group—disparagingly described as the people of injustice—that influenced some community members.



John Ben-Daniel graduated in medicine from Cambridge and London Universities in 1978. He settled in Jerusalem in 1998, where he continues to work as a family physician. For more than 30 years, he has studied the Scriptures, and researched their archaeological and historical background. He attended a course on local archaeology in 2001 and is currently a member of the Enoch Seminar. With his wife, Gloria, he has written *“The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation”* (Jerusalem, 2003), *“St. John and the Book of Revelation: From Essenes to End-Times”* (Jerusalem, 2019). His works can be found at www.newtorah.org and www.academia.edu.

Both Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria described the Essenes as a pious religious movement which flourished during the late Second Temple period. Apart from the contemporary accounts of these two authors, very little was known about the Essenes until the 1950’s, when a large collection of their writings was discovered at Qumran. Scholars suspect that these writings were produced by a small, self-segregating community within the Essene movement as a whole, but traces of the other Essene communities have eluded them up to now. This book begins with the discovery of an ancient cave-village with Essene features within the Arbel National Park, close to the Sea of Galilee. By combining evidence from archaeological finds, historical accounts and literary sources, the author builds up a profile of these non-Qumranic Essenes, following them from Mt. Arbel in Galilee to Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, and identifying the Parables of Enoch (*1Enoch 37-71*) as one of their most influential writings. The influence of this messianic prophecy is then identified among the founders of Christianity—John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth and John of Patmos. The book ends with evidence for Damascus as the birthplace of the Essenes, followed by a broad review of Essene origins and history, from the end of the Babylonian Exile to the First Revolt. Emerging from the mists of time, the larger Essene movement identified in this book could be described as the “missing link” between Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity.

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Origins, History, and Influence



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For a PowerPoint presentation given on 22.02.24, on Arbel and the Essenes (the first chapter of the book), please go to <https://vimeo.com/915933839> and enter the following password: Fra@Lec9

For SBL members, this book is now available for review on the SBL central website:
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