

CONFUSIONS OF PHARISEES AND ESSENES IN JOSEPHUS

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Several historiographical and textual problems emerge from identifying the community at Qumran with the "Essenes". Since most of our knowledge about "Essenes" is based on notices in Josephus, it is reasonable to suppose that some of these difficulties stem from Josephus' own confusions and distortions or purposeful obfuscations of data. In this regard, it is often overlooked that Josephus was himself working from sources -- two of the most well-known he admits to using were Strabo of Cappadocia and Nicolaus of Damascus.

In my forthcoming Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran, Leiden, 1982, I delineate two groups of Sadducees, one "opposition" and one "establishment". The latter, for the sake of convenience, one might designate "Boethusian". This split is reflected in both Talmudic and Karaite allusions to a split between "Zadok and Boethus"¹. I also document an earlier "split" between "opposition" and "establishment" Hassidaeans, i. e., those "Hassidaeans" whom 2 Macc 14.5 labels "war-mongers anxious to foment sedition" and another more temporizing group who go over to Alcimus. I have labeled the former group, again for the sake of convenience, "Zadokite Hassidaeans", as opposed to the latter, "Pharisee Hassidaeans". Both splits, the first in the Hassidaeans movement and the second in the Sadducean, have to do with attitudes towards foreigners generally and, in particular, foreign appointment of high priests. One should realize, that in these splits and confusions, one has the origins of Second Temple party affiliations

and sectarian strife. In fact, these terminologies have tended to slide around quite a bit, depending on who was using them and how, and nowhere is this lack of precision more evident than in Josephus.

A proper understanding of the attitude of Qumran towards the Herodian establishment is also essential in approaching these problems. Many scholars have found it impossible to determine whether Qumran was pro-Herodian or anti-Herodian, and therefore have been unable to make any real sense of the relative abandonment of the settlement during Herod's reign. The crucial material relative to Qumran's attitude towards the Herodian establishment comes in the Zadokite Document, in particular, in the condemnation of "fornication" and "riches" found there², even though this document has often been placed on palaeographic grounds by some in the second century B. C.³ By "fornication" (zanut), Qumran understands both marriage with nieces and divorce, practices absolutely characteristic of the Herodian establishment in the first century⁴; not accidentally, they are also at the bottom of this establishment's difficulties with "Zealots" and so-called early Christians⁵. "Riches" is, of course, another leitmotif of the Herodian priestly establishment and forms the basis of most of Josephus' descriptions of "Herodian" priestly clans.⁶ The third charge made in the Zadokite Document, "idolatry", is beyond the scope of this article, but it is easily elucidated within this framework.⁷

When Herod came to power, he despoiled the previous aristocracy and bribed Anthony to behead the last Maccabean priest-king Antigonus, "for otherwise the Jews could in no way be pacified."⁸ He had all the members of the Sanhedrin, except for Sameas (and/or Pollio), liquidated, many of whom had previously wished to condemn him for

executing the "nationalist" bandit chief Hezekiah.⁹ Though he promoted "such men of the private men of the city as had been of his party, he never left off avenging and punishing every day those that had chosen to be of the party of his enemies." Where "Pollio the Pharisee and Sameas a disciple of his" were concerned, Josephus unequivocally tells us that Herod "honored them above all the rest, for when Jerusalem was besieged by the Roman general Sossius and Herod, they advised the citizens to receive Herod."¹⁰

Pollio's advice and Sameas' recognition of Herod's leadership potential (the Herod he characterizes as "an admirable man") should be seen as paradigmatic for the political conduct of those whom we would define as "Pharisees" and those whom Qumran, apparently lumping several of these establishment groups together, refers to as "the Seekers after Smooth Things" (according to our definition, 'those seeking accommodation with foreigners'¹¹). It epitomizes Pharisaic political conduct from the time of Alexander Jannaeus and the Demetrius affair (and as we shall see, even before) to that of R. Yohanan b. Zacchai, not to mention the conduct of two other self-professed "Pharisees", Paul and Josephus. R. Yohanan at the time of the fall of Jerusalem "had an arrow shot into the Emperor's camp to tell him he was one of the Emperor's friends"¹²; for Paul's "establishment" sensibilities see Ro 13.1-7¹³. For perhaps the best picture of the modus vivendi of this Herodian, Pharisaic, and "Boethusian" Sadducee alliance, see War 2.17.3f., where "the Men of Power" (i.e., "the Herodians"), the high priests (i.e., our "Boethusian Sadducees"), and the principal men of the Pharisees try to convince those whom Josephus persistently calls "the innovators" that their forefathers had

accepted gifts and sacrifices from foreigners (here, of course, is the basis of the "idolatry" charge leveled against the Jerusalem establishment at Qumran).¹⁴ Failing this and "perceiving that the sedition was too far gone for them to subdue", they actually sent for the Romans, as their precursors had the Greeks, "to come with an army to the city and cut off the sedition". One should note here that one of the intermediaries for this process was a Herodian collaborator and family member named "Saul".¹⁵

Whether Pollio and Sameas are "Hillel and Shammai" or "Abtalion and Shemaiah", or a combination of both (Josephus obviously considers them well known), is immaterial for our purposes. In the earliest of these kinds of notices about so-called Pharisees, where Josephus describes how Sameas recognized Herod's leadership potential in the Hezekiah affair, Josephus notes how Sameas alone of all the members of the Sanhedrin survived and tells how he "was greatly honored...because when the city was afterwards besieged by Herod and Sossius, he persuaded the people to admit Herod into it". In addition to not clearly distinguishing between Essenes and Pharisees in these notices, Josephus confuses Sameas and Pollio with each other. In the later notice, probably from a different source than the earlier one, it is "Pollio who at the time when Herod was once upon his trial of life or death, foretold by way of reproach...how this Herod...would afterward punish them all which had its completion in time..." One should note in all these notices about "Pharisees" the general orientation of seeking accommodation with foreigners (including Herodians) and the persistent theme of fortune-telling.

If one now turns to Josephus' references to the group he refers to

as "Essenes", one encounters similar themes. Josephus first refers to "Essenes" in relation to some one he calls "Judas" in the period of the end of John Hyrcanus' reign.¹⁶ He describes this man as "a prophet" frequenting the Temple precincts "with companions and friends who abode with him as scholars in order to learn the art of foretelling things to come" and "who never missed the truth in his predictions" (italics mine). The "prophesying" or "soothsaying" theme is paradigmatic. Like Sameas, Pollio the Pharisee, Menachem the Essene, Simeon the Essene, Yohanan ben Zacchai, and Josephus himself (not to mention "the teachers and prophets" of Paul's Antioch community -- italics mine¹⁷), Judas supposedly predicts the imminent demise of John's son Antigonus at the hands of his older brother Aristobulus (a man Josephus designates as the first Hasmonaean "king"). Aristobulus, who is portrayed as dying an excruciating death because of this crime, even though he had already repented of it, is then succeeded by his anti-Pharisaic third brother Alexander Jannaeus. One should note that the story, whose source, as in the later Sameas material, appears to be Strabo, is generally hostile to Maccabean kingly pretensions, just as the Pharisees were presented as hostile to John Hyrcanus' high-priestly pretensions earlier.¹⁸

The next reference to "Essenes" comes side by side with Josephus' second reference to Pollio and Sameas.¹⁹ It follows Josephus' description of Herod's police tactics and the people's hostility to him, including a remark about Herod's own introduction of "innovations (a word Josephus usually reserves for the practises of the seditionists²⁰) to the dissolution of their religion and the disuse of their own customs". In an attempt to overcome the people's hostility, Herod

remitted a third of their taxes and introduced a loyalty oath, but "those who could not be induced to acquiesce to his scheme of government were persecuted in all manner of ways".²¹ In parallel though non-correlating notices, he describes both the Essenes and Pollio, Sameas, and their company as being excused from the oath in spite of the harsh repression just noted. Pollio and Sameas are described as keeping the company of a large group of "scholars" in exactly the manner that Judas "of the sect of Essenes" was described as being accompanied by "companions and friends who abode with him as scholars" (italics mine).

In the very next sentence, after noting how Herod excused "the Essenes", as he had the company of Pollio and Sameas, from swearing their loyalty (obviously out of regard for the ample evidence he already had of their loyalty), Josephus goes on to describe the former as a sect living "the same kind of life as those the Greeks call Pythagoraeans", by which he again appears to be alluding to the camaraderie of scholars just described in regard to Judas the Essene and Pollio the Pharisee. We conclude that at this point Josephus is confusing overlapping materials from different sources using slightly differing terminologies, perhaps from the separate accounts of Strabo and Nicolaus of Damascus noted above, but which he at least has the perspicuity to realize typologically belong together.

Josephus' next refernce to "Essenes" follows almost immediately. The confusions and evidence of parallel non-correlating sources continue. In this testimony Josephus tries to explain why Herod "held the Essenes in such honor".²² As in his "Judas of the sect of the Essenes" story, the folkloric aspects of the presentation should be

patent. He tells a story about "one of these Essenes whose name was Menahem". Describing him in terms evocative of those he used to describe Sameas, whom he called "righteous", he says Menahem "conducted his life in an excellent manner". It seems that the reason Herod held the Essenes in such high esteem was that when Herod was a schoolboy, "Menahem" saluted him as king and when Herod protested, Menahem smacked him on the bottom. This theme of predicting the future (what by this time goes by the name of "prophesying") or having "God-given knowledge of future events" is common to all these episodes. The only difference is that Sameas predicted Herod's future kingship when Herod was already a young man; Menahem when he was still a young boy. As Sameas refers to Herod as "an excellent man"²³, so Menahem describes him as "found worthy by God" and at a later point even predicts an exceedingly long reign for him, at which "Herod...gave Menahem his hand and...from that time continued to honor all Essenes".

The policy of flattering alien or foreign-imposed local rulers with prophecies of future greatness or longevity was typical of Pharisee practice from the time of Sameas (or Pollio, or both) up until the fall of the Temple, when either Josephus or R. Yohanan b. Zacchai, both Pharisees, have the audacity to apply the "Messianic" prophecy to Vespasian²⁴. In an unguarded moment during his discussion of Vespasian's "Messianic" qualifications, Josephus, also (probably inadvertently), revealed that this same Messianic "star" prophecy was the moving force behind the uprising against Rome.²⁵ That it was held in high esteem at Qumran is born out by reference to it upwards of three times in the extant corpus, once in the War Scroll, once in the Zadokite Document, and once in what appear to be "Messianic" proof

texts.²⁶ In spite of the palpable hostility of "the Essenes" at Qumran to "law-breakers" (including presumably foreigners) and everything the Herodians stood for²⁷, not to mention Josephus' indications in conjunction with his testimonies about Essenes of "spies set everywhere" and "many brought to the citadel Hyrcania (not far from Qumran) both openly and secretly and there put to death"; many scholars continue to go on believing Josephus' stories about toadying soothsayers where Herod's regard for "the Essenes" is the issue. At the same time they attribute the destruction by fire of 'the Essene settlement at Qumran', and its relative abandonment through most of Herod's reign, to an earthquake!²⁸

Whatever the "Essenes" were, it must be understood they are never sycophantic, neither in Josephus or at Qumran. Josephus gives incontestable evidence of this, particularly in his description of the unwillingness of the Essenes to blaspheme the law-giver (parallel to the "zealot" unwillingness to "call any man Lord") and their heroic resistance in the war against Rome.²⁹ The Essene contempt for "riches", which forms a large part of this description and is at the bottom of Qumran "poor" allusions, gives further evidence of this.³⁰ For its part, Qumran is never obsequious, but rather, always apocalyptic and could never have countenanced the application of the Messianic prophecy to either Romans or Herodians.

Let us now apply our theory of terminological confusions between "Pharisees" and "Essenes" to several well-known examples. Josephus tells us about one "Sadduk a Pharisee", a leader of those he accuses of "innovation" and along with Hezekiah's son Judas the Galilean, a founder of the so-called "fourth philosophy".³¹ He describes his

doctrines and those of his followers as being like the Pharisees in all things except that they had "an inviolable attachment to liberty", "would not call any man Lord", and opposed Joezer b. Boethus on the tax issue (n.b. the sitz-im-leben of "Zadok"/"Boethus" split here).³² Keeping in mind our designation of two Hassidaean groups, one "Pharisee" and the other "Zadokite", and substituting the terminology "Essene" for "Pharisee", the notice would now read "Sadduk an Essene...who was in all things like the Pharisees, except...",etc., which adds considerable terminological precision to the delineation of these matters.

In the reign of Herod's son Archelaus, Josephus tells us about another fortune-telling "man of the sect of Essenes" named Simon who predicted Archelaus' demise on the basis of a Joseph-like (and on that basis, probably mythological) dream about ears of corn.³³ Not without interest, the Slavonic Josephus refers to this Simon as a "Sadducee". Not only is the constant reiteration of the phraseology "sect of Essenes" interesting (Josephus only uses the term "Essene" as a cognomen later when referring to "John the Essene", a military commander in the early stages of the uprising³⁴), but regardless of one's opinion of the merit of the Slavonic Josephus, we can also give a plausible explanation on the basis of our theory for why a given "Simon" could be thought of as an "Essene" in one account and a "Sadducee" in another.

Even more interesting, the Slavonic Josephus refers to another establishment-type "scribe of Essene origins", also called "Simon" and closely allied to Archelaus. When the John the Baptist-like "Wild Man" who came in "the way of the Law" and preached revolution (whom the

Slavonic also places in the time of Archelaus) is brought before Archelaus, this Simon abuses him verbally and assaults him.³⁵ But in this instance it is "the Wild Man" who is the "Essene" type and Simon the "Pharisee". Our exposition of confusions between Pharisees and Essenes goes a long way towards illuminating problems implicit in this scene. The "Man", obviously intended as a facsimile of John though here unnamed, is correctly portrayed as anti-Herodian; the "scribe of Essene origins" named Simon (possibly equivalent to several illustrious Pharisees in this period by that name including the famous Shammai), pro-Herodian. He is an important Pharisee, as his intimacy with Archelaus conspicuously confirms. Even according to Josephus' detailed exposition of their customs, he cannot be an "Essene" and he is most certainly not a Qumran "Essene". Even more than with the example of the "Sadducee" Simon above, it is difficult to dismiss such complex notices, which make 'errors' characteristic of the period we are considering and not the Middle Ages, simply as the products of a medieval copyist's error or invention. This is true, particularly when they are also at odds with gospel testimonies and, historically speaking, such good sense can be made out of them, however bizarre they may at first appear.

Finally, let us apply this understanding of confusions between "Essene" and "Pharisee" terminologies to the contradictory testimonies about the birth of and nature of the "Hassidaean" movement in 1 Macc and 2 Macc. In the latter, as is well known, the Hassidaeans are portrayed as the supporters of Judas Maccabee par excellence; in the former, as back-sliding defectors who betrayed him. Substituting the new terminology "Pharisee" (or even proto-Pharisee) for the latter

group adds considerable depth and clarity to the portrayal. When one appreciates there were two groups descended from the Hassidaeans, one revolutionary and another "break-away", that "split" over the issue of election or foreign appointment of high priests, one can understand how one or the other of these groups could in some sources pass for "Essenes" and in others, "Pharisees". According to our view, what 1 Macc, in particular, has conserved in its portrait of the split between Judas and back-sliding "Hassidaeans" is the birth moment of the Pharisee Party, not the Hassidaean. As the split between those opposed to and those willing to live with foreign intervention continued into the "Herodian" period, if one keeps one's eyes fixed firmly on the anti-Herodian strain of opposition "Essene" groups and the pro-Herodian strain of establishment "Pharisaic" groups (including so-called "Sadducees", or "Boethusian" Sadducees, who, as Josephus testifies, were dominated in their post-Herodian embodiment by the Pharisees³⁶), one will never go far astray. Here, Qumran's application of the terminology "Seekers after Smooth Things" to this latter orientation is perhaps closer to the mark than any more modern appreciations of the group this euphemism is generally held to approximate.