



### *Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2015.09.11*

**Joan E. Taylor, *The Essenes, the Scrolls, and the Dead Sea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. 440. ISBN: 978-0-19-955448-5. \$62.00 Hardcover.**

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Joan Taylor's recent monograph *The Essenes, the Scrolls, and the Dead Sea* falls into two parts. The first part is a close study of descriptions of Essenes in Greek and Latin sources. The starting point for her analysis is the observation that scholarship has long been dominated by a notion that the Essenes were a marginal, ascetic, spiritual, and mystic group within a predominantly legalistic Second Temple Judaism. In a quest for an unbiased profile of the Essenes, Taylor scrutinizes ancient reports about them, covering, in addition to Josephus and Philo, the writings of Pliny (pp. 131–140), Dio Chrysostom (whose report she believes to be an independent one), Synesius, Julius Solinus (pp. 141–166), Hegesippus (pp. 173–180), Justin Martyr (pp. 180–183), and Epiphanius (pp. 183–186). Assuming that Essenes might have been known by other names, she attempts to find references to them in other ancient texts. For instance, concluding from Josephus and Eusebius that the Essenes supported Herod and enjoyed his favor, she suggests that the Herodians of Matthew and Mark are identical to the Essenes (pp. 109–130). While this proposal must remain highly conjectural, one cannot fail to notice the cumulative weight of Taylor's argument against marginalizing the Essenes. In her view they were a well-represented and politically active legal society within Second Temple Judaism.

The second part of Taylor's book spans such topics as the history of the Dead Sea, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and ancient pharmacology. It is in this section that she formulates some of her most controversial ideas. I will focus on three of them.

First, identifying the dwellers of Kh. Qumran with Essenes, Taylor suggests that Qumran, along with Ain Feshkha, was a small Essene outpost, whereas their center was in Jerusalem (p. 270).

Second, to explain the Essene presence in the area, the author proposes that Herod, favorably disposed toward the Essenes, granted them lands along the Dead Sea. For Taylor, this coincides with Josephus's remark regarding the interest of the Essenes in healing (though her ch. 12, seeking archaeological and textual evidence for such an interest, yields very little) and Herod's efforts to develop the "health industry" of the Dead Sea. With these in mind, she concludes that Essenes came to dwell at Kh. Qumran only around 34 BCE, much later than the prevalent

theories hold. This, according to Taylor, is corroborated by the archaeological data indicating significant changes at the site around that time (p. 261). Moreover, she argues that Jews/Essenes continued to live at Kh. Qumran after 70 CE, up until the earthquake of 115 CE (p. 262). This, for Taylor, corresponds with the findings from the Bar Kokhba revolt testifying to a significant Jewish population in the southern region of the Dead Sea prior to Roman suppression of the Second Revolt in 135 CE. As a side note, she proposes that the famous Copper Scroll was placed in Cave 3 during Bar Kokhba's revolt (pp. 298–299).

Third, the fact that some of the Dead Sea Scrolls were found wrapped in linen, sealed with bitumen, and placed in jars signals, for Taylor, that these scrolls containing a divine name or names were not stored, but rather buried, a practice known from later Jewish sources. To be sure, not all the caves that yielded scrolls fit a profile of a burial site. Thus Cave 4 seems to her to be a place where the scrolls were processed for future burial (p. 294). To account for the large number of manuscripts found in the vicinities of Kh. Qumran, the author suggests that they were brought for burial from many Essene communities over a period of time. In her analysis, that would be the main reason for the Essene outposts in the area: they took care of the burial of the scrolls. Taylor hints that this hypothesis may help explain some of the issues pertaining to the Scrolls, e.g., the presence of significantly diverging copies of a given literary work (she provides an example of the Damascus Document, yet also points to biblical manuscripts). In her view, these might have been brought for burial from different Essene communities. What remains somewhat unclear is how she accounts for those Scrolls that do not contain divine name(s), e.g., the calendrical documents, and do not therefore require a burial of the kind she envisions.

It remains to be seen whether Taylor's analysis of the archaeological data and her "burial hypothesis" will gain the support of the scholarly community. Meanwhile, it seems that one of the most important contributions of her book is the call to re-consider the main pieces of the Qumran puzzle. It is hoped that the fresh breeze of new insights breathing from Taylor's work will start a "chain reaction" that will lead to more new answers to the old questions.