SACRIFICIAL CULT AT QUMRAN?
AN EVALUATION OF THE EVIDENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER ALTERNATE JEWISH PRACTICES IN THE LATE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

Claudia E. Epley: Sacrificial Cult at Qumran? An Evaluation of the Evidence in the Context of Other Alternate Jewish Practices in the Late Second Temple Period
(Under the direction of Donald C. Haggis)

This thesis reexamines the evidence for Jewish sacrificial cult at the site of Khirbet Qumran, the site of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the first centuries BCE and CE. The interpretation of the animal remains discovered at the site during the excavations conducted by Roland de Vaux and subsequent projects has long been that these bones are refuse from the “pure” meals eaten by the sect, as documented in various documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, recent scholarship has revisited the possibility that the sect residing at Qumran conducted their own animal sacrifices separate from the Jerusalem temple. This thesis argues for the likelihood of a sacrificial cult at Qumran as evidenced by the animal remains, comparable sacrificial practices throughout the Mediterranean, contemporary literary works, and the existence of the Jewish temple at Leontopolis in lower Egypt that existed at the same time that the sect resided at Qumran.
For LGM, CAG, and JMT
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INTRODUCTION

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the environs of the site of Khirbet Qumran in 1947, scholars have been provided with a wealth of information concerning the varieties of Jewish practice in the Second Temple period. The Scrolls provide a glimpse into the non-mainstream worldview of the Jewish sect residing at Qumran, identified (though not uncontestedly) by many scholars with the Essenes.¹ Up until the discovery of the Scrolls, the Essenes were known only from the writings of such classical authors as Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, and Pliny the Elder; now, however, scholars are no longer reliant on these Greek and Latin sources’ descriptions of the sect—the literary and material remains of the Essenes who formed the community at Qumran may now speak for themselves.

However, even with this firsthand evidence of the sectarian group at Qumran, interpretive issues persist. There remains a question of the exact relationship between the Scrolls found in the caves surrounding Khirbet Qumran—that is, whether the Scrolls belonged to and were deposited in the caves by the group residing at Qumran in the first centuries BCE and CE, or if they were deposited in the caves by individuals or groups who were not associated with the Qumran settlement²—and the archaeology of the site itself. Even if the relationship between the Qumran

¹ “Mainstream” here referring to the Jewish religious practices and ideologies centered on the temple in Jerusalem, as opposed to the practices of the sect at Qumran, whatever the nature of those practices might have been, and the practices of such groups as that which established a rival temple at Leontopolis in Egypt during the Hasmonean/Ptolemaic period.

² Some scholars have proposed theories that dispute the interpretation of the site as a sectarian settlement, such as Robert Donceel and Pauline Donceel-Voûte, who argue that the remains at the site are those of a villa rustica; the
sect and the scrolls is affirmed, there arises the issue of how representative these texts are of the sect’s beliefs. Nevertheless, that a strong relationship exists between these two classes of evidence—written and archaeological—is undeniable for many scholars and is essential for understanding the function of the settlement at Qumran and its cultic practices.\(^3\)

**Khirbet Qumran**

The site of Khirbet Qumran is on the western short of the Dead Sea, located in the modern West Bank roughly nine miles south of Jericho.\(^4\) The earliest habitation layers at the site date to the Iron Age,\(^5\) but no long-term settlements are established prior to the sect’s use of the site beginning in the Hasmonean period, likely due to the lack of freshwater sources at the site or in its vicinity.\(^6\) The sect’s presence at the site begins in the early first century BCE, and continues largely uninterrupted until the Roman army destroyed the site in 68 CE.\(^7\)

The site sits atop a marl terrace, which rises about 200 feet above the Wadi Qumran on its southern end, and to the west of the site is a limestone and dolomite escarpment that separates the Dead Sea from the rest of the Judaean desert.\(^8\) The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered both in

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\(^3\) The dichotomy drawn here between literary and material culture is of course a false one—the Scrolls are just as much a part of the archaeology of Qumran as the ruins of the site itself.

\(^4\) Magness 2002, 21.


\(^6\) Magness 2002. The nearest freshwater springs are at Jericho and Ein Gedi; there is a brackish spring located at the site of Ein Feshkha, about two miles south of Qumran. The water of the Dead Sea is of course not potable, due to the high salt content. During the sect’s use of the site, seasonal rainwater runoff was collected in various pools and cisterns around the site (Magness 2002, 48–49, 54, 61).

\(^7\) Magness 2002, 56–62.

\(^8\) Magness 2002, 20.
natural caves in the limestone cliffs surrounding the site and in manmade caves dug out of the soft marl of the terrace. Cave 1, the first cave containing scrolls that was discovered in c. 1947, is located around a half mile north of the site. Other Scroll caves, such as Cave 4, which contained over 500 documents, and Caves 7, 8, and 9, located in the manmade caves dug into the marl terrace, are even closer to the site than Cave 1. Besides the proximity of the Scroll caves to the settlement, pottery that is unique to the sectarian levels within the settlement was also discovered in several Scroll caves, further validating the association between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the site itself.

Following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the late 1940s, Roland de Vaux, a French priest based out of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem, began excavating the site of Khirbet Qumran. A class of evidence discovered during these excavations, which were conducted throughout the 1950s and during subsequent projects is that of assorted animal remains, which appear throughout several open court-like areas between the structures of the settlement. Appearing on the surface of the ground, these remains were discovered carefully covered by ceramic vessels and large potsherds. The animals remains were regrettably understudied at the time of the excavations, however, given their placement in discrete courtyard areas of the site, these zooarchaeological specimens seem to comprise the remains of meals eaten within the compound at Qumran by the sect; however, the nature of these meals is debated and has been since the initial findings of de Vaux's excavations were published. Though the deliberate placement of these small collections of remains suggests some sort of ritual significance of these

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11 Magness 2002, 44.
12 Magness 2002, 41–42.
long-finished meals, any cultic importance is unclear from the sectarian texts comprising the Scrolls, some of which, like the Community Rule, detail some aspects of the conduct and beliefs of the members of the sect. Plausible explanations for these animal bones range from the refuse non-sacrificial “pure” ritual meals partaken of by the sect to the remains of animal sacrifice and consumption within the bounds of Qumran. What is clear, nevertheless, from both the texts of the Scrolls and the archaeology, is that the actions of the sect at Qumran constituted an alternate Jewish cultic practice to that of the mainstream at the temple in Jerusalem, whether or not the animal remains represent a full-blown sacrificial cult.

I suggest here that, not only should Qumran be considered an alternate center of Jewish worship in the late Second Temple period (a fact that is obvious from the written sources), but that such divergent centers and practices should not be considered as unusual as the present consensus seems to imply. I argue that, while “mainstream” Jews, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, at the time would have and did consider cultic activity not conducted at the Jerusalem temple as violating biblical law and therefore sacrilegious, not all Jews agreed on the legal interpretations regarding the conduct of sacrifices in a temple they considered desecrated—or else installations and practices would not have been established outside Jerusalem. My main, perhaps philosophical, point is that the validity of such alternate practices need not and should not be judged by those of the majority or the opinions thereof (whether of ancient Judaeans or modern scholars), and that not only the research on Qumran but on Second Temple Judaism more generally is done a disservice by “adhering to a Jerusalem-centered, monolithic view of the Temple as center of all

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13 1QS; Vermes 2004, 97–117.

14 Various texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls discuss “pure meals” eaten communally by the sect, however, it is unclear whether the preparation of these meals involved the sacrifice of animals according to the ritual prescriptions required by biblical law. Due to the ambiguous and metaphorical nature of the language of these texts, any arguments using them as the sole evidence for or against sacrifice having been conducted by the Essenes are problematic.
legitimate Second Temple Jewish sacrifice” and cultic practice.\textsuperscript{15} That some Jews—and, in the case of the Essenes and the Oniads, especially devout Jews—embraced the creation and maintenance of alternate practices is evidence that such actions were not out of the question for all Jews in this particular religious, cultural, and political milieu. This is evidenced by the very fact of their existence, and though I am arguing here that the animal remains at Qumran likely represent sacrificial refuse, the exact nature of the cultic practices of the sectarians is immaterial to their significance as a non-Jerusalem centered Jewish cult.

**Plan**

Below, I first lay out some operational definitions and underlying assumptions that I use throughout the essay. Following this, I briefly discuss the Oniad temple in Egypt, as a comparative example, and the historical circumstances that led to the establishment of that center and the cult at Qumran.\textsuperscript{16} Then, I review the zooarchaeological evidence recovered during the excavations at Qumran conducted by de Vaux in the 1950s and Magen and Peleg in the 1990s and early 2000s, followed by wider practices of animal sacrifice and consumption in the Mediterranean world in the Greco-Roman period. Lastly, I summarize the literary evidence and the scholarly arguments addressing sacrifice at Qumran.

\textsuperscript{15} Schofield 2016, 134.

\textsuperscript{16} Here I will concentrate on the religious aspects of the establishment of these alternate cults, but there are certainly political factors at play in this period as well. Bohak suggests, in the case of the Oniads, that the establishment of the temple at Leontopolis was due to the political situation of the time (Bohak 1996, 19–25). Such political motivations may also have had a part in the establishment of the community at Qumran, given the overtones of the story of the Wicked Priest accosting the Teacher of Righteousness on Yom Kippur in the Pesher Habakkuk (1QpHab XI, 6–8; Vermes 2004, 515), and more generally given the vast political power attained by the Maccabees and Hasmoneans in the course of their usurpation of the religious establishment in Jerusalem.
Definitions and Premises

A major point taken for granted throughout this paper is that the sect that resided at Qumran can be identified with the Essenes known from Greek and Latin sources, such as Pliny the Elder, Philo of Alexandria, and Flavius Josephus. While the identification of the site of Qumran as an Essene settlement is debated among scholars, the consensus among the secondary sources cited in this paper is that the group at Qumran can be securely identified with this sect, based on the agreement between the content of the Dead Sea Scrolls and sources such as Josephus and Pliny the Elder on many points. Additionally, to attempt to summarize the scholarship debating this point would be both tedious and outside the scope of this thesis.

Related to the above point, I also assume throughout the paper that the accounts of the Essenes (and, to an extent, the Oniads) as detailed in the writings of Josephus are, if embellished, reliable overall. While this is a point also debated by scholars, I agree with the stance of Beall in regarding Josephus “as a reliable historian,” while also acknowledging the “apologetic purposes” of his works, as well as more general issues regarding the accuracy and intentions of ancient historiography and ethnography. Nevertheless, as is demonstrated below, the agreements between Josephus’ account of the Essenes, the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the archaeology of the site of Qumran support the validity of not only Josephus’ work as a source of information on the sect, but also validate all three datasets as evidence of an alternate sacrificial cult having been present at Qumran.

17 A succinct discussion of the literary sources that discuss the Essenes is provided in Magness 2002, 39–43. Because Pliny the Elder (a native of Italy) and Philo of Alexandria (a Jewish resident of Alexandria) were not residents of Judaea and cannot claim firsthand knowledge of the Essenes, their discussions of the sect can be assumed to be less reliable than those of Josephus, who was a native of Judaea.

18 Beall 1988, 3, 11.
Furthermore, before moving on, an operational definition ought to be established for the term “alternate practice,” a phrase employed admittedly incautiously up to this point. This term should be understood to mean any Jewish cult practice in this period that does not revolve around sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple. While in the case of the cult established at Leontopolis, which could be subsumed under such a term as “rival temple” (that is, a temple that took the place of that in Jerusalem), the case of the sect at Qumran complicates such a temple-centric view of worship in this period, as there is no convincing evidence that the sect intended for their cult to constitute a physical temple replacing that in Jerusalem, even though compelling evidence suggests the possibility that sacrifices were being conducted at Qumran.

**CHASES TO JEWISH CULT IN THE LATE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD: THE MACCABEES, ZADOKITES, AND LEONTOPOLIS**

While the Essene community at Qumran was surely unique in many ways (whether or not they conducted their own sacrifices), its status as a center of alternate cultic practice to the Jerusalem temple is not, which further underscores the possibility, if not likelihood, that the animal remains found at Qumran are the remains of a sacrificial cult. Existing contemporaneously to the Essene enclave at Qumran was a Jewish temple located at Leontopolis in lower Egypt, which was founded by Onias IV, a member of the priestly Zadokite family, following his flight from Judaea due to the murder of his father, Onias III.19 The Oniad temple is known primarily from two accounts in Josephus, which describe the foundation and location of this temple, as well as some brief mentions in Rabbinic sources.20 Flinders Petrie claimed to have excavated the site of this temple,

however, subsequent scholarship has disputed the identification of the site.\textsuperscript{21} I present a (very simplified) account of the events that precipitated the establishment of both the Qumran sect and the Oniad temple.

The same series of events that precipitated the formation of the Essene sect in Judaea also led to the establishment of the Oniad temple in Egypt. Prior to the foundation of the Hasmonean dynasty, Judaea had come under the control of the Seleucid kingdom, the remains Alexander the Great’s empire in the Near East. Under this leadership, factions developed in Judaea concerning the extent to which Jews should adopt Hellenistic cultural practices; a Hellenizing agenda began to be officially promoted during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.\textsuperscript{22} Eventually, Antiochus banned Jewish practice and desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by rededicating it to Zeus.\textsuperscript{23} These actions led to armed resistance led by members of the Maccabean family, the purported events of which are documented in 1 and 2 Maccabees. Somewhat surprisingly, the revolt was successful and Judaea was relinquished from Seleucid control.

Unrest followed the Maccabean victory, however, due to the usurpation of the High Priesthood by the Maccabees from the Zadokites, the family which had controlled the High Priesthood for centuries.\textsuperscript{24} Eventually, the Maccabean family combined the role of High Priest and king of Judaea, roles that had been separate since biblical times; the resulting dynasty is known as the Hasmoneans.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Bohak 1996, 28.
\item[22] Vermes 2004, 50–51.
\item[23] Vermes 2004, 51.
\item[25] Vermes 2004, 52.
\end{footnotes}
During this period, the role of the various Jewish sects (the Sadducees, Pharisees, and the Essenes) took on political overtones, with the Sadducees supporting the new dynasty and the Pharisees opposing it. The Essenes especially disdained the temple establishment in this period; their Zadokite loyalties are documented throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as their disagreement with the interpretations of biblical law by the Pharisees.

Emerging out of the religious, political, and cultural conflict is Onias IV, a member of the deposed Zadokite family. He, with a group of followers, migrated to Egypt sometime in the mid-second century BCE. Under the protection of Ptolemy IV Philometor, the king of Egypt, Onias established his temple at a place called Leontopolis, which is in the vicinity of Heliopolis, a Greek city near Memphis. This temple was in operation from c. 150 BCE to 74 CE, when it was destroyed by the Romans following the First Jewish Revolt in Judaea.

While the existence of the Oniad temple is largely undisputed in scholarship, the lack of confidently identified archaeological remains means that there is no comparanda for the cultic evidence at Qumran. However, the Oniads and the Essenes at Qumran, whose Zadokite loyalties are expressed frequently in the Dead Sea Scrolls, have long been associated. While comparable sacrificial remains from a Jewish cult may be the only evidence that could verify the nature of the animal remains at Qumran, the very existence of another, relatively well-documented sacrificial

26 Vermes 2004, 52–53.
cult dating to roughly the same period as the sect at Qumran presents additional support for the possibility of a sacrificial cult existing at Qumran.

EVIDENCE FOR SACRIFICE AT QUMRAN

De Vaux and Zeuner’s Reports

Although de Vaux’s final report on his excavations at Qumran went unpublished in his lifetime, he does summarize his findings in *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, a volume published by the British Academy following de Vaux’s Schweich Lecture series in 1959. This summary report, along with the scientific analysis of the zooarchaeological remains by F.E. Zeuner, comprises the entire record of the primary dataset for the animal remains at Qumran from the initial excavation.

De Vaux discovered the animal remains in open spaces between various structures at Qumran, primarily clustered in both the northwest and southeast of the settlement. The bones were discovered in small caches under potsherds and jars atop the surface of the ground, and in some cases additional vessels and/or sherds were also heaped on top of the deposit. The

31 de Vaux 1973. Because of the early date of the excavation and the fact that de Vaux never published his own final report on the excavations, the record of the contexts of these various bone deposits is rather sparse, and it is unclear whether the animal remains were stored beyond the study conducted by Zeuner in 1960.

32 Zeuner 1960.

33 Zeuner’s article not only details his analysis of the animal remains but also the results of scientific studies on other material from de Vaux’s excavations at Qumran and Ein Feshkha, including carbon-14 dating of charcoal and petrographic analysis of sediments. While the data he presents is informative, it is not comprehensive, and his methodology remains unclear. One point I remain dubious of is his claim to have differentiated some skeletal remains between sheep and goats (Zeuner 1960, 28–29); to my knowledge, even today differentiation of skeletal material between these two species is difficult and in many cases impossible. Given the early date of Zeuner’s study and not knowing the details of his methodology, I am skeptical of the ratios of goat to sheep remains he provides in his article.

34 de Vaux 1973, 13n.1, Pl. XXXIX.
depositions appear throughout almost all the open areas of the site, however, the largest number appear in locus 130 in the northwest sector of the settlement. De Vaux dates the majority of the animal remains to his Period Ib, but the depositions persist into Period II, sometimes within the same loci as the deposits from the earlier period. De Vaux suggests that these deliberately deposited collections of remains were the refuse of meal with religious significance, perhaps even sacrifices, though he questions this possibility since no altar was recovered during the course of the excavations (a point addressed in subsequent scholarship).

F.E. Zeuner’s article details the results of his study of a sample of the animal remains recovered during de Vaux’s excavations at Qumran. For this analysis, Zeuner examined the contents of 39 “jars,” although he notes that it is not clear whether the individual deposits were recovered within vessels of this sort or merely covered by potsherds. Within these 39 jars or deposits, Zeuner found assorted bones and bone fragments, but no complete skeletons. The remains from these deposits totaled c. 500 individual specimens, representing at least 57 individual animals, and roughly 80 percent of which were determined to have come from sheep and goats. Another 69 specimens were determined to belong to cattle.

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37 de Vaux 1973, 13. De Vaux, unlike modern excavators, did not change loci numbers in response to stratigraphic phases, rather the loci for each phase remain static unless a new structure is recovered. This means that, for example, loci 130, which contained the largest number of animal bone deposits, contains phases dating to both de Vaux’s Period Ib and II.
38 de Vaux 1973, 12, 14, 111. For more recent discussion of the absence of an altar, see Ekroth 2016, 43–46.
39 Zeuner 1960, 28, 28n.1.
40 Zeuner 1960, 28.
42 Zeuner 1960, 29.
Overall, the preservation of the remains was poor, partially due to the presence of gypsum, probably a component of the plaster used at the site, which rendered the bones brittle. Some specimens displayed evidence of charring, which Zeuner suggests is the result of spit-roasting the flesh for consumption. A smaller number of the bones were calcined, indicating that they had been placed directly in a very hot fire for some period of time, evidence that suggests that these parts of the animal may have been intended to be a burnt offering. The majority of the deposits contained the remains of only one individual animal. The relatively few numbers of individual animals represented in any given deposit, Zeuner suggests, is evidence that the group consuming these meals was also relatively small. Zeuner notes no apparent difference in the proportion of species from the samples taken from the main three deposits in loci 130, 132, and the South Trench.

**Magen and Peleg’s Excavations, 1993–2004**

Subsequent excavations over the past few decades have also recovered assorted animal remains from the site of Khirbet Qumran. The expedition led by Yitzhak Magen and Yuval Peleg from 1993 to 2004 produced animal remains dating from Iron Age II to the Roman period within the bounds of the site. Some of the bones recovered within Qumran display the same depositional

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43 Zeuner 1960, 28. The presence of plaster is attested in the vicinity of some of the bone deposits (Magness 2016, 13).

44 Zeuner 1960, 30.

45 Zeuner 1960, 30.

46 Zeuner 1960, 29.

47 Zeuner 1960, 29.

48 Zeuner 1960, 30.
phenomenon as those recorded by de Vaux, that is, that the bones had been placed deliberately under pots and potsherds. Additionally, most of the bones found during Magen and Peleg's excavation displayed evidence of having been cooked but not burnt, an aspect that is also shared with the bones studied by Zeuner.

For all periods studied during which the Essenes were active at Qumran, that is, by this report's periodization, the “Hasmonean” through the “First Century CE,” the predominant animal found was sheep/goat both in terms of individual fragments and minimum number of individuals (MNI). Again, such findings reflect those of Zeuner.

**Sacrifice in the Ancient Mediterranean**

Sacrifice had long been a defining cultic practice of religions throughout the Mediterranean world by the time the Essenes established their settlement at Khirbet Qumran. The historical circumstances that led to the fragmentation of the Judaeans into sects (including the Essenes) were themselves the result of sustained contact with cultures of the central and western Mediterranean

49 Magen and Peleg 2018; Sade 2018, 453. Also excavated during the course of this project were some caves to the west of the settlement, which produced animal remains dating to the Byzantine to the Mamluk period. Deposits were dated either by strata or associated ceramics.

50 Sade 2018, 453.

51 Sade 2018, 453.

52 Zeuner 1960, 30.

53 It should be noted that the most recent excavators, Magen and Peleg, do not associate the site with the sectarian group or the Dead Sea Scrolls but rather interpret Qumran as a “pottery manufacturing center” (Magen 2018, xi); this conclusion has been disputed by other Qumran and Dead Sea Scrolls scholars. Furthermore, because Magen and Peleg do not attribute any religious or ritual significance to the site of Khirbet Qumran and do not claim any connection between the site and the Scrolls, their interpretation for the bones recovered, both in their and de Vaux’s excavations, beneath potsherds and other ceramics is that the bones were deposited this way to deter scavengers from entering the site (Magen 2018, xi); however, if this were the only intent, it seems like burying the remains or disposing of them outside the bounds of the settlement would prove more effective.

54 Sade 2018, tables 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 16.

55 A notable exception is the Egyptians, who did not practice animal sacrifice.
beginning in the Hellenistic period.\textsuperscript{56} The social and political situation in this period not only saw the dispersal of Judaeans throughout the Mediterranean, including to Rome and Alexandria, but also brought Judaeans, both at home and abroad, into more frequent contact with polytheistic sacrificial cults.

While there were certainly many differences between beliefs and practices of ancient Judaism and neighboring polytheistic cultures, animal sacrifice is a significant commonality.\textsuperscript{57} And though many ancient Greek and Latin authors criticize various aspects of the Judaean religion that they considered foreign, sacrifice is one practice that escapes disapproval and in which these Greek and Roman authors recognize common practice.\textsuperscript{58} Indeed, even the basic template of sacrificial ritual is shared between the Judaeans’ cult and those of the Greeks and Romans: often, though not always, sacrifice takes place is an area of cultic significance, i.e. an area adjacent to a temple of a specific deity; requirements for sacrificial victims include such qualifications as the animal being “unblemished”;\textsuperscript{59} and an emphasis was placed on the blood of the sacrificial victim, which in both religious systems would be collected after the animal’s throat had been cut and applied to the altar by priests.\textsuperscript{60} Following the slaughter of the animal and the removal of its blood, the animal would

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{56} That is, following the conquests of Alexander the Great and the rule of his various successors in the Near East following his death.
\item\textsuperscript{57} Gilders 2011, 94–95; Rives 2014.
\item\textsuperscript{58} Gilders 2011, 95; Rives 2014, 119. The one exception in the Greek and Latin sources is Apion's criticism of Judaean animal sacrifice (Rives 2014, 119–20. However, Rives notes that in Contra Apionem, Josephus counters this criticism by explaining that Apion himself is an Egyptian, and therefore “outsider” to Josephus' Greek and Roman audience, whose own culture’s practices do not include the ritual slaughter of animals that is shared between Greeks, Romans, and Jews.
\item\textsuperscript{59} A major difference in the requirements of sacrificial victims is that pigs, which were widely sacrificed throughout the Greek and Roman world, were not an acceptable sacrifice or even food source for Judaeans.
\item\textsuperscript{60} Gilders 2011, 95; McClymond 2011, 238; Rives 2014, 118.
\end{itemize}
be butchered and then various parts of the body burned on the altar as an offering to the deity.\textsuperscript{61} Other parts would then be cooked, often by boiling, and consumed by worshippers.\textsuperscript{62} Alternatively, in some rituals, the entire carcass of the animal would be burnt on the altar (a holocaust offering), though this practice was more prevalent in Judaean cult than Greek or Roman.\textsuperscript{63}

Because of the widespread similarities between sacrificial ritual of polytheistic cults and that of the Judaeans, texts describing Judaean sacrifice to a Greco-Roman audience only explain the divergent aspects of various rituals, not the fact that they sacrifice, since this was seen by these authors as a normative ritual practice.\textsuperscript{64} Additionally, even the sections of the biblical texts prescribing sacrifice take for granted some basic familiarity with sacrificial conduct, devoting more space to enumerating the minute instructions for specific kinds of sacrifices.\textsuperscript{65} Since so many similarities exist between Greco-Roman polytheistic and Judaean sacrifice and Judaean, and differences in ritual conduct can be expected to be remarked upon in sources describing Judaeans to a Greek and Roman audience, we can reasonably expect that the disposal of sacrificial debris (a point not remarked upon either in Judaean-authored literature, such as the Tanakh or the Dead Sea Scrolls, or writing about Judaeans by non-Judaeans) might look the same or similar across these cultures. The archaeological evidence for disposal of sacrificial debris is remarked upon below.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Gilders 2011, 95.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Gilders 2011, 95.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Rives 2014, 118.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Gilders 2011, 95.
\item \textsuperscript{65} McClymond 2011, 238.
\end{itemize}
Essenes and Sacrifice in Texts and Archaeology

While controversial today, that the Essenes conducted their own sacrifices separate from the Jerusalem temple is an aspect of the sect’s conduct attested in the works of Josephus, written in the late first century CE. Appearing in his second work, Antiquitates Judaicae, Josephus writes of the Essenes:

εἰς δὲ τὸ ιερὸν ἀναθήματα στέλλοντες θυσίας ἐπιτελοῦσιν διαφορότητι ἁγνειῶν, ὡς νομίζοιεν, καὶ δι’ αὐτὸ εἰργόμενοι τοῦ κοινοῦ τεμενίσματος ἐφ’ αὐτῶν τὰς θυσίας ἐπιτελοῦσιν (AJ 18.5.19).66

Sending votive offerings to the temple, they offer sacrifices with a difference in the rites of purification that they employ; on account of this they are excluded from the common court [of the Jerusalem temple] and offer sacrifices by themselves.67

That Josephus is referring to animal sacrifice is evident in his use of the verb θύω (-θυσίας in the above passage), which in Greek contexts refers to burnt animal sacrifices (literally, “to offer by burning”). This translation is further confirmed by Josephus’ reference to the courts of the Jerusalem temple. This means that Josephus is unequivocally asserting that the Essenes conducted burnt-offerings outside of the bounds of the temple in Jerusalem.

Josephus’ knowledge of the practices of the Essenes ostensibly derives from his alleged membership in the sect as a young man (Vit. 1.2.10–11).68 Given the aforementioned difficulties in working with Josephus as a source and ancient texts in general, it is impossible to ascertain whether Josephus was actually an Essene. By his own reckoning, he could not have spent more

66 Greek text used from Josephus 1965.

67 Beall 1988, 7, 25. Beall, Feldman, and Magness all note that the Latin and other later versions insert a negative into the first clause of this passage, which alters the reading to “they do not offer sacrifices” (Josephus 1965, 16n.a; Beall 1988, 25; Magness 2016, 30). However, Feldman observes that this negative is absent from manuscripts (Josephus 1965, 16n.a). This insertion may be due to later rationalizations of the text based on an anachronistic concept of the exclusivity of the Jerusalem temple by (perhaps Christian?) authors. Additionally, Feldman proposes in his 1965 translation of Antiquitates Judaicae the potential for sacrifice to have been conducted at the recently excavated site of Qumran (Josephus 1965, 16n.a).

68 Beall 1988, 13.
than six months with the sect (Vit. 1.2.10), an insufficient amount of time to become a full member according to the Community Rule (1QS VI), which details a timespan of two years to become fully initiated in the sect. Nevertheless, Josephus lived contemporaneously with the sect and was a native to Judaea (unlike Philo of Alexandria and Pliny the Elder, our only other sources that discuss the Essenes), so his works arguably provide the most accurate information concerning their practices.

Modern scholarly treatments of the Essenes’ attitude toward sacrifice at the Jerusalem temple begin to appear in print shortly following the discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. One of the first treatments of the topic was penned by Joseph M. Baumgarten in 1953. In his article published in the Harvard Theological Review, Baumgarten compares the texts of 1QpHab (the Pesher Habakkuk) and 1QS (the Community Rule) with that of the Cairo Damascus Document. While Baumgarten notes the opposition of the sectarians within these three different documents to sacrifice at the Jerusalem temple, he rejects the possibility that the Essenes conducted their own sacrifices. Furthermore, Baumgarten interprets the aforementioned passage from Josephus’ Antiquitates Judaicae as evidence that the Essenes did not wholly reject the cult in

69 Beall 1988, 2, 34.
71 Beall 1988, 2.
72 Baumgarten 1953. Here I have used Vermes' names for the documents for consistency. It should be noted that, while the Damascus Document is attested in several fragments at Qumran (4Q265–73, 5Q12, and 6Q15), these fragments were all found in caves discovered at a later date than Cave 1. Though the scrolls from Cave 1 were published shortly after their discovery (within a matter of years), the texts found in other caves at Qumran were published over the span of decades. Thus, it is very likely that at the time Baumgarten's article was published in 1953, no one, let alone anyone outside the team translating the other Scrolls, would have been aware that the Damascus Document is attested at Qumran.
73 Baumgarten 1953, 155n.45.
Jerusalem, since they continued to send votives as offerings despite their refusal to offer blood sacrifices due to their objection to the purity practices in place concerning animal sacrifice.\textsuperscript{74}

An alternate view is expressed by S.H. Steckoll in his 1967 article, “The Qumran Sect in Relation to the Temple of Leontopolis.”\textsuperscript{75} Here, Steckoll argues that not only did the sect at Qumran conduct their own sacrifices, but that this practice took place in an actual temple established at the settlement by the same priestly group that erected the temple at Leontopolis.\textsuperscript{76} In support of this theory, he cites both archaeological and textual evidence. One main feature that he cites as evidence of a temple at Qumran is the “recent discovery at Qumran of an altar,” of which he provides both a schematic and photo.\textsuperscript{77} However, Steckoll provides no other identifying information for this feature, such as a locus number, nor does he report by whom it was discovered. Other evidence that Steckoll utilizes in support of his thesis is the discovery of jars, sunk into the ground, containing animal remains and ash by Flinders Petrie during his excavation of what he believed was the Jewish temple at Leontopolis;\textsuperscript{78} not only does the description of these deposits not correspond closely to de Vaux’s own description of the Qumran animal remains, as mentioned above, Petrie’s identification of this site as Leontopolis is no longer supported in the scholarship.\textsuperscript{79}

Additionally, Steckoll’s argument for the establishment of his Qumran temple by the same Zadokite group that was active in Leontopolis is largely predicated upon an abandonment of the

\textsuperscript{74} Baumgarten 1953, 154–56. Additionally, Baumgarten’s reading of \textit{AJ} 18.5.19 is affected by the inclusion of a negative in the first clause; see above. Additionally, he translates the second occurrence of the verb \textit{θύω} as “to worship,” not as “to sacrifice” (Baumgarten 1953, 155).

\textsuperscript{75} Steckoll 1967.

\textsuperscript{76} Steckoll 1967, 55, 60–61.

\textsuperscript{77} Steckoll 1967, 57, figs. 1, Pl. I.

\textsuperscript{78} Steckoll 1967, 56.

site following the earthquake of 31 BCE and subsequent rebuilding, which he dates to 4 BCE.\footnote{Steckoll 1967, 60.} This abandonment phase, he argues, can “be understood only in the context of [the sect’s] going, not into ‘exile,’ but to another group, with whom they were associated,” that is, the community at Leontopolis.\footnote{Steckoll 1967, 60.} Following this, the sect returned to Qumran and rebuilt, due to the site’s “sanctified character,” owing to its having been the site of a consecrated temple.\footnote{Steckoll 1967, 61.} However, in a post-script appended to the main text of the article, Steckoll cites a newly published report conducted for the Jordanian government that found that there was no earthquake in 31 BCE, and therefore no abandonment.\footnote{Steckoll 1967, 69.} While Steckoll argues in this post-script that these results affect not his entire argument, but only the portions of his article that deal with the abandonment and some architectural features, it seems that the direct connection that he has drawn between Qumran and Leontopolis, which is unconvincing to begin with, is only further undermined by these supposed findings.

The most recent major treatment of the evidence for sacrifice at Qumran encompasses an entire special issue of the Journal of Ancient Judaism. Framed around Jodi Magness’ article, “Were Sacrifices Offered at Qumran? The Animal Bone Deposits Reconsidered,” the issue contains both responses to Magness’ argument, as well as two articles concerning other aspects of dining and consumption by the sect at Qumran.\footnote{Marks 2016; Wassén 2016.}

In her article, Magness reevaluates the majority consensus that the sect at Qumran, in their disavowal of the Jerusalem temple, viewed their “pure” communal meals as taking the place of...
their participation in temple sacrifice, a stance which Magness has previously supported.\textsuperscript{85} Instead, she argues that the animal remains described by de Vaux and Zeuner represent the remains of sacrifices, given these deposits’ similarities to sacrificial deposits at sanctuary sites throughout the Mediterranean and Near East.\textsuperscript{86} Magness discusses the evidence of sacrifice from such sanctuary sites as that of Poseidon at Isthmia and Demeter and Kore at Corinth, both in Greece, as well as the Philistine Temple Complex at the site of Tel Miqne-Ekron in Israel’s Shephelah, the descriptions of which resemble the animal bone deposits found at Qumran.\textsuperscript{87} From this and other archaeological and literary evidence, Magness concludes that the animal bone deposits represent the remains of sacrifices conducted by the sect at Qumran, who, instead of constructing a temple rival to that in Jerusalem, “observ[ed] and enact[ed] the laws and lifestyle of the wilderness camp with the tabernacle in its midst,” as known from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.\textsuperscript{88}

Both Gunnel Ekroth and Alison Schofield’s articles in the *Journal of Ancient Judaism* special issue support Magness’ conclusions.\textsuperscript{89} Ekroth further details the Greek evidence for sacrificial remains, and expands upon Magness’ identification of the Qumran deposits by differentiating between “altar debris”—the portion of the sacrifice burnt on the altar for the deity—and the remains of the parts of the animal(s) consumed by worshippers.\textsuperscript{90} Furthermore, she argues against citing both the lack of an altar at Qumran as evidence that no sacrificial cult could have

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\textsuperscript{85} Magness 2016, 5.
\textsuperscript{86} Magness 2016, 6.
\textsuperscript{87} Magness 2016, 16–17.
\textsuperscript{88} Magness 2016, 34.
\textsuperscript{89} Ekroth 2016; Schofield 2016.
\textsuperscript{90} Ekroth 2016, 37.
\end{flushleft}
taken place there, as well as the texts of the Scrolls, which do not explicitly sanction sacrifice outside of Jerusalem, since scholars have no way of knowing if the Dead Sea Scrolls are complete in their account of the conduct of the sectarian community at Qumran. She concludes that “Magness’ interpretation of the zooarchaeological evidence at Qumran is convincing, with the caveat that the bones do not represent sacrificial remains but debris from ritual meals following animal sacrifices,” due to the majority of the bones being unburnt.

The major opposition to Magness’ interpretation of the animal remains comes from Lawrence H. Schiffman, in his article entitled “Qumran Temple? The Literary Evidence.” This title is problematic, and deliberately provocative, as Magness’ proposal is not that the Qumranites established a temple, but that their intent was to revert their cultic practice back to that of the wilderness tabernacle known from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. Additionally, Schiffman’s literary argument against a sacrificial cult at Qumran suffers from a weakness noted by Ekroth and cited above: there is no way to tell if the corpus of the Dead Sea Scrolls is comprehensive in its documentation of the Qumran community’s practices, religious or otherwise. Schiffman also argues that since the details concerning the conduct of Jewish sacrifice are extensively documented in biblical, classical, sectarian, and rabbinic literature, details which do not include the deposition of bones in the manner described at Qumran, there is no reason to

91 Ekroth 2016, 43–46.
92 Ekroth 2016, 48.
93 Ekroth 2016, 49.
94 Ekroth 2016, 40–41. Also note the presence of some calcined bones at Qumran as recorded by Zeuner 1960, 30.
95 Schiffman 2016.
96 Magness 2016, 34.
97 Ekroth 2016, 48.
conclude that these remains resulted from sacrifice at Qumran.\textsuperscript{98} However, it is possible that the sources Schiffman cites would not have considered the details of this deposition to be necessary to such accounts, in which this manner of deposition of sacrificial material would have constituted regular practice across various religious groups and therefore not warranted comment.

While Magness’ interpretation of the animal remains at Qumran is convincing and certainly more balanced than some earlier interpretations of the zooarchaeological remains as evidence of sacrifice, this argument, like many topics surrounding Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls, nonetheless remains controversial. While it will remain impossible to prove whether or not the Essenes at Qumran performed animal sacrifice, the information collected over the years regarding their religious beliefs renders one point clear: animal sacrifice or not, the conduct of the Essenes constitutes a practice entirely outside the mainstream cult in Jerusalem, despite the demonstrated hope that one day, circumstances would allow participation in the Jerusalem temple to be restored to the sect. However, until the point at which the Jerusalem temple was rendered pure again, the Essenes had constructed a legitimate alternative cult, which for them served as a substitute to their participation in sacrifice in Jerusalem.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The information presented above regarding the evidence of sacrifice at Qumran and the Oniad temple in Egypt demonstrates that in the late Second Temple period disagreement over the proper conduct of cult in Jerusalem led to some groups establishing their own practices separate from those in Jerusalem, and that to some extent these practices were seen as nearly complete

\textsuperscript{98} Schiffman 2016, 83–84.
substitutes to the ideal form of worship in the Jerusalem temple. While some sects at the time undoubtedly would have seen these alternate practices as aberrations, the very fact of their establishment proves that this was not a universally held view, as these other groups viewed the contemporary Jerusalem cult as aberrant.

To the Jews who founded and participated in these alternate practices, their justification for these practices in light of any real or imagined exclusivity of Jerusalem temple practice was that this “normative” practice had become something other than what it should be and had been in the past. These alternate practices’ legitimacy—and further, the plausibility of a sacrificial cult at Qumran—is underscored by the fact the pious Jews who participated in them would have preferred to attend to cult at the temple in Jerusalem under different circumstances. This is apparent both from the fixation of the sect at Qumran that the ideal Jerusalem temple would return to their correct cult and purity protocol in the eschatological age, as well as the establishment of the Oniad temple by a member of one of Jerusalem’s leading priestly families.

In the case of Qumran, any real uniqueness concerning the practices of the sect there is not that they refused to participate in the rites of a temple that they viewed as corrupted. Rather, the exceptional angle of the practices of the Essenes who resided at Qumran is that, instead of constructing a completely new temple as in the case of Onias IV, this group chose to institute a more primitive, and perhaps more pure, locus of worship in their imitation of a wilderness tabernacle. Perhaps, by “setting back the clock,” literally or figuratively, in this way, the Essenes were seeking to reset Jewish cult as a whole in preparation for the day when they would be charged with the conduct of ritual at the ideal temple in Jerusalem.
WORKS CITED


