

The Essene Yearly Renewal Ceremony and the Baptism of Repentance¹

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Introduction

Ritual immersion played a significant role in the religious practice of Jews in the Second Temple period. Ritual immersion in water from a living water source—established as a practice in the book of Leviticus—was understood to render the Jew ritually clean, enabling him or her to enter certain pure or sacred areas (such as the Temple precinct) and to participate in specific religious events and in Jewish society as a whole.

The primary symbolic act for male or female proselytes to enter Judaism was ritual immersion (coupled with circumcision for men).² This act was preceded by a time of careful teaching in the Torah and the Prophets and in the proper way to observe the traditions of Judaism. This immersion was merely the first of many that the individual would perform during his lifetime. Clearly, proselyte baptism in Second Temple period Judaism was not understood to be a once-and-for-all act, but rather to be the first of many immersions during an individual's life which would maintain his or her standing as part of the sanctified people of God.

The task of this article is to examine the practice of ritual immersion among the Essenes based on evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls and secondary sources, to elucidate the role of immersion in the covenant renewal ceremony, and to explore the possible relationship between ritual immersion at Qumran and the baptism of repentance and initiation rites of John the Baptist.

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² baptizein is used as a term for the general practice of Jewish (Levitical) ritual immersion in Judith 12:7 and Ecclesiasticus (Greek Sirach) 31(34):30. The practice of proselyte baptism is attested in Rabbinic literature in contexts as early as the time of Hillel and Shammai, when there was a dispute over some aspect of the practice in the Mishnah (m.Pes. 8:8, m.Ed. 5:2). The necessity of both circumcision and baptism for full conversion of a gentile was discussed by both R. Eleazer and R. Joshua (ca. 90–130 C.E.). The idea that Judaism adopted this Christian practice is unlikely since this period was a time of avid resistance to syncretism. A similar argument should be raised against seeing mystery cults which practice ritual ablutions (e.g., Eleusinian Mysteries, Bacchic consecrations, the cult of Serapis, Hermetic rites, etc.) as the source for ritual immersion in Judaism.

Essene Immersion in General

In common with their Jewish brethren, the Essenes practiced ritual immersion in order to maintain the religious sanctity of the community. However, several significant points distinguish ritual immersion as practiced by the Qumran community from the practice of other Jewish groups.

The major difference between the rite of ritual immersion at Qumran and that practiced by the rest of then contemporary Judaism was not so much for what reason or how the immersions should be done (although there were likely some differences of opinion on these two points) but rather the emphasis on the upright and humble condition of the heart and spirit during the immersion (1QS III 8–9). Drawing upon themes found in the prophets, the *Community Rule* states that acts of acceptable worship and ritual may be carried out by those whose hearts have been circumcised and whose spirits have been endowed with the attributes of the Holy Spirit (1QS III 7–10). Thus, for the Essenes, the physical act of immersion was insufficient in itself to render the individual fit for participation in community functions. The immersion had to be preceded by a properly pious attitude and by actions which adequately reflected that attitude in order for the physical immersion to be effective. These actions included turning from evil and disobedience to the road of obedience to God’s commandments, including proper conduct toward one’s neighbors (1QS I 9–10; IV 2–6). This inner attitude was required any time an immersion took place. Only a repentant and upright spirit ensured the effectiveness of ritual immersion to obtain the external purity necessary for inclusion in the sacred rites of the community.

A novice wishing to become a member of the Essene community would be taught doctrine and correct conduct and be on probation for up to a year before his first “covenantal” immersion took place. This was to make sure that he was firmly established “in the ways of God” and had sincerely turned (“*bwç*”) from the wrong way to the right (1QS V 1, 8, 14, 22; VI 15). The fact that the effectiveness of ritual immersion was hampered by deceit and sin made repentance a necessary part of the initiation ceremonies and of any subsequent immersions for any reason during the remainder of the year and indeed, for the rest of one’s life.³

By the Holy Spirit of the Community, in His truth, shall he be cleansed of all (8) his sins; and by the Spirit of uprightness and humility shall his iniquity be atoned. By his soul’s humility towards all the precepts of God shall (9) his flesh be cleansed when sprinkled with lustral waters and sanctified in flowing water. And he shall establish his steps to walk perfectly (10) in all the ways of God, according to His command concerning His regular feasts; and he shall step aside neither to right nor to left, and (11) shall make no single step from all His words. Then will he

³ This “*hbwçt*” or “repentance” may have been the basis for John the Baptist’s “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4; see below).

please God with agreeable expiation, and it will obtain for him the Covenant (12) of the eternal Community. (1QS III 7–12)

The second significant difference in the Essene practice of ritual immersion was the practice of a higher level of immersion coupled with admittance into the Essene community. The unity of the community was dependent upon continued immersions which kept the community whole and distinct from the outside world. What distinguished the initiatory immersions from those of the community's daily life was the ceremonial aspect as the initiatory immersions were witnessed and acknowledged by the entire community.

The individual who wished to become a Son of Light experienced a multistage process of induction, described in both 1QS VI and Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* II.8.⁴ The turning points during this process were carried out annually in the third month (June) during the covenant renewal ceremony when the community as a whole accepted or rejected new applicants and reviewed the status of regular members. The process of induction may be reconstructed as follows.

1. Application for Admission: The candidate made application to the Overseer (rqb̄m) who, on the basis of a personal interview, determined whether the applicant had the potential to become a full-fledged community member (1QS VI 13–14; Josephus, *Wars* II.8.7.137). Worthy candidates were then instructed by the Overseer for an unspecified period leading up to the first covenant renewal ceremony to occur after their acceptance. At that ceremony, the candidate was presented to the Many (μybrh), who reviewed his case, and lots were cast to determine his suitability as a potential Essene (1QS VI 15–16).

2. First Probationary Year: If accepted by the Many, the candidate then underwent a full year of training and examination during which he was not yet a full-fledged member of the community since he had not entered into the same level of purification as they (1QS VI 16–17; Josephus, *Wars* II.8.7.137). During this period his property was not yet given to the community (1QS VI 17). At the end of the first year of training, the candidate appeared before the Council of the Community (djyh tx̄) and the Many for a second time. They examined his knowledge and practice of the Law and lots were cast by the priests.

3. Second Probationary Year: On his acceptance, he embarked on a second year of training. He advanced to a new level of purity, connected to “the higher level of immersion” during the Ceremony, but was not yet allowed to participate in the communal

⁴ The full text of Josephus regarding the induction of new members reads as follows: “(137) Those desiring to enter the sect do not obtain immediate admittance. The postulant waits outside for one year; the same way of life is propounded to him and he is given a hatchet, the loin-cloth which I have mentioned, and a white garment. (138) Having proved his continence during this time, he draws closer to the way of life and participates in the purificatory baths at a higher degree, but he is not yet admitted into intimacy. Indeed, after he has shown his constancy, his character is tested for another two years, and if he appears worthy he is received into the company permanently,” *Wars* II.8.7.137–38.

meal (1QS VI 18–21; Josephus, *Wars* II.8.7.138).⁵ During this time his property was handed over in pledge to the community but kept separate from the community treasury, should he for some reason fail the second year of training and depart from the community, necessitating a refund. He could participate in community life and service but was not yet allowed to enter certain areas in the community center which were considered sacrosanct for the council of the community, for the banquet and for the nightly sessions of study and deliberation on the Torah. At the end of the second year of training, he was examined once again by the Many and lots were cast to determine his suitability.

4. Acceptance into Full Membership: On successful completion of this final year, he was inducted as a full member of the community. He was “admitted into intimacy” with full rights as a community member, i.e., he not only entered into the same level of purification as the Many through immersion, but he was eligible to participate in the community’s most sacred rites and festivals including the communal meal, he became a voting member in community decisions, he was allowed to express his opinion in the nightly midrash of the Torah session, and his goods became part of the community treasury (1QS VI 21–23).

The Terms awb and rb[

The significance of the initiatory immersions within Essene thought can be seen in the use of the terms awb⁶ and rb[in the sectarian writings. These terms are used interchangeably in the community’s literature to express entry into the covenant. In most contexts the joining of the words rb[and tyrb would normally express the transgression of the covenant (e.g., Deuteronomy 17:2; Joshua 23:16; Jeremiah 34:18; CD I 20; XVI 12) However in two biblical passages this pair is used to denote the initiation of a covenantal relationship. In Genesis 15 a covenant is formed between God and Abraham (as well as his descendants) by an ancient rite where the parties passed between the halves of sacrificial animals.

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed (rb[) between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant (tyrb) with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.”
(Genesis 15:17–18)

⁵ Perhaps reflecting stricter requirements in a later stage in the community’s history, Josephus seems to have turned this year into two. By rights, the Many theoretically could reject the candidate completely or decide he must spend another year in preparation.

⁶ tyrb awb, another unusual term for making a covenant, is found in Jeremiah 34:10, Ezekiel 16:8 and 2 Chronicles 15:12. The usual term for establishing a covenant in the Bible is tyrb trkl. At Qumran the term is also used for entering the water during baptism or ritual immersion, cf. *4QBaptismal Liturgy* (4Q414) 2ii5
μymb awb rjaw.

At the time of the fulfillment of the covenant between God and Abraham, as the descendants inherit the land of promise, the covenant is reiterated and extended using the same two words. The covenantal promise is enacted as the people swear by oath to remain obedient and, as “his people,” cross the Jordan River into the land of promise.

You stand assembled today, all of you, before the Lord your God—the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your women, and the aliens who are in your camp, both those who cut your wood and those who draw your water—to enter into the covenant (tyrb^b °rb[l]) of the Lord your God, sworn by an oath, which the Lord your God is making with you today; in order that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.
(Deuteronomy 29:10–13)⁷

The *Rule of the Community* uses tyrb^b rwb[l] in connection with joining the community in 1QS I 16, 18, 20, 24, and II 10. In certain passages rb[l] is used by itself for actions associated with the annual renewal which are carried out by the individual members in order of rank, cf. 1QS II 11, 19, 20, 21. Thus the term rb[l] “to cross over,” associated with the establishment and ratification of the covenant in the Bible, had become in some way synonymous with or included the rite of immersion connected with covenant renewal at Qumran.

The Covenant Renewal Ceremony

The giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai was commemorated in the third month in association with the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) by various facets of Judaism during the Second Temple period. According to the author of the *Book of Jubilees*, Noah was commanded by God to institute a covenant renewal ceremony to be celebrated annually during the third month: “Therefore it is ordained and written in the heavenly tablets that they should observe the feast of Shavuot in this month, once per year, in order to renew the covenant in all (respects), year by year” (*Jubilees* 6:17).

⁷ The metaphor connecting passing over (or through) a body of water with initiation and baptism can also be observed in the New Testament document contemporary with the latter phase (Phase II) of the community’s history: “I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and into the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1, spoken to a Jewish and Gentile Christian audience). Later, the church father Cyril of Jerusalem, in his discourse to the baptized, included the crossing of the Jordan as part of a metaphor for baptism. For the term ^dryh ta rwb[l] used to indicate the moment that Israel entered into the covenant with their God cf. 1QDM (1Q22) I 9 and II 2; 4QpsJub^b (4Q226) 6,4 and 6; 4QapocrJosh B (4Q379) 12,3 and 16,3; Mas 11 (apocrJosh) 1+2,1.

God made a covenant with Abraham and Abraham made a sacrifice of first fruits in the same month (*Jubilees* 14:11–20). In addition, the author of *Jubilees* notes that “in the first year of the Exodus of the children from Egypt, in the third month on the sixteenth day of the month” Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai. In this way the pilgrimage feast of Shavuot, the feast of first fruits, and the yearly renewal ceremony all came to be celebrated at the same time, creating perhaps the central religious festival of the religious year.

The Sons of Light at Qumran also observed a similar yearly festival. This yearly covenant renewal ceremony is often alluded to in the Dead Sea Scrolls (cf., e.g., 4QD^a [4Q266] 11, 17; 1QS II 19–26; V 20–24; VI). Its various elements can be reconstructed from among the calendars, liturgies, and rule books.

In the Covenant Renewal in the third month, the entire membership gathered, reiterated their oaths, and were reinstated or ranked for the following year. New initiates were inducted into the community during the ceremony and members who had been convicted of committing grave faults a third time were renounced and excommunicated.⁸ The

⁸ Cf. CD IX 16–20: “For every infringement which a man commits (17) against the Law, and which his fellow has seen, being alone, if it is a matter liable to the death (penalty), reproving him, the witness shall denounce the culprit (18) to the overseer in his presence; and the overseer shall inscribe him with his own hand, waiting until he commits (19) another (infringement) before one person alone, and he again denounces him to the overseer. If he relapses and is caught in the act (a third time) before (20) one person alone, his case is juridically complete.” *4QRebukes Reported by the Overseer* (4Q477) records the actual excommunication of several sinning members. Following the name of the offender, a list of three offenses is given in each case, supporting the policy recorded in CD IX that a “three strikes and you’re out” policy was in effect. The preserved portion of text reads as follows (note how the use of $\pi\alpha\omega$ “and also” or “furthermore” emphasizes the compounding of offenses, one upon another):

]Joh \geq anan ben Mat[... was rebuked [
because] / he is short tempered [[OFFENSE NO. 1]
and also he gives the evil eye [OFFENSE NO. 2]
and also he has a boastful/haughty spirit [OFFENSE NO. 3]
] is with him[
]he [apostacized so let him be commit]ted to the darkness/the pit
]Hanania Notos was rebuked
because he[[OFFENSE NO. 1]
]to hire/shut up the spirit of the Yah \geq ad [OFFENSE NO. 2]
and] also create mixture in [Isr]ael[[OFFENSE NO. 3]
And ... ben Yo]sef was rebuked
because he gives the evil eye [OFFENSE NO. 1]
and also doesn't[]his[[OFFENSE NO. 2]

renewal ceremony included a confession of one's sins (and the sins of the community's progenitors), followed by the entry ceremony with its oaths, immersions, ranking, and ethical teaching.

As mentioned earlier, in order to enter the ranks of the community and to participate in any community sacred event, a twofold purity of heart and body, established through ritual immersion in a state of repentance and humility, was considered necessary.

Although there is no actual description of immersion procedures in the account of the annual covenant renewal ceremony (1QS I–III 11), it would be inconceivable that ritual immersion would not have taken place on the day of that solemn festival, and would indeed have played a major role in the rites of that festival. Essene immersions at the initiation/renewal ceremony should be assumed. No ceremony requiring sanctification could be carried out without them.

Having fulfilled the requirements of the probationary period, the novice would be inducted into the community during the covenant renewal ceremony. The stages of the ceremony can be reconstructed as follows:

1. Blessing of God and his works: 1QS I 18–20 (cf. Psalm 103; *4QBarkī Nafshī*), pronounced by priests and Levites, to be confirmed by those entering the covenant with the solemn “Amen, Amen.”
2. a. Priests recount God's mighty works and his favors toward Israel: 1QS I 21–22 (cf. Psalms 104 and 105 or Psalm 136), to be confirmed by those entering the covenant with the confession of sin (2c).
b. Levites recount the sins and rebellions of the sons of Israel under the dominion of Belial: 1QS I 22–23 (cf. Psalm 106), to be confirmed by those entering the covenant with the confession of sin (2c).
c. Confession of sin and unworthiness by the initiates: 1QS I 24–II 1.
3. a. The blessing of those who are among the lot of God by the priests: 1QS II 1–4.
b. Cursing of the lot of Belial and his works (and all those associated with him) pronounced by Levites and confirmed by those entering the covenant with the solemn “Amen, Amen.”
c. Cursing of those who are baptized with a deceitful (or uncircumcised) heart: 1QS II 11–18. At this point in the ceremony excommunication of recalcitrant members would also take place.⁹
d. The annual census and entry ceremony for full members. This included a “passing over” according to division and rank (according to spiritual excellence and according to the drawing of lots),¹⁰ i.e., a baptism of repentance: 1QS III 8–12.

and also he loves his kin [[OFFENSE NO. 3]

] and Hananiah ben Shim[on was rebuked

and al]so he loves....[[broken text; list missing]

For the preliminary publication of this text, see Esther Eshel, “The Rebukes by the Overseer,” *JJS* 45 (1994): 111–22.

⁹ See n. 7.

4. Confession of commitment to submit to the accepted code of conduct toward God and the community: e.g., the Two Ways/Spirits (1QS III 13–IV 26).
5. Further testing: The Essene Oath (Josephus, *Wars* II.8.7.139–42) for candidates who had successfully completed the second probationary year or for members who were being readmitted (1QS VI 17–23 and VII 18–20).

The Immersions of John the Baptist

The teaching and literature of John the Baptist have not survived as primary sources. We have accounts only from outsiders (albeit normally benign) who have limited their accounts of John's ministry and teaching to that which seemed relevant to their immediate audiences.¹¹ We know about the general character of his teaching which had a rather high ethical and apocalyptic kerygma. However, the sources are silent concerning community rules and structure and how this affected the observance of Jewish tradition by his followers. This silence may well indicate that the requirements of Jewish law as indicated in the Books of Moses continued to be carried out by his followers according to the practice of the day. Thus we should not assume that John's baptism was once-and-for-all but rather that it served as the initiation of a lifelong practice of ritual immersion preceded by self-scrutiny. In keeping with Judaism of the time, the occasions for ritual immersion for John and his disciples were on-going. It would be untenable to think that John would abrogate the requirements of the Mosaic law for his followers by teaching that they should not again immerse themselves. Rather, the aspect which made John's baptism unique was that he required repentance before immersion, not just once in a lifetime, but, as with the Sons of Light, whenever ritual immersion should take place in the future.

John required that each time an adherent would be immersed, he must first reflect upon the condition of his heart and repent if necessary. The confession of sin and unworthiness played an important role in exhibiting one's readiness for membership. ("And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5b). Confidence in oneself or in one's ancestry as justification for membership had to be categorically denied ("And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; cf. 1QS I 24). The contingency of repentance for effective ritual immersion was an important emphasis in the ministry of John the Baptist and is best

¹⁰ Although he doesn't enumerate them, Josephus states that there were four divisions of Essenes. According to CD XIV 3–6a the four divisions were the priests, the Levites, the sons of Israel and the proselytes. The list is the same in 1QS II 20 and VI 8 (except the term "elders" is substituted for "Levites" in the latter). The proselytes are not mentioned in the 1QS lists since these treat situations involving full-fledged members of the community only. Cf. also *4QFour Lots* (4Q279) 1, 2–6. The finding of a large number of lots in association with the large immersion pool with four divisions perhaps pinpoints the location of this ceremony. See the Excursus at the end of this article.

¹¹ I.e., the accounts in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and Josephus, *Antiquities* xviii.116–19.

illustrated when he turned the crowds away telling them that they must first show fruits of repentance before they could join in baptism:

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.”

Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” (Luke 3:7–14)

Josephus notes:

John, surnamed the Baptist . . . was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practise justice towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing to join in baptism. In his view this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior. (*Ant.* xviii.116–19)

Conclusion

The following points of similarity can be seen in the initiation/baptism of the Essenes and John the Baptist:

1. The candidate was not immediately accepted into the group.
2. The candidate was taught to keep the central teachings of the group.
3. The candidate was scrutinized during a probationary period before inclusion.
4. The candidate had to repent and be cleansed from sin through prescribed righteous behavior.
5. A cleansed and upright soul was considered to be a precondition for the body to be cleansed through ritual immersion.

6. Cleanliness of body and spirit was a precondition for enduring membership in the community.

7. The candidate was required to deny that justification could be inherited through his ancestry.

8. The candidate was required to confess the sins of his past life as part of the initiation ceremony.

9. The initial immersion was the first act in a lifelong practice of ritual immersion.

10. The initiation ceremony was witnessed by the community as a whole (or by a designated group of witnesses from the community).

11. The ceremony included the renunciation of idolatry.

For the Essenes the immersion at initiation was only one (albeit highly significant and symbolic) act in the overall ceremony. For John, who seems to have separated initiation from the covenant renewal ceremony (that is to say, there is no indication that he limited the initiatory baptism of his followers to the Feast of Shavuot), this immersion became central and the act was considered prominent among all other actions (confession, oaths, etc.) during the initiation ceremony. Thus the entire rite of initiation by John became known simply by the name “baptism of repentance.”

There were serious implications in the initiatory immersion/baptism of both John and the Essenes. They both applied an initiation procedure to Jews that within the rest of Judaism was required only of Gentiles. To join in baptism was to leave darkness and come into the light. Thus, in the view of the Essenes, and likely of John, not simply the world of Jews and Gentiles, but Israel itself was separated into two camps: those who were accepted by God and those who were destined for destruction.

The parallel between John’s teaching and that of the Essenes is not a new observation. A direct or indirect link between John and the Essenes has been proposed by several scholars ever since the first scrolls were published.¹² Even if a direct link cannot be established with certainty, a link in thought, practice, and geography certainly can be established. The links in thought may grow indirectly from a common adherence to the Old Testament prophetic tradition as well as from the influence of a deeper pool of contemporary Jewish traditions. However, was there a more direct link between John and the Essenes? Did he know Essenes personally? Or was he, himself, a former Essene?¹³

¹² There are also some differences between Essene practice and that of John: (1) There was a strict Essene prescription that community members *not* rebuke the sons of darkness lest they betray divine doctrine to the unworthy (1QS IX 16–17). Certainly John’s rebuke of Herod Antipas and even of those who came to him at the Jordan would have transgressed this rule. (2) Essene requirements of a soldier would certainly have been more stringent than John’s. (3) Essene initiation would have been done privately and only at one time during the year, contrary to John’s practice, which from all indications was conducted in a setting accessible to the public.

¹³ Besides the other obvious parallels between John and the Essenes concerning rites of initiation, John’s diet is peculiarly close to that of previously excommunicated Essenes. Josephus notes: “Those who are caught in the act of committing grave faults are expelled from the order. The individual thus excluded

The major division between John (with the Essenes) and the rest of Judaism was on this very point. In their shared view, one's ancestry did not automatically make the individual acceptable to God. The prerequisite set for acceptable sacrifice by the prophets was proclaimed through this. Prior to personal repentance, no Israelite was acceptable to God (cf., e.g., Hosea 6:6 "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice"; similarly, Jesus in Matthew 5:23–24: "So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"). The implication of this is that both the Essenes and John in effect were saying to their fellow countrymen, in keeping with the statements of the prophets, that their worship and practice had been ineffective. In order to make things right they must undergo a procedure parallel to that which was endured by gentile proselytes who were entering the Jewish faith. They must be circumcised (albeit with the circumcision of the heart) and they must undergo their first proper immersion (which conveyed not just cleanliness of the body from ritual impurity but, accompanied by righteous behavior, of the spirit from sin as well). Both of these were a preliminary requirement to participation in community functions.

Excursus

Immersion and the Archaeological Realia from Khirbet Qumran

The Immersion Pools

Two main cisterns were built during Qumran's early years. Locus 110, for uses related to purity, was filled with rain water carried by an aqueduct. Locus 91, for common use, was filled with spring water carried by donkey train from Ein Feshkha.

The nine immersion pools at Kh. Qumran can be divided into three groups.

1. Two pools for general entry into the special or sacred areas of the site:
 - a. Loci 48/49 for entry into Council of the Community;

often perishes, the prey to a most miserable fate; for bound by his oaths and customs he cannot even share the food of others. Reduced to eating grass, he perishes, his body dried up by hunger," Wars II.8.8.143. Though prevented from partaking of the food of others, the resourceful ex-Essene could find sustenance in the desert. Locusts and grasshoppers (the only insects that weren't forbidden, cf. Leviticus 11:20–23) are a noted food for desert dwellers, found in abundance in the Judean wilderness. The term usually mistranslated "wild honey," meli (*meli*), should not be considered bee honey, which is not a desert product. According to the contemporary historian Diodorus Siculus (first century B.C.E.; *DS* 19.94) and the geographer Strabo (first century B.C.E.–first century C.E.; *Str.* 12.3.18) this term was generally used for sweet gums extracted from certain plants. I would like to posit an alternative rendering for meli. The well-known desert staple "salt plant"—the *jwlm* (*malua*) of Job 30:4—may be referred to, if the Greek term meli is merely a transliteration of the Hebrew term (or its Aramaic equivalent *jylm*—*melia*). It is likely that there were many more former Essenes (having either quit voluntarily or having been excommunicated); both are mentioned in the sectarian documents (cf. 1QS VII 17–21, 22–25; 4QD^a 11,6–17). Bannus, mentioned by Josephus, also may have been a former Essene (cf. Josephus, *Vita* 11–12).

- b. Loci 56/58 for entry into the dining room.
- 2. Five pools related to work areas requiring individual purity:
 - a. Locus 138 serving the slaughter area;
 - b. Locus 118 serving the cookery;
 - c. Locus 117 serving the bakery;
 - d. Locus 69 serving the wine press;
 - e. Locus 71 serving the potter's workshop.
- 3. Two pools for immersion of items:
 - a. Locus 50 for immersion of garments;
 - b. Locus 68 for immersion of ceramic vessels.

Immersion pools intended for human use normally contain one or more of the following features:

- 1. Steps which span the full width of the pool and descend to the bottom.
- 2. Every third or fourth step is extra wide, providing a series of platforms for immersion which compensated for the variation in water depth during the year.
- 3. A raised plaster divider which is intended to create a physical separation between the unclean who descend and the clean who ascend from the water.

The original main immersion pool (loci 48/49) from the early period (Period Ib) at Qumran contained all three defining features as well as the following elaborations:

- 1. The entrance was unique, entered from a separate corridor on the southeast.
- 2. The pool was exited through four exits, well-defined by three raised plaster dividers on the steps which were extended by kurkar blocks at the top (which also served as the bases of the exit door frames).¹⁴ At the top of the stairs near the four exits was a stone paved floor (locus 66) where four lots were found (with the values 16, 17, 18, 19, i.e. in numerical order).

¹⁴ For a depiction of the cracked immersion pool, see photos 161–65 in Jean-Baptiste Humbert and Alain Chambon, *Fouilles de Khirbet Qumrân et Aïn Feshkha* (Freiburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).



The function of these four channels may well correspond to the four classes of the Essenes mentioned in n. 9 above. Each channel would have been used by one group of Essenes in connection with that group's "passing over," linked with the judgments and four lotteries for ranking the members of each class within the community conducted during the covenant renewal ceremony.

The Lots

The act of casting lots was commonplace in Judaism throughout most of its history. The role of the Divine in this act was stated categorically in the book of Proverbs: “The lot is cast into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord” (Proverbs 16:33). The practice was especially associated with priestly activities (Nehemiah 10:34, 11:1). The apportionment of land was determined by the priest Eleazar through drawing lots (Joshua 19:51). At the Temple the lots took on various forms. The special use of the Urim and Thummim was the responsibility of the High Priest. The duties of the priests were determined by casting lots (1 Chronicles 24–25). The Levites cast lots at the Temple gates in order to determine which tasks each Levite would carry out on a specific day (1 Chronicles 26:13–16). Under Nehemiah, ten per cent of the people were set aside to live in Jerusalem, determined by lot (Nehemiah 11:1–2). In the New Testament Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist) was chosen by lot to offer the incense in the Temple (Luke 1:8–9). The disciples of Jesus determined who would replace Judas Iscariot by casting lots (Acts 1:26).

It is therefore not surprising that lots should be found at Qumran. At least fifty-nine lots were discovered at Qumran during the course of R. de Vaux’s excavations.¹⁵ De Vaux recorded these according to item and locus number as “boulée percée incomplètes” and noted the size and number of holes on each. In Volume I of the official publication, these lots are listed in the list of objects attached to loci as “boule d’argile.” De Vaux, without understanding the actual use and significance of the lots, chose to provide the simplest description of them (as he also did in the case of the sundial which he listed as “disque de calcaire” [Q909]). The PAM photographs of eight of these have been published in *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Microfiche* (seven are pictured below).¹⁶

The lots are smoothed balls of clay measuring 25 ± 5 mm in diameter with partially pierced holes arranged over the surface ranging in numerical value from one to twenty-seven.¹⁷ Although these lots were found scattered over a wide area at the site, the main concentrations were found in three areas, (1) at least nine in the area of the cracked immersion pool (loci 48, 66, and environs—from period 1: pre-Herodian context), (2) at least fourteen in the southwest sector near the southwest pool (especially loci 91, 99, 104–5 from period 2 contexts: first century C.E.) and (3) nine from a disposal area for pure or sacred objects (locus 130).

¹⁵ An additional three were found at Ein Feshkha. Lots were also found at Masada. However, in that case, they were potsherds with names written on the surface in ink. Yigael Yadin and Joseph Naveh, *Masada I: The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965 Final Reports. The Aramaic and Hebrew Ostraca and Jar Inscriptions* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989), 28–31; pl. 25.

¹⁶ Emanuel Tov in collaboration with Stephen Pfann, *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Microfiche: A Comprehensive Facsimile Edition of the Texts from the Judean Desert*, 2nd edition (Leiden: Brill, 1995). See PAM 40.236 (fiche 4), 42.682 (fiche 55) and 42.869 (fiche 59).

¹⁷ From a preliminary survey of those lots excavated in datable contexts period 1 (pre-Herodian) contained lots in numerical value up to 27 while those from period 2 (first century C.E.) seem to range between one and ten.

