Beyond the Essene Hypothesis

The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism

GABRIELE BOCCACCINI

WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN / CAMBRIDGE, U.K.
3. Pre-Maccabean Texts in the Qumran Library: Enochic and Zadokite Documents

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain a large number of documents that were composed before the Maccabean period. While we are accustomed to calling this literature "biblical," "apocryphal," and "pseudepigraphic," we should more properly, and less anachronistically, use the terms "Zadokite" and "Enochic."

(a) The Zadokite literature has a very complex history. It includes most of the so-called biblical texts, with the exception of the later Esther and Daniel, and also apocryphal texts such as the Epistle of Jeremiah, Tobit, and Sirach. From modern research in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament we know that this literature was originally produced by different varieties of ancient Judaism, but during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods it was collected, edited, and transmitted by the religious authorities of the temple of Jerusalem, the high priesthood of the house of Zadok. An analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrates that during middle Judaism the Zadokite literature was not textually fixed but was still subjected, to some extent, to a process of growth that resulted in a plurality of texts and textual forms. None of the texts of Zadokite Judaism preserved at Qumran, however, presents evidence of explicit editing or interpolation that one could attribute specifically to the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The texts of Zadokite Judaism were quoted as authoritative in the sectarian scrolls, and these texts were preserved with respect and devotion in those forms in which they were then known: proto-Masoretic, proto-Samaritan, proto-Septuagintal, and others.


The Prehistory of the Sect

I have used the phrase "explicit" editing or interpolation advisedly. The fluidity of the tradition allowed textual freedom, but, as attested by the presence of pseudo-Zadokite documents as well as of the targumim and pesharim, the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls had no compelling need to change the ancient Zadokite texts in order to infer their sectarian ideas.

The only possible example of an explicit sectarian interpolation in a text of Zadokite Judaism is Sir 15:14b, and, paradoxically, it does not come from the Qumran library but from some manuscripts of the lost Hebrew Sirach text discovered at the end of the last century in the Cairo Genizah, actually the attic storeroom of the ancient synagogue of Fustat (Old Cairo). As in the case of the Damascus Document, a copy of which was also found in the Cairo Genizah, the Qumran fragments of Sirach (2QSir) have proved that the medieval scribes employed as the basis for their manuscripts a text virtually identical to that known at Qumran. The Sirach Hebrew text discovered in the Cairo Genizah contains a significant addition unknown in the Greek and in all the other ancient versions: "In the beginning [God] created man — and placed him in the power of his abductor [Heb. ḥwprw] — and made him subject to his own will [ṣrwn]" (Sir 15:14).

This is a clear interpolation that breaks the rhythm of the verse and whose intent is through parallelism to give a negative connotation to the term yešer, which originally was a neutral term. The community of the Dead Sea Scrolls would have the strongest interest in modifying a text that contained the most explicit reference in Zadokite literature to the freedom of human choice. Conceptually, the gloss turns the original meaning of the text.


SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS

passage from a eulogy on human free will into a statement of God’s moral
predestination in line with the dualistic anthropology of the community of
the Dead Sea Scrolls, “which explains ἔρησις in terms of a principle of evil
which dominates a man.”33 Although the evidence is not conclusive, a
growing number of scholars agree that the interpolation in Sir 15:14b
and possibly other additions to the Hebrew Sirach originated at Qumran.34
(b) The case of the Enochic literature is parallel and analogous to
that of the Zadokite literature. Before the publication of the Qumran
fragments, it was customary to date 1 Enoch around and after the Maccabean
crisis, even though the composite nature of the document, in particular
regarding the Book of the Watchers, led some scholars to perceive a much
older prehistory.35 Milik’s edition of the Aramaic fragments in 1976 made
clear that the earliest parts of 1 Enoch (chs. 6-36, the Book of the Watchers;
and chs. 73–82, the Astronomical Book) were pre-Maccabean.36 The paleo-
ographic analysis showed that copies of these documents went back to the
end of the third or the beginning of the second BCE. The actual
composition might have occurred even earlier. The Aramaic fragments also
demonstrated that the Ethiopic version represents a text virtually identical
to that of the Book of the Watchers, while the Ethiopic Astronomical Book
is only an abbreviated, and rather confused, condensation of the original
Aramaic composition. The pre-Maccabean dating of the earliest parts of

33. R. E. Murphy, “Érēs in the Qumran Literature,” Bib 39 (1958) 334-44
(quotation on p. 335); cf. J. Hadot, Pensées maures et volonté libre dans la Sagesse
and the Omnipotence of God,” in Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 BCE to 200 CE (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 105-9. See also J. J. Collins: “The original Sirach
had no place for a demonic spoiler” (Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls, 35).
34. Cf. Gilbert, “Book of Ben Sira”; cf. also M. Philonenko, “Sur une inter-
polaison essénienne dans le Sitacle (6,15-16).” Orientalia Suecana 33-35 (1984-86)
317-21. Di Lella warns that the gloss in Sir 15:14b might be a medieval retroversion
from the Syriac text of 4:19b (Hebrew Text of Sirach, 119-25).
35. For a date around the Maccabean crisis, see H. H. Rowley, Jewish Apocalyptic
prehistory, see D. Dimant, “The Fallen Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the
Apostrophai and Pseudepigraphic Books Related to Them” (diss., Hebrew University of
36. J. T. Milik with M. Black, The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of
1 Enoch also led scholars to recognize the antiquity of another ancient text
that was produced by the same Enochic circles, the Aramaic Levi.37 This
document, several copies of which were preserved among the Dead Sea
Scrolls, was already known through some medieval Greek manuscripts.38
The high number of Enochic manuscripts found at Qumran suggests
that the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls considered the Enochic texts
to be as authoritative as the Zadokite documents and preserved them with
equal respect and devotion. As in the case of the Zadokite literature, there
is no evidence whatsoever that the ancient texts of the Enochic literature
were submitted to explicit sectarian editing or interpolation.
(c) The importance of the Enochic literature lies in the fact that it
testifies to the existence, during the Zadokite period, of a nonconformist
priestly tradition. Zadokite Judaism was a society that clearly defined the
lines of cosmic and social structure. The Priestly narrative tells that through
creation God turned the primeval disorder into the divine order by organizing
the whole cosmos according to the principle of division: light from
darkness, the waters above from the waters below, water from dry land
(Gen 1:1-2:4a). The refrain “God saw that it was good” repeats that
everything was made according to God’s will, until the climactic conclusion
of the sixth day when “God saw that it was very good” (Gen 1:31).
The disruptive forces of the universe, evil and impurity, are not un-
leashed but caged within precise boundaries. As long as human beings dare
d not trespass the boundaries established by God, evil and impurity are con-
trollable. Obedience to the moral laws allows one to avoid evil, which was
primarily understood as a punishment from God for human transgressions,
while following the purity laws brings impurity under control. The primeval
history, as edited in the Zadokite torah (Gen 1-11), warns that any attempt to
cross the boundary between humanity and the divine always results in
disaster. Human beings have responsibility for, and the capability of, main-
taining the distinction between good and evil, holy and profane, pure and
impure. They can blame only themselves for their physical and moral failures.
In the Zadokite worldview, the Jerusalem temple — their temple —

159-70.
38. On Aramaic Levi, see the detailed study by R. A. Kugler, From Patriarch to
Priest: The Levite-Priestly Tradition from Aramaic Levi to Testament of Levi, SBEJL
separated from the profane world around it, was a visual representation of the cosmos itself. As God's realm, heaven, is separate from the human realm, the earth, so the earthly dwelling of God produces around the temple a series of concentric circles of greater degrees of holiness separating the profane world from the most holy mountain of Jerusalem. The internal structure of the temple, with its series of concentric courts around the holy of holies, was intended to replicate the structure of the cosmos and the structure of the earth.39

The Zadokite priests, who controlled the temple up to the Maccabean period, claimed to be the custodians of the good and uncorrupted order created by God. "The high priest . . . and his priestly kinsmen served as the human community that established and maintained connection between the various orders of being. Their labor in the temple preserved all other orders of being from collapse. Upon them, the people of Israel, the land of Israel, and, ultimately, the entire cosmos and its population all depended."40 It was incumbent on the priesthood to be morally irreproachable and "to distinguish between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean" (Lev 10:10).

The ideology of the authors of the Enoch documents directly opposed that of the Zadokites. The catalyst was a particular concept of the origin of evil that portrayed a group of rebellious angels as ultimately responsible for the spread of evil and impurity on earth.41


40. Jaffee, Early Judaism, 171.


---

While the Zadokites founded their legitimacy on their responsibility to be the faithful keepers of the cosmic order, the Enochians argued that this world had been corrupted by an original sin of angels, who had contaminated God's creation by crossing the boundary between heaven and earth and by revealing secret knowledge to human beings. Despite God's reaction and the subsequent flood, the original order was not, and could not be, restored. The good angels, led by Michael, defeated the evil angels, led by Semyaz and Azazel. The mortal bodies of the giants, the offspring of the evil union of angels and women, were killed, but their immortal souls survived as evil spirits (1 En 15:8-10) and continue to roam about the world in order to corrupt human beings and to destroy cosmic order. While Zadokite Judaism describes creation as a process from past disorder to current divine order, the Enochians claim that God's past order has been replaced by the current disorder. While Zadokite Judaism claims that there were no rebellious angels, the satan also being a member of the heavenly court (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Zech 3:1-2; 1 Chr 21:1), Enochic Judaism would be ultimately responsible for the creation of the concept of the devil.42 While Zadokite Judaism struggles to separate evil and impurity from the demonic and makes their spread depend on human choice, Enochic Judaism removes control of these disruptive forces from humans. "Rebellion against the order of the Most High unleashes the forces of chaos . . . the defilement of the created order extending from humankind to birds to beasts to reptiles. This, in biblical metaphor, is a description of the collapse of the order of creation, with pugnacious forces unleashed in a vicious process of degeneration and decay."43

As a result of angelic sin, human beings cannot control the spread of evil and impurity. Human beings are still held accountable for their actions, but they are victims of an evil that they have not caused and cannot resist. Impurity also spreads out of human control, the boundaries between the clean and the unclean having been disrupted by the angels' crossing over the boundaries between the holy and the profane. Although the concepts of impurity and evil remain conceptually separate in Enochic Judaism, impurity is now more closely connected with evil. The impurity produced by the fallen angels has weakened the human capability of resisting evil.

The myth of the fallen angels was not merely a bizarre or folkloric
expansion of ancient legends; it disrupted the very foundations of Zadokite Judaism. Enochic Judaism directly challenged the legitimacy of the second temple and its priesthood. “We are witnessing a harsh indictment against the temple cult and its expository tradition, an indictment originating within the sectarian perspective of a highly developed apocalyptic eschatology.”

For the Enochians, the power that the house of Zadok claims is mere illusion, if not the guilty pretentiousness of evil usurpers. Evil and impurity are uncontrollable, and human beings, including the proud priests of Jerusalem, are powerless. The only hope is in God’s intervention. The Enochians completely ignore the Mosaic torah and the Jerusalem temple, that is, the two tenets of the order of the universe. In addition, the attribution to Enoch of priestly characteristics suggests the existence of a pure pre-Christian, pre-priesthood and pre-apocalyptic sect. For the Enochian, God is the only true priest that, for the Enochians, was already corrupted after the angelic sin and the flood.

Finally, the superiority of Enochic Judaism is guaranteed not only by its claimed antiquity but also by the superior status of their reveler, Enoch, who, unlike his rival Moses, lived before the angelic sin and never died but “was taken” by God (Gen 5:24), and being now in heaven has more direct access to God’s revelation.

The anti-Zadokite character of Enochic Judaism and its priestly nature are confirmed by the Aramaic Levi, which endorses a pre-Zadokite ideal priesthood. “On one hand, the priests of the author’s day... are implicitly indicted by the model of Levi that varies from the Pentateuchal norms, and... are explicitly accused by Levi’s warnings about his apostate descendants. On the other hand there are priests who accept the norms established in Levi, the most ancient priest of all; they are the adherents to the author’s views, those who prize purity, wisdom, and learning as traits proper to the priesthood. Aramaic Levi is a rejection of the former kind of priest, and a plea for acceptance of the latter type.”

(d) While the terms of the opposition between the Enochians and the

44. Ibid., 226.
46. Kugler, From Patriarch to Priest, 136-37.

Zadokites are clearly set, it is more difficult to reconstruct the chronology of the schism. The substantial consensus among scholars is that the Enochic literature is rooted in oral and literary traditions that predate the emergence of Enochic Judaism as an established movement. These traditions are as ancient as those preserved by Zadokite literature; they go back to the same Babylonian milieu of the exilic age and to the pre-exilic mythological heritage of ancient Israel. But when did the schism between Enochians and Zadokites occur?

Ben Zion Wacholder takes Ezekiel as the forerunner of an anti-Zadokite opposition party, emphasizing the importance of the exiled prophet-priest for the development of Enochic Judaism, a role of founding father that scholars in Jewish mysticism and apocalypticism also attribute to Ezekiel. In many ways, the pre-Maccabean Enochic literature, particularly chs. 21-26 of the Book of the Watchers, resembles Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was as important in Zadokite Judaism as in Enochic Judaism, however, and the same father-child relationship has been claimed between

Ezekiel and Zadokite Judaism. Paul D. Hanson presents Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple as “the fountainhead of the hierocratic tradition” and “the promulgation of a program of restoration.” More recently, Stephen L. Cook has convincingly demonstrated how “the school of Ezekiel is a starting point for elucidating both the Zadokite priesthood and Zadokite millennialism.”

There is no reason to make the “pragmatic” Ezekiel clash with the “visionary” Ezekiel. In the context of the Babylonian exile, Ezekiel’s dissociation of God’s heavenly abode from the Jerusalem temple offered the common priestly background from which both Enochic and Zadokite traditions arose. The disagreement and therefore the emergence of two distinctive parties would occur only later, after the return from the exile, and would concern the modalities of the restoration. While the Zadokites claimed that God’s order had been fully restored with the construction of the second temple, the Enochians still viewed restoration as a future event and gave cosmic dimensions to a crisis that for the Zadokites had momentarily affected only the historical relationships between God and Israel.

Paolo Sacchi argues that the schism between Enochians and Zadokites occurred at the beginning of the fourth century BCE. Studying the Book of the Watchers, he concludes that the complex stratification of the document implies a long redactional process that reaches back to the Persian period. He makes a strong case that the absence of the Enoch character in 1 Enoch 6–11 makes this section the oldest part of the Enochic collection, a section that in turn is based on earlier traditions, inasmuch as it combines two originally independent stories, one centered on the sexual union of angels and women, the other on the spread of secret knowledge. If Sacchi


is correct, then the myth of the fallen angels would not be an expansion of Gen 6:1-4, but rather a parallel development of the common mythological heritage shared by both the Enochians and the Zadokites.

The historical setting seems to support such a reconstruction of the origins of Enochic Judaism. Zadokite Judaism established itself only gradually through the reforms of Nehemiah and Ezra. The fifth century BCE seems still largely characterized by the conflict with the last representatives of the prophetic movements faithful to the heritage of the Davidic monarchy (Third Isaiah, Ruth, Jonah). It was only in the fourth century BCE that Zadokite Judaism eventually triumphed and its opponents had to adjust themselves to the new situation and to define the terms of their opposition. While the Samaritans were excluded from the Jerusalem temple and founded a schismatic community, a priestly opposition party took shape in Judaea and coalesced around ancient myths with Enoch as their hero.

Michael E. Stone and David W. Suter share the view that the composition of the Book of the Watchers was the catalyst of the schism but took place rather to the third century BCE. In their judgment, the process of the hellenization of the Zadokite priesthood gives the most likely setting.

Whether Enochic Judaism emerged in the fourth or third century BCE, one thing is certain: Enochic Judaism arose out of anti-Zadokite priestly circles that opposed the power of the priestly Zadokite establishment. The long debate in scholarship about whether the Enoch books come from priestly or antipriestly circles finds a consistent resolution when considering

that the priestly nature of Enochic Judaism does not contradict its anti-
priestly attitudes. Enoch’s “critique of the Jerusalem priestly estab-
ishment . . . takes seriously the priesthood’s claim for itself and the im-
portance of priestly duties and categories. This attitude is at once critical
of the reality it sees in the temple and deeply devoted to the ideal of the
temple understood in a quite concrete way.”

At the roots of the Qumran community, therefore, is an ancient schism
within the Jewish priesthood between Enochians and Zadokites. We do not
know exactly who the Enochians were, whether they were genealogically
related to the Zadokites or were members of rival priestly families. Unlike
the situation with the Samaritans, we have no evidence that the Enochians
formed a schismatic community, in Palestine or elsewhere. The Enochians
were an opposition party within the temple elite, not a group of separatists.
The words of Robert A. Kugler about Aramaic Levi apply to the entire
Enochic literature in pre-Maccabean times: it testifies to “a period of time
when there was a dispute regarding the proper character of the priestly
office, but when the discussion was still quite tame, and there was yet room
for differences of opinion.”

In conclusion, the analysis of the ancient literature collected in the
Dead Sea Scrolls leads to the striking discovery that the library of Qumran
contained records of both pro-Zadokite and anti-Zadokite Judaism. The
statements in Sirach supporting the freedom of human will (Sir 15:11-20)
and polemically rejecting the idea of the devil (21:27) and the corruption
of the universe (39:16-35) show that the conflict between Zadokite Judaism
and Enochic Judaism did not belong to a remote past but was still unre-
solved at the beginning of the second century BCE. Did the people of the
Dead Sea Scrolls collect those ancient religious texts regardless of their
ideological origins? Were they indifferent about the confrontation between
Zadokites and Enochians? Or was there a logic in preserving the documents
of both parties? The answer may be found in a series of documents that
chronologically and ideologically lie between those ancient texts and the
sectarian writings of the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

57. Hanson argued that the Enochic literature came from nonpriestly circles
(Down of Apocalyptic).
58. Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven, 27.
59. Kugler, From Patriarch to Priest, 135.
60. For a detailed analysis of the confrontation between Sirach and Enochic
Judaism, see Boccaccini, “Ben Sira, Qohelet, and Apocalyptic,” in Middle Judaism,
77-125; idem, “Origine del male, libertà dell’ uomo e retribuzione nella sapienza di Ben
Sira,” Hen 8 (1986) 1-37. Comparing Sirach and 1 Enoch, Randall A. Argall has
reached the same conclusion: “each tradition views the other among its rivals” (1 Enoch
and Sirach: A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Rev-