

PREDESTINATION AND ESSENISM

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ABSTRACT: The widely spread Essenes practice of the future events prediction is likely to be based on their belief in the absolute predestination. In this light the hitherto unclarified etymology of the very term Ἐσσαῖοι / Ἐσσηνοί can be traced to the Aramaic notion חשיא (pl. st. emph.)/resp. חשיאן (st. abs.; sing. חשה), which is likely to be interpreted as “what man has to suffer, predestination, fortune”; this derivation appears to be relevant not only semantically, but also linguistically. Thus the term “Essenes” can be interpreted as the “fatalists” (see e.g. Tantlevskij 2013). The doctrine of predestination also plays the key role in religious outlook of the Qumran community, and it is considered to be one of the most fundamental arguments in favor of the Qumranites identification with the Essenes. Some Platonic-Pythagorean (not only Stoic) doctrines can be regarded as certain Hellenistic parallels to the Essenic-Qumranic conception of predestination.

KEYWORDS: Judean history and ideology in Hellenistic and early Roman periods, sectarian Judaism, Essenes, Qumran community, history of ancient philosophy, Pythagoreanism, Platonism, predestination, eschatology.

Identifying the Essenes mode of life with that of the Pythagoreans, Josephus Flavius (*Jewish Antiquities* XV, 371) singles out the attitude towards predestination (εἰμαρμένη; lit. “fate”, “destiny”) as the main aspect of the religious sects separation in Judea (XIII, 171–173). At this the very essence of the Essenes’ doctrine, according to Josephus, is “that all things are best ascribed to God” (XVIII, 18). Also this idea seems to be implicitly attested in Plinius the Elder’s *Historia Naturalis* V, 73. The widely spread Essenes’ practice of the future events prediction is likely to be based on their belief in the absolute predestination. In this light the hitherto unclarified ety-

mology of the very term Ἐσσηαῖοι / Ἐσσηνοί can be traced to the Aramaic notion חשיא (pl. st. emph.)/resp. חשיאן (st. abs.; sing. חשא), which is likely to be interpreted as “what man has to suffer, predestination, fortune”; this derivation appears to be relevant not only semantically, but also linguistically. Thus the term “Essenes” can be interpreted as the “fatalists” (see e.g. Tantlevskij 2013).

The doctrine of predestination plays the key role in religious outlook of the Qumran community, and it is considered to be one of the most fundamental arguments in favor of the Qumranites identification with the Essenes. On the basis of the main Qumran manuscripts analysis one can conclude that, according to the sectarians views, the idea/plan of the future Universe arises originally in God’s Mind (סכל, בינה), Thought (מחשבת), and the world itself is created through His Knowledge (דעת). It is possible to assume that the terms מחשבת, סכל/בינה, דעת can be correlated here with some Greek philosophical notions. One can connect these notions (in particular, in the light of Philo of Alexandria’s writings) with the term λόγος, which is sometimes implied as a synonym of the divine “mind” in some Hellenistic philosophical constructions. On the other hand, one can mention the Platonic-Aristotelian notions παράδειγμα and νοῦς, denoting mind or thought, which rule the Universe.

The fact that the idea of predestination was not alien to the Pythagorean and Platonic traditions can be confirmed by the following arguments. First of all, let us point out the fr. 88 from Eudemus of Rhodes’ *Physics*, in which the Pythagoreans belief in absolute universal reiteration, originating from their conviction in the existence of rational-numerical regularity, ruling the world, is attested. Secondly, one can point out some of Plato’s indications scattered in his texts to the necessity and pre-determination of what is going on – from the image of the “golden thread” in his *Laws* (644c–645a) and the famous “Ananke’s spindle” from his *Republic* (616c) to the discussion about the necessity and regularity of the world’s epochs in his *Statesman* (268e ff.). According to the *Republic*, people elect their own destiny based on the experience gained in previous incarnations of the eternal souls. This choice can’t be changed: the next “chance” will appear only before the next birth. “Retentive” individuals who do not drink too much water from the river Amelet are allowed to accept their fate as something due. In many places in Plato’s dialogues Socrates predicts his own fate, and his behavior during the trial and after it can be understood as an example of philosophical acceptance of the inevitable future. Constant references to the voice of the demon further reinforce the feeling that according to Plato, Socrates was a man who knew how to read his own fate. Thus, his “paradigm” from the *Timaeus* appears to be not only as a static, but also as a dynamic “design” of the being. Especially clear this idea can be seen in Plato’s teaching of the direct and mediated world’s governing by a god in the epochs of Kronos and Zeus (*Statesman*, *ibid*). If the “retrograde” moving of the universe means a change of the direction of time, then it can be assumed that in the “age of Kronos” the creation of fates of those who will live in the “times of Zeus” takes place. They live the “opposite lives” by revolting from the ground and moving from old age to youth, and then to the infant state.

Thus the “age of Kronos” is not only a good time of direct world’s governing by gods, but also the time of formation of the fates unfolding in the “age of Zeus”.

However, in this age the Space is inclined to deviate from the paths, which have been prepared for it by the demiurge, therefore people do not accomplish their mission. Arbitrariness dooms them to the afterlife retribution and to a series of rebirths – when people, but not gods, choose fate. In the *Republic* Lachesis says: «Ephemeral souls! Here is the beginning of a turn, fatal for the perishable generation... For no divinity shall cast lots for you, but you shall choose your own deity» (*Republic* 617d-e). Only philosophers, following the “circle of identity”, i. e. the laws and norms established by the demiurge, carry out their inclinations obtained during the previous cycle. Thus we meet with two levels of fatalism – one from Kronos, proper and good, and another one from the man himself associated with the nature of “other”, which is fraught with accidents and mistakes leading to evil.

These Platonic-Pythagorean doctrines can be regarded as certain Hellenistic parallels to the Essenic conception of predestination. We know that the Pythagoreans were among the first in the history of Greek literature to offer allegorical interpretations of the Greek mythology. In this connection let us mention that Clement of Alexandria considered Philo of Alexandria – whose views seem to be akin in some aspects to those of the Essenes-Qumranites – to have been a “Pythagorean” (*Stromata* I 72 4; II 100 3). Naturally, we can speak about the “Pythagoreanism” of Philo to the same extent, as of the Essenes-Qumranites’ “Pythagoreanism”.

The latter ones, being not inclined to the onto-cosmological speculations, emphasize the eschatological component in the idea of the indispensable predestination. It is even possible to say that in their view, the whole world history, not yet started, has already been realized, and accomplished in its ideal form in God’s Mind. A human being appears to be a twofold essence, selfness, and exists in two hypostases – as a pre-created God’s idea and as a creature of the Universe. All this helps to understand the firm confidence of the Qumranites that the prophetic predictions of their Teacher of Righteousness, endowed with a secret “knowledge” directly from God’s Mind, Thought (see, e. g., *The Thanksgiving Hymns of the Teacher*; *The Peshar Habakkuk*), as well as the prognostications of their other leaders, «in the hearts of whom God has put an intellect that they can interpret the words» of the biblical prophets, will be put into effect without fail. Thus, God was immanent to the (future) Universe before Creation; or, in other words, the Universe, existing ideally in God’s Mind, is immanent to Him.

On an eschatological New Creation, in Metahistory, when the world will know God and God will be with the world and *in* the world, and the world – with Him and *in* Him, He also comes to be immanent to the created Universe, but on the other manner. Perceiving Concepts and Projects of the Creator, the Qumranites appear to be not a blind tool in the hand of Providence, but deliberate co-creators, cooperators of the Lord, *voluntary* and *freely* carrying out the Divine Plan, realizing His Will.

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