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**THE JUDAEAN CULTURAL CONTEXT
OF COMMUNITY OF GOODS IN THE EARLY
JESUS MOVEMENT**

PART IV

IV. The Jesus Movement and Holy Community of Life and Property amongst the Poor of Judaea

The first three parts of this study have argued that the community of goods attested in Acts 2–6 of the earliest Jerusalem congregation of followers of Jesus after his death, resurrection and ascension should be understood as a form of virtuoso religious life bearing close similarities with the life of the monastic echelon of Essenes resident in the towns and villages of the populous heartland of Judaea and in their more socially separate community by the Dead Sea. This part of my study will further ground my emphatic acceptance of the extreme historical value of the Acts report, and extend my interpretation of the original character of the events reported in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles as revealing an Essene-like form of virtuoso religion within earliest Jerusalem Christianity by further depicting the interlocking wider context which connects the common purse of Jesus’ travelling party, the Judaeen practice of formal property-sharing, and the sharing of the first believers in Jerusalem and by close consideration of some philological aspects of the account of Ananias and Sapphira’s property-donation in Acts 5:1–11.¹

1. Jesus’ travelling party: consecration in community of goods to proclamation of God’s kingdom and care for the poor.

Jesus’ travelling party of disciples apparently held their money in common; Judas administered their common purse (John 12:6; 13:29). We may assume that the monetary support of Jesus’ wealthy and high status women patrons (Luke 8:1–3) was received into this purse. Disbursements for the poor appear to have been made from this common purse during Jesus’ ministry. According to Mark, some present at Jesus’ anointing at Bethany imagined that the costly perfumed oil poured over Jesus might have been sold and the proceeds donated to the poor, probably through the auspices of Judas as the group’s treasurer (14:4–5). Matthew tells us these detractors were disciples (26:8–9), while John identifies Judas as the lone, or perhaps principal, scolding voice. John tells

¹ An earlier version of this part of my study appeared as ‘Holy community of life and property and amongst the poor: A response to Steve Walton’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, 2 (April 2008), pp. 113–27, a brief exploration of the dimensions outlined above, written at the request of the editors, the late I. Howard Marshall, and Anthony N. S. Lane, in response to Dr. Walton’s ‘Primitive communism in Acts? Does Acts present the community of goods (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35) as mistaken?’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, 2 (April 2008), pp. 99–111. I here repeat my sincere thanks Dr. Walton for his careful consideration and thoughtful critique of my work to resist the sceptical view of earliest Christian community of goods.

us that at Jesus' last supper some of his disciples, after Judas' departure following Jesus' cryptic words to him, thought Jesus had instructed him to make purchases for the group's needs at the feast, or to give alms to the poor, suggesting a pattern of both common expenditure and disbursements for the poor from the common purse (12:4–6). When Jesus asked Philip where bread might be purchased to feed a large crowd near Passover, Philip exclaimed that two hundred *denarii* would not suffice. Jesus' question was intended to test Philip (John 6:5–7), perhaps because it was not usually beyond the financial resources of the common purse to aid the needy in Jesus' audience.

We may assume that Jesus frequently sanctioned expenditures for the needy outside his immediate group from the common purse. Very substantial benefactions were within the means of Jesus' elite women patrons. Jesus often appears in the Gospels dining and teaching at meals; the existence of the common purse suggests that his travelling party did not always dine at others' expense. Rather, the needy probably received assistance at open meals financed from the travelling group's purse, though certain meals were private to Jesus and his travelling group. We may assume that Jesus was able to offer more assistance to the needy than food alone, through the resources of the common purse, and to precipitate generosity from benefactors when resources proved too little to meet all legitimate needs. The complete consecration to service in God's Kingdom of Jesus' mobile party of disciples was expressed, in part, by their possessionless travel and generous common life.

The Gospels, then, bear witness to receipts from wealthy patrons into the common purse of Jesus' disciple-group, and probably both to disbursements for the needs of Jesus' travelling party and the needy outside this group. We probably find, early in Acts, a continuation of this pattern. All who believed and joined the expanding group of Jesus' disciples 'had all things in common'. Believers sold their possessions; distributions were made to meet the needs of all (2:44–45). We learn that 'as many as owned lands or houses sold them', laying the proceeds at the apostles' feet (4:34–35). These events occurred only weeks after Jesus' death and resurrection. Since these accounts appear in Acts, it is easy to conceive them primarily as part of 'Church History', and to look forward to the later chapters of Acts and the letters of Paul for analogies to help us understand their pattern, rather than to look back to the ministry of Jesus in order to find their direct root in the practice of his travelling party. It is, however, the contexts of long-established, Judaeen virtuoso religion (the life of the Essene religious orders) and of the common purse created by Jesus for his travelling party of disciples which most help in understanding the communal economic life of the earliest Jerusalem congregation of Jesus' followers. During the period between Jesus' last Passover and Pentecost, his disciple-group, according to Luke-Acts, settled in Jerusalem and followed a life of intense, continuous prayer and worship. The group of Jesus' followers, gathered from Galilee and planted in Jerusalem, were somehow billeted together in the guest premises of 'the room upstairs where they were staying', probably close by, or even within, a community of Jerusalem Essenes resident by the 'Gate of the Essenes' on the southwest hill of Jerusalem.² There, they lived a communal life together, 'constantly devoting themselves to prayer', and so continued the communal sharing initiated by Jesus, their now heavenly master (Acts 1:13–14; cf. Luke 24:49–52; Acts 1:1–5). Their economic

² Rainer Riesner wrote the only book-length treatment of the Essene Quarter and the early Jesus community of the 'Upper Room' on Jerusalem's southwest hill, *Essener und Urgemeinde in Jerusalem: Neue Funde und Quellen* (Giessen/Basel: Brunnen Verlag, 2nd edition 1998). See also Bargil Pixner, 'Jerusalem's Essene Gateway. Where the Community Lived in Jesus' Time', *Biblical Archaeology Review* 23.3 (1997), pp. 22–31, 64–66; idem, *Paths of the Messiah and Sites of the Early Church from Galilee to Jerusalem* (ed. Rainer Riesner; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2010), pp. 192–219, 239–

pattern of life – based around a common purse into which large donations were received from wealthy patrons, a common purse from which the group lived, a common purse from which the needy might receive support – was not a *novum*. This way of life bore the stamp of Jesus’ own authority and practice, and expressed the continued consecration to him of those who proclaimed him as heavenly Lord.

2. Holy community of life and property amongst the poor: the unique Judaeen solution to the problems of agrarian economy

I have come to believe that the common life of Jesus’ travelling party had its ultimate roots with *Judaeen* practice. Jesus was linked to a Judaeen group immediately before bursting onto the Galilean scene in public ministry (cf. Mark 1:1–20 and parallels; John 1:19–43). He appears to have ‘taken north’ the Judaeen concept and practice of an intensely integrated social and religious life. He gathered, through the extraordinary force of his own person, a group of chosen Galileans into a travelling party which every day shared meals and received instruction. Such ‘common life’ appears not to have been a Galilean practice. There are no other attested contemporary examples. By contrast, the practice of common life is very well attested for Judaea, amongst the Essenes.³

Closely communitarian forms of living had developed in Judaea because its social, economic and religious world was rather different from that of Galilee. The community of property of the early Jerusalem church reflects this specifically Judaeen social milieu and the ways through which many Judaeans had long responded to the economic problems of the age. The land of Galilee was more fertile than Judaea, and afforded more opportunities for economic expansion. Galilee lay on major trade routes, and was well connected to the coast. By contrast, Judaea was a land-locked, rugged, semi-arid inland region. A relatively small area geographically, off the major trade routes, its religious, social and economic world was dominated by its

252 and 360–368; Rainer Riesner, ‘Jesus, the Primitive Community, and the Essene Quarter of Jerusalem’, in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 198–234.

³ Philo limits the Essene movement to Judaea, *Apology for the Jews* 11.1. On this see Brian J. Capper, ‘Essene Community Houses and Jesus’ Early Community’, in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 472–502, esp. 473–479. Philo’s account seems to be dependent upon a source shared by Josephus, who also numbers the celibate male Essenes to over 4000 but does not mention Judaea. Roland Bergmeier identifies this common source as a distinctly Pythagoreanising earlier writer, *Die Essener-Berichte des Flavius Josephus: Quellenstudien zu den Essener-Texten im Werk des jüdischen Historiographen* (Kampen, Pharos, 1993). Ultimately our judgment as to exactly how to understand Philo’s geographical reference to Judaea (whether the Jewish heartland region, notably the habitable highlands close to Jerusalem and the Shephelah, or a more extended region) may have to depend on such general factors allowing interpretation as are available to us since the habitual geographical reference style of this unknown author is not recoverable. For a variety of reasons, the breadth of which will become apparent through my entire study, I am inclined to understand this reference to Judaea to refer to the Jewish heartland region rather than to interpret it more widely as, say, referring to the whole area once under the control of Herod the Great, who in 40 BC was granted the title “King of the Jews” by the Roman senate (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 1.14.4 §284; *Antiquities* 14.14.4 §385). The wider understanding of Judaea would include all the Palestinian regions of Jewish settlement along with Samaria and intervening and associated gentile-occupied territories such as the coastal plain. Philo is known to have visited the Jerusalem Temple at least once in his lifetime (*Prov.* 2.64). Since this visit will have involved overland travel through the densely settled Judaeen heartland, Philo may have had pointed out to him Essene community houses in the towns and villages through which he passed, or himself sought out examples. His interest in the community of ‘Therapeuts’ by Lake Mareotis near Alexandria, indicated by his extensive and laudatory treatment of these ascetics in his *On the Contemplative Life*, suggests that he would have been interested to learn what he could of the specialist religious houses of Judaea. Berndt Schaller may therefore be quite incorrect to assume that Philo’s knowledge of the number of Essenes of Judaea may only have depended on literary sources rather than personal observation and enquiry, cf. Berndt Schaller, ‘4000 Essener — 6000 Pharisäer: Zum Hintergrund und Wert antiker Zahlenangaben’, in B. Kollmann, W. Reinbold, and A. Steudel (eds.), *Antikes Judentum und Frühes Christentum: Festschrift für Hartmut Stegemann zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 172–182, see p. 174.

massive Temple. It had a long history as a Temple state, ruled by its clergy.⁴ In consequence, ideals of holiness and consecration dominated the Judaeen religious and social world in an almost totalitarian fashion, far more extensively than they did the Galilean milieu, while the economic harshness of Judaeen life posed the problems of survival in a subsistence economy more sharply than the more 'open' economy of Galilee.

The particular Judaeen response to the problems of subsistence in the ancient agrarian world took, because of these unusual circumstances, a unique form. In Judaea, the Essene movement developed widespread and well understood forms of regulated economic sharing. This local, uniquely Judaeen pattern of social organisation was long established by the first century AD. There existed in Judaea a prestigious 'upper echelon' of more than four thousand celibate male Essenes, who lived with each other in full community of property.⁵ On most days they worked as labourers and artisans in the fields of local estate owners.⁶ They shared common meals with each other in the evenings,⁷ open-handedly entertaining members of the order from elsewhere, who may have travelled to find work or disseminate news.⁸ This 'holy core' of Essene monks was distributed through the perhaps two hundred villages and towns of the Judaeen landscape in small communities of ten or more.⁹ It seems also to have occupied an important centre on the southwest hill of Jerusalem.¹⁰ It was

Similarly, it is clear that Josephus had personal knowledge of the religious groupings of the region and may, therefore, not have based his knowledge of the number of celibate Essene males merely on his literary source.

⁴ The consequences of this socio-geographic differentiation were worked out by my student, Timothy J. M. Ling, *The Judaeen Poor and the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), see esp. pp. 78–97; cf. also his 'Virtuoso Religion and the Judaeen Social World', in Louise J. Lawrence and Mario I. Aguilar, *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2004), pp. 227–258.

⁵ Philo, *That Every Good Man is Free*, §75; Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.5 §§20–21. Although these texts clearly enumerate only *male celibate* Essenes, they are often wrongly taken to number the *whole* Essene movement at 'over four thousand'. This misreading drastically diminishes appreciation of the scale and importance of Essenism in the Judaeen social and religious world. Timothy J. Murray, *Restricted Generosity in the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), pp. 124–125, has recently challenged my acceptance of the validity of the explicit count of 'over four thousand' celibate male Essenes given by Josephus and Philo. He begins from Berndt Schaller's claim that 'the numbers 4000 and 6000 are *topoi* of ancient historiography and cannot be taken as numerically accurate, but indicate instead 'ideale Gruppentypen', relating particularly to military groupings. He goes on to adduce other reasons why these numbers may drastically exaggerate the numbers of celibate Essenes. The argument of Berndt Schaller's '4000 Essener — 6000 Pharisäer: Zum Hintergrund und Wert antiker Zahlenangaben', in B. Kollmann, W. Reinbold, and A. Steudel (eds.), *Antikes Judentum und Frühes Christentum: Festschrift für Hartmut Stegemann zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 172–182, suffers in my view from profound methodological deficiency since he makes no statistical comparison with other numbers given for numbers of troops in ancient sources, for if 4000 and 6000 are *topoi*, we should expect them to be more frequent than figures such as 2000, 3000, 5000, 7000, and 8000 (etc.). Some years ago I used the Perseus search tool (Tufts University) to survey numbers given for troops in ancient historiographers and found no higher frequencies for 4000 and 6000 in the many accounts of military forces than for other round figures in the thousands. This shows that 4000 and 6000 are not *topoi*. Moreover, neither Murray or Schaller spot that by avoiding an enumeration of the whole Essene movement, instead merely citing the known number of the celibates, Josephus distorted the facts to make them appear in line with his tendency to emphasise the importance of the Pharisees (whom he numbers at 6000 in total, *Antiquities*, 17 §41). He neglected to enumerate the obviously larger total number of the Essene movement, which also included marrying members, probably much more numerous than the 'over 4000' celibate males since celibacy in the more difficult choice for human beings. By not giving a figure for the 'second order Essenes', who marry but whose lifestyle he indicates as otherwise the same as that of the celibate males, Josephus succeeded in making the Pharisees, whom he advocated as the best leaders of Judaism, appear larger in number than the Essenes, though the Pharisees were patently the smaller grouping (a narrow retainer class, smaller than a widespread movement amongst the ordinary population). Philo mentions only the ascetic male echelon of the Essene movement, in line with his philosophical interest. Thus the issue of the 'over four thousand' Essenes is not one of exaggeration, but, for different reasons on the part of Philo and Josephus, one of minimalization. My 'maximalist' reading of the scale and influence of the Essene movement and its social caring amongst the ordinary mass of the population recovers historical reality from the tendencies (deliberate oversight or suppression) of the elite ancient Jewish authors. I hope in the future to write a more extensive defence of my understanding of the whole Judaeen Essene movement as numbering perhaps several tens of thousands or more.

⁶ Cf. Philo, *Apology for the Jews* 11:4–9; cf. Brian J. Capper, 'The New Covenant in Southern Palestine at the Arrest of Jesus' in James R. Davila (ed.) *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), pp. 90–116, see pp. 95–98.

⁷ Philo, *Apology for the Jews*, 11.10–11.

⁸ Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.8.4 §§124–125.

⁹ 1QS VI.3–4; Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.8.9 §146.

associated with a 'second order' of marrying Essenes,¹¹ which was probably much larger. The ancient sources give us no figures for this group, but since celibacy is always a less popular option than marriage, it probably numbered several tens of thousands, perhaps more.

Hartmut Stegemann, one of the principal early researchers on the Dead Sea Scrolls, came to conclude that the Essene movement was the 'main Jewish union of the second Temple period'.¹² I have argued, in earlier parts of this study as well as elsewhere, by a statistical method, that Essenism was probably the dominant social and religious force amongst the labourers, artisans and needy of the villages and towns of rural Judaea. I would also suggest that the Essenes were very well represented amongst the poor urban population of Jerusalem.¹³

Overpopulation and scarcity of resources characterised the ancient agrarian economy. The needy were frequently compelled to migration, perhaps to seek work in the large coastal cities, to soldiering, or to work on large estates as servants or slaves. Women were frequently forced into prostitution. Essenism offered different options for the needy of Judaea. Children who could not be fed in poor local families could be adopted into Essene communities, where they received training in work, economic security, and education in holy tradition.¹⁴ By this route many male children of the poor came as adults to renounce the pleasures and social standing of normal family life, enjoying instead highly honoured status as Essene monks and a replacement form of fictive kinship in an extensive and loving brotherhood.¹⁵ Since numerous males did not father children, but cared for those of others, Essene male celibacy and communal life came to function, in the Judaeian heartland, as economically important compensating mechanisms against the dangers of overpopulation and undernourishment. There may also have been honoured Essene orders for widows and life-long celibate women.¹⁶

The population of Jerusalem in the first century AD was c. 60,000–80,000.¹⁷ The population of rural Judaea was of a similar size, the two hundred or so villages and towns averaging a few hundred souls each, including children.¹⁸ The more than four thousand celibate male Essenes were sufficient in number to form communities of between ten and twenty in most, if not all, the towns and villages of the region. This powerful, firmly united 'core' of over four thousand skilled, educated and highly disciplined male celibates was supported by, I would suggest, at least several thousand families whose male heads belonged to the second Essene order. For every male child adopted by the Essenes, a reciprocally grateful local family may have attached itself to the Essene movement. Indeed, the reciprocal obligations typically inherent in gift-giving, honour and patronage in

¹⁰ See in general the scholarly treatments cited in note 2 above and Otto Betz and Rainer Riesner, *Verschwörung um Qumran. Jesus, die Schriftrollen, und der Vatikan* (Munich: Knaur, 2007), pp. 226–238; Riesner, 'Essener und Urkirche auf dem Südwesthügel Jerusalems (Zion III)', in Nikodemus C. Schnabel (ed.), *Laetere Jerusalem* (Münster: Aschendorf, 2006), pp. 200–234; Brian J. Capper, 'The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods', in Richard J. Bauckham (ed.), *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995; volume 4 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*), pp. 323–356, see pp. 341–350; Capper, '“With the Oldest Monks...” Light from Essene History on the Career of the Beloved Disciple?', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 49 (1998), pp. 1–55, see pp. 19–36.

¹¹ Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.8.13 §§160–161.

¹² Hartmut Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 140–153; idem, 'The Qumran Essenes – Local Members of the Main Jewish Union in Late Second Temple Times', in J. Trebolle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner (eds.), *The Madrid Qumran Congress* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), Vol. 1, pp. 83–166.

¹³ See my pieces cited in notes 3 and 6 above.

¹⁴ Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.8.2 §120.

¹⁵ Josephus tells us that the Essenes were 'lovers of each other' (*fila/llhloi*) more than other Jewish groups, *Jewish War* 2.8.2 §119. Philo emphasizes mutual service in menial tasks, care of the sick, and care of the old by the young, *That Every Good Man is Free*, §§79, 87–88.

¹⁶ Cf. the 'mothers' of the community in 2Q270 VII i lines 13–14.

¹⁷ Cf. Wolfgang Reinhardt, 'The Population Size of Jerusalem and the Numerical Growth of the Jerusalem Church', in Richard J. Bauckham (ed.) *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 237–265.

agrarian societies suggest that the care afforded to the economically weaker elements of Judaeian rural society caused considerable numbers of the families of the poorer rural population of Judaea to become integrated into the Essene movement as permanently associated and economically contributing members of the Essene New Covenant. It would not be at all surprising if in fact, over the century and more before the birth of the Jesus movement, most rural clans and families in Judaea had come to express gratitude to the Essene movement by such permanent secondary association. I would argue that the two Essene orders, acting in concert, probably dominated the social, political and religious world of Judaea's towns and villages. Both Jesus and the early community of his followers in Jerusalem therefore had to acknowledge and evaluate the care offered by the Essene community houses of the region's towns and villages and to reckon with the consequent Essene domination of the Judaeian rural scene. The longstanding, honoured presence of the celibate male Essene order throughout Judaea, its intimate connections through adoption with the local population, and its willingness to assist rural families facing economic crisis when there were too many mouths to feed,¹⁹ may indeed mean that a substantial proportion of those who laboured in the city of Jerusalem itself, the urban artisan population who dwelt within the city walls or in the nearer villages, had been absorbed into the second Essene order by the time of Jesus.

When we find, therefore, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, the early church of Jerusalem sharing their property and joining together in daily common meals, we are observing a well-established and widespread feature of Judaeian cultural and economic life, practised by the primary Essene order. Full sharing of property and daily life was, of course, only practised by a minority of Judaea's inhabitants. None the less, it was a mode of life, expressive of complete personal consecration and holiness, which most Judaeians certainly respected and understood, and with which many had personal connections through membership in the secondary Essene order. This form of holy, communal life had been lived out, before the eyes of all, by the influential, venerable order of celibate male Essene monks for approaching two centuries at the time the Christian church began. Shared property and common meals, along with regular prayer and study at the feet of esteemed teachers who held no personal property, were aspects of a widespread local Judaeian social form which expressed an ideal of complete holiness and personal consecration. The earliest post-Easter group of Jesus' followers had, according to Acts, experienced a massive outpouring of God's Spirit, enjoying across its whole community inspirations of prophecy and glossolalia (2:1–41). It is hardly surprising that we find the expanding community of believers, recently impressed with an extraordinary sense of God's holiness and powerful presence, implementing the local Judaeian ideal of communalised, holy living, renouncing personal possessions and devoting themselves, after their working day, to prayer, study and common meals (Acts 2:42–47; cf. 1QS VI.2–3, 6–7), a way of life which spilled over into care for the indigent to the extent that these could be included through secondary association. This development was both the appropriate way to continue the common life initiated by Jesus in a local, permanently settled context and a viable way to express his social concern for the poor of the wider Jewish community.

3. Ananias and Sapphira: breach of holy community

¹⁸ Cf. Capper in Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology*, see pp. 473–476 and pp. 492–493.

¹⁹ Cf. Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.8.2 §120 (adoption) and 2.8.6 §134 (almsgiving and assistance outside the individual Essene's group).

When Ananias and Sapphira breached the fellowship and trust of their community, which was aspiring to an ideal of perfect holiness and consecration, their actions were probably viewed by all with horror. There are three suggested explanations of the true nature of the couple's crime.

First, it is suggested that they had made some dedication of their property in advance of sale, and were therefore culpable when they failed to bring the whole sum before the apostles.²⁰ This explanation fails because it does not correspond with Peter's question at the beginning of Acts 5:4. Had the couple dedicated their property in advance of sale, Peter would have emphasised that after its sale they were obliged to surrender its full value. Yet he emphasises that the sum they had obtained was entirely their own, to do with as they pleased.

Second, some have proposed that Ananias and Sapphira surrendered their property as a supererogatory gift, and were condemned for their pretence in seeking to emulate others who had made unusually large donations, while deceptively retaining a part of their property.²¹ This interpretation of the couple's crime cannot explain their drastic punishment, which surely implies that they had perpetrated a quite heinous deception, a glaringly obvious breach of the community's fundamental practice. It would surely have been nugatory for the couple to have fallen into deception out of fear for their own security when making an unusually generous, indeed highly sacrificial, gift of alms. The proposal of a supererogatory gift can also furnish no clear explanation as to the timing of the couple's expression of intent to donate all their property. They had clearly made no such declaration before its sale, since Peter emphasised they could have disposed of it after its sale as they chose. They seem also not to have made such a declaration after the sale and before bringing a part of the sum obtained to the apostles. Had they verbally declared their intent following the sale, it would also be pointless for Peter to refer back to the sale and to emphasise by doing this their free disposal over their assets after it. Had they committed them following the sale, he would most likely have referred to this declaration ('You promised to give all the proceeds from the sale of your property') rather than to emphasise their free disposal over their assets. Ananias appears not to have made any verbal declaration at the point of laying his money at the feet of the apostles. No declaration on his part is recorded, only his participation in the ritual. Before condemning Sapphira, Peter has to pry from her such a false declaration (Acts 5:8), implying that she also made none up to that point. Ananias' deception appears only to have consisted in going through a community ritual of laying property before the apostles without surrendering all his property, perhaps as only one of a line of non-speaking aspirants.

This action of laying property at the apostles' feet, without words or declaration, appears to have had the quite unambiguous meaning that those who laid property at the apostles' feet were surrendering its full value. No declaration on Ananias' part was required. A context of mere almsgiving, no matter how generous and inspired, cannot account for such ceremonial meaning. This ritual, which carried the implication of full renunciation of property, seems clearly to have arisen from a cultural context in which individuals embarked upon a life of renunciation and complete devotion to communities of effectively monastic type. Individuals surrendered, according to a recognised rule, all their property into the control of the holy community they aspired to join. Since such full community of life is well attested for the Judaeian cultural and religious milieu by the classical accounts of the Essenes and the *Rule of the Community* discovered at Qumran, I have repeatedly argued in my earlier publications that this local, effectively regulated form of property-sharing is the right context for understanding Peter's words in Acts 5:4. It is through a process of elimination of *failing*

²⁰ Cf. Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, *The Beginnings of Christianity I, The Acts of the Apostles*, IV (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 50.

²¹ Cf. Richard Belward Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 65.

explanations of Ananias and Sapphira's crime that I have come to propose this third explanation, that Ananias and Sapphira breached the rules of a well understood process of provisional surrender of property on their entry into the final phase of their novitiate.²² This system of provisional surrender of property is revealed to us in column VI of the *Rule of the Community* discovered at Qumran. It regulated novices' surrender of property not only in the Qumran community, but also in the c. 200 small communities of Essene male celibates in the towns and villages of rural Judaea, and in the Essene community located on the southwest hill of Jerusalem too.

Commentators usually find the strongest argument against the historicity of the Acts account of the community of property of the earliest disciples in the apparent contradiction between the statements of Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32, 34, indicating a universal sharing of property, and Peter's implication to Ananias and Sapphira at Acts 5:4 that their property donation was voluntary. Despite the extraordinarily frequent rehearsal of this argument, it is fallacious. Community of property is usually entered upon on a fully voluntary basis (as in all forms of monasticism). Peter's point was that Ananias and Sapphira were not compelled to join the common purse, but that since they had sought to do this, they should have abided by the general rule, which applied to all who wished to join; they could withhold nothing. One possible way to understand the earliest community's structure is that it contained an 'inner group', and that only transition into this inner core required full renunciation of property. I have contemplated this 'inner circle' possibility carefully, especially since within Essenism full community of property was practised by only a sector of the movement, and have indeed fully supported it in print.²³ I now incline to a modified view²⁴, in order to give the summary statements of Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32, 34 regarding community of property full weight.

The author of Acts probably had reason to claim that the whole of the earliest Jerusalem community of believers in Jesus after Pentecost practised full community of property. His reason was, I suspect, the preservation in tradition of the simple truth of an originally comprehensive community of property, which was due in part to the peculiar origins and intentions of the three thousand converts at Pentecost (2:41). It appears that many of these converts, already gathered for the festival, were from the widespread Judaeian 'communitarian stream', i.e. from the Essene movement, which had its centre on the southwest hill, where the early Jerusalem church appears to have begun.²⁵ Essenism regularly advanced many to the next phase of their novitiate at its annual Pentecost covenant renewal festival.²⁶ It appears that Jesus had successfully 'implanted' his disciple-group into the Jerusalem Essene Quarter as its leading echelon; hence the close-knit community of Galileans loyal to him was able to grow very rapidly indeed in Jerusalem, as Acts records, and immediately to express local Judaeian institutions and processes in its structure. Many of the first three thousand converts were, I suspect, already living in a common life on the southwest hill or elsewhere in Jerusalem and Judaea. Others were preparing to surrender their property and to advance to the final stage of the Essene novitiate at Pentecost,

²² For my most extensive argument concerning the inadequacy of other explanations of Ananias and Sapphira's misdeed, see still 'The Interpretation of Acts 5.4', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 19 (1983), pp. 117–131.

²³ Capper, 'Palestinian Cultural Context' in Bauckham (ed.), *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, p. 355. The 'inner group' view was a feature of some early comparisons of IQS with the Acts account of earliest Christian community of goods, cf. Sherman E. Johnson, 'The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline and the Jerusalem Church of Acts', in Krister Stendahl (ed.), *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1958), pp. 129–142, see p. 131; Johannes P. M. Van der Ploeg, *The Excavations at Qumran* (London: Longmans, 1958), p. 208.

²⁴ As Steve Walton observed, 'Primitive communism in Acts? Does Acts present the community of goods (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35) as mistaken?', *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, 2 (April 2008), pp. 99–111, see p. 101 note 11. 28.

²⁵ For the traditions locating the upper room on Jerusalem's southwest hill see the literature cited above in notes 2 and 10; my own treatments are in Capper, 'Palestinian Cultural Context' in Bauckham (ed.), *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 345–349 and ' "With the Oldest Monks..." ' *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 49 (1998), pp. 36–42.

²⁶ Cf. Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1997), pp. 79–81 and 150–153.

AD 30. I suspect this group also included some older Jews from abroad, ‘devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem’ (Acts 2:5). These, I would propose, had been seeking to retire to an already existent pattern of common life and worship based on the Essene Quarter of the southwest hill and attendance at the Temple.²⁷ Some may have already been using guest facilities adjacent to the guest premises used by Jesus’ disciple group. They did not anticipate the extraordinary events and preaching of the first Christian Pentecost, but they received them gladly. The novices amongst these converts continued in their resolve to enter fully into a holy common life.

Others from the Essene orders (or perhaps similarly intensely socially integrated, ascetic Judaeans groups not known to us by name) may have responded to Peter and John’s preaching in the Temple at 4:4, probably at some point in the first year of the Galilean disciples’ leadership in Jerusalem. Acts continues to describe a thoroughgoing community of property at 4:32 and 34, in advance of Ananias and Sapphira’s deception at perhaps the group’s second celebration of Pentecost (either in AD 31, if Jesus’ crucifixion is to be dated to the year 30, or in AD 34, if Jesus’ crucifixion is to be dated to the year 33). I suspect that thereafter the numbers of those who joined the common life started to diminish, and permanently ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ groups emerged for the first time. In the second year of the community’s life large numbers of Jews from Jerusalem’s Greek-speaking synagogues of Jerusalem may have been converted to the apostles’ message but not joined the common life, leading to problems with the care of their widows (cf. Acts 6:1–6).²⁸ This hypothetical reconstruction allows us to take seriously the Acts report of earliest Christian community of goods, which lasted as a universal practice for perhaps the first year of the community’s life. While this early community stands in Christian historical perspective as the first Church, it resembled in its social form a large religious order, embracing both men and women. It appears to have utilized, in addition to its large site on the southwest hill, a number of other houses in Jerusalem (Acts 2:46); these may have been community houses and guest facilities of the Essene movement and/or similar groups nearby and elsewhere in Jerusalem. In these locations, a common life was expressed through the sharing of daily wages to finance a common meal each evening. Property owners who held ‘houses and lands’ (Acts 4:34, cf. 2.45) seem either to have sold all these, or to have sold surplus assets, surrendering their value to the community. Premises may have been transferred whole for community use as accommodation or meeting places.²⁹ Ananias and Sapphira departed from whatever was general practice.

²⁷ I suspect, too, that Ananias and Sapphira were an older couple, who, like many others, sought to consecrate their latter years to prayer, communal life and service in this community and worship at the Temple. In acting thus they may therefore have operated within a well-established form of socio-economic exchange (reciprocity) common within the cultural environment of Judaea, in which the elderly gave over their resources to a town or village ‘community house’ (*beth-ha-chever*, see CD XIV lines 12–17 and 4Q266 I lines 5–13) in exchange for a promise of all needed care and provision, while agreeing to become servant-workers and educator-elders of the community house, according to their ability, for example helping with food preparation, clothing production, work in vegetable and herb gardens, maintenance and cleaning of the community premises, care of the sick and of the infirm elderly, and with the education of children and youth. This staff of local elder-educators in the Essene community houses is visible as the ‘fathers’ and mothers’ to whom obedience is enjoined in 4Q270 VII i lines 13–14.

²⁸ For argument that Stephen’s martyrdom, which follows at Acts 6:7–8:1, to which Paul was a witness and willing assistant shortly before his conversion, should be dated to in AD 31 or 32, see Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 59–74. Some recent scholars have preferred understandings of Pauline chronology which begin from a somewhat later date for Paul’s conversion, subsequent to the AD 33 dating of Jesus’ crucifixion. Colin Humphreys, Professor of Materials Science at Cambridge University, has renewed the argument that the astronomical evidence points to AD 33 as the year of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, *The Mystery of the Last Supper* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²⁹ The form of the courtyard house lent itself to multiple occupancy. Qumran ostrakon 1 (KhQ1) seems to be a draft of a novice’s transfer of a whole estate to the Qumran community, indicating that in the Judaeans cultural and legal context of the community of goods of Acts 2–6 legal documents may have been drawn up when estates were donated to the congregation. See Ada Yardeni, ‘A Draft of a Deed on an Ostrakon from Khirbet Qumran’, *Israel Exploration Journal* 47

4. Ananias and Sapphira ‘embezzled’ their own property

As Steve Walton has noted,³⁰ I have in my various treatments of the story of Ananias and Sapphira emphasised in my exegesis the meaning of the verb *nosfi/zomai* (5:2, 3). In my view this verb always means ‘purloin, pilfer, embezzle’, and is a ‘smoking gun’ pointing to the true nature of Ananias and Sapphira’s crime as having to do with their retention of their property, not merely their deception. Since they desired to enter the common life, they had no right to subtract any sum from the money they gained from the sale of their property, although it would not have become community property until a year later, had they been finally accepted into the community. Numerous translations inadequately translate this verb as ‘keep back’. In my view, this is because without understanding of the process of provisional property surrender, translation as ‘embezzle’ may seem to contradict Peter’s assertion that their property remained fully their own.

The other New Testament usage of this verb, in Titus 2:10, clearly describes stealing. Slaves are exhorted ‘not to pilfer (*mh\ nosfisame/nouj*), but to show perfect and complete fidelity’ (NRSV). If we look back to the Greek Old Testament, we find only uses indicating theft. In the Apocrypha, at 2 Maccabees 4:32, we learn that the corrupt and hellenising High Priest Menelaus ‘*stole* some of the gold vessels of the Temple (*xrusw/mata/ tina tw~n tou= i9erou= nosfisa/menoi*)’ (NRSV). At Joshua 7:1, ‘the children of Israel committed a great trespass, and purloined [part] of the accursed thing (*kai\ e0nosfi/santo a0po\ tou= a0naqe/matoj*); and Achar... took of the accursed thing (*kai\ e1laben A)jar...*).’³¹ Biblical usage therefore sets pilfering slaves, an embezzling High Priest and the purloining Achan alongside Ananias and Sapphira, suggesting that in their case too we are dealing with a matter of ‘theft’, i.e. that they had no right to retain any part of the proceeds from the sale of their property as they embarked upon the final phase of their novitiate.

Steve Walton sought to emphasise that neither the Liddell-Scott-Jones nor Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich lexica suggest the translation ‘pilfer/embezzle’ for this verb in Acts 5:2–3. In my view, in the case of LSJ, Dr. Walton has found a little more in the entry than is present. Section II.3 notes that the middle voice is used with active sense in the Hellenistic period to indicate ‘put aside for oneself, appropriate, purloin’. It cites towards its end LXX Joshua 7:1, a little later Acts 5:2, and finally Titus 2:10, defining the meaning of none of

(1997), pp. 233–37; Philip R. Callaway, ‘A Second Look at Ostrakon No. 1 from Khirbet Qumran’, *Qumran Chronicle* 7 (1997), 145–170; Norman Golb, ‘Qadmoniot and the ‘Yahad’ claim”, *Qumran Chronicle* 7 (1997), pp. 171–173; Greg Doudna, ‘Ostraca KhQ1 and KhQ3 from the Cemetery of Qumran: A New Edition’, *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 5 (2004–2005) [online at <http://www.jhsonline.org/cocoon/JHS/a035.html>]; Frank Moore Cross, and Esti [Esther] Eshel, ‘Ostraca from Khirbet Qumran’, *Israel Exploration Journal* 47 (1997), pp. 17–28, and ‘KhQOstrakon 1’, in Philip Alexander et al., *Qumran Cave 4, XXIV, Cryptic Texts and Miscellanea, Part I*, DJD 36 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 497–507; Frederick H. Cryer, ‘The Qumran Conveyance: A Reply to F. M. Cross and E. Eshel’, *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 11 (1997), pp. 232–40.

³⁰ Steve Walton, ‘Primitive communism in Acts? Does Acts present the community of goods (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35) as mistaken?’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, 2 (April 2008), pp. 99–111, see p. 106 note 28.

these texts more closely. It does not emphasise that the actions they describe are illegitimate; yet neither does it suggest any restriction of their meaning to ‘put aside for oneself’ in a morally neutral sense.³²

Usage shows that all actions described with the verb in the middle voice in the Hellenistic period are illegitimate. In their commentary on Acts, Lake and Cadbury carefully considered Hellenistic Greek usage of the verb,³³ concluding:

‘Achan took from the spoil of Jericho dedicated to Jehovah, Ananias retained private property dedicated to the Christian community. The word [nosfi/sasqai] would therefore seem to imply that Ananias stole money which did not belong to him, or, in other words, that he had no right to keep any part of his property. No other explanation is possible in view of the evidence as to its use. It occurs not infrequently in Hellenistic prose... and always implies (a) that the theft is secret; (b) that part of a larger quantity is purloined, hence it is followed by ε0k... or α0πο... as well as by other constructions; (c) it is to be noted further that the verb is less commonly used of theft from one individual by another than of taking to oneself (the lexica use for it i0diopoiēi=sqai) what is handled as a trust.’

My examination of many examples of this verb has merely repeated Lake and Cadbury’s work and convinced me that they were correct. It always implies an illegitimate action – stealing, embezzlement, purloining, or pilfering.³⁴ It is of particular interest to compare the story of Ananias and Sapphira with Diodorus of Sicily’s account (first century BC) of a shared, tribal system of cultivation found in Spain, cited by Lake and Cadbury:

‘Of the tribes neighbouring upon the Celtiberians the most advanced is the people of the Vaccaei, as they are called; for this people each year divides among its members the land which it tills and making the fruits the

³¹ The Greek is here cited within the translation of Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint LXX*, (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1844).

³² Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones et al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), p. 1182.

³³ Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, *The Beginnings of Christianity I, The Acts of the Apostles*, IV (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 50.

³⁴ Xenophon tells of commanders admitting their power to *embezzle* (nosfi/sasqai) from their camp’s war booty, ‘though common property (koinw̃n o1ntwn) with those who helped get it’ (*Cyropaedia* 4.2.42). Polybius explains the Roman rule of warfare that no soldiers *embezzle* (nosfi/sasqai) from booty but keep instead their pre-campaign oath (10.16.6). Philo writes that Joseph, averting famine, appointed inspectors of high character so that no farmer should *embezzle* (nosfi/sasai) and eat the seed corn provided from the public granaries (*Joseph* 43 §260). Joseph’s own high character was shown by not *pilfering* a single drachma (ou0demi/an draxmh\ n nosfisa/menoi) of Pharaoh’s wealth (43 §258). The Israelites purloined none of the dedicated spoil (ou0den e0k th~j lei/aj nosfisa/menoi, *Moses* 1.45 §253). Plutarch tells us that Pompey, tried for theft of public property, established that most of the embezzling (nenosfisme/non) had been done by another (*Pompey* 4.620D, cf. 664C). Part of Themistocles’ poor reputation was embezzlement of much state wealth (polla\ th=j pole/wj nenosfisame/noj, *Praec. ger. reip.* 13.809A). Themistocles proved that his fellow officials had embezzled much (polla\ nenosfisame/nouj, *Aristides* 4.3). Demosthenes was wronged by his guardians’ *purloining* of his property (nosfisame/nwn, *Demosthenes* IV.847D). Markus attacked Lucullus for *embezzling* much (polla\ nenosfisame/nw\|) from state funds (*Lucullus* 37.2) Athenaeus writes of one Gyllipus starving himself to death because convicted of *embezzling* (nosfisa/menwn) public funds (*Deipnosophists* 6.234a). The examples in the papyri are to the same effect.

property of all (tou|j karpou|j koinopo|iou/menoi) they measure out his portion to each man, and for any cultivators who have misappropriated some part for themselves (kai\ toi=j nosfisame/noij ti gewrgoi=j) they have set the penalty as death.’ (5.34.3)

Here we find a number of resonances with Acts: a system of shared property described with the *koin-* root, distributions, the case of misappropriation, and the consequence of death for such misappropriation. The common nexus ideas and terms revealed by this comparison implies that the verb *nosfi/zomai* was the most natural choice for an author who sought to catch a tone of secret breach of trust in respect of publicly or commonly held property. The extended parallel thus revealed supports the view that the author of Acts used the verb *nosfi/zomai* because he understood Ananias and Sapphira’s retention of part of their property to be illegitimate in view of their goal of joining a fully communal economy.³⁵

I am content to oppose the opinion of the Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon, which in this case appears merely derivative of conventional exegesis and translation rather than a useful guide; it mistranslates Acts 5:2, 3 because it has neither heeded Lake and Cadbury’s observation and freshly surveyed usage, nor understood the relevance of the *Rule of the Community* for unravelling the true nature of Ananias and Sapphira’s crime. Kurt and Barbara Aland’s revision of Walter Bauer’s *Wörterbuch*, by contrast, accepts Lake and Cadbury’s observations and translates *e0nosfi/sato* in Acts 5.2 ‘*er unterschlug*’, i.e. ‘he embezzled’.³⁶

³⁵ Christopher Hays responded to my use of this passage with an unpersuasive argument in his interesting and wide-ranging published Oxford DPhil thesis, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics: A Study in Their Coherence and Character* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). On the one hand, Hays agrees with me that the verb *nosfi/zomai* always indicates an illegitimate act, in his words ‘it is clear in each context that the named appropriation of goods is morally repugnant’ (p. 214). However, in his accompanying footnote (n. 50), while he acknowledges that the parallel cited above of the verb being used of the inappropriate false appropriation of goods ‘is certainly eye-catching, especially since the punishment for the embezzlement described by Diodorus was also death’, continuing ‘but Capper has engaged in what James Barr calls an “illegitimate totality transfer.” The mere occurrence of *e0nosfi/sato* in such a context does not corroborate that it likely means the same thing in the Lukan context.’ This is not the proposal I made; I was commenting on the character of the context in which the verb (of known meaning) was used rather than on the meaning of the verb. I base my understanding of the verb on its use in numerous other contexts to indicate ‘embezzle, purloin, pilfer’, the meaning it also has in this passage of Diodorus as well as in Acts 5:2, 3. My point is much the same as Hays’ own observation: the parallel is striking because of the similar combination of elements, my ‘system of shared property described with the *koin-* root, distributions, the case of misappropriation, and the consequence of death for such misappropriation.’ I base my understanding the meaning of the verb in this passage in Diodorus, and also its meaning in Acts 5: 2, 3 and elsewhere in the New Testament simply on its uniform, universal meaning in Hellenistic usage (as I wrote before citing the passage, ‘it always implies an illegitimate action — stealing, embezzlement, purloining or pilfering’). I then cited the results of my survey in the accompanying footnote to this statement (as here, above), before proceeding to cite Diodorus only as a particularly interesting comparative example. I cite Diodorus as an interesting example because he shows us something more about the reasons for Luke’s choice of the verb, not to base my understanding of the verb’s meaning in Acts 5, 2, 3 in on this example. The point I seek to gain from citing the Diodorus passage is how the verb is such a natural choice in Hellenistic Greek when seeking to denote the act of purloining in the context of systems of shared property. Luke himself speaks of the sharing of property, providing the common context (which is thus not ‘transferred’). The parallel is pertinent as evidence of a common nexus of ideas and terminology in both authors, what I have called ‘a number of resonances.’ This extended nexus of ideas does makes it likely that a similar, rather than a markedly different, legal reality of community of property is being described by Luke in Acts (2:44–45 and) 4:32–5:11.

³⁶ Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland (eds.), *Griechisch–deutsches Wörterbuch* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 6th edition, 1988), column 1100. I thank my friend and patron Herr Ulrich Wippermann of Bonn, my colleague Prof. Bee Scherer, and my former student Annette Borchert for confirming that *unterschlagen* always denotes an illegitimate action,

5. ‘Sold’ or ‘Handed Over’?

I close this part of my study with suggestions concerning Peter’s first question in Acts 5:4, *ou0xi me/non soi\ e1menen kai\ praqe/n e0n th~| sh~| e0cousi/a| u9ph=rxen*; For Steve Walton a ‘key weakness’ of my view is that Peter asserts *prima facie* through this rhetorical question that *prior* to handing his money over to the apostles it remained his own; according to my view Peter should say that Ananias retained title to his property *after* he handed it over to the apostles, since it would be preserved for him in a ‘blocked account.’³⁷ I observe first that it may be possible to read the participle *praqe/n* with the sylleptic sense ‘sold and handed over’, allowing it to include the idea of delivering over as well as that of sale. Peter’s question is clearly concise in its expression, as are numerous Rabbinic rulings on matters of sale and acquisition. Since his statement was first made, in my view, in a context in which all Peter’s hearers understood the conditions of the Essene novitiate, it is possible that he expressed the ideas of sale and surrender with a single word, and that when he spoke of Ananias’ property before it was ‘sold’, he implied, because of the context understood by his hearers, ‘sold and handed over’.

However, we must investigate further on this point, since it is striking that the common Hebrew and Aramaic words for ‘sell’ (Semitic root *m-k-r*) mean semantically ‘hand over’ in their original sense, coming to mean in common usage ‘sell’ because sale often involves the physical handing over of property. It is possible, therefore, that the Greek of Acts, in having Peter say ‘After it was *sold*, it was still in your power’, may restrict the sense in which Peter used this Semitic lexeme, giving an ultimately limited and therefore perhaps even technically incorrect rendering of the Semitic verb used by Peter. It is clear that Peter’s question was originally posed in a Semitic language. The Essene officer may, indeed, have emphasised, to a deceptive novice, the protection afforded him during the last phase of his novitiate by saying: ‘After you *handed over* your property,

when used in reference to money, ‘embezzle, misappropriate’; cf. Peter Terrell et al. (eds.), *Collins German Dictionary* (Glasgow: Collins, 1980), p. 691.

³⁷ I note that Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol 2 (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2013) p. 1187, observes that my suggestion that the phased entrance procedure of 1QS VI 16–22 should be understood as the relevant cultural background and ‘model’ for understanding the account of Ananias and Sapphira ‘offers a plausible account of the dynamics behind this narrative.’ He continues: ‘The text, however, refers to the funds being their own after the sale, not after their donation (5:4).’ This is exactly the objection that Steve Walton brought against the exegesis I suggest. In my first treatment of Acts 5:4 (in *JSNT* 19 (1983) pp. 117–131) I grappled at length with a related problem that the text poses, namely that while Peter seems to presuppose the right to discuss the status of the property before and after the event of sale, there is no indication within the account as we have it that Ananias made any verbal declaration that what he brought was the full sum obtained from the sale of his piece of land. To achieve a satisfactory exegesis of the account, which pays attention to all difficulties, it is necessary both to assume that the ritual of property-donation through which Ananias was passing was a fixed cultural form with the unambiguous meaning that the whole of a person’s assets were, through this action, being passed into the keeping of the community (hence Ananias could be accused of deception without having uttered a false declaration), and to emphasise that Peter referred to the event of sale (if this was the only semantic reference of his words) as preparatory for the event of donation in this unambiguous ritual form. If, on the one hand, the unambiguous meaning of the verb *nosfi/zomai* is allowed to stand — it is a point of exegesis which must not be suppressed — and on the other, Peter is held to be referring only to the status of the land after sale, but before Ananias’ depositing of it at the apostles’ feet, there seems to be simply no possible intelligible exegesis of the passage which accounts for all its detail. It is on this ground, I would argue, that we are compelled to work from the known cultural model, the progressive entrance procedure of 1 QS VI 16–20, which offers the plausible solution to the problem of Ananias’ crime (as Keener acknowledges) that he had no meritorious reason to withhold any part of his property nor to deceive the congregation by his actions since his property remained his own after passing into the care of the apostles. The interpretation of Peter’s participle *praqe/n* by reference to the broader semantic range of its semitic equivalent *m-k-r* in niphāl offered here is a plausible way to a complete solution of what without it remains an intractable impasse.

it was still in your power.’ Yet transmission between languages sometimes yields an inaccurate rendering, or perhaps, rather, a limited rendering which could only be made properly comprehensive by extensive paraphrase. The Greek of Acts conveys Peter’s essential point (Ananias’ free disposal over his property), but may render a verb which was used to denote ‘sell and hand over’, rather than simply ‘sell’, or may have been used originally only in the sense of ‘hand over’.

The usual Hebrew word for ‘sell’ is מָכַר (*makhar*). Edward Lipinski has shown that the ancient Semitic root *m-k-r* ‘signifies a transfer of possession which can, but must not necessarily, amount to a sale.’³⁸ Sale was ‘originally understood in the Semitic world’ as ‘just a particular case of delivery of possession, a rather comprehensive notion denoted by the root *mkr*’; ‘a scrutiny of the verbal and nominal use of the root *mkr* in the older texts shows that it does not apply specifically to sale, but designates delivery of possession... with or without the intent of passing ownership.’ He demonstrates the meaning ‘hand over’ in many legal passages.³⁹ In the usage of the Hebrew Bible, *m-k-r* means properly the transfer of an object, which may be, but is not always, the object of an act of sale. When we turn to study usage in post-biblical law, we find that the seminal lexicographer Jacob Levy⁴⁰ explained exactly the same point, namely that *makhar* in the *Talmudim* and *Midrashim* ‘properly’ denotes ‘exchange, hand over’ (*tauschen, übergeben*). He acknowledged that *makhar* ‘usually’ indicates ‘sell’ (*verkaufen*), but insisted that even in this usage the root ‘properly’ indicates ‘hand over the sold, exchanged object’ (*den gekauften, eingetauschten Gegenstand übergeben*).⁴¹

In my view, Peter had to emphasise precisely that Ananias was yielding his possession (i.e. control) of his property, but not his ownership of it, to the community. Peter may have expressed ‘handed over’ with *m-k-r* in niphāl. Or, his word may have been so remembered early in the tradition. According to Michael Wise’s sociolinguistic model of Judaea, both high and dialect forms of Hebrew were in use there in the first century AD. Wise also argues that Jesus probably knew both high and at least one dialect form of Hebrew.⁴² Jesus’ disciple Peter could probably express himself in dialect Hebrew. It is possible that a niphāl form of *m-k-r* was rendered into Greek with *πραξεν* on the mistaken assumption that Peter was referring back to Ananias’ earlier act of selling his property rather than speaking of his current action of handing over the proceeds from the sale. If the party responsible for rendering the account into Greek did not understand the practice of preserving the novice’s funds in a blocked account, this mistranslation would actually be highly likely.

Bible readers familiar with the language of any of the English translations in the line of descent from the ‘Authorised Version’ (or ‘King James Version’ / ‘KJV’) to the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) will be familiar with apparent usage in the book of Judges, according to which Israel’s God repeatedly ‘sold’ his people into the hands of their enemies (Judges 2:14 [in parallel with *n-t-n*, ‘give’]; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7). At 1 Samuel

³⁸ Edward Lipinski, art. *mkr*, in G. Johannes Botterweck and K. V. Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 291–296. The quotation is from p. 292.

³⁹ Edward Lipinski, ‘Sale, Transfer, and Delivery in Ancient Semitic Terminology’, in H. Klengel (ed.), *Gesellschaft und Kultur im alten Vorderasien, (Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients, 15, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1982)*, pp. 173–185, quotations from p. 176. See pp. 174–178 for his studies of Deuteronomy 15:12; Leviticus 25:13–16, 29–31, 34, 39–42; Ruth 4:3–5; Exodus 21:7–8, 37 and 22:2 (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.8.27 §272); Isaiah 50:1; 52:3–5; Amos 2:6 and Esther 7:4. In all of these texts ‘hand over’ is the proper translation.

⁴⁰ From whose progressively published *Wörterbuch* (1876–1889), for example, the German born American Marcus Jastrow’s *A Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (1886–1903) drew much.

⁴¹ Jacob Levy, *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963 [originally Leipzig, 1876–89]), Vol. 3, p. 115. Here ‘properly’ is my translation of Levy’s ‘eig.’ (= *eigentlich*), ‘usually’ my rendering of his ‘gew.’ (= *gewöhnlich*).

⁴² M. O. Wise, art. ‘Languages of Palestine’, in Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL/Leicester, InterVarsity Press), pp. 434–444, see esp. pp. 441 and 443.

12:9 Israel is ‘sold’ into the hand of Sisera; at Judges 4:9 the prophetess Deborah informs Barak that ‘the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman’. Similarly, at Deuteronomy 32:30, Moses’ song tells that Israel could not have been routed by their enemies ‘unless their Rock had *sold* them, [unless] the Lord had given them up’ (NRSV). Here *makar* is set in synonymous parallel with סגר (*s-g-r*) in hiphil (‘shut up’ or ‘deliver up’). Elijah declares to Ahab, in an idiomatic reflexive usage characteristic of the books of Kings, “you have given yourself up [NRSV ‘sold yourself’] to do what is evil” (1 Kings 21:20, cf. v. 25 and 2 Kings 17:17). Of course, none of these texts envisage the payment of a price. Lipinski’s studies show that *m-k-r* does not mean ‘sell’ in any of them, but carries only its essential root meaning, ‘hand over’, ‘deliver up’. All translations of these texts with ‘sell’ are mistaken. Since a whole tradition of modern Bible translation has misunderstood *makar* to mean ‘sell’ in many passages, despite the awkwardness of this rendering,⁴³ it is possible that such a misunderstanding may also have occurred in the transmission from Hebrew (or Aramaic) into Greek of Peter’s question about the status of Ananias’ property in the next phase of his novitiate.

After sale, and after being handed over to the congregation under the authority of the apostles, by being laid at their feet, Ananias’ property would nonetheless remain his own, as he passed to the next phase of a progressive procedure through which he might in future, at the conclusion of the whole process, actually be allowed to divest himself of his property, finally joining the possessionless life of the apostles’ circle. In the Jerusalem and Judaeen social and cultural context in which this process was fully understood, and had indeed been practised amongst the Essenes for more than a century at the time of the events recounted in Acts, indeed within a within a particular Essene religious community in Jerusalem which employed this process, a community into which, as we have argued in the earlier parts of this study, Jesus had himself sought to integrate his travelling group of disciples with its common purse, at a moment when others too were seeking to make the same social transition to a closer relationship to the apostles’ common purse as applicant participants, Peter may have used a form of *m-k-r* in niphil to indicate the present moment of handing over, rather than the recently and immediately past event of sale, of Ananias’ property. Or, he may have used *m-k-r* in niphil in momentary sylleptic wise, denoting both ideas, ‘sold and handed over’ with a single word, a linguistic usage possible because both the wider meaning ‘hand over’ as well as the more specific meaning ‘sell’ were inherent in the verb *m-k-r*, and because, in the rhetorical context of his utterance, the point that Ananias’ property remained as much his own before being ‘sold and handed over’ as afterwards was clear to all his original hearers, allowing concise expression in which one word denoted both ideas simultaneously. It is possible that Peter expressed himself in an overly concise way, and that this was authentically remembered, resulting in the puzzle which interpreters of Luke’s story of Ananias and Sapphira’s deceptive property-donation have often detected, and sought to solve by various means. Certainly, outside the original Judaeen social context in which the Essene procedure of phased entry over a prolonged period into membership of a fully property-sharing communal life were not readily understood, Peter’s words to Ananias might easily be misunderstood, resulting in an apparent reference to the more easily understood, and known, preparatory event of sale rather than the

⁴³ My late colleague, the highly esteemed teacher of English language Dr. Stephen Bax, applied his keen sense for language usage to my observations above and pointed out to me that in early English ‘sell’ could mean ‘to give’ in various senses, including ‘to hand over (something, esp. food, a gift)’, ‘to deliver up (a person, esp. a hostage)’; and ‘to give up (a person) treacherously to his enemies; to betray’. ‘Sell’ in English therefore originally had a similar semantic range to the Hebrew root *makar*. This may imply that the first English translations of the Bible sometimes used ‘sell’ to denote ‘hand over’, ‘deliver up’. Cf. art. ‘sell’ in J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. XIV (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), pp. 934–936. The definitions cited here are from sections B1 and B2, cf. also B3e.

less readily understood phenomenon of the physical transfer to the apostles' management of the sum generated by Ananias' sale of his asset, while it remained, legally, still his own property.