

Scholar doubts Essenes existed

by UPI

JERUSALEM -- An Israeli scholar claims a priestly caste banished from the Temple of Jerusalem wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls rather than the Essenes, as widely believed.

Most biblical scholars say the scrolls found in 1947 in the caves of Qumran were written by Essenes, an ascetic Jewish community who lived in canyons near the Dead Sea in the first century A.D.

Rachel Eior, a prominent scholar doubts the Essenes existed and says she believes they were an invention of Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, Time magazine reported Tuesday.

Eior, who teaches at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, contends Josephus fabricated the Essenes to impress Romans, portraying the Essenes as similar to Spartans, who the Romans considered the highest ideal of human behavior.

Eior theorizes the real authors of the scrolls were members of the banished priestly caste of Zadok who hid the scrolls in Qumran for safekeeping.

Eior's theories don't sit well with James Charlesworth, director of the Dead Sea Scrolls project at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. Charlesworth told Time at least eight scholars in antiquity have referred to the Essenes, not just Josephus.

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