

(Hindley, David C) Analysis of Pliny the Elder's description of Essenes in NH 5.17 English (2024-01-12)

<i>The Natural History.</i> Pliny the Elder. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S. H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A. London. Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. 1855. (Some clauses relocated to match Latin order)	<i>Naturalis Historia.</i> Pliny the Elder. Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff. Lipsiae. Teubner. 1906.	Google Translation
<p>N.H. Bk 5, chapter (17.) Lying on the west [of Asphaltites],</p> <p>[[are the Esseni,]]</p> <p>and sufficiently distant to escape its noxious exhalations,</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>a people that live apart from the world,</p> <p>and marvellous beyond all others throughout the whole earth,</p> <p>for they have no women among them;</p> <p>to sexual desire they are strangers;</p> <p>money they have none;</p> <p>the palm-trees are their only companions.</p> <p>Day after day, however, their numbers are fully recruited</p> <p>by multitudes of strangers that resort to them,</p> <p>[[and wearied with the miseries of life]]</p>	<p>Plin. Nat. 5.29 ab occidente litora</p> <p>esseni</p> <p>fugiant usque qua nocent,</p> <p>gens sola</p> <p>et in toto orbe praeter ceteras mira,</p> <p>sine ulla femina,</p> <p>omni venere abdicata,</p> <p>sine pecunia,</p> <p>socia palmarum.</p> <p>in diem ex aequo convenarum turba renascitur,</p> <p>large frequentantibus</p> <p>quos vita fessos</p>	<p>Pliny Nat. 5.29 from the western shores of</p> <p>Essenes</p> <p>they flee as far as they hurt,</p> <p>a nation alone</p> <p>and in the whole world apart from other wonders,</p> <p>without any woman</p> <p>renounced all love</p> <p>without money,</p> <p>an associate of palm trees.</p> <p>in a day from an equal crowd is reborn,</p> <p>large attendance</p> <p>those who are tired of life</p>

driven thither to adopt their usages	ad mores eorum	to their behavior
by the tempests of fortune, [...].	fortuna fluctibus agit.	fortune acts in waves.
Thus it is, that through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, this people eternally prolongs its existence, without a single birth taking place there; so fruitful a source of population to it is	ita per saeculorum milia - incredibile dictu – gens aeterna est, in qua nemo nascitur. tam fecunda illis aliorum vitae paenitentia est!	thus for thousands of centuries - an incredible saying – the nation is eternal, in which no one is born. the repentance of the lives of others is so fruitful for them!

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Pliny the Elder, Natural History, Book 5, chapter:

(17.) Lying on the west of Asphaltites, and sufficiently distant to escape its noxious exhalations, are the Esseni⁽²⁹⁾,

- a people that live apart from the world,
- and marvellous beyond all others throughout the whole earth,
 - for they have no women among them;
 - to sexual desire they are strangers;
 - money they have none;
 - the palm-trees are their only companions.
- Day after day, however, their numbers are fully recruited by multitudes of strangers that resort to them,
 - driven thither to adopt their usages by the tempests of fortune,
 - and wearied with the miseries of life.
- Thus it is, that through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, this people eternally prolongs its existence,
- without a single birth taking place there;
- so fruitful a source of population to it is
- that weariness of life which is felt by others.

²⁹ The Essenes, or Hessesenes.

These properly formed one of the great sects into which the Jews were divided in the time of Christ.

They are not mentioned by name in the New Testament,

but it has been conjectured that they are alluded to in Matt. xix. 12, and Col. ii. 18, 23.

As stated here by Pliny, they generally lived at a distance from large towns,

in communities which bore a great resemblance to the monkish societies of later times.

They sent gifts to the Temple at Jerusalem, but never offered sacrifices there.

They were divided into four classes, according to the time of their initiation.

Their origin is uncertain.

Some writers look upon them as the same as the Assidians, or Chasidim, mentioned in 1 Maccabees, ii. 42, vii. 13.

Their principal society was probably the one mentioned by Pliny,

and from this other smaller ones proceeded, and spread over Palestine, Syria, and Egypt.

The Essenes of Egypt were divided into two sects;

the practical Essenes, whose mode of life was the same as those of Palestine;

and the contemplative Essenes, who were called Therapeutae.

Both sects maintained the same doctrines;

but the latter were distinguished by a more rigid mode of life.

It has been suggested by Taylor, the editor of 'Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible,' that John the Baptist belonged to this sect.

Naturalis Historia. Pliny the Elder. Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff. Lipsiae. Teubner. 1906.

Plin. Nat. 5.29

ab occidente litora essenii fugiunt usque qua nocent, gens sola et in toto orbe praeter ceteras mira, sine ulla femina, omni venere abdicata, sine pecunia, socia palmarum. in diem ex aequo convenarum turba renascitur, large frequentantibus quos vita fessos ad mores eorum fortuna fluctibus agit. ita per saeculorum milia - incredibile dictu - gens aeterna est, in qua nemo nascitur. tam fecunda illis aliorum vitae paenitentia est! infra hos engada oppidum fuit, secundum ab hierosolymis fertilitate palmetorumque nemoribus, nunc alterum bustum. inde masada castellum in rupe, et ipsum haut procul asphaltite. et hactenus iudaea est.