

On whether the three historical records of the Essene sect were Roman government propaganda (Article 8)

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Abstract

This paper describes how the mythical Jewish sect called the Essene, can be understood as Roman Government propaganda, aiming to help mold the behavior of peoples from diverse backgrounds, into compliance and acceptance of extreme social control, after they had accepted Jesus and Emperor worship, and in a manner that exactly aligns with the goals of Emperor Titus.

The current state of the debate on the Essene

When assessing the historicity of the famous 'Essene sect', we should start by acknowledging that there are over a billion people – i.e. Christians and Christian scholars – who have a strong vested interest in believing, and convincing others, that the Essene did exist. The reason that Christians seek to convince everyone that the Essene existed, is partly because it is the only philosophy that Jesus' teachings align with, to the extent that they feel Jesus must have been a leader of the Essene.

If Christians could somehow convince the world that the Essene existed, they could then argue that Jesus' teachings align with a more traditional way of life that was practiced by small but pious and virtuous communities. However if the Essene – and therefore their alleged philosophy – could be shown to be fictional, it would point to Jesus' near-identical philosophy also being fictional.

The desperation of Christian claims that there is evidence the Essene existed.

The main effort by Christians to argue the Essene existed, is found in their continued attempts to assert that Qumran was an Essene settlement. We can see this desperation in the fact that the archeology team announced they had discovered the first Essene settlement, before actually digging very much of it up, and indeed before analyzing the library of scrolls found there.

So what was their rationale for suggesting it was the first ever Essene settlement discovered? To a reasonable approximation, this can be summed up in 1) the fact they had dug pools for water, 2) they had communal eating areas, and 3) it lies not quite in the general vicinity of the large region where one of the sources suggested Essene settlements had existed.

Now, it's true that the original sources describe the Essene as practicing bathing, but the Qumran site is in a very arid region right next to the vast and completely undrinkable salt water of the Dead Sea, so surely it's more likely they needed these pools primarily for water storage? It's also true that the original sources describe the Essene as practicing communal eating, but so did a vast number of tiny rural communities all around the world, so this 'evidence' is remarkable in how unpersuasive it is.

And as to the idea that Qumran's location falls within the very large region in which the original source suggested Essene settlements had been, it isn't entirely a match either. Unlike several important locations, notably Jerusalem, Qumran is not 'above the town of Ein Gedi'. Instead, it is located further round the shore of the Dead Sea, so the location is also not evidence of it being Essene.

Indeed, ever since their big announcement, a slow trickle of evidence has emerged suggesting it was not Essene. For example remains of women and children were found, which two out of three original sources – rather ludicrously – say were not permitted in Essene sects. And they also found bones in debris indicating an animal-based diet, which is completely at odds with the Essene who apparently only ate one foodstuff per meal in the most spartan fashion, i.e. implicitly vegetarian.

But here's the clincher:

If there was one thing you would be guaranteed to find mentioned in a Christian library, it's Jesus Christ. It would be the dominant topic of most of the books. And by analogy, the one thing you'd be guaranteed to find in a library of religious scrolls belonging to a settlement of the fabled minority Jewish Essene sect, would some mention of the Essene sect or its beliefs. The fact that not a single one of the Dead Sea Scrolls talks about the Essene sect, or for that matter even mentions the word 'Essene', should surely be the end of the argument, and the continued noise from Christian scholars rehashing relatively minor points of debate, only underscores their desperation.

Reasons to think the Essene didn't exist (or else were nothing like how they were described):

1. There are no surviving writings, buildings, tombs, etc or any physical evidence for the existence of the Essene (Qumran being laughable).
2. There are only three original sources claiming first-hand knowledge that it existed - Philo, Pliny and Josephus. It's hardly impressive.
3. One of the three sources – Josephus Flavius – has been shown to be fictional, and indeed just a pen name of the Roman Government to spread propaganda (see my 4th article, section 3f and 3h where I show that his supposed autobiographical life story in War of the Jews, is a covert parody of Jesus' story, and the parallels involved in this parody help form the APTVS signature).
4. There is only one record of a person claiming that they had been a member of the Essene Sect – namely Josephus Flavius – and, as per point 3 above, we can demonstrate that he is fictional.
5. All three of the original sources are closely associated with the 1st century Roman Government.
6. **All three of the original sources are closely associated with Emperor Titus – as follows:**
 - A. Philo of Alexandria. **He had a nephew who helped Titus lead their forces to destroy Jerusalem¹.**
 - B. Pliny the Younger. **He was raised by his uncle Pliny the Elder, who was a close friend of Titus.**
 - C. Josephus Flavius. **'He' claims close affiliation and trusted relationship with Titus.**

I will come back to the importance of point 6 later, since this is key.

¹ According to War of the Jews.

If all three sources are associated with Titus, does that mean all three sources originate from his reign?

No. And I think that the reality was a little more complicated.

I suspect one or two of the sources – Philo and Pliny – predate Titus’ reign, and that Philo in particular perhaps predates the Flavian era entirely. It’s possible the writing about the Essene published in Philo’s name (whether Philo actually wrote it or not is a completely separate question) is an earlier Roman government attempt to convince the Jews to adopt a culture of humility, pacifism, and acceptance of oppression (conceivably with similar timing to the production of the Pauline epistles, e.g. under the authority of a previous emperor).

It’s also possible that War of the Jews deliberately associates Philo with Titus, when perhaps there was no valid basis to do so, as this would align with the apparent goal (implicitly identified in my 4th article), of making everything as much as possible, to seem to be about Titus.

My guess is that War of the Jews took advantage of, and builds on those two earlier sources for the Essene (just as Luke’s story builds on the limited detail of Jesus’ life in the Pauline epistles), and I see it as deviating from their descriptions in specific ways that align with Titus’ objectives, which I will discuss later.

How the practices of this supposedly Jewish sect are ludicrously implausible, incompatible with being Jewish, and curiously aligned with Titus Flavius’ goals.

For this discussion I will canter through what the original three sources tell us about the Essene. Bear in mind these three sources offer us the sum total of what is known about the Essene by authors claiming to have first-hand knowledge of it.

So let’s see what Philo, Pliny and Josephus’ publications tell us about the Essene:

1. **They allow only one food per meal, and since they live and eat in the most spartan fashion, this single food cannot realistically be meat, so therefore they are vegetarian.**

It’s quite a stretch to imagine this could be a real way of life. But an interesting implication of not allowing more than one food per meal, is that you then cannot perform the annual Jewish Passover sacrifice, since this explicitly requires two foods - Lamb and unleavened bread.

2. **They don’t sacrifice living animals, but dedicate themselves to the service of God.**

Now the reason the Roman government would publish information promoting this model of pious living starts to become clear.

If a Jew could be convinced to follow Jesus, and then to accept these descriptions of the Essene as their guide for how a more pious traditional people lived prior to what Jesus called the ‘evil generation’, then the teaching of “only one foodstuff per meal” along with not performing sacrifices, leads to them not performing the Passover ritual – which requires sacrificing a living animal.

As the reader might be aware, it’s the Passover ritual that binds the Jewish people together as a nation, and makes them meet as a family to pass on their culture, and collectively retell the story of their escape from Egypt and sacred covenant with God, and – most importantly – makes them eject non-Jews from their homes, thereby preventing intermarriage without conversion, and maintaining the purity of the Jewish nation.

If there was any doubt that the government wanted to put a stop to Passover, notice how, centuries later, the Roman Catholic Church instituted a non-meat based festival (i.e. Easter) with the same lunar based movable feast rules to coincide with Passover, thereby preventing people from performing Passover without their absence from Church being noticed.

Notice also that it doesn’t say they devote themselves to the service of the Jewish God – just to ‘God’.

3. They never pick up weapons...

This doesn't sound like Judaism at all. The whole ethos of Judaism is being a nation that fought to escape being enslaved, as led by their warrior God, and then awaiting their Messiah who would be a military warrior and lead them to victory. They had just spent a century in on-and-off conflict with Rome - it was non-stop fighting.

Again, the agenda of the Roman Government is fairly obvious. It aims to convince 1st Century Jews, indeed especially those who had accepted Jesus' story, to put down their weapons.

4. ...but War of the Jews states that as an exception they will carry weapons to fight 'Robbers'.

Why would the story offer this exception? We find the answer in War of the Jews where the Jewish leadership is repeatedly referred to as robbers, for having stolen Judea from Rome, thereby forcing Rome's invasion to retake it.

This suggests a more subtle message, which is that once the Jews have converted to Jesus (and as shown in my 4th article – to accept Titus as their god), they should be willing to fight against Rome's enemies. We can see this aligning with Titus' objectives, once we appreciate that Titus wasn't only hoping to convert the Jews to Jesus, as a stepping stone to worship of himself, but he also aimed to convert the Legions in the same manner. That's why War of the Jews had to offer this specific exception.

5. They do not marry or have sex or indeed have women or children, and yet sustain their numbers for 'thousands of ages'...

This is ludicrous. No community can sustain even a generation without children, let alone thousands of years, or indeed thousands of ages. Simply didn't happen.

It points to an objective of convincing men to willingly live apart from women. As discussed, this might be to convince Jews or slaves accept their place in work camps, and/or might be because this message will also be used to influence the behavior of followers of Jesus and Titus who work and fight in the Legions.

6. ...but War of the Jews contradicts the apparently earlier Philo and Pliny, claiming there were two orders of the Essene sect: one doesn't completely ban marriage, and the other entirely allows it.

Why would this be? I think the answer is that the (probably earlier) literature from Philo and Pliny simply aimed to facilitate oppression of Jews, however War of the Jews was part of a larger project aiming to convert the slaves, Legions and commoners of all faiths to believe in Jesus and then Titus, and for these audiences it was necessary to offer a second model that facilitates reproduction, to help the Empire's workforce grow rather than dwindle.

7. They work long hours, eat in silence, and are arranged in classes, with the higher classes controlling the lower ones, and they are not allowed to do anything of their free will except to help others. To do anything else requires permission of their in-house curators.

Again, we can see a model for living within a heavily controlled commune, and the emphasis on rigid control and only doing as instructed, sounds very much like working in the Legions. Notice how parallel this is to Jesus' instruction to publicans to 'do exactly no more than is appointed to you'.

8. The name of their 'Legislator' after God, is a matter of great veneration.

Notice that, again, the text of War of the Jews is silent as to who this Legislator is. In Whiston's famous translation from the 1600's he added [Moses] after the word Legislator, apparently feeling the need to fill this odd silence. But as shown in my 7th article, Titus' goal was to present Jesus, and thus himself, as the new Legislator.

9. If anyone blasphemes the name of the legislator, they are sentenced to death.

This comment in War of the Jews is interesting because in Luke it is not Jesus who cannot be blasphemed, but rather the Holy Ghost which in Greek is 'Agion Pneuma' which in turn represents the letters AP in the APTVS signature (see my 4th article for details and evidence).

As I mention in my earlier articles, I leave it to the reader to decide whether this Arrius Piso is a title used by Titus to enable him to be referenced covertly in the Gospels, or is a separate but undocumented royal.

10. They believe that anyone in a position of authority must have been put there by God.

The hidden agenda here hardly needs explaining.

11. There is no other people that live communally, that is so thoroughly established in fact.

If you don't have evidence, why not assert that there is evidence as a substitute for providing it.

12. The original sources suggest vaguely that the Essene lived in "many places" and in unspecified "town and cities", and only War of the Jews offers a location: Jerusalem.

Why is the (apparently earlier) literature from Philo and Pliny so vague?

Why does War of the Jews offer Jerusalem as the one location it is willing to identify? Notice that War of the Jews was written just after Jerusalem had been utterly destroyed so completely as to leave no stone upon another?

Could the reason be that all three authors knew full well that the Essene never existed and didn't want to offer details that could be used to prove them wrong?

Why it is so noteworthy that all three sources for the Essene are closely linked with Emperor Titus?

By now it should be apparent to any readers of my 4th article, that Titus is responsible for the most detailed account of War of the Jews, and wanted it published to guide the culture and practices of the diverse demographics who he planned to draw into worshipping Jesus and then himself, in order that he could embed sustained acceptance of extreme social inequality and hierarchical social control.

The following observations will help show this:

1. All three sources for the Essene are linked to the Roman Government, and to Emperor Titus.
2. These descriptions of the Essene are blatantly ludicrous, and deeply incompatible with Judaism.
3. The Essene philosophy matches the teachings of Jesus.
4. Nobody disputes that War of the Jews was produced under Vespasian and Titus' authority (indeed it states this), and this is the source offering the most detail about the Essene sect.
5. In my 4th article I provide proof that Titus and Vespasian's government created Jesus' story as set out in Luke, and included covert messages enabling Titus to be revealed as his second coming.
6. I also show that Titus' family did this to convert the Jews, the Legions and also commoners and slaves of all faiths, into an utterly compliant workforce.
7. The government needed most of its peoples to have children to sustain and grow the workforce – for example commoners in the fields, including any converted ex-Jews. For others, the government needed them to willingly tolerate the lack of access to womenfolk – for example the lowest ranks of the Legions, the Navy, those working in mines, and some slaves, especially eunuchs (**i.e. there are two types of audience, fraternization being encouraged in one, and the other where people should tolerate it being unavailable**).
8. War of the Jews describes and indeed lauds the ways of the Essene, offering them as a model for pious living that could be seen as virtuous, which involves acceptance of poverty, hard work, and extreme hierarchical control – but **it presents two Essene models for virtuous living: one allowing fraternization, and the other nearly banning it**.
9. In Luke, Jesus tells (implicitly Roman) soldiers to accept low pay, says that followers should go into all nations making them disciples (evoking an invasion force) baptizing them (which readers of my 4th article will observe was a metaphor for Titus' attack drowning John's forces), and describes the man who has the greatest faith in Israel as being a (implicitly Roman) centurion, and even suggests that some men would voluntarily become eunuchs for 'the kingdom of heaven's sake'.

From these observations alone, it becomes clear that the three published descriptions of the Essene sect are fictional government propaganda aiming to provide a model that the believers of Jesus, and later

Titus, could be led to accept as a model of pious virtue, in order that they would then tolerate being forced to live in a society matching that description.

The model permitting women, children and marriage would be held up for commoners working the fields, as well as the middle and upper ranks of the Legions, whilst those sent to work in the baggage section of the Legions, or the Navy, mines, or in some slave populations, could be presented with the model that promotes acceptance of a lack of access to womenfolk.

Summary

Using the evidence (in my 4th article) that Jesus' story was created to lead the Jews, Legions and commoners to start worshipping Emperor Titus Flavius as Jesus' second coming, we can see that the original sources for the existence of the Essene, including War of the Jews produced under Flavian reign, were presenting a model for virtuous traditional living, that could be used to guide the culture and practices of the eventual Titus-worshipping believers, and help quell any protest or call for social change.

The description of the Essene, especially in War of the Jews, gives us an important insight into the objectives of Emperor Titus, and the reasons that Jesus' story was created. In particular it shows that Titus didn't merely want people to worship him so that nobody could unseat his reign. His goal was to instill beliefs in the peoples of Europe that would cause widespread and generationally sustained acceptance of the most extreme social inequality, suffering, poverty and slavery, that was the hallmark of the Empire around that time.

As explained in my 4th article, this project barely got off the starting blocks because both Vespasian and Titus died unexpectedly, with Titus dying just two years after gaining the throne from his father. His successor Domitian showed reluctant interest in the project, and his successors would have been keen to shut it down entirely, since a religion designed to promote sole worship of their predecessor could only be a threat to their hold on the throne.

Whilst this does not prove there was never a sect called the Essene, it shows that if there had been, it certainly did not have the characteristics ascribed to it.