

## Pliny, Natural History V, xv: The Solitary Essenes

Greco-Roman Period

*In contrast to Josephus' Essenes who marry for purposes of propagation, Pliny's Essenes never marry. While Josephus says that this sect is found in every city, Pliny locates them on the western coast of the Dead Sea. This account has been a major linchpin in the identification of Qumran on the shore of the Dead Sea as an Essene center.*

On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes which is remarkable beyond all the other tribes of the whole world as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of persons tired of life and driven there by the waves of fortune to adopt their manners. Thus, through thousands of ages (incredible to relate) a race in which no one is born lives on forever- so prolific for their advantage is other men's weariness of life!

Lying below the Essenes was formerly the town of Engedi, second only to Jerusalem in the fertility of its land and in its groves of palm trees, but now like Jerusalem a heap of ashes. Next comes Masada, a fortress on a rock, itself also not far from the Dead Sea. This is the limit of Judaea.