

written by the Essenes who, according to the 1st century CE Jewish historian Josephus, flourished in Judea from the 2nd century BCE to the 1st century CE, at the time of Jesus and just before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. But already in the 1950's, in the infancy of Scroll scholarship, at least two respected Hebrew University professors of Semitic linguistics Moshe Goshen-Gottstein and Chaim Rabin questioned that theory. Elior says their minority-view arguments were marginalized or dismissed entirely.

Another, more sensational illustration of the passions that the debate arouses came in early March, with the arrest in New York of Raphael Golb, son of University of Chicago Jewish historian Norman Golb, on suspicion of using dozens of Internet aliases to reinforce his father's case and defame one of his critics. The senior Golb, also an expert on the Cairo Genizah library of documents which were found in the 19th century, has been arguing for years that the scrolls were the work of many diverse groups. He has also argued that the Qumran complex was not an Essene monastery but a fortress for Jews fleeing Roman invaders. Author of the 1996 book "Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls? The Search for the Secret of Qumran," Golb has accused mainstream scholars of trying to silence him and of constituting a united sect no less fanatic than the Qumran sect.

Referring to the Golb affair, Elior told *The Jerusalem Report*: "It's a personal tragedy for the Golb family which has nothing to do with my book or what I have to say." She says the measures taken by the Golb son were extreme and unacceptable, however it's legitimately infuriating that the senior Golb's views were automatically dismissed by others.

**T**HE ESSENES ARE MENTIONED by at least four 1st century sources: Philo of Alexandria, the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher; Pliny the Elder, the Roman author; Josephus, who said they lived in celibate abstinence from worldly pleasures, including sex; and the slightly later Dio Chrysostom, the Greek philosopher and historian. But Elior asserts that what she calls Josephus' "invented" writings on the subject were erroneously repeated in subsequent centuries. She says that the Essenes are, in fact, a "legend" and aren't even mentioned in the scrolls whose English-language translation fills 39 volumes. "Philo was telling a story. It is absurd to think that for so many years, such a large group of people, numbering in the thousands, led a celibate life, which is against the Jewish imperative to 'go forth and multiply' and are hardly ever men-

tioned. In fact that's because the Essenes never existed. The argument was made in the 1950's. I'm just making the same argument again and louder."

Speaking passionately, Elior theorizes that Josephus, a former Jewish priest who wrote his history in Rome, invented the fable to rebut negative Roman stereotypes about the Jews. "So he created an 'imaginary' Jewish sect of virtuous, Spartan-like people who lived communally and survived by adopting masses of orphans." She conjectures that Josephus likely chose that model because he knew that the Romans admired the Spartans. The real authors, she says, were likely the Sadducees, descendants of Zadok, the Israelites' high priest under King David. The Sadducees served as high priests until 175 BCE, when they were ousted by the Hasmoneans and were banished from the Temple. "When the renegade sons of Zadok, who were deeply conservative, left Jerusalem, they took with them their library which was all about their priestly heritage." She theorizes that they took the library to isolated Qumran for safekeeping because Jewish life was unstable in Jerusalem. Elior notes that there has always been a secondary debate among scholars whether the scrolls were actually written in Qumran or just brought there for storage.

Elior's theory has been rapidly and roundly rejected by mainstream scholars who angrily insist that she is blithely overturning 60 years of careful research and that her field is not the period of the scrolls, but Jewish mysticism of later periods. "She hasn't even published a single thing in a scholarly Dead Sea Scroll journal," charges Bar-Ilan University archeology professor Hanan Eshel.

Dr. Adolfo Roitman, curator of the Shrine of the Book, which houses the Dead Sea Scroll collection at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, tells *The Report* that he too "strongly disagrees" with Elior. He has not read her book, but says: "I don't see any reason to refute careful scholarship which says that the Essenes existed and wrote the scrolls." Roitman says that he is confident that the Essenes were a genuine sect and he points out that they are referred to, in great detail by Josephus, Pliny, Philo and Dio Chrysostom. "The fact that they are not mentioned elsewhere is irrelevant," he continues. "Many significant ancient sects were only casually mentioned. That's how ancient historiography works, that is what we have." He cites the Herodians, a sect mentioned infrequently in the New Testament as having shown an unfriendly disposition towards Jesus as well as a sect of monastic healers who lived outside Alexandria who are mentioned only by Philo.

Roitman says that Josephus is a kind of "ancient ethnographer" and he is describing "a group at odds with contemporary Greco-Roman society." He says Elior is reading the ancient sources, "in a simplistic way. She has adopted a very problematic approach to ancient historiography."

**S**INCE THE FULL PUBLICATION OF the scrolls eight years ago, the field has been opened up to scholars in a wide range of fields, from women's studies to philology. Elior and Golb are part of that new wave of scholars who came to the Dead Sea Scrolls from other disciplines.

Born and raised in Israel, Elior says she stumbled on the possibility that the Essenes were a utopian fiction by chance, because of her academic interest in the history of Jewish mysticism. Her 1987 sabbatical at Oxford University coincided with Hebrew University professor Emanuel Tov's monumental editing of the scrolls there. "The printing press was at Oxford and I spent my time reading the volumes as they were published. I noticed that the scrolls were deeply connected to priestly memory and affiliated with subjects that related to Sadducee tradition. The fact is, it was their library, they wrote it."

She admits breezily that she's an "outsider" in the cloistered world of Dead Sea Scroll scholarship. "But so what, if I came to the subject in a round-about way?" she asks. "I have been studying the Dead Sea Scrolls for many years. I make no remarks about archeology, only on texts that everybody can read." She insists that "an unbiased reader" will come to the same conclusion that she has. But the Essene thesis, she says, was and remains the majority opinion. Scholars who have questioned the existence of the Essenes have been severely criticized since the 1950's and continue to be spurned today, she says, citing Golb.

The Essenes were first mentioned by Philo, who died in the year 50 CE. He wrote that there were more than 4,000 Essenes living in villages throughout the Land of Israel. He claimed that these people lived simply and had no earthly possessions, studied and strictly observed the Sabbath. They were steeped in high ideals and love of God, led a communal life and possessed no slaves. The second "witness," Pliny the Elder who died in the year 79, mentioned Ein Gedi, next to the Dead Sea, as their place of residence, a location that Elior asserts was too small an area to accommodate so many inhabitants. Josephus, writing in the last third of the 1st century in Rome, provides the third testimony. He relates much the same information,