

## TALES FROM THE OUTHOUSE

Evidence for an ancient latrine in Qumran, a settlement on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea in Israel, has bolstered the idea that Qumran was occupied by the Essenes, a strict, all-male Jewish sect linked to the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Some years ago James Tabor, a scholar of early Christianity at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, spotted what appeared to be the remains of ancient toilet stalls behind a bluff about 1000 meters northwest of the Qumran camp. Recent soil samples turned up intestinal parasites specific to humans.

The find supports the notion that the Essenes did in fact inhabit Qumran from around 150 B.C.E. to 70 C.E., Tabor reports in the forthcoming issue of the journal *Revue de Qumran*. The men apparently

followed toiletry practices prescribed in the scrolls, which included placement of

latrines out of sight of camp and burial of feces.

The latrine may also help explain why more than 90% of the men interred in a Qumran graveyard died before age 40.

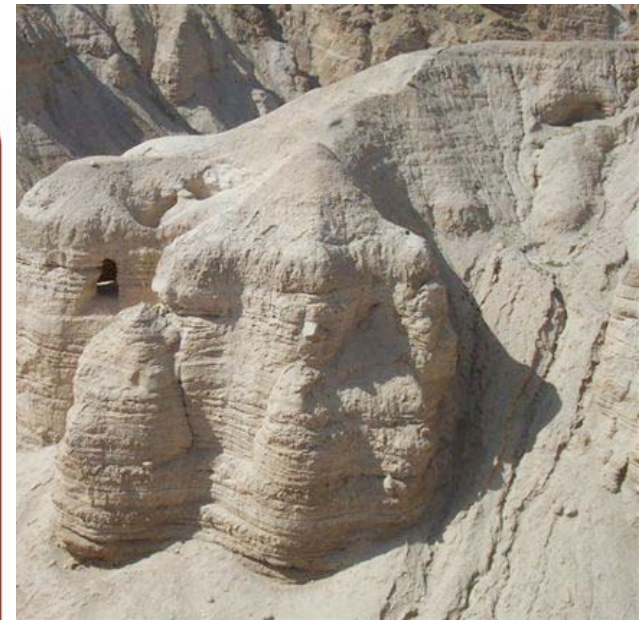
Burial of feces meant that intestinal parasites survived

rather than being dried up in the sun, says Tabor. The men evidently tracked the pathogens into a pool they were required to immerse themselves in on returning to camp. "In effect, the pool becomes a toxic waste pool," he says.

"There is a great deal of debate among scholars about how [Qumran] functioned and who lived there," says historian Joan Branham of Providence College in Rhode Island. "The discovery of a possible latrine could be an important piece of the overall puzzle."



**Alleged latrine is behind rocks at upper left.**



Which parasites do you think they meant??



**Dead Sea Scrolls**