

Mythmaking of Masada

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Abstract:

After Israel gained their independence in 1948, the nation's antiquities held no artifacts of the nation's history. The use of archeology at this time was to create a nationalistic history that would boost morale for Israeli Citizens for the up and coming battles against neighboring countries in the 1960s and 1970s. The fight to become a sovereign state, began with the interpretation of history and the archeological sites that followed. In this paper, the ancient site of Masada, will be investigated for how political intentions tend to get in the way of interpretation of history. With this the grand illusion of mythmaking in history, comes into effect while trying to create a credible source for an historical event. The use of military and the morale of citizens, helped create a bind between historical fact and historical myth. Masada, since its excavation in the years 1963-1965, has shown how history can be skewed to fit the narrative of the victors.

Mythmaking of Masada

By: Emma Wishau

Introduction

As the sun lays its warmth across the dry and barren land, a meager tourist sits at the foot of one of the world's ancient wonders. Placed west of the Dead Sea in the Judean desert, Masada has sat as a plateau fortress for over two thousand years. Before the herd of tourists take to the cable car for their ascent to the very top, they enter into a small theatre to watch a short film. This film was made to not only inform a visitor of Masada's history, but also to entertain them as well. After the short film, a visitor has a view of a more of a mocking, light hearted play on history of Masada. The doors open automatically, the warm sunlight creeps into the air conditioned dark room. From here, stepping onto the cable car patio, the visitors find themselves squinting back the rays to see the fortress more clearly for the first time. While waiting at the bottom for the next cable car to make its ascent, one can feel the excitement in the air. Squeezing into the cramped cable car, the ascent gives a beautiful view of the Dead Sea, as well as the 'snake path' that had been used for thousands of years, as a passage up the steep plateau. For an ordinary tourist, who has no background in Israeli history loses touch of what the story of Masada actually is.

As an outsider, they do not know that the Israeli army actually used to induct new recruits on top of this plateau, on the last day of training. As a tourist, there is no capability of imagining the young and eager faces spending their last night in training, hiking through the terrain to only climb the 'snake path' to the summit, before sunrise, to be sworn into the Israeli Defense Force. An ordinary tourist, does not hear the words echoed as day breaks over the plateau, by the noted

general, professor, and archeologist, Yigael Yadin, whom during the ceremony conducted in the summer of 1963, is quoted telling young recruits enthusiastically:

“When Napoleon stood among his troops next to the pyramids of Egypt, he declared that ‘four thousand years of history look down upon you.’ But what would he not have given to be able to say to his men: four thousand years of your own history look down upon you.”

-Yigael Yadin¹.

The images of heroic ancient Jewish history, are lost upon the ignorant face of the modern day tourism. The controversial history that is ‘Masada’ has been debated by scholars for almost a century now. With the only written narrative of Masada, coming from only one source, archeological findings at the site can only interpreted as they lay.

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) no longer swear their new recruits on top of Masada. The interpretation of Masada as a historical site has been skewed by scholars since the beginning of its written history. The political atmosphere that takes place at an archeological site, can influence what the interpretation of the history of the site will be. The influence of the interpretation of history can only be magnified when it is brought to the attention of the public, by doing so this leave little room in the compelling interpretation formed, for contradictory sources. In the case of Masada, it was placed as a symbolic site for Israeli Nationalism in the 20th century. At the turn of the century though, the interpretation would transition into a myth, and the mighty tale of Masada will lose significance among the people. In the heat of the moment, it was necessary for those affiliated with the site to draw from the compelling narrative that was given to them, instead of the hard facts they found while digging for the truth. Yigael Yadin received the name “Mr. Masada” which over time since his work on the site as an

¹ Silberman, Neil Asher. *A prophet from amongst you the life of Yigael Yadin: soldier, scholar, and mythmaker of modern Israel*. Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. 1993. Pg. 275

archeologist, has evolved to be more spiteful than its original purpose. It is left to an ordinary visitor of Masada to decide to either consider this site as a myth or as fact.

Narrative History of Masada

The history of Masada is written by the famous ancient Jewish Roman historian Josephus. Popular to this day, Josephus' name has echoed through the centuries. He is the only written account that historians, archeologists, and other fields in the academic world have been able to find and use for Masada specifically. In 35BCE, King Herod decided on fortifying this remote palace on top of this plateau in the Dead Sea region.² Even though the story of Masada through the ages, may not have begun at this specific time, it is the most controversial century of the fortress. This is where the narrative of Josephus begins.

King Herod was given the title 'King of the Jews' and because of his Roman background, was not considered a popular candidate among his subjects in the Judean kingdom. Fearing revolt, and also the pressing threat of Queen Cleopatra, of Egypt, King Herod felt the need of making himself and his family a safe haven in this remote Dead Sea area.³ The fortress Masada had already existed and after some modifications to this hillside safe haven, it was finally fit for a king. This site has evidence of storage halls that could store enough food, liquids, and oils, to survive on the plateau during a long lasting siege.⁴ The noted water cisterns that were found by the amateur archeologist, Gutman, found in his ten day excavation in 1953, were along a

² Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

³ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

⁴ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

magnificent discovery of Roman like technology working.⁵ Along with the storage halls, these large cisterns around the plateau, can collect enough winter rainfall that life is able to survive for the rest of the year on top of the plateau. This led to Herod's family being able to stay out of harm's way for months at a time without his direct protection.

Masada's only downfall was it became such an ideal location, that there were many who wished to conquer the plateau for their own benefit.⁶ It became a strong hold that would witness many different sieges throughout time. Another example of popular sites that would witness many different sieges, can be compared to the site of Megiddo. This was once a grand city that was placed right in the middle of two popular trade routes of its time. By having control over Megiddo, its' captors held control over international trade for over 6,000 years.⁷ Unlike Megiddo though, Masada's history has less bloodstains because of its height advantage. When considering the feat of Masada as a fortress, the most arguable, popular, narrative leads to the first century.

In the year 66 C.E., Masada was in the control of the Roman Empire. There was revolt in the land taking place, where different groups of rebellions were putting pressure on the Roman Army. According to Josephus, Masada was taken over by the rebel group named the Sicarii and held their position from the year 66 CE to 73-74CE.⁸ The name Sicarii, can be translated to

⁵ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada*. Ahmhurst, New York. (2002)

⁶ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

⁷"Introducing Megiddo - The Megiddo Expedition." *Introducing Megiddo - The Megiddo Expedition*. Accessed November 20, 2014. <https://sites.google.com/site/megiddoexpedition/the-site/introduction>

⁸ Yadin, Yigael. *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*. Random House, New York. 1966.

mean knifeman.⁹ This specific group gained this nickname after being known for assassinating political figures in crowded places, with small knives that they would hide under their robes.¹⁰ Masada was where the Sicarii would hide during the fall of Jerusalem and the second temple to the Roman Empire.

In 70CE, Judea became part of the Roman Empire's land grab, it was a small token, but with many benefits such as the access to the popular trade routes of the time. As the Romans began to expand, what was left of rebellions began to dwindle. Those who did not hold Roman citizenship were either exiled, killed, or enslaved. After the fall of Jerusalem, governor Silva Flavius led the Tenth Legion on a campaign throughout Judea to wipe out these small pockets of resistance. The last group to face the wrath of the Tenth Legion was that of the Sicarii rebellions at Masada.

When the Roman Army came upon Masada, a new strategy was made to conquer this small group of Jewish rebels. The Sicarii were led by Eleazar ben Y'air. Eleazar was the nephew of Menahem, who was the Sicarii leader, who led the rebellion into taking back Masada from the Romans in 66CE. Menahem was assassinated in Jerusalem, where after the Sicarii fled to Masada.¹¹ The rebel population grew to 960 people including men, women, and children. They took in refugees that had traveled to the area, in order to seek sanctuary. Though this thought of accepting those seeking for help may seem charitable, the Sicarii were held responsible for pillaging the nearby town of Ein Gedi, where they were accused of slaughtering

⁹ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

¹⁰ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

¹¹ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

over 700 Jews, who surrendered to the power of the Roman Empire.¹² The Sicarii then took food and other resources from the town and fled to the top of their plateau. The description of these rebels given by Josephus, is given in such a light, the reader can only picture these rebels as a brutish, barbaric, and a menacing group to surrounding communities of Masada.¹³

“The one part was desirous of tyrannizing over others, and the rest of offering violence to others, and of plundering such as were richer than themselves. They were the Sicarii who firsts began these transgressions, and first became barbarous towards those allied to them and left no words of reproach unsaid and no works of perdition untried, in order to destroy those whom their contrivances affected.”

– Josephus¹⁴

By 73CE, the Roman Army laid situated at the base of the plateau.¹⁵ They had already set up a base camp and were considering the different options of attacking Masada. An assault ramp became the plan because of how inaccessible the “snake path”, is for carrying the heavy machinery necessary to take down the siege wall.¹⁶ The ramp was constructed by Jewish slaves, in order to ensure the safety of the lives of Roman soldiers. In contrast to Josephus’s description of the barbaric actions against enslaved Jews, the Sicarii spared the lives of these Jews who

¹² Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

¹³ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

¹⁴ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

¹⁵ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 196. Pg. 699

¹⁶ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 196. Pg. 699

succumbed to the Roman Empire.¹⁷ After weeks of working on this assault ramp, it was put to the test as they hauled large battering rams up the side of the cliff.¹⁸

In the time that the Romans were able to create this ramp and take down the first wall, the occupants in the fortress built a second siege wall which was built with flexible material such as dirt and wood.¹⁹ The Roman technology was unable to break through the wall, but it was easily set ablaze. Capture seemed inevitable and the Romans descended from the top of the plateau for a celebratory evening, knowing they had accomplished a mighty victory. That night, as the Romans slept with ease, the Sicari were on top of the plateau weighing their options:

“Neither did Eleazar once think of flying away, nor would he permit any one to do so; but when he saw their wall burned down by the fire, and could devise no other way of escaping, or room for their farther courage, and setting before their eyes what the Romans would do to them, their children, and their wives, if they got them into their power, he consulted about having them all slain.”

-Josephus²⁰

Inevitable defeat was looming over rebels that evening. The choices laid in front of them, either surrender to the mighty force of the Roman Army or die fighting. Fighting will only lead to a massacre by the sword of their enemies and those who would survive the bloodshed will only be forced into enslavement, this was more than they could bare. In Josephus’s writing

¹⁷ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

¹⁸ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 699

¹⁹ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 700

²⁰ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 700

of the last siege at Masada, he gives the narrative a third option. Taking the sword to themselves than rather than giving the satisfaction to the Romans.

In Josephus's account, he articulates a speech given by Eleazar to his followers. The speech is so beautifully moving and unyielding, that the reader cannot feel anything less than nostalgic for these barbaric rebels. These words have haunted the world for the last two thousand years:

“Since we, long ago, my generous friends, resolved never to be servants to the Romans, no to any other than to God himself... let our wives die before they are abused, and our children before they have tasted of slavery; and after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually, and preserve ourselves in freedom, as an excellent funeral monument for us, But first let us destroy our money and the fortress by fire; for I am well assured that this would be a great grief to the romans, that they shall not be able to seize upon our bodies, and shall fail our wealth also: and let us spare nothing but our provisions for they will be a testimonial when we are dead...we have preferred death before slavery.”

-Josephus²¹

After this speech, Josephus then goes to describe that they then “chose ten men by lot, to slay the rest”, it describes men holding their families for one last time, as a designated man would come around as the families bore their necks to whom would be their saving grace from misery and torture.²² By the end, while all laid still, these ten men were chosen to kill one another again by lot, and the last person standing was to draw a sword and lodge it deep into their awaiting heavy heart. All was still the next morning, as the Romans fled into the fortress:

“Now for the Romans, they expected that they should be fought in the morning, when accordingly they put on their armor, and laid bridges of planks

²¹ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 701

²² Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 704

upon their ladders from their banks, to make and assault upon the fortress which they did; but saw nobody as an enemy, but a terrible solitude on every side, with a fire within the place, as well as a perfect silence.”

-Josephus²³

There were no cries of battle, no cowardly whimpering's of defeat, and their inevitable victory was soiled under the hand of their conquered.

Interpreting Josephus's Interpretation

Anytime the name Masada is mentioned, the name Josephus is surely soon to follow, if conversation is to continue. His works *The Jewish War* and *The Antiquities of the Jews* were his accounts of Jewish history. Without Josephus, the identity of Masada would have been lost to time, and today it would be nothing more than a mysterious hilltop fortress. Nevertheless, Josephus was considered a traitor by his own people. Born into what Josephus describes as an “aristocratic family, which is from a long line of priests”²⁴, Josephus was a well-educated Jew during this time. He was part of the Jewish campaign, revolting against the Roman Empire when he was capture in 66CE. After his capture and imprisonment, it is said that he betrayed 39 of his fellow Jews, who were then put to death in Jotapata in his place.²⁵ He held onto a guilty conscious throughout the rest of Rome's takeover of Judea.²⁶ He was then given Roman citizenship and for the sake of his own people who lost their homeland for what would be for thousands of years, felt the need to record their history. The last stance at Masada was described, by Josephus's hand, as a courageous act that would go down in history. Through the

²³ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 705

²⁴ Seward, Desmond. *Jerusalem's Traitor: Josephus, Masada, and the fall of Judea*. Cambridge, MA. 2009.

²⁵ Seward, Desmond. *Jerusalem's Traitor: Josephus, Masada, and the fall of Judea*. Cambridge, MA. 2009.

²⁶ Weiss-Rosmarin, Trud. 1967. “Masada, Josephus, and Yadin,” *Jewish Spectator* 32 (8): 2-8, 30 (October)

last chapters of his works on *The Jewish Wars*, the reader watches Josephus's heart warm to these brutish rebels as he describes the Romans reaction to encountering this mass suicide:

“They came within the palace, and so met with the multitude of the slain, but could take no pleasure in the fact, though it were done to their enemies. Nor could they do other than wonder at the courage of their resolution, and the immovable contempt of death which so great a number of them had shown, when they went through with such an action as that was.”

-Josephus²⁷

Showing this sympathy towards the rebels through the story, can be interpreted as Josephus having some guilt for turning his back on his country. His way of repaying was leaving a legacy for his people to build a strong future off of, where ever they were to end up. In his accounts, the rebels that held on to this fortified plateau were the unsung heroes. They chose to take their own lives instead of giving into the relentless Roman army. What can be in favor towards the authenticity of Josephus's writing is that the Romans would not have seen the mass suicide as courageous as Josephus depicted it. There is something to say about the story, if a suicide did not happen, something like this would not have been brought back to Josephus's attention.

The narrative that Josephus created, did have some historical importance, by giving full detail of Herod's time on top of the plateau. His work has been beneficial for scholars over the centuries, but it still holds the criticism of them being nothing more than “an adventure story...has the immediacy of the first-person historical novel.”²⁸ Josephus did not witness the events he describes first hand. When it comes to the case of Masada, he gives the reader the

²⁷ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1968. Pg. 705

²⁸ Seward, Desmond. *Jerusalem's Traitor: Josephus, Masada, and the fall of Judea*. Cambridge, MA. 2009. pg.xiv)

possibility of claiming to have been able to reenact the entire scene and speech by Eleazar, because the surviving two women and five children.²⁹ Supposedly, two women, one of whom, was described as an intelligent relative of Eleazar, and five children, were those to have survived the slaughter by hiding in a water cistern.³⁰ The woman, who was related to Eleazar, was the only person who gave Josephus a detailed account.

Josephus gives the reader a reasoning why they should believe in what the woman said, by describing her as not only a relative to Eleazar but also a well-educated woman. The speech is so compelling and powerful, that even today it is unfathomable to even try and relate to the bravery of these people. It is difficult to tell if this was all true, if there were survivors or if it was just well written story by Josephus. If he made up his sources for the mass suicide, it is interesting to wonder why he chose women to be his credible source. Would it be the same story if it were told by a man as a sole survivor? If it was a man, perhaps his pride would be what would lead him to lie. When looking at sources during this time, one source that rarely has a woman's narrative would be the Bible. Josephus was writing down history, at the same time the authors of the bible were creating their narrative. Women rarely have a voice in these passages, but when they do, it is mainly used by the author to show the importance and reliability of what the women had to say.³¹

Archeology in the Holy Lands, many archeologists use ancient texts to be able to grasp the context, location, and significance of certain sites. More often than not, archeology in Israel

²⁹ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 196

³⁰ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 196

³¹ Brettler, Marc. *How to Read the Jewish Bible*. The Jewish Publication Society, 2005.

uses the bible as a primary document for many sites around the country. For them to balance the use of a religious text, they have also used Josephus to bring the focus of the site back to historical purpose. Josephus's writings date back to the 1st century, the same time period of the beginning of the New Testament. He is used in Biblical archeology as a source to give greater significance to what is written in the bible.³² The bible as a historical source can be tricky when being used as a primary document on a site.³³ The historical context of the bible is hard to follow because more often than not there is not specific dates of when certain occurrences happened.

The use of Josephus on biblical sites, is more of creating a historical timeline. These archeologists wish to prove the authenticity of a site, whether it is for religious reasons, or for historical. In Josephus's works relates to the way the bible is written, in the fashion of how he records history. He creates more of a secondary narrative, rather than his own primary narrative. When looking at the narrative of Masada, it is hard not to think of parallel stories that are in the Torah. In the book of Exodus, when Moses and the Jews were fleeing from the grasp of Egypt, it is hard to not look at how similar the context of the story is to that of Masada. It is mentioned that that this last stance happened on the night of the Jewish holiday of Passover. Symbolically, this last form of resistance, can be considered a parallel story, to the Jews who fled from Egypt to find their Promise Land. With Eleazar, as a replication of a younger Moses, he leads his people into the unknown. Like Moses against the mighty ruling power of Pharaoh, this mass suicide that was performed on top of Masada, shows how determined and unwilling the Sicarii were, to giving into the intimidating bully that was the Roman Army.

³² Cline, Eric H. *Biblical Archaeology a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

³³ Cline, Eric H. *Biblical Archaeology a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

This last stance was the ending to the narrative of *Wars of the Jews*. Josephus interpreted the scene, not that of an end to a brutish, tyrant of a rebellion, that need to be extinguished, but of a heroic stance against the loss of freedom of his very own people. With this mass suicide lingering, it was the end of land of Judea for the Jewish people, but because of the choice of death before slavery by these Sicarii rebellions, they leave the land in a more gallant light than they would have if they succumbed to defeat. It is easy to consider Josephus as a primary source, he is the only source of what could have happened, but the fact still shows that at best he is a secondary source. This can be proven with the fact that majority of his work came by the word of mouth, or from diaries of Roman Generals.³⁴ By collecting sources from the Roman Army, this can only lay claim that the saying “winners write history” becomes even more surreal.

Building a Nation

The first signs of a Zionist movement was created in the late 19th century. Emigrating European Jews back to the Holy Land the first signs of nationalism, began with collecting a history of Jews from ancient Israel. Coincidentally enough the publication *Wars of the Jews* was translated into Hebrew for the first time in 1862.³⁵ With the use of Josephus’s history, this movement was able to create a national collective memory of ancient Jewish history.³⁶ Josephus became a common household name, especially in England, since the first translation of his work into English was more than a century earlier than the Hebrew translation, by the

³⁴ Seward, Desmond. *Jerusalem’s Traitor: Josephus, Masada, and the fall of Judea*. Cambridge, MA. 2009. pg.xiv)

³⁵ Walkowitz, Daniel J., and Lisa Maya Knauer. *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004. 236-240.

³⁶ Walkowitz, Daniel J., and Lisa Maya Knauer. *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004. 236-240.

Englishman William Winston.³⁷ This historical narrative of Masada by Josephus became the focal point of a nationalistic movement in the 1920s, where more Jews were becoming more nostalgic of their past than before. With the help of different scholars, children that grew up on the small communities called a *kibbutz* were able to learn more about their ancestors. Youth groups began to form and the use of Josephus began to increase. During the 1920s, the poet Yitzhak Lamdan grew in popularity when he created a poem that many Jewish Israelis' took to heart. His poem "Masada" was published in 1927. From there, it was a national hit amongst the *kibbutz* communities. Many people, mainly children would take the trek to hike to the top of Masada and recite not only this poem but also reenact the entire narrative of Josephus's Masada.³⁸ In the book *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, I the authors, Daniel Walkowitz, states that the "The trip to Masada was essentially a form of pilgrimage and that reaching it fulfilled a national mission of symbolically embracing a sacred ancient past."³⁹ Youth groups from these *kibbutzs*, have been enduring this long, treacherous hike to the top of Masada, to be able to feel the sacrifice and determination it takes to creating and holding a nation. The last stanza of Lamdan's poem is the phrase "Masada shall not fall, again!" in this case those who found pride within this poem, saw it as "the whole country is like Masada...we have to fight until the very end, not to yield and not to give up."⁴⁰ In the beginning stages of Israel becoming a nation again this movement organized resistance against

³⁷ Silberman, Neil Asher. *A prophet from amongst you the life of Yigael Yadin: soldier, scholar, and mythmaker of modern Israel*. Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. 1993. Pg. 275

³⁸ Walkowitz, Daniel J., and Lisa Maya Knauer. *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004. 236-240.

³⁹ Walkowitz, Daniel J., and Lisa Maya Knauer. *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004. 236-240.

⁴⁰ Walkowitz, Daniel J., and Lisa Maya Knauer. *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004. 236-240.

the British mandate of Palestine.⁴¹ These treks to Masada were done under the radar because of the fact it was forbidden by the British government because of how dangerous it could be.⁴² The British Mandate of Palestine was from 1923 through 1945, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. In 1948, Israel gained independence, which after World War II, many European Jews fled back to the Holy Land. After World War II, Jews returning to their ancient homeland felt defeated and were not looking to find pride in another historical event where they were treated less than human, and enslaved once again. Masada gave them fire in their bellies, knowing their ancestors stood up for themselves and said enough is enough. The courageous thought of giving their life for freedom, was enough for youth to be willing to push back the borders of pressing neighbors of Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and gain independence from Jordan still present in Jerusalem during the 1960s.⁴³

Looking for the Truth

Masada was identified in 1838 by the famous biblical archeologist Edward Robinson. Though his profession was not archeology, but geography instead.⁴⁴ Robinson, did not climb to the summit of Masada, but from a distance identified it from the distance according to ancient maps. Since then, Masada came back to the consciousness of the world after being a desolate area for so long. Pilgrimages and amateur archeological surveying, occupied the top of Masada until the years of 1963 through 1965.

⁴¹ Silberman, Neil Asher. *A prophet from amongst you the life of Yigael Yadin: soldier, scholar, and mythmaker of modern Israel*. Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. 1993. Pg. 275

⁴² Walkowitz, Daniel J., and Lisa Maya Knauer. *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004. 236-240.

⁴³ Blumberg, Arnold. *The History of Israel*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998.

⁴⁴ Cline, Eric H. *Biblical Archaeology a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Yigael Yadin, who was born on March 21, 1917 in Jerusalem, was son of the famous archaeologist Eliezer L. Sukenik⁴⁵. Sukenik is most well-known for his work on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Growing up, Yadin had a fascination of archeology and the collection of national history. Even a young Yigael Yadin recalls his childhood on the *kibbutz* and how Masada was seen as a national symbol. In 1947, he joined the Jewish underground group called Hagana, where he was appointed officer of operations and planning.⁴⁶ After Israel gained their independence in 1948, Yadin was then promoted to Chief of staff of the newly created Israel Army in the year 1949. He held this position until 1952, where afterwards he went to school at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. From there, Yadin received his Ph.D. in archeology, in 1955.⁴⁷ He taught at the university and also was well known for his work not only on the Dead Sea Scrolls, but also his dig at Hazor, just west of the Sea of Galilee.

With Yadin's military background, he began to gain favor of powerful politicians at this time, including that of the Prime Minister Ben-Gurion. After his dig at Hazor was completed, Yadin was approached by Masada archeologist Scmaria Gutman. Gutman, along with a group of amateur archeologists, had been working on the site of Masada in the mid-1950s. With enough funding to only spend short periods of time on top of Masada, Gutman was still able to find major discoveries. These discoveries would include the original gate of 'snake path'. Gutman would later go on to uncover the water cisterns, and identify Herod's Palaces.⁴⁸ Even though Gutman had been working on the site of Masada for so long, he did not have the political power

⁴⁵ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada*. Ahmhurst, New York. (2002)

⁴⁶ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

⁴⁷ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada*. Ahmhurst, New York. (2002)

⁴⁸Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

and connections to be able to carry on with his work. He was in need of help, and Yadin held the power to be able to do so.

At first, Yadin was not convinced he wanted to take on the mighty task of Masada. He did not see it so much as a site that would bring the right historical identification for the time. Yadin was not the only one to have felt this, for the Prime Minister at the time, Ben-Gurion, was skeptical also. They were both looking more for a compelling story for the nation to latch onto, where there was not so heinous of an idea of a Mass suicide.⁴⁹ Gutman continued to fight for his work, and claims that:

“A generation of youth was raised by Masada. This is the generation that created the state, the generation of defense in its various manifestations. Masada has been a source of power and courage to liberate the country to strike roots, and defend the whole territory.”

- Scmaria Gutman⁵⁰

The story of Masada, is not that of finding one savior for an entire nation. It is that of a nation willing to die, rather than give up their freedom. With the political parties of this time, the ideology of the Labor party, was that of for the good of the nation, rather than the individual.⁵¹ So, baring this in mind, Yadin was convinced by Gutman that the tale of Masada must be researched and brought back to the public's eye.

After being convinced by Gutman, Yadin set out to find funds that would help him with the needs of being able to conduct the largest and most important dig of Israel to date.⁵² Finding

⁴⁹ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

⁵⁰ Gutman, introduction to Ilan, Li-Metzada be-Ikvot ha Kana'im [To Masada in the Zealots' Footsteps], 3.

⁵¹ Yanai, Natan. "The citizen as Pioneer: Ben-Gurion's concept of citizenship" *Israel Studies*, volume 1, no. 1. Indiana University Press. Spring, 1996, pp. 127-143

⁵² Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

private funding, Yadin was able to receive enough to cover the costs of the dig, which in today's standards (according to a source from 1995) would have added up to be just over two million dollars.⁵³ One condition was that Yadin would broadcast the dig in various ways through the media. There is evidence of this time that news reports of Masada had reached to different parts of the world. The contending newspaper, *The Observer*, was the most reoccurring on the site, to create updates of the findings on the site. This newspaper can be found holding articles in national newspapers around the world, even in the United States in 1963, which gives audiences the excitement of the beginning of the dig.⁵⁴ This sort of coverage brought even more of the public's eye back to Masada, not only the whole nation of Israel was watching every step Yadin was making, but the whole world.

On the Site

Thousands of coins were found, scrolls, pottery, ancient architecture, and tools. These alone should have been a successful dig, and as an archeologist he should have been proud of what they accomplished. Yadin worked two years on the excavation of Masada. His findings were marvels on their own, and gave modern Israelis, who had been deeply concerned with issues of sovereignty and independence, a tangible link between the present and the past.⁵⁵ The finds at Masada reveal the splendor and tragedy of an earlier national existence. As a powerful political metaphor that is Masada, Yadin is quotes stating that:

⁵³ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada*. Ahmhurst, New York. (2002)

⁵⁴ O'Donovan, Patrick. "Israel's Masada Excavation Begins." *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 19, 1963.

⁵⁵ Silberman, Neil Asher. *Between past and Present: Archaeology, Ideology, and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East*. New York: H. Holt, 1989. 87.

“Masada is no ordinary site, and we had to concern ourselves not only with our own immediate expedition but with the future- with the hundreds of thousands of visitors drawn by the drama of Masada, who would wish to see something of the physical remains of Masada’s past. We therefore decided on a procedure quite different from that customarily followed in an archaeological excavation.”

-Yigael Yadin⁵⁶

The biggest challenge of the site was not finding volunteers to move dirt and discover the past. That was actually the easiest to gain international and nation help from eager volunteers from all different backgrounds and education.⁵⁷ Yadin is quoted saying “I can only keep three promises to you. One the food will be bad, two there will be ten people to a tent, and three the work will be hard. I kept all three of those promises.”⁵⁸ The biggest challenge was figuring out where to place the base camp for the diggers on the site. With the help of the Israeli Defense Force, they were able to build a functional basecamp for volunteers to reside in.⁵⁹ From the very beginning this dig has been weaved into a political agenda, and Yadin was the weaver that controlled how much politics got in the way of the dig. Though the media, such as reporters, camera, and film, were present on site, majority of the volunteers would point the attention back to Yadin. He kept many of discoveries sealed away from the public during a season, and only he would announce the discoveries as they came. Though he was scrutinized for this lack of information shared with the public, he did record the data in the most accurate way, a skill that he was able to show even earlier in his career at Hazor. Scholars have mentioned how thorough of a job Yadin always conducted, he even recorded every meeting between himself and his group

⁵⁶Walkowitz, Daniel J., and Lisa Maya Knauer. *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004. 236-240.

⁵⁷ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada*. Ahmhurst, New York. (2002)

⁵⁸ Silberman, Neil Asher. *A prophet from amongst you the life of Yigael Yadin: soldier, scholar, and mythmaker of modern Israel*. Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. 1993. Pg. 275

⁵⁹ Yadin, Yigael. *Masada: Herod’s Fortress and the Zealots’ Last Stand*. Random House, New York. 1966.

leads.⁶⁰ According to the book *A History of Archaeological Thought* by Bruce Trigger, an archeologist job is recording data in the most accurate way. The archeologist in some way, turns into an archivist who is trying to preserve the artifact in their possession in its most original state.⁶¹ When it comes to archeology, a proper recording of placement and location of an artifact gives more information and a timeline than the artifact itself could do alone. To get to the next time period though, an archeologist must destroy their evidence in order to move forward. So a proper and accurate recording is necessary for essentially a primary source to be considered reliable. Throughout the history of Archeology, there have been many trial and errors. So much precious and useful information, forever gone because of careless treatment of a site. There are instances in the Holy Land in the late 19th century, of biblical archeologists making the mistakes of throwing away priceless artifacts because they did not have the time and patience of studying an area.⁶²

Though Yadin has been critiqued since the beginning for his interpretation of Masada, the irony of the context of the site is that he was being critiqued on the sources he was finding himself, with the accurate recordings of what was found on the site. It has been known since his book, *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*, was published only a year after the excavation that Yadin's interpretation could not be considered a reliable source of history. The artifacts that were found at Masada, could have been interpreted in multiple different ways. Due to the fact he was using only Josephus as his primary source for the entire excavation, he is accused of misconduct of historical context, in order to create a compelling story.⁶³ This

⁶⁰ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. pg. 67

⁶¹ Trigger, Bruce G. *A History of Archaeological Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pg. 18

⁶² Cline, Eric H. *Biblical Archaeology a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

⁶³ Yadin, Yigael. Naveh, Joseph. Meshorer, Yaacov. *Masada 1: The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963-1965 Final Reports*. Israel Exploration Society the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 1989.

accusation comes 20 years after the excavation, when Yadin's field reports are finally published for the public. Many scholars pounced at the opportunity to being able to dissect every mistaken words Yadin had used for 20 years. Yadin does not simply make up discoveries, or tried to muddle the truth by displacement of contradictory finds to better fit his agenda with the site, but over time, Yadin was discredited for all of his work related to the Sicarii on the site, because his interpretation of the findings changed over time.

An example of this was pointed out by sociologist Nachman Ben-Yehuda, he quotes Yadin interpreting the findings of three bodies found. Any human remains found on the site automatically grabbed attention, because of the history of the site. The three bodies turned out to be those that belonged to a child age 8 to 12, a woman age 18 to 22, and a man age 21 to 23.⁶⁴ The group could easily for a person walking by, look like a Sicarii family in their last moments of life. The perfection of this group, would have been enough for anyone to be thrilled over, until the math of the ages are done. It couldn't possibly be a family because the male and female were too young to have a child of that age.

⁶⁴Yadin, Yigael. *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*. Random House, New York. 1966.

In the recorded meeting between Yadin and one of his section leads, Dr. Haas, there is recorded proof of Yadin denying the possibility of these three being a Sicarii family that took part of the mass suicide.

Dr. Haas: Three skeletons were found in locus 8...one of a woman....This is a woman aged seventeen to eighteen and there is also there a skeleton of a child aged eleven to twelve....the third skeleton....is first of all a man, and his age is between twenty and twenty-two, quite young too.

Yadin:....It is obvious that the child and woman cannot be mother and son because of the age difference, so if there really was a family here, the man could possibly be the father of the child....

-November 23, 1963 recordings of Dr. Yadin and Dr. Haas⁶⁵

In *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*, Yadin states that it is very possible that the young child was a sibling of the couple, or even the son of the man if you add and subtract years from both. This idea of the possibility of finding a family of the last defenders, was enough for Yadin, just ten years after the original statement, to claim that these three found were in fact Sicarii/Zelot family.⁶⁶ He had no proof of being able to make such claims hold any validation. Whether he truly believed it, or just wanted those listening to gain a sense of nationalism, he would have had a hard time proving his statement because of the work he has done as an archeologist.

Though he is guilty of historical misconduct by his lack of evidence to prove his interpretations to be true. When it came to the work as an archeologist, he conducted his work in a professional and accurate matter. His interpretation on history was skewed by his nationalistic ideologies.

⁶⁵ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. pg. 67

⁶⁶Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. pg. 68

Yadin's search for Masada's last defenders eventually turned himself into the last defender of the Myth of Masada.

Artifacts

The 25-28 human remains that were found, ended up being more trouble than they were worth. The remains that were found, did have a mixture of men, women, and children. After carbon dating the artifacts that laid amongst the human remains, dated them between 44-115CE⁶⁷ This puts them in the right time to have been these last defenders of Masada, as Yadin would have called them. Like the three bodies that were mentioned before, none of the ages of the bodies found varied too much to be considered families. The children found were all too old to have belonged to the women that were found within the area these remains were found. All of the children aged from 8 to 12 years old, while the women were 18 to 22 years of age. This was not the only wrench that was thrown into the mix. The remains had various other animal remains with them. One animal that was included into the mix, were the remains of pigs.⁶⁸ If this were to be the burial site of Jewish last defenders, then it is possible Romans felt no sympathy and were disgusted enough with how cowardly their suicide attempts were, to disgrace their burial by sacrificing a pig.⁶⁹ With this interpretation of the artifacts, this goes against the narrative of Josephus, where he paints the picture that the Romans were shocked and commemorated the courage of these rebels. It also could have meant that this was actually a Roman burial, because the sacrificing of animals, including pigs, was part of their culture at the time.⁷⁰ Even with the

⁶⁷ Yadin, Yigael. *Masada: Herod's Rortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*. Random House, New York. 1966.

⁶⁸ Yadin, Yigael. *Masada: Herod's Rortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*. Random House, New York. 1966.

⁶⁹ Weiss-Rosmarin, Trud. 1967. "Masada, Josephus, and Yadin," *Jewish Spectator* 32 (8): 2-8, 30 (October)

⁷⁰ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada*. Ahmhurst, New York. (2002)

evidence of this small grave site on Masada, it still does not answer where the rest of the 900 bodies went.

The ostraca that were found on the site was in the words of Yadin, “the most important discoveries of the dig.”⁷¹ This find though seemed insignificant at the time of their discovery, blew up the media of the best proof that the Sicarii were on top of Masada and what Josephus said had some truth in it. What an ostraca is, is simply a shard of pottery with names written on them. Eleven shards were found, new each other a narrow hallway just off of the northern palace.⁷² They would be an interesting find, but nothing until the discovery of one bearing the name ben Y’air, the infamous leader who gave his last valiant speech before the Sicarii’s final decision. In Josephus, he describes them choosing ten by lot for who would be those responsible for the deaths of their fellow people. This find was exciting not only for the site, but for the entire nation of Israel. Finally, they found proof of Masada, Yadin jumped on reenacting the heroic scene of these ten men, choosing their fate of being the angel of death that night before Passover so many years ago. The critiques of this interpretation though points out that it was only ten men not eleven. There were eleven ostracas found, also the fact it was an ostraca in the first place. Also going back to the original text of Josephus, lots can also be translated into rocks.⁷³ The location of these ostracas also served as a problem since the quarters were too small to have been able to fit all 960 people in while they chose those who would murder the rest.⁷⁴ In Josephus’s works it is said that some 960 Sicarii, men, women, and children,

⁷¹ Yadin, Yigael. *Masada: Herod’s Rortress and the Zealots’ Last Stand*. Random House, New York. 1966.

⁷² Yadin, Yigael. *Masada: Herod’s Rortress and the Zealots’ Last Stand*. Random House, New York. 1966.

⁷³ Weiss-Rosmarin, Trud. 1967. “Masada, Josephus, and Yadin,” *Jewish Spectator* 32 (8): 2-8, 30 (October)

⁷⁴ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

committed a mass suicide.⁷⁵ With the archeological evidence, there is nothing that resembles that many dead bodies could have existed on top of the plateau. First of all, the fact there is not sign of the 960 bodies, the ones that were found did not match up in age where it would create a family of Jewish revolts. Josephus does state that the Romans disposed of the bodies, after the siege for sanitary reasons. Though logical, there would have been more evidence of where that many bodies would have ended up. They could have burned them and dispensed the ash, but to burn that many bodies would take a lot of lumber to create a blaze large enough to do the job, and the location being in a barren dessert there is not much for resources to do so.⁷⁶ Beside the fact that there are signs of large fires on top of the plateau, they were never violent enough to have taken care of such a large job.

The story of Masada did not have much evidence for it to be a factual event that happened in time, but Yadin continued to try and persuade the public into believing his interpretation that the mass suicide on Masada was an actual occurrence. Though his book does not admit to Masada being a fact, it does hint towards it still being a possibility. He uses a lot of information on King Herod's structures and compares them to what Josephus has to say of them. The accuracy of Josephus's description, is a way of showing the reader that Josephus did not make up historical facts on certain parts of Masada, so why would he make up the Mass suicide. Yadin was working on creating the picture for the nation of Israel to "the taste of life here is the feeling of an ancient nation returning to its homeland."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Tamarin, Alfred H., and Flavius Josephus. *Revolt in Judea: the Road to Masada: The Eyewitness Account by Flavius Josephus of the Roman Campaign against Judea, the Destruction of the Second Temple, and the Heroism of Masada*. New York: Four Winds Press, 196

⁷⁶ Silberman, Neil Asher. *A prophet from amongst you the life of Yigael Yadin: soldier, scholar, and mythmaker of modern Israel*. Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. 1993. Pg. 275

⁷⁷ Yadin, Yigael. 1973. "1900 Years since the Fall of Masada." *Maariv*, April 16, p. 15.

Myths in the making

When Israel gained their independence in 1948, its antiquities were close to none.⁷⁸ The constant pressure to create a history for this newly formed country was present over the scholarly world. Every field was working to create a nation for its people to be proud of. Archeology is one field that took the brunt force of this pressure, as it was the only field that could prove with tangible evidence that that land once was owned by their Israeli ancestors.⁷⁹ Like many nations in the twentieth century the creation of this nationalistic view was evident across the globe. The way a history gets interpreted holds more than just the truth in it. In the Soviet Union, during the 1930s, archeology was facing this same pressure that Israel was facing twenty years later. Scholars were looking for a way to protect their nation from an expanding Germany.

With the borders of neighboring countries began to succumb to the invading German army, the “Soviet scholars responded with an assertion of patriotism and by fostering national self-consciousness...”⁸⁰ With this ideology scholars went into their fields to be able to make claims that the Soviet Union had ancient claims to a territory that would prove the German claims that the Slavs were on land that historically belonged to the Germany were false.⁸¹ Comparing the archeological research that was happening in the Soviet Union, there is a connection to governmental, nationalistic, and political claims on a site can push a country to interpreting history in a way that will help morph and mold their future. The connection between Soviet archeology and Israeli archeology is that both were looking to use archeology for political

⁷⁸Bacon, Edward. "Israel." In *Digging for History*, 136-137. London: A. & C. Black, 1960.

⁷⁹ Bacon, Edward. "Israel." In *Digging for History*, 136-137. London: A. & C. Black, 1960.

⁸⁰ Trigger, Bruce G. "Culture-historical Archaeology." In *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 174-230. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pg. 299

⁸¹ Trigger, Bruce G. "Culture-historical Archaeology." In *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 174-230. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989

and national reasoning, by shaping it to a more modern national consciousness.⁸² The use of biblical archeology in Israel though is considered more of a study of ideology rather than a scientific field. The base of ‘mythmaking’ began, where interpretation was able to be so easily skewed of historical sites because it was for the good of the nation and its new nationalistic consciousness.

The proof of this concept of mythmaking for the site of Masada can be seen with not only what sources Yadin had used during the excavation but also how he used them. He used Josephus’s work more as an “authentic report” rather than just a narrative that plays with the truth of what could have happened.⁸³ The problem lays in the fact that the archeological findings did not prove Josephus to be factual, but Yadin’s interpretation of certain artifacts tries to stretch the truth in order to cover up the myth that was becoming of Masada.

The reason that Yadin has been scrutinized for so long is because he had a book published of his own interpretation of the History of Masada and the Archeological site was open to the public only a year after the excavations, all before he published his Final Reports of the site, that give the true and accurate details of the site. Sadly, he was not able to publish his own works before his death in 1984. So the task at hand was left to his colleagues and students to finish it for him. In 1989, with the help of Joseph Naveh, and Yaacov Meshorer, *Masada 1* was finally in print after over 20 years after the excavations. Naveh states in the preface of this book, that this was not an easy task to take on. It took him years to collect all of the written artifacts

⁸² Trigger, Bruce G. "Culture-historical Archaeology." In *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 174-230. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989

⁸³ Yadin, Yigael. Naveh, Joseph. Meshorer, Yaacov. *Masada 1: The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963-1965 Final Reports*. Israel Exploration Society the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 1989. pg. 5)

that Yadin kept at his home privately and also try to understand the notes that were left behind by Yadin.⁸⁴ Naveh also states that:

“Though following in Yadin’s footsteps, I do not feel obliged to adhere to his opinions; rather, I shall try to present the evidence and leave the continuation of the debate to those scholars who have already done it. Unless the evidence is really unequivocal, I prefer to leave historical problems unsolved. In fact, not only shall I make no attempt to answer the historical questions existing so far; I shall even raise some new ones.”

-Joseph Naveh⁸⁵

By this one statement in his introduction into the Final Reports of Masada, Naveh had finally served Masada with the justice of creating a reliable, creditable, archeological source for the academic world. Finally, the archeological surveying of Masada had come to terms of not trying to recreate a narrative, that was lost thousands of years ago, but to strike up new interests in what was found. In the 1950s, the Israeli Defense Forces began summiting Masada to swear in new recruits. Taken after the pilgrimages that many of your groups were taking, the symbolic nature behind this trek, is what led to the decision of bringing the military to Masada. In a short period of time it became an influential and powerful tradition for the IDF to continue.⁸⁶ The statement of Masada alone, made anyone in attendance to these ceremonies, more patriotic and symbolic towards Israel. According to textbooks, speeches, ceremonies, and pamphlets of the time, only parts of Josephus’s narrative had been used. An example of this can be found where in his narrative, Josephus describes the heinous crimes committed in Ein Gedi, were not mentioned in any of the modern day material handed out.⁸⁷ Generals of the army who were preaching the

⁸⁴ Yadin, Yigael. Naveh, Joseph. Meshorer, Yaacov. *Masada 1: The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963-1965 Final Reports*. Israel Exploration Society the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 1989. pg. 5

⁸⁵ Yadin, Yigael. Naveh, Joseph. Meshorer, Yaacov. *Masada 1: The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963-1965 Final Reports*. Israel Exploration Society the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 1989. pg. 5)

⁸⁶ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

⁸⁷ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

significance of Masada to young ears, never mentioned that they themselves never read Josephus's original works, but only what was passed to them in a booklet.⁸⁸ The narrative story that Josephus creates, fits nicely tucked into Israel's history. It is like many other nations around the world, a tale of heroism, dedication, and devotion for freedom. Keeping this in the back pocket of the IDF in earlier years, shows to have proven to stir the hearts of their young soldiers, and awaken the fire in a sleepy nation. This drive to continue what their ancestors started, seems to be the theme of the early years of Israel's independence. Though majority of the text that Yadin wrote after the dig received the label, "nationalistic, political, moral-ideological"⁸⁹ It is not the first time an archeologist would skew the truth in order to form a patriotic ideology within their country. With the accusations of the IDF already cutting out parts of Josephus's work before giving it to the public, this shows that the interpretation of Masada was only useful in the myth form. There are direct quotes from commanders who were considered legends for courage, determination, and strength that accept the fact that their history of Masada may have been a myth:

"The question is what is more important. There is no perfection. Exactly who these people were, it is not important! Were they Jewish? That is what is important! Of course, it is possible to find things that would show that not everything was in order. But, overall, there are struggles for this land. And when we look at this struggle, it becomes a potentiating charge that reinforces our struggle today. A heritage and tradition that we can rely on. The experience is so strong that even if other things are found – archaeological, historical, et cetera – they will not change it."

- Moshe Bar-Kochva⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

⁸⁹ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. *Sacrificing Truth: Archaeology and the Myth of Masada*. Ahmurst, New York. (2002)

⁹⁰ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. pg 154 mthmaking)

There were many opposed to the ceremonies being conducted at Masada. Majority of the public did not see how the history of a mass suicide should boost the morale of soldiers of this time. When the Six-Day war ended in June of 1967, the control over Jerusalem finally came into Israeli hands. The ceremonies moved from Masada to the Western Wall in the heart of Jerusalem that year. Another location that also took the task of swearing in recruits was moved to the national site of Latrun, which was to commemorate armored forces of today rather than those of the past.⁹¹ Yossi Ben-Hanan, at the time a commander of swearing in of recruits, gives the most accurate detail, by stating that even though the ceremony at Masada was impressive, it became apparent in 1986 that the reality of continuing ceremonies there was not as efficient as it once was.⁹² The recruits' base was moved farther south over the years, so logistically speaking it was no longer relevant to continue. Today, Masada is now a National Landmark that still holds evidence of ancient Judaism, which proves a nationalistic idea of having rights to their land. It is still a nostalgic site for many tourists to visit, and because of the controversy over the history of the site, it is one of Israel's most popular sites to visit.

Conclusion

Maintained by the Israel national Parks authority as and historical monument, Masada has become a popular tourist attraction. The political, nationalistic symbol that it once was, now became nothing more than just a monument to the nation's history and heritage. No one can be sure of what happened on top of this plateau over 2,000 years ago, but the myth of Masada will carry on from generation to generation as it has in the past. The interpretation that has been

⁹¹ Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

⁹² Yehuda, Nachman. *The Masada Myth Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

given by historians, archeologists, and sociologists can only prove that there is no way of proving the actual history based off of only a single secondary narrative. The words that had been spoken on top of Masada over two thousand years ago, are lost to the world, and what can be found on the site, should be held just as significant as if finding “Eleazar ben Yair was here” written in the sand. The search for one historical event, can shadow the discovery of the new sources that are being offered. Though Yadin is looked upon as nothing more than a fraud of information, he was placed in a tough situation, where a completely honest interpretation of the site, may have led to the loss of morale of a nation. Israel as a new nation, had much to prove, to many surrounding nations who believed they were not entitled to the land. Like Masada, there was a message that needed to be sent to the rest of the world, of the importance of this territory to these people. Masada gave new Israelis a new unyielding attitude, along with tangible evidence that they belonged. These Israelis carried out their promise to “‘Never again shall Masada fall!’ by preserving this site and realizing it has more historical significance than just a mass suicide. Those who risked their careers and credibility for the interpretation of the mass suicide that Josephus describes at Masada, did in fact become this fortresses last defenders, and because of this myth, Masada thrives to this day by being maintained and visited as a historical monument. Let the tale of Masada live on.

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