The First Jewish Revolt: Social Conflict and the Problem of Debt

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Recent work has emphasised persuasively that internal tensions within first century Judaeo society were at least partly responsible for provoking political unrest. Such internal problems alone will not suffice for the expression of outrage by the exploited in the form of a nationalist rebellion rather than the class struggle one might expect — such nationalism was the product of a particular ideology which, despite much recent work, still needs further investigation. Nonetheless there is a pressing need to explain in social and economic terms the ‘sickness’ from which, according to Josephus, Judaea suffered. That sickness was nothing as simple as general poverty — on the contrary, Judaea was a rich province; what Josephus describes is a more complex phenomenon of class warfare, with bandits and escaped slaves attacking the homes of the rich in city and countryside. Geographically the problem is based on Jerusalem and its environs — more distant areas of Palestine such as Galilee lacked


2 Contra Kreissig Soz. Zus. p. 102, for whom there was no way out of exploitation for the downtrodden classes except revolt from Rome.

3 Most importantly M. Hengel Die Zeloten (1976).

4 Anthropological, rather than theological, theories might prove fruitful in this area. For instance, Palestinian Jews tended, unlike most of their Gentile contemporaries, to explain illness in terms of attack by impurities or demons from outside the body rather than imbalance or putrefaction within. Hence perhaps a tendency to assume that a sick society is under attack from outside rather than rotting internally. Cf. M. Douglas, Natural Symbols (1970).

5 BJ VII 260. Josephus has a polemical purpose in emphasising the role of the less reputable, poorer Jews in the revolt since he thereby exculpates himself and his class; nonetheless, descriptions like that in this passage do not serve such a purpose since they admit oppression by the powerful as much as criminal behaviour by the masses. I assume, pace S. J. D. Cohen, Josephus in Galilee and Rome (1979) p. 181, that Josephus can be understood to be telling the truth except where there is good reason to insist otherwise.

6 BJ III 49-50; VII 143. The rhetoric in BJ II 86 (= AJ XVII 307) about Judaea being more poverty stricken after Herod Archelaus than at any other time since Ezra is absurd. It did not fool Augustus to whom it was addressed.

such a wide division between economic classes\(^1\) and had a safety valve for the landless poor in emigration to the cities of the Decapolis,\(^2\) while Galilean bandits before the outbreak of revolt tended to attack foreigners rather than the richer members of their own society.\(^10\) But in Judaea the social tensions are all too apparent and call for examination. Two factors in particular must be explained: the ability of some of the wealthy classes to take over temporary control of the otherwise hostile rebels from the impoverished sections of the community,\(^11\) and the phenomenon of widespread debt among those same poor. This last, I shall argue, is the clue to the whole pattern of social distress.

Josephus reports that the archives were burnt in Jerusalem at the beginning of the revolt in order to prevent the collection of outstanding debts (BJ II 427). Josephus may be wrong — creditors doubtless kept other copies of loan documents to prove what they were owed.\(^12\) But the act, even if only symbolic, indicates by its lack of concern for the interests of creditors that many of the loans had been made over a class divide. The rich aristocracy of Jerusalem had been lending to the urban poor, and in a society that forbade the taking of usurious interest this needs explanation, in particular since those same rich were presumably behind the change in the law that, through the *prosbul*, ensured the security of such loans even over the Sabbatical Year (see below). These loans were not purely a matter of charity, for charity as a virtue is described in texts of the period as giving, not lending;\(^13\) I shall suggest instead that both small independent farmers

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\(^2\) Schürer - Vermes - Millar - Black, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* vol. II (1979) pp. 144, 150, etc. re Jewish communities in the Decapolis cities. It is just as striking that Jews settled in some of these cities peacefully before 66 as it is significant that tensions with their Gentile hosts came to the surface after the revolt broke out; in Scythopolis, the Jewish community remained amicable to the last moment.

\(^10\) Freyne, *op. cit.* pp. 208-255 disposes effectively of the myth that Galilee was constantly in a state of revolutionary turmoil; for bandits attacking Gentile rather than Galilean territory, *AJ XIV* 159, and, after 66, *Vita* 45.

\(^11\) BJ II 562-568. Despite Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-8, who argues that all these generals, appointed after the defeat of Cestius, were really just as revolutionary as the original leaders of the revolt, Josephus' statement that they were from τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ ἡμερήσιον and that they had to be lured to the support of the rebels by force and persuasion, is both consistent and plausible and should be accepted (see my review of Cohen in *JRS* 1981).

\(^12\) This is assumed by *mBB* 10: 5-8, and documents admitting debt are among the finds from the Judaean Desert, cf. P. Benoit, J. T. Milik et R. de Vaux, *Les Grottes de Murabba'at. Discoveries in the Judaean Desert II* (1960) (henceforth: *DJD* II) nos. 18 and 114, especially line 19. Josephus attributes to arsonists in Antioch the same assumption that burnt archives prevent debt collection (*BJ* VII 61).

and the craftsmen and urban plebs of Jerusalem fell heavily into debt as much because the rich landowners needed to invest surplus income profitably as because the poor needed loans to survive.

Other explanations for the increase in indebtedness have been offered but they seem insufficient. High taxation on agricultural produce14 may have pushed the farmers of uneconomic plots into debt, but it is rash to assume that Roman and Temple taxation of the period was much more oppressive than Palestinian taxation at other times, or contemporary taxes elsewhere in the Empire,15 and this cannot have been the sole factor producing economic crisis. The scarcity of good agricultural land round Jerusalem when combined with an increasing population16 may have pushed some peasants off the land and into the city, but again the option of emigration to the Mediterranean diaspora was more available in this period of the Pax Romana than ever before. Finally, to some extent the problem may have been simply a recurrence of the crisis that faced Isaiah in the eighth century and Nehemiah in the fifth,17 and it might seem reasonable to assume that indebtedness of poor independent farmers to rich landowners always occurs in a peasant society after bad harvests, but the persistence of the problem and the inclusion of the urban plebs among the debtors would argue for special factors leading to the first century social breakdown.18

The crucial new element was the exceptional influx of wealth into the economically parasitic city of Jerusalem and the uneven distribution of that wealth among the population. Pilgrims from other parts of Palestine and from abroad spent money on offerings and for services within the city. 19 With the Herodian family spending ostentatiously,20 the city grew in size and population at a great rate.21 The effect should have been beneficial, but in practice it was only the few who benefited: the rich, especially rich

15 Tacitus (Annals II 42) assumed that complaints about Roman taxation revealed only a desire for their diminution but it seems from Josephus that Jewish objection to Roman taxation tended to be on ideological rather than economic grounds, cf. E. M. Smallwood, The Jews under Roman Rule (1976) p. 160.
16 Grant, op. cit. p. 85.
17 Isaiah 5: 8-10; Nehemiah 5: 1ff.; cf. 1 Kings 21.
18 I assume here that the indebted was whom the insurgents hoped to win over to their side by burning the archives (BJ II 427) were present in the city at the time. This would seem likely since the rebels were seeking immediate support.
20 Ibid. pp. 10 ff
21 BJ V 148 ff. Excavation tends to confirm Josephus' panegyric.
priests, became richer, and so did those with Temple monopolies or a function in the service industries. But with insufficient opportunities for employment (see below) there was no mechanism for channelling wealth towards the more needy elements of the population except in the form of charity, especially when even skilled crafts might be less than essential with the availability of imported goods from elsewhere in the Roman empire. And because those aristocrats did not know what to do with their wealth, the poor in the end not only did not gain but in many cases actually suffered.

Much was spent by the rich on consumption and the purchase of durable goods. Great buildings were erected at public expense and luxury goods were acquired from abroad. Such spending, however, did not exhaust the wealth available, not least because private showy expenditure seems to have been considered less socially desirable among the Jewish aristocrats than among their Roman contemporaries — for instance, the normal, if not universal, strict adherence to the laws on idolatry prevented general indulgence in the sort of art collections fashionable in Rome. The result was a problem for the rich in the disposal and investment of a large unconsumed surplus; the methods chosen for such investment led, when combined with other factors, to the social sickness that Josephus describes.

Much surplus wealth was simply stored away in the form of metal and other valuables, either in private houses or in personal deposits in the Temple treasury (BJ VI 282). The example of surrounding cultures, however, must have made the rich aware of the waste in money lying idle and so they looked for suitable investments. Here they encountered a problem: the Judaean economy lacked sufficient enterprises from which a suitable return on invested capital could be assured, and the option for entrepreneurs of creating new businesses on a base other than the

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24 See K. Hopkins ‘Economic growth and towns in Classical Antiquity’, in P. Abrams and E. A. Wrigley (edd.), Towns in Society (1978) pp. 35-77, on the extent to which goods of many different kinds were transported by both land and water and traded over wide areas in this period.
25 Primarily the Temple, but cf. also the paving of Jerusalem (AJ XX 222).
27 On this last, see G. Foerster in S. Safrai and M. Stern (edd.), The Jewish People in the First Century II, pp. 971 and 1092. The difference in levels of conspicuous consumption should not be stressed too much since it is not quantifiable; cf. also Josephan evidence of the splendid houses of some of the rich (Kreissig, op. cit., p. 59), with some archaeological confirmation in Y. Yadin (ed.), Jerusalem Revealed (1975), and also considerable expenditure by the pious on funerals (BJ II 1). However, it does provide a contrast to the employment provided for the Roman plebs by the senatorial aristocracy and public works (P. A. Brunt, ‘Free labour and public works at Rome’, JRS (1980) pp. 81-100).
traditional reliance on agriculture and pilgrimage traffic was closed by the reluctance of their home market to buy domestically produced goods when such goods were readily available from centres of production elsewhere in the Empire. There is little evidence of rich aristocrats putting money into new manufacturing industry or long-distance trade.28 Instead, wealth was invested in either land or loans. Safest was the purchase of land, since rentals could bring in a steady income without risk to capital; it can be readily assumed that most aristocrats were big landowners with estates farmed by tenants.29 Land, however, could not suffice for all the surplus, for its availability was severely limited and the increasing population was ideologically attached to ancestral plots.30 The only feasible alternative was to lend cash to others, an equally socially prestigious indication of the creditor's prosperity31 and a sure way to make a good profit.

Biblical law, of course, forbids the taking of usurious interest, and that this was irksome to some is shown by tannaitic texts which complain that the laws on usury were infringed.32 Such illegality, however, was not strictly necessary for the creditor to profit: with the help of the new institution of the prosubul, a decent income could be made from loans, without problems for the conscientious.

The prosubul enabled a creditor to exact payment of a debt with the backing of the courts even after the universal cancellation of debts at the end of the seven-year cycle. The sort of debts assumed by the ruling seem to be loans by the rich to the poor across a social divide — loans to friends would not need a prosubul, for the moral obligation to repay loans after the

28 Despite Kreissig, Soz. Zus., pp. 62 and 69-73. Kreissig's evidence is all from late talmudic texts and reveals little except rabbinic speculation in later antiquity about first century Jerusalem. The sophisticated heter 'isqa' which permits investment by partnership in industrial concerns is not attested before the talmudic period, contra J. D. M. Derrett, op. cit., p. 21, even though the law in mBM 5: 4 has the potential as early as the tannaitic period for development in that direction. For availability of goods from abroad, see above, note 24; for similar limitations on investment in the Roman economy, see P. A. Brunt, Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic (1971) pp. 20-23.

29 Most such land was, presumably, in Judaea. However, some estates may have been in Idumaea or Perea, though there is no good evidence for Judaeans aristocrats investing in farms in the hills of Galilee, contra S. W. Baron, Social and Religious History of the Jewish People (1952) 1, p. 278. I assume that the aristocrats of the Gentile poleis will have prevented the rich of Jerusalem from buying up the good land in the territories of the coastal cities. Investors in land near Jerusalem included not only locals like Josephus (Vita 422) but also rich foreigners (Kreissig, art cit., p. 233); farming was by tenants, a Hellenistic method introduced in the late Hasmonan period according to Kreissig, art. cit., p. 232. There is no evidence of big latifundia in Palestine in this period, or of large-scale use of slaves.

30 Grant, op. cit., pp. 64-5, 84-87.
31 Derrett, op. cit., p. 27.
32 mBM 5: 11; mSanh 3: 3. It is, however, pointed out by Sherwin-White, op. cit., p. 142 that there are no such complaints in the New Testament texts, but this may not reflect conditions in Palestine so much as the Gentile audience to whom the gospels were largely addressed.
Sabbatical Year, even without a prosbul (mShebi. 10:9), would be enough to ensure repayment at the risk of social stigma, while, similarly, no rich trading colleague could afford to welch on his debt if he hoped for further credit. The prosbul institution was, then, enacted for loan agreements in which the creditor and the debtor lacked social ties to bind them, and in the absence of professional money-lenders requiring state and legal backing to secure such loans such creditors must be the rich of Judaea.

The reasons for a legal innovation like the prosbul must have been weighty. The prosbul, unlike almost all the rest of tannaitic law, directly contradicted biblical rulings about the Sabbatical Year — hence some later amoraic rabbis were less than sympathetic to the change (bGitt. 36b). The Mishnah, however, in attributing the institution to Hillel, had no such reservations: it was a ‘precaution for the general good’ (mGitt 4:3), a phrase explained elsewhere in terms of Hillel’s desire to help would-be borrowers over the illegal credit squeeze that occurred at the end of each seven year cycle (mShebi 10:3). This explanation is rather weak — it is not characteristic of the tannaim to change the Law just because they find that people are transgressing it. Modern interpretations, however, are not much better: they assume, anachronistically, that the prosbul was needed for the long-term credit backing essential to a capitalist economy.

None of these explanations seems to me sufficient. Instead, the change in the law should be understood in the context already described of the need of the rich to find suitable outlets for investment. Since the prosbul was only effective with the sanction of Jewish courts (mShebi 10:4), and since most of those courts, from the Sanhedrin down, were dominated by aristocrats, it can be assumed that the rich did not disapprove of the measure; nor can the otherwise attractive explanation be accepted that this was a theoretical innovation put forward by socially conscientious but politically powerless religious leaders. Whether or not Hillel was in fact connected with the prosbul’s introduction, a document from the Judaean Desert (DJD II 18) shows the institution to have been in use, and presumably backed by the courts, early in the reign of Nero.

The rich, then, wanted the prosbul. Their motive, perhaps surprisingly, given the class of unreliable poverty-stricken debtors made available to them as a result, was profit. If the debtor repaid his loan within the set time limit, the lender lost nothing and gained a grateful friend. If repayment was

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33 Sherwin-White, op. cit., pp. 141-2. The gospel evidence that he uses is confirmed by tannaitic texts, which assume that loans are private affairs between individuals, as in the Judaean Desert loan documents.
34 S. W. Baron, op. cit. II, p. 262; Applebaum, art. cit., p. 163.
made after the fixed period, as perhaps it was expected to be, the fine charged in the Judaean Desert documents provided 20% interest.\(^{36}\) And if (as must often have been the case despite the lower interest rates that such availability of credit should have brought) repayment was altogether impossible because the debtor could not raise the liquid assets,\(^{37}\) foreclosure brought a rich reward: amortisation was very rare, an act of supererogatory virtue,\(^{38}\) and, instead, property, especially (and desirably) land, was forfeited for non-repayment,\(^{39}\) while sometimes the debtor himself, if not members of his family, became the creditor's slave.\(^{40}\) This is an impressive return on investment. Rich men could afford to lend, not just to peasants and artisans who might be trusted to repay from income, or to tenants for seed-corn to produce rent (though this also happened, cf. \textit{mBM} 5:8), but to anyone desperate enough to borrow. There were many such; with a growing population, the owners of divided plots needed to buy extra land to render their farms viable, and, with competition in the land market from aristocrats who could afford high prices, peasants needed to borrow from those same aristocrats in order to make such purchases. These peasants might never have sufficient surplus to repay the loan, but the laws dealing with insolvent debtors meant that, unless a borrower with less fixed assets than the sum loaned took to banditry or emigration, the creditor could not lose.

The wealth that flowed into Jerusalem led in this way to the indebtedness of many of the poor of both city and countryside (see flow chart). Many of

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\(^{36}\) \textit{DJD} II 18 line 6: \textit{bhmš}. In \textit{DJD} II 114 line 16, a loan probably involving at least one Gentile and written in Greek, the equivalent clause is described unashamedly as 'interest' (\textit{tokon}), whereas documents recording deals between Jews scrupulously avoid the terminology, if not the substance, of usury.

\(^{37}\) Repayment had to be in coin or other moveables. The cession of part of the debtor's land, at a rate for land prices fixed by the court, was a humane introduction to Roman law made only under Julius Caesar; it had no counterpart in other ancient systems of debt and was probably itself changed in Rome only for political rather than charitable reasons (M. W. Frederiksen, 'Caesar, Cicero and the Problem of Debt', \textit{JRS} (1966) pp. 128-141).

\(^{38}\) Derrett, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45: such actions appear in exhortatory parables rather than everyday life.

\(^{39}\) This is the case in \textit{DJD} II 18 and 114, cf. \textit{mBM} 5: 3. \textit{mshei}. 10: 6 gives the ruling that the court will only permit \textit{a prosbul} if the debtor can give land as security, although the creditor can circumvent this condition by giving him title to a small parcel of land along with the rest of the loan. Note also Judas of En-gedi borrowing against a mortgage on his father's house (H. J. Polotsky, 'The Greek papyri from the Cave of the Letters', \textit{IEJ} XII (1962) p. 259).

\(^{40}\) This has been a fiercely disputed topic, but there seems no reason now to doubt the main arguments of E. E. Urbach, 'The Laws regarding Slavery as a Source for Social History of the Period of the Second Temple, the Mishnah and Talmud, \textit{Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies London I} (1964), pp. 1-94. Urbach suggests that only economic reasons (i.e. the cheap price of foreign slaves) and not legal changes prevented debt slavery from being very widespread indeed. The sale of wife and children by a debtor to help pay off his debt is more difficult to assert (cf. Derrett, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 38) but \textit{meduy.} 8: 2 assumes that a daughter could be sent away from home for long periods as a pledge, presumably to secure a loan. Kreissig, \textit{art. cit.}, p. 238 has, characteristically, no doubts on either topic.
the urban plebs were unemployed after the completion of the Temple in 64, and the social tensions created were so considerable that even economically unaware contemporaries felt the need to take action (AJ XX 220); since that action was insufficient (AJ XX 222), the urban poor had to borrow in order to stay alive, and the extremists in the Temple had good grounds for hope that such debtors would be encouraged by the burning of the archives to join in the revolt (BJ II 247). And rural debt was no less serious. Peasants were reduced to selling off or forfeiting their farms and becoming part of a rural proletariat of growing size and volatile political ambitions (cf. BJ II 265). Of these landless, some turned to banditry, often with the tacit support of other members of their class; imprisonment of such male-factors was, as the procurator Albinus may have perceived, and as the Jewish aristocrat Josephus certainly did not, no solution to the underlying social stress (BJ II 273).

Some rural debtors, and presumably more urban debtors who lacked sufficient land to offer as pledge, were reduced by their creditors to slavery. On their release by the revolutionary Simon b. Giora (BJ IV 508), they fought alongside the peasants from whose ranks they had originally come, providing some of the fiercest fighters of the war. This much is clear from Josephus, and if he has less to say about so crucial an element in the revolutionary struggle than the subject would seem to deserve, this can be put down to his aims in writing history: neither his Greco-Roman aristocratic readers nor his Flavian masters would enjoy reading about the Jewish War if it appeared to be no more than a servile revolt and, since Josephus is writing about political and military events, he can justifiably say little about slaves on the grounds that they, like women, usually affect such history only when they are emancipated. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to suggest that the class of Jewish debt-slaves never reached the proportions that were theoretically possible: the relatively cheap price of Gentile slaves on the Empire-wide market reduced the incentive to enslave Jews unless they had particular skills of use to their owner. Furthermore, Jewish slaves had too many rights designed for the maintenance of their dignity to permit

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42 BJ IV 508, 510, V 443. If these slaves had not been Jews, they would surely have taken to flight rather than risking their lives in the war. Cf. Kreissig, Soz. Zus., p. 140.
43 Cf. the grandiose introduction to Josephus’ history of ‘the greatest of all wars’: BJ I 1 and 4. Flavian propaganda hinged on the restoration of the Pax Deorum with the subjugation of Judaea.
44 This is the argument of Urbach, art cit., p. 31. It follows from this that there were fewer debt slaves than there might have been; it does not preclude there having been, nonetheless, a formidable number available to participate in the revolt.
full economic use to be made of their labour,\(^{45}\) while those rights were preserved by the apparently generally accepted reversion of slaves to full rather than partial citizen status on receipt of freedom.\(^{46}\) In a society that only needed slave labour on a small scale and mostly for domestic work,\(^{47}\) creditors will have preferred, when possible, to take land or other property as forfeits for unpaid debts rather than the grudging servile labour of the debtor.\(^{48}\) In this, Judaea differed from some other parts of Syria: in Dura-Europus men sold themselves voluntarily into slavery, preferring servitude to the continuing struggle to make a living from their own property.\(^{49}\) The value put on freedom in Jewish society prevented any such institution taking root among Jews in Palestine.\(^{50}\)

Economic forces, then, pushed the poorer peasants more into banditry than slavery, but, in both cases, their hatred for the rich in both countryside and city (often, doubtless, the same landowners, resident in the city but reliant on country rents) is well documented.\(^{51}\) Nonetheless, some of those same rich, including Josephus himself, succeeded, even if only briefly, in taking over control of the revolt after it had started (BJ II 562-8), a turn of events that would surely have been impossible in a war based solely on


\(^{46}\) Hence the lack of references to freedmen in Palestinian society, cf. Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 68, where different conclusions are drawn from this fact. Urbach, *art. cit.*, pp. 30-31, points out from *Sifra* that a freed slave was likely to suffer social if not legal diminution in status.


\(^{48}\) Selling the debtor on the market was, of course, a possible alternative way of recovering a bad debt (Urbach, *art. cit.*, p. 27, on sales of Hebrew slaves by one Jewish master to another). However, the difficulties involved for the Jewish buyer in using his Jewish slave to full advantage (see above, note 45) will have discouraged such purchases, and there was a strong prejudice against letting Jews be sold to Gentiles even if the latter might have been prepared to pay a higher price (Urbach, *art. cit.*, pp. 13-14; *Sifre* Deut. 118; *AJ* XVI 1-5). On the other hand, convicted thieves sold into servitude should have swelled the total of slaves considerably (Urbach, *art. cit.*, pp. 18f; B. S. Jackson, *Theft in Early Jewish Law* (1972) p. 141, n. 6).

\(^{49}\) C. B. Welles, *The Parchments and Papyri. The Excavations at Dura-Europus. Final Report V* Part I (1959) pp. 109-114 (P. Dura 20); M. I. Finley, 'La Servitude pour Dettes', *Rev. Hist. de Droit Fr. et Étranger* (1965) p. 165. The Dura-Europus documents provide useful parallels to the phrases found in *DJD* II 18 and 114. For example, it may be suggested from omissions in *DJD* II 18 that the debtor's own person was not in this case at stake (perhaps because the two parties are of the same class background, hence also the rather informal script); on the other hand, the use of *ἐκ τοῦ* *κοιμίου* in *DJD* II 114, line 19, rather than *παρά* as in *DJD* II 115, line 16 (with *ἐκ* in line 17) and P. Dura 20 lines 17-18 (*παρά* is only conjectured in P. Dura 21 and 22), perhaps indicates a particularly strong commitment to the liability of the debtor to forfeit his freedom in a loan where the creditor is probably a Roman soldier.

\(^{50}\) Note the rhetoric on the coins issued by the rebels in 67-8. Kreissig, *Soc. Zus.*, p. 142, suggests that supporters of Simon b. Glora implied by the slogan *ḥrwt Šywnt* not nationalist but class freedom.

\(^{51}\) Brunt, *Josephus*, *passim*. 
Whatever the role of religious prestige in the winning of political power — many of these aristocrats were priests or other religious leaders — the phenomenon at least has to make sense within the pattern of economic interdependence so far outlined.

It is not in fact so surprising that members of the traditional aristocracy should have taken control of the revolution near its beginning but have been ousted when their leadership against Rome ceased to appear effective. Their position within society was bolstered in times of political success by precisely the economic factors that fuelled opposition to them in times of failure. During the years of peace, many of the poor, apart from those opting out into banditry, will have relied on the benevolence of the aristocracy for the preservation of their livelihood: peasant farmers actually needed the loans so freely offered to them, whatever the dire consequences of accepting them; tenants in the countryside needed the seed-corn that landlords, for the sake, presumably, of higher rent, provided in bad years (cf. mBM 5:8); the urban plebs looked to the Jerusalem aristocracy for employment (AJ XX 222) and for the charitable dole that social mores rendered normal. While this sort of reliance on the rich could hardly make the poor look upon them with affection, and while none of these practices carried with them the social ties familiar in the patronage system of contemporary Rome, they nonetheless at least prevented widespread participation in a purely class war until new leaders of their own class showed the poor how to achieve a far more thoroughgoing change in their society than just the removal of oppressive Roman rule.

Such leaders did, of course, finally emerge, and the last stages of the rebellion degenerated into a vicious and futile class war with the slaughter and plunder of the rich. The main cause of the disaster was neither the moral decay that Josephus claimed to see, nor the cruel imperialism of the Roman enemy, but something much more insidious: Judaean society rotted from within because of the social imbalance caused by excessive wealth attracted during the Pax Romana into the holy city of Jerusalem.

52 Kreissig, Soz. Zus., p. 138 ignores the problems in this episode by accepting Josephus' apologetic in the Vita and asserting that these aristocrats remained constant in favour of peace. This makes the BJ passage impossible to explain.
53 M. Hengel, Poverty and Riches in the Early Church (ET 1974), p. 20; Derrett, op. cit., p. xlv points out that the rich need to have the poor always with them because conspicuous charity is a prime means to a reputation for both piety and wealth.
Fig: The problem of debt in first century Palestine

Temple dues  \(\rightarrow\) Pilgrimage income  \(\rightarrow\) Herodian spending

\[\text{influx of wealth into Jerusalem}\]

Unconsumed wealth

Land investment

Cash deposits e.g. Temple treasury

Loan investment

CREDITORS

1. Flouting of usury laws
2. Prosbul introduced to improve security of investment
3. Archives burnt in 66

DEBTORS

Borrow to pay taxes

Borrow in bad years for rent

Borrow if underemployed

Move to city

Emigration

Slaves

Tenants

Employment and security depend on wealthy classes

Landless peasants

Peasants sell out

Peasants lease additional plots

Peasants borrow to buy additional plots

Partible inheritance with population increase

1. Insufficient surplus for taxes from small plots
2. Insufficient surplus to buy additional land to supplement uneconomic plots

Investment demand

High demand for land  \(\rightarrow\) High land prices  \(\rightarrow\) Inelastic supply (geographic constraints)

Population increase