Jewish armed resistance against Roman rule in Judaea reached its culmination and exhausted itself in the Revolt of Bar Kokhba. Great numbers of rebels participated in the insurrection, employing guerilla-tactics, and large reinforcements were needed to suppress it. The rebels were united under the leadership of one man: Bar Kokhba. The revolt resulted in the emergence of a kind of independent state, marked by the organization of local authorities, the issue of coinage and the leasing of state-land.

Whereas in the past this war was often ignored in scholarly literature, great and even excessive attention is now being paid to the revolt. For the lack of interest of past generations two basic reasons may be mentioned. (1) No extant literary source gives a comprehensive description of the revolt, its causes and course. We have consequently to depend on a variety of testimonies found in talmudic and Roman literature, in the writings of the Church Fathers, and in Samaritan chronicles. These sources contain partial and isolated statements only, sometimes contradictory and often tendentious, which must then be interpreted in combination with the archaeological evidence. However, all the available combined information still does not produce a clear picture of the course of the revolt, and essential problems cannot be solved, such as the geographical scope of the rising, the question of whether Jerusalem was conquered by the rebels, and if so whether the Temple was rebuilt. (2) Historians used to assume that the Jewish diaspora began after the destruction of the Second Temple. This view was determined by a theological concept, for in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth scholars wished to represent the destruction of the Second Temple as divine punishment of the people of Israel since they saw the rise of Christianity as the true continuation of Judaism.  

1 Obviously such an attitude precluded serious consideration of the
Revolt of Bar Kokhba and its impact, for in this rebellion the Jews displayed impressive military and political activity some sixty years after the suppression of the First Revolt.

In recent decades various factors have heightened interest in the Revolt of Bar Kokhba. (1) A critical and balanced scrutiny of Jewish history in the period of the Mishnah has made it clear that after the destruction of the Second Temple the Jews in Judaea still showed many of the characteristics of an independent people. This follows in particular from the study of the independent Jewish authorities and their relationship with the Roman government and with the Jewish people in the country and in the diaspora. The Jewish leadership was actively involved in the rehabilitation of the people after the suppression of the First Revolt and the destruction of the Temple. The Jewish authorities created in this period the basic conditions for a continued religious and national life without Jerusalem and the Temple. The unity of the nation during the revolt of Bar Kokhba, and the military and political strength it displayed, formed the apogee of this process and showed the vitality of the people generations after the destruction of the Second Temple.

(2) Popular interest in the two Jewish revolts against Rome in Judaea has greatly increased as a result of the spectacular archaeological discoveries of recent decades. The excavations at Masada have produced what may almost be called a monument to the First Revolt. In 1952, documents and objects from the time of the Bar Kokhba uprising were found in Wadi Murabba‘at. In 1960 and 1961, further discoveries were made in the Judaean desert, notably of documents including letters from Bar Kokhba, found in Nahal Ḥever (see below). In addition a systematic exploration was undertaken in several areas of caves and underground hiding-places, at least some of which were constructed in the period under consideration. All these finds have attracted attention to the revolt and its leader and given fresh impetus to the study of the subject.

(3) A recent development which does not in fact belong to the realm of scholarship must briefly be noted. There is today in Israel a tendency to identify with the rebels. It might have been expected that the generation which saw the establishment of the Jewish state would identify with past periods of national prosperity, with the Kingdom of David and Solomon or

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2 This approach was first developed by Gedalyahu Alon, who was followed by many students of the period of the Mishnah and the Talmud. See in particular: G. Alon, The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age, i (1980), pp. 1-17. See also the recent treatment (with different views on the subject) by M. Goodman, State and Society in Roman Galilee, AD 132-212 (1983), esp. parts iii and iv.

3 See, for example, the expressions of such sentiment in Y. Yadin’s popular accounts of his discoveries: Masada (1966), p. 201; Bar Kokhba (1971), p. 15: Bar Kokhba “the last President of Israel 1800 years ago”; p. 253: “we found that our emotions were a mixture of tension and awe, yet astonishment and pride at being part of the reborn State of Israel after a Diaspora of 1800 years”.
that of the Hasmonaeans. Instead, there is clearly an inclination to feel closer to those who fought a foreign empire unsuccessfully. This has become the subject of polemic writings in recent years. Bar Kokhba’s revolt is now described as an inexcusable failure which could have been foreseen and avoided. Y. Harkabi and others assume that contemporary political controversies may be clarified by the study of the revolt, a supposition that has made the study of the revolt itself a subject of debate. These publications have again excited popular curiosity in regard to this war in Israel.

Once scholars turned their attention to the Bar Kokhba revolt, they depicted it in various ways, depending to a large extent on personal conceptions of the Roman empire, the Jewish people, Greek and Roman culture, and Jewish religion. We find in scholarly literature discussions which wholly identify with a presumed Roman point of view or, conversely, with that of the Jews. A third group attempts to understand historical reality by giving both the supposed Roman and Jewish perspectives. Roman actions are described as basically benevolent (but shortsighted); Jewish resistance as comprehensible. An example of the first attitude is that of Wilhelm Weber; ‘‘Finally his (Hadrian’s) serious war, that against the Jews, was in essence purely defensive. In it he was fully justified in taking drastic and relentless measures’’. Through the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, ‘‘new life was to blossom forth from the ruins. But the break with the past was unavoidable . . . Graeco-Roman culture was henceforth to prosper’’ etc. As so often, this extreme statement has something in common with the opposite point of view expressed in the publications of several Israeli scholars. These agree with Weber that Hadrian consciously intended to destroy Jewish life and culture in Judaea and elsewhere. The difference, of course, is that Weber considered this a laudable plan, accepting the brutal repression of Jewish resistance as unavoidable, while

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6 See also: B. W. Henderson, The Life and Principate of the Emperor Hadrian (1923), pp. 213-231, esp. 213ff.; 220f. Henderson, however, has harsh words for Hadrian as well: ‘‘Not even Caligula in all his madness could have devised a provocation more sure of its result’’. Like some Israeli authors, Henderson considers ‘‘Hadrian’s work linked with post-war Zionism’’ (for which he has no sympathy). Henderson’s negative judgement of Judaism after the revolt of Bar Kokhba echoes that of Th. Mommsen, Römische Geschichte, v, p. 551ff. and of many others.

Israeli scholars often see the revolt as an heroic struggle against Roman oppression. In contrast to those who manifestly take sides, others prefer a balanced view that attempts to explain what happened without blaming either the Jews or the Romans unduly. These assume that Hadrian's intentions were essentially benevolent. He did not want to destroy Jewish culture in Judaea and he was unaware of the significance of his reputed decision to ban circumcision. It is held that on the one hand no active aggression against the Jews was intended, and on the other that the Jews cannot be blamed for their violent response.

There exists now a new trend towards critical re-examination. In a recent book P. Schäfer denies the historical relevance of many literary sources relating to the revolt. Elsewhere Bar Kokhba is described as a "pious thug". It has been suggested that the Jewish war was not as disastrous from the Roman perspective as Cassius Dio and modern authors claim. The messianic or zealot character of the revolt has been denied. It is argued that no evidence exists of any tension in the 120's or of underground preparations for war. In the past, it was generally held that the revolt spread over the whole of the Roman province of Judaea. Now, many scholars argue that only a limited area was affected and that Jerusalem was never captured.

Critical scrutiny of the evidence is necessary, of course. Yet since there is always room for disagreement on specific subjects, it cannot lead to decisive revision. The most substantial contribution to our information on the revolt has been made by archaeological exploration, epigraphy, and numismatics. The present paper presents an account of the development of modern thinking on the revolt and of the impact of archaeological discoveries.

The Evidence

Talmudic Sources

The revolt of Bar Kokhba is mentioned rather extensively in talmudic literature for several reasons, one of them being that, apart from the deep

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10 G. W. Bowersock, "A Roman Perspective on the Bar Kokhba Revolt" in: *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ii, by W. S. Green (Brown Judaic Studies 9, 1980), pp. 131-141; or cf. Broshi (above, n. 4): "a despotic leader, cruel and arrogant" and Mommsen (above, n. 6): "Rauberhauptmann". This is, in fact, the judgement of Eusebius, *HE* iv 6,2: φονικός καὶ λῃστηριός τις ἄνδρ.
13 Idem, "The Participation of Galilee in the 'War of Qitos' (= Quietus) or in the 'Ben Kosba Revolt'", *Cathedra* 4 (1977), pp. 67-73 (Hebrew); Bowersock, (above, n. 10), pp. 132-4. See below, p. 49.
14 Below, pp. 54f.
impression made by the events themselves, the final editing of the Mishnah took place not very long after the war ended. Sages active in the period c. 140-180 played a crucial role both in the redaction of tannaitic literature and in the development of the oral law. Most references to the revolt are found in three groups of tradition focussing on (1) the quality of Bar Kokhba's leadership; (2) the attitude of the sages towards the rebellion and Bar Kokhba personally; and (3) the fall of Bethar and the aftermath of the revolt. Little information exists on the causes and course of the war, but talmudic sources must be taken into account when considering its geographical scope, the possible conquest of Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the Temple by the rebels.

The evaluation of the Talmud as an historical source is problematic in general, and this is particularly true of the evidence relating to the revolt. The character of talmudic literature is such that historical facts are mentioned incidentally only. The aim of the Talmud is not historiography. It concentrates on legislation (halakhah) and on theological didactics (aggadah). One may find there in juxtaposition sources from the period of the revolt itself; sources dating to the years after the revolt showing the deep impression made by failure and defeat; anachronistic descriptions of historical situations clearly reflecting a later period; sources which attempt to solve in a historiosophic manner problems connected with the revolt. All these are bound to have been distorted by later editors for whom the revolt was a nebulous event which took place in ancient history.

The revolt of Bar Kokhba was at first studied by scholars who did not seriously examine talmudic material or considered it as of only marginal importance. Others accepted each talmudic source at its face value, as authentic information. Where they encountered internal contradictions, they tended to resolve them by reconciliation. G. Alon laid the foundations of the modern study of the period of the Mishnah and the Talmud through critical examination of talmudic literature. He took it upon himself to separate the authentic historical kernel from the mass of halakhic and aggadic material, while combining this with evidence from Greek and Latin literature. Alon, in his treatment of the revolt, attempted to analyze basic problems such as the geographic scope of the war, involvement of the Samaritans and the attitude of the sages towards the rebellion.

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15 yTa'anit iv 68d-69b; Lamentations Rabbah ii 4; ibid. ed. Buber, pp. 100-109; bGiṭin 57a-58a.
16 See e.g. F. Gregorovius, Der Kaiser Hadrian (1884), pp. 188-216.
17 For instance, I. Halevy, Dorot ha-Rishonim, iv (1967), pp. 574-672.
Recently, two methods of analysis have been developed which go much further than Alon's in their critical evaluation of talmudic sources. The first emphasizes that the rebellion must be studied in the light of the preceding period, through comparative analysis of the talmudic sources regarding the First Revolt.19 The authenticity of the sources is analyzed, particularly the respective reliability of the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmuds, their background, the way in which they were edited, and their particular tendencies. These scholars are highly critical of the Babylonian sources, which are remote chronologically and geographically, and were later distorted for extraneous purposes, such as the preservation of good relations with the gentile authorities. On the other hand, they consider the Palestinian sources as containing authentic historical evidence in addition to a mass of legendary material. The second method dissects talmudic sources into their component parts and studies each source separately, considering its historical relevance, if any.20 This approach might seem to be the most precise of all. Its strength lies in the elimination of speculation prevalent in previous research, but a fundamental weakness is that it fails to consider the sources in combination, and this sometimes results in conjecture that is no better founded than that which it criticized in the first place.

Greek and Latin Sources

The relevant Greek and Latin sources are discussed in various works dealing with the revolt.21 It is generally admitted that Dio's account provides the sole consistent survey, but the text is preserved only in the Byzantine epitome of Xiphilinus.22 Moreover, it is a general description, not an account of the course of the war. For its causes, the Historia Augusta is important as the only source to mention a ban on circumcision preceding the revolt.23 The Historia Augusta is, of course, a most unreliable and problematic work. We may add that the statement there gives the impression of being a hostile pronouncement, disparaging circumcision and providing the reputed reason for the revolt. This does not mean that it is untrue; but Dio, even in Xiphilinus' version, is not hostile. Christian

20 Schäfer (above, n. 9); D. Goodblatt, "Did the Tannaim support Bar-Kokhva?", Cathedra 29 (1983), pp. 6-12; idem, "The Title Nasi and the Ideological Background of the Second Revolt" in: New Studies (above, n. 19), pp. 113-132 (both papers in Hebrew).
21 See in particular: M. Stern, Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism, ii (1980), nos. 332; 342; 343; 353; 440; 511. Patristic sources are mentioned in the commentary but not cited in full.
sources are remote in time and antagonistic towards the Jews, yet it cannot be denied that they and the Jewish sources have features in common which they do not share with Dio: references to Bar Kokhba, Tineius Rufus and the fall of Bethar, as opposed to the statement regarding Julius Severus in the latter source. This may partly be explained by the circumstance that Jewish and Christian sources are, in fact, local sources, while Dio presumably based himself on Roman material. However, it is also possible that talmudic literature and the Church Fathers reflect, to a certain extent, a common tradition, even though they have no common sympathy. We have, altogether, four contemporary references to the war. Three are isolated sentences (Appianus, Fronto and Pausanias). The fourth does not even mention the revolt specifically (Apollodorus of Damascus). Our sources are deficient, however they are interpreted.

Samaritan Chronicles

There exists no systematic discussion of the Samaritan chronicles related to the revolt, but various scholars mention them in their works. The chronicles date to the Middle Ages and they are very probably influenced by the relationship between Jews and Samaritans as it developed in the period after the revolt.

Archaeological Exploration

Archaeological evidence gains in importance when literary sources are scarce. Accordingly, archaeology has more to contribute, relatively speaking, to our understanding of the Bar Kokhba revolt than to that of the First Revolt. The excavations at Masada, for instance, are valuable because among other things they confirm much of what Josephus relates; but they add comparatively little to what can be learned from the literary source. As regards the Bar Kokhba revolt, part of what we know derives exclusively

24 Appianus, *Syriaca* 50, 252. Cf. Stern (above, n. 21), no. 343; Fronto, *de bello Parthico*, 2; cf. Stern, no. 342; Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio* I 5,5; cf. Stern, no. 353. Fronto refers to the great number of Roman soldiers killed under Hadrian in Britain (c. AD 118) and in the Jewish rebellion. Bowersock (above, n. 10), p. 132, singles out Fronto as the only author who gives us the contemporary Roman perspective, because no other writer mentions the British revolt as comparable with the Jewish one. The Jewish revolt received more publicity afterwards. Pausanias, however, another contemporary of Hadrian, mentions the Jewish war as the only event to disturb the peace in Hadrian's reign. It may be argued that Pausanias rather than Fronto gives us the Roman perspective, for Fronto listed as many disasters as he could. E. Champlin, *Fronto and Antonine Rome* (1980), p. 95, points out that "an astonishing note of bitterness pervades Fronto's attitude to Hadrian". The present passage is characteristic of the author's disparagement of that emperor.


from archaeological evidence, and elementary problems can be solved only—if at all—by systematic field-work.

Archaeological exploration has thrown light on the activities of both the Roman army and the Jewish insurgents. Despite the sensational discoveries of the past decades, much of what we now know is due to patient and systematic exploration begun in the nineteenth century. Of general importance and still invaluable is the Survey of Western Palestine. Much of the network of Roman roads in the country was first indicated on the map of the Survey. French scholars first published two important inscriptions from Bethar: (1) a Roman milestone which shows that the Jerusalem—Beth Govrin road was constructed in 130, two years before the revolt broke out, when Hadrian visited the province; (2) a military inscription recording troops which presumably took part in the siege of Bar Kokhba's last stronghold. Bethar has not been excavated, but surface exploration has produced plans of the extant remains of the Roman siegeworks and of the walls of the Roman camps near the site.

Relevant to the history of the revolt is, further, the continued exploration of the Roman road network in the country. It is now known that most Roman roads were first constructed in the reign of Hadrian, before the revolt broke out. On the other hand, archaeology has so far failed to uncover any traces of military construction (roads or camps) dating to the years of the war, apart from the remains at Bethar. Roads and forts had been tentatively ascribed to the period of the revolt, but there is no evidence for this, and at least part of these forts are now known to be of Byzantine date. Abel and others attempted to trace strategic roads which

27 C. R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener, Survey of Western Palestine, Memoirs, i-iii (1881-3). Roman roads and milestones are indicated on the map which was published in 1880.
28 J. Germer-Durand, RB 3 (1894), 613; P. Thomsen, "Die römischen Meilensteine der Provinzen Syria, Arabia und Palaestina" ZDPV 40 (1917), no. 282.
29 CIL iii, no. 14155.2.
32 Kochavi (above, n. 30), p. 26, map 3.
allegedly encircled the area of the revolt and their idea found wide acceptance. However, this is definitely a misconception.

Our knowledge concerning the Roman troops in the country before and during the revolt derives from Greek and Latin inscriptions found in Israel and in other countries. Important, too, is our familiarity with the physical setting in which the war was fought. Only an understanding of the nature of the terrain helps to explain its suitability for guerilla warfare.

Coinage is part of the archaeological material discussed in any treatment of the revolt, and the contribution of numismatic evidence towards our understanding of the revolt cannot be over-estimated. Coin-hoards help to determine the geographical scope of the revolt. Here, recent discoveries are particularly important. As noted by Mildenberg, two-thirds of the total number of coins known have come to light after 1965. The size of the Bar Kokhba coinage, and the quantities of coins issued, tell us something of the

34 C. Kuhl, "Römische Strassen und Strassenstationen in der Umgebung von Jerusalem, i" PJB 24 (1928), p. 127, noted the importance of the construction of a Roman road past Bethar in 130, but asserted that Hadrian's road-building had only cultural and administrative significance and no military purpose. F.-M. Abel, Géographie de la Palestine, ii (1938), p. 222f., states incorrectly: "La révolte des Juifs sous Barkokèba, en 132-135, eut pour corollaire la création des voies de l'Idumée, d'Aelia à Hébron, d'Aelia à Eleutheropolis". Yeivin (above, n. 7) followed this mistake and imagined that during the war a road from Eleutheropolis (Beth Govrin) to Lydda was also constructed. This formed the basis for his theory of strategic encirclement. M. Avi-Yonah, The Holy Land from the Persian to the Arab Conquest (1977), p. 184f., misquoting and misinterpreting a midrashic text and archaeological evidence, confidently states that the line should be extended further northwards. Kochavi (above, n. 32) was influenced by this theory when he assigned road-construction to the years of the revolt. See also Smallwood (above, n. 8), p. 452, and M. Avi-Yonah, Carta's Atlas of the Period of the Second Temple, the Mishnah and the Talmud (1964), p. 83.

35 For the evidence see: Isaac and Roll (above, n. 31), p. 91f. and n. 12 on p. 100.

36 See the discussion by Applebaum (above, n. 7), pp. 25ff., and cf. the original edition of Schürer (above, n. 1), which describes a revolt that, theoretically speaking, could have taken place anywhere in the world.


39 Mildenberg (above), p. 311f.
population and the economy of Judaea at the time of the revolt.\textsuperscript{40} The legends and symbols on them embody the only extant contemporary pronouncements of the values and objectives of the insurgents.\textsuperscript{41} Interpretation, however, became possible only after the chronology of the coinage was established in recent years. Finally, with the help of the coinage, specific problems may be solved such as the date of the foundation of Aelia Capitolina and the chronology of the revolt.

The hiding-places of the insurgents are, of course, among the most spectacular discoveries of recent times. The documents discovered give a sense of immediacy rare in the study of antiquity. The letters from the leader of the revolt have no parallel among ancient sources. Many of the texts discovered by Prof. Yadin are as yet unpublished, more than twenty years after they were found.\textsuperscript{42} The documents throw a partial light on the organization of the revolt, on the personality of the leader and his priorities, but they add hardly anything to our knowledge of the causes and the course of the war.\textsuperscript{43}

Hardly less spectacular is the find in recent years of great numbers of subterranean hiding-places, some of which can with certainty be assigned to the revolt of Bar Kokhba. Most occur within ancient settlements. They are caves cut from the rock, linked by low and narrow horizontal passages and by vertical shafts which connect different levels. The entrances are usually low and narrow and can be blocked from the inside. The hiding-places are provided with ventilation-shafts, water-tanks, store-rooms and niches for lamps.

\textsuperscript{40} Op. cit., p. 327.
\textsuperscript{41} See below, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{42} When this paper was sent to the press, shortly after Yigael Yadin's death, it was not clear to us whether there were any concrete plans regarding the unpublished documents. For the finds from the Murabba 'at caves see P. Benoit, J. T. Milik and R. de Vaux, \textit{Discoveries in the Judean Desert}, ii, \textit{Les grottes de Murabba 'at} (1961); for the Nahal Hever finds, see Y. Yadin, \textit{Judean Desert Studies}, \textit{The Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters} (1963); for a preliminary report on the Bar Kokhba letters found there, see Yadin, \textit{"Expedition D"}, \textit{IEJ} 11 (1961), 36-52; for the Babatha archive, see the preliminary reports by Yadin: \textit{"Expedition D"}, \textit{IEJ} 12 (1962), pp. 227-57; esp. 235ff. (on the Aramaic, Hebrew and Nabatean documents); see also id. \textit{"The Nabatean Kingdom, Provincia Arabia, Petra and En-Gedi in the Documents from Nahal Hever"} \textit{Ex Oriente Lux} 17 (1963), pp. 227-41; for a preliminary account of the contents of the Greek documents, H. J. Polotsky, \textit{IEJ} 12 (1962), pp. 258-62; three documents. published in full: id., \textit{"The Archive of Babatha"}, \textit{Eretz-Israel} 8 (1967), pp. 46-50 (in Hebrew); N. Lewis, \textit{"Two Greek Documents from Provincia Arabia"} \textit{Illinois Classical Studies} 3 (1978), pp. 100-114; H. J. Wolff, \textit{"Römisches Provinzialrecht in der Provinz Arabien"} ANRW ii, 13 (1980), pp. 763-806; two letters from Bar Kokhba's headquarters to 'Ein Geddi: B. Lifshitz, \textit{"Papyrus grecs du désert de Judah"}, \textit{Aegyptus} 42 (1962), pp. 204-256. For the finds from other caves, see Y. Aharoni, \textit{"Expedition B"}, \textit{IEJ} 11 (1962), pp. 11-24; B. Lifshitz, \textit{"The Greek Documents from Nahal Seelim and Nahal Mishmar"}, \textit{ibid.} pp. 53-621 (lists of names). Finally, Yadin's popular account, \textit{Bar Kokhba} (1971).

\textsuperscript{43} Cf. Applebaum's observations (above, n. 7), p. 1.
These archaeological discoveries correspond in a remarkable manner to Dio's description of the Jewish refuges in the Bar Kokhba revolt: "To be sure, they did not dare try conclusions with the Romans in the open field, but they occupied the advantageous positions in the country and strengthened them with mines and walls, in order that they might have places of refuge whenever they should be hard pressed, and might meet together unobserved under ground; and they pierced these subterranean passages from above at intervals to let in air and light". (Dio lxix 12:1(3); Loeb). Talmudic sources which deal with the revolt contain descriptions of people hiding in caves.

Several archaeologists are of the opinion that these refuges are all related to the Bar Kokhba revolt, an assumption that rests basically on three arguments. First, in part of the subterranean strongholds finds have come to light which must indubitably be assigned to the revolt (Bar Kokhba coinage). Second, the refuges and the measures taken to prevent their discovery and penetration from the outside are so similar as to be virtually identical. This, it is argued, indicates that there was a uniform plan behind their construction. Third, emphasis is laid on the conformity of the archaeological evidence with the words of Cassius Dio and talmudic sources.

Other archaeologists and historians doubt that all these hide-outs are exclusively related to the period of the Bar Kokhba revolt. In their view, they were prepared and used from the Hellenistic until the Byzantine period. From a number of inscriptions and literary sources it appears that the use of caves as bases and refuges by bandits and terrorists in their fight against the authorities was common in various periods.\(^{43a}\) This, of course, is not to deny the use of subterranean hiding-places during the Bar Kokhba revolt also, as proved by archaeological evidence and indicated by Cassius Dio. It must be noted, however, that the talmudic sources relate only to the last stage of the revolt and the period of persecution that followed.

First discovered was the cave in Wadi Daliyah, south-west of Phasaelis in the Jordan valley.\(^{44}\) Then followed the caves at Khirbat al-'Arrub between Bethlehem and Hebron,\(^{45}\) and at Khirbat al-'Aqiq, east of Emmaus (Nicopolis).\(^{46}\) Of particular interest is the evidence at Herodion of...
occupation during the two Jewish revolts, since a rebel camp there is mentioned in one of the documents from Wadi Murabba‘at. Many rock-cut hiding-places have now been found in the Shephelat Yehudah (the foothills of Judaea) and elsewhere. New discoveries are being made regularly as systematic exploration continues. Some of these—if not all—were occupied in the time of the revolt of Bar Kokhba. A number of similar artificial caves have now been explored in Lower Galilee as well.

The Causes of the War

No subject relating to the war has been more discussed than its causes, but it can scarcely be said that progress has been made. It is remarkable how many scholars admit that this is a matter of controversy and then claim to produce a decisive argument in favour of their own opinion. The aim of the present paper is not to suggest a solution however, even though we too may have our personal preference. It will suffice here to indicate the current state of the debate.

The following causes or combination of causes are found in modern literature:


49 See A. Kloner, “The subterranean Hideaways of the Judean Foothills and the Bar-Kokhba Revolt” The Jerusalem Cathedra 3 (1983), pp. 83-96 (a preliminary account); see also Y. Dagan, Shephelat Yehudah (1982, in Hebrew), pp. 32-4. Dagan argues that these hiding-places were used from the Hellenistic till the Byzantine periods; for a similar argument, see G. Foerster, Cathedra 28 (1983), pp. 155-7 (Hebrew). Note also Dagan’s brief note in Hadashot Arkheologiyot 82 (1983), p. 58, with a sketch-map indicating the location of 69 caves prepared as hide-outs. The same issue contains reports on recent discoveries: Y. Patrich and R. Rubin, ibid., p. 40f. on caves found in Wadi Suweinit, c. 6 km. SE of Ramallah; D. Alon, ibid., pp. 64-6, on the partial excavation of a small fort and rock-cut cave system in Nahal Yattir. The fort is said to have been built after the First Revolt, while the cave system has produced coins of the period of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Additional sites, also on the southern edge of the Hebron Mountains, are now being explored. For a discussion of the talmudic sources referring to refugees in caves in the period of the revolt, see A. Oppenheimer, Cathedra 26 (1982), pp. 24-29 (in Hebrew).

50 Discussion and plans by Y. Tepper and Y. Shahar, Jewish Settlements in Galilee in the Revolts against the Romans and the underground Hiding-Places (published by the Department of Local Studies of the Qibbutz Movement, 1983, in Hebrew). In several caves, pottery ascribed to the second century has been found; in a cave at Shunem (Valley of Jezreel) coins from AD 59 to 76/7 have been collected. Several other caves have failed to produce any datable material. For a cave previously explored, see D. Bahat, “A Roof Tile of the Legio VI Ferrata and Pottery Vessels from Ḥorvat Ḥazon” IEJ 24 (1974), pp. 160-169.
(1) The revolt was caused by Hadrian's decision to transform Jerusalem into a pagan city, as stated by Cassius Dio.

(2) It was caused by a ban on circumcision as indicated in the *Historia Augusta*.

(3) These sources may be combined. The revolt was caused by the decision to found Aelia Capitolina and by a ban on circumcision.

(4) Hadrian decided, or was believed to have decided, that the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem might be rebuilt. When it appeared that he would not permit this the Jews rebelled.

(5) Various scholars have suggested that the destruction of the Temple created a psychological climate which led to renewed violence, irrespective of any decisions which may have formed the immediate cause of the revolt.\(^{51}\)

(6) It has been suggested that the economic situation contributed to the outbreak of the revolt.\(^{52}\) S. Applebaum argues that the revolt took its initial impetus from peasant discontent engendered by expropriation and oppressive tenurial conditions.\(^{53}\)

Most scholars advocate the third alternative in one form or another.\(^{54}\)

Several consider the foundation of Aelia Capitolina the sole cause of the revolt.\(^{55}\) Only Bowersock and Mildenberg altogether reject Dio's statement

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\(^{51}\) Mommsen (above, n. 6), p. 543; Henderson (above, n. 6), p. 213f. Smallwood (above, n. 8), p. 438, speaks of endemic nationalism; Applebaum (above, n. 7), p. 9, and in Rappaport (above, n. 7), pp. 211-5. See also L. Huteau-Dubois, "Les sursauts du nationalisme Juif contre l'occupation Romaine; de Massada à Bar Kokhba" *REJ* 127 (1968), p. 172f. The value of such arguments is denied by Bowersock (above, n. 10), pp. 132f.; 138 and by Mildenberg (above, n. 37), pp. 332-4. See also below, p. 16.

\(^{52}\) Alon (above, n. 7), ii, pp. 2-4.

\(^{53}\) Applebaum (above, n. 7), pp. 9-17; *id. "Judaea as a Roman Province", ANRW ii, 8 (1977), pp. 385-95; *id. in Rappaport, loc. cit.* For a different view, see Mildenberg, *loc. cit.*

\(^{54}\) Mommsen (above, n. 6); Schürer in the German and in the revised versions (above, n. 1), pp. 671-9; and pp. 535-40 respectively. Similarly Abel (above, n. 1), pp. 83-6; Alon (above, n. 7), ii, pp. 9-15; Applebaum, (above, n. 7), pp. 7-9 and in Rappaport (above, n. 7), pp. 220-5; Herr (above, n. 12), pp. 1-11 lays emphasis on the ban on circumcision but considers it possible that the foundation of Aelia also was a factor; for the opposite view, see Henderson (above, n. 6), p. 213f.; Yeivin (above, n. 7), pp. 58-61. Yeivin's account of the outbreak of the war is otherwise wholly speculative. See also B. Lifshitz, "Jerusalem sous la domination romaine", *ANRW* ii, 8 (1977), pp. 473-5; Huteau-Dubois (above, n. 51); P. Prigent, *La fin de Jérusalem* (1969), pp. 94-101. Smallwood (above, n. 8), pp. 428-38, considers these causes complementary to the evidence for continuous and increasing unrest in the years preceding the revolt.

that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina was the reason for the rebellion. Bowersock argues that two years elapsed between Hadrian's visit to Judaea and the outbreak of the revolt there. That need not be decisive. Parallels show that the development of a Roman colony might proceed very slowly once the decision to found one had been taken. The alleged permission given by Hadrian to rebuild the Jewish Temple, subsequently withdrawn, is not now considered a primary cause of the revolt by anyone.

Some contemporary studies, however, are not prepared to reject the story absolutely and assume there may be some truth in it.

A few additional observations may be made. The coin legends, "Jerusalem" and "For the Freedom of Jerusalem", and the design of the Temple on the coinage, are not mint indications but programmatic declarations. Accordingly, they cannot decide whether Jerusalem was

56 Bowersock (above, n. 10), p. 135f.; Mildenberg (above, n. 37), pp. 332-4. A. Schlatter, Die Tage Trajans und Hadrians (1897), pp. 1f.; 11f.; 31; 40; 88-99, argued that the revolt was not caused by any provocation on the part of the Romans. "Hadrian hat nicht durch Bedrueckung sondern durch sein Entgegenkommen die Leidenschaft des Volkes zu diesem furchtbarren Ausbruch gebracht". Schlatter considered this the final battle of the Jewish people. He was first of all interested in the confrontation between Jews and Christians. This preoccupation is even more apparent in his brochure: Wird der Jude über uns siegen? Ein Wort für die Weihnachtszeit (Velbert im Rheinland, 1935). H. Mantel, "The Causes of the Bar Kokhba Revolt", JQR 58 (1967-1968), pp. 224-242; 274-296, also rejects both the cause given by Dio and that mentioned in the Historia Augusta. He argues that Eusebius describes the true state of affairs: "It was not the decrees of Hadrian that caused the revolt, but Hadrian's decrees constituted a reaction to the Jewish revolt". See also Mantel's "Postscript", ibid. 59 (1968-1969), pp. 341-2. Mantel's theory is basically the same as that of Schlatter. A similar approach to a different conflict may be found in a recent study of the American War of Independence: R. W. Tucker and D. C. Hendrickson, The Fall of the British Empire: Origins of the American Independence (1982). The authors attempt to show that the colonies were the challenging power, while Britain's attitude was too passive and conciliatory. Britain's policy "was one of appeasement" and this, according to the authors, was the real cause of the conflict.

57 The walls of Aquileia were built in 169 BC, twelve years after the foundation of the colony (Livy xliii 1; 17). Note also the early history of Placentia and Cremona, cf. B. Isaac, Talanta 3 (1971), p. 20f. These were military colonies built in hostile territory. For the Roman colonies in Judaea see Isaac, "Roman Colonies in Judaea: The Foundation of Aelia Capitolina", Talanta 12-13 (1980-1981), 31-54.

58 It was considered an immediate cause of the revolt by several scholars in the 19th century, notably Grätz (above, n. 1), pp. 125ff; J. Derenbourg, Essai sur l'histoire et la géographie de la Palestine (1867), pp. 412-420; Schlatter (above, n. 56), 59-67 states without hesitation that the temple was virtually completed when the revolt broke out.


60 Mildenberg, HSCP (above, n. 37), p. 325.
taken by the insurgents. They provide, however, the only extant contemporary pronouncements in regard to the values and objectives, both of the leadership of the revolt and of the recipients of the coins. Jerusalem clearly was of central importance to the rebels, whether they temporarily captured the city or not.

Several studies refer to the praise of Hadrian in the fifth Sibylline Oracle (11. 46-50), composed by a Jew before the end of Hadrian’s reign. It has been variously interpreted:

(1) as confirmation that Hadrian was popular among the Jews early in his reign;\(^6^1\)

(2) as an indication of the attitude of the Jews toward Hadrian at the time of his visit to Judaea in 130, before the presumed ban on circumcision.\(^6^2\)

(3) Schäfer goes much further. He considers this passage evidence of support among Hellenizing Jews in Palestine for Hadrian’s policy regarding Judaism. As in the time of the Maccabees, the ruler was encouraged to impose Hellenism by a group of Jews in the country, and the revolt was started by their rivals, who remained unnoticed until it was too late. This is an artificial transfer of the situation in the second century BC to that three centuries later, and the Sibylline Oracle is no sufficient basis for such a theory.\(^6^3\)

As for Hadrian, it is hard to determine what he knew or what he could have known, what he felt about the Jews and what he hoped for in Judaea. It is true that he did not wage wars of conquest, but all that we know about his religious policy shows him to have been intolerant and an activist.\(^6^4\)

It may now be considered certain that Aelia Capitolina was formally founded before the outbreak of the war for it has been shown that foundation coinage of the colony was issued before the end of the revolt.\(^6^5\)

As noted above, it is not our aim to offer a solution for problems which, on the evidence available, apparently remain debatable. Something may however be said about the nature of the debate. Without demeaning the importance of the various questions discussed, it may be observed that two

\(^6^1\) Gregorovius (above, n. 16), p. 37f.; Grätz (above, n. 1), pp. 126-8; Alon (above, n. 7), i, pp. 1; 282-4; Rokeah (above, n. 55), p. 130.

\(^6^2\) Bowersock (above, n. 10), p. 134.

\(^6^3\) Schäfer (above, n. 9), pp. 48-50, a surprising speculation for an author whose declared aim is to combat the uncritical use of literary sources.


major issues are, in fact, at stake: the ultimate responsibility for and justification of the revolt; and the credibility of the ancient sources, Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian respectively. The discussion is essentially about the values, morals and achievements of both sides, according to ancient norms and those of our own times. Summing up, we shall now list again modern views on the causes and background of the revolt.

A. The Romans
(1) The Romans consciously intended to suppress Judaism in Judaea. Some authors consider such a policy laudable or necessary, others condemn it as imperialist oppression.
(2) An activist and intolerant policy threatened values fundamental to the Jews.
(3) The Jews felt themselves threatened by actions which were not aimed at Judaism in particular and hence cannot be considered anti-Jewish.

B. The Jews
(1) There is disagreement as regards the situation preceding the revolt. Was there prolonged unrest before 132? If so, this would show that they were acting in response to the climate created by the Roman occupation. Among those who assume that this was the case, some conclude that it explains, or even justifies, their rebellion. Others, on the contrary, assert that it justifies strong Roman action against the rebels.
(2) Should one sympathize with the ideology of the insurgents (itself a matter of debate)? Were Bar Kokhba and his followers fanatic bandits or heroic freedom-fighters, or both?
(3) Schäfer’s view: there were Jews who supported Hadrian’s Hellenizing policy, which itself was not hostile in character.
As regards the sources, these are usually interpreted so as to confirm a specific conception of the events. However, a matter of disagreement in its own right is the evaluation of talmudic sources. On the one hand, there are

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46 See below, p. 49, for views of the ideology of the rebels. One example of total rejection of their aims may be cited: “Kein fühlender Mensch wird dem Schicksal des Judenvolk seine Teilnahme versagen, aber kein ruhig denkender sich vorstellen, dass der Sieg eines Akiba und Barkocheba einen Fortschritt in der geschichtlichen Entwicklung auch nur Ausiens würde bezeichnet haben. Die Herstellung eines selbständigen Judenstaates war unendbar und unmöglich. Er hätte die ganze Schöpfung Roms in Syrien, vom Euphrat bis zum roten Meer zersprengt, und an die Stelle der hellenistisch-römischen Cultur den beschränkten semitischen Fanatismus und die religiöse Unduldsamkeit gesetzt. Die kosmopolitische Idee des Römerreichs hatte keinen gleich hartnäckigen Feind als das Judenvolk, und deshalb wurde dieses als Staatsprinzip umgebracht”. (Gregorovius, above, n. 16, p. 204). Gregorovius has no doubt that it was a blessing to be part of the Roman Empire. Those who thought otherwise were fanatics in his opinion. Similar or opposite assumptions, even though expressed in less peremptory or explicit form, still influence the debate about Bar Kokhba.
those who assume that judicious interpretation will find much that is of value to the historian. On the other, there is a conviction that no authentic history can be drawn from these sources unless the contrary can be proved.

Prior Unrest

It is clear that the Bar Kokhba revolt did not erupt spontaneously. The question is, how far can its origins be traced? Not much is known about the period between the wars, but according to some scholars talmudic sources when properly analyzed allow a partial insight in the political development of Judaism in Judaea. It is argued that the activities of the Jewish authorities must be studied from the years of recovery after the First Revolt up to the revolt in the diaspora in the reign of Trajan. Some even see a connection between the ideology that gave the Bar Kokhba revolt its impetus and the attitudes of the zealots in Pharisaic circles in the period before the First Revolt. These are said to have been among the followers of Beth Shammai.67 In any event, it is intrinsically likely that a connection existed between the activities of the Jewish authorities at Yavneh and the revolt of Bar Kokhba.

Two different effects of their endeavours may be mentioned. In reshaping the life of the nation after the loss of Jerusalem and the Temple, the authorities went to great effort to prevent the people from being wholly cut off from religion as practised in the days of the Second Temple. Thus they repeatedly emphasized that the Temple would soon be rebuilt. This was not an abstract phrase, but a firm expectation which formed the basis of the development of halakhot and the routine of daily life.68

Second, the leaders at Yavneh did much to intensify the unity of the nation. In this period many of the parties and sects disappeared which had typified the life of the people before the destruction of the Temple. At the same time, many groups, including the Jewish Christian sects, were expelled from the Jewish community. It is likely that there was a connection between this policy, which actively sought to unite the people, and the undivided resistance to Rome under the leadership of Bar Kokhba. This unity certainly contributed to the impact of the rebellion, as did the fact that there was no Jewish party at that time opposed to the revolt.69

68 Alon (above, n. 2), p. 111-118; 253-265; Ben-Shalom, in New Studies (above, n. 19), p. 11.
The fierce rebellion of the Jews in the diaspora in 115-117 is well attested in various sources. It is a subject of debate whether the Jews in Judaea participated. The literary sources do not convince everybody. It has been argued that there was unrest in Judaea in the subsequent period preceding the Bar Kokhba revolt. Epigraphical and archaeological evidence has now shown that the Roman army in Judaea was reinforced before 120, probably in 117, an indication that there must have been trouble in those years. The evidence for the strengthening of the army in Judaea is as follows. It is certain that the rank of governor and that of procurator rose in importance before the Bar Kokhba revolt, a change which must have entailed the addition of a second legion to the provincial army. In 120, a road was constructed from Legio (Caparcotna, Kefar ‘Otnay) to Sepphoris, proof of the location of a military camp at the former site, later the fortress of the legion VI Ferrata. In the same year a road was constructed from Ptolemais (Acco) to Sepphoris. On a milestone of that year, the Leg(io) II (Traiana) is mentioned, which proves that it was in the area together with

76 Several authors believe there was a large scale war: Grätz (above, n. 1), pp. 112-6; M. Avi-Yonah, “When did Judea become a Consular Province?” IEJ 23 (1973), p. 213; M. Pucci, La rivolta ebraica al tempo di Traiano (1981), pp. 104-119; Bietenhard (above, n. 55), pp. 69-73. The majority assume that there were upheavals but no war in the full sense of the term: Gregorovius (above, n. 16), pp. 24-7 (the only scholar, so it seems, who repeats without scepticism Dio’s story about Jewish cannibalism); Alon (above, n. 7), i, pp. 255-263; Schürer (above, n. 1), (1973), p. 533f.; Smallwood (above, n. 8), pp. 421-7, and her earlier paper: “Palestine c. A.D. 115-118”, Historia 11 (1962), pp. 500-10; Applebaum, Prolegomena (above, n. 7), p. 18 and in Rappaport (above, n. 7), pp. 208; 211f.; D. Goodblatt, “The Jews of Eretz Israel in the Years 70-132”, ibid., p. 182; I. Shatzman, “Armed Confrontation between Romans and Jews”, ibid., p. 324f. There was no revolt in Palestine according to Derenbourg (above, n. 58), pp. 404-8; Schlatter (above, n. 56), p. 88f. D. Rokeah, “The War of Kitos”, Scripta Hierosolymitana 23 (1972), pp. 79-84, argues that “Kitos” of the talmudic sources is not Lusius Quietus, governor of Judaea, but Quintus Marcus Turbo, who suppressed the Jewish rebellion in Egypt. According to this theory, the sources would not refer to a war in Judaea but only to the revolt in the diaspora. The theory, however, is not convincing, for Roman citizens were not usually referred to by their first name (praenomen).

71 Strathman (above, n. 55), p. 107; Alon (above, n. 7), ii, pp. 1-15; Mantel (above, n. 56); Smallwood (above, n. 8), pp. 421-7; Applebaum, Prolegomena (above, n. 7), p. 18, and in Rappaport (above, n. 7), pp. 211-215; Goodblatt, ibid., p. 182; Shatzman, ibid., p. 324f. Bowersock (above, n. 10), p. 133, rejects their argument and states that there is no evidence for prior unrest.

72 For references, see B. Isaac and I. Roll, “Judaea in the early Years of Hadrian’s Reign” Latomus 38 (1979), pp. 54-66.

73 Tineius Rufus, legate of Judaea when the revolt broke out, was suffect consul in 127. The significance of this was first pointed out by R. Syme. JRS 48 (1958), p. 1 with n. 5.

74 H.-G. Pflaum, “Remarques sur le changement de statut administratif de la province de Judee: à propos d’une inscription récemment découverte à Sidé de Pamphylie” IEJ 19 (1969), pp. 225-233, observed that in 123 the procurator of Judaea was a ducenarius. Consequently the legate must have been of consular rank by that time.
the X Fretensis, based on Jerusalem. At least one other unit was transferred to Judaea between 91 and 124. Furthermore the construction of military roads in Galilee is significant in itself. Long ago it was pointed out by A. H. M. Jones that the coinage of Tiberias of 119/120 had, for the first time, a pagan character, an indication perhaps that the local administration had been transferred to non-Jewish elements. The same may have happened at Sepphoris and Neapolis.

All this is best explained as the Roman response to local unrest in 117/8. Something may also be said about the subsequent period in this connection. It has gradually become clear that most Roman roads in Judaea were first constructed in 129/130. It has been assumed that the roads were built in preparation for Hadrian's visit to the province. Parallels from other provinces suggest, however, that such a programme was military in character and part of plans for taking drastic measures. If this is true, it is possible that they were a response to unrest in the preceding years; but there is no proof for this assumption.

In sum, it may be concluded that there is evidence of increased Roman military activity in the area, both in the years following Trajan's death and in 129/130, which may reflect a response to local unrest, or preparations for the suppression of anticipated hostilities, or both.

Pertinent to the period preceding the revolt is further talmudic testimony regarding Bethar, the last fortress of the insurgents. A number of sources indicate that this was an important Jewish town in the years between the two major wars and during the revolt of Bar Kokhba. Evidence shows that

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76 The Cohors I milliaria Thracum was in Syria in 91 (M. Roxan, Roman Military Diplomas 1954-77 (1978), no. 4) and is mentioned in a document from the "Babatha archive", referring to 124, which shows that it was in Judaea by that time. Cf. H. J. Polotsky, IEJ 12 (1962), p. 259. The unit was still in the province in 139 (CIL xvi 87) and in 186 (Roxan, RMD, no. 69). See Smallwood (above, n. 8), p. 422, n. 136; M. Speidel, "A tile-stamp of the Cohors I Thracum milliaria from Hebron", ZPE 35 (1979), pp. 170-2; D. Kennedy, "Military Cohorts", ZPE 50 (1983), p. 257.


78 See Isaac, Talanta 12-13 (above, n. 57), pp. 44-6; Isaac and Roll (above, n. 31), p. 91f.


80 As argued by Isaac, Talanta 12-13 (above, n. 57), p. 46.

81 See also Smallwood (above, n. 8), p. 436f.; Shatzman (above, n. 70).
the Jewish authorities had their seat established at Bethar.\textsuperscript{82} Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel stated that he had been taught there as a pupil. We cannot assume that he was a student during the war, for he was appointed patriarch shortly afterwards. He will therefore have studied in this place before the revolt and it follows that the patriarchal family was settled there at the time. The transfer of the seat of the leadership to Bethar near Jerusalem is significant and reflects the hope that after its liberation the centre of Jewish authority would again be established there.\textsuperscript{83} If excavations were to be carried out at Bethar, it might help to clarify the importance of the town before the revolt.

It has been claimed that the many travels of R. Aqiva to the diaspora were associated with preparations for the war. R. Aqiva is known as one of the leaders of the revolt and it is suggested that the aim of his journeys to the diaspora was to procure financial support or to recruit men for the war.\textsuperscript{84} This theory lacks support. The sources do not suggest that these were other than conventional journeys to visit Jewish communities, to preach, solve halakhic problems and so forth. Moreover, R. Aqiva made some of his trips as member of a mission headed by Rabban Gamaliel, who travelled to the diaspora before the revolt in the reign of Trajan. R. Aqiva cannot, of course, have planned the revolt of Bar Kokhba before 115.\textsuperscript{85}

Cassius Dio states explicitly that preparations for the war were made during the period between Hadrian’s visit (in 130) and the outbreak of the revolt (in 132). The underground hiding-places which are now being explored may partly have been prepared in those years.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82} See Alon (above, n. 7), ii, pp. 38-40; A. Oppenheimer in \textit{Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest}, i, ed. Z. Baras (1982, in Hebrew), pp. 48-50. The sources led Alon to assume that the Jewish leadership was established at Bethar only at the time of the revolt itself, while Oppenheimer concludes that part of these sources refer also to the years before the war.

\textsuperscript{83} It is likely that the Jewish authorities were also established at Lydda for some time in the years between the revolt under Trajan and the Bar Kokhba revolt, see: Alon (above, n. 7), i, pp. 291-4.

\textsuperscript{84} See e.g. Graetz (above, n. 1), pp. 135-6; I. H. Weiss, \textit{Dor Dor we-Doreshaw}, ii (1904), p. 3; Z. Frankel, \textit{Darkei ha-Mishnah} (photostatic repr. 1959), p. 128; Avi-Yonah, \textit{Carta’s Atlas} (above, n. 34), p. 81.

\textsuperscript{85} Cf. Halevy (above, n. 17), pp. 622-6; S. Safrai, \textit{Rabbi Aqiva b. Yosef, Hayaw u-Mishnato} (1970), p. 30. It should be noted that, on general grounds, it is unlikely that the Jews of the diaspora supported the Bar Kokhba revolt in a significant manner. The grave results of the revolt in the diaspora in the reign of Trajan will have precluded active participation of the Jews living in nearby countries. The persecution after the revolt of Bar Kokhba was aimed at the Jews in Judaea alone. This is indirect proof that the diaspora was not involved in the war on a large scale. Dio states that “all Judaea had been stirred up, and the Jews everywhere (ἀνασυνάχθησαν γῆς) were showing signs of disturbance” (ixix 13:1, Transl. Cary, Loeb). This must be interpreted as referring to Judaea proper and the country as a whole. Cf. Oppenheimer (above, n. 82), p. 68.

\textsuperscript{86} Above, pp. 43f.
The Course of the War

The literary sources and archaeological evidence do not allow of a description of the course of the war. In fact, we know nothing at all of the first stage of the rebellion; Cassius Dio passes it over in silence, possibly because the Jews were successful at that point. Talmudic sources, by contrast, refer again and again to the end of the war, impressed as they were by the ultimate failure of the rising and the fall of Bethar. Efforts in scholarly literature to give a full or partial account of the war are inevitably speculative.87 In this connection, only three subjects can be debated: the geographical scope of the revolt, the question of whether Jerusalem was captured, and the size of the Roman forces which suppressed the rebellion.

(1) The geographical scope of the revolt

The available evidence relates mainly to Judaea in the narrow and proper sense, and it appears that this is where most of the fighting took place. There is no consensus about whether the war spread at all to Galilee88 though admittedly a number of references in literary sources may point toward incidents in that region.89 In any event, it cannot be presupposed that the revolt in Galilee resembled that in Judaea. All hoards containing coins of the second Jewish revolt were discovered in Judaea, notably in the

87 See e.g.: Yeivin (above, n. 7), pp. 67-104; Avi-Yonah, Carta's Atlas (above, n. 34), pp. 82-4 with maps 123-8. In these works one may find detailed discussions and maps describing troop-movements and battles which are partly the product of the authors' imagination and partly the result of over-interpretation (or misinterpretation) of literary sources and archaeological evidence. Recently M. Gichon (above, n. 46) has suggested that the discovery and excavation of subterranean hiding-places now allows the reconstruction of an outline of the course of the war.

88 The most comprehensive study has been that of A. Büchler, "Die Schauplätze der Bar-Kochbakriege und die auf diesen bezogenen jüdischen Nachrichten" JQR 16 (1904), pp. 143-205. Büchler concludes that the war was on the whole confined to Judaea proper. This had earlier been the view of Derenbourg (above, n. 58), pp. 427-9. On the other hand, Schlatter (above, n. 56); Schürer (above, n. 1), in the German edition, p. 685 (the revised ed., p. 545, is ambiguous); Yeivin (above, n. 7), pp. 67-74; 89-96; Gichon (above, 59), pp. 86-7; assert that Galilee took part in the rebellion. Yeivin even maintains that this is where the war broke out. Alon (above, n. 7), ii, pp. 19-23, accepts Büchler's view that Judaea was the main focus of hostilities, but he concludes that there is evidence in talmudic sources for manifestations of revolt in Galilee and in parts of Transjordan. It must be noted, however, that talmudic sources testifying to economic hardship in Galilee after the war are not necessarily evidence of fighting there, as assumed by Alon. The cause may just as well have been the arrival in Galilee of great numbers of refugees or oppressive taxation after the war. In two recent papers it has been suggested that Roman military and administrative re-organization in Galilee and the Valley of Jezreel successfully prevented the outbreak of large-scale hostilities there: Isaac and Roll (above, n. 72), pp. 62-5; Oppenheimer (above, n. 77), pp. 53-66. It is suggested that the Roman re-organization in Galilee was prompted by events in the reign of Trajan (the "War of Quietus"). See also the discussion on Oppenheimer's paper in the same issue, pp. 67-83, and, most recently, Applebaum, in Rappaport (above, n. 7), pp. 237-242.

89 See A. Oppenheimer, "Galilee during the Bar Kokhba Revolt: Collected Sources", The Roman Period in Israel (Published by the Department of Local Studies of the Qibbutz movement, 1973, in Hebrew), pp. 227-234.
Hebron mountains, west of Jerusalem, and in the Judaean desert. The same is true of the underground hiding-places recently explored, although admittedly not many of those are firmly dated and some have now been found in Lower Galilee as well.

Talmudic sources on the aftermath furnish additional information. Enactments dealing with the acquisition by Jews of landed property, confiscated by the Romans (sigariqon), were temporarily annulled in Judaea. The most likely explanation of this is that it was a response to large-scale land-expropriations by the Romans. The sages apparently wanted to preserve Jewish occupation of the land. On the other hand, it is stated in regard to Galilee that the enactments concerning sigariqon were always in force there.

The focus of Jewish life was transferred to Galilee and the authorities established Ushah in Lower Galilee as their centre. Refugees moved from Judaea to Galilee, as is illustrated by the organization of priestly courses in settlements in Galilee. Most of these courses were in Judaea in the period of the Second Temple.

(2) The conquest of Jerusalem

It is not clear whether Jerusalem was captured by the Jews in the revolt of Bar Kokhba. Appianus and Christian authors lend support to the view that the city fell into the hands of the Jews and was reconquered by Roman troops. Those who adopt the opposite point of view explain that Cassius

90 Above, p. 41 and n. 38.
91 Above, p. 44 and nn. 49-50.
92 yGittin v 47b. See S. Safrai, "Siqariqon", Zion 17 (1952), pp. 56-64; Rokeaḥ (above, n. 55), pp. 125-131.
95 Appianus (above, n. 24); Eusebius, Demonstratio Evangelica vi 18, 10; HE iv 5,2; v 12, 1. Two documents from Wadi Murabba‘at may be relevant: Benoit, Milik and de Vaux (above, n. 42), no. 29, recto 1.9 and 11 (p. 142); no. 30, 1.8 (p. 145), cf. the addendum on p. 205. In the addendum Milik suggests that these documents, acts of sale, were signed in Jerusalem in August 133 and in the autumn of 134, which would imply that Jerusalem was occupied by the Jews at the time. However, the reading is uncertain and proceeds from the a priori assumption that Jerusalem was indeed occupied by the rebels. In fact, on p. 143 Milik proposes a different reading instead of the crucial "at Jerusalem", which he later preferred. See also Applebaum (below, n. 98). See Smallwood (above, n. 8) for further patristic sources.
Dio, the best source, is silent on the subject.\(^6\) The coin legend “For the Freedom of Jerusalem” has been explained as celebrating the capture of the city, and the legend “Jerusalem” has been interpreted as a mint indication. According to others, however, these legends describe war aims or hopes rather than achievements.\(^7\) The evidence from Appian and Christian sources would seem decisive. However, as pointed out by Applebaum, the archaeological evidence, as it stands, raises grave doubts, for in the excavations carried out since 1967 in the Old City of Jerusalem almost no coins of the Second Revolt came to light.\(^8\)

It may be added that a number of Midrashim speak of Hadrian as “the destroyer of the Temple”.\(^9\) This is a peculiar statement, and the late date seems to disqualify them as trustworthy sources for the problem here discussed.

The geographical scope of the rising in general, and the reconquest of Jerusalem, are important subjects in their own right, and yet, as so often in the discussion relating to the war, a significant element of ideology lies behind the arguments. At issue are the achievements of the rebels. If Bar Kokhba controlled the greater part of the province of Judaea and the capital Jerusalem for a considerable period, it is easier to justify his effort. Increased achievement enhances, in our view, the stature of Bar Kokhba and his men. If he did not control more than part of Judaea proper, excluding its centre, Jerusalem, he nowhere near approached success in modern eyes. There would be more reason to assert that the Jews should have known in advance that theirs was a lost cause. Total failure is hard to justify, easy to condemn.

\(^6\) Jerusalem was captured in the opinion of Schürer (above, n. 1), pp. 685-7 with n. 112; 691; (German edition, with references to older literature); 545f.; 550f. (revised edition); Abel (above, n.1), p. 92f.; Avi-Yonah (above, n. 55); Derenbourg (above, n. 58), p. 431; Gichon, (above, n. 59), p. 86f.; Henderson (above, n. 6), p. 218; Huteau-Dubois (above, n. 51), pp. 180-3; Lifshitz (above, n. 54), p. 482; Mommsen (above, n. 6); Prigent (above, n. 54), p. 109; Smallwood (above, n. 8), pp. 443-5; Stern (above, n. 21), p. 180; Strathmann (above, n. 55), pp. 109-112; Weber (above, n. 5), p. 313f.; Yeivin (above, n. 7), pp. 80-6. The latter even states that the Jews started rebuilding the walls. Abel, Avi-Yonah, Huteau-Dubois, Prigent, and Strathmann believe that a start was made with the reconstruction of the Temple. For the opinion of Milik see n. 95. Against Jewish capture of the town have argued Bowersock, (above, n. 10), p. 136f.; Mildenberg, HSCP (above, n. 37), pp. 320-5; Schäfer (above, n. 9), and older works, cited by Schürer. See also n. 101 below.

\(^7\) See Mildenberg, loc. cit.

\(^8\) See Applebaum (above, n. 7), p. 27; Mildenberg, HSCP (above, n. 37), p. 323. This observation is true for the excavations conducted by B. Mazar west and south of the Temple Mount and for those conducted by N. Avigad in the “Upper City”, cf.: N. Avigad, Ha'ir Ha'elyonah (1980), pp. 205-7. Applebaum, in his more recent study, follows Milik (see n. 95) in asserting that Jerusalem was indeed captured by the rebels and held at least until September/October of 134 (in Rappaport (above, n. 7), pp. 242; 245f.; 254).

(3) The Roman forces

While significant discoveries have been made regarding the strength of the garrison in Judaea before the war, the same cannot be said about the Roman troops which participated in the war itself. This is not for want of interest. It merely shows that our knowledge depends on chance discoveries of inscriptions. When we compare recent lists of units known to have been sent to Judaea with one compiled more than eighty years ago we notice that they are virtually identical.\footnote{Compare Schürer's list in the original edition (above, n. 1), n. 116 on pp. 687-9, with that in the revised edition, n. 150 on pp. 547-9. See also the lists in Applebaum (above, n. 7), pp. 44-9; 65-8; Smallwood (above, n. 8), pp. 446-9; Stern (above, n. 21), pp. 397-400. Shatzman (above, n. 70), p. 327, lists the Legion I Italica as having dispatched a vexillation to Judaea. This is possible, since the two other legions from Moesia Inferior, the V Macedonica and the XI Claudia, are attested, but there is no evidence for the participation in the war of the I Italica.}

Most of the new evidence is inconclusive, e.g., the numismatic evidence regarding the legion V Macedonica.\footnote{J. Meyshan, "The Legion which reconquered Jerusalem in the War of Bar Kochba (AD 132-5)", PEQ 90 (1958), pp. 19-26 = Essays in Jewish Numismatics (1968), pp. 143-150, has published a foundation coin of Aelia Capitolina with the legend: "LE V". It has, however, been suggested that we are faced with an error for "LE X": Applebaum (above, n. 7), n. 243 on p. 83f.; Isaac (above, n. 57), Talanta 12-13, p. 47, n. 75.} The participation of the XXII Deiotariana and its possible disbandment or destruction are uncertain.\footnote{The legion was in Egypt in 119 (BGU i, no. 140). It is missing from a list of legions from the period of Antoninus Pius (ILS 2288). Its disappearance may have been the result of events in the Bar Kokhba war. Cf. Ritterling, RE xii, s.v. Legio, cols. 1292; 1795; H. M. D. Parker, The Roman Legions (1928), p. 162f.; J. F. Gilliam, AJP 77 (1956), p. 362; Smallwood (above, n. 8), p. 446f.; Applebaum (above, n. 7), pp. 26f.; 36 with n. 296; Isaac and Roll (above, n. 72), pp. 59f. The possibility is mentioned with strong reservations by Schürer (above, n. 1, revised edition), p. 548; Keppie (above, n. 75), p. 863; Stern (above, n. 21), p. 398; Shatzman (above, n. 70), n. 153 on p. 437. Bowersock (above, n. 10), p. 133f., and Schäfer (above, n. 9), pp. 12-14 reject the theory.} Some new evidence has come to light regarding the legion II Traiana, and we now know that the praetorian cohorts probably fought in this war. This is of special interest because it indicates that the emperor himself was in Judaea at the same time. It could, however, already be inferred from literary sources and other inscriptions.\footnote{Cf. Dio 14.3; the letter of Apollodorus of Damascus to Hadrian (ap. Stern, above, n. 21, no. 322 with introduction and comments on pp. 134f.); also Jerome, In Joel i 4; Chronicon Paschale i (Dindorf, p. 474); for inscriptions see ILS 1065 which mentions Q. Lollius Urbicus as legate of Hadrian in the war and possibly CIL vi 974 referring to Hadrian himself. Gregorovius (above, n. 16), p. 197, denies that Hadrian was in Judaea during the war.}

Tineius Rufus is known as governor of Judaea at the outbreak of the war from Jewish and Christian sources only,\footnote{Eusebius, HE iv 6,1; Chron.Hadr. xvi (Schoene ii, p. 166f.).} but he is attested as suffect consul in 127.\footnote{Schürer (above, n. 1, revised ed.), p. 518; Smallwood (above, n. 8), p. 550. See also n. 73, above.} Julius Severus is not mentioned in Jewish and Christian sources. Dio mentions his transfer from Britain to Judaea for the
suppression of the revolt.\textsuperscript{106} This is confirmed by an inscription which lists his career.\textsuperscript{107}

\textit{Bar Kokhba, Leader of the Revolt}

It is no coincidence that the revolt of Bar Kokhba was the only Jewish war fought against foreign rule in antiquity to have been named after one leader,\textsuperscript{108} for a major contribution to the impact of the rising was the unity of the rebels under Bar Kokhba's leadership. In talmudic sources he is given the title "Nasi and Messiah", and the years of his reign are described as kingship.\textsuperscript{109} In his letters he assumes the title "Nesi Yisrael", and on coins he appears as "Simeon Nesi Yisrael". The title "Nasi" may be interpreted in various ways. It has been explained as denoting a limited form of authority lower in status than that of king and comparable to that of ethnarch, the title of the first Hasmonaean rulers.\textsuperscript{110} Others assume that it refers to the ideal king as in Ezekiel's vision of the End of Days.\textsuperscript{111}

R. Aqiva declared of Bar Kokhba: "This is the King Messiah".\textsuperscript{112} The role of messiah, attributed to him has also been variously interpreted: as a divine and supernatural saviour and redeemer,\textsuperscript{113} or as a general and leader of ordinary human stature whose title merely emphasizes his royal rank.\textsuperscript{114}

Bar Kokhba is not mentioned by Cassius Dio or in the \textit{Historia Augusta}. He is referred to only in talmudic and Christian sources. The latter describe him as a murderer and a bandit but at the same time attribute to him miracles and supernatural signs.\textsuperscript{115} We cannot know whether these sources reflect authentic traditions regarding Bar Kokhba's status and deeds. Their aim may simply have been to blacken his image and to represent him as "antichrist".

Talmudic sources refer to Bar Kokhba ambivalently. On the one hand, they emphasize his legendary strength, R. Aqiva's admiration for him and

\textsuperscript{106} Dio Ixix 13,2.


\textsuperscript{108} The Bar Kokhba revolt is referred to under that name in talmudic literature. See Seder \textit{Olam Rabbah xxx} (ed. Ratner, p. 146): "the war of Ben Koziba".

\textsuperscript{109} See for example bSanhedrin 97b: "and the kingship of Ben Koziba two years and a half".

\textsuperscript{110}\textsuperscript{109} See Alon (above, n. 7), ii, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{111} See Oppenheimer (above, n. 82), p. 51.


\textsuperscript{113} An extreme example of this view can be found in Y. Devir, \textit{Bar Kokhba, the Man and Messiah in the light of Talmudic Literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls} (1964, in Hebrew). Devir sees Bar Kokhba as acting under the influence of the Dead Sea sect and inspiration from the desert, while the people considered him the messiah.


\textsuperscript{115} See Eusebius, \textit{HE} iv 6,2; Jerome, \textit{Apol. in Libr. Rufini} iii 31 (PL xxiii, col. 480) and cf. Alon (above, n. 7), ii, p. 34.
even his obedience to the sages. On the other, they criticize his addresses to God, "Do not help and do not humiliate", and it is said that he was put to death by the sages when it appeared that he was a false messiah. There are diverse explanations for this ambivalent attitude, namely, that it reflects differences of opinion among the sages during the revolt, or a change of mind after the failure of the rising. Others wish to differentiate between an authentic attitude at the time of the war, and anachronistic opinions which actually date to the period of the redaction of talmudic literature.

Bar Kokhba's letters give a partial but genuine impression of his personality. He seems to have been an aggressive general and ruler who occupied himself in person with details of discipline and daily life in his army units. His leadership moreover extended beyond the sphere of military matters, for part of his letters deal with the leasing of lands on his behalf. It appears that he insisted on the observance of religious commandments such as those of the sabbath, and precepts connected with the produce of the land. He even gave instructions concerning the supply of the four species of sukkoth.

The Aftermath

Talmudic literature gives vivid and extensive descriptions of the horrors of the Jewish defeat, and much is written about the bitter fate of the besieged at Bethar. Cassius Dio emphasizes the extent of the destruction and lists the numbers of those fallen in battle, and of forts and settlements destroyed. These accounts and the establishment of the Jewish authorities in Galilee have led some scholars to assume that all of Judaea was laid

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116 Disrespect for God can be found also in Palestinian sources, e.g. yTa'anit iv 68d. Similar expressions are ascribed to the brothers from Kefar Ḥaravah (ibid. 69a and parallel sources). See also the words of Bar Daroma (bGiṭṭin 57b). The execution of Bar Kokhba by sages occurs only in the Babylonian Talmud (bSanhedrin 93b).

117 See Alon (above, n. 7), ii, p. 42; Oppenheimer (above, n. 114), p. 156f.; Goodblatt, Cafedra (above, n. 20), pp. 6-12; Ben Shalom, Cafedra (above, n. 19), pp. 19-28.

118 Note e.g. the threats and reproaches in Bar Kokhba's letters to Masabala and Yehonatan, rebel commanders in the area of En Gedi, Yadin, IEJ 11 (1961) (above, n. 42), pp. 41ff.; 46ff.; or the threats addressed to men of the unit of Yeshua ben Galgoula: Benoit, Milik and de Vaux (above, n. 42), pp. 159-162.

119 See e.g. Benoit, Milik and de Vaux, op. cit., no. 24, pp. 124-128.


121 yTa'anit iv 69a; Lamentations Rabbah ii 4. Talmudic literature contains a graphic description of the bitter fate of the refugees who hid in caves in the Judaean desert. The midrash tells of people who concealed themselves in caves and consumed the bodies of their friends until one of them found out that he had been eating the flesh of his father's corpse (Lamentations Rabbah i 45). This picture has been corroborated by archaeological evidence in the "Cave of Horrors" where at least forty men took refuge, finally burning their possessions and dying while under siege (Y. Aharoni, "Expedition B—The Cave of Horror", IEJ 11 (1962), pp. 186-199).
waste. However, a closer look at the sources, and the archaeological evidence, clearly shows that Judaea was not permanently depopulated and that it certainly recovered within a few generations. But the centre of authority did not return to the region nor did it regain the predominant position which is enjoyed among the Jews in other parts of the country and – to a certain extent – in the diaspora.

After the revolt, the Romans issued a number of decrees of religious persecution against the Jews there, but although they interfered with several aspects of religious life, their purpose was not the suppression of Jewish religion as such. Their tendency was to suppress those elements in the Jewish religion which were of national significance and to abolish the autonomy of the Jewish people. M. D. Herr emphasized in his study of the decrees of persecution that they did not include demands to violate religious prohibitions, such as idolatry or the consumption of prohibited food, but entailed only measures against religious injunctions. S. Lieberman argues that they were not issued all at once, but that a gradual development may be discerned. He analyzes details of the decrees and the methods by which they were put into effect, and proves that they were in accordance with customary practice in the Roman Empire. Schäfer disagrees with the total number of oppressive measures listed by Lieberman and Herr. He discusses each source separately and concludes that the terminology found in part of the sources does not necessarily refer to the period of the revolt or its aftermath. As with other subjects, Schäfer's analysis of sources in isolation does not lead to results more logical than those reached in previous publications. Studying the sources in combination and against the background of what is known of Roman practice in parallel situations, Lieberman and Herr appear to formulate more convincing conclusions.

The response of the people and the sages to the decrees was not uniform. There were those who attempted to continue living according to Jewish law with modifications or in secret, while others openly ignored them and willingly faced execution. We may recognize here patterns of Jewish response to persecution which were to become familiar in later periods. Historical literary expression of such attitudes can be found in the traditions concerning the "Ten Sages", martyred by the Romans, in religious *piyutim*

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124 M. D. Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrian's Days" *Scripta Hierosolimitana* 23 (1972), pp. 82-125.
126 Schäfer (above, n. 9), pp. 194-235.
of the Middle Ages, although not all the sages mentioned there were in fact killed for their faith during the persecutions following the revolt. ¹²⁷

**Progress and Controversy**

It is the aim of this paper to trace the development of the study of the Bar Kokhba revolt during the past century. We have found both progress and controversy, but it cannot be claimed that most advance has been made where controversy is fiercest. Progress depends on a patient analysis of sources and systematic archaeological exploration. Controversy, on the other hand, is instructive in that it clarifies modern attitudes towards Jewish resistance and towards the Roman empire, the object of this resistance.