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Book Review

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Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. xxi; 401 pp. Illustrations, tables, appendix, bibliography, index. $22.95.

This evaluation of Nachman Ben-Yehuda's *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel* will summarize the book's main thrust, examine its conceptual framework, offer criticisms of the author's argument and method, then discuss two implications of Masada for LDS culture.

Summary

Perhaps to cushion the shock inflicted on fellow Israelis by his debunking of the "Masada myth," Nachman Ben-Yehuda prefaces his analysis with a confession of the trauma he personally experienced in 1987 when his own faith was shaken. Involved in a group studying political assassinations by Jews, he read a paper by David Rapoport[1] portraying the Sicarii on ancient Masada as Jewish terrorists. Since that portrayal conflicted with what he had learned in his Israeli schooling and military service, Ben-Yehuda rushed to check the main extant source: Josephus's *The Jewish War.* To his

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temporary angst, he says, he discovered "that Rapoport was right and I was wrong." Moreover, he recounts,

> I felt cheated and manipulated. I tried to reconstruct in my own mind how, during my formative years, going through the Israeli socialization process, I acquired "knowledge" about Masada that was not only wrong but also very biased. . . . What was I supposed to do when it turned out that such a major element of my identity was based on falsehood, on a deviant belief? (5)

To this "personal angle" of his investigation into the Masada myth, Ben-Yehuda joins a "professional angle." A sociology professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he has published extensively in the fields of deviance and of social psychology.[2] The book's cover and introduction imply that such training and experience qualify him to explain why and how a "deviant belief" entered the memories of many Israelis of his generation.

As to the story of Masada, Ben-Yehuda defines a "deviant" narrative, in large part, as a retelling that digresses from the only surviving literary source: Josephus's *The Jewish War.* He summarizes (27–43) that text as follows. In the context of the Jews' increasing resentment at Roman rule, two distinct groups arose. The Zealots, extreme Pharisees willing to take up arms against Rome in the cause of Jewish independence, emerged about A.D. 6 over issues of worship and taxation. A half-century later, there materialized a more indiscriminately violent faction called the Sicarii (from Latin *sica:* dagger), who specialized in assassinating (and robbing) Jewish collaborators as well as Romans. In A.D. 66, under a leader named Menachem, the Sicarii captured Herod's fortress on Masada, a mesa overlooking the Dead Sea. They went from there to Jerusalem, participated in the seizure of the Upper City, and assassinated the High Priest, Hanania. Hanania's followers retaliated by killing Menachem, whose party, now led by Eleazar ben Yair, fled back to Masada—all this before the end of A.D. 66. Josephus says that ben Yair "acted the part of a tyrant at Masada afterwards" (36). During the next six years, the Sicarii conducted raids for supplies and booty against nearby Jewish villages. They made a particularly brutal attack on En Gedi, killing several hundred women and children. Meanwhile, the Roman army secured Galilee in A.D. 67, capturing Josephus at Jotapata, then besieged and destroyed Jerusalem

in A.D. 70. Roman "mop up" operations ensued against fortresses like Herodium and Macherus, which the Zealots defended fiercely.

It was not until late in A.D. 72 that the Romans moved against the Sicarii on Masada, which they took early in A.D. 73. So, although Josephus does not specify the siege's length, his text implies that it lasted about six months and possibly only four. Nor does Josephus mention any military forays by the Sicarii against the Roman troops; it is possible that conflict occurred only when the Roman siege ramp reached Masada's wall. Then, rather than resisting until overwhelmed as did the Zealots at Jerusalem, Herodium, and Macherus, ben Yair urged the option of suicide upon his followers, who probably balked at the suggestion, for the "tyrant" had to make two impassioned speeches to convince them. Ben-Yehuda assumes that the decision was "made by men from the dominant social category on Masada (the Sicarii) and that the men killed everyone, including the women and children. The Sicarii on Masada left no choice for anyone who may have been reluctant" (37). The Sicarii then cast lots to select those who would kill first their colleagues and then themselves. By hiding in a cavern, two "reluctant" women and five children survived the massacre. Josephus comments on the feelings of the Roman troops, encountering an eerie silence after breaching the wall: "nor could they do other than wonder at the courage of their [the Sicarii] resolution." Yet Josephus expresses disgust at the mass murder-suicide: "Miserable men indeed they were!" (41).

In that regard, Ben-Yehuda points out (228–32) that Orthodox Judaism essentially repressed the memory of Masada, which is mentioned neither in the Talmud (codified oral law) nor in the Midrash (commentaries). He speculates that the rabbis omitted it for two reasons. First, the incident entails Jews choosing death over life, whereas the opposite priority is enshrined in Jewish law, which forbids suicide as well as murder. Second, Masada signifies unyielding fanaticism to the point of communal extinction. Yet Yohanan ben Zakkai and other moderate Pharisaic rabbis preserved Judaism after the Great Revolt by compromising with Roman officials, who allowed a Sanhedrin to function at Yavneh/Jamnia,[3] where the Haggadah (ceremonial text) for Passover was prepared and the compilation of the Mishnah (oldest part of Talmud) begun. So the rabbis preferred Jamnia over Masada as a symbol for postbiblical Judaism.

In the twentieth century, however, Josephus's account of the episode at Masada was rediscovered by Jews,[4] some of whom engaged in selective omission and outright fabrication to create a largely different story—what Ben-Yehuda calls "the Masada mythical narrative." He itemizes (299–301) the omissions, including: distinctions between Zealots and Sicarii, the latter's attacks on fellow Jews (especially at En Gedi), their apparent unwillingness to fight the Romans, ben Yair's *two* speeches, the existence of survivors—suggesting that others would have opted to live had they been given the choice, and so the involvement of murder as well as suicide in the mass death. He cites (300–303), as examples of fabrication, these ideas: that Masada was populated mainly by Zealot veterans from Jerusalem who fled there to continue their resistance after the city's fall, that the Roman siege lasted up to three years, that the "freedom fighters" on Masada frequently attacked the besieging Roman forces, and that the whole episode represents a "heroic stand" deserving to function as a prominent symbol for Judaism and Israel.

"In essence," concludes Ben-Yehuda,

> [the Masada mythical narrative] assumes the following [typical, composite] form: The leaders of the Great Revolt belonged to a group of Jews referred to as Zealots. The Roman imperial army crushed the revolt and conquered and destroyed Jerusalem together with the Second Temple. The Zealots who survived the siege and destruction of the city escaped to the fortress of Masada, a difficult-to-reach stronghold on top of a mountain near the Dead Sea. The Romans reached Masada too. They surrounded the fortress and put it under siege. After three years of a heroic battle by the few Zealots against the huge Roman army, the Zealots on top of Masada realized that there was no more hope. They faced a grim future: either be killed by the Romans or become slaves. They thus decided to kill themselves, a heroic death, rather than become slaves. When the Roman soldiers entered Masada, they found there only silence and dead bodies. (13–14; compare another composite version on 302–3)

Conceptual Framework

Ben-Yehuda acknowledges that he is by no means the first to recognize mythical elements in the tourist-media-schoolbook version of Masada. He cites Bernard Lewis's *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (1975) as identifying the popular narrative as

an example of "invented history" then discusses (14–16) several other scholarly critics whose work preceded his.[5] He therefore justifies his own extensive research and full volume on two other grounds. First, he sets his explanation within a conceptual framework. Second, he explains "*how* that mythical narrative was created, in maximum detail"[6] (19). So an evaluation of his contribution ought to focus on these two related claims.

Ben-Yehuda identifies three components in his conceptual framework: constructionism (in this case, why and how a society constructs a myth), the Allport and Postman model of rumor circulation, and Barry Schwartz's reconciliation of continuity and discontinuity in collective memory. By far his most important theoretical referent is constructionism, which, in his article on "Moral Panics" (1994), he contrasts with "objectivism." In this juxtaposition, those familiar with social science debates will recognize the spilling over into sociology of a controversy originating in history. The objectivist disciples of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) asserted that careful research based on contemporaneous documents could yield—about the reality of past events—as objective an understanding as that produced about matter or nature by physical or life scientists. Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) and other "subjectivists" countered that past events cannot be repeated as experiments—much less under controlled conditions—and that historical "evidence" is typically fragmentary and biased. They also referred to the distinction made by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) between objectively "unknowable reality" and conditioned human perceptions of it. So they argued that historians can at best offer plausible, but subjective, explanations that indulge the changing interests of successive generations. Within sociology, the likes of Max Weber (1864–1920) embraced objectivism, while Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958) and others espoused subjectivism or "constructivism." Ben-Yehuda's intellectual pedigree can be traced through Howard Saul Becker (1928–) back to Znaniecki.[7]

History's objectivism-subjectivism controversy was transposed in sociology to the field of "social problems." In his 1994 article, Ben-Yehuda explains that a social problem (for example, drug craze, witchcraft) is viewed by objectivists as "an objective, concretely real, damaging or threatening condition." However, he continues, "To

the constructionist, social problems do not exist objectively; they are constructed by the human mind. . . . Definitions of social problems derive from or are produced by specific sociocultural circumstances."[8] So the constructionist investigates, not an objectively real problem, but rather the circumstances, moods, and needs of a society some of whose members subjectively perceive a problem. Ben-Yehuda used constructionism first in his doctoral dissertation (1977) to explain twentieth-century America's "myth of the Junkie" and then in a 1980 article to explain late medieval Europe's construction of a panic over witchcraft.[9] He now draws upon the same concept to explain twentieth-century Zionism's construction of the "Masada myth."

He does so by exploring the circumstances, moods, and needs of the Zionist movement and modern Israel. In brief, modern (secular) Zionism, which urged the Jews' return to *Eretz Yisrael,* deemphasized the inglorious Jewish past in the Diaspora. Rather, it sought to bond the immigrants to their ancestors' homeland while overcoming the Diaspora image of passive Jews in order "to create a new type of hard-working and determined Jews. This new Jew *had* to seek personal freedom and national liberty and, above all, to be connected to his or her land, ready to fight for it and—if necessary—to die for it" (75–76).

Also, maintains Ben-Yehuda, for secular nationalists (Zionists, for example) their patriotism becomes a "civil religion,"[10] in which political leaders function as priests, while national symbols acquire sacred dimensions. Moreover, he points out (98–100, 131–36), this was occurring in a context of danger to the emerging Jewish nation. Associating Zionism with European imperialism, Arabs were beginning to use violence against Jewish settlers. In 1932— culminating decades of increasing anti-Semitism throughout Europe—the newly empowered Nazis launched "legal" then physical attacks on European Jews.

In 1941, when Germany's Afrika Korps threatened to invade Palestine from Egypt, Zionist strategists formulated what they called "the Masada Plan" to coordinate a "last stand" in their "last refuge" of *Eretz Yisrael.* In other words, the early twentieth-century Holy Land represented for Zionist immigrants a circumstance of nation-building and a mood of determination to stand fast

against nation-threatening perils. So there existed an urgent need for a visual symbol of national heroism as well as of Jewish claims to the land of Palestine, a symbol that could accordingly function as a pilgrimage shrine for the "civil religion." The Masada myth was socially constructed in such a context, explains Ben-Yehuda (232–39), to satisfy that need.

He also uses constructionism to explain how and by whom the myth was constructed, identifying (287–92) several "moral entrepreneurs." After the Hebrew translation of Josephus's *The Jewish War* appeared in 1923, Yitzhak Lamdan (1899–1954) wrote a poem, "Masada" (1927), which contains the famous lines: "Ascend, chain of the dance / Never again shall Masada fall." Ben-Yehuda notes that this book-length poem went through twelve editions and, by the 1930s, was required reading in Zionist (later, Israeli) schools. Lamdan's use of Masada as a heroic emblem received academic legitimacy when Hebrew University historian Joseph Klausner wrote, among other works, "Masada and Its Heroes" (1937). Ben-Yehuda also quotes several passages from a booklet by Bar-Droma from the same year, including: "We will recall the memory of the heroes of Masada—the last of a war of freedom, of a nation that is rooted in its land" (192). In turn, "historical" accounts by Klausner and Bar-Droma inspired Yoseph Braslawski to compose historical novels, like *When Masada Fell* (1941) and *Masada* (1944), along with guidebooks, such as *Do You Know the Land?* (1950).[11]

Ben-Yehuda pins the label of most active "moral entrepreneur" on Shmaria Guttman, an amateur archaeologist who first climbed Masada in 1933. Thereafter, Guttman devoted himself energetically to promoting the site as a national shrine of heroism. He encouraged youth clubs, school groups, and paramilitary units of Zionist political factions to make Masada the destination of their pilgrimage outings. For these occasions—as well as for the media and tourism—he prepared handouts and guidebooks. Ben-Yehuda gives some credit to Guttman for the decision, in the mid-1950s, by armored units of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to hold their swearing-in ceremonies for new recruits atop Masada. While taking their oaths, the new soldiers recited: "Because of the bravery of the Masada fighters, we stand here today."[12] Upon learning that the heroic account disseminated by the IDF in these dramatic

ceremonies disagreed with the lone historical source, one officer recalled: "I got it from Shmaria Guttman. . . . We did not read Josephus Flavius in the original" (154–55).

If Guttman was the most active promoter of Masada, then perhaps the most influential was Yigael Yadin (1917–84). Initially reluctant to excavate Masada, Yadin was persuaded to do so—according to Ben-Yehuda—by Guttman. Once Israel's most famous archaeologist (and natural showman) joined the enterprise, he endowed the myth with its ultimate degree of credibility. Ben-Yehuda makes two sets of observations about Yadin's contribution to the Masada myth. The first set treats possible light shed by archaeology on what happened, which Ben-Yehuda describes as minimal. "The excavations did not confirm or refute many of the important aspects of Josephus Flavius's narrative," he concludes,

> except for the facts that there was a fortress called Masada built by Herod, that the Romans put a siege around it, that they built a siege ramp, and that they were effective in winning. The questions regarding the Sicarii, the suicide, Elazar Ben-Yair's speeches, the massacre at Ein Gedi, and the length of the siege, as well as a few others, still remain unanswered to this day. (57)

In his other set of observations, Ben-Yehuda detects a pattern. Mythical assertions, he says, exist mainly in Yadin's later, popular writings—for example, *The Story of Masada by Yigael Yadin, Retold for Young Readers by Gerald Gottlieb* (1969). The archaeologist's earlier, professional publications contain more guarded language. Ben-Yehuda illustrates this pattern by discussing Yadin's comments, on separate occasions, about the discovery on Masada of three skeletons (a man, a young woman, and a child). First, Yadin's field notes reveal merely an inconclusive discussion with colleagues about the possible genders, ages, and relationships of the skeletons. Second, in a popular book, *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand* (1966), he asked (editorially), "Could it be that we had discovered the bones of . . . [the last] fighter [on Masada] and of his family?" Finally, in a 1971 encyclopedia entry, he asserted, "The skeletons undoubtedly represent the remains of an important commander of Masada and his family" (68).[13] With Yadin's archaeology, it seems, as with war stories and sporting tales, certitude and magnitude tend to increase in proportion to distance from the facts.

To explain precisely that phenomenon, Ben-Yehuda uses, as his second theoretical referent, a model on the dissemination of rumors.[14] Allport and Postman identify three related subprocesses—leveling, sharpening, and assimilation—in the tendency of rumors to change while spreading. "Leveling refers to the fact that much of the detail in the original message gets lost." Sharpening "explains how certain themes in a (rumor) message tend to become sharper, crisper, and more salient" (263). Finally, the assimilation subprocess molds the message to the transmitter's values and agenda. Ben-Yehuda then shows how, as the Masada myth grew, it was leveled (omissions), sharpened (emphases), and assimilated to the agenda of secular Zionism. This sociological explanation does make a certain amount of sense.

Criticisms

However, exploiting the immense theoretical literature on how myths interact with historical accounts—a process discussed at length in the earliest critique of the Masada myth cited by Ben-Yehuda (Lewis's *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented*)—would make at least as much sense, if not more, than Ben-Yehuda's approach.

In that regard, I acknowledge that there are risks in having a historian such as myself evaluate a book from a field which its author calls "historical sociology." Among them is that the reviewer may not resist the temptation to quibble about issues persisting between sociology and modern history, which are twentieth-century branches from the same eighteenth-century trunk—including an issue like appropriate kinds and amounts of theorizing.[15] Many historians still view theory as Puritans viewed art—the simpler the better—whereas some sociologists indulge their tastes for conceptualization to a level of baroque splendor. Ben-Yehuda's third theoretical referent—Schwartz's reconciliation of continuity and discontinuity in collective memory—exceeds my puritanical tolerance for theorizing and triggers my quibble reflex.

In the first place, as applied by Ben-Yehuda, this reconciliation theory rests on a misunderstanding of the historiographical issues. Briefly, he restates the controversy between past-oriented objectivism and present-oriented subjectivism within a sociological field called

collective memory—"how human societies remember their past" (272)—a very old sphere of inquiry known to nonsociologists as historiography. Objectivism, he says, assumes "continuity" between past and present, whereas subjectivism assumes "discontinuity." "[Schwartz] claimed that these approaches are not contradictory and that one may integrate them both into a coherent interpretation that emphasizes both continuity and discontinuity," states Ben-Yehuda at the outset. "It is my intention to test Barry Schwartz's integrative hypothesis, directly, explicitly, and meticulously, in this study" (22–23). Toward the book's end, he pronounces the theory confirmed because, besides mythical elements representing discontinuity, "the *basic* historical facts appear in the mythical narrative most of the time" (297), thus representing continuity.

But these "*basic* facts" derive from Josephus—not from some direct pipeline to objective reality, which subjectivists-constructionists like Croce, Znaniecki, and Ben-Yehuda have branded unknowable. If popular versions of Masada contain "facts" from Josephus along with mythical elements, this combination demonstrates fidelity blended with fabrication in exploiting available source materials—not teamwork between objectivism and subjectivism.

The status of Josephus as the *only* surviving literary account does not render it an *objective* account. Ben-Yehuda acknowledges (27–31) the debate about problematic issues concerning Josephus. For example, *The Jewish War* constitutes a self-justification for Josephus's defection to the Roman side; he was unlikely an eyewitness of Masada's siege and fall, and—in the Greek tradition exemplified by Thucydides—he very probably fabricated the speeches that he put into the mouth of Eleazar ben Yair. Yet Ben-Yehuda insists that

> For my purposes, Josephus Flavius's credibility and reliability are a side issue. . . . The many arguments about the validity and accuracy of Josephus's narrative are simply irrelevant to this work. . . . The analytical puzzle of this work is [rather] . . . how some modern Israeli interpreters . . . changed and molded Josephus's original narrative. (21, 29)

So, in the second place, the theoretical discussion of continuity-discontinuity is also—with respect to the purpose stated—an irrelevant side issue; it does more to confuse than to advance the main argument of the Masada myth's social construction.

Yet, in another sense, that discussion helps to reveal Ben-Yehuda's tactic, for—although asserting that "A historical explanation . . . is always an exercise in constructionism" (276)—he resorts to objectivism when it suits his purposes. That is, he assumes the pose of an objectivist when summarizing Josephus (see his chapter 2: "The *Historical* Events of Masada" (italics added). He then employs his own "objective" summary as a baseline when, now switching to the stance of a subjectivist-constructionist, he explains why and how mythical components arose in the twentieth century. A mischievous reader or reviewer might insist that Ben-Yehuda approach Josephus from the same theoretical posture from which he approaches Klausner, Braslawski, and Yadin. Besides taking seriously the problems with Josephus's account, this would entail acknowledging viability in readings of Josephus that differ from his own.

Or, if indeed every historical explanation is subjective, then we may look for subjective emphases in Ben-Yehuda's summary of Josephus. A careful reading of *The Jewish War,* whose author was justifying his defection and flattering his new patrons, might yield the following thesis: the Great Revolt occurred because hotheaded Jewish "terrorists"[16] overreacted to the unwise acts of irresponsible Roman procurators in Judea. Ben-Yehuda, creating a foil as well as a baseline for the Zionist-Israeli heroic myth, wants to expose the Sicarii in particular as having been worse than terrorists; he wants them to have been *cowardly* terrorists. So his summary teases Josephus's data in that direction. Because *The Jewish War* mentions no attacks by the Sicarii on besieging Roman troops, Ben-Yehuda concludes that the Sicarii "avoided opportunities to fight" and lacked "fighting spirit" (42–43). Although the text indicates that the Sicarii captured Masada in A.D. 66, it doesn't say explicitly that they seized it from the Roman soldiers stationed there since Herod's death (4 B.C.). Therefore, speculates Ben-Yehuda, another Jewish faction may have first fought and displaced the Romans from the fortress, of which the Sicarii later gained control "by treachery" (328 n. 12). Ben-Yehuda complains that "Yadin systematically ignores Josephus's insistence that the rebels on Masada were the Sicarii. Yadin uses the term *defenders,* but much more frequently, *Zealots*" (58–59). Yet, in his chronology of events,

Ben-Yehuda's entry under A.D. 66 reads, "The Jewish Great Revolt begins. A group of Jewish rebels takes the fortress from the Roman Garrison" (xix). By deciding that "rebels" (not necessarily Sicarii) took Masada in A.D. 66, he subjectively underscores the Sicarii's probable cowardice.

It is perhaps to avoid tarnishing his foil that Ben-Yehuda minimizes the contributions of archaeology in piecing together the ancient story. He consequently does not mention that thousands of iron arrow- and spearheads were found throughout the area, and that many of these weapons can be traced to a pair of forges the rebels, presumably the Sicarii, created atop Masada.[17] In other words, an alternate interpretation of the Sicarii, based on Josephus and on archaeology, is that they were tolerably *brave* terrorists. But it suits Ben-Yehuda's purposes to "level," "sharpen," and "assimilate" Josephus's account in the direction of cowardice.

A fuller understanding of his motives for doing so can be acquired by examining Ben-Yehuda's explanation of the Masada myth's decline, which is disappointingly superficial. He points out that Israel's devotion to Masada peaked in the 1960s; by the 1970s, "pilgrimages" to the site by Israeli youth and military groups were sharply down and critics were beginning to challenge the myth. Later, the IDF's armored units shifted their swearing-in ceremonies to Latrun, the site of a crucial battle in the 1948 war. By the late 1980s, Masada seemed to function less as a national shrine of heroism and more as just another tourist attraction.

Ben-Yehuda accounts for this phenomenon with growth metaphors. "Some very major and basic cultural changes were taking place in Jewish Israeli society during the 1970s," he observes. So "Israeli society and culture, particularly its intellectual elite, are beginning to look at themselves (and the society in which they live) in a more mature and independent way" (257, 287). The myth was needed during Zionism's youthful nation-building phase, in other words; but Israel outgrew the need, so the myth started to wane.

In expounding this maturation thesis, Ben-Yehuda fails to apply his constructionist theory as well as he might. If a myth is socially constructed in response to a society's circumstances, moods, and needs, stating that "things changed" constitutes an inadequate explanation of the myth's deconstruction. A more satisfactory

explanation would spell out how the changes comprised fresh circumstances, moods, and needs that increasingly provoked identifiable categories of the society to attack the myth on behalf of their new concerns. Ben-Yehuda does offer some hints in this direction: "The Masada mythical narrative became an ideological burden and could no longer be viewed as a completely positive, problem-free symbol" (291). He also quotes Baila Shargel: "by the middle of the 1970s, Masada has become, for many, a symbol of what Israel did *not* want to become" (256). But, unlike Kedar and Shargal, Ben-Yehuda devotes very little discussion to the transformation of Masada into a negative image "for many" and none at all to the "many" critics' political circumstances, moods, and needs.

Such a discussion might be summarized as follows. The June 1967 war resulted in Israel's acquiring control of territories, including the Sinai, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip—the latter two containing large Palestinian Arab populations. Over the issue of these territories' future, Israeli political culture soon polarized into two general factions. The right called for Israel's permanent control over the territories on two grounds: (1) history (the main Old Testament sites are in the West Bank), and (2) what might be called "outpost-maintenance security," because the West Bank and the Golan Heights provide "strategic depth" on the East. The left countered by drawing attention to "the demographic problem": owing to their much higher birthrate, the Palestinians may within a generation constitute the majority within "Greater Israel" (the pre-1967 state, plus the territories). That development would put Jewish Israeli society into a situation dangerously resembling that of the white minority regime in pre-1990 South Africa. The left consequently formulated a plan that may be called "quagmire-exiting security." That is, it advocated giving up the territories in exchange for a negotiated peace. Such an exchange occurred in the Camp David Agreement (1979); Israel returned the Sinai to Egypt, which signed a peace treaty with Israel. Leftists called for the extension of the lands-for-peace formula to other neighboring Arab states and to the Palestinians.

Israel's right and left have not just expressed conflicting proposals for the territories' future; they have implemented opposing policies when in power. Winning the 1977 elections, the right-wing

Likud bloc subsidized Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Golan Heights, and Gaza Strip. The left-leaning Labour alliance, returning to office after the 1992 elections, acted on its concerns by signing first the land-for-peace Oslo Agreement (1993) with Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and then a peace agreement with Jordan (1994). But, arguing that Israel needs resoluteness rather than concession-making, the Likud bloc won (barely) the 1996 elections, following which it greatly slowed the "peace process" with the PLO and spoke of expanding the Jewish West Bank settlements. So, while the Israeli right has not ceased emphasizing the need to "stand fast" against military threats to the nation, the left has stressed the need for compromise and has criticized the right's inflexibility as one of the main problems facing Israel.

Thus, Masada persists as a useful, positive emblem for the right wing of Israel's political culture.[18] Indeed, Ben-Yehuda mentions that, the myth having now come under attack, even the *religious* right has begun to espouse it (287). For the left wing, however, in these new circumstances Masada has come to symbolize unyielding fanaticism to the point of willingness to risk national calamity. Quoting Henry Kissinger, General Y. Harkabi, Israel's ex-chief of intelligence, stated in 1981, "A wrong strategic doctrine can lead to disaster." Harkabi also said, "The proponents of the 'resoluteness' doctrine do not seem to be aware of this." He then cited the example of Hitler's convincing Germans that their nation could not exist without *Lebensraum* (additional territory for "living space"), a policy which led to World War II and to catastrophe for Germany. "The price of a Greater Land of Israel," novelist Amos Oz told a rightist settler group in 1983, is "that people will go to the battlefield with the feeling that they were being dragged into giving up their lives for an issue on which at least half of this nation sees, unlike you, a possibility of compromise."[19] Thus, to the Israeli left, Masada has come to be, not a shrine of heroism, but a "complex" functioning as the myth's *verso* side. "An Israeli leader who sees himself standing on the heights of Masada is surely liable to lose his capacity of seeing reality as it is," warned Hebrew University historian Benjamin Kedar in 1982.

> There is yet another danger. It is unavoidable that behavior influenced by identification with Masada will indeed resuscitate it. If 'the

entire world is against us', then one begins to behave as if 'we are against the entire world', and such behavior is bound to lead to ever-increasing isolation, which in several important aspects will really resemble that of Ben-Yair and his companions. . . .

> Nineteen hundred years after the fall of Masada we would do well to detach ourselves from the myth and to uproot the complex. An ancient people like ourselves has not a single past to draw symbols from. . . . Let us choose the Book of Isaiah rather than the Book of Joshua.[20]

"Kedar," explains Baila Shargel, summarizing the historian's earlier (1973) article in Hebrew, "found in Ben-Yair's famous motto ['to live free or to die'] not the transcendent value of liberty but an eagerness to court death."[21]

In short, Israel's post-1967 circumstances engendered among leftists a mood of strategic compromise over the future of the territories occupied in June 1967. So that political culture's intellectuals—including Y. Harkabi, A. Oz, B. Kedar, and (lately) N. Ben-Yehuda—have acted on their perception of this current need by assailing the Masada mythical narrative, now associated by them with the paranoid "complex" of their rightist opponents. Perhaps Ben-Yehuda glossed over such circumstances, moods, and needs because he is one of the "moral entrepreneurs" pursuing the Masada myth's deconstruction.

LDS Contexts

The Israeli discussion, concerning the promotion of steadfastness while avoiding suicidal extremism, is one of the two contexts in which Masada's symbolism has diffused into LDS culture. Latter-day Saints have experienced and can learn from several of the same tendencies as the Israelis that influence the social and ideological presentation of historical accounts.

In 1841, about two years after the Mormons' forced eviction from Missouri, *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo) reprinted an unnamed historian's account—containing some heroic overtones—of Masada's fall. The editors (Don Carlos Smith and R. B. Thompson) affixed a preface mixing admiration with censure:

> The following thrilling account of the self devotedness of the Jews, scarcely has its equal on the pages of history.—Although such a

course must be condemned, it shows their attachment to their ancient religion, the God of their fathers, and also their abhorrence of the Romans.[22]

More than a century later, Neal A. Maxwell explored the same borderland between steadfastness and zealotry. He asserted that "There should be no Mormon Massadas, but, in addition to Carthage, there were Haun's Mill and many other times and places forebearers gave everything they had." A footnote—containing mythical ingredients—explains the reference to Masada:

> Masada (or Massada) was a fortified town on the south end of the Dead Sea where the Jews, after the fall of Jerusalem, made their last stand for three years against 10,000 Romans, ending around 72 A.D. The Zealots killed their wives and children and committed suicide rather than surrender to the Romans, who were greeted by a solemn stillness and an awful silence as they finally entered the fortress.[23]

The editors of the Infobases "LDS Collectors Library" on CD-ROM cross-referenced that footnote to James E. Talmage's account of Jesus' calling Simon Zelotes ("the Zealot") to be one of the twelve Apostles. So, ironically, a footnote describing the Zealots on Masada in semiheroic terms finds itself juxtaposed to Talmage's own observation: "Doubtless Simon had learned moderation and toleration from the teachings of Christ; otherwise he would scarcely have been suited to the apostolic ministry."[24]

The second LDS context in which the Masada account appears also somewhat parallels the Jewish-Israeli experience. It sets the scholarly ideal of dealing honestly with source materials against the temptation to embellish for greater impact—perhaps toward some larger purpose. In the Jewish experience, the overriding need for a national shrine of heroism justified Klausner, Guttman, Yadin, and others in exaggerating or misrepresenting Josephus's account of Masada. A similar "larger purpose" has justified some LDS scholars in assimilating the Masada mythical narrative to their own agenda. For example, Jerald Johansen's "Masada, Citadel of Freedom's Cry" (May 1972 *Ensign*), even while citing Josephus as its source of information, describes the event largely in heroic terms:

> After Herod's death, Masada was commandeered by a Roman garrison until Jewish Zealots captured it. The dramatic and courageous defense of Masada by those 960 men, women, and children against

Flavius Silva's besieging Roman Tenth Legion has won the admiration and respect of everyone who has read of their valiant effort. . . .

May this provide fresh inspiration for liberty-loving people everywhere. For death is sweeter than loss of liberty. And freedom is still worth dying for today.

Perhaps, in this case, the larger, misrepresentation-justifying purpose was to reinforce a tendency among some Latter-day Saints to equate the modern (secular) nation-state of Israel with scriptural "spiritual Israel."[25] Johansen and others of this trend have thus pursued for Mormonism an objective which the rabbis rejected for Judaism: transforming Masada into a religious emblem.

Nevertheless, various perceptions of the events at Masada are found in LDS literature. For example, LaMar C. Berrett's *Discovering the World of the Bible*—which has been used by thousands of LDS tourists who have visited the Holy Land—provides a largely mythical account of Masada. The version in the 1973 edition of Berrett's guidebook is preserved in the 1996 edition, which lists D. Kelly Ogden as coauthor. Yet for another recent book, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City*, Kelly Ogden composed the section on Masada (204–23), which scrupulously follows Josephus's account and avoids mythical assertions.[26]

Conclusion

In summary, Nachman Ben-Yehuda formulates a credible, detailed, concept-based explanation of why and how the Masada myth entered the memory of secular Zionists and modern Israelis. It is an explanation, however, which is "irritatingly repetitive," overloaded with theory, devious in overtly rejecting objectivism while employing it *sub rosa,* and superficial in accounting for the myth's decline. If all historical explanations are social constructions, then so is this one by Ben-Yehuda. His "objective" summary of Josephus includes subjective emphases. And his *Masada Myth* may be seen in part as springing from Israeli leftists' perception of a need to deconstruct Masada's "resoluteness" associations in the post-1967 circumstances of peacemaking.

Masada teaches lessons beyond the site's immediate geographical and cultural settings. Two of these are especially instructive for

Mormons as well as for Jews and Israelis. First, in cultivating stead-fastness, a religious or national community needs to avoid all-or-nothing fanaticism. Second, in recounting episodes about the human past, Latter-day Saints, as well as all good historians, ought to avoid the extremes of exaggeration as well as debunking and to apply the affirmation that "We believe in being honest" (A of F 13) to their assertions based on historical texts as well as to their dealings with fellow beings.[27]

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NOTES

[1]David Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," *American Political Science Review* 78, no. 30 (1984): 658–77.

[2]Ben-Yehuda's earlier publications include "The European Witch Craze of the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective," *American Journal of Sociology* 86 (July 1980): 1–31; "History, Selection, and Randomness—Towards an Analysis of Social Historical Explanations," *Quality and Quantity* 17 (1983): 347–67; *Deviance and Moral Boundaries: Witchcraft, the Occult, Science Fiction, Deviant Sciences and Scientists* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985); *The Politics and Morality of Deviance* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); *Political Assassinations by Jews: A Rhetorical Device for Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); and with Erich Goode, "Moral Panics: Culture, Politics, and Social Construction," *Annual Review of Sociology* 20 (1994): 149–71.

[3]While including no references to Masada, the Talmud contains five separate versions of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's defection to the Romans, who permitted him to establish the first *yeshiva* (rabbinical seminary) at Jamnia.

[4]Y. N. Simchoni's Hebrew translation of Josphus's *Jewish War* was published in 1923.

[5]Bernard Lewis, *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Baila R. Shargel, "The Evolution of the Masada Myth," *Judaism* 28, no. 3 (1979): 357–71; Yael Zerubavel, "The Last Stand: On the Transformation of Symbols in Modern Israeli Culture" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1980); Benjamin Kedar, "Masada: The Myth and the Complex," *Jerusalem Quarterly,* no. 24 (summer 1982): 57–63; Benjamin Kedar, "The Masada Complex" (in Hebrew), *Ha-Aretz* 22 (April 1973): 16; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "Josephus Flavius and Masada" (in Hebrew), *Zemanim* 13 (1983): 67–75; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Murderers of Memory* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991). This article is an adaptation of Vidal-Naquet's introduction to his 1976 French translation of Josephus's *Jewish War*. The book was originally written in French as *Les assassins de la mémoire: Un Eichmann de papier et autres*

essais sur le révisionnisme (Paris: Éditions La Décourerte, 1987). Ben-Yehuda does not cite Vidal-Naquet's *The Jews: History, Memory, and the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), also first published in French (1991). See Bernard Knox's essay on Vidal-Naquet's writings in "Victims and Executioners," *New York Review of Books* 43, no. 17 (October 31, 1996): 18-21. Edward M. Bruner and Phyllis Gorfain, "Dialogic Narration and the Paradoxes of Masada," in *Text, Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society*, ed. Stuart Plattner and Edward M. Bruner (Washington: American Ethnological Society, 1984), 56-75; Barry Schwartz, Yael Zerubavel, and Bernice M. Barnett, "The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory," *Sociological Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1986): 147-64; Dan Bitan, "Masada—The Symbol and the Myth" (in Hebrew), in *The Dead Sea and the Judean Desert, 1900-1967*, ed. Mordechai Naor, Idaw Series, vol. 13 (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, 1990), 221-35; Robert Paine, "Masada between History and Memory" (paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association, Memorial University of Newfoundland, June 1991); Robert Paine, "Masada: A History of a Memory," *History and Anthropology* 6, no. 4 (1994): 371-409; Anita Shapira, *Land and Power (The Sword of the Dove)* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992).

[6]With reference to the "maximum detail" part of Ben-Yehuda's objective, one reviewer describes *The Masada Myth* as "irritatingly repetitive." B. Kraut (University of Cincinnati) in *Choice* 33 (July-August 1996): 1834.

[7]Leopold von Ranke, "On the Character of Historical Science" (1830s), translated and published in Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke, trans. Wilma A. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), 33-46; J. B. Bury, "History as a Science," in *The Varieties of History*, ed. Fritz Stern (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 209-23; Benedetto Croce, "L'attitude subjective et l'attitude objective dans la composition historique," *Revue de Synthèse Historique* 6 (June 1903): 261-65; Benedetto Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice* (1916; reprint, New York: Russell and Russell, 1960); Max Weber, "Objective Possibility and Adequate Causation in Historical Explanation," in *Zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik* (1924)/*On the Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1938; reprint, New York: Free Press, 1969): 164-88; Florian Znaniecki, *Cultural Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1919); Nachman Ben-Yehuda and others, "Howard S. Becker: A Portrait of an Intellectual's Sociological Imagination," *Sociological Inquiry* 59 (fall 1989): 467-89; Howard S. Becker, ed., *Social Problems: A Modern Approach* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966).

[8]Ben-Yehuda and Goode, "Moral Panics," 151.

[9]Nachman Ben-Yehuda, "The Myth of the Junkie—Towards a Natural Typology of Drug Addicts" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1977); Ben-Yehuda, "European Witch Craze ," 1-31.

[10]The concept of civil religion was pioneered by Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 (winter 1967): 1-21; and John A. Coleman, "Civil Religion," *Sociological Analysis* 31 (summer 1970): 67-77. Ben-Yehuda cites Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).

[11]Joseph Klausner, *Masada and Its Heroes* (in Hebrew), Lanoar Library of Eretz Israel, booklet no. 62 (Tel Aviv: Omanut, 1937), 3-33; Yoseph Braslawski,

When Masada Fell (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1941); Yoseph Braslawski, *Masada* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1944); Yoseph Braslawski, "Did You Know the Land?" in *The Dead Sea, Around and Around* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz Hameuchads, 1955), 297–448.

[12]Shargel, "Evolution of the Masada Myth," 363.

[13]Yigael Yadin, *Masada: First Season of Excavations, 1963–1964: Preliminary Report* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1965); Yigael Yadin, *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand,* trans. Moshe Pearlman (New York: Random House, 1966); Yigael Yadin, *The Story of Masada by Yigael Yadin, Retold for Young Readers by Gerald Gottlieb* (New York: Random House, 1969); *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), s.v. "Masada," 11:1078–91.

[14]Gordon W. Allport and Leo J. Postman, "The Basic Psychology of Rumor," *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences,* 2d ser., 8, no. 2 (1945): 61–81; Gordon W. Allport and Leo J. Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Henry Holt, 1947).

[15]Nineteenth-century sociology (then still more or less a branch of history) was highly speculative, while contemporaneous historians tended to slight theory in favor of "digging out the facts" and polishing the narrative. A joke among sociologists is that "sociology is like history but without the work, while history is like sociology but without the brains." The late BYU historian Russell B. Swensen used to counsel history students (only half in jest) that "the eleventh commandment for historians is 'thou shalt not commit sociology.'"

[16]Referring to the Zealots as well as to the Sicarii, Josephus also used such pejorative terms as "brigands," "wretches who deserved punishment," "the most depraved elements," and "murderers." From such language, Rapoport and Ben-Yehuda feel justified in using the modern term "terrorists" (43).

[17]Jodi Magness, "Masada: Arms and the Man," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18 (July/August 1992): 58–67. Compare Ehud Netzer, "The Last Days and Hours at Masada," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 17 (November/December 1991): 20–32; and Ehud Netzer, "Masada," in *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land,* 4 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 3:973–85.

[18]Ben-Yehuda cites Arthur Milner's play "Masada," which was first staged during 1990 in Canada. Among the drama's closing lines are these:

> Compromise with the Arabs? Live side-by-side in peace—a Jewish state, a Palestinian state? Compromise is for the weak. . . .
>
> But if the United States decides its interests are better served by Syria or Saudi Arabia, we will take care of ourselves. . . . Let the Arabs send their armies against us. If we are resolute, if we are ready to sacrifice, we shall not be defeated. We shall take strength from the land. . . .
>
> Yes, we want peace and we shall have peace—on our terms. We shall choose a never-ending war over an Israel cut up and divided. . . . If we fight with the courage and determination of the Zealots—and if we are willing to die a thousand deaths—we cannot be defeated. (220)

[19]Yehoshafat Harkabi, "Reflections on National Defence Policy," *Jerusalem Quarterly,* no. 19 (spring 1981): 108-19; Amos Oz, *In the Land of Israel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 152.

[20]Benjamin Kedar, "Masada: The Myth and the Complex," *Jerusalem Quarterly,* no. 24 (summer 1982): 57-63.

[21]Baila R. Shargel, "The Evolution of the Masada Myth," *Judaism* 28, no. 3 (1979): 357-71 (esp. 369).

[22]"Fall of Herodio [*sic*]—Machaerus—Masada—Fate of Josephus—Agrippa—Bernice," *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 18 (July 15, 1841): 476-78.

[23]Neal A. Maxwell, *"For the Power Is in Them . . .": Mormon Musings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 50.

[24]James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 225.

[25]Many LDS observers have tended to see Zionist immigration to Palestine, culminating in the state of Israel's creation (1948), as fulfilling scriptural prophecy. Very early publications included: "The Zionites," *Millennial Star* 58, no. 32 (August 6, 1896): 510-11; George Q. Cannon, "The Zionist Congress," *Millennial Star* 59, no. 41 (October 14, 1897): 644-45; J. M. Tanner, "The Zionist Movement," *Improvement Era* 3 (November 1899): 1-8; "Logic of Zionism," *Millennial Star* 64, no. 37 (September 11, 1902): 582-83; and Jan M. Sjodahl, "Prophecies Being Fulfilled," *Millennial Star* 77, no. 9 (March 4, 1915): 136-38.

More recent pro-Zionist LDS pronouncements include: LeGrand Richards, *Israel! Do You Know?* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954); Eldin Ricks, "Zionism and the Mormon Church," in *Herzl Yearbook* 5 (1963): 147-74; W. Cleon Skousen, *Fantastic Victory: Israel's Rendezvous with Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967); Truman G. Madsen, "The Mormon Attitude toward Zionism" (series of lectures on Zionism, Haifa University, May 1981); and Michael T. Benson, "Harry S. Truman as a Modern Cyrus," *BYU Studies* 34, no. 1 (1994): 6-27.

Jerald Johansen, "Masada, Citadel of Freedom's Cry," *Ensign* 2 (May 1972): 44-50. The article informs that "Dr. Johansen, who teaches at the Ogden (Utah) Institute of Religion adjacent to the Weber State College campus, has traveled and studied in the Middle East." Other articles in that same "Holy Land issue" of the *Ensign* make comparable assertions—especially W. Cleon Skousen, "The Birth of Modern Israel" (51-57), Eldin Ricks, "Judah Must Return" (94-95), and Daniel H. Ludlow, "The Future of the Holy Land" (96-103). Yet articles presenting alternate views—for example, William E. Berrett's "For the Law Shall Go Forth from Zion" (105-8) and especially Rodney Turner's "The Quest for a Peculiar People" (6-11)—suggest that the LDS discussion of Zionism has included more diverse and more subtle positions than that of "Mormon Zionism." See also my "Jews in LDS Thought," *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994-95): 137-64, and "What Mormons Have Thought about, *inter alia,* the Jews" (forthcoming).

[26]LaMar C. Berrett and D. Kelly Ogden, *Discovering the World of the Bible* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book, 1996), 207-10; David B. Galbraith, D. Kelly Ogden, and Andrew C. Skinner, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996).

[27]"Accuracy and reliability are of the essence of scholarship. All scholars worth their salt have wrestled long with the questions of what can and cannot, what should and should not, what must or must not be said. They acknowledge and evaluate data both for and against their ideas and theories. They eschew all

forms of plagiarism and generously recognize their indebtedness to other scholars. They guard on all sides against the covert influences of unstated assumptions, bias, and esoteric terminology. They describe shades of grey where they exist. They identify clearly their personal opinions as such. They avoid material omissions, for often what is not said can be as misleading as what is said." John W. Welch, "Into the 1990s," *BYU Studies* 31, no. 4 (1991): 25.