

**THE DE-EVOLUTION OF THE JEWISH WARRIOR:
SELF-IDENTITY AS ‘WARRIOR’ THROUGH JEWISH LITERATURE
FROM 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.**

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“You who from the moment Pompey’s forces crushed you have never stopped rebelling.”

-Titus according to Josephus

(Josephus, *The Jewish War*, VI:25.)

Overview:

Nicholas Anderson's thesis titled, 'The De-evolution of the Jewish Warrior,' is a diachronic study of the Jewish self-view as 'warrior,' covering selected Jewish literature from about 200 B.C.E to 200 C.E. The premise of this thesis is that such a study of Jewish literature in its historical context might enable the historian to better understand the Jewish self-identity as 'warrior' in those four centuries, as well as the paradigmatic change from 'warrior' to 'accommodationist' in the wake of the Bar Kochba revolt.

In seven chapters, this thesis consists of literary analysis, historical analysis, and partial translations of I Maccabees, The Book of Judith, 'The Scroll Of The War Of The Sons Of Light Against The Sons of Darkness' from Qumran, Josephus' account of Massada, the available literature that talks about the Diaspora revolt and the Bar Kochba revolt, and *Megillat Ta'anit*.

For my son, Maccabee

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Introduction:

This thesis is a diachronic study of the Jewish self-view as ‘warrior,’ covering selected Jewish literature from about 200 B.C.E to 200 C.E. The premise of this thesis is that such a study of Jewish literature in its historical context might enable the historian to understand better the Jewish self-identity as ‘warrior’ in those four centuries. This is not to say that any singular piece of Jewish literature from this period would inform us with any degree of certainty the degree to which the Jews of an age viewed themselves as ‘warrior;’ to the contrary, it can not. After all, the only thing that the historian can minimally be sure of is that each of the selected pieces of Jewish literature is a ‘literary artifact,’ meaning that it can give the historian a sense of what the authors might have thought, but by itself it can not say what any given society thought or even if it was mainstream. In each source, this uncertainty often extends to questions of authorship and audience.

Although the historian can speculate, there often is really no way of knowing who wrote a particular text, and who read that text, with complete certainty. That being said, a conglomeration of each individual piece of literature studied illuminates trends that otherwise might be missed; and in a diachronic study such as taken on in this thesis, there is a proverbial graphing of individual data-points through which certain patterns emerge that support claims of societal norms and psyche-permeation. Thus, although each single piece of literature from an age can not assure us of much, the patterns that emerge when viewing several such pieces of literature are more informative.

In this spirit, the literature examined in this thesis, regardless of historical veracity, is in itself useful as literature for determining how Jews of an age might have thought of themselves, or wanted to think of themselves, as warriors. In other words, regardless of whether or not the literature accurately recounts historical fact, it is a fact that the literature did exist; and therefore the literature can be mined for what it might tell us about the age in which it was created. All of this helps ‘shed light’ on how Jews might have viewed themselves, and been viewed as warriors, in a particular time.

In some ways, the desire to explore this idea of Jewish self-identity as warrior has been mulling around my mind for many years. Growing up in a secular family who flirted with Reform Jewish education, I was raised with the Holocaust as the central Jewish event, and subsequent reason for maintaining Jewish identity. This premise, along with other cultural factors, led me to conclude before I was a teen that Jews were weak and victims. After all, unlike many other cultures amalgamated within the American melting pot, Jews were not in professional sports¹ and Jewish stereotypes made Jews into people with brains but without brawn. More poignantly, as schoolchildren we were taught that, *en masse* the Jews, even the men, had passively been herded into the Nazi gas chambers without ever attempting to fight. The death of 6 million, including 1.5 million children was protested, but rarely physically. The Jews did not lose a war, for there was never even a battle. There was no mass uprising, for there was barely even armed-resistance.² For various reasons that are retrospectively understandable even as they remain inexcusable, the Jews of Europe³ allowed themselves to be murdered. Studies of Jewish history, including the conclusions of this thesis, suggest that

¹ With rare and noted, exception.

² The fact that Jews hold up the ‘Warsaw uprising’ (1944) as our most cited modern example of organized armed resistance, an effort which was limited, contained, and easily suppressed by the local Nazi authority, only further demonstrates the point.

³ And by proxy, the world.

by the time the Nazis began the ‘final solution,’ the Jewish community was unable to even conceive of physical resistance, even when their lives (and those of their children) depended on it.

A few years later at age thirteen, that image that I had of the Jew as victim was sharply jolted upon my first visit to the state of Israel. A country full of Jews who were not just the accountants and bankers of the familiar stereotype, but also were the bus drivers, farmers, policemen and soldiers. Men and women, of all ages, went about their lives in military uniforms, with muscles, guns, and most importantly, pride. Instantly I understood that these Israelis were a type of ‘new Jew,’ who would never have let their families be led to the slaughter, and would shed blood to make sure that ‘never again’ was more than just words.

In the years that followed, my experiences and studies enlightened me to the fact that there were many Jews outside of Israel who shared the machismo of their Israeli-‘cousins,’ but the questions of ‘why’ and ‘how’ still continued to nag me. Why did it take the Holocaust to guilt the world into allowing the Jews a place of their own? How did we, as a people, ever get to the collective state of mind that we needed the gifts of others in order to have permission to defend our lives against those who would take them? Were we always like this? Was the situation always thus... or had something happened to make us like this...to put us in such a compromising situation?

Once I began studying Torah these questions became even more pronounced. It does not take a scholar to realize that the Israelites of the Bible are almost constantly engaged in war, and even the most revered biblical figures led the Israelite armies into battle. Add to this confusion the mythical lore of the Maccabees, after which are dubbed the Israeli Olympics and Israeli International sports teams, these modern examples of physical Jews who can

physically compete in a physical world. I often wondered how the Jews went from the conquering and victorious people of the Bible or the heroes of Judah Maccabee to a people who could not, or would not, defend themselves against the Nazi death machine. It is the friction of contemporary Jewish self-identity, the conflation of ‘victim’ and ‘warrior,’ which gave rise to this thesis, which is aptly titled ‘the de-evolution of the Jewish warrior.’

In my research I hoped to accomplish four things. First, although through a casual perusal of the Bible I suspected that the characters revered in Judaism possessed a warrior-identity and warrior qualities; I wanted to look more closely at specifics. Second, although I had heard about the Maccabees, my ‘knowledge’ was but cursory and at best, second-hand. I wanted to read the sources myself, and reach my own conclusions. Third, I suspected that the literary genre known as Second Temple Literature, some of which overlaps and extends past the Hasmonean dynasty, might provide other examples of literature in which Jews were strong, suitably able to defend themselves against conquerors, and in some cases, able to claim the title of ‘conqueror.’ Because most of the literature that can be categorized as ‘Second Temple’ is outside of the Jewish canon, I also was eager to delve into material that is much less studied than that literature that is held sacred to Judaism. I thought that if such texts could be found, they might inform as to specifically how Jews of an era viewed themselves as warriors and what ‘warrior’ qualities were valued. Of course, the privilege of taking new (for me) Second Temple texts and really studying them was interesting and worthwhile in itself. Additionally, the later the composition of those texts which lionized the Jewish warrior, the closer (perhaps) I might come to my fourth objective, that being to identify a specific time, or event, which demarked the paradigmatic shift from Jews being comfortable engaging in war, to being a people war-averse.

With these goals in mind, I began my research shifting through Second Temple literature looking for texts in which the Jewish characters were warriors. My inquiries revealed that there was a varied plethora of such texts, far more than I could ever hope to explore within a life-time, much less the confines of a Master's thesis. Thus, after further exploratory examination, I selected seven texts to include in this thesis. The examination and analysis of each of those seven texts serves as the basis for a chapter. Of those seven, five neatly fit into the category of Second Temple literature which contain strong Jewish identification as warrior, although they all do this differently. These are: I Maccabees, The Book of Judith, 'The Scroll Of The War Of The Sons Of Light Against The Sons of Darkness' from Qumran, Josephus' account of Massada, the available literature that talks about the Diaspora revolt and the Bar Kochba revolt, and *Megillat Ta'anit*.

My research primarily embraced three types of sources: First, when applicable and possible, the primary literary source itself. When the oldest existing version of the text was in Hebrew, then I utilized the Hebrew version as well as various English translations. In these instances, although I sometimes looked at photocopies of actual manuscripts, I mostly relied on critical editions. In instances when the Hebrew was not the original language, or when the Hebrew original is not known to still exist, I relied on various English translations rather than the Greek or Latin. The Second type of resource used was existing secondary interpretations and commentaries as well as sociological and historical analysis of those primary documents. The third type of resource was historical accounts of each era that I thought would help explain the literary text in the general context of the times, as well as within the specific context of the Jewish people *vis-à-vis* social, political, military, and natural factors. Since the experts often could not agree on even basic facts, in writing each

chapter I often presented opposing arguments, and then when appropriate, offered my own analysis.

Clearly my choices for what to include in this thesis are those texts that I thought might help me realize my goals; but it is very possible that there are many existing Jewish texts from the Second Temple Period that I did not write about which would either be totally irrelevant to this thesis, or even counter my hypothesis and findings.

My research on timely literary texts, taken in summation, as well as historical analysis, suggests certain findings to this effect: throughout the four hundred years leading up to Bar Kochba's defeat, Jews had a strong-warrior identity; however, after the Bar Kochba revolt, a paradigmatic shift occurred resulting in a Jewish people that was war-averse. Broadly speaking, the suggestions towards this conclusion were arrived at by viewing the chosen texts as a series of indicating data-points that both reflect, and refract, the Jewish warrior identity present (minimally) in the confines of each individual text and (maximally) in the societal whole.⁴

As this thesis will demonstrate, the Jewish literature of each age reflected the political and social realities of the day; while at the same time it refracted an idealized Jewish self-image.⁵ When war was a viable option for the Jews, which it was from the Hasmonean period⁶ through the Bar Kochba war,⁷ some Jewish literature championed the Jewish warrior.

⁴ This is not to say that the 'warrior' identity was the only identity that Jews lionized and championed. For instance, Jewish literature throughout the ages also champions the person who can engage in peace. For instance, in the Hebrew Bible, the word 'shalom' appears 164 times, although according to Aaron Tapper in his dissertation on the subject (Tapper, "From Gaza," 71.), the meaning of the word is far from consistent.

⁵ Again, albeit perhaps only the ideal of the text's author, if one believes that each work was written by, and for, an audience of one.

⁶ The first Hasmonean revolt against the Seleucids took place from 167-164 B.C.E., but the independent Hasmonean dynasty is dated from the years of 164 B.C.E. to 63 C.E. concluding when Rome conquered Judah.

⁷ The second war with Rome, or the 'Bar-Kochba war' occurred between the years 132-135 C.E.

However, after Bar Kochba's stunning defeat by Rome, there was a distinct change in the collective Jewish psyche from 'warrior' to 'war-averse;' specifically, the Jews of Judaea⁸ went from being a people 'comfortable' engaging in war to a people distinctly averse to, and fearful of, both war and violence. I label this latter attitude as 'pacifist' and 'accommodationist.' In the same manner as it did in the preceding centuries, Jewish literature post Bar Kochba demonstrated this morphed Jewish self-identity dictated by the post-Bar Kochba reality. With the shattered Bar Kochba revolt went much of the Jewish aspiration to actively reclaim their former glory through war.

As war ceased to be a viable option for Jews, the Jewish self-image as warrior underwent a radical paradigmatic shift towards accommodationism. Once again, mirroring the social and political realities of their day, the Jewish warrior-hero was replaced with a demilitarized pacifist identity, who in turn served as both model and exemplar to the Jewish masses. Although this change was not overtly acknowledged by the rabbinic authority, examples such as the rabbinic treatment of the Maccabean victories or their 'annulment' of *Megillat Ta'anit* indicate that such change did occur.

One might surmise that this change was either a conscious departure from, or the result of a pragmatic self-reprioritization of, both the existing religious texts and the messianic vision; and thus of the very religion itself. History indicates that an accommodationist stance behooved the rabbinic authorities after Bar Kochba's demise because their very existence, and certainly their 'authorized power,' was permitted only through the grace of the Roman authority. The Rabbinic authorities needed only to look at the Bar Kochba debacle as a reminder of the price for Jewish armed resistance. The rabbis likely realized that violent

⁸ The term 'Judaea' is used when speaking of this geographic area before it became a Roman province, at which point, historical Judaea becomes historical 'Palestine'.

national confrontation with the Romans could only lead to more Jewish bloodshed, defeat, and increased Jewish restrictions.⁹ Essentially, 70 years of failed Jewish revolt led the rabbinic authorities to realize that further military engagement literally would risk Jewish survival; however security might be achieved through accommodationism.

Although the dates of 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E are neatly packaged, they are far from arbitrary. In essence these dates mark the beginning and the end of an era; the era when Jews aggressively pursued their national freedom of politic and religion from foreign occupation via military means.¹⁰ In the area of 200 B.C.E, the Seleucid Greeks took over Judaea. For various reasons these new occupiers awakened dormant bellicose tendencies in the Jewish population which had arguably been in hibernation since the biblical era of the Judges.¹¹

These four hundred years also cover such monumental events as the Roman occupation of Palestine which began in 63 B.C.E., the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., and the rise and failure of both the Diaspora revolt (115-117 C.E) and the Bar Kochba revolt (132-135 C.E.). Conveniently, the year (*circa*) 200 C.E. marks the solidification of a pivotal Jewish legal code, that being the codification of the Mishnah. This literature hints at the Jewish transformation to pacifism and accommodationism where Messianism could not be achieved through violence, but rather only through prayer and *mitzvot*. For the purposes of this thesis, ‘Messianism’ is a catch-all phrase which encompassed historical aspirations for political, social, and religious independence. And with the Mishnah, Jewish views that championed a military option were forbidden and considered both rogue and inappropriate.

⁹ As seen in the post-Bar-Kochba Hadrian decrees.

¹⁰ This era of 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. is also sometimes referred to as the ‘Apocalyptic Era.’ “Characteristic of this era of apocalypticism to suggest that this age was approaching an end.” (Sollamo, “War and Violence.” 348.)

¹¹ Samson, whom tradition chronologically places as the last of the biblical Judges, is said to have lived *circa* the late 12th or early 11th century B.C.E. (My. S. s.v. “Samson”)

This thesis consists of seven chapters that will examine how Jews viewed themselves as ‘warrior’ through certain pieces of period literature. The format of each chapter is to examine the general historical context of the period in which the text was composed, and then the specifics of how that general history affected the Jewish community in which the text existed. Thus, each chapter places a literary work¹² in its historical, social and religious context in an attempt to analyze the intent and effect behind the original literary work, as well as how that work was perceived and influenced certain Jewish communities in posterity. To effectively do this, the literary details relating to Jewish self-identity as warrior are examined in close detail, with subsequent personal analysis rendered when appropriate.

Chapter One, ‘The Bible,’ covers a selection of biblical characters who exhibit warrior traits. This chapter highlights certain words, actions, and interactions to clarify how these characters present as ‘warrior,’ and are later exemplified as such by later Jewish generations.

Chapter Two centers on I Maccabees. Primarily, the thesis hypothesizes that these books were written, and reflective of, a time of tremendous Palestinian Jewish militarism leading to the Hasmonean Dynasty. This was a time that future generations up through the Bar Kochba revolt would glorify as the ‘golden age,’ and the literature provided a (misleading) example of how Jewish militants could throw off foreign occupation of Judaea. This literature shows that Jews thought themselves to be superior warriors who could fight and defeat major military powers. This chapter will also show that hundreds of years later, in their efforts to demilitarize the Jews, the victories of the Maccabees and the Hasmonean might were marginalized into obscurity by rabbinic authorities.

¹² Chapter Six is the exception to this general rule in that there is no sole piece of literature to evaluate, but rather this thesis will survey how Bar Kochba was treated in extra-Judaic sources, by various authors, and from a modern historical perspective.

Chapter Three focuses on the Book of Judith. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the presentation of a ‘woman warrior’ who, like the Maccabees, fights using unconventional weapons and strategy against hopeless odds and an ‘invincible’ enemy. The chapter shows that even if Judith is a purely fantastical story without a grain of historical truth, in her character’s refusal to submit to the forces of superior armies, and to resist with everything that she had, Judith became a role model for those who wished to champion active and violent resistance.

Chapter Four focuses on Qumran’s ‘War Text,’ also known as ‘The Scroll Of The War Of The Sons Of Light Against The Sons of Darkness.’ The chapter focuses on the historical uncertainty, violence, and unrest in Judaea that is juxtaposed with the Jewish feelings of powerlessness in the face of the Roman might. An in-depth analysis of the Qumran warrior as portrayed the ‘War Text’ is then followed by discourse as to the exact nature and purpose of the text itself: a preposterous proposal of the powerless or a pre-text to realistic revolt.

Chapter Five focuses on Josephus’ account of Massada within the context of the Great Revolt. While considering Josephus’ historical authenticity, the chapter also considers how Josephus’ Massada account as literature is in itself useful for determining how Jews of an age might have thought of themselves, or wanted to think of themselves, as warrior. After all, it is a fact that the literature did exist; and therefore the literature can be mined for what it might tell us about the age in which it was created.

Chapter Six first focuses on the Diaspora Revolt and shows that although it is likely that each local conflict had specific local causes,¹³ there is significant evidence to suggest that the Jewish warriors from each of these communities coordinated and cooperated with one

¹³ Yadin, *Bar Kokhba*, 17; Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 93.

another¹⁴ towards a common goal and against a common enemy. Despite the tremendous risks that ultimately were realized upon each revolt's failure, Chapter Six emphasizes that the Jews of these Diaspora communities were not just prepared to engage against the mightiest fighting force in the world, but that they actually engaged; thus indicating that the Jewish warrior existed and was common enough to simultaneously lead four established Jewish communities in armed revolt.

The second part of Chapter six focuses on the last significant Jewish, military endeavor in ancient history,¹⁵ the Bar Kochba revolt (132-135 CE). The thesis examines the state of the Roman Empire *vis-à-vis* Jewish national and messianic aspirations, the plausible causes of the Jewish revolt, what was at stake for both the Romans and the Jews, the strategies and tactics of both armies, and the resulting punitive Roman consequences. Additionally, Bar Kochba is examined as a historic and literary figure. This chapter also shows how the rabbinic authorities were initially split in their support for Bar Kochba, but that after the revolt was quashed the rabbinic authorities railed against him, his militarism, and any sort of messianic aspirations through violence. From this point on, messianic inclinations were only to be pursued non-violently through prayer and *mitzvot*, and specifically not through armed struggle.

Chapter Seven focuses on the *Megillat Ta'anit*, 'the Scroll of Fasting,' which is really a concise list mainly comprised of Jewish military victories to be annually commemorated. The chapter professes that the fact that most of *Megillat Ta'anit* is a list of Jewish military achievements, and one that was halakhically endorsed,¹⁶ strongly suggests that the Jewish people held armed-resistance as an ideal to be commemorated, celebrated, and applauded.

¹⁴ Sper, *The Future*, 56; Ben Zeev, "The Uprising," 94.

¹⁵ Up until the *Aliyah* movements of the 19th century as prelude to the creation of the state of Israel.

¹⁶ Although not universally.

This final chapter analyzes the latest scholarly discoveries on *Megillat Ta'anit*, and shows that it is reasonable to suggest that the *terminus ad quem* may extend past the Great Revolt, and into the era of Bar Kochba. Additionally, the 3rd century rabbinic decree to 'annul' *Megillat Ta'anit* is examined in the context of the hypothesis that the rabbis were demilitarizing Judaism in order to avoid further slaughter and to appease their Roman benefactors.

Chapter One- The Bible:

Although prior to these key four centuries, the Bible is central to the Jewish religion and culture, and therefore is the vital starting point when evaluating relevant Second Temple and Rabbinic literature that contains Jewish self-identity as warrior.¹⁷ The biblical characters, and their warrior attributes, serve as an example, and narrative starting point, for some of the Second Temple literature;¹⁸ but they also quintessentially demonstrate the antithetical change directed by some rabbinic authorities in the Amoraic period.

War dominates the biblical narrative landscape. The main biblical Hebrew word for war, *מלחמה*, appears 118¹⁹ times, thus reflecting the prominence of the war theme in the Bible. Indeed, much of the biblical context is war; a literary backdrop which accurately reflected the harsh realities of the Bronze²⁰ and Iron²¹ ages inside the historical Levant.

It is safe to say that during the Middle Bronze Age, war, and violence, was common throughout the Fertile Crescent.²² However, the historic Levant was “drawn into the power struggles with greater force than the other Near Eastern countries, and their inhabitants frequently became the victims of these international maneuverings.”²³ The geographical area where the early biblical heroes roamed, for they are presented as being semi-nomads, was a strategically vital bridge to all of the regional super-powers of the day.²⁴ Thus, the conquest and control of the Levant was a prerequisite to either checking competing imperialistic interests, or to furthering a nation’s imperial aspirations. “It is not

¹⁷ All abbreviations and documentation are referenced to: Alexander, Patrick and Kutsko, John eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.

¹⁸ See Testament of Judah & Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs.

¹⁹ According to Bibleworks software (version 6) program, the number 118 includes all the various possible forms and derivations.

²⁰ The age of the Patriarchs may be dated to *circa* 2200-1550 B.C.E. (Avi-Yonah, “War and Warfare”, 20: 620.)

²¹ 1200-900 B.C.E. (Avi-Yonah, “War and Warfare,” 20: 622.)

²² Coote, “Ancient Israel,” in Esler, *Tribalism*, 36.

²³ Ben Sasson, *A History*, 8.

²⁴ Almost consistently Egypt to the South, with various regional powers fluctuating to the North, although mostly the Assyrians and Persians.

surprising, therefore, that Palestine and Syria served as international battle-grounds more often than any other area in the ancient world. In addition, there were stubborn enemies to the east and west, in the form of desert marauders and seafaring peoples. However, these could not compare in sheer power to the mighty forces that had come into being beyond the northern and southern frontiers.”²⁵ The almost constant jostling, in the form of military maneuvers, for control of the Levant dictated that the region’s inhabitants were accustomed to the unfortunate reality, and the constant possibility, of war either directed against them or in the general region.

This is not to say that most of the biblical characters, either as actual people or historical/literary representations, ever were regional ‘super-powers’. To the contrary, they were not.²⁶ However, logically they had to have been proficient in ‘war’; that being organized armed conflict for the sake of defense or set goals, in order to navigate the rough and ever changing bellicose political waters in which they lived. Tribes that were unable to engage in war did not enjoy longevity, but rather were conquered, enslaved, and assimilated into those tribal groups that were able to physically defend and conquer.²⁷

From the text of the Bible itself, the biblical heroes as individuals and as tribal leaders clearly engaged in war, as well as feats of tremendous physical strength which can be seen as a coveted characteristic for a warrior. Although the Israelite narrator does not focus on these traits or their military accomplishments, these bellicose characteristics are an integral part of their mythic persona, and arguably their charismatic appeal. In fact, it is precisely these qualities, at least in part, which

²⁵ Ben Sasson, *A History*, 6.

²⁶ “Attempts at determining a comparatively accurate date for (many of the biblical characters, including the) Patriarchs are themselves doomed to failure, for in fact it is difficult to speak of the so-called ‘patriarchal period’ as a well-defined chronological entity, even where one accepts the biblical tradition as such. It would seem, rather, that imbedded in this narrative cycle are reminiscences of centuries-long historical processes that may hark back to the West Semitic migrations within the Fertile Crescent that made their way ever westwards and reached their apex during the first quarter of the second millennium. These extended time spans were telescoped in the biblical narrative in a mere trigenerational scheme; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Ben Sasson, *A History*, 32.)

²⁷ Coote, “Ancient Israel,” in Esler, *Tribalism*, 36.

qualify the biblical heroes for leadership. They are strong, they are strategic, and through their war-skills they enable their dependents to survive.

Starting with the first Patriarch, Abraham, there are direct and indirect references to the military prowess of biblical characters. Most obvious is Genesis 14 which recounts how Abraham's nephew, Lot, was captured in a raid relating to a regional war between local kings. This was dubbed the war of the 'four kings against five.'²⁸ As it happened, the Four Kings²⁹ together looted and conquered much of the territory belonging to The Five Kings,³⁰ land that covered all the regions of the Transjordan, Edom and the Negev.³¹ Lot and his family were captured and taken as booty. Abraham,³² upon hearing of Lot's capture "armed his disciples who had been born in his house – three hundred and eighteen of them- and pursued the enemy army many miles to the North:

וישמע אברם כי נשבה אחיו וירק את חניכיו ילידי ביתו שמנה עשר ושלוש מאות
וירדף עד דן ויחלק עליהם לילה הוא ועבדיו ויכם וירדפם עד חובה אשר משמאל
לדמשק וישב את כל הרכש וגם את לוט אחיו ורכשו השיב וגם את הנשים ואת העם

And when Abram heard that his kinsman was taken captive, he armed his disciples who had been born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and he pursued them as far as Dan. And he with his servants deployed against them at night and struck them; he pursued them as far as Hobah which is North of Damascus. He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his kinsman, Lot, with his possessions, as well as the women and the people.³³

From a simple reading of Genesis 14, the reader can deduce a few important things about Abraham. First, Abraham quickly assembles his men and pursues the army of the Four Kings; thus showing that Abraham's force was trained, fleet and able to mobilize very quickly. This reflects a

²⁸ Genesis 14:9.

²⁹ According to Genesis 14:1, the Four Kings are: Amraphel, king of Shinar; Arioch, king of Ellasar; Chedorlaomer, king of Elam; and Tidal, king of Goiim.

³⁰ According to Genesis 14, the Five Kings are: Bera, king of Sodom; Birsha, king of Gomorrah; Shinab, king of Admah; Shemeber, king of Zeboiim; and Zoar, king of Bela.

³¹ Muffs, "Abraham," 95, n. 42.

³² Then still 'Avram.'

³³ Genesis 14:14-16.

group accustomed to, and ready for, armed conflict. This assumption is strengthened if one reads *חניכיו* as ‘his trained men.’ In the context of battle, which is the context of this story, ‘his trained men’ can be read as men trained in the discipline of battle; or, in a word, ‘warriors.’ Second, Abraham’s private army of 318 men was sizable enough to defeat the same enemy army that had defeated those armies of the Five Kings. This would indicate that Abraham’s private army was more powerful than the combined regional war-lords since, in his victory, Abraham essentially conquers the conquerors. Third, this passage shows that Abraham’s army was not only trained to repel an enemy, but to pursue and attack; a feat that requires a higher level of experience, skill and training. Fourth, Abraham was strategic enough to attack at night, thus showing his commanding skills as a ‘general.’ The night attack also buttresses the assertion that his force was cohesive and well trained. In summary, Abraham’s military victory over the marauding Four Kings is direct textual evidence of his skill as warrior, and war leader.³⁴

More subtle, indirect textual evidence is indicated a few chapters later,³⁵ with overtures from the remaining Five Kings led by Abimelech. Abraham has magnanimously restored Abimelech’s plundered property and persons, after which Abimelech sues Abraham for a peace-treaty. “It is Abimelech, significantly accompanied by his general Phicol, who seeks to enter into a pact of non-aggression with Abraham. Clearly, the patriarch’s presence in the land constituted something of a threat to the Philistine king. All this evidence clearly suggests that the patriarch was not simply a powerless resident alien of the land.”³⁶

Isaac, although somewhat ‘flat’ as a literary figure, certainly has attributes of para-military prowess, although the biblical text is unclear if this was based on actual deed or merely reputation by

³⁴ These assumptions were confirmed as ‘reasonable’ by Major (res) Yariv Nornberg of the Israeli Defense Force, telephone interview, 7/12/07.

³⁵ Genesis 21:22-23.

³⁶ Muffs, “Abraham,” 96.

association. In a later narrative, Isaac too is approached by Abimelech to parley, except that in addition to bringing his general, Phicol, to the deliberations, Abimelech also brings his advisor, Ahuzat.³⁷ This would indicate that like Abraham, Isaac also was considered a military threat, perhaps to an even greater degree than was Abraham, to the local established chiefdoms and thus wisely pacified through armistice.

Like his father and grandfather, Jacob is not depicted as being bellicose, yet there are many references to his physical and military prowess. Regarding his physical strength, Isaac is able to single-handedly roll the rock off of the water-well,³⁸ a feat that usually required the combined efforts of many men. This public display of almost 'super-human' strength also marked Isaac as dangerous to confront, thus helping to ensure his safety while alone in a foreign land.³⁹

Most acute is Jacob's hand-to-hand combat with the mysterious entity ((vya) i))))) understood to be a divine being, along the river Jabok.⁴⁰

ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר וירא כי לא יכל לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע
כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו ויאמר שלחני כי עלה השחר ויאמר לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתני
ויאמר אליו מה שמך ויאמר יעקב ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל כי שרית
עם אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל וישאל יעקב ויאמר הגידה נא שמך ויאמר למה זה תשאל לשמי
ויברך אתו שם ויקרא יעקב שם המקום פניאל כי ראיתי אלהים פנים אל פנים ותנצל נפשי

Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. ²⁶
When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at
its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. ²⁷
Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let
you go, unless you bless me." ²⁸ Said the other, "What is your name?" He
replied, "Jacob." ²⁹ Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for
you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." ³⁰ Jacob
asked, "Pray tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!"

³⁷ Muffs, "Abraham," 96 n 43. Furthermore, "a re-examination of the secular treaties between Isaac and Abimelech, and between Jacob and Laban, will clearly demonstrate that military activity, following Near Eastern traditions of law and chivalry, is a common – but often neglected- theme in the lives of all the patriarchs as depicted by many of the tradents in the Book of Genesis." (Muffs, "Abraham," 82.)

³⁸ Genesis 29:2.

³⁹ Jacob grew up in Canaan, but sojourned east to Nahor where he was without the protection of his tribe.

⁴⁰ Genesis 32:25-31.

And he took leave of him there. ³¹ So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved.

This narrative gives Jacob the strength and endurance to fight through the night “until the break of dawn.” As for the compliment that the angel gives to Jacob, “You have striven with God and with men,”⁴¹ biblical scholars⁴² posit that “this can hardly refer to the contests with Laban or Esau; it points rather to the existence of a fuller body of legend, in which Jacob figured as a hero of many combats, culminating in this successful struggle with the deity.”⁴³

Further buttressing his warrior accomplishments, Jacob later reveals that he captured the city of Shechem “from the Amorites with my sword and bow.”⁴⁴ This statement indicates that Jacob not only was known as a successful warrior by both men and God, but also that he conceived of himself as warrior and a conqueror.

Some of Jacob’s sons also engaged in acts of war. Most obvious are the two brothers, Simeon and Levy, who not only used their swords, but slaughtered a rival tribe for perceived tribal honor. After intentionally tricking the men of Shechem to circumcise themselves with the pretense of forming an alliance,⁴⁵ the two brothers ruthlessly slaughtered all of Shechem’s men, and enslaved that city’s women and children:

ויהי ביום השלישי בהיותם כאבים ויקחו שני בני יעקב שמעון ולוי אחי דינה איש חרבו ויבאו על העיר בטח ויהרגו כל זכר ואת חמור ואת שכם בנו הרגו לפי חרב ויקחו את דינה מבית שכם ויצאו בני יעקב באו על החללים ויבזו העיר אשר טמאו אחותם את צאנם ואת בקרם ואת חמריהם ואת אשר בעיר ואת אשר בשדה לקחו ואת כל חילם ואת כל טפם ואת

⁴¹ Genesis 32:29.

⁴² Muffs, “Abraham,” 100.

⁴³ Muffs, “Abraham,” 100.

⁴⁴ “The history of the verse is somewhat as follows: the original form was unequivocally military and did not include ‘ehad ‘al aheka. These words were added by a pious redactor whose intention was to obfuscate the original warlike tone.” (Muffs, “Abraham,” 99.)

⁴⁵ Genesis 34:21: "These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them."

נשיהם שבו ויבזו ואת כל אשר בבית ויאמר יעקב אל שמעון ואל לוי עכרתם אתי להבאישני
בישב הארץ בכנעני ובפרזי ואני מתי מספר ונאספו עלי והכוני ונשמדתי אני וביתי
ויאמרו הכזונה יעשה את אחותנו

On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, brothers of Dinah, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the males. ²⁶ They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. ²⁷ The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled.²⁸ They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside;²⁹ all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty. ³⁰ Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed." ³¹ But they answered, "Should our sister be treated like a whore?"⁴⁶

From a simple reading of Genesis 34:25-31, the reader can deduce a few important things about Simeon and Levy; and from the characteristics of these two brothers make some assumptions about Jacob's tribe in general. First, the brothers were adept in para-military maneuvering. Since the mass circumcision of Shechem was proposed by Jacob's sons, the reader has no reason not to think that the entire slaughter was premeditated. In this case, they strategized how to totally eliminate a numerically superior tribe without losing even one of their own number. Although to the modern reader this might seem ruthless, from a strategic perspective it is brilliant.

Second, the text relays that each brother took his sword, **איש חרבו**. In the Middle Bronze Age, the sword was not a common instrument of the average man, but rather was employed by military infantry.⁴⁷ Although simple weapons for defense were likely commonplace, a **חרב** was the weapon of a fighter. The fact that at least these two brothers, Simeon and Levy, had access to swords indicates that they likely were comfortable using them.

⁴⁶ Genesis 34:25-31.

⁴⁷ Avi-Yonah, "War and Warfare," 20: 620.

Third, not only did Simeon and Levy plan out the attack on Shechem, but they also implemented their plan by killing all of the men, who were helpless at the time, in cold blood. This amount of slaughter, apparently done without hesitation or remorse, would indicate that both brothers were no strangers to war and violence. Fourth, in addition to killing the men, they enslaved the women and children and took all of the possessions as booty. This often was the fate that a defeated tribe faced, and to do so was almost the expected behavior of the victors. Simeon and Levy seem to be at ease behaving like victors, which would indicate their comfort with both war and victory. Fifth, when their father, Jacob, expresses fear of retribution from the other area tribes, Simeon and Levy respond with a justification, and without remorse. In doing so, they demonstrate confidence in their capacity to fight and their ability to handle any competing tribes who might seek revenge. In summary, Simeon and Levy's premeditated slaughter of a rival tribe is direct textual evidence of their comfort, skill and capacity to wage war.

Although the biblical narrative does not directly tell of the war exploits of Jacob's other sons, there are some indirect references that would indicate that at least some of the sons had fierce reputations and identified as warriors. "Even a superficial perusal of the last words of Jacob⁴⁸ or the last words of Moses⁴⁹ presents the reader with a whole host of heroic deeds and military attributes."⁵⁰ For instance, Jacob relays one son's reputation as a warrior when he says:

יהי דן נחש עלי דרך שפיפן עלי ארז הנשך עקבי סוס ויפל רכבו אחור

Dan shall be a serpent by the road, a viper by the path, which bites the horse's heels so that his rider is thrown backward⁵¹

Similarly, Moses describes Dan as "a lion's whelp that leaps forth from Bashan:"⁵²

⁴⁸ Genesis 49.

⁴⁹ Deuteronomy 33.

⁵⁰ Muffs, "Abraham," 100.

⁵¹ Genesis 49:17.

⁵² Deuteronomy 33:22.

ולדן אמר דן גור אריה יזנק מן הבשן

In Jacob's swan-song Dan is portrayed as a fierce snake who, employing guerilla tactics, hides and then attacks unexpectedly, and thus is able to repel larger and stronger forces. Moses labels Dan as a young lion who leaps. Both passages liken Dan to dangerous, aggressive predators. The parallels seem to complement one another, lionizing Dan's ability to wage war and inflict damage upon his enemies.

Another of Jacob's sons, Levi, also is compared to a lion; thus reflecting his abilities to wage war and to defeat soundly any who might face him in battle. Levi is charged to absolutely crush his enemy by 'smiting the loins of his foes'. This is a biblical expression which can mean destroying one's physical loins,⁵³ or can act as an idiom for breaking someone's resolve.⁵⁴ Either way, Levi has the warrior reputation as one without mercy who strikes fear into his enemies and will 'let his enemies rise no more.'⁵⁵

מחץ מתנים קמיו ומשנאיו מן יקומון

Likewise Gad is presented as a blessed lion, "poised to tear off arm and scalp."⁵⁶

ולגד אמר ברוך מרחיב גד כלביא שכן וטרף זרוע אף קדקד

Notice the imagery here is not of Gad-the-lion fighting other animals, but of people. Gad is 'poised' for war, and so others fear him; but by being poised, he is actually more fearsome because he is in control. His power is that he is always ready for war, and so that even his presence serves as a threat.

Benjamin is compared to another ferocious animal, a hungry wolf:

⁵³ See Jeremiah 48:37; Ezeikiel 47:4; Amos 8:10.

⁵⁴ See Proverbs 30:31; Ezeikiel 21:11; Ezeikiel 29:7; Nahum 2:2; Nahum 2:11.

⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 33:11.

⁵⁶ Deuteronomy 33:20.

בנימין זאב יטרף בבקר יאכל עד ולערב יחלק שלל

The ravenous wolf: In the morning he consumes the foe and in the evening he divides the spoil.⁵⁷

It is not enough that Benjamin is a predator, but he is a predator on the hunt. The imagery here is deliberately intended to portray Benjamin as a fierce warrior who can not just defend, but also attack. A soldier accomplished in war and accustomed to victory.

Even Joseph, whose biblical narrative is one of spoiled teen, slave, prisoner, and finally as a pampered vizier, is attributed intractable battle-field resolve and deadly acumen with the war-bow. “Archers bitterly assailed him. They shot at him and harried him. Yet his bow stayed taut, and his arms were made firm.”⁵⁸

וימררהו ורבו וישטמהו בעלי חצים
ותשב באיתן קשתו ויפזו זרעי ידיו מידי אביר יעקב משם רעה אבן ישראל

Moses description of Joseph is even more violent than that of Jacob. In Deuteronomy, Joseph does not kill with a bow from afar, but rather defeats everyone by attacking and goring like a colossal bull:

בכור שורו הדר לו וקרני ראם קרניו בהם עמים ינגח יחדו אפסי ארץ והם רבבות אפרים והם אלפי מנשה

Like a firstling bull in his majesty, he has horns like the horns of the wild-ox; with them he gores the peoples, the ends of the earth one and all.⁵⁹

Indeed, the nation of Israel was comprised of all twelve tribes, each assigned military strength and victory over their many enemies:

אשריך ישראל מי כמוך עם נושע ביקוק מגן עזרך ואשר חרב גאותך וכחשו איביך לך
ואתה על במותימו תדרך

⁵⁷ Genesis 49:27.

⁵⁸ Genesis 49:23-24.

⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 33:17.

O happy Israel! Who is like you, A people delivered by the LORD, Your protecting Shield, your Sword triumphant! Your enemies shall come cringing before you, And you shall tread on their backs.⁶⁰

Many, many of the subsequent biblical heroes are also men (and women) of war, accustomed and comfortable with feats of strength, para-military strategy, acts of intentional violence, and military action. Recall that while still living under Pharaoh's roof Moses kills an Egyptian slave-master in cold blood:

ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו ויפן כה וכה וירא כי אין איש ויך את המצרי ויטמנהו בחול

Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.⁶¹

An analysis of these two lines reveals some very interesting characteristics about Moses. First, Moses' motivation for killing the task-master was spurred on by tribal, or ethnic, friction. It was not because the Egyptian was beating a slave that Moses was driven to take violent action, but that he was beating an *Israelite* slave; the group that Moses identified with in contrast to the people known as Egyptians. If Moses just wanted the beating to stop, it is elusive to the analyst why he would not just command the task-master to desist. After all, Moses was a member of Pharaoh's royal family, surely he could have verbally commanded the Egyptian, at least in this instance, to refrain. As insight into Moses' character, and later propensity for military action, it is important that Moses decided not to command, or reprimand, but rather to kill.

Second, the text says that Moses looked 'this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian.' This would indicate that the violence was strategically premeditated, and that

⁶⁰ Deuteronomy 33:29.

⁶¹ Exodus 2:11-12.

Moses killed the Egyptian despite understanding that if found out, he would face harsh consequences. Also, by hiding the dead body in the sand, Moses hoped to avoid detection and punishment. Finally, Moses' method for killing the Egyptian was not removed and subtle, but rather face to face and in cold blood. This would indicate that Moses was not averse to violence by his own hand. Moses was motivated to murder along ethnic lines; his strategy was premeditated and calculated and his implementation was brutal. The biblical narrative does not assign any remorse to Moses for his action; to the contrary, Moses' decision to kill seems to be justified and lauded.

Throughout Exodus, Moses emerges as a leader of the Israelite people. In the volatile setting of the ancient world, sometimes circumstance dictated that Moses act as the commander and strategist for the Israelite army, as in the battle with Amalek. Unlike Moses' killing of the Egyptian task-master, in this narrative Moses does not enter into direct combat, but rather is the general strategically directing his field commander, Joshua. Understandably, Moses realized that he was more valuable in the battle as a calculating general than as a foot-soldier. In climbing the mountain and remaining visible to his Israelite troops, Moses stands as a sign that the battle was going well, and as a symbol to boost the Israelite warrior moral. Moses strategy, and his army's fortitude, succeed in bringing about a military victory:

ויבא עמלק וילחם עם ישראל ברפידים: ויאמר משה אל יהושע בחר לנו אנשים וצא הלחם בעמלק מחר אנכי נצב על ראש הגבעה ומטה האלהים בידי ויעש יהושע כאשר אמר לו משה להלחם בעמלק ומשה אהרן וחור עלו ראש הגבעה והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו וגבר ישראל וכאשר יניח ידו וגבר עמלק וידי משה כבדים ויקחו אבן וישימו תחתיו וישב עליה ואהרן וחור תמכו בידי מזה אחד ומזה אחד ויהי ידיו אמונה עד בא השמש ויחלש יהושע את עמלק ואת עמו לפי חרב

Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in my hand." Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur

went up to the top of the hill. Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set. And Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword.⁶²

The sortie with Amalek is not the only battle in which Moses commands Israelite soldiers. After returning from Mt. Sinai with the ten commandments, and seeing Israelites worshipping the golden calf, Moses commands the Levites to battle against the guilty Israelites:

ויאמר להם כה אמר יקוק אלהי ישראל שימו איש חרבו על ירכו עברו ושובו משער לשער
במחנה והרגו איש את אחיו ואיש את רעהו ואיש את קרבו ויעשו בני לוי כדבר משה ויפל
מן העם ביום ההוא כשלשת אלפי איש

He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Each of you put sword on thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay brother, neighbor, and kin." The Levites did as Moses had bidden; and some three thousand of the people fell that day.⁶³

The narrative here is revealing. First, the Levites, those priests who would become responsible for the Tabernacle, carried swords. Not only that, but according to the Torah narrative, they were a cohesive enough fighting unit to coordinate attacks on 3,000 Israelites throughout the camp. Additionally, they were ruthless enough, upon the command of Moses their general, to fight against people from all of the other tribes. The fact that Moses could rely on the loyalty of such a well trained fighting unit in a civil war attests to Moses' control over a vital unit of the Israelite army. That Moses could command the Levite troops into Civil War again reinforces Moses' ability, and willingness, to wage war...even against a dissenting group of his own people.

At the beginning of Deuteronomy, when Moses is reviewing the Israelite history, he refers to his role in leading the Israelites in yet still other battles against enemy armies. Interesting is the use of

⁶² Exodus 17:8-13.

⁶³ Exodus 32:27-28.

the singular *At^a Kohⁱ*; implying Moses' direct action and not that of Israel. Likely this reflects

Moses' leadership and command of the Israelite fighting forces:

ויהי בארבעים שנה בעשתי עשר חדש באחד לחדש דבר משה אל בני ישראל ככל אשר צוה
יקוק אתו אלהם אחרי הכתו את סיחן מלך האמרי אשר יושב בחשבון ואת עוג מלך הבשן
אשר יושב בעשתרת באדרעי

It was in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moses addressed the Israelites in accordance with the instructions that the LORD had given him for them, after he had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth and Edrei.⁶⁴

Later in Deuteronomy these battles are more fully recounted:

ויאמר יקוק אלי ראה החלתי תת לפניך את סיחן ואת ארצו החל רש לרשת את ארצו ויצא
סיחן לקראתנו הוא וכל עמו למלחמה יהצה ויתנהו יקוק אלהינו לפנינו ונך אתו ואת <בנו>
בניו ואת כל עמו ונלכד את כל עריו בעת ההוא ונחרם את כל עיר מתם והנשים והטף לא
השארנו שריד רק הבהמה בזזנו לנו ושלל הערים אשר לכדנו מערער אשר על שפת נחל
ארנן והעיר אשר בנחל ועד הגלעד לא היתה קריה אשר שגבה ממנו את הכל נתן יקוק
אלהינו לפנינו

And the LORD said to me: See, I begin by placing Sihon and his land at your disposal. Begin the occupation; take possession of his land. Sihon with all his men took the field against us at Jahaz, and the LORD our God delivered him to us and we defeated him and his sons and all his men. At that time we captured all his towns, and we doomed every town -- men, women, and children -- leaving no survivor. We retained as booty only the cattle and the spoil of the cities that we captured. From Aroer on the edge of the Arnon valley, including the town in the valley itself, to Gilead, not a city was too mighty for us; the LORD our God delivered everything to us.⁶⁵

The details of these battles are raw. Israel attacked and captured King Sihon's land, but not before first meeting and defeating Sihon's full fighting force in the field. Under Moses' command, the Israelite army killed every person in Sihon's kingdom, including the women and children. The suggestion that the Israelite warriors could meet an army in open battle, as well as sack their fortified

⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 1:3-4, 2:31-37 recounts that Moses slew Sihon, King of Amorites and Og, King of Bashan.

⁶⁵ Deuteronomy 2:31-36.

cities, indicates that the Israelite fighting force was unified, coordinated, and powerful. They were also portrayed as following standard army procedure in taking booty from their defeated foe. The fact that they were ordered to, and actually killed all of the kingdom's native inhabitants speaks to both their discipline, and their ruthlessness. Certainly by this point the Israelite army is a fighting force accomplished in war.⁶⁶

It seems that Moses' successor, Joshua was being groomed for leadership, and was acceptable as such, at least in part because of his military brilliance in leading the nascent Israelites in bloody battle against Amalek.⁶⁷ But Amalek was only Joshua's warm-up for the fierce battles against The Seven Nations when the Israelites finally entered, and physically conquered, Canaan.⁶⁸ Recounting every battle that Joshua led when conquering Canaan is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a few choice passages about Joshua will demonstrate his almost mythological war-prowess.

In terms of commanding authority, Joshua is the undisputed military leader of the twelve tribes, and general over the Israelite invasion into Canaan. His troops tell him, "Any man who flouts your commands and does not obey every order you give him shall be put to death. Only be strong and resolute!"⁶⁹ It is these last two qualities, strength and resolution, which the troops feel are coveted in their leader and essential to victory.

Since Joshua is leading the Israelite army in conquest of fortified cities which is best accomplished by siege, one can be sure that success depended not as much on battle-field strength, but on calculated

⁶⁶ Of course, the reader must consider the possibility that even if this account is read as 'true,' that it might have been embellished. That being said, the real point is not how accurately the narrative reflects the historical reality, but rather the fact that the biblical narrative as a written piece of literature and should be considered as such.

⁶⁷ Exodus 17:9

⁶⁸ The book of Judges.

⁶⁹ Joshua 1:18.

strategy. Joshua employs spies to run reconnaissance, scoping out each city's weaknesses and encouraging infiltration by stealth.⁷⁰

Joshua's sacking of Ai is a great example of Joshua's strategic battle acumen. Knowing that a direct attack on Ai's reinforced city walls would be disastrous, Joshua tricks Ai's army into leaving the city, and then when they are away the Israelite army burns it, thus essentially ending the battle:

ויקם יהושע וכל עם המלחמה לעלות העי ויבחר יהושע שלשים אלף איש גבורי החיל וישלחם לילה ויצו אתם לאמר ראו אתם ארבים לעיר מאחרי העיר אל תרחיקו מן העיר מאד והייתם כלכם נכנים ואני וכל העם אשר אתי נקרב אל העיר והיה כי יצאו לקראתנו כאשר בראשנה ונסנו לפניהם ויצאו אחרינו עד התיקנו אותם מן העיר כי יאמרו נסים לפנינו כאשר בראשנה ונסנו לפניהם ואתם תקמו מהאורב והורשתם את העיר ונתנה יקוק אלהיכם בידכם... והאורב קם מהרה ממקומו וירוצו כנטות ידו ויבאו העיר וילכדוה וימהרו ויציתו את העיר באש ויפנו אנשי העי אחריהם ויראו והנה עלה עשן העיר השמימה ולא היה בהם ידים לנוס הנה והנה והעם הנס המדבר נהפך אל הרודף

So Joshua and all the fighting troops prepared for the march on Ai. Joshua chose thirty thousand men, valiant warriors, and sent them ahead by night. He instructed them as follows: "Mind, you are to lie in ambush behind the city; don't stay too far from the city, and all of you be on the alert. I and all the troops with me will approach the city; and when they come out against us, as they did the first time, we will flee from them. They will come rushing after us until we have drawn them away from the city. They will think, 'They are fleeing from us the same as last time;' but while we are fleeing before them, you will dash out from your ambush and seize the city, and the LORD your God will deliver it into your hands.... They entered the city and captured it; and they swiftly set fire to the city. The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising to the sky; they had no room for flight in any direction. The people who had been fleeing to the wilderness now became the pursuers.⁷¹

Joshua uses his prior battle with Ai, in which the Israelites were routed, to lure Ai into a false sense of confidence. Joshua aptly divides his troops, and coordinates tactics to overcome an entrenched enemy. Joshua and his strategies are credited with the military victory, and the subsequent Israelite

⁷⁰ For example, in Joshua 2:1, Joshua secretly sent two spies from Shittim into Jericho.

⁷¹ Joshua 8:3-7, 19-20.

rise to power, with the narrator assuring the reader that it was stratagem such as was used against Ai that enabled the nomadic Israelites to become ‘the pursuers.’

When it comes to fighting through cunning, it is Sampson the Nazir who, in the opinion of this author, exhibits the most creative and destructive plans. In one instance, Samson ties torches between pairs of foxes, and then sends 150 pairs into the Philistine fields, thus burning all of their crops.⁷² When the Philistines come to the tribe of Judah to extradite Samson, Samson willingly goes but once he is inside the enemy camp, he picks up an ass jawbone and wields it to single-handedly slaughter 1,000 Philistine soldiers.⁷³ It is because of Samson’s superhuman strength and amazing ability to kill his enemy, that he is chosen by the people to lead Israel for 20 years.⁷⁴ Clearly the Israelites were clamoring for a champion⁷⁵ as they awarded not just wisdom, but the man who was strong enough to keep them from the slave markets of the Philistines. The narrative text informs the reader that Samson’s strength comes from God, thus reinforcing the idea that this warrior and his amazing abilities were to be admired.

Another poignant example from the Bible of warrior qualities comes during the reign of Saul, who, after soundly defeating Amalek in an extended war, refused to kill the Amalek king, Agag. When Samuel the prophet sees that Saul is unable to kill his Amalekite counterpart in cold blood, Samuel takes a sword and slices Agag, in half.⁷⁶

⁷² Judges 15:3-4.

⁷³ Judges 15:15.

⁷⁴ Judges 15:20.

⁷⁵ “Following the sociologist Max Weber, some historians have aptly described this regime of the Judges as constituting a leadership based on personal charisma... Charismatic rule thrives on a people’s belief in the appearance in a time of crisis of a divinely favored personage enjoying a close relationship with God, experiencing divine revelations and possessed of outstanding courage. This type of leadership is characteristically spontaneous and specifically personal... The clamor for a champion in a time of distress would produce a voluntary gathering of the people around this person, a feeling of total dependence upon him and a national religious awakening.” (Ben Sasson, *A History*, 67.)

⁷⁶ I Samuel 15:33.

Aside from the context of this passage once again being war, it is interesting that the Israelite King is expected to exhibit the warrior trait of being able to kill in cold blood, and of following orders.⁷⁷ Even more interesting is that Saul was unable, or unwilling, to kill his Amelekite counterpart. Was it Saul's desire for mercy that kept him from slicing Agog in half, or was he unaccustomed to direct bloodshed by his own hand? Either way, Saul's dearth of this warrior trait cost him his kingship, as is seen when Samuel says, "The LORD has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you."⁷⁸ By this statement, Samuel the Prophet is saying that Saul's weakness is enough to dethrone him. In this statement, Samuel is implying that Saul will be replaced by someone more comfortable with killing.

And of course King David, in addition to leading a successful, violent *coupe d'etat*, uses his army to expand his vassalage into unprecedented regions by conquering his neighbors. The biblical narrator recounts David's military accomplishments during a particular campaign when David used his military force to steam-roll over the neighboring tribes, thus expanding Israel's domain and subjecting the surrounding kingdoms to an annual tribute:

ויך את מואב וימדדו בחבל השכב אותם ארצה וימדד שני חבלים להמית ומלא החבל להחיות ותהי מואב לדוד לעבדים נושאי מנחה ויך דוד את הדדעזר בן רחב מלך צובה בלכתו להשיב ידו בנהר(פרת) וילכד דוד ממנו אלף ושבע מאות פרשים ועשרים אלף איש רגלי ויעקר דוד את כל הרכב ויותר ממנו מאה רכב ותבא ארם דמשק לעזר להדדעזר מלך צובה ויך דוד בארם עשרים ושנים אלף איש וישם דוד נצבים בארם דמשק ותהי ארם לדוד לעבדים נושאי מנחה וישע יקוק את דוד בכל אשר הלך ויקח דוד את שלטי הזהב אשר היו אל עבדי הדדעזר ויביאם ירושלם ומבטח ומברתי ערי הדדעזר לקח המלך דוד נחשת הרבה
מאד

And the Moabites became tributary vassals of David. David defeated Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, who was then on his way to restore his monument at the Euphrates River. David captured 1700 horsemen and 20000 foot soldiers of his force; and David hamstringed all the chariot horses, except for 100 which he retained. And when the Arameans of Damascus came

⁷⁷ The Bible portrays it is God's command that Amelek is to be totally annihilated.

⁷⁸ 1 Samuel 15:27-28.

to the aid of King Hadadezer of Zobah, David struck down 22000 of the Arameans. David stationed garrisons in Aram of Damascus, and the Arameans became tributary vassals of David. The LORD gave David victory wherever he went. David took the gold shields carried by Hadadezer's retinue and brought them to Jerusalem; and from Betah and Berothai, towns of Hadadezer, King David took a vast amount of copper.⁷⁹

King David is portrayed not just as a visionary strategist, but also as a ruthless commander who was known for systematically slaughtering his war-captives:

וַיִּךְ אֶת מוֹאֵב וַיִּמְדַּם בַּחֶבֶל הַשֶּׁכֶב אוֹתָם אֶרְצָה וַיִּמְדַּד שְׁנֵי חֲבָלִים לְהַמִּית וּמֵלֵא חֲבָל לְהַחִיּוֹת וַתְּהִי מוֹאֵב לְדוֹד לְעֶבְדִּים נְשָׂאֵי מִנְחָה

He also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and he measured them off with a cord; he measured out two lengths of cord for those who were to be put to death, and one length for those to be spared.⁸⁰

As a national and military leader, being an accomplished warrior was an admirable quality. David personally sliced off the foreskins of two-hundred Philistines in order to woo the King's daughter.⁸¹ Amazingly, (and telling of the cultural values of the time), a warrior fierce enough to take two hundred enemy foreskins was worthy of not only the King's daughter, but the people's admiration and, eventually, the entire kingdom.

Certainly from these examples, a select few amongst the possible many, it is clear that war was part of the biblical backdrop; that the biblical heroes were portrayed as both warriors and military leaders; and that the continuation of the Israelite nation was dependent on their military success against the ever present enemy nations. Thus, military prowess was considered a coveted characteristic and the biblical writers understood this 'warrior' trait to be part of their national (or tribal) self-identity.

⁷⁹ 2 Samuel 8:2-8.

⁸⁰ 2 Samuel 8:2.

⁸¹ I Samuel 18:27.

Chapter Two- I Maccabees:⁸²

The book of I Maccabees is considered historical literature written by a Jew for a Jewish audience.⁸³ It recalls the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid Greeks as well as the rise of the independent Hasmonean state in historic Palestine. Before delving into the literature itself, specifically the Jewish warrior-identity championed within the text, it is important to review the historical circumstance that fomented the Jewish revolt; for it is the historical circumstances that somehow galvanized the Jewish population from a mentality of passively accepting foreign rule to one of waging war to preserve their religious freedom and eventually towards their political independence.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the genesis of these events, it might be easiest to begin where I Maccabees begins, with the man who changed the face of the Western world. When Alexander the Great was only twenty-three years old, he boldly led his army out of Macedonia and into Asia. In 323 BCE, less than ten years later, his armies had conquered the largest empire the world had ever known, over 3,000 miles stretching from Greece in the west to India in the east.

However, upon Alexander's death his generals, known as the *diadochi*, each appropriated a different part of the empire for themselves. The turbulent years from 323 to 301 B.C.E. saw endless conflicts among these *diadochi* concluding with the *diadochi* splitting Alexander's empire and creating the first Hellenistic kingdoms. Of Alexander's generals: Lysimachus acquired Thrace, Cassander grabbed Macedonia and Greece; Antigonus secured Asia Minor; Ptolemy Lagus gained Egypt and its periphery while Seleucus Nicator became the king of the rest of the Persian Empire which included Syria and Mesopotamia. Both Ptolemy

⁸² Unless otherwise noted, all translations of I Maccabees is taken from Altridge, H.W. "I Maccabees." Pages 716-897 in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*. Edited by Michael Stone (trans. 'Today's English Version'.) Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984; similarly, II Maccabees is taken from Altridge, H.W. "II Maccabees." Pages 898- 1025 in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*. Edited by Michael Stone (trans. 'Today's English Version'.) Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

⁸³ Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 14.

and Seleucus lay claim to Palestine, a coveted prize due to its strategic location and accessible ports.⁸⁴

As it had been since the Bronze Age, Palestine was of major strategic importance as an advance base for any military campaign against, or defense of, Egypt.⁸⁵ Additionally, its harbors enabled Palestine to be the hub for all types of imports and exports which included local olives, 'asphalt from the Dead Sea used for embalming, and the world- famous perfume from Ein Gedi known as balsam (*Pesimon*), which was produced exclusively by that community.⁸⁶ Thus, for over twenty years⁸⁷ the two most powerful Hellenistic dynasties, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, battled for control over Palestine with disastrous results for its towns and population. For a hundred years⁸⁸ Judaea was part of the Ptolemaic empire and in that time, there is no evidence of major Jewish discontent with the ruling Ptolemies, and certainly no mass Jewish revolt. In the year 201 B.C.E, Palestine switched hands when the Seleucid Antiochus III defeated the Ptolemaic Ptolemy IV Philopator at Panias. As a result the Seleucids annexed Judaea to their empire where it remained until gaining its full independence in 142 BCE after the Hasmonean revolt.⁸⁹

For the Jewish inhabitants, the change of rule from Ptolemaic to Seleucid initially had little effect because Antiochus III (223-187 BCE), the Seleucid conqueror of Palestine, changed almost nothing in the pattern of government and customs that had prevailed in Ptolemaic Judaea. At the start of his reign he allowed Judaea⁹⁰ to maintain its traditional system of government and even granted the

⁸⁴ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 3.

⁸⁵ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 4.

⁸⁶ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 4.

⁸⁷ 323 to 301 B.C.E.

⁸⁸ 300 to 201 B.C.E.

⁸⁹ Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 171.

⁹⁰ "Until the Hasmonean Revolt, Judaea was a self-contained unit, one of the many formed under the Seleucid province of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia. Thus the identity of the province Yahud (Judaea) was established from the days of Persian rule, and even its Greek name, Ioudaia, was similar. To the Seleucids, Judaea, with its population of Ioudaioi, was a nation (ethnos) with its center in Jerusalem." (Ben Sasson, *A History*, 191.)

Jews additional privileges.⁹¹ But the political and financial crisis that befell the Seleucid Kingdom came to force a change in its domestic policy;⁹² and with that change of policy came a change in the Jewish mentality towards their Hellenized rulers.

Although tolerance and benevolence was initially Antiochus' policy, his reign quickly became one of turmoil. His energies constantly were devoted to preventing insurrection within the motley states that comprised his empire and keeping foreign enemies like the Romans and Parthians at bay. In the year 168-167 B.C.E. Antiochus' empire stood at the nadir of debility. In the summer of 168, near Eleusis, across the Canobic branch of the Nile, the Roman legate, Gaius Popilius Laenas, forced the Seleucid monarch to abandon his conquest of Egypt, which only a few years before lay almost fully within his grasp. Antiochus III's defeat in the war against Rome had saddled the Seleucid administration with a heavy financial burden of indemnities to be paid to the Roman republic.⁹³

The Seleucid failure to conquer Egypt, and the wasted financial investment, left Antiochus with a crushing debt and he was forced to raise money wherever he could. In light of the Seleucid financial crisis, Antiochus saw no reason not to commandeer the enormous wealth kept in the ancient temples of their kingdom, one of which was the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. In raiding The Temple treasury, the Seleucids were acting out of simple financial consideration and was in no way targeting the Jews for particular retribution.⁹⁴

However, soon afterwards Antiochus initiated a series of injunctions that absolutely were particular to the Jews:

It was his next action, also financially motivated, that sowed the seeds of the future Jewish rebellion. He annulled the hereditary office of High Priesthood, as instituted in the Torah, and replaced the High Priest, Onias III, with the priest⁹⁵ who bribed him with the most money.⁹⁶ The High

⁹¹ i.e. - the remission of all royal taxes for three years.

⁹² Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 104

⁹³ Cohen, *The Hasmonean*, 23.

⁹⁴ Ben Sasson, *A History*, 201.

⁹⁵ Initially it was a Hellenized priest named Jason, the brother of Onias III, who bought himself this position. Jason attempted to import extreme Hellenism to Jerusalem in an effort to convert the city into a full *polis*.

⁹⁶ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 7.

Priest was not only the religious head but also the political leader of the nation. He exercised supreme authority over the Temple, which included responsibility for the capital's security and its regular water supply. He also was responsible for the gathering of royal taxes.⁹⁷

In other words, the position of High Priest was potentially a hugely lucrative position of power and therefore, Antiochus was convinced that he could personally profit by selling the position to the highest bidder.

Therefore, in 167 BCE Antiochus took two additional drastic steps. The first step was to build a large fortress in close proximity to the Temple named the Acra, which was garrisoned with crack Greek troops.⁹⁸ According to Maccabees I, “Then Antiochus and his forces built high walls and strong towers in the area north of the Temple, turning it into a fort... They also brought in arms and supplies and stored in the fort all the loot that they had taken in Jerusalem. This fort became a great threat to the city.”⁹⁹

The second step was that Antiochus issued an edict banning public practice of Judaism upon pain of death. Maccabees I recounts that “The King also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judaea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. He ordered them not to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or wine offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days. They were even ordered to defile the Temple and the holy things in it. They were commanded to build pagan altars, temples, and shrines, and to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there. They were forbidden to circumcise their sons and were required to make themselves ritually unclean in every way they could, so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses and would disobey all its commands. The penalty

⁹⁷ Ben Sasson, *A History*, 192.

⁹⁸ Book, “Jewish Journeys,” 7.

⁹⁹ I Mac 1:33, 35.

for disobeying the king's decree was death."¹⁰⁰ This was the first recorded case of a specifically religious persecution in Jewish history and essentially was a declaration of war against the non-Hellenized Jews.

Antiochus' edicts against the Jews remain puzzling. They seem counterintuitive to the Hellenistic tendencies of hyper-tolerance and assimilation. Polytheism is in general regarded as naturally tolerant, and it is a fact that Antiochus did not resort to religious compulsion in respect to other nations in his kingdom. The priests of the Babylonians and other nations continued to live their traditional religious lives and to serve their gods. Antiochus himself was particularly inclined towards the cult of Olympian Zeus, as is evidenced by the coins he struck, but there are no grounds for assuming that this attachment induced him to humiliate other cults, with the exception of the Jewish religion, which he persecuted mercilessly.¹⁰¹

It was precisely because the Jews were 'militant' about their monotheism that they were intractably opposed to practicing polytheism, and thus highly resistant to the idea of assimilating into the greater Hellenized culture. Antiochus decided that the only way to make the Jews tolerant, and thus malleable, was to weaken the Jews' resolve to practice solely their obdurate monotheistic Judaism. The 'tipping point' for the Jews was not the subjugation by a foreign power, they were used to that; rather, it was Antiochus' targeted persecution that made the Jews feel as if they had absolutely no choice but to revolt violently or forfeit their religiously commanded separate identity.

In retrospect, the historian has to question the wisdom of Antiochus' logic. Certainly it seems as though Antiochus, like his Ptolemaic predecessors, could easily have pacified the Jews simply by not forcing polytheism upon them. Regardless, his plan backfired and provoked the Jews into a fierce armed rebellion. Forty years of armed resistance and frequent military victory catapulted the Jews to a status far beyond regaining their pre-revolt

¹⁰⁰ I Mac 1:44-50.

¹⁰¹ Ben Sasson, *A History*, 205.

status quo which merely permitted them to practice their monotheistic Judaism as a pacified subjugated people within the Seleucid Empire. Under the pressure of necessity, Judaeans Jewish armed resistance morphed from pockets of guerilla brigades to battle-hardened victorious armies. As is relevant to this thesis, the historian has to wonder what is it that enabled these Jews, unaccustomed as they were to war, to be such strong warriors. What inspired their resolve to fight, and win, against almost consistently numerically superior, superbly trained, and better armed enemy armies?

In an ironic peripeteia, by the time the Hasmonean dynasty was established¹⁰² the Jews had bested their Seleucid oppressors at war,¹⁰³ greatly expanded their sovereign territory, purged the land of inimical gentile forces either by destroying nations or mass forced conversions,¹⁰⁴ and entered into alliances with foreign nations such as Rome, Sparta, and Athens. It is essential to understand that all of these things were only possible because the Jews were able to field such a powerful military force and control a piece of vitally strategic land. Only their military prowess enabled them to defeat the Seleucid armies, conquer their neighbors, and to be an attractive ally to foreign powers. The history of Antiochus' edicts against the Jews and the subsequent rise of the Jewish warriors and the Jewish Hasmonean Empire are chronicled in the book of I Maccabees.

¹⁰² Under Simon the Ethnarch in 142 B.C.E.

¹⁰³ "The enmity between Hasmonean Judaea and Tryphon automatically made Simon a natural ally of Tryphon's opponent, Demetrius II. One consequence of this alliance was that Demetrius exempted Judaea from paying tribute to the royal exchequer (in 142). Thus the independence of Judaea was acknowledged by the official representative of the Seleucid dynasty. The Jews themselves reckoned Jewish sovereignty from this year: 'And the people of Israel began to write in their instruments and contracts: In the first year of Simon, High Priest, commander and leader of the Jews' (I Mac 13:42) After twenty-five long years of struggle, Judaea had become a sovereign state in every respect. The war, which had begun as a desperate revolt against the religious policy of Antiochus Epiphanes, had gone far beyond its original aims and resulted in the re-establishment of the Jewish state after an interruption of more than 440 years." (Ben Sasson, *A History*, 215.)

¹⁰⁴ i.e. – the Idumeans under John Hyrcanus

Although there are four non-canonical books that are called ‘Maccabee’, most scholars consider only the first book of Maccabees (Maccabee I) to be a reliable historical source; and as a source it has some value to be sure. It covers the forty year period from the accession of Antiochus (175 B.C.) to the death of Simon the Maccabee (135 B.C.).¹⁰⁵ The Jewish revolt, lead by Matthathias and his five sons, Judah, Jonathan, Yochanan, Eliezar and Simon, had several phases. Despite being constantly out-armed and outmanned, the Maccabees led an irregular army of thousands of anti-Hellenist Jews to fight battles in the mountains, to lay siege to enemy garrisons, and even in the open field. The Jewish revolt was both a war against the Seleucid hegemony and a civil one against the Hellenized Jews.

The first phase of the war started in 167 BCE when Antiochus outlawed Judaism. During the course of the next three years he sent various Greek generals with their armies to exterminate the Jewish rebels; but after suffering a series of surprising defeats, Antiochus ultimately was forced to declare a temporary truce. The first phase culminated with the Jewish forces conquering Jerusalem, which allowed them to rededicate the Temple in the year 164 BCE. Retaking Jerusalem was considered such a great military victory, and the rededication of the Temple such an important event, that the Maccabees declared an annual holiday (Hanukkah) to commemorate these Jewish victories.¹⁰⁶

The second phase of the Jewish revolt was less of a rebellion than a rise to Jewish national independence under the leadership of Judah’s four brothers. The second stage recalls battles against their gentile neighbors, power struggles with competing local Jewish groups, pacts, betrayal, and alliances with various other empires. The battles waged by what was to be known as the Hasmonean dynasty did not always end in victory, but gradually they

¹⁰⁵ Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 62.

¹⁰⁶ I Mac 4:59

were able to solidify their power and borders, and eventually expand far into neighboring territories.

“Despite that fact that the text from which all translations have been derived is the Greek of the Septuagint; modern scholarship believes that the Septuagint is itself a translation of a Hebrew original.”¹⁰⁷ Historians infer this assertion from the sentence structure of I Maccabees which is certainly Hebrew and many expressions and words that occur which are literal translations of Hebrew idioms.¹⁰⁸ This once extant, but no longer, original Hebrew Urtext is collaborated by St. Jerome¹⁰⁹ who reported that he saw the book in Hebrew,¹¹⁰ as well as Origen¹¹¹ who gives a transliteration of “its Semitic title” which he reports as *Sarbeth Sarbane el*, or more correctly *Sarbeth Sarbanaiel*. Though the meaning of this title is uncertain, it is decidedly either Hebrew or Aramaic.

Conventional scholarship dates I Maccabees somewhere between 135 B.C.E and 63 B.C.E. The year 135 B.C.E marks the beginning of John Hyreanus’ reign, the same ruler who is mentioned in the work’s concluding sentences:

But someone ran to Gezer ahead of Ptolemy’s men and reported to John that his father and his brothers had been killed and that Ptolemy was sending his soldiers to kill him. John was horrified at the news, but, because he had been warned in advance, he was able to capture and put to death the men who had been sent to kill him. Now the rest of what John did from the time he succeeded his father: his wars, his deeds of courage, his rebuilding of walls, and his other accomplishments, are written in the chronicles of his reign as High Priest.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Altridge, *I Maccabees*, 171.

¹⁰⁸ i.e. – I Mac: I: 4, 15, 16, 44; II: 19, 42, 48; V: 37, 40; etc. “These peculiarities can scarcely be explained by assuming that the writer was little versed in Greek, for a number of instances show that he was acquainted with the niceties of the language.” (Toy, “Maccabees, Book of.”)

¹⁰⁹ ca. 345 - 420 C.E.

¹¹⁰ Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 17.

¹¹¹ 185- 284 C.E.

¹¹² I Mac 16:21-24.

“However, as the Romans are throughout spoken of in terms of respect and friendliness, it is clear that the *terminus ad quem* must be some time before the conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 B.C.E.”¹¹³ As to whether the date can be more nearly determined scholars are not agreed.

As this chapter is primarily concerned with Jewish self-identity as warrior, the authorship and audience of I Maccabees is of particular interest. Unfortunately, no hard evidence for either actual identity exists beyond that which one might infer from the literary work itself.¹¹⁴ From the text the reader can ascertain that he was a devout Palestinian Jew who likely was either a participant in the Maccabean fighting force, or had access to those Jewish warriors that did. The author also admired the Hasmonean family and he believed that Jews owed their survival and success entirely to them:

When the people of Israel heard about all this, they asked themselves, ‘How can we express our thanks to Simon and his sons? He, his brothers, and his father’s whole family have been towers of strength for our nation. They have fought off our enemies and set the nation free...Often when wars broke out in the country, Simon son of Mattathias, a priest of the Jehoiarib family, and his brothers risked their lives in protecting our nation, our Temple, and our Law against our enemies. They have brought great glory to our nation.’¹¹⁵

Additionally, from the text it is clear that the author held the warrior traits of the Jewish fighters in the highest esteem, and that he admired the strategic military acumen of the Jewish generals.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 63; Altridge, *I Maccabees*, 171.

¹¹⁴ Although this author has not seen any scholars claim that the author of I Maccabees is Jason of Cyrus, the author of II Maccabees claims to write a summary of a more detailed account already recorded by a certain Jason of Cyrus. “I will now try to summarize in a single book the five volumes written by Jason.” II Mac 2:23-28.

¹¹⁵ I Mac 14:25-26, 29.

¹¹⁶ Toy, “Maccabees, Book of.”)

Forgoing the possibilities that the narrative itself is merely embellishment or exaggeration, from the context and language of Maccabees I, the Jewish warriors are treated as heroes. Throughout the text, certain warrior traits are emphasized and lionized as admirable. For instance, as a group, the Jews who fought under Maccabean command are described as “the strongest and bravest men in Israel,”¹¹⁷ thus iterating that both strength and courage were qualities to be complimented and aspired to, even if this description is embellished or exaggerated.. As important to the Jewish soldiers was their ability to fight, and win, in actual combat. “The battle began, and in *the hand-to-hand fighting* about 5,000 of Lysias’ men were killed. When Lysias saw that his army was being defeated and when he saw the reckless courage of Judas and his men...”¹¹⁸

Perhaps the best description of the fierce Jewish warrior, one who is able to wreak havoc on the enemy on the battle-field, is the famous story recounted in Maccabees I of Eleazar slaying the elephant:

When Eleazar Avaran saw that one of the elephants was larger than the others and that it was covered with royal armor, he thought that the king was riding on it. Eleazar sacrificed his life to save his people and to gain eternal fame. *He ran boldly toward the elephant, which was in the middle of a battalion of infantry. He rushed forward killing men to the right and left, so that the enemy soldiers fell back before him on both sides. He slipped under the elephant and stabbed it to death, and it fell on him and killed him.*¹¹⁹

Although the physical ability of the Jewish warrior to engage successfully in combat was lauded, their aggressiveness is credited for ‘evening the odds’ and ‘leveling the playing

¹¹⁷ I Mac 2:42.

¹¹⁸ I Mac 4:34-35, italics my own.

¹¹⁹ I Mac 6:43-46, italics my own.

field.’ For instance, as was typical,¹²⁰ in a particular battle Judah’s troops were very much outnumbered by the army of general Gorgias so much so that the Gentiles were confident in their victory. Judah realized that if he waited for Gorgias’ army to attack, thus allowing the battle to commence on Gorgias’ terms and at his pace, the Jews would be slaughtered. Instead, as was typical, Judah did the unexpected and attacked the much bigger enemy force, thus aggressively capitalizing on his own troop’s desperation and utilizing the element of surprise:

When the Gentiles saw Judas and his men preparing for battle, they moved out of their camp to fight. Then Judas and his men sounded their trumpets and attacked. The Gentiles broke ranks and fled to the plain...altogether they killed about 3,000 of the enemy.¹²¹

The Jews often surprised the enemy forces with unexpected moves and fierce attacks, but it is their ruthlessness that is often lauded throughout the text:

So Judas and his *army suddenly turned and attacked* Bozrah by the desert road, captured the town, and killed every man in it. They looted the town and set it on fire.¹²²

By killing all of the town’s men and razing it to the ground the Maccabees were ensuring that they would not have to worry about those men flanking them as they continued their campaign, relieved themselves of having to guard and feed prisoners, and guaranteed that they would not have to sack the same fortified town twice. Remember, most of this war was not between two established countries with land, resources and ambassadors; rather, Judah and his troops were always on the run, living off the land, and operating under the threat of

¹²⁰ “The military position of Judaea was precarious, for even Antiochus’ forces on the near side of the Euphrates were far more numerous and better trained than the fighters who gathered under the banner of the Hasmoneans.” (Ben Sasson, *A History*, 207.)

¹²¹ I Mac 4:12-15.

¹²² I Mac 5:28.

existential extermination. The modern reader might consider being ‘ruthless’ less than admirable, but to the Maccabees, it was a trait that would help ensure their survival.

According to the text, it really was the literal survival of the Jews that was at stake. Indirectly the argument can be made that if Antiochus’ goals were met, and Judaeen Judaism was destroyed, than the other isolated settlements of Jewish populations outside of Judaea would not have had the psychological or physical strength to maintain their separate identity and thus would have disappeared from history. Be that as it may, certainly the very existence of the Jewish rebels, numbering in the many thousands, was at perilous risk because Antiochus’ definitive primary goal was their absolute destruction. One instance where this is conveyed is when “Lysias was ordered (by Antiochus) to send an army against the Jews, especially the Jews in Jerusalem, to break their power and destroy them so that no trace of them would remain. He was ordered to take their land and give it to foreigners.”¹²³ The threat of extermination from the powerful ruling king would have been, and according to the text was, taken seriously.¹²⁴ Many times throughout I Maccabees the Jewish commanders remind the Jewish troops that they are fighting for their lives and the survival of their people.¹²⁵ Psychologically, this fact might explain why the Jewish troops were so fierce, so aggressive, and at times, so ruthless. The Gentile empires could always afford to retreat and to regroup in order to fight another day; however the Jews could not afford such a luxury as each defeat was hugely costly and potentially final.

In I Maccabees, the Jewish commander is portrayed as the quintessential soldier and Jewish citizen, with his warrior attributes considered ideal. In describing his battle-endowments with admiration, the Maccabee become the archetype for what the Jewish man

¹²³ I Mac 3:35-36, also see Nacantor’s orders in I Mac 7:26.

¹²⁴ See I Mac 9:44.

¹²⁵ See I Mac 3:59.

can, and ought to be. Although it is difficult to prioritize all of his characteristics, it is clear that his most valuable trait is the ability to lead Jewish armies to victory, thus not only ensuring Jewish survival, but also commanding that Jews be respected for their battle prowess, and treated as such.¹²⁶ This is demonstrated when Matthathias passes leadership to Judah. He is told, “Judas Maccabeus has been strong all his life, he will be your commander and will lead you in battle against the enemy....Avenge the wrongs done to your people. Pay back the Gentiles for what they have done.”¹²⁷ From this statement it is clear that Judah’s main role is to lead the Jews to military victory. Similarly, when the mantle of leadership passes from Jonathan to Simon, Maccabees I reports that the people enthusiastically rallied “and they answered with a loud shout, ‘You are now our leader in place of your brothers Judas and Jonathan. *Fight our wars, and we will do whatever you ask.*”¹²⁸

The Jewish leader, however, does not just direct his troops from a safe distance; but rather picks up his sword to lead the charge and in doing so, inspires other men to do the same. “Judas was the first to cross the river against the enemy, *and all his men followed him.*”¹²⁹ In a manner reminiscent of his biblical namesake and exemplar, the text describes Judah as being a fierce warrior who slays with his sword and inspires fear in his enemies.

Judas brought greater glory to his people.
In his armor, he was like a giant.
He took up his weapons and went to war.
With his own sword he defended his camp.
He was like a ferocious lion roaring as it attacks.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ See I Mac 11:52 after Jonathan saved King Demetrius from the gentile mob at Antioch.

¹²⁷ I Mac 2:66-68.

¹²⁸ I Mac 13:8-9, italics my own.

¹²⁹ I Mac 5:43, italics my own.

¹³⁰ I Mac 3:3-4.

The Jewish warrior, as portrayed in the text, does not just fight for his own survival, but for Jews everywhere:

Jews lived beyond Judaea itself. The Jewish population was particularly dense in the three districts of southern Samaria – Lydda, Ephraim and Ramathaim...Naturally, some of them sought political union with Judaea, and during the Hasmonean Revolt the Jews from the hills to the north and north-west of Jerusalem and from the Plain of Lydda were among the most valiant of the fighters. Even the actual cradle of the revolt, Modi'in, seems to have lain outside Judaea, in the district of Lydda.¹³¹

Often these Jewish populations were isolated amongst hostile Gentile neighbors, and were subject to retribution for Jewish victories elsewhere in the region. A good many of the battles described in I Maccabees are battles in greater Palestine fought against the Gentile nations with whom the Jewish population was interspersed.

We must not forget that the settlements of the Jewish population in Palestine- whether in Judaea or elsewhere- were surrounded by a hostile gentile population; and while this population was of widely differing ethnic origins, Hellenistic rule provided it, stratified as it was, with something like a united Hellenized leadership.¹³²

The text itself relays the atmosphere in these years and the violently tense relations with the Gentile neighbors: “When the neighboring nations heard that they Jews had built the altar and restored the Temple as it had been before, they were so furious that they made up their minds to destroy all the Jews who were living about them. So they began to murder and kill our people.”¹³³ In these years of war, often Jewish settlements beyond Palestine took part in, or were dragged into, the fighting. The text relays that when a Jewish settlement was in danger, they would cry out to Judah: “Many of us have already been killed. Come rescue us!”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ben Sasson, *A History*, 198.

¹³² Ben Sasson, *A History*, 197.

¹³³ I Mac 5:1-2.

¹³⁴ I Mac 5:12.

In Maccabees I, the Jewish commanders consider the lives of Jews under attack their responsibility, and often the Jewish army takes great risks¹³⁵ to save Jewish brethren from annihilation. “They left there and marched all night to the fortress at Dathema... (with the war-cry) ‘Fight today for our fellow Jews!’”¹³⁶ However, once those Jewish populations were saved, they could not just be left alone with the hopes that they could defend themselves; rather, under the protection of the Jewish troops those remote Jewish populations were relocated to more secure areas in Judaea.¹³⁷ “Then Judas gathered together all the Jews in Gilead to take them back to Judaea with him. It was a large group of all kinds of people, together with their wives and children.”¹³⁸ In this way, the Jewish troops could be augmented with new reserves, Jewish innocents could be protected, and the Maccabees would not have to worry about having to divert further military resources to protect isolated Jewish settlements. This ingathering of Jews into Judaea would also enable their contemporary aspirations of Jewish nationalism.

As seen when Judah was facing insurmountable odds in his final battle, the Jewish general was portrayed as having courage in the face of death and the resolve never to back down. “Never let it be said that I ran from a battle. If our time has come, let’s die bravely for our fellow Jews and not leave any stain on our honor.”¹³⁹ The text shows that the Jewish general inspires his men and has the courage to keep on fighting no matter what. The message here is clear: fighting they at least have a chance, but by being passive they will surely die:

¹³⁵ And go to great expense, as seen in the few instances when the Maccabean leadership was able to pay ransom for Jewish prisoners of war. See I Mac 9:70.

¹³⁶ I Mac 5:29, 32 – similarly the Maccabees marched on Bozrah, Alenu, Maked, Bozot and Chaspho to save threatened Jewish populations.

¹³⁷ Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 293.

¹³⁸ I Mac 5:45.

¹³⁹ I Mac 9:10.

When Judas' men saw the army coming against them, they asked, 'how can our little group of men fight an army as big as that? Besides, we have not eaten all day, and we are tired!' 'It is not difficult,' Judas answered, 'for a small group to overpower a large one. It makes no difference to the Lord whether we are rescued by many people or by just a few. Victory in battle does not depend on who has the largest army; it is the Lord's power that determines the outcome. Our enemies are coming against us with great violence, intending to plunder our possessions and kill our wives and children. But we are fighting for our lives and our religion.'¹⁴⁰

It is this attitude, this example, which inspires the common Jewish man, even in the story, to rise up and claim his right to fight his enemy. "The Jews pursued them all day long from Adasa to Gezer. As they followed, they kept sounding the call to battle on the trumpets, "*and from all the surrounding villages of Judaea people came out and attacked the fleeing enemy from the sides.*"¹⁴¹ This forced them back toward the Jews who were chasing them, and all of the enemy were killed in the fight. Not one of them survived."¹⁴² Here the Jew is no longer a passive minority subject to the whim of a foreign power, but rather is a member of a warrior nation who rallies to fight for his own people.

The Maccabees are portrayed with traits that go far beyond physical abilities, courageous attitudes and leadership skills; they were smart and strategic as well. As military leaders, the Jewish commanders could fight on multiple fronts¹⁴³ using guerilla tactics, open field strategy,¹⁴⁴ and even emulate enemy tactics to lay siege to fortified towns. "So Judas decided

¹⁴⁰ I Mac 3:18-21.

¹⁴¹ I Mac 5:22-24.

¹⁴² I Mac 5:19-20.

¹⁴² This occurs in I Mac 7:45-46 after Jonathan fights and wins a battle that was strategically important to Alexander.

¹⁴³ I Mac 5:18-20.

¹⁴⁴ "Under Jonathan and Simon the Jewish armies proved that they were not confined to the hilly terrain of Judaea and could successfully engage the royal armies even in the plains, far from their bases." (Ben Sasson, *A History*, 207.)

to get rid of them and called all the people together to besiege the fort. The people assembled and laid siege to the fort....They built siege platforms and battering rams.”¹⁴⁵

Another trait that the Jewish warrior, and commander, possessed is that they were ‘loyal to the law of Moses’ but they were able to balance their religion with the practicalities of war. Primarily this balance is demonstrated in the Maccabees' decision to wage war on Shabbat, despite the apparent religious tradition to the contrary. In the early part of the initial revolt, communities of Jews were slaughtered without even attempting to defend themselves because the Gentile armies attacked them on the Sabbath. These Jewish communities believed that it was better to be killed rather than to desecrate Shabbat.¹⁴⁶ In other words, these Jews were too religious to survive the realities of war, which in the Gentile world is not suspended for the Jewish Sabbath.

Upon hearing about these massacres, Mattathias and the other commanders made a conscious decision that it was better to violate the Sabbath rather than be killed. “When Mattathias and his friends heard the news about this, they were greatly saddened and said to one another, ‘If all of us do as these other Jews have done and refuse to fight the Gentiles to defend our lives and our religion, we will soon be wiped off the face of the earth.’ On that day they decided that if anyone attacked them on the Sabbath, they would defend themselves, so that they would not all die as other Jews had died in the caves.”¹⁴⁷ Thus Mattathias decided to change the law for the best possible reason, that being survival.

Once the Jewish revolt saw some initial success, especially after Antiochus admitted defeat by suing for a treaty, the Maccabees were adept at establishing diplomatic relations

¹⁴⁵ I Mac 5:19-20.

¹⁴⁶ Aaron Panken (Panken, *The Rhetoric*, 9.) cites Moshe Herr’s reconstruction of history. Warfare on Shabbat was entirely forbidden before the incident with Mattathias, but after Mattathias’ decision to fight on Shabbat, the practice of defensive war on Shabbat was thereafter permitted.

¹⁴⁷ I Mac 2:35-38.

with other empires, mainly Ptolemaic Egypt,¹⁴⁸ the Spartans¹⁴⁹ and the Romans.¹⁵⁰ By establishing alliances with the enemies of their enemies, the Hasmoneans gained powerful allies who further buttressed their legitimacy, strengthened their reputation, and eventually enabled their national independence.

It is interesting that in the diplomatic letters to Sparta, both the Hasmoneans and the Spartans claim ‘blood-relation’ to each other, thus further legitimating their alliance. “The following is a copy of the earlier letter: King Arius of Sparta to Onias the High Priest, greetings. We have found a document about the Spartans and the Jews indicating that we are related and that both of our nations are descended from Abraham.”¹⁵¹ Sparta was known for their fierce fighting and desire for independence, often defeating much larger armies. Could the Jews have identified with the Spartan warrior mentality, thus influencing them to suggest that the two nations were related? Although purely speculative, a lack of evidence for other connections makes this assumption plausible.

The most important diplomatic alliance that the Hasmoneans sought was with the ambitious Roman Empire.¹⁵² Rome accepted the Jews’ offer of alliance and sent a letter, engraved in bronze, to Jerusalem as a record of their treaty.¹⁵³ In part, the treaty reads:

May things go well for the Romans and for the Jewish nation on land and Sea! May they never have enemies, and may they never go to war. But if war is declared first against Rome or any of her allies anywhere,

¹⁴⁸ “When King Alexander heard what Jonathan had done, he gave him even greater honors. He sent him a gold shoulder buckle, which is given only to those honored with the title, ‘relative to the King.’ He also gave him the city of Ekron and its surrounding territory.”(I Mac 10:88-89.)

¹⁴⁹ I Mac 12:20.

¹⁵⁰ I Mac 8:17-30.

¹⁵¹ I Mac 12:19-21.

¹⁵² “Relations with states outside the Seleucid empire also received attention. The embassy to Rome dispatched by Judas and the resultant treaty of alliance, recorded on bronze tablets in Jerusalem...was confirmed under Jonathan and Simon, in whose reign Rome again intervenes in Seleucid affairs on behalf of the Jews. Furthermore, the author records on several occasions between the Jews and the Spartans,” as well as the Athenians. This was helpful in consolidating Judaea’s international standing. (Altridge, *I Maccabees*, 174.)

¹⁵³ I Mac 8:22.

the Jewish nation will come to her aid with wholehearted support, as the situation may require...and in the same way, if war is declared first against the Jewish nation, the Romans will come to their aid with hearty support, as the situation may require.¹⁵⁴

Butting against the front-lines of the Seleucid Empire, the Jewish people's fight for independence was strategically vital to Rome's imperialist expansionist policy. It seems that Rome was almost looking for an excuse to engage the Seleucids in war, as can be seen when the Senate confronts the Seleucid king Demetrius by asking him, "Why have you treated our friends and allies, the Jews, so harshly? If they complain to us about you one more time, we will support their cause and go to war against you on land and sea."¹⁵⁵ The Jewish leaders engaged in international intrigue and alliances through war and diplomacy with soldiers and ambassadors; but from Maccabees I it is clear that the Jews were only valuable to these foreign powers because of their military power and their potential to control such a strategic location.

From the text it is clear that the Jews also admired the Romans, and were inspired by the Roman way of waging war and their ability to conquer their enemies. Perhaps the Hasmoneans modeled themselves after their Roman contemporaries, at least in their ambitions to expand their empire, collect tribute from their neighboring nations, and have their military command respect:

Judas had heard about the Romans and their reputation as a military power...People had told him about the wars the Romans had fought and their heroic acts among the Gauls, whom they had conquered and forced to pay taxes. By careful planning and persistence, they had conquered the whole country, even though it was far from Rome. They had overcome the kings (and) defeated them so badly that the survivors had to pay annual taxes...took their wives and children captive, plundered their possessions, occupied their land, tore down

¹⁵⁴ I Mac 8:23-25, 27.

¹⁵⁵ I Mac 8:31-32.

their fortresses, and made them slaves. They also destroyed or made slaves of...everyone who had fought against them.¹⁵⁶

The other clear role-model that Maccabees I consistently refers to is the biblical one. The Jewish commanders frequently refer to the great military deeds and accomplishments of their ancestors; reasoning that that same blood flows through their veins, and thus the Maccabean Jews also have the potential for greatness in battle. Matthatias' last speech to his sons while on his deathbed demonstrates this succinctly:

When the time came for Mattathias to die, he said to his sons, 'these are times of violence and distress. Arrogant people are in control and have made us an object of ridicule. But you, my sons, must be devoted to the Law and ready to die to defend God's covenant with our ancestors. *Remember what your ancestors did and how much they accomplished in their day. Follow their example (emphasis added)...*¹⁵⁷

From the genesis of the Revolt, the author of Maccabees I employs the biblical reference of Phinehas as an ancestor who zealously engaged in the righteous killing of not only a gentile, but also of a fellow Jew:

Shaking with rage, he (Mattathias) ran forward and killed the man right there on the alter. He also killed the royal official who was forcing the people to sacrifice. In this way Mattathias showed his deep devotion for the *Law just as Phinehas had done when he killed Zimri son of Salu.*¹⁵⁸

The intended inference is that just as Phinehas was rewarded by God¹⁵⁹ for killing a Jew who was straying under the detrimental influence of a Gentile,¹⁶⁰ so too Mattathias acted righteously in his decisions to kill.

¹⁵⁶ I Mac 8:1-11.

¹⁵⁷ I Mac 2:49-51, italics my own.

¹⁵⁸ I Mac 2:24-25; emphasis my own.

¹⁵⁹ The priestly line continues through Phinehas. This was interpreted as a sign of God's favor.

¹⁶⁰ Phinehas speared Zimri while he was in the act of sexual intercourse with a non-Israelite woman. (Numbers 25:7-8)

The fact that the Jewish troops were always outnumbered by the Gentile armies, and that the odds were always against them, caused the Jews to remember that they are descended from the same shepherd David who killed the Philistine giant Goliath despite Goliath's size, armor, and training. "In the following year Lysias gathered an army of 60,000 well-trained infantry and 5,000 cavalry, intending to conquer the Jews...Judas came to meet them with 10,000 men. When Judas saw how strong the enemy's army was, he prayed, 'We will praise you, Savior of Israel, You broke the attack of the giant by the hand of your servant David...'”¹⁶¹ Consistent with their biblical role model David, who expanded the Jewish kingdom through war, those few Jews were eventually able to expand their borders under the Hasmonean dynasty far beyond Judaea.¹⁶²

Even the Jewish expansion outside of Judaea was not considered, by those Jews, conquering new territory; but rather it was merely reclaiming what had already been conquered by their ancestors, and thus naturally belonging to the descendents of those biblical heroes. "Simon answered, 'We have never taken land away from other nations or confiscated anything that belonged to other people. On the contrary, we have simply taken back property that we inherited from our ancestors, land that had been unjustly taken away from us by our enemies at one time or another. We are now only making use of this opportunity to recover our ancestral heritage.'”¹⁶³ According to Simon, the Jewish warrior was merely a continuation from their biblical ancestors and their military achievements.

¹⁶¹ I Mac 4:28-30.

¹⁶² "More Jewish war expansion occurred under John Hyrcanus (134-132 BCE)...in every direction, including the annexation of Idumea, where its population was forced to convert to Judaism... The conquests by John Hyrcanus and Aristobulus increased Judaea to several times its former size. (Ben Sasson, *The History*, 218.) ...and Alexander Jannai's (103-76 BCE) reign was a succession of conquests and wars. Under his rule, Hasmonean Judaea reached its largest territorial size." (Ben Sasson, *The History*, 220.)

¹⁶³ I Mac 15:33-34.

To summarize, with the blood of biblical military heroes pulsing through his veins, the Jewish warrior as presented in Maccabees I was strong, brave, aggressive and when needed, ruthless. The Jewish warrior was not just fierce in hand-to-hand combat, but was smart and fought strategically. Versatile in his attack and unpredictable in his sudden parleys, the Jewish warrior was not afraid to die in battle and fought for Jews everywhere. But the Maccabean warrior was not a savage, but rather was a righteous man who was able to balance his religious duties with the practical realities of war. Thus, through his battle-prowess and strategic acumen, the Jew commanded respect from both his enemy and his ally; and thus was able to establish his independence from foreign reign, conquer his Gentile neighbors, and aptly maneuver through international diplomacy with the greatest nations in the known world. In I Maccabees, the Jewish warrior who can fight was someone to be praised, respected, emulated and held up as a role model for what a Jewish man should be.

Along those lines is the origin of the holiday of Hanukkah, initiated by the Maccabees upon defeating the Seleucid armies in the most important battle of that war. As suggested in the context of Maccabees I, an annual nationalistic holiday to commemorate the Jewish military victory and resulting rededication of The Temple¹⁶⁴ would serve to remind the Jewish people of their ability to physically overcome enemy armies, as well as their astonishing success in maintaining their separate identity as a monotheistic people. Re-conquering Jerusalem and reclaiming The Temple was no small feat, to the contrary, according to Maccabees I Antiochus' army had 60,000 troops supported by 5,000 cavalry¹⁶⁵ commanded by Lysias, the emperor's own cousin. By defeating his powerful army, the relatively small force of Jewish warriors were able to force a temporary truce with terms that

¹⁶⁴ Commemorating victory on the 25th Kislev in the Year 164 BCE.

¹⁶⁵ I Mac 4:28.

included annulling Antiochus' anti-Jewish decrees. Following that battle for Jerusalem, Judah's subsequent rededication of The Temple was both a poignant symbol of the Jewish revolt's success and the pride that the Jewish warrior was warranted for his performance on the battle-field.

However, the explanation for the celebration of Hanukkah, which seems so clear in the context of Maccabees I, changes over time to something very different. "Each of the four main ancient sources on the events of Hanukkah; Maccabees I, Maccabees II, Josephus' Antiquities, and the Talmud each have different interpretations on the emotionally charged culmination of the first stage of the Hasmonean revolt, which was the rededication of the Temple by Judah and his followers."¹⁶⁶

By the time the Talmud was codified in the 6th-7th Century C.E, the rabbis had all but omitted the military aspect of the holiday and replaced the accomplishments of the Jewish warrior with a religious 'miracle' story, not seen in any of the earlier sources, concerning a cask of oil that inexplicably lasted eight days and a menorah. By the time of the Talmud's codification, the rabbis had succeeded in obscuring a decisively nationalistic holiday commemorating Jewish military victory and replacing it with a religious story which was almost void of any military memory. Additionally insightful, this story is not treated with any seriousness in the Mishnah or Tosephtah. Viewed another way, each age's authority has recognized Hanukkah as a celebration that Israel was obliged to commemorate; however, what exactly the Jewish people were celebrating varies greatly with each age's historical context and particular agenda.

The only primary contemporary sources from the Temple vicinity of the events of Hanukkah are the two books of the Maccabees. II Maccabees is similar to I Maccabees In

¹⁶⁶ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 11.

that it was written around the same time and general covers the same events over the same period of time; however it was written in Greek for a Diaspora audience by an anonymous author who admits to writing a summary of a previous account written by a certain Jason of Cyrus,¹⁶⁷ of whom, nothing is known. Much more so than Maccabees I, the author attributes Jewish human accomplishment, including military victories, to God and miracles. He also professes his hope not only to inform his audience, but to entertain it.¹⁶⁸

After the Maccabean military victory, Maccabees I goes on to say:

The twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev, in the year 149¹⁶⁹ was the anniversary of the day the Gentiles had desecrated the altar. On that day a sacrifice was offered on the new altar in accordance with the Law of Moses. The new altar was dedicated and hymns were sung to the accompaniment of harps, lutes and cymbals. All the people bowed down with their faces to the ground and worshipped and praised the Lord *for giving them victory*...For eight days they celebrated the rededication of the altar...then Judas, his brothers, and the entire community of Israel decreed that the rededication of the altar should be celebrated with a festival of joy and gladness at the same time each year, beginning on the twenty-fifth of the month of Kislev and lasting for eight days.¹⁷⁰

From the text, it is clear that the twenty-fifth of Kislev marked historical book-ends with the anniversary of when ‘the Gentiles had desecrated the altar’ on one end and the rededication on the other. From the context of Maccabees I, (“then Judas ordered some of his soldiers to attack the men in the fort¹⁷¹ while he purified the Temple,”¹⁷² it appears as though Judah led his troops directly to The Temple as soon as they achieved victory, thus we can

¹⁶⁷ “I will now try to summarize in a single book the five volumes written by Jason. The number of details and the bulk of material can be overwhelming for anyone who wants to read an account of the events. But I have attempted to simplify it for all readers; those who read for sheer pleasure will find enjoyment and those who want to memorize the facts will not find it difficult. . .I will leave the matter of details to the original author and attempt to give only a summary of the events.” II Mac 2:23-28.

¹⁶⁸ II Mac 15:39.

¹⁶⁹ Corresponds with 164 B.C.E.

¹⁷⁰ I Mac 4:52-59, italics my own.

¹⁷¹ The Acra.

¹⁷² I Mac 4:41.

assume that the 25th of Kislev was the actual day where the Jews were victorious. What is more, it is clear from the text that the Jews understood that the only reason that they were able to rededicate The Temple was because of their military victory...which is why they specifically “praised the Lord for their victory.” It seems that for the writer of Maccabees I, the rededication and the Maccabean victory were inseparably linked, but that the former could not have happened without the latter. Thus, at least in large part, Hanukkah clearly was a celebration to commemorate the military accomplishments of the Jewish soldiers.

In I Maccabees there is no mention of the cruse of oil that miraculously burned for eight days and similarly “there is no mention of the nine branched menorah that would become a central feature of the festival. Rather the holiday seems to have been instituted as an independence day to commemorate the founding of the Hasmonean Dynasty.”¹⁷³

When Jason of Cyrene writes about this holiday in II Maccabees, he explains the holiday to the Jews of Alexandria as a ‘Sukkot’ of winter with the expressed intent to have the Diaspora community begin to celebrate it annually; thus the historian can infer that the community of Alexandria was previously unaccustomed to do so. Even though Maccabees II is similar to Maccabees I in that it relays the historiography of the Maccabean revolt, when it comes to explaining the miracle behind the eight day celebration of the 25th of Kislev, Jason gives a very different explanation:

From the Jews of Jerusalem and Judaea to those in Egypt, warm greeting...we thank God because he saved us from great danger. We were like men ready to fight against a king, but God drove the enemy from our holy city. When King Antiochus arrived in Persia, his army seemed impossible to defeat, but they were cut to pieces...(and so) on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev we will celebrate the Festival of Rededication just as we celebrate the Festival of Shelters (Sukkote). We thought it important to remind you of this, so that you

¹⁷³ Book, “Jewish Journeys,” 12.

too may celebrate this festival. In this way you will remember how fire appeared when Nehemiah offered sacrifices after he had rebuilt the Temple and the altar. At the time when our ancestors were being taken to exile in Persia, a few devout priests took some fire from the altar and secretly hid it in the bottom of a dry cistern. They hid the fire so well that no one ever discovered it. Years later, when it pleased God, the Persian emperor sent Nehemiah back to Jerusalem, and Nehemiah told the descendents that they had found no fire but only some oily liquid. Nehemiah then told them to scoop some up and bring it to him. When everything for the sacrifice had been placed on the altar, he told the priests to pour the liquid over both the wood and the sacrifice. After this was done and some time had passed, the sun appeared from behind the clouds, and suddenly everything on the altar burst into flames. Everyone looked on in amazement...Nehemiah and his friends called the liquid *nepthar*, which means 'purification'...¹⁷⁴

Although fitting with the style of II Maccabees in that the military victory of the Maccabees was credited to God, the miracle that is being commemorated seems to be referring to 'the sacrificial fire that Nehemiah found almost three centuries before the Maccabean rededication! Again the cruse of oil and the Menorah are not mentioned in this source.'¹⁷⁵

Josephus, writing in the first century CE, in his *Jewish Antiquities* similarly sets the context for the rededication of The Temple as the culmination of the Jews military victory over their Gentile enemies. Josephus does refer to Chanukah as the "Festival of Lights" without giving a reason. He describes the first Chanukah:

Judah and the men of his town celebrated the restoration of the sacrifices in the Temple for eight days, and omitted no sort of celebration, but made their hearts glad with expensive and splendid sacrifices. And he honored God with songs of praise on the harp, and he delighted the people. They were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long intermission, they unexpectedly regained

¹⁷⁴ II Mac 1:1-36.

¹⁷⁵ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 12.

their freedom of worship, that they made it a law for posterity to celebrate the restoration of the Temple worship for eight days. And from that day to this we celebrate the festival and call it Lights.¹⁷⁶

Josephus, who is not reticent in writing about miracles, admits that he is unsure of the origin of the name, 'Festival of Light.' He guessed that its origin may have to do with the regaining of Jewish freedom. Josephus failed to mention any customs relating to the observance of this holiday. He did mention that the celebration is eight days in duration, however, once again the cruse of oil and the Menorah are not referred to.¹⁷⁷

However, it stands to reason that the name 'Festival of Lights' could be a cultural reference or precursor 'menorah'.

To this author it is clear that in Maccabees I, Maccabees II and Josephus, although the exact nature of the miracle that Israel annually commemorates varies considerably, each of those works contains the explanation for celebration within the context of Jewish revolt and military victory in Jerusalem. Thus, the reader of each of those works understands that it was the Jewish military victory (whether through human strategic genius or the grace of God) which led to the Jews regaining the Temple and being able to rededicate it after purification. This is not the case with the Mishnah, Tosephtah or the Talmud. Today Hanukah is considered the first post-biblical festival in Judaism. Although the holiday is in fact mentioned in the Mishnah six times,¹⁷⁸ its coverage as a military victory in both the Mishnah and the Talmud is marginalized to the point of obscurity. Unlike the earlier texts mentioned where the holiday is clearly in the context of the Jewish military victory, in the tractate of Shabbat, Hanukkah is casually referred to as an aside during a discussion about Shabbat candles:

¹⁷⁶ Josephus, *Ant.*, 12.

¹⁷⁷ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 13.

¹⁷⁸ These are *m. Ta'anit*. 2:10; *m. Makkot*. 3:9; *m. Rosh HaShanah* 1:3; *m. Bikkurim* 1:6, 6:6; *m. Megillah* 3:4. (Panken, "the liturgy," chapter 2.)

מאי חנוכה? דתנו רבנן: בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון, דלא למספד בהון ודלא להתענות בהון. שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל תמאן כל השמנים שבהיכל, וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום, בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול, ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד, נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים. לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל והודאה.

What is Hanukkah? As the rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth (day) Kislev the days of Hanukkah begin. They (the holiday) are eight days.... for when the Greeks entered the Temple they contaminated all the oil that was in the Temple. And when the royal Hasmonean House gained the upper hand and vanquished them, (the Hasmoneans) searched and found only one flask of oil that was lying with (out of sight) with the Kohen Gadol's seal (still intact). And it contained only (enough oil) to kindle (the menorah) for one day. (however) a miracle was performed with (this oil) and they kindled (the menorah) for eight days. (Because of this) In the following year the Hasmoneans and the Sanhedrin established and rendered these eight days festival days with respect to Hallel and 'thanksgiving'.¹⁷⁹

The Talmud's explanation of Hanukkah seems to be a bit of an amalgamation from all of the earlier sources, but without the military emphasis. Like the previously mentioned ancient texts in this chapter, it does reiterate that the holiday is for eight days and begins on the 25th of Kislev. It also refers to the Greek desecration of the Temple; however, the Greek desecration is not a general desecration of unclean animals and statues to foreign Gods as in I Maccabees,¹⁸⁰ but rather is limited to the sacred oil. This is reminiscent of II Maccabees' explanation of Nehemiah's *nephthar*, but attributed to the Hasmonean rededication rather than to that biblical character. Tractate Shabbat does cite that this miracle occurred in the aftermath of the Hasmonean victory, but this one line is casually mentioned without the grand battle context of the previously mentioned texts. The Talmud says that the holiday is

¹⁷⁹ *b. Shabbat* 21b.

¹⁸⁰ I Mac 1:46-47, "They...defiled the Temple and the holy things in it...(and) built pagan altars and shrines...to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there."

to celebrate the miracle of the oil and clearly does not attribute the holiday, or the miracle, to the actual Jewish military victory over the gentile armies.

This is the first mention of this occurrence in a source that was completed almost seven centuries after the events described! The Rabbis deflect attention from the miraculous aspect of the military victory, in which a ragtag bunch of Jews manage to defeat one of the most effective fighting forces in the world, and instead focus on the miracle of the oil which had been previously unmentioned in any other source.¹⁸¹

Unlike the writers of Maccabees I, the rabbis were not writing in an age where Jews were succeeding in armed revolt, nationalist aspirations, and military achievements. To the contrary quite the opposite; the rabbis were writing a few centuries later, on the heels of an age when Jewish warriors, dedication, or genius battle strategy had failed to throw-off foreign gentile occupiers. There was an age when Jewish warriors had been utterly defeated by Roman armies, Jewish attempts at rebellion brutally subjugated, and Jewish nationalism a mere memory. In an attempt to protect what was left of the Jewish people, the rabbis attempted to demilitarize Judaism. ‘The rabbis felt that the way to preserve Judaism for the future was not through military revolution against overwhelming forces in the way of the Maccabees, but rather they emphasized passivity and accommodation in the form of Torah study and observance of the *mitzvot*.’¹⁸²

As the following chapters will continue to demonstrate, as a means to Jewish survival the rabbis sought to change the Jewish man’s self-identity as warrior to one of non-military religious accommodationists. However, between the fall of the Hasmonean dynasty and the defeat of Bar Kochbas’ revolt, I Maccabees may have served to influence the general Jewish population to repeated armed insurrection against the Romans by lionizing the Maccabean

¹⁸¹ Book, “Jewish Journeys,” 13.

¹⁸² Book, “Jewish Journeys,” 13.

warrior who would fight against great odds to victoriously drive out foreign forces from the Jewish homeland and restore Jewish independence.

Chapter Three- The Book of Judith:

The book of Judith¹⁸³ is a narrative piece of literature dating from Second Temple times.¹⁸⁴ The story is as follows: Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Assyria, waged war against his neighbors and, despite their wealth, strength, and incredibly fortified cities,¹⁸⁵ Nebuchadnezzar utterly defeated them.¹⁸⁶ Before too long, Nebuchadnezzar sent his chief general, Holofernes, to continue his campaign of expansion¹⁸⁷ and Holofernes successfully conquered all the nations from the Persian boarder to Sidon and Tyre.

When Holofernes' army came to the narrow valley of Esdraelon, which leads into Judaea, the Assyrian forces found that Esdraelon's mountain passes¹⁸⁸ were defended by a small group of Jews living in the fortified mountain towns of Bethulia and Betomesthaim. These mountain Jews essentially served as gatekeepers tasked with keeping the Assyrians out of greater Judaea and specifically were seen as the only hope of keeping Jerusalem and the recently restored Temple safe.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ Translation from Moore, Carey. *Judith*. Vol. 40 of *The Anchor Bible*. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985.

¹⁸⁴ Since Judith is generally considered fiction, scholars have difficulty assigning it an exact date. Generally scholars think it likely that Judith was comprised early in the first century B.C.E. during the late Hasmonean period either toward the end of John Hycanus I (135-104 B.C.E.) or at the beginning of the reign of Alexander Janneus (103-78 BCE). Craven, "Judith," 43; Moore, "Judith," 67; Nickelsburg, "Judith," 50.

¹⁸⁵ Judith 1:2-4.

¹⁸⁶ "In the seventeenth year he marshaled his forces against Arphaxed; and in battle he defeated him, routing Arphaxed's entire army and all his cavalry and chariots. He occupied his towns and then turned to Ecbatana, subduing its tower." (Judith 1:13-14).

¹⁸⁷ Judith 2:4.

¹⁸⁸ Carey Moore (Moore, "Judith," 45.) figuratively characterizes this narrow pass (Judith 4:7) as the 'Palestinian Thermopylae' which the Spartans famously defended with just 300 warriors against Xerxes and the Persian legions. However, Moore cedes that Arnaldo Momigliano's (Biblical Archeologist 45, 1982, 227-228) assessment that the stories of Judith and the Spartan stand at Thermopylae have so much in common that it is plausible that the former story was actually based on the latter. (Moore, "Judith," 154.) This author would posit that based on the documented alliance and treaties between the Hasmonean Dynasty and the Spartans (Chapter #2); perhaps this connection, or influence, further hints towards perceived warrior-cultural commonalities. Specifically, the Hasmonean warriors admired, and sought to emulate, the Spartan reputation for military prowess, especially against stacked odds.

¹⁸⁹ "(The Jews were) alarmed for Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord their God. For they had returned from exile only a short time before; and all the people of Judaea had been reunited, and the sacred utensils, the altar, and the Temple had just recently been rededicated after they had been defiled." (Judith 4:2-3).

When Holofernes realized that sacking Bethulia and Betomesthaim was the key to gaining entrée into Judaea, he conferred with local Gentile chiefs who told Holofernes the Jews were fierce in battle and would not easily be defeated, especially since their towns used the mountain heights to their advantage and were well fortified. Nevertheless, Holofernes attacked¹⁹⁰ driving the Jews behind their city walls, and systematically laid siege.¹⁹¹ Thinking that the massive Assyrian force would be unable to survive off the sparse mountain land, the Jews hoped to wait-out Holofernes' siege; but Holofernes was able to cut off the Jews' water supply¹⁹² to the point where they literally were dying of thirst and on the verge of surrender.¹⁹³ However, at the proverbial 11th hour, a local young widow named Judith appeared to the town leaders and promised that she would defeat the invaders¹⁹⁴ and thus the Jews would avoid the dreaded fate of a conquered people.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ “The next day Holofernes ordered his entire army...to make war against the Israelites...every able-bodied man...a hundred and seventy thousand infantrymen and twelve thousand cavalry.” (Judith 7:1-2.)

¹⁹¹ The Jews hoped to wait-out Holofernes' siege thinking that the massive Assyrian force would be unable to survive off the sparse mountain land. (Judith 7:4.)

¹⁹² “He (Holofernes) found their water sources, seized them, so thirst will destroy them, and they will surrender their town.” (Judith 7:7, 13.)

¹⁹³ “The Assyrian army had blockaded them for thirty four days, and all the water reserves were depleted for all the inhabitants of Bethulia. The cisterns were going dry, and no one could quench his thirst for even a day because the water had to be rationed. The children were listless, and the women and young men fainted from thirst and were collapsing in the town's streets and gateways, for they no longer had any strength... (the people cried out to the leaders) ‘Contact them (the Assyrians) at once and hand over the whole town to be sacked by Holofernes' people and all his army, for it is better for us to be sacked by them. For although we shall become slaves, our lives will be spared; and we shall not witness with our own eyes the death of our little ones or our wives and children breathing their last.’” (Judith 7:20-22, 26-27.)

¹⁹⁴ “Judith said to them, ‘Listen to me. I am going to do something which will go down among the children of our people for endless generations. As for you, stand at the gate tonight, and I will leave with my maid...the Lord will deliver Israel by my hand. But you must not inquire into the affair; for I will not tell you what I am going to do until it is accomplished.’” (Judith 8:32-34.)

¹⁹⁵ Nebuchadnezzar swore that he would “come upon them, and I will cover every square inch of land with the feet of my army, and I will let them be looted by my troops. Their wounded will fill their ravines and gullies! I will send them away as captives to the ends of the whole world...on the rebellious show no mercy. Let them be slaughtered and looted...” (Judith 2:7-11.) Later, Holofernes specifically threatens the obstinate Jews who refused to surrender when he promises that “We, Nebuchadnezzar's servants, will strike them down as if they were one man. Their hills will be drunk with their blood, and their plains filled with their corpses. Not even their footsteps will survive! They will be completely wiped out!” (Judith 6:3-5.)

Judith, who is described as being ‘shapely and beautiful,’¹⁹⁶ wealthy¹⁹⁷ and righteous,¹⁹⁸ used clothing and make-up to make herself irresistibly attractive. She then gained entrée into the enemy camp by making two types of overtures to Holofernes. The first overture was to tantalize Holofernes with information on how to penetrate the Jewish defenses; the second was of a sexual nature. Holofernes in turn, confident of an imminent victory against the mountain Jews, was eager to engage the shapely Judith and to enjoy the fruits of his spoils. Smitten by her very presence, Holofernes exclaimed to his officers that “in terms of beauty and brains, there is not another woman like this from one end of the earth to the other!”¹⁹⁹ Before too long, over a feast, Judith helped Holofernes get incredibly drunk²⁰⁰ and tempted him with sexual *ententes*.²⁰¹ Fully intending to have sex with this beautiful Jewess,²⁰² they entered his tent and while Holofernes “sprawled on his bed, dead drunk,”²⁰³ Judith ironically used Holofernes’ own sword to chop off his head savagely.²⁰⁴ Judith immediately put his bloody head in a sack, and with her maid escaped from out of the Assyrian camp into the night.

Once back behind the town walls, Judith quickly assumed command of the Jewish forces. She commanded a daring battle strategy which bluffed the Assyrians into thinking that the

¹⁹⁶ Judith 8:7.

¹⁹⁷ “Her husband Manasseh had left her gold and silver, male and female servants, livestock, and fields.” (Judith 8:14.)

¹⁹⁸ “(...despite her wealth, age and beauty) “there was no one who spoke ill of her, so devoutly did she fear God.” (Judith 8:9.)

¹⁹⁹ Judith 11:21.

²⁰⁰ “Holofernes was so delighted with her that he drank a great deal of wine, much more than he had ever drunk on a single day since he was born.” (Judith 12:20.)

²⁰¹ “Who am I that I should refuse my lord? I will do whatever he desires right away, and it will be something to boast of until my dying day.” (Judith 12:14.)

²⁰² “Holofernes was beside himself with desire, and his brain was reeling, and he was very eager to have relations with her.” (Judith 12:16.)

²⁰³ Judith 13:2.

²⁰⁴ “She went to the bedpost by Holofernes’ head, and took down from it his sword, and approaching the bed, she grabbed the hair of his head and...struck at his neck twice with all of her might, and chopped off his head.” (Judith 13:6-8.)

Jews still had sufficient strength to fight, and she gambled on a certain chaos that might ensue once the Assyrians realized that their leader had been slain. Her tactics were successful and when the Assyrian soldiers fled, they were pursued and cut-down by Jews not only from those mountain towns, but from across the entire land.

The book of Judith employs descriptions of the Jews, of Judith, and of their actions which may inform the reader of the author's perception of Jew-as-warrior. Although the question of verifiable history is interesting, the finished work serves to inform regardless of its factual truth. To begin, the lengthy accounts of King Nebuchadnezzar's military might, as well as the strength of the Gentile enemies whom he defeated, clearly relays the certainty that the Assyrian army was beyond defeat via conventional military methods. Quintessential to this point is the description of one of these defeated kings, King Arphaxed of Medes, who despite the impressive fortification of his city, fell beneath the tidal wave of the Assyrian might:

King Arphaxed ruled over Medes and Ecbatana and had thought his capital to be un-impregnable. Arphaxad had surrounded Ecbatana with walls of hewn stones four and a half feet thick. He had designed its gates, which were one hundred and five feet high and sixty feet wide, to allow his army of mighty men to parade forth, with his infantry in full formation.²⁰⁵

The message is clear: if the Assyrians could defeat a tremendous power like King Arphaxed, then the small towns of mountain Jews, despite their reputation as fierce fighters, could not possibly stand a chance.

After more than thirty days of withstanding the Assyrian siege, the Jews were dying of thirst. Rather than die in this slow and painful manner, they decided (almost) that it would be better to suffer the consequences of slavery rather than see their children waste away. They

²⁰⁵ Judith 1:13-14.

were desperate, and thus it made sense to embrace Judith's highly unorthodox strategy for salvation.

Judith herself embodies the familiar warrior ideal found in both the Bible and in I Maccabees in that she is willing to risk her life against the enemy to save her people, she has tremendous courage against great odds, she effectively uses unorthodox tactics against a numerically superior enemy; she arms herself with the best weapons (intelligence, beauty, sexuality, enemy's overconfidence) available to her, and she employs daring battle tactics to overcome superior forces. Judith models the Jew who takes action against the enemy, and ruthlessly fights to win despite the risks and the odds.

Like the Maccabees, the heroine Judith was decisive in her decisions and quick in her implementation. Once Judith realized the dire situation, she began to act. Furthermore, Judith risked her reputation, her chastity, her freedom and her life to kill Holofernes, and thus to give her people a small chance of escaping the horrible fate of a conquered people. Judith's choice is even more impressive once one realizes that Judith likely had options not available to her Jewish neighbors or male parallels. One must assume that any woman who could so enchant Holofernes with her beauty and intelligence could easily have switched her loyalties and avoided risking her personal safety. Likely, if she had so desired, Judith could have found her way into the arms of a powerful Assyrian man and lived out her life in comfort and safety. But she did the opposite and with tremendous courage Judith faced the enemy and risked everything for her people.

Reminiscent of the Maccabees, Judith used aggressive and unorthodox tactics to overcome her huge disadvantages; those being that she was alone, a woman, and had to enter into the enemy camp both unassuming and unarmed. The fact that her goal from the outset

seemed to have been to kill the enemy general, not on the battle field where she would not have stood a chance, but rather in his own tent, shows a focused discipline which would be the envy of any soldier. Judith proved herself practical as a “clever and resourceful assassin,”²⁰⁶ with both her meticulous preparations and her ability to mask her murderous intent. Judith unabashedly deceives Holofernes, and in doing so, was able to implement a complex and fragile plan.

What is more, like any good strategist, Judith masterfully used the enemy’s weakness against him. Specifically, she first used Holofernes’ ‘lack of mastery for his own desires against him,’²⁰⁷ those being his desires for power, food, alcohol and sex. Even more impressive is that Judith correctly ascertained that the Assyrian army would be rudderless without their leader, and thus with but one precise cut of a sword that indestructible force could be made vulnerable.

After returning with Holofernes’ severed head, it is Judith who commanded the innovative battle strategy. Judith’s daring tactics effectively maximized the drama and made her gamble possible by showing the Assyrian army that their leader, Holofernes, had been killed under their very noses by the people whom they thought were on the verge of surrender:²⁰⁸

(Judith said to the village leaders) ‘Please hear me out, my brothers, Take this head and hang it from the battlements of our wall. And as soon as day breaks and the sun comes out over the land, each of you take up your weapons, and let every able-bodied man leave the town. Appoint a commander for them as if you were about to descend upon the plain against the Assyrian outpost. Only you must not descend! Then the Assyrian outpost will grab their weapons and make for camp. They will rouse the officers of the Assyrian army and then rush

²⁰⁶ Nickelsburg, “Judith,” 47 referring to Judith 10:1-5.

²⁰⁷ deSilva, *Introducing*, 85.

²⁰⁸ Judith 14:1-5.

into Holofernes' tent, and not find him! Then they will panic and retreat at your advance, and you and all who live within Israel's borders will pursue them and cut them down in their tracks.

It is vital to note that it is Judith who dictated the strategy, and the male village leaders listened. But more amazing, is that Judith's entire strategy was based on a bluff! She knew first hand the dire situation that the thirsty Jews were in, but counted on scaring the Assyrians into a retreat. It was a desperate plan, but one that brilliantly capitalized on the enemy's only weakness, that being their shocked perception of reality and the chaos of being leaderless. It worked:

So Bagoas went into (Holofernes' tent)...and found him on top of the bed stool – a discarded corpse, with his head missing! He let out a yell...then, quivering with fear, no man stood firm with his comrade, but with common impulse they tried to escape along every path in the plain and the hill country. Those who were encamped in the hills around Bethulia were fleeing too. Then the Israelites, every fighting man among them, sallied out after them.²⁰⁹

Judith's personal actions, her active pursuit of blood and victory, speak of a warrior. 'There is no doubt that her beauty is a weapon by which Judith saves Israel...she uses her sexual attraction as a weapon...she girds herself in the armor of womanhood: she has her hair done, puts on makeup, attires herself glamorously, and goes out in her beauty to confront the enemy general.'²¹⁰ To this author, it speaks volumes that Judith chose to kill Holofernes via decapitation rather than some method more subtle, like poison. Although Judith's strategy necessitated the general's head to route the Assyrian army, one can not help but to be struck by the cold brutality of the act. Nonetheless, the heroine is credited with saving her people from defeat, death, rape and enslavement through her ruthless actions. When her people's lives were at risk, Judith, like other idealized Jewish warriors, goes for the proverbial jugular

²⁰⁹ Judith 14:14-16, 15; 2-3.

²¹⁰ Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*, 340.

vein. Her example of action against the superior enemy, using any means necessary, is lauded to inspire emulation.

In terms of the book of Judith's authenticity, meaning historical accuracy, many scholars firmly hold that the narrative is "didactic fiction and not factual history."²¹¹ That being said, many of those same scholars think that this fiction was meant by Judith's anonymous writer²¹² both to entertain and to instruct as a "model for proper and improper actions."²¹³ This author agrees with Alonso-Schokel who thinks that Judith is "the homiletic model of man who preaches or advocates active resistance and not passive surrender."²¹⁴

Along the same lines, other scholars²¹⁵ think that Judith served to inspire as Resistance Literature in that "the faithful are those who fight the good fight."²¹⁶ This author would posit that the historical accuracy of the Book of Judith is far less important, in the context of this thesis, than the fact that the book existed and presumably was read by the Jewish masses. Even if she was entirely fictional, Judith was an exemplar. Although it is impossible to know if for a fact, it certainly is possible that her example informed the psyche of the masses in much the same way that popular media does today. In hearing of Judith's refusal to submit to the forces of superior armies, and to resist with everything that she had, Judith becomes a role model for those who wish to champion active, violent resistance.

²¹¹ This view is held by: Craven, "Judith," 43; Nickelsburg, "Judith," 48; and deSilva, *Introducing*, 92. A notable exception to this line of thinking is Moore, "Judith," 45: "With the exception of a few statements (Judith 3:8, 4:7.), the rest of the narrative remains well within the bounds of realism and could be essentially true, i.e., just slightly exaggerated."

²¹² Due to the fact the Judith's author appears to be familiar with the Jewish religious customs, history and geography of second century Palestine, there is a consensus that the anonymous author likely was a Palestinian Jew. (Moore, "Judith," 70; deSilva, *Introducing*, 90; Craven, "Judith," 43.) Additionally, although no Hebrew Urtext survives, "the Book of Judith gives every indication of being a translation of Hebrew text." (Moore, "Judith," 66.)

²¹³ Nickelsburg, "Judith," 48.

²¹⁴ Alonso-Schokel, "Ruth, Tobias," 66.

²¹⁵ Winter, TIDotB, 1025; Craven, "Judith," 46.

²¹⁶ Craven, "Judith," 46.

Chapter Four- The Scroll Of The War Of The Sons Of Light Against The Sons of Darkness:²¹⁷

The general historical context in Judaea around the millennial transition was one of uncertainty, violence, and unrest.²¹⁸ Eventually, due to civil war between two rival brothers contending for control over Judaea, John Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, the Hasmonean Dynasty fatally splintered. Desperate for power, each brother appealed to the neighboring Roman Empire for aid in hopes of gaining control despite the potential dangers of extensive military dependence and economic debt at the hands of the ambitious Caesars. Although the Hasmoneans had been ruling under the Roman shadow for decades, once aware of the depth of Judaeans vulnerability, Rome decided in 63 B.C.E. that Judaea was weak enough to commandeer with minimal effort; which they did without shedding one drop of blood.²¹⁹

The following century under Roman rule was not one of peace and tranquility in Judaea as “these years were constantly characterized by civil and political unrest.”²²⁰ It is unclear how much of the unrest was due to lingering hopes of reclaiming Jewish nationalistic aspirations versus desperate reactions to perceived deprivations of accustomed religious independence and freedom. However, regardless of the specific causes, many Jewish insurrections took place as Jews took up arms in a desperate protest against Roman policy

²¹⁷ The late professor E.L. Sukenik named the scroll ‘The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness’ on account of its contents and by way of summarizing the first line of col. i: ‘The first engagement of the Sons of Light shall be to attack the lot of the Sons of Darkness.’ (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 1.)

²¹⁸ Although an extensive rendering of this era’s fascinating history would be interesting and worthwhile in and of itself, the confines of this thesis dictate that only a very general history be conferred as it is the context for the War Text.

²¹⁹ “ In general terms, Roman rule in late Second Temple Palestine may be divided into three major stages: 1. vassal state under Hyrcanus II, 63-40 B.C.E.; 2. Herodian rule, 37 B.C.E-6 C.E; 3. Direct Roman rule, 6-66 C.E. (save for the brief reign of Agrippa I, 41-44 C.E.)” (Altridge, “I Maccabees,” in *Jewish Writings*. ed. Stone, 18.)

²²⁰ Altridge, “I Maccabees,” in *Jewish Writings*. ed. Stone, 18.

and persons, particularly those of Caligula (37-41 C.E.) and Nero (54-68 C.E.). “By the end of the last Roman governors, total anarchy seems to have prevailed in Judaea.”²²¹ A culmination of these Jewish armed revolts was a full scale war which ended with the destruction of the Temple (70 C.E.).

The end of Jewish religious sovereignty, made blatant with the destruction of the Temple, was a time of great uncertainty, social upheaval, and apocalyptic expectation for many. Even without the overt violence, various political-religious sects vied for influence and power amongst the common people and both authorities, Judaeans and Roman. Some of the Jewish literature of this era reflects the Jewish uncertainty and reaction to this paradigmatic shift, specifically that of increasing Roman control and the subsequent correlating Jewish powerlessness. “The Roman conquest in general, and in particular the turbulent days in Judaea following Herod’s death, were an ideal setting for the propagation of beliefs regarding an imminent deliverance from the yoke of foreign conquest,”²²² and the reclaiming of Jewish sovereignty.

Amid this uncertainty, sometime in the second century B.C.E.,²²³ a group of Jews living in Judaea with sectarian sentiments against the ruling Jerusalem priesthood “defined themselves as a discerning group struggling against an unsympathetic Jewish majority.”²²⁴ They established a community outside of Jerusalem by the Dead Sea in a place known as Qumran. It is likely that this community was one of a group called the Essenes.²²⁵ The

²²¹ Altridge, “I Maccabees,” in *Jewish Writings*. ed. Stone 22.

²²² Altridge, “I Maccabees,” in *Jewish Writings*. ed. Stone 25.

²²³ “we must be content to date the founding of the sect sometime in the second century BCE after the Hasmoneans had taken over the high priesthood, about 152 BCE” (Schiffman, “Origin,” 46).

²²⁴ Schiffman, “Origin,” 42.

²²⁵ “The Essenes, a sect noted for its piety and distinctive theology, were known in Greek as *Essenoi* or *Essaioi*. Although numerous suggestions have been made about the etymology of the name, none has achieved scholarly consensus. The most recent theory, and also the most probable, holds that the name was borrowed from a group of devotees of the cult of Artemis in Asia Minor, whose demeanor and dress somewhat resembled those of the

question of exactly the origins of this Qumran community, specifically their social standing among the known Hasmonean era parties, is debated still amongst leading scholars;²²⁶ however, their origin is not overly important to this thesis. What is important to this thesis is how the historian might interpret the literature found in the Dead Sea Caves²²⁷ *vis-a-vis* how that Qumran community might have viewed themselves as warriors. To this end, it is essential to note that the Qumran community believed that they were currently living on the verge of the End of Days²²⁸ and typical of apocalyptic groups, they believed that their age would soon be followed by the dawn of a new and better one.”²²⁹ Specifically, the era which they hoped would end was their era of Roman rule, and the concomitant Jewish powerlessness.

Although there are hints, instances and references to military aspirations, or plans, throughout many of the Dead Sea Scrolls,²³⁰ the scroll known as the War Text is singularly devoted to battle plans for a specific eschatological war to be waged in the future. The War Text reveals that the world will be divided into two diametrically opposite forces of ‘good’ and ‘evil’; specifically the ‘Sons of Light,’ those being the warriors of the Qumran community, will battle against the ‘Sons of Darkness,’ those being basically everyone else in

group in Judaea. Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, most scholars have identified the Qumran sect with the Essenes...although the term ‘Essene’ does not appear in any of the Qumran scrolls...The Roman author Pliny identifies an Essene settlement between Jericho and Ein Gedi on the western shore of the Dead Sea.” (Schiffman, *Reclaiming*, 78.)

²²⁶ “Scholars differ widely in their attempts to identify the sect of the scrolls with one of the sects known to us from other sources. In fact, the sect has been identified by various scholars with every single one of the numerous sects which existed toward the end and after the period of the Second Temple... Many scholars now accept the view, first suggested by E.L. Sukenik and developed by Dupont-Sommer, Brownlee, Grinz, De Vauz and others that the sect of the scrolls was Essenes. (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 246.)

²²⁷ Known as ‘The Dead Sea Scrolls.’

²²⁸ Schiffman, “Origin,” 42.

²²⁹ Sollamo, “War and Violence,” 348.

²³⁰ To this point, scholars include the scrolls of ‘The Community Rule’ (Schiffman, *Personal Interview*, 24 August, 2007; Sollamo, “War and Violence,” 349.), and the various *pesharim* (Sollamo, “War and Violence,” 349; Bolotnikov, “The Theme,” 262.)

the world, but quintessentially led by a people referred to as the ‘*kittim*’.²³¹ This war between good and evil on earth will be paralleled by superhuman dualistic forces in heaven. After six taxing battles in which the ‘Sons of Light’ will alternately defeat and then fall to the ‘Sons of Darkness’, the ‘Sons of Light’ ultimately will be victorious in the seventh and final battle through the grace of God’s intervention. Although the War Text does not specify it, in the Jewish tradition of partnership and covenant, it seems as though the contest can only be decided by God if the loyal warriors of ‘light’ first wage, and win, against the vast and powerful forces of ‘darkness’. Thus both the very real human efforts and battles of the ‘Sons of Light’ along with the divine effort of God are needed in tandem in order to reign victorious and usher in the new age.

Most striking to this author about the War Text is not its assurance of ultimate victory, its polemic against the enemy, or its reliance on God for ultimate salvation; these traits are common²³² to the other genres of literature covered in this thesis. What is most striking is the incredible attention to detail in which the author of the War Text²³³ describes everything having to do with the warrior, weapons, mounts, formations, and tactics. Unlike other pieces of Jewish literature in which the future revelations are attributed to a biblical prophet, “the author mentions neither himself nor the circumstances in which were revealed to him the things which he tells his readers; nor does he attribute the revelation to righteous men of the past, as we so often find in the apocalyptic works. His style is matter-of-fact and terse,

²³¹ “*Kittim*” is a code word for Romans...and the defeat of the “*kittim*” seems to be the major concern of the author of the War Scroll throughout the whole book. Since the scroll was written during the Roman rule, the author wanted to hide his intentions from Roman censorship and make the content of the scroll understandable only to the group...therefore he was using a code word. (Bolotnikov, “The Theme,” 264.) Additionally, the ‘war of *kittos*’ is mentioned in Jewish sources (*Seder Olam Rabbah* 30, *M. Sot.* 9.14.) It is dated fifty-two years after Vespasian’s war and sixteen before Bar Kochba.” (Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 100.)

²³² But certainly not limited to the works of literature covered in this thesis.

²³³ Yadin, *The Scroll*, ix.

describing the occurrences as facts, self-evident and known to his readers.”²³⁴ In short, much of the War Text seems to be a practical manual for properly conducting war against specific, but cryptically named enemies,²³⁵ with almost every possible imaginable variable anticipated and provisioned against.

The goals of this thesis chapter are two-fold: Firstly, to examine and analyze the image of the Qumran army and warrior described by the author in the War Text.²³⁶ These descriptions provide possible insight into how the Qumran man saw himself, or ideally wanted to see himself, as a soldier. Secondly, this author hopes to theorize about the motivations of the War Text author against the questions of the actual existence of a viable Qumran fighting force. In other words, were the details of this war-manual the actual plans of a militant group actively planning to implement attacks; or rather was the War Text the delusional fantasy of a powerless and passive bunch who never actually thought to do anything more than talk about what would happen with the manifestation of Divine guidance and the impossibility of perfect conditions?

Unlike the descriptions of the warrior found in the Bible, Maccabees and Judith, the War Text does not have much specific description about the individual warrior except as each is a part of the whole army. The army is fully comprised of the ‘Sons of Light,’ and each and every warrior in that army is of the absolute highest quality in every imaginable respect. The army is incredibly organized and coordinated; while the warriors are disciplined and well trained. The army is complete and comprised of foot-soldiers, cavalry and war towers on the

²³⁴ Yadin, *The Scroll 7* in reference to chapters #2 and #9 of the War Text.

²³⁵ i.e. - “In the first year they shall fight against Aram Naharaim, in the second against the sons of Lud, in the third against the remainder of the sons of Aram: Uz, Hul ,Togar and Masha...in the fourth and the fifth they shall fight against the sons of Arpachshad,.. etc.” (Yadin, *The Scroll 2:10-11.*)

²³⁶ All War Text English translations are taken from Yadin, Yigael. *The Scroll Of The War Of The Sons Of Light Against The Sons of Darkness*. Translated by Batya and Chaim Rabin. Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1962. Each translation is demarcated with X: Y representing column: line, respectively.

field; while the soldiers are well armed and uniformly immaculate. The army is not a defensive army, but rather is an aggressive army that plans to attack the enemy first and pursue them across the lands until they are crushed,²³⁷ while each individual warrior will gladly step forward to initiate attacks with war-darts dubbed with such epithets as ‘sparks of blood to fell the slain by the anger of God.’

Guided by Torah, the holy army is girded in ritual purity, commanded by battle-priests and paralleled by angelic beings who simultaneously carry this war into the heavens; so too each individual soldier is ritually pure and of intractable faith to God and of their destined ultimate victory. The army is comprised of remnants from the twelve tribes who gather outside of Jerusalem eager to be God’s army; while each warrior is a brave volunteer eager to annihilate the enemy. The army is steadfast despite the assured and pre-ordained defeats prior to their ultimate victory; while the warrior is honored to die in battle as the ultimate sacrifice for his army’s ultimate victory.

The War Text’s description of how the army of the ‘Sons of Light’ was to employ banners and trumpets confers that the ideal army was super-organized and that the ideal warrior was hyper-disciplined. The contemporary reader must remember that in the days before modern technology, battles were decided based on field communication, or lack thereof. An army that could fluidly communicate and quickly react to commands while the arrows were flying had a tremendous advantage over one that could not. All the more so for a force like the ‘Sons of Light’ which planned on being numerically inferior to their enemy in

²³⁷ The war is to be waged in three phases of extending concentric circles starting with Judaea and ending with an expansionist push North to battle the Kittim who have settled in distant lands. As Yadin summarizes, “In the first it will be conducted against the alliance of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia, led by the Kittim of Asshur. Joined to these will be a group of ‘offenders against the Covenant’ from amongst the Jews. In the second phase they will fight the ‘Kittim who dwell in Egypt’. In the third and last phase the war will be waged against the kings of the north’ in general.” (7). It is interesting to note that by the end of the first campaign, all Jews who are not considered ‘Sons of Light’ will be defeated and dead, thus leaving a united Jewry to engage in subsequent battles.

each and every engagement. The ability to react quickly and decisively as a fighting unit would make them sharply dangerous and much more effective at war.

In the army²³⁸ of the ‘Sons of Light,’ each military division from the largest to its smallest subdivision of ten men had its individual banner with the troop’s name, its commander, and all of that commander’s direct reports. For instance, one of the myriad units (one-thousand men) carried a banner with their name ‘retribution of God’²³⁹ and underneath it was inscribed the name of that myriad’s commander with ten names of each of his sub-commanders who each led one of the myriad’s hundred-man battalions. Another fighting troop, this one of only ten men, was named ‘Rejoicings of God upon the ten-stringed lyre’ and beneath that inscription the banner held the name of that troop’s commander of the ten, along with the names of the nine men in his charge.”²⁴⁰ In this way, each man was identified by name to at least one fighting unit, and often more than one. In terms of organization, with this banner system each soldier would know exactly his place in the army, and thus his place and role in each different type of battle formation. Through these descriptions, without having any description of the army’s strength or individual’s fighting prowess, the War Text’s author conveys the warrior ideals of organization and discipline above all else.

The War Text also describes in excruciating detail the exact trumpet calls with which to maneuver each unit into, and out of, different battle scenarios:

The use of the trumpets for summoning them when the battle intervals are opened for the advance of the skirmishers, the trumpets for the fanfare of the slain, the trumpets of the ambush, the trumpets of

²³⁸ The structure for the whole army of the ‘Sons of Light’ was modeled after biblical Israel’s organization (Exodus 18) while encamped and while wandering in the wilderness. “Thus the men are organized by tribes, families, thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.” (Dimant, D. “The War Scroll.” In *Jewish Writing* (ed. Stone),. 516.)

²³⁹ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 43.

²⁴⁰ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 4:5.

pursuit when the enemy is smitten, and the trumpets of withdrawal when the battle returns.²⁴¹

In this way, the army of the ‘Sons of Light’ would be able to communicate and react to real-time battle situations with pre-arranged trumpet signals. However the War Text does not just detail that there would be signals for each type of general battle engagement, but rather amazingly it details the exact length and tone of the trumpet signal for each variation on these engagements! For instance:

The trumpets shall keep blowing to direct the sling-men until they have finished throwing seven times. Then the priests shall blow on the trumpets of withdrawal, and they shall come to take up position by the side of the first formation to fall in at their appointed position. The priests shall blow on the trumpets of summoning, and three skirmishing battalions shall go forth from the intervals and take up position between the lines, with cavalry on their flanks on the right and on the left. The priests shall blow on their trumpets a level note, signals to array for battle, and the columns shall deploy into their proper arrays, each man to his place. When they are drawn up in three arrays, the priests shall blow for them a second fanfare, a low legato note, signals for advance, until they approach the enemy lines and stretch their hands to their weapons; then the priests shall blow on the six trumpets of assault a high pitched intermittent note to direct the fighting, and the Levites and all the band of the horn-blowers shall blow in unison a great battle fanfare to melt the heart of the enemy. At the sound of the fanfare, the battle darts shall go forth to fell the slain. The sound of the horns shall cease, while on the trumpets the priests shall keep on blowing a high-pitched intermittent note so as to direct, signals for fighting, until the skirmishers have hurled into the line seven times. Then the priests shall blow for them the trumpets of withdrawal, a low note alternately level and legato...²⁴²

The War Text goes on to list the exact composition and size of the army. “The whole army, seven formations, twenty eight thousand warriors, and the horsemen, six thousand in

²⁴¹ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 3:1-2.

²⁴² Yadin, *The Scroll*, 8:1-14.

number...”²⁴³ This army is described as exceedingly well armed. In addition to infantry and cavalry, they would have the advantages of ‘war towers’ armed with men and machines to help neutralize enemy archers, break enemy flanking attempts, and lay siege to fortified cities. In one description, The War Text instructs on one particular use for these towers, that being ‘to disorganize the enemy:’

Disposition for changing the array of the battle battalions, so as to form up in the shape of a rectangle with towers, enveloping arms with towers, an arc with towers, a flat arc with protruding columns, and wings issuing forth from both sides of the line, to disorganize the enemy...there shall be all round the tower in the three frontal positions three hundred shields.²⁴⁴

The War Text, in manual-like fashion, lists the weapons that each type of soldier would have depending on his battalion and the anticipated battle formations. No warrior was armed with just one type of weapon, but rather each warrior carried a virtual arsenal on his person. In various specified combinations, soldiers were instructed to carry: shield, greave, helmet, cuirass, sword, darts, staff, lance, spear, sling, and bow. As if that were not impressive enough detail, each of these weapons was to be crafted according to specifically indicated requirements of uniform length, material, and adornment. For instance:

All of them shall carry shields of burnished copper, like a face mirror. The shield shall be bordered with a rim of cable work and a pattern of running spiral, work of an artificer, in gold, silver, and copper welded together and precious stones in *ajour* work, work of a smith, cunningly wrought. The length of the shield shall be two cubits and half, and its breadth one cubit and half.²⁴⁵

With each weapon manufactured as an exact replica, this army is portrayed as not only an organized one comprised of disciplined soldiers, but a handsomely sharp one as well.

²⁴³ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 9: 4.

²⁴⁴ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 9:10-11, 13.

²⁴⁵ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 8:4-7.

Although each weapon's appearance and use is described in a manner that is worthwhile to examine, it is the war-darts that are particularly interesting. Like all of the weapons, the war-darts were to be of the highest quality of make and aesthetic, but additionally, each war-dart was to be inscribed with a battle-cry connoting either God's bellicose intentions toward the enemy, or the fierceness of the 'Sons of Light' in battle. For instance, each soldier's second dart²⁴⁶ would be inscribed with the name 'sparks of blood to fell the slain by the anger of God;' and his third dart would bear the epithet 'Glitter of a sword devouring the sinful slain by the judgment of God.'²⁴⁷

To buttress the infantry and war-towers, the army of the 'Sons of Light' employed superior cavalry. The cavalry, like the infantry, had different instructions for various types of battles and were described in such a way as to connote perfection. In addition to being men of the finest character with the finest training fully armed with the finest weapons, they were to ride only stallions of superior breeding, training, conditioning, experience and temperament. The War Text is not remiss in any detail. For example, when the cavalry enters initial battles that the War Text calls 'skirmishes':

...seven hundred horsemen being on one side and seven hundred on the other...all the cavalry that go forth to battle with the skirmishers shall be on male horses fleet of foot, tender of mouth, long of wind, full in the measure of their years, trained for battle and accustomed to hearing the noises and to the sight of all spectacles. Their riders shall be men of valour for battle, trained in horsemanship, the measure of their age being from thirty to forty-five years...they and their mounts shall be garbed in cuirasses, helmets and greaves, armed with round shields and spear eight cubits long, a bow and arrows and battle darts, all of them ready in their arrays for the day of vengeance, volunteers

²⁴⁶ Every soldier had seven darts which he would hurl at the enemy at the start of each battle.

²⁴⁷ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 6:3

for battle,²⁴⁸ to destroy the enemy in the battle of God and to shed the blood of their guilty slain.²⁴⁹

The War Text's description of the army of the 'Sons of Light' goes beyond their succinct organization and iron discipline, beyond their tactical adroitness and superior ability to wage war because of their innately superior training and weaponry. The army and every soldier in it has the attitude and character of a warrior, that being appropriately aggressive in their desire to attack the enemy, and rightfully ruthless in their eagerness to continue fighting until the enemy is not just subdued, but is dead. The very first line of the War Text sets the overall tone for the tome and the mission of the army; "the first engagement of the Sons of Light shall be *to attack* the lot of the Sons of Darkness..."²⁵⁰

248 "Volunteers of battle": Throughout the War Text, the author stresses that the soldiers must be volunteers and at one point (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 10:5), he quotes Deuteronomy regarding 'turning back the faint-hearted'. However, as Yadin points out (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 304, n. 5), the War Text omits the first three of the four Deuteronomic war exemptions listed in Deuteronomy 20:5-8:

"Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home; lest he die in battle and another marry her...Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest the courage of his comrades' flag like his." (*Tanach*, Jewish Publication Society, Deut 20:5-8.)

The first three of these causes, the social causes for dismissal, are not listed at all in the War Text. Perhaps just as the Rabbis later (circa 225 C.E. when the Mishnah was codified) would hyper-extend these war-exemptions (war exemptions are expanded upon in Mishnah Sotah 8 and are further extensively discussed in Bavli Sotah 30's-40's) to the point that it would be virtually impossible for anyone not to be exempt, the War Text of Qumran seems to have taken the opposite approach so that the most people possible could be conscripted. It is interesting that the fourth Deuteronomic cause for war-exemption, that being he who is too 'faint-hearted,' which is given the least attention by the Rabbis, is the only cause for dismissal for the Qumran warriors. Perhaps this shows that the author of the War Text was virulently opposed to having cowards in their army because each man was supposed to be 'eager' to fight God's war against the rest of the world. Assuming that Qumran had the same Deuteronomic text as the rabbis, it is interesting that both the Rabbis of the Mishnah and the author of the War Text instituted change in order to fit their agendas, and those changes, reflecting the polarity of each party's agenda, were on opposite polarities. The Rabbis of the Mishnah wanted to demilitarize Judaism and so they expanded the war exemptions so that with their interpretation nobody would have been biblically required to fight; however the author of Qumran was fomenting a military resurgence by describing a time (albeit perhaps one purely fantastical), when everyone of their community would be required to fight...except for cowards. That being said, The War Text does restrict who could fight by excluding women and children from battle. Even men under twenty-five years of age could not fight, although they could participate in a support role.

²⁴⁹ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 6:7-16.

²⁵⁰ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 1:1. Emphasis my own.

The War Text is very clear throughout its length that the army of the ‘Sons of Light’ is not a defensive army protecting land or lives, but, to the contrary, is an aggressive army that is charged to surge forth into the territory of the enemy²⁵¹ with the sole purpose of eliminating any military force that falls under the auspices of the ‘Sons of Darkness’:

The whole army, seven formations, twenty eight thousand warriors, and the horsemen, six thousand in number, all these shall take up the pursuit so as to destroy the enemy in the battle of god for an eternal annihilation. The priests shall blow for them the trumpets of pursuit, and the warriors shall spread out against the whole enemy force for a pursuit of annihilation, while the cavalry roll back the enemy at the sides of the field of battle until their extermination.²⁵²

Most telling about the nature of Qumran’s War Text is the religious nature of the army and its warriors. They are called the ‘Sons of Light’ because they are the faithful remnant of the twelve tribes who hold with the proper state of mind, ritual observance and ritual purity. Their army was to be perfectly holy because battle-Priests were to be in command, and each warrior would be ritually pure before entering the battles where, under God-invoking banners, they would use weapons with God’s name to battle God’s enemies. The War Text specifies that the army would engage in prayer before and after each battle, and defeats on the battlefield should be interpreted as nothing other than God’s divine plan towards ultimate victory, and not indicative of any long-term status. For the warriors of the War Text, the exact fulfillment of the Law was an essential condition for success since not only was the outcome of the war on earth to be balanced on a precipice, but the parallel angelic battles being waged in the heavens were likewise tenderly balanced. Only by waging God’s war properly, especially in accordance to Torah precepts, would God ultimately tip the balance of

²⁵¹ “In the first year they shall fight against Aram Naharaim, in the second against the sons of Lud, in the third against the remainder of the sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Togar and Masha...in the fourth and the fifth they shall fight against the sons of Arpachshad,.. in the remaining ten years the war shall spread out against all sons of Japeth in their dwelling places. (Yadin, *The Scroll*, 2:10-11.)

²⁵² Yadin, *The Scroll*, 9:4-7.

alternating victories and defeats by entering the fray in the eleventh hour and in doing so secure victory for God's faithful warriors.

Guided by the Torah's rules of engagement, the War Text is clear that this war would have to be fought not only in accordance with all the laws and statutes of warfare specified in the Law of Moses, but according to all the general rules of war practiced by the nations against whom they would fight. For instance, the 'Sons of Light' would absolutely adhere to the biblical prohibition against fighting on Shabbat²⁵³ or in sabbatical years.²⁵⁴ The War Text does not explain how the army of the 'Sons of Light' would reconcile the proclivity of other armies to continue to wage war on Shabbat, irrespective of what the Torah might decree or that Qumran might wish. This of course begs the question of how 'real' these battle plans were if a condition to enter into the war was that both sides, including the 'Sons of Dark,' would respect the Sabbath as holy and in accordance to the biblical text, refrain from war on Shabbat.

This author is tempted to summarize that the author of the War Text created impossibly high standards as mandatory preconditions for waging war, and in doing so ensured that the 'Sons of Light' could never actually fight. The organization and discipline described, although not impossible, would have been the envy of every army in the world. The unwavering commitment, training, aggressiveness and ruthlessness of each warrior gives this fighting force mythical prowess; and the quality, quantity and uniformity of the arsenal, including towers and horse, point towards not only a superior field presence but an

²⁵³ It is interesting to note that in this case of forbidding war on Shabbat the Qumran community (as it is reflected in the War Text) did not support (in fact Qumran theoretically reversed) the decision of the Maccabean army to ignore the biblical decree out of necessity. This observation is, of course, conditional on whether we can accept that the report in I Maccabees was reflective of the reality that Jews would thereafter fight on Shabbat. As presented earlier in this thesis, the Maccabees decreed that the reality of war outweighed the biblical prohibitions against fighting on Shabbat because the enemy did not similarly 'take Shabbat off' from the field of battle.

²⁵⁴ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 2.9.

unshakable support infrastructure. All of these factors: the twenty-eight thousand warriors and six thousand horses,²⁵⁵ the trumpets and the discipline, the weapons and the attitude; are set against the fact that “the community lacked the wherewithal to wage war” at all.²⁵⁶ Far from a dedicated military force of 34,000 men supported by an intractable infrastructure, likely Qumran was a community of a few hundred.²⁵⁷ Although it is difficult to ascertain the degree, if any, of militarism²⁵⁸ in Qumran, certainly militarism was not the prime concern, or endeavor, of the community. Thus, it is akin to fantasy to think that a small community could swell their ranks with the quantity and quality of men that the War Texts mandates as a pre-condition for war.

Numerical and qualitative fantasies aside, although the parallel war to be fought in heaven might be dismissed as theological belief, the practical implications of not reconciling the Torah laws with the realities of war cannot be ignored. That the author of the War Text does not even attempt to reconcile these biblical restrictions with the harsh realities of war indicates that the conditions necessary for the ‘Sons of Light’ to wage war was, in reality, impossible. In other words, the example of fighting on Shabbat is a ‘loophole’ that forbids Qumran to actually engage in fighting since that precondition could never have been met for the simple reason that an enemy would not ‘rest’ on Shabbat, even if Qumran insisted on it.

²⁵⁵ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 9: 4.

²⁵⁶ Sollamo, “War and Violence,” 345.

²⁵⁷ According to the testimony of Philo and Josephus, there were about four thousand Essenes-scattered in communities throughout Palestine...” (Schiffman, *Reclaiming*, 79.) but Dr. Schiffman personally estimates that the Qumran male membership was limited to a few hundred. (Schiffman, *email correspondence*, 23 October, 2007.)

²⁵⁸ However, Lawrence Schiffman (Schiffman, *Personal Interview*, 24 August, 2007.) thinks that likely there was a some sort of real military component to the community, if for no other reason than that ‘they expected the Romans to attack them...and they needed to be ready.’ Opponents to his theory point to the lack of archeological evidence at Qumran that would suggest militarism, such as a cache of weapons. However, aside from the familiar mantra that ‘a lack of evidence is not evidence of absence,’ Professor Schiffman counters this assertion by pointing out that “in 66 C.E. the war starts with the Romans. It is plausible that three out of four of the Qumran guys left to fight, and those were the messianists. It might have been that they took the weapons with them...and this would have left about one of four of the Qumran community in Qumran without a weapons cache...”

Assuming that the impossible conditions precluded Qumran from fighting an actual war, the historian must wonder if the War Text author set the standards impossibly high deliberately in order to avoid military action. If this were the case, then perhaps this fantastical literature was an attempt to theologically and psychologically explain Jewish powerlessness (and perhaps suffering) in a new post-Hasmonean world where the Roman polytheists were the dominant military force; and the Jews, no matter how pious, were at best pawns and puppets to Roman power. If setting the conditions for war at an unobtainable level was a conscious decision by the author of the War Text, then perhaps his intent is reflective of, or a predecessor for, the similar strategy employed by the mishnaic rabbis to demilitarize Judaism and Messianism by making Jewish redemption only available through Torah study and *mitzvot*, Divine initiation and intervention. What is certain is that the plans, numbers and details set forth in the War Text do not seem to reflect any sort of reality in terms of what the Qumran community feasibly might have been capable of implementing.

That being said, although this author is *tempted* to dismiss the War Text as delusional fantasy, regardless of the War Text author's deliberate intention; in his final analysis he can not because of that scroll's propensity for detail. If the War Text were meant to function in some sort of hyperbolic or prophetic way, then why not just do what other such writings do and prophesize with grand, but general, declarations. The War Text does not do make general grand declarations, but rather instructs in painstaking detail. In contrast to a narrative or poetry, the manual-type form and the extensive details take away from any 'enjoyment' that an audience might receive from a genre that flowed. The War Manual seems very much a working document meant to instruct.

Even more to the point, this author would opine that such a working document, meant to instruct (even if fantastic), is a vital first step to any practical action. In other words, the first step to real action is real planning. Even if that detail was only ‘real’ on a hypothetical level, it is a vital component that reflects at least the possibility of action. This reading of the War Text would suggest that the extensive war described in the War Text is indicative of real intentions “for the planned offensive against the occupying Romans... although perhaps not to reach independence for Judaea, but to bring eternal redemption and victory over the forces of evil.”²⁵⁹

It should also be noted that the depth and degree of details attached to the military was not something that came from the author’s imagination, but rather seems congruent with practical war manuals thought to exist at the time:

The laws of war and of military organizations as set out in the Torah, tactics of the armies of the world, and the prayers: these obliged him to base himself²⁶⁰ on different sources. For the first subject, he of course relies mainly on Numbers and Deuteronomy... On the other hand, when he came to write on the second subject- the tactics of war, arms, the trumpet signals, etc. – he had to turn to different sources. The number of accounts of battles in the Bible is not large and they could not serve him as a source for a detailed description such as he wished to present to his readers. Also the descriptions of wars in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are very general and could not supply him with the material needed. An analysis of the chapters in question (cps 5-7) and of the terminology employed proves that he used contemporary military sources.²⁶¹ Unfortunately the only sentence in which he mentions the sources from which he drew his knowledge has mostly been eaten away... this sentence gave the name of the source on which he relied: “In that very place, he²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Bolotnikov, “The Theme,” 265-8.

²⁶⁰ Meaning the writer of The War Text.

²⁶¹ Professor Lawrence Schiffman agrees with Yadin’s assessment that the Qumran community had practical war manuals. He comments that “the war text was futuristic... although there is evidence that there also were practical war manuals written by the Qumran community that have been lost... but we can assume that they did exist.” (Schiffman, *Personal Interview*, 24 August, 2007.)

²⁶² The Priest leading the ‘Sons of Light’ into battle against the ‘Sons of Darkness’.

shall array all the formations, as written *in the Book (?) of War*.²⁶³... This would be a reference to a book of general military rules²⁶⁴ or perhaps to a kind of handbook on military matters for the use of priests.²⁶⁵

It would also seem plausible, if not probable, that an author who could write in such exhaustive tactical and practical detail might likely have direct military experience himself. Whether there were many men with similar experience in Qumran is unknown, but one thing is for sure. In contrast to the later Mishnaic rabbis who demilitarize Judaism by teaching that Messianism would come about not through violence but through prayer and *mitzvot*; the community of Qumran was quite positive that even if their army was nothing but fantasy, the idealized course of action toward a new world order was one which centered on war and violence in which they were to have an active part. The inclusion of such precise military details indicate that Qumran took themselves seriously as warriors, and wanted to have others (potential recruits) take them seriously as well.

Unfortunately, even in Qumran's final moments the historian can infer little as to just how serious the men of Qumran took themselves as warriors, regardless of the intent or effect of the War Text. 'We know little about the final battle and circumstances at Qumran when the Roman legions approached Qumran on their way to Massada. That the Romans destroyed the main building of the community points to at least some skirmishes at Qumran;²⁶⁶ but there is no indication of any of the specifics, or even if the Qumran

²⁶³ Yadin's footnote on 'the book (?) of war:' "It is impossible to say whether the missing word was *sefer*- in which case a military handbook of some kind may have been meant- or *serekh*. In the latter case, the reference may actually be to the first part of our scroll. (Yadin, *The Scroll*, n.6.

²⁶⁴ Yadin posits the possibility that perhaps this 'Book of War' is the same one mentioned in *b. Moed Qatan* 25b: "A certain youngster opened the eulogy over Rav Hanuna as follows: A disciple of sages has ascended from Babylonia and with him a Book of Wars."

²⁶⁵ Yadin, *The Scroll*, 16-17.

²⁶⁶ Sollamo, (Sollamo, "War and Violence," 350.) cites Magness' *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, 61, cg. 184.

community's 'Sons of Light', successfully engaged the Romans at all.²⁶⁷ Unlike the War Text, the men of Qumran did not alternate defeats with victories over the '*kittim*' and 'Sons of Darkness.' Their first and only battle ended their lives and their community...but perhaps not the spirit of their aspirations. Those would be carried on over the next half century with Jewish revolts and rebellions until they climaxed in the Akiva-backed Bar Kochba revolt.

In conclusion, the War Text is different from other writings of that era for many reasons, but the extensive militaristic detail and practical tactical planning give the War Text a feeling of 'seriousness' that is absent in the biblical narrative accounts and prophetic writings. Writings like the Book of Judith and I Maccabees are narratives, but the War Text is an instruction manual reminiscent of halakhah. As posed in the introduction to this thesis, an interpretation for a halakhah of 'war' seems conspicuously absent from Jewish literature.²⁶⁸ Perhaps the War Text could have been set to function as such; in essence, perhaps it is the 'missing link'.

²⁶⁷ Sollamo (Sollamo, "War and Violence," 350.) does point out that in his Jewish War II, Josephus reports that the Essenes were terribly tortured by the Romans...and he made the Essenes martyrs and heroes of their faith in the Maccabean spirit.

²⁶⁸ Although the rules of Deuteronomy 20 are about war, the subject lacks an extensive interpretation similar to that of how to celebrate Torah holidays, deal with land acquisition, or laws of marital purity.

Chapter Five- Josephus' Account of Massada:

This thesis will briefly examine the Massada story because it generally fits in with the theme of examining a piece of Jewish literature that reflects and refracts certain Jewish self-images as 'warrior' from the era in which it was written and initially read. To partake in this exercise, one must utilize Flavius Josephus'²⁶⁹ account of the Massada event as he reports it in his book, 'The Jewish War,'²⁷⁰ due to the fact that aside from Josephus' account, the story of Massada as we know it is unknown and not mentioned in Jewish literature.²⁷¹

Like all of the pieces of literature presented in this thesis, the historical veracity of Josephus' account is somewhat questionable. Although this chapter will briefly delve into the issue of Josephus' accuracy and embellishment, as well as partake in admitted conjecture as to Josephus' possible motives; this author holds that Josephus' account is consistent with the overall sentiment of this thesis; that being that Josephus' Massada account as literature, regardless of historical veracity, is in itself useful for determining how Jews of an age might have thought of themselves, or wanted to think of themselves, as warrior. In other words, regardless of whether or not the literature accurately recounts historical fact, it is a fact that the literature did exist; and therefore the literature can be mined for what it might tell us about the age in which it was created.

Like all the literature presented in this thesis, Josephus' Massada account demands to be read in its historical context. The Hasmonean Jewish state, weak and overly dependent on

²⁶⁹ Josephus, son of Matthias, was born in 37 C.E., served as a commander for the Jewish forces in the Galilee against the Romans, and eventually became a Roman citizen and notable historian chronicling, amongst other things, the factors and events of Rome's war with the Jews. Once in Rome, his patrons were often the Emperors themselves, and Josephus was given a house, a pension for life and Roman citizenship.

²⁷⁰ A.k.a.: *Bellum Judacium*.

²⁷¹ Dr. Martin Cohen (Cohen, *Personal Interview*, October 3, 2007) confirms this fact and further explains that the Massada story does not appear in Jewish literature specifically because its narrative of militant Jews defying Rome was counter to the rabbi's effort and desire to acquiesce to Rome and demilitarize Judaism.

their ambitious Roman allies, was annexed as a Roman province to be governed by Roman officials in 6 C.E. One of the Roman puppets who ruled Judaea was King Herod,²⁷² who rightly perceived that he was vulnerable at the hands of his Jewish subjects and so built a desert fortress outside of Jerusalem in case he was forced to flee his capital. This fortress, called Massada, was built to wait out trouble. Herod spared no expense or effort to make sure that a small group of soldiers might defend Massada's walls against a much larger force, and that there would be enough food, water and weapons to last for years.

Although Herod's preparations might allow him to wait out trouble, it was the desert landscape in which Massada was situated that could enable it to actually break a siege. Massada was situated in the middle of a desert above the waves of the Dead Sea; and the local environment, harsh and spartan, would not provide enough food or potable water for an army at siege to survive without a steady infrastructure to transport vast quantities of both over long distances. However, Massada's extensive system of cisterns was designed to catch the rain and thus to enable the fortress enough water to survive a siege that might last years. Massada's origin and development is described by Josephus:²⁷³

When Herod came to the throne he decided that no place would better repay attention and the strongest fortification, especially in view of the proximity of Arabia; for its situation was most opportune, commanding as it did a view of Arab territory. So he surrounded a large area with walls and towers and founded a city there, from which an ascent led up to the ridge itself. Not content with that he built a wall round the very summit and erected towers at the corners, each

²⁷² In 70 B.C.E. Herod was born in Ashkelon, which at the time was in the region of Idumea. Appointed governor of the Galilee by his father Antipater in 47 B.C.E, Herod crushed a Jewish revolt led by Hezekiah and had the rebels put to death without a trial. Arraigned before the *Sanhedrin*, he fled before they could pass sentence. In 43 B.C.E. Herod was appointed governor of *Coele Syria* by the Roman Senate and three years later Herod was similarly crowned King of Judaea, a land which at the time had recently fallen into the hands of the Parthians. Soon after, in 37 B.C.E., Herod returned to Judaea with Roman military backing and after five months of siege, captured Jerusalem. (Barnavi and Eliav-Feldon, *Historical Atlas*, 50.)

²⁷³ All Josephus quotes are taken from the translation done by G.A. Williamson, *The Jewish War*, Penguin Books, 1970.

ninety feet high. In the middle of this enclosure he built a palace...and he constructed a number of tanks to receive rain-water and maintain a constant supply. He might well have been competing with nature in the hope that the impregnability the place had received from her might be outdone by his own artificial defenses. He further provided an ample store of weapons and engines, and managed to think of everything that could enable the occupants to snap their fingers at the longest siege.²⁷⁴

As the years progressed, Roman relations with certain sizable segments of the Jewish population steadily deteriorated until they exploded into open revolt and war in 66 C.E.²⁷⁵ The Jewish forces were not a cohesively unified force but were rather more along the lines of a loose confederation of warring sects. After being soundly defeated in open battles, the Jewish fighting forces mostly barred themselves inside the besieged Jerusalem walls where they spent as much time fighting each other as they did keeping the Romans out.

According to Josephus, one of the militant Jewish sects at the time was the Sicarii,²⁷⁶ who were extreme not only in their bellicose tactics but also in their theology. At the outbreak of the war with Rome in 66 C.E., the Sicarii captured Massada, but not before they first had slaughtered the Jewish inhabitants of Ein Geddi,²⁷⁷ who were, in their eyes, wicked and doomed to perdition.²⁷⁸ The historian can assume that while the Roman army defeated the organized Jewish forces centered around Jerusalem, these Sicarii waited out the fighting in their Massada fortress. Finally, in late 74 C.E., the campaign commander, Flavius Silva,

²⁷⁴ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, II:264:68.

²⁷⁵ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, II:425:7

²⁷⁶ Aside from Josephus, it is not at all clear that the Sicarii was a true sect, as opposed to a small group loosely, if at all, affiliated.

²⁷⁷ Shaye Cohen reports (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 400.) that it was not only the men of Ein Geddi who the Sicarii slaughtered, but over 700 women and children as well.

²⁷⁸ Cohen, "Massada Literary," 401.

approached Massada with his troops²⁷⁹ and set to work ‘mopping up’ the tiny remains of Jewish armed resistance.²⁸⁰

Josephus’ account claims that the charismatic leader of the Sicarii militants was a certain Eleazar.²⁸¹ Josephus relays that before taking over Massada, Eleazar had experience, and success, in fighting the Romans both in the open field, and under siege. Although the following description of Eleazar precedes Eleazar’s command of Massada, it is important for two reasons.

The first is that Josephus seems to hold Eleazar, and his warrior attributes, in high esteem. Eleazar and the other Jewish troops are portrayed as courageous, not afraid to strike first at the enemy, and exceedingly dangerous in battle. Further, Eleazar specifically is portrayed as a charismatic leader who could rally his peers to battle, as bold in his strategy, unafraid to risk, and fierce in his fighting. Caring for his men, Eleazar also was confident enough in his battle prowess that he not only led attacks on fortified positions, but guarded the retreat of his troops with his own sword.

Secondly, and somewhat surprisingly, Josephus does not describe any actual fighting between Jews and Romans in the final Massada showdown; and so this description of Eleazar

²⁷⁹ Mainly the 10th legion.

²⁸⁰ Cohen, “Massada Literary,” 401.

²⁸¹ It is interesting to note that Josephus himself claims that while he was fighting the Romans, one of his best fighters was a man named Eleazar, son of Samias, from Saba in the Galilee. Josephus speaks at length and with admiration of Eleazar and his strength in battle: “In this struggle one of the Jews distinguished himself in a way that calls for very special mention. His father’s name was Samias, his own Eleazar, and his birthplace Saba in Galilee. This man raised a huge stone and flung it from the wall at the battering-ram with such tremendous force that he broke off its head. Then he leapt down and seizing the head under the noses of the enemy carried it back to the wall without turning a hair. A target now for all his foes and with no armor to protect his body from the rain of missiles, he was pierced by five shafts; but paying not the slightest regard to them he climbed the wall and stood there for all to admire his daring...he charged the ranks of the Tenth Legion, falling upon the Romans with such dash and fury that they broke through their lines and routed all who stood in their path.” (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, III:232.2) It remains to be seen if this Eleazar is the same one who Josephus later says led the militants at Massada (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, VII:202:6), but if this is in fact the case, then Josephus is claiming to not only know the leader of the Massada Jews, but to have fought alongside of him against the Romans.

as a warrior fighting is that much more emphasized. It is interesting and relevant to Josephus' narrative that despite Eleazar's prowess, ultimately the Roman siege was successful and Eleazar narrowly escaped with his life. In this light, it makes sense that in the future Eleazar, faced with the doom of certain Roman success, despite the best efforts of his accomplished and adroit warriors, might champion other options:

They (Jews under siege by Roman troops) wanted to test their prospects of escaping a siege; so they made vigorous sorties every day and grappled with all whom they encountered; at heavy costs to both sides... Among the besieged was a young man, bold in enterprise and energetic in action, named Eleazar. He had been prominent in the sorties, inciting the majority of defenders to issue forth and interrupt the building of the platforms, and in the encounters doing a great deal of damage to the Romans; for those who dared to sally out with him he smoothed the way to the attack, and made retreat safe by being the last to withdraw.²⁸²

Josephus goes on to recount, with an abundance of specific detail, the final confrontation on Massada between the determined Roman war-machine and Eleazar's warriors. Realizing Massada's strengths, Flavius Silva set his engineers in standard siege-breaking endeavors, mainly cutting off avenues of escape and building ramparts to neutralize Massada's advantage of height and fortified walls. Meanwhile, inside the mountain-top fortress, although the Jews wanted for nothing, they could only wait and watch as the Roman ramps began to take form. Josephus describes that the Jews would banter and taunt the Roman troops while they worked, sometimes with volleys of arrows and stones, sometimes with words, and sometimes 'thumbing their noses' at the Romans by standing on Massada's walls, in full view of the Roman troops, and pouring out valuable water into the sand as if to say, 'we are not in a hurry, and we are very comfortable.'

²⁸² Josephus, *The Jewish War*, VII:202:6.

Eventually the Roman ramparts reached Massada's outer defenses and the Roman troops attacked the outer walls. In anticipation of this, the men of Massada built an inner wall of wood and pliable material in order to withstand battering rams. However, by the time the Romans were ready to attack it was near dark, and so the Romans burned down the new inner wall, but then retreated with the intent to return with the dawn to defeat the Massada warriors.

It was at this point Eleazar gathered all of the Massada men and with an impassioned speech, advocated for the collective suicide of everyone present, as well as their wives and children. Josephus has Eleazar's speech as long and addressing different subjects, including his belief that the soul lives pleasantly after death, and that despite herculean efforts, Rome was invincible to defeat. Despite being a bit lengthy, a section of Eleazar's speech is worth quoting at length because in it Josephus *vis-a-vi* Eleazar relayed not only his reasoning for mass suicide, but also hinted at how he viewed the 'warrior-qualities' of these Jewish men:

...and now all hope has fled, abandoning us to our fate, let us at once choose death with honor and do the kindest thing we can for ourselves, our wives and children, while it is still possible to show ourselves any kindness. After all, we were born to die, we and those we brought into the world: this even the luckiest must face. But outrage, slavery, and the sight of our wives led away to shame with our children-these are not evils to which man is subject by the laws of nature: men undergo them through their own cowardice, if they have a chance to forestall them by death and will not take it. We were very proud of our courage, so we revolted from Rome: now in the final stages they have offered to spare our lives and we have turned the offer down. Is anyone too blind to see how furious they will be if they take us alive? Pity the young whose bodies are strong enough to survive prolonged torture; pity the not-so-young whose old frames would break under such ill-usage. A man will see his wife violently carried off; he will hear the voice of his child crying, 'father!' when his own hands are fettered. Come! While our hands are free and can hold a sword, let them do a noble service! Let us die unenslaved by our enemies, and leave this world as free men in the company with our

wives and children...let us deny the enemy their hoped for pleasure at our expense, and without more ado leave them to be dumbfounded by our death and awed by our courage.²⁸³

From this passage it is clear that above all else Eleazar (and Josephus) valued a warrior's courage, and the ability to die a free man (rather than as a prisoner or a slave). Since even the Romans would "be awed" by this act of "courage," it would seem that courage to do something radical and drastically adverse to self-preservation, such as mass suicide, was an indication of the true 'mettle' of a superior warrior. Perhaps this was admired because it indicated a certain ruthlessness, or dedication, or willingness to die unfettered despite the highest cost.²⁸⁴

However, this passage, and indeed the entire Massada story, has to be viewed not only by the choice that the men of Massada made, but also by the options that did not choose. Most obvious is that they chose mass suicide over torture and enslavement, as well as over being helpless to protect their wives and children from the horrible fates that surely awaited them. If the Massada tale is any indication of Josephus' view of Jewish warriors, then the reader can conclude that for the Jewish warrior, there were some things that were worse than death.

²⁸³ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, VII:390:45.

²⁸⁴ In his comprehensive comparative study, Shaye Cohen shows that in the Second Temple Period mass suicide as an alternative to enslavement was not rare, or limited to any particular culture. "Massada was not unique. Ancient history provides many examples of a besieged city or fortress whose inhabitants (men, women, and children) preferred death to surrender or capture." (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 386.) Cohen lists 16 such historical narratives that resemble Josephus' Massada tale. Further, Cohen states that: "collective suicide was the action of last resort...for Greeks, Romans and the townspeople of Asia Minor whose object was to avoid capture not only by the Romans but also by Persians, Greeks, and Carthaginians." (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 390.) Cohen also demonstrates that many of Josephus' contemporary historian-peers similarly lionized a group's choice for mass suicide thus reflecting a general Roman admiration for such men who could make, and implement, such a hard decision: "Our corpus shows that ancient historians generally approved of collective suicide...for instance, Polybius and his followers clearly admire the desperate resolution of the Phocians, while Appian has the Roman consul admire the 'virtue' or 'prowess' of the Astapaeans...who as 'lovers of liberty, could not tolerate slavery.'" (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 392.) This author would posit that Cohen's demonstration of the commonality of mass suicide adds probability to the veracity of Josephus' account.

What is harder to understand is why the men of Massada did not choose to fight to their deaths,²⁸⁵ even if death was certain. Whether by suicide or battle, both avenues have identical results. One would think that at least by fighting the Romans, the Jewish warrior could die a warrior's death. However, by Josephus' account, since these warriors chose suicide over battle it would seem that by their standards, the more 'manly' thing to do was to have the resolve to kill one's comrades, family and finally self in order to die freely, on their own terms. This act is one of ultimate defiance. Perhaps then this is the ultimate warrior quality, for Josephus at least, that a warrior could determine the time and manner of his own death.

Keeping in mind that the Josephus account is the only written account available of the Massada event, at this point it might be appropriate to address how accurately Josephus' account reflects what really happened on Massada, or if the Massada event ever happened at all. As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the veracity of Josephus' account, although important in other contexts, has no bearing on this thesis' assumption that the factual presence of a piece of literature is grounds enough to utilize it as an avenue for determining perceived Jewish self-identity. However, determining a degree of veracity might allow the historian insight into the Josephus' motivations to expand his narrative with any creative exaggerations.

When judging the veracity of Josephus' account, one must remember a few things. First, Josephus admits that he was not at Massada, and so the reader must assume that some of his account is permitted through creative license. For instance, it is unreasonable to condemn Josephus' conception of Eleazar's speech because it is obviously not a rendition verbatim. Second, like all the historians of his day, Josephus was permitted to insert creative rhetoric in

²⁸⁵ Perhaps after killing their families first to humanely save them from their fates.

the absence of fact; and even to exaggerate in order to enhance the narrative's effectiveness to entertain.²⁸⁶

In light of that caveat, based on external collaborating evidence, (mostly archeological discovery from the Massada site in Israel and data from existent external Roman imperial commentaries),²⁸⁷ scholars²⁸⁸ agree that in matters of facts, figures, distances, measurements and formations, Josephus accounted with accuracy.²⁸⁹ It is unclear whether this accuracy can be attributed to first hand knowledge, second hand accounts, or the use of the Roman imperial records (which because of his patrons would have been at his disposal). This is not to say that Josephus' accuracy was always total. To the contrary, even those scholars who hold by Josephus' general veracity admit that (in areas that do not describe facts, figures, distances, measurements and formation) his "inaccuracies range from vagueness to blatant exaggeration."²⁹⁰ However, on the other extreme of the spectrum, even those critics who charge Josephus' Massada account as being a "farrago of fiction, conjecture, and error"²⁹¹ must be clearly qualified in their academic context; for this type of criticism is shouted not to challenge the veracity of the general narrated event, but merely the absoluteness of the details. For instance, even Shaye Cohen who calls Josephus's account a "farrago of fiction, conjecture, and error" admits that:

²⁸⁶ "Josephus needs no apology for these inventions and embellishments since practically all the historians of antiquity did such things." (Cohen, "Massada Literary," 397.)

²⁸⁷ "Undoubtedly, the source of much of Josephus' accurate data was the Roman imperial commentaries, the *hupomnemata*, specifically mentioned by him three times in his works. (Broshi, "The Credibility," 381.) Josephus relied on commentaries dating not only from the period of the Great War but also on later commentaries found by him in the imperial archives." (Broshi, "The Credibility," 383.)

²⁸⁸ This author reaches this conclusion by comparing scholars on opposite sides of the spectrum regarding their opinion of Josephus' veracity. For instance, both Magen Broshi and Shaye Cohen, who seem to agree on little else, both concur that at least in these areas, Josephus is credible.

²⁸⁹ For instance, Josephus accurately provided the correct distances between geographical points, the measurements of the Massada fortifications and even, upon renewed scholarship, the relative accuracy of this population estimates. (Broshi, *The Credibility*, 380-381.)

²⁹⁰ Broshi, "The Credibility," 383.

²⁹¹ Cohen, "Massada Literary," 399.

We may readily believe that the Josephan story has a basis in fact. First, it is plausible. Many Jews committed suicide during the crucial moments of the war in 66-70, and, as we have seen above, many non-Jews also committed suicide rather than face their enemies.²⁹²

To paraphrase Cohen's analysis of how the Massada event 'really happened' *vis-a-vis* Josephus' account, Cohen thinks that Josephus exaggerated in that *not all* of the Massada residents committed suicide, or burned their buildings, *exactly* as Josephus says. Rather, Cohen's admitted conjecture of the events has some of the Jews slaying their families and setting the public buildings on fire; while others of the Sicarii fought to the death or attempted to hide or escape. He concludes that upon breaching Massada's defenses, the Romans were in no mood to take prisoners and massacred all whom they found.²⁹³ The point being that despite condemning words, even Josephus' most harsh critics admit that the bulk of what he says is certainly plausible, they just take issue with some of the details.

Another way to look at the plausibility of Josephus' account is to consider why Josephus would make up something that was not true if his account, and credibility, could be invalidated by the myriad of Roman soldiers involved, including his patron himself, Flavius Silva. The answer is that Josephus would not and could not. Josephus, albeit permitted with some creative license, had to write within the confines of what were considered the basic facts and conjectures of the Roman victors at Massada. It is precisely because his account had to be within the realm of 'truth' that Josephus could not (and did not) have the Sicarii engaging in some desperate fight...because everyone who was at Massada knew that such a battle never occurred.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Cohen, "Massada Literary," 399.

²⁹³ Cohen, "Massada Literary," 403.

²⁹⁴ Since Josephus is the only source for what happened at Massada, and was the official Roman historian on the subject as empowered by the Roman Emperors, his account is 'the' official Roman account of all that occurred.

Additionally, Josephus' motivations for recording the Massada event in the way that he does must be understood in the context of his personal situation as well as his intended audience. Although Josephus claimed to be from a priestly family which could proudly trace its pedigree to the early Hasmoneans, and he claimed to have led Jewish forces against the Romans in the Galilee, Josephus clearly was perceived by some Jews in his own day as a traitor. Although after the war Titus gave Josephus an estate outside of Jerusalem, Josephus thought it prudent to decamp for good to Rome.²⁹⁵ Likely he feared for his very life by the Jews of Judaea who were bitter at his changed allegiance, and who sought to make an example of Josephus by broadcasting what would happen to traitorous Jews. In addition to the accusations by his fellow Jews, the fact that Josephus never returned to Judaea likely indicates that he feared for his life.²⁹⁶

Josephus wrote about the Jews not necessarily because he loved the Jews but because 'the Jews' were the only thing on which he was an expert and was considered worthwhile to the Romans. Remember, in 'The Jewish War,' Josephus is not just writing about the Jews, but of their war with Rome and specifically, the Jewish defeat at the hands of the very men who later become his patrons. 'The Jewish War' was published because it made the Roman Emperors look good. And the stronger the Jewish warriors were made to look, the better their Roman victors would appear. That being said, Jewish warrior prowess and making the Romans look good are not necessarily mutually exclusive endeavors. However, despite attractive political theories, it is very difficult to be certain of Josephus' motivation for portraying the Jewish warrior as positively as he did.

²⁹⁵ Once in Rome, Josephus was given the very house in which Vespasian had lived as a private citizen, a pension for life, and Roman citizenship. Later, Vespasian gave him a second large estate in Judaea, and Domitian exempted his property from the land-tax payable by all provincials, a highly coveted honor. (Smallwood, "Introduction," 13.)

²⁹⁶ Smallwood, "Introduction," 13.

The one clue that might give some hint as to Josephus' reasons for his portrayal of the Jewish warrior is his intended readership. Aside from the commission to be part of the official Roman annals, it seems that Josephus' initial intended audience was other Jews! In his introduction to *The Jewish War*, Josephus informed his readers that he originally wrote his account in Aramaic "for circulation among the Jews of the eastern Diaspora-those living beyond the Euphrates, under Parthian rule."²⁹⁷ Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the region, but would have prevented most of the Roman Empire from reading what he wrote.

What then, was Josephus hoping to accomplish? Certainly there seems to be an element of self-affirmation and self-congratulation in showing the mettle of the Jewish 'race' of which he was a member. Indeed, Josephus makes the Jews out to be worthy adversaries who 'fought the good fight' but eventually lost to the superior Romans. In other words, the military prowess of the Jew did not matter because the Romans were, and always would be, better.²⁹⁸ If anything, Josephus seems to write as a cautionary tale for Jews to know that when they are outclassed and beaten by their betters, they need to accommodate and acquiesce to the Romans. In doing so, like Josephus himself, Jews would receive the benefits of Roman largess and would be better off with Rome as their proverbial patrons. Through the Massada account, Josephus alludes to the fact that the futile alternatives of fighting to the bitter end or nobly committing suicide still results in death rather than the security of self governance and prosperity; all of which were to be had under Roman authority.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ "and later translated it into Greek in order to make it accessible to the peoples of the Roman Empire." Smallwood, "Introduction," 14.)

²⁹⁸ In the seven years of war, from 66 C.E. to the fall of Massada in 73 C.E., from the beginning the Romans had far greater forces: three legions reinforced with auxiliaries, approximately sixty thousand well-trained professional soldiers. (Barnavi and Eliav-Feldon, *A Historical Atlas*, 52)

²⁹⁹ Although Massada was the final stronghold of the Jews and is thus is the climax of *The Jewish War*, this tension between suicide and dying in battle is one that is a consistent theme throughout the book. Although this author has not done extensive research to prove this point, certainly Josephus himself cogently argues against

To some readers, Josephus' suggestions might seem pusillanimous; but to others they might seem starkly practical and even parallel to what some of the rabbis in fact would adhere to, starting with Yochanan ben Zakai and evolving into a demilitarized Judaism. Interestingly, and perhaps deliberately, both Josephus³⁰⁰ and Yochanan ben Zakai³⁰¹ claim to have escaped Roman siege³⁰² only to be given an audience with Vespasian whom they prophesize would become Emperor. Soon after, when this prediction became reality,³⁰³ both were given privileges worthy of his prophesy. For Josephus, it was access to the highest echelons of Roman society, a powerful patron, and entrée into the publishing world. For Yochanan ben Zakai, it was permission to relocate to Yavneh in order to ensure Judaism's survival. In both cases, each man submitted to the physical military superiority of Rome in order to survive and succeed.

Whether taken as a metaphor or merely as an example reflective of the reality, each man sacrificed his pride as 'warrior' in order to obtain what he perceived as a higher goal. But as we will see in the next chapter, despite the Roman victories in the war of 66 C.E., the submissive attitude of Josephus and the rabbis of Yavneh were not uniformly adhered to, nor was it a forgone conclusion. The spirit of the biblical warriors, the Maccabees, Judith and the 'Sons of Light' was a part of the collective Jewish psyche³⁰⁴ and could not easily be subverted. Jews were a people who had succeeded in war, and despite Roman defeats, that

suicide (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, III:382:17) when the remnants of his Galilean troops were trapped in the cave and considering suicide as a viable option.

³⁰⁰ Josephus claims to have been brought out of a cave in the Galilee where his men had committed suicide, and marched by Nicanor to Vespasian. (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, III:383:19.)

³⁰¹ Yochanan ben Zakai's account is recorded in *b. Gittin* 55b-57b

³⁰² Josephus from a cave in Jotapata and Yochanan ben Zakai from Jerusalem in a coffin.

³⁰³ "In July of 69 C.E. by which time Nero had been dethroned and his two short-lived successors had met equally inglorious ends." (Smallwood, "Introduction," 11.)

³⁰⁴ Although it is difficult to establish that because Jewish warrior-identity exists within a text that this reflects a warrior psyche within the society, minimally it is evidence that the warrior psyche existed at least within one particular segment of the Jewish society.

warrior self-identity would not be bleached out easily for any reason, whether convenience, luxury, or even the necessity of survival.

Chapter Six- The Diaspora and Bar Kochba Revolts:

In the 60 years after the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), the warrior self-identity of the Jewish people was not only alive, but boiling over. Starting with a series of armed-revolts in the Diaspora, and ending with the harsh finality of Bar Kochba's revolt in Judaea, the Jewish warrior 'spirit' brought open war against Rome and in certain cases, their Gentile neighbors. The brutal Roman defeat of the Jews in Judaea can not be emphasized enough, as it is the pivotal historical event that led to, or forced, a major paradigm shift within the national Jewish psyche. With Bar Kochba's defeat at Betar (135 C.E.),³⁰⁵ Jews' self-identity as warrior was drastically shifted to one that was war-averse and assimilationist.

Up until this point, previous chapters of this thesis have centered on Jewish literature from the Second Temple Period;³⁰⁶ however, this chapter will stray from this formula in that it will center around the historical events of Jewish armed revolt rather than focus exclusively on any one piece of contemporary Jewish literature³⁰⁷ because, for various reasons which will be discussed in this chapter, such a singular work is not known to exist. In this way, this chapter is less formal coverage of specific literature than an 'interlude.' However, as this chapter will explain, the Jewish armed revolts that followed the destruction of the Second Temple, and the ultimate consequences at the hands of the Roman military machine were absolutely vital in the way that they affected the Jewish psyche, Judaism, and the Jewish people from that point forward. Thus, chapter six of this thesis might be regarded as a 'vital

³⁰⁵ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 122.

³⁰⁶ By definition, the events of this chapter happen after the Second Temple was destroyed, and thus fall outside of the scope of what is 'Second Temple.' Nonetheless, a contemporary Jewish source or piece of literature is lacking.

³⁰⁷ However, for lack of better options, this chapter will utilize later Jewish and non-Jewish sources to a certain degree.

interlude' which explains "the tensions between Jewish perceptions or ideologies of power and the political realities of Jewish life."³⁰⁸

However, Chapter Six: 'the Bar Kochba revolt,' is like the previous chapters in that it is less important for the purposes of this thesis to unravel what is 'true' and historically 'factual,' than it is to focus on how the events as they were recorded and understood by the Jewish people might have reflected and refracted Jewish self-identity as warrior. This chapter will look at the historical context, possible causes, initial success and ultimate defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt. Additionally, it will delve into Bar Kochba as a historic and literary figure. All of this helps 'shed light' on how Jews were viewed and viewed themselves as warrior at the time.

Finally, this chapter will examine how Rabbi Akiva's alleged allegiance with Bar Kochba's forces occurred, and how it was described by the Talmudic tradents after their stunning defeat. This section will show how the tradents were initially split in their support for Bar Kochba, but that after the revolt was quashed the rabbinic authority railed against him, his militarism, and any sort of messianic aspirations to be achieved through violence. In contrast to previous centuries, from this point on Jewish nationalism and Messianism was to be pursued non-violently through prayer and *mitzvot*, and specifically not through the lens of armed struggle.

Barely forty years after The Great Revolt, Jews throughout the Roman Empire rose up in armed rebellion. These revolts occurred in prominent Jewish communities in Libya,³⁰⁹ Egypt,³¹⁰ Cyprus,³¹¹ and Syria (Mesopotamia)³¹² at roughly the same time (115-117 C.E.)³¹³

³⁰⁸ Biale, *Power and Powerlessness*, ix.

³⁰⁹ Cyrene or 'Cyrnaica.'

³¹⁰ Alexandria.

³¹¹ Salamis.

and so these revolts together have been dubbed ‘The Diaspora Revolt.’ Although it is likely that each local conflict had specific local causes,³¹⁴ there is significant evidence to suggest that the Jewish warriors from each of these communities coordinated and cooperated with one another³¹⁵ toward a common goal and against a common enemy

The Diaspora Revolt erupted during the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan³¹⁶ in 115 C.E. while Trajan was occupied in Syria with war against Parthia.³¹⁷ “This spasmodic revolt started in AD 115 in Cyrnaica (Libya), where the Jews...fought against the local population so fiercely that eventually the Romans were compelled to intervene. At the same time, or shortly thereafter, the Jews of Egypt rose too; Cyprus followed as a battle scene, and so did Mesopotamia with a general revolt in 116.”³¹⁸ The causes for the various Diaspora Jewish uprisings are unknown, but the speculative consensus amongst various historians seems to be that likely the causes were an amalgamation of Jewish national “messianic yearnings”³¹⁹ and the “local factors of social, economical, political, and ideological competition...between Jews and Greeks.”³²⁰ Additionally, these four Jewish communities provided fertile ground for the surviving Judaeen veterans of the Great Revolt, and it stands to reason that they brought with them to these Diaspora communities not only their battle-field experience, but their philosophy³²¹ and leadership, which took root and spread.³²²

³¹² Antioch

³¹³ Schiffman, *From Text*, 172.

³¹⁴ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 17; Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 93.

³¹⁵ Sper, *The Future*, 56; Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 94.

³¹⁶ 98-117 C.E.

³¹⁷ Sper, *The Future*, 55.

³¹⁸ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 17.

³¹⁹ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 17.

³²⁰ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 93.

³²¹ Perhaps what Josephus refers to as the ‘fourth philosophy’ lionized by the Zealots.

³²² Sper, *The Future*, 56.

The Libyan uprising had its roots back in 73 C.E., when mass armed resistance ended with the deaths and confiscation of property of a large number of wealthy Jews.³²³ Now, two generations later, once again the Jews of Libya rose up against their Greek and Roman neighbors, but this time under the leadership of a certain Jewish ‘King Andreas.’³²⁴ According to Dio’s account,³²⁵ the Jews successfully attacked and destroyed local Cyrenean pagan temples, statues of gods, and centers of Greek civic life with shockingly violent and cruel behavior. After initial victory over local garrisons, the Jews tried to destroy the road between Cyrene and its port, Apollonia; in order to disrupt the anticipated Roman reinforcements set to arrive by sea

Within a few months, in October of 115 C.E., the Jews of Egypt also rose up against their non-Jewish neighbors in a widespread armed revolt that spread through large sections of the country. Like their Jewish brethren in Libya, they too targeted pagan temples and civic centers.³²⁶ This antagonism between the Egyptian Jews and their gentile neighbors went back at least to the third century B.C.E., but in recent generations violent exchanges along ethnic lines had grown both in frequency and intensity. Under the Emperor Claudius (41-54 CE) this longstanding feud between the Jews and Greeks in Alexandria had erupted into open

³²³ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 94.

³²⁴ According to Ben Zeev, (Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 94), the Roman historian Dio Cassius, (Ziphilinus 68:32.1) reports that this king’s name was “Andreas”, but according to the ancient historian Eusebius, his name was “Lukuas.” Ben Zeev explains this as “either two different persons or one person with two names, a common practice at the time.” This author thinks it likely the latter.

³²⁵ “The most important and extensive of the classical sources for the Second Revolt are the writings of *Dio Cassius*, the third-century historian, in his *Roman History*, although his passage dealing with our subject actually comes to us only in an abbreviated form through the hands of Ziphilinus, an eleventh-century monk...but Dio does not mention the leader of the Jews nor the fact that he had been successful; nor does he mention the duration of the war. In fact, even the cause of the revolt as described by Dio is contradicted by other historians. (Dio says that Jews could not tolerate foreign races settling in their city and foreign religious rights being planted there)” (Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 19.) As a source, although certainly imperfect, Peter Schafer in his summation of Bar-Kochba scholars’ work from the 2001 Princeton University conference titled, ‘Bar Kochba Reconsidered’ says: “Dio Cassius’ report has become the major trustworthy literary source of the uprising.” (Schafer, “Preface,” XX).

³²⁶ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 96.

fighting;³²⁷ and in October of the year 115 “armed attacks had been perpetrated by Greeks against Jews, the last of which may definitely be considered a direct cause of the Jewish uprising.”³²⁸ As the Jewish revolt in Egypt continued on, the lines were clearly drawn with the Egyptian Greeks reinforced by both the Roman military and the Egyptian peasants,³²⁹ while the Jews of Alexandria were reinforced by Jews from Syria³³⁰ and Libya. Specifically, “Eusebius states that the Jews of Libya acted in co-operation with the Jews of Egypt and specifically mentions a military alliance adding that at a certain stage the Jews of Libya passed into Egypt.”³³¹ Dio Cassius also reports³³² that having annihilated their pagan adversaries in Libya, the Libyan Jews marched east to support the Jews of Egypt in late 115 or early 116 C.E.³³³

At roughly the same time, the Jews of Cyprus, led by a man named Artemion, rose up against their pagan neighbors and destroyed the city of Salamis. The full extent of the loss of life is unclear, although from the records it is clear that the local gentile inhabitants of Cyprus were unable to contend with the armed Jewish forces that remained victorious until the Roman military legions under Marcus Turbo arrived to defeat them. “Dio states that in Cyprus ‘two hundred and forty thousand (gentiles) perished’ whereas Orosius writes that ‘all the Greek inhabitants of Salamis were killed’”³³⁴

In the Jewish uprisings of the Diaspora revolt, the last to begin was in Syria towards the end of 116 C.E. The details of the causes of this revolt and the resulting damages are unclear, but according to the sixth century chronicler Malalas, “thirty thousand Jews rushed

³²⁷ Sper, *The Future*, 56; quoting the 6th century chronicler Malalas.

³²⁸ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 96.

³²⁹ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 96.

³³⁰ Sper, *The Future*, 56.

³³¹ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 94.

³³² Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Book LXVIII: 32:2.

³³³ Sper, *The Future*, 57.

³³⁴ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 96.

up from Tiberius to support their brethren in Antioch.”³³⁵ What is clear from Roman records is that the Jewish Revolt in Syria was effective enough so that Trajan was forced to call up one of his best generals, Lusius Quietus, to quell the Jewish revolt.

The Roman reaction to the Diaspora Revolt was forceful and thorough. It is clear that they took the Jewish uprisings very seriously as they named the revolt a ‘*tumultus*’ indicating they viewed it as an emergency graver than war.³³⁶ In response, Trajan sent in legions of land and sea forces,³³⁷ including cavalry,³³⁸ led by top generals on the side of the Greeks. Marco Turbo, one of Trajan’s best, was in command of the Libyan, Egyptian and Cypriot fronts. He arrived in Libya and crushed the Jewish uprising before the autumn of 117.³³⁹

The harsh and thorough character of Turbo’s campaign against these Jewish revolts is described by Appian,³⁴⁰ who states that in his day, Trajan ‘exterminated’ the Jewish race in Egypt.”³⁴¹ Additionally, the Jerusalem Talmud describes the destruction of the great synagogue of Alexandrian, and the subsequent despair of the Egyptian Jewry.³⁴²

תני אמר רבי יודה כל שלא ראה דיפלי איסטב' של אכסנדריאה לא ראה כבוד ישר'
מימיו כמין בסילקי גדולה היה ואסטיו לפנים מסטיו היתה פעמים היו בה כפלים
כיוצאי מצרים ושבעים קתידראות של זהב היו שם מקובעות אבנים טובות
ומרגליות כנגד שבעים זקינים וכל אחת ואחת היתה עומדת בעשרים וחמש ריבוא
דינרי...ומי החריבה טרוגיינוס הרשע.

It was taught that R. Judah said, ‘Whoever has never seen the double-colonnade (the basilica-synagogue) of Alexandria has never seen

³³⁵ Alon, *The Jews* (trans. G. Levi), 363.

³³⁶ Sper, *The Future*, 56.

³³⁷ “The forces that accompanied Marcus Turbo likely were the *legio XXII Deiotariana* and the *legio III Cyrenaica*, the *coheri I Ulpia Afronum equitus* and the *coheri I Augusta praetorian Luistanorum equitata*, the latter of which suffered heavy losses in Egypt” during the early summer of 117. (Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 97.)

³³⁸ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 97.

³³⁹ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 97.

³⁴⁰ c. 95-165 CE.

³⁴¹ Ben Zeev, “The Uprising,” 97.

³⁴² *j. Sukkah*, 5:1,55b.

Israel's glory in his entire life. It was a kind of large basilica, with one colonnade inside another. Sometimes there were twice as many people there as those who went forth from Egypt. Now there were seventy-one golden thrones set up there, one for each of the seventy-one elders, each one worth twenty-five talents of gold ...and who destroyed it all? It was the evil Trajan.³⁴³

What is certain is that after Turbo's sublimation of the Jewish revolts in Egypt and Libya in 117 C.E., these two communities "almost disappear from the sources. In Egypt, the land that had belonged to the Jews was confiscated by the Roman government, and a consequence of the revolt may have been the abolition of the Jewish court in Alexandria."³⁴⁴

Similarly in Cyprus, after Turbo's Roman military machine subdued the Jewish rebellion, scholars have found no evidence of a Jewish presence on the island until the fourth century, which may give serious credence to Dio's assertion³⁴⁵ that after the revolt "no Jew may set foot on that island, and even if one of them is driven upon the shores by a storm he is put to death."³⁴⁶

To deal with the Jewish uprising in Syria,³⁴⁷ Trajan sent his general Lucius Quietus, who was ferocious in putting down the Mesopotamian revolt.³⁴⁸ As a reward for his leadership, Trajan rewarded Quietus with the governorship of Palestine. However, it seems as though quashing the Jewish revolt of Syria was not as quick or clean as they would have liked, for when Hadrian³⁴⁹ became emperor in 117 C.E. he had to spend his first year mopping up the last of the Syrian Jewish rebels.³⁵⁰

³⁴³ Neusner, tr. *The Talmud of the Land of Israel, Sukkah*, 117.

³⁴⁴ Ben Zeev, "The Uprising," 97.

³⁴⁵ Dio, *Roman History*, book 68.32.3.

³⁴⁶ Ben Zeev, "The Uprising," 97.

³⁴⁷ Syria is sometimes referred to as 'Mesopotamia.'

³⁴⁸ Thus, the Diaspora Revolt is often referred to as 'the war of Quietus' in Rabbinic texts.

³⁴⁹ 76-138 C.E.

³⁵⁰ Schiffman, *From Text*, 172.

It is a fact that four Jewish communities (Libya, Egypt, Cyprus, Syria) engage in armed revolt at roughly the same time (115-117). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of contemporary sources so we may never know what really happened. However, minimally, this fact would indicate that they were mutually influenced and encouraged by one another. This author would posit that from the timing and reports of Jewish troops aiding other Jewish communities, it is reasonable to assert that it is likely that there was a degree of military coordination. This would indicate that common bonds, causes, enemies and goals were shared amongst the Diaspora Jewish communities. Even more so, the fact that four Jewish communities rose in armed revolt against their gentile neighbors and further engaged in war, regardless of success, against the Roman military strongly points to a very real Jewish self-identity as warrior. These Jews not only thought of themselves as warriors, but were confident enough in that identity to engage in coordinated violence against their gentile neighbor. Surely the community leaders understood that armed revolt against the local governments would result in eventual confrontation with the Roman military.

This author would suggest that these Diaspora Jewish communities were very aware of the eventuality, and were prepared for it. Perhaps they thought that their example would empower other revolts, Jewish and non-Jewish, throughout the Roman empire which in turn would help their cause and ultimate success. After all, in some ways this was the case with the original Libyan Jewish revolt's initial success empowering similar action in Egypt, Cyprus and Syria. This 'domino effect' would explain the Roman reaction of dubbing the Diaspora Revolt as '*tumultus*' and sending seasoned veterans like Turbo and Quietus with crack Roman troops.

These Jews were more than ‘ready’ to engage, they engaged! To emphasize the point, think about the Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora since 117 C.E, and even the Diaspora communities throughout the world today. Can we even imagine the Jews of France, or Argentina, or America ever having the ‘readiness,’ much less the ‘resolve,’ to rise up in a coordinated armed revolt no matter what their grievances? Even if we can imagine such a situation, history provides us with the resounding answer of ‘no;’ and the primary reason is that unlike the Jews of 115 C.E., Diaspora Jews ever after have not thought of themselves as warriors. Of course, the eras hold tremendous differences in social realities, but those Jews of 115 C.E. were closer to the warrior mentality of the Great Revolt, the pride of the Hasmonean dynasty, the Maccabean victories, and the surfeit of Jewish literature of the Second Temple Period which reflected and reinforced the Jewish self-identity as warrior. But even as the Diaspora Revolt showed Jews the highs of initial military success and the lows of military defeat, both in terms of Jewish life and punitive consequences, the Diaspora Revolt was perhaps merely a warm-up for the incredible Jewish uprising, and then ultimate stunning defeat of Bar Kochba at the hands of the Romans only 15 years later.

The Bar Kochba Revolt, named for its leader, began in the summer of 132 C.E and ended in the summer of 135 C.E.³⁵¹ This Jewish revolt against the Romans in Judaea was the apex and final Jewish uprising against Roman rule in Palestine,³⁵² after which the Jews would not engage in armed struggle for an independent homeland for almost two millennia.³⁵³ For various reasons that will be detailed later in this chapter, the Jews under Bar Kochba were initially very successful defeating first the local Judaeian garrisons and then the Syrian legions. Ultimately, Hadrian was forced to deal with Judaea by sending in multiple legions

³⁵¹ Eshel, “The Dates,” in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 112, 122.

³⁵² Eshel, “The Dates,” in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 105.

³⁵³ Book, “Jewish Journeys,” 94.

and his top general, Julius Severus, all the way from Britain. Even against these overwhelming forces, the Judaeans still managed to inflict huge losses upon the Romans. The Bar Kochba revolt ended in a dramatic fashion with the Jews taking their last stand at the Judaeans fortress of Betar. Using similar techniques as they had in breaching Massada, the Romans sacked Betar and crushed the Jewish rebellion with a ferocity that echoed still in Jewish literature for hundreds of years. Once the Jewish fighting forces were destroyed, the emperor Hadrian³⁵⁴ enacted vicious anti-Jewish legislation designed both to punish the Jews, and to keep the Roman Empire from having to spend money or send troops against the warrior Jews ever again.

One of the most interesting and surprising things about the Bar Kochba war was the tremendously high stakes for both the Jews and the Romans. Readings of the Bar Kochba revolt range from minimalist to maximalist. The minimalist view is that since Rome was spread thin over a large empire, and the Parthians posturing on the eastern borders were poised to invade at the first sign of Roman weakness, the Jewish revolt had to be crushed quickly and harshly.³⁵⁵ In terms of geography, although Judaea was small, it cut the Roman Empire in two; thus losing it would seriously impair Roman contiguity. Hadrian therefore had no choice but to keep Judaea from revolution at all costs.³⁵⁶ Additionally, Rome feared the ‘domino effect’ that a successful revolt (revolution) might have on the rest of the subjugated peoples within the Roman Empire. In other words, failure to quell the Jewish revolt in Judaea would mean more than losing one province, but rather would likely mean that Rome would have to fight on multiple fronts throughout their empire. Thus, the overwhelming force employed by Hadrian, plus the punitive measures against the Judaeans

³⁵⁴ Hadrian reigned 117-138 C.E.

³⁵⁵ Book, “Jewish Journeys,” 96.

³⁵⁶ Sper, *The Future*, 94.

Jews following their defeat were designed not to only deal with the “Jewish problem,” but also to serve as an example for any other would-be revolutionists throughout the Roman empire.

The maximalist view is that the Romans dealt with the Jews of Judaea not as a common uprising, but as a potential rival for world power:

To better understand the causes of this great struggle it is necessary to know that Rome was especially harsh with nations viewed as potential rivals for world power specifically: Greece, Carthage and Judaea. Only these nations had, in Roman eyes, the demographic weight, technical sophistication, military history, and culture capable of rivaling that of Rome in the ancient western world.

For over a century Rome fought a series of wars against Carthage, known as the Punic wars, before she was finally able to establish mastery over the western Mediterranean. Rome did not merely subjugate Carthage as she would a smaller state. In 146 B.C.E Rome destroyed Carthage, mother city of her rival, leaving not one stone standing, and then spread salt on the ground where the city had stood, turning it into a desert. At this point, Carthage disappears from history.³⁵⁷ (Thus) the Roman treatment ...of Judaea clearly demonstrates that this policy did not reflect any particular Roman antipathy towards Judaism as has often been assumed, nor was it a response to any particular behavior on the part of the Jews. Rather, this was standard Roman imperial policy for dealing with a potential rival for world power, a policy different from that applied to smaller states with less potential.³⁵⁸

Whether the revolt is closer to the maximalist or minimalist view in terms of its importance to the Roman Empire, part of what makes the Bar Kochba revolt so hard to analyze and to understand is the conspicuous dearth of primary sources. The Bar Kochba Revolt lacked a Josephus Flavius to describe the events of the war, and thus, despite its tremendous importance, very little is known of it.³⁵⁹ Case in point is that so little is known

³⁵⁷ Sper, *The Future*, 64-65.

³⁵⁸ Sper, *The Future*, 66.

³⁵⁹ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 18.

about the war that even the very name of the leader of the revolt, Bar Kochba, could not be ascertained until the Yadin discoveries in the 1950's:

Its details remain shrouded in mystery. With no historical treatise to provide a systematic account of the revolt and no lost work (Roman or Jewish) describing it, any scholarly attempt to reconstruct its course inevitably confronts the stumbling block of reliance on sources representing varying objectives, reliability and dates, leaving many seminal issues unresolved. Continuing to be debated are the revolt's direct causes, the geographical extent of Bar Kochba's regime and whether it included Jerusalem, and the magnitude of the Roman reaction.³⁶⁰

More importantly, as it relates to this thesis, is the theory that the conspicuous dearth of primary sources, or even secondary literature (Jewish or Roman) can only be explained as deliberate:

Both sides in the conflict were not particularly interested in recording the details of the war for posterity. The Romans did not like to harp on defeat. Even though they ultimately achieved domination over the Jewish rebels through sheer force of numbers, the cost was almost debilitatingly high. The Jewish sages, on the other hand, did not want to encourage further suicidal attacks against the military might of Rome, fearing that the results might prove catastrophic for the very survival of Judaism.³⁶¹

Amazingly, in large part due to a lack of sources, scholars today still have a very hard time coming to consensus with any degree of confidence the causes of the Bar Kochba rebellion. In his summary of the 2003 Princeton University conclave titled, 'Bar Kochba Reconsidered,' which was attended by most of the leading world historians on the subject of the Bar Kochba revolt, chairman Peter Schafer writes:

We are still far from a scholarly consensus regarding most of the questions related to the Bar Kochba Revolt³⁶²...(although) the revolt appears now as the result of a long-lasting anti-Jewish policy on the

³⁶⁰ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 105.

³⁶¹ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 100.

³⁶² Schafer, "Preface," VIII.

Roman side, and of prolonged and well-planned preparations on the Jewish side.³⁶³

This author would opine that practically the only thing that scholars do agree on is that the Bar Kochba revolt occurred. The list of possible contributing factors briefly described includes:

...administrative changes in Judaea following the First Revolt of 66-70; the unrest caused by the sizable Roman military presence in Judaea; a possible economic decline- a shift from landowning to sharecropping; the nationalistic agitation provoked by Jewish uprisings in Egypt, Cyrenaica, and Libya during the Trajanic Revolt (115-117) and Trajan's war ("the War of Quietus") against the Jews of Mesopotamia (116-117). For proximate causes, the sparse historical evidence focuses inconclusively on the foundation of the pagan city of Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem (Cassius Dio 69.12,1-2) or on Hadrian's ban on circumcision³⁶⁴ (Historia Augusta, Vita Hadriani 14.2). Although scholars are divided about these factors weight and historicity, the prevailing consensus ascribes a role to both. One must also note the part played by the construction of a temple to Jupiter on the Temple Mount.³⁶⁵ Reminiscent of the introduction of a statue of Zeus to the Temple in 167 BCE that had sparked the Hasmonean revolt, the Jews evidently believed they could once again successfully rid the Temple Mount of this unwanted idolatrous presence.³⁶⁶

"As soon as Hadrian, who had resided in the area of Judaea for a few years, left, the Jews broke out into open revolt with remarkable initial successes."³⁶⁷ The leader of the Judaeans

³⁶³ Schafer, "Preface," XX.

³⁶⁴ In addition to his survey of Greek and Latin sources as well as through Talmudic literature (Mishna Shabbat 19:1, Tosefta Shabbat 15:9, and Mishna Avot 3:11), Aharon Oppenheimer ((Oppenheimer "The ban," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 69.) concludes that "our reconsideration thus leads us to the conclusion that there is no source either in Greek and Latin, or in the Talmudic literature, from which it is possible to conclude that the ban on circumcision preceded the Bar Kochba revolt," and thus circumcision has no definitive causal connection with the causes of the revolt.

³⁶⁵ "After Trajan came Hadrian (117 CE) whose hyper-tolerant philosophy for dealing with other religions was initially almost contrary to his predecessor's. Perhaps Hadrian was reacting to a changing religio-political landscape, as it is estimated that up to 10% of the Roman Empire was Jewish, mostly via high conversion rates, by the end of the first century CE. Since such a sizable percentage of his Empire was Jewish, Hadrian sought to gain favor with them by rebuilding The Temple in Jerusalem; however, for some reason, at some point, Hadrian changed his mind. When the Jews heard that the Temple was not to be rebuilt, they once again began to prepare for revolt." (Schiffman, *From Text*, 171.)

³⁶⁶ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 106.

³⁶⁷ Book, "Jewish Journeys," 95.

revolt we know now to be a man named Simeon bar Kosiba,³⁶⁸ who was dubbed Bar Kochba in his own day by his followers who believed in his Messianic nature. Like the rest of the revolt, little is known about Bar Kochba except through legend and secondary sources written hundreds of years after his death. But from conservative speculation about his vital leadership in the revolt, Talmudic and Midrashic writing, and 20th century archeological discovery, the contemporary historian does have some indication about Bar Kochba's role and character.

An amalgamation of a four factors separated the Bar Kochba revolt from the earlier revolts of the Great Revolt and the Diaspora revolt: leadership, Jewish numbers, veteran warriors, and the Land. The earlier revolts had some, but not all of these factors. Unlike the Great Revolt where Jewish factional infighting wreaked havoc amongst the ranks of Jewish warriors to the benefit of the Roman enemy, Bar Kochba united the Jewish populace³⁶⁹ and unified the Jewish fighting forces of Judaea, as can be inferred by his title 'Nasi,' and in turn acted as a beacon to Jewish warriors throughout the Roman Empire. An important constituency of those attracted to Bar Kochba's proverbial rising star was the surviving

³⁶⁸ "The name Bar-Kochba, which in Hebrew and Aramaic literally means 'son of a star' obviously referring to his Messianic nature- was preserved only in the sources of the early Church Fathers...Scores of scholars have argued and debated this point for many years. One school of thought believed that his real name had indeed been Bar-Kochba (perhaps after his birthplace) but was later, when his mission failed, altered, 'pun-fashion,' to mean 'the deceiver.' Others argue just the reverse: that his real name had been bar-Koziba- again after his birthplace or perhaps his father's name- later to be changed by his followers and ardent believers in his Messianic mission into Bar-Kochba: 'son of a star.' " (Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 18.) "In January 1952, de Vaux and Harding brought from Kando and from the Bedouins of the Ta'amireh tribe some more documents, including another that began similarly: 'From Shimeon ben Kosiba to Yeshua ben Galgoula and the people of the fort, Shalom.' It was obvious that they belonged to the Bar-Kochba period; indeed, they revealed for the first time his true name: Shimeon ben (or bar) Kosiba. We could now understand the riddle of his name." (Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 127.)

³⁶⁹ Scholars debate the extent of Bar Kochba's unification of the Judaeian populace. The Consensus seems to be that certainly the unification was less than total, but in many areas the percentage was likely quite large. Although we must figure that a percentage of the population ideologically endorsed the revolt, it is certain that at least some percentage of those who were 'on board' with Bar Kochba were forced to 'support' him by threat of force and fear of repercussion. (Mor "The Geographical Scope," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.)

veterans of the Diaspora revolt; those men who were accustomed to war and with an ideology of revolution swelled the military ranks. To this effect, rabbinic literature cites figures between 150,000 and 250,000 school children in Betar during its siege.³⁷⁰ Although the numbers might be exaggerated, the idea that there were many, many children of Jewish warriors is effectively conveyed.³⁷¹ Bavli Gittin 58a describes:

ארבע מאות בתי כנסיות היו בכרך ביתר, ובכל אחת ואחת היו בה ארבע מאות מלמדי תינוקות, וכל אחד ואחד היו לפניו ארבע מאות תינוקות של בית רבן, וכשהיה אויב נכנס לשם היו דוקרין אותן בחוטרין, וכשגבר אויב ולכדום, כרכום בספריהם והציתום באש.

There were four hundred synagogues in the city of Bethar, and in every one were four hundred teachers of children, and each one had under him four hundred pupils, and when the enemy entered there they pierced them with their staves, and when the enemy prevailed and captured them, they wrapped them in their scrolls and burnt them with fire.

The last factor in the amalgamated mix is that Bar Kochba's revolt, unlike the Diaspora revolt, was fought to expel the Romans from Judaea; the land which the Jews believed was theirs as bequeathed by God since biblical times. This was the same land from which the Maccabees, the ideological forefathers of Bar Kochba's revolt, had expelled their Greek occupiers in 164 B.C.E – a land in which they knew how to wage guerilla warfare, and where the population would likely ideologically be sympathetic to the nationalistic and messianistic goals. This was the land which had held both sacrificial Temples, and the land which the biblical prophets promised the Jews would reclaim when they were once again worthy. Reclaiming Judaea³⁷² was a beacon, a rallying cry, and a real symbol to call on Jews to fight.

³⁷⁰ b. *Gittin* 58a with parallels in *j. Taanit* IV:69a; *Lamentations Rabbah* 2:4-5.

³⁷¹ Sper, *The Future*, 99.

³⁷² "Some likelihood also exists that Ben Kosiba gained hegemony over a small part of Transjordan." (Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 113.)

Together, the four factors of leadership, Jewish numbers, veteran warriors, and the Land – provided the Jewish warriors advantages that they previously had lacked.

Like the Maccabees, Bar Kochba’s warriors used guerilla tactics in the Judaeen hills which granted them military advantages over the Roman army:

It is possible that in this stage of the revolt the local Roman command did not take the Jewish rebels seriously. Likewise, the garrison of Judaea and the forces that joined to support it continued to fight according to their traditional techniques without adjusting to the terrain, or to the tactics used by the rebels. At this time the Romans suffered heavy losses, and some of the senior commanders like the governor of Judaea, Tineius Refus, and the governors of the neighboring provinces, Publicius Marcellus and Haterius Nepos, probably participated in the fighting in Judaea.³⁷³

In response, Hadrian sent two of the legions stationed in Syria to subdue the revolt, but they too were decimated and repulsed by Bar Kochba. Hadrian then ordered legions from Egypt’s, including the province’s best, Legion XXII Deiotariniana (the 22nd Legion) containing 15,000 soldiers, but the Jewish rebels were ready for them and literally annihilated them. This was the first time in Roman history that an entire legion was destroyed to such an extent that it literally disappeared from the Roman military records.³⁷⁴

In the first phase the rebels fought a guerilla war in limited areas in the Judaeen Mountains, but these were familiar territories, which granted them military advantages over the Roman army. It is possible that in this stage of the revolt the local Roman command did not take the Jewish rebels seriously. Likewise, the garrison of Judaea and the forces that joined to support it continued to fight according to their traditional techniques without adjusting to the terrain, or to the tactics used by the rebels. At this time the Romans suffered heavy losses, and some of the senior commanders like the governor of Judaea, Tineius Refus, and the governors of the neighboring provinces, Publicius Marcellus and Haterius Nepos, probably participated in the fighting in Judaea.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Mor “The Geographical Scope,” in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.

³⁷⁴ Book (Book, “Jewish Journeys,” 95.) summarizes the findings of L.J.F. Keppie, “The History and Disappearance of the Legion XXII Deiotariana,” *Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel*, Ed. A. Kasher, U. Rappaport and G. Fuks, (Tad ben Tzvi: Jerusalem, 1990.)

³⁷⁵ Mor “The Geographical Scope,” in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.

In these early battles the Romans suffered huge losses. So much so that when Hadrian wrote to the Senate during the revolt he deliberately omitted using the customary opening phrase traditionally invoked by an emperor while on campaign: “If you and you children are in health, it is well; I and the legions are in good health,” because the Roman troops had sustained such devastating losses against the Jewish rebels.³⁷⁶ His troops were far from ‘being in good health,’ and the campaign to suppress the Jews of Judaea was not at all going well.

Bar Kochba’s guerilla warfare was buttressed with iron military discipline which was vital to keep order within the ranks and rebellion, both for internal cohesion as well as against superior Roman forces in battle. An example that has been preserved through the Jerusalem Talmud and Midrash Lamentations,³⁷⁷ was Bar Kochba’s practice to mark his soldiers as a means of identification to his army from which there could be no return, and to test their commitment to the cause, by demanding the price of a finger.³⁷⁸

Like the zealous Maccabees, Bar Kochba and his troops strictly observed Jewish law.

³⁷⁶ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 69:12-14: “Many Romans, moreover, perished in this war. Therefore, Hadrian, in writing to the Senate, did not employ the opening phrase commonly affected by the emperors: ‘If you and you children are in health, it is well: The legions and I are in good health.’”

³⁷⁷ “As a source Midrash Lamentations is problematic. Most of it was likely written in the 4th century C.E., but additions were added into the 8th century C.E.. It is also very likely that there are oral traditions reflective of events and material that pre-date the 4th century C.E. by centuries contained within its corpus. The problem is that it is very difficult to accurately discern what specific material is earlier or later within Lamentations Rabbah.” (Norman Cohen, *Interview*, 1/17/08) The Encyclopaedia Judaica adds: “Except for some later additions, the entire Midrash, including the proems, is a compilation redacted by a single redactor. No sage later than the fourth century C.E. is mentioned in it. The list of kingdoms that subjected the Jewish people concludes with “Edom Seir,” i.e., Rome and Byzantium (1:14)...Lamentations Rabbah is the earliest source that gives a list of the Ten Martyrs of the Hadrianic persecutions (2:2)” (Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. *Lamentations Rabbah*.)

³⁷⁸ *j. ta’anit* 4:8; also paralleled in Midrash Lamentations, “There sages used to tell him: ‘how long will you continue to make the men of Israel blemished? When he retorted: ‘How else shall they be tested? They replied, ‘let anyone who cannot uproot a cedar from Lebanon’³⁷⁸ be refused enrolment in your army.”

³⁷⁹Although Bar Kochba presents...as someone who is concerned about religious precepts, it is not the Rabbinic Halakhah that motivates him but rather the law as preserved in the earlier, pre-70 traditions. As the Nasi ("Prince") he is much closer to the Maccabees, the Qumran community, and the Zealots than to the Rabbis. This image of Bar Kochba, as a hero reviving the Maccabean ideals, fits well the priestly connotations of his movement.³⁸⁰

Part of Bar Kochba's success was that the Jews were not alone in the fight, but in accordance with Rome's nightmare scenario of a domino effect, were joined by regional gentile allies. One of those allies was the Nabataeans of Arabia, about whom one historian posits:

The participation of the Nabataeans in the revolt must be viewed in the light of Cassius Dio's statement that 'many outside nations, too, were joining them (the Jews) through eagerness for gain.'...(Cotton) accepts the possibility that the 'eagerness for gain' could refer to Nabataean mercenaries who joined Bar Kochba in their greed for gain.³⁸¹

Like the Maccabean leaders (Chapter 2), Bar Kochba presents historically and through Jewish literature as a quintessential hero, albeit tempered with a reality that is absent from I Maccabees. It seems as though he was charismatic enough to have unified disparate Jewish factions into a unified fighting force; to have been a savvy military general who utilized intimate knowledge of the land to decimate superior enemy forces through guerilla tactics; to have forged foreign alliances against a common enemy; to have demanded unwavering commitment from his troops; to have used both ideology and force to recruit reinforcements and maintain discipline; to have been zealous in his religious observance; and to have led his people in a battle to purge the Jewish land from foreign powers. The early Jewish victories

³⁷⁹ As seen in the two letters from Bar Kochba to a regional commander that Yadin discovered regarding the Four Species necessary to observe Sukkot (Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 128.), this has been documented through the discovery of many letters, economic documents, and other discoveries from the Judean desert caves (Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Shafer), 121.)

³⁸⁰ Shafer, "Preface," VIII.

³⁸¹ Shafer, "Preface," XIII referring Cotton, *The Bar Kochba Revolt*(ed. Shafer), 143-147, 152.

empowered his revolt, and the promise of a victory similar to that of the Maccabees must have been virtually tangible... until Rome, the most powerful army in the entire world, finally rallied and turned its full military might towards Judaea.

The Roman reaction to the Jewish revolt in Judaea was brutal and thorough. After the Roman troops from Syria and Egypt were stymied or destroyed, the Emperor Hadrian ordered in his best general, Sextus Julius Severus,³⁸² from Britannia to quell Bar Kochba's revolt. Severus brought with him overwhelming force, Rome's strongest six legions plus various auxiliary troops from another five.³⁸³ All told, Severus' army numbered almost a quarter of a million seasoned troops ordered to quell the Jewish forces which are estimated to be no more than 20,000.³⁸⁴

Upon Julius Severus' arrival in Judaea, he adjusted the Roman tactics to meet those of the Jewish rebels. Using the vast numbers of his soldiers, he adopted guerilla tactics, divided his soldiers into small units and defeated the rebels using a 'scorched earth' policy,³⁸⁵ forcing part of them to fortify and take refuge in Bethar while others found shelter in the caves of the region.³⁸⁶

The last of the Jewish rebels retreated to the fortress of Betar, which fell in the summer of 135 C.E.

Betar was Bar Kochba's greatest stronghold and last line of defense, and so it was buttressed against siege by high walls, an ample supply of food and arms, and a fresh spring supplying water. Not only was Betar Bar Kochba's military base from which all war

³⁸² Mor "The Geographical Scope," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.

³⁸³ "The available evidence indicates that six legions (II, III, VI, X, XII, XXII) participated in their entirety and another four or five were partially represented." (Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 123.)

³⁸⁴ Book, *The Bar Kochba Revolt*, 96.

³⁸⁵ "Although Dio's figure of 985 as the number of villages destroyed during the war seems hyperbolic, all Judaeian villages, without exception, excavated thus far were razed following the Bar Kochba Revolt. This evidence supports the total regional destruction following the war." (Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 125.)

³⁸⁶ Mor "The Geographical Scope," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 130.

operations emanated, but also where the families of Bar Kochba's Jewish warriors resided.³⁸⁷

Like Massada, the fortress of Betar stood elevated atop a steep mountain rising 150 meters above its valley, its height and easily defended walls effectively neutralizing far superior enemy numbers.³⁸⁸

As at Massada, the Romans employed almost exactly the same siege complex as the Tenth Legion did in 74 C.E. (Chapter Five). Using the same engineering approach, the Romans built a 4-km-long dike, which soon eliminated Betar's advantage of altitude.³⁸⁹ Rabbinic literature tells that many Jewish soldiers were killed trying to defend against, and pull down, the Roman dike. After all, it is very likely that they knew of Massada and that when the ramp was finally complete, their fate and that of their families would be sealed.³⁹⁰

שוב מעשה בששים בני אדם שירדו לכרקום ביתר ולא עלה אחד מהם

Sixty men went down to the dike at Betar and not a single one of them came back...

However, the Jewish efforts to disrupt the siege ramp ultimately was for naught, as its completion allowed for the Roman troops to storm Betar's walls en masse, overwhelm the Jewish warriors, and enslave the women and children to the last person.

With the fall of Betar, signaling the end of Bar Kochba's revolt, the Romans celebrated in a manner, and to a degree, rarely seen in Roman history. "Not only in Rome was victory celebrated. Three commanders were awarded the *ornamenta triumphalia* for their part in putting down the Bar Kochba revolt: Sex. Iulius Severus, governor of Judaea, C. Quinctius Certus Publicius Marcellus, governor of Syria, and T. Haterius Nepos, governor of Arabia. It must not be overlooked that in no other war waged by Rome, since the Augustan principate, were so many

³⁸⁷ Talmud, *Gittin* 58a, *Lamentations Rabbah* 2:4-5.

³⁸⁸ Chaim Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 241.

³⁸⁹ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 122.

³⁹⁰ *Tos. Yev.* 14.8.

senators awarded the highest marks of honour available to those belonging to their class.³⁹¹

In addition to high honors awarded to key military leadership in putting down the Jewish revolt, the Romans erected a grandiose triumphal arch to immortalize the Roman victory, and to recognize the tremendous amount of Roman blood spilled towards this goal:

The triumphal arch with its remaining inscription was built in the context of the Bar Kochba Revolt, and not during Hadrian's visit to the province around 130 CE; it was erected by order of the Roman Senate, and not by one of the two legions serving in Judaea at the time of the visit; and it commemorates a decisive victory towards the conclusion of the revolt.³⁹²

The tremendous measures that the Romans took to quell the revolt, including the vast number of soldiers they utilized and the superior generals they resourced; their celebration of the final victory by awarding the ultimate military awards and building a triumphal arch strongly suggests that the Romans perceived the Judaeen revolt as a genuine threat to their empire.³⁹³ However, although Roman victory over the Jewish revolt in Judaea was itself an achievement in the short-term, Hadrian realized that suppressing yet another Jewish rebellion was 'treating the symptom', but not at all addressing the problem itself. Hadrian realized that Bar Kochba's efforts were just the latest attempt by a warrior-people who, as recent history had shown them, could not be placated by normal Roman policy. A people who had the viewed themselves as warriors, and likely would rise again thus costing Rome money, time and lives; not to speak of the risk that such a tenaciously bellicose people might cause to the empire itself if their next attempt was more successful. For Hadrian, long-term measures were needed to insure that the Jews never again would rise up in armed struggle against Rome.

³⁹¹ Eck, "Hadrian," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 166.

³⁹² Shafer, "Preface," XIII, referring to Eck, "Hadrian," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 161-162.

³⁹³ Eshel, "The Dates," in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 123.

The practical realities of 60 years of Jewish revolt against Roman rule, both in the Diaspora and in Judaea, were staggering. The year 135 C.E. was the culmination of three generations of Jewish men indoctrinated to war, with many thousands of them killed in battle. It is a wonder that there were any fighting age Jewish men left to repopulate any of the Jewish communities that had risen up, and failed, against Roman military might. Severus' strategy of destroying all Jewish villages and outposts where they stood meant that Jewish civilization in Judaea had been razed to the ground. Once the war was over, Hadrian decreed that Jews were forbidden to live in Jerusalem at all.³⁹⁴ Upon pain of death, they were also forbidden from even visiting, except on the 9th of Av, a date which tradition attaches to the date of Betar's fall, as well as to other major historical events that commemorate Jewish military defeat at the hands of foreign forces. In allowing Jews to visit their celebrated homeland only on the annual date when they had been absolutely defeated minimally served as a reminder to those who might think about again taking on Rome: and maximally was Hadrian's way of 'thumbing his nose,' or 'salting the wounds,' of those who had caused so much trouble and bloodshed again and again against Roman dominance. Additionally, as a practical consequence of Jewish defeat in Bar Kochba's war, many thousands of Jews were carried out of Judaea in shackles, likely removed from Jewish history never to be heard from again.³⁹⁵

In order to 'salt the soil' of Jewish military aspiration, and in an effort to attack the very existence of Jewish identity, Hadrian decreed 19 anti-Jewish edicts, "the rationale behind these repressive decrees was to forbid the public gathering of Jews and the observance of

³⁹⁴ Schafer, "Preface," XII.

³⁹⁵ Littman, *A Concise History of the Jewish People*, 97.

religious practices integral to Judaism. The punishment for anyone caught in violation of these decrees was severe.”³⁹⁶

An additional more lasting punitive measure taken by the Romans involved expunging Judaea from the provincial name, changing it from Provincia Judaea to Provincia Syria Palestina. Although such name changes occurred elsewhere, never before or after was a nation’s name expunged as the result of rebellion. Following the appalling failure of the Bar Kochba Revolt, the Jews made no further attempts to achieve national independence.³⁹⁷

This exceptional form of punishment had never been inflicted on any other people in the entire history of the Roman empire.”³⁹⁸ However, after Hadrian’s death³⁹⁹ and with the accession of the emperor Antoninus Pius,⁴⁰⁰ perhaps in an effort to assuage the Jewish population elsewhere in the Roman empire, virtually all of Hadrian’s decrees were rescinded.”⁴⁰¹

Whatever Antoninus’ motives, the effect of three generations of Jewish revolt and brutal defeat took its toll and resulted in a marked change in Jewish leadership, and the populace’s acceptance of accommodationism in place of military action. Perhaps this trend was the only practical response to 60 years of Jewish military failure and perhaps it was easier to push this new agenda since it is fair to assume that most of the militants were dead. What is clear is that Jews, who had a long history of identifying as a military people comfortable waging war, did not do so again for almost two millennia.

The question of the existence, or degree, of Tannaitic support for Bar Kochba and his revolt is an interesting one, and worth pursuing despite an absence of reliable sources on the

³⁹⁶ Book, “Jewish Journeys,” 98.

³⁹⁷ Eshel, “The Dates,” in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 126.

³⁹⁸ Eck, “Hadrian,” in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 168.

³⁹⁹ 138 C.E

⁴⁰⁰ b.86 C.E-d.161C.E. Pius ruled from 138 to 161C.E.

⁴⁰¹ Schiffman, *From Text*, 17.

subject. According to Jewish sources, Bar Kochba himself was present, and fell, at Betar. Even as the ramp was being built, Midrash Lamentations recounts how Bar Kochba brutally dealt with dissension in the ranks, and with plots to fraternize with the Roman soldiers. For example, the Midrash explains that Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'in was with Bar Kochba at Betar during the last siege of the revolt, but Bar Kochba suspected him of betraying the secrets of Bethar to the Romans. Upon hearing that Rabbi Eleazar was betraying the Jewish warriors, he 'kicked him with his foot and killed him'.⁴⁰² This account from Midrash Lamentations is interesting because it professes three important things. First, that Tannaim were involved in the revolt to such a degree that at least one, R' Eleazar of Modi'in, was in the fort as the Romans were building their ramp. Second, that there was a possibility of this Tanna having betrayed, or planned on betraying, the Betar defenses. It is important to emphasize that Bar Kochba is portrayed as directly killing a Tanna by kicking him to death. If nothing else, this hints at the complex relationship between Bar Kochba and the early Talmudic sages:

The Tannaim were divided, some supporting his rebellion, others not. Those who supported him saw him as a messianic figure.⁴⁰³ The most famous of the authorities⁴⁰⁴ who supported Bar Kochba, according to Jewish and Roman sources,⁴⁰⁵ was none other than Rabbi Akiva, to whom tradition has assigned the role of being the spiritual leader of Bar Kochba's revolt.⁴⁰⁶ In the opinion of most authors,⁴⁰⁷ Akiva was one of the keenest supporters of the rebellion. He journeyed throughout the Jewish Diaspora looking for

⁴⁰² Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 26.

⁴⁰³ Schiffman, *From Text*, 173.

⁴⁰⁴ Finkelstein (Finkelstein, "Rabbi Akiba," 3.) posits that Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Simeon were also clearly in the Bar Kochba camp.

⁴⁰⁵ "So impressive a leader was bar Kochba that Rabbi Akiva declared him the Messiah and became his 'greatest supporter.' (Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, LXIX:12:3) (Sper, *The Future*, 99.)

⁴⁰⁶ Sper, *The Future*, 61.

⁴⁰⁷ Not just authors, but this is how the religious tradition understands Akivah's role (see Koltitz, *Rabbi Akivah*, 171.)...thus, once again, the facts are less important than the perception.

resources and sympathizers for his revolt against Rome; he proclaimed Bar Kosiva to be the Messiah; he was imprisoned as a result of his active support of the rebellion; and finally he died a cruel martyr's death because of his convictions.⁴⁰⁸

Some modern scholars, like Peter Schafer, opine that the literature connecting the subject of the relationship between Rabbi Akiba and Bar Kochba is “for the most part fanciful and not critically sound”⁴⁰⁹ and therefore, details within it are not worth discussing. This author would point out that Dio Cassius, the most reliable source on the Bar Kochba rebellion as stated by Schafer,⁴¹⁰ collaborates with the sentiment of later Jewish literature; as can be seen in Dio Cassius statement, “So impressive a leader was Bar Kochba that Rabbi Akiva declared him the Messiah and became his ‘greatest supporter.’⁴¹¹ This is not to say that the sources about the relationship are perfect, far from it, but they are the only sources available and so must be utilized as such, even if with a healthy ‘grain of salt.’

There is a speculative theory that certain stories within the Talmuds and Midrash contain cryptic references to Tannaitic support, and participation, in Bar Kochba's revolt. For instance: “Both the content and the wording of a *baraita* in *Yevamot* provide us with information regarding Rabbi Akiva's pupils.”⁴¹² Specifically, *Yevamot* 62b says:

אמרו: שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא, מגבת עד אנטיפרס,
וכולן מתו בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה, והיה העולם שמם, עד שבא
ר"ע אצל רבותינו שבדרום, ושנאה להם ר"מ ור' יהודה ור' יוסי ורבי שמעון ורבי
אלעזר בן שמוע, והם הם העמידו תורה אותה שעה. תנא: כולם מתו מפסח ועד
עצרת. אמר רב חמא בר אבא, ואיתימא ר' חייא בר אבין: כולם מתו מיתה רעה.
מאי היא? א"ר נחמן: אסכרה

⁴⁰⁸ Schafer, “Rabbi Aqiva,” 113.

⁴⁰⁹ Schafer, “Rabbi Aqiva,” 113.

⁴¹⁰ “Dio Cassius’ report has become the major trustworthy literary source of the uprising” (summation of Bar-Kochba scholars in 2001 Princeton University conference) (Schafer, “Preface,” XX.)

⁴¹¹ Sper, (Sper, *The Future*, 99) cites Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, LXIX:12:3.

⁴¹² Kolitz, *Rabbi Akivah*, 218; similar sentiment is expressed by Sper, *The Future*, 99.

They said: Rabbi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of pupils, from Gabbath to Antipatris, and all of them died during one period, because they did not act respectfully to each other. The entire world was desolate until Rabbi Akiva came to our Rabbis in the South and taught them: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Yose, Rabbi Simeon, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Shammua. They are the ones who revived the Torah at that time. It has been taught that all of them died between Pesah and Shevuot. Rabbi Hama bar Abba, or, as some say, Rabbi Hiyya bar Avin, said, They all died a bad death. What was it? Rav Nahman said, Croup.⁴¹³

The theory details that that the expression “pair of pupils”(זוגים תלמידים) is some sort of code for ‘student-fighters’ engaged in revolt military service. The term “pair of pupils” is rare⁴¹⁴ in the Talmud and it could possibly refer to religious disciples who were in some sort of para-military commitment.⁴¹⁵

More convincing are the two locations cited in Yevamot 62b:

‘Gabbath’ and ‘Antipatris,’ which are not to be found on any maps of Jewish settlement at the end of the Second Temple period and later, for they were not settlements. They were, in fact, Roman garrisons or fortresses.⁴¹⁶

In one of the Roman turning points against the Jews in Bar Kochba’s revolt, “the front between Chezib-Acco-Gabbath and Antipatris-Kotzrim was breached during the period between Pesah and Shavuot.”⁴¹⁷ At that time, Bar Kochba’s troops were routed by the Roman forces, and huge numbers of Jews fell in battle.”⁴¹⁸ This is the ‘bad death’ to which

⁴¹³ As Kolitz (Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 225.) notes, “note should be taken of the linguistic and phonetic connection between the word *askara*/אסכרה (croup) mentioned here and *askaria*, which means ‘army’ or ‘troop’ in Turkish and Arabic. Although we have not found any sources which testify to the connection between them, this similarity cannot be ignored.

⁴¹⁴ This is the only instance found in the Bavli.

⁴¹⁵ Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 219.

⁴¹⁶ Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 220.

⁴¹⁷ Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 222.

⁴¹⁸ Kolitz (Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 222) goes on to relay that in the course of that Roman rout, the Jewish warriors “were successful only on one day, when they waged a counterattack with their remaining forces and repulsed the enemy. This occurred on the 33rd day of the counting of the Omer (Lag ba-Omer), which was established as a holiday for all time.” Yadin (Yadin, *Bar Kokbah*, 27) also talks about Lag Ba’omer in a similar way when he says, “It was centuries of persecution of the Jews and their yearning for national rehabilitation that turned Bar-Kochba into a people’s hero- an elusive figure they clung to because he had demonstrated, and was the last to

Yevamot 62b is referring. Unfortunately, mining the Talmud and Midrash for other such examples which may, or may not, be cryptic fossils describing Akiva's role in Bar Kochba's revolt is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is worthwhile to reiterate that what is 'fact' is often less important than what is perceived within the literature.

However, of primary importance to this thesis is the literature that shows that during the revolt Akiba proclaimed Bar Kochba the Messiah, while other authorities were not convinced or even were opposed to this statement of support. Equally as important is how other rabbis in the same literature, written or curtailed after the revolt's failure, derided and mocked Bar Kochba as nothing but a liar. "Those who, like Rabbi Aqiba, believed in his Messianic nature called him, playing a small pun on his name by changing the S into K, Kochba; while those who opposed him, particularly after his failure, played a different pun by changing the S into Z, thus distorting the meanings completely to read 'liar' or 'son of a liar.'⁴¹⁹

Akiva's proclamation of Bar Kochba as the Messiah appears in three sources⁴²⁰ that pretty much say the same thing with very little variation, and "these are the only sources in rabbinic literature in which Aqiva and Bar Kokba are brought into direct contact with one another."⁴²¹ The basic formula can be seen in the Jerusalem Talmud, *Ta'anit* 4:5:

עקיבה רבי היה דורש דרך כוכב מיעקב דרך כוזבא מיעקב רבי עקיבה כד הוה חמי
בר כוזבה הוה אמר דין הוא מלכא משיחא אמר ליה רבי יוחנן בן תורתא עקיבה
יעלו עשבים בלחייך ועדיין בן דוד לא יבא

Akiva used to expound, '*there shall step forth a star out of Jacob.*'⁴²² thus Koziva steps forth out of Jacob! When R. Aqiva beheld Bar Koziva, he exclaimed, 'This is the king Messiah.' R. Yohanan b. Torta retorted,

demonstrate, that the Jews could fight to win spiritual and political independence. To commemorate his revolt it became tradition for the children of Jewish communities in eastern Europe to go into the fields at the festival of Lag Ba'omer and play 'Bar-Kochba and the Romans' with makeshift bows and arrows..."

⁴¹⁹ Yadin, *Bar Kochba*, 127.

⁴²⁰ y. *Ta'anit* 4:5, b. *Gittin* 57-8, *Lamentations Rabbah* 2:2.4.

⁴²¹ Schafer, "*Rabbi Aqiva*," 119.

⁴²² Quoting Numbers 24:17.

‘Aqiva, grass will grow between your checks and he still will not have come.’

All of these texts display Akiva’s proclamation that Bar Kochba is the messiah; and they all⁴²³ refer to the leader of the Jewish revolt as Bar Koziva/ בר כוזבה (with a ז). Since Bar Kochba, as Yadin’s discovery shows, was originally called by his name, Shimon ben or Bar Kosiva/ כוסבה (with a ס), “all the versions of the text reflect the rabbinic change of meaning of Bar Kosiva’s name to Bar Koziva (in other words to ‘son of a liar,’ ...) and therefore the situation after the Bar Kochba rebellion.”⁴²⁴

The devastating failure of the Kochba revolt “cannot be overestimated.”⁴²⁵ The Judaeen Jewish community never recovered from the Bar Kochba war. In its wake, Jews no longer formed the majority in Palestine, and the Jewish center moved to the Galilee.⁴²⁶ Since the Bar Kochba revolt is barely even referred to in rabbinic sources, it is difficult to ascertain with any certainty the mind-set of the rabbis in the wake of the Roman destruction. The men mostly dead, families torn apart by war and slavery, the promise of a new Temple in Jerusalem farther away than ever, economic crisis, and the remnants of Judaeans in Diaspora once again. It is in this context that the Rabbis must have uniformly agreed that armed resistance was no longer a viable option. To continue on that path would certainly mean more dead Jews and perhaps even the death of Judaism itself. “To this end they downplayed the revolt, “demilitarized” the Talmud and emphasized that Messianic Redemption would be achieved by merit of Torah study and not by military might.”⁴²⁷

⁴²³ With the exceptions being direct Akiva quotes.

⁴²⁴ Schafer, “Rabbi Aqiva”, 118-119.

⁴²⁵ Hammer, “A Rabbinic Response,” 40.

⁴²⁶ Eshel, “The Dates,” in *The Bar Kochba War Reconsidered* (ed. Schafer), 126.

⁴²⁷ Book, “Jewish Journeys,” 102.

By demilitarizing Judaism, and kowtowing to Rome, the Rabbis were actually achieving three things. They were keeping Jews alive; they were changing the psyche of Judaism from bellicose to war-averse; and they were empowering themselves as the new Jewish leaders as recognized by the dominant culture and military authority, that being Rome.

This changed the basic reality of the Patriarchate. From a head of an academy deriving his authority because of his implicit recognition by the people, the Patriarch became the channel whereby the average citizen had contact with the coercive power, i.e., the Romans. Both judicial power and fiscal power were now in the hands of the Patriarch.⁴²⁸

In a sense the institution of the Patriarch had achieved its final victorious realization: complete internal and external recognition.⁴²⁹ It was this apolitical, demilitarized and accomodationist Judaism that became Rabbinic Judaism, but the memory of the age when the Jewish warrior held political power was preserved in national memory, Messianism and extra-canonical literature.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ Elazar, *Authority*, 100.

⁴²⁹ Elazar, *Authority*, 108.

⁴³⁰ Biale, *Power*, 11.

Chapter Seven- *Megillat Ta'anit*:

Megillat Ta'anit, the 'scroll of fasting' is a bit of a misnomer, as the scroll is really a list of dates from antiquity when one was forbidden to fast⁴³¹ because the dates commemorated auspicious Jewish historical events.⁴³² It is an annual calendar⁴³³ in which the vast majority of the 35 dates listed clearly refer to Jewish military or political achievements.⁴³⁴ The compilers of *Megillat Ta'anit* thought these dates worthy of special mention and treatment apart from other days in the calendar year; in other words, a holiday of sorts. The day and month of each event is listed without a year, and thus the document is confusing; however, "it is obvious that the text of the Megillah is arranged according to the sequence of the months and not in chronological order. To establish the historical meaning of the events commemorated in the Megillah, and to interpret these, it is necessary to rearrange the various dates in a chronological setting."⁴³⁵ This task, however, is much easier said than done.

Megillat Ta'anit is relevant to this thesis for three reasons. The first is the fact that most of *Megillat Ta'anit* is a list of Jewish military achievements. What does this say about the Jewish culture that would have such a list, and set it apart to be observed in commemoration? The second reason has to do with the date to which *Megillat Ta'anit* extends. Modern scholarship is split as to whether the military commemorations listed extended past The Great Revolt into the Bar Kochba era or not. That modern scholarship is in consensus that the dates minimally coincide with the Great Revolt is almost entirely due to the fact that they

⁴³¹ Fasting is prohibited on them all, and in 14 cases it was additionally forbidden to give a eulogy.

⁴³² Strack, *Introduction*, 15.

⁴³³ Starting with the month of Nisan.

⁴³⁴ Of the 36 listed commemorations, a large percentage 23 clearly refer to some sort of military-political event; eight appear to be religious commemoration, and five are too brief and cryptic to categorize, i.e., 'on the 7th (of Kislev) is a holiday.'

⁴³⁵ Zeitlin, "Megillat Taanit," 70.

can cross-check them with Josephus' account. Tragically, since Bar Kochba lacked a Josephus, there is no source to collaborate for potential Bar Kochba military achievements.

There are scholars, including modern ones of the highest esteem, that posit the possibility that the end-date of *Megillat Ta'anit* extends beyond the Great Revolt... and one only has to extend six decades beyond the Great Revolt to get to Bar Kochba. As it is, dates listed in *Megillat Ta'anit* that can not be accounted for through collaboration are safely labeled by scholars as 'miscellaneous',⁴³⁶ 'obscure',⁴³⁷ 'unidentifiable',⁴³⁸ or some sort of cryptic reference to the Pharisaic-Sadducean conflict.⁴³⁹ What is important about the end-point is that it informs the historian about the 'mindset' of the proto-rabbinic authors who compiled and disseminated *Megillat Ta'anit*, as well as the populace who agreed not to fast on these semi-holidays celebrating military victory. The exact end-date helps inform the historian know when the Jewish leaders and populace employed this mindset of lionizing military victory.

Regardless of *Megillat Ta'anit's terminus ad quem* commemorations, the third reason why *Megillat Ta'anit* is relevant to this thesis is because 3rd century authorities annulled it.⁴⁴⁰ This fact buttresses the theory that there was a concerted rabbinic effort to demilitarize Judaism and the Jewish people in efforts to appease Rome by obscuring the Jews' history of armed rebellion from even the Jews themselves.

Like attempts to study the Bar Kochba revolt, the problem that the modern historian has in studying *Megillat Ta'anit* is a lack of reliable contemporary sources. A huge amount of what even the best modern expert does is pure speculation, attempting to piece together

⁴³⁶ Zeitlin, "Megillat Taanit," 116.

⁴³⁷ Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, 10.

⁴³⁸ Stern, review of Noam, 184.

⁴³⁹ Glatzer, s.v. "Megillat Ta'anit," 769.

⁴⁴⁰ Stern, review of Noam, 184; Glatzer, s.v. "Megillat Ta'anit," 769.

damaged manuscripts, dealing with huge differences in content (up to 50% in the two best preserved manuscripts⁴⁴¹) between various manuscripts,⁴⁴² discerning the extent of reliability of *Megillat Ta'anit's* included commentary; and desperately searching for possible collaboration with external sources. It is no wonder that there has been a dearth of scholarly work on *Megillat Ta'anit*,⁴⁴³ since the material available to work with is as narrow as the speculation is wide. All of the questions listed above that make *Megillat Ta'anit* interesting to this thesis are only able to be guessed at by the experts, including Vered Noam in her 2003 critical edition.⁴⁴⁴ In short, we just don't know much; yet, we know that *Megillat Ta'anit* existed, that it was hailed as 'halakhic' by the Tannaim, and that it was cancelled sometime in the post-Amoraic era. Thus, *Megillat Ta'anit* is very interesting and for the purposes of this thesis it is well worth analyzing what is known, what is likely, what is possible, and what can only be guessed at.

There are additional difficulties in deciphering *Megillat Ta'anit*; it is very short. It really is little more than a list.⁴⁴⁵ For instance:

“On the 7th of Elul was the day of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, on which it is forbidden to mourn. On the 17th thereof the Romans evacuated Judah and Jerusalem; on the 22nd thereof we began to slay the wicked; on the 23rd of Tishri were removed the 'mentions'

⁴⁴¹ The Oxford and Parma manuscripts.

⁴⁴² “Noam (Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit*, 319-322.) shows that the scholion is attested in the manuscripts in two very different recensions that differ in about half their contents. The main two manuscripts that she uses are the Oxford and Parma manuscripts. Although some common sources are used, the recensions do not seem to have originated from a single Urtext. (Stern, review of Noam, 185.)

⁴⁴³ There is a serious dearth in contemporary scholarship in *Megillat Ta'anit*, with the notable exception of Vered Noam's 2003 critical edition. Before that, the serious attempts at analysis were limited to H. Lichtenstein's (German) *Die Fastenrolle-Eine Untersuchung zur judisch-hellenistischen geschichte*, HUCA, 8-9 (1931-2), 257-351; S. Zeitlin's doctoral thesis, *'Megillat ta'anit as a source for Jewish Chronology and History in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods'* (1922); and an article by Gesch Graetz in 1906.

⁴⁴⁴ “As Noam demonstrates, half of these events remain obscure and unidentifiable, whilst the other half belongs mostly to the Hasmonean period., most famously, the Maccabean victory, commemorated on the days of Hanukah, although some events are earlier and some later.” (Stern, review of Noam, 184.)

⁴⁴⁵ Especially without the included commentary, sometimes referred to as 'scholion.'

on documents; On the 23rd of Heshvan the Sorega was torn away from the Azarah; On the 25th thereof the wall of Samaria was captured.”⁴⁴⁶

Megillat Ta’anit uses language to explain each date’s importance which is not only terse, but, as described by University College of London’s professor Sacha Stern, the language is “cryptic.”⁴⁴⁷ Minimally, this ‘cryptic’ language makes it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to ascribe with any confidence a particular historical event to some of the listed dates. Maximally, it is possible that this terseness was deliberate so as to hide the exact reason for the semi-holiday from those who could find offense and punish, specifically the Romans. Admittedly, the author has absolutely no evidence to suggest this, except that Jews have many times in their history censured offensive parts of their literature in order to avoid repercussions from enemy eyes. Either way, the brevity and terseness of some of the dates listed suggests that at one point the people reading the date automatically knew the corresponding commemorative event. Even more assured is that beyond a certain point, those who were assumed to know, forgot. This is evidenced by the different explanations that various *Megillat Ta’anit* manuscripts give for the same date, and that today many of those especially terse dates are truly a mystery.

The main text of *Megillat Ta’anit* was written in middle Aramaic, while the included “scholion” explaining the historical events referred to in each of the entries is in Hebrew. Recent scholarship disagrees on when the scholion were added. The origins and history of the scholion are “unclear because it remained a fluid composition.”⁴⁴⁸ Vered Noam posits that it was added quite early, well before the codification of the Bavli;⁴⁴⁹ whereas Nahum

⁴⁴⁶ translation: Zeitlin, “Megillat Taanit,” 69.

⁴⁴⁷ Stern, review of Noam, 184.

⁴⁴⁸ Stern, review of Noam, 185.

⁴⁴⁹ Stern, review of Noam, 184.

Glatzer holds that it was appended after the Bavli was codified.⁴⁵⁰ “Some of the scholia provide detailed, informed aggadic accounts, others are vacuous and clearly improvised⁴⁵¹ In Noam’s estimation, half of the scholion is unique and unattested in rabbinic literature, but parallels can be found in earlier Jewish works such as the books of Maccabees, others parts of the Septuagint, and especially Josephus.⁴⁵² “Other parts of the scholion are attested in the Babylonian Talmud (13 entries in all);⁴⁵³ but surprisingly, no scholion is found in the Palestinian Talmud of any other Palestinian rabbinic sources. Noam does not attempt to explain why this is the trend.⁴⁵⁴ In terms of using the scholion to explain *Megillat Ta’anit’s* listed dates, the fact that the existing manuscripts differ so greatly in their explanations only further confuses modern historical attempts at understanding.

When it comes to actually naming a date for *Megillat Ta’anit*, scholars agree that *Megillat Ta’anit* “certainly existed, already in written form, at the time of the redaction of the Mishnah, since it is cited in the Mishnah.”⁴⁵⁵ However, when asked to be more specific, there is little agreement. Noam posits a 1st century C.E. dating, probably prior to 70 C.E.⁴⁵⁶ She claims that *Megillat Ta’anit* was composed by a 1st century C.E. Pharisaic, Shammaitic figure that can be identified as R’ Hananiah b. Hezeqiah or his son Eleazar.⁴⁵⁷ Noam’s view is supported, and influenced by, the appendix of *Megillat Ta’anit* which gives the author as Eliezar, the son of Hananiah

⁴⁵⁰ Glatzer, *s.v.* “Megillat Taanit,” 769.

⁴⁵¹ Stern, review of Noam, 184

⁴⁵² Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 22-24.

⁴⁵³ Stern (Stern, review of Noam, 185) cites Noam (Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 133-158, 361-375.)

⁴⁵⁴ Stern, review of Noam, 185.

⁴⁵⁵ Stern, review of Noam, 184.

⁴⁵⁶ Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 19-21.

⁴⁵⁷ Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 333-336.

b. Hezekiah⁴⁵⁸ as well as the Tannaitic source in the Bavli which purports that

Megillat Ta'anit was compiled by "Hananiah b. Hezekiah and his company."⁴⁵⁹

מי כתב מגילת תענית? אמרו: חנניה בן הזקיה וסיעתו

Who wrote *Megillath Ta'anit*? Said they, Hananiah b. Hezekiah and his companions, who cherished their troubles.

Sacha Stern respectfully rejects Noam's dependence on Rabbinic sources as reliable, as well as her conclusions. He says:

Noam appears to assume the historical reliability of early rabbinic sources and traditions; a position that historians, today, can no longer adopt without considerable reservations and qualifications...On the question of the origins of *Megillat Ta'anit* and its early history, I beg to differ with the author... (based on the acceptable known evidence) *Megillat Ta'anit* is clearly pre-Mishnaic, Judaeen, and related to rabbinic or proto-rabbinic circles, but more than that, we do not know.⁴⁶⁰

In other words, although Stern does not come out and say it in his review, it seems as though he would date it later than 1st century, but before the codification of the Mishnah. This would put his estimate within the era of Bar Kochba.⁴⁶¹

Nahum Glatzer also posits the possibility that at least the scholion dates from the Bar Kochba era, even if the Hebrew dates that can be identified date no later than the Great Revolt. "The work received its present form close to the time of the destruction of the Second Temple or at the latest during the Bar Kokhba era."⁴⁶² Glatzer's assertion coincides with

⁴⁵⁸ According to Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 2:409- this man was one of the leading rebels against the Romans.

⁴⁵⁹ *b. Shabbat* 13b.

⁴⁶⁰ Stern, review of Noam, 186.

⁴⁶¹ Sacha Stern directly agrees that this is possible. "It seems to me that materials from the Trajanic or Bar-Kokhba period do not contradict my general assumption that MT is "clearly pre-Mishnaic, Judaeen, and related to rabbinic or proto-rabbinic circles" (Sacha Stern, *personal email correspondence*, 1/22/08)

⁴⁶² Glatzer, "Megillat Ta'anit," 769.

Strack's assessment from 1920, when he wrote, "the Aramaic text was probably composed in part before the destruction of Jerusalem; its present form dates from the reign of Hadrian."⁴⁶³

Again, since virtually no 'new' evidence has surfaced, even the most erudite modern scholar can only analyze with any certainty that which is clearly stated. For instance, of the clearly labeled historical events, "Among the earlier events is Purim (14-15 Adar); the latest clearly labeled event, is the entry for 22 Shevat, which may refer to the abrogation of Caligula's decree to introduce an idol into the Temple."⁴⁶⁴ However, for the other half⁴⁶⁵ of *Megillat Ta'anit* that is very much unclear, they can only reluctantly speculate. In addition to the large percentage of dates that are difficult or impossible to connect to the historical events that they commemorate, there is the pesky problem of what to do with the names of people in *Megillat Ta'anit* who lived and were active after the destruction of the Temple. Primarily is the name 'Trajan' referred to in connection to Adar 12,⁴⁶⁶ which is dubbed, 'Trajan's Day.' If this is the case, then this Roman emperor who was succeeded by Hadrian and who crushed the Bar Kokhba revolt proves that at least part of *Megillat Ta'anit* extends into the Bar Kochba era. Additionally, the Scholion for Adar 28⁴⁶⁷ mentions the Hadrianic decrees which were imposed after the revolt, such as the prohibition of circumcision⁴⁶⁸

A number of theories exist to explain these references within the confines of events pre-70 C.E. Glatzer lumps them into the category of the 'not easily explained' but posits that perhaps they allude to "victories of the Pharisees over the Sadducees, but the details are not

⁴⁶³ Strack, *Introduction*, 15.

⁴⁶⁴ Stern (Stern, review of Noam, 184) in agreement with Noam's assessment. This recognition that what is clearly identifiable as events related to the Great Revolt is also shared by Zeitlin, (Zeitlin, "Megillat Taanit," 3.) although he lists the final clearly identifiable event as the Adar 17th, 66 C.E., "when Vespasian overcame all resistance in Galilee, and with the conclusion of the war the Jewish people lost its autonomy."

⁴⁶⁵ Up to 50% according to Noam & Stern.

⁴⁶⁶ Zeitlin, "Megillat Taanit," 108.

⁴⁶⁷ Glatzer, "Megillat Ta'anit," 769.

⁴⁶⁸ Kolitz, *Rabbi Akiva*, 227.

clear.”⁴⁶⁹ It is apparent that Glatzer posits this theory because it is one of the standard tropes historians use to explain everything in this period; however, the explanation of a Pharisee-Sadducee rift would not be sufficient if *Megillat Ta’anit terminus ad quem* extends beyond the fall of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

Other theories suggest that Trajan’s day does not refer to the Roman emperor Trajan, but to something or someone else altogether; although the various theories seems as much speculation as the theory that Trajan actually refers to Trajan.⁴⁷⁰ Similarly, the reference to a ‘ban on circumcision’ is explained as commentary that was added much later, and therefore certainly unreliable and likely not true. This would lend weight to a Bar Kochba era end-date, though scholars believe the commentary is unreliable. In some cases scholars give credence to the commentary, while in others,⁴⁷¹ they dismiss the commentary as vacuous. The trend seems to be that commentary that can be collaborated by external sources, such as Josephus, are considered ‘reliable,’ while those that can not be collaborated by external sources are considered ‘unreliable.’ Of course the problem still is that history did not grace the Bar Kochba revolt with a Josephus-type writer who could corroborate certain dates and events in *Megillat Ta’anit*. Although this methodology is understandable, but it does severely limit that which scholarly consensus has labeled ‘acceptable’ altogether.

It also is understandable that scholars are naturally reticent to speculate in the absence of evidence. But in this case, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Certainly in the case of *Megillat Ta’anit*, where even the world’s leading experts admit that so much is ‘grey,’ is it not possible that the document extends beyond the obvious? For instance, since we have no evidence that *Megillat Ta’anit* was closed or canonized before the Mishnah,

⁴⁶⁹ Glatzer, *s.v.* “*Megillat Ta’anit*,” 769.

⁴⁷⁰ Zeitlin, “*Megillat Taanit*,” 108.

⁴⁷¹ The instance that refers to the ban on circumcision as one of Hadrian’s decrees in particular.

might it be possible that it was a ‘fluid’ work in progress in much the same way as its scholion? After all, there were only 60 years between the Great Revolt and Bar Kochba. The decision by this author to situate this chapter on *Megillat Ta’anit* after the Bar Kochba revolt reveals this author’s opinion on the matter; that being the certain possibility that *Megillat Ta’anit’s terminus ad quem* extends to the Bar Kochba revolt. However, regardless of when *Megillat Ta’anit* was finalized, the purpose of the list of victories seems to have been to strengthen the spirit of heroism and faith in the success of armed Jewish engagement.

Although “tannaitic sources treated *Megillat Ta’anit* as halakhically authoritative, its halakhic authority was questioned in the Amoraic period:⁴⁷²

איתמר, רב ורבי חנינא אמרי: בטלה מגילת תענית, רבי יוחנן ורבי יהושע בן לוי אמרי: לא בטלה מגילת תענית. רב ורבי חנינא אמרי: בטלה מגילת תענית, הכי קאמר: בזמן שיש שלום - יהיו לששון ולשמחה, אין שלום - צום. והנך נמי כי הני. רבי יוחנן ורבי יהושע בן לוי אמרי: לא בטלה מגילת תענית, הני הוא דתלינהו רחמנא בבנין בית המקדש, אבל הנך - כדקיימי קיימי

It has been stated [elsewhere]: Rab and R. Hanina hold that the *Megillat Ta’anit* has been annulled, whereas R. Johanan and Resh Lakish hold that the *Megillat Ta’anit*, has not been annulled. Rab and R. Hanina hold that the *Megillat Ta’anit* has been annulled, interpreting the words of the prophet thus: ‘When there is peace, these days¹⁶ shall be for joy and gladness, but when there is no peace, they shall be fasts’, and placing the days mentioned in the *Megillat Ta’anit*, on the same footing. R. Johanan and Resh Lakish hold that the *Megillat Ta’anit* has not been annulled, maintaining that it was those others that the All-Merciful made dependent on the existence of the Temple, but these [mentioned in *Megillat Ta’anit*] remain unaffected.

In the post-Amoraic period, the ruling that *Megillat Ta’anit* was ‘cancelled’ had become widely accepted.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² b. *Rosh HaShana* 18b.

⁴⁷³ b. *Rosh HaShanah* 19b.

וחכמים מטהרין. - תנאי היא. דתניא: הימים האלו הכתובין במגילת תענית, בין בזמן שבית המקדש קיים, בין בזמן שאין בית המקדש קיים - אסורין, דברי רבי מאיר. רבי יוסי אומר: בזמן שבית המקדש קיים - אסורין, מפני ששמחה היא להם. אין בית המקדש קיים - מותרין, מפני שאבל הוא להם. והלכתא: בטלו, והלכתא - לא בטלו. קשיא הלכתא אהלכתא! - לא קשיא; כאן - בחנוכה ופורים, כאן - בשאר יומי.

There is a difference of opinion between Tannaim (as to whether the *Megillat Ta'anit*, has been annulled), as it has been taught: These days which are mentioned in the *Megillat Ta'anit* are prohibited (to be kept as fast days) whether in the period when the Temple is standing or in the period when the Temple is not standing. So R. Meir. R. Jose says: In the period when the Temple is standing they are prohibited, because they (Israel) have cause for rejoicing; in the period when the Temple is not standing they are permitted, because they have cause for mourning.' The law is that these prohibitions are annulled and the law is that they are not annulled.

This last statement, 'the law is that these prohibitions are annulled and the law is that they are not annulled' explains its general neglect in subsequent rabbinic literature⁴⁷⁴ Of the dates listed in *Megillat Ta'anit*, the only two exceptions shielded from annulment were Purim and Hannukah.⁴⁷⁵

שאני חנוכה דמיפרסם ניסא.

Hanukah is different because it commemorates publicly a miracle.

That there were exceptions, those of Hannukah and Purim, which were still observed even after the *gezarah* perhaps provides some insight into the rabbis' reasoning in the first place. Perhaps the observation of Hannukah and Purim were too widespread,⁴⁷⁶ well known, and desired to enforce the decree. Even if rabbis decreed it, the community had to accept it

⁴⁷⁴ Stern (Stern, review of Noam, 184.) summarizing Noam, *Megillat Taanit*. 350-352.

⁴⁷⁵ *b. Rosh HaShanah* 18b.

⁴⁷⁶ Panken (Panken, "The Liturgical," chapter 2.) demonstrates that even by the time of the Mishnah, Hannukah was used as a terminus ad quem delimitating certain liturgical practices. This fact makes it very likely that by c. 200 C.E., Hannukah was a generally recognized holiday in the Jewish community.

in order for it to ‘stick.’ Further, imagine if all the dates listed in *Megillat Ta’anit* were observed with the same fervor as the days decreed ‘hallel.’ Not only would this additional observance have an impact upon the liturgical cycle of the year, it would be a constant reminder (36 days each year) of Jewish ‘warrior’ identity. In the rabbis’ opinion, this would be ‘too much’ of a reminder of military uprisings, victories, and armed resistance. And so they did away with it.

In summary, the fact that most of *Megillat Ta’anit* is a list of Jewish military achievements strongly suggests that the Jewish people held armed-resistance as an ideal to be commemorated, celebrated, and lionized. Whether the victories or Bar Kochba are included in the listed dates gives the historian hints as to the temporal extent of the society’s warrior mind-set, both that of the populace and the proto-rabbinic leaders. The fact that 3rd century tradents annulled it⁴⁷⁷ buttresses the theory that there was a concerted rabbinic effort to demilitarize Judaism and the Jewish people in efforts to appease Rome by obscuring the Jews’ history of armed rebellion from even the Jews themselves.

⁴⁷⁷Stern, review of Noam, 184; Glatzer, “Megillat Ta’anit,” 769.

Conclusion:

This thesis, ‘The De-evolution of the Jewish Warrior,’ examined a number of Second Temple Period Jewish texts set within their historical context to glean hints as to how Jews of an era viewed themselves as ‘warriors’ in the four centuries of 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. Although each single piece of literature by itself can not assure us of much, the patterns that emerge when viewing several such pieces of literature together through a diachronic study reveal a trend. In summation, close readings of certain selected texts along with historical analysis suggest that throughout the four hundred years leading up to Bar Kochba’s defeat, many Jews of the Levant thought of themselves as warriors; however, after the Bar Kochba revolt, a paradigmatic shift occurred resulting in a Jewish people that were war-averse.

All of the literature examined in this thesis describes the Jews as warriors, and lauds warrior qualities as admirable and fit for emulation. These warrior qualities are physical ones: strength, speed, skill with weapons, endurance; intellectual ones: adroit with strategy, preying on the enemy’s weaknesses; attitudinal ones: courageous, aggressive, unafraid to die for the cause, protective of other Jews; and ones of faith: confident in God’s favor, religiously respectful. Additionally, the Jewish warrior was admired for active, violent resistance against foreign enemies. Admittedly, the literature itself can only provide limited data-points, each a ‘literary artifact’ that minimally reflects the views of a single author, although this author thinks that such limits are extremely unlikely.⁴⁷⁸ Even so, these literary artifacts which all point to the same conclusions are further buttressed with historical facts of Jewish armed uprisings and conquests that consistently occurred starting with the Maccabean revolt and extending through the Bar Kochba defeat; a span of time that covers almost four centuries. In other words, the fact that Jews were engaged in coordinated armed conflict,

⁴⁷⁸ Unless one assumes that each text was read by an audience of no more than one.

whether wars of defense, conquest, or armed revolt, throughout Judaea and the Diaspora, proves that the warrior image found in the selected Second Temple Period texts of this thesis was not limited to a sole author. To the contrary, the almost constant armed conflict and the literature together prove that many Jews thought of themselves as warriors, for in fact, many Jews engaged in war.

From these findings, one can safely conclude that such a 'warrior' self-image was widespread, although exactly how deeply it permeated into the Jewish collective psyche is impossible to say; except that historians collectively speculate that one of the reasons why the rabbis began to demilitarize Judaism after the Bar Kochba defeat was that there were few Jewish men of fighting age left alive. From this logic, one must assume that the Jewish self-identity of warrior permeated the Jews of Judaea deeply indeed. Of course, it makes sense that the literature of an age would reflect and refract the political and social realities of the day, which is the nature of literature. And so when war was a viable option for the Jews, which it was from the Hasmonean period⁴⁷⁹ through the Bar Kochba war,⁴⁸⁰ Jewish literature was written which championed the Jewish warrior.

This thesis also sought to prove that the rabbinic literature that followed Bar Kochba's defeat reflected this new social reality of Jewish powerlessness. Unfortunately, although the instances examined do suggest this, they only *suggest*, as opposed to prove. The rabbinic treatment of the Maccabean victories, and the military victories listed in *Megillat Ta'anit*, are two solid data-points that support this thesis, but more work needs to be done to approach 'proof.'⁴⁸¹ Certainly it seems as though there was a distinct change in the collective Jewish

⁴⁷⁹ The first Hasmonean revolt against the Seleucids took place from 167-164 B.C.E., but the independent Hasmonean dynasty is dated from the years of 167 B.C.E. to 63 C.E. concluding when Rome conquered Judah.

⁴⁸⁰ 132-135 C.E.

⁴⁸¹ Such an undertaking would be another thesis.

psyche from ‘warrior’ to ‘war-averse’ after Bar Kochba, and this was the time when the rabbinic authority was empowered and validated by no other than the Roman occupiers. Specifically, it seems that only after the rabbis became the recognized leaders of the Jewish community⁴⁸² from without, that the Jews of Judaea went from being a people ‘comfortable’ engaging in war to a people distinctly averse to, and fearful of, both war and violence.

⁴⁸² The rabbis in turn had to find ways to justify the Roman domination that allowed for the Jewish theology to remain superior within their system of law and the Jewish community. “In brief, we may summarize the rabbinic response to the conditions and challenges of the post Bar Kochba era as follows: 1) The defeat was not the result of Roman might. Rome was nothing more than God’s instrument. 2) God had done this because of the abandonment of Torah which remains the only path to salvation and because He wished to bring about redemption through suffering and purification. 3) The election of Israel remains in force. They are His people in possession of His eternally valid Torah. 4) The future will witness Israel’s vindication which includes the end of suffering, the punishment of Rome and of all who had rejoiced in Israel’s defeat, and Israel’s assumption of world rule and complete redemption.” (Hammer, *A Rabbinic Response to the Post Bar Kochba Era*, 53.)

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