

RLST 124I: Varieties of Ancient Judaism
Spring 2009
Handout #4e (April 28, 2009)
“The First Jewish War”

The Players

Agrippa II: “King” of the Jews, great-grandson of Herod the Great; his authority was limited to Galilee and the Transjordan (and very circumscribed there), and the authority to appoint high priests; after the Jewish War, he lived out his life outside of Judaea

Sicarii: “Dagger-men” (from Latin *sica*, a short dagger): group of guerilla revolutionaries who seem to have operated primarily through covert “ops” (like assassination)

Zealots: called “the fourth philosophy” by Josephus (after the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes), a group of religious revolutionaries who pushed for the First Jewish War

Gessius Florus: procurator of Judaea (64-68 [?] CE)

Nero: Emperor of Rome (54-68 CE)

Vespasian: Roman general; emperor of Rome (69-79 CE)

Titus: Roman general (son of Vespasian); later emperor of Rome (79-81 CE)

Menahem: “founder” of the *Sicarii*; son (or grandson) of Judas the Galilean, took Masada in 66 but died soon after in Jerusalem

Joseph bar Matthias: an aristocrat of the priestly class, and a Pharisee, who served as a commanding general in the Galilee in the early years of the Jewish War; after his defeat and capture by Vespasian, he was briefly enslaved, but eventually “made nice” with Vespasian, and was granted freedom and citizenship in Rome as Flavius Josephus

Eleazar bar Simon: a Zealot leader who secured early victories against the provincial armies (before the arrival of Vespasian); eventually he moved with his forces to occupy western Jerusalem (around the Temple Mount) before being overpowered by the forces of John of Gischala

John of Gischala (Gush Halav): served as a general in northern Galilee with Joseph bar Matthias; after the defeat by Vespasian, he moved south to occupy part of Jerusalem, and forcefully displaced Eleazar bar Simon during the siege by Titus; after the destruction of the Temple, he surrendered and, after the triumph of Titus and Vespasian in Rome, was sent into permanent exile and imprisonment

Simon bar Giora: perhaps an Idumean convert (or descendant of converts) to Judaism, who raised an impressive army and occupied part of Jerusalem, likely with messianic kingly aspirations; his struggles with John of Gischala likely weakened the resistance within the city, leading to its surrender to Titus; after the triumph in Rome, Simon was executed

Eleazar bar Yair: *Sicarius* leader in charge of the last hold-outs in Masada who, according to Josephus, inspired the besieged Jews to commit mass suicide

War Timeline

- 63: The completion of Herod the Great's Temple renovations
- 66: **Florus** (under Nero's orders) attempts to seize funds from the Temple coffers, leading to unrest on Jerusalem
Sicarii under the command of **Menahem** seize the Herodian fortress at Masada
Menahem enters Jerusalem as a (messianic?) king, but is killed by rival factions
- 67: Roman legions from Syria enter Judaea; aristocratic Jews take generalships in the countryside
Nero appoints a retired general, **Vespasian**, to put down the uprising
- 68: Despite early reversals, **Vespasian** manages to seize control of Galilee and other border territories of the province
Civil unrest (the death of **Nero** and the rise of pretenders) leads **Vespasian** to halt his campaign
- 69: **Vespasian** declared emperor and leaves Judaea to secure his throne; **Titus** takes charge of the campaign
- 70: **Jerusalem** is under the control of rival Jewish factions; eventually, after a protracted siege, the city falls to **Titus**; the Temple, and much of the city, goes up in flames
Titus takes spoils of the city back to Rome, where he and **Vespasian** celebrate a triumphal parade, displaying the fallen leaders **John** (later imprisoned) and **Simon** (executed)
- 73: The new governor of Judaea, **Lucius Silva**, lays siege to the last *Sicarii* in Masada

Post-War: Consequences

fiscus iudaicus: an annual tax (a replacement of the “Temple Tax” Diaspora Jews had previously paid voluntarily) as war reparations to the Roman government: due from *all Jews throughout the Roman Empire*

synagogue: literally, “congregation”: during Second Temple Period, probably something like a *community center*; increasingly viewed as a *proscuchē*, i.e., a “prayer-house”

sectarianism: Temple-based sectarian movements (Sadducees, Essenes [?], Qumran community) now defunct, as is the priestly aristocracy

Patriarch: spokesperson for the Jews of Judaea (and, increasingly, a symbol of unity in the Diaspora)

Uprising of 117

Second Jewish War (132-135)

Religious consequences?

- Torah-synagogue nexus of religious identity
- authority vacuum (sages)
- new discourses of resistance to Empire (martyrdom)
- “Judaism” firmly detached from “Judaea” [?]