

Preface

In 66 CE, the Jewish revolt against Roman rule broke out. Four years later, in 70 CE, Jerusalem and the Temple lay in ruins. Three years after that, the Masada stronghold, in which the last of the Jewish insurgents fortified themselves, fell. The revolt was suppressed – the iron hand of the Roman military wreaked havoc and destruction among the rebellious Jewish settlements. Thousands of Jews were put to death; thousands more were sold into slavery.

The Great Revolt against the Romans – the causes of its outbreak, the divisions in the Jewish society, the doomed struggle against the Roman Empire and the devastation in its wake, and many other of its aspects – constitutes one of the historic events that is permanently etched in the historical memory of the Jewish people and, as such, has accompanied us to this very day. Recently, for example, the Israeli writer Meir Shalev wrote a newspaper article headlined, “Accepted Lies”:

...Judea was not destroyed because of factionalism and Judaism did not survive because of unity. Judea was destroyed because of the military superiority of the Romans, because of the stupidity and extremism of the Zealots and because of the surrender of the leadership to their Messianic violence. Judaism survived thanks to the wisdom, vision, and moderation of personalities like Rabbi Yochanan ben-Zakkai, who succeeded in escaping these murderous patriots, handing himself over to the Romans, exchanging the Temple for the synagogue and the slaughtered lamb for prayer, and equipping us with the means of cultural and spiritual existence for the time in exile.

Two thousand years after the destruction, two thousand years in which Judaism decried the Zealots and tried to put them out of heart and mind, we returned to Jerusalem. The Temple, fortunately, we have not yet built, but we have already acted like fools and called streets in our cities after those contemptible figures, Shimon bar-Giora, Yochanan of Gush Halav, and Elazar ben-Yair. And now we have added even honey-lipped gatherings of mourning and destruction, where they preach unity between those who do not quite understand the nature of these Zealots and those who see them as exemplars (Excerpt translated from *Yediot Ahronot*, Saturday Supplement, July 27, 2007, p. 5.).

The first historians and archaeologists who dealt with the events of the Great Revolt focused their studies on sites and events that were considered the most heroic and fateful – Jerusalem and Masada – while the Galilee, where the Romans under the leadership of Vespasian began their campaign to suppress the revolt, gained the attention of researchers only at a much later stage of research.

The present exhibition, “The Great Revolt in the Galilee,” and its accompanying catalogue are the fruit of the research of archaeologists and historians who deal with the Jewish and the non-Jewish settlement of the Galilee in the 1st century CE and with the events of the rebellion in the Galilee. Finds from Gamla and Yodfat comprise the focus of the exhibition. At these two sites, archaeologists have uncovered evidence of destruction that accords with the dramatic descriptions of Joseph ben-Matityahu. Finds are also presented from other sites testifying to the material

culture of Galilean settlements, Jewish and Gentile, in the 1st century CE; finds representing the presence of Roman legions whose mission was to put down the rebellion; and finds – presented to the public for the first time – that bear living testimony to preparations made by the Jews of the Galilee in advance of the revolt. Among these finds are whole jugs that were discovered in hiding places that owners of private homes dug under the floors of their houses. (See Y. Alexandre's article on the discoveries at Kfar Kanna in this catalogue).

Finally something of a personal note: There was a heavy tome with a black binding that stood out on the shelf in my parents' bookcase: *Jesus of Nazareth*, by Prof. Joseph Klausner, who numbers among those who laid the foundations for the Jewish historical study of the Second Temple period. My father, a cousin of Klausner, had received this book as a gift from him. It is to this volume, which I read in my youth, that I attribute my interest in Christianity's initial steps, an interest that is explored in my article [in Hebrew] in this catalogue. Alongside *Jesus of Nazareth* were other works from the pen of Joseph Klausner. I have chosen to quote the following excerpt from one of his articles, "Shimon bar-Kokhba," in which he explains his attitude toward what motivated the Jews to revolt. The words were written fervently and out of a deep emotional involvement – a style that is so different and foreign to historical writing today:

In the year 70, Jerusalem suffered its horrible destruction, the Land of Israel was turned almost entirely into desert, the Temple was set aflame, and tens of thousand of Jews were killed, thrown to wild animals, or sold into slavery – and here, only 62 years later, again another terrible revolt! Had the rebels not learned anything at all from what had transpired less than seventy years earlier?

How can we explain these frequent rebellions, all of which ended in utter failure and, nevertheless, not one of them prevented the next, which followed so closely in time and place? After all, during all these revolts there were wise men and statesmen from Israel who objected to every rebellion, and to all appearances those who objected were right: they said that the revolt would not succeed – and in truth it did not. For every revolt ended in the bloodshed of tens of thousands from Israel, in being uprooted from the land, in slavery and degradation. So why, despite all this, did rebellions not cease for scores of years?

Certainly, small Judea could have resigned itself to its fate and surrendered to Rome – and remained occupied with Torah. But then the Romans would have laid even a heavier hand on it and oppressed it more and more. An aggressive and abusive nation – in particular, its low-level officials – can sense a weak and submissive nation – and immediately tramples it like clay. Keeping quiet, turning the heart away from the affairs of the State and studying Torah and wisdom – woe is Torah that comes from dejection, alas the wisdom that comes not from expanding knowledge but from the imprisoned spirit in the cage of cruel servitude. Torah – that is the genius and that is the glory of the nation; and where they cease – Torah also ceases. And wisdom that has no vision, no exaltedness, no freedom, it too, is not worth very much (Joseph Klausner, *When a Nation Fights for Freedom, Historical Essays*, Tel Aviv, 1945, pp. 153-189. [Hebrew]).

Our thanks to all the historians and archaeologists who contributed the results of their studies to this exhibition and its catalogue; to the exhibition's scientific advisers, Prof. Uriel Rappaport, Dr. Danny Syon, and Dr. Mordechai Aviam. Our appreciation to staff members of the Israel Antiquities Authority: Dr. Hava Katz, Dr. Orit Shamir, Michael Saban, Adi Ziv-Sodri, Alegre Sabriego, Dr. Donald Ariel, and Gabriela Bijovsky. We also extend our appreciation to the Katzrin Museum, to the Department of Museums of the Ministry of Science, Culture, and Sport, and not least to the management of the Hecht Foundation.

Ofra Rimon

Museum Director and Curator