

ARE THERE ANY NEW FACTORS CONCERNING THE BAR-KOKHBA  
REVOLT?

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**Keywords:** Bar-Kokhba revolt, ban of circumcision, foundation of Aelia Capitolina.

**Abstract:** *The author focuses his research on four main subjects concerning the Bar-Kokhba revolt: (1) Hadrian's promise to rebuild the Temple, (2) the ban on circumcision, (3) the Foundation of Aelia Capitolina and (4) Bar Kokhba's leadership.*

**Rezumat:** *Autorul își concentrează analiza asupra a 4 puncte importante privind revolta lui Bar-Kokhba: (1) promisiunea lui Hadrian de a reconstrui templul din Ierusalim, (2) interzicerea circumciziei, (3) întemeierea Aeliei Capitolina, (4) conducerea lui Bar Kokhba.*

One subject that has been extensively discussed in the research on the Bar-Kokhba revolt is the question regarding the immediate factors that caused its outbreak. During the last two decades, this issue has been examined from several points of view.<sup>2</sup> In my book, *The Bar-Kokhba Revolt: Its Extent and Effect*, I discussed this at length. My main argument was that a revolt does not usually break out because of immediate causes. The decision to go to war against a superior military force, both in numbers and in organization, is the result of cumulative and continuous factors in the social, economic, national and religious spheres.<sup>3</sup> Since the direct causes for the revolt have recently been raised once again for discussion, I shall focus my examination of them in light of the sources and research done in recent years on the following subjects: (1) Hadrian's promise to rebuild the Temple, (2) the ban on circumcision, (3) the Foundation of Aelia Capitolina and (4) Bar Kokhba's leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> MOR, RAPPAPORT 2001. See also the bibliographical appendix to this article.

<sup>3</sup> MOR 1991.

## 1. Hadrian's Promise to Rebuild the Temple

Midrash Genesis Rabba, 64:29

In the days of R. Joshua b. Hananiah the [Roman] State ordered the Temple to be rebuilt. Pappus and Lulianus set tables from Acco as far as Antioch and provided those who came up from the Exile [i.e. Babylon] with all their needs. Thereupon Samaritans went and warned [the Emperor]: *'Be it known now unto the king, that, if this rebellious city be builded and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute (mindah), impost (belo) or toll – halak' (Ezra IV, 13): 'mindah' is land tax; 'belo' is poll-tax<sup>1</sup>; 'halak' is androtiga.<sup>2</sup> 'Yet what can I do,' said he, 'seeing that I have already given the order?' 'Send a command to them that they must change its site or add five cubits thereto or lessen it by five cubits, and then they will with draw from it of their own accord.'* Now the Community [of Israel] was assembled in the plain of Beth Rimmon; when the [royal] dispatches arrived, they burst out weeping, and wanted to revolt against the [Roman] power. Thereupon they [the Sages] decided: Let R. Joshua b. Hanania go, as he is a master of Scripture. So he went and harangued them: A wild lion killed [an animal], and a bone stuck in his throat. Thereupon he proclaimed: 'I will reward anyone who removes it.' An Egyptian heron, which has a long beak, came and pulled it out and demanded his reward. 'Go', he replied, 'you will be able to boast that you entered the lion's mouth in peace and came out in peace' [unscathed]. Even so, Let us be satisfied that we entered into dealings with this people in peace and have emerged in peace (Midrash Rabbah, Genesis, Translated by Freedman, H).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> בימי ר' יהושע בן חנניה גזרה מלכות שיבנה בית המקדש, הושיבו פפוס ולוליאנוס טרפיון מעכו ועד אנטיוכיה והיו מספיקים לעולי גולה, אזלין אילין כותאי ואמרין ליה ידיע ליהוי למלכא דיהן קריתא דך תתבנא ושוריא ישתכללון מנדה בלו והלך לא ינתנון (עזרא ד יג) מנדה זו מידת הארץ, בלו זה פרוביגרון, והלך לאדרוטינה, אמר להון מה נעביד וגזרית, אמרין ליה שלח אמר להון ישנוניה מן אתריה אי יוספון עלוי חמש אמין או יבצרון מיניה חמש אמין ומן גרמון אינון חזרין בהון. הוין קהלייא מצמתין בהדא בקעתא דבית רמון, כיוון דאתון כתביא שורון בייכין בעיין ממרד על מלכותא, אמרין יעול חד בר נש חכים וישרך ציבורא, אמרין יעול ר' יהושע בן חנניה דהוא אסכולסטיקה דאורייתא, על ודרש אריה טרף וטרף ועמד עצם בגרונן, אמר כל

This source describes the promise made by Hadrian to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. The plan failed because of the subversions of the Samaritans, and its cancellation nearly led to a Jewish revolt against Hadrian. Since I have adopted the approach of those researchers who discount the historical value of the source, I shall not expand on this matter.<sup>5</sup> In my view, this text belongs with a number of Jewish anti-Samaritan sources that try to present the Samaritans as the schemers behind most of the calamities that befell the Jews.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. The Ban on Circumcision

*Historia Augusta*, **Hadrianus 14.2**:

Moverunt ea tempestate et Iudaei bellum, quod vettabantur mutilare genitalia.<sup>7</sup>

This line in the biography of Hadrian, from a collection of biographies of the Caesars called **Historia Augusta**, has been interpreted as evidence that Hadrian forbade the Jews to perform circumcisions. The problematic nature of the **Historia Augusta** in general, and the biography of Hadrian in particular (which is ascribed to an imaginary author named Spartianus), are well documented.<sup>8</sup>

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דאתי מפק ליה אנא יהיב ליה אגריה, אתא הדין קורה מצרייה דמקוריה אריך ויהיב מקורה ואפקיה, אמר ליה  
 הב לי אגרי. אמר ליה אזיל תהוי מגלג ואמר דעלת לפומיה דאריא בשלם ונפקת בשלם, כך דיינו שניכנסנו  
 באומה זו בשלום ויצאנו בשלום (בראשית רבה סד, כט מהדורת תיאודור-אלבק, 710–712)

<sup>5</sup> MOR 1991, 171-173.

<sup>6</sup> MOR 2003a, 172-175.

<sup>7</sup> For the different translations of the phrase *mutilare genitalia*, See for example: David Magie: "At this time the Jews began war, because they were forbidden to practise circumcision" (*The Scriptorum Historiae Augusta*, translated by Magie D, LCL, Vol. I, Cambridge, Mass. 1921, 45). M. Rabello: "At that time the Jews, too, began war because they were forbidden to mutilate (mutilare) the sexual organs" (RABELLO 1995, 187); Isaac "At this time the Jews started a war because they were forbidden to mutilate their genitals" (ISAAC 1998, 277); Golan: The Iudaei began war because they were forbidden to damage a necessary part of the male's genital organs" (GOLAN 1988, 338).

<sup>8</sup> On the *Historia Augusta*, see: SYME 1971a. See also GOLAN 1989.

Ronald Syme has already drawn attention to the fact that the Jews provide a rich variety of peculiarity, and therefore the [work] contains comic aspects:

The concern of the *Historia Augusta* with the Jews was not, it appears, either sustained or notably malevolent. Fun and oddities rather than any preoccupation with cult and race and nationality.<sup>9</sup>

David Golan also draws attention to the grotesque and ironic style of writing in **Historia Augusta**. In his view, circumcision is mentioned in a context of mockery for the sake of *thaumasia* (an extraordinary kind of the strange-grotesque that also arouses amazement). In his words:

No less telling is the fact that the editor-author rather than choose the prevailing technical or juridical term for describing circumcision in his text, that is *circumcidere*, preferred an expression which bluntly associated it with castration. The literary effect to which the writer aimed seems obvious, combining erotic innuendos and scoffing remarks on account of the oddity of the *Iudaei*.<sup>10</sup>

In a similar manner, Benjamin Isaac notes:

It is worth noting that the SHA does not mention circumcision but mutilation. The implication is that this was a ludicrous rebellion, for who in any sense would go to war because he was forbidden to mutilate his genitals?<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, Moshe David Herr and Alfredo Mordechai Rabello maintain that the only cause for the revolt was the ban on circumcision. Herr explains that circumcision was perceived by Hadrian as castration and thus imposed on the Jews the decree forbidding castration. He finds

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<sup>9</sup> SYME 1971b, 68.

<sup>10</sup> GOLAN 1988, 338. See: ISAAC 2005, 64.

<sup>11</sup> ISAAC 1998, 277-278. See also: ISAAC 2004, 472-474.

support for his view in Midrash Bereshit Rabbati which will be discussed later on.<sup>12</sup>

*Midrash Bereshit Rabbati*, 17, 1:

R. Yudan said: When Turnus Rufus banned circumcision, a man circumcised his son and went up to the Bema and was caught. He asked him: Didn't you hear that I prohibited? He answered: I heard. He asked him: So why did you circumcise your son? He answered: Two set at me the prohibition; the king said that I shall do and his servant ordered not to do. Which one should I fulfill? Turnus Rufus told him: The king allowed circumcising and I said not to circumcise, he will come and deal with you. The baby replied from the bosom of his mother and said: You are exempt. Since Turnus Rufus noticed that he is an infant, he said: He did not say it on his own, but he told it to me, and he dismissed him<sup>13</sup>

In his discussion of the sources that relate to the ban on circumcision, Aharon Oppenheimer claimed that these sources refer to the religious decrees that Hadrian promulgated after the suppression of the revolt.<sup>14</sup> He shares the opinion of scholars who find in *Historia Augusta* a clear intention to arouse laughter and ridicule towards the Jews, exactly as Martial did in one of his epigrams:

Menophilus' person a sheath covers so enormous that it would be sufficient for the whole tribe of comic actors. This fellow I had imagined – for we often bathe together – was solicitous to spare his voice, Flaccus; but while he was exercising himself in the view of

<sup>12</sup> HERR 1972, 82-125; HERR (1978), 1-11.

<sup>13</sup> אמר ר' יודן: משגור טורנוס רופוס שלא ימול אדם, מל אחד את בנו ועלה לבימה ונתפס. אמר לו: לא שמעת שגזרת? אמר לו: שמעתי. אמר לו: ומפני מה מלת את בנך? אמר לו: שנים גזרו עלי גזרה, המלך אמר שאעשה ועבדו גזר שלא אעשה, אי זה אקיים? אמר לו טורנוס רופוס: מלך אמר לימול, ואני אמרתי שלא לימול, יבא ויעמוד עליך. ענה התינוק מחיק אמו ואמר: פטור אתה, כיון שראה טורנוס רופוס שהוא קטן, אמר: אינו אומר מעצמו אלא הוא אמר לי, פטרוהו... (Ed. H. Albeck, p. 73): א.

<sup>14</sup> OPPENHEIMER 2003, 55-69.

the people in the middle of the exercise ground, the sheath unluckily fell off: lo, he was circumcised.<sup>15</sup>

But his main criticism was aimed at Herr's use of *Midrash Bereshit Rabbati*. This midrash is a small part of the midrash compiled by Moses the Preacher who lived during the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Narbonne and Toulouse. His nickname "The Preacher" was given for his expertise and because his books were written as collections of homiletics in the style of classic midrashim.<sup>16</sup> His primary works have been lost, but select fragments have been preserved in secondary quotations, mainly by Rashi and the Dominican monk Raymondus Martini in his book *Pugio Fidei* (The Dagger of Faith), published in 1278.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the midrash of Moses the Preacher cannot serve as reliable evidence for the circumcision decree.

Peter Schäfer also rejects the circumcision decree as a cause for the Second Revolt. In his view, this prohibition was imposed during the course of the rebellion or after its suppression, and the issue concerning circumcision was part of an internal Jewish struggle without any connection to Hadrian the Emperor.<sup>18</sup> He bases his perception on what is said in *Tosefta Shabbat 46:9*:

The mashukh (משוך) needs to be [re]circumcised. R. Yehudah said: he should not be [re]circumcised, if he has performed the episposmos because this is dangerous. They said that many were [re]circumcised in the days of Ben Koziba, and they had children and did not die, for it is said: 'Circumcising, he shall be circumcised' (Gen. 17:13) – even a hundred times. And it says: 'He has broken my covenant' (Gen. 17:14) any uncircumcised male shall be cut off from his people: he has broken my covenant – to include the one who has his foreskin drawn forward (mashukh).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Martialis, *Epigrammata*, 7, 82 (trans. W. C. A. Ker, LCL). See: STERN 1989, 526-527.

<sup>16</sup> TA-SHEMA 2001.

<sup>17</sup> On Rabbi Moses the Preacher, see: HIMMELFARB 1984, 55-78; HIMMELFARB 1994, 114-135.

<sup>18</sup> SCHÄFER 1981a; SCHÄFER 1981b, 74-94.

<sup>19</sup> המשוך צריך שימול, רבי יהודה אומר: משוך לא ימול, מפני שהוא מסוכן. אמרו לו: הרבה מלו בימי בן כוזבא והיו לו בנים ולא מתו, שנאמר "המול ימול" (בראשית יז 13), אפילו

Those who drew their foreskin forward were Jews who did so of their own free will in order to be considered gentiles. They were assimilated Jews who collaborated with the Romans in the political and cultural sphere. He compares them to the Hellenists of the period preceding the decrees of Antiochus Epiphanes. In 1990, in a jubilee volume in honor of the Oxford scholar Geza Vermes, Schäfer returned to the subject of the Second Revolt and the circumcision decrees in an article on Hadrian's policy in the Judaea.<sup>20</sup> He returned once again to this subject in an article he published in 1999 entitled: "The Bar Kokhba Revolt and Circumcision: Historical Evidence and Modern Apologetics".<sup>21</sup>

In both of these articles, Schäfer aims most of his critical arrows at Mordechai Rabello, Professor of Law at the Hebrew University.<sup>22</sup> In Rabello's words:

Spartianus relates the events preceding the Bar Kokhba revolt, and considers in explicit terms the ban on circumcision as the cause of the revolt...However, it is our position that in this renewal not only castration, but circumcision as well, could be banned and punished...It is reasonable to assume that like the ban on castration, the ban on circumcision held force over Jews and non Jews through the Empire...the ban was probably enforced, in particular in the Eastern regions of the Empire (Syria, Palestine, Arabia and Egypt): i.e., the regions where circumcision was most heavily practiced.<sup>23</sup>

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מאה פעם ואומר "זאת בריתי הפר" (שם, יז 14) לרבות את המשוך (תוספתא, שבת מו, ט, מהדורת ליברמן, 71).

<sup>20</sup> SCHÄFER 1990, 281-303. See also: HENGEL 1996, 358-391.

<sup>21</sup> SCHÄFER 1999, 119-132.

<sup>22</sup> RABELLO 1995, 176-214.

<sup>23</sup> RABELLO 1995, 188-189.

Rabello also rejects the interpretation of Schäfer regarding the “drawers of foreskin”. In his opinion, the drawing of foreskins should not be ascribed only to the assimilated who had undergone the operation, since:

The danger threatened the person who performed the act, e.g. the fathers etc., and not only the circumcised new born son.<sup>24</sup>

This means that, according to Rabello, the drawing of foreskins was done out of fear of the Romans who tended to be especially strict in considering the tense political situation, and only a few did so for the sake of assimilation.

Schäfer’s criticism focuses on the interpretation that Rabello gives to the sentence: “He should not be [re]circumcised ... because this is dangerous”. In his opinion, Rabello ignores the fact that the words **because this is dangerous** does not refer to the original circumcision but to the re-circumcision after the foreskin was drawn. The word **dangerous** does not apply to Hadrian’s prohibition of circumcision but to the medical procedure of the drawing process. In Schäfer’s view, the words of Rabbi Yehudah in the Tosefta are not connected at all with the Bar Kokhba revolt, but are concerned with the general phenomenon of the foreskin drawers, without reference to any definite historical event.<sup>25</sup>

I concur with Schäfer's main argument that the circumcision decree was not the cause of the revolt, but I do not agree with his explanations about the foreskin drawers. The central issue of the Bar Kokhba revolt was not the confrontation between assimilated Jews and national Jews who opposed cooperation with the Romans and the adoption of the Roman way of life. Ever since the Roman conquest of 63 BCE, there were Jewish collaborators with Roman rule. These were Jews who desired to live like the Romans, whom Schäfer calls “assimilated Jews”. Did their circumcision prevent them from assimilating? A prominent example of Jews of this kind was Herod and his family, who not only did not try to draw their foreskins but were, in fact strictly

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<sup>24</sup> RABELLO 1995, 198.

<sup>25</sup> SCHÄFER 1990, 294-295.



observant of this commandment. It is sufficient to recall the condition that Herod laid down for Sellaeus the Nabataean: that if he wished to marry his sister Salome, he would have to accept the customs of the Jews including circumcision.<sup>26</sup> In my opinion, the comparison that Schäfer makes between the internal struggle in Judaea and the situation in Judah on the eve of the Antiochus decrees is invalid. The Hellenistic reform occurred in 175 BCE, before these decrees were issued. As long as there was no danger to the national-religious existence of that generation, hardly any evidence could be found for the struggle between Hellenists and “nationalists” such as the Hasmoneans. For the years that preceded the Second Revolt and during its course there is hardly any evidence for struggles of this kind. On the contrary, there is evidence of cooperation with the Roman government that did not entail the assimilation of the collaborators. In this regard, it is enough to recall the examples of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabban Gamliel.

### 3. The Foundation of Aelia Capitolina

#### 3.1 In 130 CE - As a Cause for the Revolt

##### *Cassius Dio, Roman History, LIX 12*

At Jerusalem he founded a City in place of the one which had been razed to ground, naming it Aelia Capitolina, and on the site of the temple of the God he raised a new temple to Jupiter, This brought on a war of no slight importance nor of brief duration, for the Jews deemed it intolerable that foreign races should be settled in their city and foreign religious rites planted there

(LCL, vol. 9 translated by E. Cary)

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<sup>26</sup> JA, 16, 220-225.

These are not the original words of Cassius Dio, who lived at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, but a section from a synopsis written by the monk Xiphilinus at the request of the Emperor Michael VII in the 1070s.<sup>27</sup> According to this late evidence, the founding of Aelia Capitolina roused the Jews to revolt against the Romans. However, just as we have rejected the late dated statements by Moses the Preacher regarding the circumcision decree, we shall also have to reject the evidence of Xiphilinus.

### **3.2 In 136 CE – As a Result of the Revolt**

Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6:

Thus, when the city had come to be free of the nation of the Jews, and its ancient inhabitants had been entirely destroyed, it was colonized by a foreign race and the Roman city that thereafter arose changed its name and was called Aelia in honor of the reigning emperor, Aelius Hadrian. And as the church in it was now composed of Gentiles, the first after the bishops of the circumcision to be entrusted with the administration of those there was Marcus.<sup>28</sup>

The writings of Eusebius (Bishop of Caesarea in the 4<sup>th</sup> century) are usually filled with hatred for the Jews, especially in his description of the Second Revolt and the behavior of its leader (I shall return to this later on). According to Eusebius, it appears that the founding of Aelia Capitolina was part of the punitive measures that the Romans took against the Jews after the revolt was suppressed.

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<sup>27</sup> On Cassius Dio and Xiphilinus, see: BRUNT 1980, 477-494; ISAAC 1998, 211-21; GICHON 1986, 15-43.

<sup>28</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, in: *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington, 1965), Vol. I, p. 214.

In view of the conflicting evidence in the sources regarding the time and motive for the construction of Aelia Capitolina, two main questions are raised: first, the cause (or causes) that prompted Hadrian to build the colonia, and secondly, when exactly it was built. The answers to these questions determine whether its founding was the pretext for the revolt. In the past I have rejected any suggestion that the erection of Aelia Capitolina in the years 129-130, CE during Hadrian's visit to the region, was an intentional anti-Jewish measure. The founding of the city was part of the general policy of the Caesar to strengthen the Hellenistic foundations in his empire, and resulted from an examination of the status and function of Provincia Judaea within the system of eastern provinces, and its readiness to become culturally, socially, and religiously integrated into this system.<sup>29</sup> The main person who "vindicated" Hadrian from any anti-Jewish intentions in this connection was Benjamin Isaac. He explained the erection of Aelia Capitolina within general Roman policy. Ever since the days of Trajan, the Romans in the border provinces in Europe aspired to match the number of colonies in the provinces to the number of legions stationed there. This principle was also applied in Syria, although the number of colonies there had already amounted to three before the reign of Trajan. In view of this principle, Hadrian's aim in the reconstruction of Jerusalem was clear. He wanted to restore the city and make it the second Roman colony in Judaea. He chose Jerusalem as a colony because the Tenth Legion Fretensis had been stationed in the city since 70 CE.<sup>30</sup>

David Golan also links the founding of Aelia Capitolina with the general policy of the Roman emperor, but takes the discussion to the theological level:

Hadrian's major concern became what was the optimal answer to various questions: by what manner and means, in spite of his self-imposed limits, could Christianity be beaten, in of its not being

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<sup>29</sup> MOR 1991, 88-93.

<sup>30</sup> ISAAC 1998, 104, note 83. For a similar interpretation, see: BOATWRIGHT 2000, 172-173, 196-203.

confined to a territory, a nation, an army or a similar framework, how could this rival faith be removed from the precincts of Rome?

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Hadrian had become more and more confident that only by reversing the situation completely, by toppling the essential Christian symbol, would his needs be served; It was of vital importance to provide the Roman public with self-evident proof that would weaken the remaining symbols, preachings, and postulates of Christianity to their foundation.<sup>31</sup>

The ruins of Jerusalem were used by the Christians in their polemics against the Jews to prove the realization of the curse started by Jesus:

**“No one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down”.**<sup>32</sup>

In the opinion of Golan, the decision of Hadrian to build Aelia Capitolina over the ruins of Jerusalem was also fostered by the echoes of the polemics based on the principles of Christianity and on the signs that prove its truths. In this polemical debate “Jerusalem destroyed” was the central argument, and the efforts of the Pauline school of thought to bring Christianity to the nations could not minimize the centrality of Jerusalem in the story of Jesus.

In my opinion, the main fault in the view suggested by Golan is that it tries to create a kind of forestalling of the Julian the Apostate affair, even though it is difficult to link this matter with the pagan emperor Hadrian, since there is no attempt here at rebuilding the Temple. In fact, it

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<sup>31</sup> GOLAN 1986, 236-237.

<sup>32</sup> On Jesus' sayings about the destruction of the Temple see: Matt. 23: 37-38: Matt. 24: 2: Mark 13:2: “As Jesus came out of the temple, one of the disciples said to him, Look Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings. Then asked him, Do you see these great buildings? No one stone will be left here upon another all will be thrown down”; Luke 19, 41-44: As Jesus came near the and saw the city, he wept over it...Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another...”.

is the Temple far more than Jerusalem that stands at the center of the “prophecy” of Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

Martin Goodman regarded the decision of Hadrian to establish a Roman colony in Jerusalem as a continuation of Trajan’s policies. During the reign of Trajan a Jewish revolt broke out in the Diaspora against a background of despair among the Jews at the refusal of the authorities to rebuild the Temple. The response of Trajan was harsh, to the extent that Goodman called it a “final solution” for the destruction of Judaism. Hadrian’s role in this process was the decision to turn Jerusalem into a Roman colony. The erection of “a little Rome” in place of Jerusalem would make sure that the Jews could no longer hope for the reconstruction of their Temple in Jerusalem. In Goodman’s view, the unique aspect of the founding of Aelia Capitolina was that it was not erected, as were the other colonies, in honor of its citizens, but in order to repress a group of subjects.<sup>34</sup>

The view proposed by Goodman cannot withstand criticism. First of all, if behind the revolt in the Diaspora there was continuous despair at the failure to rebuild the Temple, one might expect that the population of the Land of Israel would take an active role in the revolt. Although, it is quite clear that a significant portion of the population of Provincia Judaea, Judaea and Idumaea did not participate in the revolt.<sup>35</sup> Even with regard to Galilee, which is usually associated with the “War of Kitos”, there are some who doubt its participation in events that might be associated with the Diaspora revolt.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, had the main reason for the Second Revolt been the founding of the colony Aelia Capitolina instead of Jerusalem, which, as Goodman says, was a colony that was not intended even for the “assimilated Hellenized” Jews, we would expect a different reaction from the participants in the Second Revolt. Indeed, there is

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<sup>33</sup> See our discussion above, of Midrash Genesis Rabba, 64, 29. The source does not constitute proof that Hadrian wanted to reconstruct Jerusalem as a Jewish city, and therefore there is no mention of rebuilding the Temple.

<sup>34</sup> See: GOODMAN 1992, 27-38. See also: GOODMAN 2003, 23-29.

<sup>35</sup> For a recent summary, see: PUCCI BEN ZEEV 2006, 93-104.

<sup>36</sup> ROKEAH 1972, 79-84.

hardly any scholar who thinks that Jerusalem was in the hands of the rebels or that they tried to conquer it. However, anyone who claims that the founding of Aelia Capitolina preceded the revolt and was the main cause for its outbreak must prove what the position of Jerusalem was during the course of the revolt!

Among the studies on Aelia Capitolina<sup>37</sup> and its connection to the Temple Mount are those by Yaron Zvi Eliav.<sup>38</sup> One of the important conclusions he makes is that Aelia Capitolina did not include the Temple Mount, and that it therefore remained in its state of desolation.<sup>39</sup> Following the position of Oded Irshai, who noted the tendency of Christian authors of the Byzantine period to give a new interpretation to Hadrian's acts in connection with the Bar Kokhba revolt and to color them in anti-Jewish hues,<sup>40</sup> Eliav argues that throughout within the Cassius Dio summary there are certain theological leanings of the monk Xiphilinus, and that it is only his words in the name of Cassius Dio that link the temple of Jupiter to the Temple Mount.<sup>41</sup>

When Xiphilinus wants to present Hadrian's acts as intended against the Jews, he turns them into a theological confrontation between Hadrian and the Jewish God. This author relocates the pagan temple and simply transfers it from the city to the Temple Mount. Moreover, he portrays this act, that was neutral and quite natural for the foundation of a new colony, in the violent strokes of religious conflict.<sup>42</sup> In his rejection of the historical value of the Cassius Dio-Xiphilinus summary regarding the acts of Hadrian in Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, Eliav also does not accept the location of the pagan temple on the Temple Mount.<sup>43</sup>

According to Eliav, no anti-Jewish tendencies should be ascribed to Hadrian. All that guided him in the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, and in leaving the area of the old Temple sanctuary outside the city scheme,

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example: FRIEDHEIM 2007, 125-152.

<sup>38</sup> ELIAV 1997, 125-144; ELIAV 2003, 241-277; ELIAV 2005.

<sup>39</sup> ELIAV 2005, 87.

<sup>40</sup> IRSHAI 1995, 129-178.

<sup>41</sup> ELIAV 2005, 86-87, n. 15.

<sup>42</sup> ELIAV 2005, 82.

<sup>43</sup> For a different view, see: TSAFRIR 1999, 157.

were technical and logistic considerations. These considerations induced the Roman founders of the colony to discard the borderlines of the old city that lay in ruins before them, and to design their colony within a new urban framework. The urban centers, the traffic routes, the temples, and other architectural elements created a new picture for the city of Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup>

If we adopt the conclusions of Eliav that the founders of Aelia Capitolina raised a new city, then its erection did not change the realities of Jerusalem at all. Since the year 70 CE, Jerusalem had remained in its ruined state, Jews did not live there, and the permanent camp of the Tenth Legion was stationed in the city. Therefore, we can discount the founding of Aelia Capitolina as the main cause for the Second Revolt.<sup>45</sup> In view of the explanations of Eliav, it is clear that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina was not a *casus belli* for the rebels.

To complete the discussion about Aelia Capitolina as a possible cause for the outbreak of the revolt, it is necessary to discuss the date for the foundation of the colony. This will be done mainly on the basis of numismatic evidence. Already in 1967, Yaakov Meshorer noted that in the archaeological plundering of Mount Hebron, a coin hoard was found dating to the period of the Bar Kokhba revolt and contained some coins from Aelia Capitolina. From these coins, Meshorer deduced that one should accept the words of the Cassius Dio-Xiphilinus summary regarding the founding of the city in the year 130 CE, i.e. before the outbreak of the revolt.<sup>46</sup> Since these coins were not found in an official excavation, some have cast doubt whether they were minted in Aelia before the end of the revolt. Therefore, they cannot provide evidence for the date of the founding of this colony,<sup>47</sup> but Hanan Eshel and Boaz Zissu, in an archaeological survey of the refuge caves in Nahal Michmash (Wadi

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<sup>44</sup> ELIAV 2005, 87-91.

<sup>45</sup> SHAHAR 2006, 131-146.

<sup>46</sup> MESHORER 1985, 43-50; MESHORER 1989, 19.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example: OPPENHEIMER, ISAAC 1987, 416, n. 65. Herr claims that the hoard was buried in the year 135, and it may be that the coins of the city began to be minted during the course of the revolt.

Suweinit) found coins that assist in determining the date for the founding of Aelia Capitolina.<sup>48</sup> The reference is to two undated coins, minted in Aelia Capitolina (Nos. 11 and 12), that were found together with four Bar Kokhba coins: three coins (Nos. 13-15) dated the second year of the revolt, i.e. 133/4 CE, and one coin (No. 16) from an undated series that was minted in the third and fourth year of the revolt. The discovery of these two coins of Aelia Capitolina, together with coins minted during the course of the revolt, indicates that these coins were minted before the year 135 CE.

Arie Kindler reaches the same conclusion, also on the basis of the numismatic analysis. In addition to the find mentioned above, Kindler relies on an analysis of the coins of the foundation of the city during the reign of Hadrian, on the form of Hadrian's portrait and the inscription beside it embossed on these coins. Thus, Kindler also regards the founding of the colony as a *casus belli* for the Second Revolt.<sup>49</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina was founded before the outbreak of the revolt, but was its founding the immediate cause for this outbreak? In view of the research by Eliav, I doubt this is so. The conclusion of Eliav is that the founding of the colony did not directly affect the Temple Mount. Therefore I find it difficult to regard its founding as one of the causes for the revolt, since from the year 70 CE, after the destruction of the Temple and the stationing of the Tenth Legion, the city was under direct Roman control.

If we do not accept Eliav's conclusions and regard the establishment of the colony as a cause for the outbreak of the revolt, then the reaction of the Jews to its founding is very surprising. If this was the cause, then one would expect that the leaders of the revolt and its participants would have concentrated all their efforts in an attempt to conquer the city, to purify it, perhaps even to renew the cultic rites in it, and to rebuild the Temple. According to the information at our disposal, this did not occur.

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<sup>48</sup> ESHEL, ZISSU 2000-2002, 168-175; ESHEL 2000, 636-643.

<sup>49</sup> KINDLER 2000-2002, 176-179.



The numismatic evidence is double proof that the rebel fighters did not reach Jerusalem. In excavations in Jerusalem only **four** Bar Kokhba coins have been found thus far, a tiny number in comparison with the 15,000 that were found throughout the region.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, in the areas of the uprising, thousands of coins of the Second Revolt were found.<sup>51</sup> Even the attempt to find evidence of the control of the rebels over Jerusalem in the documents of Wadi Murabba'at do not appear to be serious. From an examination of Documents 22 and 29 from Murabba'at, it was determined that the papyri dates are before the year 78 CE, and have no connection with the events of the Second Revolt.<sup>52</sup>

In view of what has been said above, neither the prohibition of circumcision nor the conversion of Jerusalem into a Roman colony were the immediate causes for the outbreak of the Second Revolt. It may be that these were actually the outcome of the revolt, as part of the punitive measures imposed by Hadrian on the Jews. Therefore the question must be asked: Was there a cause for the outbreak of the Second Revolt? In order to try and answer this question, we shall now turn to the issue of Bar Kokhba's leadership.

#### 4. Bar Kokhba's Leadership

The leadership of Bar Kokhba is deduced from scattered evidence in the letters and coins of the revolt, and in rabbinic and Christian sources. I shall open with the words of Eusebius of Caesarea.

##### 4.1 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4: 6:

And so, as the rebellion of the Jews again progressed in seriousness and extent ... At that time a certain **Bar Cochebas** by name, which means '**star**' was the general of the Jews, who among

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<sup>50</sup> ESHEL 2007.

<sup>51</sup> ZISSU, ESHEL 2001, 17-40; KAUFMAN 2000-2002.

<sup>52</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of these documents, see: ESHEL 2000; ESHEL 2007.

other characteristics was a **cut-throat** and a **bandit**, but who relied on his name, as if dealing with slaves, and boasted that he was a star that had come down from heaven to shed light upon them in their misery.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.2 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4: 6:

The same author (Justin) mentioning the war of that time against the Jews, adds the following: For in the Jewish war which has just taken place, Bar Chocheba, the leader of the Jewish rebellion, ordered Christians only to be brought to terrible punishments, if they did not deny Jesus as the Christ and Blaspheme him.<sup>54</sup>

This writer mentions the war that was waged in those days against the Jews, and therefore the author notes: In the present Jewish war the leader of the Jewish rebels, Bar Kokhba, commanded that hostility should be shown only to the Christians if they insist on their refusal to deny the messianic nature of Jesus and to blaspheme his name.<sup>55</sup>

The Christian sources focused on the leader and his leadership, and on the condition of the Christian community during the revolt, as exemplified in the words of Eusebius. Christian authors wanted to “justify” the destiny and fate of Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple, and therefore gave prominence to the leading figure of Bar Kokhba as a false messiah who lied to his believers and brought heavy catastrophe upon them. Paradoxically, the messianic pretensions of the leader of the revolt can be found in the Jewish Talmudic sources in the form of an exegesis of a verse from the prophecy of Balaam: “There shall

<sup>53</sup> *The Fathers of the Church, Eusebius Pamphili, Ecclesiastical History*, Books 1-5, Translated by Roy J. Deferari, New York 1953, p. 213. I added the emphasis.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>55</sup> Eusebius cited in Justin, *Apol.* I.36.1. for parallel versions, see: Eusebius, *Chronicles* to the year 133. Latin version: “Kokhba the duke of the Jewish sect, killed the Christians through various tortures [since] they refused to support him against the Roman army”. Armenian version: “Kokhbas, who led the Jewish rebellion punished many of the Christians in several tortures since they refused to fight with him against the Romans”. For a discussion on this source, see: BAUCKHAM 1998, 228-238.

come a star out of Jacob and a scepter shall arise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17):

#### 4.3 Jerusalem Talmud, *Ta'anith* 4, 8:

Rabbi Aqiba when he saw Bar-Kozebah, he said tis is the king Messiah. Said to him Rabbi Yohanan ben Torta, Aqiba grass will grow on your cheeks, and the Messiah will not yet have come!<sup>56</sup>

In 1968 Haim Dov Mantel published an article in which he discusses the motives for the Bar Kokhba revolt, reaching the conclusion that the revolt broke out in 125/126 CE.<sup>57</sup> He dates the background for the disappointment and bitterness among the Jews to the early years of Hadrian's rule because he did not liberate the Land of Israel from Roman bondage as he had for the countries beyond the Euphrates. Mantel accepts the words of Eusebius, in spite of their hostility (4.1), that reflect, in his opinion, the main cause for the outbreak of the revolt. Eusebius does not mention the two causes discussed above. He blames the Jews, whose aspiration for freedom and redemption caused them to rebel against Rome, and who were head by Bar Kokhba whom his supporters regarded as the Messiah.<sup>58</sup> To clarify the question, Mantel discusses once again the "national" messiah phenomenon that was so widespread in Provincia Judaea during the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. He noted a number of figures whom Josephus said were considered "kings" or "messiahs" by their supporters

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<sup>56</sup> Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai taught: Rabbi Akiba used to expound: A star shall come out of Jacob, Kosiba shall come out of Jacob. When Rabbi Akiba saw Bar Kosiba he used to say: This is the King Messiah. Rabbi Yohanan ben Torta said to him: Akiba, grass will grow on your cheeks and the Son of David will not have come". Parallel in Lamentations Rabba (Buber edition), p. 101.

<sup>57</sup> MANTEL 1967-1969, 224-242, 274-296, 341-342.

<sup>58</sup> MANTEL 1967-1969, 228, 278. Mantel also finds support in the words of Pausanias of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century who wrote nearly at the same time as the repression of the revolt: "He [Hadrian] never wanted to go to war without a reason. Although he decreased, reduced and constricted the Hebrews who rebelled beyond Syria (*Description of Greece*, I, 5.5). See also: STERN 1989, II, 192, No. 353.

(I shall discuss this later on). Mantel notes that, unlike the various “messiahs” who preceded Bar Kokhba, he enjoyed the support of the Sages of his generation headed by Rabbi Akiba. The declaration of Rabbi Akiba concerning the messianic nature of the rebel leader and his recognition of him as a “prince” united the Jews in the country and in the Diaspora under the flag of Bar Kokhba.

In his further discussion of Eusebius (4.3) Mantel deals mainly with the significance of the titles “messiah” and “prince”, and in fact defines the leader of the revolt as a “messiah”: “The extent to which the Jews exalted the personality and later the memory of Bar Kokhba, may be inferred from the Talmud which implies that Bar Kokhba was short of only one quality to make him the Messiah. He was unable to smell whether a litigant was right or wrong. Apparently the Talmud held that all other qualities which Isaiah ascribes to the son of David, were fulfilled in him.

“not only had no doubt that Bar Kokhba actually fulfilled the function intended for the Messiah by succeeding in expelling the Romans from Judaea, but that his personality was also suited to the role of the Messiah”.<sup>59</sup>

Mantel’s article did not receive much response in the research literature, mainly because he brought the date of the revolt forward to the year 125/126, a date that does not correspond to what we know about the revolt, and perhaps because of his interest in the messianic nature of the rebel leader.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, during the years that have passed, the discussion in the research literature on the question of the “messianic” and “princely” nature of Bar Kokhba has widened, and most researchers make the distinction between the eschatological messiah and the national messiah. Recently, Mantel has been given indirect support by Craig Evans, who, like Mantel, argues that the title “Prince”, both on the coins and in the letters of the revolt, was imbued with eschatological-messianic meaning

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<sup>59</sup> MANTEL 1967-1969, 282.

<sup>60</sup> See MANTEL 1967-1969, 239-242. See, for example, the criticism of S. Appelbaum (APPELBAUM 1972, 48, n. 53).

resembling the meaning of this title as it was understood in Qumran and in Ezekiel 37:24-25. In the opinion of Evans, the literary sources, however few and flimsy, describe Simon Bar Kokhba as the Messiah. He also believes that Rabbi Akiba recognized the messianic nature of Bar Kokhba since to interpret the phrase “a star came out of Jacob” as referring to him was not merely a “call for encouragement” but had profound meaning for the supporters of Ben Kosiba and indicated, in his view, that his supporters indeed saw him as the Messiah.<sup>61</sup>

Some have tried to learn about the messianic figure of Ben Kosiba from the coins of the revolt – the façade of the Temple decorated with a star. Numismatists such as Ya’akov Meshorer, Leo Miltenberg, and Arie Kindler reject such suppositions. The first two claim, for example, that the decoration was not a star but a rosette or rose,<sup>62</sup> while Kindler thought that “the purpose of this ‘star’ which is sometimes no more than a kind of cross, is merely to fill empty space on the coin”.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, Hillel Newman argues that on Roman coins the rose and star are the same. He finds parallels to the coins of the revolt in coins from Asia Minor and Greece that were minted in honor of the Divine Antinous, lover of Emperor Hadrian who drowned in the Nile, in which he identifies a star resembling a rose. He therefore continues to maintain the symbolic meaning of the star on the coins of the revolt and its messianic implications.<sup>64</sup> However, most of the researchers have transferred the discussion about messianism to the “political” sphere.

In the opinion of Yisrael Levin: “Messianism is not particularly a reason for uprising, but serves in most cases as an expression of the yearnings and impulses that usually originate in other spheres of life”.<sup>65</sup> He therefore negates the very existence of political messianism in the descriptions of Josephus, even though there may have been those who

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<sup>61</sup> EVANS 1995, 183-211; EVANS 2006, 9-40.

<sup>62</sup> MESHORER 1998, 134; MILDENBERG 1984, 43-45.

<sup>63</sup> HABAS 2000, 141-142. Referring to Kindler's assumption.

<sup>64</sup> NEWMAN 2001, 98-99.

<sup>65</sup> LEVINE LEE 1983, 135-152.

acted against the Romans out of messianic motives. From the unique words of Rabbi Akiba on Bar Kokhba (4.1) and the use of the title 'Prince' on the coins and in the letters of Simon, one cannot learn, in Levin's opinion, about the messianic nature of the revolt.<sup>66</sup>

Aharon Oppenheimer also restricts the messianic aspect of the revolt and deduces this from the fact that, in the letters and coins, the description of the leader is "Prince" and not a king or a messiah. He interprets the image or figure of the leader of the revolt in terms of national realities, as a leader with political and military talents and having the charisma that comes from his great physical strength.<sup>67</sup>

Moshe David Herr once again discusses this in "Realistic Political Messianism and Cosmic Eschatological Messianism in the Teachings of the Sages".<sup>68</sup> In his opinion, the phenomenon of messianism has many facets and varieties. Between the two extremes of realistic political messianism and catastrophic cosmic eschatological messianism, there exist a variety of shades. He believes that "Ben Kosiba himself did not have and was not seen to have the slightest trace of any mystical or apocalyptic experience", and that the Second Revolt "was imposed upon him by force of circumstance".<sup>69</sup>

Efrat Habas-Rubin also rejects the interpretation that regards Bar Kokhba as a messianic figure. In her opinion, the distinction between the title "Prince" and "Prince of Israel" is central to the understanding the title of Prince of Israel used by Simon Ben Kosiba. This title was chosen to "emphasize that Bar Kokhba had no pretensions to be considered a member of the Davidic dynasty, or to compete with the royal house of David as it was understood in his period ... and on the other hand, to stress the political and national character of his leadership, while using a title that is not dissociated from the terms familiar in early and late Jewish tradition".<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> LEVINE LEE 1983, 149.

<sup>67</sup> OPPENHEIMER 1983. See also: JAFFÉ 2006, 103-123.

<sup>68</sup> HERR 1985, 331-346.

<sup>69</sup> HERR 1985, 332-333.

<sup>70</sup> HABAS 2000 133-146, especially 138.

Peter Schäfer, in returning to sum up the issue of Bar Kokhba and the Sages, continues to reject entirely the historical value of the sources that were mentioned (4.1, and its parallel in Lamentations Rabba, 2,4). He especially refuses to make any connection between Rabbi Akiba and his statement that presumably points to the messianic nature of Bar Kokhba, and the support of the greatest Sage of his generation in the revolt and its leader. He explains how, in his opinion, the events of the Second Revolt and the description of Bar Kosiba himself were critically “inserted” into the world of the Sages of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, and therefore the source in question and those similar to it cannot be considered as evidence of the support of the Sages for the revolt.<sup>71</sup> In Schäfer’s view, the title “Prince” is well embedded in the worldview of Second Temple Judaism. This title was preferred by the Sages to the title of king since it had less ideational impact, since by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE this title had lost its power with the last of the Hasmonean kings, especially after the reign of Herod. In spite of negating the connection between messianism and the Second Revolt, Schäfer finds no difficulty in attaching the title of “Messiah” to Bar Kosiba because, in his view, the Messiah was part of contemporary 2<sup>nd</sup> century history, and not part of utopia or future history.<sup>72</sup>

Most scholars thus see Bar Kosiba as a political and national leader, basing themselves mainly on the various kinds of “messiahs” mentioned in Josephus.<sup>73</sup> Therefore in order to define the “messianism” of Bar Kokhba, and whether there was an immediate cause for the outbreak of the revolt, analogy should be used to compare the description of Josephus and other sources with the account on the figure and leadership of Bar Kokhba.

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<sup>71</sup> SCHÄFER 2003, 1-22, see especially pages 15, 17. In the past, Schäfer cautiously argued that Rabbi Akiba recognized Bar Kokhba as the Messiah. See: SCHÄFER 1978, 65-121; SCHÄFER 1980, 113-130. However, he argued to exclude R. Akiba’s name from this translation (SCHÄFER 1981a).

<sup>72</sup> SCHÄFER 2003, 18.

<sup>73</sup> MANTEL 1967-1969,282; HERR 1985, 337-339; SCHÄFER 2003, 19; REINHARTZ 1989, 171-194; EVANS 1995, 183-211; COLLINS 1995, 198-204; GAGER 1998, 37-46.

I have listed about twenty “types” whose names have been associated in Josephus and in other sources with messianism in its widest sense, and who were active in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora from the time of Ezekias the Galilean, when Herod was the governor of Galilee in 49 BCE, until the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE. Josephus describes the phenomenon in general, and these are his words after having given a description of several events that occurred in Herod’s kingdom immediately after the king died:

**Antiquities 17: 258:**

And now Judea was filled with **bandits**, and whoever found a few men to join with him in riots was set up as a **king** and they were hasty (to inflict) disaster on the people. They aggravated the Romans (but) a little, and a few (of them) murdered their own people.

Elsewhere he says:

**The Jewish War II: 264-265:**

Now when these were quieted, it happened, as it does in a diseased body, that another part was subject to an inflammation; for a company of deceivers and robbers got together, and persuaded the Jews to revolt, and exhorted them to assert their liberty, inflicting death on those that continued in obedience to the Roman government, and saying, that such as willingly chose slavery ought to be forced from such their desired inclinations; for they parted themselves into different bodies, and lay in wait up and down the country, and plundered the houses of the great men, and slew the men themselves, and set the villages on fire; and this till all Judea was filled with the effects of their madness. And thus the flame was every day more and more blown up, till it came to a direct war



A study of these descriptions of “messiahs” shows to what extent nearly all of them have the same characteristics. First, Their activities are very brief and end in failure. All of them acted within confined territorial boundaries, and all had supporters who followed them and were sometimes called a “large troop” or a “large gang”, which at the end dispersed in all directions. Some declared themselves or were declared by their supporters as kings, and others treated them like royalty. Most of them are described as handsome men who excelled in “height and strength” as men of “physical vigor” and “high courage” and “possessing great daring”. Josephus calls them “bandit leaders”, “scoundrels”, “sorcerers”, “liars”, “prophets”, and some of them are motivated by madness. All of them are perceived as rebels against the government and find their death in hanging, burning or crucifixion.

In order to exemplify this, I shall mention only three of them. Simeon, who was declared by the insanity of his supporters as king and wore a royal crown (Antiq. 17:273-277, JW II:60); Ethronges the Shepherd, who dared to aspire to the throne, was called a king and wore a royal crown, and whom Josephus notes that: “He himself dealt with important matters befitting a king” (Antiq. 17:278-284); and Menahem, who appeared in the Temple wearing royal robes (JW II:433-448).<sup>74</sup>

The characteristics mentioned above greatly resemble the descriptions of Bar Kokhba in Jewish and Christian sources. According to the best of my knowledge, the archaeological finds reflect the spread of the revolt within a fairly limited area.<sup>75</sup> In the Jerusalem Talmud, one statement with the reservation of Ben Torta, identifies the leader of the revolt as a messiah, and the Babylonian Talmud presents him after the fact as a false messiah. Traditional sources say that he had an enormous number of supporters, and that he selected his soldiers among them after arduous and dangerous tests of ability and courage such as cutting off a finger or uprooting oaks. He was so strong and ruthless that he killed Eleazar with a kick. From his letters we learn that he was careful to

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<sup>74</sup> STERN 1991, 300-308.

<sup>75</sup> MOR 2003b, 107-131.

observe all the commandments, but traditional sources blame his failure on his arrogance towards God, and he was killed by heavenly decree - by a snake that was found around his neck or on his shanks, which were the main center of his strength. It was said that: "If God had not killed him, who else could have done so!" In Christian sources he is presented as one who claimed he fell from heaven in order to redeem his supporters, and also as a cruel and murderous leader; like bandits, he had enormous strength and attacked anyone who did not support him.

Although there is great resemblance between the descriptions of these leaders, there are some outstanding differences. Even though he acted within a limited area, he achieved military success in his battles against the Romans. His activities lasted for nearly four and a half years, and he engaged large forces of the Roman army under the best of their commanders. He set up a well-ordered mechanism with which he held command over the areas under his control with a high hand. Indeed, in order to suppress the revolt, the Romans were forced to bring their best commanders and elite units which ended the revolt after a prolonged siege on Betar and a hunt for remaining rebels in the Judaeen Desert.

Ben Kosiba was therefore a charismatic leader to whom researchers try to ascribe messianic qualities in its various senses, but in his letters and coins of the first year of the revolt, only the title of "Prince" was attached to his name. These attempts ignore the fact that he was the leader of a fairly local revolt. His name was associated with his place of origin, Khirbet Kosiba, eight kilometers northwest of Hebron, which was the geographical focus of the revolt.<sup>76</sup> The leader of the revolt gained the support of those who lived in that area: Sages,<sup>77</sup> priests,<sup>78</sup> farmers, and perhaps even non-Jews. The support was the result of his personality and special abilities. According to the sources, he had the outstanding qualities of charismatic leaders who in times of crisis was followed by the masses, and he led them by virtue of his personality and special abilities.

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<sup>76</sup> See: SCHÄFER 1999, 15 in which he rejects the name Kosiba as testifying to his place of origin.

<sup>77</sup> See: ROZENFELD 2005, 319-359. See also: HACHAM 2005, 547-563.

<sup>78</sup> GOODBLAT 1996, 225-249.

While writing this article I thought that the title "Messiah" would perhaps answer the question as to the immediate motive for the revolt, and that we could return to the forty-year-old suggestion of Haim Dov Mantel. The cause for the revolt was the messianic nature of the leader of the revolt. However, the deeper I went in my study, the clearer it became that the answer to our question is not in the titles of the leader of the revolt: "Messiah", "King", or "Prince", titles that his supporters or enemies gave him.

In view of the "messianic" characteristics of Bar Kokhba, it appears that he does not fit the definition of a leader of a messianic movement. Messianic movements are usually created by their supporters, and flourish from the ground up. Their leaders are what the movement understands them to be, and they serve as the focal point of a symbolic identity rather than a source of authority and initiative.<sup>79</sup> This is not how the figure of Bar Kokhba is portrayed! From the sources, in spite of their paucity and bias, a charismatic, authoritative, and enterprising figure emerges, who presumably promises to find an answer to the cumulative and continuous difficulties in the social, economic, national and religious spheres, and it is all of these together that were eventually the cause for the Second Revolt.

Therefore, if it was not the prohibition of circumcision or the founding of Aelia Capitolina that caused the revolt, and if the emphasis is laid on the leader of the revolt, the question then arises as to the time of the uprising. Why did Ben Kosiba launch the revolt in the year 132 in particular? In my opinion, the date of the revolt should be linked to Hadrian's visit to the region, which extended from the autumn of 129 to the summer of 130. In his itinerary, Hadrian visited Phoenicia, the Land of Israel, and Arabia. From Gaza he took the sea route to Alexandria, from where he returned to Syria. After another visit to Provincia Asia he visited Athens in 131-132.<sup>80</sup> The urgent visits of Hadrian in the eastern provinces were political attempts to unify the Roman Empire. These visits were

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<sup>79</sup> TALMON 1965, 528.

<sup>80</sup> MILLAR 1993, 105-108.

accompanied by building and development enterprises, and there is no doubt that these were an economic burden on the inhabitants of the provinces. The visits of the Caesar imposed a heavy strain on the inhabitants of the Land of Israel who were forced, among other things, to cover the expenses of the emperor's royal retinue, as was the accepted practice. The remarks of Cassius Dio-Xiphilinius hints at the realities of the region. According to them, as long as Hadrian remained in Egypt and Syria, the Jews remained quiescent, but only after he had left the region did they rebel. They took advantage of the period between the visit of Hadrian to the region and the outbreak of the revolt to prepare the area of revolt by amassing weapons and setting up a system of refuge (Cassius Dio, 69, 12.2). The causes were therefore of a continuous nature, and the charismatic leadership of Bar Kokhba swept up his followers who went out in revolt against the Romans.

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