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[Review of] Nachman Ben-Yehuda, The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, xxi + 401 pp.

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most basic, locative, sense, and accordingly translate οἰκέλοι νόμοι 'the laws of one's country'? That would lead us, so as to maintain the parallelism, to translate πάτριος too as referring to a country, Egypt; thus Thackeray ('his country's laws...laws of his country') and Reinach ('lois de sa patrie ... lois de son pays'). Or, rather, should we resolve the problem in the other direction, as Schröder (p. 146), maintaining 'väterlich' for πάτριος but translating οἰκέλος in a more general sense as 'heimisch': 'dessen eigenen väterlichen Gesetzen...den heimischen Gesetzen'? These questions deserve detailed examination, not least because the question, whether Jews see their laws as those of a country or as those of a people, is of fundamental importance for the nature of Jewish identity.

Schröder's book is well researched, well organized and well written, thorough, disciplined and perspicacious. It is completed by a copious bibliography (even including some Hebrew works) and by helpful indices. Would that the world of Josephan scholarship had more such volumes on his central concepts.

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Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, xxi + 401 pp.

The Masada Myth is not primarily a work of history — much less of ancient history. Rather, it lies squarely within the discipline of sociology, and concerns itself particularly with the sociology of knowledge, using the creation of the 'Masada myth' as a case study. This is by no means the first or only work on this subject: as early as 1975 Bernard Lewis examined Masada in his influential *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented*. As recently as 1995 Yael Zerubavel included Masada (along with the Bar Kochba uprising and Yosef Trumpeldor's death at Tel Hai) in *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Yet Ben-Yehuda has written the first book-length treatment to focus exclusively on the creation of the Masada myth. It is the best investigation of the subject to date and, despite its sociological bent, is an important work for historians.

After an introduction, which discusses methodology, *The Masada Myth* begins with a short survey of the historical evidence. While the specialist will learn nothing here, Ben-Yehuda does a good job at setting out what little we actually know about the siege, a useful exercise. The next part of the book discusses the development of the modern Masada myth, with an entire chapter devoted to the pivotal role of Shmaria Guttman. Ben-Yehuda investigates how the myth was used, and expanded, by various groups: Zionist Youth Organizations, the Jewish Underground in the Mandate period (Hagana, Irgun and the Stern Gang), and, after Independence, by the Israel Defense Force. The following section surveys the vision of Masada in Israeli textbooks, popular media, the tourism industry and children's literature. Finally, Ben-Yehuda analyzes the question of the Masada myth from a sociological perspective, discussing 'collective memory', 'mythical narrative' and 'contextual constructionism'. For the ancient historian or classicist, the beginning of the book is likely to be the most interesting, particularly the discussion of how the myth was created by omitting key portions of Josephus' narrative. The central discussion of how the Masada myth was propagated is of general historical interest, but while Ben-Yehuda's

concluding sociological analysis seems thorough (as far as I can judge), the historian can safely skip over these sections.

Ben-Yehuda focuses on two basic elements of the Masada myth: first, that the defenders were nationalist freedom fighters, and second, that their resistance was both fierce and long-lasting, with up to three years of constant fighting. Ben-Yehuda notes that neither element of the myth is supported by the historical evidence. Josephus characterizes the *Sicarii* as bandits and terrorists and blames them for the massacre of hundreds of innocent Jews at En Gedi. It is noteworthy that the modern Masada myth suppresses this view: Yadin, for example, falsely referred to the defenders as 'Zealots' in order to distance them from the misdeeds of the *Sicarii*. Of course, to some extent Ben-Yehuda is begging the question, as whether one sees the *Sicarii* as terrorists or freedom fighters is ultimately a subjective determination.

On the second point, the myth asserts the Romans kept Masada under active siege for two or even three years. Ben-Yehuda points out that there is absolutely no historical basis for this assertion, which flies in the face of Josephus' account. In analyzing the modern myth's treatment of the length of the siege, however, Ben-Yehuda accepts the scholarly consensus of a four- to six-month siege. As I have argued in the pages of this journal (*SCI* 14 (1995) 87-110), there is no reason to think the siege lasted over a winter, and many reasons to think it did not. Josephus gives only the end date of the siege, Xanthicus 15, which whether a Julian date (April 15) or a Jewish one (Nisan 15) is about six weeks after the traditional start of the Roman campaigning season, March 1. All the evidence suggests that the Romans could easily have completed the siege in this period, and no doubt did so. Of course, Ben-Yehuda cannot be blamed for accepting the view of the majority of historians and a six-week siege merely amplifies his point: that the Masada myth's basic notion, that the siege was a very long one, seriously misrepresents history.

In discussing historical issues, such as the length of the siege, Ben-Yehuda takes a sociological point of view:

For my purposes, Josephus Flavius' credibility and reliability are side issue. I take Josephus Flavius as my departure point and compare the Masada mythical narrative to his version of events. (21)

This theoretical approach works in focusing on the way the myth diverges from Josephus' account, while purporting to be based on it. Historians, however, cannot take this route — they must concern themselves not only with Josephus as a source, but with trying to recreate the siege of Masada as a historical event. In fact, Ben-Yehuda does engage in some historical criticism in discussing Josephus, although not always with success: for example, he seems to accept Ben Jair's speeches, clearly complete inventions of Josephus, as authentic (37).

A more serious criticism of Ben-Yehuda is that he does not sufficiently analyze Josephus' own role in creating the Masada myth. Josephus' attention to the siege is out of all proportion to its military or strategic significance. As Seth Schwartz has argued, the story was probably originally intended as a dramatic ending to the *Jewish War*, which explains Josephus' hyperbole ('The Composition and Publication of Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* Book 7', *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986) 378). Josephus doubtless deliberately obscured the actual length of the short siege precisely in order to amplify its impact. Nevertheless, one must distinguish between Josephus' tendentiousness and the modern Masada myth.

While the famous mass 'suicide' at Masada is almost certainly historical, Ben-Yehuda notes that the Masada myth misconstrues it. In the first place, the women and children did not kill themselves, but were executed by the male *Sicarii*, and it is not at all clear (or likely) that they volunteered to die. Indeed, several survived by hiding and presumably others would have if they could. Secondly, while the defenders' death is characterized in the myth as a noble act, taken when there was no alternative, the possibility of fighting the Romans to the death is not considered. Interestingly, Jossipon's 10th century Hebrew rendering of Josephus 'adjusts' the end of the story in exactly this way: the Jewish defenders die in a last desperate attack on the Romans.

The discussion of how the modern Masada myth developed, or more accurately, was developed, is most interesting part of the book. Ben-Yehuda seems hesitant to lay personal blame for the rise of the myth at the feet of Shmaria Guttman, whom he clearly admires. Nevertheless, it is clear that Guttman, and others, including Yigael Yadin, were perfectly cognizant that the version of events they were putting forth was at odds with the historical evidence. These individuals, and others, no doubt felt that political factors, specifically the need to create a heroic proto-Zionist myth, outweighed empirical considerations.

Historical myths, particularly ones with political ramifications, are difficult to attack with mere facts. The siege of the Alamo is as important in Texas 'nationalism' as Masada is to Zionism. One of the key elements in the story is Davy Crockett 'goin' down fightin'' against overwhelming odds. The historical record, however, shows that Crockett and a handful of other defenders surrendered to the Mexicans and were shot by order of General Santa Ana. When the *Columbia Encyclopedia* included this fact in their article on the Alamo in the 1940s, there was such an uproar that the embarrassing reality was omitted in subsequent editions. It was not until the 1970s that biographies of Crockett and histories of the Alamo portrayed the real ending. Even so, John Wayne's characterization and generations of tour guides have had a much more powerful effect than the historical evidence. The vast majority of Americans still think that Crockett died fighting. Ironically, Ben-Yehuda himself is unsure whether the legendary version is myth or reality (329 n. 28).

Why should we be concerned about the existence of such historical myths? Even if they are not true, do they not have a salutary effect: instilling patriotism and ethics in young Israelis (or Texans or Serbs, as the case may be)? The danger is that by giving up the notion of objectivity and empiricism, history will become mere propaganda and public relations. The historical project itself, which has made such enormous strides in understanding the past, particularly the ancient past, is threatened by such a notion.

Ben-Yehuda describes how the usefulness of the Masada myth declined with the Six-Day War, for a variety of reasons. Whereas few of the areas associated with ancient Judaism were included in the original state, many fell into Israeli hands at that time. In addition, there was less of a mortal threat to the state, and the image of the suicidal last stand seemed less appropriate. Ben-Yehuda also touches on how uncomfortable religious Jews, an increasingly influential element of Israeli society, have been with the Masada story; after all, Halacha forbids suicide. Finally, Israel's attitude towards tourism was changing as well. Ben-Gurion once indicated his disdain for the tourist trade, quipping that he did not help establish the state of Israel to see Jewish waiters, but the industry is now one of Israel's largest. As Masada becomes a *sine qua non* for tours, it becomes less attractive as a national shrine.

While the political usefulness of the myth might be gone, the historical side effects will negatively impact scholarship, in many different fields, for generations. The idea of two- or three-year siege of Masada has indeed corrupted a number of scholarly discussions. For example, in his influential work *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, Edward Luttwak took the idea of a three-year siege of Masada as a fundamental datum in his discussion of Roman strategic thinking (3-4). Since Luttwak is a military historian, he certainly should have known better, but scholars in other disciplines quite innocently take up this idea, with unfortunate results. For example, a recent discussion in a scholarly journal on mass suicide turns on the question of the psychological impact of being besieged for years (*Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 24/2 (1994) 204, 6). A ethnobotanist devotes serious study to how farming was possible on top of Masada to try and explain how the defenders survived years of siege (*Discover* 15/12 (Dec. 1994) 14). The historical reality of a short siege of Masada seriously affects the assumptions on which these, and other, scholarly discussions are based. The only remedy to the continued effect of historical myths is the exactly sort of vigorous questioning which characterizes Ben-Yehuda's work.

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Studies on the Jewish Diaspora in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, Te'uda XII, edd. B. Isaac and A. Oppenheimer, Tel Aviv, 1996, 254 pp.

The fourteen papers in this volume were delivered at a conference at Tel Aviv University in January 1991. Modern historians who, like some of their ancient Greek predecessors, look for the deeper meanings in strange historical conjunctions, will find a rich example in a conference on the Jewish Diaspora held in Israel on the eve of the Gulf War. The editors appropriately thank the foreign participants 'who joined the conference as if nothing at all untoward was happening'. They themselves are to be thanked for focusing attention on a vital and complex topic which until recently has received scant attention and only formulaic treatment. There is a good deal of literary, documentary and archaeological evidence which awaits detailed scrutiny, as well as a number of questions which have not been asked honestly, such as why and how — and whether — we may talk about a 'Jewish Diaspora' as an undifferentiated phenomenon. Most of the scholars who spoke at the Tel Aviv conference appreciate the minute evidentiary matters and the larger methodological questions. That the papers published here are of uneven quality is unavoidable in conference proceedings, and the bane of well-intentioned editors.

The first three papers (in Hebrew with English summaries) study the relationship between the Jewish establishment in Palestine and Diaspora communities in different periods. Uriel Rappaport, 'The Jews of Eretz-Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora during the Hellenistic and Hasmonean Periods', argues that the locus of authority and the source of social and political initiatives shifts from Babylonia to Palestine, especially under the self-assertive Hasmoneans. According to Shmuel Safrai, 'Contact Between the Leadership of the Land of Israel and the Hellenistic and Eastern Diasporas in the First and Second Centuries', the Palestinian focus of Jewish activity, at least from a rabbinic point of view, continued into the early second century CE but shifted back to Babylonia after the Bar Kokhba revolt. (To complete the chronological continuum, Aryeh Kasher, 'Herod