

## Social Banditry? Galilean Banditry from Herod until the Outbreak of the First Jewish Revolt\*

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Scholarship on the first Jewish revolt of 66-70 CE has advanced considerably since the publication of Martin Hengel's *Die Zeloten* in 1961.<sup>1</sup> In it Hengel argued, based on his reading of Josephus, that the outbreak of the first Jewish revolt against Rome was primarily the result of an established anti-Roman Galilean resistance movement known as 'the Zealots', who were an amalgam of various subgroups such as the 'Bandits', 'Sicarii', and 'Fourth Philosophy'.<sup>2</sup> Though Hengel's thesis had an immediate impact on subsequent scholarship, over time, many became wary of his conclusions. Solomon Zeitlin and later Morton Smith were among the first who seriously challenged Hengel's work.<sup>3</sup> They convincingly demonstrated that 'the Zealots' never existed as an organized resistance group until sometime after the initial outbreak of the first revolt, and that the 'Sicarii' and 'Zealots', who were virtually synonymous according to Hengel, were actually two distinct groups. More recently, Richard Horsley has attempted to show in a number of related articles and monographs that the Galilee was neither a hotbed of Zealotism nor were the various bandits who operated there members of the 'Fourth Philosophy' and consequently part of a longstanding Jewish resistance movement.<sup>4</sup> Horsley contends that Hengel's characterization of the Galilee was based on a misreading of Josephus and also had an apologetic agenda, as it served as a foil against which to portray the Galilean Jesus of Nazareth as an apolitical pacifist who preached peace and passive resistance.<sup>5</sup>

A major feature of Horsley's critique of Hengel was his attempt to offer a viable alternative to Hengel's characterization of Galilean banditry. Whereas Hengel located Galilean banditry firmly within the context of the 'Fourth Philosophy', Horsley argued that Galilean banditry in Josephus is best understood as a definite example of 'social

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\* I thank Fergus Millar (University of Oxford) and John Kloppenborg (University of Toronto) for reading earlier drafts of the paper and providing many useful comments and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Martin Hengel, *Die Zeloten* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-145.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon Zeitlin, 'Zealots and Sicarii', *JBL* 81 (1962), 395-98; Morton Smith, 'Zealots and Sicarii: Their Origins and Relations', *HTR* 64 (1971), 1-19.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Horsley, 'Josephus and the Bandits', *JSJ* 10 (1979), 37-63; 'Ancient Jewish Banditry and the Revolt against Rome', *CBQ* 43 (1981), 409-432; Richard Horsley and John Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA.: Trinity Press International, 1985); Richard Horsely, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, PA.: Trinity Press International, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), x.

banditry'.<sup>6</sup> Here Horsley invokes the work of modern social historian Eric Hobsbawm and his thesis of social banditry which argues that such banditry functioned as a pre-political and non-organized form of rural protest against injustice and as resistance to foreign occupation.<sup>7</sup> In this vein social bandits operated much like Robin Hoods as they fought on behalf of the peasantry and righted any wrongs that were inflicted upon them by the ruling classes. While this characterization of ancient Galilean banditry seems sensational, it currently dominates the field of scholarship. Martin Goodman, Peter Richardson, K.C. Hanson and Douglas Oakman, have to varying degrees embraced Horsley's thesis and joined with him in identifying the various manifestations of Galilean banditry as examples of 'social banditry'.<sup>8</sup>

However, when Hobsbawm's thesis is rigorously applied to Josephus and his depiction of Galilean banditry, the model of social banditry does not fit as nicely as Horsley and others argue. While certain features may possibly be present in Josephus' various accounts, the complete absence of many fundamental characteristics of the social bandit thesis would seem to preclude such a characterization. Upon close examination the picture appears more complex and variegated and resists this ideological reductionism. Rather, it seems that Galilean banditry operated primarily within structures of power and the maintenance of that power. This view of Galilean banditry seems to fit in well with the phenomenon of banditry in the larger Roman world and agrees in many respects with Brent Shaw's general assessment of banditry in the Roman Empire which locates it primarily within relationships of power and patronage.<sup>9</sup> In order to demonstrate this thesis, this paper will examine Josephus' depiction of Galilean banditry from its first appearance in the time of Herod in the mid-first century BCE until the mid-sixties CE when the Jewish revolt begins and Josephus' description of the Galilee breaks off. This examination will attempt to show the many problems associated with the social bandit hypothesis and will seek to offer an alternate framework that is more nuanced and allows for a more accurate assessment that is not so ideologically rooted.

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<sup>6</sup> Horsley, 'Josephus and the Bandits', 42-60; 'Ancient Jewish Banditry and the Revolt against Rome', 412-424; *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*, 48-87; *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1995), 256-268.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), 13-29; 'Social Banditry', in H. Landsberger (ed.), *Rural Protest: Peasant Movements and Social Change* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 142-157; *Bandits* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Abacus, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome A.D. 66-70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 60-65; Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 250-52; K.C. Hanson and Douglas Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 86-91, 203.

<sup>9</sup> Brent Shaw, 'Bandits in the Roman Empire', *P&P* 105 (1984), 5-52; 'The Bandit', in Andrea Giardina (ed.), *The Romans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 300-341.

## I. Banditry and the Roman World

Banditry was thoroughly entrenched in the Roman world, as it appeared at different times and in varying locations affecting both the rich and poor alike.<sup>10</sup> While it was actively suppressed under Augustus and was rare in the first century, with the exception of a few notable locations (i.e. Cilicia and Judea), it gradually increased in the second century until it grew to epidemic proportions in the later empire.<sup>11</sup> It even appears that some degree of banditry was regarded as normal and indigenous to pastoral borderlands and other suitable regions.<sup>12</sup> From the numerous references to banditry in ancient sources it is clear that it was a common phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> However, it is with some difficulty that an exact meaning for the word 'bandit' can be established. While references to banditry abound, there is no uniformity in the exact semantic field of the term, because ancient authors tended to employ this term loosely to refer to anyone who acted in violent opposition to the established order, or pejoratively to slander or malign an enemy.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, in many instances the term is used to refer to bands of robbers who dwelt and plundered in the rural countryside.<sup>15</sup> The technical terms most often employed by Greek and Latin authors to refer to bandits were *λησται* and *latrones* and they were purposely distinguished from the thief, *κλέπτης* or *fur*, by their *modus operandi*. While both tried to acquire goods illegally, the thief worked with greater stealth and typically with less violence, whereas a bandit operated more openly and typically stole goods by resorting to direct confrontation. What enabled a bandit to expropriate goods forcefully was the fact that a bandit never operated alone; he was always accompanied by a group of associates. Samuel Brunk, in his studies on banditry in twentieth-century Mexico, offers a concise definition of banditry that seems very applicable to this paper and will serve as its working definition. According to Brunk a bandit is, 'someone who engages in property theft as part of a group. This theft is sometimes combined with violence against the owners of that property and is generally associated with rural rather than urban areas, and with direct confrontation rather than stealth'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For a deeper discussion and analysis of banditry on a large scale in the ancient world see Shaw's works listed above and Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), appendix B 'Banditry'.

<sup>11</sup> MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 259-60. For a second century view of banditry see Fergus Millar, 'The World of the Golden Ass', *JRS* 71 (1981), 63-75.

<sup>12</sup> John Kloppenborg-Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History And Setting Of The Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 249-50.

<sup>13</sup> Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* shows the extent to which banditry may have been prevalent in the countryside (2.18f; 3.29f; 4.13f; 7.6f).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature. Writing, Identity, and Empire in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 69-87; Brent Shaw, 'Bandit Highlands and Lowland Peace: The Mountains of Isauria-Cilicia', *JESHO* 233 (1990), 200-01; Shaw, 'Bandits in the Roman Empire', 4-6.

<sup>15</sup> MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 255.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Brunk, "'The Sad Situation of Civilians and Soldiers": The Banditry of Zapatismo in the Mexican Revolution', *ARH* 101(1963), 334.

Bandits operated mostly in rural areas or on the frontiers of society where there was little government opposition or where local magistrates were responsible for policing.<sup>17</sup> Ancient police forces worked mainly in cities, and their effectiveness diminished substantially the further they distanced themselves from the city walls.<sup>18</sup> The reasons bandits opted to prey in rural areas or mountainous regions were manifold. These areas gave them the freedom to roam relatively untouched in search of prey along highways where pre-industrial travel was slow and cumbersome and it was simple for bandits to disperse quickly and hide from serious threats. The ideal location for a gang of bandits was one where they could operate in a complex local situation, and where a few miles might put them beyond the reach of one authority and under the jurisdiction of a new one.<sup>19</sup>

From the available ancient evidence it appears that while bandits were primarily drawn from the lower echelons of society, they could also be men of virtually any social rank or economic status.<sup>20</sup> Common among bandits were unemployed or ex-soldiers, and due to the fluid nature of the boundaries of certain gangs, numbers within a particular band could swell and fall as soldiers were released from or rejoined active military service.<sup>21</sup> Numbers would rise when discharged soldiers, who often received insufficient tracts of land following their tour, had to supplement their income. Usually they were quickly absorbed into pre-existing gangs because their skills could be readily employed. According to Brent Shaw, another factor that swelled the numbers of those engaged in banditry was the 'enforced desertion' of large numbers of soldiers when rival commanders, each with his own army, vied for the pay and provision of a district.<sup>22</sup> While the victor's army would remain intact, the other army had to disband, and the soldiers were either forced to become civilians or out of necessity were led to a life of banditry. Usually the only difference between those who might have been bandits and those who actually were bandits was that the former lived in regions closer to power and were able to work as retainers, soldiers, guards or enforcers.<sup>23</sup>

Besides soldiers, the other types of men usually engaged in banditry were those who were drawn from the ranks of disenfranchised farmers, peasants, tenant labourers or itinerants and who were constantly on the brink of destitution and only needed one crop failure to ensure total poverty. It therefore comes as no surprise that whenever there was a poor agricultural year, this often resulted in, 'a harvest of banditry' (ὥστε ἀσπόρου τῆς γῆς γενομένης ληστεῖαι ἂν φύοντο), as Josephus claimed.<sup>24</sup> In such circumstances, banditry may have provided the only means whereby these lower classes could sustain

<sup>17</sup> A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 43, 98.

<sup>18</sup> On the structural problems of policing see Keith Hopwood, 'Bandits, Elites and Rural Order', in Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London: Routledge, 1989), 177-80; Fergus Millar, 'Italy and the Roman Empire: Augustus to Constantine', *Phoenix* 40 (1986), 295-318; Millar, 'The World of the Golden Ass', 67f.

<sup>19</sup> Hopwood, 'Bandits, Elites and Rural Order', 180.

<sup>20</sup> Kloppenborg-Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 250; Shaw, 'Bandits in the Roman Empire', 38.

<sup>21</sup> For the movement of men of violence in and out of the *auxilia* see Stephen Dyson, 'Native Revolt Patterns in the Roman Empire', *ANRW* II.3 (1975), 138-75.

<sup>22</sup> Shaw, 'Bandits in the Roman Empire', 30.

<sup>23</sup> Kloppenborg-Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 249-50.

<sup>24</sup> Jos. *AJ* 18.274.

themselves. But famine was not the only circumstance that gave rise to increased banditry, as economic instability, social distress, and general societal breakdown resulting from civil wars or rebellion were also contributing factors. As Dio Cassius noted:

Ever since war had been carried on continuously in many different places at once, and many cities had been overthrown, while sentences hung over the heads of all the fugitives, and there was no freedom from fear for anyone anywhere, large numbers had turned to banditry (ληστεία).<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, banditry was not always accompanied by economic or social turmoil. While some may have engaged in it because it was their only option, others appear to have become bandits for purely economic reasons, as it had the potential to be an extremely lucrative occupation.<sup>26</sup>

The very real danger bandits posed can be derived from a number of diverse sources. Inscriptions on tombstones that read *interfectus a latronibus* have been found in various parts of the empire and suggest that this manner of death was common enough for it to give rise to the expression.<sup>27</sup> Even along the more populated highways outside of Rome it was not uncommon for people to be attacked. Pliny the Younger remarked in one of his letters that on one occasion when a Roman *eques* and his companion set out along the *Via Flaminia*, they were never seen again, and presumably fell victim to bandits.<sup>28</sup> Earlier Seneca noted that ‘only the poor man is safe from bandit attacks’, and Paul in his second epistle to the Corinthians mentioned the constant danger bandits posed to his travels.<sup>29</sup> Even Jesus, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, draws on the imagery of a traveler falling prey to bandits on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.<sup>30</sup> Despite the apparent prevalence of banditry in the early Roman Empire, numerous efforts were made by the authorities to keep it in check. Small detachments of *stationarii* or guards were stationed at posts in the worst places along highways. Augustus initiated this practice by setting up *stationes* in Italy during the civil wars, and later Tiberius increased their numbers as banditry continued to persist.<sup>31</sup> Confiscation of weapons appears to have been another means to reduce banditry, and was carried out by Tiberius in Egypt and by Claudius in Britain.<sup>32</sup> Local officials or governors could also draw on the military

<sup>25</sup> Dio Cass. 36.20.2.

<sup>26</sup> MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 266-68.

<sup>27</sup> Shaw, ‘Bandits in the Roman Empire’, 10, who cites the following inscriptions: *ILS* 2011, 20307 (Rome); *ILS* 5112 (Dalmatia); *CIL* III 1559 (Dacia); *ILS* 5795 (Africa). The phrase *abducto a latronibus* is likewise attested in inscriptions (*CIL* III 2544; cf. SHA, *Max.* 2.1; Apul. *Met.* 4.23). In the later Empire attacks by bandits eventually came to be recognized within Roman law as a common cause of death (*Dig.* 13.6.5.4).

<sup>28</sup> Pliny, *Ep.* 6.25.

<sup>29</sup> Seneca, *Ep.* 123 (cf. Juv. 10.22; Apul. *Met.* 1.5); 2 Cor. 11:26.

<sup>30</sup> Luke 10:25-37. It is likely that the parable stems from a common occurrence to which the audience of Jesus could readily relate.

<sup>31</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 32.1; *Tib.* 37.1. An inscription from a fort erected by Commodus in Numidia in the late second century CE reads, ‘between two highways for the safety of travellers’ and may refer to a post similar to the ones established under Augustus and Tiberius (*CIL* VIII 2495).

<sup>32</sup> Phil. *Flacc.* 86-92; Tac. *Ann.* 12.31.

resources of their province or other provinces for aid, and by the second century official military posts were set up with the specific aim of pursuing bandits in all the provinces.<sup>33</sup> However, our information is somewhat limited concerning other means by which banditry was combatted in the early Empire, since actual laws concerning it are poorly attested.<sup>34</sup>

## II. Ancient Galilean Banditry

While scholarly opinion is somewhat divided on exactly how much banditry existed in the Galilee from Herod to the outbreak of the first Jewish revolt, the picture that emerges from Josephus is one that depicts the Galilee as rife with banditry.<sup>35</sup> The earliest reference in Josephus to Galilean banditry is in 48/47 BCE when Hezekias, whom Josephus describes as a ἀρχιληστής, plundered along the Syrian frontier and in the formerly Jewish territory of the Decapolis accompanied by a large band of followers.<sup>36</sup> Though Josephus gives little information regarding this band's composition or motivation, he makes it clear that they posed a serious threat to the stability of the region. This threat so alarmed Antipater that he created a new military office in Galilee and appointed his son Herod to the post.<sup>37</sup> Herod promptly purged the region of the gang by putting the greater part of them to death, along with their leader Hezekias. While this pleased the inhabitants of Syria immensely, it apparently troubled certain elites in Jerusalem, because Herod executed Hezekias without consulting the Jerusalem Sanhedrin.<sup>38</sup>

About ten years later, between 39-37 BCE, Josephus reports that another group of bandits appeared in the Galilee, when Herod struggled for power against the Parthian-backed Hasmonean, Antigonos. This time Josephus reports that numerous gangs operated near Arbela just east of Tarichaeae/Magdala. In this instance Josephus says little of their activities beyond designating them as λησταί, and reports that they were so daring that they led an offensive against Herod's forces. In time, through a series of

<sup>33</sup> Tert. *Apol.* 2.8; Fronto, *Ep. Ad Antoninum Pium* 8.1; Apul. *Met.* 7.7; SHA, *Sev.* 18.6; Dio Cass. 54.12.1; 56.19.1-2; Amm. Marc. 19.13; Lib. *Or.* 25.43.

<sup>34</sup> Most of the laws that specifically dealt with banditry were passed in the later Empire (*Dig.* 47.16.1; 48.3.6.1).

<sup>35</sup> Richard Horsley sees banditry as widespread and thoroughly entrenched in Galilean society in the decades preceding the revolt of 66 CE. For him it is symptomatic of the larger social and economic problems that were besetting the region. See Horsley, 'Josephus and the Bandits', 37-63; Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*, 48-87; *Galilee*, 264-269. While Seán Freyne also sees Galilean banditry as representative of economic distress in the form of monetization and urbanization, he does not feel that it was as ubiquitous as Horsley assumes. See Seán Freyne, 'Bandits in Galilee: A Contribution to the Study of Social Conditions in First Century Palestine', in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute of Howard Clark Kee* (ed. Jacob Neusner et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 50-67; Freyne, *Galilee: From Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 211-216.

<sup>36</sup> *BJ* 1.204-206; *AJ* 14.160.

<sup>37</sup> *BJ* 1.203; *AJ* 14.158.

<sup>38</sup> *BJ* 1.208-215; *AJ* 14.165-166.

campaigns, Herod eventually exterminated this gang who had taken refuge in the caves of Arbela.<sup>39</sup>

For the remainder of Herod's reign Josephus mentions nothing more of banditry in the Galilee.<sup>40</sup> But when Herod died in 4 BCE, Josephus cites an instance where a bandit-like group arose in Sepphoris amidst the anarchy that ensued on news of his death.<sup>41</sup> Though Josephus does not use the technical term λησται to designate this group, he identifies their leader Judas as, 'the son of Hezekiah the bandit chief' ('Ιούδας δὲ ἦν Ἐζεκιῶ τοῦ ἀρχιληστοῦ υἱός).<sup>42</sup> Following this incident, Josephus has little to say of banditry in the Galilee during the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas (4 BCE-39 CE) or under the jurisdiction of King Agrippa I (41-44 CE). However, with the reestablishment of procuratorial rule following the death of Agrippa I, Josephus makes it clear that a steady rise in banditry occurred until the mid-sixties CE.<sup>43</sup> Josephus relates that during the tenure of Cumanus (ca. 48-52 CE), a bandit by the name of Eleazer was employed by certain Galileans to sack some Samaritan cities because they had been involved in murdering a Galilean who had been making his way to Jerusalem for Passover.<sup>44</sup>

In the years immediately preceding the revolt, Josephus reports that banditry steadily increased until it reached near epidemic proportions.<sup>45</sup> According to Josephus, the procuratorial policies of Albinus (ca. 62-64 CE) provoked banditry, and on one occasion, before his recall, Albinus allegedly emptied the prisons and allowed certain inmates to go free, resulting in an upsurge in banditry.<sup>46</sup> Josephus reports that when Albinus' successor, Gessius Florus (ca. 64-66 CE), came to power, his policies likewise encouraged banditry.<sup>47</sup> Josephus makes it clear that banditry was widespread during his tenure and he tells us that Florus even allowed certain gangs to operate with little government opposition, as long as he was financially compensated.<sup>48</sup> However, given the apologetic

<sup>39</sup> *BJ* 1.304-313; *AJ* 14.420-430.

<sup>40</sup> Josephus records that sometime around 23 BCE bandits from the region of Trachonitis, outside the Galilee, were sacking the district around Damascus. In the *Antiquities* Josephus credits Herod with exterminating them at Caesar's request (*AJ* 15.343-348), while in the *Bellum* the Syrian governor M. Terentius Varro is responsible for their extinction (*BJ* 1.398-400).

<sup>41</sup> *BJ* 2.56; *AJ* 17.272.

<sup>42</sup> *AJ* 17.271.

<sup>43</sup> Though not in Galilee but in Idumaea, Josephus relates how in the mid-forties a bandit chief named Tholomaeus was executed under the procurator Fadus in his attempt to purge the province of banditry (*AJ* 20.5). Later, under Cumanus, Josephus tells of another incident outside of Jerusalem, on the road to Beth-horon, where a group of bandits raided a baggage train of a certain Stephen, a slave of Caesar (*BJ* 2. 228-230; *AJ* 20.113-117).

<sup>44</sup> *BJ* 2.228-235; *AJ* 20.113-124, 161, 253.

<sup>45</sup> Josephus reports that one of the outcomes of Eleazer's raid into Samaria was that it resulted in the 'whole of Judea' being 'infested with bands of bandits' (ἐξ ἐκείνου τε ἡ σύμπασα Ἰουδαία λησστηρίων ἐπληρώθη) (*AJ* 20.121-124). Though Josephus mentions 'Judea' at this point it may be wondered whether this includes the region of the Galilee as well, given that when Roman procuratorial rule was established in 44 CE for administrative purposes, Judea encompasses both Judea proper and the region of the Galilee (*AJ* 19.364).

<sup>46</sup> *BJ* 2.272-273; *AJ* 20.215.

<sup>47</sup> *BJ* 2.277.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 2.278-279.

tendencies of Josephus at this point, in that an upsurge in banditry is being used, in part, to illustrate Roman mismanagement of the province on the eve of the first revolt, it may be wondered whether the actions and policies of certain leaders actually encouraged banditry to the extent that Josephus asserts.<sup>49</sup>

In the Galilee specifically, banditry escalated to epidemic proportions on the eve of the revolt. Shortly after the defeat of the Syrian legate Cestius Gallus (66 CE), Josephus went to the Galilee either to lead, or perhaps to quell, the rebellion.<sup>50</sup> His eyewitness account in his *Vita* is crucial because it reveals the extent to which the Galilee was plagued by banditry. Shortly after his arrival, while he was in Gischala, he summoned some local gangs to a meeting in order to put a stop to their raiding.<sup>51</sup> Josephus then reported that in order to quell their activities he convinced the people of the region to pay them off as mercenaries since, 'it would be impossible to disarm them', and because he felt that, 'it was better to give them [bandits] a small sum voluntarily than to submit to raids upon their property'.<sup>52</sup>

Shortly after this episode Josephus reports that he encountered a large gang of bandits on his way from Tiberias to Sepphoris.<sup>53</sup> When the Sepphorites, who had remained loyal to Rome during the initial stages of the revolt, heard that Josephus was coming with a large body of men, they hired out a bandit chief (ἀρχιληστής) named Jesus, who operated near Ptolemias with his 800 followers, to attack Josephus.<sup>54</sup> However, the attack was thwarted and Josephus was able to capture him. But instead of punishing Jesus, Josephus allowed him to be set free and return to his previous plundering as long as he took an oath of loyalty.<sup>55</sup> Shortly after Josephus' pact with Jesus, he relates how another group of bandits from Dabaritta who were operating along the *Via Maris* of the Great Plain of Esdraelon raided a convoy of Marcus Julius Agrippa's finance officer Ptolemy, and made off with a considerable stash.<sup>56</sup> When they appeared before Josephus to get sanction for their actions and to flaunt their spoils, he seized their booty and instructed them that the goods must be returned to Agrippa II because the law forbade theft, even from enemies.<sup>57</sup> However, Josephus did not punish the gang, but allowed them to return to their former activities.

<sup>49</sup> Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judea*, 7-11. Despite the apologetic purposes that banditry might serve at this point in Josephus' narrative, if Judea were experiencing some societal breakdown in the prelude to the first revolt (which is not unlikely), then an upsurge in banditry may have actually occurred.

<sup>50</sup> According to his *Bellum Judaicum* he went to the Galilee as a general to lead the resistance against Rome (*BJ*. 2.568). But in his *Vita*, which was written twenty years later, he claims he went to the Galilee to suppress the rebellion (*Vita* 28-29).

<sup>51</sup> *Vita* 77-81.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 77-78.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 104-111.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 104-111.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 111.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 126-131. Though Josephus does not use the technical term for 'banditry' (ληστεία) when he describes the activities of the young men from Dabaritta, later on in his narrative he refers to them as bandits (λησταί) (*Vita* 145-146).

<sup>57</sup> *Vita* 129-131.



The prevalence of Galilean banditry on the eve of the revolt is illustrated in two further instances in the *Vita*. While at Tarichaeae, Josephus met with some captives who were former leaders of Tiberias and informed them that although he was well aware of Rome's military might and realized that they were going to reconquer the region eventually, he nonetheless had to conceal his true feeling from the Galileans because of the influence of the various gangs of 'bandits'.<sup>58</sup> Later, when Josephus informed his associates that he was going to resign his post as commander of the Galilee because of all the treacherous plots hatched against him, his friends passionately besought him to stay. Central to their fear should Josephus depart was their concern that they would fall, 'easy prey to the bandits'.<sup>59</sup>

According to Josephus, one of the most prominent bandits who operated in Galilee at this time was John son of Levi (John of Gischala).<sup>60</sup> Josephus notes that when John began his career as a bandit he was very poor and worked alone, but when he began experiencing success others joined him and he eventually headed a band of around 400 men.<sup>61</sup> John, like many other bandits in Galilee, worked in both the public and private spheres. He would covertly raid and plunder along the trade routes, but also managed to get control legally of the corn supply in Galilee and, in addition, he ran a rather lucrative olive-oil business at the expense of the Syrian Jews.<sup>62</sup> Like John son of Levi, Jesus son of Sapphias from Tiberias was another prominent figure in Galilee who appears to have been engaged in bandit-like activity.<sup>63</sup> Josephus does not specify his numbers but notes that his band was mostly made up of men from the lower classes.<sup>64</sup>

### III. Galilean Banditry and Social Banditry

The view of Galilean banditry that emerges from Josephus shows that it was a complex and varied phenomenon, but it does not resemble social banditry. While the social bandit model may have some points of similarity with certain features of Galilean banditry, many of the key characteristics of the social bandit hypothesis simply do not exist. According to Hobsbawm, whom Horsley follows closely, social banditry was purely a rural phenomenon that did not exist without peasant unrest.<sup>65</sup> It thrived most in pastoral economies and flourished in places that were remote and on the frontiers of society. In these regions, bandits were attracted to major routes of communication and highways

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 206.

<sup>60</sup> Josephus' severe hatred of John is manifest on a number of occasions (*BJ* 2.585-87; *Vita* 70-5; 122) and raises the possibility that he identified John as a bandit more for personal reasons, in order to malign his character, than because John was an actual bandit. However, given the types of activities John was allegedly engaged in combined with the fluid nature of the category of a bandit, such a designation is not completely unwarranted.

<sup>61</sup> *BJ* 2.585-589.

<sup>62</sup> *Vita* 70-76.

<sup>63</sup> *BJ* 3.450.

<sup>64</sup> Though this gang's numbers are not known, it was apparently large enough to demolish Antipas' palace at Tiberias and then massacre the city's Greek residents (*Vita* 66-67).

<sup>65</sup> Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 20.

where prey was most accessible.<sup>66</sup> Social banditry was a form of pre-political social protest, which did not furnish a program for peasant society and their discontent with the world, but only offered a form of self-help. As Hobsbawm asserts, 'They [social bandits] protest not against the fact that peasants are poor and oppressed, but against the fact that they are sometimes excessively poor and oppressed'.<sup>67</sup> Social bandits are 'social' in that they still belong to the public sphere from which they came and can easily move in and out of its ranks, raiding and plundering on certain occasions and then quickly dispersing to return to their everyday lives. They may be regarded as common criminals by the state, but to the peasants and ordinary people they are considered, 'heroes, champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported'.<sup>68</sup>

It is the relationship between the peasant and the social bandit that distinguishes social banditry from banditry proper and other types of rural crime. While common robbers and bandits are not selective about their victims, social bandits never prey on the peasants or the poorer classes of society from which they are primarily drawn. As Hobsbawm points out, 'It would be unthinkable for a social bandit to snatch the peasant's (though not the lord's) harvest in his own territory, or perhaps even elsewhere. Those who do, therefore lack the peculiar relationship which makes banditry "social"'.<sup>69</sup> Not only do social bandits steal only from the rich and those of the privileged classes, they periodically redistribute their spoils back to the poor peasants.<sup>70</sup> Though Hobsbawm is not altogether clear about the exact origins of a social bandit, he identifies one common route: a man commits an act that is regarded as a crime by the state, but not by the local people (e.g. an honourable revenge killing) and flees to hide in the hills.<sup>71</sup> However, Hobsbawm also sees civil war, foreign conquest, administrative breakdown, harvest failure, high taxation and pauperization as conditions that could foster social banditry.<sup>72</sup>

Richard Horsley's use of the 'social bandit' model for Galilean banditry from Herod to the outbreak of the revolt remains very faithful to Hobsbawm's model, and only differs from it in one respect. While Hobsbawm does not see social banditry as generally leading to popular rebellion,<sup>73</sup> Horsley believes that this could happen should two developments occur simultaneously: (1) if social banditry became rampant and the bandits were joined by larger resistance groups, and (2) if an apocalyptic or millenarian belief penetrated these groups.<sup>74</sup> Central to Horsley's characterization of Galilean banditry is his understanding of Roman Galilee. According to him two features that were endemic to this region and abetted the outbreaks of social banditry were the degree of taxation in the Galilee, coupled with the glaring class tensions manifested between the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 7-13.

<sup>67</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 24.

<sup>68</sup> Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 20.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 46-62.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 34-37.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 7-18.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 106-119.

<sup>74</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 39. In his view, this is exactly what happened on the eve of the first Jewish revolt against Rome.

urban elites and the rural poor.<sup>75</sup> Horsley believes that the Galilee was heavily taxed and that normally peasants paid, 'well over 40% of their production' for various taxes.<sup>76</sup> As a result of this excessive taxation, peasants were more susceptible to bankruptcy and hence banditry usually offered the only alternative. But while the exact tax rates are not altogether clear for the Galilee and Judea in the first century CE, 'well over 40%', sounds much too high.<sup>77</sup> Despite there being some evidence that taxation in its various forms was steep and may have been especially burdensome on the Galilean peasantry, the available evidence does not suggest that this was the major fault line within Galilean society which led to peasant unrest and hence social banditry. Herod reduced taxes by a third in 20 BCE and again in 14 BCE by a quarter.<sup>78</sup> From roughly 37 BCE until 44 CE the Galilee was a client kingdom and by all estimations did not pay imperial taxes.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, as Tessa Rajak has pointed out, if taxation was one of the leading factors of social tension at this time, it is difficult to see why such taxation was apparently accepted under the Persians, Ptolemies, and, even for a short time, the Seleucids.<sup>80</sup>

The other central feature in the Galilee that Horsley sees as particularly conducive to social banditry was the tensions and hostilities manifested between the urban elites and the rural poor.<sup>81</sup> Horsley argues that the foundation of Tiberias and the re-foundation of Sepphoris as a metropolis during the reign of Antipas had a deleterious impact upon the rural peasantry in the Galilee which ultimately resulted in a rapid upsurge in social banditry. He argues that these two cities consumed numerous resources, placed a substantial burden on the surrounding peasantry, and were instrumental in implementing a number of policies that negatively affected Galilean peasants.<sup>82</sup> While Horsley is firmly located within the mainstream of scholarship in this assessment of the Galilee, in that the foundation of Sepphoris and Tiberias did create new problems for Galilean peasants, his

<sup>75</sup> Horsley's views on Roman Galilee are most accessible in his book, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996).

<sup>76</sup> To arrive at this figure Horsley combines imperial, local, and religious taxes; Horsley and Hansen, *Prophets, Bandits, and Messiahs*, 56f. Horsley also points to the references in Tacitus and Josephus to taxation complaints in Judea (Tac. *Ann.* 2.42; Jos. *BJ* 2.85).

<sup>77</sup> E.P. Sanders has suggested that while taxation may have been around 28% when all taxes were taken into account, it did not have as much of an impact on social tensions in Judea and Galilee as Horsley has assumed. Sanders argues, 'taxes in most years would be under 28%; in the worst possible case they would be 33%', Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE - 66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 167-68. Josephus preserves an imperial order from Julius Caesar that reveals that the *tributum soli* was only levied at 12.5% annually (*AJ* 14.202-3).

<sup>78</sup> Jos. *AJ* 15.365; 16.64.

<sup>79</sup> Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC - 337 AD* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 46; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC - AD 135)*, I (Edinburgh: T&T Clark LTD, 1973), 317 and 399-427.

<sup>80</sup> Tessa Rajak, 'Review of: *Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian*', *JJS* 28 (1977), 207-08.

<sup>81</sup> Horsley and Hanson, *Prophets, Bandits, and Messiahs*, 56f.

<sup>82</sup> Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee*, 43-87. He notes that when the revolt did break out in 66 CE, villagers and peasants from the surrounding areas tried to sack these cities (Jos. *Vita* 30, 39, 66, 375, 381-89).

interpretation of the situation, namely that these factors led to, and even necessitated, social banditry does not necessarily follow from the available data. While there were certain social tensions in the Galilee from the time of Herod Antipas to the outbreak of the first revolt, resulting from numerous factors, it does not necessarily follow that the resulting banditry had to be ‘social’ in nature. While Horsley may have correctly highlighted some of the tensions in the Galilee, his interpretation and use of the data to demonstrate his social bandit hypothesis is problematic, because he never actually establishes the case for social banditry, and only shows that certain preconditions were already in place. As John Kloppenborg-Verbin has pointed out, ‘It is a priori likely that an increase in [any type of] banditry is symptomatic of worsening social and economic conditions’.<sup>83</sup>

#### IV. Social Banditry in Josephus?

Turning to Josephus, Horsley begins his assessment of Galilean banditry by identifying Hezekias, the ἀρχιληστής whom Herod executed in 48/47 BCE, as a social bandit.<sup>84</sup> Yet this designation is extremely tenuous and forced, given that Josephus says very little about Hezekias specifically or about the social formation or motives of his gang.<sup>85</sup> Josephus reports that these bandits not only raided cities (πόλεις), which might be expected of social bandits if the cities were a source of imperialist oppression and excessive wealth, but that they also sacked small unfortified towns and villages (κῶμαι) with presumably peasant populations.<sup>86</sup> Horsley’s chief piece of evidence that Hezekias and his gang were social bandits is that they apparently were on good terms with the peasants. He asserts, ‘concerning their possible robbing the rich and giving to the poor we have no evidence, but they do appear to be on good terms with the people in Galilee’.<sup>87</sup> To sustain this claim, Horsley points out that there is no evidence that the gang ever plundered in Galilee directly (they preyed along the Syrian frontier) and when the Sanhedrin tried Herod for killing them, it had the support of certain Galileans.<sup>88</sup> However, neither the fact that this group appears to have operated just outside the Galilee in Syria nor the fact that certain Galileans supported the prosecution of Herod by the Sanhedrin, which was partially instigated at the request of the mothers of the deceased bandits, is compelling evidence of social banditry.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the real instigators of the Sanhedrin’s prosecution of Herod were wealthy Jerusalemites who were pro-Hasmonean. The Sanhedrin tried Herod not because the bandits were beloved in the Galilee, but because they feared that Herod was gaining too much power and needed to be held in check. As Seán Freyne has pointed out, ‘it was the influential Jews

<sup>83</sup> Kloppenborg-Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 247.

<sup>84</sup> Horsley, ‘Josephus and the Bandits’, 53f; Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, Messiahs*, 63f.

<sup>85</sup> In the *Bellum* and the *Antiquities* combined, there are only two paragraphs telling of this incident, and each paragraph is essentially the same (*BJ* 1.204-206; *AJ* 14.160).

<sup>86</sup> *BJ* 1.204-206; *AJ* 14.160.

<sup>87</sup> Horsley, ‘Josephus and the Bandits’, 53.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 54; see Josephus, *BJ* 1.204-213; *AJ* 14.160-68.

<sup>89</sup> Jos. *AJ* 14.168.

in Jerusalem who were the most vocal against Herod, no doubt because they saw in Hezekias' fate a threat to their own position'.<sup>90</sup>

Horsley proceeds to identify the next episode of banditry occurring near Arbela in ca. 39-37 BCE as yet another example of social banditry.<sup>91</sup> It appears from the context of Josephus' discussion of these bandits that they were not fighting on behalf of oppressed peasants or small landholders, but on behalf of Herod's rival for power, the Parthian-backed Antigonus.<sup>92</sup> This is made explicit in Josephus, when immediately prior to this account, he says, 'he [Herod] set out to reduce the remaining strongholds of Galilee and to expel the garrisons of Antigonus'.<sup>93</sup> Josephus then connects Herod's intent to reduce Antigonus' strongholds with an attack on Sepphoris and an attack on the bandits dwelling in the Arbela caves.<sup>94</sup>

Moving to the procuratorship of Cumanus (ca. 48-52 CE), Horsley identifies an ἀρχιληστής named Eleazer ben Deinaeus, who was asked by some Galileans to help destroy certain Samaritan towns, as an example of yet another social bandit.<sup>95</sup> The significance of this incident for Horsley is that it highlights the close relationship between the peasants and bandits that is a defining characteristic of social banditry. According to Horsley, 'The most striking thing about Eleazar's group and other Jewish banditry in this period is the close relationship between the bandits and the people who support them, protect them, and even call them to aid'.<sup>96</sup> However, in both of Josephus' accounts of the incident in the *Bellum* and the *Antiquities* it is not clear that the common people had a very close relationship with Eleazer, beyond merely knowing that he was the leader of a gang of bandits.<sup>97</sup> It is entirely possible that Eleazer's primary motives for joining the raids on Samaritan towns was because it afforded him the opportunity to plunder, and not because he felt allegiance to the peasantry or sought some sort of vigilante justice on their behalf. Even if Eleazer was exacting a kind of retribution on the Samaritans, it does

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<sup>90</sup> Freyne, 'Bandits in Galilee', 57.

<sup>91</sup> Horsley, 'Josephus and the Bandits', 56-57.

<sup>92</sup> *BJ* 1.357; Kloppenborg-Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 247-48.

<sup>93</sup> *Jos. BJ* 1.303.

<sup>94</sup> Josephus also reports that these bandits were, 'infesting a wide area and inflicting on the inhabitants evils no less than those of war', *BJ* 1.304. If social bandits are supposed to protect the locals and defend their interests against imperial oppression, why then are they causing such trouble for the locals?

<sup>95</sup> Prior to this incident, when telling of the death of Herod, Josephus reports that Judas the son of Hezekias, the former ἀρχιληστής who had been killed by Herod, sacked the royal palaces at Sepphoris, and then went about the region plundering all those he came across (Josephus, *BJ* 2.56; *AJ* 17.272). Horsley, however, does not identify Judas as a social bandit, but argues that because he had royal pretensions, he fits into another category altogether. For Horsley there are three expressions of unrest in Galilee: social banditry, popular kingship and the actions of the urban poor. Horsley places Judas under the category of 'popular kingship' (Horsley, *Galilee*, 256-275). But does the fact that Judas had royal pretensions necessarily put him beyond the category of a social bandit? Horsley has no problem with categorizing John of Gischala as a social bandit, yet he certainly seems to have aspired to power, and perhaps he had royal pretensions as well (Josephus, *Vita* 71, 189-190).

<sup>96</sup> Horsley, 'Josephus and the Bandits', 57.

<sup>97</sup> *AJ* 20.121; *BJ* 2.235.

not necessarily follow that he had to be a social bandit. The regional differences between the Galilee and Samaria and the mutual enmity of the populations of these two regions could equally have been an impetus influencing Eleazer's decision to participate in the attack.

In the months following the outbreak of the revolt, when Josephus was stationed in the Galilee, the picture he presents in his *Vita* is at complete odds with the notion of social banditry. In his first encounter with Galilean bandits at Gischala in ca. 66 CE, Josephus has the locals pay them protection money — an ironic situation, given that social bandits are supposed to be protecting the peasantry and not extorting money from them.<sup>98</sup> Nor does Jesus, the ἀρχιληστής from Ptolemais, fit the social bandit model. Josephus relates that Jesus and his 800 followers attacked him on the way to Sepphoris, because they had been paid by the Sepphorites, who feared that Josephus might assault their city.<sup>99</sup> If Jesus were a social bandit it would certainly be problematic to defend an avowedly Roman city like Sepphoris that gathered taxes from the outlying areas and carried out Roman policy. Jesus' initial defense of Sepphoris reveals his motives and shows that he had no concern for social causes in Galilee. Furthermore, when Josephus captured Jesus he had him declare his allegiance and then released him, together with his band. That Jesus readily switched allegiances gives some insight into how Galilean banditry really worked, namely, that bandit groups operated within positions of power and patronage. At the time, Josephus carried more weight than Sepphoris, so Jesus readily switched his allegiance.<sup>100</sup>

Though the next episode of banditry in the Galilee appears to be more promising for the social bandit hypothesis, it is not without its problems. In this incident, young men from Dabaritta sacked a baggage train in the Great Plain belonging to Ptolemy, the finance minister of Marcus Julius Agrippa.<sup>101</sup> While it is not impossible that the young men attacked the baggage train because they saw it as a symbol of Roman repression and aristocratic rule, the text is mute on this point. But Josephus does report that when he informed them that he intended to put up for sale the spoils they had taken and send the proceeds to Jerusalem for the restoration of the walls, the group became enraged and left, indignant that they did not receive a portion. Their reluctance to share their spoils with the Jerusalemites and contribute to the restoration of the walls of the city was less than altruistic.

According to Josephus, the most prominent bandit in Galilee during the revolt was John of Gischala. Though Josephus periodically refers to him as a 'bandit' chiefly in order to malign him and his character, at other times he is depicted performing the very activities that would characterize one as a bandit, as he oversaw a gang of some 400 men who periodically plundered throughout the Galilee.<sup>102</sup> Horsley asserts that John of

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<sup>98</sup> *Vita* 77-78.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 104-111.

<sup>100</sup> As Keith Hopwood has pointed out, 'Protection in rural society is competitive. A "protector" has to ensure that his protection is better than that of his rivals to obtain greater following in the community, access to more resources and so increase his standing. Such a process turns protection into a protection racket', 'Bandits, Elites, and Rural Order', 181.

<sup>101</sup> *Jos. Vita* 126-131.

<sup>102</sup> *BJ* 2.585-94; *Vita* 71-76.

Gischala was essentially a social bandit, but was a rare exception of a bandit who became a revolutionary.<sup>103</sup> However, John's actions clearly seem to exclude him from the social bandit characterization as he repeatedly preyed on other Galilean peasants, became extremely rich, and was motivated not by social causes, but by the accumulation of wealth, as is illustrated by his lucrative, if not criminal, olive-oil business which he ran on the side.<sup>104</sup>

## V. Conclusion

The picture of Galilean banditry that emerges from the time of Herod up until the outbreak of the first revolt is variegated and complex, but of all the Galilean bandits described by Josephus, none fit the mold of a social bandit, as many fundamental qualities of the social bandit hypothesis cannot be detected. Never once does Josephus report that Galilean bandits redistributed their spoils to the poor, and there is no clear indication that the various gangs were on good terms with the peasantry, enjoyed their support, or worked for their betterment. Even when the social bandit hypothesis seems more promising, arguing that social banditry typically flourishes in periods of socio-economic turmoil or political unrest, it is a *non sequitur* that the banditry arising from such preconditions has to be social in nature.

An examination of Galilean banditry during this period reveals that there is not a consistent picture or even a prolonged struggle between the rich and the poor that can account for the various manifestations of banditry.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, to classify all appearances as social banditry is simply a form of ideological reductionism that belies the complexities of the situation. In the decades preceding the revolt, socio-economic conditions were likely to have influenced the degree of banditry, but these circumstances alone cannot account for all of its manifestations, and in the earlier examples under Herod, imperial power struggles seem to be at work. The picture of Galilean banditry that emerges, particularly on the eve of the first revolt, reveals a type of banditry where different gangs were struggling for power or territory, and were willing to be used by different individuals who tried to attain control of the Galilee. Bandits like Jesus of Ptolemais or John of Gischala were willing to be used as mercenaries, and appear to have had no ideological platform besides the accumulation of wealth and power. In this vein, Galilean banditry might best be seen within the framework of patron-client relationships, where elites or local strong men guarded their interests in the countryside by hiring and patronizing certain gangs.

If social bandits ever existed in the Galilee in the decades leading up to the first revolt, then Josephus certainly does not mention or describe them, and in fact, one may

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<sup>103</sup> Horsley, *Galilee*, 167-68.

<sup>104</sup> Josephus, *Vita* 70-76.

<sup>105</sup> Though Horsley argues that the central fault line in Galilee was between the ruling urban elites and the rural poor, this proposition lacks convincing substance. Certainly there was friction between these groups, but whether or not this was the chief source of turmoil is unclear from the sources. Horsley places taxation of the region at well over 40%, which is certainly exorbitant (and probably much too high an estimate), but this fits nicely into the social bandit thesis. By making this divide central, Horsley is able to place peasants and social bandits neatly on one side and the rich on the other.

rightly wonder whether the sensational social bandit hypothesis has ever been authenticated. Even Eric Hobsbawm's work on social banditry which used relatively modern examples has been seriously challenged through a number of telling critiques.<sup>106</sup> Hobsbawm's chief pieces of evidence for alleged modern examples of social banditry are mostly derived from oral stories and songs from popular culture that may not accurately portray reality. As one critic has argued, 'Hobsbawm proceeded directly from myth to reality without justifying the procedure, and perhaps originally without realizing that he was interpreting the myth of banditry as an image of real patterns of bandit behaviour'.<sup>107</sup> In the ancient setting, the same problem of disentangling myth from social reality exists. While there are periodic references to Robin Hood-like bandits in antiquity, Brent Shaw has convincingly shown that this is a literary image that belongs primarily to the ideological arena and such characterizations should not necessarily be taken as authentic.<sup>108</sup> This is not to say that there never existed an altruistic bandit, but it does mean that rarely, if ever, did a bandit function as a Robin Hood. Social bandits, if ever they did exist, were to be found primarily on parchment, rather than in the ancient hills and forests.

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<sup>106</sup> The most systematic critique and challenge of Hobsbawm's thesis is Richard Slatta (ed.), *Bandidos: The Varieties of Latin American Banditry* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987). A. Knight has said of Hobsbawm's thesis, 'The Social Bandit's career in Academe has somewhat paralleled his life under the greenwood tree. Introduced by Professor Hobsbawm, he was initially welcomed, even feted, and he put in many public appearances in academic company; but then (inevitability after such uncritical acceptance) some academics grew leery, and the recent trend — especially among experts — has been to qualify, de-emphasize and even deny his role'. *The Mexican Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), I.353-354.

<sup>107</sup> J. Winkler, 'Lollianos and the Desperadoes', *JHS* 100 (1980), 175.

<sup>108</sup> Shaw, 'Bandits in the Roman Empire', 44-50.



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