

Once Again: Who Captured Masada? On Doublets, Reading Against the Grain, and What Josephus Actually Wrote

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It sometimes happens, in our debates about the relative merits of traditional source-criticism and more modern composition criticism,¹ that is, as to where precisely to place this or that ancient historian or this or that text on the continuum between slavish dependence upon sources and total creativity unfettered by truth or tradition, that we lose sight of what the historian actually wrote, and of the fact that both types of criticism are meant to solve problems. Thus, for example, when a historical work contains two narratives that seem to report the same event, but the author does not coordinate between the two (identifying one as proleptic or the other as retrospective), source-critics may suggest that we have a doublet that results from the author's use of two sources that describe the same event. Or, on the other side, if an author's account is mysteriously laconic, a composition-critic may suggest that the author wanted to hide something, and then proceed to look for other evidence as to what types of things the author wanted his readers to see or not to see. However, if the author does not tell the same story twice there is no call for talk about doublets, and if the story is told fully there is no reason to inquire about why it is laconic; if, in short, there is no problem, there is no reason to apply our methods to solve it. It seems that it may be salutary to note that at times, in fact, we have let our methods get ahead of us and create problems that require answers, where in fact there are none of the former so no need for the latter.

The question we shall address is: Who captured Masada from the Romans in 66 CE, around the outbreak of the rebellion against Rome? Josephus addresses the question in several passages of his *War*:

At 2.408, at the point of his narrative where the event occurred (κάν τούτῳ), he says Masada was stormed (ῶρμησαν) and taken by stratagem (καταλαμβάντες ... λάθρα) by 'some of the foremost movers of the rebellion' (τινὲς τῶν μάλιστα κινούντων τὸν πόλεμον). In this passage, Josephus explicitly says that it was from the Romans that it was captured; the attackers are said to have slaughtered the Roman guards stationed there.

At 7.297, looking back retrospectively from the beginning of the Roman siege of Masada in 73, Josephus states that it had been captured by stratagem (δόλω) by Eleazar ben Jair and the Sicarii. This passage does not say explicitly from whom it had been captured, but in a book about a war between Jews and Romans, and in the absence of reference to any specific enemies, it is reasonable for readers to assume it was from the

¹ For a survey of these, see S. Mason's 'Introduction to the Judean Antiquities', in L.H. Feldman, *Judean Antiquities, 1-4 Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary III* (Leiden 2000), xiii-xvi. For the broader, extra-Josephan context of these debates, see R.J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London 1997).

Romans that it was captured by Eleazar and the Sicarii, who are known to have been anti-Roman rebels.

At 7.253 Josephus reports that Eleazar ben Jair had been the head (προειστήκει) of the Sicarii who had captured (κατειληφόντων) Masada; while he does not say explicitly that Eleazar led them in its capture, it is a natural inference.

At 4.400 Josephus says that the Sicarii, who had — in the past (κατειληφότες) — captured Masada, carried out attacks on nearby regions.

A review of this dossier finds nothing contradictory and nothing missing. The Sicarii are known to have been prime movers of the rebellion, and Eleazar ben Jair is known to have been a leader of the Sicarii. Indeed, to ice the cake we may add that at 2.447 Josephus reports that after things got tough for the Sicarii in Jerusalem several of them, including Eleazar ben Jair, fled secretly to Masada; that no explanation is needed for their choice of Masada sits well with our conclusion that those holding Masada were Eleazar's men.

It thus appears that there are only two ways 'Who Captured Masada?' can become a problem: either we adduce some new source that contradicts those assembled above, or we ignore some of them and thus leave the others telling only a partial picture. Both have been tried, the former employing a source-critical tool (doublets) and coming to the conclusion that Masada was captured not by Eleazar but, rather, by Menahem (a relative of his assassinated in Jerusalem in 66) — a position which is in fact regnant today,² perhaps surprisingly, given the current disrepute of source-criticism.³ The latter approach, in contrast, applies a composition-critical suspicion to what is characterized as the laconic nature of 2.408 and suggests that Josephus was covering up the embarrassing fact that those who captured Masada were in fact aristocratic priests from Jerusalem, the type of people he was loath to portray as villains. In what follows, we shall argue that the whole

² For the only protest I have noticed, see the brief remarks by R.A. Horsley, 'Menahem in Jerusalem: A Brief Messianic Episode among the Sicarii — Not "Zealot Messianism"', *Novum Testamentum* 27, 1985, 338 with n. 13 ('Josephus says nothing that would suggest that Menahem led the capture of Masada or was in command of the fortress as the revolt broke out' ... 'J.W. 2.408 and 433 do not appear to be doublets'.) For the regnant consensus, see for example: Y. Yadin, *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand* (London 1966) 16; S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (Manchester 1967), 131; M. Hengel, *Die Zeloten*² (Leiden/Köln 1976), 365, n. 2 (= *The Zealots* [Edinburgh 1989] 358, n. 231); D.M. Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution, 6-74 C.E.: A Political History Based on the Writings of Josephus* (Philadelphia 1976), 112; M. Stern, 'Zealots', *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book 1973* (Jerusalem 1973), 138 and idem, 'Sicarii and Zealots', *Society and Religion in the Second Temple Period*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah and Z. Baras (Jerusalem 1977), 274; E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule, From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations* (corrected ed., Leiden 1981), 292, 294; C.T.R. Hayward, 'The Fourth Philosophy: Sicarii and Zealots', in: E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ II* (new English edition by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Black, Edinburgh 1979), 600; M. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome A.D. 66-70* (Cambridge 1987), 169. All of these works preceded the detailed studies cited in nn. 11 and 13 below, that also uphold the view that it was Menahem who first captured Masada.

³ For a straw in the wind, note that David S. Potter finds it necessary to open his discussion of the subject by noting that 'Quellenforschung should not be a dirty word' — *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian* (London and New York 1999), 90.

point of departure of the former route is in error, and that the latter route, precisely because it is based upon ignoring the rest of the evidence apart from 2.408, should be left outside the study of history.

1. A Doublet?

This approach may be traced back to a 1924 article by Hans Drexler.⁴ Drexler focuses on a passage we ignored above: *War* 2.433-4. Here Josephus, in the course of his account of combat in Jerusalem, reports that ‘meanwhile one Menahem, son of Judas known as “the Galilean” who (had been) a great *sophistes* and had at the time of Quirinius taken the Jews to task for obeying the Romans alongside of God, took up his close associates and withdrew (ἀνεχώρησεν) to Masada; after breaking into King Herod’s armory there and arming, in addition to his own countrymen, also other brigands and using them as his bodyguards, he returned — as if a king — to Jerusalem ...’. Drexler thinks Josephus’ story is illogical: Why should Menahem leave Jerusalem in the midst of the fighting in order to bring weapons from Masada (*‘als ob damals in Jerusalem keine zu haben gewesen wären, nach der Eroberung der Antonia übrigen’*), and why should he have had to break into Herod’s armory at Masada, if — as reported at §408 — Masada had already been occupied by his own faction?⁵ Drexler’s answer was based on the assumption that Menahem was a leader of the Sicarii, a conclusion — which we share — based on the fact that he is said (at *War* 2.433) to have been a son of Judas of Galilee, just as Eleazar ben Jair, identified in passages assembled above as a *Sicarius*, is said at 2.447 to have been a relative of Menahem’s and at 7.253 to have been a descendant (ἀπόγονος) of Judas of Galilee. On this basis, Drexler decided to apply a term taken from the world of source-criticism⁶ and arrived at the following conclusion (p. 281):

Also wir haben hier einfach eine Dublette. Und zwar muß 433f. gestrichen und 408 und 425 inhaltlich aus diesen Paragraphen ergänzt werden: Führer der Sikarier ist Manaem; sie haben sich in Masada, das sie erobert hatten, bewaffnet.

That is, it is not the case that, after the Sicarii had captured Masada (§408) and then come to Jerusalem (§425), Menahem left the fighting in Jerusalem in order to return to Masada, break into the armory, and return rearmed to Jerusalem (§§433-4). Rather, the

⁴ H. Drexler, ‘Untersuchungen zu Josephus und zur Geschichte des jüdischen Aufstandes 66-70’, *Klio* 19 (1925), 280-1.

⁵ So I take to be the sense of his question, ‘*Warum bricht er (Menahem) die Rüstkammer des Herodes auf, wo doch Masada schon 408 besetzt worden ist?*’ If that is indeed what he meant, it seems not to be a very persuasive question, for capturing a fortress does not open automatically the doors of its armories.

⁶ Note that neither Drexler nor any of his many followers (see notes 2, 15) actually claimed that the putative doublet means Josephus was combining different sources. In fact, I have seen no explanation at all as to how the putative doublet originated. Given the fact that Drexler introduced the term ‘doublet’ into this discussion a mere four years after the appearance of Richard Laqueur’s *Der jüdische Historiker Flavius Josephus: Ein biographischer Versuch auf neuer quellenkritischer Grundlage* (Giessen 1920), it is likely that his assumption was — as Laqueur’s — that such phenomena point to successive revisions, by Josephus, of his own material.

Sicarii broke into the armory after capturing Masada (§408 + 433-434a) and then, armed, proceeded to Jerusalem (§425 + 434b).⁷

Drexler, whose interest was events in Jerusalem, did not devote any attention to the apparent contradiction between his implied conclusion that Menahem had captured Masada and Josephus' other statements that point to Eleazar ben Jair.⁸ The road to that was paved by S.J.D. Cohen, who picked up on a parallel problem.⁹ Namely, in response to Drexler's assertion that 2.433-4 refers in part to what had been related in 2.408 (capture of Masada) and in part to what had been related in 2.425 (entrance of Sicarii into Jerusalem), Cohen responds that the details of the *latter* of those two parallels do not correspond: 'Menahem's arrival as a king in 434 does not match the entrance of 425'.¹⁰ This led Cohen to offer an alternative theory, which we shall address below, in Part 2. For the present it is enough to note that concerning the *former* of the two parallels Cohen does go on, in the same note, to observe that, on the other hand,

Possible support for this [Drexler's] theory is provided by *BJ* 7.297 which describes Eleazar's capture of Masada by a trick (δόλω). Unless this refers to *BJ* 2.408 (λάθρα), the reference is unclear.

The problem with this, of course, as we saw with regard to Drexler, is that it does not account for the difference between Eleazar and Menahem. But it does get very close, so it is not surprising that a decade later Hannah M. Cotton and Joseph Geiger picked up on the point directly. In their discussion, they first suggest that we build upon 7.297 and conclude that it indeed was Eleazar ben Jair who led the Sicarii in capturing Masada from the Romans. That conclusion would have been fine, in my opinion, but they proceed to reject it by an indirect argument: after adding that this conclusion 'makes *BJ* 2.408 a doublet of *BJ* 2.447' (Eleazar's escape from Jerusalem to Masada), they note that this:

makes it difficult to place the episode related in *BJ* 2.433 (Menahem's breaking into Herod's armoury on Masada), which could have taken place only prior to the events connected with Eleazar. The result is a serious chronological dislocation in Josephus.

Therefore, to avoid concluding to such a dislocation they reject the premise upon which it was based, namely, that Eleazar ben Jair captured Masada. Rather, Cotton and Geiger reject 7.297 as mistaken, for if it refers to Eleazar's flight to Masada (2.447) there was

⁷ Everyone has forerunners. Drexler's summary of what happened is already to be found in H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden* III (Leipzig 1856), 374 and in A. Hausrath, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*² II (Heidelberg 1875), 432. But neither mentions the problem in Josephus. In later editions of his work (III/2 [Leipzig 1888⁴] 457 n. 3 = III/2 [ed. M. Brann, 1906⁵] 458 n. 4) Graetz did allude to the problem, ever so briefly, commenting that in 2.433 the reference to Menahem's trip to Masada must "als Plusquamperfekt genommen werden". But he did not say what considerations led him to this conclusion. It was left to Drexler to spell out the problems. As we shall see, they are not so great.

⁸ Actually, Drexler does not explicitly say that Menahem and not Eleazar captured Masada. Later writers ignored this.

⁹ S.J.D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden 1979), 193.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, n. 27.

no need for δόλος (since the Sicarii already controlled the fort) and if it refers to the capture of Masada from the Romans (2.208), then that was done by Menahem and not by Eleazar. That is, they revert to Drexler's position, as they note explicitly.¹¹

However, the inset citation from Cotton and Geiger makes sense only if we assume that 2.433-4, refers to a capture of Masada, not merely to breaking into an armory there. I see no basis for that assumption. On the contrary, the very fact that Menahem is said to have needed only to 'break in' (ἀναρρήξας) to the armory (but not to capture the fortress) and the fact that it is characterized as Herod's — although he had died seventy years before — implies there was no fighting involved; it sounds like the arms were simply there, waiting for someone to jimmy the door or break the lock and take them.¹²

A year later Cotton, this time together with Jonathan Price, took another stab at the problem, and their discussion of Josephus' diction moved the issue forward significantly. Namely, they focused especially upon Josephus' verbs in §§433-4, which have Menahem 'withdrawing' (ἀνεχώρησεν) to Masada and then, after collecting weapons, 'returning' to Jerusalem (ἐπάνεισιν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα).¹³ These verbs, they argued, show very clearly that Josephus was neither thinking of a capture of Masada (for ἀνεχώρησεν 'leaves almost no doubt that what is meant is a withdrawal to a place already in his hands'¹⁴) nor referring to the Sicarii's first entrance into Jerusalem, described at §425. That is, §§433-4 is not a doublet of §§408, 425.

With this I would fully agree. In fact, I think it is fair to add that their argument shows how improper Drexler's use of 'doublet' was, although it was often repeated.¹⁵ For in fact §§433-4 does not refer to any capture of Masada at all. Doublets, as I noted at the outset, are typically uncoordinated reports of the same event. What Drexler meant, however, was not that Josephus twice told the same story but, rather, that he told a story as if it had two parts while it is illogical to believe it really did. Drexler simply held that it did not make sense for Menahem not to have broken into the armory upon first capturing Masada, or to have left Jerusalem in the midst of the fighting when there were (so Drexler supposed) many weapons available there. Cotton and Price, and I, would simply hold that you need more than that to set aside the plain statement of our source; it could

¹¹ H.M. Cotton and J. Geiger, *The Latin and Greek Documents*, Masada II: The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963-1965: Final Reports (Jerusalem 1989), 4-6. Their adoption of Drexler's position is noted explicitly at 6, n. 19.

¹² The same verb appears in a similar context at *War* 2.56. For its nuances, see H.St.J. Thackeray, *A Lexicon to Josephus* I (Paris 1930), 42.

¹³ H.M. Cotton and J. Price, 'Who Conquered Masada in 66 CE, and Who Lived There Until the Fortress Fell?', *Zion* 55, 1989/90, 451-452 (in Hebrew).

¹⁴ Cotton and Price, 451 (my translation). For ample demonstration of this, see H.St.J. Thackeray, *Lexicon* (n. 12), 44-45. The importance of this point for the Cotton-Price argument is shown neatly by the fact that while they build upon this verb as a reason to reject Drexler's doublet theory, the Cotton-Geiger discussion, which adopted Drexler's theory, had correspondingly omitted the verb from its translation of 2.433 (p. 5: 'Menahem, son of Judas surnamed the Galilean ... took his intimate friends to Masada, where he broke into King Herod's armoury ...'. (Their translation is based upon, but not identical with, Thackeray's in the Loeb Classical Library edition.)

¹⁵ Of those cited in our n. 2, see esp. Hengel (probably same events), Rhoads ('doublet'), and Goodman ('The account in Josephus is admittedly confused: the attack on Masada is recounted in two places ...').

well be that developments in Jerusalem forced Menahem to seek additional weapons that were not otherwise available. Moreover, I would add that in fact there is no reason to assume Menahem had ever been in Masada prior to the visit reported in 2.433-4.

It is here, in fact, that I would part ways with Cotton and Price, for toward the end of their argument they assume that if Menahem 'withdrew' to Masada he must have been the one to capture it — an assumption which forces them to water down or discard 7.297.¹⁶ The fact that a military force withdraws to a given position, and gets supplies there, shows the position is in the hands of friendly forces, but does not indicate who captured it. I see no reason not to assume, as we did at the outset, that Eleazar ben Jair led the Sicarii who captured Masada; later, in the course of fighting in Jerusalem, one Sicarii leader (Menahem) was to go to Masada for weapons (§§433-4) while another (Eleazar), who had been in Masada, would soon return to it (§447). That Eleazar was a Sicarii leader already at this time results not only from 2.447, which singles him out, but also from his standing as a descendant of the movement's founder.

True, it is normally assumed that Eleazar ben Jair took over leadership after Menahem's death, for Menahem is said to have been 'a son of Judas' (*War* 2.433) while Eleazar was only 'a descendant' of Judas (*War* 7.253); in a movement dominated by a clan, we would expect the older to be the leader before the younger. However, even if we ignore the fact that the former datum (that Menahem was Judas' son) is often doubted in favor of the assumption that he was in fact Judas' grandson,¹⁷ in which case it is not clear that he was Eleazar's senior, in any case it is possible that Eleazar operated independently of Menahem, or even on Menahem's orders, in capturing Masada. Thus, even if Menahem was the more senior member of the clan, that would not require us to reject Josephus' clear testimony that Eleazar captured the fortress.

2. Reading Josephus against the Grain

Until now we, as our predecessors, discussed the texts on the assumptions that Josephus — who was a local, a contemporary and a participant in public affairs, and who also had access to numerous knowledgeable informants — knew what happened and wanted to tell us what happened, and that any problems in understanding him resulted from the difficulty to coordinate properly the evidence he gives in different passages. However, we all recognize that in fact Josephus might not have known and/or that he might not have wanted to tell us what happened. If we nonetheless read him on the basis of both

¹⁶ Namely, on p. 451 they assume that Menahem led the Sicarii who captured Masada, so if 7.297 says Eleazar led them that is either exaggerated (perhaps Eleazar accompanied Menahem) or plain wrong, a result of the fact that by 73 or 74 CE, the period Josephus is describing in 7.297, Menahem had been dead for seven or eight years while Eleazar had been commanding Masada during all those years.

¹⁷ So, for example, Stern, 'Zealots', 150 n. 11 and Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, 292 n. 119; both refer in this connection to J.S. Kennard, 'Judas of Galilee and His Clan', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 36, 1945/46, esp. 284-5. The argument is based upon two chronological considerations that apparently create a gap of more than one generation between Judas and Menahem: Judas himself seems to have died ca. 6 CE (Acts of the Apostles 5:37) and two of his sons were old enough to be executed as rebels already twenty years before the outbreak of the rebellion in which Menahem was involved (*Ant.* 20.102).

assumptions, it was because we assume that, as a rule, our suspicions about Josephus should become relevant only when we are satisfied that we understand what he means but find it hard to believe him. That, it turns out, is not an assumption shared by all.

Back in 1979, Cohen's assumption (which we have rejected, as did Cotton and Price) that §§433-4 refers to a capture of Masada led him to two alternative explanations of the relationship of that capture to the one described in §408.¹⁸ The first was Drexler's suggestion, discussed above, that they are a doublet. The second was that those who captured Masada the first time, described in §408, in fact were not Sicarii, and it was from them — 'perhaps, the priests of Jerusalem' — that Menahem eventually captured it, as reported in §§433-4. Cohen did not pursue the matter, contenting himself with noting that the issue 'shows our ignorance and Josephus' lack of concern for accuracy', but recently this second suggestion of his was adopted in a detailed discussion by James S. McLaren.

In his *Turbulent Times? Josephus and Scholarship on Judaea in the First Century CE* (Sheffield 1998), McLaren argued that historical scholarship has been enslaved by Josephus, following his accounts and therefore accepting his biases and explanations far too gullibly. As a test-case of how this may be countered, McLaren devoted several pages (265-8) to *War* 2.208. McLaren's approach is first to isolate the passage, then to emphasize how much it does not tell us (who exactly captured Masada, and how they did it), and then to explain Josephus' reticence by positing that what really happened ran counter to the historian's agenda, so that he tried to hide it from us. The isolation is accomplished as follows. After noting that the 'occupation of Masada is referred to on eight occasions in *War*', McLaren comments:

A brief, cursory reading of the possible similarities and differences between the eight references indicates that Josephus appears to be describing more than one event. The only obvious point in all the accounts is the naming of Masada. *There are significant overt differences in the identity of those who occupy the fortress and the timing of the operation.* Therefore, although the naming of Masada acts as an initial magnet, at this stage it is appropriate to treat the account of *War* 2.408 as the only description of this particular capture of the fortress. (p. 266; my italics)

In this passage, the sentence I italicized is the operative one, for it justifies the isolation of §408. Therefore, it is important to inspect the footnote McLaren appends at this point:

The people are not identified by name in *War* 2.408. In *War* 2.433-4 it is Menahem and his 'notable' associates, while in 2.447, 4.400, 7.253 and 297 it is Eleazar b. Jairus and the Sicarii.

Our approach was to leave 2.433-4 and 2.447 aside since they do not refer to any capture at all, and to build on the other references which identify, as Sicarii led by Eleazar ben Jair, those left unidentified at 2.408. Having for some reason contented himself 'at this stage' with a 'brief, cursory reading' and therefore not seeing the irrelevance of 2.433-4, 447, McLaren's approach, in contrast, is to supplement 2.408 by reference to another story which does not refer even to Masada, much less to its capture. Namely, where (building on Josephus' references to stratagem) Cohen (p. 193) had merely suggested

¹⁸ Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, 193.

that ‘the priests of Jerusalem ... could have feigned loyalty to Rome and thus have captured an otherwise almost impregnable fortress’, McLaren suggests that Josephus ‘was being deliberately vague in order to protect certain people from being associated with the action’, and then he proceeds to develop a similar suspicion in his discussion of the next episode in *War*: the decision to suspend sacrifices that bespoke loyalty to Rome (§§409-17). Josephus ascribes this decision to hotheaded young Jerusalemite priests and takes pains to show that it was vigorously opposed by the true representatives of legitimate Judaism (leading citizens, high priests and prominent Pharisees — §411), who did not know about or approve the action, but McLaren warns us not to be misled so easily by Josephus’ biases:

Josephus conveys the idea that what had taken place was the work of a faction which failed to submit their proposal to proper community discussion. It was those protesting the legitimacy of what was done that sought to restore order. We do not know whether the decision [to suspend sacrifices] was the result of a process of consultation. Because Josephus makes no reference to a meeting before the action does not necessarily mean there was not one, especially given the apparent weighting of the narrative in favour of those who opposed the cessation. (p. 271)

Thus, having raised doubts in our mind about the identity of those who participated in the decision, we should not be surprised to find McLaren returning, a few pages later (281-2), to the capture of Masada and suggesting that it too was the work of the hot-headed aristocratic priests of Jerusalem; in support of this, he points to the chronological parallel between the two events (κάν τούτω ... ἅμα δέ — beginnings of §§408-9) and to the fact that such aristocratic priests might have known the right people and so would have been able to trick their way into the fortress. His conclusion:

The ‘most ardent promoters of war’ [*War* 2.408], therefore, is a cloak used by Josephus to protect the identity of those who captured Masada. It is no wonder that Josephus is vague regarding the identity of those who attacked the fortress and the link between the two events. They were probably the work of prominent, respected members of the priesthood. (282)

Thus, what began as an alternative suggestion by Cohen to account for what was wrongly thought to be a contradiction between *War* 2.408 and 433 has now become a full-fledged theory that ignores not only 2.433, which is indeed irrelevant, but also all the other Josephan evidence on the capture of Masada that is directly relevant.

Curiously, however, McLaren appends to the first sentence of the above quotation the following note:

The one rider to this interpretation is if the description of the people who captured Masada is used elsewhere by Josephus and it can be linked with a specific group of people.

That is, if τινές τῶν μάλιστα κινούντων τὸν πόλεμον were to turn out to be a phrase Josephus normally uses of a specific group of people, McLaren would allow that to govern the identification of those described at *War* 2.408. In fact, Josephus does not use it of any specific group. But why should we suppose that Josephan diction, elsewhere, is a better guide to whom Josephus was thinking of in 2.408 than his own explicit statements, elsewhere, concerning the authors of the same event?

In short, it seems to me that focusing upon what Josephus does not say in any particular passage may be of great heuristic use in discovering what interests him and what he would rather ignore. To that extent McLaren is definitely right. But as for the reconstruction of what happened, we may ignore other sources — even those supplied by others, but certainly those supplied by Josephus himself — only at our peril. And when we go so far as not only to ignore them, but also to substitute for them other stories which appeal to us more, although the ones told by our sources did not present problems that require such alternate stories, we come very close to crossing the line between history and fiction.¹⁹ As Momigliano put it, ‘the difference between a novelist and an historian is that a novelist is free to invent the facts ... all of the historian’s work is based upon sources’.²⁰ Of course, some would deny that any such line exists. I labor according to the rules of a different tradition,²¹ and still find it meaningful.

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¹⁹ For an amusing case of how easy it is to elevate our own ideas to a status equal to that of our sources, note the end of B. Murelstein’s introduction to his Josephus reader (*Flavius Josephus, Lebenslauf ...* [Vienna 1938], 11): ‘Über sein Ende ist uns nichts Näheres bekannt. Der Kirchenvater Eusebius berichtet [in *Hist. eccl.* 3.9.2 — D.R.S.], daß Josephus nach seinem Tode in Rom durch Errichtung einer Bildsäule geehrt worden sei. Im krassen Gegensatz zu dieser Auszeichnung steht die Vermutung, daß er gleichzeitig mit seinem Gönner Epaphroditus unter Domitian hingerichtet wurde. Der Widerspruch zwischen den beiden Ueberlieferungen über den Tod des Josephus ist für sein ganzes Wesen bezeichnend. Am Judentum in Treue hängend, steht er auch im Banne der großen Idee des römischen Imperiums. Sein zerrissenes und zweideutiges Wesen läßt ihn daher als Sinnbild der jüdischen Tragik erscheinen’. This piece of attractive rhetoric, printed in a book published in Vienna in 1938 of which some copies are over-stamped ‘Made in Germany’, would have been just as suggestive even if Murelstein had not, from one sentence to the next, promoted his source-less ‘Vermutung’ to the status of ‘Ueberlieferung’.

²⁰ Arnaldo Momigliano, ‘Le regole del giuoco nello studio della storia antica’, in *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* I, Storia e letteratura, 149 (Rome 1980), 15, 20 (‘La differenza tra un romanziere e uno storico è che il romanziere è libero di inventare i fatti ... tutto il lavoro dello storico è su fonti’).

²¹ I wonder if Momigliano would still be happy about lending his authority to terming our profession a ‘game’.