

Some Remarks on Simon Bar Giora*

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One of the more interesting figures of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome is that of Simon Bar Giora. He is also one of the more enigmatic figures. Although Simon Bar Giora became the main leader of the revolt after his entry into Jerusalem in the spring of 69, only a few specific studies have been devoted to him. This may be the result of the problematic nature of some aspects pertaining to him.

The following remarks will be devoted to some of these aspects: his origins, his social tendencies, and the messianic aspirations ascribed to him.

a) *The Origins of Simon Bar Giora*

Simon Bar Giora is mentioned by three ancient historians, Josephus Flavius, Tacitus and Cassius Dio. The main source is Josephus. Simon is mentioned many times in the *Bellum Judaicum*, but on only eight occasions does Josephus refer to him by his full name. The common form is ὁ τοῦ Γιώρα Σίμων which appears four times.¹ The form ὁ Γιώρα Σίμων appears three times,² and υἱὸς ... Γιώρα Σίμων only once.³

Tacitus mentions Simon in his description of the tripartite division of besieged Jerusalem among the leaders of the revolt,⁴ where he notes that Simon was holding “the outermost and largest circuit of the walls”. However,

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1 *BJ* 2.521; 5.11, 114; 7.25.

2 *Ibid.* 2.652; 7.154, 265.

3 *Ibid.* 4.503.

4 Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.12.3.

Tacitus mistakenly attributes the name 'Bargiora' to John of Gischala.⁵ It seems that the mistake stems from Tacitus' carelessness in copying his source or, perhaps, from a mistake in the source itself.⁶

The third source where Simon Bar Giora is mentioned is Cassius Dio, who relates that Bargioras (ὁ Βαργιορᾶς), the leader of the rebels, was captured by the Romans, and was the only one to be executed in connection with the triumph of Vespasian and Titus in Rome.⁷

The name Bar Giora thus appears in all three sources. "Giora" (גיורא) means "a proselyte" in Aramaic, and the first thing we should verify is whether Simon was indeed the son of a proselyte. Almost all the scholars who have dealt with Simon Bar Giora give an answer in the affirmative. Only two scholars have denied this supposition. The first was S. Krauss who assumed that the word "Giora" became a man's proper name. According to Krauss, Simon Bar Giora was the son of a man called Giora, and not the son of a proselyte.⁸ But, to the best of my knowledge, we do not have any ancient example of "Giora" as a proper name.⁹

5 "Tres duces totidem exercitus: extrema et latissima moenium Simo, mediam urbem Ioannes quem et Bargioram vocabant."

6 Cf. M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* 2 (Jerusalem 1980) 59, *ad loc.*

7 D.C. 66,71.

8 S. Krauss, 'An Investigation about the 'glossae sacrae',' *Proceedings of the University and the Library in Jerusalem; Oriental Studies and Judaism*, 1 (Jerusalem 1924) 9 (Hebrew). Krauss differentiates, without any reason, between the name "Bar Giora" (בר גיורא) and the name "Bar Giorei" (בר גיורי) [or "Ben Gerim" in Hebrew] which appears in the Talmud. Only the latter, according to Krauss, denotes a proselyte origin. But his supposition is unacceptable. See: "R. Issac Bar Jacob Bar Giorei" (BT *Mo'ed Katan* 18a), while the Munich Ms. has: "Bar Giora". The same sage is mentioned also in BT *Eruvin* 62a. The Talmud also mentions Judah Ben Gerim the pupil of R. Simon Bar Yoḥai (BT *Shabat* 33b; *Mo'ed Katan* 9a). The same sage is alluded to in *Bereshith Rabbah* 35.16 (ed. J. Theodor and C. Albeck, p. 330, l.8) as R. Yudan Bar Giorei.

9 The name does not appear in the index of J.-B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, 1 (Rome 1936). Neither does it appear in the prosopography of Egyptian Jews: V. Tcherikover, A. Fuks and M. Stern, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 (Cambridge Mass. 1964) nor in J. Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic; The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* (Jerusalem 1978) 152 (list of proper names) (Hebrew). The word גיורא appears in an inscription from Dura Europos (Naveh, *ibid.*, no. 88), but there it means "proselyte": "ר-נארשן-ן גיורא."

The other scholar who held a different interpretation of Simon Bar Giora's name was Klausner. According to Klausner Simon Bar Giora was the leader of the *sicarii*.¹⁰ Klausner did not try to prove this striking assertion though between the lines it seems that he would connect Simon's "leadership" with his stay in Masada, where Eleazar Ben Yair and some of the *sicarii* found refuge after the assassination of Menahem. He also based this assertion on Simon's social tendencies (on which see below). From here Klausner took yet another step and identified Simon with "Ben Batiaḥ", the nephew of Rabban Yoḥanan Ben Zakkai, mentioned in *Koheleth Rabbah* as "Head of the *kesarin* (קסרין) in Jerusalem",¹¹ in *Eikhah Rabbah* as "Bar Sakrah",¹² and in the Babylonian Talmud as "Abba Sikra the head of the bullies (ריש בריני) in Jerusalem".¹³

After reaching the very dubious conclusion (as I shall presently show) that Simon Bar Giora's "real" name was Simon Ben Batiaḥ, Klausner tried to explain the meaning of "Bar Giora". He regarded the name as a derogatory nickname alluding to Simon's cruelty: "'Bar Giora', the son of a proselyte; a man whose origin is from gentiles, and not from merciful Israelites".¹⁴ To strengthen his assumption Klausner argued that if indeed Simon were a son of a proselyte, it is difficult to understand why Josephus does not denounce him as such, as he denounced Herod by asserting that he was "a half-Jew".¹⁵

Let us answer Klausner's assertions one by one. There is no way we can accept Klausner's basic assumption that Simon Bar Giora was the leader of the *sicarii*,¹⁶ and that for three reasons: (a) Josephus does not state it as a fact anywhere. There is no doubt that Josephus would have mentioned it if it had been true. (b) Josephus relates that when Simon asked for asylum in Masada, the *sicarii* first regarded him with suspicion, and later refused to join him (!) when he took to the mountains and gathered an army.¹⁷ (c) When Josephus

10 J. Klausner, *History of the Second Temple Period*,⁴ 5 (Jerusalem 1954) 164–165, 228–229, and especially note 41 (Hebrew).

11 *Koheleth Rabbah* 7.25. Klausner accepts the emendation סקרין=קסרין.

12 *Eikhah Rabbah* 1.258 (ed. S. Buber, [Vilna 1899] 66).

13 BT *Gittin* 56a. "The fist of Ben Batiaḥ" is alluded to in Mishnah *Kelim* 17.12.

14 Klausner (above, n.10) 230 n.41.

15 *Ant.* 14.403.

16 On that see the brief allusions of C. Roth, 'Simon Bar Giora, Ancient Jewish Hero,' *Commentary* 25 (1960) 54; and M. Stern, 'Zealots,' in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book 1973* (Jerusalem 1973) 145.

17 *BJ* 4.505–507.

enumerates the various groups that took part in the revolt, he lists the *sicarii* and Simon Bar Giora as two separate groups.¹⁸ Once we have demonstrated that Simon could not have been the leader of the *sicarii*, Klausner's identification of Simon with Ben Batiaḥ collapses of its own accord.

As to Klausner's assumption that "Bar Giora" is a derogatory nickname signifying cruelty, one should note that there is no hint of that anywhere in Josephus' writing. Josephus regards it as a name and not as a nickname. There is no doubt that had it really been a derogatory nickname, Josephus would have been keen to point that out to his non-Jewish readers,¹⁹ especially as he had very little sympathy for Simon. We may add that nowhere in his writings is Josephus hostile toward proselytes.²⁰ On the contrary. Josephus stresses the positive attitude of Judaism towards the proselytes: "To all who desire to come and live under the same laws with us, he [i.e. Moses] gives a gracious welcome".²¹ This attitude is implicit in the story about the piety of Izates and in his and his mother's acts of charity towards the people of Jerusalem in times of famine.²² Josephus' positive attitude towards proselytism has even induced some scholars to surmise that Josephus in his writings (in the *Antiquities* and the *Contra Apionem*) is trying to explain Judaism to non-Jews so that they would eventually embrace Judaism.²³

Regarding Klausner's query why Josephus does not denounce Simon Bar Giora as a son of a proselyte, as he denounces Herod as "a half-Jew", one should note that Klausner was not precise. It is not Josephus who draws attention to Herod's semi-Jewishness. This information is given, in a reported speech, as part of the arguments of Antigonus, the last Hasmonean king, before the Roman general Silo, as to why Herod is unfit to become the king of the Jews.²⁴ It is noteworthy that when Josephus himself sums up the downfall

18 *Ibid.* 7.253–258 (the *sicarii*); 265–266 (Simon Bar Giora).

19 As he did in the case of Alexander Jannaeus' derogatory nickname "Thrakidas" (*Ant.* 13.383).

20 In *Contra Apionem* 2.123–124 Josephus states that not all the Greeks who adopted the Jewish laws remained faithful to Judaism for a long time. But Josephus writes these things in a neutral tone, and not defiantly.

21 *Ibid.* 2.210. See also *ibid.* 2.261, 282–286.

22 *Ant.* 20.17–96.

23 J. Rosenbloom, *Conversion to Judaism: From the Biblical Period to the Present* (Cincinnati 1978) 47. But cf. the cautious phrasing of H.J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia 1960) 252 n. 1.

24 *Ant.* 14.403: "... It would be contrary to their own notion of right if they gave the kingship to Herod who was a commoner and an Idumaeen, that is, a half-Jew."

of the Hasmonean dynasty and the rise of Herod he points out that the kingship passed to Herod “who came from a house of common people and from a private family that was subject to the kings”, but he does not even hint at Herod’s proselyte origins.²⁵

One might note that Klausner overlooked another way of explaining “Bar Giora” as a derogatory nickname. In one Aramaic dialect, at least, the word “Gaiora” (גִּיּוֹרָא) or “Giora” (גִּיּוֹרָא) means “the adulterer”.²⁶ Therefore, it could have been said that “Bar Giora” is a derogatory label meaning “the son of the adulterer”. But it seems to me that this suggestion is far-fetched since surely Josephus would not have passed over in silence such a golden opportunity to denigrate Simon’s origins.

To sum up: it seems that Simon Bar Giora was indeed the son of a proselyte, since all other suggestions to explain his name do not withstand close scrutiny. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand why Josephus never explicitly mentions Simon’s proselyte origins, and why he never explains these origins to his non-Jewish readers. It is possible that the participation of proselytes in the revolt seemed natural to Josephus, as we know that the proselytes of the royal house of Adiabene took part in the revolt.²⁷ It stands to reason that many other proselytes remained loyal to their newly-adopted nation at its gravest hour.

Nevertheless, it is rather astonishing that a proselyte’s son became the most important leader of the revolt.²⁸ Stern explains it by the charismatic personality of Simon, and by the extinction of the traditional leadership.²⁹ Stern also assumes that Simon was the leader of the rebels from Jewish Transjordan.³⁰ There is no doubt that already at the beginning of the revolt Simon led a particular group of rebels, since he appears as an independent leader already

25 *Ibid.* 14.491.

26 See Targum Yehonathan to Leviticus, 20:10, and also *Neophyti* 1 to the same verse.

27 *BJ* 2.520, 6.356. Incidentally, Michel assumed, without any proof, that Simon’s father was a proselyte from the Diaspora: O. Michel, ‘Studien zu Josephus: Simon Bar Giora’, *New Testament Studies*, 14 (1967/68) 403.

28 See already Roth (n. 16 above) 53.

29 Stern (n. 16 above) 145.

30 M. Stern, ‘The Leadership of the Groups of Freedom Fighters at the End of the Second Temple Period,’ in: *The Great Man and His Age* (Jerusalem 1963) 76 (Hebrew).

in the first battle with Cestius Gallus.³¹ But we must disagree with Stern's assumption that Simon's source of power lay in Transjordan. There is no doubt that Stern's assumption is influenced by his earlier one that Simon came from the Hellenistic city of Gerasa in Transjordan.³² We shall discuss this assumption later. Here we shall state only that among all those of Simon's men whose place of origin is known to us, there is not even one who came from Transjordan.³³

Let us pass now to the question of Simon's place of origin. Josephus introduces Simon as Γερασηνός, i.e. a man of Gerasa.³⁴ The Hellenistic city of Gerasa in Transjordan is preferred by some scholars since it had a substantial Jewish community, which could have influenced some non-Jews in the city to embrace Judaism.³⁵ But the fact that we cannot find any connection between Simon and Transjordan weakens this argument.

Another possibility is to identify Gerasa with Jureish (map reference 180 167), today an Arab village 35 km north-east of Jerusalem, and 3,5 km

31 *BJ* 2.521.

32 Stern (n. 30 above) 76.

33 Simon's men whose place of origin is known: The "lame man" from Adiabene (*BJ* 5.474); Ananus son of Bagadates of Emmaus (*ibid.* 6.229); Jacob son of Sosas, one of the commanders of the Idumaeans (*ibid.* 6.92, 148); Tephthaios from the town of Garis in Galilee (*ibid.* 5.474). [It should be noted that the presence of this man among Simon's men casts doubts on Stern's assertion (n. 16 above, p. 145): "... there is no proof that the Galileans joined his [Simon's] forces to any extent". It is true that Niese (B. Niese, *Flavii Iosephi Opera*, 6, [Berlin 1895] Index, s.v. Γυφθαῖος), Schalit (A. Schalit, *Namenwörterbuch zu Flavius Josephus*, [Leiden 1968] s.v. Γυφθέος) and others, identified this Tephthaios from Garis with Gypthaios, mentioned as one of the heroes among the men of John of Gischala (*BJ* 6.92, 148). But it seems to me that we are not allowed to alter the text in the face of the definite statements of Josephus, that Tephthaios was one of the men of Simon, while Gypthaios was one of the men of John of Gischala. See also O. Michel and O. Bauernfeind, *Flavius Josephus, De Bello Judaico*, Griechisch und Deutsch, 2, 1 (München 1963); 2, 2 (Darmstadt 1969) *ad locc.*; 3 (Darmstadt 1969) Index, s.v. Tephthäus aus Garis; Gyphtheos].

34 *BJ* 4.503.

35 See Klausner (n.10 above) 228, n. 36; Roth (n.16 above) 53; Stern (n.16 above) 146, especially n. 39. Stern prefers the Transjordanian Gerasa, since he finds this Hellenistic city more suitable to the presence of proselytes than the town of Gerasa (Jureish). On Jureish see below. On the Jewish community in Gerasa and its good relations with the non-Jews at the beginning of the revolt cf. *BJ* 2.480.

south-west of Akrafe.³⁶ I find this possibility more plausible, in view of the fact that this Gerasa is located in the toparchy of Akrobatene, which was the area in which Simon was active during the earlier stages of the revolt.³⁷ Josephus states that Simon recruited a large number of rebels in the toparchy of Akrobatene while the faction of Ananus son of Ananus was still in control of Jerusalem. When the government of the moderates sent troops against Simon (who had attacked some wealthy Jews), he escaped to Masada (in the winter of 66/67) and stayed there till the assassination of Ananus son of Ananus.³⁸ After this assassination (in the winter of 67/68), we hear again about Simon's control of the toparchy of Akrobatene.³⁹

It seems that also at that period (prior to Simon's entrance into Jerusalem in the spring of 69) Simon's headquarters were situated in the toparchy of Akrobatene or in its vicinity. Josephus states that these headquarters were situated in a village called Ναΐν, which was fortified by Simon with a wall.⁴⁰ The most likely identification of Nain is Khirbet 'Ain 'Aineh about 3 km south-west of Jureish.⁴¹

- 36 The first to suggest this identification was A. Schlatter, *Zur Topographie und Geschichte Palästinas* (Calw/Stuttgart 1893) 370. This identification was reiterated by Benvenisti (who presumably did not know of Schlatter's earlier suggestion). See: D. Benvenisti, 'Gerasa ; The Birth-Place of Simon Bar Giora,' *Zion; Bulletin of the Palestine Society for History and Ethnography*, 1, 2nd issue (1930) 22–24 (Hebrew); See also N. Shalem, *Kirjath Sepher*, 17 (1940) 172 (Hebrew). This identification was accepted by M. Avi-Yonah, *Geographical History of Eretz Israel*³ (Jerusalem 1962) 122 (Hebrew); by Schalit (n. 33 above), s.v. Γέρασα (2); by C. Möller and G. Schmidt, *Siedlungen Palästinas nach Flavius Josephus* (Wiesbaden 1976) s.v. Γέρασα (2); and recently by U. Rappaport, in: *The History of the Jewish People*, the volume: *Judaea and Rome — The Jewish Revolts* (Jerusalem 1983) 63 (Hebrew).
- 37 For Gerasa's location in the toparchy of Akrobatene see Avi-Yonah (n. 36 above) 122. Cf. also the map in Z. Safrai, 'The Administrative Structure of Judaea in the Roman Period,' *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, 4 (Haifa 1978) 115 (Hebrew).
- 38 *BJ* 2.652–653. According to *BJ* 4.504 the whole of the toparchy of Akrobatene was under Simon's control.
- 39 *Ibid.* 4.511.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 See Möller and Schmidt (n. 36 above), s.v. 'Αΐν. The conventional identification of Nain is with 'Ain Fara. See E. Nestle, 'Judaea bei Josephus,' *ZDPV* 34 (1911) 102–103; S. Klein, *The Land of Judaea* (Tel Aviv 1939) 252 (Hebrew); Avi-Yonah (n. 36 above) 105. But see the arguments of Möller and Schmidt against this identification. Cf. also J. Patrich, 'Ain Fara — Temporary Headquarters of Bar

To sum up the question of Simon's place of origin one should note that there are also other suggestions as to the identification of Gerasa.⁴² But it seems that one should prefer Gerasa in Akrobatene because of the explicit connections of Simon with this area.

b) *The Social Ideology of Simon Bar Giora*

On this matter, in sharp contrast to others pertaining to Simon, there is a general consensus among scholars; they regard Simon as a leader who sprang from the lower classes, led these classes in revolt and held extreme and revolutionary social views.⁴³ Especially decisive on this point are Kreissig and Applebaum. Kreissig assumes that apart from Simon's nationalistic aim, of overthrowing the Roman yoke, he also had a social aim — of fighting against the oppression of the poor at the hands of landowners in Judaea and of the rich of Jerusalem. Kreissig also assumes that Simon's army included slaves, peasants, and urban day-labourers. But Josephus does not mention any peasants in this context. As for day-labourers: Kreissig's proof lies in the mention of the stonecutters employed by Simon in his desperate attempt to flee from Jerusalem in an underground passage.⁴⁴ It is doubtful, however, whether we can draw any conclusion concerning the general social composition of Simon's army from this one specific case. Applebaum is of the opinion that the reason for Simon's execution in Rome was his egalitarian ideology which terrified Vespasian. But it seems that the fact that Simon was chosen as the scapegoat in Rome is connected with his having been the main leader of the besieged rebels in Jerusalem, who had about two-thirds of the active combatants under his command.⁴⁵

Giora,' *Teva va-Aretz*, 28/1 (November-December 1985) 23–24 (Hebrew).

- 42 A. Schlatter, *Die hebräischen Namen bei Josephus* (=Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie, Jahrg. 17, Heft 3) (Gütersloh 1913) 39, thinks that the place must be near Jericho, but does not specify. J. Press, *Eretz Israel; A Topographical-Historical Encyclopaedia*², 1 (Jerusalem 1951) 174 (Hebrew), identifies the place with Jerash (Khirbet Geres) about 15 km. south-west of Jerusalem (map reference 158 124).
- 43 J. Klausner, *When a Nation Fights for Its Freedom*⁵ (Tel Aviv 1947) 326 (Hebrew); Roth (n. 16 above) 54–55; Michel (n.27 above) 402; H. Kreissig, *Die sozialen Zusammenhänge des jüdischen Krieges* (Berlin 1970) 141–142; S. Applebaum, 'The Zealots: The Case for Revaluation,' *JRS* 61 (1971) 168; Stern (n. 6 above), 59; M. Goodman, 'The First Jewish Revolt: Social Conflict and the Problem of Debt,' *JJS* 33 (1982) 424; T. Rajak, *Josephus* (London 1983) 136.
- 44 *BJ* 7.26
- 45 Applebaum (n. 43 above) 166. But see Stern (n.6 above) 59.

All the scholars cited above base their arguments on two statements made by Josephus: (a) In the early stages of the revolt, while Simon was operating in the toparchy of Akrobatene, he not only plundered the houses of the rich, but also harmed the owners bodily.⁴⁶ (b) When Simon left his refuge in Masada, in the winter of 67/68, he freed slaves and enlisted them in his army.⁴⁷

It seems doubtful whether Simon had any definite social aims which he endeavoured to achieve. The attacks on the rich can be explained as a result of Simon's opportunistic needs, serving him in two ways. First, plundering the rich enabled him to finance his army. Secondly, physical attacks on them won him the support of the lower classes, and enabled him to enlarge his army, when it was still small.

The following incident will show that Simon did not have any special sympathy with the lower classes. When he was still besieging Jerusalem, before his entrance into the city in the spring of 69, he ordered the killing of all members of the lower classes who had tried to leave the city for the *χώρα* and had fallen into his hands.⁴⁸ Here Simon does not exactly appear as the champion of the lower classes. Also while in Jerusalem Simon did not flinch from harming these classes, as clearly appears from Josephus' statement.⁴⁹ Moreover, in another passage Josephus explicitly says that after Simon's departure from Masada and following his first successes he was joined by many influential people (*πολλοὶ...δυνατοί*), and his army was no longer an army of slaves and brigands but an army of numerous citizens (*δημοτικῶν*), subservient to him as to a king.⁵⁰

This passage brings us to the question of the liberation of slaves by Simon. It seems that also in this matter Simon was guided by opportunistic motives

46 *BJ* 2.652. In *BJ* 5.439–440 Josephus mentions attacks on the rich in besieged Jerusalem, but here the reference is both to Simon and John of Gischala.

47 *Ibid.* 4.508.

48 *Ibid.* 5.557. Josephus uses the word *ὁ ἐργάτης* which can be translated as a "workman". Liddell and Scott note that the word denotes especially "one who works the soil". In his translation of Josephus Thackeray has here: "any of the labouring class".

49 *BJ* 5.439. It deals with the deeds of the accomplices of "the tyrants". It is clear from the context that Josephus refers here also to Simon's followers. Those who came to harm were of...*ταπεινότεροι*, i.e. people of lowly birth, as opposed to people of rank and wealth.

50 *BJ* 4.510. According to Rengstorff *οἱ δυνατοί* are "the influential people, the leading circles, the nobility, the powerful (mighty) ones, the heads, notables"; K.H. Rengstorff, *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus*, 1 (Leiden 1973) s.v. *δυνατός*.

and his principal aim was to enlarge his army, which was still rather small after he had left Masada. Such motives become clear from Josephus' statement: "He [i.e. Simon] withdrew to the hills, where by proclaiming liberty for the slaves *and rewards for the free*, he gathered around him the villains from every quarter".⁵¹ That is to say that Simon employed two proven means in order to enlarge his army. He was not acting to achieve any social aims. This can also be inferred from the fact that immediately after this passage Josephus states that Simon's army was *no longer* an army of slaves and brigands. Had there been any substance to the claim that Simon had social aims, we would have expected to hear about Simon freeing more slaves on his entrance into Jerusalem, but there is no hint of that in Josephus.⁵²

c) *Was Simon Bar Giora a "King-Messiah"?*

The last question to which we shall address ourselves will be whether Simon was regarded by himself and by his followers as the "King-Messiah". It is well known that Josephus tried to play down the messianic expectations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel on the eve of and during the first revolt.⁵³ Josephus' evasiveness has induced some scholars to try to cast some light on this matter by interpreting certain "clues" which they found in the *Bellum Judaicum* and on the bronze coins of the fourth year of the revolt. We shall examine their arguments one by one.

The most common argument of these scholars is based on the episode in which Simon emerged from among the ruins of the temple. Josephus relates that when Simon's attempt to escape from Jerusalem by means of a tunnel was frustrated, he tried to frighten the Romans in order to take advantage of their stupefaction and to escape. For this aim he dressed himself in white tunics and over them a purple mantle, and emerged from the place where the temple formerly stood.⁵⁴ Simon's attire and his specific place of emergence were understood by certain scholars as having messianic connotations.⁵⁵

51 *BJ* 4.508 (Thackeray's translation). The italics are mine. Even Kreissig (n.43 above) 141, has to admit that the liberation of slaves in order to win them as brothers-in-arms was not uncommon in ancient times. But as usual Kreissig wraps all his arguments in a thick cover of Marxism.

52 In contrast to what the reader may understand from Goodman (n. 43 above) 424.

53 See, recently: M. Stern, in: *The History of The Jewish People*, the volume: *Judaea and Rome — The Jewish Revolts* (Jerusalem 1983) 105 (Hebrew).

54 *BJ* 7.29

55 Klausner (n. 43 above) 328; M. Hengel, *Die Zeloten*² (Leiden/Köln 1976) 303–304; L.H. Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship (1937–1980)* (Berlin/New York 1984) 671.

Another conventional argument is that first advanced by Kanael in 1953. Kanael assumed that the bronze coins carrying the legend לגאולת ציון (“of the redemption of Zion” according to Kanael’s translation) on the obverse, and the legend “year four, half” (or “quarter”, or just “year four”) on the reverse were struck under the authority of Simon Bar Giora. The legend “of the redemption of Zion” hints, according to Kanael, at the messianic character of Simon.⁵⁶

Another argument, brought forward by Roth, was the liberation of slaves by Simon. Roth drew attention to Isaiah 61, 1: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me as a herald of joy to the humble, to bind up the wounded of heart, *to proclaim release to the captives, liberation to the imprisoned.*” Roth assumed that in the first century this possibly was “one of the accepted ‘Messianic passages’.”⁵⁷ Therefore, the liberation of slaves shows, according to Roth, that Simon considered himself to be the Messiah.

A fourth argument was advanced by Lane, and accepted by Feldman. Lane based his suggestion on Josephus’ statement concerning Simon’s entrance into Jerusalem in the spring of 69, that the people of Jerusalem hailed Simon as “saviour and guardian” ($\text{\sigma\omega\tau\eta\rho\dots\kappa\alpha\iota\ \kappa\eta\delta\epsilon\mu\acute{o}\nu}$).⁵⁸ Lane assumed, from the use of these terms, that Simon was regarded by the people of Jerusalem as the Messiah.⁵⁹

In 1968 Michel addressed himself to the question of Simon’s Messiahship. Michel is cautious in his statements and, in fact, does not commit himself on that matter.⁶⁰ But the impression one gets from Michel’s discourse is that

56 B. Kanael, ‘The Historical Background of the Coins “Year Four... of the Redemption of Zion”,’ *BASOR* 129 (1953) 18–20. His suggestion was accepted by Hengel (n. 55 above) 303; C. Roth, ‘The Historical Implications of the Jewish Coinage of the First Revolt.’ *IEJ* 12 (1962) 43–44; M. Stern, ‘Sicarii and Zealots’, in: *Society and Religion in the Second Temple Period (World History of the Jewish People, 8)* (Jerusalem 1977) 289.

57 Roth (n. 16 above) 54–55. He notes, by way of proving his assumption, that “Jesus too had applied this passage to himself [Luke, IV, 18].”

58 *BJ* 4.575

59 W.C. Lane, *Times of Refreshments: A Study of Eschatological Periodization in Judaism and Christianity* (Diss. Th.D., Harvard, Cambridge Mass. 1962) 283–300. Unfortunately, I have not been able to see this thesis for myself and the information is according to Feldman (n.55 above) 671.

60 Michel (n. 27 above) 403–404, 406–407. Cf. Feldman (n. 55 above) 490. R.A. Horsley and J.S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets and Messiahs* (Minneapolis 1985) 119–127, who draw heavily on Michel’s study, have nothing new to say.

Simon indeed had messianic pretensions. Michel especially stresses the element of the popular hero in the description of Simon, an element which brings messianic connotations to Michel's mind.⁶¹

Finally, we must mention Stern's arguments. Stern too is cautious, but it seems that he too is of the opinion that Simon had messianic aspirations.⁶² Apart from the coins of year four, mentioned above, Stern attaches great importance to Josephus' statement that Simon's men were "subservient to his command as to a king", and were ready to sacrifice their lives "had he given the order".⁶³

Let us try now to refute these arguments one by one. Simon's appearance among the ruins of the temple clad in white and purple cannot be interpreted, in my opinion, as an attempt of messianic revelation. Josephus emphasizes that Simon's aim was to create a scare among the Roman guards in order to escape from Jerusalem. It is true that one may argue, as indeed Michel has done, that Josephus distorted the details of this episode on purpose, in order to cast aspersions upon Simon, who is one of the "villains" in his narrative.⁶⁴ But Michel himself admits that this episode must have come from "a good historical tradition", consequently the main features of Josephus' description are likely to be correct. Simon's frantic attempts *to escape* from Jerusalem totally undermine Michel's thesis that Simon surrendered himself to the Romans on the ruins of the temple as "a sacrifice to God". One should rather attribute Simon's appearance in regal attire to his desire *to look like* a supernatural figure rising from among the ruins.⁶⁵

Kanael's suggestion as to the meaning behind the legend "of the redemption of Zion" on the coins of year four has found many adherents. But we must bear in mind that we do not know with certainty under what authority these coins were struck, and their attribution to Simon is an assumption which has not been proved. Kanael attributes them to Simon on the grounds that they were struck in bronze. This, he assumes, was the result of the fact that the bullion of silver was in the temple's treasury; this, in turn, was in the

61 Michel stresses (without justification as we shall presently see) Simon's connections with "the South", and this he associates with another hero from "the South", i.e. David.

62 Stern (n. 56 above) 289, and also 284. Stern writes about "... the messianic nature of his [Simon's] personality."

63 *BJ* 4.510 (subservient to his command as to a king); *ibid.* 5.309 (their readiness to sacrifice their lives).

64 Michel (n. 27 above) 406–407.

65 On regal allusions attributed to Simon see below.

hands of John of Gischala and the Zealots, Simon's enemies. One should note, however, that bronze coins were also struck during the second and third years of the revolt (before Simon's entrance into Jerusalem).⁶⁶ One should also note in this context, that Roth's proposal to regard the words "לגאולת ציין" as a kind of warlike slogan designed to instil confidence into the hearts of Simon's men is not plausible. It seems that one should connect this legend with the legend on the reverse ("year four"), and understand it as a whole: "year four of the redemption of Zion" (i.e. the fourth year since the redemption had begun).⁶⁷

Roth's argument regarding the messianic element inherent in the liberation of slaves by Simon is interesting, but it seems to me that the liberation is better explained by the marked opportunistic streak in Simon's activities, as it has emerged from our discussion (see above, p. 114).

As to Lane's argument that the terms "saviour and guardian" reveal the messianic nature of Simon as conceived by the people of Jerusalem, one can only point out that Josephus employs these terms (separately) many times without any messianic meaning. Moreover, Josephus uses these terms with regard to himself, to Herod's father Antipater, to Herod himself, and to Vespasian.⁶⁸

As noted above, Michel hints at the messianic element in Simon's personality, without actually committing himself on the matter. Michel attaches great importance to Simon being "the hero from the South" (like David, in his time), who captured Hebron, the city of David. Thus Michel tries to draw a parallel between David and Simon, hinting at the messianic element of "the Gibbor". But it should be noted that the presentation of Simon as "the hero from the South" is misleading. As we have seen above Simon had much stronger connections with the area *north* of Jerusalem, being the native of Gerasa. This is underlined by the fact that his headquarters prior to his entrance into Jerusalem were situated in that same area.

66 See also A. Kindler, 'Numismatic Remarks on Jewish Minting of the End of the Second Temple Period', in: A. Oppenheimer et al. (eds.) *Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period* (Jerusalem 1980) 271–278 (Hebrew). Kindler rejects the theory which views the bronze coins of year four as an emergency coinage, which was intended to replace the silver coinage.

67 Roth (n. 56 above) 43. On the legend as a whole as signifying an era see already Kanael (n. 56 above) 20. Cf. Rajak (n. 43 above) 142.

68 With regard to Josephus himself (*BJ* 2.638: *Vita*, 244, 259); to Antipater (*BJ* 1.202, 223); to Herod (*Ant.* 14.444); to Vespasian (*BJ* 3.459; 7.71). Cf. D.M. Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution: 6–74 CE* (Philadelphia 1976) 145, n. 73.

Finally we must consider Stern's argument. As noted above, Stern found a clue to Simon's Messiahship in Josephus' statement that Simon's men were "subservient to his command as to a king". Stern does not elaborate, but it seems that he associates the term "king" with the term "King-Messiah" ("מלך-המשיח"). Josephus, however, does not explicitly state that Simon was indeed a king, or that he appeared as one. On the other hand, when Josephus describes the disturbances in Judaea after Herod's death he explicitly states that both Simon, a slave of Herod, and Athronges were bold enough to put on the diadem.⁶⁹ Likewise Josephus stresses the fact that Judah son of Ezekias, under the same circumstances, nursed "ambition for royal rank".⁷⁰ It seems to me that Josephus would not have shirked from stating definitely that Simon acted as a king had it really been the case.⁷¹ One can explain the total obedience of Simon's men to him by his charismatic personality. This charisma found expression, among other ways, in Simon's courage and physical strength.⁷²

To sum up the question of Simon's so-called Messiahship one should mention the just remarks of Kreissig on this matter. Kreissig maintains that if Simon really had any overt messianic pretensions, he would have been exposed as a false Messiah by Josephus, who wrote the *Bellum Judaicum* after the destruction of the temple and Simon's execution.⁷³ However, we find no such denunciation of Simon in Josephus, and the reason for that, as I have endeavoured to show, is clear.

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69 Simon, one of Herod's slaves (*BJ* 2.57; *Ant.* 17.273). Athronges (*BJ* 2.62; *Ant.* 17.280).

70 *Ant.* 17.272.

71 The claim that Simon aspired to royalty is rejected also by Applebaum (n. 43 above) 168, but he does not give his reasons.

72 *BJ* 4.504.

73 Kreissig (n. 43 above) 142.