

SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA

YEARBOOK OF THE ISRAEL SOCIETY
FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES

VOLUME XXXIX

2020

The appearance of this volume has been made possible by the support of

Bar-Ilan University
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The Open University
Tel Aviv University
University of Haifa

PUBLISHED BY
THE ISRAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES
<http://www.israel-classics.org>

Manuscripts in the form of e-mail attachments should be sent to one of these e-mail addresses:
scripta.classica.israelica@gmail.com or isaacb@tauex.tau.ac.il. For reviews, contact
Daniela.Dueck@biu.ac.il. Please visit our website for submission guidelines. All submissions are
refereed by outside readers.

Books for review should be sent to the Book Review Editor at the following address: The Editors,
Scripta Classica Israelica, c/o Department of Classics, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan 5290002,
Israel.

Price \$50

© 2020 The Israel Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies
All Rights Reserved

Camera-ready copy produced by the editorial staff of *Scripta Classica Israelica*
Printed in Israel by Magnes Press, Jerusalem

SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA

YEARBOOK OF THE ISRAEL SOCIETY
FOR THE
PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES

Editor-in-Chief: BENJAMIN ISAAC

Editorial Board:
AVI AVIDOV
GABRIEL DANZIG
DANIELA DUECK

Editorial Assistant: Naama Earon

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD
OF *SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA*

François de Callatay, Brussels and Paris
Hubert Cancik, Berlin
Averil Cameron, Oxford
Hannah M. Cotton, Jerusalem
Werner Eck, Köln
Denis Feeney, Princeton
John Glucker, Tel Aviv
Erich Gruen, Berkeley
Benjamin Isaac, Tel Aviv

David Konstan, New York
Jaap Mansfeld, Utrecht
Doron Mendels, Jerusalem
Ra'anana Meridor, Jerusalem
John North, London
Peter J. Rhodes, Durham
Hannah Rosén, Jerusalem
Greg Woolf, London

THE ISRAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION
OF CLASSICAL STUDIES

OFFICERS 2019-2020

President:	Jonathan Price
Secretary:	Lisa Maurice
Treasurer:	Shimon Epstein

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Adi Erlich
Merav Haklai
Lisa Maurice
Andrea Rotstein
Iris Sulimani
Uri Yiftach

HONORARY MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY

Hannah Cotton
Ranon Katzoff
Ra'anana Meridor

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ROBERT A. KASTER, Cicero's Economy of Praise	1
EVA ANAGNOSTOU-LAOUTIDES AND BART VAN WASSENHOVE, Drunkenness and Philosophical Enthusiasm in Seneca's <i>De Tranquillitate Animi</i>	15
FAYAH HAUSSKER, Plut. <i>Them.</i> 10.5: Generosity and Greek Public Education in Historical Memory	35
CARLO DELLE DONNE, Time and Time-Before-Time: An Ancient Puzzle	55
MERON PIOTRKOWSKI, On the Origin of the Jewish Historian Artapanus	73
RIVKA GERSHT, The Caesarea Maritima Asklepios and the Question of Glykon	85
MAREN R. NIEHOFF, From the "Theater of the World" to the "Mask of Christ" — and Back Again: Insights from Origen's Newly Discovered Homilies on Psalms	117
NOGA EREZ-YODFAT, The Inscribed Gold <i>Lamellae</i> from Roman Palestine: Old Questions, New Evidence	137
EMMANUEL NANTET, The Public Boats of Olbia: Warships or State Merchantmen?	149
REVIEW ARTICLES	
DAVID F. GRAF, A Major Catalogue of Toponyms for the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Periods	163
GUY D. STIEBEL, What Have the Romans Ever Done for Us?	175
BOOK REVIEWS	
Hallvard Fossheim, Vigdis Songe-Møller and Knut Ågotnes (eds.), <i>Philosophy as Drama: Plato's Thinking through Dialogue</i> (by Ivor Ludlam)	183
Lisa Maurice, <i>Screening Divinity</i> (by Adele Reinhartz)	186
Altay Coşkun and David Engels (eds.), <i>Rome and the Seleukid East: Selected Papers from Seleukid Study Day V, Brussels, 21-23 August 2015</i> (by Joshua Schwartz)	189
J. Alison Rosenblitt, <i>Rome after Sulla</i> (by Alexander Yakobson)	191
Miriam T. Griffin, <i>Politics and Philosophy at Rome. Collected Papers</i> (by Joseph Geiger)	194
Katelijn Vandorpe (ed.), <i>A Companion to Greco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt</i> (by Haggai Olshanetsky)	197
OBITUARIES: DAVID GOLAN (by Ephraim David)	
FERGUS MILLAR (by Hannah M. Cotton)	201
LISA ULLMANN (by Jonathan Price)	204
LISA ULLMANN (by Jonathan Price)	207
DISSERTATIONS IN PROGRESS	
PROCEEDINGS: THE ISRAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES	211
	215

What Have the Romans Ever Done for Us?

Guy D. Stiebel

Jodi Magness, *Masada: From Jewish Revolt to Modern Myth*, Princeton University Press, 2019. xiv + 265 pp. ISBN 9780691167107.

The site of Masada is seemingly one of the most studied sites in the Near East, and surely in Israel. The first western explorer to mention the site, still known back then as es-Sebbeh (Sebba), was the German Ulrich Jasper Seetzen who visited the Dead Sea region in 1806. Rivers of inks have been spilt ever since over numerous aspects of the site, more intensively following the reporting of the results of the epic expedition by Yigael Yadin (1963-65). In addition to countless papers and many books, eight Final Reports of Yadin's excavations have been published to date. Recently a semi-popular condensed version of them was published by Amnon Ben-Tor. Thus, the publication of a new book that aims to offer a synthesis of the "story of Masada" during the time of the First Jewish revolt is something to celebrate. Fewer scholars are better able than the author to take on this task. Prof. Jodi Magness of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the President of the Archaeological Institute of America is one of the most prominent voices in present-day Classical Archaeology of the Levant. In addition to her vast field experience, Magness has published extensively on themes and material culture interfacing or relating directly to the study of Masada and was the co-author of a chapter devoted to the *militaria* of Masada in the Final Report series. Most notably, Magness was a co-director of the 1995's excavation season at Camp F and the siege ramp at Masada.

The book comprises nine main chapters that are preceded and followed by a prologue and an epilogue. In addition to one of the most beautiful covers to be published in recent years, it contains two maps and forty-six figures, eight of which are in colour, as well as a section of references and a detailed index. Two useful maps of the Hasmonaean and Herodian kingdoms precede the prologue. The readers would have benefited if the site of Masada had been indicated on the first map. This is relevant as the site existed during that period of time, and also because it is the first map (or figure) one encounters in the book.

It is a known axiom that there is not a single scholarly book to be found that is free of typos and this applies even in a book such as the one under discussion that was evidently meticulously combed through during the editing and proofs processes. Such are the ghostly "KV" letters that appear at the end of the second paragraph on page 164, or the opening sentence of the book in which the number of the "Jewish men, women and children [who] reportedly chose to take their own lives" should be 960 rather than 967.

In the prologue Magness describes the lay-out of the book and explicitly mentions her scholarly aims. Some of the building blocks of her arguments are placed there, for example the fact that Josephus is the only historical source for the gripping story of the

mass suicide and that many scholars now believe Josephus's description of this episode "is fabricated — that it never happened!" (p. 3). In the following page one may read "for the history of this period we rely mainly on Josephus, a controversial figure regarded in Jewish tradition as a traitor" (p. 4). Without dwelling upon this belligerent statement, I merely wish to emphasize that in *Jewish tradition* Josephus was not regarded in such a way. The term "traitor" was linked to him during the years or even the decades following the episode in Jotapata in AD 67, and thereafter only from the late 19th century on; however, for some 1700 years, Jewish tradition did not discuss Josephus very much, if at all, and certainly *not* in such terms.

Chapter 1 is devoted to the narration of the "Siege of Masada" as well as to Flavius Josephus. Hence the roman army, its siege camps and their excavation, alongside brief details concerning military equipment, are noted. Following is a discussion of the assault ramp and its structure and the final battle. This part gravely misses a discussion of the fortlets along the road that connected Masada to the Judaeian Highland during and served the Roman army. Archaeological report on them was published in 2016, and it sheds light about the possible route of military activity and supply.¹ The second subchapter presents Josephus's biography and his writings, followed by a narration of his biases and apologetic tendencies and the afterlife of his accounts. The post script discusses the discovery of the stamped name Josephus in Latin on the mud-plastered wall of one rebels' dwellings in the casemate wall, quoting Hananh M. Cotton and Joseph Geiger who noted in 1989 that it a "highly puzzling" find (pp. 24-25). Yet, already in 2011 and 2012, two papers discussed this bread stamp imprint and set it in context, as part of the bread baking activity. In addition this study identified a central bakery, as well as indications for communal administration, food storage and supply and related ritual activity at Masada during the time of the revolt.²

In Chapter 2: "The search for Masada", Magness details the lengthy history of research on the site that spans over 200 hundred years. The chapter is divided into two sub-chapters that relate to research on Masada during the 19th and 20th centuries and up to today. Most scholars are included in the first sub-chapter; however, it misses the first scholar of all, Seetzen (1806), documenting it as the "cursed mountain" and Van de Velde (1854), Rey (1860) and Tuch (1863). The second sub-chapter misses Sandel who is credited for the first description of the water cisterns in northwestern slope (1905). More surprising is the omission there of Hawkes's contribution (1929), the British scholar who studied the siege system from RAF's aerial photographs. Lastly, in addition to the place given to Shmaryahu Gutman's discoveries, the contributions of Micah

¹ U. Davidovich, R. Porat, R. Bar-Nathan, R.E. Jackson-Tal, Y. Farhi, N. Marom and G.D. Stiebel, The Road from the Judean Highlands to Masada and the Excavations of Badar and Zfira Fortlet, in J. Patrich, O. Peleg-Barkat and E. Ben Yosef (eds.), *Arise, Walk through the Land, Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Land of Israel in Memory of Yizhar Hirschfeld on the Tenth Anniversary of his Demise*, Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem, 2016, 103-128.

² G.D. Stiebel, 'Meager Bread and Scant Water' — Food for Thought at Masada, in: A.I. Baumgarten, H. Eshel, R. Katzoff and S. Tzoref (eds.), *Halakhah in Light of Epigraphy* (JAJ Supp. Ser. 3), Göttingen, 2011, 283-303; G.D. Stiebel, 'Meager Bread and Scant Water' — The Food of the Rebels' Community at Masada, in: A. Sitrinski (ed.), *Salt of the Earth*, Vol. VI, Jerusalem, 2012, 104-116.

(Mike) Livne and Ze'ev Mehsel, who were the first to identify the palace noted in Flavius Josephus's account with the Northern Palace (1953), should have been mentioned. Lastly, one may find details concerning the most recent excavations of Tel Aviv University's expedition (2017-) in the preliminary discussion that was published in 2018.³

Moving to Chapter 3: "Masada in Context", Magness presents the geographical setting of Masada, alongside the geophysics, climate and hydrology, as well as the historical and chronological contexts of the Dead Sea region. The typical flora and fauna are further noted. The recent history of the Dead Sea is presented, including a review of its current dire state. The reader is even given swimming instructions and warnings about hazards. Returning to ancient days, a short discussion of the region's desert roads and trails would have been a desirable addition, in particular the road and small fortlets that connected Masada to the "settled land", noted above.

The chapter on historical setting (pp. 46-58) notes mainly the highlights and main sites, but does not refer to the Chalcolithic period at Masada that yielded in the past decade most notable finds (such as the DNA sequencing of barley) in the excavation of one of "Yoram Cave".⁴ Claims that were made by Yadin for the presence of Iron age pottery at Masada, were proven to be Hellenistic in nature, a fact that hints to a Ptolemaic phase at Masada, Herodium and their environ.⁵ In addition the finds from Marda (the name of the monastery at Masada) during the Byzantine period are barely mentioned.⁶

In Chapter 4, titled: "Masada and Herod's Other Building Projects", the author takes the reader to a condensed textual tour around Judaea of Herod. From Masada to Jerusalem, over to Caesarea Maritima and Samaria-Sebaste, Jericho and Herodium. The main architectural enterprises in Judaea are noted. Concerning the discussion of Masada, the opinion that Josephus never visited or saw it (p. 63) has been challenged by several scholars. They attributed mistakes in his description to his observation position, situated west of Masada, which was garrisoned then by the Roman army. Such an opportunity to view Masada may have taken place during his three years' stay in his youth in the wilderness as a disciple of Bannus.⁷ The description of the water system could benefit

³ G.D. Stiebel and B. Gross (2018), Masada Shall Never Fail (to Surprise) Again, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 24-34.

⁴ Mascher M. *et al.* (2016), Genomic Analysis of 6,000-year-old Cultivated Grain Illuminates the Domestication History of Barley, *Nature Genetics* 48.9: 1089-93. Much informative is the convincing conclusion published in 2013 by Uri Davidovich suggesting the Judaeian Desert caves served in Chalcolithic as well as place of refuge as well (Davidovich U. (2013), The Chalcolithic — Early Bronze Age Transition: A View from the Judean Desert Caves, Southern Levant, *Paléorient* 39, 125-138).

⁵ R. Porat, Y. Kalman, R. Chachi, Sh. Terem, N. Achipaz and G.D. Stiebel (2018), The Earliest Settlement at Herodium in the Hellenistic Period, and the Geo-historical Implication, *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and its Region* 12: 214-239 (Hebrew).

⁶ For the new data see note 3, 37-40.

⁷ *Vita* 12.

from the contribution of Netzer in the book of aqueducts in Israel,⁸ while potential links with Roman VIPs such as Marcus Agrippa, manifested in the architecture, as noted by Gideon Forester and Ehud Netzer are completely overlooked. Lastly, the destruction of Herod's tomb (p. 89) was attributed by the expedition to time of the revolt and has been associated with the activity of Simon bar Giora, rather than soon after the King's death as there noted.

Chapter 5 "Judea before Herod" offers a very fine and thorough historical and geopolitical discussion. The latter comprises a discussion of the varied schools of thought and religious and political ideologies that developed into the three philosophies, noted by Josephus, yet only on page 113 does Magness devote two short paragraphs to the foundation story of Masada in the Hellenistic period. The scant pottery finds and the hoard of Ptolemaic coins is largely ignored as is the siege of Herod of the site in 42BC, during the subjection of Helix, Malichos's brother, upheaval, as noted by Josephus.⁹

Chapter 6, "From Herod to the First Revolt against Rome", is divided into three chronological parts. The discussion is based heavily on Josephus, and modern historical scholarship, despite the fact that much new archaeological data regarding this period of time has become available in the past decade. Such is the new date of the stepped street leading from the Siloam to the Temple Mount, that was linked by Joseph (Joe) Uziel, Nahshon Szanton and Moran Hagbi with Pontius Pilate's building activity.¹⁰ The author distances herself from the determination of the causes that led to the outbreak of the revolt and leaves it to the historians.

In Chapter 7, "The First Jewish Revolt against Rome", Magness presents the events that took place in Judaea, from the outbreak of the revolt to the Roman conquest of the Galilee and the Golan. A special place is given to the battle of Gamala. A substantial part of the chapter is devoted to the siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple and the aftermath of the revolt and is loaded with social, political and religious implications. References to the acts of the *sicarii* in Jerusalem during the first years of the revolt provide the necessary linkage to the events at Masada.

Chapter 8, "The Rebel Occupation of Masada", is an important chapter that touches upon the very core of the community of rebels at the site. The first section discusses the question of identity. Despite the claim that many tourists are being told until this day about the presence of Zealots at Masada (p. 165) — this is not in fact the case anymore. The term Zealots has not appeared for the past 15 years on any of the signs, nor in the detailed brochure that is given to each visitor. Much thought and effort are devoted by the Masada archaeological expedition, with the aid of the INPA and under the auspices of the ministry of Tourism to informing/updating all guides as well. Magness amasses thereafter data from the published archaeological remains concerning the housing, food,

⁸ E. Netzer (2002), The Aqueducts and Water-Supply of Masada, in D. Amit, J. Patrich and Y. Hirschfeld (eds.), *The Aqueducts of Israel* (JRA Supp. Ser. 46), Ann Arbor, 353-364.

⁹ *BJ* 1.237-238.

¹⁰ N. Szanton, M. Hagbi, M. Haber, J. Uziel and D.T. Ariel (2016), Monumental Building Projects in Jerusalem in the Days of Pontius Pilate: A Numismatic View from the Stepped Street in the Tyropoeon Valley, *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and Its Region* 10, 99-114 (Hebrew); N. Szanton, M. Hagbi, J. Uziel and D.T. Ariel (2019), Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem: The Monumental Street from the Siloam Pool to the Temple Mount, *Tel Aviv* 46.2, 147-166.

ritual activity and specific aspects of material culture such as limestone and dung vessels. Subchapters are further devoted to clothing and gender at the site. Special place is devoted to the rich epigraphic assemblage that sheds light on ritual aspects, sectarians and administration. The heterogenic nature of the rebels and the community of refugees emerges from the discussion in the book, yet it is not always up-to-date. An example of this is the discussion of the existence of sectarian members such as the Qumran community. In 2011, a paper I published offered to identify architectural remains at Masada that bore typical affinities that had parallels only at Qumran, such as a communal *miqveh* (with typical niches = של אוליירין noted in Mishnah Tohorot 7:7)¹¹ and dining/praying room.¹² The latter was noted already in the 1960's as "Beth Midrash". The alleged tannery (L1276), noted as one of the rebels' workshops, is in fact a *fullonica*. A more problematic statement is found in the section devoted to administration of the community, where Magness notes the existence of pottery vessels from the time of the revolt in several Herodian storerooms (p. 170). However, till this day, as convincingly demonstrated by Netzer in his *Masada III Final Report*, only one storeroom (L502) has been identified as a storeroom that functioned as such during the revolt. It is situated in the Western Palace, which more and more reveals itself as the location where the rebels concentrated their communal activities, food storing and production as well as distribution centre; to which one may add the metal workshops noted by Magness. The gender discussion (p. 183) ignores the name of the "daughter of Katros" published by Yadin and Naveh.¹³ It may very well be connected with the priestly family in Jerusalem, the residence of which was excavated by Avigad and known as the "Burnt House". The cosmetic bronze tools and their spatial distribution were studied by Ehud Netzer's MA student Hilit Krause (2005).

Chapter 9, "Masada Shall Not Fall Again?: Yigael Yadin the Mass Suicide and the Masada Myth", is the chapter that the entire book is leading up to; yet, very little of it is actually based on archaeological data. Magness attempts to present a critical mass, that consists of the scanty skeletal finds, new historical critical reading, mainly that of Shaye J.D. Cohen and Steve Mason, which according to her, cast doubts on even the plausibility that such an act of mass suicide took place. I will discuss the nature of this argument below; but I wish to note that Hillel Geva's claim for the existence of secondary siege and a second ramp being built against the southern wall of the Northern Palace is unfounded. To begin with there is no logic from a military perspective to construct a soil ramp, when one may simply break through the door or climb to the roof. Moreover, all the finds in the main body of the ramp appear to date to Herod's time. In addition, the lack of any typical spatial distribution evidence for urban fighting within the boundaries of the site, like the one observable at Olynthos further negates Geva's

¹¹ R. Reich (2013), *Miqwa'ot (Jewish Ritual Baths) in the Second Temple, Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods*, Jerusalem, 182-183 and note 57.

¹² G.D. Stiebel (2013), About Identity and Space at Masada of the Great Revolt, in: E. Schiller and G. Barkai (eds.), *Architecture and Art in Second Temple Jerusalem*, Ariel 200-201, Jerusalem, 169-178 (Hebrew), in particular 170-174; G.D. Stiebel (2006), Masada, s.v. in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2nd ed.), Thomson Gale (Macmillan Reference), Detroit, Vol. 13, 593-599.

¹³ Y. Yadin and J. Naveh (1989), *The Aramaic and Hebrew Ostraca and Jar Inscriptions: The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963-1965, Final Report I*, Jerusalem, 22, No. 405.

suggestion. Above all, the dumping of the soil should be connected with the first “water gate” that was situated nearby and site formation processes that were intended to allow access to and from the gate during Herod’s days and has nothing to do with the Roman military activity.

The Epilogue brings forward an abridged narrative of a ‘walk-through’ tour of the site, in which the author takes the reader hand-by-hand along the main sections of the site. The existence of a museum in the eastern visitor centre is briefly noted, but it is worthy more discussion, since it is the only site in Israel (part of a blessed rather new global trend) allowing visitors to see the unearthed artefacts at the site, rather than in a regional or a national museum. Additionally, the reader might be advised that in spring 2019 a new *son et lumière* (sound and light show) that is devoted to the period of the revolt was inaugurated in the western foot of the site. An attempt was made not only to harness new technologies, such as video-mapping, but also to correct past errors and introduce new data and new approaches to this turbulent period. Accordingly, to-date unheard voices were of brought forward, such as that of women, and an emphasis was given, among other things, to the heterorganic nature of the community of rebels and refugees during the time of the revolt.

It is apparent that this book was written out of love; love of the author to the Dead Sea region, to the landscape, and to the site of Masada — and not less to the historical period under discussion. This attitude is clearly nourished from Magness own biography, as noted by her on several occasions, working as a guide and naturalist at Ein-Gedi field school. In many parts of the book the reader is taken on a tour of the archaeological sites and between the lines of the historical texts. It should be stressed that the text is fluent and captivating, but at the very same time it is a somewhat frustrating experience. The order of the chapters that was detailed above makes it a bit difficult to follow. Starting with a chapter on the Roman siege of AD 72-73 or 73-74 is understandable, despite the leap in time that the readers are asked to take thereafter. However, the fact that following Chapter 4, which discusses King Herod the Great’s enterprises in Judaea, we move a century back in time in Chapter 5 in order to discuss Late Hellenistic Judaea, only to return to Herod’s era in Chapter 6 is *not* inevitable. Yet above all I found more questionable the fact that out of nine chapters, only four are devoted directly to Masada; and if one excludes Chapter 2, which describes the history of research, we are left with only three chapters, i.e. merely fifty-nine pages out of the 196 pages that are actually discussing the theme of the book.

Masada Shall Not Fall Again?

Attempting to examine the theme of Masada during the time of the revolt and particularly towards its end from a *Google Earth*-like perspective, I do find that there are many similarities to the process Qumranic studies underwent in the past two decades, one that Jodi Magness played a very prominent part in. The incubating period was followed by attempts to introduce new paradigms, many of which are painted in post-modernistic colours. The main framework of the narrative of Qumran, like that Masada, still stands. This is not to say that there are no holes and gaps in our understanding of the occurrences that took place 2000 years ago. However, the way to advance is not merely by stating what is allegedly wrong. Our scholarly duty is to offer an alternative. In many

respects the final chapters of Magness' book falls into the same trap that it claims Yadin and the conveyors of the previous paradigm fell, when the main focus is on the heroic/dramatic story of the suicide that is targeted by Magness with full force. However, when there is not much new to say archaeologically there is a tendency to direct the criticism against the agents. Thus, holding the story-tellers responsible, both the ancient and modern ones, is too easy a solution and not a very productive one. Claiming that Josephus and/or Yadin knowingly or unintentionally falsified or manipulated the data is similar to claiming that Father Roland Guérin de Vaux identified Qumran with the communal residence of the Essenes because he was Christian priest or that Israeli scholars interpreted it in the same way because they were influenced by socialist ideologies that flourished in Israel in the 50's and 60's of the past century. In the words of Monty Python, ask not what have Josephus/the Romans/the archaeologists ever done for us but every now and then, what are we doing to ourselves by taking these non-productive paths. In a book that is due to be published this forthcoming autumn I claim that Josephus is not the only historical source that relates to the episode of mass suicide at Masada in AD 73/4.¹⁴ Furthermore, the argument aims to provide an answer to the haunting question of why. Why did the Roman army embark on such a siege, three years after the conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple and two years following the triumph at Rome, which was an official statement that the war was over? I argue there that the considerations of the Romans were utterly different from previous suggestions and far more earthly in nature, and has to do with economic considerations, namely the trade of balsam.¹⁵ Notwithstanding, our recent archaeological expedition to Masada has been attempting ever since 2017 to focus less on death and the question of the "last night", but rather on life at the refugees' camp that Masada became between AD 66 and 73/4. Questions such as identity, status and gender, to name a few, became the foci of our work and were proven to be very fruitful.¹⁶

And a very final note. Context is indeed everything and too often we all appear to lack the perspective that allows us to place current research in context. Much of the critical tone that is interwoven in Magness's monograph has to do with the political agendas that have influenced the way the archaeological and historical sources were interpreted, most notably by the most influential scholarly figure associated with Masada — Yigael Yadin. It should be stressed that this criticism is conveyed in a very deferential and elegant way, echoing Magness's respect towards one of her greatest teachers, as she herself testifies, but still it is clearly there. I often tell my students that Masada forms an excellent test case, one that allows us to document the processes Jewish and Israeli society underwent in last century. In a way, it is like looking at a mirror that reflects not only Judaea two millennia ago but also capture the states of mind of those who attempt to look through or behind the glass — the students of the past and their *zeitgeist*. Personally, I find it not surprising that everything is indeed political and that objectiveness is apparently a relative thing, and this is true with regarded to Yadin and to Magness (like everyone else) as well. Scattered throughout the text one may

¹⁴ G.D. Stiebel, *Arms, Men and Society in Roman Judaea*, Bloomsbury ISBN 978-0-567-69175-0; <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/arms-men-and-society-in-roman-judaea-97805676917502020/>.

¹⁵ See also above note 12, 175-177.

¹⁶ See above note 3.

come across several references in which it becomes evident that the author's favourite political animal is the donkey rather than the elephant (*cf.* pages ix and 200). Magness ends the book with a reference to the consecutive presidential visits to Masada, as an example of the politicized use of Masada, starting with President Clinton and followed by President George W. Bush. On May 22, 2017 she notes, President Trump was planning to deliver a speech from Masada's top. Magness, goes on describing the cancelation of the visit attributing it to Trump's refusal to take the cable car up the mountain when he was informed that helicopters could not land on Masada's summit. This claim was based on the report of a *single* Israeli reporter... However, knowing it from first hand, as well as from Eitan Campbell, then director of Masada National Park, it is clear beyond any doubt that the helicopters were never planned to land on the summit, but rather in the nearby airstrip (partly also as a lesson from the German Chancellor Willy Brandt helicopter's incident at Masada in 1973).¹⁷ The cancelation was due to the arid climate and immense heat, and the speech was given in the air-conditioned Israel Museum, Jerusalem, instead. Needless to say, the official statements of both Israel and the US attributed the cancelation to the severe climatic conditions as well. Looking at the recent discussion of the whole event, dare I say... *fake news*?

In May 2008, during the visit of President Bush to Masada I was asked to guide Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. I opened the tour with a citation from a briefing given in 2002 in the Department of Defense by Secretary Donald Rumsfeld: "...as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns — the ones we don't know we don't know". I did note that I was not sure whether Mr. Rumsfeld knew what he was talking about (to which Secretary Rice responded with a smile), but further added that for me, this has been the best definition ever given to the study of the past; a field in which we are consistently engaged with the *known known*, *known unknown* and ultimately with the *unknown unknown*. For the scholarly community it seems that the book *Masada: From Jewish Revolt to Modern Myth* provides much of the first two categories, alas very little of the *unknown unknown*. For the educated and the avid reader, the fluent and energetic writing of Jodi Magness coupled with her vast spectrum of knowledge that is embedded throughout the book, will surely provide an enjoyable reading experience with much food for thought.

Tel Aviv University
guystiebel@tauex.tau.ac.il

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcoLPU68rGo>.