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THE SICARII AND MASADA

BY SOLOMON ZEITLIN, Dropsie College

THE WORD SICARII is of Latin origin and means assassins, murderers. *Sicarii autem appellantur a sica, quod significat ferreum cultrum.*¹ Assassins are called *sicarii* from *sica*, a short dagger. During the dictatorship of Sulla, a law was passed *lex Cornelia de Sicarris*.² He who kills other persons allied to him by cognation or alliance should undergo the penalty of this law. The Roman writers make reference to murderers as *sicarii*. Tacitus, in speaking about the plebian tribune Octavius, wrote that he was sentenced by the verdict of the Senate and under the law of *sicariis* (the law of assassination).³ Suetonius, in his *Life of Julius Caesar*, wrote, "In conducting prosecutions for murder (the *sicariis*) he included in the number of murderers even those who had received money from the public treasury during the proscriptions for bringing in the heads of Roman citizens, although they were expressly exempted by the Cornelian laws."⁴

Josephus, describing the different sects which dominated the life of the Judaeans and were responsible for the great catastrophe which befell the land, named one group *Sicarii*. In his book *War* he wrote, "A new species of banditti was springing up in Jerusalem, the so-called *Sicarii* who committed murder in broad daylight in the heart of the city."⁵ This group which Josephus named *Sicarii* were followers of Judah the Galilaeen, who organized a party which Josephus named

¹ *Justinian's Institutes* 4. 18.

² Cf. *ibid.*

³ Tacitus *Ann.* 13.44. *sententia patrum et legē de sicariis condemnatur.*

⁴ 11, cf. also *ibid.* 72. *si grassatorum et sicariorum ope in tuenda sua dignitate usus esset.*

⁵ 2. 13. 3 (254).

Fourth Philosophy. It came into being at the time that Quirinus was sent by Augustus Caesar to take the census of the country. Judah the Galilaeen incited the people to revolt, claiming that payment of taxes to Rome was tantamount to slavery. They propagated the idea that there should be no lordship of man over man, that God is the only ruler.⁶ They treated those who were willing to submit to the Romans as enemies, plundering their property, setting fire to their habitations and even killing those who sided with the Romans.⁷

After the death of Judah the Galilaeen his son Menachem became the leader of this group. Following the assassination of Menachem and the suppression of the Sicarii in Jerusalem Eleazar son of Jairus who was a relative of Menachem, succeeded with some of his followers in escaping to Masada.⁸ Eleazar thus became the leader of the Sicarii.

Masada, as was pointed out in my previous article,⁹ was a well-known citadel in the time of David. The location of Masada made it a strong bastion for refuge. On the east was the Dead Sea while on the west it was difficult of ascent. The road from the west zigzagged and was termed a snakeway. Masada was virtually impregnable by nature. Josephus tells us that Jonathan the High Priest, brother of Judah of Makkabee, fortified it.¹⁰ Josephus further stated that when the Parthians captured Jerusalem Herod fled to Masada.¹¹ When Herod became king he was still unsure not only of his position but indeed of his life as long as Cleopatra was mistress of Antony. He fortified Masada and made it a refuge in case of need. In describing Masada Josephus wrote: "For it is said that Herod furnished this fortress as a refuge for himself, suspecting a two-fold danger; peril on the one hand from the Judaeen populace, lest they should depose him and restore

⁶ *War*, 2. 8. 1 (117-118); *Ant.* 18. 1.1 (4-5).

⁷ *War*, *ibid.* (256-257); (428-429).

⁸ *Ibid.* (447).

⁹ "Masada and the Sicarii" *JQR*, April, 1965.

¹⁰ *War*, 7.8.3 (285).

¹¹ *Ant.* 14.13.8 (358-362).

their former dynasty to power; the greater and more serious, Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, for she never concealed her intention, but was constantly importuning Antony urging him to slay Herod, and praying him to confer upon her the throne of Judaea . . . It was such fears that drove Herod to fortify Masada.”¹² After the suppression of the Sicarii in the autumn of 65 C. E., Eleazar son of Jairus and his followers fled to Masada for refuge and remained there inactive during the entire period of the war against the Romans. In the spring of 72 C. E. Flavius Silva, the Roman general, laid siege to the fortress of Masada. The Sicarii numbering nine hundred and sixty men, women and children committed suicide rather than submit to the Romans. The only survivors were two old women and five children who had concealed themselves.¹³

Josephus is only source for the history of the Sicarii. He was the first to use the term *sicarii* in Greek. In dealing with the accounts given by Josephus of the Sicarii, we must bear in mind that he was prejudiced against them. He was a pacifist, opposed to any rebellion against the Romans. At one time he was forced to hide in the Temple for fear of being assassinated by those who instigated the revolt.¹⁴ After the victory over Cestius, when the provisional government was established, Galilee was placed under the charge of Josephus. Officially he was commanded to go to Galilee to organize defense against the Romans. The members of the provisional government were playing for time. Heart and soul they were against the war but being afraid of the people they spoke openly for war. The provisional government strove to disarm the extremists so that it would have all power concentrated in its hands, and thus be enabled to make peace with Rome. In reality, Josephus was commissioned to go to Galilee not to organize the defense against the Romans but rather to disarm the rebels and endeavor to keep the peace.¹⁵

During these tragic days in Judaea Josephus was one of the

¹² *War*, 7.8.4 (300).

¹³ *Ibid.* (389-401).

¹⁴ *Vita*, 5.

¹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* 5-6, S. Zeitlin, *Josephus on Jesus*, pp. 5-7.

actors on the political scene of Judaea. He was preoccupied with and acted in the affairs of the State. The Sicarii were also active in political affairs. In their philosophical outlook and their views as to how the State should be governed were diametrically opposed to those of Josephus; indeed, there was great hostility between them. Thus we cannot expect that Josephus could be objective in his accounts of the Sicarii. Yet dealing with the history of the Sicarii we can only follow their acts as they were recorded by Josephus. Since his interpretations of their acts given by Josephus cannot be readily accepted, he was prejudiced against them. The underlying reasons for their acts must be carefully analyzed. On the basis of their philosophical and idealogical outlook on the Judaeian State and their attitude towards the Romans, as recorded by Josephus, and corroborated in the tannaitic literature, we may arrive at the motivations for some of their acts. Josephus named the Sicarii assassins, bandits and this nomenclature is used in the Talmud.¹⁶

During the long period from the time that the Sicarii fled to Masada until their mass suicide they did not participate in the war against the Romans. During the years when Vespasian besieged the Judaeans the Sicarii did not furnish aid to the Judaeans nor did they venture to harass the Romans. Though the terrain in the environs of Masada was favorable for ambushes, the Sicarii did not take advantage of this and did not ambush the Romans, nor did they organize any guerilla warfare against the Romans. Even when finally besieged by the Romans they did not move to assail them. At other fortresses that were besieged by the Romans, such as Jotapata, the Judaeans counter attacked and assailed the Romans with missiles, rocks and even poured boiling water on the enemy.¹⁷ Many Judaeans distinguished themselves by great heroism in defending their cities and fortresses. There were no counter attacks against the Romans when the Sicarii were besieged in

¹⁶ Cf. Talmud Git. 56.

¹⁷ *War*, 3.6.8-9 (161-170).

Masada. Josephus relates that when the Sicarii learned that the Romans were inactive and there was a civil struggle going on in Jerusalem they embarked on raids on neighboring communities. During the festival of Unleavened Bread the Sicarii raided En-Gedi, plundered the property of the inhabitants and killed men, women and children. They made similar raids in the environs of Masada. He further relates, "They would proceed by companies—smaller than an army but larger than a mere band—of brigands and fall upon shrines and cities."¹⁸

From Josephus we learn that Simon son of Gioras, after he had been expelled by the high priest Ananus from the province of Acrabetene, went to Masada. At first the Sicarii regarded him with suspicion and allowed him and his followers only in the lower part of Masada, while they occupied the upper part. He tried to induce the Sicarii to undertake actions but was unsuccessful. When the Sicarii were besieged by the Romans their sole defensive act was to build another inside wall for protection, which the Romans succeeded in setting on fire.¹⁹ Even during the last days of the siege the Sicarii did not make any efforts to fight back nor did they kill a single Roman soldier. Their leader, Eleazar, did not incite them to fight the Romans but called for the suicide of all the Sicarii in Masada. Their actions present an enigma. They were assassins but while in Masada they did not kill any Romans although they had ample opportunity.

Eleazar's speeches appealing to his fellow men to commit suicide as recorded by Josephus may be the key to the mystery of the passivity of the Sicarii.

Josephus relates that when Eleazar appealed to his men to destroy themselves rather than be captured by the Romans he said:

Long since, my brave men, we determined neither to serve the Romans nor any other save God for he alone is man's

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 4.9.3 (503-507).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 7.8.6 (320).

true and righteous Lord; and now the time is come which bids us verify that resolution by our actions. At this crisis let us not disgrace ourselves; we who in the past refused to submit even to a slavery involving no peril, let us not now, along with slavery, deliberately accept the irreparable penalties awaiting us if we are to fall alive into Roman hands. For as we were the first of all to revolt, so are we the last in arms against them. Moreover, I believe that it is God who has granted us this favor, that we have in our power to die nobly and in freedom—a privilege denied to others who have met unexpected defeat.²⁰

This speech had little effect on his followers. Thus Eleazar delivered another speech dealing with the virtue of suicide:

Deeply indeed was I deceived in thinking that I should have brave men as associates in our struggles for freedom—men determined to live with honor or to die. But you, it seems, were no better than the common herd in valor or in courage, you who are afraid even of that death that will deliver you from the direst ills . . . For it is death which gives liberty to the soul and permits it to depart to its own pure abode, death to be free from all calamity; but so long as it is imprisoned in a mortal body and tainted with all its miseries, it is in sober truth, death . . . Unslaved by the foe let us die, as free men with our children and wives let us quit this life together. This our laws enjoin, this our wives and children implore of us. The need for this is of God's ordering, the reverse of this is the Romans' desire and their fear is lest a single one of us should die before capture. Haste we then to leave them, instead of their hoped-for enjoyment at securing us, amazement at our death and admiration for our fortitude.²¹

This speech had great effect on his listeners and all the Sicarii in Masada, numbering nine hundred and sixty, in-

²⁰ *Ibid.* 8.6 (323-336).

²¹ *Ibid.* (342-350).

cluding women and children committed suicide. Before doing so they set the palace ablaze.²²

On another occasion Josephus records a speech of his own in which he condemned the act of suicide. After the fall of Jotapata Josephus found himself in a cave with some men who had succeeded in escaping from the fortress. When the Romans discovered the cave where they were hidden the men decided to commit suicide. Josephus opposed this act and pleaded with the men not to do so. The speech which he delivered to them reads in part as follows:

. . . Another says, 'It is honorable to die in war' yes, but according to the law of war, that is to say at the hand of the conqueror . . . 'It is honorable to die for liberty,' said another: I concur but on condition that one dies fighting, by the hands of those who would rob us of it . . . 'No, it is slavery we fear' I shall be told. Much liberty we enjoy at present! 'It is noble to enjoy oneself,' another will say. Not so I say, but most ignoble; in my opinion there could be no more arrant coward than the pilot who, for fear of a tempest, deliberately sinks his ship before the storm. No, suicide is alike repugnant to that nature which all creatures share, and an act of impiety towards God who created us . . . For it is from Him that we have received our being, and it is to Him that we should leave the decision to take it away. All of us, it is true, have mortal bodies composed of perishable matter, but the soul lives forever, immortal; it is a portion of God housed in our bodies. If, then, one who makes away with or misapplies a deposit entrusted to him by a fellow-man is reckoned a perjured villain, how can he who casts out from his own body the deposit which God has placed there, hope to elude Him whom he hath thus wronged? . . . That is why this crime, so hateful to God, is punished also by the interpreters of the laws. With us it is ordained that the body of a suicide should be exposed

²² *Ibid.* 9.1 (397-401).

unburied until sunset, although it is thought right to bury even our enemies slain in war. In other nations the law requires that a suicide's right hand, with which he made war on himself, should be cut off, holding that, as the body was unnaturally severed from the soul so the hand should be severed from the body.²³

The speech of Eleazar, leader of the Sicarii, exalting suicide came to us from Josephus. Josephus was not in Masada when Eleazar supposedly delivered the speech he was already in Rome. The two women who survived did not report Eleazar's speech to Josephus. If Eleazar did deliver the speech it is doubtful if the women heard it, and if they did, it is certain that they did not memorize the speech to be able to recount it to Josephus or any one else, Josephus himself concocted the speech in the spirit in which he believed that the leader would speak to influence his followers to commit suicide.

The views on suicide as expressed in the speeches above are diametrically opposed to one other. In the speech by Eleazar, the leader of the Sicarii, the act of suicide in some extraordinary circumstances is even considered a virtue. In the speech given by Josephus suicide under any circumstances is a crime against society and against God. It is true that when Josephus delivered his speech to his fellowmen in the cave he was determined to live as he had dreamt that he was chosen to assist the Judaeans during and after the war. His views expressed on suicide, however, are in accord with the views of the sages, who maintained that one who committed suicide would not share a portion in the Future World.²⁴ This view was a tenet in the Judaeen religion.

To understand fully the view of the Sicarii on suicide as well as their behavior during the war against the Romans, we must turn back and analyze their activities from the time of their origin and during the time of the revolt up to the time of the war.

²³ *Ibid.* 3.8.5 (361-382).

²⁴ Cf. Mid.R.G. 82.

When Augustus Caesar removed Archelaus and appointed Copinius as procurator, Judas of Gallilee incited the Judaeans to revolt and not to pay tribute to the Romans. He maintained that there is only one master, and that is God and that no mortal master should be tolerated.²⁵ His followers whom Josephus called the Fourth Philosophy, continued the same idea as followed by Judas, the founder of this group. They were against their own countrymen and any mortal master either a procurator or high priest. As a matter of fact their terroristic acts were directed especially against the leaders of Judaea. They assassinated Jonathan the High Priest.²⁶ To commit terroristic acts they carried a dagger, *sicae*, in their bosoms which they used to commit their terroristic acts, and they were therefore called Sicarii.

With the outbreak of the revolt which was greatly inspired by Eleazar son of Ananias, the Sicarii, under the leadership of Menachem, son of Judas the Galilaeen, joined their forces. They succeeded in capturing the royal palaces and were victorious over Agrippa's royal army as well as the Roman legion. After the victory the High Priest Ananias and his brother Ezechias were killed by the Sicarii.²⁷ The killing of the High Priest Ananias was a consequence of the fact that the Sicarii recognized only one master, God, and no mortal lordship. In accordance with their philosophy—no lordship of man the high priest, the leader of the Judaeans was to them as pernicious as Roman authority. They regarded him on a par with the Romans. During the last years before the revolt they directed their ire primarily against their countrymen the Judaeans and their leaders who submitted to the Romans, rather than against the Romans themselves. They assassinated more of their fellowmen Judaeans than the Romans. They hid the *sicae* in order to assassinate their fellow Judaeans, not the Romans. The killing of the High Priest Ananias aroused indignation and fear among the

²⁵ *War*, 2.8.1 (118); *Ant.* 18.4.1 (4).

²⁶ *War*, 2.8.3 (256).

²⁷ *Ibid.* 9 (441).

followers of Eleazar. Eleazar and his followers succeeded in suppressing the Sicarii and their leader Menachem was killed. Many of the Sicarii succeeded to escape to Masada which was a fortress for refuge. Eleazar son of Jairus, a relative of Menachem became their leader.²⁸

From the time of antiquity down to the seventh century C.E. the fortress Masada was used as a refuge by those who were persecuted and by those who feared for their lives. David found a refuge there when he fled from his father-in-law King Saul.²⁹ Joseph, the brother of Herod, took refuge in Masada. Herod, in his fear of Cleopatra, fortified Masada in the event that he would have to flee the country. The Sicarii, after their leader Menachem was slain, fled to Masada to escape persecution by the Judaeans authorities. During the wars between Heraclius, King of Byzantium and the neo-Parthians the Jews of Parthia were persecuted by both parties and many Jews fled to Masada for refuge.³⁰

The Sicarii who fled to Masada in the autumn of 65 C.E. remained there until the spring of 72 when Flavius Silva besieged the fortress and they committed suicide. During this short period the Judaeans were victorious over Cestius and the independent government was established in Jerusalem. After the fall of Galilee, civil war raged in Judaea among the different sects. Most fanatic and zealous in the persecution of the war against the Romans were the people called Zealots, who were organized by Eleazar son of Simon.³¹ The Zealots fought the government which was headed by the High Priest Ananias and Simon son of Gamaliel, because they suspected them of not being whole heartedly for the war against the Romans. In this period of war against the Romans and of the civil war raging in Jerusalem the Sicarii remained inactive in Masada and did not render any aid to their country men in Judaea.

We have seen that the philosophy of the Sicarii was that

²⁸ *Ibid.* (446-448).

²⁹ I Sam. 22.7.

³⁰ Cf. S. Zeitlin, *JQR*, 1965, p. 306.

³¹ *War*, 2.20.3 (564-565); *ibid.* 4.4.1 (225); 5.6.1 (25).

God is the only master, no lordship of man over man. They were concerned only with their fellow Judaeans and not with the other nations of the world. They opposed the Judaeen government more venomously than the Roman authorities over Judaea. Like the Apocalyptists they believed that God is the only ruler. The Apocalyptists merely preached this idea, however the Sicarii endeavored to enforce their convictions by terroristic acts.

We can now understand why the Sicarii did not come to the aid of their fellow Judaeans in the war against the Romans. They were against any government in Judaea regardless of who headed the State, either Ananias the high priest or Eleazar the leader of the Zealots. They considered the Zealots traitors in that they accepted a mortal the head of the State.

After Jerusalem was taken by the Romans and the Temple was burned many members of the Sicarii succeeded in escaping to Egypt. While in Alexandria, they continued to propagate their ideology among the Judaeans. They incited their co-religionists to revolt against Rome. They killed those Judaeans who opposed them. The leaders of the Judaeen community in Alexandria became alarmed and feared that the Romans would destroy the entire community. The leaders of the *Gerousia* decided to deliver the Sicarii to the Romans, and all of them were subsequently arrested. Josephus wrote,

For under every form of torture of body, devised for the sole object of making them acknowledge Caesar as master, not one submitted nor brought to the verge of utterance; but all kept their resolves, triumphant over constraint, meeting the tortures and the fire with bodies that seemed insensible of pain and souls that well nigh exulted in it. But most of all were the spectators struck by the children of tender age, not one of whom could be prevailed upon to call Caesar master. So far did the strength of courage rise superior to the weakness of their frames.³²

³² *Ibid.* 7.10.1 (410-419).

They were indeed martyrs for their ideas. Similarly, the early Christians underwent torture and death so as not to be ruled by the genius of Caesar. The Sicarii martyrs had great impact on the first Christian martyrs. It was probably the courageous deaths of the Sicarii for their principles in Alexandria that inspired Josephus to put into the mouth of Eleazar the leader of the Sicarii in Masada, the exalted speech appealing for suicide rather than submission to the Romans.

The Sicarii were idealists. Their ideal of no lordship of man over man was as utopian in that time as it is today. The society of that day was not ready for such idealism. The Sicarii were fanatics, endeavoring by the use of terror to force their ideas on their fellow Judaeans. In so doing they destroyed even the visage of the Judaeian State. *Masada did not fall to the Romans*. The Sicarii did not counterattack to protect Masada, they offered no resistance. They committed suicide and by this act they simply *delivered Masada to the Romans*. The Sicarii, being idealists, caused much harm to the Judaeian people and were greatly responsible for the destruction of the Judaeian State. It has been well said that fanatical idealists are more harmful to a state than ordinary criminals. In Jewish history the Sicarii were considered murderers largely responsible for the destruction of the Second Commonwealth. Both Josephus and the sages in the Talmud named them murderers and placed the onus of the destruction of the State and the burning of the Temple upon them.

II

Since the nineteenth century scholars have been deeply interested in Masada and a number of archaeological expeditions have been undertaken on the site of the fortress.³³ Recently the well known and distinguished archaeologist Professor Yigael Yadin has been engaged in excavation at Masada and has discovered many archaeological items of

³³ Cf. S. Zeitlin, *JQR*, April, 1965, p. 317.

great importance. He has recently published a book giving a full account of this expedition, a beautifully illustrated volume. The production of this book does credit to the author as well as the publisher, Random House.³⁴ Scholars will always be indebted to Professor Yadin for the findings of his archaeological expedition of Masada.

The account of the expedition is of great importance to archaeologists but it has no historical value for the period of the Second Commonwealth and the siege of Masada, since it does not provide any new material which is not found from other sources. To the contrary in many cases it blurs and sometimes distorts the history of that period. The reason for these defects is simply that Professor Yadin though a distinguished archaeologist, is not a historian of Judaea during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Neither were there any historians in the expedition to guide him. Therefore the book contains a number of historical inaccuracies.

The book is entitled *Masada; Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand*. This title is both a misnomer and a distortion of historical fact. It was not the Zealots who were never in Masada, but the Sicarii. The Zealots and the Sicarii were two distinct groups and were hostile to each other. Each group held a different philosophy of the Judaeian State and of the war against the Romans. To write that the Zealots were in Masada for a considerable period is tantamount to say that after the Bolshevik revolution in October (November) 1917 the Mensheviks took possession of the Kremlin and remained there for a period many years. It should be noted that Professor Yadin does not refer to the Sicarii in his book.

Josephus clearly distinguished between the Zealots and the Sicarii. In his book *War* he makes fifty references to the Zealots as a party, while he mentioned the Sicarii fifteen times as a party. In *Antiquities* he refers to the Sicarii but he does not mention the Zealots. This is due to the fact that the ac-

³⁴ *Masada Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' last Stand*, Random House, New York.

counts of the events given in *Antiquities* terminate with the outbreak of the revolt against the Romans in the year 65 while the Zealots came into being in the year 66. To call the Sicarii Zealots is a distortion of historical fact and blurs the history of the last days of Judaea.

The great discovery in Masada, which was widely advertised, was the finding of a *mikve* a ritual immersion bath. Professor Yadin wrote that the news of the discovery of a *mikve* in Masada aroused great interest in orthodox religious quarters and distinguished rabbis made a pilgrimage to Masada to determine whether the *mikve* was *kosher*. To the delight of Professor Yadin the rabbis declared that the *mikve* was *kosher* according to the meticulous of the halaka.³⁵ Which halaka? Anyone having an understanding of the history and development of the halaka knows that until the time of Rabbi who codified the halaka and named it Mishne there was no fixed halaka regarding the building of a *mikve*. It is true that before Rabbi's time many halakot were codified in the academies of Javneh and Ousha. However one cannot say that there were established halakot regarding the *mikve* during the Second Commonwealth. In the Mishne and particularly in the Tosefta, there were divergent views among the sages regarding the fitness of a *mikve*.³⁶ Professor Yadin has included an excellent photography of the rabbis examining the *mikve*. The legend reads, "Expert in the rules governing ritual baths."³⁷ With all my great respect to the rabbis who ascended to Masada to examine the *mikve* I must say that to them the *Shulchan Aruch*, composed by Joseph Caro, is actually the halaka given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. But a historian of halaka must distinguish between the halakot of the Middle Ages and the halakot in vogue during the Second Commonwealth—there is a vast difference.

On page 167 Professor Yadin states that the discovery of the

³⁵ Pp. 166-167.

³⁶ Cf. S. Zeitlin, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-309.

³⁷ P. 167.

mikve illustrates, "that the defenders of Masada were devout Jews, and that even here, on dry Masada, they had gone to the arduous length of building these ritual baths in scrupulous conformity with the injunctions of traditional Jewish law." First let me say that the word "defenders" used by Professor Yadin is historically wrong. *The Sicarii did not defend Masada*. They did not resist the Romans, they did not kill even one Roman soldier. They *surrendered* the fortress to the Romans by their suicide. As for Professor Yadin's assertion that they "were devout Jews," this too is questionable. Jews who resorted to killing their fellow Jews even within the precinct of the Temple can hardly be called devout Jews. It is true that they killed their fellow Jews in the name of their ideals, even in the name of their religion, but the Pharisees were against the killing of any Jews unless it was in case of self defense. In the eyes of the Pharisees, the Sicarii were murderers.

Professor Yadin further states that the discovery of the *mikve* will "shed interesting light on a number of hitherto obscure passages in the Mishna."³⁸ I do not know of any obscure passages in the Mishna in connection with the laws of the *mikve*. It is a pity that Dr. Yadin did not cite these passages.

On page 96 the author states, "Several of the vessels also carried the Hebrew letter 't' (*Tav* in Hebrew), written in ink and charcoal, and there is no doubt that this stood for the Hebrew word *truma*—priestly due—as explained in the *Mishna* (the codification of traditional jurisprudence). These inscriptions, and the inscription *Ma'aser Kohen* (priestly tithe) found in another building, led us to the conclusion that the defenders [sic] of Masada were not only Zealots from the national-political point of view, but also lived rigidly according to the religious code, strictly adhering to such commandments of tithing despite the harsh conditions of life at Masada." There is no proof whatsoever that the Sicarii stored *truma* in these jars. Can we not assume that when the Sicarii fled from

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Jerusalem they took with them jars in which *truma* had been kept? We also know that while in Masada the Sicarii raided and plundered the surrounding Judæan towns and villages and may have obtained possession of jars in which *truma* was kept by the original owners. It is absurd to assume that people who killed high priests were so particular with the title of *truma*. According to Professor Yadin they were "strictly adhering to such commandments as tithing." However they did not adhere to the commandments "not to kill," "not to kidnap," "not to plunder the property of your fellow Jew." They were guilty of all these crimes.

On one jar the author found the inscription, "*Kahana Raba Aqavia* the literal translation of which is 'Great Priest Aqavia.' What it meant" ³⁹ said the author "was that the owner of the vessel was Aqavia, and was of the family of High Priests." There was no high priest of the Second Commonwealth named Aqavia. And if Aqavia was of the family of the High Priests he would not be called *Kahana Raba*. The descendants of the High Priests were called בני כהנים גדולים. The words *Kahana Raba* prefixed to a proper name denoted a title addressed to a person of distinction and came into vogue long after the destruction of the Second Temple. The inscription *Kahna Raba Aqavia* militates against the entire theory of Professor Yadin. This inscription is not of the Sicarii period but is of the sixth or seventh century C.E.

Among the many discoveries at Masada Professor Yadin found different scrolls. One fragment reads, "The song of the sixth Sabbath sacrifice on the ninth of the second month.' Seeing this and a few other lines," Dr. Yadin said, "I was suddenly struck by the amazing fact that this text was exactly the same as the text of one of the scrolls discovered in Qumran, in cave four. That scroll was a very definite sectarian scroll which details 'songs of the Sabbath sacrifices' dealing with each Sabbath and its date." ⁴⁰ This scroll belongs to a sectarian

³⁹ P. 189.

⁴⁰ P. 173.

Karaite. I have pointed out elsewhere that during the Karaitic period sectarians propagated different calendars.⁴¹

Yadin asks, "What have these sectarian scrolls to do with Masada?" The answer is simple. During the sixth-seventh centuries different groups lived in Masada.

The author continues, "A minority of scholars have long suggested that the Qumran sect should be identified with the Sicarii Zealots," (here he makes the only mention of the Sicarii, and this is in referring to a minority of scholars). This theory is not only untenable but false. Josephus who is the source for the Zealots and the Sicarii and the main source for the Essenes does not mention that the Essenes ever went to Masada. He does relate that when Simon son of Gioras was expelled by the High Priest Ananus he went to Masada. If the Essenes had taken refuge in Masada Josephus would not have neglect to mention it. Simon son of Gioras who had ideas similar to those held by the Sicarii, was not trusted by them. The Essenes whose views were diametrically opposed to those held by the Sicarii certainly would not have been welcomed in Masada by the Sicarii. The Essenes propagated that each member should keep faith with the ruler "since no ruler attains his office save by the will of God."⁴² The Sicarii did not recognize mortal rulers. Thus the entire theory of Yadin is historically faulty and cannot be considered by any serious historian.

Professor Yadin also claims that he discovered some more scrolls, which contain fragments from Ben Sira. He states, "Well, here at Masada we had just discovered part of the original Hebrew text of *The Wisdom of Ben-Sira*, and the writing of our scroll could be dated to the first half of 1st century B.C."⁴³ The fact that these fragments contain the word שותף partner, militates against the theory that it is the original Ben Sira. Not only the word שותף was unknown

⁴¹ *JQR*, April, 1965.

⁴² *War*, 2.8.7 (140).

⁴³ P. 175.

during the time of Ben Sira but the system of partnership was not yet known to the Judaeans of his time. Hence it must be said that the term שותף found in the fragments clearly indicates that they are not the original of Ben Sira. They are on a par with the Ben Sira discovered in the Cairo Geniza.⁴⁴

Among the fragments discovered in Masada were also chapters of the Book of Leviticus. According to Yadin they were chapters 8 and 12. He writes, "To note that this scroll too was absolutely identical, with the traditional text of *Leviticus*. Moreover, there was the same division into sections, the traditional division into 'open' and 'closed' ones, that is, sections which begin after an empty line-space at the end of the previous one, and those which begin after a small space in the same line."⁴⁵ The fact that the fragments of the Book of Leviticus are in accordance with the traditional text clearly indicates of a later period since the traditional text of the Pentateuch was not established until after the destruction of the Second Temple. Moreover the fact that the fragments of the Book of Leviticus have the traditional division into 'open' פתוחה and 'closed' סתומה demonstrates without any shadow of doubt that these fragments are not of the time of the Sicarii since the divisions of 'open' and 'closed' were introduced into the Pentateuch long after the destruction of the Second Temple.

The Hebrew Scrolls have been assigned as the writings of the Essenes, Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots and the Judaeans without a thorough investigation of the texts of the Scrolls. Some of the protagonists of the antiquity of the Scrolls could not even read the Hebrew of the Scrolls. The translations made of the Hebrew Scrolls are generally faulty. First—due to the fact that the Scrolls themselves are unintelligible, second because the translators were not well versed in medieval Hebrew.

Some of the Christian protagonists of the antiquity of the

⁴⁴ Cf. S. Zeitlin, *JQR*, Jan. 1966, pp. 185-190.

⁴⁵ P. 179.

Scrolls have had an axe to grind to show the development of the origins of Christianity. The radicals wanted to demonstrate that there was a forerunner before Jesus, the Teacher of Righteousness, who was crucified before Jesus and that there is no originality in the teachings of Jesus. However true Christians do not need to look for new evidence for the origin of Christianity. Some writers assigned the Scrolls to great antiquity for purposes of sensationalism and they utilized it to a great extent by press releases, radio and television.

Before he made the statement about the great discovery in Masada of fragments of the Book of Leviticus Prof. Yadin should have investigated whether or not the system of the divisions of 'open' פתוחה and 'closed' סתומה had been introduced into the Pentateuch before the destruction of the Second Temple. This imperative investigation he did not do. This is the dramatic-comic episode in the story of the Scrolls. Again statements were made about the Teacher of Righteousness מורה צדק not knowing that this term came into vogue during the Karaitic period. In sum the scrolls discovered in Masada are of the late seventh and early eighth century (this does not refer to the potteries and other findings).

Professor Yadin writes that the "excavations showed that several chambers must be ascribed to the work of the Byzantine monks."⁴⁶ In the beginning of the seventh century the Byzantians sought refuge in Masada, and a short time later the Jews escaped to Masada from their persecutors. At the beginning of the seventh century Palestine was in turmoil. In 614 the neo-Parthians conquered Jerusalem. The Byzantians were persecuted and many monks undoubtedly sought refuge in Masada. Fourteen years later Heraclius, King of the Byzantians, reconquered Palestine. The Jews of Palestine were persecuted and almost annihilated. Undoubtedly many fled to Masada for refuge. The Hebrew Scrolls found in Masada are not of the Sicarii but of the time of Heraclius.

The surrender of Masada to Rome by the Sicarii was not

⁴⁶ P. 62.

heroic to say the least. The Jews cannot be proud of it. Neither can they be proud of the Sicarii. They were idealists, their ideals were instrumental in bringing about the destruction of the Judaeen State. The few skeletons found by Professor Yadin in Masada most probably were of Byzantian monks and Judaeen sectarians who took refuge in Masada during the war between the neo-Parthians and the Byzantians.

The terms and the words **בית המשפט, מורה צדק, ברית אברהם, אשר בתלמוד, בית השתחות, קץ האחרון, גמר קץ, תוגר, רבני בטניה, כהנא, רבא עקביא,** and other terms as well as the ellipses, connecting lines and parentheses, and the divisions of "open" and "closed" employed in the fragments of Leviticus stamp the Scrolls definitely and unequivocally as compositions of the Middle Ages.

P. S.

This article marks the fiftieth year of my association with the *Jewish Quarterly Review*. My first article was "The Semikah Controversy between the Zugoth." It was published in April 1917. In this essay I endeavored to prove that the controversy between the Zugoth was not on the question of laying hands on the animals brought to be sacrificed, as generally assumed, but on the question of tradition. I have noticed that one author has stated that I have retracted my theory. This is false; I emphatically still adhere to the view which I expressed in my article published in April 1917.