

## Josephus' Role in Shaping the Image of Tourist Sites in Israel

In this lecture, I shall analyze how Josephus' writings have helped to shape the way in which events and sites from the period of the Second Temple are presented to modern tourists and pilgrims in Israel. In the first section of the lecture, I shall focus on the sites themselves, examining the way Josephus' identification and description have influenced two models on show in Jerusalem with respect to the Temple and the Temple Mount on the one hand and the visitors' experience of Masada on the other. In the second section, I shall address the ideological complexity embedded in the use nationally-oriented Israeli tour guides make of Josephus, exemplified in a poem by the tour guide and poet Yitzhak Shalev. In conclusion, I shall relate to the way in which Josephus' presence is felt .in municipal space in Israel via the use of streets bearing his name

A) Josephus' writings serve as a central historical source for a description of the land of Israel in the ancient period, in particular the second half of the Second Temple period. One of the most striking examples in which archaeology has been influenced by his account is the identification of Gamla, which Josephus depicts as facing Taricheae-Migdal. Another one is the location of the Herodian port of Caesarea, Josephus' detailed description in the *Antiquities* dovetailing almost perfectly with the archaeological findings and enabling a reconstruction of sections that have not been preserved, such as the two towers standing at the entrance to the port. Scepticism regarding the existence of the amphitheatre he depicted in the south of the city located on a spot from which it was possible to look out over the sea (*Ant.* 15.341)—not discovered until the 1990s—raised doubts regarding Josephus' reliability. The U-shaped hippodrome found north of the theatre, however, led to a revised identification with the amphitheatre he depicts, on the premise that he used the term “amphitheatre” as a generic word for a place of amusement that had galleries. The reconstruction of Herodian Caesarea is thus based on Josephus' writings, which guided and filled in the gaps in the .archaeological remains

Josephus being in Rome when he wrote, apparently not returning to Eretz Israel during the thirty years of his residence in the Roman capital, his accounts sometimes suffer from inaccuracy. A good example is his depiction of marble and monolithic pillars in Jerusalem of the tail end of the Second Temple period. He also places monolithic pillars and marble slabs at Masada, as well as on a white stone wall—while the archaeological evidence evinces a yellowish stone plastered white and the “snake's trail” having two slopes on both sides.

Josephus' first thirty-three years, in which he lived and worked in Eretz Israel, supplemented by the diaries of the Roman military commanders that came into his hands after the war, form the central historical sources for completing and sometimes guiding archaeological research into the

land towards the end of the Second Temple period. Of the numerous sites Josephus describes, he devotes the most detailed accounts to Jerusalem and its Temple, these now coming to the aid of the archaeological excavations conducted over the past fifty odd years. The study and reconstruction of Second Temple Jerusalem rests first and foremost on Josephus' writings, primarily in the *War* and the *Antiquities*, in which he describes the city's walls and principal structures.

Those who sought to reconstruct the Temple Mount were aided by archaeological findings, Josephus' depictions, and tannaitic sources—primarily the tractates *Yoma* and *Tamid*. Although the majority of the descriptions correspond with one another, in some cases Josephus' details differ from those in the tannaitic literature. In the following, I shall discuss the two models of the Temple and Temple Mount on show at central tourist sites in Jerusalem and examine how Josephus' writings have influenced their contours.

The first is the 1:50 scale model of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount constructed by Michael Avi Yonah in the 1960s for a tourist project sponsored by the businessman Hans Kroch. Initially located in the courtyard of the Holyland Hotel in Jerusalem, it was moved to the Israel Museum in 2006. It is interesting to note that just as Josephus wrote his descriptions far from Jerusalem in Rome, so Avi Yonah's comprehensive article regarding the city and Temple in the Second Temple period published in *Sefer Yerushalayim* in 1956 and the planning and construction of the model were conducted during the years 1962 and 1966 when East Jerusalem lay beyond the reach of Israelis in Jordanian hands.

The second model was constructed by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation and has been on show in the Kotel tunnels since the beginning of the previous decade. It was built by Zalman Koren, who reconstructed the Temple and its courts, and Dan Bahat—responsible for the Western Wall excavations—who reconstructed the Temple Mount.

Unlike (almost) scientific writing, reconstructing a model allows for no ambiguities or uncertainties, requiring a clear understanding and opinion of what actually existed. In their writings, both Avi Yonah and Zalman Koren addressed the places in which the literary sources—Josephus and rabbinic literature—differed in their description. Avi Yonah assumed that the account given in the Mishna—completed many years after the destruction—was primarily based on second- or third-hand witnesses (ignoring the possibility that most of the mishnas in the tractates *Tamid* and *Middot* are early). While he believed the mishnaic description of the Temple itself to be the most accurate, he regarded that of the Temple Mount given in the Mishna to be minimal and incidental. Although Josephus, on the other hand, saw the Temple with his own eyes, he wrote after it had been destroyed and sought to paint it in a glorious light for the foreign audience for whom he was writing.

The Temple in Avi Yonah's model thus primarily follows the description given in the Mishna and rabbinic literature with some details from Josephus, the Temple Mount being reconstructed

principally on the basis of Josephus' accounts. According to the Mishna, the Temple Mount was 500 amah by 500 amah—i.e., 250 by 250 metres—encompassed by “a stoa within a stoa.” Avi Yonah preferred Josephus' notation that the southern stoa stretched from the western to the eastern end, however—i.e., far beyond the expanse the Mishna specifies as constituting the Temple Mount. Discrepancies also exist in this regard between Josephus' *Antiquities* and *War*, however. These may be explained either as a Josephan inaccuracy—the method adopted by Shaye Cohen—or as reflecting the development of the Temple Mount and the substantial changes it underwent in the period between Herod's reign (described in the *Antiquities*) and the destruction (described in the *War*), as posited by Lee Levine.

The second model does not cover the whole city as it was at the end of the Second Temple period but only the Temple and the Temple Mount. *Contra* Avi Yonah, Koren and Bahat regard the mishnaic description as the most reliable and accurate. In their model, the covered stoa thus does not run the length of a 250 by 250 metre expanse—i.e., it does not encompass the Temple Mount as we know it today or that is shown in Avi Yonah's model but sets off a much smaller area of 500 by 500 amot within this larger area, as described by the Mishna.

Koren—a well-known rabbinic figure—explains his non-reliance on Jossipon, the primary source on medieval commentators had relied, in an appendix to his monograph, arguing that Jossipon's evidence had not served the majority of Jewish writers throughout history because they regarded him to be a second-hand witness. In contrast to them, he makes use of Josephus, referring to his writings consistently alongside talmudic sources and archaeological findings. According to Koren, the discrepancies between Josephus and the Mishna are limited. He assumes as his starting point that Josephus' goal was not “to provide accurate details but to give his readers the general impression the edifice left on those who saw it.” The Mishna, on the other hand, intended to determine halakhot and is thus far more precise and accurate. Here, he differs from Lee Levine, who endeavours to reconcile the *War* and *Antiquities* with respect to the dimensions and area of the Temple Mount and argues that, despite the disparities between the two descriptions, Josephus' account is far more reliable than that of the Mishna.

Thus, where there appear to be contradictions between the Mishna and Josephus, Avi Yonah is inclined to rely on Josephus, at least in regard to the Temple Mount. Koren and the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, on the other hand, adopt Jacob Hildesheimer's view that the tractate *Middot* is to be attributed to R. Eliezer b. Ya'akov, who lived and worked in the second half of the first century C.E. and thus apparently saw the Temple with his own eyes. They thus contend that the Mishna is a more accurate source than Josephus.

## **Masada**

While in Jerusalem we have not only archaeological findings and Josephus' descriptions but also additional literary sources such as rabbinic literature and the Gospels, the only literary source we have for Masada is Josephus' *War*. Yadin, who excavated at Masada in the 1960s, viewed Josephus' writings as a guide for reconstructing the site and a description of the events that took place there in 73 C.E. Since the 1980s, numerous scholars have raised serious doubts regarding Josephus' account of the siege, the capture of the mount, and the mass suicide and its archaeological and historical veracity, as well as Eleazar b. Yair's speech. Yadin basing himself on Josephus, the skeptics have criticized both his presuppositions and work method. Recently, Amnon ben Tor, Yadin's student and successor, has addressed these archaeological reservations, reinforcing Yadin's conclusions.

The tourists' visit to the new museum opened at Masada in 2007 begins with an encounter with a statue in the figure of Josephus seated in the garden of his home in Rome as responsible for the descriptions, findings, and events that happened on the mount as discovered by Yadin—whose figure concludes the visit to the museum. Josephus' dominance is not limited to the fact that he serves as the axis of the museum tour, however, the light and sound show witnessed in the summer by thousands of tourists that reenacts the story of Masada also incorporating him as a Roman commander—despite the fact that at this juncture he had already been in Rome for three years. According to the show, it was Josephus who explained to Lucius Flavius Silva that the voices on the mount were celebrating the Passover Seder, a discussion even arising between Josephus and some Christians. This is not a coincidental error, Josephus' presence amongst the ranks of the Roman army being intended to express the complexity of the fact that, despite being a central witness to the event, he in fact belonged to the enemy camp.

#### B) Ideological reservations

The use of Josephus as a source for descriptions of Second Temple Eretz Israel and its history was not self-evident, raising ideological reservations amongst several writers and thinkers. One of the clearest expressions of this phenomenon lies in a poem written by Yitzhak Shalev (1919-1993)—a prominent intellectual and tour guide who guided groups around tourists site throughout the 1950s to 1980s—entitled “Josephus”:

The paths in the book of times  
Lead to Josephus  
The footnotes say: Look in Josephus.  
Without him there are no first and second walls,  
No upper or lower cities,  
No Temple or Antonia [Fortress]  
Or Herod.

Eleazar ben Yair's speech  
Read in the ears of the youth ascending Masada  
To the light of lamps –  
Nor have we this.

He accompanies me like a shadow on the wall,  
Phazael tower guides me,  
He leads me to the hump of Gamla  
And on the Yodfat path,  
In my rucksack on my back –  
The *War of the Jews*.

All year round he stands before me as a sentence,  
My hand sent to seal his fate  
Is suddenly stilled.  
The passing of the verdict has been postponed  
To a later date ...

The poem has three parts. The first recounts what every historian and tour guide knows—that Josephus is the source, that there are places and stories of which, were it not for him, we would know nothing. The second part speaks in the tour guide's voice: wherever I go, Josephus goes with me. The third part, however, expresses the problematic aspect of this circumstance—the need to judge Josephus, the judgment of Josephus himself—an act the poet prefers to evade by putting it off from year to year.

Not everyone, it is true, adopted Shalev's compromise, parts of Israeli society—Ultra-Orthodox groups, for example—rather making use of the tenth-century Josippon. This fact is attested by the numerous editions of the latter and its increased sales between 17 Tammuz and Tisha B'Av, when the religious public are immersed in the events that led to the destruction of the Second Temple. This tendency to favour Josippon over Josephus, however, is supplemented by the fact that the medieval sages used Josippon rather than Josephus, not knowing the latter's works. The Ultra-Orthodox community is simply preserving this custom—as it does so by many others.

C)

Let me conclude with another example of the complex attitude taken towards Josephus in modern Israeli life and its geographical space—evinced by the streets that bear his name, my guiding premise being that street names reflect the collective consciousness on the one hand and shape collective memory and consciousness on the other. Two streets bear Josephus' name in the modern

State of Israel—one in Jerusalem, the other in Beersheba. In comparison, streets commemorating Heinrich Graetz are to be found in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Beersheba, Holon, Ra'anana, and Rechovot. Herod is only commemorated by street names in Jerusalem and Tiberias, streets bearing the names of Bar Kokhba and Masada on the other hand, being found in over ten cities. (This comparison, it should be noted, does not include rabbinic figures.)

Joseph ben Mattitياهو St. in Beersheba is near the Ben-Gurion University campus, in continuation of Simha Assaf St.—a scholar of the gaonic period—on one side and the continuation of Zev Ya'avetz St. and close to Joseph Klausner St. on the other side—i.e., in a neighbourhood named after Jewish historians. In Jerusalem, it lies in the heart of an Orthodox neighbourhood of the city, alongside Rashi St. and Rashbam St. The street was given its name in 1940 by the Pro-Jerusalem Society under the directorship of Ronald Storrs, the British governor of Mandatory Jerusalem, who gave seventeen names to streets reflecting the city's history—such as St. George, The Prophets, Agrippas, Salah-a-Din, and Flavius. Although Yitzhak ben Zvi was a member of the committee and sought to have the street named “Joseph ben Mattitياهو,” this proposal was rejected on the grounds that the name “Flavius” was shorter. In 1948, the street was renamed Joseph ben Mattitياهو, the official sign later being changed to “Joseph ben Mattitياهو, priest, one of the leaders of the Jewish revolt in the Galilee.” Of all the descriptions that could have been given to Josephus, this was the one chosen for a street in an Orthodox neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

### Summary

While historians regard Josephus' writings with greater or lesser degrees of caution with regard to their historical accuracy, they have played a key role in the design and reconstruction of Second Temple sites in Israel. Unlike academia and the publicist genre, where Josephus' credibility can be debated, the nature of tourist sites prevents them from conveying the problematics of using Josephus' writings, thus allowing the latter to serve as a central tool in the reconstruction of the past and the interpretation of the findings that have been preserved.