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Jewish Rebellions against Rome

- 63 BCE – 40 – seven waves, led by Aristobulus II and his sons
- 4 BCE after Herod’s death
- 6 CE upon Roman annexation of Judea – led by Judas the Galilean
- 6—66 various outbreaks under Roman governors, esp. towards 66
- 66-73/4 Judean rebellion, culminating with fall of Jerusalem (70) and Masada (73/74 - which was commanded by Judas the G’s grandson, Eleazar b. Yair)
- 115—117 rebellion(s?) in Diaspora
- 132-135 Bar-Kochva rebellion in Judea
It all began with a card catalogue
Vol. 12 of the catalogue of the Ecole biblique (Jerusalem), published in 1986, has 28 items under Zélotes - all between 1958 and 1976. Similarly:

- M. Hengel, *Die Zeloten* (1961; 2nd ed. in English in 1989: *The Zealots*)
- D. M. Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution, 6-74 C.E.: A Political History Based on the Writings of Josephus* (1976)
Why?

**Direct route:**

- Sects, especially since Qumran finds in 1947; even some attempts to make Qumran sectarians into “Zealots” (esp. on basis of *War of Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness*).


- Masada Excavations – with much fanfare.
1966

מצדה – ימי
המ - בצומ הצה,
1964
Four readers on ancient Jewish history published by the Historical Society of Israel, 1973-1983:


*The Jewish Revolts in the Days of Trajan (115-117 CE)* (ed. D. Rokeah, 1977/78)


But by 1980s, between Yom Kippur War and then Lebanese War, wars lost their luster


Yehoshafat Harkabi, *The Bar Kokhba Syndrome: Risk and Realism in International Relations* (1983; Hebrew in 1982 as זַדוֹנֶו, לֶא פְּנְטְזָיוֹן : לָכֵּהַ מְרֵד בַּר קוקַּחְבַּה : וְרִיאֶנֶמוֹ יָרוּדַּמְשַׁד , וְניִמְבַּ תוּנִיָּדָרָמב , וְנִיָּדַלְדַּלְדַּלְדַּלְדַּלַּל)
Ancient Jewish History – A Christian Pursuit

Emil Schürer, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Zeitgeschichte* (1873)

*Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (2-3 vols.; 3-4 editions until 1901-1909)

And Josephus, our main source, gives little reason for Christians to take an interest in ancient Jewish rebels.

- After all, Josephus lists, a few times, only three types of Judaism (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes).

- True, he does mention, once (Ant. 18.9) a “Fourth Philosophy” of rebels, but he condemns them as foreign/innovative/heretical, and anyway they are involved in revolt against Rome – a political project.

- So not much reason for students of ancient Jewish theology, or those interested particularly in Jesus (who was a religious figure), should be interested in such rebels. Indeed, Schürer has no chapter on rebels. So what happened in the 1960s?
Two Dilemmas for Christians of Conscience after the Holocaust

1. How could Christians not have opposed the Nazi state, and even collaborated with it?

   But how could they have opposed the Nazi state, given Paul’s admonition: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1)?

2. Who was responsible for death of Jesus? Is it not the case, that Christian blaming of the Jews contributed to antisemitism?

   But if the Jews were not responsible, then Pilate was – and what reason could he have had to kill Jesus? Wasn’t he peace-loving, turning the other cheek, otherworldly?
The first question, about Rom 13:1, led to lots of soul-searching, and exegetical creativity


But whatever may be done with the exegesis of Paul, to get around Rom 13:1: What if Jesus were a rebel against Rome? That could solve both problems.
Arbeiten zur Geschichte des späteren Judentums und des Urchristentums

Leiden : Brill, 1968-
Bd. 6-Bd. 7.

German

Continues: Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums.
Continued by: Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums

1968-

= Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (since 2006)
The first volume in this series

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Hengel’s main point: the Zealots were religious

This argument, based to significant extent on “zeal” (Pinchas, Elijah), as well as on rabbinic approval of “zealots” (מייאנק), entails much argument against:

a. Josephus, our main source, who denigrates the rebels and portrays them as “innovators” = heretical deviants from Jewish tradition; Hengel argues about Josephus’s apologetic needs and bias.

b. Joseph Klausner, who praises them as ancient Jewish nationalists (Zionists); Hengel basically holds that interpreting the first century in line with modern secular Zionism is anachronistic.

Hengel’s view means that a religious Jew could be a rebel against Rome. For example: Jesus of Nazareth.
Jesus/Zealots/Trial of Jesus -- boom in the 1960s

- Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (1961); 2nd ed., 1974, lists 70+ reviews
- Joel Carmichael, *The Death of Jesus* (1962)
- J. C. McRuer, *The Trial of Jesus* (1964)
- S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus the Zealot* (1967)
- S. G. F. Brandon, *The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth* (1968)
- Haim Cohn, *The Trial and Death of Jesus* (Hebrew 1968; English 1971)
- D. R. Catchpole, *The Trial of Jesus: A Study in the Gospels and Jewish Historiography from 1770 to the Present Day* (1971)
But then the Bubble Burst:
1. Cold feet about Jesus

• M. Hengel, *Was Jesus a Revolutionist?* (1971; German 1970)
• H. Maccoby, “Is the Political Jesus Dead?”, *Encounter* 46/2 (Feb. 1976), 80-89
Once all anti-Roman rebels were called "Zealots"

**ZEALOTS AND SICARII, THEIR ORIGINS AND RELATION**

**MORTON SMITH**

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It has long been the common opinion that the Zealots were the party founded by Judas the Galilean — so Graetz and Jost, for instance, writing in the middle of the past century.¹ Derenbourg, it is true, observed that the term "Zealots" was not applied to the opponents of the Romans before the revolt, but when he came to the events of the revolt he made a descendant of Judas, Menahem, the leader of the Zealots and so apparently assumed the connection of the party with Judas.² Schürer's adherence canonized the common opinion, and also the common description of the *Sicarii* as a more fanatical fraction of the party — though the sources contain nothing to suggest that the party had split before the *Sicarii* appeared.³ Hence, with only minor variations, Eduard Meyer,⁴ Bousset,⁵ Baron,⁶ and Yadin's account of the Zealots in *Masada*,⁷ to name only the largest studies.⁸
No permanent peace was gained, however, but only a truce of uncertain duration. Judas of Gamala in the Golan, called the Galilean (he is no doubt identical with Judas son of Hezekiah mentioned on p. 332), made it his mission in company with a Pharisee named Zadduk to rouse the people to resistance and preach revolt and insurrection in the name of religion. They met with no significant success at first, but were nevertheless responsible for the emergence, as an offshoot from the Pharisees, of a stricter and more fanatical party of resolute patriots, or as they called themselves, activists or Zealots, unwilling to wait in quiet submission for the fulfilment, with God’s help, of Israel’s messianic hope, but desirous rather of bringing it to reality by means of the sword in battle against the godless enemy. It was due to their activities that the spark of rebellion continued to smoulder for sixty years, when it finally burst into flame.

Of Coponius and some of his successors little more is known than their names. Altogether there were seven—possibly only six—prefects who held office as governors of Judaea from A.D. 6 to 41. (1) Coponius, about A.D. 6 to 9, B. J. ii 8, 1 (117); Ant. xviii 2, 2 (29–31); (2) Marcus Ambibulus, named in our manuscripts Ambibuchus, about A.D. 9 to 12, Ant. xviii 2, 2 (31); (3) Annius Rufus about A.D. 12 to 15, Ant. xviii 2, 2 (32–3); (4) Valerius Gratus A.D. 15 to 26, Ant. xviii 2, 2 (33).

128. Zenkiri, 502. Lk. 6:15; Acts 11:13; Jos. B.J. iv 3, 9 (150); 4, 6 (201); 5, 1 (305); 6, 3 (377); vii 8, 1 (266). Instead of the קַפִּי of Biblical Hebrew, later Hebrew and Aramaic use also נָקִי and נַקָּי (see Levy, Nebiheb, Wörterbuch, and Jastrow, Dictionary, s.v.). From the plural of the latter form (נַקְיַים) is derived the Greek ἱεραπόρης which should be read in Mt. 10:24 and Mk. 11:18 rather than ἱεραπετής. For recent treatments of the subject see W. R. Farmer, Maccabees, Zealots and Josephus (1959); M. Hengel, Die Zealoten (1961)—the major modern study; S. G. F. Brandon, Jesus and the Zealots (1967); M. Smith, ‘Zealots and Sicarii: their Origins and Relations’, IntB 64 (1971), pp. 1–19; S. Applebaum, ‘The Zealots: the Case for Revaluation’, JRES 64 (1971), pp. 156–70; M. Borg, ‘The Currency of the Term “Zealot”’, JThSt 22 (1971), pp. 304–12.

129. Cf. in general B. J. ii 8, 1 (128), Ant. xviii 1, 1 (4–10), Acts 5:37. The descendants of Judas also distinguished themselves as Zealots. His sons Jacob and Simon were executed by Tiberius Julius Alexander, Ant. xx 5, 2 (102); his son (or grandson?) Menahem (Manain) was one of the principal leaders at the beginning of the rebellion in A.D. 66, B. J. ii 17, 8–9 (434–48). A descendant of Judas and relative of Menahem by the name of Eleazar directed the defence of Masada in A.D. 74, B. J. ii 17, 9 (447); vii 8, 1 (533); 8, 2 (275); 8, 6–7 (320–88); 9, 1 (399). See Yigael Yadin, Masada: Herod’s Fortress and the Zealots’ Last Stand
The bubble burst:

2: Scholarly Recognition that not all rebels were Zealots

Main argument: Josephus first mentions “Zealots” with reference to 66 CE (War 2.564, 651), and distinguishes them from other rebels in list at War 7.259ff. (next slide)


Josephus, *War* 7.262-269 (tr. Thackeray)

wealthy. The Sicarii were the first to set the example of this lawlessness and cruelty to their kinsmen, leaving no word unspoken to insult, no deed untried to ruin, the victims of their conspiracy. Yet even they were shown by John to be more moderate than...
But if Zealots didn’t exist until 66, then Jesus (d. 30) wasn’t a Zealot.


*Luke 6*: And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles; [14] Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, [15] and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, [16] and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.
Which left Hengel and others the task of reasserting a basic unity among the rebels without having to make a specific claim about Jesus


In sum,

A major flourishing of scholarship on an ancient Jewish movement, which hitherto had been of little interest to Christians, was generated, in great measure, by Christian, especially German Christian, self-examination concerning the role of Christianity in fostering the Holocaust.

Once, however, such self-examination issued in more direct results, such as Vatican II (1962-1965) and “nostra Aetate,” scholarship, and believing Christians, could back away from the more radical and specific claims concerning Jesus.

With that, Christian interest waned – around the same time that the Yom Kippur War and then the Lebanese War put a damper on Israeli enthusiasm about militant nationalism. But in the meantime scholarship had progressed in its understanding of the diversity of ancient Jewish rebels, as also – of Josephus’s portrayal of them.
Thank you