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DATING THE SIEGE OF MASADA

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The broad chronology of the Jewish War is clear: Josephus provides the basic framework. Yet opinion is still divided over the dating of the final action, the siege of Masada. The fortress was captured, according to Josephus, on 16 Xanthikos; the year is not given.<sup>1)</sup> The canonical date is 73; epigraphy suggests 74, but has met with less than universal approval.<sup>2)</sup> The case may be reviewed briefly.

It is well known that the siege was prosecuted by L.Flavius Silva; Josephus records this much, omitting any biography of the man.<sup>3)</sup> Fortunately, his career emerges from other sources: two almost identical inscriptions from his home town, Urbs Salvia, provide the details.<sup>4)</sup> It may be gleaned from these that, prior to his governorship of Judaea, Silva was elevated to the rank of ex-praetor and enrolled among the patricians during the imperial censorship. Now, Vespasian and Titus entered the office of censor some time between April and the end of June 73; their period of office seems to have lapsed during the course of the following year.<sup>5)</sup> At any rate, this neatly precludes Silva from having been in command in Judaea in April 73. The corollary for the siege of Masada is clear.<sup>6)</sup>

In Josephus' text, the Masada episode is flanked by notice of events in Commagene and in Egypt; a tight chronological sequence may be assumed. The first event, the annexation of the client-kingdom of Antiochus IV, occurred

1) Josephus, *Bell.Iud.* VII 9.1 (401). Here, the suicide of the defenders is dated to 15 Xanthikos; the Romans entered Masada early the next day. The month of Xanthikos is usually equated with Jewish Nisan, hence March/April: cf. E.Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ I*, rev. ed. G.Vermes - F.Millar, Edinburgh 1973, 512 n.139. There remains the possibility that Josephus simply transliterated the Roman (i.e. Julian) date of 15 April: the case for Josephus' transliteration of dates from official Roman sources is argued by J.Nicols, *Vespasian and the Partes Flavianaes*, Wiesbaden 1978, 44-45. Finally, B.Niese, 'Zur Chronologie des Josephus', *Hermes* 28, 1893, 209, preferring the Tyrian calendar, equates 15 Xanthikos with 2 May; this is surely too late.

2) The attempt of Niese, *op.cit.* (n.1), 211-212, to date the siege to 72 is notable only for its eccentricity, though his thesis would seem to have convinced A.Garzetti, *L'Impero da Tiberio agli Antonini*, Bologna 1960, 243 and 267. For 73, G.Hölscher, 'Masada', *RE XIV* 2, 1930, 2056, may be taken as representative. For 74, see below, especially n.6.

3) *Bell.Iud.* VII 8.1 (252); cf. *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 368.

4) *AE* 1969/70, 183; cf. W.Eck, *Senatoren von Vespasian bis Hadrian*, Munich 1970, 93-111, summarized in his entry, 'Flavius (181)', *RE Suppl. XIV*, 1974, 121-122.

5) R.Weynand, 'Flavius (206)', *RE VI*, 1909, 2655 and 2659.

6) As already argued by Eck, *op.cit.* (n.4), 98-100, but not universally accepted: cf. H.Bengtson, *Die Flavier. Geschichte eines römischen Kaiserhauses*, Munich 1979, 81, asserting that 'Masada ist am 15. April 73 gefallen. Werner Eck ist zwar für den 15. April 74 eingetreten, aber dieses Datum erscheint doch wohl zu spät'.

in 72; on that point, there is no dissent.<sup>7)</sup>

The second event concerns the praefectus Aegypti, Ti. Julius Lupus, whose death is placed after the fall of Masada by Josephus; the resulting vacancy was filled by one Paulinus.<sup>8)</sup> It is argued that the changeover occurred in 73: a papyrus appears to attest an office-bearer named Paulinus in that year, but the case demands re-examination.

The facts of the matter are these: Ti. Julius Lupus is last attested in office early in the year 73,<sup>9)</sup> and a papyrus mentions a certain Curtius Paulinus in connection with an epikrisis conducted in the fifth Egyptian year of Vespasian, 72/73.<sup>10)</sup> The significance of the latter is not immediately apparent, and the obvious conclusion has been drawn: Curtius Paulinus was prefect of Egypt in 73. However, such certainty was premature; the correct interpretation of the document is far more subtle. The text actually refers to the selection of individuals by Paulinus at some time prior to the named epikrisis; hence, it is previous business which occupied him. We need not assume his direct involvement with the affairs of 72/73. Nor should we, for this is not the end of the matter: a second papyrus records a tribunus militum, Curtius Paulinus by name, conducting epikriseis in the third and fourth years of Nero's reign; 56/57 and 57/58.<sup>11)</sup> The scenario becomes clear. The Flavian papyrus refers back to one of these Neronian epikriseis, and we must dismiss Curtius Paulinus from the events of 73: he is obviously not Josephus' Paulinus, so our terminus ante quem for the death of Julius Lupus crumbles.<sup>12)</sup> The next attested praefectus Aegypti is C. Aeternius Fronto, late in the year 78,<sup>13)</sup> with at least one intermediate prefect, a certain Valerius.<sup>14)</sup> A case has been made for identification with Vespasian's amicus Valerius Paulinus, and convincingly.<sup>15)</sup> Here, then, is our successor to Julius Lupus, but the knowledge

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7) Bell.Iud. VII 7.1-3 (219-243). In general, see A.B.Bosworth, 'Vespasian's reorganisation of the north-eastern frontier', *Antichthon* 10, 1976, 63-78.

8) Bell.Iud. VII 10.4 (434-436); cf. Pliny, *Nat.Hist.* 19.11.

9) SB VIII 9818 = SEG 20, 651. For Lupus, see PIR<sup>2</sup> I 390; A.Stein, 'Iulius (330)', *RE X* 1, 1917, 664-665.

10) P.Oxy. X 1266.

11) P.Oxy. XLVI 3279; cf. P.Mich. inv. 1935, which attests the same tribune active in the years 56/57 and 58/59.

12) In general, see P.J.Sijpesteijn, 'Flavius Josephus and the Praefect of Egypt in 73 AD', *Historia* 28, 1979, 117-125. However, Sijpesteijn accepts (p.118) that Masada 'was taken by the Romans c. May 3, 73 AD', and builds his chronology around this unproven (indeed, mistaken) assumption.

13) AE 1937, 236; PIR<sup>2</sup> L 287. See H.-G.Pflaum, 'A propos des Préfets d'Egypte', *Latomus* 10, 1951, 473, for the dating, now confirmed by P.Oxy. XXXVI 2756; Fronto is attested in office in the eleventh Egyptian year of Vespasian, which ran from 29 August 78 to 23 June 79.

14) J.Schwartz (ed.), *Papyrus Grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg*, Publ. Bibl. nat. et Univ. de Strasbourg IV, 1972, 49-50 = P.Strassb. 541.

15) H.-G.Pflaum, *Les Carrières Procuratoriennes équestres sous le Haut-Empire Romain I*, Paris 1960, 94 no.40.

adds nothing to the matter at hand; Lupus' death cannot be precisely located within the period 73-78.

The combined authority of Josephus and papyrology provides a somewhat less reliable chronology than has hitherto been supposed. The promotion of Paulinus to the Egyptian prefecture, filling the vacancy created by Lupus' death, is generally taken to be closely dated:<sup>16)</sup> as we have seen, it is not. The text of Josephus places the fall of Masada in the mid-70s; it is no more precise than that, despite modern claims to the contrary.<sup>17)</sup> Greater precision is afforded by the career inscriptions of the conqueror, Flavius Silva.

Silva took up his Judaeian command after his double adlection; there is no reason to doubt the chronological ordering of the inscriptions. We may imagine him travelling to the East during the latter half of 73. On his arrival, there were preparations to be made for the forthcoming siege, and he surely awaited the winter before commencing operations: the baking heat of summer at Masada would have been more than a besieging army could bear. Josephus offers no record of the duration of the siege, but events came to a head in April; by our reckoning, the year will have been 74. The rest is well known.

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16) For instance, C.P.Jones, *American Journal of Philology* 95,1974,90, placing the death of Lupus 'not later than August, 73'; P.A.Brunet, 'The Administrators of Roman Egypt', *JRS* 65,1975,143, preserving the date of 73 for the death of Lupus, though realising that P.Oxy. 1266 must be discounted; E.M.Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, Leiden 1976,338 n.27 with 366 n.39, dating the changeover to 'before the end of Vespasian's 5th Egyptian year'; Sijpesteijn, *op.cit.* (n.12), 119, assuming that 'Lupus died somewhere in the fall of 73 AD, i.e. in the 6th Egyptian year of Vespasian'.

17) For instance, G.W.Bowersock, 'Old and New in the History of Judaea', *JRS* 65,1975,183-184, asserting that 'Masada did indeed fall in spring of AD 73' and appealing to 'Josephus' confirmed chronology'. See also the works cited above,n.16.