

# Josephus on the School Bench

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“Opinions are divided about the conduct of Yosef ben Matityahu in the Galilee front of the Great Revolt. Conduct a trial of his deeds, his leadership, and the manner of his management of the war.”<sup>1</sup> This is a proposal for summarizing the teaching content of a mid-twentieth century history textbook’s unit about the Great Revolt. I assume there is no historian other than Yosef ben Matityahu—Josephus—whom students are asked to put on trial. In this article, I attempt to sketch the complex and changing attitudes toward the personality, actions, and writings of Josephus in the history textbooks written in Hebrew and used in Israel from its pre-state days in the nineteenth century through the present. During this period, dramatic changes unfolded in both the Jewish presence in the Land of Israel, including the founding of the State of Israel, and in pedagogical approaches to history. The historiography of the Israeli educational system in general and of its history education in particular attributes great importance to political changes as a powerful incentive for the teaching of history.<sup>2</sup> Have these changes also been expressed in the evaluation of Josephus’ character and writings?

## 1 Methodology

For 21st-century professional historians, there is no longer an ‘agreed-upon history’ or an ‘authoritative description of the past.’ Nevertheless, “what appears in school textbooks is legitimately sanctioned knowledge that has been allocated an official stamp of ‘truth,’ but what textbooks offer are not truths but claims to truth.”<sup>3</sup> The pretension to ‘truth’ stems from the status of history education as a tier in establishing a stable national identity, which demonstrates confidence in the righteousness of the nation’s path. Since the 19th century,

1 Avivi and Perski, *Sixth Grade*, 128.

2 Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*; Kizel, *Subservient History*. For a more nuanced attitude see Conforti, *Past Tense*, 214–289. Anyway, Conforti also argues that the political and historical changes influenced and shaped history textbooks, see also Conforti, “Alternative Voices.”

3 Foster and Crawford, “History Textbook Research,” 8; see also, Alayan and Podeh, “Introduction,” 3–4.

history education has played a central role in shaping and achieving a shared national identity by instilling the collective memory.<sup>4</sup> “The history curriculum is traditionally regarded as the vehicle through which nations seek to store, transmit and disseminate narratives that define conceptions of nationhood and national culture; as such they are crucial sites for investigation.”<sup>5</sup>

History textbooks are the main application of the curriculum.<sup>6</sup> Therefore they play an essential role in creating collective national memory and constructing Israel’s national identity.<sup>7</sup> However, just as the curriculum is subject to public debate by groups representing different values and perceptions of identity, the application of the curriculum, even after its approval, is accompanied by different interpretations reflected in the textbooks.<sup>8</sup> Even though there may have been some devaluation in the status of the textbook in recent years due to the use of the internet, it is still the primary source of information for school students, especially regarding antiquity.<sup>9</sup>

Methodologically, it is possible to point out three contexts in regard to which the textbooks should be examined: (1) *The context of influence*: the textbook is an application of the curriculum. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the political, social, ideological, and economic factors that influence the design of the curriculum. (2) *The context of textbook production*: how the curriculum is reflected in the textbook. In this context, the dominant method is content analysis of the of history textbooks, aimed at identifying the historical narrative, for the most part, the national historical narrative and its ways of empowering it. (3) *The context of practice*: whether and how textbooks are taught in class.<sup>10</sup>

In this article, I will deal mainly with the first two contexts by way of a content analysis of the textbooks. The choice of this method stems from the fact

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4 The academic literature on the subject is very extensive. Some argue that history education in the United States is in fact an acquaintance and internalization of American collective national memory; see VanSledright, “Narratives.” On history education and collective memory see most recently, Bullock and Bullock, “Re-imagining History.” History education and nationality have been constantly discussed in many different contexts; see the bibliography cited in the articles mentioned above n. 3. This affinity will probably also continue in the coming years, as argued by Grever and Tina van der Vlies, “Why National Narratives.” This article also has an extensive review of research on history education and nationalism in recent years.

5 Foster and Crawford, “History Textbook Research,” 5.

6 Repoussi and Tutiaux-Guillon, “New Trends,” 156.

7 Alayna and Podeh, “Introduction,” 3; VanSledright, “Narratives,” 113–119.

8 Foster and Crawford, “History Textbook Research,” 5.

9 Repoussi and Tutiaux-Guillon, “New Trends,” 156; Alayna and Podeh, “Introduction,” 2.

10 Foster and Crawford, “History Textbook Research,” 11–14.

that a significant proportion of the books to be examined are continuous texts that make little use of images or other graphic aids. The main questions I will address are:

1. *Josephus' personality*: whether and how Josephus was judged, particularly the evaluation of his deeds at Yodfat (Jotapata). In this context, it must be examined whether and how groups (Zealots, Sicarii) and other persons (Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, Yohanan of Gush Halav [John of Giscala]) acted during the revolt have been evaluated.
2. *Josephus as a historical source*: are Josephus' writings perceived as a reliable source? What is the relationship between the assessment of Josephus as an actor and attitude toward his books?

I will examine the Hebrew textbooks written for both elementary and high schools and studied in the Land of Israel from the end of the 19th century until today. I will only deal with books written for the Zionist (general and religious) education system, and therefore history books with an ultra-Orthodox orientation will not be discussed in this framework. However, it is a broad corpus containing over forty books.<sup>11</sup> It is impossible to present a detailed content analysis of each of the books, mainly since some have been published in several editions with interesting changes.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, I will deal mainly with widely circulated books. I will also examine in more detail books that clearly illustrate changes that have taken place in the evaluation of Josephus' character over time.

## 2 The Return of the Historian: Josephus in Hebrew Textbooks up to World War I

The rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century in Europe breathed new life into the past. According to politicians, teachers, and professional historians the events of the past created the nation and bestowed meaning and purpose upon it.<sup>13</sup> A 1914 German guide for teaching history wrote: "In the first place,

11 There is not yet a neat list of all the ancient history textbooks written during this period. The list at the end of Ruth Firer's dissertation can be a starting point. It includes all the textbooks written from the end of the 19th century to the 1970s; it also refers to the Middle Ages and the Modern Era; see Firer, *Formation and Information*, 345–352. A list of history textbooks written for the State Religious Education system is found in Weintraub, *The Development*, 394–408.

12 See for example below, p. 476.

13 The scholarly literature is very vast; Marsden, *The School Textbook*, 148–166, is a good introduction for the subject; see also Marsden, "Poisoned History;" Wilschut, "History at the Mercy."

history education should strive for a real, decidedly German spirit. If this is not achieved, it has failed its most splendid goal.<sup>14</sup> These trends are also very evident in the first history textbooks written in Hebrew.<sup>15</sup> Ze'ev Yavetz, the first to publish a history textbook in Hebrew in 1890, opened his book with the following declaration: "But I will clearly state that not only for its own purpose did I write it, but also to serve as a faithful means of fostering attachment in the Jewish nation toward its heritage and sacred traditions: to present it with the greats of the nation in all their splendor and glory, that they may serve as exemplary role models for the Jewish nation in all their ways."<sup>16</sup> Yavetz managed to recount the entire span of all Jewish history up to his time in only 150 pages. Nonetheless, he devoted several sentences to Josephus. He notes both Josephus' role as the commander of the Revolt in the Galilee and his writings, commenting that Vespasian was kind to him "because he saw in him that his spirit was loyal to the Romans, and that his soul was more precious to him than his people."<sup>17</sup> With just a few words, Yavetz set the stage for the widespread description and evaluation of Josephus in the textbooks that followed.

The primary emphasis in history teaching was placed on the periods when Jews lived and were active in the Land of Israel, from biblical times through the Bar Kokhba Revolt.<sup>18</sup> In this context, of course, great importance was placed on the loss of national independence during the Second Temple Period. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858–1922), who revived and modernized the Hebrew language, also dedicated himself to imparting Jewish history. In 1892, he published a history textbook for elementary school. In the first lines of the book, he explains that the book's purpose is "to imbue in our children ... the concept, found in the chronicles of the Jewish people, that it is a **national** people, that experienced days when it lived a **complete life**, loved its **national freedom**, and would risk its life for this freedom"<sup>19</sup> (emphasis in the original). With his total commitment to nationalism, specifically in the form of political independence for the Land of Israel,<sup>20</sup> Ben-Yehuda did not spare Josephus from his sharp pen, missing not miss a derisive word with which to attack Josephus. Moreover, Ben-Yehuda accused Josephus of significantly changing the story of the Great Revolt to fit his ideological goals. According to Ben-Yehuda, the genuine leader of the Galilee rebels was John of Giscala; even before Yosef ben Matityahu

14 Cited by Wilschut, "History at the Mercy," 695.

15 For the history of Hebrew education in late Ottoman Palestine, see Elboim-Dror, *Hebrew Education*. David Shahar, *Know*, 199–205 focused on history education during this period.

16 Yavetz, *The Book of Chronicles*, III–IV.

17 Yavetz, *The Book of Chronicles*, 40.

18 Furas, *Educating Palestine*, 187–188.

19 Ben-Yehudah, *History*, 3.

20 For this motif in Ben-Yehudah's historiographical writing, see Porat, "The Nation," 70–74.

reached the Galilee, John had already built fighting battalions. Ben-Yehuda had no doubt that if John had been the commander of the Galilee, then “they could have stood as an iron wall before Rome’s legions without allowing them to enter into the land.”<sup>21</sup> Ben-Yehuda describes Josephus as follows: “Cowardly, hypocritical, of low soul, seeking only his own benefit, a loyal lover of the Romans and a traitor to his people.”<sup>22</sup> Summarizing the Roman conquest of the Galilee, Ben-Yehuda writes: “Yosef ben Matityahu handed the Land into the enemy’s hand.”<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, Ben-Yehuda mentions Josephus more than he does Titus and Vespasian together! Josephus is Titus’ advisor during the siege of Jerusalem and attempts to weaken the morale of the rebels through his speeches. According to Ben-Yehuda, Josephus’ *Bellum Judaicum* is a work written by a traitor seeking to justify his own actions and to slander the loyal zealots. Yet Ben-Yehuda vows as follows: “Yet the memory of these heroes shall not be forgotten among the people of Israel for all time.”<sup>24</sup>

A different appraisal of Josephus can be found in another widely-used textbook at the time, written by the Jewish-Russian historian Simon Dubnow. Along with his work as a professional historian, Dubnow also published a history textbook translated from Russian into Hebrew by Aharon Libushitzky. Although Dubnow did not give Josephus’ character much attention, his analysis of Josephus is nevertheless more complex than that of Ben-Yehuda. Dubnow describes Josephus as someone who, from a young age, had had a high opinion of the Romans’ military and diplomatic capabilities, and thus did not believe in the possibility of victory against them. Dubnow does not use derisive language toward Josephus. He describes the Siege of Yodfat neutrally and concludes his discussion with the observation that “the Jews of Jerusalem blamed Yosef for the city’s fall and decried him as one of the traitors for falling to the enemy.”<sup>25</sup> Dubnow does not explicitly reveal his opinion on the matter, but his silence should not be interpreted as approval of Josephus’ course of actions. Actually, Dubnow describes the zealots and John of Giscala very sympathetically.<sup>26</sup> Although with slight differences, mostly in tone and rhetoric, all history textbooks of the pre-World War I period praised the zealots

21 Ben-Yehudah, *History*, 166.

22 Ben-Yehudah, *History*, 166.

23 Ben-Yehudah, *History*, 166.

24 Ben-Yehudah, *History*, 172.

25 Dubnow, *The History*, 75.

26 The close assessments of Josephus by Ben-Yehudah and Dubnow support Dimitry Shumsky’s conclusion that Dubnow’s ideas and historical thought were part of the legitimate Zionist discourse of his time, see Shumsky, “Zionism.”

and condemned Josephus.<sup>27</sup> But what about the schoolchildren themselves? Memoires of those who were schoolchildren during that time can give us a hint about how they imagined the Great Revolt. Haim Keller, as a child, who studied at a school in Rosh Pina in the early twentieth century, retells his experiences as follows:

We lived the lives of the protectors and fighters of the Galilee, we breathed in the longing for freedom and the yearning for liberation. Afterwards, on the same mountains and hills surrounding Meron and Gush Halav, we walked with reverence and said: 'Here, here, walked the heroes of the Galilee, Yohanan and Eleazar! We shall walk in their path until the redemption, this is how Wilkomitz taught us.'<sup>28</sup>

### 3 The Second Period: The British Mandate (1920–1948)—Continuity and Reassessment

After World War I, the Jewish population in Mandatory Palestine grew significantly. The growing influx of immigrants with differing political and cultural views led to the creation of different educational streams. Although almost all the streams shared the Zionist vision, they differed in many cultural and ideological respects. Most of the children in the urban and semi-urban settlements studied in the general stream, which followed the curricula of the World Zionist Organization's (WZO) education department. Religious students who did not study in yeshivot, preferring instead a modern education, studied in the religious education stream of the Mizrahi movement. Children of the kibbutzim, and from the urban population identifying with socialist values, studied in the socialist-leaning Workers stream. Each stream created its own curriculum and sometimes even textbooks were written to reflect the values of a particular educational stream.<sup>29</sup> As we shall see below, changes were not limited to the structure of the education system. During this period, the writing of history textbooks was mainly done by trained historians. As a result, there were significant changes in the evaluation of Josephus and his deeds, which

27 Shahar, *Know*, 199–205.

28 Riklis, *The Teacher*, 75. Simhah Wilkomitz (1871–1918) was one of the prominent teachers at the beginning of the 20th century in Palestine, and his influence on students and teachers is well attested; see Dror, "The New Rural."

29 On the importance of history education for each stream see Furas, *Educating Palestine*, 187–189.

influenced the textbooks written in the next two generations. Considering this, I will discuss more intensively the textbooks written during this period.

In the WZO's first history curriculum (1923), it was determined that history should be taught in a way that "would awaken among the students a sense of participation in our nation's fate."<sup>30</sup> With the introduction of the new curriculum, new textbooks were written both for lower schools (Grades 1–8) and high schools. The first to be published were history textbooks written by Yaakov Naftali Simhoni (1884–1926) in the 1920s, which were meant for high school students and teaching students. Simhoni was a young and promising scholar. One of his most important literary works was a translation of Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* from Greek into Hebrew, and thus he certainly had a great interest in the character of Josephus.<sup>31</sup> Simhoni's Josephus was a young man with many talents, but one who should not have been sent to the Galilee because he lacked military experience. Simhoni accepts that the revolt in the Galilee failed because of Josephus' lack of faith in the possibility of victory, but in contrast to the textbooks of the previous generation, he does not accuse Josephus of treason. It is possible that the desire to "launder" Josephus caused Simhoni to almost skip over Josephus' actions after the fall of Yodfat. Simhoni merely notes in short that he fell prisoner to the Romans.<sup>32</sup>

Simhoni also adopts the main elements of Josephus' hostile position toward John of Giscala. According to Simhoni, John "ruled with extreme tyranny, maltreated the wealthy residents, and turned many over to killers. The cruelty of his rule engendered much hate against him."<sup>33</sup> In line with Josephus, Simhoni describes at length how the zealots' wars harmed Jerusalem and how the Temple was burnt against Titus' wishes. Moreover, Josephus receives Simhoni's praise for faithfully describing the last moments of Masada with admiration, notwithstanding his hatred for the zealots. Simhoni discusses Josephus' books in detail, using this as an opportunity to praise the "glorious defense" that Josephus provided the Jewish people before the nations, and how Josephus described the "virtue of the people Israel above all the peoples of the land."<sup>34</sup> He even hints that Josephus may have been in contact with some rabbinic leaders while in Rome.<sup>35</sup> In this manner, Josephus is por-

30 The Educational Department, *Curriculum*, 41.

31 Simhoni died at the age of only 42. His death was a severe loss for the advancement of science and the national aspirations involved in the study of Jewish history. For his life and literary work see Shmueli, "Portrait."

32 Simhoni, *The History*, 1B:175–177.

33 Simhoni, *The History*, 1B:178.

34 Simhoni, *The History*, 2:34.

35 Simhoni, *The History*, 2:35.

trayed as not a traitor, and even becomes as an active participant in Simhoni's national project.

Simhoni's positive attitude towards Josephus cannot be separated from Simhoni's close familiarity with Josephus' writings. In his introduction to the translation, Simhoni goes to the trouble of justifying Josephus and his writings. He is empathetic with Josephus' difficult situation in Rome and claims that Josephus almost certainly wrote with historical precision and should not be described as or considered a traitor.<sup>36</sup> Scholars argued that Simhoni's approach was not accepted by Jewish historians until the last quarter of 20th century.<sup>37</sup> However, it turns out that his positions have permeated public understanding. Since Simhoni, newer textbooks have taken a more moderate approach towards Josephus.

*Divrei yemei 'amenu (The Chronicles of Our People)*, written by Chaim A. Zuta and Isaac Spivak, was the most common history textbook for elementary school students during the Mandate period.<sup>38</sup> The book dedicates to Yosef ben Matityahu a rather long section dealing with his activities in Galilee. According to the book, Josephus boasted of his religious identity as a Pharisee but "in politics and culture gave Rome above little Judea."<sup>39</sup> Another problem Josephus had was his lack of knowledge in military matters. Nevertheless, the book highlights the active role of Josephus during the siege of Yodfat and his attempts to defend the city. Admittedly, the book attributes Josephus' survival to his cunning. However, the book completely avoids slamming Josephus with derogatory nicknames, as the writers of the previous generation had. Nor does the book show much sympathy for the zealots and John of Giscala, who are accused of civil war and murder.<sup>40</sup> Yitzhak Conforti, who thoroughly studied the history textbooks during the Mandate period, described Zuta and Spivak's book as having a "moderate" nationalist tendency.<sup>41</sup>

A similar tone can also be found in *Toldot 'amenu (History of Our People)*, a history textbook for elementary school written by two prominent educators, Baruch Avivi and Natan Perski.<sup>42</sup> At the beginning of the chapter on "The Great War of Independence and the Destruction of Judah," the abysmal

36 Simhoni, *History of the Jewish War*, vii–xxviii.

37 Schwartz, "From Masada to Jotapata."

38 Zuta and Spivak, *Chronicles*. On Zuta and Spivak, see Furas, *Educating Palestine*, 124–127. On the wide circulation of their book see Conforti, *Past Tense*, 256m15.

39 Zuta and Spivak, *Chronicles*, 1B:174

40 Zuta and Spivak, *Chronicles*, 1B:176–178.

41 Conforti, *Past Tense*, 256–258.

42 Avivi and Perski, *History*.



contrast between “a mighty people of faith” and “a mighty power”<sup>43</sup> is described. Although the Romans are militarily strong, the Jews have supreme heroism and devotion. Avivi and Perski’s commitment to the rebels is unquestionable. This approach is in line with what Conforti called the “activist Zionist approach” and which he contrasted with the “moderate” approach of Zuta and Spivak.<sup>44</sup> Considering this, it is surprising that Yosef ben Matityahu is portrayed in a complex and moderate way. According to Avivi and Perski, Josephus “expressed a deep affection for the glory of the Roman Empire because of its strict rule and good order,” and he did not believe in the revolt’s success. However, he “was swept away by the current of enthusiasm ... and also joined the War of Independence.”<sup>45</sup> The book’s authors also praise Josephus for preparing the fighting forces in Galilee and fortifying Galilee’s cities. Moreover, the book adopts almost verbatim Josephus’ account of the dialogue between him and the warriors in the cave after the fall of Yodfat. The authors conclude this episode neutrally: “by chance or in cunning only Joseph remains alive.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, the book “clears” Josephus of the accusation of treason. The destruction’s narrative ends with the experiences of Josephus in Rome. The authors note the importance of the *Jewish War* as the only historical source for the Great Revolt. Josephus’ book is positively appreciated, precisely from a Jewish point of view: “it [= the book] excels in artistic art and a strong emotional expression of the heroic plots in the war of the Jews for their freedom.”<sup>47</sup>

The Mizrahi Religious Zionist educational stream created a unique curriculum that reflects the national dimension and the demand that the teaching of history create in the child “a brave connection to the people of Israel and the Land of Israel, our nation’s homeland and the soil of the teachings of the prophets and sages.”<sup>48</sup> The next step was to write original textbooks suitable for the religious Zionist stream and its curriculum. The task was placed on the shoulders of the young and promising historian Jacob Katz, who later became a renowned historian. Katz describes at length Josephus’ character and deeds. He declares that on the one hand, Josephus was impressed by Rome’s power and therefore understood that the revolt had no chance of succeeding, but

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43 Avivi and Perski, *History*, 2:116.

44 Conforti, *Past Tense*, 267.

45 Avivi and Perski, *History*, 2:119.

46 Avivi and Perski, *History*, 2:125.

47 Avivi and Perski, *History*, 2:148. It turns out that the changing evaluation of Josephus did not remain within the school’s walls. In 1938, Natan Bistrizky’s play “Jerusalem and Rome” was staged, centered on the character of Josephus, who is sympathetically designed; see Feldman, “Flavius’ on Trial.”

48 The Supervisors, *The Curriculum*, 20.

that after the rebels' initial successes, "his lust for honor pushed him to seek greatness," leading him to seek and receive the appointment as commander of the Galilee.<sup>49</sup> According to Katz, it was Josephus' selfish personality and pursuit of honor and luxury that drove the rest of his actions. His conduct in the cave at Yodfat after the city's fall is explained by his wanting "to remain alive no matter what."<sup>50</sup> Still, although Katz condemns Josephus, he has no admiration at all for the rebels, viewing them as a bunch of violent people who harmed everything sacred and precious.<sup>51</sup> As befitting someone faithful and committed to the rabbinic tradition, Katz's ideal figure is, of course, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, to whom Katz dedicates a long paragraph. He explains that Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai understood that the revolt was bound to fail and thus left besieged Jerusalem to establish a Torah center in Yavneh.<sup>52</sup> Although Josephus and Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai were apparently in the same political camp, Katz clearly distinguishes between the "cowardly" military leader concerned for his own welfare who joined the Roman camp and the religious leader concerned for the Jewish people's spiritual future.

Katz concludes the depiction of Jerusalem's second destruction with Josephus' activity in Rome. He adopts Simhoni's notion that, through his literary work, Josephus "wanted to show the greatness of the people Israel in the past to the nations" and that Josephus' preoccupation with the Torah was intended "to raise up the faith of his people above all [other] peoples' religions."<sup>53</sup> Katz concludes that "in so doing, Yosef ben Matityahu atoned, through the words he wrote, for his sins as a warrior."<sup>54</sup> This explains why Katz adopts almost without reservation Josephus' historical narrative, despite the fact that he was certainly familiar with Gedaliah Alon's critical studies. There were scholars who were very impressed by Katz's willingness not to "adopt the Zionist activist heroic pantheon;"<sup>55</sup> however, as we have seen, Katz's assessment of Josephus and his writings was shared by other writers.

Compared to Simhoni, Zuta and Spivak, and even Avivi and Persky, Katz's book is a setback. Katz criticizes and even condemns Josephus' personality and sees it as the reason for his actions, while other history textbooks mainly mentioned his political considerations and lack of military experience. Although Katz's final verdict against Josephus is not as severe as Ben Yehuda's,

49 Katz, *Israel*, 129.

50 Katz, *Israel*, 131.

51 Katz, *Israel*, 133–134.

52 Katz, *Israel*, 135.

53 Katz, *Israel*, 143.

54 Katz, *Israel*, 143.

55 Conforti, "Jacob Katz," 175–176.

Katz's distinctive judgmental tone is unusual compared to other contemporary textbooks.<sup>56</sup>

As portrayed in his history textbook, Katz's character is markedly different from the considered and especially critical figure more familiar from his academic writings. Dan Porat is well aware of Katz's dual nature and the contradiction between Katz as a professional historian and Katz as a history educator.<sup>57</sup> Porat explains that according to Katz, the role of history teaching is not to know the craft of the historian and how historical narratives are created but to associate the student with the national and cultural values of his society; as Katz put it: "The role of the study of national history is to raise the national affinity to the heart of one's consciousness."<sup>58</sup> The following episode illustrates this well.

Katz recalls that after his textbook was published, Mordechai Raziell, one of the senior teachers at the Tachkemoni religious school in Tel Aviv, approached him. Raziell, who had strong national views, argued that it was impossible for Josephus' writing to atone for his actions, as there is no atonement for betrayal. Katz was sensitive to this criticism, and in later editions changed the text to "in so doing, Yosef ben Matityahu **thought** to atone, through the words he wrote, for his sins as a warrior" (emphasis added).<sup>59</sup>

The writing about Josephus during the Mandate period reveals greater complexity than has been described in the scholarly literature. The assertion that history teaching was uniformly recruited to national goals in order to inculcate uncritical admiration of the nation's past does not stand the test of the evidence, at least regarding Josephus and the description of the Great Revolt. All history textbooks discussed here saw themselves as committed to national values, yet nevertheless described the complex character of Josephus, examined

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56 Katz's judicial approach is also reflected in his assessment of the zealots. Katz not only accepts Josephus' critique but adds to it. Katz claims that the cessation of the emperor's sacrifice was against the law and seeks to prove this from the Bible. Then he states emphatically: "From the hatred of the young people their foreign approaches in their hearts are laws that are not according to the Torah" (Katz, *Israel*, 124). This harsh criticism does not arise even in Josephus. Considering this, Conforti's claim that Katz, unlike other authors of history textbooks, did not favor a particular ideological position but "assumed the role of the teacher that does not impose ideological concepts on the student" (Conforti, "Jacob Katz," 181), should be reconsidered.

57 Porat, "One Historian."

58 Katz, "On History," 241.

59 Katz, *With My Own Eyes*, 131–132. Katz later regretted this amendment, and completely changed the closing sentence: "As a warrior, Joseph did not add honor to himself, but as a defender of Israel he will be remembered for good" (Katz and Bachrach, *Israel*, 166). Indeed, the judgmental tone towards Josephus remained the same.

his actions according to scholarly criteria, and produced a complex narrative not committed to promoting national values at the cost of trampling “historical truth.”

#### 4 The Third Period: Building a State, Rewriting History?

The foundation of the state of Israel and the creation of a state educational system offered an opportunity to unify the streams of education and write a unitary curriculum. Indeed, the state religious stream maintained some autonomy, which enabled it to make special adaptations to the curriculum and to use its own textbooks. In 1954, a curriculum for elementary schools (grades 1–8) was introduced. It was based on the recognition that education had a central role to play in transforming the various ethnicities and groups in the young state into “a free people in its land, which knows how to live in freedom and liberty and to protect it in strength and wisdom, to be worthy of the name ‘Israel’ ... a people which ... in our days has been given the lofty and challenging task of being ‘ready for tomorrow’s redemption.’”<sup>60</sup> This national sentiment was expressed by the Education Minister and prominent historian Ben-Zion Dinur. The national importance of education in building Israeli society has been emphasized and made salient in many diverse ways and has been widely discussed in the last decades.<sup>61</sup>

According to Dinur, the goal of history education is to “provide students the recognition that the founding of the State of Israel is the fruit of generations of loyalty and yearning ... and to plant in them the love for the State of Israel and the desire to act on its behalf and protect its existence.”<sup>62</sup> Such a curriculum included an honorable place was given to the Great Revolt, including “Yosef Flavius[!]” and “the failure of the defense of the Galilee and its causes.”<sup>63</sup> The clear national sentiment of Dinur’s agenda would lead one to assume that Josephus would not be one of the admired figures in this curriculum. However, the textbooks and the state curriculum were not always in accord. In the State Religious Education system, it was not considered necessary to change the textbooks. Katz’s book, with its moderate and complex narrative and its

60 Ministry of Education, *Curriculum*, 14.

61 Rein, “Ben Zion Dinur;” Conforti, *Past Tense*, 237–244; Porat, “Between Nation;” Porat, “One Historian,” 62–64.

62 Ministry of Education, *Curriculum*, 18.

63 Ministry of Education, *Curriculum*, 82.

slightly empathetic attitude to Josephus, remained the main textbook through the late 1980s; even the author of this chapter used it as a student.

Over time, new textbooks began to be written. The history textbook written by Binyamin Ahiya and Moshe Harpaz for sixth graders according to the new curriculum was the most used for several decades in the General State Education. While previous textbooks dwelled on the origin, character, conduct, and writings of Josephus, in this textbook all these matters were compressed into several relatively short lines. However, the ambivalence toward Josephus remained. On the one hand, he is described as a “wise and clever man,” on the other hand “his heart was not whole with the role placed on him and with the revolt in general.”<sup>64</sup> The reason for this, according to the book, is, of course, the high esteem in which Josephus held Rome’s strength. The authors’ criticism is leveled primarily at his military tactics: they argue that instead of fortifying his troops in Yodfat, Josephus should have used guerilla tactics. The *Bellum Judaicum* is mentioned as the primary source for the period without any reservation.

Two years after the publication of the curriculum for elementary schools, an updated curriculum was written for high schools by Michael Ziv, one of the most prominent figures in the young education system. According to Ziv, the goal of history education is “[t]o develop in the student social activism, out of a sense of responsibility to the future. We do not intend to raise historians, but rather, citizens, participants in the creation and formation of history.”<sup>65</sup> Ziv distinguishes between the scientific aspects of the study of history and the goals of teaching. Students are not supposed to be junior historians, but rather citizens loyal to their state. The goal of history classes is “to plant in the heart of the youth the Jewish national recognition ... to instill in the student’s heart the recognition of the State of Israel’s importance for ensuring the corporeal and continued historical existence of the people of Israel.”<sup>66</sup>

Ziv then began writing history textbooks for high school that would suit the new curriculum. Despite Ziv’s national declarations, for him, Yosef ben Matityahu was neither a traitor nor a scoundrel. Rather, Ziv presents Josephus as a complex person, who, while greatly impressed by Rome’s strength, excelled in “his strong faith in the redemption of Israel ... and his being a descendant of the Hasmoneans and his expertise in Roman affairs were of great benefit.”<sup>67</sup> Ziv’s textbook refrains from criticizing Josephus’ activities in the Galilee and

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64 Ahiyah and Harpaz, *History of Israel*, 209.

65 Ziv, *Teaching History*, 14.

66 The Ministry of Education, *Curriculum for Secondary School*, 35.

67 Ziv, Kirschenbaum, and Abramsky, *History*, 176–177.

mentions that Justus of Tiberias testified to Josephus' commitment to the revolt and the war against Rome. Criticism of Josephus is levied only through the words of John of Giscala. Although the book states that Josephus deceived the warriors in the Yodfat cave, immediately afterwards it offers Josephus' explanation that God had given him a prophetic role. So, the book not only does not reject this argument, but even gives it a rational interpretation, according to which Josephus had intended his destiny to be one of chronicling and passing on the history of the war to future generations. In general, the book accepts Josephus' version of the Great Revolt, except for the account of the burning of the Temple. The story of the destruction concludes, as in other textbooks, with praises to Josephus' literary endeavor. His literary corpus is described as a set of books meant to defend the Jewish people's honor and faith. In this context, *Against Apion* receives especially high praise, and Ziv declares that "this book secured its author a place of honor in Jewish history."<sup>68</sup>

In scholarly literature, it is accepted that in the first two decades of the State of Israel, history teaching was enlisted in the service of stimulating national needs, building the nation, and emphasizing faith in the rectitude of the Zionist enterprise.<sup>69</sup> Yet, analyzing how the figure of Josephus was shaped in history textbooks indicates that even during this time, Josephus continued to be presented as a complex person, and the textbooks refrained from hurling derisive epithets at him, such as "traitor" and "coward." It is almost certain that the descriptions of Josephus were influenced by progress in research and the academic advice provided to the textbooks' authors, yet the fact that up-to-date academic research served as a shield to the explicit national trends of the state curriculum is highly significant.

## 5 The Fourth Period: From National History to Scientific History

In the 1960s, history education in the Western world underwent a major upheaval. Up to that time, history education had been seen as part of a means of establishing national identity. Critical voices, primarily critical of its consequences for the rise of militant nationalism, had little if any impact on the curricula in the West.<sup>70</sup> A turning point came in the 1960s. The American edu-

68 Ziv, Kirschenbaum, and Abramsky, *History*, 202.

69 See above, n. 61, and especially Mathias, "Nationalizing Education;" Mathias, "Curriculum," 49–50. For particular case studies see, e.g., Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*; Kizel, *Subservient History*, 57–79

70 Marsden, "Poisoned History."

cational psychologist Benjamin Bloom emphasized that the goal of school learning should not be familiarity with knowledge but, rather, gaining learning skills, which would assist the student in any field the student should choose later in life.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Jerome Bruner, the American cognitive psychologist, argued that when dealing with the various fields of knowledge (literature, history, science, etc.), the goal is not familiarity with the particular content of these fields, but rather understanding the “structure of knowledge” of each one of them.<sup>72</sup> Put differently, historical studies should not transform the student into a loyal member of the community, but rather into a junior historian. A sense of belonging and identity as pedagogical goals were replaced by the ability to ask questions and read critically.<sup>73</sup>

The Israeli education system adopted these approaches, and over the course of the 1970s curricula and textbooks were rewritten in all subjects taught in schools, including history.<sup>74</sup> The middle school (Grades 7–9) history curriculum starts with setting five goals in the field of cognition. Only the first goal involves acquiring knowledge of historical events, while the rest deal with the skills needed for historical research, including being able to utilize sources of information fully, to make comparisons between historical phenomena, to search for causes and consequences, and the like. The next three goals are defined as goals in the field of values. The first pertains to judging historical events in accordance with moral standards; the second deals with “fostering understanding and tolerance towards ... other people and nations.” Only the last deals with identity and belonging: “cultivating a feeling of identification with the nation and the state.”<sup>75</sup> Toward the end of the 1970s, a new curriculum was also written for high school. In this curriculum, also, national values were pushed aside in favor of historical skills and cognitive abilities.<sup>76</sup>

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71 Bloom and Krathwohl, *Taxonomy*.

72 Bruner, *The Process*.

73 For a review of the ‘curriculum revolution’ in the Western world, see Lévesque and Clark, “Historical Thinking,” for its historical background and implications see Colby, “The Emergence.” Although she deals with the UK, the processes described took place in other Western countries. Indeed, leaders and supporters of the scientifically oriented curriculum have from time to time argued that they do not intend to raise young historians. That, they sought to instill in school students the use of investigative methods routine in the historical discipline, see the critique of Herbst, “Review,” 327.

74 On the curriculum reform in Israel see Ben-Peretz and Zajdman, “Three Generations.” On the history curriculum reform see Conforti, *Past Tense*, 247–250; Mathias, “Curriculum,” 47–65. On the debates about the history curriculum see Porat, “One Historian,” 65–69.

75 Ministry of Education, *The History Curriculum* (1975), 9.

76 Ministry of Education, *The History Curriculum* (1977), 4.

Were these changes also reflected in the textbooks that followed them? Dan Porat dealt with how the Second Temple period and notably the Great Revolt were described in history textbooks from 1948 to the 1990s. According to Porat, the curricular revolution of the 1970s did not lead to a fundamental change in the textbooks written, and only in the 1990s following political and social changes can a real change be noticed.<sup>77</sup> However, reading the textbooks' assessment of Josephus shows that the curricular changes began to make a real mark already much earlier.

During the 1970s, a textbook was published for students of state elementary education written in the Ministry of Education in the Curriculum Division.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, one can find in this book a nationalist tone, as Porat noted;<sup>79</sup> nevertheless, it is different from its predecessors in many ways. Appreciation and glory are reserved exclusively for Masada's fighters.<sup>80</sup> The zealots who fought in Jerusalem are described in a rather negative way. Their violent acts and murder are described in detail, and to some extent the city's fall is imputed to their duty.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, the chapter opens with a rather long reference to Josephus as a historical source.<sup>82</sup> In this context, there is no mention of Yodfat's story or Josephus' 'betrayal.' Instead, his books are described as a primary source of information. Many passages from Josephus and other sources are quoted following the new curriculum, which emphasizes historical skills. Students are asked to analyze the sources and extract information from them. Concerning Elazar Ben Yair's speech, the degree of credibility of Josephus is also examined.<sup>83</sup> However, concerning Josephus, the military commander, the book does not criticize him, and his actions in Yodfat are hardly mentioned.<sup>84</sup>

A fundamental change can also be seen in the State Religious Education system. A textbook written by Akiva Doron within the Curriculum Division takes a judgmental tone when discussing Josephus, but it is much more moderate.<sup>85</sup> The book describes Josephus' preparatory actions in the Galilee in

77 Porat, "Reconstructing."

78 The Curriculum Division, *History Lessons*.

79 Porat, "Reconstructing," 203.

80 The Curriculum Division, *History Lessons*, 103. Cf. Porat, "Reconstructing," 202–204, who takes the Masada episode as a representation of the book's national tone.

81 The Curriculum Division, *History Lessons*, 96–101.

82 The Curriculum Division, *History Lessons*, 55.

83 The Curriculum Division, *History Lessons*, 104–110.

84 This was already noticed by Porat, "Reconstructing," 202, but he didn't see it as an important change.

85 Doron, *From Generation-to-Generation*. The book was written over the 1970's and 1980's. The 1991 edition is the latest edition. The book was the most circulated in the State Religious Education system until 2020.



a neutral manner and adds the hypothesis that Josephus didn't have "the vigor and enthusiasm for battle, which characterized the zealots of the Galilee."<sup>86</sup> The claim that Josephus already thought to defect to the Roman side is attributed to John of Giscala but is not presented as the book's position. However, Josephus' surrender is explained by saying that he "wanted to save his skin."<sup>87</sup> As a rule, the book accepts Josephus' narrative without reservation. The culprits in the destruction are the zealots.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, there is a suggestion in the book to discuss whether Josephus was a traitor or not, but the book does not provide enough information to address the question. More importantly, there is an impression that the book is trying to avoid charged questions. The descriptions of the Civil War in Jerusalem are short and laconic, and the Masada affair is not mentioned at all.

These changes, which permeated the new textbooks, are clearly reflected in *Jewish Society in Second Temple Times: Developments and Struggles in the Period between the Return to Zion and the Bar Kokhba Revolt*.<sup>89</sup> This book was written for the secondary school with the assistance of four academic advisors and it reflects a completely different didactic approach. Previous history textbooks would present the student with an organized account of the historical narrative, in which passages from sources and discussions are presented in a separate and distinct context. Yet in this book, long passages from historical sources and from the work of modern scholars are integrated into the narrative historical lecture. While reading, the student is prompted, by way of leading questions, to delve into the ancient historians' passages and modern scholarly discourse in order to reconstruct the historical realities.<sup>90</sup>

The book gives primary attention to evaluating Josephus' credibility and motivations. For example, after presenting the "fourth philosophy," the students are asked: "How does Yosef ben Matityahu describe the people of the 'fourth philosophy'? What, in your opinion, did he want to achieve in presenting their opinions as a transformation of the fathers' ways? What do you learn about Yosef ben Matityahu's attitude to the people of the 'fourth philosophy'?"<sup>91</sup> As a whole, the book includes many comments about Josephus' writing and its reliability. One of the clear examples of this relates to the episode of the burning of the Temple. Students are introduced to Josephus' account, according to

86 Doron, *From Generation-to-Generation*, 350.

87 Doron, *From Generation-to-Generation*, 353.

88 Doron, *From Generation-to-Generation*, 364.

89 Qisos-Edalman, *Jewish Society*.

90 These methods were adopted in other history textbooks; see Mathias, "Curriculum," 54-55.

91 Qisos-Edalman, *Jewish Society*, 237.

which the Temple was burnt against Titus' wishes, and in opposition, the statement of Sulpicius Severus is provided, according to which Titus was directly responsible for the burning of the Temple. Students are then asked to explain their position on this contradiction.<sup>92</sup>

However, the critique of Josephus as a primary source in this book does not stem from rejection of or alienation toward the "traitor to his people." Instead, the book almost reluctantly describes the conflict between John of Giscala and Yosef ben Matityahu. The Yodfat episode is recounted in short, without hinting that Josephus survived due to an act of deception.<sup>93</sup> In general, the book completely avoids making clear ethical judgments of Josephus and his actions. In fact, while the author proposes that the teacher should conduct a public trial of Josephus among the students, it suggests that the teacher should notice that "the intent for such a discussion is not to reach extreme conclusions of complete rejection or approval. It is important that students understand the person's complexity and the problem with relating to his book, and get used to seeing that there is a lot of gray in the world, not only black or white."<sup>94</sup>

The presentation of Josephus' character exposes two processes that transpired in Israeli society and its education system. The scientific aspect of the textbook, which engages with source criticism and reveals the disagreements among scholars, is an outstanding example of the curricula written in the previous decade, inspired by the curriculum revolution in the English-speaking world. Yet the last sentence from the pedagogical guidebook for teachers indicates that this revolution was a part of a deep change Israeli society was undergoing at the same time. The textbooks written in the 1950s and 1960s were written out of a strong and naïve faith in the righteousness of Zionism and the State of Israel. These faiths were undermined after the Yom Kippur War, the public dispute on the settlement in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, and the unending war in Lebanon. The recognition "that there is a lot of gray in the world, not only black or white," expresses the appeal and rupture processes that Israeli society experienced.<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, the combination of both processes, the educational and the social, enabled a sort of transformation of Josephus' status in history textbooks. Until this point, we have seen that all history textbooks evaluated Josephus' personality and deeds against moral

92 Qisos-Edalman, *Jewish Society*, 302–303.

93 Qisos-Edalman, *Jewish Society*, 288.

94 Brody (Edalman), *Jewish Society*, 121.

95 These processes were discussed intensively by many scholars. The most thorough research is Almog, *Farewell*. For a partial summary of his conclusions in English see Almog "Shifting." For another assessment of these social and cultural changes, see Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli*, 213–308. I thank Dr. Yossi Londin for his assistance here.

and national values, but Josephus the historian was accepted almost without change, and even was praised. Now, the tables had turned. Adoption of the scientific-critical approach facilitated a precise analysis of Josephus' writings and awareness of his biases. At the same time, the recognition that "there is no black and white in life," enabled a more tolerant and comprehensive evaluation of the man and an understanding of his ideological leanings. Doron's book represents the other side of the conflicts and rifts in Israeli society. The book avoided, apparently intentionally, discussing explosive issues, such as the Civil War in Jerusalem and the suicide on Masada, instead offering a rather pale picture of the events.

## 6 Josephus in the 21st Century: Continuity and Dialogue

During the past forty years, two additional curricula have been drawn up. Although the new history textbooks retreat from the in-depth scientific approach, the character of Josephus remains quite complex.

The most common textbook currently used in elementary state education is *Journey to the Past: Greece, Rome, and Jerusalem*.<sup>96</sup> Reading the chapter on the great revolt, the most striking thing about it is the absence of adjectives. The zealots and the Masada fighters do not receive praise, while the moderates or opponents of the revolt are not indecent in any way. Previous books had suggested directly or implicitly that Josephus' problematic personality led to the failure of the defense of the Galilee. Now this failure is attributed to the mere lack of military education of Josephus.<sup>97</sup> The book avoids any judicial evaluation of Josephus' actions. Instead, it devotes extensive space to questioning his degree of objectivity as having taken part in the war.<sup>98</sup> Although neutral in tone, reading between the lines one can detect the change in values that has taken place in Israeli society. The book sums up the great revolt in these words: "In the fall of Masada in 73 the great revolt ended, the revolt took a hefty toll on the Jewish people living in Judea. The temple ... was destroyed. Jerusalem was ruined, and the Jews lost hope of gaining independence. In this war of destruction many Jews were killed, many others died of starvation and plagues."<sup>99</sup> For the first time in a history textbook, there is an emphasis on the casualties, rather than the loss of the temple. More than that, the rebels and their families

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96 Rhein, *Journey*.

97 Rhein, *Journey*, 177.

98 Rhein, *Journey*, 189.

99 Rhein, *Journey*, 187–188.

were not killed in the “Great Revolt” but as part of the “Destruction War.” The sensitivity of Israeli society to loss of life in war is manifested not only in present battles, but also in past wars.

These trends are also evident in the book *From a Temple State to the People of the Book: A History of the Second Temple*, intended for high school students.<sup>100</sup> Like its predecessor, the various groups and personalities of the period are described neutrally. The judicial assessment of Josephus’ actions is replaced by a scholarly discussion of the credibility of Josephus as a historical source.<sup>101</sup> However, the book goes one step further. Not only are the Masada fighters and zealots not praised, but the book also devotes ample space to the ‘Masada myth’ that has developed in recent generations. The book concludes the discussion of Masada’s status in Zionist-Israeli culture as follows:

In the Masada myth, emphasis was placed on the heroism of the Masada warriors, their courage, and their last chance in the war for the freedom of the Jews. For the most part, those involved in the myth ignored the tragic end of its protagonists and their mass suicide. Only details from the story that helped educate the youth for courage, sacrifice, and love for the country were emphasized in the myth, while the details that did not serve these values were omitted.<sup>102</sup>

These concluding remarks are almost a negative reflection of Ben-Yehuda’s enthusiastic remarks about the heroism of the zealots. They teach about the long route which history education in Israel has taken, from an instrument used by Zionist educators for instilling a national ethos and collective memory to a field of knowledge that criticizes the fundamental beliefs of the national narrative.<sup>103</sup> Critical thinking, however, and the distance with which the books report on the history of the nation, provoked a heated public debate. The turn of the 21st century was accompanied by lively public interest in the status of history education and its ideological implications for Israeli students.<sup>104</sup> In

100 Cohen, *From a Temple State*. There are a few books for secondary school: Avieli-Tabibian, *Journeys*; Schwartz, *From a Temple State*; for the State Religious Education system, see Ilany, *And These are the Histories*. All these books give only a shortened version of the period. They omit treatment of Josephus almost completely.

101 Cohen, *From a Temple State*, 129–130.

102 Cohen, *From a Temple State*, 150.

103 The critical trend is also reflected in other issues in current history textbooks, see Teff-Seker, “Attitudes.”

104 See for example Naveh, *Past in Turmoil*. Israel is no exception. At the turn of the 21st-century, national identity and globalization issues have led to disputes over history education in many countries; see Popp, “National Textbook.”

the first decade of the twenty-first century, public criticism even led to the withdrawal of a textbook because some sectors in Israeli society felt it had a leftwing bias.<sup>105</sup>

Over the last decades, there has also been an increasing split within the education system between the General State Education system and the State Religious Education system. This split has been made possible thanks to the dramatic political changes of the late 1970s. The first curriculum in history for the elementary State Religious Education system was written only at the beginning of the new millennium.<sup>106</sup> However, the significant change was not within the Ministry of Education but with the rise of ideological groups outside of the Ministry of Education that strive to express their ideological perceptions in schools.<sup>107</sup>

The criticism of the leftist tendency of the history curriculum and textbooks stimulated to the religious right's growing interest in history studies, which culminated in the founding of a publishing house, the Har Bracha Institute, aimed at writing and distributing textbooks for the State Religious schools.<sup>108</sup> The Har Bracha Institute is an arm of the Har Bracha Yeshiva, located in the Har Bracha settlement south of Nablus. Since its early years, the yeshiva has had much interest in history. It was founded by students of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, who, like his father, Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, saw history as an arena of divine revelation. Rabbi Ze'ev Sultanovich, who is part of the yeshiva's faculty and who serves as a consultant and advisor for the textbooks' authors, dedicates his time to discerning the theological meaning behind upheavals in world events, especially within Jewish history.<sup>109</sup>

Over the past decade, the Har Bracha Institute has published history textbooks that aim "to show the hand of God in historical processes and the world's

105 Raz-Krakotzkin, "History Textbooks;" Goldberg and Gerwin, "Israeli History."

106 The differences between the general school system and the religious one goes back to the first curriculum of 1954. However, differences grew over the years and especially after the religious school system began writing its own curricula, see Hofman, "The Politics." The State Religious Education system new curriculum is discussed by Weintraub, "The Bible."

107 On the awakening of the interest in history and history teaching among the right-wing intellectuals, see Shapira, "The Strategies;" Goldberg and Gerwin, "Israeli History," 114–115. On the reactions in the religious-right-wing-settlers sector, see Weintraub, "The Bible."

108 Weintraub, "The Bible," 52; Weintraub and Naveh, "Faith-Based History," 53.

109 Sultanovich's historiosophical conception is articulated in his book *Intelligence at Times*. For scholarly discussion of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook and Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook, and their historiosophy, see Garb, "Rabbi Kook." On the imparting of these ideas and historical thinking in the yeshivot among Rabbi Kook's followers, see Fuchs, "The Construction." There are some political and ideological differences between Har Hamor yeshiva and Har Bracha yeshiva, but the historiosophical approach is quite similar.

progress toward the Redemption."<sup>110</sup> The location of the yeshiva in Judea and Samaria hints that this redemption is characterized by a radical national approach. Recently, the institute published a textbook for sixth graders in the State Religious Education system.<sup>111</sup> In accordance with the institute's religious and national tendencies, it is natural that it attributes great significance to the events surrounding the destruction of the Second Temple. The chapter titled "Revolt and Destruction" opens as follows:

In contrast to other nations, most of whom were integrated into the great Roman Empire and indulged in its delights, the Jewish nation launched an out-and-out war for its freedom and its national identity. This desperate war was commemorated throughout the Roman Empire as no other battle ever was.

The revolt took a heavy toll on the Jewish people. The temple was destroyed, and tens of thousands of people were killed. However, today about two thousand years after the Great Revolt, most nations continue to one degree or another the Greco-Roman culture to which they are accustomed. The Jewish people still live and create within the independent cultural space whose existence it was fighting for.<sup>112</sup>

Against this background, the words of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda sound remarkably restrained. Considering this, it is surprising to discover in this same book the assessment that "the decision to revolt against the Romans was not a considered decision taken by the Jewish leadership but was forced on the nation by the radicals."<sup>113</sup> The book condemns the Sicarii and the Zealots because they did not agree to accept the moderate leadership of the revolt. And what about Josephus? The book notes without any reservations that he led the fighting in the Galilee, and only "when the situation seemed hopeless he tried to convince the rebels to submit."<sup>114</sup> As for the Yodfat episode, the book's author writes only that "he persuaded his companions that instead of killing each other they should give themselves up to the Romans."<sup>115</sup> It is true that students are asked directly, "*Do you think Josephus is considered a traitor to his people?*", but given the negative image of the Zealots and the reasonable way Josephus

110 Har Bracha Yeshiva website, retrieved 19 May 2023, [http://yhb.org.il/?page\\_id=5](http://yhb.org.il/?page_id=5) [Hebrew]. Quoted and translated in Weintraub and Naveh, "Faith-Based History," 45.

111 Hertz, *The Struggle*.

112 Hertz, *The Struggle*, 107.

113 Hertz, *The Struggle*, 114.

114 Hertz, *The Struggle*, 117.

115 Hertz, *The Struggle*, 117.

is presented in this book, they have no reason to judge him as such. The book goes on to describe the wars of the Zealots at length and, in fact, blames them for the destruction. On the other hand, the book refrains from saying anything negative about Vespasian and Titus.

Paradoxically, the Har Bracha book accepts Josephus' narrative. Why? Weintraub and Naveh, who studied the Har Bracha textbooks for secondary schools, introduce two models of faith-based history books.<sup>116</sup> The national-religious model holds that national identity is linked to religious identity. It is belief in and adherence to religious customs that have shaped the nation's identity and enabled its existence. Such a model characterizes the books of the previous generation (including Katz's book). The other model is the divine model, according to which the purpose of the study of history is to show how God leads and conducts the world.

Although Weintraub and Naveh emphasize several times that Har Bracha is a settlement on the outskirts of Nablus, they ignore the national dimension and catalog Har Bracha books within the divine model. According to Weintraub and Naveh, the national aspect is woven into the redemption process led by God. Nevertheless, the Har Bracha Institute, as a Religious Zionist institute, is strongly committed to religious and national values. This dual commitment may sometimes create internal contradictions, both in everyday life and on the ideological level.

Indeed, the tension between the national aspect expressed in hatred of Rome and an understanding of the rebels' motivation versus condemnation of the rebels and acceptance of rabbinic reservations and criticism is reflected in Rabbi Sultanovich's book. According to Rabbi Sultanovich, the rabbinic leadership found itself in an "impossible" situation: "It was impossible not to support the revolt,"<sup>117</sup> but on the other hand, the rabbis knew that the Jewish people suffered from spiritual and religious defects. Finally, Rabbi Sultanovich argues that "the leaders of the revolt were not rabbis but ordinary people," and they are condemned in rabbinic literature because they "did not accept the rabbinic directions."<sup>118</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Weintraub and Naveh, "Faith-Based History," 48–51.

<sup>117</sup> Sultanovich, *Intelligence at Times*, 1.303.

<sup>118</sup> Sultanovich, *Intelligence at Times*, 1.304. It should be noted that the need to present a historical picture that supports this historiosophical interpretation undermines the complexity of the past. According to Josephus, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel (*BJ* 4.159), one of the senior members of the Pharisee leadership, was one of the revolt's leaders. This fact is not mentioned in Rabbi Sultanovich's book, and only secondarily mentioned in the history textbook.

This approach is reflected in the textbook. The national declaration made at the chapter's opening clearly expresses the author's nationalistic worldview. One might therefore have expected a rejection of Josephus and his books. Yet the same chapter expresses commitment to Jewish tradition, particularly rabbinic literature. Along with Josephus' writings, the book quotes and discusses several rabbinic traditions. The two most prominent are the rabbinic saying that the Second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred, and the story of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai's escape from Jerusalem. The first tradition blames the destruction not on the Romans but rather, according to the author's interpretation, on the conflict among the zealot groups. This position leads to a view that Josephus' description is supported by and provides clear historical weight to rabbinic tradition. Blaming the zealots, however, of course reduces the blame on the Romans.

The tradition of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai's flight sheds positive light on a person who, like Josephus, fled to the Roman side. The author's historiographic approach provides an additional dimension to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai's story: Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai fled to Yavneh not only because he believed the revolt had no chance, but because he knew how to interpret the will of God. The revolt against Rome was against God's wishes, while standing alongside Rome accorded with the divinely planned path of history. For this reason, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai not only fled Jerusalem but also blessed Vespasian and prophesied his reign. The textbook's author understood well that she could not condemn Josephus, who had acted just like Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai.

The author's dual, contradictory commitment is also expressed in her treatment of the Masada episode, which is given a considerable space in the book. At the beginning of the episode the book declares, "Masada has become a symbol of fighting to the end for independence, liberty, and the freedom to choose."<sup>119</sup> This declaration is similar to the position of the 1940s and 1950s textbooks, in which Masada was given a central place in the national ethos. Yet the approach is then immediately changed. The book continues with lengthy passages from the speech given by Eleazar ben Yair (as recorded by Josephus), followed by an explanation and evaluation of the speech, concluding with the question, "Was this really a sense of the victory of the spirit, or of painful fall and loss of life?" The book poses three additional questions. The first pertains to Josephus: "Why, in your opinion, did Josephus describe the last moments on Masada in such an impressive manner? (Think also about a certain event

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119 Hertz, *The Struggle*, 118.



Josephus thought about while writing the passage).<sup>120</sup> Students are asked to compare Josephus' positive judgment of the Masada rebels to his own actions in Yodfat. In this way, a positive aspect is added to Josephus' character, at least from a national perspective. This question is followed by two questions that undermine the positive description of the rebels. Students are asked to think of some of the justifications expressed by the women who refused to die along with the other zealots and their families. Subsequently, students are asked to put themselves in the place of the fighters and explain "Which side would you have chosen—to surrender to Rome or to continue the war to the end?"<sup>121</sup>

Regarding the Masada episode, too, there is a contradiction between the ideological declaration at the chapter's opening describing Masada as a heroic national symbol and the discussion that obliges the students to note the problematic evaluation of the rebels' mass suicide. The equivocal judgment of the Masada zealots also reflects on Josephus' character, of course. Perhaps Josephus acted correctly in Yodfat, and his actions can be justified, just like the students have now justified and understood the flight of the women from death on the mountaintop.

Again, the ambiguity, and perhaps even contradiction, regarding Masada appears to be connected to the author's dual commitment. A textbook committed to national values must give a prominent place to Masada, which is a powerful part of the Zionist ethos. Indeed, the book is very aware of this: "Masada is one of the most popular sites in Israel."<sup>122</sup> The book even acknowledges the experience of visiting Masada, addressing students as follows: "In visiting the site, attempt to feel those moments before the glorious landscape."<sup>123</sup> In order to provide students in the classroom the experience of visiting Masada, the book includes two color pages of the landscape and archaeological findings of the site. Masada's presence in the book is connected to the site's status in the Zionist-Israeli ethos, but Masada is not part of the rabbinic collective memory. As mentioned, from the point of view of the rabbis, to whom the book's author is committed, the correct choice was that of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, who preferred to accept Roman rule rather than committing a suicide or fight. Thus, the book is obliged to raise questions about the actions of the Masada rebels and to prepare students to recognize that the right path at the time was that of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai.

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120 Hertz, *The Struggle*, 119.

121 Hertz, *The Struggle*, 119.

122 Hertz, *The Struggle*, 119.

123 Hertz, *The Struggle*, 119.

In conclusion, Rabbi Kook's national-religious theology seems to intertwine and empower nationality and religion alike. History seems to be a sweeping and precise movement led by God. In practice, the dual commitment to the nation and religion creates gaps and contradictions in deciphering history and appreciating its meaning. Thus, paradoxically, a textbook written in the far right-wing condemns the rebels, raises a question mark concerning the Masada warriors, and is in no hurry to judge Josephus.

## 7 Conclusion

History textbooks throughout the world and in Israel have been perceived as a given state's agents for imparting the national ethos. Indeed, Israeli history textbooks published until World War I express a well-formed national position, expressed *inter alia* in insults and condemnation of Josephus' actions and deeds. However, following the war, there was a major shift. Although the construction of the Jewish national home continued in great force, and many of the textbook authors saw themselves as committed to consolidating Jewish Zionist nationalism, the attitude towards Josephus changed. Textbooks began to recognize and even praise his literary contribution to the Jewish people. The derogatory name-calling ceased and a clearer understanding of his motives begins to appear. The reason for this is likely the commitment of the textbooks' authors both to academic research and to the scientific values of the curricula. In contrast to the widespread view in the scholarly literature that textbooks are greatly influenced by changes regarding nationalism and the nation's status, it appears that, regarding Josephus at least, the commitments of the textbooks' authors to Jewish nationalism, to the scholarly literature, to curricula, and even to the religious world and rabbinic literature led them by various paths to present Josephus to students as a complex character.

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