According to Josephus, Judaea and Galilee were periodically infested with brigands, from the “archbrigand” Hezekiah, who was murdered by the ambitious young Herod, to John son of Levi and Jesus the Galilean, both prominent leaders in the Jewish rebellion against Rome. HENGEL and RENGSTORF would have us believe, however, that such “brigands” were not actually brigands at all 1). Indeed modern historians generally agree with the ancient Roman historians that once Augustus had re-established law and order, the world was safe for Roman civilization 2). “The Imperial peace keeps every corner of the earth safe from the fear of bandits’ attacks.” Regarding Syria-Palestine in particular, Ramsay MACMULLEN reassures us in his survey of “enemies of the Roman order” that bandits never established themselves dangerously, there being little or no trouble at all from the first half of the first century till the adventures of the audacious outlaw Claudius in the 190s 3). MACMULLEN, however, would appear to have overlooked most of the reports regarding banditry by Josephus, including the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66-70 which, according to the Jewish historian who participated in the events, was provoked by and partly led by brigands. It would seem necessary therefore to examine more carefully the reality and character of the phenomena which Josephus calls “banditry”.

If MACMULLEN overlooks the evidence on bandits in Josephus, HENGEL and others misinterpret it. The work of HENGEL and RENGSTORF illustrates two influential and widespread misconceptions about Josephus’ use of the nomenclature of banditry: (a) that Josephus employs this terminology predominantly in very general

2) For example, L. ROBERT, *Etudes anatoliennes* (Paris 1937), 96. The quotation following in the text is from a historian at the time of Tiberius.
terms, primarily as a polemical moral judgement, thus descrediting people who are not bandits at all, but religiously faithful Jewish liberationists, and blaming them for the disastrous revolt against Rome; and (b) that Josephus uses “banditry” as a summarizing concept for the Zealots, understood in broad general terms as the Jewish movement of liberation from Roman rule. These are misleading over-simplifications. The situation is considerably more complex than would appear from scholarship such as Hengel’s.

To (a): Josephus presents no such consistent castigation of the Jewish rebels in terms of banditry. Some of the more important polemical passages often mentioned in this connection (e.g., War 2, 652ff.; 5, 443) do not even use the terminology in casting such moral judgment. Especially striking is that “banditry” is missing as a characterization in the lengthy recital of the different rebel groups and their activities in War 7, 253-274. In a very few passages Josephus does use “banditry” in a general and pejorative sense in polemics against people who were probably not actual bandits, although some of their actions appear brigand-like from Josephus’ point of view. In War 2, 274-275 he compares certain leaders of “the revolutionaries” in Jerusalem at the time of the procurator Albinus to brigand-chiefs or tyrants. Similarly, in a summary comment, Ant. 17, 285, he labels as “brigandage” the spontaneous popular uprisings following the death of Herod in 4 BCE. In a few other passages Josephus condemns

4) Similarly, Salo Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews II (Philadelphia 1937), 46-47, even assimilates the “zealots” to the brigands or guerrillas; and A. Momigliano, in Cambridge Ancient History, vol. X (Cambridge 1934), 853-860, identifies the brigands as bands of extremist Pharisees and makes brigands and Zealots the same. Hengel assumes that the (non-Jewish) brigands in Trachonitis mentioned by Josephus in War 1, 398-399 and Ant. 15, 344-348; 16, 271-284, 292, 347-348, are actual brigands. We may wonder why, then, according to Hengel, pp 29, 42-47, Josephus suddenly shifts his use of the nomenclature when he discusses Jewish “brigands”.

5) Vr. Hengel, op. cit., 45. Hengel’s discussion of “Die λῃστεία bei Josephus” contains a number of questionable readings, inaccurate references, and misleading assumptions, esp. on pp. 43, 45-46. For example, for the statement that the brigands are, according to Josephus, “die Hauptschuldigen am Ausbruch des jüdischen Krieges” the primary reference given is War 2, 417, a passage which has nothing to do with “brigands”. In the following study I have used the Loeb Classical Library editions for the texts of Josephus, Dio Cassius, Polybius, Strabo, etc., as well as for the translations (occasionally slightly adapted) quoted at points. Because of the frequency with which the terminology will recur in this study, I have transliterated the Greek (leste, lesteia, etc.) and translated with “bandit” and “brigand” interchangeably.

6) Hengel, ibid., 42-43, apparently reads the “banditry” of the summary statement in Ant. 17, 285 back into the preceding account of the popular uprisings, suggesting that the latter were bandits.