

The First Century CE Jewish Revolts against Rome as Insurgency

The Roman governance of Judaea has been described as inconsistent (e.g., Curran 76-77), and not without some validity. Inconsistencies in particulars, however, should not obscure a discernible and rational template visible in securing the region – one with cultural, political, and military dimensions – which is consistent both with consolidation of influence elsewhere in the empire, and with modern literature on aims and methods of counterinsurgency. I have argued elsewhere that there are consistencies between Vespasian's counterinsurgency campaign against the British, while he commanded the *legio II Augusta*, and his actions during the Jewish revolt, a couple of decades later. In this talk, I would like to adopt a rather larger-scale view, one that acknowledges the details of structural changes between the settlements of Pompey and Vespasian, but focuses chiefly on commonalities. Since the span allowed is but fifteen minutes, I will focus on one facet of the template: the relationship between Roman initiatives in urbanization, military recruitment, and control in the region.

From the very inception of Roman intervention in the region, Pompey and Gabinius began to found or re-found urban centers (e.g., Sebaste/Samaria, Bet Shean/Scythopolis). That such a policy could be justified in reference to rural resistance to, and urban compatibility with, Hellenistic rule prior to the Maccabean revolts may not be relevant – Pompey and his heirs were acting upon cultural imperatives that needed no historical bases. In fact, the cities of the Decapolis and the coast were valuable centers of acculturation to a more cosmopolitan life compatible to Roman influence. So too, were outposts in more remote locales (e.g., Sepphoris). As is well known, these cities sided with the Romans against the Jews in 66 as did, of course, Caesarea Maritima, founded by Herod the Great. Their contribution to Roman operations as logistical and operational bases was significant during the revolt (Roth). Less apparent, perhaps,

was their responsibility for both provoking and deterring revolt. This role derived from the recruitment of urban men into some of the six auxiliary cohorts that comprised the military force immediately available to the Roman magistrate (at various times prefect or procurator). Two cohorts were specifically named as Samaritan (*Ala I Sebastenorum*, *Cohors I Sebastenorum*), both probably created by Herod the Great from this populace, though under the command of Roman advisors. The cohort in Jerusalem (perhaps a *cohors equitata*) may also have recruited locally among the Greek-speaking urban populations, since the Jewish population was not liable for military service. While there were also three Italian auxiliary cohorts, much of the cultural and religious provocations stemmed from the local units, even as they carried out much of the counterinsurgency work before the full-scale outbreak of the revolt.

The recruitment of sympathetic native populations into a counterinsurgency force has become recognized as an essential for long-term stability. In the Roman case, these forces normally operated under the command of Roman officers, who accustomed the natives to imperial discipline and values – indeed, assimilation was a goal for both recruit and recruiter. While the long-term success of the auxiliary arm was notable and enduring, it proved unsatisfactory in Judaea because the traditional hostility of the Samaritan and urban populations was distilled rather than diffused in the cohorts, since Jews isolated themselves from military service. Likewise, the potential effect of urbanization on the area was diminished due to the maintenance of separate social identities even when the populations were mixed. On the other hand, these phenomena diminished the potential threat of the revolt. The failure of social integration into a cosmopolitan identity rapidly caused the revolt to take on the nature of a civil war, in which the rebels fought viciously among themselves. The failure of military integration

spared the Romans and Jewish Ariovistus or Tacfarinas, and left the Jews waging war with more courage than expertise.

In sum, the Romans took their standard template and applied it to Judaea. The problem, perhaps, was less inconsistency than consistency.

Adams, J.P., "The Roman Imperial Army in the East: Social and Governmental Problems," *The Ancient World* 2.4 (1979): 129-137.

Appelbaum, S. "Jews and Service in the Roman Army" in *Roman Frontier Studies* Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press (1971): 181-184.

Curran, J. "'The Long Hesitation': Some Reflections on the Romans in Judaea." *Greece & Rome* 52.1 (2005): 70-98

Gracey, M.H. *The Roman Army in Syria, Judaea and Arabia*. D. Phil. Dissertation, Oxford, 1981.

Gracey, M.H. "The Armies of the Judaeian Client Kings" in Freeman, P., Kennedy, D. [eds.] *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East*. Oxford: BAR (1987): 311-323.

Roth, J. *The logistics of the Roman army in the Jewish war*. PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1990

Speidel, M.P. 'The Roman Army in Judaea under the Procurators' *Ancient Society* 13/14 (1982-3): 233-240.