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## **Masada performances : the contested indentities of touristic spaces**

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MASADA PERFORMANCES: THE CONTESTED  
IDENTITIES OF TOURISTIC SPACES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by

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לסבא וסבתא

Chapter 5 is for Miles Richardson

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## **ABSTRACT**

Masada, a Herodian fortress and the site of an ancient struggle between Jews and Romans that culminated in a mass suicide by 960 Jews, is a symbolically important site for the country of Israel and for the Jewish people. Previous research on Masada has focused on how the story about the site, told through popular culture, in history books, and at the site, has been used to create and maintain a national Israeli and, more broadly, Jewish identity. Masada is the second most visited site in Israel, attracting over 800,000 people each year, and the number of visitors to the site has steadily increased over the last thirty years. When tourists visit Masada, they hear the story of the site and the story is framed so tourists will have a meaningful experience. While some scholars have looked at how the Masada story gets told to tourists who visit the site, these studies all tend to ignore what tourists do at the site. The research, presented this way, seems to assume that tourists and others who hear the story are passive recipients. I argue that tourists who visit Masada take a more active role in the meaning they get from their visit.

In this dissertation I focus on what tourists and others do at Masada. I frame these actions as performances, conscious and deliberate acts that constitute who a person is and how they want to be seen. I argue that the touristic performances at Masada are expressions of the meaning that people get from the site and from being on tour. I conclude that being on tour encourages a fluid approach to individual and national identity. As tourists contend with the site, other tourists, and their own identity, tourist sites can be productive spaces to explore who a person is and who they want to be.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

Masada, an ancient fortress in the Judean desert, is the site of the last stand of a group of Jewish rebels against the Roman army at the end of the first Jewish-Roman war. For nearly 2000 years after that last stand, the fortress stood empty. Beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, though, as young Jews began immigrating to Palestine, more and more people have made the trek into the desert to see the ancient fortress each year. Today, people come to Masada from all over the world and for all sorts of reasons. Some people stay for less than an hour, others for the better part of a day. Some come for educational experiences, some for religious, and some just because the tour book says they must. Many embark on the difficult hour-long hike up the “snake path,” while others are content to take the 3-minute trip to the top via the state-of-the-art cable car. While people have a number of reasons to travel to any particular place, Eitan Campbell, the Director of Masada National Park, stated that people come to Masada to experience the beautiful location, to walk in the footsteps of those who came before them, to explore the history of the site, and finally, to hear and understand the story of the site (Campbell).

The landscape surrounding Masada is striking. Located in the Jordan Rift Valley about ¼ mile from the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth, Masada stands atop a plateau, surrounded by beautiful stark vistas. From the top of Masada visitors can see the Jordan Mountains and the Dead Sea to the east, the Negev, Israel’s vast desert, to the west and south, and the natural springs of Ein Gedi to the north. It is a complex landscape, carved out by annual desert floods and the regular movements of the Dead Sea Rift. The rich minerals that fill the Dead Sea region create striking contrasts in the landscape that shift and change as the sun moves across the sky. At about 1200 feet above the Dead Sea, Masada offers one of the most complete views of this landscape. Additionally, due to its isolation and relative height, Masada is an ideal location to

watch the sun set and rise. Every morning, thousands of visitors hike to the top well before sunrise, position themselves on the eastern ramparts of the fortress, and watch as the sky turns from purple to red and finally to orange as the sun climbs over the mountains. This striking view is not only the backdrop to one of the most important stories in Israeli/Jewish culture, but also the backdrop to a number of cultural performances, including sunrise concerts and an annual opera series put on by the Israeli Opera.

Tourists who come to Masada see the well-maintained Roman architecture and can get an idea of what life might have been like 2,000 years ago. Herod the Great turned the fortress into a palace around the year 37 BCE and despite an earthquake that toppled many of the structures atop Masada in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of the frescos and mosaics are still intact. Thanks to an extensive archaeological dig and restoration project begun in the 1960s, the site looks like it most likely would have before the earthquake. The excavation lasted three years and involved thousands of volunteers from all over the world. When he turned the site over to the state parks authority, Yigael Yadin, the lead archaeologist on the restoration project, stipulated that tourists should be made to feel as though they were walking into an historic site, discovering it for the first time (Campbell).

Many tourists visit Masada to walk in the footsteps of those who came before them. They consider the site an important part of their history and feel compelled to find ways to understand those who tried, 2,000 years ago, to stand against a great army in order to preserve their way of life for future generations. But tourists also come to walk in the footsteps of more recent ancestral explorers, the members of the Jewish youth groups that wandered through the Negev in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, and the people who worked on the excavations. An important aspect for many who come for this reason is the struggle of reaching Masada, as part of the fortress'

appeal is its isolation. The youth groups and archaeologists, the Jewish defenders, and all others who came to Masada in ancient times did so under harsh conditions, including a walk up a steep and winding path that is difficult even in the cooler winter months. Masada's visitors often see their trip as a sort of pilgrimage. They may not wander ten days through the desert anymore to reach the site, but the path they take can help them feel more connected to the site and its story.

Finally, visitors are attracted to the site to hear the story of the Sicarii, the Jewish defenders of Masada. As they stood against insurmountable odds, a fighting force more than forty times the size of their own, the Sicarii opted to take their own lives rather than become slaves to the Romans. Tourists hear the story from tour guides, audio guides available for rent, markers at the site, tour books, and from other tourists. During these tours, particularly the guided but also the self-guided, tourists are often asked to place themselves in the role of the Jewish defenders. They are asked if they would have chosen death at their own hands, slavery, or to fight until dead or captured.

During my research, I never encountered a tourist who came for only one of the above reasons. To some extent, most came for all four. The tourists who visit Masada, like tourists who visit any historic, symbolic site, want to have a meaningful and worthwhile experience. While tourists work to fulfill that desire, they encounter other tourists, tour guides, and groups who all have their own reasons for being there. The everyday life performances of tourists, their habits, quirks, and way of comporting themselves at the site, mix with tour guide performances, performances by other groups and organizations, and the layout of the site according to the demands of the Israeli National Parks Authority (NPA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to create an environment saturated with meaningful performances. In this dissertation I contend that while certain sites like Masada are

symbolically meaningful, it is the myriad of performances of tourists, guides, and others at the site that make the site meaningful and determine the nature of that meaning.

### **Why Masada?**

In previous social scientific studies of Masada the focus has been on the myth, what Ben-Yehuda refers to as a “particularly selective historically invented sequence (narrative) based, partially, on Josephus Flavius’s account, minus some very important details and supplemented by items ranging from a rather liberal interpretation of his writings to sheer fabrication” (307). Ben-Yehuda’s lengthy critique of the Masada myth examines how the story of Masada is and has been told through history books, popular accounts, and by youth groups in pre-state Israel (Palestine). He argues that any account looking to understand the complexities of how a myth becomes established should study “total social structures and/or processes by examining behavioral patterns . . . and as part of larger social processes of change” (310). While Ben-Yehuda offers an in-depth historical account of how the myth has developed and has been used, he fails to address a major aspect of the “total social structure,” the tourists who visit Masada every day. In fact, there has not been a study of Masada that has focused on what tourists do and hear at the site. Yael Zerubavel mentions the importance of tourist activities at Masada, such as Bar Mitzvah and prayer ceremonies held in the synagogue, and explains that the site has become “a place of pilgrimage for Jews outside and inside Israel” (236), but she does not interrogate other tourist activities or explore what else these pilgrims see and do at Masada. Finally, Kelner and Sussun do address the story of Masada that tourists hear when they visit the site with a tour guide, but their focus is on the structure of the narrative and not on the experience of the tour.

As Bruner and Gorfain make clear, the focus on how the Masada story is told is a focus on how power is constituted through the site. Bruner and Gorfain argue that the telling of

authoritative narratives at and about the site confirms Foucault's notion that "power is constituted from the bottom up rather than emanating in some divine manner from the top down" (172). As a story and a site that holds symbolic significance for Israel, it is a wonder that no study has looked explicitly at what people do when they visit Masada. What happens when the mythic story is put in play with the everyday life performances of tourists, guides, and workers at the site? Do these performances challenge or reify commonly held conceptions and interpretations of the myth, and to what extent? Bruner and Gorfain explain that when tourists visit a site like Masada, they "move through the story as [they] move through the site, using all channels of communication—[they] hear the story, read the literature, talk about the story with other tourists, and see the site, photograph it, and touch it" (187). By an engagement with the site, other tourists, and guides, "an event is personalized and made relevant to our own life situation. The story of Masada becomes utterly present, fresh, and unique" (187). It stands to reason that Ben-Yehuda's focus on the history of the narrative might be somewhat misplaced. While I do not argue that studying a site like Masada necessitates understanding the authoritative narratives of the site, I believe that in order to understand the impact of the story and the site, a ground level approach is necessary. A better understanding of the touristic activities at Masada will give us insight into the possible meaning that tourists get from visiting the site. While tourists are surely influenced by the stories they hear at and about the site, I argue that they are at least equally influenced by their own touristic experience.

This argument is not unique in tourism studies. The problem that continues to arise, though, is the extent to which tourists have agency. Edensor explains the problem, arguing that "performative norms need to be continually enacted to retain their power, and the prescriptive conventions and values that inhere in them are rarely disrupted" ("Performing Tourism" 62).

Implicit in this contention is the possibility for tourist performances to be enacted differently, and, hence, for the power of an authoritative account of the site to be challenged. The problem, as Edensor illustrates is

When tourists enter particular stages, they are usually informed by pre-existing discursive, practical, embodied norms which help to guide their performative orientations and achieve a working consensus about what to do. Here then, performance is a ‘discrete concretization of cultural assumptions’ (Carlson, 1996: 16) which mingle everyday and tourist codes of action (71).

The difficulty for tourists in choosing how to play their roles is compounded by the difficulty of knowing that the performance takes place with and for others. As Edensor notes, “this internal and external surveillance may restrict the scope of performances and help to underscore communal conventions about ‘appropriate’ ways of being a tourist” (72). Most tourism scholars address tourist performances in this way, as constrained by site and societal norms. However, some scholars have argued that tourists, guides, and workers at the site engage in performances that are nuanced and able to subvert dominant iterations of the story of the site and dominant modes of being a tourist. For example, Tamar Katriel points out that when tour guides are confronted with oppositional narratives, those narratives are brought to the fore. As tour guides contend with the oppositional narrative, the text of the site is opened up, “thus challenging its claims to cultural authority” (“Our Future” 72). As Edensor makes clear, it may be difficult for tourists to voice these oppositional narratives. If and when they are voiced, however, they reveal the performance possibilities as more than “discrete concretization of cultural assumptions.” In this respect, it makes more sense to talk about touristic performances in terms of “a consciousness of doubleness,” an awareness that the performance a person has engaged in is a performance with certain expectations (Carlson 5). This conception of performance affords agency to the performer in order to choose how they perform. Even though a person may choose

to perform to a norm, the consciousness of doubleness conception assumes that the performance is a choice.

By being aware of the performances they engage in, tourists choose how to make a site meaningful. While many may choose to perform to a norm and work towards the sacralization of a site (what MacCannell defines as a collective understanding of the importance of a site), some will choose to perform differently, contributing to what Michael Bowman refers to as “site de-sacralization,” or the “refusal of a tour’s imperatives” (“Looking” 128). Bowman argues that by refusing the imperatives of the tour, tourists gain a critical perspective of the site. Approaching tourist performances as a doubleness, acknowledging that there are norms and expectations but tourists choose if and how to follow those norms and expectations, can help tourism scholars better understand how tourists and others engage in touristic practices. By focusing on performances at Masada, we can see how meaning is made, challenged, and upheld at the site. Like Bruner and Gorfain, I believe that power is constituted from the bottom up, from the tourists, guides, and workers at the site. While some of these performances reify authoritative meanings and interpretations of the site, I argue that all are, to some extent, aware of their performance and some offer performances that “de-sacralize” the site and create new possible ways of interpreting and telling the Masada story.

### **A Theoretical Approach to Studying Masada**

In order to understand how Masada becomes meaningful and how tourists, guides, and workers at the site create meaningful experiences, it is necessary to understand how Masada became a symbolic site in the first place, how the site is framed for tourists, and how to view the performances that take place at and around Masada. Throughout my analysis I draw on three theoretical clusters that help delimit the site and focus on how meaning is made at Masada.



Theories of nationhood establish how and why Masada has become symbolically significant. Theories of tourism and tourists set up how tourists learn to engage culturally significant sites. Lastly, theories of performance help explain why certain actions and activities might take place and provide a framework for understanding those actions and activities.

### **Masada and the Nation of Israel**

In 1927, Yitzhak Lamdan, a Russian Jewish poet who immigrated to Palestine in 1920, wrote the poem, “Masada.” In the poem, Lamdan penned the now famous line, “Masada shall not fall again.” That line has become a slogan that has been used in a number of ways to call Jews, Israelis, and others to action. Yael Zerubavel traces the two major uses of this slogan. The “activist narrative,” one that links Masada to events like the Warsaw ghetto uprising, looks at Masada as a moment of strength amidst a history of oppression. The focus of this narrative is on the fact that the Sicarii stood up against insurmountable odds to protect what they believed in. The “tragic commemorative narrative,” on the other hand, links Masada to events like the pogroms of Eastern Europe and the Holocaust and looks to Masada as a physical reminder that Jews and the Jewish state must prevent its enemies from backing the country into a corner (Zerubavel 212). Both narratives developed around the slogan “Masada shall not fall again.” As Jean-Jacques Lecercle, following Lenin, points out, slogans exert performative force. A slogan “*identifies the moment in the conjuncture . . . names the task associated with the moment . . . [and] it condenses and embodies the concrete analysis of the concrete situation*” (273; emphasis in original). The Jews in Palestine, and later the government of Israel, used the slogan “Masada shall not fall again” in a number of different ways to help address a number of political ends. Shmaria Guttman, a major leader of the Jewish youth movements in Palestine during the 1930s and ’40s, first championed the use of the phrase as a slogan. Like many of the early Zionist

leaders, Guttman recognized the potential of Masada as a symbolic site and the need for such symbols:

These were difficult years (1941-1943). There were fears that Rommel would arrive [to Palestine] through Egypt. I was in the Hagana and I [knew] what was planned . . . I thought, What would the young adolescents do? I thought that they had to be socialized into being prepared for anything, [particularly] for freedom and liberty. Then I said, ‘There is nothing like Masada for this purpose’ (qtd. in Ben-Yehuda, 74-5).

Masada connects Jews to a past where they lived in and fought for their own country. Through the slogan, it also suggests a possible future where the Jewish people will forever be able to defend their homeland. But as Lecercle points out, the meaning of a slogan derives not just from its “capacity to intervene in the conjuncture [it] analyze[s], but also, in naming it, to call it into being” (279-80). The Masada slogan came about in order to identify the conjuncture of late nineteenth and early twentieth century European Jewry. Amidst the horrors of the pogroms, many young European Jews wanted to break ties with their recent past and began to imagine themselves in a new light. This, combined with the opportunism of major Zionists led to a large migration of Jews from Europe to Palestine. The slogan helped name Palestine as their new/old homeland and called these Jews to protect that homeland. Finally, the use of the slogan established the new population as a nation, preemptively calling the state of Israel into being.

While this was the first use of the slogan, it has since been repurposed and reused a number of times and for a number of different socio-political ends. By looking at these different uses, as I do in Chapter 2, we can see that despite changing social and political conditions, a slogan can retain its performative force, which can then be employed for different political ends. This performative nature of the slogan, its usability in changing social, political and historical contexts, necessitates a fair amount of editing and reworking in the moments where the slogan is recontextualized. In order for a slogan like “Masada shall not fall again” to work, it must make

sense within a given context, and that tends to require some editing of history. A relevant example of this editing can be seen in *Performing the Past* by Tamar Katriel.

In her analysis of Israeli settlement museums Katriel remarks how, despite the reliance of early Israeli settlers on their Arab neighbors, the museums are presented with little to no reference of Arabs (134). In serving an ideological purpose to the state of Israel, the inclusion of Arab assistance would go against the notions of independence and strength to persevere of the Jewish people. As de Certeau notes, the past is then the “fiction of the present” (8), doing more to serve a particular authority than to actually tell the story of past events. For de Certeau, History becomes an interiorization of a mythic past and not an accurate recording of past events. This strategic forgetting, however, is not always a negative thing, and at times can be necessary. In order to move forward from an unsettling past, people may have to find a way to forget certain traumas and weaknesses in order to find joy and strength. For example, as Zerubavel points out, in the Yishuv (the collection of the Jewish residents of Palestine before the creation of the state of Israel) the poem “Masada” by Yitzhak Lamdan was widely read and taught in schools. The focus of the poem is on the journey to Masada and emphasizes the struggle to survive. School children were taught to look to Masada as a story of heritage and strength. By the late 1960s, however, the narrative and meaning of Masada had shifted. The story that was told to encourage a generation to be strong and fight for their land was now used to justify aggressive military tactics. When Stewart Alsop, a journalist for *Newsweek*, interviewed then Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir at a press conference in 1973, accusing her of having a “Masada complex,” Meir’s response was “we do have a Masada complex. We have a pogrom complex. We have a Hitler complex” (qtd. in Zerubavel 209). In her response, Meir demonstrated what Nietzsche referred to as “critical remembering.” In the face of such a devastating event, argues Meir, the Jewish nation

had no other choice but to pick up the remnants of the past and build from these a new future. The trouble with the critical view, however, is that it can lead us to believe that “every past is worthy of being condemned” (Nietzsche 106), and towards a rationalization that *any* future can be just and right. What was forgotten in early versions of the Masada story, namely the suicide, was now remembered and made central. Likewise, what was remembered in early versions, the strength and courage of the Sicarii, was here edited out. For better or worse, as the needs of the nation change, so too does its telling of its national myths.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community” (6). For Anderson, the constructed histories of nations are recorded in a homogeneous, empty time. The major events of a nation are recorded synchronically, allowing events, occurring across space and time and with dramatically different actors, to identify a single community. Following Anderson, Homi K. Bhabha argues that in order to understand the relationship between the nation and how it narrates its actions requires that we “investigate the nation-space in the *process* of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are *in media res*” (3). As the past actions of the nation are (re)called into public discourse we gain an understanding of how these imagined communities are constructed and in a continual state of becoming.

As Tim Edensor points out, though, it is not only how a nation tells its story that determines its identity. Edensor critiques Anderson and others (notably, Adorno and Horkheimer) for their general disregard for embodied practices. While they may discuss culture and national identity as something dynamic and always in motion, this dynamism stops with “what are disparagingly called the ‘culture industries’” (*National Identity* 13). By focusing on popular culture as something produced to pacify the masses, popular culture is reified and

homogenized “as inherently harmful” (13). Edensor prefers to think of cultural and national identity as a matrix, one that includes the doings of multi-national corporations as well as the doings of individuals. As he notes, identity is “a process of continually weaving together fragments of discourse and images, enactions, spaces and times, things and people into a vast matrix, in which complex systems of relationality between elements constellate around common sense themes – one such being the national” (29-30). By using the term “matrix,” Edensor notes that national identity is dynamic and dialogic, having as much to do with a national myth as it does with cultural “images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices” (17). In other words, it is not possible to discuss national identity without taking into account the multiple actors at play within this vast matrix. Just as the official voices of Masada (the state of Israel, the Israeli Parks Administration and the Israeli Board of Tourism) structure the way the story of Masada is told, visitors to Masada create and disseminate the story with their own meanings, across diverse media technologies. Through Internet social network sites and blogs, the use of photography and a number of other media, visitors to Masada enter into the matrix of identity that defines Masada. As such, an analysis of Masada as a site of national importance must take into account the meaning created by individuals who visit the site and the vast cultural matrix with which they identify. To this end, it is important to focus on the tourists themselves and what they see and do at Masada.

While conducting this research, I studied the nation of Israel as it was in the process of being narrated. The boundaries of this nation are determined not just by the physical boundaries of the state, but also by how people and groups identified with the ancient story of Masada. While the physical borders of the country might constitute the national homeland, it is just as much constituted by the stories told by and about the nation. Masada is a key node in the Israeli

national matrix, one that connects Jews all over the world to the country of Israel. Conversely, Jews who make their home outside of Israel, through sites like Masada, are able to connect the country of Israel to their own Jewishness. Jews outside of Israel do not belong to the nation of Israel. Rather, the country of Israel, insofar as it manages and protects Jewish sites, is part of the Jewish nation.

### **Touring a Culturally Significant Site**

Chris Rojek notes that certain tourist sites hold such a prominent place in the cultural imagination that they “seem to command us to visit them at least once in our lifetime” (52). He argues that such sights are readily accessible through what he terms an “index of representation . . . a range of signs, images and symbols which make the sight familiar to us in ordinary culture” (53). While this means that we are drawn to a site through a number of cultural sources, which sources draw a particular tourist and what that tourist’s response to the site will be is anyone’s guess. This combination of a site as a place that is culturally rooted but with the possibility of an individualized significance makes it difficult to study a site ontologically. Rather than trying to understand what a site is, then, it makes more sense to look at what tourists do at a site and what cultural elements they bring with them to the site. Yes, tourists have expectations when they visit a site and those expectations are culturally bound, but one person’s reason for going on tour will vary from another’s.

As Edensor notes “tourist spaces and places are diversely represented, with contesting notions about what they mean, being articulated by different groups of people” (*Tourists at the Taj* 6). While a particular tourist’s expectations may or may not be met, that tourist must also contend with official narratives of a sight and the desires of other tourists who also want meaningful experiences. A site like Masada is part of a cultural matrix, and tourists who visit

Masada are compelled to visit the site, in part, because they identify with a culture that places Masada within its matrix. Additionally, when tourists come to Masada, they bring with them an “index of representation” that helps them frame what to expect from the experience. The difficulty for tourists lies in how they expect to view the site, what John Urry refers to as “the tourist gaze” (1-2). For Urry, tourists come to a site with preconceived notions of what to look for and how to look. In her discussion of how we view the everyday life practices of others, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests, “the exotic is the place where nothing is utterly ordinary. Such encounters force us to make comparisons that pierce the membrane of our own quotidian world, allowing us to be spectators of ourselves” (48). As tourists perform and watch the performances of others on tour, they find themselves spectators of themselves, their own culture, and the culture of others. As the major guidebooks to Israel all feature Masada prominently, and as Masada is the most visited secular sight in Israel, focusing on performances at Masada is integral to understanding the meaning that tourists get from their visit to the fortress.

### **Tourist Performances and Touring Performances**

As I have noted, the cultural significance of Masada has been duly recorded (Yadin; Zerubavel; Ben Yehuda; Bruner *Culture*; Ben-Tor). However, Masada is open to different interpretations by the thousands who visit every day. Through the stories they know coming in, the stories they hear from guides or official literature, and their individual reactions and performances at the site, Masada speaks differently to everyone who visits, and encourages tourists to act in particular ways. Additionally, tour guides, performance troupes, and cultural events all offer tourists different ways of viewing and experiencing the site. Whatever meaning tourists get from the site will be predicated on their own interpretations of the performances they

see and the different cultural images and ideas that are brought with them into the sight. One way to think about this is that when tourists visit Masada, they hear an authoritative voice, one that tells them how to act and what story to listen to/for. Conversely, they also hear their own voice, one that may have distinctly different things to say. Mikhail Bakhtin frames this issue in terms of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Morson and Emerson explain centripetal forces as those seeking “to impose order on an essentially heterogeneous and messy world” (30). Whereas centripetal forces try to pull everything together into easily understood frames, centrifugal forces, each individual’s attempt to come to terms with who and where they are in the world, often struggle against the pull. The performances I focus on throughout this dissertation highlight this struggle.

In a study comparable to my study of Masada, Mark Neumann looks at the Grand Canyon as “not simply a landscape of nature but a culturally created spectacle unified and divided by the broader dramas of cultural transformation taking place in America since the turn of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century” (11). Neumann notes that while these broad dramas influence how we encounter the site, the site also forces us into an encounter with others. The performances tourists engage in create the scene that they watch and contribute to the meaning making process just as official narratives do and just as broader cultural dramas do. The meaning someone gains from a site like Masada may have as much to do with the story told by a tour guide as it does with a group of tourists singing Black Sabbath’s “Iron Man” as they climb the mountain.

### **A Practical Approach to Studying Masada**

Once I decided to research Masada, I had to figure out which aspects of the site I wanted to study and how I would go about studying those aspects. I began by focusing on the dominant narratives told about Masada. This process involved reading histories of the site (Flavius;



Yadin), reading research on how the site became and maintained its symbolic significance (Ben Tor; Ben-Yehuda; Bruner *Culture*; Katriel and Shenhar; Zerubavel), and reading and watching how Masada was represented in popular culture (Sagal; Broza). Additionally, I read a number of books, journal articles, newspaper articles, and watched a number of movies that dealt with Israeli and Jewish history in general. This research provided the foundation to understand how Masada has been socially constructed over time, and how and why people feel the need to invest time and effort into visiting the site, arguing about the meaning of the site, and trying to discredit the meaning that others find in the site. Then I went to Masada.

Over the course of the summers of 2010 and 2011, I spent about sixty days at Masada conducting participant observation research. The amount I participated and the amount I observed varied from day to day and was dependent on a number of factors, but largely on whether or not there was a group that would let me tour the site with them. Some days I walked with three or four groups, while others I just found a spot and watched. On other days, I would meet people at the Masada Youth Hostel the night before and lead a tour myself. On the days where I participated with a group, I tried to remain as involved as the group would let me. I made a point to speak with members of the group and their guide to make sure that I was welcome to join. Once given the go-ahead, I stowed my notebook in my backpack and tried, as much as I could, to be a member of the group. When the tour finished and the group headed back down the mountain I thanked them and then found a place to record what I remembered from the encounter. During the times I primarily observed, I focused my attention on different places where guides and tourists would be sure to pass by. If I found myself at one spot too long, I found another, or looked for something that stood out as unusual and headed in that direction.

During my observations, I tried to encounter the site both with a touristic wonder as well as a researcher's gaze. In other words, I worked to see the sight anew each day, while I maintained the foundation of my ethnographic focus and training. To see the sight fresh each day, I looked, as Miles Richardson suggests ethnographers should, "with a listening eye" (Richardson). Looking with a listening eye is a charge to focus on the mundane aspects of a place that we might take for granted, and to look for aspects of the subject that are unique. For example, when a tour group sits down together to write postcards home, but one young woman walks away from the group to write her card in seclusion, the mundane act of writing is similar to other acts at the site, but slightly different. Additionally, my touristic wonder of seeing things anew is organized by my employment of participant observation research. As Dwight Conquergood argues, "participant observation fieldwork privileges the body as a site of knowing" (352). By focusing on mundane acts as performances, I emphasize bodies and action at the forefront of my research practice. The tourist's embodied presence at the site, their way of engaging and being physically present on tour, proved to be a rich source for understanding how meaning was gained and created at Masada.

Being a tourist and being at Masada are both symbolic actions. As Kenneth Burke notes, "The ability to use symbols enables human beings to imagine, to select, to create, and to define the situations to which they respond" (8). The fact that tourists come from all over the world to the middle of the desert, in the middle of the summer heat, to climb a mountain and hear a story is extraordinary, and I tried my best while at the site to remember and pay attention to that. The tourists at Masada chose to come there, and my role as researcher was to mark and explain the significance of that symbolic action. I believe that what makes a site important, meaningful, and symbolically relevant does not exist within the site or in the story or history of the site, but in the

performances and interactions of people and groups at the site. Scholars like Dean MacCannell argue that tourists search for authenticity at tourist sites because their own everyday life is lacking in authentic experience. Tourist performances in this respect are about finding meaning in the tourist site. Edward Bruner, on the other hand, argues that tourists engage with sites that culturally produce meanings for tourists through the structure of the tourist experience. Bruner looks at being a tourist as a social practice, and, hence, a performance that one enters into. This is the performative nature of the tourist script. Like Bruner, I believe that authenticity is a construction. Tourists are generally aware of the construction and, hence, travel for the experiences that being on tour affords them. Unlike Bruner, however, I am not concerned with whether or not tourists take on the role of tourist, no matter how well informed that role might be. Rather, I am interested in how the performances that occur at a tourist site create the site as meaningful. When tourism scholars write about Masada and many other tourist sites, they often seem to forget that the presence of tourists at these places is extraordinary. The extent that a particular tourist may or may not choose to act in a prescribed way should be seen as secondary to the fact that they are acting in this place at all. Everyday life performances of people at the site, performances by tour guides and performance troupes, and the construction and maintenance of the site itself are all ways that meaning is communicated. No single performance, however, can be pinpointed without taking into account the other performances that influence, inform, and butt up against it. Masada is a performance saturated environment where, though it is difficult to determine where any particular performance begins or ends, performances occur. How these performances take place and by whom can teach us why people come to Masada and to sites like it when they could very easily hear the same story in the comfort of their home.

The limitation of viewing the site this way is that any one performance can be privileged over another at the subjective discretion of the researcher. Hence, my subjectivity will be clearly present in the performances I choose to report and analyze. There are certain performances, thoughts, and ideas that draw my attention more than others, and I focus on those throughout the dissertation. I delimit these choices by focusing on the relationship between actors, scenes, and actions. The actors are tourists, guides, professional performing artists and employees at the site. The scenes are the many points of interest officially marked off by the site management. The actions I focused on were the actions that fell outside of the traditional scripts followed at Masada. I determined what counts as a traditional script through my review of literature (e.g. Zerubavel's commemorative narratives) and through my observations at the site. By speaking with tourists and watching what tourists and groups do at the site, patterns of behavior and types of performance became apparent. I am not concerned with these specific types of performances, though I do point out a few throughout the dissertation as a way to contextualize the actions I describe. Instead, I am concerned with what these performances do, for people at Masada, and in relation to other performances. There is no one meaning at a site like Masada. Rather, there are constellations of meaning. Each chapter of this dissertation focuses on one constellation and is, by no means, exhaustive. The relationship between a set of actors, scenes, and actions can make a particular constellation stand out. This dissertation presents a number of ways that meaning is made at Masada. By focusing on performance, we can see that symbolically meaningful sites have a near infinite number of possible meanings and that those possibilities are revealed through performance.

This dissertation is the product of four months of ethnographic, participant-observation research. Following Victor Turner, Conquergood remarks that ethnographic practice is the study

of “*homo performans*, humanity as performer, a culture-inventing, social performing, self-making and self-transforming creature” (“Rethinking” 358; emphasis in original). Conquergood goes on to explain, “performance centered research takes as both its subject matter and method the experiencing body situated in time, place, and history” (359). For Conquergood, ethnographic research, the study of *homo performans*, requires an embodied and engaged researcher. In other words, embodiment in the field of research means being able to engage in and with the people the researcher studies. Such engagement allows the researcher to understand the perspective of the people and culture that he is studying, but it also requires that the researcher open himself up to the risks of the field. From a methodological perspective, this just makes good sense. A researcher should spend as much time with the subject of his research as possible so he is able to assess the situation adequately. I spent my time at Masada climbing up and down the mountain, traveling around the site in the summer heat, watching the sunrise, and eating meals in the Masada and Ein Gedi hostels with tourists, guides, and workers at the site. I gained an intimate knowledge of the different people on tour and what they wanted out of the tour. I also gained an intimate knowledge of what it means to guide tourists and to be an ambassador for the site and country. While every guide and person on tour is different, being with them made me keenly aware of the joys, frustrations, and goals of many on tour.

From a theoretical perspective ethnographic research forces the academic outside of the academy, which also makes good sense. My ethnographic approach was simply to *watch*, *see*, and *do*. Communication scholars focus on how messages are sent and how meaning is made. To study communication as it happens means that the scholar has to either spy on people so they “act naturally,” or let the subjects know that they’re being watched, in which case the subjects might not “act naturally.” A performance approach to ethnography does two things in this

respect. First, the approach suggests that we are, as stated above, *homo performans*, so the only thing that changes with the insertion of the researcher is that the researcher is brought into the performance environment. Second, by spending an extended amount of time with the people the ethnographer is studying, people are more likely to “perform” less for the researcher and just perform, as they become comfortable having the researcher around. From an ethical perspective, this is why I consult with everyone I cite from my fieldwork before I include what they say in my work. I find that the results I get from conversations in the field are more rich and complex than in the studies I have conducted through surveys and by reading travel blogs and other public tourist posts. Additionally, this approach allows me to study acts of communication as they happen, and not as they are later recorded.

Finally, on an ethical/political note, engagement in ethnographic fieldwork reminds me constantly that I am dealing with real people who are highly invested in what they are doing. If I make an assumption or a generalization about a person I met in the field, I am reminded that the person is someone that I have spent time with and that I know on a personal level. Occasionally I disagree with the people I meet, but having had friendly encounters with them I am more apt to give their perspective and argument due consideration. There should be trust between a researcher and the people he studies. Engaging in participant-observation ethnography helps me situate that trust at the forefront of my research.

The structure of the rest of the dissertation is meant to mirror my own experience with the site. What this means is that each chapter builds on and from the previous chapter. The story of Masada is complex and contested and has, over the last 85 years, been told in a number of different authoritative ways. Additionally, many elements of the story are left out, regardless of how the story is told. I am not straightforward about what these elements are or when they

appear in this dissertation, but many do appear. While these elements are important to any argument about Masada, be it the site or the story, my focus is on the experience of the site and I would like you, the reader, to have an experience similar to my own. Earlier I pointed out why a ground level approach to studying a site like Masada is necessary. Such an approach focuses on the everyday meaningful actions of those at the site. I believe that a response to those actions should be similarly grounded. Just as tourists are aware of the larger cultural narratives that inform their actions and activities at the site, I too am aware of the larger theoretical narratives that inform my actions in this dissertation. However, just as tourists find their own way to approach the site and its narratives, I too have my own approach and that approach is grounded in the experiential aspects of fieldwork. To understand why tourists do what they do it is important to walk with them and to be, to some extent, a tourist yourself. The same holds true for ethnographic work, which is why I ask you to experience the site not all at once, but bit by bit, as an ethnographer would.

My approach to writing is in line with Dwight Conquergood's contention that "knowledge is *located*, not transcendent . . . that it must be *engaged*, not abstracted . . . and that it is forged from *solidarity with*, not separation from, the people" ("Interventions" 315 italics in original). In order to understand what the various actors do at Masada and why they do those things, it is important to engage with them as knowing subjects, so I place their performances front and center. From this point, my analytic perspective mixes with the experience of being on tour and offers a reading that is academic, but from the field, one that knows both about tourism, and also with tourists, guides, and workers at the site.

One way to approach the following chapters is to think of them as four successive days you might spend traveling around Masada. While each day may focus on one aspect of the site,

each day is also informed by the experiences of the previous days and the expectations of what is to come. Chapter 2 explores the relationship between guides, the path they follow, and the stories they tell. This chapter emphasizes the different authoritative narratives that are told at and about Masada. Even those tourists who may not be familiar with these narratives when they arrive at Masada will become familiar with at least one of them fairly quickly in their visit. As has been pointed out in tourism research, guides tell the story of the site and, through their telling, are able to translate a message about the site to their tour group (Fine and Speer; Brin and Noy; Kellner and Sussun). In this chapter I argue that guides do more than tell a story and they do more than translate a message for their group. Guides create experiences for their group that have the potential to help tourists contend with individual, group, and national identities.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the aspects of the Masada story that most guides leave out by analyzing how a performance group, Asphalt Theatre (AT), reimagines the characters in the story. I explain how AT has some similarities with “living history performances.” In my analysis I focus on the differences in order to highlight issues and possibilities of living history performances and I explore how such performances might benefit a site like Masada. Living history performances are performances that represent the past in an effort to create an “authentic reproduction” of the past. This practice tends to leave out versions and moments of history that may contradict the message living history performers want to get across. The performance by AT, however, uses theatricality to call attention to the constructed nature of the performance. While this diminishes the authenticity aspect that living history museums strive for, I argue that by focusing on the reproduction aspect of living history, museums and historic sites can allow for more nuanced and more critical understandings of a history.



Chapter 4 examines the consumption practices of tourists and visitors to Masada and the concerns that come with the commodification of a symbolic site. While local and national economies and ideologies can be bolstered by the tourism industry, and while those profits can go to support less frequented but equally significant national sites, there is the concern that the commodification of a site will diminish the site's symbolic value. While at Masada, I noticed two ways that amenities were added to the site: enhancements and supplements. Enhancements are meant to add to the symbolic power of the site, creating a more meaningful experience for tourists, whereas supplements are meant to make tourists more comfortable and the tour more enjoyable. In this chapter I explore the relationship between enhancements and supplements at Masada, and I argue that supplements decrease the symbolic value of culturally significant sites.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I shift my focus to what tourists do at each point of interest at Masada. By the time you get to this chapter, you will be somewhat familiar with how the Masada story is told and challenged at the site. You will also be somewhat familiar with what it means to be a tourist traveling through the site, dealing with other tourists and officials at the site. You should have a general idea of what is going on at Masada and have a clear conception of how the major issues I have set out to address in this dissertation can be addressed through an ethnographic encounter with a site like Masada. Chapter 5 asks that you take all of that into consideration and let it inform how you see what tourists do at the site. The activities and actions I highlight in this chapter are all attempts, by tourists, to have meaningful encounters at the site. They also comprise the brunt of what you will see when you visit Masada. They are the centrifugal forces, pulling away from the master narratives of how tourists are supposed to act and how the story of Masada should be told.

## CHAPTER 2

### TOUR GUIDE PERFORMANCES: CRAFTING A MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE

One morning at the entryway at the top of Masada, I sat close to a tour guide waiting for his group to refill their canteens. After a moment, another guide came through the gate with his group. The guide quickly told them the story of the Sicarii, their fight against the Romans, and their eventual collective suicide. Then he said, “Come. I will show you everything.” As this guide left, the guide sitting next to me scoffed. I looked at him and raised an eyebrow. He said, “He told it all wrong. You can’t tell the story before they see the site. First, you take them around, give them the *history*. Then you tell them the *story*.” The distinction this guide was making was between artifacts and historical data (history), and the events surrounding the collective suicide of the Sicarii (story). While most guides do structure their tours this way (artifacts first and then slowly tell the events, saving the climax until the end of the tour), there was no hard and fast rule of how to intersperse the historical data with the events. Additionally, there was rarely a consensus on many of the historical “facts.” Just as one guide told her group that the Sicarii were buried on the western side of the mountain, another guide told his group that the bodies were burned. Still a third guide said that the Romans carted the bodies off elsewhere. There were also discrepancies between many of the structures at the site. For instance, just as one guide told his group that a hole in the ground was a *mikveh*, a ritual bath, another guide said the same hole was used as a toilet. Even when guides identified an artifact or an event similarly to another guide, how they used the artifact or event was often different. As such, I prefer to look at the entire tour as a story that guides conduct and the artifacts and events as elements of those stories. After taking part in over 60 guided tours at Masada, I found that however guides choose to structure their tours, they included four key elements: historical artifacts, the events of the

Sicarii's last stand, an ideological perspective, and an experience that makes the trip worthwhile. While tourists can be guided in a number of ways, professional tour guides create an experience for their groups that other methods, like placards and guidebooks, cannot.<sup>1</sup>

### **Guiding Tours and Framing the Tourist Experience**

As a tourist I am guided in two ways. First, I am guided to a site, and later I am guided at the site. I go to a site because I have been compelled to go. Valene Smith suggests that tourists go on tour for a number of reasons, and that a particular place or trip might satisfy a number of tourist desires. For Smith, Masada might fulfill the desire of the "historical tourist," one who goes in search for monuments of the past. The close surrounding area, however, offers other reasons for tourists to make the trek to the desert as well. Those interested in "ethnic tourism," viewing the quaint customs of indigenous people," or "cultural tourism," searching out "local color" (5), can find both at the nearby Bedouin camp/hotel, *Kfar Hanokdim*. "Environmental tourists" in search of unique landscapes will find the view of the Dead Sea and the surrounding area from the walls of Masada particularly striking. And, of course, those interested in "recreational tourism," otherwise known as "sand, sea, and sex" tourism (5), will have plenty to see and do at the Dead Sea and the Wadi David waterfalls.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In order to become a tour guide in Israel, a guide must complete a two-year training course, the equivalent of an Associates degree in the United States. Prospective guides take courses in geography and climate, geology and geomorphology, botany and zoology, comparative religion, archaeology, art and architecture, history of the land of Israel/Palestine, current affairs, and leadership and guidance. Additionally, prospective guides take 80 field trips to major sites in Israel, led by an instructor guide. After completing the training program, prospective guides must pass a licensing exam by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism (tayarut).

<sup>2</sup> In most travel guides of Israel, Masada is featured prominently and is placed as part of a suggested trip into the desert, where tourists can engage in a number of touristic activities and fulfill a number of touristic desires. As such, Masada features prominently on most tourist itineraries to Israel. For example, *Fodor's Israel* has an image of Masada on its table of contents page and places Masada as one of Israel's top attractions (Balint, et al. 18).

In addition to being guided to a site, there are a number of ways that I can be guided at a site. These include objects (paths, signs, brochures), other people (I watch one person and then I do what they do, see what they see, or follow the path they follow), and professional guides (experts about the site I wish to experience and experts at creating the possibilities for experience).

While any site is always already brimming with possibilities, the tour guide helps to delimit those possibilities. By delimiting the possibilities, guides do two things. First, they frame the site so tourists will find it meaningful. Erik Cohen (“Tourist Guide”), for example, looks at how tour guides juggle the goal of the group (set by the tour company and the tourists themselves), the dynamics of the group, and the constraints of the site to lead their group and mediate the experience. Cohen notes that in so doing, guides direct the group in how to see and interpret the site. Second, tour guides create a particular experience, one that will distinguish them from other guides and make the choice of having a tour guide feel worthwhile. Jonathan Wynn discusses how tour guides help shape the environment of their tour and, hence, the context of the tour itself. Wynn explains how many of the guides he interviewed in New York City had distinctive perspectives on the city and its sights. These guides tried to translate that perspective for their tour group in order to make a meaningful experience (23-29). As Wynn notes, guides want their tourists to share what they feel for the site, and try to use the tour to foster deep connections to the site for their tourists. Through the guides’ interpretations of the site and through their engagement with the group, tour guides build meaningful connections between tourists and a site.

As there are no tour guides for hire at Masada, tourists who want a tour guide have to bring one with them. Because of its remote location, when tourists travel to Masada, they will

also typically stop at the Dead Sea and a number of other sites (e.g. the Ein Gedi nature reserve and the Wadi David waterfalls, the Qumran caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, and Dead Sea spas are common tourist stops), making a day of their trip. Most of the tourists and guides I spoke with said that Masada is the highlight of their day and their main reason for coming to the desert.

Keeping in mind that the role of the guide is to frame and interpret the site for tourists in an engaging way, tour guides must be able to meet four criteria. First, the guide must be able to tell the story of the site. Second, the guide must demonstrate an authority of the site and its meaning. Third, a guide has to be able to respond to the needs, inquiries, and personalities of the members of his group. Fourth, and finally, a guide must be able to craft an experience for their group, one that differentiates the personal guided tour from other types of tours.

Each guide approaches these tasks differently. There are different ways to frame and tell the story and history, there are different ways of moving through a site, and there are different ways of building a connection for tourists to the site. The goal of this chapter is to identify the different ways the site is framed for tourists by guides. By identifying the frames used at Masada, guides reveal the limits of a tourist's ability to have a meaningful experience on a guided tour. As guides frame the content and the space of the tour, they reveal the limits of what is possible in a guided experience.

Within these limits, tourists find themselves in what Tim Edensor calls "enclavic spaces." For Edensor, an enclavic space is set up to close the tourist off from "potentially offensive sights, sounds, and smells" (*Tourists at the Taj* 38). Edensor contrasts enclavic with heterogeneous space, noting "enclavic spaces are carefully staged and designed so that performance is somewhat prescriptive, whereas in heterogeneous spaces, stage boundaries are less clear and a

wider range of improvisation is encouraged” (53). While Edensor notes that many sites are marked by an “interpenetration” of enclavic and heterogeneous spaces (52), I argue that the tour guide led experience at Masada attempts to close off the possibility of heterogeneity. As guides frame the site in meaningful ways, they work to regulate the possible interactions and experiences tourists can have at a site. In this chapter, by delimiting the types of experience tour guides stage for their groups, I show the types of enclavic spaces created by guides. Additionally, by focusing on the possible experiences tourists can have on a tour guide led trip to Masada, we can also see what is not possible on the tour but may be possible through other types of touristic engagement.

### **Framing Masada**

Most tour guides understand the juggling that needs to occur: they structure the tour so it has cultural relevance for the tourists in their group, and they frame the site as a unique experience that made the trip worthwhile. At Masada, tour guides also use the tour to get a message across to their tourists; a skilled tour guide can help tourists develop an individual connection to the site and the story of the site. Below I explain the frameworks that tour guides use to structure their tours. These frameworks are based on observations of over 60 tour guides at Masada. As guides work to fulfill the four aspects of guiding listed above, they frame the site in a socio-historical context, and they frame it with a performance style. Socio-historical frames determine how tourists will create meaning from their experience, while the performance frames determine the nature of their experience.

### **Socio-Historical Frames**

There are four time periods during which Masada played a significant role in Israeli/Jewish society, and the significance changed over time to meet particular socio-cultural

needs. During the first period, the pre-state years between 1927 and 1945, Masada was used as a symbol connecting the Jews in the present to their heroic ancestors (Kelner 26-30; Zerubavel 63-67). As Jews immigrated to Palestine, they sought powerful figures from the past, and the Sicarii of Masada were some of those figures. The second time period, the 1940s through the early 1970s, were the years of the “Masada Complex.” During this period Masada stood as a warning and a reminder of what happens when Jews let the enemy get the upper hand. The use of Masada as a symbol during this time period was marked by Israel’s focus on protecting its borders and its citizens by whatever means necessary. The third period, beginning around the time of the 1982 Lebanon War, was marked by a revisionist movement. Where Israel was once viewed as the metaphorical “David” of the Middle East, the country was now referred to as the “Goliath” of the region (Van Creveld). During this period Masada allowed for a critical reflection on the actions of the state. The final period, the 1990s to the present, is marked by the rise of Diaspora tourism. With waning religious and cultural practice within the Jewish Diaspora, Masada became a symbol to connect Jews around the world to Israel and to rekindle a connection to their Judaism (Cohen, *Youth Tourism*).

During each socio-historical period, Masada held a specific symbolic meaning that was used to a number of social, political, and cultural ends. Today at Masada, guides draw on one of these periods in order to frame the type of meaning they hope their tourists gain from their tour.

### **Performance Frames**

In addition to framing the type of meaning that tourists will get from their trip to Masada, guides also frame the type of experience tourists will have. As I noted above, guides at Masada all told a story, had authoritative knowledge about the site, engaged their group in dialogue about the meaning of the site, and structured activities that kept their group active and engaged.

Additionally, while guides focused on these four aspects of the tour, many guides excelled in at least one of the four aspects. By focusing on guides who excelled in one of the four aspects of guiding, I developed four performance frames. While they are not mutually exclusive, these four frames accurately represent how guides at Masada structure their tour and the different possibilities that lie in the tour guide led experience. First is the “Intimate Storyteller” frame. This frame focuses on the guide’s personal experiences with the site and their excitement in relating that experience to the group. These guides tell the story of Masada in tandem with their own story about the site. Second, in the “Authoritative Narrative” frame, guides comport themselves with a sense of urgency and a need to be, above all, the voice of authority. Guides understand that tourists are there to enjoy themselves, but they also understand that the guide is the steward of important information and he must get that information across without contradiction. In the third frame, “Dialogic Engagement,” the guide works with the group to help them get the experience they want. As they tell the story of the site, guides push their tour group to come to their own conclusions about its meaning. Finally, the “Structured Communitas” frame is focused on a series of activities created by the guide. Guides use these activities to add to the telling of the story and to punctuate points they hope to make.

The socio-historical frames place Masada within a context where the site was significant for Israelis and/or Jews in general. The performance frames then help tourists connect their personal experience with the site to a specific meaningful interpretation of the site. Together, these frames create an enclavic space for tourists. While tourists may come to their own understanding about a site, the guided tour limits their possible interactions and interpretations. Despite these limitations, one can see how a guided tour allows for a structured meaning-making process that can challenge and/or reify dominant interpretations of the site.



## **Intimate Storyteller**

At 4:30 in the morning, crowded outside the gate leading to the snake path, the long winding path tourists take to get to the top of Masada, was a tour group from South Carolina. They were members of a church brought to Israel by their pastor, Jon. Their trip had been organized by HiRoad Adventures, and their guide was a young Israeli named Yossi. Yossi had long, wavy, dirty blond hair and a serious but kind demeanor. He told us to drink plenty of water on the way up so we wouldn't get dehydrated. After we made it to the top, Jon led the group in a short prayer, and then Yossi took over. He told us that even though he was a tour guide and went through the training to be a tour guide, he was not an expert on Masada. "Instead," he said, "my friend will be meeting us up here shortly. He worked here a long time ago and he knows this place, maybe better than anyone." Yossi informed us that his friend would be climbing up the path on the other side of the mountain, the Roman ramp path. Then Yossi looked at his watch and said, "He'll still be a few minutes. I will show you some of the ruins here, but we will wait until he gets here to really hear the story of Masada." Yossi then followed the traditional path taken by tour guides at Masada. We turned right at the entryway and walked through the better preserved Roman ruins, the entrance to the northern palace, and the palace itself. While Yossi was clearly knowledgeable on the subject, stopping to point out historical artifacts and preservation methods, explaining what the buildings were used for both in Roman times as well as during the Jewish revolt, and answering any questions that came up, he was apprehensive about telling the story of Masada; he said the story would be better told by his friend.

The problem was that his friend was late. Every few minutes or so Yossi would get on the phone and either text or call his friend, reassuring us that it would just be a few more minutes, that there was traffic on the other side of the mountain. We toured the ruins for about 30 minutes

(a task that takes most tour guides at least an hour to accomplish), and then Yossi took us into a little covered area and had us take a seat. Then his phone rang. After a minute he hung up the phone and told us that his friend was here. Yossi said he was going to meet him at the entrance and that he would be back in a minute. As soon as Yossi left, there was chatter among the group about Yossi's friend. Why was he so late, what would he be like, why couldn't Yossi just tell us a story . . . ? Then Yossi's friend showed up, and we all laughed. It was not Yossi, but it was not *not* Yossi. Dressed in linen pants and shirt, a rope belt, and a siccar (the long bent knife used by the Sicari, the Jews at Masada), Yossi introduced himself as Elazar ben Yair, the leader of the rebels at Masada. Despite our laughter, Yossi did not break character. His telling of the Masada story drew us in and kept us laughing. He told us that during the initial attempts by the Romans to seize Masada he, his sons, and the men he commanded fended them off. As they easily picked off the advancing Romans, his wife made a scorecard and gave out prizes to whomever killed the most Romans. He told us, "Then we all jumped onto the walls, and just like *Braveheart*, we pulled our pants down and laughed at the Romans!"

As Yossi-cum-Elazar mixed humor with history, he fully engaged his audience with his story, picking up logistics of the attack as well as knowledge of the motives and practices of the Sicari. However, once the story turned to the final night, the night where the Jews on Masada would opt to take their own lives, Yossi's demeanor changed. He stepped out of his role as Elazar Ben-Yair, and told the story in third person narrative. When he reached the point where Ben-Yair was making his famous speech, the speech that convinced the rest of the Sicarii to commit suicide instead of fight the Romans, Yossi pulled out the guidebook for Masada, and began to read Ben-Yair's speech, as written by Josephus. After he finished reading, there was a moment of silence. Then Yossi began to tell us the story of his own encounter with Masada. At

17, just before he was scheduled to join the army, he was thinking about refusing and taking the jail time that would come along with his refusal. A few weeks before he was scheduled to report, Yossi and some friends took a trip to the Dead Sea. Early one morning, Yossi felt compelled to climb Masada. He had never wanted to do so before, but all of a sudden he felt as though he had to climb the mountain. He told us that he reached the top just as the sun was rising. Alone at the top, Yossi received a vision of the events on Masada. He found himself surrounded by the ghosts of his ancestors, and he watched as the siege took place, as the wall fell, and as the Jews decided to take their own lives rather than be condemned to a life of slavery. He said, “In 1948, it was the first time that Jews fought as free men in almost 2000 years. After that victory, in the streets of Tel-Aviv of the newly declared state of Israel, we all gathered around and sang *hatikvah*.” Then, slowly rocking back and forth like a man entranced in prayer, Yossi began to sing. It was incredibly moving. Yossi finished by saying that after this experience he couldn’t back away from his service. He understood his ability to fight as a free Jew in the state of Israel as an honor made possible by all those who came before him.

Yossi’s performance as tour guide was three-fold. First, he told the history of the site, focusing on the archaeological artifacts. Then, as Ben-Yair, he told the story of the site, the story of the Sicarii. Finally, he told the personal story of his own relationship to the site, though he was still dressed as Ben-Yair. While the first part of Yossi’s performance helps establish Yossi as an authority on the site, for the purposes of this section, I focus on the stories he tells, first as Ben-Yair and then as himself. The first, a traditional story performance, is used to entertain and educate the audience, while the second, a personal narrative, is used to argue for a particular interpretation of that story. Both stories establish a narrative frame that draws on and illustrates a specific historical conjuncture, and both can be better understood by performance theory. First, I

will address the conjuncture and how a particular type of tourism was established in Israel. Then I will discuss Yossi's stories, the performance choices he made, and the implications they hold.

### **Establishing an Israeli National Identity Through Domestic Tourism**

In a 1942 seminar, Shmaria Guttman, a Zionist educator and youth group leader, said, "We must intensify and amplify the mental connection with the chain of Hebraic heroism in the past. Before us we must imagine Masada—fortress of Israel that stood in the battle for the freedom of the people and the land against the legions of Rome" (qtd. in Ben Yehuda 74). For Guttman, though, the best way to imagine the story of Masada was to actually make a trip to Masada. As a youth group leader, Guttman encouraged thousands of young Jews to make a trek to Masada. The purpose of these trips to Masada, as Ben Yehuda points out, was to connect the young Jewish participants, many of whom would be the future leaders of Israel, to the story, as both a tale of caution and of heroics. At the time, Masada had not been excavated. What people knew of the site came from the writings of Josephus and what they found when they visited the site. The purpose of these youth group trips was, in an ideological sense, to lay claim to the land. From the Jewish settlers in pre-Israel Palestine to current day domestic tourists, one of the primary purposes of travel for Israeli Jews in Israel has been to develop a connection to the land through experiencing the land (Brin and Noy). As Shaul Kelner points out, since the first Aliyah, Jewish educators in Palestine would organize what was called a "tiyul." The purpose of the tiyul was to use "tourism to strike roots, stake a claim, and sustain commitment" to the land, and it was premised "on the idea that *yedi'at ha'aretz*, 'knowing the land of Israel,' would breed *ahavat ha'aretz*, 'love for the land of Israel'" (25). So, while there is an aspect of claiming the land by physical presence, more apparent is the claiming of the land through stories. Stories of the ancestral past are mixed with stories of the exploring present. The stories then connect that

past to a present situation. Yossi connected his personal narrative of traveling to Masada with his development of a willingness to fight and die for his country. His story explains to his group how he developed his own *ahavat ha'aretz* by traveling through and knowing the land.

It is not surprising that the *tiyul* developed early on in Israel's history. Gregory Clark, drawing on the work of Kenneth Burke, discusses how landscapes can be framed rhetorically so that the individuals who visit these landscapes feel that they are taking part in a larger public life. Clark notes that as tourists visit their own national monuments and their own nation's landscapes, they can achieve "a *public experience*—a transformative personal encounter with shared symbols of a people's collectivity" (94). The *tiyul* served to connect Jews in Palestine together (these trips were not alone but with groups) and also served to connect the Jews in Palestine to their ancient ancestors, who walked the same land and performed heroic deeds. The goal of these first settlers was to dissociate themselves from their parents' and grandparents' generations and to live a life that worked against the developed stereotypes (the "wandering Jew" and "Shylock" as the most prominent). As Hannah Arendt pointed out in 1935, following Martin Buber, "the renaissance of the Jewish people can only come about through a radical return to its great past and its living religious values" (32). The connections made on a *tiyul*, then, were to heroic ancestors, with a group of peers, striving to break from a more recent past.

It is also not surprising, then, that works of art from the 1920s and 30s, like Lamdan's poem "Masada," valorized those who would not yield to oppressive powers. As they traveled from the Golan Heights down to the Judean Desert, the Jews of this time saw themselves walking in the footsteps of their ancestors, but ancestors who had largely been eschewed for the previous 1,500 years. A great example of this came with the adoption of Bar Kokhba as an Israeli folk hero. In 135 CE, about 60 years after the first Jewish-Roman war, Bar Kokhba led a

revolt against the Romans. The results were even more devastating than the first war and ended with the almost complete expulsion of Jews from the area. Many historians refer to the Bar Kokhba revolt as the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora. As Yael Zerubavel points out, “the Jewish sources indicate a highly ambivalent attitude toward [Bar Kokhba], appearing to be far more negative than positive” (50). For Jews immigrating to Palestine, however, Bar Kokhba was looked to as a hero for standing up against an oppressive power. These Jews appropriated the Jewish holiday, Lag BaOmer, celebrating the life and death of the ancient Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. While they still celebrated Bar Yochai, they now celebrated Bar Kokhba as well. Lag BaOmer was turned from a distinctly Jewish holiday, one that celebrated an ancient mystic, into a nationalistic Jewish holiday that celebrated an ancient revolt. Likewise, as Zerubavel points out, the story of Masada was largely ignored until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century immigration of Jews into Palestine (62). According to rabbinic law and custom, where suicide is strictly forbidden, the story of Masada was a story to be condemned, not praised. The European Jews who immigrated to Palestine during this time, however, like Yossi, connected the story of the Sicarii with their own struggle to carve out a national identity.

The tiyul was an opportunity to travel the land and establish a connection to it. This connection went beyond an historical understanding of the new immigrants’ ancestry and a present day understanding of the land itself. Instead, the connection was to the past through presence. In other words, the tiyul was not a trip to a place in order to claim that place. Rather, it was a tour to see what the ghosts of the past had left for those in the present. Many of the Jews who arrived in Palestine during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did not travel there to claim the land. They went to learn who they were through the ghosts of their past. For them, the land was already theirs. As Tamar Katriel points out, this establishment of a connection to the land

through the ghosts of the past is consistent with the traditional tendency in Jewish history to privilege ritual over narrative. Following Yerushalmi, Katriel notes, “in the case of the Jews, knowledge of the past has been traditionally transmitted in a significant way by means of communally shared ritual practices rather than by means of the historical narrative” (*Performing* 101). Katriel goes on, explaining that the purpose of the ritual practices was to “reinvoke a series of timeless existential states that participants are invited to relive. . . . In traditional Jewish thought, therefore, the main interest lies in the significance of past events rather than in the concrete details of their unfolding, and particularity of new events is subordinated to well-organized archetypal patterns” (101). The tiyul became a new Jewish/Israeli ritual. The land that these newcomers experienced was placed into the setting of “well-organized archetypal patterns,” highlighting how ancient stories, like Bar Kokhba and Masada, fit into “timeless existential states” that these Jews could see themselves a part of.

### **Personal Narrative Performance at the Tourist Site**

Yossi’s tour is structured to resemble the tiyul of the pre-state days. While a modern tourist expects certain things, like the history of the site, Yossi glosses over these aspects of the tour. He continually interrupts himself by either reminding the group that they will be hearing the story soon or by looking at his phone and sending a text message, telling his group that his friend is almost here. From the moment the tour begins, we are told that what we see is not important. The story is the reason we are all here. While Yossi’s performance alters the historical narrative by not attempting to give an accurate representation of Elazar Ben-Yair, it maintains a traditionally understood message within the narrative. The choices Yossi makes bridge the historical gap between ancient times and our own, allowing him to transition smoothly into his own story of Masada without disrupting the traditional narrative. He tells about how he was

compelled to climb Masada and that when he reached the top he found himself surrounded by his ancestors. Yossi did not present this as a metaphor. In that moment, Yossi saw the Sicarii fighting the Romans. It wasn't until he witnessed with his own eyes the feats of these long-dead Jews that he felt the need to take part in the protection of the country. Yossi draws us in to his account through his performance of the story of the Sicarii. Witnessing the connection between the historic event and Yossi's own story, the tourists in his group are able to see ourselves as a part of a similar storyline. As an audience, we see, understand, and sympathize with Yossi's desire to protect the country.

Yossi's performance evokes a connection for his audience through his skillful creation of character combined with his candid presentation of self. In the first story he tells, Yossi relates the tale of the battle between the Sicarii and the 10<sup>th</sup> Roman Legion. He creates a characterization of Elazar Ben-Yair and does not break character, despite laughter from the audience and moments of improvisation. In his role as tour guide, we expect a certain authority about the history of the site. When he takes on the role of Ben-Yair, though, Yossi's personality emerges. Rather than an impersonal historical account of the Sicarii, we see Yossi's imagination of the Sicarii as normal, everyday people. Ben-Yair is not some mystical historical figure shrouded in the mist of the past, but a real live iteration of Yossi's imagination. The drama that begins to unfold is not about the Sicarii, but about Yossi himself, and what it means for him to tell the story of Masada. While Yossi offers aspects of a collective narrative, the story is framed by *his* experience. We don't hear about the founding of the state of Israel. Rather, we hear Yossi sing the song that hundreds of thousands of Jews sang when the country was founded. We don't hear a third person narrative of the events at Masada. Rather, we hear an imagined first person account that tells us more about Yossi than it does about the site.



Finally, Yossi does not provide an argument about the meaning of Masada and its place in Israeli culture (as do many tours of Masada). Rather, we hear the meaning that Yossi made for himself. We hear his rationale and we understand what he believes and why he believes it. After he finishes the main part of the story, Yossi steps out of the role of Ben-Yair, and begins to read the speech by Ben-Yair from Josephus. He then tells his personal narrative. The main points of the narrative were that, at 17, he felt little connection to the country, that he was compelled by some force to climb Masada, and that once he climbed he was confronted by the ghosts of his ancient ancestors. That encounter served as a rite of passage for Yossi, compelling him not just into adulthood, but also into citizenship. Peterson and Langellier contend, “personal narrative is a situated, strategic practice of textualizing experience rather than a text independent of context” (139). Yossi’s story textualizes his experience by creating a meaningful connection between his personal narrative, the founding of the country of Israel, and the story of the Sicarii. As I noted earlier, a part of why tourists come to Masada is the opportunity to walk in the footsteps of those who came before. Yossi’s personal narrative performs this function. Whereas his performance as Ben-Yair offered his audience insight into Yossi’s imaginative character, his personal narrative placed his own story within the context of the history of the site. His audience is then asked to contend with these two stories together, one that teaches us about the inner character of Yossi, and the other that situates Yossi as a part of the Masada narrative. The experience we get from Yossi is an experience of nationalism. Yossi’s personal story is a compelling story about how a young man came to love his country and develop the willingness to fight and die for it. His stories and his tour do not connect us directly to Masada. Instead, we remain connected to Yossi and his story. We see the seamlessness with which Yossi’s story fits within the narrative of

Masada. This leaves us with the possibility that we might have or gain an experience that can connect us to Masada as well.

### **Authoritative Narrative**

Most mornings I was at Masada I would climb up with a group that I met at the base and tour around with them until they left. Afterwards, I would wait either by the entrance to the snake path or by the main water station and try to meet up with a group as they reached the top. Omer's group had taken the cable car up and I met them at the water station. I approached Omer while his group was getting situated and taking pictures of the view. When I asked him if I could tag along he seemed a bit apprehensive. I told him that I wasn't looking to critique or contradict anyone; I just wanted to know how different guides led their groups. He said I could join, provided his group agreed and that I didn't say anything during the tour. I put my notebook away and told him I would be no more than a fly on the wall.

In general, the tour had the same structure as most. Omer walked us through the ruins of Herod's temple, next he took the tour to the Western Palace, then to the breach point in the wall, and finally back to the shaded area by the entryway. Throughout the tour, Omer led authoritatively. Whereas some guides will point out the possible discrepancies between Josephus' account and the archaeological findings, or say that the archaeological findings are inconclusive, Omer presented everything with certainty.<sup>3</sup> He made claims about artifacts and events for which the facts are inconclusive. Had a group member been a scholar of Masada, she might have raised a question or two about the validity of what Omer was saying, but that did not

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<sup>3</sup> One example of a discrepancy is when Josephus says that the pillars of the palace were cut from a single stone (396), when, in fact, they were made of a series of stones covered in plaster and made to look like a single structure. Another common discrepancy at Masada is the spot where a number of ostraca were found that Yigael Yadin suggested might have been used as the lots to determine which of the men at Masada would kill the others. Guides will often point out that this claim is inconclusive.

happen. Most people who come to Masada have not read Josephus' account and fewer still are familiar with the work of Yigael Yadin. They simply trust the guide. They come to the site with certain expectations about what they will see and how it will be framed. As I noted earlier, people are compelled to visit a site for a number of reasons. Visitors have expectations about the site and part of those expectations is the notion that an engagement with the site should offer more than the story that brings them. That engagement combines the aspects of the site people might learn before they come to the site with the rhetoric of the tour to give them a privileged look into the past.

Often Masada tours assume a positive orientation towards the site. For instance, guides take their groups to the echo point at the southern part of the mountain where they will engage in a number of ritualistic practices. In a large group I was with one day, the guide took us there and told us that the echo was so great that it would reverberate all around Israel. He then suggested that we shout, "*am yisroel chai*" ("the nation/people of Israel live"), so that everyone in Israel could hear us. In a smaller group, the guide told one of the children on the tour that God lives in the mountains surrounding Masada. He told the young boy to ask any question he wanted and that God would answer. The boy was at a loss, so the guide suggested he ask, "Why are we here?" When the echo came back, the guide said that it was God telling him that he needs to ask himself that question. Still another guide told his group that it was "the souls of the Zealots<sup>4</sup> shouting back at us through history." These encounters suggest that the literal echoes heard by tourists at Masada represent the figurative echoes of the past that people come to experience.

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<sup>4</sup> While guides will often use the term Zealots, I use the term Sicarii. Most historians believe that the Sicarii were the leaders at Masada. Guides tend to prefer the term Zealots because it has fewer negative connotations than the term Sicarii.

Most of the tourists I spoke with said that the echo point was one of the most memorable parts of their tour. While tourism scholars often raise the question of the authenticity of tourist sites, the experience at the echo point suggests that tourists might be less interested in the literal meaning of the site than in an experience the site makes possible. MacCannell argues that tourists seek out authenticity when visiting a historic site (3), and a number of other writers look at how sites try to make themselves *more* authentic. Scott Magelssen, for instance, notes that living history museums conduct extensive research into their sites to help tourists feel like they are walking into the past. Historic sites and museums work to build connections to the past for tourists. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett illustrates, items labeled “authentic” gain “higher value as ... signs that point away from themselves to something else, to ‘life’” (25). While such authentic images and artifacts from the past may help tourists have a more “authentic experience,” the degree to which tourists actually want something authentic is debatable. As Cohen notes, tourists go on tour and situate themselves on a spectrum, somewhere between pleasure seeking and authenticity seeking. Cohen argues that tourists will look for what they want from the site and strive to achieve that end (“A Phenomenology”). Additionally, as Michael Bowman suggests, authenticity may be more in the mind of the tourist and the encounter between their “imaginative fantasies” and a material site (“Tracing Mary” 194). There is no real question of authenticity at the echo point. Guides bring tourists there to foster an imaginative fantasy, one where tourists gain an opportunity to identify with whoever it is they shout to and listen for. While an individual may choose to shout whatever comes to mind, guides have the ability shape this experience and point the tourist’s imagination in a particular direction.

Omer’s closing statement is a performative echo that travels from the present moment into Israel’s past and is, subsequently, heard again. After he finished the main part of the tour and

brought us back to the shaded spot by the entryway, Omer concluded the story of Masada. He told us that arrowheads were found around where we sat, so we know that there was fighting close to the top. He then told us of the collective suicide. A member of the group asked what happened to the bodies, and Omer told him that the bodies were thrown over the side and buried at the southern end of the mountain. He then said that the bodies could not be exhumed because rabbinic law forbids the exhumation of a properly buried body. Omer concluded, “And that’s the story.” As he continued, he used rocks to demonstrate his final point. He picked up one and placed it in front of him. “You see, this is Masada.” He then picked up others and began placing them in a circle around the center rock. “And you see, here are the Roman camps. The Jews at Masada were surrounded. They had no choice! Now, we have today.” He pointed to the center rock. “This is Israel. And here we have Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt. And I ask, can we let Iran get a nuclear weapon?” The answer seemed self-evident and the implications responded to salient fears about the future of the Middle East. The tour group members nodded knowingly.

The truth of the site was very important for Omer. His continual assertion of truth throughout his tour was punctuated by his closing question, “can we let Iran get a nuclear weapon?” This question reiterates a public debate about Masada and Israel’s militarism that began in the 1970s. Whereas through the early 1960s, discussions of Masada generally fit into what Zerubavel discusses as an “activist commemorative narrative,” in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a *tragic* commemorative narrative developed. As Zerubavel points out, “whereas the activist commemorative narrative emphasized the contrast between Masada and the Holocaust, the new narrative highlights the analogy between the two events. . . . In this framework, the situation, not the act of suicide, is strongly condemned” (193). As I stated earlier, the framework that Zerubavel mentions has been termed “the Masada complex,” suggesting that Israel feels

justified in its attitude and actions taken against its Arab neighbors. Until Prime Minister Golda Meir publicly stated that there was indeed a Masada complex, the statement was simply a way to criticize Israel's military force. Meir's affirmation, in the context of a public press conference given by the highest authority in the government, gave the statement performative force. In other words, there was no longer any question as to whether or not Israel had a Masada complex. Rather, Israel's political activity would occur as part of a complex that placed the possibility of annihilation at the hands of an enemy at its center.

The Masada complex has generally been linked to Israel's militarism. Particularly in the early years of the state, there was a tremendous amount of support for the military. While people may not have enjoyed their service, they saw it as a necessary part of social life.<sup>5</sup> In the mid 1970s things began to change. The first "refuseniks," Israeli soldiers who report for duty but selectively refuse to serve in certain capacities, began to appear. The first major refusenik movement was in response to the 1982 Lebanon war, and the movement grew in momentum during the First Intifada, and continued to gain notoriety through the Second Intifada. While no exact numbers exist in terms of how many people have selectively refused to serve in the IDF (the IDF does not prosecute all those who selectively refuse and will often reassign refuseniks to duties that they accept), estimates suggest that over the years a few thousand soldiers have refused, including a number of high ranking officers. In her introduction to *Refusenik!*, Susan Sontag explains that "it is hard to defy the wisdom of the tribe: the wisdom that values the lives of members of the tribe above all others. It will always be unpopular – it will always be deemed unpatriotic" (xii). While the number of refuseniks may not appear to be significant, Sontag points

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<sup>5</sup> Military service is, and has been since the inception of the state, mandatory for all Israeli citizens, male and female, though exemption is generally offered to all minority groups, except the Druze. Hence, the vast majority of Israeli soldiers are Jewish.

to the difficulty in defying the norms of society, particularly when they deal with the supposed protection of the citizens of the state. The growing number of refuseniks over the last 40 years suggests that there is a less cohesive feeling about Israeli militarism than there once was.

Another telling example of how public sentiment has shifted is the creation and reception of Ari Folman's film, *Waltz with Bashir*. The film, a documentary about the effects of the 1982 Lebanon War, explores Folman's attempts to remember certain parts of the war that he has forgotten. In an interview with the US's National Public Radio (NPR), Folman said that the impetus for creating the film was that he was haunted by the war. Folman notes that this haunting comes about because of the feeling that, "as common soldiers, we didn't know what was going on," and that comes at a moment "when . . . you put everything in one frame and say, okay, there is something very bad, there is mass murder going on just around the hill." The mass murder that Folman brings up occurred at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp, a camp that was supposed to be protected by Israeli forces. The Israeli forces facilitated the massacre by allowing members of the Lebanese Phalangist militia to pass into the camp and then shot flares over the camp to aid the Phalangists. At least 762 Palestinians were killed, and some numbers count the dead at upwards of 3,500. Immediately following the massacre, an official Israeli commission was established to determine the role that Israel played in the massacre. The commission determined that Israel was indirectly responsible for the massacre and that Menachem Begin, the Prime Minister of Israel, should have exercised greater involvement in allowing the Phalangists to enter the camps. The commission also recommended that defense minister Ariel Sharon resign (Schiff and Ya'ari 283-284).

During the documentary, Folman interviews a number of people who served with him in Lebanon as he tries to remember what he did while he was there. The general response from a

number of the people is that they wish that they could forget and move past the experience, and some wonder why Folman doesn't try to do the same. Folman notes that even though he can't remember, he is haunted by nightmares and images that he can't seem to put together, and it seems that others in the film are as well. In his interview with NPR, Folman said that the film was better received in Israel than he thought it would be: "I was expecting at least a kind of debate, a controversy, something. And then I was hugged dearly by all the political spectrum. The government took it as a project and they keep sending the film all over the world, at their expense" (NPR).

The 1982 war and the First Intifada were occasions when Israelis began to look differently at themselves. The '82 war, when Israel chased the PLO leadership into Lebanon, was a prime example of the Masada complex at work. The growth of the refusenik movement and the warm reception of films and other works of art that called into question the types of forgetting that would be necessary to maintain the Masada complex, suggest that the complex, for Israelis, might be working itself out. The rise of social networking groups, like "Israel-Loves-Iran," with over 100,000 Facebook members, suggests that many Israelis take issue with a militaristic foreign policy. Even a recent article in the conservative leaning *Jerusalem Post Magazine* criticizes Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for his "Masada complex," stating: "Reminiscent of the Zealots, Netanyahu's refusal to compromise will inevitably lead to the destruction of the State of Israel as we know it" (Levin).

Omer's question to his group, "can we let Iran get a nuclear weapon?" does not just occur 40 years after Golda Meir's endorsement of the complex, but also within a distinctly different social context. Israelis seem to be questioning, and have been for some time, their public memory. Through works of art, social critique, protest, and social networking, there are clear



signs that Omer's statement no longer fits the context of the current Israeli society. Yet the reception of his statement at Masada (and the reception of others like it) suggests that the site of Masada is a different entity altogether than the symbol of Masada. Tours act as interpretations of the site. Omer presents his group with the facts and then offers his interpretation of those facts: Masada happened as Josephus said it happened, ergo we must attack Iran. As Derrida notes, an interpretation "may pretend simply to state, show, and inform, but it actually produces" ("A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event" 447). For tourists at Masada, Omer's interpretation reproduces the Masada complex for tourists, transferring it from a distinctly Israeli complex into one that makes sense at the site only. For example, if an Israeli politician declared in the Knesset that, because of events like Masada, we must attack Iran, he would come off as absurd and/or would be met with harsh debate. For a tour guide at Masada to declare the same thing, however, seemed amenable to the tourists on the trip. While I do not know how the tourists actually felt, none openly argued with Omer's interpretation. As a guide who possesses knowledge about the site that tourists do not, Omer offers an authoritative interpretation of the site.

### **Dialogic Engagement**

At the hottest part of the day, when Masada is usually close to empty, I record my final notes and prepare to head down to the visitor's center. The few groups that do tour during this time usually do so without much energy and as quickly as possible. One day, however, as I was packing my bag, I heard a boisterous group having a good time. I wandered over and gave my typical spiel. I introduced the project and myself and told them that if I wrote about them, I would be happy to share what I wrote and take their comments into consideration. Without reservation, they agreed. The group was a Birthright group from the United States and all the

members of the group identified as part of the LGBTQ community. They referred to themselves as “gay Birthright,” and suggested that I do the same.

Since 2000, the Taglit-Birthright organization has sent over 300,000 young Jews on free 10-day trips to Israel. According to the Birthright website, “the trip aims to strengthen participants’ Jewish identity; to build an understanding, friendship and lasting bond with the land and people of Israel; and to reinforce the solidarity of the Jewish people worldwide” (Birthright). Ilan, the tour guide for gay Birthright, said that a part of the educational side of the Birthright program is to try to frame historical events in such a way that the tourists on these trips don’t see the conflicts as merely black or white, but as existing within various shades of gray. Ilan told me that he would take his groups on tours to the separation wall that blocks off the West Bank from Israel. He said that while he tries to offer the perspective of the Palestinians, invariably, those whom the tourists see on these trips are Israelis, and the stories that they hear, whether about Israelis or Palestinians, all come from Israelis. Ilan acknowledges that it is difficult to identify with another group when you never actually meet that group. Echoing this contention, Kelner relates an experience he had with a Birthright group at the separation wall. In *Tours That Bind*, Kelner said that while the group spent time discussing the separation wall and the plight of the Palestinians, “with no Palestinians present to speak for themselves, their perspectives were filtered through the voice of the Israeli guide who took the prerogative of representing them” (58). Additionally, Kelner noted that Birthright tourism, much like other forms of tourism that occur in Israel, combines socio-political elements, nature, and “hedonistic 3-S tourism (sun, sea, and sex)” (68). Kelner goes on:

The multiple frameworks of interpretation establish a sense of normalcy and thereby depoliticize a hotly contested terrain. More important, they take an implicit ideological stand, challenging positions that claim that the sole proper way of understanding the country is through the lens of the Arab-Israeli conflict (76).

While Birthright strives for an educational experience for its tourists, the majority of Birthright tours appear similar to the other tours I watched at Masada. While the tour operator (Birthright) may aim for a certain overall experience, and while the guide must work within the parameters of the tour operator, he must also address the needs and desires of his group.

Ilan took his group on a similar path as other tour guides. He began by taking the group through the ruins of Herod's bathhouse and palace. He then told them about the logistics of living in the desert and what the Jewish Zealots had to do to survive. Finally, he took them through the story of the Roman siege and the ensuing mass suicide. After this, Ilan presented the story of Yohanan ben Zakai as a way to address the difficult decision that the Jews faced at Masada. Invoking the story of ben Zakai is a common way for guides to begin a discussion like this. Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai was one of the most influential rabbis of the time. He is credited as one of the primary contributors to the *Mishnah*, the core text of Rabbinical Judaism. During the Jewish-Roman war, ben Zakai found himself trapped in Jerusalem. His supporters managed to smuggle him out of the city in a coffin and into the Roman lines. There, ben Zakai met with the Roman general and future emperor, Vespasian. He told the general that he did not agree with the revolt, that it was not worth the bloodshed, and that he was only concerned with being able to practice his religion in peace. He asked Vespasian for safe passage for himself and his students to Yavneh. Once in Yavneh, he said, they would peacefully study the Torah and never think of bothering the Romans. Vespasian allowed this and ben Zakai became a key figure in restructuring Judaism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> With the destruction of the temple, the primary place of worship for Jews, the major rituals and rites had to be re-envisioned. Ben Zakai was key in replacing animal sacrifice with prayer and creating a framework that would allow the religion to maintain its cohesion, even in the Diaspora.

Ilan then told his group that he wanted to have a conversation with them about what they experienced, and he wanted them to think of three different stories and the three possibilities that each one suggests. First, was the story of the Zealots who, faced with having to live under Roman rule, saw the situation as black and white. As Ilan said, “For them, it was freedom or nothing.” The second story was the story of ben Zakai who, rather than fight and die, said that he would focus on studying Torah, what he viewed as the essence of living a good life. Finally, he brings up the story of the Roman historian and author of the authoritative text about Masada, Josephus Flavius. Josephus was a Jew named Yosef ben Matisyahu who fought against the Romans at the beginning of the war. When he and his troops found themselves cornered by the Romans, the group entered into a suicide pact like the Sicarii at Masada, and each man took the life of another until Josephus was the only one left. Rather than take his own life, though, Josephus convinced the Romans to offer him a position as an historian, someone who would be able to tell both sides of the story. Ilan offered these three positions to his group – “freedom or nothing, religious freedom under foreign rule, or, if you can’t beat them, join them” – and asked which they would choose were they in the same situation.

While not all guides ended their tour this way, a few did. The guide hopes to spark a debate about how best to face an oppressive scenario. As I noted above, the history of the Jewish Diaspora is often viewed as one oppression after another (the tragic commemorative narrative), and it is not inconceivable to think that tourists on organized trips to Israel have experienced or might, at some point, experience an oppressive act against them. Although the question is expressed in an historical context, it suggests that Jews still face oppression in their lives. Additionally, guides like Ilan will frame the conversation in terms of the type of Jew that a person could be in the world. First, like the Sicarii, one could declare that Israel was their land,

so they should be in Israel, no matter what. Second, like Josephus, one could acknowledge their Jewish heritage, but opt not to practice or pass it on. Finally, like ben Zakai, one could choose to live away from the Jewish center and practice their Judaism wherever they happen to be in the world. While guides have a certain amount of freedom to present the story as they wish, this particular structuring of the narrative was one of the more common ones and, arguably, reflects trends in Israeli society that opt for a more critical approach to history and how it is used. By asking tourists to debate the different possible readings of the site, tour guides work to decenter a single authoritative account. While the goals of many of the tours are to foster a connection between the tourists, the state, and a Jewish identity, tour guides more often create that connection through these types of discussion than through other strategies (e.g., the authoritative narrative Omer used to conduct his tour).

When Ilan began this discussion with his group, they were tentative at first. Fairly quickly the group decided that this conception was too simple for them, particularly if one were to take into account the LGBTQ community (as they were wont to do). Rather than discuss Judaism, then, the students on the tour equated the three options to growing up LGBTQ in the United States. The group recognized that many people who want to come out find themselves in communities that would be intolerant. First, like the Sicarii they could opt to hold their ground; they could say that this is where they are from and who they are. In this scenario, the students on the trip began to bring up Matthew Shepard and the rash of school bullying that occurs against LGBTQ students. The second option, to be like Josephus, the LGBTQ students equated to staying in the closet, avoiding the dangers of being openly LGBTQ in the United States. Finally, they equated ben Zakai with kids who escape their communities to a place like New York, “the

gay island,” as one tourist said. There they could be open with little fear of any backlash, just like ben Zakai and his followers were allowed to practice their religion in peace.

The conversation was rich, lasted longer than any I experienced with other tour groups, and involved just about everyone in the group. A few months later, I called Ilan to speak with him about his group. I asked if he thought that this group was unique, or if all of his groups spent this much time discussing the questions he asks in such an in depth way. He said:

Lots of groups are very excited when they come to Israel, but this group was different than any of the others. They’re all from the same community. They share the same beliefs, values, difficulties. They felt very comfortable [with each other] from the beginning. They were a lot more open, discussion-wise and the level of discussion gets higher and higher [as the trip goes on]. Almost every group, we have a big discussion, relevant, meaningful. Eighty-five percent of the time. It depends on the tour guide, how they frame the trip. The group bonds when they define themselves. But also, when other people define you, it’s bonding (Ilan)

What stands out about this tour, generally speaking, is the group’s discussion about the importance of the site. Ilan managed to frame the conversation for his group and allowed the frame to shift to better meet their needs. The tour emphasizes the importance of creating a dialogue about the site, and when done well, the dialogue focuses more on the identities of the members of the tour group than on any sort of prescribed message dictated by the tour guide. Instead of trying to convince his group that they should feel a connection to the site and/or Israel because of their Jewish heritage or Jewish sympathies, Ilan allows his group to focus on their own identities. By focusing on their own identities, they create a metaphoric connection to the site. Rather than be defined by the site, they maintain their ability to define themselves, but they find a way to do so within the context of the site. Such a connection might not have them screaming, “Masada shall not fall again,” but Masada becomes a possible lens through which they can identify themselves in the future. While the focus of the tourism industry is about

putting the tourist in the site, this type of tour puts the site in the tourist; Masada becomes a part of the tourist's identity.

In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" Judith Butler contends that identities are performances that people enter into. A person's identity is determined by how they take on prescribed roles and how they enact their everyday performances. So, while the performative roles one takes on may be choices that they make, the roles themselves existed before they arrived and, hence, "constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" (162). Ilan's tour group suggests that the taking on of a particular role is an incredibly nuanced and complex process. Ilan presents his group with what is, at Masada, a normal way of identifying with the story of the site. Immediately, though, his group adapts this framework to fit aspects of their identity that are not normal in the context of the site. As Derrida notes, the contextual and citational nature of the performative engenders "an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (*Limited* 12). What we see in Ilan's tour group is that the act of claiming an identity creates the possibility of new ways of understanding other aspects of an identity. By taking part on the Birthright trip, these tourists are claiming a Jewish identity. They determine, through their engagement with each other and the story of the site, how they will take on any new aspects of their identity. The performance of identity is something that is entered into, but is also made singular through the metaphors the group chose to employ.

While this type of connection with the site can be made on one's own, rarely will tour guides facilitate it. The tour guide has a responsibility to his group, the site, and at sites of national importance, to the country as well. A dialogic approach does not privilege one of these responsibilities over another, but instead creates a space where all three are recognized. Guided tours, in particular, are dictated by the guide. The guide chooses where to take his group and how

to tell the story of the site. In my conversation with Ilan, he said that because of this, “there is a thin line between education and brainwashing. I know that my love for Israel doesn’t have anything to do with the moral history of the site. I have to embrace my love and understand it as complicated” (Telephone interview). By structuring the tour so that a dialogue would occur for the group, and by allowing that dialogue to be as open as it was, Ilan recognized that, as much as he was asking the tour group to develop a connection to the site, to do so would require him to have his own connection to the site challenged. As Katriel and Shenhar suggest, this type of dialogic engagement “points our attention to the role of cultural stories as potential generators of social dramas and as oppositional, meaning-shifting processes” (363). As much as the tour changed the members of the group, this type of tour also challenges the guide to be open to personal change as well. While I do not claim to speak to what Ilan felt about his group’s discussion, leaving it as open as he did was rare, as most guides take a heavier hand in directing how the group interprets the meaning of the site.

### **Structured Communitas**

Tourism, as has been pointed out, has a lot in common with ritual (Grayburn, “Secular”; “The Sacred”). On a basic level, when someone goes on tour, they leave the mundane world of their everyday life and enter into the liminal space of the tour. As I noted earlier, tourists go on tour for a number of reasons, but generally, they go to have experiences that are lacking in their everyday lives. While tourists return home to the same life they left to go on tour, the hope is that in some way, the tour has changed them. For instance, after returning from a trip I might decide to add things to my diet that were not common before the tour, or I might decide that I’m going to look towards the mundane with the same joy and vigor that I looked at the world while on tour. Though the same experiences can be had at home, I recognize going on tour as something



outside of my everyday life. Being on tour encourages what Victor Turner calls “communitas,” a feeling of togetherness that I have with other travelers. The people met and the places visited on tour are heightened, not because they’re in a different place, but because tourists want them to be heightened. When I go on tour, I’m more likely not just to speak to strangers, but also to sit down for a drink with strangers, travel with strangers, and do all sorts of other things that I wouldn’t normally consider doing with strangers. Without the inhibitions that normally constrain me at home, on tour I have spontaneous experiences that have the ability to shape how I see myself, and the possibilities of who I can be/become.

It is difficult not to have these experiences while travelling, though certain choices in how one travels may make these interactions more common. Backpackers, for example, will often share living spaces, food, and transportation with relative strangers, and travel stories from backpackers tend to involve interactions with other backpackers. These conditions welcome the possibility of communitas. Turner states “communitas emerges where social structure is not” (126). As tourists engage in activities with other tourists, possibilities for spontaneous communitas, a feeling of togetherness that is fleeting yet generative, emerge. For Turner, spontaneous communitas is “nature in dialogue with structure . . . together they make up one stream of life, the one affluent supplying power, the other alluvial fertility” (140). Communitas most readily occurs during liminal moments, where the structure of our everyday life might still be present, but is kept in check by our desire to experiment and change. At times, when we decide to give structure to the experiences we had during states of communitas, such as incorporating eating habits picked up on tour, we create what Turner calls “normative communitas.” While the structure may take away from the alluvial quality of the communitas, these moments allow us to continue to mark that we were changed by being on tour. It can act as

a reminder that our identities are what we make of them, and even though we lock ourselves into particular structures, we can manipulate those structures.

As I noted earlier in the chapter, tourists who want a guide at Masada have to bring one with them. Most of these groups travel to other places as well with the same guide, typically over the course of a number of days. Many of these groups are composed of people from similar backgrounds, so even if they don't know each other at the beginning of the trip, they will often form intimate bonds with other members of their group over the course of the tour. Additionally, many groups (particularly religious organizations) will put together a trip of people from the same community who may consider themselves acquaintances before the trip. One goal of such trips is to create bonds among the members of the group. The group leaders on these trips will often focus on moments of spontaneous *communitas* and attempt to structure these moments for their group so that the experience of being on the tour continues to affect the tourists when they return home. The harnessing of these moments on tour to bond a community together when they return home is what Turner calls "ideological *communitas*." An example of ideological *communitas* comes from Jon Williamson, the pastor of a church group from Greenville, South Carolina, who took 37 members of his church on a tour of Israel and Jordan. When I asked him if, and how, the trip affected him and his group, he said,

We have become "ambassadors" for Israel in our community and are actively fighting against the anti-Semitism that is on the rise. One of the young ladies in our youth group organized an event called "Never Again!" They gathered a large group of people in downtown Greenville (similar to a flash mob) and they all wore black shirts with the Star of David on their arms. At a pre-determined time, they all fell to the ground like they were dead. Others walked around to explain that this was in remembrance of the Jews that had been killed in the Holocaust and to bring awareness to the anti-Semitism in our country (Williamson).

For Jon and his group, the tour of Israel was a spiritual tour, meant to draw the group together.

Even sites that are commonly viewed as secular, like Masada, were framed with a religious tone.

As he and his group made their way to the top of the mountain, Jon led the group in a devotional reading from Ephesians, and a short prayer. Jon made an effort to make sure that every site they visited, they did so with an eye towards getting closer to God. The secular, as Jon made clear, can be seen as a place awaiting a religious interpretation. Additionally, the tour made a strong impact between their religious experience and the country of Israel. Such experiences fostered the possibility for the flash mob type performance that Jon described above. The tour, because of its liminal nature, and because people often want to expand who they are through the experiences they have when they go on tour, can encourage moments of *communitas*. Tour group organizers and guides can draw from those moments of spontaneity in order to affect tourists, so that the tourist is changed, in a particular way.

One example of the tour being used to foster ideological *communitas* was with an American student group from the United States. The students were on an eight-week trip to Israel. A part of that time was dedicated to learning the history of Israel and the Jewish people, and a part was dedicated to exploring the sites of Israel. The education often overlapped into the tour, as their guide/teacher regularly stopped and had them write notes in their journal, or compare one site with another or one period of history with another. As these students spent eight weeks together, there were definite moments of *communitas*. On the tour, it was clear that the guide/teacher, Dan, structured the tour so that spontaneous *communitas* would occur and that such occurrences could be used as teachable moments in order to frame the site ideologically for the students/tourists. While Dan's role as teacher and the tourists' roles as students were always present, I focus on the moments of this tour that resembled moments that I witnessed on a number of other tours as well. I chose this group to focus on because the ideological nature of the tour was so clearly articulated with the activities that Dan led for his group. Three parts of Dan's

tour stand out: A story, a lesson on how to kill a Roman soldier, and a ritualistic activity at the end of the tour. Together, the three work to create a sense of *communitas*, and then create a framework that gives structure to the moments of togetherness felt by the group.

After the group made it to the top of the mountain, Dan told them that they were free to watch the sunrise or to join him and others in morning prayers. Dan had brought his tefillin,<sup>7</sup> put them on with a few others from the group and a few more people from a neighboring group. They quickly went through the morning prayers, and then Dan led his group to a quieter area of the mountain. There he told them a story about Yigael Yadin, the head archaeologist during the excavation of Masada. One morning, Yadin was riding the train from Jerusalem to Tel-Aviv. He was a well known public figure in Israel, so when he sat down, the woman across the aisle took notice. Shortly after the train left, a religious looking young Russian began making his way down the aisle, asking people if they would like to put on tefillin. The woman was sure that Yadin would just ignore the young Jew, as he was an avowed secularist. However, as there were very few Russians in Israel at the time (the cold war made it hard to leave the country, and even harder to be a Jew), when the man asked Yadin if he would like to put on tefillin, Yadin said, "Let me ask you a question first." Yadin asked the young Chasid if, when he was in Russia, he had put on tefillin every day. The Chasid said yes, so Yadin asked, "What did people think about it?" The young man said that he was often ridiculed. He petitioned to leave the country and was instead sent to the gulag. Yadin then asked, "Did you put on tefillin in the gulag?" The young man said that he did, and that in addition to being ridiculed he was beaten every day. After hearing the young man's story Yadin said that he could not possibly refuse to put on the tefillin.

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<sup>7</sup> Tefillin are little boxes that contain pieces of scripture. Men traditionally wear them during morning prayers. One is wrapped around the left arm so that the box rests on the bicep, close to the heart, and the other is placed on the head, so that the box rests just above and between the eyes.

The young man put the tefillin on Yadin, said a prayer, and then continued down the train car. Upon seeing this exchange, the woman leaned over and said, "Excuse me, but I couldn't help overhear what just took place." She said that she knew that Yadin was secular and thanked him for listening to the young man's story and for putting on the tefillin. She said that her husband had been a religious man. During the Sinai War his unit was pinned down by sniper fire and mortar shells, and her husband jumped up in order to reveal the position of the sniper. In so doing, he took a fatal bullet. As he lay dying, the men in the unit asked if there was anything they could do for him. The dying man made them promise to put on tefillin every day. The woman then told Yadin that when he allowed the young Chasid to put tefillin on him, it was as though Yadin was fulfilling the wishes of her dead husband. Upon hearing this story, Yadin pulled out a box. He told the woman that he had been working on an excavation of a site in the desert and that he wanted to show her what he had found. He opened the box that he was carrying to reveal a 2000-year-old pair of tefillin. She was the first person besides Yadin to see the ancient discovery, and he told her that he wanted her to see them as a way to thank her for her story.

Before Dan finished the story, he told the group that the tefillin for the arm and the head each have the same texts inside. The tefillin for the head, however, is divided into four sections whereas the one for the arm is undivided. Dan told them that with our head we have to weigh all the different possibilities, but when we act, we must be sure, and act as one. He then said that each individual in this group may have different ideas about the world and their place in it, but in the time where action is needed, they would have to be able to act together. Just as Jon began the day with his group with a devotion to frame the experience, this story, and the contention that the group members would have to act together, frames the rest of the day. The story teaches the group that even though they are witnessing a site that was important for a specific point in

history, the traditions from that history are just as important today. It suggests that, while their individuality helps make them who they are, there is a deeper essence that will always be more important than their self.

A little while later, as Dan was about to take the group to the breach point in the wall, he told his group that before the Romans actually made it up to the top of Masada, the Jews would engage in sneak attacks and reconnaissance activities. He then posed a question to the group. He said, “The Romans were the biggest, strongest army that the world had ever seen. How is it possible for a peasant Jew to kill a Roman soldier?” The group had a few ideas, but Dan told them that, while there are a number of ways one could do it, he would show them the best way. He said that the first thing to do would be to sneak up behind the Roman. Since the ground was rocky, it made it difficult to move without being heard. Instead of walking up to a Roman, then, you would have to slowly crawl, pulling yourself along on your elbows. He then told them to all lie flat on their bellies as he showed them how to crawl stealthily across the rocky desert ground. After they got the crawling down, he called for a volunteer. The volunteer stood watch as Dan crawled up behind him, then rose up, put one arm around the Roman’s mouth (“you can’t let him scream”), and with the other hand, Dan mimicked slashing the soldier’s throat. Finally, as the soldier began to gurgle and die, it was important to lay the body down as quietly as possible. Then you can crawl on to kill the next soldier.

Everyone in the group got a kick out of the activity. Most importantly, they noticed that what they were doing was special. They saw what other groups were doing, and it was clear that few, if any, engaged in the same type of activities that they were engaging in. After this activity, they were brought to the breach point in the wall and, like many other groups, were encouraged by their guide to enter into a debate about what they would have done in a similar situation. In

most groups, the majority said that it would be difficult to choose death, either at the hands of the Romans, or at their own hands. Most said that they would surrender in the hopes of living (and possibly fighting) another day. This group, however, was different. Here the majority of the debate revolved around the option of suicide or fighting, with only a very few saying they would consider surrender. While it's difficult to tell what would happen if any of these tourists did face a situation like this, the nature of the group was such that, compared to other groups, a disproportionate number opted not to surrender. Though this could be read in a number of ways, the fact that so many said that they would not surrender suggests that the tourists in this group have developed some sort of group identity.

While it might be easy to celebrate the notion of *communitas*, a common problem that can arise in these situations is a sort of groupthink. Members of the group think like other members of the group, and they do what they think the rest of the group expects them to do. Sometimes this can allow people to express feelings they have that they might be unable to express in other situations, but sometimes it makes them feel like they have to express feelings they may not have in order to maintain membership in the group. While the group members seemed to genuinely have those feelings, it was clear that those feelings arose out of the persuasive strategy used by Dan in the group activities and stories outlined above.

Finally, as the group was about to head back down the snake path, Dan had them all stand in a circle. He spoke about Masada as a very significant site for the Jewish people and for the state of Israel. Drawing on both the activist and tragic commemorative narratives, he suggested that Israel, strong as it is, needs protection. This notion is one that seems to have arisen fairly recently. In *Youth Tourism to Israel*, Erik Cohen analyzes the recent phenomenon of Diaspora tourism. Writing exclusively about "Israel Experience Tours," Cohen says that the major

objectives of these tours are to create/strengthen a connection to Israel for people on these tours, to teach about Israel and Jewish history, to develop intimate connections to other Jews from their own communities, and to feel connected to Jewish culture. These goals arose from a general exigency facing the Jewish people. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a noticeable decline in Jewish activities and communities outside of Israel. Particularly in the United States, more and more young Jews were marrying outside of the faith and engaging in fewer religious or even secular Jewish activities. The Israel Experience program, and soon many others, developed to meet this dilemma. By taking young Jews (13-26 years old) to Israel for free, or at very little cost, these organizations hoped that by developing a connection to Israel and their Jewish heritage, they would want to maintain that connection back home.

After he completed his comments about why Masada was such an important site, Dan then told everyone in the group to pick up two rocks. He said,

It is against the law for us to take anything from this site. You're not going to take these rocks; you're going to borrow them. One is for you, and one is for a friend. I want you to take them home with you, and keep one for yourself and give one to a friend. Tell your friend that the rock was borrowed, and that you would like them to return it for you. As for your own rock, that is for you to bring back one day.

This final act of the day performatively asks the tourists to make a vow. Like a dare, a vow calls others to bear witness to the action that you are to perform. Parker and Sedgwick discuss a dare as a statement that “ostensibly involves only a singular first and a singular second person” (171), but they point out that it also involves possible third persons, others that are interpolated into the act simply by the speaker’s statement. Thus, when someone dares me to do something, the dare is easily written off as if there’s no one else around. If others are present, though, and none speak out against the dare, then there is a performative force to the statement. I have to worry not just about what the person daring me thinks, but about what those interpolated by the speaker might



think of me as well. The vow Dan asks his group to make works similarly, particularly within the context of the entire day. The story he told suggested that important matters should be acted upon without dissent. The activity helped create a sense of *communitas*, a feeling of togetherness, among the group. Finally, by invoking the two commemorative narratives, he linked the group in front of him to a much larger, global group that is also called to action. Though the others in the group might not be physically present to see if each member fulfills his/her vow, taking the rocks and making the vow suggests the establishment of an ideological *communitas*. As Turner notes, “ideological *communitas* is at once an attempt to describe the external and visible effects—the outward form, it might be said—of an inward experience of existential *communitas*, and to spell out the optimal social conditions under which such experiences might be expected to flourish and multiply” (132). Being on tour together is enough to offer a group a feeling of *communitas*. By structuring the tour for a specific experience, Dan is able to foster an ideological *communitas*.

### **The Limits of Tour Guide Performances**

In the beginning of this chapter I suggested that tour guides create an enclavic space during their tour. Experiences that might be uncomfortable are blocked out from the tourist experience. For example, while tour guides have a wealth of information and relay much of that information to their groups, certain stories about the Sicarii are unilaterally left out from guided tours at Masada. Most notably, guides leave out the story of the Sicarii being expelled from Jerusalem by other Jewish groups and the story of the Sicarii slaughtering the 700 Jewish inhabitants of Ein Gedi. Both of these stories paint the Sicarii in a negative light and, as one guide said to me, make the story “more complicated” (Ron). By complicating the story it becomes more difficult for the guide to get a particular meaning across to tourists. Additionally,

guides try to regulate the types of interactions that their group has. They avoid areas where there is another guide or other tourists milling about, and when it comes time to tell the story of the Sicarii, guides find a secluded area far from other groups and as quiet as possible. By leaving certain things out, and by steering tourists away from unplanned encounters, it becomes easier for guides to make the point they want to make. While this definitely limits the possible ways a tourist can see and experience the site, it creates an experience where a meaning and purpose of their visit can be clearly articulated.

I focused on these four guides because, as each drew from a particular socio-historical context, and each exemplified a particular performance frame, the meaning and experience they crafted for their tour group was easy to see. In regards to the context, every guide I watched seemed to structure their tour similarly to one of these four. Each guide stressed either the importance of tourists maintaining ties to their Jewish ancestors, the need to protect Israel at all costs, the need to question and understand what it means to be Jewish, or the need to support Israel from the Diaspora. As each individually strives to relay a different meaning to tourists, the four together show that each is only one possible way of making meaning out of the story of Masada. Additionally, if we take the four periods together, we can imagine that there are other possible ways of interpreting the site and its story. While one interpretation may prove persuasive, read together they raise questions of what is left out, to what ends, and what other possibilities for structuring these tours might exist. These questions are interrogated more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

I also focused on these four in particular because their skillful use of a performance frame opened a clear way for me and other tourists to develop a personal connection to the site. As Yossi told us his story about the site, we understood his personal connection and saw a possible

way to build our own connections to the site. His intimate telling created a situation where we wanted to identify with him and his story. With Omer, because of his confidence with and focus on the history of the site, we were inclined to respect his interpretation of the site. Even if we might not agree with it, because of his authority as guide and as a knowledgeable steward of the site, we know it would be difficult to voice our disagreement. Ilan created an experience for his group that allowed them to find their own connection to the site. By privileging the group members' identities over any specific interpretation of the site, Ilan allowed for Masada to be an experience for his group to better understand their own identities. Finally, by structuring the tour through a series of meaningful activities, Dan created a feeling of community for his group that has the potential to extend far beyond the experience of the tour. These tourists were made to feel a responsibility to the site and what it stands for through their engagement with the site and their other group members.

While I focused on the four frames and their distinctions, they are not mutually exclusive. The experience with each was so striking because each was a master guide. Each was a skilled storyteller, each spoke in an authoritative voice about the site, each engaged their group in a process of meaning making, and each structured activities for their group to perform. While this served to bind the members of the group together, this also created an enclavic feeling for these tours. Instead of experiencing the site freely, these tours attempt to close off interactions with people outside the tour, and limit the tourist's ability to experience the site in a way not prescribed by the guide.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **THE ANGEL OF LIVING HISTORY: RE-PRESENTING THE PAST**

Visitors at living history museums have the opportunity to step out of their present and into the past created by the museum. Performance theorist Scott Magelssen defines “living history museums” as places that strive to create past events “anew in the present” (xiii). One of the most well-known living history museums is Plimoth Plantation, in Plymouth Massachusetts. At Plimoth Plantation, curators and performers stage the year 1627, every season, for tourists. The performers study their roles and interact with tourists who want to know what life was like 400 years ago. As residents from the year 1627, the performers learn how to interact with tourists from the present. They are happy to explain what life is like for them, and they feign amazement at the wizardry of present day items and at the absurdity of present day dress. At living history museums, the past collides with the present, and both are said to be wiser for it. The present gains an understanding of how it came to be from an understanding of the customs of the past, and the past gains insofar as past events can be more clearly articulated thanks to the archival research conducted by the museum curators and by the embodiment of bygone roles by performers. As a Plimoth promotional video says, “People who pay a return visit here are likely to discover that tomorrow’s past is even closer to the year 1627 than today’s” (qtd. in Magelssen). At living history museums, acts of preservation aim at bringing the past closer to the present. In this way, visitors to these museums can gain a better understanding of what the past looked and felt like.

The preservation work at Masada has some similarities to living history museums. What tourists walk into is not meant to resemble the Masada of 2000 years ago, but instead the Masada of about 150 years ago, before the earthquake that toppled many of the buildings. The

restorations are meant to take tourists back to a point where, like the explorers who arrived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, they can imagine for themselves what the Herodian site looked like. In a conversation I had with Eitan Campbell, the director of Masada National Park, he told me that his hope was to maintain the site as envisioned by Yigael Yadin, the head archaeologist during the excavations. He said, “people should be able to walk in and feel like it was untouched for 2,000 years” (Campbell). Of course, during that time the buildings on top of Masada went through some significant changes. Campbell pointed out that the purpose of the renovations and restorations was not to restore it to what it was, but to restore it to a point where tourists would be able to fill in the gaps with their imagination. The semi-reconstructed buildings offer a glimpse into the past, just as the explorers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century might have had. For tourists to actually feel what it was like 2,000 years ago, though, requires them to imagine the past for themselves. They can enter the hollowed out buildings, look at the mosaics, and try to place themselves in the shoes of the Roman elite that would have been able to live like this, or in the shoes of the Sicarii, who eschewed the lavish Roman lifestyle and tried to live more humbly. Because of the openness of the site, tourists are free to go almost wherever they want, fully exploring the original architecture, without any “do not enter” or “please don’t touch” signs, just as the archaeologists and explorers did before them.

Anthropologist Edward Bruner refers to living history sites as “authentic reproductions,” marking both the constructed nature of these sites and the fact that tourists are encouraged to engage with the site as though it exists in the time period it claims to be (149). Bruner argues that when tourists visit these sites, they want to engage with the reproduction as though it were authentic and, hence, allow themselves to be persuaded by the curators, producers, and performers at such sites (147). For example, many tourists still take the difficult hour-long snake-

path trail to the top of Masada when they could easily take the three-minute cable car ride. They do this, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, because they want to follow in the footsteps of those who came before them. Additionally, the numbered path laid out for tourists and the path that tour guides generally take helps frame the tourist experience as one of discovery. As tourists travel around the mountaintop, guides and markers verify certain historical artifacts along the way, and finally arrive at either the breach point in the wall, or the site where the Sicarii leaders chose collective suicide. At these points, tourists can conclude, like the archaeologists who came before (Yadin), that this was indeed the ancient site of the Sicarii's last stand. Masada, like many living history sites, attempts to bring visitors back to a point in history. From this point in history, visitors can imagine life as it was for those who called the past the present.

The primary difference between Masada and living history museums is that there are no living history performers at Masada. While some guides may don period clothing and pretend to be a character from the past, the time, effort, and energy that most living history performers put into the creation of that character is largely absent. These types of tour guide performances tend to be more like a *schtick*, a gimmick to get their groups more involved. Hence, the goal of such performances is not a historical accuracy, but a historical resemblance that may add to the total experience created by the tour guide. Living history performers, whether engaging in first or third person narration, in addition to being highly knowledgeable about their subject, are also skilled at presenting it from a specific point in the past. Tour guides, while they may be able to speak authoritatively about the past, primarily do so from the perspective of the present. In this chapter, I analyze the performance *Masada Live*, a staged performance by the Asphalt Theatre Company (ATC) that helps raise issues and possibilities associated with living history performances. Before I describe the performance, I will briefly explain what some of those issues

are. I will then describe the performance *Masada Live* pointing out the potentials such a performance offers Masada in particular and living history museums in general. Living history performances emphasize the *authentic* aspects of their reproductions. By focusing on the *reproduction* aspect instead, living history museums and performances can help visitors/tourists productively and critically engage a history. A reproduction reminds the audience that what they are witnessing might look like the past, but is not the past. The “looks like but is not” aspect of reproduction creates a productive gap for interrogating aspects of history that may have been left out, either by accident or by an inability to remember.

### **Living History: A Meaningful Experience/A Performance of Forgetting**

As I noted above, living history museums try to transport their visitors to a bygone time. This transportation is not so the visitor can partake in this time, though many living history museums offer visitors the experience of learning crafts from the past. Rather, the goal of living history museums is to offer visitors a slice of a past life. Living history performers and their performances act as mimetic displays of a time period. In other words, mimetic performances represent a moment from the past. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that these performances can expand the boundary of a site “to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica” (20). Mimetic performances may combine with other displays (guided description, placards, and pamphlets, for example) that serve to contextualize the site in an effort to give the tourist a lasting impression or image of the site. While the contextual displays try to explain the object on display, the mimetic displays present artifacts as though they were a “slice of life lifted from the everyday world” (20). The representation serves to contribute to the authenticity of the site, the objects on display, and the actions involved in the performance.

The problem with mimetic performances arises when the performance attempts to reveal a truth about an event. Performances at living history museums often tell the audience, “This is the way it was. This is as close as we can get to it today. This will help you understand the past better.” Implicit in that contention is the notion that we will be able to understand our present and the possibilities of the future more clearly as well. If we know what happened then, we can trace a path to now, and better understand how we got to where we are. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Megelssen both make clear, mimesis, through its presentation as a slice of life, often obscures the constructed nature of the object/performance, so the viewer can easily forget that the slice was cut by one person for the viewing pleasure of others. Megelssen finds this particularly alarming for mimetic performances. He notes that when tourists visit living history museums, they witness everyday acts performed from different historical eras. The tourists/audience, “though no longer constrained to tiered rows of theatre seats, [are] nonetheless guided into a passive acceptance of specific narratives” (124). While living history performances give us a glimpse into the past, it is also a very specific and well-rehearsed glimpse.

Many tourists understand this, at least to some extent. Writing about Plimoth Plantation, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, “However persuasive the representation, finally what you experience is the site itself” (199). While some tourists may be savvier than others, all tourists recognize that the site is constructed and that their real experience is not of a time gone by, but of a site that represents that time gone by. Additionally, as Bruner points out, there is a certain practicality to any editing of history that takes place. To account for current day tourists, a site has to leave out certain events or ideas in order to conform to the sensibilities of the tourists, “allowing visitors to attribute their own meanings to the site” (158). Besides the fact that there is simply too much history to tell, today’s audiences are going to want to listen and watch in ways



that are different from audiences of the past. As Magelssen points out, just as living history museums try to present an accurate picture of the past, this picture is “informed by present sensibilities” (40) in order to continue to attract tourists to the site.

By framing sites and performances for present day sensibilities, the site necessarily leaves out certain aspects of the past. Rebecca Schneider notes that a performance’s ability to acknowledge this can be productive. Schneider argues that mimesis is “a powerful tool for cross- or intra-temporal negotiation, even (perhaps) interaction or inter(in)animation of one time with another time” (30-31). Since the mimetic performance can never truly be the thing it represents, mimesis affords us the opportunity to examine the gap between what is, and what might have been, and this is the true power of living history museums and performances. By reperforming the past, there will inevitably be mistakes, or things that we don’t get exactly right. Schneider argues that it is in the moment of the mistake where we can see both our inability to remember the past perfectly as well as the possibilities that forgetting allows. The problem, of course, is when history is presented not as ‘what might have been,’ but as “what actually was,” as is often the case with living history museums and performances. In this respect, living history museums and performances are similar to other presentations of history. Walter Benjamin referred to what he called “the angel of history” to address the disconnect between how we remember the past and what might have actually been. As Benjamin illustrates, “Where we perceive a chain of events, [the angel] sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet” (257). Despite the fact that a representation of the past, a history, will never be able to get the past exactly right, Benjamin suggests that we encounter history as though it is right; we encounter a past event as though it is a link in a clear chain of events. The angel, on the other hand, will encounter the same chain of events as a pile of wreckage that keeps growing

taller. In this conception, if we embrace a history, we glance backwards and see the chain of events, the progress that we have made since the past. If we don't embrace that history, though, we can feel like the angel, helplessly propelled into a future built on the rubble of the past. Benjamin posed the angel of history as a metaphor to interrogate how we use the past, both physically and ideologically. Performances like *Masada Live*, as I discuss below, have the ability to make us remember that there are things that we have forgotten, i.e. to critically reflect on some of the rubble/links. Even if we can never remember certain moments of the past, remembering that we forget or that we don't see the past as clearly as we might think, at the very least, helps us recognize that the past we tell is a past we tell for a reason and, hence, is only one possible way of telling the past.

The performance *Masada Live* is not a living history performance, but it is also not *not* a living history performance. In their representation of the past, the performers make it clear that there is a significant gap between what was and what we see presented before us. What follows is a description and analysis of the performance *Masada Live*. As I noted in Chapter 2, there are a number of ways that the story of Masada is told, but the tellings generally follow a very similar pattern. In guided tours of Masada, stories that paint the Sicarii in a negative light are left out. The guided structure helps delimit the tourist experience so the meaning of the site is more easily translated from guide to tourist. As the story of Masada is told during the performance of *Masada Live*, we see not only the possibility of live theatrical performances to tell the history of a site, but also how, through the act of performance, one presentation of history has the ability to challenge and/or destabilize others.

### Preparing the Stage: Actors, Props, and Scene

In my first meeting with Eitan Campbell, he told me that I had to get in touch with Moshe Hanuka, the director of *Asphalt Theatre*. Eitan said that Moshe and his theatre company put on a fantastic performance at Masada, and if I was studying the site, I had to see it. When I called Moshe, he told me that I was more than welcome to come and watch the performance. So, one morning, well before sunrise, I met Moshe on the outskirts of Arad, a town about thirty minutes from Masada. He introduced me to Idan and Orit, two of the other members of the company, and then we drove to the Western side of the mountain, hiked up, and I watched as the three set up the stage for the performance and got into costume. They used a small palace that was closed off to tourists as a green room, a place to warm up before the show.

Around 5:00 a.m., after everything was set up, the first tourists began to reach the top of the snake path, and from the sound of it the Birthright groups weren't far behind. Idan was resting while Moshe and Orit were going through their props and checking to make sure that everything was in order. Their costumes and props, including the musical instruments, were all handmade. Moshe said that he did this for two reasons. First, while he is not trying to create a performance that recreates life as it was 2,000 years ago, he wants his audience to get a sense of that life. Though a part of the costume is made to give a cartoonish feel to their characters, the rest of the handmade costumes and instruments are made to transport the audience back in time. The sandals in Figure 1, for example, were handmade to look like an ancient pair of sandals found during the excavation of Masada. This attention to detail, however, is contrasted with the odd skullcaps that the characters in *Masada Live* wear (Figure 3). The skullcaps, made of cloth, give each character a slightly goofy look. Like the buildings, Moshe's costumes give the viewer



Figure 1 Handmade sandals, photograph by author.

a semblance of what life was like. Unlike the buildings, though, Moshe’s costumes tell us how he wants us to see the past: with a bit of levity and the feeling that it is not the past, but that it is also not *not* the past. The costumes are almost, but clearly not, period; the costumes remind us that the story we are about to see is possibly, but clearly not, the historic event. In other words, the costumes remind us of what Schneider refers to as the “both/and” of theatricality, the conundrum “in which represented bumps uncomfortably . . . against the affective, bodily instrument of the real” (41). Asphalt Theatre’s attention to detail, but only to a point, makes the audience aware that the performers are authoring this history, but also that the performers are actively working against that voice becoming authoritative.

According to Moshe, the second reason Asphalt Theatre creates their costume pieces from scratch and uses materials that would have been available to the Sicarii at Masada is to feel more connected to the story they are telling.



Figure 2 Handmade flutes and drum, photograph by author.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses how Plimoth Plantation places authenticity “not in the artifacts per se or in the models on which they are based, but in the *methods* by which they were made—in a way of doing, which is a way of knowing” (196; emphasis in original). The members of Asphalt Theatre, in order to give their performance, need to have this bodily knowing, to feel what life would have been like for those they are portraying (Hanuka). What is different from their performance than a performance given at a living history museum like Plimoth Plantation is that the act of remembering the past through performance does not necessitate forgetting the present. The performers at Plimoth Plantation, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, “must actively forget what came after the very moment they are reenacting” (197). This forgetting forward pushes the audience to make the connection from their present to the past. As Magelssen points out, the performers don’t just reiterate a past moment without concern for any subsequent moments, they do it from a historical position with distinctly different values and concerns.

Being encouraged to make connections to the past, tourists and performers can easily forget the difference of values and concerns, allowing their own values to determine how we understand the events and actions of the past. Asphalt Theatre makes no pretense to be from the past. While parts of their costumes are meticulously crafted to resemble the clothing worn during the time of the Sicarii, other parts are clear fabrications, reminders to the audience that these characters and the stories they tell, at least to some extent, are made up.

In Asphalt Theatre's performance of *Masada Live*, by drawing the eye towards the constructed nature of their performance in a theatrical setting, the performers create a space where it is possible to destabilize the traditional narrative of the site and offer new readings and interpretations of the history of the site. Between the story they tell and the way they tell it, it is clear that their intent is more to delight the audience than to authentically represent a history. Through that delight, however, we see what I call a *re-presentation* of history that challenges what we know and how we know it. As I noted earlier, a problem with some representational or mimetic performances is that performers often actively present *a* history as though it were *the* history of the site. To distinguish between this type of representational performance and types that clearly reveal their constructed nature, I will refer to the latter as "re-presentational." In contrast to representations, which attempt to stand in for the past, re-presentational performances draw from the past in order to make something new. The past does not tell us where to go or what to do. Rather, it informs our present with a near infinite number of possibilities. Re-presentational performances break away from telling the story of the past and instead imagine how that story might look in the present. This means that performers acknowledge the constructed nature of any story<sup>8</sup> and remind their audiences that the history they tell is the history

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<sup>8</sup> Allen Feldman notes, "The event is not what happens. The event is that which can be

that they, in the present, with present concerns and motivations, tell.

In the description of the performance below, I explain how Asphalt Theatre's performance acknowledges the passage of time in such a way that the concerns and ideals of the past are held up against those of the present. This juxtaposition alienates the audience from the action of the performers. As Bertolt Brecht notes, the act of alienation has the ability to critically distance the audience from the actions on stage (71). Such distance urges the audience to critically look at their present situation. Below, I describe the performance, *Masada Live*, with special attention to how Asphalt Theatre alienates their audience and offers critical perspective on the story of Masada.

### **Masada Live**

At about 5:30 a.m. Moshe received a call from the director of the youth group for which Asphalt Theatre would perform. He told me to go meet the youth group and that the performance would come to us. After hanging out with the group for a few minutes, we noticed Moshe, Idan, and Orir sneaking around a building and stealthily making their way toward us. When it was clear that they had been spotted, they charged at us and demanded to know who we were and what we were doing here. The three were trying to root out any Romans who might be hiding within our group. Moshe said that if we were Romans we would be killed. They asked some in the group for their names to see if any were Roman names. Still unsure after hearing a few of the names, they began to interrogate members of the group about what they were doing at Masada. Once the performers were finally satisfied that we were not Romans, all pretense of aggression dropped away, they began to joke with us, and invited us to follow them to the stage area. Moshe and Idan began playing flutes and Orir beat a drum hanging over his shoulder. We followed them

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narrated" (qtd. in Pollock 13). Feldman is following Hayden White with the notion that History doesn't come wrapped up as story. Rather, we structure and then tell history as a story.

to the stage and they continued to play until we had all taken a seat. They joked around with us a little more, and once we were all settled, they began the more formal performance.

They introduced themselves as Rechavya (Moshe), Tzfanya (Idan), and Shmaya (Orir). They told us that they were defenders of Masada. With great bravado, Tzfanya walked to center stage and began to tell us what the Jewish warriors at Masada did to fend off the Romans. Knocking an invisible arrow into an invisible bow, he used his great strength to show us how “the warriors would shoot arrows at the Romans.” With mounting effort and energy he demonstrated how warriors would “throw spears at the Romans, throw buckets of boiling oil . . .” But before he could continue and demonstrate throwing a bucket of oil in the general direction of the audience, Rechavya interrupted to reiterate that it was the warriors that did these things, not the three of them. Rechavya said, “we used to pass buckets of rubble to fill up the hole in the wall,” and sluggishly mimed carrying a bucket full of rocks. We learn that the three were responsible for the menial tasks that no one else wanted to do. These were not the heroes of Masada most tourists visiting the site learned about. There was no bravery or valor in battle, and, from the fact that they were standing right in front of us, there was also clearly no falling on their own swords so as not to be captured. They say that this was because of “the problem.” Before explaining what “the problem” was, though, Rechavya acts out what it was like when Ben-Yair declared that they should fight. As Rechavya said the word “Romans,” Tzfanya and Shmaya took out noisemakers, rattled them around, shouted out “Romaaaaaans!” and then spat on the ground in a display of disgust. This became an ongoing motif throughout the performance. Any time a group was mentioned that Tzfanya and Shmaya did not like, they dropped what they were doing, yelled and rattled their noisemakers, and spit on the ground. Even at this early point in the performance, it was clear that the three detested the Romans, and would like nothing more than



to vanquish any Romans that showed up. To their great dismay, though, rather than have them prepare to battle, Elazar Ben-Yair assigned them to guard the southern, “deserted” tower that no one would even consider attacking.

Resigned, they assumed their post. They climbed the tower, looked all around, and tried to stand guard, but as time went on, they “winked,” they “blinked,” they “fell asleep.” Falling asleep, we find out, is “the problem.” The three are hopelessly sick with narcolepsy. Whenever something important happens, they tend to fall asleep. And when they woke up this time, they found the mountain deserted. No one was left. As they slept, they woke up to realize that they, as Rechavya says, “all three share the same dream. And in our dream an angel is revealed to us saying, ‘keep the seed of Israel on Masada. I will give you signs and miracles to find your match.’” The angel commands them to stay at Masada, and lets them know that they will eventually receive a sign. They tell us that the arrival of our group must be the sign they were waiting for. The three are so excited that they can hardly contain themselves. They work together to create the angel, to replay for us what the messenger of God told them. Rechavya tucked his arms into his shirt, and Tzfanya and Shmaya stood behind him, moving their arms up and down, as though they were flapping wings. After Rechavya says the line “...to find your match,” Shmaya breaks away and says, “say we want to marry today!” Rechavya briefly scolds the others for trying to push the story too fast, but then quickly finishes his spiel as the angel saying, “yes, yes, find our match and marry and be happy.”

Tzfanya then addressed the audience with a sly grin and endearing, childlike excitement, saying “And since you are here, this is a miracle! And a sign from God!” Shmaya jumped in, adding, “that the time is right and that the time is come!” And finally, Rechavya concluded, “and so, whoever is not married, please raise her hand.” Then the three went into the audience and

each chose himself a bride. As they chose their brides, it became clear that the rest of the performance was going to be about making the brides-to-be feel comfortable about their soon-to-be husbands. The words of the angel from their dream, after nearly 2000 years, are finally coming true. And, apparently, the angel doesn't seem to think that the brides-to-be should have any problem with conforming to the wants and expectations of a different era. For the performance *Masada Live*, the angel serves as a plot device that helps explain the characters' willingness to wait for so long, the power of their faith, and their excitement to see us and perform for us. I also can't help but see the angel in contrast to Benjamin's angel of history I discussed earlier.

Angels are God's messengers. As God's messengers, they have been used dramatically to keep a plot moving forward. They help characters figure out what they should be doing. The angel in *Masada Live*, however, seems to do just the opposite, urging the characters to continue on as if nothing has changed. Benjamin's angel helplessly moves forward as the wreckage of the past builds and builds. The angel in *Masada Live*, however, is markedly different. I imagine the *Masada Live* angel, what I call "the angel of *living* history," standing next to Benjamin's angel, as blissfully unaware of the wreckage as Benjamin argues we often are. The angel of history laments our forward motion and tries to remind us that the path of history is not straight and simple, but complex and marked by the innumerable attempts at recording, defining, and attributing meaning. Benjamin's angel of history sees these attempts as markers of the destructive nature of using the past to try to remedy our present situation. The angel of *living* history, however, urges us on. There is no wreckage, at least none that he seems to see, so the past, in the present, should have no problems moving forward. The world today may be different,

but never so different that we can't see the path we walk on. As the performance continues, the audience can notice that the wreckage



Figure 3 The Angel of Living History, photograph from asphalt.co.il

*is* piling up. The angel of living history, though, with his idyllic prophesies of a future where everything will be the same but better, is oblivious to the past in front of him. All he sees is the future that will never come to be. And so, the characters keep moving forward by doing what they did in the past. For the audience, there is a clear break between where the angel of living history seems to come from and where we seem to be. As I watch the angel in the performance, I am compelled to wonder why the characters seem to think that they will have a seamless transition despite the many years between their time and ours. As I watched, I wondered about progress, and about which aspects of the past, when told in the present, make me uncomfortable. I could imagine the productive tension of staging the two metaphors side by side, the angel of history on one side, struggling against the winds of progress, and the angel of living history on the other side, unaware of his forward momentum. The one too concerned with the past to look forward, the other too concerned with the future to remember.

After they chose their brides the three declare that their new wives will live with them on Masada, settle down and Masada will become a “fortress of love.” Then they explained how Masada was built, and how to build walls that will last 2000 years (despite the obvious fact that they are standing in front of a crumbled reconstruction of a wall). “First of all, you have to take a heavy base stone.” Tzfanya walked up and crouched down in the middle of the stage. Then Shmaya joined him and said “and above it, a lighter stone,” as he pulled himself up and stood on Tzfanya’s shoulders. The balancing act elicited an array of “ooh’s” and “ahhh’s” from the audience. Then to display the tower, Rechavya stood facing Tzfanya, and Shmaya flipped himself upside down so his shoulders were supported by Rechavya and Tzfanya, and his feet were sticking straight up in the air. The seeming effortlessness of the acrobatics was striking to watch. They then went through a series of vignettes of the daily life of Masada, including bathing, fetching water, cooking, and eating. All the while, the actors used their bodies to demonstrate the buildings and the actions of the other people they lived with. This section ends when Rechavya explains that the most precious memory he had was from the day that Shmaya was born. As Rechavya began to recount the story, Tzfanya lifted Shmaya over his head so that Shmaya hung down behind Tzfanya, with his arms around Tzfanya’s waist. Tzfanya held Shmaya’s legs above Tzfanya’s head. Rechavya then rushed over and told Tzfanya to push. Slowly but surely, and to the delight of the audience, Tzfanya lowered Shmaya who pulled himself down and through Tzfanya’s legs. Rechavya caught the newly born Shmaya who was mewling like a newborn baby.

As I noted earlier, most living history sites try their best to “get it right.” Three men demonstrating birth, however, is impossible to “get right.” Shmaya being born on stage, then, is a bit disconcerting, but it also has the effect of establishing a powerful connection between the

three characters, telling the story of how they care for one another. The acrobatics of the moment certainly highlight the theatricality, but in recreating a very touching, albeit humorous scene, we see what Schneider means when she discusses theatre's disconcerting juxtaposition of the real and the staged. There is nothing real about the birth of the character Shmaya, but the performance of the birth is uncanny in its ability to translate the experience of birth to the audience. The boisterous but uncomfortable laughter from the audience highlights performance's ability to make what was past seem real, even though we know that neither the past event (the story of the character Shmaya being born), nor the stage event (the acrobatics) are real acts of childbirth. The acts seem real, but they are not the acts they represent.

After the birth, there was a celebration where the performers sang an ancient hymn and played music as the audience clapped and danced along. Eventually the performers returned to the part of the story about the Romans coming, telling their future wives in the audience that if they had been able to capture any Romans, they would have killed them. In order to display their skills, they began an extended juggling routine/competition. It started with the three juggling together, then each one displaying his own skill at juggling. In the midst of their juggling, they slashed out with their weapons, explaining how they would stab and slash the Romans. After Rechavya and Shmaya had their turn with swords, Tzfanya took center stage with his spear. He juggled and spun the spear before miming stabbing a Roman soldier. He jabbed his spear hard into the invisible Roman, gave it a good twist, then flung the Roman over his shoulder. Then, he repeated the display, but this time he skewered 10 Romans! Now he stood panting, working up more energy before announcing that now he would kill 200 Romans! With a long, hard jab and twist, he successfully killed the 200 and threw them onto his growing pile. Finally, he boasts that he could kill 1000 Romans. We watched as he tried to work up the courage this would need but

at the last moment, he dropped his spear and ran off stage in horror at the thought of facing 1000 Roman soldiers. Exasperated, Rechavya said, “if we only had an actual Roman, we could show you how brave we are! How we would defeat the Romans.” They decided to bring up an audience member to play the role. After attempting a number of unsuccessful attacks on the Roman, they finally realize that in order to beat a Roman, you have to “fight like a Roman.” So, Shmaya jumped up and was caught by Tzfanya and Rechavya who used him as a battering ram to knock down the Roman soldier. To celebrate their victory, they sang another hymn and once again the audience joined in by clapping and dancing. When the song was over, they thanked the audience and concluded the performance.

As I stated earlier, whenever Rechavya named a person or a group that they didn’t like, Tzfanya and Shmaya would spit on the ground. At one point, in the midst of trying to figure out how to kill the Roman, Shmaya and Tzfanya got into a fight over who was better equipped to kill the soldier. Before long they were choking each other and Rechavya had to jump in to stop them. He said, “You know, you remind me of 2000 years ago. Just the same. Fighting each other, divided. You are hurting each other instead of fighting the Romans! Who are we?” The others respond, “Zealots!” Rechavya then went on to list a number of other Jewish groups, saying “we did not fight the Romans alone.” He lists off the Tzdokim, Proshim, Issim, and then says Regular Jews. Each time he named a sect, Tzfanya and Shmaya repeated the name and spit in disgust. Rechavya asked, “you are never out of spit?” and Shmaya responded, “ah, we have enough spit for all of Israel’s people.” Then Rechavya told them how during the war, in Jerusalem, it was the Sicarii who destroyed the food supplies of other Jews and caused the city to fall. He said that they had to unite with all the Jews, just like King David united the twelve tribes of Israel, in order to be victorious.

In chapter 2, I explained how different guides tell the story of Masada based on different historical understandings of the site. To the best of their ability, they present Masada to their tour groups so the story will become clearer. Each point of interest on the map becomes a possible lens through which we can look back in time. For the guides, Masada the place is a medium to tell Masada the story. The site becomes important because it plays the role of verifying the events of the past. The site is the authentic place that reminds tourists that the events actually happened, right here, just as their tour guide or the guidebook says. Instead of viewing history as something that can be presented through an experience of a site, the performance of *Masada Live* re-presents that history. Though they perform at the site, their interpretation is not bound to any artifacts or structures at the site. They speak freely about their lives, their desires, and their beliefs and are, hence, able to talk about the daily life of the Sicarii without being bound only by what archaeologists know. Whereas a guide relies on artifacts and the archaeological authority of the site, performers re-presenting the past can easily add cultural elements, like the hymns they sing, to their performance. These elements, in addition to being entertaining, also make the characters of the story more accessible, and less like heroic giants from a mythic past. This accessibility, then, makes way for critique. Understanding the characters as re-presentations of people who had hopes, fears, desires, and a few shortcomings, helps the audience see how the ancient Sicarii were real people and not just characters in an abstract story. Additionally, as I point out below, *Masada Live's* re-presentation of the past, through their use of humor and their focus on the quotidian aspects of the everyday lives of the Sicarii, undermines the authority of the canonical story.

## Accessing the Past

The story of *Masada Live* begins with the characters that, having just woken up from a very long sleep, are as shocked to see us in the year 2011 as we should be to see them from the year 73. While a part of the performance involves their telling the story of the siege of Masada, the brunt of the performance is about them relating their actions to a modern audience. They chose wives from the crowd and then engaged in feats of strength and agility (juggling and acrobatics) to impress their brides-to-be. They engaged in a slapstick display of how they would kill a Roman soldier, had they been awake while there were any Roman soldiers to be killed. Finally, they made no qualms about the fact that, given the power, they would kill everyone who was not like them, Jews included. As an audience member, we are drawn into the performance because of the theatricality, but we are also left questioning the motives and actions of the characters. We don't see the performers as strong warriors protecting the integrity and the legacy of the Sicarii of Masada. Instead, we see clowns – masters of showmanship with a few unnerving values. Additionally, the strengths and values that they hold dear, like the blind courage to fight no matter what, don't seem to be values that they actually possess.

*Masada Live*, by re-presenting the characters in the story of Masada, parodies other current day representations of characters from the past. Whereas Dan (chapter 2) characterizes the Jewish warrior as a stealthy artisan of death capable of taking out any Roman soldier, in *Masada Live* we see Tzfanya drive a spear through 200 Roman soldiers with one thrust. Historians generally agree that of the 967 people at Masada, only 200-300 were trained fighters. Compared with the 8,000-10,000 Roman soldiers they faced, it is clear that the odds faced by the Jewish fighters were daunting. While Dan's performance of "how to kill a Roman soldier" leaves some room for the possibility of fighting, Idan's portrayal of Tzfanya makes the odds seem



ridiculous. While Tzfanya wouldn't have to kill 200, he would have to kill at least 40 if the Jews were going to stand a chance.

Another example of the difference between representational performances and re-presentational ones can be seen in Yossi's portrayal of Elazar Ben-Yair in Chapter 2. Yossi focused on the familial nature of the Sicarii. He made it clear that this battle was Roman against Jew. As he told the story of the Romans using Jewish slaves to build a ramp to the top of the mountain, Yossi said that what stayed the hand of the Sicarii was knowing that to stop the ramp from being built meant killing fellow Jews. For Yossi-cum-Elazar, the hatred that the Sicarii felt for the Romans was not enough to cause them to kill innocent Jews. In *Masada Live*, however, only the Sicarii were worth dying for. As other groups of Jews are mentioned during the performance, Tzfanya and Shmaya shouted the name of the group in derision and then spit on the ground showing their disgust. While many historical accounts suggest that infighting amongst the Jews was a significant factor in their defeat during the Jewish-Roman war, few people at Masada bring up these aspects of the history. For example, Josephus described how the Sicarii at Masada massacred the Jews in Ein Gedi in order to steal their food and supplies (266). While attempts by historians have been made to bring to light how that history has been silenced in Israeli cultural memory (Ben-Yehuda 79), and archaeological digs lend strong evidence to the ancient massacre (Feldman), rarely are the Jews at Ein Gedi, or any other Jews from the time period, brought up in guided tours of Masada.

While there is something noble in standing against an army 40 times the size of your own and opting to die with those you love rather than risk a different fate, the parody reveals another side of this history: one person standing against forty is reckless, and claiming that the one is good and everyone else is evil is absurd. Explaining Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of parody,

Morson and Emerson note, parody has the ability to reveal other possibilities for understanding an event (434). To be clear, the event I'm discussing is not the suicide at Masada, but the current uses of the Masada story to make sense of the current political and religious climate for Israel, Israelis, and Jews all around the world. As I discussed in Chapter 2, performances of history can help us envision new ways of understanding the past, but they also have the performative force to privilege one version of history over others and, hence, one version of being in the present over others. The story remains a sort of sacred cultural artifact; what changes is our focus on and treatment of the characters and the events within the story. The parody, on the other hand, challenges how the story should be told and why we should continue telling it. As Morson and Emerson point out, for Bakhtin, parody "is the 'corrective of reality,' always richer and more contradictory than any single genre or word can express" (434). The performance, *Masada Live*, is not arguing that the story of Masada shouldn't be told. Rather, among all the different ways that the story is told, from history books to guided tours, they remind us that the questions of who is telling, how they are telling it, and why they are telling it, remain important. It opens up the conversation so it is not just about which aspects of the story to tell, but also asks how has the story been told, to whom, and to what ends. It does not suggest that we should get rid of a history. Rather, it brings to mind, as Schneider makes clear, questions about how one time period remembers another: "with whom do we affiliate? To whom do we attribute event? Who do we count among associates? Among ancestors? Who among generations? Who within history? Who without?" (59).

The parody makes us laugh. In the case of *Masada Live*, we laugh at characters that would otherwise be considered sacred. As Morson and Emerson note, Bakhtin suggests this laughter has two major effects. First, it undermines authority, "but only authority with

pretensions to be timeless and absolute” (435). One thing we learn from watching tour guide performances is that the story of Masada is used for a number of different ends. Since the story remains the same throughout these tellings, the story itself gains a timeless quality. In the performance *Masada Live*, however, the story never ends. The performance concludes with the characters defeating one Roman soldier (even though they acknowledge that it wasn’t a real Roman soldier) and then singing a hymn to their audience/wives. There is no coda or moral given to the audience. Rather, we are left with a number of cartoonish images: a man giving birth to another, a man killing 200 others with a single blow, three men transforming themselves into battering rams, catapults, and ramparts, along with a number of other equally fun and ridiculous actions. While we know that these are not the real historical figures, they remind us that a representation, no matter how convincing, will never be the figure or object that it represents. The exaggerations that they blatantly display remind us that there may be other, more subtle exaggerations that we may not be aware of. Morson and Emerson explain that as we laugh, we undermine the historical tradition that brought us to the story we find ourselves laughing at (442).

Second, the laughter of parody helps us forget. Whereas stories told by guides continually remind us that the past can help us better understand our present, *Masada Live* makes it almost impossible to understand this past, let alone apply it to the present. Even the characters argue that what is normal for them, the hatred of other, similar groups, might not be productive. They make it possible to forget how Masada has been used and how certain actions have been conducted under the auspices that the Sicarii were fighting a noble fight. Noble or not, *Masada Live* reminds us that it was ridiculous. Whatever else the Sicarii were, we see from the performance that they were also vengeful, fighting an impossible fight, and possessive of a value system that

seems, in many ways, contradictory to our own: fundamentalist and extremist. As I explored in Chapter 2, Masada has been used for a number of political ends. From the foundation of the state of Israel, to the maintenance of a tight border control policy, to the international support of Jews in the Diaspora, to connecting those Jews in the Diaspora to their Jewish roots. While I am not saying that these ends cannot be justified, the parodic performance reminds us that when we drag the past into the present, we run the risk of ignoring the wreckage we might drag with us, just to make a point.

### **Performances Remember | Performances Forget**

In the performances that I've addressed, those of tour guides and that of Asphalt Theatre, there are two types of forgetting. The first is what Michael Rogin calls "motivated forgetting . . . a cultural impulse both to have the experience and not to retain it in memory" (105). When an experience is taken out of context to serve a different purpose, we experience motivated forgetting. In terms of cultural memory, certain events come to mean different things as time goes on. What we forget are the particularities of the event that occurred in order to sanctify what we want the event to mean. A common act of forgetting employed by the guides is the infighting among Jews during the Jewish-Roman war, and the particularly nasty assassinations and mass murders carried out by the Sicarii. The almost ubiquitous use of the term Zealot over the term Sicarii is just one example of this iteration of motivated forgetting employed by the guides.

The other type of forgetting is what Marc Augé calls "oblivion." Augé argues that as we find ways to narrate our lives, we have to be able to edit. When we narrate we leave things out that either don't matter to the story, or would make the story too complicated to tell. For Augé, when we witness an event, the event sticks into our memory. In order to explain the memory, we narrate the event. The narration is what Augé calls remembrance. Oblivion is the act of shaping

our remembrances to fit into our memory of an event. In *Masada Live*, the performers collapse time. The characters in the performance are blissfully unaware of the previous 1900 years of Jewish life. By forgetting the present and everything that led to the audience being there, the performance asks the audience to trace the path, from the characters they see in front of them to their own touring of the site. Connecting those dots requires a critical return to their own position in the present.

Oblivion, the act of shaping our remembrances to fit our memory, can be a powerful tool for performers. As Augé notes, oblivion requires vigilance, an “effort to imagine in the present what might resemble the past, or better . . . to remember the past as a present” (88). In the case of Masada, this means that we would have to forget everything that has gone into making the site meaningful. We have to forget the current political climate of the Middle East, the history of Arab-Israeli conflicts, the founding of the state of Israel, the Holocaust, pogroms, inquisitions, ghettos, and everything else that has been a part of the Diaspora. The characters in *Masada Live* don’t say anything about our past. Instead, they focus on re-presenting their present, an image from our past. They never tell us why we should watch them or what we should learn or feel from watching them. There is also no ending to their story, as the audience simply watches their present. What comes next is up to the audience. If the performers forget well enough so that there is enough of a gap between the performance time and the present, the audience has to struggle and add their own context and criticism to the performance they witnessed. In this way, the performance, through its own vigilance to forget, can cause the audience to also be vigilant, to criticize what they remember and why they remember in that way.

Schneider argues that performance is often “a battle concerning the future of the past” (4). Tour guides use the past to actively address the different possible futures the site could have,

and make arguments about why a particular image of the future will better serve the present. So, where one guide foresees a war with Iran and is hence able to use the site to argue for a preemptive strike, another sees the secularization of world Jewry as an increasing problem, and Masada as a site to rebuild a connection to Judaism. In this chapter, I focused on how performance can be employed to take a more critical approach to our actions in the present, particularly in the choices we make to commemorate the past. As Schneider points out, performers reenacting a past historical moment “gain a kind of agency in the re-do” (180). Rather than trying to represent history, as most tour guides do, Asphalt Theatre re-does, or re-presents history. By asking questions like “What happens to linear history if nothing is ever fully completed nor discretely begun?” (180), performances like *Masada Live*, push their audiences to challenge what they believe about their own history. Of course, a staged performance like *Masada Live* is not the only way to achieve this possibility for an audience. As can be seen in the way Ilan conducted his tour in Chapter 2, there are ways for tour guides to challenge the dominant history of a site as well. Few tour guides, however, actually leave the space for such a challenge. Even Ilan, who allowed for new narratives to be told, still worked for those narratives to fit within a more traditional framework.

The forgetting that *Masada Live* presents is jarring and affords us the opportunity to be critical of how we remember and use our past. When confronted with a past that we have forgotten, we are faced with the choice of remembering again, as closely as we can to the way we remembered it the first time, or remembering it in a new way, that will allow for a new way of being in the world. While a person may remember and forget instances of their lives, and have trouble trying to remember again, performance helps to stage the forgetting, before it takes place, or outside of the arena in which it traditionally takes place. In other words, the Masada story is a

part of the national myth of Israel. In various iterations, it can be found in both popular media, and official documents. Performances, like *Masada Live*, can offer a venue to reimagine how the myth is presented. Rather than presenting it as part of a continuous, uninterrupted story that brings us from then to now, performances can suture two time periods together. As audience members witness the suture, it is hard to ignore the scar that history has left behind, and it is hard not to wonder how it got there.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SELLING MASADA: ENHANCING AND SUPPLEMENTING THE TOURIST SITE**

Moshe told me that a few days before his scheduled performance, he received a call from a representative of the “Masada Group,” telling him that Asphalt Theatre did not have the right to perform at Masada. The representative told Moshe that if he performed, The Masada Group would have the right to press charges. Moshe, in turn, told the representative that Eitan—the Director of Masada National Park—had given them the right to perform at Masada and, since Eitan was in charge, The Masada Group would have to take it up with him. Moshe spoke passionately about this experience. He was worried about the prospect of not being able to perform at Masada. He said the show is “not something you do other places. It is made for here. But [The Masada Group], they don’t care.” Most of all, Moshe seemed fearful for the future of the site. He could not sleep after receiving the phone call. He referred to his performance as an “enrichment performance,” noting that it was not about making a profit off of the site, but about honoring the site, its history, and the tourists who visit. He didn’t understand why a performance like *Masada Live*, would be denied the right to perform at Masada.

In the year and a half since I first met with Moshe, his relationship to The Masada Group has changed. No longer antagonistic, The Masada Group has established a relationship with Moshe and Asphalt Theatre that acknowledges the importance of enrichment programs like *Masada Live* for sites like Masada. My conversations with Moshe and Eitan, and the Masada Group’s website, [masada.org.il](http://masada.org.il), indicate that the company manages the for-profit aspects of the national park. While Eitan is in charge of maintaining the site and organizing special events, The Masada Group focuses on the more non-essential tourist amenities, such as the gift shop and the new food court area. I will not go into great detail about how The Masada Group manages the



spaces they manage. Rather, I want to focus on how both the National Park and the Masada Group strive to create a more dynamic experience for tourists by adding amenities and events for visitors at Masada.

According to its website, the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority (NPA) is the “representative of a single, short, period of time during the existence of the remains [of historic sites], and [their] job is to guard [those sites]” (National Parks). The NPA is guided by a number of principals with the aim of protecting cultural heritage, preserving the surrounding areas of heritage sites, and reinforcing the relationship between the public and the sites the NPA protects (National Parks). Eitan echoed these principles in the conversations I had with him, and it was clear that he tried to be as consistent as possible with these five principles. Above all, Eitan believed that when tourists visit Masada, they should have a meaningful experience, and he saw his job as facilitating that experience. Eitan encourages programming like the new annual opera series at Masada, and a sunrise concert series that features Israeli singer/songwriter David Broza, which target both international and domestic tourists alike. For Eitan, these events highlight Masada as a culturally important site. Additionally, Eitan’s edict that nothing should be sold *on* Masada is an attempt to keep the site’s focus squarely on Masada’s history, story, and archaeological discoveries.

In this chapter, I focus on how Masada is framed and made meaningful for tourists at the site. Following Nelson Graburn, I believe that the tourist experience is akin to ritual. For Graburn, tourists desire “to visit a particular place because they believe that they will experience something positive that they cannot experience at home” (26). The special occasion of being on tour invites tourists to step away from the concerns of their everyday life and enter the world of the tour. Graburn argues that people go on tour because they want to be changed in some way.

He suggests that when tourists return from a trip, they mark the passage of time through the experience of the tour. For example, I might mark 1988 as the first time I climbed Masada. In this respect, the date is not just a date from a number of years ago, but also a marker of a significant moment in my life. Graburn suggests that a tourist's decision to travel is predicated on the knowledge that they will be changed by the trip.

While Graburn addresses a reason why people decide to travel, Dean MacCannell focuses on why people choose to go to a particular place. MacCannell argues that a sight becomes a tourist destination once its image and story has been reproduced in popular culture, a process he defines as "sight sacralization" (43-45). For MacCannell, "Tourist attractions are not merely a collection of random material representations. When they appear in tourist itineraries, they have a moral claim on the tourist and, at the same time, they tend toward universality, incorporating natural, social, historical and cultural domains in a single representation made possible by the tour" (45). Zerubavel clearly explains the moral claim of Masada as it developed through the activist commemorative narrative (we can be heroes like our ancestors) and the tragic commemorative narrative (we cannot allow ourselves to be put in the same situation as our ancestors). Masada is often framed according to these narratives for tourists on large package tours (Sussun and Kelner 157). Most of the individual tourists I met knew the basic history of Masada before they came, and had expectations that they would have a meaningful experience at the site. Eitan views his role as manager of the national park as helping tourists have the meaningful experience they come for.

Whereas Eitan's aim is to *enhance* the tourist experience in line with the NPA guidelines, The Masada Group offers services that strive to *supplement* the tourist experience. I define enhancements as the elements that directly relate to the meaning of the site. On the other hand, I

define supplements as elements that primarily contribute to the actions associated with being a tourist. While both enhancements and supplements have to exist within the guidelines of the NPA's vision for the site, each promotes a different significant aspect of a site. Enhancements are improvements, amenities and experiences that have been crafted or approved by an authority of the site. They assist in telling, framing, or facilitating what Bruner calls "monumental stories," the "grand historical stories of the formation of peoples and nations" (26). Supplements, on the other hand, contribute to the aspects of the site that are not directly related to the site's monumental or mythic nature. While supplements capitalize on the mythic nature of the site, they do not add to it. That does not mean, however, that they should be discredited. Supplements can help make the tourist more relaxed or comfortable as they experience the mythic quality of the site. Additionally, while tourists may come for Masada, they may also want to have other experiences that are not directly related to the site.

For example, the Masada Group does not see Masada as *just* an ancient site of cultural significance. For them, Masada can be an exciting destination. The Masada Group facilitates weddings, birthdays, and corporate events at the visitor center and offers a number of catering options. For tourists who want to experience more than a day at Masada, the Masada Group can help schedule hotel stays and spa treatments, provide shopping at Masada and in the surrounding region, and offer a number of guided excursions in the Dead Sea region.

In one of my conversations with Eitan, he expressed mixed feelings about the commercialization of the site, but he noted that as it stands now, it is a situation he can live with. He wants Masada to be about the history and the story of the site. He does not like that the gift store and the McDonald's in the visitor's center represent "consumerism and Americanism" (Campbell), but so long as there is nothing for sale at the top of the mountain, he is content to let

things stand as they are. Eitan went further, saying that even though the relationship was not ideal, there were aspects of it that he could see as beneficial. For example, a few years ago Eitan was on official business in France, a country with which he is not particularly familiar. He said, “I was on a very small budget. I find a restaurant and I can’t read a single thing. I order whatever and they bring me this tiny thing, so expensive. The next day I see a McDonald’s, and I think, great! Now I know what I’m gonna get!” (Campbell). Being in a foreign country, whether for work or as a tourist, can be stressful. Eitan points out that at times it can be comforting to stumble across something familiar. Below I explain the difference between supplements and enhancements and how each can contribute to a tourist site. Then I address some of the issues and concerns that Eitan expressed. My primary concern is the extent to which the commodification of a site might limit the tourist experience.

### **Enhancing or Supplementing**

Enhancements at Masada include events like the annual Israeli Opera series, the scribe who writes a torah scroll in the synagogue at the top of Masada, or the sunrise concerts performed by Spanish-Israeli singer-songwriter David Broza. Supplements are things like the McDonald’s and the gift shop, the Dead Sea spas, and the Ein Gedi nature reserve. Enhancements are meant to have a direct relationship to the meaning of the site, whereas supplements contribute to the actions involved in being comfortable while on tour.

### **Enhancing**

In *The Tourist*, MacCannell explains sight sacralization as a sort of “miracle of consensus” by which a culture comes to revere a sight as culturally significant (42). As time goes on, however, some sights may lose their cultural significance. Enhancements to a site, like the opera described above, help maintain the cultural significance of a site through acts of transfer.

While MacCannell argues that a sight is made important by “piling up representations of it alongside” (47), these representations only serve to get people to the site in the first place. MacCannell does not contend with meaning making processes that do not involve reproductions of a site. A number of tourists I encountered at Masada were visiting the site simply because, through the process of sight sacralization, they felt as though they were supposed to, but expressed no real connection to Masada or its historical story. It is not surprising that an ancient fort that was the site of a mass suicide is unappealing to some. It is also not surprising, through the process of sight sacralization, that even though it is unappealing, these people still come. Enhancements to a site help make the site more appealing. As events of cultural significance like an opera or a scribe writing a torah are staged at Masada, the meaning of the site transfers onto the actions of the cultural performances, and vice versa. These are not representations of Masada, but like Masada, presentations of culture. Enhancements to a site are culturally specific performances that add to the meaning of the site by situating the site within the context of other cultural performances. Some tourism scholars might argue that we can write off a site whose claim to fame is a mass suicide that took place two thousand years ago simply as a site of “dark tourism.” As Bowman and Pezzullo note, “by labeling certain tourist sites ‘dark’, an implicit claim is made that there is something disturbing, troubling, suspicious, weird, morbid, or perverse about them” (190). They contend, “touring sites of death ... may illuminate the artistic, scientific, and political values of a culture’s past, present, and future” (199). Aspects of this illumination can be seen in the enhancements at a site like Masada. When the site is entangled within a web of other culturally significant performances and events, we see it as an integral part of our cultural identities. Enhancements don’t tell us why a site is culturally significant. Rather, enhancements place the site within a system of significance. Enhancements are not other things

to see and do at the site; enhancements are the signposts that direct the viewer of Masada to its position within a larger culturally important web of symbols.

Focusing on the enhancements of a site enables us to see how the authority of the site wants tourists to situate their experience. For example, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Committee on Conscience hosts displays and installations that visitors to the museum can see after they tour the museum's permanent exhibitions. These displays focus on the prevention of genocide, placing the museum itself within the larger context of international efforts to bring attention to other issues, like the Holocaust, that have horrific global effects. Another example can be seen at the Grand Canyon Skywalk, a cantilevered bridge that juts out 4,000 feet above the canyon floor. The floor of the bridge is transparent, allowing visitors to stand over and look directly down onto the canyon floor. Placed at a site that has come to symbolize the American Frontier, the Grand Canyon Skywalk enhances the canyon by offering viewers an additional viewing perspective. While the Skywalk is a privately owned attraction, its purpose is to highlight aspects of the Grand Canyon, one of "the Earth's greatest on-going geological spectacles" (UNESCO). Hence, it is not *just* about making money, but about enhancing the Grand Canyon for the tourist. Attractions or events that enhance a site do so in an effort to help visitors better understand or experience the site's significance.

### **Supplementing**

Supplements to a site are not culturally connected to a site like enhancements are. Rather, supplements are things that exist to make the tourist experience more comfortable and/or to offer tourists something additional. Surrounding attractions like the Ein Gedi nature reserve and the Dead Sea spas help tourists make the most of their day. Rather than driving up to two hours to see Masada, climbing the mountain, and then driving back, tourists can see and do more things in

the surrounding area. What tourists choose to see and do outside of Masada adds to their overall tourist experience and will, no doubt, make their way into how they tell the story of their travels. These other activities, though, are meant to be other than and separate from the experience of Masada. It is not uncommon to hear tourists at Masada lament the heat and express excitement and anticipation for either the Dead Sea or Ein Gedi. They see Masada as an important, “must-see” site, but look forward to more comfortable experiences.

As Eitan pointed out, amenities offered at the site, like McDonald’s, can also afford tourists a more familiar and, hence, more comfortable experience. Just as some tourists look forward to a dip in the Dead Sea, others look forward to some ice cream and air conditioning back at the base of the mountain. The desert heat can be bad enough, but add to that the unfamiliarity of a foreign country and/or finding oneself in the middle of nowhere, and some creature comforts are often heartily welcomed by tourists. The purpose of such amenities is to make tourists feel like even though they may be thousands of miles from home, there are certain familiar experiences that translate across international boundaries. Whereas enhancements to Masada try to distance tourists from the site by enhancing its mythic quality, supplements try to bring it closer, stressing a universal reproducibility and familiarity. The site may not be found anywhere else in the world, but what you sense around the site can be found everywhere that’s worth going. The worry, of course, is that such supplements become so pervasive at the site that the sight tourists come to see is now unclear: are we here for the kitsch, or for the site? Urry and Larsen note that this is precisely the problem faced by Niagara Falls. As the Falls went from an “exotic wonder,” to a place for romance, to a tourist spectacle, why people visit the Falls is no longer clear. Because the emphasis is no longer placed on the Falls, but on everything tourists can do surrounding the Falls, the Falls “now stand for kitsch, sex, and commercial spectacle. It is

as though the Falls are no longer there as such and can only be seen as spectacle” (67). This is precisely why the McDonald’s is such a contested element at Masada. On the one hand, as Eitan pointed out, it stands for “consumerism and Americanism” and threatens to take tourists out of the mental space of identifying with the story of the site and experiencing the myth. Whether they hate or love McDonald’s, and whether they hate or love McDonald’s at Masada, it distracts them from the site. On the other hand, also as Eitan pointed out, McDonald’s can serve the role of “comfort food” in a place that seems to have little that is familiar. McDonald’s is a slice of home for many tourists, something that they might not regard with great feeling one way or another in their everyday life, but can serve as a reminder of home and the comforts of their everyday life while on tour.

### **The Commodification of Masada**

In light of my conversations with Eitan and Moshe, it is clear that while neither is completely happy with the relationship between the site and the Masada Group, both believe that the relationship could be worse, and Eitan is able to see some of the benefits for tourists that the Masada Group is able to provide. The question, as is often raised at tourist sites, is to what extent the commodification of a site limits the tourist experience. With over 800,000 visitors each year and the ability to accommodate up to 1.25 million visitors a year, Masada could be a highly profitable site. The fear that Eitan expressed and is often echoed in tourism literature is that the site will be so overrun with its own commodification that tourists have trouble experiencing the mythical quality of the site. As Ritzer and Liska point out, the more things a site chooses to sell, the more likely a site “can become little more than a means to sell lots of other commodities” (103). The tourist experience, then, becomes less about seeing a site and more about consumption in an unfamiliar place. When the stated intent of the site is to bolster or enhance the



viewer's connection to or understanding of a national identity, the push towards commodification becomes more problematic. In regards to the conservation of national parks in the United States, Frederick Law Olmstead worried that "the market would lead, rather than follow, public tastes, including private owners to convert these areas to more profitable uses than the contemplative reflection" that many might have preferred (Doremus, 439). As I noted above, the NPA, like Olmstead, views its role as guarding the national parks and preventing any exploitation of the parks. The NPA focuses on "the preservation and cultivation of archaeological sites in national parks and nature reserves... in order to strengthen the relationship between the public and the heritage of the country" (*National Parks*). To some, it might seem that a McDonald's at an ancient fortress would hinder, rather than strengthen the relationship between the public and its heritage.

The debate, as Lawrence Mintz points out, is centered on "attitudes about popular culture and its aesthetics. We have a hierarchy of tourist motives and activities that places various ambiguously defined spiritual and intellectual purposes at the top and entertainment or amusement at the bottom" (269). Because it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what cultural value a site holds and why a particular person might choose a particular destination, it makes more sense to talk about a spectrum instead of a hierarchy. The extent to which Masada and other nationally important historic sites should strictly serve the mythic story of the site, or allow for the fulfillment of other tourist pleasures and desires, fits within this debate. To suggest that any site should only cater to one side of the spectrum belies the complexity of tourists' own desires as well as the necessities of the maintenance of the site. For example, there are obvious financial reasons beyond the desires of tourists to capitalize on the tourists who visit Masada. While Masada makes enough money to cover its own operational costs, many other national historic

sites may have a more difficult time attracting tourist dollars. Their upkeep, however, requires the same careful attention as Masada. Proceeds from commercial ventures at Masada, like the space leased to the Masada Group, could go towards maintaining other, less frequented sites.

How much money is taken in by the Masada Group, and the extent to which that money is used at Masada and other national historic sites, though, is not a concern for this chapter.<sup>9</sup> Rather, my focus is on what the effects are for tourists, regardless of how the money is allocated, from offering commodities at a site like Masada. Most of the tourists I spoke with expressed disdain for the McDonald's at Masada. There is a Facebook group called "Boycott McDonald's at Masada," the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* noted that "it's hard not to draw symbolism from the opening of a McDonald's at the visitors center at Masada" (Arad), and Israeli talk show hosts, Yishai and Malkah Fleisher suggested that McDonald's is "capitalism's emperor" coming in and taking over a sacred Jewish site (Fleisher).

While some responses, like Eitan's, were ambivalent, most seem to have an immediate adverse reaction upon hearing about the McDonald's. As Moshe pointed out, though, it's not just the McDonald's. In response to his initial interactions with the Masada Group, Moshe noted that it was "like Masada happening again" (Hanuka). For Moshe, the problem was what was offered at the site and who had the authority to offer it. Like Eitan, Moshe believes that what makes Masada a great site is the combination of the physical place where the story occurred and the ability for tourists to encounter that place without encumbrance. Moshe and Eitan both viewed regulations about what people can say or do at Masada, as well as the commercialization of the site, as possible hindrances for tourists who want to freely explore the site. Echoing Yossi (Chapter 2), both also said that when they first came to Masada, they were inextricably drawn to

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<sup>9</sup> For a thorough analysis of the relationship between national parks and commercial activity, see Doremus.

the site. Eitan knew that he wanted to spend his life taking care of the site. Moshe knew that he wanted to help others be inspired by the site just as he was first inspired. Below, I talk about what makes Masada special for Eitan, Moshe, and thousands of others who visit Masada each year: the original, physical site, and the unique experience it offers. Then I discuss how commercialization changes a site like Masada.

### **The Aura of Masada**

In Chapter 2, I discussed four reasons people come to Masada: The striking landscape, the history, to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors, and to hear the story of the Sicarii. The first explorers to visit Masada, though, were primarily concerned with the history of biblical sites. During the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, “Military and economic aims merged with religious fervor and the advent of archaeology” and spurred a wide array of visitors from Europe and America to travel to Palestine (Getty). These early visitors were more interested in mapping and recording the terrain than the story of Masada. In the third volume of his thirteen volume survey of Palestine from 1881, Conder devotes four pages to Masada and focuses solely on what physically remains of Herod’s palace and various measurements of the plateau and ruins (Conder 418-421). British clergyman, scholar, and ornithologist Henry Baker Tristram recounts the story as Josephus told it in order to give context to his visit. His focus, though, is largely on the terrain and the stark beauty of the desert (305-317). It was not until Shmaria Guttman, a Zionist who immigrated to Palestine with his family in the early twentieth-century, first visited Masada in 1933 that people began visiting Masada for the story.

Guttman was among the first to publicly note that Masada could be a powerful nationalistic symbol. While the landscape of a place and the archaeological history of a site are important, rarely can they be enough to attract the kind of tourist attention that Masada has. This

began when Guttman and other youth group leaders during the 1930s and 1940s organized desert treks for Jewish youth in Palestine to Masada. Guttman said that in Masada, “I saw an opportunity to prepare the young ones for what might come. We discussed there, among ourselves, the possibility of standing against the enemy” (quoted in Ben-Yehuda, 74). At the time, the possible enemy was the British Empire and anyone who would stand against the creation of a Jewish state. Masada was able to serve as a familiar symbol around which the new Jewish residents of Palestine could assemble. They viewed the Sicarii as freedom fighters, preferring to die than leave their land.

Within the exploits of the Jewish youth groups in Palestine lie the markers of a nationalism that would fuel the future state of Israel. On the one hand, acts like the *tiyul*, described in Chapter 2, help a new nation map out its borders, based on the actions and presence of ancestors who occupied the same place. As Benedict Anderson points out, a new nation must have the grammar that defines itself and a series of structures and objects that “create a historical depth of field” connecting the present to the past through a sort of “album of ancestors” (185). The *tiyul* was a way for new citizens of the new state to walk their borders and view the ancestral presence. On the other hand, particularly for Israel, the new nation needed more than an ancestral history to connect them to their land. New Israelis needed a heroic image of the past. It was not enough for them to say this was their land because their ancestors used to live there. However the struggle for the new state would take place, the new citizens would need symbols to draw them together and historical figures to inspire them to fight. They were creating what Nietzsche called a “monumental history,” where, by drawing on great historical figures, people learn “that the greatness that once existed was in any event *possible* and may thus be possible again” (69; emphasis in original). Masada served both functions, first as a physical marker that Jews had

once been there, and second as a monument to heroes of the past that could be used to inspire youth to fight for the land.

In framing the site this way, Guttman and other youth leaders helped set in motion the mythologizing of Masada, which made it more than a nationalistic monument. It is important to note that their use of Masada was not an attempt to mythologize the site; rather, it was an active attempt to politicize the site. As Barthes explains, myth gives a “natural image” of reality, but “is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made” (142). By producing the site and its historical significance, the youth leaders drew on a specific moment of the site and constructed a specific meaning to attach to the site in order to achieve a political end. Once that political end was met and Israel was established, Masada took on a mythical quality. Today, as people visit Masada, the story they hear and the site they see are, as Barthes says, “deprived of their history, changed into gestures” (*Mythologies* 122). In other words, the story and the site are less concerned with the specifics of historical events than they are with expressing an idea or meaning about those events. The story and site are intricately linked to the footsteps of those who came before, but only to *some* of those who came before. It is remarkable, for instance, that even the Christian groups who visit Masada rarely spend much time at the Byzantine church or consider, in any great detail, the missionaries that came before them. Rather, they focus primarily on the Jewish history of the site.

Not only is a certain history told in a certain way; today, we are alienated from that history and its associated meaning. As Schwartz, Zerubavel and Barnett (1986) point out, the initial intent and reception of the poem “Masada” by Yitzhak Lamdan was as an allegory for Jews in Palestine who, for a number of social and political reasons, were, for better or worse, stuck in Palestine. By 1927, the year the poem was written, Jews in Palestine could not safely

return to Europe even if they wanted to do so. During this time, Masada was a site of resolve for many Jews in Palestine. Traveling there as part of a youth group became a rite of passage that helped solidify that resolve. By the 1960s, though, many of these groups stopped making treks to the desert, and Masada underwent preparations to be turned into an official state tourist site.

Today, they go to see the place where the founders of Israel came, and to hear the story that those founders heard. Tourists visiting Masada today come to experience the myth of the site. But as Chapters 2 and 3 make clear, there is no one meaning that tourists are supposed to get from the site. It is a mythic site in the sense that there is no fixed meaning; visitors to Masada find ways to make the site meaningful for themselves. A clear example can be seen in how the gay Birthright group, discussed in Chapter 2, took the story of Masada told to them by Ilan, their guide, and adapted the interpretive framework Ilan laid out to better fit their identities. Their ability to place their own identities into the context of the Masada story is an illustration of the mythic nature of the story.

The Masada myth helps establish the uniqueness of the site. It is a place that tourists come to wonder about the events of the past and to try and make meaning from those events. Actions like climbing the snake path or playing the role of a Sicarii are examples of people trying to make meaning out of the site. The uniqueness of the site is what Benjamin referred to as an aura, “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however near it may be” (222). Part of the appeal of visiting Masada is its perceived historicity, being able to stand where the Sicarii stood, see what they saw, and imagine the world they experienced. This aura, for many, is what makes the site a site worth visiting. Hence, the site has a symbolic value for tourists who visit. Symbolic value is related to what Pierre Bourdieu calls “symbolic capital” (179). For Bourdieu, symbolic

capital is gained from experiences that are considered culturally significant. These experiences are valuable insofar as other people recognize the symbolic capital of the experience.

### **The Masada Experience**

The experience tourists have of the site stands in for, but is never the mythic events. Tourists try to relate their experience at Masada with the story of the site. Part of the experience of Masada is encountering its aura as myth, the struggle of finding a personal connection to the site. This encounter does not happen naturally. In some way the encounter has to be facilitated. The myth is made up of the striking landscape, the historical events and artifacts, the framing of the site during the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, and the stories told about the site. By visiting the site, a tourist will sensually experience the landscape, and the ancient ruins speak of the history of the site. To experience the myth, however, the site must be framed for them and they must, at some point, hear the story.

The framing of the site and the telling of the story can occur just about anywhere. One tourist I met learned about Masada from his fourth grade teacher in New Zealand and decided, 20 years later, to visit. Others heard the story in books or on television or through a program associated with a synagogue, church, or community center. And, of course, the story can be told and framed at the site by markers and guides. Erving Goffman pointed out that we create “social frameworks” that help guide our actions. These frameworks incorporate a “controlling effort” that compels us to see the social event in specific ways (22). Events and performances presented at and about Masada are done within a particular framework of understanding Masada, the events that have taken place there, and the history of how those events have come to be understood. Performances that occur at Masada today are rooted in the mythical framework of the site and, hence, increase our perceived distance to the myth, enhancing the aura of the site.

While a number of performances and events can be used as examples, I will focus on the Israeli Opera Festival, a yearly opera staged each summer in the shadow of Masada.

Beginning in the summer of 2010, and continuing each summer since, tourists can visit Masada and see the Israeli Opera stage a classic opera at the base of the mountain. The Israeli Opera stages these performances at Masada in order to increase the overall magnitude of the performance. They note that the “music enjoys a much bigger spectrum once it is performed under the stars and even more so by the Mt. [sic] of Masada with its extra added emotional value” (Israel-Opera). The choice to stage the opera at Masada is predicated on the understanding that the emotional significance of the site will positively affect the viewers’ experience of the opera. There is already in place a shared social understanding of the cultural significance of Masada. In its use of Masada as a backdrop, the Israeli Opera employs Masada as a symbol. Following Kenneth Burke, Gregory Clark notes that people “must seek in their common surrounding some ‘objective evidence’ of their identity” (3), and in those surroundings, be they a landscape, a work of art, or an ancient site, people find shared symbolic meaning. Being able to understand those symbols helps people feel connected to a larger social identity. In its ability to effectively use Masada as a symbol, the Israeli Opera not only draws on the power of Masada as a site of collective meaning and importance, but also helps reify Masada’s meaning and how it can and should be understood. By using Masada for what they see as its inherent “emotional value,” and by attracting over 45,000 people to see the yearly performances, the Israeli Opera uses and affirms Masada’s symbolic value. In this respect, the specialness of the event is not the opera, but the presentation of Masada as the backdrop for an opera. Masada’s conventional significance, the meaning and emotion attached to the Masada myth, becomes



entangled with the significance of the opera. The symbolic value of the site allows for this act of transfer, and rather than losing its meaning, the myth is bolstered.

Diana Taylor defines “acts of transfer” as performances that transmit “social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity” (2). She contrasts acts of transfer with Joseph Roach’s use of the term “surrogation,” and the contrast is useful in explaining the importance and impact of a performance like the Israeli Opera at Masada. As Taylor notes, surrogation explains how transmission of symbolic images and gestures “occurs through forgetting and erasure” (46). For Roach, when “actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitute the social fabric” (2), societies will, at times, attempt to replace the loss with a satisfactory alternate. Roach notes that these alternates rarely succeed as they are either lacking or in excess of the qualities that made up the original. In chapter 2, we can see Omer attempting a form of surrogation. By replacing Masada by the current state of Israel, he attempts to replace the social situation of the past with the social situation of the present. The act of surrogation fails for a number of reasons, but primarily because the leap from one socio-historical setting to another is too great. The opera, and other performances like it,<sup>10</sup> however, enhance the site by transferring the emotional content of Masada onto other culturally important events. The Israeli Opera at Masada is what Taylor would refer to as an act of transfer, “a form of multiplication and simultaneity” (46) that encourages the transfer of meaning and significance from one cultural event or performance to another. Masada, as cultural symbol, gives and receives significance from cultural events in reciprocal acts of transfer. Acts of transfer like the opera can embolden and strengthen the myth, giving it new life for new audiences.

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<sup>10</sup> Notably, the sunrise concerts featuring David Broza and the weekly sound and light show that narrates the story of the Sicarii at Masada.

### **Diminishing the Aura of Masada**

While enhancements may embolden the myth, supplements can have the effect of diminishing the myth. Protected by the NPA, Masada is a site that connects historical events to present day Israeli culture. As the official representative of the NPA, Eitan strives to create and facilitate events and performances that strengthen and enhance the cultural connection. As a profitable tourist site, though, Masada must also meet the demands created by a tourist economy. Amenities and services are offered to make tourists feel more comfortable and to make them feel like they got the most out of their visit. The worry for many tourism scholars and for site managers like Eitan, is that such amenities and activities take away from the mythical quality of the site. The concern is that by making a site feel more comfortable or look more like home, the site begins to lose the essence of what makes it a sight worth seeing. While it might be difficult to determine the exact nature of the symbolic value of a site like Masada, it is clear that the value is rooted in the mythic story of the site. If too many supplements are added to the site and too much focus is diverted from the story, the value of the site can be diminished.

I do not argue with Eitan and tourist scholars who say that supplemental amenities and attractions take away from or diminish the aura of a site. They undoubtedly force tourists to contend with the site in the presence of everything else around it. I heard tourists remark and/or complain about a wide array of supplements to the site: McDonald's, trash cans at the top of the site, the ice cream stand, the picnic tables, the items in the gift shop, the cost of the items in the gift shop, the pool at the hostel, and the hostel itself, to name a few. But generally, tourists found a way to look past all of that stuff, likely because very few supplements can be found at the top of the site, the place where they hear and identify with the story of Masada.

There are a number of reasons that tourists will visit a site. The process of sight sacralization, the frameworks of the site and of the actions and events associated with the site, and the commodities and experiences available at a site create certain expectations for tourists. Eitan is in a struggle to maintain the mythic quality of Masada by attempting to narrow how people define the site and, hence, the mindset people have when they come to visit the site. In this chapter I showed how the framework of Masada is determined and maintained for visitors to the site. I also showed that by offering other amenities and activities at the site, tourists are made more comfortable, but the framework is threatened and the site management must contend with these supplemental aspects of the site. What I found, though, is that to an extent Eitan will always be fighting a losing battle, and it has nothing to do with the supplemental aspects of the site. Tourists, working within whatever frameworks they find at the site and whatever frameworks they bring with them, will make the site into an altogether different experience from what Eitan or the Masada Group had planned. As Julia Harrison notes, tourists will “make their touristic adventures meaningful for themselves in ways that may bear no relationship to what the tourism industry suggests will generate ‘treasured memories’” (27).

As I show in the next chapter, when tourists enter a place, they make that place into something that can never be perfectly dictated. Tourists may come to understand what the site management would like them to learn or experience at the site, but they will learn and experience it (or not) in their own way and in their own time. Additionally, as tourists enter a site they inevitably encounter what the site management can’t fully control: other tourists. Tourists juggle not just the intended meaning of a site and its supplemental resources and amenities, but also the actions of other tourists. What most people were not able to look past, though, were other tourists. The most common phrase at Masada is not “Masada Shall Not Fall Again,” but like so

many other sites, “damn tourists,” or some other iteration of the phrase. Understanding and experiencing a site like Masada has more to do with the experience of being with other tourists than it has to do with sacralization and commodification of the sight.

### **Encounters with Other Tourists: Losing Control of the Tourist Site**

When tourists go on tour, they may not know exactly what to expect, but they tend to go with an idea of what they want (relaxation, history, unique encounters, sexual promiscuity), and work towards their goal. Yes, the essence of a site can change, like Niagara Falls, but all that changes is who dictates what meaning should be taken from a site, and what that meaning should be, not what the meaning actual is that is taken from the site. There is, of course, a difference between attracting tourists to a site to relay meaning and attracting tourists to a site to turn a profit. But tourists don’t just show up to a site and take in whatever meaning a site says for them to take in. Even if they didn’t have to contend with all the supplemental aspects of the site, they would still have to contend with other tourists. And even if they didn’t have to contend with other tourists, they would still have to contend with themselves on tour.

Harrison argues that tourists travel to “connect, to find some kind of intimate if temporary bond with broader humanity. They do so by willingly displacing themselves from the privacy of their home” (51). Whatever they encounter while on tour, even if it is the most mundane thing, tourists see it *while on tour*. They are no longer at home and they want an experience that reminds them that they are no longer at home. Seeing the McDonald’s at Masada can never be the same as seeing McDonald’s while driving home from work, just as the opera at Masada is never the same as the opera in the opera house. In the eye of the tourist, the McDonald’s and the opera can both offer a way of viewing and creating a bond with broader humanity.

In the next chapter I put on my tour guide hat and take you around Masada. My tour guide hat is different than my research hat, so feel free to sit back, relax, and enjoy the tour. Rather than looking at the site, though, I direct you to turn your gaze to the tourists.

## CHAPTER 5

### WELCOME TO MASADA! GETTING AROUND WITHOUT A GUIDE

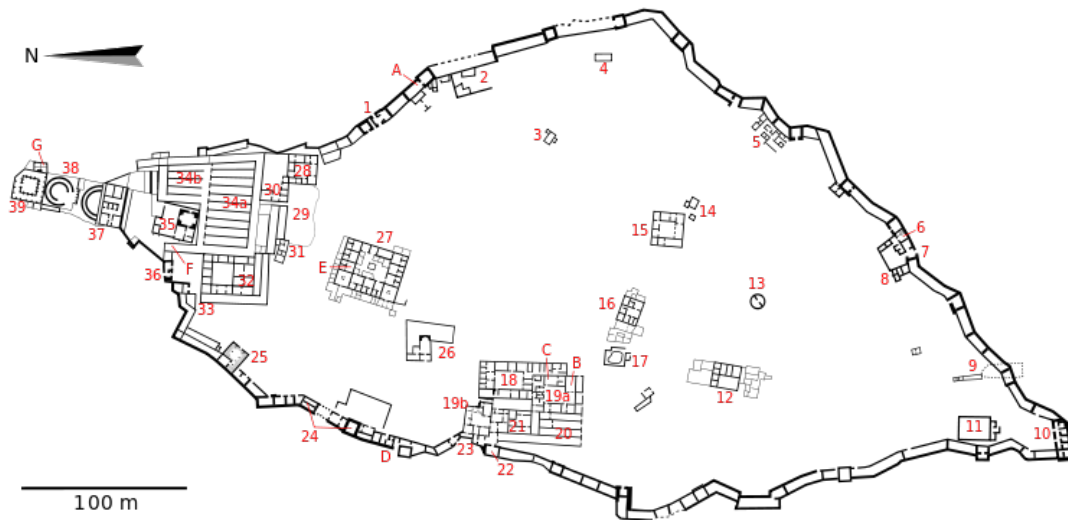


Figure 4 Map of Masada by User:Kordas (2009) (CC-BY 3.0)

Welcome to Masada! To begin, it should be noted that the title of this chapter is a bit deceiving. Nowadays it is nearly impossible to visit a site like Masada without a guide. Perhaps when the American missionary Samuel Wolcott and British painter William Tipping climbed to the top in 1842 they were able to explore unencumbered by the thoughts or motives of a guide, but even then they had the easily navigable Roman ramp path, the buildings, and the detritus of the past to guide their way: artifacts. For the place alone does indeed speak to us. Surrounded by the past, we can hear it, often unintelligible, calling out to us, as I'm sure Wolcott and Tipping did.

While these artifacts most likely guided Wolcott and Tipping to some extent, they did have a certain amount of freedom in that no one told them explicitly what to see or do. Today, even if you come to Masada alone, you will not be able to escape the presence of tour guides and

their large, often unruly groups that swarm the top of the mountain like so many locusts in the twilight.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 5 The Tourist Swarm

Later in the day, when the sun and the temperature are at their highest, even though the groups diminish significantly, you might still have trouble “going it alone,” as it were. Solo travelers are given a map to take with them (much like the one you have above), and each number on the map has a corresponding description that tells you why you are looking at what you are looking at. Should you opt to discard this map you will find that each “place of interest” has a marker in front of it that tells you what you are looking at, if not why you are looking at it. Add to that the

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<sup>11</sup> All images in this chapter were taken by the author, unless otherwise noted.

inevitable chatter that you will hear from other tourists, and you will find that it is almost impossible to not know what's going on at Masada.

So, as you can see, the possibility of getting around Masada without a guide, or at the very least something or someone guiding you is not really a possibility at all. The real question to ask yourself as you come to Masada might be: "When I travel to Masada, how do I want to be guided?" The most common and simplest way would be to just follow the numbers on the map above. If you're pressed for time (it is pretty hot up there, and you probably already hear the Dead Sea and the springs at Ein Gedi calling your name), you might want to work your way backwards around the site, hitting the northern end of the mountain first. That's where all the pretty stuff is: mosaics, columns, vistas! Go until you're tired, or bored, or too hot to take anything else in, then head back down and see the rest of what the Dead Sea area has to offer. Whatever route you choose make sure you drink plenty of water. In such hot conditions you should be drinking about four liters a day. (For more helpful tips on hiking and enjoying the outdoors, take some time to peruse the website of the National Parks Authority at [parks.org.il](http://parks.org.il). There is an English version of the site, but it's not nearly as informative as the Hebrew version, so keep your phrase book handy). Just remember, frequent trips to the bathroom are better than passing out from dehydration.

Should you want more guidance than a simple map and some numbers, but you don't want to feel "guided," you may want to keep reading. However, if you know nothing about the history of the site, or the story of the Sicarii who committed mass suicide here (I hope I didn't ruin anything for you!), and you want to know those things, you might want to give this guide to someone else. There aren't really any "facts" here. Rather, this "guide" is filled with anecdotes. I very well might have titled it "This one time, I was at Masada, and I saw . . ." because that's



basically what you're going to get: an in-depth accounting of what a tourist might see and do at Masada. You may choose to do what others do or you may choose to do something completely different. It's all up to you. What follows, then, is not so much a guide as a list of tourist actions and interactions that caught my attention.

The first thing you'll have to figure out once you get to Masada National Park is how to get to the top. Between the cable car and a number of well paved paths at the top that make it easy to get around in a wheelchair, just about everyone should be able to enjoy Masada without too much hassle. A day at Masada, however, does not demand that you visit the top of the site. For instance, perhaps you are traveling with your family, and a few family members really want to see the top, but a few are not too keen on being out in the heat. Fortunately, there is plenty to do at the base of the mountain. There is a large gift shop where you can buy anything from a handcrafted menorah to a t-shirt that says, "I climbed Masada and all I got was this lousy t-shirt!" (You can get this shirt even if you didn't climb Masada. Who's going to know back home? Just tell them it was hard, hot, and the Roman ruins were a sight to behold). You will also find snack vendors, a full buffet with all sorts of Israeli foods, and if you're hankering for home, you can always pick up a Big Mac® and fries at McDonald's®. Then you can cool off with some soft serve ice cream. Finally, if you're really looking for the Masada experience but you're not feeling the desert heat, the Masada Museological Experience is not to be missed.

Not just a museum, the Museological Experience combines archaeological artifacts and a theatrical atmosphere together with an accompanying radio play that magically whisks the listener away to the past, all the while keeping one of our feet firmly grounded in the present.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Museological Experience was designed and created by Eliav Nahlieli at the Program1 studio in Tel Aviv. Video and images about the project can be found at the website [www.program1.com](http://www.program1.com). In an interview, Nahlieli said that traditional museums try to "present the

We all know, of course, that we can't actually visit the past, but if we listen to the artifacts and let them speak themselves, we can hear a bit of the past. Of course a 2000-year-old pottery shard can't really "speak itself," but the Experience takes care of that for you.



Figure 6 The Museological Experience

As you travel around dark rooms with life-sized displays of ancient life, two companions will accompany you via a headset (a wide variety of languages and dialects is available.

Australian English is my personal favorite). When you encounter an ancient object on the tour, your audio companions discuss with themselves where the items come from, and some of the

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past" using "impersonal technology" like signs and narration that read like they come from a high school history textbook (Nahlieli). The Experience focuses more on carrying the visitor into the past, creating a feeling of "an absent presence." Each room is dominated by a setting of the past, containing sculpted scenery and figures painted black. Throughout each room are a number of display cases containing artifacts found at Masada. The juxtaposition of the artifacts and the haunting scenes, combined with the radio play of two people trying to understand the events of Masada together with the artifacts they see in the museum, places the listener/viewer in an interesting position. Viewing but not quite viewing the history of Masada, and listening, but not engaging in a conversation about Masada is what creates that "absent presence" that Nahlieli spoke about. Both the artifacts and the museumgoer are, and are not, fully present at the museum.

possible interpretations we might get from them and their place among all the other objects that were discovered at Masada. The two voices seem to have more opinions than answers, so you might have to figure out the meaning on your own. The tour could very well be letting us put the pieces together for ourselves: “Here’s the evidence, what might it mean?!” Of course it also might be that the voices in our heads are subtly and persuasively pushing us towards a very particular understanding of the past. It could be that the dialogic exchange that never declares anything with certainty has left us with little choice of understanding the artifacts in any other way than what the voices say “could have been the past.” It’s hard to say. A fun game to play is to wait in the anteroom of the museum and follow a couple in. Once the voices start you can pretend it’s the couple and that you’re eavesdropping on their conversation.

Beyond the museum and the visitor’s center, Masada is home to a number of performances. At the beginning of every summer the Israeli Opera performs close to the visitor’s center. On the western side of the mountain, every Tuesday and Thursday night between March and October at 9:00 p.m., there is a sound and light show that tells the story of Masada through a spectacular visual and aural display.

As you can see, there is plenty to do around Masada and I haven’t even mentioned the hiking trails and geological formations around the mountain. Most people who come to Masada, however, still want to climb up the mountain (or take the cable car) and explore the top. So, if you really want to explore the top, I suggest following the route laid out below. It will take you a while to traverse the site this way (plan about 4-6 hours), and it doesn’t really tell you anything about the site, per se, but all of that historical information can be found online anyway. Instead, the tour focuses on what you’ll see taking place when you go to Masada, and offers a unique and experienced perspective of the site (I’ve spent over sixty days there!). Some of the experiences

will be historical in nature, causing bits of the past to jump right out in front of you. Other experiences will remind you just how firmly rooted you are in the present: almost immovable. And still others will have you grasping for time, wondering if you are here, there, or somewhere else. After all, “we live in a time when traditions,” places, and stories “can die in life, be preserved archivally as behaviors, and later restored.”<sup>13</sup>

1. The Snake Path Gate – There are two ways to enter Masada today. This is not the easy way up, yet it is the path that many people choose. If you want to hike up but don’t want a difficult time of it, there is a path that follows the Roman Ramp [23a], and is by far the more sensible route. Many opt to spend the night before they visit Masada with the Bedouin’s at Kfar Hanokdim, enjoying the legendary Bedouin hospitality. “You would be surprised to know that Bedouin tents in Israel offer a great deal of luxury, the kind that would make the sons of Israel choose to stay in the desert” (Kfar Hanokdim).<sup>14</sup> Just make sure to book well in advance,

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<sup>13</sup> Schechner 78.

<sup>14</sup> There are a number of similar hotels around Israel. Depending on the location, packages can be between \$60 and \$300 (Kfar Hanokdim tends towards the latter). As many of the Bedouin communities in Israel have shifted from nomadic to a more urbanized life, it’s hard to say what would be a more “authentic” Bedouin experience. Modernization of the Middle East has made it so most Bedouin now live agrarian or semi-nomadic lives. Kfar Hanokdim and similar hotels serve as a sort of snapshot of an idealized Bedouin lifestyle. Now, if you head north from Masada on Route 1, then continue east towards Jerusalem, you’ll see other Bedouin “villages” off the side of the highway. You will pass them rather quickly, and there is no good place to pull off the road to see them, so you’ll have to be quick about taking a photo, but you will notice a stark contrast between these villages (it would be more apt to call them “shanty towns”) and the Bedouin hotels.

The staging of Bedouin culture in Israel and the rest of the Middle East would make for an interesting study. The difference between what Bedouin life is today and presentations of an “authentic Bedouin village” as advertised on the Kfar Hanokdim website (*Kfar Hanokdim*) calls to mind Schneider’s contention that “history replayed is neither entirely removed nor significantly distanced from that which is cited, in the way, perhaps, that a slap is not removed from the face slapped, even as the hand and face do not become one and the same” (176). At Kfar Hanokdim, issues of cultural and financial richness intersect in problematic ways. An analysis of the relational “slap” could be productive in understanding the relationship today

especially during peak tourist seasons. A brave traveler might choose to pack some extra water and head south into the desert and see if she can't find an authentic Bedouin community.

The most sensible route to the top of Masada, however, would be the cable car from the visitor's center on the eastern side of the mountain. The cable car will get you from the visitor's center to the top of Masada in just about three minutes.

Despite these other possible routes to the top, though, many people still opt to take the snake path up. Depending on your level of fitness and the time of day, the snake path is a 30-90 minute hike. Many choose to hike up at 4:30 in the morning in order to make it to the top by sunrise. If you choose to go at this time, don't expect it to be a quiet, contemplative journey up; you will most likely be surrounded by large "package tour" groups, especially Birthright groups. The Birthright groups are the worst! They are made up of young adults (18-26 years old) from the United States, England, France, Australia, and Russia, among other places. They embark on a ten-day whirlwind tour of Israel. For many the tour is an excuse to drink copious amounts of alcohol and attempt to sleep with the Israeli soldiers who are on the trip with them.<sup>15</sup> For you, the solitary hiker up the mountain, this means that a boisterous group who will be singing, screaming, and joking all the way up the mountain will most likely surround you. Also be aware that because many of the Birthright participants were probably drinking late into the night, some

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between Bedouin communities throughout the Middle East and the countries they find themselves in.

<sup>15</sup> A Google search for "birthright sex" yields a number of informative articles ranging from "how-to," to ethical concerns. The reason the soldiers come onto the tour in the first place is to create a "mifgash," a cultural encounter between Israeli and non-Israeli Jews. As Aurora, a Birthright participant I spoke with told me though, "right from the start, the biggest question is who's gonna hook-up with a soldier" (Aurora). As Shaul Kelner points out, the highly sexualized atmosphere of the Birthright tour undermines the purpose of the mifgash by fetishizing both groups (*Tours That Bind* 139). In other words, Birthright tourists may not be in the mindset of an explorer seeking out a life changing experience. Often, they are just looking for a change.

will be dehydrated on the hike up and a few will probably puke in the middle of the path. Even in the dim morning twilight, though, it's pretty easy to distinguish the dark throw-up spots on the way up.

About halfway up the path, maybe a little farther, you will reach a handrail that sings when you touch it. Even though there is a sort of competitive spirit among those who climb the path (My personal best was 26 minutes. I saw two brothers in their late teens run up in under 18 minutes. I also saw a woman in her early 60s make it in 35 minutes), this is a good spot to stop and take a breather. If you left around 4:30, you'll be able to see the first hints of orange and red just over the mountains in Jordan. If you look directly in front of you at the near shore of the Dead Sea, you'll notice a canal coming out of the sea. This is where they drain the sea of minerals and then ship those minerals to beauty supply stores all over the world. You can also find some of the minerals for sale in the gift shop in the visitor's center. You don't want to linger too long, though. You're almost at the top.

As you continue to wind up the mountain you might hear encouraging shouts from people who got up a little earlier than you. Now is a good time to remember that many people chose the easier western ramp path and others are waiting a few hours until the cable car begins to operate. Even though the going is hard and the Birthright groups are getting on your nerves, you're in the midst of an experience that not everyone who comes to Masada has. I remember speaking with a friend in the United States who asked if I climbed Masada. I said yes, and with longing in his eyes and voice he said, "I hope I can do that one day." Even though the path has been rebuilt and made safer over the years, it is still the same path that the Jewish youth groups of the 1940s, '50s and '60s used, and it is the same path that protected the Sicarii and forced the Romans to expend countless man-hours to construct an enormous ramp to the top of the mountain. Those who don't

take the path tend to say that it's too difficult for them, or they don't see the point in walking up in the heat when there's a perfectly good cable car that will take them up. By choosing to take the path you've made a statement: in order to see the past a certain struggle is necessary. Even the rare tourist who finds nothing enjoyable at the top has told me, "Well, at least I took the snake path. Otherwise I wouldn't have gotten anything from the experience."<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the path you choose, you will come to Masada with the expectation that there is a correct way to see the site.<sup>17</sup> While this might be the case, consider perhaps that you, the person having the

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<sup>16</sup> Lera, personal interview.

<sup>17</sup> Most sites have these expectations. There are things tourists learn they are supposed to do and if they don't do those things, they must be prepared to explain why to their family, friends, and random strangers who know of the site. This is one of the reasons we take photographs on tour. Urry and Larson point out that photography is "the most important technology for developing and extending the tourist gaze" (155), as the photograph reminds the viewer what the tour is supposed to be about. Photographing a tourist site allows tourists to show those at home how they looked at the site. Those photographs can be compared with how other tourists viewed the site. Furthermore, photos can be an instructive tool letting people know possible ways of viewing the site. But photographs are not the only way to fulfill the expectations of being on tour. Showing someone that they witnessed a site can be achieved in ways that work against dominant modes of viewing. The graffiti in the Southern Cistern [9], for example, can act as placeholders where tourists can return and mark their own history at the site. "David was here in 1987" gets the addition "and in 1995" and leaves room for future additions by David, his family and friends, and by complete strangers. Just as expectations can exist to reify the tourist gaze, they can also exist to highlight the possibility of creating a highly personalized connection to the site.

What tourists look at while on tour brings to mind the question of what tourists are looking for. Harrison notes that tourists are often spurred to take a trip as they recount memories from a previous trip (5). This might suggest that just as we tell stories to organize the past, so too might we tell stories to plan for the future, to remind us of what was, and what could be. Harrison also notes that the tourists she interviewed wanted their trips to be a learning experience and enjoyable (9). What dictates their choice of trip, though, is hard to determine, especially as tourist destinations may "fall in and out of favor" (13).

As I pointed out earlier, Masada is a good example of how a tourist site can fall in and out of favor as times change. Today, at the top of Masada, a tourist will most likely either be a part of a Birthright tour or unable to traverse the mountain without running into a Birthright tour. It is possible that the Birthright movement will eventually slow down, change into something else, or disappear altogether. As it stands now, it is a bit difficult to see the site without the Birthright groups, but it is possible. Tourists don't just come to Masada because they are

experience, might be better at judging what should be done on tour and how it should be done than others. After all, is it wise to let someone else dictate what you're supposed to do when you are the one on vacation?

29. The Quarry – This may very well be the most uninteresting thing to see at Masada. When you reach the top of the snake path [1], look left and acknowledge the Israeli flag at the top, then turn right and follow the path to the quarry on your left. Walk about halfway down the ramp into the quarry, tilt your head, and peer down at the rock wall. Do you see the woman walking toward the dark hole in the wall in Fig. 7? She will soon find out that it's just an indent in the wall, hidden in shadow. If you were wondering where they got the stones to build the structures at Masada, the quarry is a reminder that you are standing on a large rock, from which stones can be cut. As you move through the site you will see similar holes in the ground [3]. You may look in one or two more, but eventually you'll stop looking and just move on. So take a moment here to marvel at the labor that went into cutting out this large hole in the ground, and move on.

37. Upper Terrace – Ignore the guide wearing sunglasses and a toga made out of a bed sheet, carrying a bottle of wine, and pretending to be a drunken Herod, and head to the back part of the terrace that looks over the northern end of the mountain. This is a great spot for taking pictures. Since the cell reception is pretty good up here, you can upload them immediately to Facebook if

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supposed to, or because their packaged tour takes them there. Jude, a tourist I met from New Zealand, came to Masada because he had a fourth grade teacher who taught the story of Masada as part of a history class. As I hiked up with Jude, he told how the teacher had brought hummus and pita to class that day for the kids to try. Another tourist, Ya'el, left her life in the United States to join the IDF, and now leads new IDF recruits on trips to Masada. Margo, another tourist I met, was compelled by the beauty of the site to ask those around her to join her in saying a prayer.

Like most tourist sites, there is no one reason why tourists go. The choice to visit one site or another is rarely determined by a single motivation. Rather, for each individual, the reasons tend to be myriad and speak as much about the person as they do about the site and the various prompts that pushed them to this site rather than any other.





Fig. 7 Tourists peer down at the quarry with their heads slightly tilted.

you want to do so. You will notice other people taking pictures as well. There might be points where you question if this is what you should be doing. Sure, it's nice to be able to have access to all this digital technology, and if you're reading this from Masada you might even be reading

it on a digital reader, but you might begin to wonder if you're missing out on what you're supposed to be seeing by focusing on creating images to help you remember. What if you end up never really looking at the desert until you get to your computer and admire the pictures you took?

The truth of the matter is that you have expectations. There's a good chance that those expectations will never be met. Whether you look with your eyes or your camera's lens, the desert will never speak to you directly as you hoped it would. It will sound and look different. Less magnificent here, more magnificent there. If it's not too late, turn around and take a photograph of that ridiculous guide. He is, by far, one of the last things you expect to see. Now you know that when you get home you will be able to show all your friends what a ridiculous thing you saw at Masada, and you can stop looking for what you're supposed to be looking for, and you can just look. And by all means, continue to take pictures, even if they can't capture the moment as you hope to capture it. They will capture something.

20. Storerooms – Here you will see nothing out of the ordinary. What used to be the storerooms for what used to be the Western Palace is now a nice shady place where a tour guide can walk her group through some of the finer points of Masada. The tour group you see may very well be a group of Israeli soldiers, sitting or lying around on the floor, some paying half attention and some paying none at all. Some have a large machine gun sitting on their laps, or flung over their shoulders, or under their packs that they're using for pillows while the tour guide, also an Israeli soldier, drones on about how important supplies are in the desert. If you've been in Israel for more than a day, chances are you will pay little, if any, attention to this group. You've seen soldiers everywhere. On the bus, hanging out at the beach, ordering a Big Mac® at McDonald's®. Everywhere. And they blend in. Even the students on the Birthright trip, ecstatic

to see the soldiers at first, sort of forget that they're there after a few days. If you stay in Israel long enough, you stop seeing the guns and the fatigues. Pretty soon all you see is people. And chances are that's what you'll see at Masada.<sup>18</sup>

21. Water Gate – This is where the map, admittedly, gets a little bit wonky. There is a Gate [33], and then there is this water gate. The water gate is where they would bring the water up from the cisterns on the side of the mountain back in Herod's days. The Gate [33] on the other hand, is not a gate at all. I don't know why the map says it is.

As you stand at the water gate, you will look down and see a lot of stairs. It's probably about ¼ the distance of the snake path [1]. Going down will take you to the Middle Terrace [38] and the Lower Terrace [39]. Because most people don't go down there, you'll have the lower terrace partly to yourself. The view is similar to the view at the Upper Terrace [37] but there are fewer people in your way, and rarely, if ever, will you see someone in a toga. But it is a long way down, and then you're going to have to make the trek all the way back up. If you stand at the gate, you can watch other people at the top of the stairs cock their heads to one side, like they did

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<sup>18</sup> "Images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order" (Connerton 3), and where better than Masada to remind ourselves that these soldiers, executors of the will of the state, have disappeared into the mundane everydayness of Israeli life. Masada is a symbolic site, and as Tim Edensor points out, "symbolic sites have a mythical function, in that they can be widely shared as a cultural resource, there is a consensus that they are of importance, and yet the values which inhere in this status can be contested" (*National Identity* 47). It wasn't too long ago that all soldiers in the Israeli Defense Force would go through their inauguration at Masada. While very few are inaugurated there today, every soldier still travels there, in uniform and with a company. Whereas the image of an Israeli soldier at Masada was at one time iconic, today it is not at all exceptional. In other words, at one time, the soldier at Masada signified the need for Israel to be able to protect itself at any cost. The soldier at Masada would be what Barthes called a "mythic image." As Barthes points out, "The meaning contained a whole system of values: a history, a geography, a morality . . . a literature" (*Mythologies* 118). The signification of the mythic image made the presence of soldiers throughout Israel ubiquitous. Today, though, the image of the soldier at Masada is not of a soldier being inaugurated, but a soldier going on tour. In the same way that someone might see an Israeli soldier at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, on the bus in Tel-Aviv, or at the market in Haifa, the soldier is a soldier who just happens to be at Masada. Even at Masada they have become a mundane part of everyday Israeli life.

at the quarry [29], before they decide that it's too far down and turn to go do something else.

Don't be ashamed if you turn away. Sometimes being on tour can make you feel like you have to go see everything, but everything is too much. Embrace the fact that there are just some sights that you're not going to see.

31. Tower – If you get to Masada early, before the other tourists arrive, and well before sunrise, you can situate yourself at the Small Palace [15] and watch something amazing. From this spot you will get a view of just about the whole mountain and you can watch as guides hurry their groups to their favorite spots. Every guide has a few of these spots in mind, spots that will afford their group some privacy but also an unimpeded view of the sunrise. There's always a rush towards the Tower, the tallest spot on the mountain. If you are a lone tourist, I would advise against climbing the Tower early in the morning as you will inevitably be overrun by a tour group. Better to find something safe, like the Grand Residence [Location Unknown] where you won't be pushed away by a large group.

You may find it frustrating to have to contend constantly with these groups. In the morning, however, as you watch these groups rush to the spots their guides have picked out for them, take a moment to remember a time where you were so excited to show someone something you cared about. While there is something to be said about finding a magical place on your own, after you find that place, you might want to share it with other people. You might want to take what was special about that place and help other people find something special in it as well. The most intimate and special moments I had at Masada were with people who already had a story about Masada. For example, Amos, a Navy veteran, told me about his father who had been in the Israeli army in the 1950s. Amos's father had taken him up the snake path before the excavation, when Amos was just a boy. There was also Terry, an archaeology buff, fascinated with the

geological history of Masada and the Dead Sea area. Terry told me stories of his days spent wandering the desert around Masada. We would often meet in the hostel dining room to exchange stories from our days. And, of course, there is Eitan, the director of the site. When I first met Eitan, he had just come down from the top of the mountain to meet me in his office at the base. He was covered in sweat and I received a healthy dose of it when he shook my hand. He told me that he was happy to meet me, but that he gets frustrated when his work keeps him in his office at the base, and not on top of the mountain. These are the guides to seek out. Their love for the site will turn into your love for the site.

7. Southern Gate – During the excavation and in subsequent years of renovations, Masada has been made more accessible. Paved paths go around the mountain for wheelchair access, restrooms and water are readily available, and wooden stairs have been added at a number of places for the safety and convenience of tourists. At the Southern Gate, under the staircase added during one of these renovations, is a heart. Cement was poured for the foundation of the stairs, and before the cement dried, someone placed a series of stones in the shape of a heart.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> By virtue of being at Masada, the heart represents Masada. For good or bad, just as the kids climbing the snake path and singing, “move bitch, get out the way, get out the way” is a part of what makes Masada, the heart does the same thing. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, “the exotic is the place where nothing is utterly ordinary. Such encounters force us to make comparisons that pierce the membrane of our own quotidian world, allowing us for a brief moment to be spectators of ourselves, an effect that is also experienced by those on display” (48). When I see something like the heart, placed into freshly poured concrete, two things happen. First, I am taken back to my own childhood and to the handprints and initials I left in the freshly poured concrete on the sidewalk outside my house. As I lean down to touch the heart, other images from my childhood flood my imagination. The second thing that happens is that these images dance around with the images at Masada. Masada turns from ancient symbolic site to childhood playground, and back again. I know that I never intended anything spectacular to occur when I wrote my initials in wet cement as a child, and I imagine that the person who placed the heart here never intended anything spectacular to occur at the heart either. By virtue of its location, however, the heart takes on a life of its own, and part of that life is intricately linked to Masada.

9. Southern Water Cistern – I am still waiting for a letter back from the Austrian couple that left their address on the wall inside this great cistern. I didn't find any other addresses, but people here sure do like letting others know that they were here. A number of people make return trips and write their names each time they come: David was here 1987 and 1995. Others write things like: JerUSAlem!<sup>20</sup> Some people look at the writing on the wall and express negative feelings about the people who write on the walls. They say things like: "What assholes would try to ruin a site like this!?" At some sites, when people write on the walls, a partition is made so people can't do that anymore. At other sites it becomes a part of the site: an attraction in and of itself. Evidence suggests that the cistern will stay open, so make sure that when you come, you bring a Sharpie®.

23. Western Byzantine Gate – If you come up the Roman ramp path, you will enter through this gate. The story goes that when the Byzantine monks made Masada their home, they had a donkey. And this was a pretty smart donkey. Every few days they would send the donkey out of the gate with empty saddlebags. Alone, the donkey would head down the path and south towards Ein Gedi. There, the donkey would meet a monk who would load the saddlebags with fruits and vegetables for the monks at Masada. Once loaded up, the donkey would return to the mountain

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<sup>20</sup> The cistern has become something more than the site it was meant to be. A mural made up of names and images, the cistern is a site in its own right. As guides might focus on the earliest graffiti left by Jewish youth groups in the 1940s, and while tourists spend time reading what others have written and take the time to write their own names, the story of Masada gets rewritten. Here, tourists enter into the narrative and take on a role in the story, just like those who came to excavate the site, then the explorers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Byzantine monks before them, and the Sicarii, Romans, and Hasmonians before. Creating their own graffiti and reading the graffiti left by others, places tourists in between the corporeal world of the physical tourist site and the imaginative world of those who came to this space before them. As Michael Bowman suggests, following Bærenholdt and Haldrup, the mix of the corporeal and the imaginative gives tourists an experience of a "fantastic realism"—a haunting—where objects and spaces and images and stories...lose their aura and become *traces*, in Benjamin's sense, allowing visitors to be at once possessed by the site and to take possession of it" (210). The Southern Cistern is no longer a part of Masada. It is at the site, but it belongs to the tourists.

with the bounty. Today, coming up the path are hordes of Birthright participants. Many get to the top and declare how they thought it would be a much tougher climb than it was, mistaking the Roman ramp path for the snake path [1]. Some seem disappointed, but most just seem really tired.

26. Byzantine Church – There is a story that is told about Masada. It is told in a variety of ways, but it is always the story about the Jews and the Romans, not about the Byzantine monks that lived here longer than anyone before, during the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Because the church is close to the Roman ramp and the breaching point in the wall, a few guides will take their groups here and have them sit in the shade as they discuss the siege of Masada. But most don't. Most just walk on by. Yes, there are some beautiful mosaics and the structure of the walls is strikingly different than the stark Herodian architecture on the rest of the mountain, but it has nothing to do with the story that people come for, so it's largely ignored.<sup>21</sup> I imagine that the monks would be fine with that. They did come to the desert for solitude after all. I can't really say why they left, but I don't imagine that they wanted what they did on the mountain to be remembered by anyone but God.

8. Rebel Dwellings – The Sicarii made their homes between the casemate walls or in some of the less ornate Roman buildings. If you wonder why anyone would want to come to the middle of this desert, let alone make their home here, your guess is as good as mine. Then again, things

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<sup>21</sup> On my first day of fieldwork, waiting for the bus to take me back to Arad, I met a couple of women from Russia. I asked them what they thought of Masada. Neither one said they had a good experience. One of the women, Lera, told me that she didn't understand what the big deal was: "We have Roman ruins all over Europe. Why do we need to come to the middle of the desert to see them?" When I asked about the story, again they seemed unimpressed. While I understand where they're coming from, and while I can see the story and the site being underwhelming, there's more than the story and the site to experience at a place like Masada. There are the people, the scenery, and the interactions as well. Though I suppose that if the story and the site don't catch your attention, and you travelled all this way into the middle of the desert, all that other stuff might be easily overlooked, especially when the various texts encountered by tourists en route to Masada (guidebooks, advertisements, maps, and posters) tell tourists what to expect and see. This can make it difficult to expect or see something else.

were pretty different 2,000 years ago. The desert was filled with Jewish sects that were bent on finding their own understanding of their religion. Just a few miles up the road, around the same time, some Jewish or early Christian sect hid a bunch of scrolls in caves at Qumran. The community seems to be similar in many ways to the Sicarii at Masada. (Though there's no evidence to suggest that the group at Qumran ever committed acts of mass murder like the Sicarii did when they raided Ein Gedi. So they weren't all that similar.) When other early Christians headed out into the desert in the third century, led by Saint Anthony, they were driven by a desire to detach themselves from concerns of mortal life. Today, close to one million tourists head out into that same desert every year. It's difficult to say what exactly they're looking for.

22. Tanner's Tower – The extent to which anyone expected Masada to be remembered is impossible to say. The few pages devoted to Masada in Josephus' account don't really tell us much. The fact that between Josephus' account and the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was only one or two mentions of Masada in any Jewish texts suggests that at best, it would be a small footnote in Jewish history. You wouldn't know it, though, if you climbed up Masada today. In addition to the thousands of visitors you will also see that the site is under constant renovation.<sup>22</sup> Some

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<sup>22</sup> As Yosef Yerushalmi points out, "The modern effort to reconstruct the Jewish past begins at a time that witnesses a sharp break in the continuity of Jewish living and hence also an ever growing decay of Jewish group memory. In this sense, if for no other, history becomes what it had never been before—the faith of fallen Jews" (86). One only has to look at what the Sicarii at Masada left behind to understand the difference between Jewish group memory in the past and Jewish group memory in the last 150 years. Unlike the Roman structures at Masada, the Jewish ones were never meant to last. They were meant for the present, not the future. For example, if you go into the Bathhouse [35], just after walking in, tourists will notice an odd small structure built directly on top of some really gorgeous mosaics. The luxuries of the bathhouse did not concern the Sicarii, but the cool structure could be used for other things. The desecration of Roman designs had little to do with any hatred of the Romans. Rather, it suggests that the Sicarii were more concerned with surviving in the present than leaving anything for posterity. Yerushalmi continues, contending that "what we call 'forgetting' in a collective sense occurs when human groups fail—whether purposely or passively, out of rebellion, indifference, or indolence, or as the result of some disruptive historical catastrophe—to transmit what they know



areas, like the Tanner's Tower, have less to offer visitors so the renovations take a little bit longer. But if you walk around, you'll see a number of projects underway. New paths and new shaded areas are in the works, and a few mosaics are being touched up.

25. Synagogue – In the back corner of the synagogue, in an air-conditioned room constructed at great expense by an American benefactor, sits a Rabbi named Shai Abramovitch. Four days a week Rabbi Abramovitch drives from Arad to Masada, takes the cable car up, walks to his little room in the back of the synagogue, and writes a Torah. There is a glass door so you can stand and watch him work. One day, an old woman who was wandering around the synagogue alone turned the corner, saw the scribe, and immediately fell to the floor. Rabbi Abramovitch rushed out and brought the woman inside. She was crying. She said that her father was a scribe and when she was a young girl, the Nazis came to her house and killed her father right in front of her. “When I turned the corner” said the woman, “I saw my father.”

12. Small Palace – There's not much to see here as it's all under construction, but if you head 20 meters or so south-east, you'll get to the Beit Midrash, the “house of study”. If you stick around long enough, you'll probably catch a glimpse of Rabbi Menachem performing a Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Traditionally, a boy has his Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13 and a girl has her Bat Mitzvah at the age of 12. The ceremony involves the Bnei Mitzvah (the boys and/or girls going through the ritual) reading from the Torah, leading the service, and offering some words of wisdom for the congregation. While some Bnei Mitzvahs study for a few months, most spend a year or more in preparation. Once they complete the ceremony, the Bnei Mitzvah is considered to be an adult and, hence, a contributing member to their community.

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out of their past to their posterity” (109). Until fairly recently, there were no monuments or memorials for the Jewish people. What was known was passed down through writing and through storytelling and through the practice of Judaism. Without that tradition, without that faith, our memory lies in the faith of those who came before, of those who had faith.



Fig. 8 Masada Bar Mitzvah

The Bnei Mitzvah ceremonies that Rabbi Menachem holds, however, are different. The Bnei Mitzvah are young adults traveling on a Birthright trip. Three or four in every group choose to become Bnei Mitzvah early in the trip, then a few days later Rabbi Menachem will conduct the ceremony. The Bnei Mitzvah will choose a Jewish name, and each might say a few words about what this experience means. The rest of the congregation (the other members on the trip) tend to be either sleeping, cracking jokes, or somehow involved in the ceremony.

During one of these services, Rabbi Menachem began his brief sermon: “Why do we bring you here, to Masada? The Zealots chose to take their lives because they thought they couldn’t be Jews. This is why we come. We have our own challenges. We have to make our lives holy. They took their lives for the reason that we live.” He then put the tallit (prayer shawl) on the first of the Bnei Mitzvah. Before they began, however, the service was interrupted when a family walked by and a member of the family grumbled something in Spanish. A few members of the group spoke Spanish and began yelling at the woman who spoke. Then the woman yelled

back. Before chaos could erupt, some members of the Birthright group calmed down the other members and the family wandered off. Still seething, one woman in the Birthright group said that the woman she was yelling at had said, “What we’re doing is ridiculous. She said that we were crazy for sitting here talking about this.” The woman that spoke Spanish was referring to what Rabbi Menachem had just said. The situation put people in the group visibly on edge. When the service resumed, no longer was anyone cracking jokes or falling asleep. The whole group was energized and engaged in the service and the ensuing celebration.<sup>23</sup>

When a group is not going through a ceremony like this, the Beit Midrash is a nice place to relax in the shade and get your bearings.

2. Rebel Dwellings – A while back there were three tourists who decided they were going to spend the night at Masada. They were drinking a lot, and when one of them had to relieve himself, he stood on the walls so that he could pee over the side of the mountain. The desert is known for having huge gusts of wind and as the man was peeing, a gust picked him up and blew him right off.

In the mornings, people crowd around these walls in order to get a good view of the sunrise. When the site workers are not present, people will stand or sit on the walls for a better view. Or maybe just to be closer to the edge. There are about 50 people who work at Masada, and that includes office staff, workers at the entrances to both sides of the mountain, workers at the visitor center, and workers at the top of the mountain. The primary responsibility of those

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<sup>23</sup> While watching these ceremonies, I thought a lot about my own Bar Mitzvah and the time and energy that went into it. Technically, there is no difference between the one I had and the one Rabbi Menachem conducts. According to rabbinic law, once the ritual is fulfilled, you are considered a contributing member of the Jewish community. As long as the basic elements are all there, the ceremony has been achieved. What a person achieves by going through a ritual like this is really up to the person performing the ritual. The significance lies not in the act, but in the meaning they choose to ascribe to the act.

who work at the top is not to stop tourists from doing stupid things. Rather, their job is to maintain the site and make it more convenient for tourists by building new shaded areas and making sure the water systems are all properly functioning. They are not babysitters, but early in the morning, when tourists can't seem to help themselves, some of these workers will break off from what they're doing and chastise tourists who are putting their own lives at risk.

23b. The Shalom Cistern – Travel through the Byzantine Gate [23] and just past the Roman ramp you will find a path that curves up and around to the north. Few tour guides or tourists consider going this way, and if you're not careful, you could take the wrong path and end up wandering out into the desert. Following the correct path, though, will take you to a series of cisterns lining the side of the mountain. There are rails placed in front of the cisterns in a feeble attempt to prevent you from entering. The rails seem to say, "don't come in . . . but I won't tell if you do." In one of these cisterns, on the floor, are a bunch of rocks that spell out the word שלום, or transliterated, *shalom*. In English, *shalom* means hello, peace, and goodbye. For the most part in Israel, though, when people say hello they say "*allo*" or "*hi*," and when they say goodbye they say "*le'hitrayot*" or "*bye*." There's no other word for peace.

It is rare to hear anyone talk about peace at Masada. It just doesn't seem to be a word that comes up much. There are, however, elements of the past that seem to be speaking about it, or at the very least are presenting us with images and ideas that need peace to thrive. There are the easy things to see, like the Southern Gate [7] and some of the writing on the wall in the Southern Cistern [9], but there are also a few elements of the past that you have to dig a little deeper to find peace, like the Administrative Area [21] and the Residential Area [19]. And even though it might not be directly stated, I believe you will find an element of peace at the Mosaic Workshop [14] as well. Peace has a tendency to creep up on you at Masada.

13. Columbarium – Though there are no longer any doves kept at Masada, the place does seem to be overrun with Tristram’s Starlings, scavenger birds that will eat just about anything. These birds are so brazen and secure that they will come and steal food right out of your hands. It wasn’t always that way, though. Tristram’s Starlings are desert birds that live close to major cities. Even though Masada isn’t a city, tourists leave more than enough scraps to leave these birds fat and happy.<sup>24</sup> Please, just make sure to throw your trash in the proper place.

24. Columbarium – It’s not just birds you’ll see at Masada, but all sorts of other little critters as well. But the cats get the biggest draw. It doesn’t matter what a guide is saying; once a cat shows up all attention shifts to the feline. It is often the unordinary that draws us in and, as weird as the guide wearing the toga [37] might be, he has nothing on the cats. If you sit at the Snake Path Gate [1] for a while, you’re bound to hear a parent ask their child what they liked most. There’s a good chance that the child will say “the cat!”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> It is not surprising that tourists change the landscape. Over the last 10 years there have been an average of 550,000 visitors to Masada each year, with that number being significantly larger in recent years (835,837 in 2011, according to Israeli Parks Authority). These same people are also often visiting neighboring sites such as the Dead Sea and the Ein Gedi nature reserve. The popularity of the Dead Sea goes beyond visitors to Israel. The sea is mined for its minerals that are used by spas and for its potash that is used in fertilizers. The water level of the sea is dropping about one meter a year, and while a number of projects have been proposed to revitalize the sea, nothing solid has been put in place at this time. However, while environmentalists worry that it will be gone by the year 2050, Yechieli et al. argue that over time, the Dead Sea will lose up to 150 meters more before finding a new equilibrium. It will continue to shrink until it reaches about two-thirds its current size within the next 400 years (757).

<sup>25</sup> As much as we focus on the strange and the new in a foreign space, we are equally enthralled by the familiar within the new landscape. As tourists arrive at the Jerusalem central bus station for the first time, for instance, they tend to take pictures of מקדונלד'ס, the kosher McDonald’s. The familiar in a strange place is just as picture worthy as the strange. One can’t help but wonder just how stable the sacredness of something like the Wailing Wall is in light of the kosher McDonald’s, or how sacred the story of Masada in light of the cats.

27. Barracks – One day, after a *bnei mitzvah* ceremony, I spoke with Rabbi Menachem. He was a little agitated that day because he wanted to speak about the silence of the desert to his group, but outside forces were continually interrupting him. He said that if you listen, the desert will speak to you. He turned to a little bush and said, “do you see this bush? To one person it is the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses. To another it’s ecology. To another it’s scenery. Still, to a fourth, it’s ‘ach! I just scratched myself!’” Rabbi Menachem said that it’s difficult to find the meaning in something when you have people screaming and yelling all over the place.

You will notice that it is surprisingly difficult to find time alone on Masada, this mountain in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the desert. For example, one afternoon as I was walking down the snake path with a few people I met at the hostel the night before, we got stuck behind a Birthright group. Worse still, we couldn’t even have a conversation since the group members were singing a medley of songs by the band Queen as loudly as they could. Eventually we just decided to join them. The next 20 minutes or so was spent working our way through Queen’s oeuvre with a bunch of strangers.

There are moments when you do find solitude however, and you find that no matter how loud those around you might be, there’s always some silence to be found. Take, for instance, the group that gathered around the Barracks one morning to write postcards home to their family members. The group leader handed out the postcards and told the students in the group to write a letter home and to tell their family that they were writing from the top of Masada. While the students began diligently completing the task, one girl took her postcard and found a nook amidst some rocks about 10 meters away. Crouched in her nook, away from the distractions of her group and anything else that might be going on, she composed a letter to someone far away. Or, take for example a different morning, when people were scampering all over the area, headed

toward the eastern wall to watch the sunrise. One young man set his stuff down in the Barracks, pulled out his tallit and tefillin, and went through the morning prayers. Even though the prayers are traditionally said with a congregation, there is no hard and fast rule that says they must be.

At the same time, even the most well-structured tours and best laid plans of travellers are often interrupted and challenged by the whims and the wills of those on tour. A conversation turns into a group sing-a-long and a group activity can readily become an intimate private moment.

3. Hermit's Cave – *“Jesus said to him, ‘if you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me’.”*<sup>26</sup>

During the first few centuries of the Common Era, many Christians who wanted to find themselves closer to God took Jesus’ words to heart and travelled to the solitude of the desert. Most people who pass the Hermit’s Cave tend to walk right by. Perhaps after seeing the Quarry [29] they’ve had enough of looking at holes in the ground. But as you pass, take a moment to look into this hole and see if you can imagine a man who, 1500 years ago, gave up everything to live in a cave. And he didn’t go alone either. Thousands more like him went into the desert. They formed small communities and they worked together in these communities to make sure that everyone’s basic needs were met. And when they finished the work needed to sustain the physical life of the community they returned to their holes to study more fully the teachings of Christ.

38. Middle Terrace – As Josephus writes it, Masada was just one more ordeal for the Romans. A clean up mission after a long and frustrating war that often found the Roman army waiting for the Jews to kill each other before going in to clean up the mess. After Masada, this baffling last

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<sup>26</sup> Coogan 1774.

moment of defiance, the Romans found two women and a few children hiding out in a part of Herod's palace. There are no records of what happened to these last remaining Jews of Masada. Perhaps the trauma of the mass suicide overwhelmed them. Perhaps they remained loyal to the Sicarii and were eventually put to death or sold into slavery by the Romans. Or perhaps, like Josephus, they embraced the Roman way of life and served rather mundane lives somewhere in the Roman Empire.

4. Eastern Water Cistern – There are ruins and there are ruined ruins, areas of the mountain with construction signs and warnings posted, but no tangible signs that any work is getting done. There might even be ruined, ruined ruins, structures that don't have any trace that we can't even see anymore. Where was the garden that they used to grow their food? What if the archaeologists were mistaken and there are buildings where there shouldn't be buildings, and empty spaces where there should be some sort of structure?

18. Service Area – There's a structure here that was probably a toilet. It looks like a toilet with a path for plumbing so water could flow out from it. Guides try not to call attention to it so you might miss it if you're not looking for it. The people who do find it tend to be kids. They take pictures of themselves pretending to poop in a 2,000 year old commode. Now you could ignore it and pretend that the toilet isn't there, like the guides, or you could recognize that it's on the map, so it must be important. It's either the toilet or the set of stairs that take you into the Western Palace that the mapmaker meant to mark, but seeing how the stairs look pretty new, my money is on the toilet. I think that's what the mapmaker wants you to see.

19. Residential Area – Nothing is fully restored at Masada. When you enter into the upper level of the Western Palace you will look down and see two beautiful mosaics. Guides will tell you that they are from Roman times, but they are just as much from the near past as well. As you



look down at the mosaics you might find yourself standing next to a young woman also looking down. She is spending a semester in Israel, taking regular high school courses, but also Israel and Israeli history courses. As a part of these courses students are taken to all sorts of sites around the country. This young woman was most excited for her trip to Masada and you can see it in the smile on her face. Her father had told her about the excavation and how he decided to come and join the many others from all over the world to help out. He told her that most of the work was moving rocks from one area to another but that every now and then he would get a chance to dig. On one of these digs he uncovered a mosaic. He was quickly ushered away by the more skilled excavators and archaeologists but he never forgot the experience and the contribution he made. After telling you this story, the young woman will lean over the railing and stare down at the mosaic her father uncovered.

16. Small Palace – In a way, Masada is in a constant state of restoration. New paths intended to blend in with the old are regularly being constructed. Repairs on buildings blend into the scenery. As you walk by a site, you might find yourself transported back to the 1960s, watching as the site is being made ready for tourist engagement.

17. Public Immersion Pool – Imagine a time when both the Public Immersion Pool and the Swimming Pool [11] were filled. Imagine a time when all the pools, mikveh's, cisterns and the bathhouse were filled with water. Water for years and years. It's hard because today everything is dried up. And even though the desert still experiences flash floods most years, it still isn't enough to fill all the needs of Masada. Today, there are tourists to think about and the minerals that have to be extracted from the Dead Sea. Today, it's not just a few settlements scattered throughout the desert but entire industries that need water. And beyond the industries there's an entire country filled with millions of people that need the water, too. And to satiate all those

needs there is just one small sea and one small river. So, unfortunately, you're just going to have to imagine Masada overflowing with water. There are too many other things that water is needed for.

32. Administration Building – This is one of the major thoroughfares at Masada. There are bathrooms, a water fountain, a tree and a couple of shaded areas. Chances are good that one tour group or another will occupy the shaded areas, but you can probably find a space in the back if you want a moment out of the sun. You might get to listen in as a religious group leader explains to his group what a mikveh is and how he had to go into a mikveh before his wedding night so he would be pure when he touched his wife for the first time.<sup>27</sup> You might also see three young adults with their sketchpads out, talking about how this might be 'it.' This might be the moment that they look back on, maybe not as *the* defining moment of their artistic expression, but certainly one of them. The desert, the fortress, and the Dead Sea may be themes these young artists continue to return to throughout their lives.

35. Bathhouse – You kind of have to wonder about the gall it takes to build a spa in the middle of the desert with such a tenuous water supply. I have to wonder if Herod ever thought of a possible time when such luxury just couldn't be sustained anymore. Some argue that the same thoughts should be occurring to us today, that tourism takes more from the local economy than it is able to give back. But we're talking about 800,000 visitors a year, and with the newly redesigned shopping complex and other amenities for tourists, it looks like Masada is on track to walk one million visitors through its doors any year now. Clearly, others think it might be prudent to use those resources for what they're worth before they do one day disappear.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The first time an orthodox Jewish couple touch each other is when they meet under the *chuppah*, a canopy under which a wedding ceremony is conducted.

[Location Unknown]. Grand Residence – I apologize for not marking this spot on the map, but you’re just going to have to figure it out for yourself. As noted earlier, the Birthright groups run everything up here. The Grand Residence offers the one really great view of the sunrise that isn’t big enough to accommodate large groups. The lucky few who find this spot can sometimes get a rare treat of watching the Masada sunrise alone or with a few friends. One morning, a small group who meet at the hostel the night before climbed up with a large can of beer and a few cups swiped from the hostel kitchen. They used this space to toast the sunrise, the hike up, and their newfound friendship, even if they all knew that they would probably never see each other again after this day. At the same time, a man sat on one of the walls, leaning back in quiet contemplation. He didn’t bother the small group and they didn’t bother him. They all understood the specialness of this moment. After a short while a few Israeli soldiers showed up and even though they were a little loud, they were more concerned with setting up their camping stove and making coffee than they were with getting a good view of the sunrise, so they didn’t really bother any of the others. There really is no better place to watch the sunrise. I hope you find it.

5. Rebel Dwellings – Herod probably never imagined that the casemate walls, used to protect his fortress, would one day be turned into living quarters. It would be like people deciding that instead of living in their homes in Israel they all chose to live in the middle of Rothschild

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<sup>28</sup> Issues of sustainability are consistently raised in the research on tourism. However, there is no single study that focuses on sustainability in the Negev and the Dead Sea region in Israel. As David Leslie notes, tourist enterprises are “major consumers of resources (energy, water, etc.), and waste producers which account for substantial pollution and the consumption of non-renewable resources” (2). In 2011, the Israeli Water Authority put out a series of television advertisements. In the advertisements, a woman speaks to the camera, saying that “Israel is drying up” and “we have no water to waste.” As she speaks, her skin begins to crack like an arid desert. Water conservation in Israel is a significant concern. Among the many resources tourists and the tourist industry rely on is clean, easily accessible water. The growing number of visitors to Masada in particular and the Dead Sea region in general over the last few decades may have unforeseen consequences, both for the region and the country.

Boulevard in downtown Tel-Aviv.<sup>29</sup> The wall was made as a barrier, not as residencies. Of course, I doubt that the Sicarii would have ever thought we would be coming up here to look at where they lived.<sup>30</sup>

6. Mikveh – When building a new Jewish community, the first thing to build, before the houses or the synagogue or the fortifications, is the mikveh. The way you hear religious group leaders talk about mikvehs at Masada, you would think that they were the main attraction. In the midst of one of his digs at Masada, Yigael Yadin got a call from a Rabbi from Bnei Brak.<sup>31</sup> The Rabbi said that he heard that there was a mikveh at Masada and was wondering if he could come take a look. Yadin agreed, so early the next morning, four rabbis from Bnei Brak drove to Masada. Yadin was excited to show them around, but they asked to be taken directly to the mikveh. When they got there, one rabbi jumped in and began to take measurements. When he was finished, the four rabbis thanked Yadin and promptly headed back down the mountain and back to Bnei Brak.

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<sup>29</sup> Even though the palaces were all perfectly intact, the Jews at Masada opted to live between the walls in an effort to eschew the Roman way of life, opting for simple necessities rather than lavish luxuries readily available. In 2011, in response to the consistent and overwhelming rise in the cost of living, hundreds of thousands of Israelis spent months living in tents in the middle of major thoroughfares throughout the country and most notably in Tel-Aviv. One protestor told me that by living in the street they were able to show that the current system forced them to spend all their time working and worrying about how to pay their rent. In the street, people cooked for each other in communal kitchens and neighbors helped out neighbors. Living in the street was a chance for Israelis to perform the type of community they wanted and that their current system didn't allow. Even though forces may surround us that limit our ability to act, those very limitations often reveal the clear ways we can subvert those forces and act in our own way.

<sup>30</sup> Actually, I'm not sure I doubt that. The Sicarii are often referred to as the first terrorist organization. They struck in daylight, targeting Roman officials in market squares on popular market days. As Bruce Hoffman points out, they understood that public acts of violence "were designed to have psychological repercussions far beyond the immediate victim(s) of the terrorist attack and thereby to send a powerful message to a wider, watching target audience" (83). They understood that the act being seen was more important than the act itself. They understood that it wasn't their lives at stake, but their legacy.

<sup>31</sup> Bnei Brak is a center of Orthodox Judaism in Israel.

The next morning, the headline of the Bnei Brak newspaper read: “Kosher Mikveh Found at Masada.”<sup>32</sup> According to some guides, there are a great many mikvehs at Masada, but some of these are in dispute. For example, I heard one guide refer to a mikveh and another guide refer to the same spot as a toilet.

11. Swimming Pool – The pool is totally dried up so there’s no real reason to go here. Perhaps one day someone may decide to build a small hotel on the top of Masada and reopen the pool, but that’s probably still a few years away.

39. Lower Terrace – So, you made the choice to go down the stairs from the Water Gate, the path less traveled. Has it made all the difference? Of course, when it comes to tourism, the question might be better expressed “how could it not be different?” Or perhaps it shouldn’t be a question at all. Perhaps you should sit down with others who had similar experiences and you could relate your experiences to each other. You will probably find that each person’s experience was distinct but that in the telling there were many similarities, especially in form. Travel is, after all, something we learn to do. We may never do it right, i.e., as the guide tells us we should, and there will always be something unexpected. When you tell and listen to stories, it may make you want to return. The return trip, though, is not to experience what the other experienced, or even to re-experience what you experienced. We might never have exactly the right experience, but the nice thing about traveling down new roads is that you can never really do it wrong.

23a. The Roman Ramp – Some say that if you look at the Roman Ramp closely you will find the original wood that was used to build the ramp from 2,000 years ago. Some more cynical and skeptical people scoff at this notion saying that if you do find something it was probably placed

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<sup>32</sup> A mikveh is kosher if it allows a person to be fully submerged in a pool of natural water. Rabbinic law outlines the details more thoroughly.

there to make the site seem more authentic. Just like the pottery shards that you can find at the top of the mountain. The Internet Movie Database for example, says that the wood today is leftover from filming the 1980 miniseries, *Masada*, starring Peter O'Toole. Regardless of what is said, there is wood poking out of the ramp and there are pieces of pottery scattered here and there, particularly on the southern side of the mountain. It doesn't really matter if the pieces are actually real, does it?

14. Mosaic Workshop – Masada rises in the middle. From this spot you can see just about the entire mountain. To the north, especially early in the morning, you will see about 1,000 people hugging the walls, waiting for the sun to rise. You will hear a few people belting out the introduction to *The Lion King* as the first rays of the sun break the top of the mountain. Just before the singing starts, though, there will be a few people who gasp and point out to their friends that the sun is rising. Then there will be a moment where everything is silent.

If you look to the south around this time, you might spot a group of Israel Scouts going through an initiation ritual. One of the scouts leads the rest, about 20 in all, and everyone but the leader is blindfolded. If someone trips, the rest work together to make sure that the person who tripped doesn't fall and that everyone behind her is aware of the obstacle. When they finish, they form a circle on a small stage where the group leaders speak with them about the importance of trust. They then go through a more formal initiation ritual.

Trust exercises tend to be more about the people you're with than the place where the exercise is performed, but Masada does offer quite a backdrop for an exercise like this. We could say, for example, that if we trust each other we can face any obstacle that comes before us. We can't know for sure how the Sicarii came to the decision to kill themselves. Did they put their trust in God and methodically kill each other, like the story often goes? Or was it only a few that

used their trust in that way? Perhaps, unable to convince the rest that this was the most prudent course of action, while most were asleep, a few decided to kill everyone else. Perhaps there was a struggle and the brutal few won out over the many. Regardless, the Romans would have come to the top to find close to a thousand dead bodies, slashed and stabbed. It is possible that as the Romans climbed their ramp [23a] that the metallic stench of blood and the sound of silence already reached them.

But that is just one possible outcome of a trust exercise. I imagine that the Israel scouts had something different in mind. I imagine that the focus of their exercise had more to do with that old and sacred biblical adage, “love thy fellow like thyself.” As Maimonides tells us, while only the saintliest can ever achieve this true love for others, it is the responsibility of each Jew to desire success for others just as he desires success for himself.<sup>33</sup> Ostensibly, all desires being equal, one should work with others to help them achieve this success.<sup>34</sup>

10. Southern Fort – Walk out onto the platform and shout at the mountains to hear your voice shout back at you. Your voice will bounce from rock to rock, spread out in all directions, and eventually return. It’s a little bit of magic, and even though it might feel a little goofy, embracing your role as a tourist allows you to be goofy. It should be noted, however, that enjoying this magic isn’t always easy. Aside from the fear that you might look a little weird screaming into the desert, you should also remember that people come from all over the world to visit a site like

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<sup>33</sup> Scherman 661.

<sup>34</sup> Faith in this sense is not just about trusting your fellow or God, but the fostering of a communal spirit. As each child in the group led and was in turn led by others in the group, they acted out God’s decree. While we can’t say for sure that this trust was radically different than the act of trust in the group suicide, we can see that the Rabbinic tradition has eschewed the story of Masada. When Masada is discussed amongst spiritual leaders, it is done in terms of the everyday life of the Sicarii: The creation and utilization of a mikveh and the communal living arrangement of the Sicarii, acts that adhere to the commandment to love thy neighbor, outlined in Leviticus 19:18.

Masada, and rarely do they come ready to embrace every aspect of being on tour. Some might hold stereotypes not just about tourists, but also about people that they're not familiar with. They might even view the site as, in a way, belonging to people like them and view you as someone who, not like them, doesn't belong. For example, when I was at the Southern Fort with a Peruvian man named Gonzalo, we passed by a guide from Australia. As we passed, the guide looked at Gonzalo and uttered a slur about Mexicans. Gonzalo took a breath and continued walking. To be honest, I don't really know if Gonzalo even heard the slur. We stood at the echo point and, after a moment of deciding what to yell, Gonzalo just leaned over the edge and screamed. His scream came back, tempered by banging against the rocks for a while.

34. Storerooms – A guide asked the tourists in his group if there was anyone who could read Hebrew. A young boy raised his hand. The guide took the boy to a broken pillar and asked if the boy could read the Hebrew letter *ש* (*shin*) chiseled onto the pillar. After correctly identifying the letter, the guide congratulated the boy and said “you see, 2,000 years later and the language remains the same. We can read and understand what they said in the past!”

Close to the pillar, in one of the numerous storerooms, archaeologists working during the excavation found a number of date seeds. In 2005, after being carbon-dated to Herodian times by the Natural Medicine Research Center in Jerusalem, the seeds were taken to the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies at Kibbutz Ketara. The seeds were fertilized and one of them actually sprouted and is now over 3 feet tall. Although the Jordan date palm became extinct around 150 CE, scientists were able to give the species new life.

Through words and/or scientific progress, the past can be resurrected and given new life!

33. Gate – There is a story about President George W. Bush at Masada. It is said that he and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert were touring Masada and Olmert attempted to get Bush to



drink from a jug. The real use of the jug is to pour water on a display that demonstrates how flood waters reach the top of Masada. One version of the story says that Bush was about to drink but Olmert stopped him at the last minute, laughing, and called Bush an idiot. Another version says that Bush felt uncomfortable drinking the water and opted to hug the Prime Minister instead. Whatever the case, the jug is meant to pour water on the display, and not meant for people to drink out of. But it is possible that you might not realize this if you just happen upon the display. After all, it looks like all the other displays at Masada, but has a mysterious jug and spigot under it. And when you come to a site like Masada, you want to be wowed. You want to have an experience that will be memorable and what better way to have a memorable experience than to engage in some sort of ritual. While some people come to Masada with a ritual prepared, like the bnei mitzvahs, it's not out of the question to think that there might be rituals waiting for you when you get there. So, sure, you might do something at the site that isn't meant to be done, or you might take a picture of something that looks important but is really just another rock, but sometimes that's okay. Sometimes it's okay to make your own meaning from the site. Of course, sometimes it's not. Sometimes it upsets or makes fun of the culture that you are visiting. A reckless engagement with a site of national, cultural, or religious importance could belittle a sacred site. You should probably do some research about the culture that you're visiting, and instead of just jumping right into something, you might want to ask someone who's familiar with local customs and culture first.

21. Administration Area – If you can sneak past the guard in the early hours of the day, come to this spot at around 3:30 in the morning. You might see four performers setting up a tarp and laying down carpet in order to create a stage space for a performance they'll be giving in a few hours. When they are setting up, Ilan, one of the performers, might pull you aside and tell you to

enjoy this moment. Before the tourists make their way up the path, as the tips of the mountains turn a dark hue of purple, enjoy the silence of the desert. It's a special time, just before the twilight. The new day is about to begin and you can't yet tell what it will bring. And when you look around you'll notice the stage that was just created in the midst of a space that hundreds of people pass through every day without a second glance. Perhaps you'll take in the construction on the other parts of the mountain as well. The mountain may begin to resemble a once painted canvas, ready to be touched up or repainted completely. If you scratch away enough you will get glimpses of the past. You may make out a tree here or a song there. If you keep scratching through you might be able to see all the way to a blank canvas. Perhaps this is as the Hasmonians saw it: just a small mountain in the desert.

15. Small Palace – There are a few locked doors on Masada. Ancient buildings turned into storage sheds, or a small break room with a table, kitchenette, and a bed for the few workers who work at the top of the mountain. During the day you will see these workers around, preparing for special functions or building new shaded areas, or working on some restoration projects. If you step out of line, you might see one of them approach you and tell you to stop what you're doing. For example, one morning a man who had hiked up the mountain with his two kids walked over to one of the fountains. His three bottles were each half full with water. He dumped all the water onto the ground and began to refill his bottles. One of the workers rushed out and tried to get the man to stop dumping his water but the man paid the worker no mind. The worker was insistent so the man said that he didn't understand what the problem was. At this point his kids had the faucet running and were splashing each other with water. The worker shut the water off and began to walk away. The man turned the water back on and told his kids that they could keep playing if they wanted. The worker turned around and headed back in the direction of the faucet.

The man held his hand up to stop the worker and, with his other hand, put his bottle under the faucet, suggesting that he was just going to refill his water. The worker waited. When the bottle was filled, the man turned the faucet off and then took his kids to sit down a few feet away. The worker left, and once he was fully out of sight, the man sent his kids back to play in the faucet.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

When I began this project I had no idea what I was looking for. I guess there was a part of me that wanted to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Don't get me wrong, I didn't think that I would, I just figured if I was going to work on something I should "go big or go home," as they say. After two summers of fieldwork, three years of writing, and seven years of graduate school, I found that I was working on something much smaller. I realize now that the big things are easy. The big problems are often symptoms of something much smaller, something much more difficult to detect. For a while I thought I might be studying the Masada myth, but even that is still a symptom of something much smaller and much more complex. The issue I was getting at was identity and what people do in order to figure out and declare who they are. I do not mean to be reductionist here. Rather, I am pointing out that what I continued to return to over the course of my research were issues of identity, how our identities are constructed, and the role we play in that construction. If I could change who I am and what I believe, I might be able to resolve some of my conflicts. I knew that this was true on a personal level and I suspected that it was true for others as well. I also suspect that it is true for nations, but my concerns in this dissertation were more focused on individuals and small groups.

The contention held by many tourism scholars is that people go on tour to witness and learn about other people and cultures. Lury explains that "there is in this approach a presumption of not only a unity of place and culture, but also of the immobility of both in relation to a fixed, cartographically coordinated space, with the tourist as one of the wandering figures whose travels, paradoxically, fix places and cultures in this ordered space" (75). Lury argues that as travelers move from one culture to another, "the boundaries between things – between people, places, and cultures – are being transgressed and then redrawn" (90). While Lury's argument

does suggest that tourists have agency, the agency lies in the ability to travel between cultures and the ability to affect culture, not in the ability to affect themselves. After spending time at Masada, I believe that travel gives tourists the ability to learn more about themselves and to experiment with their identities. I believe that identity is fluid, but can be more or less viscous. Travel lowers the viscosity of our identities.

One place in my research where this was particularly clear was with the gay birthright group. All the tourists in the group identified as part of the LGBTQ community. They also all identified as Jewish. Both those identities seem like they would have trouble mixing together, particularly if we take into consideration the harsh stance against homosexuality throughout the Old Testament. By applying the traditional Masada narrative as a simile to help explain their LGBTQ identity, however, these tourists found a space where the two aspects of their identities could flow together smoothly.

Acts of interpretation like that of the gay birthright group don't just affect individual identities, but national identities as well. As I have pointed out, Ben Yehuda wrote at length about how the Masada story was created and how it became a national myth. His hope was to debunk the myth. The myth, however, is not some secret plot or grand scheme set in play by people in power. Rather, it is developed by people trying to figure out who they are and who they want to be. Ben Yehuda is quick to cast Shmaria Guttman as a villain in his story, but this suggests that those in Guttman's seminars and the generations that followed were just a bunch of dupes. I think it makes more sense to consider that they were not dupes but, instead, people searching for a way to understand themselves and make sense out of who and where they were. After watching tourists at Masada, it's clear how the myth can be an interesting and productive jumping off point to critique how we accept and incorporate a national identity into our

individual identities. Just as an individual's identity can be more fluid while on tour, a national myth, as it is told on tour and engaged with by people at the tourist site, is understood as fluid as well. The performances I focused on showed how people at the site experiment with how fluid these identities can be. Whether this is done explicitly, like when Rechavya in *Masada Live* questioned the characters' hatred for those who were not like them, or implicitly, like when Dan had his group make a vow, the myth becomes as fluid as those at the site want it to be.

Masada is a site where one of the most important stories of Jewish and Israeli identity is placed front and center. It is a story that tourists rarely passively accept and it is a story that is never told exactly the same way twice. Tourists and guides embody parts of the story, question parts of it, and play with what the story can mean. Over time, dominant interpretations of the story may have come to the fore, but they didn't arise through a concerted effort by a person or group in power but, to borrow a phrase from Foucault, through a "concerted carnival" (161). With so many interpretations and possibilities floating around it is hard to say which one will get picked up and take the lead as a new dominant interpretation of the site. What we see in Chapter 5, though, is that as more people visit the site, the possibility exists for dominant interpretations to lose their hold. People at Masada do try to have a meaningful experience, but they also try to determine the nature of that meaning. The site, through tourists' engagement, can take on meanings that have little or nothing to do with the story. Masada can be a place to find artistic inspiration, a place to discuss environmental issues, or just a place to feel alone in the world for a moment. Tourists go on tour because they want to have new experiences and figure out who they are. When they engage a site like Masada with this goal in mind, they have the power to change the meaning of the site as well.

## **Last Impressions**

Tourist sites, as Graburn makes clear, are liminal places. They are “betwixt-and-between” places that people leave the comfort of their home to visit. When they return home, they hope to be changed for the better. Masada stands out as a liminal site. The openness of the space with the relatively few restrictions placed on tourist decorum allows for tourists to be open to the possibilities of being changed by the tour.

That said, I think that there are a few things that can be improved. First and foremost, I think the guides should reflect the openness of the management of the site. This is not to say that guides should be regulated to tell the story in certain ways, or to not tell certain aspects of the story. Rather, like Ilan, they should shy away from any definitive assessment of the meaning of the site. The tourists I saw that seemed to have a more enjoyable and engaging experience were led by guides who encouraged an active engagement with the site and the story. The Israeli Ministry of Tourism should focus on dialogic engagement and structured *communitas* when they train guides.

In regards to the site itself, I think that the site management should make clear what is available at the site. For instance, the performance of *Masada Live* can encourage great discussions about the preservation of national sites and how national stories are told, but it is not clear how and when the performances are offered. Additionally, groups not on large package tours might arrive at Masada without a guide, unaware of the fact that there are no guides for hire at Masada. Guided tours of the site can be a powerful tool to connect tourists to the site. Like *Masada Live*, guided tours can frame the site in ways that help instruct tourists in the possible ways to make meaning of their trip.

The site also needs to pay more attention to and be aware of how supplements may negatively affect tourists. While a fast food restaurant will surely negatively affect the symbolic value of the site, if it must be added, it should at least be a fast food chain that has less cultural baggage than something like McDonald's. Cohen and Avieli explain how tourists might feel more comfortable eating at a chain restaurant because of the standards that they know many chains have to abide by and that they will generally get "safe" food, but I have to ask, why not go with a comparable Israeli chain? Supplements, should they be added to a site, should serve the needs and desires of the tourists and any local populations that might make use of them, first and foremost. While I am sure that a cost-benefit analysis was conducted when the decision to add McDonald's was made, future analyses should take into account the symbolic value of the site as a possible cost.

Finally, tourists who visit Masada do want a cultural experience. However, that experience shouldn't stop at the history and the story of the site, but should also incorporate what it means to experience present-day Israel. This does not mean that the site should be politicized, but certain political aspects could and should be made clear at the site. The most notable, of course, is the scarcity of water. This issue is brought into such clear focus as guides tell the story of Masada, but rarely is it brought up in any explicit way that deals with current water crises that Israel has to deal with. This is a simple problem that guides can make clear to their groups and for tourists without a tour guide it can be made clear by signs at the water stations. The openness of a site should not come at the expense of natural resources.

In closing, I think that Masada warrants further study. The issues that the site management has to contend with (the management of a site of national importance, entertaining close to one million visitors a year and the environmental factors that go along with that, and



maintaining a profitable site without losing the site's significance) are all important issues facing tourism and communication scholars alike. Studies like mine can help sites like Masada better understand how tourists make use of their visit. As more and more people are travelling each year, and as travel can have significant implications in how people shape and practice their identity, tourism studies scholars can and should have an active role in helping sites decide how to prepare for tourists.

### **Take Us Into Consideration: A Coda**

As I said in the introduction, my focus was on a number of constellations of meaning that I saw at the site, determined by various sets of actors, scenes, and actions. There are many more constellations out there as well. My conclusive remarks, then, will focus on something Eitan said to me at the beginning of my second summer of research at Masada. Towards the end of the previous summer, Eitan told me that if I was going to come back, to see him so he could give me a pass that would allow me to move freely around the site. When I went to meet him the next summer to get my badge, Eitan seemed wary. We had a brief conversation while he made me a badge. Then I gave him my card with my phone number so he could contact me if necessary, and I got up to leave. When I reached the door I paused, turned to Eitan, and asked him about the new McDonald's, and when it was built. Eitan told me that it had just opened a week before. Then he asked, "What do you think about it?" I shrugged and said, "I guess it's cool." Eitan cocked his head to the side, raised an eyebrow, and said "It's cool?" I realized I should have been more honest. I said, "It's weird." Eitan nodded in agreement and said, "It's weird." We spoke a while longer about the McDonald's and Eitan's management of the site before I finally turned to go. On my way out, Eitan stopped me and said, "do what you like with the badge, but when you write, remember, you promised to take us into consideration." I told him I remembered.

Much of the writing process of this dissertation came easily enough. My field notes have provided me with a rich source of material that I can draw on for years to come. If I found myself stumped for what to write about, I could easily flip to a page in my notes and find something remarkable. When it came to making claims about the site and figuring out the meaning of events and interactions, though, the process was arduous. I found myself in a continuous struggle to make sure that I was, indeed, taking Eitan and the site into consideration. It was a struggle, but by no means impossible. Had I not felt that Eitan was doing something good, I would not have been able to keep that promise and my integrity at the same time. The struggle was about separating what Eitan was trying to do with the site and what others did at and with the site.

It would be hard not to like Eitan. When I first met him, he had just come down from the top of the mountain. He is an imposing man who probably seems taller and bigger than he actually is by the way he carries himself. His voice is deeply sonorous and he seems to always be on the verge of smiling. When we first met, he reached out his hand and made no apologies for it being covered in sweat. He simply said, "I just came from the top. I love it up there. If I could be there all the time, I would, but I have work down here too." In that conversation and the ones that followed, it was clear that Eitan loved the site. I never asked him why he loved the site. I felt that it would be akin to asking a parent why they loved their child, or a child why they loved their parent. I felt that when he asked me to take the site into consideration, it was an expression of this unconditional love, knowing that others might fixate on what he might look past. I made it a point, then, not to look past what others might fixate on, but also not to fixate on those things either. I wanted to understand the site as a living thing, given life by the stories about it and the interactions at it. Of course, some of those stories and interactions are not always easy to hear or

pretty to look at, so my attention was often on the moments during which they occurred and not on any sort of overarching or all-encompassing meaning. Looking back, however, there are still some unsettling aspects of the site and of my research that I have trouble looking past. I believe, like Eitan, that the site can be, and often is, a wonderful place. It is a place where people can learn about themselves and have deeply meaningful encounters with the site and with other people. The site has this ability because of its mythic quality, its ability to offer stories and events that just about anyone can imagine themselves caught up in. The site is unsettling, however, as a symbol in a system of symbols that have been used to justify actions that are distasteful at best. As I conclude this dissertation, I want to talk about two moments that stood out for me as particularly frustrating in terms of how Masada can be used symbolically. The first moment was when Omer asked his group “can we let Iran get a nuclear weapon?” This moment contributed to what I think is a negative symbolic use of the site. The second moment comes from an email I received from Moshe a few months ago. The email left me feeling frustrated about the dissertation project and questioning what exactly is meant by the charge to “take us into consideration.”

### **Bomb Iran: The Problem with People and History**

As ironic as it might sound, growing up in the United States, it’s difficult to imagine what it would be like to live with the constant possibility of war. Sure, we’ve been at war for the better part of my life, but that war never really hits home, and when it does, our country tends to hit back a whole lot harder. I have never felt concerned for my safety in that respect. I have, however, had to explain to people I meet outside of this country that when my country does hit back, I tend to not be happy about it. I don’t like that we’ve been at war for most of my life, and I don’t like that our response to violence is almost always more violence, but the only effects that I

feel from it come from my interactions with people on the outside looking in. When I meet these people, I put on my ambassador hat and make it clear that I am an American, but that doesn't mean that I support the actions of my country. I say that I never, in my wildest imagination, thought that the president I elected, who ran on the platforms of "hope" and "change" would set up a program that allows for the indiscriminate killing of just about anyone in the world if he deems it a national threat. I say, "yes, I am an American, but not that type of American." This is my standpoint. I am an American against war. It is a much different thing, I would wager, to be an Israeli against war.

When Omer asked his question about Iran, it was frustrating because I thought that he was wrong, but I also clearly understood why others would think he was right. In the United States, it still makes no sense to me why anyone would support the wars we've been in during the last decade, let alone war in general. In Israel, though, there is the constant threat of violence. There is almost nowhere you can look in the country and not see an Israeli soldier, prepared for war. In fact, because of conscription, just about everyone is a soldier. I heard war stories from my dad and my grandfather as I was growing up, and in Israel, I saw how issues of safety and security have structured so many aspects of travel and everyday life that here we take for granted. "Normal" for Israel is different than "normal" for many other places. Their normal is an overt and public constant state of threat. It is so overt and public that when I told people that I was going there to do research, everyone, including strangers, expressed deep concern for my safety. And I know that it's not for nothing. I know that when I hear about missiles flying into Israel, I get concerned for my family and friends that are currently there.

When I first heard Omer use his tour to justify an attack against Iran, I rolled my eyes. But quickly I realized that his words were not going away. They worried me more and more as I

went about my research, as I sifted through my field notes, and as I wrote this dissertation. They worry me because I do have family and friends in Israel who live in that overt and public state of threat. But more so, his words worry me because when I think about them, I also can't help but think the words "same as it ever was." The story is repeated and the meaning gets transferred from one place in time to another, and the crazy thing is that the situation is not that different, at least from the outside looking in. The threat level and locus may change as time goes on, but the response is the same. Fortunately, I met Ilan, and many other people who are telling a story that has less to do with Israel and more to do with the people at Masada. It's hard to tell, but the site is constantly changing. It's changing in ways that make it easier for people to move around, play and wonder/wander about the site. The physical changes to the site make it easier to maneuver physically and, by making the site more comfortable to be at, they also make Masada easier to maneuver creatively and intellectually. To say what Omer said took a lot of work and research and thought on his part, but it was easy. He took an incredibly difficult and complex history and narrative, and whittled it down into a catchy phrase. It is much more difficult to actually wrestle with the history and narrative, as Ilan and his group do. As Masada becomes more convenient to move through (better walkways, more shaded areas and more cold water stations) it becomes easier for guides to spend more time there and help tourists have a meaningful engagement with the site and others at the site. I think that the type of tour that Omer chose to lead disrespects the effort and energy put into the site by staff and by those who come to visit.

### **Is It the Language, or Is It Just Me?**

Omer never gave me an email address or a phone number. He said that there was no reason to contact him and that I could write whatever I wanted to. I might have been harsh, particularly in this conclusion, but I was honest and I believe I accurately represented on the

page what I saw at Masada. Most of the other people I write about and many that I don't, exchanged contact information with me and said that they would be happy if I kept them in the loop. There were certain people that I knew I would need some feedback from if I wanted to make sure that I was accurately reporting the things that they said or did. One of those people was Moshe, and I was glad to do it. The short chapter about *Masada Live* relates a single moment of a long day I spent with Moshe, a day filled with rich conversation, good food, and a very friendly rapport. When I finished an early draft of the chapter I sent it to Moshe and asked him to give me any feedback he had. A few weeks later he responded, saying that he really enjoyed reading the paper, and that he made a few marginal comments. For the most part, the comments were details that I missed or, because of the accent, misheard and misinterpreted. They were easy to fix and are reflected in this final draft. The last comment he left, though, was hard to read. The original passage was:

The performance reveals the fallacy of using the events of Masada to justify the founding of the state, preemptive strikes, and harsh containment strategies against neighboring countries and populations. This isn't to say that those actions can never be justified; *Masada Live* just argues that it is ridiculous to justify them with the story of Masada.

Moshe's marginal response was:

This is worth a conversation and I hope we will meet again- you are invited to my home. But ... I think this is incorrect and, excuse me, bullshit...

I felt compelled to respond immediately, so I sent Moshe an email. I wasn't sure if there was some sort of miscommunication, or if we were coming from two fundamentally different perspectives. I responded,

Is it fair to say that you think we can benefit from a more complicated version of the Masada story? One where the Zealots were not strictly good or evil, but just people trying to live the life that they want to live? In that respect, I would say that the flaws in the story can be instructive (about our past and about how we conduct ourselves in the present) and, hence, make the Masada story a story that is, in that sense, ageless. But it

isn't a story that dictates how we should act. Rather, it's a story that explains how we sometimes are, and how we can be better. Would that make sense?

The point that I was trying to make was that the performance allowed for a critical engagement with the Masada story by the audience. I make that point much clearer now in the dissertation. When I sent these questions to Moshe, he didn't respond. I let a month go by and emailed him again. It's now been almost three months and I still have not heard anything from Moshe.

Of course, I can speculate all day about why I haven't heard anything from him, but it's not really going to get me anywhere. What I initially wrote touched a nerve. I tried to clarify my purpose in writing what I wrote, and because of that I was able to make my argument stronger. I also made it clear that it was an argument that I was making, not Moshe or Asphalt Theatre. I think that both of those things are essential to good ethnography, and they came out of another good ethnography practice, which is staying in touch with the people you interview and observe. I know that I have conducted a solid and rigorous ethnographic study of Masada. I also know that it's possible that my research might make some people feel like I haven't fully taken them into consideration, when I promised I would. It hurts to know that that is a possibility.

On my last day at Masada I went to see Eitan to thank him for everything. The meeting turned into an exit interview, of sorts. He asked me questions about my research, what I made of the site, and what I thought about the work that he was doing. I couldn't say much except that there was a whole lot going on and that I thought that was a good thing. Then he asked me what my plans were after I finished, and I told him that I hoped to get a job. He looked at me a moment and then said "come work here." It was a serious offer. I asked what I would do, and he told me that it didn't matter, that he would find something. I told him that I would think about it, and I did. The job offer had nothing to do with my skills, whatever those may be. It came

because of the investment I put into the site. For a number of months Eitan saw me at the site, every day, and he knew that after I left I would be spending a lot of time writing about the site. Not a day goes by where I don't consider Masada and Eitan and I imagine it will be a long time, if ever, before I see such a day. For two years now, Eitan's business card has hung from a yellow pushpin right about my computer. It's the first thing I see when I start work and it's the last thing I see when I finish work. Next to it is the badge I used to travel around the site. There's also a postcard, a flier for the sound and light show, a magnet, a hat, and plenty of books all around me. Eitan wants people to work at the site that love it as much as he does. I know that Eitan's offer was for me to physically come and work there, but even though I'm writing this from about 7,000 miles away, I have been working on Masada this whole time.



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## APPENDIX: LETTER REGARDING IRB



April 23, 2013

To: Gary Byerly  
Dean of the Graduate School  
Louisiana State University

Through Matthew Lee  
Associate Vice Chancellor

This week I was informed by a graduate student, Ariel Gratch, in the Department of Communication Studies that he defended his dissertation but never went through the IRB. His major professor is Dr. Michael Bowman.

I met with Ariel on April 23. I also asked him to prepare the exemption materials he should have submitted earlier. I told him it is not possible for the IRB to give retroactive approval to a study. However, I would review his project and send my recommendations to you.

Ariel's study involved interviews with tourists at Masada National Park. His interview does not appear to cover any sensitive questions. His sample does not include any vulnerable people. He obtained oral consent from his participants but not written consent. He told participants the study was confidential. These procedures would be allowed under IRB rules if he had applied for an exemption. Had he applied for an exemption, it would have been granted.

I found no evidence that he harmed anyone in his study.

In summary, I believe that, while putting LSU in jeopardy of federal audits by violating LSU policy on the use of human subjects, he did no harm to any of his participants.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Mathews,  
Chair LSU Institutional Review Board

## **THE VITA**

Ariel Gratch was born in Orange, California. His father is from Israel and his mother from the United States. Ariel received his bachelor's degree from Kennesaw State University, his master's degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and will receive his doctorate degree from Louisiana State University in May 2013. In addition to his academic work, Ariel is a performing artist who is known for his experimental storytelling work. Upon receiving his degree he plans to teach and conduct research in the fields of performance studies, tourism, and communication. He also plans to continue his performance practice and to create and conduct storytelling workshops.