

One Historical Reason the Haredim Should Fight in the IDF

Divisions with Israeli society are often reported by both outsiders and insiders without having done due historical diligence. That is because we live in ahistorical times. Here is a piece of reporting which tries to make amends for this:

By Geoffrey Clarfield

The secular men and women, and the modern Orthodox soldiers of the IDF deserve our gratitude and praise. They have fought and continue to fight an on and off war on seven fronts, against implacable enemies of the Jewish People and the State of Israel.

Many of their best friends and close relatives have died in battle or have been wounded. And, they are fighting during an exponential rise in world antisemitism and an Islamic Jihad against Israel, Jewish communities in the Diaspora (“Globalize the Intifada”) and tragically, a sleeping West. More reason to praise them.

The Ultra-Orthodox of Israel do not go the IDF. Their Rabbis forbid it. They argue that their job is to pray for Israel. Many proclaim that that is the equivalent of fighting. They are different from the



Mosaic Floor from Byzantine Synagogue in the Land of Israel (photo by Geoffrey Clarfield)

extreme Netura Karta who do not recognize the legitimacy of the modern State of Israel and who argue that there can be no national redemption until the Messiah comes. These Jewish anti-Zionists are beyond the pale, but in my opinion the Haredi are not. Here is why.

For most secular Israelis (and they are not all that "secular" as they usually follow the Orthodox rituals of the life cycle, the annual festivals, and the Sabbath as well as Jewish birth and death ceremonies), the Haredim drive them to distraction.

Secularists and modern Orthodox legitimately complain that they and their children must defend all Israelis and take the risk of dying or being wounded in battle while the Haredim pray. To make matters worse, some do not even do that, but this is the institutional claim they proffer to justify dodging the draft.

Secular Israelis' greatest error is assuming that assiduous study of the Talmud and a passivity derived from centuries of exile, is the root cause driving this inability to embrace the reality principle-that Israel has more enemies than friends and all able-bodied men and women must be armed to defend the state, their communities and immediate families.

It was not always so. One must remember that the Mishna, which is the central core of the Talmud, emerged in its final oral form a century or two after the destruction of the Second Temple. The Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds, which are based on the Mishna, were standardized and written out just before the rise of Islam in the 7th century CE.

And so, from at least the third century there was a period when the proto-Talmud, facilitated by the rising Rabbinical class, ruled supreme over the Jewish communities of the Land of Israel under the Christian Romans and under the Zoroastrians in Mesopotamia. In Israel, the Talmud did not stop their revolts and struggle for national independence.

Times of Israel writer Rosella Turcetin has written about recently discovered physical evidence of at least one of these revolts just a few months ago. Here is what she says:

A rare hoard of 22 bronze coins dating to the 4th century CE has been uncovered deep underground in a hiding complex beneath the ancient settlement of Huqqoq in the Lower Galilee, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) announced Thursday. The discovery offers an unprecedented glimpse into the [little-known Third Jewish Revolt](#) against the Romans, which erupted in the region in 351 CE, according to Prof. Yinon Shivtiel of Zefat Academic College. Shivtiel co-directs the excavations at the site alongside IAA archaeologist Uri Berger.

This is just one piece of archaeological evidence that supports written evidence of a series of periodic violent revolts against Byzantine Christian rule, often documented by Christian writers of the time. This history has yet to be integrated into general Jewish history by academic and popular writers and, it is foreign to the contemporary understanding of the history of this time. Many of these later national revolts were driven by the Samaritan neighbors of the surviving Jews of the Land of Israel, but often Jews joined in.

For example, from 529-531 CE a messianic leader named Julianus ben Sabar of the Samaritan community and faith, still numerous in the Biblical heartland of the Land of Israel, revolted against the Byzantine Romans. The revolt failed but gave a taste of independence for a full three years. Many Jews joined.

In 556 CE when the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I was in power, Samaritans and their Jewish allies revolted once again. It is said that between one hundred to one hundred and twenty thousand Samaritans and Jews were killed, with many driven into exile. Later the Samaritans rebelled again in 572, 573 and in 578.

If you still think that the Jewish people in the Land of Israel were under the “passive rule” of their Talmudic studying Rabbis, note that the Jewish population of the Land of Israel revolted against the Byzantines and secured independence with support from the Persians, when they fought against the Byzantine Empire under the rule of Emperor Heraclius in the early 600s.

The historian, Daniel Graupe, has written a major monograph about the revolt. Here is one significant quotation:

The Jewish rebellion occurred 544 years after the Roman destruction of the Second Jewish Temple (70 CE).

The 614 CE rebellion resulted in the 3 years of Jewish rule of Jerusalem, and possibly, of all the land of Israel. It also happened 480 years after the Bar-Kokhva rebellion against the Romans (132-135 CE).

Interestingly, Bar-Kokhva ruled Jerusalem for almost the same duration as was the rule of the city during the 614 CE revolt...This rebellion started just 8 years before the emergence

of Islam at the Hijra of Prophet Mohammed from Mecca (622 CE), and 23 years before the Moslem conquest of Jerusalem from the Byzantines...

In his introduction Graupe writes that all the sources that he used to author the book are available online, but few professional historians have taken the time to integrate them as has he has done.

Had the Jews succeeded in their battles against the

Byzantines, they might have then maintained an independent and armed Jewish state, had they not been finally betrayed by their Persian patrons, thus triggering their defeat once again. Soon after, the Byzantines lost the Land of Israel to invading Arabians with a new religion after the Byzantine and Persian empires had been decimated by the plague.

The takeaway? Jews who were by the 7th century imbued with the study of the Talmud as the framework for Jewish life in late antique Israel had no religious inhibitions in taking their chance fighting in a war against the Byzantines to regain control of their land and religion, and to free themselves from the well documented religious and social persecution of Jews that we now know was part and parcel of Byzantine theology, law and culture.

Today, those who think that it is the Talmud and the study of the Talmud alone that prevents the Haredim from joining the IDF are incorrect. Young Haredim who are allowed to find out about this history, might just take heart that their spiritual ancestors were hardly pacifists.

In fact, they were Talmud studying warriors. One day these young scholars may become warriors again. The Talmud clearly does not forbid it. And, one day some young Haredi men who think outside of the box may discover this truth and join the IDF.

First posted in the [Times of Israel](#)