



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

## **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/public-scholar-program> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

**The application format has been changed since this application was submitted.** You must follow the guidelines in the currently posted Notice of Funding Opportunity (see above link).

Project Title: Masada: A New History

Institution: University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Project Director: Jodi Magness

Grant Program: Public Scholars

## ***Masada: A New History, by Jodi Magness***

### *Significance and contribution*

Two thousand years ago, 967 Jewish men, women, and children reportedly chose to take their own lives rather than suffer enslavement, torture, or death at the hands of the Roman army. This dramatic event occurred atop Masada, a barren and wind-swept mountain overlooking the Dead Sea. The story of the mass suicide is related by only one ancient author, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. Josephus ended his seven-book account of *The Jewish War* – which describes the First Jewish Revolt against Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple in 70 C.E. – with the fall of Masada. Whereas for Jews the revolt was a national disaster, Christians viewed the temple's destruction as a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy (see Mt 24: 1-2; Mk 13: 1-2; Lk 21:5-6).

The Jewish resistance at Masada became a symbol of the embattled modern State of Israel as a result of the 1963-1965 excavations conducted by the renowned archaeologist Yigael Yadin, who also served as Chief-of-Staff of the Israel Defense Forces. Although Masada's iconic status has diminished in today's post-Zionist era, it remains the second most visited archaeological site in Israel.

The story of Masada has been told by other modern scholars, foremost among them Yadin, who provided a riveting first-hand account of the discoveries from his excavations. More recently, the Israeli archaeologist Amnon Ben-Tor produced a richly-illustrated popular volume that updates Yadin's classic in light of the finds published in the eight volumes of the final excavation reports. My project builds on these accounts without replicating them, by presenting Masada within the larger context of events that affected Judea during the late Second Temple period (first century B.C.E. and first century C.E.). My presentation integrates historical/literary evidence with the most up-to-date archaeological findings, yielding a gripping narrative that follows the fate of the Jews under Roman rule through the story of Masada.

I introduce readers to Masada by beginning at the end of the story, with the fall of the mountain to the Romans in 72/73 or 73/74 C.E. (Chapter 1). The popular fascination with Masada is due to Josephus' sensational account of the mass suicide. Therefore, this book opens with Eleazar Ben-Yair's speech (as reported by Josephus), convincing the Jewish rebels besieged atop Masada to deprive the Romans of victory and spare themselves horrible suffering by taking their own lives. The mass suicide was accomplished by drawing lots, with the last man running a sword through himself. The introduction ends by posing the questions: how did the Jews atop Masada get to this point, and how do we know about these events?

In Chapter 2, I explore Masada's natural setting and review the history of exploration of the Dead Sea region. Chapter 3 surveys the first century B.C.E., a turbulent period that witnessed the decline of the Roman Republic and Rome's annexation of the Hasmonean (Jewish) kingdom in Judea. Disagreements among Jews about how to worship the God of Israel properly, particularly relating to the sacrificial cult in the Jerusalem Temple, led to the formation of

various groups and sects including the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and (later) Jesus' movement.

Rome's annexation of the Hasmonean kingdom set the stage for the rise to power of Herod, who was appointed client king of Judea in 40 B.C.E. Herod was a cruel and ruthless ruler who, ironically, is best-known for an atrocity that he probably did not commit: the Massacre of the Innocents (see Mt 2:16-18). Chapter 4 provides an overview of Herod's reign and his major building projects aside from Masada, including his other fortified desert palaces such as Machaerus, the reconstructed Second Temple in Jerusalem, and Caesarea Maritima. In Chapter 5, I describe Herod's buildings atop Masada, which include a fortification wall with towers, two palace complexes, and an elaborate water system. Even on this remote mountain, Herod equipped his palaces with the most up-to-date Roman amenities, including bathhouses and rich interior decoration such as mosaic floors and Pompeian-style wall paintings.

Chapter 6 provides an overview of the deteriorating conditions in Judea after Herod's death, which culminated with the outbreak of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome (66-70 C.E.). The revolt was suppressed by Vespasian and his son Titus, who took Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Temple – an event which the Gospel writers say Jesus predicted. After Vespasian was proclaimed emperor in 69 C.E., he and his family (the Flavians) celebrated their victory over the Jews as though Judea was a newly-conquered province, complete with a victory parade, a triumphal arch (the Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum), and a special series of coins. The "Judean war" became the centerpiece of Flavian propaganda, legitimizing the newly-established dynasty. After 70 C.E., Jewish rebels who had occupied Masada during the revolt continued to hold out atop the mountain.

Chapter 7 explores the archaeological remains associated with the rebel families, who lived jam-packed in the rooms of Herod's casemate (fortification) wall and reused other Herodian buildings. Thanks to the arid climate, more organic materials - including clothing and leather sandals - were preserved at Masada than at nearly any other archaeological site in Palestine, shedding valuable light on daily life.

Chapter 8 tells the story of the siege of Masada, which occurred in the winter-spring of 72/73 or 73/74 C.E., when approximately 8000 Roman soldiers arrived at the foot of the mountain. This chapter incorporates data from the 1995 excavations that I co-directed in the siege works at Masada, as well as information about the military equipment from Yadin's excavations which I published. Chapter 9 presents an overview of the life and works of Flavius Josephus, who is our only ancient source on the mass suicide at Masada. I consider the reliability of Josephus' account in light of recent suggestions that he fabricated the story of the mass suicide.

In Chapter 10, I explore the rise of the "Masada myth" – the transformation of Masada into a symbol of the modern state of Israel – in connection with Yadin's life and legacy, and the decline of that myth in the post-Zionist era. The book concludes with an epilogue presenting a guided tour of Masada, including remains such as a Byzantine church which are not discussed in other chapters.

### Work Plan

Because my research and teaching focus on the topics covered in this book, the fellowship period will be devoted to writing rather than reading and gathering information. Based on past experience, I know that I need a year to write a book. For this reason, I negotiated a contract with Princeton University Press to submit the completed manuscript by the end of 2017. An NEH Fellowship would enable me to take a full year's sabbatical in 2016-2017, supplementing the one-semester paid leave offered by my university. During that year, I anticipate writing the entire manuscript without difficulty.

As described above, the book will consist of ten chapters plus an epilogue:

Chapter 1: Introduction: the fall of Masada

Chapter 2: The setting: the Dead Sea region and history of exploration of Masada

Chapter 3: Judea in the first century BCE

Chapter 4: Herod the Great and his building projects

Chapter 5: Herod's fortified palaces at Masada

Chapter 6: From Herod's death to the First Jewish Revolt against Rome

Chapter 7: Masada during the First Revolt

Chapter 8: The siege of Masada

Chapter 9: Flavius Josephus and the story of Masada

Chapter 10: Yigael Yadin and the "Masada myth"

Epilogue: A guided tour of Masada

### Competencies, skills, and access

Since 2002, I have been the Kenan Distinguished Professor for Teaching Excellence in Early Judaism in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. My research expertise is the archaeology of Palestine in the Roman, Byzantine, and early Islamic periods, and my teaching focuses on Judaism in the late Second Temple period (first century B.C.E. and first century C.E.). I am trained in the archaeology of the Classical (Greco-Roman) world and the Near East, having received a B.A. in Archaeology and History from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1977), and a Ph.D. in Classical Archaeology from the University of Pennsylvania (1989). As an undergraduate, I studied with Yadin.

After completing my B.A., I worked for three years as a guide at the Ein Gedi Field School, during which period I visited Masada hundreds of times with tour groups and acquired an intimate knowledge of the Dead Sea region. In the summer of 1995, I co-directed excavations in the Roman siege works at Masada, and I published the pottery from those excavations as well as the military equipment from Yadin's excavations. From 2003-2007 I co-directed excavations in the Late Roman fort at Yotvata in Israel's southern Arava. Since 2011 I have directed excavations at the ancient village of Huqoq in Israel's Galilee ([www.huqoq.org](http://www.huqoq.org)).

I am committed to public outreach by making the results of my research accessible to a wide audience. As part of this commitment, I have published articles in popular magazines such as *Biblical Archaeology Review*, as well as several books that are accessible to non-specialist readers, including my award-winning monograph, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2002), which was written with the support of an NEH Fellowship; and *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit* (2011). In 2012, I published *The Archaeology of the Holy Land from the Destruction of Solomon's Temple to the Muslim Conquest* (Cambridge University Press), which is designed as a textbook for students and seminarians, as well as being marketed to a broader audience. The writing sample for this NEH application comes from the chapter on Masada in *The Archaeology of the Holy Land*. In addition, I have produced two lecture series with The Teaching Company's Great Courses: "The Holy Land Revealed" (released Dec. 2010), and "Jesus and His Jewish Influences" (released Dec. 2015).

With regard to the languages relevant to this project, I have native proficiency in Modern Hebrew and can read Ancient Greek, French, and German. No special access to any materials is required, and all of the information on which this project is based is published. If awarded an NEH Fellowship I plan to spend my sabbatical in Chapel Hill, where there are excellent library collections (at UNC and Duke), and where I own many of the books necessary for this project. If at some point I find that a visit to Masada would be helpful, I can spend time in Jerusalem, where I own a small apartment and have access to the libraries at the Hebrew University and the Rockefeller Museum.

#### Final product and dissemination

As mentioned above, this book is under contract with Princeton University Press, with the completed manuscript due by 31 December 2017. The provisional title is *Masada: A New History*. 50 illustrations will accompany the text. It is aimed at a non-specialist audience that includes scholars in related fields, students (graduates and undergraduates), and the general public. Princeton University Press will promote it as a trade book, as part of a series called Turning Points in Ancient History. The book should appear in print 8-10 months after the final submission, meaning after outside reviews and final revisions made in light of those reviews. The estimated initial print run is 5,000-7,500 copies.

*Masada: A New History* will present the most up-to-date archaeological findings relating to the Holy Land in general and Masada in particular, integrated within a history of the Jews in the late Second Temple period. Like my other works, the text will be clearly written and jargon-free, making it widely accessible but without being dummed-down. The book will appeal to readers interested in classical archaeology, biblical studies, ancient history (especially the Roman world), and early Judaism. Presumably, a significant portion of the audience will consist of Jews and Christians who wish to understand Masada's significance within the context of the late Second Temple period, especially the reign of Herod the Great and the time of Jesus, leading up to the First Revolt and the destruction of the Second Temple.

## Bibliography for *Masada: A New History*, by Jodi Magness

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