



[Epitaph for a soldier from Jerusalem \(TitAq II, 499\)](#) [1]

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Funerary.

Original Location/Place: Western Cemetery of the Canabae, tomb 7 or 8, Aquincum, Pannonia Inferior.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Aquincumi Múzeum, Budapest. Inv. no.: 63.10.11.

Date: 151 CE to 200 CE

Physical Characteristics: Large tomb marker of white limestone. The inscription is set within a double frame, which curves inwards to form a semi-circular shape on the left and right sides. The bottom left hand side of the plaque has been damaged.

Material: Limestone.

Measurements: Width: 113cm

Height: 75cm

Depth: 30cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications: Tituli Aquincenses II, 499

EDH: [068393](#) [2]

Commentary: This short funerary inscription was discovered in a cemetery in ancient Aquincum, a city in the northeast of ancient Pannonia (Budapest, Hungary) close to the Roman frontier. The plaque on which the epitaph is written has been damaged on its lower left hand side, although the majority of the text has remained intact. It is a dedication to Aelius Silvanus, who served as a centurion in the *Legio II Adiutrix*, the legion founded by Vespasian in 70 CE. The inscription states that Aelius Silvanus was a native of Syria-Palaestina and the colony of Aelia Capitolina (*domo Syria Palaestina /colon(ia) Ael(ia) Capitolina*). Having served an unusually long sixty-one years in the Roman army (*stipendiorum LXI*), he died at the age of eighty-six, with his funerary monument undertaken by his daughter and heir, Aelia Silvana, through the agency of Aelius Filoquarius, who has been interpreted by Sandor Scheiber as the freedman of the dead Silvanus (Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, p. 67). The last possible date for the inscription has been suggested as c. 200 CE, meaning that Silvanus, as a child, may possibly have witnessed Hadrian's foundation of Aelia Capitolina on the ancient site of Jerusalem, and the renaming of the province as Syria Palaestina.

Aelius Silvanus had served in the *Legio II Adiutrix*, which was based in Aquincum itself. There has been some discussion as to whether or not the legion, or at least a detachment from it, fought during the Bar Kokhba war in 132-135 CE. Werner Eck and Sándor Scheiber have connected it to the revolt through epigraphic and numismatic evidence, with Eck linking a detachment of the legion to the *Legio X Gemina* which was from the same region and which did fight in the war ("Roman Point of View," p. 81). Scheiber has offered numismatic evidence, in the form of Cistophorus coins minted under Hadrian that were found in Pannonia, but which originated in the East and had no monetary value outside of Asia Minor and the neighbouring provinces. He has suggested that the coins were brought to Pannonia as 'souvenirs' by the soldiers who served in Judea, but Menahem Mor remained unconvinced. For the later, epigraphic sources attest to certain *auxilia* forces from Upper Pannonia serving Rome against Bar Kokhba in Judea, but there is nothing to suggest a full *vexillatio* from the *Legio II Adiutrix* was transferred there (Mor, *The Second Jewish Revolt*, p. 309, *contra* Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, p. 61-67). It is certain, however, that the *Legio II Adiutrix* fought in the Marcomannic and Sarmatian Wars under Marcus Aurelius in 171-173 CE, during which time they suffered such losses that soldiers from the *Legio III Augusta*, based in Africa, were transferred to their number (for a discussion of where the legion is known to have served, see Lörincz, "Legio II Adiutrix," p. 165-166).

The inscription has also led to much conjecture as to the ethnico-religious identity of Aelius Silvanus. He is listed in the text as a native of Syria-Palaestina and the *colonia Aelia Capitolina*, which is perhaps indicative of his Roman citizenship; Aelia Capitolina was founded on the site of Jerusalem following the conclusion of the Bar Kokhba revolt, and the province renamed entirely. Aelius Silvanus's nomenclature also appears to be Roman. However, because of the inscription's claim that Silvanus was a 'native' of Syria-Palaestina (*domo*), his religious identity has been interpreted by some as originally Jewish. Sándor Scheiber proposed that Silvanus came from Jerusalem, and



was awarded Roman citizenship by Hadrian in return for joining the detachment of the *Legio II Adiutrix* that was based in the province, based on his assumption of the emperor's *praenomen* 'Aelius' (Schieber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, p. 67). However, as Péter Kovács has argued, there is little beyond the hometown of Silvanus by which it is possible to conclude that he was also of Jewish origins; other inscriptions from Pannonia can be said to be Jewish based on the names and attributions given in their texts, as well as their geographical location, and he confirms that there was a Jewish community in Pannonia Inferior, complete with a synagogue at Intercisa, from the Severan period onwards, but as he likely rightly notes, it cannot be said with any certainty whether or not Aelius Silvanus was one of their number (Kovács, "Notes on the "Jewish" Inscriptions in Pannonia", p. 173-179).

Irrespective of Aelius Silvanus's religious identity, however, the description of his hometown as the *colonia Aelia Capitolina*, in the province of *Syria-Palaestina* is nonetheless significant; dying at the age of 86, Aelius Silvanus would almost certainly have remembered the original name of the city and known the province as 'Judea'. The very latest date that the inscription is believed to have been set up is c. 200 CE, which would have made him a child at the time of Hadrian's foundation and renaming, but it is possible too that he was already an adult in the early 130s CE, and witnessed the '*damnatio memoriae*' of his hometown by the Roman administration. It is also possible that Aelius was not a Jewish resident of Jerusalem at all, but rather the son of a veteran who had been stationed in the legion based there following the destruction of the city under Vespasian and Titus in 70 CE. Beyond the particular case of Aelius and regardless of his identity, this absolute and definitive abolition of the Jewish identity of the place must have been shocking in its finality, and a prodigious statement of Roman power in the region. The clarity with which it is asserted on the tombstone is, however, perhaps the most useful evidence in support of Aelius Silvanus's Roman self-definition; the devastating loss of the most holy Jewish city would surely not have been advertised in such a blatant and authoritative way by a Jew, even one who participated in Rome's dominion and administration.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Aelius](#) [3]
- [legio II Adiutrix](#) [4]
- [Syria Palaestina](#) [5]
- [Aelia Capitolina](#) [6]
- [colonia](#) [7]
- [stipendium](#) [8]
- [filia](#) [9]
- [heres](#) [10]

Thematic keywords:

- [Aelia Capitolina](#) [11]
- [Syria-Palestina](#) [12]
- [Roman army](#) [13]
- [Roman soldier](#) [14]
- [Roman citizenship](#) [15]
- [Roman colony](#) [16]
- [Pannonia](#) [17]
- [Roman legion](#) [18]
- [Bar Kokhba Revolt](#) [19]

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