Iulius Severus, Hellenistic descendant, and Roman Governor in the Bar Kokhba Revolt

Career of Iulius Severus, one of the Roman officials in the East during the Bar Kokhba revolt.

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

Original Location/Place: On the wall of the citadel of Ancyra, modern Ankara (Turkey)

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Unknown

Date: 142 CE to 152 CE

Physical Characteristics: Unknown. I.Ankara 76, bearing almost an identical text, is a rectangular block with the top shaped into a triangle.

Material: Unknown. I.Ankara 76 (see above) is made of white marble

Measurements: Unknown. I.Ankara 76 is 211 centimetres high, between 56 and 59 centimetres wide, and 54 centimetres thick

Language: Greek

Category: Greek

Publications:

Commentary:

With this text, M. Iulius Euschemon wanted to honour his benefactor (??????????/euergetês), C. Iulius Severus. Only the career of the latter is listed, but this suffices to show the remarkable prominence of the honouree. The inscription can be dated to the mid-2nd century because the position of provincial governor of Germania Inferior and Antoninus Pius’s agency are recorded (l. 24-29), but not the proconsulship that C. Iulius Severus held in Asia between 152 and 153 CE (Aelius Aristides, Orations L.12).

Prior to this higher imperial status, the “descendant (??????????/apogonos) of kings and tetrarchs” had completed all the official services (??????????/philotimiai) in his home province of Galatia. This territory and their people (??????/ethnos) was bequeathed by the Hellenistic monarch Amyntas to the Romans in 25 BCE (Cassius Dio, History of Rome LIII.26.2; Strabo, Geography 12.5.1, see Mitchell, Anatolia, 61-79), but members of the former royal lineage still controlled much of the public life of the capital, Ancyra, in the 1st century CE as shown by the first list of high-priests of the imperial cult (I.Ankara 2). Severus certainly belonged to one of such families which were also rewarded with Roman citizenship from an early stage – hence Iulius – and had not forgotten about their mixed Galatian and Greek heritage a century later (see I.Ankara 73). Concerning his early local career, another inscription from Ancyra confirms that, as early as 114 CE, “he had already exceeded all those who had ever held high office in his donations and acts of generosity” (I.Ankara 72, l. 15-17). Among such energetic activities, the most celebrated was the provision of the resources necessary to host the Roman troops who spent the winter in the city on their way to the Parthian war. The expedition was led by Trajan and this encounter with both the emperor and his future adopted son proved fundamental for the career advancement of C. Iulius Severus. As recorded in lines 7 to 9 of our inscription, his promotion to the equestrian rank, or that of the tribunes (??????????/dêmarchoi), was directly awarded by Hadrian. The imperial favour was very present in the subsequent offices, including his first tribunate (??????????/presbeusas) in Asia, and many other positions in the equestrian cursus that culminated with his admission to the Senate and even the consulate (see Halfmann, Senatoren, p. 151-152). Hadrian’s trust on him was not solely whimsical as, for example, Cassius Dio (Roman History LXIX.14.4) still remembered the brilliant performance of C. Iulius Severus in Bithynia where he acted as corrector and curator; a position which again followed a direct imperial appointment and required constant contact with the local institutions (l. 18-21, see Guerber, “Correctores”). Both this good reputation and sympathy are important for understanding the most noteworthy mission in his career: the administration (??????????/dioikêsas) of Syria when Publius Marcellus needed to depart from the province “due to the Jewish revolt” (??? ??? ??????? ?? ?? ???????/dia tên kinêsin tên loutaiôn).
This “Jewish revolt” naturally refers to the uprising led by Simon Ben Kosiba, also known as Bar Kokhba, which struck the Levantine provinces at the end of Hadrian’s reign. The causes of this rebellion are still unclear and debated, mainly because of the lack of reliable historical sources (see, most recently, Mor, The Second Jewish Revolt, p. 13-146). The episode is reported in some detail by the Byzantine monk, Xiphillianus, who epitomised the work of Cassius Dio (see Isaac, “The Second Jewish Revolt”). According to the Bithynian author (Roman History LXIX.12.1), the Jews allegedly rose in arms as a result of the foundation of Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem. On the basis of numismatic evidence, it has been concluded that the establishment of this Roman colony most likely occurred between 129 and 130 CE, when Hadrian crossed Syria, Arabia (Gerasa) and Palestine on his route to Egypt. This imperial visit (or adventus Augusti) is confirmed by local coins and inscriptions (see Halfmann, Itinera, p. 207-208), such as the recently discovered stone block that the Legio X Fretensis dedicated in Jerusalem. Hadrian, an avid traveller and promoter of ancient Greek culture, is known to have promoted the re-birth of cities during his journeys (Boatwright, Hadrian, p. 209-210). Nevertheless, the case of Aelia Capitolina is exceptional because no other colonial deduction is attested under his reign and it would have appeared very unusual to supersede the stable legionary camp of the Legio X Fretensis (see Isaac, “Roman Colonies”). Moreover, as the Jews had previously endured in Cyrene, the foundation of Roman colonies was not only concerned with re-population, but also entailed the imposition of a series of measures of imperial control and consensus against which the local population of Judea could certainly react. In this case, Cassius Dio’s account points out the construction of a temple of Jupiter – a god favourite of Hadrian, see the favours towards Aezani – on the former site of the burnt Jewish temple. The problem with this unique casus belli stems from the fact that Bar Kokhba’s operations are not securely attested until the second quarter of 132 CE (Eshel, “The Bar Kokhba”, p. 111-112). Accordingly, modern scholars have normally alluded to the controversial ban on circumcision recorded in the Historia Augusta (Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian XIV.2), and local economic difficulties reported by the Rabbinic sources (see Applebaum, Prolegomena, p. 9-17). Whatever the exact case may be, it is undeniable that in the first year of his revolt Bar Kokhba managed to gain control of the majority of Judea, where he minted his own coins proclaiming the “Redemption of Israel” (Mildenberg, The Coinage, p. 29-31). His strict – and somehow despotic – control is also attested through the extraordinary epistolar archives discovered in caves near the Dead Sea (see Eshel, “The Bar Kokhba”, p. 109-110).

From a Roman perspective, the immediate response to these developments followed the normal procedure and the provincial governor Tineius Rufus was the first to intervene (see Bowersock, “A Roman”). Bar Kokhba’s initial successes soon required a change of strategy and full imperial strength. The riotous precedent set across the Diaspora at the end of Trajan’s reign was still very present and, consequently, additional military contingents were sent to complement the two legions permanently stationed in Judea since 120. Many of such reinforcements were provided by the Syrian units commanded by Publius Marcellus, whose administration in the province needed to be replaced by our C. Iulius Severus. If we believe the rabbinic sources, Tineius Rufus operations started to work against Jews such as Akiva and prepared the final victorious plan adopted by Hadrian (see Applebaum, “Tineius Rufus”). Cassius Dio (Roman History LXIX.13.2) remarks that the emperor decided to send his best generals, especially Sextus Iulius Severus (PIR² 576, not related to our Ancyran Severus), who was dispatched from Britain. This information is confirmed by the extraordinary appointment of the governor substituting Sextus on the island, Publius Mummius Sisenna, who was consul in 133 CE (see Birley, The Roman Government, p. 129-134). Until the arrival of the Roman general, it has been argued that Hadrian may have visited himself Palestine for a second time to supervise the military operations (see Birley, Hadrian, p. 273-275; Syme, “Journeys of Hadrian,” p. 165-167 vs. Halfmann, Itinera, p. 209-210; cf. Jones, “An Edict”). At any rate, Bar Kokhba’s final defeat was carried by Sextus Iulius Severus and the emperor’s “trusted generals”. The Jewish forces failed to “liberate Jerusalem” as claimed on their last coins, were sieged by the Roman troops in Bethar, and the supporters had to flee to desert caves which contain marks of destruction and fire (see Eshel, “The Bar Kokhba”, p. 122-127).

The combination of all these sources shows the challenge that the Bar Kokhba revolt posed to Rome and its rule. Not coincidentally, when the imperial instructor of the Antonine period, Cornelius Fronto, refers to the wars waged by Hadrian, he lamented the numerous soldiers who fell in Judea (On the Parthian War 2.2). From a Greek perspective, Pausanias also reported that the emperor was forced to enter upon this confrontation (I.5.5; see Geiger, Joseph, “The Bar-Kokhba Revolt”). Furthermore, the magnitude of the imperial response is not only confirmed by the operations carried out during the war, but also from its consequences. Military personnel and commanders participating in this expeditio ludaica were decorated with triumphal rewards and a massive
commemorative arch erected in Beth Shean (Scythopolis) may signal the final victory. As a further punitive measure, the name of Judea disappeared from the Palestinian province as did many Jews who did not revolt for the rest of the imperial period (see for all the corresponding sources in Eck, “The Bar Kokhba Revolt”; vs. Bowersock, “The Tel Shalem Arch”).

Our inscription can therefore support that Hadrian took full advantage of the imperial apparatus to terminate the Jewish threat. Prior to 132, C. Iulius Severus had been favoured with a career based on good performances, experience, and trust. When other seasoned commanders needed to take care of the military action, he was extraordinarily appointed to administer Syria. Despite its initial successes and messianic messages, the Bar Kokhba revolt was doomed to fail under such Roman power. To achieve this, the empire counted with a former royal Hellenistic descendant who was committed to his Galatian motherland, but also aspired to reach the highest ranks of Rome through loyal service and commitment to his endorsing leaders.

Keywords in the original language:

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Thematic keywords:

- Hadrian
- Tineius Rufus
- Bar Kokhba
- Bar Kokhba Revolt
- Jewish revolt
- military response
- Roman administration
- equestrian order
- Roman knight
- senator
- Hellenistic king
- royal descendant
- Roman army
- Roman power
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### Haterius Nepos, Arabia, and the Bar Kokhba revolt

The governor of Arabia, Titus Haterius Nepos, is honoured as a benefactor after the Bar Kokhba revolt.

- Read more about Haterius Nepos, Arabia, and the Bar Kokhba revolt

### The inscription of the arch of Hadrian in Gerasa

The city of Gerasa prepares a monumental arch coinciding with the visit of Hadrian in 130 CE

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### Arch of Hadrian at Gerasa (129-130 CE)
Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View

Inscription

Colonisation of Cyrene and the Jewish Riots under Trajan

A Roman commander from Attaleia in Pamphylia is honoured for services that included the colonisation of Cyrene after Trajan

Relief / Sculpture

Bronze statue of Hadrian from Tel Shalem (135-137 CE)

Text

Cassius Dio, Roman History LXIX.12-14 [6]
The Bar Kokhba Revolt.

- Read more about Cassius Dio, Roman History LXIX.12-14 [6]

Text

Cassius Dio, *Roman History LXIX.12.1* [7]

The foundation of the colony of *Aelia Capitolina*.

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