



Jewish dedication to Alexander Severus (CIL III, 3327)

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[1]

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

Original Location/Place: Intercisa, Pannonia Inferior (Hungary)

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum (Hungary). Inventory number: 154.1874.2

Date: 222 CE to 235 CE

Physical Characteristics: Limestone plaque with a Latin inscription within an incised *tabula ansata*; the final line of the inscription is inscribed outside of the *tabula*.

Material: Limestone

Measurements: Width: 82 cm

Height: 58 cm

Depth: 22.5 cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman, Jewish

Publications: *CIL* III, 3327 = (*CIL* III, 10301 = *CJud* I, 677)

EDH: [HD024864](#) [2]

Commentary: This inscription was first recorded in 1864, when it was discovered having been built into a wall of an outbuilding at the Post Office of Dunapentele, Hungary, near the Roman site of Intercisa. It is a dedication invoking divine support for the health and welfare of the emperor, Alexander Severus, and has been considered an important text for the evidence it provides of a Jewish community there in the early third century CE. If that interpretation is indeed correct, the inscription also provides evidence of the popularity of Alexander Severus amongst the Jews, which is also noted in rabbinic literature (see e.g. [Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Shirah \(Be-Shalah?\), parashah 6](#) [3]; [Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 1:10, 72b](#) [4]; [Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 10b](#) [5]).

The inscription was dedicated by one Cosmius, who asked for the continued safety of the emperor Alexander Severus – who is described here with two of the honorific titles characteristic of the Severan emperors, namely *Pius* and *Felix* - and his mother Julia Mamaea (*pro salute domini / nostri Severi Alexan/dri Pii Felicis Augusti et Iuliae / Mamaeae Augustae*). The request for support is not made to gods of the Roman pantheon, and in particular to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, as such pleas for the welfare of the emperor most often are, but rather “to the Eternal God” (*deus aeternus*), which has been interpreted as a Latin ‘translation’ of the appellation of the Jewish God; just as *Theos Hypsistos* (Most High God) was occasionally used for Jewish inscriptions in Greek, *deus aeternus* has been understood as a Latin version of the same concept, although Sandor Scheiber noted that the name *Deus Magnus Aeternus* (Eternal Great God) was also used by pagans as well (*Jewish Inscriptions in Hungary*, p. 26-31). Although a dedication in support of a Roman emperor by a member of the Jewish community might appear surprising in view of the three major conflicts that opposed Jews and Romans between 66 and 135 CE, it should be noted that both Septimius Severus and Julia Domna, and his descendant Alexander Severus and his mother Julia Mamaea enjoyed particular popularity amongst the Jews. Several inscriptions dedicated synagogues to Severan emperors (see e.g. the so-called Mindius Faustus inscription at Ostia, *JJWE* I, 13), and it was under the same dynasty that Jews became eligible for public office. Alexander Severus in particular was so popular that, according to the *Historia Augusta*, his opponents described him as the “Syrian archisynagogus,” in



criticism of his friendliness towards the community (*Life of Alexander Severus*, 28.7; Gröll, “Jewish dedications to Roman emperors,” p. 4).

Lines 6-8 of the inscription have generated much debate, with various interpretations having been offered for how the role of Cosmius, the dedicator of the inscription, should be understood, and what the reference to SYNAG in fact means. The inscription states that Cosmius willingly repaid his vow (*votum / reddidit libens Cosmius*), followed by the description of his job, which is given in its abbreviated form as: PR / STA SPONDILL A SYNAG. PR STA has been expanded to *praepositus stationis*, meaning “superintendent of the guardpost,” but scholars have disagreed on how SPONDILL A SYNAG should be understood. Ferenc Fülep believed the complete form to be *spondilla synag(ogae)*, believing *spondilla* to be a specific title associated with the synagogue, which referred to the musician who accompanied the offerings been made with singing (see Fülep, “New remarks,” p. 94). Sandor Scheiber suggested that the abbreviations be expanded to *Spondill. a(rchi)synag(ogus)*, with ‘Spondilla’ as the name of the guardpost where Cosmius was superintendent, and the rest relating to a Jewish title within the synagogue itself (Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions in Hungary*, p. 26). More recently, Heikki Solin agreed with the attribution of *Spondilla* as the name of the *statio*, and proposed that A SYNAG should in fact be read as a *synag(oga)*, or “by the synagogue” as a topographical reference to where the *statio* (“guardpost”) was in relation to it (Solin, “Zu Pannonischen Juden,” p. 233-236). The discussion is further complicated by the discovery, in 1951, of the word IVDAEORVM (“of the Jews”) outside of the main epigraphic field, below the *tabula ansata*; due to the condition of the stone, this word had not been noted before that date, but following cleaning and more careful analysis by Ferenc Fülep, the Jewish nature of the dedication – which had been questioned by earlier scholars – appeared to be confirmed (see Fülep, “New Remarks,” p. 93). Heikki Solin used this very discovery, however, to prove that the inscription had no connection to a Jewish community in Intercisa, pointing out that it was extremely unlikely that such a community would refer to their own place of worship as *synagoga Iudaeorum* (“synagogue of the Jews”) (Solin, “Zu Pannonischen Juden,” p. 234-235). However, as David Noy *et al.* have demonstrated, there is epigraphic evidence for exactly such a reference in Asia Minor, with the Jews of Kyme or Phocaea honouring Tation using the very same expression (*CIJ* 738; Noy *et al.*, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* I, p. 13-14). The most recent interpretation of the inscription, then, understands these final lines to indicate the role and location of Cosmius’s employment (“superintendent of the guardpost Spondilla”), with a *synagoga Iudaeorum* indicative of his membership of the synagogue, “not necessarily the synagogue’s involvement in the dedication” (Noy *et al.*, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* I, p. 14).

The inscription is therefore evidence for a possible Jewish presence at Intercisa in the third century CE; although no excavations have yet brought to light the site of the synagogue itself, one has been identified at Stobi, the former capital of *Macedonia Salutaris* (Gradsko, Republic of Macedonia), which is the closest in terms of geography to the potential site at Intercisa. Like the synagogue at Stobi, the one in Intercisa must have been a simple structure in which the congregation will have gathered to recite prayers; the Latin translation of “the Eternal God” can perhaps be qualified by the complete lack of epigraphic evidence in Hebrew from Pannonia, suggesting that the Jewish community there existed in Latin only, outside of formal rituals (Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions in Hungary*, p. 27).

How the Jews came to be at Intercisa is another important question; Tibor Gröll has noted three situations which led to the growth of the Jewish presence across the Western provinces, which began initially with the large number of Jewish men, women and children who were brought to Italy as a result of Vespasian and Titus’s sacking of Jerusalem in 70 CE (Gröll, “Jewish presence in the Danubian province,” p. 11). Tens of thousands of them were sold as slaves both after their victory in the “Jewish War” and again after Hadrian’s defeat of the Bar Kokhba revolt in the early second century CE, which created communities of Jews across the empire in a way not seen since the earliest days of the Diaspora in the east (Gröll, “Jewish presence in the Danubian province,” p. 11). From the mid-second century CE onwards there were growing numbers of Jewish auxiliary soldiers in the Roman army, some of whom certainly arrived in the garrison at Intercisa with Marcus Aurelius, judging by the funerary inscription of one Flavia Optata, who originated from the “detachment of Jews from Emesa” (*de numero regionum Emesenorum Iudaeorum*), perhaps as the wife or concubine of a soldier (*CIJ* 640; Gröll, “Jewish presence in the Danubian province”, p. 12). However they arrived in the Pannonian provinces, it is clear that the Jewish community was a visible aspect of the Roman landscape there, and particularly in the Severan period; the popularity of the dynasty and especially that of Alexander Severus, as communicated by the dedication under discussion here, is a rare insight into the peaceful co-existence of Jews and Romans at the height of Roman power.

Keywords in the original language:



- [deus](#) [6]
- [aeternus](#) [7]
- [salus](#) [8]
- [dominus](#) [9]
- [Severus Alexander](#) [10]
- [Pius](#) [11]
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- [Iulia Mamaea](#) [14]
- [mater](#) [15]
- [Spondilla](#) [16]
- [synagoga](#) [17]
- [Iudaeus](#) [18]

Thematic keywords:

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- [dedication](#) [20]
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- [Intercisa](#) [28]
- [synagogue](#) [29]
- [loyalty to Rome](#) [30]
- [friend of Rome](#) [31]

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Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[A Jewish Vow for the Salvation of the Severans from Qazion \[41\]](#)

A group of Jews dedicates a vow to the salvation of Septimius Severus, Caracalla, Geta and Iulia Domna. It belongs to a building project of controversial nature.



- [Read more about A Jewish Vow for the Salvation of the Severans from Qazion](#) [41]

Text

[Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Shirah \(Be-Shala?\), parashah 6](#) [42]

Antoninus and Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch

- [Read more about Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Shirah \(Be-Shala?\), parashah 6](#) [42]

Text

[Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 1:10, 72b](#) [43]

Antoninus and Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch

- [Read more about Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 1:10, 72b](#) [43]

Text

[Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 10b](#) [44]

Antoninus and Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch

- [Read more about Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 10b](#) [44]

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- [3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/mekhilta-de-rabbi-ishmael-shirah-be-shala%E1%B8%A5-parashah-6>
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