



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

Bronze statue of Hadrian from Tel Shalem



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[Head of a bronze statue of Hadrian from Tel Shalem](#) [2]



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[Cuirass of a bronze statue of Hadrian from Tel Shalem](#) [4]



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Name of the artist: Unknown

Patron/Sponsor: Hadrian

Original Location/Place:

Tel Shalem

Actual Location (Collection/Museum):

Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Description: Fragmentary remains of a bronze statue of the emperor Hadrian. The head is of the Rollockenfrisur type, which was widespread in the provinces and was characterised by the depiction of nine curls, which surround the face (Wegner, *Das römische Herrschbild*, II,3). The head and arm are attached to a cuirassed torso, which is decorated with a relief depicting a battle scene with a group of three pairs of soldiers who fight in duels. The two couples on the sides are depicted in the middle of a fight, the central couple is portrayed towards the end of a fight. The warrior to the right is wounded and defeated and is waiting for the “coup de grâce.” The cuirass also wears the *cingulum*, or the military belt, which indicates the wearer’s rank. The torso does not appear to be dressed in the *paludamentum*, or the military cloak which usually falls from the shoulders of cuirassed statues of Roman military generals, but is rather dressed with a type of scarf-like garment (Gergel, “The Tel Shalem Hadrian



reconsidered,” p. 239). Based on the current reconstruction it seems that the statue depicted Hadrian addressing the army in a pose of *adlocutio*, although a reconsideration of the angle of the arm has suggested that it in fact bent at the elbow in order to hold a spear or baton (Gergel, “The Tel Shalem Hadrian reconsidered,” p. 234) Excavated from the same site were the fragmentary remains of a bronze head of a young boy, a number of lappets and straps from the cuirassed torso, and the large toe of a left foot.

Date: 135 CE to 137 CE

Material:

Bronze

Commentary: The fragmentary condition of the statue and its successive reconstruction are still the source of disagreement amongst scholars. Gideon Foerster’s work on the excavation of the site of Tel Shalem (Beth Shean Valley, two kilometers south of Kibbutz Tirat Zvi and about 12 km south of Scythopolis), and subsequent reconstruction and publication of the statue, suggested that the torso and head were part of an original work that constituted a *contraposto* statue with the right arm raised in a gesture of military address, or *adlocutio* (Foerster, “A Cuirassed Bronze Statue of Hadrian,” p. 139-60). Multiple interpretations have been proposed for the relief decoration on the cuirass; the pairs of figures depicted on the torso break with standard Roman iconographic practice in a frieze-like arrangement (Gergel, “The Tel Shalem reconsidered,” p. 240). The figures are all nude and carry Greek weaponry, with the central figure also wearing a ‘Phrygian’ cap (Foerster, “A Cuirassed Bronze Statue of Hadrian,” p. 148-150). Identifying these figures has proven problematic; an episode from Hadrian’s reported favourite Greek epic poem, the *Thebais*, has been suggested, in which Cadmus and the dragon’s teeth are represented (Vermule, “Cuirassed statues,” p. 101). Gideon Foerster believed the scene to depict the final duel between Aeneas and Turnus at the end of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, identifying Aeneas as the central figure with the Phrygian cap (Virgil, *Aeneid* XII.887-952). He went on to associate Aeneas’s victory over the Latins with Hadrian’s victory over the Jews in the Bar Kokhba revolt, justifying its inclusion on the torso as representative of Hadrian’s imperialist message in which he was constituted as the founder of a ‘new Rome’ (Foerster, “A Cuirassed Bronze Statue of Hadrian,” p. 155-157). This would date the statue to 132-133 CE, when Hadrian returned to Judea to oversee the final phases of the war against the Jewish insurgents. However, other scholars argue that the statue was set up after the war to commemorate the creation of the province of Syria-Palestina – the name assumed by the province of Judea in the wake of the tragic conclusion of the Bar Kokhba War in 135 CE (Gergel, “The Tel Shalem Hadrian Reconsidered,” p. 231-251). If this is indeed the case, it would seem that this statue was not the only one that was commissioned with the purpose of celebrating the defeat of the Jewish rebels; an inscribed base discovered in Rome points to the existence of a marble statue of Hadrian which was erected in the precincts of the Temple of *divus* Vespasian and of *divus* Titus. Clearly, Hadrian wished to associate himself with the Flavian emperors, who had subdued Judea, between 66 and 70 CE, and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple (Opper, *Hadrian, Empire and Conflict*, p. 92).

However, Richard Gergel’s re-examination of the statue and his analysis of the metal composition has led to a different set of propositions. He noted the difficulty in making sense of the relief of the cuirass, particularly with respect to the use of a purely mythological narrative to describe the Bar Kokhba revolt (Gergel, “The Tel Shalem Hadrian Reconsidered,” p. 241). He found no parallel with the scene on the Tel Shalem torso in iconography on other Hadrianic cuirassed statue breastplates, and ultimately concluded that the torso itself most likely came from an earlier Hellenistic bronze trophy, to which the head and arm were added (Gergel, “The Tel Shalem Hadrian Reconsidered,” p. 245-246 and 251).

The site at which the statue was found may go some way to explain how the torso and head came to be composed in one monument; Tel Shalem (in the Beth Shean Valley) was an active military camp that, along with another based at Legio (Lajjun), separated Galilee from Judea and controlled the roads leading to Beth Shean, Shechem, and Jericho (for more detailed information concerning the camp, see Mor, “What does Tel Shalem have to do with the Bar Kokhba Revolt?” p. 79-96). The bronze statue stood in the military camp of a detachment, or *vexillatio*, of the Legio VI Fretensis, one of the legions that took part in the repression of the Bar Kokhba revolt. The statue probably decorated the *principia*, or the general headquarters, the location of the commander of the detachment. It is theorised from other archaeological evidence at the site, including the construction of a monumental victory arch, that a crucial battle of the Bar Kokhba revolt took place nearby (see Mor, “What does Tel Shalem have to do with the Bar Kokhba Revolt?” p. 79-96), and so the statue may have been erected in 132-133 CE to celebrate the Roman army’s victory in the region, or even later in 135 CE to celebrate Hadrian’s reorganisation of Judea into the new province of Syria-Palestina (Gergel, “The Tel Shalem Hadrian Reconsidered,” p. 233). This would certainly seem to support the interpretation of the statue as part of a group, together with the head of a small boy that was with the figure of a captive child or supplicant placed to the side or beneath his right foot (Gergel, “The Tel Shalem Hadrian Reconsidered,” p. 234). The location of the statue in the *principia*, or the camp’s headquarters, points to the possibility that the statue was utilised for imperial cult activity in the camp, and acted as a focus of



identity and loyalty for the soldiers of the legion. Similar bronze and metal fragments have been identified in fort sites such as at Aalen, where the remains of cultic statues for Iuppiter Dolichenus and the emperor Alexander Severus were identified, and both of which were later dismantled and hoarded in a cellar under the *principia*, presumably to be melted down or reused (Kemke and Scholz, *Das Römerkastell Aalen*, p. 40-41). This fits with the suggestion that the torso was from an earlier 'trophy' monument that was reused by the legion, with the archaeological evidence for their involvement in the Bar Kokhba revolt therefore indicating the commemorative and celebratory motivation for the erection of the statue. The combination of an earlier monument with the new head of Hadrian – which was likely imported to the camp – was a practical and economical way of setting up an honorific monument, with the limbs and new drapery produced locally to hide the joins. Richard Gergel has even proposed that the addition of the child figure, as captive or supplicant, was conceived to “enrich the iconographic significance of the work” (Gergel, “The Tel Shalem Hadrian Reconsidered,” p. 249).

Thematic keywords:

- [Hadrian](#) [6]
- [Judea](#) [7]
- [Jews](#) [8]
- [Syria-Palestina](#) [9]
- [Nisa-Scythopolis](#) [10]
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- [imperial cult](#) [14]
- [Jewish war](#) [15]
- [Bar Kokhba Revolt](#) [16]

Bibliographical references: Eck, Werner, “[The Bar Kokhba Revolt: The Roman Point of View](#)” [17], *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999) : 76-89

Eck, Werner, Förster, Gideon, “[A triumphal Arch for Hadrian near Tel Shalem in the Beth Shean Valley](#)” [18], *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 12 (1999) : 294-313

Förster, Gideon, “[A Cuirassed Statue of Hadrian](#)” [19], *Israel Museum News* 16 (1980) : 107-110

Gergel, Richard A., “[The Tel Shalem Hadrian Reconsidered](#)” [20], *American Journal of Archaeology* 95 (1991) : 231-251

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Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[Haterius Nepos, Arabia, and the Bar Kokhba revolt](#) [27]

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](#) [27]

Inscription

[Iulius Severus, Hellenistic descendant, and Roman Governor in the Bar Kokhba Revolt](#) [28]



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

- [Read more about Iulius Severus, Hellenistic descendant, and Roman Governor in the Bar Kokhba Revolt](#) [28]

Architecture

[Arch of Hadrian at Gerasa \(129-130 CE\) \[29\]](#)

[Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View \[30\]](#)



[Arch of Hadrian - Jerash – General View \[31\]](#)



[Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View \[32\]](#)



- [Read more about Arch of Hadrian at Gerasa \(129-130 CE\)](#) [29]

Text

[Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LXIX.12-14 \[33\]](#)

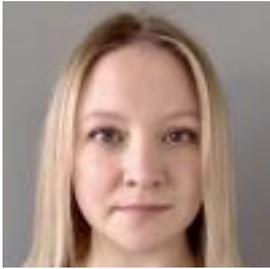
The Bar Kokhba Revolt.

- [Read more about Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LXIX.12-14](#) [33]



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