



[Dedication of a statue for Antoninus Pius in Jerusalem \(CIIP 2, 718\) \[1\]](#)

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Honorific

Original Location/Place: unknown location in Jerusalem

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Southern wall of the Ummayyad palace on Temple Mount, Jerusalem.

Date: 138 CE

Physical Characteristics: Rectangular block of stone that has been inserted upside down, high up in the southern wall of the Ummayyad palace on Temple Mount. No details are visible as a result of the way it has been placed within the wall.

Material: Limestone (?)

Measurements: Height: c. 60 cm

Width: c. 80-90 cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications: *CIIP* 1.2, 718

CIL III 6639

Commentary: The above inscription, first published in 1843, was re-used as a building block in the southern wall of the Ummayyad palace on Temple Mount; it can still be seen today inserted high up in the wall and upside down. In 2006 Werner Eck was able to take new photographs, which have resulted in a re-reading of its text and further discussion as to its meaning (Eck, "Revision lateinischer Inschriften aus Jerusalem", p. 213-215).

The inscription is a dedication to the emperor Antoninus Pius, by decree of the municipal council of Aelia Capitolina. The size of the block on which it is inscribed has led to suggestions that the block was originally a base for a statue of the emperor, although its current insertion in the wall of the southern palace means it is impossible to examine it for clamps or fixings that might indicate whether or not it was a standing (*statua pedestris*) or equestrian statue (Eck, "Revision lateinischer Inschriften aus Jerusalem," p. 214). It has long been assumed that a statue of Antoninus Pius accompanied a statue of his predecessor on the Temple Mount, due to the record of the 'pilgrim of Bordeaux' which, in the 330s CE, stated that two statues of Hadrian stood there (*Itinerarium Burdigalense* 591,4, C); a number of scholars have suggested that the pilgrim in fact saw a statue placed on the base under consideration here, and that he misinterpreted the nomenclature of the dedicatory inscription as referring to Hadrian, rather than his adopted son who also adopted the same names. Werner Eck has, however dismissed this hypothesis, noting that there is no proof that this base ever stood on the Temple Mount, nor that the Bordeaux pilgrim was mistaken in his identification of two statues of Hadrian, and so the exact location of the statue of Antoninus Pius remains unknown (Eck, "Revision lateinischer Inschriften aus Jerusalem," p. 215; see n. 8 for earlier bibliography discussing the location of the statue).

Eck's re-reading of the inscription has put to rest the speculation that the preserved base was in fact a fragment of a longer text; previous readings had focused on the 'missing' imperial titulature at the beginning, where we would typically expect the emperor's names to be introduced by *Imp(eratori) Caes(ari)*. These titles are missing from the base, whose text begins directly with the names of the emperor in lines 1 and 2: *Tito Aelio Hadriano / Antonino Augusto Pio*. Although some have suggested that these titles were originally inscribed across a moulding or cornice of the base, Eck believes this to be unlikely and instead suggests that the titles never formed part of the inscription's text. This is, in itself, a highly conspicuous feature. The titles of *Imperator* and *Caesar* were awarded to Antoninus Pius following the death of Hadrian in 138 CE, which is implied to have already taken place in the inscription's text by his appellation as *Augustus* and as *pater patriae*, making the lack of imperial titles a distinctly odd feature of the text (Eck, "Revision lateinischer Inschriften aus Jerusalem," p. 214-215). Also striking is the omission of any other of Antoninus Pius's functions; there is no reference to the *tribunicia potestas* or to the consulate, the decisive roles by which the imperial rights of the emperor were also expressed. In addition to the title of *pater patriae*, only the priestly functions of a *pontifex* and augur appear, neither of which fit into the proper imperial titulature; Antoninus Pius is known to have been a member of both the colleges of the *pontifices* and the augurs, but both of these would have been superseded by his additional role as *pontifex maximus*, which he assumed following his adoptive father's death (Cotton *et al.*, *CIIP* 1.2, 718). Werner Eck has explained this anomaly in the inscription as likely reflective of Antoninus Pius leading the two colleges in the short period between his adoption and the death of Hadrian, that is, between February and June, 138 CE, of which those in Aelia Capitolina



who commissioned the statue unnecessarily took note; a similar error of judgement is given to explain the omission of *Imperatori Caesari* in line 1, although Eck indeed also notes that the errors cannot have caused too much concern in the city or amongst those who ordered the statue and base to be constructed, as it survived for long enough to be later inserted into the wall of Temple Mount (Eck, "Revision lateinischer Inschriften aus Jerusalem," p. 215).

The final line of the inscription - *d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) p(ecunia) p(ublica)* - is also confirmed, but with the addition of *ex* at the start of the line, which had not previously been noted. This legal statement, recording that the statue had been set up "by decree of the *decurio*, at public expense," was a very common formula in honorific inscriptions, which acted almost as a financial document to confirm the funding from the colony's treasury. It asserted both the good work of the *decurio* in commissioning the dedication and arranging for its construction, and also the civic contribution that made it possible, through the application of public funds.

Werner Eck's re-reading of the inscription does not change its content – the local council of Aelia Capitolina had decided to honour Antoninus Pius with statue, upon whose base the decision was recorded – but the situation in which a statue might be offered is worthy of some consideration. Following the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt Hadrian had banned all Jews from the city of Jerusalem and re-named it Aelia Capitolina, in a permanent marker of Rome's political and religious supremacy ([Renaming of Jerusalem as Colonia Aelia Capitolina \(CIIP 1.2, 728\)](#) [2]). The pagan character of the city was emphasised by the construction of a new monumental centre that centred around the *cardo maximus* and the Forum, which may have been further adorned by the addition of a statue of Hadrian in the temple to Jupiter, which some argue stood on the site of the former Great Temple of the Jews (Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 478). The erection of a statue of another emperor in the city served to underscore Rome's presence and the institution of her traditions, such as the dedication of figurative statues – considered sacrilegious by the Jews – within religious and civic precincts as a way of demonstrating loyalty to the imperial house.

However, the construction of a statue and dedicatory base to the new emperor was not necessarily a sign that Antoninus Pius continued, or intended to continue, the extreme restrictions that his predecessor had placed upon the Jewish community of the province. Although he did not lift the ban on Jews entering Aelia Capitolina, he did attempt to establish a *modus vivendi* that would allow the Jews and Romans to coexist in the region with relatively little conflict (Grant, *The Antonines*, p. 20). Whilst careful not to give rise to further outbursts of nationalism or independence, Antoninus Pius responded to the community with the same humane conservatism that came to characterise much of his reign; the *Digest* records that he issued a rescript that repealed the ban on circumcision for the Jews, allowing the community to practise their important ritual but with the same penalties and punishments for castration on anyone who enacted the practise on a non-Jew, in a bid to curb proselytism and conversion (see [Digest XLVIII, viii, 11.1](#) [3]; Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 469). There is some debate as to whether or not Antoninus Pius' predecessor Hadrian had in fact banned circumcision; scholars have questioned the problematic nature of the *Historia Augusta* in which the reference appears, and of the vocabulary used to describe the ban: "At this time also, the Jews started a war because they were forbidden to mutilate their *genitalia*" (*Moverunt ea tempestate et Iudaei bellum, quod vetabantur mutilare genitalia*; for the other arguments see [Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian XIV.2](#) [4]). For those who favour the interpretation that Hadrian *had* made a ban on circumcision, Antoninus Pius' rescript appears to have been a limited concession to the Jews, who were allowed to circumcise their sons; for those who question the presence of a ban, Antoninus Pius's rescript was the first to clarify the conditions in which circumcision could take place (see (Abusch, "Negotiating Difference," p. 73). The retention of a general ban on circumcision, but with special exception for the Jews, followed the principle that had been established since the Late Republic, which saw Rome make exceptions to general rules in order to allow the Jews to answer the requirements of their specific Law (Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 471). This one act appears to have paved a way for a more peaceful shared existence between the Jews of the new Syria-Palaestina and their Roman cohabitants; whilst Aelia Capitolina and her new monumental centre remained a symbol of Roman victory and dominance in the region, the concessions or regulations made by Antoninus Pius that concerned Jewish religious life were a remarkable step towards improved relations.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Antoninus Pius](#) [5]
- [decurio](#) [6]
- [pecunia publica](#) [7]

Thematic keywords:



- [Aelia Capitolina](#) [8]
- [Roman colony](#) [9]
- [Antoninus Pius](#) [10]
- [statue](#) [11]
- [Bar Kokhba](#) [12]
- [circumcision](#) [13]

Bibliographical references: Abusch, Raʿanan, [“Negotiating Difference: Genital Mutilation in Roman Slave Law and the History of the Bar Kokhba Revolt”](#) [14], in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered. New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome* (ed. Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 71-91

Cotton, Hannah, et al. (eds.), [Corpus inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae: a multi-lingual corpus of the inscriptions from Alexander to Muhammad: Volume I, part 2](#) [15] (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2012)

Eck, Werner, [Revision lateinischer Inschriften aus Jerusalem](#) [16], *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 169 (2009) : 213-229

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Smallwood, E. Mary, [The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations](#) [20] (*Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity* 20; Leiden: Brill, 1997)

Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[Renaming of Jerusalem as Colonia Aelia Capitolina \(CIIP 1.2, 728\)](#) [21]

- [Read more about Renaming of Jerusalem as Colonia Aelia Capitolina \(CIIP 1.2, 728\)](#) [21]

Text

[Digest XLVIII.8.11 \(Modestinus, Legal Rules VI\)](#) [22]

Antoninus Pius's ban on circumcision for non-Jews

- [Read more about Digest XLVIII.8.11 \(Modestinus, Legal Rules VI\)](#) [22]

Text

[Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian XIV.2](#) [23]

Hadrian's ban of circumcision

- [Read more about Historia Augusta, Life of Hadrian XIV.2](#) [23]

Inscription

[A soldier is decorated with the corona aurea after the Bar Kokhba revolt \(CIL X, 3733\)](#) [24]

- [Read more about A soldier is decorated with the corona aurea after the Bar Kokhba revolt \(CIL X, 3733\)](#) [24]



Inscription

[Haterius Nepos, Arabia, and the Bar Kokhba revolt \[25\]](#)

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 \[25\]](#)

Inscription

[Iulius Severus, Hellenistic descendant, and Roman Governor in the Bar Kokhba Revolt \[26\]](#)

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 \[26\]](#)

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Links

- [1] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/dedication-statue-antoninus-pius-jerusalem-ciip-2-718>
- [2] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/renaming-jerusalem-colonia-aelia-capitolina-ciip-12-728>
- [3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/digest%C2%A0xlvi811-modestinus-legal-rules%C2%A0vi>
- [4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/historia-augusta-life-hadrian%C2%A0xiv2>
- [5] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/antoninus-pius>
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/decurio>
- [7] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/pecunia-publica>
- [8] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/aelia-capitolina>
- [9] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/roman-colony>
- [10] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/antoninus-pius>
- [11] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/statue>
- [12] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/bar-kokhba>
- [13] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/circumcision>
- [14] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/%E2%80%9Cnegotiating-difference-genital-mutilation-roman-slave-law-and-history-bar-kokhba-revolt%E2%80%9D>
- [15] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/corpus-inscriptionum-iudaeae-palestinae-multi-lingual-corpus-inscriptions->



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[16] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/revision-lateinischer-inschriften-aus-jerusalem>

[17] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/tiberius-antonines-history-roman-empire-ad-14-192>

[18] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/antonines-roman-empire-transition>

[19] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/%E2%80%9Cban-circumcision-cause-revolt-reconsideration%E2%80%9D>

[20] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/jews-under-roman-rule-pompey-diocletian-study-political-relations-0>

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[23] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/historia-augusta-life-hadrian%C2%A0xiv2>

[24] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/soldier-decorated-corona-aurea-after-bar-kokhba-revolt-cil-x-3733>

[25] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/haterius-nepos-arabia-and-bar-kokhba-revolt>

[26] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/iulius-severus-hellenistic-descendant-and-roman-governor-bar-kokhba-revolt>

[27] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/caroline-barron>