



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.

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):

Honorific inscription

Original Location/Place: Unknown

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Old deposit of stones, near the temple of Artemis in Gerasa (Jordan)

Date: 134 CE

Physical Characteristics: Square block, the top and right sides are damaged

Material:

Hard limestone

Measurements: 49 centimetres in height, 64 centimetres in width, and 40 centimetres thick

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications:

Gatier, Pierre-Louis, "Gouverneurs et procurateurs à Gerasa," in *Syria* 73, 1996, p. 48, no. 2 [SEG 46.2058; AE 1996.1599].

Commentary:

On its own, this very brief honorific inscription from Gerasa would be rather unimportant. However, other pieces of information from the province of Arabia and the rest of the Roman Empire shed light on a source significant for understanding the administration of the East both before and during the Jewish revolt led by Bar Kokhba.

Titus Haterius Nepos is one of the Roman governors attested in Babatha's archive, the collection of various documents found inside one of the caves near the Dead Sea where some Jews fled and died in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba war (see Yadin, *The Finds*, p. 15-41). Three papyri (*P. Yadin* 1 23, 25-26) contain summons dating from 17th November 130 to 9th July 131 in which the governor is referred to as ?????????? ?????????? ??????????/?presbeutês *Sebastou antistratêgos*, equivalent to the Latin *legatus Augusti pro praetore*. This rank is inferior to the denomination ??????????/?hypatikos (=consularis) recorded in line 2 of our inscription. Consequently, a status promotion needs to be supposed between the moment in which Babatha's documents were drafted and this honorific monument was set up. By virtue of a military diploma discovered in Dacia (*CIL* XVI.78), the consulship of T. Haterius Nepos can be dated to 134 CE. Accordingly, it appears that this governor stayed in the province of Arabia when the neighbouring territory of Judea was, first, subject to the control of Bar Kokhba and, subsequently, witness to the Roman military response.

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, Xiphillinus, 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 soon after 130 CE, when Hadrian crossed the Levant on his route to Egypt. This imperial visit (or *adventus Augusti*) is confirmed by many local coins and inscriptions (see Halfmann, *Itinera*, p. 206-208), such as the recently discovered stone block that the Legio X Fretensis dedicated in Jerusalem, and Late Antique authors (see Baker, "Epiphanius"). In Arabia, the best evidence comes from Gerasa, the place where our inscription was found and also a spectacular commemorative arch was erected. On this arch, it has been argued that the name of T. Haterius Nepos was erased after he received Hadrian in the city (see Sartre, *Trois études*, p. 54, 82 and followed by Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 108). This theory is not longer sustainable thanks to the discovery of our later honorific text in which there is no trace of a *damnatio memoriae*. Nevertheless, we do not know exactly when the governor started his appointment or whether he met the emperor personally. By the end of the summer 130 CE, Hadrian was



already in Egypt (see Birley, *Hadrian*, p. 235-258), and the first secure attestation of Haterius Nepos in Arabia dates to November, as noted above. In any case, not only Gerasa but also the entire province administered by this Roman official benefitted from the imperial visit as shown by one of Babatha's papyrus in which Petra is referred to with the epithet ????????/*Hadrianê* (*P. Yadin* 1.25, l. 11). These papyri also confirm that the governor was expected to complete the legal circuit across the assize centres (or *conventus*) in 131 CE. In other words, there are no evident signs of disruption in the public life of either T. Haterius Nepos or the native inhabitants.

From 132 CE, the situation was about to change. In this year, the coins of Bar Kokhba proclaimed the "Redemption of Israel" (Mildenberg, *The Coinage*, p. 29-31), and Hadrian was forced to send C. Iulius Severus, one of his trusted eastern collaborators, to Syria because the governor was put in command of the legions. Such a change of office is not attested in Arabia, but the participation of members of the *III Cyrenaica* – garrisoned at Bostra – in the military actions is confirmed (*CIL* XIV.3610=*ILS* 1071). Consequently, T. Haterius Nepos collaborated in the suppression of the Jewish revolt both in his province and across the Jordan border. This combined strategy involving several civil and military levels of Roman power would explain that Babatha was forced to leave the area of Maoza and sought refuge in the remote caves by the Dead Sea controlled by the rebel forces (see Cotton, "Ein Gedi", p. 154). Like any war and regardless of the target, collateral damages on the local population are unavoidable and the martial tactic employed to suppress this rebellion could explain that a Safaitic inscription refers to one Nepos as "a tyrant" (Abbadî and Zayadine, "Nepos the Governor").

Our honorific text, by contrast, narrates a very different story. The provincial governor was praised as a benefactor (????????/euergetês) by a prominent member of the civic community of Gerasa. The family of Marcus Ulpius Philipus received their Roman citizenship either when M. Ulpius Trajan – father of the emperor – was governor of Syria in 75/76 CE (*AE* 1996.598; see Gatier, *Onomastique*, p. 257), or by Trajan himself (see Eck, *Judäa-Syria Palästina*, p. 91). As such, he could only commend a man who contributed to the pacification of the neighbouring area, something for which Petra may have honoured the governor as well (*AE* 1968.526). From a Roman perspective, the rewards for T. Haterius Nepos are indeed evident. As mentioned above, he became consular in 134 and, on account of his positive performance, Hadrian probably bestowed on him the triumphal ornaments (*ornamenta triumphalia*, *CIL* 11.5212=*ILS* 1058) which were also granted to other heroes of this war (see Eck, "The Bar Kokhba Revolt"). Consequently, this brief inscription should illustrate the differing consequences of the last Jewish uprising in the high imperial period. On the one hand, Bar Kokhba's forces failed to "liberate Jerusalem" as they claimed on their last coins, were sieged by the legionary troops in Bethar, and supporters such as Babatha were massacred in caves still containing marks of destruction and fire (see Eshel, "The Bar Kokhba", p. 122-127). On the other hand, victorious Romans such as T. Haterius Nepos continued their careers with decorations and received honorific inscriptions for their generous services.

Keywords in the original language:

- ?????????
- ??????
- ?????????

Thematic keywords:

- Arabia
- Haterius Nepos
- Hadrian
- Jewish revolt
- Bar Kokhba
- Bar Kokhba Revolt
- Roman administration
- governor
- military response



- Roman army
- Roman power
- Babatha
- Petra

Bibliographical references: Abbadi, Sabri, Zayadine, Fawzi , Nepos the Governor of the Province Arabia in Safaitic Inscription, *Semitica* 46 (1996) : 1996

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Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View



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Text

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Text

[Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LXIX.12-14 \[7\]](#)

The Bar Kokhba Revolt.



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