



[Renaming of Jerusalem as Colonia Aelia Capitolina \(CIIP 1.2, 728\) \[1\]](#)

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

Original Location/Place: unknown location, Jerusalem.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Reused as a building block above the north-eastern passage of the Roman triple arch under the Damascus gate.

Date: 135 CE to 136 CE

Physical Characteristics: Large limestone block, built into the wall of the north-eastern passage of a Roman triumphal arch, now situated under the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. The block, and those on either side of it, were not originally part of the arch but inserted there at a later date. The face of the block with the inscription is badly eroded, leaving only traces of some letters visible (Eck, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae* 1.2, no. 728).

Material: Limestone.

Measurements: Height: 83 cm

Width: 186 cm

The un-erased section measures 15cm in height, lettering 10 cm.

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications:

CIIP 1.2, 728

Commentary: The limestone block inserted into the wall above the north-eastern passage of a Roman triple arch in Jerusalem, above the Damascus Gate, originally contained a building dedication; the inscription's text is badly eroded, with only a few words in the final line now visible, but it clearly recorded the dedication of a building or civic structure, by "decree of the decurions" (*decreto decurionum*). Although it is not possible to date the inscription, nor identify the edifice from which it originally came, the legible remains are interesting because they record the city's change of status following the Bar Kokhba revolt, to the new *Colonia Aelia Capitolina* (for discussion of the inscription's archaeology and date, see Arnauld, *Les arcs romains*, p. 195-198, in which she believes it to be second century CE).

The emperor Hadrian had visited the city of Jerusalem in 130 CE, during his journey across Syria, Arabia and Palestine en route to Egypt (see Syme, "Journeys of Hadrian," p. 163-165). It appears that he decided to replace the old Jewish holy city with a new Roman colony, to be named after his family – *Aelia* – and after Jupiter (*Capitolinus*), on the ruins of the city that remained from the Flavian siege in 71 CE. A temple dedicated to the chief Roman god, Jupiter Optimus Maximus, had also been proposed, with some arguing for its location on the site of the Jewish temple that had been destroyed by Titus and his troops, following Cassius Dio's somewhat ambiguous statement ?? ??? ???? ???? ???? ???? (es ton tou naou tou theou topon), "on the site of the temple of the [Jewish] god" (*Roman History*, LXIX.12.1). Nicole Belayche has dismissed the theory the site of the Jewish Temple as the location of the new Roman temple, on the basis of later historical descriptions and archaeological data, which attests to the abandonment of Temple Mount (Belayche, "Du Mont du Temple," p. 398-399), with others interpreting Cassius Dio's statement as evidence for the Jupiter Temple having been constructed somewhere in the new city, and becoming the major temple of the city due to there being nothing left on Temple Mount (see Cotton, Di Segni, Eck et als, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae* I, Pars 1, p. 19-20). In addition to the destruction of the Second Temple having limited Jewish religious practices by removing the opportunity to sacrifice to the Jewish god, the decision to build a new temple to a Roman god – wherever the temple to Jupiter was to be built – represented a brazen suppression of local customs and memory. Much has been made of the extent to which the foundation of the colony – originally conceived of as a benefaction to the province – contributed to the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba revolt (Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 459), or whether it emerged as a punishment of the Jews at the end of the conflict (see Schürer, *History of the Jews*, p. 540-542; Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 432-434; Applebaum, *Prolegomena*, p. 8-12; Isaac, "Roman colonies," p. 100-102). However, what is most clear is that the foundation of the *Colonia Aelia Capitolina* was an unprecedented event in Hadrian's reign; unlike any of the other cities of the empire with which Hadrian had interacted, *Aelia Capitolina* alone involved the entire destruction of a city and the "wholesale replacement of its



population by a new one” (Millar, *Rome, the Greek World and the East*, p. 188).

A legionary garrison of the *Legio X Fretensis* had been stationed in Jerusalem since the conclusion of the Flavian conquest there, but following the defeat of the Jews in the Bar Kokhba Revolt the city was additionally re-founded as a *colonia*, as part of the punishment of the Jews and “as a symbol of Roman tenacity of purpose” (Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 459). Coins were minted that showed the emperor performing the ancient rite of *circumductio*, leading a plough drawn by a cow and a bull around the limits of the new colony, to mark out its sacred *pomerium* (see e.g. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Palestine (Galilee, Samaria and Judaea)*, p. 82); although it is unlikely that Hadrian himself was actually present for the drawing of the plough, it has been conjectured that the ceremony took place across the ruins of the old city following the example set after the conquest of Carthage in 146 BCE, and even possibly across the old Temple site, to reinforce the victory of Roman Jupiter over the Jewish god (Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 549). The surviving Jews of the city were banned from it, and the surrounding area, by imperial decree, with the exclusion extended to include even Jewish Christians, who had not supported the revolt (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* IV.6.3-4; *Chronicon Paschale*, 18-19; Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, VII.13.5). They were permitted to return once a year, on 9 Ab, when they could enter the city and bemoan its fate at the Wailing Wall (Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 460).

Physically, the city changed dramatically; a forum was created in the centre of the city including a temple for the Capitoline Triad, and the temple of Jupiter may have been constructed on the site of the Jewish temple, along with one dedicated to Hadrian as Olympius, in further emphasis of Rome’s religious and political domination (Smallwood, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 459-460). The street plan was altered and the city was adorned with two public baths, a theatre, a nymphaeum with four porticoes, and a monumental gate with twelve entrances, according to the list of Hadrianic building works given by *Chronicon Paschale* (I, 474. For the building works undertaken by Hadrian in Aelia Capitolina, see Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire*, p. 196-203; Belayche, *Judaea-Palestina*, p. 108-169). Such building works were common features of the early years of Roman colonies, but they also contained an ideological dimension, which aimed at the permanent alteration of the urban landscape and organisation (Isaac, “Roman Colonies,” p. 101).

The foundation of *Aelia Capitolina* did not follow the traditional framework for the establishment of colonies, particularly in the eastern provinces, such as at Berytus, in Pisidia and at Ptolemais, which were veteran settlements intended to tame and civilise the regions in which they were placed (Levick, *Roman Colonies*, p. 6; 38-40). The colonies acted as “*ad hoc* garrisons...their sites chosen out of military considerations” (Isaac, “Roman Colonies,” p. 93). However, Jerusalem already *had* a garrison, which had been in control of the city since the First Jewish War in 70 CE, with the Roman colony established by Vespasian instead at Caesarea Maritima, as the *Colonia Prima Flavia Augusta Caesarea*; the foundation of a colony alongside a garrison is completely unattested elsewhere at this time, and it is not clear how the division between the military territory and the civic administration of *Aelia* was intended to function. Benjamin Isaac has suggested that Hadrian’s actions may have been motivated by the presence of veterans from the existing military garrison with whom the colony could be settled; in terms of religious policy Hadrian’s actions could have been achieved by giving Jerusalem *polis* status, but the practical utility of establishing a *colonia* and the political weight that such a foundation communicated was an invaluable opportunity to advertise Rome’s total dominance and control (Isaac, “Roman Colonies,” p. 103-104).

The most important aspect of the foundation of *Aelia Capitolina* was, however, the message of exclusion that it sent to the provincial population. The Jews were banned from their holiest city, and, in contrast with other cities founded by Hadrian, such as Antinoopolis, the infrastructure and civic organisation aimed at stifling their needs, wants and ethnic character. Indeed, the foundation of the colony “did not involve the local population in any constructive way” (Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire*, p. 197-198). It was a self-sufficient entity, that looked Roman and whose name linked it with the emperor and with the cult of Rome’s most important god, in a permanent assertion of Rome’s suppression of the revolt and her religious and political subjugation of the Jewish people. Although parallels might be drawn with Rome’s conversion of military sites such as ‘Sarmizegetusa Regia’ to the civilian colony of *Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa*, under Trajan (see the [Foundation of Dacica](#) [2]), the situation in *Aelia Capitolina* was different. In Dacia the Roman colony had been founded on a new site, which used the name of the old stronghold as an epithet indicating Rome’s ownership of the settlement; in *Aelia Capitolina*, the earlier city had been razed and its name abolished, but the site remained the same. The intention was not just to establish Roman control and ownership in the region, but to eradicate the Jewish presence from the city entirely; the foundation of the colony “reaffirmed Rome’s military might and humiliated the provincials who dared to oppose it” (Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire*, p. 202).



Keywords in the original language:

- [colonia](#) [3]
- [Aelia Capitolina](#) [4]
- [decurio](#) [5]

Thematic keywords:

- [Roman colony](#) [6]
- [Bar Kokhba Revolt](#) [7]
- [Third Jewish Revolt](#) [8]
- [Hadrian](#) [9]
- [Jerusalem](#) [10]
- [Judea](#) [11]
- [Roman domination](#) [12]
- [Roman power](#) [13]
- [Aelia Capitolina](#) [14]

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[Edict on the immunity of veterans from the Legio X Fretensis in Egypt \(CIL XVI, App. 12\) \[28\]](#)

- [Read more about Edict on the immunity of veterans from the Legio X Fretensis in Egypt \(CIL XVI, App. 12\) \[28\]](#)

Inscription

[Military Diploma for a soldier from Syria Palaestina \(CIL XVI, 87\) \[29\]](#)



- [Read more about Military Diploma for a soldier from Syria Palaestina \(CIL XVI, 87\)](#) [29]

Inscription

[Dedication to Sextus Julius Severus, consular legate of Judea \(CIL III, 2830\)](#) [30]

- [Read more about Dedication to Sextus Julius Severus, consular legate of Judea \(CIL III, 2830\)](#) [30]

Inscription

[Haterius Nepos, Arabia, and the Bar Kokhba revolt](#) [31]

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](#) [31]

Text

[Cassius Dio, Roman History LXIX.12.1](#) [32]

The foundation of the colony of *Aelia Capitolina*.

- [Read more about Cassius Dio, Roman History LXIX.12.1](#) [32]

Numismatic item

[City-Coin of Aelia Capitolina depicting the head of Hadrian and the ceremonial foundation of the city \(130 CE\)](#) [33]

- [Read more about City-Coin of Aelia Capitolina depicting the head of Hadrian and the ceremonial foundation of the city \(130 CE\)](#) [33]

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