

A magnificent bronze statue of Hadrian, now on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, was found by chance by an American tourist in Tel Shalem (Beth Shean Valley, Israel) on the 25th of July 1975 while searching for ancient coins with a metal detector. Tel Shalem was once occupied by a detachment of the Sixth Roman Legion (Legio VI Ferrata). The 50 fragments of this statue were found in a building which stood at the centre of the camp, perhaps in the *principia* (the headquarters tent or building).



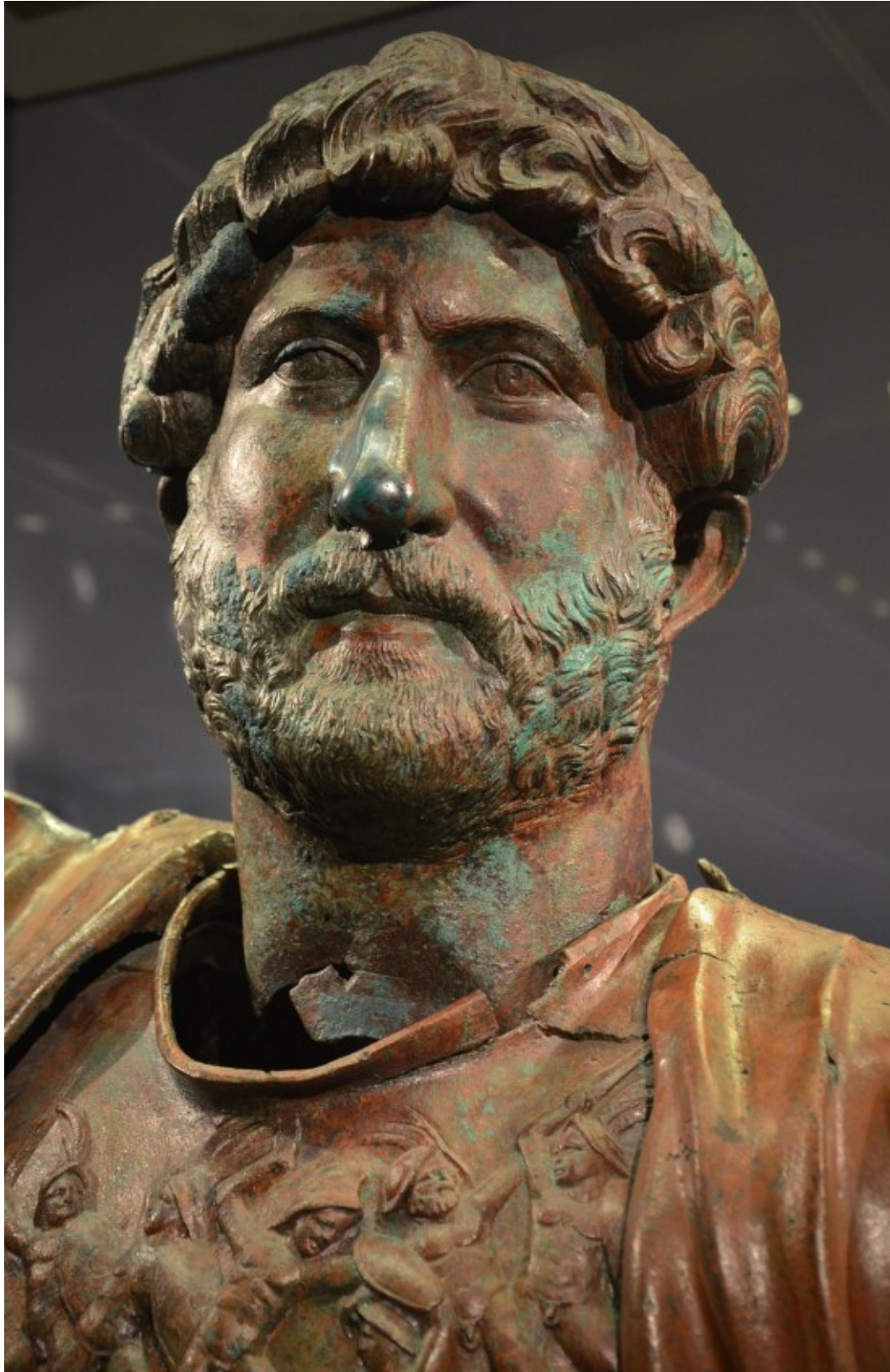
*Bronze statue of Hadrian, found at the Camp of the Sixth Roman Legion in Tel*

*Shalem, Israel Museum, Jerusalem*

This remarkable statue was apparently used for the ritual worship of the emperor. Evidence suggests that it may have been erected in AD 132-133 to commemorate Hadrian's personal involvement in suppressing the [Bar Kokhba revolt](#) or that it may have been set up in AD 135/6 to celebrate the conclusion of Hadrian's reorganisation of Judaea into a new province named Syria-Palestina.

The statue probably portrays Hadrian in the pose of the supreme military commander greeting his troops (*adlocutio*) or as a [conqueror stepping on a defeated enemy](#) (a [head of a youth](#) was found next to the statue), though it's far from certain that the head and the cuirass originally belong together. Nevertheless, the Jerusalem bust is one of the finest bronze portraits to survive from antiquity. Only a few of this type of statues have been preserved in bronze, most of the surviving ones were made of marble. Hence the importance of this statue, which is further enhanced by its high quality of execution.

The head, cast in one piece and found intact, is one of the finest extant portraits of the emperor and is of a type popular in the provinces; the Rollockenfrisur type. Probably cast in an imperial workshop in Rome, Greece or in Asia Minor, the statue features the standardized likeness of the emperor, down to the unique shape of his earlobe, a symptom of the heart disease that eventually caused his death.



*Bronze statue of Hadrian, found at the Camp of the Sixth Roman Legion in Tel Shalem, detail of the head, Israel Museum, Jerusalem*

The cuirass is decorated with an enigmatic depiction of six nude warriors. It has been suggested that the scene depicts a duel between Aeneas, wearing a Phrygian cap, and Turnus, the king of the Rutuli. The scene may be seen as an allegory of the triumph of Hadrian over the Bar Kokhba revolt.



*Bronze statue of Hadrian, found at the Camp of the Sixth Roman Legion in Tel Shalem, detail of breastplate depicting a mythological battle, Israel Museum, Jerusalem*

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As is very common with cuirassed statue decoration, the torso wears a *cingulum*, a military belt wrapped around the waist and tied at the front in an elaborate knot (also commonly referred to as the Hercules' knot). A *paladumentum*, or military cloak, falls over his shoulders.



*Bronze statue of Hadrian, detail of the military belt (cingulum), found at the Camp of the Sixth Roman Legion in Tel Shalem, Israel Museum, Jerusalem*

About a year and a half after the discovery of the statue, a monumental inscription dedicated to Hadrian was discovered near the camp. The inscription had been part of a **triumphal arch** built in AD 136 in honour of the emperor.

Sources:

- G. Foerster, *A Cuirassed Statue of Hadrian*, IMN 16 (1980) 107-110\* G. Foerster, *A Cuirassed Bronze Statue of Hadrian*, Atiqot (English Version) 17 (1985), pp. 139-157
- RA Gergel, *The Tel Shalem Hadrian Reconsidered*, American Journal of Archaeology, Vol. 95, No. 2. (Apr., 1991), pp. 231-251
- The Israel Museum, Publisher: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2005 (museum [link](#))



*Bronze statue of Hadrian, found at the Camp of the Sixth Roman Legion in Tel Shalem,  
117-138 AD, Israel Museum, Jerusalem*

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