

About a year and a half after the discovery of the bronze statue of Hadrian in 1977 (see previous post [here](#)), six fragments of a monumental Latin inscription – the largest ever found in Israel – were discovered near the camp of the Sixth Legion in Tel Shalem.



Monumental inscription from a triumphal arch dedicated to Hadrian, discovered near the camp of the Sixth Legion at Tel Shalem, Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The inscription, inscribed in three lines, had belonged to a large triumphal arch erected presumably in AD 136 by order of the Roman Senate to commemorate the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

A proposed reconstruction of the inscription was made in 1999 by Professor Werner Eck of the University of Cologne, a renowned scholar on Roman ancient history. According to W. Eck the inscription reads (with the expansion of abbreviations):



Proposed restoration of the monumental inscription by W. Eck (1999)

Imp (eratori) Cae [s (ari) divi T] ra [iani Par-]
th [i] ci f (ilio) d [lvi Nervae NEP (Oti) Tr] Aiano [Hadriano Aug (Usto)]
pon [t] if (i) m [ax (imo), Trib (Unicia pot (estate) XX ?, imp (eratori) I] I, co (n) s (uli) [III, p (atri) p
(atrae) S (enatus) P (opulus) q (ue) R (omanus)?]

The reconstructed titulare by W. Eck precisely dates the arch. In AD 136 Hadrian accepted the title of Imperator for the 2nd time -IMP II-. If W. Eck's reconstruction is correct then the arch was dedicated to Hadrian in honour of his victory over the Jews. Unfortunately, the end of the third line, where the dedicator was mentioned, is not preserved. However W. Eck's reconstruction, when using the correct scale, demonstrates that only a few letters are missing after the emperor's titles. The choice seemed quite clear for W. Eck; the letter missing were SPQR -*Senātus Populusque Rōmānus*- (the Senate and the People of Rome). The Senate and the People of Rome is several times attested as having honoured emperors by erecting an arch or some other large monument in the provinces to commemorate a great achievement, especially an important victory.

The impressive dimensions of the inscription - about 11 m wide - and the size of the letters - 41cm high in the first line - show that the inscription belonged to a monumental arch similar to the Arch of Titus in Rome, erected after his death to commemorate his conquest of Jerusalem.



Reconstruction drawing of the triumphal arch dedicated to Hadrian near the camp of the Sixth Legion at Tel Shalem, Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Celebrations of the victory over the Bar Kokhba revolt were not confined to Judaea. Monuments commemorating the event were also set up in Rome; an inscribed slab ([CIL VI 974](#)) from the base of a colossal statue of Hadrian dedicated directly beneath the Temple of the deified Vespasian and Titus – the first destroyers of the Jews – has survived. This may indicate an attempt to link the Bar Kokhba revolt victory with Vespasian's victory during the First Jewish-Roman War.



CIL VI 974

The name of the rebellious province of Judaea was officially changed to Syria Palaestina (chosen after the Philistines, ancient enemies of the Israelites) as further punishment of the defeated and the Jewish population expelled.

Sources:

- Werner Eck, *The bar Kokhba Revolt: The Roman Point of View*, The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 89, (1999), pp. 76-89
- The Israel Museum (museum [link](#))

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