

**THE CAUSES OF THE BAR KOKHBA REVOLT:
A CRITICAL REASSESSMENT AND NEW COMPARISONS**

by

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ABSTRACT

The causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt have long been debated. This thesis will explore the immediate causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt and compare them to other provincial revolts in the Roman Empire. Doing so will allow us to determine the similarity of the Bar Kokhba revolt to Roman provincial revolts in general. In chapter one, I argue that the unrest in Judaea before the revolt fostered enmity between Jews and Romans. When compounded with Hadrian's decision to found the *colonia* Aelia Capitolina, this ultimately led the Jews to rebel. I analyze the literary source, Cassius Dio, to determine the reliability of his writings. Furthermore, thorough analyses of the archaeological and numismatic evidence, especially the Aelia Capitolina provincial and Bar Kokhba revolt coinage, support the foundation of Aelia Capitolina as the immediate cause. In chapter two, I argue that Hadrian's supposed ban on circumcision was not a cause of the revolt. I argue that the source that states this, *Historia Augusta*, is not historically reliable. Moreover, I argue through close examination of Roman literary, legal, cultural, and social trends that Rome never forbade circumcision before or during the Hadrianic era. Similarly, I analyze the rabbinic sources that have been taken to affirm this ban, and argue that because they are not historiographical works, they can only be used to understand the times in which they were redacted. Finally, in chapter three I compare the causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt to other provincial revolts under the early Roman Empire to determine that the Bar Kokhba revolt fits within the general paradigm of these revolts. I argue that the unrest in Judaea and the foundation of Aelia Capitolina parallel actions that sparked other provincial revolts. As a result, the Bar Kokhba revolt ought to be considered a Roman provincial revolt and not solely a Jewish revolt. This final chapter allows us to view the Bar Kokhba revolt in a different light, thereby possibly opening further avenues of research on the Bar Kokhba revolt.

PREFACE

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Brian Burnstein.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 CE), a seminal event in the history of Jews and Judaism, continues to be a topic of heated debate among scholars. Our knowledge of the revolt, however, suffers from a dearth of primary sources. Moreover, the surviving sources are opaque, complex, and highly biased. For these reasons, scholars continue to disagree on a number of basic issues regarding the history of the revolt, as there is little consensus on the revolt's causes, geographic extent, aftermath, and leadership. In this paper, I explore one of these issues – the causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt, which ancient authors reported as the foundation of Aelia Capitolina over Jerusalem or a ban on circumcision, and compare them to the causes of other Roman provincial revolts from the same era. I argue that because Hadrian's decision to construct the Roman *colonia* of Aelia Capitolina over Jerusalem, which followed years of unrest in Judaea, constitutes the immediate cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt, it parallels other Roman provincial revolts of the same era.

1.1: Literature Review

Debates on the Bar Kokhba revolt have centered on how scholars view and use the two most important primary sources – Cassius Dio (henceforth Dio) and the *Historia Augusta* (*HA*). According to Dio, an early third century CE Roman historian and statesman from Nicaea, the revolt was caused by Hadrian's decision to found Aelia Capitolina over Jerusalem. *HA*, a fourth century CE compilation of biographies of Roman emperors and their heirs from 117–284 CE, however, holds that the rebellion was provoked by Hadrian's ban on circumcision. The differences between these two sources have contributed to a divergence of scholarly opinions.

An early and influential voice in this discussion is E. Mary Smallwood, who first addressed the causes of the revolt in her 1959 article, “The Legislation of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius against Circumcision.”¹ In her study, Smallwood uses rabbinic sources to support *HA*’s claim that the revolt was sparked by a ban on circumcision. She argues for the historical accuracy of certain key rabbinic sources based on their attribution to rabbis who lived during or shortly after the revolt – even though the texts in which these sources appear were compiled centuries later. She modified her argument in her 1981 volume *The Jews under Roman Rule*, where she holds that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, the ban on circumcision, or a combination of the two could have caused the revolt.² Whatever the cause, she argues that it intensified the existing unrest in Judaea.

In the wake of Smallwood’s original assessment, Hugo Mantel (1968) used Eusebius, a late third century CE Christian bishop and historian, as a source to demonstrate that Hadrian imposed a ban on circumcision and founded Aelia Capitolina only after the revolt as punitive measures.³ He added that the nationalistic and messianic fervor in Judaea absolved Hadrian of any wrongdoing, but Mantel does not take into account Eusebius’s pro-Christian and anti-Jewish biases. Meanwhile, Moshe Herr’s “Persecution and Martyrdom in Hadrian’s Days,” (1971), on the other hand, follows Smallwood’s original assessment, arguing that a ban on circumcision (and possibly the foundation of Aelia Capitolina) pre-dated the revolt. This, he argues, resulted in 20 other Jewish practices and customs, including public reading of the Torah and lighting the Sabbath candles, being banned during the revolt, which would not have been possible without an

¹ Smallwood, E. Mary. “The Legislation of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius against Circumcision.” *Latomus* 18 (1959):

² Smallwood, E. Mary. *The Jews under Roman Rule*. Vol. 20. Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981.

³ Mantel, Hugo. “The Causes of the Bar Kokba Revolt.” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 58 (1968): 224–42; 274–96.

earlier ban on circumcision. Herr utilizes later rabbinic sources to make his argument, although he does not take into account the problematic nature of using rabbinic texts as historical sources.⁴

Since the publication of Smallwood's monograph (1981), Benjamin Isaac, Peter Schäfer, Menahem Mor, and others have taken a more critical approach to examining the Bar Kokhba revolt and its causes. Isaac's *The Near East under Roman Rule: Selected Papers* (1998) contains a selection of his own articles published between 1974 and 1996.⁵ Isaac draws on road milestones and other archaeological finds to argue that Hadrian responded to Judaeen unrest by increasing Rome's military presence.⁶ Isaac also draws attention to and illuminates Roman administrative interference within the province of Judaea, arguing that this administrative provocation and the foundation of Aelia Capitolina as a military *colonia* instigated the revolt.⁷ In particular, Isaac highlights the persistence of banditry within the province throughout Roman rule.⁸

Schäfer has been especially influential in scholarship on the Bar Kokhba revolt. In his 1999 article, "The Bar Kokhba Revolt and Circumcision: Historical Evidence and Modern Apologists," he argues against the ban on circumcision as a cause of the revolt.⁹ This argument relies on the historical and cultural trends of Jewish interactions with Greco-Roman culture from as early as late Seleucid rule (198-c.160 BCE) through to the Bar Kokhba period. He argues that a rabbinic source that some Jews re-circumcised themselves during the revolt (Tosefta Shabbat 15:9) does not mean that there was necessarily a ban. Rather, Schäfer holds that some Jews had

⁴ Herr, Moshe D. "Persecution and Martyrdom in Hadrian's Days." *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 23 (1972): 85–125.

⁵ Isaac, Benjamin H. *The Near East under Roman Rule: Selected Papers*. Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava 177. Leiden ; New York: Brill, 1998.

⁶ Isaac 1998, 48-68.

⁷ Isaac 1998, 87-111.

⁸ Isaac 1998, 122-158.

⁹ Schäfer, Peter. "The Bar Kokhba Revolt and Circumcision," in *Jüdische Geschichte in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit: Wege der Forschung: vom alten zum neuen Schürer*, 119-132. Edited by A. Oppenheimer and E. Müller-Luckner. München: Oldenbourg, 1999.

undergone epispasm (the stretching of the foreskin) in order to better assimilate into a gentile world.

Schäfer's edited volume, *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered* (2003), includes articles by other scholars on a number of issues in Bar Kokhba studies. In "Trajan and the Origins of the Bar Kokhba War," Martin Goodman argues that Hadrian continued Flavian anti-Jewish measures because he was Trajan's heir, and Trajan himself owed his position as emperor to his own father, Marcus Ulpius Traianus, having served as a general under Vespasian.¹⁰ Therefore, it was necessary to remember and implement the policies of Flavian Rome. In "Numismatics and the Foundation of Aelia Capitolina," Yoram Tsafrir analyzes recently discovered Aelia Capitolina coins and argues that they were likely issued during the revolt, but does not conclude that Hadrian founded Aelia before the war.¹¹ Instead, Tsafrir argues that Aelia was founded during the revolt, as the Roman coins were found together with those minted by Bar Kokhba in 133/34 CE.

The next set of articles in Schäfer's volume address the ban on circumcision. Isaac, in "Roman Religious Policy and the Bar Kokhba War," analyzes the trends in Roman religious policy and concludes that practicing Judaism was permitted to those who were born Jewish, in part because of the antiquity of the religion and Roman appreciation for ancestral practices.¹² Because Roman religious policies tended towards pragmatic tolerance, Isaac argues that a general ban on circumcision for all Jews was unlikely. Rather, Isaac argues that there was likely

¹⁰ Goodman, Martin. "Trajan and the Origins of the Bar Kokhba War." In *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome*, edited by Peter Schäfer, 23–30. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 100. Tübingen: Mohr, 2003.

¹¹ Tsafrir, Yoram. "Numismatics and the Foundation of Aelia Capitolina: A Critical Review." In *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome*, edited by Peter Schäfer, 31–36. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 100. Tübingen: Mohr, 2003.

¹² Isaac, Benjamin. "Roman Religious Policy and the Bar Kokhba War." In *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome*, 37–54. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 100. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

only a ban on circumcision against proselytes, as evidenced by Antoninus Pius' later rescript. Aharon Oppenheimer analyzes the possible ban through the use of rabbinic sources in "The Ban on Circumcision as a Cause of the Revolt: A Reconsideration."¹³ Oppenheimer argues that none of these sources unequivocally indicate that any such ban existed – rightly deeming rabbinic sources as unreliable for this investigation. Finally, Ra'anana Abusch, in "Negotiating Difference: Genital Mutilation in Roman Slave Law and the History of the Bar Kokhba Revolt," analyzes Roman legal sources pertaining to circumcision and castration from before and after the revolt, and concludes that no such ban ever existed.¹⁴ He further argues that any attempt to regulate circumcision was done to protect the treatment of slaves. Although they differ in their methodologies and sources used, all three scholars reach the same conclusion: that a ban on circumcision as the cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt is unlikely.

This past year (2016) has seen the publication of Menahem Mor's *The Second Jewish Revolt: The Bar Kokhba War, 132-136 CE*, one of the most thorough explorations into the revolt, and one of a handful of works that compares it with other Roman provincial revolts.¹⁵ Mor argues that the Bar Kokhba revolt was caused by the continuous social, economic, political, religious, and national strife in Judaea following the First Revolt, combined with a charismatic leader in Simeon Bar Kokhba. Although not the first person to express this view (Smallwood began to hint at such in 1981), Mor makes perhaps the most unique argument among recent scholars. He argues against (much like Mantel did 50 years earlier) any specific policy decision by Hadrian, including a ban on circumcision or the construction of Aelia Capitolina, as leading

¹³ Oppenheimer, Aharon. "The Ban on Circumcision as a Cause of the Revolt: A Reconsideration." In *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome*, edited by Peter Schäfer, 55–70. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 100. Tübingen: Mohr, 2003.

¹⁴ Abusch, Ra'anana. "Negotiating the Difference: Genital Mutilation in Roman Slave Law and the History of the Bar Kokhba Revolt." In *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome*, edited by Peter Schäfer, 71–92. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 100. Tübingen: Mohr, 2003.

¹⁵ Mor, Menahem. *The Second Jewish Revolt the Bar Kokhba War, 132-136 CE*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016. See also Benjamin Isaac, "Cassius Dio on the Revolt of Bar-Kokhba," *SCI* 7 (1983-84): 77-87.

to the revolt. Mor acknowledges Stephen L. Dyson's categories of provincial revolts as essential for assessing the tumultuous situation in Judaea,¹⁶ and uses rabbinic sources to support his argument, which I avoid using due to their unreliability as historical sources. Instead, I will further the use of Dyson's categories of provincial revolts by using it in conjunction with archaeological and near-contemporary literary evidence to analyze the Bar Kokhba revolt as a provincial revolt in greater detail.

1.2: A Brief Historical Survey of Judaea

Judaea under Roman rule was characterized by periods of conflict and peace.¹⁷ While some of the late Hasmonean rulers were closely tied to Rome, Roman rule in Judaea began in earnest with the death of the last Hasmonean ruler Antigonus in 37 BCE. He was defeated by the Idumean-Jew Herod (the Great). Herod's ascent, which was enabled by Roman support, transformed Judaea into a client kingdom. While his reign saw periods of discontent and small rebellions, Herod was largely successful in bringing about relative stability. Following his death in 4 BCE, under a series of weaker rulers, Judaea (and Palestine as a whole) would plunge into greater disarray. The rule of Archelaus, one of Herod's successors, was so unpopular that by 6 CE, he was deposed and his dominion became a Roman province. Judaea as an imperial province was not free from discord either, as the people were oppressed by new taxes or otherwise distressed by the actions of the governors, such as Pontius Pilate's attempt to introduce an effigy of the emperor into Jerusalem.¹⁸ Strife continued during Caligula's reign (37-41 CE), for as

¹⁶ Dyson, Stephen L. 1971. "Native Revolts in the Roman Empire." *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 20 (2/3): 239–74.

¹⁷ A note about terminology. Since Judaea can refer to both the province and the similarly named region around Jerusalem, I will use *Provincia Judaea* when referring to the province as a whole, and *Judaea* when referring to region surrounding Jerusalem. I choose not to use *Palestina* as the Roman province did not contain the name "Palestina" until after the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt, thus making its use anachronistic.

¹⁸ Pontius Pilate served as governor of Judaea from 26-36 CE. Gabba 1999, 137.

emperor he attempted to place a statue of himself in the Jewish temple at Jerusalem. His death in 41 CE likely prevented open revolt.¹⁹

The client king Agrippa I, who had Hasmonean lineage, was well received by Jews and gentiles alike, and his short reign, which began in 41 CE, was characterized by stability. Following his death in 44 CE, however, the province again fell into disarray due to banditry and unstable governance from Rome. Clashes also arose between Jews and Samaritans, and the period saw the rise of political and religious fanatical groups, such as the *sicarii* (Zealots) – who engaged in guerrilla warfare against Roman soldiers. A series of short-term governors, who had often little familiarity with Judaism, further contributed to the deteriorating situation. Hostilities between the Jews and Romans culminated in open rebellion in 66 CE, the First Jewish Revolt against Rome. The first century CE Jewish historian Josephus recorded much of the history of the war, which ended with the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE by the Roman army under the command of Emperor Vespasian’s son, Titus.²⁰

Following the war, Vespasian instituted the *fiscus Iudaicus*, a two-denarii tax paid by Jews for the upkeep of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus in Rome. The *fiscus Iudaicus* was meant to supplant the biblically-ordained tax that Jews were obligated to pay to the temple in Jerusalem.²¹ This tax included not only the adult men (ages 20-50) that had paid the tax to the temple in Jerusalem, but also women, children, proselytes, and slaves. Vespasian’s son,

¹⁹ On this period, see Gabba 1999, 99-148.

²⁰ The last holdouts of the revolt fell at the Herodian fortress Masada in 73 C.E., though the circumstances of their demise (mass suicide?) are the subject of debate among scholars. See Gabba 1999, 165-67; Y. Yadin, *Masada I-V: The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963-1965, Final Reports*, 5 vols. (Jerusalem 1989-95); S. Cohen, “Masada: Literary Tradition, Archaeological Remains, and the Credibility of Josephus,” *JJS* 33 (1982), 385-405.

²¹ Josephus *BJ*, 7.218: φόρον δὲ τοῖς ὀπουδηποτοῦν οὖσιν Ἰουδαίοις ἐπέβαλεν δύο δραχμὰς ἕκαστον κελεύσας ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος εἰς τὸ Καπετώλιον φέρειν, ὥσπερ πρότερον εἰς τὸν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις νεῶν συνετέλουν: “He put down a tax on Jews living all over, ordering them to bring two drachmas each every year to the Capitol, just as before they did for the temple in Jerusalem.” For the biblical law, see Exodus 30:13: “This they shall give, every one that passes among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) a half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD.”

Domitian, strictly enforced this tax, expanding it to those who concealed their faith or engaged in some Jewish customs. Domitian's successor, Nerva, later relaxed its severity for those who openly practiced Judaism, which excused many people from paying the tax.

The subsequent decades were comparatively peaceful in the province. By comparison, the waning years of Trajan's reign (98-117 CE) saw the Diaspora Revolts, in which Jewish communities in Alexandria, Cyrene, and Cyprus rose up against Rome, only to be brutally put down.²² Upon Hadrian's accession in 117 CE, relations between Jews and Romans were unstable – seeing periods of peace followed by discontent and sometimes outright revolt. This historical background is essential for understanding the causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt.²³

1.3: Chapter Outline

This thesis explores the causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt through a close examination of the two most important primary sources – the writings of Dio and *HA*. Chapter 1 addresses Dio's statement that Hadrian's foundation of Aelia Capitolina over Jerusalem was the cause of the revolt. I argue that it was the construction of Aelia Capitolina, which followed decades of unrest in Roman Judaea, which constitutes the immediate cause of the revolt. Archaeological evidence, including provincial and revolt coinage, helps to support Dio's statement. Chapter 2 looks closely at the account found in *HA* of Hadrian's ban on circumcision. I argue that such a ban, whether empire-wide or on Jews alone, never occurred and makes no sense in light of Roman religious policy. Moreover, I argue that Antoninus Pius's rescript, which some scholars have used to corroborate a ban, was instead intended to specify whom Jews could circumcise. For that

²² See Pucci Ben Zeev 2006, 93-104 for more on the Diaspora revolts. A possible "War of Kitos" is mentioned in the rabbinic sources *Seder Olam Rabbah* 30 and *M. Sot.* 9, 14, and leads some scholars to posit some uprising occurred ca. 116 CE. It is the non-historical character of rabbinic sources and the lack of corroboration of such a war in the Roman historical sources, such as Dio, lead me to doubt whether this revolt occurred at all.

²³ Gabba 1999, 142-48 on the instability in Judaea; 156-67 on the revolt. Schwartz 2006, 23-33 on Judaea between the two revolts and the implementation of the *fiscus Judaicus*.

reason it cannot be considered a cause of the revolt. Chapter 3 places the Bar Kokhba revolt into context by comparing it to other provincial revolts in the early Roman Empire. This chapter argues that the Bar Kokhba revolt bears a number of important similarities to other provincial revolts. Thus, the Bar Kokhba revolt is less unique than scholars have generally held.

1.4: Conclusion

This project requires thorough examination and analysis of the primary literary sources. I closely study Dio's writings and *HA* to determine the historicity of their respective accounts of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Moreover, I compare their respective causes to historical and cultural trends concerning Jews and Judaism in the Roman Empire. Of particular importance are the construction of *coloniae* and legislation on castration and proselytism. Among archaeological evidence, especially important are numismatics from the Wadi-Suweinit hoard and the finds related to the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, including those from the excavations at the site of the Jerusalem International Convention Center. Finally, some attention is given to the rabbinic sources, although I note that they are not to be used as historiographical, but rather as didactic or exegetical, perhaps containing threads of believable, although not necessarily true, tales.

In this thesis, I argue that Dio's assertion that the revolt was caused by the foundation of Aelia Capitolina was the immediate cause of the war, precipitated by a history of unrest in Provincia Judaea. I also show that *HA* is unreliable in its account that the revolt was caused by a ban on circumcision. Including the Bar Kokhba revolt in the general framework of other revolts against Rome allows us to view it through a different lens. This approach provides greater context that illuminates unique aspects of the Bar Kokhba revolt that has heretofore received little scholarly attention.

CHAPTER 2: Laying the Foundations for Aelia Capitolina

2.1: Introduction

What caused the Bar Kokhba revolt? In this chapter, I explore the various possible causes of the revolt through a critical examination of the primary sources and assessment of secondary scholarship on the topic. I argue that it was the unrest in Provincia Judaea during the early years of Hadrian's reign and his decision to found Aelia Capitolina over Jerusalem that constitute the immediate causes of the revolt.

2.2: Prior Unrest

The circumstances surrounding Provincia Judaea and the Jews in the years preceding the outbreak of the revolt in 132 CE played important roles in fomenting sedition. The situation in the province, then, from the end of Trajan's reign to the outbreak of war, needs unpacking. The early fourth century CE Christian bishop, historian, and theologian Eusebius suggests that there was some tension between the Judaeans and Romans during this period that required the presence of additional troops.

And of course, with the revolt of the Jews again growing serious, Rufus, governor of Judaea, after an auxiliary force had been sent to him by the emperor, utilizing their madness as a pretext, attacked them without mercy.²⁴

While Eusebius' anti-Jewish biases are well known (see below) and he was not a contemporary of the revolt, there may be some truth to his statement, requiring further evaluation. The suggestion that the Judaeans were perturbed and there were perhaps minor instances of conflict well before Hadrian's decision to found Aelia Capitolina – although Eusebius attributes its

²⁴ Eusebius, *EH* 4.6.1. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. Καὶ δῆτα τῆς Ἰουδαίων ἀποστασίας αὐθις εἰς μέγα καὶ πολὺ προελθούσης Ῥοῦφος ἐπάρχων τῆς Ἰουδαίας, στρατιωτικῆς αὐτῶι συμμαχίας ὑπὸ βασιλέως πεμφθείσης, ταῖς ἀπονοίαις αὐτῶν ἀφειδῶς χρώμενος ἐπεξήει.

foundation as a consequence of the revolt – and that the tension and enmity between the Judaeans and Romans contributed to the outbreak of war is worth investigating.

In what follows, then, I evaluate archaeological evidence in order to discern whether unrest was present in Provincia Judaea prior to the outbreak of the revolt. I argue that milestones constructed throughout the province by the Roman military suggest increased military action through road building because of this unrest. The unrest also likely contributed to the presence of multiple legions. I also argue that banditry played a role in promoting Roman military strength in the province. It is this unrest and the military response that followed that were likely underlying factors of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

Archaeological sources, such as milestones for roads, suggest unrest in Provincia Judaea in the early years of Hadrian's reign. Benjamin Isaac has collected examples of Hadrianic era milestones in Judaea. Of the six he securely dates to Hadrian's reign, three are located on the roads from Caparcotna to Sepphoris, Neapolis, and Scythopolis, dated to 120 CE and 129/30 CE (Sepphoris), unknown due to fragmentary evidence (Neapolis), and 129 CE (Scythopolis). One additional fragmentary milestone was found on the road from Scythopolis to Jericho, while two dating to 130 CE lead from Aelia Capitolina to Eleutheropolis and Hebron.²⁵ As the milestones mark roads in use by the military at the time the milestones were erected, we can surmise that the military was active in Judaea during Hadrian's reign because the legions recorded their presence in the region on these milestones. Furthermore, during times of war or unrest, "the legions brought with them units whose task it was to straighten, to broaden and to level existing roads."²⁶ The amount of roads that underwent construction or improvement during this period suggests an elevated level of provincial unrest, evidenced by the amount and geographical spread of the

²⁵ Isaac 1998, 49-50, in *The Near East Under Roman Rule*. Originally published as "Milestones in Judaea: From Vespasian to Constantine." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 110 (1978), 47-60.

²⁶ Isaac 1998, 50.

milestones. These newly improved roads would have allowed the army to move efficiently throughout the province and reach areas of potential unrest faster. While this does not mean that the roads were initially constructed at the same time as the milestones, it does identify the time in which they were improved (widened, straightened, etc.) for the use of the armies in Provincia Judaea. This period stretches roughly from 120–130 CE, suggesting provincial unrest at this time.

Moreover, evidence suggests that additional legions were present in Provincia Judaea besides X Fretensis, which was stationed in Jerusalem. Josephus, the late first century CE Jewish historian, records X Fretensis in Jerusalem after the First Revolt: “Caesar [Vespasian] resolved to leave behind as a guard there, the tenth legion, and some troops of cavalry and bands of foot soldiers.”²⁷ Evidence for X Fretensis at Jerusalem after 70 CE and through the Bar Kokhba revolt is plentiful.²⁸ This includes Flavian-era inscriptions and brick and roof stamps. The inscriptions include the names of Vespasian and Titus, and references to the tenth legion, indicating that X Fretensis was encamped there by 80 CE.²⁹ The stamped roof tiles and bricks date from ca. 70 CE through the third century CE, and record that Legio X Fretensis was present at Aelia Capitolina.³⁰ The milestones mentioned above, however, offer no evidence that X Fretensis

²⁷ Josephus *BJ*, 7.1.2.1: Καῖσαρ δὲ φυλακὴν μὲν αὐτόθι καταλιπεῖν ἔγνω τῶν ταγμάτων τὸ δέκατον καὶ τινὰς ἴλας ἰππέων καὶ λόχους πεζῶν, πάντα δ’ ἤδη τὰ τοῦ πολέμου διφικηκῶς ἐπαινέσαι τε σύμπασαν ἐπόθει τὴν στρατιὰν ἐπὶ τοῖς κατορθώμασιν καὶ τὰ προσήκοντα γέρα τοῖς ἀριστεύουσιν ἀποδοῦναι.

²⁸ For a recent summary of the various sources and arguments, see Magness 2011, 317-21. There is debate among scholars as to the precise location of the legionary camp. For the purposes of my argument what matters is that they were based somewhere in Jerusalem/Aelia Capitolina.

²⁹ Isaac and Gichon 1974, 117-123. Their reconstructed inscription reads: Imp(eratori) Caesar(i) | Vespasian[o] | Aug(usto); Imp(eratori) T(ito) [Cae] | sar(i) Vesp(asiano) Aug(usti) [f(ilio)] | L(ucio) [Flavio Silva leg(agto)] | Aug(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore) | leg(io) X Fr(etensis). “For the emperor Caesar Vespasian Augustus, and son of the emperor Titus Caesar Vespasian Augustus, by Lucius Flavius Silva the legate, propraetor for Augustus, in Legio X Fretensis.” They hold that the erased fifth line is a *damnatio memoriae* of L. Flavius Silva, who served as governor of Judaea 73-81 CE, and can help date the inscription to this period.

³⁰ Geva 2003, 405-422. For more on archaeological evidence that affirms X Fretensis in Jerusalem between 70-130 CE, see Rosenthal-Heginbottom, Weksler-Bdolah, and Onn, *The Western Wall Plaza Excavations 2. The Eastern Cardo*, Jerusalem.

constructed them. Isaac and Roll record a milestone marker from 120 CE as evidence that Legio II Traiana was present in Provincia Judaea.³¹ Reconstructed, it reads

[Imp(erator) Caesar Divi Tr]iaiani
Part<h>ici fil(ius) D[ivi Nervae] nepos
Hadrianus Aug(ustus) pontif(ex)
max(imus) trib(unicia) potetastas (sic)
iiii co(n)s(ul) iii Leg(io) ii T(raiana)

As early as 120 CE, then, a second legion (II Traiana) was present in Provincia Judaea.³² The location of this milestone on the road from Caparcotna to Sepphoris and the number of roads constructed from Caparcotna suggests it was now the base of another legion, which around 120 CE was II Traiana.³³ That the legionary garrison of the province was doubled during Hadrian's reign may suggest that Roman administrators believed the province to be unruly and in need of further military support.

The improvement of these roads begs further questions. It is possible that they were improved in preparation for Hadrian's tour of the province or as a military measure against local unrest. At what point he made plans to tour the province is unknown, but Hadrian's presence in Britain ca. 120 CE suggests plans for his travels through Judaea and other eastern provinces had not yet been finalized.³⁴ Therefore, it is more likely that some level of unrest was already underway that required additional military support, and the improvement of roads would have

³¹ Isaac and Roll 1979b, 150. Because of the fragmentary nature of this inscription, I have presented it above in Latin. Its English translation would read: "Imperator Caesar Hadrian Augustus, son of the Divine Trajan Parthican, grandson of the Divine Nerva, the pontifex maximus, having tribunician power for the fourth time, consul for the third time, [120 CE], by Legio II Traiana."

³² Scholarly consensus on which legion remained in the Galilee has not been reached. It is doubtful II Traiana remained there, as they are recorded in Egypt in 127 CE (CIL iii 42, 79.) Other suggested legions in Judaea include VI Ferrata, III Cyrenaica, and XXII Deiotariana.

³³ Isaac and Roll 1979b, 151-2. They argue that this was a military road because it connected with Sepphoris, which sided with Rome during the First Revolt. Making Sepphoris accessible, then, may have helped with recruitment or other military efforts.

³⁴ For a summary of Hadrian's movements in the provinces, see Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*, 1997.

likely facilitated the movement of these additional troops to areas of unrest efficiently and quickly.

No doubt Hadrian's tour of Judaea also fostered unrest. It is unlikely that the army on tour with Hadrian were housed at an already existing or contemporaneously constructed encampment. Rather, cities along the route were likely expected to provide both housing and food for the emperor, his entourage, and even the army itself.³⁵ The quartering and supplying of Hadrian and his entourage appears ill-received by the locals, as the Jewish response to the increase of soldiers in Judaea was to furnish faulty weaponry for the Roman army, as Dio suggested.³⁶ This implies that the influx of military personnel that was undertaken to prevent insurrection actually further provoked discontent in the years leading up to the revolt, as it would have caused serious financial hardship.

In addition to evidence of road construction and milestones, a papyrus from Egypt dating to 128 CE records a shipment of clothing sent from Egypt, for “the necessity of the soldiers serving in Judaea.”³⁷ This supports the hypothesis of a military presence in Judaea larger than what was normally stationed there.³⁸ Smallwood suggests that the clothes were requested because of a transfer of sailors from the fleet at Misenum to Legio X Fretensis. The discovery of

³⁵ Ando 2000, 194; Suet. *Tib.*, 38. *quamuis prouincias quoque et exercitus reuisurum se saepe pronuntiasset et prope quotannis profectionem praepararet, uehiculis comprehensis, commeatibus per municipia et colonias dispositis.* “Yet he often announced that he would visit the provinces too and armies, and nearly every year he prepared for a journey, by chartering carriages and arranging supplies in the free towns and colonies.”

³⁶ Dio 69.12.2. *πλὴν καθ’ ὅσον τὰ ὄπλα τὰ ἐπιταχθέντα σφίσιν ἦττον ἐπιτήδεια ἐξἐπίτηδες κατεσκεύασαν ὡς ἀποδοκιμασθεῖσιν αὐτοῖς ὑπ’ ἐκείνων χρήσασθαι.* “Excepting that, they furnished on purpose such weapons, having been ordered to do so, less suitable for them [the Romans].”

³⁷ P. Rylands 189, in *Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, volume ii, Documents of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods*, eds. De M. Johnson, Martin, Hunt, p. 236-7. The relevant lines 4-7 read *καὶ ἰς <σ>τρατιωτικὰς χρείας τῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ στρατευμένων παλλίωλα λευκὰ πέντε, ε. Ιγ (ἔτους) Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος Τραϊανοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ Σεβαστοῦ, Χοΐακ κβ.* “...and for the needs of the soldiers serving in Judaea, 5 white cloaks. The 13th year of the Emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus, Choiak 22 (128 CE).”

³⁸ Horbury 2014, 294-5; Smallwood 1976, 437. Horbury suggests that the additional forces were needed to construct roads and aqueducts, both of which would allow a larger force to be supported for a longer time. It should be noted that the movement of soldiers from Misenum, Italy, would likely be more expensive and time consuming than simply transferring some from legions in nearby provinces.

another papyrus from Caesarea dating to 150 CE indicates that a group of former sailors had served in Legio X for over twenty years: “When we were sailors, lord, in the praetorian fleet at Misenum and by the indulgence of the divine Hadrian we were transferred into Legio X Fretensis more than 20 years ago...”³⁹ These veterans must have been transferred to the Tenth Legion before the start of the revolt in 132 CE, by no later than 129 CE.⁴⁰ It is possible that these transferred sailors were the same ones who needed additional clothing for their military needs, or even those that Eusebius mentions as being sent by the emperor before the revolt. I agree with Smallwood and Horbury that such an unusual conversion of sailors to soldiers indicates a need for additional security in the regions of greatest unrest. In this case, these appear to be near Caparcotna and Aelia Capitolina, the site of the two legions in Judaea, as evidenced by the milestones. Additional Roman soldiers were unlikely to be brought into a region during peacetime, thereby suggesting a significant amount of conflict.⁴¹ This increase in soldiers also implies that the situation was well beyond the ordinary banditry in the region and prompted an organized military response.⁴² The increase of military supplies and soldiers to Provincia Judaea, then, supports the theory that soldiers were transferred there early in Hadrian’s reign to combat some degree of provincial unrest.

The ubiquity of banditry in the ancient world suggests this would have continued in Judaea during Hadrian’s reign. Isaac links the increase in military personnel in the province to the suppression of local banditry, arguing that the army most often served as an internal police

³⁹ PSI ix 102 = Cavenaile, *Corpus Papyrorum Latinarum* 117. cum militaverimus, domine, in classe praetoria Misenensi et ex indulgentia divi Hadriani in legionem Fretensem translatis annos super XX omnia nobis.

⁴⁰ Alon 1989, 577-79 trans. Levi.

⁴¹ Eck 1999, 79-80 on the evidence for the transfer in the papyrus; 80-89 for the movement of various legions into the province the deal with the revolt. Mor 2016, 41.

⁴² See Grünewald 2004, 17-25 on the ubiquity of banditry.

force.⁴³ Pollard and Berry note an example of the military acting as an internal police force from Legio X Fretensis on a Latin inscription from Jerusalem, upon which a soldier from this legion describes himself as the *beneficarius*, or a soldier exempted from normal duties, often to serve as a bodyguard or as an internal police.⁴⁴ Moreover, as I have argued above, the movement of additional troops in the province and increased road building suggests a province in turmoil or experiencing unrest beyond normal measures of banditry. The attested presence of the Roman military and those with unique positions for suppressing banditry suggests there was some amount of disturbance in the province prior to the outset of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

To say, however, that the unrest in Provincia Judaea was the primary cause of the revolt is somewhat of an exaggeration. More precisely, this enmity likely represented an underlying factor, as the increase in soldiers in the province of Judaea, whether due to Jewish seditiousness or Roman military heavy-handedness, necessitated the foundation of a second *colonia* in the province, which Hadrian established over Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina. It is this action that would precipitate a Jewish response and begin in earnest the Bar Kokhba revolt.

2.3: A Brief Examination of Dio and Xiphilinus

Dio presents one of the two major reasons recorded as the immediate cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt: the re-founding of Jerusalem as the *colonia* Aelia Capitolina and the construction

⁴³ Isaac 1998, 152: "...firstly, that there was internal unrest, much of it social and economic in origin, but some of it with ideological motives; secondly, that the threat posed by nomads living inside or outside the zone of nominal or actual Roman control was not of such a kind that the stability or Roman rule in the provinces was seriously threatened, thirdly that the Roman army was therefore more engaged with internal police duties and less in foreign defence than was often assumed." For more on tensions between provincials and the army, see Christopher J. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (Oxford, OUP 2012).

⁴⁴ Pollard and Berry 2012, 149; *CIL* 3.14155³: D.M. L. MAGNIUS FELIX MIL. LEG. X. FRET. B. TRIB. MIL. ANN. XVIII VIX. XXXIX. "To the shades of the dead. Lucius Magnus Felix, soldier in Legio X Fretensis, *beneficarius* of the tribune, served for 19 years, lived 39. Originally published in Joffrey, *Palestine exploration fund, Quarterly statement*, 1898, p. 35. Shaw 1984, 18. For the definition of *beneficarius*, see OLD, p. 230, *beneficarius*.

of a temple to Jupiter there. Our knowledge of how events unfolded comes from Cassius Dio 69.12.1-2, wherein he writes:

And at Jerusalem, he founded a city instead of the one that had been razed to the ground, which he named Aelia Capitolina, and at the site of the (instead of)⁴⁵ temple of the god he erected a new temple to Jupiter. War, neither trivial nor short-lived, was set into motion. For the Jews, considering it something terrible that some foreign tribes be settled in their city and that alien religious rites be dedicated in the city, kept quiet while Hadrian was present in Egypt and again in Syria. Excepting that, they furnished on purpose such weapons, having been ordered to do so, less suitable for them [the Romans], so that the Romans would reject them as unworthy to be used by them. And when Hadrian was further away, they openly revolted.⁴⁶

Dio is the only ancient author who records the foundation of Aelia Capitolina as the cause of the revolt. As such, it is important to question the validity of his statement. The major work on the reliability of Dio as a historian and biographer of Hadrian remains Fergus Millar's 1964 *A Study of Cassius Dio*. He argues that, in general, Dio is a reliable historian.⁴⁷ As Dio likely wrote Book 69 in ca. 217/218 CE, we must consider his own sources for Hadrian's reign. Dio acknowledges using Hadrian's autobiography as a source, but only for the death of his lover Antinous, who supposedly drowned in the Nile. Dio, however, immediately rejects this story in favor of one claiming that Antinous was sacrificed.⁴⁸ This shows that, while we cannot conclude that Dio used Hadrian's autobiography for the Bar Kokhba revolt, he likely had access to sources contemporaneous with the revolt. Moreover, as a senator himself, Dio likely had access to senate

⁴⁵ Bowersock's (1980, 137) reading of *es topon* as meaning "instead of" is dependent on the passage being re-written entirely by Xiphilinus. Millar and Mallan argue that Xiphilinus often copied Dio, especially with regards to Jews (see below). The *es topon* thus likely retains the Koine meaning, something akin to "at the place of." Both translations maintain that it was a Roman temple built, not the Jewish one.

⁴⁶ Cassius Dio 69.12.1-2. ἐς δὲ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα πόλιν αὐτοῦ ἀντὶ τῆς κατασκαφείσης οἰκίσαντος, ἦν καὶ Αἰλίαν Καπιτωλίαν ὠνόμασε, καὶ ἐς τὸν τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τόπον ναὸν τῷ Διὶ ἕτερον ἀντεγείραντος πόλεμος. οὔτε μικρὸς οὔτ' ὀλιγοχρόνιος ἐκινήθη. Ἰουδαῖοι γὰρ δεινὸν τι ποιοῦμενοι τὸ ἀλλοφύλους τινὰς ἐς τὴν πόλιν σφῶν οἰκισθῆναι καὶ τὸ ἱερά ἀλλότρια ἐν αὐτῇ ἰδρυθῆναι, παρόντος μὲν ἐν τε τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ αὖθις ἐν τῇ Συρίᾳ τοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ ἡσύχαζον, πλὴν καθ' ὅσον τὰ ὄπλα τὰ ἐπιταχθέντα σφίσιν ἦττον ἐπιτήδεια ἐξεπίτηδες κατεσκευάσαν ὡς ἀποδοκιμασθεῖσιν αὐτοῖς ὑπ' ἐκείνων χρήσασθαι, ἐπεὶ δὲ πόρρω ἐγένετο, φανερώς ἀπέστησαν.

⁴⁷ Millar 1964, 1-4. This has been seconded by Edmondson 1992, 54-5.

⁴⁸ Millar 1964, 61. Dio 69.11.2 εἶτ' οὖν ἐς τὸν Νεῖλον ἐκπεσόν, ὡς Ἀδριανὸς γράφει, εἴτε καὶ ἱερουργηθεῖς, ὡς ἡ ἀλήθεια ἔχει. "Therefore, either he drowned in the Nile, as Hadrian writes, or he was sacrificed, as truth holds."

records and earlier histories.⁴⁹ In particular, Edmondson notes “there are sufficient parallels in Dio’s account of the Julio-Claudian period to Tacitus...and Suetonius...to suggest that he had access to both these works.”⁵⁰ While not sources for the Hadrianic period, this suggests that Dio utilized near-contemporary works for a given era. Indeed, in his summary of the Bar Kokhba revolt, Dio records that Hadrian failed to address the Senate with the customary greeting in his letter because the destruction caused by the revolt was so severe – perhaps found in the senate records.⁵¹

Indeed, just a few survived. Fifty of their most important garrisons and nine hundred eighty five of their most notable villages were razed to the ground. 580,000 men were slaughtered in the raids and battles (and the number of those that died through famine, disease, and fire was beyond count), with the result that almost all of Judaea was made desolate, just as what had even been relayed to them before the war. For the tomb of Solomon, which they kept in veneration, fell apart in and of itself and collapsed, and many wolves and hyenas, howling, rushed into their cities. Moreover, many Romans died in this war. Therefore, Hadrian, writing to the Senate, did not use the customary opening of the emperors; that is, *“If you and your children are healthy, it is well; I and the legions are healthy.”*⁵²

However difficult it would be to attribute individual sections of Dio to his various sources, it is nevertheless likely that what remains in Xiphilinus’ epitome of books 36-80 can be regarded as reliable because of his close reproduction of Dio’s words and structure,⁵³ particularly

⁴⁹ Edmondson 1992, 30-2.

⁵⁰ Edmondson 1992, 30-1. The Julio-Claudian period – at least from Tiberius to Nero – covers books 58-63. Of those, book 63 (Nero) is found only within Xiphilinus’ epitome. That it contains sufficient parallels with other established histories of Nero suggests that even the epitomized texts of Dio may be reliable.

⁵¹ Millar 1964, 34-5 notes that Dio makes references to Livy, Sallust, and Arrian, with direct quotes to Augustus in his autobiography and Hadrian regarding the deaths of Vespasian and Antinous. Hadrian’s address to the Senate also suggests that he returned to Judaea in the closing moments of the revolt.

⁵² Dio 69.14.1-3: ὀλίγοι γοῦν κομιδῇ περιεγένοντο. καὶ φρούρια μὲν αὐτῶν πενήτηκοντα τὰ γε ἀξιολογώτατα, κῶμαι δὲ ἑνακόσιαι καὶ ὀγδοήκοντα καὶ πέντε ὀνομαστότατα κατεσκάφησαν, ἄνδρες δὲ ὀκτῶ καὶ πενήτηκοντα μυριάδες ἐσφάγησαν ἔν τε ταῖς καταδρομαῖς καὶ ταῖς μάχαις ἑτῶν τε γὰρ λιμῶ καὶ νόσῳ καὶ πυρὶ φθαρέντων τὸ πλῆθος ἀνεξερεῦνθητον ἦν, ὥστε πάσαν ὀλίγου δεῖν τὴν Ἰουδαίαν ἐρημωθῆναι, καθάπερ που καὶ πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου αὐτοῖς προεδείχθη: τὸ γὰρ μνημεῖον τοῦ Σολομῶντος, ὃ ἐν τοῖς σεβασμίσις οὗτοι ἄγουσιν, ἀπὸ ταυτομάτου διελύθη τε καὶ συνέπεσε, καὶ λύκοι ὕαιναί τε πολλοὶ ἐς τὰς πόλεις αὐτῶν ἐσέπιπτον ὠρυόμενοι. πολλοὶ μὲντοι ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ τούτῳ καὶ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀπώλοντο: διὸ καὶ ὁ Ἀδριανὸς γράφων πρὸς τὴν βουλὴν οὐκ ἐχρήσατο τῷ προομίῳ τῷ συνήθει τοῖς αὐτοκράτορσιν, ὅτι ‘εἰ αὐτοὶ τε καὶ οἱ παῖδες ὑμῶν ὑγιαίνετε, εὖ ἂν ἔχοι: ἐγὼ καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα ὑγιαίνομεν.’

⁵³ See, for example, Boissevain v2, p. 234 on Dio 69.4.4: composita verba Xiphilini et exc. Val. 296:

in those places where Dio’s own words are extant without abridgment (books 36-60).⁵⁴ As a result, the overall similarity in vocabulary and structure allow us to look at specific references to Jews and Judaism to determine the epitome’s closeness to Dio’s writings and therefore its reliability.⁵⁵ Millar notes an important aspect of this – that Xiphilinus’ narrative begins with Hadrian’s reconstruction of Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina and the foundation of a temple in Jerusalem, arguing that Xiphilinus does so “because it was of greater religious interest than much else in his narrative.”⁵⁶ Mallan, however, argues that Xiphilinus retains narratives relating to Judaism because of an “antiquarian interest,” noting that if it was done to serve a Christian agenda, we ought to expect the presence of anti-Jewish polemic.⁵⁷ He argues this in regard to another Jewish matter: the feud between the Hasmoneans Aristobulus and Hyrcanus. Both narratives lack polemics against Jews, and Mallan suggests that this is because “Xiphilinus seems most interested in copying Dio’s description of the customs of the Jews.”⁵⁸ In both passages on Jews and Judaism, no polemic against Judaism appears. Rather, they merely explain

Xiph: τὸν δὲ Σευῆρον ἐς Βιθυνίαν ἔπεμψεν ὅπως μὲν οὐδεν ἄρχοντος δὲ καὶ ἐπιστάτου, ἀεὶ αὐτοῦ μνημονεύειν. “He sent Severus to Bithynia... Exc Val. 296: ὅτι ὁ Σεβῆρος μετὰ τὴν νίκην τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐς Βιθυνίαν ἐπέμφθη ὑπὸ Ἀδριανοῦ ὅπλων μὲν ἄρχοντος δὲ καὶ ἐπιστάτου, ἀεὶ αὐτοῦ μνημονεύειν, τῇ δὲ δὴ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ κλήρῳ, ἐδόθη. “Severus was sent to Bithynia by Hadrian after the victory over the Jews... The notable change between Dio and Xiphilinus here is Xiphilinus’ tendency to prefer active verbs to passive.

⁵⁴ Millar 1964, 2. See Mallan 2013, 617-632 for a lengthy argument and exempla. The length of the Bar Kokhba narrative within Dio-Xiphilinus has led to the opinion that Xiphilinus retained all or most of Dio, especially when compared to how Xiphilinus treats other imperial events. Rich 1990, 18-19 on Xiphilinus’ epitome of Dio; “Xiphilinus’ work... is not so much a précis as a selection from Dio’s material, often keeping very close to Dio’s wording.”

⁵⁵ Millar 1964, 2; Mallan 2013, 617; on the retention of imperial speeches, 618-621; that he had a copy of Dio while he epitomized, 626. This is inferred through Dio 70.1.1: ἰστέον ὅτι τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἀντωνίνου τοῦ Εὐσεβοῦς ἐν τοῖς ἀντιγράφοις τοῦ Δίωνος οὐχ εὕρισκεται, παθόντων τι ὡς εἰκὸς τῶν βιβλίων, ὥστε ἀγνοεῖσθαι τὴν κατ’ αὐτὸν ἱστορίαν σχεδὸν σύμπασαν. “One must know that the works regarding Antoninus Pius in the writings of Dio cannot be found, as though some of the books are destroyed, so that nearly all the history of his reign is unknown.”

⁵⁶ Millar 1964, 68.

⁵⁷ Mallan 2013, 631; Brunt 1980, 489.

⁵⁸ Mallan 2013, 631-32. Dio 37.15-17; Xiph. 7.30-8.16. See Boissevain, p. 403-406, n. L4: quod in Xiphilini epitome additum invenies καίτοι προσίων αὐτῷ καὶ ὑποσχόμενος. “Because in the epitome of Xiphilinus you will find added: And he came even closer to it and underwent it.” The context of the passage is not changed; Xiphilinus has added his own interpretation, however.

Jewish customs and histories. In the first passage, the conflict between the Hasmoneans, Dio finds interest in explaining Jewish customs regarding the worship of their god.

They [the Jews] have been separated from the rest of mankind both in practically every aspect of life to speak of, and especially they honor none of the usual gods, but they worship devoutly one in particular. And nor do they have any statue of him or the other gods in Jerusalem, believing him to be unnamable and invisible, they worship him in the most remarkable way. They built a large and extremely beautiful temple to him, except that it was wide open and roofless, and dedicated [to him] the day called the day of Saturn, upon which they do many most peculiar things, and undertake no serious work.⁵⁹

The Bar Kokhba narrative, preserved in Xiphilinus's epitome, similarly discusses Jewish customs, explicating how Jews felt about the settlement of foreign people and religious practices in Jerusalem.⁶⁰ The retaining of descriptions of Jewish customs by Xiphilinus suggests he attempted to maintain Dio's original, as such descriptions are seemingly consistent with Dio's text. Thus, whatever Xiphilinus's intent in retaining this passage, his exposition on it appears relatively unchanged from Dio's original. This does not necessarily mean that we have Dio's text verbatim, but that Xiphilinus's epitome rather presents these matters within a similar narrative structure, likely retaining what he considered to be the most important elements, while keeping close to Dio's wording. As such, I argue that the epitome of Xiphilinus, and by extension the Bar Kokhba revolt narrative, should be considered a reliable representation of Dio's original text.

Not all scholars agree about the accuracy of Xiphilinus. Yaron Eliav argues that Xiphilinus drastically changed Dio's words.⁶¹ Whereas Millar acknowledged the accuracy and

⁵⁹ Dio 37.17.2-3: κεχωρίδαται δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀνθρώπων ἕς τε τᾶλλα τὰ περὶ τὴν δίαιταν πάνθ' ὡς εἰπεῖν, καὶ μάλισθ' ὅτι τῶν μὲν ἄλλων θεῶν οὐδένα τιμῶσιν, ἓνα δὲ τινὰ ἰσχυρῶς σέβουσιν. οὐδ' ἄγαλμα οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἐν αὐτοῖς ποτε τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις ἔσχον, ἄρρητον δὲ δὴ καὶ ἀειδῆ αὐτὸν νομίζοντες εἶναι περισσότατα ἀνθρώπων θρησκείουσι. καὶ αὐτῶ νεῶν τε μέγιστον καὶ περικαλλέστατον, πλὴν καθ' ὅσον ἀχανῆς τε καὶ ἀνώροφος ἦν, ἐξεποίησαν, καὶ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν τοῦ Κρόνου καλουμένην ἀνέθεσαν, καὶ ἄλλα τε ἐν αὐτῇ ἰδιαίτατα πολλὰ ποιοῦσι, καὶ ἔργου οὐδενὸς σπουδαίου προσάπτονται.

⁶⁰ Dio 69.12.2. Ἰουδαῖοι γὰρ δεινόν τι ποιούμενοι τὸ ἀλλοφύλους τινὰς ἐς τὴν πόλιν σφῶν οἰκισθῆναι καὶ τὸ ἱερὰ ἀλλότρια ἐν αὐτῇ ἰδρυθῆναι. For the Jews, considering it something terrible that some foreign tribes be settled in their city and that alien religious rites be dedicated in the city.

⁶¹ Eliav 1997, 129-30.

similarity of Xiphilinus's work to Dio's original, Eliav remarks on Xiphilinus's reputed carelessness and alterations.⁶² Eliav thus looks at three features of the epitome, concluding that the structural design, vocabulary, and theological tendencies of the passage are more indicative of a Christian writer like Xiphilinus than that of a Roman like Dio.⁶³ I summarize and refute Eliav's arguments as follows:

1) Structure: Eliav argues that the structure of the text is not similar enough to maintain Dio's words. He rightly acknowledges that the construction of a Roman temple on the Temple Mount is what would have disturbed the Jews (ἐς τὸν τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τόπον ναὸν τῷ Διὶ ἔτερον ἀντεγείραντος), but argues that this specific reason is not given in the parallel sentence regarding the Jewish sentiments about their anger (καὶ τὸ ἱερά ἀλλότρια ἐν αὐτῇ ἰδρυθῆναι).⁶⁴ However, I note that as this passage is abridged, it is entirely possible that Xiphilinus did not choose to reiterate the same argument in such short succession. He also argues that the lack of parallelism is seen when the Jewish response does not mention any action occurring on the Temple Mount, which he says the Jews would have seen as reprehensible.⁶⁵ I disagree, noting that where Dio writes καὶ τὸ ἱερά ἀλλότρια ἐν αὐτῇ ἰδρυθῆναι is indicative of parallelism within the Jewish response. Moreover, the Roman actions are both introduced by the preposition ἐς within the genitive absolute, while the Jewish responses to these are found within the accusative-infinitive indirect discourse governed by ποιούμενοι, maintaining parallel structure throughout.

2) Vocabulary: Eliav argues that the verb ἀντεγείρω is a later word, commonly used by the Church fathers in the sense of a religious confrontation. He does note, however, that its use in Roman literature can mean, "to build in opposition," as found in Appian.⁶⁶ As Appian lived roughly a century before Dio, it seems that both authors had familiarity with this verb, however rare it may be in our extant literature. The original meaning, too, was something more akin to "to build instead," rather than that of a religious confrontation as it comes to mean in the patristic authors. And, as demonstrated above, Xiphilinus maintained the original vocabulary, if only changing verb tense in some passages. This word, then, would both fit the meaning in Dio's text and the definition purportedly ascribed to it by Xiphilinus, and we cannot conclude that Xiphilinus added it to the text.

3) Theological Tendencies: Here I agree with Eliav that the wording used to describe the temple (τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ) is more indicative of Jewish or Christian authors than Roman

⁶² Eliav 1997, 131. Brunt 1980, on Xiphilinus as an epitomizer 488-492. 491: "Thus Xiphilinus fails to preserve the proportions of Dio's narratives or to make clear his interpretation of events, and though to an unexpectedly large extent his epitome is a series of excerpts, it simply omits much that Dio must have thought, and rightly, was of importance."

⁶³ Eliav 1997, 142.

⁶⁴ Eliav 1997, 133-34.

⁶⁵ Eliav 1997, 134.

⁶⁶ Eliav 1997, 134-36.

ones, particularly in that a Roman author would be expected to identify the deity.⁶⁷ However, Dio records the monotheism of the Jews earlier, noting its peculiarity.⁶⁸ Having earlier noted this passage as likely being uncorrupted by Xiphilinus, referring to “the temple of the god” in book 69 does not seem out of place for Dio. Dio does not name the Jewish god (instead saying, “whoever he is”⁶⁹), but contrasts it with a temple to Zeus because it is a known, named god.

Xiphilinus, writing for the Byzantine emperor Michael VII during the 1060s CE, undoubtedly edited Dio’s work, perhaps to promote a better understanding of the text for his readers or simply as a result of the abridgment. It does seem, however, that both Millar’s and Mallan’s arguments that Xiphilinus retained passages pertaining to Jews and Judaism because of his religious interests in it and their antiquarianism, respectively, are correct. Both passages, the feud between Aristobolus and Hyrcanus, and the Bar Kokhba revolt suggest as much. Despite Eliav’s arguments, there exists no indication that Xiphilinus’s excerpt on the Bar Kokhba revolt underwent massive, narrative-changing alterations. Rather, Xiphilinus retained the overall narrative structure and vocabulary of Dio’s original work, albeit likely in some abbreviated fashion. Therefore, in the remainder of this chapter, in light of the fact that I find Dio’s account to be generally reliable, I argue that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina constituted the immediate cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

⁶⁷ Eliav 1997, 136-42. For Dio on the temple, see 37.16.1: ἐπί τε γὰρ μετεώρου ἦν καὶ περιβόλω ἰδίῳ ὠχύρωτο, for it was high off the ground and fortified by its own wall, 49.22.5, ὥστε τοὺς προτέρους τοὺς μετὰ τοῦ ἱεροῦ χειρωθέντας, so that those who had been captured earlier along *with the temple*, 65.4-6, ἦν δὲ τρία αὐτοῖς σὺν τῷ τοῦ νεῶ περιβόλω τείχει, it had three walls including the one around *the temple*; on ‘god’, see 37.15.2. See also pp. 143-44 for an appendix of mentions of specific temples in Dio. Mentions of the temple in Jerusalem do not indicate the name of the god.

⁶⁸ Dio 37.15.2: ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ σφετέρου θεοῦ, ὅστις ποτὲ οὗτός ἐστιν; “...on behalf of their god, whoever he is.”

⁶⁹ Dio 37.15.2

2.4: The Foundation of Aelia Capitolina

Let us return to the words of Dio-Xiphilinus. “While Hadrian was present in Egypt and again in Syria they (the Jews) kept quiet...but when he was far off, they openly revolted.”⁷⁰

Dio’s use of the *men/de* construction underscores the stark contrast of Hadrian and the Jews both temporally and geographically. His words also indicate that perhaps some level of planning went into the revolt, either instigated or exacerbated by the foundation of Aelia Capitolina. This preparation may be in response to the increased Roman military presence in Judaea, as detailed above. Nonetheless, if Dio’s reason for the revolt is to be upheld, we must determine the date of the foundation of Aelia Capitolina.

When did Hadrian found Aelia Capitolina? To determine this, I review modern scholarship on the relative dating of the foundation of Aelia Capitolina (before or after the revolt) to conclude that it can be placed before the revolt. I then analyze numismatic and archaeological sources that support this relative dating, and can help date the foundation of Aelia Capitolina to ca. 128-130 CE – before the revolt began in 132 CE.

Dio records the foundation of Aelia Capitolina as a cause of the revolt, which therefore dates it to before the revolt began. “And at Jerusalem he founded a city in place of the one that had been razed to the ground, which he named Aelia Capitolina...War, neither trivial nor short-lived, was set into motion.”⁷¹ There are other ancient authors who connect the foundation of Aelia Capitolina to the Bar Kokhba revolt. In particular, Eusebius identifies it as a punitive measure following the war.

Thus, when the city had reached the point of absence of the Jewish people and the complete ruin of its ancient inhabitants, and having been settled by another race,

⁷⁰ Dio 69.12.2: παρόντος μὲν ἔν τε τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ αὖθις ἐν τῇ Συρίᾳ τοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ ἡσύχαζον... ἐπεὶ δὲ πόρρω ἐγένετο, φανερώς ἀπέστησαν.

⁷¹ Dio 69.12.1: ἐς δὲ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα πόλιν αὐτοῦ ἀντὶ τῆς κατασκαφείσης οἰκίσαντος, ἦν καὶ Αἰλίαν Καπιτωλίαν ὠνόμασε.

thereafter the Roman city which sprung up changed its name, and was called Aelia in honor of the emperor Aelius Hadrian.⁷²

Hugo Mantel argues that Eusebius is correct in his assessment of the causes, that “it was not the decrees [the foundation of Aelia and the ban on circumcision (analyzed in the following chapter)] of Hadrian that caused the Bar Kokhba Revolt, but rather the reverse is true: Hadrian’s decrees constituted a reaction of the Romans to the Jewish revolt.”⁷³ This is unlikely, given the later (relative to Dio) time in which Eusebius is writing and his inherent Christian polemic against Judaism, which he employs to legitimize Christianity. This appears early in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, where he ascribes the destruction of the Second Temple by Vespasian and Titus to divine retribution for the Jews’ crimes against and rejection of Jesus.⁷⁴ Mantel absolves the Romans and Hadrian of any antagonistic act which may have instigated the rebellion, and attributes the entire revolt to the Jews’ “desire for freedom and salvation, which to the Romans and Christians appeared as nothing but a spirit of madness and suicide.”⁷⁵ Eusebius’ polemic against Jews must be taken into consideration, and therefore casts doubt upon the veracity of his writing, especially, as I have noted above, when it comes to punishments inflicted upon the Jews by the Romans.

⁷² Eusebius, *HE*, 4.6.4: οὕτω δὴ τῆς πόλεως εἰς ἐρημίαν τοῦ Ἰουδαίων ἔθνους παντελῆ τε φθορὰν τῶν πάλαι οἰκητόρων ἐλθούσης ἐξ ἀλλοφύλου τε γένους συνοικισθείσης, ἢ μετέπειτα συστάσα Ῥωμαϊκὴ πόλις τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἀμείψασα, εἰς τὴν τοῦ κρατοῦντος Αἰλίου Ἀδριανοῦ τιμὴν Αἰλία προσαγορεύεται.

⁷³ Mantel 1968, 225. This includes a ban on circumcision in the aftermath of the revolt. For my analysis thereof, see the following chapter.

⁷⁴ Eusebius *HE*, 2.6.8. Ἐπὶ τούτοις μυρίας ἄλλας ἐν αὐτοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις κεκινήσθαι νεωτεροποιίας ὁ αὐτὸς ἐμφαίνει, παριστάς ὡς οὐδαμῶς ἐξ ἐκείνου διέλιπον τὴν τε πόλιν καὶ τὴν Ἰουδαίαν ἅπασαν στάσεις καὶ πόλεμοι καὶ κακῶν ἐπάλληλοι μηχαναί, εἰς ὅτε τὸ πανύστατον ἢ κατὰ Οὐεσπασιανὸν αὐτοὺς μετῆλθεν πολιορκία. Ἰουδαίους μὲν οὖν ὧν κατὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τετολμήκασιν, ταύτη πη τὰ ἐκ τῆς θείας μετῆει δίκης. “In addition to these, the same author exhibits many other uprisings that took place in Jerusalem itself, showing how from that time seditions and wars and contrivances of evils happening one after the other did not spare Jerusalem nor all Judaea, to the point when Vespasian’s siege finally punished them. Thus the vengeance of justice from God came upon the Jews for that which they had dared [to do] against Christ.”

⁷⁵ Mantel 1968, 277-78. To absolve the Romans of any instigating act goes against the general role of Rome in provincial rebellions. See chapter 3 for an analysis of provincial revolts and their relation to the Bar Kokhba revolt.

Other scholars maintain that Hadrian founded Aelia Capitolina before the revolt. Dio's own words imply that Hadrian visited Provincia Judaea between 128 – 130 CE before continuing on to Egypt and finally Athens. It was during this visit that, as Martin Goodman puts it, “[Hadrian] put into operation his final solution for Jewish rebelliousness,” dating the foundation of Aelia Capitolina to 130 CE.⁷⁶ He concludes this on the continuation of Flavian policies under Trajan (whose own father owed his status to Vespasian) and subsequently Hadrian.⁷⁷ Especially after the Diaspora Revolts of 115-117 CE, an official governmental position to stamp out the Jews and their purported factious nature would make sense, with the implication that the construction of Aelia would fulfill that goal. Hadrian's presence in Judaea around 130 CE thus represents the most likely date for the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, as I will show below.

With it more likely that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina occurred before the revolt, the archaeological evidence must be analyzed, of which the numismatic material provides the best support to date the founding of Aelia Capitolina to before the revolt.⁷⁸ Hadrian visited Provincia Judaea during his tour of the eastern provinces, at least some time before the construction of *colonia* Aelia Capitolina began, and during which time he likely planned its construction.⁷⁹ Leo Mildenberg argues that two *sestertii* of Hadrian's *adventus* coinage indicate such. The reverses of these coins feature the inscription ADVENTVI AVG IVDAEAE and a personification of Judaea. It seems unlikely that Hadrian would have issued coins celebrating his *adventus* in Judaea after the Bar Kokhba revolt with the provincial name Judaea featured heavily on them; if

⁷⁶ Goodman 2003, 28; Horbury 2014, 308-311 agrees with 130 CE as a founding date. Goodman's terminology intentionally invokes the Holocaust; the aftermath of the revolt certainly shares in a disastrous end. For more on Hadrian and his provincial tours, see Anthony Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁷⁷ Goodman 2003, 26. See Boatwright 2000, 196-203 for a dating of 129-30 CE foundation. She also points out the Roman-ness of the new *colonia* and its blatant anti-Jewish archaeology and imagery.

⁷⁸ For more on using coins to analyze aspects of identity, see Christopher Howgego, “Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces,” in *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces*, eds. Christopher Howgego, Volker Heuchert, and Andrew Burnett (Oxford: OUP 2005).

⁷⁹ Goodman 2003, 28.

anything, the province would be called Syria Palestina on the coins,⁸⁰ the new name of the province after the revolt. I know of no such coins issued under Hadrian.

While Hadrian was assuredly in Judaea prior to the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, the aforementioned coins do not date its foundation. Two bronze coins, found in 1998 by Hanan Eshel and Boaz Zissu, lend support to a pre-revolt founding of Aelia Capitolina. These new coins, found in their original contexts along with 14 more from the same find spot, provide evidence that Rome was minting Aelia Capitolina coins before the Bar Kokhba revolt began. This hoard was discovered in the el-Jai cave at Wadi Suweinit,⁸¹ located northeast of Jerusalem. Eshel and Zissu acknowledge that the coins must have been minted before 135 CE because they were found and likely deposited with four Bar Kokhba coins dated to the second year of the revolt, ca. 133/134 CE.⁸² This indicates that these coins could have been minted as late as 134 CE. This also represents the earliest possible date of deposition of the coins - the second year (133/134 CE) of the Bar Kokhba revolt, and prevents them from securely dating the minting of the Aelia Capitolina coins to before the revolt began.⁸³ The terminus ante quem for the striking of these Aelia Capitolina is thus ca. 133/134 CE.

They describe the coins as follows:⁸⁴

1. Obv: Bust of Hadrian; inscription: IMP CAES TR[AI HADRIANO AVG PP].
Rev: Hadrian, ploughing with bull and cow; inscription: COL AEL KA[PIT] [CO]ND.
2. Obv: Bust of Hadrian; inscription: IMP CAES TR HAD AVG.
Rev: Bust of Sabina; inscription: SABIN AVGVS.

⁸⁰ Mildenberg 1984, 97-8. See also Mattingly 1966, 493-94, nos. 1655-1661.

⁸¹ Eshel and Zissu 2000, 168. Kindler 2000, 176-77 n.5 notes that Sabina, who died in 137 CE, is still given the title of Augusta, not Diva, so the coin must predate 137 CE. In addition, its discovery with the Bar Kokhba hoard limits its minting to 135 CE, the end of the revolt.

⁸² For more on the Bar Kokhba revolt coinage and its uses in dating and determining the causes of the revolt, see below.

⁸³ Eshel and Zissu 2000, 173. Tsafir 2003, 34-36.

⁸⁴ Eshel and Zissu 2000, 172.

They argue that if Aelia Capitolina was founded before the outbreak of war, we should find Bar Kokhba coins overstruck Aelia Capitolina ones.⁸⁵ While the symbolism of such an act is undeniably strong, I argue that striking Bar Kokhba coins over any existing Roman coinage would function as well and would have ultimately the same, if not a somewhat muted, effect. In addition, their argument presupposes that all Aelia Capitolina foundation coins were struck at Aelia Capitolina itself. Neither coin detailed above, however, indicates exactly where it was struck. Indeed, it is doubtful that every city in antiquity would have had its own mint. If Rome wanted to celebrate the foundation of a *colonia* (Aelia Capitolina), minting coins would be a top priority with respect to propaganda, whether or not they did so at that exact site. Moreover, I agree with Eshel and Zissu's argument that it would have taken some time to construct a mint. To be sure, infrastructure and temples would have been of greater importance, and the minting of foundation coins could have taken place at an already established nearby mint, such as Alexandria or Antioch,⁸⁶ and brought to Aelia Capitolina and its vicinity for circulation upon completion.

Arie Kindler suggests that two features allow us to date the minting of the coins to before the outbreak of the revolt: the shape of Hadrian's portrait and the obverse legend. He notes that Hadrian appears more similar to Trajan in Hadrian's earlier coins. Until ca. 130 CE, he is depicted with a flatter head, which gives him a narrow and thin face as opposed to the fuller, thicker face consistent with coins from the latter half of his rule. This feature, as noted by

⁸⁵ Eshel and Zissu 2000, 173. Tsafirir (2003, 35) agrees with Eshel and Zissu that these coins do not necessarily mean that Aelia Capitolina was founded before the outbreak of war: "If we assume that Hadrian established a colony in 130 CE, but the mint started to function only during the war (it took some time to complete the building and organization of the city's mint), the chances of finding a Bar Kokhba coin minted on a brand new Aelia Capitolina coin are very small." contra. Kindler 2000, 177: "Traces of Gaza and Ascalon have been found (though scarce) overstruck by Bar Kokhba."

⁸⁶ Howgego 1995, 28-9 on cities sharing dies. 30 "In addition to Rome, the mints of Alexandria and Antioch also struck silver coinage for other provinces in the east." I see no reason why a similar situation could not exist for bronze coins.

Kindler, appears in other imperial and provincial coinage from cities in the eastern provinces likely issued during Hadrian's tour of the eastern provinces, including Tiberias and Petra.⁸⁷ As for the obverse legend, Trajan's name disappears from it by 134 CE, with it being phased out beginning in 128 CE.⁸⁸ Kindler discusses one more coin, with a bust of Hadrian on the obverse and the Capitoline triad on the reverse, inscribed with COL AEL KAP (*colonia Aelia Capitolina*). All three of the coins mentioned have the flattened head of Hadrian and include Trajan's name in the obverse legend, thereby giving them a terminus ante quem of 134 CE.⁸⁹ Given that the Aelia Capitolina coins found among the Wadi Suweinit hoard contain the elements of Hadrianic numismata expected of an earlier date (the flattened head of Hadrian and Trajan's name in the obverse legend), and both reverse legends refer to the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, it suggests a minting of between 128-130 CE, right around the time at which Hadrian visited the site.

Archaeological evidence supporting a pre-revolt founding of Aelia is not limited to coins. A recent study of the archaeological finds under the eastern *cardo* of Aelia Capitolina by Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah finds evidence of a terminus post quem of the construction to the beginning of Hadrian's reign. Weksler-Bdolah suggests that Hadrian decided to found this colony upon his accession, although the actual construction likely began sometime later.⁹⁰ She concludes this through the analysis of the findings, the latest dated of which are a Hadrianic coin and a potsherd

⁸⁷ Kindler 2000, 177; Mattingly 1965, cxxii. pp. 493-4, 512 for coins from Judaea, pl. 92.8, 92.9, 95.3. Kindler 2000, 178 on date of provincial coinage. It is suggested that once Hadrian had been in power long enough, he no longer had to rest upon Trajan's laurels, and thus the change in depiction. I would also propose, although difficult to determine, that the later pictures of Hadrian are consistent with an older Hadrian.

⁸⁸ Kindler 2000, 177-78. Mattingly 1965, cx-clxxxvi on an introduction to Hadrian's coins. Cxxii on the size of Hadrian's head; p. 373-74 for examples of the change in legend.

⁸⁹ Kindler 2000, 179.

⁹⁰ Weksler-Bdolah 2014, 55-57. If her hypothesis is correct, it lends credence to the suggestion of prior unrest in Judaea and the preparations of war, and perhaps the revolt would not break out until actual construction began.

from the first third of the second century CE.⁹¹ She furthers this hypothesis through the presence of a Roman dump beneath the *cardo*, which contained pottery associated with Legio X Fretensis and an abundance of pig bones.⁹² As the Tenth Legion had already been encamped at Jerusalem by the time of the revolt, the foundation of Aelia Capitolina likely dates, in her opinion, to before the Bar Kokhba revolt.⁹³

In addition, several scholars attribute Hadrian's alleged proposed, but ultimately reneged, reconstruction of the Jewish temple as a cause of the revolt. They claim that instead of the Jewish temple, a Roman one was built in its place.⁹⁴ While Dio states that the construction of a temple to Jupiter in Aelia Capitolina contributed to the revolt, neither archaeological evidence, nor a non-rabbinic literary source corroborates its existence. The rabbinic sources, as I have mentioned above, cannot be considered historiographical works, and therefore do not preserve a reliable representation of events.⁹⁵ The construction of Aelia Capitolina as a *colonia*, complete with Roman temples and statuary throughout,⁹⁶ would have likely obviated the possibility of temple

⁹¹ Weksler-Bdolah 2014, 49-50.

⁹² Weksler-Bdolah 2014, 54-56.

⁹³ Kindler 2000, 179; Mildenberg 1984, 99-101. While Mildenberg accepts the foundation of Aelia Capitolina to before the revolt, he (102-109) cites Hadrian's ban on circumcision as the leading cause for revolt. I refute this argument in the following chapter. Isaac 1992, 353-54 argues that the construction of Aelia took quite some time, as there is more evidence for construction under Antoninus Pius than Hadrian. It is possible that the Bar Kokhba revolt delayed the construction. For more archaeological evidence of the insurgents in their hiding places, see Y. Yadin, *The Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters*, Jerusalem 1963.

⁹⁴ For hypotheses on the location of this Capitoline temple, see: Yaron Eliav, "The Urban Layout of Aelia Capitolina: A New View from the Perspective of the Temple Mount," in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered*, ed. Peter Schäfer. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen (2003). Eliav situates the Temple Mount outside the limits of Aelia and the Capitoline temple north of the forum; Nicole Belayche, "Du Mont du Temple au Golgotha: le Capitole de la colonie d'*Aelia Capitolina*." *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 214: 2014, 387-413. She situates the temple at Golgotha.

⁹⁵ The most commonly used source to argue for this is Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* 64:10, although its late date c. 5th CE and vagueness have led some to see it as coming from Julian's "the Apostate" (r. 361-363) decision to rebuild the temple, which ultimately failed. See also Rubenstein 2002, 61, for a brief overview of this midrash.

⁹⁶ The founding of a Roman city or colony brought with it many of the following architectural structures: *fora*, *basilicae*, temples, theaters and amphitheaters, baths, and walls. Arnould-Béhar (2005, 87-89) discusses two theories of this new city: that Hadrian modeled it entirely as a Roman city, or that the new colony was moved. For the purposes of this paper, the difference between theories does not matter; I hold that any foundation of a Roman *colonia* would have brought with it structures typical of Roman cities, and any desire to rebuild the temple inside the *pomerium* of the new city would have been suppressed. See also idem, "Remarques sur la place et la fonction de la

reconstruction, particularly within the *pomerium* of the new city.⁹⁷ This lack of reconstruction ought to be considered an effect of the foundation of a Roman *colonia*, and not as a separate cause of the war. The construction of Aelia Capitolina, then, marked a complete loss of Jerusalem and possibility for the reconstruction of the Jewish temple, prompting Bar Kokhba and his loyalists to revolt.

2.5: The Jewish Response to Aelia Capitolina

The foundation of Aelia Capitolina before the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba revolt does not necessarily indicate that it caused the revolt. Analyses of the inscriptions and symbols on the Bar Kokhba revolt coinage will help elucidate the Jewish response to the causes. I will show that these verify the argument that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina was the immediate cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

Under the leadership of Bar Kokhba, the Jews minted their own coins by striking their own symbols and slogans over the existing Roman coins. Ya'akov Meshorer hypothesizes that this was done to rid the Jewish world of Roman influence: namely, the emperor, Roman culture, and Roman religion.⁹⁸ The coins overstruck by Bar Kokhba feature phrases and symbols consistent with a war caused in part by the foundation of a Roman city over Jerusalem, and are inscribed in Hebrew as such:⁹⁹ “Year one of Israel’s redemption” and “Jerusalem.”¹⁰⁰ Much as the Roman coins celebrating the foundation of Aelia Capitolina could be used for propaganda,

porte de Damas (porte Romaine) dans la cité d’Aelia Capitolina,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 114: (179-183) 1998.

⁹⁷ For more on foreign religious rites and the *pomerium*, especially of Rome, see below.

⁹⁸ Meshorer 2001, 137. He notes that there were different techniques in reworking bronze and silver coins. Bronze coins could be rubbed down, whereas silver coins had to be hammered and the rims reworked because rubbing them would reduce the amount of precious metal in the coin. That these coins could not be used outside of Bar Kokhba’s territory is evidence of their symbolic importance. This is not the only instance of revolts minting their own coins in an independence movement: the First Revolt (66-70 CE), Meshorer compares aspects of each coinage, p. 66; the rebels during the Social War (91-87 BCE) also minted their own coins.

⁹⁹ The importance of Hebrew on the coins is discussed in detail below.

¹⁰⁰ Meshorer 2001, 140.

the Bar Kokhba coins likely functioned similarly. Thus, inscribing “Jerusalem” on the coins could have been used to emphasize the revolt’s aims to other Jews not intimately associated with the revolt leadership and perhaps to persuade others to join the revolt through the use and circulation of the coins. As coins were widely used, stating the goals of the revolt on them would have likely been the quickest way to spread it among the people without divulging plans for the revolt to Romans, especially as they most likely did not know Hebrew. Moreover, the inscription “Jerusalem” surrounds a depiction of the temple façade (discussed below), suggesting, as Meshorer correctly argues, “that Bar Kokhba’s primary ideal was to conquer the city and rebuild it and its Temple,”¹⁰¹ and supports the argument that the founding of Aelia Capitolina was the cause of the revolt. For if Jerusalem still existed, or Aelia Capitolina had not been founded atop the ruins of Jerusalem, it seems unlikely that its representation on the revolt coinage would have been necessary. From the outset of the revolt, then, the recapture of Jerusalem and its de-Romanization appear to be the main goal.

Coins from the second through fourth years of the revolt have what some scholars have identified as a star above the temple façade, although note its similarity to a plus sign or flower. Some have identified it with Bar Kokhba’s identification as the messiah, whereas others suggest it was merely decorative.¹⁰² The use of *nasi* (prince) as a title and the corresponding passages from Lamentations Rabbah 2:2-4 indicates that there may have been a belief in Bar Kokhba as the messiah. In Lamentations Rabbah, Rabbi Akiva proclaims Bar Kokhba the messiah due to Akiva’s reading of Numbers 24:17 (“There shall come forth a star out of Jacob”), whereas Rabbi

¹⁰¹ Meshorer 2001, 143; Mildenberg 1984, 29-31 on the legends of the coins through the years of the revolt. “To the Jews, the Temple and “Jerusalem” – picture and word – together signified: this was our Temple in Jerusalem and this it must once again be.”

¹⁰² Meshorer 2001, 152-54, 58; Mildenberg 1984, 43-5 opts for decorative. Muesham 1966, 39-41 prefers not to interpret it; she notes that it may have been inspired by a symbol on the gates to the temple. This would further the argument that the revolt was in part temple-based.

Yohanan interprets his name “Kokhba” (“star”), as “Koziba” (“liar”) and dismisses Bar Kokhba as the messiah because of the revolt’s failure.¹⁰³ Schäfer rightly emphasizes that this does not provide any historical information about the relationship between Rabbi Akiva and Bar Kokhba,¹⁰⁴ and its late date allowed its redactors to disregard any messianic fervor because of the revolt’s failure and therefore discredit any claims of Bar Kokhba as the messiah. Although difficult to determine the true nature of this symbol on the coins, the symbol’s identification as a star would lend credence to the messianic fervor and religious aspect of the revolt, which likely included a desire for temple reconstruction.

An inscription on a coin by itself is not enough to support the claim that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina was the cause of the revolt, but further symbols on the coins support this claim. All these symbols can be said to have distinctly Jewish meanings or relate to Jerusalem in some way. Most prominent among them is the temple façade, suggesting that in addition to reclaiming Jerusalem, they desired to reestablish the temple or remove Roman objects from the Temple Mount. Although these coins cannot verify Dio’s claim that a temple to Jupiter was built atop the Temple Mount, they do imply that the establishment of Aelia Capitolina may have prevented the reconstruction of the Jewish temple.

Other symbols included the *lulav* (palm frond)¹⁰⁵ and *etrog* (citron).¹⁰⁶ Also depicted on the coins were vessels that would commonly be found in the temple, including the flagon,

¹⁰³ Midrash Lamentations Rabbah 58: *Parashah* 2:2:4-6. “Rabbi would interpret the verse, “There shall come forth a star out of Jacob” (Num. 24:17) in this way: “Do not read the letters of the word for ‘star’ as ‘star’ but as ‘deceit.’” When R. Aqiba saw Bar Koziba, he said, “This is they royal messiah.” R. Yohanan b. Torta said to him, “Aqiba, grass will grow from your cheeks and he will still not have come.” R. Yohanan interpreted the verse, “The voice is the voice of Jacob” (Gen 27:22) in this way: “The voice is the voice of Caesar Hadrian, who killed eighty thousand myriads of people at Betar.” trans. Neusner.

¹⁰⁴ Akiva lived c. 40 – c. 135 CE, accordingly executed by the Romans for his role in the Bar Kokhba revolt. A leading rabbi of his time, many rabbis to whom the redaction of the Mishnah and later rabbinic works are attributed arose from his school.

¹⁰⁵ The date palm frond (or the bound collection of the four species shaken together during the festival of Sukkot (Tabernacles), including the willow, myrtle and *etrog*)

amphora, and musical instruments (harp and lyre), and palm trees, vines, and wreaths.¹⁰⁷ The religious and nationalistic importance of these symbols would not have been lost upon Jews, particularly the temple façade, the *lulav*, and *etrog*. The palm tree was often used on Roman coins to symbolize Judaea, such as with the *Judaea capta* coins of Vespasian and on those celebrating Nerva's abolishment of the severity of the *fiscus Judaicus*. It appears that Bar Kokhba appropriated it to emphasize and promote the goals of the movement, which appears to be the establishment of an independent Jewish state, to those familiar with images of Roman provincial coinage.¹⁰⁸

By the second and third years of the revolt, inscriptions on the Bar Kokhba coins had changed from “the redemption of Israel” to “for the freedom of Israel” and “for the freedom of Jerusalem.”¹⁰⁹ This remains consistent with the desire to liberate Jerusalem from Roman control. Moreover, the inscriptions on the coins appear entirely in the ancient paleo-Hebrew script, not the common Hebrew-Aramaic characters of the day, and especially not in Greek or Latin.¹¹⁰ The importance of Hebrew and Aramaic used in the revolt is evident in the Bar Kokhba letters. For example, in *P. Yadin 52* a certain Soumaios explains that he writes in the Greek script because he cannot write in Hebrew or Aramaic,¹¹¹ whereas the overwhelming majority of the letters are written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Thus, these would likely be unintelligible to all but a select few, and especially to Romans, furthering the argument that the rebellion was focused on creating an

¹⁰⁶ A large citron fruit, likely originally native to Judaea, that is shaken with the *lulav* during the festival of Sukkot.

¹⁰⁷ Meshorer 2001, 143-51; Mildenberg 1984, 31-48. For images of the Bar Kokhba coins, see Meshorer 2001, p. 340-48, plates 64-72, coins 218-310. For more on Jewish symbols and their meanings, see *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* in 13 v., Erwin Goodenough, New York 1953. An abridged edition, edited by Jacob Neusner, was published in 1988, and more recently updated in 2014. See Muesham, *Coin and Temple*, 1966, for analysis of architecture on Jewish coins.

¹⁰⁸ Meshorer 2001, 149-50. He notes that the palm always has 7 or 9 branches on the Bar Kokhba coins, emphasizing the importance of the number seven in Judaism.

¹⁰⁹ Meshorer 2001, 151-63; Mildenberg 1984, 30-1.

¹¹⁰ Meshorer 2001, 163; Mildenberg 1984, 69-72. The Paleo-Hebrew script had long since fallen by the wayside; its use on the coins, then, represents Bar Kokhba's assertion of an independent Jewish state.

¹¹¹ Hannah M. Cotton, 2002 in *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters*, 351-58.

independent Jewish state. The Bar Kokhba coins represent the war entirely as one to take back Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, supporting the idea that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina and absence or lack of reconstruction of the temple caused the revolt.

2.6: Conclusion

Having established that Hadrian was undeniably in Judaea around 130 CE, and that Aelia Capitolina was founded before the outbreak of the revolt, is it possible to confirm the foundation of Aelia Capitolina as the immediate cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt? It is my belief that the decision to found Aelia Capitolina over Jerusalem and the suppression of Jewish cultural and religious institutions (particularly the temple) that entailed was the final factor in inciting the revolt after nearly a decade's unrest between Jews and Romans in Judaea. To say that it is the sole cause would be incorrect, but it can be viewed as the immediate impetus.¹¹² The reign of Hadrian coincided with the decision to move additional troops into Judaea, perhaps in response to the diaspora revolts, to prevent similar actions in Judaea, or more likely as a response to ongoing unrest. At any rate, it appears that this was not well received, and the Jews made plans to rebel, furnishing the Romans with shoddy weapons. Hadrian's decision to found Aelia Capitolina, then, likely finalized the plans for sedition. By all indications, Dio's words ring true, even if Xiphilinus did abridge them, as "war, neither trivial nor short-lived, was set into motion." The introduction of Roman rites and the loss of hope for the restoration of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem intensified any ill feelings against the Romans harbored by the Jews at the time.

¹¹² Horbury 2014, 311, 316. emphasis my own. "The original plans to admit new aliens and their cults, and perhaps at the same time to omit any reconstruction of the Jewish temple, would have been made known about the year 130 and would have constituted a *provocation* to many Jews and to some in the now fairly significant Judaeen Christian community, the announcement of the foundation of Aelia seems, therefore, to have the best claim to be considered the immediate occasion of the revolt."

CHAPTER 3: Cutting Out the Ban on Circumcision

3.1: Introduction

Nearly two centuries after Cassius Dio, another Roman author attributed the cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt to a singular specific event. The unknown author of the *Vita Hadriani* within the *Historia Augusta* states:

At this time, the Jews were moved to war, because they were prohibited from mutilating their genitals.¹¹³

Based on this passage, scholars have argued that a ban on circumcision enacted by Hadrian was the immediate cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Scholars who assign value to the *Historia Augusta* find support in Justinian's *Digest*, in which Antoninus Pius (r. 138-161) is accredited with overturning Hadrian's ban on circumcision.

It is permitted for the Jews to circumcise only their own sons by rescript of divine Pius; he who should do this [circumcise] on one not of the same religion, the penalty of the castrator shall be imposed.¹¹⁴

Thus, Pius's rescript is often used as evidence to support the historicity of Hadrian's supposed ban on circumcision, as the rescript appears to have reversed Hadrian's decision. As I shall argue, however, a ban on circumcision did not lead to the Bar Kokhba revolt. Rather, as I will show, it is highly unlikely that Hadrian enacted such a ban on circumcision.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *SHA* vita Hadrian. 14.2: Moverunt ea tempestate et Iudaei bellum, quod vetabantur mutilare genitalia.

¹¹⁴ *Digest* 48.8.11: Modestinus libro sexton regularum: Circumcidere Iudaeis filios suos tantum rescripto divi Pii permittitur: in non eiusdem religionis qui hoc fecerit, castrantis poena irrogatur.

¹¹⁵ There are a number of ancient authors that refer to circumcision being practiced by Egyptians (and in particular their priests), Jews, and other Semitic and Near Eastern peoples. A universal ban, then, could extend to cover all those living within the boundaries of the empire. The earliest reference comes from Herodotus 2.104.3: Φοίνικες δὲ καὶ Σύριοι οἱ ἐν τῇ Παλαιστίνῃ καὶ αὐτοὶ ὁμολογεῖσιν παρ' Αἰγυπτίων μεμαθηκέναι, Σύριοι δὲ οἱ περὶ Θερμώδοντα καὶ Παρθένιον ποταμὸν καὶ Μάκρωνες οἱ τοῦτοις ἀστυγείτονες ἐόντες ἀπὸ Κόλχων φασὶ νεωστὶ μεμαθηκέναι. οὗτοι γὰρ εἰσὶ οἱ περιταμνόμενοι ἀνθρώπων μόνοι, καὶ οὗτοι Αἰγυπτίοισι φαίνονται ποιεῦντες κατὰ ταῦτά. "The Phoenicians and Syrians in Palestine agree that they learned [circumcision] from the Egyptians, and the Syrians by the Thermodon and Parthenion river and their neighbors Macrones say that they learned it recently from the Colchians. For these are the only people who circumcise, and they seem to do just as the Egyptians." Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.5.2) too indicates that the Jews adopted circumcision from the Egyptians: circumcidere genitalia instituerunt ut diversitate noscantur...e more Aegyptio. "They decided to circumcise their genitals so that they would be

3.2: Reliability and Analysis of the Sources

3.2.1: *Historia Augusta*

Written centuries after the revolt, the *Historia Augusta* (*HA*) is even further removed from the Bar Kokhba war than Dio. Scholars have noted that “because the *HA* preserves both genuine and spurious material, it poses especially difficult historical problems.”¹¹⁶ Sorting out the reliable information from that which is unreliable can be a complex task. In this chapter, I focus on *HA*’s claim that the Bar Kokhba revolt was sparked by a ban on circumcision enacted by Hadrian and demonstrate that it is based on unreliable information and claims.

While scholars initially held *HA* to be the work of six authors, it is now broadly understood to have been written by one author, composed between 395-400 CE.¹¹⁷ As Mark Thomson explains, this unknown author may have drawn upon the same source material as Dio given the numerous similarities between the two texts – although this does not include the cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt.¹¹⁸ In light of the fact that Dio and *HA* likely shared a source, and given the war’s importance and devastating impact on the Romans, one would expect the two texts to agree on the revolt’s causes. While Dio’s account appears to be reliable (see my discussion in Chapter 1), we must nevertheless at least consider the possibility that there may be some veracity

recognized by their difference...from the Egyptian custom.” While Tacitus is referring to burial rites follow Egyptian practices, it seems that everything preceding it in the paragraph would fit this explanation. For a brief summary of ancient circumcision see Jack M. Sasson, “Circumcision in the Ancient Near East,” *JBL* 85: 1966, p. 473-76; Feldman 1994, 153-55.

¹¹⁶ Thomson 2012, 7-8. f. 6-9 on Hadrian. I refer the reader to Thomson 2012, 20-53 for compelling arguments regarding the above authorship and dating.

¹¹⁷ Thomson 2012, 7 n. 7.

¹¹⁸ Thomson 2012, 8-9, n. 14-17 for parallels. Two brief examples: Hadrian never covered his while traveling: Dio 69.9.4 οὐδὲ τὴν κεφαλὴν οὐκ ἐν θάλπει, οὐκ ἐν ρίγει ἐκαλύφθη, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ταῖς χιόσι ταῖς Κελτικαῖς καὶ ἐν τοῖς καύμασι τοῖς Αἰγυπτιακοῖς γυμνῆ αὐτῆ περιήει, “He covered his head neither in heat nor cold, but even in Celtic snows and Egyptian summers he went about with it bare.” *HA* 23.1 Peragratis sane omnibus orbis partibus capite nudo et in summis plerumque imbribus atque frigoribus in morbum incidit lectualem, “After going through nearly the whole world with his head bare, both in the worst storms and frosts he fell ill.” He preferred Antimachus to Homer and tried to imitate him: Dio 69.4.6 τὸν γοῦν Ὅμηρον καταλύων Ἀντίμαχον ἀντ’ αὐτοῦ ἐσήγεν, “He abolished Homer and introduced Antimachus instead of him.” *HA* 16.2 Catacannas libros obscurissimos Antimachum imitando scripsit, “He wrote Catacannae, a most obscure work by imitating Antimachus.”

to *HA*'s claims that the Jews revolted solely because they were prohibited from mutilating their genitals.

Nevertheless, there are a number of examples that suggest an anti-Jewish agenda within *HA*. Scholars have noted *HA*'s similarity to the contemporaneous Christian author John Chrysostom (c. 349-407 CE), who also links circumcision to genital mutilation.¹¹⁹ Aharon Oppenheimer argues that *HA*'s statement that the Jews revolted because they were forbidden to mutilate their genitals purposely paints the Jews in an unfavorable and bizarre light,¹²⁰ as distinct from the general populace.¹²¹ Moreover, the claim that a ban on circumcision caused the revolt is not found in any other extant evidence that deals specifically with the revolt, prompting the question of the source of *HA*'s information. This statement, and that within the *Life of Elagabalus*, the biography of Emperor Elagabalus (r. 218-222 CE) within *HA*, which mocks Jewish dietary customs by claiming that Elagabalus tried to induce Jews to eat ostrich, a non-kosher food, may indicate that the author held biases against Jews and Judaism. *HA* perhaps sought to refrain from legitimizing the revolt and the destruction that it caused by further disparaging Jews and Judaism.¹²² Isaac notes that *HA* contains slurs against the Jews with those from the biographies of Hadrian and Elagabalus constituting the best examples.¹²³ It should also

¹¹⁹ Isaac 1998, 278. John Chrysostom, *Homilia adversus Judaeos*, PG 48, co. 845 (quoting Paul, *Philippians* 3.2: βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν. ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἐσμὲν ἢ περιτομή, οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες... "Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil doers, look out for the mutilated. For we are the circumcision, those who serve god in spirit...")

¹²⁰ Oppenheimer 2003, 55-6. Isaac 2004, 473-4. He expresses the sentiment that the author believes the rebellion to be ridiculous – who revolts because they cannot mutilate their genitals?

¹²¹ Oppenheimer 2003, 56 notes further instances of this within *HA*. Within the *Life of Elagabalus*, Jews are mocked for their food customs. *HA Heliogabalus* 28.4: Struthocamelos exhibit in cenis aliquotiens, dicens praeceptum Iudeis, ut ederent. "Sometimes at feasts he served ostriches, saying that Jews had been commanded to eat them." Ostriches (struthocamelos), however, are not kosher, as indicated by Leviticus 11:16 and Deuteronomy 14:15. In addition, the knowledge of Jewish abstention from pig was well known.

¹²² It should not go without notice that *HA* was composed when Christianity was flourishing. Due to lack of evidence, I cannot make this argument, but it seems possible that the author had pro-Christian tendencies or was himself Christian.

¹²³ Isaac 1998, 276-78. "The first passage about Elagabalus and the ostriches simply makes the point that Jewish dietary laws are ridiculous, while the reference to the Bar Kokhba war reinforces the image of Jews, among other

be noted that *HA* situates the revolt anachronistically within the chronology of Hadrian's life; Hadrian has not yet left Egypt for Greece, and his movements in *HA* do not correspond with the time frame of the revolt. As a result, it appears doubtful as to whether *HA*'s account of the ban on circumcision is reliable or whether its author had ulterior motives and biases when it came to his discussions of Jews and Judaism.

3.2.2: *Digest*

While the unreliability of *HA* gives us pause, little reason exists to think that laws pertaining to Jews found in the *Digest* are anything less than authentic. The *Digest*, compiled under Justinian from 529-533 CE, was open to alterations, additions, and deletions by its editors to avoid repetitions and contractions.¹²⁴ This was carried out on the orders of Justinian to maintain the jurists' arguments and sense of the original law, and there is little evidence to suggest that the compilers introduced new or anachronistic laws into the *Digest*. How one today deciphers the intent behind the original promulgation of the law can differ, though. As such, I wish to analyze two aspects concerning *Digest* 48.8.11, Pius's rescript.¹²⁵ The first is the penalty associated with castration. In an earlier section of *Digest* 48.8, we learn that Hadrian banned castration, punishing those that practiced it with penalties defined by the *lex Cornelia de sicariis*:¹²⁶ deportation to a somewhat inhospitable island and the confiscation of one's

eastern peoples, as being both capricious and seditious." Contra Syme 1971, 26-7. For all the instances of Jews and Judaism within the *HA*, see Stern GLAJJ v.2.

¹²⁴ Honoré 2010, 13. Honoré, who has written extensively on the *Digest*, has argued the above. Linder 1987, 50.

¹²⁵ *Digest* 48.8.11: Modestinus libro sexton regularum: Circumcidere Iudaeis filios suos tantum rescripto divi Pii permittitur: in non eiusdem religionis qui hoc fecerit, castrantis poena irrogatur. It is permitted for the Jews to circumcise only their own sons by rescript of divine Pius; he who should do this [circumcise] on one not of the same religion, the penalty of the castrator shall be imposed.

¹²⁶ *Digest* 48.8.4.2. Idem divus hadrianus rescripsit: "constitutum quidem est, ne spadones fierent, eos autem, qui hoc crimine arguerentur, corneliae legis poena teneri eorumque bona merito fisco meo vindicari debere, sed et in servos, qui spadones fecerint, ultimo supplicio animadvertendum esse: et qui hoc crimine tenentur, si non adfuerint, de absentibus quoque, tamquam lege cornelia teneantur, pronuntiandum esse. plane si ipsi, qui hanc iniuriam passi sunt, proclamaverint, audire eos praeses provinciae debet, qui virilitatem amiserunt: nemo enim liberum servumve

property.¹²⁷ This general ban on castration is often understood to include circumcision, but it is significant that the authors chose to use *castrare* and *excidere* (to castrate) instead of *circumcidere* (to circumcise).¹²⁸ Moreover, the law is explicitly designed to prevent the creation of eunuchs, *spadones*, as it says in the opening line.¹²⁹ As by definition a eunuch is a castrated man, nothing in the language of the law indicates a desire to suppress circumcision per se – either against Jews only or anyone else.

The second aspect pertaining to Hadrian’s supposed ban on circumcision is the fact that Pius issued a rescript allowing Jews to circumcise their own sons. A rescript was a written reply from the Emperor providing his decision and clarification on an existing law or mandate, particularly a difficult or confusing one, that was questioned by a government official.¹³⁰ Thus, Pius’s rescript was a response to someone (likely a governor or high-ranking provincial

invitum sinentemve castrare debet, neve quis se sponte castrandum praebere debet. at si quis adversus edictum meum fecerit, medico quidem, qui exciderit, capitale erit, item ipsi qui se sponte excidendum praebuit”.

“The same Divine Hadrian wrote in a rescript: “It is established, to stop the making of eunuchs, that those who are found guilty of this crime, be held to the penalty of the *lex Cornelia* and that their goods be deservedly assumed into my treasury. But slaves who would make eunuchs of other slaves must be given capital punishment. And those who are held on this charge, should they not appear [in court], it must be pronounced even in their absence as though they were held under the *lex Cornelia*. Certainly if those who have suffered this injury should proclaim [so], it is necessary that the governor of the province hear those who have lost their manhood. For no one ought to castrate [another], either free or slave, willing or unwilling, nor should anyone ought to offer himself willingly to be castrated. And if anyone should act against my edict, even the doctor who cut will be punished capitally, as is the same for those who offered themselves willingly for cutting.””

¹²⁷ *Digest* 48.8.3.5. *Legis corneliae de sicariis et veneficis poena insulae deportatio est et omnium bonorum ademptio. sed solent hodie capite puniri, nisi honestiore loco positi fuerint, ut poenam legis sustineant: humiliores enim solent vel bestiis subici, altiores vero deportantur in insulam.*

“The penalty of the *lex cornelia* for murders and poisoners is deportation to an island the confiscation of all one’s goods. But nowadays capital punishment is customary, except for those of too high a rank to be held to the penalty of the law; for those of lower rank are accustomed to be thrown to the beasts, while their betters are deported to an island.” When Ulpian commented on the law in the early 3rd century CE, the added penalties were class based.

¹²⁸ There are those that suggest that Hadrian’s legislation on circumcision was a continuation of those on castration: Stern 1980, 621. I argue that as castration encompasses circumcision, we would expect to find a ban on circumcision before one on castration, yet one does not exist.

¹²⁹ *Digest* 48.8.4.2: *constitutum quidem est, ne spadones fierent...*”It is established, to stop the making of eunuchs...”

¹³⁰ Millar 1992, 242-52, 328-41: “For it from this time [Hadrian] that we have the first unambiguous cases of consultation of [the emperor] by proconsuls as well as by his own *legati*.” See *OLD*, entry *rescriptum*, p. 1627. The entries for *rescribo* and *rescriptio* both further this denotation. Horbury 2014, 314: “Pius’s rescript can then better be taken as an answer specifically on circumcision, not necessarily in the context of an extended understanding of Hadrian’s rescript on castration.”

magistrate), who wrote to Pius requesting clarification as to who Jews could circumcise: could the Jews circumcise anyone, including their own sons, or slaves and proselytes? Pius responded that only their own sons could be circumcised. At some point during Pius's rule, then, one individual desired to know about the legal status regarding Jews and circumcision, possibly resulting from unclear mandates enacted after the revolt. As there is little reason to doubt the historicity of Pius's rescript, we must analyze Roman legal, religious, and social trends to determine whether the revolt could have been in response to a ban on circumcision.

3.3: Roman Sources and Circumcision

Despite the questionable historical value of *HA*, many scholars still argue that Hadrian issued a ban on circumcision, which directly led to the Bar Kokhba revolt.¹³¹ Others maintain that a ban on circumcision was enacted in the aftermath of the revolt as a punitive measure against the Jews.¹³² I, however, argue that no ban on circumcision existed, either before or after the revolt, based on Roman cultural and legal trends regarding circumcision in the years preceding the revolt. Ra'anana Abusch argues that the absence of a ban on circumcision centers on Antoninus Pius's rescript. He presents a trifold argument, discussing the three main aspects of this legislation. Abusch argues (emphasis mine) that

*no Hadrianic prohibition of circumcision ever existed in any form – neither as an empire-wide prohibition nor as one selectively applied to the Jews, neither before the outbreak of the war nor in its wake...there is absolutely no evidence that the legal status of circumcision was addressed in Roman imperial legislation before the time of Hadrian's successor Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE), who first promulgated a rescript...as a part of a general trend within imperial legislative policy to address the maltreatment of slaves.*¹³³

¹³¹ See Abusch 2003, 72 n.2 for an extensive bibliography of this scholarly opinion.

¹³² Schäfer. "The Causes of the Bar Kokhba Revolt." *Studies in Aggadah, Targum and Jewish Liturgy in Memory of Joseph Hinemann* (1981): 74-94. Oppenheimer, "The Ban on Circumcision as a Cause of the Revolt: A Reconsideration," in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered*, ed. Schäfer. Tübingen (2003): 55-69.

¹³³ Abusch 2003, 73.

I agree with Abusch's argument, although I add that a prohibition against circumcision was also designed to prevent the full conversion of proselytes to Judaism. A ban like this would have been directed specifically against proselytes and slaves. It is not necessarily a retraction of an earlier law. In what follows, I analyze Roman religious and legal policies, especially where they pertain to Jews and Judaism, and argue that no comprehensive ban on circumcision existed before the reign of Hadrian, and therefore it was not a cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

3.3.1: *The Absence of a Ban on Circumcision before Hadrian*

Ancient authors often identified circumcision as a Jewish trait, even if they were aware that other ethnic groups also practiced it.¹³⁴ It is reasonable to think, therefore, that if Hadrian had any issues with Jews or wanted to somehow humiliate them, an explicit law banning this practice would have been enacted. Hadrian's predecessors, and Hadrian himself, had created laws that prohibited castration.¹³⁵ Later laws, as I will show, specified that circumcision was allowed for Jews alone – thereby demonstrating a clear understanding of the difference between castration and circumcision. Abusch argues, “While not a single law survives that attests to Hadrian's interest in circumcision in general and Jewish circumcision in particular, we find an abundance of imperial legislation instituted before and during his reign concerning castration.”¹³⁶ I have noted two such examples above, with many more recorded within the *Digest*.¹³⁷ For

¹³⁴ Schäfer 1997, 93-102; Feldman 1993, 153-58 on the attacks on Jewish circumcision.

¹³⁵ For arguments on the conflation of the two terms, see Rabello 1975 and below. The number of laws specifically mentioning castration or circumcision the number of authors specifically using the Latin word for ‘circumcision’ suggests to me that Romans were able to distinguish between the two acts.

¹³⁶ Abusch 2003, 76. 84 he notes the lack of “comparable restrictions on the religious practices of Jews residing at Rome further undermines the notion that imperial legislation restricted circumcision during Hadrian's reign.” Feldman 1993, 100, although in favor of a ban on circumcision as a result of the revolt, argues that it was a “continuation of the legislation concerning *castration*.”

¹³⁷ *Digest* 48.8.3.4: et qui hominem libidinis vel promercii causa castraverit, ex senatus consulto poena legis corneliae punitur. “And whoever has castrated a man because of their licentiousness or reward, by decree of the senate he will be punished by the penalty of the *lex Cornelia*.”

example, as early as Nerva's reign (c. 96-98 CE), the owner of a castrated slave was held liable for a fine.

He, whoever handed over his slave to be castrated, is fined for half of his property by decree of the senate, which was made in the consulship of Neratius Priscus and Annius Verus (97 CE).¹³⁸

Hadrian, too, clarified laws pertaining to castrators.

And those too, who make [one castrated by] the squeezing of his testicles, from the constitution of the Divine Hadrian to Ninnius Hasta, are held in the same cause as those who castrate [them].¹³⁹

This specific law is the most telling. Enacted by Hadrian, there is no mention of circumcision, but instead it clarifies circumstances regarding castration and its associated penalties, as defined by the *lex Cornelia*. Moreover, this law works with *Digest* 48.8.4.2, Hadrian's edict on the creation of eunuchs, by taking a hard stance against castration, regardless of how it is achieved. Both laws, ascribed to Nerva and Hadrian, respectively, were enacted before the revolt and only deal with the legal ramifications of castration, not circumcision. The sheer volume of these laws before the Bar Kokhba revolt and absence of any specific mention to circumcision leads me to accept Abusch's argument that the Romans, or at least those in charge of imperial legislation, were much more concerned with castration than circumcision.

Schäfer raises the possibility that Trajan, not Hadrian, may have instituted the ban on circumcision.¹⁴⁰ He cites a Syriac passage written by Bardaisan (154-222 CE), an ante-Nicene gnostic church father, poet, and philosopher, which reads "It is but yesterday since the Romans took possession of Arabia, and they abolished all the laws previously existing there, and

¹³⁸ *Digest* 48.8.6: Is, qui servum castrandum tradiderit, pro parte dimidia bonorum multatur ex senatus consulto, quod neratio prisco et annio vero consulibus factum est.

¹³⁹ *Digest* 48.8.5: Hi quoque, qui thlibias faciunt, ex constitutione divi hadriani ad ninnium hastam in eadem causa sunt, qua hi qui castrant.

¹⁴⁰ Schäfer 1997, 103-4.

especially the circumcision which they practiced.”¹⁴¹ This may have occurred when Rome conquered the Nabataean kingdom of Arabia in 106 CE.¹⁴² If this were the case, it would mean that Trajan first enacted a ban on circumcision. There is, however, no indication as to whether the ban applied to Arabia, Judaea, or anywhere else in the empire. If it were shown to be empire-wide, then one would also have to explain why the Jews did not react to it for another twenty-six years. Notably, there are the Diaspora Revolts of 115-117 CE, which were not sparked by such a ban – rather scholars find that they were likely an opportunistic uprising of diaspora Jews against the perceived tyranny of Rome while Trajan led a large campaign into Parthia. Moreover, they were instigated by the economic troubles caused by the *fiscus Iudaicus* and the continuous hostilities between Jews and Greeks in diaspora communities, especially in Alexandria.¹⁴³ An empire-wide ban on Jewish circumcision during Trajan’s reign, therefore, seems highly speculative.

The language used in the laws is also important. As I have noted above, the word for castration (*castrare*) was chosen intentionally, instead of the Latin for circumcision (*circumcidere*). Alfredo Rabello, on the other hand, believes that Hadrian’s use of *excidere* in *Digest* 48.8.4.2 refers to both castration and circumcision, yet as I have shown above, this law only prohibited castration to stop the production of eunuchs.¹⁴⁴ As Tacitus, Suetonius, and Juvenal used the word for circumcision at this time (early second century CE),¹⁴⁵ it is reasonable to expect that if Hadrian had intended to ban circumcision, he would have done so explicitly.

¹⁴¹ Drijvers, 1965, 56f. trans. Pratten 1995, 733, *Ante-Nicene Fathers v.8*, ed. Roberts and Donaldson.

¹⁴² Schäfer 1997, 104; Stern 1980, 620.

¹⁴³ For more on the Diaspora Revolt, see Pucci Ben Zeev, Miriam. *Diaspora Judaism in Turmoil, 116/117 CE: Ancient Sources and Modern Insights*. Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 6. Leuven; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005.

¹⁴⁴ Rabello 1975, 189-192.

¹⁴⁵ Tac. *Hist.*, 5.5.1-2: *Circumcidere genitalia instituerunt ut diversitate noscantur*, “They decided to circumcise their genitals so that they might be noted for their difference;” Suet. *Dom.* 12.2: *inspiceretur nonagenarius senex an circumsectus esset*, “A 90-year old man was inspected [to see] whether he was circumcised;” Juv 14.104: *quaesitum ad fontem solos deducere uerpos*, “...[they] lead the circumcised alone to the desired fountain.”

Pierre Cordier argues that these authors do not depict circumcision as genital mutilation as *HA* does, but that the uncovered glans indicates unrestrained licentiousness,¹⁴⁶ particularly when the word *verpus* designates one who is circumcised.¹⁴⁷ This can be explained by Martial's Menophilus's (see below) attempt to cover his circumcision with a sheath. While the circumcised Jew may be an object of ridicule, neither the language nor vocabulary of Roman law and Roman literature link circumcision with castration or genital mutilation.

Furthermore, there may be an argument to be made regarding the lack of enforceability of a ban on circumcision, but it is not without its weaknesses.¹⁴⁸ Although strip-searches for circumcision by the army were unlikely to have occurred, that they did under Domitian is enough to suggest that they could happen again, even if Suetonius recorded the event because of the novelty and severity of it.¹⁴⁹ As I discuss below, however, if a ban on circumcision did exist, it could only have targeted babies and proselytes – examining adults would have made no difference, as no law existed that forced circumcised Jews to undergo epispasm (the process of

¹⁴⁶ Note in particular Martial, *Ep.*, 11.84, with the repeated *verpa poeta* in reference to a poet Anchialus of Jerusalem and the following line: *Pedicas puerum, verpe poeta, meum; You sodomize my boy, circumcised poet.* For more on this epigram, see Kay, N. M., and Martial. *Martial Book XI: A Commentary*. London: Duckworth, 1985.

¹⁴⁷ Cordier 2001, 337-355. I agree with Abusch's argument (2003 p. 77, n. 22) that Cordier is incorrect in seeing a ban on circumcision as an attempt to impose Roman *mores* on Jews. This imposes a strict explanation for the ban, when by all accounts Rome was pragmatic towards foreign religions, except when they were seen to corrupt/infect Roman citizens. A further explanation is given under the following section, Proselytes and Circumcision. See Isaac 2004, 472-74 on Roman views of Jewish circumcision. Shaye Cohen (1993, 12-22) discusses circumcision as an identity marker to Jews and Romans in more detail.

¹⁴⁸ On the one hand, the lack of an efficient police force would have made the detection of circumcised Jews unlikely. The army may have been capable of enforcing a ban, but to accomplish this the soldiers in Provincia Judaea (or elsewhere) would have needed to strip-search individuals, a far cry from their regular duties. On the other hand, strip-searches for circumcision were known to have occurred under Domitian's reign (r. 81-96 CE). Because of the contemporary nature of this incident, we cannot conclude that strip-searches would not have happened in Judaea. Although these were done in order to confirm who was a Jew and therefore obligated to pay the *fiscus*, they still show that such actions could and did occur. Domitian's successor, Nerva issued coins announcing the end of these searches: *fisci Iudaici calumnia sublata*. See Hunterian Museum (University of Glasgow), and Anne S. Robertson, eds. *Roman Imperial Coins in the Hunter Coin Cabinet, University of Glasgow*. Glasgow University Publications. London: Published for the University of Glasgow by the Oxford University Press, 1962. Plate 58, no. 35; Plate 59, no. 45. Both coins feature a palm tree (the symbol for Judaea) on the reverse with the inscription *fisci Iudaici calumnia sublata*.

¹⁴⁹ Suet. *Dom.* 12.2: *Interfuisse me adulescentulum memini, cum a procuratore frequentissimoque consilio inspiceretur nonagenarius senex an circumsectus esset; "I remember being present as a youth, when a ninety year old man was examined by the procurator and an extremely crowded court to see whether he was circumcised."*

restoring the foreskin).¹⁵⁰ Therefore, it is highly unlikely that a ban on circumcision existed, either in general or just for Jews, before Hadrian's rule, and as such could not have provoked the revolt.

3.3.2: *Proselytes and Circumcision*

Benjamin Isaac also argues against the existence of a general ban on circumcision – either empire-wide or against Jews alone. His argument is based on the pragmatic tolerance of Roman religious policy in general, more so than any policy directed towards Judaism in particular.¹⁵¹ He maintains that foreigners could practice their religions in Rome as long as those religions were both ancient and morally acceptable to Rome.¹⁵² What was “morally acceptable,” however, could be a highly subjective and contentious matter. Rome itself used to practice human sacrifice, and it was not officially abolished until 97 BCE.¹⁵³ In addition, the *evocatio* of Magna Mater to aid during the Second Punic War required that her castrated priests, the *Galli*, come with her to Rome – which was problematic because Romans were forbidden to become eunuchs.¹⁵⁴ If Rome, therefore, permitted the practices of certain religions that had a supposed moral inferiority, a different reason must exist for any such ban. Isaac further argues that any ban that did exist was promulgated to effectively stop proselytism and conversion of Romans to

¹⁵⁰ The issue of epispasm will be discussed below.

¹⁵¹ Isaac 2003, 38; Feldman 1993, 101: “so long as it posed no threat, through attempts at proselytism, to the state cult or to the social and political order.”

¹⁵² Isaac 2003, 42-3.

¹⁵³ Pliny, *NH*, 30.3: DCLVII demum anno Urbis Cn. Cornelio Lentulo P. Licinio Crasso cos. Senatusconsultum factum est ne homo immolaretur, palamque in tempus illud sacra prodigiosa celebrata. “Finally, in the 657th year of the city, in the consulship of Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus and Publius Licinius Crassus a *senatus consultum* was passed that no man may be sacrificed; clearly to that time terrible rites were practiced.”

¹⁵⁴ D.H. 2.19.4-5: ἱεράται δὲ αὐτῆς ἀνὴρ Φρυγῆ καὶ γυνὴ Φρυγία καὶ περιάγουσιν ἀνὰ τὴν πόλιν οὗτοι μητραγυρτοῦντες. . . Ῥωμαίων δὲ τῶν αὐθιγενῶν οὔτε μητραγυρτῶν τις οὔτε καταλούμενος πορεύεται διὰ τῆς πόλεως ποικίλην ἐνδεδικῶς στολὴν οὔτε ὀργιάζει τὴν θεὸν τοῖς Φρυγίοις ὀργιασμοῖς κατὰ νόμον καὶ ψήφισμα βουλῆς. “Her priests are a Phrygian man and woman and being priests of the mother goddess they lead the procession through the city. . . no one of the native Romans proceeds through the city either being a priest of Cybele nor being accompanied by the flute wearing a many-colored robe, nor worships the goddess in Phrygian ceremonies, by law and decree of the senate.”

foreign religions, which included Judaism.¹⁵⁵ Any such ban would not have been on circumcision, but conversion to or adoption of non-traditional religious practices, which can be seen in how Rome addressed other religious traditions when they first made inroads at Rome.

Rome attempted to stop the spread of religions and cults, such as those of Bacchus and Isis, among the people before they did so with Judaism. In 186 BCE, the senate took action against the recently arrived cult of Bacchus and his festival, the *Bacchanalia*;¹⁵⁶ the Egyptian cults of Isis and Sarapis were banned and temples destroyed on numerous occasions, notably in 53 BCE.¹⁵⁷ Under Augustus, however, temples to Isis were allowed, but only outside the *pomerium*.¹⁵⁸ While the specific reasons for banning certain religions may have varied, one thing was constant: these religions were not officially state-sanctioned and somehow threatened the boundaries of Roman social and political order.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Isaac 2003, 38. Goodman (1989, 40-44) argues that Nerva's removal of the *calumnia* of the *fiscus Iudaicus* essentially gave legal recognition to Jewish proselytes as long as they voluntarily paid the tax. However, there is no evidence that these proselytes underwent full conversion, which included circumcision. It is possible that the Roman government was concerned about its citizens circumcising themselves in the years before the Bar Kokhba revolt, but the existence of the *fiscus* does not support that.

¹⁵⁶ Livy, 39.16.6-10: iudicabant enim prudentissimi uiri omnis diuini humanique iuris nihil aeque dissoluendae religionis esse, quam ubi non patrio sed externo ritu sacrificaretur. haec uobis praedicenda ratus sum, ne qua superstitio agitare animos uestros, cum demolientes nos Bacchanalia discutientesque nefarios coetus cerneretis. "For the wisest men of all divine and human law judged that nothing could destroy religion more than when it was sacrificed, non by a native, but by a foreign rite. I thought that this warning be given to you, not to inflame your minds at such superstition when you see us demolishing the Bacchanalia and breaking up their nefarious meetings."

¹⁵⁷ Dio 40.47.2: περί τε τὸν Σάραπιν καὶ περὶ τὴν Ἴσιν ψηφισθὲν τέρας οὐδενὸς ἦττον γενέσθαι: τοὺς γὰρ ναοὺς αὐτῶν, οὓς ἰδίᾳ τινὲς ἐπεποίητο, καθελεῖν τῇ βουλῇ ἔδοξεν "They voted regarding the temples of Sarapis and Isis, a sign of nothing less. It was decreed by the senate to tear down their temples, which some people had built on their own account."

¹⁵⁸ Dio 53.2.4: καὶ τὰ μὲν ἱερὰ τὰ Αἰγύπτια οὐκ ἐσεδέξατο εἶσω τοῦ πωμηρίου, τῶν δὲ δὴ ναῶν πρόνοιαν ἐποίησατο; "He did not permit the Egyptian rites inside the pomerium, but made provisions for the temples."

¹⁵⁹ The *Bacchanalia*, for instance, brought women into the public sphere at night, without the protection of their husbands or fathers. For more on the Bacchanalia, see Pailler, Jean-Marie. *Bacchanalia: La Répression de 186 Av. J.-C. À Rome et En Italie: Vestiges, Images, Tradition*. Bibliothèque Des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, fasc. 270. Roma : 1988: Ecole française de Rome, Paris, 1988 and Beard, Mary, John A. North, and S. R. F. Price. *Religions of Rome*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Judaism, too, faced similar issues at Rome. Although Caesar and Augustus both allowed Jews to practice their ancestral traditions,¹⁶⁰ the situation was different before and after their reigns. Jews were possibly expelled from Rome in 139 BCE, but almost assuredly so in 19 CE. Valerius Maximus, who flourished during Tiberius' rule (14-37 CE), recorded the expulsion of 139 BCE, but the account only survives in the writings of the later authors Iulius Paris (c. 4th CE) and Ianuarius Nepotianus (c. 5th CE), both of whom say that Cornelius Hispalus expelled the Jews for trying to spread their religion.¹⁶¹ In 19 CE,

Another debate was regarding the expulsions of the Egyptian and Jewish rites: a decree of the senate was made that 4,000 freedmen, *infected by that superstition*, who are of suitable age, be shipped to the island Sardinia, where they were forced into fighting brigandage. If they perished because of the severity of the climate, it was a cheap loss. The rest had to leave Italy, unless they abandoned their profane rites before a specific day.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Under Caesar: Jos. *AJ*, 14.10.2: παραχειμασίαν δὲ ἢ χρήματα πράσσεισθαι οὐ δοκιμάζω, “I think it fitting that they do not provide winter quarters or that money be required of them.”; Under Augustus: Jos. *AJ*, 14.10.10-12, 20: ἐγὼ τε οὖν αὐτοῖς... δίδωμι τὴν ἀστρατείαν καὶ συγχωρῶ χρῆσθαι τοῖς πατρίοις ἐθισμοῖς... “And therefore I grant to them,... exemption from service and to use their ancestral customs...”; Philo, *Leg.* 23: ἀλλ’ ὅμως οὔτε ἐξώκισε τῆς Ῥώμης ἐκείνους οὔτε τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν αὐτῶν ἀφείλετο πολιτείαν, ὅτι καὶ τῆς Ἰουδαϊκῆς ἐφρόντιζον. “But likewise he never removed them from Rome nor took away their Roman citizenship, because he thought highly of Jews.” (The entirety of this letter speaks of the positive actions Augustus had for Jews.)

¹⁶¹ Stern 1974, 358.

¹⁶² Tac. *Ann.*, 2.85: actum et de sacris Aegyptiis Iudaicisque pellendis factumque patrum consultum ut quattuor milia libertini generis ea superstitione infecta quis idonea aetas in insulam Sardiniam veherentur, coercendis illic latrociniiis et, si ob gravitatem caeli interissent, vile damnum, ceteri cederent Italia nisi certam ante diem profanos ritus exuissent. Josephus' explanation (*AJ* 18.3.5) is that gifts the noblewoman Fulvia laid out for Jupiter were swindled by a few Jews to the Temple in Jerusalem. Φουλβίαν τῶν ἐν ἀξιώματι γυναικῶν καὶ νομίμοις προσεληλυθυῖαν τοῖς Ἰουδαϊκοῖς πείθουσι πορφύραν καὶ χρυσὸν εἰς τὸ ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἱερὸν διαπέμψασθαι... καὶ οἱ μὲν δὴ διὰ κακίαν τεσσάρων ἀνδρῶν ἠλαύνοντο τῆς πόλεως, “They persuaded Fulvia, a woman of great dignity and having embraced the Jewish laws, to send purple and gold to the temple in Jerusalem... and because of this crime of four men, [4,000 Jews] were banished from the city.” Why punish an entire group for the actions of one/a few? This goes against Rome's practice of pragmatic tolerance. Suetonius and Dio also record this expulsion. Suet., *Tib.*, 36: externas caerimonias, Aegyptios Iudaicosque ritus compescuit, coactis qui superstitione ea tenebantur religiosas uestes cum instrumento omni comburere. “He abolished foreign religions, the Egyptian and Jewish rites, compelling those who were swayed by that superstition to burn their religious clothing with all their paraphernalia.” Dio 57.18.5: τῶν τε Ἰουδαίων πολλῶν ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην συνελθόντων καὶ συχνοὺς τῶν ἐπιχωρίων ἐς τὰ σφέτερα ἔθη μεθιστάντων, τοὺς πλείονας ἐξήλασεν. “When many Jews were arriving at Rome and converting many of the natives to their customs, they [the Romans] drove out the majority [of them].”

How many of these Jewish ex-slaves abandoned Judaism is unknown, but it is probable that many refused to acquiesce.¹⁶³ Ultimately, scholars have debated whether Jews actively proselytized or people found affinity for Judaism in another way,¹⁶⁴ but it does not alter what Roman texts claim. It is evident that Tacitus saw both Jewish and Egyptian religious practices as a plague that was infecting the Roman citizenry, and suggests that there was worry that these foreign rites would make further inroads amongst Romans. It seems that the expulsion of these people was performed under the guise of military conscription, when in reality it may have been a religious matter. Moreover, it suggests that some would have been allowed to remain in Italy if they renounced their newfound faith. Although it does not appear to be directed at proselytism *per se*, it does seem that there was apprehension regarding the sudden increase of Romans practicing eastern religions. Even so, no evidence for a ban on circumcision exists at this time.

Schäfer argues that despite Jewish antipathy among many Roman authors, little evidence exists “for pagan responses to proselytizing before the beginning of the third century CE.”¹⁶⁵ I read the situation a little differently. To be sure, there is no official legislation during the first century CE against proselytism via circumcision, but there are active measures taken to stop the spread of Judaism. These are not laws enacted to stop Judaism merely because it is different, but rather because it is perceived to be somehow subverting the boundaries or status quo of Roman

¹⁶³ Isaac 2004, 481: “Rome accepted that the Jews had a peculiar fanaticism which made it impossible to demand of them what was demanded of everybody else... for they were aware that Jews would rather let themselves be killed than revere a mortal ruler as if he were a god. For the same reason Jews were exempted from army service and other duties which impinged on their customs. The Romans succeeded in building an empire because they were realists and they did not usually attempt to enforce the unenforceable.”

¹⁶⁴ This has been strongly debated. For the purposes of our paper, what matters is whether Romans thought Jews actively proselytized. For an extensive bibliography, both for and against see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 553-54, n. 1.

¹⁶⁵ Schäfer 1997, 106-116.

society by having Romans reject the *mos maiorum*.¹⁶⁶ The antipathy is particularly evident in Tacitus *Ann.* 2.85 (quoted above), where he remarks that the death of these conscripted Jews and Egyptians hardly matters. Comments against Jews proselytizing Romans are found in Tacitus' *Histories* and Juvenal's *Satires*.¹⁶⁷ Tacitus remarks:

Those who are converted to their [the Jewish] way of life accept the same, and no earlier are they trained than to despise the gods, to renounce their fatherland, to hold their parents, children, and brothers as worthless.¹⁶⁸

From this, it appears that the chief concerns were that Romans would abandon the *mos maiorum* and engage in Jewish practices – whereby they would cease worshipping the imperial cult and eschew their families, the core building block of Roman society. Less of an issue was Jews themselves maintaining their ancestral ways, even though some Romans may not have liked them.¹⁶⁹ It would appear that the Roman government took measures against proselytism to ensure that Romans did not stray from their traditional ancestral practices unless the new religion was incorporated into the Roman pantheon. Similar actions against other religions or religious traditions having newly entered the public sphere suggest these actions were taken when they began to upset the status quo or social order. And here Judaism was no exception.¹⁷⁰

The Roman uneasiness towards foreign religions, especially those that incited conversion or tangible acts upon the human body, or that upset social order, explains why a ban on

¹⁶⁶ This is noticeable in that Jews held special dispensation from worshipping the imperial cult. This changed after the First Revolt and the implementation of the *fiscus Iudaicus* (see Smallwood 1981, 379-85 for a summary of this).

¹⁶⁷ Juv. 14.100-104: Romanas autem soliti contemnere leges | Iudaicum ediscunt et seruant ac metuunt ius, | tradidit arcano quodcumque uolumine Moyses: | non monstrare uias eadem nisi sacra colenti, | quaesitum ad fontem solos deducere uerpos. “Accustomed to despise Roman laws, they learn and practice and fear Jewish law, and whatever else Moses handed down in the secret volume: not to show the way unless they follow the sacred rites, to lead only the circumcised to the sought after fountain.”

¹⁶⁸ Tac. *Hist.* 5.5.2: Transgressi in morem eorum idem usurpant, nec quicquam prius imbuuntur quam contemnere deos, exuere patriam, parentes liberos fratres uilia habere.

For more on Jewish proselytism and expulsions from Rome, see Schäfer 1997, 106-118; Gruen 2002, 29-36.

¹⁶⁹ If these slaves had fully converted to Judaism, they might have only paid tax to the temple in Jerusalem; in a bid to regain this lost income, it is possible that the Roman government desired them to return to Roman ways.

¹⁷⁰ Although Cohen has demonstrated that differentiating Jews and non-Jews in antiquity was nigh impossible (Cohen 1993, 1-45), that did not stop ancient authors from making stereotypical comments regarding the behavior and customs of Jews. See Stern, 1974-1980, *GLAJJ* v1-2 for a comprehensive overview and bibliography.

circumcision for proselytes might have existed.¹⁷¹ Isaac summarizes that this ban would have nothing to do with neither Jews nor the Bar Kokhba revolt, and that it would have been one on conversion, which happened to include circumcision.¹⁷² But as I have demonstrated, nothing in Roman law or religious policy indicates the wholesale prohibition of circumcision before the Bar Kokhba revolt. As a cause of the revolt, then, it is improbable. Thus, in the wake of the Bar Kokhba revolt, Pius's rescript limited circumcision to only Jews of Judaeen origin practicing their ancestral religion and was not a retraction of a comprehensive ban enacted by Hadrian.

3.3.3: *Slavery and Circumcision*

Abusch suggests that Antoninus Pius' rescript was not a retraction of an earlier Hadrianic decree, but rather a reaffirmation of the Jewish right that restricted the act to *their own sons*.¹⁷³ He sees this as an attempt to protect Roman slaves from castration and circumcision. Keith Bradley has demonstrated how slaves were often abused and tortured in Roman society.¹⁷⁴ There is no doubt that some slaves suffered immensely, within the boundaries of the law, even if some considered such abuse to be in bad taste. But would the circumcision of slaves owned by Jews be legal or illegal? Catherine Hezser notes that emperors passed laws trying to curtail violence against slaves,¹⁷⁵ including Claudius,¹⁷⁶ Domitian,¹⁷⁷ and most notably Hadrian.

The same Divine Hadrian wrote in a rescript: "It is established, to stop the making of eunuchs, that those who are found guilty of this crime, be held to the penalty of

¹⁷¹ It was obvious, even to Romans, that circumcision clearly marked one as a Jew, even if all circumcised were not Jews. See Goodman 1994, 67-77.

¹⁷² Isaac 2003, 54. See also Isaac 2004, 449-50: "The rescript thus determines that Jewish identity is exclusively a matter of origin and it effectively makes full conversion a criminal act... the Jews, as a recognized people – but only themselves and their descendants – were allowed to practice their religion without hindrance, both in Judaea and elsewhere, even in Rome."

¹⁷³ Abusch 2003, 87.

¹⁷⁴ Bradley, K. R. *Slavery and Society at Rome*. Key Themes in Ancient History. Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

¹⁷⁵ Hezser 2003, 161.

¹⁷⁶ Suet., *Claud.* 25.2: *si quis necare quem mallet quam exponere, caedis crimine teneri*. "If anyone preferred to kill [their slave] rather than manumit them, he would be held to the charge of murder."

¹⁷⁷ Suet., *Dom.* 7: *castrari mares vetuit*. "He forbade males to be castrated."

the *lex Cornelia* and that their goods be deservedly assumed into my treasury. But slaves who would make eunuchs of other slaves must be given capital punishment. And those who are held on this charge, should they not appear [in court], it must be pronounced even in their absence as though they were held under the *lex Cornelia*. Certainly if those who have suffered this injury should proclaim [so], it is necessary that the governor of the province hear those who have lost their manhood. For no one ought to castrate [another], either free or slave, willing or unwilling, nor should anyone ought to offer himself willingly to be castrated. And if anyone should act against my edict, even the doctor who cut will be punished capitally, as is the same for those who offered themselves willingly for cutting.”¹⁷⁸

I have noted above that this law of Hadrian (its date is unknown) does not explicitly refer to circumcision, but rather castration.

It seems likely that these laws would affect Jewish slave owners similarly, although no evidence exists for Jewish slave ownership in Judaea during the Bar Kokhba period. However, the Tosefta, redacted ca. 250 CE, records exegeses on the circumcision of gentile slaves.¹⁷⁹

Hezser argues that the circumcision of Jewish-owned gentile slaves would have been done to allow slaves to participate in the Jewish family’s customs, rather than as an act of conversion.¹⁸⁰

While this does not relay the historicity of Jewish slave circumcision during the second century CE,¹⁸¹ the abundance of anti-castration laws protecting slaves suggests castration and circumcision of slaves was occurring at that time. The rescript may have been issued in part,

¹⁷⁸ *Digest* 48.8.4.2. (Ulpian, Duties of the Proconsul). Idem divus hadrianus rescripsit: " constitutum quidem est, ne spadones fierent, eos autem, qui hoc crimine arguerentur, corneliae legis poena teneri eorumque bona merito fisco meo vindicari debere, sed et in servos, qui spadones fecerint, ultimo supplicio animadvertendum esse: et qui hoc crimine tenentur, si non adfuerint, de absentibus quoque, tamquam lege cornelia teneantur, pronuntiandum esse. plane si ipsi, qui hanc iniuriam passi sunt, proclamaverint, audire eos praeses provinciae debet, qui virilitatem amiserunt: nemo enim liberum servumve invitum sinentemve castrare debet, neve quis se sponte castrandum praebere debet. at si quis adversus edictum meum fecerit, medico quidem, qui exciderit, capitale erit, item ipsi qui se sponte excidendum praebuit".

¹⁷⁹ Tosefta, Avodah Zarah 3:11. The assumption concerning slaves of gentiles, even if they are circumcised, [is that] behold, they are gentiles.

¹⁸⁰ Hezser 2005, 35-7.

¹⁸¹ It is unlikely that Jews only began practicing slavery after 200 CE. Given that Rome was a slave society, one should expect slavery to permeate throughout the empire, regardless of ethnic origin or religion. Wealthy Jews, living in the diaspora or Judaea, would have likely held slaves.

then, to address the treatment of Jewish-owned slaves. Let us look again at Pius's rescript, as preserved by Modestin in the *Digest*:

It is permitted for the Jews to circumcise only their own sons by rescript of divine Pius; he who should do this on one not of the same religion, the penalty of the castrator shall be imposed.¹⁸²

Nothing in Pius's rescript suggests the penalties were only associated with proselytic circumcision. Instead, it indicates that he was further clarifying Hadrian's earlier rescript on the castration of slaves. So if Jewish slave owners were circumcising their slaves, this appears to indicate that they were subject to the same laws regarding slave treatment as the rest of the empire. We have seen, above, how Rome attempted to limit Judaism and circumcision to ethnic-born Jews only regarding proselytes; it is reasonable to expect similar restrictions applied to Jewish owned gentile slaves as well. Moreover, later laws explicitly forbade the circumcision of non-Jewish slaves,¹⁸³ indicating that this was still an issue in the following centuries. Reading Pius's rescript as a protection for Jewish-owned gentile slaves as well makes sense in light of the continued promulgation of later laws.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² *Digest* 48.8.11. Circumcidere Iudaeis filios suos tantum rescripto divi Pii permittitur: in non eiusdem religionis qui hoc fecerit, castrantis poena irrogatur.

¹⁸³ Hezser 2005, 41-4. See Linder 1987, 117-120, under Diocletian, ca. 300: the jurist Paul records this law (*Sententiae* 5.22.3-4), which reaffirms circumcision as a Jewish rite but disallows the circumcision of non-Jewish slaves. See also pp. 138-44, under Constantine, 21 October 335; 144-51, under Constantine II, 13 August 339; 174-77, under Theodosius, September 384. The continued promulgation of similar laws suggests Jewish slave-owners paid little attention to the Roman laws; whether or not they heeded the tractate from the Talmud is open for debate as well.

¹⁸⁴ Palestinian rabbinic writings suggest that during the third century CE, Jews were concerned with whether or not they could circumcise slaves as well. pT Yeb 8:1: "This refers to what Rabbi Hila said in the name of Rabbi Yasa: If somebody buys uncircumcised slaves from Gentiles on condition that he will circumcise them, in any case if they are slaves who are men, you circumcise them by force. On condition that he will not circumcise them, he is like a son who is a man, you do not circumcise him by force." Guggenheimer. notes that this condition is negotiated with the slave trader (n. 62, p. 327). It is likely this idea stems from Exodus 12:44, "but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it [Passover] after you have circumcised him." See also Tosefta, *Avodah Zarah* 3:11. "He who purchases uncircumcised slaves from gentiles and circumcised them but did not immerse them – and so sons of slave-girls who did not immerse, whether they were circumcised or not circumcised - lo, these are deemed to be gentiles. Things upon which they sit or lie are deemed unclean." trans. Neusner. The idea that Jews would continue to circumcise non-Jewish slaves in their households, then, does not seem so unlikely, at least during the third century CE. Whether the situation was the same ca. 130-160 CE remains unresolved, but the presence of Pius' rescript

Rome allowed the physical punishment of slaves, except for castration, as shown above. Moreover, given the knowledge that circumcision was a Jewish rite, it appears that the empire allowed it to continue for Jews, but wanted to delineate the boundaries of who could be circumcised. Therefore, Pius's rescript was enacted to clarify the legal ramifications regarding Jews and circumcision of their slaves, in addition to proselytes, as I have discussed above. In short, in light of the lack of concrete evidence for a Hadrianic ban, Roman attitudes against foreign proselytism, and Roman laws on the protection of slaves, I find that the argument that the ban on circumcision caused the Bar Kokhba revolt cannot be sustained.

3.4: Rabbinic Sources on the Ban on Circumcision

Despite the well-documented problems of using rabbinic literature as a source for social history, many scholars have continued to use these texts to support the argument that a ban on circumcision caused the Bar Kokhba revolt. The limitations of rabbinic literature are noted succinctly by Oppenheimer, who writes, “The aim of the Talmud is not historiography. It concentrates on legislation (*halakhah*) and on theological didactics (*aggadah*).”¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, a number of scholars have used rabbinic literature as a historical source and below I present the most commonly used texts and demonstrate their insufficiencies.¹⁸⁶

To begin, E. Mary Smallwood holds that Mishnah Shabbat 19:1 provides evidence of a ban on circumcision.¹⁸⁷ This pericope from the Mishnah addresses a possible conflict between two Jewish laws: on the one hand, one is prohibited from carrying objects more than a certain distance on the Sabbath; on the other hand, one is obligated to circumcise one's son at eight days

suggests a similar situation. In addition, the timing of this quote from the pT, following a century of similar laws issued by Rome, may suggest some amount of knowledge of the Roman laws.

¹⁸⁵ Oppenheimer and Isaac 2005, 201.

¹⁸⁶ For even more analysis of the many rabbinic sources used by scholars, see Oppenheimer, “The Ban on Circumcision as a Cause of the Revolt: A Reconsideration,” in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered*, ed. Schäfer. Mohr-Siebeck: Tübingen, 2003.

¹⁸⁷ Smallwood 1961, 93-4.

old. The rabbis explore the potential complexities that arise when the eighth day falls on the Sabbath. This particular passage discusses whether it is permitted to bring the circumcision knife to the place of the circumcision on the Sabbath if it had not been brought there ahead of time (i.e. before the onset of the Sabbath):

Rabbi Eliezer says: If they had not brought the implement on the eve of the Sabbath, it may be brought openly on the Sabbath; and in time of danger many may cover it up in the presence of witnesses.¹⁸⁸

Smallwood cites two aspects of this pericope to argue her point: because Eliezer is known to have died before the Bar Kokhba revolt occurred, this mishnah must predate the revolt, and that a “time of danger” refers to a period when circumcision was banned by the government.¹⁸⁹

Therefore, a ban on circumcision must predate the revolt. However, her use of the reference to Eliezer to date the pericope is highly problematic, as scholars have shown that such attributions are unreliable.¹⁹⁰ Rather, the Mishnah most likely provides reliable information only for the era in which it was edited into its final form – decades after the revolt, around 220 CE.¹⁹¹ This leads Oppenheimer to conclude correctly that this passage “does not contain any evidence that the ban on circumcision preceded the Bar Kokhba revolt.”¹⁹² Because rabbinic sources are not historically reliable for this era, it is entirely possible that the reference to the “time of danger” in Mishnah Shabbat 19:1 was intended as a prescription for how the law would stand in times when it is dangerous to perform circumcision.¹⁹³ Other instances in Jewish literature that detail times when performing circumcision was considered dangerous include 1 Maccabees 1:48-64 and the

¹⁸⁸ Mishnah Shabbat 19:1. Trans. Danby.

¹⁸⁹ Smallwood 1961, 93-4; 1959, 337-38.

¹⁹⁰ Strack and Stemberger 1996, 63-66. Attributions to historical rabbis may have been used to give legitimacy to the rulings of the rabbis redacting the Mishnah.

¹⁹¹ Strack and Stemberger 1996, 59-62.

¹⁹² Oppenheimer 2003, 59-62. He does imply, however, that the ‘time of danger’ was likely added by R. Judah bar Ila’I, who flourished in the Usha period (ca. 140-160), so that a ban on circumcision may be part of the oppressive measures enacted after the revolt.

¹⁹³ As a collection of oral law and tradition, it is reasonable to establish precedents for similar situations.

Assumption of Moses 8:1. Written ca. 104-63 BCE, 1 Maccabees details the history of Israel from the reign and edicts of Antiochus IV to the death of Simon the Hasmonean and establishes the legitimacy of the Hasmonean dynasty.¹⁹⁴ The *Assumption of Moses* 8:1 was composed ca. 10-30 CE as a Herodian-era adaptation of an earlier Seleucid-era work written in light of Antiochus's repressive legislation, and records the events in Deuteronomy 31-34, which include the death of Moses and his burial.¹⁹⁵ This would help to explain the importance of Mishnah Shabbat 19:1, by noting earlier periods of persecution and suggesting that such a time could come again.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, it is wrong to suggest that this mishnah derived from the situation surrounding the Bar Kokhba revolt, and does not bring us any closer to accepting a ban on circumcision as the cause of the revolt.

Also pertinent is the issue of *epispasm*, or the process of restoring the foreskin.

According to the Tosefta, a rabbinic text that took shape a few decades after the Mishnah (c. 250 CE):

One who has his prepuce drawn forward has to be circumcised. Rabbi Judah says, "One who has his prepuce drawn forward should not be circumcised, because it is dangerous." They said to him, "Many were circumcised in the time of Bar Koziba, and they had children and did not die, since it says, *Circumcising, he shall be circumcised* (Genesis 17:13) – even a hundred times. And it says, *My covenant has he destroyed* (Genesis 17:14) – to encompass the one who has his prepuce drawn forward."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Nickelsburg 2005, 102-106.

¹⁹⁵ Nickelsburg 2005, 74-77.

¹⁹⁶ Horbury 2014, 315. This follows Freedman's suggestion of the persecution under Antiochus, albeit with no specific situation. Both were periods of intense persecution by foreign rulers.

I Macc 1:48. καὶ ἀφιέναι τοὺς υἱοὺς αὐτῶν ἀπεριτμήτους βδελύξαι τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν ἐν παντὶ ἀκαθάρτῳ καὶ βεβηλώσει. "And it was not allowed that their sons be circumcised and ordered that their souls be made entirely unclean..."

Assumption 8.1: "And there shall come upon them a second visitation and wrath, such as has not befallen them from the beginning until that time, in which He will stir up against them the king of the kings of the earth and one that ruleth with great power, who shall crucify those who confess to their circumcision," trans. Charles, p. 420 in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, II 1964.

¹⁹⁷ Tosefta Shabbat 15:9. Ed. Neusner p. 415 (with my emendations). This similarly appears at Midrash Genesis Rabbah 46:13:2-3.

Like the Mishnah, the Tosefta is not a reliable historiographical source for the Bar Kokhba era. Oppenheimer rhetorically asks why people felt the need to undergo epispasm before the revolt occurred if there was no ban, whereas Smallwood takes this as concrete evidence of the ban on circumcision predating the revolt due to the inclusion of Bar Kokhba's name.¹⁹⁸ Oppenheimer reaches his conclusion by referencing an earlier argument of Schäfer's and disagrees with Smallwood's conclusion. He argues that such legislation would have been aimed at babies, as "there would have been no point in pursuing people who had been circumcised before the ban, and non-compliance with the ban could only have applied to the circumcision of babies or proselytes."¹⁹⁹ He further argues that those who re-circumcised themselves did so because either they were forced by Bar Kokhba's troops or they wished to rejoin the fledgling Jewish state.²⁰⁰ I believe that these arguments are correct, but suggest that Rabbi Judah states the "danger" not only because of persecution, but also because of the inherent health risks associated with re-circumcision, known even in antiquity.²⁰¹ Oppenheimer also notes that the decision of some Jews to undergo epispasm may have been influenced by their desire to hide their circumcision in order to assimilate into the Roman world,²⁰² a trend evidenced in other sources. Martial describes a circumcised singer who tried to conceal it, but failed.

So large a sheath covers Menophilus' penis
That it only would be enough for all the comic actors.
I believed that he – for we often bathed together –
Was accustomed to spare his voice, Flaccus;

¹⁹⁸ Smallwood 1961, 94.

¹⁹⁹ Oppenheimer 2003, 63; Schäfer 1981, 45-50.

²⁰⁰ I would further suggest that these could be individuals who tried to conceal their circumcision to avoid paying the *fiscus Iudaicus*. Unfortunately, nothing corroborates this argument. Mor 2016, 287-88 argues that despite the early successes of the rebels through guerrilla warfare, Bar Kokhba never captured Jerusalem, although he may have desired to (for the aims of the revolt, see previous chapter). "[It] would have brought the rebels into direct confrontation into the Tenth Legion and turned the city into a deathtrap for the Jewish rebels." See also Horbury 2014, 325-32. Contra Mor 2016, 134.

²⁰¹ See Jody Rubin, "Celsus' Decircumcision Operation: Medical and Historical Implications," *Urology* XVI, 1: 121-124 (1980).

²⁰² See also Schäfer 1999 for an in-depth analysis of this argument.

While he exercised in the middle of the palaestra with people watching,
His sheath slipped off: he was circumcised!²⁰³

Finally, there is a rabbinic tradition that implicates Tineius (“Turnus”) Rufus, the governor of Provincia Judaea before the outbreak of the revolt, as having banned circumcision himself.

Rabbi Yudan said: When Turnus Rufus banned circumcision, a man circumcised his son and went up on to the *bema* (the stage at the front of the synagogue) and was caught.²⁰⁴

Like the other rabbinic sources, this text cannot be used as a historical source for the Bar Kokhba era. Rufus is employed as an antagonistic stock character and does not represent the historical individual.²⁰⁵ In addition, *Bereshit Rabbati* is a very late text, dating to perhaps the eleventh century.²⁰⁶ Moshe Herr, however, reads this text in conjunction with *HA* to validate the ban on circumcision. Herr adds a list of twenty (!) further prohibitions enacted by Rome against the Jews during the course of the revolt.²⁰⁷ First, he accepts *HA* and *Bereshit Rabbati* as historiographical in nature, giving credence to the ban on circumcision without hesitation. Second, he argues that the remaining prohibitions all derive from rabbinic literature without corroborating them with another source. These laws, he argues, were enacted during the war

²⁰³ Martial, *Epigrams* 7.82: Menophili penem tam grandis fibula vestit

Ut sit comoedis omnibus una satis.

Hunc ego credideram – nam saepe lavamur in unum –

Sollicitum voci parcere, Flacce, suae:

Dum ludit media populo spectante palaestra,

Delapsa est misero fibula: verpus erat.

²⁰⁴ *Bereshit Rabbati*, xvii 1, ed. Albeck p.73. Rufus’ name is often given as Turnus, a play on the Greek *tyranos*, “tyrant.”

²⁰⁵ Abusch 2003, 82-4 on the possibility of Rufus actually implementing a ban on circumcision. For Rufus as the antagonist in rabbinic literature, see bT Nedarim 50b; bT Avodah Zarah 20a; bT Bava Batra 10a; bT Taa’anit 29a. For a brief summary and analysis of the dialogues between Akiva and Rufus, see Schäfer 1980, 120-21: while not allowing historical conclusions about Rufus’ actions, they present how he is seen in the Jewish memory – as a symbol of Roman oppression.

²⁰⁶ Martha Himmelfarb 1984, 55-78 calls into question the sources of parts of *Bereshit Rabbati*, arguing that some parallels suggest knowledge of the Christian *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, although whether Moses ha-Darshan knew it as a Christian work is unknown.

²⁰⁷ Herr 1972, 93. p. 94-7 for the list and its sources. If not Rufus, the ban was imposed by the governor of Syria or Severus, 93 n 27. Mor 2016, 475-78 argues that these were enacted after the revolt to destabilize Jewish nationalism, although they were dismissed during Pius’ reign. I find his argument much more believable.

itself.²⁰⁸ Nothing in the extant Roman laws and especially the insertion of Rufus as the agent of Roman imperialism, however, corroborates that such harsh punitive measures including a ban on circumcision were imposed upon Jews before, during, or after the revolt, as I have argued above. In sum, there is no evidence in rabbinic literature that indicates a ban on circumcision as the cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

3.5: Conclusion

We are left wondering whence the author of the *Historia Augusta* derived his assertion that a ban on circumcision was the cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt. This text should not be relied upon as a historical source for the revolt. In addition, despite the *Digest's* reliability in preserving laws, there is no evidence that Hadrian enacted any laws prohibiting circumcision. Rather, he reinforced and strengthened existing laws on castration. Moreover, Pius's rescript should not be used to corroborate *HA's* statement regarding circumcision as a cause of the revolt; it was more likely to have been promulgated to prevent the circumcision of non ethnic-born Jews, including proselytes and slaves, and to reaffirm the allowance of circumcision for Jews. A decision to prohibit Jews from practicing circumcision would conflict with the pragmatic policies and outlook that we would expect from the Roman government.

Taken at face value, the rabbinic sources would appear to evidence the existence of a ban on circumcision. However, a deeper understanding of these texts' lack of historicity prevents us from accepting them as anything more than windows into the time at which they were redacted – nearly a century after the Bar Kokhba revolt. As a result, they cannot be used to evidence or date a ban on circumcision to before or after the revolt. Thus, Pius's rescript can only serve as a source on other measures enacted against the Jews after the war, which included the

²⁰⁸ Herr 1972, 94.

depopulation of Jews from Judaea (the region surrounding Jerusalem) and changing the name of Provincia Judaea to Syria Palestina. Notably, the rescript seemed to maintain and uphold the Jews' right to circumcise their own sons. I maintain, therefore, that there is not enough evidence to support, at any point during the Hadrian's reign, a ban on circumcision, either in general or specifically against the Jews and it cannot be understood as a cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

CHAPTER 4: Comparing Provincial Revolts

4.1: Introduction

In 1984, Benjamin Isaac published an article that treated the Bar Kokhba revolt in a comparative manner with other Roman provincial revolts. He argued that the Bar Kokhba revolt was unique in its motivations, saying that no other revolt was “caused directly by the actions of an emperor, nor... arose primarily from religious and ideological motives.”²⁰⁹ In this chapter, however, I contest Isaac’s argument. I argue that the Bar Kokhba revolt shares important characteristics with other contemporaneous revolts. These present themselves in the causes of revolts and other important aspects. Therefore, I argue that the causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt – provincial unrest in Judaea and the foundation of Aelia Capitolina - generally adhere to established patterns of native revolts in the Roman Empire. These shared characteristics of provincial revolts will provide a useful comparative tool to understand the Bar Kokhba revolt as a Roman provincial revolt, and not solely a Jewish one.²¹⁰

Stephen L. Dyson’s 1971 article, “Native Revolts in the Roman Empire,” still presents the best criteria by which to analyze Roman provincial revolts.²¹¹ Dyson establishes five categories common to provincial revolts: the conquest and near-acculturation of a native

²⁰⁹ Isaac 1984, 68-69.

²¹⁰ Dyson 1971, 239-240: “The similarity of these revolts is sufficiently striking to make one wonder whether they do not raise common problems on the nature and limitations of the Romanization process. However, they have generally been considered in the *individual context of particular provinces*, which has often led to nationalistic or partly nationalistic interpretation. Comparative study is necessary to change this tendency and allow these movements to be seen as the outcome of a more general social development... For the classical scholar, a knowledge of this type of revolt as it appears in later, better documented historical revolts will allow him a fuller understanding of the possible anthropological, psychological and historical circumstances that produced them in antiquity.” Italics my own.

²¹¹ Recent scholars have continued to use Dyson’s categories when discussing provincial revolts. These include, among many, Menahem Mor, *The Second Jewish Revolt: The Bar Kokhba War, 132-136 CE*, Leiden, Brill: 2016; Grünwald, Thomas. *Bandits in the Roman Empire: Myth and Reality*. Translated by John Drinkwater. London; New York: Routledge, 2004; Woolf, Greg. “Provincial Revolts in the Early Roman Empire.” In *The Jewish Revolt against Rome: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Mladen Popović, 27–44. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, volume 154. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011. Woolf (p. 32-3) considers Dyson’s model the best survey of provincial revolt criteria.

population, the maladministration of the province, a charismatic leader of the revolt, the Roman lack of awareness of provincial unrest, and “psycho-religious” disturbances.²¹² I do not intend to reiterate his examples of provincial revolts for each category, but note that his categories show parallels in revolts that are geographically and temporally diverse, from Britain to Pannonia and from Caesar to Nero. As a result of this groundwork, I approach this chapter by analyzing the Bar Kokhba revolt, particularly its causes, in relation to each of Dyson’s five categories to show that it does indeed adhere to his criteria. Not every revolt, however, will match exactly with each category. As I will show, however, this should not discount one from using his model to make a direct comparison with the Bar Kokhba revolt.²¹³ Moreover, multiple categories may utilize the same reason or cause. Nevertheless, this does not make the Bar Kokhba revolt incapable of comparison. Although it may not match perfectly with Dyson’s categories, a comparative study will prove useful in analyzing topics of the Bar Kokhba revolt, causes and otherwise. This further study will allow us to better understand the Bar Kokhba revolt, particularly as a Roman provincial revolt.

4.2: Conquest and Acculturation

Following the order of characteristics set by Dyson, I begin with the Roman conquest and acculturation of the native peoples. Dyson argues that revolts occur after pacification of the province (or its perceived pacification), but before a complete disruption of the native social

²¹² Dyson 1975, 171. “...native revolts must be studied as a pattern reflecting history, social circumstances and geographic conditions of different parts of the empire. When this is done, individual incidents combine to show patterns of social behavior which persisted through long time periods and evolved to suit changing historical circumstances.” He notes as factors of revolts in this paper: Romanization, financial stress, favoring agrarian economies. “Most revolts are the product of a combination of excess and opportunity.”

²¹³ Dyson 1971, 239: “Some additional uprising such as the slave revolts and the Jewish revolts manifest characteristics that are in part typical of these movements.”

structure.²¹⁴ Another aspect of this criterion is that “it is not a resistance to initial conquest.”²¹⁵

The Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135 CE) was certainly not a response to the initial Roman conquest. If that were the case, we would expect see a major revolt shortly after Pompey’s annexation of Judaea in 63 BCE.

For much of the first century of Roman rule of Provincia Judaea, the province swung between periods of unrest and peace, culminating in the First Revolt (66-70 CE) and the destruction of the Temple by Titus. In the following years, especially during the reigns of Nerva and Trajan, we begin to see some perceived pacification of the province, particularly after Nerva’s scaling back of the *fiscus Iudaicus*, limiting the tax to only those who openly practiced Judaism.²¹⁶ Whatever Nerva’s intent, it appears to have prevented Jewish unrest, both in Judaea and abroad, at least until the Diaspora Revolts that occurred during the end of Trajan’s reign. I have suggested above, however, that unrest in Provincia Judaea continued into the first years of Hadrian’s rule. I argued in chapter one that Hadrian’s deployment of troops and extra soldiers to the province seems to have been an attempt to pacify Judaea during a period of increased tumult. This attempted pacification appears to have failed, further inflaming an already tense situation.

²¹⁴ Dyson 1971, 267. This is, as Dyson notes, the spread of Roman culture and Romanization of the province (for a specific example in Dyson, see p. 258-9). This process would likely vary from province to province. As for Judaea, its effects can be seen in various ways. Belayche, Nicole. *Judaea-Palaestina: the Pagan Cults In Roman Palestine (second to Fourth Century)*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001, argues for a slight influence on Jews. One might consider, in addition, the use of zodiac mosaics in Palestinian Jewish synagogues. Seth Schwartz, *in Imperialism And Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001, argues that the defeat of Bar Kokhba marked a complete disruption in Jewish culture, evident by, for example, the use of pagan imagery on coins of the cities of the Galilee, Tiberias and Sepphoris in particular.

²¹⁵ Dyson 1971, 268.

²¹⁶ Goodman 1989, 40-44. “The only alternative, it seems to me, must be that Jews were taxed, if and only if, they declared themselves as Jews – that is, if they carried on their Jewish customs *professi*.” The story in Suetonius, *Dom.* 12.2 illustrates the severity of the tax under Domitian. Men of all ages – and women and children – were forced to pay even if they did not identify themselves as Jews. A 90-year-old man, attempting to conceal his circumcision was forced to pay the tax. Goodman argues (41) that this might have stemmed from Nerva’s attempt to court apostate Jews at Rome, such as Philo’s nephew Tiberius Julius Alexander. Tacitus describes him as *inlustris eques Romanus*, “a renowned Roman knight,” (*Tac. Ann.*, 15.28.3), but does not mention his ethnic origin.

The Judaeans' intentional manufacturing of flawed weaponry for the Roman soldiers elucidates this belief: the Romans apparently believed that they could trust the natives to suitably arm them.

I have also demonstrated that Hadrian visited Judaea during his tour of the eastern provinces (c. 128-133 CE). Dio records the Roman perception that the natives had been pacified, likely due to Hadrian's nearby presence: "When Hadrian was in Egypt and again in Syria, they [the Jews] kept quiet."²¹⁷ Their silence during Hadrian's visit to Judaea and the neighboring provinces appears to imply to the Romans that the locals had finally submitted to the inevitability of Roman rule, allowing Hadrian and his entourage to continue on their tour without worry. We know, however, that this was not the case, as by the time Hadrian had returned to Athens the revolt had begun.

The final aspect of this category is the near-acculturation or disruption in social structure of the provincials. With regard to the Jews, the destruction of the Temple marked a significant departure from their previous social structure. Shaye Cohen calls this the "democratization of Judaism," or the opening of Judaism to individual practice and belief.²¹⁸ In this,

...the temple was supplemented by the synagogue, a lay institution; the sacrificial cult was supplemented by prayer, a cultic practice open to all; and the priest was supplemented by the scribe, the learned teacher.²¹⁹

Judaism no longer relied upon the Temple for its continuation and practice. Although underway for some time during the Second Temple period, the destruction of the Temple effectively finalized this process,²²⁰ and allowed the people to continue practicing Judaism in a different form, if they so desired.²²¹

²¹⁷ Dio 69.12.2. *παρόντος μὲν ἔν τε τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ αὖθις ἐν τῇ Συρίᾳ τοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ ἡσύχαζον.*

²¹⁸ Cohen 2014, 10. Relative to ancient Judaism and cultures. Cohen notes that the individual, even with this "democratization," did not have the freedom or importance one has or can attain in Western culture.

²¹⁹ Cohen 2014, 100.

²²⁰ Goodman 2000, 665-69.

²²¹ Cohen 2014, 51.

Schäfer notes that Hadrian could have believed that Hellenized Jews, through their assimilation into Greek culture, would have welcomed the construction of Greco-Roman temples in Jerusalem, drawing upon parallels with Antiochus IV and the Hellenizing High Priests of the second century BCE.²²² Both instances, however, were met with revolt, led by the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba, respectively. This signifies that a sufficient number of Jews opposed the construction of Greek or Roman temples in Jerusalem, and wanted to prevent a complete disruption in the native social structure. Inasmuch as the social structure of the Judaeans and Jews was in flux, holdouts existed, among them Bar Kokhba and his loyalists. Their desire to recapture Jerusalem and reconstruct the Temple was expressed on the revolt coinage and implemented by the revolt leadership.²²³ As I have discussed above, the circulation of this coinage would have likely reached Jews living nearby with the hopes that they would understand the imagery on the coins and join the revolt. This demonstrates that a complete disruption in the native social structure had not yet occurred, at least among Bar Kokhba and his fellow leaders, with the hope that these feelings would be shared by other local Jews.

4.3: Administrative and Financial Problems

Next, Dyson notes the increasing administrative and financial control that Rome held over a province and its peoples.²²⁴ Let us start with the administrative issues. This is any action taken by Rome – by which I mean the emperor, provincial governor, or any other subordinate magistrate acting in the name of Rome – in the province that incites rebellion. Hadrian’s decision to found Aelia Capitolina fits this criterion. Isaac, as I have noted, argues that the Bar Kokhba

²²² Schäfer 1990, 296. contra. Goodman 2003, 28-9. “It is important to stress that Aelia Capitolina, founded probably in 130 CE, was not a new Greek *polis*, but a Roman *colonia*. It was not intended to appeal to hellenized or hellenizing Jews...No Jew, however acculturated into Greek and Roman society, can have greeted the new *colonia* with any pleasure, for it was explicitly intended for the settlement of foreign races and foreign religious rites.”

²²³ Meshorer 2001, 151-63; Mildenberg 1984, 30-1 on Jerusalem; Meshorer 2001, 143-51; Mildenberg 1984, 31-48 on images pertaining to Judaism. See chapter 1 for lengthier analysis.

²²⁴ Dyson 1971, 267.

revolt is unique among provincial revolts because it was caused by the actions of the emperor in his decision to found *colonia* Aelia Capitolina.²²⁵ While technically correct, the emperor holds a position within the Roman administration, so any decree of his promulgated in the provinces ought to be counted among such administrative issues, especially as Hadrian spent much of his rule on tour in the provinces.²²⁶ Whether Hadrian was unaware of the consequences of founding Aelia Capitolina or it was part of larger anti-Jewish measures,²²⁷ its foundation followed by the fact that the Jewish temple was not reconstructed constitute administrative problems in Provincia Judaea, initiated by Hadrian himself.²²⁸

Aelia Capitolina's foundation as a Roman *colonia* over a previous city with a native temple closely parallels with the Boudiccan revolt (61-62 CE) in Britain.²²⁹ The Trinovantes, a neighboring British tribe, joined in rebellion with the Iceni and their leader, Boudicca, after the Trinovantan city was supplanted by *colonia* Camulodunum (Colchester) and a temple to Divine Claudius was established there.

...the Trinovantes were moved to rebellion... With the most bitter hatred at the veterans, who, having recently settled the colony Camulodunum, were forcing them from their homes and driving them out of the fields, called them captives and slaves, with the soldiers fomenting the lawlessness of the veterans because of the similarity of their life and the hope of the same license. In addition, a temple to Divine Claudius, having been erected, was seen just like a citadel of eternal tyranny.²³⁰

²²⁵ Isaac 1984, 68.

²²⁶ For more on Hadrian's movements, see Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*, 1997.

²²⁷ Gambash 2015, 11. "Revolts could have thus erupted also as the result of a mere miscalculation on the part of Roman officials." Gambash suggests that Roman decision makers in the provinces may not have foreseen the consequences of their action, something that scholars have tended to take for granted.

²²⁸ If deliberate, this action follows Woolf's argument that most provincial revolts are caused by the "vicious behavior of Rome's representatives in the provinces." Woolf 2012, 38.

²²⁹ Woolf 2012, 37.

²³⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 14.31: commotis ad rebellionem Trinovantibus..., acerrimo in veteranos odio. quippe in coloniam Camulodunum recens deducti pellebant domibus, exturbabant agris, captivos, servos appellando, foventibus impotentiam veteranorum militibus similitudine vitae et spe eiusdem licentiae. ad hoc templum divo Claudio constitutum quasi arx aeternae dominationibus adspiciebatur

Such actions, performed by the emperor or the military, constitute an administrative provocation that could instigate revolt.²³¹ The foundation of Aelia Capitolina, moreover, recalls Roman cities founded in both the west and the east,²³² which included the construction of temples to the imperial cult and the Capitoline triad, Roman statuary, *fora*, and the Roman street system of *cardines* and *decumani*. Hadrian's construction of a temple to Jupiter, as recorded by Dio, constitutes an act emblematic of the founding of a new Roman city. Recent archaeological excavations by Weksler-Bdolah may indicate that construction on the eastern *cardo* of Aelia Capitolina began early in Hadrian's reign, with the city laid out on an orthogonal grid, completely destroying what was left of the older, Herodian city.²³³ This suggests a complete and deliberate suppression of the local culture, implemented by the Roman administration – in this case, Hadrian – to prevent the continuation of Judaism.

The type of rule imposed by the Romans after 70 CE in Provincia Judaea also constitutes an administrative problem. The destruction of the temple and the loss of leadership positions held by previous local rulers left a vacuum to be filled. Up until this time, Rome had allowed Judaea some sort of local or ethnic rule, either through the Herodian dynasty or the high priests. After 70 CE, and through 135 CE, Rome imposed their rule through city councils comprised mostly or entirely of non-Jews, the establishment of *coloniae* (Aelia Capitolina), and direct

²³¹ Dyson 1971, 259 also notes that the construction of a Roman temple could constitute issues with 'Romanization,' and thereby fall under category one. The same action can fall into multiple categories – no one act is so disparate as to be easy to place.

²³² For cities in the west, see Grimal 1983; the east, Raja 2012. Both conclude that Roman cities and colonies shared a number of similar structures. The best English summaries of the plan of Aelia Capitolina are Geva 1993 and Eliav 2003. Although they disagree on the location of the Temple to Jupiter (if built at all), both conclude that Aelia featured institutions common to Roman cities. See also Magness 2011, 313-16 for a summary layout of the Roman colony and all it included.

²³³ Weksler-Bdolah 2014, 48-52, 57. For more on Aelia Capitolina as a typical Roman *colonia*, see Boatwright 2000, 196-203.

military rule.²³⁴ The latter two are especially applicable to the Bar Kokhba revolt, with Aelia Capitolina as a veteran *colonia* and the basing of a second legion within the province at Caparcotna. This suggests that the tenuous situation called for direct military intervention, which brought about war rather than pacifying the province. Moreover, the lack of any native Judaeian ruler may have led to the inability of the Roman rulers to assuage any tensions or handle local Jewish interests,²³⁵ especially without a high priest.²³⁶

Administrative provocations are not limited to the local decrees. Goodman has argued extensively that Trajan's policy was dependent on his father's status as a legate in the army under Vespasian.²³⁷ Nerva's selection of Trajan as his heir allowed Trajan to continue the Flavian anti-Jewish policies first enacted under Vespasian and Titus through their shared link to the First Jewish Revolt. These policies would increase in severity under Domitian, who himself found it necessary to increase the measures against the Jews as he was too young to have participated in the First Revolt and had no military experience to his name. Thus, it was necessary to play up his father's and brother's actions and increase the severity of the recently instituted *fiscus*. As a result, Gambash argues, "The most elaborate and compelling theory [for a falling out between Jews and Romans]... was the ascent to power of a new dynasty [the Flavians] in Rome."²³⁸ The subsequent reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, indebted to the Flavians for

²³⁴ Choi 2013, 120-126, 210. Choi describes the various types of Jewish leaderships during this interwar period: kings, priests and high priests, warrior, learned, prophetic, messianic, and nasi. He notes that Bar Kokhba fits into a number of these categories: warrior (p. 177), messianic (p. 193-200), and nasi (p. 200-210). A recent find off the coast of Tel Dor in northern Israel reveals the name of a governor of Provincia Judaea ca. 130 CE, Gargilius Antiquus. Further research and analysis must be performed until it is known what significance, if any, this find will have on our knowledge of the revolt. Published by Biblical Archaeological Society, 12/08/2016, <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/inscriptions/governor-of-judea-bar-kokhba-revolt/>.

²³⁵ Baumgarten 2009, 152-58. He argues that the appointment of the high priest passed between local Jewish rulers and the Roman legate, and "While the Temple was standing, one obvious point of contact between Jews and Romans was the high priest."

²³⁶ Choi 2013, 174. The only priest noted as involved in the Bar Kokhba revolt is Eleazer, who is recorded on the coins as "Eleazer the priest." He is not referred to as "High Priest," unlike the Hasmonean rulers.

²³⁷ See Goodman 2003, 2004 for more.

²³⁸ Gambash 2015, 162. pp. 162-69 for more.

their positions, saw no attempt to reverse these policies, and thus the foundation of Aelia Capitolina may have arisen due to Flavian policies. Indeed, *colonia Aelia Capitolina*, as a product of Hadrian's rule, closely resembles how Vespasian endowed the already existing city Caesarea with the honorific title *colonia*.²³⁹ The foundation of Aelia Capitolina may then be an action designed to emulate Flavian policies in the province.

Whether there was financial maladministration is much more difficult to determine. Isaac has claimed that the Bar Kokhba revolt is the only rebellion that does not have an explicit financial cause. He compares it to the revolts of the Treveri, Frisians, Arminius, and Boudicca as those that do, in order to emphasize the supposed uniqueness of the Bar Kokhba revolt.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Isaac 1998, 94-99; Bazzana 2010, 91. *Digest* 50.15.8: Divus Vespasianus Caesarienses colonos fecit; "The divine Vespasian made the Caesareans colonists." Isaac argues that no extra veterans were settled at Caesarea, but that the title was honorific. See Josephus, *BJ*, 7.6.6.: Περὶ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν καιρὸν ἐπέστειλε Καῖσαρ Βάσσῳ καὶ Λαβερῖῳ Μαξιμῷ, οὗτος δὲ ἦν ἐπίτροπος, κελεύων πᾶσαν γῆν ἀποδόσθαι τῶν Ἰουδαίων. οὐ γὰρ κατόκισεν ἐκεῖ πόλιν ἰδίαν αὐτῷ τὴν χώραν φυλάττων, ὀκτακοσίοις δὲ μόνοις ἀπὸ τῆς στρατιᾶς διαφειμένοις χωρίον ἔδωκεν εἰς κατοίκησιν, ὃ καλεῖται μὲν Ἀμμαοῦς, ἀπέχει δὲ τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων σταδίους τριάκοντα. "At this time, Vespasian wrote to Bassus and Labeius Maximus, who was governor, ordering that the entire land of the Judaeans be sold. For he did not found his own city there, keeping the land for himself. He gave the land to 800 men only dismissed from the army to live there, which is called Emmaus. It lays 300 stades from Jerusalem."

²⁴⁰ Isaac 1984, 69-70. Treveri: Tac. *Ann.* 3.40: igitur per conciliabula et coetus seditiosa disserebant de continuatione tributorum, gravitate faenoris, saevitia ac superbia praesidentium. "Therefore, in assemblies and meetings they discussed sedition regarding the continuation of the tributes, the severity of interests, and the cruelty and pride of the governors."

Frisians: Tac. *Ann.* 4.72: tributum iis Drusus iusserat modicum pro angustia rerum, ut in usus militaris coria boum penderent. "Drusus had ordered a moderate tribute for the shallowness of their resources, that they pay the hides of oxen for military use."

Arminius: Dio 56.18.3: ἐπεὶ δ' ὁ Οὐᾶρος ὁ Κυντίλιος τὴν τε ἡγεμονίαν τῆς Γερμανίας λαβὼν καὶ τὰ παρ' ἐκείνοις ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς διοικῶν ἔσπευσεν αὐτοὺς ἀθροῦτερον μεταστῆσαι, καὶ τὰ τε ἄλλα ὡς καὶ δουλεύουσί σφισιν ἐπέταττε καὶ χρήματα ὡς καὶ παρ' ὑπηκόων ἐσέπρασεν. "When Quintilius Varus, receiving the province of Germany and managing the duties of the office among them, urged to change them more quickly. Among other things, he commanded them as though they were slaves and exacted money as though from subjects."

Boudicca: Tac. *Ann.* 14.31: iam primum uxor eius Boudicca verberibus adfecta et filiae stupro violatae sunt; praecipui quique Icenorum, quasi cunctam regionem muneri acceperant, avitis bonis exuuntur, et propinqui regis inter mancipia habebantur; "Now first his wife Boudicca was struck by blows and her daughters were raped; even the leaders of the Iceni, were stripped of their ancestral goods, as though they had received all their land as gifts, and even the relatives of the king were held in chains."

Dio 62.2: πρόφασις δὲ τοῦ πολέμου ἐγένετο ἡ δήμευσις τῶν χρημάτων ἃ Κλαύδιος τοῖς πρώτοις αὐτῶν ἐδεδώκει: καὶ ἔδει καὶ ἐκεῖνα, ὡς γε Δεκιανὸς Κάτος ὁ τῆς νήσου ἐπιτροπεύων ἔλεγεν, ἀναπόμπιμα γενέσθαι. διὰ τε οὖν τοῦτο, καὶ ὅτι ὁ Σενέκας χιλίας σφίσι μυριάδας ἄκουσιν ἐπὶ χρησταῖς ἐλπίσι τόκων δανείσας ἔπειτ' ἀθρόας τε ἅμα αὐτὰς καὶ βιαίως ἐσέπρασεν, ἐπανεστῆσαν. "The origins of the war was the confiscation of the money which Claudius had gifted to their leaders. And beyond these, as Decianus Catus, the procurator of the island, said, were to be paid back. Because of this, and since Seneca had lent 400,000 sesterces to them that they did not want, with the hopes of receiving good rates, exacted it forcefully, they revolted."

Moreover, ancient historians reported financial reasons as directly responsible for all of these revolts. It should be noted, however, that just because neither Dio nor *HA* explicitly say that financial maladministration contributed to the beginnings of the Bar Kokhba revolt does not mean that it did not exist. As I have demonstrated in chapter one, the deployment of additional Roman soldiers into Provincia Judaea required extra provisions. The locals would have likely taken on the worst of this economic burden, from quartering troops (and Hadrian's entourage) on the move in the province to supplying foodstuffs. Goodman further suggests that the loss of Jerusalem as a market town would have likely affected local farmers hoping to sell their wares to traders and visitors to the city.²⁴¹ The establishment of a *colonia* also necessitated the settling of veterans with land to farm, likely appropriated from Judaeans living nearby. These people would have lost their livelihood and consequently endured financial hardship, perhaps explaining why we see the revolt localized to Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.²⁴² Although we cannot know the level of taxes on the locals or whether the *fiscus Iudaicus* continued under Hadrian, the situation suggests some level of financial stress among the provincials – stress that was created by the Roman government.

4.4: A Charismatic Leader

Each revolt also had a single, charismatic leader, often coming from the Romanized aristocracy, who preached unity among his followers by hearkening back to previous

²⁴¹ Goodman 2000, 672.

²⁴² See especially Mor, "The Geographical Scope of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt," in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered*, ed. Schäfer. Tübingen, 2003: 107-131. Mor argues that despite the Tel Shalem arch located in northern Israel, there is no indication that the revolt reached the Galilee. This is supplemented by Kloner and Zissu, "Hiding Complexes in Judaea: An Archaeological and Geographical Update on the Area of the Bar Kokhba Revolt," *ibid.* 181-216. They argue that the caves used as hiding complexes in the region surrounding Jerusalem contain coinage from the revolt indicate that the revolt was limited in geographical scope. contra. Shahar, "The Underground Hideouts in Galilee and their Historical Meaning," *ibid.* 217-240. Although no revolt coins have been found in the Galilee, S. argues that the hideouts were made in preparation for the revolt spreading there. While this is possible, I find it more likely that certain individuals from the Galilee joined in the rebellion, much as it appeared some Nabataeans did as well, according to Cotton, "The Bar Kokhba Revolt and the Documents from the Judaeian Desert: Nabataean Participation in the Revolt (*P. Yadin* 52)," *ibid.* 133-152.

independent native kingdoms.²⁴³ A notable example of this is Boudicca, the queen of the Iceni, and leader of the Boudiccan rebellion (c. 61-62 CE). She and her husband Prasutagus ruled their client kingdom for a long time.²⁴⁴ Their status and long reign under Roman hegemony suggests that they were, in some part, Romanized. Upon the start of the revolt, Boudicca dominates the rebellion as the only known leader, and the fact that she “was one of the few surviving members of tribal royalty in occupied Britain made her a natural rallying point.”²⁴⁵ Those wishing to return to a time before Roman occupation would have likely found her, and her cause, to be their greatest hope.

Simon Bar Kokhba, the leader of the Jewish revolt against Hadrian, mostly aligns with Dyson’s paradigm. He was undoubtedly a charismatic leader. The papyri discovered in the Cave of Letters attests to this fact. Although some portray him as a willful, harsh man (threatening to fether his lieutenants if they disobey),²⁴⁶ they demonstrate his power and command of his army. In addition, the use of paleo-Hebrew on the revolt coinage displays a desire to be seen like the Maccabees and their revolt from Seleucid hegemony,²⁴⁷ perhaps in an attempt to see the same success they had against their overlords. Moreover, the attraction to Bar Kokhba as leader may also be attributed to the fact that some viewed him as a messianic figure, which will be discussed in further detail below.

On the other hand, Bar Kokhba was almost assuredly not a member of the Romanized aristocracy. I would suggest, nonetheless, that he had familiarity with Roman military operations. The brief success attained by the rebels would not have been possible if he, or his generals, did

²⁴³ Dyson 1971, 267-8.

²⁴⁴ Tac. *Ann.*, 14.31.1: longa opulentia clarus.

²⁴⁵ Dyson 1971, 261-2.

²⁴⁶ “From Shimeon ben Kosiba to Yeshua ben Galgoula and to the men of the fort, peace. I take heaven to witness against me that unless you mobilize [destroy?] the Galileans who are with you every man I will put into fetters as I did to ben Aphlul.” trans. Yadin 1971, 137-38.

²⁴⁷ Meshorer 2001, 163

not have some understanding of Roman military maneuvers and how to counteract them. Additional evidence suggests that Simon Bar Kokhba was not a member of the Romanized class. The inscriptions on the revolt coinage are all in Hebrew or paleo-Hebrew, rather than the Greek or Latin one would expect to find on Roman coins from the same era, surpassing the Hasmoneans, who minted bilingual Hebrew-Greek coins.²⁴⁸ In doing so, it suggests that Bar Kokhba wanted to establish a Jewish state free of Greek or Roman culture. In addition, the papyri ascribed to him are nearly all written in Hebrew or Aramaic. One notable exception, as I have mentioned in a previous chapter, is *P. Yadin 52*, in which Soumaios, a lieutenant in Bar Kokhba's army, apologizes for having to use Greek because he does not know Hebrew or Aramaic.²⁴⁹ From this, we might surmise that Bar Kokhba wanted his lieutenants to use native Semitic languages rather than the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean – Greek. This would have the effect of uniting his followers under a single tongue, rather than allowing any number of disparate languages under his rule, effectively creating an ethno-nationalistic state. While not a perfect fit, the Bar Kokhba revolt mostly adheres to the specifications for a charismatic leader of provincial revolts.

4.5: Surprise Attack

Each provincial revolt would also catch the Roman leadership in the province unaware.²⁵⁰ The Bar Kokhba revolt easily falls into this category. I have discussed the relevant passage above, but will repeat it here: “When Hadrian was in Egypt and again in Syria, they [the Jews]

²⁴⁸ See especially from the reigns of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE) and Alexander Janneus (103-76 BCE). One from Alexander Janneus's reign has ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ in Greek and HMLK YHWNTN in Hebrew, Meshorer 2001, n.11. For a brief summary of the different types of Hasmonean coins, see Hanson, Richard Simon. "Toward A Chronology of the Hasmonean Coins." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 216 (1974): 21-23. A Judaea entirely free of foreign culture had not existed since the biblical era, if at all.

²⁴⁹ Hannah M. Cotton, 2002 in *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters*, 351-58.

²⁵⁰ Dyson 1971, 268.

kept quiet.”²⁵¹ Clearly, some amount of planning went into the revolt to ensure Hadrian and his entourage were far from Provincia Judaea before attacking. Dio also records the tardiness of the Roman response.

And at first the Romans made no account of them. But when all Judaea had been stirred up, and the Jews of every land were being roused and joined in revolt, they were demonstrating many troubles against the Romans, both in secret and openly.²⁵²

The slow response of the Romans afforded Bar Kokhba and his loyalists early gains in the war. It seems likely that the Roman perception that the province was at peace allowed the rebels to catch the Romans unaware. This parallels closely the rebellion of Boudicca and the Iceni, who likewise revolted when the governor Paullinus was otherwise occupied in attacking the Druid stronghold on Mona. According to Tacitus:

But then Suetonius Paullinus had Britain...therefore he prepared to attack the island Mona, strongly inhabited and a place for refugees...the sudden revolt of the province was announced to Suetonius while he was doing these things.²⁵³

We may view these circumstances as the Romans not taking the threat of revolt seriously or the rebels waiting for the opportune moment to strike, or a combination of both, after they had been roused by their respective causes.

4.6: Socio-Religious Disturbances

Finally, there are what Dyson terms “psycho-religious disturbances.”²⁵⁴ He explains these as efforts by “native people whose cultural and political identity is under assault by a superior

²⁵¹ Dio 69.12.2. παρόντος μὲν ἔν τε τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ αὖθις ἐν τῇ Συρίᾳ τοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ ἡσύχαζον.

²⁵² Dio 69.12.1: καὶ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἐν οὐδενὶ αὐτοῦς λόγῳ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι ἐποιοῦντο: ἐπεὶ δ' ἦ τε Ἰουδαία πᾶσα ἐκεκίνητο, καὶ οἱ ἀπανταχοῦ γῆς Ἰουδαῖοι συνεταράττοντο καὶ συνήεσαν, καὶ πολλὰ κακὰ ἐς τοὺς Ῥωμαίους τὰ μὲν λάθρα τὰ δὲ καὶ φανερώς ἐνεδείκνυντο.

²⁵³ Tac. *Ann.* 14.29.3-30: sed tum Paulinus Suetonius obtinebat Britannos...igitur Monam insulam, incolis validam et receptaculum perfugarum, adgredi parat...haec agenti Suetonio repentina defectio provinciae nuntiatur.

²⁵⁴ Dyson 1971, 268.

culture to assert its independence and self identity,²⁵⁵ and that these only occur when the native group “realizes the potential finality of their subjugation.” I proceed with an analysis of the Bar Kokhba revolt as a “psycho-religious disturbance” to show its viability as a Roman provincial revolt.²⁵⁶

The foundation of Aelia Capitolina as a Roman *colonia* and the likelihood that a Roman temple or statuary graced this new city, as I argue above, appear to have been enough to incite rebellion. The construction and demarcation of the *pomerium* of Aelia Capitolina likely forestalled any hope that Jerusalem would be restored or any possible Jewish temple would be reconstructed within it. This recalls, as I previously noted, the Roman reluctance to allow foreign rites within the *pomerium* of Rome. As a *colonia*, then, I expect a similar trend to have occurred. As Eliav notes, because Jerusalem has been continuously inhabited, it is very difficult to discover plentiful evidence dating to the time at which Aelia Capitolina was founded (ca. 128-130 CE) and “its ongoing life has done considerable damage to its earlier layers.”²⁵⁷ What does date to this period, however, are two monumental entrances, one below the Damascus Gate,²⁵⁸ and the Ecce Homo arch, which Eliav argues would have marked the boundary of the *pomerium*, even

²⁵⁵ Dyson 1971, 246. “This often leads to a sudden, massive effort to expel the invader, many times accompanied by evidence of a changed, disturbed psychological state which sometimes displays itself in the rise of new religious movements.”

²⁵⁶ The psychology of revolts has also been explored through the trans-theoretical model (TTM), first posited in 1984 by Prochaska and DiClemente for changes in health in group cultures and individuals. The TTM assumes that change is both dynamic and a process. It further breaks down psychological change into five categories. 1) Precontemplation: This represents the status quo, a lack of concern or awareness of recent changes. 2) Contemplation: There is awareness of a need to change, although it is not imminent. 3) Preparation: There is a commitment to change, and plans are set in motion. 4) Action: Change begins. 5) Maintenance) Change has occurred and is now the new normative behavior. The TTM is applied to revolts within Rogers and de Los Santos, “A Model for Understanding the Psychology of Revolts and Revolutions,” 2014, 15-33, wherein the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s USA and the Protestant Reformation are evaluated. The “contemplation” stage of the TTM matches Dyson’s argument that a revolt will not occur until the people realize “the finality of their situation.”

²⁵⁷ Eliav 2003, 243. The best English overview for the archaeology of Aelia Capitolina is Geva, “Jerusalem,” *NEAEHL* 758-767.

²⁵⁸ For more on the Damascus Gate, see Wigthman, *The Damascus Gate: Excavations by C. M. Bennett and J. B. Hennessy at the Damascus Gate, Jerusalem, 1964-66* (BAR 519), Oxford 1989.

with the absence of defensive walls.²⁵⁹ Despite the paucity of evidence indicating extensive Roman building works, fragments of marble, columns, and the Roman street system imply that Aelia Capitolina was designed as a typical *colonia*, replete with Roman structures and institutions.²⁶⁰ The beginning of the transformation of Jerusalem into a Roman city with Roman cultural institutions and architecture represents, in Dyson's words, "the finality of their subjugation." Any chance to restore Jerusalem or the temple would be lost. This likely signified to Bar Kokhba and his allies the loss of their traditions and cultural identity, thereby instigating the revolt.

We see, as I have shown above, a similar occurrence in Britain that led the Trinovantes to join with the Iceni in their revolt against Rome, with the destruction of their city and the construction of the imperial cult in the new *colonia* there. Whether or not Hadrian actually constructed a Roman temple on the Temple Mount as Dio says, the depiction of the temple on the Bar Kokhba revolt coinage implies some level of religious motivation. This coinage also expressed the rebellion's desire for independence and self-identity through the use of slogans such as "For the freedom of Jerusalem," and the use of well-known Jewish symbols like the palm frond (*lulav*), citron (*etrog*), and temple façade.

Some may argue that Jews welcomed Roman culture and were receptive to cultural change. Some Jews, both in Judaea and in the Diaspora, had been Hellenized or Romanized to varying degrees, or were so far removed from Jerusalem that it held no special meaning for them.²⁶¹ I have already noted the idea that Hadrian may have believed that Hellenized Jews

²⁵⁹ Eliav 2003, 254.

²⁶⁰ Eliav 2003, 273-74: "They reconfigured the spatial organization and designed their colony in an innovative urban setting, with municipal centers, traffic arteries, temples and other architectonic elements joining together to form its new shape."

²⁶¹ For more on these phenomena, see Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, and Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*. One notable example of a Romanized Jew is Philo's nephew, Tiberius Julius Alexander, who served as a provincial magistrate. Travel to Jerusalem for Diaspora Jews would have been expensive and dangerous; how many

living in and around Jerusalem would have welcomed a Greco-Roman temple there. Goodman, however, rightly argues that Aelia Capitolina's designation as a *colonia* meant that neither Hellenized or Romanized Jews would have shown any affinity to this new Roman *colonia*, especially because it was settled with foreign races and religious rites, which Dio records as one of the main impetuses of the revolt.²⁶² But the Jews of antiquity were not monolithic, and most Jews probably concerned themselves with the continuation of Judaism, even if it survived in an altered state.²⁶³ These Jews, more concerned with the survival and perpetuation of Judaism, likely did not perceive the same finality of the situation as Bar Kokhba did. Whether some Jews acquiesced to the new situation or not, enough seemed to have regarded Hadrian's actions as upsetting socio-religious norms to warrant revolt.

A possible religious element of the Bar Kokhba revolt exists in its messianic implications, according to later rabbinic attributions to Rabbi Akiva. Indeed, the translation of the name Bar Kokhba as "son of a star" has messianic undertones. When one views this in conjunction with the Bar Kokhba revolt coinage featuring a star on them,²⁶⁴ the possibility of religious significance to the revolt seems likely. Moreover, the use of religious symbols on the coins, including the palm frond, citron, temple façade, and others, discussed in detail in chapter one, suggest the religious motivations of the revolt. All of these symbols could have been used to spread the religious motivations of the revolt, as it is likely that Jews who encountered and used these newly minted coins were familiar with the significance of the symbols. Of course, the failure of the revolt led many rabbis to discount Akiva's opinion, as they derided Bar Kokhba as

Jews set foot in Jerusalem beyond those from the area and nearby provinces is unknown, but likely such trips would have been limited to the wealthy.

²⁶² Goodman 2003, 28-9; Dio 69.12.2. For more on Aelia Capitolina as a typical Roman *colonia*, see Boatwright 2000, 196-203.

²⁶³ Cohen 2014, 51.

²⁶⁴ See above, chapter 1.

“Bar Koziba,” or “son of lies.” Nonetheless, the loss of Jerusalem and its temple likely expressed to Bar Kokhba the finality of their situation and the imminent subjugation of Judaea, which manifested itself in a revolt for political, social, cultural, and religious independence from Rome.

4.7: Conclusion

Although scholars have tended to treat the Bar Kokhba revolt as a unique event, I find that it deserves to be understood along the lines of a typical Roman provincial revolt. I have argued above that the construction of Aelia Capitolina constituted the final provocation of the revolt. As a Roman provincial revolt, however, more weight is added to the unrest in the province during the beginning of Hadrian’s rule, thereby emphasizing the similarities in the underlying causes between the Bar Kokhba revolt and other Roman provincial revolts. By placing it within this group, it opens new avenues of research by which we might be able to analyze the Bar Kokhba revolt, specifically within the financial and administrative problems that likely plagued Provincia Judaea in the years preceding the revolt.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

For some time, many scholars have attributed the causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt to Hadrian's ban on circumcision. Recent scholarship has debated the timing of this ban, often placing it after the revolt as a punitive measure. I have argued, however, that through the examination of Roman laws issued both before and after the revolt, and the general attitudes towards circumcision, proselytism, and slavery, that it is very unlikely that Hadrian instituted a ban on circumcision. The revolt, therefore, was caused by other factors – particularly Hadrian's construction of Aelia Capitolina over Jerusalem.

The archaeological sources, particularly the imperial provincial and revolt coinage and finds dated to early second century CE Aelia Capitolina, support Dio's account that the *colonia* was indeed founded before the outbreak of war and was a major factor in inciting the rebellion. Whether Hadrian established a Roman temple or statuary in his new city as Dio suggests, there are still a number of parallels between the Bar Kokhba revolt and previous revolts instigated by similar imperial actions.

Moreover, if a ban on circumcision cannot be maintained as the cause of the Bar Kokhba revolt, then the revolt even more closely parallels other provincial revolts. In this regard, all of these revolts demonstrate native provincial outrage at the systemic brutality and economic burdens imposed upon them by Rome. The archaeological evidence of an increased Roman military presence indicates this provincial outrage, as it is unlikely that there would have been a need to deploy additional troops if the province was truly pacified. While it is difficult to assess the level of both political and economic stress in Provincia Judaea, the unrest there, evident by the vast influx of legions and supplementary troops into it during these years, may account for some amount of any additional stress. If, as I have suggested, the locals were responsible for

providing supplies and places of rest for their oppressors, it would have harmed the locals' livelihood. These actions seemed to have laid the groundwork for the revolt, so when Hadrian announced his decision to found Aelia Capitolina over Jerusalem, tensions had reached a breaking point. At any rate, Hadrian's actions in Judaea, from moving additional troops into the province to founding Aelia Capitolina, appear to have increased the level of both political and economic stress. Antipathy between Romans and provincials, and the harsh suppression of the province by the Roman provincial government helps us understand that many aspects of the Bar Kokhba revolt (and its suppression) were similar to other provincial revolts of the period.

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