

was murderous and a bandit, but relied on his name, as if dealing with slaves, and claimed to be a luminary who had come down to them from heaven and was magically enlightening those who were in misery. The war reached its height in the eighteenth year of the reign of Hadrian in Beththera,¹³⁴ which was a strong citadel not very far from Jerusalem; the siege lasted a long time before the rebels were driven to final destruction by famine and thirst and the instigator of their madness paid the penalty he deserved. Hadrian commanded that by a legal decree and ordinances the whole nation should be absolutely prevented from entering from henceforth even the district round Jerusalem, so that not even from a distance could it see its ancestral home. Ariston of Pella¹³⁵ tells the story. Thus when the city came to be bereft of the nation of the Jews, and its ancient inhabitants had completely perished, it was colonized by foreigners, and the Roman city which afterwards arose changed its name, and in the honor of the reigning Emperor Aelius Hadrian was called Aelia. The church, too, in it was composed of Gentiles, and after the Jewish bishops the first who was appointed to minister there was Marcus.

9.6.3 The Bar Kokhba Letters: Day-to-Day Conduct of the Revolt

One of the most dramatic archaeological discoveries is the letters written by Bar Kokhba himself (whose real name was Simeon bar Kosiba) during the revolt. They are, for the most part, military dispatches and they confirm the historicity of the revolt while casting light on the nature of the administration of Judea by the rebels.



Simeon Bar Kosiba to Yehonathan and to Masabala, a letter:

That every man from Tekoa and from Tel Adirin who is with you, you shall send them to me without delay. And if you shall not send them, let it be known to you, that I will exact punishment from you.

Salisa [son of] Yose, wrote it.¹³⁶

Simeon, son of Kosiba, the ruler over Israel, to Jonathan and Masabala, peace!

134. Hebrew, Betar.

135. A mid-second century Christian author whose work is not preserved.

136. Trans. J. Fitzmyer, D. J. Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), p. 161, no. 59 with restorations from K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), p. 216.

That you should inspect and take the wheat which Hanan bar Yishma'el has brought, and send me, after inspection, one hundred. And you should give them with assurance for they have been found to be stolen. And if you do not do this, then retribution will be exacted from you. And send me the man immediately with assurance.

And every Tekoan man who is with you, the houses in which they dwell will be burned down, and from you I will exact retribution.

(As for) Joshua, son of the Palmyrene, you shall seize him and send him to me with assurance. Do not hesitate to seize the sword which is upon him. You shall send him.

Samuel, son of Ammi.¹³⁷

Letter of Simeon bar Kosiba, peace!

To Yehonathan son of Ba'aya [my order is] that whatever Elisha tells you do for him and help him [in every] action. Be well.¹³⁸

From the Administrators of Beth Mashko, from Yeshua and from Eleazar to Yeshua ben Galgoula chief of the camp, peace.

Let it be known to you that the cow which Yehoseph ben Ariston took from Ya'akov ben Yehudah, who dwells in Beth Mashko, belongs to him [i.e. to Ya'akov] by purchase. Were it not for the Gentiles [i.e. the Romans] who are near us, I would have gone up and satisfied you concerning this, lest you will say that it is out of contempt that I did not go up to you. Be you well and the whole House of Israel.

Yeshua ben Elazar has written it [i.e. dictated it]

Eleazar ben Yehoseph has written it

Ya'akov ben Yehudah, for himself

Sha'ul ben Eliezar, witness

Yehoseph ben Yehoseph, witness

Ya'akov ben Yehoseph, testifies [scribe or notary?].¹³⁹

Simeon, son of Kosiba, to Jonathan, son of Ba'yan, and Masabala, son of Simeon:

You are to send to me Eleazar, son of Hitta, immediately before the Sabbath . . .

137. Fitzmyer and Harrington, p. 159, no. 53 with restorations from Beyer, pp. 213–14.

138. Y. Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 126.

139. Yadin, p. 136 with modifications by L. H. Schiffman.