

## Cassius Dio on the Revolt of Bar Kokhba\*

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The *epitome* of Dio's text describes a dangerous revolt caused by Hadrian's decision to transform Jerusalem into a Roman colony and a pagan cult-centre. The insurgents were motivated by religious fervour and ideology. Their rebellion was well-planned. After Hadrian's departure they fought a guerilla-war, avoiding open battle. The Romans were slow to react. Only when the rising had assumed major proportions were reinforcements sent against the Jews. Their commander, Julius Severus, also avoided open battle, isolating Jewish strongholds and reducing them systematically. Losses were very high on both sides. Much of Judaea was destroyed.

These are the main points of the only consistent survey of the Revolt as abridged by Xiphilinus. This account forms the basis for every modern discussion. Its credibility has been evaluated on internal grounds and by comparison with additional information from literary and epigraphical sources relating to the revolt. In this paper I shall approach Dio's text in a somewhat different manner, namely by comparison with the description in ancient literary sources of other insurrections against Roman rule in this period. The material, it must be noted, is found mainly in Dio's History and in the works of Tacitus. This might help us to judge whether Dio has properly brought out the specific character of this war. We should establish whether the text contains features which recur in other descriptions of native rebellions as opposed to elements peculiar to this text.

First, the cause of the uprising: Hadrian's measures regarding Jerusalem. I do not know of any other insurrection said to have been caused directly by the

\* The substance of this paper was presented as a lecture at a symposium on the Bar Kokhba Revolt at Tel-Aviv University in March 1982.

actions of an emperor,<sup>1</sup> nor have I found any which arose primarily from religious and ideological motives. In the first and second centuries AD every rebellion is somehow attributed to anger about taxation in one form or another and to the behaviour of those responsible for its collection. To mention only a few examples: In 21 the Treveri revolted because of the magnitude of their foreign debt.<sup>2</sup> The Frisians successfully rebelled in 28.<sup>3</sup> They used to pay a moderate tribute in kind. Their rising was prompted by excessive demands made by the officer in charge of the region.<sup>4</sup> Dio attributes the rebellion of Arminius to the imposition of taxes.<sup>5</sup> The first Jewish revolt was, according to Tacitus, caused by the bad government of the procurators.<sup>6</sup> The insurrection of the Iceni under Boudicca in 60–1 is ascribed by Tacitus to the rapacity of the financial procurator and his collaborators at the time of

- 1 The revolt of Vindex aimed at overthrowing Nero. However, as pointed out by P.A. Brunt, this was not a native rebellion against Roman rule, but a general uprising against Nero's oppressive regime ("The Revolt of Vindex and the Fall of Nero," *Latomus* 18 (1959) 531–9). Cf. J.B. Hainsworth, "Verginius and Vindex," *Historia* 11 (1962) 86–96. For a different view see S.L. Dyson, "Native Revolt Patterns in the Roman Empire," *ANRW* II, 3, 158–61. In this study (*ibid.* 138–75) and in an earlier paper: "Native Revolts in the Roman Empire," *Historia* 20(1971) 239–74, Dyson formulates general conclusions on such revolts. This is not the aim of the present paper, which evaluates Dio's report on the Second Jewish Revolt through comparison with other literary sources on native revolts. It may be noted that one emperor, Caligula, *almost* caused a revolt when he ordered that a statue with his effigy be set up in the Temple in Jerusalem, cf.: E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, I, revised by G. Vermes and F. Millar (Edinburgh 1973), 394–7. It is, of course, no coincidence that this too was a case involving the Emperor-cult and Jewish religion.
- 2 Tacitus, *Ann.* 3, 40–6, esp. 40,1. In 40,4 this is further specified as: continuous taxation, the burden of debt and the cruelty and arrogance of the governor. The revolt in Illyricum, AD 6–9 is also ascribed to tribute and maladministration, cf. Dio 55. 29,1; 56. 16,3. See however Syme, *CAH* X, 369.
- 3 Tacitus, *Ann.* 4. 72–4.
- 4 *Ibid.* 72, 1–2.
- 5 Dio 56. 18,3; Tacitus, *Ann.* 1. 59. Both Dio and Velleius hold the governor Quinctilius Varus responsible for the outbreak of the revolt in AD 9, but Velleius, 2. 117 and Florus, 2. 30,31 say that the cause was the introduction of Roman jurisdiction.
- 6 *Hist.* 5. 9,3–10,1.

incorporation in the Roman province.<sup>7</sup> It may be noted that, when the revolt broke out, the provincial governor was engaged in the suppression of the cult-centre of the Druids at Mona (Anglesey). That, however, is not described as a cause of the rebellion. This uprising is of particular interest for our purpose, since we have both Tacitus' account and that of Dio, abridged by Xiphilinus.<sup>8</sup> Tacitus provides far more information<sup>9</sup> and Dio is, by comparison, 'verbose and miserable' — the words of Sir Ronald Syme.<sup>10</sup> Dio's description of the outbreak of the revolt at least agrees with that of Tacitus in ascribing its primary cause to Roman exactions.<sup>11</sup>

Another factor mentioned by Tacitus were the outrages suffered by the Queen and her daughters and the nobility of the Iceni at the hands of centurions and fiscal agents.<sup>12</sup> This too is a recurrent theme. Personal grievances of native leaders are also mentioned as a significant motive in connection with the insurrections of the Batavians,<sup>13</sup> of the Brigantes,<sup>14</sup> and in Pontos in Asia Minor, all in 69.<sup>15</sup>

Tacitus gives a third reason which prompted the Britons to revolt under Boudicca, namely resentment at the conscription of their men into the auxilia of the Roman army.<sup>16</sup> In two other cases the levy was the primary cause of a

7 *Ann.* 14.31 and 32,7; Dio 62.2.

8 The sources for the revolt are Tacitus, *Ann.* 14. 29–39; *Agricola* 15–16,2; Dio 62. 1–12 (Xiphilinus). For the revolt see G. Webster, *Boudicca, the British Revolt against Rome AD 60* (London 1978); S. Frere, *Britannia* (1974<sup>2</sup>) p.104–8; Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford 1981) 100–23.

9 For an evaluation of the sources see R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford 1958) 762–6.

10 *Op. cit.*, 763.

11 Like Tacitus, Dio singles out the procurator as responsible for the course of events (above, n.8). Dio also states that Roman money lenders, chief among them Seneca, had extracted repayment of the vast sums they lent to the Iceni. These felt themselves facing ruin. Tacitus does not mention this and it is uncertain whether the two accounts may simply be combined. Syme (*loc. cit.*) suggests that Dio was biased by his dislike of Seneca and dismisses the item about him.

12 Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.31.

13 Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.13. For this revolt see: P.A. Brunt, "Tacitus on the Batavian Revolt," *Latomus* 19 (1960) 494ff. against G. Walser, *Rom, das Reich und die fremden Völker* (Basel 1951) 86ff.

14 Tacitus, *Hist.* 3. 45.

15 *ibid.* 47f.

16 *Agricola* 15, 3. Cf. P.A. Brunt "Conscription and Volunteering in the Roman Army," *SCI* I (1974) 107.

revolt, according to Tacitus. Until the reign of Tiberius the Thracians served under their own officers and only in neighbouring lands. They revolted in 26 when it was decided to incorporate the Thracian forces as regular units in the Roman army under Roman officers, which would serve in all parts of the Empire.<sup>17</sup> Similarly the Batavians, until 69, raised for themselves the troops Rome required. They served under their own officers. They enjoyed fiscal immunity in return for these contingents and revolted when a new levy was conducted in a brutal manner by Roman officers.<sup>18</sup>

The religious motives for the rebellion which Dio ascribes to the Jews appear to be unique in this period. On the other hand, Aelia Capitolina was not the only Roman colony which provoked resistance. A parallel case is the rising of the Trinovantes who took up arms in support of Boudicca in 60–1.<sup>19</sup> Tacitus gives a striking description of the hatred engendered by the arrogance and rapacity of the colonists at Colonia Camulodunum (Colchester). They were supported by the military, themselves prospective citizens of the colony after their discharge. Camulodunum also was the centre of the imperial cult in Britain, both a symbol of slavery and ruinously expensive to the local nobility. Another Roman colony which aroused fierce enmity among the neighbouring tribes was Colonia Agrippinensis (Cologne).<sup>20</sup> However, here too the primary motive for resistance was material rather than religious, according to our source.

To sum up: in their description of native insurrections our sources blame local officers, fiscal agents and, sometimes, the governor, but never the emperor personally. Revolts broke out because of excessive demands made upon money, men or goods of the provincials. The desire for liberty might be

17 Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.46; cf. K. Kraft, *Zur Rekrutierung der Alen und Cohorten an Rhein und Donau* (Bern 1951) 35ff.; Brunt, *op. cit.*, 106.

18 Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.14; cf. Brunt, *op.cit.* (above, n. 13); *op. cit.* (above, n. 16), 106f.

19 Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.31. See also 1.59, 8, an oration put into the mouth of Arminius in AD 15: “si patriam parentes antiqua mallent quam dominos et colonias novas...” ‘Masters and colonies’ sums up Arminius’ view of Roman rule, according to Tacitus. As suggested by Brunt, there may have been a rumour that colonies were projected (*op. cit.*, above, n. 13, p. 498, n. 3).

20 *Hist.* 4. 63–6.

mentioned as a significant factor or an effective slogan, but religious elements were never considered in this context.<sup>21</sup>

Bar Kokhba is not mentioned in the *epitome* of Dio's text. This is highly remarkable, for in ancient descriptions of native revolts in this period the leader usually plays a central role. Without a leader there was no revolt and the end of the revolt was marked by the death or capture of the leader. Such is the impression we get when reading our sources. Rome, apparently, tended to see a native uprising not so much as a mass-movement, but as an affront to her dignity suffered at the hands of an individual.<sup>22</sup> To mention only a few famous names: Jugurtha, Vercingetorix, Arminius, Boudicca, Civilis. I must mention one exception: the revolt of the Frisians in 28. Only Tacitus relates their success, but he gives no names of any chiefs, perhaps because they were successful? The case of Boudicca is particularly significant since much of Dio's account, as abridged by Xiphilinus, is taken up by a description of the Queen and her oration inciting the Britons to rebellion. She is clearly perceived as a leader without whom there could have been no rising. The insurrection ended with her death. Similarly the revolt of the Treveri and Haedui in 21 ended with the suicide of their leaders and, we may add, that of Arminius with the suicide of Quintilius Varus. Civilis started the Batavian rebellion and brought it to an end.<sup>23</sup> Caesar describes the uprising of the Gauls in 52 BC very much as a personal contest between himself and Vercingetorix.<sup>24</sup> These were all native noblemen most of whom had Roman citizen-

- 21 The great revolt of the Gauls in 52 BC (Caesar, *BG* 7) was, in fact, part of the struggle against the Roman occupation and broke out before the country had been organized as a province. The revolt of Arminius was a response to Varus' efforts to introduce provincial organization in Germany. Religion played a role in the Thracian revolt of 11 BC; cf. Dio 51. 25; 54.34, who does not tell us much. See also Dyson, *ANRW* II, 3 (1975) 172.
- 22 For the case of Jugurtha cf. Syme, *Sallust* (Berkeley 1964) 150f.
- 23 Tacitus' account breaks off in the fifth book of the *Histories*. It is, however, clear from 5.26 that Civilis negotiated a settlement on behalf of the Batavians.
- 24 Nevertheless it must be noted that the revolt of the Gauls broke out before Vercingetorix took over the general command and went on after his defeat and surrender at Alesia.

ship.<sup>25</sup> Most of them are said to have rebelled for personal reasons and, while each rising was an affront to Roman dignity, these men certainly are described as worthy enemies.

A different kind of rebel-leader is represented by Musulamian Tacfarinas,<sup>26</sup> a plain soldier who had deserted from the Roman auxilia. He was a formidable enemy, in full control of his men. Yet his inferior social status stamped him a bandit (*latro*) who could never be an acceptable partner in negotiations.<sup>27</sup> In Roman eyes Tacfarinas belonged to the same class of rebels as Spartacus.<sup>28</sup> In this connection must be mentioned two leaders of the Jewish rising in Cyrene, Egypt and Cyprus in the reign of Trajan. Dio, in the *epitome* of Xiphilinus, mentions 'a certain Andreas' and 'a certain Artemion.'<sup>29</sup> These are to us mere names, but it is clear that they were popular leaders of low social status. They are probably best compared with the brigand-chiefs active in Judaea after Herod's death: a former shepherd,<sup>30</sup> a former royal slave,<sup>31</sup> and ex-soldiers.<sup>32</sup>

- 25 Jugurtha was king and had served in the Roman army. Arminius is said to have been an *equus* (Velleius 2.118,2). Florus and Sacrovir, leaders of the Treveri and Aedui, both were noblemen with Roman citizenship, cf. Tac., *Ann.* 3.40. Civilis was *regia stirpe* (*Hist.* 4.13). Civilis was supported by the Treveri, led by Iulius Classicus and Iulius Tutor and by the Lingones under the leadership of Iulius Sabinus (4.55). They all belonged to families which received Roman citizenship before Claudius. In Britain the Brigantes caused trouble in 69 when the pro-Roman Queen Cartimandua fell out with her anti-Roman husband Venutius (Tacitus, *Hist.* 3.45), cf. I.A. Richmond, *JRS* 44(1954) 43 ff.; Frere, *op.cit.* (above, n. 8) 116 f. For the leaders of native revolts see also Dyson, *Historia* 20 (1971) 267–70.
- 26 Cf. R. Syme, "Tacfarinas, the Musulamii, and Tubursicu," *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honor of Allen Chester Johnson* (1951) 113–130 = *Roman Papers* I, 218–30.
- 27 The Roman attitude towards Tacfarinas contrasts with their treatment of Civilis with whom the provincial governor was willing to negotiate (*Hist.* 5.26).
- 28 The comparison is made by Tacitus himself, *Ann.* 3.73.
- 29 Dio 68.32, 1–3; Eusebius has Lukuas instead of Andreas, *HE* 4. 2,3. Cf. M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, II (Jerusalem 1980) 386ff.
- 30 Jos. *AJ* 17.10,7 (278–84); *BJ* 2.4,3 (60–5).
- 31 *AJ* 27. 10,6 (273–7); *BJ* 2. 4,2 (57–9).
- 32 *AJ* 17.10,4 (270).

Their activity reflects a combination of economic hardship and messianic expectations.<sup>33</sup>

To sum up: the omission of the leader's name in Dio's report of the Second Jewish Revolt is exceptional, even in an *epitome*, for the first question an ancient reader would have asked regarding any insurrection was: "who was the leader?"<sup>34</sup>

The third subject for comparison is the description of the war itself. As regards preparations carried out in secret, the Gauls in 52 BC concealed their plans<sup>35</sup> and in AD 21 they also managed to keep their arms-production hidden.<sup>36</sup> The Germans under Arminius and the Batavians and Britons in 69 likewise disguised their intentions.<sup>37</sup> Nor was there anything exceptional in the slowness of the Roman response to the Revolt of Bar Kokhba. That seems to have been a familiar pattern, usually interpreted in our sources as cavalier

33 In 68 a lowborn prophet ("e plebe Boiorum") who claimed to be the liberator of Gallic lands and a god succeeded in gathering a following of 8000 men about him (Tacitus, *Hist.* 2. 61). He was suppressed by the Aedui. At another level there was a rebellion in Pontos in 69 (*Hist.* 3. 47–8), led by a freedman of ex-king Polemo. Before the annexation this man was commander of the royal fleet and very powerful. Yet Tacitus calls him a 'barbarian slave' and speaks of a 'slave-war'.

34 The brief note on the Second Jewish Revolt in the *SHA*, v., *Hadriani* 14,2, Stern, op. cit. (above, n. 28), n. 511, does not mention Bar Kokhba either. This source, however, does not usually mention names of rebel-leaders. Talmudic and Christian sources do mention Bar Kokhba (Eusebius, *HE* 4.6,1; Eusebius, *Chron.* (ed. Schoene, II) 166–7; Jerome, *Chron.* (ed. Helm<sup>2</sup>) p. 200; Syncellus I (ed. Dindorf), p. 660; *TBTa'anit*, 29a). It should be noted that these also mention Tineius Rufus, but not Severus as Roman commander, while Dio mentions Severus but not Tineius Rufus. The role of Severus in the Bar Kokhba revolt is attested independently (see *ILS* 1056 and cf. Schürer I (above, n.1) 519; for Q. Tineius Rufus, *ibid.* p. 518). Christian and Talmudic sources—but not Cassius Dio—mention the final siege of Bethar. It is clear that the information in Jewish and Christian literature on the one hand and in Cassius Dio's work on the other derives from different but basically trustworthy traditions.

35 Caesar, *BG* 7.1.

36 *Ann.* 3.40,3; 41,3; 43,1.

37 For the Germans under Arminius see: Dio 56. 18,5–19; Velleius 2. 118. For the Batavians see: Tac., *Hist.* 4. 13. For the Britons see: *Ann.* 14.31.

indifference.<sup>38</sup> Dio explains that in the Second Jewish Revolt both sides refrained from open battle. In the literature of this period I could find no comparable description of a revolt which entailed guerilla-activity on the one hand and the systematic isolation and reduction of mountain strongholds on the other. The closest parallels might be Corbulo's Armenian expedition<sup>39</sup> and the Homanadensian war in Southern Asia Minor.<sup>40</sup> These, however, were wars of conquest, not campaigns against insurgents. Dio refers to subterranean passages as places of refuge for the Jews. These are attested through archaeology.<sup>41</sup> Josephus described caves used in this manner in other areas: early in his reign Herod suppressed brigands who lived in caves near Arbela in Galilee.<sup>42</sup> Bandits who lived in caves in Trachonitis and on the Phoenician coast are described by Josephus and Strabo.<sup>43</sup>

38 See Sallust on Jugurtha; Tacitus on the revolts of Tacfarinas (*Ann.* 4. 23); of the Frisians (*ibid.* 4. 73 f.); of the Treveri and Aedui (*ibid.* 3. 41; 44); of Civilis (*Hist.* 4.12).

39 See Tacitus, *Ann.* 13. 34–41; 14. 23–26, esp. 23.

40 Cf. B. Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (Oxford 1967), esp. chapter iv and Appendix v. The Roman conquest of NW Spain will have seen similar fighting, cf. R. Syme in: *Legio VII Gemina* (1970) = *Roman Papers* II, 825–54. Sallust and Tacitus, in their treatment of the wars against Jugurtha and Tacfarinas give striking descriptions of desert warfare, but the revolt of Bar Kokhba was not fought in the desert.

41 Evidence for Second Revolt occupation was uncovered in northern Judaea at Wadi ed-Dalieh by G.W.E. Nickelsburg, Jr. Cf. P.W. and N.L. Lapp, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 41 (1974) 49 ff.; in a cave at 'Ein el-'Arub between Bethlehem and Hebron, cf.: Y. Tsafrir, *Qadmoniot* 8 (1975) 24–27 (in Hebrew); in a cave at Khirbet el-'Aqed, east of Emmaus, see: M. Gichon, *Cathedra* 26 (1982) 30–42 (in Hebrew). In recent years scores of subterranean hiding places have been discovered in the foothills of southern Judaea and part of these can with certainty be ascribed to the Second Revolt. See a preliminary report by A. Kloner, *Cathedra* 26 (1982) 4–23 (in Hebrew).

42 Josephus *AJ* 14.15,4 (415); 15.5 (420–30); *BJ* 1. 16,2 (305); 16,4 (309–13).

43 Strabo 16.2, 20 (756); Jos. *AJ* 15.10,1 (342–8); *BJ* 1. 20,4 (398–400); *AJ* 16.9,1 (271). See on this B. Isaac, "Bandits in Judaea and Arabia," *HSCP* (1984) 171–203. See also the the inscription from Canatha, *OGIS* 424 = *IGR* III 1223 (Waddington 2324).



Dio's description of the fighting certainly reflects local reality. His statement that both sides suffered heavy losses is confirmed by other sources.<sup>44</sup> One element is remarkable by its absence. There is no charge of excessive cruelty such as Dio himself brings against the Britons in the Revolt of Boudicca<sup>45</sup> and against the Jews in the Revolt of the Diaspora.<sup>46</sup> That may be taken as an indication that the rebellion in Judaea had, at least in Dio's eyes, a different character. This also appears from the fact that he calls the Bar Kokhba revolt a *polemos*, while he does not use this term in speaking of the Revolt in the Diaspora. Another point worth mentioning is that the victims of the atrocities in these rebellions were civilian non-combatants. That may perhaps be taken as indirect support for the assumption that the Second Jewish Revolt did not extend to the mixed cities outside Judaea proper.

We may conclude that Dio's description of the Revolt of Bar Kokhba, even in its abridged form, clearly brings out the distinctive nature of the war. While specific information concerning its duration is sadly lacking, its cause, general character and conclusion are not really paralleled elsewhere in the literature covering these centuries. That may strengthen our trust in the reliability of the source.

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44 For Roman losses see Fronto, *de bello Parthico* 2; Stern, *op. cit.* (above, n. 29), nr. 342.

45 Dio 62. 1; Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.33.

46 Dio 68. 32, 1–3. See the parallel sources cited by Stern, *op. cit.* (above, n. 29), 387. Italian merchants were slaughtered in the first Mithridatic war (88 BC), cf. Appian, *Mithr.* 22 f.; Plutarch, *Sulla* 24; Memnon, *FGH* 434 F 22,9); in the *bellum Jugurthinum*, cf. Sallust, *Jug.* 26; in the great revolt of the Gauls in 52 BC, cf. Caesar, *BG* 7.3; and by the Treveri in 21, cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.42,1. Roman citizens were overpowered and traders massacred in Illyricum in AD 6; cf. Velleius 2. 110,6.