

## **Xiphilinus and the Causes for the Outbreak of the Bar Kokhba Revolt**

### **Ksyfilinos i przyczyny wybuchu powstania Bar Kochby**

**Key words:** Xiphilinus, Cassius Dio, Bar Kokhba, Hadrian, Roman Empire, Byzantium.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Ksyfilinos, Kasjusz Dion, Bar Kochba, Hadrian, Cesarstwo Rzymskie, Bizancjum.

#### **Abstract**

The Epitome of Xiphilinus, an abbreviation of books 36-80 of Cassius Dio's *Roman History* created in eleventh-century Byzantium, because of the incomplete state of preservation of the latter is an extremely important narrative source for contemporary researchers of ancient Rome during the Principate period. This is also the case with the Bar Kokhba uprising, a conflict relatively poorly documented in narrative sources. The greatest debates revolve around the causes of this conflict for which the *Epitome* of Xiphilinus constitutes the most extensive surviving narrative source. The fact that Dio's work has not been preserved in the original makes scholars question the account presented by Xiphilinus, whom they perceive as a Byzantine monk writing from a Christian and even anti-Jewish perspective.

#### **Streszczenie**

Epitome Ksyfilinosa, powstały w XI-wiecznym Bizancjum skróty ksiąg 36-80 „Historii rzymskiej” Kasjusza Diona, ze względu na niepełny stan

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zachowania tej drugiej, stanowi niezwykle ważne źródło narracyjne dla współczesnych badaczy Antycznego Rzymu w okresie Pryncypatu. Jest tak też w przypadku powstania Bar Kochby, konfliktu stosunkowo słabo udokumentowanego w źródłach narracyjnych. Największe dyskusje toczą się wokół przyczyn tego konfliktu, dla którego *Epitome* Ksyfilinosa jest najobszerniejszym, zachowanym źródłem narracyjnym. Fakt niezachowania się w oryginale dzieła Diona sprawia, że badacze poddają w wątpliwość relację przedstawioną przez Ksyfilinosa, którego postrzegają jako bizantyńskie mnicha piszącego z chrześcijańskiej, a nawet antyżydowskiej perspektywy.

The Bar Kokhba revolt, the second Jewish uprising against Roman rule from the years 132-136 under the leadership of Simon Bar Kosiba, is one of the most important events in the history of Ancient Israel during the period of Roman rule. Even though there is an enormous amount of literature on the subject, there is no scholarly consensus on many important aspects of the revolt, including its causes, course and outcome. The reasons for that may be explained by the lack of sources providing a comprehensive, consistent and reliable narrative (Schäfer 1990, 281; Isaac, Oppenheimer 1998, 234; Mor 2012, 161-193). Unlike the Great Jewish Revolt which is well documented thanks to the detailed account of Josephus, the Bar Kokhba revolt does not have literature even close in its scope to that work.

One of the most highly debated aspects of the war are its causes. The available historical sources provide different, sometimes contradictory explanations, the brevity of which results in scholars questioning their content. At the same time, newly found archaeological and especially numismatic sources, while shedding a new light on other aspects of the revolt, do not bring anything decisive regarding its causes. As for the narrative sources, scholars are left with some contemporary vague and folkloristic accounts found in Rabbinic literature and brief passages from pagan and Christian authors (Isaac, Oppenheimer 1998, 226-233; Niesiołowski-Spanó, Stebnicka 2020, 321-323, 325-326). The most important and most comprehensive account is to be found in *Roman History* of Cassius Dio (Gichon 1986, 15-16). Yet it does not contain

the original narrative of Dio, which is lost to contemporary scholars due to the incomplete state of preservation of *Roman History*, but only an intermediate eleventh-century epitome composed by Xiphilinus<sup>2</sup>.

While scholars of the Bar Kokhba revolt acknowledge the importance of Xiphilinus as a source for the uprising, opinion on its credibility is divided. As a result, scholars of the uprising are among the first in academic circles who started to doubt Dio's account surviving in the form of Xiphilinus' *Epitome*. Others treated it as a subpar copy or abridgement of the original but, due to Xiphilinus' perceived lack of originality, a trustworthy substitute of *Roman History*. This general opinion was highly influenced by pioneering work on Cassius Dio by Fergus Millar (Millar 1964, 2). Xiphilinus alleged unoriginality resulted in *Epitome* remaining understudied and at the same time one of the most important Byzantine narrative sources from the eleventh century<sup>3</sup>. Its importance stems from the incomplete state of preservation of the original books of Dio which survived to our times in incomplete state with the books 36-60, containing a history of the late Roman Republic and early Empire up to the final years of the reign of Claudius, the only part remaining. There is also an original account of the late reign of Caracalla, that of Macrinus and first chapters devoted to Elagabalus, but it survived only in the form of partially and badly preserved sixth-century manuscript Cod. Vat. Graec. 1288<sup>4</sup>. The rest is reconstructed from much later Byzantine sources. The first 35 books are partially reconstructed mainly from the content of Zonaras' chronicle, while for the books 61-80, Xiphilinus' *Epitome* constitutes a major remaining witness, if not an abridged equivalent. Important for the reconstruction of *Roman History* are also the so called *Excerpta Constantiniana*, a collection containing scattered

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<sup>2</sup> Standard edition remains Boissevain 1901, 479-730.

<sup>3</sup> On Xiphilinus and his work see: Wilson 1996, 179; Mallan 2013, 610-644; Jun-tunen 2015, 123-151; idem 2015, 123-151; Kruse 2021, 193-223.

<sup>4</sup> On the state of preservation of Dio in general and its manuscript tradition in Byzantium see: Mazzucchi 1979, 94-139.

excerpts from all parts of *Roman History*<sup>5</sup>. The *Epitome* of Xiphilinus could be considered very important for many important aspects of the history of Rome, and in many cases, the only reliable witness in spite of its very late, eleventh-century provenience.

Dio's passage on the Bar Kokhba revolt, even in its abridged version prepared by Xiphilinus, gives us the most coherent narrative of the revolt among surviving literary sources. Although it gives a general outline of the war, its course, causes, tactics employed and its result, it does not contain many details. On the other hand, when it does provide more detailed information, it is often on the topics which are not necessarily as important as the ones which are left in silence. An example of this may be the detail about the involvement of Iulius Severus yet nothing is provided about Tineius Rufus, governor of Judaea nor about the commanders and armies sent by Hadrian to suppress the revolt. The name of Bar Kokhba found in other literary sources is conspicuously not mentioned yet leaders of other Jewish revolts from the reign of Trajan are named by Xiphilinus (Stern 1980, 393).

Before examination of the relevant passages describing the causes for the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba uprising, some preliminary remarks about Xiphilinus' work should be made. The narrative about the Bar Kokhba revolt is contained in the chapter of the *Epitome* devoted to emperor Hadrian. This is an important factor which should be taken into account while interpreting Xiphilinus' account. Following his own narrative structure, Xiphilinus moved away from the typically annalistic style of Cassius Dio to a 'biographical' one, more fashionable during his

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<sup>5</sup> Zon. 7.1-9.31; it contains also a narrative corresponding with Dio's books 44-80 but it is based on Xiphilinus' *Epitome*: Boissevain 1891, 440-452; Dio's work survived in form of excerpts composed on the behest of emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus: *Excerpta de virtutibus et vitiis pars II* (Roos 1910) and *Excerpta de legationibus* (Boor 1903); Roman History is also reconstructed from the other, lesser sources like *Περὶ Συναρξέως* (Bekker 1814, 117-180); and encyclopaedia called Souda (Adler 1928-1938)

own time<sup>6</sup>. Xiphilinus scrapped Dio's books division, leaving no trace of them, and substituted them with chapters devoted to each emperor starting with Julius Caesar, creating in this way a "monarchy of Caesars" (μοναρχίας καισάρων)<sup>7</sup>. This decision not only influenced the *Epitome's* structure but also its content selected by Xiphilinus according to this narrow biographical principle. In this way, material not directly connected to the main protagonist of the narrative was either dismissed or subjected to extensive cutting or abridging.

The Bar Kokhba uprising and description of its causes was inserted into a broader narrative about Hadrian's travels and his building activities. The description of the uprising starts immediately after the passage about the founding of the city of Antinoopolis. Thus, the way in which the narrative about the uprising is structured should be seen in the context of the whole portion of Hadrian's chapter (Almagor 2019, 143-144). There is no need to assume that this structure is much different from that which Xiphilinus found in Dio's original, given that the latter very rarely alters the original order of the narrative. As in the case of Antinoopolis, Xiphilinus starts the narrative about the revolt with Hadrian's foundation of the Aelia Capitolina:

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<sup>6</sup> On the biographical structure of Byzantine historical works in the Middle Byzantine Period see: Markopoulos 2010, 697-715.

<sup>7</sup> The full name of Xiphilinus' work is *Epitome of Roman History of Dio of Nicaea, in abridgement by John Xiphilinos, containing monarchies of twenty-five Caesars from Pompey the Great to Alexandros, son of Mamea*, Xiph. 1.1-5, this title survived in two fifteenth-century manuscripts Cod. Coislinianus n. 320 (C) and Cod. Vaticanus n. 145 (V), see: Boissevain 1901, iii-iv; it is a later addition though because it does not appear in the oldest twelfth-century manuscript Ivron 812, see Berbessou Broustet 2014, 550 who as an original title of the *Epitome* proposes ἐπιτομή τῆς Δίωνος τοῦ Νικαέως ῥωμαικῆς ἱστορίας; erroneous, longer title was created because of a list of Roman emperors (τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν Καισάρων τῶν περιεχομένων τῇ βιβλῷ ταύτῃ) found at the end of manuscripts C and V; perception that Pompey was one of twenty-five Caesars stems from erroneous omission on that list of emperor Antoninus Pius, thus later copyist added Pompey to match the number, see Berbessou Broustet 2014, 549-553; this error had later implications – in fourteenth century Nikephoros Gregoras, a reader of Xiphilinus, thought that Pompey was a Roman emperor, Pérez Martín 2015, 188.

ἔς δὲ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα πόλιν αὐτοῦ ἀντὶ κατασκαφείσης οἰκίσαντος, ἦν καὶ Αἰλίαν Καπιτωλίαν ὠνόμασε, καὶ ἔς τὸν τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τόπον ναὸν τῷ Διὶ ἕτερον ἀντεγείραντος πόλεμος οὔτε μικρὸς οὔτ' ὀλιγοχρόνιος ἐκινήθη Ἰουδαῖοι γὰρ δεινὸν τι ποιούμενοι τὸ ἀλλοφύλους τινὰς εἰς τὴν πόλιν σφῶν οἰκισθῆναι καὶ τὸ ἱερὰ ἀλλότρια ἐν αὐτῇ ἰδρυθῆναι (Dio 69.12.1-2 = Xiph. 148.17-23).

At Jerusalem he founded a city in place of the one which had been razed to the ground, naming it Aelia Capitolina, and on the site of the temple of the god he raised a new temple to Jupiter. This brought on a war of no slight importance nor of brief duration, for the Jews deemed it intolerable that foreign races should be settled in their city and foreign religious rites planted there<sup>8</sup>.

Scholars assume that the passage cited above was mostly rewritten by Xiphilinus and is not a copy directly taken over from Dio's original account. Already Ursul Philip Boissevain noted in his edition of Dio: *Xiphilini manum agnosco* (Boissevain 1901, 232). This opinion is related to the specific vocabulary employed by Xiphilinus in this passage but also to its grammatical structure. The sentence is constructed as a series of subordinate clauses with the use of participles. Usually such a construction characterises Xiphilinus' paraphrasing techniques by which he combined isolated fragments taken from the original into one sentence in order to omit longer fragments he decided to not include in his narrative<sup>9</sup>.

Causes of Jewish revolt presented by Dio-Xiphilinus constitute a subject of controversy among scholars due to its originality in comparison to other witnesses. Dio's is the only narrative where the foundation of Aelia Capitolina is presented as the direct reason for the Bar Kokhba revolt (Stern 1980, 401). Dio's version is contradicted by that of Eusebius of Caesarea who presented the building of Aelia Capitolina as a result of the uprising, not its causes (Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.6.4; Almagor

<sup>8</sup> Translation is that of Cary 1925, 447.

<sup>9</sup> On Xiphilinus working methods see Brunt 1980, 490-491; Mallan 2013, 626-632.

2019, 142; Hofman 2019, 119-120). Only new, successively found numismatic evidence allowed scholars to accept the fact that Aelia was indeed founded before the uprising<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, whether it was a sufficient reason to incite a violent Jewish reaction is debatable<sup>11</sup>. Likewise, the second reason provided by Dio, that Jews were especially angered by the funding of a new temple to Jupiter in place of the destroyed Second Temple, is also problematic. To date, there is no decisive evidence supporting Dio's claim that the Romans built a pagan shrine to Jupiter on the Temple Mount (Bowersock 1980, 137; Mildenberg 1980, 333; Schäfer 1990, 289; Eliav 1997, 125-128.). Lack of such evidence makes scholars doubt Dio's account but because he is widely considered to be trustworthy historian, especially in its originally surviving parts, some believe that his version of the events was heavily distorted by Xiphilinus' paraphrase with its traces visible in syntax and vocabulary used by the Byzantine historian in the passage: ἐς τὸν τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τόπον ναὸν τῷ Διὶ ἕτερον ἀντεγέραντος (Eliav 1997, 130).

The first phrase which catches scholarly attention was the term used by Dio to describe the Second Temple – ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ – the Temple of the God – which was identified already in nineteenth century as a term employed by Xiphilinus, not Dio (Schlatter 1847, 2 n. 56). Argumentation supporting this early claim was more developed by Yaron Eliav who claimed that the term ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ is not to be found either in Greek pagan literature nor in original portions of Dio's *Roman History*. Instead, Dio simply calls the Jewish temple ναὸς and does so also in the context of pagan temples. Eliav argues that ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ is an

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<sup>10</sup> Meshorer 1967, 92-3; Isaac, Oppenheimer 1998, 237; Zissu, Eshel 2016, 389-392; Mor 2016, 127; Segni 2014, 448-449 on the other hand, based on Epiphanius' testimony proposes that preparation for its restorations started even much earlier, at the beginning of Hadrian's reign and during the emperor's visit to Judea in 130 AD, the city was officially inaugurated.

<sup>11</sup> Another possible reason is a ban on circumcision indicated by the *Historia Augusta*, although this cause is rejected by most scholars, see Schwartz 2008, 34; Mor 2012, 163-169; p. 34.

isolated expression and appears only in the passage on the causes of the Bar Kokhba uprising, carrying a Christian theological connotation by which Xiphilinus was influenced when paraphrasing Dio's original material (Eliav 1997, 136-142).

The second phrase appearing in the discussed passage which pointed scholars to Xiphilinus' alteration of Dio's material is ἐς τὸν [...] τόπον [...] ἕτερον ἀντεγείραντος and the verb ἀντεγείρω specifically used to describe supplanting of the Jewish Temple with that of Jupiter. Scholars have tried to reconcile Dio's claim that Hadrian built a new pagan temple in the exact same place with lack of any other evidence found in narrative sources or archaeological material decisively supporting it. Glen Bowersock focused on the phrase ἐς τὸν [...] τόπον and proposed that it should not be translated as 'in the place of' but 'instead of' and that temple to Jupiter was not necessarily built on the Temple Mount but in some other unspecified place. Accordingly, it was only Xiphilinus' interpretation that the pagan temple served as a replacement for God's Jewish Temple (Bowersock 1980, 135-138).

Yaron Eliav, on the other hand, focused on the verb ending this sentence – ἀντεγείρω and again, as in the case of ναοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, connects its use by Xiphilinus with his presupposed Christian agenda. The scholar pointed out that this term employed here by Xiphilinus appears relatively late in the Greek language. It does not appear in Classical, Hellenistic or Early Roman works written in Greek and neither in the New Testament or in other early Christian works. The only exception from that rule is Appian who uses this term in his *Punic Wars* to describe the way in which Carthaginian forces *fortified* their camp *against* the Roman army (ἀντήγειραν αὐτῷ χάρακα, App. *Pun.* 114). Giving other later examples taken from pagan literature, Eliav argues that the word was used in the context of a clash, either physical or metaphorical, like disputes between conflicting philosophical schools. Yet the word was not employed frequently by pagan writers and started to be used only in Patristic literature, mainly by the Cappadocian Fathers. It lost its



military meaning and started to be used in a theological sense to describe religious confrontation: an opposition to God or Church dogma or a counter position of the faithful against heretics. Eliav concludes that the term ἀντεγείρω was rare in Dio's time and it was probably Xiphilinus, or his source, who employed it motivated by theological impulse (Eliav 1997, 134-136). Thus, in his opinion, the whole clause describing Hadrian's actions on the Temple Mount was influenced by Christian leanings of Xiphilinus or his source (Eliav 1997, 142). The philological analyses of Bowersock and Eliav constitute a valid and important piece of scholarship on Xiphilinus' working methods but as shall be argued in present paper, their conclusions that epitomator's modifications were influenced by Christian worldview find no support in the available evidence, including the current state of knowledge on Xiphilinus background and preoccupation.

That Xiphilinus was influenced by Christian or even an anti-Jewish agenda, either in form of direct interference or by the influence of an alternative, Christian-oriented source of information, is an opinion universally acknowledged by scholars investigating the Bar Kokhba uprising (Fuks 1961, 101-102; Eck 1999, 78; Friedheim 2007, 128; Mor 2016, 121, 393; Gichon 1986, 22, 40; Ben-Zeev 2005, 168 n. 9). The latter possibility was explored by Eran Almagor who connects Xiphilinus' version with that of Eusebius of Caesarea. According to this scholar, Xiphilinus' portrayal of the events could have been influenced by his memory of Eusebius' text. He focuses especially on the question of foreign settlement in Jerusalem as mentioned both by Xiphilinus and Eusebius. According to Almagor, Xiphilinus named the foreign settlement of Jerusalem as one of reasons for the Bar Kokhba uprising because he wanted to emphasise the religious grounds for the revolt while in Dio, he assumes, it could have been presented as a result of destruction of Jerusalem (Almagor 2019, 143).

Almagor's theory is problematic if set against evidence provided by analysis of Xiphilinus' employment of sources alternative to Dio in

his narrative. A possibility that Xiphilinus used Eusebius' work in the passage about the Bar Kokhba revolt could be based on the fact that the epitomator mentions Eusebius as his source, albeit used in a different place and context. Due to the fact that Xiphilinus did not have at his disposal Dio's book covering the reigns of Antoninus Pius and the first part of Marcus Aurelius, he was forced to use different sources, naming Eusebius and Quadratus (Xiph. 256.8-10 = Dio 70.1.1, 256.29-257.3 = 70.2.2; cf. Mallan 2013, 633)<sup>12</sup>. Yet, it should be pointed out that Xiphilinus rarely employed different sources in parts of his *Epitome* where he had at his disposal original books of Dio. There are, however, some minor exceptions. His use of Plutarch is a most notable example. Explaining the motivations of Brutus and Cassius, Xiphilinus rejects Dio's negative assessment of Caesar's murderers arguing that the Roman historian was writing during the "reign of Caesars" and as a result was afraid to tell the truth. Xiphilinus instead prefers the version of Plutarch who provides much more sympathetic views of Brutus and Cassius<sup>13</sup>. In some rare instances, Xiphilinus furnishes more Christian oriented views than those of Dio. The most well-known example is his narrative on the "rain miracle" during the Marcomannic War of Marcus Aurelius where Xiphilinus rejects Dio's explanation of this occurrence by involvement of the Egyptian mage Harnufis, who was supposed to save the Roman forces, and explains that it was God's doing instead. In this case he does not mention his source of information but the use of Eusebius' and George the Monk's chronicles, or at least the knowledge of their content, could be detected here (Kovács 2009, 100-101). It should be taken into account however that although Xiphilinus' occasionally furnishes Christian sources, it would be a mistake to assume that he wanted to implement a Christian stamp on Dio's non-Christian narrative. Xiphilinus is very

<sup>12</sup> For how Xiphilinus composed the later reign of Hadrian and that of Antoninus Pius where he lacked corresponding books of Dio see Juntunen 2013, 459-465.

<sup>13</sup> On Xiphilinus' use of Plutarch see Brunt 1980, 489; Mallan 2013, 624-625.

restrained in his use of Christian material which is in contrast to the likes of Zonaras who also used Dio and other pagan writers in his work but interwove it with information on the martyrs and the early Church. Xiphilinus, on the other hand, misses all the possible instances where he could mention important events related to Christianity, passing over in silence even the birth of Christ (Brunt, 1980, 489; Mallan 2013, 640). What is more, in the above-mentioned instances Xiphilinus' alterations to Dio's original can be easily detected by his explicit interventions in the narrative where he either specifically mentions his alternative source or openly refutes Dio's argument. This is not the case in the narrative about the causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

Xiphilinus' alleged anti-Jewish sentiment is also problematic. This theory is discussed mostly in the context of Xiphilinus' narrative about the Jewish revolt in Cyrenaica which contains a negative assessment of Jews and their supposed cannibalism, remarks supposedly inserted by Xiphilinus and not to be found in Dio's original (Fuks 1961, 101-102)<sup>14</sup>. There is some possibility that Xiphilinus was negatively predisposed towards the Jews but it is hard to find any evidence supporting this claim due to the lack of any comprehensive information about him and his background. The hypothetical negative stance of Xiphilinus towards the Jews could be analysed only in the context of general tendencies governing eleventh-century Byzantine society and state policy towards the Jews. Albeit even in this case it is hard to make any assumptions. In the eleventh century, anti-Jewish tendencies were interwoven with Byzantine legal actions taken against the Paulicians and Nestorians who formed a significant minority on the Byzantine Eastern frontier, following conquests from the late tenth and early eleventh century. Jews appear in this legislation because these heresies were sometimes referred to as

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<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, charges levied on Jews by Dio resemble those levied on Iceni in Britain (Dio 62.7.1-3) or Bucoli in Egypt (71.4.1) and are unlikely to be added by Xiphilinus, Horbury 2014, 18.

“Jewish heresies”. After the triumph of Orthodoxy, the Byzantine state followed the policy of forced conversions of Jews alongside Christian heretics because they were associated with Iconoclasm<sup>15</sup>.

There is one aspect of Byzantine religious legislation against Monophysites and Jews which could be very loosely connected with Xiphilinus, namely an edict of the patriarch Alexius Stoudites against heretics which prohibited them from giving testimony in court against the Orthodox. It is believed that this edict was formulated and edited by the uncle of Xiphilinus, future patriarch Ioannes VIII Xiphilinus (Schminck, 1986, 30-32). Alexius Stoudites commissioned jurists, with Xiphilinus ‘the Elder’ among them, to investigate the legal status of heretics on the basis of existing Byzantine legislation and formulate new legislation which would deal with the pressing problem of a heretical population on the new Byzantine eastern frontier. The involvement of laymen jurists in Byzantine religious legislation in this case is interpreted as a sign of the increased political importance of that group (Chitwood 2017, 141-149). Due to the weakening of imperial power after the extinction of the Macedonian dynasty, new emperors relied more and more on civil apparatus consisting of men learned in rhetoric, history and law with John Mauropus, John Xiphilinus, Michael Psellus, Michael Attaleiates being the most well-known examples of that milieu. Xiphilinus the epitomator was part of that circle of intellectuals. Many of them produced works of historiography influenced by their classical education and preoccupations in the Byzantine administrative apparatus and Xiphilinus was undoubtedly part of that circle (Markopoulos 2006, 282-283; Treadgold 2013, 310; Mallan 2013, 614).

The above-mentioned considerations do not allow researchers to measure Xiphilinus’ opinion about the Jews, and it must remain a moot

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<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that Byzantine clergy generally did not support such a policy because they did not believe in the honesty of those conversions, Linder 2012, 866; on association of Jews with heretics and iconoclasm see Fishman-Duker 2012, 786 and n. 30.

point. However, information about his background points us towards considerations about his true agenda which not only governed his interpretation of Dio's account but also the methodology employed during preparation of the *Epitome*. Before that it would be useful to provide further characteristics of Xiphilinus' work and how it differs from Dio's *Roman History*.

Studies devoted to Xiphilinus' agenda and working methods have only recently started to appear. In earlier studies, he was generally presented as an unoriginal author who only copied or paraphrased the original narrative without any specified methodology or ideological agenda in mind (Millar 1964, 2; Brunt 1980, 489-491). This view on Xiphilinus could be framed in wider scholarly opinion about the Byzantine historiography divided in the classic work of Karl Krumbacher into two distinct and highly different sub-genres, the "histories" and "chronicles" with Xiphilinus' *Epitome* counted among the latter. "The chronicles" were characterised by Krumbacher and subsequent historiography up until around the middle of the twelfth century as derivative works of uneducated monks. They lacked the sophisticated, classicizing style of the "histories" and were written with the Christian scope of its writers and audiences in mind (Krumbacher 1897, 220)<sup>16</sup>. As already noted, scholars of the Bar Kokhba revolt evaluate Xiphilinus' *Epitome* according to the above-mentioned characteristics: as a monkish, unoriginal chronicle, an abridgement with a Christian agenda which in turn influenced Xiphilinus' supposed antipathy towards Jews (Mor 2017, 125). These opinions originate, however, not from Krumbacher but from the remarks of Fergus Millar that the Bar Kokhba uprising: "is given at length in Xiphilinus' text of Dio, no doubt because it was of greater

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<sup>16</sup> See: Gelzer 1898, 97 who around the same time evaluated Byzantine chronicles in a more positive light; positive views started to dominate only in the second half of twentieth century: Beck 1972, 188-197; Afinogenov 1992, 3-33; Ljubarskij 1993, 133-134; Rosenqvist 2007, 10-20; Howard-Johnson 2015, 1-22; Mariev 2015, 305-317.

religious interest than much else in his narrative” (Millar 1964, 68). It will be argued however that Xiphilinus did not follow such an agenda.

It is hard to defend the argument that Xiphilinus presented the worldview of an uneducated monk. In fact, even the opinion that he was a monk has begun to be rejected in recent times (Treadgold 2013, 310 n. 7 Kruse 2019, 257-274). Instead, as noted earlier, Xiphilinus could be considered a typical representative of the intellectual milieu of the eleventh-century Byzantine administrative apparatus which produced historians such as Psellus and Attaleiates, who were Xiphilinus’ contemporaries, but also the likes of Skylitzes, Zonaras and Manasses in the twelfth century. They constituted a stratum of men from which the Byzantine state apparatus was recruited, well educated in law, rhetoric, history and other disciplines. Their influence on the Byzantine court played an important role in the revival of interest in ancient Roman history, including the pagan one. In this case, they started to look at the periodization of history not through the Christian lens and tradition established by Eusebius of Caesarea but of ancient pagan authors like Cassius Dio. They found special interest in the constitutional changes of the Roman state which started to be the core of their historical narrative (Laiou 1994, 173; Markopoulos 2006, 290-297)<sup>17</sup>. This worldview was also shared by Xiphilinus and it is not surprising that he started his *Epitome* during the late Republic in order to show how the Roman polity changed from a democracy into an imperial monarchy. This could be assumed based on often-cited passage of Xiphilinus inserted after the narrative describing the battle of Actium:

λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ’ ἕκαστον ὅσα ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι καὶ νῦν μάλιστα, διὰ τὸ πάμπολυ ἀπηρητῆσθαι τῶν καιρῶν ἐκείνων τὸν καθ’ ἡμᾶς βίον καὶ τὸ πολίτευμα μνημονεύεσθαι (Xiph. 87.2-5)

<sup>17</sup> On the influence of juristic background on Skylitzes’ historical writing see: Laiou 1992, 165-176.

“I shall relate each and every thing as far as is required, and especially so in the present time, because a great deal of benefit for our way of life and political situation depends on remembering those critical events”<sup>18</sup>.

This passage was based on the paragraph of Dio which lacked such considerations:

λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ’ ἕκαστον ὅσα ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι μετὰ τῶν ὑπάτων, ἐφ’ ὧν ἐγένετο, μνημονεύεσθαι (Dio, 53.22.1).

“I shall now relate in detail also such of his acts as call for mention, together with the names of the consuls under which they were performed”<sup>19</sup>.

Xiphilinus clearly saw Roman history, especially the political and constitutional changes it underwent, as a means to understand political and social rules governing his own contemporary Eastern Roman polity. As such, as it will be shown, the narrative devoted to the Jews was of minor importance to Xiphilinus, the same as or even less so than to Cassius Dio.

The agenda described above influenced Xiphilinus’ interpretation of Dio’s material but also his methodology, how he selected parts of the original to be inserted into his narrative and how he paraphrased and copied them to fit into his own broader narrative. It should be also noted that Xiphilinus was influenced not only by the intellectual interests and preoccupations of his contemporaries related to ancient Roman history but also by the general tendencies governing the Byzantine historiography of his time. One of its characteristics was the previously mentioned focused biographical framework which was a major factor influencing Xiphilinus’ methods of selection. In his narrative he mostly included information directly related to the protagonist of a given chapter while most of the narrative focused on other personalities was discarded (Mallan 2013, 625, 630, 632). The content found in Dio’s *Roman History*

<sup>18</sup> Translation is that of Mallan 2013, 611.

<sup>19</sup> Translation is that of Cary, 1917, 251.

devoted to the protagonist of Xiphilinus' chapter underwent further selection. It could be observed that Xiphilinus was not interested in numerous speeches found in Dio or technicalities of the Roman system of governance, election of magistrates etc. He was not interested in Roman foreign wars either, especially during the Empire which he highly condensed leaving often only some ethnographic or topographic anecdotes, while the civil wars were scrupulously narrated. It should be pointed out that by civil wars Xiphilinus meant a war between the reigning emperor and an usurper or between the Republican *dynatoi* (term used by Xiphilinus) who vied for power, which led to the change of the government (Mallan 2013, 625, 630, 632; Kruse 2021, 199-223). For this reason, the Bar Kokhba revolt and other revolts against Roman rule in the provinces did not receive special attention in Xiphilinus' narrative.

A more appropriate way to measure Xiphilinus' attitude towards the Jews, whether it differed from that of Dio or was influenced by his Christian Byzantine background, would be to compare his narrative involving the Jews with the relevant passages of *Roman History* which survived in the original. The analysis of the fragments referring to Jews in Dio's work was conducted by Manehem Stern in although he did not compare Xiphilinus' version with Dio's original where it is possible (Stern 1980, 347-407). Of 37 fragments of Dio's *Roman History* mentioning the Jews, 18 (no. 406-423 Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism, subsequently GLAJ) are to be found in the books 37-60 which survived in the original and are covered by Xiphilinus' *Epitome* and *Excerpta Constantiniana*.

In the first passage of *Roman History* involving Jews, Dio describes the conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey and his intervention in the quarrel between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus of the Hasmonean dynasty (Dio 37.15.2-17.4 = Xiph. 7.9-8.16 = no. 40 GLAJ). Dio relates that Pompey had a problem with conquest of Jerusalem which he took only when its defenders remained inactive during the Sabbath ("days of Saturn"). The



narrative about the siege is followed by lengthy passages describing the Jews as a nation and their religion. Xiphilinus included this fragment in his narrative but took a different approach. The first part describing the siege was paraphrased while the latter containing ethnographic description of the Jews was copied from Dio by Xiphilinus without any significant changes. The description of the siege of Jerusalem, however, forms a good example of Xiphilinus' working methods in Jewish material. Dio provided a detailed narrative of the siege:

τὰ δὲ Ἱεροσόλυμα πολιορκῶν πράγματα ἔσχε. τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἄλλην πόλιν, ἐσδεξαμένων αὐτὸν τῶν τὰ τοῦ Ἵρκανοῦ φρονούντων, ἀπραγμόνως ἔλαβεν, αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ ἱερὸν προκατασχόντων τῶν ἐτέρων οὐκ ἀπόνως εἶλεν· ἐπὶ τε γὰρ μετεώρου ἦν καὶ περιβόλῳ ἰδίῳ ὠχύρωτο. καὶ εἴ γε ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἡμέραις ὁμοίως ἡμύνοντο, οὐκ ἂν αὐτὸ ἐχειρώσατο· νῦν δὲ τὰς τοῦ Κρόνου δὴ ὠνομασμένας διαλείποντες, καὶ οὐδὲν τὸ παράπαν ἐν αὐταῖς δρῶντες, παρέδωκαν τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις καιρὸν ἐν τῷ διακένῳ τούτῳ τὸ τεῖχος διασεῖσαι (Dio 37.15.3-16.2).

But [Pompey] had trouble in besieging Jerusalem. Most of the city, to be sure, he took without any trouble, as he was received by the party of Hyrcanus; but the temple itself, which the other party had occupied, he captured only with difficulty. For it was on high ground and was fortified by a wall of its own, and if they had continued defending it on all days alike, he could not have got possession of it. As it was, they made an excavation of what are called the days of Saturn, and by doing no work at all on those days afforded the Romans an opportunity in this interval to batter down the wall<sup>20</sup>.

The siege as described by Dio could be divided into two phases. In the first, Pompey took the city without much effort thanks to its submission by Hyrcanus. The second phase is devoted to the siege of the Temple Mount because of its occupation by defenders loyal to Aristobulus. Dio mentions reasons for the difficulties facing Pompey, describing the advantageous strategic position of the Jews because the Temple was situated on high ground and was covered by its own walls. Nevertheless, Pompey

<sup>20</sup> Translation is that of Cary 1914, 125.

conquered it but only due to the conduct of the defenders. Xiphilinus' version is much shorter:

τὰ δὲ Ἱεροσόλυμα πολιορκῶν πρᾶγματα ἕσχε. καὶ εἶ γε μὴ ἐν ταῖς τοῦ Κρόνου ἡμέραις ἄπρακτοι παντελῶς ἦσαν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, οὐκ ἂν εἶλεν αὐτά. νῦν δὲ ἐν τῷ διακένῳ τούτῳ καιρῷ παρέδωκαν τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις τὸ τεῖχος διασεῖσαι (Xiph. 7.19-24)

But [Pompey] had trouble in besieging Jerusalem. Had it not been for the fact that the Jews were idle on the days of Saturn, he would not have captured it. But now thanks to this interval the Romans were given the opportunity and battered down the wall.

Comparison of the two versions show that Xiphilinus did not alter the sentences he took from Dio in any significant way. All the information found in the *Epitome* conforms to that found in *Roman History*. However, the whole passage lost its comprehensiveness because of the omission of certain details which in turn led to the distortion of the original by Xiphilinus. From his version, if the original was not available, the reader could make the wrong assumption that Pompey was not able to take the whole of the city of Jerusalem, not only the Temple Mount as such differences between Dio and Xiphilinus do not come from alterations to the original made by the latter but from the omission of important details. Yet there is no trace of any changes made by Xiphilinus motivated by a special interest in Jewish matters, including related to his supposed negative disposition. This is confirmed by the fact that he did not alter Dio's Herodotean like description of the Jewish customs and religion but simply copied it verbatim without any changes. This description does not contain any negative remarks about Jews (Schwartz 1970, 150).

In the next passage, Dio mentions Palestine among the provinces conquered by the Romans from the speech of Caesar before the battle against Ariovistus (Dio 38.38.4 = no. 407 GLAJ). This fragment is not to be found in Xiphilinus' *Epitome*. Reasons for that are twofold: Xiphilinus avoids speeches contained in Dio's work and due to the fact that the event involving Caesar is covered by Xiphilinus in the first chapter

of the *Epitome* which focuses solely on Pompey. Thus, the conquests of Caesar in Gaul and Britain are mentioned only vaguely to explain Caesar's rise to prominence and his later clash with Pompey.

Xiphilinus' methodology also determined omission of the next fragment in which Dio described Gabinius' actions in the East during his governorship of Syria (Dio 39.56.5-6 = no. 408 GLAJ). He arrested Aristobulus, who after escaping from Rome returned to Palestine and caused disturbance to the Romans who sent him back to Pompey and levied additional taxes on Judea. Xiphilinus passed this fragment not only because it does not directly relate to Pompey but because the Byzantine historian further condensed his text by omission of material devoted to various minor characters who acted on behalf of the main protagonist if it did not serve Xiphilinus' writing principles. The epitomator explains this stance himself in his narrative before describing the battle of Pharsalus. He remarks that there were great deeds achieved by many great men, but they were subordinate to Caesar and Pompey and because of that Xiphilinus only briefly mentions them (Xiph. 16.19-24.).

Xiphilinus' lack of interest in the actions of Caesar in Rome and Italy was also responsible for his omission of the passage in which Dio mentions Caesar's decision to send Aristobulus back to Palestine in order to create opposition against Pompey (Dio 41.18.1 = no. 409 GLAJ). In this part of *Epitome*, Xiphilinus focuses only on the proclamation of Caesar as dictator, his rejection of the office and general opinion on power possessed by Caesar and Pompey thanks to command of armies (Xiph. 16.24-29). In this way, Xiphilinus yet again shows indifference towards Jewish matters or at least that his focus lies elsewhere in his narrative. Likewise, for the same reasons he omitted two subsequent mentions of Jews found in book 47 of *Roman History*: Cassius' capture of Judea (Dio 47.28.3 = no. 410 GLAJ) and his stay there while Dolabella seized Cilicia (Dio 47.30.1 = no. 411 GLAJ). Xiphilinus provides only a general outline of how Brutus and Cassius took possession of the provinces of Asia (Xiph. 49.13-50.15). He does mention Pacorus' invasion of Syria

and Palestine although even Dio does not provide much detail about this affair. He mistakenly mentions that Pacorus deposed Hyrcanus and replaced him with his brother Arsitobulus when in fact it was the latter's son, Antigonus (Stern 1980, 358). Yet even in this short passage taken from Dio, Xiphilinus fails to mention these details and leaves only the information about Pacorus' capture of Palestine (Dio 48.26.2 = Xiph. 57.30-31 = no. 412 GLAJ). The Roman counteroffensive under the leadership of Publius Ventidius, although mentioned by Xiphilinus, is also devoid of much detail. Dio mentions that Ventidius levied a tribute on the petty kings who aided Pacorus, with Malchus, the Nabatean king among them, but Xiphilinus leaves out all the names and only vaguely says that Ventidius drove the Parthians out of Syria (Dio 48.41.4-5 = Xiph. 60.26-30 = no. 413 GLAJ).

On the other hand, Xiphilinus mentions the capture of Jerusalem by Gaius Sosius at the behest of Antony. His narrative is similar to that of Dio in this regard. He finds interest especially in another description of the Jewish religious customs. Dio again mentions the Sabbath and its significance during the siege. Xiphilinus takes the relevant passages which he copied directly without any changes. Similarly, as in the case of Pompey's conquest, the epitomator only vaguely mentions the course of military warfare, omitting details about Sosius' actions before the siege of Jerusalem, including the victory over Antigonus. What is more, Dio levied some negative opinion about the Jews stating that they are a very bitter nation when aroused to anger but justifies their attitude claiming that they suffered far more than the Romans at their behest (Dio 49.22.4). This opinion of Dio is not to be found in Xiphilinus' *Epitome* however and could be taken as evidence of lack of any anti-Jewish sentiment on Xiphilinus' part (Dio 49.22.3-23.1 = Xiph. 68.22-29 = no. 414 GLAJ).

Xiphilinus also omitted most of the information from the last nine passages which survived in Dio's original. He was not interested in Antony's policies in the East where he subjected parts of Palestine to Cleopatra (Dio 49.22.3-23.1 = Xiph. 68.22-29 = no. 414 GLAJ), or those

of Augustus who bestowed the tetrarchy of Zenodorus upon Herodes. In this case, Xiphilinus described Augustus' arrangements in the East in very general terms without mentioning any names nor places (Dio 49.22.3-23.1 = Xiph. 68.22-29 = no. 414 GLAJ). The passage numbered by Stern as 417 is part of a list of Roman legions existing in Dio's time of which VI Ferrata was stationed in Judaea, thus for Xiphilinus it was hardly a passage related to the Jews (Dio 55.23.3 = Xiph. 113.15-16 = no. 417 GLAJ). Information about banishment of Herodes Archelaus (Dio 55.27.6 = no. 418 GLAJ) and, more noticeably, of the Jews from Rome by Tiberius<sup>21</sup> does not appear in the *Epitome*, nor do two passages about Agrippa I who was favoured by Caligula (Dio 59.8.2 = no. 420 GLAJ and 59.24.1 = no. 421 GLAJ). That Xiphilinus' did not find information about the Jews in Rome interesting is further illustrated by omission of the information about Claudius' policy towards them (Dio 60.6.6 = no. 422 GLAJ) and about another favours bestowed on Agrippa I (Dio 60.8.2-3 = no. 422 GLAJ).

Later instances of the Jews appearing in Dio did not survive in the original but only through Xiphilinus' *Epitome* and occasionally in *Excerpta Constantiniana*<sup>22</sup>. The comparisons conducted above lead to the conclusion that Xiphilinus was not that interested in Dio's Jewish material as it is assumed by some scholars. If anything, he was interested mostly in certain ethnographic descriptions of their customs and religion, particularly related to Dio's mentions of the Sabbath<sup>23</sup>. However, in this particular case, Xiphilinus does not change Dio's narrative in any meaningful way but mostly copies his information verbatim. More importantly, he does not provide any additional information taken from

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<sup>21</sup> Dio 57.18.5a = no. 419 GLAJ, it should be noted however that this passage originates not from the original Dio but from John of Antioch.

<sup>22</sup> Although it is hard to judge their credibility and faithfulness to Dio's original, they are very important testimonies for the history of Jewish nation after 70 AD because of a lack of comprehensive and more contemporary sources, Fishman-Duker 2012, 780.

<sup>23</sup> This was first observed by Mallan 2013, 631-632.

alternative sources. The fact that he omits the policies of emperors towards the Jews is telling in this regard as well. In other instances, when Dio's passage contains some information about the Jews, Xiphilinus decides to include it in the *Epitome* not because it contains information about them but because it forms a part of a broader, different topic. The same could be said about omission of some passages containing Jewish matters. They are usually discarded not because they contain information about Jews specifically but because their content did not fit in Xiphilinus' writing principles, mostly because of his biographical focus. Likewise, comparisons of Xiphilinus methodology in passages about Jewish-Roman warfare are telling in the context of the Bar Kokhba revolt. They lead to different conclusions than those by Fergus Millar who implies that Xiphilinus was driven by religious interest. If this is correct, then it does not explain why he mentions the supposedly religious causes of the uprising only vaguely while the description of warfare itself is much more detailed. In the two instances analysed above, the conquests of Jerusalem by Pompey and Sosius, descriptions of the sieges are less comprehensive than those found in Dio, while religious descriptions are copied by Xiphilinus verbatim. Thus, if he was indeed interested in the Bar Kokhba revolt because of its religious aspect, he would have provided much more information about the causes of the uprising and much less detailed description of warfare. It could be explained that he either was not interested in the religious connotations of the Bar Kokhba uprising or that it was Dio himself who did not discuss them in detail either. If the second explanation is correct, it further strengthens the argument that Xiphilinus was not interested in the religious background of the revolt since he did not find it necessary to supplement Dio's information with his own comments or additions from alternative sources.

The analysis conducted above shows that Xiphilinus rarely alters Dio's narrative. Even if he paraphrased the original in his own words, which is possible taking into account the philological analyses of the passage about the reasons of the Bar Kokhba revolt, it does not necessarily

mean that Xiphilinus greatly altered the tone of Dio's version by those very words. Even if we assume that phrases involving the terms *ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ* and *ἀντεγείρω* are indeed attestations of Xiphilinus' rephrasing, it does not necessarily mean that he made these alterations with a specific Christian or anti-Jewish agenda in mind. In fact, information on Xiphilinus' background does not support this. Rather, if some of the original sense was lost from the archetype, it is more likely due to an omission of certain important details by Xiphilinus, now lost and impossible to reconstruct. Loss of comprehensiveness of Dio's original thus most probably resulted in the ambiguity of Xiphilinus' version about the causes of the Bar Kokhba revolt. It is possible that Dio's version of the causes of the Jewish uprising was more unequivocal than that of Xiphilinus, similar to the case of Pompey's capture of Jerusalem. Only due to the loss of some information can it be concluded from Xiphilinus' version that Pompey could not breach the whole city until its defences relaxed during the Sabbath, while from Dio we know that Pompey captured the city but had problems with the siege of the Temple Mount. As such, controversy involving the foundation of the temple of Jupiter in Jerusalem could have been created because of Xiphilinus' omission of details about the place in which it was founded, if such information was indeed provided by Dio<sup>24</sup>. Accordingly, it is unlikely that Xiphilinus significantly altered Dio's description of the causes of the Bar Kokhba uprising, being motivated by Christian anti-Jewish agenda which, as was shown above, he did not repeat in any other instance when dealing with Jewish material.

Instead, Jewish motivations for the revolt as presented by Dio-Xiphilinus should be considered in the context of wider narrative of Dio about Hadrian's eastern policy. Dio's narrative structure in this part of *Roman*

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<sup>24</sup> On the possible reasons behind Hadrian's decision to build Jupiter's Temple not on the Temple Mount see Bieberstein 2007, 152; some recent archaeological findings could be interpreted as an argument supporting the foundation of the pagan temple on the Temple Mount, Magness 2012, 284.

*History*, even in the version of Xiphilinus, shows signs of a thematic structure revolving around Hadrian's travels and building activities in the provinces as a means of imperial philanthropy. Scholars acknowledge that his narrative structure was not always strictly annalistic but often varied according to the needs of his writing principles. The revolt of Bar Kokhba is part of a lengthy section where Dio describes the emperor's travel to Egypt: he records the emperor's passing through Judea (Dio 69.11.1), narrates Antinous' death and the honours given to him (Dio 69.11.2-4), the return to Judea where the revolt takes place (Dio 69.12-14), the invasion of Alani (Dio 69.15), and visit of Hadrian to Athens (Dio 69.16.1-2). Each section begins with the emperor's building project and its circumstances. It is noteworthy that the structure of the Bar Kokhba revolt narrative resembles that of Antinous where the foundation of Antinoopolis is mentioned at the beginning of the narrative yet it was a result of the story presented by Dio.

Thus, it is possible that the foundation of Aelia Capitolina was not as important a factor of the Bar Kokhba uprising as the reader is supposed to believe from Dio's narrative. Numismatic sources confirm Dio's version in terms of the chronology of the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, all points to its foundation at a time before the uprising in 130 AD, but that it was the reason for the uprising, or at least an important one, could be just a conjecture of Dio dictated by the narrative structure he undertook in the section about Hadrian's building programme.

To conclude, there is no evidence to support the claim that Xiphilinus altered Dio's narrative in any significant way motivated by his supposed monkish Christian or even anti-Jewish agenda. It is, however, very probable that condensation of Dio's material led to increased ambiguity of Xiphilinus' account because of loss of details which possibly made the original account of Dio more precise. As such one should look into the broader thematic structure of the section about Hadrian's reign for answers to the reasons behind the Bar Kokhba uprising.



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WARSZAWA 2023

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