



All-Ruling Rome, let your power never vanish (SEG 55.1204; I.Eph. 599)

A graffiti records an acclamation for the continuity of a strong Roman power.

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Graffiti

Original Location/Place: On the west wall of the unit 4 of Hanghaus 2, Ephesus.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): On the west wall of the unit 4 of Hanghaus 2, Ephesus.

Date: 1 CE to 256 CE

Physical Characteristics: Cursive lettering covering three lines of a painted wall.

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: SEG 55.1204 [I.Eph. 599]

Commentary:

The content of this text is brief and unequivocal. Rome is celebrated as an all ruling (????????/panbasilia) power (??????/kratos) which should never vanish (??????/olêta). This commentary will therefore not focus on a stock message which even appears in the traditional collection of Latin poetry – or *Anthologia Latina* (IX. 647). Instead, the most interesting feature of this graffiti resides in the fact that it was not scribbled in Rome or the Italian peninsula, but on the walls of a house in Ephesus, the capital of Asia. As such, this testimony is interesting to study the spread of imperial ideology across the provinces of the eastern Mediterranean.

Roman power and Ephesus were deeply intertwined. Already in the late Republican era, this coastal city hosted an important community of Italian settlers mostly dedicated to trading activities (*negotiatores*) and tax collection (*publicani*) in what Strabo considered the biggest emporium on western Anatolia (XIV.1.24; see Kirbihler, *Des Grecs et des Italiens*). When Augustus decided to authorise the structures of his imperial cult, Pergamum was designated centre for the Greeks and Ephesus for the Romans. However, the Ionian *polis* also promoted its Hellenistic past as shown by the foundation of Salutaris while maintaining the civic structures typical of a Greek city (e.g. Erastus and his admission into the *boule*). The famous sanctuary of Artemis also played a very prominent role in the formation of a local identity and was favoured by the Roman emperors from an early stage (e.g. Paulus Fabius Persicus' and Popillius Carus Peto's edicts). Localism and imperialism were therefore compatible in a city that acted as administrative centre of the rich province of Asia. In this context, the birthday of Antoninus Pius was lavishly celebrated and images of the emperors worn out because of the continuous use. At the same time, local benefactors such as T. Flavius Damianus could be building a new portico for Artemis' processions and paying for the expensive stay of Lucius Verus' army on its return from Parthia. Architectural landmarks such as the nymphaeum of Trajan and the so-called temple of Hadrian also combined Greek and Roman features and furnished an urban splendour commended by the emperors (Publius Vedius Antoninus). Hadrian, for example, was praised by the Ephesian population as particularly generous once he had visited the city twice and received hymns and thanks. All this collaboration, nonetheless, did not always prevent conflicts as attested by a revolt of bakers that brought the city and its institutions to a halt.

The architectural splendour of Roman Ephesus – *lumen Asiae* (Pliny, *Natural History* V.120) – was displayed not only in public buildings but also in the domestic sphere. The large residential area facing the famous Library of Celsus on the western slope of the Kuretes street is a clear testimony of this. Called by the Austrian excavators *Hanghäuser*, these terrace houses display lavish decorations and many painted walls. On one of the units belonging to the II *Hanghaus*, our graffiti was carved together with many messages mostly in Greek but also in Latin, ranging from food prices and poems to an allegedly mocking representation of Commodus (Tauber, "XII: Graffiti und Steininschriften," p. 336, GR 241). These walls are known to have hosted important local personalities such as G. Fl. Furius Aptus, benefactor of agonistic festivals, priest of Dionysos, and father of the 2nd century senator T. Fl. Lollianus Aristobulus (see Rathmayr, "Das Haus des Ritters"). In the 3rd century, detailed archaeological excavations show that these rooms were still in use, at least until traces of fire and destruction appear on levels that have been dated after 250 CE (Karwiese, *Gross ist die Artemis*, p. 122; Ladstätter, "Die Chronologie," p. 26-29). Historically, these signs can be connected to the account of the *Historia Augusta*,



which records that groups of Goths plundered and burnt both Ephesus and the temple of Artemis in the reign of Gallienus (*HA, Gall.Duo* VI.2; cf. Zosimus I.28.1 and Jordanes, *Getica* XX.107). The problematic historiographical source is, moreover, supported not only by archeological materials but also by epigraphic evidence. An inscription found in nearby Lydia dates to 263 CE and records the capture of a local inhabitant by a group of Barbarians (*SEG* 34.1271; see Robert, *Hellenica VI*, p. 121-122). Related testimonies from the Asian shores therefore confirm the dire circumstances that the population of the province had to endure in this decade (I.Didyma 159, *I.Milet.* 339; see Salomon, 1971). This situation of extreme insecurity is not exclusive to western Anatolia, when Greece, for example, suffered the attacks of the Herulians, Syria was open to the Sassanian raids and, finally, the Palmyrean dynasts managed to usurp Roman control (see e.g. Potter, *The Roman Empire*, p. 257-280). For some of these territories, such proofs of imperial weakness were not novel. The catastrophic lack of Roman defence in Ephesus was, by contrast, unprecedented.

For this reason, the context of this graffiti is particularly interesting. Under the protection of the imperial system, Ephesus flourished as one of the most important urban centres of the Ancient World. In the mid-3rd century, however, Rome was not all-ruling any more, its power had almost vanished and the same walls on which the propagandistic message was scribbled suffered destruction and fire.

Keywords in the original language:

- ????
- ???????????
- ???????
- ???????

Thematic keywords:

- Roman power
- Roman rule
- Asia Minor
- Ephesus
- acclamation
- imperial ideology
- imperial propaganda
- local population
- graffiti
- crisis of the third century
- Roman decline
- house
- destruction
- Goths
- barbarians

Bibliographical references: Kirbihler, François, *Des Grecs et des Italiens à Éphèse: histoire d'une intégration croisée, 133 a.C.-48 p.C* (Pessac: Ausonius, 2016)

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Taeuber, Hans, XII: Graffiti und Steininschriften, in *Hanghaus 2 in Ephesos Die Wohneinheit 6 Baubefund, Ausstattung, Funde* (ed. Rathmayr, E. , Thur, H. ; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften , 2014), 331-344

Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

Baetocaece / Baitokaike: Valerian and the Ancestral Privileges of a Temple in Syria

Epigraphic dossier confirming the privileges of the sanctuary of Zeus in Baetocaece (Syria) in 258-260 CE. Seleucid and Augustan precedents are used to back the worshippers' petition.

- Read more about Baetocaece / Baitokaike: Valerian and the Ancestral Privileges of a Temple in Syria

Inscription

Perge, metropolis by the emperor-god Tacitus

The city of Perge in southern Anatolia celebrates its new title of *metropolis* after the exceptional grant of the emperor Tacitus, worshipped as a god.

- Read more about Perge, metropolis by the emperor-god Tacitus

Inscription

An Anatolian Guardian of Peace in the Mid-3rd Century CE

A decree honours a local officer for having acted as a "guardian of peace" in a remote location of southern Anatolia between 270's and 280's CE.

- Read more about An Anatolian Guardian of Peace in the Mid-3rd Century CE

Inscription

The Salutaris Foundation and the Roman Representations in Ephesus

Caius Vibus Salutaris, an Ephesian member of the equestrian order, establishes a foundation in which images of the Roman emperors, the Roman people, and the Senate are prepared.

- Read more about The Salutaris Foundation and the Roman Representations in Ephesus

Inscription

The council and people of Ephesus thank Hadrian



Hadrian is honoured as “founder” and “saviour” in Ephesus prior to his journey in the Levant (129-130 CE)

- Read more about The council and people of Ephesus thank Hadrian

Inscription

Paullus Fabius Persicus, Claudius, and the temple of Artemis in Ephesos

The provincial governor of Asia tries to curb corruption in the internal affairs of Ephesus and the temple of Artemis. His actions are connected with the emperor Claudius.

- Read more about Paullus Fabius Persicus, Claudius, and the temple of Artemis in Ephesos

Inscription

Popillius Carus Peto and the festivities of Artemis in Ephesus

The Roman governor Carus Peto produces an edict authorising a local decree of Ephesus. The decree celebrates the fame of Artemis' cult and institutes that all the days of one month (*Artemision*) should be sacred and dedicated to this guardian goddess.

- Read more about Popillius Carus Peto and the festivities of Artemis in Ephesus

Inscription

Ephesus and Antoninus Pius's Birthday

The city of Ephesus decides to celebrate Antoninus Pius's birthday in exchange for the benefactions of the new emperor

- Read more about Ephesus and Antoninus Pius's Birthday

Inscription

Hadrian listens to Hymns in the Theatre of Ephesus

Hadrian visits Ephesus and the city prepares a performance of hymns sung by the local ephebes.

- Read more about Hadrian listens to Hymns in the Theatre of Ephesus

Inscription

Bakers and Riots in Ephesus

An edict of a Roman official that deals with the riots caused by an association of bakers in Ephesus. The local



council is also summoned to solve this issue.

- [Read more about Bakers and Riots in Ephesus](#)

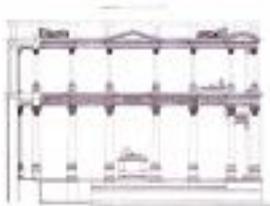
Architecture

Nymphaeum of Trajan at Ephesus (102-114 CE)

Nymphaeum of Trajan



[Reconstruction of the Nymphaeum of Trajan \[1\]](#)



[Nymphaeum of Trajan \[2\]](#)



[Reconstruction of the Nymphaeum of Trajan \[3\]](#)



- [Read more about Nymphaeum of Trajan at Ephesus \(102-114 CE\) \[4\]](#)



Architecture

[The so-called “Temple of Hadrian” at Ephesus \[5\]](#)

[Temple of Hadrian - Ephesus \[6\]](#)



[Temple of Hadrian – Ephesus – General View \[7\]](#)



[Temple of Hadrian – Ephesus - Portal \[8\]](#)



[Temple of Hadrian – Ephesus – Relief of Medusa \[9\]](#)



[Temple of Hadrian – Ephesus – Frieze \[10\]](#)





[Temple of Hadrian – Ephesus – Frieze](#) [11]



- [Read more about The so-called “Temple of Hadrian” at Ephesus](#) [5]

Inscription

[Publius Vadius Antoninus and Antoninus Pius](#) [12]

The Roman emperor Antoninus Pius praises the Ephesian benefactor Publius Vadius Antoninus for investing in works for the future

- [Read more about Publius Vadius Antoninus and Antoninus Pius](#) [12]

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