Antoninus Pius acknowledges the euergetic actions of a benefactor from Lycia.

**Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):** Imperial letter

**Original Location/Place:** Mausoleum of Opramoas in the Lycian city of Rhodiapolis

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** In-situ (Turkey)

**Date:** 151 CE

**Physical Characteristics:** The very long dossier of documents (see below) was inscribed on twenty columns, each with an average of 102 lines, which stood on the walls of what appears to be Opramoas’ Mausoleum.

**Material:** Limestone

**Measurements:**
The three outer walls on which the text was inscribed are 8 metres high and 7 metres wide

**Language:** Greek

**Category:** Roman, Greek

**Publications:**

**Commentary:**
This letter sent by the emperor Antoninus Pius is just one of the 70 documents included in a very long dossier carved on the walls of a small building next to the theatre of Rhodiapolis. The honours and benefactions of a citizen of this small settlement on the Lycian peninsula (southern Anatolia) called Opramoas are recorded across the approximately 2000 lines of text preserved. Thus this epigraphic monument constitutes the largest testimony of euergetism in the eastern Mediterranean during the Roman imperial period. This dossier, moreover, illustrates the high degree of communication and interaction existing between Rome, the provincial elites, and the local institutions in which such actions took place.

As customary in imperial correspondence, the epistle opens with the names and titles of the emperor. Antoninus Pius is firstly mentioned with his dynastical pedigree that originated in Galba and continued with Trajan and Hadrian by virtue of adoptive inheritance (see Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors*, p. 78-95). The subsequent list of civic and religious offices dates the document to 151 CE, which corresponds to the 14th time in which he held tribunician powers. The emperor did not address his letter to Opramoas’s fatherland but to the magistrates (archontes), council (boulê), and people (dēmos) of a neighbouring Lycian city called Korydalla [https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/638937]. The procedure of the communication is, nonetheless, standard. Antoninus Pius was reacting to a diplomatic mission that this community sent to report a noteworthy action; in this case, the benefactions performed (philoteimeitai) by Opramoas, son of Apollonios. The imperial response is not as expected because the Roman ruler notes that he was already aware of such euergetic actions. Previously, other cities affected by an earthquake (seismos) had already reached him. Even the provincial governor had sent a related decree (psêphisma). The gigantic length of Opramoas’s dossier is precisely due to this constant effort in either honouring or communicating Opramoas’s actions. Therefore, our letter needs to be read in the context of the whole dossier and not as a single instance.

As remarked above, the monument records documents from various sources, including the imperial chancellery, the offices of the provincial governor and many cities of the region besides Korydalla or Rhodiapolis. As such, one must understand that these were not the walls of a public archive but rather a private collection seeking to memorialise the deeds of just one man. This biased composition explains the extremely positive image of Opramoas transmitted and the fact that the documents are well spread both temporarily and geographically. The first secure testimony is dated to 139 CE and our letter corresponds to the latest group, probably soon before Opramoas’s death in the early 150’s. As for geographical distribution, virtually all the cities of the region are represented and, naturally, the commonalty (or koinon) of Lycians which was reinstated by Claudius when this
territory became a Roman province. The relevance of the latter institution is also confirmed in our letter since the regional high-priest (archiereus), Antichares II, appears as eponymous magistrate (see Reitzenstein, Die lykischen Bundespriester, p. 72-79). Opramoas had also completed this and other related offices from an early stage as confirmed by the frequent honours that the koinon dedicated to him (Kokkinia, Die Opramoas-Inschrift, p. 213-224). A similar degree of reciprocity needs to be inferred from the honours granted individually by the cities of Lycia. According to the dossier, this person alone spent several hundred thousand denarii on their civic activities (Kokkinia, Die Opramoas-Inschrift, p. 213-224). It should therefore not come as a surprise that Opramoas claimed to “have been granted the citizenship of all cities in Lycia” (poleiteuomenos en tais kata Lykian polesi pasais).

Opramoas’s benefactions on behalf of Korydalla and the cities affected by the earthquake followed an energetic attitude that was remembered for many years. Actually, the information recorded in other parts of the dossier enables us to establish a date for this natural catastrophe before 143 – most probably 141 CE (Kokkinia, Die Opramoas-Inschrift, p. 168-169). Nevertheless, not only this local remembrance is to be highlighted but even more the fact that Antoninus Pius could still refer to the event in connection with this Lycian man almost a decade later. This imperial awareness can justify, to a certain extent, Opramoas’s enthusiasm for his benefactions. As the dossier illustrates on multiple occasions, the communities and institutions benefitting from such acts send testimonies (or martyria) to the Roman authorities in order to communicate their gratitude (see Kokkinia, “Letters of Roman Authorities”). The mission sent by Korydalla and replied by Antoninus Pius belongs to this category. In other words, Opramoas could expect to attract imperial attention by standing out in his local career. The equestrian governor Rupilius Severus (PIR III 151; cf. Eck, “Prosopographica III”) accordingly celebrates Opramoas’s benefactions and even mediates with the emperor following a procedure that is also confirmed by Pliny when he was governor of Bithynia-Pontus. Both through the local testimonies and the governor’s decrees dispatched, Antoninus Pius could notice the activities of a man who particularly promoted constructions; exactly the stance that the emperor praised in the Ephesian benefactor, Vedius Antoninus. Probably as a consequence of all these positive reports for Opramoas, Antoninus Pius decided to put him in charge of the accounts of Limyra, as he states in a letter sent to this city (XII B). Under such imperial support and recognition, it is interesting to note that Opramoas was never granted Roman citizenship. This point has attracted scholarly attention as it would indicate that Antoninus Pius was not prodigal in such enfranchisements (see Heller, “Greek citizenship in the Roman Empire: political participation, social status and identities”). However, even if Opramoas may have unsuccessfully aspired for such a distinction, it must be observed that this peregrine managed to surpass many compatriots (including his enemy Jason from Kyneai, also praised by Antoninus Pius: IGRR III.704) in wealth and, especially, in grateful honours. Indeed, as a result of his benefactions his name had not only reached the emperor at Rome (apo Rômês) but also the provincial governors and, perhaps most importantly, the favour of compatriots who allowed a monument dedicated to his heroic memorialisation next to the theatre of Rhodiapolis.

Keywords in the original language:

- ?????????? [3]
- ?????????? [4]
- ????? [5]
- ????? [6]
- ????? [7]
- ???????????? [8]
- ???????? [9]
- ???????? [10]
- ???????? [11]
- ???????? [12]

Thematic keywords:
Antoninus Pius, Opramoas, and Lycia
Published on Judaism and Rome (http://www.judaism-and-rome.org)

- **Antoninus Pius** [13]
- **Opramoas** [14]
- **Lycia** [15]
- **Korydalla** [16]
- **Rhodiapolis** [17]
- **benefactor** [18]
- **letter** [19]
- **Roman rule** [20]
- **administration** [21]
- **testimony** [22]
- **euergetism** [23]
- **earthquake** [24]

**Bibliographical references:**

- Reitzenstein, Denise, *Die lykischen Bundespriester* [30] (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011)

**Other sources connected with this document:**

- **Honours for Claudius in the Stadiasmus Patarensis** [31]
  The Lycian people honour the emperor Claudius as a saviour for delivering them of internal strife and insecurity after the new province was established

  - Read more about Honours for Claudius in the Stadiasmus Patarensis [31]

- **Publius Vedius Antoninus and Antoninus Pius** [32]
  The Roman emperor Antoninus Pius praises the Ephesian benefactor Publius Vedius Antoninus for investing in works for the future

  - Read more about Publius Vedius Antoninus and Antoninus Pius [32]

**Realized by:**

**Aitor Blanco Pérez** [33]