Decree of the Greek cities in Asia accepting the proposal by the governor Paullus Fabius Maximus to start their calendars on 23 September, Augustus's birthday

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Local decree. According to Laffi, “Le iscrizioni,” p. 8, the epigraphic monument in which this document appears contained: Proconsular edict (I) and appendix (II) in Latin. Introduction (III), copy (IV), and appendix of the edict (V) in Greek. First (VI) and second (VII) decrees of the League of Greek cities. The available text is based on the composite edition of the 4 different copies found in the province of Asia recording the first decree (VI): Priene (I.Priene2014 16; cf. I.Priene 105); Apamea (CIG, 3957a; SEG, 15.815; Drew-Bear, Nouvelles inscriptions, p. 25-26, no. 14); Eumenea (CIG, III.3902b = MAMA XI.P4); and, very recently, Metropolis (SEG 56.1233; AE 2006.1452).


Date: 9 BCE

Physical Characteristics: The longest copy is that of Priene and preserves 84 lines distributed in two blocks (a-b). The first block is broken on top and the first lines are very worn. The second block is also broken on the right hand side, but its length is complete. The letters are basic and not ornamented. The layout of the edition attached below is based on this version. Other copies of the same text have different measurements, line distributions, and their state of conservation varies considerably

Material: Marble

Measurements: The two blocks from Priene are: a) 48.5 centimetres in length, 67 in width, and 34 thick; b) 84 centimetres in length, 68 in width, and 35 thick. The letters are between 1 and 5 centimetres tall

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: Blümel and Merkelbach, Die Inschriften von Priene, p. 39-56, no. 14

Commentary:
The opening formula ?????/?edoxen + dative (l. 30-31) indicates that a resolution had been adopted in an assembly; in this case by the Greeks inhabiting Asia. This abbreviated nomenclature corresponds to the League (?????/koinon) of Greek cities in the province (Vitale, Eparchie und Koinon, p. 60-65). One of its magistrates, the high-priest (?????????/archiereus) Apollonius from Aezanoi, was the mover (?????/gnômê). The following lines of the text establish the motivations of their decree (31-49), their decision (49-67), and the exact instructions through which it shall be implemented (68-77).

The assembly of Greek cities considers the arrival of Augustus as a divine gift brought by the providence (?????????/pronoia). This theme is closely related to the content of another decree drafted by the same organization and discovered at Halicarnassus equally celebrates the birthday of this Roman ruler representing the most accomplished good (???????? ????????/telêotaton agathon) for the benefit of mankind. Such benefit is explained with two main points: first, he has ended war and brings peace (l. 36). Second, his good acts exceed the examples of the past (????????????/gegonotes), the predictions for the present time (????????????/prolabontes) and the hopes
for the future (???????? ??????????? ??????/en tois esomenois elpis). As explained in our commentary of the inscription from Halicarnassus, such claims – even in its exaggerating tone – held some truth after many years of constant violence and civil wars in Asia Minor. The idea of the supra-human provenance of Augustus also fits in a context in which the fundamentals of imperial cult had already been laid across the western and eastern provinces of the Mediterranean. Both realities were likewise instigated by a new regime which promoted and fuelled such attitudes. The two documents drafted by the League of Greek cities fully accepted the heavily advertised achievement of Pax Augusta. At the same time, Roman poets aligned with Augustus’s propaganda circles were enlarging the messianic character of the new ruler; most famously exemplified by Virgil’s IVth Eclogue. As a result, the analogies and similarities that can be found between the latter text, the Christian gospels and our decrees are not surprising. For example, line 40 considers that the birthday of this god – Augustus – was the beginning of the good tidings (????????????/euangelia) in this world; closely resembling Lucas 2:10.

The close connection between central Roman ideals and their reception in the provinces is fundamental for understanding the preamble of our decree. Furthermore, it explains how and why the Greeks in Asia ended up adopting the decision to reform their calendars. As the text indicates (l. 41-42), the entire process started in a meeting of the League at Smyrna, when Lucius Volcacius Tullus was the proconsul of the province. This man, the uncle of one of Propertius’s closest friends (e.g. Elegies, I.6), had been consul in 33 BCE and held his Asian governorship between ca. 29 and 26 BCE. (PIR² V.625; Thomasson, Laterculi, p. 205, no. 1). As one of his most loyal companions – both shared the consulship –, Tullus proposed the award of a crown (????????????/stephanos) to the man who devised the best way to honour Augustus, referred to as god (????????/?theos) in line 43. The most innovative idea came precisely from another governor of the province in the year 10/9 BCE: Paulus Fabius Maximus (PIR² F 47; Thomasson, Laterculi, p. 206, no. 8). He had just been consul in 11 B.C.E., so we see another quick promotion, probably favoured by Augustus himself against the lex Pompeia and the hazards of sortition – i.e. appointments of Asian governors occurred c. 10 years after the consulship under normal circumstances. Indeed, this could explain why the Greeks considered the proconsul’s arrival in the province as the result of “his right hand and reason (l. 45).” The exact details of Fabius Maximus’s unprecedented (?????????/agnoêthen) proposal are exposed in an edict which preceded our decree, and was inscribed both in Latin and Greek on the upper part of the epigraphic monument (see above). The League provides a summary in lines 48 and 49: “to begin time from his (Augustus’s) birthday”.

Prior to Fabius Maximus’ proposal, the cities of Asia Minor used a broad range of lunisolar calendars; i.e. a series of lunar months of 29/30 days with regular intercalations in order to keep the cycle of the solar year (Thonemann, “The Calendar,” p. 123). This variety caused discrepancies regarding the beginning of the calendar, which also contrasted with the new Julian system now fully established in Rome (Stern, The Calendars, p. 222-225). For example, it is known that Miletus’ year started around the spring equinox (Tru?mpy, Untersuchungen, p. 89-93). Simultaneously, many cities had adopted the Macedonian/Seleucid calendar, which began in the month Dios – ca. the autumn equinox (Laffi, “Le iscrizioni,” p. 39-42). The latter is precisely the calendric sequence to which the governor refers before proposing the following reform: all calendars in the province of Asia shall start on the 23rd of September, a day on which the magistrates of the cities will also enter their new offices. According to Fabius Maximus, Augustus’s birthday was “the beginning of life and living,” and, therefore, the League was to draft a decree so that his proposed honour (????????/?timê) may abide forever. The cities of Asia embraced this propagandistic message as noted above, and lines 55-56 contain the core message of their decision.

In addition to accepting the 23rd of September as their New Year, the assembly ratified a previous resolution through which the first month of the calendar was called ?????????/Kaisar (l. 54); and decided to bestow a crown upon Fabius Maximus as a reward (l. 56-57). The decree continues specifying the way in which their decision shall be announced, indicating spaces and occasions which were closely related to the cult of Augustus. The gymnastic contest (????????/agôn) of Pergamum dedicated to the Roman Augusti (????????????/Sebastoi) had been authorised by the emperor himself in 29 BCE (Cassius Dio, Roman History L.II.20.9). Likewise, an announcement was to be made during the festivals dedicated to Caesar (????????????/Kaišarea), which the cities may organise locally (e.g. IGRR IV.1064). Additionally, copies of both the decree and the edict had to be carved on white marble at three different locations; firstly, the temple of Rome and Augustus – which was again authorised by the emperor to Pergamum in 29 BCE (I. 63-64); secondly, the public advocates of the League (????????????/ekdikoi) were in charge of supervising the setting up of the same inscribed pillars at the main centres of the judicial districts (????????????/dioikêseis), and at the temples devoted to Caesar (I. 64-67). This final clause concerning the reproduction and circulation of the text explains the high number of fragments surviving in distant cities of Asia: Priene, Eumenea, Dorylaion, Maenonia, Metropolis, and Apamea (Blümel, Merkelbach, Die Inschriften, p. 41). This last city was indeed head of an assize (Dio Chrysostom, To Celaenae). The presence of spaces dedicated to the imperial cult is also conceivable at the other locations, even if the original archaeological context of the inscriptions has largely been lost. At any rate, the
epigraphic evidence confirms the relevance of this resolution both at the centre and periphery of the province.

The final lines of the edict (l. 68-77) deal with the technical details that should be implemented in order to make this reform work. They also provide a greater degree of specificity as to when exactly in winter the decree of the Greek cities has been passed (Laffi, “Le iscrizioni,” p. 27-34). Despite such specifications, there are still doubts among modern scholars about the extent to which the different local calendars were transformed. For instance, we know that Ephesus kept the distinctive names of its months (Merkelbach, “Die ephesischen Monate”), and differing local eras still survived after 9 BCE. (Leschhorn, Antike Ären). In Lydia, the denomination ?????/Kaisar for the first month did not always supersede the Macedonian Dios, and even the lunisolar cycle may have not been completely discontinued (Thonemann, “The Calendar”). What remains clear in all such cases, however, is that the 23rd of September remained the beginning of the calendar in Asia for the rest of the imperial age. Indeed, the main point of the idea proposed by Fabius Maximus and automatically accepted by the League was to honour Augustus (Stern, Calendars, p. 277-278). This reform, nonetheless, did not only constitute an innovative way to promote the cult of the new ruler, but also provided the Roman administration with a clever device to homogenise local diversity and facilitate the control of the Greek province.

**Literary reference:** Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LI.20.9

Keywords in the original language:

- ????? [2]
- ??????? [3]
- ????????? [4]
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- ???????? [6]
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- ???????? [26]
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- ??????? [29]
- ?? [30]
- ??? [31]

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- imperial cult [35]
- governor [36]
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- decree [39]
- games [40]
- temple [41]
- Pax Augusta [42]
- peace [43]
- providence [44]
- future [45]
- imperial virtues [46]

**Bibliographical references:** Blümel, Wolfgang, Merkelbach, Reinhold, *Die Inschriften von Priene* [47] (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 2014)
Laffi, Umberto, *Le iscrizioni relative all'introduzione nel 9 AC. del nuovo calendario della provincia d'Asia* [50], Studi Classici e Orientali 16 (1967) : 5-98
Merkelbach, Reinhold, *Die ephesischen Monate in der Kaiserzeit* [53], ZPE 36 (1979) : 157-162
Thonemann, Peter, *The Calendar of the Roman Province Of Asia* [56], ZPE 196 (2015) : 123-141
Trümpy, Catherine, *Untersuchungen zu den altgriechischen Monatsnamen und Monatsfolgen* [57] (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997)

**Other sources connected with this document:**
- Inscription

**Decree of Halicarnassus celebrating the arrival of Caesar Augustus [59]**

- Read more about Decree of Halicarnassus celebrating the arrival of Caesar Augustus [59]

**Inscription**

**Popillius Carus Pedo and the festivities of Artemis in Ephesus [60]**

The Roman governor Carus Pedo 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 Pedo and the festivities of Artemis in Ephesus [60]

**Text**
Virgil, *Eclogues IV.1-63* [61]

The coming of a Roman Messiah

- Read more about Virgil, *Eclogues IV.1-63* [61]

Inscription

Ephesus and Antoninus Pius’s Birthday [62]

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 [62]

Inscription

Letter of Octavian to Ephesus concerning Aphrodisias [63]

Octavian requests the Ephesians to return a statue of Eros dedicated by his father Julius to Aphrodite in the city of Aphrodisias

- Read more about Letter of Octavian to Ephesus concerning Aphrodisias [63]

Inscription

Re-casting imperial images at Ephesus under Marcus Aurelius [64]

Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus instruct not to re-cast silver for their representations, even if the old images were worn and not easily identifiable.

- Read more about Re-casting imperial images at Ephesus under Marcus Aurelius [64]

Realized by:

Aitor Blanco Pérez [65]