Augustus, Kyme, and provincial propaganda

Augustus with Agrippa rule that sacred and public lands should be returned to local institutions. Then, a provincial governor settles a dispute in Kyme and instructs its magistrates to acknowledge Augustus’s restoration with an inscription.

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Dossier of official documents
Original Location/Place: Unknown
Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden (Netherlands)
Date: 27 BCE
Physical Characteristics: Stele damaged on the right and left sides and broken at the bottom. It is decorated with a flower collar on top. The Greek and Latin texts are separated by either indented paragraphs or a vacat
Material: Marble
Measurements: 47.5 centimetres in height, 31 centimetres in width, and 7.5 centimetres thick. Letters are on average 1 centimetre tall
Language: Latin, Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Commentary:
This bilingual inscription from the Asian city of Kyme had originally three documents, of which we only include the first two in our collection of sources. From lines 1 to 11 (Greek), there is an official decision concerning the restitution of public/sacred property. Lines 12 to 22 (Latin) contain a letter of the provincial governor describing the application of this decision in Kyme. Finally, from line 22 we have the Greek translation of the governor’s letter and, as the stone is broken on the bottom, it is left out of this edition and commentary.

The first document begins with the names and titulature of Augustus and Agrippa when they were consuls in 27 BCE. As some letters on the left side of line 2 are lost, we cannot know whether this was just a dating formula or the nominatives would be the subject of a verb as some scholars have suggested (see Sherk, Roman Documents, p. 318-319). The problem with this interpretation is that in line 15 of the inscription the decision is referred to as a iussus (order) Augusti Caesaris and, therefore, Agrippa’s participation is not mentioned. The edition of Engelmann, Die Inschriften von Kyme, prefers to restore ?[??????], which fits better in the available space and could perhaps be related to the restoration [vadi]monium (“bail”) in line 21. The slightly abrupt opening of the document, in any case, indicates that the inscription only records an abbreviated version focusing on the passages which were pertinent to the case of Kyme. Since the text is not complete, this also complicates the identification of the legal form of the first document, which is still disputed (see Sherk, Roman Documents, p. 316-317). This controversy mainly arises from the fact that Augustus would be legislating on aspects pertaining to a province, Asia, under the jurisdiction of the Senate (see Giovannini, “Les pouvoirs d’Auguste”). However, as we can also see later in the Cyrene edicts, this is not a unique case and can be justified by Augustus’s superior auctoritas, even if his proconsular powers were not granted by the Senate until 23 BCE (see Ferrary, “À propos des pouvoirs,” p. 134-135). These modern issues of juridical interpretation were, nonetheless, not problematic to the local institutions of Kyme and the provincial governor who – see above – just referred to this document as an “order” issued by Augustus.

The aim of his order was also clear: public (?????????/dēmosioi) or sacred (??????/hieroi) lands had to be restored (?????????????????????/apokatastathêna) to the civic institutions. Since private ownership of such assets was not allowed, lines 6 and 7 also forbid their removal, purchase, mortgage or gift. If the restoration proposed for line 2 is right, they could neither be used as pledges. The official decision also specifies that whoever is in charge of the ???????/eparcheia should take care of its enforcement (l. 8-9). The problem, in this case, is to determine the exact meaning of this word. Like its Latin equivalent provincia, the term designates only the territory in which a Roman officer had jurisdiction; but not necessarily an entire provincial unit (see Bertrand, “Langue grecque;” Stasse, “????????”). Consequently, we cannot know with certainty the geographical extension in which “Augustus’s decision” was applicable. Likewise, the identity of the officials in charge of the enforcement shall remain open. Despite such details of interpretation, it is clear that the cities of Asia were subject to this new regulation and the governor of the proconsular province was aware of its existence (see Hurlet, Le proconsul, p. 204-208).
The second document starts precisely with the letter sent by one them, Vinicius, to the magistrates of Kyme. The prosopography of the proconsul is not clear because the first letter in line 11 is lost and we know several governors of Asia called Vinicius. However, the most widely accepted identification – already proposed by Pleket, The Greek Inscriptions – is Lucius Vinicius (PIR¹ V.443), designated consul in 33 BCE, who would have held office in Asia in 27 BCE. If that is indeed the case, a very plausible context for the content of this letter can be proposed. As soon as the local institutions of Kyme knew about the applicability of a beneficial Roman ruling in their lands, they send one representative to meet (adeit) the governor and explain that a certain Lysias possessed the temple of Dionysos (Liberei Patris fanum). As both Lysias and the ambassador Apollonides are referred to with the name of, probably, local tribes (Noraceus, Tucalleus), the dispute involved citizens of the same polis (civis vester, l. 13-14). Among the inhabitants of Kyme, there was one group particularly interested in the restoration of the temple: the thyaiseitae. Their name obviously derives from the Greek ??????/thiaios, which is associated with the cult of Dionysos. Consequently, this local cultic association would just be claiming back a space that had traditionally been used for their meetings and festivities. In his response, the provincial governor confirms the validity of their case and gives instructions on how to proceed with its execution (l. 17-18). His final recommendation is particularly interesting.

In line 19, Vinicius adds that if the temple can eventually be returned to the god, the following sequence shall be inscribed: Imp(erator) Caesar deivei f(ilius) Augustus restituit. In other words, the provincial governor is imposing on the citizens of Kyme a display of gratitude towards Augustus. Such a request immediately raises crucial questions relating to our modern interpretation of ancient epigraphic sources. How widespread was this practice of imposing the preparation of congratulatory texts for the ruling authorities (cf. Suetonius on Domitian)? How can we identify genuine vs. forced local displays of gratitude? Our brief commentary of this testimony from Kyme is not the place to discuss such complex issues, affecting not only inscriptions but also any other direct material of the Ancient World for which the context of its genesis is missing. Nevertheless, we found this example convenient to illustrate the role of propaganda in our interpretation of sources; particularly as regards the largely adulatory references to Augustus – the self-proclaimed restorer of the Res Publica (RGDA 34) – spread across both the eastern and western Mediterranean.

Keywords in the original language:

- ?????????? [3]
- ????? [4]
- ???? [5]
- ????????? [6]
- ??????? [7]
- ????????? [8]
- ????? [9]
- ?????? [10]
- ????????? [11]
- proconsul [12]
- liber [13]
- fanum [14]
- sacra [15]
- deus [16]
- restituo [17]
- Augustus [18]
- Caesar [19]
- inscription [20]
- divus [21]
- imperator [22]

Thematic keywords:

- Augustus [23]
- property [24]
- land [25]
Augustus, Kyme, and provincial propaganda
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- sacred [26]
- dispute [27]
- propaganda [28]
- governor [29]
- central power [30]
- Asia [31]
- restoration [32]

Bibliographical references:  Bertrand, Jean-Marie, Langue grecque et administration romaine: de l’???????? ??? ???????? à l’???????? ??????? [33], Ktèma 7 (1982) : 167-175
Engelmann, Helmut, Die Inschriften von Kyme, [34] (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1976)
Hurlet, Frédéric, Le proconsul et le prince d’Auguste à Dioclétien, [36] (Bordeux: Ausonius, 2006)
Sherk, Robert K., Roman Documents from the Greek East [38] (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1969)
Stasse, Baudouin, ?????????: le cas du iussum Augusti de 27a (I.Kyme, 17) [39], L’Antiquité Classique 78 (2009) : 161-168

Other sources connected with this document:  Inscription

Cyrene Edicts of Augustus: I and III, [40]

Augustus sets new rules on the way Greek and Roman citizens shall chose their tribunals and juries (I). Roman citizens without immunity in the Cyrenaica shall contribute to the local liturgies (III)

- Read more about Cyrene Edicts of Augustus: I and III [40]

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[35] http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/les-pouvoirs-d%E2%80%99auguste-de-27-%C3%A0-23-av-j-c-une-relecture-de-l%E2%80%99ordonnance-de-kym%C3%A8-de-l%E2%80%99-27-ik-5-n%C2%BA-17
[39] http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/%E1%BC%90%CF%80%CE%B1%CF%81%CF%87%CE%B5%E1%BD%B7%CE%B1-le-cas-du-iussum-augusti-de-27-a-ikyme-17