



A Cypriot Oath of Allegiance to Tiberius

images_cypriot_oath.jpg



[1]

The island of Cyprus takes an oath showing their loyalty to Tiberius, praising Rome's eternity and emphasising the kinship relations between the local Aphrodite and the Roman Venus

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Oath

Original Location/Place: Found in the village of Nikokleia, near the site of ancient Palaipaphos. Most likely, the inscription was located in the famous temple dedicated to Aphrodite there

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Local Archaeological Museum of Palaipaphos (Kouklia, Cyprus)

Date: 14 CE

Physical Characteristics: The slab has several chips on the inscribed face and is considerably weathered at the upper left and lower right corners. The bottom is broken and we only preserve 21 lines. There is no word separation but paragraphs are slightly indented and can finish with a *vacat*. Letters are firmly, even if erratically, cut and forms with serifs appear.

Material: Marble

Measurements: 54.5 centimetres in height, 60.5 centimetres in width, and 8 centimetres thick. Letters are, on average, 2 centimetres tall.

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: Mitford, Terence B., "A Cypriot Oath of Allegiance to Tiberius," in *JRS* 50 (1960), p. 75-79.

Commentary: In Greek mythology, Cyprus was the birthplace of Aphrodite. Uranus's sperm had been mixed with the waters of the Mediterranean, the foam (?????/aphros) produced a goddess, and she was dragged towards the shores near [Paphos](#) [2] (e.g. Hesiod, *Theogony* 188-200). In the Roman world, this tradition was exploited by the inhabitants of the island in order to emphasise their kinship ties with the new Roman authority. Our inscription is a direct testimony of these intertwined motifs and illustrates the relevance of such displays of alliance across the provinces in the Empire.

The genre of the document is important to explore its tradition and singularities. Oaths are considerably well attested in the Greek world and they provide us with a context that is missing in the inscription (see Herrmann, *Der römische Kaisereid*). In the first line, the list of gods on which the Cypriots swore is included. The verb ??????/????? ("swear") does not appear and this contrasts with other available examples relating to loyalty and the rule of Rome. The better preserved precedent is the so-called Paphlagonian oath to Augustus in which a preamble specified when, where, and by whom the oath had been taken. The same sequence can be found in the later oath of Assos (*I.Assos* 26) and seems to constitute the standardised model. This probably indicates that our stone only recorded an abbreviated form of the entire procedure, which might have been further elaborated in other slabs now lost. Yet, the most interesting sections survive and complement the information available.



The date of the oath can be established in 14 CE when Tiberius succeeded Augustus and renewed signs of alliance are attested in different places of his realm (see Fujii, *Imperial Cult*, p. 87). As for the location of the ceremony, the famous temple of Aphrodite in [Palaipaphos](#) [3] can be suggested given the place where the inscription was found and its content. Finally, there is no doubt that the people of Cyprus were in charge of its preparation. This local character is particularly obvious in the selection of deities appearing from lines 1 to 7. The list starts with Aphrodite Akraia and the epithet ("of the heights") would refer not to a local cult but rather to the goddess overlooking the whole of Cyprus from the mount Olympos, where a temple was dedicated to her according to Strabo (*Geography* XIV.6.3). Even if there is some modern discrepancy regarding the exact origins of some of the other gods – especially the Apollo at the end of line 3 (see Cayla, "A propos de Kinyras"), the concluding remark in line 7 confirms that they were "common and ancestral to the island." This would explain that renowned cults very attached to cities such the Zeus of Salamis or the very Aphrodite of Paphos did not feature. Indeed, we are dealing with a decision (l. 20) adopted by the united body of the Cypriots for which Hestia was a counselling force (???????/Boulaia). This scenario resembles closely the more detailed information provided by the Paphlagonian oath. There, the inhabitants of Phazimon/Neapolis swore in local spaces dedicated to Augustus after a common oath had been completed in the provincial centre of Gangra. In the case of Cyprus, we cannot know whether the words agreed at Palaipaphos were later replicated with local ceremonies.

The Cypriot oath equally follows the Paphlagonian model with the addition of Augustus as one of the theoi horkioi ("swearing-gods"). However, this is done with a unique sequence that needs to be analysed in detail. In line 8, Augustus is presented as a descendant (???????/ekgonon) of Aphrodite. Such a distinctive reference immediately makes this Roman ruler related to the people of Cyprus, because both were related to the same goddess. Kinship ties had traditionally played a prominent role in the diplomatic exchanges of the Mediterranean and the Cypriots did not hesitate to exploit their particular connection with Rome (see Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*). They were obviously appealing to the heavily advertised story that linked Aeneas, son of Venus, with the Julian family to which Augustus belonged (see Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, p. 4-18). This association between Rome and Aphrodite was not completely novel and we know that the concept of Venus Genetrix was already important for the relations established between Greeks and Romans in the Republican period (see Schilling, *La religion romaine*, p. 301-374; Wallensten, *??????????*, p. 144-150). With Augustus, the difference is that he managed to institute a long-lasting system in which his personal motives and preferences became an inherent part of Rome's rule and power. It is therefore not coincidental that the Anatolian city of Aphrodisias – which also had an important sanctuary of Aphrodite – followed the same kinship strategy. This tactic, together with their staunch alliance during the Civil Wars, was rewarded by Augustus with his personal protection and a privileged grant of freedom and autonomy (see Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome*). In Paphos, we know that the Roman ruler contributed to the reconstruction of the city after an earthquake (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LIV.23.7). Therefore, the efforts of the Cypriots to foster and promote this special connection were not in vain. A second interesting episode illustrates such benefits even better. In 22 CE, Tiberius considered that the Greek cities were abusing their rights of asylum (Tacitus, *Annals* III.60-63). He requested those granted the advantageous status to come to Rome and defend their claims with documents and delegates. Cyprus and Aphrodisias were among those summoned, and they both referred to their connection with Aphrodite in order to succeed and maintain their asyilia. Later, we know that Titus personally visited the temple of the Paphian Aphrodite (Tacitus, *Histories* II.2-4; Suetonius, *Titus* 5) on his way to Jerusalem. At this very location, the abundant testimonies praising with statues and honorific bases members of the imperial family need to be understood within the same context (see Mitford, "A Cypriot Oath," p. 79).

The combination of local interests and Roman motives in our oath appears also in the reference to Rome as "everlasting" (l. 9). The correspondence between this ??????/aenaos Rômê and the ideal of *Roma Aeterna* is clear and other provincial inscriptions from Cyprus in the imperial period continue to emphasise the immortal and invincible power of the Roman leaders (e.g. SEG, 17.750; *I.Salamine* no. 138). Once more, this reference needs to be connected to the Republican precedents included in this collection illustrating that many communities across the eastern Mediterranean already started to worship *Roma* as a goddess from an early stage (see Mellor, *??? P???; Mileta*, "Die prorömischen Kulte"). While it is true that the cult of the emperor progressively superseded the prominent figure of the imperial city, this Cypriot oath still belongs to a period of transition when priests and ceremonies normally combined both.



Lines 10 to 21 contain the main body of the alliance message. The idea is that not only those summoned at the common meeting were swearing the oath, but also the entire population of the island. This sense of universality can again be encountered in other displays of divinely sanctioned loyalty available for the imperial period. The military tone of obedience “by earth and sea”, friends (?????/*philoî*), and enemies (?????/*echthroî*), equally belongs to the formulas of the genre as well as the use of the verb ????????/*eunoêsein* (“to be well disposed”). Such elements have already been analysed in the earlier Paphlagonian example, which moreover demonstrated that provincial communities were well aware of central developments occurring at Rome. Under Augustus, that oath was singular for supporting his choice of Gaius and Lucius Caesar as successors. In the case of Cyprus and under Tiberius, we can now see that this ideal continues with references not only to the emperor, but also to his entire house (???? ????/*hapas oikos*) and blood (????/*haima*). In other words, the island was committed to accepting and promoting the establishment of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The Cypriots were consequently following the traditional procedure with formulaic forms. Nonetheless, even at the beginning of Tiberius’s reign, they still took care not to put the name of the ruler among the gods and, instead, proposed to venerate (???????/*sebasesthai*) a man who will soon reject any divine honours (Suetonius, *Tiberius* 26; Tacitus, *Annals* IV.38; SEG 11.922).

Keywords in the original language:

- [????????](#) [4]
- [?????](#) [5]
- [????](#) [6]
- [?????](#) [7]
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Thematic keywords:

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- [Cyprus](#) [20]
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- [Roma Aeterna](#) [25]
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- [deification](#) [27]

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[Letter of Octavian to Ephesus concerning Aphrodisias](#) [39]

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](#) [39]

Inscription

[Oath of loyalty to Augustus in Paphlagonia](#) [40]

The inhabitants of Paphlagonia and the Roman traders among them swear an oath of loyalty to Caesar Augustus

- [Read more about Oath of loyalty to Augustus in Paphlagonia](#) [40]

Inscription

[Sacred Law of Gytheion](#) [41]

- [Read more about Sacred Law of Gytheion](#) [41]

Inscription

[Gaius-Caligula, the New Sun, and the Royal House of Thrace](#) [42]

The city of Cyzicus decrees that the kings of Thrace and Antonia Tryphaena are to be honoured because the emperor Gaius (Caligula) has confirmed their rule

- [Read more about Gaius-Caligula, the New Sun, and the Royal House of Thrace](#) [42]

Inscription

[Oath of Allegiance for Caligula \(Gaius\) in Lusitania \(CIL II, 172\)](#) [43]

- [Read more about Oath of Allegiance for Caligula \(Gaius\) in Lusitania \(CIL II, 172\)](#) [43]

Inscription

[Sardis sends an embassy to Augustus](#) [44]

The League of Greek Cities in Asia and the assembly and elders of Sardis honour Menogenes for conducting a



diplomatic mission in Rome. Augustus acknowledges the receipt of the embassy carrying a local decree which celebrated Gaius Caesar's coming of age

- [Read more about Sardis sends an embassy to Augustus](#) [44]

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