Delphi, Hadrian, and the local citizenship of a Roman soldier

Delphi

Delphi grants its local citizenship to a Roman soldier supervising the works sponsored by Hadrian.

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Local decree
Original Location/Place: East of the temple of Apollo in Delphi (Greece)
Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Not reported
Date: 125 CE
Physical Characteristics:
Orthostat containing several local documents of Delphi split in different paragraphs probably belonging to a larger monument (see image).

Material: Not reported
Measurements: Not reported. Letters are 1.5 centimetres tall.
Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek


Commentary:
This inscription comes from Delphi [2], one of the monumental sites of Hellenism in the Greek peninsula that played a central role during the Archaic, Classical and post-Classical ages (see Scott, Delphi, p. 55-145). The first four lines are therefore rooted in tradition. A formula introduces, on the one hand, the prominence of a god (?????/theos), Apollo, overseeing all the activities conducted in a settlement very attached to his prestigious oracular sanctuary (Fontenrose, The Delphic). On the other hand, the good fortune (?????/tycha) is invoked using the old epichoric dialect. In line 2, the date follows the local calendar as Poitropios was the Delphic intercalary month (Samuel, Greek and Roman Chronology, p. 73-74). On the 3rd day, the assembly of the privileged citizens (or ????????/damiourgoi, see Vatin, “Damiurges”) summoned and adopted a resolution (??????/edoxen). With such a Greek introduction, it would be difficult to anticipate that the man honoured was a Roman citizen called Caius Iulius Pudens.

Not only was Pudens fully Roman, but actually a soldier (????????/stratiôtês) of the I Legio Italica. The high-political class of Delphi had decided to grant their local citizenship (?????????/poleiteia) to this legionary. Even if such awards were mainly honorific across the eastern provinces in the imperial period, they could still be appreciated especially from a respected community that was mostly generous with international victors of the sacred Pythian festival (see Puech, “Derniers affichages”, p. 198-203). Pudens had stayed (????????/epidêmôn) at the city finely and with pudency – note the clever use of the Greek adverb ?????????/aidêmonôs related to his Latin name (Robert, Études anatoliennes, p. 88-89). But, what brought a Roman soldier to a Greek sacred place such as Delphi? Lines 6 and 9 explain that he had been supervising the works (?????/erga) and constructions (????????????????/kataskeuazomena) commissioned
by the emperor Hadrian, here described as a lord (??????/kyrios).

Consequently, this document is not only important for attesting the continuity of local institutions and old traditions at Delphi in the 2nd century CE, but also extremely interesting for assessing the impact of Roman imperial soldiers and benefactions. As a celebrated philhellenist, Hadrian is renowned for his favours and travels in Greece. Athens was undoubtedly the most benefited city (Cassius Dio, Roman History XLIV.16.1-2; Pausanias, Description of Greece I.18.6-9; see Boatwright, Hadrian and the Cities, p. 144-156), but the surviving letters addressed to the Delphians show that he was also favourably disposed towards the Pythian sanctuary (see Oliver, Greek Constitutions, p. 156-160, no. 181-193). Already in 118 CE, Hadrian had confirmed the freedom and autonomy of the Delphians on account of the city’s antiquity and nobility (FD III,4 301). In 125, his instructions concerning the Amphictiony announced that he was to visit the centre of the regional league located at Delphi (FD III,4 302). During this first tour around Greece, the contemporary author Pausanias reports that many constructions were sponsored (e.g. I.42.5, II.3.5, VI.16.4, VIII.11.8, X.35.4-5, see Birley, Hadrian, p. 175-188). Even though Pausanias says nothing about Delphi, it is very likely that the works supervised by Caius Iulius Pudens were connected with this first visit. Likewise, Hadrian could have on this occasion accepted the honorific archontate recorded in lines 12 and 13. If that was indeed the case, it would be very difficult to connect Hadrian’s initiative with the revival of the sanctuary of Apollo celebrated by the late Plutarch in The Pythian Oracles (Moralia 409 b-c; see Swain, “Plutarch, Hadrian”). What is certain is that the construction project promoted by the Roman emperor at Delphi was of a considerable scale, as it required supervision by an imperial agent staying at a free Greek city.

Furthermore, Pudens was not just a soldier but belonged to the rank of the frumentarii as recorded in line 5 of our inscription. A principal member of the army, he had a direct link with the emperor as a agent of a sort of secret service (see Rankov, “Frumentarii”). Hence, abuses and clashes of this group with the local population were numerous (MacMullen, Soldier and Civilian, 49-79). Aurelius Victor (De Caesariibus, XXXIX.44) in the 4th century CE even referred to them as a pestilens genus (“pestilent race”) and gladly reports that Diocletian suppressed their activities; something confirmed by John the Lydian (Roman Magistrates II.27). Against this background, the praiseworthy stay of Pudens at Delphi is even more remarkable. Such a positive reception of a member of the Roman army also needs to be connected with the edict that Hadrian himself issued for the communities of Asia, by which he intended to curb the unlawful exactions that his troops may commit in both official and private missions. The honorific local citizenship granted by the Delphians should show us that, even if abuses were frequent, not all the imperial soldiers were criminals. At the same time, this document attests the appointment of members of the army to supervise what appears to be civil works. While inscriptions normally commemorate the erection of a monument – the magnificence of which archaeology can sometimes corroborate – they do not commonly specify the process and agents involved in its construction. By virtue of this Delphic resolution, one should infer that the supervision and control of certain projects personally sponsored by the emperor could be intense and his representatives may not have always behaved as laudably as Pudens did. By extension, Hadrianic monuments and intervention in the Levantine provinces are widely attested too (e.g. Arch of Gerasa). In Judea, however, we do not have evidence illustrating such an esteemed interaction between the local population and the founders and builders of the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina.
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Puech, Bernadette, Derniers affichages de l'octroi du droit de cité à l'époque impériale [33], in Paton, A., Pont, A-V. ; Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2012), 195-212
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Swain, Simon, Plutarch, Hadrian, and Delphi [38], Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte 40.3 (1991) : 318-330

Other sources connected with this document: Architecture

Arch of Hadrian at Gerasa (129-130 CE) [40]

Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View [41]
Arch of Hadrian - Jerash – General View [42]

Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View [43]

• Read more about Arch of Hadrian at Gerasa (129-130 CE) [40]

Inscription

The inscription of the arch of Hadrian in Gerasa [44]

The city of Gerasa prepares a monumental arch coinciding with the visit of Hadrian in 130 CE

• Read more about The inscription of the arch of Hadrian in Gerasa [44]

Inscription

Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia [45]

Hadrian issues an edict to prevent the abuse by soldiers crossing Asia during one of his imperial visits

• Read more about Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia [45]

Inscription
Phrygian villages, Roman roads and legal disputes in the mid-3rd century CE [46]

The villages of Anossa and Antimacheia have a conflict concerning transportation obligations and the procurator of Phrygia intervenes. Minutes of three different judicial hearings are recorded as well as the letter of a soldier under his jurisdiction.

- Read more about Phrygian villages, Roman roads and legal disputes in the mid-3rd century CE [46]

Inscription

Valerius Statilus Castus, Oinoanda and the arrival of imperial statues under Valerian [47]

A military officer is honoured in Oinoanda (southern Anatolia) for providing peace and being generous on the day on which a sacred image of Valerian II arrived.

- Read more about Valerius Statilus Castus, Oinoanda and the arrival of imperial statues under Valerian [47]

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