Hadrian and Zeus in Aizanoi

Hadrian restores the ancient lands of Zeus in Aizanoi using Hellenistic precedents and members of his administration.

**Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):** Boundary stone

**Original Location/Place:** Area of the temple of Zeus in Aizanoi (Phrygia, modern Turkey)

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

**Date:** 128 CE

**Physical Characteristics:** Base, the text is heavily corroded

**Material:** Marble

**Measurements:** Not given by the original editor

**Language:** Latin, Greek

**Category:** Roman, Greek


**Commentary:**

This bilingual text was carved on a boundary stone and two other more fragmentary copies are also known (*MAMA* IX 8-9). They have all been found in the territory of Aizanoi [2], a city in north-western Phrygia (or Epictetus in Antiquity) close to the province of Bithynia. The inscriptions therefore had a clear practical purpose of delimitation and will shed light on the resolution of land conflicts in the provinces of the eastern Mediterranean, the intervention of the Roman emperor with his officials, and the importance of local religious sanctuaries.

The text is concise, containing first an abbreviated version of Hadrian’s titulature that does not mention the dynastic connections typical of his monumental inscriptions (see Hekster, *Emperors*, p. 180-181). The list of civil offices is more detailed because it provides the reader with a precise dating. The reference to the 13th tribunician powers places the setting up of the stone between 10th December 128 and 9th December 129 CE. In this year, the emperor is said to have restored (*restituit*?????????????) the territory (*fines*???????) to the founder (*conditor*?????????) Zeus and the city (*civitas*?????) of the Aizanitai, which was originally given by the kings Attalos and Prusias. This territory comprised the sacred lands belonging to the very important temple of Zeus, the remains of which can still be seen today (see Naumann, *Der Zeustempel*). For the identification of the Hellenistic kings, there are two possibilities: Attalos I (251-197 BCE) or Attalos II (159-139/8); and Prusias I (230/227-182) or Prusias II (182-149). Since the latter does not seem to have controlled the territory of north-eastern Phrygia in the mid-second century BCE, the earlier chronology with Attalos I and Prusias I is more plausible, particularly on account of the confrontations attested between the royal houses of Pergamum and Bithynia to which they respectively belonged at the end of the 3rd century BCE (see Laffi, “I terreni”, p. 19; Levick, *Monuments*, p. xl). Accordingly, the significance of this temple probably predated the constitution of Aizanoi as a city, which is first attested only by Strabo (*Geography* XII.8.12) at the beginning of the imperial period. The Bithynian king Prusias had set (*egerat*???????) the boundaries of these lands and, under Hadrian, a Roman soldier of high rank *primipilares* (i.e. chief centurion of the first cohort) was put in charge of measuring everything again. What motivated this procedure after two centuries?

Had the boundary stones only survived, it would have been very difficult to clarify the incident. However, a dossier of related documents carved directly on the walls of Zeus’s temple enable us to offer a rare insight into the process. The large inscription contains four letters either received or sent by the proconsul T. Avidius Quietus; one in Greek (*MAMA* IX P.1) and three in Latin (*MAMA* IX P.2-4). He was governor of Asia in 125-126 CE and wrote the following passage in his communications with the local institutions of Aizanoi: “*For when I wrote to him (Hadrian) explaining the whole matter, and asked him what should be done (concerning the) two things which specially stir up the dispute among you and provide the intractable and obscure nub of the matter, combining justice with humanity in accordance with his concern for judicial cases, he has resolved your long-standing strife and mutual suspicion, as you will learn from the letter which he sent to me, of which I*
send you a copy [trans. Levick, Monuments, p. xxxviii]. This administrative procedure resembles closely the testimony given by Pliny the Younger when he was in Bithynia-Pontus. A serious local dispute had arisen and the governor decided to consult the emperor who provided an authoritative solution (see Burton, “The Resolution”). From other parts of the letter, we know that this case started when Mettius Modestus was provincial governor in 119-120 CE (PIR² M. 568), and was concerned with the failure of some unspecified individuals to pay the vectigal for the plots of land (??????/klêros) which the temple of Zeus (and hence the city of Aizanoi) claimed as theirs (see Levick, Monument, p. xxxix). After six years of constant litigation creating that state of “long-standing strife and mutual suspicion,” the remaining letters of the dossier show that Avidius Quietus contacted the imperial procurator Hesperus in order to establish the dimensions of the sacred lands of the temple (see Christol, “De Leptis Magna,” p. 199-200 on Hesperus’s identity and career). This followed the response of Hadrian, who determined that a new delimitation was necessary. Given that the final boundary stones are dated to 128/9 CE, it must be inferred that the whole conflict still took two extra-years to be settled.

Together with this complex and constant communication circulating between Hadrian and members of his administration, the local diplomatic efforts of the institutions of Aizanoi must have played a very important role too. In their missions to the provincial governors and even the Roman emperor, they certainly provided all the supporting evidence at their disposal. For example, the grant of tax-exemption by Augustus to a minister of the temple of Zeus was carved on stone and the local archives should have kept a copy (MAMA IX C13; a new edition and commentary has recently been produced by Wörrie, “Neue Inschriftenfunde”). Another recently discovered letter of Julius Caesar (SEG 59.1479) confirms that the dictator also favoured the city and hence the people of Aizanoi could demonstrate both their loyalty to Rome and the ancient nature of their claim. The references made by Hadrian to Hellenistic monarchs should be read against the same documentary background. In this regard, it is particularly interesting to note that not only imperial precedents are taken into consideration but also those predating Roman domination. Indeed, this Roman emperor was renowned for his favouritism towards Greek antiquity (HA, Hadrian 1.5; Aurelius Victor, De Caesariibus XIV.2; see Fein, Die Beziehungen), to which Aizanoi allegedly belonged. Pausanias reports that the first settlers of this region came from the Peloponnesian region of Arcadia (Description of Greece VIII.4.3; X.32.3), a proconsul acknowledged their distinguished origin (MAMA IX P.24), and Antoninus Pius will accordingly confirm the admission of the polis to the commonalty of Greek cities (or Panhellenion) inaugurated by his predecessor (MAMA IX P.6-9).

The case of Aizanoi is not only important for illustrating Hadrian’s policy, but also for attesting that his governance activity did not cease when he was on the move. Whereas his letter to Avidius Quietus was most likely sent from Italy in 126 CE, the instructions inscribed on the boundary stones are dated to the year in which he departed from Athens, reached Asia, and headed eastward towards the Levant (see Halfmann, Itinerar, p. 192-193). Inscriptions from places such as Ephesus, Miletus, and Gerasa show the impact of his visits, which also provided the local population with better chances to reach imperial grants as attested in the foundation of the Demosthenia festival. The presence of Roman officials, however, was not limited to these journeys. In the case of soldiers, their passage and stay normally brought negative effects that needed to be regulated by edicts. And yet, they were necessary to implement the actions of the imperial administration and even its benefactions; for example, when a legionary officer is attested and honoured in Delphi for supervising the new constructions sponsored by Hadrian. The reference to the member of the army, Septimius Saturninus, as the provider of measurements belongs to the same context. Consequently, it sheds light on the extent to which the local population had to accept Roman control, even in cases apparently benefitting them. After almost a decade of dispute, the people of Aizanoi could finally confirm the size of their lands and secure more resources for their founding god Zeus (see Dignas, Economy of the Sacred, p. 178-188). Ancient precedents had been decisive, but the present solution of Hadrian still needed to be inscribed in both Greek and Latin for those who may have decided to challenge the limits of memory in the future.

Keywords in the original language:

- imperator [3]
- Caesar [4]
- Hadrianus [5]
- finis [6]
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- Iuppiter [7]
- conditor [8]
- civitas [9]
- restituo [10]
- primipilares [11]
- rex [12]
- ?????????? [13]
- ?????? [14]
- ?????????? [15]
- ?? [16]
- ??? [17]
- ?????? [18]
- ???? [19]
- ??????????? [20]
- ??????? [21]

Thematic keywords:

- Aizanoi [22]
- Phrygia [23]
- Hadrian [24]
- temple [25]
- Zeus [26]
- city [27]
- imperial administration [28]
- sacred land [29]
- governor [30]
- antiquity [31]
- heritage [32]
- Hellenistic king [33]
- soldier [34]
- imperial presence [35]

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  Dignas, Beate, Economy of the sacred in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor [38] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)
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Other sources connected with this document:  Inscription

Baetocaeece / Baitokaike: Valerian and the Ancestral Privileges of a Temple in Syria [46]
Epigraphic dossier confirming the privileges of the sanctuary of Zeus in Baetocaece (Syria) in 258-260 CE. Seleucid and Augustan precedents are used to back the worshippers’ petition.

- Read more about Baetocaece / Baitokaike: Valerian and the Ancestral Privileges of a Temple in Syria [46]

Inscription

**The inscription of the arch of Hadrian in Gerasa** [47]

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 [47]

Inscription

**Paullus Fabius Persicus, Claudius, and the temple of Artemis in Ephesos** [48]

The provincial governor of Asia tries to curb corruption in the internal affairs of Ephesus and the temple of Artemis. His actions are connected with the emperor Claudius.

- Read more about Paullus Fabius Persicus, Claudius, and the temple of Artemis in Ephesos [48]

Inscription

**Popillius Carus Pedo and the festivities of Artemis in Ephesus** [49]

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 [49]

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