Oath of Allegiance for Caligula (Gaius) in Lusitania (CIL II, 172)

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Honorific.

Original Location/Place: Unknown. Found on the shore of the river of Lampreia, near its confluence with the river Tajo, parish of Alvega (Abrantes, Portugal).

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Now lost.

Date: 37 CE

Physical Characteristics:
Square bronze plaque. It had a framed epigraphic field with a hole in each corner – a sign that it had been affixed in a public place. The letters were in places damaged, but the text was then intelligible as a whole.

Material: Bronze.

Measurements: Unknown.

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications: CIL II, 172
Hispania Epigraphica: 21261 [2]

Commentary: This inscription is one of six different imperial ‘oaths of allegiance’ to have survived from the early principate, which describe the loyalty of a provincial community to the emperor and imperial family. Several descriptions of these oaths – their character and content – exist in the literary record, but it is upon the six epigraphic versions (four in Greek and two in Latin) that we depend for the actual text. This inscription, one of the two in Latin to have survived, was discovered in Aritium, Lusitania (Alvega, Portugal) on a bronze tablet, and dates to 11 May, 37 CE, shortly after the accession of Caligula, to whom the citizens of Aritium swear their allegiance.

The inscription opens with the statement that the oath is being made in the presence of the governor of the province, Gaius Ummidius Durmius Quadratus, which suggests that in provinces further away from Rome a representative of the emperor, such as a governor, was a sufficient authority for administering the oath (Levick, Government of the Roman Empire, p. 133). Durmius Quadratus was a native of Casinum in Italy and had had a very successful magisterial career, taking on important roles under both Augustus and Tiberius. He had been governor of Cyprus before becoming governor of Lusitania, and following Caligula’s reign was named imperial legate in Illyricum and Syria by Claudius (see Alföldi, Fasti Hispanienses, p. 136-7).

Following the statement of the ‘official’ nature of the oath comes the main text of what it promises. The first claims to be made is that the enemies of the emperor are also the enemies of those taking the oath (ego iis inimicus /ero quos C(aii) Caesari Germanico inimicos esse / cognovero). The second claim states that it will be the job of those who take the oath to fiercely pursue those who succeed in doing harm to the emperor; the language is bellicose and imperialistic, promising to hunt such enemies by “sword and relentless war” (si quis periculum ei salutique eius / infert intuleritve armis bello internecivo), and across “land and sea” (terra marique persequi), in this latter case using the same language of the Augustan regime to describe the lengths that their loyalty shall stretch to. The third claim of allegiance promises to put the emperor before all others, including one’s own personal safety and that of one’s children (neque liberos meos / eius salute cariores), and the reaffirmation that those who oppose the emperor are the enemies of all who take this oath (habebo eosque qui in / eum hostili animo fuerint mihi hostes esse). There has been some discussion regarding the use of inimici (line 5) and hostes (line 12) to describe ‘enemies’; Anton von Premerstein, in his thorough discussion of this oath, believed the use of different words to be significant and indeed evidence of different kinds of ‘enemy’, particularly those of a more personal nature compared with those of the state (Werden und Wesen des Prinzipats, p. 50-51). Peter Herrmann, however, has suggested that the terms are simply an example of variatio (variation) as they are not always used with such distinction in Latin literature, and prefers to read an equally negative force at play in both lines (Der römische Kaisereid, p. 50, n.1). In either case, the point is clear that no enemy, be they personal or political, shall be tolerated by those who take this oath. The oath ends with an exsecratio to Jupiter Best and Greatest, invoking curses upon those who fail in their loyalty, or who break the conditions of the oath.

The scholarship concerned with these ‘oaths of loyalty’ has largely focused on two themes; what was their origin and how politically motivated were they? Were these oaths imposed upon the population or initiated independently by them? Peter Herrmann’s work remains the authoritative source for the origin of the oaths, comparing the evidence from the Greek East with the two examples that have survived from the Latin West, and demonstrating
that the Greek examples contain features from both the Classical and Hellenistic periods, combining the military oaths of loyalty to Hellenistic kings with characteristics of interstate-treaties of the Classical age (for detailed analysis and discussion, see Der römische Kaisereid, p. 21-50). In the case of the Latin oaths, Peter Herrmann decisively rejects the theory proposed by Anton von Premerstein that they grew from the clientela relationship between patrons and clients, in which the emperor existed as the supreme ‘patronus’ of his subjects, preferring to see a model for this kind of oath in the military oaths of allegiance taken by prominent leaders of the Republic (for a full discussion see Der römische Kaisereid, p. 58-66). In particular he identifies a precedent in the oaths taken by the military during the fall of the Republic between 44 BCE and the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, to Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, and most crucially, to Octavian, in 32 BCE (Der römische Kaisereid, p.78-89). The oaths sworn to Julius Caesar (44 BCE) and Mark Antony (in the East, during the crisis of the Actian campaign) were made in the military context of civil war, yet the allegiance pledged to Octavian in 32 BCE contained a political component too. His legal authority as a triumvir had come to an end in 33 BCE, and he had no formal or legal power over Mark Antony, but the oaths of 32 BCE – made by both military and citizen bodies in Italy, the western provinces and Illyricum (Res Gestae, 25) – gave him popular authority, and allowed him to make Antony the personal enemy of all those subjects who had demonstrated loyalty to Octavian by the swearing of the oath (Briscoe, Imperial Oath of Allegiance, p. 261). The oath did not give Octavian any legal power, but it popularised and publicised his claim to great moral effect, and supported the perception later recorded in the Res Gestae that he came to power not simply by bloodshed, but by “universal consent” (Res Gestae 34.1;Brunt and Moore, Res Gestae, p. 67-8). Indeed Peter Brunt and John Moore have attributed the bellicose tone of the oath from Aritium – which was surely inappropriate for a peaceful provincial community – to the very circumstances under which its model was drawn up in 32 BCE.

The oath-takers swore their loyalty rather to an individual, than the state, which continued following the death of Augustus; an oath to Tiberius was sworn before the senate in 14 CE, before the senate had even met to confirm his legal and constitutional powers (Brunt and Moore, Res Gestae, p. 68). In this sense the oath sworn at Aritium was both predicated on the Republican military examples, and also an Augustan innovation that utilised the powerful notion of military loyalty to describe the popularity of an individual in a popular and civilian network. The oath evolved to be annual and renewable, and from the reign of Tiberius onwards was an essential part of the emperor’s pattern of accession, “an automatic part of the change of rulers” (Briscoe, Imperial Oath of Allegiance, p. 262). In this sense, the question of local motivation is perhaps less relevant; whether or not the local community—in this case of Aritium—were unusually loyal to Caius cannot be proven, but it is clear that the demonstration of loyalty, in the form of public oath and public record, was an important feature of provincial society. It tied the community to Rome and the imperial household, and outwardly exhibited their support of the new emperor. The oath of allegiance was therefore part of a symbiotic exchange; it benefitted the new emperor through its public display of loyalty, enhancing the perception of his popularity and esteem in the provinces, whilst also emphasising the positive nature of that community’s devotion to the imperial dynasty.

Keywords in the original language:

- ius [3]
- inimicus [4]
- Gaius [5]
- Caligula [6]
- periculum [7]
- salus [8]
- arma [9]
- bellum [10]
- terra [11]
- mare [12]
- poena [13]
- hostilis [14]
- hostis [15]
- animus [16]
- Iuppiter Optimus Maximus [17]
- divus [18]
- deus [19]
- immortalis [20]
- patria [21]
Oath of Allegiance for Caligula (Gaius) in Lusitania (CIL II, 172)

Published on Judaism and Rome (http://www.judaism-and-rome.org)

- fortuna [22]
- Aritium [23]

Thematic keywords:

- Caligula [24]
- Lusitania [25]
- Roman province [26]
- loyalty to Rome [27]
- provincial loyalty [28]
- dynasty [29]
- civil war [30]
- oath [31]
- allegiance [32]
- enemy [33]

Bibliographical references: Alföldy, Géza, *Fasti Hispanienses* [34] (Wiesbaden, 1969)
Herrmann, Peter, *Der römische Kaisereid: Untersuchungen zu seiner Herkunft und Entwicklung* [37] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1968)
Levick, Barbara, *The Government of the Roman Empire: a sourcebook* [38] (London: Croom Helm, 1985)

Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

Oath of loyalty to Augustus in Paphlagonia [43]

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 [43]

Inscription

A Cypriot Oath of Allegiance to Tiberius [44]

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

- Read more about A Cypriot Oath of Allegiance to Tiberius [44]

Realized by:

Caroline Barron [45]