Oples, leader of the Termessian allies dispatched to Marcus Aurelius [1]

A member of the local elite of Termessos is honoured for having led a group of allies dispatched to the emperor Marcus Aurelius.

**Typology (Honorable / Funerary / etc.):** Honorable

**Original Location/Place:** Unknown

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** On a wall near the ground of Attalus's portico.

**Date:** 172 CE to 175 CE

**Physical Characteristics:** Square base

**Material:** Not specified by the editor

**Measurements:** 137 cm high, 58 cm wide. Letters are between 3 and 2.5 cm tall.

**Language:** Latin, Greek

**Category:** Greek

**Publications:**

- TAM III.1 106

**Commentary:**

This honorific text comes from Termessos [2], a city in southern Anatolia renowned in Antiquity for its inaccessibility (Arrian, *Anabasis* I.27.5-8, 28.1-2), and currently for its spectacular archaeological remains. In Roman history studies, the site on a mountain reaching over 1500 metres is particularly famous for a late Republican grant of freedom and autonomy which is preserved in bronze: the *lex Antonia de Termessibus* (*ILS* 38; see Ferrary, “La Lex”). Our inscribed stone will enable us to see that even communities with such a privileged status needed to collaborate with Rome for the sake of imperial security. Likewise, it will be interesting to observe that extraordinary services for the ruling power did not guarantee access to Roman citizenship.

The format of the inscription is rather common among the numerous statue bases that can still be found *in-situ* throughout the urban centre of Termessos (see van Nijf, “Public space and political culture”). The content equally follows traditional patterns with the opening references to the honorand’s local career as high-priest (?????????/archiereus) and priest of Dionysos (?????? ????????/hiereus Dionysou). The first position refers to the magistrate in charge of imperial cult, a non-perpetual local liturgy (cf. *SEG* 57.1441) and highly esteemed by families that could claim to be ???????????/archieratikoi (e.g. *TAM* III.1 55; see Heberdey, *Termessische Studien*, p. 28-36). As for the perpetual ??? ???/?dia biou priesthoods in Termessos, these have to be interpreted as marks of status normally displayed by members of the local elite who could hold them even before reaching adulthood (e.g. *TAM* III.1.145). The honorand, Oples, son of Obrimotes, son of Otanes was a member of this local aristocracy, with a family tree that can be traced for at least nine generations between the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE (*TAM* III.1 p. 301, cf. Heberdey, *Termessische Studien*, p. 86-90). Another honorific inscription dedicated to Oples by the people of Termessos extolls him as a “lover-of-the-fatherland” (??????????/philopatris) and “son of the city” (???? ???????/hyios poleôs). By virtue of additional agonistic bases, it is also known that Oples founded a gymnastic contest that was still celebrated decades after his death (*TAM* III.1 152, 176). Even the sarcophagus that the fatherland dedicated to him is preserved (*TAM* III.1 683). There should therefore be no doubt that the political community of Termessos considered him a benefactor worthy of praise. Oples’s network of gratefulness (l. 17: ???????????/eucharistia), nonetheless, was not only public as our honorific inscription and statue (l. 13: ????????/andrias) was dedicated by a group of private individuals bound to his patron (??????/patrôn).

From the fact that the inscription was set up “according to the will” (???? ???????/kata diathêkên), it must be inferred that Oples most likely died before it was carved. The only other chronological marks provided in the text are the titles of the emperor Marcus Aurelius listed between lines 10 and 13. The sequence finishes with Germanicus, which he adopted in 172 CE, but does not include Sarmaticus, which appeared from 175 onwards (Kienast, *Kaisertabelle*, p. 139). Consequently, the commission of our inscription must be placed between both years. This temporal framework facilitates the interpretation of the most interesting section of the text:
Lines 5 to 10. Here Oples is particularly honoured – besides his local priesthoods – for having acted as “leader of the allies sent to the greatest emperor” (?????? ??? ????????? ????????? ?? ?????? ???????????/hêgemôn tôn ekpemphthentôn summachôn tò megistò Autokratorî). As the frequent bestowal of triumphal titles on Marcus Aurelius indicates, the early 170’s were considerably tumultuous years along the imperial frontiers. Soon after Lucius Verus’s return from the Parthian campaign, Germanic tribes crossed the Danube and inflicted destructive raids. The Costobocci even reached the Greek peninsula and attacked iconic sites such as the sanctuary of Eleusis (Pausanias, Description of Greece, X.34.5; Aelius Aristides, Eleusinian Speech (no. 26)). At the same time, Roman troops were suffering heavily from the effects of the eastern plague (Duncan-Jones, “The impact”; Eck, “Die Seuche”; Jones, “Recruitment in time of Plague”), which also affected the local population of Asia Minor (Kirbihler, “Les émissions”; Filippini, “Anomalie dell’evergetismo”).

In this dire situation, the Historia Augusta (Marcus Aurelius, 21.7) reports that the emperor was forced to recruit gladiators, Dalmatian brigands and “gave weapons” (armavit) to diogmitai. The latter statement is corroborated by an inscription from Aizanoi in Phrygia which honours a man for providing the emperor with an “ally diogmites” (OGIS II.511=IGRR IV.580 ????????? ???????????/symmachos diágoimitês) in 169 CE.

These diogmitai were local security forces normally under the command of a “magistrate of peace” or eirenarch whose appointment was supervised by the Roman governor (see Brélaz, La sécurité publique, p. 145-157). In this case, however, Marcus Aurelius had not sought the collaboration of these local institutions within their territories, but rather requested their participation in an imperial campaign waged far away from the Anatolian provinces. This extraordinary support would therefore justify the use of the term “ally” that appears in our inscription from Termessos too. A related testimony from Thespiae in Greece specifies that the Boeotian contingent was composed of the youth members of the community (I.Thesp. 37: ???/neoi; see Jones, “The Levy”), who as ephesoi continued to receive both physical and cultural instruction in the cities of the Greek East during the imperial age (Kennell, Ephebeia a registen, Termessos equally had gymnasia responsible for their training and the dispatch of a similar group of young combatants is as plausible as the presence of security forces attached to the office of eirenarch that is well attested in the city until the end of the 3rd century CE. In any case, the group that Oples led to support the Roman army was not recruited as conventional auxiliary forces that might expect Roman citizenship after lengthy services (see Haynes, Blood of the Provinces). Instead, both the citizens of Termessos, Aizanoi, and Thespiae returned home once the Germanic threat came to an end and their fatherlands awarded them honours praising Roman campaigns and local euergetic careers.

These urgent and necessary missions, nevertheless, did not receive analogous rewards from an imperial perspective. Roman citizenship was not granted to Oples, who remained like most members of the Termessian elite attached to long sequences of indigenous nomenclature until 212 CE, when these were transformed as a result of the Constitutio Antoniniana (see Heberdey, Termessische Studien, p. 15-28; Blanco-Pérez, “Nomenclature and Dating”). Consequently, this inscription is not solely important for shedding light on the growing impact of Roman imperial campaigns even on allegedly “free and autonomous” communities of the eastern Mediterranean. It also illustrates that access to Roman citizenship was considerably limited still in the Antonine period. Indeed, Oples’s activities did not produce an automatic change of his personal status; and even the huge benefactions poured by Opramoas in nearby Lycia could not reach this goal under Antoninus Pius. In Africa, such limitations can also be observed on the basis of the Tabula Banasitana. That said, one should not rapidly interpret the lack of Roman citizenship as a failure. The actions of Oples and other local leaders in the 170’s confirm that both Roman and non-Romans collaborated with Marcus Aurelius in an emergency situation threatening lands away from their civic territories. Likewise, Oples’s family continue to have successful political careers and celebrated its ancestor’s agonistic contest for several decades. Finally, the continuity of structures of defence and training in Termessos contributed not only to the local security, but also to the survival of the entire Empire.

Keywords in the original language:
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Thematic keywords:

- Termessos [16]
- Marcus Aurelius [17]
- ally [18]
- army [19]
- Germans [20]
- Roman citizenship [21]
- high priest [22]
- imperial cult [23]
- Dionysos [24]
- patron [25]
- rewards [26]

Bibliographical references: Blanco-Pérez, Aitor, Nomenclature and Dating in Roman Asia Minor: (M.) Aurelius/a and the 3rd Century AD [27], Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik (2016) : 271-293


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Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

C. Claudius Lucianus: an Eirenarch from Akmoneia selected by the Roman
Oples, leader of the Termessian allies dispatched to Marcus Aurelius
Published on Judaism and Rome (http://www.judaism-and-rome.org)

**governor** [40]

C. Claudius Lucianus is selected possibly by the proconsul of Asia M. Sulpicius Crassus for the position of eirenarch, which was in charge of keeping local security.

- Read more about C. Claudius Lucianus: an Eirenarch from Akmoneia selected by the Roman governor [40]

Inscription

**Commodus and the Security of Boubon** [41]

Commodus praises the southern Anatolian city of Boubon for defending the local security and confirms a reward granted by the Lycian council.

- Read more about Commodus and the Security of Boubon [41]

Inscription

**Antoninus Pius, Opramoas, and Lycia** [42]

Antoninus Pius acknowledges the euergetic actions of a benefactor from Lycia.

- Read more about Antoninus Pius, Opramoas, and Lycia [42]

Papyrus

**P.Giss. 40 and the Constitutio Antoniniana** [43]

An edict issued by the emperor Caracalla records a universal grant of citizenship as an expression of magnificence and gratitude to the immortal gods.

Language English

- Read more about P.Giss. 40 and the Constitutio Antoniniana [43]

Inscription

**Valerius Statilius Castus, Oinoanda and the arrival of imperial statues under Valerian** [44]

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

- Read more about Valerius Statilius Castus, Oinoanda and the arrival of imperial statues under Valerian [44]

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