



## Commodus and the Security of Boubon

### commodus\_boubon.jpeg



[1]

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

**Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):** Imperial letter

**Original Location/Place:** Discovered at the theatre of Boubon, probably standing on a wall of the orchestra

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** Reported to have been buried again under the theatre of Boubon (Ibecik, Turkey) to protect it from looters.

**Date:** 190 CE

**Physical Characteristics:** Block, moulded at the top and bottom. Letters have rounded forms and are regularly carved.

**Material:** Limestone

**Measurements:** Height: 125 centimetres; length: 77 centimetres; depth 77 centimetres. Letters are between 2.40 and 2.30 centimetres tall.

**Language:** Greek

**Category:** Roman, Greek

**Publications:** Kokkinia, Christina, *Boubon: the inscriptions and archaeological remains; a survey 2004-2006*, Athens: Diffusion de Bocard, 2008 [Schindler, *Die Inschriften*, no. 2; AE 1973.451].

**Commentary:**

In 1972, F. Schindler published this almost intact inscription discovered in the southern Anatolian city of [Boubon](#) [2]. The site was again surveyed between 2004 and 2006 and, as result of this campaign, a new epigraphic catalogue was prepared by C. Kokkinia, who reports that the stone lies now probably reburied in the theatre orchestra. Even if our knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the episode is limited, this testimony is extremely interesting for assessing the role of local communities in keeping peace during the Roman imperial period.

The text starts with the genealogical connections of a Roman emperor

(????????/autokratôr,????/Kaisar) who descended from Marcus Aurelius, Antoninus Pius, Hadrian, Trajan, and even Nerva. As the last direct ruler of the Antonine dynasty, the inscription records the official titulature of Commodus (see Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors*, p. 178-183). Like his father, Commodus was bestowed with the triumphal titles Sarmaticus and Germanicus, to which the denominations Maximus and Britannicus were added in 182 and 184, respectively (see Hekster, *Commodus*,p. 15-67). The series of offices completing the sequence and, particularly, the reference to the 15<sup>th</sup> tribunician powers enable us to date this inscription precisely to 190 CE. Lines 9 and 10 likewise show us that an imperial letter was carved and that the magistrates (????????/archontes), council (????/boulê), and people (????/dêmos) of Boubon were the recipients. Both this formula and the use of the infinitive ?????? ("to greet") are expected in the constant correspondence circulating between Rome and the cities in the Greek east. From line 11, the main text of the communication starts and it is concerned with two interconnected events. On the one hand, the emperor is praising



the people of Boubon for the zeal (????????/prothymia) and bravery (????????/andreia) in capturing criminals (??? ?????? ?????????/ tôn lêstôn synlêmpsîs). On the other hand, Commodus is confirming the decision of the Lycian League (?? ?????? ??????/to Lykiôn ethnos) to upgrade the status of the city as a reward for such noble deeds (????????????????/andragathêmata). This honour (??????/teimê) consisted in the addition of a vote in the regional council so that Boubon would be considered “a three-vote-community” (????????/tripsêphoi).

According to Strabo (*Geography* XIV.3), Xanthos, Patara, Pinara, Olympos, Myra and Tlos formed this privileged group controlling the Lycian league since Hellenistic times. This regional institution was restored by Rome during the annexation of the territory under Claudius. By virtue of a large monument commemorating this process – the so-called *Stadiasmus Patarensis* –, the Lycians “delivered from sedition and lawlessness and bandits through the divine providence (of the emperor) recovered concord and fair justice and the ancestral laws, after entrusting the government from the reckless populace to the councillors chosen among the best.” We can therefore see that the Roman reliance on the Lycian league was deeply concerned with its capacity to keep local security in the new province, especially with regard to the suppression of the brigandage (????????/lêsteia) appearing in the imperial letter from Boubon too. Accordingly, it is not surprising to find that one of the most important magistracies of this institution was called *archiphylachia*, a name deriving from the Greek verb ???????/phylassô (“to protect”). During the imperial period the office was mainly in charge of the collection of taxes for the *fiscus* (see Brélaz, *La sécurité publique*, p. 213-225), but still in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE a man was honoured for having conducted it with all peace (????????/eirênê) and piety (????????/eusebeia, *IGRR* III. 488).

Southern Anatolia, and particularly the Taurus mountains, had traditionally been subject to banditry. Rome was well acquainted with the problems posed by the rough orography of this area; from Pompey’s wars against the pirates to Cicero’s testimony while he was governor of Cilicia and the pacification of Pisidia under Augustus following Amyntas’s bequeath of the kingdom of Galatia (see Mitchell, “Native Rebellion”). Modern studies such as Shaw, Lenski, Feld and Pilhofer have focused on the opposition between mountain and plain that is mostly relevant to the eastern region of Isauria. The reality in Pisidia and northern Lycia was much more nuanced. Strabo distinguished between a list of 12 orderly cities and “other communities also living in the mountains, divided into separate tribes, governed by tyrants, like the Cilicians, and trained in piracy” (*Geography* XII.7). Consequently, at the beginning of the imperial rule, the distinction in south-western Asia Minor was rather based on the opposition between civic and wild. Our inscription from Boubon shows that the dense urban network existing in this area of the Empire at the end of the Antonine period had not yet completely eliminated such episodes of wilderness. The site of Boubon, located on top of a conical hill reaching over 1000 metres above the sea level, would have therefore been difficult to defend by imperial forces and only the local intervention proved effective.

Rome’s reliance on locals to keep peace in provincial communities was not unprecedented, but rather the norm in Asia Minor. This attitude is best illustrated by the development and expansion of the office of the *eirenarchia* during the imperial period. Numerous inscriptions record the presence of this local office among the careers of notables not only from many Greek cities of the Anatolian peninsula, but also Roman colonies in Greece such as Philippi (see Brélaz, *La sécurité publique*, p. 90-122). Even if these inscriptions are not extremely informative about their role and duties, their appearance in secondary sources such as the novel *Ephesiaka* (II.13.3-4) and the Martyrdom of St. Conon (XIII.2) sheds light on the ways in which these local officers and their staff could intervene when issues of local security were at stake. Moreover, we know that the Roman governor supervised their appointment from an anecdotal report by Aelius Aristides (L.72-78), which has recently been confirmed by an inscription from Akmonia (*SEG* 56.1493; cf. Blanco-Pérez, “C. Claudius Lucianus”). This tight provincial control can be better understood if we take into consideration that communities of Asia Minor had the power of keeping captives in their territories, as corroborated by Pliny’s letter to Trajan concerning the role of public slaves with such duties in Bithynia-Pontus (X.19-20). The Digest also specifies: “the local magistrates (*magistratus municipales*) had to take care of transferring captured outlaws to the offices (*praesidium*) of the governor safely and rightly” (11.4.4). In this regard, both Hadrian and Antoninus Pius reformed the way in which the detention reports written by the eirenarchs should be scrutinised (*Digest* 48.3.6).

Against this background the reference to the capture of brigands in Boubon can be contextualised. Likewise, the



maintenance of structures of local security in both this city and the Lycian league proved fundamental for defending the conditions on which *Pax Romana* could be experienced by the provincial population and extolled by the imperial propaganda. Commodus and his entourage were well aware of this delicate balance, so it should now be no wonder that the spectacular upgrade of Boubon's status was confirmed as a reward for their heroic actions.

Keywords in the original language:

- [???????????](#) [3]
- [??????](#) [4]
- [?????](#) [5]
- [?????](#) [6]
- [?????](#) [7]
- [?????](#) [8]
- [?????????](#) [9]
- [?????????](#) [10]
- [?????????](#) [11]
- [?????????](#) [12]
- [????](#) [13]
- [?????](#) [14]
- [?????](#) [15]
- [?????????](#) [16]
- [?????????????](#) [17]
- [?????????](#) [18]
- [?????????](#) [19]

Thematic keywords:

- [Commodus](#) [20]
- [Boubon](#) [21]
- [Lycia](#) [22]
- [Lycian League](#) [23]
- [brigandage](#) [24]
- [local security](#) [25]
- [imperial letter](#) [26]
- [captive](#) [27]
- [Pax Romana](#) [28]
- [Roman peace](#) [29]

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### [Honours for Claudius in the Stadiasmus Patarensis \[40\]](#)

The Lycian people honour the emperor Claudius as a saviour for delivering them of internal strife and insecurity after the new province was established

- [Read more about Honours for Claudius in the Stadiasmus Patarensis \[40\]](#)

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

### [An Anatolian Guardian of Peace in the Mid-3rd Century CE](#) [42]

A decree honours a local officer for having acted as a “guardian of peace” in a remote location of southern Anatolia between 270’s and 280’s CE.

- [Read more about An Anatolian Guardian of Peace in the Mid-3rd Century CE](#) [42]

Inscription

### [Valerius Statilius Castus, Oinoanda and the arrival of imperial statues under Valerian](#) [43]

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 Statilius Castus, Oinoanda and the arrival of imperial statues under Valerian](#) [43]

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### [Aitor Blanco Pérez](#) [44]



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- [1] [https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/commodus\\_image.jpeg?itok=fYgLts5J](https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/commodus_image.jpeg?itok=fYgLts5J)
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- [19] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/%CF%80%CF%81%E1%BD%B3%CF%83%CE%B2%CE%B5%CF%85%CF%89>
- [20] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/commodus>
- [21] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/boubon>
- [22] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/lycia>
- [23] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/lycian-league>
- [24] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/brigandage>
- [25] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/local-security>
- [26] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/imperial-letter>
- [27] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/captive>
- [28] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/pax-romana>
- [29] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/roman-peace>
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- [41] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/commodus-and-security-boubon>
- [42] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/anatolian-guardian-peace-mid-3rd-century-ce>
- [43] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/valerius-statilius-castus-oinoanda-and-arrival-imperial-statues-under-valerian>
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