



[Gaius-Caligula, the New Sun, and the Royal House of Thrace](#) [1]

The city of Cyzicus decrees that the kings of Thrace and Antonia Tryphaena are to be honoured because the emperor Gaius (Caligula) has confirmed their rule

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):

Local decree

Original Location/Place: The block was discovered in a reused context in the old Turkish village of Tscharik-Köy, close to the archaeological site of Cyzicus and the modern city of Erdek

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): After its discovery, the stone was brought to the Imperial Museum in the Çinili Köşk (Istanbul) in 1882 with the inventory number 659

Date: 37 CE

Physical Characteristics: A circular hole on the top was used as a fountain and this had damaged the surface of the stone. This local decree was preceded by another honorific text for Antonia Thryphaena (*IGRR* IV. 144, see below)

Material: Marble

Measurements: 124 centimetres in height, 86 in width, and 18 centimetres thick

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: Barth, Matthias and Stauber, Josef, *Inscripfen Mysia und Troas: Kyzikene, Kapu Da?*, no. 1439 [*IGRR* IV.145; *SIG*³ 798]

Commentary: This inscription was discovered close to the ancient site of [Cyzicus](#) [2] in the northern area of the province of Asia. Its content, however, is interesting not only for the information provided about the local institutions of the Greek city, but especially for the honours decreed for members of the royal house of Thrace.

The first three lines begin with a dating formula that is typical of local honorific resolutions. The *????????/hipparchês* was the eponymous magistrate of Cyzicus and, in this year, the prestigious position was symbolically held by the emperor Gaius Caesar (Caligula). The month Thargelion likewise belonged to the local calendar of the city and, on this date, the people (*?????/dêmos*) together with the magistrates adopted a resolution (*??????/edoxen*). From line 3 to 18 and introduced by the particle *????/epeî*, the reasons justifying the grant of honours are listed. From the first moment, it is clear that the local decree has a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, it seeks to exalt the rule and divine qualities of the Roman emperor. On the other, Cyzicus wants to express its gratitude to a group of Thracian kings. A preliminary historical explanation becomes necessary in order to clarify the double nature of our document.

At the beginning of the imperial age, Thrace was still nominally ruled by local kings who swore allegiance and submission to the power of Rome. As one of the so-called 'client-kingdoms' (Badian, *Foreign Clientelae*; Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King*; Lozanov, "Roman Thrace," p. 78-80), their autonomy was subject to the interests of the emperor as the intervention of Tiberius in 18 CE illustrates. Until this year, Cotys VIII had been the king selected by Augustus, probably on account of both his royal lineage and the cultural refinement praised by Ovid during the poet's exile on the Black Sea (*Letters from Pontus* II.9; see Sullivan, "Thrace in the Eastern," p. 200-204). As soon as Augustus died, Cotys's uncle, Rhescuporis III started to conspire for the throne. Tiberius condemned such aspirations but his warnings were disregarded and Rhescuporis ended up killing his nephew. Thanks to Tacitus's account of the episode (*Annals* II.64-67), we know that the Thracian usurper was punished and brought to a trial before the Senate in which Antonia Thryphaena, Cotys's wife, managed to get him sent to Egypt where he died. As a result of this process, Tiberius gave the throne to Rhoematalces II (Rhescuporis's son) and the male descendants of Cotys who were too young and remained under the tutelage of Trebellenus Rufus.



Tiberius still continued to be fundamental for the maintenance of the new dynastic arrangement at least in 21 and 26 C.E. (Tacitus, *Annals* III.38-39, IV.47-51). Meanwhile, the actions taken by Antonia Tryphaena explain the special bond established between the Thracian royal house and Cyzicus. Even if she belonged to one of the most prominent dynasties of the late Hellenistic age – she was daughter of Polemo, king of Pontus (Sullivan, “Dynasts in Pontus,” p. 922-923) –, the queen did not marry again (Strabo, *Geography* XII.3.29). Remaining widow, she also decided to move to a location in which could presumably be far from court conspiracies but close enough to control the ruling aspirations of her sons. Cyzicus, on the other side of the Sea of Marmara and opposite the coasts of Thrace met both criteria. From here, Antonia Thryphaena became a strong promoter of the imperial power to which she and her family had so much to thank for. It is therefore not surprising to find another honorific decree of Cyzicus for Tryphaena in which a reference to the “eternal house of the greatest of gods, Tiberius Augustus Cesar, and his immortal power” is included (*IGRR* IV.144, l. 3-4).

Our inscription praises Gaius's rule and an even greater degree of gratefulness can be observed. The reason for this attitude is stated in lines 9 and 10: the sons of Cotys VIII had finally been installed as sole sovereigns (????????/basileis) of Thrace and this was due to the emperor's favour (?????/charis). As a result, the first part of the document is presented as a way to equally return (???? ???????/isai amoibai) their gratitude (??????????/eucharistia) towards “such a great god” (l. 5). This god is no other than Gaius, whom the new Thracian kings personally knew because they had been “foster-brothers and companions” (?????????o? ??? ???????/syntrophoi kai hetairoi), probably when Antonia Thryphaena went to Rome to avenge the murder of their father. Such circumstances are connected to the unique content of lines 4 and 5. Gaius is presented as the new Sun (??????/Hêlios) god, “who wished to illuminate with his own rays of light.” These words could perfectly be contextualised in the language related, first, to Hellenistic ruler worship and, then, Roman imperial cult that was already well established in the province of Asia. In the case of Gaius/Caligula, such a testimony becomes even more revealing. Indeed, it can be coupled with ancient literary sources denouncing that this particular emperor became obsessed with his divine attributes (Suetonius, *Gaius* 22; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LIX.26-27; Aalders, “????? ????”). The most illuminating witness of this attitude is Philo of Alexandria, the Jew who led an embassy before the emperor and reports something which is worth citing in full (Embassy to Gaius 95-96): “he metamorphosed and transformed himself into Apollo, crowning his head with garlands, in the form of rays, and holding a bow and arrows in his left hand, and holding forth graces in his right, as if it became him to proffer blessings to all men from his ready store, and to display the best arrangement possible on his right hand, but to contract the punishments which he had it in his power to inflict, and to allot to them a more confined space on his left. And immediately there were established choruses, who had been carefully trained, singing paeans to him [Jonge's trans.]”

According to Cassius Dio (LIX.28.1), he likewise requested the Milesians to reserve a space for him in their oracle of Apollo Didymaios and we even know that the crowns that he bestowed on the victors of the German campaigns were full of celestial allegories (Suetonius, *Gaius* 45.1), also featuring in the imperial coinage of the year 37-38 C.E. (Levy, “Caligula's Radiate Crown”). Local coins show that such an extravagant behaviour was embraced by some communities of western Asia Minor (see Bury, “L'idéologie impériale,” p. 581), and our inscription confirms an acceptance dictated by the precedents of imperial worship. The association of Roman humans with Greek deities was far from unprecedented and, indeed, the people of Cyzicus also refer to Gaius' sister, Drusilla, as a “New Aphrodite” (l. 12). Similar divine references to her can be found in other settlements of the eastern Mediterranean (e.g. *SEG* 34.180; *IG* XII,2.172; *I.Magnesia* 156) and certainly increased when Drusilla unexpectedly died in 38 CE (Suetonius, *Gaius* 24). Gaius then decided to celebrate pompous funerary commemorations in which a Trojan spectacle was performed and her deification was decreed together with the setting up of a statue in the temple of Venus (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LIX.11.2-4). These actions were naturally intended to emphasise that the fate of the Julian dynasty resulted from the success of its sacred ancestors, who originated from Aeneas and were therefore mythical descendants of the loving goddess.

Nevertheless, this honorific decree is not only fundamental for understanding the impact that imperial attitudes had on the local perception of Roman power. With this communal decision, Cyzicus is also providing us with an example of the decisive role that residents could play in civic life. In this case, Antonia Tryphaena, a royal descendant and consort queen, decided to settle in this new home-city (??????/patris) and brought with her gratitude towards the Roman emperors, economic resources, and regional prominence. On this occasion, she was sponsoring games (??????/agônes) for Drusilla, but other inscriptions show that she undertook many expensive enterprises and financed the renovation of the market-place (*IGRR* IV.144, 146). For all these reasons, the city enthusiastically (??????????/prothymia) wished to “commend” and “welcome” both Thryphaena and her sons upon their ceremonial entry (l. 18-25). At the same time, by honouring Rhoimetalkes and Polemon and Kotys –the kings



on which Gaius' rays were casted– the people of Cyzicus may also have hoped not only for the new emperor's "eternal endurance and welfare" (??????? ?????? ???? ???????/aiônios *diamonê kai sôteria*), but also for the return of the ancient privileges of freedom which Tiberius had recently removed from the city "because of their acts of special lawlessness against the Romans" (Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.3).

Keywords in the original language:

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Thematic keywords:

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- [sun](#) [40]
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- [immortality](#) [49]
- [eternity](#) [50]

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Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[Oath of Allegiance for Caligula \(Gaius\) in Lusitania \(CIL II, 172\)](#) [61]

- [Read more about Oath of Allegiance for Caligula \(Gaius\) in Lusitania \(CIL II, 172\)](#) [61]

Inscription

[Sardis sends an embassy to Augustus](#) [62]

The League of Greek Cities in Asia and the assembly and elders of Sardis honour Menogenes for conducting a diplomatic mission in Rome. Augustus acknowledges the receipt of the embassy carrying a local decree which celebrated Gaius Caesar's coming of age

- [Read more about Sardis sends an embassy to Augustus](#) [62]

Inscription

[Oath of loyalty to Augustus in Paphlagonia](#) [63]

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](#) [63]

Inscription

[A Cypriot Oath of Allegiance to Tiberius](#) [64]

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](#) [64]

Inscription

[The Flavian Emperors and the Walls of Iberia \(Caucasus\)](#) [65]

Vespasian and Titus provide resources to fortify the walls in the capital of the kingdom of Iberia (Caucasus). The king is called *philorhomaïos* and *philokaisar*

- [Read more about The Flavian Emperors and the Walls of Iberia \(Caucasus\)](#) [65]

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