



Hadrian and Erastus's Admission to the Ephesian Council

Erastus, Hadrian and Ephesus.jpg



[1]

Hadrian respectfully recommends the admission of his sea-captain to the Ephesian council.

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

Original Location/Place: Council house of Ephesus, proscenium

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): British Museum, London [1867,1122.429]

Date: 128 CE to 129 CE

Physical Characteristics: The inscription is broken in several fragments but can be restored by virtue of another surviving copy of the text [*I.Eph.* 1488]. Letters are elegantly and regularly carved. The first lines with the imperial titulature are larger than the rest of the document.

Material: Marble

Measurements: 101.6 centimetres in height, and 1.82 metres in width

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: *Die Inschriften von Ephesos* V.1487 [SIG³ 838]

Commentary:

Many letters addressed by Hadrian to communities in the eastern Mediterranean have survived (Anastasiadis, *An Index*, p. 278). Most of them are concerned with issues brought to him by educated diplomats and representatives. This document is special because the emperor writes not to respond to a petition but rather to request a favour. Consequently, it can shed light on certain aspects that normally escape the epigraphic representation of the relations established between Rome and its subjects.

Hadrian presents himself with a typical titulature emphasising, firstly, his dynastic connections with the adopted ancestors Trajan and Nerva (see Hekster, *Emperors*, p. 180-181). Secondly, the list of civil and religious offices enables us to date the document between 10th December 128 and 9th December 129, the period in which he held the tribunician powers for the 13th time. This year coincides with the contemporary event recorded in line 11: Hadrian was heading from Eleusis in Greece to Ephesus in Asia. The trip was made by boat and Lucius Erastus participated in the imperial expedition as a sea-captain (see Drew-Bear, Richard, "Hadrien et Erastos"). This was the second time that Hadrian had met this man after they travelled together from Ephesus to the island of Rhodes in 124 CE (see Halfmann, *Itinera*, p. 201; Birley, *Hadrian*, p. 172-174). From these two encounters a sentiment of gratitude had grown in the emperor and he was now trying to reward his services. Such favours for sea-captains are not unprecedented in Roman history as confirmed by the *S.C. de Asclepiade* or the Roman citizenship granted to Seleukos of Rhosos. In this case, the grant of Roman citizenship typical of the late Republic and early Empire does not appear to be at stake. Instead, Hadrian is concerned with the admission of Lucius Erastus to the Ephesian council (?????/*boulê*). Accordingly, Hadrian addressed his letter to this institution and the magistrates (???????/*archontes*) of the city, but not to the Ephesian people (?????/*dêmos*) as it would be customary (l. 5).

The emperor outlines the case from lines 6 to 13, introducing Lucius Erastus' words. The sea-captain affirmed to be a citizen (???????/*poleitês*) of Ephesus and to have been useful (???????/*chrêsimos*) for his fatherland (???????/*patris*) by virtue of his maritime operations. For instance, he had transported many Roman authorities (???????/*hêgemones*) into the province (?????/*ethnos*). At the beginning of the 3rd century CE, Caracalla



ruled that governors of Asia should set foot on Ephesus first (*Dig.* 1.16.4.5), and the city celebrated this achievement on its coins (BMC *Ionia* p. 99 no. 346). Consequently, Erastus's activities could indeed be regarded as positive and beneficial for the whole of the Ephesian community. Moreover, Hadrian supported such claims with his personal experience and journeys. The emperor, however, does not submit his request directly, but rather puts it in the sailor's mouth. The verb [????????/euchetai](#) ("wishes") appears in 3rd person singular and conveys the desire to become councillor ([????????/bouleutês](#)). This careful choice of words is particularly noteworthy as it shows respect for the local institutions. Hadrian could have just given binding instructions as attested in the edict drafted to curb the abuses of his soldiers in Asia. Instead, he addresses Ephesus on terms of alleged equality. This is most evident in the sentence recorded between lines 12 and 13. The key term is [????????/dokimasia](#), which was the selection process that candidates to the council had to pass (see Dmitriev, *City Government*, p. 154-157). If admitted, they might also have to pay an entrance fee as Pliny the Younger reports when he was governor of Bithynia-Pontus under Trajan (*Letters* X.112) and tried to homogenise provincial administration. This emperor, nonetheless, still recommended in this matter to follow "the law of each of the cities" (*Letters* X.113). His successor Hadrian was likewise aware of such local regulations and therefore leaves the matter in the hands of the Ephesians ([????/hymein](#)). Indeed, the emperor even presents the possibility of encountering obstacles ([??????/enpodôn](#)) and offers to pay for the corresponding fee ([????????/argyrion](#)) of the election ([????????/archairesia](#)).

Hadrian's letter does not contain obvious language of Roman domination and subjection. While it is true that the emperor's support almost guaranteed the success of this request, no orders are issued. Even if Hadrian had such powers, he decided to maintain a tradition of nuanced diplomacy certainly preferred by the provincial population. Greek cities in the eastern Mediterranean had constantly been under the control of foreign powers; be it the Persians, Macedonians and now the Romans. And yet, they managed to retain some prerogatives of autonomy that a Philhellenist ruler such as Hadrian could not intend to shatter. Lucius Erastus was most likely admitted to the Ephesian council, since no community in the province of Asia would have dared to dismiss an imperial endorsement. Nevertheless, the Ephesians could be both content and proud to display the amicable and respectful terms on which Hadrian had contacted them. Such a local reaction could explain that the text was inscribed not only once but, at least, twice on the walls of the council house (see above). These copies are also important because they immediately anticipate the advantageous benefactions granted by Hadrian during his second stay at the city in 129 CE, when the resources of the temple of Artemis were secured, grain from Egypt imported, and the harbour refurbished. In the second half of the same year, the emperor started moving eastwards and soon reached the Levant, visiting Arabia and Judaea in 130 CE. In this trip, traces of imperial intervention such as the arch of Gerasa and the foundation of Aelia Capitolina can be found. Nonetheless, no documents have been discovered illustrating the complex, multi-layered, and delicate balance that Rome could establish between its dominion and the respect for local institutions.

Keywords in the original language:

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Thematic keywords:

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- [diplomacy](#) [19]
- [respect](#) [20]
- [Roman power](#) [21]
- [letter](#) [22]
- [local institutions](#) [23]
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- [imperial favour](#) [27]

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[Hadrian, The Restless Emperor](#) [29]

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[City government in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor](#) [30]

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[Hadrien et Erastos, naoclère d'Éphèse](#) [33]

Thomas DREW-BEAR & François RICHARD, article-in-a-book *L'Afrique, la Gaule, la religion à l'époque romaine : mélanges à la mémoire de Marcel Le Glay* Y. Le Bohec (742-751) Brussels Latomus 1994

Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[Senatus Consultum de Asclepiade](#) [34]



Grant of Roman friendship and privileges to a group of Greek sea-captains after the Italic war

- [Read more about Senatus Consultum de Asclepiade](#) [34]

Inscription

[Octavian and the Roman citizenship of Seleukos of Rhosos](#) [35]

Octavian sends several letters to the city of Rhosos concerning the rights and privileges granted to his sea-captain Seleukos

- [Read more about Octavian and the Roman citizenship of Seleukos of Rhosos](#) [35]

Architecture

[Arch of Hadrian at Gerasa \(129-130 CE\)](#) [36]

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[Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View](#) [39]



- [Read more about Arch of Hadrian at Gerasa \(129-130 CE\)](#) [36]



Inscription

[Hadrian listens to Hymns in the Theatre of Ephesus](#) [40]

Hadrian visits Ephesus and the city prepares a performance of hymns sung by the local ephebes.

- [Read more about Hadrian listens to Hymns in the Theatre of Ephesus](#) [40]

Inscription

[Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia](#) [41]

Hadrian issues an edict to prevent the abuse by soldiers crossing Asia during one of his imperial visits

- [Read more about Hadrian, Roman soldiers, and Asia](#) [41]

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