Oath of loyalty to Augustus in Paphlagonia

The inhabitants of Paphlagonia and the Roman traders among them swear an oath of loyalty to Caesar Augustus

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Oath

Original Location/Place: Orthodox Church in Vezirköprü (Turkey)

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): In 1910, it was reported to have been transported to the Imperial Museum of Constantinople

Date: 3 BCE

Physical Characteristics: The stele was broken into two pieces. It has a circular mould on top and the bottom is square. The right side of the stone and the central area between lines 5 and 12 are particularly damaged. There is no word separation but a *vacat* appears between the preface and body of the oath. The paragraphs are indented

Material: Sandstone

Measurements: 109 centimetres in height, 50 (on average) centimetres in width, and 15 centimetres thick. Letters are 1.2 centimetres tall.

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines du Pont et de l'Arménie, p. 75-76, no. 66 (OGIS 532; IGR III.137)

Commentary:

The content of the stele can be divided into three different sections. A (l. 1-5): date and preamble to the oath. B (l. 6-35): text of the oath and imprecation. C (l. 36-42): local conclusion. The style is largely formulaic but it provides very interesting information regarding provincial organisation, loyalty to the Roman emperor and the local organisation of imperial cult.

The first dating formula refers to Augustus’s 12th consulship, the second is a local era and the third follows the Roman calendar. Each of the elements opening this document is significant for different reasons. First, Augustus became consul for the 12th time in 5 BCE, exactly when his adopted son, Gaius Caesar, became an adult and was designated consul and “leader of the youth” at the Forum. The local era corresponds to 3 BCE, so three years after Paphlagonia became part of a Roman province. Finally, March 6th (or one day before the Nonas) coincides with the date in which Augustus was designated pontifex maximus in 12 BCE (CIL XI 3003 = ILS 154). As will be emphasised below, this combination of Roman and local motives is important to understand the context and genesis of the oath (??????/horkos). The place in which it was completed is equally significant. Gangra [2] (later Germanicopolis), in the northern Anatolian peninsula, was the royal capital of Deiotarus who, upon his death, bequeathed the kingdom of Paphlagonia to Augustus (Strabo, Geography, XII.3.41). If the restoration proposed for line 4 is right, it would mean that Roman officials still kept camps (??????/kastra) as temporary outposts while the territory was being reorganised and attached to the larger province of Galatia. In the oath-taking ceremony, two distinguished groups participated: the inhabitants of Paphlagonia and the trading Romans living among them. Considering the long-standing presence of Romans along the Black Sea coast – a colony was established in Sinope in the time of Strabo (Geography, XII.3.11) –, the attestation of such businessmen in Paphlagonia is not surprising, especially when the provincial integration of the region opened new economic opportunities and prospects for exploitation. As for the Paphlagonian natives, their participation needs to be understood in connection with the information provided by the last section of the document.

Lines 36 to 40 explain that the oath originally taken at Gangra was later repeated by all (the native inhabitants) at the local spaces dedicated to Augustus (???????/Sebasteia) and next to his altars (?????/bômoi). This was the procedure exactly followed in Phazimon [3] – known as Neapolis since Pompey (Strabo, Geography, 12.3.38). Consequently, when the preamble refers to the “inhabitants of Paphlagonia,” it does so in a figurative way; i.e. the communities of the region probably sent representatives to Gangra in order to take the oath on their behalf and then transfer the message and procedure to the compatriots upon their return. This is, for example, attested by the Boeotian delegate Epaminondas under Caligula [IG VII.2711]. At any rate, the use of “inhabitants” is still noteworthy because it does not draw distinctions between those natives on the basis of gender, age, or even civic status.

The universal acceptance of the oath would explain that our inscription records its content with the 1st person in singular. After the verb ?????/omnuô (“swear”), the lists of gods appearing can be ascribed to the Greek tradition.
They are invoked, for example, in the oaths that the city of Iasos took for Ptolemy in 309/304 BCE (i.lasos 3), Pergamean mercenaries for Eumenes shortly after 263 (iivp p.13), and the Magnesians for Seleukos c. 242 (i.smyrna 573). Consequently, it is important to understand the oath from Phazimon/Neapolis according to such precedents (see Herrmann, Der römische Kaisereid), particularly in a region such as Paphlagonia that had been ruled by Hellenistic kings until this point. On top of the Greek tradition, Anatolia had witnessed such displays of divinely sanctioned loyalty since the time of the Hittites following a practice common to other near-eastern cultures (see Connolly, “????? ?????”; Weinfeld, “The loyalty oath”). Indeed, our text needs to be highlighted for combining such precedents and adapting them to the new Roman context. The mixed nature of the oath is evident from the moment in which Augustus appears immediately after the list of gods and goddesses (l. 11). This degree of adaptation also explains that the traditional formula ?????????/?eunoēsein is addressed not only to the living ruler but also to his sons and descendants. Between the years 5 and 2 BCE this dynastic aspect played a particularly important role in Rome. As mentioned above, this is the period when Augustus unmistakably prepared Gaius and Lucius Caesar to be his heirs and designated them as consuls. The central effort to secure and promote the Principate succession was widely echoed in the provinces. For instance, we know that Sardis organised a festival to celebrate Gaius’s coming of age and sent a congratulatory embassy to Rome. Public oaths were just another way to display unmistakable support for the dynastic move. It is not coincidental that we have two of such texts which mentioned both Augustus and his descendants presumably in the same year and have been discovered on opposite sides of the Mediterranean – Samos and Baetica (see Martínez, “The First Oath”). Also in the same period, Flavius Josephus (Jewish Antiquities XVII.2.4) reports that Judea showed with oaths his good-will towards the Caesar and the dynastic matters. Our Paphlagonian oath, swore just 2 years thereafter, needs to be understood in this same context. In fact, the connection of Augustus’s policy with the oaths of local communities was not novel. His RGDA, chapter 25, already mentions that, prior to the Battle of Actium, all Italy, Gaul, Spain, Africa, Sicilia and Sardinia “swore with the same words” (juravit in eadem verba). Cassius Dio (Roman History L.6.6) also confirms that Mark Antony’s eastern allies – among whom was king Deiotarus – did the same. The military component of such oaths of loyalty also appears in the Paphlagonian example (l. 15-25). Thus, references to enemies (?????/?echthroi) and weapons (????/hopla) replicate the formulas found in the treaties of friendship and alliance established between the Roman Republic and some communities in the eastern Mediterranean; e.g. Mytilene: IG XII 2.35. The final imprecatory clause (l. 26-35) is equally connected to the Greek precedents mentioned above.

This mixture between Hellenistic tradition and Augustus’ central policy resembles closely the testimonies attesting the genesis of Roman imperial cult in the Greek East. On the one hand, local communities were used to being subject to rulers and displaying their devoted loyalty. On the other hand, the Roman leader himself authorised and regulated the continuity of a tradition that made him a god-like. For this exact reason, his name in the Paphlagonian oath appeared after Zeus, Earth, Sun, and the rest of deities. Neither is coincidental that, when the text reached the community of Phazimon/Neapolis, the inhabitants completed it at the sacred space dedicated to him and next to his altar. Like other contemporary inscriptions relating to imperial cult included in our collection, this direct source is fundamental to assess the impact and early stages of the corresponding change of paradigm. In the case of Paphlagonia, it is particularly striking that our copy assumes the presence of Sebasteia and altars dedicated to Augustus in all the communities of the region just three years after the Hellenistic kingdom became part of a Roman province. Likewise, the reasonable completeness of the document allows us to compare its content with more fragmentary or later examples of oaths both in the eastern and western provinces. For instance, under Tiberius, the oath from Palaipaphos (Cyprus) does not include this emperor among the gods but focuses instead on Augustus and Rome’s eternity. This again demonstrates, despite the apparent formulaic format, the adaptability of such texts to convey central Roman ideals – in this case, Tiberius’s refusal of divine honours (Suetonius, Tiberius 26; Tacitus, Annals IV.38; SEG 11.922). Analogies and distinctions can equally be drawn with the famous testimonies from Assos (i.Assos 26) and Aritium (CIL II.172) under Caligula. More importantly, all such precedents can better contextualise the increasingly important role played by oaths and other displays of verbal loyalty towards the rulers of the Empire (see Le Gall, “Le serment à l'empereur;” Cancik, “Der Kaiser-Eid”).

Keywords in the original language:

- ?????????? [4]
- ????? [5]
- ???? [6]
- ???? [7]
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Thematic keywords:

- Augustus
- oath
- curse
- heir
- dynasty
- Paphlagonia
- imperial cult
- Hellenistic king
- loyalty
- friendship
- administration

Bibliographical references:
Herrmann, Peter, Der römische Kaisereid: Untersuchungen zu seiner Herkunft und Entwicklung (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1968)
Le Gall, Joël, Le serment à l'empereur: une base méconnue de la tyrannie impériale sous le Haut-Empire? (Latomus 44 (1985) : 767-783)
SØRENSEN, Søren, A Re-examination of the Imperial Oath from Vezirköprü, in PHILIA 1 (2015) : 14-32

Sards sends an embassy to Augustus

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.
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]

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