



Pergamum, Trajan, and Games in honour of Rome

pergamon_trajan_1.jpg



[1]

Trajan and the Roman Senate authorise the organisation of sacred games in Pergamum with the sponsorship of Iulius Quadratus

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Dossier of documents

Original Location/Place: Discovered between the Traianeum and the Library of Pergamum (inv. III 447)

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Museums of Berlin (Germany)

Date: 114 CE to 116 CE

Physical Characteristics: The inscription is broken on the right top and bottom corners. The inscribed area is framed within a mould. The different documents are split into paragraphs. Lettering is slightly irregular but clearly readable. Interpunctuation is more abundant in the Latin parts.

Material: Marble

Measurements: 76 centimetres high, 57 centimetres wide, and 12 centimetres thick. Letters are between 8 and 12 centimetres tall

Language: Latin, Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: *IVP* II 269 [*CIL* 3.7086; *IGRR* 4.336]

Commentary:

This stele contains a dossier of four different documents that deal with a memorable episode in the history of Pergamum in the imperial period: the grant of the second sacred games by the emperor Trajan and the Roman senate. The state of the stone and of some of its texts is rather fragmentary. However, the sequence of events can be reconstructed with a fair degree of certainty.

A) The formulaic greeting formula opening the first document indicates that it was probably sent by a Roman official, most likely the provincial governor. The letter is very short, but several key elements can be identified. Already in lines 2 to 4, we are informed that a competition (????/agôn) is at stake and the “very illustrious” Senate (????????/synklêtos) is involved. These games had a sacred status (????/?hieros) and were related to the imperial cult because the high-priest (????????/archiereus), Claudius Silianus, a member of a prominent local family appears (Müller, “Hadrien an die Pergamener,” p. 372, no. 18).

B) The second document contains the decision of the Senate (*senatus consultum*) concerning the Pergamean petition (*postulatio*). The Latin translation of ???/agôn is *certamen* and it is specified that the games were held in honour of the temple of *Iuppiter Amicalis* and Trajan. The titulature of the emperor (l. 10) is important because it dates the document before 116 CE, when Parthia was conquered and he was named *Parthicus*. As for the reference to Jupiter, this is another Latin rendering of a Greek entity. The epithet *amicalis* corresponds to ?????/philios (“friendly”), meaning the god was Zeus Philios. The choice of this deity is significant because it confirms the importance of “friendship” or *amicitia* for the relations established between Rome and the provinces even still in the high imperial period. This concept dominated foreign diplomacy during the



Roman Republic as attested for example in the oath taken by Aphrodisias after the Mithridatic wars, which invoked both Zeus Philios and the Concord with Rome (see Reynolds, *Aphrodisias*, p. 6-7). In the case of Pergamum, a new temple (*templum*) had been dedicated to this Zeus Philios and Trajan, which therefore constituted a new centre of the imperial cult. This connection between agonistic festivals and the creation of such spaces of worship is not novel. Indeed, Cassius Dio (*Roman History* LI.20.7-9) reports that, when Augustus let the Greeks in Asia consecrate precincts in his name in Pergamum, he also authorised them “to hold the sacred games in honour of Caesar’s temple.” From 29 BCE, local evidence confirms the organisation of a new festival called *Rhōmaia Sebastia*, as well as the adoption of the title of ????????/neōkoros which was reserved for the most important centres of the imperial cult (see Burrell, *Neokoroi*, p. 18-22). This precedent was fundamental for the new bid for games launched by Pergamum under Trajan. As lines 12 and 13 record, the Senate specified that the new sacred games should have the same status (*conditio*) as those “in honour of Rome [and the god Augustus].” This distinguished condition is more precisely worded in line 11: ????????/eiselastikon. The Greek term did not have a Latin equivalent and can neither be translated into English. It refers to a very specific category of games, the victors of which were entitled to return home with a welcoming parade and a public pension (Slater, “The Victor’s Return”). Under Roman domination, this top rank was eagerly sought but the emperor together with the Senate only authorised it under exceptional circumstances (see e.g. Pliny, *Letters* X.118-119). For this reason, cities normally waited to propose such games when projects for the construction of grand temples of the imperial cult had been approved. This is exactly the case of Pergamum. Again, both coins and inscriptions confirm that the *polis* was the first in Asia to receive the second *neokoria* thanks to the temple dedicated to Zeus Philios and Trajan (see Burrell, *Neokoroi*, p. 22-30).

C) The third document is introduced by a heading in Greek, even if it was originally written in Latin. It contains the instructions (???????/entolai = *mandata*) that Trajan, the Caesar, probably addressed to the Roman official who wrote the first letter of the dossier. The emperor confirms that the games of Pergamum had been authorised through a *constitutio* (l. 17), which also specified that it had the five-year cycle (*quinquennale*) typical of the major Greek festivals. Trajan also refers to the endorsement of the senatorial order (*ordo*) and emphasises the participation of one of his senatorial friends (*amicus clarissimus vir*). The same man also appeared at the end of document B and, hence, his name can be restored as Iulius Quadratus in line 18 too. The many honorific inscriptions for this senator discovered in Pergamum corroborate the close relationship between him and Trajan (see Halfmann, *Die Senatoren*, p. 112-115). The emperor directly appointed Caius Aulus Antius Iulius Quadratus (*PIR*² I 507) for many provincial offices in the East, including Syria, Cappadocia or Armenia. He also participated in the Dacian triumphs and was one of the first easterners to reach the consulship, together with his cousin C. Iulius Severus (*IGRR* III.173). His energetic activity in Pergamum was extremely high and practically inaugurated a new golden age of urban planning at the beginning of the 2nd century CE (*IvP* III 21, see Halfmann, *Städtebau*, p. 45-55). The construction of the second neocorate temple – the so-called Traianeum, see Radt, *Pergamon Geschichte*, p. 209-220 – belonged to such projects for which the collaboration, influence, and sponsorship of members of the Senate close to the emperor were crucial (see Eck, “Die Präsenz senatorischer Familien”). Indeed, in addition to promoting the new sacred festival in honour of Trajan and Zeus Philios (or ????????/Traianeia Deiphileia), he also left his son as one of the first high-priests of the new temples of the imperial cult (*IvP* III 20).

D) The last document is a letter addressed by Trajan to the local institutions of Pergamum. It is the most fragmentary but provides a *t.p.q.* in 114 CE. It also reveals that the agonistic festival involved the organisation of a parallel fair taking place at public spaces (???????/agoraioi) and that the aforementioned petition (???????/axiōma) was delivered through an embassy. Such diplomatic missions confirm the significance of these games for the communities in the eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, we know that this was not Pergamum’s first attempt to elevate its regional prestige in the imperial period. After Augustus, the city tried to obtain their second *neokoria* both under Tiberius (*Tacitus. Annals* IV.55-56 [2]) and Gaius-Caligula (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LIX.29.1). Consequently, the possibility of launching and reaching such grants depended not only on the local availability of funds or enthusiasm, but rather on imperial decisions favouring or rejecting incessant waves of petitions. For example, when Miletus asked Marcus Aurelius for sacred games, the emperor responded that his grant was unique due to concerns over the financial burdens of other candidates (*I.Milet.* 1075). Accordingly, both



Trajan's and the Senate's insistence in Iulius Quadratus's involvement became fundamental for the Pergamean success. The consul and personal friend in the imperial court wholeheartedly supported a project that was not disrupted by his son and will still facilitate the organisation of *Traianeia Deiphileia* in the 3rd century CE (e.g. *I.Smyrna* 659; *I.Napoli* 48; *SEG* 27.843). Besides this privileged endorsement, Pergamum made the right proposal of names and deities for these games. The association of Trajan with an amicable Zeus was positive and could reinforce the good reception of his rule and cult. The concept of “friendship” (*amicitia*) was an ideal propagated by Roman hegemony across the Mediterranean and reciprocally advertised by loyal provincials. In fact, Zeus Philios was prominent in Dio Chrysostom, a Bithynian rhetor contemporary of Trajan, who might have delivered speeches in front of the emperor (see I.37-41, III.86-132). Finally, with the authorisation of this new festival Trajan could also connect his policies with those of Augustus, who had previously granted *neokoria* and sacred games to Pergamum.

The combination of all these factors resulted in the success of Pergamum's bid and the epigraphic and numismatic commemoration of both this process and the memory of Trajan. As a result, this dossier of documents sheds light on the complex network of favours and petitions that dominated the relations established between imperial rule and provincial communities. In this case, Trajan received an embassy, trusted the endorsement of his companion Iulius Quadratus, and induced the senatorial sanction. Then the officials of the province were informed via the emperor's mandates and Pergamum became the first of the region in terms of international games and numbers of neocorates – compared, especially, with the single *neokoria* of Ephesus. Such an achievement, nonetheless, did not satiate local aspirations as the former Hellenistic capital again proposed to raise another temple of the imperial cult under Hadrian, which the emperor refused on financial grounds (*SEG* 59.1424). Instead, he took advantage of this opportunity to enhance the dynastic connection with his adopted father and managed to have his colossal statue placed in the same Traianeum (see Schowalter, “The Zeus Philios).

Keywords in the original language:

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Thematic keywords:

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- [games](#) [25]
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- [imperial cult](#) [27]
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- [agonistic culture](#) [39]

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[Letter of Octavian to Ephesus concerning Aphrodisias \[48\]](#)

Octavian requests the Ephesians to return a statue of Eros dedicated by his father Julius to Aphrodite in the city of Aphrodisias

- [Read more about Letter of Octavian to Ephesus concerning Aphrodisias \[48\]](#)

Inscription

[Aphrodisias and the imperial temple of Ephesus under Domitian \[49\]](#)

The free and autonomous city of Aphrodisias sets up a monument in Ephesus commemorating the grant of *neokoria* by Domitian

- [Read more about Aphrodisias and the imperial temple of Ephesus under Domitian \[49\]](#)

Inscription

[Octavian and the Roman citizenship of Seleukos of Rhosos \[50\]](#)

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 \[50\]](#)

Inscription

[Senatus Consultum de Asclepiade \[51\]](#)

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

- [Read more about Senatus Consultum de Asclepiade \[51\]](#)

Text

[Tacitus, Annals IV.55-56 \[2\]](#)

Tiberius grants Smyrna the right to build a temple dedicated to him



- [Read more about Tacitus, Annals IV.55-56](#) [2]

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