The Roman emperor Antoninus Pius praises the Ephesian benefactor Publius Vedius Antoninus for investing in works for the future.

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

**Original Location/Place:** Proscenium of the council-house of Ephesus

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** Not given by the editors

**Date:** 145 CE

**Physical Characteristics:** Not given by the editors

**Material:** Marble

**Measurements:** Not given by the editors

**Language:** Greek

**Category:** Roman, Greek

**Publications:** Die Inschriften von Ephesos 1491 [SIG² 850]

**Commentary:**

Constant epistolary exchange circulated between the local institutions of the eastern Mediterranean and the Roman emperors. Many imperial letters sent by Antoninus Pius to magistrates (????????/archontes), council (????/?boulê), and people (????/?dêmos) are preserved. However, not so many contain such a degree of support for a private individual (Vedius Antoninus), and critique for the public recipient (see Kokkinia, “Letters of Roman Authorities”). This testimony will therefore shed light on the intervention of Roman authorities in local issues, the ideological agenda of Roman power, and the conflicts arising among provincials seeking imperial assistance.

As is customary, the letter opens with the comprehensive titulature of the emperor; including both his dynastic connections with Hadrian, Trajan, and Nerva and the civil offices that date this document to 145 CE (8th tribunician power). The main body of the communication begins from line 7 and Antoninus Pius’s words are not formulaic. The emperor notes that his response did not follow the official channels of correspondence between Ephesus and the imperial court, but rather the private letters (????????/grammata) sent to him by a man referred to as Vedius Antoninus. By virtue of the many inscriptions preserved from this site, it is known that the political institutions of Ephesus – who celebrated the emperor’s imperial birthday with sacred days – consulted Antoninus Pius on many occasions; for example, concerning their aspirations for titles and provincial pre-eminency (I.Eph. 1489). Consequently, this initial remark should be read as an open (albeit polite) critique to the way in which the case was made known to him (????/?emathon). The issue at stake is also clear from the first lines of the imperial communication: ?????????/philotimia. This term cannot accurately be translated in modern languages, as it designates the Greek traditional ambition for communal praise (????/timê), which was earned through euergetic actions (see Roskam, The Lash of Ambition). From this secondary meaning, the concept can normally be rendered as “benefaction” and the corresponding verb ?????????????/philotimeisthai as “to benefit”. In the case of Vedius Antoninus, his benefaction was concerned with constructions (????????????/oikodomêmata) for which he made a preliminary announcement or ?????????/epangelia. The local reception of the initiative was apparently not possible (l. 11-12, for an alternative restoration see Kokkinia, “Letters of Roman Authorities,” p. 204-205); in contrast to the praising reaction of Antoninus Pius. To this emperor, Vedius had asked for help (?????????/boêtheia) in order to find support for the embellishment (????????/kosmos) of his works. Roman rulers could indeed grant financial means for local projects that they considered appealing and/or necessary; however, the procedure was not automatic and depended on personal persuasion, favour, and even whim (see Pont, Orner, p. 459-488; and Winter, Staatliche Baupolitik). Antoninus Pius bases his support on an argument that is particularly interesting for understanding the urban development of settlements in the Greek East during the Antonine period.

Prior to the analysis of lines 13-19, it is necessary to explain why the Ephesian population might oppose a project that was backed by both a wealthy local citizen and the Roman emperor. First of all, the identification of Vedius Antoninus is not straightforward. It was a normal practice among Roman aristocratic families that sons bore the names of their parents and ancestors, sometimes even sharing the same surnames or cognomina. Only whole series of nomenclature can solve such cases but the sequence of Vedius Antoninus is heavily abbreviated in our
case. Despite these problems and according to the rich epigraphic materials surviving from the city, everything indicates that Antoninus Pius is referring to M. Claudius P. Vedius Antoninus Sabinianus, whose father had been adopted into the Vedian family during Hadrian’s reign (see Fontani, “I Vedii”). Sabinianus did not only continue the euergetic actions of his ancestors, but actually tried to surpass all previous benefactions with the construction and financing of, among other elements, two big gymnasium-bath complexes at opposite sides of Ephesus (see Halfmann, Städtebau, p. 79-80). The magnitude of this unprecedented enterprise may have been deemed excessive by his fellow compatriots, and could perfectly have led to internal tensions. In this regard, a good analogy can be drawn with the episode denounced by another important political actor of Asia Minor and rhetor called Dio Chrysostom. Through his speeches, particularly no. XLVII, he lamented the attitude of some citizens of Prusa (his motherland), who opposed a project to build a grand colonnade. This testimony shows that local competition for prestige could be bitter and may resemble the initial opposition that Vedius Antoninus had to face in Ephesus.

In addition to jealousy, a second reason for this local opposition can be inferred from Antoninus Pius’s final argument. The emperor affirms that there were certain actions such as spectacles (????/theai) and money-distributions (??????/dianomai) which generated instant fame. Illustrative and almost contemporary examples of this kind of benefaction can be found in our collection such as the foundation of Salutaris in Ephesus itself, Titus Praxias in Akmoneia, the Demostheneia games in Oinoanda, or the Euaresteia in Balboura for which extolling local decrees were produced. Understandably, this type of event provided the population with more tangible and immediate benefits that could not be matched by complex and frequently delayed building projects. Antoninus Pius, by contrast, supported the long-lasting impact proposed by Vedius and also backed by the provincial governor Claudius Iulianus (PIR² J 76; cf. Aelius Aristides, Orations L.107). Indeed, the solid foundations of such constructions provided durable platforms to spread messages that could become permanent. While the record of many spectacles and money distributions in Ephesus has been lost, the spectacular archaeological remains surviving from Vedius’ projects still confirm today the motivations of Antoninus Pius’s letter and agenda (see Steksal, “Zu den Stiftungen”; Steksal, “Das Vediusgymnasium”). For example, the walls of the council-house restored by him were those precisely commemorating that the imperial praise and recommendation had been successful (l.Eph. 460; see Taeuber, “The Inscriptions”). After all, Vedius Antoninus Sabinianus ended up being greatly honoured by his fellow Ephesians and even became Roman senator, a rank that the descendants of his family continued to enjoy almost a century later (Philostratus, Life of Sophists II.23; cf. Halfmann, Die Senatoren, p. 168-170).

Keywords in the original language:

- ????? [3]
- ????? [4]
- ????? [5]
- ????? [6]
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- ??????????? [14]
- ?????? [15]
- ????? [16]
- ???????? [17]
- ???????? [18]

Thematic keywords:
Publius Vedius Antoninus and Antoninus Pius
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- benefaction [19]
- Antoninus Pius [20]
- imperial presence [21]
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- building [24]
- building policy [25]
- money [26]
- distributions [27]
- imperial letter [28]
- local conflict [29]
- fame [30]

Bibliographical references:
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Other sources connected with this document:
- Inscription

The Salutaris Foundation and the Roman Representations in Ephesus [40]

Caius Vibius Salutaris, an Ephesian member of the equestrian order, establishes a foundation in which images of the Roman emperors, the Roman people, and the Senate are prepared.

- Read more about The Salutaris Foundation and the Roman Representations in Ephesus [40]

Imperial images and the Demostheneia under Hadrian [41]

Iulius Demosthenes founds a new agonistic festival under Hadrian combining local motifs of Oenoanda and the imperial cult

- Read more about Imperial images and the Demostheneia under Hadrian [41]

Antoninus Pius and the Meleagria Games of Balboura [42]

The emperor Antoninus Pius confirms the foundation of games that followed the precedent set by the neighbouring
city of Oinoanda

- Read more about Antoninus Pius and the Meleagria Games of Balboura [42]

Inscription

**Ephesus and Antoninus Pius’s Birthday [43]**

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Inscription

**Funerary Foundation of Titus Praxias and the Eternal Rule of the Romans [44]**

A local decree specifies the clauses of a foundation given by Praxias, which was to be protected in the eternity of Roman rule and guarded by the Augusti

- Read more about Funerary Foundation of Titus Praxias and the Eternal Rule of the Romans [44]

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