



Amastris and the everlasting hegemony of the Romans under Hadrian [1]

A local benefactor prepares a statue and vows for the hegemony of Hadrian, and the perpetual preservation and victory of the Roman people and senate.

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Dedicatory base

Original Location/Place: Unknown

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Museum of Amasra (Turkey)

Date: 131 CE

Physical Characteristics: Square statue base with a moulded frame on the bottom. The left side is slightly damaged and parts of the right corner too. Letters are well carved and the first line is indented, without word separation.

Material: Marble

Measurements: 56 centimetres in height, 60 centimetres in width, and 42 centimetres thick. Letters are between 1.5 and 1 centimetre tall

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: Marek, Christian, "Katalog der Inschriften im Museum von Amasra," in *Epigraphica Anatolica* 6, 1985, p. 134, no. 2 [SEG 35.1317]

Commentary:

The city of [Amastris](#) [2] in the northern Anatolian region of Paphlagonia started counting time since 70 BCE, the year in which the Roman general Lucullus took control of the area during the Mithridatic wars (Appian, *The Mithridatic Wars* 82; see Marek, *Stadt*, 88-100; Leschhorn, *Antike Ären*, p. 162-168). Consequently, the number 201 recorded in line 11 of the inscription corresponds to 131 CE. This local chronology is also confirmed by the reference to Hadrian with the title Parthicus, which he bore since the beginning of his reign. Even if the titulature of the emperor is abbreviated, it is clear that, above any other civil or religious offices, it sought to highlight the dynastic lineage from the gods Nerva and Trajan (see Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors*, p. 180-181).

The man commissioning the inscription was Gaius Heliophon. While the first name has a western origin, the full sequence does not follow the *tria nomina* rules, which were restricted to Roman citizens and appear in the case of the president of the magistrates (????????/archontes): L(ucius) Aelius Aelianus (l. 12-13). Despite his probable lack of Roman citizenship, Gaius Heliophon was a prominent member of the local political community of Amastris. This is inferred from his office of ?????????/ephêbarchos, which was in charge of one of the quintessential institutions of Hellenistic *poleis*: the ephebes (see Chankowski, *L'Éphébie Hellénistique*). These were the young men among the local citizenship body who enrolled in the gymnasium and were offered physical training and intellectual education also during the Roman imperial period (see Kennell, *Ephebeia*). When Gaius Heliophon was holding this position, he decided to prepare with his own funds a statue of a satyr (????????/satyros), which was most likely placed in the gymnasium used for the ephebes's meetings. Indeed, our texts instructs in lines 16 and 17 to inscribe their names on the base (?????/bômos) that completed Gaius Heliophon's donation.

The agency of this donor is important for assessing the vow introducing the text. The first line of the dedication to the good fortune (????/tychê) is very common in the public epigraphic production of the Greek east. However, the sequence starting in line 2 is not formulaic. The word ?????????/hêgemonia with this sense of "hegemonic supremacy" rather than mere "leadership" is only sparsely attested in the inscriptions dating to the imperial period (e.g. Thyateira with Galba). Likewise, the addition of ?????????/aiônion ("perpetual") to the common theme of the preservation (????????/diamonê) and victory (????/nikê) shows an effort to depart from conventional constructions in order to highlight adherence to Roman imperial ideals. The final lines (7-10) of the sequence are particularly interesting because they contain an analogy between the Roman senate (????????????/synklêtos) and people (?????/dêmos), and the council (?????/boulê) and people of Amastris. In other words, both institutional frameworks were compatible; one local and the other global that deserved such hopes for an everlasting future



together.

While the concept of *Aeternitas* ("eternity") in connection with Roman rule can already be found in the Augustean propaganda and Pliny the Younger (*Panegyricus* 67.1.1) reports vows *pro aeternitate imperii* before Trajan, it is not coincidental that its representation on central coinage became completely established at the beginning of Hadrian's reign, just before our inscription was set up (Charlesworth, "Providentia and Aeternitas," p. 122-131; Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 351). In this period, a positive reaction to this ideal was certainly plausible. Prior to 131, Hadrian had paid remarkable visits to the eastern Mediterranean provinces and the impact of these journeys was certainly experienced by the local population, even though Paphlagonia and the Pontic shores were not on his route (see Birley, *Hadrian*, p. 162-174, 215-225). Some consequences such as the exactions of his accompanying soldiers may be negative, but this emperor is particularly renowned for the benefactions granted to ancient cities such as Athens and native sanctuaries such as Zeus in Aezanis (see Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities*). Again, none of such grants is attested in the case of Amastris (cf. Ep. X.98.2), but the general imperial context favoured the celebration of Roman power. After the withdrawal from Mesopotamia and the campaign in Britain, peaceful conditions largely dominated and were not broken until the uprising of Bar Kokhba in Judea, which did not occur until 132.

In addition to these generalising remarks, there is a more specific piece of evidence shedding light on the motivations behind the celebratory text of our inscription. In 1991, a new inscription from Amastris was published attesting a final benefaction of Gaius Heliophon [*SEG* 41.1106; *AE* 1991.1460]. This document dates to 147 CE and records that the council and people of Amastris set up a statue of the emperor – Antoninus Pius, in this case – with the money bequeathed by Gaius Heliophon's will (???????/*diathêkê*) for this purpose. In other words, this man had given clear instructions as to the elements on which the public institutions of the city could spend his donation; and, indeed, his wife as heir (????????/klêronomos) was in charge of supervising everything. When this posthumous preoccupation with the promotion of the Roman emperor is combined with the message conveyed by the statue base set up in his lifetime, the former exaltation of Hadrian's hegemony and perpetual preservation of Rome can be better understood. Not only did the imperial context favour the positive reception of Roman power, but there were also individuals (even without Roman citizenship) committed to its promotion with public inscriptions and monuments conspicuous to the rest of their compatriots. As such, the case of Gaius Heliophon can be compared with previous examples of our collection such as Eratophanes of Rhodes and Praxias of Akmonia, who were commended for their imperial devotion already under Claudius and the Flavians. In the times of Hadrian, it has accordingly been shown that such displays of local and personal alliance were still pertinent to the spread to imperial ideals.

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Thematic keywords:



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[Thyateira, the Roman Senate, and Roman Hegemony \[43\]](#)

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Inscription

[Eratophanes of Rhodes, a devoted promoter of Claudius \[44\]](#)

A local benefactor and priest of the imperial cult is honoured in both Rhodes and Caria for his piety towards the emperor

- [Read more about Eratophanes of Rhodes, a devoted promoter of Claudius \[44\]](#)

Inscription

[Funerary Foundation of Titus Praxias and the Eternal Rule of the Romans \[45\]](#)

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*

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Inscription

[Iulius Severus, Hellenistic descendant, and Roman Governor in the Bar Kokhba Revolt \[46\]](#)



Career of Iulius Severus, one of the Roman officials in the East during the Bar Kokhba revolt.

- [Read more about Iulius Severus, Hellenistic descendant, and Roman Governor in the Bar Kokhba Revolt](#) [46]

Inscription

[Haterius Nepos, Arabia, and the Bar Kokhba revolt](#) [47]

The governor of Arabia, Titus Haterius Nepos, is honoured as a benefactor after the Bar Kokhba revolt.

- [Read more about Haterius Nepos, Arabia, and the Bar Kokhba revolt](#) [47]

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