



An Augustan governor on the freedom of Chios

chios_freedom_cig_2222_2mb.jpg



[1]

The provincial governor settles a dispute concerning the freedom of Chios and describes the use of previous official documents

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

Original Location/Place: Unknown. Found in a reused context at the Byzantine-Genoese Kastro of Chios

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Museum of Chios, Greece (inv. 164)

Date: 4 CE to 5 CE

Physical Characteristics: Boeckh in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* only reports that the stone was a *rudis lapis* (rough) and broken at the bottom. The picture below – courtesy of Charles Crowther (University of Oxford) – shows that the inscription is now broken into three fragments and parts of the left side are lost. While the central area of the bigger fragment has some chips, the surface has generally been smoothed and letters are well carved, in a style that resembles more inscriptions of the imperial period rather than of the end of the Republic. Since this was a wall block, it might actually have comprised a series of imperial letters similar to the “archive wall” of Aphrodisias, which also collects official documents recording the “freedom” of the city

Material: Marble

Measurements: The preserved block is 51.2 centimetres in height, 101 centimetres in width, and 35 centimetres thick. Letter forms are between 16 and 17 centimetres tall and the line interval is 7 centimetres

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications:

CIG 2222 (*SEG* 22.507; *IGRR* IV.943; *SIG*³ 785)

Commentary: This stone found in the Aegean island of [Chios](#) [2] is important for two different aspects. Firstly, it explicitly records the procedure followed by the provincial governor in order to settle a local dispute. Secondly, it describes some of the benefits and rights of a city granted the status of “free” and “friend” of the Romans.

Both the beginning and end of the document are lost. However, we are certain that the letter was prepared by the successor of Antistius Vetus in the proconsulship of Asia. As it appears from lines 18 and 19 that Augustus was still alive when the document was drafted, Antistius Vetus should be identified with the consul of 6 BCE, who was governor around 2/3 and 3/4 CE. When he left the province, our anonymous officer was met with ambassadors from Chios (????? ???????/*Cheiôn presbeis*) presumably in 4/5 CE. The exact issue brought by the diplomatic delegation is unknown but it triggered an official investigation. As it becomes clear from the text, governors mostly found out about on-going provincial matters upon their arrival. This happened every single year in the case of the proconsular territory of Asia. Hence, we can better understand Chios’s promptness to organise a new embassy in order to speak on their behalf. In addition to this oral defence, lines 5 to 13 illustrate the paramount importance of keeping records of decisions affecting the status of local entities. On the one hand, the governor says that he is following the general procedure (????????? ???????/*katholikê prothesis*) by preserving Vetus’s letter; presumably at the provincial archive of Ephesus. On the other hand, he asks both disputing parties to produce written



memoranda (?????????/gegrammena hupomnêmata) supporting their claims. This is also described as a habit (?????????/synêtheia). Consequently, local institutions were also recommended to keep copies in their archives.

It is not coincidental that, after the revision of all the documents brought to him, the governor chose the oldest (?????????/tois chronois archaiotaton). Indeed, antiquity meant authority; and Roman officers normally based their decisions on existing precedents (see e.g. Burton, "The Resolution"). In this case, the most authoritative source was found in a sealed copy (?????????/antisfragisma) of a Senatus consultum dating to Sulla's second consulship (80 BCE). This was drafted in the context of the First Mithridatic war when Chios aligned with the Romans (Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 46-47, 61). As a reward for their loyal support, the city was granted the "friendship of the Romans" (l. 16) and could enjoy its own laws, customs, and rights (?????/nomoi, ???/ethê, ??????/dikaia). This process resembles the later grant of amicitia to the nearby city of Mytilene in Lesbos, for which the S.C. is actually preserved (IG XII 2.35). Our document is also relevant to the attestation of personal grants of this friendship status such as the S.C. de Asclepiade.

The privileges decreed by the Senate automatically made Chios a city with freedom (?????????/eleutheria) as is also recorded at the very end of the broken stone. Lines 16 and 17 specify that such a "free" city was not under the jurisdiction of Roman officials (see Ferrary, "La liberté," Lintott, *Imperium Romanum*, p. 36-40); and this is also known from other grants of "freedom" such as those of Kolophon (SEG 39.1244), Termessos (CIL I² 589), and Apollonia (Cicero, *For Flaccus* 71). The clause contained between lines 17 and 18 is, nonetheless, unique. It is stated that even Roman residents shall be subject (?????????/hypakousin) to the Chian laws. This required obedience contrasts with the multiple benefits granted to Roman citizens in the Greek East. For example, the document recording Seleukos of Rhosos's enfranchisement specifies that he could choose the courts which would try his cases (*privilegium fori*) and, moreover, had the right to send embassies to Rome on his behalf (*ius legationis*). This superior legal status would have provoked disputes with the autonomous jurisdiction granted to "free cities". Our document from Chios seems to be a response to these challenges.

It is impossible to know whether the obedience to local laws imposed on Roman citizens was something unique to Chios, or applicable to other "free cities" in the eastern Mediterranean. Whatever the case may be, the instructions of this provincial governor would fit in Augustus' policy to favour certain local interests and rights. This is the same context of the Cyrene edicts in which he made Roman citizens subject to the liturgies of *poleis* and forced them to stop conspiring in court against the disadvantaged Greeks. All such instructions and issues would not have arisen without the unprecedented spread of Roman citizenship experienced in the Greek East at the end of the Republic.

Literary reference: Appian, *Mithridatic Wars* 46-47, 61

Keywords in the original language:

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Thematic keywords:

- [freedom](#) [15]



- [friendship](#) [16]
- [Roman citizenship](#) [17]
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- [Chios](#) [23]
- [Augustus](#) [24]

Bibliographical references:

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[La liberté des cités et ses limites à l'époque républicaine](#) [26]

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[Imperium Romanum: Politics and Administration](#) [27]

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[Augustan Procedure and Legal Documents in RDGE 70](#) [29]

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Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[Senatus Consultum de Asclepiade](#) [30]

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

- [Read more about Senatus Consultum de Asclepiade](#) [30]

Inscription

[Octavian and the Roman citizenship of Seleukos of Rhosos](#) [31]

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](#) [31]



Inscription

[Cyrene Edicts of Augustus: I and III \[32\]](#)

Augustus sets new rules on the way Greek and Roman citizens shall chose their tribunals and juries (I). Roman citizens without immunity in the Cyrenaica shall contribute to the local liturgies (III)

- [Read more about Cyrene Edicts of Augustus: I and III \[32\]](#)

Inscription

[Letter of Octavian to Ephesus concerning Aphrodisias \[33\]](#)

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 \[33\]](#)

Inscription

[Oples, leader of the Termessian allies dispatched to Marcus Aurelius \[34\]](#)

A member of the local elite of Termessos is honoured for having led a group of allies dispatched to the emperor Marcus Aurelius.

- [Read more about Oples, leader of the Termessian allies dispatched to Marcus Aurelius \[34\]](#)

Inscription

[Perge, metropolis by the emperor-god Tacitus \[35\]](#)

The city of Perge in southern Anatolia celebrates its new title of *metropolis* after the exceptional grant of the emperor Tacitus, worshipped as a god.

- [Read more about Perge, metropolis by the emperor-god Tacitus \[35\]](#)

Inscription

[Hadrian and Zeus in Aizanoi \[36\]](#)

Hadrian restores the ancient lands of Zeus in Aizanoi using Hellenistic precedents and members of his administration

- [Read more about Hadrian and Zeus in Aizanoi \[36\]](#)

Inscription



[Baetocaece / Baitokaike: Valerian and the Ancestral Privileges of a Temple in Syria \[37\]](#)

Epigraphic dossier confirming the privileges of the sanctuary of Zeus in Baetocaece (Syria) in 258-260 CE. Seleucid and Augustan precedents are used to back the worshippers' petition.

- [Read more about Baetocaece / Baitokaike: Valerian and the Ancestral Privileges of a Temple in Syria \[37\]](#)

Inscription

[Provincial Edict and the Market Days of Mandragoreis \(Asia\) \[38\]](#)

Edict responding to a village in the Maeander valley that petitioned for market days. The legal procedure concerning the reproduction of this official document is also detailed.

- [Read more about Provincial Edict and the Market Days of Mandragoreis \(Asia\) \[38\]](#)

Inscription

[Aphrodisias and the imperial temple of Ephesus under Domitian \[39\]](#)

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 \[39\]](#)

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Inscription

[A Roman Curator and the Games of Aphrodisias under Commodus \[40\]](#)

A local agent sent by the Roman administration discusses the financial viability of Greek games and its impact on the city of Aphrodisias in the reign of Commodus.

- [Read more about A Roman Curator and the Games of Aphrodisias under Commodus \[40\]](#)

Realized by:

[Aitor Blanco Pérez \[41\]](#)



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