



## [Mylasa, its local coins and the long life of the Severan emperors \[1\]](#)

A typical city in Asia Minor drafts a resolution concerning illegal banking activities and local legal procedures. The fragmentary decree includes an acclamation and several messages extolling the Roman emperors and the eternity of their rule.

**Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):** Local decree

**Original Location/Place:** Agora of Mylasa according to the inscription (l. 46). Discovered in 1895 in the Jewish quarter of Milas (Turkey).

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** Unknown.

**Date:** 209 CE to 211 CE

**Physical Characteristics:** The stele was broken on the top, bottom and left sides. Letters are slightly irregularly carved, with ligatures, serifs and no interpunctuation.

**Material:** Marble

**Measurements:** 170 centimetres high, 46 wide

**Language:** Greek

**Category:** Roman, Greek

**Publications:** *I. Mylasa* 605 [OGIS 515]

**Commentary:**

The reader should first be warned that some parts of this inscription have been heavily restored, with proposals that are still contested as recently shown by Katsari (*Roman Monetary System*, p. 148). Accordingly, even if our commentary follows the more canonical version of the text, it will be mostly concerned with elements that can certainly be read on the stone. The reader should also be warned that this is one of the very few direct testimonies concerning banking activities in the eastern Mediterranean outside of Egypt and it has, consequently, sparked numerous debates among economic historians. Our commentary, however, is not very much interested in these specific issues but, rather, in the attestation of how provincial communities subject to Rome dealt with internal problems and in the role played by the imperial administration and ideology.

The typology of the document is clear even from the fragmentary lines surviving in the upper part of the slab. A common resolution (?????/*gnômê*) had been agreed by the local council (?????/*boulê*) and people (?????/*dêmos*) concerning an issue that needed to be rectified (?????????????/*epanorthôsaî*). The inscription does not mention it explicitly, but this institutional framework must belong to the city of [Mylasa](#) [2] (modern Milas), where the stone was found. The settlement, located in the south-western Anatolian region of Caria, had adopted Greek civic procedures already in the Hellenistic age, but was not one of the great provincial centres of Asia during the imperial period. In other words, we have a text originating from one of the many medium-sized *poleis* in the Greek East that was not particularly favoured or privileged under Roman rule. This is an important aspect for the assessment of how common and representative the reference to the imperial Fortune (?????/*Tychê*) in line 14 could be among other average provincial communities. In this case, the emperors praised as greatest (?????????/*megistoi*), and most likely, divine (?????????/*theiotatoi*), were Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta while they shared power, so the decree (?????????/*psêphisma*) must date between 209 and 211 CE.

The unique content of the inscription certainly complicates its analysis. We are informed that individuals – both of free and slave status – had been accused of exchanging (?????????????/*ameibomenos*) money without belonging to a bank (?????????/*trapeza*). This was an illegal activity but the resolution distinguishes two types of offenders. On the one hand, those who did not charge a commission (?????????/*kollybos*) could be asked to pay to both the accuser and the banker as explained in lines 22 to 25. On the other hand, the ones that benefitted from the commission were more severely punished, because not only did they need to return the money but also had to pay a fine to the imperial fiscus (?????????/*tameion*) and the people of the city. In the case of a slave, the master had to hand him over to the magistrates (?????????/*archontes*) of the council who would then proceed with his lashing (?????????????????/*masteigousthai*) and imprisonment in a cell (?????????????/*praktoreion*). This legal



distinction is therefore relevant as it shows that exemptions from some harsh punishments did not just operate for Roman citizens but also for common provincials of free status. Likewise, the document sheds light on the considerable powers that local courts still retained outside of imperial jurisdiction. Between lines 35 and 44, the decree actually elaborates on the judicial procedures that should be conducted in order to make the previous clauses effective. The accusations (????????????/prosangelia) were to be handled by a board of magistrates who published the public notice (????????/prographê) within three days and summoned councillors also subject to fines. As common in resolutions of Greek cities, the text had to be inscribed on a stele and placed at prominent location – in this case, the market square (????/agora) – because the regulations were meant to prevail.

The last part of the decree is particularly interesting because it justifies the urgency, gravity and exhaustiveness of the entire procedure. The institutions of the city affirm that the general situation was shaky (????????/saleuei) because of malpractices that prevented having what was necessary (????????/epitêdia), reduced the resources of the population and, consequently, crippled the abundance (????????/euporia) funding the taxes (????/phorai) for the emperors. Indeed, the problems that banking activities could generate is best illustrated by a letter sent to Pergamum in which probably an emperor tried to put an end to illegal profits (*IGRR* IV.352). In the case of Mylasa, greedy bankers were not at stake but rather abuses in the management of local coinage. Communities in the eastern Mediterranean could still produce under Roman rule their own bronze coins that had exchange rates with the imperial issues (see Howgego, *Coinage*). The system was restricted to a limited number of banking agents in Mylasa but it failed to prevent the emergence of a black market which, as shown by our inscription, threatened local finances. What is more remarkable, however, is that the city appears to be mostly preoccupied with the negative effects that these local issues and communal procedures may have on a duty imposed by Rome, namely the collection of taxes. The interdependence between Mylasa's practices and Roman rule becomes even more evident in the bottom – and again fragmentary – part of the inscription. A reference to the leading role (????????/hêgemonia) is made in connection with the solution previously attributed to the imperial fortune. Furthermore, the local resolution of the Greek city decided to introduce an acclamation (quite surprisingly in Latin: *succlamatum est*), which celebrated the eternity (?? ?????/is aiôna) and invincibility of the rulers (????????/anikêtoi kyrioi).

Such exaltations of the eternity and hegemony of Rome and its emperors were not unprecedented in the Greek East, as shown for example by the foundation of Praxias and inscriptions from Thyateira and Amastris. In the case of Mylasa, another important aspect also needs to be taken into consideration even if it is not directly stated in the surviving decree. Such financial problems of the city could not have gone unnoticed to Roman personnel concerned with imperial revenues. Our resolution therefore did not only serve to solve local issues but also to let the provincial administration know of the efforts undertaken by the affected community. Consequently, one should not automatically interpret that this document presents a purely independent and unbiased narrative. And yet, it is relevant to observe that provincials struggling to pay Roman taxes still agreed to convey and proclaim messages of unmistakable loyalty, devotion and imperial ideology.

Keywords in the original language:

- [????????????](#) [3]
- [?????](#) [4]
- [?????](#) [5]
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Thematic keywords:

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- [Roman power](#) [45]
- [market](#) [46]

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### [Coinage and identity in the Roman Provinces](#) [50]



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**Other sources connected with this document:** Inscription

## [Funerary Foundation of Titus Praxias and the Eternal Rule of the Romans \[51\]](#)

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 \[51\]](#)

Inscription

## [Thyateira, the Roman Senate, and Roman Hegemony \[52\]](#)

The people of Thyateira dedicate a monument to the emperor Nerva, the Senate, and the Roman hegemony

- [Read more about Thyateira, the Roman Senate, and Roman Hegemony \[52\]](#)

Inscription

## [Amastris and the everlasting hegemony of the Romans under Hadrian \[53\]](#)

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.

- [Read more about Amastris and the everlasting hegemony of the Romans under Hadrian \[53\]](#)

Inscription

## [A Jewish Vow for the Salvation of the Severans from Qazion \[54\]](#)

A group of Jews dedicates a vow to the salvation of Septimius Severus, Caracalla, Geta and Iulia Domna. It belongs to a building project of controversial nature.

- [Read more about A Jewish Vow for the Salvation of the Severans from Qazion \[54\]](#)

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