Octavian and the Roman citizenship of Seleukos of Rhosos

rhosos_seleukos.jpeg



[1]

Octavian sends several letters to the city of Rhosos concerning the rights and privileges granted to his sea-captain Seleukos

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

Original Location/Place: Necropolis of Rhosos

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

Date: 42 BCE to 30 BCE Physical Characteristics:

The long rectangular limestone block is currently broken into two pieces. The top of the stone is irregularly mutilated – especially on the right edge – but the bottom has a smooth shape. On the right side there is a moulded frame measuring c. 5 centimetres. The reading of the letters becomes difficult after line 20 and, especially, between 25 and 51. The stonecutter only rarely omits letters but the general style is not outstanding, as it is also normal in other 1st century BCE inscriptions from the Greek East. There is neither separation nor marks of punctuation between the words. However, the different documents and clauses of the dossier are normally separated with either a new paragraph or a *vacat*.

Material: Limestone

Measurements: The stone is 139 centimetres in height, 58 centimetres in width, and 15 centimetres thick. The

letters are 7 centimetres tall on average, but 10 centimetres in the first line

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: Raggi, *Seleuco di Rhosos*, p. 24-32 (*SEG* 54.1625; *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* III,1.718)

Commentary:

This dossier comprises four documents dealing with the Roman citizenship granted by Octavian to his sea-captain Seleukos. Our selection only contains in full documents I and IV, the less fragmentary clauses of document II, but not document II. Documents I, III and IV are letters directly sent by Octavian to the local institutions of Rhosos [2]. Document II specifies the nature, rights, and benefits of this Roman citizenship.

The first letter (I. 1-8) acts as a preamble of the long official record attached below. It can be dated to the year 35/4 BCE on the basis of both the local era opening the inscription (????? ??) and the titulature displayed by Octavian (4th time imperator, 2nd and 3rd time consul designatus). The recipients are the magistrates, council and people of Rhosos, who are described as "holy and inviolate and autonomous." This city on the border between the provinces of Cilicia and Syria was never particularly prominent. Everything indicates that Rhosos heavily supported the triumviri following Julius Caesar's death since its privileged titulature has no precedents before the end of the Roman Republic. This support and grant would also explain that the local era most likely started in the year 42 BCE as it can be established from coins with Commodus's and Crispina's portraits (*Roman Provincial Coinage* IV.6279 [3]). A contemporary coin (*RPC* IV.6300 [4]) also confirms that the city was still considered "sacred and autonomous with asylum" in the imperial age.



As the dossier later informs, Rhosos was Seleukos's homeland. With this cover - and largely formulaic - letter Octavian wants the local institutions of the city to register a copy of Seleukos's grant of citizenship in the local archives (??????? ???????/dêmosia grammata). He also requests that copies are sent to the most important urban centres of the region: Tarsus, Antioch and, possibly, Seleucia. The record of this document had been extracted from a stele placed at the Capitol of Rome (I. 5). The use of the verb ??????/exelêphthê (???????/eklambanô) is important to understand document II but, at the same time, obscures its exact juridical format (see Sherk, Roman Documents, p. 302-304). Since this is not an exact copy, we cannot know whether the text attached below corresponds to an edict, a decree, a law or even a commentary (see Raggi, Seleuco, p. 76-85). For example, it is obvious that line 9 was subject to modification as the name of Octavian appears alone without a reference to his colleagues in the triumvirate; especially Mark Antony who was in charge of the eastern Mediterranean when this decision was adopted. This is, of course, caused by the fact that this dossier was inscribed after the Battle of Actium. The scribe, however, did not care to alter the plural form ?????/edôkan in line 11 which does not match with the singular subject ?????????/autokratôr. Given the unclear nature of the text, it is equally impossible to elucidate with certainty whether Seleukos's Roman citizenship was granted only on a personal basis (viritim), or because he belonged to a larger group enfranchised en bloc (see Roussel, "Un syrien," p. 46-51; Guarducci, "Intorno alla iscrizione," p. 55; De Visscher, "Le statut" vs. Levi, "La grande iscrizione," p. 123).

After explaining such motives, the next clause of the text specifies the terms of this grant. As mentioned above, it did not only included Roman citizenship (???????/politeia) but also immunity (???????/aneisphoria) for Seleukos, his parents, wife, and descendants. The sequence contained in lines 21 to 23 is even clearer as to the very privileged status given to them. This slightly periphrastic Greek expression corresponds to the Roman juridical category of optima lege optimoque iure cives Romani immunes. Two different issues arise from this equivalence. On the one hand, this is exactly the clause used by Octavian in the so-called Edicta de privilegiis veteranorum (BGU 2 no. 628 l. 10-11), which also dates to the triumviral period. Seleukos falls into this category of veterans and it is tempting to link his enfranchisement with this more general grant of immunity (see Wolff, Die Entwicklung, p. 68-97). However, the available text refers specifically to Seleukos's actions and involvement and it is phrased as if it was granted on an individual basis. Probably, the best way to solve this issue was proposed by Sherk, Roman Documents p. 304, who drew an analogy between this personalised record of Roman citizenship and the drafting of Roman military diplomas in the imperial period.

The second issue raised by Octavian's grant to Seleukos is more crucial for understanding the development of



Roman citizenship at the end of the Republic. This grant is chronologically placed between two fundamental and, rather, antagonist testimonies dealing with the problem of dual citizenship. According to Cicero, such dual citizenships were not allowed under Roman law as famously spelled out in the Pro Balbo 28.1: *duarum civitatum civis noster esse iure civili nemo potest*. By contrast, Augustus between 7 and 4 BCE. in the so-called Cyrene Edicts ratifies this possibility. Furthermore, he tries to regulate precisely the controversies caused by Roman citizens that still had to contribute to the fiscal and civic burdens to which the Greeks in the area were subject. In other words, the Cyrene edicts distinguish between two types of Roman citizens: the ones granted both Roman citizenship and immunity; and those without immunity from such local obligations. The controversial point among scholars is to determine whether this distinction was already in place in the triumviral period (see e.g. De Visscher, "Le statut;" Arangio-Ruiz, "Sul problema della doppia cittadinanza;" Sherwin-White, Roman Citizenship, p. 295-306; Link, "ut optimo iure;" Ferrary, "Les Grecs"). In the case of Seleukos, this academic discussion is theoretical rather than practical because he was granted both citizenship and immunity simultaneously. Likewise, it is particularly interesting to note that, according to Flavius Josephus (*Jewish War* I.194), Antipater – Herod's father – was also awarded "Roman citizenship with immunity from all types of charges" (Gilboa, "L'octroi de la citoyenneté").

After line 23 the reading of the inscription becomes quite problematic and fragmentary until approximately line 52. We know that this section contained what is referred to as ????????/philanthropa in Greek or beneficia in Latin; i.e. a list of the privileges attached to this grant of citizenship. The first of these in line 24 is the possibility of being registered in the tribe Cornelia, which belonged to the original group of tribus rusticae and was, therefore, prestigious. This adscription also allowed Seleukos and his family to make use of their ius sufragii. The text continues with several exemptions, e.g. they were not obliged to provide lodging to Roman officials (I. 33-36). Our edition starts again from line 53 which includes interesting aspects relating to the application of Roman and local law in the provinces. The first of such clauses (I. 53-59) refers to the privilegium fori. This is the possibility that the Romans had to choose the courts in which their cases were to be tried. It could be either at home according to local laws, free cities which were outside the governor's jurisdiction (e.g. Chios; see Ferrary "La liberté des citées"), or before Roman magistrates. The second clause (I. 60-63) pertains to the ius legationis. This means that, in cases where capital judgement was at stake (????????????? = praeiudicium capitis), Roman citizens could send an embassy to the Senate and to the magistrates of the Republic. The advantageous legal status resulting from such privileges – also recorded in the S.C. de Asclepiade – caused huge controversy among eastern provincials and the Cyrene edicts tried to solve this issue. The record of Seleukos's grant of citizenship finishes with the sanctio, common to other Roman legal texts, in which a fine and the means to exact it are described; naturally if the clauses of the resolution are not respected.

Our edition continues with the fourth document of the dossier (I. 85-93), which contains another letter sent by Octavian to Rhosos. It is dated to 30 BCE. because of the titles "imperator for the 6th time and consul for the 4th" and repeats the formulas used in the opening epistle; i.e. the special status of the eastern city and his well-being with the army. The rest just reiterates Seleukos's good-will (??????/eunoia), loyalty (??????/pistis), and bravery (??????/andreia); with the corresponding award of "benefactions, tax-exemption and citizenship". The only addition is Octavian's personal recommendation so that the sea-captain is again received in his homeland. We may therefore infer that Seleukos's service in the navy finished after the Battle of Actium – in which naval prowess was again fundamental— and he decided to come back to his city of origin. What is more difficult to decide is whether such a commendation was something customary or Seleukos actually needed to apply for the right to relocate there. Whatever the case may be, Octavian in lines 92 and 93 provides the institutions of Rhosos with the best argument to accept Seleukos's return. He was indebted to this man and, consequently, would favour the city in which his sea-captain was hosted. Document III – not featured in our edition – records one of such instances: Octavian had listened more carefully an embassy sent by Rhosos to Ephesus because of his affection towards Seleukos, who was actually leading the delegation. After the Roman general's final victory, no polis in the East would obviously reject the possibility of establishing bonds of friendship with the future dynastic ruler.

Keywords in the original language:

- <u>????????</u> [5]
- ?????? [6]
- ???? [7]
- <u>??????</u> [8]

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Thematic keywords:

- Octavian [40]
- Augustus [41]
- Roman citizenship [42]
- Roman Republic [43]
- <u>immunity</u> [44]
- dual-citizenship [45]
- triumvirate [46]
- navy [47]
- privileges [48]
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- court [50]
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- <u>embassy</u> [52]
- Roman tribe [53]
- <u>archive</u> [54]

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• Read more about Senatus Consultum de Asclepiade [72]

Inscription

Cyrene Edicts of Augustus: I and III [73]

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 [73]

Inscription

An Augustan governor on the freedom of Chios [74]

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

Read more about An Augustan governor on the freedom of Chios [74]

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