

On the news of Trajan's death and Hadrian's accession, embassies from every part of the empire were sent to pay homage to the new Emperor. They carried letters of congratulations with them and each received a written answer which would be taken home and proudly reproduced in stone to be displayed in a public space. A letter of thanks from Hadrian to Hierapolis happens to be preserved.

Shortly after Hadrian's accession, the Phrygian town of **Hierapolis** sent an embassy to congratulate Hadrian on his succession to the throne. Hadrian dictated a reply which he addressed to the magistrates, the Boulé and the Demos of Hierapolis.

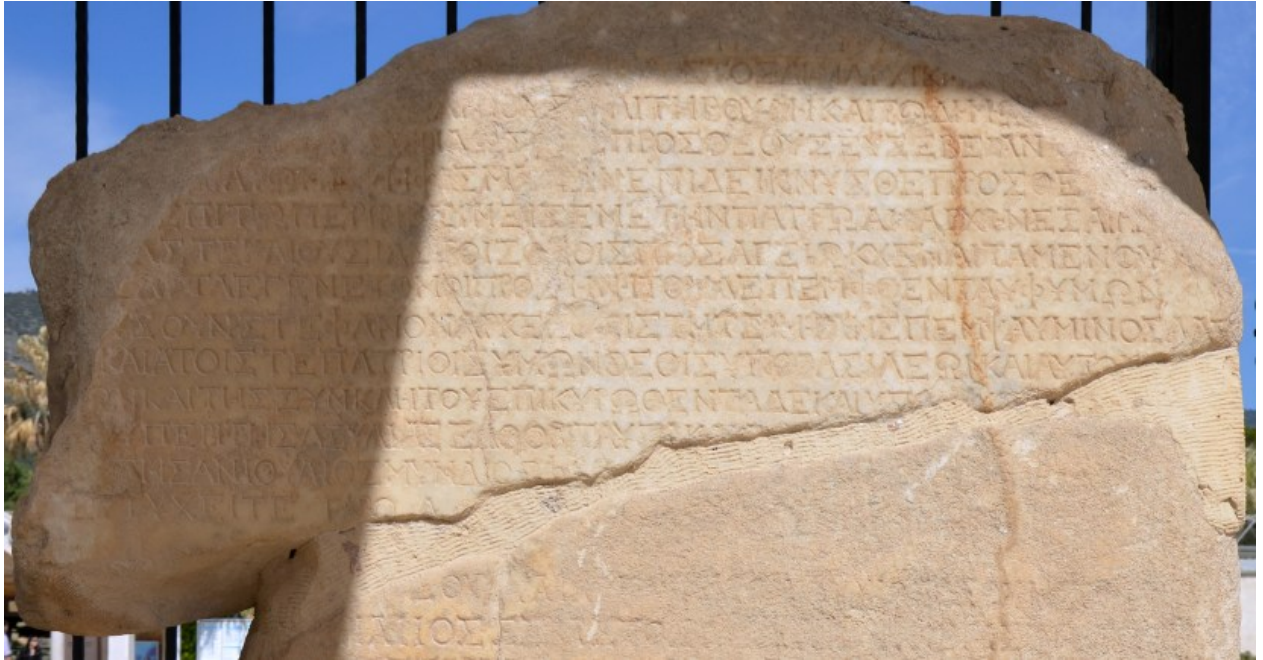
Housed in the garden of the museum of Hierapolis is a slab of white marble bearing copies of two letters of Hadrian. The two letters are separated by a blank space and the letter in question is written on the upper part of the slab. It is dated to AD 117, soon after Hadrian's accession, and is therefore the oldest official document of the reign of Hadrian that has reached us.



SEG 55- 1415- 1416. Hierapolis. Letters of Hadrian, AD 117/130.

The text, written in Greek, has been reconstructed by Tullia Ritti in 2006 in her “An Epigraphic Guide to Hierapolis of Phrygia (Pamukkale)”.

*“The Emperor Caesar Hadrian Augustus, son of the divine Trajan Parthicus, grandson of the divine Nerva, tribune of the plebs, hails the magistrates and the Council and the people of Hierapolis. The devotion that since the time of your forebears you have cultivated and now [confirm] through your decrees, already before [...] and for having accomplished exceptional prayers and sacrifices because the paternal power has been transmitted to me. These things thus pleased me, but the crown of gold that you have sent me, I have sent it back to you, feeling satisfied by the honour. As far as concerns the rights of asylum that were given to your ancestral gods by the kings and emperors and the senate, that have been ratified even by the divine Trajan, I [confirm] them as well. They spoke (as ambassadors) Julius Myndios, Philo—]. Hail. The day before the [— of the month of —, from —].”*



SEG 55- 1415. Hierapolis. Letter of Hadrian, AD 117.

The inscription tells us that the congratulatory embassy sent to Hadrian upon his accessions was led by Tiberius Iulius Myndios, a Hierapolitan elite and a considerable benefactor of the city also known through other inscriptions as *sacerdos* (priest) of Zeus. The accompanying letter presented the city's privileges of asylum and requested confirmation. It had been the custom to demand of every new emperor a confirmation of the privileges enjoyed by the communities.

The city of Hierapolis was granted the right to asylum (shelter attributed to its sanctuaries) during the reign of the Hellenistic kings in order to provide a refuge to their subjects during the many wars. During the Roman period the right of asylum possessed by the Greek sanctuaries in Greece and Asia Minor was maintained but its abuse led to a considerable reduction of the number of asylums under Tiberius (see [Tac. Ann. 3.60-63](#)). In the case of Hierapolis, the right of asylum was confirmed continuously by the various emperors down to Trajan. Hadrian consented to this tradition and allowed Hierapolis to enjoy this prestigious privilege.





*Frontinus Street extending in the north-south direction. It was the main axis of the city.*

The inscription also tells us that, as a sign of generosity, the emperor renounced the city's offer of the *aurum coronarium* (Latin "gold for the crown"). The crown tax was a large sum of money donated by the provinces to victorious Roman generals and later to emperors upon accession. Originally it was a voluntary contribution under the Republic but later it became a mandatory tax under the Empire, collected by every new emperor and also on other occasions, as, for instance, on the adoption of Antoninus Pius. When Roman rule changed hands every two or three years in the 3rd century AD, wealthy towns felt obliged to ask for a reduction not being able to sustain the cost.

Hadrian was not the first emperor to show benevolence toward cities. The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* claims Augustus refused 35,000 pounds of *aurum coronarium* offered by the towns of Italy after his victory at Actium.

*In my fifth consulship [28 BC] I remitted 55,000 lb. of aurum coronarium contributed by the municipia and colonies of Italy to my triumphs, and later, whenever I was acclaimed imperator, I refused the aurum coronarium which the municipia and colonies continued to vote with the same good will as before. Res Gestae Divi Augusti [trans. P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore]*

The slab with the two letters were found collapsed near the northern wall of the *diazoma* of the Roman theatre of Hierapolis where it was thought to be have been displayed publicly. However, according to recent studies, the inscriptions could be instead part a monumental altar dedicated to Hadrian and the Twelve Gods.



*The Roman Theatre of Hierapolis, built in the 2nd century AD under the reign of Hadrian. It has been the object of important restorations between 2004 and 2014.*

Hadrian is believed to have visited Hierapolis in AD 129 during his stay in nearby [Laodicea](#). His visit resulted in the rebuilding of the theatre and the worship of the emperor. We know from an inscription ([SEG 41- 1200](#)) that a building was dedicated to Zeus Olympios, the Theoi Patrioi (ancestral gods), Hadrian, the imperial family, and the Demos by Tiberius Iulius Myndios on behalf of his wife, Aelia Glykonis, who was the priestess of the Dodekatheon. This dedication, in addition to the two letters discussed here, appear to belong to the podium of the monumental altar built in honour of the emperor.



1 Διὶ Ὀλυμπίῳ καὶ θεοῖς πατρίοις καὶ Αὐτοκράτορι Καίσα[ρι Τ]ραιανῶ Ἀδριανῶ  
Σεβασ[τ]ῶ κ[αὶ τ]ῶ [σύ]ν[παν]τι οἴκῳ τῶν Σεβαστῶν καὶ τῶ Δήμῳ τῶν  
[Ἱερ]απολειτῶν Τιβέριος Ἰούλι[ο]ς Μ[ύνδ]ιος τὸ ἔργον κα[— — τὸ Δ]ωδεκάθ[εον  
[— — —] Γλυκωνίδος τῆς γυναικὸς ὀνόματι [τῆ]ς ἱερείας τοῦ Δωδεκαθ[έ]ου  
5 κατασκευάσας ἐ[— — ἄ]λλα ἐν αὐτῶ ἱερά ἀπὸ ἰδίας προαιρέσεως συνκαθ[ιέρωσε].

SEG 41-1200

In addition, a marble head of Hadrian found in front of the theatre in 1965 appears to be connected to the altar. It is thought to have belonged to a life-size statue, which, according to the research of F. Masino and G. Sobrà, could correctly fit the space of the central aedicule of the Altar.





*Colossal marble head of Hadrian found at Hierapolis (Archivio MAIER).*

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