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### Hellenistic and Roman Pergamon

Five centuries of history illuminated by inscriptions

Helmut Müller

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# Hellenistic and Roman Pergamon

Five centuries of history illuminated by inscriptions

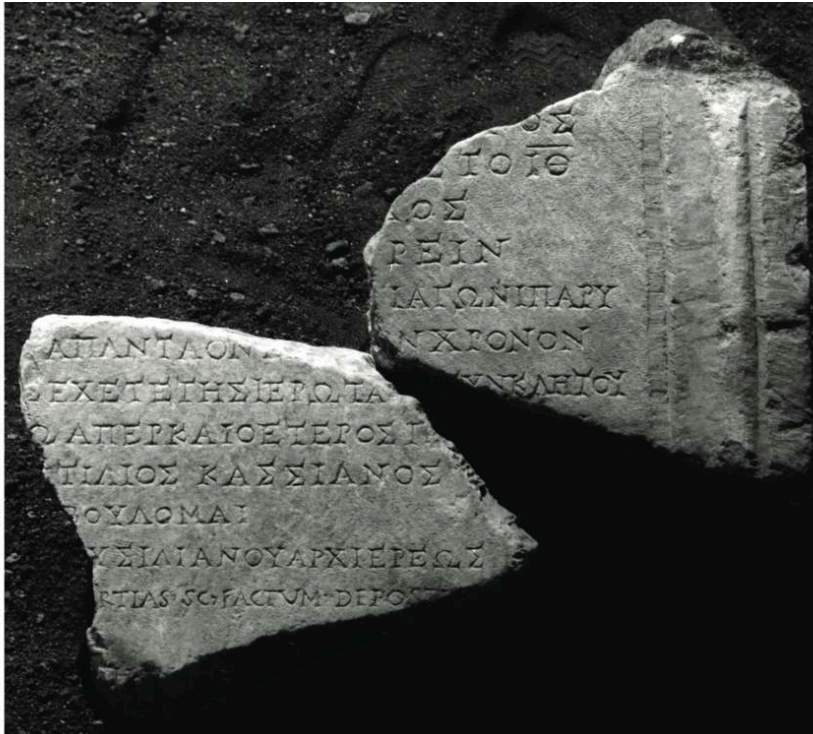
Helmut Müller

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Source : La lettre, no. 38, June 2014

- 1 Last autumn Prof. Helmut Müller (from Munich), a recognized specialist on Pergamon epigraphy and on the history of Greco-Roman Asia Minor in general, delivered four lectures at the Collège de France. He provided extensive insight into the contribution of a set of inscriptions – several of which are new and hitherto unknown – on the singular history of this city of Western Anatolia. From the mid-third century BCE, Pergamon was to become the capital of the powerful Attalid kings and later, during the High Empire, remained one of the metropolises of the Roman province of Asia.



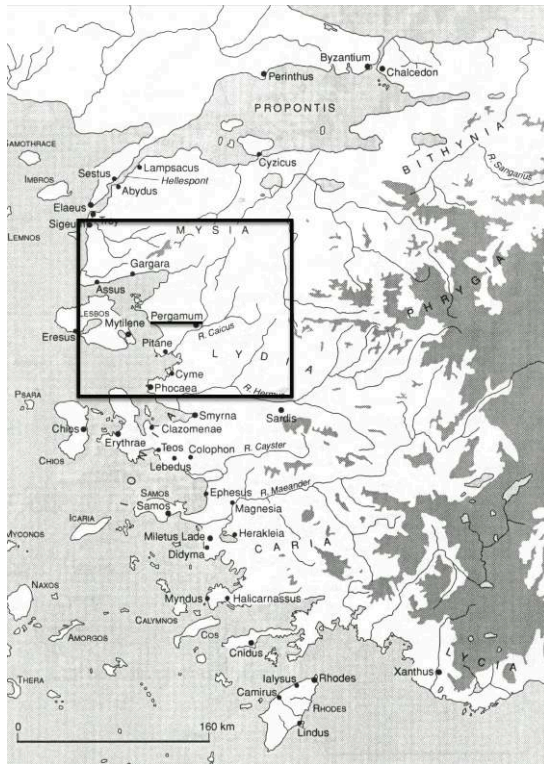
Letter from Trajan

- 2 Thus, regarding the early days of the city – at the time when it was still in the hands of Greek dynasts controlled by the King of Persia –, the epitaph of a man from Chalcis in Euboea found in the vicinity of the city sheds light on a passage in Xenophon's *Anabasis* on the presence of a Euboean ruling family in 399 BCE. Much later inscriptions also prove valuable in this respect : a summary of the history of Pergamon written in the 2nd century CE, for example, reveals the two successive transfers (from the acropolis to the plain, and then the other way around) imposed on the local population by the Persians, along with the appearance of the first political bodies characteristic of a Greek city.

## The Hellenistic period

- 3 The crucial event was then the arrival of Alexander, King of Macedonia, in Asia in the autumn of 334 BCE. This takeover, as well as the conqueror's life, are attested to by the long (unlimited) land lease discovered in the lower valley of the Caicus river, therefore near Pergamon, bearing witness to Macedonian settlers occupying the country. The subsequent split occurs with the establishment, in the city, of Philetaerus (283-263 BCE), who was to become the founder of the Attalid dynasty. His attitude towards neighbouring cities can be gleaned from a decree by Cyme of Aeolis that was recently published. His successor, Eumenes (I), inaugurated a new chapter in the dynasty's history when he managed to get rid of the suzerainty of the Seleucid kings. The deal this quasi king had to make with his mercenaries nevertheless reveals just how precarious his domination still was. One of his letters also sheds light on his position in relation to the political authorities of the city. After a victory over the Galatia – a people of Celtic origin settled in Asia Minor – his successor Attalus I was able to proclaim himself king. Later, he formed an alliance with the Romans that would prove

decisive when he fought King Philip V in the first two Macedonian wars (212-197). The kingdom however only reached its zenith with his son, Eumenes II (197-158), who took advantage of the capitulation of the Seleucid King Antiochus III to the Romans in 190, to expand considerably the kingdom of Pergamon. He successfully annexed most Seleucid possessions, allowing the Attalid State to become a great power on a Mediterranean scale, while on a cultural level the city of Pergamon joined the ranks of the other Hellenistic metropolises (as evidenced, in urban planning, by the famous *Astynomoi* Law). The complexity of the civil and military administration of this vast kingdom transpires through several newfound documents, dated from the last decade of the reign of Eumenes II.



Pergamon's location in Asia Minor

- 4 The last prince of the dynasty, Attalus III (138-133), the son of King Eumenes II and successor of Attalus II (158-138), has been mistreated by the literary tradition. The epigraphy shows that the Pergamon population actually continued to honour him even after his death. Unexpectedly, he left his kingdom to the Romans in his will, while Pergamon and most of the old cities of the Aegean coast were declared free. However the Romans had to wage a war for over four years (133-129) before they could lay hands on this legacy, as an illegitimate son of Eumenes II, Aristonikos (under the name of King Eumenes III), claimed domination of the kingdom. A growing number of documents tell us that he managed to rally the military colonies and inland cities of the kingdom against those of the coast – including the city of Pergamon –, which received support from the Romans. Yet Aristonikos failed to seize the former capital, probably because emergency measures were taken to integrate previously excluded residents as citizens.

## The Roman period

- 5 Following Rome's victory, the city was declared free – in keeping with the will of Attalus III – and thus escaped the control of the governor of the province of Asia created in 129 BCE. The new elite of the city of Pergamon concentrated its energy on training exemplary citizens, as many decrees providing a wealth of information on life at the gymnasium attest. Yet in 88 BCE most of the population rallied to Mithridates VI, King of Pontus, and took part in the massacre of the Romans settled in the city. Defeated by Sulla, the city lost its special status and, like most other Asian cities, was subjected to ruinous taxes. A few benefactors, such as the famous Diodoros Paspáros, nevertheless managed to obtain partial tax relief and maintain the smooth running of the gymnasium, after costly missions to the Roman authorities. Only Mithridates, son of Menodotus – who enjoyed Caesar's trust – successfully recovered immunity.
- 6 After defeating his opponents, Octavius – the future Augustus – allowed the umbrella body of the cities of the province of Asia to set up the common worship centre of the Emperor and Rome in Pergamon (29 BCE). From this date, which inaugurated the principate, Pergamon's main objective was to maintain, or to restore in some instances, its status as one of the great cities of Asia. Under Trajan, the city once again managed to surpass its rivals when it obtained the privilege of a second temple of the imperial cult with the erection of the *Trajanéum*. But Hadrian unexpectedly vetoed the construction of a third temple, a project that was the city's last attempt to get the better of its old rivals, Ephesus and Smyrna. Never again was Pergamon to recover its lost pre-eminence within the community of Asian cities.

- Prof. Helmut Müller was invited by the Faculty, on Prof. Denis Knoepfler's suggestion.

- Videos of these lectures are available at [www.college-de-france.fr](http://www.college-de-france.fr), on Denis Knoepfler's page.

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