

**Water Structures and Propaganda in the Anatolian Provinces during
the Roman Imperial Period**

Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi'nde Anadolu Eyaletlerinde Su Yapıları ile
Propaganda

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Öz

MS 1. Yüzyıldan itibaren Roma İmparatorluğu'nun büyük imar faaliyetlerine girişmiş olması kentlerin çehresini değiştirmiştir. İmparatorlar bu değişimleri tüm dünyaya göstermek amacı ile sikkeleri, heykelleri, anıtsal mimariyi propaganda aracı olarak kullanmaya başlamıştır. Gelişen ve değişen inşa teknikleri sayesinde form ve işlev açısından değişikliklere uğrayan aquaductler, hamamlar ve nymphaeumlar verdikleri hizmetin dışında anıtsal mimarinin bir parçası olmuş, imparatorluğun yapılar vasıtasıyla yaptığı propagandanın bir parçası olarak tarih sahnesindeki yerini almıştır. Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi'nde eyaletlerde gerçekleştirilen su ile ilgili imar faaliyetleri yurttaşların bağlılığını ve saygısını kazanmanın yanı sıra, imparatorluğun büyüklüğünü göstermek açısından ciddi bir propaganda olarak kullanılmıştır. İmparator tarafından yapılan propagandalar, Romalı olmayı özendirirken yanı sıra imparatorun ilahlaştırılmasına da (İmparator Kültü) katkı sağlamıştır. Proconsullerin eyaletlerde gerçekleştirdiği su ile ilgili imar faaliyetleri imparatora/imparatorluğa ve yurttaşlara olan hizmet sorumluluğunun dışında yapmış oldukları propagandanın sonucu olarak imparatorluk hiyerarşisinin basamaklarında yükselmeye vesile olmuştur. Kentlerde yerel elitlerin su ile ilgili imar faaliyetleriyle yapmış oldukları propagandalar, hemşehrilerinin saygı ve minnetini kazanmanın yanı sıra yüksek memuriyetlere atanmak, vatandaşlık şerefini elde etmek gibi imtiyazlarla kavuşmalarına imkân tanımıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi, Su Yapıları, Propaganda, İmar Faaliyetleri, Hayırseverlik.

Abstract

From the 1st century CE onward, the extensive building programs undertaken by the Roman Empire fundamentally transformed the urban landscape of its cities. Emperors increasingly employed coinage, statuary, and monumental architecture as instruments of propaganda to project these transformations across the empire. As construction techniques evolved, aqueducts, baths, and nymphaea underwent significant changes in both form and function, transcending their utilitarian roles to become integral components of monumental architecture and, by extension, of imperial propaganda communicated through built form. Water-related building activity in the provinces during the Roman

Imperial period served a dual purpose: it secured the loyalty and esteem of provincial citizens while simultaneously demonstrating the grandeur of the empire. Such imperial propaganda not only promoted Roman identity but also contributed to the deification of the emperor through the imperial cult. For pro-consuls, sponsoring hydraulic infrastructure in the provinces fulfilled their duty of service to the emperor and to the citizenry, while also functioning as a form of self-promotion that facilitated advancement within the imperial administrative hierarchy. Similarly, local elites who financed water-related construction projects in their home cities gained not only the gratitude and respect of their fellow citizens but also access to privileges such as appointment to high office and the honor of civic distinction.

Keywords: Roman Imperial Period, Water Structures, Propaganda, Construction Activities, Euergetizm.

Introduction

Propaganda can be defined as the totality of activities carried out through oral and written means to introduce, in still, and disseminate a particular doctrine, idea, or belief¹. From the perspective of the state, propaganda may be understood as the effort to convey the services rendered to the public through visual and auditory instruments, thereby securing the community's respect and appreciation.

Within this framework, the Roman Empire sought to promote Roman identity through the colonies it established in the provinces and made deliberate, systematic use of urban building activity as a vehicle of propaganda. To support this process, the empire effectively employed coinage, monumental architecture, literature, and public buildings as propaganda instruments².

Architectural structures constituted one of the most visible and effective elements of propaganda in the cities. Because literacy rates within the boundaries of the Roman Empire were low, written propaganda tools proved

¹ Türk Dil Kurumu, *TDK Dictionary*, 5th ed. (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 2014).

² Andrea U. De Giorgi, "Colonial Space and the City: Augustus's Geopolitics in Pisidia", ed. Rebecca J. Sweetman, *Roman Colonies in the First Century of Their Foundation* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 137--138.

insufficient to reach broad segments of society. For this reason, the display of monumental and imposing buildings in public spaces, made available for the use of the populace, became an effective propaganda strategy, particularly under the reign of Augustus³.

Indeed, Augustus's claim to have "*found Rome built of brick and left it in marble*" a statement made within the context of the *Res Gestae*, clearly reveals the ideological dimension of the building activity undertaken in the city of Rome⁴. Augustus's aspiration to extend this conception of construction to all the provinces of the empire constitutes a political legacy he bequeathed to his successors. Accordingly, architectural structures came to serve not merely as elements enhancing urban aesthetics, but also as propaganda instruments that strengthened citizens' loyalty toward the emperor and the empire⁵.

The impact of building activity on the urban skyline contributed to the perception of the emperor as a ruler who cared for his people and beautified the city. This propagandistic message spread across the entire territory of the empire not only through architectural structures themselves but also through their depiction on coinage. In this way, propaganda was disseminated through these images wherever imperial currency circulated, and this practice was subsequently maintained by later emperors⁶.

This study examines the propaganda activities carried out through water structures in the Anatolian provinces during the Roman Imperial period. Considering ancient sources and modern scholarship, the propagandistic functions of structures such as aqueducts, baths, and nymphaea are analysed. In addition, the propaganda activities conducted through these structures by emperors, proconsuls, and local elites in the Anatolian provinces are addressed.

³ James Morwood, "Aeneas, Augustus and the Theme of the City", *Greece & Rome* 38/2 (Ekim 1991): 212.

⁴ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary, 9 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 56.30.1–4; 52.41.1–2.

⁵ Engelbert Winter, *Staatliche Baupolitik und Baufürsorge in den römischen Provinzen des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, vol. 20 (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 1996), 23–24.

⁶ Lieke Meulenbroek, *The Imperial Message: Nero's Propaganda and Its Reception* (bachelor's Thesis, Faculty of Humanities, 2012), 24.

The study employs historical analysis together with a comparative method. Within this framework, the manner in which the phenomenon of propaganda in the Roman Empire was constructed through architecture and particularly through water structures is examined within its historical context. The research follows a descriptive and interpretive approach, with meaning derived from the available data.

The primary data sources of the research consist of ancient written documents and modern scholarly studies. Among the ancient sources are historians' accounts, inscriptions, and documents dating to the imperial period. In addition, epigraphic data, coinage, and archaeological finds constitute an important body of data for the study. Within the scope of the modern literature, academic works on Roman urbanization, propaganda, the history of architecture, and water structures have been examined. Through these sources, both a theoretical framework has been established and the findings obtained have been substantiated.

The research data were evaluated using qualitative data-analysis methods. Accordingly, water structures — aqueducts, baths, and nymphaea — are addressed not only in functional terms but also regarding their ideological and propagandistic dimensions. During the analysis, elements such as the façade architecture of the structures, the inscriptions they bear, and their depictions on coinage were evaluated together in order to examine how these buildings reflected imperial ideology. In addition, the purposes for which these structures were built by emperors, proconsuls, and local elites, and the effects of these activities on the urban populace, are interpreted.

This study rests on the limitations and states of preservation of the available ancient sources, together with the interpretations found in modern scholarship. In particular, the absence of archaeological data in certain regions has meant that the evaluations are, to a certain extent, interpretive in nature. Nevertheless, an effort has been made to enhance the reliability of the study through the combined use of different types of data.

1. Water Structures as Instruments of Propaganda in the Roman Empire

The roles of engineers and architects were paramount in transforming hydraulic structures which brought water, an indispensable element of life, to the

city into instruments of propaganda. The construction of water structures not only for functional purposes but also in monumental forms (particularly nymphaea, baths, and aqueducts) ensured that these edifices became symbols reflecting imperial power and sources of collective pride⁷.

Construction activities concerning water systems were presented by emperors and imperial administrators not merely as administrative duties, but as manifestations of *liberalitas* (imperial generosity) and the production of public utility. In this context, the structures in question functioned as propaganda vehicles through their monumental facade arrangements and the inscriptions they bore⁸.

The technical and aesthetic sophistication attained by hydraulic structures in the Roman Empire was lauded by ancient authors. Indeed, Pliny the Elder expresses the magnitude of water systems and their engineering prowess with the following words:

*"If we only take into consideration the abundant supply of water in public buildings, baths, pools, open channels, private houses, gardens and country estates; if we consider the distances traversed by the water before it arrives, the raising of arches, the tunneling of mountains and the building of level routes across deep valleys, we shall readily admit that there is nothing more remarkable in the whole world."*⁹

Similarly, Frontinus emphasizes the superiority of Roman water structures, stating that these works are incomparable to other monumental edifices:

*"With such an array of indispensable structures carrying so many waters, compare, if you will, the idle Pyramids or the useless, though famous, works of the Greeks."*¹⁰

The fact that both Pliny and Frontinus held high-ranking positions within the Roman Empire demonstrates that their evaluations of water structures were not merely personal opinions; rather, they reflected the significance attributed

⁷ Winter, *Staatliche Baupolitik und Baufürsorge in den römischen Provinzen des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, 51.

⁸ Stephen Mitchell, "Imperial Building in the Eastern Roman Provinces," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* (1987): 333–334.

⁹ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, ed. H. R. Rackham (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1947), III.VI.123.

¹⁰ Sextus Iulius Frontinus, *De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae*, trans. R. H. Rodgers (Vermont: University of Vermont, 2003), I.16, 6.

to the propagandistic value of water and hydraulic edifices as an integral part of imperial ideology.

1.1. Aqueducts

The most significant data regarding the construction of aqueducts in the Roman Empire can be traced through epigraphic records. These documents demonstrate that hydraulic structures were not merely infrastructural investments but were conceived as ideological instruments reflecting the emperors' commitment to public service and their *liberalitas*¹¹. Inscriptions dating to the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius ensured that such structures were directly associated with imperial authority, thereby securing a place in the collective public memory¹².

Activities involving the construction and restoration of aqueducts undertaken by emperors further underscore the political significance of these edifices. Such efforts, carried out across different periods, indicate that water structures were systematically employed to render imperial authority visible¹³. The ideological function of aqueducts was not confined to inscriptions alone; it was also disseminated across the imperial geography through coinage¹⁴. Such visual representations established a robust link between public service and imperial legitimacy, revealing that aqueducts were structures imbued with ideological meaning rather than being purely functional¹⁵.

1.2. Baths (Thermae)

¹¹ Winter, *Staatliche Baupolitik und Baufürsorge in den römischen Provinzen des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, 306.

¹² Josef Keil, *Ephesos: Ein Führer durch die Ruinenstätte und ihre Geschichte* (Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1943).

¹³ Winter, *Staatliche Baupolitik und Baufürsorge in den römischen Provinzen des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, 315; Sencer Şahin, *Zeugma ve Bölge Tarihi* (Istanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2007), 103.

¹⁴ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 230.

¹⁵ Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 142.

From the early stages of the Roman Imperial Period, baths evolved beyond structures merely meeting the need for hygiene, transforming into multifunctional public spaces¹⁶. These complexes, where individuals socialized, engaged in athletics, and participated in various events, occupied a central position in urban life¹⁷. In this regard, baths became a significant sphere for the representation of the Roman way of life.

Over time, the expansion of baths in terms of scale and capacity indicates that these edifices became monumental structures reflecting not only functional utility but also imperial prosperity and organizational prowess¹⁸. This development enhanced the visibility of baths within the city, thereby strengthening their ideological function.

Epigraphic data reveal that emperors systematically utilized the construction and restoration of baths as instruments of public representation¹⁹. Such activities served to render imperial authority visible in cities while presenting the concept of public service within an ideological framework. The propagandistic function of baths was not limited to construction alone; it was further reinforced through architectural arrangements and interior decorative programs. Specifically, the representation of the emperor and the imperial family within these spaces through sculptural programs and inscriptions ensured that ideological messages were embedded directly into the practices of daily life²⁰.

This situation demonstrates that baths were not merely structures providing public services but were venues where imperial ideology was continuously reproduced. In this context, beyond the public utility they provided, baths should be evaluated as multifaceted propaganda tools that disseminated the

¹⁶ Fikret K. Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 30.

¹⁷ Anthony Farrington, "The Roman Baths of Lycia: An Architectural Study," *British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, Monograph 20* (1995): 23; K. Kretzschmer, *Römische Thermen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000), 106.

¹⁸ Francesco Gallo, *Terme e società nel mondo romano* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2007), 1.

¹⁹ Winter, *Staatliche Baupolitik und Baufürsorge in den römischen Provinzen des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, 319.

²⁰ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 32.

Roman lifestyle, rendered imperial authority visible, and strengthened social cohesion.

1.3. Nymphaea

During the Roman Imperial Period, nymphaea underwent a profound architectural evolution, transcending their origins as simple water-distribution points to become monumental facade arrangements and indispensable components of urban space. Characterized by vaulted roofs, apsidal plans, and the exhibition of statuary within exhedrae, these structures proliferated from the 1st century AD onwards, establishing themselves as a defining feature of the decorative landscape in Roman cities²¹.

This architectural shift underscores that nymphaea were conceived not merely through a functional lens, but as edifices imbued with deep ideological significance. Through their elaborate facades and curated sculptural programs, these structures were transformed into public stages for the visual manifestation of imperial ideology. Epigraphic evidence further confirms that nymphaea were systematically linked to the emperors' public works, serving as potent vehicles for ideological representation.

The propagandistic capacity of nymphaea was particularly amplified by their sculptural programs. The strategic placement of figures representing the emperor and the imperial family in central positions demonstrates that these structures were designed as more than just aesthetic landmarks; they functioned as "narrative surfaces" for ideological discourse. In this regard, nymphaea offered sophisticated visual compositions that articulated the emperor's *liberalitas*, authority, and divine legitimacy²². This mode of representation was not restricted to physical architecture and statuary but was disseminated throughout the empire via numismatic channels. This ideological representation was not confined to architecture and statuary programs alone but was also disseminated across the empire's geography through coinage. The appearance of nymphaeum depictions in numismatic representation indicates that these

²¹ L. Crema, "L'architettura romana nell'età della repubblica," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 1/4 (1973): 733.

²² Georgia Aristodimou, "Ephesus (Antiquity), Nymphaeum of Trajan," *Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World: Asia Minor* (2013), 3.

structures were perceived as images symbolizing imperial power, pointing to a close relationship between architecture and visual propaganda. Nymphaea should accordingly be regarded as multilayered propaganda instruments in which architectural form, statuary programs, and numismatic representation were employed together. These structures constitute significant sites of representation through which the ideological, political, and cultural discourse of the Roman Empire was reproduced within urban space.

2. Propaganda Activities through Water Structures in the Provinces of Anatolia

Public building activity in the provinces subject to the Roman Empire was shaped not solely by processes directed by the central authority but also by the active participation of local elites. The acquisition of various privileges by local elites in return for the public services they rendered encouraged these groups to engage in building activity. This situation laid the groundwork for a substantial portion of urban construction activity to be carried out through local resources and individual contributions, thereby supporting both the strengthening of local economies and the sustainability of the imperial system²³.

This process produced a structure based on mutual dependence and shared interest between the city and the empire. While imperial authority was rendered visible at the local level through public building activity, cities in turn expressed their loyalty and allegiance through various practices of honorific commemoration. This reciprocal relationship indicates that public buildings functioned not merely as functional investments but also as instruments generating prestige, loyalty, and ideological allegiance.

Within the scope of construction activities carried out in the provincial cities, roads, aqueducts, and other public works were systematically employed as elements of propaganda to both manifest imperial power and secure public support. In this context, a robust link was established between the direct benefits provided by public structures and the order maintained by imperial

²³ Cicero, *Pro Manilia or Oratio de imperio Cn. Pompei*, 6.1; Strabo, *Geographika*, 12.8.11.

authority, thereby strengthening the bond between the central administration and local society²⁴.

The construction of water structures in the provinces can be categorized according to their sources of funding. These edifices may be analyzed in two fundamental groups, those financed by the imperial or public treasury, and those realized by local elites within the framework of donation and philanthropic activities (euergetism). This binary structure demonstrates that the Roman Empire developed a balanced administrative model in the provinces, oscillating between central control and local participation. Therefore, hydraulic structures should be evaluated not merely as technical and economic investments, but as vital components of this multi-layered system of governance and representation.

2.1. Propaganda Activities of Emperors through Water Structures

In all the provinces subject to the Roman Empire, the construction of large-scale water structures carried out in parallel with propaganda efforts significantly increased the demand for water²⁵. With the accession of Augustus, building activity aimed at meeting cities' water needs gained momentum²⁶. Within the scope of this construction activity, aqueducts, baths, and nymphaea while constituting high-cost infrastructural elements also brought health, comfort, and prestige to the surrounding environment, thereby contributing to making cities more liveable. In addition, the water-related building activity carried out by the emperor in the provinces secured the loyalty and respect of his subjects while simultaneously functioning as an important propaganda instrument that displayed the greatness and power of the empire²⁷.

The inscription recording that Emperor Augustus had the "Aqua Iulia" aqueduct built in the city of Ephesus at the beginning of the first century CE states

²⁴ Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²⁵ H. Fahlbusch, "Vergleich antiker griechischer und römischer Wasserversorgungsanlage," *Mitteilungen aus dem Leichtweiß-Institut* 73 (1982): 173; G. Ünver, *Yazıtlar Işığında Karia Kentlerinde Yurttaşların Kent İmarına Katılımları* (PhD Diss., Akdeniz University, 2012), 146.

²⁶ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 19–20.

²⁷ Cassius Dio, *Rhomaika*, 56.30.3–4.

that this structure was built during his proconsulship²⁸. Similarly, the inscription concerning the "Aqua Throessitica" aqueduct states that this water channel was brought to the city under the patronage of Augustus and his son Tiberius, under the supervision of Gaius Sextilius Pollio, son of Publius, and the proconsul Gaius Ofillius²⁹. The information that the Aqua Throessitica was built by Augustus and Tiberius under the supervision of Pollio and Proculus is corroborated by both epigraphic data and modern scholarship³⁰. The rationale behind the emperor honoring Ephesus with two separate aqueducts may be linked to the city's steadfast loyalty to Rome during the Aristonicus revolt³¹. This situation illustrates that the Empire rewarded loyal cities through construction activities and, through such investments, sent a clear message to the provinces that every stance taken toward Rome would meet with a corresponding response. Consequently, these building activities should be evaluated not merely as infrastructural investments but as components of a deliberate propaganda strategy.

The inscription recording that Emperor Nero carried out the repair of an aqueduct in the city of Ephesus between 54 and 68 CE shows that this structure was rebuilt by Emperor Nero Caesar Augustus Germanicus and dedicated to the goddess Artemis³². The dedication of this public service to the goddess Artemis indicates that the emperor situated his public activity within a sacred framework. This produced a message that the emperor served both the gods and the populace, and it is accordingly understood that such structures functioned as an ideological propaganda instrument aimed at reinforcing the populace's respect and loyalty.

An inscription dating to 69/70 CE records the repair of a bath in the city of Olympos by Emperor Vespasian. This inscription identifies the emperor as "the

²⁸ IK 12, 2, No. 401; Engelbert Winter, *Staatliche Baupolitik.*, 306.

²⁹ J. Keil, *Denkmäler aus dem rauhen Kilikien* (1943), 102; IK 12, 2, No. 402; Winter, *Staatliche Baupolitik.*, 306..

³⁰ H. Uzunoğlu, *Epigrafik Belgeler Işığında Güney ve Güneybatı Anadolu'da Su ve Su Yapıları* (PhD Diss., Akdeniz University, 2018), 112.

³¹ D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 155.

³² D. Knibbe and B. İplikçioğlu, "Neue Inschriften aus Ephesos IX," *Jaherehefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts* 55 (1984): 121; SEG XXXIV, No. 1122; Winter, *Staatliche Baupolitik*, 315.

visible god of land and sea" and states that the structure was restored by him³³. This restored bath was probably damaged once again at a later date, since an inscription recording that the structure was rebuilt in 78 CE through the proconsul Titus Aurelius Quietus states that Vespasian is referred to by the same titles and that the bath was constructed anew from its foundations³⁴.

The attentiveness shown by emperors to the construction and repair of baths is related not only to policies of hygiene and health but also to policies aimed at preserving social order within cities. Indeed, an episode recounted by Philostratus in which the people of Ephesus, claiming that the baths were not adequately heated, resorted to violence against the proconsul clearly demonstrates the importance these structures held for social peace³⁵.

An inscription recording that, between 69 and 70 CE, Emperor Vespasian had the aqueduct at Patara largely destroyed by an earthquake rebuilt through the proconsul Sextus Marcius Priscus, clearly indicates the importance the emperor attached to such infrastructural activity³⁶. According to this inscription, the emperor rebuilt the pressurized water channel, which had collapsed as a result of the earthquake, from its foundations using stone pipes over a period of approximately thirty months. In addition, it is understood that detailed technical information concerning how maintenance and repair processes would be carried out without interrupting the water flow, should the aqueduct suffer damage again, was recorded and passed on to future generations³⁷.

The inscription documenting that, between 79 and 80 CE, Emperor Titus had a large fountain (nymphaeum) built in the city of Miletus through Ulpian Traianus, proconsul of Asia, clearly reveals the function of such structures within imperial propaganda³⁸. The inscription's description of the emperor as a victorious commander who had held the tribunician power nine times, been

³³ B. İplikçioglu, *Eskiçağ Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (2006), 75–81; SEG 56, 1762.

³⁴ O. Adak and Ö. Tüner (2004), 59–60; SEG 54, 1355; İplikçioglu, 76; SEG 56, 1763; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*, 1.16.

³⁵ Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*, 1.16.

³⁶ M. Oktan, *Roma'nın Anadolu'daki Yapı Politikası* (PhD Diss., 2011), 132; S. Şahin, *Kilikien und Isaurien* (2007), 103.

³⁷ Şahin, *Kilikien und Isaurien*, 103; S. Şahin, *Inschriften von Kilikien* (2014), 342.

³⁸ *Milet I*, 5, 53, No. 1; ILS 8970.

acclaimed emperor fifteen times, bore the title *pater patriae*, and personally commanded the Jewish War, underscores that the structure was conceived within an ideological framework³⁹.

The inscription concerning the construction of a bath in the city of Arkyanda by Emperor Trajan between 97 and 99 CE reveals that this structure was built from its foundations through the emperor's legatus, Lucius Iulius Marinus Caecilius Simplex⁴⁰.

Emperor Hadrian's approval, in 125 CE, for the funds and revenues set aside for the gladiatorial games planned in the city of Aphrodisias which were subsequently cancelled to be allocated instead to the construction of an aqueduct clearly demonstrates the importance the empire attached to water structures in the provinces⁴¹.

The inscription concerning the construction of a bath in the city of Kelen-deris by Emperor Antoninus Pius in 141 CE is notable for the emphasis it places, alongside laudatory references to the emperor's nobility and his titles of "pontifex maximus" and "father of the fatherland," on the name of the proconsul Gaius Etrilius Regillus Laberius Priscus⁴².

2.2. Propaganda Activities of Proconsuls through Water Structures

The activities of proconsuls and other officials regarding the construction of water structures in the provinces were conducted under the permission and guidance of the emperor, as evidenced by the correspondence of Pliny the Younger during his proconsulship in Bithynia under Trajan. In a letter to the emperor, Pliny reports that the people of Nicomedia had spent 3,329,000 sesterces on an aqueduct and an additional 2,000,000 sesterces on a second water line, yet both projects remained incomplete. He requested the emperor's assistance to ensure these substantial sums were not squandered⁴³. The emperor's response, commanding that all necessary steps be taken to provide water to

³⁹ Uzunoğlu, 255.

⁴⁰ *IK* 48, No. 24; Oktan, 178.

⁴¹ J. Reynolds, "Aphrodisias and Rome," *Journal of Roman Studies Monographs* (2000): 5–20; *SEG* 50, No. 1096.

⁴² M. H. Sayar, "Kelenderis'ten Yeni Yazıtlar," *Gephyra* 10 (2013): 595–604.

⁴³ Plinius Secundus, *Epistulae*, 10.37.

Nicomedia and placing the responsibility directly on Pliny, underscores the high expectations the empire held for its provincial administrators regarding hydraulic infrastructure⁴⁴. These exchanges reveal that water structures were regarded not merely as technical or administrative matters, but as integral components of imperial policy and propaganda strategy.

The inscription recording that Gaius Laecanius Bassus, proconsul of Asia, had a fountain (nymphaeum) built in the city of Ephesus between 80 and 81 CE demonstrates how such building activity was honored at the local level⁴⁵. According to the inscription, the proconsul Bassus praised by the people of Ephesus as one who had “done much good for the city” was honored by the city with the erection of a statue in recognition of the service he had rendered. This suggests that the construction activity in question may have been carried out as an act of benefaction (euergesia).

Similarly, the inscription recording that Lucius Caelius Montius, proconsul of Asia, entirely renewed the aqueduct in the city of Tralleis between 340 and 350 CE clearly reveals that this activity carried an ideological dimension in addition to its purely technical character⁴⁶. Described in the inscription as “a great work of a virtue that considers everything”, this aqueduct was brought to the city through tunnels cut through mountains over a distance of approximately three hundred stadia. Following this large-scale engineering undertaking, it is stated that the council of Tralleis erected a statue of the proconsul beside the aqueduct and honored him with the titles “savior” (*soter*) and “founder” (*ktistes*)⁴⁷.

The inscription recording that Antonius Tatianos, proconsul of Caria, completed the Bath of Faustina in the city of Miletus toward the end of the third century CE clearly reveals how this building activity was regarded at the local level⁴⁸. The description of the proconsul in the inscription as “the best of men”,

⁴⁴ Plinius Secundus, *Epistulae*, 10.38.

⁴⁵ Engelbert Winter, *Staatliche Baupolitik und Baufürsorge in den römischen Provinzen des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien* (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 1996), 159.

⁴⁶ *ITralleis-Nysa*, No. 152.

⁴⁷ *ITralleis-Nysa*, No. 152-153.

⁴⁸ *SEG* 4, No. 425.

and the statement that he completed the Bath of Faustina “better than previous governors”, indicate that this activity carried an ideological dimension.

An inscription documenting that an unidentified proconsul had a bath built in the city of Ephesus between the fourth and sixth centuries CE reveals a different conception of representation⁴⁹. The inscription states that the proconsul who had the bath built came from Italy and held the office of proconsul, yet it does not clearly state his identity. The closing phrase of the text “that is all from me, farewell” likewise points to a style that departs from the conventional formulas of such inscriptions⁵⁰.

As the inscription indicates, the extensive aqueduct construction undertaken by Montius is notable both for its technical difficulty and for its scale. The praise he received in return for this service, together with the titles “savior” and “founder” attributed to him, reflect the vital importance the urban populace attached to water structures and, by extension, to water itself. Accordingly, the water structures built by proconsuls should be regarded not merely as public services but also as powerful instruments of propaganda and prestige at the local level.

2.3. Propaganda Activities of Local Elites through Water Structures

Across the territories under Roman rule, contributing to the building activity of cities not only secured various privileges and honorific titles for individuals but also made a significant contribution to the increase in water structures within cities⁵¹. This situation offered Roman citizens the opportunity to be appointed to high offices, while for local elites who were not Roman citizens it represented a path toward attaining the honor of citizenship. Moreover, imperial administrators transformed this process into a propaganda instrument

⁴⁹ D. Knibbe and B. İplikçioğlu, “Neue Inschriften aus Ephesos IX,” *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts* 55 (1984): 127–128; SEG 34, No. 1115.

⁵⁰ Knibbe and İplikçioğlu, 127–128; SEG 34, No. 1115.

⁵¹ Werner Eck, *Senatoren von Vespasian bis Hadrian: Prosopographische Untersuchungen mit Einschluss der Jahres- und Provinzialfasten der Statthalter* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1987), 56.

encouraging the Roman way of life, and local elites, seeking to obtain political privileges, competed with one another through large-scale expenditure⁵².

The understanding that benefactions made to a city were not without reciprocal expectation took shape around the principle of "do ut des" (I give so that you may give), which emerges as a system of reciprocity carrying a propagandistic dimension. This conception, grounded in mutual benefit within Roman culture, found expression across various domains of religious, political, and social life⁵³, and laid the groundwork for the development of the concept of benefaction (euergesia).

Although benefaction is generally regarded as an expression of unconditional assistance and generosity, it in fact acquires meaning within a system of "gift Exchange"⁵⁴. Within this framework, it is understood that individuals who contributed to Rome or to their city obtained returns for their assistance in various forms, being rewarded in particular through the offices they held in their cities and the honorific titles they acquired⁵⁵.

It may be said that benefactors who engaged in building activity aimed at supplying water to a city thereby earned both the respect of the populace and the appreciation of the empire. In this respect, the water structures realized by local elites should be regarded as propaganda instruments serving not only the fulfilment of public needs but also the production of social status, political power, and ideological legitimacy.

An inscription found as spolia in the city's council building, recording that Admon, son of Troilos, had the fountain located in the Upper Agora of the city of Sagalassos built during the early Roman Imperial period, reveals that Admon constructed this structure during his tenure as *agoranomos* in order to supply

⁵² Akdoğu Arca, *Lykia ve Pamphylia Kentlerinde Euergesia* (Master's Thesis, Akdeniz University, 2001), 27-28; Arjan Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire: Citizens, Elites and Benefactors in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.

⁵³ Akdoğu Arca, *Lykia ve Pamphylia Kentlerinde Euergesia*, 141; Philippe Gauthier, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs (IVe-Ier siècle av. J.-C.)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1985), 12.

⁵⁴ Maurice Sartre, *Le Haut-Empire romain: Les provinces de Méditerranée orientale d'Auguste aux Sévères, 31 av. J.-C.-235 apr. J.-C.* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997), 132.

⁵⁵ Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire*, 9.

quality drinking water to the crowds visiting the expanding agora and to encourage social interaction⁵⁶. The fact that such an act of benefaction was carried out in a central area heavily frequented by the populace relates not only to the provision of public service but also to a propaganda function achieved through the visible display of generosity. Similarly, the inscription documenting that Adrastos, son of Apollonios, reorganized the water structures in the city of Aphrodisias between 89 and 96 CE reveals that such activities were evaluated within a multilayered ideological framework⁵⁷. The dedication of this service to the goddess Aphrodite, to Domitian Caesar Augustus Germanicus, to the imperial house, and to the demos (the popular assembly) indicates that both local and imperial centers of power were honored together. This is related to the fact that the demos constituted a body composed of individuals influential and respected in the city's political decisions⁵⁸.

It is also notable that Adrastos, after becoming a priest of the imperial cult, purchased land in connection with activities related to the city's water needs. Indeed, ancient sources likewise indicate that the acquisition of the land through which water passed was necessary in order for water to be conveyed to settlement areas and for the right of use to be secured⁵⁹. This reveals a direct relationship between the ownership of water and landownership. In addition, the reference to Adrastos's daughter in the inscription should be regarded as a provision pointing to who would, in the future, continue to hold offices in the city and carry out building and benefaction activities. Within this framework, the privileges obtained through acts of benefaction, the new acts of benefaction required by these privileges, and the prestige they generated should be considered as forming part of a continuous cycle of power and propaganda.

Because the inscription belonging to the two-storey nymphaeum thought to have been built on the southern slope of the acropolis of the city of Perge,

⁵⁶ P. Talloen and J. Poblome, "Every Agora Needs a Fountain: The Early Roman Imperial Fountain on the Upper Agora of Sagalassos (SW Turkey)," *Colloquium Anatolicum* 19 (2021): 156.

⁵⁷ MAMA VIII, No. 449; *I Aphrodisias* (2007), No. 12.314.

⁵⁸ David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 855.

⁵⁹ *CIL* IX, No. 4786.

dated to between 117 and 138 CE, has not survived, it is not possible to determine with certainty the identity of the structure's benefactor. Nevertheless, the female portraits found in the niches of the nymphaeum suggest that the structure may have been built by local elites⁶⁰. The presence of a River-God figure behind the pool, and, within the niches, figures of Zeus, an Artemis of the Versailles type, two female portraits thought to represent the building's benefactresses, and two statues of Hadrian, one depicted nude and the other in armor indicates that the structure possessed a rich iconographic program⁶¹.

The nude depiction of the emperor can be interpreted as a propagandistic element linked to deification, while the armored representation emphasizes his power and protective role. These two distinct modes of portrayal, making both the divine and military aspects of the emperor visible within the same structure, likely formed a multi-layered propagandistic language predicated on the city's loyalty and obedience.

The inscription concerning the construction of a fountain (nymphaeum) by Aurelia Paulina in the city of Perge in 195 CE clearly reveals the propaganda activities carried out by local elites through water structures⁶². The inscription states that Aurelia Paulina chief priestess of the imperial cult and lifelong priestess of Artemis Pergaia, and widow of Aquilius, who had been granted the privilege of Roman citizenship by Commodus personally covered all expenses relating to the fountain structure and its decorative elements⁶³. The fact that Aurelia Paulina, who is understood, on the basis of her family and social standing, to have been a local elite, obtained Roman citizenship as a result of her services to the empire indicates that propaganda operated successfully at the local level. Given the privileges afforded by Roman citizenship, it is understood that this status was employed by the empire as an instrument encouraging Roman identity. Indeed, since Roman citizenship could be obtained only with the emperor's

⁶⁰ Aşkın Özdzibay, *Perge'nin M.S. 1.-2. yüzyıllardaki Gelişimi* (PhD Diss., Istanbul University, 2008), 109; Arif Müfid Mansel, *Die Ruinen von Perge* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 145.

⁶¹ Özdzibay, *Perge'nin M.S. 1.-2. yüzyıllardaki Gelişimi*, 110-111.

⁶² *IPerge* 195; Louis Robert, "Chronique d'épigraphie grecque," *Revue des Études Grecques* 72 (1959): 258, No. 452; SEG 17, 840.

⁶³ Uzunoğlu, H., *Epigrafik Belgeler Işığında Güney ve Güneybatı Anadolu'da Su ve Su Yapıları*, 350.

permission and entailed significant obligations⁶⁴, a direct relationship can be established between the status acquired through such acts of benefaction and propaganda.

The inscription recording that Tiberius Claudius Eurymneus brought water to the city of Aspendos in the second century CE clearly reveals the scope and nature of the activities carried out by local elites through water structures⁶⁵. The inscription praises Eurymneus for having held important offices such as *arkhiereus*, *demiourgos*, *gymnasiarkhos*, and *agonothetes*, and states that he was honored during his tenure as *gymnasiarkhos*. In addition, particular emphasis is placed on activities such as his donation of 2,000,000 denarii to supply water to the city, his undertaking of three embassies to the emperors at his own expense, and his provision of high-quality refined olive oil to the populace during his tenure as *dekaprotos*⁶⁶. These wide-ranging activities carried out by Eurymneus demonstrate the extent to which he benefited the city while also suggesting that these contributions, through their visibility, served a propaganda function. The donation of as large a sum as 2,000,000 denarii for the construction of the Aspendos aqueduct is particularly notable in demonstrating how costly such water-structure projects could be. It is understood that Eurymneus's family had likely obtained Roman citizenship during the reign of Claudius and occupied a position of considerable economic strength⁶⁷. Within this framework, Eurymneus's activities clearly reflect the reciprocal relationship of interest grounded in the principle of "do ut des"⁶⁸. This example constitutes important evidence of how a long-term relationship of mutual benefit was sustained between local elites and imperial authority.

The inscription recording that Bryonianus Lollianus repaired the aqueducts in the city of Side during the first half of the third century CE clearly

⁶⁴ Barbara Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 104, 130.

⁶⁵ G. Radet and P. Paris, *Mission archéologique de Milet et du golfe Latmique* (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1886), No. 8; IGR III, 804; Helmut Brandt, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft Pamphyliens und Pisidiens im Altertum (Asia Minor Studien 7)* (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 1992), 101.

⁶⁶ Radet and Paris, *Mission archéologique de Milet et du golfe Latmique*, No. 8; IGR III, 804.

⁶⁷ IGR III, 804.

⁶⁸ Akdoğan Arca, *Lykia ve Pamphylia Kentlerinde Euergesia*, 27–28; Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire*, 6.

reveals the prestige and propagandistic value obtained by local elites through water structures⁶⁹. Following the inscription's emphasis on Lollianus's tenure of important offices such as primipilarius, procurator, ducenarius, and consul, the particular mention, prior to his description as "patriotic," of his kinship with individuals of consular rank is noteworthy. This indicates that social status and political legitimacy were consciously emphasized through the inscription. The fact that Lollianus, in return for this service, was honored with the erection of a statue in a central location beside the nymphaeum demonstrates that activities related to water structures translated directly into public visibility and the production of prestige⁷⁰. Furthermore, the inscription's phrase addressed to "Ktis-tios" commemorating that his statue was erected beside the House of the Nymphs, near the leaders of the "Great Gate," and expressing joy in the currents of the river created by Zeus and in the mighty roar of the ever flowing water, indicates that the activity in question was presented within a sacred context. Such language demonstrates that water was perceived not only as a physical necessity but also as a sacred and ideological element. It thus reveals that activities carried out through water structures functioned as a powerful propaganda instrument in both religious and political terms.

Conclusion

The extensive building activity initiated in the Roman Empire with the accession of Augustus not only transformed the physical fabric of cities but also created a new system of representation through which imperial ideology was constructed on a spatial level⁷¹. In this process, the emperor employed coinage, statuary, and monumental architecture systematically as propaganda instruments to disseminate this transformation across the entire territory of the empire. This indicates that architectural production was conceived not merely as an aesthetic or functional activity but also as an ideological instrument.

⁶⁹ I Side 105; Christopher Foss, "Bryonianus Lollianus of Side," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 26 (1977): 161-172; Arif Müfid Mansel, *Side: 1947-1966 yılları kazıları ve araştırmalarının sonuçları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1978), 32-94; Karl Lanckoronski, *Städte Pamphyliens und Pisidiens*, vol. 1 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1892), No. 107; *IGR* III, No. 811.

⁷⁰ Foss, "Bryonianus Lollianus of Side," 161-171.

⁷¹ Cassius Dio, *Rhomaika*, 56.39.4; 56.30.3-4.

Aqueducts, baths, and nymphaea, which underwent transformation in form and function through advancing construction techniques, ceased to be mere infrastructural elements meeting basic needs and became integral parts of monumental architecture. Beyond the services they provided, these structures were transformed into instruments representing the empire's technical capacity, organizational power, and ideological supremacy, and thereby occupied a central place in Rome's strategy of spatial propaganda. The increase, from the first century CE onward, in the number of large water structures both in the city of Rome and in the provinces subject to the empire indicates that water was conceived not merely as a vital necessity but also as a deliberate ideological instrument. This finding aligns with studies demonstrating that the building policies that gained momentum under Augustus were directly related to propaganda⁷².

The use of water structures as instruments of propaganda was determined by both their functional and their visual characteristics. Aqueducts, beyond supplying clean and continuous water, dominated the urban skyline through their multi-storey, monumental construction and, in this respect, became a visual representation of imperial power. Supported by inscriptions and coinage, these structures functioned as an effective instrument for conveying imperial ideology to broad segments of the population. This finding aligns with the assessments of scholars such as Zanker and Ando regarding the role of architecture and visual representation in propaganda processes⁷³.

Baths, for their part, ceased during the Roman Imperial period to be structures meeting only the need for hygiene and were transformed into spaces of socio-cultural interaction. As public spaces representing the Roman way of life, these structures both shaped everyday practices and became, through the statuary programs and inscriptions they contained, important elements of the propaganda process. The large capacity of baths ensured that these ideological messages reached different segments of society directly and continuously. In

⁷² *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 19–20.

⁷³ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (1988); Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (2000).

this respect, baths may be regarded as among the most visible sites of interaction between propaganda and social life.

Nymphaea, through the architectural transformation they underwent, ceased to be mere water-distribution structures and became, through their monumental façade arrangements, statuary programs, and inscriptions, multilayered surfaces of propaganda. Through the visual and symbolic narrative presented together with the flow of water, these structures produced a powerful representation rendering visible the emperor's generosity and divine legitimacy. This indicates that nymphaea were structures conceived not only aesthetically but also ideologically.

The water-related building activity carried out by emperors in the provinces served as an effective propaganda instrument, both securing the loyalty and respect of their subjects and demonstrating the greatness and power of the empire⁷⁴. This propaganda process not only encouraged the Roman way of life⁷⁵ but also made significant contributions to the deification of the emperor (the Imperial Cult).

Within this framework, the water structures realized by proconsuls in the provinces, while fulfilling an administrative responsibility, must also have served as a mechanism of propaganda employed to advance within the imperial hierarchy. Through the building activity they carried out, proconsuls demonstrated their service to both the emperor and the local population, thereby reinforcing their political legitimacy and securing opportunities for career advancement.

The activities carried out by local elites through water structures, in turn, should be evaluated within the system of euergesia. These activities allowed benefactors to gain respect and gratitude among their fellow citizens while also enabling them to obtain important privileges such as appointment to high office and Roman citizenship. Within this framework, water structures became one of the important instruments of social status, political power, and identity construction for local elites.

⁷⁴ Cassius Dio, *Rhomaika*, 56.30.3–4.

⁷⁵ Barbara Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (1967), 104.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that water structures in the Roman Empire constituted not merely infrastructural elements but also the fundamental instruments of a systematic and multilayered propaganda mechanism. This building activity, carried out in response to the vital need for water, was received positively by society; moreover, the privileges obtained in return for this service, and the new obligations arising from these privileges, transformed propaganda into a self-sustaining cycle of power. While supporting the physical development of cities, this cycle simultaneously contributed to improving the quality of life of citizens. Water structures in the Roman Empire should therefore be regarded as multifaceted propaganda instruments situated at the intersection not only of engineering and architectural achievement but also of ideological, political, and social processes.

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