

In the year 312 AD numerous cities in the Levant and Asia Minor sent petitions to the Emperor Maximinus Daza, asking permission to oblige their local Christians to offer sacrifices to the local Gods or run them out of town. The emperor's appreciative reply was set up in stone in several of the cities which had petitioned him - two copies have been found in SW Turkey, one as recently as the 1980s. The grandiloquent phraseology is characteristic of imperial utterances. Eusebius of Caesarea in Palestine translated from Latin into Greek the text sent to the city of Tyre (and displayed on a pillar by the city) and preserved it in his *Church History*

Copy of a translation of the rescript of Maximinus in answer to the memorials against us, taken from the pillar in Tyre.

3. Now at length the feeble power of the human mind has become able to shake off and to scatter every dark mist of error, which before this besieged the senses of men, who were more miserable than impious, and enveloped them in dark and destructive ignorance; and to perceive that it is governed and established by the beneficent providence of the immortal gods.

4. It passes belief how grateful, how pleasing and how agreeable it is to us, that you have given a most decided proof of your pious resolution; for even before this it was known to every one how much regard and reverence you were paying to the immortal gods, exhibiting not a faith of bare and empty words, but continued and wonderful examples of illustrious deeds.

5. Wherefore your city may justly be called a seat and dwelling of the immortal gods. At least, it appears by many signs that it flourishes because of the presence of the celestial gods.

6. Behold, therefore, your city, regardless of all private advantages, and omitting its former petitions in its own behalf, when it perceived that the adherents of that execrable vanity were again beginning to spread, and to start the greatest conflagration — like a neglected and extinguished funeral pile when its brands are rekindled — immediately resorted to our piety as to a metropolis of all religiousness, asking some remedy and aid.

7. It is evident that the gods have given you this saving mind on account of your faith and piety. Accordingly that supreme and mightiest Jove, who presides over your illustrious city, who preserves your ancestral gods, your wives and children, your hearths and homes from

every destructive pest, has infused into your souls this wholesome resolve; showing and proving how excellent and glorious and salutary it is to observe with the becoming reverence the worship and sacred rites of the immortal gods.

8. For who can be found so ignorant or so devoid of all understanding as not to perceive that it is due to the kindly care of the gods that the earth does not refuse the seed sown in it, nor disappoint the hope of the husbandmen with vain expectation; that impious war is not inevitably fixed upon earth, and wasted bodies dragged down to death under the influence of a corrupted atmosphere; that the sea is not swollen and raised on high by blasts of intemperate winds; that unexpected hurricanes do not burst forth and stir up the destructive tempest; moreover, that the earth, the nourisher and mother of all, is not shaken from its lowest depths with a terrible tremor, and that the mountains upon it do not sink into the opening chasms. No one is ignorant that all these, and evils still worse than these, have oftentimes happened hitherto.

9. And all these misfortunes have taken place on account of the destructive error of the empty vanity of those impious men, when it prevailed in their souls, and, we may almost say, weighed down the whole world with shame.

10. After other words he adds:

Let them look at the standing crops already flourishing with waving heads in the broad fields, and at the meadows glittering with plants and flowers, in response to abundant rains and the restored mildness and softness of the atmosphere.

11. Finally, let all rejoice that the might of the most powerful and terrible Mars has been propitiated by our piety, our sacrifices, and our veneration; and let them on this account enjoy firm and tranquil peace and quiet; and let as many as have wholly abandoned that blind error and delusion and have returned to a right and sound mind rejoice the more, as those who have been rescued from an unexpected storm or severe disease and are to reap the fruits of pleasure for the rest of their life.

12. But if they still persist in their execrable vanity, let them, as you have desired, be driven far away from your city and territory, that thus, in accordance with your praiseworthy zeal in this matter, your city, being freed from every pollution and impiety, may, according to its native disposition, attend to the sacred rites of the immortal gods with becoming reverence.

13. But that you may know how acceptable to us your request respecting this matter has been, and how ready our mind is to confer benefits voluntarily, without memorials and

petitions, we permit your devotion to ask whatever great gift ye may desire in return for this your pious disposition.

14. And now ask that this may be done and that you may receive it; for you shall obtain it without delay. This, being granted to your city, shall furnish for all time an evidence of reverent piety toward the immortal gods, and of the fact that you have obtained from our benevolence merited prizes for this choice of yours; and it shall be shown to your children and children's children.

15. This was published against us in all the provinces, depriving us of every hope of good, at least from men; so that, according to that divine utterance, If it were possible, even the elect would have stumbled

Eusebius *Church History IX, 7, 3-15*