A letter of Hadrian to Naryka (Eastern Locris)

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Though more letters of Hadrian are preserved than those of any other emperor of the High Empire, a newly published example is exceptional in many ways. First mentioned in print in 1998, when it was still on the antiquities market, it was given to the Louvre in the following year by Jean-Luc Chalmé, and since 2000 versions and discussions of the text have multiplied. In the present article, I present a revised text, discuss various points of interest that it raises, and ask what, in the last analysis, the letter is about; for this purpose I reserve discussion of the very last lines to the end.¹

The letter is dated between December 137 and July 138, the last months of Hadrian’s life, when he was already seriously ill; it is the latest dated letter of his surviving correspondence. The recipients are the citizens of Narik or Naryka, a small and rather obscure community of Eastern or Opuntian Locris in Greece. The reported dimensions are 0.90 m. height and 0.50 m. across, but the letter-sizes, which vary, are not available. It is perhaps unique among imperial letters in Greek being written not on marble or other stone, but on bronze. Greek inscriptions written on bronze are (apart from coins) usually private ones, such as statues or votives. In Greece, public ones are mainly found in central and W Greece, notably at Olympia; two well-known 5th-c. inscriptions of the western or Ozolian Locrians are also on bronze.²

The text is inscribed on a pedimental stele, which has a bust of Hadrian in the pediment and was probably slotted at the base into a stone support, since there are no holes for attachment to a wall. The layout of the text differentiates between the salutation in II. 2-7 (containing the emperor’s name and titles) and the following text. In the first part, the cutter does not break any words, and sometimes leaves gaps between words and at the ends of lines, three times adding *hederae distinguentes* (in my text I have marked these as ●). He also puts small raised dots to indicate numerals in lines 5 and 6. In the second part, he breaks words 6 times out of a visible 14, uses no *hederae*, and only rarely marks breaks in the sense by small spaces (I.17 before κατά and I.19 before ὠνομάζοντοι). The spelling *ἀμφιζητήσειν* in I.8, if not an error, presumably developed from the form *ἀμφιζητηθεῖν*, which begins to appear in the 2nd c. B.C.

I propose the following text.

*Ἀγαθῆ ἡ ὑψάτη Ἀὐτοκράτορ Καῖσαρ θεός Τραϊανὸς
Παρθικοῦ υἱός, θεοῦ Νέρου υἱοῦ, Τραϊανὸς
4 ἸΔΡΙΑΝΟΣ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ, ἀρχιερεύς μέγιστος*

¹ I have used the following abbreviations:

