

The Baptismal Well Inscription of Ex Comitibus Leo, son of Leo from the Kırşehir Museum

Kırşehir Müzesi'nden Ex Comitibus Leon oğlu Leon'un Vaftiz Kuyusu Yazıtı

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Abstract: This article concerns a large inscription carved in marble, which was found used as a decorative object in the garden of a private property in the Boztepe District of Kırşehir Province and later included in 2016 in the inventory of the Kırşehir Museum. The new inscription featured a Psalm verse and the name of the person who had the inscription made, someone called Leo with the title of *ex comitibus*. It is noteworthy because the verse concerns baptism and the hole in the center indicates it was used as a lid to a baptismal well. In contrast to the baptismal pools used commonly in the Early Christian period, having a well specifically for this ritual makes this a rare documented example. This study aims to determine the exact function and the date of the inscribed stone. The subject of baptism in the Early Christian period and the historical development of the *comes* title, which became widespread during the reign of Constantine I, have been examined to provide perspective. Thinking that they would contribute to the dating explanations have also provided for the elaborate decoration carrying the style of the period.

Keywords: Cappadocia • Comes • the Liturgy of Baptism • Baptismal Well • Psalm. 29. 3

Öz: Bu makalenin konusunu 2016 yılında Kırşehir Müzesi envanterine kazandırılan, Kırşehir ili Boztepe ilçesinde özel bir mülkün bahçesinde peyzaj malzemesi olarak kullanılmış, dev boyuttaki mermer bir levha üzerinde yer alan yazıt oluşturmaktadır. Bu yeni yazıtta, Zebur'dan bir ayet ve *ex comitibus* unvanına sahip Leon adlı bir kişinin taşı yaptırıldığı yazmaktadır. Taş, bir kuyu üzerinde kullanıldığını gösteren ortasındaki delik ve üzerindeki vaftiz ile ilgili ayet sebebiyle özeldir. Erken Hristiyanlık döneminde yaygın olan vaftiz havuzlarının kullanımının aksine bir kuyunun bu ritüel için yapılmış olması onu bugüne dek belgelenmiş nadir örneklerden biri yapmaktadır. Bu makalede yazıtın üzerinde yer aldığı taşın kullanım amacının belirlenmesi ve yazıtın tarihlendirilmesi üzerinde durulacaktır. Bu amacı yerine getirmek için Erken Hristiyanlık Dönemi'nde vaftiz konusu ve I. Constantinus dönemi ile yaygınlaşan *comes* unvanının tarihsel gelişimi üzerinde durulmuş, ayrıca taş üzerindeki, yapıldığı dönemin stilini taşıyan zengin bezemeler de tarihlendirmede katkısı olacağı düşüncesi ile açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kappadokia • Comes • Vaftiz Litürjisi • Vaftiz Kuyusu • Zebur 29. 3

Very few archaeological excavations and surveys have been carried out in Kırşehir. In the past, the Kırşehir Museum has come into possession of inscriptions either through recoveries by security forces during operations against antiquities looters and when discoveries are reported by the residents. The inscription examined in this article was recovered by the gendarmerie. The inscription was brought to the museum from the Boztepe district in 2016, while our team was working at the Karıncalı Rescue Excavation conducted under the supervision of the Kırşehir Museum. It was previously

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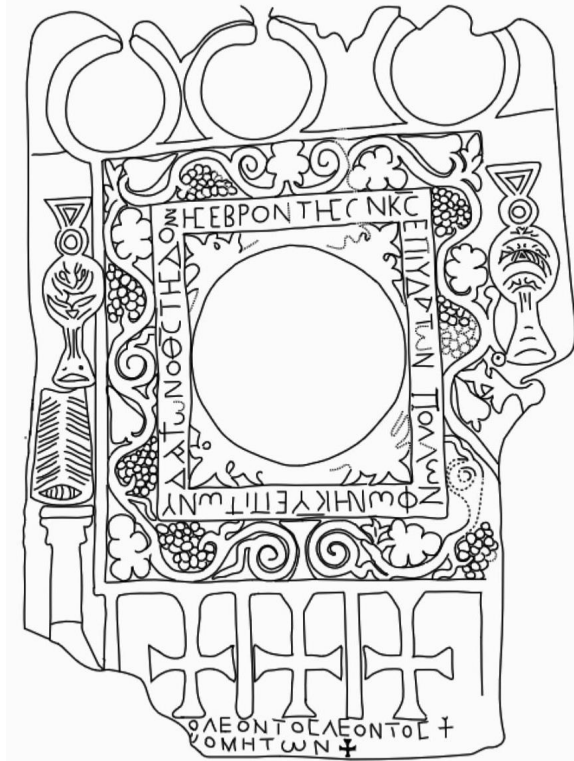
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used as a decorative object in a doctor's garden.

There is a 50 cm diameter hole in the center of the rectangular gray marble slab, which is thought to belong to a religious building. This hole is surrounded by a 6 cm wide square frame. Part A of the inscription is carved inside the band formed by the frame. Outside the frame, there are three large rings above and three large cross motifs below. There is a groove at the top of the rings. These rings probably functioned to hold a bucket or jug-like container. The two lines of inscription just below the cross motifs form Part B of the inscription. The right side of the stone was cut 20 cm inwards from the middle to the lower end. The lower left corner of the slab is missing.

Leaf motifs are seen on the inner corners of the frame facing the hole. There is a depiction of a vine pattern with spiraling branches just above the inscription. The motif consists of grape bunches, vine leaves, and heart-shaped leaves. This floral pattern is surrounded on three sides. In the upper right, a line for the fourth side was left unfinished. In the lower right, the end of the line turns down instead of up, leaving the vine pattern unbound on the right side of the stone. Outside this second frame, there are three vertically aligned depictions on the left side of the stone. These are respectively; an upside-down handle-less jug, a palm leaf, and a Doric column. These decorations were probably similarly repeated on the right side of the stone. However, today, only a single-handle jug motif can be seen on the right side due to a 20 cm indentation from the middle downwards. The rim of the jug is everted like that on the left.

Inv. no.: Unknown; Finding Place: Kırşehir/Boztepe; Brought to the Kırşehir Museum in 2016. H: 164 cm; L: 118 cm; D: 20 cm; Lh: A. 3-5 cm (Figs. 1-2).



Figs. 1-2. The Baptismal Well Inscription and Sketch Thereof

A φωνῆ Κ(υριο)υ ἐπὶ τῶν ὑ-
 2 δάτων, ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς τῆς δόξ-
 ης ἐβρόντησεν, Κ(υριο)ς
 4 ἐπὶ ὑδάτων^{vac.} πολλῶν.

✠ ✠ ✠

B [ἀ]πὸ Λέοντος Λέοντος ✠
 2 [^{vac.?}] κομήτων ✠

A *The voice of the Lord on the waters,
 the God of glory thundered,
 the Lord on many waters¹.*

✠ ✠ ✠

B *[It was built by] Leon's son Leon, ✠
 ex comitibus. ✠*

Lines A1-4: The abbreviation Κ(υριο)υ² is used in A1, θ(εὸ)ς³ in A2, and Κ(υριο)ς⁴ in A3. As clearly seen in the photograph and the sketch of the inscription, the **Ξ** form of the letter Ξ is used in Line A2, but in contrast to the rest of the inscription, the letter Α is used in the **Λ** form in Line A4. These forms of letters were used in the IVth and VIIth centuries⁵. A verse of a *Psalm* is inscribed in lines A1-4 inside the frame⁶. This verse is more commonly found in inscriptions belonging to a water-related item⁷ or place⁸. Although modern researchers associate the verse with the worship of Baal⁹, which is important for Jews, it has strong connections with baptism in early commentaries on the *Psalms*. For example, preferring a David-oriented interpretation, Theodoret believed that the verse described the baptism of Jesus¹⁰. Arnobius the Younger wrote that the voice in the waters mentioned in *Psalm* 29. 3-4 was that of the Father at the baptism of Jesus¹¹. Meanwhile, Augustine claimed that it was the thundering voice of Jesus in this verse, not the Father¹². This association can be considered as an indication that the stone might have been related to a well of holy water or to a baptistery well and that the hole in the center was not a later intervention. However, it is difficult to immediately associate the well stone with baptism. An accurate definition first requires looking at whether wells were used for baptism in the Early Christian period.

Since adults were mostly baptized in the Early Christian period, this ritual often took place in the sea, streams-rivers, lakes, or baptismal pools. Up until the VIth century, adults were baptized in groups

¹ Hill 2005, 87.

² Oikonomides 1974, 79.

³ Oikonomides 1974, 70.

⁴ Oikonomides 1974, 78.

⁵ Metzger 1991, 23.

⁶ In *Septuaginta, Psalm. 29. 3* (28. 3).

⁷ Wulff 1909, 318 no.1676.

⁸ Lifshitz 1962, 82 = *SEG XX* 465 = Lehmann & Holum 2000, 133; *IG XIV* 2320 = Feissel 1976, 169 = *SEG XXVI* 1124. According to B. Lifshitz, who first published the inscription, it may have been used in the baptistery. Nicolaou 1995, 226, no.19 = *SEG XLV* 1862; *I.Klaudiupolis* 173; *I.Prusa* 212; French 1992, 56, no.16 = *I.Sinope* 196 used as a water trough. Pazaras 2001, 295 = *SEG LI* 819.

⁹ Brueggemann & Bellinger 2014, 148.

¹⁰ Blaising & Hardin 2008, 216.

¹¹ Blaising & Hardin 2008, 216.

¹² Gillingham 2012, 182; Blaising & Hardin 2008, 216.

and immersed in water three times in accord with belief in the Holy Trinity¹³. This requirement led to the construction of baptisteries and baptismal pools in early churches¹⁴. Baptismal fonts gradually replaced the pools in the IVth century following the spread of infant baptism. So much so that, the construction of baptisteries became unnecessary in the late VIth century¹⁵. Thus, wells are not mentioned among places where baptism ceremonies are held.

Baptism is mentioned in several verses of the Bible. In one of them, the venue for the baptism is the Jordan River. The verse tells how John the Baptist called people to repent and be baptized here and the time he baptized Jesus¹⁶. In another, Jesus asked a woman of Samaria for water at Jacob's Well, she refused, convinced Jesus was Jewish. Jesus answered, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water"¹⁷. In another verse, Jesus likens believers' faith to water flowing through them: "Whoever believes in me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"¹⁸. Well water is mentioned in only one of these verses. Previously regarded by Jews as a ritual of redemption, immersion appears in the Acts of the Apostles as the first ritual of converts to Christianity¹⁹. It is mentioned that most of these people²⁰ were baptized in their homes²¹. Neither the Bible nor the Acts of the Apostles mention the use of wells for baptism.

The context in early Christian texts is different where it is claimed that the washing of the Jews, especially Barnabas²², would not provide redemption²³. In his dialogue with Trypho, Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165)²⁴ argues that the practice of circumcision in Judaism does not exist in Christianity, he also uses the expression "your useless baptism of the wells" for the Jewish practice of immersion in well water. Justin rejects their baptism, saying that, "Him, the living fountain, and dug for yourselves broken cisterns which can hold no water"²⁵. In fact, Justin Martyr here refers to the verse where Jesus

¹³ Whitaker 1970, 2-3: Tertullianus' (c. 155-220 A.D.) *De Baptismo* and Hippolytos' (c. 160-235 A.D.) *Apostolike Paradosis* describe two different baptism ceremonies in early churches. Although the procedure was practiced differently, a detailed account of the ritual was provided. Wright 2004, 1033-1034: Tertullian believed that only adults should be baptized; he was against infant baptism thinking that they might sin in the future.

¹⁴ Koch 1995, 40.

¹⁵ Koch 1995, 41.

¹⁶ *Matthew* 3. 13-17; *Mark* 1. 9-11; *Luke* 3. 21-22; *John* 1. 32-34.

¹⁷ *John* 4. 10.

¹⁸ *John* 7. 38.b.

¹⁹ *Acts* 2. 38; 22. 16; Johnson 2007, 7-8: The origin of John the Baptist's ritualistic ceremony of repentance and conversion to a new religion is mostly rooted in Judaism. Ioseph. *Bell. Iud.* II 149-150: According to Iosephus, the Jewish Essene community which lived in Qumran between the IIIrd century B.C. and the Ist century A.D. bathed or immersed in water during the day to maintain purity in their beliefs.

²⁰ *Acts* 8. 36-38: Philip the Eunuch was baptized during a journey in a place with water.

²¹ *Acts* 9. 18; 16. 15, 33.

²² Cohen 1990, 194: From the first century onwards, Jews by birth and proselytes practiced immersion before entering temples so as not to profane the sacred or other reasons.

²³ Ferguson 2014, 56-57.

²⁴ Whitaker 1970, 1-2.

²⁵ Jeremiah 2. 13; Slusser 2003, 31.

asked a woman of Samaria for water at Jacob's Well using the expression "living water"²⁶. This example, which Justin Martyr gave for a completely different subject, confirms that Christians performed this ritual at water wells as Jews did in their early baptisms, however, this form of baptism was disapproved by Justin Martyr and like-minded Christians.

Line B1-2: On the two lines at the bottom of the stone, we see the phrase ἀπό κομήτων, which is also found in an inscription from Cibyra²⁷. The Latin equivalent of this pattern is *ex comitibus*, meaning from the former *comites*. *Comes* is an official title that has been recorded since the Roman Republican period. However, the duties of this officer evolved over time. For purposes of dating the inscription, it would be useful to examine the changes in the responsibilities of this official.

Derived from the word *comitor*, which means to accompany, attend, and follow, a *comes* (pl. *comites*)²⁸ was the unofficial companion of the emperor before Constantine²⁹. The title became official during the rule of Constantine. In Greek, the official title was written as κόμης³⁰. It is known that there was an official named *comes*, who was a member of the *cohors amicorum* from the Republican period. In that period, the *comes* was the entourage who accompanied a *magistratus* when he left Rome whether during war or peace³¹. The *comites* received no wages during this period but their travel expenses were covered. In the Principate period, the *comes* was an advisor to the emperor, his envoys, and proconsuls during their travels. *Comites* received payment from the *Aerarium* or the *Fiscus* in this period. From the IIIrd century A.D., it was a separate duty and denoted a certain social status³². A *comes* could come from the senatorial or equestrian classes. Undoubtedly, the most senior *comites* were often people from the emperor's inner circle who would join their excursions³³. According to W. Eck, these people took part in the journeys upon the emperor's verbal or written request. Besides senators and equestrians, it is known that doctors and intellectuals close to the emperor participated in these trips with the title of *comes*. The title was also indicated in the *cursus honorum*s of senators and knights if they continued in this duty for a certain period of time³⁴. *Comites* acted as advisors on these journeys until the Numerian period³⁵.

The definition of this title was revised during the reign of Constantine. Under his rule, the *comites* were appointed from the emperor's closest circle. It is known that some *comites* were sent to oversee the work of or replace governors at the emperor's request when there was a need to tighten central authority over the provinces. Constantine appointed Octavian as the *comes* of Hispania in A.D. 316/7 and Tiberian, as the *comes* of Africa in A.D. 326/7, and later Tiberian and Severus as the *comites* of Hispania respectively in A.D. 332 and 333/4. He also appointed Acacius as the *comes* of Macedonia

²⁶ John 4. 10.

²⁷ *I.Kibyra* 74: Φλ(άουιον)· Ἄννιον Χρυσόβιον τὸν καὶ | Ἀνατόλιον τὸν λαμπρότ(ατον) | Φλ(άουιος) Ἄννιος
Ἀνατόλιος | ὁ λαμπρότ(ατος) ἀπὸ κομήτ(ων) || ^{vac.} τὸν γλυκύτατον ^{vac.} | ^{vac.} υἰόν. ^{vac.}

²⁸ Burrill 1850, 30; Lewis & Short 1891, 375.

²⁹ Southern & Dixon 2014, 59.

³⁰ Burrill 1850, 30.

³¹ Suet. *Iul.* 42; *Dig.* I.18, 16; Gizewski 1997, 89.

³² Scharf 1994, 5.

³³ Demougin 2015, 261-262.

³⁴ Eck 2006, 76-77.

³⁵ Demougin 2015, 262.

in A.D. 327, Tertullianus as the *comes* of the diocese of Asiana and Lollianus as the *comes* of *Orientis* in A.D. 330³⁶. Some *comites* acted as ambassadors between the emperor and his subjects. In the *Vita Constantini*, Eusebius mentions two such active *comites*³⁷. Eusebius also talks about three regular groups of companions during the Constantine period, namely *comites tertii ordinis*, *comites secundi ordinis* and *comites primi ordinis*³⁸. The existence of a status difference amongst the *comites* is attested previously from the notification Tiberius gave to Suetonius about the payment to the *comites* who accompanied him on one occasion³⁹. This distinction is believed to have more to do with the affiliation of the *comes* to the emperor rather than merit⁴⁰.

As mentioned above, the title *comes* was awarded to both senators and equestrians.⁴¹ For example, Acacius, the *comes* of Macedonia in A.D. 327, was from the equestrian class. Strategius was also a *comes* from the equestrian class⁴². Ancient sources mention first and second-order *comites* coming from the senatorial class. There are two known examples of *comes secundi ordinis*. One of them was Lucius Crepereius Madalianus⁴³, who was previously *consularis Ponti et Bithyniae*, and the other was Valerius Proculus⁴⁴, the governor of first Constantinople and then Sicilia following the establishment of the *consularis Europae et Thraciae*. There are also three examples of *comes primi ordinis* from the Constantine period. The first was Q. Flavius Maessius Egnatius Lollianus⁴⁵, who became *comes primi ordinis* in A.D. 336/7. The second was Flavius Dionysius⁴⁶, who was the governor of Phoenicia in A.D. 328/9, consul to Syria in A.D. 329-335 and senator of Sicilia. The last was Valerius Proculus, a former *comes secundi ordinis*. There was also the *comes flaviales*, a title unique to the Constantine period, given to aristocrats who were in the close service of the emperor. L. Creperius Madalianus and Egnatius Lollianus were also appointed to this rank⁴⁷.

Comes was originally an honorary title given to the emperor's entourage before it evolved into both civil and military duties. For example, a person appointed as *comes sacrarum largitionum* was a civilian administrator who had as much power as the minister of finance. A person with the title *comes rei militaris* oversaw military missions. If this official had a military background before becoming a *comes*, then the title would be of an honorary nature. Titles such as *comes et magister equitum*, *comes*

³⁶ Jones 1964, 105.

³⁷ Euseb. *Vit. Const.* III. 53. 2.

³⁸ Euseb. *Vit. Const.* IV. 1. 2.

³⁹ Suet. *Tib.* 46.

⁴⁰ Scharf 1994, 7.

⁴¹ Moser 2018, 73: Constantine established an imperial *comites* when he founded Constantinople. According to A. H. M. Jones, this was a third group outside of the senators and the equestrian class. However, since there was no lineage between these officials, D. Schlinkert defined them as "Führungselite" rather than a third class. Based on extant examples, M. Moser claimed that *comes* could come from both senatorial and equestrian classes, and that there was no third class.

⁴² Euseb. *Vit. Const.* III. 62. 1; Jones *et al.* 1971, 611.

⁴³ Jones *et al.* 1971, 530; Scharf 1994, 16-17.

⁴⁴ Jones *et al.* 1971, 747.

⁴⁵ Jones *et al.* 1971, 512; Scharf 1994, 10-14.

⁴⁶ Jones *et al.* 1971, 259.

⁴⁷ Moser 2018, 75-77.

et dux, or *comes et praeses* were used in such cases. The authority of military officers could vary from a frontier commander to a *magister militum*. Different alignments in the east and west of the empire meant that the authority of the *comes* varied in the military hierarchy⁴⁸.

Constantine I honored the members of the Senate and their officials with the title of *comes* as a reward for their services. Towards the end of the IVth century A.D., the title *comes* was awarded so frequently that it was regarded as an honorary title except for the three mentioned above⁴⁹. This is why, from the mid-IVth century A.D., being a *comes* did not necessarily mean that the person had served the imperial palace. But at least at the time it was introduced, being a retired *comes* (*ex comitibus*) was considered an honorable title because it was a real duty at the palace⁵⁰.

Based on prosopographic sources on Leo, son of Leo, we see a Leo who was a textile merchant that was appointed by Arcadius as the *comes rei militaris* of the East in A.D. 399. Sources from the period attest that, despite having no military experience, Leo was appointed for being a close friend of Eutropius, to whom Arcadius had given control of the empire⁵¹. He was sent to suppress Tribigild's Revolt⁵² and died in a swamp while fighting the enemy in Pamphylia⁵³. No other Leo is mentioned in R. Scharf's *comites ordinis primi* list⁵⁴.

The only mention of this name in ancient sources related to Cappadocia⁵⁵ after the IVth century A.D. is a Leo of Cappadocia in *Pratum Spirituale*, a work by John Moschus who wrote about the stories of monks during his travels of the VIth and VIIth centuries A.D.⁵⁶. As a monk, it is clear that Leo lacked the political and financial power to have such an inscription made.

Besides the inscription, the depictions on the stone also provide some clues as to the function of the stone and when it was made. The dominating floral motif consists primarily of grape bunches and vine leaves with spiraling branches toward the tips. These decorations refer to the vines and grapes in the Bible and are considered to be among the attributes of Jesus, signifying the bond between him and his disciples⁵⁷. This pattern was used in a wide area from the IVth to the end of the VIIth century A.D.⁵⁸. In the second frame on the left side of the stone, there are three vertically aligned depictions. These are respectively an upside-down handle-less jug, a palm leaf, and a Doric column. The jug depiction located on the upper right part of the stone has a handle. The jug appears in depictions of the verse where Jesus asks a woman of Samaria for water at Jacob's Well⁵⁹. Another depiction seen on the stone

⁴⁸ Southern & Dixon 2014, 59.

⁴⁹ Seeck 1900, 634-636; Jones 1964, 104-105; Gizewski 1997, 90-91; Lee 2018, 375.

⁵⁰ Jones 1964, 104-105.

⁵¹ Claud. *in Eutr.* XX. 381-9; Zos. V. 14. 2; Jones *et al.* 1980, 661.

⁵² Jones *et al.* 1980, 1125; Liebeschuetz 1990, 104-110; Cameron & Long 1993, 223-232.

⁵³ Claud. *in Eutr.* XX. 432-55; Zos. V. 16.5.

⁵⁴ Scharf 1994, 59-61.

⁵⁵ *LGPN* V.C, 245.

⁵⁶ Ioann. Moskh. *Prat. Spirit.* no. 112.

⁵⁷ John 15.1-5; Ferguson 1961, 39-40; Akyürek & Tiryaki 2010, 395.

⁵⁸ Milburn 1988, 39 fig. 22; 61 fig. 31; 78 fig. 45; 172 fig. 112; Beckwith 1988, 19 fig. 1; 30 fig. 11; 65 fig. 47; 123 fig. 99-100; Kitzinger 1995, 89 fig. 164; Akyürek & Tiryaki 2010, 402 fig. 10; Harrison & Hill 2014, fig. 87-91; 93-100, 102; Yılmaz 2019, 153-157 fig. 6-8; fig. 12-14.

⁵⁹ *John* 4. 10; Jensen 2011, 91 fig. 3.1; 278 fig. 6.9.

is the palm leaf, a symbol used by the Early Church to represent Christianity's victory over death⁶⁰. Between the Vth and the IXth centuries A.D., palm leaf depictions appear frequently on many mediums from wall mosaics to carved stone⁶¹.

In conclusion, the stone could be dated to between the IVth and the VIIth centuries A.D. based on characters of the Late Antiquity, the abbreviations used in the text, and the decorative style. However, there are strong indications that the inscription dates to the IVth-Vth centuries A.D., based on the fact that it is a lid for a baptismal well that was possibly used in the Early Christian period, when the distinction between Jewish and Christian customs was still vague. Although a name and title are inscribed on the stone, it is insufficient to suggest a precise date. We know of a Leo who became *comes rei militaris* of the East in A.D. 399, however, we also know that this is not the retired *comes* we are looking for since this Leo died while serving as a *comes*. Knowing that the title *ex comitibus* was awarded to people who had never really served as *comites* from the IVth century A.D., strengthens the possibility of Leo being an ordinary wealthy rural citizen. As a matter of fact, Th. Corsten, who first encountered the title *ex comitibus* in an inscription from Cibyra, claimed that in the IVth century A.D., it was no more than an honorary title awarded to people even if they had never served the *imperial comitatus*, and that he could not link the title holder Anatolii with any *comes* mentioned in the sources⁶².

⁶⁰ Hall 1974, 231; Ferguson 1961, 36.

⁶¹ Deckers 2016, 107 fig. 113; Beckwith 1988, 29 fig. 12-13; 34 fig. 18; 108-19 fig. 88; 110 fig. 89; 196 fig. 162.

⁶² *I.Kibyra* 74.

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