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JUSTICE AND VENGEANCE OF GODS IN THE WESTERN MICROASIAN EPIGRAPHICAL SOURCES

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Abstract. *The article analyses the main topics related to the epigraphical sources in the western region of Asia Minor concerning the gods of justice and vengeance establishing the geographical area of their expansion, the specific period of composition, the typology, their purpose and content, the causes and types of punishments, and the role these deities played within the frames of the local rural conservative society.*

Résumé. *L'article analyse les principaux problèmes à l'égard des sources épigraphiques de la région occidentale de l'Asie Mineure en ce qui concerne les dieux du justice et de vengeance pour établir le territoire d'expansion, la période de la conception, la typologie, leur buts et contenus, les causes et types des punitions et le rôle joué par ces divinités dans le cadre d'une société locale rurale et conservatrice.*

Rezumat. *Articolul analizează principalele probleme privind izvoarele epigrafice din vestul Asiei Mici cu referire la zeii justiției și răzbunării, cu scopul de a stabili teritoriul de expansiune, perioada de concepție, tipologia, țelurile și conținuturile, cauzele și tipurile de pedepse și rolul jucat de aceste divinități în cadrul unei societăți rurale și conservatoare.*

A definite amount of epigraphs were discovered on a relative large *geographical area* comprising especially the North-Eastern side of Lydia, and the surrounding regions of Phrygia and Mysia, between the upper Hermos valley and the Meander. Their case is singular in the entire Graeco-Roman world. In the ancient times special denominations for this peculiar category of inscriptions didn't exist. Therefore, only the modern scientists have tried to find a specific term in order to define them: 'confessional' or 'propitiatory inscriptions', 'Beichtinschriften', 'Sühne-Inschriften', and 'stèles de confession'. The *period* of time they were dedicated can be strictly traced especially thanks to the mentions on the stelae and is comprised between the second half of the first century and the third quarter of the third century A.D. The oldest and one of the shortest dates from 57/58 A.D. (142 Sullan era), referring to Mên Artemodorou Axiottenos (EA, 22, 1994, no. 56), and the most recent is dedicated to the Great Zeus of the sacred oaks

(Μετὰ Ζεὺς ἐξείκαστο εὐδυσμῶν) in 263/264 A.D. (348 Sullan era) by a certain Athenaios after having been addressed by the god through a vision while sleeping (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 11).

A 'standard' confessional inscription implies most often a certain *typology*:

- a) the admittance of the great powers of the god and of the sin committed against the deity;
- b) the punishment given by the god himself and the way of manifesting his powers;
- c) redemption of the wrongdoer;
- d) the final statements including the warning that no one is allowed to treat the god lightly.

The redemption of the wrongdoer was a consequence of the dedicant's submittance to the commandments given by the god himself directly, without intercessors, through dreams and visions (MACMULLEN 1987, 59-60, 102-106; MITCHELL, I 1993, 192-194; MILLER 1985, 67; *EA*, 22, 1994, nos. 1, 9, 11, 33, 34, 65, 106; BURKERT 1987, 12-29). For instance, on a second century stele found at Buldan the dedicant had been informed by the deity himself that, as a consequence of a promise he got impure (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 98). But when the intercessors did appear, they should represent a 'qualified personnel' in the service of the god: (1) angels or gods subordinated to another higher, greater one, (2) priests and prophets or even associations of friends of angels. These conceptions are widespread especially in Lydia, Mysia and Phrygia, but also in Galatia as well and do not pertain only the category of confessional inscriptions. In the case of Hosios kai Dikaios ('The Holy and the Just'), an imprecation stele discovered at Hadrianoutherai in the central Mysia presents him as a messenger, ἀγγελοῦ, of the god Helios (*JGSK*, 52, 19). To these two solar gods of justice and vengeance Stateilia's husband addressed after her death a Galatian epigraph discovered at Karahoca in order to have her dowry back, on the ground that 'Stateilia, while living and conscious gave in trust to someone a green woolen garment and two silver bracelets and unless he returns them, may you, Holy and Just, and Lord Helios (Ὁ ἅγιος κούριε), avenge her, a corpse, and her living children' (*RECAM*, II, 242). Aurelius and a certain Association of the Friends of Angels made a vow to Hosios kai Dikaios at Yayla Baba köy, while at Temrek near Borlu (Lydia), a certain individual '... and Lucia, through the agency of the prophet Alexander of Saittai, set this up in

thanksgiving to ... and to the holy and just angel' (SHEPPARD 1980/1981, nos. 8, 9). It is also to Hosios kai Dikaios that Telesphoros and Hermogenes of Stalla set up a stele of confession because of their having committed perjury, even if the name of the deity is not clearly indicated within the text itself (DREW-BEAR 1976, no. 17 = *EA*, 22, 1994, no. 105; MITCHELL, II, 1993, 25-26).

An interesting example regarding the above-mentioned typology is represented by a dedication addressed to Mên Axiottenos in 164-165 A.D. which was discovered at Köleköy, a location probably situated on the territory of the Lydian city of Saittai: 'Great is Mên Axiottenos, king in Tarsi! When the sceptre had been set up in case anyone stole anything from the bath-house, since a cloak was stolen, the god took vengeance on the thief and made him bring the cloak to the god after a time, and he made confession. So the god gave orders through an angel that the cloak should be sold and his powers written up on a stele. In the year 249 (= A.D. 164/5)' (cf. SHEPPARD 1980/1981, no. 10 = *CMRDM*, I, 69 = *EA*, 22, 1994, no. 3).

These dedications were set as a proof that the names and the influence of the gods should not be treated lightly as well as a *warning* for the other members of the communities or the passersby (ROBERT 1987, 360) and placed most probably on the walls of the sanctuaries belonging to some specific indigenous deities: Zeus Didymeites, Zeus Oreites, Zeus Trosou, Zeus Orkamanites, Zeus Ogmenos, Mên Axiottenos, Mên eg Diodotou, Mên Petraeitis, Mên Labanas, Mên Tiamou, Zeus Sabazios, Meter Atimis, Meter Hipta, Meter Tarsene/Tazene, Meter Karpime, Meter Leto, Meter Phileis, Meter Talimmene, Meter Theon, Artemis Anaitis, Apollo Axyros/Azyros, Apollo Bozenos, Apollo Propylaios, Apollo Tarsene, Apollo Lairbenos, Hosios kai Dikaios, and Theos Tarsios. Yet, most of the locations are very scattered. The densest groups of inscriptions belong to the sanctuary of Apollo Lairbenos, situated near Motella, but on the other bank of the Meander river, to the sanctuary of Meter Phileis located several miles away from the Lydian town of Philadelphia, on the upper valley of Cogamus, and to the Maeonian group dedicated especially to the local Mên and Anaitis and placed around the sites of Saittai, Collyda and Kula.

The *content* of the inscriptions refers to the injuries suffered by certain individuals who neglected the powers of the gods and were given divine punishment in return. One of their specific features that set them apart from the rest of the epigraphs found in the area is that the wrongdoer should have *publicly admitted personal sins* so as to be

forgiven (if it were not already too late for the individual to express personal feelings of regret) and subsequently erect a penitential stele (LANE FOX 1997, 135). On the other hand, it was necessarily for him/her to *beg for the god's mercy* unless the divine vengeance should extend to the closest relatives as the enraged Apollo and the mistress Anaitis were invoked to set a vengeance for he who dared to desecrate a monument 'unto his children's children and his descendants' descendant' (MITCHELL, I, 1993, 188). In a similar way, a certain Pollio was careful to offer in 238/239 A.D. numerous gifts, including wine, food, and animals to the gods Mên Axiottenos, 'the king of Perkos/Perkon' and the Great Zeus Oreites for the divine rage to be tempered and for the gods' favours be established upon their children's children together with their own descendants. There are at least three other examples to sustain this theory. For instance, an inscription from Kula dedicated to Mên Artemidorou Axiot(t)enos entrusts us that a 13 years old girl, Herakleides, had to suffer because of her mother's intention to hide an event that clearly proved the manifestation of the great powers of the god thus refusing to make public and properly worship the deity and acting 'rather for the benefit of people than to the god'. Discovering that a specific stone of hyacinth which belonged to the family had been stolen, Syntyche, Theogenes' wife and Herakleides' mother, addressed her prayers to Mên Artemidorou Axiot(t)enos for the thief to be found. In the very 31st day afterwards the god plainly made use of his powers and tore up the thief, a girl named Apphia. But on the girl's mother request, Syntyche did not make this public, a deed that caused the god's rage (EA, 22, 1994, no. 59). Another story is narrated on the epigraph found at Ibrahim Ağa köy. Zeus Peizenos caused an eye injury to Diogene's daughter, Tatiane, for his not having fulfilled the promiss to the god. The vow being accomplished, the god was pleased and they subsequently erected the stele (EA, 22, 1994, no. 45). The third instance refers to the lethal punishment against Socrates, in the very same day when his own mother, Tatias, uttered injuries and curses in the temple while not admitting her own sins (EA, 22, 1994, no. 69).

Still, there are instances when the real cause of the punishment remains unclear, either because the discovered stelae are damaged (i.e. most of the inscriptions addressed to Meter Phileis in her sanctary situated on the NE of Philadelphia: EA, 22, 1994, no. 83, 86-88, 91-93) or for the simple fact that the dedicant did not mean to state it (EA, 22, 1994, no. 40, 41, 104, 109, 118). For example, Epitynchanos raised a stele to Apollo Propylaios at Eumeneia because of a specific reason he omitted to state

(DREW-BEAR 1976, no. 15 = *EA*, 22, 1994, no. 104); and the same does Isias, who had been punished by Meter Talimene (?) (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 42; *NIS*, I, p. 25) or Gaius whose incomplete dedication doesn't allow any speculation about the 'blessed reason' he was referring to (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 124).

There always existed a *reason* for the gods to commit vengeance upon the dedicants, even if the *sins* or personal errors were done unintentionally (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 10, 11, 76) or on purpose:

- a) poisoning, spells, and magic (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 69);
- b) sexual offences, desires, and rapes (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 5, 110, 111, 117; MITCHELL, I, 1993, 194 – masturbation in the *hieron*);
- c) ritual impurities or being in an impure condition (MACMULLEN 1987, 96-97); (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 36, 110, 112, 115, 116, 120); eating meat not sacrificed to the god (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 1, 123); wearing impure clothes (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 43, 55, 110);
- d) perjuries (MACMULLEN 1987, 100); (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 52, 54, 68, 102, 103, 105, 106, 107, 110, 120);
- e) curses in the temple (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 69) or uttering improper words (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 95);
- f) thefts (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 13, 59, 68, 106, 107);
- g) unfulfilled promises and vows (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 45);
- h) violation of the sacred precinct (*horion*) and the destruction of the things that belonged to the god: sacred pigeons, (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 50, 106) and sacred trees (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 7, 10, 11, 76);
- i) refusal or delay in accomplishing a task or a ritual act (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 71, 113) or to take part to the celebration of their mysteries (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 108);
- j) refusal to 'advertize' the god's deeds and powers (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 59);
- k) ignoring the gods' warnings (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 7);
- l) interference of other civil or military authority (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 49 = *CCIS*, II, 36; *EA*, 22, 1994 = *NIS*, I, p. 26);
- m) refusal to return sums of money (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 54; ROBERT 1963, 267-270);
- n) doubt or lack of trust in the deity (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 10, 12);

When the punishment was too severe and caused the death of the individual or impeded him/her to erect his/her own penitential stele, *the*

closest relatives or even their adoptive children (EA, 22, 1994, no. 4) should ask for deity's mercy to unbreak the curse or the punishment and its consequences so that the deceased rest in peace. This was the case of Asklas who, together with his nephews Asklas and Apollonides, dedicated at K p ler, in 173/174 A.D. a stele for a sin committed by his own father (EA, 22, 1994, no. 24). In a similar way, Thalamos dedicated an inscription to Zeus Orkamanites because of his wife's perjury (EA, 22, 1994, no. 102; see also DREW-BEAR, NAOUR 1990, 1939-1944). Even more dramatic was the case of Apollonios, who refused to return a sum of 40 denars to Skollos, swearing on the name of the gods Meter Atimis and Meis Tiamou to have given it back. After Skollos implored the goddess to make justice for him, Apollonios was punished to death by her, and it was only Apollonios' daughter, Tatias, who could cancel the sworn and its fatal consequences (EA, 22, 1994, no. 54).

The types of *punishments* can be divided into several categories such as a) **diseases** (eye or chest injuries, backside or legs diseases or affections, divine possessions of the body) (EA, 22, 1994, no. 5, 45, 49, 50, 75, 84, 85, 89, 93, 95, 123; MACMULLEN 1987, 88), b) **madness** (NIS, p. 25; L. ROBERT 1963, 268-270), c) **dumbness** (EA, 22, 1994, no. 1), d) **lethal accidents** or those that could have led to death unless the gods intervention (EA, 22, 1994, no. 7, 10, 11, 59), and e) **others** (EA, 22, 1994, no. 12, 36, 96, 100) that are not specified in the texts of the inscriptions.

A monument raised at Ayazviran in 118/119 A.D. mentions the harsh punishment Trophime, the daughter of Artemidoros, was subject to because of her disobedience in accomplish a task given by the god himself (through a vision?). She became a lunatic, but after consulting the will of Meter Tarsene, Apollo Tarsios, and M n Artemidoros Axiottenos, she decided to raise the stele to confess about their vengeance (*νευμεψι*) and to put herself in the service of the gods (EA, 22, 1994, no. 57 = CMRDM, I, 47 = Sartre 1995, 326).

Around the sanctuaries and temples there were strictly defined sacred precincts over which the direct jurisdiction of the gods extended directly. Crossing its boundaries in an impure state was a major crime. Inside, the supplicants felt that they were protected by the gods themselves and believed to be closer to their presence. It was here that many pilgrims or visitors have found asylum or were lodged even for weeks expecting the gods to manifest their powers through numerous *epiphaneiai*, to get cured or to receive a commandment, an oric vision or

an oracle. Such oracles for instance could be rendered for example by the indigenous god Apollo Lairbenos (MILLER, 1985, p. 48; CEYLAN, RITTI 1997, 57-67; LANE FOX 1997, 44-45, 246-250), and his true followers could initiate themselves in the mysteries of the god (EA, 22, 1994, no. 108).

The gods were viewed as *omnipotent* having a great upon the destinies of the individuals. A dedication of Aphias, the daughter of Theodoros, addressed to Meter Leto in the sanctuary of Apollo Lairbenos near Motella states that the goddess is the one 'who makes the impossible possible' (EA, 22, 1994, no. 122). Another epigraph that belonged to the sanctuary and discovered at Ortaköy and dedicated probably to the same local Apollo addressed as master (ἑυβριῶν) attests that the god was considered the master of the dedicant's body, who saved it and rendered it back after his penitence (EA, 22, 1994, no. 123).

Some were even considered to rule as kings (βασιλευσῶν) or to master the communities in those specific locations: (1) Mên Axiottenos for Perkos/Perkon (EA, 22, 1994, no. 6), Tarsi (?) in the territorium of Saittai (EA, 22, 1994, no. 3) or Koresa (EA, 22, 1994, no. 57), and (2) Meter (?Tarse)ne, Mis Labanas, and Mis Artemidorou for the village (*kome*) Dorou (EA, 22, 1994, no. 40).

They were thus perceived as the highest moral authority, the only one that could intervene not only to protect the dead, but also to regulate the behaviour and the relationships between the members of the community (MITCHELL I, 1993, 189). We can therefore discover many interesting things about the psychology, institutions and religious mentality of the dedicants, their needs and expectations, and their way of perceiving the divine world, that set them apart from those promoted by the urban milieu. Stephen Mitchell underlined the careful distinctions that should be done between these *worlds apart*, the city and the rural ones: 'The villages of rural Asia Minor lived a life that differed radically from that of the cities. Language and nomenclature, diet and lifestyle, cults and patterns of authority marked them as worlds apart. Villagers will have been regarded with a mixture of contempt, suspicion, and incomprehension by most city dwellers' (MITCHELL I, 1993, 195).

Thus, the gods acted as a sort of *divine moral council* in a region dominated by a very conservative rural lifestyle and morality (NIS, 23-24; MITCHELL I, 1993, 189-190; LANE FOX 1997, 136). Civil and military authorities were not allowed and should not have interfered in any respect because 'dans ces sociétés paysannes et religieuses (...) les

délits de toute sorte sont jugés et punis par les dieux' (*NIS*, 26). If that happened by any chance, the wrongdoers should have suffered the consequences. The two following examples are relevant. The first one concerns the sacred slave (ἱερόδουλος) Trophimos, and is narrated on a dedication to Meter Hipta and Zeus Sabazios found at Ayazviran (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 49 = *CCIS*, II, 36). It is not yet very clear what sort of right the dedicant had over this sacred slave, but the fact that he determined his seizing/arresting (?) by certain authority or magistrate (*NIS*, I, p. 26; see *DGF*, p. 712 for the potential meanings of ἐ*ῤουῖνα) caused the rage of gods who punished him with an injury at his eyes. The second refers to a certain woman from Motella, whose real name is unknown, had taken soldiers to the sanctuary to protect herself from enemies (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 114; *NIS*, I, p. 26) or even to revenge herself on an enemy (MITCHELL I, 1993, 194).

But we should also take into account another aspect concerning the dedicants who belong to this conservative rural society: their social and financial position was not meagre at all. Some of them were among the notables of the community. They should have been rich enough to have their stones carved by local specialists and their costs were expensive (LANE FOX 1997, 136). Still, there were also some sacred slaves (*hierodouloi*) to make such dedications. An example is that of Theodoros, who had been imprisoned and blinded but subsequently released by Zeus and the Great Mên Artemidorou because of his repeated sexual experiences, especially with unmarried women (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 5). Another stele was erected by the sacred slave Trophimos, on the request of Zeus Sabazios (*EA*, 22, 1994, no. 77 = *CCIS*, II, 34). This category of sacred slaves were not uncommon in Asia Minor, even if they formed only a definite minority among the whole population. The most eloquent cases of their presence are known at the sanctuary of Apollo Lairbenos near Motella and at the temple-states of the two Comanas (the Pontic and the Cappadocian ones). Some may have been true-born and some other have been entrusted by their relatives or slave-owners in the service of specific gods (MITCHELL I, 1993, 193).

Yet, one should be careful in drawing too abrupt a line between the local particularism and the general features of the other Oriental cults. It is true that, at least on the ground of typological features and the manner of expressing the public confessions, divine vengeance and punishment of the sinners, we witness an unique case in the Roman Empire. Besides, all these dedications are addressed to the local gods. But we should also take into account the fact that they follow phenomenologically the same

trend with and present similar features to the other Oriental cults in general and especially to the microasian ones.

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