

*HYP SISTOS* CULTS IN THE GREEK WORLD

*HYPISSTOS* CULTS IN THE GREEK WORLD DURING THE ROMAN IMPERIUM

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ABSTRACT: Between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, there was a rise in inscriptions dedicated to gods given the epithet *hypsistos* (“most high”). This growth raises questions about the beliefs and composition of the cult or cults that set up these dedications. The answers to these questions shed light on the construction and spread of monotheism in the pagan world as well as the context in which early Christianity spread and attracted followers. Many scholars, from Schürer in 1897 to Mitchell in 2010 have interpreted the *Hypsistos* inscriptions as evidence of a widespread pagan cult that practiced a syncretic Jewish-pagan religion and worshiped the Jewish god. In this essay, I examine *Hypsistos* inscriptions from the Bosporan kingdom, Anatolia, and Athens. Where possible, I infer the beliefs of the groups or persons that set up dedication, compare the iconography of the dedications, identify the gods of the inscriptions, often hidden behind a guise of anonymity, and explore the demographic composition of the groups that set up these shrines and dedications. I find that a variety of groups set up dedications to the Most High God, and that *hypsistos* connotes a number of different meanings. The beliefs of the worshipers that set up these dedications range from pagan polytheism to an extreme henotheism almost indistinguishable from monotheism. In some cases these worshipers may associate themselves with the Jewish religion, in other cases they do not.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, there was a marked increase in the number of inscriptions set up throughout the Greek-speaking world dedicated to a god given the epithet, ὕψιστος (“most-high”). These were quite often dedicated to an unnamed god but the epithet ὕψιστος was sometimes applied to Zeus or to a local deity. The increase of these inscriptions has been interpreted by some modern scholars as evidence of a widespread cult and a shift toward monotheism in pagan religious thought. A close examination of the epigraphic evidence, however, shows that worship of gods given the epithet was often highly localized. The gods worshiped as ὕψιστος were often indigenous deities. A wide range of religious ideologies, cults, and forms of worship lie behind the epithet. While it is clear that a cult of *Theos Hypsistos* that held a monotheistic, or nearly monotheistic belief did exist by no later than the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, the epigraphic data can inflate the perceived size and influence of the cult, if it is not carefully examined.

In 1897, Emil Schürer published *Die Juden im bosporanischen Reiche und die Genossenschaften der σεβόμενοι θεὸν ὕψιστον ebendasselbst*, and his paper remains influential today. Schürer argued that the cult of *Theos Hypsistos* (“the Most-high God”) in the Bosporan kingdom arose through the influence of Jewish communities. In his view, the cult of *Theos Hypsistos* was a syncretic religion, adopting features of both paganism and Judaism. He connects the εἰσποιητοὶ ἀδελφοὶ σεβόμενοι θεὸν ὕψιστον (“adopted brothers who revere god most high”) from the city of Tanais with the “God-fearers” of the Christian New Testament, known in *Acts of the Apostles* as σεβόμενοι τὸν θεόν

(“worshippers of god”) or *φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν* (“fearers of god”).<sup>1</sup> The “God-fearers” of *Acts* were pagan Jewish sympathizers who associated with Jewish synagogues. Schürer conflates these two groups with the *Hypsistos* worshipers described by early Christian writers in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>2</sup> These writers reported one or more groups, variously called Hypsistarians, Massalians, Euphemites, or Theosebeis, that worship a single god called either *Hypsistos* or *Pantokator* (“Almighty”) and practice a mixture of pagan and Jewish religious practices. These were located variously in Cappadocia, Phoenicia and Palestine.<sup>3</sup> Thus Schürer posited a widespread cult devoted to *Theos Hypsistos*, that ranged throughout Anatolia, Syria and Palestine. The cult associated closely with Jews, and “war weder Judenthum noch Heidentum, sondern sich eine Neutralisirung beider.”<sup>4</sup>

Schürer thus set the template for scholarly examination of the cult of *Theos Hypsistos*. Cumont follows Schürer’s assessment of the associations in the Bosporan kingdom. He agrees that they arose from Jewish influence in the area, and were a part of a widespread, syncretic cult of *Theos Hypsistos* that was closely associated with Judaism. He adds that a confusion existed between *Theos Hypsistos*, *Zeus Sabazios* and Yahweh *Sabaoth* in Mysia, seemingly confirming a syncretic connection between Zeus and the Jewish god.<sup>5</sup> Goodenough goes further than Schürer. He sees nothing in the inscriptions

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<sup>1</sup> Schürer (1897), 207-209 and 218-20. The whole phrase *σεβόμενος τὸν θεόν* occurs only twice, in *Acts* 16:14 and 18:7, referring to Gentile individuals. On its own, *σεβόμενος* occurs three times as an adjective, describing Jewish proselytes (13:43), high-ranking women of Pisidian Antioch (13:50), and Greeks whom Paul and Silas converted (17:4). It occurs once substantively, referring to “Jews and worshippers” in an Athenian synagogue (17:17).

<sup>2</sup> Schürer (1897), 221-3.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 18.5 writes of the Hypsistarians; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 2.5, writes of the same group; Epiphanius, *Haer.* 80.1, writes of a group called either the Massalians or the Euphemites; Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate*, 3 writes of Theosebeis.

<sup>4</sup> Schürer (1897), 225.

<sup>5</sup> Cumont (1914), 448.



of the Tanais associations that is incompatible with Judaism. In his estimate, the associations comprise Hellenistic Jewish converts.<sup>6</sup> Roberts, Skeat, and Nock also follow Schürer's reasoning, connecting the associations in Tanais with Jewish influence, and the Hypsistarians of Cappadocia. They complicate the issue, however, pointing out that the epithet was widespread beyond Jewish influence.<sup>7</sup> Thus they suppose that the Zeus *Hypsistos* of an Egyptian papyrus may be the Hellenized form of an indigenous deity, such as Ammon.<sup>8</sup>

Levinskaya proposes that a strict demarcation can be made between the cults of Zeus *Hypsistos* and *Theos Hypsistos*. Her evidence is that dedications to Zeus *Hypsistos* and *Theos Hypsistos* are markedly different in form, with the latter completely lacking in anthropoid images of the deity. She also claims that dedications to Zeus *Hypsistos* and *Theos Hypsistos* are not found together, originating in different areas of the world. She makes an exception for Athens, but does not explain the anomaly.<sup>9</sup> She argues, like Schürer, that the bulk of dedications to *Theos Hypsistos* reveal Jewish influence and the existence of a cult of "God-fearers," worshiping the Jewish god without fully converting to Judaism.<sup>10</sup> As with Schürer, the synods of the city of Tanais and the Bosporan kingdom are a linchpin piece of evidence for her conclusions.<sup>11</sup>

Mitchell gathers together an exhaustive collection of inscriptions dedicated to a

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<sup>6</sup> Goodenough (1957), 232-3.

<sup>7</sup> Nock, et al (1936), 63-67.

<sup>8</sup> Nock, et al (1936), 71-2; *P.Lond.* 7.2193 = *SB* 5.7835.

<sup>9</sup> Levinskaya (1996), 85-6.

<sup>10</sup> Levinskaya (1996), 95-7.

<sup>11</sup> Levinskaya (1996), 105-116.

*Hypsistos* deity, whether the epithet is paired with Zeus, *Theos*, or appears alone.<sup>12</sup> He analyzes these under the broad umbrella of a single, monotheistic cult devoted to a Most High God, deliberately left unnamed by worshipers. A 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century inscription found in the wall of the Lycian city, Oenoanda, provides the crucial epigraphic evidence of this pagan monotheism, a belief that he attributes widely.<sup>13</sup> Mitchell connects diverse sites to a single cult, from the shrine at Athens to the synods of the city of Tanais, in the Bosporan kingdom.<sup>14</sup> He too follows Schürer's lead on the evidence from Tanais, arguing that worship of *Theos Hypsistos* there, and by extension elsewhere, shows Jewish influence,<sup>15</sup> and he likewise holds that the cult of *Theos Hypsistos* can be identified with the "God-fearers" of the New Testament.<sup>16</sup> Thus he outlines a cult with a huge geographic spread. "*Hypsistos* was one of the most widely worshiped gods of the eastern Mediterranean world."<sup>17</sup>

I will examine and compare several localized uses of the *ὑψιστος*. The study will necessarily be divided geographically with an eye to chronology and connections between regions. I will show that while it is indeed the case that some of the *Hypsistos* inscriptions clearly refer to monotheistic or near-monotheistic worship, this not universal. A few inscriptions list the most-high god alongside other deities, without any indication that the other deities are significantly diminished. Nor is it clear that the many inscriptions, often separated by great distances both temporally and geographically, are set up by individuals

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<sup>12</sup> Mitchell (1999), 128-148, supplemented in Mitchell (2010), 198-208.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell (1999), 81 and 86-92

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell (1999), 105.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell (1999), 114.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell (1999), 115-21.

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell (1999), 99.

connected to a single widespread cult with a consistent concept of the god addressed as *Hypsistos*. The evidence shows a good deal of regional variation, and it is not discordant with the existence of multiple cults devoted to a variety of gods. This includes the “God-fearers,” and monotheistic worshipers, but it is not limited to them. Neither of Levinskaya’s claims are supported by evidence. First, the evidence in Athens is not so easily dismissed. Second, a number of dedications to *Theos Hypsistos* or unnamed gods are clearly intended to refer to gods named elsewhere. There is nevertheless good reason to approach the *Hypsistos* epigraphy with caution. Mitchell’s broad umbrella fractures when regional collections of *Hypsistos* dedications are looked at closely.

In the second chapter, I will examine the use of ὕψιστος in ancient literature. It appears in ancient Greek literature as early as Pindar, and in this usage the epithet in no way denies or diminishes polytheistic belief. Of course, the opposite is true in the case of Jewish and Christian references to ὕψιστος, who most certainly consider their god the sole deity. And whereas the epithet is relatively rare in Greek literature, it is quite common in Jewish and Christian literature. If epigraphy bearing the epithet shows Christian or Jewish origin or influence, it surely reflects Jewish or Christian monotheism.

I will also cover literary references to pagan monotheism, particularly the Hypsistarians mentioned by Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory identifies the god they worshiped as *Pantokrator*, an epithet closely associated with Jewish use, far more so than *Hypsistos*. This epithet does appear in some inscriptions dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*, though I will show in Chapter Three that these must be read with great care. Some of the practices he attributes to these worshipers, such as the practice of worshiping god as fire

or lamplight is attested by the presence of lamps at some sites of ὕψιστος worship.

Gregory of Nyssa likewise mentions a monotheistic group alongside Jews that he calls the Hypsistianoi. In Cyprus, Epiphanius of Salamis describes similar groups toward the end of the 4th century AD, although he made no connection to Judaism. He calls them Euphemites or Massalians, and their god, *Pantokrator*. He says they held their services with many lanterns and lights. Cyril of Alexandria also describes a group that mingles pagan and Jewish practices, calling them Theosebeis (“God-fearers”).

All of these do indicate the presence of monotheistic cults in Anatolia, perhaps influenced by Judaism. I will show, however, that the differences apparent in the literature can become unclear in the epigraphy. Epigraphic evidence contains very little context for placing the finds in a broader cultural tapestry. Given how finely the early Christian writers parsed groups with very similar beliefs, it is imperative that scholarly examination not be quick to lump superficially similar inscriptions together without careful justification.

In the three following chapters, I will look at *Hypsistos* epigraphy in three separate geographical regions in order to highlight the distinct differences between these groups, as well as what connections may exist. I will examine epigraphy from the Bosporan kingdom on the north shore of the Black Sea, a shrine to *Zeus Hypsistos* in Athens, and make a brief survey of the evidence from Anatolia.

Epigraphy in the Bosporan kingdom attests the existence of several cult associations between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD devoted to an unnamed *Theos Hypsistos*. The inscriptions include a number of enrollment lists in Tanais that preserve

the names of their members and a hierarchy of officials. Jewish manumission inscriptions in Gorgippia and Panticapaeum, also dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos* make clear the presence of Jewish communities referring to the god by the same name. Schürer argued that several factors demonstrate Jewish influence on the Tanais cults; Jewish names among the lists, and a few tablets that refer to associations by language found in the New Testament. In addition, some of the manumission inscriptions in Panticapaeum and Gorgippia show a mix of Jewish and pagan influences, attesting to syncretic worship. There is, however, no evidence of Jewish presence in Tanais itself, where the cult of *Theos Hypsistos* was most prevalent. Prosopographical examination indicates that the members of these associations were largely Iranian or Hellenized locals. The names and language Schürer points to can be explained in a pagan context and the evidence in Panticapaeum and Gorgippia is ambiguous. A representation of the god worshiped in Tanais, bearded, mounted, dressed in Sarmatian trappings, identifies the god with Iranian rider-gods and local solar deities, and displays a connection to the Bosporan royal family. The devotion to *Theos Hypsistos* in the Bosphorus cannot be assumed to be monotheistic, but rather, it is a henotheistic devotion to a royal cult that existed alongside Jewish communities.

A *Hypsistos* cult existed in Athens from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. A sanctuary to *Zeus Hypsistos* occupied the Pnyx, the hill which had formerly been the site of the Athenian Assemblies. The cult is identified by almost 20 votive plaques or altars found at the site dedicated to *Zeus Hypsistos*, *Theos Hypsistos*, or simply to *Hypsistos*. Over a dozen more have been found at other locations in Athens and associated with this

sanctuary due to references to *Hypsistos*. The cult of *Hypsistos* at this site is particular for being a healing cult—most of the votive plaques include a depiction of the body part the devotee wishes healed—which is not typical of Zeus. It is also notable that the majority of the votives were offered by women, a marked reversal of the *Hypsistos* dedications elsewhere, which almost exclusively attest only male dedicants. Prosopographical analysis of the names of the dedicants reveal they were, for the most part, native Greeks. I will show that while this cult may have been connected to the broader cult of *Theos Hypsistos*, the worship of Zeus *Hypsistos* in Athens took on a distinctly local character that connected it to the history of worship of Zeus in the city.

The *ὑψιστος* inscriptions in Anatolia show a great deal of variety. The best evidence for monotheistic worship is found in the inscription on the wall of Oenoanda. The inscription quotes a Clarian oracle that describes a transcendent god, demoting the other gods to *ἄγγελοι* (“angels” or “messengers”). A nearby inscription on the same wall is dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*. Although the god of this inscription transcends any individual deity, such as Zeus, the language nevertheless derives from Greek thought. Inscriptions as far away as Amastris, on the south coast of the Black Sea show a similar conception of *Theos Hypsistos*, as do a set of inscriptions from Carian Stratonicea that pair Zeus or *Theos Hypsistos* with a subordinate, intermediary deity. These inscriptions do have some common ground with Jewish inscriptions in Anatolia. Alongside these inscriptions, however, are dedications that depict *Theos Hypsistos* in a clearly polytheistic context, named alongside other gods without any diminishment of the latter. Other inscriptions show the influence of native Persian religion, pairing *Theos Hypsistos* with

the Zoroastrian-influenced Ὅσιος καὶ Δίκαιος (“Holy and Just”). Many dedications exhibit rural concerns. Several dedications to *Theos Hypsistos* request that the god protect cattle, a common wish for rural cults, or they depict sheafs of wheat or bunches of grapes, professing a god that held common appeal.

On the basis of a geographically organized examination of ὕψιστος inscriptions, I will show that while use of the epithet spread throughout the Greek-speaking world during the Roman Imperium, this does not mean that individuals and groups that made use of the term shared any other connection. Nor did use of the epithet necessarily demonstrate a shift toward monotheistic thought on the part of the devotee. A monotheistic, or near-monotheistic cult that worshiped an anonymous *Theos Hypsistos* certainly did exist, but I will show that its presence was not so widespread as a count of *Hypsistos* dedications might imply.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERARY EVIDENCE OF *HYPYSISTOS* WORSHIP

Pagans, Jews and Christians all referred to their respective deities as *ὑψιστος* at one time or another. The epithet acquired a variety of meanings, and its interpretation depends on the circumstances of its application. Greek poets referring to Zeus *Hypsistos* had sense a of the “most-high” that was quite different from Jewish and Christian references to *Theos Hypsistos*. Later Christian writers sought to differentiate themselves from pagan Jewish sympathizers who adopted worship of *Theos Hypsistos*. Despite very similar beliefs and influences, the Christian writers saw a clear distinction between themselves and other groups that used much the same language. All of these differences can easily be lost in the epigraphic record.

Schürer outlines the pagan literary use of the epithet, *ὑψιστος*.<sup>18</sup> It dates as far back as Pindar in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. He gives the epithet to Zeus in two places in his *Nemean Ode*.<sup>19</sup> Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Theocritus also describe Zeus as *ὑψιστος*.<sup>20</sup> It is clear in these cases that this is an indication of a hierarchy among the gods that places Zeus in the chief position of both power and place, but not a position so supreme that a de facto monotheism can be assumed. In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, *ὑψιστος* is explicitly connected to an altar of Zeus and its position at the peak of a mountain. This sense of *ὑψιστος* as a divine hierarchy of position is likewise true in Pausanias' descriptions of monuments dedicated to Zeus *Hypsistos*. In Corinth, he describes a statue of Zeus *Hypsistos* standing alongside two others, one of Zeus *Cthonius* (“Zeus beneath the earth”), and another of

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<sup>18</sup> Schürer (1897), 209.

<sup>19</sup> *Nem.* 1.90 and 11.2.

<sup>20</sup> Aesch. *Eum.* 28; Sophoc. *Philoct.* 1289 and *Trach.* 1191; Theocrit. *Idyll.* 25.159.



Zeus without an epithet.<sup>21</sup> The two paired epithets, *Hypsistos* and *Cthonius*, indicate the great breadth of Zeus' power, from the upper reaches of the sky to the lower depths of the earth. He further lists two altars to Zeus *Hypsistos* in Olympia in the midst of a long list of all the altars in the city to the many gods, including several others to Zeus under various epithets.<sup>22</sup> Finally, in Thebes, by the *Hypsistas* gate, there is a sanctuary devoted to Zeus *Hypsistos*.<sup>23</sup> The use of ὕψιστος to describe Zeus in these instances demonstrates that care must be taken in the interpretation of epigraphic attestations of *Theos Hypsistos*, which could likewise refer to a polytheistic hierarchy rather than monotheistic belief. As I will show, many of the ὕψιστος inscriptions reflect just this sort of hierarchical ordering of divine powers, without denying the presence and power of other gods.

Conversely, ὕψιστος was used throughout Jewish scripture as an epithet for the Jewish god and its use in inscriptions may indicate Jewish origin or influence. Schürer lists a great many examples of its use in the Septuagint, particularly in *Psalms*, as well as examples from the Apocrypha. In these cases, the epithet obviously refers to the Jewish god and monotheistic belief. Where the epigraphic evidence shows Jewish influence, the same inference can be drawn.

Literary evidence for pagan worshipers of *Theos Hypsistos* is present in brief passages in four Christian writers from the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Due to the brevity of these passages only a few details of this group (or, these groups) can be established. All of the passages are quite late with respect to the majority of the

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<sup>21</sup> Paus. 2.2.8.

<sup>22</sup> Paus. 5.15.5.

<sup>23</sup> Paus. 9.8.5.

epigraphic evidence, the bulk of which is from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. Nevertheless, the literature does show some close correlations to information derived from the epigraphy.

Two of these passages can be read together. Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa were contemporaneous Christian writers dwelling in Cappadocia at the time of the composition of their respective works. They each wrote briefly of *Hypsistos* worshipers and gave them very similar names. Given the close correlation in date, location, and name, they were almost certainly referring to the same group.

In the funeral oration of his father (c. 374 AD), Gregory of Nazianzus wrote briefly of his father's involvement in a syncretic Jewish-pagan movement. He calls these worshipers *Hypsistarioi*:

*ἐκεῖνος τοίνυν... ῥίζης ἐγένετο βλάστημα οὐκ ἐπαινετῆς ... ἐκ δυοῖν τοῖν ἐναντιωτάτοιν συγκεκραμένης. ἐλληνικῆς τε πλάνης καὶ νομικῆς τερατείας · ὧν ἀμφοτέρων τὰ μέρη φυγῶν ἐκ μερῶν συνετέθη. τῆς μὲν γὰρ τὰ εἰδῶλα καὶ τὰς θυσίας ἀποπεμπόμενοι τιμῶσι τὸ πῦρ καὶ τὰ λύχνα · τῆς δὲ τὸ σάββατον αἰδούμενοι καὶ τὴν περὶ τὰ βρώματα ἔστιν ἡ μικρολογία τὴν περιτομὴν ἀτιμάζουσιν. ὑπιστάριοι τοῖς ταπεινοῖς ὄνομα, καὶ ὁ Παντοκράτωρ δὴ μόνος αὐτοῖς σεβάσμιος.<sup>24</sup>*

*“That man, accordingly ... was offspring of stock not to be praised ... formed by union of two opposites, both Greek error and legal chicanery, from either of which some parts heeded, from others fled. For, of the one, although dismissing idols and sacrifices they revere fire and lamps, and of the other, although they regard the Sabbath and minutiae concerning foods, they pay no honour to circumcision. Hypsistarioi is the name for these lowly men, and the Almighty alone is reverend to them.”*

Gregory of Nyssa wrote two books against the heresy of Eunomius. He wrote the volumes after returning to Cappadocia from Armenia in 381 AD. The second book makes a brief mention of a group he calls the *Hypsistianoi*:

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 18.5

ὁ γὰρ ὁμολογῶν τὸν πατέρα πάντοτε καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχειν, ἕνα καὶ μόνον ὄντα, τὸν τῆς εὐσεβείας κρατύνει λόγον ... εἰ δὲ ἄλλον τινὰ παρὰ τὸν πατέρα θεὸν ἀναπλάσσει, Ἰουδαίοις διαλεγέσθω ἢ τοῖς λεγομένοις Ὑψιστιανοῖς · ὧν αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ πρὸς τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς διαφορὰ, τὸ θεὸν μὲν αὐτοὺς ὁμολογεῖν εἶναι τινα, ὃν ὀνομάζουσιν Ὑψιστον ἢ παντοκράτορα · πατέρα δὲ αὐτὸν εἶναι μὴ παραδέχεσθαι.<sup>25</sup>

*“For he who confesses the father at all times and in a like manner, being one and alone, strengthens the word of reverence ... but if he invents something new besides God the father, let him converse with the Jews or those called Hysistianoi, whose disagreement with the Christians is this, that they confess God to be something which they call the Highest or Almighty but do not accept him to be the father.”*

It is notable that both Nyssa and Nazianzus say that this group refers to god they worship as *Παντοκράτωρ* (“Almighty”), although they identify them by a name derived from *Ὑψιστος* (“Most High”). *Παντοκράτωρ* is an epithet closely associated with the Jewish god,<sup>26</sup> corroborating the claim of a close connection between the *Hysistos* worshipers and Jewish communities. The epithet is quite rare in inscriptions, however. Mitchell, in his list of nearly 300 known *Hysistos* inscriptions, finds only four that make use of the epithet, all in Gorgippia, on the north shore of the Black Sea, rather far from Cappadocia. They are separated further by a gulf of time; the inscriptions are dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD.<sup>27</sup> These four inscriptions are discussed in Chapter Three.

The reverence for fire and lamps, by contrast, has a good deal more epigraphic

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<sup>25</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 2.5.

<sup>26</sup> See Schürer (1897), 205 for many examples of *παντοκράτωρ* in the Septuagint and the Biblical Apocrypha. It was also used by the earliest Christian writers, but it was later supplanted by the view of god as father. According to Goodenough (1953), 175, 176-7, and 181, *παντοκράτωρ* identifies the Jewish god on magical charms and amulets. By contrast, Cook (1914, 1925, 1940) finds no examples of *παντοκράτωρ* as an epithet of Zeus. Crete has yielded one reference to *Hermes Pantokrator*, Goodenough (1957), 222; Kaibel (1878), n. 815.

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell (1999), nos. 84 = *SEG* 32.790; 85 = *CIRB* 1123; 86 = *CIRB* 1126; 87 = *CIRB* 1125. His 2010 addendum to this list contains no instances of *παντοκράτωρ*. Frey's 1975 *Corpus of Jewish Inscriptions* lists two of these as the only instances of the epithet in the corpus: Mitchell (1999), nos. 85 = *CJI* 690 and 87 = *CJI* 78\*; A dedication to *παντοκράτωρ θεός* was found in a synagogue in Sardis, Kraabel (1978), 25.

support. The sanctuary of Zeus *Hypsistos* in Athens, for example, had accumulated a large volume of ancient lamp fragments, discussed in Chapter Five. Similarly, a structure in Delos contains both dedications to *Theos Hypsistos* and the remains of many lamps, some showing pagan symbols.<sup>28</sup> As well, dedications to *Theos Hypsistos* occasionally mention offerings of lamps or lamp lighting.<sup>29</sup> An inscription on the wall of the Lycian city, Oenoanda, discussed in Chapter Four, pays reverence to a god “that dwells in fire.”<sup>30</sup>

Epiphanius, in a treatise written between 374 and 377 AD that describes and condemns various heresies, describes a group he calls the Massalians. The Massalians contemporary to him are heretical Christians, but in the course of introducing these, he discusses an earlier group who were also called Massalians, in the time of Constantius,<sup>31</sup> and otherwise known as Euphemites. The Massalians of Constantius, he says, were wholly pagan:

*ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι μὲν ἐξ Ἑλλήνων ὠρμᾶντο, οὔτε Ἰουδαϊσμῷ προσανέχοντες οὔτε Χριστιανοὶ ὑπάρχοντες οὔτε ἀπὸ Σαμαρειτῶν, ἀλλὰ μόνον Ἕλληνες ὄντες δῆθεν καὶ θεοὺς μὲν λέγοντες, μηδενὶ δὲ <τούτων> προσκυνοῦντες, ἐνὶ δὲ μόνον δῆθεν τὸ σέβας νέμοντες καὶ καλοῦντες Παντοκράτορα. τινὰς δὲ οἴκους ἑαυτοῖς κατασκευάσαντες ἢ τόπους πλατεῖς, φόρων δίκην, προσευχὰς ταύτας ἐκάλουν.<sup>32</sup> ... καθ' ἐσπέραν καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἔω μετὰ πολλῆς λυχναψίας καὶ φώτων συναθροιζόμενοι, ἐπὶ πολὺ τε καταλεγματία τινὰ ὑπὸ τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς σπουδαίων καὶ εὐφημίας τινὰς δῆθεν εἰς τὸν θεὸν ποιούμενοι, ὡς <διὰ> καταλεγματίων καὶ εὐφημιῶν ὥσπερ θεὸν ἐξιλεούμενοι, ἑαυτοὺς ἀπατῶσιν.*

*But those arose from the Greeks, not devoted to the Jews nor being Christians, nor from the Samaritans, but indeed were merely pagans and though they professed the gods, they worshiped none, indeed, paying reverence to one alone and calling*

<sup>28</sup> Kraabel (1979), 491-3. The designation of this building is ambiguous. Goodenough (1953), 71-5 calls it a synagogue, but with great reservation. Trebilco (1991), 134 and Kraabel agree. Mitchell (1999), 98 likewise concurs with the caveat that the lamp offerings attest to Gentile presence as well.

<sup>29</sup> See *CIG* 4380n<sup>2</sup>, or *TAM* 5.2 n. 1400.

<sup>30</sup> *SEG* 27.933

<sup>31</sup> It is not clear whether Constantius I (305 – 306 AD) or Constantius II (337 – 361 AD) is intended.

<sup>32</sup> Epiphanius, *Haer.* 80.1

*him Almighty. Building certain houses for themselves, or flat places, like fora, they called these prayer-houses. ... assembling every evening and every dawn with much lamp-lighting and torches, indeed offering a certain hymn, a long one, by sages among them and blessings to god, as if (through) blessings and hymns they might propitiate god, as it were, they deceive themselves.*

Epiphanius' description, despite denying any association with the Jewish religion, provides a couple of details that call this assertion into question. First, the Massalians, like the *Hypsistos* worshipers of Nyssa and Nazianzus, worshiped their god as *Παντοκράτωρ*. Second, he states that they name their places of congregation *προσευχαί* ("prayer-houses"). In epigraphy, the *προσευχή* is almost exclusively considered to fall under the demesne of the Jewish religion.<sup>33</sup> Epiphanius' claim calls this into question, at least in regard to worshipers of *Theos Hypsistos*, but the association also undermines his denial of any Jewish connection. His Massalians acknowledge of pagan deities, however, even if the acknowledgement amounts to little more than lip-service. They also resemble the *Hypsistos* worshipers in the ceremonial use of light. He further attributes to them crepuscular worship and the prominent use of blessings and hymns. Given the many similarities it is possible to conclude that Epiphanius wrote of the same group as Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, or at least that the two groups were closely related. He does not, unfortunately, provide any geographic information.

Cyril of Alexandria is the latest of these writers. His work, *On Adoration and Worship in Spirit and Truth* is the first of his works but likely written after his assumption

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<sup>33</sup> Trebilco (1991), 134 and 241, note 33; Goodenough (1953), 86: "From Alexandria also come remarks of Philo about the synagogues and their use. His usual term for a synagogue is *προσευχή*, which he uses so often that it has made epigraphists in general feel it safe to presume that any inscription which uses the word is probably Jewish, unless other evidence contradicts."

of the bishopric of Alexandria in 412 AD.<sup>34</sup> He begins by describing a heresy of the Old Testament, the devotion of King Melchizedek to the Most High God in *Genesis*, but he links the heresy to the activity of a contemporaneous group:

*Προσεκύνον μὲν γὰρ ... ὑψίστῳ Θεῷ ... προσεδέχοντο δὲ καὶ ἑτέρους τάχα πού θεοὺς, ἐναριθμοῦντες αὐτῷ τὰ ἐξαιρέτα τῶν κτισμάτων, γῆν τε καὶ οὐρανόν, ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην, καὶ τὰ τῶν ἀστρῶν ἐπισημότερα · καὶ πλημμέλημα μὲν ἀρχαῖον ἢ ἐπὶ τῷδε καταφθορὰ καὶ πλάνησις, διήκει δὲ καὶ εἰς δεῦρο καὶ παρατείνεται. Φπονοῦσι γὰρ ὧδε παραληροῦντες ἔτι τῶν ἐν τῇ Φοινίκῃ καὶ Παλαιστίνῃ τινές, οἱ σφᾶς μὲν αὐτοὺς θεοσεβεῖς ὀνομάζουσιν, οἷμον δὲ τινα θρησκείας διαστείχουσι μέσην, οὔτε τοῖς Ἰουδαίων ἔθεσι καθαρῶς, οὔτε τοῖς Ἑλλήνων προσκείμενοι, εἰς ἄμφω δὲ ὥσπερ διαρριπτούμενοι καὶ μεμερισμένοι.<sup>35</sup>*

*“For they made obeisance... to most-high god ... and yet they doubtless accepted others as gods, reckoning as his the exceptional of created things, both earth and heaven, the sun and the moon, and the more notable of the stars. And the ancient trespass, that ruin and error to this very day, extends even to here and is prolonged. For in this way they are prudent, yet they speak certain nonsenses of those in Phoenicia and Palestine, who call themselves Theosebeis, they practice a certain way of religious worship in-between, not belonging purely to the Jewish custom nor to the Greek, but to both just as if cast about and divided up.”*

Thus Cyril of Alexandria describes another group of syncretic Jewish-pagan *Hypsistos* worshipers, locating them in Phoenicia and Palestine. He names them *Θεοσεβεῖς* (“God-fearers”), a term that has some epigraphic support, though the evidence is often contested.<sup>36</sup> Like Epiphanius’ Massalians, the God-fearers acknowledge the existence of other gods, but exalt the Most-High God above all others. Unlike Epiphanius, Cyril of Alexandria does not deny any association with Jews, but rather describes their worship as a syncretic mix of Jewish and pagan customs, like the *Hypsistos* worshipers of Gregory of

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<sup>34</sup> Russell (2000), 13.

<sup>35</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Schürer (1986), 166-68 provides a thorough list of the epigraphic evidence. Two substantial pieces of evidence are an inscription from Aphrodisias that lists Gentile patrons of a synagogue under the heading *Θεοσεβεῖς* (see Reynolds and Tannenbaum, [1987]), and an inscription from a theatre in Miletus that reserves seats “for Jews and God-fearers” (*CIJ* II 748).

Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus.

A summary of the attributes assigned by each author displays the similarities and differences between the various descriptions. Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa can be assumed to have spoken of the same group:

Table 1: Comparison of <i>Hypsistos</i> worshipers in literary sources.		
<b>Gregory of Nazianzus</b>	<b>Epiphanius</b>	<b>Cyril of Alexandria</b>
<b>Gregory of Nyssa</b>		
<i>Called Hypsistarioi or Hypsistianoï</i>	<i>Called Massalians or Euphemites</i>	<i>Called Theosebeis</i>
<i>Syncretic Jewish-pagan worship.</i>	<i>Greek worship</i>	<i>Syncretic Jewish-pagan worship.</i>
<i>God is named Hypsistos or Pantokrator.</i>	<i>God is named Pantokrator.</i>	<i>God is named Hypsistos.</i>
<i>Found in Cappadocia.</i>		<i>Found in Phoenicia and Palestine.</i>
<i>They dismiss idols and sacrifices.</i>	<i>They profess the gods but do not worship them.</i>	<i>They acknowledge other gods.</i>
<i>They revere fire and lamps.</i>		
<i>They have regard for the Sabbath and food laws.</i>		
<i>They do not practice circumcision.</i>		
<i>They do not accept god as father.</i>	<i>They build houses and fora called proseuchai.</i>	
	<i>They assemble at evening and dawn.</i>	
	<i>They sing hymns and blessings</i>	

It may be impossible to determine with certainty whether the four authors described three different groups with many similarities, or whether they gave three different names to a single cult, but the latter seems the likelier conclusion. There are few perfect correlations, but this is to be expected from such sparse information. Notably, there is nothing in any of

the descriptions that rules out a conclusion that all four writers describe the same group. The apparent differences are easily smoothed over. Epiphanius' assertion that the Massalians are wholly Greek without Jewish influence is suspect, given the names for their god and for their places of worship, both closely associated with Jews. The dismissal of idols and sacrifices found in Gregory of Nazianzus is not incongruent with acknowledgement of other gods, short of worship. Moreover, it is fully compatible with the worship that Epiphanius attributes to them; singing hymns and blessings are a likely replacement for sacrificial worship. The relative fluidity of contact between different regions of the empire would have permitted members of a single cult to have maintained contact between Cappadocia, Phoenicia, and Palestine, even a relatively small cult of limited scope. There is, in truth, little reason not to accept the four passages as referring to a single cult.

What is clear is that these Christian thinkers sought to differentiate themselves from groups that had very similar beliefs and influences as themselves and that they were quite able to do so. This is similarly true of Jewish communities, especially after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 AD. Rabbinic reforms strengthened Jewish ethnic ties in the Diaspora, shored up the boundaries of Judaism, and differentiated Jewish worship of the Diaspora communities from the pagan milieu in which they lived. The Hebrew language and Jewish names gradually become more frequent in epigraphy after these events.<sup>37</sup> Differences between pagan and Jewish inscriptions can nevertheless remain difficult to see in the epigraphic record. Gibson

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<sup>37</sup> Collar (2013), 226.



discusses the difficulty of identifying Jewish inscriptions from pagan and Christian inscriptions.<sup>38</sup> For one, many indicators of Jewish identification, such as Biblical names or the presence of a menorah, were adopted by Christians. Furthermore, however much the use of explicitly Jewish indicators increased, a great many inscriptions simply do not bear them, even where the context of their find implies Jewish origins. Moreover, many Jewish inscriptions may have made use of Hellenistic cultural tropes, such as invocation of pagan deities. These cannot be eliminated on an assumption that Jews of the Diaspora would have rejected such cultural influences. The converse is also true—Gentiles occasionally adopt Jewish usages in their inscriptions.<sup>39</sup> As Gibson puts it, “the collection of Jewish inscriptions will comprise only those examples in which Jews chose to connect the inscription to Jewish communal life.”<sup>40</sup> It is impossible to say how many inscriptions, divorced from their original context, have had their ethnic or religious origins effectively erased.

This is, of course, just as true of *Hypsistos* inscriptions. In many instances, pagan inscriptions dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos* might be indistinguishable from Jewish dedications to the same. This is certainly true if *Hypsistos* worshipers consciously associated with Jewish communities and adopted Jewish usages such as referring to their god as *Παντοκράτωρ*, or their places of worship as *προσευχαί*, but it does not cease to be true if even they did not. The epigraphic remains they left behind would likely have preserved few distinctions.

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<sup>38</sup> Gibson (1999), 5-12.

<sup>39</sup> See Trebilco (1991), 73-4

<sup>40</sup> Gibson (1999), 7.

It is clear, then, that the literary evidence does demonstrate the existence of at least one cult devoted to the Most High God. This cult practised a syncretic form of worship influenced by both Greek and Jewish religions. They acknowledged the presence of other gods, but worshiped only one, whom they called Most High or Almighty. This was not a sacrificial cult, but rather, its members gathered at dawn and evenings to sing hymns and blessings. Evidence of their presence in the vicinity of Jewish communities is to be expected, and as a result, much of the epigraphic evidence for this cult is sure to be confused as Jewish. Conversely, where the passage of time has erased all but the bare dedicatory inscriptions, the evidence could easily pass for traditional Hellenistic worship.

### CHAPTER THREE: *THEOS HYP SISTOS* IN THE BOSPORAN KINGDOM

Ustinova calls the cult of the Most High God in the Bosphorus “second in importance only to that of Aphrodite *Ourania*.”<sup>41</sup> The importance of the cult in this region is undisputed. Evidence of worship of *Theos Hypsistos* is found throughout the Bosporan kingdom, dating from the first century AD to the fourth. It was centred in the city of Tanais, where membership of cult associations devoted to the unnamed god comprised nearly the entire free, male population in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The cult of the Most High God in the Bosphorus is central to modern scholarly interest in the cult. Schürer proposed that the cult was neither Jewish nor pagan, but rather “eine Neutralisierung beider,”<sup>42</sup> on the basis that dedications to *Theos Hypsistos* in the region show a mixture of Jewish and pagan traits. Levinskaya similarly proposes that the associations of Tanais were founded and populated by pagan sympathizers of the Jewish religion, the so-called God-fearers.<sup>43</sup> Goodenough takes Schürer’s proposal further still; he suggests that the members of the synods were Hellenized Jewish converts.<sup>44</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, Ustinova traces the origins of the cult in Tanais to indigenous celestial deities, exalted and adopted as patrons of the royal dynasty. This cult existed alongside Jewish communities, devoted to their own Most High God, and independent of their influence.<sup>45</sup> Ustinova’s case is persuasive and consistent with a view that cults of *Theos Hypsistos* were not a homogenous group, worshipping a single, identifiable deity, but were typically devoted to local, indigenous deities, exalted to high station.

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<sup>41</sup> Ustinova (1999), 177.

<sup>42</sup> Schürer (1897), 225.

<sup>43</sup> Levinskaya (1996), 113-4.

<sup>44</sup> Goodenough (1957), 232-3.

<sup>45</sup> Ustinova (1999), 282-3.

Central to an examination of *Theos Hypsistos* in the Bosphorus is a collection of inscriptions in the city of Tanais, dedicated to an unnamed god. Mitchell lists 15 dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*, set up by synods and brotherhoods of the city.<sup>46</sup> The earliest of these attests that it was inscribed during the reign of King Tiberius Julius Rhoemetalces, who ruled the Bosporan kingdom between the years 132-153 AD.<sup>47</sup> Tanais was a city at the northeast shore of the Black Sea, located on the estuary of the Don River. Initially it was a prosperous trading colony at the furthest reaches of Hellenic expansion. The town was razed after a rebellion against Bosporan control late in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, and rebuilt about century later. It remained an important trading center and Roman military base, under control of Bosporan client-kings.<sup>48</sup> A small votive tablet dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*, and dated no later than the early part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, should also be included among the evidence for *Theos Hypsistos* in Tanais. It was found in the nearby Russian city, Rostov-on-the-Don, and probably originated from Tanais. It is a private votive, offered by two brothers, and its inscription is brief.<sup>49</sup> By itself, the inscription provides little information on the nature and structure of worship of *Theos Hypsistos* in Tanais, but its date attests to the presence of the cult much earlier than any of the synod or brotherhood tablets.

The inscriptions of 11 of these tablets declare that they were erected by synods in Tanais devoted to *Theos Hypsistos*. A tablet dedicated to θεός ἐπήκοος (“the god who

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<sup>46</sup> Mitchell (1999), 134-5 nos. 89-103 = *CIRB* 1260-1261, 1277-1287, 1289.

<sup>47</sup> *CIRB* 1261.

<sup>48</sup> Cancik and Schneider (2014).

<sup>49</sup> *CIRB* 1316.

listens”) should be added to this list.<sup>50</sup> Its inscription follows the same formula as the other synod tablets. The epithet, *ἐπήκοος*, is common on votive offerings to many different gods, including *Theos Hypsistos*.

The formulae of these stelae vary only slightly. On three of the tablets, the inscriptions are surmounted by reliefs, all variations on eagle and gable motifs.<sup>51</sup> Almost all begin *ἀγαθῆ τύχη*, an appeal for good fortune commonly found on *ex-votos* and altars. The tablet is dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*, occasionally as a prayer or vow (*εὐχή*).<sup>52</sup> They name the king of the Bosphorus during whose reign the tablet was set up, and name the titled officials of the synod.<sup>53</sup> The titles are the same on each tablet. They include a priest, a *synagogos*, a *philagathos*, a *paraphilagathos*, a *gymnasiarch*, and a *neaniskarch*. In four cases a “father of the synod” is also listed after the priest.<sup>54</sup> The positions seem to be listed in order of descending prestige, and there are examples of members rising through the ranks.<sup>55</sup> In this hierarchy, the *gymnasiarch* and the *neaniskarch* were probably of equal importance: the order of these two titles differs from one tablet to the next.<sup>56</sup> There follows a list of the members of the synod, concluding with the year, month, and day that the tablet was set up. The members of the synods are usually called *thiasotai* (*θιασῶται*),<sup>57</sup> but the variations *thiaseitai* and *thiasitai* are also found.<sup>58</sup> Variations on

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<sup>50</sup> *CIRB* 1288.

<sup>51</sup> *CIRB* 1260, two eagles holding a garland beneath a gable; *CIRB* 1261, an eagle sitting atop a gable; *CIRB* 1277, an eagle in a gable.

<sup>52</sup> *CIRB* 1261, 1284, and 1287 are dedicated as vows.

<sup>53</sup> *CIRB* 1287 lacks any mention of the king, but is otherwise similar to the others.

<sup>54</sup> *CIRB* 1261, 1277, 1282, and 1288.

<sup>55</sup> Ustinova (1999), 189.

<sup>56</sup> The *gymnasiarch* is usually listed first of the two. This occurs on *CIRB* 1260a, 1278, 1279, 1282, and 1287. Three of the tablets list the *neaniskarch* before the *gymnasiarch*: *CIRB* 1277, 1280, and 1288.

<sup>57</sup> *CIRB* 1260, 1278, 1279, 1280, 1282, 1287, and 1288.

<sup>58</sup> *CIRB* 1260a and 1277, respectively.

these terms are fairly common in the Bosphoran kingdom, in associations devoted to various gods.<sup>59</sup>

Four other tablets are set up not by synods, but by *εἰσποιητοὶ ἀδελφοὶ σεβόμενοι θεὸν ὕψιστον*, “adopted brothers who worship the Most High God.”<sup>60</sup> The inscriptions contain a preamble that follows a similar pattern as those set up by the synods,<sup>61</sup> but lack any named officials with the exception of one or more *presbyters* (“elders”).<sup>62</sup> Two of these bear eagle and gable reliefs, like the synod tablets.<sup>63</sup> It is clear that these organizations are related, but not identical to the synods. The membership lists are a good deal shorter than the synods. The best preserved of the four, with the longest list of names, lists 25 members in addition to the *presbyters*.<sup>64</sup> The synod tablets, on the other hand, generally list between 40 and 48 names in addition to the officials, excepting the more fragmentary examples.

During the period that these groups were active, multiple synods existed side by side in the city, with very little overlap in membership. A comparison of three synod tablets attests to this, two dated 225 AD and one dated 228 AD. A different set of officials presides over each of these synods. Each lists between 40 and 47 names with only two names in common between them, and one of these is an uncertain match.<sup>65</sup> A fourth synod tablet from 220 AD, which lists 55 members, yields six names in common with the other

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<sup>59</sup> Ustinova (1999), 198-9.

<sup>60</sup> *CIRB* 1281, 1283, 1285, 1286.

<sup>61</sup> With the exception of *CIRB* 1286; it is broken at the top and has therefore lost its preamble.

<sup>62</sup> *CIRB* 1283 contains four *presbyters*; *CIRB* 1286 has at least six (these are the only preserved names); *CIRB* 1285 has but one *presbyter*.

<sup>63</sup> *CIRB* 1285, two eagles holding a garland; *CIRB* 1281 = Mitchell (1999), n. 96, an eagle in a gable.

<sup>64</sup> *CIRB* 1283.

<sup>65</sup> *CIRB* 1279, 1280, and 1282. The common names are shared by *CIRB* 1279 and 1282. The certain name is Sotericus son of Publius. With less certainty *CIRB* 1282 has Chomeus son of Athenodorus, which might be matched with *X. . . ιος Ἀ[θην]οδώρου* from *CIRB* 1279.

three. Furthermore, the synod of this tablet shares a priest with one of the synods of 225, and one of its members is the *philagathos* of the synod in 225.<sup>66</sup> A single priest, therefore, could lead multiple synods, and a member from one synod could be promoted to the administrative rank of another. Members also either moved from one synod to another or could be enrolled in the ranks of multiple synods.

Between the years 220 AD and 225 AD, nearly 300 unique names are listed on the extant tablets. If the synods were composed entirely of adult males, this would have amounted to nearly the entire population of free, adult men.<sup>67</sup> It is safe to conclude that membership in these synods and devotion to an unnamed most high god was central to civic life in Tanais. This was by no means a minor cult in the city, worshiped by a handful of people, but rather these groups were the most important, or at least the most expansive organizations in the city.

The titles of the officials in the synod tablets also imply an expansive role for the organizations. Oversight of civic institutions by a priest was typical in the Greek world. The priest was fundamentally a civic official who acted as a city's representative to the gods, and was charged with maintaining the city's good relationship with them. Public sacrifices were central to this relationship.<sup>68</sup> A *synagogos* is likewise typical for Greek associations in the Bosporan kingdom and elsewhere in the Greek world. The position

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<sup>66</sup> *CIRB* 1278 can pair four names from *CIRB* 1279, three with certainty: Chophrasmus son of Phorgabacus is the priest of both, Gosacus son of Aspacus is listed among the member lists of both, and Antimachus son of Pasion is a member on 1278 and the *philagathos* of 1279; the fourth name is paired with some doubt: O---dus son of Demetrius from 1278 with Odiardus son of Demetrius from 1279. *CIRB* 1278 also shares the name Asandrus son of Thaumastus with *CIRB* 1280, and Macarius son of Achaemenes with *CIRB* 1282.

<sup>67</sup> Ustinova (1999), 184; Levinskaya (1996), 108.

<sup>68</sup> Potter (2003), 410-12.

could cover a broad range of responsibilities that varied a good deal from one place to another. The *synagogos* could have been the founder of the association, or convened assemblies, or presided over feasts or religious functions.<sup>69</sup> The inscriptions offer no hint as to precisely what duties the *synagogos* carried out. Elsewhere in the Greek world, the *synagogos* is often the first-listed official in the inscriptions of associations, and is present even where a priest is not.<sup>70</sup> In the Tanais inscriptions, the *synagogos* always follows the priest, and also the “father of the synod” when that title is present. This suggests that observance of public sacrifice is the paramount duty of the associations.

The *philagathos* is a rare title on association inscriptions, but does occur in Asia Minor, including in the Bosphoran city of Panticapaeum.<sup>71</sup> The duties required of the position evidently demanded an assistant, the *paraphilagathos*. These titles occur rarely in Hellenic associations, and what duties were entailed cannot be determined with certainty. Conjecture has included supervision of the morals and good conduct of the members, governance of common meals, admission of new members, or the collection of dues, but none of these is supported by strong evidence.<sup>72</sup>

The *gymnasiarchos* and *neaniskarchos* were typically associated with ephebic activities and the gymnasium in Hellenistic society, and are rarely found outside of that context. These, however, had disappeared from life in the Bosphoran kingdom by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, and no remains of a gymnasium have yet been found in Tanais. The role of these figures was therefore presumably different in Tanais than elsewhere in the Greek

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<sup>69</sup> Poland (1932), 1317-21.

<sup>70</sup> Poland (1932), 1319-20.

<sup>71</sup> Ustinova (1999), 191; *CIRB* 76.

<sup>72</sup> Ustinova (1999), 191.



world,<sup>73</sup> but probably still involved the physical training and education of young men in the city. The *grammateus* elsewhere in the Greek world was a record-keeper,<sup>74</sup> suggesting “considerable sophistication in their bookkeeping and proceedings in general.”<sup>75</sup>

The named officials taken as a group, with all their varied roles demonstrates the wide scope of the synods in Tanais. The clubs oversaw feasts and public sacrifices, and also the education of the city's youth and moral guidance of its citizens, and kept extensive records. This is suggestive that the associations were concerned overall with directing proper civic conduct of the citizens of the city; the synods pervaded public life. The presence of *gymnasiarchoi* implies a civic role for physical training. The synods may have played a role in military training and organization in the city. This has been suggested for the associations of Panticapaeum, with the additional prevalence there of tombstones bearing military iconography,<sup>76</sup> and may well be likewise true for Tanais.

The brotherhoods appear to have been more exclusive. The lists are shorter and have significantly more overlap with the synod tablets. The most complete brotherhood tablet lists 23 members, and six of these names appear also on synod tablets.<sup>77</sup> On another more fragmentary brotherhood tablet, only six names are preserved, and four of these are found on other synod tablets.<sup>78</sup> In both cases, the brotherhood drew its membership from at least two different synods, precluding the conclusion that the brotherhoods were inner

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<sup>73</sup> Ustinova (1999), 192.

<sup>74</sup> Rhodes (2014), *grammateis* in Athens were responsible for publication of decrees and documents generated by the Athenian council and assemblies; Harper (1934), 51, the *basilikos grammateus* in Ptolemaic Egypt recorded the award of tax contracts.

<sup>75</sup> Ustinova (1999), 192.

<sup>76</sup> Ustinova (1999), 197.

<sup>77</sup> *CIRB* 1283 (dated 228 AD) shares three names with synod tablet *CIRB* 1279 (dated 225 AD) and three names with synod tablet *CIRB* 1282 (dated 228 AD).

<sup>78</sup> *CIRB* 1286 has lost both its preamble and its conclusion and thus its date, but it shares three names with *CIRB* 1282 (dated 228 AD) and one name with *CIRB* 1278 (dated 220 AD).

circles operating within individual synods, but the more exclusive membership is suggestive of a more elite status. The small number of extant brotherhood tablets, as opposed to the more numerous synod tablets, also attests to the exclusivity of the groups.<sup>79</sup> In all cases of dual membership, enrollment in a synod either preceded the brotherhood or the two were simultaneous; the brotherhoods were not junior memberships,<sup>80</sup> nor is it likely that they were recent converts, as Schürer proposes.<sup>81</sup> The fictive familial language recorded on the brotherhood tablets also suggests a closer, more binding connection between their members than among the synods. It is true, however, given the presence of a “father of the synod” on some of the synod tablets, that familial language clearly extended throughout the organizations in Tanais. The use of fraternal and other familial language was not at all uncommon in Greek associations, although it was more typically used informally, as attested by literary and epistolary evidence, and not as often recorded in epigraphy.<sup>82</sup> The brotherhood tablets therefore display a more formal recognition of status.

Very similar associations existed in the nearby city of Panticapaeum, contemporaneous with the synods of Tanais. The associations there were headed by officials with the same titles in the same ordering of importance.<sup>83</sup> Two of these are dedicated to deities, but not to *Theos Hypsistos*. Rather, one is dedicated to Aphrodite

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<sup>79</sup> Ustinova (1999), 185.

<sup>80</sup> Ustinova (1999), 186.

<sup>81</sup> Schürer (1897), 208.

<sup>82</sup> Harland (2005), 495-6.

<sup>83</sup> Ustinova (1999), 196-7, citing two votive tablets, *CIRB* 75 and 76, and gathering information from tombstones, *CIRB* 79-81, 83, 84, 86, 89, 90-93, 95, 96, 98, 99, 103-105.

*Ourania Aparetou medeousa* and the other to Zeus and Hera Soteris.<sup>84</sup> Several tombstones show evidence of the use of familial language among the associations of Panticapaeum. Some include a “father” or a “father of the synod” among the list of officials.<sup>85</sup> One is set up to by the members of a synod to commemorate *τὸν ἴδιον ἀδελφόν* (“their own brother”).<sup>86</sup> Both cities therefore show a similar approach to public life, structured through civic associations devoted to one or more patron deities. This organization of public life is not particular to any deity, but rather the patron deity is adopted and incorporated into the local custom of worship and social organization.

On the basis of the phrase in the brotherhood tablets, *εἰσποιητοὶ ἀδελφοὶ σεβόμενοι θεὸν ὕψιστον* (“adopted brothers who revere god most high”), Schürer sees a connection to Jewish worship. That term alongside *θεός ὕψιστος*, as the Jewish god is so frequently called in the Septuagint, led Schürer to see in Tanais a cult that had been heavily influenced by Jewish settlers. In particular, he makes a connection to the *σεβόμενοι τὸν θεόν* (“worshippers of the god”) from the *Acts of the Apostles*.<sup>87</sup> A number of scholars have argued that *σεβόμενοι* (“worshippers” or “reverent”) alongside *φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν* (“fearers of god” or “god-fearers”) are technical terms in *Acts* that referred to pagan sympathizers of the Jewish religion.<sup>88</sup> This has, in turn led to a search for Gentiles who

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<sup>84</sup> *CIRB* 75 and 76 respectively. The other cited inscriptions from Panticapaeum do not include dedications to deities.

<sup>85</sup> *CIRB* 95, 96, 103, and 105 list a *πατήρ*; *CIRB* 98-100 and 104 list a *πατήρ σύνοδου*.

<sup>86</sup> *CIRB* 104.

<sup>87</sup> Schürer (1897), 207-209.

<sup>88</sup> Romaniuk (1964), 73-9, examines the use of *σεβόμενοι* in *Acts* and concludes that it is a technical term, synonymous with *φοβούμενοι* referring to specifically to Greeks who have turned to worship of the Jewish god; Lieu (1995), 483 sees the use in *Acts* in a “near-technical sense,” without further elaboration.

attach themselves to Jewish communities in the Greek world,<sup>89</sup> including the synods and brotherhoods in Tanais. Regardless of the use of *σεβόμενοι* in *Acts*, however, it cannot be shown that this technical sense of the word can be inferred outside of *Acts*. Instead, the search for Gentile sympathizers in the epigraphic record has focused on the presence of *theosebeis* (“god-fearers”) in connection to Jewish sites. On the other hand, *σεβόμενοι* is found in reference to pagan worshipers of Apollo, Anubis,<sup>90</sup> and Mithras.<sup>91</sup> Multiple inscriptions dedicated to Artemis *Leucophryene* refer to her worshipers as *σεβόμενοι*.<sup>92</sup> Mitchell follows Schürer, making a connection between the adopted brothers of Tanais and the god-fearers found elsewhere,<sup>93</sup> but without confirmation that *σεβόμενοι* is a technical term equivalent to *theosebeis* there is not sufficient evidence to support this conclusion.

Nor is there evidence of a Jewish presence among the names of the association members. In the earliest tablets, about half the names are Greek, the rest Roman and Iranian. Over time, the proportion of Iranian names increases.<sup>94</sup> Schürer does see two Jewish names among them,<sup>95</sup> Azarion<sup>96</sup> and Sambation.<sup>97</sup> In addition, variations of

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<sup>89</sup> See Feldman (1986); Mitchell (1999), 115-121 and (2010), 189-196, identifies the god-fearers with the cult of *Theos Hysistos*; Baker (2005), following Mitchell, also equates the god-fearers with the cult of *Theos Hysistos* in Miletus.

<sup>90</sup> Feldman (1950), 203-4 and 204 note 19; the reference to Apollo: *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 557 line 7 and Anubis: Plut. *Mor.* 368F.

<sup>91</sup> Ustinova (1999), 210; Plut. *Vita Alex.* 30.

<sup>92</sup> Ustinova (1999), 214.

<sup>93</sup> Mitchell (1999), 116-7.

<sup>94</sup> Ustinova (1999), 184-5 and 257: in many cases, men with Greek names bear a barbarian patronymic, and vice versa; Rostovtzeff (1969), 168: “It appears, therefore, that the Greek citizen population was gradually submerged by Iranian and Thracian elements.”

<sup>95</sup> Schürer (1897), 218.

<sup>96</sup> *CIRB* 1278 and 1287.

<sup>97</sup> *CIRB* 1278, 1279, 1280, 1282.

Sambation—Sambion and Sabbion—are elsewhere attested in Tanais.<sup>98</sup> Haynman<sup>99</sup> and Levinskaya<sup>100</sup> follow Schürer, and see in the presence of these names evidence of Jewish influence upon the associations in Tanais. The names can be discounted, however. Azarion has clear Iranian origins,<sup>101</sup> and Sambation, although of Jewish origin, had become commonplace in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>102</sup>

There is, then, nothing in the brotherhood tablets to lead to the conclusion that they are adopting the use of *σεβόμενοι* in any special, technical sense or that the term was used as a result of Jewish influence, except through the connection to *Theos Hypsistos*. *Theos Hypsistos*, however, was not at all exclusive to Jewish use. As seen in Anatolia, the epithet *ὑψιστος* was applied to a number of gods, and does not necessarily imply Jewish influence,<sup>103</sup> and dedications to *Theos Hypsistos* in Lydia and at Athens are quite clearly pagan.

Other cult items found in Tanais further undermine Goodenough's proposal that Tanais was populated by Jewish converts. Excavations in Tanais have unearthed pagan cult items, including an inscription of fortification repairs bearing the bust relief of a goddess, a fragment of an altar bearing the relief of a goddess, and a pair of cellar shrines.<sup>104</sup> Dedications to Greek gods have been found, though they are rare.<sup>105</sup>

Conversely, Tanais has yet to yield any unequivocally Jewish epigraphy, except a single

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<sup>98</sup> Ustinova (1999), 233.

<sup>99</sup> Haynman (1993), 56 also adds the name Kzegodi, but does so without citation. Kzegodi appears in neither the synod nor the brotherhood tablets, nor again is it listed in Zgusta (1955).

<sup>100</sup> Levinskaya (1996), 112-3.

<sup>101</sup> Zgusta (1955), 62 §44.

<sup>102</sup> Zgusta (1955), 321-3 §740.

<sup>103</sup> See Trebilco (1991), 131-2; Cook (1940), 1163.

<sup>104</sup> Haynman (1993), 55-6.

<sup>105</sup> *CIRB* 1237, to Zeus, Ares, and Aphrodite; *CIRB* 1315, to Artemis; *CIRB* 1239, to Apollo.

graffito with a Jewish name. Likewise, burial sites in Tanais show the influence of Greek, Maeotian, Scythian, and Sarmatian traditions, but not Jewish.<sup>106</sup> The nearest known Jewish community was 300 kilometres away, in Panticapaeum.<sup>107</sup>

Identification of the unnamed god of the association inscriptions can deny Jewish influence in the city with even greater certainty. A stele that commemorates the Day of Tanais, dated to 104 AD,<sup>108</sup> sheds light on the identity of this god. Ustinova connects this stele to the synods and brotherhoods dedicated to *Theos Hysistos*.<sup>109</sup> Its inscription follows a formula similar to the synod tablets, with the exceptions that it lacks a dedication to the god, and includes the date prior to listing the officials. The date includes the phrase, *ἀγοντες θ' ἡμέραν Τανάιδος* (“celebrating the ninth (?) day of Tanais”). The officials listed are the priest, the *synagogos*, the *philagathos*, and the *paraphilagathos*. Thirteen members are listed thereafter. Given that membership in the synods of Tanais included most or all the free male citizens, and the identical titles, it is reasonable to connect the association listed on this tablet with the synods of the later inscriptions. The upper part of this stele depicts a rider on a saddled horse, facing right. The rider holds a rhyton. He has long hair and a beard and is dressed in Sarmatian clothing. He stands before an altar with a burning fire, and behind the altar stands a tree.

Divine horsemen were a popular motif in the art of the Bosphorus, particularly with the influx of Scythian and Sarmatian settlement from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD onwards.<sup>110</sup> It was common to depict the rider-god facing a goddess, or as here, the goddess represented

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<sup>106</sup> Ustinova (1999), 257-8.

<sup>107</sup> Ustinova (1999), 237.

<sup>108</sup> *CIRB* 1259 = *SEG* 58.785.

<sup>109</sup> Ustinova (1999), 192.

<sup>110</sup> Ustinova (1999), 261-3.

by a tree, a local expression of Aphrodite *Ourania*.<sup>111</sup> Haynman proposes that the scene depicts the apotheosis of the priest-king, represented by the rider, “through amalgamation with the newly-born sun, symbolized by the fire.” The rider receives the powers of the Mother Goddess, manifested as the Tree of Life. Haynman relates the image to Canaan-Phoenician solar festivals, tracing a continuity of religious worship to 17<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century BC Palestine.<sup>112</sup> Her argument depends heavily on an etymology of the name of the royal family of Bosphorus, Aspourgos, but it stretches quite thin, demanding a continuity of identity for a Scythian royal family over the course of 1700 years.

Ustinova is more rightly cautious. She ties the identity of the Most High God of Tanais with a far more local origin, both geographically and chronologically. Her survey of horse-rider deities of the Bosporan kingdom and neighboring regions makes clear the difficulty of assigning a specific identity to the anonymous figure, but she considers Mithra a likely candidate. The celestial associations of *Theos Hypsistos* are clear, apparent in the meaning of the epithet, *hypsistos*; the god dwells high above all other gods. Identification with a solar deity is therefore likely, especially given that celestial and solar imagery was very popular in the Bosphorus. Worship of Mithra, in particular, was widespread and he was typically depicted on horseback on the eastern and southern coasts of the Black Sea. Moreover, Mithra was acquired as a patron deity of the royal dynasty of the Bosporan kingdom.<sup>113</sup> Ustinova has also found a connection to a god named Pharnouchos and the Day of Tanais in a passage by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Syrian novelist

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<sup>111</sup> Ustinova (1999), 266; and 261, she lists examples of Aphrodite with arboreal-shaped limbs or head, with hands like palm leaves.

<sup>112</sup> Haynman (1993), 56-8.

<sup>113</sup> Ustinova (1999), 270-275 .

Iamblichus, cited by Photius:

“In the same place stories about Pharnouchos, and Pharsiris, and Tanais, who gave his name to the river Tanais, are recounted in minor details, and that the mysteries of Aphrodite, that are celebrated by the people living in the place and its vicinity, are in honor of Tanais and Pharsiris.”<sup>114</sup>

A comparable god, Pharnos or Men Pharnaces, was popular in the Pontos. The connection is slight and certainly other solar gods were worshiped in the region. Adoption of an anonymous title may well have been an attempt to unite various solar deities under a supreme god more closely associated with the royal dynasty.<sup>115</sup>

There is a clear link between the Day of Tanais stele and the royal dynasty. A gold wreath found in a burial site near Panticapaeum depicts a nearly identical scene to that on the Day of Tanais stele. The grave is that of a woman from the family of the Bosporan king, Rhescouporis II, dated to 210 AD.<sup>116</sup> The scene is found again on another gold wreath from among the grave goods of a man of the same period and family, with an addition that the goddess Nike stands behind the horseman, crowning him with a wreath.<sup>117</sup> *Theos Hysistos*, the divine rider, is being used as the divine representative of the Bosporan kings. The image of Nike crowning the rider represents a form of divine investiture. The coinage of the Bosporan kings supports this. Horsemen are often found on the reverse faces, as is Nike, often holding a wreath. A coin of Sauromates II, dated to 193 AD depicts the standing figure of the king, with Nike to the right, crowning him.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ustinova (1999), 149-50 and 276-7; Photius, *Bibliotheca* 94.

<sup>115</sup> Ustinova (1999), 277.

<sup>116</sup> Ustinova (1999), 262 and 367 plate 26.

<sup>117</sup> Ustinova (1999), 265.

<sup>118</sup> Frolova (1979), 42 and Plate 37 nos. 7 and 9-13. Examples of horsemen at 29, 33, 39, 40, 44, 48, 52-54; depictions of Nike were very common, but in particular, she is shown holding a wreath at 20, enclosed within a wreath at 23; eagles depicted at 43, 45, and 54.



This presence of the divine representative of the Bosporan kings on the Day of Tanais stele suggests that the association that set up the stele operated under royal sanction, or was devoted to the royal dynasty. By extension, the structure of the synods of Tanais may have been likewise sanctioned or so devoted. This fits well with Rostovtzeff's summation of Tanais, and the nearby cities, Panticapaeum and Gorgippia, as cities that were under constant threat from their nomadic neighbours, which "led the city populations to rally close round the throne, in order to defend, if not their nationality, at least their civilization and their privileges."<sup>119</sup>

If the synod and brotherhood tablets are purely pagan documents, without Jewish influence, there is then a need for a re-examination of the manumission documents Schürer uses to bolster his argument. He includes in his survey four manumission documents.<sup>120</sup> Two of these are clearly Jewish. They declare that the slaves are released at the *προσευχή*, the "prayer-house", and given full freedom, with the caveat that the manumitted slave fulfil some obligation for the prayer-house.<sup>121</sup> The *προσευχή*, though not explicitly a Jewish term, is found almost exclusively in ancient literature and epigraphy to refer to a Jewish prayer-house.<sup>122</sup> The documents conclude that they are

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<sup>119</sup> Rostovtzeff (1969), 165-6.

<sup>120</sup> Schürer (1897), 201-206; *CIRB* 70 dated to late 1<sup>st</sup> – mid 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD, from Panticapaeum; *CIRB* 73 ca. 100-150 AD, from Panticapaeum; *CIRB* 1123 dated to 41 AD, from Gorgippia; *CIRB* 1125, dated 93-124 AD, from Gorgippia.

<sup>121</sup> Gibson (1999), 134-149 discusses the nature of these obligations. The Greek is difficult. The manumitted slave is granted full freedom *χωρίς εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν θωπείας τε καὶ προσκατερήσεως*, literally, "except for flattery and perseverance to the prayer-house." Gibson's reading manages to hew quite close to the literal meaning. The manumitted slaves are required to render their service to the prayer-house, taking a meaning of *προσκατερήσεις* that is seen in the New Testament (*Acts* 8:13 and 10:7) as well as in the epigraphic record (*IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1028 and *IC* 2.11.3), and is further required to adopt an appropriately servile attitude in the course of those duties.

<sup>122</sup> Goodenough (1953), 86; Trebilco (1991), 134 and 241, note 33; Sanders (1999), 6.

overseen by the *συναγωγή τῶν Ἰουδαίων*, the community of the Jews.<sup>123</sup>

Schürer compares these documents with the two other manumission documents, which begin with dedications to *Theos Hypsistos*.<sup>124</sup> Another manumission document also from the Gorgippia region is similarly dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*,<sup>125</sup> and so is a highly damaged votive offering.<sup>126</sup> There is good reason to believe that the *Theos Hypsistos* of these four documents does indeed refer to the Jewish deity. The full invocation of the deity on these documents is *Θεῶ Ὑψίστῳ παντοκράτορι ἐλόγητῶ*, “to God Most-high, almighty, and blessed.”<sup>127</sup> The epithets, *παντοκράτωρ* and *ἐλόγητός*, are well-associated with the Jewish god,<sup>128</sup> and make identification of the god in these inscriptions with Yahweh reasonably certain. One also states that the slave is dedicated to the *προσευχή*, further confirming Jewish authorship.<sup>129</sup> The other inscriptions are broken, enough so that references to a prayer-house may well fit in the gaps. On the other hand, even the most complete of these lacks certain elements of the Jewish manumissions above, and contains another that seems to undermine certainty that these are Jewish documents. The manumitted slave of the longest document is not required to render any service for the prayer-house, nor is the document overseen by the synagogue. Instead, the manumissions are authorized *ὑπὸ Δία, Γῆν, Ἥλιον*, “under sanction of Zeus, the Earth, and the Sun.”

To Schürer, these differences preclude Jewish authorship, and demonstrate instead

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<sup>123</sup> *CIRB* 70 and 73.

<sup>124</sup> *CIRB* 1123 and 1125.

<sup>125</sup> *CIRB* 1126.

<sup>126</sup> *SEG* 32.790.

<sup>127</sup> *SEG* 32.790 preserves only ... *τοκράτωρ*... The remainder of the invocation is furnished by the editor.

<sup>128</sup> Schürer (1897), 205 lists many examples of these epithets for god in the Septuagint, the Biblical Apocrypha, and the Christian New Testament; Nock, et al. (1936), 65 points out that *ἐλόγητός* in particular, “has no chance of being Greek.”

<sup>129</sup> *CIRB* 1123.

that pagan worshipers had adopted the Jewish god and were associating themselves with Jewish prayer-houses.<sup>130</sup> Levinskaya follows along with this line of thought, asserting that Jewish converts were manumitting their slaves in Jewish synagogues.<sup>131</sup> This is not necessarily the case, however. This phrase, “ὕπὸ Δία, Γῆν, Ἥλιον,” has appeared elsewhere in manumission documents as a banal formula. Goodenough points to its presence in manumissions from among the Oxyrhynchus papyri in just this light, concluding that a Jewish slave-owner in the ancient world might include this phrase in a manumission document in much the same way that a Jewish person in a present-day court of law might swear on a Bible that contained the Christian New Testament.<sup>132</sup> These kinds of legal formulae were not necessarily seen to conflict with exclusive worship of the Jewish god. Gibson buttresses this conclusion by inclusion of a 5<sup>th</sup> century BC legal oath made by a Jewish woman to the Egyptian goddess Satis.<sup>133</sup> Additionally, the formula appears on pagan manumissions that are explicitly dedicated to other gods in the text of the manumission.<sup>134</sup>

The lack of any ongoing obligation or oversight by a synagogue may be easily explained, insofar as the lack of the former removes the necessity of the latter. Manumission agreements often required that freed slaves continue some obligatory service, a *paramonē*, for their former owners for a period of time.<sup>135</sup> That obligation could take the form of service to a local temple, as is the case in the two examples cited here. In

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<sup>130</sup> Schürer (1897), 204.

<sup>131</sup> Levinskaya (1996), 113.

<sup>132</sup> Goodenough (1957), 222-3; and see Gibson (1999), 119-20 and 119 note 28.

<sup>133</sup> Gibson (1999), 120-1 and note 31.

<sup>134</sup> E.g. *CIRB* 74, which is dedicated to the goddesses Ma and Parthenos, and concludes with the formulaic  
ὕπὸ Δία, Γῆν, Ἥλιον.

<sup>135</sup> Schieman (2014).

such cases the community associated with the temple was given oversight over the manumission, so as to uphold the contract.<sup>136</sup> Manumission contracts were quite variable, however, and the *paramonē* could take the form of personal service to the slave-owner, or might not be imposed at all.<sup>137</sup> In these cases, no community oversight was necessary. Such could easily be the case with the *Theos Hysistos* manumission documents.

Thus the manumission documents dedicated to *Theos Hysistos* do not confirm the presence of Gentile worshipers associating with Jewish communities, but the possibility cannot be completely dismissed, either. Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus both claim that the *Hysistos* worshipers revered their god as *Παντοκράτωρ*, and Epiphanius attributes to the same or similar worshipers the use of *προσευχαί*, “prayer-houses.” There is slight further evidence to support presence of such worshipers in the Bosphorus. Another Jewish manumission document makes an addition to the concluding formula.<sup>138</sup> Like the other documents, the released slave is required to perform service, but in this case the service is “overseen by the community of the Jews *καὶ θεὸν σέβων*.” The last addition creates a grammatical quandary, which Gibson explores in some detail.<sup>139</sup> It may be a participle, with a male slave as the subject of the clause, requiring that he worship god, but this removes the dangling participle from its antecedent by seven lines, an unusual distance. Ustinova justifies this by pointing out that the Greek of Bosphoran inscriptions is “rich in anacoluthia.”<sup>140</sup> Gibson, however, sides with reading the final letters as *καὶ θεοσέβων* (“and the God-fearers”), a misspelling of *theosebeis*. He

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<sup>136</sup> Gibson (1999), 150.

<sup>137</sup> E.g. *CIRB* 1021.

<sup>138</sup> *CIRB* 71, dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

<sup>139</sup> Gibson (1999), 140-144.

<sup>140</sup> Ustinova (1999), 231 and note 49.

agrees with conjecture that the name was unfamiliar to the stonecutter. *Theosebeis* is the name that Cyril of Alexandria gave to worshipers of the Most High God in Palestine and Phoenicia. While the name is seen elsewhere in the Greek world, it is otherwise unknown in the Bosphorus,<sup>141</sup> casting doubt on this reading of the text. The epithet *εὐλογητός* also remains a barrier to this interpretation, insofar as it is foreign to pagan worship, but there is evidence that Gentile Judaizers sometimes made use of similar terms.<sup>142</sup> The epithet confirms either that these documents are Jewish, or that they are the product of worshipers closely affiliated with the Jews. Ultimately the evidence for the existence of Jewish-affiliated *Hypsistos* worshipers in the Bosporan kingdom is ambiguous at best.

Even should the presence of such *Hypsistos* worshipers in Gorgippia be conceded, this does not necessitate that the associations of Tanais likewise associated with or had connections to Jewish communities. There is simply no evidence of Jewish influence in Tanais, neither in cultic remains, nor among the names of worshipers, and the Most High God worshiped there has clearly pagan precedents. Without corroborating evidence to support the suggestion of Jewish-pagan syncretism in Tanais, the presence of Jewish-influenced *Hypsistos* worshipers elsewhere demonstrates only that the Bosporan kingdom could host multiple groups that worshiped very different conceptions of a Most High God, some worshiping the Jewish god, and others exalting a pagan deity. Worship of the *Theos Hypsistos* existed in the Bosporan kingdom as a distinctly pagan cult, devoted to a celestial deity that had been adopted as the patron of the royal dynasty. Barring clear

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<sup>141</sup> Ustinova (1999), 231.

<sup>142</sup> Trebilco (1991), 157-8 n. 4.3 = *CIG* 2924, Capitolina, a Gentile Judaizer in Caria, who identifies as a *θεοσεβής* (“god-fearer”), concludes her dedication, *εὐλογία* (“blessings”).

evidence of state-supported monotheism, the pagan *Theos Hypsistos* of the Bosphorus cannot be read as a monotheistic god. And yet Jewish communities in the Bosphorus also referred to their god as *Theos Hypsistos*, apparently without confusion with the pagan deity. The multiplicity of religious expression in the ancient world permitted worshipers of unnamed deities to exist alongside one another, and maintain distinction between their gods. Distinctions that have become difficult to see in the skeletal remains of the epigraphic record were surely marked when they were fleshed out in the array of living cultural accoutrements.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: *HYPYSISTOS* IN ANATOLIA

*Hypsistos* inscriptions in the greatest variety can be found in Anatolia, some clearly transmitting some form of monotheistic thought, others offering little departure from standard dedications to Greek gods, and others again rooted in traditional forms of worship of local Anatolian deities. I intend to examine what information inscriptions can reveal concerning the nature of *Theos Hypsistos*, his worship, and the cults devoted to the god.

One of the most important inscriptions in Anatolia, with respect to study of *Theos Hypsistos* and pagan monotheism lies in the ruins of the ancient city of Oenoanda.<sup>143</sup> The ruins of the city lie in the southwest of Turkey, between the ancient territories of Lycia and Phrygia. They were discovered in 1841, and were subsequently explored in multiple expeditions. The city belonged to the kingdom of Pergamon in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, was then a member of a Tetrapolis along with Bubon, Balbura, and Cybara, and was thereafter a member of the Lycian League. References to Oenoanda in ancient literature are few and brief; it was not a city of any special renown.<sup>144</sup> Subsequent to discovery of the ruin, the city garnered its greatest modern fame for a lengthy inscription that had been inscribed on a wall of a stoa, composed by Diogenes of Oenoanda, summarizing the philosophy of Epicurus.<sup>145</sup>

The inscription dedicated to an unnamed god was discovered in 1844 and published in 1852, though it was initially passed off as a funerary inscription, too

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<sup>143</sup> Details of Oenoanda in *RE* XVII 2 (1937) cols. 2230-2234 and Bean (1976), 640-1.

<sup>144</sup> Strab. 13.4.17; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 5.28; Ptolem. *Geo.* 5.3.8; Appian, *Bell. Civ.* 4.79.

<sup>145</sup> First fragments published by Cousin (1892), more recently updated and expounded upon by Smith (1977) and by Clay (1990).

damaged to be reliably restored.<sup>146</sup> In 1971, G. E. Bean published a new transcription of the text, which follows, divided into six lines of hexameter<sup>147</sup>:

[A]ὐτοφυῆς, ἀδίδακτος, ἀμήτωρ, | ἀστυφέλικτος, |  
οὐνομα μὴ χωλῶν, πολυώνυμος, | ἐν πυρὶ ναίων, |  
τοῦτο θεός · μεικρὰ | δὲ θεοῦ μερὶς ἄγγελιοι ἡμεῖς.  
τοῦτο πενθομένοισι θεοῦ πέρι ὅστις ὑπάρχει, |  
Aί[θ]έ[ρ]α πανδερκ[ῆ] θε]ὸν ἔννεπεν, εἰς | ὃν ὁρῶντας  
εὔχεσθ' ἠέλουσ' πρὸς ἀντολίην ἑσποῶ[ν]τα[ς].

*Self-begotten, un-taught, un-mothered, undisturbed, not permitting a name, many-named, dwelling in fire, this is god; we messengers are but a small portion of god. For those asking this concerning god, who he is, he said that the all-seeing Aether is god, gazing upon which you pray, at dawn, looking toward the sunrise.*<sup>148</sup>

The relief of an altar has been carved into the stone, and the text inscribed over top. Two courses below this block is another, similarly shaped and engraved, containing the text, *Χρωματίς Θεῶ | ὑψίστω | τὸν λόχγον | εὐχ[ή]ν* (“Chromatis [offers] a lantern to the Most High God as a vow”),<sup>149</sup> thus linking both inscriptions to a *Hypsistos* cult. Differing letter forms make it clear that the two inscriptions were not simultaneously inscribed by the same hand, but neither could one have been set up without knowledge of the other.<sup>150</sup> The inscriptions sit high on a wall, to the right of an arched doorway. This was formerly the entry to a round tower on the inside of a southern city wall. This part of the wall faces northeast and rises higher than much of the city, such that it is the first place in the city to receive the light of dawn.<sup>151</sup> Robert dates the inscription to the late second century, or the early part of the third, on the premise that it is an oracle received prior to the writing of

<sup>146</sup> Bean (1971), 21; Robert (1971), 599-602.

<sup>147</sup> Bean (1971), 20-2 n.37 = *SEG* 27.933.

<sup>148</sup> Translation is my own.

<sup>149</sup> *CIG* 4380n<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>150</sup> Hall (1978), 266.

<sup>151</sup> Hall (1978), 264-5 describes the physical location of the inscriptions and the importance of such placement.



Lactantius (see below), a public proclamation, “comme ailleurs d'autres étaient exposés sur l'agora.”<sup>152</sup> Hall, on the other hand, suggests that it is a private inscription, set up after a renovation of the city wall that left this section of the wall as an extramural remnant, and thus dates it late in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>153</sup>

The location of the site, along with the content of the two inscriptions, offer an outline of how worship was performed to this unnamed, most-high god. Worshippers gathered at dawn, and prayed in the direction of the sun as it appeared over the ridge of the eastern mountains. Lamps were a typical offering, symbolic of the god who dwells in fire, and is represented by the rising sun. Lamp offerings are common at many sites devoted to *Hypsistos* deities, and presents one of the few common links between fairly disparate groups.<sup>154</sup>

The text of the longer inscription appears twice elsewhere in ancient literature. One is a late 5<sup>th</sup> century Christian text known as the *Tübingen Theosophy*, in which pagan oracles had been collected in an effort to prove pagan knowledge of Christian truths. One of these oracles, 16 lines of hexameter verse that conclude, with only minor variation, with the first three lines of the passage inscribed on the wall at Oenoanda. The passage describes a boundless being of eternal flame who presides above the sky, unknown to the gods unless it is his wish to be known. Robert has been able to attribute a number of passages from the Theosophy to the oracle of Apollo at Didyma, and even to a known

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<sup>152</sup> Robert (1971), 608.

<sup>153</sup> Hall (1978), 265-6.

<sup>154</sup> See the many lamp fragments recovered at the site of the Pnyx in Athens, as well as an altar in Serdica with built-in Roman lamps, Tacheva-Hitova (1983), 194 n. 6. See also *SEG* 52.1858 and 1859, bronze lamp hangers of unknown provenance, dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*

prophet, active in the early part of the third century.<sup>155</sup> The same three lines inscribed on the wall at Oenoanda are also found in the writings of Lactantius, again with only minor variation. He quotes the Greek and attributes it to the oracle of Apollo at Claros.<sup>156</sup>

Lactantius describes an oracle of 21 verses, so the last three lines of the Oenoandan inscription, though not present in the *Tübingen Theosophy*, may well have been a part of the original oracle (and, in fact, leaving three more lines of verse yet unknown).

The unnamed god is remarkably elevated in this inscription. The other gods are but “a small part” of this god; he encompasses the other gods, subsumes them even, as a part of his being. There seems little question that this is an expression of monotheistic worship, or something so near monotheism as to be almost indistinguishable from it. Even if the statement does not deny the existence of a pantheon of gods, the lesser gods are so subordinated as to surrender their individual autonomy. They have become nothing more than *ἄγγελοι* to the will of the highest god.

The resemblance of the god and the prescribed worship to the Massalians of Epiphanius is unmistakable. The worshipers still acknowledge the other pagan gods, but pay reverence only to one. They worship at dawn (although not in the evening) and make lamp offerings. A hymn, here inscribed in stone, plays a prominent role in their ceremony. Both the inscription and the longer oracle transcribed by Lactantius do lack the epithet, *παντοκράτωρ* (“almighty”), however, nor is there any confirmation that the spot was ever referred to as a *προσευχή* (“prayer-house”). The wholly pagan character of the oracle at Oenoanda would lend support to his depiction of a group lacking association with Jews,

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<sup>155</sup> Robert (1971), 604.

<sup>156</sup> *Divine Institutions* 1.7; Robert (1971), 607.

Christians, or Samaritans.

It is worthwhile to identify the god so as to trace the sources of influence on the cult. Is this the same *Theos Hypsistos* that is worshiped elsewhere? The fact that the inscription originates from an oracle of Apollo suggests that this *Hypsistos* worship has incorporated a Hellenic pantheon. Is this *Theos Hypsistos* to be identified with Zeus, as he so clearly has been elsewhere, elevated to a supreme level? The answer is rather complex. Lactantius certainly did not think so, though he was eager to associate the oracle with the Christian conception of God.<sup>157</sup> Robert does see a possible connection between the *Αιθήρ πανδερκής* (“all-seeing Aether”) of the oracle and a little-known cult devoted to Zeus Aitherios.<sup>158</sup> *Πολώνυμος* (“many-named”) provides another connection to Zeus as well as to Stoic thought; Cleanthes, a Stoic philosopher of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, addresses Zeus by this epithet.<sup>159</sup> But other epithets of the inscription are found applied to other gods, *αὐτοφυής* (“self-begotten”) to Apollo, for example, or *ἀδίδακτος* (“un-taught”) to Helios. An eternal flame that presides above the sky is, of course, reminiscent of Helios, a connection deepened by the prescription to pray facing the rising sun.<sup>160</sup> And, like Helios, this is a god who watches over the world.<sup>161</sup> The *Hypsistos* deity of Oenoanda transcends Zeus, and the nearby dedication pointedly avoids naming the god. In another place, a dedication might leave the god unnamed without any implication that the god has no name. Such is the case in Athens, where dedications to *Theos Hypsistos* are found side by

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<sup>157</sup> *Divine Institutions* 1.7: “num quis potest suspicari de Jove esse dictum, qui et matrem habuit, et nomen?”

<sup>158</sup> Robert (1971), 606-7.

<sup>159</sup> “Hymn to Zeus” in Pearson (1891), 274 n. 48.

<sup>160</sup> A connection also made by Hall (1978), 267, and Robert (1971), 615, pointed to the similarity between the epithet *πανδερκής* and *παντόπτης*, which has been associated with Helios.

<sup>161</sup> See, e.g. Homer, *Od.* 11.109: *Ἡελίου, ὃς πάντ’ ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντ’ ἐπακούει.*

side in the same shrine as those to Zeus *Hypsistos*. Here, however, beneath the invocation to a god quite explicitly “not permitting a name,” the anonymity of the dedication takes on a special meaning.

The style of the oracle, with its piling on of epithets, is very similar to other Greek mystical writing, particularly to Orphic hymns and magical papyri.<sup>162</sup> The phrase *ἐν πυρὶ ναίων* (“dwelling in fire”) is particularly suggestive of conceptions of a divine fire as found in Stoic, Neo-platonic, or Gnostic thought. The diminution of the gods, referring to them as *ἄγγελοι* (“messengers”), also reflects popular religious concepts prevalent in Caria, Lydia and Phrygia at the time, where angel worship was widespread.<sup>163</sup>

What we find, then, is a god that draws its characteristics from a long tradition of Greek philosophy and religion. This deity may transcend Zeus, but it is nevertheless deeply embedded in the language of Greek thought. The language is highly intellectual, as one might expect from an oracle composed by an educated priest of Apollo at Claros, an important site of pilgrimage. Given the prominent and lengthy inscription of Epicurian thought set up in the city, it is perhaps not surprising that *Hypsistos* worshippers at Oenoanda chose to advertise their own philosophy with a refined, intellectual passage.

There is evidence that this form of monotheistic or nearly monotheistic worship of *Theos Hypsistos* was widespread, at least over the breadth of Anatolia. The oracle resembles another inscription, found on an altar in Amastris, on the southern coast of the Black Sea, bearing the following inscription:

*θεῶ ὑψίστω ὀμοφῆ ἀκερσεκόμου βωμὸν θεοῦ ὑψίστοιου, ὃς κατὰ πάντων ἔστι καὶ οὐ*

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<sup>162</sup> Robert (1971), 610.

<sup>163</sup> Robert (1971), 610-14.

*βλέπεται, εἰσοράα δὲ δείμαθ' ὄπως ἀπαλάκκηται βροτολογιέα θνητῶν*<sup>164</sup>

*To the most high god, by the voice of the long-haired one, an altar of the most-high god, who encompasses everything and is not seen, but he looks upon terrors so that the plagues of mortal men might be warded off.*<sup>165</sup>

There is an obvious parallel here between these two oracles. Both are pronouncements of Apollo (“the long-haired god”). Both describe a god in whom lessers are subsumed, a god who sees but is not seen. Marek associates the oracle of this altar with the nearest Apollonian oracle to the site of the find, at Abonuteichos-Ionopolis, dedicated to Glycon,<sup>166</sup> but it seems as though the text refers to the same oracle quoted at Oenoanda.<sup>167</sup>

Another altar reveals less concerning the nature of the god worshiped, but shows a similarity in the nature of the worship. It is a good deal closer to Oenoanda than the altar at Amastris, about 300 miles to the northeast of the city, in the vicinity of ancient Magnesia. This altar is a round marble dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos* by Teimitheus Labrantides son of Diagorus and his wife.<sup>168</sup> An initial inscription dedicates the altar to *Theos Hypsistos*. Below it, a later addition states that Teimitheus' sons have further established a lighting of lamps (*τὰς λυχναιψίας*), demonstrating that here, as at Oenoanda, lighting lanterns was central to worship of this god.

But other dedications to *Hypsistos* deities imply significant divergence from the all-encompassing god of the Oenoandan inscription, and the austere prayer it prescribes. In some cases, there is no apparent difference between the worship of *Theos Hypsistos* and any other pagan deity. A stele located in Panormos, near Cyzicus in northwest

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<sup>164</sup> Marek (2000), 135 n. 2 = *SEG* 50.1225.

<sup>165</sup> Translation is my own.

<sup>166</sup> Marek (2000), 136.

<sup>167</sup> Chaniotis (2007), 11-12, makes the very same connection between these two inscriptions.

<sup>168</sup> *TAM* 5.2 n. 1400

Anatolia, is exemplary. An inscription dedicates the stele to Zeus *Hypsistos*. It bears reliefs of Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo. Two smaller panels below depict the entertainments of a banquet.<sup>169</sup> Here, Zeus is depicted alongside other gods without marked elevation, nor is there any indication of worship as prescribed by the Oenoandan inscription. *Hypsistos*, in this case, does not raise Zeus beyond the stature granted to him by Homer's use of the epithet. There is little reason to infer monotheistic practice from this stele. Nilsson makes a connection between Zeus *Hypsistos* and Zeus *Sabazios* in the region, and both of these to the Jewish god, also often identified as *Hypsistos*. He posits that this stele depicts a Greek adoption of the Jewish practice of feasting on the Sabbath. Even if that is so, the stele nonetheless depicts Zeus well-accompanied by his fellow deities, and his worshipers engaged in wholly pagan delights, with flute-players, naked dancers, and a boy serving wine. Nilsson therefore perceives an incongruence with Jewish worship, "il est curieux que le culte le plus matérialiste que je connaisse se soit attaché au dieu juif."<sup>170</sup> If this is simply recognized as a typical dedication to a Greek Zeus, however, without assuming Jewish influence, the incongruence disappears.

This stele does predate most *Hypsistos* activity; Nilsson places it prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, though he does not explain what led him to this date. If he is correct, the inscription sits outside of the main body of evidence for the cult, but it is not the only *Hypsistos* inscription that displays a continued devotion to a multiplicity of gods in the Roman period. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, porters in Kos dedicated a stone "To Zeus *Hypsistos* and to Hera *Ourania* and to Poseidon Unshakeable and to Apollo and to all the

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<sup>169</sup> Nilsson (1960), 179-80.

<sup>170</sup> Nilsson (1960), 180.

other gods.”<sup>171</sup> And from the ancient Lycian city of Nisa, there is a dedication to Theos *Hypsistos*, as well as to Mother Oreia and to all the gods.<sup>172</sup> Even where *Theos Hypsistos* is not paired with other gods, the iconography of the offerings is suggestive of typical pagan worship that does not harmonize with the remote, anonymous deity of Oenoandan inscription. A pair of altars from Bithynia provide a demonstration of this. One is dedicated to Zeus *Hypsistos*, in accordance with a dream. A relief of an eagle graces the space below the inscription.<sup>173</sup> The second, addressed more anonymously to *Theos Hypsistos* bears reliefs of an eagle, the head of a man (perhaps a depiction of the god?), and the head of a bull.<sup>174</sup> These inscriptions demonstrate that the presence of the epithet *hypsistos* is not at all incompatible with a very traditional, pagan approach to the gods. This in and of itself is not surprising. Zeus is called *Hypsistos* by Pindar, after all. Thus it appears that occasional traditional, pagan Greek use of the epithet continued in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, even while a cult formed around *Theos Hypsistos* as a monotheistic, or nearly monotheistic god. It would be careless to associate all instances of the epithet with a particular cult. Mitchell does address this criticism to a degree. For instance, he sets worship of Zeus *Hypsistos* in Macedonia apart from the worship of *Theos Hypsistos* elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world, saying of it: “None of these finds (in Macedonia) suggests that the worship of Zeus *Hypsistos* differed significantly from that of other Greek Olympian cults.”<sup>175</sup>

Some inscriptions, on the other hand, demonstrate non-Greek influences on the

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<sup>171</sup> *SEG* 43.549 EV n. 199.

<sup>172</sup> *SEG* 61.1754 = *TAM* 2.737.

<sup>173</sup> *TAM* 4.1.62.

<sup>174</sup> *TAM* 4.1.80.

<sup>175</sup> Mitchell (2010), 170.

cult, or are unassociated with the cult altogether. A number of these cast doubt that *Theos Hypsistos* can be reliably associated with Zeus. Some are surely associated with other pagan deities. One is an altar found in the region of ancient Phrygia. It is dedicated  $\Theta\epsilon\tilde{\omega}\ \Upsilon\psi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau[\omega]\ \kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}\ \text{'}\text{O}\sigma\acute{\iota}\omega\ \kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}\ \Delta\iota\grave{\iota}$ .<sup>176</sup> The inclusion of Zeus alongside *Theos Hypsistos* and Hosios would seem to preclude identification of Zeus with the Most High God in this case. This is particularly telling in Phrygia, where the god is always referred to as *Theos Hypsistos*, and never *Zeus Hypsistos*.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, if this inscription is associated with the same cult that endorsed the sentiment at Oenoanda, it compromises any certainty that (near-)monotheistic belief was universal among *Hypsistos* worshipers. The evidence that that worship of *Theos Hypsistos* as an independent, nameless deity was prevalent in Phrygia will be discussed below. On that basis the inscription should be included among the corpus of inscriptions for a *Hypsistos* cult in Anatolia and provides information about the character of the cult in Phrygia. But the inclusion of Zeus as a separate entity alongside *Theos Hypsistos* demonstrates that the local cult had a conception of the god that was different from the isolated figure depicted at Oenoanda. Furthermore, the presence of the god Hosios suggests an epichoric influence on worship, as discussed below.

In Pisidia, the inscription on a round, undecorated altar declares that Kointos, a priest of Mên, has dedicated it  $\Theta\epsilon\tilde{\omega}\ \Upsilon\psi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\omega$ .<sup>178</sup> The god is unnamed, but given that the priest has explicitly declared his devotion to Men, the Most High God can be assumed to

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<sup>176</sup> Drew-Bear (1978), p.41-2 no. 8.

<sup>177</sup> Drew-Bear and Naour (2010), 2035 and see below note 72.

<sup>178</sup> Bean (1960), n. 115.



be the same. Mitchell associates this dedication with another only a few kilometres away, dedicated *Θεῷ Ὑψίστῳ καὶ ἀγείᾳ καταφύγῃ*,<sup>179</sup> but the connection seems strained. *Καταφύγῃ* almost exclusively connotes Jewish worship and *ἀγείᾳ* is likewise closely linked to Judaism. Without further corroborating evidence, there is no reason to make a connection between the two, and neither are otherwise suggestive of the deity identified at Oenoanda, nor his worship. The inscription demonstrates that worshipers had few qualms about setting up an altar or votive offering without naming the god to whom it was dedicated. As Nock puts it: “A dedication was addressed to the gods and not to the public, and therefore there was not in antiquity that need, which a modern man might feel, for the avoidance of ambiguity; circumlocutions were used which were intelligible only to the dedicant.”<sup>180</sup> Therefore, unless corroborating evidence links a *Hypsistos* inscription to a coherent cult, it cannot be included for the purposes of delineating a portrait of the cult. It is notable that *Hypsistos* was a rare epithet for Mên.<sup>181</sup> This may be part of a general trend to exalt favoured gods under Roman rule, and cannot be interpreted as evidence of a coherent cult.<sup>182</sup> As further evidence, we find the epithet applied also to female deities. A stele from the region of Kollyda in Phrygia, is devoted to *Θεῶν Ὑψίστην*,<sup>183</sup> which most likely refers to an Egyptian deity, either Sarapis or Isis.<sup>184</sup>

An inscription dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, from Stratonicæa in Caria, on the other hand, offers evidence that some seemingly traditional, pagan pairings, given

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<sup>179</sup> Mitchell (1999), 113. Text in Mitchell (1999), 143 n. 230 = Trebilco (1991), 136 n. 4.8. = *SEG* 19.852.

<sup>180</sup> Nock (1936), 61.

<sup>181</sup> Petzl (2014) does not list *Hypsistos* among the known epithets for Mên.

<sup>182</sup> Trebilco (1991), 128.

<sup>183</sup> *TAM* 5.1.359.

<sup>184</sup> Mitchell (2010), 171-2.

corroborating evidence, may be included as evidence for a *Hypsistos* cult consistent with the inscription at Oenoanda. This inscription is dedicated “to Zeus *Hypsistos* and to Hecate *Soteria* and to Zeus *Capitolium* and to Tyche.”<sup>185</sup> At first glance the inscription pairs Zeus equally with Hecate and Tyche, but Hecate and Tyche are scarcely co-equal gods to Zeus. The dedication must be interpreted in light of a collection of votive offerings found nearby, dedicated to Zeus or *Theos Hypsistos* alongside an unnamed *θεῖον* (“divinity”).<sup>186</sup> These are almost exclusively dedicated to Zeus *Hypsistos*, but there two dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*, and one simply to *Hypsistos*. A number of different epithets describe his divine companion: *heavenly, great, good, royal*, and in four cases, *messenger*. The *θεῖον* here might well be identified as Hecate, who often served as a mediator between the gods and humanity.<sup>187</sup> The identification is not without problems. The epithet *οὐράνιον* (“heavenly”) seems ill-applied to Hecate, who was also named Hecate *χθόνια* (“of the underworld”).<sup>188</sup> Hecate is also a feminine figure and the adjectives are either neuter or masculine—they all identify the gods in the dative and the gender is uncertain. If neuter, they may not be incompatible with a feminine deity.<sup>189</sup> In any case, the persistent pairing of Zeus with an intermediary suggests an exaltation to the point of inaccessibility, consistent with the position of the Oenoandan deity. Likewise consistent is the diminution of the intermediary, messenger deity, characterized as *θεῖον*, a divine being, but lesser than *θεός*.

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<sup>185</sup> Mitchell (1999), 137 n. 140.

<sup>186</sup> Mitchell (1999), 137-8 nos. 140-157.

<sup>187</sup> Sokolowski (1960), 227-8. Hecate, Pluto, Kore, and sometimes Hermes were referred to as *καταχθόνιοι ἄγγελοι*.

<sup>188</sup> Sokolowski (1960), 227-8, citing *scholia Theocritus* II, 12.

<sup>189</sup> And see Stuckenbruck (1993), 181 note 389 for a brief discussion of ἡ ἄγγελος as a feminine figure.

Other *Hypsistos* inscriptions, naturally, are Jewish.<sup>190</sup> Schürer, who first examined the cult of *Theos Hypsistos*, saw it as a syncretic mingling of pagan and Jewish influences,<sup>191</sup> and Mitchell continues to posit that worshipers of a pagan cult of *Theos Hypsistos* shared common ground with Jewish believers.<sup>192</sup> It is true that Jewish settlement in Anatolia, particularly western Anatolia was extensive, from as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, under the Seleucid rule of Antiochus III.<sup>193</sup> Daily interaction between Greek communities and Jewish could have proved a fertile ground for a mingling of religious ideas and customs and the growth of syncretic cults. By way of example, Jews in Acmonia held important civic offices, contributed financially to the city, and adopted local customs.<sup>194</sup> In turn, at least one pagan inscription from the area in the third century AD makes use of a Jewish curse formula.<sup>195</sup>

Undeniable connections between Judaism and pagan *Theos Hypsistos* cults, however, are difficult to confirm and remain controversial. Stein claims that there is no epigraphic evidence of identifiably pagan *Hypsistos* texts that make use of Jewish elements, nor are there Jewish inscriptions that show influence of the pagan cult. Rather, dedications to Most High gods are identified as Jewish or pagan, or they do not contain enough information to confirm identification either way.<sup>196</sup> One controversial inscription is a 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century AD altar from Galatia. Its inscription reads:

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<sup>190</sup> Mitchell (2010) counts 25 in his corpus that are clearly Jewish either by their content or by their proximity to other archaeological remains identified as Jewish, p. 186 notes 74 and 75.

<sup>191</sup> Schürer (1897), 200.

<sup>192</sup> Mitchell (2010), 185-9.

<sup>193</sup> Trebilco (1991), 34-5.

<sup>194</sup> Trebilco (1991), 83-4; Hirschmann (2007), 135 note 7 lists examples of Jewish city magistrates also in Sardis and Corycus.

<sup>195</sup> Trebilco (1991), 73-4: *διὰ τέκνα τέκνων ἔγωνα ἐγόνα*.

<sup>196</sup> Stein (2001), 122-3. The great majority of dedications are brief, offering only the name of the god, of dedicant, and formulaic

τῷ μεγάλῳ | Θεῷ Ὑψίστῳ καὶ | Ἐπουρανίῳ καὶ | τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ | ἀγγέλοις καὶ τῇ  
προσκυνητῇ αὐτοῦ προσευχῇ τὰ | ὧδε ἔργα γείνεται<sup>197</sup>

*For the great god, most high and heavenly, and for his holy angels and for his  
prayer-house for worshipping, where his deeds are done.*

The term *προσευχή* is well-established as a Jewish term for a prayer-house.<sup>198</sup> Mitchell attributes this inscription to pagan *Hypsistos* worshipers on the basis of the epithet *ἐπουράνιος*, linking it to worship of *Mên Ouranios*,<sup>199</sup> but the association is not sound. Though rare, *ἐπουράνιος* does occur as an epithet of the Jewish god, and the expression *ἅγιοι ἄγγελοι* likewise occurs in Jewish and Christian literature with reference to the Jewish god and his angels.<sup>200</sup> The inscription is therefore quite likely Jewish, and there seems little reason to suspect pagan influence.

In other places, worship of *Theos Hypsistos* flourished where there could be little Jewish influence. On Cyprus, more than 20 inscriptions dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos* have been recovered from various sites. Although Jewish communities were present on Cyprus since at least early in the 1st century BC,<sup>201</sup> following an insurrection in 116 AD, the Jewish population on Cyprus suffered heavy persecution.<sup>202</sup> While they maintained a presence on the island, the epigraphic record is nearly silent between the 2nd and 4th centuries AD. Since most of the *Hypsistos* inscriptions found on Cyprus are dated to this

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<sup>197</sup> SEG 31.1080; Mitchell (1999), 141 n. 202; Trebilco (1991), 137 n. 4.9.

<sup>198</sup> Trebilco (1991), 134 and 241, note 33; Goodenough (1953), 86; Sanders (1999), 6.

<sup>199</sup> Mitchell (1999), 114-5.

<sup>200</sup> Trebilco (1991), 137 and 243 note 48. For *ἐπουράνιος*: Ps. 67:15; II Macc 3:39; III Macc 6:28, 7:6; IV Macc 4:11. For *ἅγιοι ἄγγελοι*: Job 5:1; Tobit 11:4; Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26; Acts 10:22.

<sup>201</sup> Mitford (1990), 2204.

<sup>202</sup> Mitford (1990), 2205 rejects Dio's claim that Jews were entirely exterminated and barred from Cyprus, given archaeological evidence of a continued Jewish presence, but retribution of some kind almost surely followed the insurrection, and persecution extended into the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD: "A rescript from Salamis, perhaps of Severan date, prohibits the establishment of a *statio* or club-house for craftsmen of a certain race, presumably Jewish."

period of silence, it is as likely as not that the cult found its way to the island through gentile channels.<sup>203</sup>

The temptation to draw this inscription into the corpus of a monotheistic cult of *Theos Hypsistos* is revealing of the nature of that deity. *Ἐπουράνιος* is not incongruent with Jewish worship, but a similar adjective does occur in the first line of the Clarian oracle recorded in *Tübingen Theosophy*, though it was not inscribed at Oenoanda. The oracle describes the god as *ὑπερουρανίου κότεος καθύπερθε λελογχώς*, “presiding from above the supra-heavenly hollow.”<sup>204</sup> Shared language is suggestive of a shared concept, and even if the worshipers of *Theos Hypsistos* did not worship in Jewish temples, or vice versa, it is difficult to believe they did not recognize common ground. The description of God Most High with his angels is certainly reminiscent of the Oenoandan inscription, in which the other gods served the unnamed god as *ἄγγελοι*. As mentioned above, this is a significant diminution of the Olympian gods. Typically in the Greek imagination, Apollo and the other gods, with the exception of Hermes, are *ἄγγελοι* by occasional vocation rather than identity.<sup>205</sup> The role of mediator between men and gods was much more suited to lesser deities, the *δαίμονες*.<sup>206</sup>

This is far from the only case in which the Most High God is connected with angelic beings. Aside from the cache mentioned above, at Stratoniceaea, two more inscriptions from Lydia are dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos* and a *μεγάλος θεῖος* (“great

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<sup>203</sup> *IJO* 3, p. 213.

<sup>204</sup> Robert (1971), 605, translates this far more eloquently: “résidant bien au-dessus de l’enveloppe supracéleste”.

<sup>205</sup> Hirschmann (2007), 137: “ἄγγελος (ist) ein temporäres, an eine bestimmte Aufgabe gebundenes Attribut. Manche Götter können bisweilen als *éggelow* fungieren, haben aber anders als Hermes außer der *éggelow*-Funktion noch Zuständigkeitsgebiete, die keine Botenfunktion integrieren.”

<sup>206</sup> Hirschmann (2007), 137 and see Plato, *Symp.* 202e-203a; Plutarch, *de def. Orac.* 13.

divinity”).<sup>207</sup> The aforementioned inscription, dedicated *Θεῶ Ὑψίστ[ω] καὶ Ὀσίω καὶ Διὶ* may also be included; the god *Ὀσίος καὶ Δίκαιος* was frequently identified as *angelikos* or *theios*.<sup>208</sup> So too may a 3<sup>rd</sup> century Lydian inscription ostensibly dedicated *Θεῶ Ὀσίω καὶ Δικαίω*, which the engraver initially began *ΘΕΩΥΨ[Ι]Σ*.<sup>209</sup> Clearly it was not at all uncommon for *Theos Hypsistos* to be accompanied by a divine companion of lesser status. Nor is it surprising that a god so isolated and remote would be in need of an intermediary.

The association of *Theos Hypsistos* with *Ὀσίος καὶ Δίκαιος* reveals a Persian Zoroastrian influence on the cult. They are not traditional, named gods of pagan pantheons, but rather they are personifications of moral values, beyond even what we see expressed in the classical Roman civic deities.<sup>210</sup> This is typical of Zoroastrian belief in which the personifications of the good qualities of the highest god, Ahura Mazda, acted as independent divine beings. These beings served revelatory functions and stood in opposition to the evil forces of the world.<sup>211</sup> This treatment of intermediary divinities is also harmonious with the Oenoandan inscription, treating the other gods as *μεικρὰ δὲ θεοῦ μέρης*. Worship of *Ὀσίος καὶ Δίκαιος* in Lydia and Phrygia is also part of a trend toward abstract beliefs in the region during the Imperial period.<sup>212</sup> This trend is likewise reflected in the anonymity of *Theos Hypsistos* inscriptions in the region<sup>213</sup> and is, again, consistent

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<sup>207</sup> Mitchell (1999), 139 nos. 71 and 72.

<sup>208</sup> Mitchell (1993), 46.

<sup>209</sup> Mitchell (2010), 203-4 n. A48 = *SEG* 48.1427: “Possibly the *θεὸς Ὀσίος καὶ Δικαίος* served as intermediary between *Hypsistos* and (the dedicant).”

<sup>210</sup> Hirschmann (2007), 145.

<sup>211</sup> Hirschmann (2007), 141-2.

<sup>212</sup> Drew-Bear and Naour (1990), 2037.

<sup>213</sup> Mitchell (1999), 138-9, nos. 163-178 collects 16 *Hypsistos* inscriptions from Lydia; 141-2 nos. 205-227

with the Oenoandan inscription.

Much worship of *Theos Hypsistos* does not demonstrate concern for theological niceties, but rather for the homely concerns of everyday life. The evidence from Phrygia attests to this, and gives a picture of the form local worship took. The wealth of *Hypsistos* inscriptions found in Phrygia speak to the local popularity of a cult dedicated to the god in the region. There was a temple dedicated to the god, probably in the vicinity of Aizanoi; its columns have been unearthed.<sup>214</sup> Most of the inscriptions are found on small, rural altars. They are often decorated with agricultural motifs, such as ears of wheat or bunches of grapes.<sup>215</sup> Another altar is set up *ὑπὲρ Βοῶν σωτηρίας καὶ τῶν ἰδί[ων π]άντων* (“for the protection of my cattle and my entire household”).<sup>216</sup> The many altars dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos* with an agricultural theme demonstrate that the province of the deity covered the same traditional spheres as pagan deities. The god was worshipped in the exact same manner as *Zeus Bronton* or *Zeus Karpodotes*. Even gods that would seem to be consistent with a more abstract mode of thought, such as *Ἵσσιος καὶ Δίκαιος* and *Κριτής* (“Justice”), were worshipped in just the same manner in rural Phrygia. Any finer theological differences between the gods played second fiddle to more immediate corporeal concerns, the health of livestock and crops.<sup>217</sup>

And so an examination of *Hypsistos* inscriptions in Anatolia outlines a picture of

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collects 22 from Phrygia. To these Mitchell (2010), 203-4 nos. A44 – A48 adds five more from Lydia; 204 nos. A53 – A55 add three more from Phrygia. Of these, all but three are dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*, or simply *Hypsistos*.

<sup>214</sup> Drew-Bear and Naour (1990), 2041-2 n. 35 = *SEG* 40.1251.

<sup>215</sup> E.g. *SEG* 45.1058, a sheaf of wheat and a palmette acroteria; *MAMA* 5.211, two sheafs of wheat; *MAMA* 5.186, three sheafs of wheat; Drew-Bear and Naour (1990), 2036 n. 31 = *SEG* 50.1227, a bunch of grapes; Drew-Bear and Naour (1990), 2038 n. 32 = *SEG* 40.1235, a sheaf of wheat inside a wreath.

<sup>216</sup> *MAMA* 5.212.

<sup>217</sup> Drew-Bear and Naour (1990), 2037 note 497.

the god and its cult. The characteristics of the cult permit some differentiation from other expressions of worship; not all *Hypsistos* inscriptions can be attributed to a single cult. Some can be set aside, either as a continuance of more traditional modes of pagan worship, or as part of a general trend to the exaltation of gods, not necessarily associated with the same cult. The Most High God was typically associated with Zeus but this connection was often tenuous or absent. We see a god that found its clearest and most refined expression at Oenoanda, stated in undeniably Greek terms. There, *Theos Hypsistos* was exalted high above all other gods, so much so that the pagan gods were diminished. They were made into mere messengers, and a small part of the god, subsumed into his very being. The god was associated with the sun and fire, and worshiped with lamp offerings. This exaltation of the god inspired a concern about the god's remote isolation, and he was often paired with intermediaries, to enable communication between the god and humanity. The traditional pagan deities could take up this role, but they were diminished, addressed as *θεῖος* rather than *θεός*. Anatolia, however, proved a fertile ground for syncretic worship and Persian divinities sometimes became the intermediaries between god and humanity. Where this happened, the Most High God was divorced from Zeus, becoming a nameless deity. Though inscriptions cannot with any certainty link the pagan *Hypsistos* with the Jewish, the two gods share many traits, a fact undoubtedly recognized by the followers of both. Finally, the god remained the province of homely concerns. In Phrygia he was worshiped as an agricultural deity, appealed to for the health of crops and cattle. However high the worshipers exalted the god, he did not escape from pedestrian appeal.



## CHAPTER FIVE: ZEUS *HYP SISTOS* IN ATHENS

Compared with *Hypsistos* shrines elsewhere, the sanctuary to Zeus *Hypsistos* in Athens offers a wealth of data, and I will examine it from several different angles. The location of the site has a curious history that bears on the interpretation of *Hypsistos* in Athens. Zeus *Hypsistos* at Athens is primarily known through anatomical votives dedicated to the god. This is unusual, both for Zeus and for *Theos Hypsistos*. The composition of his followers is likewise particular from other *Hypsistos* cults. Analysis of the shrine reveals a portrait of the Most High God that is particular to Athens, yet nevertheless associated with a broader network of *Hypsistos* worship.

Because of the discovery of marble tablets dedicated to Zeus *Hypsistos*, it has been known since 1803 that the site of the Athenian Pnyx had at one point hosted a shrine to the god.<sup>218</sup> Thirty-four inscriptions have been found that can be associated with this sanctuary to Zeus *Hypsistos* on the site of the Pnyx. Eighteen of these were found at the site itself, and 16 were found elsewhere and associated to the site by reference to Zeus *Hypsistos* in the inscription. Most of these are small votive plaques that would fit into the shallow niches carved into the rock face, and a number of the discovered plaques have been paired with niches in the wall.<sup>219</sup> Fragments of five altars and a column have also been found, in one case at the site,<sup>220</sup> and in the others, in the vicinity Athens and associated with the site.<sup>221</sup> The votives are all dated between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.

The Pnyx, a hill located in central Athens, had been the chosen location for

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<sup>218</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 90.

<sup>219</sup> Forsén (1993), 515.

<sup>220</sup> Thompson (1936), 156, fig.6a and 6b

<sup>221</sup> *IG* II2 4738; Meritt (1948), n. 34; Meritt (1954) n. 40; Meritt (1957), n. 35 = *SEG* XVI 185; Meritt (1960), n. 108 = *SEG* XIX 226.

democratic assemblies since as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, but fell out of use for this purpose in the Roman period, in favour of the Theatre of Dionysus.<sup>222</sup> The site underwent several renovations during the lifetime of its use, divided into three periods. The dating of these periods has bearing on the shrine to *Zeus Hypsistos*, so a brief discussion of the site and its renovations is in order.

In the earliest period, the assembly place was oriented so that the audience faced generally toward the northwest, with the concavity of the hill-slope providing seating.<sup>223</sup> A renovation dated to around the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC reversed the facing of the Pnyx by means of a parabolic retaining wall open toward the south. This was filled in to create an incline opposite to the natural slope of the hill.<sup>224</sup> The Pnyx was expanded again in a third period, to which belongs the shrine to *Zeus Hypsistos*. A scarp was carved out along the southern wall from the shoulder of the hill, cut down level to the base of a new Bema, where the speaker stood. A new semi-circular retaining wall was constructed, at a greater radius than that of the second period, using massive stones quarried from the south side of the auditorium, in front of the scarp.<sup>225</sup> The retaining wall supported an earthen embankment that rose steeply to its peak at the back of the auditorium then dropped in a gentle slope toward the Bema, to provide seating space for the Assembly.<sup>226</sup>

The Bema of the third period still stands, a square, stone dais. Just southeast of the Bema, above the scarp, three rows of benches are cut into the hillside, parallel with the

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<sup>222</sup> Travlos (1971), 466-7.

<sup>223</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 106-9.

<sup>224</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 129-34.

<sup>225</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 139-41.

<sup>226</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 149-55.

eastern length of the scarp.<sup>227</sup> The remains of the sanctuary to Zeus *Hypsistos* lie just east of the Bema, below these benches, where 58 shallow, rectangular niches have been cut into the facing of the scarp to hold votive plaques. The niches are various sizes, but none of them are large; the largest is 44 cm. high.

The scarp at the area of the shrine is not an uninterrupted surface, but rather, the majority of the niches lie within an inset area, where the stone surface is more roughly dressed than the rest of the scarp face. The bottom edge of this inset area lies about 2 m. above the base of the scarp and extends to the top, with no upper frame. The inset is deepest at the western end, toward the Bema. The area runs 8.2 m., before the depth of the inset area diminishes to nothing. The ledge of the inset area is broken at the western end, suggesting the remains of steps that were sheared away when the scarp was cut.

Within the embedded area are 33 niches. Twenty-one more are cut into the scarp to the west, and four to the east. There are at least four more beddings for votives along the bottom ledge of the embedded area, two more in one of the stone benches above the scarp, and traces of 2 holes for iron pins in the face of the scarp, from which more votives could be hung.<sup>228</sup> The inset area is interrupted by a large recess cut into the middle of it, 2.38 m. tall, 1.10 m. wide, and 38 cm. deep. The base of this recess is cut below the lower ledge of the embedded area. It breaks two small niches and there is space for pilasters, which would have covered several more. This surely received a statue of the god worshipped here.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 158-165.

<sup>228</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 194-6.

<sup>229</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 199.

The date attributed to the Third Period of the Pnyx has undergone a good deal of revision since the original excavation. Kourouniotes and Thompson used the material in the fill of the expanded area between the retaining wall of the second period and that of the third period to gain some clue as to the date of the expansion. Much of it belongs to the Hellenistic period, although some dates to as early as the 4th and 5th centuries BC. Some fragments of glass unguentaria and pottery led to the excavators to posit an initial *terminus post quem* of somewhere between the late 1st century AD and the early 2nd.<sup>230</sup> In addition, they compared the style of blocks used to build a terrace wall above the scarp to that of the those used to construct the Library of Hadrian, the temple of Olympian Zeus, and the reconstructed Pompeian by the Dipylon Gate, all built in the time of Hadrian. This style fell out of fashion in Athens in the middle of the 2nd century AD, further corroborating a date in the late 1st and early second century AD. They proposed that the expansion was a Hadrianic initiative along with the temple of Olympian Zeus and the rebuilding of the Pompeian.<sup>231</sup>

Later investigation has overturned this conclusion. The dates associated with much of the pottery from the fill have undergone substantial revision. The pieces are of a much later date, as recent as the late third century AD, a period far too chaotic for anyone to have undertaken construction of this magnitude. This rules out a Hadrianic date and raises the possibility that the Roman deposits into the fill are later intrusions, the remains of later habitation as well as lamp offerings at the sanctuary of Zeus *Hypsistos* that have washed downhill and mixed with the sediment during rainfalls. The location of the

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<sup>230</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 181-3.

<sup>231</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 187-8.

Roman material supports this conclusion, concentrated in localized deposits, rather than spread throughout the fill.<sup>232</sup> Furthermore, the style of the third period retaining wall closely matches that of the fortification around the acropolis of the Phocian town of Panopeus. This style is typified by megalithic blocks in a trapezoidal shape. The faces of the blocks are left rough, and the joining edges are cut in a series of parallel grooves, a product of the quarrying technique used to cut them. Camp links the construction of the Phocian wall to a period of cooperation mentioned by Pausanias, when Athens and Thebes helped rebuild Phocian cities after the Sacred War in 346 BC, and before the battle of Chaironeia in 338 BC. Such help would have included labour and skilled workmen. The close correspondence of styles suggests a similar date for the expansion of the Pnyx as well.<sup>233</sup>

The revision of the dates of the third period of the Pnyx creates a problem for attributing a date to the sanctuary, since Kourouniotes and Thompson had proposed that the sanctuary pre-dated the expansion. The embedded area was almost surely not carved into the scarp subsequent to the expansion of the auditorium, and the area is too irregular to be credibly associated with the construction itself. The scarp face, had it been available, would have been a better surface for receiving the votive plaques than the rough surface of the embedded area, so neither was there reason for worshippers to carve away a shallow inset after the construction, especially given that the boundaries of the embedded area were not subsequently respected. Furthermore, the placement of the votive plaques is too high to be legible from the final base of the scarp; the lowest niches would have been

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<sup>232</sup> Rotroff and Camp (1996), 267-70; Forsén (1993), 508, n. 7.

<sup>233</sup> Rotroff and Camp (1996), 271-4.

2 m. or more above the ground of the auditorium. The remains of stairs at the west end of the area, sheared away, suggest this was the south end of a room or pit that predated the third period expansion; during the second period, it would have fallen outside the boundaries of the Pnyx. There must have been some reason, then, that the architect of the third period did not set the plane of the scarp further back, and so create a smooth wall. Kourouniotes and Thompson posited that the sanctuary predates the expansion, and that the lower edge of the embedded area was level with the floor of the former sanctuary. With the floor at that level, the height of the votive plaques resembles similar sanctuaries, such as those dedicated to Eros and Aphrodite, and to Apollo on the Acropolis. Once a sanctuary was established at the site, it could not be dislodged, and the expansion of the Assembly place was obliged to preserve it in some form. Niches carved into the face of the scarp, outside of the embedded area attest that it continued to see use afterward.<sup>234</sup> So too does the larger recess cut into the embedded area, the base of which falls below the proposed floor of the original sanctuary. None of the artifacts associated with Zeus *Hypsistos*, however, are as old as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC; rather, they are dated between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

Forsén counters that with the floor of the sanctuary level with the ledge of the embedded area, the height of the offerings would in fact be lower than at comparable sites, and questions why, after the third period construction, dedicants would have continued to carve out niches at the same level after the floor had been lowered by almost 2 meters. Rather, when one accounts for 0.5-1 m. of earth laid over the rock floor, as the

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<sup>234</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 194-5.

original excavators had done in diagrams of a reconstructed third period Pnyx, all the niches are at a height comparable with other sanctuaries, suggesting that they were placed when the ground was at that level.<sup>235</sup> The embedded area, then, although it predates the third period of the Pnyx, served some purpose other than as a sanctuary for Zeus *Hypsistos*; perhaps it is the remnant of a southern entrance to the second period.<sup>236</sup> This does, however, leave unexplained why the architect of the third period left rough surface of the embedded area intact.

Another problem yet remains. Kourouniotes and Thompson pointed to one of the blocks of the northern retaining wall as further evidence that the sanctuary predates the expansion; it bears a shallow niche with similar dimensions as the niches on the southern scarp. The cutting is at the top of the block, and would have been covered by the second course of the retaining wall, and therefore useless to the construction. Kourouniotes and Thompson surmised that the block had been quarried from a section of rock that formed an adjacent wall of the embedded space.<sup>237</sup> This raises the possibility that a sanctuary of some form did exist at the space in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, prior to the expansion of the third period, although not necessarily dedicated to Zeus *Hypsistos*, given the early date. When the expansion cut away all but the southernmost wall, any existing votive offerings would have been buried off site.

The cult of Zeus *Hypsistos* thus occupied an existing shrine that had been defunct, perhaps for centuries, and after the Pnyx itself had fallen out of use. This raises a number

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<sup>235</sup> Forsén (1993), 510-511 and 510, n. 13 points out that in “the sanctuary of Eros and Aphrodite, the niches from the Roman period... when the level of the floor of the sanctuary had been lowered, are set considerably lower in the rock than the earlier niches.”

<sup>236</sup> Forsén (1993), 517-519.

<sup>237</sup> Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 199.

of possibilities. The cult devoted to *Zeus Hypsistos* in Athens may have been small, poorly-funded, lacking means to erect an independent shrine. It is also possible that the site was chosen from a desire to re-establish worship of Zeus at the site, particularly given that a shrine devoted to Zeus Agoraios had been moved from the Pnyx to the Agora.<sup>238</sup>

The votives themselves have much to offer concerning the nature of the cult. Of the 34 inscriptions, 19 are dedicated by women. In most cases, this is determined by the name of the devotee, but in some cases where the name was not preserved, the sex of the dedicant is inferred from a relief of a breast or other female body part on the votive tablet,<sup>239</sup> or in one case, from the gender of a participle in the inscription.<sup>240</sup> Two are uncertain; the name has been lost, but a trailing *α* in the first line of the inscriptions may attest a feminine name.<sup>241</sup> Eight can be attributed to men with certainty, and the remaining five inscriptions are too fragmentary to preserve any clear clue as to the gender of the devotee. When only the anatomical votives are considered, the ratio skews even more heavily to women; 15 of the anatomical votives linked to this site are from women, and only three are from men. Although the size of the sample is too small to draw any firm conclusions concerning the demographic make-up of the worshippers, the gender difference is comparable to dedications offered at the Athenian Asclepieion, where men and women generally offered dedications in equal number, but a greater number of anatomical votives were offered by women.<sup>242</sup> A wider survey of anatomical dedications in the Aegean region reveals that the ratio of men to women is generally even, with

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<sup>238</sup> Travlos (1971), 466.

<sup>239</sup> Thompson (1936), 154-5, fig. 4b; Van Straten (1981), 1183, n. 8.13 = Forsén (1996), 68, Nr. 8.15

<sup>240</sup> Thompson (1936), 156, fig.6b: *θεραπευθεῖσα*.

<sup>241</sup> *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 4807 and *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 4843.

<sup>242</sup> Aleshire (1989), 45-6.



women only slightly predominant, so the sampling here is remarkably weighted to women.<sup>243</sup>

The presence of so many women reveals a marked difference between the cult of Zeus *Hypsistos* at this site, and offerings dedicated to *Hypsistos* cults elsewhere. A monument set up in Thracia, for example, lists the members of the cult association that erected it, all of them male.<sup>244</sup> Likewise, inscriptions from Tanais, listing participants of synods devoted to *Theos Hypsistos*, are entirely populated by males.<sup>245</sup> While exclusively male enrollment (or perhaps, epigraphic acknowledgement of enrollment) may simply be typical of Greek associations, a similar picture develops from an examination of offerings from individuals. The only collection of offerings from individual dedicants that is near to the size of the Athenian collection is that from Carian Stratonicæa. Of these 18 dedications, 16 of which list the names of the dedicants, only six name women, and in all but one of those the women's names are paired with a male name, almost surely offerings made by married couples.<sup>246</sup> A similar ratio occurs in inscriptions from Phrygia. Of 14 inscriptions on which the names of dedicants and their genders can be discerned, only five name women, and about half of those are pairings of male and female dedicants.<sup>247</sup> A final comparison again yields a similar result. Of 26 inscriptions Mitchell lists from Macedonia, only two bear female names,<sup>248</sup> although a third may list the name of a

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<sup>243</sup> Forsén (1996), 164.

<sup>244</sup> Tacheva-Hitova (1983), No. 3.24 = No. 4.11 = *IGB* 4.1924.

<sup>245</sup> Ustinova (1999), 184.

<sup>246</sup> Mitchell (1999), 137-8 nos. 140-157; nos. 143, 144, 150, 151, 153, 156 list women's names; n. 156 lists a woman (*Τρυφῶσα*) as the sole dedicant.

<sup>247</sup> Mitchell (1999), 141-2 nos. 205-227.

<sup>248</sup> Mitchell (1999), 130-1 nos. 34-59. Women's names are listed on nos. 37 (*Ἀ[ρ]ιάγνη*) and 52 (*Διαζείπα*)

female slave.<sup>249</sup>

The extant votive offerings which depict body parts are, for the most part, typical of Greek anatomical *ex votos* insofar as there is a lack of internal body parts or any evidence of disease. Only one votive is an exception to this; it depicts a womb in relief,<sup>250</sup> a habit more typical of Italic votive traditions.<sup>251</sup> Most representations of anatomy can be read as a response to injury or sickness. Although it cannot always be known whether they were intended as supplication for aid or as a thank-offering for recovery,<sup>252</sup> on several of the votives *εὐχὴν* is a typical formulaic expressing that the votive is offered in fulfillment of a vow that had been conditional on the god's favour.<sup>253</sup> Eight of the 19 anatomical votives, however, depict breasts, which connotes a desire for fertility or for plentiful milk. Two others, one depicting a womb and another of a pudendum, may likewise reflect a desire for fertility.<sup>254</sup> Four of the *ex votos* depict eyes, and these too may express a desire that Zeus be observant of their ailment rather than refer to an ailment specific to the eyes.<sup>255</sup> The variety of depictions and the desires they represent are typical of offerings to such healing shrines, however.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Mitchell (1999), 130 n. 35; Cormack (1931), 20.

<sup>250</sup> *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 4800.

<sup>251</sup> Aleshire (1989), 40-41; Van Straten (1981), 101, 111. Anatomical *ex votos* depicting internal organs are more commonly found in Italic and Etruscan traditions, v. MacIntosh Turfa (1994), 225ff.

<sup>252</sup> Jackson (1988), 161.

<sup>253</sup> Van Straten (1981), 70.

<sup>254</sup> Aleshire (1989), 41; Jackson (1988), 164.

<sup>255</sup> Jackson (1988), 157-8, interprets some eye votives dedicated to Asclepius in this manner. Aleshire (1989), 42, and Van Straten (1981), 149-50, do read eye votives as referring to ailments of the eye and based on the preponderance of such *ex votos* at the Athenian Asclepieion, Aleshire conjectures that the residents of Athen may have suffered a predilection to ocular ailment. Alternatively, some shrines may have specialised in particular ailments and would have therefore drawn pilgrims seeking cures peculiar to those shrines (v. Jackson (1988), 160-2).

<sup>256</sup> Van Straten (1981), 109 lists anatomical votives offered to the Athenian Asclepieion which include depictions of the torso, the face, eyes, noses, jaws, mouths, teeth, breasts, genitals, legs, hips, knees, feet, etc.

The shrine to Zeus *Hypsistos* on the Pnyx existed alongside the Athenian Asclepieion, on the south slope of the Acropolis. The Asclepieion was an active shrine well into the 5th century AD<sup>257</sup> and Asclepius was popular enough to appear on Athenian coins in 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.<sup>258</sup> Dedicants who offered anatomical votives to Zeus *Hypsistos* were either forsaking the Athenian Asclepieion in favour of Zeus, or were offering prayers to both. This is not to say that turning to Zeus rather than Asclepius meant a loss of faith in the latter, only that the dedicant may have had reason to believe Zeus was responsible for curing their condition rather than Asclepius; the infirm were often directed to particular gods by dreams, for example.<sup>259</sup> There is no evidence at this shrine, therefore, that this *Hypsistos* cult was atypical of pagan worship.

The presence of so many anatomical *ex-votos* dedicated to Zeus is unusual, although this does not necessarily mean that there had been a change in the imagining of Zeus; taking recourse to Zeus as a healing deity was not new to Athenians. In one of his orations, Demosthenes quotes an oracle that prescribes prayer and sacrifice to Zeus *Hypatos* (“Highest Zeus”) for health (*περὶ ὑγιείας*), and Zeus is regularly invoked as a saviour under various epithets.<sup>260</sup> Moreover, Zeus is often closely associated with Asclepius, and altars to Zeus regularly occupy space in the Asclepieia of a number of cities.<sup>261</sup> There are, however, very few anatomical votives dedicated to Zeus, and the majority of them are associated with this shrine to Zeus *Hypsistos*. Other anatomical

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<sup>257</sup> Aleshire (1989), 19.

<sup>258</sup> Aleshire (1989), 17.

<sup>259</sup> Jackson (1988), 138, 146-7, 152 and Van Straten (1981), 98 discuss the interplay of dreams and cure in antiquity. Also see, e.g. *TAM* 4.1.62: *Ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. Διὶ Ὑψίστῳ Στράτων Μουκάζου κατὰ ὄναρ ἀνέσθησα.*

<sup>260</sup> Forsén (1996), 147; Demosth. 21.52

<sup>261</sup> Forsén (1996), 147-8.

votives dedicated to Zeus fall into two groups. They are either propitiary votives, dissimilar to healing votives, or they are indeed healing votives of a similar type to the collection at Athens.

Of propitiary votives, there is one: a stele found in Lydia, dedicated to Zeus Sabazios and Mother Hipta.<sup>262</sup> The stele depicts a pair of doves and a pair of eyes accompanied by a confession of the dedicant, Diokles, that he stole some doves sacred to the gods and was therefore stricken in the eyes. In this case there is no question as to why Diokles has turned to Zeus: it is Zeus whom he offended and so it is Zeus he must appease. The dedication is not typical of votives dedicated to healing gods, although there is obvious overlap between the two in that the dedicant seeks a divine healing. Propitiary votives confess to a crime, and are set up in order that the god might cease a divine retribution, typically in the form of an illness or injury that has stricken the dedicant.<sup>263</sup> Zeus figures in these inscriptions no more or less than a number of other gods.<sup>264</sup>

Turning to the other healing votives, they are clearly not connected to the healing cult of Zeus at Athens. Van Straten lists ten stelai depicting body parts and dedicated to Zeus, all found in Phrygia, seven in the region of Emir Dağ.<sup>265</sup> Eyes, arms, and legs are depicted. They are dedicated variously to Zeus Petarenos, Zeus Alsenos, and Zeus Orochoreites, all with the formulaic *εὐχὴν*. A similar stele, also found in Emir Dağ, depicting a leg, is dedicated to Zeus Abozenos.<sup>266</sup> Several caches of inscriptions have been found in Phrygia, dedicated to Zeus Alsenos, most of them inscribed with a simple

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<sup>262</sup> Buckler (1914), 169ff, pl. XV; Van Straten (1981), 102, 138 no. 44.5.

<sup>263</sup> Chaniotis (1994), 324-6, outlines the formulae of propitiary inscriptions.

<sup>264</sup> Chaniotis (1994), 340-1, lists a sampling of 30 propitiary inscriptions from Phrygia and Lydia.

<sup>265</sup> Van Straten (1981), 139-40; Tuğrul, *passim*.

<sup>266</sup> Mitchell (1993), 20 fig. 7.

formulaic *εὐχήν*, which translates as a prayer or vow, and the deity is not found elsewhere. Zeus Alsenos was a minor, rural deity whose worship was localized to central Phrygia.<sup>267</sup> Other inscriptions have been found dedicated to Apollo Alsenos.<sup>268</sup> The epithet Alsenos is associated with either forests groves,<sup>269</sup> or more likely with a particular town in Phrygia over which Zeus or Apollo have guardianship.<sup>270</sup> Zeus Orochoreites, Petarnos, and Abozenos are likewise small, syncretic or very localized cults native to Phrygia. For Zeus Orochoreites, only eight inscriptions are known, all in Phrygia;<sup>271</sup> for Zeus Petarenos, fourteen;<sup>272</sup> and Zeus Abozenos, only four.<sup>273</sup> These occasional instances of healing votives dedicated to Zeus are not suggestive of a more widespread healing cult devoted to Zeus of which the shrine at Athens is a part. Rather, they are small, local cults which have been associated with Zeus.<sup>274</sup> Zeus has acquired the name of the local deity as an epithet, and along with it the expression of worship offered to that deity.

Anatomical votives dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos* are likewise scarce, and also highly localized. Aside from a single dedication from Lydia,<sup>275</sup> and a rural altar in Pisidia depicting a foot,<sup>276</sup> there is a cache of dedications from Cyprus, and nothing else known.

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<sup>267</sup> Drew-Bear and Naour (1990), 1914.

<sup>268</sup> Drew-Bear and Naour (1990), 1915-39, discuss several inscriptions dedicated to Zeus Alsenos and Apollo Alsenos, and the existing scholarship of these deities. Add to the inscriptions published there, *SEG* 40.1422; 42.1314; 47.1707-9, 1716-19; 49.1805 (many attestations); 53.1472.

<sup>269</sup> Tuğrul (1966), 175-6.

<sup>270</sup> See *SEG* 49.1805.

<sup>271</sup> Drew-Bear and Naour (1990), 1931-2 cite four and publish two more, to which add *SEG* 49.1805 (n. 5), 1850.

<sup>272</sup> Tuğrul (1966), 176, cites four and adds four more (nos. 17-20); to these add *SEG* 43.946; 44.1054, 1055; 47.1710, 1712-13.

<sup>273</sup> Drew-Bear and Naour (1990), 2023-5; to which add 44.1038.

<sup>274</sup> Mitchell (1993), 23-4, discusses the frequent association of Zeus with local deities.

<sup>275</sup> Van Straten (1981), 138 n. 47.4, a female breast.

<sup>276</sup> *TAM* 3.33, an altar surmounted by the sculpture of a sandaled human foot, more than 1.00 m long. The inscription declares that the altar was erected by Theopompus as a vow (*εὐχήν*) for the sake of his health (*ὕπερ ὑγείας*).

There are inscriptions dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos* from several sites on Cyprus, but ten anatomical votives attest to a healing sanctuary in the area of Golgoï, near the present-day village of Athienou, although their exact provenance is unknown.<sup>277</sup> Four of these bear inscriptions dedicating them to *Theos Hypsistos*. Roman names and the style of letter date the inscriptions to the third to fourth centuries AD,<sup>278</sup> later than the *Hypsistos* cult in Athens, but with significant overlap. An examination of the names on Cypriot dedications, however, do not reveal any connection to Athens; the names are generally either common throughout the Greek world or particular to Cyprus. In her examination of the *Hypsistos* cult using modern network theory, Collar notes that the cult on Cyprus was “introverted and somewhat disconnected.”<sup>279</sup> As with the Anatolian healing cults dedicated to Zeus, this particular expression of worship was peculiar to the region, not part of a widespread trend.

It does not seem unreasonable, then, to suspect a similar explanation for the healing cult at Athens as at other sites where Zeus is worshiped as a healing deity. At Athens, the *Hypsistos* cult usurped aspects of worship locally associated with Zeus, just as at other sites, Zeus usurped the role of local deities. In the worship of Zeus *Hypsistos* at Athens as a healing deity, devotees may well have felt a continuity with past worship of Zeus in the city. Making a connection between Zeus Most High (*Υψιστος*) and Highest (*Υπατος*) Zeus, to whom Demosthenes prescribed prayers for one's health, may have been an easy step. The location of their worship, taking possession of an abandoned

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<sup>277</sup> Van Straten (1981), 141-2 nos. 51.1-15;

<sup>278</sup> Caubet and Helly (1971), 331-2.

<sup>279</sup> Collar (2013), 271.

shrine at a location once associated with worship of Zeus, may likewise have capitalized on a desire for continuity with the past at Athens.

The iconography found on the artifacts other than anatomical depictions is slight. The anatomical votives are small with little room for more than the relief and a brief inscription, but fragments of six altars and one column have been found. Only a single altar and the column preserve any kind of iconography. The column is in Ionic style, bearing an eagle.<sup>280</sup> The other item, a small altar, bears a boukranion on the front and back.<sup>281</sup> The eagle is commonly associated with Zeus,<sup>282</sup> and appears elsewhere in sanctuaries dedicated to Zeus *Hypsistos*.<sup>283</sup> More occasionally, eagles adorn monuments dedicated to the unnamed *Theos Hypsistos*.<sup>284</sup> Beyond Zeus and *Hypsistos*, the eagle is associated with several other gods throughout the Mediterranean, including Yahweh, Baal Shamin, and Jupiter Dolichenus,<sup>285</sup> so it is impossible to draw firm conclusions concerning lineage of the cult from the depiction. This column was dedicated by *Ἰουλ - Ἀσκληπιανή* on behalf of her son Maximus, so in this case the presence of the eagle may show the presence of Roman influence. The most obvious piece of iconography is absent from the epigraphical record, but may be inferred from its vacancy. At the center of the shrine, a recess is cut into the rock large enough to receive a cult statue of the god. The recess interrupts several niches as well as the lower boundary of the larger inset area of the scarp. It therefore post-dates the second renovation of the Pnyx and can be safely

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<sup>280</sup> *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 4782

<sup>281</sup> Meritt (1960), 63 n. 108.

<sup>282</sup> Of the many depictions of eagles associated with Zeus, Pausanias spoke of an altar to Zeus *Lýkaios*, preceded by two columns bearing gilded eagles (Paus. 8.38.7; Cook [1914], 66).

<sup>283</sup> Tacheva-Hitova (1983), 192 n. 3; 202-3 n. 22.

<sup>284</sup> Ustinova (1999), 183-4.

<sup>285</sup> Ustinova (1999), 183-4.

associated with the third period and the shrine to *Zeus Hypsistos*. The existence of a cult statue of the god sets it apart from the worship of *Theos Hypsistos* in Anatolia, which is aniconic, for the most part.

If this shrine for *Zeus Hypsistos* was set up and used by a cult with widespread connections to a larger network of *Hypsistos* cults, the names might bear this out. The inscriptions almost without exception bear individual names without demotic or patronymic, but this is typical for small *ex votis* and does not necessarily rule out that dedicants are Athenian citizens.<sup>286</sup> A few of the *ex votis* bear names that were more common in Athens than elsewhere in the Greek world,<sup>287</sup> and some of the names can be attributed with certainty to Athenian citizens,<sup>288</sup> suggesting a native Attic heritage for at least some of the adherents. Other names, on the other hand, are suggestive of foreign worship at the shrine. There is an altar dedicated by a *Γλαῦκος Τρύφαινα Λέων*.<sup>289</sup> The altar was not found on the site, but near the Propylaea and associated with the site due to its dedication to *[ὕ]ψίστω*. The name, *Τρύφαινα*, is quite rare in Greek inscriptions except in Coastal Asia Minor, particularly in Ionia and Lydia. Several other names are markedly prevalent in Lydia,<sup>290</sup> suggesting that among the possible foreign origins of dedicants, Lydia is prevalent. Two of these, *Γαμική* and *(Κλαυδία) Πρέπουσα* are not otherwise present in inscriptions in Attica. Four other names recorded on the artifacts have never

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<sup>286</sup> Forsén (1996), 162, 167-8; Aleshire (1989), 53-4.

<sup>287</sup> These are *Σύντροφος* (*IG II<sup>2</sup> 4798*); *Μοιραγένης* (*SEG XVI 185*); *Εὔδοτος* (*IG II<sup>2</sup> 4799*); and *Εὐφροσύνης* (*IG II<sup>2</sup> 4766*) as determined by a count of attestations in the volumes of LGPN. *Μοιραγένης* and *Σύντροφος* in particular are quite rare outside of Attica.

<sup>288</sup> Forsén (1996), 166. The names are *Εὐτυχίς*, *Εὐπραξίς*, *Χρυσάριν*, and *Δαφνίς*.

<sup>289</sup> *IG II<sup>2</sup> 4738*.

<sup>290</sup> *Γαμική* (Thompson [1936], 154, fig.4a); *Ιουλία* (*IG II<sup>2</sup> 4782*); *Κλαυδία Πρέπουσα* (each individually) (*IG II<sup>2</sup> 4806*); *Τεπτία* (*IG II<sup>2</sup> 4801*).



been attributed with any certainty to Athenian citizens.<sup>291</sup> Furthermore, one votive may be read as evidence of pilgrimage to the shrine, and so connection to a network of *Hypsistos* worshippers. This *ex voto* depicts the imprint of a pair of feet, like footprints carved into the plaque.<sup>292</sup> Forsén points out that representation of feet in this manner is unique among Greek healing votives; feet are typically depicted in relief or as three-dimensional sculptures. Footprints like this, however, are found in the sanctuaries of Egyptian and African deities, which “*die Pilger in Wallfahrtsorten weihten, um an ihre Wallfahrt zu erinnern und um ihre Anwesenheit im Heiligtum zu verewigen.*”<sup>293</sup> At least some of the worshippers, then, were surely foreigners, and others slaves or metics.

Examination of the cult of *Hypsistos* at Athens yields an anomalous picture of the god and his worship. Worship of Zeus *Hypsistos* at Athens is unlike *Hypsistos* worship elsewhere. Here, the god is primarily a healing deity, and as such he draws worshippers and modes of worship similar to other healing deities, such as Asclepius; like Zeus *Hypsistos* at Athens, the Asclepieion at Athens received anatomical votives, and women made those offerings to a much greater degree than to *Hypsistos* shrines elsewhere. Furthermore, the assumed presence of a cult statue is a divergence of the more aniconic, invisible god worshiped at Oenoanda or Amastris. Nevertheless, there is some consistency with *Hypsistos* worship elsewhere. As at Oenoanda, the shrine is open, not housed in a temple, and the shrine is situated such that worshippers could follow the prescription for worship there, turning east to face the rising sun. The deposits of Roman

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<sup>291</sup> Forsén (1996), 166. The names are *Εὐτυχίς*, *Εὐπραξίς*, *Χρυσάριον*, and *Λαφνίς*.

<sup>292</sup> *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 4784.

<sup>293</sup> Forsén (1996), 25.

lanterns at the site also attest to lamp offerings, as at Oenoanda and other *Hypsistos* shrines. Given the presence of foreigners and pilgrims among the worshipers, the shrine was surely linked to a wider network of *Hypsistos* worship, yet *Zeus Hypsistos* was connected to conceptions of Zeus in Athens. Local Athenians, possibly citizens worshiped at the shrine. As with worship of *Theos Hypsistos* in Phrygia, the local form that the god and his worship took was shaped by local influences.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The rise in inscriptions dedicated to “most high” gods in the Greek world during the Roman Imperium cannot be explained simply by the growth of a single, monotheistic cult. Even sites that might be connected to such a cult by shared practices also show marked differences from each other. Local cults devoted to *Theos Hypsistos* were deeply influenced by indigenous beliefs. In some cases, *Theos Hypsistos* was a malleable god that was changed by his believers to fit into the local cultural milieu, and in others, he was unconnected with the deity of the monotheistic cult. *Hypsistos* had multiple connotations in the Greek world. The context of its use must dictate the interpretation of the epithet. Where the context is lost, we must accept ambiguity.

That a cult existed which worshiped a deliberately nameless deity is known from four early Christian writers. On its own, their testimony could not easily be dismissed, but it is further supported by epigraphic evidence. Gregory Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa both spoke of groups they called Hypsistarioi or Hypsistianoi, and called their god *Hypsistos*, making a clear connection to *Hypsistos* inscriptions. Cyril of Alexandria offers the same detail about the group he calls Theosebeis. The presence of Theosebeis is also attested in epigraphy, in Aphrodisias, Miletus, and elsewhere. These groups, according to Gregory of Nazianzus, revered fire and light. This reverence is evident in the presence of lamp sacrifices at many sites of *Hypsistos* worship. We find reference to a lantern-offering in an inscription next to the Clarian oracle on the wall at Oenoanda; an altar from ancient Magnesia offers lamp-lighting to the god; large amounts of lamp fragments lay in the fill of the Athenian sanctuary of Zeus *Hypsistos*. The inscription of the Clarian oracle at

Oenoanda also affirms that at least some *Hypsistos* worshipers acknowledged other gods but did not worship them, as Epiphanius wrote. Epiphanius' description of their worship, singing hymns at sunrise and sunset, reconciles well with Gregory of Nazianzus' claim that they dismissed idols and sacrifices. Both of these descriptions fit well with the Oenoandan inscription which prescribes that worship take the form of a prayer, sung facing the sunrise.

It is clear, then, that such a group existed. The inscription at Oenoanda shows that they worshiped a deity that they had exalted to the point of monotheistic worship. The other gods were diminished, serving as angels, and were but a small part of the deity. A similar exaltation of Zeus, alongside a diminution is present at Carian Stratonicea, where Zeus *Hypsistos* is paired with Hecate, who is not referred to as *θεός*, a full-fledged god, but rather is invoked with a diminutive *θεῖον*. Elsewhere in central Anatolia, particularly in Phrygia, *Theos Hypsistos* is paired with subordinate deities such as *Hosios kai Dikaios*, suggesting that the remote, exalted deity was in want of an intermediary.

It is difficult to gauge how widespread this cult was. An altar in Amastris, dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos*, using similar language as that of the Clarian oracle, provides evidence that a similar belief had spread at least as far as the southern coast of the Black Sea. The sanctuary at Athens shares some similarities with the site at Oenoanda, but as I shall note, there are also important differences, and a connection to the cult at Oenoanda is ambiguous. Most inscriptions dedicated to *Theos* or *Zeus Hypsistos* are brief and offer no insight into the beliefs that lie behind them.

The spread of Judaism and the association of Judaizing sympathizers was a factor

in the spread of this cult. Of the four Christian writers who wrote of this cult, only Epiphanius denies a connection to the Jewish religion, and even his description includes details that suggest Jewish influence. The exaltation of *Theos Hypsistos* at Oenoanda is thoroughly couched in Greek mystical language and thought, but there are nevertheless similarities with Jewish worship of Yahweh. The use of *Hypsistos* is obviously an overlap that can make distinguishing the epigraphy difficult. They also share in the supreme exaltation of their deity, and attach to him the ministration of angels. These similarities created a space for common ground between the two communities. Conclusively proving Jewish influence on this cult of *Theos Hypsistos* may be impossible, but the similarities in thought that we can see lend credence to the descriptions given by Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria that the cult developed a form of syncretic worship.

On the other hand, many inscriptions dedicated to a *Hypsistos* deity clearly intend a more traditionally Greek meaning for the epithet, referring to the god's celestial placement and position and in a divine hierarchy, but not exalting him to the point of *de facto* monotheism. This meaning is present in Greek literature from as early as the first part of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, in Pindar. Pausanias lists examples of dedications to Zeus *Hypsistos* in Corinth, Olympia, and Thebes. A 1<sup>st</sup> century BC stele from Panormos depicts Zeus *Hypsistos* alongside other Olympian gods, who are in no way diminished, and shows scenes typical of Hellenic feasting. These examples pre-date the growth of the monotheistic cults, but this usage continued in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. The association of porters in Kos dedicated a stone to Zeus *Hypsistos* and the other Olympian

gods without unusual exaltation of Zeus. Meanwhile, in Thrace and Macedonia, there is no evidence that the cult of Zeus *Hypsistos* popular there practiced anything other than typical Hellenic worship.

In the Bosphoran kingdom, multiple groups referred to their god as *Hypsistos* without clear influence upon or confusion with each other. Four manumission tablets from Gorgippia and Panticapaeum in the 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD are dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos Pantokrator Eulogetos*. In one case, the slave is manumitted in the *proseuche*; other inscriptions are incomplete. This is language closely associated with the Jewish religion, and the authors of these documents are either Jewish, or Jewish sympathizers. One of these, however, is authorized by the sanction of Zeus, Gaia, and Helios. While this may suggest a pagan author for the manumission, evidence from elsewhere in the Greek world shows that this is a banal formulaic, and not therefore incompatible with monotheistic belief.

Conversely, the *Hypsistos* manumissions could have been authored by pagan Jewish sympathizers. The Christian authors do attribute use of the terms *Pantokrator* and *proseuche* to the *Hypsistos* worshipers they describe. A manumission document from the 1<sup>st</sup> century that explicitly invokes the Jewish community may also mention the *Theosebeis*. This is a difficult reading, however, and assumes an error on the part of the engraver. Another interpretation reads the same passage as requiring the manumitted slave pay reverence to the Jewish god.

Whatever the case, whether the *Theosebeis* were present in the Bosphoran kingdom or not, these manumission documents do not appear to have any connection to a royal cult

that also referred to their deity as *Theos Hypsistos*. The evidence for this cult dates between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, and is centred in the city of Tanais, although evidence of its existence is also present in Gorgippia and Panticapaeum. A number of tablets from Tanais attest that all or nearly all the free male population belonged to a group of associations devoted to *Theos Hypsistos*. These associations were governed by a hierarchy of officiants in a similar fashion as Hellenic associations throughout the Greek world. The titles of the officiants imply that the associations were responsible for public sacrifices in the city, holding ritual feasts, and broadly governing civic life, including, perhaps, military service. A few of these tablets list the members of more exclusive groups that called themselves worshipers (*σεβόμενοι*) of *Theos Hypsistos*. This term, *σεβόμενοι*, is used in the New Testament to describe a group of Judaizing pagans, but it is used more widely in the Greek world to refer to worship or reverence, without any special, technical meaning.

There is no evidence of any Jewish presence among the associations in Tanais or in the city itself, and thus no reason to connect the *Theos Hypsistos* of Tanais with the Jewish god, except by assuming a connection with Jewish communities in Panticapaeum and Gorgippia, hundreds of miles away. More concrete evidence identifies the *Theos Hypsistos* of Tanais with a patron deity of the Bosporan royal family. A 1<sup>st</sup> century AD tablet, erected by one of the associations of the city to commemorate the “Day of Tanais,” depicts the god, a divine horseman in Sarmatian trappings. The god may be identified with one of any number of indigenous, celestial rider-gods that were popular in the region. The image on the Day of Tanais tablet shares iconography with images found on

stelae from royal tombs as well as images stamped into the coinage of the Bosporan kingdom. It is thus likely that the associations in Tanais and similar associations elsewhere in the Bosporan kingdom were royally sanctioned groups, devoted to the divine patron of the royal family. They had no connection to the *Hypsistos* cult of Oenoanda.

Even where *Hypsistos* inscriptions might be connected to the cult of the Oenoandan inscription, there is evidence that local expressions of worship and conceptions of the deity were highly variable. This is the case with other finds from Anatolia. In central Anatolia, the god is clearly influenced by Zoroastrian thought, often paired with *Hosios kai Dikaios*, the Holy and Just. Such divine personification of moral values was typical of the Zoroastrian religion, even more so than of Roman civic religion. In these regions, *Theos Hypsistos* had not merely transcended Zeus, he was no longer associated with Zeus at all. Another inscription invokes *Theos Hypsistos* alongside *Hosios* and Zeus.

In Athens, on the other hand, local worship of Zeus dominated the conception of the Most High God and the make-up of the cult. There are some similarities to worship of “most high” deities elsewhere; it is an outdoor sanctuary on a hill, as at Oenoanda, and lamp fragments at the site attest to similar offerings. *Zeus Hypsistos* is different in Athens than he is elsewhere, however. Here Zeus Most High was worshiped as a healing deity, as the god had been known and worshiped in Athens since the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Demosthenes had attributed the power of healing to *Zeus Hypatos* (“highest”) rather than *Hypsistos* (“most high”) but the epithets are clearly very similar, and there is little difficulty in the suggestion that *Hypsistos* worshipers attributed to their god the powers of *Hypatos*. The



demographic make-up of dedicants at the sanctuary in Athens is very different from *Hypsistos* shrines elsewhere. More than half the dedications were offered by women, whereas elsewhere, dedications to *Hypsistos* deities are made almost exclusively by men. The make-up of the cult at Athens more closely resembles that of other Hellenic healing cults, such as at the Athenian Asclepieion. The space for a cult statue depicting the god, though the statue itself has not been recovered, implies another marked distinction from the cult in Anatolia. Such a depiction fits well with traditional, pagan worship, but suggests a disconnect with the invisible, ethereal god of the Clarian oracle inscribed at Oenoanda. When worship of Zeus *Hypsistos* was adopted in Athens, the god was changed to conform to local expectations. As in Anatolia, the *Hypsistos* cult in Athens was highly influenced by indigenous, pagan worship.

The picture that emerges of *Hypsistos* cults in the Greco-Roman world is not that of a single cult, spreading throughout the Mediterranean, but rather one of many individual cults, devoted to indigenous deities, exalting their gods above others. The idea of exaltation spread, and a mode of worship by the offering of lanterns, but there does not seem to have been a uniform conception of the highest god. Instead, worshipers exalted locally worshiped divinities, typically but not always Zeus. These worshipers were perhaps inspired by Jewish worship, or perhaps as the supremacy of the exalted god developed, they found common ground. Even as this new exaltation of god spread and found its most definitive voice in the Clarian oracle, traditional use of *ὑψιστος* continued, as it had for centuries, both among Jews and pagans. Furthermore, in the Bosporan kingdom, the royal family adopted a henotheistic, celestial deity as its patron, lending

further complexity to the patchwork of *Hypsistos* worship.

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