

Sharing the Will of Gods: Angels and Oracles in Roman Imperial Anatolia

Iulian Moga

There are numerous contributions presenting the role of the angels within the Jewish, Christian and pagan environments, but very few are devoted to Asia Minor. Two among the latest are particularly interesting: Arnold's *Colossian Syncretism. The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (1996) and Cline's *Ancient Angels. Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire* (2011). They are valuable contributions not only because they continue the predecessor's efforts – like Cumont, Sokolowski, Sheppard and more recently Hirschmann – to unveil the nature, functionality and purpose of the supernatural assistants, but for their contextual analyses related to the local ground.

Occurrences of the mentions regarding angelic beings in Asia Minor are highly diversified. They vary from the magical texts on the local apotropaic amulets or *defixiones* to the funerary formulas of curse in the central-western area of Anatolia and answers provided by Apollinic oracles. But most of them are related to judicial prayers, and this is why we will also stress this part.

From different perspectives, we could say that, in the north-west Anatolia (especially in Caria, Phrygia, and Lydia) gods and their messengers played their part as regulatory factors of the social life within the small local communities or as patrons of the individual and collective destinies. Even in the Microasian pagan environment of the first Christian centuries – under the influence of theological and philosophical-religious trends of that time – the presence of certain ideas related to the perception of the divine world as an ordered society became ever more obvious. Intermediary – angelic or demonic beings – which had to monitor various regions of the Universe, populated this ordered society. However, they could also interfere with the individual's life as a *messenger* of the divine will, as a *mediator*, transmitting the commands of a supreme divine power (most of the times, Theos/Zeus Hypsistos, Men or Hosios kai Dikaios), through oniric visions or epiphanies, or punishing them at times for moral crimes. Such supernatural beings were also justitiary

when interacting with the humans, thus becoming “angels of fire”, invoked to set away the divine wrath and to avenge the injustices, such as one can read in an inscription of Kidrama in Caria¹.

Some judicial prayers like that of Claudiopolis in Bithynia, are addressed both to the lord gods and the angels in a strictly ordered hierarchy. In this very instance², a certain Kapetolinos seeks to bind (*katadein*) several men and women in order to prevent them from providing information about him:

“... let all these (people) cease from speaking ill, gossiping from spying; rather, let them be silent, dumb, making no accusation against Kapetolinos, to whom Danae gave birth, also called Beautiful, through the power of the names: Lord Gods, restrain all those inscribed (herein)!”.

And then, after a series of common *voces mysticae*, the text follows: “Lord Gods, angels, restrain all those inscribed (herein) – every bit of their strength (which they might use) against Kapetolinos to whom Danae gave birth, also called Beautiful”.

It is possible in this case, as well as on another similar magical invocation addressed to Theos Hypsistos from Oxyrhynchos³ that the dedicant be of a Jewish origin because of his matrilineal line. This last example is also very useful because it is one of the two preserved texts mentioning the Most High God in a magical context. Here the god is requested to eliminate any potential harm from “every spirit wicked and evil”. Two other elements could indicate in this specific case the Jewish origin: the use of the seal of Solomon and the mention that it was this god “who created heaven and earth”.

Particularly interesting is a series of texts where pagan elements are mingled with the Jewish ones. According to some views, it is possible that the clients who requested the magical rituals to be non-Jews, but the specialists who were practitioners of this kind of magic be Jews⁴. The first example in this respect is that of a silver tablet, found in a tomb of Amisossos in Pontos, which state that:

¹ Sheppard 1980-1981, p. 86, nr. 7.

² Gager 1992, p. 137, nr. 47.

³ PKöln 338.

⁴ See the explanations on PKöln 338, p. 54, n. 4.

“I am the great one who is sitting in heaven, the wandering hollow of the cosmos ARSENONEOPHRIS, the safe name MIARSAU as the true daimon BARICHAA KMEPHI who is the ruler of the kingdom of gods. ABRIAOTH ALARPHOTHO SETH. Never let evil appear. Drive away, drive away the curse from Rouphina, and if someone does me an injustice, revert (the curse) back to him. Nor let poison harm me. King of kings ABRIAON TO ORHIARE. I am the one ruling the place in Moses’s name”⁵.

In a similar magical papyrus providing a recipe for a *defixio* to gain victory in chariot races, the archangels like Michael, Souriel, Gabriel and Raphael are mentioned as *gods*, together with Iao, Abaoth and Adonai⁶. A third example could come from a text where the oracular god Apollo is perceived as lord and master and is invoked as the “first archangel of the god, great Zeus” together with Michael, “who rule heaven’s realm”, and the archangel Gabriel⁷. In a similar way, the notion of the spirits of the underworld becomes interchangeable with that of the gods of the underworld as well⁸.

One of the most interesting and debated inscriptions mentioning angels is the one discovered at Oinoanda, in Northern Lycia, which represents the reply of the oracle from Claros. It was placed at very little distance on the same wall with another inscription – mentioning that a certain Chromatis dedicated a lamp to the Most High God after making a vow⁹. Both of them confined a space that marked the precinct of such a house of prayer (or *proseuchē*, a common term for both the Jews and the Hyspistarian pagans). The epigraphs were carefully placed in the north-eastern side of the city wall, near the entrance, so that the first rays of sunrise would fall exactly above the altar, thus indicating *the direction* for the prayers of the worshippers. What is particularly interesting for the this oracle of Oinoanda is not only the conception regarding the divine hierarchy that was supposed to be obedient to a higher god, but also the fact that the subordinate gods, including the oracular Apollo, are assimilated to immaterial angelic beings.

⁵ Gager 1992, pp. 225-226, nr. 120.

⁶ Arnold 1996, p. 29.

⁷ Arnold 1996, p. 24.

⁸ Gager 1992, pp. 178-180, n. 17 and 20.

⁹ Robert, 1971, p. 602; Hall 1978, pp. 263-267; Athanassiadi 1992, p. 54; Lane Fox, 1997, pp. 180-181.

Equally important in this case is both to perceive the content of the inscription itself, and the context in which the oracle was given. The fact that Chromatis placed her dedication near the existing one that unveiled the nature of this polyonymic, aetheric, celestial god proves that she totally identified her personal Most High God from her ex-voto with the Clarian one, whose association with the idea of light and fire is also obvious. On the other hand, the fact that the content of the oracle was preserved in the *Divine Institutions* of Lactantius and in the 5th century collection currently known as the *Theosophy of Tübingen* underlines the importance it had, even for the Christians themselves, in striving to prove their theory on *praeparatio euangelica*¹⁰.

Timing and place are also important. The oracle was composed in Claros, near Colophon, in a very prolific period for the Microasian oracles, that started from approximately the times of the great epidemy (*loimos*), after the campaign of Lucius Verus in Mesopotamia, and ended at the middle of the 3rd century AD¹¹. Honorary inscriptions dedicated to the prophets, priests and priestesses as a token of appreciation for their piety regarding the gods and the purity of their life present them as having been a sort of pagan “saints”, in any case as provable models of reverence and piety to follow¹². Besides, it is not by hazard that several times the offices of priests and prophets of Claros and Didyma were held by Neoplatonists, later Stoics and Neopythagoreans¹³. This is why the oracle of Claros proved itself one of the most eclectic ones regarding the origin of the pilgrims, the approached subjects, and the prescribed rituals. Unlike Didyma, most of the individual clients or those grouped in special embassies sent by various cities – that were not situated in the very proximity of the sanctuary – came from rather lately hellenized or non-fully hellenized cities that had a slightly different religious orientation than common Greeks. The authorities of the oracle gradually adapted to fit their demands and expectations, according to Zsuzsanna Várhelyi, and provided a peculiar dynamics of oracular consultation¹⁴. This is how similarities with confession inscriptions could be explained sometimes, or clear prescriptions

¹⁰ Cline 2011, pp. 30-34.

¹¹ Moga 2011a, p. 264.

¹² Busine 2005, p. 181.

¹³ Lane Fox 1997, p. 209; Moga 2011a, p. 264.

¹⁴ Várhelyi 2001, p. 15.

involving expiatory magical rituals in order to get rid of the plague and all its subsequent disasters. The religious language involved, not only in the case of this oracle, but on many other theological ones, represent a clear testimony of a common, plurivalent religious language proper to the so-called second paganism in approaching subjects related to afterlife or nature of divine and of the human soul.

People punished by the god were not always aware of what exactly caused the divine wrath to come and they asked about directly so as to get clarified over the matter or else they chose to consult an oracle or a prophet. Glykia, the daughter of Ioulios, son of Agrios, having been punished at the breach by Anaitis of the metroon (*Anaëitis eg metroō*), addressed questions to the goddess most probably related to the origin of the divine wrath and receiving the proper answer she dedicated an offering¹⁵. Even if they knew or not the real reason of the punishment, the culprits addressed prayers to the gods so as to be pardoned for the sins committed deliberately or the unintentional ones, as well as for those known to them or not ascertained¹⁶. Thus, an angel of Men Petraeites Axiottenos clearly revealed himself to Chryseros and Stratonikos who questioned the god about their known and unknown guilts¹⁷. A certain Aurelios Stratonikos admitted on a stele dated in AD 236-237 the guilt of cutting some trees from the sacred grove of Zeus Sabazios and Artemis Anaitis without having any clue of the fact that they belonged to the gods¹⁸ and someone named Metrodoros, son of Glykon was specifically asked by the goddess, probably Anaitis, to erect another stele to replace the one unattentively broken by him at an early age¹⁹.

The nature of the question was normally mentioned in the inscriptions regarding these oracles. Yet, some are not specified. Glykina raised a small marble altar to the Most High God according to a vow together with someone else, but the nature of the inquiry remains unclarified²⁰. In a similar way, Hermias give his thanks at Didyma to Zeus Hysistos after consulting the oracle without sharing its content²¹.

¹⁵ Diakonoff 1979, p. 151, nr. 31 (fig. 34); Petzl 1994, p. 98, nr. 75.

¹⁶ Chaniotis 2004, pp. 23-24.

¹⁷ Petzl 1994, pp. 47-48, nr. 38; Petzl 1998, p. 11; Moga 2011a, p. 243.

¹⁸ Diakonoff 1979, 148, nr. 20; Petzl 1994, pp. 99-100, nr. 76.

¹⁹ Petzl 1994, pp. 101-102, nr. 78 (and fig.) = Diakonoff 1979, pp. 154-155, nr. D1.

²⁰ Mitchell 1999, p. 140, nr. 187; IPergam, nr. 331.

²¹ Mitchell 1999, p. 137, nr. 133; IDidyma, nr. 129.

Inquiry requests were determined by various motivations. The gods could be asked by means of an oracle regarding a lack in properly fulfilling a vow. Erpos or Herpos, mentioned on an inscription dated in AD 235-236 from Ayazviran, could not honour her promise to provide a bull as payment and asked Men Axiottenos who agreed to advertize the decision by raising a stele instead²². A certain Trophime questioned in AD 118-119 Meter Tarsene, Apollo Tarsios and Men Artemidoros Axiottenos about their will after being driven to insanity for disobeying the request of divinity²³. An unknown male individual also consulted an oracle as he was convinced that when he was born the constellation was unfavourable, being punished at his knees and entrails by Artemis Anaitis²⁴.

Three other examples involving inquiries through oracles are worth mentioning as they concern extremely serious sins. On a confession inscription from 205-206, discovered at Gölde, we find that two brothers, Ammianos and Hermogenes went to the temple to ask Men Motylittes, Zeus Sabazios, Artemis Anaitis, the Great Senate, the Council of Gods, as well as the village and the sacred association (*hieros doumos*) if they could find mercy as they were punished for challenging their father while he confessed the power of the gods. The confrontation must have been really harsh as we are informed that the father did not get any ruth and passed away²⁵. In the second case the question to the god Apollo Azyros about the redemption of the culprits was put by the parents of the children Melite and Makedon who became *hierosyloi* by stealing from the sacred property²⁶. The last example here is that of a woman named Julia, who cursed her forster child allegedly just reason. When she asked the gods about the event they apparently came down on her, then she atoned, was redeemed and praised them²⁷.

The redemption of the wrongdoer was a consequence of the dedicant's submittance to the commandments given by the god

²² Lane 1970, pp. 51-52; Petzl 1994, nr. 61; Moga 2011a, pp. 127-128.

²³ CMRDM I, nr. 47; Petzl 1994, pp. 68-69, nr. 57; Sartre, 1995, p. 326; TAM V.1, nr. 460; Moga 2011a, pp. 124-125, 248, 251.

²⁴ Petzl 1997, pp. 69-70, nr. 1; Petzl 1998b, pp. 66-71.

²⁵ ETAM 24, nr. 85 (fig. 85); Moga 2011a, pp. 439-440, catalogue Men nr. 25 = Anaitis nr. 16b.

²⁶ Petzl 1994, pp. 31-32, nr. 22; Moga 2011a, pp. 208-209.

²⁷ Herrmann – Varinlioğlu 1984, p. 13, nr. 9; Petzl 1994, p. 20; Moga 2011a, pp. 229-230.

himself directly, without intercessors, through dreams and visions²⁸. For instance, on a second century stele found at Buldan the dedicant had been informed by the deity himself that, as a consequence of a promise he got impure²⁹. But when the intercessors did appear, they should represent a “qualified personnel” in the service of the god: (1) angels or gods subordinated to another higher, greater one, (2) priests and prophets or even associations of friends of angels. These conceptions are widespread especially in Lydia, Mysia and Phrygia, but also in Galatia as well and do not pertain only the category of confessional inscriptions. In the case of Hosios kai Dikaios (“The Holy and the Just”), an imprecation stele discovered at Hadrianoutherai in the central Mysia presents him as a messenger, *angelos*, of the god Helios³⁰. To these two solar gods of justice and vengeance Stateilia’s husband addressed, after her death, a Galatian epigraph discovered at Karahoca in order to have her dowry back, on the ground that “Stateilia, while living and conscious gave in trust to someone a green woolen garment and two silver bracelets and unless he returns them, may you, Holy and Just, and Lord Helios, avenge her, a corpse, and her living children”³¹. Aurelius and a certain Association of the Friends of Angels made a vow to Hosios kai Dikaios at Yayla Baba köy, while at Temrek near Borlu (Lydia), a certain individual “... and Lucia, through the agency of the prophet Alexander of Saittai, set this up in thanksgiving to ... and to the holy and just angel”³². It is also to Hosios kai Dikaios that Telesphoros and Hermogenes of Stalla set up a confession inscription because of their having committed perjury, even if the name of the deity is not clearly indicated within the text itself³³.

In some contexts, the gods themselves could act collectively as a council of gods³⁴. This is the case of an inscription from Kollyda in Lydia, where they are mentioned together with the great Senatus, the village, and a sacred association called *hieros doumos*, being asked by

²⁸ Miller 1985, p. 67; MacMullen 1987², pp. 59-60, 102-106; Mitchell 1993, I, pp. 192-194; Petzl 1994, nrs. 1, 9, 11, 33, 34, 65, 106.

²⁹ Petzl 1994, nr. 98.

³⁰ IGSK 52, nr. 19.

³¹ RECAM II, nr. 242.

³² Sheppard 1980/1981, nrs. 8, 9.

³³ Drew-Bear 1976, nr. 17 = Petzl 1994, nr. 105; Mitchell 1993, II, pp. 25-26.

³⁴ See for example Malay 2003, pp. 13-14; Moga 2011a, pp. 436-437, catalogue Men nr. 19.

the brothers in need to be delivered from a punishment for having committed the sin of overcoming their father³⁵. In such an instance, the position of the gods could be relatively easily to be replaced by the angels, archangels, spirits of the underworld or maleficent spirits, due to their frequent assimilation to gods, especially in the magical texts, within the Jewish both the pagan and the Jewish contexts. In this position, the angels may become “holy angels” (*hagioi angeloi*)³⁶, “holy assistants” or *paredroi*³⁷, lord angels or supreme angels (*kyrioi angeloi*)³⁸. We should take into account, when analyzing their occurrences, similar cases from other areas mostly related to the use of magic.

Before concluding, we should also take into account three such mentions of angels of vengeance in relation to cases of theft and murder which are encountered in both the Jewish and the Anatolian pagan environment. The first two inscriptions come from the necropolis of Rheneia, an island next to Delos, and they have a similar content, except for the names of the deceased to be revenged, meaning Herakleia and, Martina, respectively:

“I call upon and pray to God the Most high, the Lord of the spirits and of all flesh, against those who have treacherously murdered or poisoned the poor Heraclea, who died untimely, and who have unjustly shed her innocent blood; may the same happen to them who have murdered or poisoned her and to their children, Lord, you who see everything, and you, angels of God, for Whom every soul humiliates itself on this day with supplications, (hoping) that you revenge her innocent blood and settle your account with them as soon as possible”³⁹.

In this case, we have to mention that the phrase employed – usually encountered as *heis tekna teknon*, indicating that the punishment had to target the successive generations of descendants of the wrongdoer – appears rather often in the Jewish, pagan, and Christian environments in the western side of Asia Minor. Another

³⁵ Várhelyi 2001, p. 15; Moga 2011a, p. 428 and catalogue inscription Men nr. 25 = Anaitis nr. 16b.

³⁶ Arnold 1996, pp. 26-29.

³⁷ Arnold 1996, pp. 29 f.

³⁸ Arnold 1996, p. 29 = PGM XXXVI, p. 171, ll. 246-255.

³⁹ IJO I, Ach 70; CIJ I, 785a; Mazilu 2001, pp. 81-82; Moga 2011b, pp. 204-205, nr. A1.

type of formula spread within all the three interference environments is the so-called *Eumeneian formula*, the best expressed in a (most probably) Jewish inscription, discovered at Eumenia, where there is a warning addressed to the potential violators of Roubes' grave (actually, Reuben). It reads, "If anyone buries another one [here], he will have to reckon with God and the angel of Roubes"⁴⁰.

The third mention related to the angels of revenge is that of the angel of Men, present on a confession inscription datable in AD 164-165, belonging to the area of Lydia, could be translated as follows:

"Great is Men Axiottenos Tarsi, who rules Tarsi as a king! Because a scepter was set up in the event that someone stole something from the bathhouse, when a garment was stolen the god was displeased, and after some time he made the thief bring the garment to the god, and he confessed. Therefore, through a messenger the god commanded that the garment be sold and to record [the god's] powers on a stele. In the year 249"⁴¹.

Several mentions should be stated about this stele, too. First, Men plays – in this case – the role of a superior divinity (in other cases, we encounter Theos Hypsistos or Hosios kai Dikaios), a fact which demonstrates very clearly that the pattern of the divine world ordering also applied to other divinities, not only to the Most High God⁴². In certain contexts, such as that of Saittai in Lydia, Men was also considered a supreme god, as shown by the following aretological formula: "One is the god in heaven, great is Men the Celestial, great is the power of the Immortal God".

On the other side, concerning this inscription – and numerous other epigraphs on Men and Anaitis in the Lydian area –, we underline the presence of a magical-religious ritual through which the temple priest bound the guilty person or the culprit by a swear, putting the god's sceptre on the altar, as the sceptre itself represented the god's power (*dynamis tou theou*). As for the magical rituals properly, only the person who uttered the spell – meaning only that specific priest – could break the proffered curse. God's punishment varied from a simple warning to dreadful diseases or even death. However, the

⁴⁰ Cline 2011, pp. 99-102.

⁴¹ Petzl 1994, nr. 3.

⁴² For example see Moga 2011a, p. 302: catalogue Hypsistos nr. 39; Mitchell 1999, p. 141, nr. 202; SEG 31 (1981), nr. 1080; Sheppard 1980-1981, p. 94, nr. 11.

victim's relatives usually felt it was their duty to appease the god of for the guilt of the deceased, as they believed that the divine punishment could fall on the successive generations to come.

The role of angels of justice was taken over – in certain cases, mostly in the Anatolian area – even by solar deities such as Apollo or Hosios kai Dikaios. The double quality of Hosios is also apparent in the inscriptions of Temrek or Yaylababa Köyu, where he was clearly named angel and worshipped by an association of the friends of angels. As for Apollo, he is also mentioned as an intermediary being in at least two other situations. First, Plutarch, in his work on the disappearance of the oracles, *De defectu oraculorum*⁴³, mentions him as a *daimon* before the slaughter of the earth-dragon Python in Delphi⁴⁴. As an angel, he could be encountered at Oinoanda on an inscription noting the reply of the Clarian oracle to a question related to the nature of the divinity.

Several observations also related to other inscriptions concerning the Most High are to be made, which also include the pattern of divine world ordering. First, the hierarchic pattern is rather clear both at Stratonicea, in Caria and at Kalecik, near Ankara, by placing the angels in a second position, after that of Zeus and the one of Theos Hypsistos, respectively.

As for the terminology employed, we also notice other formulas designating the divine beings besides *angeloi* and *daimones*; we refer here to Theos Angelos, Agathos Angelos, Theios Basilikos or Angeloi Katachthonioi⁴⁵. The pattern of divine world ordering can create great confusions related to the paternity of the inscription and to the origin of the ethnocultural background of the dedicator. For example, concerning the epigraph belonging to Kalecik, the only elements that could lead to the probability of considering the inscription as Jewish are those mentioned by Paul Trebilco: (1) in the Jewish texts, as well as in the Septuagint, customarily the definite article was placed in front of the name of Theos Hypsistos (though this phenomenon also occurred in the pagan setting); (2) the construction “the holy angels” (*hagioi angeloi*) appears only in the Jewish sources. For the rest, the mention of the house of prayer (*proseuchē*), the name of Theos Hypsistos ascribed to God the Most

⁴³ Plut. *De def. orac.* 13.

⁴⁴ Hirschmann 2007, p. 157.

⁴⁵ See in Moga 2011a: catalogue Hypsistos nrs. 46, 87-97.

High and the divine world ordering are common elements with the pagan (and even with the Christian) environments.

All these examples underline that we should pay a special attention to every little detail, as well as to the contextual elements regarding the place of origin for the epigraphs, as sometimes fatal confusions and wrong ascriptions may appear due to the use – in certain cases – of a terminology common to the Jewish, pagan, and Christian environment in order to define seemingly or genuinely similar notions.

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