

Ὑψιστος and the Synagogue at Sardis

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THE EXCAVATIONS AT SARDIS are still in progress under the direction of Professor George M. A. Hanfmann of Harvard and only preliminary reports¹ have been published; but already finds made there promise to clarify a number of problems in the history of Graeco-Roman religions, in which I include post-exilic Judaism and early Christianity. With one of those problems I wish to deal in this article, a long-held 'common opinion', the hypothesis of a connection between the epithet ὕψιστος and the theology and piety of Diaspora Judaism.

I

It is necessary first to consider the religions of the area around Sardis, specifically those of ancient Lydia, Phrygia and Ionia in the Roman province of Asia, what is now western Asiatic Turkey. The evidence for these religions in the time of the Roman Empire is chiefly epigraphical and archaeological; extended texts are rare. There is no Anatolian Qumran or Nag Hammadi. Nevertheless, some general statements can be made:

(1) The Greek cults and Judaism existed in Asia Minor very early. Jews were present there *half a millennium* before the construction of the mammoth Sardis synagogue: *Obadiah* 20 refers to exiles from Jerusalem living in 'Sepharad', Aramaic for Sardis (sixth/fifth century B.C.).² Greek connections with the area are even earlier; I need mention only

¹ Annual reports are printed in *BASOR* (beginning 1959), and are cited here by *BASOR* issue-number, year and page; the first footnote of each year's article is devoted customarily to a bibliography of the year's other publications dealing with Sardis and the excavations. The best survey of the history of Sardis is now G. M. A. Hanfmann, "Sardis und Lydien," *AbhMainz*, Jhrg. 1960 no.6. For a thorough and very readable survey of the finds through 1964, see D. G. Mitten, "A New Look at Ancient Sardis," *BiblArch* 29 (1966) 38-68.

² I. Rabinowitz, "Sepharad/Sardis," *Encyclopedia Biblica* (in Hebrew) forthcoming, with full bibliography. This article was made available in manuscript to the Sardis expedition by courtesy of the author. See also M. J. Mellink, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* IV. (1962) 272f, s.v. SEPHARAD.

the ‘Ionian’ or ‘Milesian’ pre-Socratics, associated with Ionia and the town of Miletus on the west-central coast. Or the name of Troy, on the northwest coast.

(2) The most familiar deity of western Asia Minor is the Great Mother, who is worshipped in Greece by the end of the archaic period and is formally brought to Rome by the state in 204 B.C.³ An examination of the inscriptions reveals that this area actually contained a great number of ‘mother’-goddesses; Josef Keil counted a dozen in Lydia alone, Meter Hipta, Meter Sipylene, Meter Tazene, and the like.⁴

(3) The inscriptions mentioning these and other Anatolian deities reveal something else about the piety of western Asia Minor: the worshipper often sees himself as a humble, insignificant person, a slave, not a free man. It is true that a number of local gods are turned into near-cosmic deities in the Hellenistic period; this occurs in many areas during the religious transformations which take place at this time. Before such gods, worshippers are appropriately meek. But this attitude of submissive humility is particularly prevalent in western Asia Minor, as three sets of inscriptions will show:

(a) The first are the so-called ‘Penitential Inscriptions’, centering in the Katakekaumene of northeast Lydia, the ‘burned-over area’ beginning just east of Sardis. The inscriptions are from around the third century and follow this pattern: (1) the dedicant states that he has broken a divine regulation—trespassed on sacred land, broken an oath, taken a slave which was not his—and (2) the deity has punished him for it: a man is afflicted with an eye disease, a woman is punished “in the breasts”; (3) the transgressor thereupon repents and (4) sets up the inscription as a public indication of his evil doing and as a warning to others about the awful power of the god. The inscriptions are usually quite specific: the dedicant’s offense, the god offended, the punishment experienced are all listed. Franz Steinleitner, who did the standard study of these texts, describes the religious attitude they reveal: the deity is awesome, powerful and remote; his worshippers are as nothing before him.⁵ Martin Persson Nilsson saw a particular re-

³ M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion I*³ (*Hdb. der Altertumsw.* V.2.1, München 1967) 725 [hereafter *GGR I*]; K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (*Hdb. der Altertumsw.* V.4, München 1960) 258–62.

⁴ Josef Keil, “Die Kulte Lydiens,” in *Anatolian Studies Presented to Sir William Mitchell Ramsay*, edd. W. H. Buckler and W. M. Calder (Manchester 1923) 239–66, esp. 257–58.

⁵ Franz Steinleitner, *Die Beicht im Zusammenhange mit der sakralen Rechtspflege in der Antike* (Leipzig 1913) 76ff.

ligious frame of mind⁶ behind these inscriptions; he called it the “Lydian-Phrygian mentality.”

(b) The second set of inscriptions was recently studied by Louis Robert;⁷ the texts are dedications to an anonymous deity τὸ θεῖον, ‘the divinity’. One text calls this god τὸ θεῖον ὄσιον καὶ δίκαιον, ‘the holy and righteous divinity’.⁸ Whether τὸ θεῖον be a familiar deity under a new, more lofty name, or a new god entirely, the impression is of a god of great majesty and power.

(c) A third set of inscriptions includes those which refer to an ἄγγελος or ἄγγελικός, a divine messenger. Most of these texts come from around Stratoniceia in Caria, but Robert has published one from Saittai, some forty miles northeast of Sardis. It is from the second or third century, an expression of thanksgiving to two deities; the first name is lost, but the second is called ἄγγελος ὄσιος δίκαιος, ‘the holy and just intermediary (or messenger)’.⁹ The town of Colossae is located some seventy miles northeast of Stratoniceia and the same distance south-east of Sardis; in the New Testament letter to the church at Colossae, the writer charges his opponents with angel-worship (*Col.* 2.18).¹⁰ Anatolian Jews¹¹ were somehow involved in this Colossian heresy, but there is a current of pagan ἄγγελος-piety present as well, a piety which focuses on a remote deity, so far distant that messengers or interme-

⁶ M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* II² (*Hdb. der Altertumsw.* V.2.2, München 1961) 291 [hereafter, *GGR* II].

⁷ Louis Robert, “Reliefs votifs et cultes d’Anatolie,” *Anatolia* 3 (1958) 112ff.

⁸ Robert, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.7) 116f.

⁹ Robert, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.7) 120, *cf.* 120–23 and the research report of F. Sokolowski, “Sur le culte d’Angelos dans le paganisme grec et romain,” *HThR* 53 (1960) 225–29, and Nilsson, *GGR* II.577.

¹⁰ On the *NT* text, see the commentaries *ad loc.* By the later Imperial Period, if not earlier, angel-cultus is a well-attested part of some forms of Anatolian Christianity; this is clear from the ban on this practice in Canon 35 of the fourth-century Council of Laodicea (a town less than ten miles from Colossae), from such Phrygian inscriptions as *MAMA* I 434 and IV 307, and from the veneration of the archangel Michael, which has a major early center at the Church of St Michael at Chonae, five miles south of Colossae; *cf.* W. M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*³ (London 1894) 465–80, and J. Michl, *RAC* V (1962) *s.v.* ENGEL 182, 200, 243–51 (“Michaelskult” 251).

¹¹ It is not impossible that this ἄγγελος-piety entered Colossian Christianity *via* local Jews who brought the indigenous Anatolian idea of the divine ἄγγελος with them when they became Christians (the Christians attacked in the letter to the Colossians). On Diaspora Judaism as a channel for the importation of elements of pagan piety into early Christianity, see my note in E. R. Goodenough with A. T. Kraabel, “Paul and the Hellenization of Christianity,” in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (*Stud.Hist.Rel.* 14, Leiden 1968) 35–37.

diaries are required to bridge the gap between him and his mortal worshippers.

One inscription from a Lydian altar may serve to summarize this side of Anatolian piety; the lettering is second or third century, but the dedicant omits his name and the date—perhaps he considered such minor matters unnecessary or unworthy. The text is a confession and an invocation: *εἷς θεὸς ἐν οὐρανοῖς, μέγας Μῆν Οὐράνιος, μεγάλη δύναμις τοῦ ἀθανάτου θεοῦ*, “There is (only) one (important) god in the heavens, Mēn Ouranios, the mighty power of the immortal god.”¹²

With this religious attitude present, it is not at all surprising that the word *ὑψιστος*, ‘highest’ or ‘supreme’, is used of deities in 34 inscriptions in the area under discussion. But this part of Asia Minor also contains a number of well-attested Jewish settlements; most of their inscriptions are from the second or third centuries, but many of the communities had their beginnings in the Hellenistic period. *ὑψιστος* is a common epithet of God in the Septuagint, and Franz Cumont, Martin Nilsson and Carsten Colpe have all argued for strong Jewish influence in *ὑψιστος*-inscriptions; such men deserve to be taken seriously.¹³ We must look at the Jewish evidence from western Asia Minor.

II

The major Jewish settlements in this area have been known for some time. IONIA: In Miletus, the theatre contains seats reserved for Jews, according to a crude but rather famous inscription (*CIJud* 748). In Priene there is a small synagogue from about the fourth century.¹⁴ In Smyrna there is a strong early tradition of the involvement of Jews

¹² Josef Keil and A. von Premerstein, “Berichte über eine zweite Reise in Lydien,” *DenkschrWien* 54.2 (1911) no. 211, cf. Erik Peterson, *Εἷς Θεός* (*Forsch.Rel.Lit.A.u.N.T.* n.f. 24, Göttingen) 268f, and Nilsson, *GGR* II.657.

¹³ F. Cumont, *RE* 9 (1916) 444–50, s.v. *Υψιστος*; Nilsson, *GGR* II.662ff; Colpe, *Der Kleine Pauly* II (1967) 1291f, s.v. *Hypsistos* (which begins with the statement that *hypsistos* is a divine epithet “das seine religiöse Prägnanz als Übersetzung des semit. Äquivalents *‘Eljōn* gewonnen hat.”) See also A. B. Cook, *Zeus* II (Cambridge 1925) 876ff, and A. D. Nock, “iv. Zeus Hypsistos” in C. Roberts, T. Skeat and Nock, “The Gild of Zeus Hypsistos,” *HThR* 29 (1936) 55–72.

¹⁴ On the Priene synagogue, see T. Wiegand and H. Schrader, *Priene* (Berlin 1904) 320, 480f; E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York 1953–68) II.77, III.878f, 882; E. L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (London 1934) 42f.

in the persecution of Christians;¹⁵ there are also Jewish inscriptions of the third and fourth centuries and an inscription (*ca.* A.D. 125) erected by the city and mentioning Jews.¹⁶ In Ephesus, certain graves are put under the protection of the Jewish community (*CIJud* 745f, second/third centuries). PHRYGIA: The Jews of Phrygia are well attested; inscriptions in some numbers exist for the towns of Eumeneia, Acmonia, Apameia and Hierapolis, most of them simple burial texts of *ca.* the third century.¹⁷ Apameia also gained the attention of art historians when some of its coins were found to depict Noah and his ark (third century).¹⁸ Acmonia produced the only clearly Jewish inscription using the epithet *Ἰψιστος* (*CIJud* 769)—of which, more shortly. LYDIA: In Lydia the major cities known to have Jewish populations are Philadelphia, Thyateira and Sardis; epigraphical and literary evidence exists for all three locations.¹⁹

These communities are described briefly in the standard reference works: Juster, Schürer, Goodenough; Samuel Krauss and Viktor Tcherikover. The Phrygian Jews were the subject of a useful early study by Sir William Ramsay.²⁰ All these scholars indicated something of the nature of Anatolian Judaism, but it was not until the Sardis discoveries that the picture began to become clear. This is chiefly because of the quantity of evidence we now possess which was unknown before 1962: more Jewish inscriptions from this one city than from all the rest

¹⁵ See the patristic texts *Passio Polycarpi*, *Passio Pionii* and *Vita Polycarpi*, and the discussion of them (subtitled “L’hagiographie de Smyrne”) in H. Delehayé, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*² (Bruxelles 1966) 11–59.

¹⁶ The four Jewish inscriptions are *CIJud* 739–41 and *SIG*³ 1247 note; the inscription erected by the city is *CIJud* 742=IGRR IV 1431.

¹⁷ Incomplete publication of the Jewish texts from these towns in *CIJud*: Eumeneia, 761; Acmonia, 760, 762–71; Apameia, 773f; Hierapolis, 775–80.

¹⁸ These coins are most conveniently seen in H. Leclercq, *DACL* I.2 (1907) 2515f fig.825–27, s.v. APAMÉE; good photo of an inferior specimen (A.D. 238–44) in Mary B. Comstock, “Greek Imperial Coins,” *BMFA* 65:342 (1967) 163f fig.5. See also Goodenough, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.14) II.119f, III.700. The most recent discussion is H. Strauss, “Jüdische Quellen frühchristlicher Kunst,” *ZNTW* 57 (1966) 134–36, with negative conclusions.

¹⁹ On Philadelphia and Thyateira, see Emil Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*⁴ III (Leipzig 1909) 14f, and *CIJud*. 752–54. In addition there are brief references in Cicero and Josephus to some of the cities already mentioned; cf. Gerhard Kittel, “Das kleinasiatische Judentum in der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit,” *ThLZ* 69 (1944) 9–20.

²⁰ J. Juster, *Les juifs dans l’empire romain* I (Paris 1914) 189–92; Schürer, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.19) 12–24; Goodenough, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.14) II. 77–81; S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer* (Berlin/Wien 1922) 230–35; A. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia 1959) 287–89. W. M. Ramsay, *Cities and Bishops of Phrygia* II.2 (Oxford 1897) 667–76.

of western Asia Minor; the largest synagogue site excavated anywhere, and the second earliest known (only the Masada synagogue is older). Sardis has now become the most important Jewish site in Asia Minor, and one of the three most important in the whole of the Diaspora; only Rome and Dura Europus may be considered rivals.

As a city, Sardis became politically and economically important in the period 700–550 B.C., under the Mermnad rulers Gyges, Alyattes and Croesus. The city continued to be an economic and governmental center under the Persians, then under the Seleucids, the Attalids of Pergamum and finally the Romans.²¹ The city's population reached a maximum of perhaps 100,000 in the second century.²²

The Jews had reached Sardis in large numbers by the middle of the Hellenistic period; many of them had come not from Palestine but from regions farther east. According to Josephus, some 2000 Jewish families were moved from Babylonia and Mesopotamia to Lydia and Phrygia by the Seleucid king Antiochus III at the end of the third century B.C. or the beginning of the second (*AJ* 12.147–53); these families were entrusted to Antiochus' general Zeuxis, who had headquarters at Sardis.²³ By the middle of the first century B.C. the Jews possessed a *topos*, a place of assembly in the city (Josephus, *AJ* 14.235); this was an antecedent of the synagogue-basilica now being excavated. The earliest inscriptions from this synagogue are from the later second century, the latest from the fourth and fifth centuries.

The synagogue itself is a gigantic building, a narrow basilica 90 meters long from apse to front steps; the main hall alone is 18 meters wide by 55 meters long. It is located beside the main highway, the old Royal Road, for centuries the principal overland route between the east and the Aegean. Immediately to the north and west of the synagogue is a major social center of Roman Sardis, the huge gymnasium-and-baths complex, part of which is now being reconstructed by the Turkish government and the Sardis expedition. It is obvious from a city plan²⁴ that the synagogue-basilica was designed along with the baths as a unit, part of a huge urban renewal project undertaken after the city was heavily damaged by an earthquake in A.D. 17. The basilica

²¹ Hanfmann, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 514ff; Mitten, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 38–68.

²² Hanfmann, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 531.

²³ As shown by an inscription from Sardis recently published by L. Robert, *Nouvelles inscriptions de Sardes* I (Paris 1964) no.1.

²⁴ See provisionally *BASOR* 177 (1965) 11 fig.10; a detailed city plan is nearing completion.

began probably as a public building,²⁵ but it had become Jewish property by the latter half of the second century and continued as such until the destruction of the city by the Persians in the early seventh century; even after Constantine it was not demolished or appropriated by the government.

All this suggests that the Jews of Sardis were a powerful people.²⁶ It required political power and social acceptance to obtain such a fine building in the first place, and to continue to retain it later in the face of Christian envy; it required economic power to support and re-decorate the building—the Sardis Jews must have had all of these. They fit into Sardis society fully, and at the same time they maintained their Jewish cultural and religious identity: the synagogue was a building for worship and teaching, as its furnishings and inscriptions²⁷ make clear.

III

But my present purpose is not to tell what has been found at Sardis; much of that information has been published already in the annual excavation reports. I am concerned rather to show some of the implications of Sardis for the understanding of Graeco-Roman religions.

The Jewish community at Sardis existed at a time when the people of Asia Minor honored a great variety of deities; a common reaction now to such a profusion is scholarly confusion, specifically the claim that deities and cults were mixed, combined, syncretized on Anatolian soil. More complete evidence allows us to sort out the various deities and to analyse the alleged syncretisms with greater accuracy. The assumed connection between ὕψιστος and Diaspora Judaism is a commonplace of our discipline; this hypothesis can now be tested. For

²⁵ Professor Henry Detweiler, associate director of the Sardis expedition, appears correct in assuming that the building was first a civic basilica before it was turned over to the Jewish community in the second century; cf. *BASOR* 187 (1967) 23, 25.

²⁶ The new epigraphic evidence bears this out. Of the 27 males mentioned in the inscriptions, nine bear the title 'member of the city council' (*βουλευτής*), two are functionaries in the Roman provincial government and another is a former Roman procurator; cf. John H. Kroll, "The Synagogue Donation Inscriptions, Report, 1966," 6f (typescript by courtesy of the author and the Sardis Expedition).

²⁷ Squarely in the center of the main hall is a fourth-century inscription honoring one of the community's religious leaders; his name is lost, but his titles are *ιερεύς* and *σοφοδιδάσκαλος*, 'priest' and 'teacher-of-wisdom', cf. *BASOR* 187 (1967) 29 and fig.48 (p.23). Generally on the synagogue's furnishings, see Goodenough, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.14) XII.191-95.

Lydia, Phrygia and Ionia we have a goodly number of *ὑψιστος*-inscriptions and also, thanks to Sardis, contemporary evidence of a powerful Jewish population. The area²⁸ under consideration is relatively small, less than 150 miles north to south, 200 miles east to west—we are not surveying the entire Eastern Mediterranean—but if the supposed connections do not appear here, their existence in other areas may no longer be assumed.

I will begin this survey²⁹ of the *ὑψιστος*-texts with the one inscription from this area which contains the epithet and is at the same time undeniably Jewish; it comes from Acmonia, Phrygia (*CIJud* 769), where more than a dozen Jewish inscriptions from the first three Christian centuries have been found. The Jews of Acmonia had powerful friends among the gentile population and one gentile, a woman magistrate by the name of Julia Severa, apparently built the local synagogue at her own expense in the latter part of the first century (*MAMA* VI 264 = *CIJud* 766). The Jewish *ὑψιστος*-inscription is fragmentary; it contains a brief reference to an Old Testament text and calls upon ‘the highest god’ (ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστος) to protect the grave. This very deliberate arrangement of articles, noun and adjective is unparalleled in the other Anatolian *ὑψιστος*-texts, which call the god simply *ὑψιστος* or θεὸς ὑψιστος, never using the Greek article.

In the other inscriptions, the dedicant often has in mind a specific deity whose name or image appears elsewhere on the stone; he calls this god *ὑψιστος* because the god was for him ‘supreme’ or ‘highest’. Thus, in a recently discovered text³⁰ from Pisidia, a dedication is made to θεὸς ὑψιστος “at the injunction of the god”; the *ὑψιστος* meant becomes clear in a later line when the dedicant identifies himself as a priest of Mēn Ouranios, an Anatolian moon-god. Two inscriptions³¹ from Aezani in Phrygia honor θεὸς ὑψιστος, one because of “merciful delivery from many sufferings”; a large temple of Zeus has been discovered nearby, along with a number of inscriptions in his honor—it appears that the dedicants of the two θεὸς ὑψιστος-inscriptions had this

²⁸ The area has two foci: Sardis on the west and the Phrygian Jewish communities on the east.

²⁹ Sources for the *ὑψιστος*-inscriptions examined: Keil’s list, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 255; Cook’s list for Lydia, Phrygia and (because he has no entry for Ionia as such) Caria and Mysia, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.13) II.879–83 (as supplemented by Nock, *op.cit.* [*supra* n.13]); *CIJud*; *SEG*.

³⁰ Published by G. Bean, “Notes and Inscriptions from Pisidia II,” *AnatStud* 10 (1960) 65, no.115; cf. Nilsson, *GGR* II.637.

³¹ For these two inscriptions and their setting, see Cook, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.13) II.964–68.

Zeus in mind. In Nacoleia, Phrygia, a dedication to θεὸς ὑψιστος appears among many to Zeus Bennios and Zeus Bronton.³² Here θεὸς ὑψιστος may indicate an attempt to identify the other two titles and encompass them with a more neutral, grander name.

In Ionia, the westernmost of the three provinces, the texts are less ambiguous; if the adjective ὑψιστος is used, the proper name is usually Zeus. Even if the name Zeus be omitted, the text is usually clear enough. Thus, of two small altars of white marble (very much alike) found at Pergamum, one was dedicated to θεὸς ὑψιστος, the other to ἥλιος θεὸς ὑψιστος, i.e. Apollo or another sun-god.³³ From Miletus come two inscriptions honoring a certain Oulpios Karpos, “the priest of the most holy Θεὸς Ὑψιστος Σωτήρ”; both are done by trade guilds, in one case “the city gardeners” (OGIS 755), in the other “the guild of shell-fish spearers” (OGIS 756)—shellfish is, of course, a food prohibited by Old Testament dietary laws.³⁴

There are two dedications to θεὸς ὑψιστος which, at first glance, might appear Jewish; the texts are very similar to those already mentioned, but the articles dedicated to the god are not unknown in Jewish art and worship and might seem to be the gifts of Anatolian Jews. And both dedications were discovered in Lydia, 30 miles or less from Sardis. The first³⁵ is a small, rather rough image of an eagle, found near Thyateira. It is an *ex voto* to θεὸς ὑψιστος, dated by Franz Cumont to the second century. As Erwin Goodenough showed,³⁶ the eagle is not uncommon in Jewish art and symbolism. In the Sardis synagogue, the focus of worship was a massive marble table; the table supports are in the shape of eagles, each a meter high and more than a meter wide.³⁷ But the eagle is also an attribute of Zeus, and of any number of high-gods and mountain-gods;³⁸ if the

³² The inscription is IGRR IV 542; cf. W. M. Ramsay, “Sepulchral Customs in Ancient Phrygia,” *JHS* 5 (1884) 258f.

³³ M. Fränkel, ed. *Die Inschriften von Pergamon II (Altortümer von Pergamon VIII.2)*, Berlin 1895) 243f, no.330f. cf. Erwin Ohlemutz, *Die Kulte und Heiligtümer der Götter in Pergamon* (Würzburg 1940) 85–87.

³⁴ L. E. Toombs, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962) I.645, s.v. CLEAN AND UNCLEAN. These Miletus inscriptions are discussed by Nock, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.13) 67 n.75; Nilsson, *GGR* II.664.

³⁵ F. Cumont, “Un ex-voto au Théos Hypsistos,” *BullAcadBelg* 1912, 251–53.

³⁶ Most recently in *op.cit.* (*supra* n.14) VIII.121–42.

³⁷ On the ‘Eagle Table’, see Hanfmann, “The Sixth Campaign at Sardis (1963),” *BASOR* 174 (1964) 34–36.

³⁸ On the eagle as a religious symbol T. Schneider and E. Stemplinger, *RACH* I (1950) 87–91 s.v. ADLER, and Cook, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.13) indices s.v. EAGLE.

Thyateria eagle were Jewish, made at a time when a powerful and self-conscious Jewish community existed 30 miles away, the donor of the *ex voto* would surely have made this clear. For example, the inscription might be expected to set it apart from dedications to other gods called ἮΨΙΣΤΟΣ; the Jewish ἮΨΙΣΤΟΣ-inscription from Acmonia does that, the Thyateira eagle dedication does not.

The other inscription was found even closer to Sardis, in a little town now called Sariçam, just north of Manisa (Magnesia ad Sipylum). Again the text (IGRR IV 1176) is no different in form from those of other dedications to local deities. The dedication is in two parts, one by a husband and wife, the other by their three sons. The parents dedicate a βωμός, on which the inscription is cut; it is a small marble column, nearly a meter high, without flutes but provided with a capital and base. The sons later install a lamp on the top of the βωμός;³⁹ this would perhaps be an appropriate dedication to the God of the Jews,⁴⁰ but lamps are also important in Graeco-Roman cult, and lamp-dedications appear in the Greek world even before the Hellenistic period.⁴¹ In addition, ἮΨΙΣΤΟΣ in this inscription is not a fixed title, but a rather casual epithet; the parents' dedication is to θεὸς ἮΨΙΣΤΟΣ, but the sons are content to call the deity simply ἮΨΙΣΤΟΣ when they add their inscription some 20 centimeters below.

Finally inscriptions from Lydia within 30 miles of Sardis should be

³⁹ The inscription indicates that the sons' contribution is τὰ λυχνάψια (the meaning of the plural is uncertain); the singular τὸ λυχνάψιον is not listed in the standard lexica, but is related to the feminine noun λυχνάψια, '(festival or ceremony of) lamplighting'. IGRR errs both in its reproduction of this noun and in its locating of the inscription at Agae; in August 1966 the present writer located, photographed and squeezed the stone at the spot (courtyard of the Sariçam mosque) where it had been first copied by A. Fronrier, who published it in 1886. The assistance of Bay K. Z. Polatkan (Director, Manisa Museum) in locating and recording the Sariçam inscription is here gratefully acknowledged.

⁴⁰ On lamps and light-symbolism in Jewish cult, see Goodenough, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.14) IV. 71–98. On a third-century βωμός from Pergamum bearing a lamp, the dedication (probably) of a Gentile convert to Judaism, see M. P. Nilsson, "Zwei Altäre aus Pergamon," *Opuscula Selecta* III (Lund 1960) 297–301; E. Bickermann, "The Altars of Gentiles, a Note on the Jewish 'ius sacrum'," *RevIntDroitsAnt* 5 (1958) 158; G. Dellling, "Die Altarinschriften eines Gottesfürchtigen in Pergamon," *NT* 7 (1964/5) 73–80. The deity is addressed thereon as θεὸς κύριος ὁ ὦν εἰς ἀεί.

⁴¹ On the use of lamps in Graeco-Roman cult, J. Gagé, *RACH* VII (1966–67) 154–87 s.v. FACKBL, and (for Pergamum) H. Pleket, "An Aspect of the Emperor Cult: Imperial Mysteries," *HThR* 58 (1965) 341–45, 347. On lamp dedications, see M. P. Nilsson, "Lampen und Kerzen im Kult der Antike," *Opuscula Selecta* III (Lund 1960) 189–214; the importance of such dedications was first brought to my attention by Bentley R. Layton of Harvard University.

mentioned: the first is a dedication to a goddess, *θεὰ ὑψίστη*.⁴² The second⁴³ is the dedication of an image of another goddess, Thea Larmene; the image is dedicated *θεῶ ὑψίστῳ καὶ μεγ[ά]λῳ θείῳ*—it is dated to A.D. 181, exactly contemporary with the earliest Sardis synagogue inscriptions. In this general area, Jewish evidence exists in abundance, but neither of these texts can be Jewish.

IV

It is obvious from these examples that the epithet *ὑψιστος*, when it appears in Asia Minor, can never be taken, by itself, as proof that the text is Jewish. Then what was the origin of the original hypothesis of a connection between this epithet and Diaspora Judaism? And how was Asia Minor singled out as the location in which abundant evidence for this connection could be found?

The first question is the simpler one: the epithet is used frequently in the Septuagint for the God of the Old Testament.⁴⁴ When the word began to turn up in eastern Mediterranean inscriptions, it seemed logical to conclude that the Septuagint and the inscriptions, when they used the same word, were talking about the same god. Nilsson's statement of the situation demonstrates this scholarly confusion. He begins by saying, quite correctly, “*Ἵψιστος* is an adjective which may be applied to any great god . . . (it) is especially suitable for Zeus and the other high gods.” But then he immediately continues, “It is just for that reason that the Semitic Baalim and the God of the Jews bear that title. The latter (the God of the Jews) is given the name very frequently in the Septuagint and also in inscriptions from Asia Minor, where the Seleucids had caused numerous Jews to settle.”⁴⁵ Nilsson was attempting to write carefully on a topic about which many earlier scholars⁴⁶ had made extravagant and ill-founded assumptions, but

⁴² Keil and von Premerstein, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.12) no.189; cf. Robert, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.7) 119 n.60.

⁴³ Robert, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.7) 112ff.

⁴⁴ Judging from the standard concordance, the LXX uses *ὑψιστος* (alone) of God 54 times, *ὁ ὑψιστος* 50 times, *ὁ θεὸς ὑψιστος* once, *ὑψιστος θεός* not at all. Of the nine NT uses of *ὑψιστος* for God, four use the form *ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστος* (Mk. 5.11//Lk 8.28, Acts 16.7, Hebr. 7.1); the remainder use *ὑψιστος* (anarthrous) except for Acts 7.48 *ὁ ὑψιστος*. The Apostolic Fathers use *ὁ ὑψιστος* five times (all in *I Clem.*), *ὑψιστος* once (introd. of Ignatius' letter to Rome).

⁴⁵ GGR II.664.

⁴⁶ For example, Kittel's use (*op.cit.* [*supra* n.19] *passim*) of the many *ὑψιστος*-texts to produce a picture of a 'Judaizing process' spreading irresistibly over the Roman Empire and re-

even Nilsson went far beyond his evidence. The Jews whom the Seleucids transplanted are those already mentioned who settled around Sardis in Lydia and Phrygia. Since Nilsson wrote, the Sardis discoveries have revealed that Jewish presence and influence in just this area are far greater than he or anyone else had imagined. But the newer evidence, instead of drawing ὑψιστος more closely into Anatolian Judaism, points in the other direction. In the one nearby Jewish text in which the title is used, the phrasing is deliberate, surely self-conscious; the dedicant seems to be asserting that in the face of all the deities given the title ὑψιστος, his god, the God of the Jews, is in fact *the highest god* (CIJud 769).

But why would a non-Jew use this epithet for his god? For this area of Lydia, Phrygia and Ionia there are at least two major causes: the first is simply that here a number of gods are associated with heights and mountain-peaks;⁴⁷ most of the gods are Anatolian, not Greek, to begin with, and when Greek epithets become necessary, ὑψιστος is a likely one. The second cause is more complex, and has to do with what Nilsson called an "impulse toward monotheism"; as he made perfectly clear, the trend of piety and religious thought in the Graeco-Roman world is frequently in this direction.⁴⁸ The explanation is simple enough: after Alexander the Great, local gods began to seem insufficient; a deity worth honoring had to have world-wide, even cosmic authority. In an age when an emperor had almost universal power, one's gods could have no less. Philosophers from Cleanthes to Plutarch to Maximus of Tyre spoke in terms of an exalted, eternal god, and so did the manufacturers and users of magical papyri and charms.

Men called a god ὑψιστος because he was the highest, in their estimation, or because they wanted to reach the highest; in many cases he was in fact "the only god for them," or at least the only one worth mentioning, a deity superior to the many local gods. Men needed a

versed finally only by Christianity. But Nilsson's argumentation is not always so careful either; perhaps least convincing in his treatment of ὑψιστος is his attempt (GGR II.666) to find Jewish participation in a western Anatolian cult whose monuments show Zeus, Artemis and Apollo and whose inscriptions mention Zeus, Zeus Hypsistos, Apollo and Cybele. (His presentation is further clouded by the fact that his pictures of reliefs in question are mislabeled in GGR II: Tafeln 14.3 and 14.4 have been reversed, cf. p.666.)

⁴⁷ A. B. Cook discusses *Hypsistos* (in *op.cit.* [supra n.13] II.2 App.B, pp.876ff) in an appendix entitled "The Mountain-cults of Zeus."

⁴⁸ On the "Drang zum Monotheismus," GGR II.569-78.

deity who had power not only in their own home towns, but wherever they might go in the much larger world of the Hellenistic monarchies and then of the Roman Empire.

Such forces and human requirements as these produced the ὑψιστος-inscriptions of Lydia, Phrygia and Ionia. I suggest that they are also behind ὑψιστος-texts found elsewhere in the Graeco-Roman world.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ This conclusion might be reinforced by a glance at another divine epithet. The desire for a θεὸς ἐπήκοος, 'a god who listens (to our prayers)', is also part of the piety of this period; as O. Weinreich has shown, this term is used quite frequently in the Imperial Period, yet no one postulates a single deity Epēkoos or asks that all occurrences of the epithet be derived from a single source. The Weinreich article is "Θεοὶ ἐπήκοοι," *AthMitt* 37 (1912) 1-68; the second part (46-68) is a fascinating discussion of votive reliefs depicting only (the god's) ears, a graphic example of the meaning of the epithet. For more recent evidence, see M. Avi-Yonah, "Syrian Gods at Ptolemais-Accho," *IsraelExplor* 9 (1959) 5ff. [Addendum: generally on Anatolian Judaism, see my *Judaism in Western Asia Minor under the Roman Empire*, forthcoming in the series *Studia Post-Biblica* (Leiden) ed. J. C. H. Lebram.]