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***Kyrios* and *despotes*: addresses to deities and religious experiences**

Abstract: Addresses to deities as *kyrios/a* and *despotes* (“master” or “lord”) top a list that encompasses a rich lexicon of divine rulership. My study tackles two combined issues raised by these two onomastic attributes: (1) do they betray mainly the memory of a more peculiar and closer religious experience of deities than do other addresses? (2) to what extent do the two terms express a prominent status of the experienced deities leading towards a “henotheistic” interpretation, as usually conceptualized by modern research? The collection and study of epigraphic testimonies invited me to distance my conclusions from both the three features generally recognized when deities are praised thus (slave’s submission, oriental flavor and henotheism) and current interpretations that treat the two terms as synonymous, as if expressing the same kind of experience of the deity. In the three geographical – thus cultural – areas under scrutiny, where these ritual epithets are the more numerous (the Levant, Thracia and its surroundings, and Egypt), any divine power is implicitly *kyrios* in his/her own sanctuary. *Despotes* might be a better candidate for advocating an evolution towards a hierarchical/henotheistic conception of the pantheon and its expression in specific religious experiences.

εἰσὶν θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοί.¹

ἔνθα σε ἔγνω, Μανδοῦλι,
ἥλιον τὸν παντεπόπτην δεσπότην, ἀπάντων βασιλέα.²

In the first *Letter to the Corinthians*, quoted above in excerpt, Paul noted the multiplicity of gods and *kyrioi* in order to distance his faith, and his God, from the conception of a plural divine world. For approaching both the topics of the structure and functioning of polytheisms throughout the kaleidoscopic aspects of divine

¹ Paul, *Ep. Cor.* I, 8, 5: “there are many gods and many lords”. I thank Dan Dana for our discussion on Thracia and its surroundings.

² Bernand 1969, no. 166, ll. 7–8, at Talmis (Kalabsha, Nubia), 1st–3rd century CE (= *SB* 4127): “Then I knew you, Mandoulis, the sun, all-seeing Lord, Master of everything”.

powers / ‘*puissances*’ (J.-P. Vernant),³ and the kinds and deepness of religious experiences, addresses to deities – the more so the *epicleseis* (i.e. ritual epithets) that deities are given in epigraphic dedications – offer an avenue.⁴ Considering the theme under scrutiny, “experiencing the religious”, I choose to focus on this corpus of written evidence because literary texts (novels and poetry mainly) narrate religious experiences through imaginative discourses, even when they rely or could rely on actual facts – thus endless discussions on the historical value of some texts like Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* XI. Epigraphy also has its discursive rules and strategies, notwithstanding stereotyped formulas; yet the fact that the author of an inscription usually speaks in the first person betrays a different stage and network of mediation, among which that of the temple authorities where the inscription is set up. Moreover, comparing lists of Latin and Greek epithets in literary evidence (Bruchmann 1893–1902; Santoro 1974; Ronchi 1974–1977) and indexes of epigraphic publications, demonstrates that the range of epithets is far larger in the first category.⁵ Artistic creation left more freedom, imagination and space for inventiveness than cultic communication, as the prose writer Aelius Aristides complained.⁶

In historiography, some of these ritual epithets are considered as reflecting testimony both of more intense or intimate experiences of the gods, and a state of submission of the worshipper that would be characteristic of an ‘Eastern religiosity’ (Pleket 1981, 176). Addresses to deities as *kyrios/a* and *despotes* (“master” or “lord”) top a list that encompasses a rich lexicon of divine rulership. My study tackles two combined issues raised by these two epithets: (1) investigating whether they betray mainly the memory of a more peculiar and closer religious experience of deities than do other dedications; and (2) appreciating to what extent the two terms express a prominent status of the experienced deities leading towards a “henotheistic” interpretation, as usually conceptualized by modern research. Such an inquiry opens towards a large

³ Vernant 1985, 362: “Les dieux helléniques sont des Puissances, non des personnes”. Cf. Bonnet, Belayche et al. 2017.

⁴ E.g. out of a long bibliography, Belayche et al. 2005. The research group “Mapping polytheisms” headed by Corinne Bonnet (Toulouse, FR) proposes now the syntagma “attribut onomastique”, Bonnet et al. 2018.

⁵ See for instance in Latin texts the numerous portraits of any deity as “*potens*” (Aesculapius, Amor, Apollon, Ceres, Dis, Fortuna, Juno, Jupiter, Lar, Liber, Mars, Neptune, Pan, Priape, Rome, Silvanus, Terra, Venus, Vesta), with or without their sphere of power (*Armipotens*, *Ignipotens*, *Salsipotens*, etc.), while *potens* is rare in epigraphic dedications and restricted to a few deities (Diana: *CIL* 3, 1418 and 11, 3198).

⁶ Aelius Aristides, Εἰς τὸν Σάραπιν (*Or.* 45), 1–3.

horizon in history of religions, in so far as *kyrios/a* and *despotes* are not neutral terms as we shall see.

The collection and study of epigraphic testimonies invites me to distance my conclusions from current interpretations that treat the two terms as synonymous, as if expressing the same kind of experience of the deity. Actually, their uses reveal different religious connotations within the three geographical – thus cultural – areas where these ritual epithets are the more numerous: the Levant, Thracia and its surroundings, and Egypt.⁷ At the very least they display significant nuances that will be underlined. Even in the Near East – where *kyrios/a* has a large range of meanings, yet with little clear evidence of direct experience of the divine (as in epiphanies for instance), and where *despotes* is rarely attested before Christian testimonies (from the 5th century onwards)⁸ – for the most part, *kyrios/a* designates an authoritative status of the deity within a sanctuary. In the three areas under scrutiny, increasing attestations of the two terms during the imperial period accords with the social trend towards glorification of powerful figures, either divine or human, that flourished within the contemporary context of civic competitions (see e.g. Belayche 2010, with previous bibliography). Viewed from this social history perspective, *kyrios* participates in an evolution that coined the religious language in the Roman Eastern Mediterranean, putting emphasis on a political lexicon (“*épithètes de puissance*” in French, “*Machtepitheta*” in German)⁹ in line with competitive concerns in civic societies of the time.¹⁰ Voicing a masterly status within a community of gods and humans, addressing a deity as *kyrios* does not say a lot about a theological conception of the “*société des dieux*” (J.-P. Vernant) itself. *Despotes*, in contrast, is more frequently used when worshippers experience the divine personally, through oracles, dreams, or other similar specific experiences, as Egyptian testimonies will demonstrate clearly.

After some necessary historiographical reminders, I shall first examine Levantine evidence, since the prevalent scholarly position on the term *kyrios* stresses both an “oriental connection” and submission to deities. I shall then pass to the two other areas rich with attestations, searching for eventual differences. The Thracian repertoire of *kyrios/a* will demonstrate a literal use of the term for identifying divine powers – as masters of the (cult) place. Finally, Egyptian documents will show a clear distinction between *kyrios* and *despotes* in relation to worshippers’ religious experiences.

⁷ The demonstration will not refer to the exhaustive repertoire of attestations for reasons of space.

⁸ Cf. the Christian formula εἰς Θεός, ὁ πάντων Δεσπότης.

⁹ Cf. Chaniotis and Chiai 2007, 121.

¹⁰ For acclamatory epithets, Chaniotis 2009, 208–213 and Chaniotis 2010, 130–131 n. 80.

1 *Kyrios* according to the “orthodox” thesis (H.W. Pleket)

These historiographical observations are intended to draw attention (though briefly) to a possible hermeneutic bias arising from the Jewish use of *Kyrios* as one of the Greek designations of the Jewish God in the Septuagint¹¹ (and then its Christian application to Jesus Christ),¹² when interpretations of epigraphic addresses to gods/goddesses as *kyrios/a* are at stake. There is not much evidence to single out the term in traditional, Greek and Roman, religions. Few testimonies come from ancient Greece.¹³ Classicists list *kyrios* within a large category of epithets of power and sovereignty: “master of” the house, and then of the empire,¹⁴ “the one who has authority over” (e.g. the *parthenoi*), “lord” or “monarch” like *dominus* in Latin (Chantraine 2009 [1968–1980], 578–579). Actually, Zeus can be *kyrios* in archaic and classical Greek poetry and drama,¹⁵ as are other deities. Yet Greek gods’ sovereignty is rather termed with other words in literary or epigraphic evidence (like the oracular tablets from Dodona): *potnia*, *anax*,¹⁶ *basileus*, *despotes* (generally only in specific contexts),¹⁷ *despoina*. Starting from the basic, literal meaning, historians of religions rightly stress the vertical relationship between gods and men as expressed in the ritual uses of *kyrios*.

¹¹ See among many epigraphic examples: *IJO* I, 70 = *IDelos* 2532 (Rheneia): ἀξιώ τὸν θεὸν τὸν ὑψιστον τὸν κύριον τῶν πνευμάτων. For Philo of Alexandria, *De mutatione nominum* 11–12, God is *Kyrios*, but this is not a personal name. The reference book is Baudissin 1926–1929, discussed by Cerfaux 1931 for the shift from the *Tetragrammaton* to “le Seigneur qui s’est attaché son peuple”. On the question of the use of *Kyrios* or the *Tetragrammaton* in the *Septuaginta*, Pietersma 1984 and Harl 1986, 51–52.

¹² See among many epigraphic examples: *MAMA* III, 112 (Cilicia): τάδε λέγει Κ(ύριος) παντωκράτωρ (*sic*). The standard book is Bousset 1913. See also *TWNT* III (1938), s.v. κύριος (W. Foerster) and *SDB* 5 (1957), s.v. “Kyrios” (L. Cerfaux), col. 199–228; Nock 1928 [1972], 74–77.

¹³ Thus this chronological precision by Versnel 2011, 304, when defining henotheism: “Though most of the elements analyzed above [i.e. the nine characteristics of henotheism] can already be found sporadically in earlier periods, their amalgamation into one structural complex is specifically characteristic of the religious mentality we have been discussing.”

¹⁴ E.g. Trajan in Cilicia (in 106–115), Bean, Mitford 1965, 26 no. 30, ll. 2–3: τῷ κυρίῳ σωτήρι καὶ εὐεργέτῃ τοῦ κόσμου. See also many dedications τῇ κυρίᾳ πατρίδι, e.g. *SEG* 7, 852 and 858 (Gerasa, 2nd century).

¹⁵ Pindarus, *Isthm.* V, 52 (ὁ πάντων κύριος) and Euripides, *Iph. Aul.* 703; see also Aristophanes, *Plut.* 748.

¹⁶ E.g. in 350–200 BCE, Lhôte 2006, no. 23, l. 2: δέσποτα ἄναξ Ζεῦ Ναϊε καὶ Διώνη [. . .].

¹⁷ Cf. Dionysos acclaimed by the chorus as δέσποτα δέσποτα in Euripides, *Bacchae* 583; an Attic *defixio* (imprecation) addressed to the masters of the underworld, *IG* III, App. 94: [ὦ] δεσπότη[α]ι χθόνιοι καὶ ἐ[π]ιτύμβιοι.

Yet, upon interpretation, the dominant trend is that *kyrios* would betray a political (monarchic) and “oriental” religious conception, which spread in the Eastern Mediterranean from the Hellenistic period onwards.

I shall limit the review to two great scholars who marked important steps: from Arthur Darby Nock in 1925 to Hans Pleket in 1981 (for Latin evidence, Veyne 1986). Their interpretations of *kyrios* put emphasis on religious behaviors presented as obeying divine orders (after formulas like “*kata suntagma / onar / epitagen*”, etc.) or describing the worshippers as slaves of the deities – thus its examination in the *magnum opus* of Franz Bömer on the religion of the slaves.¹⁸ In Nock’s words in 1925:

That conception of the gods as absolute rulers [...] becomes prominent in Hellenistic times and finds expression in such titles as *kyrios*, *despotēs*, *tyrannos*. The gods were assimilated to the absolute monarchs of the East. [Nock, 1925 (1972), 47]

Three years later, the great master of Harvard singled out a turning point in the Hellenistic period after the classical, literal use of *kyrios*:

the nuance of *Kyrios* depends on the person or god to whom it is applied; *it can be a mere courtesy title*, like “Master” in English. *In Christianity, just as in many Hellenistic cults*, it implies a belief in the divine overruling of the individual, who receives commands from on high. [Nock 1928 (1972), 87; my emphasis]

In 1928 already, A.D. Nock envisioned my two present issues (a status designation and a personal relationship), yet with the hermeneutic model of his time, asserting a *praeparatio* to Christianity by the Hellenistic, and then Roman, religious evolutions. The consensus on gods honored as *kyrioi* by δοῦλοι θεοῦ, according to an “oriental” conception, was revisited by Hans Pleket in 1981 (esp. 174–178). Though recalling documents going back to classical Greece, he reasserted the oriental influence during the post-Classical period, mirroring monarchic systems:

this dependency is strengthened and disseminated in the Hellenistic-Roman period under Oriental influence and in connection with the rise of autocratic political systems.¹⁹ [Pleket 1981, 155]

¹⁸ Bömer 1961, esp. 193–214. Yet in the sanctuary of the Mother of Gods at Leukopetra (Macedonia), the common formula for a slave’s manumissions (οὐδεις ἔστε κύριος ἢ μόνη ἡ θεός, *I Leukopetra*, no. 90 in 238–239) does not transform the newly free man into a sacred slave. He gets his freedom while entering into the patronage of the Mother and becoming her *cliens*, thus with no other possible master (*kyrios/dominus*).

¹⁹ Pleket 1981, 179 considers that the social structure offered a favorable field to this “ideology of power”; for a discussion of the dialectic between freedom and tyranny as a conscious

Actually one rarely finds the entry *kyrios* in indices of books on Greek and Roman religions, even when religion in the Hellenistic Near East is under discussion (e.g. Bonnet 2015). On the other hand, all dictionaries or lexica of the Bible or the New Testament (see above n. 12) have the item,²⁰ when they refer to the previous use of the term (the Pentateuch was translated in the 3rd century BCE). They all argue for what Pleket calls the “orthodox” version, after recalling the Semitic words translated by *kyrios* – *Ba'al/Ba'alat* (Lord, Dame) and *Adon* (Master).²¹ Following this interpretation, *kyrios* is connected to an “oriental” context or influence (whatever ambiguities vested with the term, Belayche 2000) characterized by the two aforementioned interwoven features: an absolute authority of the divine power who, consequently, rules over worshippers enslaved to it, in contrast to the *libertas* of the traditional, contractual relationship with the gods. A third feature also rests on such a basis: addressing a deity as *kyrios* accords with the “henotheistic” conception of pagan theology during the imperial period.²²

Evidence called to support the argument is far from displaying the advocated features – to say nothing of the current debate on the existence of divine rulership in Greek classical, polytheistic thinking (recent, comprehensive analysis in Versnel 2011 and 2017). First, the collection of epigraphic evidence honoring deities as *kyrios/a* in the Roman period does not single out the Near East (possibly for reasons of conservation),²³ when compared to Egypt (following an enduring tradition) and Thracia (and surrounding areas). Secondly, a relatively small amount of documents is found in Anatolia, although the worshippers’ submission is an unquestionable characteristic of the so-called confession texts.²⁴ These general observations prompt further examination.

ambiguity, Versnel 1998, 72–95. Pleket is followed by Versnel 2011, 287, for henotheistic trends (“This divine absolutism in many respects imitates the model of the worldly autocracy so typical of Hellenistic kingship”), but not for the “oriental” influence (128–129).

20 One recent example, Van der Toorn et al. 1999², s.v. *Kyrios* (D. Zeller, 492): “the designation *kyrios* for gods is mainly a non-Greek, oriental phenomenon from Hellenistic and Roman times”.

21 Cf. *L'DNY LMLK'STRT 'L HMN* (“To my Lord, to Milkashtart, god of Hammon”), quoted by Bonnet 2015, 318 (*TSSI* III, 32).

22 It is one of the “nine characteristics of henotheistic religion” (the fifth one: “cultic worship, personal submission to the god”) of Versnel 2011, 289–296.

23 The PHI Greek inscriptions database (<http://epigraphy.packhum.org/>) is not helpful for setting proportions because the term is frequently used in socio-political (patronage and emperors) and Christian contexts.

24 Two testimonies only: Petzl 1994, no. 68, 16 (Men *kyrios* of Tiamos), and 123, 2 (Apollo Lairbenos; it is not a formulaic designation though there are plenty of acclamatory epithets, see above n. 10).

2 *Kyrios/a* translates as *Ba'al/Ba'alat* or *Adon* in the Levant

The majority of Near Eastern dedications addressing their deity as *kyrios/a* comes from Syro-Phoenician and Arabic regions: coastal Syria, the Anti Lebanon from Bekaa to Hermon, and further east on the Hauran plateau to Gerasa and Bosra on the south, and north to the Euphrates. In these regions, the more so in hinterlands, local traditions of numerous divine masters were vivid, and they were even perpetuated thanks to Hellenization, as brilliantly demonstrated by Glen Bowersock (1990).

Kyrios/a is a literal translation of Semitic divine appellations: *Ba'al* and *Adon* for gods, *Ba'alat* for goddesses. Like in the *Phoenician history* of Philo of Byblos – Βεελσάμην, ὃ ἐστὶ παρὰ Φοῖνιξι κύριος οὐρανοῦ, Ζεὺς δὲ παρ' Ἑλλήσιν²⁵ – the bilingual dedication of Seleucos (*Bar'ateh* in Palmyrenian), son of Lucius, leaves no doubt on the equivalence, though the use does not echo *per se* a specific religious experience of the god (*PAT* 1089). In 31 CE – thus before Dura-Europos entered the *imperium* of Rome, though the presence of Rome is already perceptible in anthroponymy – Seleucos and his son Ababouis (*bbwhy*) offered a statue (τὸ[ν] ἀνδριάντα) – probably the relief – τῷ Δεῖ κυρίῳ / *b'šmyn* in three “languages”: Greek, Palmyrenian Aramaic, and iconographic (thanks to the sculptor / *glyptēs* Iaraios / *Yarhai*). The document was found in a small structure (thus called “temple of Zeus *kyrios*”) possibly erected c. 28 CE by immigrants coming from Palmyra.²⁶ The inscription engraved on the plinth of the relief (Fig. 1) attests to the translation of the Aramaic *Ba'al Shamīn* as Zeus *kyrios*. There is only one other testimony in Dura: a Greek graffito dated to c. 210 CE, inscribed on a wall of one of the rooms of the Roman *praetorium* that enclosed the temple of Artemis-Azzanathkona.²⁷ It can be surmised that Aramaic was Seleucos' mother tongue,²⁸ for he calls *Ba'al Shamīn* “*lh*”, “my god” (with the suffix of ownership). This is a very thin clue for asserting a deep personal relationship of Seleucos with “his” god. Testimonies are more numerous in the Hauran, and that of Decimus Lucius Fabianus, a Roman legionary (legion unknown after the break of the stone) is more demonstrative for the point: he thanked “Zeus the Lord” for having been

25 Baumgarten 1981 *ap.* Eusebius, *PE* I, 10, 7 (= Jacoby, 790.F, 2, 46) and 149–152.

26 Downey 1977, 31–34 and 208–210, no. 10, pl. 4, fig. 10 (= *LIMC* 3, s.v. Zeus, 75–76 no. 1, pl. 62). Cf. Dirven 1999, 115–117 and 211–222 no. 5, pl. II and fig. 6 for the plan of the temple.

27 Rostovtzeff 1934, 161–162 no. 483.

28 On the complex Syrian “Greekness” in Dura, Andrade 2013, 211–232 (229–231 for the Seleucos monument).

Fig. 1: Yale University Art Gallery, 1935.45 (<https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/6833>), public domain.

propitiated (ἰλ[ασίας χάριν]).²⁹ Yet these two documents are isolated in the whole corpus analyzed below and cannot generate a systematic connection between the onomastic attribute and a specific religious experience.

Coming back to Seleucos in Dura, his relationship with Ba'al Shamîn in Aramaic (*lh*) is not paralleled in the Greek version of the dedication, nor in the relief. The latter pictures a commonplace sacrificial homage with Palmyrene iconographic features (Fig. 1). The god is seated, with his upper body facing the

²⁹ Littmann, Magie Jr., Stuart 1915, no. 665 (= *IGRR* 3.1297): Διὶ Κυρίῳ / [ε]ὐχὴν ἰλ[ασίας χάριν / Δέκ]μος Ἰ[ού]/[λ]ιος Φα/[βι]ανός / [στρ]ατιώτ[η]ς / [λεγε]ῖται νο<ς> [...].

viewer but his legs on profile, wearing a *calathos* and holding a bunch of fruits and grains in his right hand. A man wearing a himation is standing on his right, probably an image of Seleucos bringing a ram as an offering (?). The depiction of a master god, provider of prosperity, expresses one of the providential features of the atmospheric Lord of the Heavens (*Ba'al Shamîn*).

The Greek translation might sound redundant, as the prominent status of local *ba'alim*³⁰ was regularly interpreted in Greek by the master god Zeus' theonym, specified by an epichoric epithet (e.g. Ζεὺς Δαμασκένος), when the Semitic naming was not just transliterated, like Βεελσάμην or Βαλμαρκωδ (Lat. *Balmarcod*). Seleucos' *Zeus kyrios* version might intend to stress the mastership of the cult place, yet without any emphasis on a particular experience.

In the Hauran also (Sourdel 1952, 25–27), Zeus is honored as *kyrios* during the reign of the emperor Claudius. The area, then, was part of the land of the Herodian tetrarch Agrippa II, once it had been separated from the Nabatean sphere of influence half a century before. At Sanamein-Aire (50 km south of Damascus), three brothers with local or Hellenized names (Eunomos son of Hector, Aias and Nikaios), offered to Zeus *kyrios* some building (τοῦτο τὸ μέρος) in the “temple” (οἰκοδομῆσαι ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ), “by piety and as a thanksgiving”.³¹ The temple is unlocated (unlike the Severian Tychaion, Dentzer-Feydi 2010). Yet the naming of the god as *kyrios* is consistent with the context of a cult place embellished or enlarged by the dedicants. The occasion for the dedication evokes regular religious homages, reinforced probably by euergetic concerns. The epithet of the god expresses in Greek a masterful position in his sanctuary, with no hint of specific experience of the god. One can read a similar semantic use in a consecration to a local *ba'al* (he is πατῶος) with a celestial field (he is οὐράνιος) at Damas:³² once both his divine field and link with the dedicant have been designated, his status is explicitly stated (“the Lord” with article). In Bosra, the dedication of Gaius Iulius Maximus, a soldier of the *IIIa legio Cyrenaica*, “to Zeus *kyrios* and Hera, ancestral gods”³³ points more probably towards a Roman context – Jupiter and Juno addressed with a local formula crossing a Jupiter *dominus*

30 Cf. PAT 1572, a bilingual dedication in Palmyra; in Gerasa a Zeus Kronos (Bel? Saturn?), SEG 7, 862. More generally Kaizer 2002, 83–84.

31 Littmann, Magie Jr., Stuart 1915, no. 655/2, in 45 CE: ἔτους πέμπτου τῆς <ἡγεμονίας> Αὐτοκράτορος Τιβερίου Κ<λ>αυδίου Καίσαρος Σεβας/τοῦ Γερμανικοῦ Εὐνομος Ἐκτορος / καὶ Αἴας καὶ Νείκαιος ἀδελφοὶ ἤρξαν οἰκοδομῆσαι ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος / ἐκ τῶν ιδίων τῷ Διὶ Κυρίῳ εὐσεβείας κ/αὶ εὐχαριστείας ἔνεκα.

32 SEG 1, 546: Θεῷ Οὐρανίῳ / Πατρώῳ τῷ κυ/ρίῳ Λυσίας ὁ καὶ Δη/μήτριος Δημητρί/ου ἐκ τῶν ιδίων / εὐσεβῶς ἀνέθη/κεν.

33 IGLS XIII, 1, 9002: Διὶ [Κ]υρίῳ καὶ Ἡρᾷ θεοῖς πατρώοις, Γ(αίος) Ἰούλιος Μά<ξ>ιμος στρατ (ιωτήρ) λεγ(ιώνας) γ' Κυ(ρ)νηαίκτης.

in Latin – than towards an *interpretatio* of local gods, for Hera did not match with local goddesses as far as I know.³⁴

Such a crossing between two cultural traditions of master gods is widely illustrated at Berytus/Heliopolis, the more Roman of the Phoenician coastal cities, where every god with a public sanctuary is *kyrios/a*. In this Roman colony, there is a combination of an indigenous tradition – exemplified by the transliterated Βαλμαρκωδ (Lat. *Balmarcod*), the “Lord of Dances (κοίρανε κώμων)” in his sanctuary of Deir el Kala³⁵ – with the colonial creation of Jupiter, Mercurius and Venus, for whom the Latin conception of *dominus/a* was vested with a welcomed local look.³⁶ A late dedication (250–300 CE) “to Hermes Lord Savior” was engraved by worshippers with local or Hellenized names on the moulding of an altar adorned with a caduceus within a crown.³⁷ The altar was found in the extra-urban sanctuary built on the Cheikh Abdallah hill (to the south of the colony), where a written boundary stone delimited Hermes’ territory.³⁸

A reverse bronze coin struck by Heliopolis under Philip the Arab (Fig. 2) pictures the temple on a rocky hill with a stepped path, with the purse and the caduceus in the field. Three Latin dedications found in the sanctuary call the god *dominus*. They were commissioned by well-known Berytan families (the Afidenii, Statilii and Tittii) and betray a Roman context in many respects: onomastics, nomenclatures, military functions and epigraphic formulas.³⁹ The fact that a god is called *kyrios* in his cult place is an expected designation of his ownership status and crosses many testimonies of deities honored as *dominus/a* in Latin. In the colony of Berytus/Heliopolis, the majority of homages to Mercurius are in Latin. All (but two) are offered *Mercurio domino*,⁴⁰ thus suggesting a

³⁴ Pirenne Delforge and Pironti 2016 do not examine Roman evidence.

³⁵ Cf. Rey-Coquais 1999, 626–627; Aliquot 2009a, 138–139; Belayche and Hošek 2011, 389–391.

³⁶ Cf. Hošek 2017.

³⁷ SEG 38, 1562: Ἑρμῆ Κυρίῳ / Σωτήρι / Σοαίμῳ, Διόδοτος, I— —, / Διόδοτος υἱοῖ Αἰδρου ΑΡ — —.

³⁸ Cf. Aliquot 2009a, 294 for archaeological data, and 207–211. See also Aliquot 2009b.

³⁹ IGLS VI, 2737: Mercuri/o Dom(ino) / L(ucius) Afidenus / Stati[li]a[nus] / Val[ens]; Salamé-Sarkis 1987, 130, no. 7: (Mercur[ri]/o do[m(ino)]) / Tittia / Severa / Rufilli / [—]; 131 no. 8: Mercur[i]/o dom(ino) / Stat(ilius) Afide/nus L(uci) f(ilius) Fab(ia tribu) Ru/fillus, praefectus / fab[rum], tri(bunus) mil(itum) / leg(ionis) V Mac(edonicae) / v(otum) l(ibens) a(nimo) s(olvit).

⁴⁰ Cf. AE 1924, 1138 (Berytus): Mercurio / Domino / Q(uintus) Antonius / Eutyches / Sacerdotia/nus pro sal[u]te sua et uxoris et filio[r(um)] / v(otum) l(ibens) a(nimo) s(olvit); AE 2009, 1572 (Berytus): [Mer]curio Domin(o) / [e]x responso Apolli/nis C(aius) Iulius Her/mes Cinnamu[s] / geometra. Venus, who is the more Roman figure of the “triad” (see Hošek 2012, 402–409) is *domina* as well, AE 1924, 137 (= Triade I, no. 212): Veneri Dom(inae) / Caninia pr(o) s(alute) s(ua) / et Q(uinti) et fil(ii) Max(imi) / v(otum) l(ibens) a(nimo) s(olvit).

Fig. 2: SNG Copenhagen 435, Philip the Arab, used by courtesy of CNG, www.cngcoins.com.

formulaic designation with a Roman inspiration.⁴¹ This is confirmed by a dedication from a village which honors “Mercurius lord of the village of Ham (Μερκουρίω δωμίνω κῶμης Χάμωνος)” – with Lat. *domino* transliterated – on the occasion of the building of his temple.⁴² When comparing these testimonies to the one of Hermes *kyrios*, both express an authoritative status of the god, crossing two traditions, *dominus* and *ba'al*. Linguistic transfers were not one-way processes, whatever their apparent direction, and the building of the figure of Mercurius through his namings combines many features, both local and transferred ones, of the “*tuf culturel*”, to speak with Louis Robert for Anatolia (Hošek 2012, 260–273).

With Jupiter and Venus, this Mercurius/Hermes was one of the three figures of the so-called “Heliopolitan triad”, a modern reconstruction that recent researches invite rightly to dismiss.⁴³ The religious identity of the Heliopolitan Mercurius raised many debates recently as well. Julien Aliquot studied the god’s pre-Roman presence in Lebanon, for the caduceus is displayed on coins’ reverses of the Iturean tetrarchs of Chalcis in the 1st century BCE. He emphasized Mercurius’ quality of being a messenger, akin to the Palmyrenian Malakbel, which would have put a *dominus/kyrios* like him in a secondary rank (Aliquot 2009b), if the “triad” actually existed. Anne-Rose Hošek took to pieces the iconographic, cultural and religious *bricolage* that Roman colonists who built this divine figure manufactured; she underlines his aspect as a cosmic figure, far from the traditional image of being both a shepherd-god and secondary power (Hošek 2012, 389–401). For my concern with respect to the experience devotees had of gods they called “*kyrios*”, it is important that the two male gods of the so-called triad, Jupiter and Mercurius, both “*kyrios/dominus*”, are

⁴¹ Hošek 2012, 301–302. A similar phenomenon in Africa with Saturn, Le Glay 1966, 125.

⁴² *Triade* I, no. 168 (= Hošek 2012, 302).

⁴³ Cf. Kropp 2010. For a close study of the debate, Hošek 2012, 430–474.

often associated in reliefs and dedications (Hošek 2012, 391–393 and 414). Far from exhibiting inconsistency (Versnel 2017), they illustrate the conception of cohabitation of equally powerful divine powers within polytheism.

Heliopolitan Jupiter is *dominus*, rarely *kyrios*, because he is generally given homages in Latin. Thus the few dedications coming from Heliopolis and addressing him as *kyrios* or *despotes* offer helpful testimonies for discriminating between the two meanings and checking the “henotheistic” feature of *kyrios* if one follows the dominant scholarship. Under the Severans, Apollonios Segna, a citizen of Arados (further north on the coast), together with his children, consecrated a statue Διὶ μεγ[ίσ]τῳ Ἡλιοπολείτῃ κυρίῳ (IGLS VI, 2729, ll. 3–4). This worshipper reports a privileged relationship with the god through an oracle ([εὐξάμ]ενος κατὰ χ[ρηματισ]μόν, ll. 7–8), the reason why he adds an acknowledgement of the god’s powerful quality (*megistos*) to his authoritative status in his sanctuary (*kyrios*). For a couple of Roman citizens (Cassius Verus and Chareinè), worshippers of the Heliopolitan god (Jupiter probably), this all-powerful conception of the god of their homage is expressed by both *megistos* and *despotes*,⁴⁴ two epithets that distance their special experience of the god from the more common formula *dominus/kyrios*. The two aforementioned Heliopolitan dedications throw light on the rhetorical means for testifying of a specific experience of the god. But there is no great evidence for relating them to an “oriental” tradition, which would have existed in Arados for instance. In the famous inscription of Baitokaeke, the great sanctuary of a local Zeus/Ba’al in the *chora* of Arados,⁴⁵ the two emperors Valerian and Gratian (in 258–260) recalled economic and fiscal privileges for the sanctuary. The liberality is explicitly linked with the power of the god in his place (τῆς ἐνεργείας θεοῦ Διὸς Βαιτοκαϊκης and ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ).⁴⁶ Yet the latter is not qualified as *kyrios* or *despotes*, though his power is duly underlined.

Local tradition is more likely expressed in Greek dedications offered to Kronos. At Nebi Abel, south-west of Abila, eleven worshippers offered an altar in 166/167 “to Kronos *kyrios* after an oracle of the gods Zeus and Apis of Abila”.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ IGLS VI, 2730: Θεῷ μεγίστῳ / Ἡλιουπολίτῃ / δεσπότῃ / [Κ]άσσιος / Οὐῆρος / ἄμα Χαρείνῃ / συμβίῳ τῇ ἄξιῳ/λογ]ωτάτῃ καὶ —.

⁴⁵ Cf. Darbbour and Tholbecq 2009. A general overview in Bonnet 2015, 138–142.

⁴⁶ IGLS VII, 4028, C 18b-20 and Feissel 1993.

⁴⁷ South-West to Abila, in 166/167, RICIS 402/1005 with translation: [ἔ]τους η[ο]υ’ — — — Κρόνῳ κυρίῳ κατὰ χ[ρησ]μ[ο]ν θεῶν [Διὸς καὶ Ἀπιδος Αβίλης ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας τῶν Κυρίων [11 names] τὸν βωμόν ἐποίησαν ἐπὶ ἱερέως διὰ βίου Σοαμου Διοδότου, „En l’an 478 [...] au seigneur [Kron]os conformément à un oracle des dieux [Zeus] et Apis d’Abila, pour le salut des Seigneurs [list of 11 names] ont fait l’autel sous le prêtre à vie Sahaimos fils de Diodotos“.

The deity of the place, Kronos, is *kyrios*, while those of the religious experience are not. Thanks to another dedication cut on the rock between 14 and 29 CE, we know that his temple and the road access were offered by Nymphaios, son of Abimmes, an emancipated slave of the tetrarch Lysanias.

Pour le salut des Seigneurs augustes et toute leur maison, Nymphaios fils d'Abimmès, affranchi du tétrarque Lysanias, a construit la route qu'il a fondée (τὴν ὁδὸν κτίσας ἐπόησεν), et il a élevé le temple (τὸν ναὸν οἰκοδόμησεν) et a fait toutes les plantations (τὰς φυτείας πάσας ἐφύτευσεν), à ses frais, pour le seigneur Kronos et sa patrie (Κρόνω κυρίῳ καὶ τῇ πατρίδι), par piété (εὐσεβείας χάριν).

[OGIS 606; transl. Aliquot 2009a, 161, slightly modified]

In his dedication, Nymphaios links the divine owner of the newly founded cult place (Kronos *kyrios*) and the town related to him (his motherland). He does not report a specific religious experience besides the current piety and euergetism of this former slave. This Kronos *kyrios* recalls the Phoenician theology of Philo of Byblos, wherein Kronos is figured as the founder of the city of Byblos, the city being his house, i.e. temple,⁴⁸ according to a long tradition, Mesopotamian and then Ugaritic.⁴⁹ In that context, the “courtesy title” proposed by A.D. Nock is rightly consistent. In the Philonian mythology, woven with so many intricate cultural references, Kronos holds a prominent place as a primordial and founding figure, the one who dispatches the world between the deities, in the wake of the Hesiodic tradition.⁵⁰ Byblos, a main concern for the author as his homeland, is given to *Ba'alat Gubal*, the Lady of Byblos (Bonnet 2015, 164–171), and Phoenicia to the couple Zeus and Hadad-Astarte. In evidence of the Roman period, there is only one document (as far as I know) displaying Kronos *kyrios* as a supreme and cosmic deity. At Maad, in the mountainous hinterland of Byblos, a group of inscriptions was found in a church built on the ruins of a pagan building. One dedication, still discussed, is engraved on a cippus within a *tabula ansata*:

τῷ Κυρίῳ/ω ἀγί(ω) κὲ κυ/[ρ]ίῳ ὅλου / [τ]οῦ κόσ/[μ]ου Σατρά/[π]ε θεὸς / [ἐ]ποίησε
To the saint Lord and Lord of the whole universe, the god Satrapes made (this dedication).⁵¹

⁴⁸ Baumgarten 1981 *ap.* Eusebius, *PE* I, 10, 19: “Following these events, Kronos builds a wall around his dwelling and founds the first city in Phoenicia, Byblos”. See Ribichini 1994.

⁴⁹ Margueron 2016; Bonnet 2008.

⁵⁰ Philo equates the Greek Kronos with the Ugaritic El (Baumgarten 1981, 180–213), though some of his deeds are parallel to those of the Greek Zeus.

⁵¹ Chausson and Nordiguan 1996, 40–43 no. 1, with French translation.

The first lines configure an all-powerful deity, honored for his sanctity like many deities in the Near East: an imperial type *Kyrios*, who has parallels with the biblical Kyrios and in Isiac aretalogies anchored on Egyptian tradition. The god Satrapes⁵² is the Greek spelling of a Phoenician god Shadrafa,⁵³ honored at Sarepta and known in Palmyra as well (see *PAT* 0206), a “dieu protecteur, apotropaïque et thérapeutique” (Bonnet 2015, 195). Actually, he is pictured at Palmyra in a military garment, but the spear he leans on is wrapped by a snake’s coils,⁵⁴ as in Asclepieian iconography. Both the garment and attribute suggest a cultural fertilization by Greco-Roman figuration. Leaving aside the question of dedications made by gods (Milik 1972) – a question that Ernest Renan, the first editor of the document, bypassed when reading an anthroponym “Etheos” on line 5 –, a divine power as universal ruler, and even further a local lordship regularly acknowledged by the title “*kyrios*”, is not the rule so far. It is unique even at Maad.

A last example puts *kyrios* in a masterful position with no specific religious experience of him. In the mid-2nd century, at Skythopolis (Beth Shean) – one of the cities of the former Decapolis with a deep Hellenistic background –, Dionysos is *kyrios* and *ktistes*:

To the god Dionysos (Θεῷ Διονύσῳ), lord and founder (κτίστη τῷ κυρίῳ), Seleukos son of Aristo (Σέλευκος Ἀρίστωνος) offered in thanksgiving (χαριστήριον).⁵⁵

Though granted by scholarship with a prominent place in the local pantheon, Dionysos was not the only deity honored as *kyrios* there. He shares the epithet with Kore, *kyria* in her cult place at the foot of the theater (Fig. 3).

Yet Kore is far more glorified in Sebaste where she is “a mistress of everything (ὁ παντῶν δεσπότης)”, “great Kore invincible (μεγάλη Κόρη, ἡ ἀνέικητος)”, acclaimed as εἷς θεός (“One god”) (Flusser 1975), but not *kyria*. In Heliopolis as well, Kronos is *despotes* (and not *kyrios*) for a group of religious servants (ὑπερ[ε]τ[ή]σας) who call upon his providence (Ζεῦ βοήθι, “Zeus protect!”).⁵⁶

52 F. Chausson, who republished the text in 1996, chooses the reading on lines 5–6: Satrapes (nominative), with omission of the “s”.

53 The theonym would be Iranian, meaning “The Lord of Power”, Dupont-Sommer 1976, 653. At Maad in 8 BCE, he is honored by a local worshipper with no epicleris, Chausson and Nordguian 1996, 43 no. 2.

54 Cf. Drijvers 1976, pl. XL VIII; for the inscription *PAT* 0318. See also Gawlikowski 1990, 2646–2647.

55 Di Segni 1997. See Belayche 2017, 11–15.

56 *IGLS* VI, 2740 with translation: Ζεῦ βοήθι μνησθῶσιν οἱ τῆς γ’ δεκανία[ς] Μαρτίνος Μαρίνου] ὁ καλῶς κὲ δικέως ὑπερ[ε]τ[ή]σας δεσπ[ό]τη Κρόνῳ κὲ θεοῖς. Ἀπελ(λαίου) δ’, ἐ[τ(ους) –](?), “Zeus protège ! Qu’on se souvienne de ceux de la 3^{ème} décanie. Martinos fils de Marinos ayant servi bien et justement le maître Cronos et les dieux, le 4 du mois Apellaios, en l’an [...]”.

Fig. 3: Skythopolis, inscription *in situ* in the temple of Demeter and Kore (photo: N. Belayche).

Definitely *kyrios* points towards rulership of a place, temple or city, compared to *despotes*, which is more akin to expressing a special experience of the deity and of his/her supreme position.

Recalling the three features that dominant historiography considers as characteristic of the use of *kyrios* – personal submission, oriental influence and henotheistic conception – this review of Near Eastern attestations demonstrates firstly that *kyrios* is not a systematic formula for gods in the Near East. Secondly, it designates local rulership of a place, with rare cases of intimate religious experiences of the respective god. The conclusion is not different for goddesses called *kyria* in the Levant, though we do find more numerous mentions of a specific and personal experience of their divine power.

As for male gods, the Greek “courtesy title” (Nock) is a regular translation of *Ba’alat* (“Lady/Dame”). Testimonies of goddesses called “*kyria*” are concentrated on a few divine figures,⁵⁷ because of the prevalence of the “Lady Astarte” in many Phoenician documents,⁵⁸ either in her Syrian form (*kyria* Atargatis) or in her Greek interpretation (*kyria* Artemis). She is regularly portrayed on reverses of Levantine civic coinages because of the role she plays in civic protection,

⁵⁷ Two examples: Athena, a Greek *interpretatio* of the Nabatean Allat, *SEG* 7, 1103 (Arabia, Athela / ‘Atīl, second-third centuries): Ἀθηνᾶ τῇ κυρίᾳ; Kore many times, see above in Skythopolis and *IGLS* VI, 2978 (Chalcis of Lebanon, ‘Anḡarr, second-third centuries): τῇ κυρίᾳ Κόρῃ.

⁵⁸ See also Punic documents in the West, *CIS* I, 3914 (Carthage, fourth-third centuries BCE): “To the Ladies, to Astarte and to Tanit in Lebanon”.

comparable to the Tychai. In the Eastern Hermon at Kafr Hawar (to the south of the Anti-Lebanon massif), the Hierapolitan *Dea Syria* (Θεᾷ Συρία Ἱερα[πι]ολιτῶν) is *kyria Atargatis* (πεμφθεὶς ὑπὸ τῆς κυρίας Αταργάτη[ς]), and Lucius is her worshipper, her slave (Λούκιος δοῦλος αὐτῆς):

(A) : A la déesse syrienne de Hiéropolis, Lucius, son esclave, a consacré l'autel, étant venu 20 fois et ayant rempli 40 sacs.

(B) : Lucius d'Akraba, pieux et envoyé par la Maîtresse Atargatis,

(C) : a fait lui-même toute l'inscription sur l'autel grâce à 24 autres déplacements,

(D) : il a offert pour chaque déplacement 2 sacs [...].

[IGLS XI, 45, B 3–5 and A 1–4, transl. Aliquot 79]

This document might sound as a perfect case for the “orthodox” interpretation (Pleket). But it is unique among other attestations for Artemis *kyria*. Moreover, Lucius is a servant of the goddess, either a wandering priest (Aliquot 2009, 79) or charged with collecting the revenues of sacred lands; in both cases, the goddess is her “boss”, her *kyria*. Obscure “Ladies of X place” are given the honorific appellation, like a “Dame Semea” (τῇ κυρίᾳ Σημέᾳ) in Emesene,⁵⁹ or more well-known figures, like those of the circle of Pan, the divine owner of the sanctuary of Caesarea Philippi/Banias (Southern Hermon): Nemesis (honored by a priest of Pan)⁶⁰ and the Nymph Echo. Dedications to Nemesis do not stress any special relationship, in contrast to that of a statue of “Lady Echo (τὴν κ[υ]ρ[ί]αν Ἠχώ)” made after an oracle received in a dream (ὁνίρω χρησιμοδο[τ]η[θ]είς).⁶¹ Two other monuments stress a personal relationship: in Gerasa where Artemis *kyria* again sent an oracle in 98 CE (χρησμοῦ ἔνεκεν);⁶² and in 2nd-century Dura-Europos, with an homage τῇ κυρίᾳ Αταργάτι “after an order (κατ’ ἐπ[ι]ταγήν)” (SEG 7, 801).

Again, these few experiences are not in the majority for goddesses called *kyria*. Artemis in Gerasa (Djerash) is a good case because, within the context of her competition with Zeus, who settled for long at the gate of the city, his temple adjoining the theater, she was set in a prominent place in the urban grid

⁵⁹ IGLS V, 2089, Burdj el-Qā’I in 196/7.

⁶⁰ IGLS XI, A 16 by Valerius Hispanus, priest of the god Pan (ιερεὺς θεοῦ Πανός), for the safety of the emperors: “a consacré (la statue de) la Dame Némésis (τὴν κυρίαν Νέμεσιν) et son temple, achevé avec la roche creusée par lui-même, avec son décor et sa grille de fer tout entière” (transl. Aliquot); in Palmyra, Seyrig 1950, 242–247, no. 6, l. 3 (Flavius Domitianus consecrated (the statue of) τὴν κυρίαν Νέμεσιν); and in 2nd century Syria (unknown provenance), Dain 1933, 92, no. 84.

⁶¹ IGLS XI, A 17, by Agrippa, son of Marcus, a magistrate, in 221/222.

⁶² IGRR III, 1358, 3–6: Διογένης Λεω/νίδου Ἀρτέμιδι κυρία τὸν / βωμὸν εὐσεβείας καὶ χρη/σμοῦ ἔνεκεν.

redesigned with the monumentalization of her temple under Antoninus Pius. She gets four dedications as *kyria* by both Hellenized natives and Romans, between the last quarter of the 1st century⁶³ and the 2nd century, when she is praised by ritual agents (ἀρχιβωμιστᾶι) of other gods (Apollo, Kore and *sunnaoi theoi*) as celestial Lady⁶⁴ – polytheistic thinking being consistent with cohabitations of divine powers. In 209–211, Flavius Munatius, *bouleutes*, paid for the mosaic pavement of the *pronaos* of her temple.⁶⁵ The designation looks formulaic for the civic deity, like in Laodicea of Lebanon where she is similarly honored by two priestesses as well.⁶⁶ Her naming as *kyria* underlines the importance of her sanctuary.

For both female and male deities, *kyrios/a* in the Levant is firstly the devotional recognition of a status of local, divine leadership. Expressions of specific religious experiences connected with this onomastic attribute are few and situational, and not a systematic feature. Thus the prevailing interpretative model of *kyrios/a* would need further argument to switch from describing occasional cases to an actual pattern. This conclusion is also supported by another region where deities of both genres are regularly honored as *kyrios/a*: Thracia.

3 *Kyrios/a* as master of the local sanctuary in Thracia (and its surroundings)

I shall review more quickly the area of the Lower Danube provinces, because testimonies are numerous indeed, yet laconic and repetitive. They demonstrate clearly, to my eyes, that *kyrios/a* is foremost the designation for the local divine master. Any deity, within any cultural tradition (indigenous and Greco-Romanized), within any context (villages, Greek cities, Roman colonies), is honored as *kyrios/a* with traditional ritual (vows and regular offerings) by devotees of any social rank (up to *bouleutai*). Besides the “Thracian Hero/Rider”⁶⁷ and various local

⁶³ In 79–80, Artemis *kyria* receives a portico (Ἀρτέμιδι κυρία τὴν στοὰν ἐπύησαν (*sic*) ἐκ τῶν ιδίων) and a cellar or a cistern (καὶ τὸν λάκκον) offered by a group of worshippers (οἱ σεβόμενοι), *IGRR* III, 1363.

⁶⁴ *SEG* 38, 1652: ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. / Ἀκρίσιος Ἀμύντου / καὶ Διογένης καὶ Ἀμύν/τας υἱοὶ ἀρχιβωμιστᾶι / Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ Κόρης / καὶ τῶν συννάων θεῶν / εὐξάμενοι τῇ Κυρίᾳ Οὐρανίᾳ / Ἀρτέμιδι τὸν ἀκμάζοντα / Καίρῳ ἐκ τῶν ιδίων / ἀνέθηκα. See also *SEG* 35, 1573.

⁶⁵ *SEG* 7, 869: [τὸ πρό]ναιον τῆς κυρίας Ἀρτέμ[ιδ]ος ἐκ τῶν ιδίων ἐψηφοθέτη[σ]εν.

⁶⁶ In 115/6 Zosipatra, ἱερασαμένην τ<ῇ> κυρίας Ἀρτέμιδος, and the year after Berenike (*IGLS* IV, 1263, 6–8, = *RICIS* 402/0302) and 1264).

⁶⁷ See Oppermann 2006, index 400 s.v. Ἡρώς and Ἡρω, 401 s.v. κύριος. E.g. *IGBulg* V, 5518 (Philippopolis, Plovdiv): κυρίῳ Ἡρωί (= Oppermann 2006, no. 82; for all deities with a rider

deities interpreted or not with Greek names and pictured or not as riders,⁶⁸ all gods/goddesses with Greek names are *kyrios/a*: Zeus⁶⁹ with Hera,⁷⁰ Asclepios many times,⁷¹ Pluto,⁷² Dionysos,⁷³ Sabazios,⁷⁴ Ares,⁷⁵ Apollo,⁷⁶ Herakles,⁷⁷ Artemis,⁷⁸ the Nymphs,⁷⁹ and so on. The honorific address fits to any divine figure, be it obscure for us like so many *kyrioi* of villages.⁸⁰ Many dedications are made by soldiers, who were usually strangers to the province and probably adopted both a formulaic address and the iconography of the rider god that typify many of them. However numerous the instances, the title is rarely connected with a specific religious experience, e.g. salvation for soldiers,⁸¹ or oracular assistance, for instance by Lord Asclepios, Hygeia and Telesphoros (an interpretation of

relief and called *kyrios* in the territory of the city, 180–212); *IGBulg* IV, 2344 (Nicopolis ad Nestum, Garmen): κυρίῳ Ἡρωὶ Πυρμηρ[ουλα] (= Oppermann 2006, 179). For the Latin equivalent, *dominus*, Szabó 2017.

68 E.g. *IGBulg* II, 768 (between Nicopolis ad Istrum and Marcianopolis): [κ]υρίῳ Δαρζαλα, with a composite relief of a Greek-like, bearded god, sacrificing over an altar with a patera and holding the cornucopia (= Oppermann 2006, 292).

69 Possibly interpreting local gods, e.g. *IGBulg* IV, 2218 (Pautalia): τῷ κυρίῳ Διὶ Ζβελσουρδῳ, who is κυρίῳ θεῷ προγονικῷ Ζβελσουρδῳ (no. 2217). *IGBulg* III 1, 1373 (Διὶ Ζβελθιουρδῳ) with a relief of Zeus with eagle and thunder.

70 *IGBulg*. III, 1089 (Philippopolis): κυρίῳ Διὶ καὶ κυρίᾳ Ἡρᾷ; 25 dedications for *kyria Hera* in the *IGBulg*.

71 *IGBulg* V 5810: κυρίῳ Ἀσκληπι[ῶ], in Pautalia where there were curative springs and one (or many) local deity(ies) interpreted as Asklepios, cf. 5801 (κυρίῳ Ἀσκληπιῶ[ι Κε]ιλαισκη[νω]), 5800 (κυρίῳ Ἀσκληπιῶ Κε]ιλαισκη[νω]), 5786 (κυρίῳ Ἀ]σκληπιῶ Κου]λακ[ου]σηνῳ Κε]ιλαισκη[νω]), etc.; see also 5839; II, 514 (on Oescus and Utus): κυρίῳ Ἀσκληπιῶ Σαλδοουσ[σηνῳ], by a *beneficiarius consularis* in Greek, with a relief figuring Asclepios with Hygeia and Telesphoros. See Oppermann 2006, index 398–399.

72 *IGBulg*. IV, 2343 (Nicopolis ad Nestum): κυρίῳ · Πλούτωνι.

73 *IGBulg* V, 5684 (Serdica): κυρίῳ Διονύσω.

74 *IGBulg*. IV, 1927 (Serdica): κυρίῳ Σαβαζίῳ Αθουπαρηνῳ by his priest who built the temple.

75 An *interpretatio*, *IGBulg* V, 5610 (Augusta Traiana): τῷ κυρίῳ Ἄρηι Σουρεγεθῇ Σελλη[νω].

76 *IGBulg*. V, 5652 (Anchialos): κυρίῳ Ἀπόλλωνι.

77 *IGBulg* IV, 2136 (Pautalia): κυρίῳ Ἡρακλ[ῆ].

78 *IGBulg* IV, 2113 (Pautalia): κυρίᾳ <Α>ρτέμει.

79 Seventeen dedications as *kyriai* in the *IGBulg*. Female deities (Hera, Artemis, the Nymphs, Hecate, etc.) are *kyriai*, yet with no systematic relief as the “Rider god”. For Artemis figured as a huntress, Deoudi 2010.

80 *IGBulg*. IV, 2232 (Pautalia): κυρίῳ Διὶ vac. κωμῆται Σπορτηληνοι; 2216 (Pautalia): Διὶ Ζβελσουρδῳ τῷ κυρίῳ by a village (Βολβαβρινηνοι κωμῆται); IV, 2043 (Serdica): ἡ κωμαρχία for Lord Zeus; III, 1711 (Augusta Traiana): κυρίῳ Ἀπόλλωνι Κερμυλλ[ηνῳ κωμῆται] Σκασκοπαρηνοι.

81 In Serdica, a soldier of the *Ila legio Parthica* thanks Lord Sabazios for his *pronoia*, *IGBulg*. IV, 2024, 4–6: κυρίῳ Σαβαζίῳ ἐ[κ] προνοίας εὐχαρισ[τή]ριον ἔστησε.

local deities for they are Ζυσδρηνοί),⁸² though *kyrios* Asclepios has 125 attestations in the *IGBulg*. The onomastic attribute is a “courtesy title” that sets a status for divine powers. The term might have even looked much too formulaic for worshippers who were eager to single out their god or relate a special experience with him. In such cases, a further distinction needed to be added. In Pautalia the “Lord god *Zhelsourdos*” is praised as ancestral;⁸³ in Serdica an Asclepios (probably an interpretation of a local/tribal? god) is *kyrios* and *prostates*;⁸⁴ and in Apulum (Dacia) Lord Asclepios and Hygiea are singled out as *epekooi* (*IGRR* I, 541).

This brief, though representative, overview offers a clear picture of the meaning of *kyrios* when it qualifies deities in Thracia and its surroundings. As in the Near East, and without any clue for an influence though all testimonies date back to the Roman period, the designation is an expression of the status of the deity, as master in his sanctuary and thus patron of the community he or she protects. The fact that so many villages or peoples used the title is a convincing argument. If one searches for similarity with the Near Eastern *ba'alim*, it can be found in this relationship between a god in his “house”/temple and the people who lived nearby and expected a correlative protection.⁸⁵ In that respect, the daily experience they had of the god might look like a privileged one, even without specific experiences like dreams or oracles. Yet the epigraphic repertoire proves that the special link between a god and his place and population became a formula expressing a status, and thus spread in any group, including newly settled populations like colonists and travelling soldiers. In these Low Danubian provinces, the many reliefs of the riding god (the so-called Thracian rider / *Heros equitans*)⁸⁶ might have been a way for investigating also the visual expression of a deity entitled as *kyrios*. They are inconclusive,

82 *IGBulg* III, 1132, Philippopolis (Plovdiv): Κλ(αύδιος) Σπαρτοκος κυρίῳ Ἀσκληπιῷ καὶ Ὑγίᾳ καὶ Τελεσφόρῳ Ζυσδρηνοὶς ὑπὲρ τοῦ υἱοῦ Ρυμεταλκου τοῦ καὶ Ὀλυμπίου κατὰ χρησμὸν κληθέντος εὐχὴν. See also II, 544 (between Oescus and Utus).

83 *IGBulg* IV, 2217, 1–4: κυρίῳ θεῷ προγονικῷ Ζβελσουρδῳ.

84 *IGBulg* IV, 1934: τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ προστάτῃ Ἀσκληπιῷ Κουλκουσηνωι.

85 A parallel in Anatolian maledictions that entrust the integrity of the tomb to *Kyria Anaetis*, cf. Herrmann 1962, 59 no. 54. *Kyrioi theoi* on gold leaves found in tombs at Egnatia (*SEG* 57, 923–924), and on lead tablets in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Corinth (Stroud 2013, no. 127, 115–117).

86 Dimitrova 2002. The many attestations of gods honored as *kyrios/a* in Thracia led “thracologists” (gladly nationalistic) to a reconstruction of a Thracian pantheon dominated by an all-powerful solar deity in line with henotheistic reconstructions of religious evolutions during the imperial period; see for instance Tacheva-Hitova 1978.

however, for the designation does not have a parallel in the iconographic language: the *Heros equitans*' motive stands for any deity, *kyrios* or not.⁸⁷

4 *Kyrios* and *despotes* in Roman Egypt

The Egyptian dossier confirms what we observed in the case of Thracia. What is more important, it throws light on the distinction between *kyrios* and *despotes* with respect to religious experiences. As in the Lower Danube area, from the Nile Delta up to the Nubian desert⁸⁸ almost all the gods are *kyrios/a* in their sanctuaries, whatever their rank of importance in the Egyptian divine world. At Pathyris (mod. Dabbabīyeh) in the western desert, a *proskynema* is offered in 232 CE to a “triad” of deities – among which an epichoric form of Isis (“who takes care of Egypt”) – and to the “greatest gods” who share their temple. They are all *kyrioi* (τῶν κυρίων θεῶν Πρῶ τοῦ θεοῦ μεγίστου καὶ Ὁρεγέβθιος καὶ Ἰσιδος Ῥεσακέμεως καὶ οἱ (!) σὺν αὐτοῖ (!) θεῶν μεγίστων), and the stature of each is expressed either through their theonyms⁸⁹ or through their distinction as *megistos* (greatest).⁹⁰ The same precision occurs in Deir el-Bahari, where the Amenhotep's ownership (παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ Ἀμενώθῃ, “at the Lord Amenothēs”) “in this sanctuary” (ἐν τῷ τεμένει τοῦ[τω]) is combined with the greatness of the deities who share his cult place (τῶν συννάων θεῶν μεγίστων) (Bataille 1951, 77). Whatever the deities' local or more universal stature,⁹¹ the designation as

⁸⁷ I studied this dossier at the Chicago-Paris Workshop on Ancient Religions, “*Image and Writing in Ancient Religions: Dispositifs, interactions, concurrence*”, Paris 2016, September 19: “Image et écriture, interprétation et juxtaposition. Des reliefs adressés Κυρίῳ en Thrace romaine” (unpublished). The conclusion is not proper to *kyrios*, cf. Belayche 2008.

⁸⁸ A few examples only among many from North to South: the god Sobek/Soukos (the god crocodile, Lord of the lake) at Soknopaiou Nesos (Dimai), in March 24 BCE, Bernard 1975, 73, 3–4 (= *OGIS* 655 = *SB* 5, 8895): τῷ θεῷ καὶ κυρίῳ Σοκνοπαίῳ παρὰ τῷ <ν> ἐκ Νείλου πόλεως; at Theadelphia, 2nd century CE, Bernard 1981, II, 128, (= *SB* 3, 6940): τῷ κυρίῳ Σούχῳ. See also Bes à Abydos (Perdrizet and Lefebvre 1919, no. 504: τὸν κύριον Βησῶν) and Hermes at Pselkis (El Dakka), close to Kalabsha, in Nubia in 130/131 (*IGRR* I 5, 1367 / 5092 = *SB* 5, 7933): παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ Ἑρμῇ, also in 135 CE (*OGIS* 207 = *SB* 5, 7931), a probable interpretation of the Egyptian god Thot, for he is honored by a physician (ἰατρός) of the *XXa legio*.

⁸⁹ See Bricault and Pezin 1993, for their explication in Egyptian language.

⁹⁰ Bernard 1989, no. 10 = *IGRR* I 5, 1271 = *SB* 1, 239.

⁹¹ Besides the expected Sarapis (*SB* 1, 1154 in the Fayoum) and Isis (Wagner 1987, 56 no. 10 = *SEG* 30, 1723, at Kharga/Doush, a Western oasis, in 1st–2nd century), the god Pan in his Paneion at Wadi Hammamat honored by a Roman citizen in 14 BCE (*IGRR* I 5, 1235 = *SB* 5, 8579): παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ Πανί; and so on.

kyrios/a is but an expression of their status in the sanctuary, embedded within a social and polite rhetoric.

As already noted in Thracia, the addressee as *kyrios* is always attributed another quality when the devotee wishes to particularize the divine portrait or his/her experience. In the Memnonion of Abydos, the Osiris tomb housed an oracle, which was replaced by an oracle of Bes in the Roman period.⁹² The Memnonion housed a multitude of temples of gods and pharaohs (Seti I on the first rank); yet Bes is the only *kyrios* when he is honored with other deities.⁹³ Silvanus son of Hermodoros rendered his homage in the sanctuary after a consultation: παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ μου θεῷ μεγίστῳ Βησῶ ἀψεύστῳ χρησιμοδότῃ (Perdrizet and Lefebvre 1919, 505). He combines diverse devices for advertising the privileged relationship (τῷ κυρίῳ μου θεῷ, “to my god Lord”) he had with the god, and for expressing his exalted conception of him: Bes is *megistos* – another proof of the fact that *kyrios* does not cover the full register of glorification – and trustworthy (ἀψεύστῳ) when he gives oracles (χρησιμοδότῃ). Both the context and experience of the deity recall Heliopolitan evidence (above p. 98), and the limits of the term *kyrios* for emphasizing a special relationship with a deity. This reading is confirmed in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari (W of Thebes), where (Asclepios-) Amenothep (and Hygeia) had an incubation sanctuary.⁹⁴ A well-known *dipinto* provides another proof. A rather detailed narrative of Athenodoros, a soldier garrisoned in Koptos under Hadrian (?), reports his nightly epiphanic experience of Asklepios, Amenothep and Hygeia: they are *agathos* (Asklepios and Amenothep), *eudoxos* (Amenothep), *megistè* (Hygeia), but not *kyrios*.⁹⁵ In another 1st/2nd-century consultation, “Lord Amenothep” is praised as “the greatest god” (τοῦ κυρίου Ἀμενώθου θεοῦ μεγίστου, Renberg 2017, 471). Similarly, in a 1st/2nd-century *proskynema*, Asclepios is praised as *kyrios* in the first lines that state the kind of homage: τὸ προσκύνημα Εὐγράφι[ος] παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ θεῷ / Ἀσκληπιῷ καὶ Ἀμενώθῃ καὶ Ὑγιειᾷ (“Proscyneme. Eugraphios for the god Lord Asclepios, and Amenothep, and Hygeia”). Then when the text comes to the mention of the salutary experience, it opts for more accurate expressions of the divine absolute power and providential assistance: μνήσθητι ἡμῶν, δέσποτα, ἡμῶν / σωτῆρες (“Be us remembered, Masters, our saviors”) (Bataille 1951, 120). *Despotes* is the designation at this stage of the experience.

⁹² With incubation practices, Renberg 2017, 486–497, who does not examine addresses to the god.

⁹³ Perdrizet, Lefebvre 1919, 580, 4–5: παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ Βησῶ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις θεοῖς.

⁹⁴ Cf. Bataille 1951, no. 79: παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἀμενώθ<ου>. See Renberg 2017, 456–467, who does not address the question of the appellation of the god.

⁹⁵ Bataille 1951, no. 126; Renberg 2013.

The distinction between the uses of *kyrios* and *despotes* for narrating specific religious experiences is clearer at Kalabsha/Talmis in Nubia (50 km to the south of the first Cataract). The Nubian god Mandoulis had a well-known oracular sanctuary in Roman Talmis, built under Augustus at a traditional meeting point of the nomadic tribes, with a cult place already. The place attracted a lot of pilgrims who left memories of their visits, in Greek language in the majority. Worshippers belonged to the surrounding population and to military units stationed in the south of Egypt up to the 3rd century. As expected, Mandoulis is *kyrios* in his sanctuary,⁹⁶ and he is the only one so called when other deities are honored with him, like Bes at the Memnonion. When, under Vespasian, a Roman worshipper reports his homage made in the name of his whole family, he first reports the event in a formulaic way (τὸ προσκύνημα [...] παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ Μανδούλει καὶ τοῖς συννάοις θεοῖς, “Proskyneme [...] for the Lord Mandoulis and the deities who share his temple”, ll. 1 & 5–6). Then he details the motive of his visit in the month of Choiak (ἦλθον εἰς Τάλμιν Χοιάκ κ', ll. 6–7), singling out at that point the “great god Mandoulis” (προσεκύνησα θεὸν μέγαν Μανδοῦλο, ll. 8–9), before closing his text with an homage by his parents παρὰ τοῖς ἐνθάδε θεοῖς (ll. 9–10).⁹⁷ The variations in the report of the *proskynemata* are instructive. There is a distinction of tone between the common statement of the first lines (*kyrios*) – in most cases the only ones that were engraved by the pilgrims – and the more personal narrative that follows, where the god appears through his peculiar conception by his worshipper (*meḡas*, *meḡistos* in four other *proskynemata* written by Roman soldiers).⁹⁸ An additional argument is offered by the famous poetic hymn to Mandoulis Aion, a very complex narrative of an epiphanic, religious experience, which deserves the numerous available studies.⁹⁹ The purified, anonymous worshipper was granted a vision of a solar Mandoulis during a transforming experience (ἐνθεασάμενος ἀνέ[γνω], “I had a vision and I happened to know”, l. 9). He magnified the god as δέσποτα (l. 1), “the all-seeing master, king of all, all-powerful Eternity” (τὸν παντεπόπτην δεσπότην, ἀπάντων βασιλέα, Αἰῶνα παντοκράτορα, ll. 18–19).¹⁰⁰ Although *kyrios* is formulaic in the sanctuary, it has no place in the flood of exalted designations accompanying a mystical-like experience.

⁹⁶ E.g. *IGRR* I, 1339, 13–14 (= *SB* 1, 1020): παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ Μανδούλει, by soldiers of an Iturean unit. See also 1346, and following.

⁹⁷ Gauthier 1911–1914, 268, no. 1 = *SB* 1, 4586.

⁹⁸ *IGRR* I 5, 1334 (= *SB* 1, 1018) and 1355 (= *SB* 5, 8532); Gauthier 1911–1914, 254 no. 14 (= *SB* 1, 4570) and 276 no. 18 (= *SB* 1, 4596).

⁹⁹ Three references only: Nock 1934 [1972]; Frankfurter 1998, 108–109; Tallet 2012 (with exhaustive bibliography).

¹⁰⁰ Bernand 1969, 166 (= *SB* 4127).

5 Conclusion

Some conclusions can be asserted even if it has been impossible to take into account all testimonies within the length of a paper. Analysis of epigraphic evidence of deities called *kyrios/a* or *despotes* invites solidly founded reservations on the three features generally recognized when deities are praised as such (slave's submission, oriental flavor and henotheism). Any divine power is implicitly *kyrios* in his/her own sanctuary, as demonstrated in the three regions I focused on. This observation weakens an interpretation that would recognize a henotheistic trend when addresses with *kyrios* are found in dedications. Yet the title is not formulaic in all sanctuaries. For instance, Men Askaenos is not *kyrios* in his great sanctuary at Pisidian Antioch. In Pergamon Asclepios is rarely praised as *kyrios*,¹⁰¹ the more so never praised as such by his most beloved worshipper, Aelius Aristides, who is in a permanent, privileged relationship with him. Moreover, a deity called *kyrios/a* in a particular place is not systematically *the* great deity of that place. At Comana of Cappadocia, where the great temple of the goddess Ma (interpreted as Bellona by the Romans) was coextensive to the political power (up to its annexation), this Anatolian Mother, divine mistress of the temple-state, is not *kyria*. The divine powers praised with this title there are Apollo, Asclepios, Hermes and Men, in dedications offered by their priests, for whom their god is a *Kyrios* indeed.¹⁰² *Kyrios* is not a marker for pre-eminence in the representation of a pantheon. It is but a "courtesy title", a homage to a powerful figure,¹⁰³ a "*Monsignore*". Gods are powers, thus they are all *kyrioi* as Paul said, and the term has no hyperbolic meaning that could characterize the henotheistic evolution of the imperial period. If the designation can match Near Eastern monarchic forms, it is not systematic for Levantine deities during the Roman period.

Inscriptions rarely show situations of submission, besides the basic fact that, in any religious relationship, there is always a gap between two imagined ontologies, the human and the divine one. In Thracia, dedications addressing deities as *kyrios/a* usually display a traditional, votive system (εὐχὴν, εὐξάμενος). In Egypt, some attestations of deities honored as *kyrios/a* are read on *proskynemata*, a relevant corpus for "lived religion". And yet, in this Greco-Roman, Egyptian religious world, rooted in a long tradition of divine autocracy on the model of Pharaonic power, and where the gap between deities and humans was

¹⁰¹ IvP III, 106 (end of the 1st–beginning of the 2nd century), by a *frumentarius* of the *legio VIa Ferrata*.

¹⁰² *Anatolian Studies* 1972, 227–239, no. 2, 5, 6 and 10.

¹⁰³ Versnel 2010, 279, speaks of a "superior title" in "prayers for justice".

immeasurable for those who were not priests,¹⁰⁴ addressing a deity as *kynos/a* has a less personal impact than praising him/her as *despotes*. This could explain why *despotes* is more frequently used in poetic praises for deities, like in hymns honoring Isis.¹⁰⁵ In that respect and depending on a chronological inquiry, *despotes* might be a better candidate for advocating an evolution towards a hierarchical/henotheistic conception of the pantheon and its expression in specific religious experiences.

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Abbreviations (for periodicals see *L'Année philologique*):

ANRW:	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
CIS:	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i>
IDélos:	<i>Inscriptions de Délos</i>
IGBulg:	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae</i>
IGLS:	<i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de Syrie</i>
IGRR:	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas pertinentes</i>
IJO:	<i>Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis</i>
ILeukopetra:	Ph.M. Photios, M.B. Hatzopoulos, L. Gounaropoulou, P. Paschidis 2000. <i>Inscriptions du sanctuaire de la Mère des Dieux autochtone de Leukopetra (Macédoine)</i> . Meletemata 28. Athens.
IvP:	<i>Inchriften von Pergamon</i>
LIMC:	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>
MAMA:	<i>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua</i>
OGIS:	<i>Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae</i>
PAT:	D.R. Hillers, E. Cussini 1996. <i>Palmyrenian Aramaic Texts</i> . Baltimore-London.
RICIS:	<i>Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques</i>
SB:	<i>Sammelbuch Griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten</i>
SDB:	<i>Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible</i>

¹⁰⁴ Like in Near Eastern temples, the topography of sanctuaries, with progressive areas (courts, then rooms) vested with different sacred qualities, up to the place where the divine figure stands (the *naos* or *cella*), opened only to ritual agents, gives a pertinent spatial image of the (im)possible contact with the “otherness”.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. the Isidoros hymn to Isis at Medinet Mādi (Narmouthis), Bernand 1969 no. 175, 24–26 (1st century BCE), with translation: “Mais les Egyptiens t’appellent Θιοῦιν (l’unique), parce que tu es, toi seule / Toutes les déesses que les peuples nomment par d’autres noms. / Maîtresse (δεσπότη), je n’obtiendrai pas ta grande puissance (μεγάλην δύναμιν) en te chantant, / sauveur immortelle, aux nombreux noms, très grande Isis (σώτειρ’ ἀθανάτη, πολυώνυμε, Ἴσι μεγίστη)”.

SEG:	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
SNG:	<i>Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum</i>
TAM:	<i>Tituli Asiae Minoris</i>
Triade:	Y. Hajjar 1977. <i>La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek</i> , vol. 1–2. EPRO 59. Leiden.
TWNT:	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i>

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