Symposium Classicum Peregrinum

BLESSINGS AND CURSES IN ANTIQUITY

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Panel II: Curses and Blessings in the Roman World

“Comparison and reflection on two formulas for consecration:

Greek καθιερόω (τῷ θεῷ) and Latin sacer (deo)”

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the theme of this Symposium, I will try to illustrate how the act of consecrating a human to the divinity can be ambivalent depending on the context. To this aim, I have chosen two consecration formulas: one in Greek καθιερώσειν Σωτήρ Εκάτη, which is inscribed on a Phrygian funerary stele of the III A.D. and has a positive sense as a blessing. The other formula in Latin stands as a kind of curse in judicial context; it is addressed to a condemned person who is pronounced "sacer to Jupiter" (eius caput lovi sacer esset).

Thus, the connexion between the human and the divinity seems to be the only meeting point for two acts of consecration which contexts, religious-funerary and judicial-politic, are different and which goals are almost the opposite. It is curious, or at least remarkable, the fact that the gods’ names are expressed in dative case in both syntactical constructions.

Individually, these formulas are particular for a reason. The Greek blessing is the unique case among Phrygian epitaphs from II-III A.D. and dedicated to Hecate that uses the syntactical structure καθιερώσειν τῷ θεῷ. In other cases we find the expression τιμηθέντα ὑπὸ + genitive case for divinity’s name (Σωτήρ Εκάτης) καθιερώσασαι. For its part, the Latin judicial sentence is special because formulas for consecratio or devotio of a sacer homo are normally more appropriated to chthonian divinities (dis inferis) and not to heavenly Jupiter.

2. CONSECRATION FOR BLESSING IN A GREEK FORMULA FROM A FUNERARY STELE

Funerary stele (193-211 A.D.) from the Anatolian planes of high Tembris (actual Turkish Eskişehir) close to Kotiaion in Northwest Phrygia.

Iconological description. – White-marble stele (1’30m). The funerary monument consists in two sections with a triangular façade on the top. The façade has a representation of the eagle of the apotheosis. The upper section has triple goddess Hecate in the middle, the standing figures look to the front and they are holding short torches with their hands. They are dressed with a long chiton and a tight-fitting robe with long sleeves. Their faces framed by puffed hair and ringlets fall down the neck, they three were poloi on their heads and the central figure has also a moon crescent over it within which there is a bust of draped Helios with the sun behind him. The moon, the sun and the stars normally appear in imperial Anatolic iconography by influence of afterlife belief in eastern cultures (Persian, Hittite), pagan and Anatolic religions. God Men is on the right of the triple goddess, wearing a robe above the

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1 I am considering here the formula sacer esto as a special way of cursing the human, giving that his life is offered to the divinity and left to god’s will. He becomes a tabooed, banned man who is not part of the society anymore. Agamben, on the contrary, considers that sacer esto “non è una formula di maledizione religiosa che sancisce il cattere unheimlich, cioè insieme augusto e abietto, di qualcosa: essa è, invece, la formulazione politica originaria dell’impostazione del vincolo sovrano” (cf. Agamben, 2005: 94-85), that is, not a cursing formula but as an “original politic statement for the setting of the sovereign duty”.

2 It has a different meaning: the deceased couple is “honoured by goddess Hecate with death”,

3 Cf. MDAI(A) 10 (1885) 16,3 = SEg 29.1408, 40.1186, II = CMRDM 1.99; LIMC 327; De Hoz, 1998 n. 4; Rostovtzeff, 1981 tav. XLVI; Perdrizet, 1896: 64-66 tav. XVI. Online available in https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/270846

4 Cf. Perdrizet, 1896: 66 and note 2 for Hecate Soteira not only at Kotiaion in Phrygia but also in Laguna.

knees and a Phrygian hat, a moon crescent rises behind his shoulders. On the left of Hecate, a naked masculine figure holds a double axe in one hand and an indistinctive object on the other hand which is being bitten by a dog next to him. On the right side above the characters, the symbol of the husband: an open diptych (his Great Book), on the left side the symbols of the housewife: a dove (or a crow) on a wooden basket, a comb and a hand mirror with a little circle in the centre. The busts of the deceased couple, Gaios and Appsion, are represented on the lower section. They look to the front, left hands covered by the mantle while right hands are set on the heart-side, Apsion is wearing a spinning wheel in her hand. Below them there is a plough. They were a well-off family, he a landlord and her wife an exemplary housewife.

**Inscription.** – The Greek inscription is written on the stripe that divides both sections: Ἀπψιον τὸν ἑαυτῆς σύννυμον Γάειον κατεειρώσεν Σωτίρη Έκατη καὶ Απελλάς καὶ Γάειος ἑτείμησαν τοὺς ἑαυτῶν γονέων μνήμες ἡμῖν. | Τειμὶ ἡ ἀσ Μου ῥματε ανός.

**Translation.** – “Appsion, her wife, consecrated her husband Gaios to Hecate Soteira and Apellas and Gaios honoured their parents’ grace of memory. [By] Teimeas Murmatedanos”.

**Brief linguistic commentary.** – 1. Ἀπψιον: Ἀπψιον7; τὸ ἀπψιον “dear”, family hypocorism of endearment (Eust. 565.26; Poll. 3.74; Eust.I.c.)8; ἀψιον τὸ πρόσωπον (Hsch. α 8966)9; the group -ψι- has got a reduplicating sound /p/. 2. σύννυμον: σύμμυθον, phonetic confusion, -ν- before –β- should be –μ-. 3. κατεειρώσεν: καθιερώσεν, -τ- for –θ-; double –ε- by mistake. 4. γονέως: γονεῖς, iotacism phenomenon, -ς instead of –ες (ac. pl.). 5. μνήμες: μνήμης, iotacism phenomenon, -ς instead of –ης (gen. fem. sing.).

We only find a few epigraphic parallels for the structure κατεειρώσεν τῷ θεῷ of our inscription. For example, an epigram found in Smyrna but original from Phrygia: τέκνον ἀπέερωσαν Απολλώνι. And another epigram from Lydian city of Kula: Δία Κτήσιον Τατα Παπαν... κατεειρώσαν where De Hoz says that the theonyms in accusative case are used here for dative10.

**Function.** – The verb καθιερώσω serves to the wife put the soul of her husband under Hecate’s protection. At the same time their children blessing their parents’ souls11. This shows the special connection between the mortal and the divinity, especially from Hellenistic period on and in Imperial literature. A similar conception in Christian belief, already settled in Phrygia between II-III A.D., reveals its coexistence with paganism at that time.

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7 It is a female name in a Lydian inscription from Philadelphea, 26-22 BC [TAM V (3) 1703]: “Φίλα ἡ καὶ Ἀπψιον, daughter of Μηνόδωτος”; as well as in a Lydian inscription from Sardis, I/II AD ([*Sardis* 53-54 II]: “Ἀπψιον Σκαυνδα, daughter of Μένανδρος Λεςχις, There is also the male name Ἀπψιον of a Lydian inscription from Maionia, 249-251 AD (*BMC Lydia* 130 no. 26; 136 nos. 53-57; *SNG Glasgow* 1990F coins): “Αὐρ. Ἀπψιον ὁ καὶ ΑΒήναιος, son of Ἀπψιον, father of Αὐρ. Ἀπψιον”. See Ricl, 2010: 535, 543 and 547, 533, respectively.
9 *DGE* 1991: 661.
**Origin. Why the deceased was consecrated to Hecate?** – Hecate’s function as *Saviour* (Σώτειρα) in death realm recalls her association with the souls of the unhappy dead. She became the “prototype of all vengeful ghosts” and leader of spirits12. This is a fundamental reason why Hecate became the divine Saviour which represents the Cosmic Soul in the *Chaldean Oracles*13. The guardian function of the goddess in the cosmic realm, as intermediary protector and guide of the souls, is closely connected with her original role as φύλαξ and προπύλεια14 in the doorways, the liminal and transitional areas15.

During Hellenistic and Roman period Hecate was venerated as *Soteira*, *Megiste* (“greatest”, μεγίστη) and *Epiphanistate* (“[most] manifest goddess”, ἐπιφανής < ἐπιφανειατή) in her temple of Lagina (Caria, s. I a.C.). Carian epigraphs from Panamara mention Hecate together with Zeus *Panamaros*, Hera and Tyche (*ISt* 217)16, and also with Zeus *Hypsisstos-Kapetolios* and Tyche (*ISt* 330)17. Under the epithet *Soteira* Hecate is syncretised with Artemis in Epidaurus (*IG IV*.12, 509), Kotiaion (*CIG* n. 3827a) and Delos18 (*ID* nº 2448).

**Greek formulas to protect the graves –**

- The rest of Phrygian epitaphs from Tembris and Kotiaion19 dedicated to Hecate presents a different syntactical structure:

  - Nominative case (= person who consecrates) + Accusative case (person who is consecrated to the divinity) + τιμηθέντα/ς ὑπὸ Σωτείρης Ἐκάτης (after [the deceased] has being honoured by the goddess with death) + κατειέρωσαν/ἀπειέρωσαν (they consecrated),

  Syntax changes and the meaning is slightly different in comparison with our formula:

    - Nominative case (Ἀπίσιον = she who consecrates) + Accusative case (τὸν ἐαὐτῆς σύνβιον Γάειον = person who is consecrated) κατειέρωσεν Σωτείρης Ἐκάτη + καὶ Nominative case (Ἀπελλάδας καὶ Γάειος, that is, their children = who dedicates) + ετείμησαν + Accusative case (τοὺς ἐαυτῶν γονίς = they who are dedicated).

- Formulas of consecration with the name of divinity in accusative case (warning against grave robbers):

  - Epitaph *IGR IV*, nº 621(Temenotiri-Flaviopoli, 269-270 a.C.):

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15 They dedicated a small sanctuary to Hecate *Propyleia* at the entrance of the sacred area of Demeter *Malophoros* in Selinunte, Sicily (VII-VI B.C.); also Zeus *Meilichios* has a reserved place in this area.
18 Cf. Serafini, 2015: 385 ss.
This Phrygian funerary stele is a warning against whoever dares to damage the hero’s resting place: he would suffer the rage of Ouranian Hecate.

- Bilingual Attic epitaph from Eleusis for cursing (“tituli sepulcrum cum diris et poenarum sanctionibus”, n. 13213)21:

\[ \text{ἐάν τις [tὸν τιὸν σαλεύῃ ἔχει} \text{ τοὺς καταχθονίους θεῶν κεχωλυμένους (=} \text{habebit deos Manes iratos)} \]

- Cilician epitaph from Sepphoris (ancient Diocesare, Galilee region, Israel)22:

\[ \text{ἔξει πάντα} \text{ tà θεία κεχωλυμένα καὶ τὰς στυγέρας Ἑρευνώς καὶ ἰδίου τέκνου ἡπατός γεύσεται.} \]

- Name of divinity in dative case:
  - Attic rhetoric epitaph for cursing (“tituli sepulcrum cum diris et poenarum sanctionibus”, n. 13209-13210)

Αντωνία ἢ καὶ Σωκρατίκη τῷ γλυκύτατῷ μου ἄνδρι Ἀντίχω τῷ καὶ Συνειώ ἐποίησα τὸ ἡρώων τοῦτο, τέλος καμάτων. Παραδίδομι (νº 13210) τοῖς καταχθονίοις θεοίς τοῦτο τὸ ἡρώων φυλάσσειν, Πλούτωνι, καὶ Δήμητρι καὶ Περσεφόνη καὶ Ἐρυννύσιν καὶ πάσιν τοῖς καταχθονίοις θεοῖς.

- Greek ἠτώ (=ἔστω) equivalent to Latin sacer esto, name of divinity in dative case:
  - Dodurga, in the plain of Karayükpazar:

[...] \( \text{εἳ} \) \( \text{δὲ τις} \) \( \text{κακουργῇ, ἢτω ἐνοκος Ἡλίων Σελήνη}\)23. From Imperial time on, the form ἠτώ became a widespread vulgarism for ἔστω.

### 3. Cursing Consecration in a Latin Formula from Livy (III, 55, 7): eius caput lovi sacer esset

**Historical background context of the expression sacer esto: the Lapis Niger** – pronouncing a man sacer24 is the earliest Roman criminal law. The first register of the formula sacer esto was found in the Cippus of the Forum called Lapis Niger in the form sakros esed25. The formula inscribed on the stone serves as a curse: the criminal who dare to damage the stone would be consecrated to infernal deities. Scholars have dated this inscription in the VI sec. B.C.26 Maybe it is the lapis niger in Comitio referred by Festus (II A.D.) as a funerary place where Romulus

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24 Cf. Bennett, 1930: 5.
26 The characters of the Lapis Niger are similar to those of Greek Chalcidian from which the Latin alphabet comes from.
was buried or where he was killed. Festus also refers a cursing formula in the name of Jupiter: *si quisquam aliuta faxit, ipsos lovi sacer esto* 27 when he quotes the *leges sacrae* of the XII Tables. The author gave indeed the first definition of *sacer homo*: *is est quem populous iudicavit ob maleficium; neque fas est eum immolari, sed qui occidit parricidii non damnatur* 28.

**Cursing consecration formula in Livy** (I A.D.) 29 – The passage III, 55, 7 from Livy’s *Ab urbe condita* tells the administrative measures took by Lucius Valerius and Marcus Horatius during their consulship (449 B.C.), favourable both to people and to patricians. Among those measures, it was prescribed that whoever violates the *sacrosanctus* character of the tribunes of the plebs would be judged by the *aediles* or the *decemviral* judges. They would forfeit the head of the guilty to Jupiter and all his possessions should be offer to the temple of Ceres 30, Liber and Libera.

The expression *eius caput lovi sacrum esset* means that he can be killed with impunity but never can be “sacrificed” to a divinity as a votive offering 31: he was removed and isolated from the society in a similar way of the original tabooed man 32. Such a curse consecration was normally addressed to infernal deities (χθονιοις θεοις) or *Diebus Manes* and it surprise that the formula in Festus and Livy is addressed to Jupiter instead.

The mention of the “head” (*caput*) in the formula recalls the beheading of the sacrificial animal with an axe, and it was probably the first form of human execution in Rome (from 509 B.C. during Valerian-Horatian consulship (449 B.C.) until Verrius Flaccus, 55 B.C.-20 A.D. 33).

Whatever human or object declared *sacer* became property of the divinity (*quidquid quod deorum habetur*) 34. As referred by Agamben, *sacer* is a limit-concept in the Roman social organization. It lies within the *ius divinum* and the *ius humanum*, probably referring to an original political structure where there was not a clear difference between the sacred and the profane, the religious and political fields.

The adjective *sacer* indicates that something is a “property” of the god (possessor’s name in dative 35), so in the formula *eius caput lovi sacrum esset* Jupiter becomes the “owner” of the consecrated human. The human proclaimed *sacer* cannot be judge by the human law, on the

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27 Cf. Festus, 5 L.
28 Cf. Festus, *sacer mons*, 424 L.
30...qui tribunis plebis, aedilibus, iudicibus decemviris no cuisset, *eius caput lovi sacrum esset*, familia ad eadem Cereris Liberi Liberisaeque venumiret, Livy, III, 55, 7. Also in Plu., *Rom. 22, 3.*
33 According to Bennett, the methods of judgement and execution of an individual criminal changed along the Roman history. The first period (before 509 B.C.) was characterised by the use of the *ax*, but in the second period (from 509 B.C. until V. Flaccus’ time) the *ax* was removed from the *fasces* and the criminal was granted of appealing to the people, cf. Bennett, 1930: 8-9. Roman religion depends on collective, represented on the figure of the State. The ritual to declare something or somebody *sacer* was performed by a specific magistrate in the name of the State (the State *dedicat*), and the *pontifex* pronounced the *solemnia verba* (the priest *consecrat*) to accomplish the ritual passage, cf. Morani, 1981: 33, 39.
35 The name of the divine possessor is only specified when required by the circumstances.
ions. I have consecrated myself to serve the deities and pray to the gods and the holy powers for Greeks to get health and victory. Prayers for Greeks are prescribed, and the seer Eufrantides prescribes to Themistocles to sacrifice three young men to Baco Omesta with prayers for Greeks to get health and victory.

Further contexts for a sacer offering to Iovi — this “negative” consecration of the human in the name of Jupiter is surprising. Normally the consecrations to the heavenly god have a “positive” sense when the subjects are a mountain/hill, a plant (like trees quercus, pinus...) or food. The priesthood institution (sacerdotium) or the prophana, the days of wine harvest (vinaliorum dies), the carmina, etc.

Sometimes the general of an army immolated himself against the enemy as a sacred offer to Jupiter that will propitiate the victory to his legion. Only human sacrifices consecrated to Jupiter Estygium and the infernal deities, as Didò’s suicide, see Jupiter as the divine receptor of a “negative” or unhappy action, as well as in the judicial sentence. Nevertheless, there is a very important difference: the immolation (especially like the general of a legion or the priests) is a voluntary offering as a sacred victim to the god, quite the opposite is the case of the condemned to death in a trial. The former has been cursed and now is a banned man, he can never be considered as a sacrificial victim since he can be killed with impunity. Also in this context human sacrifices accomplished to gain the god’s favour.

4. FINAL REMARKS AND QUESTION POINTS

36 In the context of sacra the word fas expresses the regulation of the human-god relationship and it is the equivalent of the ius in the context of interpersonal human rapport. Cf. Morani, 1981: 35.


38 Cf. Ovidius, Pontonius Mela, De chorographia LLA 330, Lib. 3, par. 66, pag. 70, lin. 27; Silius Italicus, Punica (LLA 368) lib. 10 versus 163, p. 253; Civică Ilignea (Plin. Major, NH (LLA 399), lib. 16, par. 11, vol. 3, p. 4, lin. 13); D. Magnus Ausonius, Eclogarum liber (CPL 1392 + (M), LLA 554.2, ecloga 19, 3, p. 110), Caius Iulius Solinus, Collectanea rerum memorabilium (LLA 603) cap. 52, par. 16, p. 186, lin. 7; etc.

39 Cf. Frechulfus Lexouensis, Historiarum libri XII, pars. 1, lib. 1, cap. 28, p. 60, lin. 49.

40 Cf. Gisbertus Trudonensis, Gesta abbatum Trudonsium (continuatio prim : lib. VIII et X-XIII), lib. 12, par. 6., lin. 59, p. 73.


42 Cf. Martianus Capella, De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii (LLA 710), lib. 9, par. 907, p. 345, lin. 22; Paulinus Nolanus (pseud), Carmen 32 (CPL 0206) versus 62, page 332.

43 Although the Latin verb in this case is devoveo, cf. Livy, VIII, 9, 6-8: Sicut verbis nuncupavi ita pro re publica (populi Romani) Quiiritium legiones auxiliaque hostium mecum Deis Manibus Tellurique devoveo. A parallel in Greek, the priests an Fabius Maximus, cf. Plu., Cam. XXI, 4: ἐπευξάμενοι τοις θεοῖς, ὡς ἐαυτοὺς ὑπὲρ τῆς παρθένου τοῦ δαιμονὶ καθερεύοντες… “[the priests, the old distinguished men, headed by Fabius as Pontifex Maximus] prayed to the gods and consecrated themselves as victims for the salvation of the city.”


46 Cf. Plu., Them. XIII, 3: τούτων ἵμων Ἐφύραντιδης ὁ μάντης […] τῆς Θεομυστίκης δεσιωσάμενος ἐκέλευεν τῶν νεανίσκων κατάρξασθαι καὶ καθερεύοσα πάντας ὑμητή Διόνυσο προσευξάμενον… the seer Eufrantides prescribes to Themistocles to sacrifice three young men to Baco Omesta with prayers for Greeks to get health and victory.
4.1. The formula καθιερόω τῷ θεῷ of our Phrygian epitaph (κατεειρωσεν Σωτίρη ἕκατη) is an exception among the other epitaphs from Timbris in which Hecate is mentioned. The rest of the cases presents the structure τιμηθέντα ὑπὸ (Σωτίρης) ἕκατης καθιερόων, which also expresses a different meaning “[the deceased] has been honoured by Hecate with death”. It is also particular because there are very few examples of the formula καθιερόω followed by the name of divinity in dative in a funerary context (a Phrygian epitaph, *ibid.* p. 3). At first, the construction καθιερόω τῷ θεῷ seems common when consecrating non-human subjects⁴⁷, and it later became usual even for the Christian formula to consecrate the human soul to God⁴⁸.

The divinity’s name in dative for both Greek and Latin formulas probably expresses the fact that the god becomes owner of the human. It might not be further relevant giving that the contexts and goals are so different in the funerary and judicial examples.

→ We only can turn back to the origin of the Latin formula *sacer esto* in the *Cippus* of the Forum if it serves as a threat against the violator of Romulus’ gravestone. In the same way, sometimes the epigraphs of the funerary steles have a hint of menace and aim to protect the resting place of the deceased against grave robbers.

→ However it be, epitaphs from Tembris and Maionia, as De Hoz had once remarked⁴⁹, are special because they show a local use of the verb καθιερόω to dedicate the soul of the deceased to the divinity, putting the grave under its protection.

4.2. *Chthonian deities* – The consecration formula that we have seen are addressed to chthonian divinities, Hecate and Jupiter⁵⁰. For Hecate it is not surprising considering the influence of the goddess in death and funerary realm, especially as guide of the souls.

It is not that “usual” declaring the human life sacer to Jupiter, a heavenly (“positive”) god instead of the *Diis Manibus*, the infernal deities of the *devotio*.

→ why cursing in the name of Jupiter?

In the judicial context that we have seen, the sentence also mentions chthonian Ceres, since the wife and personal assets of the condemned were donated to the temple of the goddess.

4.3. In brief, it was my aim here to show two different contexts for human consecration.

Blessing in funerary context has a positive sense when the human soul of the deceased is

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⁴⁷ Places like villages, houses, *temenoi* or sanctuaires (*cf.* D.L., II, 52, 8; Plu., *Rom.* XVIII, 1, 3; Plu., *Num.* XIII, 2, 7, *Tim.* XXXVI, 7, 1; Suda, s.v. ι 203, 3, ι 2498, 15 and 19, etc.), calendar dates (*cf.* Plu., *Cam.* VII, 7, 1); Vestals’ priesthood (*cf.* Plu., *Num.* IX, 5, 3); statues, altars and the *naos* of a temple (*cf.* Pl., *Lg.* 738C Steph., etc.).

⁴⁸ *Cf.* Cyrillus, *Pr.Ps.* 69, p. 1009, 33, *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate* 68, p. 713, 825, 957, etc.; Suda, s.v. σ 777, 5, etc.


consecrated to the divinity; and cursing in this judicial context, which means to declare a human sacer to the god, banning him from the community.

It serves to demonstrate that the connexion between human and gods has an ambiguous and ambivalent value depending on the context. In any case, it is always the divinity, expressed in dative case in the formulas of consecration, to become the possessor of the human life or soul.

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