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One God Supreme: A Case Study of Religious Tolerance and Survival

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The Find

A picture of a sundial with a Greek inscription was published in the 33rd (2000) issue of *Qadmoniot*, as an illustration to the essay of Y. Magen, 'Mount Gerizim—A Temple City'.[1] Surprisingly, however, the sundial's inscription, neither transcribed nor translated, failed to provoke commentary. And yet the inscription is remarkable in many ways: one of only five Greek inscriptions from the Hellenistic era ever found on Mount Gerizim, it was discovered outside any architectural context. The inscription addresses θεὸς ὕψιστος, the God Most High, which would have provided the archaeologists of Gerizim with a doubly difficult quest: to identify the 'nationality' of the so-called god, and to find a temple in which this sundial would have stood—Samaritan, Seleucid or Roman. Inscriptions bearing the εἷς θεός invocation present a similar problem. Therefore, in the following brief review of the recent scholarship, I shall attempt to combine the consideration of both titles.[2]

1. Y. Magen, 'Mount Gerezim—A Temple City: Summary of Eighteen Years of Excavations', *Qadmoniot* 33 (2000), pp. 74-118.

2. Abbreviations used in this article of some epigraphical and papyrological sources:

CIG = *Corpus inscriptionum graecarum* (4 vols.; Berlin: Deutsch Academie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, 1828–77).

CIJ = J.-B. Frey (ed.), *Corpus inscriptionum judaicarum: Recueil des inscriptions juives qui vont du IIIe siècle avant Jésus-Christ au VIIe siècle de notre ère* (Sussidi allo studio delle antichità cristiane, 1, 3; Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristians, 1936–).

The Problem of Identification: θεὸς ὕψιστος *and* εἷς θεός

The scholarly consensus would suggest Judeo-Christian origins for both θεὸς ὕψιστος and εἷς θεός. Scholars tend to label artifacts with these titles as Jewish or Christian, even when they lack further

CPJ = V.A. Tcherikover in collaboration with A. Fuks (eds.), *Corpus papyrorum judaicarum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957–64).

Faras IV = J. Kubińska (ed.), *Faras, IV: Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes* (Warsaw: Éditions scientifiques de Plogne, 1974).

IG II^2 = J. Kirchner (ed.), *Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno posteriores, (Inscriptiones Graecae, consilio et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Borussicae editae. Editio minor, 2-3)* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 2nd edn, 1913–40).

IG XIV = G. Kaibel (ed.), *Inscriptiones Graecae.* XIV. *Inscriptiones Graecae Siciliae et Italiae, additis Graecis Galliae, Hispaniae, Britanniae, Germaniae inscriptionibus* (Berlin: G. Reimerum, 1890).

IGChrEg = G. Lefebvre (ed.), *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Égypte* (Mémoires publiés par les members, 101; Paris: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1907).

IJO = W. Ameling *et al.* (eds.), *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*. I. *Eastern Europe*. II. *Asia Minor*. III. *Syria and Cyprus* (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum, 99.1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

JIG = W. Horbury and D. Noy (eds.), *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

JIWE = D. Noy (ed.), *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993–).

PG = *Patrologiae Graecae* (http://phoenix.reltech.org/Ebind/docs/Migne/Migne.html).

PL = J.-P. Migne *et al.* (eds.), *Patrologiae cursus completes: Series Graeca* (Paris: Migne, 1857–89).

PLRE = A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale and J. Morris (eds.), *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971–92).

PED = Packhum Epigraphical Database (http://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions/search_main.html).

Pummer = R. Pummer (ed.), *Early Christian Authors on Samaritans and Samaritanism: Texts, Translations and Commentary* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism = Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum, 92; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

TAM V = P. Herrmann (ed.), *Tituli Asiae Minoris* V. *Tituli Lydiae, linguis Graeca et Latina conscripti* (2 vols.; Vienna: Prostat in Aedibus Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1981, 1989).

TLG = *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (http://www.tlg.uci.edu/).

evidence of their origins. The myth of Judeo-Christian roots for εἷς θεός was first unmasked by Di Segni.[3] Having collected 62 inscriptions with this formula from Palestine, she concludes that only seventeen of them may be securely defined as Christian, and between two and four of them as Jewish, while the largest group consists of pagan specimens connected to the cult of Helios-Serapis. Moreover, many Christian examples also bear traces of pagan imagery. Within the realm of obviously pagan origins of εἷς θεός there is a significant number—at least nine—of Samaritan inscriptions. Most pagan examples derive from the same district, thus forging a clear connection between the pagan and the Samaritan assemblages. The question that Di Segni leaves open, however, is 'how and in which direction it worked', or—and I would argue that the emphasis should be shifted—who, and for what purpose, borrowed the cult language of their neighbors. According to Di Segni, perhaps a temple to Zeus Hypsistos erected on Mount Gerizim (though she provides no evidence of this) 'may embody a development that proceeded from the center to the outskirts of Samaria', and, as I understand her argument, would then serve as evidence of the pagan influence on the Samaritan community. This argument invites a discussion concerning the cult of Zeus/Theos Hypsistos among Samaritans, Jews and Gentiles.

The climax of this discussion came in a comprehensive study by Mitchell.[4] For him, the keystone of the debate is 'why worshippers chose to address their god (θεὸς ὕψιστος) by a name that fit both pagan and Jewish patterns of belief'. In contrast to Di Segni, who presumes the existence of different religious movements using the identical term for their object of worship, Mitchell sees a single religious movement uniting people of different ethnicities and cultures but of similar monotheistic beliefs.

3. L. Di Segni, 'ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ in Palestinian Inscriptions', *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994), pp. 94-115. She points to the study by E. Peterson, ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), who collected a large number of examples with εἷς θεός and concluded that it was a typically Christian formula. His conclusions have then become a self-fulfilling prophecy, that is, every inscription containing this formula and without a clear indication of its pagan provenance was classified as Christian.

4. S. Mitchell, 'The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews and Christians', in P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 81-148.

Mitchell's evidence, however, is not unequivocal. Indeed, he refers to and cites authors who were themselves uncertain about the ethnicity and belief of those whom they called 'Ὑψιστάριοι, Messalians or Θεοσέβεις. For Epiphanius, 'they are simply pagans who admit the existence of gods but worship none of them; they adore one god only whom they call Almighty'.[5] Like Jews, however, they construct *proseuchai*, one of which is located near Shechem. According to Gregory of Nazianzus[6] and Gregory of Nyssa,[7] their belief was influenced by the 'Hellenic error' on the one hand, as well as 'adherence to the Jewish law' on the other; they worshipped idols of fire, but also observed the Sabbath and adhered to the dietary laws of *kashrut*. Further complicating matters, Epiphanius distinguishes between an earlier group consisting of μόνον Ἕλληνες and a later sect that was an offshoot of Christianity at the time of Constantine. This latter group, in turn, must be distinguished from yet another Christian group, the sect of Θεοσέβεις, who also worshipped Hypsistos, but stemmed from both the apostolic movement and Judaism. It must also be noted that apart from these movements, which combined pagan, Jewish and Christian features, there continued to exist pagan worshippers of Zeus/Theos Hypsistos who bore no obvious influence of Judaism or Christianity.[8]

This picture certainly represents more than one movement. However, having presented what I have shown in the paragraph above, Mitchell offers an answer to the question posed by Di Segni, namely, in what direction the influence went. Presupposing that the basic message and use of θεὸς ὕψιστος was inherent to Judaism, one is bound to see the importing of its terminology into pagan use, and to conclude that it was the pagan community that absorbed Jewish influence. Although Mitchell does suggest that 'Jews of the Diaspora could not prevent their own beliefs and sense of cultural and religious identity being influenced by Gentile neighbors',[9] he fails to demonstrate the results of this influence; instead, Mitchell's hypothesis serves only to complete his picture of universal Jewish–pagan syncretism.

Those who argue against this 'unified' theory claim that people speaking the same language but belonging to different religions must

5. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 80.1-2, cited in Mitchell, 'Cult', p. 93.
6. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. Bas.* 18.5 (*PG* 35.990).
7. Gregory of Nyssa, *Refut. conf. eun.* 38 (*PG* 45.482).
8. Mitchell, 'Cult'.
9. Mitchell, 'Cult', 127.

inevitably, from time to time, use identical epithets for their different, yet 'most high and only' gods. Consequently, both Zeus and the Jewish god may have been called θεὸς ὕψιστος or παντοκράτωρ, but this shared terminology did not make pagans of Jews and proselytes of pagans.[10] In this case, scholars simply ignore the questions of Di Segni and Mitchell, due to the apparent necessity of using a common language. In other words, this argument presupposes that Greek lacked an adequate vocabulary, and thus did not allow for religious groups to give their respective gods different epithets; or, alternatively, the Greek language was adequate, but the problem of nameless gods, as viewed by scholars, has been grossly exaggerated. In other words, a Greek dedicating his work to the Olympian Zeus would not be bothered by the fact that his fellow citizens might understand it as dedicated to a Jewish or Christian god.

In my opinion, the questions of Di Segni and Mitchell were justly articulated, and the observations of Di Segni, who seems to connect the Samaritan dedications to εἶς θεός with the worship of Zeus Hypsistos on Mount Gerizim, reflect the situation most accurately: just as εἶς θεός in Palestine could rarely have Jewish provenance,[11] neither did the θεὸς ὕψιστος invocation.

At this point, an important statement should be made. This paper is not trying to define some 'normative' religion—a 'monotheist' could believe in angels and demons, while a 'pagan' could, in fact, worship one deity as the source of the universe. Instead, this paper is about the language. Whereas religious *norms* were at best vague, the *borders* between different religious groups were certainly present. Therefore, one may ask: why would members of one group *like* to cross these borders? Can inscriptions and literary sources provide evidence of this

10. M. Stein, 'Die Verehrung des Theos Hypsistos: Ein allumfassender pagan–juedischen Synkretismus', *Epigraphica Anatolica* 33 (2001), pp. 119-26.

11. The evidence for Jewish and Christian usage is questionable and, in any case, scarce. Jews clearly preferred θεὸς βοηθός, while Christian examples are confined almost exclusively to Byzantine Egypt and a few inscriptions from contemporary Syria and Palestine. From outside Palestine, only three inscriptions were identified as Jewish, and included in *IJO*: *Syr*75 (Aleppo, 272–73 CE), containing no clear indication of any provenance; a Samaritan dedication *Mac*17 (Thessaloniki, fourth to sixth centuries CE); and a Jewish epitaph from Pannonia, *Pan*2 (fourth century CE), showing, besides the εἶς θεός formula and a menorah, 'the only assured Jewish "portrait" group in a tombstone'. E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (13 vols.; New York: Pantheon, 1953–68), II, p. 60.

crossing? The following section will examine these questions. I shall try to present the evidence as it is, letting inscriptions speak for themselves, not presuming their provenance and the religious 'norms' of their authors.

θεὸς ὕψιστος *in Jewish Inscriptions and the Septuagint*

Perhaps the strongest counterargument to the above conclusion concerning the provenance of θεὸς ὕψιστος and εἷς θεός relates to occurrences of θεὸς ὕψιστος in the Septuagint. Indeed, there are 139 occurrences of ὕψιστος, but only seventeen are morphological variants of the combination θεὸς ὕψιστος; of those, eight appear in the apocrypha originally written in Greek (*3 Macc*. 7.9; 1 Esd. 8.1; 6.30; 8.21; 9.46; Sir. 24.23; 41.8; 7.9) and three come from the Theodotian version of Daniel (4.2; 5.21; 3.93), which is a second-century Christian adaptation of the original.

The remaining six instances are Greek translations from only three chapters in the Hebrew Bible:

Ps. 56.3 (MT/ET 57.3):
κεκράξομαι πρὸς τὸν θεὸν τὸν ὕψιστον
(אקרא לאלהים עליון);

Ps. 77.56 (MT/ET 78.56):
παρεπίκραναν τὸν θεὸν τὸν ὕψιστον
(וימרו את־אלהים עלון);

Ps. 77.35 (MT/ET 78.35):
ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὕψιστος λυτρωτὴς αὐτῶν ἐστιν
(ואל עליון גאלם; preceded by ויזכרו כי־אלהים צורם);

Gen. 14.18-20:
Mechizedek king of Salem (מלכי־צדק מלך שלם)
was ἱερεὺς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου (כהן לאל עליון)
he said, εὐλογημένος ’Αβραμ τῷ θεῷ τῷ ὑψίστῳ and εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὕψιστος (both אל עליון).

These cases remain quite ambiguous: Perhaps the translators of the Septuagint understood אל עליון (*'ēl 'elyôn*) of Genesis as the God

foreign to Israel, the God of Salem's (Shechem's) king Melchizedek.[12] As for Psalms 56 and 77, אלהים עלון (*'ēlōhim 'elyôn*; Ps. 56.3; 77.35) is obviously not the same as אל עליון of Melchizedek. Regarding the prevalent use of ὁ ὕψιστος alone, which in 122 of the 139 instances mentioned above does refer to the God of Israel,[13] the difference between this epithet and an invocation of θεὸς ὕψιστος is clear and important: whereas in a sentence with θεὸς ὕψιστος, the word ὕψιστος is an attributive adjective pointing to a feature of the substantive θεός, ὁ ὕψιστος itself functions as substantive with a fixed quality—the name, the title, the synonym of θεός in this case.

In fact, the inscriptions containing θεὸς ὕψιστος provide as little evidence for the Jewish adaptation of this invocation as the Septuagint. To date, fifteen dedications to θεὸς ὕψιστος have been identified as Jewish, almost all identifications demonstrating the same kind of assumption mentioned in the previous section: the building where an invocation to θεὸς ὕψιστος originated could first be identified as a synagogue due to that very invocation, and then the invocation to θεὸς ὕψιστος could be considered Jewish, due to the fact of being found in a synagogue. The building GD 80 at Delos may exemplify this sort of confusion. In the excavations of 1912–13, Andre Plassart identified the building GD 80 as a synagogue dating from the second century BCE mostly on the basis of dedications to θεὸς ὕψιστος.[14] Some 50 years later, Philippe Bruneau dedicated a much more detailed study to the building, substantially reconsidering its history and function.[15]

12. The Septuagint reads in Jer. 48.5 (= MT Jer. 41.5) 'Salem' for 'Shiloh', correcting משלו to משלם, and referring to Shalem, a city near Shechem (according to LXX Gen. 33.18).

13. See the same use by Philo: ὅτε διεμέριζεν ὁ ὕψιστος (*Post.* 89.7; *Plant.* 59.3; *Congr.* 58.2).

14. A. Plassart, 'La synagogue juive de Délos', *RB* 11 (1914), pp. 523-34 (526-30).

15. P. Bruneau, 'Contributions à l'histoire urbaine de Délos à l'époque hellénistique et à l'époque impériale', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 92 (1968), pp. 633-709; *idem*, *Recherches sur les cultes de Délos à l'époque hellénistique et à l'époque impériale* (Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 217; Paris: Boccard, 1970); *idem*, 'Rues à colonnes', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 102 (1978), pp. 115-24; *idem*, 'Les Israélites de Délos et la juiverie délienne', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 106 (1982), pp. 465-504; *idem*,'Juifs et Samaritains à Délos', in M. Mentre (ed.), *L'Art juif au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Berg, 1988), pp. 91-93.

According to him, the structure indeed served as a Jewish assembly house but could have been erected only after 88 BCE. After Bruneau, L. Michael White,[16] Donald D. Binder[17] and Monika Trümper[18] offered their theories concerning the building GD 80. Even though scholars seem to agree that the building was first constructed to function as a private house and later became a synagogue, its transformation into a synagogue and the date of this transformation is still debated.[19] In fact, since synagogues in the Diaspora are not expected to display any particular sort of architecture, their identification will always remain a subject of controversy, depending on what kind of evidence—sculpture, furniture, ceramic or inscriptions—is given priority in the eyes of the researcher. That is to say that the building GD 80 may offer, in fact, as little support for the Jewish identification of Theos Hypsistos inscriptions as those inscriptions for the identification of GD 80 as a synagogue. This fact obliges us to consider invocations to θεὸς ὕψιστος independently of their architectural context, in cases where it is not obvious. The problem is aggravated by the fact that Jewish and pagan dedicators in the Hellenistic milieu usually bore the same names and used practically the same vocabulary, leaving no distinct evidence for their ethnicity and religion.

Viewed in this perspective, the evidence provided by most of the so-called 'Jewish' invocations to θεὸς ὕψιστος looks very ambiguous. Four inscriptions from the building GD 80 at Delos, be it a synagogue or not, turn out to be hardly instructive: some dedicators with common

16. L.M. White, 'The Delos Synagogue Revisited: Recent Fieldwork in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora', *HTR* 80.2 (1987), pp. 133-60.

17. D.D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (SBLDS, 169; Atlanta: SBL, 1999).

18. M. Trümper, 'The Oldest Original Synagogue Building in the Diaspora: The Delos Synagogue Reconsidered', *Hesperia* 73.4 (2004), pp. 513-98.

19. The debate on the identification of this building as a synagogue continues. Some scholars argue it was a house (B.D. Mazur, *Studies of Jewry in Ancient Greece* [Athens: Hestia, 1935], pp. 15-24) or a sanctuary to Zeus (H. Shanks, *Judaism in Stone: The Archaeology of Ancient Synagogues* [New York: Joanna Cotler, 1979], p. 43), and that all dedications are pagan votives (Mazur). E.L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (London: British Academy, 1934), p. 38, also argues for the pagan usage of GD 80, pointing to pedestals of statues found therein.

names are making dedications in the name of Theos Hypsistos.[20] A better case for the Jewish Theos Hypsistos might be made with the help of inscriptions from Rheinea (the burial island of Delos),[21] Acmonia in Phrygia[22] and Sibidunda in Pisidia,[23] whose authors seem to have used

20. *Ach*60—a vow of Zosas from Paros (first to second centuries CE). The name Zosas as epicoristic of Zosimos may refer to either Jew or Gentile. However, no Jewish community is known to have existed in Paros (*IJO* I, p. 220). *Ach*61—a vow of Marcia (first to second centuries CE). Indeed, the name Marcia occurs in Jewish inscriptions from Rome (*IJO* I, p. 221). Yet it was a common Roman name and cannot be instructive. *Ach*62—a vow of Laodice, 'having been saved by his (of Theos Hypsistos) cure' (first century BCE) (*IJO* I, p. 222). Similar inscriptions, dated to the imperial period, were found on the Pnyx at Athens (Mitchell, 'Cult', no. 129). The name Laodice is not attested to in Jewish inscriptions, and probably suggests Laodicean origin. *Ach*63—a vow of Lysimachus (first century BCE) (*IJO* I, pp. 223-24). The name Lysimachus occurs in only one Jewish inscription from Cyrenaica. The word χαριστήριον ('thanks-offering') is instructive, indicating an offering of thanks from Lysimachus; although there are hundreds of pagan votive inscriptions showing it, not a single one has Jewish provenance (consult PED).

21. *Ach*70-71—the epitaphs of Martina and Heracleia, both victims of murder (*IJO* I, pp. 235-42). These epitaphs contain curses addressed to their murderers. The main justification for labeling these inscriptions as Jewish lies in the phrase τὸν κύριον τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός ('the Lord of spirits and all flesh') referring to Theos Hypsistos. Given that this epitaph almost literally matches LXX Num. 16.22 and 27.16, the spirits mentioned there were said to be the angels of God, which would imply that Martina and Heracleia were Jews (A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927], p. 416). Parallels from the Septuagint were also found for the acclamation κύριε ὁ πάντα ἐφορῶν ('O Lord, the Ruler of all') (LXX Job 34.23; 2 Macc. 12.22; 15.2). However, none of these arguments is persuasive. In addition to these two epitaphs, the first phrase, 'the lord of the spirits and all flesh', is attested in 34 Christian inscriptions from Egypt; while for the phrase 'O Lord, who sees everything', the only parallel is in *SEG* XVIII 561 (Neokaisareia in Ponus), perfectly pagan, ἡλίου τε τοῦ πάντα ἐφορῶντος. See *Faras, IV*, 36/7, 38/8, 40/9; IGChrEg, 564, 608, 635, 636. See also Ph. le Bas, *Inscriptions grecques et latines receuillies en Grèce par la commission de Morée* (Paris: Didot, 1839), V, pp. 185-94 n. 269. He argues that *Ach71* is Christian, and suggests an eleventh- to twelfth-century date.

22. *IJO* II, p. 176—the epitaph with a curse addressed to anyone who would reopen the grave and place into it another corpse (third century CE or later). The only reason to consider this inscription as Jewish is the phrase τὸ ἀρᾶς δρέπανον, which may allude to LXX Zech. 5.1-2. However, in the same village, another, clearly pagan, inscription with a dedication to Theos Hypsistos was found, which would call into question the 'Jewishness' of the epitaph discussed. See P. van der Horst,

wording that approximates quotations from the Septuagint. Still, those quotations and allusions can well point to more than one religious group.

However, there are a few inscriptions whose Jewish provenance cannot be disputed, those linking the cult of Theos Hypsistos with a *prayer-house* for Jews, later called a *synagogue*.[24] Among these inscriptions, there are dedications of a prayer-house to Theos Hypsistos: *JIG* 9 (Alexandria, second century CE), *JIG* 27 (Athribis, first to second centuries BCE), and *JIG* 105 (Leontopolis, second century BCE). Of these, only *JIG* 27 is completely preserved. This inscription belongs to Ptolemaios, son of Epikydes, 'chief of police and the Jews in Athribis', who dedicates the prayer-house to Theos Hypsistos, on behalf of King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra. The dedicator is clearly eager to present himself as both a citizen of Hellenistic Egypt and a servant of King Ptolemy.

Being a good citizen in Ptolemaic Egypt did not necessarily require sacrificing one's religious identity;[25] however, for Jews of Gorgippia

Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE–700 CE) (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991), p. 57; and Mitchell, 'Cult', p. 141, no. 205: 'Ἀγατῇ τύχῃ κτλ.

23. *IJO* II, p. 215—the dedication of Artimas (second to third centuries CE?). The inscription reads: θεῷ ὑψίστωι καὶ ἁγείᾳ καταφυγῇ κτλ. It may refer to τὸν ὕψιστον ἔθου καταφυγήν σου in LXX Ps. 90.9 ('Thou, my soul, hast made the Most High thy refuge') and may be translated as 'the Most High God (who is) also the Holy Refuge' (P. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], p. 136 n. 4), or more literally, 'to the Most High god and the Holy Refuge'. Needless to say, in the first case the dedication may be either Christian or Jewish. However, according to the second variant of translation, 'Αγία Καταφυγή can be understood as a name of another deity, *synnaos* partner of Theos Hypsistos, which would suggest that the dedication is pagan: according to B. Lifshitz, 'Le culte du dieu très haut à Gorgippia', *Rivista di Filologia e d'lnstruzione Classica* 92 (1964), pp. 160-61 (160 n. 6), 'Αγία Καταφυγή is a Roman goddess *Sancta Tutella*.

24. M. Hengel, 'Proseuche und Synagoge', in G. Jeremias, H.W. Kuhn and H. Stegmann (eds.), *Tradition und Glaube*: *Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt* (Festgabe K.G. Kuhn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), pp. 157-84; I. Levinskaya, 'A Jewish or Gentile Prayer House? The Meaning of ΠΡΟΣΕΥΧΗ', *TynBul* 41 (1990), pp. 154-59.

25. The status of Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt seriously differed from their status in the subsequent period, due to the resolution of the Romans to preserve the 'Greek' element. On Jews as 'Hellenes', see J. Mélèze Modrzejewski, 'Jewish Law

on the Black Sea, it seems to have been quite a compromise. Inscriptions *BS* 20-22[26] contain manumissions, where, following the greeting to Theos Hypsistos, the masters liberate their slaves under an oath to Zeus, Gea and Helios. Whereas the manumissions *BS* 21 and 22 show no reference to any involvement on the part of the Jewish community, *BS* 20 clearly does: Pothos son of Strabo announces the manumission of his slave and swears by Zeus, Gea and Helios. There is nothing particularly exceptional here, except that Pothos does this in a προσευχή, a prayer-house of Jews. The Greco-Roman East enjoyed a pluralistic legal system in which each member of a major ethnic or religious group could make a transaction according to the juristic norms of that group.[27] The oath by Zeus, Gea and Helios was required for Hellenistic manumission, and had to be pronounced in one of the central public places of the city, such as the local *agora* in Asia Minor, or the *dromos* in Egypt. Hellenistic-style manumission was not, however, the only choice for a Jewish proselyte; in fact, this would have been a rather strange thing to deliver to one's new-found brethren in a synagogue. From the position of the proselyte in question, such a false proselytism must have been devoid of meaning. From the position of Jews, such a person with his pagan oaths would have been considered blasphemous and thus rejected from their synagogue. The only solution to this paradox is to conclude that not only pagans but also Jews of Gorgippia used to swear by Zeus, Gea and Helios. To become fully-fledged members of Hellenistic society, these people were ready for compromises as difficult as swearing a pagan oath.

Dedicating the synagogues to Theos Hypsistos may have seemed an easy option—Jewish use of ὕψιστος sounded almost identical to pagan use, and the interchange between the two was likely to elude Jews and Greeks of the Greco-Roman era, just as it continues to mislead modern scholars. For in truth, the opinion that θεὸς ὕψιστος was regularly used by Greek-speaking Jews to describe their God[28] is groundless. A few Jewish inscriptions bearing this title are just a drop in the bucket:

and Hellenistic Legal Practice in Egypt', in N.S. Hecht *et al.* (eds.), *An Introduction to the History and Sources of Jewish Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 75-99.

26. *IJO* I, pp. 303-13.

27. See Modrzejewske, 'Jewish Law'.

28. For this perspective, see, e.g., L. Kant, 'Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin', *ANRW* II.20.2 (1987), pp. 671-713.

as many as 15 (all discussed above) or as few as two—*BS* 20 and *JIG* 27—among the total of 331 inscriptions[29] referring to Theos Hypsistos.

In summary, Jews and pagans (and later Jews and Christians) *did not* usually use the same title to address their god/s; both θεὸς ὕψιστος and εἷς θεός were originally epithets of the pagan cult, though with clear geographical and chronological variations: θεὸς ὕψιστος whose message is truly polytheistic, typically appears on pagan dedications dated from the second century BCE to the second century CE from Achaea, Macedonia and Asia Minor, the cradle of Hellenistic civilization;[30] εἷς θεός appears as if replacing its predecessor, from the second century CE onward. At first, it appears in Attica,[31] Asia Minor,[32] and Italy[33] in exclusively pagan contexts; then, in a much larger number (86 inscriptions), it appears in pagan-Gnostic and Samaritan inscriptions of Syria and Palestine; finally, beginning in the fourth or fifth century, it reaches Egypt (141 inscriptions), where its usage remains exclusively Christian.

This assessment indicates that in a certain territory during a certain period, the use of θεός ὕψιστος and εἷς θεός belongs in only one religious cult. Jews were aware of the pagan provenance of these epithets and seem to have avoided their use. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that the cases of deviation from this rule were not random: 'Jewish' instances were few, and their authors' motives seem quite clear. Yet the Samaritan group remains enigmatic; its cases, constituting one-third of all Palestinian examples of εἷς θεός, are too

29. 293 in Mitchell, 'Cult', pp. 128-47; and 331 in PED.

30. Out of 331 inscriptions, 149 come from Asia Minor and the Aegean Islands; 81 from Greece; 51 from Thrace and the Black Sea; and only 43 from Greater Syria, East, Egypt, Nubia and Cyrenaica (PED).

31. *IG* II^2 1764; B.D. Meritt and J. Traill (eds.), *The Athenian Agora.* XV. *Inscriptions, The Athenian Councillors* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies, 1974), p. 334.

32. D.F. McCabe (ed.), *Aphrodisias Inscriptions: Texts and List* (Princeton Project on the Inscriptions of Anatolia; Princeton: Institute for Advanced Study, 1991) 647.5; *TAM* V 1.75; S. Mitchell (ed.), *Regional Epigraphic Catalogues of Asia Minor*. II. *The Ankara District. The Inscriptions of North Galatia* (British Archaeological Reports, International Series, 135; Oxford: B.A.R., 1982), II, p. 160; *CIG* 3956c; E. Kalinka (ed.), *Tituli Asiae Minoris* I. *Tituli Lyciae linguis graeca et latina conscripti* (Vienna: Prostat in Aedibus Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1901), no. 1222.

33. *IG* XIV 642; 2413.2, 7.

numerous to be categorized as exceptions. This phenomenon returns us to the question of whether Samaritans, for some reason, *intentionally* and *on a regular basis* modified their dedications to resemble the dedications of the Hellenistic population that surrounded them, or, alternatively, the Greeks of Palestine were so influenced by Samaritans that they borrowed their cult language. Perhaps the answer will emerge in an analysis of the earlier Samaritan inscriptions with θεὸς ὕψιστος. Fortunately, we have such a remnant.

The Sundial from Mount Gerizim

Mount Gerizim is a limestone massif 2,855 feet in elevation, which rises roughly east, southeast and south of the center of the modern city of Shechem-Nablus (Samaria, Israel). Its inhabitants, according to Josephus, descend from Cuthaeans, the race of Sanballat, appointed governor of Samaria by Darius III (336–331 BCE).[34] This Sanballat, in order to cement goodwill with the Jews in Jerusalem, arranged a marriage between his daughter Nikaso and a certain Manasseh identified as the brother of Johanan the high priest. However, when the elders in Jerusalem refused to recognize his marriage, Manasseh went to Samaria leading with him many from Jerusalem. After that, when Sanballat supported Alexander the Great, offering him 8,000 Samaritans to assist in the siege of Tyre, Alexander gave his consent to build a temple on Mount Gerizim. So the temple was built to rival the one in Jerusalem and Manasseh was appointed its high priest. According to the Samaritans' understanding of the event, it was on Mount Gerizim (rather than Mount Moriah) that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice to God (Gen. 22.2). Moreover, Mount Gerizim (rather than Mount Zion) was also understood to be the site where God chose to establish his Name (Deut. 12.5). These identifications made Mount Gerizim the focus of spiritual values for Samaritans.

Archaeological excavations have unearthed a few residential and industrial quarters, as well as a building complex incorporated in massive fortifications, the earliest stratum of which dates from the

34. Josephus, *Ant.* 11.302-304. This paper does not focus on the question of who the Samaritans really were, Cuthaens, or the group described in 2 Kings 17: their king was Hoshea son of Elah, who conspired with Shalmaneser king of Assyria, and therefore was 'evil in the sight of the Lord'. For our current purpose, Samaritans are inhabitants of Mount Gerizim in the Greco-Roman period.

Persian period (fifth century BCE), while the latest shows a Byzantine church of Mary Theotokos, built by the command of Justinian.[35]

The sundial with the Greek inscription was found on the southern slope of the mountain beneath the monastery, along with many other inscriptions, which were, most probably, taken from their original place and reused as spolia in constructing the walls of the monastery; some time later, they would have rolled down the hill as the church was abandoned and started to collapse.

The inscription, showing typical characters of the Hellenistic-early Roman period,[36] reads:

ΘΕΩΙΥΨΙΣΤΩΙ
ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙ[..]ΟΧΡΗΜΑΤΑΓΩ[…]
ΤΩΝΑΠΑ[..]ΥΠΤΟΥΑΓΙΩΝΔ[..]

Which can be taken as:

θεῷ ὑψίστῳ
Πτολεμαῖ[ος] ὁ χρηματαγω[γὸς]
τῶν ἀπ’ Α[ἰγ]ύπτου ἁγίων δ[..]

35. Surveys and excavations were first undertaken by C.W. Wilsonin in 1866; in 1930, A.M. Schneider excavated the Byzantine church, while I. Ben-Zvi uncovered part of the staircase leading from Neapolis to the Roman temple. The temple was excavated by R.J. Bull in 1964–68. Since 1982, Y. Magen, Archaeological Staff Officer of Judea and Samaria for the Israel Antiquities Authority, has been in charge of carrying on the research on Mount Gerizim. See R.J. Bull and G.E. Wright, ‘Newly Discovered Temples on Mount Gerizim in Jordan’, *HTR* 58 (1965), pp. 234-37; R.J. Bull, ‘The Excavation of Tell er-Ras on Mt Gerizim’, *BA* (1968), pp. 58-72; Y. Magen, ‘Mount Gerizim and the Samaritans’, in F. Manns *et al*. (eds.), *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), pp. 91-148.

36. For the purpose of dating, the most instructive choice would be the four-stroke sigma, which ‘survives only in the monumental script of the first century and totally disappears in the course of the 2nd’, while classical omega, although prevalent in the Hellenistic period, still appears as late as the second century CE. The alpha with broken middle bar is attested to throughout the Greco-Roman period, although during the second to fourth centuries CE it was the least popular (L. Di Segni, “Dated Greek Inscriptions from Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods” [PhD Diss., Hebrew University, 1997], p. 890. Instructive are the serifs, which ornament almost all the relevant letters: Γ, Η, Λ, Μ, Ν, Π, Τ. Among the dated North-Palestinian inscriptions no such *chi* is shown after 90 CE (or Η after 141/2 CE). In the south, however, these forms survive as late as the seventh century CE (see tables in Di Segni, ‘Dated Greek Inscriptions’, pp. 894-915).

To the God Most High
Ptolemy the *chrēmatagōgos*
from ([out] of ?) the holy (places ?) of Egypt...

Line 2: Πτολεμαῖος ὁ χρηματαγωγός must be a deliverer of the gift to Gerizim. *LSJ* translates χρηματαγωγός as 'a money-carrier', although showing only a single occurrence of this word in P.Hib. 110.52, 84, the postal register from Ptolemaic Egypt dated to 270 (l. 52) and 255 (l. 84) BCE. This is a fragment from the daybook of an intermediate station in the government's postal service. Here θεω-γένης (= θεογένης) χρηματαγωγός is an official for whom a 'roll' from king Ptolemy was delivered, and who, consequently, belonged to the king's staff. In reflecting on these scarce data, we may interpret *chrēmatagōgos* as an *administrator* charged with either a permanent office or a short-term project.

Line 3: The ending of the third line is difficult to restore. An immediate suggestion reserving for ἁγίων the role of an adjective could be ἁγίων δώ(ρων) or δώρ(ων). Thus, the aforementioned Ptolemy is indeed a deliverer of some 'holy goods', probably money from Egypt. Alternatively, δ[might stand for δ[ωμ(ατιων)], implying that the whole expression ἀπὸ τῶν κτλ. could be a part of the title of *chrēmatagōgos*, i.e. 'administrator of the holy houses of Egypt'.[37] Or ἅγιος may have a similar meaning (holy place, sanctuary), while standing alone as a noun. Then δ[could belong to either a sum of money, like δ[(ραχμαι) X], or a date, δ[X]. In the first case, ἁγίων may go with <χρημάτων> (to be understood from the word χρηματαγωγός), and the actual content of these 'holy goods' could be some kind of tribute sent by the Samaritan community in Egypt, as Jews of the Diaspora used to send the sacred tithe to Jerusalem. Accordingly, δ[could be a part of δ[εκ(άτης)].

And finally, in Jewish dedications, ἅγιος may denote a holy place—temple or prayer house. Although Egyptian Jews usually used different

37. Another possibility might be that the dedication was financed '*out* of the holy (gifts?) from Egypt' (χρηματαγω[γὸς ἐκ] τῶν κτλ.). I would not dare to offer this as a serious restoration because the suggested abbreviation is a pure hypothesis.

words for their sanctuaries,[38] the translation of Hebrew *miqdāsh* or *māqôm* as ἅγιος is frequently attested to in the Septuagint.[39]

The above observations provide only limited help in our search for the sundial's date and place. Inasmuch as the only testament to the position of *chrēmatagōgos* is dated to the middle of the third century BCE (P.Hib. 110), this position probably did not have a long history, and the origin of any other undated artifact mentioning this official should be considered chronologically in connection with P.Hib. 110. Taking into account that the settlement on Mount Gerizim was seized and destroyed by John Hyrkanos between 111 and 107 BCE, the most probable time-span for the inscription discussed is the third to second century BCE, which is a long period.

Moreover, I believe that it is also apparent that the gift was sent by the Samaritan community in Egypt for the *Samaritan* temple on Gerizim; the pagan provenance of the inscription should therefore be ruled out. An attempt to locate this temple, however, remains quite tricky.

When the first excavations on Gerizim began, scholars assumed that the site did not have a Samaritan temple, only a worship site similar to that of Shiloh, a town nearby. Later, on the northern, highest peak of the mountain Tel er-Ras, archaeologists discovered remains of a temple, whose *terminus ante quem*—judging by the ceramic found therein—was set at the second century BCE. This temple appears to be buried under another one built in the time of Hadrian (c. 120 CE).[40]

The current excavators maintain a different opinion. After twenty years of excavations they still maintain that no Hellenistic stratum exists under the Roman temple on Tel er-Ras, while claiming that the foundation of a Samaritan temple remains hidden under the church of Mary Theotokos and that the magnificent fortifications, which now surround the church, were once part of a temple complex similar to that of Jerusalem.[41] That said, not even a trace of this supposed Samaritan temple has been found under the church.

38. They usually call them ἱερὸν περίβολον, προσευχή, συναγωγή, and θεοῦ σύγκυρος: *CIJ* 2, 1433, *JIG* 105, *CPJ* 3, 1532a.

39. E.g., LXX Lev. 19.30; 20.3; Num. 3.38; 10.21; Isa. 60.13; 26.21; Jer. 28.51 (= MT 51.51); Ezek. 21.2; 5.11; etc.

40. Bull and Wright, 'Newly Discovered Temples'.

41. Magen, 'Mount Gerizim'.

According to the *Chronicles* of Jerome (who, on this account, follows Josephus), 'Manasses, the brother of Jaddu, the priest of the Jews, built a temple on Mount Gerizim' in 337 BCE (111th Olympiad).[42] In 169 BCE, the temple was re-dedicated to Ζεὺς Ξένιος (Jupiter Perigrinus), after the Samaritans themselves had made a request to Antiochus IV.[43] In the version of Josephus,[44] they simply presented their temple as an anonymous one dedicated to Greek Zeus (προσαγορευθῆναι δὲ τὸ ἀνώνυμον ἱερὸν Διὸς 'Ελληνὶου—or, in other words, a temple dedicated to the chief anonymous god of the Greeks. In approximately 18 BCE, one hundred years after the temple was razed by John Hyrkanos, the temple was rebuilt by Herod, who 'revived Samaria from its foundations that once lay in ashes'.[45] According to Eusebius, in the days of Hadrian, this temple was desecrated by 'unbecoming images, idols, sacrifices, and bloodshed'.[46] Archaeologists have questioned the reliability of this passage from Eusebius since they cannot locate any evidence of the Samaritan temple's reconstruction after its destruction by Hyrkanos, and, consequently, of its desecration in times of Hadrian. They do, however, confirm the erection of a Roman temple dedicated to Olympian Zeus on Tel er-Ras in the period described by Eusebius and at the command of Hadrian. This temple, with a monumental staircase, was depicted on local coins (Neapolis) of the second and third centuries CE. The Pilgrim of Bordeaux provides an eye-witness account of 1,300 steps leading to its entrance from the foot of the mountain,[47] whereas Epiphanius of Salamis and Procopius of Gaza note 1,500.[48]

In order to elucidate my concluding argument, I turn my focus here on three particular textual sources. First, consider Epiphanius of

42. Jerome, *Chron.* 47.123.1-3 = *PL* 27.471-472 = Pummer, 77, p. 193. (All following translations are from Pummer.)

43. Jerome, *Chron.* 47.123.16-24 = *PL* 27.473-474 = Pummer, 79, p. 194; based on Josephus, *Ant*. 12.261 and 2 Macc. 6.1-2.

44. See references in F.M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine* (Paris: Gabalda, 1933), p. 365 nn. 5, 6.

45. Jerome, *Chron*. 47.166.4-8 = *PL* 27.553-554 = Pummer, 85, p. 197.

46. Eusebius, *Theoph.* 4.23 = Pummer, 32, pp. 89-91.

47. *Itinerarium Burdigalense* 587.2-5–588.1 = *PL* 8.790 = Pummer, 52, pp. 112-13.

48. Epiphanius, *De gemm.* 192.17 = Pummer, 75, p. 180. Procopius, *Comm. in Deut*. 11:29 = *PG* 87.908 = Pummer, 116, pp. 230-31. Procopius reports about 501 steps, which must be the scribe's mistake.

Salamis, who clearly associates the monumental staircase leading up to Tel er-Ras with a *Samaritan* sanctuary: ‘One slope of the mountain of Gerizim is cut into steps up to the very top of the mountain of the Samaritans, who dwelt in the city of Neapolis. On the summit of the mountain, they have erected a building and bow down to Mount Gerizim.’[49] Secondly, I point to Procopius of Caesarea, who claims that the Samaritans never had a temple on Gerizim: ‘In Palestine there is a city named Neapolis, above which rises a high mountain, called Garizin. The Samaritans originally held this mountain; and they had been wont to go up to the summit of the mountain to pray on all occasions not because they had ever built any temple there, but because they worshipped the summit itself with the greatest reverence.’[50] We can reconcile the apparent discrepancy between these two sources with the help of the third one: Photius of Constantinople, who lived and wrote in the ninth century CE. ‘He [Damascius] says that the successor of Proclus, Marinus, came from Neapolis in Palestine, a city situated near the mountain called Argarizon. Then the impious writer uttered the blasphemy that on this mountain there is a most holy sanctuary of *Zeus the Highest, to whom Abraham the father of the old Hebrews consecrated himself*, as Marinus himself maintains.’[51]

This last statement of Photius is actually the culmination of what I have attempted to demonstrate in this essay: that during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, there was no temple on Mount Gerizim other than the Tel er-Ras sanctuary. In other words, the very same temple, in different chapters of its history, was dedicated to the Samaritan God the Most High and the Hellenistic Zeus the Most High-Xenios-Olympian. The result of this is the confusion of various authors in considering the temple on Tel er-Ras as alternatively Samaritan or Hellenistic. Hence their confusion on account of the very ethnicity and belief of the Samaritans; they were frequently accused of idolatry[52] and, according to Origen, were never persecuted for their religion by the Romans

49. Epiphanius, *De gemm.* 192; in Pummer, 75, p. 180.

50. Procopius, *De aedif.* 5.7.1-2 = Pummer, 136, pp. 304-305.

51. …ἐν ᾧ Διὸς ὑψίστου ἁγιώτατον ἱερόν. Photius, *Bibliotheca* 242.345b.18-28 = *PG* 103.1284 = Pummer, 191, p. 429. Marinus, probably an apostate Samaritan, was born in Neapolis, in approximately 440 CE; on his life see *PLRE* 2, pp. 725-26.

52. E.g. Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.13.8-10 = *PL* 2.339 = Pummer, 4, p. 34; Epiphanius, *Haer.* 9.2.4 = Pummer, 66, p. 156.

(unless there were Sicarii among them).[53] The same Origen calls them ἑτερόδοξοι in relation to Jews, and asks ‘Can one say to a Samaritan woman, “You Jews”, or “You Gentiles”?’[54]

Taking into account the ease and goodwill with which Samaritans permit the Greek god to come and go (see, e.g., Josephus above), one must admit that the Samaritan θεὸς ὕψιστος may never in fact have abandoned the temple completely; indeed, his own name served him best in eluding and resisting foreign invaders. I believe that although the sundial with the dedication to θεὸς ὕψιστος belonged to the earliest phase of the temple on Mount Gerizim (Tel er-Ras), it could maintain its spot after the temple was re-dedicated to Zeus. Thus, I also believe that neither the decision to use *this* dedicatory formula nor the occurrence of the *pagan* εἷς θεός formula in later Samaritan inscriptions can be considered accidental.

Dividends of such a flexible ‘heterodoxy’ were high indeed: hundreds of years after the temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed, the Samaritan community on Gerizim continued to flourish. Moreover, Hadrian is said to have installed in their sanctuary the bronze doors of the Jerusalem temple,[55] which would hardly constitute an act of desecration. By the time of Julian the Apostate (361–63 CE), an earthquake had destroyed the temple, and its bronze doors had been reused in a newly constructed Samaritan synagogue at the edge of Neapolis,[56] as a symbol of continuity and persistence.

53. Origen, *Cels.* 2.13 = *PG* 11.820-821 = Pummer, 12, p. 56.
54. Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 13.17.101-103 = *PG* 14.424 = Pummer, 26, pp. 68-69.
55. *PG* 103, col. 1283.
56. See references in Abel, *Géographie*, p. 365 nn. 5, 6.