

## THE HIGHEST GOD WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO NORTH-PONTUS\*

In 1890 Latyshev republished the known inscriptions from Panticapaeum, Gorgippia, and Tanais in the second volume of North Pontic inscriptions. The work of this excellent epigraphist caught the eye of Emil Schürer, for whom these unusual texts held a special appeal. As he wrote in his important article of 1897,<sup>1</sup> “Die Formel σεβόμενοι θεὸν ὕψιστον erinnert jeden Theologen sofort an die σεβόμενοι θεὸν der Apostelgeschichte”. The eminent scholar of Judaism compiled a list of all the attestations he knew for the Highest God, explored the implications of Latyshev’s inscriptions in the light of Jewish and Christian use of the designation, and concluded that there was a strong Jewish influence on the three Pontic communities. His article remains the foundation of much that has been written on these texts down to the present time. Arthur Darby Nock’s important paper on Zeus Hypsistos once again surveyed the whole topic, including the Bosphoran texts, with attention to local divergences in cult.<sup>2</sup> A difficult manumission text, discovered at Kerch (Panticapaeum) in 1928 and published in 1935, took its place among the Bosphoran items already known and stimulated the interest of Benjamin Nadel and others with fruitful results.<sup>3</sup> This text and other new discoveries were collaboratively re-edited, along with the Latyshev material, in the corpus for the Bosphoran Kingdom published in Moscow in 1965 under the title of *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani (CIRB)*. With the aid of this convenient work several scholars, notably I. A. Levin-skaya and Yu. Ustinova, have intensively studied the texts concerning the Highest God in recent decades,<sup>4</sup> and the posthumous publication of work

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\* This paper is offered to Alexander Gavrilov with admiration and affection.

<sup>1</sup> E. Schürer, “Die Juden im bosporanischen Reiche und die Genossenschaften der σεβόμενοι θεὸν ὕψιστον ebendasselbst”, *SB Preuss. Akad. Wiss* 1897: 1, 200–225. The quotation is from p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> A. D. Nock, with C. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, “The Gild of Zeus Hypsistos”, *Harv. Theol. Rev.* 29 (1936) 39–88.

<sup>3</sup> *CIRB* 71 (Kerch), found 1928, published 1935. Cf.: B. Nadel, “Об экономическом смысле оговорки χωρίς εις την προσευχὴν θωπείας τε καὶ προσκαρτερήσεως βοσπορских манумиссий” (“The economical sense of the conditional χωρίς εις την προσευχὴν θωπείας τε καὶ προσκαρτερήσεως in Bosphoran manumissions”), *VDI* 1948: 1, 203–206 and S. Lurye *apud* Nadel, *BZIH* 27 (Warsaw 1958) 12.

<sup>4</sup> I. A. Levin-skaya, “К вопросу о фракийском происхождении культа θεὸς ὕψιστος” (“On the issue of the Thracian origin of the cult of θεὸς ὕψιστος”), *Antichnaya Balkanistika*

from the pen of Mikhail Rostovtzev in 1989 and 1990 has revealed unexpected observations of his on the basis of Latyshev's material.<sup>5</sup> In 1999 two major discussions of the Highest God in the northern Pontus appeared almost simultaneously: Yu. Ustinova's book on the kingdom's supreme gods, with a detailed treatment of the Highest God, and Stephen Mitchell's long article on Theos Hypsistos, elaborating a bold hypothesis that he first proposed in *Chiron* the year before.<sup>6</sup>

Although Ustinova and Mitchell make polite reference to one another in their works, it is obvious that their views are totally incompatible. For Ustinova, "Various gods were worshipped as 'the most high' in several areas", and she declares emphatically that expressions such as *σεβόμενοι θεόν* or *θεοσεβής* "did not have a special technical sense, and did not necessarily imply pagan adherents of Judaism".<sup>7</sup> In a dramatic contrast, Mitchell writes consistently of a single unified cult, which he calls "the cult of Theos Hypsistos", not only in the Pontic territories but throughout the Graeco-Roman world. He categorically asserts that *θεοσεβής* "was a specific, 'technical' term used to describe themselves by the worshippers of Theos Hypsistos".<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, he proposes that the modest number of epigraphic texts that mention *θεοσεβεῖς* (conventionally called "god-fearers") be enlarged enormously by adding all the texts that mention the Highest God. Mitchell's arguments are as weak as his collection of attestations is thorough, and before the issues settle down in his favor we must look again at this material. Some problems seem to have escaped the attention of all those who have studied these texts from Schürer onwards. Hence the engagement with Mitchell's argument need not be wholly negative.

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(Moscow 1984) 25–26; eadem, "Кульτ ΘΕΟΣ ΥΨΙΣΤΟΣ на Боспоре. К вопросу о влиянии культа Сабазия" ("The cult of ΘΕΟΣ ΥΨΙΣΤΟΣ in the Bosporan Kingdom and the issue of the influence of the Sabazios-cult"), *Antichnaya Balkanistika* (Moscow 1987) 67–73; eadem, *Эпиграфические памятники культа Theos Hypsistos как источник по этнокультурной истории Боспора в I–IV вв. н. э.* (Epigraphical evidence for the cult of Theos Hypsistos as a source for the ethno-cultural history of the Bosphorus in I–IV AD). Diss. (Leningrad 1988); Yu. Ustinova, "The *thiasoi* of Theos Hypsistos in Tanais", *Hist. Rel.* 31 (1991) 150–80.

<sup>5</sup> M. Rostovtzeff, *VDI* 1989: 3, 199–203, with German translation and commentary in: H. Heinen, *M. Rostowzew: Skythien und der Bosphorus II. Wiederentdeckte Kapitel und Verwandtes*, *Historia Einzelschr.* 83 (1993).

<sup>6</sup> Yu. Ustinova, *The Supreme Gods of the Bosporan Kingdom* (Leiden 1999); S. Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews, and Christians", in: P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede (ed.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 1999) 81–148. Cf.: idem, "Wer waren die Gottesfürchtigen?", *Chiron* 28 (1998) 54–64.

<sup>7</sup> Ustinova, *op. cit.* (n. 6) 228 and 238.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, in: *Pagan Monotheism* (n. 6) 119.

Without his knowledge Mitchell has, in fact, reproduced the hypothesis of Levinskaya from 1984, although he has documented it far more fully. Levinskaya had written in terms that Mitchell would immediately recognize, "The cult of *Theos Hypsistos*, which was spread in Egypt, Greece, Asia Minor, Thrace, and the Northern Black Sea littoral, is to be considered as a single cult, having however local peculiarities. The cult of *Theos Hypsistos* was generally linked with Judaism" (p. 27).<sup>9</sup> Schürer had asserted long ago the general connection with Judaism, but the rest of Levinskaya's interpretation in 1984 proved indefensible. Ustinova rightly branded it as "untenable" and insisted, "a single cult has never existed" (p. 228). Now Mitchell, in ignorance of Levinskaya but with knowledge of Ustinova's earlier work, to which he expressly takes exception, has chosen to resuscitate and amplify the doctrine of a single cult of *Theos Hypsistos*. His article, which is in English and easily accessible in a volume published by the Oxford University Press, will not suffer the neglect of work in Russian (*Ros-sica non leguntur*), and his collection of testimonia will be consulted profitably by anyone working on this topic. Even Ustinova herself thanks Mitchell for showing her the text of his article in advance of publication. She describes it as "his yet unpublished fundamental study on *Theos Hypsistos*",<sup>10</sup> but she must have been well aware that she could not accept most of what he had written in it.

The Highest God was a trope of classical Greek poetry and appears notably in Aeschylus, Pindar, and Sophocles, in passages that require no commentary in this context. But the use of the expression θεὸς ὑψίστος by the translators of the *Septuagint* to render the *Old Testament's* *elyon* for the God of the Jews effectively delimited its subsequent use in literature. After that the term was largely confined to Jews and Christians. The availability of the electronic version of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* allows us to make this point with a certainty that was not possible for Schürer. He knew from his reading that among pagan writers Pausanias had mentioned the Highest God three times as a name for old Greek cults in Greece (in Corinth, Olympia, and Thebes),<sup>11</sup> but he did not know that this god is never once mentioned in Strabo, Dio Chrysostom, Plutarch, Chariton, Aristides, Achil-

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted with disapproval by Ustinova, *op. cit.* (n. 6) 228 ("utterly untenable"). Ustinova had not seen I. Levinskaya's handbook, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1996), with a detailed and often polemical summary of evidence on God-Fearers and the Highest God from p. 51 to p. 126. A Russian translation of this book (И. Левинская, *Деяния апостолов на фоне еврейской диаспоры*) appeared in St. Petersburg in 2000, but I have not seen it.

<sup>10</sup> Ustinova, *op. cit.* (n. 6) p. x.

<sup>11</sup> Schürer, *op. cit.* (n. 1) 209.

les Tatius, Artemidorus, Lucian, Maximus of Tyre, Athenaeus, Galen, Plotinus, Himerius, Libanius, and Proclus. He appears only as the God of the *Old Testament* and only in such writers as Philo and the Fathers. Julian the Apostate mentions him once in a text that confirms this finding. It is Julian's statement of intent to rebuild the Jewish temple, which he describes as the temple of θεὸς ὕψιστος.<sup>12</sup>

Epigraphic attestations are another matter altogether. There are a little less than two hundred, by Mitchell's count, and they are scattered, as Levinskaya observed, all over the Graeco-Roman world, but naturally with the greatest number in the eastern Mediterranean lands. The adjective ὕψιστος is sometimes attached to the name of a god and sometimes not. It is found most often with Zeus or an equivalent divinity such as Baalshamin in Palmyra. In a well known group of texts from Seleuceia on the Calycadnus the god is sometimes called simply the Highest God and sometimes Zeus Hysistos, but this is no warrant for assuming that the two appellations are interchangeable at other places.<sup>13</sup> Helios and Sarapis, for example, also turn up as the Highest God. As Arthur Darby Nock and Louis Robert emphasized throughout their careers, it is imperative to look at local cults, since a familiar name such as Zeus or an anonymous deity such as the Highest God can have very different associations and character.<sup>14</sup> The more than fifty dedications to Zeus Hysistos on the Pnyx in Athens document healings through the representation of the ailing parts.<sup>15</sup> Such divine activity is not only uncharacteristic of Zeus elsewhere but inconceivable in any kind of Jewish context.

As the sanctuary in Athens shows, θεὸς ὕψιστος by no means always designated the God of the Jews or implied Jewish influence. Instances of anthropomorphism are particularly telling, and of these none is more striking than an altar at Pisidian Termessus with a dedication to the Highest God.<sup>16</sup> The inscription specifies that the foot of the god was placed upon the altar, and the extant remains show that the divine foot, perhaps two feet, stood there in bronze. This is clearly a pagan dedication. It is so much at variance with Jewish or Christian theology that it alone would suffice to invalidate any assumption that all dedications to the Highest God represent

<sup>12</sup> Julian, *Epist.* 134 (Bidez, ed. Budé) 197.

<sup>13</sup> Cf.: G. W. Bowersock, "The New Inscription from Rāsūn in Jordan", *Syria* 76 (1999) 223–225, with 223, n. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Nock, *op. cit.* (n. 2) and, for example, L. Robert, *Nouvelles Inscriptions de Sardes* (Paris 1964).

<sup>15</sup> B. Forsén, "The Sanctuary of Zeus Hysistos and the Assembly Place on the Pnyx", *Hesp.* 62 (1993) 507–521 (Zeus Hysistos – Athens).

<sup>16</sup> *TAM* 3. 1. 32 (Termessus foot).

a single cult. Mitchell's desire to unite all the attestations to the Highest God is most clearly exposed in his comments on a dedication at Sibidounda in Asia Minor, which he relates to another text addressed to a deity of the same name at nearby Andeda.<sup>17</sup> As J. and L. Robert recognized,<sup>18</sup> in correcting an erroneous interpretation of B. Lifshitz, the Sibidounda inscription, addressed to the Highest God and mentioning a holy *καταφυγή*, echoes the *Septuagint's* rendering for divine refuge in *Exodus* and above all the Psalms. It was therefore written by Jews or persons under Jewish influence. Here the God is the Jewish God. By contrast, the inscription at Andeda, which is geographically close to Sibidounda, was erected by a priest of Mên Ouranios to Theos Hypsistos. It is therefore unmistakably pagan. But since the god is called by the same name in the two texts, Mitchell asks incredulously, "Can we seriously suggest that they represented different modes of belief and religious thinking to their worshippers? Was the Theos Hypsistos of the Sibidounda text conceptually and culturally alien from his namesake at Andeda? The proposition is hard to believe".<sup>19</sup> Yet the proposition must be believed. The texts speak eloquently of their wholly different, albeit adjacent cultures. What would be truly hard to believe is that Jews and Judaizers would share in the same cult as a priest of Mên Ouranios.

Like Schürer, Mitchell was impressed by the occurrence of the phrase *σεβόμενοι θεὸν ὑψιστον* on the Tanais inscriptions, since it reminded him of similar phrases (though without *ὑψιστον*) in the *Acts of the Apostles*.<sup>20</sup> The phrases there, often discussed, seemed to imply a community of a sympathizers with Judaism – gentiles who revered the Jewish God. The great stele from the synagogue at Aphrodisias, discovered in the late 1970s, has now taught us that at least in that city the Jews were supported by non-Jewish contributors who were called *θεοσεβεῖς*. Hence the *New Testament* God-fearers seemed to be identical to the Aphrodisian *θεοσεβεῖς*.<sup>21</sup> But again we must consider local conditions. It is true that in the synagogue at Sardis inscriptions naming certain donors as *θεοσεβεῖς* imply something similar to what we can see at Aphrodisias,<sup>22</sup> but there is no justification for generalizing the use of the term throughout the Graeco-Roman world. Most

<sup>17</sup> Sibidounda: G. E. Bean, "Notes and Inscriptions from Pisidia. Part II", *AS* 10 (1960) 70, no. 122. Andeda: *ibid.*, 65, no. 115.

<sup>18</sup> *Bull. ép.* (1965) 412.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, in: *Pagan Monotheism* (n. 6) 113.

<sup>20</sup> *Σεβόμενοι / φοβούμενοι* in *Acts*: e. g. 13. 17, 26, 43; 16. 14; 17. 17; 18. 7. For the Tanais texts see below.

<sup>21</sup> J. M. Reynolds and R. Tannebaum, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias* (Cambridge 1987).

<sup>22</sup> See now J. Kroll, *Harv. Theol. Rev.* 94 (2001): 1, nos. 8, 9, 22, 57, 59, 66.

literary texts of the imperial period consistently use the word simply to mean 'pious' or 'revering God' without any additional confessional baggage. At least one passage in Josephus reflects the more narrow interpretation, as seen in *Acts*, Aphrodisias, and Sardis,<sup>23</sup> but the vast majority of writers do not. Philo does not, and Eusebius uses both noun and adjective explicitly for Jews themselves.<sup>24</sup> The attachment of the term to Jews is likewise found on the famous inscription on a theater seat at Miletus, announcing the place for the Jews who are also *theosebioi*: τὸπος τῶν Εἰουδαίων τῶν καὶ θεοσεβι<ῶ>ν.<sup>25</sup> As Robert insisted, there is no justification whatever for postulating that the order of the words is mistaken and that we should read καὶ τῶν, so as to create two distinct groups.<sup>26</sup> We shall see that comparable violence has also been done to a Bosporan inscription. Mitchell was obliged to subscribe to the rewriting of both texts in both cases in order to make his argument.

The case for interpreting all cults of the Highest God as revealing communities of θεοσεβεῖς must naturally stand or fall on whether or not the extant records ever show a correlation of the two terms. In all the testimony – literary, epigraphic, papyrological, and numismatic – there is only one text that makes the necessary equation. That appears in the work of Cyril of Alexandria, who reports a cult of the Highest God in Palestine and Phoenicia.<sup>27</sup> According to Cyril, the worshippers called themselves θεοσεβεῖς. We should note that this group, from late antiquity, is identified with a specific part of the Near East. It is a regional group, not a universal one, and the implication of Cyril's observation could hardly be that other worshippers of the Highest God also called themselves by that term. Quite the contrary. In any case, Cyril is all there is.

Mitchell attempts to summon other witnesses in his support, but none provides the equivalence he requires. He brings in Epiphanius, who, without using the term θεοσεβεῖς, describes a heresy of regional character.<sup>28</sup> The Christian heretics, like the pagan antecedents to whom Epiphanius alludes, conspicuously took up Jewish observances, and they were known as Messalians or Euphemites. The name Messalian ought to arouse curiosity, since it is a Semitic word for people who pray, as in the Syriac *mšalyânê*. The Greek equivalent in Epiphanius, εὐφημίται, is like εὐχῆται found in

<sup>23</sup> Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 20. 195 (Poppaea interceding on behalf of the Jews).

<sup>24</sup> Eus., *Praep. Evan.* 6. 11. 23: τὴν καθ' Ἑβραίους θεοσεβειαν; 7. 8. 35: τὸν θεοσεβῆ καὶ ἀληθῶς Ἑβραῖον.

<sup>25</sup> *Inscr. Milet.* Teil 2 (1998) no. 940 III f.

<sup>26</sup> Robert, *op. cit.* (n. 14) 41.

<sup>27</sup> Cyril Alex, *PG* 68. 281–282.

<sup>28</sup> Epiphanius, *Panar.* 7. 80.

other texts about this same heresy.<sup>29</sup> The Greek does no more than render the Semitic word. This is a Near Eastern cult associated with one Symeon of Mesopotamia, best known for a treatise on asceticism. Epiphanius, like Cyril, is describing a regional phenomenon of Judaizers. The well known Cappadocian texts, adduced by Mitchell, from Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa on Hypsistarii and Hypsistiani respectively show that the cults they describe used the name *Hypsistos* and that non-Jews had adopted Jewish observances.<sup>30</sup> But nowhere in these texts are these worshippers described as θεοσεβεῖς in any sense, technical or otherwise, nor are they said to describe themselves in these terms. They represent yet another regional adaptation of Jewish observances. There is not the slightest reason to connect them with an empire-wide cult of anything.

The Bosporan inscriptions must therefore be taken on their own terms. They reveal local cults from as early as the first part of the first century AD, in other words when Christianity was in its infancy but Judaism was not. It has been universally acknowledged that the texts from Anapa (Gorgippia) display a conjunction of Jewish elements that presuppose either a Jewish community or a community deeply influenced by Judaism. It is not the dedication to the Highest God that imposes this conclusion but the words παντοκράτωρ and εὐλογητός in conjunction with it. In fact παντοκράτωρ is wholly absent from the *Gospels* and appears only once in the *New Testament* outside the *Apocalypse*, where it is frequent.<sup>31</sup> But Ustinova is on the right track in asserting that we cannot make any inferences at all from the evidence for the Jews at Gorgippia in assessing the situation either in Tanais, far to the north at the extremity of the inhabited world, or in Kerch (Panticapaeum), opposite Gorgippia.<sup>32</sup>

The epigraphy of Tanais has long demonstrated that this remote and superficially hellenized city at the mouth of the Don on the Sea of Azov had many cult organizations, often called σύνοδοι or θίασοι, dedicated to the worship of Theos Hypsistos. Unlike the Gorgippia inscriptions, the Tanais texts provide no compelling evidence of Jewish influence in either language or observance. The σύνοδοι refer to themselves by the phrase ἡ σύνοδος ἢ περὶ θεὸν ὕψιστον, but at least one organization used a different formulation, naming associated or adopted brethren (ἀδελφοί) who worshipped

<sup>29</sup> εὐχῖται (εὐχῆται), εὐφημῖται, Symeon of Mesopotamia – *Askétikon* (cf. *PG* 86. 45–52; 94. 728–737).

<sup>30</sup> *Greg. Naz.*, *PG* 35. 992 (ὕψιστιάριοι). *Greg. Nyss.* 2. 327 Jaeger (ὕψιστιανοί).

<sup>31</sup> *CIRB* 1123, 1125, 1126; *SEG* 32. 790 (Anapa / Gorgippia): θεῷ ὕψιστῳ παντοκράτορι εὐλογητῷ. Cf. *II Cor.*, 6. 18 and *Apoc.*, 1. 8, 4. 8, 11. 17, 15. 3, 16. 7 and 14, 19. 6 and 15, 21. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Ustinova, *op. cit.* (n. 6) 229–30 and 239.

(σεβόμενοι) the Highest God.<sup>33</sup> This was the phrase that had captivated Schürer. Two points should be emphasized in relation to the use of σεβόμενοι or φοβούμενοι in *Acts*. The first is that the Highest God is never named at all in the relevant passages. The second point is that the language of the brethren inscriptions at Tanais obviously gives nothing more than a variant of the language that appears on the σύνοδοι inscriptions. Both simply designate in different terms the object of veneration. Σεβόμενοι carries no more baggage than what the word actually means.

The epigraphy of Kerch (Panticapaeum) has its own distinctive anomalies. Here we are dealing with another local cult of Theos Hypsistos in the North Pontic territories. The Kerch cult emerges from manumission documents,<sup>34</sup> which, as in Gorgippia, provide good reason to postulate the presence of a community of Jews or a highly Judaized community. At Kerch a προσευχή is explicitly mentioned. On the other hand, since an oath is required in the names of Zeus, Helios, and Earth, we must assume either that all citizens, Jewish or not, were subject to it, or that we are dealing with Judaized pagans. A slave receives his freedom on condition that he maintain his devotion to the Jewish community of the synagogue. The language, attested in three inscriptions, is unique to Kerch. The slave must display εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν θωπεία and προσκαρτέρησις.<sup>35</sup> Such a formulation has turned up nowhere else, but even more remarkable is its inclusion of the word θωπεία, universally recognized by commentators as meaning reverence, veneration, or, as Schürer rendered it, *Ehrfurcht*. No one appears to have noticed, as far as I can tell, that the word carries this meaning nowhere else in the entire literary and epigraphic record from the ancient world. It always means 'flattery'. In a remote place, such as the city of Panticapaeum, one can hardly expect good classical or imperial Greek. But a completely new meaning for a traditional classical word, often used by the patristic writers in its normal sense, should have elicited some curiosity.

In medieval and modern Greek θωπεία means a caress, a slight gesture of the hand to imply devotion or affection. In today's Greek the sense of 'flattery' survives only in a metaphorical or figurative use of the word. In one late letter on papyrus the verb θωπεύω appears to have the sense of 'to care for' or 'to look after' someone. This might lend support to the view that what we have in the Kerch documents is a reflection of a transition in the

<sup>33</sup> *CIRB* 1278, 1279, 1280, 1282 (Tanais): ἡ σύνοδος ἢ περὶ θεὸν ὑψιστον. *CIRB* 1281, 1283, 1285, 1286 (Tanais): εἰσποιητοὶ (or ἰσποιητοὶ) ἀδελφοὶ σεβόμενοι θεὸν ὑψιστον.

<sup>34</sup> *CIRB* 70, 71, and 73. Cf. no. 985 (Taman).

<sup>35</sup> E.g., *CIRB* 70 (Kerch), ll. 13–15, χωρὶς ἰς τὴν προσευχὴν θωπείας τε καὶ προσκαρτερήσεως].



popular language, whereby *θωπεία* indicated genuine devotion, care, or concern rather than something feigned as in flattery.<sup>36</sup> The sense of 'caress' would be the outcome of this process of transition. The freedmen at Panticapaeum were obviously not required to caress the *προσευχή*, but they *were* asked to show their devotion to it.

Nadel remarked, as early as 1948, that the document from Kerch published in 1935 contained an altered version of the stipulation imposed on the new freedman.<sup>37</sup> He noticed that *θωπεία* was missing although *προσκαρτέρησις* remained in a verbal form. Yet, in an anacolouthon that is by no means atypical of the Bosporan inscriptions, the sense of *θωπεία* was conveyed at the end of the stipulation through the words *θεὸν σέβων* (in agreement with the subject of the *ὅπως* clause). Nadel's interpretation was accepted by the editors of the *CIRB*, but in the 1960s B. Lifshitz and H. Bellen independently decided that the two words, for which the reading is not in doubt, should be combined into one by eliminating the letter *nu*. Bellen complained that Nadel's view was impugned by the bad Greek he was obliged to accept in the text.<sup>38</sup> So a new epigraphic occurrence of *θεοσεβεῖς* was born. But correct classical Greek cannot be expected of the Bosporan communities, and, as Ustinova observed, the editors of the *CIRB* offered an appendix listing dozens of grammatical mistakes and inconsistencies.<sup>39</sup> The replacement of *θωπεία* with *θεὸν σέβων* not only confirms the rare meaning of *θωπεία*. It maintains the structure of the local legal formula for new freedmen. The inscription should be read as Nadel and the *CIRB* give it:

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 ΚΟΥ ἀφιήμι ἐπὶ τῆς προσευ-  
 χῆς Ἑλπίαν ἐμ[α]υ[τ]ῆς θρεπ[τ]ὸν  
 ὅπως ἐστὶν ἀπαρενόχλητος  
 καὶ ἀνεπίληπτος ἀπὸ παντός  
 κληρονόμου χωρὶς τοῦ προσ-  
 καρτερεῖν τῇ προσευχῇ ἐπι-  
 τροπευούσης τῆς συναγω-  
 γῆς τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ θεὸν  
 σέβων.

The disparate cultures of the Bosporan cities can serve as a microcosm of the even more disparate cultures of the entire Greek East. Theos Hypsistos, in his anonymous guise and in his various named incarnations,

<sup>36</sup> *PSI* 6. 525, 16 (*θωπεύω*).

<sup>37</sup> *CIRB* 71: cf. B. Nadel, *op. cit.* (n. 3).

<sup>38</sup> For Bellen and Lifshitz, see *Bull. ép.* (1969) 52 and 405.

<sup>39</sup> Ustinova, *op. cit.* (n. 6) 231, n. 49. See *CIRB*, pp. 797–831, and p. 80 on no. 71, ll. 9–10.

such as Zeus, Helios, or Sarapis, was not one god. Hellenophone Jews and Christians knew that their God was Hypsistos, but they can have been in no doubt that many of the cults dedicated to a deity of that name had nothing to do with them. The affectation of Jewish practices by pagans and later by Christians is an interesting and significant development in local communities across Palestine, Asia Minor, and the Bosporan Kingdom. But these neither represented a concerted international movement nor were they part of those wholly pagan cults that boasted a god of the same name. If the God-fearers of *Acts* and the θεοσεβεῖς of Aphrodisias and Sardis were all gentile sympathizers with Judaism (as they probably were), that does not necessarily mean that they resembled the Hypsistarii or Hypsistiani in the practices they took over from the Jews. Ancient religion always allowed for local diversity, and never more than in the kaleidoscope of cults of the Highest God.

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Начиная с XIX в. внимание ученых привлекает группа севернопричерноморских надписей из Пантикапея, Горгиппии и Танаиса, содержащих упоминание Бога Высочайшего. Длительное время было неясно, являются ли эти культы чисто местными или представляют собой часть религиозного κοινῆ. Не было ответа и на вопрос о влиянии на них иудаизма или христианства. В 1897 г. Э. Шюрер подробно исследовал боспорские свидетельства культа Бога Высочайшего. Публикация в 1928 г. манумиссии из Пантикапея оживила дискуссию о других манумиссиях из этого региона в контексте предполагаемого наличия там иудейских или христианских общин. Недавно появилась смелая гипотеза С. Митчелла, пытающаяся охватить очень широкий материал, в том числе и упомянутый круг вопросов. Ее автор полагает, что все, кто бы ни почитал Бога Высочайшего на территории Римской империи, идентичны тем, кто известен как “боящиеся Бога”. Однако Ю. Устинова, одновременно опубликовавшая важное исследование о верховных божествах Боспорского царства, отстаивает прямо противоположную точку зрения.

Рассмотрение доводов Митчелла в пользу того, что Бог Высочайший был божеством единой группы почитателей, приводит к выводу о полной несостоятельности его гипотезы. Свидетельства об этом боге, взятые в их хронологической и территориальной полноте, разнообразны и неоднозначны, так что в каждом отдельном случае нет необходимости делать вывод, что перед нами иудаизм или христианство. Единственным ключом к истолкованию этого материала является местный контекст, и севернопричерноморские надписи

здесь особенно поучительны. Надписи I в. н. э. из Горгиипии свидетельствуют, по всей видимости, о существовании там в том или ином виде иудейской общины, однако это обстоятельство никак не помогает в интерпретации надписей из Танаиса или Пантикапея. Нет никаких признаков наличия иудеев среди почитателей Бога Высочайшего в Танаисе, в то время как в пантикапейских манумиссиях прямо упоминается *προσευχή*. То обстоятельство, что слово *θεολεία* имеет в этих надписях несвойственное ему значение 'почтение', а в одной из надписей вместо этого слова употребляется перифраза, говорит в пользу того истолкования *CIRB 71*, которое предложил Надэль и приняли издатели корпуса. Разнообразные культы Бога Высочайшего, засвидетельствованные у разных народов, не обнаруживают единства. Отсутствует связь между ними и засвидетельствованными в IV в. н. э. *гипсистиариями* или *гипсистианами*. Культы причерноморской периферии отличаются не меньшим разнообразием, чем в центре находившегося под влиянием греческой культуры региона, где распространившееся использование греческого языка могло так же легко разъединять народы, как и объединять.