The Greek of the Early Church and the Pagan Ritual.

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XV. The Power of God.

The power of the god or goddess is often exulted: [εὐλογοῦντες ὁ θεός] (Athen. Milt. Mittheil., 1881, p. 273),¹ or [εὖλογος σου τὰς δυνάμεις] (Mt. 22:29), or δυνάμεις Θεοῦ εὐχαριστῶ Διὸς. The threat is used, he who is disobedient ἀναγνώστει τὰς δυνάμεις του Διὸς (Le Bas-Waddington, No. 668).

The plural δυνάμεις is used in all these cases: it indicates, as is common with the plural of abstract nouns (especially in Latin), instances in which δύναμις is shown, i.e. 'marvellous works.' In the example last quoted, 'he that is disobedient shall recognize the marvellous acts of Zeus.' The thought corresponds to the Mohammedan saying 'Mashallah! (what God wills!') an exclamation of surprise at anything remarkable, or great, or excellent.

Both singular and plural are used in the New Testament: μὴ εἰδότες τὴν δυνάμιν τοῦ Θεοῦ, Mt 22:29; δυνάμεις Κυρίου ἢν, Lk 5:17; and δυνάμεις οὗ τὰς πυρός ὁ Θεὸς ἐποίη, Ac 10:11.

The god or goddess is the powerful one: δυναμὸς εὐχαριστῶ Διὸς (comp. Ro 11:28, δυνάτος γὰρ ἐστιν ὁ Θεός; He 11:19, δυνατός ὁ Θεός). Leto makes things possible that were impossible, e.g. εὖ δυναμῶν δυνατά (οἱ) Τοῦ (C.B., No. 53; comp. Mk 10:27, Mt 19:28, παρὰ Θεοῦ πάντα δυνατά); Lk 18:27, τὰ δυνατὰ παρὰ ἀνθρώπους δυνατά παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ ἐστίν.

One of the most remarkable of all the hieratic inscriptions is now in the Boston Fine Art Museum, but evidently is closely related to the Katakekaumene inscriptions. In 196 A.D. Mousaios and Kalligeneia paid their vow on behalf of their son, Mousaios, bearing witness to the marvellous acts of the gods (μαρτυροῦμεν τὰς δυνάμεις τῶν Θεῶν). The 'bearing witness' is a variation of the 'publishing on a stélé,' (sec. xiii.); but it is interesting to find a word that became so characteristic of public Christian testimony used of public pagan testimony to the power of the god; μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ ὑπακούοντα (Rev 22:18) might be inscribed on every pagan stèle of confession.

¹ Misprinted 373; this fault extends over two sheets of the Mittheilungen.
inscriptions there rarely occurs anything to show Jewish origin; but the natural probability that such large bodies of Jewish settlers, placed from the first in a position of advantage and privilege, would produce men of importance in business and politics, is confirmed by a recent discovery, which makes it probable that several powerful families, boasting descent from ‘kings and tetrarchs,’ were of Jewish origin.  

It is, however, certain that the god δώσις καὶ δίκαιος was often represented as the horseman god (Sabazios), and the pair of epithets is once applied to men. We can only guess as to the possibility that the dedications ‘to the Holy and Just’ may have been due in part at least to the influence exerted by Jewish ideas on the pagan ritual of Phrygia. But this is a certainty in regard to another title used in dedications, ‘To the Most High’ or ‘To the Most High God,’ Θεὸς ὑψάστῳ. This is indeed found in some cases, where, from date or other reasons, Jewish influence cannot be thought of; but in a number of cases in Asia Minor, where the title is used, Jewish influence is proved by other circumstances. This name is more characteristic of the Old Testament than of the New, though found in the latter.

The name ‘the Lord,’ Ὅ Κύrios, is rather rare in the hieratic inscriptions. It is probably due to Semitic influence, and is certainly not of the Greek type; but it is more likely to originate in the old Semitic spirit of early Anatolian religion than in late Jewish influence. Hence ‘the Lady’ is often mentioned instead of ‘the Lord.’ When converts in Galatia and Asia spoke of ‘the Lord,’ it would hardly be possible for them to divest themselves wholly of the ideas which they had formerly associated with that title. Nor was it Paul’s intention that they should rid themselves entirely of their old ideas. He desired to purify rather than to obliterate them, as was pointed out in the opening section. There is no room to doubt that he used the customary language and forms of polite intercourse, and encouraged his followers to do the same; and so far as letter-writing is concerned, that is proved by the comparison of his Epistles and the ordinary letters of the period. Most of these forms were connected with religion, and took a religious cast, as, for example, in Rome a dinner began with an invocatio deorum, and ended with a libation to the Lares. Paul’s aim was to retain the religious form, omitting only the idolatrous element. That is plain throughout his teaching, and its wisdom is indubitable. His converts were not to separate themselves from the world, but to preserve a gracious and courteous demeanour to all.

Naturally, history showed how difficult it was to eliminate the idolatrous element; it returned in new forms; the old local deities became the angels of Colossian worship and the local saints, even ‘the Christ of Smyrna,’ in the later Greek Church.

The other titles in the inscriptions, Tyrannos, epithets from the places of worship, like Δαιμόνιος etc., and other unexplained names, like Tiamou, are not such as could have any analogies in early Christian language, though the local epithets came back once more in the later Christianity as epithepet of saints.

I have come to an end, but not finished the work. It is obvious that each of the preceding sections has merely touched the fringe of a topic on which much more can be learned; and that our conception of the way in which Asia Minor was Christianized, and of the character of the resulting religion in the country (which played so important a part in determining the Christianity of the Empire), will be cleared up in many respects when the work is properly done.

It may be worth adding, in conclusion, that the rare form ἱρακτεῖ (Col 214) is exactly paralleled by ἱρακτόρα, which is used in the same sense, ‘having taken away,’ in one of these hieratic inscriptions; see Athen. Mittheilungen, 1881, p. 273 (misprinted 373), where the word is absurdly and unjustifiably altered by inserting a syllable ἵπτακτορα.  

1 Speculations on the subject may be found in C.B., chap. xv., on ‘The Jews in Phrygia.’  
2 The subject has been much treated in recent times; references in C.B. pt. ii. p. 652f.; Schürer, Theolog. Litttg. 1897, p. 257; Roscher, Lexicon Mythol. s.v. Hypsistos; and Cumont, Hypsistos.

3 St. Paul the Trav. p. 149.