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REVISITING THE CULT OF ARES IN GRECO-ROMAN ASIA MINOR

Abstract: This article revisits the cults of Ares in Asia Minor, with particular attention to the southern regions of the peninsula. It starts from the interpretation of these cults as local manifestations of indigenous warrior deities assimilated to the Greek Ares, while focusing on specific features that complicate such a model. The study first analyses the distinctive iconography of Ares holding a trident at Amblada in eastern Pisidia, as attested in numismatic evidence. It then investigates the god's oracular dimension, especially in connection with alphabetical oracles in Kabalia and neighbouring regions. The alleged dedication of a statuette of Hermanubis to Ares is also considered in relation to this divinatory aspect. Finally, two Clarian oracles from Syedra and Iconium prescribing the erection of statues of Ares alongside Hermes (Argeiphontes) and Dike/Thesmos are re-examined, with attention to their historical context and religious content. The evidence presented in the article underscores the local particularities and the complexity of cult practices within the hybrid ritual landscape of Greco-Roman Asia Minor.

Keywords: *Ares; Anatolian Studies; Greek Epigraphy; Ancient Religion; Oracles; Claros.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on religion in Greco-Roman Asia Minor has increasingly moved beyond models that explain local cults either as static survivals of an indigenous past or as straightforward products of Hellenisation.[1] The religious landscape is better approached as structurally plural, historically layered, and continuously rearticulated. Local traditions did not disappear under the impact of Greek language, civic institutions, or Roman administration; rather, they were reformulated through them. The adoption of Greek divine names, epithets, and theological vocabulary provided Anatolian communities with shared cultural codes, yet these did not efface regional specificities. Instead, they created a medium in which older cults could be reinterpreted, expanded, and strategically aligned with broader Mediterranean discourses.

The cults of Ares in Asia Minor, particularly those concentrated in the southern regions of the peninsula, have long attracted scholarly attention, especially following the observations of the distinguished epigraphist Louis Robert. He interpreted these cults as local manifestations of indigenous deities assimilated to their Greek counterpart on account of their predominantly martial character and shared attributes.[2] The prominence of

[1] See in particular PARKER 2023, focusing on Roman Phrygia.
[2] Seminal works are ROBERT 1955, 72-78; ROBERT 1983, 572, 578-583, with note 149 for further references. For some pertinent remarks on Robert's words see MILLINGTON 2013,

such warrior gods among Anatolian worshippers has likewise been associated with a protective function extending beyond strictly military contexts, encompassing the safeguarding of crops and possibly livestock.[3] At the same time, certain features of the evidence reveal idiosyncrasies whose development is not always easy to reconstruct.

One such feature is the iconography of Ares holding a trident in eastern Pisidia. Another concerns the god's apparent oracular dimension in southern Asia Minor in connection with alphabetical oracles. Closely related to this divinatory aspect is the alleged dedication to Ares of a statuette of Hermanubis, which raises further questions about the scope and character of the god's cult. Finally, two Clarian oracles prescribing the erection of statues of Ares together with Hermes (Argeiphontes) and Dike/Thesmos are re-examined in order to contextualise them both historically and from a cultic perspective.

The conclusions reached here, as is inevitable when working with fragmentary and in some cases unique material, may appear less definitive than one might wish. They nevertheless merit formulation, insofar as they illuminate issues of broader significance for the study of ancient religion, particularly within the complex and hybrid cultic environment characteristic of Greco-Roman Asia Minor.

2. THE TRIDENT OF ARES

Where full-body representations are preserved, the iconography of Ares in southern Asia Minor displays a notable degree of consistency. The god of war is typically depicted as a hoplite, equipped with helmet, shield, and spear.[4] A mounted form of Ares is also attested at the village of Taşlıpınar (formerly Zekeriyaköy), approximately 30 km from Beyşehir in Pisidia, in keeping with the rider-god motif widespread in Greco-Roman Asia Minor.[5]

A distinctive representation of Ares is attested at Amblada in eastern Pisidia, where the god appears to have enjoyed special veneration. We know not only that a panegyriarch made a vow to Ares (*epēkoos*?), but also that a city tribe (*phyle*) bore the name of the god.[6] Numismatic evidence shows Ares holding a trident. One of the earliest attestations is an unpublished specimen from the reign of Commodus (**Fig. 1**),[7] whose reverse bears a Greek legend commemorating the emperor as "new Ares."[8]

At first sight, the association of the trident with earthquakes or inland waters—by analogy with Poseidon—appears almost inescapable.[9] Upon closer reflection, however, such an interpretation cannot be regarded as conclusive, since the attribute may reflect local features—whether cultic, mythical, or otherwise—that remain unknown to us. Later coinage issued under the philosopher Artemidoros depicts the god "holding out [his] hand over trident and amphora, and spear with shield," perhaps reflecting a broader strategy of cultural Hellenisation.[10]

Ares also appears unarmed on coins from Pamphylian Syedra during the Roman period. This depiction must be understood within a specific historical and cultural context, to which we shall return in the fourth section. It relates to a well-known Clarian oracle that prescribed the placement of a *deikēlon* of Ares, chained by Hermes and judged by Dike, in the centre of the city as a remedy against an enemy horde. A similar text is attested at Iconium in Lycaonia.

3. THE ORACULAR ASPECT OF ARES

Alongside the martial and protective profile of the indigenous gods of war, the evidence also suggests an oracular dimension in southern Asia Minor. Herodotus (VII.76-77) provides the earliest reference to an oracle of Ares, already in the fifth century BC, most probably among the Solymoi or the Pisidians.[11] Epigraphic testimonies further corroborate this picture, such as the two inscriptions from the territory of Side in eastern Pamphylia during the Imperial period (*I.Side* II, nos. 377-378), as well as the alleged oracle underlying the erection of an altar in the territory of Sagalassos at the instruction of Ares Kiddeudas.[12] On this basis, the possibility

Fig. 1. With permission of wildwinds.com, ex Solidus Numismatik auction 14, April 2017. "Description: Commodus, AE26 of Amblada, Pisidia. AD 177-192. 8.9 g. AYT KAI Λ KOMMO, laureate, draped and cuirassed bust right. / NEOC APHC AMBΛAΔEΩN ΛAKEΔAI, Ares standing left, holding patera and trident. Solidus 14, 291. Unpublished for Commodus. This reverse type known e.g. for Caracalla."

553-562, who also explores the possibility that Luwian Iyarri and Roman Mars influenced the development of cults of Ares in Anatolia while comparing with Greece.

[3] See AKÇAY 2023 for pre-assessments on the sanctuary of Ares at Ekizce in the territory of Phaselis.

[4] See in detail DÖKÜ/KILECI 2022, 112-119.

[5] See in detail DELEMEN 1999, 69-70, 194-197.

[6] See *Denkmäler Lycaonien* nos. 76-77 (*BE* 1969, 576).

[7] Similar coins from the reign of Septimius Severus are known, with Caracalla and Geta on the obverse: see *RPC* V.3, — (unassigned; ID 73736) [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/73736]; *RPC* V.3, — (unassigned; ID 73737) [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/73737]; *RPC* V.3, — (unassigned; ID 73732) [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/73732].

[8] For this phenomenon see WALLENSTEN 2017; WALLENSTEN 2018; WALLENSTEN 2018b. The same coinage also refers to Amblada's claimed Lacedaemonian descent, a cultural trope shared by some Pisidian communities; see ARROYO-QUIRCE 2016 for the significant case of neighbouring Selge.

[9] For Poseidon in Anatolia see PARKER 2023, 185-186. For other trident gods see CHUVIN 1981 (Apollo at Tarsus) and RIVAULT 2021, 168-180 (Zenoposeidon at Mylasa).

[10] For the coin see *RPC* V.3, — (unassigned; ID 73731) [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/73731]; for the philosopher Artemidoros see ARROYO-QUIRCE 2020 [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/magistrate/3046].

[11] See GONZALES 2005; ARROYO-QUIRCE 2024.

[12] For discussion of the epithet, see ARROYO-QUIRCE 2024, 399-400. If it is to be understood as toponymic, one may note here the suggestive reading ΚΙΔΟΑΣ—though without certainty—in a highly fragmentary Hellenistic royal letter discovered at Olbasa; see MILNER 1998, 65-66 no. 145 (*SEG* 48-1532, third/second century BC).

of additional oracular cults of Ares within the Anatolian milieu cannot be excluded, whatever the specific procedures of consultation and response involved.[13]

A votive inscription discovered in the rural highlands of Kabalia may lend further support to this hypothesis, since it has been interpreted as evidence that Ares delivered an alphabetical oracle.[14] This would be exceptional, given that the principal divinity of the known alphabetical oracles—characteristic of southern Asia Minor during the second and third centuries AD—appears to be Apollo, sometimes in association with Hermes, or even Sarapis, but not Ares.[15]

A further point of discussion concerns an alleged dedication to Ares involving a bronze statuette of Hermanubis, of unknown provenance but attributed to southwest Asia Minor.

3. 1. Ares and the alphabetical oracle

To begin this line of enquiry, attention must be given to the investigations conducted in 2017 in the valley of Ballık, near the village of Ambarcık in the Çavdır district of Burdur, as documented by Dökü/Kileci.[16] These scholars published a votive dedication discovered inside a cave depicting the god Ares and identified the same deity in the eroded relief located outside, adjacent to the alphabetical oracle inscription first recorded by Corsten.[17] The figure of Ares—apparently holding a phiale in his right hand and a shield in his left—is thus understood to have been the lord of the rock sanctuary and the giver of the oracle. The inscription inside the cave, which mentions a certain Troilos IV, is dated to the Roman Imperial period (probably the second–third centuries AD), and the findspot appears to lie within the territory of ancient Balboura.

The god at the rock sanctuary with the alphabetical oracle appears to have been designated simply as Ares, without any accompanying Greek or indigenous epithet. This absence of qualification is not exceptional within Kabalia, as is also attested in the urban centre of Balboura itself. A statue base of local limestone—rediscovered and republished by Milner[18]—apparently records a (joint?) cult of Zeus Philios, Herakles, and Ares.[19]

As for the alphabetical oracle, the attentive reader will observe that the relevant editions cite Kibyra rather than Balboura as the provenance.[20] What matters here, however, is that the findspot is identical to that of the votive inscription discovered inside the cave (i.e. Ballık, in the village of Ambarcık).[21] The inscription is a rock-cut text engraved on a panel in the form of a pedimental stele and begins with several introductory lines, now highly fragmentary. The reconstruction may include the name Aur. Troilos, a term referring to the oracle itself, a threat of punishment in the event that the inscription is chiselled out or the monument otherwise damaged, and a general reference to the ancestors. Whether the name of Ares was once present in the introductory part of the inscription cannot be determined given the poor state of preservation.

Thereafter, the consultant encounters twenty-four verse responses, one for each letter of the Greek alphabet, drawn by lot. These responses, which are almost entirely preserved, belong to the so-called Koinetradition (i.e. the common tradition), as elucidated by Nollé,[22] who reconstructs the archetypal text through comparison with corresponding inscriptions attested at other sites in southern Asia Minor. As will be discussed in the next section of this paper, the responses of the common tradition are attested—with minor variations—in alphabetical oracles found at sites such as Oinoanda, Olympos, Pamphylia, and Pisidia. Other distinct traditions are likewise attested.[23]

A further question concerns whether Troilos IV, as recorded inside the cave, and Aur. Troilos, as attested outside it, are to be identified as the same individual—representing different stages of his life[24]—or whether they were related in some way. It would not, for instance, be surprising if a descendant of Troilos IV—so designated because he was the son of Troilos, son of Troilos, son of Troilos—bore the same name. Nevertheless, since the personal name Troilos is among the most common in the region,[25] it cannot be excluded that Troilos IV and Aur. Troilos were distinct and unrelated individuals who happened to share an interest in the cult of Ares at this site.[26] At most, it is reasonable to suppose that they were members of the local elites.[27]

[13] See STONEMAN 2011, 77-103 for an overview of oracular culture in Asia Minor.
[14] See DÖKÜ/KILECI 2022.
[15] See NOLLÉ 2007, 223-279 for a comprehensive analysis of the epigraphic evidence.
[16] DÖKÜ/KILECI 2022.
[17] See CORSTEN 1997, 42, who had suggested that it might represent Hermes. Such an identification is not without justification, as the god can appear in alphabetical oracles, possibly serving as a mediator for Apollo. A noteworthy example is the rock-cut alphabetical oracle located within a military fortress in the territory of Pisidian Adada; see NOLLÉ 2007, 231-239; LABARRE/ÖZSAIT 2014; ISMAELLI 2014, 57-61.
[18] MILNER 2012, 89-93 no. 4 (*SEG* 62-1377, ca. AD 150).
[19] Additional evidence includes a silver plaque dedicated to Ares, probably by the *demos* of the Myangleis, although its precise provenance within the region remains uncertain; see ROUSSET 2010, 162-166 no. 14 (*SEG* 60-1561, 1st or 2nd cent. AD?).
[20] Ed. pr. CORSTEN 1997; PETZL 1997 (*SEG* 47-1808); *I.Kibyra* no. 97; NOLLÉ 2007, 244-245.
[21] Delimiting territorial boundaries between Balboura and Kibyra goes beyond the scope of the present paper, but it should be noted that other inscriptions have been found in the same location: *I.Kibyra* no. 88 (rock-cut votive relief panel depicting the Dioskouroi as two horsemen flanking a standing female figure), and *I.Kibyra* no. 98 a-c (rock-cut inscriptions poorly preserved).
[22] NOLLÉ 2007, 243-253.
[23] The "traditions" constitute a classificatory concept employed by NOLLÉ 2007 to designate five groups of alphabetical oracle texts, distinguished on the basis of the content and formulation of their respective responses. These are: (I) the tradition of Adada; (II) the tradition combining the former with the so-called common tradition; (III) the common tradition (Koinetradition); (IV) the tradition of Hierapolis in Phrygia; and (V) the tradition attested in Timbriada in Pisidia and Soloi in Cyprus.
[24] For nomenclature and dating in the epigraphy of Asia Minor after the promulgation of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in AD 212, see BLANCO-PÉREZ 2016.
[25] See COULTON 2012, 143.
[26] For illustrative purposes, one may note the involvement of an agoranomos from Boubon named Aurelius Troilos in the dedication of a statue and its base to the greatest god Ares at a rural shrine situated approximately 3 km east of the city of Boubon; for discussion of the settlement and the epigraphic evidence see KOKKINIA 2008, 101-106 nos. 71-72.
[27] On this see NOLLÉ 2007, 225-226.

3. 2. Alphabetical oracles in southern Asia Minor

As mentioned above, the twenty-four verse responses of the alphabetical oracle at Ballık belong to the so-called Koinetradition. This common tradition offers answers to encourage patience and the waiting for an opportune moment, promises reward after toil, and urges reliance upon divine support, while mentioning such theonyms as Helios, Deo (i.e. Demeter) twice, Phoibos (Apollo), Zeus, and probably Ge as the divine personification of the earth. The verses are marked by simplicity of language and content; their frequent agricultural imagery would likely have appealed to a circle of consultants drawn from comparatively modest rural backgrounds.[28]

Within the region of Kabalia, the Koinetradition is also attested in neighbouring Oinoanda, where an alphabetical oracle is inscribed in the rock-cut tomb of Katagraphos, son of Philetairos, lifelong priest *pro poleōs* of Leto and "the other gods," possibly including Apollo.[29] In this context, Katagraphos may be viewed as a mediator between divinity and consultant, evidently on the basis of personal expertise or recognised competence.[30]

Outside the region of Kabalia, a further (fragmentary) alphabetical oracle from Olympos in eastern Lycia is associated with a family tomb inscription,[31] although nothing in this case explicitly implies gods, priesthoods, or cult officials. The only relevant detail is that one of the tomb's occupants bears the name Aurelia Chryseis, which recalls the daughter of Apollo's celebrated priest in the *Iliad* of Homer; yet this association is far from decisive, as the name may have been chosen for cultural rather than cultic reasons.

Additional attestations of the Koinetradition come from two alphabetical oracles discovered in Pisidia and Pamphylia. One originates from the urban area of Aspendos, near the remains of an unidentified ancient building and Roman-period vaults;[32] the other was found in the necropolis of an as yet unidentified Pisidian city at a site called Asar, approximately 1 km south-east of the town of Melli (now Kocaaliler).[33] This latter oracle, engraved on a block of grey limestone, is associated with a grave, though it remains uncertain whether any further inscription once specified the commissioner or the god, if any, to whom it was attributed.

In a related instance, a family tomb at Olympos preserves an alphabetical oracle that combines the Koinetradition with verses also attested in the Adada-Tradition.[34] From the archaeological context, however, it may only be inferred that the tomb's owner, Aurelius Pigres III, son of Telesphoros, was an eminent member of the local community.[35] A further alphabetical oracle in the Pamphylian city of Side is attributed to this mixed tradition, although the inscription preserves merely the first two verses in fragmentary form. It is now kept in the repository of the local museum, and little can be established about its original context.[36]

Alphabetical oracles are occasionally attested within sanctuary contexts. This is the case for two traditions: the Hierapolis-Tradition, attested in the sanctuary of Apollo at Hierapolis,[37] and the Timbriada/Soloi-Tradition. Of the latter, one example derives from the sanctuary of Aphrodite and Isis on the island of Cyprus,[38] and another from the cave sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods Vegeinos at Zindan Mağarası in northern Pisidia.[39] However, the conspicuous prominence of Sarapis in the oracular responses has led to the suggestion that this chresmological tradition was adopted from "ein Sarapis-Heiligtum".[40] Further instances of alphabetical oracles in sanctuary settings may well be identified.[41]

Overall, the picture remains far from precise when it comes to identifying the ultimate divine source of the oracular responses. Apollo (with or without Hermes) is the most immediate candidate, given his cultic and oracular prominence in Asia Minor, yet this does not preclude other possibilities, as the case of Sarapis suggests. In other contexts, only deceased individuals are attested—such as the priest of Leto—perhaps conceived as intermediaries of divine knowledge.

Returning to the alphabetical oracle at Ballık, the most remarkable fact is the use of the Koinetradition at a rock-cut sanctuary dedicated to the indigenous warrior god assimilated to Ares. This means that the god, known to be oracular in southern Asia Minor, comes to share participation in alphabetical oracles with such renowned deities as Apollo and Sarapis. The absence of the theonym of Ares in the responses may appear striking, but it should not be regarded as decisive given the nature of the phenomenon.[42]

3. 3. Ares and Hermanubis

To conclude this study, a notable instance concerns the alleged dedication to Ares of a bronze statuette representing Hermanubis—the anthropomorphic, Hellenised version of the Egyptian god Anubis—depicted as a youthful figure

[28] On this see NOLLÉ 2007, 279.
[29] For the text of the oracle see NOLLÉ 2007, 247-248 (*SEG* 68-1335); for the context see MILNER 2019, 134-138, who notes another inscription "containing an invocation to Helios, in the solar aspect of Apollo, to avenge the death of 'Molesis the *pro poleos* priest' (unpublished)" and "an inscribed panel containing an acrostic based on the formula Κατάγραφος Φιλεταίρου ἱερεὺς Λητοῦς, 'Katagraphos son of Philetairos, priest of Leto', repeated 15 times (YC 1241*c*: unpublished)." See also *SEG* 68-1334 for a (fragmentary) dice oracle found in Oinoanda at the foot of the mountain some metres below the "Apollo-temple."
[30] On this see ISMAELLI 2014, 57.
[31] For both inscriptions see *TAM* II 3 no. 953; NOLLÉ 2007, 248-249.
[32] See NOLLÉ 2007, 243.
[33] See NOLLÉ 2007, 246.
[34] See *TAM* II 3 no. 947; NOLLÉ 2007, 239-242.
[35] On this see ISMAELLI 2014, 54.
[36] See NOLLÉ 2007, 242-243: "Streufund in Side; als Fundort wird ein Ort bei der Seemauer im Nordwestabschnitt der Halbinsel, also in Hafennähe, angegeben".
[37] See NOLLÉ 2007, 253-263. A second alphabetical oracle may come either "aus einem Heiligtum (dem des Apollon?) oder einem Grab der Nekropole" NOLLÉ 2007, 263-265. For an overview of Apollonian oracles in Hierapolis see GUIZZI 2018.
[38] NOLLÉ 2007, 269-276.
[39] NOLLÉ 2007, 265-269.
[40] NOLLÉ 2007, 268.
[41] IŞIN 2014, 95, who deals with a cave sanctuary dedicated to Apollo Mamblasenos and Mother in southern Pisidia, presents two inscribed round stones discovered at the site, each bearing a single letter (N and Φ, with photographs; see *SEG* 64-1350). These artifacts are identified as tokens used for an alphabetical oracle.
[42] In this sense, it should be noted that the expression θεὸς λέγει ("the god says") in the alpha response—the first one—is anonymous enough to be adapted to different gods.

wearing a kalathos and holding a caduceus in his right hand and a palm branch in his left. The artefact, of unknown provenance but attributed by Bricault[43] to southwest Asia Minor and dated to the second–third century AD, was offered for sale in a catalogue of the Royal-Athena Galleries in New York (*Art of the Ancient World* XIV, New York–London 2003, no. 45) (*SEG* 61-1561; *EBGR* 2012.30).

The statuette bears an inscription engraved on its concave circular base, identifying Menis, son of Trokondas, and Lala, daughter of Lamachos, as the dedicants of the vow (*euche*), and employing the singular dative Ἄρητι (*Arēti*) in reference to the god. This uncommon form appears to find parallels in votive inscriptions from the sanctuary of Ares at Ekizce in the territory of Phaselis.[44]

With regard to the interpretation of such an unusual dedication, the account offered by Bricault[45] remains the most comprehensive treatment currently available and is therefore cited here in full:

> "Hermanubis est avant tout un dieu psychopompe, qui guide les âmes, écoute les suppliants (ἐπήκοος, εὐχάριστος) et porte la victoire (νικηφόρος), si l'on en croit les rares inscriptions grecques qui nous livrent son nom. Ce sont peut-être ces qualités, avant toute chose, qui ont incité les dédicants à offrir à Arès, divinité oraculaire [fn. 38: "Comme Hermanubis l'est certainement aussi"] et guerrière particulièrement vénérée dans cette partie de l'Asie Mineure, une représentation du dieu hybride alexandrin."

Accordingly, one of the underlying connections may lie in the oracular character of Ares in southern Asia Minor, as already discussed in the previous section. On balance, it is difficult to propose more convincing alternatives.

4. ARES AND BANDITRY

Building on earlier—though largely neglected—scholarship,[46] this last section examines two Greek inscriptions, closely related both in form and in content, which record the erection of statues of Ares in association with Hermes (Argeiphontes) and Dike/Themsos in the cities of Syedra in Pamphylia and Iconium in Lycaonia. The two texts have been classified as oracular responses, commonly attributed to the renowned sanctuary of Apollo at Claros,[47] yet their interpretation and contextualisation remain matters of debate.

The principal aim here is to comment on the oracular evidence as a remedy against banditry in the Imperial period, while also addressing its connection with the religious life in both cities.

4. 1. Two Clarian oracles at Syedra and Iconium

The discussion begins with the oracular response found at Syedra, inscribed on a limestone block built into the south face of the tower at the extreme summit, according to Bean/Mitford,[48] its first editors. The inscription has since attracted considerable scholarly attention for a variety of reasons; nevertheless, the essential elements remain clear. Thirteen dactylic hexameters describe the threat posed by an enemy horde to the peace and prosperity of the city's inhabitants. The most significant passage for the present analysis is found in verses 3–6, composed in the conventional epic-Homeric register.

The oracle prescribes the erection of a *deikēlon* of the god Ares—represented as a bloodthirsty, man-destroying deity—in the centre of the city, together with the performance of sacrifices while he is symbolically bound with the iron chains of Hermes. On the opposite side is to be placed a statue of Dike, who is to judge the god Ares, thus compelling him to assume the posture of a suppliant.

For the purposes of this study, the complete Greek text is reproduced below following Gonzales,[49] who comments on the ritual procedure aimed at the binding of Ares in order to secure the protection and prosperity of the land. The dating proposed by the first editors—"the Early Empire"—rests on palaeographical grounds (notably the letter forms),[50] yet this chronological range is too broad to permit a precise reconstruction of the historical circumstances underlying the text.[51] The only relatively secure chronological indication is that the consultation of the oracle cannot be later than the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (AD 161-169), when contemporary Syedran coinage displays on the reverse the corresponding iconography of Dike–Ares–Hermes.[52]

Πάμφυλοι Συεδρῆες ἐπιξύν[ῳ ἐν ἀρούρ]ῃ
ναίοντες χθόνα παμμιγέων ἐ[ριβώλ]ακα φωτῶν
Ἄρηος δείκηλον ἐναιμέος ἀνδροφόνοιο
στήσαντες μεσάτῳ πόλιος [π]α[ρ]ὰ ἔρδετε θύσθλα
δεσμοῖς Ἑρμείαο σιδηρείοις μιν ἔχοντες·
ἐγ δ' ἑτέροιο Δίκη σφε θεμιστεύουσα δικάζ[οι].

[43] BRICAULT 2011.
[44] See esp. AKÇAY 2024, 284-285, Inv. No 4EY6.
[45] BRICAULT 2011, 134.
[46] Particular attention should be paid to RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS 1991. In what follows, the abbreviation *OC* refers to the catalogue of oracles from Claros included in his PhD dissertation.
[47] See first and foremost ROBERT 1966; RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS 1991, 127-138 (*OC* nos. 19-20); MERKELBACH/STAUBER 1996, 30-31 nos. 15-16; MERKELBACH/STAUBER 2001, 99 no. 14/07/01; MERKELBACH/STAUBER 2002, 168-169 no. 18/19/01. Subsequently, see BUSINE 2005, 448 nos. 20-21; GRAF 2007; OESTERHELD 2008, 573 nos. 15-16; FERRARY 2014, 110-111. The alternative offered by GONZALES 2005, 279-281, positing a southern Anatolian oracle of Ares as the divine source based on the god's prominence in the inscriptions, is an appealing hypothesis that cannot yet be proved in the current state of knowledge.
[48] BEAN/MITFORD 1965, 21-23 no. 26.
[49] GONZALES 2005, 279-280.
[50] See BEAN/MITFORD 1965, 22.
[51] For a thorough overview of this much-discussed topic, special mention should be made of RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS 1991, 127-133 (*OC* no. 19); GONZALES 2004, 436-441; TOMASCHITZ 2004.
[52] For the coins see *RPC* IV.25376 ,3 (temporary) [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/4/25376]; *RPC* IV.9366 ,3 (temporary) [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/4/9366]. For an eloquent description see ROBERT 1966, 98, especially on Hermes and Ares: "on comprend maintenant qu'il le tient enchaîné au poignet, comme un gendarme conduit un prisonnier."

αὐτὰρ ὁ λισσομένῳ ἴκελος πέλοι· ὧδε γ[ὰρ ὑ]μεῖν
ἔσσεται εἰρηναῖος, ἀνάρσιον ὄχλον ἐ[λά]σσας
τῆλε πάτρης, ὄρσει δὲ πολύλλιτον εὐοχθείαν.
σὺν δὲ καὶ ὑμέες ἅπτεσθαι κρατεροῖο [π]όν[οι]ο,
ἢ σεύοντες ἢ ἐν δεσμοῖς ἀλύτοις πε[δ]όω[ντες],
μηδ᾽ ὄκνῳ δόμεναι ληϊστήρων τίσ[ι]ν αἰν[ήν].
οὕτω γὰρ μάλα πᾶσαν ὑπεγδύσε[σθε κ]όλο[υσιν].

L. 2: ἐ[ριβώλ]ạκα, Maróti 1991, 177-178; E - - c. 6 - - ATA, Bean/Mitford 1965, 21.

Translation:

Pamphylians of Syedra, who inhabit a rich land of mixed men in shared fields, plant a likeness of bloody, man-slaying Ares in the middle of the city and beside (him) perform sacrifices as you bind him with the iron bonds of Hermes, and on the other side let Justice administer the law and judge him; let him resemble a suppliant. Thus will he become a peaceful deity for you, once he has driven the enemy horde far from your country, and he will give rise to prosperity much prayed for. And you, at the same time, take great pain, either chasing them or placing them in unbreakable bonds, and do not, out of fear of the bandits, pay their terrible penalty. For thus will you escape from all degradation.[53]

As for the oracular response addressed to Iconium—known as the site of a Roman colony founded by Augustus[54]—the inscription was discovered reused as a stair step in present-day Konya. Only four verses in dactylic hexameters have survived, yet they contain crucial information. According to the first editors,[55] the letters were deeply chiselled and still preserved traces of red colouring.

The text refers to a *deikēlon* of Ares, flanked by two statues: one of Hermes, here bearing the epithet Argeiphontes, and another of Thesmos (i.e. Law), which clearly replaces Dike (i.e. Justice) in the Syedran version. The similarities with the oracular inscription from Syedra are striking, although the Iconian text has received comparatively less attention, largely owing to its state of preservation, which complicates detailed exegesis. The crux lies in the sequence ΜΕΓΑΛΟΙΜΙΑ, preserved in the middle of the third extant line, and allegedly constituting a hapax μεγαλοίμια.[56] Merkelbach/Stauber[57] analyse the term as μεγαλ-οίμια, derived from οἶμος / οἴμη, and interpret it as meaning "hochberühmt im Gesang," referring to the statues (ἀγάλματα) of the gods ("hochberühmte Standbilder").[58] This is also the interpretation adopted in the standard collection of Greek verse inscriptions from Asia Minor.[59]

An earlier solution—apparently overlooked—was proposed by Carratelli,[60] who construed the expression differently: μέγα as a modifier of χρειώ (frequently neuter in poetic usage), in the sense of "necessità grande," and λοίμια as a neuter plural adjective qualifying the statues (ἀγάλματα). Within this interpretation, the statues are to be understood as "statue atte a fugar la peste," as suggested by comparison with Apollo Loimios at Lindos.[61] The oracle of Apollo at Claros was frequently consulted in response to outbreaks of plague and epidemic disease, prompting the erection of cult statues not only of Apollo himself but also of other deities, such as Artemis of Ephesus and Hygieia.[62]

However, such an interpretation would entail positing two closely parallel oracular responses prescribing essentially identical ritual remedies for two distinct problems (i.e. banditry in Syedra and plague in Iconium), an apparent contradiction that calls for further clarification. The most illuminating explanation has been advanced by Rodríguez Somolinos,[63] who connects both oracular responses with endemic banditry in the Taurus Mountains during the second century AD.[64] This chronological framework coincides not only with several documented delegations from Iconium to the sanctuary of Apollo at Claros,[65] but also with the coinage first issued at Syedra under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, which displays the iconographic triad Dike–Ares–Hermes, as previously noted.

Drawing on textual parallels, Rodríguez Somolinos[66] argues that *loimia* should be read metaphorically as denoting the bandits, who are thus likened to a plague.[67] On this basis, the inscription may be understood and translated as follows:

[- - -]
ạἵ ṭ᾽ ẹἰσ̣ὶ π̣ṭọλίων κηδήμονες ἠδ᾽ ὀλέτειραι·
2 Ἑρμείην δὲ Ἀργειφόντην Θεσμόν τε τίοντες,
ὧν ὑμεῖν χρειὼ μέγα λοίμια ἀγάλματα τεῦξαι

[53] The English translation of GONZALES 2005, 279-280 is reproduced here in full with two exceptions. One is the Greek word ληϊστήρων (l. 12), which he renders as "pirates" but which may, as will be seen below, be more accurately understood as "bandits." The other is the translation of δείκηλον (l. 3), rendered not as "statue" but as "likeness," following GRAF 2007, 116.
[54] See in detail MITCHELL 1979.
[55] See HEBERDEY/WILHELM 1896, 161 no. 267, with facsimile. Should any modern reader wonder about palaeographical criteria for dating the inscription, GRAF 2007, 117 points out that it does not help to date the text "any better than between late Hellenistic and Imperial time."
[56] Neither the first editors, HEBERDEY/WILHELM 1896, 161 no. 267, nor Louis ROBERT 1966, 96 n. 1 propose an interpretation of it.
[57] MERKELBACH/STAUBER 1996, 31 no. 16.
[58] See also GRAF 2007, 116: "very famous statues."
[59] MERKELBACH/STAUBER 2001, 99 no. 14/07/01.
[60] CARRATELLI 1965, 12.
[61] CARRATELLI 1965, 12.
[62] For an overview of the topic, see BUSINE 2005, 172-180; JONES 2005; JONES 2006; GRAF 2007.
[63] RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS 1991, 127-138 (*OC* nos. 19-20).
[64] On this subject, see esp. BRÉLAZ 2005, 52-56.
[65] According to FERRARY 2014, 160-162, thirteen memorials or fragments of memorials have been preserved with the name of the colony of Iconium (nos. 47, 49, 53, 59, 71, 77, 123, 125, 126, 135, 138, 152, 261), and three others may be with a probability close to certainty (nos. 39, 89, 339). The first certain memorial (no. 47) is recorded during the pritany of Hermias (II) son of Attalus (I) (135/6 AD more than 136/7) and the last (no. 261) during the 102nd pritany of Apollo (186/187 AD). The memorial no. 39 ("presque certainement Iconium") is recorded during the pritany of Claudius Rufus (132/133 AD), and the memorial no. 339 ("très probablement") is an undatable fragment.
[66] RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS 1991, 134-138 (*OC* no. 20).
[67] "Es decir, los bandidos son un λοιμός, son ἄνδρες λοιμοί. Hay que colocar estatuas λοίμια, esto es, que pongan freno a ese λοιμός" RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS 1991, 137 (*OC* no. 20). One may note in passing that RODRÍGUEZ SOMOLINOS 1991, 137 also considers editing μέγ᾽ ἀλοίμια, assuming a hapax ἀλοίμιος that could be related to ἀλοιμός (see *DGE* s.v. http://dge.cchs.csic.es/xdge/ἀλοιμός).

στῆσα[ί] τε ἀμφ' Ἄρεως ἑκάτερθεν δεικήλωι
[- - -]

Translation:

(…) and who[68] *are both protectors and destroyers of cities; but honouring Hermes, the slayer of Argus, and Law, of whom you have great need to make statues capable of containing such a pest, and to erect them around the likeness of Ares, on either side (…).*

All things considered, the above interpretation is philologically persuasive, avoids unnecessary palaeographic complications, and makes good sense of the prominence of Ares in both responses, since a god of war could readily be associated with episodes of banditry.[69]

4. 2. Cults of Ares in Syedra and Iconium

In the case of Syedra, the prominence of the cult of Ares is well attested. The god appears independently—without accompanying figures—armed with spear and shield on the reverse of imperial coinage, including at least one specimen from the reign of Marcus Aurelius.[70] Moreover, his bearded and helmeted bust is represented on the obverse of another issue, the reverse of which depicts "Aphrodite standing facing, head left, holding a mirror in her right hand and arranging her hair with her left."[71] The epigraphic record points in the same direction: priests of Ares are attested and must have been prominent members of the civic community.[72] A male priesthood of Aphrodite also appears to have existed.[73]

As for the other divinities mentioned in the oracle, "Hermes standing left, holding purse and caduceus" is likewise depicted alone on the reverse of imperial coins from Syedra,[74] whereas no further explicit references to Dike have, to date, been identified.

In Iconium, the only secure evidence for Ares appears to be the oracular response itself.[75] No coinage attests a Thesmos–Ares–Hermes motif comparable to that of Syedra, nor do there seem to be issues depicting the god of war independently.[76] A votive dedication now in the Konya Archaeological Museum, addressed to Ares by a priest (name lost), may also be noted; it features a small relief bust of an elderly woman on a base, although its provenance remains unknown (*I. Mus. Konya* no. 36).[77] This situation stands in marked contrast to the prominence of Ares at other Lycaonian sites, such as Savatra, where several imperial inscriptions refer to Ares and the Areiai as *theoi patrioi* and *epēkooi*.[78] Lystra—likewise a Roman colony, as was Iconium—provides further evidence: a Latin inscription attests a *sacerdos Martis* in AD 97-98.[79]

A comparable pattern may be observed in the case of Hermes, who functions in various Lycaonian contexts as a kind of assistant to Zeus.[80] In Iconium, however, the oracular response seems to constitute the sole attestation of the god.[81] The same applies to Thesmos.[82]

In conclusion, although arguments *ex silentio* must always be treated with caution, the available evidence strongly suggests that the oracle's prescriptions were not intended to reflect or accommodate the existing civic pantheons of the cities concerned, but rather articulate a broader Panhellenic religious horizon. How, if at all, local cults may have been shaped by these global discourses remains to be clarified.

5. SUMMARY

In light of the evidence reviewed above, several points may be summarised.

The discussion opened with the iconography of Ares holding a trident at Amblada in eastern Pisidia, an attribute that invites comparison with Poseidon as an attractive line of interpretation regarding both its meaning and its function. Such an association, however, cannot be regarded as definitive, as it may instead reflect local features that are presently unknown to us.

The second part of the study examined the god's divinatory dimension in southern Asia Minor, particularly in relation to alphabetical oracles. The unusual dedication to Ares involving the Egyptian god Hermanubis has likewise been cautiously interpreted in connection with this oracular aspect, admittedly in the absence of a more convincing explanation.

Attention then turned to two Clarian oracles prescribing the erection of statues of Ares alongside Hermes (Argeiphontes) and Dike/Thesmos at Syedra and Iconium, prompted by the problem of endemic banditry in the second century AD. Further analysis has suggested that the instructions attributed to Clarian Apollo should be understood as reflecting the Greek cultural framing of Ares' cult in relation to this social and security concern.

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[68] Please note that the Greek text employs a feminine relative pronoun.

[69] In a related instance, one may note in passing the funerary epigram *SEG* 65-1466 (Kibyra, 3rd century AD), which mentions Ares and Dike in the epitaph of a man killed by bandits.

[70] See *RPC* IV.9356 ,3 (temporary) [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/4/9356].

[71] See *RPC* III, 2771 [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/3/2771]. The issue is dated to the "first half of the second century," without specifying BC or AD. It seems Hellenistic, though a more precise assessment must be left to specialists.

[72] See ADAK 2021, 4-9 no. 1 (hereditary priesthood); ADAK 2021, 14-16 no. 7. One might also add that the personal name Areios is attested once in Syedra: see *LGPN* V5b-31305.

[73] See ADAK 2021, 11-12 no. 4.

[74] See e.g. *RPC* VIII, — (unassigned; ID 2959) [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/2959]; *RPC* VI, 6974 (temporary) [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/6/6974].

[75] See RÖHR 2009, 100 no. 32.

[76] Just in case, note *RPC* II, 1611 (reverse design: "Minerva (?) standing facing, head left, holding spear and resting on shield") [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/2/1611].

[77] *I. Mus. Konya* no. 35, provenance Sızma (Zizima), is wrongly seen by the editor as a dedication to Ares (see PARKER 2023, 61 n. 115, who speaks of Pan), but the name of the dedicator deserves to be quoted all the same: Λ. Καλπούρνιος Ἀρηΐφιλος (*LGPN* V5c-15316).

[78] See ROBERT 1955, 72-78; MILLINGTON 2013, 560, 562; ALKAN/IŞIK 2021, 463-465 no. 4.

[79] *I.Lykaonien* no. 166.

[80] See PARKER 2023, 185.

[81] See RÖHR 2009, 153 no. 185.

[82] An identification with "Aequitas standing left, holding scales and cornucopia" (as described in numismatic records from Iconium) seems a rather desperate solution: see e.g. *RPC* VII.2775 ,2 [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/7.2/2775]; *RPC* VII.2776 ,2 [https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/7.2/2776].

Overall, the evidence assembled here points to cults of Ares in southern Asia Minor characterised by considerable religious specificities, the evolution of which remains difficult to reconstruct. What survives often reflects the outcomes of complex and dynamic interactions in particular settings—a reminder that, despite sustained scholarly attention, many local religious phenomena continue to resist precise historical understanding.

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