Gods and Emperors at Aigeai in Cilicia

Mika Kajava
University of Helsinki

The article addresses some aspects of the Roman Imperial cult in Asia Minor by discussing a number of round altars from Aigeai in Cilicia. The dedicatory inscriptions of these monuments, some of which are unpublished (D10, E14), testify to various local methodologies of honouring the Roman emperors and their family members jointly with local deities. As they do not mention specific dedicators, the altars must have been set up on public initiative.

From the port city of Aigeai (Ayas) in eastern Cilicia comes a remarkable set of round altars bearing two dedications each: one to poliadic (Dionysos – Demeter; Asklepios – Hygeia) or other deities, and the other to Roman emperors and their family members. Most of the latter are additions engraved on the back of the altars, although sometimes the original dedication was given to one or more deities and an emperor (or emperors) simultaneously. In no case is a dedicator recorded. Although the dossier is well known and has been studied in detail, there are a number of issues that are still worth addressing. The evidence may be summarized briefly by presenting the dedications according to their original recipients.

A. Five joint dedications to Dionysos Kalikarpous and Demeter Karpotrophos (or Karpotrophos; Διονύσῳ Καλλικάρπῳ καὶ Δήμητρι Καρποφόρῳ) with later dedications on another side of the altar (except No. 5) to one or more members of the imperial house:


4) Heberdey & Wilhelm 1896, 16 No. 44 (cf. IGR III 923; IGLS III 714; Sayar 2004b, 252 No. 68; Haymann 2014b, 273 No. 22): to aikisΣεβαστοῖς, Date uncertain, but not later than Severan times.

5) Sayar 2004b, 251 No. 66, with PI. 13,4 (SEG LIV 1479; cf. Haymann 2014b, 274 No. 24): this case is somewhat peculiar, as Διονύσῳ Καλλικάρπῳ is inscribed twice and is followed by καὶ Δή/μητρι Καρποφόρῳ και Αὐτοκράτοροι Καίσαρα, the unknown emperor thus appearing on the same side of the altar. See below for discussion.

B. Dedication to Demeter Karpotrophos, “other Sebastoi”, Hadrian, and Isis, with an added dedication on side B to Severus Alexander and others:

6) Sayar 2004b, 250 No. 64, with PI. 13,3 (SEG LIV 1478; cf. Haymann 2014b, 267 No. 10). Side A: Δήμητρι Καρποφόρῳ, / τοῖς ἄλλοις Σεβαστοῖς / καὶ Αὐτοκράτοροι / Καίσαρι Ἀλεξάνδρῳ / Σεβαστῷ καὶ [---]. Judging by Feissel (1991, 53), the dedication continued with the mention of Julia Mamaea and the phrase καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις Σεβαστοῖς (“Julia Mammaea et aux autres Augustes”). Unfortunately, the photograph (Sayar 2004b, Pl. 13, 4) does not allow the texts to be read in their entirety. The text of side A in its published form is somewhat problematic; see below for discussion.

C. Three joint dedications to Asklepios and Hygeia (Nos. 7-8: Ἀσκληπιῷ / καὶ Ὑγείᾳ / Σωτῆρι / Πολιούχοις; No. 9: without epithets), two of which (Nos. 8-9) include later dedications to emperors. Nos. 7 and 8 ended up in Messina in Sicily (the former is extant, but the latter disappeared during the earthquake of 1908).

7) SEG XLII 870 (cf. Manganaro 1996, with an erroneous attribution to Messina). This is the only altar of the set that was never rededicated to emperors; see Strasser 2002; Haymann 2014b, 266 No. 8.

8) IGR LIV 1478; cf. Haymann 2014b, 266 No. 8. See below for discussion.

9) Weiss 1982, 192-194 (SEG XXXII 1312; cf. Haymann 2014b, 271 No. 18): (A) joint dedication to Gordian III, theoi Gordianoi (Gordian I and II) and the theoi

1 For help and useful information I am indebted to Denis Feissel, Florian Haymann, Olli Salomies, Mustafa H. Sayar, Jean-Yves Strasser and the two anonymous readers.

2 For the correct reading of the dedication to Dionysos and Demeter on the other side, see Robert 1973, 168 n. 27. In a copy reported by Jerphanion & Jalabert 1908, 476, the end of the fourth line of this text would read ΑΘΗΤΥ: perhaps “to Agathe Tyche” following the names of the other deities rather than a mistake of the copyist.
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Sebastoi Alexander Severus, Caracalla and Julia Domna, 238 CE; (B) καὶ τοῖς Σέβαστοῖς; (C) joint dedication to Asklepios, Hygeia and theoi Sebastoi. This order of the dedications¹ was revised, probably correctly, on palaeographic and other grounds, by Dagron & Feissel 1987, p. 124: the dedication given to the two deities and the previous emperors (C) would have been the earliest one, perhaps amplified with one to the living Sebasto (B), unless this latter is a superfluous equivalent of theoi Sebastoi. If the relationships between the texts can be established in this way, the dedication of 238 CE being the last in order, the altar with its dedicatory inscriptions would fit the general pattern described for the rest of the Aigeai material.

D. Joint dedications to unknown / non-poliadic deities and Julio-Claudians, along with others to later emperors.


11) IGR III 921 (cf. IGLS III 715; Haymann 2014b, 264 No. 5): joint dedication to Augustus (Theos Sebastos Kaisar), Poseidon Asphaleios and Aphrodite Euploia, with "καὶ τοῖς Σέβαστοῖς" on another side (this addition is probably identical with CIG 4442, see Robert 1973, 166).

E. Probable joint dedications to gods and emperors. The original recipient(s), one or more deities, would have been recorded on one of the lost sides of the altar.


13) IGR III 922 ("ex schedis Instituti archaeologici Vindobonensis"; the copy was probably made by Rudolf Heberdey, who in the "Reisen” publication was responsible for eastern Cilicia, and thus Aigeai): dedication to Septimius Severus and to at least one of his sons.


In the Greco-Roman world there were multiple strategies of associating Roman rulers with gods: the adoption by emperors of divine epithets, the juxtaposition of emperor and god in art and architecture, and so on.⁴ However, the method introduced in Aigeai is a particular one, as we are dealing with a complex composed of round altars very similar to each other in terms of shape and size,⁵ which were all dedicated first to Greek gods and later to Roman emperors. Individual cases of altars of gods being redirected to rulers do exist, but such a large and coherent set as the one here considered strongly points to a local or regional tradition, which judging by the chronology of the added dedications seems to have endured through several generations.⁶ On the other hand, the set of altars from Aigeai, both as a whole and individually, probably also reflects Imperial propaganda or, at least, consent on the part of the Roman administration.

In their capacity as saviours and givers of prosperity, the deities documented on the altars were especially apt for imperial associations. While the two versions of Demeter and Dionysos were both associated with karpós, Asclepios and Hygeia were worshipped as saviours protecting the city (sôtêres poliouchoi), such qualities being widely used as vehicles for Imperial ideology. It seems equally understandable that Augustus had received an altar jointly with Poseidon Asphaleios (“Securer”) and Aphrodite Euploia (“Fair Voyage”); the former, the Earthshaker, is the one who also stabilizes the ground, and so he was besought as the Securer in the event of earthquakes, while Aphrodite had a significant role as the protectress of seafarers.

On the other hand, since Poseidon the Securer was also called upon to calm sea storms, one wonders whether both deities, Aphrodite and Poseidon, had been offered sacrifices to guarantee safe sailing conditions for the emperor, perhaps on his sea voyage back from Syria in 20 BCE. It might also be the case that Augustus, who in the Greek East was sometimes hailed as “γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης ἐπόπτης” (or similar),⁷ appears in the company of Poseidon and Aphrodite as the lord of the known world, whether land or sea.⁸

What is remarkable about these altars is that no dedicators are ever mentioned in their inscriptions. This is a strong indication of their public status and of a context which did not require further identification, the absence of a dedicatory generally pointing to monuments that were not given by private individuals on their own initiative.⁹ In the present case, one may assume that the public label of the altars was manifested by their display in some centrally located civic or religious place, where they had been dedicated by a public body, probably the city itself. Although little is known about their conditions of discovery (more precise information about find spots is recorded only for Nos. 1 and 9), it may well be that the majority of the altars came from, respectively, the sanctuaries of Demeter and Dionysos and of

6 For altars to Augustus subsequently rededicated to other emperors, see the Athenian evidence discussed by Benjamin & Rabuttschek 1959, passim.

7 IGR I 901 = IOSPE II 354 (Phanagoria, Sarmatia); IGR III 719 (Myra, Lycia); SEG LVII 1665 (Tyberissos, Lycia; cf. Kajava 2011, 586-587); I. Pergamon 381 and 383a = IGR IV 309 and 315. The expression itself was probably a novelty introduced under Pompey.

8 For a Coan round altar dedicated, in second use, to Claudius assimilated with Poseidon Asphaleios, see Berges 1996, 115 No. 24 (cf. p. 154) = IGLXII 4, 417: Κλαυδίου / Καίσαρος / Σεβαστοῦ / Ποσίδωνος Άσφαλειου. This was probably made by the imperial workshop responsible for orientalising coinage under Claudius.

9 Cf. Robert 1973, 169; Strasser 2002, 157. See Kajava 2011, 574-575 for altars to emperors (especially the ruling emperor) by anonymous dedicators. Further Cilician evidence for the omission of dedicators in altar inscriptions to gods and emperors may be found in Hierapolis Kastabala (Heberdey & Wilhelmi 1896, 27 No. 60a-b; Sayar & Stiewert & Tauebler 1989, 9-33, Nos. 8-19) as well as in Anazarbos (Sayar 2000, 22 No. 10; 43 Nos. 41-43, 48-49 Nos. 54-57).


4 Price 1984, passim; Frija 2010.

5 See Berges 1986 and 1996 for the typology.
Asklepios. On the other hand, one might also consider a central public location like the local agora. Either way, the original places of dedication must have been such that they did not leave the dedicators’ identity ambiguous.

To conclude, let me add some observations on Nos. 5, 6 and 10, regarding their inscriptions and the identity of some of their recipients.

As noted above, the inscription of No. 5 is noteworthy due to the fact that the name of Dionysos Kalikarpos is recorded twice, and also because the emperor appears on the same side of the altar: Δήμητρι / Καρποτρόφῳ / Καίσαρι and may have been the Asklepieia of Cos and Pergamon, see Robert 1973, 184-204; Ziegler 1994; Steger 2004, 97-99.

In any case, the dedication might be tentatively associated with one of Hadrian’s journeys through the region, during which he probably visited Aigeai as well, and it seems more than once. Note, finally, that Sabina may have accompanied Hadrian during one of the visits, perhaps in the summer of 129 CE. The unpublished dedication on side A of No. 10 would seem to begin with the mention of “God Caesar” but, as Denis Feissel kindly informs me, the item θεῷ Καίσαρι is in fact preceded by “καί”, which must mean that the dedication also went to a god or goddess or to more deities, perhaps a pair such as Dionysos Kalikarpos and Demeter Karpophoros (ή-τροφος), or Asklepios and Hygeia, or some other divine combination. However, whether the divine recipients were originally accompanied by “God Caesar”, either alone or jointly with the “Sebastoi” (καὶ τοῖς Σεβαστοῖς), must remain uncertain, for these items may have been added later, either simultaneously or in two steps. In the former case, the term “Sebastoi” would likely refer to living members of the early Julio-Claudian house, although, considering that from about the mid-first century CE the expression (Theoi) Sebastoi began to include not only the living emperor and his family but also the previous rulers and their houses, one could tentatively consider a somewhat later period as well. In either case, however, assuming that “Theos Kaiser” refers to Caesar the Dictator (and not to Augustus, who is “Theos Sebastos Kaiser” in No. 11, or to another Julio-Claudian Caesar), one should hypothesize that at Aigeai there was a cult of the Deified Caesar that still endured long after his death. This may not be excluded, as it is documented by other evidence that some Romans, Julio-Claudians and others, were occasionally worshipped posthumously over several decades. On the other hand, if the “Sebastoi” item is later than “God Caesar”, as it may well be, it could date anywhere before the early 3rd century CE.

The latter, in particular, was a major cult centre with a reputation comparable to that of the Asklepieia of Cos and Pergamon, see Robert 1973, 184-204; Ziegler 1994; Steger 2004, 97-99. Hadrian, perhaps styled as neos Asklepios, may have been the synoikos of the local god, see Haymann 2014a, 164-165 and 2014b, 82. Under Severus Alexander, the city was probably made neokoros for the god’s temple, see Burrell 2004, 231. For the cult of Demeter and Dionysos at Aigeai, see Noile 2003, 80-81; Sayar 2004a, 195.

from the evidence of coins that Sabina was identified with Isis in Egypt, as with many other deities in many other places, and since cults of Egyptian gods are well attested in Cilia, one might assume that Sabina was also associated with Isis (Euploia?) in Aigeai, just as she was equated with Artemis in other Cilician cities. In any case, the dedication might be tentatively associated with one of Hadrian’s journeys through the region, during which he probably visited Aigeai as well, and it seems more than once. Note, finally, that Sabina may have accompanied Hadrian during one of the visits, perhaps in the summer of 129 CE. The unpublished dedication on side A of No. 10 would seem to begin with the mention of “God Caesar” but, as Denis Feissel kindly informs me, the item θεῷ Καίσαρι is in fact preceded by “καί”, which must mean that the dedication also went to a god or goddess or to more deities, perhaps a pair such as Dionysos Kalikarpos and Demeter Karpophoros (ή-τροφος), or Asklepios and Hygeia, or some other divine combination. However, whether the divine recipients were originally accompanied by “God Caesar”, either alone or jointly with the “Sebastoi” (καὶ τοῖς Σεβαστοῖς), must remain uncertain, for these items may have been added later, either simultaneously or in two steps. In the former case, the term “Sebastoi” would likely refer to living members of the early Julio-Claudian house, although, considering that from about the mid-first century CE the expression (Theoi) Sebastoi began to include not only the living emperor and his family but also the previous rulers and their houses, one could tentatively consider a somewhat later period as well. In either case, however, assuming that “Theos Kaiser” refers to Caesar the Dictator (and not to Augustus, who is “Theos Sebastos Kaiser” in No. 11, or to another Julio-Claudian Caesar), one should hypothesize that at Aigeai there was a cult of the Deified Caesar that still endured long after his death. This may not be excluded, as it is documented by other evidence that some Romans, Julio-Claudians and others, were occasionally worshipped posthumously over several decades. On the other hand, if the “Sebastoi” item is later than “God Caesar”, as it may well be, it could date anywhere before the early 3rd century CE.

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16 Haymann 2014a, 153 and 2014ab, 81, discussing numismatic evidence (according to Haymann, at least two visits by the emperor may be proved numismatically), and pointing out (2014b, 84) that if Isis Euploia is meant, the reference might be to an imperial sea voyage.
17 Lozano 2007.
At any rate, the altar dedication may suggest a cult for Caesar, which would not be surprising, considering that he had visited Aigeai and made it a “free city” in 47 BCE, in recognition of which the local people introduced a calendar era starting from that year. The city may well have bestowed divine cultic honours on Caesar already during his lifetime.

References


