ΚΥΡΙΕ, ΔΕΣΠΟΤΑ, *DOMINE*
GREEK POLITENESS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE[*]

Abstract: Why did the Greeks of the Roman period make such extensive use of the vocative κύριε, when Greeks of earlier periods had been content with only one vocative meaning 'master', δέσποτα? This study, based primarily on a comprehensive search of documentary papyri but also making extensive use of literary evidence (particularly that of the Septuagint and New Testament), traces the development of both terms from the classical period to the seventh century AD. It concludes that κύριε was created to provide a translation for Latin *domine,* and that *domine,* which has often been considered a translation of κύριε, had a Roman origin. In addition, both κύριε and *domine* were from their beginnings much less deferential than is traditionally supposed, so that neither term underwent the process of 'weakening' which converted English 'master' into 'Mr'. δέσποτα, which was originally far more deferential than the other two terms, did undergo some weakening, but not (until a very late period) as much as is usually supposed. These findings in turn imply that Imperial politeness has been somewhat misunderstood and suggest that the Greeks of the first few centuries AD were much less servile in their language than is traditionally assumed.

IT is often observed that the vocative κύριε, which is ubiquitous both in the New Testament and in papyrus letters, did not exist at all in the classical period.[1] Even more common is the observation that both κύριε, which should mean 'lord', and δέσποτα, which should mean 'master', underwent a spectacular process of weakening in the Imperial period: although originally they were terms for superiors, first κύριε and then δέσποτα eventually became usable to close relatives, subordinates, and even children.[2] Discussions of the development often point to a Latin parallel to show that the sudden enormous popularity of these forms of address was part of a general cultural phenomenon in the early Empire, for while Cicero could use a simple, unadorned name to address anyone of any rank, by the first century AD the title *domine*, 'master', had become as common in Latin as κύριε and δέσποτα in Greek.[3] The modern development of 'master' into 'Mr' and equivalent processes with French *Monsieur* and German *Herr* are obvious parallels; that we have not yet reached the stage of using such addresses to our children is due to the fact that we have not been forced to adopt the attitude of abject servility which Augustus and his successors demanded from the formerly free citizens of Rome.

Or is it? On closer examination, several aspects of this traditional view of Imperial politeness are puzzling. Assuming that there was in fact an epidemic of servility at the beginning of the Empire, why did it require the creation of the new vocative κύριε rather than a simple increase in use of the pre-existing δέσποτα? Why did κύριε weaken before δέσποτα did, given the almost universal tendency in modern languages for new polite addresses to be more deferential than older ones with the same semantic fields?[4] If the process was a general cultural phenomenon rather than a development linked to the individual words involved, why did κύριε and

[1] E.g. J. Svennung, *Anredeformen: Vergleichende Forschungen zur indirekten Anrede in der Dritten Person und zum Nominativ für den Vokativ* (Uppsala 1958) 337; H. Zilliacus, *Untersuchungen zu den abstrakten Anredeformen und Höflichkeitstiteln im Griechischen* (Helsinki 1949) 20; T. Wendel, *Die Gesprächsanrede im griechischen Epos und Drama der Blütezeit* (Stuttgart 1929) 88. Sometimes this statement is made in the more accurate form that κύριε is absent from classical Greek except for one occurrence in Pindar (*P.* 2.58).

[2] E.g. D. Hagedorn and K.A. Worp, 'Von κύριος zu δεσπότης: Eine Bemerkung zur Kaisertitulatur im 3./4. Jhdt.', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 39

(1980) 177; Svennung (n.1) 336-8; Zilliacus (n.1) 34; W. Foerster and G. Quell, 'Κύριος', in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart 1938) 2.1044; W.W. Baudissin and O. Eissfeldt, *Kyrios als Gottesname im Judentum und seine Stelle in der Religionsgeschichte* (Giessen 1926-9) 2.296-7.

[3] E.g. M. Bang, 'Über den Gebrauch der Anrede *Domine* im gemeinen Leben', appendix to L. Friedlaender, *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms* (9th-10th edn, ed. G. Wissowa, Leipzig 1921) 4.82-8; Svennung (n.1) 338-46.

[4] F. Braun, *Terms of Address: Problems of Patterns and Usage in Various Languages and Cultures* (Berlin 1988) 57.

δέσποτα behave differently at all? Could a restructuring of the top tier of an enormous bureaucracy really cause a fundamental change in the way ordinary people interacted with one another, even in regions where the majority of the populace were not Roman citizens and were governed largely by their own pre-Roman institutions? And are we really sure that we know what these terms meant to the people who used and received them?

The problems surrounding κύριε and δέσποτα have been extensively studied already,[5] but recent developments have given scholars a new opportunity to solve them. Not only has the quantity of papyri and other non-literary evidence for language use increased immensely since the most important work on this topic was done, but the development of electronic tools for text analysis has made it possible to handle this evidence in new ways. Perhaps, if we consider the issue afresh, it will be possible to re-interpret this aspect of Imperial politeness in a way that fits all the evidence and the principles of linguistics as well.

DOMINE

Although our main concern is with κύριε and δέσποτα, a full understanding of these terms is not possible without taking into account the similar developments affecting Latin *domine*, so we must begin with a summary of those developments.[6] While the word *dominus* (meaning 'householder', 'owner', or 'master') is common from an early period, the custom of using *domine* and *domina* as addresses seems to have arisen only in the latter part of the first century BC:[7] not only is it unattested in the Republican period, but both Cicero and Horace provide contexts in which their failure to use or to mention *domine* is striking.[8] By the middle of the first century AD, however, *domine* was such a common form of address that Seneca mentions it as a standard way of greeting people whose names one has forgotten (*Ep.* 3.1). The term seems to have started out within the family and then spread to unrelated addressees, for Suetonius reports that Augustus, when he decided to forbid the use of *domine* to himself, would not allow such flattery to be used *even* by his children or grandchildren, *not even* among themselves.[9]

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[5] See L. Bréhier, 'L'origine des titres impériaux à Byzance', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 15 (1906) 161-78; A. Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten* (4th edn, Tübingen 1923) 298-306; F. Preisigke, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden* (Berlin 1924-7; see also revised edn by E. Kiessling 1944) s.vv.; Baudissin and Eissfeldt (n.2); K. Amantos, 'Γλωσσικά', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 38 (1928) 18-20; L. Dineen, *Titles of Address in Christian Greek Epistolography to 527 AD* (Chicago 1929) 56-7, 66-8, 76, 78; Wendel (n.1) 88; Foerster and Quell (n.2) 2.1038-94; K.H. Rengstorf, 'Δεσπότης', in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart 1938) 2.43-8; Zilliacus (n.1) 20, 34; H. Zilliacus, *Zur Sprache griechischer Familienbriefe des III. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Helsinki 1943) 31-2; F. Dölger, 'Die Entwicklung der Byzantinischen Kaisertitulatur und die Datierung von Kaiserdarstellungen in der Byzantinischen Kleinkunst', in G.E. Mylonas and D. Raymond (eds.), *Studies Presented to David Moore Robinson* (St. Louis 1953) 2.985-1005; Svennung (n.1) 336-8; P. Bureth, *Les titulatures impériales dans les papyrus, les ostraca, et les inscriptions d'Égypte (30 a. C. -- 284 ap. C.)* (Brussels 1964); Hagedorn and Worp (n.2) 165-77; A. Pietersma, 'Kyrios or tetragram: a renewed quest for the original LXX', in A. Pietersma and C. Cox (eds.), *De Septuaginta: Studies in Honour of John*

William Wevers on his Sixty-fifth Birthday (Mississauga, ON 1984) 85-101; W. Bauer and K. and B. Aland, *Griechisch–deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur* (6th edn, Berlin 1988) s.vv.; E. Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address: From Herodotus to Lucian* (Oxford 1996) 95-101; M. Grünbart, *Die Anrede im byzantinischen Brief von Prokopios von Gaza bis Michael Choniates* (diss. Vienna 2000) 173-5, 193-4, 206-7; also further bibliography cited in these works.

[6] What follows is only an overview omitting many of the details and most of the evidence; for complete information see E. Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address: From Plautus to Apuleius* (Oxford 2002), ch.2.

[7] Except the use of *domina* and *domine* to lovers, which has been traced to the second century BC (Lucilius *fr.* 730 Marx) but seems to be a separate issue.

[8] The contexts are Cicero's letters (compare the high frequency of *domine* in the letters preserved at Vindolanda) and Horace's discussions of flattery (*S.* 2.5.23-38, *Ep.* 1.6.54-5, 1.7.37-8; compare Juvenal 5.132-9, 8.161 and Martial 2.68, 4.83, 6.88, etc.)

[9] Suet. *Aug.* 53.1: *dominumque se posthac appellari ne a liberis quidem aut nepotibus suis vel serio vel ioco passus est atque eius modi blanditias etiam inter ipsos prohibuit.*

Although the traditional view held that *domine* was in origin the term slaves used to their masters and that it was therefore deeply servile when used by free men, it now appears that slaves did not actually use this word, at least until a period in which free men had already started calling each other *domine*. (The slaves' word for 'master' was *erus* in reference and *ere* in address, at least until the end of the first century BC.[10]) This explains why *domine* as an address, far from being gradually weakened, seems in its earliest occurrences to be only mildly polite: it entered the general system of Roman addresses as a familial term, not a servile one, and it reflects the 'householder' meaning of *dominus* rather than its 'slave-master' sense, thus indicating not that the addressee has absolute power over the speaker, but that he is a man of some property and social standing who is being honoured like a relative.[11]

ΔΕΣΠΟΤΑ

Greek δεσπότης, feminine δέσποινα, is in many respects the exact counterpart of *dominus*. Like the Latin term, it is derived from a word for 'house' and originally means 'house-owner', although it was soon generalized to mean 'owner', 'lord', or 'master' of any type of property, including slaves or the subjects of an absolute ruler.[12] In the classical period the address δέσποτα occurs in such contexts as slaves addressing their masters,[13] subjects addressing kings and queens,[14] and humans addressing divinities.[15] It continues to be used this way in the New Testament and in literary texts of the Imperial period.[16]

In papyrus documents δεσπότης first appears in the late first century BC[17] and in its referential usage means, as one would expect, 'master, owner' (*BGU* iv.1125.7). The only instance of the vocative from that period is δέσπο[τα αὐτοκράτωρ] addressed to the emperor Augustus (*PSI* x.1160.20).

In documents of the first century AD δεσπότης / δέσποινα in referential usage still means 'master' and 'owner' (*P.Oxy.* i.49.4; *P.Congr. XV* 15.3.50, 15.4.73) but in the vocative is occasionally used in what seems to be a very weakened sense: a son calls his father δέσποτα πάτερ (*P.Oxy.* xlvii.3356.13) and a man calls a friend δέσποτα (*P.Oxy.* xlii.3057.29, 1st or 2nd c.). In second-century papyri δέσποτα is used in petitions to the epistrategos (*SB* xvi.12500.20) and eparch (*ChLA* iii.201.6) as well as by a woman, perhaps a slave, to a man who may be her master (*P.Giss.* 17.3), while δέσποινα is used by a son to his mother (*P.Wisc.* ii.84.3.36).

[10] *Cf.* J. Köhm, *Altlateinische Forschungen* (Leipzig 1905) 167.

[11] *Cf.* the widespread use of kinship terms such as *pater* ('father') and *frater* ('brother') in address to men unrelated to the speaker, and the frequent combination of such terms with *domine* (e.g. in the Vindolanda tablets; n.b. also Greek Anthology 10. 44 and Horace and Juvenal cited in n.8 above.)

[12] The feminine is first attested in Homer (e.g. *Od.* 7.347, 14.127); the masculine (which poses metrical difficulties in epic) appears in Sappho (95.8 V), Pindar (*P.* 4.207), Aeschylus (*Eu.* 60), Herodotus (3.89), Isocrates (4.121), Aristotle (*Pol.* 1253b), etc. *Cf.* LSJ s.v.

[13] E.g. Hdt. 3.85.2; Eur. *Cyc.* 250; Ar. *Ran.* 1, *Vesp.* 142; Men. *Dysc.* 589.

[14] E.g. Hdt. 1.8.3, 1.90.2; Xen. *Cyr.* 6.6.2; Aesch. *Pers.* 1049; Eur. *Heracl.* 785.

[15] E.g. Eur. *IT* 271, *Bacch.* 582; Ar. *Vesp.* 389, *Nub.* 264, *Ach.* 247.

[16] E.g. Chariton 2.1.3, 4.2.9; Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 2.3; Achilles Tatius 3.20.1, 5.17.3; for New Testament usage, see Rengstorf (n.5) esp. 47-8.

[17] Statistics concerning papyrus documents are based on electronic searches of the Duke Database of Documentary Papyri, using the search facilities on the web version of the Perseus program (perseus.csad.ox.ac.uk) in June 2000. This software allows very sophisticated searching, locating even misspelled versions of the words concerned, and the database contains virtually all papyri published before 1996. Whenever possible (i.e. in about 80% of the cases) I checked the data thus obtained against a printed edition to verify dates and contexts. In addition, I have deleted from my statistics all occurrences which are purely supplements, retaining only those of which some trace remains on the papyrus.

In the third century the addresses δέσποτα, δέσποτά μου, ἡγεμὼν δέσποτα (μου), and δέσποτα ἡγεμών are often used in petitions (and, less often, reports) to important officials;[18] there are also a few examples of δέσποτα and δέσποτά μου in private letters to employers or patrons (*P.Rein.* ii.113.6; *PSI* ix.1081.12, 32, 3rd or 4th c.), and once δέσποτά μοι is used by a father to his son (*P.Oxy.* i.123.7, 3rd or 4th c.).

In the fourth century as well, δέσποτα, ἡγεμὼν δέσποτα, δέσποτα ἡγεμών, and ἔπαρχε δέσποτα are often used in petitions (and, less often, reports) to important officials.[19] There are also numerous instances of δέσποτα, δέσποτά μου, δέσποτα πάτρων ('patron'), δέσποτα ἀδελφέ, δέσποτα (μου) πάτερ, δέσποτα ἡμῶν, δέσποτά μου τιμιώτατε, and κύριέ μου δέσποτα πατήρ in private letters to social superiors and men of whom the writer is making requests and/or whom he is treating with notable respect.[20] Κύριέ μου δέσποτα is used by a son to his father (*P.Kell.* 74.33), and δέσποτα, δέσποτα ἀδελφέ, and δέσποτα πάτερ are used to people whom the writers call 'father' or 'brother' but who may not actually be related to them.[21] Δέσποτά μου and δέσποτα ἀδελφέ are occasionally used in contexts where the addressee's superiority is not certain (*SB* xiv.11622. 5; *P.Herm.* 6.33), and δέσποτα is once used in a letter from a landlord to his subordinate (*P.Herm.* 11. 28).

Papyri from the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries show a slightly different pattern.[22] At this period, as earlier, δέσποτα is often used in petitions[23] and addressed to superiors.[24] It is also occasionally used to 'fathers' (*SB* vi.9399.4, xii.10773.5), but in the fifth through seventh centuries I have found no occurrences of the address in letters to actual relatives, subordinates, or people to whom the writer is clearly not expressing deference (though there are of course some fragmentary letters in which the level of deference is impossible to ascertain).

We have largely confined this investigation to instances of the vocative δέσποτα, because those occurrences will be most relevant to the problem of the creation of a vocative for κύριος. Δεσπότης also appears in papyri in other cases, however, and these occurrences of the word fall into several groups. When δεσπότης is used like a vocative to refer to the addressee of a letter or petition (for example when it stands in the dative in the opening formula of a letter) it seems to function like the vocative in being usable primarily to superiors but also occasionally to relatives, etc. (e.g. *P.Sarap.* 21.3; *P.Oxy.* x.1298.1, xlviii.3396.23, 3420.1); this usage, however, forms at all periods a minority of the examples. From the end of the third century δεσπότης is

[18] *P.Berl.Frisk* 3.3; *P.Cair.Isid.* 66.3; *P.Flor.* i.58.14; *P.Kell.* 19a.3; *P.Leit.* 7.14, 9.6; *P.Oxy.* x.1252.2.14, xvii.2131.7, 2133.4, xxxiv.2713.8, xlv.3243.1. *fr.* 1.5; *PSI* ix.1076.5; *PSI Congr.* xxi.13.1.14; *P.Tebt.* ii.326.3; *P.Vind.Bosw.* 4.3; *SB* iii.7205.3; perhaps *P.Flor.* i.58.3.

[19] *CPR* vii.15.2, xiia.15.8; *P.Amh.* ii.82.4; *P.Cair.Isid.* 74.5, 76.9; *P.Col.* vii.169.3, 170.9, 173.4; *P.Kell.* 20.17; *P.Mert.* ii.91.6, 7; *P.NYU* i.1a.6; *P.Oxy.* i.71.3; *P.Ryl.* iv.706.11; *PSI* vii.769.1; *P.Sakaon* 38.3, 40.5, 41.3, 44.4; *P.Turner* 44.4; *SB* xiv.11929.16; *Chr. Mitt.* 63.16, 77.11, 78.10.

[20] *P.Amh.* ii.143.24; *P.Abinn.* 26.4, 26.26, 31.7; *P.Haun.* ii.25.7; *P.Herm.* 7.15, 8.18, 9.7; *P.Kell.* 5.26, 46.29, 69.16; *P.Neph.* 10.7, 19.4; *P.Ross.Georg.* iii.9.23; *SB* i.2266.15, viii.9683.15, 21, 25, xiv.11882.3, 4, 10; *Stud. Pal.* xx.111.5, 4th or 5th c.; perhaps *P.Ross.Georg.* iii.8.23.

[21] *P.Kell.* 75.31; *P.Select.* 18.40; *P.Stras.* iv.286.5, 16; *PSI* vii.838.6, 4th or 5th c. Kinship terms (both in reference and in address) are commonly used in papyri to close friends and in-laws as well as to relatives, and in some situations to more distant associates as well. Whenever such terms appear I have examined the letters for other evidence about the nature of the relationship concerned; if such evidence is present, the letters are classified as communication to family members or non-relatives accordingly. Sometimes, however, I can only conclude that the addressee is either a relative or a friend; in such situations I indicate the problem by putting inverted commas around the kinship term in question, as 'brother'.

[22] These centuries are treated together because many of the papyri involved cannot be dated to a specific century.

[23] E.g. *P.Cair.Mas.* i.67020.5; *P.Flor.* iii.296.19; *P.Lond.* v.1674.21; *P.Oxy.* i.130.16, xvi.1944.12; *SB* vi.9239.19.

[24] E.g. *BGU* ii.546.2, 547.6, 9; *P.Cair.Mas.* i.67068.14, 67069.16, 67076.12; *P.Grenf.* i.66.3; *P.Herm.* 16.6; *P.Iand.* ii.22.3; *P.Köln* vii.317.28; *P.Lond.* v.1786.29; *P.Oxy.* xvi.1834.6, 1858.4, 1866.6, lix.4008.3; *P.Prag.* ii.197.7; *SB* vi.9400.25, 9616.37.

often used to refer to the emperor[25] or (still later) to God,[26] and in many documents the word retains its traditional usage of 'owner' or 'master' in connection with slaves or other property.[27]

The pattern of usage we have found for δέσποτα does not suggest the kind of gradual weakening that is usually claimed for this address. From the first century AD onwards δέσποτα is occasionally used to friends and relatives; uses to social superiors are rare at first but then increase rapidly, while the familial usage does not seem to increase significantly over time and disappears completely after the fourth century. Nor is there any indication that the average superiority of the addressees over the writers gradually declined over time; instances of δέσποτα used to people who are clearly not in a position of superiority are completely absent in the later centuries.[28] In fact there are only two clear examples of such usage at any period (the father addressing his son, *P.Oxy.* i.123.7, and the landlord addressing his subordinate, *P.Herm.* 11.28), and these come from the third and fourth centuries.

It thus looks as though the emphasis that has traditionally been placed on the few clear examples of highly weakened δέσποτα is misleading. The address did weaken from one used only by slaves and to monarchs to one usable to all sorts of social superiors, but the use to friends, relatives and subordinates seems to have been a rarity that died out in the later Empire, rather than the overall direction of development. Any theory purporting to explain the evolution of δέσποτα should therefore explain not only the existence of the usage to friends and relatives, but also why this usage appears in the papyri earlier than the use to social superiors and why it subsequently disappears.

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Before attempting to build such a theory, however, we need to consider the history of κύριε. In the classical period κύριος, feminine κυρία, can be either an adjective meaning 'having power' or a substantive meaning 'person having power', 'lord', 'guardian', 'trustee', and 'head of a family'; it does not occur in Homer but appears soon thereafter and is relatively common.[29] The vocative, however, is practically nonexistent in either gender: the only occurrence in classical literature is in Pindar, *P.* 2.58.

In the Septuagint, on the other hand, the vocative κύριε is common, even in portions dated as early as the third century BC.[30] This peculiarity seems to be the result of the techniques employed in translating the Septuagint from Hebrew into Greek. As is well known, the translators often tried to translate a given Hebrew word consistently with the same Greek word, even when the Hebrew word could be used in ways that its chosen Greek equivalent normally could not.[31] Κύριος translates several Hebrew words, including יהוה, *Yahweh* (the name of God), and אדון *adon* 'lord, master',[32] and as a result, when one of those words is used as an address in the Hebrew (whether to God or to a human), the translators normally rendered it with κύριε, even though this vocative did not really exist in Greek.

Apart from the Septuagint and the single occurrence in Pindar, the vocative of κύριος (and of κυρία) remains unattested until the first century AD, when it makes its appearance in the New Testament. As an address to God, this vocative is clearly borrowed from the Septuagint into the language of the New Testament, but it is less clear that the use of κύριε to humans (other than Jesus, who as son of God can receive religious addresses) was also so transferred. It is notable

[25] E.g. *BGU* xii.2135.10, xiii.2296.7; *P.Oxy* i.66.1, xii.1470.1, xiv.1627.1, xvii.2113.27. See Hagedorn and Worp (n.2).

[26] E.g. *BGU* i.315.1; *CPR* iv.16.2; *P.Oxy.* xxxiv.2729.3, xvi.1868.11.

[27] E.g. *BGU* iv.1033.19, v.1210.7.164; *PSI* v.447.22; *P.Oxy.* lix.3997.18.

[28] There are 129 examples of δέσποτα in papyri of the

5th–7th c. and 90 in those of the 1st–4th c., so the difference is not due to a decline in the amount of available data.

[29] *Cf.* LSJ s.v. and Foerster and Quell (n.2) 1040-3.

[30] 46 examples in the Pentateuch, including *Gen.* 18:3, 19:18, 20:4, 23:6, 24:12, 24:18, 24:42, 31:35.

[31] *Cf.* J. Wackernagel, 'Lateinisch–Griechisches', *Indogermanische Forschungen* 31 (1912-13) 262-5.

[32] See Foerster and Quell (n.2) 1056-7.

that this 'profane' usage does not occur in the earliest portions of the New Testament (the letters of Paul, written in the 50s AD, and the gospel of Mark, written c. AD 65-70); indeed these works make very sparing use of κύριε even to Jesus or to God.[33] In later gospels (Matthew, probably written c. AD 80-90, Luke, probably written sometime after AD 70, and John, probably written c. AD 90), on the other hand, κύριε is used to humans in contexts which seem to have nothing to do with Old Testament devotional language,[34] and its use to Jesus and to God is ubiquitous.[35]

Why does the use of κύριε, and particularly its use in non-devotional contexts, increase so noticeably between the earlier and later books of the New Testament? It is hard to connect this rise with the Septuagint, which is quoted by earlier writers as much as by later ones. The obvious explanation is the one we would normally give when texts of different dates show some change of language: that the language itself was evolving. Thus the earlier writers avoided κύριε because it was not a normal part of their language (except in religious contexts), while the later writers used the form because they were familiar with it; in other words, in the course of the first century κύριε had become part of non-Biblical Greek.

There is in fact considerable evidence that κύριε entered the normal Greek address system in the course of the first century AD. The earliest occurrence of κύριε (apart from Pindar, the Septuagint, and quotations of the Septuagint) occurs in the writings of Philo, who quotes a delegation of Jews addressing the emperor Gaius with κύριε Γάιε around AD 40.[36] The philosopher Epictetus (c. AD 50–120) not only uses κύριε frequently,[37] but also comments that αἱ γυναῖκες εὐθὺς ἀπὸ τεσσαρεσκαίδεκα ἐτῶν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνδρῶν κυρίαι καλοῦνται ('women are called κυρία by men from the time they are fourteen years old'). Non-literary sources point in the same direction: papyrus documents from earlier periods apparently never contain κύριε or vocative κυρία,[38] but there are eleven examples in papyri dated to the first century AD and five more which could come from either the first or the second century.

It thus seems fairly clear that in the first century AD κύριος suddenly acquired a vocative after centuries of being conspicuously unusable in address, and that since this development was independent of usage in the Septuagint, the new address had no religious connotations when used to humans. What then did it mean? In Philo's address to the emperor, it is clearly respectful; in

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[33] In Paul only at *Romans* 10:16, 11:3, and *Heb.* 1:10, all in direct quotations from the Septuagint; in *Mark* only at 7:28, to Jesus.

[34] *Matthew* 13:37, 21:30, 25:11, 25:20, 25:22, 25:24, 27:63; *Luke* 13:8, 14:22, 19:16, 19:18, 19:20, 19:25; *John* 12:21, 20:15.

[35] An additional difficulty with the New Testament material is that much of the conversation reported in it would actually have been spoken in Aramaic, so that memories of the words originally used could in theory have influenced the Greek writers' language: on some occasions κύριε seems to translate מָרִי ('my lord') and διδάσκαλε to translate רַבִּי ('my teacher'). Even if one accepts the likelihood of such influence, however, it would not explain the differences among the different Gospels, for it is thought that the later writers deliberately changed to κύριε addresses in their Greek sources which had used the term διδάσκαλε (Foerster and Quell (n.2) 1092-3).

[36] *Leg.* 356; Philo also uses κύριε on a number of other occasions (*Post.* 132.6, *Plant.* 47.2, 47.3, *Ebr.* 54.4, *Conf.* 173.5, *Heres* 20.9, *Abr.* 131.5, 6), but these are all quotations from the Septuagint.

[37] 1.29.48, 2.7.9, 2.7.13, 2.15.15, 2.16.13, 2.20.30, 3.10.15, 3.22.38, 3.23.11, 3.23.19, 4.1.57.

[38] One might think that as the majority of papyri come from the Imperial period most words are likely to be unattested earlier, but there is in fact a considerable amount of papyrus material earlier than the first century AD; according to my estimates of the quantity of material from various centuries in the Duke database (for which see below), the material from the first two centuries BC is equivalent in volume to that from the first century AD. However, one very fragmentary but allegedly early papyrus (*BGU* 1187.13) contains the words]τελευτην κυριε[, and the editors suggest that this may be the vocative κύριε rather than a form of κυριεύειν, on the grounds that the latter would be expected to take the genitive rather than the accusative which seems to precede it. It is, however, unwise to assume in such a fragmentary document that the word preceding κυριε[is necessarily the object of the verb, quite apart from the fact that κυριεύω sometimes takes an accusative object in papyri (*cf.* E. Mayser, *Grammatik der griechischen Papyri aus der Ptolemäerzeit* (Berlin 1934) 2.2.217). In addition, the papyrus is undated and has been assigned to the first century BC only on the evidence of the handwriting, which is not always reliable. It therefore seems unwise to count this fragment as the sole example of an address otherwise unattested at this period.

Epictetus' generalized address to women, the term is flattering but less deferential than in Philo. Epictetus also quotes κύριε in other contexts, frequently as a flattering address between equals[39] and occasionally as an address to superiors (2.20.30, 4.1.57).

The papyri also suggest a wide range of potential addressees. Many of the first-century examples of κύριε and vocative κυρία are addressed to superiors and seem to come from the kind of distanced, official correspondence in which a word for 'master' that was following the route of English 'Mr' would be appropriate: an official addresses another official of equal or higher rank as κύριέ μου Ἡρακλείδη (*P.Oxy.* xlix.3469.1), an agent uses κύριέ μου to his employer (*P.Rein.* i.41.11), a petitioner uses κύριε to an official (*SB* x.10564.6, 1st or 2nd c.), in a fragmentary document κύριε seems to be used to an official (*P.Stras.* 808.20), κύριε Καῖσαρ [Οὐεσπ]ασιανός and κύριε Σεβαστέ appear in an acclamation to the emperor Vespasian (*SB* xvi.12255.11, 15, 21), and a woman uses κύριε to a man of indeterminate status (*P.Oxy.Hels.* 45.19). Others, however, indicate more intimate connections: a son addresses his father as κύριε (*BGU* ii.665.18), a woman uses κύριέ μου ἀδελφέ to her brother (*SB* v.774327, 1st or 2nd c.), κυρία is used to the writer's sister (*PIFAO* ii.10.24, 1st or 2nd c.), a man uses κοίρι⟨έ⟩ μου in a private letter to a friend (*SB* xii.11148.7), κύριε and κύριέ μου ἀδελφέ are used to 'brothers' (*P.Phil.* 34.13; *P.Oxy.Hels.* 46.12, 1st or 2nd c.) and κυρ[ί]α ἀδε[λφή] to a 'sister' (*PIFAO* ii.41 *fr.* B 10, 1st or 2nd c.), while κυρία is used in a fragmentary letter to a friend or relative (*P.Oxy.* xlix.3503.3).

Thus the first-century papyri containing κύριε and vocative κυρία seem to be about equally divided between contexts in which distanced respect is plausible and letters to family and friends. This pattern is incompatible with the standard theory that κύριε began as an address indicating the real deference of 'master' and then weakened until it could be used within the family: right from the start κύριε seems to have been used freely to friends and relatives.

LATER CENTURIES

After the first century the use of κύριε / κυρία increases greatly in papyrus documents; there are 292 occurrences in the second century, 207 in the third century, and 259 in the fourth century. The apparent drop in the third century is illusory, caused by a smaller number of preserved papyri from this period; if one calculates the occurrences of κύριε relative to the volume of preserved documents, the following pattern emerges:[40]

	A	B
2nd c. BC	0	0
1st c. BC	0	1.1
1st c. AD	7.5	1.1
2nd c. AD	37.2	0.5
3rd c. AD	39.6	4.7
4th c. AD	78.9	22.3
5th c. AD	45.1	42.2
6th c. AD	11.9	28.6
7th c. AD	4.2	30.7
8th c. AD	0	3.6

A = Occurrences of κύριε per 5000 occurrences of καί
B = Occurrences of δέσποτα per 5000 occurrences of καί

[39] E.g. 2.7.9, 2.7.13, 2.15.15, 3.10.15, 3.23.11.

[40] The amount of papyrus material in existence was calculated by searching the Duke database (see above) for the word καί, on the grounds that this word is common at all periods and in all types of document. For these purposes I used the search engine's date-specific search capacity and searched century by century; the result is that papyri dated to more than one century (e.g. second or third AD) have been counted more than once, and that in the (very small number of) cases in which the dating on the disk is inaccurate, those inaccuracies have not been corrected; moreover, instances of καί occurring only as supplements have been included. To correct for the fact that these parameters are different from those that I used for my own

It thus appears that the use of κύριε increases through the fourth century and then falls off rapidly, while the use of δέσποτα, which is insignificant until the third century, reaches its peak in the fifth century and is thereafter more common than κύριε, though the frequency of both declines in the later centuries.

In the second century approximately two-thirds of the instances of κύριε and vocative κυρία are addressed to superiors unrelated to the writers; this higher percentage than in the first century is due to a large number of petitions to important officials. The rest are addressed to equals, friends, relatives (especially parents, but also siblings and children), people of uncertain relationship called relatives (especially brothers, but also parents and children), and subordinates.[41] In the third century the number of instances used to unrelated superiors returns to approximately half; this shift seems to result from the substantial number of third-century petitions which use δέσποτα (see above). The other half is addressed to the same group of friends and relatives seen in the second century, except that the percentage of people called relatives who can be ascertained to be actual blood relatives is lower.[42] In the fourth century the percentage of unrelated superiors addressed as κύριε declines sharply; this change is clearly linked to the increase in the use of δέσποτα in petitions and unofficial correspondence to superiors. The majority of addressees receiving κύριε or κυρία are now friends and relatives, and the number of children and subordinates receiving the term also increases.[43] In later centuries, for which there is much less evidence, κύριε continues to be used both to superiors and to relatives, etc.[44] but is increasingly used to God as well.[45]

statistics on κύριε and δέσποτα, I thought it best to use, in this table alone, statistics for those words derived in the same way as the statistics for καί (in other words, the raw numbers generated by a century-by-century electronic search for the masculine vocative only). The numbers in the table are therefore based on the following figures: 2nd c. BC: καί = 10,166, κύριε = 0, δέσποτα = 0; 1st c. BC: καί = 4,573, κύριε = 0, δέσποτα = 1; 1st c. AD: καί = 14,021, κύριε = 21, δέσποτα = 3; 2nd c. AD: καί = 37,272, κύριε = 277, δέσποτα = 4; 3rd c. AD: καί = 26,393, κύριε = 209, δέσποτα = 25; 4th c. AD: καί = 17,493, κύριε = 276, δέσποτα = 78; 5th c. AD: καί = 5,208, κύριε = 47, δέσποτα = 44; 6th c. AD: καί = 19,382, κύριε = 46, δέσποτα = 111; 7th c. AD: καί = 7,165, κύριε = 6, δέσποτα = 44; 8th c. AD: καί = 2,782, κύριε = 0, δέσποτα = 2.

[41] E.g. BGU iii.821.1 (father); P.Brem. 54.16 ('brother'), 61.59 (nephew), 63.20 (daughter), 65.11 (friend); P.Flor. iii.332.20 (son); P.Giss. 11.20 (equal or subordinate), 15.6 (unrelated subordinate), 85.16 (brother); P.Haun. ii.16.19 (father); P.Mert. ii.82.7 (friend); P.Mich. iii.212.9 ('son'), viii.477.23 (father), viii.480.5 (father), xv.751.9 (mother), xv.752.9 (mother); P.Mil. ii.87.17 ('brother'); P.Oxy. xviii.2192.25 ('brother'), xxxiv.2726.10 (business partner); P.Princ. ii.69.6 ('brother'); PSI xiii.1359.5 (mother); P.Warr. 13 A 3 ('father'); P.Wisc. ii.lxxi.25 ('brother'); P.Würzb. 21 A 12 (father); SB iii.6263.8 (mother), viii.9903.17 ('sister'), x.10277.12 (father), xiv.11900.14 (father).

[42] E.g. BGU iii.816.28 (father), iii.949.7 ('brother'), iv.1080.25 (son); CPR vii.57.21 ('sister', 3rd or 4th c.); P.Berl.Zill. 12.4 ('mother', 3rd or 4th c.); P.Flor. ii.154.7 ('brother'), iii.338.16 ('brother'); P.Harr. i.109.20 (unrelated subordinate, third or fourth century); P.Iand. vi.115.10 ('brother'); P.Oslo iii.161.11 (mother); P.Oxy.

i.122.13 (unrelated subordinate, third or fourth century), i.123.24 (son, third or fourth century), vi.937.9 (sister), xiv.1678.4 ('mother'), xiv.1679.3 ('mother'), xvii.2151.10 ('mother'), xlii.3065.14 (mother); P.Rein. ii.116.5 ('mother'); P.Ross.Georg. iii.2.2 (mother); P.Ryl. ii.441.3 ('father'), iv.695.10 ('brother'); PSI vii.833.8 ('father'); P.Tebt. ii.420.16 ('brother'); P.Vind.Sijp. 26.22 ('brother'); SB iii.6222.41 ('sister'), iii.6262.24 ('father').

[43] E.g. BGU iii.984.28 ('brother'); CPR vi.82.12 (father), viii.28.4 (friend), viii.52.19 (father, 4th or 5th c.), xviia.39.5 (subordinate); P.Congr.XV 22.6.17 (mother); P.Harr. i.110.4 ('father'); P.Haun. ii.40.3 ('brother'); P.Kell. 74.33 (father); P.Köln iv.199.12 ('son'); P.Lond. ii.480.15 ('brother'), v.1655 (orders to a tradesman), v.1659.15 ('father'); P.Oxy. xii.1424.21 (brother), xii.1589.19 (subordinate), xiv.1682.16 (wife), xiv.1776.23 (subordinate), xx.2275.4 ('brother'), xxxi.2602.3 ('brother'), xlvi.3314.5 (wife), xlviii.3398.23 (brother), xlviii.3399.10 (brother), xlviii.3430.29 ('son'), lv.3818.8 ('brother'), lvi.3858.7 (unrelated equal), lvi.3860.33 (husband), lvi.3861.25 (subordinate, 4th or 5th c.), lix.3998.15 (daughter), lix.4000.5 ('father'); PSI ix.1082.3 (husband), x.1161.15 ('mother'), xiii.1366.10 ('son', 4th or 5th c.), SB xiv.11437 (daughter, 4th or 5th c.), xiv.11588.1 (son), xiv.11881.8 ('mother'), xvi.1260.10 ('brother'), xviii.13589.3 ('son').

[44] E.g. P.Amst. i.56 (unrelated equal, 6th c.); P.Batav. 21.13 (sister, 6th c.), 21.17 ('daughter', 6th c.); P.Bour. 25.7 (aunt, 5th c.); P.Mil. ii.87.17 ('brother', 6th c.); P.Oxy. x.1300.5 ('mother', 5th c.), lix.4004.19 ('brother', 5th c.); PSI v.478.18 ('brother', 5th c.); SB vi.9158.30 ('mother', 5th c.), xvi.12572.17 (son, 5th or 6th c.).

[45] E.g. in contracts, to invoke divine protection: CPR 9.1.4, etc.

The evidence of the papyri thus points to a clear difference between κύριε and δέσποτα, even at a very late period: κύριε is always used for friends, relatives, and equals as much or almost as much as for unrelated superiors, while δέσποτα is used only rarely for people other than unrelated superiors. This is not to say that the same person cannot be addressed both as δέσποτα and as κύριε, for such usage does occur, both to superiors and (very occasionally) to relatives;[46] the difference is one of frequency rather than any absolute distinction of usage.

SOLUTIONS

Similar distinctions between δέσποτα and κύριε, and between δεσπότης and κύριος, can be found in a wide variety of other sources. In Imperial titulature δεσπότης largely replaces κύριος at the beginning of the fourth century, because the former is a more respectful term.[47] In Christian epistolography of the first six centuries δεσπότης is 'a term of very great respect and usually implies that the writer is addressing a person who has authority over him', while κύριος is much less subservient and can be used to family members; a similar distinction is observable between δέσποινα and κυρία.[48] In modern Greek δεσπότης means 'bishop' or 'despot', κύριος means 'Mr' and κυρία 'Mrs', and in many dialects descendants of κύριος and κυρία provide the standard words for relatives such as fathers, mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and godparents.[49] Manuel Moschopulos, writing *c.* 1300, comments δεσπότης λέγεται πρὸς δοῦλον, κύριος δὲ πρὸς ἐλεύθερον ('δεσπότης is used in the case of a slave, but κύριος in the case of a free man').[50]

These distinctions tell us that the use of κύριε, δέσποτα and *domine* cannot simply have been a cultural phenomenon unconnected to the histories of individual words; it is obvious that κύριε and δέσποτα are not equivalent. It also partly explains the creation of the vocative κύριε in the first place: the purpose it served could not be filled by δέσποτα, as that address meant something else. Yet what was the motivation for creating such an address? The simplistic one of a general increase in servility at the start of the Empire can be ruled out, for as we have seen κύριε was never very servile; a truly servile society would have used δέσποτα.

Another proposed explanation is that between the classical and Roman periods there was a change in the meaning of the word κύριος so that it could be more widely applied to officials as a title, and this made its vocative form more useful.[51] The evidence adduced for this change, however, is scanty, and even its proposers admit that in the first century AD the vocative κύριε could be used to a wider range of people than could be referred to as κύριος, a fact which means that the change in the referential meaning could not fully explain the usage of the address.[52]

The third explanation is that the Greek use of κύριε did not arise within Greek but was borrowed from Semitic languages in which equivalent addresses were common. Such borrowings are normally suggested by scholars concerned primarily with the New Testament,[53] in which context the explanation is highly attractive (though the evidence adduced for the Semitic usage concerned is distressingly slim[54]). Such borrowings are unlikely, however, to have spread as widely

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[46] E.g. *P.Amh.* ii.143.15, 24 (4th c.); *P.Berl.Frisk* 3.3, 11 (3rd. c.); *P.Cair.Isid.* 66.3, 19 (3rd. c.); *P.Giss.* 17.3, 5 (2nd. c.); *P.Haun.* ii.25.7 (4th c.); *P.Kell.* 20.6, 17 (4th c.); *P.Kell.* 74.33 (4th c.); *P.Herm.* 6.4, 33 (4th c.); *P.Lond.* v.1675.7, 8 (6th c.); *P.Oxy.* i.123.7, 24 (3rd or 4th c.), xxvii.2479. 28 (6th c.).

[47] Not, as used to be thought, because of Christian scruples about κύριος; see Hagedorn and Worp (n.2) 177; also Bréhier (n.5) 164.

[48] Dineen (n.5) 56, 66, 76, 78.

[49] Zilliacus, *Familienbriefe* (n.5) 32; Amantos (n.5) 20; G.P. Shipp, *Modern Greek Evidence for the Ancient Greek Vocabulary* (Sydney 1979) 347.

[50] *Sylloge Vocum Atticarum*, s.v. δεσπότης (cited in Foerster and Quell (n.2) 1042).

[51] Foerster and Quell (n.2) 1043-4.

[52] Foerster and Quell (n.2) 1085.

[53] Foerster and Quell (n.2) 1052; Baudissin and Eissfeldt (n.2) 2.298; also Svennung (n.1) 336.

[54] See Baudissin and Eissfeldt (n.2) 2.298.

as κύριε is attested,[55] for Semitic speakers were largely confined to certain portions of the Empire; it is also not immediately clear why they would have required the creation of κύριε rather than increased use of δέσποτα. In addition, the borrowing theory fails to account for the sudden appearance of κύριε in the first century and its rapid acceptance, when the cultures concerned had been in close contact for centuries without any such transfer of addresses at earlier periods.

There is, however, another language from which the tendency to use this type of address could have been borrowed: Latin. As we have seen, Latin *domine* was used in a fashion very similar to κύριε, as a courteous but not especially subservient address to close relatives, friends, and others to whom the speaker wished to be polite. A need for an equivalent of this address would have necessitated the creation of a new vocative, for although the normal equivalent of *dominus* was δεσπότης (see below), δέσποτα was a very subservient address with completely inappropriate connotations, while κύριος had enough similarity to *dominus* in referential usage to make it the obvious second choice when δεσπότης could not be used. Imitation of *domine* would also explain why the application of κύριε was wider than the application of κύριος: the new address was simply used in the same contexts as its Latin model. The wide geographical distribution of κύριε also fits well with this theory, since Greek and Latin speakers were in close proximity throughout much of the empire. The sudden appearance of κύριε in the first century AD is explained by the fact that Latin *domine* itself only appeared towards the end of the first century BC but then rapidly became ubiquitous; given the extent to which *domine* was used, a heavily bilingual empire would really have needed a Greek equivalent by the end of the first century AD.

This theory is strengthened by the existence of bilingual documents in which a Latin letter containing the address *domine* is translated into Greek with κύριε.[56] It is also supported by the tendency of both κύριε and κυρία to be used with μου, which in its use with vocatives is clearly a translation of Latin *mi*.[57] Although Latin *domine* seems normally to be used without *mi*, and therefore κύριέ μου would not simply be a borrowing of *domine mi*, the presence of μου shows that κύριε is in a context which has certainly been influenced by Latin to some extent. Κύριε and κυρία are followed by μου 31 per cent of the time in the first century and 25 per cent of the time in the second century; by contrast, in the first two centuries AD, δέσποτα is never followed by μου, πάτερ is followed by μου 5 per cent of the time, and ἀδελφέ is followed by μου 2 per cent of the time.[58] Thus κύριε is more likely to be accompanied by recognizable Latinisms than are other common addresses at the same period.

The borrowing of κύριε from Latin can also explain the Greek address system's apparent violation of the sociolinguistic principle that newer forms are more polite than older ones with a similar lexical meaning. This rule applies when substitution occurs naturally within a single language as a result of the weakening of an older polite term, but it would not apply to a situation in which the new address was introduced in order to provide an equivalent for a less deferential address in another language.

Although the theory that κύριε started as a translation of Latin *domine* can explain all the problems associated with this address, there is one major obstacle to its acceptance: in the early Empire it was much more common for Greek words and usages to be borrowed into Latin than vice versa, and so it has traditionally been assumed that *domine* is itself a translation of κύριε.[59]

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[55] That is, Egypt (the papyri), Judaea (Philo and the New Testament), and Greece/Rome (Epictetus, who was born in Phrygia, taught in both places).

[56] *P.Oxy.* ix.1202.15, xii.1466.4; probably originally *PSI* x.1101.6.

[57] J. Wackernagel, 'Genetiv und Adjektiv', in *Mélanges de linguistique offerts à F. de Saussure* (Paris 1908) 151; Svennung (n.1) 245.

[58] The precise figures are: 1st century, with μου: κύριε / κυρία = 5, πάτερ = 0, ἀδελφέ = 2; without μου: κύριε / κυρία = 11, πάτερ = 7, ἀδελφέ = 35; 2nd century, with μου: κύριε / κυρία = 74, πάτερ = 1, ἀδελφέ = 2; without μου: κύριε / κυρία = 218, πάτερ = 14, ἀδελφέ = 159.

[59] See Svennung (n.1) 336.

Yet recent research has revealed that the Greek of the Roman Empire was more susceptible to Latin influence than was previously recognized.[60] In these circumstances we cannot automatically assume that where there is a similarity between Greek and Latin, it is the Latin which has been influenced by Greek. Moreover, *domine* first appears in the reign of Augustus and becomes common by the time of Nero, while κύριε is not attested until the reign of Gaius and does not seem to have become common until the very end of the first century. It is thus much more likely that κύριε is a Latinism than that *domine* is a Grecism.

Domine, in fact, can explain not only the sudden appearance and immediately 'weakened' usage of κύριε, but also some of the problems surrounding δέσποτα. Δεσπότης was certainly the Greek word most obviously equivalent to Latin *dominus*; the referential meanings of the two words were virtually identical, and for this reason δεσπότης was normally used to translate *dominus* in cases other than the vocative.[61] For that reason, given the tendency of ancient translators to try to establish one-to-one equations between words, it was almost inevitable that once the Greeks started needing a translation for *domine*, some of them would use δέσποτα. This uncertainty in the translation of *domine* accounts for the early examples of 'weakened' δέσποτα without difficulty, but it is surprising that it should have persisted into the fourth century, when κύριε had long been established. Nevertheless, the uncertainty did eventually disappear, aided not only by the existence of κύριε but also (and probably more relevantly, given the date of disappearance) by the growing use of δέσποτα as a deferential address by free men and women.

The history of κύριε and δέσποτα can thus be explained in a manner very different from the traditional view. In the classical and Hellenistic periods, δέσποτα was a highly subservient address and κύριε was essentially not in use. In the first century AD, in order to provide equivalents for the new Latin address *domine*, the vocative κύριε was created and δέσποτα was sometimes used in a drastically weakened sense. In the second, third, and fourth centuries the use of κύριε continued to grow, though its meaning did not change and no weakening occurred; at the same time, in a development probably unconnected to Latin usage, the servile δέσποτα was weakened enough to be usable by free men expressing deference to their superiors. In the fourth century the change in imperial titulature acknowledged this use of δέσποτα, and after that century it was sufficiently common to preclude any further use of δέσποτα as a translation of *domine*.

If this reanalysis is correct, it has important implications for our understanding of Greek politeness in the early Empire. In using κύριε to their superiors, Greek speakers were not being servile; the address was not particularly deferential and had never sounded servile at any period. In using it to members of their family, Greeks were not carrying politeness and formality to absurd lengths and treating their nearest and dearest like members of the bureaucracy: κύριε was from its earliest uses as much a term for friends and family as for anyone else and therefore did not sound like an address derived from formal settings. Not in the creation of this word, but only in the later empire, as the use of δέσποτα grew and surpassed that of κύριε, can the true beginnings of the elaborate Byzantine politeness formulae be found.

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[60] *Cf.* F. Biville, *Les emprunts du latin au grec: approche phonétique* (Louvain 1990-5) and further bibliography cited therein, esp. 2.521-3.

[61] E.g. Cassius Dio 55.12.2, 67.4.7.