

The Temple as Courtroom: Judicial Inscriptions from Roman Imperial Lydia
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In this paper I investigate the phenomenon of religious “Judicial Inscriptions”. These are inscriptions from Roman Imperial Lydia which record legal proceedings performed before the local deities of Asia Minor such as “Men” and “Anaeitis”. The wronged party would present their case before the god at the local temple through the erection of scepters, and the god would then take on the responsibilities of judge, jury and executioner. The deity’s judgement would manifest itself in such signs as the sudden death or sickness of the guilty party. When the guilty received this punishment, s/he would erect a stele which outlined the details of the case and begged the deity for mercy. This religious process is almost entirely unparalleled throughout the ancient mediterranean.

The question remains, why did the Lydians frequent the temples for dispute resolution, when they lived so close to the Roman capital of the province? I argue that, far from eschewing the Roman courts, the Lydians sought out both institutions, but in different situations. The temple proceedings offered victims the sure hope of identification and punishment of criminals. The local praetorian court, though exceedingly popular for resolving disputes, was ill-equipped to conduct prolonged investigations. By analyzing the vocabulary of the inscriptions next to the Roman judicial language preserved in the Digest and other legal texts, I show the debt that this religious institution owed to the Roman legal context. The judicial proceedings conducted within the temple played a unique function in ancient Lydia, allowing both the praetorian ‘natural’ courts and the local ‘supernatural’ temples to retain their popularity, each offering a unique service.