

## The Pallakai of Zeus Larasios

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This short study reexamines two inscribed bases for votive offerings (probably statues) in the shape of altars from Tralleis, set up by two women who served as *παλλακαί* or *παλλακίδες*<sup>1</sup>. The dedications are made to Zeus and, since they come from Tralleis, we may safely assume that this is the local god, *Ζεὺς Λαράσιος*, to whom the city of Tralleis was sacred<sup>2</sup>. The first base, which was found in the 19th century, entered the collection of E. Purser in Izmir and was first published in 1875 in *Μουσεῖον*, the journal of the Evangelical School, after a copy by J. Misthos<sup>3</sup>. The inscription was published again with corrections in 1883 by W. M. Ramsay<sup>4</sup>. A drawing of the altar was given by Pappakonstantinos, *Αἱ Τράλλεις* (1895) no 33 (*non vidi*); a second more accurate drawing was made by J. Keil (*Skizzenbuch Smyrna* 8, 1910), who also recorded the exact measurements: height 0,75 m, breadth 0,355 m thickness 0,35 m.<sup>5</sup> Date: late 2nd or the early 3rd cent. AD The text reads:

Ἀγαθῇ Τύχῃ. | Λ. Αὐρηλία Αἰμιλία, ἐκ προγόνων παλλακίδων καὶ ἀνιπτοπόδων, θυγάτηρ Λ. Αὐρ. Σεκούνδου Ση[...]ου, παλλακεύσα καὶ κατὰ χρησμόν | Δί.

With Good Fortune. L(ucia) Aurelia Aimilia, whose ancestors were *pallakides* and *aniptopodes*, daughter of L(ucius) Aur(elius) Secundus ..., who served as *pallake* and according to the oracle (dedicated this) to Zeus.

The second base was published in 1937 by L. Robert, who saw it in a house at Aydin<sup>6</sup>; it had been apparently reused in a late wall. The measurements are roughly the same as those of the first base: height 0,72 m, breadth 0,36 m thickness 0,36 m. Date: late 2<sup>nd</sup> or the early 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. AD The text reads:

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This paper is a largely revised version of a communication presented in the Greek-Turkish epigraphic conference held at Antalya in May 2012. The paper could also be entitled: “The usefulness of ancient lexicographers for the study of Greek inscriptions”.

<sup>1</sup> *I. Tralleis* 6-7. The most recent detailed study of these inscriptions is Budin 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Budin 2003, 149 n. 6. On Zeus Larasios see RE Suppl. X (1972) s.v. Zeus. Teil I. Epiklesen, 329 (H. Schwabl; reprinted as final section of H. Schwabl, *Zeus*, München 1978, no new pagination).

<sup>3</sup> On the editions and studies of this inscription prior to 1937 see Robert 1937, 406 n. 2; Latte 1940, 13 n. 5; the lemma of *I. Tralleis* 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ramsay 1883, 276-277.

<sup>5</sup> See *I. Tralleis* 6, p. 11. On Josef Keil’s particularly valuable “Skizzenbücher” of inscriptions kept in the Evangelical School of Izmir (Smyrna) see Petzl 1974, 117 n. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Robert 1937, 407.

Μελτίνη Μοσχᾶ<sup>7</sup>, | παλλακή, μητρός | δὲ Παυλίνης τῆς | Οὐαλεριανοῦ φιλ|τάτης, παλλακευ|σά-  
σης ἐπὶ τὸ ἐξῆς | πενταετηρίσι β', | ἀπὸ γένους τῶν παλλακίδων, | Δί.

Meltine daughter of Moschas, a *pallake*, whose mother was Paulina daughter of Valerianus, the dearest, who served as *pallake* on two consecutive five-year festivals, from a family of the *pallakides*, (dedicated this) to Zeus.

Robert, followed by most subsequent editors, takes the word Φιλτάτης to be the second name of Paulina. But, as K. Latte rightly observed, a second name following the name of the father in an inscription of the Roman Imperial period should be the *cognomen* of a Roman citizen<sup>8</sup>, which cannot be the case here, since neither Meltine nor her mother Paulina are Roman citizens with *praenomen* and *nomen gentile*. Latte therefore took φιλτάτη as an appellative for daughter, pointing out that there is a parallel for this use of the word in a papyrus<sup>9</sup>. Another possibility (which I adopted in my translation) is to take φιλτάτης as a postponed attribute to μητρός (dearest mother). The position of the adjective after the name of the parent is attested in similar inscriptions<sup>10</sup>.

The dedicants of both bases state that they served as παλλακαί or παλλακίδες, a word that, within the context of the sanctuary of Zeus Larasios, cannot have the usual meaning concubine or kept woman, but must have a cultic significance. W. Ramsay, in his brief commentary to the first inscription, thought, without considering other possibilities, that the παλλακαί were in fact sacred prostitutes, an interpretation that was initially accepted without question<sup>11</sup> and taken up by L. Robert in his publication of the second inscription. Yet the Greek terms Ramsay used in order to describe the function (*hetaira* and *hierodoule*)<sup>12</sup> reveal the weakness of his interpretation; for the word παλλακή denotes a kept woman, which is quite different from a prostitute (whether or not she served in a sanctuary) or a woman providing sexual services (ἑταίρα). This was pointed out by Kurt Latte, who challenged Ramsay's interpretation and proposed to consider the παλλακαί of Tralleis as servants of the divinity rather than sacred prostitutes; he drew a parallel to the Pythia of Delphi, who is often described as a servant of Apollo, and he put forward the hypothesis that

<sup>7</sup> Budin 2003, 155, apparently believes that “Moskha” is a surname of Meltine, for she writes: “Meltine Moskha, rather than being ‘daughter of male name x ...’, presents herself as ‘of the mother Paulina ...’; she goes on to make remarks about the use of matronymics. But Μοσχᾶς is a well-attested personal name and so Chaniotis – Mylonopoulos 2007, 252, no. 33, are certainly correct in pointing out that the genitive Μοσχᾶ is the name of Meltine's father.

<sup>8</sup> Latte 1940, 14 n. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Latte 1940, 14 n. 6: “Therefore I prefer to take it as appellative for daughter like φίλτατοι children P. Oxy. I 135”.

<sup>10</sup> A parallel for this word order is provided by a grave inscription from Phrygia (Haspels 1971, 355, no. 144): Ζωτικὸς με|τὰ συνβίου Εἰ|ρήνης πατρι|Ὀ|νησίμω κὲ μη|τρί| Ἀμμία γλυ|κυτάτοις μνή|ματος φιλτάτο|υ τὴν ἐώνιον χά|ριν κὲ Διὶ Βροντῶ|ντι εὐχῆν. Zotikos with his consort Eirene to his father Onesimos and his mother Ammia, the most delightful ones, (set up) the most cherished grave monument in ever-lasting gratitude and (fulfilled) a vow to Zeus Bronton.

<sup>11</sup> The most prominent supporter of this view was Cook 1914-1940 II, 959-960; see Robert 1937, 406 n. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ramsay 1883, 276-277: “Aurélia Aemilia belonged to a family in which the ancient custom was retained that the women should in their youth be *hetairai* in the service of the temple. ... she acted as a *hierodoule* like her ancestors in obedience to an order from the oracle.”

the παλλακαί were prophetesses, who were supposed to have sexual intercourse with the god they were serving<sup>13</sup>. Latte went even a step further and questioned the association of the two women with the cult of Zeus, since Apollo had an important sanctuary and possibly an oracle in Tralleis; in his view Zeus Larasios, being the main god of Tralleis, might well receive votive offerings from the priests of other gods of the city<sup>14</sup>. Latte's arguments led Robert to change his mind, admitting that sacral prostitution does not suit the context here and that the παλλακαί should be called "concubines" of the god<sup>15</sup>; he refrained, however, from speculating on their function and did not mention Latte's opinion that they were prophetesses. Although most scholars have since accepted that the παλλακαί from Tralleis must have been cult functionaries of some sort<sup>16</sup>, Ramsay's view that they were sacred prostitutes still has followers<sup>17</sup>.

Latte's hypothesis that the παλλακαί were prophetesses is based on two arguments. (a) Herodotus, 1, 182, informs us that in the sanctuary of Apollo at Patara, during the period when oracles were given (in the winter months), the priestess (πρόμαντις) was shut in every night in the temple and he compares this situation with that of the priestesses of Belos in Babylon and of Ammon in Egyptian Thebes, who abstained from contact with men and were thought to have sexual intercourse with the gods they were serving. (b) The term ἀνιπτόποδες used in the first inscription suggests a connection with the cult of Zeus at Dodona, whose priests (ὑποφήται) are described in the Iliad, in the famous prayer of Achilles to Zeus Dodonaios, as ἀνιπτόποδες χαμαιεύναι (16. 233-235). All subsequent instances of the adjective ἀνιπτόπους in Greek literature can be traced back to this famous Homeric passage. It is possible, although by no means certain<sup>18</sup>, that the unwashed feet of the priests of Dodona had some connection with their mantic power.

Neither of the arguments put forward by Latte is convincing, for they both fail to explain the use of the word παλλακή for a woman fulfilling a sacred function. Latte thinks that a *unio mystica* in the form of sexual intercourse between the god and his female human servants took place, possibly accompanied by some special revelation<sup>19</sup>. But παλλακή (concubine) is hardly a suitable term to describe a woman participating in a sacred union (ιερός γάμος) with a god. In fact, Latte himself is led to consider the practice he reconstructs as a sign of social and religious decadence characteristic, in his opinion, of the Roman Imperial period<sup>20</sup>. "But when the ladies of Tralles boasted of having been concubines of a god, this was merely one more satisfaction of the insatiable vanity and passion for titles characteristic of social life in imperial times. At that period, religious feeling was satisfied on other lines. The gods of the past and the rites of old ages had lost almost all power over the minds of mankind." This depreciatory remark hardly explains the traditional designation

<sup>13</sup> Latte 1939; Latte 1940, 13-18.

<sup>14</sup> Latte 1940, 15-16.

<sup>15</sup> Bull. Épigr. 1940, 147: "Il ne s'agit pas de prostitution sacrée, mais de concubines du dieu"; cf. Hermary 2014, 257, n. 91. It appears that Robert and Latte exchanged views privately on several questions including this one, since Latte 1940, 1 n. 1, thanks Robert for providing him with helpful information.

<sup>16</sup> Debord 1972, 150; Debord 1982, 363-364 n. 174; Legras 1997, 253; Budin 2003, 155-158; Budin 2008, 193-196; Chaniotis – Mylonopoulos 2007, 252-253, no. 33.

<sup>17</sup> Fauth, 1988, 37 (with no mention of diverging opinions).

<sup>18</sup> Latte 1940, 15: "With all due reserve, we may surmise that the puzzling ἀνιπτόπόδων throws a little light on the problem."

<sup>19</sup> Latte 1940, 16-17.

<sup>20</sup> Latte 1940, 17.

of the women serving the god as παλλακαί, a choice that was clearly not due the ladies themselves. Furthermore, the use of the term ἀνιπτόποδες to describe the function of the ancestors of one of the women, seems, if anything, to speak against the connection with Apollo which Latte tried to establish. The choice of this term should rather be seen as an effort to connect the cult of Zeus Larasios with that of Zeus Dodonaios and may suggest that the god of Tralleis gave oracles, at least occasionally. In this case the oracle according to which Aurelia Aimilia made her dedication will have come from Zeus Larasios himself.

It is therefore improbable that the παλλακαί of Tralleis functioned as prophetesses, a conclusion also shared by S. L. Budin<sup>21</sup>. Yet there can be little doubt that they were cult functionaries in the sanctuary of Zeus Larasios. The aorist participle παλλακεύσασα used in both votive inscriptions points to a functionary making a dedication on leaving office<sup>22</sup>. It is also clear from the expressions ἐκ προγόνων παλλακίδων (in the first inscription) and ἀπό γένους τῶν παλλακίδων (in the second inscription) that the function was hereditary. It is worth noticing that Paulina, the mother of Meltine, served twice, on two consecutive penteteric festivals of Zeus<sup>23</sup>. The recording of this two-term service shows that it was an unusual occurrence. We may therefore conclude that the παλλακεία was normally exercised only once.

In order to determine the function of the παλλακαί of Zeus Larasios we should look closer into the meaning and the etymology of this term as they are recorded by ancient authors and lexicographers. L. Aennaeus Cornutus, *Compendium de graecae theologiae traditionibus* 38, 2-5 Lang (= 32, 6-8 Torres), in his attempt to explain Athena's cult epithet Παλλάς, sees it as an expression of the youth of the goddess, a feature recorded in mythology; he therefore connects this epithet etymologically with πάλληκες (young boys) and παλλακαί (young girls) and ultimately with the verb πάλλομαι, for whatever is young is vibrant (σκιρτητικὸν καὶ παλλόμενον):

Παλλάς δὲ λέγεται διὰ τὴν μεμυθευμένην περὶ αὐτὴν νεότητα, ἀφ' οὗ καὶ οἱ πάλληκες καὶ παλλακαὶ προσαγορεύονται· σκιρτητικὸν γὰρ καὶ παλλόμενον τὸ νέον.

Aelius Dionysius, in two entries of his atticistic lexicon, states that the exact meaning of the word παλλακή or παλλακίς is "young girl" and explains that it is the feminine form of πάλλας or πάλλαξ, which means "young boy"<sup>24</sup>:

παλλακαί· τὸ μὲν ἀκριβὲς τῶν παιδίσκων αἱ νέαι, καθὰ καὶ τῶν ἀρρένων πάλλακες.

πάλλας καὶ πάλλαξ· ὁ νέος, καὶ πάλλαντες· οἱ νέοι, ὡς φησι Φιλιστ<ε>ίδης ἐν Συγγενικοῖς. ἐκ δὲ τοῦ πάλλακος παλλακή καὶ παλλακίς, ἡ κόρη.

The grammarian Herennius Philo is more precise, asserting that πάλληξ, who could also be called βούπαις, ἀντίπαις or μελλέφηβος, denotes a youngster who is not any more a παῖς and not yet an

<sup>21</sup> Budin 2003, 153-155, correctly rejects this interpretation, but her arguments are partly marred by mistakes and misunderstandings as Chaniotis – Mylonopoulos 2007, 253, no. 33, rightly pointed out; see also Hermay 2014, 257 n. 91.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Budin 2003, 157. Dedications on leaving office are a well-attested practice in Greco-Roman antiquity.

<sup>23</sup> Robert 1937, 407, understood correctly that the religious function (not the sacred prostitution as he thought at the time, an opinion he later revised; see above) was exercised at the time of the great penteteric festival of Zeus Larasios; cf. Chaniotis – Mylonopoulos 2007, 253, no. 33.

<sup>24</sup> Erbse 1950, 134.

ἔφηβος<sup>25</sup>.

παῖς δὲ (*scil.* λέγεται) ὁ διὰ τῶν ἐγκυκλίων μαθημάτων δυνάμενος ἰέναι. τὰ δὲ ἐχόμενα ταύτης οἱ μὲν πάλληκα, οἱ δὲ βούπαιδα, οἱ δὲ ἀντίπαιδα, οἱ δὲ μελλέφηβον καλοῦσιν.

One can therefore assume that the παλλακαί of Zeus Larasios were very young girls, past childhood but probably not yet full adults, who served the god only once (or twice in exceptional cases) on the occasion of the god's penteteric festival<sup>26</sup>. It is theoretically possible that the function of these servants of Zeus Larasios included a symbolic sexual union with the god himself (or with a man impersonating him), even though the evidence for this practice in the ancient Greek world is scarce. A. Hermary has drawn attention to a double face relief of the Hellenistic period from Cyprus, which shows on one side a bearded head wearing an ivy crown (probably Dionysos) and on the other a standing bearded man having sexual intercourse with a woman reclining on a cubic seat<sup>27</sup>. This scene may well represent a *hieros gamos*, as Hermary thinks, and it is tempting to follow his suggestion that the 'concubines' of Tralleis performed a similar ritual<sup>28</sup>. There is also an interesting Egyptian parallel for young women functioning as 'concubines' of a great god: Strabo, 17, 1, 46 (816C)<sup>29</sup>, uses the word παλλάς (the actual form is the accusative plural παλλάδας, which should probably be emended into παλλακάς or παλλακίδας<sup>30</sup>), clearly a synonym of παλλακή<sup>31</sup>, to describe the kind of young girl of high birth who was dedicated to Zeus (Ammon) in Thebes and could have intercourse with whomever she chose "until the natural cleansing of the body" (that is the onset of menstruation)<sup>32</sup>. The girl performing this sacred function, in which the sexual element (παλλακεύει καὶ σύνεστιν) was prominent<sup>33</sup>, is called in Egyptian documents "the wife of Ammon"<sup>34</sup>. Diodorus Siculus 1, 47, 1, also uses the term "concubines of Zeus" when he comes to speak of the graves of the "wives of Ammon" in Egyptian Thebes<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Palmieri 1988, 42. Cf. Etymologicum Gudianum, ed. De Stefani, 307.

<sup>26</sup> The παλλακαί of Zeus Larasios exercised their function during the festival and not throughout the four-year period, as Robert 1937, 407, pertinently remarks: "seulement au moment de la fête pentaétérique de Zeus Larasios, quand la panégyrie faisait affluer les pèlerins au sanctuaire." Budin 2003, 157, seems unaware of this interpretation when she states that "[t]he expression ἐπὶ τὸ ἐξῆς πενταετηρίσι β' denotes a ten-year period of activity broken up into two units of five years each." This has been also noted by Chaniotis – Mylonopoulos 2007, 253, no. 33.

<sup>27</sup> Hermary 2014, 256, fig. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Hermary 2014, 256-257 with n. 91.

<sup>29</sup> Τῶ δὲ Διὶ, ὃν μάλιστα τιμῶσιν, εὐειδεστάτη καὶ γένους λαμπροτάτου παρθένος ἱερᾶται, ἃς καλοῦσιν οἱ Ἕλληνας παλλάδας (παλλακάς Xylander, παλλακίδας Dindorf in TGL s.v., πελειάδας S. West). αὕτη δὲ καὶ παλλακεύει καὶ σύνεστιν οἷς βούλεται μέχρι ἂν ἡ φυσικὴ γένηται κάθαρσις τοῦ σώματος· μετὰ δὲ τὴν κάθαρσιν δίδοται πρὸς ἄνδρα, πρὶν δὲ δοθῆναι πένθος αὐτῆς ἄγεται μετὰ τὸν τῆς παλλακειᾶς καιρόν. This passage is discussed at length by Quack 2009, 171-174.

<sup>30</sup> For the proposed emendations of the word see Radt 2009, 487-488 and the *apparatus criticus* of his edition; further Quack 2009, 172 n. 115.

<sup>31</sup> Strabo's text makes this perfectly clear: αὕτη δὲ παλλακεύει καὶ σύνεστιν οἷς βούλεται.

<sup>32</sup> Quack 2009, 172.

<sup>33</sup> Quack 2009, 172 n. 116.

<sup>34</sup> Legras 1997, 252-254.

<sup>35</sup> Quack 2009, 171.

We may conclude that Strabo and Diodorus used the term *παλλακίς τοῦ Διός* to render the Egyptian term “wife of Ammon” because they were aware of the existence of a similar sacred function in Greek religion<sup>36</sup>. I would even venture to suggest that both authors had precisely the *παλλακαί* of Zeus Larasios in mind as a model for this translation. The fact that, according to Strabo, the Egyptian “wives of Ammon” were young girls at the beginning of puberty whose function ended with the onset of menstruation justifies in my opinion the hypothesis that the same was true of the *παλλακαί* of Zeus Larasios. The young age of the girls made the use of the terms *γαμετή* or *γυνή* unsuitable. Since the function of the *παλλακαί* of Zeus Larasios was hereditary, it is not too far-fetched to suppose that they performed a ‘rite of passage’ signaling the transition from childhood to reproductive age consisting in a ritual union (perhaps on behalf of their entire age class) in the service of the principal god of the city. Another reason for calling them ‘concubines’ was probably that in the mind of the Greeks no mortal woman could claim to become the ‘wife’ of Zeus, for this position was occupied by his divine consort Hera.

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<sup>36</sup> Legras 1997, 253 : « Tout se passe donc comme si les Grecs avaient rendu par les mots *παλλακίς* ou *παλλάς* ce titre égyptien d’ « épouses du dieu », ces termes existant en grec pour désigner une réalité religieuse semblable, à savoir des jeunes filles consacrées au service des dieux. »

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### Zeus Larasios'un *Pallake*'leri

#### Özet

Tralleis'ten (Aydın) Zeus Larasios'a sunulan adaklardan MS ikinci yüzyıl sonu ya da üçüncü yüzyıl başına tarihlenen iki yazıtlı kaide, ilkinin 19. yüzyılda yayınlanmasından bu yana tekrar tekrar tartışılmıştır. Tartışmanın çıkış noktası, sunuları adayan kadınların kendilerini *pallakai* (cariyeler) olarak tanımlamaları olmuştur; bu, veraset yöntemiyle bir yaşam boyunca yalnızca bir kez (ya da istisnai durumlarda iki kez) sahip olunabilen kutsal bir işlemdir. Beş yılda bir kutlanan Zeus Larasios festivalinde *pallakai* tarafından her dört yılda bir yerine getirilen görevler konusunda araştırmacılar arasında bir fikir birliği yoktur. W. Ramsay tarafından 1883 yılında ortaya atılan kutsal fahişeler oldukları hipotezi terk edilmiştir. K. Latte'nin *pallakai*'ı (Pythia modelinde) kâhin olarak kabul etme önerisi de sorunludur. Antik sözlükbilimcilerin *pallake* ya da *pallakis* terimini ergenliğin başlangıcındaki genç kız olarak açıklamaları, Zeus Larasios'un *pallakai*'ının çocukluk-tan üreme çağına geçişi işaret eden bir ritüel gerçekleştirdiklerini düşündürmektedir. Strabon, Mısır Tebai'ında bu türden bir ritüel kaydetmiştir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Zeus Larasios, Tralleis, *pallake*, cariye, ergenlik, ritüel.



**The *Pallakai* of Zeus Larasios****Abstract**

Two inscribed bases of votive offerings to Zeus Larasios from Tralleis (Aydın), dating from the late second or early third century AD, have been repeatedly discussed ever since the first of them was published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The starting point of the discussion has been the fact that the women who dedicated the offerings identify themselves as *pallakai* (concubines), a sacred function that was hereditary and could be held only once (or in exceptional cases twice) in a lifetime. There is no agreement among scholars on the duties performed by the *pallakai* every four years, on the occasion of the penteteric festival of Zeus Larasios. The hypothesis that they were sacred prostitutes, put forward by W. Ramsay in 1883, has been abandoned. The proposal of K. Latte to recognize the *pallakai* as prophetesses (on the model of the Pythia) is also problematic. The explanation of the term *pallake* or *pallakis* by ancient lexicographers as a young girl at the beginning of puberty suggests that the *pallakai* of Zeus Larasios performed a ritual signaling the transition from childhood to reproductive age. Strabo records a ritual of this kind in Egyptian Thebes.

*Keywords:* Zeus Larasios, Tralleis, *pallake*, concubine, puberty, ritual.