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Dice oracles, polytheism and the mechanisms of decision-making in imperial Asia Minor

This research is about the so-called "Lot oracles" of Asia Minor from the 2nd century AD. I investigate the mysterious and yet seemingly inevitable need for humans to make decisions based on external mechanisms. Such analysis allowed me to reflect on morality, virtues, and polytheism in imperial Asia Minor. I focused on the epigraphic texts' cultural and internal elements in my study, especially by adopting an emic approach wherever appropriate and ruling out any perspective that seemed too general. The essay is structured in two sections. In the first section, I give an account of the previous scholarship on the lot oracles relevant to my arguments, including some related methodological issues. Then, I move on to the heart of this paper by advancing some hypothesis of interpretation for the texts labeled as "Lot oracles", proposing a case study: the personification of Victoria. I argue the following: the randomization of the dice oracles is fastened to the divine intervention in the very act of rolling them, which is the external mechanism needed to make the response significative and helpful in deciding what to endeavor; the overlapping content of dice oracles and gnomic literature is the underpinning support for morally determined behaviors, which provide some warranty from both a human and a divine standpoint; the dice oracles, connected as they are with public spaces and civic issues of morality and religion, feature exemplarity, advising on what is right to do and how to be a good citizen (which is crucial in imperial Asia Minor).