As discussed in the previous chapter, the oracular response recorded at Oenoanda suggests that the belief in a supreme deity and attendant *angeloi* existed at a popular level in later Roman Anatolia. The present chapter examines inscriptions intended for display, dated between the late-second and early-fourth centuries CE, which make reference to *angeloi* in pagan religious contexts. These inscribed texts reveal both the widespread nature of *angelos* invocation in Roman-era religions and the function of the Greek language in allowing distinct religious traditions to be expressed in shared terms.

Most, but not all, dedications to *angeloi* come from Anatolia. However, they are not confined to one area within Anatolia, nor are they limited to a single religious tradition. Smaller numbers of dedications to *angeloi* come from the Hellenized regions of Syria, Arabia, and Egypt, as well as the western Mediterranean. Previous studies of pagan angel dedications have focused on identifying the source of such veneration. In order to explain the phenomenon, scholars have alternately argued in favor of Jewish influence, Syrian influence, and local religious development, examples of which I examine below. The present study considers *angelos* inscriptions in light of the theories of Glenn Bowersock and Polymnia Athanassiadi, which suggest that Hellenic language and culture played a crucial role in allowing distinct and divergent religious traditions to communicate similar religious ideas through a common cultural and linguistic medium.¹ The inscriptions examined below share the common feature of using the Greek term *angelos* to denote the function and identity of a spiritual mediator, which, I argue, reveals the role of Hellenism as a medium for expressing local religious traditions in common terms. Thus, rather than argue

that pagan angelos veneration owes its origin to a single religious tradition, the present study examines how the shared religious term angelos enabled distinct religious traditions to express similar beliefs in divine mediators in a mutually intelligible manner.

*Pagan Angels: Franz Cumont and the Parameters of the Debate*

The present chapter continues the work of Franz Cumont, who in 1915 examined the evidence for what he termed “the angels of paganism.” Cumont’s study of such beings gathered together inscriptive and literary evidence in sufficient quantity to offer some generalizations about this religious phenomenon. Principal among Cumont’s contributions to the subject was the demonstration that the belief in divine angeloi existed in various manifestations throughout pagan society in the late empire. Cumont showed that the belief in such angeloi was not only to be found among later Roman Neoplatonists, but also among Roman soldiers in Egypt and in the hinterlands of Asia and Greece. Cumont’s evidence indicated that while pagan angel veneration had regional foci, particularly in Asia Minor, in the cosmopolitan world of the later empire the pagan belief in such angeloi could be found in places as far apart as Rome and Syria.

Cumont was also able to draw out some of the principal pagan beliefs concerning angeloi. Cumont argued that pagan angeloi were, above all, the messengers of the gods, but that they were also believed to be the conductors of souls into the afterlife. Cumont hesitated to argue for a particular origin for the pagan cult of angels, primarily because the origins are difficult to ascertain absolutely. However, with reservations, Cumont suggested that the pagan cult of angels in late antiquity was ultimately Syrian in origin.

Contributing to the study of pagan angels begun by Cumont, F. Sokolowski (1960) gathered together many of the relevant references to divine angeloi in Greek literature in order to argue that an unnamed angel who was the recipient of dedications at Stratonikeia in Asia Minor was Hekate. As I discuss below, the angelos dedications from Stratonikeia form a significant portion of the inscriptions relat-

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3 Cumont (1915) 161.