

ARCHAI ἄρχαι

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I. The Greek term *arché*, and its equivalent Latin translation *principium*. carries the basic meaning of primacy in time or rank. It is an abstract term for power often used with the meaning ‘sphere of authority’, i.e. power which is wielded by someone in a position of political, social or economic authority, such as a public official (Luke 20:20; Sib. Or. 5.20, 153). In the singular or plural *arché* is sometimes paired with *exousia* with the meaning ‘office and authority’ (Plato Alcibiades 135a; Philo Leg. 71; Luke 12:11; Titus 3:1; Mart. Poi. 10:2). It is also paired with *basileis*, ‘kings’ (PSS. Sol. 2:30; Philo Somn. 1.290). and also linked with ‘kings and rulers’, *hégoumenoi* (1 Clem 32:2). It also is used in a more concrete sense referring to those who rule or govern, i.e. ‘magistrate’. ‘ruler’, ‘governor’ (Luke 12:11). When used with the latter meaning, *arché* to the same semantic subdomain as *archôn*; in the Greek version of 1 Enoch 6:7-8, e.g. *arché* and *archôn* are used interchangeably. By extension, *arché* can be used as a title for a supernatural force or power, whether good or evil, which has some control over the activities and destiny of human beings (Eph 6:12). Since the phrase *archai kai exousiai* is a stock expression used of ‘magistrates and authorities’ (Luke 12:11; Titus 3:1; Mart. Poi. 10:2), it is likely that this political terminology was simply applied by figurative extension to supernatural beings who were thought to occupy vague positions of authority over other supernatural beings or over human beings.

II. The term *archai* (and its Latin equivalent *principia*), when used of supernatural beings, appears to have been used exclusively in early Christianity. and perhaps antecedently in early Judaism and early Christianity until it was eventually adopted by Christian Gnostics and appropriated by Neoplatonic philosophers. Though it is generally presumed that early Christianity borrowed the language for various classes of angelic beings (→Angels) including *archai* from Judaism. the evidence is problematic. One supposed Jewish apocalyptic antecedent to Paul’s use of the term ‘principalities’ (*archai*) in Rom 8:38-39 (where it is linked with ‘angels’ in one of the earliest occurrence of the term as an angelic category) is found in 1 Enoch 61:10: “And he will call all the host of the heavens. and all the holy ones above, and the host of the LORD. and the →Cherubim. and the →Seraphim and the Ophannim, and all the angels of power, and all the angels of the principalities (presumably *archai*.” Yet the dating of 1 Enoch 37-71 (the so-called Similitudes of Enoch in which this statement is found) is problematic; there is no persuasive evidence requiring a date prior to the middle of the first century CE. Further, it is possible that the Ethiopic phrase for ‘angels of principalities’ may be translating the Greek phrase *angeloi kuriotétôn* (→Dominions) rather than *angeloi archôn* (Black 1982). Similarly, the Theodotianic version of Daniel 10:20 speaks of the ‘prince of Persia’ and the •prince of Greece’, certainly angelic beings in charge of particular nations (→Prince). In 1 Enoch 6:8 (preserved in Greek and Aramaic in addition to Ethiopic), *archai* is used of twenty named angels or →watchers, each of whom commands ten angels of lesser status. This angelic organization appears to have a military origin, for the Israelite army was arranged under leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens (Exod 18:21. 25; Deut 1:15; 1 Macc 3:55; 1QM 3.16-17: 4.1-5, 15-17). Josephus refers to the organization of the Maccabean army in 1 Macc 3:55 as “the old traditional manner” (Ant. 12.301). In the LXX Exod 18:21. 25 and I Macc 3:55 the term *dekadarchai* is used for commanders of the lowest level of military organization, which was also common in the Hellenistic world (Xenophon Cyr. 8.1.14; Polybius 6.25.2; Josephus War 2.578;

Arrian *Anab.* 7.23.3). There are several other places in 1 Enoch, where the term *archai* or *archontes* very probably lies behind the Ethiopic. 1 Enoch 71:5 speaks of “the leaders of the heads of thousands who are in charge of the whole creation” and 1 Enoch 80:6 mentions that “many heads of the →stars in command will go astray” (see also 1 Enoch 82:11-20). In Jubilees 10:8. →Mastemah is called “the chief of the spirits”. In 4Q Shīr Shab the term *nési'im*, ‘princes’. is used of angels several times (4Q403 1 i 1. 10, 21; 4Q400 3 ii 2: 4Q405 13 2-3. 7; Newsom 1985:26-27), as is the term *rä'sim*, ‘chiefs’ (4Q403 1 ii l l: 4Q405 23 ii 10; Newsom 1985:27). and these are combined in the title ‘chief princes’ (4Q403 1 ii 20.21; 4Q405 8-9 5-6). In the LXX, the term *rō's*. is occasionally translated with *archôn* (Deut 33:5; Job 29:25; Ezek 38:2-3) or *arché*, meaning ‘chief, ‘master’, ‘sovereign’, ‘prince’, i.e. a term for leadership in the military, political and priestly ranks. Another use of the term *archai* for a category of angelic beings in Judaism occurs in the Theod. Daniel 7:27 (Theodotion. the reviser of an earlier ‘Ur-Theodotianic’ version of the Greek OT, was active toward the end of the second century CE): “Then kingship and authority and the greatness of the kingdoms under the entire heaven were given to the holy ones (*hagioi*) of the Most High, and his kingship is an eternal kingship and all rulers (*hai archai* shall serve and obey him.” Here *archai*, ‘rulers’ (the LXX has *exousiai*, ‘authorities’) is parallel to *hagioi*, the holy ones’), a Greek translation of the Heb term *qedōsim*, a designation often used of angels (→saints. Ps 89:6; Job 5:1; 15:15: ach 14:5; Daniel 4: 14; 8:13; see also Tobit 12:15; T. Levi 12:15; PSS. Sol. 17:49). The Aram phrase underlying *hagioi* in Theod. Daniel 7:27 is actually ‘*am qaddisim*, ‘the people of the saints’, i.e. Israel is the people of the holy ones [angels] (Collins 1977).

III. There are several problems in interpreting the term *archai* in the NT. One problem is that of determining whether or not the *archai* refer to human rulers or supernatural rulers. Another is that of determining whether, when supernatural beings are in view, they are good or evil. A third problem is that of determining whether supernatural categories of beings such as *archai* are distinct from other categories, such as *exousiai* and *dynameis*. or whether such designations are largely interchangeable. Paul includes angels, principalities (*archai*) and powers in in a list of obstacles which might separate the believer from the love of God in Rom 8:38. Clement of Alexandria interprets these as evil supernatural powers (Strom. 4.14). He may be correct, for since angels and *archai* appear to be antithetical in Rom 8:38, it is possible that the former are good while the latter are evil. In 1 Cor 15:24 it is clear that the *archai*, along with every authority and power, are considered hostile, since they are subject to destruction and are parallel to the term in 1 Cor 15:25. though here these categories may (but probably do not) refer to human rulers. There can be little doubt that the powers mentioned in Eph 1:21 and 6:12, and specifically the *archai* must be understood as evil supernatural powers.

In general it must be concluded that the lists of supernatural beings including the *archai* in Pauline and Deutero-Pauline literature are hostile supernatural beings. Further. it appears that the various categories are largely interchangeable, though it is possible that both authors and readers shared certain understandings about such beings which they did not find necessary to make more explicit.

Lists of Angelic Beings. The terms *archai* and *exousiai*, or their Latin equivalents *principia* and *potestates*, were frequently paired in a formulaic way to refer to supernatural beings (Eph 3:10; Col 1:16: 2:10. 15; Justin I Apol. 41.1; Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.21.5; Act. Phil. 132, 144; Methodius Symp. 6; Epiphanius Pan. 31.5.2 [a Valentinian source]). When the three terms *archai*, *exousiai* and *dynameis* are used together (almost always in that order), supernatural beings are usually in view (1

Cor 15:24; Justin Dial. 120.6: T. sol. 20.15: Act. John 98 [here the order is *dynameis*, *exousiai*, and *archai*, the reverse of the normal order, and the list goes on to include ‘demons’, activities {*energeiai*}, threatenings {*apeilai*}, passions {*thymoi*}, calumnies. →Satan and the inferior root]). Short lists of angelic beings occur in early Christian magical procedures such as PGM 13.15: *archai kai exousiai kai kosmokratores*. ‘rulers and authorities and cosmic rulers’ (the same brief list found in Origen De principiis 1.6.3), and PGM 21.2-3: *pasés archés kai exousias kai kuriotétos*, ‘every ruler and authority and ruling power’. These lists seem to imply that *archai* are one among several classes of angelic beings, though the hierarchization of such beings appears to be a later step.

Angelic Classes and Hierarchies. In Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism, there were numerous attempts to classify or systematize the various traditional terms for angelic beings. Despite frequent claims to the contrary, these speculations are not attested earlier than the first century CE. In T. Levi 3:1-8 (part of a more extensive Jewish interpolation in a variety of angelic beings are correlated with some of the seven heavens, though *archai* are not mentioned. The third heaven (3:3) contains the ‘powers of the hosts’ (*hai dynameis tōn parembolōn*), in the fourth heaven (3:8) are ‘→thrones and authorities’ (*thronoi, exousiai*), in the fifth heaven (3:7) are angels, and in the sixth heaven (3:5) are the ‘angels of the presence of the Lord’. While the Grundschrift of the *T. 12 Patr* may be as early as 200 BCE, this Jewish interpolation is probably much later, i.e. the first century CE. *Archai* are apparently mentioned in a classification of ten angelic orders in Slavonic 2 Enoch 20:1 found in the longer recension which cannot with any assurance be dated earlier than the second century CE: (1) archangels, (2) incorporeal forces (*dynameis?*), (3) dominions (*kuriotétes*), (4) origins (*archai?*), (5) authorities (*exousiai?*), (6) *cherubim*, (7) *seraphim*, (8) many-eyed thrones (*thronoi?*), (9) regiments and (10) shining ‘*otanim?*’(?) stations. In one of the eight Syriac manuscripts of the *Testament of Adam*, there is a list of heavenly powers placing them in a hierarchical arrangement beginning from the lowest and proceeding to the highest order: angels, archangels, archons (*archai*), authorities, powers, dominions, and finally at the highest level, thrones, seraphim and cherubim are grouped together (4:1-8). In *De caelesti hierarchia*, Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, strongly influenced by Neoplatonic angelology, presents a hierarchy of angelic beings in three orders consisting of three types of angels in each order: (1) the highest order consists of seraphim, cherubim and thrones, 7.14, (2) the middle order consists of Dominions (*kuriotétes*). Authorities, (*exousia*), and Powers, (*dynameis*), 8.1, and (3) the lowest order consists of principalities (*archai*), archangels (*archangeloi*), and angels, (*angeloi*), 9.1-2. This author also uses the terms angels and heavenly powers, *dynameis ouranias*, as generic terms for heavenly beings (4.1; 11.1-2). Iamblichus lists supernatural beings which reveal a god, such as an angel, archangel, demon, archon or a soul (*De myst.* 2.3). In an inscription written over the heads of angels in a Mosaic in the Koimesis Church, the terms *archai, dynameis, kuriotétes*, and *exousiai* appear (Sanin, 1:497).

IV. Bibliography

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D. E. Aune