

I will offer a timely overview and a necessary reassessment of the phenomenon of Greek priesthood sales. The number of Greek inscriptions which attest to the practice of selling priesthoods has increased substantially in the past two decades (there are now more than eighty relevant texts) and the phenomenon has as a result attracted greater scholarly attention. D. Obbink and R. Parker (*Chiron* 2000, 415-449, and *Chiron* 2001, 229-252), as well as H.-U. Wiemer (*Chiron* 2003, 263-310), have respectively provided models for the study of the documents, but largely from the perspective of the abundant material from Kos. B. Dignas in her book (2002) as well as in a recent study (2003) has attempted to show that the documents were primarily financial both in origin and in utility.

My paper will first challenge the received assumption that the practice of selling priesthoods originated in the eastern Aegean in the 5th century BCE. Long-neglected comparative evidence shows that the Greek practice was in all likelihood inspired by more ancient sales of priesthoods in Egypt. Second, the paper will reconsider the function of priesthood sales. Since recent discussion focuses almost exclusively on the financial significance of sales (Dignas, 2003), cultic and civic aspects of the contracts and records of sale have not received proper attention. I will aim to rectify this bias by looking at how the function of the texts varied according to local and historical contexts. For example, sales of priesthoods could serve to codify the principles of newly founded cults, to grant the purchaser a hereditary office or to transfer the control of a cult outside of the purview of an existing priestly family. These religious and political functions suggest that sales of priesthoods were not always, as is usually assumed, driven by economic needs. An undue focus on the financial aspects of the documents can be traced to disapproval, both ancient and modern, of the idea of selling priesthoods. Ancient criticism accounts at least partially for the confinement of the practice to the eastern Aegean. Finally, I will suggest that sales of priesthoods can more properly be seen as an alternative means, employed by some Greek cities, of codifying priestly responsibilities and privileges. The objective of the practice, if one can generalise, was the selection of an individual of sufficient wealth and other qualifications to serve as an officiant and benefactor for a cult.

Dignas, B. *Economy of the Sacred in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor*. Oxford 2002.

——— “ ‘Auf seine Kosten kommen’—ein Kriterium für Priester? Zum Verkauf von Priestertümern im hellenistischen Kleinasien,” 27-40 in: Heedemann, H. and Winter, E. eds. *Neue Forschungen zur Religionsgeschichte Kleinasiens, Elmar Schwertheim zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet*. Asia Minor Studien 49. Bonn 2003.