

Sacred Goods and Local Conflicts in Hellenistic Macedonia

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The Greek adjective *hieros* was often employed to describe territories, lands, buildings, objects, revenues, or money considered as belonging to one or more deities. Modern scholars debate whether the communities of men which actually controlled these properties were, in legal terms, true ‘co-owners’ or simple ‘managers’ of them. In any case, ancient Greek states definitely used to lay their hands, whenever the need arose, on sacred funds and revenues, which they perceived as their own and were usually managed through civic magistrates. Such behavior was widespread and perceived as normal, at least until it was limited to local sanctuaries that lay within the territory of a *polis* or of a regional *koinon*. It is therefore difficult to establish whether the “sacred” goods or revenues (*hierà*) were *distinguished* in legal terms from the “communal” ones (*koinà*, *demosia*), or if they were considered as a *subspecies* of them. Many epigraphic and literary sources apparently support the former interpretation, but we should accept that there is no single explanation that is valid for all historical contexts and regions of the ancient Greek world.

In Hellenistic Macedonia, royal arbitrations in conflicts arising from the administration of sacred goods are well attested, and involve cities or *koinà*, as well as sanctuaries. The Antigonid kings did not adopt a standard position when they were involved in such conflicts; each case was judged on its own, and the same quarrel could be settled in opposite ways by different kings. This is clearly shown by the rich set of documents from Labraunda, in Caria, informing us about the controversies between the priest of Zeus and the “league” of the *Chrysaoreis* on the one hand, and the city of Mylasa on the other.¹ In this case, Antigonus Doson supported the rights of the *Chrysaoreis* and the priest of Zeus against Mylasa, while Philip V sided with the city. In other cases, the same Philip V defended the financial autonomy of the sanctuaries against the rapacity of secular authorities: he granted the *ateleia* to the sacred lands of the sanctuary of Abai, in Phokis,² and he wrote a *diagramma* in order to protect the goods of Serapis in Thessalonike.³ His father Demetrius similarly wrote letters to the *epistates* of Beroea Harpalos, disposing that the revenues of Herakles *Kynagidas* appropriated by the city should be returned to the god.⁴

Both the letters of Demetrius to Beroea and Philip’s *diagramma* on the sanctuary of Serapis concern well-known wealthy sanctuaries of Macedonia proper; both are useful to the general discussion regarding the ‘osmosis’ between public and sacred finances in Greek cities. At the same time, the documents from Beroea and Thessalonike inform us about some peculiar developments in the relationship between the king and cities in Hellenistic Macedonia. They also show the legislative overlap between the king’s legislative role and the civic autonomy.

A substantial peculiarity of Antigonid Macedonia, when compared with other Hellenistic kingdoms, also emerges. The Seleucid kingdom, at least under Antiochus III,

had a “minister of sacred affairs” at the central level as well as powerful local ‘supervisors’ of the administration of the most important and wealthy sanctuaries. Also in the Attalid kingdom, a “supervisor of the sacred revenues” is attested, at least after 188 BC, although modern scholars debate the extent of his powers. In Macedonia, the available evidence does not allow us to assume any similar centralization of the control of sacred revenues. Here, apparently, local magistrates were sufficient to ensure the king’s voice was heard at the local level.

Notes

¹ Crampa 1969, 27–41 no. 5.

² Prignitz 2014, 141–143.

³ Hatzopoulos 1996, no. 15.

⁴ EKM I, 3.

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