

Cults, Money, and Prestige: Cultic Offices as a Means of Prestige for Leading Families in Asia Minor

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Abstract

Inscriptions dating to the Archaic and Classical periods avoided mentioning the individuals as holders of cultic and public offices. Unlike the epigraphic sources from earlier periods, inscriptions from the Hellenistic and following periods indicated the cultic offices and the role of priests as benefactors of the cults. The elites as holders of cultic offices used the erection of honorific statues and inscriptions as one of the means of raising their family's prestige. This paper aims to trace the changing role and importance of statues and inscriptions dedicated by cultic officials in relation to their prestige in Asia Minor.

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (641–647) mentions the different cultic tasks of a girl had in the early stage of her life.¹ She performed various cultic services for the cult of Athena and Artemis. The performance of these cultic services was reserved for a small number of people who were members of leading families of the city. The prestige associated with cult and rituals itself was high, considering the epigraphic sources. The so-called hierous and honorary inscriptions engraved on the costly statue bases testify to the cultic offices that the members of the elite held.²

Inscriptions dating to the Archaic and early Classical periods were short and limited to the name of the dedicator, patronymic, and to the name of the deity (Table 1).³ Sometimes, the reason for the dedication was also indicated. The inscriptions are generally silent concerning the cultic office of the dedicators. It began to change during the late Classical period. The period after the death of Alexander the Great form a new chapter in the history of ancient Greece and brought changes in the self-presentation of cultic officials, which also found its expression in inscriptions and honorific statues (Table 1). Inscriptions dating to the Hellenistic and following periods emphasize the cultic and political offices of the dedicators, those of their family members, and their benefactions. The poleis also honoured women and men for their services as priests and civic benefactors. Even if women did not have equal standing with men, many inscriptions also honored priestesses. The inscriptions testify that women were honored in the same way as men. The inscriptions engraved on statue bases or stelai were set up at sanctuaries, stoai, bouleuteria, agorai, street, and other public places. Depending on the city, several dozen or more than hundred honorific statues were set up in public places and sanctuaries of the city. Many statues are not preserved, as bronze statues were melted down and re-used and marble statues were destroyed or damaged in Late Antiquity.

period	man/woman
Archaic and Classical period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the name of the honorand • patronymic • deity • the reason for the dedication
late Classical and early Hellenistic period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the name of the honorand • patronymic • priestly status • deity • the reason for the dedication
From the 3 rd century BCE onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the name of the honorand • patronymic • priestly status • deity • previous cultic and political offices • honours received from the <i>polis</i> • cultic and political offices of the family members • benefaction • the reason for the dedication

Table 1: The contents of inscriptions dedicated in honour of cultic officials

The changes in self-representation of cultic officials can be also observed in art. During the Archaic period, goddesses were sometimes represented with more sophisticated hairstyles, headgear, and clothes than mortal women. The difference began to vanish during the Classical and following periods. The representation of priests with a priestly attribute is seldom. Especially statues represent male and female priests without any insignia of priestly status. Without inscriptions, it is difficult to determine whether the statues represent worshippers or priestesses. The garments and the drapery of the priests do not have features, which distinguish them from those of the worshippers or deities. The honorific statues of cultic officials had life-size or over-life-size. Women are dressed in chiton or peplos and himation; men are dressed in chiton and himation. Fourteen grave stelai from Smyrna dating to the Hellenistic period and dedicated by the demos to priestesses are an exception in this respect.⁴ The grave stelai depict the deceased with one torch on each side. The torch used as an attribute of a goddess – Artemis, Hecate, or Demeter – identify the deceased as a priestess. The inscriptions engraved on these grave stelai do not mention the cultic office of the deceased.

Each city had over the centuries a significant number of cultic officials. However, only one part of the priests was honored with an honorific statue or grave stele. The

inscriptions engraved on the votive portrait statues of cultic officials became longer during the Hellenistic, Roman, and Imperial periods. Not only the inscriptions were longer in later periods, but also the number of honorific statues was increased during the Hellenistic and later periods. The inscriptions dedicated from the 3rd century BC onwards emphasize more and more the cultic offices of the honorand, those of his family members, and his benefactions.⁵ The benefaction was regulated by 'do ut des'. In return, the *demos* honoured the priest for his 'benefaction' with public honors: the dedication of an honorific statue set up in a public place and an inscription that revealed the piety, benefactions, and the noble background of the priest.

Fig. 1 shows three statues of women dating to the Hellenistic period, which were found at the sanctuaries of Demeter in Priene and Cnidus. The three women are dressed in chiton and himation. The first statue, found at the sanctuary of Demeter in Priene, depicts Hegeso (3rd century BC), who was a priestess of Demeter (Fig. 1a).⁶ *IK Priene* 192 (= *IPriene* 173) engraved on the statue base of Hegeso mentions the name of her father, husband, and her priesthood of Demeter and Kore. The over-life-size marble statue, the drapery, and the fabric of the garment of Hegeso mark her social status. Even if *IPriene* 173 is short and does not emphasize the wealth, benefaction, cultic, and political offices of the family members of Hegeso, it marks the beginning of the end of the modesty: to not emphasize the own social, cultic status, and wealth in inscriptions. We do not know



Fig. 1: a. Statue of Hegeso from Priene; b. Statue of a woman from the sanctuary of Demeter at Cnidus; c. Statue of Demeter from the sanctuary of Demeter at Cnidus.

whether Hegeso's family or the polis initiated the expensive statue. The authorization of the polis was required for the erection of the statue in a public place.⁷ Mylonopoulos points out that it was extremely rare for a priestess to dedicate her portrait statue.⁸ Presumably, Hegeso's family financed the statue and it was set up with the permission of the demos at the sanctuary of Demeter in Priene. In the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, Pergamon set up statues of cultic officials in public places and sanctuaries.⁹ The inscriptions engraved on the statue bases indicate that the demos was the initiator (ὁ δῆμος ἐτίμησεν – the demos honored). However, this formulation does not necessarily mean that the demos also financed the honorific statues. Pilz states that the statues of priestesses were presumably not set up before the 2nd century BC by the demos.¹⁰ If we consider the lifespan of the sanctuary of Demeter at Priene, we must realize that the number of votive portrait statues set up at this site is significantly low. The sanctuary of Demeter at Priene has existed at least for 500 years. Therefore, only two votive portrait statues are attested for this shrine (*I.Priene 172* and *IK Priene 192*). The statues of the family members of the two priestesses of Demeter – Timonassa and Hegeso – are not attested for Priene. The inscriptions from the Roman and Imperial periods illustrate that the families of the honored cultic officials owned significant material resources and were also able to afford to dedicate several statues of their family members. Apparently, the honours were assigned to few cultic and civic officials during the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods.

Ἡγησὼ Ἱπποσθένους,
 Εὐκρίτου δὲ γυνή,
 ἱερῆ Δήμητρος καὶ Κόρης.

Hegeso, the daughter of Hippothenes,
 the wife of Eukritos,
priestess of Demeter and Kore
IK Priene 192

The second statue (2nd century BC), found at the sanctuary of Demeter in Cnidus, does not bear an inscription (Fig. 1b). It can represent a priestess or a worshipper. The third statue depicts Demeter (350 BC), which was also found at the same sanctuary (Fig. 1c). Demeter is represented sitting on a throne that identifies her as a goddess. However, Demeter was often depicted standing and without attributes. Some deities were represented with particular attributes and iconography, which served to indicate the identity of the deity. From the Classical period onwards, several deities, especially goddesses, were represented in the same way as mortal women. The iconography of Hegeso is similar to that of Demeter, whom she served. The question arises whether the elite intended to vanish the iconographic differences between deities and themselves. Especially the representation of women and goddesses is similar to each other. The statues and reliefs of male deities differ from those of mortal men. Male deities were usually depicted in himation and with their upper body naked, whereas mortal men were usually depicted in chiton and himation. It is easier to distinguish male deities from mortal men than goddesses from mortal women.

A statue of Simo was dedicated around the same period as that of Hegeso. In contrast to the inscription of Hegeso, Simo does not only mention the name of her father, husband, her priestly status, and the deity, but also her virtue, wealth, and her family (I. Erythrai 210a).¹¹ The inscription commemorating Simo is one of the rare inscriptions dating to the 4th and 3rd centuries BC that testifies that a woman set up her own statue. Dillon states that the setting up votive portrait statues of women is first attested for Athens in the 4th century BC.¹² The statue of Simo was presumably one of the first statues of a priestess set up in Asia Minor. The portrait statue of Simo and the inscription demonstrated the social prestige of her families within local framework.

[Σ]ιμῶ τήν[δ' ἔστη]σ[α] γυνή Ζωίλου Διονύσῳ
 [ἰ<ε>]ρέα πρὸ πόλεως Παγκρατίδew θυγάτηρ,
 [εἰ]κ[ό]να μὲ[μ] μορφῆς, ἀρετῆς δ' ἐπίδειγμα καὶ ὄλβου,
 [ἀθ]άνατον μνήμην παισὶ τε καὶ προγόνοις.

I.Erythrai 210a

Simo, wife of Zoilos,
priestess of the city, daughter of Pankratides,
 set up this **image**¹³ of beauty and example of virtue and wealth
 for **Dionysus, as an eternal memory for my children and ancestors.**

I.Erythrai 210a; translation by Dillon 2010: 9.

The Roman period marks the beginning of a new era. The Roman and Imperial periods are marked by the increased number of statues set up in honor of cultic and political officials in public places and sanctuaries. Under the Roman rules, the modest formulations in Greek inscriptions were replaced by formulations, which emphasized the cultic and political engagement of the honorand, his/her piety, and benefactions. I.Erythrai 105 dating to the Imperial period is a good example. The gerousia initiated the erection of the statue of Pherekleides, who had political offices and supervised banquets and the festival Demetria, which was presumably celebrated in honor of Demeter.¹⁴ Pherekleides does not indicate the amount of money he donated for various cultic activities, but he uses the expression such as 'from his own resources' and 'in a generous manner'. Most of the inscriptions dedicated around the same period as I.Erythrai 105 use similar expressions and terms to indicate the benefaction of the honorands.

<p>ἡ γερουσία ἐτείμησεν ἐκ τῶν ιδίων προσόδων Φερ.κλ.ιδεα τὸν υἱὸν τῆς γερουσίας, ἀγορανομήσαντα κα[ἰ]</p>	<p>the gerousia honoured, from its own resources, Pherekleides, from his own resources, as an agoramon of the gerousia and</p>
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	[ε]ὕποσιαρχήσ[αν]τα καὶ πανη- γυρι-	a leader of the euposiarch and pane-
5	αρχήσαντα τῶν Δημητρίων ἐνδό - [ξ]ως καὶ μεγαλοψύ[χ]ως, ἀρετῆς ἕνε-	arch of the Demetria in a glorious and generous manner , on account
	κα καὶ εὐνοίας τῆς εἰς ἐαυτήν	of excellence and goodwill shown towards
	ἐπιμεληθέντων τῶν ἀρχόντων	the supervision of archons
	.. Φιλωνίδου Ἀρτεμᾶ καὶ Μενάν-	.. Philonidos Artema and Menan-
10	δρου.	dros.

I.Erythrai 105

The cult of Zeus Panamaros at Panamara and that of Hecate at Lagina were the major cults of Stratonikeia. We learn from the inscriptions dedicated in honor of cultic officials of Zeus and Hecate that they were from wealthy families who held cultic offices for generations.¹⁵ I.Stratonikeia 667 (Imperial period) was dedicated in honour of Thrason Leon, who was a priest of Zeus.¹⁶ At ages between 10 and 20, he held different cultic offices of Zeus. His wife was a priestess, his daughter a kleidophoros (key-bearer of Hecate), and his brother was a priest. Thrason Leon also emphasizes the high sum he donated to the city. Only a small part of the inscriptions dedicated in honour of priests mention the amount of money donated for cultic and civic activities. Von den Hoff points out that the honorific statues and inscriptions stressed the importance of cultic activities in the polis and that the honored priests acted on behalf of the cult, city, and piety.¹⁷ In fact, the family of Thrason Leon competed, like other wealthy families, for public prestige with benefaction. Apparently, it was also crucial to hold cultic offices. As the cultic office of Zeus and Hecate were the most prestigious offices in the territory of Stratonikeia, Thrason Leon and his family members held the priesthoods of both cults. As priests were an essential component of each city, it was crucial for leading families to hold a high estimated cultic office. Benefaction allowed Thrason Leon and his family to enhance their public prestige and to ask for one of the highest public honours: the erection of his statue.

ἱερεὺς

ἕξ ἐπανγγελίας **Θράσων** Ἱεροκλέους **Λέων** Ἱε(ροκωμήτης) ἐτῶν [.]

μετὰ ἀρχιερωσύνην ἦν ἐτέλεσεν ὧν ἐτῶν δέκ[α]

καὶ **γυμνασιαρχίαν** ἦν ἐτέλεσεν ὧν ἐτῶν δέκα

5 ἐνδὸς καὶ **ἱερωσύνην** τοῦ μεγίστου θεοῦ **Διὸς**

Παναμάρου ἦν ἐτέλεσεν ὧν ἐτῶν δέκα ἕξ καὶ **ιε-**

ρωσύνην τοῦ προπάτορος **Διὸς Χρυσαιορείου** ἦν ἐ-

τέλεσεν ἐτῶν εἴκοσι καὶ **σειτωνίαν** ὧν αὐτοὶ ὑ-

πέσχοντο (δηναρίων) μ(υρίων) ἀναποδότων τῇ **πόλει**.

- 10 *ἰέρεια ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ Ἀπφιάς Ἀρτεμιδώρου* K[(ωρα)ζ(ις),]
 [κλειδοφορ]οῦσης τῆς *Θυγατρὸς* αὐτῶν *Ἀμμ[ί]-*
 [αξ τῆς *Θράσων*]ος *Ἀπφίας* [Ἰε(ροκωμήτιδος),] *συνφιλοτειμου[μένου]*
 [αὐτῶ τοῦ *ἀδελφοῦ Λέοντος* τοῦ Ἰεροκλέους *Θράσωνος*.]
I.Stratonikeia 667

- The **priest** was,
 in accordance with his commitment, **Thrason Leon**, son of Hierokles, of the
 demon of Hierokome,
 aged [---], after a high **priesthood**, which he had at the **age of 10**,
gymnasiarch at the **age of 11**,
 5 a **priesthood** of the great god **Zeus**
Panamaros performed at the **age of 16**,
 a **priesthood** of **Zeus Chrysaorian Propator**
 carried out at the **age of 20**, a **sitionie**,
 for which he gave **10,000 denarii** as non-refundable funds **to the city**;
 10 the **priestess** was **his wife Apphia, daughter of Artemidoros**, of the deme of
 Koraza;
 their **daughter Ammia Apphia**,
 [daughter of Thrason, of the deme of Hierokomè], was a **clidophore**; the
 [brother of the priest, **Leon Thrason** son of Hierocles], **contributed to the**
generosity of their priesthood

Conclusion

Votive portrait statues were dedicated in honour of priests of major polis cults. Some statues were also dedicated to priests of minor cults; however, this was more an exception. The dedication of a statue was a highly costly matter. Diogenes Laertius (6.2.35) says that the price for a life-size bronze statue was 3,000 drachmas, while a quart barley flour was sold for two copper coins.¹⁸ Only some inscriptions say explicitly that the demos paid for the honorific statues of priests. It seems likely that the most honorific statues were financed by the priests and their families.

Inscriptions from the Archaic and Classical periods avoided naming the cultic offices and the benefaction of the honoured priests. Benefaction was also practiced during the Archaic and Classical periods but was seldom mentioned in inscriptions dedicated by priests. It is presumably linked to the idea of modesty that prevented from the public display of personal wealth, benefactions, prestige, and offices. The political changes during the Hellenistic period and especially under the Roman rulers also changed the self-representation of wealthy families who acted as priests of major civic cults and donated a large sum of money for the funding of festivals, public buildings, and sanctuaries.

The aim of the benefaction was not one-sided. The funding of the cult allowed cultic officials to promote their public prestige. The combination of cultic and public offices with benefaction was essential for a career and self-representation in ancient Greece. The ambitions were awarded with honorific statues set up in public places.

Notes

- ¹ For Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* 641–647, see Sourvinou 1971, 339–342; Grebe 1999, 194–203.
- ² The so-called *hiereus* inscriptions were dedicated by the priests. The honorary inscriptions were initiated by the *demoi*.
- ³ For a detailed analysis of dedicatory inscriptions, see Day 2010, 181 f.
- ⁴ Pfuhl, Möbius 1979, nos. 405–410, 529–531, 855, 872; Grossman 2001, 118; *ThesCRA* III 2006, nos. 77. 78; Klöckner 2013, 303 f.; Schipporeit 2013, 196.
- ⁵ For benefaction in ancient Greece, see Gauthier 1985; Dignas 2006; Gyax 2016.
- ⁶ For Hegeso, see Connelly 2007, 137 f.; Dillon 2010, 125 f.; Schipporeit 2013, 167 f.
- ⁷ McLean 2002, 242; Mylonopoulos 2013, 122 f.
- ⁸ Mylonopoulos 2013, 128 f.
- ⁹ Mathys 2012, 278–281.
- ¹⁰ Pilz 2013, 155.
- ¹¹ For Simo, see also Dillon 2010, 9; Pilz 2013, 163 f.
- ¹² Dillon 2010, 57.
- ¹³ The term εἰκῶν (*eikōn*) means 'image' and refers to the statue.
- ¹⁴ For *I.Erythrai* 105, see also Schipporeit 2013, 61.
- ¹⁵ Laumonier 1937 and 1938.
- ¹⁶ Laumonier 1938, 268 f.
- ¹⁷ von den Hoff 2008, 114.
- ¹⁸ For further epigraphic sources on the cost of statues, see Ma 2013, 264.

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Fig. 1: a. courtesy of Antikensammlung, Berlin; photo by J. Laurentius; b. Newton 1862, pl. 56; c. Newton 1862, pl. 55.

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