

CHAPTER 2

Religion without a Church

Religious Authority in Greece

In the posthumously published lectures commonly known as *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, Jacob Burckhardt distinguished between societies in which “religion is determined by the state” and those in which “the state is determined by religion”; and he described the transition from the one form to the other occasioned by the triumph of Christianity as “a revolution of which we may say that it was the greatest that ever happened.”¹ That, at all events, is the apocalyptic proposition that faced readers of the *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* as they were first published; the scholarly re-edition of his lecture notes that appeared in 1982 suggests that the intended claim was less extreme, namely that the transition to Christianity was the greatest transformation ever to occur in the relation between state and religion, not in the absolute. But even in that mitigated form Burckhardt’s claim pinpoints something crucial to Greco-Roman religion: the absence of institutional structures independent of the state. One might almost say that Greek religion operated without institutions altogether. The Delphic oracle,

1. Quoted from the translation edited by J. H. Nichols, *Force and Freedom: Reflections on History* (Boston, 1943), 202. The relevant pages in the edition of the lecture notes (*Über das Studium der Geschichte*, ed. P. Ganz [Munich, 1982]), are 191, 311. Cf. W. Burkert, “Jacob Burckhardt über griechische Religion,” in *Jacob Burckhardt und die Griechen*, ed. L. Burckhardt and H. J. Gehrke, 209–27 (Basel, 2006).

it is true, had enormous prestige and was almost invariably obeyed when consulted; but Apollo (or the Delphic priesthood) could not force states to consult the oracle. How then did this religion without a church work?²

Sacred Business in the Assembly

I start with a concrete case, a humdrum one, deliberately chosen to illustrate a routine procedure. A fragmentary inscription of the third century BC from Miletus reads as follows:

[Whether] it will be agreeable to the goddess and beneficial to the people both now and henceforth if [the people] conducts the collections for Artemis Boulephoros Skiris as the Skiridai expound and propose or as now occurs. Whatever the god pronounces let the sacred messengers report to the assembly, and let the people, having heard, deliberate, in order that everything may be done in accord with the advice of the god. As sacred messengers were chosen [4 names]. The Milesian people asks whether it will be agreeable to the goddess and beneficial to the people both now and henceforth if [the people] conducts the collections for Artemis Boulephoros... [the stone breaks off]³

So the assembly has decided to consult a god, who will certainly be the local oracular god Apollo of Didyma, on a proposed reform in organizing the collections that financed the cult. What the reform was we do not know, but the presumption is that it was approved by Apollo, or the transaction would scarcely have been recorded on stone. Four significant agencies or factors are in play in the inscription: the assembly; the oracle; a group of specialists, the Skiridai, attached to a particular cult; and the activity of “expounding” (ἐξηγεῖσθαι), which the Skiridai are said to perform. The assembly is involved twice: it first resolves to consult an oracle, and it will then make a decision on the substantive issue on the basis of the oracle’s advice. (The language

2. For one city see R. Garland, “Priests and Power in Classical Athens,” in *Pagan Priests*, 73–91.

3. *Milet* 6.3.1225 (*LSA* 47), “before 234/3?” No. 1224 is a newly published, slightly earlier text of similar content. The issue was quite often of concern. In *IG* 12.6.3 (“s. III² a.”: = *LSCG* 123) a priest of Isis asks the Samian assembly for permission to collect as before; in *ibid.* XII.6.2 (“c. med. s. III a”) priests (?) of the Syrian goddess are given collecting rights; *SEG* 6.775 (Tlos, “s. ii. a”: = *LSA* 77) forbids unauthorized collection.

of advice, the god being treated exactly like a human counselor, is regular.⁴) In this case the assembly has predetermined to do as the god counsels, and assemblies as far as we know always did follow oracular advice in such cases; but formally both decisions were made by the assembly, and the decision to take the matter to the god was a real one.

Two points are to be noted here. The Skiridai do not consult the god on their own initiative. No private individual or interest group can approach a god about a matter of public concern and then spring the result on the assembly; the decision to consult has to come from the assembly itself. When Asander as satrap of Caria in 321/0 proposed to the Amyzonians that "Bagadates, whom the oracle of Apollo has designated for him, should be *neōkoros* of Artemis," he was not observing the norms of Greek polis life in presenting a Delphi-sanctioned fait accompli. The nearest approach to an exception from the polis world comes from Anaphe in the second century BC, where one Timotheus decided to build a temple of Aphrodite, evidently at his own expense, and donate it to the city, but was in doubt whether it should be located within the existing precinct of Apollo Asgelatas or of Asclepius. He consulted the god on this point, but the form of his question was not "Where should I build the temple?" nor "Should the city build this temple?" but "Where should I ask the city's permission to build the temple?"⁵ De facto the god's positive response must have been influential, but de jure his question had only concerned his own conduct ("What request shall I make?"), not the city's.⁶ The second point to note is that the decision to consult is not a referral from a human body with secular competence to one with spiritual competence: it is a referral to a god. No body comparable to a church intervenes.

Taking such questions to a god was common but far from invariable. In the late fourth century (?) a group of "Bacchoi" approached the Cnidians with a proposal to ban all lodging in the sanctuary of Dionysus Bacchus, "in order that it may be kept pure."⁷ Procedurally this case is exactly like the Milesian one, a reform proposed to the assembly by a group closely involved with a particular cult (whatever these "Bacchoi" may have been, which is

4. See the commentary in *Milet* 6.3 ad loc. In Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.5 Socrates, when consulted by Xenophon, advises him to consult Apollo: forms of the same verb ἀνακαινύω are used in both cases.

5. *LSCG* 129. Asander: *Amyzon* 2.

6. For the distinction, cf. Xen. *Anab.* 5.6.27–8: Xenophon is accused of making a consultative sacrifice about a matter of public concern without consulting the army; he replies that he was merely inquiring whether to raise the issue with the army at all. The private initiatives of the prophet Damianos at Didyma at or beyond the end of the third century AD (*Didyma* 504.15–16, 29–31) belong to a different world: L. Robert, *CRAI* (1968): 593–94.

7. *IKnidos* 160 (*LSA* 55; Jaccottet, *Choirs Dionysos*, no. 154, where see the commentary).

obscure). But it seems simply to have been accepted without more ado. Most of the texts collected in volumes entitled "Sacred Laws of the Greeks" are regulations passed by ordinary legislative assemblies of Greek cities. "Sacred" indicates the topic of the laws in question but reveals nothing about the issuing bodies. Greek legislative bodies devoted much time and attention to sacred matters. Twenty meetings of the Athenian assembly each year had a compulsory space at the start of the agenda for three items of sacred business, and such formal division of the business occurred in other cities too.⁸ About most such business, as in the Cnidians' response to the Bacchoi, the assembly made up its own mind without reference to an oracle. Many such autonomous decisions of the assembly, including this one, concern matters of discipline and good order within sanctuaries and at festivals; the rationale may have been that there was no need to consult a god about proposals that were manifestly in the gods' interest. But autonomous decisions penetrate well into the area of sacred finance, about which one might suppose that the gods would have views. The issue is perhaps one of the special sensitivities that provoked referral to an oracle in a particular case; it is discussed in appendix 1 below.⁹

I turn now to the Skiridai of the Milesian inquiry from which I began. Though otherwise unknown, their name shows them to be a group closely concerned with the cult of Artemis Skiritis. Groups of this type are best known from Attica, where many cults were attached to the hereditary associations known as *genē*: the priest or priestess was invariably recruited from within the *genos*, and the other members often had some role in running of the cult. The Skiridai must have been a society roughly of this type, one of several known in Miletus.¹⁰ One of the problems of Greek religion concerns

8. Twenty meetings: Ar. *Ath. Pol.* 43.6. The formula that such-and-such a person is to be allowed first access to the assembly μετὰ τὰ ἱερά, found frequently in Athens and sometimes outside, refers to the division (see P. J. Rhodes, *Chiron* 25 [1995]: 195 n. 33 [+]; *BÉ* [1996] no. 157; *BÉ* [2008], no. 399); so too do such formulas as χρηματίζουσι περὶ τούτων ἐν ἱεροῖς (*LSCG* 40.16). On the Argive 'Assembly for Sacred Matters' see C. Kritzas, *CRAI* 2006, 424, with references. The distinction made in some cities between laws and decrees needs not concern us here. Compare in general R. Parker, "What Are Sacred Laws?" in *The Law and the Courts in Ancient Greece*, ed. E. Harris and L. Rubinstein, 57–70 (London, 2004).

9. See p. 265.

10. Branchidai: Hdt. 1.46.2, and often; Molpoi: *LSA* 50 passim, and often; Onitadai: *LSA* 50.31, 37, 40; ? Xynchidai (*Milet* 6.3.1385); Euangelidai, Conon *FGH* 26 ¶44. Evidence from elsewhere in the Greek world is sparse, perhaps deceptively so: see, e.g., Callim. *Aet. fr.* 75.32–38 (Keos); Tac. *Hist.* 2.3 and Hesych. κ 2744, τ 1107 (Cyprus); Arist. *fr.* 549 Rose (Massilia); ? RO 62 (*LSCG* 151) A 52 (Cos). Hereditary transmission of priesthoods within individual families (Hdt. 7.153.2–3; cf. 3.142.4; for a probable Istrian case, Chiekova, *Pont gauche*, 18–19), particularly royal families (Hdt. 4.161.3; 6.56.1), also occurs, and in the Hellenistic period recurs (see, e.g., *IHistriae* 1.15–20; *ibid.* 19.20–23; *Isr. Cos* 82.6–11; *Syll.* 1007 n. 4 with *IG* 4 (1)² 60; for the act of handing over see *LSCG*

sources of expertise or traditional knowledge. Since the details of procedure at particular festivals were not normally published, the question arises of where the memory of proper procedure at elaborate rites performed once a year only was lodged. The most plausible answer is often the collective expertise of *genē*-like groups.¹¹

Not all cults, however, had such groups associated with them; indeed it is very unclear how common they were other than in Attica. Often the know-how must have rested more precariously, particularly precariously when tenure was annual, with a single priest; perhaps to mitigate this difficulty, successive holders of such priesthoods occasionally constituted themselves as boards of "those who have held the priesthood of x." From our present point of view the single priest and the group are analytically interchangeable, since single priests can approach an assembly with a proposal concerning their cult just as do the Skiridai.¹² In both cases what we are seeing is the role of specialists in initiating and influencing action in the religious sphere. But though specialists may advise, the assembly decides. The same relation applies in the military sphere: the seer reads the omens, but it is the general who decides what action to take on the basis of them. Experts have a role, but that role is separated from the power of actual decision making.¹³

61; LSA 13 [on the latter see E. Stavrianopoulou in *Norme religieuse*, 220–24, with refs.]; priesthoods held διὰ γένους are common under the Roman Empire (for some references, see A. Chanotis in *Practitioners of the Divine*, 22 n. 24). On Athenian *genē*, see Parker, *Athenian Religion*, chap. 5 and appendix 2.

11. Three sacred laws reveal these difficulties: one from Tlos (LSA 78 B, "c. 100 BC") appoints one of the city's priests to "attend all the sacrifices conducted by the *hierothutēs* and the other magistrates on behalf of the people in order that the sacrifices handed down from the forefathers be conducted piously"; the position was a recurrent one, as side A of the stone contains traces of similar appointments. In LSA 121.10–12 from Ephesus ("3rd c. AD") the "publicly financed hierophant" is to teach the *prytanis*, who has sacrificial duties, "what is customary for the gods on each point." A different solution is found in LSA 33 B 74–84 (Magnesia on the Maeander, early second century BC): the decree establishing the festival of the Eisiteria is to be read out in the assembly each year. Sale of priesthood contracts specified general duties but not fine points of ritual. On the problem, cf. A. Chanotis, "Priests as Ritual Experts in the Greek World," in *Practitioners of the Divine*, 17–34. A decree of 20–19 honoring an Eleusinian daduch speaks of his endeavors to restore lost traditions not just from family memory but also from documentary research (if that is what περὶ τὰς ἀπογραφὰς ζήτησις means): *IEleusis* 300.63–68. Herodotus constantly ascribes special learning to Egyptian priests: similar statements about their Greek counterparts are much rarer (but see Hdt. 2.55.3; Pl. *Meno* 81A–B, on which see Parker, *Polytheism*, 99; Paus. 1.22.3; and note especially the two "letters" by priests of Athena Lindia often cited in the Lindian chronicle, e.g., FGrH 532 B–C 1; Dignas, "Rhodian Priests," 44).

12. See LSS 11 with LSCG 21 (IG 2².47.23–30 with *ibid.* 4962); LSCG 41, 42, 44, 102, 123. Boards of past priests: Dignas, "Rhodian Priests," 43–44 (Rhodes, Cos, and perhaps Cyrene; the Mantinean society of priestesses of Demeter, n. 31 below, could be similar).

13. Cf. for Rome, M. Beard in *Pagan Priests*, 42–43. General and seer: Pl. *Lach.* 199A.

The Skiridai in the inscription are said not merely to have made a proposal but to have "expounded" it. The verb in question, ἐξηγεῖσθαι, is the quasi-technical term that indicates discussing a religious issue on the basis of specialized knowledge; it is used again, for instance, of a proposal about sacrifices made to the Athenian assembly by the priest of Asclepius Euthydemus.¹⁴ Exegesis has two aspects. In Attica and probably elsewhere there were special functionaries known as exegetes whose role was to advise individuals on religious questions, particularly those relating to pollution. In the other polis where exegetes are explicitly attested, Cos, we find them bringing to the assembly a proposal that "sacred and ancestral laws" concerning purification be codified; it is surely plausible, though as it happens unrecorded, that the Attic exegetes too on occasion advised the assembly, whether spontaneously or on request.¹⁵ The other form of exegesis is that which is found here, the one that occurred when priests or priestly groups spoke with authority about the practices or traditions of their cult. Such was apparently the role of the "Eumolpid exegetes" in Athens, to expound the traditions of the great cult at Eleusis. Exegesis of this kind doubtless occurred throughout Greece, even if the random scatter of our evidence seldom reveals it. In contrast to the punitive disciplinary "sacred laws" emanating from assemblies, those that merely advise worshippers on the etiquette of a cult (what to sacrifice; what rules of purity to observe) must have their origin in such exegesis.¹⁶

The decisions to be taken by the assembly, those concerning a revised sacrificial calendar or the rights and duties attached to a priesthood, for instance, might be of some complication, and in these cases an individual or a commission was often appointed to draft proposals. The best-known such religious draftsman was Nicomachus, who prepared a new sacrificial code for Athens and was prosecuted for his pains.¹⁷ Nicomachus was (to speak anachronistically) a civil servant, not a man of god.

At this point the question "Who took decisions about religious matters in Greece in the absence of a church?" has found an answer, a simple one: in a democracy, the citizen assembly (heavily guided, no doubt, by the prior

14. LSS 11.4.

15. See F. Jacoby, *Atthis* (Oxford, 1949), 8–51; J. H. Oliver, *The Athenian Expounders of the Sacred and Ancestral Law* (Baltimore, 1950). Coan exegetes: LSCG 154 A 4; SEG 55. 931.24. Eumolpid exegesis: Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 295–96.

16. See "What Are Sacred Laws?" n. 8 above; cf. Jacoby, *Atthis* (in previous note), 237 n. 2.

17. See Lysias 30; cf., e.g., the committee that drafted the proposals of the firstfruits decree (*IEleusis* 28a [IG 1³.78; ML 73]). For committees drafting job descriptions for priestships in Cos, see *Chiron* 30 (2000): 424.

deliberations of the council, but for the present purpose the distinction is unimportant); under other constitutions, we assume, whatever body governed the state: the principle is the same under all constitutions that the same body took decisions on both sacred and non-sacred issues. The important special case of decisions to accept a new cult into the civic pantheon is discussed in appendix 2;¹⁸ those decisions too were taken in the assembly.

The question "On what basis were such decisions taken?" has also been partly answered. It remains to ask what influence individuals other than priests and priestly groups might have had over the assembly, both by making proposals and in contributing to debate where there was controversy. Regrettably but inescapably, the evidence is almost entirely Athenian. In principle, under a democracy, anyone could contribute, but in practice three groups are chiefly in question. First there are interest groups. It was through pressure from Thracians, Egyptians, and Citians resident in Athens that land was assigned for shrines of Bendis, Isis, and the Citians' Aphrodite; though foreigners could not address the assembly, they could make requests to it and so initiate a process.¹⁹

Second come religious specialists other than priests, above all *manteis*, seers, and *chrēsmologoi*, oracle-singers. These two branches of diviner must be sharply distinguished from priests; in many ways they and not the priests are the true religious specialists of Greece. Unlike most priests, seers lived by their craft (the case with oracle-singers is less clear), and, because they were not tied to particular cults, they could claim a much broader competence. There is no reason to think that priests would have felt authorized to approach or advise the assembly on any cult other than their own; but an inscription shows Athens' most famous seer, Lampon, operating on a wide front: he recommends that proposals made by a commission on summoning firstfruits of corn to Eleusis be accepted; he goes on to propose that a month be intercalated, that regulations be introduced to prevent the establishment of altars in the region known as the Pelargikon, and that he himself be commissioned to draft proposals for collecting firstfruits of olive oil. Lampon's enormous political prestige was doubtless unusual, but the *chrēsmologos* Hierocles was prominent too, and it must have been through political activity that another *chrēsmologos* Diopeithes acquired his sobriquet of "mad." The seer Euthyphro in Plato may complain that he is laughed at when he "speaks in the assembly on religious matters, predicting the future," but his complaint confirms that he spoke; had he concentrated more on "speaking

18. See p. 273.

19. LSCG 46 (IG 2².1283) 6; RO 91 (LSCG 34).

about religious matters" and less on "predicting the future," there might have been less laughter.²⁰

Finally and most importantly there were politicians. According to Plutarch, Themistocles became unpopular for founding a shrine of Artemis Aristoboule, Artemis of best counsel, after the repulse of the Persian invasion: people saw in the epithet a bragging allusion to Themistocles' own bright ideas. Doubtful though the details of that incident are, it can serve as an emblem of the politician's role in shaping religious policy. A decree of 421/0 regulating the festival of Hephaestus was proposed by Hyperbolus, a demagogue much despised by Thucydides. When in the 330s the merchants of Citium in Cyprus sought permission to buy land to establish a shrine of their Aphrodite, it was the leading politician of the day, Lycurgus, who supported their cause in the assembly. Further proposals on religious matters, some extending down to very minute details, bear Lycurgus's name; many more evidently emanate from his circle.²¹ One can even speak of Lycurgus's religious policy, not a thing that can be ascribed to many Greeks,²² and certainly not to any priest acting as such. (Lycurgus in fact belonged to the *genos* that supplied the priest of Poseidon Erechtheus and may himself have held that prestigious office. These associations possibly enhanced his authority in speaking of religious matters; but it was as politician, not as priest, that he steered the assembly.) Other factors aside, the intermeshing of sacred and public finance was so close that no politician could avoid becoming involved in the affairs of the gods, as a fourth-century rhetorical handbook makes clear. Androtion's involvement with the melting down of old dedications to make processional

20. Lampon's proposals: *IEleusis* 28a (IG 1³.78; ML 73). Euthyphro: Pl. *Euthphr.* 3B-C (Socrates calls him a *mantis* in 3E: so rightly Flower, *Seer*, 142). On these figures see Parker, *Polytheism*, 92, 111-18; Flower, *Seer*, 58-65, 122-26 (but I doubt his argument that the designation of Hierocles as a *chrēsmologos* in Ar. *Pax* 1047 is just an Aristophanic joke). Diviners were influential at Sparta too, as the fame of Tisamenus of Elis and his grandson Agias shows (Flower, *Seer*, 94-95), but it is not clear that any will have belonged to crucial decision-making bodies: the role of the *chrēsmologos* Diopeithes in the succession dispute between Leotychidas and Agesilaus (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.3) may have been simply to provide an oracle that was then deployed by Leotychidas; or he may have been adduced by Leotychidas as an expert witness before (probably) the *gerousia* (P. Cartledge, *Agesilaos* [London, 1987], 111); if, as is probable, he is identical with the Athenian Diopeithes (for opinions see Flower, *Seer*, 124 n. 47), he certainly operated as an outsider.

21. Themistocles: Plut. *Them.* 22.2 (cf. Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 155 n. 8). Hyperbolus: IG 1³.82. Merchants: RO 91 (LSCG 34). Further proposals: IG 2².333 (S. Lambert, *ZPE* 154 (2005): 137-44); two separate proposals in *IEleusis* 177.431-32. His circle: cf. Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 242-55. Priesthood of Poseidon Erechtheus: [Plut.] *XOrat.* 843E-F; the statement that Lycurgus himself held it in Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 242, is too confident.

22. The tyrant Clisthenes of Sicyon might be an exception, as Hayden Pelliccia pointed out to me: again, not a religious specialist.

vessels was represented by his political enemy Demosthenes as dire impiety; but it was routine administrative activity, routinely carried out.²³

Politicians influenced religion. Did religion also influence politics? At a level of shared goals and values it did so very profoundly, since, it was agreed, no city could prosper that failed to maintain right relations with the gods. But nobody rose to political prominence through holding religious office. Lampon was influential, but, as far as we know, in the religious sphere only; important citizens who also held priesthoods are easy to find, particularly in the Hellenistic period, but the priesthoods were an appurtenance of high standing, not its foundation. Interventions in public debate in the name of religion are rare, and usually relate to cults of Demeter, which, as mysteries, invested the cult officials with especial authority. The *genē* associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries tried but failed to prevent the recall to Athens of Alcibiades, who had supposedly profaned their cult. During an interval of hostilities in the civil war of 403 the Sacred Herald of the Mysteries, "a man of powerful voice," appealed to his fellow citizens in the name of the sacred rites they had participated in together to abandon the cause of the "most impious" Thirty. Serving as an envoy in 371/0, Kallias, the Daduch of the same cult, reminded the Spartans of the privileges in relation to the Mysteries that they had enjoyed since mythical times.²⁴ On particular occasions, then, a cult official might be able to make appropriate appeal to shared religious traditions. But this was not a basis for lasting authority. Herodotus, it is true, seems to see the power of Gelon, tyrant of Gela and Syracuse, as partly resting on his family's hereditary role as "hierophants of the chthonian gods."²⁵ But the claim is enigmatic, and isolated.

Priests and Priestesses

Priests and priestesses had, we have seen, a certain input into the decision-making process, but far from a dominant role. What of their other functions? In contrast to the Roman situation, priests and priestesses are at least clearly identifiable.²⁶ It is true that an enormous number of cultic roles were

23. Handbook: [Arist.] *Rh. Al.* 1423a20–1424a8. Androton: Dem. 22.69–78; 24.176–86; cf. D. M. Lewis, *BSA* 49 (1954): 39–49.

24. Alcibiades: below, p. 52. Sacred herald: Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.20–22. Callias: *ibid.* 6.3.3–6. Cf. T. Wareh, "Hierophantic performances," in *Horkos*, ed. A. Sommerstein, 161–78 (Bristol, 2007).

25. *Hdt.* 7.153.

26. For excellent syntheses, see V. Pirenne-Delforge, *ThesCRA* 5:1–31 (priests/priestesses), S. Georgoudi, *ibid.* 31–60 (*hieropoioi* and the like). My focus in what follows is on priests in cults of the city or its subdivisions; but note that private associations also had priests.

discharged by non-priests: by children and young people charged with special tasks and sometimes bearing special titles; by choruses, of all ages; by "performers of sacred rites" (*hieropoioi*) appointed by the city; by magistrates; and by others besides. Priests were also often flanked by boards of "super-visors" (*epistatai*; *epimelētai*) and "treasurers of sacred monies" and "temple builders" and, again, magistrates: details vary from city to city, and a list of the parapriestly functionaries both on the cultic and the administrative side from the whole Greek world would be unmanageably long.²⁷ Nonetheless, a function exists clearly identified by the Greek words *ιερεύς* and *ιέρεια*, normally and reasonably translated priest and priestess.

The dominant tradition has long been to downplay the importance of this function in Greek religion, to stress the lack of special training for what was usually a part-time post, to note that priests from different cults never met together to discuss matters of common concern; Isocrates' statement is often quoted that men wrongly regard kingship, like priesthood, as something that any man is fit for.²⁸ Early in the first century BC the people of Herakleia under Latmos in Caria asked an oracle whether the most important priesthood of their city (that of Athena Latmia) should henceforth be sold by auction for life or whether a new occupant should be elected annually. Both alternatives may seem to modern eyes to devalue the office, the one by making the criterion of choice ability to pay, the other by imposing too short a tenure to allow for acquisition of expertise; yet both systems were very widely applied. The oracle pronounced in favor of annual election of the person preeminent in "birth and orderliness of life" (*ὅς γένει ἡδὲ βίου τάξει προφερέστατος ἐστίν*): the criterion therefore was civic standing and respectability, not religious commitment. Priesthoods that were open to children and even, in a few cases, confined to them cannot have carried heavy duties or responsibilities.²⁹

27. For Attica see R. Garland, *BSA* 79 (1984): 75–123; for other cities, S. Georgoudi (previous note).

28. Isoc. 2 (*Nicoles*) 6 τὴν βασιλείαν ὥσπερ ἱερωσύνην παντὸς ἀνδρὸς εἶναι νομίζουσιν, ὃ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πραγμάτων μέγιστόν ἐστι καὶ πλείστης προνοίας δεόμενον. It is the valuation of kingship, not of priesthood, that Isocrates rejects; cf. Isoc. *Antid.* 71.

29. Herakleia: *SEG* 40.956: cf. p. 268 below. Sale of priesthoods was commonplace from c. 400 BC in Greek Asia Minor and islands (e.g., Chios, Cos) off its coast: see *ThesCRA* 5:7 and for what may be the earliest instances (on Chios), R. Parker in *Χιακὸν Συμπόσιον εἰς μνήμην W. G. Forrest*, ed. G. Malouchou and A. Matthaiou, 69–72 (Athens, 2006). Annual tenure was normal for priesthoods created in Athens from the fifth century onward (selection for life from *genē* remained the system for older-established priesthoods). The terms of tenure of priesthoods outside Athens in the archaic and classical periods are scarcely known, while for the Hellenistic period we lack a synthesis; but annual tenure is certainly not rare. Children: some contracts of sale for priesthoods

A reaction against the consensus has begun of late, and one good consequence should be to overcome the vagueness and overgeneralization that tend to prevail on an under-researched topic. It is obviously rash, for instance, to compare the experience of a priestess who served for one year in a minor cult with that of Lysimache, priestess for sixty-four years in the most important state cult of Athens;³⁰ that Lysimache was a part-timer is not at all clear, that she was emotionally deeply committed to the goddess whom she served is surely highly likely. A Mantinean ex-priestess in the 40s BC made arrangements for her support for the cult of Demeter and the "society of priestesses of Demeter" (itself a noteworthy rarity) to be maintained by her daughter and granddaughter after her death. A minimal counterclaim to the traditional downplaying of the role of priests and priestesses is to observe that they were evidently necessary to the working of the religious system.³¹ Just how necessary is shown by a famous list of priesthood sales from Hellenistic Erythrae, which shows that that small place had at least fifty-four. A newly discovered text from Attica issued not by the city but a subgroup, probably the deme Aixone, listed at least ten separate priesthoods. Two further priesthoods of that deme are independently attested; if we accept the attribution of the new text to Aixone, add the two to the ten and extrapolate in proportion for the whole of Attica, we reach the startling figure of at least 545 deme priesthoods.³² Completely irresponsible and fantastic though that calculation is, the point that priesthoods were very abundant remains. Burkert's remark that "Greek religion could almost be defined as a religion without priests" looks very bold in the light of such facts (of which, of course, he was well aware); and when Jacob Burckhardt claimed that "the Greeks occupied a world of laymen... they simply did not know what a priest was," he was using language in a very humpty-dumptyesque way.³³

Some priests were depicted on their tombstones holding the symbols of priestly office (for a man the sacrificial knife, for a woman the temple key);

impose minimum age limits as low as eight or ten: *Chiron* 30 (2000): 424 cf. SEG 55. 926. 7; for priesthoods restricted to maidens or boys, see *ThesCRA* 5:6.

30. Pliny *HN* 34.76 with *CEG* 757.

31. So Price, *Religions*, 68; other revisionist works are Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess*; Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred*; *Practitioners of the Divine*. On priestesses note too S. Georgoudi, "Athanatous therapeuein: Reflexions sur des femmes au service des dieux," in 'Ιδιὰ καὶ δημοσίᾳ, 69–82. Mantinean priestess: *IG* 5.2.266. On colleges of ex-priests, see n. 12 above.

32. *I Erythrae* 201 (cf. p. 98); *SEG* 54.214, with Parker, "Aixone," 197.

33. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 95: the paradox is explained in what follows: "There is no priestly caste as a closed group with fixed tradition, education, initiation and hierarchy." Burckhardt: *Über das Studium* (n. 1 above), 198, 326: "Eine völlige Laienwelt... sie wußten eigentlich nicht was ein Priester sei." In *Kulturgeschichte*, 325, Burckhardt more reasonably distinguished between priests, which the Greeks had, and *Priesterstand/Priestertum*, which they lacked.

they or their kin evidently saw the office as an integral part of what they were. That argument is double-edged, however, because only a small proportion of tombstones bear priestly emblems: more people must have held priesthoods at some time in their lives than chose to advertise it on their graves. Some arguments for marks of separation between priests and laity are similarly double-edged: priests might wear distinctive dress, but normally only on ceremonial occasions; some priests were bound to chastity, but most were not.³⁴

What is fairly clear is that at most times and places in the Greek world priesthood was not, despite Isocrates' dictum, something for anybody; prestige attached to the office, and it was therefore dominated by a social elite. For Cicero it was proof of the wisdom of the Roman ancestors that they "wished the same people to be in charge of the cult of the immortal gods and the supreme interest of the state"; the situation was not so different in Greece. In the two Greek cities that retained kings, priesthoods were attached to the office, and where priesthoods were allocated by election or auction they were mostly held by men of the governing classes and their wives and daughters, those "preeminent in birth and orderliness of life" in the words of the oracle. In Hellenistic Rhodes, a kind of priestly cursus honorum developed whereby leading citizens occupied the main annual priesthoods in a fixed order.³⁵ Anyone who has looked carefully at the theater of Dionysus in Athens knows that the public priests had specially designated front seats. On occasions of civic display in the Hellenistic city, the "priests and priestesses" were frequently required to participate as a group; they existed as a ceremonial body though not as a deliberative one.³⁶ They were part of the establishment.

34. Tombstones: A. Scholl, *Die attischen Bildfeldstelen des 4. Jhs. v. Chr.* (Berlin, 1996), 135–48; A. Kosmopoulou, *BSA* 96 (2001): 292–99; Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess*, chap. 8. Double-edged: I owe this observation to Marietta Horster. Dress: Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess*, chap. 4; A. G. Mantis, *Προβλήματα της εικονογραφίας των ιερειών και των ιερέων στην αρχαία Ελληνική τέχνη* (Athens, 1990), 82–96; *ThesCRA* 5:29–31; for epigraphic evidence, *Chiron* 30 (2000): 425. Chastity: Parker, *Miasma*, 86–91; for other purity requirements, *ibid.*, 175 n. 177.

35. Cicero: *Dom.* 1. Kings as priests: Hdt. 4.161.3; 6.56. Rhodes: Dignas, "Rhodian Priests." Priesthood and the governing class: the issue is too large to document here, but see, e.g., R. van Bremen, *The Limits of Participation* (Amsterdam, 1996), 22, 29–30, 44; Dignas in *Practitioners of the Divine*, 78–80. Prestige: R. van den Hoff, "Images and Prestige of Cult Personnel in Athens," in *Practitioners of the Divine*, 107–41 (much of which has parallels throughout Greece).

36. Cf. S. Dmitriev, *City Government in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (New York, 2005), 25: "The occasions mentioned above required the presence of priests, as almost everything in Greek cities did, but they were not religious events." Front seats: M. Maass, *Die Prohedrie des Dionysostheaters in Athen* (Munich, 1972); outside Athens, *Chiron* 30 (2000): 425 (8). Priests and priestesses: see, e.g., *RO* 85 B 42–3; *LSA* 15.40–41; 32.36–37; 81.11; *LSS* 44.9; *IPriene* 14.17–20; *OGIS* 332.33; *RPh* 63

Did being part of the establishment mean that they had to do as the rest of the establishment wished? According to the standard view, the priest, to speak bluntly, took orders from the assembly: the terms of office were often determined by the assembly (as we see from the advertisements for priesthood sales from the eastern Greek world), and at Athens priests even had to undergo audit, *euthynē*, like ordinary magistrates.³⁷ The most powerful attempt to show priests occupying a more independent position is an important study from 2002 by Beate Dignas. She investigates several cases in Asia Minor where priests and civic authorities seem to be in conflict, a dispute, for instance, that lasted at least twenty years (c. 240 to 220) between the priests in the important cult of Zeus at Labraunda in Caria and the authorities of the neighboring city of Mylasa; what was at issue was the control of sacred revenues, and three Hellenistic monarchs as well as several of their officials were sucked into the affair.³⁸ She argues that we need to conceptualize the situation in terms of a triangle of interests, constituted by city, priests, and king: the interests of city and priests do not blend into one.

The crucial difference between these cases and the situation in archaic and classical Greece is the existence of a king as an external third party to whom appeal could be made. The leverage that the king gave the priests was not available in the classical city. At Athens, when the assembly in 411 discussed the recall of Alcibiades, who had supposedly profaned the Mysteries of Eleusis in 415, members of the two sacred *genē* who controlled the cult protested in the name of religion. The case shows that, as Dignas argues, priestly groups might internalize the values of a cult and come to see themselves as more committed to their god than to their city.³⁹ But protest was all they could do—protest, and be outvoted. Alcibiades did eventually return, though not,

(1937): 337–38 no. 10, lines 12–14; cf. Plut. *Pelop.* 33.5. For joint dedications by the *συντελεῖς* of a given year in Lindos, see Dignas, “Rhodian Priests,” 43.

37. Priesthood sales: above n. 29; but terms of tenure were also determined by the assembly at Athens, IG 1³.35 (M/L 44, LSCG 12 A). Audit: IG 2².354.21–22; 410.22; Aeschin. 3.18. Priesthoods were not formally magistracies (M. Hansen, *GRBS* 21 [1980]: 170), but the gap was not great (Arist. *Pol.* 1299a 15–19; Dmitriev, 2005, in n. 36, 25–26).

38. Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred*; for the Labraunda case, known from *ILabraunda* 1, see 59–66. In fairness to Dignas’s admirable monograph I should stress that her model well fits the region and time frame it is designed to fit.

39. “The sanctuaries were run and their activities shaped by individuals who identified themselves with this task and saw themselves interacting with the secular world of the *polis*”: Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred*, 33; cf. 30 on “administration from within.” Alcibiades: Thuc. 8.53.2 (411); cursing and uncursing: Plut. *Alc.* 22.5, 33.3; [Lys.] 6.51. But it should be noted that the strength of involvement of the two Eleusinian *genē* with their hugely prestigious cult was scarcely typical. SEG 48.1037.17 (“c. 180–166 B.C.”) instructs priests and priestesses to curse offenders against the Delian sanctuaries.

as it happens, on that occasion, and the *genē* were instructed to uncurse the curses that they had earlier pronounced against him (again on the instructions of the assembly). Dignas sums up her position by quoting a brief letter of the Macedonian king Demetrius II concerning Beroia:

Demetrius to Harpalus greetings. The priests of Heracles say that some of the god’s revenues have been diverted to the public funds. Take care now that they are restored to the god. Farewell.

The king intervenes for the god against the city, on appeal by the priests. But, again, without a monarch the city would have been free to appropriate Heracles’ funds for its own uses.⁴⁰

If priests could not stand up effectively for their god against secular interests, what were they for? What function did they exercise that no one else did?⁴¹ It proves strangely difficult to answer that question. Two limiting positions are possible here. One would start from the point that there was no such thing as a priest or priestess *tout court*, a person who served all the gods, nor even a priest or priestess of Apollo or Artemis or Dionysus; one was always priest in a particular cult in a particular sanctuary, with the added epithet (Athena *Polias* or Dionysus *Thylophorus* or whatever) usually required to identify the site in question.⁴² One might then see the priest or priestess as essentially a glorified sacristan or churchwarden, a person who presides over a particular sanctuary and ensures that property is not stolen and sacrifice is made in accord with the specific local norms.⁴³

The opposite approach would start from the statement in Plato that “the class of priests, as tradition says, is skilled in giving gifts from us to the gods through sacrifices in accord with their wishes, and in beseeching from them for us through prayers the acquisition of benefits.”⁴⁴ Since prayer accompanies sacrifice, what Plato’s claim amounts to is that priests are experts in sacrificing; and, since sacrifice was the most important means of communication

40. *Syll.*³ 459, M. B. Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions under the Kings* (Athens, 1996), vol. 2, no. 8: 248 BC. For the pressures to divert funds, see the case study of first-century AD Miletus by Chaniotis in *Practitioners of the Divine*, 23–25; note too the interventions by priests to protect funds that he cites, *ibid.*, 26 n. 35.

41. Thirty attempts at definition are helpfully cited and discussed by A. Henrichs in *Practitioners of the Divine*, 1–14.

42. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 95—and already Burckhardt, *Kulturgeschichte*, 394.

43. Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1322b 18–25.

44. Pl. *Plt.* 290c–d καὶ μὴν καὶ τὸ τῶν ἱερέων αὐτοῦ γένος, ὥς τὸ νόμιμον φησι, παρὰ μὲν ἡμῶν δωρεὰς θεοῖς διὰ θυσιῶν ἐπιστημὴν ἔστι κατὰ νόον ἐκείνοις δωρεῖσθαι, παρὰ δὲ ἐκείνων ἡμῖν εὐχαῖς κτήσιν ἀγαθῶν αἰτήσασθαι; cf. Pl. *Symp.* 202e.

between gods and men, one might extend the claim a little to the proposition that priests were the privileged mediators between the two breeds. In the Hellenistic period, we find priestesses in leading cults of Pergamum who are "pleasing to the gods" praised for contributing to the "safety of the city" by their piety. There develops (explicitly in Cyrene, by implication in some other places) the conception of the "fair year" priest, during whose term of office the city enjoyed "peace and prosperity" or "plenty and fair crops" or the like.⁴⁵

One difficulty with this approach is that, even though the commonest Homeric word for "immolate an animal," ἱερεῖω, is etymologically just "do what a priest does," priests were far from having an exclusive right to sacrifice. It is not just that individuals were free to sacrifice for themselves in their own homes, nor even just that priests did not have a monopoly on sacrificing even within their own sanctuaries: an early Chian sacred law prescribes, for instance, that "if the priest isn't there, let him [the worshipper] call out three times, trying to make himself heard, and perform the rite himself."⁴⁶ The real objection is that, even at public rites conducted for the well-being of the city, sacrifices were just as likely to be conducted by magistrates as by priests. Just after the passage quoted above on the role of priests, Plato adds that "in many places in Greece one finds the chief magistrates required to fulfill the chief role in such sacrifices"; he goes on to mention the ritual role of the annual "king archon" at Athens. Aristotle explicitly distinguishes between two types of public sacrifice: those "assigned by convention to priests" and those performed by officials who "derive their authority from the common hearth." At Athens the nine main magistracies were described as "crown-wearing": the crown was a symbol of sacredness, which assimilated magistrates to priests; in many Hellenistic cities the eponymous magistrate came to be known as just that, Stephanephoros, crown-wearer, and the crown that he wore was apparently sacred to a specific god.

Both priests and magistrates regularly sacrificed and prayed on behalf of the city, often together; and numerous texts show them closely associated on ceremonial occasions. In a calendar from Mykonos we not only find the choice of the most beautiful sows entrusted to the boule, but also an

45. Pergamum: OGIS 299.1–12 (149 BC, according to C. P. Jones, *Chiron* 4 [1974]: 188–89); SEG 4.687 (c. 60s BC, according to Jones [in this note], 200). "Fair year priest": L. Robert, *Hellenica*, vol. 1 (Limoges, 1940), 7–17; vol. 2 (Paris, 1946), 142–45; vols. 11–12 (Paris, 1960), 542–55, on what is now SEG 26.1835.

46. LSS 129.7–11; cf. *IOropos* 277 (LSCG 69; RO 27) 25–27. Persians, by contrast, supposedly could not sacrifice without a *magos*: Hdt. 1.132.3; so too Indians needed a "sophist," i.e., Brahman (Arrian, *Indica* 11.3).

instruction that "the magistrates and priests shall ensure that the rites are conducted well."⁴⁷ "Performers of rites" too (*hieropoioi*), boards of citizens often recruited from the boule, not only provided organizational assistance but could also be said to perform public sacrifices. Honored guests too might be given the privilege of sacrificing an animal.⁴⁸ Even the conception of the "fair year" priest has its origin in the practice of noting that, in the year of particular magistrates, a city flourished: we read, for instance, that "in the archonship of Aristokritos" (284 BC) there was "health and prosperity" on Delos, almost two and a half centuries before the year of a priest of Athena Lindia on Rhodes was credited with "peace and prosperity."⁴⁹

From a theoretical point of view this near equivalence of priest and magistrate is of fundamental importance. Future research needs to address the question of whether and how their roles can be differentiated. One can argue that magistrates had organizational responsibility for sacred events within which priests provided more specialized services of expert prayer and sacrifice.⁵⁰ On similar lines, it has been suggested that we could separate the

47. Pl. *Plt.* 290E; Arist. *Pol.* 1322b 26–8 (cf. p. 62 below on the "sweeper" role of Spensithios, and many allusions to sacrifices performed by demarchs, e.g., IG 2².1183.33; SEG 50.168 A 2.1–2, 23). Crown-wearing at Athens: Parker, *Polytheism*, 98. Stephanephoroi: B. Dignas, *Kernos* 20 (2007): 173–87. The Stephanephorate blurs the distinction of magistrate and priest; so too does the role of the priest of Zeus Akraios as chief magistrate of Demetrias (F. Stählin, *AM* 54 [1929]: 204–5; E. Meyer in F. Stählin et al., *Pagasai und Demetrias* [Berlin, 1934], 184). Magistrate and priest at Athens: Parker, *Polytheism*, 95–99 [+]. A few examples from outside Athens: magistrates and priests co-involved in processions: LSA 32.31–40; 81.9–13; LSS 44.8–11; *IPriene* 14.21; *Isr. Cos* 82.20–23; Paus. 2.35.5; in prayers LSA 15.39–48; and cf. n. 50. Mykonos: LSCG 96.13, 19–20.

48. *Hieropoioi*: Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 54.6–7 (mentioning sacrifices: cf. *IEleusis* 13 [IG 1³.5; LSCG 4]), with P. J. Rhodes's commentary ad loc.; S. Georgoudi, in *ThesCRA* 5:32–40. Guests: L. Robert, *Hellenica*, vols. 11–12 (Paris, 1960), 126–30.

49. IG 11.2.105; *Lindos* 347 (Syll.³ 765) a 4. On such formulas, see Robert, *Hellenica*, 2:142 [+]; *Lindos*, p. 91.

50. Note the vocabulary of supervision (ἐπιμελεῖσθαι) and organization (διοικεῖν) used of magistrates in Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 57.1. This distinction is one strand in a rare article addressing the problem, F. Gschnitzer, "Bemerkungen zum Zusammenwirken von Magistraten und Priestern in der griechischen Welt," *Ktema* 14 (1989): 31–38. Among his observations are (1) that public curses are often solely the responsibility of magistrates (Plut. *Sol.* 24.1; Schwyzler 688 C 6–9; ML 30 + SEG 31.985; Syll.³ 578.60–64; LSA 16.17–27), sometimes of magistrates in association with priests (IC 3.4.7; SEG 33.679.7–13), once of priests apparently under instruction/supervision from magistrates (IG 11.4.1296A and B); one ad hominem curse is added to the prayers uttered by public priests (Livy 31.44.6; on the cursing of profaners of the Eleusinian Mysteries, a special case, see n. 39); (2) that in Syll.³ 180 (IG 2².114) and 181 (IG 2².112) public vows are pronounced by heralds, not priests; (3) that in *Illion* 32 (OGIS 219) priests and magistrates are involved throughout, but emphasis falls on priests in relation to prayers (20–27) and on magistrates in organizing a sacrifice (27–30) [but the latter hierarchy is reversed in OGIS 309.4–7!]; (4) that sacrifices to ensure the success of a sympoly are conducted in *Milet.* 1.3.146.50–55, 73–78 by priests and the Stephanephoros, whereas in *Milet.* 1.3.150 (Syll.³ 633) 17–24 an offering by *prytaneis* is added, with the priest in a subordinate role [cf., e.g., SEG 41.1003, 2.33–36]. His conclusion (translated) is "The sphere reserved for the

roles by varying the emphasis in the two cases: priests *pray and sacrifice* for the city; magistrates pray and sacrifice *for the city*: they come from different directions but converge at one point.⁵¹ Part of our difficulty lies in the distinction drawn by Hubert and Mauss between "le sacrifiant," the person who sponsors and pays for the sacrifice, and "le sacrificateur," the specialist who performs the ritual actions. Since Greek fails to make any such distinction, both magistrate and priest might "sacrifice" on the same occasion, the magistrate as "sacrifiant" (representing the city, which pays for the victim), the priest as "sacrificateur." It is very plausible that, could we observe the rites more closely, such a complementarity of roles would often be revealed; and in such cases the priest retains a distinctive sacral function.⁵² But the passage from Aristotle cited above shows that certain rites were wholly in the charge of magistrates. And there is never any effort in Greek allusions to these topics to reserve to priests the dignity of representing the city before the gods. Greeks were always happy to speak of both classes praying and sacrificing for the city without making the distinctions teased out above.

To return to the question of the specific function of the priest or priestess, they certainly had special rights and responsibilities in relation to particular sanctuaries, the cult images that they contained, and the cult acts there conducted.⁵³ They also probably had an exclusive role in certain sacrifices made within that cult: it will not have been arbitrary whether a particular sacrifice was performed by a priest or a magistrate; the priest will have been a privileged intermediary between gods and men on particular occasions and in a

specific cult personnel is evidently small, and its boundaries permeable, at least for the authority of the state, which in the last analysis covers religious activity as a whole (*die staatliche Autorität, die am Ende doch das ganze Sakralwesen mit umspannt*). There can be no talk of autonomy of the religious sphere among the Greeks."

51. Anonymous Oxford University Press reader cited in Parker, *Polytheism*, 98 n. 32.

52. In *Iscr. Cos* 145.12–20 the *monarchos* and the *hieropoioi* are instructed to make certain sacrifices to Hermes Enagonios and the priest to "process with them." But earlier it has been said (10–11) that the priest is to "place the sacred portions on the altar" for all those sacrificing in the shrine. The case is doubtless similar, though less clear, in *ibid.* 180.24–27; 215.24–44; the new texts *SEG* 55. 926.8–9, 928 A 13–14, B 14, 931. 17–18 suggest that such placing of the sacred portions on the altar by the official priest was the Coan norm. For a strong assertion of the primacy of the priest in ritual, see A. H. Rasmussen in *Religion and Society*, ed. A. H. Rasmussen and S. W. Rasmussen, 71–80 (Rome, 2008). Sacrifiant/sacrificateur: Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, chap. 1.

53. Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred*, 33: "We know that their job was to perform or assist in public or private sacrifice, to maintain order and respect for the sacred laws, to organize the religious festivals, to look after the cult statue and the relevant cult-buildings and also to check the revenues and expenditures of the sanctuary." Legends concerning transfer of cult statues tend to have them carried by the priestess (*ThesCRA* 5:16). Tendence of the statue is stressed in the epitaph for the first priestess of Athena Nike at Athens, *IG* 1³.1330 = *CEG* 93, sacrifice in one for a priest from Cnidus, *SEG* 44.904 (*Steinepigramme* 1, 01/01/10; *ThesCRA* 5:19 no. 71).

particular context. As a group, as we have seen, they symbolized the collective piety of the city on ceremonial occasions. In a crisis too, where a desperate supplication had to be made to the gods, or in the name of the gods, or to a monarch, they would often be deployed.⁵⁴

They were rather closer to the gods than ordinary people. The requirements of purity imposed on them were somewhat more stringent than on others; they had to be "healthy and intact in body," like the gods themselves; there were stories of priests and priestesses (but down to what level?) being spared enslavement or payment of ransom by victorious enemies. Their dreams had especial weight: speaking in the Athenian assembly, Demosthenes cited a Sicilian priestess's dream about the tyrant Dionysius, and significant dreams of the priest or ex-priest of Athena Lindia are recorded in a notable document of Rhodian local history, the Lindian chronicle.⁵⁵ The crowns they wore perhaps imitated those of the gods they served and (occasionally) embodied. On the other hand, the most important channel of communication between gods and men was through divination, and ordinary priests had little to do with that; it was the sphere of seers and, at oracular shrines, of "prophets" and "prophetesses." (How to classify these figures is one of the ambiguities at the margin of the class of priests; but, even if prophets are priests, it does not follow that priests are, in general, prophets.) We cannot therefore in any general way treat priests as the mediators between gods and men. As we have seen, they did not even have a monopoly on mediating through sacrifice. In private, ordinary heads of household did it; on a public level, priests shared the role with magistrates.⁵⁶

"ordinary priest"

Polis Religion

That sharing is an emblem of the Greek intermingling of church and state, what it has become fashionable to call "polis religion." The expression "polis

54. Pirenne-Delforge in *ThesCRA* 5:17, citing *Plut. Pelop.* 12.6, *Polyb.* 16.33.5 (cf. *ibid.* 16.31.7, where they administer solemn oaths); cf. the priest of Zeus in *Soph. OT* 18.

55. Purity: above, n. 34. Intact: J. Wilgaux, in *Norme religieuse*, 231–41. Priests spared: *Arrian Anab.* 1.9.9, cf. *Plut. Alex.* 11.12; *Plut. Alc.* 29.5. Dreams: *Aeschin.* 2.10; *FGH* 532 D 2 and 3; note too the dreams sent by Demeter to her priestesses at Corinth relating to Timoleon, *Diod. Sic.* 16.66.4; *Plut. Timol.* 8. 1, and the interpretation of omens before Leuctra by Theban priestesses, *Xen. Hell.* 6.4.7. But I have found only one priestly dream in *Pausanias*, 4.26.3. Crowns: B. Dignas, *Kernos* 20 (2007): 184, with bibl.

56. A. Henrichs in *Practitioners of the Divine*, 8, plausibly suggests that "in the case of animal sacrifice, it was the ritual performance itself rather than the performer that mediated between gods and men."

religion" had no doubt been casually used previously, but it became a term of art, the summation of an approach and a theory, only with the publication of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood's article "What Is Polis Religion?" in 1990. That article, probably the most influential single item in the study of Greek religion since the early studies of Burkert and Vernant in the 1960s, has been widely seen as proposing a new paradigm, one that is much debated. For some, it gives the polis too much control over religion; for others, religion too much control over the polis.⁵⁷ But it does not introduce a new paradigm in the sense of replacing existing ones, to which it is, in fact, complementary. And it is certainly not a denial of the role of individuals and of groups, of private sacrifices and dedications, in Greek religion. Nor is it a denial that individuals went outside the confines of their city for religious purposes, to consult an oracle for instance, and that certain religious events were organised by supra-polis bodies such as amphictionies.

What the article does do is focus attention on the questions of decision making and authority discussed above; and it argues much more emphatically and incisively than had been done before that "it was the ordered community, the polis, which assumed the role played in Christianity by the Church."⁵⁸ It is not primarily a thesis about religion as a matter of imagination, conceptualization, belief; it is about organization, policing, control. "The polis provided the fundamental framework in which Greek religion operated," it claims; "the polis anchored, legitimated and mediated all religious activity." The statement "polis religion embraces, contains and mediates all religious discourse" may seem to go further, because it introduces discourse, the world of ideas.⁵⁹ But the claim is not that the polis generates all religious ideas. Sourvinou-Inwood stresses that many myths and practices were Panhellenic and does not deny that religious ideas floated freely from one city to another; the claim is merely that, in the long term, it was the city that determined whether a particular religious conception, at least insofar as it affected actual

57. Sourvinou-Inwood, "Polis Religion." For the latter criticism, see M. H. Hansen and T. H. Nielsen, *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Greek Poleis* (Oxford, 2004), 130–34; for variants of the former, G. Woolf, "Polis-Religion and Its Alternatives in the Roman Provinces," in *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion*, ed. H. Cancik and J. Rüpke, 71–84 (Tübingen, 1997), repr. in *Roman Religion*, ed. C. Ando (Edinburgh, 2003), chap. 2 (with the comments of J. Scheid, *Quand faire, c'est croire* [Paris, 2005], 125–28); A. Bendlin, "Looking beyond the Civic Compromise: Religious Pluralism in Late Republican Rome," in *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy*, ed. E. Bispham and C. Smith, 115–35 (Edinburgh, 2000). A "symposium in memory of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood" at the University of Reading (July 4–6, 2008) took as its theme "Perceptions of Polis-Religion: Inside-Outside"; cf. J. Kindt, "Polis Religion: A Critical Appreciation," *Kernos* 22 (2009): 9–34.

58. Sourvinou-Inwood, "Polis Religion," 19–20 (though she goes on at once to point out the danger inherent in all such comparisons).

59. These three citations: Sourvinou-Inwood, "Polis Religion," 13, 15, 20.

practice, was to be granted right of residence within its walls. In most parts of the Greek world,⁶⁰ individuals lived their lives within city-states, even if they went outside them occasionally to Panhellenic sanctuaries. For organization and control, the crucial body was the city.

Of the various critiques that have been offered, the most interesting perhaps concerns the scope of the control exercised by the polis. Rites were conducted at many different levels: by the city itself, by the formally recognized subunits of the city such as demes, tribes, and phratries, by long-established hereditary cult groups such as *genē*, and also in various cult societies of differing levels of stability that the individual joined by choice: worshippers of the Mother, of Sabazius, of Adonis, of Dionysus, of the Corybantes, initiates of Orpheus, and so on. It can be argued that at this bottom level in particular, the level of elective cults, there was a freedom and a scope for creativity that the polis-religion model seems to disallow. But even at the intermediate level there can have been very little real regulation except by group convention: if a particular set of worshippers chose to adjust sacrificial rules in the cult, to change a particular offering, say, from a holocaust to one yielding edible meat, it is hard to see how the polis could have stopped them.⁶¹ As for what could happen below the level of the group, a famous passage of Plato's *Laws* on what he strikingly calls "illegal god business (*θεοπολεῖν παρὰ νόμον*)" must be quoted (the general sense is clear though all translators struggle with details of Plato's impressionistic late style):

No one shall possess a shrine in his own house: when anyone is inclined to sacrifice, he shall go to the public shrines to sacrifice, and he shall hand over his offerings to the priests and priestesses who care about the relevant observances; and he shall join in the prayers along with anyone else he wishes to have join in with him. This shall be done for the following reasons. It is not easy to establish shrines and gods, and to do it properly needs much thought; yet it is typical of all women, in particular, and of the sick everywhere and those in danger and in any kind of difficulty, and on the other hand when people come into

60. Where political organization was not based on the city, religious organization was necessarily also different. Sourvinou-Inwood does not make this point, but as I know from conversation certainly acknowledged it. She can perhaps be charged with reducing the role of the poleis Delphi and Elis at the great Panhellenic sanctuaries that they controlled to ordinary polis business, when these were in fact special relationships: S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. 3, *Books 5.25–8.109* (Oxford, 2008), 125.

61. Self-regulation was discussed by F. S. Naiden in an interesting paper at the Reading conference (n. 57 above), "How Athens Regulated Sacrifice by Individuals and Associations."

any kind of wealth, to consecrate whatever they have to hand and vow sacrifices and promise foundations to gods and *daimones* and the children of gods—they do this because of fears in visions when awake and in dreams, and similarly, remembering many apparitions and treating altars and shrines as remedies for each of them, they fill every house and every village, siting them in open spaces too and wherever anyone in such a state of mind hits upon [or, wherever any has had such an experience].⁶²

Plato's view is evidently that the polis should indeed "anchor, legitimate, and mediate all religious activity," but in the real city of Athens regrettably failed to do so.

It is important here to consider mechanisms. Greek cities no more had a public religious prosecutor than they had a public prosecutor of any kind. The only way in which most kinds of religious misbehavior could be controlled was through the willingness of a volunteer prosecutor to lodge an accusation of impiety. The counter that can then be made from the polis-religion side is to point to occasions when prosecutions were in fact brought against organizers of elective cults. Three cases are known from the fourth century where women (always women) who led revel bands were prosecuted on charges (unfortunately not known in detail) relating in some way to those bands; two of the prosecutions ended in execution.⁶³ A rare detail attested from outside Athens is that at Thebes, probably in the fourth century, legislation was passed to prohibit "nocturnal rites" (probably of women). One can also point out that most scholars believe that impiety, *asebeia*, like pornography according to Justice Stewart, was an "I know it when I see it" kind of thing.⁶⁴ (But it was not unique in this among offenses known to Greek law; underspecification seems to have been the norm.) Since it was undefined, it was unlimited: one could never know what a prosecutor might not try to bring under the heading. The polis, it can be argued, by allowing prosecutions for an undefined crime of impiety, claimed a right of control over all

62. Pl. *Leg.* 909d–910. Did Plato really wish to abolish such familiar domestic cults as that of Zeus Ktesios? My guess is that they were too accepted and unexceptionable for him to think of them here; if so, there is some justification for treating them as de facto though not de jure aspects of "polis religion" in the sense of "practices dictated by communal norms," not by individual preference. But for critics of Sourvinou-Inwood in this area, see n. 57.

63. See Dickie, *Magicians*, 50–54, on the prosecutions of Phryne, Theoris, and Nino.

64. See references in Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 215 n. 63. Thebes: Cic. *Leg.* 2.37 (in a context concerning women's rites and Bacchic rites) *omnia nocturna in media Graecia Diagondas* (mss: *Daitondas* Knoepfler) *lege perpetua sustulit*: see two studies by D. Knoepfler cited in SEG 39.435, 50.481.

religious activities that occurred on its territory. It did not and in fact could not exercise this right of control in all cases, and as a result there was de facto a good measure of freedom; but that freedom was never acknowledged as a principle, and could be withdrawn.

Both sides in the debate have some right on their side. Those who object that the polis-religion model is making the Greek city into a 1984 or Brave New World society are right that it was not like that at all. In Rome, not a notably intolerant place in religious terms, we know of bans/restrictions/expulsions relating to rites of Bacchus, Isis, and Cybele, and others striking Jews and astrologers; in Athens, by contrast, it was only in a comedy of Aristophanes that "Sabazius and other foreign gods" were expelled from the city.⁶⁵ Even in Athens, however, there was no ideal of "religious freedom," and there were limits to religious laissez-faire. The modern perspective in which religion is a sphere distinct from the state and not to be intruded on by it is wholly alien to the Greeks.⁶⁶ They had no way to conceive of religious practice except as intertwined with the broader structure of life in the city.

Was It Ever Thus?

Most of the evidence in this chapter has been taken from classical Athens, with some supplementation from Hellenistic cities. About earlier times and other places one is largely reduced to the negative observation that nothing suggests a radically different principle of organization. At most one might wonder whether there might once have been a closer connection between control over cults and political power: the Attic *genē*, religious bodies only in the classical period, may once have had a place in the political structure; in the Molpoi of Miletus we can observe an instance (but a unique one) of a religious association that retained some influence over access to the citizenship into the Hellenistic period.⁶⁷ Were this uncertain speculation correct,

65. Cic. *Leg.* 2.37, perhaps referring to 'Ἐπει (cf. K/A p. 296). Rome: Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 91–96, 228–36; *ThesCRA* 3:275–77.

66. Sourvinou-Inwood, "Polis Religion," 18. Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred*, 1, notes the complex relation between church and state that exists in many modern countries, but adds as a crucial difference "the Greeks never even claimed a separation of church and state." See now the well-judged conclusion to P. J. Rhodes, "State and Religion in Athenian Inscriptions," *Greece and Rome* 56 (2009): 1–13. "Der Form nach behielt sich wohl der Staat die Verfügung über fremde Kulte vor, allein die Praxis war eine ungleiche": Burckhardt, *Kulturgeschichte*, 324.

67. *Genē*: Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 65. Molpoi: V. B. Gorman, *Miletos, the Ornament of Ionia* (Ann Arbor, 2001), 94–97 (who, however, underestimates the importance of their involvement with citizenship).

the conclusion should doubtless be that one elite controlled both religious life and the affairs of the city (as in the Hellenistic period) rather than that there was an independent route to power through religious office. In Athens, the annual magistrate known as "king" had especial responsibility for sacred matters: he adjudicated disputes relating to priesthoods, "administered" most of the ancestral sacrifices, and selected junior officiants in several cults; trials for impiety and deliberate murder were heard in his court. Magistrates of the same name existed in other cities, very likely with similar functions. Whether or not these annual kings were descendants of actual kings, they were understood to be so; secular and sacral were believed to have been inseparable in the archaic as in the classical city. In classical Athens again, the Areopagus council exercised an ill-defined power of supervision over the religious life of the city, probably a vestige of its greater general competence in earlier times.⁶⁸ The Areopagus was made up of ex-magistrates, not of priests.

I finish with some historical snapshots. In the one mention of the mechanism of the appointment of a priest in Homer, it is said that "the Trojans" made Theano their priestess. Thus the idea of the priest as a servant and appointee of the people is already visible, long before the emergence of democracy. The second snapshot is from an archaic oligarchy, an otherwise unknown city or subdivision of a city in Crete c. 550 BC. This body, the Dataleis, appointed one Spensithios as its public scribe, entrusting him with recording all "public, divine, and mortal affairs." As in the Athenian assembly, divine and mortal affairs were distinguished conceptually, but not separately handled. The text also lays down that in public cults that lack a priest of their own Spensithios is to perform the sacrifices. So the blurring of roles between civic official and priest is already attested in sixth-century Crete: appointed as a specialist in writing, Spensithios serves as a sweeper up of stray priestly functions too.⁶⁹

The final snapshot is of the first known Greek chief priest, *archiereus*, one Nikanor, appointed chief priest of all shrines on this side of the Taurus Mountains by Antiochus III in 209 BC.⁷⁰ We see here on the one hand the real change brought by Hellenistic monarchy. The new kings had a power over religious affairs unthinkable for individuals in previous

68. *Basileus* in Athens: Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 57.1–2, with P. J. Rhodes's commentary ad loc.; P. Carlier, *La royauté en Grèce avant Alexandre* (Strasbourg, 1984), 329–50. *Basileis* outside Athens: *ibid.*, 487–91. Areopagus: Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 130.

69. Theano: Hom. *Il.* 6.300. Spensithios: A. M. Davies and L. H. Jeffery, *Kadmos* 9 (1970): 118–54 (= *Nomima* 1:22).

70. SEG 37.1010 (for a new copy see *ibid.* 54.1353) with SEG 46.1519 (Ma, *Antiochos III*, dossier 4 and 49); cf. H. Müller, "Der hellenistische Archiereus," *Chiron* 30 (2000): 519–42.

centuries: Alexander decreed that the dead Hephaestion was to be a hero throughout his empire; Ptolemy Soter created a new Greco-Egyptian god, Sarapis; Attalus III elevated Zeus Sabazios to the highest honors in Pergamum because of his mother's devotion to that cult.⁷¹ We have already seen how sanctuaries could appeal to kings against cities. Outside the Greek cities, new, more centralized organizational structures were set in place, of which the creation of the chief priesthood was one; an inscription first published in 2007 showed that it was the Seleucid aim of bringing religious activity under bureaucratic control that underlies the story of Heliodorus's impious attempt on the temple treasures of Jerusalem, the miraculous repulse of which is related in the second book of Maccabees and dramatized by Raphael in *La cacciata di Eliodoro dal Tempio* in the Vatican.⁷² The chief priesthood is therefore symptom of a transformed world.

But though a chief priest sounds like a symbol of distinctively religious authority, he was nothing of the kind. We happen to know that both Nikanor and another chief priest appointed by Antiochus⁷³ were men grown grey in royal service now taking up the priesthood as a kind of pensioned retirement post, but that is not the essential point. What is more important is that these were still administrative positions within the Seleucid bureaucracy, posts to which the king appointed and from which he could no doubt have dismissed if need arose. There was little danger of a meddlesome priest emerging in these conditions, none of his standing out effectively against the king. The chief priest was a servant of the king just as the priests of the classical period were servants of the people.

71. Arr. *Anab.* 7.14.7, with Hyperides, *Epitaphios* col. 8.21; OCD³ s.v. Sarapis; RC 67.

72. H. M. Cotton and M. Wörle, "Seleukos IV to Heliodoros: A New Dossier of Royal Correspondence from Israel," *ZPE* 159 (2007): 191–203.

73. RC 44.