



Summary :

The Asiarch was one of the most important officials in the Koinon of Asia. Many different opinions have been expressed regarding his own and his spouse's responsibilities, as well as his relation to the archiereus.

Date

Roman period

Geographical Location

Province of Asia

1. Introduction

Asiarchs are testified among the leading officials in the [Koinon of Asia](#). Functionaries with a similar title are also found in other koina, e.g. macedoniarch, thracarch, vithyniarch, lyciarch. The title appears to emanate from civic officials who preexisted the Imperial period, such as lyciarch. Besides, asiarchs existed in Asia before the time of [Augustus](#), as it is evident by an extract from [Strabo](#) which mentions that there were asiarchs in [Tralleis](#)¹ already from the period of [Pompeius](#), whom he calls 'being the highest in the province'. In the *Acts of Apostles*² it is mentioned that [Paul](#) had friends among the asiarchs of Ephesus, which further certifies the existence of the title in the 1st century AD.

Archiereis of the Koinon of Asia are recorded epigraphically since the 1st century AD, however asiarchs are mentioned in inscriptions only from the 2nd century AD onwards, while on coins from the middle of the 2nd century AD.³ Nevertheless, the evidence referring to asiarchs is considerably more - almost double - than that referring to archiereis. Epigraphical evidence from the early 1st cent. AD has only been supported by R.A. Kearsley, however her arguments, although with correct observations on the dissemination of the Roman names in Asia Minor, do not completely justify the suggested dating for the text, as they are not based on firm internal epigraphical criteria.⁴

Thus a question emerges from the evidence on the titles of archiereus and asiarch: are these two different titles of the same rank or not? If they are not, which were the spheres of responsibilities of each dignitary? A final answer has not been given, neither by the hundreds of inscriptions nor by the coins or the information provided by literary texts. Written sources are interpreted in various ways by scholars and each new discovery or study provokes a new circle of juxtapositions and debates. Moreover, the lack of ample ancient sources and modern studies on the organisation of other Roman Koina do not enlight us through parallel developments. A short background of the research on the subject of asiarch follows and the leading tendencies in modern studies are presented.

2. History of research - modern approaches

Already since the 19th century scholars have been studying this subject. J. Marquardt supported the identification of the two offices, while W.H. Waddington attributed particular responsibilities to the asiarch in the games of the koinon to honour the emperor. More specifically, he suggested that the asiarch is either at the head of the organisation or he is identified with the archiereus, whose in the final year of service the games took place. C.G. Brandis in his entry for asiarch in *Real-Enzyklopaedie* considers him to be a representative, a 'deputy' of the convention, while D. Magie believes that the title was honorary and was given as a reward for voluntarily assuming various responsibilities connected to the



organisation of the games, minting and construction of buildings.⁵

J. Deininger,⁶ after examining all the older theories, concludes that any effort to dissociate the two offices does not resolve the problem but leads to contradiction with some of the sources. Thus, he supports their identification through a series of arguments. He considers an extract of legal Modestinus⁷ dated to the first half of the 3rd century AD to be fundamental. In this passage *asiarchia*, *vithyniarchia* and *cappadocarchia* are equal to 'ethnos (nation's) hier<osyne> (priesthood)', which provides exemption from other liturgies for the period of the dignitary's service, while the word 'ethnos (nation)' is considered equivalent to 'koinon'. However, the passage gave rise to controversy among scholars, while it was claimed that instead of the word 'Hier<osyne >', which is found mainly in Christian writers and bears a particular load, it is preferable to complete it as 'Hier<archia >'. This view is supported by Deininger by juxtaposing the phrase from the 26th speech of Aelius Aristides 'hierosyne of koinon of Asia'.⁸ The authenticity of the passage of Modestinus was disputed only by Brandis,⁹ claiming that it would have been redundant to explain the meaning of the title *asiarch* in a period when everybody knew its content. Deininger¹⁰ objects that such words could not have been of general use and descriptive of all their nuances, while inscriptions vindicate Modestinus, since they clearly show that the office was hieratic. Thus, *asiarchia* was a development of the annual authority of the Koinon of Asia, prior to the Imperial period. With the establishment of the provincial cult of Augustus and Rome in 29 BC the *asiarch* assumed the role of the *archiereus* (highpriest) of the [Imperial cult](#). The title of *archiereus* prevailed until the 2nd century, while after that the title of *asiarch* became popular again.¹¹

According to Deininger, the *asiarch* remained, as it was in the years of the Republic, limited in duration, probably annual, but the same person could repeatedly be nominated. The correlation of the *asiarch* exclusively with the organisation of the public games (see the aforementioned opinion of Magie) is not valid according to Deininger, since that could be well included in the responsibilities of the *archiereus* of the Koinon. In addition, the title in the inscriptions is associated occasionally with the temples of the provincial imperial cult, e.g. 'asiarch of the temples at Ephesus'. Moreover, the fact that both *archiereis* and *asiarchs* are mentioned as spouses of *arhierieiai* of Asia provides according to Deininger further proof for their identification.

The research has not ceased since then to deal with the problem of the *asiarch*, however without unanimity among the scholars about the identification or not with the *archiereus* of the koinon of Asia. M. Rossner, M. Campanile and P. Herz actually built their views on the theory of Deininger, enriching it respectively with new arguments, exhaustive lists of dignitaries and equivalences with other regions of the empire.¹² Among the scholars who disputed the identification of the two ranks, two are worth mentioning R. Kearsley¹³ and P. Friesen.¹⁴

With a number of articles Kearsley tries to prove that the title of *asiarch* existed already since the beginning of the 1st century AD, that *arhierieiai* were completely independent from their spouses and dignitaries in the koinon, that *asiarchia* and *prelacy* could not have coincided, since it would have been incompatible for a wife to be *archiereia* and the husband *asiarch* in the same year and that the *asiarchs* were associated with the local aristocracy of various cities and had local administrative tasks.

Herz replies to the arguments developed by Kearsley in her articles, thus developing a dialogue between them.¹⁵ The most important arguments that Herz opposes concern a few individual statements by Kearsley, but they all aim to prove that the *asiarch* and the *archiereus* are identified. More precisely, he thinks that the two titles simply describe the



two domains of responsibilities of the same dignitary. The asiarch is the head of the koinon, that is to say the political and administrative ruler, while the archiereus represents the supremacy of the same person in ritual level. The fact that in certain coins the title of the asiarch and not of archiereus is recorded does not imply that the asiarch had administrative tasks exclusively but simply denotes a preference for the title, which probably ascribed higher prestige, since in a province the cities competed one another and the local elite aimed at higher honours. Moreover, the title of archiereus could be confused with the urban highpriest of the imperial cult, while the abbreviation arch(iereus) on coins could be taken for the abbreviation arch(on). The title 'asiarchissa' (female for asiarch) does not exist, since a woman could not have political or administrative duties.¹⁶

Herz expressed a different theory than Kearsley regarding to the activities of the archiereia, taking into consideration the position of women. Herz accepts that the archiereia was responsible for the worship of deified women and living empresses, but this was the case only since the apotheosis of Livia (42 AD) onwards. However, it was not possible to act entirely independently or instead of a male archiereus,¹⁷ as this would have political and constitutional consequences: it would mean that she would chair the assemblies of the koinon and that she would have the authority to speak on behalf of the koinon with the **proconsul** or even the emperor. Moreover, it would imply that she would be responsible for the organization of the games of the koinon, since she was not allowed to visit theatres and stadiums, and when her present is recorded, she always escorted her spouse. In addition, even though women are testified in certain political offices, they only theoretically rule. Thus, according to Herz, the position women are placed in that period by Kearsley contradicts everything we know about their rights, since even the right to manage their own fortune was only acquired with **jus trium liberorum**.

Not only Kearsley, but also Friesen supports the division of the two titles. His originality is that he introduces the latest technology in the study of the subject, having created a continuously enriched database, which is accessible on the internet. The data consist of more than 500 inscriptions and coins, the 1/3 of which comes from the rich material of Ephesus. By analysing these sources Friesen concludes that the theory of the identification of the asiarch and the archiereus should be rejected. He believes that there is no theory to justify the opposite in a satisfactory way and to answer the question of why there were two different titles for the same office. To Deininger's attempt to overcome the difficulties created by the passage of Strabo¹⁸ which mentions the existence of the asiarch already before Augustus, who were responsible for the imperial cult having the title of archiereus, and received the title of the asiarch from the 2nd century, Friesen juxtaposes five main arguments:

A) Apart from the fact that Deininger and his followers provide no explanation for the supposed absorption of the title of asiarch by that of archiereus, there is also a problem of numbers which contradicts their view: if the asiarchs, who are identified with the archiereis, were the annual heads of the koinon of Asia, then between 76 and 275 AD 200 dignitaries should be recorded. Nevertheless, 158 asiarchs are testified for the same period – a high percentage (79%), taken into consideration the fragmentary evidence- and 57 archiereis. Conclusively, we have a total of 215 different persons and their corresponding periods of service and not 200.

B) The sources report 129 testimonies for archiereis in total and 269 for asiarchs. In a total of 129 only 4 concern archiereis who are mentioned in coins.¹⁹ On the contrary the names of the asiarchs are written 84 times on coins and one asiarch should also be added, recorded on a lead weight from **Smyrna**.²⁰ According to Friesen that leads to the conclusion that the duties of the asiarch were mostly related to administrative affairs.



C) Taking into consideration that the acquisition of the right of Roman citizenship was actually an indication of social status, Friesen compares archiereis and asiarchs on that basis. He draws evidence from the 2nd cent. AD, a period when both offices are testified and the Roman government was quite diffused but still not expanded universally, as it happened after 212 AD, when [Caracalla](#) with the Constitutio Antoniniana granted Roman citizenship to all free citizens of the empire. Friesen based on his electronic data discovered that the asiarchs possessed citizenship in a percentage of 88,9 %, while the archiereis in a percentage of 92,6 %. Therefore he concludes that the social status of the archiereis fairly surpasses that of the asiarchs, which implies that the two titles were not identical.

D) Rossner²¹ had observed that asiarchs are often mentioned as sponsors of gladiatorial games; since these games were closely associated with the imperial cult, he claimed that the asiarchs and the archiereis of the imperial cult are identical. Friesen contradicts that argument by saying that sponsors of gladiatorial games are testified who were neither asiarchs nor archiereis of the imperial cult of the province. Moreover, epigraphical evidence indicates that the asiarchs and the archiereis approached the games in rather different ways. Seven asiarchs and two archiereis are mentioned in this context. All seven asiarchs were protectors of a gladiator's family, while the two archiereis were honoured because they had supported a specific game. This proves, according to Friesen, the close relation between asiarchs and gladiators, but not the same for archiereis.

E) Finally, Friesen deals with the issue of archiereiai known as spouses of both archiereis and asiarchs, which led Deininger to fortify his opinion supporting the identification of the two titles. On the contrary, Friesen believes that this logic cannot prevail, as in the 30 pairs that are testified, the titles of the 16 could support the identification, but the titles of the remaining 14 would reject it.²²

Moreover, he quotes a table,²³ whose numerical data led him to the conclusion that the spouses of archiereis and asiarchs were not involved to the same degree in the female prelicity of the imperial cult, therefore they are not identified. The aforementioned five arguments lead Friesen to the following conclusions:

- a) Asiarchs and archiereis are not identified in any way.
- b) Asiarchs cannot be considered as heads of the koinon of Asia.
- c) The two offices are cited in completely different ways in the sources.
- d) Asiarchs seem to be of a slightly lower social status than archiereis.
- e) Only asiarchs appear to have particular bonds with families of gladiators.
- f) Finally, there are differences in the participation of the spouses of the two dignitaries in practicing the imperial cult.

However, despite the fact that Friesen's theory is based on solid numerical data drawn from his electronic data, there have been reactions, as numbers can give a general picture, but the interpretation of the numerical data plays a more important role. Thus, H. Engelmann has written a short criticism on the data and methodology of Friesen, employing two examples from the data itself; M. Aurelius Diadochus from [Thyateira](#) and Tib. Claudius Reginus from [Ephesus](#).²⁴

According to Engelmann these two cases are susceptible to different interpretation and do not justify the separation of the two titles. In addition, each case needs individual examination because, although useful, electronic data cannot substitute literary methods. Therefore we see that the reasonable arguments of one view are refuted by equally reasonable arguments of the other, since the evidence provided by different ancient sources have not been interpreted satisfactorily, so a confusing picture of contradictions appears from the sources.



There seems to be only one point where the different aspects concerning the identification of the two titles meet: the title of archiereus definitely concerns ritual competences, while the asiarch involves administrative duties. However, it remains unresolved whether two individual domains of responsibilities concern two different dignitaries or these are simply different titles of the same office with various duties.

1. Strabo 14.1.42
2. *Anthologia Palatina* 19.31.
3. Deininger, J., *Die Provinziallandtage der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zum Ende des dritten Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Berlin 1965), p. 42, f. 1-2.
4. This view is supported by Kearsley, R.A., 'A leading family of Cibyra and some asiarchs of the first century', *AS* 38 (1988), pp. 43-51 and in Kearsley, R.A., 'The Asiarchs of Cibyra again: the Roman presence in Southern Asia Minor in 1st cent. B.C.-1st cent. A.D. and its impact on the epigraphic record', *Tyche* 11 (1996), pp. 129-155.
5. Magie, D., *Roman rule in Asia Minor: to the end of the third century after Christ* (Princeton 1950).
6. Deininger, J., *Die Provinziallandtage der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zum Ende des dritten Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Berlin 1965), pp. 41-50, where on pages 43-44 there is a summary of the older theories and related bibliography. For a critic on Deininger's book see Robert, L., 'Les inscriptions', in des Gagniers, J., et al. (ed.), *Laodicée de Lycos. Campagnes 1961-1968. Le Nymphée* (Quebec 1969), p. 266, f.7.
7. *Pandektis* 27.1,6,14.
8. For more information about Modestinus's passage and modern scholars' views, as well as his arguments see Deininger, J., *Die Provinziallandtage der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zum Ende des dritten Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Berlin 1965), p.44, f.5, p.45, f.1.
9. *RE* II 2 (1896), col. 1574, see entry 'Asiarches' (C.G. Brandis).
10. Deininger, J., *Die Provinziallandtage der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zum Ende des dritten Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Berlin 1965), p. 45.
11. Deininger, J., *Die Provinziallandtage der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zum Ende des dritten Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Berlin 1965), p. 50.
12. Rossner, M., 'Asiarchen und Archeireis Asias', *Studia classica* 16 (1974), pp. 101-142, in particular 101-111; Campanile, M., *I sacerdoti del koinon d'Asia (I sec. a. C.-III sec. d. C.): Contributo allo studio della romanizzazione delle élites provinciali nell'Oriente Greco* (Pisa 1994) and Herz, P., 'Asiarchen und Archiereiai: Zum Provinzialkult der Provinz Asia', *Tyche* 7 (1992), pp. 93-115.
13. We mention the articles: Kearsley, R. A., 'Asiarchs, Archiereis and the Archiereiai of Asia', *GRBS* 27 (1986), pp. 183-192; Kearsley, R. A., 'M. Ulpius Appuleius Eurykles. Panhellen, asiarch and archiereus of Asia', *Antichthon* 21 (1987), pp. 49-56; Kearsley, R.A., 'Some asiarchs from Ephesos', in Horsley, G. H. R. (ed.), *New documents illustrating early Christianity* 4 (Sydney 1987), pp. 46-55; Kearsley, R. A., 'Asiarchs: Titulature and function. A reappraisal', *Studia Classica* 26 (1988), pp. 57-65; Kearsley, R. A., 'Asiarchs, archiereis and archiereiai of Asia: New evidence from Amorium in Frygia', *EA* 16 (1900), p. 69-80; Kearsley, R. A., 'The Asiarchs of Cibyra again: the Roman presence in Southern Asia Minor in 1st cent. B.C.-1st cent. A.D. and its impact on the epigraphical record', *Tyche* 11 (1996), pp. 129-155, p. 153 in particular, n. 182.
14. Friesen, St., 'Asiarchs', *ZPE* 126 (1999), pp. 275-290, where all the former views and their arguments are discussed, and Friesen, St., 'Highpriests of Asia and Asiarchs: Farewell to the identification theory', in Scherrer, P.-Taeuber, H.,-Thür, H. (eds.), *Steine und Wege. Festschrift für Dieter Knibbe zum 65. Geburtstag, Sonderschriften des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts* 32 (Wien 1999), pp. 303-307.



15. P. Herz replies with his article Herz, P., 'Asiarchen und Archiereiai: Zum Provinzialkult der Provinz Asia', *Tyche* 7 (1992), pp. 93-115 and she responds with her article Kearsley, R. A., 'The Asiarchs of Cibyra again: the Roman presence in Southern Asia Minor in 1st cent. B.C.-1st cent. A.D. and its impact on the epigraphical record', *Tyche* 11 (1996), pp. 129-155.
16. See Kirbihler, F., 'Les femmes magistrats et liturges en Asie Mineure (IIe s. av. J.-C.-IIIe s. ap. J.-C.)', *Ktèma* 19 (1994), pp. 51-75.
17. Kearsley, R. A., 'Asiarchs, Archiereis and the Archiereiai of Asia', *GRBS* 27 (1986), pp. 183-192, p. 191 in particular: 'a functional archiereia of Asia excludes the possibility that an Asiarch occupied the position of archiereus of Asia simultaneously'.
18. Strabo 14.1.42.
19. See Friesen, St., 'Highpriests of Asia and Asiarchs: Farewell to the identification theory', in Scherrer, P.-Taeuber, H.,-Thür, H. (eds.), *Steine und Wege. Festschrift für Dieter Knibbe zum 65. Geburtstag, Sonderschriften des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts* 32 (Wien 1999), pp. 303-307, particularly p. 304, n. 15.
20. Friesen, St., 'Highpriests of Asia and Asiarchs: Farewell to the identification theory', in Scherrer, P.-Taeuber, H.,-Thür, H. (eds.), *Steine und Wege. Festschrift für Dieter Knibbe zum 65. Geburtstag, Sonderschriften des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts* 32 (Wien 1999), pp. 303-307, particularly p. 304, n. 16.
21. Rossner, M., 'Asiarchen und Archeireis Asias', *Studii clasice* 16 (1974), pp. 101-142, especially pp. 103-104.
22. Friesen, St., 'Highpriests of Asia and Asiarchs: Farewell to the identification theory', in Scherrer, P.-Taeuber, H.,-Thür, H. (eds.), *Steine und Wege. Festschrift für Dieter Knibbe zum 65. Geburtstag, Sonderschriften des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts* 32 (Wien 1999), pp. 303-307, particularly p. 306, n. 27-30.
23. See table in the auxiliary catalogue in the entry's supplements.
24. Engelmann, H., 'Asiarchs', *ZPE* 132 (2000), pp.173-175.

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Glossary :

	jus trium liberorum The status acquired by a woman with three children.
	proconsul, -lis A quite high ranking official, vir spectabilis according to the rank of the senate, who was inequable only to the Domestikos of the Scholae and to the Magister Militum per Orientem. The proconsul usually served as a governor of the Imperial provinces (i.e. in Asia Minor the provinces of Asia and Cappadocia). The office was demoted from the 9th century onwards and the term was in use until the 12th century meaning a dignity.

Auxiliary Catalogues

Titles of the spouses of archiereis and asiarchs

	Spouses of archiereis	Spouses of asiarchs
Total of women recorded	14	16
Archiereiai of Asia with the same number of service with their husband	11	5
Exception: only a local archiereia of a city	1	4
Exception: archiereia of Asia with different than her	1	3



husband number of service		
Exception: there was no archiereia	1	4
Total exception	3(21%)	11(69%)