



Michael Crawford, *Diocletian's Edict of Maximum Prices at the Civil Basilica in Aphrodisias*, Aphrodisias XIII, Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden 2023, pp. XVI, 208 p., 35 plates

With the publication of *Diocletian's Edict of Maximum Prices at the Civil Basilica in Aphrodisias*, Michael Crawford culminates a research journey that began more than half a century ago, in the wake of exceptional epigraphic findings at the sites of Aphrodisias and Aezani in the ancient province of Phrygia-Caria (western Anatolia).¹ The work and

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¹ Discoveries at Aphrodisias: K. T. Erim et al., *The copy of Diocletian's Edict on Maximum Prices from Aphrodisias in Caria*, "The Journal of Roman Studies" 1970, vol. 60, pp. 120–141; K. T. Erim, J. M. Reynolds, M. H. Crawford, *Diocletian's currency reform: A new inscription*, "The Journal of Roman Studies" 1971, vol. 61, pp. 171–177; K. T. Erim, J. M. Reynolds, *The Aphrodisias copy of Diocletian's Edict on Maximum Prices*, "The Journal of Roman Studies" 1973, vol. 63, pp. 99–110; J. M. Reynolds, *Imperial regulations*, in: *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity. The late Roman and Byzantine inscriptions including texts from the excavations at Aphrodisias conducted by Kenan T. Erim*, ed. C. M. Roueché, London 1989, pp. 252–318; eadem, *Diocletian's Prices Edict: New fragments of the copy at Aphrodisias*, in: *Römische Inschriften: Neufunde, Neulesungen und Neuinterpretation*, Hrsg. R. Frei-Stolba, M. A. Speidel, Basel 1995, pp. 17–28; at Aezani: R. and F. Naumann, *Der Rundbau in Aezani, mit dem Preisedikt des Diokletian und das Gebäude mit dem Edikt in Stratonikeia*, Tübingen 1973; M. H. Crawford, J. M. Reyn-

dedication of this scholar can be praised as monumental, just like the document that is the subject of this research: the longest known inscription from the Greco-Roman world and also the most widely attested, with Latin and Greek fragments of the text found at over forty different sites.²

Of all these sites, Aphrodisias is the one that has produced the largest portion of the text and the only one where the so-called “Currency Dossier” has been found – a crucial document for understanding both the Prices Edict and tetrarchic policy in the early 4th century AD. Even more significant is how in Aphrodisias it was possible to reconstruct in detail the original arrangement of the documents, in an investigation where philology and archaeology mutually contributed to definitively establishing the complete structure of the Edict and reconstructing the façade of the building that housed it: the Civil Basilica. The volume presented by Crawford thus continues the tradition of modern editions of the Edict, in which scholars from Th. Mommsen to S. Lauffer and M. Giaccherio worked to combine the testimony of an increasing number of epigraphic fragments into a single text; but the author complements this tradition with research conducted in recent decades to reconstruct the copies of the edict displayed in individual cities, each with their own peculiarities.³

The volume is published in the Aphrodisias Monographs series edited by R. R. R. Smith. After the prefaces by the series editor and the author, there is a table of concordances (pp. XIII–XVI) with previous editions of the *Edict of Maximum Prices*, prepared by Benet Salway. In the Introduction (pp. 1–12), Crawford discusses the reconstruction of the text and gives a historical and chronological interpretation of Diocletian’s measures on

olds, *The publication of the Prices Edict: A new inscription from Aezani*, “The Journal of Roman Studies” 1975, vol. 65, pp. 160–163.

² The Edict has been found only in Latin, the tariff in Latin or in Greek translation: see M. Giaccherio, *Edictum Diocletiani et Collegarum de pretiis rerum venalium in integrum fere restitutum e Latinis Graecisque fragmentis*, Genova 1973, pp. 35–86.

³ See M. H. Crawford, *Discovery, autopsy, and progress: Diocletian’s jigsaw puzzles*, in: *Classics in progress*, ed. T. P. Wiseman, London 2002, pp. 145–163. For the Aezani copy of the Edict see, with R. and F. Naumann, cit. above, nt. 1; M. H. Crawford, J. M. Reynolds, *The Aezani copy of the Prices Edict*, “Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik” 1977, Bd. 26, pp. 125–151, and ibidem, 1979, Bd. 34, pp. 163–210.

fixing maximum prices, reaffirming some of the theses he has already expressed on the subject.⁴ In Chapter 2 (pp. 13–29), Philip Stinson describes the positioning of the Prices Edict and the Currency Dossier on the north façade of the Basilica of Aphrodisias,⁵ providing a precise reconstruction of the placement of the two texts, the distribution of surviving fragments, and the order followed in the inscription of the documents. Through its impressive illustrations, this chapter gives a clear idea of the immense work done by Crawford and his colleagues in meticulously reconstructing the order of over two hundred sixty fragments.

The edition of the copy of the *Edict of Maximum Prices* at Aphrodisias, with Latin text and English translation, forms the core of the volume (pp. 31–119). It is followed by a comparison between the reconstruction of the structure of Aphrodisias text and copies of the edict found at other sites (“Parallel texts”, pp. 121–126), arranged according to Crawford’s new numeration. The chapter also includes an update on the most significant epigraphic discoveries which occurred after Lauffer’s edition.

In Chapter 5 (pp. 127–131), Crawford provides a new edition of the “Currency Dossier”, which has been epigraphically attested at Aphrodisias

⁴ In addition to his works cited in the previous notes, cf. especially the short review article of Lauffer’s edition of the Edict, M. H. Crawford, *Price Control*, “The Classical Review” 1975, vol. 25.2, pp. 276–279 (regarding the chronology of the Edict, the comparison with earlier Roman practice, the concept of *iustum pretium*). The reader will not find in this introduction any discussion or reference regarding the relationship of the Prices Edict to Diocletian’s fiscal reforms, to the practice of *coemptiones* of precious metals attested for the first time in 300 AD, to the problem of military pay (or to the several investigations devoted to these topics by R. Bagnall, J.-M. Carrié, E. Lo Cascio, and many others; for two recent, different reconsiderations of the Prices Edicts and Diocletian’s goals see G. Bransbourg, *Inflation and monetary reforms in the fourth century: Diocletian’s twin Edicts of AD 301*, in: *Debasement: Manipulation of coin standards in pre-modern monetary systems*, ed. K. Butcher, Oxbow Books 2020, pp. 165–194; M. Colombo, *Le tariffe dell’Edictum de pretiis rerum uenialium, il costo del grano durante il IV secolo e il modius*, “Historia” 2024, vol. 73.4, pp. 449–474). In Crawford’s perspective, the Edict rather stands at the end of a Roman tradition of trust in the market, on which “Diocletian and his colleagues seem firmly to have turned their backs” (p. 8).

⁵ On this building see also the monograph published within the same Aphrodisias series: P. Stinson, *The civil Basilica*, Wiesbaden 2016.

only.⁶ This is a very precious addition to the volume because, despite serious lacunae in several parts of the text, the edition offers for the first time ever a clear idea of the whole structure of the Dossier (consisting of one or two edicts and an imperial letter addressed to an official)⁷ and includes all the known fragments in a continuous lineation. Like the Prices Edict, this document was engraved on the Civil Basilica, but not on the façade, rather at the top of the pier that frames the façade of the Basilica. According to Crawford, the position of the two documents on the building indicates that the Prices Edict could not have been promulgated after the Edict on the currency, as it is commonly believed,⁸ but that both must have been promulgated in Summer 301 AD.

⁶ The first edition was made by K. T. Erim, J. M. Reynolds, M. H. Crawford in 1971 (op. cit., nt. 1); a second edition by J. M. Reynolds in 1989 (op. cit., nt. 1).

⁷ According to Crawford, the Currency Dossier consisted of two edicts and one imperial letter. The first edict (Block 1, ll. 1–21) introduced by a complete titulature of the imperial college; the second (Block 2, ll. 22–33) only by *Idem Impp. Augg. [dicunt]*. The scholar suggests that the imperial letter was introduced by *E(xemplum) S(acrarum) L(itterarum)* at the beginning of l. 34 of the first block. However, this portion of the text does not survive and we cannot rule out the possibility that the beginning of the letter was at l. 22, after the shortened version of the imperial college. If so, the Currency Dossier at Aphrodisias would include one edict only and one imperial letter.

⁸ The reform of the currency was to come into force on 1 September 301 AD; the “traditional” chronology for the promulgation of the Prices edict, that is between 20 November and 9 December 301 AD, was established by J. Lafaurie, *Remarques sur les dates de quelques inscriptions du début du IV^e siècle*, “Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres” 1965, pp. 196–198, on the base of the titulature of Diocletian in the Egypt copy, presumably from Alexandria, where Diocletian is recorded in his XVIII regnal year (starting 20 November 301 AD) and XVIII tribunician year (finishing 9 December 301 AD). On the base of this chronology, some scholars have established a causal relationship between the Currency Edict (1 September 301 AD), which allegedly triggered a rise in prices, and the promulgation of the *Edict on Maximum Prices* (between 20 November and 9 December 301 AD), which was supposedly issued to curb this rise. Crawford (pp. 1–2) rejects this chronological relationship (and the evidence from the Egyptian copy) for two reasons: the first, as mentioned in the text, concerns the respective placement of the two documents on the Basilica of Aphrodisias, which would suggest the anteriority of the Prices Edict over the Currency Dossier (“it is surely impossible to believe that the Currency Dossier would have been engraved at the top of the pier that frames the façade of the Basilica on the left, unless the Prices Edict had already filled

The edition of the Greek edict of the governor of Phrygia and Caria, Fulvius Asticus, which was engraved on the macellum of Aezani after the Prices Edict, complemented by a “Retro-conversion into Latin” and an English translation, is included in the first Appendix (p. 171). In the second Appendix (pp. 173–190), there is a list of fragments found at Aphrodisias of the Prices Edict and the Currency Edicts, with information about their discovery, content, and publication, compiled by Julia Lenaghan. Photographs of many of these fragments (unfortunately not all) are reproduced in the final Plates, after an essential Bibliography (pp. 191–193) and an index of Latin words (pp. 197–208). The volume also includes a Turkish translation (pp. 133–170) of the Prices Edict, written by Mustafa D. Somersan, Serra Somersan, and Yaşar Demiröz.

The table of concordances with previous editions of the Prices Edict shows how deeply Crawford has modified the division into chapters of the long list of commodities, services, and prices attached to the Edict. He numbers as independent rubrics many parts that were treated as sections within rubrics in earlier editions. As a result, while Lauffer’s and Giacchero’s editions numbered 37 and 35 rubrics respectively, the new text established by Crawford is divided into a total of 70 chapters, which follow the text of the Edict.⁹ Regarding the order of rubrics, based on the evidence from Aphro-

almost the whole”, p. 1); the second relates to the complexity and rationality, “even by modern standards,” of the lengthy tariff attached to the *Edict of Maximum Prices*, which could not have been prepared within just a few weeks to counter an unexpected inflation. The two measures complement each other: see M. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine monetary economy, c. 300–1450*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 458–462; cf. now G. Bransbourg, op. cit., nt. 4, pp. 171–173. This makes hard to accept the theory of Crawford (pp. 11–12) that the compilers of the Edict didn’t know about the planned revaluation of the radiate piece, from 2 to 4 *denarii*: the structure of prices clearly suggests that the compilers worked considering values of 2, 4, and 25 *denarii* (see, among others, V. Picozzi, *L’iscrizione di Afrodisia e il valore delle monete dioclezianee*, “Rivista Italiana di Numismatica” 1977, vol. 79, pp. 91–108; G. and W. Leiner, *Kleinmünzen und ihre Werte nach dem Preisedikt Diokletians: Ein Lösungsvorschlag auf statistischer Basis*, “Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte” 1980, Bd. 29.2, pp. 219–241).

⁹ An example will provide a clear idea of Crawford’s work: while in Lauffer and Giacchero, chapter 9 on footwear includes a section *De formis caligaribus*, followed by *De caligis* (from 9,5), *De soleis et gallicis* (from 9,12), [*De so*]leis *Babulonicis et purpureis et*

disias (see Bay III, 36–41 = Pl. 22), Crawford moves the chapter “on pens and ink” (*De cannis et atramento*) before the six rubrics which preceded it in the Megalopolis copy of the Edict and in the previous editions by Lauffer and Giaccherio.¹⁰ According to the Author, the chapter “may have been tucked into a suitable small space at the end of Ch. 41 in the Aphrodisias copy, as being the first of a group of very short chapters” (p. 3).

A further subdivision is introduced in the edition of the text, corresponding to the placement of fragments on the wall of the Basilica of Aphrodisias. The text is divided into the six Bays of the Basilica’s façade, which are subdivided into the panels of the register and the dado.¹¹ The distribution of the text on the façade shows that midway through the project, the engravers, concerned about the available space, decided to use not only the lower and upper register, but also the attic register (in Bay IV). While this arrangement complicated the reading of the inscribed rubrics (with the first panel of the attic register opening with the rubric *de vestimentis*), their meticulous planning ultimately preserved space in Bay VI – space later used to incorporate a revised version of the chapter on maritime freight charges (ch. 70), which arrived at Aphrodisias (and Aezani) after the engraving of the Prices Edict had already been completed.¹²

Foeniceis et alvis (corrected to *De calceis Babylonicis et purpureis et Foeniceis et alvis*, from 9,17), *De soccis sive furnis* (9,20), in Crawford’s edition these sections constitute five independent rubrics, numbered from 11 to 15. This separation does not occur for the five sections of chapter 7 (*De mercedibus operariorum et artificum*), attested at Aphrodisias by only few fragments (Bay 2,22; Bay 3,1).

¹⁰ *De cannis et atramento*: ch. 42 Crawford, ch. 18,11 Lauffer and Giaccherio. The six rubrics are *De coloribus*, *De ebore et testudine*, *De acu*, *De ueturarum mercedibus*, *De pabulis*, *De pluma*, corresponding to ch. 43–49 Crawford, ch. 16,7–9, 16,10–11, 16,12–14, 17,1–5, 17,6–8, 18,1–10 Giaccherio.

¹¹ See Chapter 2 by P. Stinson for a general overview.

¹² At Aezani, on the building where the *Edict of Maximum Prices* was engraved, the first version of the chapter on freight charges was followed by the promulgation edict of provincial governor Fulvius Asticus (p. 171); at Aphrodisias, by the acclamation *feliciter multis annis* (“with good luck, for many years”, ch. 69, l. 50). This indicates that the (first) rubric on freight charges (ch. 69) concluded the text of the Edict, and that the revised version (ch. 70) was communicated only later: see the discussion by Crawford, pp. 4–6.

In the edition of the Prices Edict at Aphrodisias, Crawford limits the use of standard epigraphic conventions for this revised, problematic chapter on freight charges, while for the remainder he simply indicates with italics when the Aphrodisias text is supplemented by other Latin fragments, and with underlining when the text is supplemented on the basis of Greek fragments (in square brackets when it is attested only in Greek form, which is translated into Latin by Crawford).¹³ As the Aphrodisias's copy was inscribed in Latin, there is no Greek equivalent in this edition. There are also very few commentary and apparatus notes, and the English translation only partially compensates for this limitation. The previous editions by Lauffer and Giacchero, and particularly the critical apparatus and commentary of the former, thus remain essential tools for studying the Edict.

However, the possibility to read through an almost continuous sequence the over 1,400 entries of the tariff represents an exceptional achievement for modern scholarship on the ancient world. With justified pride, Crawford can state that this volume offers "a (very nearly) complete text", of the Edict, "with no more than a handful of missing, and a slightly larger number of incomplete lines" (p. IX). Even for those parts that are still incomplete,¹⁴ this edition represents a considerable improvement on past reconstructions and provides important new material that will stimulate further academic discussion on this exceptional document.

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¹³ As already noted by another reviewer, these conventions can be confusing (see E. Dickey, in: *Bryn Mawr classical review*, <https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2024/2024.07.21/> [accessed on February 25, 2025]).

¹⁴ Crawford indicates (p. IX) as still "seriously incomplete" the chapters on purple clothing (ch. 57), *pigmenta* (ch. 68), the revised chapter on water transport (ch. 70); the text (not the prices) of ch. 38 is unknown and Crawford suggests this was a chapter on lead (p. 3, *Lead?*); according to the Author, there are also possible inconsistencies among few prices (see p. 3, *Iron*), as well as doubt concerning the likely existence of two versions of ch. 67 and ch. 68 (see p. IX).