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Theatre Rituals

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The shows in the ancient theatre did not only consist of theatrical and other artistic performances. A large variety of other activities, including ritual actions, took place both on the occasion of thymelic and musical competitions and in the context of other celebrations. After presenting an overview of the religious rituals performed in theatres, this paper focusses on non-religious rituals, such as the crowning of benefactors, the announcement of honours, ceremonial entrances of magistrates and honoured persons, acclamations, speech acts, and rituals of consecration. It is argued that stereotypical formulae in honorific decrees and other inscriptions reflect rituals of communication between mortals and immortals, between subject and ruler, between mass and élite, and between citizens and foreigners. Certain clauses in inscriptions should be interpreted as 'stage directions' for the successful performance of rituals. Theatre rituals were perhaps not meant to be spectacles; perhaps the theatre was chosen as their setting only because of the advantages it offered in a practical sense (acoustics, seats, large gatherings of people). But the choice of this particular setting, i.e. the space of *thea* (the watching of spectacles), sooner or later had consequences for the form of the rituals themselves.

MURPHY'S LAW OF RITUAL DISASTERS—OR,
WHY RITUALS REQUIRE STAGING

In AD 365 Procopius, taking advantage of the absence of emperor Valens, attempted to conquer the throne with the help of a few soldiers. His attempt was successful—or at least so he thought. Ammianus Marcellinus describes the ceremony, hastily organised:¹

Because a purple robe could nowhere be found, he was dressed in a gold-embroidered tunic, like an attendant at court, but from foot to waist he looked like a page in the service of the palace; he wore purple shoes on his feet, and bore a lance, and a small piece of purple cloth in his left hand . . . Then he appeared in public, surrounded by a number of armed men, and now advancing with more confidence and with upraised standards, attended with a fearful din of shields mournfully clashing together, which the soldiers from fear of his being pelted from housetops with stones or pieces of tile closely joined together over the very crests of their helmets . . . When the said Procopius had mounted the tribunal, and all were filled with amazement, fearing the gloomy silence, and believing (as indeed he had expected) that he had merely come to a steeper road to death, since a trembling which pervaded all his limbs hindered him speaking, he stood for a long time without a word. Finally he began with broken and dying utterance to say a little, justifying his action by his relationship with the imperial family. Then at first by the low whispers of a few, who had been hired for the purpose, later by the tumultuous acclamations of the people, he was hailed as emperor in disorderly fashion, and hastily went on to the Senate House. There finding none of the distinguished senators, but only a few persons of low rank, with rapid steps he hastened to the palace and entered it with ill-omened step.

(Ammianus Marcellinus 26.5.15–18)

If Procopius' *dies imperii* looks like the parody of a ceremony, it is because it was badly staged, hasty and disorderly. The new emperor could not find the appropriate costume, the right words and an enthusiastic audience that would hail him and not throw stones on him. This passage is an example of Murphy's law applied in ceremonies. Everything that could possibly go wrong, went wrong.

¹ I owe this reference to an unsuccessful ritual to Dr Thorsten Beigel.

Let us imagine for a moment how Murphy's law could work in a theatre, say in Priene. Dionysos' priest, who could not sleep all night because of diarrhoea, comes too late, only to find that his seat of honour has been occupied by a foreign envoy, who had not been told that he should enter the theatre when the herald announces his name. Because of the priest's weak voice nobody in the audience notices his prayer, and instead they all watch a fight in the fourth row; there, Aristodemos discovered himself seating next to Kallion whom he suspects as the person who had deprived his daughter of her virginity. After the libations and the prayer, both the *stephanephoros* (the chief magistrate) and the *agonothetes* (the organiser of the contest) stand up, hoping to have their short moment of glory and to be admired in their glamorous garments. They now look at one another because they do not know who is supposed to begin reading the announcements of crowns of honour; both of them start reading together, then both of them pause; both of them start again, until finally they agree, on stage, on the sequence of their speeches. While the *agonothetes* slowly reads the text of an honorific decree for a benefactor, he is interrupted by a man who enters the *orchestra* from the right *parodos*; it is Kriton, a benefactor, who has been waiting to hear the invitation to receive his seat of honour, alas, in vain; the secretary of the assembly had forgotten to put his name on the list that was read aloud by the herald; having lost his patience, he now enters uninvited and demands a seat in the front row. Now it is the spectators who lose their patience, for the announcements of honours decreed in the past years find no end. The tumult soon gets out of control, for the *agonothetes* incurred such high expenses on *kithara* singers that no money was left for the club-bearers needed to keep order in the theatre.

One does not really need a sudden rain, a strong wind, or an earthquake to ruin a day in the theatre, so eagerly anticipated by urban populations; bad organisation can sometimes be a much bigger disaster for a show.

People go to a cinema to enjoy a film, but this does not mean that they do not find the commercials entertaining and the previews informative. Similarly, the show in the ancient theatre did not consist only of theatrical and other artistic performances. A large variety of other activities, including ritual actions, took place both on the

occasion of thymelic and musical competitions and in the context of other celebrations. Brigitte Le Guen (1995) has drawn attention to religious rites, such as the offering of sacrifices (e.g. at the Sarapieia in Tanagra), arguing for this reason—and correctly—that dramatic performances cannot be regarded as simply secular entertainment. A theatre often provided the ideal setting for all kinds of gatherings of people, from royal weddings (Chaniotis 1997) and meetings of the popular assembly, to courts and celebrations of emperor cult (see below). These gatherings were either aiming at the performance of rituals (weddings, emperor cult), or were accompanied by rituals (assembly).

An ancient theatre as public space is the locus of rituals. In some cases a theatre is even built so that the performance of a ritual can be watched by spectators, as in the case of the theatrical space added to the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia in Sparta so that spectators could watch the competition of Spartan youths in flogging themselves.

Unfortunately, rituals belong to the most elusive phenomena of ancient behaviour. As widely established, stereotypical activities, followed consistently and (at least in theory) invariably, they are rarely described and hardly ever explained by those who perform them; they are rather described by those who observe them and are astounded at the differences from the rituals of their own culture—or they are described by puzzled antiquarians (Chaniotis 2005). It is for this reason that our knowledge of theatre rituals is rather limited and usually based on indirect information. This article is dedicated to the information provided by the epigraphic sources.

RELIGIOUS RITUALS IN THEATRES

Among the rituals performed in theatres those of a religious nature are more often and more directly mentioned or described in inscriptions. A regulation (*diagraphē*) in the city of Priene which concerns the sale of the priesthood of Dionysos (*I.Priene* 174, second century BC) states: 'he will offer the sacrifices that are offered to Dionysos Melpomenos in the theatre and he will burn incense and will make the libation and the prayer on behalf of the city of Priene'.

Sacrifices are often followed by banquets, and, again, in Priene we do find an attestation of a banquet offered by the *agonothetai* ‘in the theatre’ for the citizens, the other population and the foreign sacred envoys (*I.Priene* 118, first century BC). The sacred law concerning the mysteries of Andania (*LSCG* 65) refers to purifications (*katharmoi*) to be performed in the theatre. And an inscription—possibly a pierre errante—found in Chalkis, describes the achievements of M. Ulpius Kallineikos, the Younger (*SEG* 29, 807, third century AD?). Kallineikos who had the function (or perhaps the nick-name?) ‘the one who is carried’ (*phoreimenos*), was carried on a phallus fifty-five times around the *orchestra* of the theatre (Veyne 1985; Csapo 1997). The expression *ep’ agathoi* (‘for a good outcome’) in this text is not just a formula, but a reference to the fact that Kallineikos’ acrobatic performance had taken place for the well-being of the community; it was an offering to the god.

Theatres were privileged ritual spaces also in connection with the cult of the emperor. When mortals communicate with the gods, by praying, sacrificing, or making a dedication, it is often expected, albeit not required, that others watch these expressions of piety. The necessity of spectators is far more important in the communication between polis communities and emperors as recipients of ritual actions. This is one of the reasons — certainly not the only reason — why theatres play an important role in the rituals of emperor cult: the citizens, the representatives of the imperial administration, the foreigners, sometimes the emperor himself, should watch how a civic community honoured the mortal divinity of an emperor. This is not the place to discuss the rituals of emperor cult that took place in theatres, especially since most of the material has already been collected and studied by Elizabeth Gebhard (1988 and 1996). I epigrammatically mention her discussion of processions that took place to and through theatres. Members of the procession assembled in a specified order at a shrine in the city or outside the walls and walked through the streets to the theatre carrying images which were finally set up in the theatre. At the end of the day or of the festival the images were returned to their place of origin.

The best-known procession of this type is the one at Gytheion (*SEG* 11, 923, AD 15). The *agoranomos* (the magistrate responsible for the market), the ephebes and the *neoi* (the age-class of young

men aged from twenty to thirty), the other citizens, all dressed in white and wearing laurel crowns, the sacred virgins, and the women in their ritual garments proceeded from the sanctuary of Asklepios to the theatre. When they arrived there and before the performers entered, three painted *eikones* (images) representing Augustus, Tiberius, and Livia were set up, and a table with an incense-burner on it was placed in the middle of the theatre. The magistrates burned incense and prayed for the safety of the rulers.

The foundation of Salutaris at Ephesos involved the carrying of thirty-one figures of silver and gold from the sanctuary of Artemis, through the Magnesian Gates to the theatre, where they were set up in the cavea, creating thirty-one points of brilliant light as the sun struck the gold and the silver (*I.Ephesos* 27; Rogers 1991).

At Oinoanda the procession probably began at the temple of Apollo and moved through the theatre, where twenty *mastigophoroi* (bearers of whips) took care of order (Wörrle 1988; *SEG* 38, 1462 C, AD 125–6). The representatives of other cities were also escorted through the theatre (ll. 85–7): ‘whatever sacrifices (i.e. sacrificial animals) are sent by other cities, these too should be escorted in procession (*pompeuesthai*) through the theatre and announced at the time they are sent’. I will return to the significance of the processions and the announcements for the understanding of inscriptions on theatre seats later.

I should also mention the performance of hymns for emperor Hadrian in the theatre of Ephesos on the occasion of his visit there (*I.Ephesos* 1145).

Some of the theatre rituals have left their traces both in its architecture, e.g. in the altar, in the *parodoi* (ceremonial entrances), and in the seats of honour, but also in its epigraphy. As I will argue, the number and complexity of ritual actions that took place in theatres made some kind of organisation and staging necessary, which again has left its traces in inscriptions both written in theatres and referring to theatres.

STEREOTYPICAL FORMULAE IN DECREES:
STAGING DIRECTIONS FOR RITUALS?

A type of epigraphic evidence closely associated with rituals which took place in theatres is a stereotypical formula found in countless honorific decrees:² it provides for the crowning of local and foreign benefactors in the theatre and/or the announcement of this honour during a dramatic festival. The fact that we have a stereotypical formula should not be misinterpreted as evidence for a routine; the formula presupposes a stereotypical action, a ritual.

These 'crowning formulae' have the same structure. They provide information about the festival in which the crowning and/or announcement will take place, about the responsible magistrates, about the form and sometimes the value of the crown, in a few cases also about the exact text of the announcement, and occasionally about the repetition of this action year after year.

One of the most detailed instructions is given in the honorary decree of Kolophon for Ptolemaios (c. 130–110 BC):

He is to be crowned with a crown of gold and with a statue of gold for his virtue and his love of what is good for the people; the honours are to be announced at the Dionysia and the Klaria during the competitions; the *pyrtaneis* (presidents of the council) will be responsible for the announcement at the Dionysia, the *agonothetai* (those responsible for the competitions) at the Klaria; he is to be crowned, and an announcement of the honours by the herald should be made during the performance of the *pyrrhiche*-dance and during the gymnical competitions for ever; the announcement should be as follows: 'The *demos* crowns Ptolemaios, son of Pantagnotos, with a crown of gold and with a statue of gold, because he is a virtuous man and a lover of virtue, and generous towards the citizens, a man who never neglected the city's interests.'

(SEG 39, 1243 col. V 27–43)

The contemporary decree of the same city for Menippos (after 120/19 BC) is identical in the wording with regard to the honours, but not as regards the content of the announcement:

² On formulaic expressions in general see Rhodes and Lewis (1997) 18–23; cf. Chaniotis (1999). On the formulae concerning the announcement of honours see Henry (1983).

The *demoi* crowns Menippos, son of Apollonides, natural son of Eumedes, with a crown of gold and with a statue of gold, because he is a benefactor, generous and a lover of virtue with regard to the citizens, a leader of the fatherland in difficult times.

(SEG 39, 1244 col. III 21–34)

In the text of the announcement one immediately notices an effort for an individual characterisation of the achievements of the two persons (cf. *I.Priene* 63).

Let us consider now the practical aspects of the announcement of the honours, looking again at the decrees for Ptolemaios and Menippos. In both cases the honours were to be announced at the Dionysia in the theatre for ever—as long as the honoured persons were alive, but possibly also after their death (cf. *SEG* 39, 759). Both decrees are roughly contemporary, so that it is most likely that for a period of time both announcements were made, one after the other, on the same occasion, in front of the same audience. If Ptolemaios and Menippos were present, one may assume that they stood up or even went to the stage to be hailed by the citizens. If such an honour was decreed for yet another benefactor every year, and taking into consideration life expectancy, one would have up to fifteen or twenty such announcements in a city of a medium size—and this in addition to other honours and ceremonies. Repetitions of similar texts and actions are as exciting as commencement ceremonies in American universities. They are tolerated only because all the persons involved as actors or spectators have a few seconds in which either they or a person they love stands in the centre of attention. What about an ancient audience that had come to the theatre for the performances and not for the ‘commercial’? When would the point be reached at which the audience lost its patience?

As a matter of fact we have direct evidence showing that sometimes the announcement of honours took quite some time. The inventory of the treasurers of Athena and the Other Gods for the year 304/3 gives us an impression of the number of such announcements:

The following items were not delivered by the treasurers in office during the archonship of Pherekles to the treasurers in office during the archonship of Leostratos: the crowns that were announced at the Dionysia during the

competition of the tragedians, announced³ by Philippos, son of Nikias of Acharnai, the magistrate responsible for the administration (*epi tei dioikesei*), in accordance with the decree of the people that was proposed by Philippos, son of Nikias of Acharnai. The following crowns were announced: The people crown Antigonos with a crown with a value of 1,000 drachmas, etc.

(SEG 38, 143)

At least twelve crowns were announced on the same occasion: one for Antigonos the One-Eyed, four for Demetrios the Besieger, one for Antigonos and Demetrios, one for the council and the people by the Peparthians, one for the council and the people by the (new) *isoteleis* (privileged foreign residents), and four crowns for the councillors in office in four consecutive years, from 306 to 303. The repetition of the same text may have given this ceremony some solemnity, and most spectators some boredom, but among the audience we may expect some 2,000 men who were keen to experience this celebration: the 2,000 councillors of the past four years. Nonetheless some variation in the text would have been most welcome.

We find such variations not only with regard to the texts, but also with regard to the occasion and the event, during which the announcement or the crowning took place (see below). We usually find the instruction that the announcement has to take place during the festival of the Dionysia, i.e. on the occasion of the dramatic competitions. However, some decrees instruct the responsible officials to make the announcement at the 'first Dionysia' (*Διονυσίαις τοῖς πρώτοις*), i.e. during the next/coming Dionysia (SEG 35, 912: Kos, second century BC; *I.Priene* 4, 17, and 61: Priene, fourth and third century BC), some decrees do not. It was not self-evident that the honours were to be announced on the next occasion. The aforementioned inventory shows that some councillors had to wait for four years to see the crown that had been decreed for the council, in which they had served, announced in the theatre. A decree of the Aixoneis (SEG 36, 186, 313/12 BC) specifies the year of an honorific ceremony to be performed in the theatre during the competition of the comedies ('in the year after Theophrastos' archonship'), obviously in order to ensure a prompt announcement.

³ Or, according to another restoration, 'brought back' (*ἀνεκόμισεν*).

The Dionysia usually lasted for several days and included a very diverse programme. For this reason some decrees specify exactly when the announcement was to be made, e.g. during the competition of the tragedians (SEG 34, 106: Eleusis; SEG 44, 699: Andros, third century BC; SEG 44, 949 I: Teos, third/second century BC; *I.Priene* 17: Priene, third century BC), during the new competition of the tragedians in Athens, both at the Great Dionysia (SEG 28, 60, third century BC) and at the City Dionysia (SEG 28, 75, c. 203 BC), or during the fair (*panegyris*) in an unknown city (SEG 29, 771, second century BC). A great honour was the repetition of the announcement in various festivals, e.g. in Kyme at the festival Dionysia and Attaleia in Kyme (SEG 29, 1216, second century). In some cases the instructions are very detailed. For instance, a decree in Kyme instructs the ceremony to take place 'on the next Dionysia during the competition of the boys' (SEG 33, 1035, second century BC); a decree in Priene is even more detailed: 'in the theatre, at the first (next) Dionysia, during the competition of the boys, when the *demos* performs the customary libations' (*I.Priene* 108, c. 129 BC). Similarly, another decree of Kyme specifies the appropriate moment for this honour during the festivals of the Great Soteria and the Rhomaia: 'when the *agonothetai* (the persons who preside over the competitions) perform the sacrifices in the theatre on the 13th day' (SEG 33, 1039, second century BC).⁴ We may assume that at least in some years and in some cities the number of crownings and announcements could take such dimensions that provisions such as those presented here had to be taken in order to distribute these announcements among the festivals (dramatic or athletic), among the days of the celebration, and among the various events. Not every honoured person could expect an announcement in the coming festival.

⁴ Cf. similar precisions in the following decrees: *I.Priene* 81: during the musical competition (Priene, c. 200 BC); SEG 29, 1072: 'during the musical competition when the people perform the choruses' (Halikarnassos, second century BC); SEG 29, 1089: in the theatre, 'when the people perform the musical competition' (Theangela, first century BC); IG XII 6.1, 150: 'the sacred herald should make announcement during the competition of the tragedians in the theatre naming each one of them separately, along with the father's name' (honorary decree for Koan judges, Samos, late fourth century BC).

Similar variations can be observed with regard to the persons responsible for the announcement. The announcement was often made by the persons who presided over the competition (*agonothetes*),⁵ but in addition to the *agonothetai* we find references to many other magistrates and priests who undertook this task.⁶ These differences are in part due to the duties of the officials, in part to their ambition to have their small share in glory when they stand up in the theatre, dressed in their best clothes, to be for a few minutes the centre of attention.

Even clearer are the differences in the type of the crown. They concern the value, the material, and the form (gold, ivy, myrtle, olive, decorated with the portrait of a god etc.).⁷ The expression 'the greatest crown that the law provides for' (στέφανος ὁ μέγιστος ἐκ τοῦ νόμου: SEG 29, 752) suggests a hierarchy of crowns, not only in value, but probably also in form. Expressions such as 'a distinguished crown' (διαφέρων στέφανος: SEG 8, 529 ll. 44), 'a crown of merit' (στέφανος ἀριστεΐος: I.Perge 14 and 23; I.Priene 108), 'a crown of excellent behaviour as a citizen' (ἀριστοπολιτείας στέφανος: I.Olympia 465; SEG 46, 402), 'a crown of virtue' (ἀρετῆς στέφανος: MAMA VIII 408), or 'the crown of the god' (ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ στέφανος: SEG 43, 773; ὁ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ στέφανος: SEG 49, 1753) show that crown does not equal crown and that the rituals of the crowning and of the announcement of this honour were anything but uniform and monotonous, the more so when not only the announcement, but also the crowning itself took place in the theatre.

Unfortunately little is known about the procedure of crowning. It was usually less spectacular than the device that the Pergamenes attempted to apply in the case of king Mithridates VI in 88 BC. In the theatre, where they had assembled, they set up a machinery of some kind which would lower a statue of Nike holding a crown in her hand which would be placed on the king's head. However, when

⁵ SEG 39, 1153 (Ephesos); SEG 29, 1216 and 33, 1039 (Kyme); SEG 35, 912 (Kos); SEG 39, 1243 col. V (Kolophon); I.Priene 4, 17, 61, 81 (Priene).

⁶ E.g. *Basileis*: SEG 36, 1046 (Miletos). *Demarchos*: SEG 34, 106 (Eleusis). *Epi tei dioikesei*: SEG 28, 60, and 38, 143 (Athens). *Hieromnemon*: I.Byzantion 2. Priest of Dionysos and *prytaneis*: SEG 39, 1243 (Kolophon). *Stratego*: SEG 28, 75.

⁷ E.g. SEG 39, 1153 (Ephesos, third century).

the statue was being lowered towards Mithridates, it broke to pieces just as Nike was about to touch his head, and the crown went tumbling from her hand to the ground in the midst of the theatre (Plu. *Sulla* 11). Most honorees would probably satisfy themselves with a magistrate (rather than a beautiful virgin) who would place the crown on their head or hand it out, as the representations on documentary reliefs imply (Meyer 1989: 132–40). Of course it is difficult to find an answer to the question of how one crowns a foreign community or a council of 500 members.

I have discussed the ritual of crowning in some detail because it is so widespread and so well attested that it allows us to recognise not only the stereotypical formulations which one expects in inscriptions that concern rituals, but also individual features which are connected with staging instructions, without which the performance of a ritual can be either chaotic or monotonous and consequently inadequate for the audience in a theatre.

The last point makes all the difference in the world: we are dealing with a ritual that takes place before or during a performance for which hundreds or thousands of people have come to the theatre.

CEREMONIAL ENTRANCES

Theatre rituals have to compete with theatrical performances. Staging is more urgently needed than in other rituals that take place in a sanctuary, a private club, or at home. And the larger the gathering of people, the more difficult to stage the rituals in an orderly and aesthetically satisfying manner. An anonymous statesman in Chios, who served as an *agonothetes* of the first celebration of the festival for Dea Roma around 188 BC, was not only praised for his financial contributions and for a beautiful (*καλός*) musical *agon*, but he is also honoured because ‘he took care of the proper conduct (*εὐκοσμία*) and good order (*εὐταξία*) with regard to/in the theatre (*κατὰ θέατρον*)’ (SEG 30, 1073); he is praised for having succeeded where others had probably failed.

Proper conduct and good order do not primarily refer to the performers, although quarrels among them were not unusual—this

is perhaps the context of the expression *ἄμαχα* (without μάχη, without combat, or 'unbeatable?') in the backstage rooms in the theatre of Aphrodisias (Roueché 1993: 17–21). Proper conduct and good order primarily refer to the spectators, especially the less privileged spectators who did not have a seat of honour. In many theatres we have evidence for sectors or rows reserved for particular groups of the citizen-body. In the theatre of Herakleia Lynkestis in Macedonia (SEG 49, 720) seating inscriptions giving the names of tribes are written horizontally along the lowest row of seats. They name the tribes Asklepias, Artemisias, of the Sebastos,⁸ Herakleios, and Dionysias. In Kaunos blocks with the names of the tribes Kranais and Rhadamanthis have been found (Ehrhardt 1997). The seat reservations may have played a role in the arrival of the citizens as spectators, but I have the impression that they were far more important for the occasions in which the citizens were themselves active participants. A Samian decree (IG XII 6, 172 A ll. 3–8) instructs the *prytaneis* to invite the members of the assembly, which convened in the theatre, to take their seats there according to the subdivisions of the citizen-body (*chilyastyes*); signs were to be set up in order to determine the place reserved for each *chilyastys*. The assembly was not the only occasion on which the citizens (or groups of citizens) were divided according to tribes. When citizens, ephebes, or young men attended processions, they did so divided into *phylai* (Chaniotis 1995: 156 n. 75). It follows that when these processions reached the theatre and entered it, the persons that attended the procession could take their seat in an orderly manner only if seats had been reserved for each tribe. Generalisations are very dangerous, but I would like to suggest that in some cases the tribal inscriptions written on the seats of theatres should be seen in the context of processions that ended in the theatre. White marble seats found near the theatre of Ephesos bear a long inscription which states that these seats were reserved for citizens—possibly for official representatives—of Keramos by the high priest Ulpius Aristokrates, who held his office on the second celebration of the Hadrianeia in AD 128 (SEG 34, 1168). The representatives of Keramos most likely entered the theatre

⁸ I assume that the genitive Σεβαστοῦ does not refer to a priest of Augustus (ἱερεὺς Σεβαστοῦ), but to a tribe (φυλή Σεβαστοῦ).

all together, took their seats in a ceremonial way, and probably after the respective announcement. One may interpret the seats reserved for the *Apolloniatai* in the theatre of Antiocheia in Pisidia in the same manner (*SEG* 50, 1290, imperial period).

This brings me to another theatre ritual for which some staging was necessary: the invitation to take a seat of honour (*prohedria*). A ceremonial entrance in procession of the men and women for whom a *prohedria* was reserved is very probable. It is implied by the verbs *καλεῖσθαι* ('to be invited') and *εἰσκηρύσσεσθαι* ('to be invited by the herald to enter'), as in an honorary decree of Magnesia on the Maeander: Apollophanes was

to be invited by the herald to take a seat of honour together with the other benefactors in the competitions organised by the people, so that everyone knows that the people thankfully acknowledge the good and virtuous men and show the gratitude that benefactors deserve.

(*I.Magnesia* 92 a)

Everyone would have recognised the people's gratitude only if some kind of an announcement was made, and not if all these men entered the theatre together with the spectators. Their entrance was part of the show, exactly as the public appearances and the competition of the *choregoi* were part of the show in the Classical Athenian dramatic competitions (Wilson 2000: 95–102, 136–43).

Some decrees provide more details about the seat of honour, such as its exact location (e.g. next to the priest of Dionysos in *SEG* 36, 187) or its form (e.g. a throne as in the case of M. Ulpius Eubiotos Leuros in Athens in *IG* II² 82 = *SEG* 30, 82). An Athenian decree shows that the architect elected to be responsible for the sanctuaries had the burdensome task of accommodating the honoured persons (*SEG* 27, 60: *κατανέμειν τὴν προεδρίαν* : see Csapo, below).

The funerary epigram for the high priestess Romana in Side (late third century AD) mentions her office, which she owed to her husband Zosimos, in connection with her appearance in the theatre:

He did not only lead her to the wedding bed, the mother of his children, but he had her carried as a high priestess in the brilliant thymelic competitions, in purple dress, and placed on her head a crown of gold, a worthy present of her prudence.

(*I.Side* 226; Merkelbach and Stauber 2002: 158–9)

The interest of this text goes beyond the proof that high priestesses did not serve in their own right, but as wives of high priests (Herz 1992; Hayward 1998). It gives us an impression of the manner in which magistrates made their entrance to the theatre to receive their seats of honour, with impressive garments and crowns. This epigram makes sense only in the context of a ceremonial entrance—possibly in a procession—of all the persons who had a seat of honour, their names being announced as they entered. Such an entrance is reported about Agrippa I who arrived at a festival celebrated for the emperor in a theatre in AD 44. At daybreak on the second day of the festival, as Josephus narrates (*AJ* 29, 343), Agrippa, clad in robes of shimmering silver, made his way to the theatre to take advantage of the sunrise. The beams of light dancing off his robes as the sun came up made for a wondrous sight. A man in the crowd shouted out: 'You are more than mortal in your being.' Agrippa was punished for his arrogance and died within five days, but for many magistrates their entrance into the theatre was their moment of glory, for example for the priest of Dionysos in Priene (*I.Priene* 174). He was given the right 'to sit in the theatre in a seat of honour and to wear the garment which he chooses and an ivy-crown of gold'.

VERBAL RITUALS AND SPEECH ACTS

The announcement of honours and the invitation to members of the élite, benefactors, and guests of honour were alas not the only verbal rituals to which spectators were exposed, sitting in the hot sun and hungry, not only in a metaphorical sense. Other announcements, more or less important, were made. The Parian decree concerning the festival of Artemis Leukophryene in Magnesia on the Maeander provides, for example, for an announcement of the consecration of the city and the territory and of the new contest during the Dionysia in the theatre (c. 208 BC):

the magistrates should announce the *asylia* and the consecration of the city and the territory of the Magnetes in the theatre when we first celebrate the Great Dionysia in the competition of tragedies, and the envoys,

Molossos, Demetrios and Kallikrates should also announce the *agon* and the *panegyris*.

(*I.Magnesia* 50)

In Philadelpheia, a letter of Caracalla concerning the *neokoreia* of the city, that is its right to have a temple of the emperor, was read in the theatre (*IGR* IV 1619 b, 18 November AD 213).

One of the largest groups of inscriptions concerning the Hellenistic theatre is the dossier of fifty-nine texts from Iasos that record the contributions of citizens for the celebration of the Dionysia and the construction of the theatre (*I.Iasos* 160–218; see Crowther, below). Their chronology is a matter of controversy (Migeotte 1993; Crowther 1995b), but there can be no doubt that we are dealing with a long period of time. In these documents one finds three variants of a stereotypical formula that express the fact that a person who had promised to make a donation in the past fulfilled his promise. One of the variants of this formula explicitly states that the promise (*ἐπίνευσις*) was made during the celebration of the Dionysia (*τῶν ἐπινευσάντων πρότερον ἐν Διονυσίῳ*). The monotonous repetition of this formula suggests a ritual: during or at the end of the competition of the Dionysia, the citizens were publicly asked to make a contribution for the next year. The public performance of such promises is suggested by Theophrastos (*Characters* 22) and Athenaios (*Deipnosophistai* 4.168 f.; cf. Migeotte 1992: 23–4).

In this context one should also mention the manumission records inscribed in or near theatres, for example in Bouthrotos and in Delphi. Some of the Delphic manumission records (e.g. *SEG* 34, 403, first century AD) refer to a law, according to which manumissions were to be inscribed in the theatre in the sanctuary of Apollo (*ἐνχαράξας εἰς τὸ ἱερόν τοῦ Πυθίου Ἀπόλλωνος εἰς τὸ θέατρον κατὰ τὸν νόμον*). The location may be related to the custom to announce the manumissions in the theatre, either in meetings of the assembly or in festivals. The invocations of the Muse Ourania in the theatre of Aphrodisias (Rouché 1993: nos. 2, 4–5) also presuppose acclamations of the spectators at some point of the celebration. We have direct evidence for such acclamations from Perge (*SEG* 50, 1342–3, c. AD 275). Here, the quaestor pro praetore of the provinces of Lykia and Pamphylia, Claudius Cornelianus Latro Apellianus impressed

the population with his building works; the people responded with acclamations inscribed on the balustrade of the theatre, the place where the acclamations probably took place—possibly after a speech of Cornelianus: ‘Be fortunate, Cornelianus; you are constructing an Olympian work for the mother-city (of the province); take a seat of honour (or preside over)!’ (εὐτύχη Κορνηλιανέ· Ὀλύμπιον ἔργον κτίζεις τῇ μητροπόλει· προκάθησε); ‘be fortunate, Cornelianus; the entire building waits for you’ ([εὐτύ]χη Κορνηλιανέ· ὄλον τὸ κτίσμα σὲ περιμένει).

Finally, we find numerous attestations of rituals of consecration that took place in the theatre, perhaps not every year, but quite often. I am referring to the dedication of the entire theatre, of separate sections, or of statues. The theatre of Gerasa was dedicated (ἀφιερῶθη) to Domitian (*SEG* 27, 1009); the ‘birthday’ of the theatre of Aspendos was celebrated as an agonistic festival (*CIG* 4342 d, c. AD 150–175: ἀγὼν γυμνικὸς γενέθλιος τοῦ θεάτρου); in Ephesos a section of the theatre (σελῖς) was dedicated to Artemis Ephesia and an anonymous emperor (*SEG* 48, 1383); and many dedicatory inscriptions from the theatre of Aphrodisias attest the dedications, possibly of parts of the theatre, as they were completed, to Aphrodite, the emperors, the *demos*, and the *patris* (Reynolds 1991). These acts of consecration were ritual acts, including sacrifices, and the same applies to the erection of statues. The honorary decrees for Apolophanes of Magnesia on the Maeander (*I.Magnesia* 92, early second century BC) mention the erection of his bronze statues in the most prominent place in the theatre; bronze statues of Aristomenes and Alexander the Great were dedicated in the theatre of Messene (*SEG* 48, 503–4). Denis Knoepfler (Knoepfler 1997) has suggested that Praxiteles’ statue of Eros was removed from Thespiai by L. Mummius in 146 BC and given to Athens, where it was displayed under the *skene* of the theatre of Dionysos (Athenaios 13.591A; *Greek Anthology* 16.207), near Praxiteles’ statue of Nike (*IG* II² 3089). In Ephesos, whenever the popular assembly took place in the theatre, statues representing the tribes, other personifications, deities, and local heroes were set up on bases (*I.Ephesos* 28–36).

CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that the stereotypical formulations used in inscriptions when referring to theatre are evidence for stereotypical actions, for rituals:

- rituals of communication between mortals and immortals,
- rituals of communication between subject and ruler/people and élite, and
- rituals of communication between citizens and foreigners.

These stereotypical actions were performed in front of the same audience that watched the theatrical and musical performances and on the same stage on which actors, musicians, mimes, and dancers impressed the audience with their skills and their costumes. This additional programme in the theatre, consisting of sacrifices and libations, the invitation to persons to take seats of honour, the ceremonial entrances of magistrates and benefactors, the announcements of honours and the crowning of benefactors, could not compete with the theatrical and musical performances, but it could certainly be assimilated into or influenced by them. I have suggested in the light of some evidence that there is an interest in the staging of these additional rituals, in the costumes, in the use of the space, the voice, the movement. Although there is no way to prove this, I suspect that this interest in staging originates in the influence of the theatrical performances (cf. Chaniotis 1997). If this is correct, it may have wider implications for the study of historical developments in the Hellenistic and Roman imperial period. After a man had experienced a sacrifice offered in the *thymele*, in a magnificent setting, by a priest with impressive garments and a brilliant crown who has prayed in a room with excellent acoustics—after this ritual experience would a man be satisfied with the sacrifices in the sanctuary, in his club house, and his home? Theatre rituals were perhaps not meant to be spectacles; perhaps the theatre was chosen as their setting only because of the advantages it offers in a practical sense (acoustics, seats, large gatherings of people). But the choice of the space sooner or later had consequences for the form of the rituals.

The theatre is the place of *thea*, the place where people come to watch—usually artistic performances, but not only. This element of *thea*—an impressive show—is not absent in the other activities in this space, as my last example will hopefully show, precisely because it has nothing to do with either artistic performances or ritual actions, but with a trial. The honorary decree of Priene for Krates (*I.Priene* 111, early first century BC) is very fragmentary—especially in its most interesting passage (this is Murphy’s law applied in epigraphy). This passage nonetheless makes clear that Krates successfully defended his city’s interests together with other *ekdikoi* (public advocates) in Erythrai (l. 129: *συνκατώρθωσεν μετὰ τῶν ἐκδικῶν*). Upon the announcement of this good outcome the city rejoiced and celebrated (ll. 129–30: *συνησθέντες τοῖς γεγονῶσι εὐημερήμασι ἑαυτοῖς ἐκ τῆς κρίσεως*). Nothing is unusual in all this, and these phrases would suffice to demonstrate Krates’ achievement. And yet the author of this decree found it necessary to mention the exact location in Erythrai where the trial had taken place (ll. 126–8): ‘he presented the arguments on behalf of the city in the theatre of the Erythraians—in the presence also of a quite large number of other people, indeed of—.’ For the author of the decree it was important to add that Krates had defended his city not only in front of judges, but in front of a large audience. The presence of an audience in the theatre made Krates’ achievement more important, certainly for analogous reasons as an attack against a person in a theatre, that is in front of spectators, called for a more severe punishment.⁹ People witnessed Krates’ success, not in court, but in the theatre, the place of competition, but also the place of spectacles. Krates was not only praised for a successful diplomatic and legal mission, but also for a successful show.

⁹ *Digesta* 47.10.9.1 (Ulp. 57 ad ed.): *sed et si in teatro vel in foro caedit et vulnerat, quamquam non atrociter, atrocem facit.*