

BOOK REVIEW

Theater Outside Athens: Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy. Edited by KATHRYN BOSHER. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xvii + 473. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-0-521-76178-9

Theater Outside Athens shows just how the pendulum has swung in a generation. Twenty-two years ago *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* (ed. by J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin) adopted an exclusively Athenocentric view of theater. This is the first book to view Classical Greek theater from an exclusively non-Athenian perspective. It asks how drama was written, sponsored, performed and received differently in the West, even if (at least some of) it originated in Athens. *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* concluded that drama had much to do with Athenian democratic self-definition. *Theater Outside Athens* shows unequivocally that Classical drama appealed to non-Athenians, people who, for the most part, did not live in democracies, and even people who were not Greek.

The late and much missed Kate Boshier assembled a team of seventeen experts to pursue this question through a thorough re-examination of the historical, literary, archaeological and iconographic evidence. Even though few still believe the comfortable assertion of *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* “that fifth-century plays were written for single performances” in Athens (394), Boshier, in her introductory overview (1–16), identifies another Athenocentrism in the current default supposition that drama performed in the West in the late fifth or fourth century was Athenian drama. Some was and *Theater Outside Athens* explores how and why it was received in the West; some was not, and *Theater Outside Athens* also attempts to establish the existence of a continuing regional theater in the West (Boshier left behind a nearly complete manuscript of a book on this topic).

Section 1 deals with texts and historical contexts. In the first chapter Jonathan Hall sets the stage with a brilliant deconstruction of colonial and postcolonial models of cultural interaction between settlers and indigens and settlers and mother city in which he convincingly problematizes “Greek colonization,” both adjective and noun: the ethnic identities associated with the colonial model were not invented until the sixth and fifth centuries (19–34). In Chapter 2 Kathryn Morgan magisterially reviews the evidence and contexts of the rich and innovative performance tradition of poetic song in the Greek West to the time of the

Deinomenids (35–55). Chapters 3 and 4 examine the fragments of Epicharmus, our most direct testimony to an independent Sicilian theater: in a subtle and enlightening reconstruction of two plots of Epicharmian comedy, Andreas Willi identifies a “colonial” subversion of authority in his treatments of philosophical discourse and Homeric epic (56–75, and incidentally defends, against Hall, the use of [post]-colonial models); Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén complements this with a general study of the fragments for epic, lyric, dramatic and philosophical influences upon Epicharmus; when there are similarities with contemporaries she tends to assume that Epicharmus was the imitator (76–96). In Chapter 5, Kate Boshier discusses Aeschylus’ visits to Syracuse and makes a strong case for a first performance of *Persians* there. The next chapter (112–36) by David Smith analyzes the political manipulation of the genealogy of Xuthos, uncovering *en route* Aeschylus’ propagandizing intentions in promoting a Deinomenid Xuthos in his *Aetnian Women* and Euripides’ in turning him into an Athenian in *Ion*.

Chapters 7 and 8 turn our attention to Dionysius I, the tragedian king. Although we may never know if Dionysius was a good tragedian, despite an overtly politically motivated tradition to the contrary, Anne Duncan shows that he was certainly innovative, even writing contemporary and autobiographical tragedies, and self-consciously represented himself, both on and off stage, as a tragic Just King (137–55). Sara Monoson complements this chapter with evidence from an unexpected source: this fascinating study (156–1–72) shows just how Dionysio-centric Plato’s abstract discussion of tyranny and tyrants is, but also how surprisingly relevant to the volume’s main theme since Plato’s allusions to Dionysius “systematically mobilize the tyrant’s associations with theater” (160).

Part II is focused on the material evidence. Clemente Marconi’s valuable survey (175–207) of the dating and historical and physical contexts of the stone theaters of Sicily identifies a building boom in the second half of the fourth century bc (Acragas, Helorus, Heraclea Minoa, Iaitas, Montagna dei Cavalli, Tyndaris) and a general tendency (unlike e.g. Athens) to place theaters in civic centers and on acropoleis. A major support for the Classical dating of these theaters is the findings of the excavation of Montagna dei Cavalli that receives a preliminary publication by Stefano Vassallo in Chapter 10 (208–25). Unlike other Sicilian theaters, that of Montagna dei Cavalli (Hippana?) was undisturbed until 2007 when systematic excavation permitted a precise dating (second half and probably third quarter fourth century bc), thanks to a votive deposit in the orchestra. The theater is the earliest archaeologically datable theater in Sicily.

In a characteristically lucid discussion Oliver Taplin (Chapter 11, 226–50) asks how and with what resources ancient actors travelled. He makes the important point that so far as our evidence goes we are not to think of ancient troupes wandering at will, like Medieval players, but rather attracted by prize competitions at regular festivals, where they could expect the host city to provide much of the equipment and, most likely, the chorus. In Chapter 12 (251–71) Luigi Todisco asks how the Daunians who purchased so many Greek mythological and theatrical vases understood the iconography. He modifies a theory of Luca Giuliani that funerary orators (possibly even actors) lectured to the bereaved on the mythical subjects depicted on the pots destined for the tomb. Instead, Todisco proposes that the potters themselves, or their sale's agents, studied Iapygian languages and pitched their products directly to the Daunian market. It is not easy to believe that foreigners managed to turn Daunian funerals into either seminars or infomercials.

In Chapter 13, Chris Dearden takes aim at the “argument that claims *all* the comedies depicted on vases from western Greece were Attic in origin” (286, 272–88). This is a bloodless target, so far as I know, and not fully populated by the citation (273) of Olson’s “the plays performed in Syracuse and elsewhere in this period (c. fourth century) were imports from Athens” because Olson’s sentence actually begins “Occam’s razor suggests ...” Dearden does present a number of arguments that might persuade us not to invoke Occam’s razor, but we still await a convincing identification of a non-Athenian comedy as opposed to the “nine or so” (285) that are demonstrably Athenian. The reader may well feel that nine to zero is an impressive score, even if it is not football, and it does not help to point out that we have another two hundred vases that tell us nothing either way as if we were counting abstentions in a plebiscite. But Dearden is clearly right in encouraging scholars to reserve judgment.

In a well-illustrated Chapter 14 (289–342) Richard Green looks at regional and chronological development in the comic vases of the Greek West. Green supposes that the painters of most regional schools saw local performances and reacted in their own way and idiom (Paestan however depends on a more remote “memory” and actual theater experience seems excluded for most Campanian). The regional differences reflect trends in artistic practice but not in the drama that is represented because the diachronic developments in composition, subjects and costume run parallel to those in Athens. The most original and ambitious chapter in the volume is the sixteenth by Bonnie MacLachlan (343–64).

Casting a wide net over the material and textual remains in the Greek West she argues for a particularly strong link between comic performance and initiation ritual (especially prenuptial and funerary rituals linked to the sphere of Kore/Persephone).

Section III, entitled “Hellenistic Reflections,” is not a mere epilogue, but contains two of the best papers in the volume. In the Introduction Boshier asks if our own Athenocentric definition of what constituted “theater” does not unfairly exclude the one clearly distinctive element of the Sicilian comic tradition, namely mime (13). There is no chapter devoted to mime in Section I, but Chapters 16 by David Kutzko (367–90) and 17 by Benjamin Acosta-Hughes (391–408) partly compensate for the gap. Both papers are concerned with the survival of the mime tradition. Kutzko traces the literary heritage of Herodas through iambos, Sicilian mime and Attic comedy, with a significant sidelight on the impact of Sophron on Plato. Acosta-Hughes argues persuasively that Theocritus’ idyls and particularly Theocritus’ “mimes” were designed for performance and not the learned and elite book culture stereotypically associated with Hellenistic poetry.

If there is one flaw with the design of the book it is the lack of much sustained discussion of the influence of Sicilian on Athenian theater. Kutzko, for example, shows numerous parallels with both Aristophanes (e.g. the “female dramas,” 380–1) and the character drama and everyday realism of New Comedy (esp. 383–5), but these are classified as parallel developments, despite an earlier mention of the possibility that Sophron directly influenced Attic comedy (367). The pursuit of Sicilian drama’s influence on Attic seems to have been excluded from the contributors’ mandate, even despite the encouraging lead from Aristotle, often quoted, that Epicharmus introduced plots to Attic comedy. There may not have been much to say, given the state of the evidence, but, perhaps paradoxically, the avoidance of the topic seems rather to be an unfortunate consequence of the book’s programmatic reaction to Athenocentrism.

This catalogue of topics does little justice to this rich collection of material and especially to thematic links and internal dialogue between papers. Even a topic that was expressly placed outside the ambit of the volume (10) kept re-emerging under multiple perspectives, namely the reception of theater by non-Greek Sicilians and Italians. The majority of our theatrical vases were found in “native” Italy, after all, and so were some of our production centres. Todisco, whose chapter dealt with this issue directly, argues that before the 330s bc the Daunians and Peucetians who imported Attic and Apulian theatrical vases did

not have the cultural or linguistic prerequisites for a direct experience of Greek theater; this view is shared to some extent by Green (esp. 316 n. 48).

In an appendix to his paper Taplin points out some shortcomings in Todisco's treatment: the neglect, for example, of the many name labels on the imported vases. If Todisco is right, then the situation is very different from Sicily where Hall argues for extensive bilingualism, cohabitation and intermarriage even in the Archaic period (28) and Marconi argues that the material culture shows local populations to be thoroughly Hellenized "by the middle of the fifth century bc" (176). Vasallo's theater site in Hippana, a Sicel city, appears to give excellent evidence for non-Greek receptivity to theater, and even more so the remarkable fact (224) that it was built at a time when the territory was directly controlled by Carthage. But then so was the Sicel city of Iaitas when its theater was built at in the late fourth century bc (189).

This volume is an important landmark in the scholarship on ancient theater. It inaugurates the study of regional theater in antiquity. The book was edited with a loving care that allowed very few errors of any sort. The fifty-four illustrations are generally high-quality reproductions.

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