

# Political games

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique**

Band (Jahr): **58 (2012)**

PDF erstellt am: **02.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-660651>

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## II

ONNO M. VAN NIJF

### POLITICAL GAMES<sup>1</sup>

#### *Political culture and political theatre*

There was a strong taste for the spectacular in the Greek city after the classical age that found its chief expression in the dramatic increase of festivals with athletic and artistic competitions.<sup>2</sup> This 'agonistic explosion', as it was dubbed by Louis Robert, left a clear mark on political and institutional life in post-classical Greek cities, particularly in the Roman period. One of the more obvious symptoms of this development was the rise to prominence of the gymnasiarch and the agonothete, i.e. the officials and functionaries who occupied themselves with athletic festivals and their infrastructure. Quass describes these functions as liturgical *archai* (leiturgische Ämter), since the officials appear to have been elected by political means,

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Harry Pleket, Sofia Voutsaki, Kaja Harter-Uibopuu, Christina Williamson and Eleni van Nijf for their help with this paper. The comments of my colleagues at the 2011 *Entretiens* have caused me to reconsider some of my formulations. I have, however, kept the tenor of the original, so as not to pre-empt the discussion that is appended.

<sup>2</sup> A. CHANIOTIS, "Sich selbst feiern? Städtische Feste des Hellenismus im Spannungsfeld von Religion und Politik", in *Stadt und Bürgerbild im Hellenismus*, hrsg. von M. WÖRRLE und P. ZANKER (München 1995), 147-172; A. CHANIOTIS, "Negotiating Religion in the Cities of the Eastern Roman Empire", in *Kernos* 16 (2003), 177-190. The agonistic explosion: L. ROBERT, "Discours d'ouverture", in *Πρακτικά του Η' διεθνούς συνεδρίου Ελληνικής και Λατινικής επιγραφικής. Αθήνα, 3-9 Οκτωβρίου 1982, Τόμος Α'* (Athena 1984), 35-45, esp. 35-36 = *Opera Minora Selecta*, VI (Amsterdam 1989), 700-719, esp. 700-701.

but were expected to foot the bill themselves.<sup>3</sup> The traditional explanation of this phenomenon is that the cities lacked the resources to pay for these extravaganzas from their own pockets,<sup>4</sup> yet the overall financial situation was, in fact, not all that bad, and it has recently even been argued that benefactors provided mostly just the icing on the cake.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, even if many festivities were funded by the treasury, the fact remains that the officials appointed to organize and supervise them tended to use their term of office to embellish, expand, and enlarge existing festivals at their own expense. The most striking example of this festive euergetism may be found in the many spectacles that were organized and funded by private benefactors. In south-west Asia Minor alone, hundreds of these prize contests (*themides*) are known. For example, at least fifteen local agonistic contests are attested just for the city of Termessos, all named after their local founders.<sup>6</sup> A recent study by Hall and Milner mentions another ten in nearby Oinoanda.<sup>7</sup> The total number of local games all over Roman Asia Minor can only be surmised, but it must have been considerable.<sup>8</sup> In this paper I will argue that these large numbers

<sup>3</sup> F. QUASS, *Die Honoratiorenschicht in den Städten des griechischen Ostens. Untersuchungen zur politischen und sozialen Entwicklung in hellenistischer und römischer Zeit* (Stuttgart 1993).

<sup>4</sup> W. TARN, *Hellenistic Civilisation*, rev. by the author and G.T. GRIFFITH (London 1966); P. VEYNE, *Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris 1976).

<sup>5</sup> A. ZUIDERHOEK, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire. Citizens, Elites and Benefactors in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 2009).

<sup>6</sup> R. HEBERDEY, "Gymnische und andere Agone in Termessus Pisidiae", in *Anatolian Studies Presented to Sir William Mitchell Ramsay* (Manchester 1923), 195-206.

<sup>7</sup> A. HALL and N.P. MILNER, "Education and Athletics. Documents Illustrating the Festivals of Oenoanda", in *Studies in the History and Topography of Lycia and Pisidia in Memoriam A.S. Hall*, ed. by D. FRENCH (Ankara 1994), 7-47.

<sup>8</sup> H.W. PLEKET, "Einige Betrachtungen zum Thema: 'Geld und Sport'", in *Nikephoros* 17 (2004), 77-89; A. FARRINGTON, "Θέμιδες and the Local Elites of Lycia, Pamphylia and Pisidia", in *Pathways to Power. Civic Elites in the Eastern Part of the Roman Empire. Proceedings of the International Workshop held at Athens Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene 19 December 2005*, ed. by A.D. RIZAKIS and F. CAMIA (Athens 2008), 241-249.

of contests and other spectacles (whether funded by private or public means) not only had an impact on civic life, but were moreover events of major political significance, entirely embedded in the statecraft of the imperial Greek city. They were all, so to speak, political games.

Our knowledge of these festivals derives from several types of source. Among the most common are of course the numerous individual victory monuments that were set up for the successful athletes in the cities, and the many local coins that commemorated civic games.<sup>9</sup> More information on the procedures is given in the inscriptions that record aspects of the foundation of a particular festival in individual cities. Very often these documents disclose who the organisers were and which processes led to the establishment of the festival. The often long inscriptions show the great impact of such festivals on political life in institutional terms (e.g. the need for extra officials such as market supervisors, or religious officials), but also in terms of political deliberation. Some texts offer a glimpse of the political processes that often remain hidden. The entire dossier of the Demostheneia of Oinoanda, for example, reveals how the negotiations took place between the donor and the city, which apparently did not accept every festival that was offered to her simply as a matter of course. Demosthenes ultimately had to rely on the support of Hadrian to get his way with his fellow citizens. Similar procedural elements are visible in the organisation of the procession that Vibius Salutaris set up in Ephesus. In the prelude of the decree that confirmed the acceptance of his offer we read:

“Concerning all these things, having privately proposed the bequest, he has asked that it be ratified by a decree of the *boule* and the *demos*, and now the governors of the province... have ordered us to introduce with their sanction the motion concerning his dedications.”

<sup>9</sup> W. LESCHHORN, “Die Verbreitung von Agonen in den östlichen Provinzen des römischen Reiches”, in *Stadion* 24 (1998), 31-57. See also J. NOLLÉ in this volume.



The whole procedure from the first presentation of the festival to its final acceptance by the civic authorities appears to have been an extended affair, not to mention the fact that each festival put a huge administrative burden upon the city officials.<sup>10</sup>

It is tempting to see the increase in political attention for spectacles and festivals as a symptom of the decline and fall of the old Greek *polis*, and *polis* politics, which many believe to have been unavoidable after Chaeronea. Previous scholarship on the political history of the Greek *polis* after the classical age has tended to consider any political activity irrelevant, dismissing it as mere show or empty ritual.<sup>11</sup> Political deliberation was, in this view, largely spent on such trivial matters by an order of notables who thought it “better to amuse people than to govern [them]”.<sup>12</sup> Assemblies continued to meet, but they were only meant to rubberstamp decisions taken by the councillors; the voice of the *demos* was only heard during carefully orchestrated acclamations, expressing admiration for the notables or loyalty to Rome. The notables assumed the costs of office from their own pockets, and stepped in as benefactors when city funds were insufficient to pay for cheap food, buildings, and festivals. In other words, political life in the Greek city had changed beyond recognition. The *polis*, once the home of democracy, was now dominated by an oligarchic clique supported by an oppressive empire, but was devoid of any real power. Political life had turned into political theatre: elite status involved role-playing. Local politics had, in this view, become a spectator sport.

<sup>10</sup> G.M. ROGERS, “Demosthenes of Oenoanda and Models of Euergetism”, in *JRS* 81 (1991), 91-100; K. HARTER-UIBOPUU, “Zum Gerichtswesen im kaiserzeitlichen Sparta”, in *Symposium 2005. Vorträge zur griechischen und hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte* (Salerno, 14.-18. September 2005), hrsg. von E. CANTARELLA (Wien 2007), 335-348.

<sup>11</sup> O.M. VAN NIJF and R. ALSTON, “Political Culture in the Greek City after the Classical Age. Introduction and Preview”, in *Political Culture in the Greek City after the Classical Age*, ed. by O.M. VAN NIJF and R. ALSTON (Leuven 2011), 1-26.

<sup>12</sup> W. TARN and G.T. GRIFFITH, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 115.

Discussing the changes as exclusively negative and in terms of decline, however, is of little help in interpreting what was really going on at the time. Had local politics indeed been reduced to empty rituals devoid of political meaning, it is hard to understand why someone like Plutarch even bothered to write advice to local politicians, why any of the thousands of notables pursued a political career and invested their time and money, or why tens of thousands of ordinary citizens thought it worth their while to show up in the assemblies and vote. Indeed, historians are now gradually abandoning long-held views about the supposed decline of the Greek city, and there is a revival of interest in the political history of the Greek city in the later period. Scholars have begun to agree that the Hellenistic *polis* was vibrant, at least until the advent of Rome. Recent scholarship now seems to argue for greater continuity of political forms and institutions well into the empire itself.<sup>13</sup> It is well known that, even at the end of the third century AD, when *polis* status was in the gift of the emperor, political decisions were still taken locally by the *boule* and the *demos* in an assembly. Political institutions, and the formulae of political decision making, would have been recognizable to Greeks of an earlier age. Indeed, contemporary observers took local politics very seriously. The epigraphic record shows that the historical actors invested widely in their cities in terms of time, money, and effort, and that patriotism was thriving. In general, we have every reason to assume that political activity and local citizenship remained a major source of personal identity and collective pride.<sup>14</sup> The civic — dare I say democratic? — spirit had not totally vanished.

<sup>13</sup> V. GRIEB, *Hellenistische Demokratie. Politische Organisation und Struktur in freien griechischen Poleis nach Alexander dem Grossen* (Stuttgart 2008); S. CARLSSON, *Hellenistic Democracies. Freedom, Independence and Political Procedure in Some East Greek City-States* (Stuttgart 2010); A. ZUIDERHOEK, "On the Political Sociology of the Imperial Greek City", in *GRBS* 48 (2008), 417-445.

<sup>14</sup> E.C.L. VAN DER VLIET, "Pride and Participation. Political Practice, Euergetism, and Oligarchisation in the Hellenistic Polis", in *Political Culture*, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 155-184.

*Political culture*

We need to be aware, however, that there had been significant changes, as well as continuities, and we need to address both these aspects in order to make sense of politics in the post-classical *polis*. If local politics adopted a taste for the spectacular, and if it had evolved into a kind of political theatre, then we should put this development at the centre of our investigations into politics as it really was, rather than viewing it as a decline from what it ought to have been. Politics is not only defined by the institutions that it uses to run the state machinery, but also by its wider cultural context — the values and norms that influence the way in which it is conducted. We must complement, then, our conventional analysis of structures and institutions, and study political aspects of the imperial Greek city from a wider cultural perspective, which gives a place to spectacle and performance. I refer to the notion of ‘political culture’, which encapsulates a ‘menu of approaches’ developed in political science, but also adopted by historians. “Involving both the ideals and the operating norms of a political system, political culture includes subjective attitudes and sentiments as well as objective symbols and creeds that together govern political behaviour and give structure and order to the political process”.<sup>15</sup> In modern political historiography, the concept has been enthusiastically received, because it liberates historians from the limits of a narrow analysis of formal institutions and practices, while legitimizing the inclusion of new sources and the discussion of new subjects, including games and festivals. Of course, the observation that politics does not only rely on institutions is not new. Already in the nineteenth century Bagehot warned historians that not only the ‘efficient’, but also the ‘dignified’ elements of a political system should be scrutinized.<sup>16</sup> Politics is thus analyzed as a form

<sup>15</sup> L.W. PYE, “Political Culture”, in *The Oxford Companion to the Politics of the World*, ed. by J. KRIEGER (Oxford 2001), 661–662.

<sup>16</sup> W. BAGEHOT, *The English Constitution* (London 1867).



of culture with ritual, symbolic, and ludic elements, the development of which still needs to be charted. Indeed, a particularly popular metaphor for politics in this type of analysis is that of spectacle or theatre. While this metaphor may be applied to every age, historians agree that some periods develop a stronger taste for the spectacular or theatrical. British politics in the nineteenth century may have been one example, with the rise of the political sketch-writer as a kind of theatre critic; the development of modern-day television democracies is another example.<sup>17</sup> I suggest that we analyze politics in the post-classical city also for its spectacular and theatrical components. A cultural approach to politics in the post-classical *polis* then provides us with a new set of conceptual and analytical tools, allowing us to draw on a much wider range of cultural and social practices for political analysis. It also encourages us to use new sources, including material culture, and offers a new approach to the study of public inscriptions and monuments, our most common type of evidence. Looking at politics as part of a wider political culture reminds us that we should not only mine the texts for information on institutions, administrative concerns, and individual careers, but contextualize them in their wider settings (cultural, political, and material), and approach them as elements of a continuing public discourse that addressed and informed the 'values, expectations, and implicit rules that express and share collective intentions and actions'.<sup>18</sup>

### *Athletes and politicians on a pedestal*

There are several ways in which the spectacular was intertwined with the political in the imperial Greek cities. I have

<sup>17</sup> H. TE VELDE, *Het theater van de politiek* (Amsterdam 2003); D. PELS and H. TE VELDE (red.), *Politieke stijl: over presentatie en optreden in de politiek* (Amsterdam 2000).

<sup>18</sup> L. HUNT, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley 1984).



argued above that public festivals became an important object of political decision-making, but there is also evidence that politics itself adopted a more 'spectacular' character, and in particular that politicians started to make — so to speak — a spectacle of themselves. Politicians, or rather the members of elite families who dominated political life to a large extent, began to play a different role in the cities — not in terms of formal political power, but rather in the way they behaved, and in the styles and roles in which they wished to be publicly portrayed. Peter Brown has admirably captured the changes in atmosphere with his expression, 'the age of ambition', referring, of course, to the notion of *philotimia* which was a driving force behind much of the elite's behaviour. Honour was to be found in acts of generosity and public service, but it was also a matter of lifestyle, of public role-playing, and of the development of a particular political style. Of course, we can no longer observe local politicians in action, nor explore all the roles they performed, but we can get an idea as to how the political class was publicly representing itself by considering honorific language and, in particular, its material expression in the form of honorific inscriptions.

In this part of my paper I want to argue that there is a strong tendency to merge athletic and political representations. One of the most striking characteristics of the urban landscape of the imperial Greek city was the proliferation of statues and inscriptions. Lining the streets, framing the agoras, and adorning public buildings were monuments that commemorated the deeds, names, and faces of local heroes. Among them we find local priests, magistrates, and benefactors, as well as the members of their families, but also a surprisingly large number of athletes. When we look at honorific inscriptions in our epigraphic corpora, it is easy to forget that each text was part of a much larger monument with a prominent visual impact. Moreover, these were public monuments, and we may expect that each monument was the result of long

discussions, i.e. the investment of political time and of private and public energy and money. They were part and parcel of politics, and an example of the particular political culture of the Graeco-Roman city.

Most of the scholarship on these monuments has been concerned with the factual information that they provide on institutional life and individual careers (including those of athletes), but honorific monuments also offer insights into the political culture. It should be noted that honorific monuments carried a political statement: as public monuments they were the expression of values and ideologies shared by the honorands and the honouring communities. To put it more strongly, they were 'civic mirrors', i.e. they were as much a statement of how leaders ought to behave, as a reflection of their actual behaviour.

So the question is: what are the qualities that were expected of the political leaders in the Roman East? All over the Roman East the monuments highlighted obvious political virtues such as patriotism (in the form of benefactions, political office, and other outstanding services to the city), exemplary piety, and priestly functions — and, of course, loyalty to Rome. A salient feature of the honorific language of the time, however, is the commemoration of athletic achievements found in so many texts. The statue for the victorious athlete must have been among the most common sights along the colonnaded streets and in the open squares that characterized the great rebuilding of the Roman East. A good and accessible example is Aphrodisias, where Charlotte Roueché's excellent study, *Performers and Partisans*, allows us to grasp the importance of agonistics for the image of the local elites.<sup>19</sup> My own studies of the epigraphic representation in the small city of Termessos, with an excellently preserved record of honorific monuments, show that up to 50% of the monuments referred to athletic victory.

<sup>19</sup> CH. ROUECHÉ, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods. A Study Based on Inscriptions from the Current Excavations at Aphrodisias in Caria* (London 1993).

I suggest that an honorific map in other cities might yield a similar image as well.<sup>20</sup>

There are various ways to look at these monuments. Some statues display the athletes in action, drawing attention to the moment of competition; others emphasize victory by representing the athlete as crowning himself. A great number of monuments adopt the Lysippan image of the *apoxyomenos*, thus marking the moment of transition from the role of athlete to that of a private citizen.<sup>21</sup> We can also differentiate between different types of athletes. Some monuments would have been set up for the real heroes — the champions of the international athletic circuit. Even the smallest city might have one or two native stars to commemorate. A great example of this is the spectacularly detailed honorific inscription that was set up by the city of Sardeis for the top athlete, M. Aurelius Damostratos Damas.<sup>22</sup> It is worth quoting the text in full, to get an idea of the range of contests and the status of the star athletes of the Roman Empire.

“(A) M. Aurelius Demostratos Damas, high priest of the entire athletic association, president of the athletic association for life and supervisor of the imperial baths, pankratiast, twice period victor, boxer without a lost match, victor *extraordinaire*, citizen of Sardeis, Alexandria... Pergamon Corinth (?)... Argos, Sparta... Elis, having obtained in all... victories, of which [67] in sacred contests. In Italy, Hellas, Asia, and Alexandria, including the following: the Olympia at Pisa [... times], the Pythia at Delphi three times, the Isthmia, five times, the Nemeia [... times]; the Aspis at Argos three times; in Rome the Capetolia twice, in Puteoli twice, in Nea Polis [... times], the Actia twice,

<sup>20</sup> O.M. VAN NIJF, “Inscriptions and Civic Memory in the Roman East”, in *The Afterlife of Inscriptions*, ed. by A. COOLEY (London 2000), 21-36; O.M. VAN NIJF, “Public Space and Political Culture in Roman Termessos”, in *Political Culture*, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 215-242.

<sup>21</sup> O.M. VAN NIJF, “Quelques notes préliminaires sur la nudité athlétique comme problème”, in *S’habiller, se déshabiller dans les mondes anciens*, éd. par F. GHERCHANOC et V. HUET (Paris in press).

<sup>22</sup> *I. Sardis* 79; cf. J.-Y. STRASSER, “La carrière du pancratiaste Markos Aurélios Dèmostratos Damas”, in *BCH* 127 (2003), 251-299.



in Athens ten times: of which the Panathenaia [... times], the Panhellenia three times, the Olympeia [... times], the Hadria-neia, once; in Rhodes the Haleia three times; at Sardeis the Chrysanthinos four times, at Ephesos nine times; at Smyrna six times; at Pergamon the Augusteiea three times; at Alexandria [... times]; at Rome in the triumphal contests of our Lords the emperors Antoninus and Commodus he was crowned with a golden crown and he obtained the gold prize. Upon request he obtained from our most divine Lords, the emperors Severus and Antoninus, the right to transfer his high priesthood and his presidency of the athletic association to his sons. His statue was erected by his sons: Aurelius Damas, high priest of the entire athletic association, president of the athletic association for life, supervisor of the imperial baths, multiple victor and victor *extraordinaire*, Marcus Demonstratianos, multiple victor and victor *extraordinaire*, Demonstratos Hegemonides multiple victor and victor *extraordinaire*, and Damianos, president of the athletic association.

(B) And of all the prize games [where he competed in the pankration in the categories of boys and men]: [unknown] three times; at [Larissa] in Thessaly, three times; at Thespieae, the Erotideia once; [unknown] once; [unknown] twice; [unknown ending in AS] once; [unknown] four times; [unknown ending in N] once; [unknown] once (now a sacred contest); [unknown] once (now a sacred contest); at [Byza]ntion once (now a sacred contest); at [Peri]nthos once (now a sacred contest); [the Olymp]eia of Macedonia [...]; [unknown] twice; the contests [of the *koinon*] of the Arcadians in Mantineia three times; at Sparta(?) six times: the [Euryk]leia twice (now a sacred contest); [unknown ending in IIA?] twice; [unknown ending in EIA] three times; at [Demetri]as in Macedonia once; in the [unknown ending in EIA] in the Isthmos four times; at [unknown ending in ONA] once.

(C) The only and first ever of men to have won twenty contests in the category of boys, and having progressed from the category of boys to the category of adult men, he won forty-eight sacred contests, among them the boxing in the Pythian games at Delphi, in the Isthmian Games, in the Nemean Games; in the Hadreianeios Philadelpheios of Alexandria. And he was honoured by the Divine Marcus and the Divine Commodus with citizenship at Alexandria on the terms of a native Alexandrian, and with the presidency of the athletic association of the contests listed below:



the Capetolia in Rome, the Chrysanthinos in Sardeis; the contests of the *koinon* of Asia in Sardeis; the Didymeia in Miletos, the Hadrianeios Philadelphios in Alexandria, the Sebasteios in Alexandria, the Seleukeios in Alexandria, the contests of Antinoopolis, and all the contests in Egypt, the contests of the *koinon* of Asia in Tralleis, the contests of the *koinon* of Bithynia in Nikomedeia, the Eurykleia in Sparta. He was honoured by the divine Severus and our most divine Lord Antoninus with many other great honours and with the presidency of the athletic association at the Eusebeia at Puteoli and the Sebasta at Neapolis."

Damas was, of course, one of the most successful athletes of the Roman Empire, but every city was in fact keen on commemorating and listing the international successes of its foremost athletes, and so Damas' honorific inscriptions were rooted in a vocabulary that was widely shared throughout the Roman East. It should be noted, however, that the majority of athletic honorific inscriptions were set up for local heroes: athletes from the local gymnasia, boys and young men of ephebic age, who only starred in local competitions.<sup>23</sup> Most of them were of course scions of elite families, as the gymnasia catered mainly to the needs of the *jeunesse dorée*. The prize lists of *gymnasion* contests suggest that they were joined by the sons of wealthier craftsmen and traders, but public individual recognition of their athletic exploits was by and large the preserve of members of the local elite families. It is, however, a sign of the times that many monuments commemorated the athletic successes of (adult) priests and magistrates. Athletic victory, priestly functions, and magisterial generosity could be mentioned on one and the same monument, an indication that these were seen as commensurable qualities.

An inscription from Termessos illustrates how these elements could come together: a certain M. Aurelius Moles, member of one of the city's foremost families, was identified as

<sup>23</sup> O. VAN NIJF, "Local Heroes. Athletics, Festivals and Elite Self-Fashioning in the Roman East", in *Being Greek under Rome*, ed. by S. GOLDHILL (Cambridge 2001), 306-334.

a priest and praised for his athletic exploits at home and abroad.<sup>24</sup> Before we dismiss this as the irrelevant exception from an Anatolian backwater, it may be useful to remember that Moles places himself in a venerable tradition that included such luminaries as the Kolophonian politicians, Polemaios and Menippos, who, despite their philosophical and political activities, were also eager to have their athletic successes publicly commemorated.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, and tellingly, statues for athletes were not only found in gymnasia, where one would expect them, but throughout the city in the most conspicuous places, alongside the statues for magistrates, priests, and benefactors, which suggests that the achievements of victorious athletes were deemed to have been of the same order. Everywhere in the Roman East citizens were presented with images of their leaders as well-trained athletes, and apparently there was no perceived conflict between these different spheres. In fact, an athlete was *ipso facto* a public figure, as is indicated by a passage in Dio Chrysostom, where a practising athlete is contrasted with an *idiotes* (private citizen).<sup>26</sup> The boxer Melankomas showed his excellence in training:

"He was just like one of the most carefully wrought statues, and also he had a colour like well-blended bronze, moreover [he] was more courageous and bigger than any other man in the world, not merely than any of his opponents; and furthermore, he was the most beautiful. And if he had remained a private citizen (*idiotes*) and had not gone in for boxing at all... he would have become widely known simply on account of his beauty."

It is no surprise, then, that in a second oration we learn that Melankomas' death was seen as a loss for the entire community. How can we explain this? As I have argued elsewhere, athletics was a quintessentially Greek cultural activity that helped the elite to stake out its claim to Greek *paideia* in search

<sup>24</sup> TAM III, 168.

<sup>25</sup> L. ROBERT et J. ROBERT, *Claros I. Décrets hellénistiques*, 1 (Paris 1989).

<sup>26</sup> DIO CHR. Or. 28, 5: cf. Or. 29.

of social distinction.<sup>27</sup> I would like to suggest here, however, that athletics also had a distinct civic and political dimension. Athletics was a successful combination of aristocratic and civic ideologies. Athletic victory served to denote individual excellence, but at the same time represented it as a primordial civic quality, because it was established in a public context, open to all and to be seen by all. Athletic skills constituted, therefore, an attractive asset in the political discourse of the time, where attempts at oligarchization and hierarchization still had to be framed in terms that were acceptable to the *demos* in the assembly. As the example of Melankomas shows, perfect citizens also had perfect bodies. Now your average notable was no Melankomas, but the fact that the commemoration of athletic success was so popular reflected the persistence of the 'Greek dream' that individual valour was established in open contest, while effectively limiting its social value to a narrow circle of notables who were able to secure public commemoration. Athletic success put the elite literally and metaphorically on a pedestal — and this was pure politics.

### *Political spectacles as rational rituals*

Can we explore the link between politics and athletic competition in the post-classical Greek city in other ways? If local politics indeed developed a theatrical style, with a growing emphasis on spectacle and performance and on the representation of political roles, we should also expect the world of festivals and spectacles itself to become increasingly politicized. This was indeed the case. Public ceremonies and other ritualized collective practices, such as processions, banquets, and agonistic festivals, had always had a civic function, but in the period with

<sup>27</sup> O. VAN NIJF, *art. cit.* (n. 23); O.M. VAN NIJF, "Athletics, Andreia and the Askesis-Culture in the Roman East", in *Andreia. Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*, ed. by R.M. ROSEN and I. SLUITER (Leiden 2003), 263-286.



which we are concerned this role increased at the expense of other dimensions.<sup>28</sup> Festivals retained a religious core, of course, but political or civic ingredients seem to have been more and more visible: the growing prominence of liturgical magistrates, such as the *agonothetai* (discussed above), at the expense of priests is only one symptom of this development. But the whole atmosphere seems to have changed: Angelos Chaniotis aptly describes this as a growing 'functionalization' of the festival that now "offered the *polis* the proper opportunity to undertake a diplomatic mission, to attract visitors, to demonstrate loyalty towards a king, to organize a fair, to represent itself, to transmit traditions to the youth, to strengthen its cohesion, to distract the attention of the poor from their problems."<sup>29</sup> Under Roman rule, organizers kept emphasizing their piety towards the traditional deities, although the latter were now joined by the 'imperial gods',<sup>30</sup> which had a massive impact on agonistic festivals. As has been pointed out by Robert and Mitchell, the imperial cult seems to have been a major factor behind the extraordinary rise of agonistic festivals, immediately followed by the foundations of private benefactors who organised the large numbers of *themides*, or other local festivals.<sup>31</sup> The populace may have been grateful for the fact that these spectacles dispelled their tedium,<sup>32</sup> but the overall effect was that these rituals also helped the benefactors to establish themselves as the ruling order. The question is: how do cultural practices such as rituals and ceremonies constitute power?<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> A. CHANIOTIS, "Negotiating Religion", *art. cit.* (n. 2).

<sup>29</sup> A. CHANIOTIS, "Sich selbst feiern", *art. cit.* (n. 2), 162.

<sup>30</sup> P.A. HARLAND, "Imperial Cults within Local Cultural Life. Associations in Roman Asia", *Ancient History Bulletin* 17 (2003), 85-107; S. PRICE, *Rituals and Power. The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984).

<sup>31</sup> L. ROBERT, "Discours d'ouverture" (see n. 2), 35-36; S. MITCHELL, "Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor", *JRS* 80 (1990), 183-193; for local games, see n. 8 above.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *CIL* IX 1589 (p. 695) = *CIL* X 521b. A certain Tanonius Marcellinus was praised because his entertainments had dispelled the *longa populi taedia*.

<sup>33</sup> M.S.-Y. CHWE, *Rational Ritual. Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* (Princeton 2001).



Cultural anthropologists like Geertz have suggested that spectacular demonstrations of power (such as the royal progress or the imperial burial) can be read as a text, a cultural fiction that was offered to the population as a blueprint for how to live their lives.<sup>34</sup> Ancient historians have followed suit.<sup>35</sup> This is a powerful model, but it can be criticized on the grounds that it is not very successful in explaining change, except as the result of top-down symbolic action, nor does it explain sufficiently how it is that large audiences are so affected by these spectacles that they adapt their behaviour. At this point, I want to draw on the work of Michael Chwe, whose model of the 'rational ritual' addresses exactly these questions. The twin notions of rational ritual and common knowledge will allow me to sketch a more nuanced and dynamic picture of the role of ceremonies and festivals in the political culture of the Graeco-Roman city.

As a game theorist, Chwe is interested in the issue of coordination among humans. In his work he focuses on the processes that are used to generate common knowledge, which is a prerequisite for collective action. Getting people to take a particular course of action, e.g. support a common goal, share in a group identity, support a political regime (or, on the contrary, undertake action to subvert it), presents, in Chwe's view, a coordination problem. Chwe argues that to get common action, or a common will, 'common knowledge' is needed first. This is to be distinguished from 'shared knowledge', in the sense that it requires not simply that 'everybody knows', but rather that this knowledge is also present at a meta-level: i.e. it is important that "everybody knows that everybody knows the same thing as well". For collective action, it is important that people know that other people agree with them, for only then

<sup>34</sup> C. GEERTZ, *Negara. The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton 1980).

<sup>35</sup> S. PRICE, "From Noble Funerals to Divine Cult. The Consecration of Roman Emperors", in *Rituals of Royalty. Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. by D. CANNADINE and S. PRICE (Cambridge 1987), 56-105.

are they inclined to take a common course of action. Accordingly, in this view political legitimacy depends on general agreement between the rulers and the ruled, on common knowledge that everyone will take the written and unwritten rules of the political game seriously. It is, therefore, in the interest of political rulers to ensure that everybody shares their view of society, and that alternative views do not become 'common knowledge.'

There are, of course, various ways in which information can be shared and common knowledge can be created, e.g. by means of coinage, inscriptions, advertising, gossip, or nowadays Twitter, but Chwe argues that rituals often perform this role. The importance of rituals is that they let individuals interact with each other. A public ritual is first and foremost an occasion where all the members of a community are required to be present in one place and jointly learn the cultural information contained in the spectacle — but they are especially required to learn that everybody else has learnt the same thing.

Rituals help in social and political integration by making public the values and implicit rules that express and share collective intentions and actions and by making sure that everyone knows that these values are shared by all concerned. It is important in this context to note that agonistic (and other civic) festivals were not simply spectacular entertainment displayed to a passive population, but that they demanded an active role by the ordinary population. Angelos Chaniotis, among others, has noted that festivals became heavily scripted events that involved the participation of large parts of the population in fixed roles.<sup>36</sup> Sacred laws and civic decrees that dealt with their organization read, in the words of Chaniotis, like dramatic scripts with increasing elaboration. Many texts show that processions, distributions, banquets, and contests became strictly regulated according to hierarchical principles, carefully listing all the participants and stipulating their role in the spectacles. This trend

<sup>36</sup> A. CHANIOTIS, "Sich selbst feiern", *art. cit.* (n. 2).

began in the Hellenistic period, but culminated under the Empire. One of the most striking examples may be found in the provisions for the organization of a quadrennial theatrical festival that were left by the benefactor C. Iulius Demosthenes of Oinoanda (mentioned above). Among the regulations, we find exceptionally detailed instructions for a civic procession, in which a portable altar and imperial images were to be escorted by the festival officials, civic priests (the imperial priest and priestess and the priest of Zeus), and political functionaries of the city, as well as by representatives of the dependent villages in Oinoanda's territory, each with one or more sacrificial bulls.<sup>37</sup> The procession encapsulated civic identity in terms of its political hierarchy, all participants being the representatives of institutional or local groups.<sup>38</sup> Other festivals contained similar regulations.<sup>39</sup> These processions, then, were scripted by and for the elites, who were thus hoping to impose their sense of order on their fellow citizens. By performing a particular public role in the festival, the participants showed that they had accepted the political order of which the festival was an expression — and the public nature of the festival made sure that their acceptance was common knowledge, making it harder for people to dissent.

I wish to argue that spectacles such as athletic competitions also served to foster civic identity. In this case, a special role was played not so much by the performers, but by the spectators, the members of the audience of the shows, contests, and spectacles that were so often put on in the cities of the Roman East. Again, I draw on Chwe, who insists that one important and practically universal way in which rituals create common knowledge is through the spatial organization of the participants in an

<sup>37</sup> *SEG* 38, 1462 ll. 65-75. Translation: Mitchell. See M. WÖRRLE, *Stadt und Fest in kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien. Studien zu einer agonistischen Stiftung aus Oinoanda* (München 1988).

<sup>38</sup> G.M. ROGERS, *art. cit.* (n. 10), 96-99.

<sup>39</sup> Ephesos: Vibius Salutaris *IK-Ephesos* 27; Akraephia: Epaminondas *IG VII* 2712; Gytheion: Eurykles *SEG* 11, 923.



inward-facing circle, which enables everyone not only to see, but also to be seen. The inward-facing circle not only reaches many people at the same time, but it also allows for intervisibility, which generates common knowledge in the sense that all spectators know that they have all seen the same thing, so that they can adjust their behaviour accordingly.<sup>40</sup> No place in the Graeco-Roman city was more suited to this purpose than the auditoria of theatres, amphitheatres, and stadia, which were the prime setting for musical or athletic contests, but which also functioned as important stations for civic and religious processions, providing benefactors with a suitable location to present handouts and distributions or toss out small gifts (*rhimmata*) to the citizenry. The great rebuilding of the Roman East added other types of auditorium to the repertoire. Stadia and hippodromes were built for athletic contests and horse racing; amphitheatres were rarely built in the East, but existing theatres were adapted for gladiatorial shows, which were an indispensable element in the celebrations connected with the imperial cult. Moreover, theatres were also frequently the sites of assembly meetings, yet another reminder of the closeness of the political and the spectacular. Going to the theatre, or to gladiatorial games, meant more, therefore, than being entertained. These were places that defined a whole sector of civic activity, and they demanded appropriate dress, gestures, and decorum of the spectators who attended them. In ancient auditoria, spectators took part in the ritual performance. To adapt Ovid's quip in the *Ars Amatoria*: everyone came to see the games, but also to be seen.<sup>41</sup>

It should be noted, therefore, that the composition of the audience was far from random. In the classical Greek city, theatres were designed to express the isonomic basis that underlay the political order. Each wedge offered notionally equivalent places to all the individual members of a *phyle*, the only

<sup>40</sup> M.S.-Y. CHWE, *op. cit.* (n. 33), 36-37.

<sup>41</sup> Ov. *Ars* 1, 99 *Spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur ut ipsae.*



exceptions being the ornate seats in the front rows that were reserved for the (annually rotating) officials and priests. Distinction was thus marked by function in the political organization of the city and its democratic institutions. It is useful to compare the classical Greek auditorium with the situation in Rome, where seating arrangements were hierarchical by tradition and meant to express individual rank and social status. In the late Republic and the early imperial period, Roman seating arrangements were seen as an expression of a well-ordered society. The fact that the word *ordo* could be used both for a row of seats and for a political order in the modern sense again suggests a close relation between the two domains, but one that was diametrically opposed to that in the classical Greek *poleis*.

Such political regulations only seem to have increased over time. After Augustus' *Lex Julia Theatralis*, seating arrangements were subject to the strictest political control, and the amphitheatre (the perfect inward-facing circle!) in particular emerges as a kind of ideal representation of Roman social and political hierarchy that focuses on the emperor, his family, and other members of his entourage.<sup>42</sup> In the imperial period, in what may be a clear case of cultural transfer, the seating arrangements in Greek auditoria began to present a distinct and hierarchical view of society: auditoria were enlarged by the addition of *diazomata* and other subdivisions of the *cavea*, which allowed for a corresponding subdivision of the audience. Moreover, in many places we find evidence that spectators watching the contests and games were segregated by class or social category; seating inscriptions marking out different groups have been found in a large number of auditoria throughout the Roman East, including theatres, *odeia*, and stadia in cities as diverse as Athens, Termessos, Saïttai, Aphrodisias, Bostra, Didyma, and Miletos.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> E. RAWSON, "Discrimina Ordinum. The *Lex Julia Theatralis*", in *PBSR* 55 (1987), 83-114.

<sup>43</sup> O.M. VAN NIJF, *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East* (Amsterdam 1997), 209-240.

The members of the order of local councillors were, of course, seated in the front row, wearing their crowns and purple clothes. Special seats were reserved for magistrates and priests, and their families (a sign that such offices had come to be seen as the property of a particular social class). Apart from these, we find a number of groups, such as youth associations and *gerousiai*, or craftsmen and traders, who were seated with the fellow members of their professional associations, as inscriptions from various cities show. Other groups with reserved seats were the boards of religious functionaries such as *hymnoidoi* or *chrysophoroi*. Seats of honour were also given to successful performers and victors in sacred games (the theatre of Termessos has a row for the *hieronikai*), yet another sign of their importance for the city's self image.<sup>44</sup> So, if we look at the theatres and stadia as 'inward-facing circles', we see that each auditorium was a representation of the city as a hierarchy of (overlapping) status groups. Each festival served as a "structure of participation" by groups with a stake in the community that had to be reinforced in a public setting. The audience had a clear role in the ritual display: simply by sitting in their allocated places, they performed — and, hopefully, internalized — their relative position in the civic hierarchy.

This, at least was the general idea. But ritual power is a fickle thing. Modern studies of political rituals suggest that the same events that are used to produce civic solidarity are also often the locus of civic unrest. Pride of place goes, of course, to the example of the carnival procession in the French city of Romans, turned into a blood-bath, that has been analyzed by the French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie.<sup>45</sup> Festival-related riots are, of course, also attested for Antiquity, even though the most famous examples lie outside the proper scope of this essay. Our sources make clear that at the end of antiquity the hippodrome had become a locus of civic, politically-based unrest. The Nika

<sup>44</sup> TAM III, 872.

<sup>45</sup> E. LE ROY LADURIE, *Le carnaval de Romans de la Chandeleur au mercredi des Cendres, 1579-1580* (Paris 1979).

riots of AD 532 are, of course, a classic case, infamous for the rapid spread of violence that ultimately cost over 30,000 lives. But riots have also been attested for the hippodromes of Thessalonica, Antioch, and Alexandria.<sup>46</sup> Another famous example is the riot that broke out in the amphitheatre of Pompeii in AD 59, leading to the ban on illegal *collegia* in that town. The story is known from Tacitus, who apparently attributes it to local rivalries and political in-fighting.<sup>47</sup> A fascinating wall painting in Pompeii, found in a house of moderate wealth, seems to show the same event. Why the owner was so interested in the episode remains unknown: it has been suggested that he was a gladiator, but we cannot exclude the possibility of some personal connection with the turmoil.<sup>48</sup>

It should, therefore, be noted that ritual settings, and particularly the 'inward-facing circles' of stadia and amphitheatres, were then, as they are today, also likely spots in which popular protests and riots might erupt. The organizers of the Demostheneia in Oinoanda were aware of the risks: the text stipulates that the *agonothetai*, who were responsible for the *eukosmia* (orderly behaviour) during the festivals, made sure that *mastigophoroi* (scourge-bearers) or *rhabdouchoi* (rod-bearers) were at hand to impose discipline.<sup>49</sup> As much as the notables tried their best at crowd control, however, there was always the possibility that matters could get out of hand, that there would be fights between rival groups of supporters, or that grievances against the organizing politicians would be expressed publicly. Several texts prove that such riots or protests were also susceptible to the logic of common knowledge: many individuals in a city may have been disgruntled for one reason or another, but only when they were publicly expressed in the context of a ritual

<sup>46</sup> J.H. HUMPHREY, *Roman Circuses. Arenas for Chariot Racing* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1986), 461 (Antioch); 510 (Alexandria); 630 (Thessalonica).

<sup>47</sup> TAC. *Ann.* 14, 17.

<sup>48</sup> V. HUET, "La représentation de la rixe de l'amphithéâtre de Pompéi. Une préfiguration de l'« hooliganisme »", in *Histoire Urbaine* 10 (2004), 89-112.

<sup>49</sup> M. WÖRRLE, *op. cit.* (n. 37), 212-213; 219-220.



could these feelings become common knowledge, encouraging each individual to join the protest, riots, or plundering. There is, perhaps predictably, not much epigraphic evidence that such protests occurred frequently, but the known cases did take place at a festival, or at least in a theatrical setting. The Christian writer Tertullian plays on what must have been a common stereotype when he argues that Christians 'prefer to celebrate the Emperor's festivals with a good conscience, instead of with riotous behaviour'.<sup>50</sup> Another Christian text shows how riotous behaviour and theatrical spaces could be closely connected. This occurred during the famous riot of the silversmiths at Ephesus: "The city became filled with confusion, and with one accord [the Ephesians] rushed into the theatre." The situation was clearly getting out of hand: "Some were crying out one thing and others another; for the assembly was in confusion, and the majority of them did not know the reason why they had come together ... but when they recognized that [Paul] was a Jew, one cry arose from them all, as they shouted for about two hours: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" The day, however, was saved for St Paul by the *grammateus*, who quietened the crowds by pointing out that the events might bring about Roman displeasure: "And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly."<sup>51</sup> For the Ephesians, therefore, the theatre was the natural place to air their grievances. In fact the (para)political role of this meeting is indicated by the *grammateus* who addresses the spontaneous gathering as an assembly meeting (*ekklesia*). If we can assume that the behaviour of the masses at regular political meetings was not all that different, we may understand a little better why Plutarch and his colleagues still spoke about the assemblies of their day with awe. *Polis* politics had all but come to an end.

To conclude this section: I have argued that festivals had a clear political dimension. Their structured organization was

<sup>50</sup> TERT. *Apol.* 35.

<sup>51</sup> *Acts* 19:23.



not a reflection of an immutably ordered society, but instead represented a phase in the ongoing process of social and political negotiation, whereby the elite used these performances to impose their hierarchical world-view upon a potentially unwilling population. Although our information about these events generally derives from official inscriptions and regulations, which emphasize the static and hierarchical outcome as a matter of course, we have nonetheless seen that there is also evidence that such events could take a very different political turn.

### *The city and the oikoumene*

In the last part of this paper, I want to look at the way in which festivals functioned at the level of intercity relations. After the classical period, the Greek cities found themselves in a new multi-polar world that John Ma has described in terms of 'peer-polity interaction', drawing attention to the way in which these nominally equal cities established and maintained connections though diplomatic means and symbolic practices, such as kinship diplomacy.<sup>52</sup> But some players were more equal than others. After Hellenistic kings had dominated parts of the scene for a long time, the entire Mediterranean ultimately became a single interconnected geo-political and cultural system under the domination of Rome. We could describe this as a form of ancient globalization; the Greeks themselves used the term *oikoumene*, i.e. the inhabited world, an old theoretical term that now, with the onset of Roman rule, became a political as well as a cultural unity.<sup>53</sup> In

<sup>52</sup> J. MA, "Peer Polity Interaction in the Hellenistic Age", in *Pe&P* 180 (2003), 9-40.

<sup>53</sup> C.A. BAYLY, "'Archaic' and 'Modern' Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, c. 1750-1850", in *Globalization in World History*, ed. by A.G. HOPKINS (London 2002), 46-73; O.M. VAN NIJF, "Global Players. Athletes and Performers in the Hellenistic and Roman World", in *Hephaistos* 24 (2006), 225-235; C. NICOLET, *L'inventaire du monde. Géographie et politique aux origines de l'Empire romain* (Paris 1988).

this section I want to investigate how this form of globalization interacted with the world of the agonistic festivals. I want to show that athletic, dramatic, and musical contests became an important mechanism for linking this globalizing world together. I shall argue that the development of an empire-wide athletic network provided a crucial link between the old and new Greek cities of the Roman empire, and between the Greek cities and Rome. Greek athletic culture and Roman power were fully implicated with one another: the spectacular rise of Greek athletics would have been impossible without the protective aegis of Rome, while Rome, for its part, used athletics as a means of securing its hold over the Greek cities.

By the imperial age a remarkably homogeneous Greek festival culture had spread over the eastern Mediterranean as far as Italy. Its greatest manifestations were undoubtedly the panhellenic games that had been celebrated in Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea since the Archaic period and were still flourishing under the emperors. From the Hellenistic period onwards, the number of festivals increased dramatically, reaching its acme only under the Roman emperors. Many of these festivals were local, but there was also a rising number of festivals that claimed superior panhellenic status, i.e. they aimed for recognition by the growing number of Greek cities. Some of these were actually set up by Hellenistic rulers, who thereby attempted to raise their prestige among their Greek subjects, but the majority seems to have been the initiative of both new and old Greek cities who were jockeying for position in this new enlarged and multi-polar world.<sup>54</sup> Ian Rutherford has argued that we can best interpret this phenomenon in terms of network theory. New (panhellenic) festivals were a way for cities to create a space among and make connections with other Greek cities, each forming the central hub in an agonistic network. He shows that there were many of these festival

<sup>54</sup> J. MA, *art. cit.* (n. 52).

networks with a local, regional, and in some cases even inter-regional reach.<sup>55</sup>

One of the best-known examples is certainly the case of Magnesia on the Maeander, in Caria, which was eager to gain panhellenic recognition for its festival for the local goddess Artemis Leukophryene.<sup>56</sup> After a failed attempt in 221 BC to be the 'first of the Greeks in Asia' to have their local festival acknowledged as stephanitic by their 'fellow Greeks', the Magnesians undertook a new and successful effort in 208. They launched an incredible diplomatic offensive, which included sending envoys to the ends of the Greek world, from Sicily to present day Iran; the documentation of this endeavour was displayed on a long 'archive wall' along the perimeter of the agora. The festival established (or aimed to establish) Magnesia for a brief period as the centre of a panhellenic world, a network of its own making, characterized by common religious and cultural interests, and a common Greek identity. This case is particularly well documented, but the Magnesians symbolize a trend that is widely visible. There is ample evidence that collectively suggests that in the Hellenistic and Roman period a concerted effort was made to formalize and extend (and link) such athletic networks. It is particularly noteworthy that specific institutions arose that regulated — or tried to regulate — the festive relations, and that this interaction was to a large extent left to specialists, without whom the festivals would not have succeeded: in the first place was a new group of specialist spectators, the *theoroi*, and in the second place were, of course, the athletes and other performers who toured the festivals and who bundled their power in associations that operated on a translocal and ultimately oikoumenical scale. The rise and formal organization of these groups may be interpreted as a function of the growth and strengthening of

<sup>55</sup> I. RUTHERFORD, "Network Theory and Theoric Networks", in *MHR* 22 (2007), 23-37.

<sup>56</sup> K.J. RIGSBY, *Asylia. Territorial Inviolability in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley-Los Angeles 1996), 179-279; P. THONEMANN, "Magnesia and the Greeks of Asia (*I.Magnesia* 16.16)", in *GRBS* 47 (2007), 151-160.



a worldwide athletic network that played a major part in maintaining political relations between Greek cities, and between the Greek cities and the great centres of power, including Rome.

The first sign of this process of institutionalization and specialization is the rise of the *theoria*, the formalized system of viewing, whereby Greek cities and sanctuaries sent 'official spectators' to observe and participate in religious celebrations. As we know, the panhellenic gatherings served to create a sense of common identity among the Greeks; some scholars even maintain that it was at these festivals that the notion of a Greek (or panhellenic) identity was formulated for the first time.<sup>57</sup> Here I would like to draw once more on Chwe's model and propose that such festivals can also be seen as rational rituals, geared towards the generation of common knowledge at the panhellenic level (i.e. the awareness and mutual recognition of Greek identity). It is, I think, highly suggestive that ancient sources often draw attention to the capacity of panhellenic sites to generate 'common knowledge' among all the Greeks. Inscriptions for athletic victors, for example, suggest that the special kudos of a victory at Olympia rested exactly on the knowledge that it was obtained under the 'gaze of the whole of Hellas.'<sup>58</sup> In later times, announcements that were relevant to all Greeks (such as the proclamation of Greek freedom) were also made at the panhellenic gatherings. From the late classical period onwards, we find evidence that a new category of specialist spectators was needed to secure the 'common knowledge' of these 'cultural performances'. A fragment of the comic poet Heniokhos strikingly uses the image of a circular setting — an inward-facing circle — to describe their presence at Olympia: "This place is all round, it is Olympia, and there understand that you see the *skene*, housing the *theoria* delegations of the *poleis*."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> J.M. HALL, *Hellenicity. Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago-London 2002).

<sup>58</sup> L. ROBERT, *Monnaies grecques. Types, légendes, magistrats monétaires et géographie* (Genève-Paris 1967); *LAG* 30, 36, 37, 41; *IvO* 225.

<sup>59</sup> HENIOCH. fr. 5 *PCG*.



*Theoria* can be presented as a sequence of reciprocal acts involving ever widening circles of participants. Before a particular edition of a festival was actually held, the organizing cities or sanctuary sites sent out envoys to announce the celebrations (*epangelia*) and invite Greek cities to take part. For their part, the cities responded by sending *theoroi* as official spectators, but also to take part in the festivities, conduct ritual acts, or accompany the contestants in the name of their *polis*.<sup>60</sup> *Theoroi* had their counterparts in *theorodokoi* — formally appointed ‘official hosts’ — who may in their turn have served as *theoroi* in the other direction.<sup>61</sup> Although these exchanges must have had a long history, they become particularly prominent in the Hellenistic period, when we find a growing number of inscriptions that testify to their activities, especially the formal lists of *theorodokoi* connected to a particular festival, and honorific inscriptions for *theoroi* and *theorodokoi* erected by both the organizing sites and the visiting cities. While the rise of this institution may partly be connected to the growing number of newly established panhellenic festivals in the Hellenistic world, it would seem that *theoria* was becoming more important to old cities and renowned festivals as well: sites such as Delphi and Nemea — hardly newcomers — began to publish long lists of *theoroi* and *theorodokoi*, and in Athens the *theoria* to Delphi, the Pythais, was “revitalized in a spectacular manner.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the rise of these institutions, which tend to be left to specialists, seems to represent a move away from the personalized nature of interstate relations, such as *xenia*, that had characterized the world of the archaic and classical *polis*.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> I. RUTHERFORD, *art. cit.* (n. 55); C. SOURVINOU-INWOOD, “What is Polis Religion?”, in *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander*, ed. by O. MURRAY and S. PRICE (Oxford 1990), 295–322.

<sup>61</sup> P. PERLMAN, *City and Sanctuary in Ancient Greece. The Theorodokia in the Peloponnese* (Göttingen 2000); S.G. MILLER, “The Theorodokoi of the Nemean Games”, in *Hesperia* 57 (1988), 147–163.

<sup>62</sup> I. RUTHERFORD, “Theoria”, in *Brill’s New Pauly*, ed. by H. CANKIK and H. SCHNEIDER (2011). *Brill Online*. University of Groningen. Accessed 03 November 2011. <[http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=bnp\\_e1209940](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=bnp_e1209940)>

<sup>63</sup> G. HERMAN, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge 1987).

The rise of institutionalized *theoria* may have been a response to the growing number of cities that made a claim to Greek identity and wanted these claims to be known and recognized. The job of the *theoroi* was to generate the 'common knowledge' of these festivals throughout the expanded world. The monumentalization of these exchanges, often at great expense, both at the festival site and the host city, as well as in the participating cities, fixed this knowledge for all eternity. The rise of *theoria* was, therefore, an important feature of post-classical intercity diplomacy, and the exchange of official observers and the commemoration of these exchanges became an important way to assert Greek city status in the contemporary multi-polar world. This kind of festival diplomacy did not come to an end when the ascendancy of Rome replaced the multi-polar world of the post-classical *polis* with a single hierarchical network spanning the entire world (the *oikoumene*). It is clear, however, that there were some changes: *theoroi* recede into the background and were often replaced by *synthytai* (fellow-sacrificers), whose title puts the focus on the common sacrificial banquet as the high point of the joint festivities.<sup>64</sup> Cities nonetheless continued to send and invite envoys to their festivals, as is evident in the case of Mytilene, which announced its decision to celebrate games in honour of Augustus to cities all over the Mediterranean as well as to other festival sites:<sup>65</sup>

"And it was decided to send at the occasion of the first time these contests were ever held... to the most illustrious cities, and to set up placards or *stelai* with a copy of this decree in the temple that was built by the *koinon* of Asia in Pergamon... (and envoys were also sent to?) Actium, Brindisi, Tarraco, Massalia... and Antiochia near Daphne."

<sup>64</sup> C.P. JONES, "'Joint Sacrifice' at Iasus and Side", in *JHS* 118 (1998), 183-186; W. ORTH, "Gemeinschaftserhaltende Opfer", in *Iconologia Sacra. Mythos, Bildkunst und Dichtung in der Religions- und Sozialgeschichte Alteuropas. Festschrift für Karel Hauck zum 75. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von H. KELLER and N. STAUBACH (Berlin-New York 1994), 1-8.

<sup>65</sup> *IG XII 2*, 58 ll. 10-14. S. PRICE, *op. cit.* (n. 30), 128.

And the same happened — albeit on a smaller scale — in less prestigious festivals as well. One example is found in Oinoanda. Here the benefactor M. Aurelius Artemon “invited also the splendid cities Termessos in Pamphylia, the ancestral kin, and Caesarea Kibyra in Asia” to a festival that was celebrated in his name.<sup>66</sup> It should also be noted that seats were reserved in the *stadion* of Aphrodisias for the observers from friendly cities: Mastaura, Antioch, Kibyra, and Miletos.<sup>67</sup> Another inscription shows that the Aphrodisians had been in a local alliance with Tabae and Kibyra since the late republic.<sup>68</sup>

The shift towards *synthytai* marked a further significant change: the growing importance of Rome. Christopher Jones has demonstrated that the documentation for the *synthytai* of the imperial age is almost exclusively found for festivals that were associated with emperors or imperial benefaction.<sup>69</sup> In the imperial period, festive diplomacy went on under the close supervision of the emperor. Contests remained the object of considerable local pride, as is evident from the monumental inscriptions and the legends that we find on coins commemorating local festivals. It is, furthermore, well known that festivals were the object of intense intercity rivalry.<sup>70</sup> Cities competed to have bigger games, larger prizes, and better athletes, but most of all to obtain prestigious titles and privileges that were in the gift of the emperor. Acknowledgment of these privileges no longer depended on mutual recognition, but became centralized through the hands of the emperors, who used their power to establish a centrally sanctioned hierarchy. Simon Price has demonstrated the various ways in which the imperial cult was integrated with existing festivals, and new imperial festivals were added to the civic calendars. New

<sup>66</sup> SEG 44, 1186, 23 ff.

<sup>67</sup> In the stadium of Aphrodisias, specially marked seats were found for representatives of Mastaura, Antioch, Kibyra, and Miletos: CH. ROUECHÉ, *op. cit.* (n. 19), nos. 45. 4O; 34S; 35L; 12H (= *IAph2007*, 10.4; 10.29; 10.30; 10.11H).

<sup>68</sup> J.M. REYNOLDS, *Aphrodisias and Rome* (London 1982), no. 1 (= *IAph2007*, 8.210).

<sup>69</sup> C.P. JONES, *art. cit.* (n. 64).

<sup>70</sup> A. HELLER, *Les bêtises des Grecs. Conflits et rivalités entre cités d'Asie et de Bithynie à l'époque romaine, 129 a.C.-235 p.C.* (Bordeaux 2006).



stephanitic festivals, or festivals that were promoted to this rank by the emperors, would henceforth be known as a *dorea*, i.e. a donation by the emperor.<sup>71</sup> Cities and emperors became locked in a system of (symbolic) exchange, whereby cities had to ask for the right to organize imperial festivals and emperors ultimately had to grant such privileges, while all parties upheld the shared fiction that such exchanges were not automatic.

With the rise of Rome, therefore, a new kind of centrality was put into place. Subtle distinctions between the imperial privileges and titles allowed a hierarchy of prestige to develop, through which each city entered into negotiation with Rome about status distinctions, while at the same time nervously eyeing its peers, lest these should receive greater honours.<sup>72</sup> What was at stake for each city at every festival was its prestige, and the recognition of both its place among its 'peers' (and rivals) and its reputation vis-à-vis the imperial centre in Rome. What was at stake for Rome was a means to control the circulation of honour among its subject cities. The exchanges of envoys, observers, and sacrificers again produced a common (oikoumenical) knowledge, allowing the cities to celebrate their common Greek identity as well as their loyalty to the emperor in Rome. It is thus obvious that the essentially non-hierarchical networks that revolved around the panhellenic festivals of the classical period and that had multiplied in the Hellenistic period were gradually being replaced by one global hierarchical network, with Rome and the emperor at its centre.

In this context a particular role was played by the travelling athletes (and other performers) who toured the Roman Empire 'along a perpetual cycle' (ἀεὶ ἐκ περιόδου), as it was put by the Aphrodisian *curator urbis* M. Ulpius Appuleius Eurycles.<sup>73</sup> The evidence for their activities consists largely of honorific inscriptions and dedications that recorded their victories in the

<sup>71</sup> S. PRICE, *op. cit.* (n. 30), ch. 5.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. J.E. LENDON, *Empire of Honour. The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford 1997).

<sup>73</sup> CH. ROUECHÉ, *op. cit.* (n. 19), no. 51, l. 15 (= *IAPH2007*, 15.330).



festivals, as well as the various honours and privileges that they had obtained. In the imperial period, monuments for individual athletes and artists not only became more numerous, but also grew longer and more detailed, as more importance was attached to each individual achievement and distinction.<sup>74</sup> Victories were listed with great care, and there was a marked tendency to rank these victories, either in chronological order or according to the relative standing of the festivals themselves.<sup>75</sup> The amazing level of detail of these inscriptions has allowed modern scholars from Louis Robert to Jean-Yves Strasser to reconstruct the careers of individual artists and athletes. There has been less reflection, however, on the fact that throughout the Greek world these inscriptions, while set up at different locations (festivals sites or cities), are so very consistent in the way that they record and value victories and titles. Of course, the athletes will have provided the necessary information to the individuals and organizations involved, but honorific monuments were not pure self-representation by the honorands; they were civic monuments and, therefore, a joint product — or civic monuments that were set up to reflect the identities and social aims of all the parties involved. The relative uniformity of the monuments suggests, however, that they had a significance that extended far beyond the boundaries of each individual city. They were, so to speak, a truly global phenomenon. One interesting aspect is that they seem to rely on a common pool of knowledge, which suggests that information on agonistic victories was systematically recorded and circulated throughout the Greek world. How was this common knowledge created? And what was its purpose?

Authors like Pausanias and Philostratus show that there were records available at Olympia for consultation, and the names

<sup>74</sup> The crowns were often represented on the monuments as well, with a brief indication of the games where they were obtained. For a good example, see J.P. MICHAUD, "Chronique des fouilles et découvertes archéologiques en Grèce en 1968 et 1969", in *BCH* 94 (1970), 946-949.

<sup>75</sup> S.A. BRUNET, *Greek Athletes in the Roman World. The Evidence from Ephesos*. Diss. University of Texas (Austin 1998).

of the Olympionikai circulated widely, giving rise to a distinct literary genre.<sup>76</sup> Festival sites and cities must have had similar archives. We know, for example, that in Ephesos athletes could obtain a copy of a document stating their victory in one of the city's contests for 60 *denarii* (a hefty fee!), and the same would have applied elsewhere.<sup>77</sup>

Athletes and other performers must have kept these precious certificates recording their personal victories, as papyrological finds make clear. Peter Frisch has collected a number of papyrological dossiers with information about the privileges to which athletes and performers could lay claim, such as the right to a triumphal entry, reserved seats at games, a *syntaxis* (a gratification or annuity provided by the victor's hometown), and other marks of individual distinction.<sup>78</sup> This knowledge, however, must also have been available to the authorities. Agonistic victories were used to support the claims of athletes to privileges. It is unthinkable that the cities would have relied exclusively on the *ad hoc* information supplied by the individual victors themselves. Cities must have had access to their own records. As the matter of athletic privileges was ultimately a concern for the imperial authorities and therefore subject to legislation, this knowledge must also have been available in Rome as well.<sup>79</sup> It has been suggested that the oikoumenical (worldwide) associations of athletes formed a crucial link in this empire-wide communication.<sup>80</sup> Athletics did not only produce a festival network, but also a network of common knowledge.

<sup>76</sup> P. CHRISTESEN, *Olympic Victor Lists and Ancient Greek History* (Cambridge-New York 2007); cf. PHILOSTR. *Gym.* 2; PAUS. 5, 21, 9.

<sup>77</sup> *IK-Ephesos* 14.

<sup>78</sup> P. FRISCH, *Zehn agonistische Papyri* (Opladen 1986) (= *P.Agon.*).

<sup>79</sup> PLIN. *Epist.* 10, 118-119. Now spectacularly confirmed in G. PETZL und E. SCHWERTHEIM, *Hadrian und die dionysischen Künstler. Drei in Alexandria Troas neugefundene Briefe des Kaisers an die Künstler-Vereinigung* (Bonn 2006). For the triumphal entry: L. ROBERT, in *BE* (1961), 221.

<sup>80</sup> R. MERKELBACH, "Der unentschiedene Kampf des Pankratiasten Ti. Claudius Rufus in Olympia", in *ZPE* 15 (1974), 99-104.

Seen in this light, athletes played a role not unlike the *theoroi* of earlier ages: they embodied the links between the individual cities in the agonistic network, both those that organized the contest as well as those that sent the athletes. Moreover, their victory monuments helped to preserve and promote common knowledge about these links. A spectacular example is the dossier of the athlete Aurelius Demonstratos Damas that I quoted above.<sup>81</sup> The dossier was collected by Jean-Yves Strasser and contains documents from sites in Italy, Asia, Egypt, and Hellas where Damas had been active. These texts will have promoted the status of Damas by commemorating his victories all over the *oikoumene*, but they must also have raised awareness of the connections between the cities themselves, and of their joint membership in a commonwealth of Greek cities under the protection of Rome.

Table 1: Frequency of the victories of Damas

Alexandria <i>Seleukeios</i> , <i>Sebasteios</i> , <i>Hadrianeios</i> <i>Philadelphaios</i> x 4
Argos <i>Aspis</i> x 3
Athens <i>Panathenaia</i> , <i>Olympia</i> , <i>Hadrianeia</i> , <i>Panhellenia</i> x 10
Ephesos i.a. <i>Balbilleia</i> x 9
Isthmia x 5
Naples <i>Sebasta</i> x 4
Nemea x 3 (at least)
Nikopolis <i>Aktia</i> x 3
Olympia x 2 (at least)
Pergamon <i>Augousteia</i> x 3
Puteoli <i>Eusebeia</i> x 2
Pythia x 3
Rhodos x 3
Rome <i>Kapetolia</i> and <i>Epinikia</i> x 3
Sardeis <i>Chrysanthina</i> x 4 ( <i>patris</i> )
Smyrna <i>Koina Asias</i> , <i>Hadriana Olympia</i> , <i>Olympia</i> x 6

<sup>81</sup> *I.Sardis* 79, the entire dossier in J.-Y. STRASSER, *art. cit.* (n. 22).

Moreover, the case of Damas also underlines the political nature of these links, since not only his victories were commemorated, but also the grants of citizenship that he acquired in the course of his career.

Table 2: The citizenships of Damas

Alexandria
Antinoopolis
Argos
Athens
Corinth
Delphi
Ephesos
Elis
Lakedaimon
Miletos
Naples
Nikomedia
Pergamon
Pinara
Sardeis ( <i>patris</i> )
Smyrna
Tralleis

In a recent paper on which these paragraphs are based, I have discussed the political or civic implications of the phenomenon of multiple citizenship, which appears to have been rare outside the world of athletes and artists.<sup>82</sup> I argue that these citizenship grants were not to be taken lightly. There were strict procedures, and the decision to award citizenship

<sup>82</sup> O.M. VAN NIJF, "Athletes, Artists and Citizens in the Imperial Greek City", in *Patrie d'origine et patries électives. Les citoyennetés multiples dans le monde grec d'époque romaine*, éd. par A. HELLER et A.-V. PONT (Bordeaux 2012), 175-194, on which this section is based.



was taken by the formal political institutions of the city, as the outcome of political deliberation.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, multiple citizenship titles do not seem to have led to a depreciation of their value or to a weakening of the bonds between an athlete and his original *patris*. Many inscriptions emphasize the patriotism of athletes and performers, or take care to specify their original hometown, which suggests that this link was still important.<sup>84</sup> More significantly, it would seem that the offer of citizenship could even lead to a strengthening of ties between various cities. It is striking that many inscriptions recording the grant did not only list an athlete's original hometown, but even strove to implicate it in the honorific exchanges between the new *patris* and the athlete. Several texts show that a city might send a copy of the decree to the original *patris*. It was not uncommon for the new *patris* to offer to set up an honorific statue in the old home city, to commemorate the new grant. Another spectacular case that illustrates this practice highlights how the commemoration of honorific citizenship was used in diplomatic games between the cities of Ephesos and Aphrodisias. When the Aphrodisian athlete Aurelius Achilles was offered Ephesian citizenship, his new *patris* erected a monument in his old hometown, in the hope of strengthening existing links. The text shows how the two cities represented the exchange as a joint effort that brought glory to both.<sup>85</sup>

“[- -] since the most splendid city of the Ephesians always welcomes those who have shown zeal with testimonies that are fitting and just for their worth, and takes a share of pleasure in the advantages of all (men) as if they were her own, and (since she considers that) whatever outstanding (advantages) accrue to the good reputation of other cities from distinguished men, these

<sup>83</sup> E.g. *FD* 3.1, 209; *FD* 3.2, 102; *FD* 3.2, 105; *FD* 3.4, 118; Hellenistic examples: *IK-Ephesos* 1415, 1416; 2005; *IvO* 54.

<sup>84</sup> E.g. *SEG* 35, 1125; 41, 1407; L. ROBERT, *À travers l'Asie Mineure* (Paris 1980), no. 1.; *IvO* 55, 225; *IK-Tralleis* 111.

<sup>85</sup> CH. ROUECHÉ, *op. cit.* (n. 19), no. 72 (= *LAph2007*, 5.214).

are matters of (?general) good fortune; and since she assigns an especial portion of her inclination towards goodwill to the most splendid city of the Aphrodisians, towards which she has many and outstanding justifications for the exchange of affection. For these reasons, (the city) has welcomed Aurelius Achilles — who has both undertaken the training of the body, and is also most noble in training, and most dignified in his way of life and his conduct, so that in him all virtue of body and soul is blended — (has welcomed him) often, both in previous contests, which he adorned, having competed impressively and with all courage, and especially in the contest of the Olympia, because, when the city encouraged him — as if it were his own fatherland — to proceed to the ultimate competition and to the category of men, he listened and was persuaded by the encouragement, and defeated his opponents and bound on the (crown of) olive with such glory that his (?display of) courage and eagerness are to be numbered among the most distinguished of contests.”

Moreover, it is worth pausing at the next lines, which explicitly seem to state that the aim of this exchange was to make Aurelius’ success a matter of common knowledge:

“For these reasons it was resolved that the testimony about these events should not extend only as far as the knowledge of those who were present and happened to be in the stadium at the time, but that by means of this decree he should be commended even more to his fatherland.”

So we see how one grant of citizenship, and the ensuing diplomatic moves, contributed to reinforcing the political ties between two cities, and thus to the construction and maintenance of one particular link. Imagine the activity generated by Damas alone, who had citizenship in sixteen cities. Even if not all of the links were commemorated with the same zeal as those between Ephesos and Aphrodisias, we cannot exclude that the commemoration of victory gave rise to some diplomatic traffic along the links of the oikoumenical agonistic network, which had the effect of forging even closer ties between these cities, as well as raising consciousness of their membership in a global network of Greek cities under Roman rule.

Finally, against this background we should also understand the role and rise to prominence of the associations of athletes and other performers which, under various names and titles, operated on a translocal and even empire-wide scale.<sup>86</sup> The organization of athletes and artists in large associations was part of a tradition that went back to the Hellenistic period.<sup>87</sup> At the beginning of the third century BC, artists were being organized in regional associations under the aegis of Dionysos. Individual associations were regionally based in the great cultural centres of the Hellenistic world: Athens; Nemea and Isthmia; Alexandria (with subsidiaries in Ptolemais, Rhodes, and Cyprus); and western Asia Minor (the association of Ionia and the Hellespont). For Greek sites in Italy and Sicily a similar association was established. A distributional pattern appears that reflects the organization of agonistic life in the Hellenistic world as a number of networks that, however, were not yet fully integrated. Athletes organized themselves somewhat later: from the late first century, similar associations arose that were placed under the protection of agonistic deities, like Herakles. Such associations could only exist if their freedom to travel, their freedom from seizure, and their freedom against indirect taxes were guaranteed. In the Hellenistic world these associations relied on international treaties, or the *asylia* that was offered by particular festivals, or they could turn to the Hellenistic kings for protection. When Rome became the dominant power in the Mediterranean, it gradually acquired these protective roles. These regional associations faded from sight, and in the imperial period they seem to have been replaced by one 'global' (oikoumenical) association, under the protection of the emperor, with headquarters that were ultimately moved to

<sup>86</sup> For a longer discussion of the role of associations, on which these paragraphs are based: O.M. VAN NIJF, *art. cit.* (n. 53).

<sup>87</sup> S. ANEZIRI, *Die Vereine der dionysischen Techniten im Kontext der hellenistischen Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte, Organisation und Wirkung der hellenistischen Technitenvereine* (Stuttgart 2003); B. LE GUEN, *Les associations de Technites dionysiaques à l'époque hellénistique*, I-II (Paris 2001).



Rome. Eventually, the associations of athletes and artists were even joined in what may perhaps best be understood as a flexible agglomeration of various overlapping groups of different types of performers, all of whom were connected to the central headquarters in Rome.<sup>88</sup> In other words, athletes and performers had organized themselves in a network-like organization.

These associations must have maintained permanent contact with Rome: the documentation suggests that they were at pains to highlight their close relationship with the emperors, as they listed their privileges and had these confirmed, expanded, and reconfirmed by successive emperors. Recently, a spectacular confirmation of the close collaboration between associations and the emperors was found in the letters by Hadrian to a branch (or node, to follow the network terminology) of the association based in Alexandria Troas.<sup>89</sup> The long first letter is a motley set of imperial rescripts confirming or clarifying the association's privileges, including the display of these decisions in their local headquarters. Other local associations must have guarded their own copies of the imperial correspondence with Rome, as in Hermoupolis, where one individual athlete was able to consult the archives when he wanted to demonstrate his entitlement to various individual privileges.<sup>90</sup> We may assume an even larger collection in the 'archives' in the *schola* at Rome that was established by Hadrian.<sup>91</sup> But, if we consider the number of festivals at which athletes and artists were active, together with the number of locally and regionally based associations, we can surmise the enormous administrative activity, as well as the continuous stream of information throughout the Roman empire, that this record-keeping must have generated.

<sup>88</sup> M.L. CALDELLI, "Curia athletarum, iera xystike synodos e organizzazione delle terme a Roma", in *ZPE* 93 (1992), 75-87.

<sup>89</sup> G. PETZL und E. SCHWERTHEIM, *op. cit.* (n. 79); see also C.P. JONES, "Three New Letters of the Emperor Hadrian", in *ZPE* 161 (2007), 145-156 and J.-Y. STRASSER, "'Qu'on fouette les concurrents...' À propos des lettres d'Hadrien retrouvées à Alexandrie de Troade", in *REG* 123 (2010), 585-622.

<sup>90</sup> *P.Agon.* 6.

<sup>91</sup> *IGR* I, 235.



In the imperial period the associations performed a crucial function in maintaining the athletic networks. They seem to have contracted the contestants, and it was their job to ensure that the competitors showed up at the individual contests.<sup>92</sup> They were held responsible by the emperors when they did not, as is shown by imperial letters on their failure to show up at the Roman-founded Panhellenia of Athens.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, emperors appointed special officials to exercise control over the associations through the institution of *xystarchia*. This title was bestowed upon prominent athletes who were put in charge of the activities of the associations in their hometown, or at a festival. The *xystarchs* were paid for their efforts, but the position was an individual honour, and it also created a permanent and very personal link between emperors, associations, and individual athletes. The rescripts of Hadrian to the association of Alexandria Troas, however, show that these associations were no mere puppets of imperial policy. The first letter of Hadrian contains a long list of imperial rescripts that all ruled in favour of the associations in conflicts with cities and festival organizers, which indicates their importance as cultural and political agents acting on behalf of the emperor.<sup>94</sup>

In this context we may also dwell briefly on the fact that these associations were all styled as *oikoumenikos*. The common opinion is that this qualification was used either to convey the idea that the associations were travelling around the entire inhabited world, or to indicate that members came from 'all over the inhabited world'. Both interpretations are possible and they are not mutually exclusive.<sup>95</sup> It may be noted, however, that the term also conjured up the close links that athletes and athletic festivals had with imperial power. While

<sup>92</sup> CH. ROUECHÉ, *op. cit.* (n. 19), no. 51.

<sup>93</sup> J.H. OLIVER, *Marcus Aurelius. Aspects of Civic and Cultural Policy in the East* (Princeton 1970), nos. 21-22 = *IG* II(2), 1106.

<sup>94</sup> G. PETZL und E. SCHWERTHEIM, *op. cit.* (n. 79).

<sup>95</sup> H.W. PLEKET, "Some Aspects of the History of Athletic Guilds", in *ZPE* 10 (1973), 197-227.

terms like *oikoumene* and *oikoumenikos* were derived from Greek geographical discourse, they became much more popular once Roman rule made it feasible to see the entire *oikoumene* as united under its leadership.<sup>96</sup> One of the first authors to use these terms in this sense was, of course, Polybius, but they gained wide currency only when they became part of the self-representation of the magnates of the late republic and, of course, the emperors. The larger part of the epigraphic evidence for the term *oikoumenikos* shows that it is used to qualify emperors as the saviours, benefactors, and protectors of the *oikoumene*. But the second largest group of attestations derives from the world of games and contests. In these cases we are normally dealing with festivals that were held in the context of the imperial cult. In other words, they were clearly designed to represent Roman rule to the subject Greeks. Where the language of *oikoumene* is so closely associated with the representation of the emperor, its use by the associations of athletes and performers must also have linked them with this same representation. It seems likely that the use of this title was closely guarded by Rome; its frequent inclusion in the title of the associations may imply that these groups considered themselves, and were considered as, an integral ingredient in this process of representational politics. By assuming the title *oikoumenikos*, the associations were sending a clear political message that they were imperial agents whose job it was to represent an oikoumenical, or global, cultural policy of Roman dynasts and emperors.

Finally, while the role of the associations within the empire is beyond question, they were also active beyond the *finis imperii*, as is shown by a papyrus from Hermoupolis containing two letters of Claudius.<sup>97</sup> In the first he thanks the association for their letter of congratulations on the emperor's victory

<sup>96</sup> C. NICOLET, *op. cit.* (n. 53); R. HINGLEY, *Globalizing Roman Culture. Unity, Diversity and Empire* (London 2005).

<sup>97</sup> *P.Agon.* 6.

over the Britons; the second shows that the associations had literally served as the emperor's agents when the client kings Gaius Iulius Antiochus of Commagene and Iulius Polemon of Pontus had celebrated games in honour of the emperor. On these occasions, the associations certainly lived up to their claim to operate on a truly worldwide *oikoumenical* scale.

### *Conclusion*

I have argued that the spectacular rise of Greek athletics under Rome was a political phenomenon: it was part of a representational turn in the political culture, in which local oligarchs were able to play the part of the successful athlete in an attempt to gain social and political capital. I have also argued that athletic contests were part and parcel of a politicization of local festivals, which may be usefully considered as rational rituals, designed to generate common knowledge about the role and place of Greek cities in the worldwide Roman Empire. I have argued that, under Roman rule, Greek athletic contests were increasingly organized in the context of a hierarchically-structured athletic network which was maintained by the mobility of network specialists: official observers and, most of all, athletes and performers who toured the *oikoumene* as the agents of imperial rule. Finally, it is worth considering here that the Romans translated *oikoumene* with the term *orbis terrarum*: 'circle of lands'. It would seem, then, that by adopting this *oikoumenical* terminology the Romans consciously turned the entire Mediterranean (to refer for a last time to Michael Chwe) into one giant 'inward-facing circle', a place where imperial identity was created as 'common knowledge' through the observance of traditional Greek festivals in a global network, in which everyone knew that everyone else knew that they were all playing political games.



## DISCUSSION

*K. Coleman:* Have you done any quantification about the types of people who would receive grants of citizenship? This would affect the importance that these grants held for the athletes.

*O. van Nijf:* I have not tried to collect all the evidence, but I have 75-100 texts in my database concerning both athletes and other performers. There are of course many more texts from the imperial period than from earlier periods, but it is quite clear from Pausanias and other literary sources that the procedure must have been in existence before. Moretti's list of *Olympionikai* would yield quite a few more examples (*Olympionikai, i vincitori negli antichi agoni olimpici* [Rome 1957]). It is interesting to note, however, that I researched this for a conference in Tours on multiple citizenship organized by Anna Heller and Anne-Valérie Pont, the proceedings of which have now been published (see *op. cit.* [n. 82]). The idea of the conference was that multiple citizenship was fairly common in the Roman period, but in fact it turned out to have been relatively rare outside the categories of athletes and artists that I discussed. Athletes were of course an exceptionally mobile group; but the discussion for the present *Entretiens* gives me the idea that we should reckon with the possibility that commemoration of citizenship was particularly important for the athletes and performers for the reasons that I suggested in my contribution.

*R. Webb:* You mention the importance of the original *patris* in many inscriptions mentioning multiple citizenship, but I want to point out that a pantomime like Apolaustos does not

have his original *patris* mentioned. How does this affect the notion that the cities mentioned were linked in some kind of network?

*O. van Nijf*: Yes, this is interesting, and I cannot really explain it; perhaps it has something to do with the relatively marginal status of a pantomime, or with the fact that he had a marginal status in his home town? My point is that the gift of additional citizenship is not necessarily a symptom of the weakening of the tie between an athlete and his original *patris*. This is clear from quite a few inscriptions (including consolation decrees by associations) that were sent to the original *patris* of a prematurely deceased athlete. The case of Aurelius Achilles shows how the award of citizenship could even lead to the strengthening of ties between two cities (although it is obvious that this was not applicable to every case, as Christopher Jones points out [see below]: there were pre-existing close ties between Aphrodisias and Ephesos). My point is that citizenship was certainly not meaningless for those who gave or received it, and citizenship titles might be used to remind people about the common identity of the cities concerned.

*C. Jones*: We would have to suppose that Same and Kephallonia felt themselves joined with Antinoopolis. *Theoroi* who trace a linear path through the cities they visit are not comparable. One might ask if cities granted citizenship to athletes in part because they aspired to be proclaimed as their *patris* at some prestigious *agôn*, as we see illustrated at Ephesos in a series of inscriptions elucidated by Louis Robert ("Sur des inscriptions d'Éphèse: fêtes, athlètes, empereurs, épigrammes", *Opera Minora Selecta*, V [Amsterdam 1989], 347-424). These long lists of citizenships and other privileges seem to reflect the self-presentation of the athlete himself, or of the city honoring him, rather than a network that he created by his peregrination.

*O. van Nijf*: I agree completely that the primary motivation for the mentioning of citizenship should be sought in the desire for self-representation of the athlete, and also that the interest of the city offering citizenship to a foreign born athlete was to raise its standing among other Greek cities at the moment of proclamation. This is in fact what I argue in the Tours paper, on which this section is based. My suggestion here was based on my application of the theory of Chwe on the rationality of rituals such as panhellenic contests. What happens at the panhellenic festivals where these proclamations were made is exactly that they create common knowledge in the form of Greek identity, and that they raise the status of the individual cities within what I suggest can best be seen as a network of Greek cities. At the panhellenic games all cities 'present' would know which other cities were present, and thus what the extent of the Greek world was. *Theoroi* made the individual links between the cities in this network visible, and permanent. The Hellenistic lists of *theorodokoi* at festival sites would have commemorated the extent of the network served by an individual festival. The enumeration of the cities (either as cities where victories were obtained, or where citizenship had been granted) in victory inscriptions of the Roman era may have had a similar effect: it was a visual reminder of the extent of the Greek world under Rome. I agree that we cannot say that the inscriptions for Demonstratos Damas and his colleagues created such networks in themselves, but they certainly kept alive the knowledge of the extent of these networks, and thus contributed to the interconnectedness of these cities.

*M.L. Caldelli*: Le osservazioni fatte a proposito di *oikoumenikos* riferito alla *synhodos* degli artisti di Dioniso sono molto interessanti. Mi chiedo e ti chiedo come dovremmo intendere questo aggettivo quando è riferito ad un agone? Indica una qualità, una caratteristica dell'agone, come *hieros* o *eiselastikos*? Oppure serve a distinguere un livello, più elevato, dell'agone



(*oikoumenikos* opposto a "locale")? Oppure indica l'adesione alla politica imperiale romana?

*J. Nollé:* Was die Frage der Bedeutung von *oikoumenikos* im Zusammenhang mit Spiele angeht, so glaube ich, dass *oikoumenikos* Spiele bezeichnete, an denen Athleten aus dem gesamten Imperium Romanum teilnehmen durften. Ein *agôn oikoumenikos* stand so im Gegensatz zu jenen Agonen, an denen die Teilnehmer nur aus einer bestimmten Region bzw. Provinz oder einer einzelnen Stadt kommen durften.

*C. Jones:* I agree with Herr Nollé that *oikoumenikos* as an epithet of *agônes* is not likely to be associated with the emperors and their rule over the Roman empire *qua* imagined *oikoumene*. We would have to imagine that *oikoumene* included very little of the West (Rome, Neapolis, Carthage, Nicopolis). It is a more attractive explanation that the *agôn* admits competitors from the whole 'world' as opposed to *agônes* with merely a city- or province-wide pool of competitors. We might compare the 'ecumenical' council of Christianity, of which the first is in Nicaea in 325.

*O. van Nijf:* It is clear that I did not make my own purposes here completely clear (though I have done so in my paper, "Global Players", which I mentioned earlier). My discussion of the term *oikoumenikos* was meant as a comment on its use by the associations of athletes and performers. In their discussions of the title in this context, scholars have suggested that the term was used to indicate that the associations had *recruited their members from all over the oikoumene* or that they *were active all over the oikoumene*. It seems to me that there may not be much to choose between the two. Obviously the term *oikoumene* is of course used to denote the 'inhabited world'. My aim was merely to suggest that *in this context* it has generally been overlooked that the term *oikoumenikos* developed particularly strong associations with imperial rule. Polybius may have been

the first to observe that Roman rule had become co-terminous with the *oikoumene*, but from Augustus onwards it was a standard epithet for Roman emperors. The use of this global image has been discussed by Nicolet in *L'inventaire du monde*. Looking through the epigraphic corpora, I noted that the term is found nearly exclusively

- 1) as a part of imperial titulature
- 2) as part of the title of festivals that mostly seem to have had a strong imperial connection and
- 3) as the title of the agonistic associations.

I suggest, therefore, that when the associations adopted this title, it was simply impossible for them (or anybody else referring to these associations by this title) to ignore the imperial associations or connotations of this term. This title framed their activities already in an imperial context, and may thus have signalled their adhesion to imperial ideology.

*C. Kokkinia:* I am sceptical about the changes that you observe in the nature of the festivals: was it not the case that festivals were always scripted? Think of the Panathenaia. Can the changes you name in the imperial period not simply be the effect of the auditoria becoming more permanent, and visible? And are you not making too much of the fact that there were seating inscriptions? We don't truly know what kind of regulations these inscriptions reflected. The persons and groups named could have bought the seats (as discussed in G. Chamberland, "A Gladiatorial Show Produced *in sordidam mercedem* (Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.62)", in *Phoenix* 61 [2007], 136-149) or acquired them by other means. There must have been changes in imperial times, but I am not sure they are securely identifiable — other than the fact, of course, that there was now an external arbiter: the emperor.

*O. van Nijf:* I agree that it must have been the case that festivals had always been 'scripted' or regulated. The point is that it became apparently more important to make these rules

explicit by epigraphic publicity. The practice of inscribing these rules *en détail* was to make knowledge of them common, and to give them a more permanent character. Secondly, it is striking that these rules, or scripts, have a more hierarchical character than in earlier periods. This does not apply only to the seating arrangements, but also to the regulations for processions, banquets and distributions. It is, for example, very clear that the instructions for handouts at festivals had a distinct set-up. Finally, the type of hierarchy that was communicated was not a functional hierarchy, but rather a hierarchy of groups and individuals with a particular social and political status in the community. In this way the festival acquired an explicitly political dimension. As to your comments on the seating inscriptions: you are right that we do not always know how the seats were allocated: especially not in the case of inscriptions which give only individual names. However, there is a marked difference between earlier Greek traditions, and those of the imperial age (which was underlined by architectural means). As we know that seating regulations were actively promoted in Rome by the emperors, I think that it is fair to describe the changes in the Greek auditoria as the result of cultural transfer, which is a term that I prefer to Romanization.

*J.-P. Thuillier:* En ce qui concerne la valeur athlétique vue comme élément-clé pour une carrière politique, croyez-vous que cela soit plus vrai à l'époque hellénistique ou impériale qu'à l'époque classique? Il me semble que plusieurs exemples en témoignent déjà pour les périodes plus anciennes.

*O. van Nijf:* This is an interesting question. I think that this is a matter of genre and of scale. Of course I agree that the élites were always present in the world of athletics. Athletic skills and athletic or agonistic success had always been claimed by the élites. As to skills, this is shown I think by the reputation of someone like Themistocles as a heavy athlete: a well-known bust from Ostia shows him with the 'cauliflower ears'



of a boxer. As to victory, we only need to think of the *Odes* of Pindar, as well as of the stories about Athenian 'aristocrats' like Cylon or Alcibiades who had been victorious at the Olympic Games (in horse racing). In fact, athletic competition had always been a quintessential element of Greek culture (*paideia*). And this is precisely where its attraction lay for Greek civic élites of the Roman period. They could use it to legitimate their élite status, in the same way that they used their literary and rhetorical education — or their euergetism, for that matter. (I have discussed this in my article, "Athletics and Paideia: Festivals and Physical Education in the World of the Second Sophistic", in *Paideia: The World of the Second Sophistic*, edited by Barbara E. Borg [Berlin-New York 2003], 203-228, and so has Thomas Schmitz, in *Bildung und Macht* [München 1997].) What is new in this period is that athletic success has become an important part of the epigraphic self-representation of the individual elites. The number of monuments commemorating athletic success proliferates, not only at the sanctuary sites, but in the city centres, where athletic success becomes one of the most prominent themes that are addressed by (public) honorific inscriptions. So, what seems to change is the political function of athletic success; it is commemorated more frequently, and more directly in support of the political 'regime of the notables'.

