Introduction

During the course of a very long conversation held as they walk across the mountains of Krete in the heat of summer, three philosophically-minded elderly gentlemen turn their attention, and the experience of their respective cultures, to a matter of supreme importance for those, like themselves, deeply concerned with finding the way to shape the best possible form of society: the education of the young. As in all things Greek, the conversation is dominated by the Athenian, in this case a nameless 'stranger'. His Spartan and Kretan companions are little more than reflective surfaces for his thoughts and pronouncements; their mountain hike to the cave of Zeus on Ida the most discrete of fictive frames for what is essentially systematic exposition. Plato now has little use for the didacticism of drama.

Khoreia – the practice of dancing and singing as a social collective to the words and music of a poet – is absolutely fundamental to this Athenian vision of the ideal paedagogy in the ideal city. And this it shares with the historical city of classical Athens, as indeed with most Greek cities of whose religious and cultural practices anything much can be known. Views diverge enormously, however, as to the precise means and matters for choral performance. This Athenian has his listeners accede without demur to his vision of a city extending its legislative and administrative powers into every corner of choral practice: who is to perform in what *khoros*; at what age; with what words, bodily gestures, metres and rhythms; wearing what garments and ornaments; to what god, hero or heroised man their performance will be directed, and with what accompanying sacrifices; on what day of the year (and virtually every day will see *khoroi* dance). Nothing whatever in *khoreia*, this practice for producing 'beautiful bodies' and 'noble souls', is left to contingency or whimsy: every poetic composition is to be checked by civic officials to ensure its 'legality', that it does not contravene what the city regards as 'just, beautiful and good'. Nor is the poet to show his work to some mere private citizen before it has been scrutinised by the guardians of the laws, the special 'Lawmakers for matters Musical' and the 'Supervisor of Education'. Anyone foolhardy enough to propose a change in the sacred laws prescribing the same choral performances, the identical hymns, on the same days every year, exposes himself to expulsion from the choral community and to prosecution for impiety.

The lengthy exposition ranges widely, among many other things making a case

for the education of women and, almost as enthusiastically, endorsing a programme to inculcate ambidexterity from an early age. But by its close there remains a significant omission. It is almost as an afterthought – but an affected afterthought, as though hoping to suppress the importance of the matter it recalls – that the question of drama, comic and tragic, is raised. The fact that they appear in this discussion at all is testimony to their continued importance as performances central to the shaping of civic identity in the mid-fourth century; while their presence among and treatment as fundamentally *choral* performances highlights an important and neglected truth: well into the later classical period, drama was conceived of as a choral form.

A mild and as it were homeopathic dose of 'the business of base bodies and ideas', of comedy, is admitted, in the belief that one exposes oneself to the dangers of the ludicrous and vulgar 'in order to avoid ever doing or saying anything ludicrous through ignorance'. And the whole practice is consigned to foreigners. But the question posed by 'the so-called "serious" poets, the tragedians', is the more pressing, precisely because of their seriousness, a quality which the elderly Athenian is very keen on for his educational purposes, and which is the most prized feature of the poetry and *khoreia* to be reperformed endlessly and without change in his visionary city. A critical question in this discussion of education then becomes whether to admit the poets of tragedy into the city and countryside, along with their actors 'with their beautiful voices and their power to speak louder than us', when they ask for permission to set up their stages in the marketplace. The works of these poets, like those of any other aspirant in the ideal city, are to be scrutinised by magistrates and tested against those of their rivals. But in this case, the rivals are the citizens of the ideal city, transformed in the Athenian's vision into poets themselves, 'of a tragedy at once most beautiful and good', the constitution of the city, 'a representation of the most beautiful and best life which is in reality, as we assert, the truest tragedy'. This radical hijacking of the title of tragic poet by the citizens *qua* citizens, and of tragedy by the city's very political structure, points to the depth of anxiety over its power. Expulsion or rejection will not work; appropriation and coercive redefinition are the only effective alternatives.

> So now, you children, offspring of soft Muses, give a display of your songs side by side with ours before the Arkhons, and if you seem to be saying the same as us, or even something better, then we shall give you a *khoros*; but if not, friends, we could never do so. (*Laws* 817d)

This question – to whom the city is to give its *khoroi*, above all its *tragic khoroi*, encapsulates in very concrete form the paedagogical and psychological issues of such concern to the elderly Athenian and the philosopher preoccupied with the maintenance of stable identity. And the question had an equal urgency for the historical Athenians themselves, but for the utterly different reason that these 'children of soft Muses' and their actors were the most prestigious of all the city's many cultural practitioners, that the democratic city as a whole identified itself very powerfully with this peculiarly complex and potent form of *khoreia*. There were few public activities in the realm of the social and cultural which carried as much privilege and prestige as having, giving, receiving, teaching or leading a tragic *khoros*. The Platonic vision of the way tragic production should be managed in the well-ordered city is entirely eccentric, and swims against the strong contemporary current of its diffusion across

and beyond the Aigean world, in the process of becoming a primary symbol not merely of the Athenian but of the Greek city.[1] The philosopher's moral and social fears seem so extreme because the society from which he draws his experience devoted energies and wealth on such a scale to its tragic *khoroi*, and had done so for more than one and a half centuries.

The Athenians were thus by no means unlike their philosopher in the importance they attached to their choral culture. While they could scarcely have differed more on the matter of dramatic *khoreia*, the principle, central to Platonic paedagogy, that the man without choral formation is a man without education (ὁ μὲν ἀπαίδευτος ἀχόρευτος ἡμῖν ἔσται, τὸν δὲ πεπαιδευμένον ἱκανῶς κεχορευκότα, *Laws* 654a–b) was one they, like most Greeks, fully endorsed. In some Greek cities the institutions for the education of the young were called simply 'the *khoros*'; in Sparta the word was used of the central political space of the city.[2] The Athenians soon became famous in Greece for the degree to which they promoted and perfected Dionysiac *khoroi* in particular (cf. Athen. 5.181c), and they were perhaps the keenest of the Greeks for naming their children with aspirations at heart for their choral future, and at any rate in a manner that testifies to the prestige choral culture maintained in their self-image: we find 'Khoral Glory' (*Khorokles*), 'Khoral Victory' (both boy and girl – *Khoronikos*, *Khoronike*); and at least one '*Khoregos*', a comic poet who surely came from a 'musical' family.[3]

The Athenians were also not unfamiliar with a high degree of formalism and legal control in the conduct of their extensive choral culture. At the centre of its management was a major institution, the *khoregia*. Its place at the heart of Athenian civic society and the importance attached to it, illuminate the absolute centrality of *khoreia* to Athens as a political community and help explain the philosopher's anxiety.

The *khoregia* has suffered from a curious lack of scholarly attention. The only works devoted specifically to it date from the end of the nineteenth century, and are largely confined to epigraphic issues, and more generally to the attempt to reconstruct the scheme of its practical organisation and conduct, that is, to writing a formal institutional history.[4] These specialist studies aside, the *khoregia* has generally been consigned to the sphere of economic history where, with the other *leitourgiai* or 'public services', it was for a long time treated as a perplexing if interesting feature of the ancient public economy. Boeckh's *Staatshaushaltung der Athener* of 1817 still remains the fundamental work in this project of economic and institutional history.[5] More recently, this somewhat narrow designation has been nuanced by fruitful analysis of the ways in which the performance of *leitourgiai* was determined by political factors, such as the desire to raise one's public profile through a 'politics of largess'.[6] In 'literary' studies of drama, on the other hand, the *khoregia* often rates little more than a passing mention, under the topic of 'staging', or with reference to the (now largely abandoned) theories which saw *khoregoi* and poets operating in personal and political concert.[7] The two spheres – institutional, economic and political history on the one hand, and theatrical history on the other – have generally been regarded as discrete and of very different orders.

The reasons for such a demarcation of analysis are not hard to divine. The materials on which any study of the *khoregia* can be based are of a diverse and difficult range of media: from fragmentary inscriptions from the wreck of monuments set up

to commemorate a choral victory, to abstract philosophical rumination on the motivating psychology of the leitourgist. But the *khoregia* is precisely as exciting and revealing a subject as it is difficult, for it ramifies into virtually all areas of Athenian life: not simply theatrical production, but a range of various other choral forms with which the Athenians honoured their gods and pleased themselves, in particular the elusive and little-studied, but extraordinarily widespread dithyramb. And the *khoregia* must also be viewed in relation to a vast array of even less familiar festival performances which the Athenians chose to organise and fund as competitions between their rich citizens. Moreover the leitourgic system was no discrete, impersonal institution, but stood at the ideological and material heart of the city, channelling vast resources of private wealth into the celebration of numerous festivals and crucially underwriting the maintenance of the fleet while simultaneously furnishing it with leaders. Operated with such a high degree of care and investment by the Athenians in the fifth and fourth centuries, it put the security of the city's choral culture on the same footing as that of its naval power, which was the backbone of its empire. For most of the period covered by this study, including the course of the long Peloponnesian war, the 'leadership of *khoroi*' and the 'command of triremes' were on a par in the institutional support they received from the polis. They were seen as parallel rather than competing priorities. The prestige and, effectively, the power that went with these different forms of 'leadership' of the demos were far from negligible. And the way their performance, and the 'favour' they generated, were exploited in relations with the demos, and equally, the way they are represented among the circles of the likes of the 'Old Oligarch', those antipathetic to the prevailing political régime, reveals an enormous amount about the contested formation of political ideologies in Athens. The subject goes to the heart of major issues concerning the political and social stability of the democratic city, of definitions of citizenship, of democratic society's proper use of its surplus wealth, and of the gap between ideology and practice.

Important recent developments in a number of areas make a reassessment of the *khoregia* all the more timely. In particular, the fruitful and influential project of reinstating Athenian drama in the material, political, social and mental landscapes in and for which it was created would hardly be complete without a study of the mechanism at its centre. In any project which takes as its object the relations between theatre and community, study of the *khoregia* must play an important part, being at the simplest level the mechanism whereby prominent members of that community, *khoregoi*, were appointed by the leading civic officer, the Eponymous Arkhon, to fund a tragic *khoros*.[8] Thus, at the very point at which tragedy is instantiated, there emerge important questions of the dynamics of individual and collective in Athenian society – questions which insistently recur in the tragedies themselves, and which its form is indeed eminently suited to explore.

This recontextualisation of drama through the *khoregia* also highlights, as Plato's discourse on *khoreia* further shows, the status of drama as a choral production, in a cultural tradition which knew of many different choral types. A consideration of the centrality which was so often accorded to *khoroi* in contemporary discussion of dramatic organisation and production may also offer a corrective to what has long been the basic tenet of the formal history of the tragic genre – namely, that that history can be seen as the steady decline in the importance of the *khoros* with a correspond-

ing increase in the rôle of the actors.[9] The *khoros* has in recent years begun to be given its due recognition not only at the centre of any attempt to understand drama in its original context but as a major form of Greek cultural, social and religious life.[10] My preference for the transliterated forms such as '*khoregia*' and '*khoros*' over their latinised equivalents, 'choregia', 'chorus' – more familiar certainly in literary studies – is largely in order to signal, however superficially, this attempt to remove some of the accretions of a scholarly tradition of great antiquity for which the *khoros* had become a problem. An important point of departure for this book was the recognition that the modern scholarship devoted to the tragic *khoros* had largely reached an impasse. The terms of analysis were predominantly formal, and predicated on a notion of 'literature' more or less inappropriate for the public and political form of Greek drama. And they were dominated by the perceived preoccupations of Aristotle's *Poetics*. In particular, the influence of the nineteenth-century obsession with the search for the origins of tragedy was slow in loosening its grip, and can be detected in many works, among them what is still the most systematic single study of the choral parts of tragedy, Kranz's *Stasimon: Untersuchungen zu Form und Gehalt der griechischen Tragödie*.[11] Perhaps the most deleterious habit of this approach was its tendency to confuse diachronic and synchronic explanation: the hypothesised, inaccessible choral origins of tragedy are adduced, explicitly or implicitly, to explain the extant examples of the form. A remarkable case is Kranz's view of the character of the *khoros*. This he saw as most strongly drawn at the beginnings of plays, and dwindling as the action predominates, the *khoros* becoming more of a spectator, with fewer interventions, at the ends of works. Kranz regarded this movement *internal* to specific tragedies as a formal analogy mirroring the history of the development of the *khoros* in the genre as a whole, rising from choral origins and ending in the marginality or death of the *khoros*.[12] The teleological bias of this approach is clear, and it is the hallmark of virtually all scholarship devoted to formal aspects of tragedy. Consigned to a brief acme of aesthetically 'appropriate' and dramatically successful participation in the action in the work of Sophokles,[13] the tragic *khoros* as it appears in the work of Aiskhylos is on this approach generally seen as a primitive element in which one can divine the origins of the genre,[14] and in Euripides, or at least in late Euripides, as a degenerate, superfluous, embarrassing relic on its way to becoming little more than the provider of act-dividing musical 'interludes' with no essential relation to the particular drama, ἐμβόλιμα.[15] The very fact of the continuing vigour of the *khoregia* for nearly a century beyond the date at which Aristotle places the start of this practice is one of the strongest arguments that this neat vision of organic decline cannot be sustained.

These related concerns of origins and formal development reflect the continuing orientation of scholarship around a model derived from (readings of) Aristotle's *Poetics*. This is the founding text for the formal, teleological analysis of tragedy and more generally for the attempt to formulate a 'theory' of tragedy and its *khoros*. Yet in Aristotle's account, the *khoros* is in fact the least amenable element to his theory of causality and action, and so is negatively privileged in his hierarchy of the 'parts' of drama, which places plot (μῦθος) and character (ἦθη) at the top, melic poetry (μέλος) and the visual (ὄψις) at the bottom, the latter considered inessential to experience of the tragic.[16] Recent work has exposed some of the exclusionary biases operating under approaches centred on this view, which often come close to ignoring the part played by the *khoros* in tragedy altogether.[17] The theoretical bent and formalism of

such approaches have also encouraged and endorsed an apolitical and largely ahistorical view of tragedy, but the effects of (and the reasons for) the hugely influential omission of both the city and the *khoros* from Aristotle's *Poetics* are coming to be better understood.[18]

Unlike Aristotle, the Athenians conceived of their drama as a choral performance, one that sat easily alongside the purely choral genre of dithyramb. A whole field of terminology used to describe the organisation and performance of Athenian drama is centred on the *khoros*. The festival *khoroi* are in an important sense regarded as being 'the city's *khoroi*'. In Athens as in the city of the *Laws*, a tragic poet with hopes of plying his craft 'asked for a *khoros*' – χορὸν αἰτεῖν (cf. Aristoph. *Knights* 513) – from the city in the person of the Arkhon, who 'gave' it – χορὸν διδόναι (cf. Aristot. *Poetics* 1449b; Kratinos fr. 17 K–A; Pl. *Rep.* 383c) – as he saw fit to the three successful poets.[19] Of course the χορηγία itself fits into this series of terms. Comedy's own broader discourse of dramatic performance is equally revealing: in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, the god of drama says that he has descended to Hades for a tragic poet, 'so that the polis may be saved and conduct its *khoroi*' (ἵν' ἡ πόλις σωθεῖσα τοὺς χόρους ἄγηι, 1419), referring to the dramatic competitions as an institution conducted by and for the polis with the simple term οἱ χοροί: and in this context, 'the city's *khoroi*' means tragedy.[20] In the *Clouds*, that group of eager aerial choral visitors to Athens characterise its principal choral festival (to which they are heading) as 'the Dionysian joy with the approach of spring, wranglings of sweet-voiced *khoroi* and the deep-toned music of pipes' (311–13). This combination of pleasure, music and choral aggression as defining features of Dionysian performance is not uncommon.[21]

Recent studies of the 'ancient economy' or – to signal an important shift in emphasis from global systems to the more personal, social and specific – of 'ancient economic relations', have refocussed attention on the leitourgic system. Whereas *leitourgiai* were once seen, and often condemned, as an irrational and wasteful example of the ancient economy's 'primitivism', they are now held up as a prime example of the personalised nature of ancient economic relations, and of the way that much of ancient Greek economic life was deeply embedded in a network of interpersonal relations, one among a range of different forms of reciprocity. The 'rationality' of the classical Greek economy can only be understood when the general subservience of economic matters *per se* to political and broadly socio-ethical principles is appreciated.[22] As for the more specific question of the economic base of tragedy, this has received surprisingly little analysis, even from Marxist critics.[23] Repugnance for probing the economic base for these masterpieces of classical literature can explain some of this neglect, but the weight of traditional disciplinary demarcations – especially between 'history' and 'literature' – is probably as much to blame. Paul Veyne's *Le Pain et le Cirque* (1976) went further than perhaps any other single work in demonstrating the advantages to be gained by liberating accounts of 'ancient economics' from inappropriate modern conceptual frameworks. For all the criticisms that have been directed against this work, Veyne's demonstration of the importance of an economy of the gift in his account of those areas of the classical Greek, Hellenistic and Roman Imperial worlds concerned with the creation and use of wealth, forcefully demonstrated the pervasiveness and power of the ethic of 'noble expenditure' to constitute social relations.[24] Veyne's study of this concept of 'euergetism' signalled

the importance of viewing the leitourgical system in socially dynamic terms, without providing the texture of detail for such a picture in the early Greek context.[25] A review of Veyne's work in the *Annales* suggested the direction such a study might take: 'Finally, in describing euergetism as outside the logic of politics, Veyne let it be understood that it might have a symbolic function, but at no point does he develop what could be an essential aspect of euergetism: a study of euergetism as social representation and symbolic practice remains to be written.'[26]

The case of classical Athens proves a rich terrain for extending Veyne's approach in this way. More recent developments in social and cultural anthropology on rituals and performance of various kinds as means for the symbolic representation of social relations have refined the techniques and demonstrated the rewards of such an approach.[27] When the somewhat artificial borders between economics, political and cultural performance are broken down, the extent and significance of the competitive and performative qualities of the *khoregia* are better understood, qualities it shared with drama itself.

Part One of this book attempts to present as coherent and detailed a picture as possible of the *khoregia* in Athens. It concentrates on the mechanics of the institution, both with an historical perspective, tracing the changing use made of this form of cultural leadership for the best part of two hundred years of Athenian democratic history; and it also sites the *khoregia* in the context of the wide range of civic activities, festal and military, which the democratic city supported by means of this special form of honorific obligation.

The second Part takes up the project sketched out above of returning to the *khoregia* some of the dynamism which this profoundly social institution clearly had and which a bare account of its formal rules will always conceal. A particularly important strand which emerges from this sociology of the *khoregia* is the persistence, in the practices surrounding this central cultural institution, of élite, aristocratic forms of behaviour and relations: the ostentatious display of personal and cultural wealth in the form of personal clothing, for instance, or in the more permanent shape of the victory-monument. The complex relationship between this form of democratic civic service with a decidedly élitist character and democratic politics and ideology are explored, in particular through that motor of élitist behaviour, the 'love of honour' (*philotimia*) and its close relative, the 'love of victory' (*philonikia*).

The final Part of the book looks beyond the usual *termini* of works devoted to the *khoregia* and the theatre. It centres on the changing evaluation of khoregic expense within Athens in the late classical period, when it becomes an important item in a debate over the best deployment of the wealth of the élite in a city no longer master of a great empire whose autonomy was increasingly open to challenge – in particular from those, somewhat ironically, who were most enthusiastically adopting and exporting Athenian drama. The 'abolition' of the *khoregia* close to the end of the fourth century, and so close to the end of democracy, is often taken to be the natural end-point of any history of the institution. But it is important also to trace the continuities across the rupture between the democratic arrangements and what followed, and to see that the seeds of the oligarchic development towards uniting cultural and political leadership had been planted long before. The fascinating neo-classicising revival of the competitive *khoregia* in first-century A.D. Roman Athens is more than

a curious epilogue of antiquarian interest, but throws reflected light on the classical *khoregia* through its powerful cultural appeal to an embattled and nostalgic Athenian élite. I close with a rough sketch of what in many respects is uncharted terrain: the organisation of *khoreia* by comparable means outside Athens. This raises, although on the current state of evidence and analysis can hardly answer in full, a series of fascinating questions about the possible rôle and nature of Athenian influence behind the khoregic systems which appear in a wide range of places. That Athenian influence is conspicuously not present in some telling instances highlights the need for a more nuanced study of the cultural traditions of the Greek world beyond the dazzling spectacles of classical Athens, and in particular of the place the collective *khoros* continued to occupy at the heart of civic life for centuries.

Part I

THE INSTITUTION

I

Private wealth for public performance

Any picture of the *khoregia* as a functioning institution will be a composite image constructed from a set of fragments from a wide range of contexts and periods. For whatever its precise date of introduction as a fully-fledged civic institution, the *khoregia* enjoyed a long history in classical Athens, enduring in an identifiably stable form for the best part of two hundred years. But even with so large a period to draw from, the image must be a partial one. Much of what we miss derives from the diurnal world of interpersonal relations, that largely inaccessible level of Athenian social history in which the grand public remains of 'civic' Athens – the texts of tragedy, the speeches delivered before mass juries, the monuments – were conceived and brought into being through the complex interactions of individuals. We have few enough of those creations which the Athenians sought to expose forever to the light of the public gaze; of the means of their production within a set of social relations we catch only glimpses. The atmosphere of the *khoregeion*, where every tragedy and comedy and hundreds of choral performances came into being, is all but lost to us.

However, theatre was no matter of 'private' initiative in Athens. The *khoroi* that were at its heart were the *city's khoroi*, and with the involvement of the polis came the culture of publicity characteristic of democratic Athens. The city devoted to their production, performance and judgement the rigorous and extensive armature of control provided by the organs of democratic government. The city as a collective entity promoted the proliferation of choral performances over the classical period; it charged the leading officers of the city with their supervision; it intervened extensively in matters concerning their production, performance, judgement and record, often by means of legislation. Our picture of the *khoregia* will recognise the dominant rôle of the city, under the ultimate authority of a sovereign demos, at every stage. But essential to the institution is the management of a complex union between collective public bodies (*phylai*, the polis itself) with their representative figures (Arkhons, *epimeletai*) and powerful individual citizens and their private wealth.[1]

Festivals were expensive affairs. A logic of expenditure was central to the Greek concept of religion. The gods enjoyed the consecration to them of things of material value which were also the most prized possessions of human communities – livestock, gold in the form of garlands, jewelry or on the horns of cattle, costly fabrics. A well-trained and well-equipped *khoros* was also a costly and beautiful thing.[2] And its value