



Introduction

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The development of ancient Greek theater in South Italy and Sicily is rarely studied, perhaps because the evidence is disparate and fragmentary and requires a command of several disciplines. In an effort to bridge these disciplinary divides, this volume brings together the work of archaeologists, art historians, philologists, literary scholars, political scientists and historians. The two main goals of the volume are to articulate the ways in which Greek theater in the west was distinct from that of the Greek mainland, and, at the same time, to investigate how the two traditions influenced each other.

Locating theater in the history of Sicily and South Italy

The tangle of cultures in ancient Sicily and South Italy complicates the archaeological, historical and literary record of early Greek settlement in the west. Early Greek trading posts in the Bronze Age seem not to have disrupted local cultures, but did perhaps lay the groundwork for the second wave of migrants from various cities in mainland Greece, the Aegean islands and Asia Minor beginning in the eighth century. At the same time, Phoenicians set up trading centers on the western side of Sicily. Etruscans from farther north also engaged in trade with the Greeks and have left a record in the material culture. It is difficult to generalize about Greek interaction with native groups in Sicily and Italy, since the nature of these varied widely.¹

¹ On Minoan and Mycenaean contact with the west, see Vagnetti (1996); on the Phoenicians in the western Mediterranean, see Garbini (1996). See Leighton (1999) and Antonaccio (2001) on pre-Greek culture and Greek interactions. An elegantly readable, but now out of date, history of Sicily is Finley (1979); De Angelis' survey of Sicilian history from c. 750 to c. 250 is forthcoming from Oxford University Press. Pugliese Carratelli's (1996) richly illustrated volume (in which Vagnetti and Garbini's essays can be found) includes a range of essays on many aspects of western Greece. In this volume, "west" and "western" refer to Sicily and South Italy.

As Jonathan Hall sets out in the first chapter of this volume, the Greek settlers in the eighth century and later came from various city-states and the settlers followed different sorts of settlement practices. Though some cities were founded with mixed groups of settlers, by and large Greek cities seem to have defined themselves against each other, rather than identifying with a wider Greek culture. From the fragmented and often partial evidence emerges a fascinating picture of Greek cities evolving variously under a set of new conditions.

From the Archaic period, poetry remains in scattered fragments. On the north coast of Sicily at Himera, for example, the poet Stesichorus took up mythical subjects, some drawn from Homer and others more relevant to the historical circumstances in which he worked.² The details of the performance of Stesichorus' poetry remain controversial, but there is no doubt that its primary mode of transmission was performance. Other poetic performance traditions flourished in South Italy and on the island and these form a backdrop to the advent of formal theater in the fifth century. Indeed, already in the Archaic period, traveling poets may have brought lyric and choral poetry to Syracuse and to other great western cities.³ In Chapter 2, Kathryn Morgan takes up early poetry in Sicily and South Italy and discusses proto-dramatic performance genres that were popular in the west. To this literary evidence can be added the art historical evidence of komast iconography found in the west, not only on vessels imported from Corinth, but also on locally made objects.⁴ Such figures have been thoroughly analyzed for their relationship to early comedy in Greece itself, and their presence in Sicily suggests a regional delight in the same proto-comic dances and performances. Readers will note a similarity between these characters and those of the later terracotta figurines and comic (once 'phlyax') figures on vases discussed by Bonnie MacLachlan, Chris Dearden and Richard Green in this volume. In both cases, padded belly and buttocks, and exaggerated phalluses emphasize the body and the bawdiness of this dance and the farcical comedies with which we might connect them. To this same Archaic period, however, we also owe the grandest of monuments: the great temples of Selinus, Syracuse, Agrigento, Metapontum, Paestum and other places. These towering stone monuments to the gods not only proclaimed the wealth of the island and of the coastal cities in South Italy, but also the ambition of the powerful leaders determined to mark the grandeur of their respective cities.⁵ In Chapter 9, Clemente Marconi explores the

² Cf. Willi (2008) 51–118; Morgan, this volume.

³ Cf. Hunter and Rutherford (2009); Kowalzig (2007). ⁴ Cf. Smith (2007) 59–60.

⁵ E.g. Marconi (2007) 29–60.

shift when, some centuries later, these great cities took up building theaters instead of temples. Then theaters would mark the landscape and define the cities, as temples had done so powerfully in the Archaic period.

By the beginning of the fifth century, some western Greek cities had been established for nearly 250 years, and their monumental architecture rivaled that of mainland Greek cities. Likewise, the philosophy and poetry of western cities had become justly famous in the persons of Pythagoras, Stesichorus and Ibycus, among others. Great rulers, tyrants, of the western cities (for example, Hippocrates, Gelon, Theron and Hieron) amassed wealth and a broad if unstable control over large portions of the area. It is in this early period, in the first half of the fifth century, that we have the first literary evidence for comic dramas and for tragedy. The earliest name that emerges from the chaotic evidence is that of Epicharmus, fêted by Aristotle for his original and formative comic plots (Arist. *Poet.* 1449b5). Since relatively little survives of his substantial body of work, he rarely comes to the fore in works on Greek theater. In order to recuperate him for the field at large, we include two chapters on his work by experts on the subject. Both Andreas Willi and Lucía Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén have published extensively on Epicharmus in German and Spanish respectively, but these are their first major essays for an English-speaking readership. In Chapter 3, Willi develops an argument that Epicharmus' plays have a specifically 'colonial' character. In Chapter 4, Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén examines the fragmentary remains of the influences on which Epicharmus must have drawn and that help us define and understand his work.

As in previous generations, local poets like Epicharmus shared the stage with traveling superstars. To the court of the Syracusan tyrant Hieron, may have come not only Simonides, Bacchylides and Pindar, but also Aeschylus.⁶ All three have left poetry or plays that celebrate the tyrant himself. Sicilian tyrants were not the only powerful and wealthy rulers to recast history and myth and to engage poets to help in reformulating it to serve their own purposes, but they do seem to have been particularly good at it.⁷ In this volume, David Smith investigates complex manipulations of the myths of Ion and Xuthus in the poetry of Stesichorus, in the *Aetnaeae* of Aeschylus and in the *Ion* of Euripides.

The second half of the fifth century, marked by political upheaval and difficult democratic struggles, has left us only the fragmentary work of

⁶ Cf. Arnson Svarlien (1990–1); Bremer (1991); Guardì (1980); Herington (1967).

⁷ See Bosher, this volume, for a discussion of Aeschylus' *Persians* as particularly well suited to the Syracusan political and theatrical situation. See Dougherty (1991 and 1993) for discussions of poetry and tragedy geared to suit Hieron's political ends.

the mime writer, Sophron. In Chapter 16, David Kutzko takes up these mimes through the more complete work of the later Herodas. There is still debate, difficult to settle, about whether Sophron's comic pieces were performed, but it is generally agreed that if they were performed it was to small groups of people in intimate spaces, perhaps most likely before elite audiences. This contrasts starkly with what we believe to have been the performance practice under the tyrant Hieron in the first half of the fifth century, whose investment in theater seems to have been to serve broad public propagandistic ends.

This quiet period for public theater in the latter half of the fifth century ended when Dionysius I seized power. He ruled, increasing his territory through Sicily and up the Italian peninsula, from 405 to 367. In this volume, Anne Duncan discusses Dionysius' own efforts at writing tragedy, and Sara Monoson analyzes his investment in theater through the eyes of his prolific critic and contemporary, Plato. In the middle and at the end of the fourth century, other Sicilian tragedians and writers of comedy and mime appear in the historical record.⁸

During Dionysius' reign, vases of tragic and comic performance began to be painted, not only in Sicily, but also up the Tyrrhenian coast in Paestum and, on the other side of the peninsula, around Tarentum and Metapontum. Most famous of those found in South Italy is the imported Pronomos vase of Attic manufacture, but there is a huge range of locally made vases that depict both tragedy and comedy.⁹ These complicated artistic artifacts are particularly striking because they appear in such great numbers in South Italy and Sicily, far greater numbers than have hitherto been discovered in any other part of the fourth-century Greek world.¹⁰ In this volume, Oliver Taplin considers what these vases can tell us about traveling actors in the west. His model demonstrates how Athenian tragedies and comedies might have been brought to the west. By contrast, Luigi Todisco describes the

⁸ Tragedy: the tyrant Mamercus of Catana, Achaëus of Syracuse, Sosiphanes possibly of Syracuse, Patroclus of Thurii. Comedy: Alexis of Thurii, of whose work some 130 titles remain, and many fragments; Philemon, probably from Syracuse; Archemstratus, Pamphilus and Carnus from the court of Dionysius I; Apollodorus of Gela; Eudocius of Syracuse. Mime: Xenarchus; Theodorus of Syracuse; Beotus of Syracuse or Tarentum; Philistus of Syracuse; Nimphodorus and perhaps Cleon from South Italy. These are recorded in Todisco (2002) 65–6, who collects the ancient testimonies for these names, and also records contemporary actors and musicians. See Dearden, this volume.

⁹ For discussion of the Pronomos vase, see Taplin and Wyles (2010). For tragic vases, see Taplin (2007a), and for comic, see Taplin (1993); and for both, Todisco (2002).

¹⁰ See Appendix B following Chapter 14 by Richard Green setting out the number and types of comic vases from South Italy and Sicily, in comparison to those from other parts of the ancient Greek world.

special difficulties that might have been involved in communicating the meaning of these vases to non-Greek native populations in South Italy. He begins with the remarkable fact that many of the vases in South Italy were found in native, rather than Greek, centers and sets out the find-spots and groupings of these vases in a series of important lists. Agreeing with Giuliani that non-Greeks did not witness performances of the plays themselves, Todisco examines ways that the Greek myths on the vases might have been explained to non-Greek-speakers. Thus Taplin and Todisco represent the two sides of a difficult debate, which has its roots in a long-standing problem of the degree of connection of these theatrical vase-paintings to actual performance. In presenting two contradictory chapters, we hope to give the reader a sense of the possible range of interpretation of these vases.

In the following three chapters, Chris Dearden, J. R. Green and Bonnie MacLachlan discuss the western Greek comic vases, once known as ‘phlyax’, which are remarkable not only for their explicit presentation of performance, but also for the enormous quantity found, and continuing to be found, in the west.¹¹ In these chapters, each author approaches the vases from different perspectives. Dearden puts the vases in their larger theatrical and historical context, demonstrating their close and particular links to the western Greek context. Likewise, MacLachlan examines some vases in conjunction with dramatic figurines, within the specific context of religious ritual, arguing for a close connection between comedy and funerary ritual. Green, by contrast, takes a very close look at artistic development in the vases over the decades, mapping out changes in style. These different approaches show aspects of the relevance of the vases not only as artifacts in their own right, but also as important pieces of evidence in the history of theater and of religion in the Greek West.

In the fourth century, theaters began to take pride of place in the Sicilian and South Italian cities as Clemente Marconi describes in Chapter 9. They were built high up on the acropoleis not only where audiences could survey the vast panoramas of rolling landscape or look out to sea, but also positioned so that the theaters themselves, grand buildings glinting in the sun, could be seen by travelers. In the following chapter, Stefano Vassallo describes for the first time the remarkable new discovery of a fourth-century theater at Montagna dei Cavalli (see the front cover of this volume), which he excavated in 2007.

In the second half of the fourth century, under the leadership of Timoleon and then Agathocles, Sicily became increasingly prosperous. Agathocles

¹¹ For a recent introduction to these vases, see Csapo (in press).

ruled as a tyrant, perhaps cruelly as the ancient sources report, from 317 to 289. Upheaval following his death was quelled, briefly at first by King Pyrrhus of Epirus, and then for some fifty years (c. 269–215 BC) by King Hieron (Hieron II), who made a treaty with Rome and set about enriching his Sicilian kingdom.

In the final section of the volume, ‘Hellenistic Reflections,’ we move to this third-century world of Hellenistic Kings and to a new set of political and social conditions. Benjamin Acosta-Hughes discusses Theocritus, a Sicilian poet, who worked for some time at the court of the Ptolemies in Alexandria, and David Kutzko takes up the Sicilian Herodas in the context of the larger tradition of Sicilian mime. Though these two writers belong to a vastly different age, their work consciously reflects the old Doric tradition of mime writing begun perhaps as early as Epicharmus, and certainly with Sophron. Through analysis of some of Theocritus’ extant work and all of Herodas that remains, we can see the late versions of this peculiarly Sicilian comic form, and through them we gain some insight into the earlier, more obscure, tradition.¹²

Themes of the volume

A basic interpretative task in the study of western Greek theater is to determine whether a regional theatrical tradition developed in the Italian peninsula and the island of Sicily, and how this tradition might be defined. This question is very hard to address using one category of evidence in isolation, because the answers from different disciplines, considered separately, are often contradictory. Earlier generations assumed a sharp divide between Athenian and west Greek traditions, interpreting, for example, the South Italian and Sicilian western Greek comic vases (then ‘phlyax’) as products of a rustic native drama, wholly distinct from that of Athens.¹³ This assumption has now been corrected through analysis of several vases, which have been shown to represent Attic Comedy.¹⁴ The interpretative pendulum is in danger of swinging to the other extreme point of view: that fourth-century Sicilian and South Italian theater was all Athenian and owed nothing to local playwrights and poets. A salutary corrective to such art historical arguments comes from study of the Doric literary tradition in the west, in, for example, the work of scholars such as Andreas Willi. Willi argues that a distinctive

¹² On later developments in mime and pantomime traditions, see Hall and Wyles (2008).

¹³ E.g. Heydemann (1886). ¹⁴ Taplin (1993a) and Csapo (1986).

‘colonial’ mentality is evident in the Doric writing of Epicharmus, as it was also in his Sicilian predecessor, Stesichorus.¹⁵ Later luminaries in the Doric tradition, Theocritus and Herodas also owe much to both the Doric as well as Athenian traditions of drama, and the last two chapters of the volume take up the complicated influences on the two Doric poets’ work.¹⁶ Still more firmly embedded in the territory, the Greek theaters of Italy and Sicily dot the landscape, and analysis of their place in the geography and culture of Sicilian cities yields information about the political and social role of theater in the Classical and Hellenistic societies of the west.¹⁷ All the papers in this volume take up this problem of defining what South Italian and Sicilian Greek theater might be, and point to characteristics of a tradition that is particularly western Greek. We hope to have begun to lay the groundwork for a definition of the character of western Greek theater by drawing on the varied answers offered by literary, archaeological and art historical sources.

Building on this fundamental work of describing a western regional theatrical tradition, the volume investigates the dynamics between Athenian and South Italian and Sicilian theater. The chapters examine the complex strands of influence that run, not just from Athens to the west, but from the west to Athens as well. These studies are framed by Hall’s introductory chapter in which he sets out the broader historical context of the relation between mainland Greek cities and those of the west. His reinterpretation of the old models of center and periphery is picked up and employed in the subsequent chapters of Morgan on western song-culture in the panhellenic context; in Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén and Willi’s study of Epicharmus between Sicily and the greater Greek world; in Bosher and Duncan’s studies of tyrants’ use of theater in their self-aggrandizing propaganda; in Smith’s argument that Stesichorus, Aeschylus and Euripides engaged in a literary battle about mythical traditions and land claims; in Monoson’s study of Plato’s interest in Dionysius. Likewise, the influence of Athens on western Greek theater is carefully evaluated in Taplin’s study of troupes of actors bringing Athenian drama to the west; in Todisco’s investigation of how Athenian tragic stories were communicated to non-Greek speakers in South Italy; in Dearden’s discussion of the comic scenes depicted on ‘phlyax’ vases; and especially in Acosta-Hughes’ and Kutzko’s studies of the influence of both Athenian and Doric traditions on the two Hellenistic poets, Theocritus and Herodas.

¹⁵ Willi (2008) and in this volume. On Stesichorus and other lyric pre-dramatic poetry in Sicily, see Morgan, this volume.

¹⁶ Acosta-Hughes and Kutzko, this volume. ¹⁷ Marconi and Vassallo, this volume.

The juxtaposition of the more familiar Athenian theater with that of the west reveals problems in some assumed characteristics of the context of ancient Greek theater. For example, the volume contributes to a re-evaluation of the connection between Greek theater and democracy. Several papers explicitly take up the role of tyrants in fostering theater in the west (Boshier, Duncan, Monoson), while others position the development of western Greek theater in early non-democratic contexts (Hall, Morgan and Acosta-Hughes). The role of tyrants in the early development of theater has not been well studied, particularly in the wake of extensive work on the relationship between Greek theater and democracy. The complicated world of fifth-century Sicilian tyranny itself has received more attention in recent years,¹⁸ but the study of Sicilian theater during the reign of these tyrants has not kept pace with this work.¹⁹ The plays of Dionysius I, in particular, have not received extensive treatment since Xanthakis-Karamanos' monograph on fourth-century tragedy.²⁰ Anne Duncan builds on new research to reopen questions about Dionysius I and the theater of his courts. Likewise, Sara Monoson, whose work has hitherto concentrated on democratic Athenian contexts,²¹ examines Plato's writing on Sicilian tyranny and theater.

This work shows that the widely accepted connection between Greek drama and democracy, set out in the 1990 volume, *Nothing to do with Dionysus?*,²² for example, does not hold in the west. Some scholars, like Jasper Griffin, for example, have argued that the general theory that democracy promoted and deeply defined both Attic plays and their festival contexts is flawed.²³ In this volume, we do not engage this larger debate, for our focus is not Athenian theater itself. Nevertheless, the argument informs our volume, for some of the difficulties of aligning the themes of the plays with democratic values that Griffin sets out can be resolved in the non-democratic contexts of performance in Sicily.²⁴ More concretely, a large proportion of the evidence that is preserved for theater in the west can be dated to periods of tyrannical or royal rule, from the plays of Epicharmus under Hieron I to the mimes of Herodas and Theocritus under Hieron II (or the Ptolemies), from the theaters built through the fourth and third centuries to many of the west Greek comic vases of the first three quarters of the fourth century. The question is complicated, however, by the tyrants' and, later, the kings' propaganda and self-presentation. It is fairly likely that even as early as Gelon and Hieron I, at the beginning of the fifth century, these tyrants presented themselves as populist and included features of democratic governments in

¹⁸ E.g. Lewis (2006). ¹⁹ But now see Duncan (2011). ²⁰ Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980).

²¹ E.g. Monoson (2000). ²² Winkler and Zeitlin (1990)

²³ Griffin (1998). ²⁴ Cf. Boshier, this volume.

their political structure. It is not implausible that some of their interest in drama stemmed from this desire to present themselves as enlightened and even, in a sense, democratic.²⁵ Nevertheless, despite late anecdotes about Epicharmus challenging Hieron and the sometimes critical undertones in the work of contemporary poets like Pindar, the propagandistic character of the plays, preserved in fragmentary records from the fifth and the fourth century, suggests a more straightforward attempt to manipulate and define public opinion about the current ruler. This political side of productions is not obviously reflected in the cases of mime texts that survive or the scenes of comic theater represented on west Greek comic vases, both of which seem to be more focused on the peculiarities of private and domestic life.²⁶ Nor need it explain all the vases representing tragedy that have been found in the west.²⁷ The grand stone theater buildings, however, are frequently engraved with the names of the patrons who built them, including the political power-houses of their day, for example Hieron II. The connection between politics and theater in Sicily and South Italy is complex and should not perhaps be submitted to a general theory, but rather treated in case-by-case examples where specific local conditions are taken into account. This volume makes a first inroad into sketching out the general framework of the history of theater in the west, and we hope that it will provide the foundation for future work on more specific political and theatrical interactions.

Significant work has been done to reinterpret the framework of colonial settlements in the west, by, among others, Irad Malkin, Jonathan Hall and Clemente Marconi.²⁸ This work is part of a larger re-evaluation of the phenomenon of Greek encounters with non-Greek, and our realization that the postcolonial reactions to Greek military and cultural force are vital elements of the story. In some studies of this kind, like Phiroze Vasunia's fascinating account of Greek Egypt, or Edith Hall's study of the development of a Greek sense of self through differentiation from the barbarian other, we are drawn into the complex world of Greek self-definition in relation to non-Greek.²⁹ These have been ground-breaking arguments for careful reading of Greek texts that discuss the 'other,' whether Egyptian, Persian or, indeed, Sicel or Sican. Since so many of our Classical texts come from Athens, our window into other Mediterranean cultures is clouded and distorted by the Athenian perspective. In our study of the Greek West, this phenomenon obtains as well. Some chapters in the volume attempt

²⁵ See Duncan, this volume, for a discussion of Dionysius I. See also Bosher (2006).

²⁶ Walsh (2009) discusses west Greek comic vases that feature heroes and divinities.

²⁷ Taplin (2007a). ²⁸ Malkin (1994); Hall (2002); Marconi (2007).

²⁹ Vasunia (2001); Hall (1991).

to unpack this perspective, for example, Monoson discusses Plato's view of Dionysius I, and Smith discusses Euripides' angle on Athenian claims to autochthony and leadership of the Ionians. Other papers are inevitably bounded by the comments left by Attic writers or the comparative model of Athenian drama.

Yet the focus of this volume is not the unraveling of the nuances of Athenian or mainland Greek views and prejudices about the west. We do not, for example, focus on Athenian plays that reference the west, like Euripides' *Trojan Women*, *Electra* and *Cyclops*, though Patricia Easterling has made a good case that the plays' internal references to the west suggest a performance there.³⁰ Rather, our aim, bald as it may be, is to attempt to gather together the western Greek perspective and archaeological context of the development of western Greek theater. In pursuing this goal, we take the focus away from some features of the western Greek culture: their interactions with non-Greeks who inhabited the area before the settlement period of the eighth century; the Phoenician and Carthaginian presence on the west coast of the island; and the complex trading relationships that Sicilian and South Italian Greeks engaged in with Etruscans and others. Certainly, contact with these 'others' must have defined and refined western Greek culture, including their theater,³¹ but the records relating them to the development of theater are as yet too few and little studied for us to engage with them in this volume. On the other hand, western Greek writing, building and painting about theater does remain in sufficient quantity to allow us to try to analyze the western point of view about the local theater scene. Thus, as a first volume on the western development of Greek theater, the task we have taken up is to gather together and to examine some of the central categories of evidence about western Greek theater.

Scope

This volume takes up the history of Greek theater in the west from its early beginnings in the poetry and drama of the early fifth century through to the literary reflections of Sicilian Doric mime in the poetry of Herodas and Theocritus. The scope of the papers and evidence adduced is broad, ranging from archaeological to literary, from art historical to epigraphical. Likewise, the modes of analysis vary from historical to literary to evidence-based catalogue. The disparate nature of the papers is a testament to the

³⁰ Easterling (1994).

³¹ See, for example, Willi (2008) on western Greek dialect and non-Greek languages in Sicily.