

Magdalena GYBAS, *Das Theater in der Stadt und die Stadt im Theater. Urbanistischer Kontext und Funktionen von Theatern im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien.* Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač 2018. 422 S.

Monumental and costly buildings in the ancient cityscapes, such as temples, theatres and baths, played an important role in the self-perception of the cities, and they were important for the self-display and social staging of the elite families. In Hellenistic Greece, huge stoas, like the Stoa of Attalos, in the Athenian agora were monumental evidence of the euergetism of the Pergamenean royal house, and in Republican Rome, temples were dedicated or rededicated in the names of victorious generals as an everlasting memory of their families and their deeds. During periods with less public communication than today, such buildings – profane or religious – became important for conveying messages, and the acknowledgement of the intent of the donors is of crucial importance for the understanding of these buildings in the cityscapes. Whereas the patrons may sometimes be recognized through inscriptions, the viewers and their perception of the building are much harder to identify. Theatres were an essential feature of a civilized city or polis as indicated by Pausanias (10.4.1), and they were present in almost every large city of the Hellenistic and Roman world. The present book by M. Gybas, a revised version of her dissertation (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, 2016), sets out to analyse the role and function of the theatres in 116 *poleis* in two Roman provinces, *Asia* and *Lycia et Pamphylia*, during the imperial period. Besides the introduction (pp. 1-13), the book contains three main parts (pp. 15-213), a catalogue (pp. 215-299), a bibliography (pp. 301-335) and 73 plates.

The elaborate *introduction* sets out the main framework for the book, including aim, research history, method, theory and terminology. Obviously, it is impossible to analyse all the theatres in detail, and on the basis of four case studies (Part I.1, pp. 15-54), the author aims to investigate their original location and their urbanistic contexts as well as their use and function over time, also taking into consideration the preceding Hellenistic period during which many of the theatres were first built. Such a study requires well-published structures, and this is the case with the theatres in Ephesos, Hierapolis, Miletos and Perge, two harbour cities, a city near the coast and an inland city.

Of the theatres in these four cities, that of Ephesos (cat. 31) is the largest and most impressive as to location and size, and its many functions can be illustrated and emphasized through the numerous inscriptions from the first construction during the 2nd century BC up to Late Antiquity. Like other theatres,

the *koilon/cavea* makes use of the natural topographical setting on the slope of the Panayır Dağ facing the harbour. Whereas the theatre in Ephesos is encapsulated in the urban centre next to the agora, the large central theatre in Hierapolis (cat. 39.2) seems to be placed in the middle of a residential area. The theatre is oriented differently from the orthogonal city plan and is placed at a distance from the administrative centre (one insula with houses has been excavated in the area to the north-west of the theatre). This theatre was not monumentalized in stone until after the earthquake around AD 60, but it is possible that a wooden construction existed before that – this would explain the different orientation. During the reign of Hadrian, the city was extended outside the city wall towards the north, partly with a huge agora and partly with a new theatre (cat. 39.1), both arranged according to the orthogonal city plan. The author convincingly argues that the theatres – or at least the newer one – should be considered an element of competition between the cities of Laodikeia and Hierapolis. The third case study concerns the theatre in Miletos (cat. 72), which is one of the oldest in Asia Minor and can be traced back to ca. 300 BC. Like the theatre in Hierapolis, it is oriented differently from the orthogonal city plan, probably indicating that its position is dependent on the topographical conditions. The fourth example stems from the city of Perge in Pamphylia (cat. 87), where a theatre was constructed outside the southern city gate perhaps during the mid-1st century AD. Like the northern theatre in Hierapolis, it was not an integrated part of the urban centre but was placed close to a stadium.

Whereas two of the theatres originate in the Hellenistic period (Ephesos and Miletos), the theatres in Hierapolis and Perge are both later. The author makes clear that there is good evidence of the multifunctional use of all the theatres relating to public gatherings, policy, cult and *munera*, all interesting topics treated in Part II. The many inscriptions in the theatre in Ephesos show that it, besides theatre plays, was used for public assemblies, cult and *munera*. In addition to political assemblies and *munera*, the theatre in Hierapolis with its lavish embellishment from the Severan period emphasized the local tutelary god Apollo together with the imperial house. Similar functions can be attributed to the theatre of Miletos, which was perhaps even used for water shows. Finally, the theatre of Perge seems to have formed part of a larger building programme extending the city with a new quarter outside the city walls where festivals and celebrations took place.

Part I.2 (pp. 54-112) is introduced with a short and useful examination of the similarities and differences between the Greek and Roman type of theatre and the characteristics of the theatres in Asia Minor, but the reader could certainly

have wished for plans of the various types. The author then goes on to investigate the location of the theatres in the cityscapes, now drawing on the full corpus of the extensive catalogue. Under five headings the author investigates the various locations of the theatres in the cityscapes regarding infrastructure, visibility and multifunctional use: 26 theatres are placed near the agora, 7 near the harbour, 36 in the outer periphery of the city (just inside the city wall or in the outskirts of the city), 16 in the periurban regions (just outside the city wall) and 8 in the extra-urban regions. Only in five cities can an axial connection between agora and theatre be proven, and this is perhaps not surprisingly to be noticed in cities planned according to an orthogonal city plan, like Priene (cat. 95), but in nine other examples the theatre is directly related to the space of the agora and then mostly planned as a unified concept.

As a methodical instrument, the grouping of the theatres seems reasonable, but is perhaps too strict in this case. The question is, for example, if it makes any sense to make a distinction between the theatres situated at the harbour and those at the agora, because the urban centres in the old Greek cities are often developed around the harbours, and it follows that many theatres would have been placed not too far away from the city centre. The author rightly draws attention to the importance of topography, and when assessing the theatre in the urban context, it is important to remember that the rather different topographical conditions would have been decisive for their first location; thus most of the theatres exploit the natural setting by organizing the *kouilon/cavea* on a slope of the hills that often enclose a natural harbour. That the topographical conditions were the overall determining factor for the location of the theatre also becomes clear from the corpus, in which only one theatre was built directly on the ground without taking advantage of a slope (Side, cat. 101). Even more important is the visibility of the theatres, a point also emphasized by the author. Theatres would be most visible in a harbour city when taking advantage of the rising landscape, and the physical setting of cities like Halikarnassos (cat. 35) was even compared directly to a theatre (Vitr. 2.8.11). The visibility of these large constructions would certainly enhance the eternal memory and fame of their builders. Even if the study focusses on the imperial period, many of the theatres were built already during the Hellenistic period, and this fact, of course, makes the evaluation of locations and contexts difficult because the theatre had first been integrated in a Hellenistic urban context and then an imperial one, and the visibility or the accessibility of the theatre may have changed considerably over the centuries. Whereas the space for the Hellenistic theatres could have been chosen more freely, the space for new imperial buildings would have been more limited, which may explain why some of them were built in the periphery of the city or even outside the city walls.

In addition to the impressive *koilon/cavea* was the stage building, which could be in two or three storeys with plenty of opportunities for sculptural and architectural embellishment in marble. It was not only the façade towards the audience that was important for the display of sculptures, but also that of the exterior towards the city – often towards an open place.

Another fascinating aspect of the theatres is their multifunctional use (I.2.4). A group of theatres that are easy to identify are what the author designates as “Festspielareale”, which are usually placed in the outskirts of the city. These theatres are usually related to other buildings intended for entertainment, competitions or games, like the odeion or the stadium. They all date back to the imperial period during which there would have been only limited space for such large constructions in the centre of the city.

The theatres were originally sacral buildings, and, as is well known, the theatres were closely connected to the cult of Dionysos, which is why a temple for this god is often directly related to the theatre. Other temples – more or less closely related to the theatres – are those for the imperial cult, and a few theatres have a temple above the *summa cavea*. Quite a number of theatres have been built in the vicinity of the periurban *necropoleis*, and this may presumably be explained by the lack of space for a theatre inside the city walls. However, in a few cases the honorary tomb of a wealthy benefactor was placed in a prominent area near the theatre itself, as in Rhodiapolis (cat. 96), an honour that was usually exclusively reserved for city founders. Finally, a peculiarity of the theatres in Asia Minor is their close relation to baths, which is perhaps not surprising since the baths were also centres of leisure and cultural activities.

Even though this part gathers much useful information about the actual location of the theatres, their contexts and multifunctionality, it also becomes evident that the author has certain difficulties in assessing the buildings in (only) the imperial contexts. A diachronic approach including fewer cities with a study of the development of the theatres spanning from the Greek Hellenistic to the Roman imperial period would perhaps have given a better understanding of the various contexts of these buildings and their function over time.

Since the chronological focus is the imperial period, it would have been interesting to compare the development of some of the cities in the two provinces with the urban development of the capital of Rome. Similar to the periurban location of the theatres together with stadia and porticoed spaces (such as Pergamon, cat. 86.2) is the organizing of the spaces outside the city walls on the Campus Martius from the Late Republican period. Here the theatres of Pom-

pey and Marcellus were in like manner surrounded by temples, porticoed spaces, stadia, an amphitheatre – and tombs.

The second part of the book (Part II, pp. 113-204) is dedicated to the study of the many functions related to the theatre, such as plays, pantomimes, mimes, recitation of poetry, festivals including music and sports competitions, games, *munera* and *venationes* as well as political assemblies and cult. As one of the main sources for these events, the author draws upon the rich epigraphical record. Many cities had their own local festival, and one good example is the Demosteia in Oinoanda (cat. 80). The festival was named after the wealthy citizen and benefactor who lived during the time of Hadrian, C. Iulius Demosthenes, and the inscription gives detailed information of the programme of the *agon* and prizes. Since only very few amphitheatres are known from Asia Minor (e.g. Pergamon, cat. 86.2), many theatres had their plans adjusted to include *munera* and *venationes* during the imperial period, a Roman element so very different from the traditional Greek use. The first *munera* are known to have been celebrated by Lucullus around 70 BC, and from then on references to gladiatorial contests are abundant. Evidence of the restructuring of the orchestra can be observed in 22 theatres, and the earliest evidence belongs to the late 2nd or early 3rd century AD (Ephesos).

The sacral aspects of the theatre are investigated in part II.2 (pp. 138-158). The festivals related to the theatre are numerous and diversified, and the author chooses to focus on the largest festivals celebrated over several days, often related to *agones* and certain local deities – and the emperor. Again, the epigraphical record gives insight into the celebrations and informs us about deities, processions, priests and other central participants in these festivals, and how they were performed with music and processions, all meant to reflect the power, wealth and status of the cities. Obviously, the theatre was an excellent place for such actions, as it could house an audience which, according to inscriptions on the seats, was often seated according to phyles. In this way, these celebrations emphasized the political and social hierarchy of the citizens at the same time as strengthening the local identity.

Not surprisingly, one of the most important deities to be celebrated is the god of the theatre, Dionysos. Other important deities in relation to the theatres were Apollo, city goddesses such as Aphrodite (Aphodisias) and Artemis (Ephesos) as well as the emperor. In this way, the theatres did not only mirror the religious world but also the identity of the city and the piousness and loyalty towards the ruler and the imperial house. The traditional elements of the festivals such as sacrifice, processions and competitions were maintained,

but it is clear that the role of the emperor increased over the years. The close relationship is also emphasized by the important inscription from Oinoanda, from which it appears that the *agonothete* carried a golden crown with the portraits of Hadrian and Apollo.

The theatres played a central role in the political life of the polis (pp. 158-174). Due to its form, the theatre was an obvious political meeting place for the assembly (*ekklesia*), where important matters with regard to the existence of the polis were discussed and decided. This use of the theatre can be traced back to the Hellenistic period. Fortunately, some of the important decisions were immortalized by inscriptions in the theatre itself, for instance in Aphrodisias (cat. 16) where letters from the emperor concerning taxation and festivals have been preserved. As part of their political assignments, the assembly could also discuss questions concerning the conferment of public honours, for instance testified by a detailed inscription found in Kolophon (cat. 53). A total of 102 preserved statue bases show that some were honoured with a statue in the theatre itself, and eight of these belonged to females. The inscriptions testify to the erection of statues of different officials such as *agonothetes*, proconsuls, questors, praetors and priests. Besides these, a number of honorary statues for private people have been preserved, usually citizens who had done something extraordinary for the city, offered money or sponsored buildings. One interesting result of the investigation is that all these theatres in the two provinces were dedicated by private people, and none are known to have been dedicated by the emperor. In contrast to the evidence from the theatres in the western part of the empire, the entire building was rarely dedicated by one single individual, probably due to the enormous costs of such a construction. Numerous inscriptions of the donors from the late Hellenistic period onwards and statue bases clearly indicate that this was a much-coveted place for private self-display of the elite of the polis.

The last part of II.2 evaluates if and how the decoration and embellishment of the theatres reflect the many activities that took place there. The author includes depictions of theatre masks and representations of muses and poets as evidence of the theatre competitions but finds almost no references to the pantomime and the mime. As for the athletic competitions, the known representations from the theatres are few, and they were probably set up in other places in the cityscape better suited for this sort of competition, like the gymnasia. In like manner, the references to the *munera* and *venationes* in the theatres are also relatively few, limited to graffiti and some reliefs like the ones preserved in Ephesos (cat. 31) and sometimes indicated by the presence of sanctuaries of Nemesis.

Over the centuries, men, women and emperors were honoured by statues, of which some were set up in the theatre itself. The earliest known statues are of two men, Apollodoros and Thrasybulus, set up in the theatre in Priene (cat. 95) dating back to the 2nd century BC. In this case, the exact location is known – a prominent place immediately in front of the scene building. Not surprisingly, the known examples of honorary statues for women are few and most of them stem from the 2nd century AD. While the various statue types are recorded and discussed, there are no considerations as to *why* these female statues were erected. The statues are based on well-known recognizable types, but all we can deduce is that they represent the “ideal of a female elite citizen”. The honorary statues for men are more abundant, and they may also be traced back to certain fixed types like togati, men in himation, and men (priests) carrying a crown with busts. The imperial family was omnipresent, and honorary statues – even equestrian statues – were set up in the theatres (Termessos, cat. 111). Other types such as the cuirass statues are well known from the imperial iconography. One may wonder why the author has left out a corresponding passage on the empresses and other members of the imperial family. On the basis of statues of tutelary deities and personifications, the author convincingly shows the importance of demonstrating identity and status of the individual cities. Besides the tutelary and local deities, topics such as founder myths became important to create an individual profile and history, and in this respect, the theatres were ideal ‘showrooms’.

Common to all the statues is the problem of context, and here the theatre in Aphrodisias (cat. 16) appears to offer the best overall evidence. It seems that honorary statues of women, men and emperors/empresses were standing among each other together with ideal sculptures in certain free and prominent spaces of the theatres, like the entrance, orchestra and stage building. This part (II.4) on the sculptural embellishment of the theatres certainly touches upon many interesting and essential aspects, but considering the volume of the book this chapter could well have been treated in a separate study.

The short Part III (pp. 205-213) sums up the main results of the book. The empirical material is presented in a comprehensive catalogue arranged alphabetically (cats. 1-116, pp. 215-299). Each entry has a short description with measurements, phases, urban context and bibliography. When known there is also a short introduction to the embellishment and the various forms of use of the theatre.

This is an important book that presents an impressive and meticulously studied material – from the location of the theatres in their urban contexts to activities taking place in and around the buildings themselves. It contains

much new information about the theatres, but also their contexts and multi-functional use is convincingly demonstrated. In addition, it gives a useful overview and, as such, it will no doubt be a longstanding handbook of the theatres in the two chosen provinces. Particularly interesting and successful is the second part concerning the various functions of the theatre. It becomes evident how important the theatres were for the identity of the polis and the possibilities for self-display of the elite as donors of the buildings themselves.

Whereas the structure of the book is clear and flawless, the reader could have wished for a clearer layout with a more differentiated and visible hierarchy of headings – some are actually difficult to distinguish from the main text. The book does not contain *one* single photo or a detailed plan of a theatre! It is lamentable not least because several passages in the book are concerned with the visibility of the theatres in different topographical settings. The topic and the study had certainly deserved a larger format with more illustrations in the text as well as larger plates, not least considering that all the plates have been specifically prepared for the publication. Last, but not least, an index is missing, and this is most unfortunate for a book of this length and containing so much carefully studied and well-researched material.

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