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Local festivals

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Published in:
The Oxford Handbook Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World

DOI:
[10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199592081.013.15](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199592081.013.15)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2021

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
van Nijf, O. M. (2021). Local festivals. In A. Futtrell, & T. Scanlon (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* (pp. 475-487). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199592081.013.15>

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The Oxford Handbook Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World

Thomas F. Scanlon (ed.), Alison Futrell (ed.)

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199592081.001.0001>

Published: 2021

Online ISBN: 9780191834066

Print ISBN: 9780199592081

CHAPTER

36 Local Festivals

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199592081.013.15> Pages 475–C36.P104

Published: 13 October 2021

Abstract

The chapter will draw attention to the importance of some 500 known Greek agonistic festivals for local identity politics and for the networking of cities in the first three centuries CE. The chapter will establish the role of such festivals as ‘civic rituals’. They will be studied against a diachronic and comparative background focusing on the role of public ritual and ceremony as a feature of political culture in the pre-modern world. The study relies on documentary sources to shed light on issues such as organization, planning and financing. Finally the religious dimensions will be explored, both in the context of traditional civic cult, but also with special attention for their link with the imperial cult.

Keywords: agonistic festivals, identity, networking, civic rituals, politics, organization, planning, financing, civic cult, imperial cult

Subject: Classical Drama, Historical Archaeology, Classical Studies

Series: Oxford Handbooks

IN the early decades of the third century CE an honorific monument was set up by a successful athlete in the small city of Termessos, high up in the mountains of Roman Pisidia (in Asia Minor):

PRIEST FOR LIFE OF THE GOD POSEI-

DON MARCUS AURELIUS

MOLES SON OF HOPLES

SON OF MOLES SON OF HOPLESIS

SACRED VICTOR

EXTRAORDINAIRE

VICTOR IN THE PRIZE-

CONTEST IN MEN'S

WRESTLING THAT WAS HELD

OUT OF THE HONOURABLE AMBITION OF TITUS

AELIUS AGRIPPINUS. WHEN

MARCUS AURELIUS ORESTIANOS PERIKLES WAS CHIEF MAGISTRATE

(*TAM* III, 168)

Hundreds of similar monuments were found throughout the Roman East, commemorating victors in obscure local contests. How should we interpret this phenomenon?

Greeks had always had a love for athletic competition as is evidenced by literary sources from Homer onward. The numerous material remains of gymnasia, stadia, and running tracks throughout the Greek world are testimony to a widespread and strikingly homogeneous athletic culture. Athletic competition was a major element in Greek self-definition: Greeks differed from barbarians by their keenness on athletic training (in the gymnasia) and competition (in the many athletic contests) (Golden 1998).

One would perhaps expect athletics to have declined when Greek cities were conquered by Hellenistic kings and Roman generals, but nothing could be further from the truth. Archaeological and epigraphical sources reveal the names of hundreds—thousands—of athletes who competed in countless festivals through the *oikoumenē*, the ‘inhabited world’. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods Greek cities equipped themselves with elaborate gymnasia, training places, and athletic stadia, as well as the rest of the athletic infrastructure. Literary, archaeological, and above all numismatic and epigraphical evidence suggests that by the Roman period this traditional Greek festival was popular as never before. ↪ In the entire Greek world, and especially in Roman Asia Minor, old festivals were revived or reorganized, and new ones were founded in large numbers. (Louis Robert describes this as an ‘athletic explosion’; Robert 2010: 111.)

The most prestigious athletic festivals were undoubtedly the Panhellenic crown contests at Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea, which for centuries had been the high points of the Greek festival calendar with a virtually unchanged programme. Their number even increased: Roman emperors added a small number of ‘Panhellenic games’ in the same style, such as the Actia in Nikopolis (Augustus) and the Panhellenia at Athens (Hadrian), and some cities strove to have their own games recognized as crown games as well (see below; on the foundation of imperial games see Guerber 2009: 215–301). However, the great majority of the festivals were local affairs. No Greek city of the Roman period was complete without one or more traditionally styled festivals that were celebrated in honour of Greek gods and Roman emperors, or important citizens. The exact number of such games is unknown, but a reliable estimate puts it in the hundreds (Leschhorn 1998a; Pleket 1998). This number is of the same order as the number of Greek cities under Roman rule, which suggests that Greek contests were an important marker of Greek city status under Roman rule.

Festive life developed its own dynamics. Small festivals, for locals only, were ‘upgraded’: disciplines were added, and prizes increased, to attract competitors from further afield. The more successful festivals attracted the top performers of their time: (Professional) athletes and artists from all over the Greek world. However, most contests would be lucky to attract a handful of top athletes, who could command a hefty appearance fee (just as modern tennis-stars do). Their heroes were normally local—or regional—champions. Yet, all contests shared in a common Greek festival culture. But these games were not mere athletic events. They were just one (important) element in a wider package that included civic processions, sacrifices, distributions, and banquets for all members of the community, and in this sense they were part of a wider political culture as well, but they were also an integral part of the self-representation of Greek cities

under Roman rule. Finally, agonistic festivals must have had a major impact on economy and society at a local level.

Civic Rituals

Public ceremonies came in many forms, and there are of course many ways in which one could try to explicate or ‘read’ them. The approach which I shall adopt here sees ceremonies as ‘part of the symbolic expression of civic concerns and as a difficult to read, but ultimately eloquent text about the nature of civic life’ (Connor 1987). Medieval and modern historians have over the last decades turned their attention to the study of public ceremonial. The inhabitants of Mediaeval and Renaissance cities lived through a perpetual series of periodic and occasional civic rituals and festivals, seen as lying at the core of a city’s identity. The importance of these rituals is indicated by the fact that they were strictly controlled by the authorities and could be the subject of detailed regulation (Muir 1997; 1981; Trexler 1980). This approach is also of use in ancient history.

p. 477 Greek cities were rightly proud of their festivals. Even if each festival took up no more than a few days a year, together they must have made a tremendous and lasting impact on the city and its institutions, on built-up space, and on the very rhythm of urban life. Large sums of money were invested in order to build proper facilities (stadia, theatres, gymnasia), while political time was dedicated to proposals for setting up new foundations, special magistrates appointed to oversee the events, and coinage issued to commemorate and advertise new contests. The ritual calendar had to be adapted to accommodate new or expanded celebrations. And of course, hundreds if not thousands of inscriptions were set up in public spaces to commemorate victors and festival organizers, or simply to mark the successful completion of yet another contest.

Agōnes and Themides

Local games were organized in honour of traditional gods, Roman emperors, and local benefactors and magistrates. A handful were set up in commemoration of (pre-)deceased elders or children (Pleket 1998). They are known to us mainly through the medium of inscriptions; but many are only known through rich numismatic records, as Greek cities were allowed under the empire to mint their own coins (coinage: Leschhorn 1998b; Harl 1987).

The normal word for a contest was *agōn*, but in southern Asia Minor a common term seems to have been *themis*. Why these cities opted for this term is not completely clear. The expression could be used, however, in combination with *agōn*, in which case it simply seems to have indicated the particular celebration or edition of contests—as in the Nth *themis* of a particular *agōn* (Strasser 2001; Farrington 2008). The term *themis* seems to refer more openly to the cash or value prizes (*themata*) that were on offer, but *agōnes* had prizes too. There were *agōnes thematitai*, *argyritai*, or *chrēmatikai*, which all put similar emphasis on the prizes (Farrington 2008; Pleket 2004). In some inscriptions set up for or by victorious athletes, victories in local games could be lumped together under this heading, but the expression was also used by the organizers themselves (van Nijf 2012). In other cases we find that the contest title specifically mentioned the level of prize money available, when they were dubbed *talantiaioi* or *hēmi-talantiaioi agōnes* (i.e. games worth a talent or half a talent; a talent was worth 6,000 *drachmae* or *denarii*). Cities would also display the value of cash prizes on their own local coinage, which may well have served to bring the attractions of the local contest to the attention of potential contestants (Harl 1987).

Of course, the terminology set these events apart from the sacred crown games (*agōnes hieroi kai stephanitai*) that were considered more prestigious and had a wider appeal and catchment area. But we should not conceive of these games as fundamentally different types, and even less as immutable categories. Contests could move from one category to another, as they were declared (and recognized) as isolympian or isopythian (i.e. equal to the Olympic or Pythian games). This may have meant no more than that they cautiously adapted the programme, and copied prizes and styles and titles of Olympic officials (Farrington 1997; Robert 1974; 1938: 53–62). In the Roman period, when the emperor became the obvious arbiter of all things Greek, granting of stephanitic status was his gift (such festivals were technically known as a *dōrea* [gift] of the emperor). Cities aiming to outdo each other accumulated imperial games, and their titles could change with each regime change (cf. Hall and Milner 1994).

p. 478 Distinctions were permeable anyway: crown games could offer prizes or valuable gifts alongside the crowns, and some were even officially styled as ‘sacred crown and prize games’ ↵ (*thematitai stephanitai agōnes*); on the other hand, on inscriptions, victories in prize games may be indicated by forms of the verb *stefanoō* (to crown) (Pleket 2004).

Festivals and Benefactors

We should not want to distinguish sharply between public and private contests either. There were of course the traditional festivals that had a long civic history. Such contests would have been funded mainly—or exclusively—from civic funds; they were sometimes described as *politikoi agōnes* (Roueché 1993: 176; cf. Pleket in *SEG* 43: 698). But private money was also used. In the early Principate many existing festivals were revived, or upgraded. Here benefactors stepped in—which may have been welcome—especially in the cities of Greece and western Asia Minor that suffered heavily in the Roman civil wars (e.g. *IG* VI. 2712; Robert 1935). But benefactors did not limit themselves to restoration: many new contests were directly paid for by wealthy benefactors.

We know this phenomenon as euergetism (from *euergesia*, the Greek word for benefaction) and it is one of the defining characteristics of civic life of the Roman period. It should be understood that the regime of the notables, as it is often called, did not rely on a formal constitutional position. Most cities were formally democracies, while on the other hand real power lay in the hands of the Roman governor, his taxmen, the army and ultimately the emperor. Yet, integration into the empire also strengthened a pre-existing tendency towards oligarchization. There was immense competition for status among the elite, and euergetism (benefactions by the wealthy) provided them with an opportunity to shine. In this context it is important to note, with Gordon, that their choices were not neutral; the benefactions ‘construct an image of what is needful to the community, an idea constructed by the élite in terms of their own values’ (Gordon 1990; for a discussion of the political culture: van Nijf and Alston 2010.).

The members of the leading oligarchies funded most of the amenities of urban culture and civic life from their own pockets, in return for which they received a symbolic reward in the form of public honours—thousands of honorific inscriptions stand testimony to this symbolic exchange. Euergetism took many different forms. Magistrates often paid for the costs connected with their offices from their own pockets. Benefactors arranged for distributions of food, wine, oil, and money; they constructed lavish civic buildings, and they provided for the imperial cult. But contests and agonistic life in general seem to have been particularly attractive to them. Benefactors spent on athletic training facilities; they built or decorated the gymnasia, paid for the expenses of running the baths, they paid for teachers and instructors, and provided the oil with which athletes rubbed their bodies. But most importantly, benefactors organized or subsidized the contests in which the athletes competed: they provided the funds, set up the prize money, and hired other performers (the classic study is Veyne 1976; see also Zuiderhoek 2009).

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Their *modus operandi* could differ, and not all festivals are known in equal detail. But even the most laconic victory inscriptions—through which the vast majority of local contests is known to us—may offer clues towards the organization. Many contests simply state that they were funded *ek philotimias* (i.e. out of honorable ambition, public generosity) (Robert 1940: 276–280). Other common expressions emphasize that this was private money (*ek tōn* ↪ *idiōn*; *ek oikeiōn chrēmatōn*), or that the money was really offered as a gift (*ek dōreas*) (Pleket 1998: 156–162). In such cases the normal road was to set up a foundation either by life, by making a promise (*hyposchesis*) in the *ekklēsia* or council, or on the other hand by setting up a testamentary foundation. Scholars have been able to reconstruct the legal niceties involved in these processes. A striking and uniquely detailed example is found in a long text from the small city of Oinoanda in Lycia, where a local benefactor offered to set up a main capital fund to endow his city with a quadrennial theatrical festival (Wörle 1988: 151–171; the classic study of foundations remains Laum 1914).

The donor specifies how much money he and his heirs are to invest, and how exactly the money is to be spent. The text even stipulates the exact amount of the prize money for different categories of competitors. Such lists were common, and they may have been set up to ensure that money was not to be diverted by cash-starved city councils to other purposes. (Other examples in Roueché 1993: 164–174 with discussion of the problems that might arise.) On the other hand, we also hear about endowments that were set up so generously that a surplus was to be expected. Demosthenes wanted the surplus money to be used for distributions; other benefactors used to money to set up statues or to supply the oil to the gymnasia (Wörle 1988: 6–7, lines 24–26; *IG V.1*, 550; *I.Ephesos* 3420).

The reasons behind this festive euergetism may be surmised. Modern experience suggests that contests, festivals, and spectacles are popular with the wider public, but what about the elites? There is some evidence to show that some members of the elite—and also intellectuals—were not always keen on organizing festivals. Philosophers were ready to point out the deleterious effect (for the benefactors!) of giving in to popular tastes, and even emperors could lend their weight to efforts to invest in other ‘good causes’; but it would seem that most individual benefactors were more than willing to supply their cities with *agōnes* (Quet 1981; *I.Ephesos* 1493). We cannot simply assume that all notables shared this intellectual distaste for festive life—and that their generosity was a case of cynical populism to be written off as ‘bread and circuses’.

Euergetism was not a form of altruism; one of its main purposes was to create social distance—to establish the benefactors as a superior stratum in society. It is not hard to understand how festivals fitted in. Each festival offered the prospective donor immense prospects of individual glory. The proposals put the proposers at the centre of political deliberation. They had to propose their plans to their peers in the *boulē* (council) and to the *ekklēsia* (assembly), which spent considerable political time in debating the merits of each proposal, and deliberated on the appropriate answer to the benefactor. Once accepted, the festivals often immortalized the name of the wealthy benefactor on a yearly or quadrennial basis. The advertisements, embassies, and coins that were to draw foreign visitors to a festival were thus an opportunity to add to the fame of the founder (Rogers 1991; Zuiderhoek 2009). The high point was undoubtedly the festival day itself. A passage of John Chrysostom captures the atmosphere neatly:

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The theatre is filling up, and all the people are sitting aloft presenting a splendid sight and composed of numberless faces ... You can see neither tiles nor stones but all is men’s bodies and faces. Then as the benefactor who has brought them together enters in the sight of all, they stand up and as from a single mouth cry out. All with one voice call him protector and ruler of the city that they share in common, and stretch out their hands in salutation ... they liken him to the greatest of rivers ... they call him Nile of gifts ... and say that he is in lavish gifts what the Ocean is among waters ... What next? The great man bows to the crowd and in this way shows ↪ his regard for them. Then he sits down amid the congratulations of his admiring peers, each of whom prays that he himself may attain the same eminence.

After the event permanent memorials remained: the coins, the public inscriptions, and the monuments for the athletic victors that all recycled the benefactor's name until the next instalment of the festival. The provision of festivals was a means for individual notables to obtain social and political prominence that legitimated their high, but potentially unstable, position on top of the civic hierarchy.

Festivals had other advantages, however. The text just quoted presents the civic festival as a dramatization of the city's social and political structure. Of course, the attention was focused on the benefactor, but when he looked around him he would see the theatre or stadium as an image of the city. It was a striking feature of the theatres and stadia of the Roman era that the seating order was modelled upon the social hierarchy. (Whereas the seating order in classical Athens, for example, had reflected a more democratic world view). Inscriptions on the seats in theatres and stadiums marked the places for various civic subgroups: members of professional associations, religious groups, members of youth associations, and lesser officials all sat in clearly demarcated areas (van Nijf 1997: 209–240). But on the best seats, in front of the others, we find the magistrates and councillors seated together with their families and their peers. This set-up was an integral part of a theatrical style of government: all spectators were part of a ritual performance designed to construct a hierarchical view of the city that put the benefactors and their families right on top. Festivals offered the class of benefactors an opportunity to stage manage a mass-participation ritual that served as an idealized representation of their own hierarchical world-view or—to borrow a phrase—offered an opportunity 'to put their world in order' (for the expression, see Darnton 1984).

Greek and Roman Identities

The political relevance did not stop at the borders of the city territories. In most cases the inhabitants of neighbouring cities would attend these orchestrated displays of civic identity, but envoys could also be sent out to invite Greek cities further afield that were linked through treaties, friendship or fictive kinship relations. (For examples of contests 'open to all Lycians' in Oinoanda see Hall and Milner 1994; on fictive kinship: Jones 1999 and Curty 1995.) Formal observers (*theōroi*) received seats of honour in the theatres and stadia, and special envoys were sent to share in the sacrifices (*synthytai*) (Roueché 1993: 182–187; Hall and Milner 1994 no. 22). The organization of a traditional Greek festival allowed cities (and their organizers) to claim their place in a global (oikoumenic) network of Greek cities. This would of course be important to 'old' Greek cities that looked back nostalgically to their past as a time of glory. But the importance of being Greek would perhaps be more keenly felt by the numerous cities whose Greek credentials were not at all secure, and whose status as a *polis* was in fact closely tied up with the *Pax Romana*. For one of the paradoxical effects of Roman rule was the spread of Greek cities in areas that had been not heavily urbanized before. Greek cities could not be envisaged otherwise than as integrated into the empire at large, and the relationship between the Greek and Roman aspects of their identities became an important ingredient of their political experience.

p. 481 It is no surprise, then, that festive culture proved sensitive to such matters, of which the introduction of the Roman imperial cult is only the most obvious example (Price 1984). Many contests were celebrated in honour of the Roman emperors, and it has been suggested that the imperial cult—or at least the need to produce massive displays of loyalty to the Roman cause—was one of the most important elements behind the spectacular rise of festivals in the first three centuries CE (Mitchell 1990). Even modest *themides* could be named after the ruling emperor, only to have their titles altered at the next regime change. This was not one-way traffic: the emperors themselves promoted and intervened where necessary. Even a benefactor like Demosthenes of Oinoanda had to enlist the support of Hadrian to convince his fellow citizens to accept his offer of a theatrical festival, and the emperor's fingerprints can be found all over the foundation (Wörrle

1988, esp. 172–182). Hadrian, as a staunch Philhellene, was renowned for his interest in Greek festive culture, but other emperors were also prepared to use the festivals to prop up their dominance over the Greeks. That individual benefactors who offered such games also stood to benefit is clear; it cannot be an accident that C. Julius Demosthenes, and other benefactors who turned their contest into a mass display of loyalty to the emperor, enjoyed Roman citizenship.

Who Were the Athletes?

Here we touch upon one of the old chestnuts of sport history. The traditional view is that Greek athletics of the Roman empire were dominated by specialists, lower class professionals, uncultured musclemen who used their athletic success (and the prize money they gained) as a vehicle of social mobility. This image has the attraction of familiarity: many of our modern sports stars followed exactly this road—but for the Roman empire the image seems inadequate. It has been demonstrated conclusively that the Graeco–Roman elite was ‘never absent’ from the athletic field (Pleket 1992; 2001; 2010), and it has by now become increasingly accepted that athletic competence was a major ingredient of the Greek elites under Rome. Local festivals needed local champions (Farrington 2008; van Nijf 2001; 2002; 2010a).

The large numbers of festivals were only possible because they rested on a widely shared gymnasium culture. All cities must have had one or more gymnasia, where civic education was offered as a mix of traditional Greek *paideia* and physical culture (van Nijf 2003; Kah and Scholz 2004; Farrington 1995). There is no doubt that the gymnasium crowd was socially selective, consisting mainly of the sons of local notables and of the wealthier craftsmen and traders with time and money to spare. Boys, ephebes, and young men would be trained and prepared for athletic competitions. But adults—and even old men—continued to frequent the gymnasia (elders in the *gymnasion*: *I.Iasos* 87; *SEG* 30, 546; *OGIS* 764). However, they did not merely go to the gym for their health: physical fitness was required of politicians too, and had to be put to the test in the many local contests under the gaze of their fellow citizens. If we look back briefly at our athlete from Termessos, we may note that he can be identified with one of the leading families of this local town, members of which performed the most important offices and priesthoods of the town. As a priest of Poseidon he was not of mean status himself. (The genealogies of the Termessian families were established by Heberdey 1929; see also his indices in *TAM* III. Marcus Aurelius Moles belonged to family O 13 [generation 7].)

- p. 482 Nor was he unique: his case can be paralleled in Termessos and elsewhere. More than 50 per cent of the known athletes in Termessos can be identified as members of the local elite. This does not imply that athletes from outside the elite did not compete—they did, of course—but that they were less successful in achieving permanent commemoration of their successes. The epigraphic record of Termessos shows that
- p. 483 members of the elite were able to commemorate their athletic victories in the city centre (Fig. 36.1). ↵

Figure 36.1.



Map of Termessos showing locations of inscriptions of athletic victors. Map by O. van Nijf.

This juxtaposition of statues and inscriptions performed several functions at once. At one level it emphasized the civic importance of athletics, by presenting the athletes as the equals of civic officials and benefactors. Athletic successes and civic benefactions were praised in similar terms, and commemorated by similar monuments. They presented athletic victory as a benefaction to the city. Moreover, the honorific epigraphy served as an ideological underpinning of the oligarchic regimes. The display of statues repeating the names and faces of a few families presented them as the repositories of all the qualities of the ideal citizen. Judging by numbers, athletic success was one of the most popular elements of this representative strategy (van Nijf 2010b).

Of course, this was the same pool from which the top athletes of the day were recruited (Pleket 2004). Successful athletes were able to go out to provincial contests, or even to the more prominent Panhellenic games; and some even became full-time athletes and members of the synods. It should be stressed, however, that the distinctions between these categories are only relative. The successes of these star performers in these circuits would still be publicly commemorated by their proud fellow-citizens and family members. (Roueché 1993: 191–212 shows how ‘international victors’ of Aphrodisian stock were commemorated alongside boy-victors in local contests; cf. Hall and Milner 1994.) Moreover, they may have provided local athletes with an inspiring example. The Lycian athletes who claimed to be *themioneikai*, i.e. *themis* victors, may have been dreaming of bigger things (TAM II 688; MAAL 23 [1914] 170, 120 = RWKIL Ada 10).

The Economic Impact of Festivals

The impact of festivals was felt in many different ways. Local festivals had a major impact on economic life. Even competitions in small cities could attract many visitors: athletes and other performers and their entourage (trainers and coaches and other assistants), official observers and other visitors, spectators, and of course the inevitable number of street performers, philosophers, tradesmen, and even prostitutes that would be attracted to festival markets (*panēgyris*) (de Ligt and de Neeve 1988). The population of a given city may have easily been doubled at the occasion of the festival, which presented challenges for the authorities and organizers, as well opportunities for enterprising types.

Public ceremonies and civic festivals were frequent interruptions to the daily routine, but they did not necessarily imply any slackening in the city's economic life. Civic and religious ceremonies did not mark out general 'holidays' in a modern sense. The contest of Demosthenes of Oinoanda took up twenty-three days during a 'period of intense harvest activities', but was itself interrupted by the scheduled monthly agora (Wörrle 1988, esp. 209–215). Many festivals were accompanied by an 'accessory festal market' (*panēgyris*), the main purpose of which appears to have been to provide the festival crowd with foodstuffs, sacrificial animals, and votives, and it may have attracted large numbers of visitors and traders. Dio Chrysostom observes that 'many [*panēgyreis*] bring in merchandise of all sorts, the tradespeople that is; and some display their own arts and crafts while others show off their accomplishments, many of them declaiming poems, both tragedies and epics, and many other prose works' (Chr. 27.5). In another speech he shows awareness of the economic benefits of such events: 'not only can those who sell goods obtain the highest prices, but also ↪ nothing in the city is out of work, neither the teams nor the houses nor the women. And this contributes not a little to prosperity; for wherever the greatest throng of people comes together, there necessarily we find money in greatest abundance, and it stands to reason that the place should thrive' (Chr. 35.15–16).

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Ancient authors seem to have thought mainly about the services—although there is some evidence that local craft production may have benefited from selling mementoes. There is, however, no suggestion that such festival markets played the part of medieval trade fairs (de Ligt and de Neeve 1988; de Ligt 1993).

In any pre-industrial context, such large fluctuations of the population would have had an immediate effect on the food situation. The supply of grain, the main staple, was something that civic authorities had to supervise at the best of times, but the dramatic rise in demand during a festival presented some acute problems. First, adequate supplies had to be secured well in advance, to meet prospective demand. *Agoranomois* had to ensure supplies, and private benefactors stepped in. The grain-funds that are occasionally found in the cities of Asia Minor may have been set up especially with festivals in mind. But even if the foundations were of a structural nature, we may assume that their existence would have been particularly necessary in a festival context (Strubbe 1987: 1989; cf. Zuiderhoek 2008).

A related problem would be the inevitable rises in the price of grain and other foodstuffs at the event itself. It is generally agreed that local authorities were unwilling, or unable, to set maximum prices under normal circumstances, but there is sufficient evidence that a festival context offered the occasion for more interventionist policies. It is surely no coincidence that the evidence for price-fixing and other measures such as *paraprosis* (selling below cost price) can often be connected to festival contexts (Garnsey and van Nijf 1998; cf. Migeotte 1997).

The dossier on Demosthenes of Oinoanda provides us with an example: the founder arranges for the appointment of three panegyriarchs selected among the councillors, 'in order to take charge of the market and the supply of provisions at the festival, with the power to write up the prices for the purchase of provisions and to inspect (60) and organize the things which are offered for sale, and to punish those who disobey'. The expression 'write-up' (*epigraphēin*) shows that we have to think of official price-lists on

wooden boards or stone. Evidence from other cities also points at the existence of such lists (Wörrle 1988: 209–215; de Ligt 1993: 42–45), as in Ephesos, where a number of the so-called *agoranomos* inscriptions on the gate of the South agora show the bread prices that were kept during Ephesian festivals (Garnsey and van Nijf 1998).

Conclusion: Contests and the City

p. 485 I have argued that athletics were a defining element of civic life in the Greek cities of the Roman empire. Many if not all cities seem to have organized one or more festivals on a yearly or quadrennial basis. Such festivals were an immense source of civic pride, and it would seem that cities competed to have the most prestigious, sophisticated, or lavish celebrations. A lot of political time must have been taken up by the preparations and arrangements of the civic festivals, and not in the last place the food supply. The world of athletics had also a place in the built city. Gymnasia, stadia, and other athletic facilities dominated the urban landscape; walking about in the city centre you could see everywhere the honorific statues that the proud city set up for its athletes. Finally, the members of the ruling oligarchies, the councillors and their families, were deeply involved in athletics and athletic festivals. They were the benefactors who paid for the training facilities and who funded the festivals. Their social importance was underlined by the hierarchical set-up of the processions and sacrificial banquets, and they often had the front seats in the stadia, from where they could watch their sons as the intended star performers of the games. Summing it up: local festivals were much more than an innocent pastime. Greek contests were a strikingly civic phenomenon.

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