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*Festivals and Benefactors**Onno M. van Nijf*

Of all types of Greek benefaction, agonistic festivals – that is, festivals that revolved around athletic, dramatic or cultural contests – may have been the most central to the phenomenon of civic euergetism in the Greek cities of the Hellenistic and Roman period. They were not the most frequent type of benefaction – according to the calculations of Arjan Zuiderhoek,¹ building was more common – but as social and cultural events, involving the expenditure of much money and energy and requiring the collaboration of large numbers of people, they had undoubtedly the greatest impact. It is probably fair to say that the prominence of contests and other festivals in the euergetic economy is normally explained as a (simple) case of ambitious politicians courting popularity by offering public entertainment and largesse. This can be summarised as the ‘bread and circuses’ approach, with a reference to Juvenal’s line about the demise of Roman politics.² Now, I do not want to question the idea that festivals were or could be a popular form of mass entertainment or that they could contribute to a donor’s popularity, but I would like to argue that festival euergetism was a complex phenomenon. Festivals should not be studied as merely the object of euergetism, but rather as one of the factors that actually shaped the process of euergetism.

The aim of this chapter is to explore some aspects of this particular form of euergetism. What was the significance of the fact that public festivals were paid for and organised by private benefactors? Why did benefactors do this? And what was it that cities stood to gain? I shall argue that festivals were not simply an *object* of euergetism but also a medium *through* which euergetism evolved. I shall consider the various ways in which the

¹ Zuiderhoek (2009) 77 calculates games and festivals at 13 per cent on a total of 529, but public building accounts for 58 per cent. Zuiderhoek lists distributions apart (17 per cent), but most of these distributions were ritual occasions and often connected with festivals as in Oinoanda: Wörle (1988).

² Juv. 10.77–81.

benefactors could contribute to the festive life of their communities and explore what they received in exchange. Festivals were much more than an opportunity for wealthy individuals to gain prestige, however. The festivals were also mass events where benefactors and their communities were jointly involved in representing the central social, cultural and political values. I shall consider the way in which festival euergetism played a central part in this process.

Festivals as Opportunities for Benefaction

Before we turn to the motivations of benefactors for offering festivals, and of assemblies for accepting them, it is useful to consider how festivals were funded and at what point benefactors were able – and expected – to step in. Festivals had always been considered as quintessential manifestations of the Greek polis culture, and most traditional festivals will have been paid for from public funds, including sacred funds, that is, moneys that were handled by and on behalf of sanctuaries.³ Now, even in fifth- and fourth-century Athens public funds alone had not been sufficient to sustain the dense festival calendar: part of the financial and organisational burden was shifted to wealthy individuals via the *chorēgia* and other liturgies. That this could involve heavy outlays indeed is clear from a passage in Lysias 21 and several similar passages where liturgies are mentioned to curry favour with a jury.⁴

From the fourth century, the social role of agonistic festivals seems to have increased as drama attached itself to athletic contests outside Athens. Festivals were upgraded by the inclusion of further contests and greater prizes, which increased the organisational complexity of the festivals at all levels.⁵ In the Hellenistic and Roman period the number of festivals started to increase even further. One of the greatest authorities in the field, Louis Robert, describes this development in terms of an ‘agonistic explosion’.⁶

As the number of festivals increased, permanent stone-built theatres and stadia became a fixture in urban landscapes. Inscriptions show that the

³ Camia (2011); for a study of festival foundations: Aneziri (2014).

⁴ Wilson (2000); Lys. 21.1–5: ‘I was certified of age in the archonship of Theopompus: appointed to produce tragic drama, I spent thirty minae and two months later, at the Thargelia, two thousand drachmae, when I won a victory with a male chorus; and in the archonship of Glaucippus, at the Great Panathenaea, eight hundred drachmae on pyrrhic dancers.’ The text goes on to list choregic and other expenses to a total of 63,300 drachmae. For other examples: Csapo and Slater (1995) 146–51.

⁵ Le Guen (2001), (1995). ⁶ Robert (1984).

festivals and ceremonial life in general only gained in social and political importance.⁷ Not only did festivals grow in number, but they became heavily regulated and even scripted affairs that were of major concern to the elites and assemblies alike.⁸ As part of this development, the role of benefactors also grew. It seems unnecessary to ask whether this was cause or effect, as the whole point of the euergetic exchanges must have been precisely to obfuscate this issue.⁹

Civic funds and organisational skills were supplemented by the efforts and from the purses of the wealthy citizens, but civic authorities still seem to have been the dominant partner in these exchanges.¹⁰ There were various ways in which benefactors were able to step in, but it is relevant that many cases relied on officials and functionaries who were, if not formally, certainly in effect expected to make a personal contribution to the festive occasion.¹¹

The most obvious were the *agōnothetai*, the formally appointed festival presidents who took it upon themselves and/or were expected to expand the festival and pay for part of it: the prizes or the *epideixeis* or even buildings that were needed for the celebration of the festivals.¹² The epigraphical record provides us with other cases of *agōnothetai* introducing new disciplines or adding in other ways to the costs of the celebrations.¹³ It seems reasonable to assume that wealthy individuals were appointed to the *agōnothesia* precisely to provoke such ‘spontaneous’ ex-officio contributions.¹⁴

As with all other euergetic exchanges, the generous *agōnothetai* could expect to receive civic honour of various types, most often inscriptions that mentioned, or obliquely referred to, the spending of time, money and effort. It should be noted, though, that such texts and monuments tend to emphasise the primacy of the polis and its institutions.¹⁵ Moreover, accounts had to be rendered at all times. A long text from first-century BCE Tanagra may serve as an example. It belongs to a genre that was

⁷ Mathé (2010); Moretti (2010). ⁸ Chaniotis (2013), (1997). ⁹ Gordon (1990).

¹⁰ Camia (2011); Gauthier (1984), (1985): for the observation that control by the *dēmos* remained important until the later Hellenistic period.

¹¹ Migeotte (2010) discusses different forms of funding in the Hellenistic city.

¹² E.g. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 66.8.11: ‘he must collect flute-players and mimes and harpists and jugglers and, more than that, pugilists and pancratiasts and wrestlers and runners and all that tribe’.

¹³ E.g. *I. Corinth* 8.3, 153.

¹⁴ Even Olympia could use some help from time to time; Josephus informs us that the King of Judea was appointed as *agōnothetēs* for life, in exchange for a substantial financial contribution, but this route was of course also open to private citizens. Pleket (1976); Camia (2011).

¹⁵ Camia (2011).

popular in Hellenistic Boiotia, that of the *apologia* or commemorative account.¹⁶ The *agōnothētēs* Glaukos listed in detail how he had spent public money as well as his own to secure the successful edition of a local festival. He carefully lists the large amounts of public money (thousands of drachmas) that he has spent on fees, crowns and other prizes and so on, and he specifically mentions that he has returned funds he had not used. Public accountability obviously still counted for much! Yet he does not forget to mention his own expenditures: ‘Other expenses for the daily oaths and the feasting of the daily participants, judges and . . . and choruses and victors, and for the incense and . . . I do [not] account, since I paid the money from my own resources.’¹⁷

In other cases we find that benefactors could step in to restore traditional festivals that had fallen into disuse. One of the most spectacular examples is that of the Boiotian magnate Epameinōndas of Akraiphia, who is presented by Veyne as the exemplary festival benefactor.¹⁸ The long text lists all his benefactions, emphasising their extraordinary character and scale. Although it is clear that Epameinōndas offered a whole new experience to his community, the authors of the document are at pains to stress the civic nature of the events. The inscription continues for many lines with his further benefactions, before it concludes with a list of the appropriate honours, including gilded portrait statues in the agora that carried the inscription framing his generosity as a civic duty: ‘The *dēmos* and *boulē* honour Epameinōndas son of Epameinōndas, for an excellent and most just performance as citizen (*arista politeusamenos*).’¹⁹

Although such efforts may have seemed hard to improve, it was probably considered even more honorable to initiate a new festival oneself. Again there was a long tradition of private individuals to initiate cults and festivals that included an agonistic contest.²⁰ However, the phenomenon of setting up new contests seems really to have taken off in the imperial period. In many cases we are dealing with local notables who were keen to show their loyalty – and that of their community – to the new imperial system, as was already the case with the festivals offered by Epameinōndas, but other cases seem to have been newly invented traditions. Throughout the East we find that private benefactors set up new agonistic festivals. The number of such new festivals increases rapidly under Roman rule to peak in the third century, when they are the most commonly attested form of

¹⁶ Migeotte (2006). I want to thank Léopold Migeotte for sending me a copy of this article.

¹⁷ *SEG* 19, 335. ¹⁸ Veyne (1976) 285–7. ¹⁹ *IG* VII, 2712, ll. 103–6.

²⁰ *IG* VII, 43 is a third-century BCE example from Megara.

benefaction. In southwest Asia Minor, where we find a particularly large concentration of such games, they were known as *themides*.²¹

We should note that many of these festivals are known only from relatively small monuments that do not offer much information about the motives of the benefactor, about the background of their generosity, or about their *modus operandi*. However, the proliferation of these monuments suggests that the presentation of new festivals quickly became a standard routine. Such festivals were referred to as *agōnes chrēmaittai* or *thematitai* after the money and cash prizes that were offered to distinguish them from the more prestigious stephanitic or sacred contests, in which a (symbolic) crown or wreath was offered. It should be noted, however, that the borderline between these types of contests was very thin indeed: crowned contests could offer valuable crowns made of gold or even cash prizes, and thematic contests could easily be ‘upgraded’.²²

With programs copied from the more prestigious sacred contests, they were a powerful illustration of the attraction of Greek (agonistic) culture to the civic elites, but they were important as community events as well. Most of these festivals seem to have been low-scale affairs that attracted mainly competitors from the city itself or from the immediate region.²³ These local festivals were an important vehicle for elite self-fashioning: they were normally named after the benefactor and involved members of their families as officials and agonothetes, and not infrequently the main performers were local as well.²⁴ Quite a few immediately or gradually attracted competitors from further afield and captured a wider audience, thus getting linked to a wider agonistic network. Our information about these festivals often depends on athletes who list them in their victory list, in which they would often be described as prize games, or if the donors provided funds for the erection of statues for the victors, which does not always seem to have happened.²⁵ A salutary reminder of the state of our ignorance is provided by the case of the Demostheneia in the small Lycian city of Oinoanda. This festival was funded in the second century but did not produce any victory inscriptions until about a century after its foundation.²⁶ In fact, we would barely have registered the festival had it not been for the decision of the benefactor C. Iulius Demosthenes to publish the entire dossier of its foundation on stone. This inscription describes in

²¹ Heberdey (1923); van Nijf (2001), (2003); Farrington (2008).

²² Pleket (2004), (2014); Remijsen (2011). ²³ Farrington (2008). ²⁴ Van Nijf (2001).

²⁵ A rare text that explicitly mentions the funding for the statues is *SEG* 44, 1174 (= Hall and Milner (1994)); van Nijf (2003).

²⁶ *SEG* 44, 1183, 1184, with Hall and Milner (1994) 30–1.

exceptional detail the whole process of setting up a foundation for a local festival that not only involved protracted negotiations between the benefactor, his colleagues in the city council, the assembly and the Roman governor, but even included the Roman emperor who lent his support to the undertaking. The dossier contains a letter by the emperor, a formal promise by Demosthenes detailing his intended set-up, a decree of acceptance of the city, an honorific decree of Demosthenes that was sent to the governor, and a subscription by the latter confirming tax reliefs. The level of detail in the documentation may have been more exceptional than the preparations involved in the organisation, making this text one of the best windows we have on the organisational complexities of local festivals and their tremendous impact on social, cultural and even political life.²⁷

Festival Euergetism as Source of Prestige

The arrangements for the Demostheneia in Oinoanda render it perfectly obvious why benefactors were attracted to festivals. These were civic events of the first order that offered members of the elite and their relatives a maximum of public exposure. The festival provided the benefactors with a respectable way to place themselves, their name and their families for an extended period at the centre of civic life and public attention. This happened, of course, during the festivals, when the benefactor would be at the center of attention,²⁸ but it started with the moment that the benefactions were offered in the assembly or in the council chamber (either at one's own initiative or as the result of peer or popular pressure); it would have continued when during the sometimes protracted negotiations the benefactors were at the very centre of political and legal deliberations.²⁹

The reputation of the benefactor was of course also raised outside the city. Coins had to be minted to mark the celebrations and to prevent any cash-flow problems during the event.³⁰ The name of the festival – the benefactor's name – and the prize money had to be announced to other cities and to the representatives of the unions of athletes and other performers who had to be persuaded to send worthy competitors.³¹ There was also an opportunity to get noticed by the Roman authorities

²⁷ *SEG* 38, 1462; Wörle (1988). For an excellent review and translation: Mitchell (1990).

²⁸ A striking description of a benefactor enjoying the attention can be found in John Chrysostom, *De inani gloria*. 4–5.

²⁹ For protracted negotiations (and an emphasis on the role of the *dēmos*): Rogers (1991); Zuiderhoek (2008).

³⁰ Harl (1987) 28–9. ³¹ Jones (1998); Rutherford (2013).

or even by the emperor himself, who could be asked to supply *martyriai* to speed up negotiations and who would receive *martyriai* from the city in turn.³²

There were many ways in which the memory of the event could be made to last even after the event. The presentation of the accounts to the assembly would have been another occasion of ritual importance, where also decisions were to be made on the honorific inscriptions for the benefactor. And then there were the inscriptions set up in honour of the (local) victorious athletes – provided the benefactor had taken care of this – that reproduced the name of the benefactor all over the urban landscape: in the agoras, along the streets, in the colonnaded avenues and even in the theatres and stadia.³³ And if the festival was the result of a foundation, as many festivals were, the whole cycle, of course, would be repeated in one, two or four years to come and thereafter in perpetuity, or at least until the money ran out.³⁴ Personal and family memories were thus firmly integrated with the passage of civic time. It was clearly the duty of later generations to keep the undertaking going. Later generations of the same family could make additional investments to the festival for athletic competitions and/or statues,³⁵ or the original endowment could be arranged more securely.³⁶ The festivals thus became a monument to the enduring social prominence of a particular family. Dio Chrysostom may have dismissed all this as ‘the inane ambitions of would-be celebrities’ (*doxokopoi*), but the social benefits are obvious.³⁷ The festival was a classic case of symbolic exchange: the benefactor spent his money in exchange for the symbolic capital, civic honour, which added to his social capital and that of his family as well. This was, however, not only a matter of status. Festivals served as a (complex) mechanism to (re-)define the relationship between the cities and their most wealthy and important members at several different levels.

Dio Chrysostom argues in his sixty-sixth oration that the ordinary population had nothing valuable to offer to the benefactors, but that was of course a deliberate misrepresentation, for the *dēmos* had something

³² Kokkinia (2017).

³³ For the impact of (agonistic) status on the urban landscape: Hall and Milner (1994); van Nijf (2011b). Statues in theatres: Di Napoli (2017); cf. Ma (2013).

³⁴ Agonistic foundations: Aneziri (2014). ³⁵ *SEG* 44, 1183 with Hall and Milner (1994) no. 19.

³⁶ For the case of the Kaisareia-Eurykleia in Sparta, which were originally set up in the age of Augustus by C. Iulius Eurykles and expanded in the third century by a descendant: Cartledge and Spawforth (1989) 171–3; Camia (2011).

³⁷ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 32.24.

crucial to offer which the benefactors craved. Festivals – alongside the more formal assemblies – were an important setting for the exchange of what was the most important political commodity, honour, but at the same time they provided the *dēmos* with a considerable handle on their benefactors.

Honour had always been central to the political economy of the Greek city, and the circulation and exchange of honours was a crucial ingredient of euergetism.³⁸ Greek cities were ‘communities of honour’.³⁹ Love of *timē* offered by one’s fellow citizens must have been a major driving force behind political engagement and civic-mindedness of leading citizens and statesmen of the classical polis. But *timē* and *philotimia* were ambivalent qualities in the polis community. In an isonomic or democratic context, expressions of individual *philotimia* were regarded with some suspicion. The excessive pursuit of individual honour presented a potential threat to citizen solidarity and could easily be construed as *hybris*. However, in the classical polis, *philotimia* was deemed acceptable only when it could be harnessed for the interests of the polis.⁴⁰ This meant that the community remained the main beneficiary of the activities that deserved the honour, and at the same time it was acknowledged as the sole legitimate source of honour.

This was symbolic exchange *within* the polis, between the *dēmos* and the leading citizens. In the classical polis, honour could be expressed by performing liturgies, and its capital value was also exploited by orators in speeches addressed at the jury courts, as we saw above in the case of Lysias 21.⁴¹ Beyond that it was difficult – and not without risk – for individuals to give (loud) expression to their (love of) honour: ostracism and indictments for *hybris* were easily provoked. Permanent commemoration of honour – monumentalisation in the form of statues and inscriptions – was only rarely granted and would always be subject to civic, that is, public, scrutiny, even under the empire when the epigraphic habit was booming.⁴²

Civic honour was processual in the sense that it depended on a joint performance of the entire community in one place. Honorific exchanges

³⁸ Veyne (1976) saw honour as the unproblematic expression of social distance in the post-classical Greek city. This image has been revised for the Hellenistic period by Gauthier and his followers, who argue for a continuity of traditional Greek practices up to the second century: Gauthier (1985). See also Ma (2013). The link between honour and politics in the imperial period has been the subject of a research project that was directed by the author and Anna Heller: Heller and van Nijf (2017).

³⁹ Lendon (1997). ⁴⁰ Whitehead (1983). ⁴¹ Ober (1989). ⁴² Ma (2013).

were played out publicly. The decision to confer honour was, of course, a matter of the formal political institutions: the *boulē*, *dēmos* and the assembly. The honours were captured in carefully crafted formal decrees, but that was never enough: to make these exchanges socially effective, honour also became a matter of public enactment and re-enactment in ceremonies and settings designed to maximise their public impact. Agonistic festivals and other public events were among the prime settings for such re-enactments. Many honorific decrees contained explicit statements to the effect that the honorific titles awarded were to be called out at public meetings, such as the festival of Dionysos or other celebrations and contests that were to be held by the city in its theatres and stadia.⁴³ Moral philosophers like Plutarch and orators like Dio Chrysostom may have tried to convince their audiences that these seats of honour had nothing much to offer,⁴⁴ but their voices would not have carried much weight with their colleagues in the council who were obviously eager to occupy these seats – nor with the urban populations at large, who continued to place their benefactors in these conspicuous positions. The question is, Why did this happen? Why were these seats of honour so important in the honorific process?

I have argued elsewhere that the notions of ‘rational ritual’ and ‘common knowledge’, which were developed by the game theorist Michel Chwe, go a long way towards explaining how such events work.⁴⁵ Chwe argues that people are more likely to take a particular course of action and make a certain practical choice when they know that other people in their situation do the same. The prerequisite of common action is common knowledge. This is not the same as shared knowledge, that is, the simple fact that people have access to the same information, but it implies the presence of this knowledge at a meta-level. When people know that other people know that they have access to the same information, it makes them more prone to accept and internalise that information and act accordingly. This is, according to Chwe, the basis not simply of common activities but also of social coherence and thereby of political legitimacy.

There are, of course, various ways in which such information can be shared, and common knowledge can be created, but Chwe argues that

⁴³ For examples: *SEG* 55, 20.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 66.2. ‘Furthermore, by official act virtually all the states have devised lures of every kind for the simpletons – crowns and front seats and public proclamations. Accordingly, in some instances men who craved these things have actually been made wretched and reduced to beggary, although the states held before them nothing great or wonderful at all.’

⁴⁵ I have discussed this in van Nijf (2012), (2015). Cf. Chwe (2001).

historically one important way in which this happened – and still happens – has been through mass ceremonies and public ritual events, where the members of a community are brought together in an ‘inward-facing circle’ where everybody knows that they are observed by all other members of the community as well (a kind of inverted panopticon). The auditoria of theatres and stadia in (later) Greek cities were ideally suited to the process. These were not only the settings for dramatic or musical contests, but also frequently the sites of assembly meetings, which is a reminder of the closeness of the political and the spectacular in this time. They provided the Greek cities with an impressive and effective setting for the public renewal of the social contract between the *dēmos* and the elite. The festival setting gave a particular political spin to the production of common knowledge because the composition of the festival audiences in ancient theatres and stadia was far from random.⁴⁶ Each auditorium served as a representation of the concepts and values that informed social and political order. The auditorium reflected the political ideology of *isonomia*. Each wedge offered notionally equivalent places to the individual members of a *phylē* – wherein the seats in the front rows were reserved for the officials and priests. In the later Greek city, and certainly under Rome, the seating arrangements in Greek auditoria began to present a more hierarchical view of society, if only because priesthoods and offices were increasingly monopolised by elite families. When honorific ceremonies started to include local benefactors from these same families, this raised their visibility even further.

At these events, the city and its benefactors came face to face, and the ceremonies and announcements that remained a fixture on the festival agenda’s served to remind both masses and elites of their part of the deal. The honour of both parties was at stake: that of the honorand as well as that of the community that awarded the honours. Each subsequent installment of the festival and each re-enacted honorific ceremony added to individual and collective fame and glory of the benefactors, but also bound them to the community. The role of the audience was to give consent, by sitting in their allocated seats, and to support the political hierarchy, by doing so in view of all their fellow citizens. In ancient auditoria spectators took part in the ritual performance. In the context of the Greek city this had a political relevance. Going to the theatre or to a festival thus went beyond mere entertainment. These were places that defined a whole sector of civic activity, and they demanded appropriate

⁴⁶ Van Nijf (1997). And more recently: Zuiderhoek (2009); van Nijf (2012).

dress, gestures and decorum of the spectators who attended them. This logic applied not only to the ordinary members of the audience, of course, but also to the benefactors who were seated in the front rows and whose names were announced, making them the very centre of public attention. This effect was undoubtedly strengthened by the epigraphic commemoration that was such a crucial ingredient in civic euergetism. Many texts include a hortatory formula that makes it explicit that these media too were meant to make a contribution to the production of common knowledge.⁴⁷

In this way the festival helped to produce political legitimacy. It is important to note, however, that this was not a top-down phenomenon: the *dēmos* was not exactly voiceless, nor without its handles on the elite benefactors and their families. Epigraphic sources may represent a harmonious picture, but authors such as Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom alert us to other aspects of this exchange. Like contemporary western politicians, local elites in the imperial Greek city lived a life of public representation.⁴⁸ In his *Praecepta rei publicae gerendae*, Plutarch warns Menemachos and other aspiring politicians that they will have to get used to public attention and live their lives ‘as on a public stage’,⁴⁹ which was not necessarily a comfortable position.⁵⁰

The consequences of this must have been particularly noticeable to the benefactors who were so visibly present at the festivals. Dio Chrysostom sarcastically compares the position of the benefactors in the front seats with that of slaves auctioned in the market: ‘while persons who are cried for sale in the market-place all deem wretched, those cried in the theatre they deem fortunate’. The result of the situation is that the elites must have felt as if they were permanently on trial. The honorific procedures in a face-to-face society implied a public, and potentially confrontational, encounter between all parties involved. Seats of honour easily turned into a pillory.

Festival euergetism, then, was about the exchange of honour which defined and redefined the relationship between the *dēmos* and its leaders – but it was clearly not a walk-over for the elite. It offered the elite an

⁴⁷ Charneux (1991). ⁴⁸ Pels and te Velde (2000).

⁴⁹ Plut. *Prae. ger. reip.*, 4: ‘for it is a difficult task to change the multitude. But do you yourself, since you are henceforth to live as on an open stage, educate your character and put it in order; and if it is not easy wholly to banish evil from the soul, at any rate remove and repress those faults which are most flourishing and conspicuous.’

⁵⁰ Cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 66.4.4; cf. 17–18: ‘Let us put it this way. Suppose one were to be put on trial every day concerning anything whatever, whether his life or his property, would it not be altogether preferable to renounce that thing and to cease being in jeopardy for the future – if it be property, then the property; if it be life, then his life?’

opportunity to gain political capital, but it affected both parties in a different way. Even though we should not talk about a full-scale democracy Athenian style, I still think that we witness here the reflexes of a long-standing local political culture that was more 'democratic' than scholars have long assumed, even though local democracy now had to operate within the limits set by an imperial system.⁵¹

Emperors and Festival Euergetism

This brings me to the next point: the role of Rome and the emperors in festival euergetism. One relatively well-studied aspect of all ancient festivals is their function in the representation of the political realities to the community. Angelos Chaniotis has repeatedly argued that from the Hellenistic period onwards this dimension increased in importance, a development that he describes as a growing functionalisation of the festivals.⁵² One important element of this development is the way in which festivals were linked to the monarchical system, for example, via ruler-cult. Many festivals of the Hellenistic and Roman period aimed to integrate the new, distant rulers into the ritual life of the political community. This phenomenon started with celebrations for kings and dynasts, but it was also extended to Roman generals. Other festivals became linked to the cult of *Thea Romē*.⁵³ In the imperial period these various strands came together, as emperors acquired a central role in the festival culture.⁵⁴ This is not the place to go into much detail about the imperial cult, and I shall limit myself to brief remarks on the various ways that emperors were involved in the euergetic exchanges surrounding the festivals.

It is well known that many agonistic festivals were dedicated, jointly dedicated or re-dedicated to Roman emperors in the context of the Roman imperial cult. This was normally the outcome of a protracted process of (symbolic) exchange that was couched in the language of euergetism; the initiative will have often come from the city or, to be more precise, from a benefactor. Many emperors were of course active founders of festivals themselves, to begin with Augustus, who marked his victory at Actium and the restoration of the Roman republic with the reorganisation of a Greek contest, the *Aktia*, that was raised to the status of crown games.⁵⁵ Other emperors, like Hadrian and Commodus, seem to have been

⁵¹ See below on the tensions that this awkward situation could produce.

⁵² Chaniotis (1995), (2003). ⁵³ Mellor (1975); Erskine (1994). ⁵⁴ Price (1984).

⁵⁵ Pavlogiannis, Albanidis and Dimitriou (2009).

particularly active in promoting festival benefactions. Festivals could not be dedicated or re-dedicated in honour of the emperor without his formal permission, but once this was granted such festivals would be known as imperial gifts (*dōrea*).⁵⁶ Cities would advertise their games by proudly referring to the imperial ‘generosity’ on their local coinage, as is shown by coins from Side that carry the legend *dōrea*.⁵⁷ In Roman colonies the Latin term *donatio* was used instead.⁵⁸ Sometimes the emperors would indeed make a financial contribution to the festivals by setting up a foundation, as seems to have happened in Ephesos⁵⁹ or in Laodicea,⁶⁰ but this can hardly have been common practice, as it would soon have depleted the imperial treasury.⁶¹ It seems more to the point to expect that the language of imperial benefaction was used to give more lustre to a local initiative.⁶²

This may be illustrated with a letter from a certain Aurelius Horion, who asks for permission to set up a foundation for a contest for ephebes in Oxyrhynchus.⁶³ His wish is apparently granted, for we have another letter that dates from a few years later that mentions the contest, but this time the contest is described as a gift of the emperors: ‘I obtained from our Lords the Emperors Severus and Antoninus (Caracalla) the gift of a contest for ephebes.’⁶⁴ The effect would have been much the same as the listing of imperial *martyriai* by benefactors such as Demosthenes of Oinoanda: imperial support was needed to give some backing to the initiative of a local benefactor and would have added to his prestige.

It is clear, nonetheless, that emperors were concerned that euergetic exchanges would continue undisturbed. Many local festivals would have had a precarious financial footing, and the emperors were prepared to send out financial officials (*curatores* or *logistai*) to check the situation. An epigraphic dossier from Aphrodisias informs us about the activities of M. Ulpius Appuleius Eurykles, a citizen from Aizanoi, who was sent to Aphrodisias to inspect the city’s finances. While he was there, he was formally asked by the city to look at the state of the funds for contests,⁶⁵ although it seems that an association of performers – who stood to lose income in case of defaulting funds – had approached him several times about the issue:

⁵⁶ For an example, see above: Mitchell (1990) 191. ⁵⁷ Mitchell (1990) 191.

⁵⁸ Robert (1936) 278 = Robert, *OMS* II, 1033. ⁵⁹ Pleket (1976) 4, n. 10.

⁶⁰ Robert (1969) 285, n. 5. ⁶¹ Mitchell (1990) 191.

⁶² Cf. Noreña, Chapter 8 in this volume. ⁶³ *POxy.* 705.

⁶⁴ *POxy.* 1202, 5–7; on these texts: Millar (1977) 452. ⁶⁵ Rouché (1993) 165.

With good fortune. Marcus Ulpius Appuleius Eurycles, designated high-priest of Asia, of the temples of Smyrna, for the second time, greets the Magistrates, Council and People of the Aphrodisians. Since it was your wish that I make provision also for the (funds) relating to the contests, because of your piety towards the very great emperor Marcus Aurelius Commodus Antoninus Augustus, and because of the memory of those who bequeathed them, and because of the reputation of the city, and since those from the Synod had also already approached me several times, I have not failed to examine this sector as well, applying the same order and zeal as (I observed) in my curatorship.⁶⁶

This was by no means a unique case: the other inscriptions from Aphrodisias show that such visitations were a regular occurrence. Perhaps it was a difficult period for Aphrodisias, but if finances were the only concern, it is surprising that Eurykles gave the go-ahead also in cases where the money in the capital fund had not yet accumulated sufficiently. These actions may have been the result of a desire to protect the interests of the synods – who were in a sense agents of imperial propaganda⁶⁷ – but it is clear that one concern was to honour ‘the memory of those who bequeathed the contests’.⁶⁸ This fitted in with a long-standing imperial policy: in a letter to his governor Pliny, the emperor Trajan ensured that athletes made an official entry to their hometowns before collecting their pensions; his successor Hadrian concerned himself with the obligations of the cities towards the athletes and performers. A long inscription that was found in Alexandria in the Troad was probably set up in the local headquarters of the Synod.⁶⁹ It contains a series of rescripts, ordering ‘that all the contests have to be celebrated, and that cities are not permitted to use agonistic funds, provided by law, decree or testament, for other purposes’, such as buildings.⁷⁰

In the same letter Hadrian also writes that an imperial official has to oversee distribution of prizes to the victors (ll. 21–2). Further down (ll. 41–2) he writes that the Ephesians are not obliged to put up statues for trumpeters and heralds, as ‘these should be paid from the proceeds of the lands that Nysios left’. The circle of euergetic exchange was apparently not to be broken.

Festivals provided their cities with an opportunity to engage in the symbolic exchange of honour at yet another level, that of the imperial state. Festivals were an opportunity to involve the emperor in the local

⁶⁶ *Iph2007*, 12, 538, ll. 1–9.

⁶⁷ Van Nijf (2011).

⁶⁸ *Iph2007*, 12, 538, ll. 6–7.

⁶⁹ Petzl and Schwertheim (2006).

⁷⁰ Petzl and Schwertheim (2006).

energetic exchanges between cities and benefactors; the initiative will have come from below, as much as from above. The imperial festivals were set up to honour the emperor, but they brought honour back for the city and presumably also that of the organising benefactors, who were able to position themselves as perfect mediators between the cities and the imperial centre in Rome. It is no coincidence that several of the festival-benefactors whom I discussed above had strong links with Rome. Both Salutaris and Demosthenes had returned home after a long career in Roman service; others will have stayed at home but had maintained special links with Rome as the officials and priests who were responsible for the imperial cult.

So far I have argued that festivals served as clearing-houses between different symbolic exchange systems that focused on the distribution and circulation of different forms of symbolic capital: social, political, cultural and religious capital. But money and, of course, labour (think of the athletes) were involved as well. When benefactors provided their cities with festivals, they were not simply catering to a public that wanted to be entertained, although that must have played a part. People want to be entertained, but what if they weren't; what if the entertainment offered was not to their taste? Were festivals indeed always such playful and pleasant events?

Tensions

Even though the festivals will have contributed to the creation of consensus and civic solidarity, we should not imagine that the route to consensus was always peaceful. Quite the opposite: they were also an occasion where rivalries and tensions within the community could easily come to the surface. These tensions existed at different levels: there is a tendency to look at the political culture of the imperial Greek city in terms of a binary opposition between *dēmos* and elite, but we should not forget that the elite may have consisted of ambitious individuals, and rival factions and families, who were competing for honour, influence and primacy in the community.⁷¹ Euergetism provided the community with a means to sort out these claims in public, and festivals were among the most effective settings to achieve this.

John Chrysostom says as much in a famous passage where he refers to the jealousy that was felt by councillors at the festival for a colleague who

⁷¹ Zuiderhoek (2008).

had organised a successful show: ‘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.’⁷² Similar observations may be found in Dio and other authors, and even in epigraphic documents. A small-scale benefactor from Oinoanda, I. Lucius Pilius Euarestos, who had financed a small local festival that he named after himself, makes no bones about it: in a concluding epigram he refers to the criticisms of his peers, and explicitly states as his aim to make them envious:

This is the fifth themis O sweet Fatherland, I Euarestos, have myself celebrated for you, rejoicing, and these are the fifth statues that I am erecting again in bronze, symbols of virtue and wisdom. Many have put up fair prizes for cities, after they were dead, but, in his own life, no mortal man. I alone dared do this, and it rejoices my heart to delight in the brazen images. So, abating your criticism, all those who have dread Envy, look upon my statue with emulous eyes.⁷³

Peer pressure and envy were of course crucial to the honorific exchange system. Such psychological factors will have stimulated members of the elite to engage in ever more magnanimous acts of euergetism. The festival setting can only have reinforced these mechanisms. The public character of the event – the fact that the entire community was gathered in the theatre or stadion, the attention and acclamations – in short, everything that was attractive to the successful benefactor – would have made it worse for his political rivals who were on that occasion reduced to being mere spectators – in full view of the entire community.

However, the tensions did not only arise out of intra-elite jealousy. They also provided the *dēmos* with leverage on their leading councillors – to come up with even more and better events at a future occasion. And again the festival setting – and the logic of common knowledge – would have made this leverage only more powerful.⁷⁴ Festival gatherings could be unpredictable mass events that were ruled by passions, including envy, sudden anger and fear, and (would-be) benefactors may well have approached these events with some trepidation.⁷⁵ When Plutarch, in his *Præcepta*, advocates the virtue of obedience, he contrasts the *good* citizens to those who ‘abuse the umpires at the contests, revile the *chorēgoi* at the Dionysiac festival, and jeer at generals and gymnasiarchs, not knowing and not understanding that it is often more glorious to pay honour than to

⁷² Joh. Chrys. *De inani gloria*. 4–5. ⁷³ Hall and Milner (1994) 18b = *SEG* 44, 1182 l./B 1–22.

⁷⁴ Chaniotis (1995). ⁷⁵ Van Nijf (2014).

receive it'.⁷⁶ Plutarch and Dio, who offer themselves as practical guides to aspiring benefactors on how to withstand the vilification and the anger of the mob (*loidoria* and *orgē tou plēthous*), may have exaggerated the risk, but they had a point.

Modern studies of political rituals suggest that the same events that are used to produce civic solidarity may easily turn into the locus of civic unrest.⁷⁷ It should be noted that ritual settings, and particularly the 'inward-facing circles' of stadia and amphitheaters, were then, as they are today, also the likely setting for erupting popular protests and riots. The logic of common knowledge, discussed above, would have been a factor here. Many individuals in a city may have been disgruntled for one reason or another, but only when this was publicly expressed in the context of a ritual would these feelings become common knowledge, encouraging each individual to join the protest, riots or plunder.

The organisers of Greek festivals were aware, of course, that festival crowds could cause an uproar and took measures to prevent any disturbance. During processions, *pompagōgoi* and other officials were appointed to keep the participants on the right track.⁷⁸ *Agōnothetai* could be praised for maintaining *eukosmia* or *eutaxia* in the theatre.⁷⁹ Benefactors took no chances: the regulations for the Demostheneia in Oinoanda stipulate that the *agōnothetai*, who were responsible for the *eukosmia* during the festivals, made sure that *mastigophoroi* or *rhabdouchoi* were at hand to impose discipline:⁸⁰ 'Twenty *mastigophoroi* should also be chosen by him, who will lead the way dressed in white clothing without undergarments, also carrying shields and whips, and they will be in charge of good order in the theatre as they have been instructed by the *agōnothetēs*' (ll. 63–4).

However, as much as the notables tried their best at crowd control, there was always a chance that matters would get out of hand, that there would be fights between rival groups in the audience or that grievances against the organising benefactors would be expressed publicly. It is easy to imagine how acclamations could turn sour if the spectacle was not to everybody's taste or if the public had other grievances to air – heckling and booing not only would have spoilt the benefactor's day but would have altered the character of the whole event.⁸¹ It is not surprising that when we hear of riots and unrest in the later Greek city these were often connected

⁷⁶ Plut. *Prae. ger. reip.* 21.

⁷⁷ The classic case is the carnival of Romans of 1579: Le Roy Ladurie (1979).

⁷⁸ Chaniotis (1995) 157.

⁷⁹ *SEG* 30.1073, ll. 16–17; *IG* II² 223 B, ll. 7–8 (= *Agora* XV, 34 B); 354, ll. 15–19.

⁸⁰ Wörle (1988). ⁸¹ Van Nijf (2014).

to festivals and theatrical settings. Nowadays we hear about supporters of particular soccer teams who are infamous for hooliganism; in antiquity the Alexandrians seem to have been particularly notorious for this type of behaviour:

The Alexandrians are moderate enough when they offer sacrifice or stroll by themselves or engage in their other pursuits; but when they enter the theatre or the stadium, just as if drugs that would madden them lay buried there, they lose all consciousness of their former state and are not ashamed to say or do anything that occurs to them... And when the dreadful exhibition is over and they are dismissed, although the more violent aspect of their disorder has been extinguished, still at street-corners and in alleyways the malady continues throughout the entire city for several days; just as when a mighty conflagration has died down, you can see for a long time, not only the smoke, but also some portions of the buildings still aflame.⁸²

Other examples show that theatres and stadia were closely associated with urban riots. Polybius records how in 204 BCE protesters dragged Agathokles, the disgraced majordomo of Ptolemy V Epiphanes, to the stadion of Alexandria, where he was publicly torn to pieces by the frenzied mob.⁸³ Another case – which did not end in a mob lynching, but only just – was described in the New Testament. The passage concerns an uproar caused by the arrival in Ephesus of the apostle Paul and fellow Christians.⁸⁴ The episode starts when a silversmith, Demetrius, warns his colleagues that the Christians represent a threat to their businesses:

When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’ Soon the whole city was in an uproar . . . and all of them rushed into the theatre together. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theatre. The assembly was in confusion: some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. But when they realised he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’

The uproar stopped only when the *grammateus* of the *boulē* stepped in to quiet the crowd (i.e. by hinting at Roman reprisals). Such riots were sometimes taken up by the visual media of the time, as we can see in a famous fresco from Pompeii that seems to depict riots that were connected

⁸² Dio Chrys. *Or.* 32.41.

⁸³ Polyb. 15.30.2.

⁸⁴ Acts 19:21–41.

with gladiatorial games.⁸⁵ I do not know of any similar images in the East, but I do not doubt that any benefactor would carry a mental image of such riots with him.

Conclusion

So, when benefactors paid for the festivals, they offered their cities much more than popular entertainment: they offered a complex social, cultural and political experience that played a major role in defining the social, political and cultural relations in the post-classical polis.

Festivals were collective performances centred on a symbolic exchange between cities, athletes and performers, elites, other cities and emperors that involved different forms of capital: political legitimacy, cultural identity, social status and even wealth. I have argued that festivals were a kind of clearing-house where these types of capital were commuted in a common currency, that of honour. Festivals were the place where cities became honorific communities.

Honour was used by benefactors to raise their status and that of their families and to give their power in the city some form of legitimacy; honour was used to provide communities with a Greek cultural identity that joined Greek cities with each other in a worldwide network; honour was used to connect with an imperial system of power; and honour (or rather the lack or withdrawal of honour) was used by the *dēmoi* to keep their leaders under control.

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⁸⁵ Huet (2004).

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