Robin Osborne
(Oxford)

Competitive festivals and the polis: a context for dramatic festivals at Athens

At festivals throughout the year Athenians repeatedly competed and observed competitions. This paper surveys the Athenian competitive year and its development, and attempts to assess the place of competition in the Athenian political order. It suggests that the critical relationship of drama to the city may be engendered by its competitive context as well as by a peculiarly Dionysiac alterity.

The year started, in Hekatombaion, with the Panathenaia. In every fourth year this was the big contest, with competitions in *mousikē* and athletics both for individuals and for teams drawn from the ten Kleisthenic tribes. The prizes were not simply the Panathenaic amphorae of wine and oil with which we are so familiar, but also sums of cash of up to 600 dr., and gold crowns to the value of 1000 dr. for the winners in certain events. This was a serious competition on which the city spent, in the early fourth century, well over a talent in prizes; contrary to the claim often made that in Greek athletic and other competitions, apart from chariot races, it was only being first that counted, here there were prizes for those second, third, fourth and fifth in certain events, and regularly prizes for the runner-up[1].

In the same month as the Panathenaia, and apparently in the same year of each Olympiad (the third), the Herakleia were celebrated at Marathon. Already by the time of Pindar these games

[1] The best evidence on the Greater Panathenaia derives from *IG*ii^2 2311, which dates from the early fourth century and from which the figures for prize money are derived. See Johnston 1987. Note also [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 60, [Andokides] 4.42, and on all festivals with an athletic element, Kyle 1987. For competitions at the lesser Panathenaia see Lysias 21.2,4, [Xenophon] *Ath. Pol.* 3.4, and J.K. Davies 1967:37. Note that there are already prizes for all in the funeral games for Patroklos in the *Iliad*.

had both men's and boys' divisions, and the prizes included silver phialai[2].

In the following month Eleusis was the focus of competitive attention. Games were held in the second and fourth years of each Olympiad, and in the late fourth century those in charge allowed 70 medimnoi of grain *(sitos)* for the trieteric festival, and for the penteteric 70 medimnoi were specially allocated for prizes for the horse race, and an uncertain figure, which must be at least 260 medimnoi, for the rest of the competition. The same contests are listed for both trieteric and penteteric celebrations: athletics *(gumnikos)*, *mousikē*, and horse racing, along with «the ancestral» contest[3].

Two months later came a competition of a different sort: the race at the Oskhophoria during the month of Pyanepsion. Twenty ephebes, two individuals or a pair from each tribe, raced from the temple of Dionysos to Phaleron, and the winner drank the «fivefold cup» of oil, wine, honey, cheese and flour. Victory in this race was evidently so worth celebrating that one victor commissioned an epinician ode from Pindar to mark his success — something surely quite remarkable in a competition limited to ephebes[4]. Games seem to have been added to the Theseia in the same month to celebrate Kimon's bringing back the bones of the hero from Skyros in the 470s. The festival is mentioned by Aristophanes, but the only details we have come from the second century, when there was a torch race, equestrian events, and an athletic contest, and when at least some of the events saw competition in tribes[5]. If we can believe the rather

[2] For the Herakleia see *IG* i^3 3, [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 54.7 (with Rhodes 1981 ad loc.), ad Pindar *Olympian* 9.88-90 with Scholia (134d Drachmann). The ascription of the Herakleia at Marathon to Hekatombaion depends on the assumption that it is these Herakleia that are at issue in Demosthenes 19.125. See also Vanderpool 1942.

[3] [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 54.7 (and Rhodes 1981 ad loc.). On trieteric and penteteric celebrations of the Eleusinia see *IG* ii^2 1672 and Clinton 1979: 9-12. Clinton shows that *IG* i^2 5 (*IG* i^3 5) does not refer to the Eleusinia.

[4] Our evidence derives mainly from Proclus, *Chrestomathia* 91-2. For Pindaric celebration see Rutherford and Irvine 1988 on P. Oxy 2451 B fr. 17 (Pindar fr. 6c Snell/Maehler). Note also Vidal-Naquet 1981:156 and n. 31.

[5] Modern scholars derive the institution of the games from Plutarch *Kimon* 8.6 and

confused statement of Proclus *(Commentary on Plato Timaios* 21b) there was also a competition at the Apatouria: «The third day of the Apatouria is called Koureotis. On this day they inscribed the kouroi who were three and four years old into the phrateres. On this day also the more skilful of the boys sing certain poems, and those who have the better memory beat the rest. For they sang rhapsodically the poems of the ancients'.

At some stage during the winter there were the games associated with the public burial of the dead. According to Diodoros the *agōn* at the public burial was introduced in 479 B.C. (Diodoros 11.33.3), and the fact that the festival was administered by the Polemarkh and closely associated with the sacrifice to Artemis Agrotera marking the anniversary of the battle of Marathon and with the commemoration of Harmodios and Aristogeiton might be held to support this date. Three bronze vessels inscribed «Athenians: prizes [[in the games]] over those who died in the war' have been found, one at Marathon, one at Ambelokepoi, and one at Karabournaki outside Thessaloniki, and on grounds of script all can be ascribed to the fifth century, two to not long after the Persian Wars. By the second century one of the main features of the games was an armed display by ephebes and a race in arms from the polyandreion[6].

The first four months of the second half of the year, Poseideon, Gamelion, Anthesterion and Elaphebolion, saw the festival calendar dominated by competitions in cultural rather than physical prowess as the Athenians celebrated the Rural Dionysia, the Lenaia, the Anthesteria and the City Dionysia[7]. The competition at the Rural Dionysia may have extended beyond drama, and the competition at the Anthesteria certainly did. The comedy of the *'agōnes khytrinoi'* of the third day of the festival, and the possible dithyrambic performances, were just two competitions among many: not only was

Theseus 36.4: see Deubner 1932:225. For the second century see *IG* ii^2 956.65. Pélékidis 1962:229 ff.

[6] [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 58.1 with Rhodes 1981 ad loc.; Stupperich 1977: I. 54-6, II.41 n. 5; *IG* ii^2 1006. 22.

[7] It is possible that there was also a literary competition at the Diasia in Anthesterion: [Lucian] *Kharidemos* 1.

the festival kicked off by the drinking competition of the Khoes on its second day, memorably celebrated by Aristophanes in the *Akharnians,* but, to judge by the iconography of the miniature khoes, there was a wide variety of other competitions, particularly athletic[8]. In this festival dramatic competitions were just one among many forms of competitive entertainment for the Athenians.

Further athletic and further poetic competition came in the eleventh month of the Athenian year with the mounted torch race at the Bendideia and the dithyrambic competition at the Thargelia, in which the tribes competed in pairs and with both men's and boys' divisions. At the Bendideia the torch race seems to have been a relay race, but we have no indication of how the teams were made up. A mounted torch race was evidently a novelty in the late fifth century[9].

In addition to those festivals which we can place in a particular month of the year there were also a number of competitive festivals which we cannot date. Both the Prometheia and the Hephaisteia featured torch races organised by tribe, and there was also a torch race for Pan about which we know nothing[10]. Regulations made in 332/1 B.C. and enacted from 329/8 B.C. established extensive agonistic events at the Amphiareia — athletics, equestrian events, 'apobasis' — perhaps on both annual and penteteric basis. There is some evidence suggesting that there had been agonistic events at the Amphiaraion even when the sanctuary was not in Athenian control earlier in the fourth century, and it is possible that a competitive Amphiareia was of some antiquity[11]. Second-century evidence

[8] [Plutarch] *Lives of the Ten Orators* 841f; Pickard-Cambridge 1968/1988: 16-17; van Hoorn 1951.

[9] Plato *Rep.* 328 a, *IG* i^3 136 for Bendis; *IG* ii^2 1138, Antiphon 6.11-13 for Thargelia competitions; Pickard-Cambridge 1968/1988.

[10] Tribal events at the Prometheia and Hephaisteia: *IG* ii^2 1138.10-11, [Xenophon] *Ath. Pol.* 3.4. Torch race: Harpokration s.v. *Lampas.* Herodotos 8.98.2 attests to the Hephaisteia, and *IG* i^3 82 indicates its fifth-century expansion. Torch race for Pan: Herodotos 8.98.2. There were competitive events at the Hermaia too (Plato *Lysis* 206d, Aiskhines 1.10, *IG* ii^2 1227.7) but I know no evidence for the torch race at the Hermaia alleged by How and Wells 1912 on Herodotos 8.98.2.

[11] *SIG*^{3} 287, 298; cf. 973 and *IG* ii^2 338, Petrakos 1968:194-8. Walbank 1982 published a new inscription which he suggested related to the Amphiaraia, but Humphreys 1985 suggests that it relates to the Epitaphia.

indicates a festival for Aias on Salamis with competitive athletics, a torch race, a boat race, and a long distance race. Deubner suggested that this festival may have been established in the wake of the battle of Salamis in which Aias and Telamon gave aid to the Athenians[12]. On the cultural side there seems to have been a festival to the Muses, presumably competitive, held in schools![13].

Numerous local festivals also included competitive elements. Information is in short supply, but from a local commemoration and from Pausanias we know of a festival of Artemis Amarousia at Athmonon with an *agōn,* and ancient lexica and local commemorations combine to indicate a festival of the Tetrakomoi at its Herakleion, featuring competitive athletic events and either a competitive or a celebratory song and dance routine[14]. These festivals were in addition to the very considerable local investment of energy and resources in the Rural Dionysia[15].

Two features of this activity need to be noted: the quantity, and the date of inception. Competitive elements appear in about half the festivals about which we have sufficient knowledge for them to merit an entry in Deubner's *Attische Feste.* Given the state of our evidence it may well be that other festivals too had competitions not noted in our sources. It seems fair to conclude that by the end of the fifth century, at least, competition was a basic element in the worship of the gods at Athens, and that the more grand the worship offered the more likely it was to include something competitive.

Claims about the development of competitive elements in festivals over time are bound to be, given the state of the evidence, tentative and tendentious. We rarely have secure knowledge of the date at which the competitive element was introduced to a festival, and even more rarely can we be sure that our first knowledge of a festival or of a competitive element within it indicates the

[12] *IG* ii^2 1227. 32 of 131 B.C., 1011. 16f., 53ff., of 106 B.C. for the festival; Herodotos 8.64 for the Heroes' rôle at Salamis; Deubner 1932:228.

[13] Aiskhines 1.10, Theophrastos *Characters* 22.6.

[14] Artemis Amarousia: *IG* ii^2 1203.17, Pausanias 1.31.4-5 and cf. *IG* i^2 865. Tetrakomoi: Pollux 4.105, Stephanos Byz. s.v. *Ekhelidai, IG* ii^2 3103-4.

[15] Whitehead 1986a: 212-222.

inauguration of that festival or of the competition. Nevertheless the accumulated list of possible or probable dates of inauguration of agonistic elements in Athenian festivals is of some interest.

It is very likely that some competitive festivals had a long history. The drinking competition is so basic to the Anthesteria as surely to have its origins in the mists of time; the other competitive events at the Anthesteria may well be later accretions. Similarly the race at the Oskhophoria might be regarded as having its antiquity guaranteed by the nature of the prize, but the organisation of the race may well have altered over time. Some form of competition in association with the other main Dionysiac festivals, the Lenaia and Dionysia, may also be posited earlier than the sixth century, but the nature of the competition on those occasions certainly changes in the second half of the sixth century, and continues to be modified from time to time later.

Other festivals are most probably either themselves invented in historic time (after Solon) or else have agonistic elements added at a historic date. The Panathenaic competitions are pretty firmly established as of sixth-century inception, and the competitions at the Eleusinia seem likely to belong to the sixth century also[16]. Given that victory monuments celebrating success in the Thargelia were dedicated at the Pythion, and given the Peisistratid interest in the sanctuary of Apollo Pythios, a Peisistratid date for the agonistic element at the Thargelia is attractive[17]. That the festival of Pan instituted after Marathon featured a torch race might be taken as showing that the torch race at the Hephaisteia and/or the Prometheia was already established by 490, but it does not give a firm date.

[16] Panathenaia: J.A. Davison 1958:25-33, Corbett 1960:57-8. The earliest Panathenaic amphora commemorates victory in a two horse chariot race. Scenes on pots not implausibly interpreted as showing *apobatai* rather than any act of war go back to the eighth century, but not necessarily in association with this particular festival: Tölle 1963:224-5 on a late Geometric neck amphora in the Volkwang-Museum, Essen, Inv. No. 969. See also more generally C.A. Morgan 1990:205-212.

[17] Souda s.v. *Pythion.* For Peisistratid connections with Apollo Pythios see *ML* 11, Thucydides 6.54.7, and D.M. Lewis' comments in *CAH* IV^2 294-5.

Torch races first appear on painted pottery in the early classical period[18].

The games at the Aianteia may have been introduced following the victory at Salamis, the games at the Epitaphia may be dated to 479 B.C., and the games at the Theseia seem reasonably reliably instituted after the return of Theseus' bones from Skyros in the 470s. Competition at the Herakleia at Marathon, open to the city as a whole and organised by thirty *athlothetai,* three from each of the ten tribes, goes back to c. 490 B.C. The race at the Bendideia is firmly an institution of the second half of the fifth century, and the games at the Amphiareia may be a fourth-century innovation. In other cases we have no knowledge — as with the Hermaia, although their close association with the kleroukhs of Salamis might be held to be suggestive.

This chronological pattern looks interestingly skewed. The festivals where competition most plausibly goes back a long way are the various Dionysiac festivals (most certainly the Anthesteria and Oskhophoria). Of the rest, the vast majority plausibly date to the century after the rejuvenation of the Panathenaia in 566 B.C., with perhaps a particularly high frequency of competitive innovations in the fifty years after 510 (Herakleia at Marathon, Pan race, Aianteia, Epitaphia, Theseia, perhaps Hephaisteia and Prometheia). Subsequent major festivals seem to get competitions at their inception (Bendideia, Amphiareia), but the frequency of innovation seems less after say 460 B.C.

How are we to explain this pattern? Where do the dramatic competitions at the Great Dionysia fit in? Recent contributions have emphasised the fragility of the evidence generally taken to indicate that dramatic competitions at the Dionysia date to the 530s B.C.[19] Were *IG* ii^2 2318 to have survived complete we would know what the Athenians later considered to be the date of the first *kōmoi* and the date of the first tragedies at the Dionysia. The tradition that tells of Pegasus bringing Dionysos from Eleutherai to Athens need not be

[18] For torch races on vases see Webster 1972:131-2, 200-201. For torch races generally see Kyle 1987:190-193.

[19] West 1989, Connor 1990.

directly connected with the decision of the people of Eleutherai to join the Athenians, and could almost equally plausibly be earlier or later than that event, whose date is in any case totally uncertain. The Marmor Parium (*FGrH* 239A46) gives 509/8 as the date of the first men's choruses, presumed dithyrambic, but this night have been in association with some festival other than the Dionysia. Thus it appears that none of the evidence which night be regarded as having a direct bearing on the inception of the Dionysia as a dramatic competition is strong enough on its own to establish the date. But to make a judgement on the basis of indirect evidence precisely requires inserting the Dionysia into the context of the competitive festivals[20].

It is often argued that the origin and continuing *raison d'être* of athletic competitions lay in the desire for glory of an aristocratic society. So, recently, C.A. Morgan (1990:208): 'It is clear that athletics, and ritualised competition of all kinds, did not form an integral part of community or state consciousness during the eighth and seventh centuries, but instead remained the preserve of the aristocracy'. There is certanly no doubt that athletic success could be turned to political advantage: Kylon tried to do so in the seventh century and in fifth century Alkibiades and Theagenes of Thasos both succeeded in doing so[21]. The decline in the numbers of monumental commemorations by individual victors in athletic events after c. 460 B.C., which is particularly marked at Athens but seems to be a phenomenon found all over Greece, might seem to offer further support to this hypothesis[22]. Yet athletic events continue to be included in and added to festivals after 460 B.C. Thus even if we suggest a strong correlation between the blossoming of competitive festivals in the period 560-460 B.C. and the high degree of publicity given to athletic success in those years, as marked by the corpus of

[20] Connor's emphasis on the political context and on the liberating effects of Dionysiac ritual ignores the considerable amount that different competitive festivals have in common, just as it fails to account for the quasi-dramatic activity which vase paintings show to have gone on in mid-sixth-century Athens.

[21] Kylon: Herodotos 5.71; Alkibiades: Thucydides 6.16; Theagenes: Pausanias 6.11, Dio Chrysostom 31.95, Athenaios 412 de, Pouilloux 1954: 52-105.

[22] C.A. Morgan 1990: 211-2, Thomas 1981. But the amount of epigraphic evidence suggests that the argument from sculpture should not be overplayed.

Pindaric Epinicians, the commemorative dedications, and the frequency of athletic statues, we are faced with the need to explain the *continued* importance of competitive festivals during a period when such publicity was more uncommon and generally muted.

The model event from the point of view of competitive festivals as struggles for brownie points among the élite is the chariot race, the one event in which money could be made to yield victory in a pretty direct, if not entirely reliable, way, and an event with clear heroic overtones. But chariot racing was a comparatively late arrival at the Olympic festival: four-horse chariots seem first to have been involved at the end of the seventh century, and two-horse chariots only come in in the late fifth century[23]. Far from athletic competitions as a whole being modelled upon aristocratic athletic competition, the signs are that at Athens, at least, non-athletic competitive elements receive public recognition at least as early, if not earlier than athletic ones, in the basically nonathletic competitions at the various Dionysiac festivals. Pictorial evidence does suggest that some sorts of games may have been familiar to Athenians already in the eighth century B.C., but nothing indicates that these games took place in the context of a festival (as opposed to e.g. a funeral). Hard evidence for games associated with a festival is available at an earlier date for Olympia and, for boxing and dancing, Delos, than for any city, and this is surely the reverse of what would be expected were aristocratic competition for political position within the city at the heart of such heroic athletic activity at festivals, and certainly in contrast to the apparent privileging of victories in an Athenian competition in commemorative dedications from the Athenian Akropolis in the sixth century (C.A. Morgan 1990: 211).

Since, even for athletic competition, the ambition of the individual aristocrat seems an inadequate explanation for the competitive practices of the classical city, it is worth looking at the collective interest of the city as well as at the divisive interests of individuals. For most competitive events at festivals there are obvious practical equivalents to the ritualised contest. Footraces,

[23] For the chariot as heroic see most recently Lissarrague 1990:98-101. For chariots at the Olympics, C.A. Morgan 1990: 90-92. See also above n. 16.

short and long, not only encourage general physical fitness but promote excellence in an area actually crucial to effective hoplite warfare, and the hoplite race in armour does this even more directly (it seems, however to be a late development); similarly wrestling, boxing and the pankration not only encouraged a general toughness, but could be fairly directly converted into desirable qualities in the hoplite front line. The field events that had less direct relevance to warfare, the discus and javelin throwing, seem at Athens to have been promoted only as part of the all-round athletic excellence tested in the pentathlon-running, jumping, wrestling, discus and javelin throwing (Kyle 1987: 178-184). Significant also, in this context, are the events of a less purely athletic nature — the *apobatai,* who apparently jumped on and off a racing chariot, and the *pyrrichistai*, who engaged in an armed dance. Success in the contest of the *pyrrichistai* was very clearly highly valued: the fourth-century prize for the victor in each of the three categories of competition (men, youths, and boys) was an ox (*IG* ii^2 2311.72-4). In the case of equestrian events too, the relation to the skills desirable in knights in war was direct—speed, skill with a javelin, and disciplined group control were the qualities tested[24].

The practical advantages of these contests was to some extent balanced by the disadvantage that all these competitions produced *winners.* Winning can be turned to political advantage precisely since winning matters, but open competition also means that winning cannot be guaranteed. Whatever the régime, the political promotion of that, effectively arbitrary, set of individuals who win in festivals is unlikely to be welcome: races and the like may encourage certain desired civic virtues, but they may equally subvert the existing order. The story of Kimon son of Stesagoras (Herodotos 6.103) illustrates this nicely.

Democratic Athens (we simply do not know about earlier practice) minimised the dangers of competitions in two ways: prizes were given to second, third and fourth place men as well as to winners; and competition was organised in more or less arbitrary groups. At the Great Panathenaia the armed dance, the *anthippasia*,

6-90. For Sparta see Hönle 1968:136-42.

the torch race, the boat race, and the contest in *euandria* were all tribal events[25]. Athenians competed in these events in the same artificial units in which they fought and in which they served together as *prytaneis.* These competitions were thus not only relevant to the training of current and future citizens in their encouragement of activitie which would promote military competence, they also built up an *esprit de corps* within, and a rivalry between, the basic political and military building blocks of the Athenian state. We cannot tell whether the Ionian tribes had been used as competitive units in Athens before Kleisthenes, but it is notable that the events that are later tribal at the Great Panathenaia are events which seem in several cases to have no long history.

Events under the patronage of the Muses might have practical advantages too. Dithyramb, which involved both song and dance, promoted desirable skills of co-ordination of physical action. Competitive dancing goes back in Athens as far as literacy, for the earliest of all Attic inscriptions is a graffito offering a reward for the most frisky dancing[26]. Plato in the *Laws* (815) assumes the formative importance of the dance in discussing the promotion and restriction of desirable and undesirable dancing, and Athenaios (628 d-f) quotes Sokrates on those who dance best being the best in war. Dithyramb was organised on a tribal basis in classical Athens, although if the *Marmor Parium* is right in dating the first choruses to 509/8 and if by choruses it means dithyramb, the use of the Kleisthenic tribes in the competition must have been a later addition. It is not clear whether the context in which Hipparkhos had earlier promoted the dithyramb was festival competition or not[27].

For a city which had decided that competition was desirable song might also play an important role in promoting that competition. The Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo not only celebrates the dancing and boxing at Apollo's festival but itself vies for the praise of the chorus of girls which it itself praises — for what sounds like a dramatic performance (lines 147-76). This combination of evocation

[25] *IG* ii^2 2311.72-81; Xenophon *Hipparkhikos* 3.10-13; *IG* ii^2 3130.
[26] *CEG* I 432, B.B. Powell 1988.
[27] Pickard-Cambridge 1962:13-15; Herington 1985: 93-4.

of competition between dancers and a sense of the song itself being in competition is a feature plain to behold in Alkman's *Partheneia*. Such encouragement of competitive choral activity was encouragement of competition among the young: as more generally in the agōgē at Sparta, so in festal dances everywhere the young were educated in competition, and in competition not on an individual basis but as to how best to serve the city and its gods as a group[28].

In the light of all this, we might suggest that from the city's point of view the decision to promote competitive festivals in general is a decision that the advantages of the competitions to the city outweigh the disadvantages. In Sparta it is relatively easy to see that the promotion of competition, especially but not solely among the young, could be undertaken safely because of the strength of the social and political constraints on converting competitive success into social dominance or political influence. In Athens such constraints were relatively weak throughout the archaic period and both before and while Athens was under tyrannical control competitive success was a destabilising factor in Athenian political life. Kleisthenic democracy certainly did not prevent competitive success being cashed out in political ways, but its diffusion of political power meant that competitive success could not be a route to official or long-lasting political control.

Whereabouts should we place the dramatic competitions in this context? Tragedy and comedy clearly shared with dithyramb the singing and dancing chorus, but unlike dithyramb they were never organised on a tribal basis. Even more than with dithyramb, however, the responsibility for a successful play or set of plays was clearly divided: author and individual actors as well as choregos and his choros could reckon to take some of the credit. The city rewarded success in dithyrambic competition with a tripod, and in the fourth century, at least, victorious choregoi dedicated these tripods in expensive and very visible monuments[29]. Just what the choregoi of

[28] On Sparta see Finley 1975:161-77, Hodkinson 1983, Calame 1977.

[29] Monument of Lysikrates: *IG* ii^2 3042; of Thrasyllos: *IG* ii^2 3056; of Nikias: *IG* ii^2 3055. See more generally Pausanias 1.20.2 and Pickard-Cambridge 1968/1988: 77-9. More monuments have recently been discovered: *Archaeological Reports* 1988-9:9. It is

tragedy received is unclear, and there is little sign of any more lasting celebration of victory than a party. Plutarch (*Themistokles* 5.5) records Themistokles setting up a tablet (*pinax*) to celebrate a successful turn as tragic choregos, but no such monuments survive, and the only epigraphic records of victories occur either in the context of monuments celebrating a variety of victories in various competitions or in the official records, in the case of the Lenaia the responsability of the *arkhon basileus*. It is worth noting that responsability for selecting the comic choregoi was transferred from the *arkhon basileus* to the tribes, giving an aspect of tribal competition to competitive comedy. In the case of tragedy the judging of the competition, at least, was tribal, with one man selected by lot from each tribe to serve as a panel and five of their written verdicts being selected by lot to decide the competition. Although, as the evidence we have from the orators shows, this could not entirely eliminate attempts to win the competition by influencing the judges, it clearly is an attempt to minimise the possibility that such manipulation could be successful[30].

In athletic competition and even in rhapsodic competition it was the way in which one performed, by comparison with other competitors, that was measured and rewarded. In dramatic competition it was not simply the way the play was executed but what the play was that was important. We cannot tell how «political» the contents of the earliest tragedies was, but it is clear that by the time of Phrynikhos' *Capture of Miletos* the contents of a play might be very overtly of political interest. Given the implicit political claims that lie behind the competing genealogies and myths in the

notable that the monuments of Thrasyllos and Nikias were put up under oligarchy (in 319 B.C.) — clear cases of showing off among the élite?

[30] Monument recording various victories including dramatic: Poursat 1967 (David Lewis suggests to me that Amumō[nē] should be read as a play title). Official records set up by *arkhon basileus* at Lenaia: cf. *SEG* 32.239 with Pickard-Cambridge 1988:360. Transfer of responsibility for choosing comic choregoi: [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 56.3. Judging: Pickard-Cambridge 1968/1988:95-8. Victors at the rural Dionysia did celebrate the success of their khoregia: *IG* ii^2 3090, 3092-3100. See also Whitehead 1986b. It must be said that *IG* ii^2 3091 and 3101 may commemorate victories at the City Dionysia rather than at the Rural Dionysia, but advertised in the home deme.

lyric poets it seems highly likely that the politicisation of tragedy could have been foreseen from the beginning[31]. It is precisely on the grounds that they will offer competing «representations» of the city that Plato in the *Laws* (817) proposes to censor tragedies before allowing them to be produced. In Athens the archon decided who should be granted choruses but we have no evidence about how he came to a decision and no reason to think that the archon's decisions were, or were even suspected to be, political. Dramatic competition at Athens must surely be seen to invite, rather than preclude, competing visions of the city.

While other festival competitions had a *potential* political effect, by offering publicity to the victor which he could turn to political account, dramatic competitions not only offered similar potential political effects, but actually and necessarily made politics one of the axes around which the competition revolved. Where the other competitions could thrust men into political prominence dramatic competition thrust issues into prominence. And just as the city's promotion of other forms of competition implies a confidence that the political effects of promoting particular individuals can be controlled, so the city's promotion of dramatic competition implies a confidence that the political effects of promoting certain issues can be controlled.

All festival competitions threaten to overturn the values of the city which promotes them. The competititve drinking at the feast of the Khoes at the Anthesteria reinforced the norm of strictly regulated drinking in a group by its stress on unregulated individual drinking of large quantities in a short time. All competition encouraged individual ambition which the city normally battled to regulate and control. But as the Khoes competition was a competition in a quality, ability to take one's drink, highly valued and indeed vital to the life of the community (as the aitiological myth of Erigone which «explained» that other Anthesteria ritual, the Aiora, stresses), so the ambitious individual was also vital to the city[32]. Ambition had to be cultivated both in order to ensure that the city was strong in the face of ambitious cities esewhere, and in order to prevent the odd ambitious individual or group from coming to dominate civic life unchallenged. It is the recognition of the fact that the ambitious individual was both politically vital to the city and also its greatest threat that is seen clearly in the love — hate relationship which the city has with the notion of *philotimia*[33].

The encouragement of ambition becomes especially important at times when there is a desire to widen political access, whether because it has been previously restricted by law or because it has previously been restricted by custom. Solon's widening of access to political office in Athens had to accompanied by the stimulation of larger numbers to civic activity. Whether or not Solon moved the Law on Stasis attributed to him, which obliges people to take sides in political disputes, it accurately identifies the crucial area of concern (Manville 1980). It is in this context that Solon's granting of civic rewards to Athenians successful in the Olympic games should perhaps be understood: bringing such people to prominence was a way of creating another route, at least in part independent of birth and wealth, to political influence, and hence another way of widening access to political power. The story of Athenian politics after Solon, for which we are all too reliant on the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia* (13-14), suggests that, if anything, Solon was too successful in stimulating some individuals to political ambition, and not successful enough in ensuring that political ambition was widely enough distributed to be self-regulating (compare, perhaps, Figueira 1984: 466-9).

For all the determination of some modern scholars to put Peisistratos' name to the reform of the Panathenaia in 566 B.C., there is no good evidence for the link, and it may be better to see the reform more as a product of the competition between rival political leaders (including Peisistratos) for supremacy: increasing the number of competitions and their prominence offered more people a chance to promote themselves and their supporters, and so this was a reform

[31] Cf. e.g. the different names given to minor mythic figures (*PMG* 218, 308); Stesichoros and Helen (*PMG* 192-3).

[32] For Erigone see Servius on Vergil *Georgics* 2.385-9, and Hyginus *Fabulae* 130, *Poet. Astr.* 2.4.5.

[33] J.K. Davies 1978: 126-8; Whitehead 1983:55-74.

from which any, and all, might hope to gain, and from which no long term domination should result. Such diffusion of competition, and hence of the glory to be won by victory, was further in the interests of a tyranny which, far from attempting to quell routine political life at Athens, promoted it, filling the traditional magistracies with undoubtedly ambitious men and increasing the numbers of city officials. The interests of the tyrants were not in fact very divergent from those of the freed city after 510. It is unsurprising that tragic competitions should begin under the tyranny (at whatever precise date) and dithyrambic competitions immediately after the liberation. Herington has stressed that the birth of the tragic festival is to be understood in the context of Peisistratid encouragement of song culture, and wants to treat the fact that tragedy is put on in competition as simply an inevitable result of its being in the tradition of *agōnes mousikoi*; without ignoring the first insight we need to acknowledge that the competitive context is more than just an accidental by-product of it[34].

Democracy needed an ambitious demos but feared ambitious individuals — that indeed is one of the issues which competing tragedies, and comedies, thrust into prominence. Achieving the one without the other was assisted by reorganising old competitions, and organising new ones, on a tribal basis, thus encouraging corporate competition while diffusing the resulting glory, and ensuring that there were always enough losers to prevent the discomfiture of loss being more politically unsettling than the boost of victory was politically advantageous. By 460 most of the competitions I listed at the beginning were in existence, and even a people proud of having more festivals than other cities might put a lower value on inventing yet more. The turn of political events meant that there were plenty of external stimuli to ambition (e.g. the empire) and that straightforwardly political means of quelling the too ambitious individual were available (compare the declining use of ostracism). But the high value put on continuing critical openness towards government meant that competitive festivals continued to have an important role in the city even in these changed circumstances. As

[34] Herington 1985:9 and chapter 4.

the tale of Kleon's relations with Aristophanes may show, there were threats to openness even from the heart of democratic political debate, and the competitive festivals had an active role to play in ensuring that the city did not succumb to those threats.

There are many lenses through which the Dionysia may be viewed. Connor has recently stressed the liberation associated with Dionysos, Goldhill the subversive qualities peculiarly associated with Dionysos[35]. In this paper I have chosen to emphasise the competitive nature of the dramatic festival, an aspect of which Connor takes no and Goldhill little account, and in doing so I hope to have offered a framework for understanding the relationship of drama to the city as a whole and for understanding why it was in the second half of the sixth century that tragedy, and during the first half of the fifth century that comedy, became part of the packed calendar of Athenian competitive festivals[36].

[35] Connor 1990; Goldhill 1990.

[36] I am grateful to the audience at Nottingham for their comments, to David Wiles who convinced me that carnivals were irrelevant, and to Ewen Bowie, David Lewis, Robert Parker and Oliver Taplin who read and commented on an earlier draft and much improved the material base on which this paper is built.

TRAGEDY, COMEDY AND THE POLIS

Papers from the Greek Drama Conference

Nottingham, 18-20 July 1990

edited by
ALAN H. SOMMERSTEIN
STEPHEN HALLIWELL
JEFFREY HENDERSON
BERNHARD ZIMMERMANN

LEVANTE EDITORI - BARI

Cover picture:
Paestan bell-crater. Museo Provinciale, Salerno.