Le Guen, B., Milanezi, S. (eds.)


This book contains the proceedings of a one-day international conference held at the University of Nantes in March 2010 and a contribution presented by John Jory at an international conference entitled “Aux marges du théâtre: de la rue à la scène dans l’Antiquité” in Paris in December 2010. Papers delivered in languages other than French were translated into French.

Set within a broader framework of studies on ancient Greek and Roman theater, the authors examine ways in which various physical objects that appeared on stage affected an audience’s experience of a dramatic performance. The different specializations through which the contributors approach the ancient theater—Greek and Latin philology, archaeology, ancient history—complement one another and provide a multivalent perspective on this complex subject.

In the introduction (pp. 17-31), the editors recapitulate previous research on physical objects employed in theater productions in ancient Greece and Rome, and briefly acknowledge major scholarly studies of the ancient Greek and Roman theater as a whole (p. 25).

The papers are grouped in two sections. The six papers in the first section (“L’appareil scénique en ses divers éléments: théorie et typologie”, pp. 35-158) consider ways in which theatrical accessories such as stage scenery, stage property, masks, and stage machinery lent a particular time, place, or character to the actors and to the performance space.

Martin Revermann (pp. 35-49) considers items of stage scenery and property on the comic and tragic stage to be an essential element of dramatic communication and semiology, and suggests that they have a greater influence on the audience than words and gestures, both because of their constant presence on the stage and because they are not bound by the subjectivity of verbal codes of communication. He compares ancient Greek theater with the Japanese Noh, Kabuki, and Bunraku theater, while granting that symbolism and stylization in Japanese theater are much more pronounced. In Greek theater, he observes, objects on stage that could not with certainty be seen by the audience—in part because of the physical layout of the stage—could nevertheless play a role in the performance by being mentioned in the text.

Alexa Piqueux (pp. 51-83) studies the evolution of masks used in fourth-century BC comedy, more specifically in Middle and New Comedy, through the evidence of clay figurines and representations on vases. On the basis of this evidence, she detects a gradual standardization of the typology of masks,
in particular those of old men. She does not presume, however, that there was an accompanying standardization of comic characters and in this context she notes that clothes and gestures remained the main elements that distinguished comic characters until the third quarter of the fourth century BC. Her study allows her to amend the classification of the ‘masks of men’ by J.R. Green as follows: ‘mask G’, occurring frequently on Attic vases, is used for the comic character of the brothel-keeper beginning in the middle of the fourth century BC.

Isabelle David (pp. 85-103) evaluates the extent to which the masks of New Comedy, as they are documented in the Onomasticon of Pollux and also in the archaeological evidence, correspond to characters in Plautus. She finds that Plautus is not entirely bound to the masks of New Comedy.

Edward John Jory (pp. 105-120) discusses an inscribed marble mask of the second century AD from Thessaloniki, preserved in the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, which was probably used as an architectural decoration of a building in the city, possibly a theater or an odeion. The mask is topped by a Phrygian cap, on which is inscribed the name ‘Astyanax’. Jory explores the data with exemplary precision. He excludes the possibility that ‘Astyanax’ is the name of the mask and leaves open the possibility that it is the personal name of a pantomime dancer or pantomime actor. He finds it most plausible that ‘Astyanax’ is the title of a popular pantomime. Rejecting the inference that pantomime masks were inscribed with names to identify characters on stage during a performance, Jory concludes that in this case the commissioner of the mask wanted to preserve the memory of a particular pantomime performance.

Leonardo Fiorentini (pp. 121-136) focuses on the stage machinery of ancient Greek theater. Reviewing the associated Greek terminology and other ancient evidence, he discusses the use of machinery in tragedy and, more particularly, its use in comedy in which tragedy is parodied.

Serena Perrone (pp. 137-158) presents an overview of papyri that preserve stage directions, and then examines Berlin papyrus 13927 (fifth-sixth century AD), which lists the stage equipment needed for a dramatic work, probably a mime, entitled Leukippe, and for seven other works. She favors the interpretation that these instructions were intended for stage directors and

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