

# The Economic Side of Greek Festivals: Some Examples from Roman Greece (Extended Abstract)\*

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In the Greek *polis*, religion represented an important part of civic finances, and public revenues were usually destined to at least partially cover expenses pertaining to the cultic sphere. In the civic budget reserved for religion, a special place was given to the costs connected with the organization of festivals.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, festivals implied several expenses for: the celebration of sacrifices, processions and banquets, the provision of sacred equipment, the construction or restoration of buildings and displays used for athletic and theatrical events, the remuneration of attendants and artists, and for the provision of prizes for victors in the *agones*. My paper tries to answer the question of how these costs were covered by the local communities, focusing on the *poleis* of Roman Greece.

It must be noted that in the most fortunate cases a festival might even cover the costs by itself. This seems to have been the case for the mysteries of the Great Gods in Messenia, if one credits a passage in the so-called ‘sacred law’ of Andania. This mentions that the Messenian authorities expected the revenues of the festival to be enough not only to reimburse the city for the initial ‘investment’ but also to give a surplus.<sup>3</sup> Indeed festivals, which were often accompanied by fairs and markets, represented a potential source of revenues for the organizing *polis*, which could collect taxes, duties, leases, and fines.<sup>4</sup> In many cases, however, the revenues from the festival were not sufficient to cover all the expenses connected with its celebration.

Despite the general scarcity of explicit references in the epigraphic evidence,<sup>5</sup> the use of public funds in Greek cities to finance festivals is mentioned significantly in the literary sources. In a well-known passage, Plutarch states that the Athenians spent more on their tragedies than in defending their independence against the barbarian.<sup>6</sup> Recent studies have demonstrated that such statements are certainly exaggerated.<sup>7</sup> However, that public funds usually were allocated to finance festivals and *agones* is also indirectly confirmed through the specification “at his own expense” (ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων) that occurs in many inscriptions in order to underline the generosity of an *agonothetes*. This means that public money was usually expected to fund that type of activity. Furthermore, it is worth noting that in many cases, inscriptions testify to the use of so-called sacred funds (*hiera chremata*) to finance festivals. Cities resorted to such funds especially for expenses linked to cultic activities.<sup>8</sup>

In many cases, however, cities had to resort to the generosity of their citizens or of well-to-do foreigners. Several inscriptions testify to the liberality of the holders of the *agonothesia*, an office consisting of an onerous liturgy. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC the Athenian *agonothetes* Miltiades of Marathon, was praised for assuming many expenses con-

nected with the celebration of the *Panathenaia*.<sup>9</sup> Numerous other epigraphic examples could be mentioned.<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that the financing of festivals in Roman Greece accurately reflects the combined public and private nature of civic finances. These were secured by public funding in the form of taxes, revenues from state and sacred properties, public loans and subscriptions, as well as by the revenues of agonistic foundations administered by civic officials, together with private munificence. The latter could consist of formal or customary financial services by the office-holders (especially the *agonothetai*) involved in the organization of such celebrations, known as liturgies (Gr. λειτουργίαι, Lat. *munera*) and *summae honorariae* (the latter only in Roman status communities). These services could also consist of supplementary benefactions performed by the same public officials or by well-to-do individuals. Judging from the epigraphic evidence it would seem that the notables' generosity made up the lion's share in the balance between public and private funding, however spontaneous this may have been. It is essential to remember, though, that by their very nature, acts of euergetism are more likely to appear in inscriptions than other more ordinary forms of funding.

### Notes

\* For a developed and detailed version of this paper see Camia 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See Aristoph. Plut. 1162–1163.

<sup>3</sup> IG V 1, 1390, ll. 53 ff.

<sup>4</sup> See D. Chr. Or. 35, 16.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. for the period in question, see the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC Athenian honorary decree IG II<sup>2</sup> 968 for an *agonothetes* of the *Panathenaia*, which refers to public funds allocated for this festival (ll. 42–43).

<sup>6</sup> Plut. Mor. 349a.

<sup>7</sup> Pritchard 2012.

<sup>8</sup> See a few examples from Boiotia: IFC 1971, no. 22 (ca. 80–50 BC), A, ll. 20–24 (*Basileia*); Knoepfler 1988 (ca. 100 AD), 266 (*Pamboiota*); Brélaz et al. 2007 (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), 275–276 (*Delia*).

<sup>9</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup> 968.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. IG IV 602 (AD 116–117) and 606 (1<sup>st</sup> century AD) from Argos; I.Thesp 374 (1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) from Thespies; IG IX 2, 90 (1<sup>st</sup> century BC–1<sup>st</sup> century AD) from Hyampolis.

## References

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