

ANCIENT THEATRE BUILDINGS

HANS PETER ISLER, *Antike Theaterbauten. Ein Handbuch* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften, 490. Band, Archäologische Forschungen Band 27), Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Wien 2017, 3 volumes, 812 + XIV pages (vol. 1, Textband) + 852 pages (vol. 2, Katalogband) + 170 plates + 62 pages (vol. 3, Tafelband), ISBN 978-3-7001-7957-3.

THE THREE VOLUMES recently published by Hans Peter Isler, emeritus professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Zurich, are not simply a manual. They are rather the work of a lifetime, as the author himself declares in the preface: an illuminating visit to the site of Monte Iato in Sicily, in Pentecost 1970, and the subsequent excavations that he conducted in the theatre until 1996, were the point of departure of his enduring interest in the ancient theatre, of which this monumental work is undoubtedly the culmination. Isler explains how, between 1979 and 2011, he travelled extensively through many of the Mediterranean countries where theatres are preserved and thus collected the material which is presented in these books. The result is a magisterial work of reference, a feat which is not unusual to Isler, as he is one of the co-authors of another set of three volumes on the ancient theatres of the Mediterranean world edited in 1994 by Giuseppina Pisani Sartorio and Paola Ciancio Rossetto.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the present three volumes is set out in the preface: “to follow and understand in detail the creation and the development of the architectural type of the theatre, from its birth until the end of the Roman imperial period” (Textband p. 23, bold by Isler). The work is devoted to the history

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1. G. Pisani Sartorio – P. Ciancio Rossetto (eds.), *Teatri greci e romani. Alle origini del linguaggio rappresentato. Censimento analitico*, 3 vols., Rome 1994.

of theatres in Graeco-Roman antiquity, with an emphasis on the birth and the development of this type of architectural monument, one which is so frequently found in the ancient world that more than 800 theatrical buildings are attested so far, stretching from modern Afghanistan (Ai Khanoum) in the east to Portugal (Olisipo) in the west, and from the UK (Camulodunum) in the north to Egypt (Oxyrhynchos and Antinoe) and Arabia (Petra) in the south. To this vast number, about 200 theatres are now added, which are mentioned in secondary sources, namely, literary and especially epigraphic testimonia.<sup>2</sup> This ambitious goal is enhanced by the sporadic discussion of figured representations that offer insights on the architectural history of ancient theatres, such as terracotta figurines and vase paintings. The main focus throughout the three volumes, however, is of an archaeological nature, and attention is primarily paid to the material remains of the theatrical buildings. These are composed of three main elements: a place for the spectators, an orchestra, and a scene building, and Isler follows the history and evolution of theatres through time by observing both the transformations which occurred to these elements and the manner in which the relationship among them eventually changed.

In the introductory chapter to the Textband the author warns the reader about the complex issue of terminology, one which is of vital importance in books of this kind. Isler is particularly careful in explaining the German words he uses throughout the book and in defending his choices; furthermore, he does not omit the discussion of ancient Greek and Roman theatrical vocabulary. Just to cite an example, he explains how ancient Greek sources label *θέατρον* the place for the spectators and, by extension, the whole theatrical building, while the auditorium is named *cavea* in Latin (Textband p. 24). The remaining sections of the introduction deal not only with obvious topics in such a book (Vitruvius' theory about the Greek and Roman theatre and his influence on Renaissance architects, a history of research on ancient theatres, the importance of the studies about the theatre of Dionysus in Athens), but also with more specific and uncommon issues, such as the future perspectives in the research on ancient theatres, as well as Isler's personal view about the modern use of ancient theatres as performing places. It is particularly welcome that Isler repeatedly stresses how our perception of the ancient Greek theatre has radically changed since Carlo Anti's suggestion (1947) that the earliest theatres had a rectilinear auditorium and

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2. In the final indexes of the volumes as many as 1006 theatrical buildings are listed, including the ones attested only in literary and epigraphic sources.

therefore a trapezoidal or rectangular orchestra — a suggestion which was not widely accepted at that time and would be confirmed only several decades later, when some theatres, located mainly in Attica, were excavated. This remark is even more welcome if one thinks that the image of the ancient Greek theatre as a building shaped on the form of a circle,<sup>3</sup> which was transposed into stone only in the late Classical and more widely in the Hellenistic period, is still widespread not only among the non-specialist public, but also among students and scholars of the ancient Graeco-Roman world.

Chapter II traces, in as many as 209 pages, the development of the Classical and Hellenistic theatre. It starts with the stair-like structures in Minoan Crete, which may be considered as a predecessor of historical theatres only from the functional point of view but have in fact nothing to do, as Isler stresses, with proper theatrical buildings. Then the earliest extant theatres are briefly discussed, among which are those in the demes of Attica. The author makes his point from the beginning: theatres were created as “an architectural container for a specifically Greek form of art, drama” (Textband p. 54); he does not completely endorse their function within the political system of late Archaic and Classical Greece, a function which should probably not be neglected.<sup>4</sup> A section is devoted to the much-debated topic of the earliest theatre of Dionysus in Athens, while the subsequent sections examine the problem of the birth and development of the circular orchestra. Isler deals with the issue of the transition from a trapezoidal to a circular orchestra in conjunction with an auditorium based on the form of the circle, and raises interesting questions, such as when and why was this change made possible. Attempts are made at establishing a typology, although the earliest examples of theatres show so many peculiarities that they can only be categorized with much difficulty. The common features — the presence of a non-circular orchestra, a seating area for the spectators, and the absence of a built *skene* — hint at simple and semi-permanent constructions not based on the shape of the circle, while the fact that (wooden) scene buildings already existed for these early theatres may

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3. This image, still current today, depends on views established in the 19th century. See for instance W. Dörpfeld – E. Reisch, *Das griechische Theater*, Athen 1896, 366: “der Tanzplatz ist selbstverständlich rund”, and U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Hermes* 21 (1886) 603–605, who affirmed that the orchestra necessarily had a circular form because it was related to the chorus’ dances.

4. See J. Paga, “Deme theaters in Attica and the trittys system”, *Hesperia* 79 (2010) 351–384. In Isler’s view, this article stresses too much the political function of theatres: see his comment Textband p. 54 note 291.

be inferred from the presence of retaining walls on the back of some orchestras (as at Thorikos, for instance).

In chapter II, the author also discusses other issues regarding the auditorium of the ancient theatres, such as the original number of spectators or the relationship between theatre capacity and the number of the inhabitants of a city, to conclude that such a relationship does not exist.<sup>5</sup> Then he examines another constituent element of the ancient theatre, namely the orchestra. Some important features in the wider area of the orchestra are described, namely the *parodoi*, the underground passages,<sup>6</sup> channels for collecting rainwater, as well as removable elements such as altars.

The most important section in this chapter, spanning 96 pages, is devoted to the discussion of the *skene* or scene building. The latter is divided into two main types, that is, scene buildings with lateral projections (“*paraskenia*”)<sup>7</sup> and scene buildings with *proskenion*. This classification is nonetheless an artificial one, as Isler himself admits, because several scene buildings show both *proskenion* and lateral projecting wings. Surprisingly, though, the author chooses to retain this formal distinction, which has serious consequences on our understanding of the architectural development of the ancient theatre.<sup>8</sup>

A lengthy section (Textband pp. 157–162) is devoted to the scene building of the theatre of Dionysus in Athens, whose influence on the development of theatrical architecture must have been decisive. Isler presents the most creditable theories on the topic, including those by older and authoritative scholars such as W. Dörpfeld, H. Bulle and E. Fiechter, and places the focus on the late Classical (or ‘Lycurgan’) phase, whilst omitting speculations about the aspect of the earliest, wooden scene building. Particular attention is given to the sturdy foundation T, which is interpreted as the remains of a passageway from the portico of the nearby sanctuary, “obgleich ein gemauerter festen Ausgang von der Halle her fehlt” (Textband p. 159).<sup>9</sup>

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5. See also the remarks in my book *Teatri della Grecia romana: forma, decorazione, funzioni. La provincia d’Achaia*, (MEΛETHMATA 67) Atene 2013, 122–124.

6. Labelled as “Charonian passageways”: see below, 267 note 34.

7. On the use of this term see below, 263.

8. He is therefore forced to affirm: “Da diese Inkonsequenz jedoch einen architektonischen Entwicklungsschritt spiegelt, hat sie im praktischen Gebrauch der Begriffe keine Folgen, sondern bleibt bloss formaler Natur” (Textband p. 157).

9. For a new attempt at reconstructing the ‘Lycurgan’ scene building, see Chr. Papastamati-von Moock, “The Theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Athens: New Data and Observations on its ‘Lycurgan’ Phase”, in: E. Csapo – H. R. Goette – J. R. Green – P. Wilson

Even greater emphasis is placed on the question about the form of the elevation of the earliest stone-made scene building, with special reference to the feature of the lateral projecting wings. Isler concludes that the very few elements at our disposal do not allow for confident reconstructions and prefers to draw some conclusions from the analysis of about a dozen known examples of scene buildings “with *paraskenia*” dated towards the end of the 4th cent. B.C.<sup>10</sup>

In discussing the types of stage buildings with *proskenion*, the author is particularly concerned with the problem of the evolution of the scene building that was equipped with a high stage and a *proskenion*. On the basis of the extant remains, the earliest examples can be reasonably dated to the late 4th century. Isler’s theory, according to which the introduction of high stage and *proskenion* must be connected to radical changes in the dramatic performances and that the earliest *proskenia* were probably wooden constructions, later replaced by stone ones (Textband pp. 178–180), still remains the topic of a lively debate.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Isler deals with the appearance of the scene building in the West, namely in southern Italy and especially in Sicily, where several peculiarities can be observed: a wide *skene*, reaching a width up to 6 m.; three openings in the upper floor of the scene building, which led to the flat roof of the *proskenion* and could be reached through stairs located inside the scene building itself; intercolumniation of the *proskenion* sometimes closed by continuous walls and façade of the *proskenion* occasionally decorated with supporting figures such as caryatids; projecting wings with an upper floor at both ends of the scene building. At this point, the reference to the phlyax vases is particularly illuminating, despite the conventional character of such vase representations and their

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(eds.), *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century B.C.*, Berlin – Boston 2014, 15–76, who interprets the foundation T as the remains of a stage machine (see esp. pp. 63–72).

10. Namely: Aigai (Vergina), Dodona, Eretria, Leontion, Makyneia, 4 examples in Sicily (Iaitas, Morgantina, Solus and Tyndaris), Lokroi Epizephyrioi in southern Italy, and probably Babylon (!) and Isthmos. See below for some comments on his suggested reconstruction.
11. See contra: J.-Ch. Moretti (see below, 262 note 30); H. R. Goette, “Griechischer Theaterbau der Klassik – Forschungsstand und Fragestellungen”, in: E. Pöhlmann (ed.), *Studien zur Bühnendichtung und zum Theaterbau der Antike*, Frankfurt a. M. – New York 1995, 9–48 (who stresses acoustic reasons, political aspects, and the need for the city’s self-representation). Already W. Dörpfeld – E. Reisch, *Das griechische Theater*, Athen 1896, 341–365, thought that actors performed in the orchestra in Hellenistic times, too. Isler’s suggestion, that the earliest stage was constituted by wooden *proskenia*, later replaced by stone constructions, is a purely speculative hypothesis (Textband p. 180).

chronology,<sup>12</sup> insofar as they remind us that different kinds of performances took place in the West by comparison to mainland Greece and that different uses of theatres were made in each one of these areas<sup>13</sup> — a matter that concerns Isler only marginally.<sup>14</sup>

The author postulates the existence of three types of elevation for the Hellenistic scene buildings: the flat façade (attested with certainty only in the 2nd-cent. B.C. theatre at Termessos), the “Thyromata-Front” (the one with openings on the upper storey of the scene building), and the façade with plastic decorative elements. The latter, a type mainly attested in Sicily where several examples can be found, such as in the theatres at Monte Iato, Tyndaris, and Segesta, is extensively discussed. The importance of these Sicilian theatres lies mainly in their contribution to the transition from Hellenistic to Roman forms of theatrical architecture, as Isler stresses later in the book (Textband pp. 259–260 and 266–268).

This observation leads the reader to chapter III, spanning as many as 300 pages, which describes the theatres in Rome and the West. At the beginning, the early theatres in Sicily and Campania are taken into account, their plan and features are analysed, and their peculiarities are stressed. Then the wooden theatres of Rome, which preceded the stone theatres built in the late 1st cent. B.C., are presented on the basis of a wide range of literary sources. The investigation of the early permanent theatres, those of Pompey and Marcellus and the *theatrum Balbi*, relies both on ancient sources and on their physical remains. A special section is devoted to the well-known passage by Plutarch, who around A.D. 100 reports that Pompey had modelled his theatre in Rome on the one in Mytilene.<sup>15</sup> Isler meticulously records a wide range of scholarly interpretations about this disputed passage in Plutarch. Researchers are still pondering the relationship between the theatre in Mytilene and the one dedicated by Pompey in Rome in 55 B.C., and a new study of the architecture of the building in Mytilene, now in progress, will probably offer some new clues on this debated issue.<sup>16</sup>

12. The phlyax vases are dated from the beginning to the third quarter of the 4th cent. B.C., that is, exactly before the construction of the earliest permanent theatres in the West.

13. See the remarks by C. Marconi, “Between Performance and Identity: The Social Context of Stone Theaters in Late Classical and Hellenistic Sicily”, in: K. Boshier (ed.), *Theater Outside Athens: Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy*, Cambridge 2012, 175–207.

14. See Isler’s general remarks on the political use of Hellenistic theatres, Textband pp. 252–253.

15. Plut., *Pompeius* 42, 4 (wrongly indicated as 42, 9 on p. 283 note 2798, Textband).

16. A preliminary report of this new study has been very recently published by Yannis Kourtzellis, “Η αρχιτεκτονική του αρχαίου Θεάτρου Μυτιλήνης. Παραρτήματα των

The next section discusses the early theatres in Campania — not fortuitously one of the most strongly Hellenized regions of Italy and one very close to Rome and Latium —, whose role in shaping the form of the Roman theatre was decisive. Subsequently, the theatres of the imperial period in the western part of the Empire are examined. The extant buildings are grouped according to the common features that can be found in their constituent parts, following the same order as in the second chapter: the spectators' place (*cavea*), the orchestra, and the scene building. As far as the *cavea* is concerned, theatres are divided into two broad categories: those with a free-standing *cavea* (where an earth embankment was necessary) and those whose *cavea* was partially or totally leaning on a slope. Isler's classification of the 220 extant examples of Roman *caveae* on the basis of this feature, as well as according to the number of *maeniana* and the presence (or absence) of an annular corridor in the upper part, has the merit of providing a good illustration of the high number of variations which were available; the section that analyses the orientation of the *cavea*, where he concludes that Roman theatres did not follow any precise rule in this regard, can be solely understood as a comment on Vitruvius' specification not to orientate theatres towards the south.<sup>17</sup> Further features of the *cavea* that are discussed include the presence of *tribunalia* (special seats reserved for a selected audience), the appearance of certain outer façades of the *cavea*, the stair system that allowed spectators to circulate within the building, and the presence of temples immediately connected with the *cavea* — a topic which deserves special attention because it was successfully adopted in the earliest stone theatre at Rome, the one built by Pompey.

As many as 155 imperial theatres in the West display traces of the original orchestra, which is considered by Isler to be a secondary element of the Roman theatre, because it was neither the main space for the performances nor the focus of the architectural design of those buildings, in spite of Vitruvius' accurate precepts on how to conceive the plan of a theatre of the Roman type (5, 6, 1). The features of the orchestra which are discussed

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πρώτων αποτελεσμάτων της μελέτης", in: V. Di Napoli et al. (eds), *What's New in Roman Greece? Recent Work on the Greek Mainland and the Islands in the Roman Period, Proceedings of a Conference held in Athens, 8–10 October 2015*, (ΜΕΛΕΤΗΜΑΤΑ 80) Athens 2018, 263–279.

17. Vitruvius, *De architectura*, 5, 3, 2: *Etiamque providendum est, ne impetus habeat a meridie. sol enim cum implet eius rotunditatem, aer conclusus curvatura neque habens potestatem vagandi versando confervescit et candens adurit excoquitque et imminuit e corporibus umores. ideo maxime vitandae sunt his rebus vitiosae regiones et eligendae salubres.*

are its general form, the importance of the lateral, roofed entrances (*aditus*), the parapet around the orchestra aimed at separating the magistrates seated within the orchestra from the public,<sup>18</sup> the pavement of the orchestra, the canal for the collection of rainwater, and the presence of altars.

The following sections analyse in detail the stage building of the Roman theatres in the West, where two main types of *scaenae frons* (wall facing the audience) can be detected: the rectilinear type and the indented one, the latter provided with niches and columns framing them. The 128 extant *scaenae frontes* are categorized according to their form and the shape of the niches; the contribution of the theatres in Sicily to the early stages of this development, already noted by Isler in the previous paragraphs, is again a central argument in this analysis. An accurate examination of the façades of the three large late Republican theatres in Rome (of Pompey, of Marcellus, and of Balbus) is offered, according to the description of the literary sources and the extant fragments of the *Forma Urbis*. Furthermore, other features of the stage building are taken into account, namely the stairs inside the openings of the façade, the low and large *pulpitum*, the building materials used in the impressive façades, the drop curtains, as well as optional elements such as basilicas, *porticus post scaenam*, *postscaenia*. A very brief account is also given of some aspects which do not immediately relate to the theatrical architecture, such as the decoration of the façade of the *pulpitum*. Finally, it is worth mentioning a lengthy section that deals with the famous “sounding vessels” cited by Vitruvius (5, 5, 1–8) and supposedly meant to improve the acoustics of ancient theatres. Isler is extremely sceptical about the truth of Vitruvius’ theory, reminds the reader that no bronze vases have been found to date in any Roman theatre and remarks that some older scholars interpreted various (clay) vases or cavities as remains of such devices — in the theatres of Aizanoi and of Cretan Gortyn, for instance. This very long chapter ends with the analysis of the spatial distribution of the theatres of the western type: in the Italian peninsula, in Sicily and Sardinia, in Spain, in northern Africa, while special attention is paid to the category of the so-called “Gallo-Roman” theatres, which were conceived for spectacles and rituals very different from those held in the theatrical buildings of Rome and Italy.

Chapter IV is devoted to the presentation of the theatres in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. The first part deals with the geographical area which includes Greece, the Balkans, and the Black Sea (Textband

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18. This parapet is named *balteus*, although this term is never attested as such in ancient sources: see the remarks below, 262–263.

pp. 561–587); a separate paragraph examining the theatres of Crete mainly focuses on the analysis of Onorio Belli's plans and their reliability for the study of these monuments. A sharp distinction is drawn between the newly built theatres and the pre-existing ones which were remodelled in imperial times. Isler underlines that newly built theatres are almost exclusively found in Greek and Balkan cities which show a particular relationship with Rome, and is concerned with issues of geographical distribution and chronology. The general picture which emerges is that several theatres of Roman Greece show a new *scaenae frons* and a low *pulpitum* of the western type, be they newly built or remodelled edifices, but adopt a rectilinear plan for the scene building, thus apparently ignoring the innovations introduced by the western types of theatre. The overall picture is not a unitary one, and Isler remarks that instead of a general typology, only some preferences can be detected: most buildings are remodelled in the area of the scene building, the rectilinear *scaenae frons* is the predominant type, and sometimes a *pulpitum* of the western type is adopted. The theatres in the Balkan region, which similarly do not show a unitary tradition, seem to be more western-oriented, while the Cretan buildings probably adopted the western models to a larger extent.

The second part of this chapter examines in detail the theatres of Roman Asia Minor. These are grouped according to their architectural features and their adoption, to a greater or lesser extent, of western architectural formulas. The specific group of the “kleinasiatisch römischer Typus” consists of those theatrical buildings which show a *cavea* exceeding the semicircle, following the Greek Hellenistic tradition, and a scene building of the western type but combined with a high *proskenion*. This is a limited group, consisting of 19 theatres, dated mainly in the 1st and 2nd cent. A.D. and found in western and southwestern Asia Minor. An important feature of these theatres is the presence of figured friezes displayed on their scene façades and alluding to local myths and history. This is a phenomenon which occurs in the mid-imperial period, and Isler devotes a separate section to such friezes, thus making an exception to the fact that his main interest lies more in the architecture and less in the decorative aspects of the theatres (Textband pp. 603–606).

On the contrary, the 29 theatres belonging to the “western Roman type” are characterized by a semi-circular *cavea*, which is suggestive of the construction of inward-looking buildings, where vaulted entrances linked the auditorium to the scene building, while the latter always had a rectilinear *scaenae frons* and frequently five doorways, as in the theatres of the

“kleinasiatisch römischer Typus”. Finally, a third group consists of those theatres which had been built in the Hellenistic period and were remodelled, especially in the area of the scene building, during the imperial age. This is the richest group, including 32 theatres. Isler also discusses some special features of the theatres in Asia Minor, such as stairs, boxes in the auditorium allocated to officials, temples *in summa cavea*, and devotes a section to the use of the word *προσκήμιον* in some inscriptions related to theatres in Asia Minor (Patara, Aphrodisias, Nysa, Iconion, Ephesus, and Miletus).<sup>19</sup>

The last section of chapter IV, which examines the theatres of the remaining parts of the East, includes heterogeneous areas such as the Levantine region,<sup>20</sup> Egypt, Cyrenaica, and Cyprus —although some peculiarities of the theatres in several of these regions are already sporadically noted in the previous chapters and sections. This wide area is characterized by the rare presence of pre-Roman (Hellenistic) theatres, and the buildings examined must almost exclusively be ascribed to the imperial period. The theatres of Egypt are very few and in their majority are attested in written sources only, while the theatres of Cyrenaica are better known and are mostly of the western type, that is, they have an inward-looking, closed plan and a semi-circular *cavea*. Cyprus, on the other hand, has only five theatres, which do not show uniform features —two of them are of Roman inspiration and have a rectilinear *scaenae frons*. The theatres in the Levant have some features which recall those of Asia Minor (e.g. profiled seats, podium around the orchestra, diverging staircases that give access to the seats), but also many elements of the theatres of the western type. Finally, a special group consists of some cult theatres located in the Syrian and Mesopotamian regions. Their main common features are not of an architectural but of a functional nature, namely, their use in the wider frame of religious festivals and their proximity to sacred precincts. Therefore, they attest to the intrusion of Greek and Roman architectural formulas into the local sacred architecture. An interesting remark concerns the orientation of the theatres in these regions of the East. In fact, despite Vitruvius’ precepts on how to orientate the theatres,<sup>21</sup> which do not find any regular application either in

19. Isler thinks that this term may indicate the scene building in general, a view which is also shared by N. de Chaisemartin and D. Theodorescu, *Aphrodisias VIII. Le théâtre d’Aphrodisias: Les structures scéniques*, Wiesbaden 2017, 30–31.

20. This area includes the Syrian Decapolis, Phoenicia, Iudaea, Samaria and Galilaea, as well as the Roman provinces of Syria and Arabia.

21. *De architect.* 5, 3, 1–2 (erroneously indicated as book 3 on p. 699 of the Textband).

Greece or in Rome and the West, the theatres in this wide area are mostly oriented towards the north, the northeast and the northwest, with the only exception of Cyprus. This clearly has to do with the hot climate of these regions and the need to provide better conditions to the viewers, and it still is the only example of a successful application of Vitruvius' theory about the insalubrity of a southern exposure. This section of chapter IV would have probably benefitted from a brief overview of the history of the lands included into this heterogeneous area, in order to provide the reader with elements that can explain the very diverse nature<sup>22</sup> of the extant evidence.

Chapter V examines the much debated and elusive category of buildings named *odea*. Isler starts his enquiry with an overview of the occurrence of the term *ὀδεῖον* / *odeum* in the literary and epigraphic sources; he also includes in his discussion the Latin label *theatrum tectum*, which refers to roofed buildings. Isler defines the *odeum* as “a theatrical building of the Roman western type which was totally roofed” (Textband p. 703) and examines the archaeological evidence, distinguishing the *odea* from both the *bouleuteria* (mainly because of the different arrangement in the area of the stage) and the unroofed theatres (because of the presence of a roof). He thus singles out 60 buildings which can in his opinion be characterized as *odea* and stresses that the earliest examples can be found in the West, a fact that should demonstrate the Roman origin of this type of building. Nonetheless, 43 out of the 60 *odea* are attested in Greece, Asia Minor and the Balkans, while only 10 are found in Italy, and the limited diffusion of the *odeum* in 1st-cent. A.D. Italy remains “difficult to explain” (Textband p. 713). A thorough analysis of the architecture of the buildings identified as *odea* leads Isler to conclude the following: the earliest attested *odeum* is the late-Republican *theatrum tectum* in Pompeii, followed by numerous examples in Greece and Asia Minor, while remaining a very rare building in the Latin West; most of the *odea* were built in the mid-imperial period; two types can be detected, namely the *odeum* with outer rectangular perimeter (having evolved from the Hellenistic *bouleuterion* and without internal supports for the roof) and the one with semicircular auditorium; they sometimes show a scene façade with openings and a decorative apparatus similar to that of the theatres; their construction required exceptional technical skills, given that their roofing had to span large surfaces up to a length of almost 30 m.

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22. It is described as “bunt”, that is, “miscellaneous,” “multi-coloured,” “heterogeneous” by Isler: Textband p. 695.

(rectangular *odea*) and almost 40 m. (semicircular *odea*);<sup>23</sup> their use was essentially similar to that of the theatres, although they were probably aimed at hosting more sophisticated scenic performances, songs and recitals, which entails that R. Meinel's theory — according to which the *odea* were exclusive buildings destined for a selected audience — should be rejected.

Chapter VI offers a brief account of the use of *vela/velaria* in Roman theatrical buildings, which provided shade to theatres and amphitheatres. Isler's comments are mainly based on the seminal study on the topic by R. Graefe<sup>24</sup> and examine a wide range of sources, from poetical texts to papyri and inscriptions. From a philological point of view, Isler follows J.-Ch. Moretti's convincing demonstration that the Greek equivalent for *velum* was not, as suggested by Graefe, the term *πέτασος*, which designates instead the protective roof above the stage.<sup>25</sup> A detailed analysis of the theatres which are equipped with *vela* includes a thorough discussion of the presence of post holes for such devices either in the area of the *cavea* and around the orchestra or in the outer external walls. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the later transformations of some theatres, in order to stage arena games, beast hunts, as well as water spectacles. Isler considers this phenomenon to be of limited importance because of its rare attestation in the wider frame of the imperial theatres.<sup>26</sup> One could argue, on the contrary, that such kinds of modification, which are widely attested in the theatres of the eastern Empire and especially in Roman Greece and Asia Minor, are of crucial relevance in the development of the theatrical culture in this area during the imperial period.<sup>27</sup>

The last chapter of the Textband (chapter VII) covers the topic of the literary and epigraphic sources. Isler addresses the evidence regarding the financing of theatres or parts of a theatre in Greek antiquity (the *polis* or

23. With the remarkable exception of the *odeum* in Carthage, whose roof must have reached a length of 63 m.

24. R. Graefe, *Vela erunt. Die Zeltdächer der römischen Theater und ähnlicher Anlagen*, Mainz 1979.

25. J.-Ch. Moretti, "Étude sur la nomenclature grecque de l'architecture théâtrale. ΠΕΤΑΣΟΣ et la dénomination grecque des vélums", *Anatolia Antiqua* 2 (1993) 133–158.

26. See Textband p. 770: "die Arenanutzung der Theater ... ein marginales Phänomen war" and, on the same page: "Für die Geschichte des antiken Theaterbaus sind die Arenen jedenfalls von Gewicht".

27. See V. Di Napoli, "Buildings for Entertainment in Roman Macedonia: Between Continuity and Rupture with the Past", in: J. Fournier – M.-G. G. Parissaki (eds.), *Les communautés du Nord Égéen au temps de l'hégémonie romaine. Entre rupture et continuités*, (MEΛΕΤΗΜΑΤΑ 77) Athènes 2018, 321–340.

the *demos*, a sanctuary, private individuals or groups of people, kings and benefactors) and in the Republican and imperial periods (cities, magistrates and officials, emperors, private benefactors), the occasions that solicited the dedication of a theatre or the sponsoring of a part of it, the preferred locations for and the content of the dedicatory inscriptions, inscriptions that attest *ludi scaenici*, as well as references to architects, contractors, and artists related to the world of the theatre. Emphasis is placed on the significance of inscriptions and dedications for the self-representation of emperors, magistrates, priests, private benefactors in public buildings such as theatres. A particularly balanced section examines the costs of building operations: Isler prefers to offer an overview of the amounts of money attested in literary and epigraphic sources and limits his remarks to sceptical observations about the possibility to reconstruct the real costs involved in such works.

The Katalogband is an impressive list of 876 archaeologically attested theatres, 60 *odea*, 46 related buildings, as well as 190 theatrical buildings which are mentioned in literary and epigraphic sources only. Each entry in the catalogue includes the ancient and modern name of the place, its modern location, a plan of the building where available, an extensive bibliography, the chronology of the building, and a description of its main parts: auditorium, orchestra, and scene building. Its usefulness for scholars who study the ancient theatre is immense.

The third volume (Tafelband) is composed by 170 B/W plates and is completed by several indexes, which cover as many as 62 pages. A particularly interesting index is the one which lists the theatrical buildings according to their chronology, grouped by centuries—or broader periods, such as “Hellenistic”, when a precise chronology is not available. This index constitutes an extraordinary visual representation of the diffusion of theatres through time. It shows how the earliest theatrical buildings (6th–5th century B.C.), located either in Attica or in places where festivals implying drama are attested (Corinth, Argos: with the remarkable, but understandable, exception of the 5th-century rectilinear theatre in Sicilian Syracuse), gradually spread around Greece and the Greek world and finally reached their peak in the imperial period, becoming a standard public building of every city of some relevance in the Empire.

The three books under review on the ancient Greek and Roman theatres are extremely rich in suggestions, proposals, and personal views expressed by Isler about this vast topic. Therefore, the few comments that follow, as well as the aforementioned remarks, convey some personal thoughts and

necessarily touch upon some aspects only, which in the opinion of the author of this review are of some interest.

In the introductory chapter, Isler follows an extremely accurate approach to the theatrical vocabulary, including extensive references to ancient literary sources and inscriptions (Textband pp. 24–30). For this reason, some choices remain unclear to the author of this review. For instance, Isler retains throughout the book the word “Koilon”<sup>28</sup> and suggests that this term is appropriate for the spectators’ area in the specific case in which this area is of circular form, although he admits that the ancient word *κοῖλον* is never used by ancient Greek sources in relation to the auditorium.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, he does not accept the proposal by Jean-Charles Moretti,<sup>30</sup> that the term *θυρώματα* indicates the entrance gates to the *parodoi* and instead applies it to the openings on the upper floor of the scene building, often speaking of “Thyromata-Bühne” and thus continuing a long-established tradition in the studies on the architecture of the ancient Greek theatre. This idea, however, merely relies on the reference to both *σκηνή* and *θυρώματα* (which should, therefore, — but why? — be located in the very same place of the scene building) in the dedicatory inscription on the architrave of the *proskenion* of the theatre in the *Amphiaraion* of Oropos (*IG VII 423*), and bypasses the real meaning of the word, which clearly alludes to and always designates a door or a gate (see the word *θύρα*).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Isler follows Vitruvius, who apparently uses the Greek term *διάζωμα* as an equivalent of the Latin *praecinctio*, or passageway which divides horizontally the auditorium, whereas in several imperial inscriptions the word *διάζωμα* indicates a flight of seats — and, most notably, it does not appear in earlier texts, where the horizontal corridor is simply named *δίοδος*.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Isler retains the Latin word *balteus* for the built parapet around the orchestra, although

28. He even uses numerous times the adjective “koilonartig”.

29. Textband p. 25 note 18, where it is erroneously labelled *κοῖλον*. The term was applied to the theatre only in late imperial times by translating into Greek the Latin word *cavea*.

30. *Pallas* 47, 1997, 35–37. The opinion by Moretti is also shared by M. Mikedaki, “Παρατηρήσεις σχετικά με τον όρο θυρώματα του αρχαίου ελληνικού θεάτρου”, in K. Kyriakos (ed.), *Το αρχαίο ελληνικό θέατρο και η πρόσληψή του. Πρακτικά του Δ΄ Πανελληνίου Θεατρολογικού Συνεδρίου*, Πάτρα 2015, 55–70.

31. See also Isler’s remark on p. 222 note 2012 (Textband).

32. The matter is analysed by Jean-Charles Moretti and Christine Mauduit in their recent paper “The Greek Vocabulary of Theatrical Architecture”, in: R. Frederiksen – E. R. Gebhard – A. Sokolicek (eds.), *The Architecture of the Ancient Greek Theatre, Acts of an International Conference at the Danish Institute at Athens 27–30 January 2012*, (MoDIA 17) Aarhus 2015, 119–129, esp. 125.

its use “für die Schranke am Rand der Orchestra ist bisher literarisch und inschriftlich nicht bezeugt.”<sup>33</sup> And, finally, why should scholars continue to use the word *parascaenia*, which never appears in Latin sources and is nothing but “eine in der Fachterminologie eingebürgerte Umsetzung des griechischen Begriffs”,<sup>34</sup> or the terms “Paraskenien-Bühnenhaus” and “Proskenion-Bühnenhaus”, which are nothing but “heuristischen Bezeichnungen” and are not found in ancient sources?<sup>35</sup> If such a theatrical vocabulary “hat sich ... eingebürgert” (Textband p. 157), a manual addressed to specialists on the topic could probably provide the ideal location for explaining, once and for all, which terms may be applied with some confidence to certain parts of the ancient theatres and which ones should instead be better avoided, first and foremost by scholars.

The matter of the chronology of the earliest theatres (chapter I, Textband) evidently involves the question about the birth of the theatre itself. Although uncertainties in the chronology of the extant buildings complicate the issue, a couple of dated theatres (namely Thorikos and Euonymon) allow dating at the beginning of the 5th or even earlier, in the late 6th cent. B.C. Surprisingly, Isler does not include in his discussion the sources regarding the *ikria* and the orchestra in the Agora of Athens nor does he deal with the issue of the earliest Athenian theatrical structures, probably because he relies almost exclusively on physical remains. At this point, a presentation of some decisive elements would have probably been beneficial to a wider discussion about the birth of the Greek theatre: namely, the famous walls R and Q in Dörpfeld’s plan of the theatre of Dionysus,<sup>36</sup> the chronology of the first official record of a dithyrambic contest in the late 6th cent. B.C., or the reported collapse of the *ikria* during a contest among

33. Textband p. 29 note 80 and p. 386. The matter has been already examined by F. Sear, *Roman Theatres*, Oxford 2006, 5–6.

34. Textband p. 30 note 92, repeated on p. 477. It is also worth mentioning that Isler uses the Greek word *παρασκήνια* for the “turmartige Vorbauten” located to both sides of the scene building, although he himself (Textband p. 29 note 86) admits that this is not supported by either literary or epigraphic sources. Similarly, he adopts the words “Euripos” and “*euripus*” for the canal around the orchestra, although he notes that this definition “geht für die Bezeichnung des Ringkanals im Theater, jedenfalls was das Griechische angeht, nicht auf antiken Gebrauch zurück” (Textband p. 146). Finally, the wide use of the term “Charonian stairs” throughout the book could probably be avoided: this is nothing but a *hapax legomenon* which is found in the *Onomasticon* by Pollux, that is, a thematic lexicon written in the last third of the 2nd century A.D.

35. Textband p. 157 and note 1334.

36. Now currently interpreted as retaining walls and not anymore as the traces of the early Classical, circular orchestra.

Aeschylus, Choerilus and Pratinas (500–497 B.C.). Instead, Isler dedicates a separate section to the early theatre in the sanctuary of Dionysus in Athens, where he stresses the similarities between the auditorium of this theatre and the one in Thorikos<sup>37</sup> and mainly deals with the inscribed stone blocks of the prohedria of the theatre of Dionysus, which are dated to the second half of the 5th cent. B.C. Isler does not regard as plausible (“insgesamt jedenfalls wenig überzeugend”: Textband p. 62) the reconstruction of a wooden, trapezoidal seating area extending to a certain height for the theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus as proposed by Jean-Charles Moretti,<sup>38</sup> on the grounds that such a structure would have been “kaum realisierbar” (Textband p. 62). Recent research in the auditorium of this theatre, however, has found clear traces of the post holes for the wooden *ikria* and a convincing, in the opinion of the author of this review, reconstruction with rectilinear, wooden benches for the spectators, extending to an important height, has been suggested.<sup>39</sup>

The birth of a circular orchestra and of a “Rundkoilon” is another central topic addressed by Isler in the chapter about the Classical and Hellenistic theatre (Textband pp. 62–69). His theory, according to which the circular form was an invention which must be ascribed to “a specific architect for a specific place” (Textband p. 62), vaguely brings to mind the approach of a 19th-century archaeologist in search for the *Meister* behind the famous works of art. Isler stresses how the perfect form of the circle was important for the ancient Greeks and suggests that a circular seating place would not improve acoustics in a decisive way (or, at least, the ancient Greeks would not have been able to measure easily this improvement), concluding that the circular auditorium was probably an Athenian invention of the second half

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37. Isler compares the two theatres because of their proximity to a temple of Dionysus, even if it remains unclear why the position of the temple of Dionysus in Thorikos, next to the theatre, should not have been determined by the topography of the place and must be instead considered as a deliberate imitation of the situation in Athens (Textband p. 60).

38. “The Theater of the Sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Late Fifth-Century Athens”, *ICS* 24 (1999/2000) 377–398 (= “Le théâtre du sanctuaire de Dionysos Eleuthéus à Athènes au Ve s. av. J.-C.”, *REG* 113 [2000] 275–298). Moretti’s view is also shared by a researcher who has devoted many years to the study of the theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus, namely, Christina Papastamati-von Moock (see below, note 39).

39. Chr. Papastamati-von Moock, “The Wooden Theatre of Dionysos Eleuthereus in Athens: Old Issues, New Research”, in: Frederiksen – Gebhard – Sokolicek, *op.cit.* (n. 32), (MoDIA 17) Aarhus 2015, 39–79. Isler probably read this article thoroughly only after the book was sent out to print (although he includes it in the bibliography), but he was certainly aware of the new finds in the theatre of Dionysus as he took part in the Athenian conference in 2012: see also his note 355 on p. 60 (Textband).

of the 4th cent. B.C. (or even of the mid-4th century), and that the name of the architect behind this project must remain unknown.<sup>40</sup> One might ask, however, if the momentous creation of a semi-circular seating place (and, consequently, of a circular orchestra)<sup>41</sup> was a sudden change in the architecture of the ancient Greek theatre or if, on the contrary, preparatory stages can be envisaged in some theatres such as the one in Kalydon, which shows a peculiar mixture of rectilinear and curved seats.<sup>42</sup> Not only acoustic, but also visibility reasons must lie behind the shift from the rectilinear to the circular plan. And if the building of a Greek theatre implies, among other things, the adaptation of the edifice to the topography of the place, then it might be pointless to search for the perfect model and the ingenious architect who invented, at some precise moment, the flawless semi-circular auditorium. It is more fruitful to picture generations of skilled architects at work, who gradually, and each time in a different way, achieved the form that was destined to be canonical for the Hellenistic — and Roman — theatre. The result of their efforts was each time different, as demonstrated by the fact that Isler classifies the auditorium of the Classical and Hellenistic theatres into two categories (the ones which exceed the semicircle and the ones which are smaller than the semicircle, respectively), but is still forced to devote a section to the exceptions to this rule, which include as many as 25 theatres. Similarly, the sections which categorize the theatres according to the number of rows of seats or to that of horizontal divisions in the auditorium, end up being mere lists which do not add much to our knowledge of the topic. In addition, comparisons of the measurements of the Classical and Hellenistic theatres, which span a length of 5 pages, lead Isler to conclude that “there were no precise rules which determined the dimensions of the orchestra and there was no fixed relationship between the diameter of the orchestra and the width of the auditorium” (Textband p. 138). And later in the same chapter, when he discusses the three types of scene building (according to their plan: one single space, a scene building separated into several spaces, and a hall divided along its long axis), after a long and detailed list, Isler concludes “dass keine Regel zu erkennen ist, ob und wie

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40. Christina Papastamati-von Moock has recently suggested that the idea of a theatre based on the form of the circle may be already behind the Periclean project in the Theatre of Dionysus: see above, note 39 (esp. pp. 71–72).

41. And not the contrary, as suggested in earlier research on Greek theatres: see above, note 3.

42. R. Frederiksen, “Early Greek Theatre Architecture: Monumentalised Koila Before and After the Invention of the Semicircular Design”, in: Frederiksen – Gebhard – Sokolicek, op.cit. (n. 32), (MoDIA 17) Aarhus 2015, 81–96.

weit das Innere des Bühnengebäudes unterteilt worden ist” and that “auch eine chronologische Differenzierung der verschiedenen Grundrissformen innerhalb des Hellenismus zeichnet sich nicht ab” (Textband p. 176). Perhaps all the above simply show how each theatrical building is nothing but a peculiar construction and a specific case to be analysed separately, and how extremely hard it is to trace, especially in the early stages, very precise typologies which eventually persisted through time.

This leads to a remark of a more general nature, regarding Isler’s constant attempt at fitting the extant evidence into categories. If this is extremely helpful in some cases, in some other instances it gives the impression that typologies are created, which probably never existed nor were of any significance to ancient architects and builders. To cite but one example from the third chapter: while analysing the form of the scene building of the theatres in the Roman West, Isler remarks that apart from the necessary elements (scene façade, stage, and *pulpitum*) there existed some additional features which are optional and not necessarily present in every Roman theatre, namely the basilicas, the *porticus post scaenam*, the small rooms placed to the sides of the scene,<sup>43</sup> and the *postscaenium*. Then he devotes as many as 33 pages to a detailed illustration of all the possible combinations of these elements, which consist of a total of 16 theoretical variations attested in 157 theatres in the Roman West, including three combinations which never occur (Textband pp. 475–507). One wonders about the purpose of such a classification, given that Isler himself explains that the presence or the absence of the aforementioned features must have been decisively influenced by several factors: local habits and traditions, financial means, architectural background, the topography of the place, and pre-existing conditions related to urban planning and architecture (Textband p. 484) —and one could also add that the purpose of every single building and the uses it aimed at were of crucial importance, and that this must have decisively influenced its architectural conception.

The question of the function leads to another observation, regarding the surprising absence, in these three volumes, of graphic reconstructions which could orientate the reader about the possible original appearance of ancient theatres or of parts of them, although Isler often expresses his opinions about this topic. This holds true also for important theatres, such as the one in the sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Athens, a monument for which several reconstruction proposals have been suggested. This has

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43. Which he labels as *parascaenia*: on this term see my remarks above, 263 note 34.

probably to do with the tendency, not unfrequently found in the archaeological literature, to bypass the function of ancient theatres and to underestimate their purpose and role in the framework of the performances they were designed for, which must have decisively conditioned their conception and their architectural development through time.

In his analysis of the late-Classical scene building of the theatre of Dionysus, Isler relies on the examination of several known examples of scene buildings “with *paraskenia*” and without *proskenion*, as remarked above. From the viewpoint of the ground plan, these theatres show so many similarities in the arrangement of the scene building with projecting wings that one is led to conclude that a common model was followed. An analysis of the same theatres under the perspective of the elevation, however, shows in Isler’s view the central role of the theatre of Iaitas (Monte Iato) in western Sicily. This theatre had a scene building of the “*paraskenia*” type and was equipped, in its first phase (late 4th or early 3rd cent. B.C. according to Isler’s chronology), with a low stage which in Isler’s opinion cannot have been a local creation and was rather inspired by a foreign model, namely the theatre of Dionysus in Athens.<sup>44</sup> The implication is clear: that a very low stage, elevated only a little (“*Tritthöhe*”) above the level of the orchestra, was present in the Athenian theatre of Dionysus and influenced later theatrical buildings. Isler does not conceal throughout the book the idea that the theatre in Monte Iato had a special significance in the evolution of the architectural type of the theatre.<sup>45</sup> The fact, however, that the so-called ‘Lycurgan’ theatre of Dionysus had very probably a single-storey stage building and that the lateral wings (which projected only very slightly) were limited to the stage alone and were not two-storeyed, leads to the conclusion that the model for the theatre of this small town high in the mountains of north-western Sicily was not the Athenian theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus, but, more plausibly, the theatre in Syracuse,<sup>46</sup> a remark which limits to a

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44. “Es kann mit Sicherheit ausgeschlossen werden, dass die niedrige Bühne eine eigene, lokale Entwicklung darstellt, sie muss sich vielmehr nach Vorbildern ausgerichtet haben. [...] Das Vorbild muss, direkt oder auch indirekt, das Dionysostheater in Athenai gewesen sein” (Textband p. 167).

45. See e.g. the preface, Textband p. 67: “Bald zeigte sich, dass das Theater von Iaitas und insbesondere der ursprüngliche Bau ein wichtiges Monument für die antike Theaterarchitektur nicht nur in Sizilien ist. Daher rührt mein Interesse für die antike Theaterarchitektur”. Isler expressed the same view already some years ago, in his article “Contributi per una storia del teatro antico: il teatro greco di Iaitas e il teatro di Segesta”, *NumAnt-Class* 10, 1981, 131–164.

46. So already Sear, *op. cit.*, 48–49.

great extent the relevance of the theatre in Monte Iato for the history and development of the Greek theatre.

In chapter IV Isler delves into the theatres of Greece, Asia Minor and the Balkans and, as already noted, concludes that they do not show a common architectural typology. He regards as surprising (“überraschend”: Textband p. 581) the fact that several theatres of Roman Greece show a new *scaenae frons* and a low *pulpitum* of the western type, while at the same time they have rectilinear scene buildings. Nonetheless, the development of the Greek theatres in the imperial period attests exactly to this phenomenon, that is, the extremely free adoption of western typologies and features and their frequent combination with elements of the local, Greek tradition.<sup>47</sup> In this regard, Isler’s choice to single out four theatres as exceptions, namely those in Stoboi, Dion, Philippopolis and the one in the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus (Textband pp. 584–586), remains unclear to the author of this review. The peculiarity of the theatres in Dion and Stoboi, which were newly built in the imperial period, lies in Isler’s view in the fact that they combine elements reminiscent of a Hellenistic typology with features from the West and even from Asia Minor, which are especially evident in the area of the *scaenae frons*. The same can be said in the case of the theatre in Philippopolis, which shows an amalgamation of western and Hellenistic features. In the opinion of this reviewer, however, such theatres do nothing but demonstrate the development just outlined and show how the architectural choices attested in Roman Greece are inspired by a singular attempt at balancing innovation and tradition. Furthermore, the theatre in the Asklepieion in Epidaurus, built in the early Hellenistic age and remodelled in imperial times, is peculiar according to Isler because some late walls<sup>48</sup> were built on the foundations of the Hellenistic scene building, very probably with the aim of reusing the edifice — a phenomenon which is not exclusively found in this theatre, as Isler himself demonstrates in the lengthy section on the later reuses of theatres (Textband chapter VI, pp. 763–778). If this theatre has a remarkable peculiarity, it is rather the fact that its architecture remained unchanged from its construction in the 330s B.C. until the late imperial period, although the building was constantly in use, and that the only changes that can be detected

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47. Similar observations already appear in my book *Teatri della Grecia romana: forma, decorazione, funzioni. La provincia d’Achaia*, (MEΛΕΤΗΜΑΤΑ 67) Athens 2013.

48. Dated to “the time of Pausanias” following von Gerkan’s proposal: Textband p. 586 and note 6006.

are the addition of two statues on bases in the area of the scene building and the replacement of a statue of Asclepius in the area of the auditorium. One might wonder, finally, if such architectural peculiarities must be read, following Isler, as an extensive adoption of western kinds of performances in Roman Greece —whereas, according to Isler, the theatres of Asia Minor, where a combination of rectilinear *scaenae frons* with high *proskenion* in the Hellenistic tradition was preferred, should demonstrate a persistence of Greek types of spectacles (Textband p. 587). An alternative explanation can be found in the constant negotiation between tradition and innovation that is observed in both the theatres and the performances held in Greece during the imperial period.<sup>49</sup>

In chapter V, Isler defines the category of the *odeum* based on some architectural features (presence of a roof, shape of the auditorium, characteristics of the stage) and on its function (mainly as concert hall). He also observes that *odea*, public buildings often dedicated by wealthy benefactors or even by emperors, may occur along with one (or more) theatres and other similar buildings (*bouleuteria*, *ekklesiasteria*, *akroateria*). In some instances, it is also possible that *odea* functioned as *bouleuteria* and, after examining the extant data, Isler decides to use the word *Odeion* in the modern sense, in order to define a theatrical building of the western Roman type which was totally roofed. The situation, however, seems to be extremely nuanced. First, such a definition of an *odeum* necessarily excludes the earliest and probably most famous building of this category, the Odeum of Pericles, which had a rectangular plan and presents no traces of a stage.<sup>50</sup> Literary sources, however, explicitly name the Periclean building *ᾠδεδεῖον* and connect it to the word *ᾠδή*, “song”, because of its primary (but not exclusive!) function. Other architectural features usually cited to differentiate an *odeum* from a *bouleuterion* are the location of the building (the *bouleuterion* may be in the proximity of an agora),<sup>51</sup> its size (a factor which can be very misleading), its capacity, the presence of an altar (in the *bouleuteria*) and others. They all seem to lead to circular argumentations.

49. See V. Di Napoli, “Romanizing Greece? Spectacles and Buildings for Entertainment in Imperial Greece”, in: C. Maderna – P. Hoffmann (eds.), *Romanisation – Romanization?!*, Proceedings of an International Conference held in Heidelberg 15–17.12.2017 (Heidelberg, in press).

50. Isler therefore affirms: “Es ist offensichtlich, dass das Odeion des Perikles von seiner architektonischen Form her nichts mit unserem Thema zu tun hat” (Textband p. 703).

51. This theory is proposed by J. Ch. Balty, *Curia ordinis. Recherches d'architecture et d'urbanisme antiques sur les curies provinciales du monde romain*, Bruxelles 1991.

Nomenclature, or the names used in inscriptions and by ancient authors for some of these buildings, may instead offer interesting insights into ancient perceptions about them. The building in Kanatha (modern Syria) bears a dedicatory inscription by the donor *Marcus Ulpius Lysias* on the wall around the orchestra, where the edifice is defined as *θεατροειδὲς ῥοδεῖον*.<sup>52</sup> It is very likely, however, that this building had no roof of any kind.<sup>53</sup> The same holds true of the theatrical building (the so-called ‘north theatre’) in Syrian Gerasa, which was unroofed and is defined in the earliest dedicatory inscription as *βουλευτήριον*, while it is called *ῥοδεῖον* in the later dedicatory inscription.<sup>54</sup> Things become even more blurred if one considers that Philostratus applies the phrase *τὸ ἐν τῷ Κεραμεικῷ θέατρον, ὃ δὴ ἐπωνόμασται Ἀγριππεῖον* (*VS* 2, 5, 3) to the roofed building dedicated by Agrippa in the Athenian Agora, which is twice designated as *ῥοδεῖον* by Pausanias (1, 8, 6 and 1, 14, 1). The same Philostratus defines the roofed building in Corinth as *θέατρον ὑπωρόφιον* (*VS* 2, 1, 5: the Greek equivalent of the Latin *theatrum tectum*) and uses the words *θέατρον κέδρον ξυνηεὶς τὸν ὄροφον* for the roofed building at the southern slopes of the Athenian Acropolis, which is still today known as Odeum of Herodes Atticus (*VS* 2, 1, 5). More examples can be cited, which make one wonder if the ancients defined buildings in terms not only of their architectural features but also of their function,<sup>55</sup> and if modern scholars are really condoned to think that ancient buildings had only one purpose and could not be, probably often, multifunctional buildings. A good example may be the Odeum of Pericles: built as the location of the *proagon*, the official theatrical presentation which took place some days before the Great Dionysia, it was used not only for this institution and for musical contests, but also for a range of different functions, such as a tribunal, a hall for political meetings, a place for distributing wheat and holding philosophical debates, and possibly also as

52. W.-H. Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie recueillies et expliquées*, Paris 1870, no. 2341. The erroneous transcription *θεατροειδης* appears twice in Isler's text, on p. 704 (Textband) and again on p. 377 (Katalogband).

53. See p. 703 of the Textband and pp. 376–377 of the Katalogband.

54. *MEFRA* 2004, 497–498 and 484–502, respectively.

55. This is already suggested by R. Meinel in his study *Das Odeion. Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden*, Frankfurt a.M. 1980, with whose conclusions Isler often does not agree.

a music school.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, it is probably not by chance that this building is termed *odeum* by Vitruvius and *κατασκευάσμα* by Pausanias.<sup>57</sup>

Two remarks concern the catalogue. Regarding the theatrical buildings attested in literary sources, Isler makes some choices which may cause confusion to the reader: namely, he lists some of these buildings as separate entities, regardless of whether they have been identified with extant remnants or not. For instance, he counts the *odeum* of Themistocles as a different building from the *odeum* of Pericles (Katalogband p. 134), whereas it is now universally accepted, *pace* Th. G. Papathanassopoulos, that Vitruvius' reference to Themistocles as the builder of the *odeum* is not reliable.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the entry of the theatre in Patras gives the reader the impression that this building, which is mentioned by Pausanias and therefore existed in Roman imperial times, was seen by Bursian in 1868 and has now disappeared.<sup>59</sup> Scholars agree, however, that the building to which Pausanias<sup>60</sup> refers is the 'theatre-stadium' built in A.D. 86 by the emperor Domitian in order to celebrate the centenary of the foundation of the colony of Patras, and whose imposing remains, brought to light by the Greek Archaeological Service, are still visible in the vicinity of the Roman *odeum*.<sup>61</sup>

The second remark concerns the organization of the bibliography of each entry. Isler's effort to include as many references as possible sometimes results in confusing lists where primary and secondary bibliographical references are not separated. Therefore, the list of publications regarding important theatrical buildings has grown indiscriminately, and the reader is lost in a multitude of titles, without a clue about which are more relevant to the study of any particular building. To cite but a few examples: the

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56. Political assemblies: Diog. L., *Chrysippus* 184; Xen. 2, 4, 8–10 and 4, 24. Tribunal (*dikasterion*): Ar., *Wasps* 1107–1111; Dem., *Against Neaera* 52 and 54; Phot. s.v. *ῥδεῖον*. Wheat storehouse: Dem., *Against Phormio* 37; Phot. s.v. *ῥδεῖον* (*διεμετρῆτο δὲ καὶ ἄλφριτα ἐκεῖ*). H. Kotsidou, *Die musischen Agone der Panathenäen in archaischer und klassischer Zeit* (München 1991) 144–149, suggests that it was used as a music school.
57. *Odeum*: Vitruvius 5, 9, 1. See also Andocides, *On the Mysteries* 38 (and *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1688 I.3*, early 4th cent. B.C., where *ῥδεῖο[ν]* is very probably the building by Pericles). *Κατασκευάσμα*: Pausanias 1, 20, 4.
58. As D. Musti has brilliantly demonstrated in his article "Tradizioni sull'Odeion di Atene: Ermogene e Temistocle", *Ktema* 27, 2002, 325–329. See also my book review of Θ.Γ. Παπαθανασόπουλος, *Το Τρόπαιο* (Αθήνα 2003), *ASAtene* 82 ser. III tom. 2, 2004, 593–600.
59. See Katalogband p. 575 and Textband p. 562. The theatre is not mentioned in the final indexes.
60. 7, 20, 6 and 21, 9 (erroneously indicated as 7, 20, 9 and 21, 6 on p. 575 of the Katalogband).
61. I. A. Παπαποστόλου, *ADelt* B 35 (1980) 185 figs. 10–11 pl. 81.

bibliography on the theatre in the sanctuary of Dionysus in Athens consists of almost 180 titles, the bibliography on the large theatre in Pompeii covers two pages and includes more than 100 titles, the bibliography on the theatre of Pompey in Rome spans three whole pages and exceeds a total of 150 titles — not to speak of a monument to which Isler has devoted many years of research, that is, the often cited Sicilian theatre in modern Monte Iato, whose bibliography covers two full pages including possibly superfluous references, such as the one to the *Guida Laterza* of Sicily.

A final comment is not addressed to the author but has to do with the choices of the publishing house and, probably, with the very future of books of this kind. Three bulky volumes that number almost 2,000 pages and weigh about 6.6 kilos are extremely difficult to use, browse, and even carry or display on a bookshelf. Times are definitely ripe for new kinds of publications which can provide a combination of a printed book (the Textband, in this instance?) and CD-ROMs (the catalogue and the plates?) that can be more easily and efficiently searched, stored, and diffused by the publisher. Last but not least, this could have important consequences on the cost of the publications, reducing them considerably.

The remarks outlined above do not intend to diminish the value of the three volumes under review. All authors who dare to write imposing syntheses on a specific topic must make brave choices and defend them, as Isler does throughout this study. This work is an extremely useful tool for all specialists in ancient Greek and Roman theatre and will soon become a reference work.

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