

Performing the Story – A Contribution to Roman Guest-Program during Diplomatic Relations

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Cultural service offered by Roman administration for foreign diplomatic guests contained a program of officially guided tours through the City of Rome. Highlight of such excursions that were undertaken before granting an audience before the Emperor or Senate, was the visit in one of the theatres. Also Emperors or members of the Imperial family were involved into the official system of diplomatic education when as young princes they took part in the Trojan-game as a ritualized reminiscence of the official history of the State. We also know guided tours led in a theatrical manner by a Roman Emperor (e.g. Gaius Caligula) himself through the palace on Palatine when he in a difficult diplomatic context explained art and culture for a provincial delegation.¹ The lecture will analyse the structure and political meaning of such cultural contributions, the selection of theatre-plays and how they could explain for foreign guests the meaning and demanding of freedom of Republic in the system of Principate. The Roman idea of a visitors program is still alive in the today's cultural program during diplomatic meetings as an interpretation of reality in past and presence.

In Antiquity the world of representation and ceremony was embedded into a framework of worshipping gods and the rulers which were believed to guarantee for the welfare and future of the community.² There was a long tradition from the ceremonial traditions in ancient Persia to those of the Byzantine emperors: e.g. the arrangement of ceremonial rooms or halls, special gowns and dresses and special protocol that subdued the individuals under the rule of protocol.³

Performing the Story – A Contribution to Roman Guest-Program during Diplomatic Relations

If we have a glance to the Greek culture one special point seems to open a perspective for the difference. The world of the Greek theatre play opened the curtain of a stage that became the living room of all characters of real society: monarchs, oligarchs, clever and stupid persons, families and other social groups, friends and enemies, problems or may-be problems disguised as a tragedy or a comedy. During a long time of literary tradition both worlds became mixed in literature as finally third/fourth century CE author Heliodoros has written: a dramatic story arranged like on stage but involved in a Graeco-Persian-Egyptian aristocratic frame. This Greek written story became one of the “blockbusters” of European-Mediterranean literature.⁴

We ask the question: what happened between? How made Romans use of that Greek traditions which were implanted into Roman culture as a result after a periods of wars against Greek poleis in the second century BCE?

There are good reasons that the Greek theatre-play not only was a public relations magnet, but more a possibility to learn about the cultural winners and to smooth over the former aggressions for the mass. However there was a strong border between performance and honour as defined by the Roman laws. *Ludicra scaenae* were discussed in the mid of first century BCE by Cicero in *de re publica* (4,9sq.) as examples of such *flagitia* that must kept under control by the Roman law.⁵ The career of theatre actors was fenced by their juridical status defined by the laws of *infamia*⁶: a deprived social status that never allowed to go-up for a better social class. And there was no change during Roman principate until Late Antiquity, when in addition Christian activities started their inflammatory preaches and tractates.⁷

Exert for that juridical and social situation there was a special use of theatre-play and performances during Roman Imperial Period when the stage became more the place to display Roman culture instead of discussing the deep social and moral problems as it originally was done by the Greek.

If we have look to the management of diplomatic affairs, ceremonies and meetings between the representatives of Roman Government and foreign diplomats, we can find an interesting cultural program for those who

originally came from outside the Roman Empire, e.g. from Persia, India or from the North (see below) and from the provinces.

After foreign envoys had arrived in Rome they had to get in contact with the office of foreign affairs i.e. the office of the *curator ad legationes et responsa Graeca*; the meeting place for diplomats was the *graecostasis*.⁸ This procedure was done as well for provincial envoys as for those who were sent by foreign or friendly rulers whose residences were situated outside the borders of the *Imperium Romanum*. Such visitors must be legitimized by scrutinizing their identity and by defining their reasons to ask for an audience before Emperor or Senate. The date and time of audience depended from the subject, the ranking system and the personal honour of the guests. The formal invitation and permission for the audience was announced to the envoys by the *grammateus* of the Imperial Court, as Philostratus, *vita Apollonii* 7,29 mentioned. Since Trajan's reign the representative *ab epistulis et legationibus et a responsis Graecis* was employed with this duty.⁹

After granting the right for an audience a lot of formalities had to be done. Suetonius, *vita Augusti* 40,5 mentioned the *pullatorum turba*, because Augustus preferred that the envoys sent by the client kings had to be dressed with the *toga*, although such persons normally had not the status of Roman citizenship. Such a difference from usual rules of dress-code caused for some audiences the character of meetings with private clients (cf. Suetonius, *vita Augusti* 60).

If the organizers of the audience judged a delegation for being uninformed or strange to the Roman culture such delegates were invited for a special tourist tour in Rome. Tacitus, *annals* 13,54 mentioned the training of the delegates which were sent from the Germanic tribe of the *Frisii*, whose settlements were situated along the shore of the German and Dutch seaside of the North-Sea. After they had disturbed a theatre-performance by changing their places the Germanic envoys were told for an information tour through the city and e.g. they visited the theatre of Pompey: the building was one of the most important public places in Rome and it was

Performing the Story – A Contribution to Roman Guest-Program during Diplomatic Relations

the first theatre built by stone. The additional auditoria beside were used as conference-hall (*curia*) by the Roman Senate in that time: at this place Gaius Iulius Caesar was assassinated.¹⁰ The theatre of Pompey was both: a place of political and formal rule and also a place of Roman identity at the change from a collapsed Republic to the rise of Early Principate. G. Alföldy argued that there were good reasons that the public places (*fora*) and the Imperial *tituli* were shown to the official visitors by such visiting tours, too.¹¹

Taking a glance to the rows of honourable spectators we could see envoys and diplomats from ancient Persia (Parthia) and India, who also fought for their honorary seats (Suetonius, *vita Augusti* 44,1; *id. vita Claudii* 25,4; Cassius Dio 68,15) next to Roman senators and other honourable persons or delegates.¹² They all became a living decoration during the presentation of Roman Imperial power and representation, as it also could be seen during the so-called Trojan-performance (*Troiae lusus*, *Troiae decursio*, *lusus puerorum equestris*) to commemorate in the public the mythic origin of Rome; young sons of honourable families and Imperial princes took part in such official performances.¹³ Because of the fact that Roman Emperors were curious towards political critics that normally were brought to the public by comedies, W. Beare argued for a program based on tragedies and Roman historic plays.¹⁴ This means that Latin language possibly was preferred and used as a rhetoric language of power, history and moral for the public part of the delegation's visit and as an additional address by Roman state to the delegates beside of the official audience the visitors still were waiting for. On the other hand the Rhetoric advises for ambassadors, as delivered by Menander Rhetor in Late Antiquity, contain elements of stage direction about the speaker's emotions and the addressed person.

“You should mention in particular the things that contribute to utility and to life, for which emperors are used to taking thought, e.g. that the baths have fallen down, the aqueducts have been destroyed, the glory of the city is ruined. After such appeals to pity, you can add: ‘This is way we come as your suppliants, plead with you, fall at your feet,

stretch our olive-branches of supplication. Believe that the ambassador's voice is the voice of the whole city, through which children and the women, the adult men and the aged, pour forth their tears and plead with you to be compassionate.'¹⁵

A similar coherence was described by K. Stock with the example of Arabian rhetoric during the twentieth century CE.¹⁶

It is worth to mention that projects to build up a theatre in a provincial city were caused by similar reasons. The Roman theatre in *Mogontiacum/Mainz*, the capital of the province *Germania Superior* in Germany, fulfilled several functions. Excavation of this theatre started in the end of nineteenth century CE, a first report was published in 1916 and research was continued from 1995 until now. The results were more than surprising: with a *cavea*-diameter by 116 m and length of stage by 42 m this theatre is bigger than the theatre in *Arausio/Orange* (France). The place of this building was close to the *honorarius tumulus* dedicated by the Roman army to Drusus the Elder (Nero Claudius Drusus, 38 BCE – 9 BCE)¹⁷, Augustus' step-son, who died aged 29 in *Mogontiacum/Mainz* in the year 9 BCE. Drusus the Elder was high-ranking commander of Roman expeditions in Germania, he was 13-11 BCE governor (*legatus Augusti pro praetore*) with headquarter in *Lugdunum/Lyon* and *consul* in 9 BCE. Latin records mention that for the time of nearly three hundred years memorial ceremonies were dedicated at that place in *Mogontiacum/Mainz*. Every year also honorary delegations travelled from *Lugdunum/Lyon* to *Mogontiacum/Mainz* in order to participate in the ceremonies and the theatre-program. Special delegations appeared to representate 60 Gaulish-Roman *civitates*.¹⁸ There are also reasons to assume that Drusus' widow, Antonia Minor (36 BCE – ca. 41 CE, daughter of Marc Antony and Octavia Minor) and his mother Livia, (58 BCE – 29 CE, Augustus' wife) had sponsored the project by their own properties¹⁹ or by their personal influence²⁰. The theatre in Mainz became a special place of Imperial representation, religious ceremonies, meeting place for diplomats and

Performing the Story – A Contribution to Roman Guest-Program during Diplomatic Relations

delegations and a symbol of cultural rule close to the border of Imperium Romanum, only five minutes by foot far from River Rhine.

It is worth to mention epigraphic records which demonstrate how members of the Roman Imperial family were honoured by official speeches and inscriptions (e.g. the famous *consolatio ad Liviam*²¹ or the honorary inscriptions about Drusus the Elder in Mogontiacum/Mainz²²). Similarly inscription CIL VI,921 (= 31200 b/c, col. II, 1.5-20) from Palatine in Rome (23 CE) delivers a detailed advise how Drusus the Younger and Germanicus (Son of Drusus the Elder) should be honoured in addition to the well-known dedication with a *clipeus argenteus* and *statuae* and by engraving their names at special place in the theatre: *Vtique omnibus [t] heatris [cuneis, qui Germanici Caesaris adpellarentur, Germanici Caesaris et Drusi] / Caesaris nomina i[n]scriberentur eique Germanici Drusique Caesarum adpellarentur*.²³

A similar function of theatre as a library of official city-history and correspondence, diplomatic meeting and memories of delegations that successfully returned from their mission to Emperor and Senate in Rome during nearly three hundred years can be admired in Aphrodisias/Geyre (Turkey). The architectural decoration of the main building and the stage building next to the *cavea* was covered by the copied texts of such events. These texts were placed as a public archive to public readers and users of the theatre.²⁴ At that place the Greek texts and translations are visible as the language of law and communication.

All these examples demonstrate that during the Roman Principate the theatres became more and more a place of political representation – and the auditory itself became a part of the performance. In Late Antiquity the reception of envoys culminated into a symbol of Imperial victory: the relief of the Theodosian obelisk in Istanbul shows the foreign envoys no longer walking through the palace or sitting at the theatre-rows but kneeling in the dust under the Emperors place: they became the besieged victims and subdued decoration of power.²⁵

Notes:

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- ¹ Ziethen 1994a, 160sq. on *Philo, legatio ad Gaium* 368sq.
² Ziethen 1994a, 162, for details see Ziethen 1994b.
³ Alföldi 1980, 100sq. and pass. Gabelmann 1984, 105sq.
⁴ Ziethen 1999.
⁵ Demandt 1993, 240
⁶ Medicus 1979, 1406sq.
⁷ Ziethen 2010.
⁸ Ziethen 1994a, 148sq.
⁹ Ziethen 1994a, 148.
¹⁰ Bellen 1994, 124, 134.
¹¹ Alföldy 1989, 226-234, esp. 230sq.
¹² Ziethen 1994a, 170sq.
¹³ Gross 1979, 983. Cf. Petersen 2005, 146sq.
¹⁴ Beare 1968, 233sq.
¹⁵ Menander Rhetor 1968, 181 [Treatise II, XIII]: The ambassadors speech (presbeutikos).
¹⁶ Stock 1999, pass., esp. 177sq.
¹⁷ Kienast 1990, 68sq.
¹⁸ Bellen 1984, 385-396; Rupprecht 2000, 157-161. For diplomatic activities initiated by the *conventus trium Galliarum* see Ziethen 1994a, 130, 244sq nos. 133-136. Ziethen 1998/1999, 39-67, esp. 46sq.
¹⁹ Mratschek-Halfmann 1993, 279sq. no. 49 (Livia), 296sq. no. 98 (very rich Alexander Lysimachos, *epitropos/administrator* of Antonia Minor); Kienast 1990, 88sq. (Antonia Minor), 83sq. (Livia Augusta). – PIR² I, p. 172sq. no. 885 (Antonia Minor: Cassius Dio 51,15.7) - L'Année Épigraphique 1993, 418 no. 1414 (SEG 41, 1991, 1442; IG V,1, 1448, 87-91) from Messene/Achaia delivers a honorary inscription for the Imperial family and esp. Livia, Antonia and Livilla. – Stegmann 1996, 800sq. – Stegmann 1999, 366sq.
²⁰ Cf. the honorary inscription (9 BCE) at Cnidos cited in L'Année Épigraphique 1992, 444 no. 1597. This inscription continues a long line of contacts between Knidos and the Imperial family.
²¹ Rupprecht 1982, 5-7, 12sq.
²² Such inscriptions referring to Drusus the Elder and well known in Mainz during the Middle Ages are mentioned in a very important text written by the monk Goswin (eleventh century CE) when he described the life of Saint Alban the Martyr: MGH 15/2, p. 988 no. 24.

²³ The inscription was revised in L'Année Épigraphique 1993, 42sq. no. 114.

²⁴ Reynolds 1992 pass. - Ziethen 1994a, 26sq., 95sq., 207sq. nos. 32-34, 230 no. 93.

²⁵ Gabelmann 1984, 206sq. no. 101, pl. 40.

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**Performing the Story – A Contribution to Roman
Guest-Program during Diplomatic Relations**

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