Preface

For more than half a century, scholars have been exploring the relationship between theatre – especially tragic theatre – and democracy. And yet, from the very beginning, theatre appealed just as much to autocrats as to democrats and it continued to thrive in autocratic states for more than half a millennium after the extinction of the Classical democracies. Knowing of no single volume devoted to theatre and autocracy, whether as a general phenomenon or even in relation to specific tyrants, monarchs or emperors, in 2017 the heptad of editors of this collection initiated a project, ‘Theatre and Autocracy in Ancient Greece’. It was clear from the outset that the sheer scope of the subject, in terms of chronology and materials, demanded collective effort, all the more so when we decided that it was arbitrary to exclude the Roman experience altogether from our purview. The project was based in Sydney (Wilson, Csapo, Green, Stoop), with partners in France (Le Guen), Germany (Goette), and Switzerland (Paillard). This volume makes no pretence to furnish a comprehensive account of the phenomenon and aspires to offer not final, but encouraging first, words.

Earlier versions of nine of its chapters were presented at a Colloquium – ‘Theatre and Autocracy in the Ancient World’ – held at the University of Sydney 26–27 July, 2018. The presentations of five speakers at that event – Anne Duncan, Simon Goldhill, Chris Kraus, Ian Rutherford and Jelle Stoop – were unavailable for publication in this book, and we take this opportunity to thank them warmly for the enormous contribution they made to the success of the event. Simon Goldhill’s paper – ‘Antigone and the Autocrats’ – was published in a collection edited by Phiroze Vasunia, The Politics of Form in Greek Literature (Bloomsbury 2021), under the title ‘Sophocles’ Antigone, Feminism’s Hegel and the Politics of Form’. We were very fortunate that Marie-Hélène Garelli and Mali Skotheim subsequently accepted our invitation to join the project and contribute their expertise in the history of theatre in the Roman early Imperial period.

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