

BIRTH of DRAMA



Ancient Greece

ANCIENT GREECE



ANCIENT GREECE



☞ developments: “Western Civilization”

☞ history

☞ politics (*theory, democracy*)

☞ architecture

☞ sculpture

☞ philosophy

☞ medicine

☞ mathematics

☞ ...

☞ theater



ANCIENT GREECE



∞ landscape:

∞ mountains

∞ plains

∞ 1/3 of Greece is/was **rock**

∞ (can't grow/graze)

∞ desolation, separation, isolation

∞ customs, laws, traditions

ANCIENT GREECE



- ∞ *geographic* isolation →
- ∞ *political/cultural* individuation (city states) →
- ∞ *governmental* decentralization →
- ∞ *external* war & *internal* competition

ANCIENT GREECE



∞ staples:

∞ grain

∞ olive

∞ grape/vine (***DIONYSUS***)

∞ fish

∞ sea:

∞ easier means of travel

∞ fish

∞ city-states = “like frogs [...] around a pond”
(**Plato**)

∞ strong navy (**Athens**)

PERSIAN INVASION



❧ First Invasion: Darius the Great

❧ Battle of Marathon (**490 BC**), Athenian victory

❧ Second Invasion: Xerxes I

❧ (**480 BC**)

❧ Darius' son, successor

❧ Battle of Thermopylae

❧ (Leonidas & the 300 Spartans)

❧ Battle of Salamis (greatest naval battle)

ATHENS



- ⌘ city = burnt by Persian during war
- ⌘ naval superpower
- ⌘ relatively free of eastern domination (Persian Empire) →
- ⌘ relatively unified Greece
- ⌘ celebration
 - ⌘ young **Sophocles** led Chorus
 - ⌘ see Chorus in **Antigone** for tone

ATHENS



- ∞ Athens = Greek center
 - ∞ of culture, art, intellectual development, philosophy
- ∞ demanded tribute from allies
 - ∞ money
 - ∞ ships
 - ∞ once voluntary/necessary, now compulsory
- ∞ money used to fund
 - ∞ navy
 - ∞ architecture
 - ∞ public festivals →
 - ∞ (1) RURAL DIONYSUS
 - ∞ (2) LENAEA
 - ∞ (3) CITY DIONYSIA

3 MAIN FESTIVALS



(1) RURAL DIONYSUS

∞ **mid-winter**

∞ **stresses Dionysus as god of fertility**

∞ **“Leader of Chorus” = headman in village**

∞ **“tragedy” = “goat song”**

∞ **goat = sacrificed on 1st day**

∞ **goat = awarded on last day**

3 MAIN FESTIVALS



(2) LENAEA

∞ January

∞ merrymaking

∞ Greek **Comedy**

∞ post-harvest celebration

∞ "satyrs" =

∞ half-men, half-goats

∞ attendants of Dionysus

∞ their antics + rough horseplay of other village festivals

∞ "**comedy**" = **comos**, revel or masquerade

3 MAIN FESTIVALS



(3) *CITY DIONYSUS*

☞ ***all extant plays from this festival**

☞ **Athens**

☞ **in late March, early April**

☞ **compulsorily attendance by ALL**

☞ **attended by official representatives of federated & allied states**

CITY DIONYSUS



DIONYSUS

☞ god of the woods

☞ vegetation god, the life-spirit of all green vegetation (ivy, pine, vine)

☞ the *Maenads* = ecstatic women followers

☞ masked or the mask itself (as portrayed in vase paintings)

☞ worship = **ecstatic possession, loss of identity** in communal dance & wine

☞ “rave-like” quality

☞ wine

☞ dance

☞ orgies

☞ ecstasy, rapture

CITY DIONYSUS



DIONYSUS

- ∞ *How do we move from fertility rites to theatrical productions?*
 - ∞ ????
 - ∞ masks
 - ∞ loss of identity
 - ∞ singing & dancing
 - ∞ "democratic"
 - ∞ unlike other deities
 - ∞ late to the Greek pantheon
 - ∞ not in temples, but in woods
 - ∞ Dionysus = one of the people
 - ∞ popular rather than aristocratic figure
 - ∞ connected to anti-aristocratic move
 - ∞ received official status under burgeoning democracy (under which theatre blossomed)
 - ∞ dramatic performance = act of art & worship

CITY DIONYSUS



- ❧ every spring
- ❧ late March, early April
- ❧ in honor of Dionysus
 - ❧ his statue was brought from the temple (in the theatre district) to “watch” the plays
 - ❧ “reserved seating” for priests of Dionysus
- ❧ Day 1:
 - ❧ procession through the city
 - ❧ actors wore stage clothes, but no masks
- ❧ Day 2-4:
 - ❧ devoted to tragedies
 - ❧ (later, would begin at dawn)
- ❧ Day 5:
 - ❧ devoted to comedies
 - ❧ (later, comedies moved to evenings after tragedies)

CITY DIONYSUS



❧ PRESIDING OFFICERS

- ❧ received plays from poets
- ❧ chose 3 plays to be performed
- ❧ assigned a leading actor & patron to poets

❧ PATRON: (*“choregus”*)

- ❧ wealthy member of the community
- ❧ paid all costs of production (as part of his civic duties)

CITY DIONYSUS



∞ AUTHOR:

- 1) composed all the music
- 2) arranged the dances (**choreographer**)
- 3) trained the Chorus (*until specialists took over*)
- 4) chief actor (*until actors increased in number & importance*)

CITY DIONYSUS



∞ AUTHOR:

∞ TRAGEDIANS:

- ∞ each had to submit **3 plays**
 - ∞ trilogy on a theme OR 3 plays on a theme
- ∞ plus, “**satyr play**”
 - ∞ bawdy comic comment on the theme of the tragedies
 - ∞ link to past early worship of Dionysus (religious element)

∞ COMEDIANS:

- ∞ limited to 1 play each

CITY DIONYSUS



œ "OSCARs":

- œ Best Production (good patron)
- œ Best Comedy
- œ Best Tragedy
- œ Best Tragic Actor

CITY DIONYSUS



DITHYRAMBS:

lyric hymns

lyric = medium of emotional expression

sung & danced

by a chorus of 50 men

in honor/praise of Dionysus

flute accompaniment

CITY DIONYSUS



DITHYRAMBS:

☞ changes in the dithyramb:

☞ performance:

- ☞ *originally* = frenzied improvisations (**ecstasy**)
- ☞ Arion = 7th-century poet who developed the dithyramb into a formalized narrative sung by the Chorus

☞ themes

- ☞ *from* the life & worship of **Dionysus**
- ☞ *to* tales of **demi-gods & heroes, legendary ancestors of the Greeks**
 - ☞ wars, feuds, marriages, adulteries, destinies of posterity/children (HOUSES)

CITY DIONYSUS



∞ CIVIC DUTY:

∞ active in politics, public affairs

∞ serve in military

∞ **attend festival**

∞ participate in festival

∞ as organizer, director, Chorus member

∞ ARCHON = festival director, organizer

∞ CHOREGOS =

∞ rich private citizen

∞ chorus director, trainer

∞ paid for rich costuming...out of his own pocket

∞ *not* like Hollywood's producers

∞ *but* were chosen by public officials

∞ **"a form of enlightened taxation"** (21)

CITY DIONYSUS



AUDIENCE:

∞ 14-15,000 spectators

∞ sat in *theatron*

∞ emotionally involved in Tragic Hero – a person like themselves

∞ *from* “congregation” *to* “audience”

CITY DIONYSUS



AUDIENCE:

❧ familiar w/stories, myths, legends from Oral Tradition

❧ used for shock, surprise *by changing* part of the story

❧ OR

❧ used for DRAMATIC IRONY

❧ audience knows what the character does not

❧ → gives Audience a god-like perspective

❧ an omniscience, on the side of Destiny, Fate

❧ knowledge of past & future

❧ sees character's actions/words against the backdrop of their destinies

❧ → gives them insight into the human condition

❧ while life = unpredictable & suffering seems indeterminate/indiscriminating/unfair

❧ yet there is a divine plan, a fairness, an order to it all

❧ (see *THEME #2 below*)

CITY DIONYSUS



THEATER:

∞ **open-air amphitheater**

∞ → see each other, actors, cityscape

∞ **(1) ORCHESTRA**

∞ center of the theater

∞ circular dancing area

∞ singing, dancing area

∞ action

∞ religious rites

∞ the center of the orchestra = **ALTAR** (dedicated to Dionysus)

CITY DIONYSUS



THEATER:

∞ (2) SKENE

∞ means "tent" or "hut"

∞ the backstage area & backdrop

∞ changing rooms, entrances, exits

∞ from which we get "scenery" (painted backdrop)

∞ "PROSKENE"

∞ area between the altar & skene

∞ raised acting area, wooden stage

∞ precursor of *proscenium stage*

CITY DIONYSUS



THEATER:

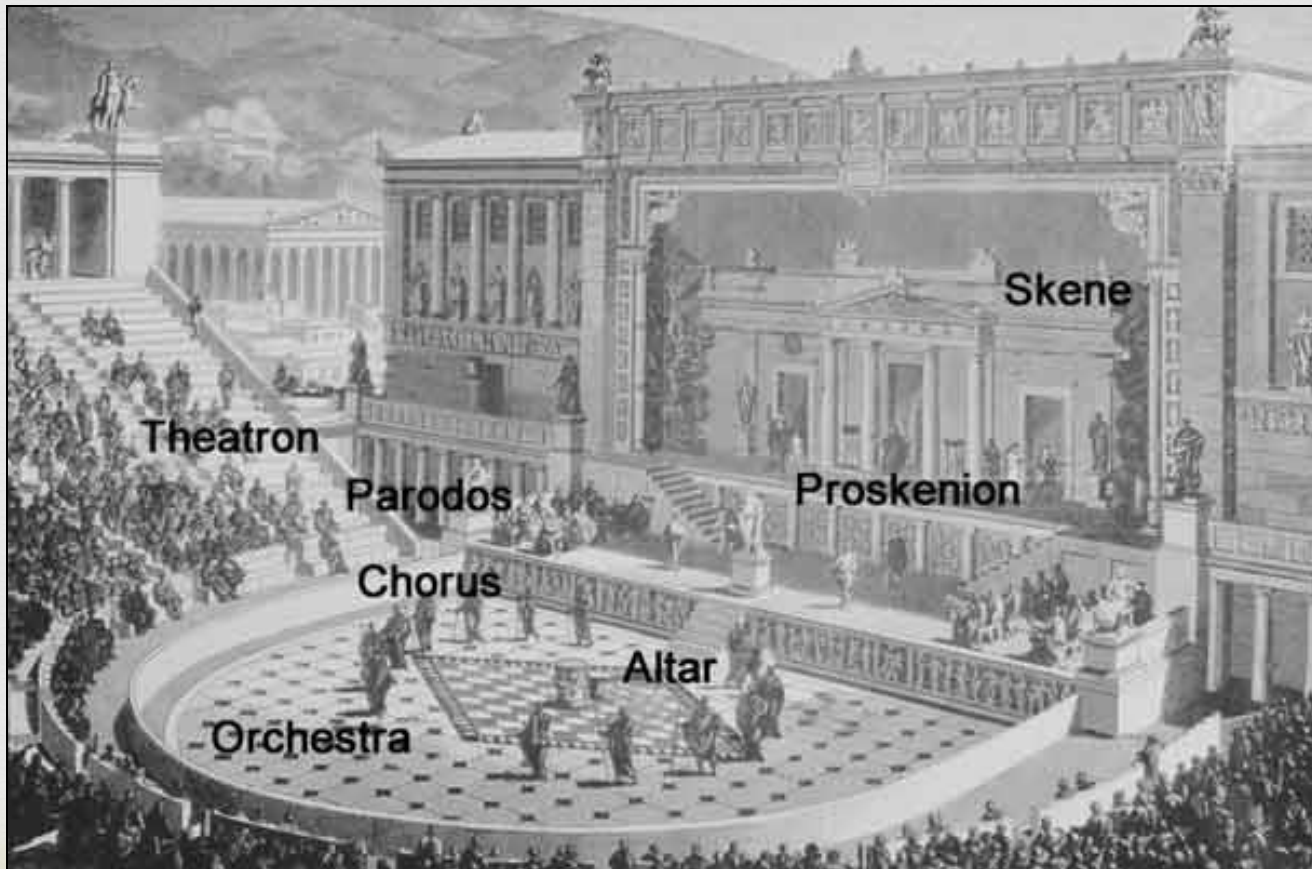
❧ (3) THEATRON

- ❧ "embankment"
- ❧ seating area for the audience
- ❧ tiered benches
- ❧ seating for 14-15k
- ❧ side of a hill

CITY DIONYSUS



THEATER:



CITY DIONYSUS



ACTORS:

∞ priests → professional actors

∞ masks

∞ made of cork or linen

∞ covered full head & hair

∞ *not* grotesque caricatures

∞ *but* realistic, naturalistic representations

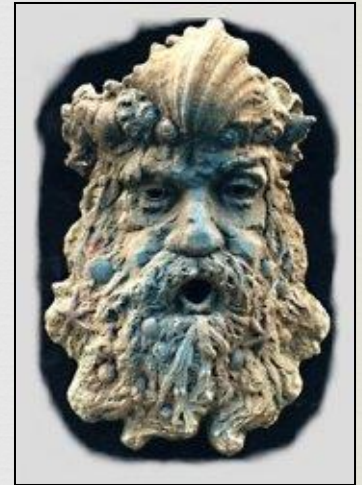
∞ of types

∞ bearded king, old man, young girl

∞ masks → NO facial expressions

∞ word + gesture = characterization

∞ (pantomime)



CITY DIONYSUS



THESPIS: (6th century BC)

☞ ****1st actor:**

☞ detached himself from the Chorus

☞ added speech of actor to the songs & dances of Chorus

☞ engaged in dialogue with Chorus

☞ as a god or hero

☞ 1st manager, too

☞ *1st *unsanctified* person who dared to assume the character of a god

☞ (previously, only priests & kings, partly deified) 1st actor

☞ **"thespian"** "thespian arts" "robes of Thespis"

☞ leader of a dithyrambic chorus

☞ from Icaria (eventually arrives in Athens)

☞ *traveling stage > cart: floor & tailboard = improvised stage

CITY DIONYSUS



THESPIS' changes lead to:

- ❧ independent development of an "actor"
- ❧ actors = choose plays, "servants of Dionysus" only by tradition
- ❧ move away from temple (though always near)
- ❧ *audience:
 - ❧ still conscious of religious significance of play
 - ❧ but play = work of art
 - ❧ play = entertainment (eventually)
 - ❧ spectators became "audience" not "congregation"
- ❧ 2nd (Aeschylus) & 3rd actors (Sophocles) → development of
 - ❧ dramatic *narrative* (between actor & Chorus)
 - ❧ dramatic *relationship* (between actors)
 - ❧ dramatic *conflict* (actor against actor)
 - ❧ **complication** of plot, characterization
 - ❧ → * limits role of the Chorus (to commentator)

CITY DIONYSUS



CHORUS:

☞ 50, 24, 10, 12, 15 men

☞ 50 = 5 men from 10 Athenian tribes

☞ Athenian citizens, *not* trained actors

☞ citizen amateurs who represented their own tribes

☞ civic pride to participate in the competition

☞ represented singular identity (Theban elders, e.g.),
although anonymous

CITY DIONYSUS



CHORUS:

☞ surrogate for audience

☞ expressing emotions, offering opinions, asking questions – that the average theater-goer may raise

☞ *vox humana*

☞ the mouthpiece of the people

☞ function = emotional bridge between audience & actors

CITY DIONYSUS



CHORUS:

- ∞ sang & danced the dithyramb
- ∞ left-over from the religious ceremonies
- ∞ *from* sole participant → *to* active participant → *to* narrator
- ∞ spoke in a conventional Doric dialect
- ∞ later, interacted with the actor/s
- ∞ Koryphaios: Leader of the Chorus
- ∞ Other functions:
 - ∞ **exposition**
 - ∞ **thematic** clarification, pronouncement

CITY DIONYSUS



PLAYWRIGHTS:

- ❧ (1) composed all the music
- ❧ (2) arranged the dances (choreographer)
- ❧ (3) trained the Chorus (*until* specialists took over)
- ❧ (4) chief actor (*until* actors increased in number & importance)
- ❧ each submitted 3 tragedies + 1 satyr play (comedy)
 - ❧ tragedy = trilogy OR related on theme
 - ❧ satyr play = lighthearted play on the connected tragedies
- ❧ 3 playwrights, 3 plays, 3 days
- ❧ sometimes playwrights = actors
 - ❧ (Aeschylus, Sophocles for a while)

CITY DIONYSUS



PLAYS: Tragedy

- ❧ **“tragedy” = “goat song”**
 - ❧ goat sacrificed on 1st day
 - ❧ goat awarded on last day
- ❧ **more esteemed than Comedy**
 - ❧ key aspect of theatre's development
 - ❧ topics
 - ❧ number of plays
 - ❧ time of day
 - ❧ awards
 - ❧ start of day →

CITY DIONYSUS



PLAYS: Tragedy

∞ start at sun rise (focus of the day)

∞ 3 plays

∞ trilogy

∞ OR related on theme

CITY DIONYSUS



PLAYS: Tragedy

- ∞ Topic = related to **legendary past** (*not contemporary issues or people*)
 - ∞ heroes, legends, myths
 - ∞ from Oral Tradition
 - ∞ historical
 - ∞ myths = only type of “history” they had
 - ∞ poetical
 - ∞ characters = symbols of human existence (death, ambitions, fears, ...)
 - ∞ religious
 - ∞ relationship of the gods to men
 - ∞ explore the mysteries of divine purpose

CITY DIONYSUS



PLAYS: Comedy

∞ at the end of the day

∞ satyr play

∞ related to the themes of the Tragedies

∞ Topic =

∞ treatment of **contemporary** themes, issues, people

∞ often ridiculing current person

∞ ribald, frank “**social satire**”

CITY DIONYSUS



PLAYS: Attributes

❧ (1) religious

❧ to honor **Dionysus**

❧ (2) civic

❧ competition between tribes

❧ civic **duty & pride**

❧ (3) political

❧ war orphans

❧ democratic attributes

❧ Theater = **Democratic**

❧ inclusive

❧ prizes awarded by 10 judges

❧ judges = elected at start by lots

❧ judges = sworn to impartiality

❧ attendance = part of civic duty & pride

❧ chorus = 50 men (5 from each of the 10 tribes of Attica)

END of GOLDEN AGE in GREECE

PELOPONNESIAN WARS:

∞ 431-404 BC

∞ Athens (& allies) vs. Sparta (& allies)

∞ tired of Athenian dominance

∞ Athens surrenders by starvation

∞ “pyrrhic victory” - both = too weak to defend themselves

∞ Macedonian Invasion shortly thereafter