

A mosaic depicting two theatrical masks. The mask on the left is white with a wide-open mouth and large, dark eyes, wearing a yellow and orange headband. The mask on the right is brown with a wide, dark smile and smaller eyes, adorned with green leaves and yellow berries. The background is a textured mosaic of grey and brown tiles.

Theatre and performance

Everyday Life in Athens and Rome (HPHP4020)

Choral performances

- Singing for the gods and for victory!
- *tragos* (goat) and *oide* (song) = *tragoidia*.
 - Thespis and the first prize for tragedy? [534 BC]
- *komoidia* (*komos* = singing and revelry).
- *orchēstra* [= dancing space].



komasts and companions – Attic black-figure neck-amphora, ca. 560 BC, Etruria (Vulci).

“Going to Sicily, therefore, at the time when Hieron was founding Etna, he put on the Women of Etna, divining a good life for those who settled the city.” – [anon.] ***Life of Aeschylus 9*** (early Hellenistic period).

“They say that being esteemed by Hieron, he re-produced the Persians in Sicily to great acclaim.” – [anon.] ***Life of Aeschylus 18*** (early Hellenistic period).

Troupes of actors, known as the “Artists of Dionysus”

“Greek” drama



Attic oinochoe (jug), mid-4th century BC

- Surviving plays largely “Athenian”.
- Peisistratos and the *Great [or] City Dionysia*.
 - 4-day festival held in March.
 - Comedies also performed from 486 BC.
- *Lenaia* established in 440 BC.
 - *lene* [maenad or devotee of Dionysos]
 - Held around January.



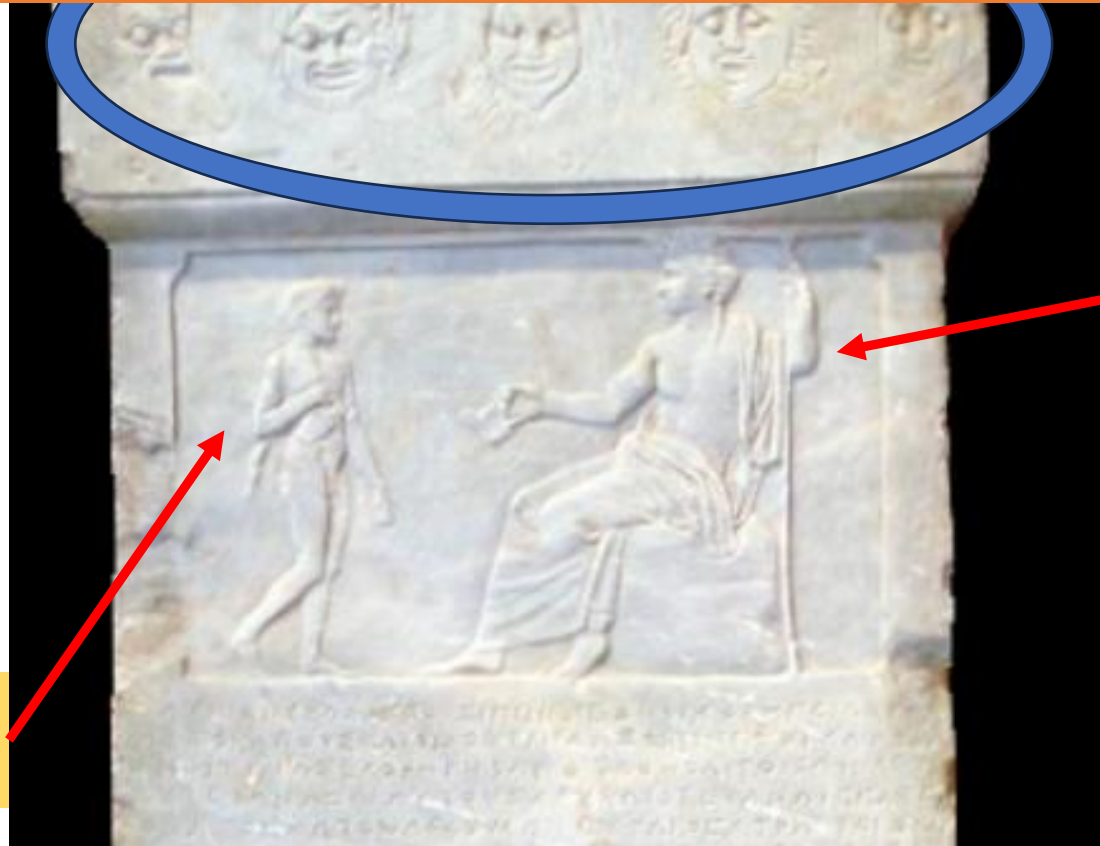
Competition

- Submitted to the Eponymous Archon.
 - 3 tragedies and one satyr play for tragedians.
 - 1 comedy for comic poets.
- *chorēgos* as a sponsor.
 - Playwrights as composers, choreographers, designers, directors and occasionally actors.
- Reward for first prize (+ second and third).
 - 10 *kritai* selected by lot.

Gods. Glaukides son of Sosippos proposed: since the choral sponsors Auteasson of Autokles and Philoxenides son of Philippos sponsored choruses well and with love of honour, the demes men shall decide, to crown them with a gold crown of 100 drachmas each in the theatre at the comedies following the archonship of Theophrastos, so that others intending to serve as choral sponsors may also show love of honour; and the demarch Hegesileos and the treasurers shall give them also for a sacrifice ten drachmas; and the treasurers shall inscribe this decree on a stone stele and stand it in the theatre, so that the Aixoneans may always celebrate the Dionysia as finely as possible. – **SEG 36.168**.

Why would this Athenian deme honour these two “chorus sponsors” in this way?

A satyr approaching Dionysus



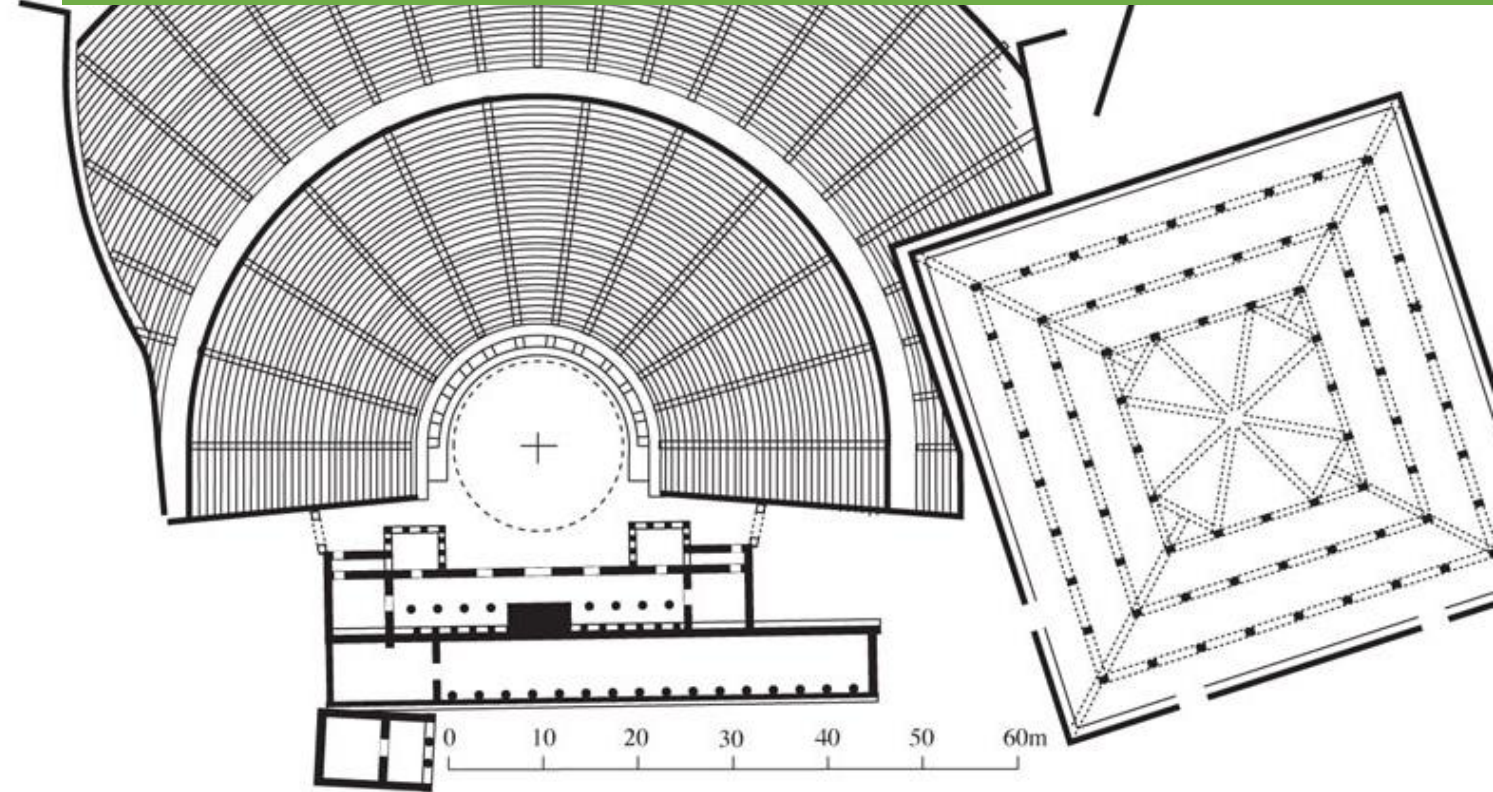
A seated Dionysus

An honorary inscription set up in the deme Auxoneto honour the *choregoi* Auteas and Philoxenides, ca. late fourth century BC.

Audiences

- Theatre of Dionysos
 - Capacity of 20,000?
 - Plato claims 30,000 (*Symposium*).
- Front row for priests, magistrates and VIPs.
 - Also, citizens (10 tribes), and special areas for metics and ephebes.
- **Could women attend?**

But some say that at the performance of the *Eumenides*, when he led on the chorus one by one, he frightened the people so much that some children lost consciousness and unborn babies were aborted. – [anon.] ***Life of Aeschylus 9*** (early Hellenistic period).

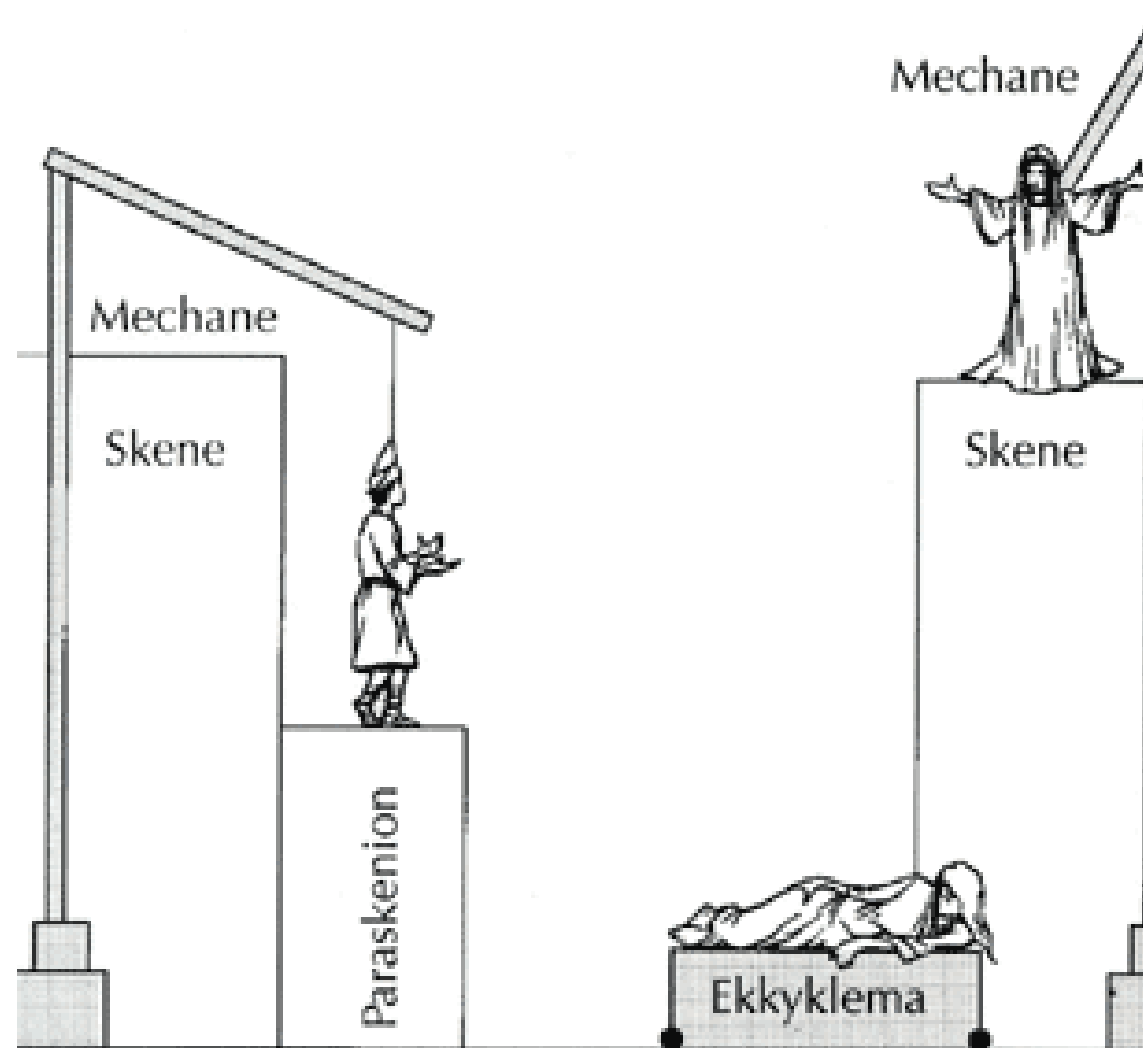


Theatre of Dionysus (modern Athens, Greece).

Cavea width: 82 m, orchestra width: 26.53 m; capacity: 17,000; Orchestra, early 5th cent., Periclean construction late 5th cent., Lycurgian construction mid 4th cent. BC, Neronian renovations mid 1st cent. CE. Plan (T. H. after Dörpfeld)

“Special effects”

- All plays taking place during daylight.
- Stage equipment
 - *ekkyklēma* (“object that is rolled out”).
 - e.g., Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*.
 - *mēchane* (“machine”).
 - A “crane”, e.g., Aristophanes’ *Clouds*.
 - Latin: *deus ex machina*.
- *paraskēnia* (buildings on the side) + *skēnē* (structure at back of stage).



“The "god in the machine" should only be used to explain what lies outside the play, either what happened earlier and is therefore beyond human knowledge, or what happens later and needs to be foretold in a proclamation. For we ascribe to the gods the power of seeing everything.” – **Aristotle *Poetics* 1454b.**

- No direct surviving depictions of the *mēchane* or crane.
 - Inference from plays where crane is like to have featured, e.g. Apollo and Helen at the end of Euripides’ *Orestes* (ll. 1625–1690).
- Potentially some could carry multiple actors and props at once.
 - Medea and her chariot with two dummies or child actors in Euripides’ *Medea* (ll. 1317–1414).
 - Trygaeus riding a dung beetle as a prop in Aristophanes’ *Peace* (ll. 80–178).



The “players”

- *chōros* lit. = dance.
 - Greek choruses a mixture of dance and song, accompanied by an *aulos*.
 - Usually entering at end of first scene.
 - Originally around 50 odd, down to about 12-15 by mid-5th century.
 - **Why the reduction in number?**
- Initially only one, then up to three (male) actors for main “speaking” parts – **what would you need to do if there were more than 3 *dramatis personae*?**
- **How did actors express different emotions?**



Xanthias: “It’s all right, boss. Be brave! Empousa is gone now and we can say - like, our funny little actor with the speech impediment, Hegelochus- “after the thtorm, I chunder!” – **Aristopshanes *Frogs* II. 303-304.** Hegelochus was an actor who had performed in Euripides’ *Orestes*.



Roman dramatic performances

Republican period

- Atellan Farce or *ludi Osci*.
- Greek drama being popularised in 3rd century.
 - Roman control of Italy and Sicily.
 - Livius Andronicus and introduction of plays (ca. 240 BC).
- Latin plays by Plautus (ca. 205–184 BC).
 - In services of the “Scipio family” or a Catonian conservative?



Mime and pantomime

- Mime – early street theatre?
 - Comic situation from ordinary life.
 - Incorporated into *Floralia*.
- Pantomime – performative dance.
 - Solo dancers and mythic themes.
 - Pylades of Cilicia and Bathyllus of Alexandria.
 - “Without voice”.
- “Pantomime” riots during reign of Tiberius.
- Other types of performers, including jugglers and acrobats.

