Overview of Greek Drama

• Tragedy and Satyr Plays emerge at the same time in late pre-Classical Athens
  – but in retrospect, Tragedy seems to come first
• the works of only three Major Classical Tragedians survive:
  – Aeschylus (525-456 BCE)
  – Sophocles (495-406 BCE)
  – Euripides (485-406 BCE)
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Overview of Greek Drama

• the earliest known type of comic drama is the Satyr Play
• “Old Comedy” is first presented at the Dionysia in 486 BCE
• first extant Old Comedies are by Aristophanes (mid-400’s – 386 BCE)
  – Cratinus (active from 440’s-420’s BCE)
  – Eupolis (active ca. 429-410 BCE)
Overview of Greek Drama

• in the post-Classical period (after 404 BCE) tragedy begins to decline
• comedy dominates Greek theatre
  – Middle Comedy (390’s- 320’s BCE)
  – New Comedy (after the 320’s BCE)
• the greatest playwright of New Comedy was Menander (344-291 BCE)
  – but his work survives largely on papyrus
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Where were plays produced in antiquity?

• Can we expect to find specially built “theatres” for the earliest dramas?
• What should we look for in early venues where drama might have happened?
  – space for acting/impersonation
  – space for seating/viewing
Knossos (Crete)
Knossos (Crete)
Reconstruction of Knossos
Open Space at Knossus
Open Space at Knossus
Open Space at Knossus
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Theatre of Dionysus (Athens)
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Dionysus (Athens)
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Dionysus (Athens)
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Thorikos (orchestra)
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Thorikos (orchestra)
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Thorikos (orchestra)
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Dionysus (theatron)
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Dionysus (*theatron*)
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Dionysus *(theatron)*
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Skene
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Skene
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Special Effects

*Ekkyklema*: a rolling platform
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Special Effects

*Mechane*: a crane used to lift actors into the air and fly them across the stage

- not necessary in plays until the 420’s BCE
  - but the end of Euripides’ *Medea* (431 BCE)?
- how did it work, e.g. actor twisting on rope?
- when not in use, was it hidden from view?
  - i.e. how illusionistic was Classical Greek theatre
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How were Greek tragedies presented?

• How many at a time?
  – Trilogies
  – actually tetralogies: 3 tragedies + satyr play

• In what style?
  – Little opportunity for Interiority
  – Presentationalism
    • cf. courtroom trials
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How were Greek tragedies presented?

• Who paid for the production?
  – Choregos ("producer")
  – a rich man required to do public service

• What was the playwright’s job?
  – Chorodidaskalos ("chorus-teacher")
  – i.e. he taught the songs/dances to the chorus
  – and originally he acted in the play himself
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Masks
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Masks

• masks allow for **multiple-role playing**

• **three-actor rule**
  – protagonist
  – deuteragonist
  – tritagonist

• why only three?
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Voices

• must have been the actor’s principal tool
  – cf. modern opera singers

• how difficult would it have been for the audience to know which actor was speaking at any moment?
  – with masked actors at some distance
  – thus, few trialogues, and all are found in later Classical tragedy
Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Stichomythy ("line-talking")

• predictable pattern of conversation based on poetic meter

• e.g. Euripides’ Hippolytus (347-352)

  Phaedra: What thing is this that men call love?
  Nurse: It’s sweetest, child, and bitter too.
  Phaedra: I’ve only known the latter, Nurse.
  Nurse: What’s that? Oh, you’re in love? With whom?
  Phaedra: That man, born from an Amazon . . .
  Nurse: Hippolytus? . . .
  Phaedra: . . . Quoth you, not I!
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The Finale of Euripides’ *Orestes*

- **Apollo (the sun)**
- **Orestes on roof of skene, with mutes playing other roles**
- **Chorus in Orchestra**
- **Menelaus on stage, with army (secondary chorus)**
- **Apollo on mechane, with mute Helen**