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How old is Greek Comedy?

• several humorous scenes in Homer
  – *Dios Apate* ("The Seduction of Zeus"): *Iliad* (Book 14)
  – *Ares and Aphrodite*: *Odyssey* (Book 8)
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Comedy in Drama

- *komoidia*: “party-song” (*kom-* + *-oid-*)
- *komastai* (“partiers”)
- originally, songs abusing party-goers at revels?
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Ancient Features of Comedy

• the *phallos*
  – actually mentioned very little in texts

• the *parabasis* (“step-aside”)
  – remnant of the original “party-song” focused directly at particular audience members?
  – explains the general absence of a “fourth wall” in later classical comedy
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Dorian Farce?
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Early Comedy in Sicily?

• Epicharmus of Syracuse
  – dates?: ca. 530-440 BCE
• Epicharmus’ purported contributions
  – the comic *agon*
  – stereotypical comic characters, e.g. the gluttonous Heracles, the cowardly Odysseus
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Satyr Plays

- Satyrs
- **Silenus**: their father/leader
  - wise, philosophical, ironic
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Satyr Plays

- Praxiteles’ *Satyr Pouring Wine*
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Satyr Plays

• Pratinas the early tragic playwright
  – earliest known writer of satyr plays
  – the inventor of the satyr play?
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Aeschylus as a Writer of Satyr Plays
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Aeschylus’ *Prometheus the Fire-Bringer*
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Sophocles’ *The Trackers*
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The Pronomos Vase
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Euripides’ Cyclops

http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/ClasDram/chapters/083reading3cyclops.htm
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Early Old Comedy

• began ca. 485 BCE (victory lists)
• nature of early comedy is unclear
  – not taken seriously because comedy doesn’t seem serious
• but plots are probably very loose, i.e. episodes do not necessarily follow logically from one to the next
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Early Old Comedy

• new dramatic festival: the **Lenaea** (ca. 440 BCE)
  – shows growing interest in comedy
  – also, shows need for more opportunities to stage comedies
  – only one per playwright at the Dionysia
    • versus three tragedies by each tragedian
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Early Comic Poets

• earliest names of comic playwrights: Chionides and Magnes
  – Aristophanes recalls the public’s mistreatment of Magnes
  – also Aristophanes seems to tie himself to Magnes’ style of comedy
    • cf. play titles: Frogs, Dionysus, Birds, Lydians
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Cratinus

- older contemporary of Aristophanes
- active from the 440’s – late 420’s BCE

- *Dionysalexandros* ("Dionysus Does Paris")
  - Dionysus pretends to be Paris and steals Helen
  - see hypothesis
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Pherecrates

• long fragment from *Chiron*
  – “The Lament of Music”
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Eupolis

- younger contemporary of Aristophanes
- died during Peloponnesian War
  - henceforth, dramatists are exempted from military service in Athens
- long papyrus fragment of *The Demes*
- also, dialogue from *The Taxiarchs*