

□□The Theater of Dionysus □□The Theater of Dionysus was Europe's first theater, and stood immediately below the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. It was originally built in the late 5th century B.C. The theater was an outdoor auditorium in the shape of a great semicircle on the slope of the Acropolis, with rows of seats on which about eighteen thousand spectators could comfortably seat. The front rows consisted of marble chairs, and were the only seats in the theater that had a back support. The priests of Dionysus and the chief magistrates of Athens reserved these rows. Priests claimed 50 of the 67 front row seats, then came the officials, the guests of honor, then finally the ordinary citizens of Athens. Beyond the front row, stood a circular space called the orchestra where the Chorus would sing and dance, and in the center of which stood the altar of Dionysus. The orchestra level was around 3 meters higher than the shrine. Behind the orchestra, there lied a heavy rectangular foundation known as the stage on which the actors would perform their section of the play. The back of the stage had a building painted to look like the front of a temple or a palace. Here, the actors would retire when they were not needed on stage or would go to when they had to change their costumes. Above lay the deep blue sky, behind it was the Acropolis, and seen in the distance was the olive colored hills and lush green of the forests that surround.□□ The theater was built as a result of the Athenian's religious practice in honor of the god, Dionysos, who personified both wine and fruitfulness. Long before the theater itself was built, an annual ceremonial festival was held for Dionysus in the same spot. This ancient ceremony was performed by choruses of men who sang and danced in the god's honor. Spectators would gather in a circle to watch these dancers; that was the way that the theater took its circular shape. When the theater was built, the performers only sang and danced about the stories of Dionysus's life, then later the stories of other gods and heroes. The stories were told in the form of a song, chanted at first by all who took place, then later by a chorus of about fifty performers. During the intervals of a song, the leader would recite part of the story himself. As time passed, these recitations became more and more important, as it eventually overtook the chorus. They were now presented by two or three people, while the chorus consisted of only fifteen performers. A maximum of three speakers were allowed on stage at once, and only one story was told during one performance. The chorus, although less important, still set the atmosphere for the play, and as well gave the audience a time of relief from a tragedy. □□□The Festival of Dionysus was a great dramatic one that was held during March and April inside the theater. Three poets were chosen every year, and each wrote a series of three tragedies based on some well-known Greek legend.

Originally, admission to the theater was free, but as the crowds grew, the leaders realized that a small entrance fee would be economically beneficial for the theater. Several plays were given in one day, and a prize was awarded to the best, so the audience was obligated to start at dawn and would remain until sunset. While watching the plays, the Athenian audience was very critical as they would bluntly show their signs of approval or disapproval by their applause, or lack thereof. The legends and traditions from which most of the Greek plays took their plots were well known to the Athenians. They were stories honoring some great event or explaining some religious observance. These legends were chosen by the different dramatists, each of whom brought forth a different side of the story to enforce some particular lesson he wished to teach the audience. The plays were written in poetry which deeply stirred the emotions of the audience. It gave the Athenians much to think about their eternal problems of human life and conduct, and the proper relationship between humans and gods.

□ □Each play followed certain guidelines which created the culture of the theater. When the play began, only three actors were allowed on stage at once. They would usually wear very elaborate costumes, and on their feet would be a strange looking wooden sole called a buskin. This would add about six inches to their height to make them look taller and more impressive to the audience. A facial mask would also be worn to identify whom the character was, and the moods and feelings that the character portrayed. The mask included a wide mouth to project the voice of the actors so that everyone in the immense audience would be able to hear what the actor had to say. The actors would change their masks as they changed their characters. There were no curtains used, even though the plays were not divided into different acts. When there was a pause in action, the Chorus would fill up the time with their songs. When a tragedy was performed, the final calamity would never be shown on stage, but a messenger would appear to give the audience an account of what had happened. □□□ □□The creation of drama and the theater was a very large stepping stone for the Greeks, as it showed surrounding and future societies many things about the Greek beliefs, lifestyles, and culture. The building of the theater itself showed their degree of engineering and architectural ability that they used in creating their structures. It also showed that they had a vague form of understanding the way that acoustics work, as all the seats, no matter where they were, could hear the sounds from the stage. The plays that were performed gave an insight on Greek history and mythology. Naturally, they would not have performed any plays which did not interest the audience. They would only display what they believed to be important for civilians to know, such as their heritage and religious beliefs.

Finally, the innovation of the drama and the theater undeniably confirmed their absolute belief in religion, as the theater would never have come about if it weren't for the worship of Dionysus by the Athenians. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□Bibliography□□□□1) Powell, Anton, Ancient Greece. Facts on File, Inc., 1989.□ □2) Onians, John, Art and Thought in the Hellenistic Age. Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1979. □ □3) Mills, Dorothy, The Book of the Ancient Greeks. G.P Putnam's Sons, 1977.□ □4) Skipp, Victor, Out of the Ancient World. Penguin Books, 1967.□ □5) Erim, Kenan, Aphrodisias, the City of Love. Facts on File Publications, 1986.□ □

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ed these rows priests claimed front seats then came officials guests honor then finally ordinary citizens athens beyond front stood circular space called orchestra where chorus would sing dance center which stood alter orchestra level around meters higher than shrine behind orchestra there lied heavy rectangular foundation known stage which actors would perform their section play back stage building painted look like temple palace here actors would retire when they were needed stage when they change their costumes above deep blue behind acropolis seen distance olive colored hills lush green forests that surround built result athenian religious practice honor dionysos personified both wine fruitful long before itself built annual ceremonial festival held same spot this ancient ceremony performed choruses sang danced honor spectators gather circle watch these dancers that took circular shape when performers only sang danced about stories life then later stories other gods heroes stories were told form song chanted first took place later chorus about fifty performers during interval song leader recite part story himself time passed these recitations became more more important eventually overtook chorus they presented three people while consisted only fifteen performers maximum three speakers allowed once story told during performance although less important still atmosphere played well gave audience time relief from tragedy festival great dramatic held during march april inside three poets chosen every year each wrote series tragedies based some well known greek legend originally admission free crowds grew leaders realized small entrance economically beneficial several plays given prize awarded best audience obligated start dawn remain until sunset while watching plays athenian audience very critical bluntly show their signs approval disapproval applause lack thereof legends traditions from most greek plays took plots well known athenians honoring some great event explaining some religious observance legends chosen different dramatists each whom brought forth different side story enforce particular lesson wished teach written poetry deeply stirred emotions gave athenians much think eternal problems human life conduct proper relationship between humans gods each play followed certain guidelines created culture began actors allowed once usually wear very elaborate costumes feet strange looking wooden sole called buskin this inches height make them look taller more impressive facial mask also worn identify whom character moods feelings character portrayed mask included wide mouth project voice everyone immense able hear what actor change masks changed characters there curtains used even though divided into different acts there pause action fill time with songs tragedy performed final calamity never shown messenger appear give account what happened creation drama very large stepping stone greeks showed surrounding future societies many things greek beliefs lifestyles culture building itself showed degree engineering architectural ability used creating structures also showed vague form understanding acoustics work matter where could hear sounds from performed gave insight history mythology naturally have interest display what believed important civilians know such heritage religious beliefs finally innovation drama undeniably confirmed absolute belief religion never have come weren't worship athenians bibliography powell anton ancient greece facts file onians john thought hellenistic thames hudson mills dorothy book ancient greeks putnam son's skipper victor world penguin books erim kenan aphrodisias city love facts file publications Essay, essays, term paper, term paper, term papers, term papers, book reports, study, college, thesis, dissertation, test answers, free research, book research, study help, download essay, download term papers