Founding Athens: *Ion* and origin myth.

Athenian drama:

- concentrates on specific episodes in a larger myth story
- focuses on human personality (and psychology)
- investigates relationships in the family and in society
- is radical in questioning the gods

But if I aimed for a place in the first ranks of the city and strove to become someone, I would be detested by the powerless while those with ability, but not eager for public life, would ridicule me for being foolish...And then again, if I took positions from those who had them, I would be thwarted by men with knowledge, who know how the system works.

paraphrase of Euripides *Ion* 595-600
Procession with religious image.

Pietrafitta, Italy
Theatre Dionysus Athens, ca 350 BCE
Actors with masks
Pronomos vase
400 BCE

Mask design: Thanos Vovolis. Stage director: Gemma Gomez. Photo © Thanos Vovolis

http://www.didaskalia.net/issues/vol7no1/vovolis_zamboulakis/image11.html
Aeschylus
523-456 BCE
ca. 620-480 BC: Archaic Period
ca. 533: introduction of the City Dionysia at Athens (Thespis)
508/7: establishment of the Athenian democracy by Cleisthenes
ca. 499: Aeschylus' first dramatic production
484: Aeschylus' first victory

Sophocles
495-405 BCE
479-323 BC: Classical Period
ca. 468: Sophocles' first production
458: Aeschylus' Oresteia
456/5: death of Aeschylus
455: Euripides' first dramatic production
447-432: construction of the Parthenon
ca. 442: Sophocles' Antigone
441: Euripides' first victory
431: Euripides' Medea; beginning of the Peloponnesian War
ca. 429-427?: Sophocles' Oedipus the King
415: Euripides' Trojan Women; Athenian expedition against Sicily
ca. 413: Euripides' Ion
ca. 409: Euripides' Phoenician Women
ca. 406/5: death of Sophocles
405: Euripides Bacchae (posthumous)
404: Spartan victory in the Peloponnesian War
401: Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus (posthumous)
407/6: death of Euripides in Macedon

Euripides
484-406 BCE
ca. 330: official copies of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides

used the performance of myth on the tragic stage to explore issues specific to the democratic Athenian polis.
Erechtheum possibly rebuilt around the time of Euripides’ *Ion*. Houses Athene’s sacred serpent

Athene’s sacred olive

http://classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com/140/flashcards/270140/png/aerial_view_of_the_acropolis1350001469675.png
Acropolis North Slope Long Rocks

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/20100410_athina112.JPG
Autochthony
The Athenians claim to be autochthonous: that they have been the continuous inhabitants of the Attica land (Athens and the surrounding area) since time immemorial.

_Ion_ 589-90: “They say the famed earth-born Athenians are no alien/ immigrant race (ἐπείσακτον γένος = race brought in from outside).

In Hesiod’s creation story sexual reproduction is not the first kind of reproduction. Gaia, Earth, is capable:

• of reproducing parthenogenically = virgin birth

• of being impregnated without sexual intercourse.

The Athenian story is that Hephaestus tried to rape Athene, she resists him and in the struggle he ejaculates on her thigh. Athene wipes the semen away with wool, which she throws to the ground, thus impregnating the Gaia. When the baby is born Athene receives the baby and charges the daughters of an earlier King, half man half snake Kekrops with his care.
Erichthonius cup 440 BCE Berlin, Antikenmuseen

image source: https://catalyst.uw.edu/workspace/ktopper/28997/198194

Ion: Earth, then was my mother!
Xuthus: Children do not spring up there.
(Ion 543-45)
1. The children of Earth have a strain of primitive violence in their make up. The battle of the autochthonous Giants against the Olympian gods (Gigantomachy) is mentioned several times in Ion.

http://www.flickr.com/photos/hen-magonza/6166176088/
Gigantomachy Pergamum Altar 200-150 BCE.
ION: Your father’s ancestor sprang from the earth?
CREUSA: Yes, Erichthonius -- the glory is no help.
ION: Athene really took him from the earth?
CREUSA: Into her virgin arms, though not her son.
ION: And she gave him as we see in paintings--
CREUSA: To Kekrops daughters who were to keep him hidden
ION: I have been told they opened the cradle
CREUSA: And died for it, the rocks were stained with blood. *Ion* 267-74

*stichomythia = rapidly alternating half, single, or double sentence dialogue*
Cecrops

Aglauros (sparkling one)    Herse (Dew)    Pandrosos (All bedewed) (jump off the Acropolis)

Hephaestus    Gaia

Erichthonios

Erechtheus

daughters (sacrificed)    Creusa    Apollo

Ion
Contest of Athene and Poseidon for the Land of Attica.

Reconstruction of the Parthenon West Pediment at Nashville, Tennessee

http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_O1x0WUBONx0/TL33LZZNnfI/AAAAAAAAAGs/U713vXOwDew/s1600/Frieze+Exterior+Close-up.JPG

Jaques Carrey drawing 1674.

Piraeus Athene
Bronze
possibly C4th BCE
http://commons.wikimedia.org
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Attic Black Figure
Eye cup
ca 530 BC
image: www.theoi.com
The dwelling place of Pallas
Is the house of our masters
( Ion 235-36)
If Ion and Creusa can recognize their true relation, Ion will come into his birthright as heir to Erichthonius. But, so far, it has been the reverse: Erichthonius was raised up from the Earth and placed in the basket for protection and nurture; Creusa imprisons Ion in his basket and places him deep in the earth to die.

For Erichthonios the basket is a protection, for Ion, it is a coffin.

Similarly, Creusa may yet repeat the fate of the Kekropids /Aglaurids, or of her own sisters. When he becomes aware of her plot to poison him, Ion wants to throw her from the cliffs of Mt. Parnassus, he says:

“Take hold of her and let Parnassus’ top, when like a quoit she bounds from rock to rock, comb out /tear to shreds/ those perfect tresses”. 1266-68.
• the ageless, ever-fresh olive recalls Athene’s contest with Poseidon for the land of Attica, the foundation and naming of Athens.

• the protective golden snakes recall those set to guard Erichthonios, the origins of the Athenian people

• the gorgon’s head on Creusa’s weaving recalls the victory of the Olympians over monstrosity. In Ιον the Gorgon is transformed into a source of healing

I am childless no longer, no longer without an heir.
The hearth is restored to the house, the rulers return to the land
And Erechtheus is young once more.
Now the autochthonous house is delivered from night and looks up to the rays of the sun.
Erechtheus is restored to youth

Athene and Erichthonios
450 BCE

Image: http://www.britishmuseum.org/