

MDS2/3 TGW

Ancient Greece:
The Dionysia, Drama and Democracy

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The mysteries of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis

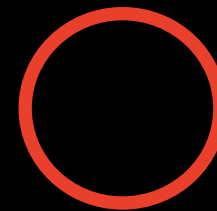
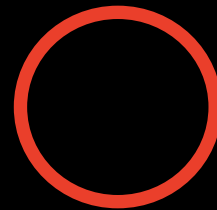
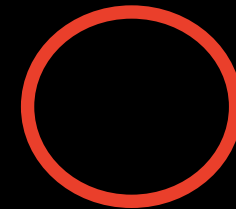
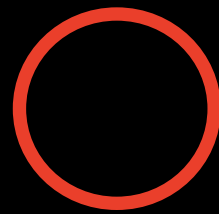
The “holy rites that are not to be transgressed nor pried into, nor divulged...” Those who did reveal the mysteries could be charged in court with impiety.

Fragments of a Roman copy set in a plaster cast of the original Greek marble relief, ca. 450–425 BCE

Procession with religious image.
Pietrafitta, Italy



Attica C5th. BCE



Thorikos

Image not available for
copyright reasons

Pronomos volute
krater
ca 400 BCE

[http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/
images/pottery/painters/
keypieces/tiverios/33-pl97-
medium.jpg](http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/images/pottery/painters/keypieces/tiverios/33-pl97-medium.jpg)

Chorus Column Krater ca. 500- 490 BCE

Image source: <http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/ClasDram/images/06/01choristersdancing.jpg>

Some dates in the history of Greek drama

534 – first official performance of tragedy at Athens (Thespis)

501 – reorganization of the festival; first official satyr-drama

498 – Aeschylus' first play

486 – first official performance of comedy

468 – Sophokles first play

455 – Euripides first play

ca. 440 – introduction of dramatic competitions at the Lenaia and a prize for actors at the Dionysia

427 – Aristophanes (comedy) first play

407 – death of Euripides

406 – death of Sophokles

ca. 330 – building of the stone theater at Athens and copies of plays by the great dramatists deposited in the state archives.

Choragic Monument of Lysicrates erected to commemorate a victory in 335/334 BCE

Thrasyillos monument
320/19 BCE
Roman columns

Program of the City Dionysia, ca. 430 BCE

Preliminaries:

8 Elaphebolion: Proagon

9 Elaphebolion: "Introduction" of Dionysos

Events:

10 Elaphebolion: Parade (pompe); sacrifice of a pig; libations; civic ceremony; tribal dithyrambic contests (men & boys)

11 Elaphebolion: Comic contest (5 poets, 1 play each)

12 Elaphebolion: Tragedian A (3 tragedies, 1 satyr-drama)

13 Elaphebolion: Tragedian B (3 tragedies, 1 satyr-drama)

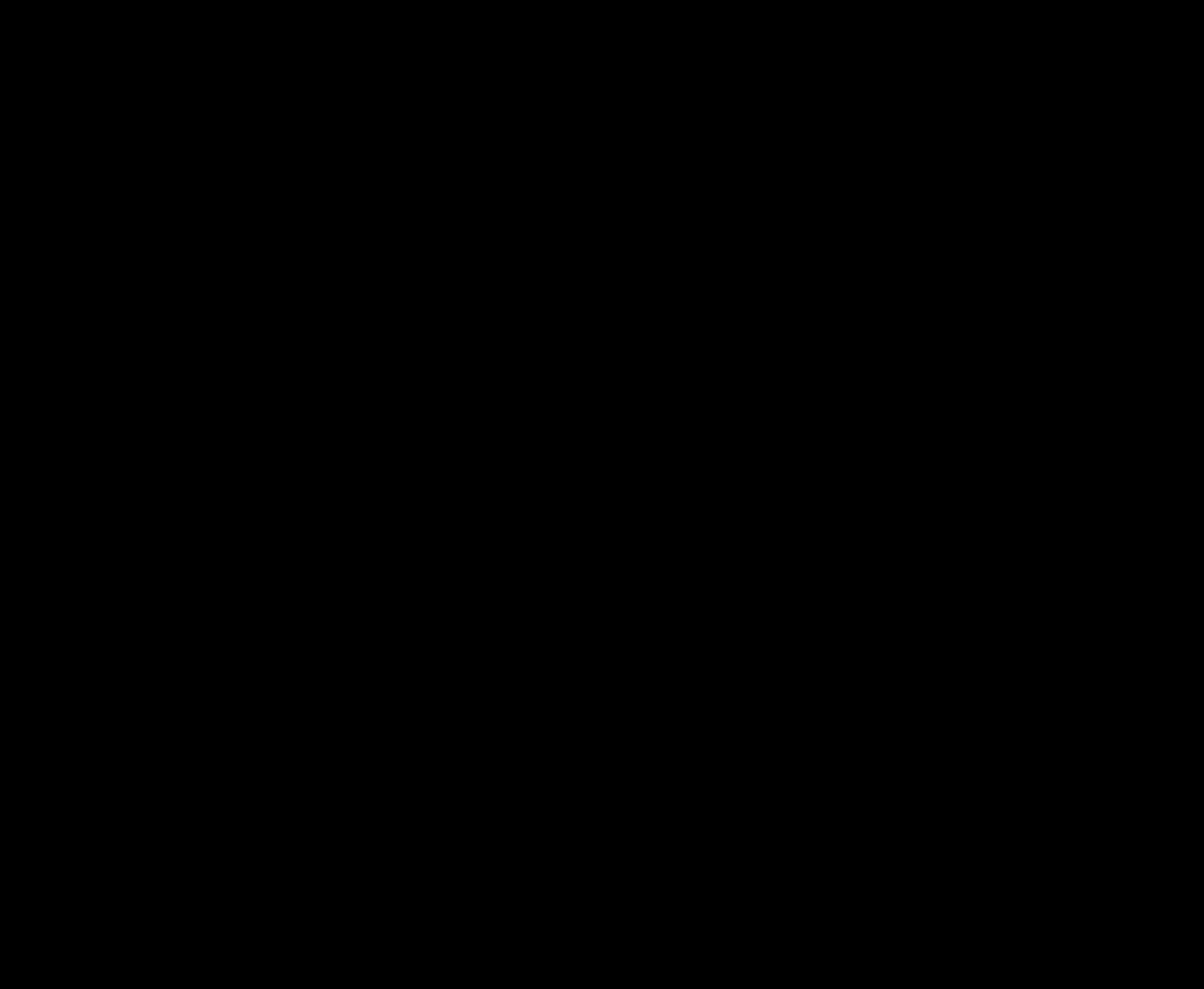
14 Elaphebolion: Tragedian C (3 tragedies, 1 satyr-drama)

Awarding of the prizes, parade of the victors

Acropolis and theatre of Dionysos

<http://www.acropolis-greek-parthenon.com/images/acropolis-map.gif>

Women with an idol of Dionysos ca. 420 BCE (stamnos)



Women with an idol of Dionysos ca. 480 BCE (Kylix)

Ceremonials which form the unique political context for the drama festival

- layout of the theatre analogous to the Assembly or the Pnyx, Assembly meetings sometimes held in the theatre. Seating in tribes.
- ten judges one from each of the ten tribes chosen (by lot?) just before the competition, of these ten votes five were selected by lot and the prizes awarded on the basis of these five votes.
- libations poured by 10 strategoi.
- After the transfer of the treasury from Delos, the tribute of the cities of the Athenian empire was brought into the theatre.
- at the same time they led in upon the stage the sons of those who had lost their lives in the war. Such was the proclamation...“These young men, whose fathers showed themselves brave men and died in war, have been supported by the state until they have come of age; and now dressed in full armour by their fellow citizens, they are sent out with the prayers of the city, to go each his way; and they are invited to seats of honour in the theatre.’ Aeschines:
- Before the tragedies a herald announced honours that had been conferred on citizens and foreigners and read out the names of slaves who had been freed.
- a special session of the *ekklesia* was convened within the theatre, to discuss the conduct of the festival for that year.

Polis issues and procedures in the plays:

Characters debate issues in a manner reminiscent of debates in the law courts and the assembly

- law court practice of interpreting character.
- basis of decision-making
- Homeric versus Hoplite heroism and warfare.
- young men at the key times of taking up a role as a man in society
- conflicting obligations of household oikos and polis
- familial roles
- concern with language; the distortions of language, language as deception
- dissolution and collapse of social order
- man reaching beyond the bounds and norms of social behaviour,
- the fragility of civilized values in the face of war and imperial conquest

social and psychological consequences of the disenfranchisement and subordination of women

Also exploration beyond the immediate concerns of the polis: sexuality, nature to culture, man's relationship to the gods, and the role of fate in determining the outcome of one's life

Transgressive force of the plays:

Both tragedy and comedy enact transgressive behaviours. Indeed, the tragic texts question, examine and often subvert the forms and language of the city's order.

However the plays do NOT seriously questioned the polis as the necessary basis of civilization.

Athens is not seriously challenged as the home of that civilization of the polis. Great individuals may suffer or die (Oedipus or Pentheus) but the larger collective lives on.