

**Lifelong Learning
Greek Drama Course**

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Timeline of Greek Drama

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7th Century BC

c. 625 Arionⁱ at Corinth produces named dithyrambic choruses.

6th Century BC

600-570 Cleisthenesⁱⁱ, tyrant of Sicyon, transfers "tragic choruses" to Dionysus

540-527 Pisistratus, tyrant of Athens, founds the festival of the Greater Dionysia

536-533 Thespisⁱⁱⁱ puts on tragedy at festival of the Greater Dionysia in Athens

525 Aeschylus born

511-508 Phrynichus' first victory in tragedy

c. 500 Pratinus of Phlius introduces the satyr play to Athens

5th Century BC

499-496 Aeschylus' first dramatic competition

c. 496 Sophocles born

490~79 Persian Wars

485 Euripides born

484 Aeschylus' first dramatic victory

472 Aeschylus' *Persians*

467 Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*

468 Aeschylus defeated by Sophocles in dramatic competition

463? Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*

458 Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*, *Eumenides*)

456 Aeschylus dies

c. 450 Aristophanes born

447 Parthenon begun in Athens

c. 445 Sophocles' *Ajax*

441 Sophocles' *Antigone*

438 Euripides' *Alcestis*

431-404 Peloponnesian War (Athens and allies vs. Sparta and allies)

- 431 Euripides' *Medea*
 c. 429 Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*
 428 Euripides' *Hippolytus*
 423 Aristophanes' *Clouds*
 415 Euripides' *Trojan Women*
 406 Euripides dies; Sophocles dies
 405 Euripides' *Bacchae*
 404 Athens loses Peloponnesian War to Sparta

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Stories about the poet Arion

- Periander was tyrant of Corinth. The Corinthians say (and the Lesbians agree) that the greatest wonder in his life was the voyage of Arion of Methymna to Taenarum on a dolphin. He was a kitharode second to none at that time and the first of men whom we know to have composed the dithyramb and named it and produced it in Corinth. (Herodotus I.23)
- Arion, of Methymna...is said also to have invented the tragic mode (*tragikoû tropou*) and first composed a stationary chorus and sung a dithyramb and named what the chorus sang and introduced satyrs speaking verses. (The Suda lexicon)
- Pindar says the dithyramb was discovered in Corinth. The inventor of the song Aristotle calls Arion. He first led the circular chorus. (Proculus, Chrest. xii)
- The first performance of tragedy was introduced by Arion of Methymna, as Solon said in his Elegies. Charon of Lampsacus says that drama was first produced at Athens by Thespis. (John the Deacon, Commentary on Hermogenes)

ⁱⁱ Stories about Cleisthenes, Sicyon, and Hero-drama

- I must not omit to explain that [the tyrant] Cleisthenes picked on Melanippus as the person to introduce into Sicyon, because he was a bitter enemy of Adrastus, having killed both Mecistes, his brother, and Tydeus his son-in-law. After settling him in his new shrine, he transferred to him the religious honors of sacrifice and festival which had previously been paid to Adrastus. The people of Sicyon had always regarded Adrastus with great reverence, because the country had once belonged to Polybus, his maternal grandfather, who died without an heir and bequeathed the kingdom to him. One of the most important of the tributes paid him was the tragic chorus, or ceremonial dance and song, which the Sicyonians celebrated in his honor; normally, the tragic chorus belongs to the worship of Dionysus; but in Sicyon it was not so -- it was performed in honor of Adrastus, treating his life-story and sufferings. Cleisthenes, however, changed this: he transferred the choruses to Dionysus, and the rest of the ceremonial to Melanippus. (Herodotus V.67)

ⁱⁱⁱ Stories about Thespis the Athenian playwright

- From when Thespis the poet first acted, who produced a play in the city and the prize was a goat... (Marmor Parium, under the year about 534 BC).
- This is Thespis, who first moulded tragic song, inventing new joys for his villagers, when Bacchus led the wine-smeared (?) chorus, for which a goat was the prize (?) and a basket of Attic figs was a prize too. The young change all this. Length of time will discover many new things. But mine is mine. (Dioscorides, Anth. Pal. VII. 410)
- The unknown poetry of the tragic Muse Thespis is said to have discovered and to have carried poems on wagons, which they sang and acted, their faces smeared with wine-lees. (Horace, *Ars Poetica* 275-277)

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- As of old tragedy formerly the chorus by itself performed the whole drama and later Thespis invented a single actor to give the chorus a rest and Aeschylus a second and Sophocles a third, thereby completing tragedy... (Diogenes Laertius III. 56)
 - Thespis: Of the city of Ikarios in Attica, the sixteenth tragic poet after the first tragic poet, Epigenes of Sicyon, but according to some second after Epigenes. Others say he was the first tragic poet. In his first tragedies he anointed his face with white lead, then he shaded his face with purslane in his performance, and after that introduced the use of masks, making them in linen alone. He produced in the 61st Olympiad (536/5-533/2 BC). Mention is made of the following plays: Games of Pelias or Phorbas, Priests, Youths, Pentheus. (The Suda lexicon).