

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
GREEK ART

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PART I : ARCHITECTURE

The Greek Temple

What is a Greek Temple? A Greek temple is the sheltering architectural building, located within a sanctuary or holy precinct, which evolved into the Greek community's place of worship. These pregnant sites can be found widely scattered throughout the Greek world, and densely placed at appropriate settings within the Greek city-state. (Appropriate? Temples were located in places traditionally associated with this or that deity, or, given a newly chosen site, in places suitable for a new house of the god—on a mountain top close to the home of Zeus, on a promontory over the sea, fitting for a home to Poseidon, or in the forest, in a locale natural for a tribute to the huntswomen goddess, Artemis.) Needless to say—and we can trace major changes through all cultures' architectural histories—there were many *stages* of temple construction in Greece. In the earliest stages, probably in evidence from 600 B.C. on, temples began to be constructed in stone, replacing wood and mud brick structures preceding them on the same site. (By the nature of the case we cannot verify the pre existence of these wooden predecessors, but there are good reasons to suppose that throw away materials like wood, stone, or clay were the initial god houses for the Greeks, and that as they consolidate the character of their religious beliefs, the Greeks accordingly consolidated the form of their temples. There are, though, competing theories of the source of the ancient Greek pre-temple temple. One theory is that Mycenaean architecture, which flourished in the Archaic Age of Greece, and which dominates in the great fortresses of Mycenae and Tiryns, in the Peloponnesus, provided the initial impulse for the Hellenic temple architecture. A second view is that Egyptian art was the inspiration for at least many elements of the Greek temple, like the Ionic order columns, which clearly work off of Egyptian floral motifs.)

How did Greek temples change over time? The earliest temples were in a style called Doric—from a traditional name for the earliest settlers in Hellas—constructed originally at Corinth, and marked by strong somewhat squat columns. The Corinthian style of temple architecture came into presence in the fourth century B.C., and was called Ionic when the Ancients began to analyze their own art history. Although the Corinthian column, and many of the details of capital, architrave, and frieze, differed more or less sharply from the Doric model, the overall structure, of all early Greek temples, was roughly the same. There were, however, changes through time, as well as variations within each style. It is important, here, to look at photos which bring out those changes. Take, for example, the Temple of Hera at Paestum (550 B.C.), the Parthenon in Athens (447-432 B.C.) and the Temple of Apollo at Didyma in today's Turkey, begun in 313 B.C. Both of the first two temples were Doric in style, the third features massive Ionic columns.

Who made the Greek temples? By the classical period, the fifth century B.C., major temples such as those on the Acropolis at Athens, were created by noted architects. Ictinus, contemporary with the renowned *archon* Pericles, was noted for his head architect role in the creation of the Parthenon, the central structural brilliance on the Acropolis, or the Temple of Bassae in the Peloponnesus, and for an important temple at Eleusis. Phidias served as the master administrator, and artistic director of the art work on the Parthenon, while Kallikrates, a distinguished architect and 'city planner' in Athens, served as a third leading force in the making of the Acropolis-temples, most prominent of Athenian projects.

The Acropolis and Parthenon. It is worth considering the setting of the Acropolis-Parthenon project, for it is an example of the most ambitious effort to be found among the city-states of Greece. By the time construction began, on an Acropolis already housing various sacred structures, Pericles had proven his superior leadership, building, with the island states of the Aegean, a military alliance which gave Athens pre eminence in Greece. Pericles put himself in overall charge of construction of the Parthenon, the cost of which, for the first year's work, was 5000 talents (some 3 billion dollars at today's rate). The project took fifteen years, was largely financed by money from the treasury of the Delian League—Athens's naval alliance—and involved the quarrying of 20 thousand tons of marble from Mount Pentele. Who made the Greek temple? Pericles? Ictinus? Or Iannis who quarried the marble and dragged it down from the mountain?

What went on in the Greek temple? The broad answer is that the temple was largely a storage area, and not a place for the rituals of worship. (Rituals—prayers and sacrifices—would normally take place outside the temple, in the sanctuary precinct.) The temple itself, of course, was an *overwhelming* storage area. The structure would be oriented toward the East, so that the rays of the morning sun came in through the giant front door of the structure, incrementally lighting more of the *cella* (or *naos*), the nave of the building, until the cult statue itself, which was at the far western end of the nave, was touched or even covered with light. In addition to the cult statue, which loomed over the hall around it, there were typically an altar, tables for votive offerings, and personal treasures dedicated to the deity enshrined there. ...It would be worth concluding our effort, to describe the awe evoked in the temple, by including a passage from the Greek traveler Pausanias. He is describing the cult statue of Athena in the Parthenon.

The statue itself is made of ivory, silver and gold. On the middle of her helmet is placed a likeness of the Sphinx ... and on either side of the helmet are griffins in relief. ... The statue of Athena is upright, with a tunic reaching to the feet, and on her breast the head of Medusa is worked in ivory. She holds a statue of Victory about four cubits high, and in the other hand a spear; at her feet lies a shield and near the spear is a serpent. This serpent would be Erichthonius. On the pedestal is the birth of Pandora in relief.

Readings

Mikalson, Jon, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Chichester, 2010), pp. 1-51.

Fullerton, Mark, *Greek Art* (Cambridge, 2000). (This text is the basic assignment for Weeks 2,3,4, and is to be read over that period of time, for it will shed light on aspects of Greek religion and art that are launch pads for our course.)

Discussion questions:

Do you see a peculiarly fitting relation between the form of the Greek temple and the nature of the religion practiced in it? Gothic cathedrals, in mediaeval Christian tradition, might seem to be extending spires toward heaven. Does the Greek temple in any comparable way suggest the meanings internal to its form?

Does there seem to be any overall 'administration' of Olympian religious practice? This question may sound absurd! Is there a Greek Vatican? A Supreme religious court? The answer is basically no, but then what assured uniformity of practice, from one temple site to another? Was there a completely autonomous priesthood in each *temenos*?

What function did light play in disclosing the cult statue in the Greek temple? Was the semi-darkness, which much of the time enclosed the cult statue, a protective device to enhance awe? Why did most of the actual worshipping take place outside the temple itself?

SCULPTURE

Sculpture and the Greek temple. Ancient Greek sculpture belongs to the same creative impulse as the ancient Greek temple. However Greek sculpture was only in part a co-product of Greek temple architecture. The period during which Greek sculpture was created on actual works of Greek architecture would be the 5th century classical period, and would involve sculptural works on metopes and pediments as well as on the extensive friezes we find on temples dating from the mid sixth to the mid fifth century. Of those ornamental sculptural works, whose *raison d'être* is to complement the temple, we find a blindingly skillful fusion with the temple, so radiant that in instances like the sculptures of the Parthenon, or of the Nike Temple on the Acropolis, the sculptural work is a seamless whole with the temple itself. (The Parthenon frieze, subsequently called The Elgin Marbles, for Lord Elgin dismantled the frieze from its pediment in the 18th century and transferred it to the British Museum, would be a central example of the brilliance of the welding of sculpture and architecture.)

Non-temple sculpture. A great deal of ancient Greek sculpture was created independent of temple architecture, and for those examples—early bronzes, archaic *kouroi* (youthful male) and *kourai* (maidens), free standing life sized sculptures often found in temple precincts, fourth and third century 'genre' sculptures like the Hermes of Praxiteles (320 B.C.) or The Dying Trumpeter (230 B.C.)—for those examples any aesthetic alliance with Greek temple architecture would be hard to formulate.

What are the landmarks of this sculpture? To attempt such a formulation, to reach toward an aesthetic which would be in common both to Greek temple creations and to further domains of Greek art—like ceramics or painting—would be to start this Greek culture syllabus on the right course, looking for the characteristic traits of ancient Greek culture; we will look for that unity as we advance and when we conclude. If we look at the developmental curve of free standing Greek sculpture, that is sculpture not part of temples, we see that it changes dramatically in character from the earliest remaining examples to the work of Hellenistic sculptures.

Greek naturalism. Look, for starters, at the Man and Centaur sculpture in bronze from 750 B.C. This example, of work in the geometric style, is a starkly abstract reminder of the kind of Near Eastern stylized art which was to generate many visual themes in subsequent Greek sculpture. This style, however, marks off sharply from the life-sized sculptures in stone which begin to spring from Hellenic workshops after 650 B.C. The creations we call *kouroi* (youthful nude standing males) and *kourai* (clothed standing maidens) pick up the stiff frontality of contemporary Egyptian culture, and speak for the aesthetic values of an age truly called Archaic, and soon, by the early decades of the fifth century, to transition off into free standing sculptural works of an entirely more 'naturalistic' cast, like the dying warrior (480 B.C.) or the Poseidon (460 B.C.) found in the sea off the Temple of Poseidon at Sunium.

Trends in sculpture history. Among these rapidly transitioning phases of Greek sculpture one struggles to see a pattern; and yet the 'sense of the cultural movement,' which is passing through social as well as art life, is that of increasing 'naturalism' in literature, the visual arts, even in philosophy, where concrete efforts are being made to identify the 'material composition' of reality. (To put 'naturalism' at the apex of this movement is doubtless a byproduct of our own cultural comfort with realism in the arts, a byproduct challenged in our own times by such art movements as Modernism in painting—Braques, Picasso—which make the abstract and often starkly non-representational—remember the bronze Man and Centaur from 750 B.C.—seem to be the center of mankind's visual universe.) If we go beyond the consummate works of the mid-fifth century sculptors we may jump sharply ahead into such work as the coy statue of Aphrodite of Cnidus (360 B.C.) which is created in the era of Plato, Xenophon, and Menander. In that statue we have gone into a world profoundly different from that of the *kourai* of the Archaic Age, some of which were still under creative production not much more than a century earlier, and examples of which abound at Greek sanctuaries throughout the Mediterranean world in the fifth century B.C. 'Finally,' if we want to skim examples of this trend toward 'naturalism' in sculpture, and then beyond it, into the

attitudinal coyness of our Aphrodite, we will find ourselves looking at sculptural work like The Dying Trumpeter (230 B.C.) which fully represents the Hellenistic comfort with the depiction of heartfelt emotions, often enough tinged, as here, with the hue of sentimentality.

Is a single Hellenic aesthetic emerging, as we peruse works of ancient Greek temple construction and sculpture? Are we finding a Greek signature on the creations? This question is rendered difficult by the obvious fact that the Hellenic artistic sensibility is in constant change, from era to era. In temple architecture we careen from the massive Doric columns of Paestum in sixth century Italy, to the perfect Doric harmonies of the Parthenon, to the Temple of Apollo at Didyma, in the 4th century B.C. The correlative history of Greek sculpture, from an Archaic *kouros* to the Dying Trumpeter, will track a sequence of style and worldview changes which are easily as dramatic as any in the realm of architectural history. Would we like to say that a celebration of light, harmony, the deeply human, pervades the high point works of the fifth century, both in temple architecture and in sculpture? Such an assertion would correspond to the overall evaluation, in Western culture, of the progress, peak, and decline of the visual arts in the Hellenic world. Anything like such an assertion would rely on tried and true belief that Humanism surges to the fore with the mid-fifth century genius, and that this is the moment to which our attentions turn as to the absolute center of the Hellenic achievement. Clearly this would be a culturally loaded way of seeing Greek visual art.

Readings

Fullerton, Mark, *Greek Art* (Cambridge, 2000). (This text is the basic assignment for Weeks 2,3,4, and is to be read over that period of time, for it will shed light on aspects of Greek religion and art that are launch pads for our course.)

Discussion questions:

From what you gather about Greek sculpture, do you feel its development moves in tandem with the development of Greek history in the broad sense? Or is this just metaphorical talk? Is historical development too broad a theme to be correlated with something as specific as the development of an art tradition?

Why are the classical Greek temples structures so profusely ornamented with sculpture? Do architectural structure and sculptural decoration fit together well? Do they—as, say, on the Parthenon frieze or the Nike Temple on the Acropolis—reinforce one another? How does this relationship work itself out in contemporary world religious edifices?

Are you comfortable with our viewing sculpture (and next week pottery) as expressions of 'culture' rather than only as expressions of 'art history?' Does art seem to you to spring from the same foundations as daily life, religious worship, and military action?

POTTERY

Developments in pottery history. The fact is that the curve of development of Greek pottery, and of the painting decorating it, closely follows the curve of development in the other arts. We go back, as we did with the development of the temple, or of sculpture, to breakthroughs, in the Archaic Age of the 8th century, into what we must recognize as a new humane, naturalistic, and 'realized' form of expression. (There we are again, repeating a pretty typical Humanist account of the movement of Ancient Greek culture, a movement taught us, in the early modern eras of our own culture, to view as consummated in the great works of the fifth century B.C.)

Pottery trends. We have mentioned a 'geometric' bronze sculpture, of a man and a centaur about to fight, dating from the mid 8th century. This work belongs to an art period of which we might want to say, that it prioritizes linear, often stark juxtapositions of forms, or, in the case of the pottery beginning to proliferate at the time, functional and often linear vessels designed each for a particular purpose-- *amphoras*, for the burial of human ashes, and later for wine and oil transport; *aryballoi* for perfume jars;

kraters, for wine or water storage. The juxtaposition of figures on the *aryballos* of the Ajax painter, from the early 7th century B.C., will convey the geometrical notion. The *aryballos* in question is only 2 7/8 inches in height—which will give an idea of the finesse of the work, which depicts a stylized band of animals around the neck of the tiny vase, and on the side full height warrior portraits. For a tall counterpoint, to this miniature perfume jar, contrast the Dipylon amphora (750 B.C.) from the Dipylon Cemetery in Athens. This five foot tall amphora served as a carrier for funeral ashes, and in its height, and intricacy of geometrical designs and stylized figures, would have served as a forceful indicator of the wealth and status of the cremated. The archaic mode of this work is qualified in a signal innovation: the potter attaches his name to the work, in contrast to the anonymity of earlier workers in geometric pottery.

Pottery and painting. Jump from where we are to Exekias, a potter-painter of the early sixth century, a renowned artist known for his numerous reworkings of themes from Homer's epics, *The Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Look at his black figure amphora of Ajax and Achilles playing checkers, at a rare moment of downtime in the course of the Trojan War. (The black figure designs, with red backgrounds, gave the painter room for sharp profiles, while the red-figure paintings, which were a few decades later to win the pottery vogue in Athens, allowed for more illumination and volatility in the depiction of the figures.) The figures are stylized but full of life, edgy, intent; no longer the formal and relatively expressionless presences we see on geometrical pottery.

As we see in the case of Exekias, painting and pottery developed hand in hand, and that will continue to be so until the 4th century B.C., when wall painting sprang out from Hellenistic cultures, and provided a freeing up of new imaginative figural powers, no longer tied to the pottery vehicle. Perhaps the perfect mating, of pottery and painting, occurs during the 5th century, in which (480 B.C.) we come on exquisite, and fully felt, scenes like the Douris painter's Eos and Memnon, a small kylix, 10 inches in diameter, on the interior of which is painted a scene of the goddess of Dawn, Eos, lifting her dead and defeated son, whom Achilles has killed and stripped. The emotion of the bereaved mother, and the total extinction of her lifeless son, who lies in her arms, deploys a dignified pathos which may serve as a brief symbol for us, here, for the special purity of achievement of painting and pottery in the 5th century.

Wall painting and the aryballos. From this point on we could follow the development of Greek painting on a course apart from pottery—a course leading toward dramatic Hellenistic wall paintings of the 4th century B.C. Or we can leave our tale at the point where painting was still an appendage of pottery, where it still finds itself in, for example, the white ground lekythos work of the so-called Reed painter, at the end of the fifth century B.C. We need to concentrate on the figure of the forlorn young man, sitting between two other figures, revealing in a few lines how profoundly he feels the death incinerated in the jar he decorates. We could hardly be more impressed, with the velocity of Greek cultural change, than by thinking from this point back three centuries to the modes of archaic potter artists like the maker of the perfume jar *aryballos* at the beginning of the 7th century.

Readings

Fullerton, Mark, *Greek Art* (Cambridge, 2000). (This text is the basic assignment for Weeks 2,3,4, and is to be read over that period of time, for it will shed light on aspects of Greek religion and art that are launch pads for our course.)

Mikalson, Jon, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Chichester, 2010), pp. 206-226

Beazly and Ashmole, *Greek Sculpture and Painting* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 1-53.

Discussion questions:

Is there such a thing as a minor art, or do all arts equally represent the culture they spring from? Does Greek pottery seem to you to express important aspects of Greek culture? Do the changes in Greek pottery, from age to age, reflect parallel changes in Greek society itself?

Does Greek pottery seem to you primarily functional—serving a purpose—or primarily aesthetic? Or are the two aspects of ceramic art inter related, so that what is beautiful is at the same time useful?

Does painting seem to be derivative from ceramic ware in Greece? Of course the Greeks and the Mycenaeans before them surrounded themselves with painting—on frescoes and walls—but was ancient painting, in the sense of design and portraiture, a derivative of ceramic art?

PERFORMING ARTS

Part I : Dance
Part II : Music
Part III : Theatre

PART I : DANCE

Overview Ancient Greek music and dance, each one interwoven with the other, were the very fabric of Hellenic culture. From Homer on, dancing plays a central role in group expression and emotion. Children were raised on dance steps and dancing games; rustic rituals, designed to foster a good harvest, were constructed around communal dances, often around dances specific to a particular region of Greece, and pre-mating dances, both rural and civilized, were standard parts of growing up Hellenic. Very little of the moral suspicion of dancing, which still clings to pockets of (say) the modern Protestant suspicion of sensuality, clings to the ancient Greek dance traditions, which were as natural to cultural life as they could be.

Theater and choral dance. At no point, in its expressiveness through dance, does ancient Greek culture reach such stages of complexity and world-significance, as in the choral dances which accompanied Greek tragedy, and which remained a defining feature of that tragedy through to the end of the fifth century B.C.E., by which time the traditional religious setting of the chorus had been diluted. Arguably, the origins of Greek drama itself lay in rural choral actions, which were part of rural life and harvest thinking, and which (speculation) derives from the oldest Hellenic traditions which speak out to us from the origins of writing, in the seventh century B.C.E. Organized choral dancing, to be sure, was some kind of dramatic nucleus out of which, by the processes of adding first a single character and then, in Aeschylus, a second character, generated the dramatic conditions for those first 'plays' left to us, *The Suppliant Maidens* or *The Persians*, of Aeschylus. What we see, already in those sophisticated works, is a prominent choral dance, in which the traditional awe, fear, hope, uncertainty of the 'commoner,' is interwoven with action-driving conflict among two protagonists.

Dance and the fabric of society The dance alluded to above, as the core of the texture of ancient Greek tragedy, was as said above, the very fabric of Hellenic society. For Plato, for example, dance is one of the necessities for the ideal republic, for the dance builds and reinforces 'the acquisition of noble, harmonious, and graceful attitudes.' Socrates promoted practice in dance as part of a proper philosophical education. Lycurgus, the legendary demagogue of Sparta, recommended dancing as the best kind of military training—the notion of dancing including, here, everything from naked male dancing (the *Hormos* dance) to dancing in full military gear, loaded and ready for battle. (Rhythm, order, discipline: all these values were deeply imbibed and inculcated throughout the Classical Age of Greece. Needless to say the inculcation of these attitudes began in the home, where girls and boys, separately, were habituated to find graceful rhythmic movement at the core of good working habits, good thinking, and pleasure.

Celebratory public dancesupport Dance as social event and act is implicit in the Hellenic chorus spirit. It was the highest honor, for an adult fifth century Athenian, to be tasked with outfitting and training the choruses who were up for presentation in the annual dramatic competitions in Athens. (Patrons of the arts, in whatever culture, find their rewards in the bosom of their own society.) Accordingly, men of distinction throughout classic Greece—Antiochus and Epaminondas, the reviver of the city of Thebes in the fourth century B.C.E.—were chosen for such high civic honors as chorus-outfitting, as well as for their general civic prominence. Patriotic Athenians like the dramatist Sophocles 'danced around the trophies of

the battle of Salamis.' Aeschylus and Aristophanes are said to have danced at performances of their own plays, and however we take these alleged fragments, of which Ancient chronography is as replete as gossip, we have no reason to question the general drift of the point. In a culture in which Socrates—this one seems to be true—danced with the dinner guests, at a party at his house, we have to accept the depth with which reason and joy could mate in fifth century B.C.E. Athens.

The dark side of the dance: Nietzsche and Dionysus The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900 C.E.) analyzes the ancient Greek bifurcation (Apollonian and Dionysian) which he sees as marking Hellenic tendencies toward control and form on the one hand, and ecstasy on the other. The greatness of Greek tragedy, for Nietzsche, results from a pairing of the two essential forces—form and ecstasy—but the balance of the Greek pairing is fragile, and when the ecstatic breaks its bonds, it can release, into dangerous orgiastic levels of dancing and fervor, the unbounded passion of the Greek spirit. The balance breaking in question, which is a letting free of the dance spirit, can lead to social as well as artistic disharmony, and in fact one of the deepest analyses of this threat, to settled Greek society, is the *Bacchae* (405 B.C.E.) of Euripides, a great play about the overwhelming of a Greek community by an invasion of it from the god Dionysus. Precisely that invasion frees, from the women of the community, their passionate desire for the orgiastic, and more widely the dark sense of human dance, at the point where it threatens male hegemony and the order in things. Euripides has gone profoundly to the greatness of dance, but also to the explosive power of dance which can tear apart even while creating.

Reading

Adshead-Lansdale.,J., ed. *Dance History: An Introduction*, London, 1994.

Dils, A., *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, Wesleyan, 2001.

Discussion questions

What is the basis of the Protestant Christian view that dancing is dangerous? Is there anything in that view? What would Euripides say about it?

What, to the ancient Greeks, was the moral-educational value of dance? Can we still use that value, in our own contemporary education?

How do children 'learn how to dance,' in our culture? Is that learning instinctual or does it need to be trained in?

PART II : MUSIC

Overview For the ancient Greeks, music was a gift of the Muses, as the term *mousike*, 'music,' suggests. According to the Greek poet, Hesiod, the muses themselves were the offspring of the supreme God Zeus, and Mnemosyne, or Memory, 'the mother of the gods.' The muses ([Calliope \(epic poetry\)](#), [Clio](#) (history), [Euterpe](#) (flutes and lyric poetry), [Thalia](#) (comedy and pastoral poetry), [Melpomene](#) (tragedy), [Terpsichore](#) (dance), [Erato](#) (love poetry), [Polyhymnia](#) (sacred poetry), [Urania](#) (astronomy) were thus offspring of deity, and in a certain sense might be understood as divine wisdom, Zeus', reflected on—that is put through the sieve of--memory. *Mousike*, whose absence you note in the above list, is in use as a general term, to cover the pervasion of the Muses in human culture. And such a pervasion was precisely the dominant feature of music, for the ancient Greeks. There was no dimension of human experience that was not intimately pervaded by music.

Plato and music In a later stage of a culture which by his time (428-348 B.C.E.) had arguably passed through its late, defining, and most creative stages, Plato describes in the *Republic* the traits he would value in an ideal state. We see in Book Three that he was (like theoretically minded fellow Greeks of the time) very sensitive to the modes or tones of different formulaic styles of music. (In music historical terms, the music making of the ancient Greeks was 'pre-harmony,' that is preceded the stage in western musical development when voices or instruments found unique realization in intersecting,

weaving together developmental themes; when, to put it positively, unique and unblended modes of music represented and elicited consistent and predictable modes of behavior. Your ethos, or moral sense, was expressed and shaped by the kinds of musical tonality you employed. This could be another way of saying that for the like-minded contemporary of Plato musical experience was directly ethical, expressing and shaping ethical behaviors. As Plato himself put it: 'when fundamental modes of music change, the fundamental mores of the state change with them.' Plato brought that historical observation into his scrutiny of the reasons for the decline of Athens after the Peloponnesian War (404 B.C.E.), a period when instrumental music was overvalued, and the ethos of the unaccompanied human voice fell into desuetude.

Greek mythical thinking and the nature of music For Plato, music was an expression of the soul, and good music was the expression of a good man. Greek myth is without exception open to such an awed view of the transcendent nature of music. A mythological account of the building of Thebes illustrates this kind of thinking: Amphion is said to have been taught music by Hermes, then to have used a golden lyre to move the stones of Thebes into place, solely by his music; his music had the power of magic. Music, virtue, and power belonged together, as Plato assumed. Hermes proves the power of music by using his newly-invented tortoise-shell lyre in order to win his way back into the favor of Apollo, whom he has impudently insulted. Even the god of music cannot resist the eloquence of well tuned strings.

The instruments for making and capturing *mousike* Music as spirit was clearly at the heart of the Greek cultural aesthetic, but what about the instruments that could serve as vehicles for music? By the fifth-century the Greek instrumentation repertoire was full: strings (*lyre, kithara, barbitos*); winds (*aulos, Pan pipes, the hydraulis*); and percussion (*tympanum*). Occasions for working with *mousike*, by using these instruments, were as rich and multiple as life in the Greek polis. Musics specific to this or that dynamic sport were finely exercised at the Games—Pythian or Olympic—at which the Greeks most visibly fine tuned the relations of body to spirit. Music, as we know from profuse vase painting evidence, was omnipresent at social entertainments, dance festivals, religious ceremonies and funerals—at each of which kinds of event modes and tonalities were employed that exactly fitted the need of the occasion. We are close to thinking that music associated with the dithyramb in praise of Dionysus lay at the root of the creation of Greek tragedy.

The mystique of music; Pythagoras Of great importance to the Greek view of music, and especially to the Platonic view of the universe, was the musical speculation of the much discussed but little understood Pythagoras (570-495 B.C.E.) This philosopher, mathematician, and cosmic musicologist, who is known to have exercised powerful influence on Plato's metaphysics and theory of mathematics, was the first westerner to identify the fundamental tonal ratio, 3:2, which pervades sequences of musical notation and, at the farthest extension of its unfolding, provides a bridge for understanding the connection between music and 'the structure of the universe.' A bridge joining ethics, mathematics, and the essential characteristics of music was among the thought-structures Pythagoras helped Plato to develop from the perspective of his own philosophy.

Reading

Lord, Albert, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, 1960.

Michaelides, S., *The Music of Ancient Greece: An Encyclopedia*, London, 1978.

Discussion questions

How much indication of musical notation remains to us from Greek music? Did the bards who sang the Homeric epics have any 'notes' to guide them?

Were particular musicians—performers or composers—of especially high regard in the ancient Greek musical tradition?

Were singing and instrumental performance joined in ancient Greek music? Was there anything like 'popular music,' on the Greek musical scene?

PART III : THEATRE

Overview It is convenient to date the institution of the ancient Greek theater to around 700 B.C.E., which would mean that the first tragedians were figuring out the essentials of their craft at the time when writing was achieving popular usage in Athens, the Homeric epics were being enshrined in polis-wide performances, and the Athenian sense of self-awareness, as a distinctive community, was making itself articulate through such early civic geniuses as Solon (638-558 B.C.E.) (Convenient it is, yes, to sketch out this kind of context for the origins of Greek theater, yet furtive references, throughout Greek literature, hint at archaic rustic festivals which would long have predated 700 B.C.E., and reverted into a period in the second millennium B.C.E., when rural sacrifice and propitiation of the gods formed a basis for the first 'tragedy,' or 'goat-song,' as the word *tragedy* has it.) Given this context, the earliest Greek theater and tragedies, in the seventh century B.C.E., were the initial expressions of a world culture on its threshold.

The developmental stages of the Greek theater *Theatron* means the 'place from which you see,' and we must envisage, at the physical origin of Greek tragedy itself, a doubtless archaic familiarity with environmental factors that supported the idea of stage, audience location, and stage, on which action could be watched from a distance; in short, for *theater* one needed the appropriately canted hill slope, a perspicuous view from it down onto a stage, and facilities of some kind—say carved out stone benches; the first in 499 B.C.E.—where the audience could sit and ideally relax. The Greek landscape, hilly and rocky, has always been generous with such visual layouts, as nothing could better illustrate than the position of the Theater of Dionysus, itself, on the slopes of the Acropolis, where in 518 B.C.E. the Festival of Dionysus was instituted. There the first recorded actor appears for us—Thespis, in 532 B.C.E.; noted as the 18th in sequence among the first actors of the Greek stage-- and there, in 534 B.C.E., occurred the first public staged readings of the Homeric epics. Such a dense digest of the events occurring around the Festival of the Theater of Dionysus, in Athens, can only start to suggest what must have been the thrilling discovery of the larger social-expressive achievement being brought to birth there. One might say that the discovery of how to manage nature for art's sake was the first and stunning stage of this achievement.

How to make a theater out of a theatron In step with the physical/structural developments, which were to create a *theatron*, went not only the landmark new actor/action stages above mentioned, but the physical paraphernalia of the actor himself. By the tradition of early Greek culture, the events to be enacted, on the Greek stage, were 'historical fictions,' traditional tales taken from parts of Homer's work, from the epic cycle of Homer's era, now mostly vanished, or from inherited Dorian culture tales, that survived from the mix of mythology which the Hellenes brought with them from the north, in the second millennium B.C.E. For the performance of such materials to become a reality, before the large crowds of Athenians who flocked to the dramatic festivals—audiences of 14,000 have been surmised for the Theater of Dionysos in Athens—many fine-tunings of the actor condition had been necessary.

Who acted in the Greek theater? Those who enacted Greek tragedy, comedy, and satyr play—the interlude type play that accompanied every dramatic trilogy—were all male, all clothed in quite stylized robes, themselves works of master art in the Athenian polis, and all more or less closely symbolized the character portrayed—the old farmer of comedy, the returned warrior of tragedy, on down the line; or, in the instance of the chorus, the 'puzzled citizens of Thebes,' or 'the frightened maidens in flight.' (In other words the actors played stock roles, although they had abundant room, thanks to the brilliance of the language leading them, to tweak the expected.) Great actors there were, in the modern sense, but the dominant tone of enacted Greek tragedy was stylization.

The chorus. Arguably, the most brilliant innovation of the Greek tragedy was the use of the chorus, and its interactions with the two or three major characters of the drama. Of course the chorus, we think, was the earliest growth point of tragedy, the rural 'nub' out of which the whole performance action of the theater took place; but at the same time the chorus was the sensitive organ through which the dramatist was able to fine tune his presentation. Aeschylus counterpoints the return of Agamemnon from war with the awed and fearful citizens of Argos, a collective voice against which the dreadful central action of the

play unrolls. Sophocles counterpoints the unfolding horror, of the house of Thebes, against the sequence of revelatory events playing out in the consciousness of Oedipus. Euripides works through his chorus to elaborate on the very terror-fraught wonders of his patron god, Dionysus, while the audience has to tremble at such dangerous praise. The chorus, in other words, is a subtle tool for modulating and interpreting the intense action at the center of the play.

How the Hellenic synthesis of historical development and artistic genius occurred The right actors, the right dramatists, the right cultural milieu, the right totally sharpened narrative sense, deployed throughout a homogeneous but argumentative social community: as our temporal distance from the ancient Greeks increases, our fascination with their achievement increases. We hunt in vain for artistic syntheses of the ancient Hellenic variety, but nowhere else do we find a comparable blend of historical-cultural readiedness with writers so deeply communal, in their thinking, that they are able to find their unique voices.

Reading

Freund, Philip, *The Birth of Theater*, London, 2003

Ley, Graham, *Acting Greek Tragedy*, Essex, 2015.

Discussion questions

In Roman theater actors were considered socially unacceptable, even disreputable. Were the greatest actors of ancient Greek drama viewed disparagingly?

Who were the sugar daddies who supported the preparations of actors and choruses for the Festivals of Dionysus? Have we any detailed information about these individuals?

How were male actors costumed and polished in order to appear as convincing female actors?