

Greek Drama

- Embodied poetry
- Performance of myth (tragedy)
- Ritual context
 - Not ritual drama
 - Drama in the context of a greater ritual
 - Ritual actions in the drama
- Social and Political Context
 - Forensic qualities = speechiness

Athenian Dramatic Festivals

- The audience: 10-14,000 people, mostly Athenian male citizens, sometimes foreign dignitaries
- Poets “applied” for a chorus 6 months before.
- Competition during religious festivals for the god Dionysus
 - City Dionysia (April/March) open to foreign visitors
 - Lenaia (January) more “closed” to outsiders



Performances of:

Tragedies (oldest form) (9 plays by 3 tragic poets)

Satyr plays (3 plays by the 3 tragic poets)

Comedies (1 each by 3 to 5 comic poets)

Dithyrambs (10 choruses of men, 10 of boys)

Audience saw 4 or 5 plays a day, for three or four days.

Tragic mornings, comic afternoons.

Other official business was done as well.

Evolution of Genres

- dithyramb (hymn in honor of Dionysus)
- tragedy (diverged from Dionysian themes)
 - Thespis, 534 BC
- satyr play (reinserted Dionysian themes)
 - included 502-501 BC
- Comedy \leftarrow from the *komos* (revelry) ca. 486 BC

Origins of Phallic Procession

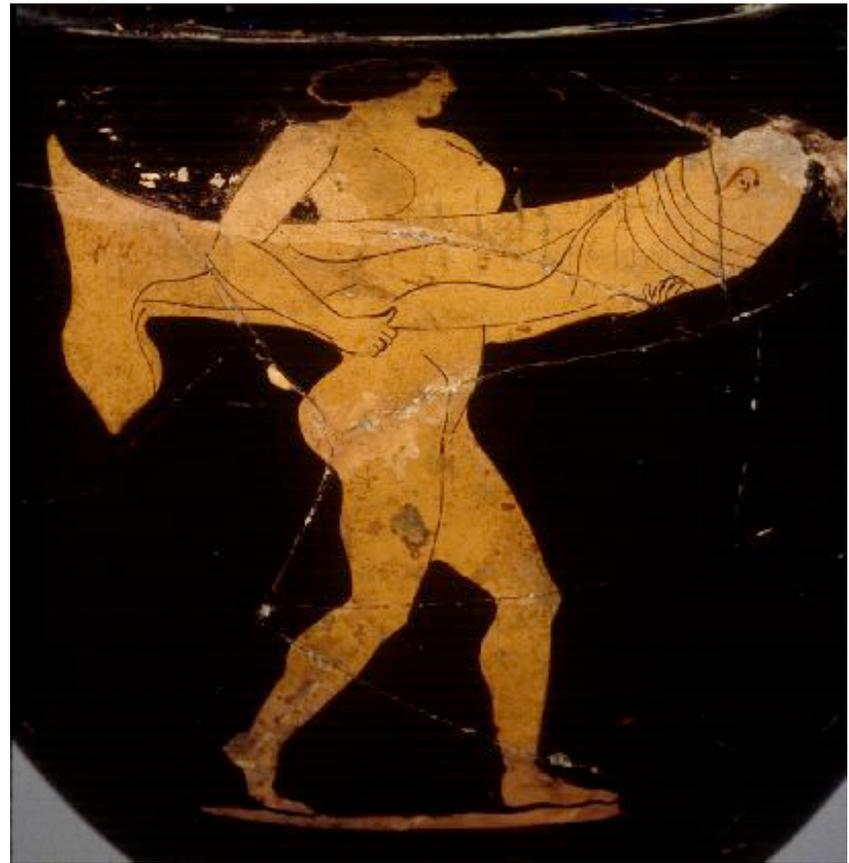
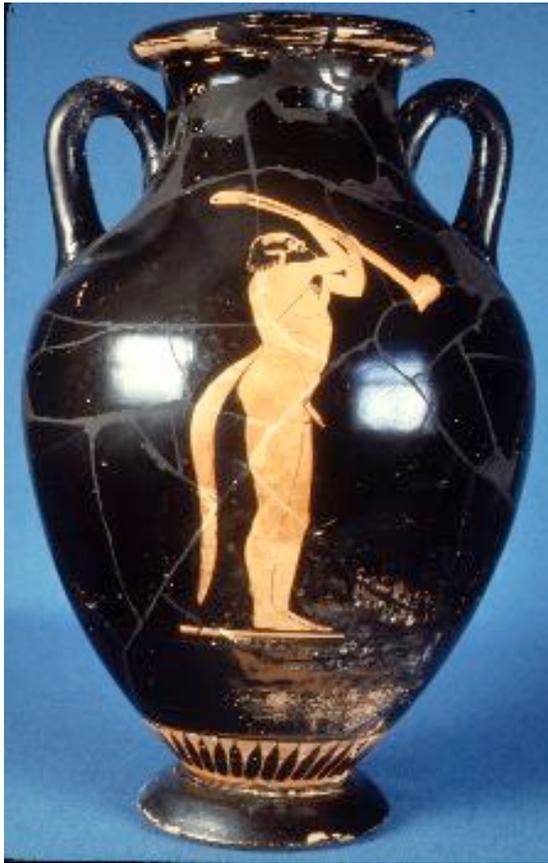
A *phallos* is a long piece of timber fitted with leather genitalia at the top. The *phallos* came to be part of the worship of Dionysus by some secret rite. About the *phallos* itself the following is said.

Pegasos took the image of Dionysus from Eleutherai—Eleutherai is a city of Boeotia [a region neighboring Attica, the region of Athens]—and brought it to Attica. The **Athenians, however, did not receive the god with reverence**, but they did not get away with this resolve unpunished, because, since the god was angry, a disease [priapism?] attacked the men's genitals and the calamity was incurable. When they found themselves succumbing to the disease, which was beyond all human magic and science, envoys were hastily dispatched to the divine oracles. When they returned they reported that **the sole cure was for them to hold the god in all reverence**. Therefore, in obedience to these pronouncements, the Athenians privately and publicly constructed *phalloi*, and with these they paid homage to the god, making them a memorial to their suffering.

Old time Dionysian rites...

Our traditional festival of the Dionysia was in former times a homely and merry procession. First came a jug of wine and a vine branch, then one celebrant dragged a he-goat along, another followed with a basket of dried figs, and last came the *phallos*. But nowadays this is disregarded and gone, what with vessels of gold carried past, rich apparel, carriages riding by, and masks.

Dionysian Phallicism



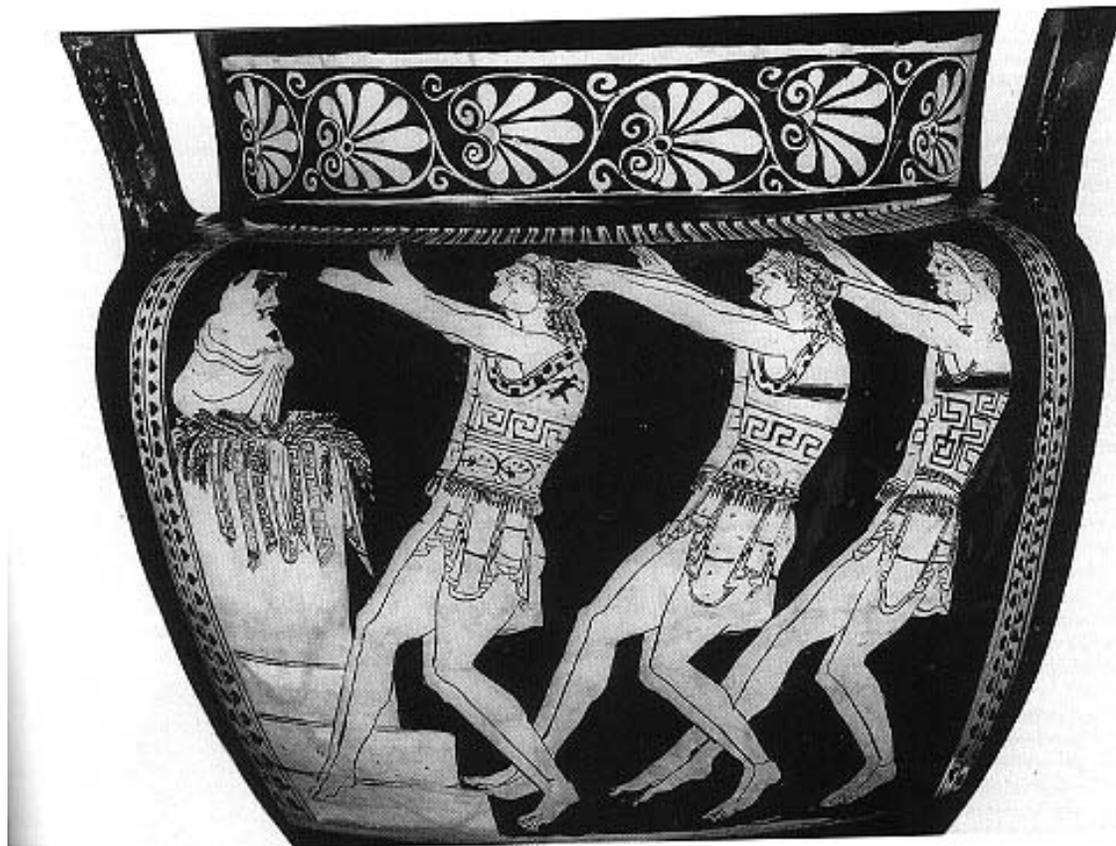
Satyrs and Maenads



Dionysian Balance...



A Chorus Singing and Dancing before an Altar

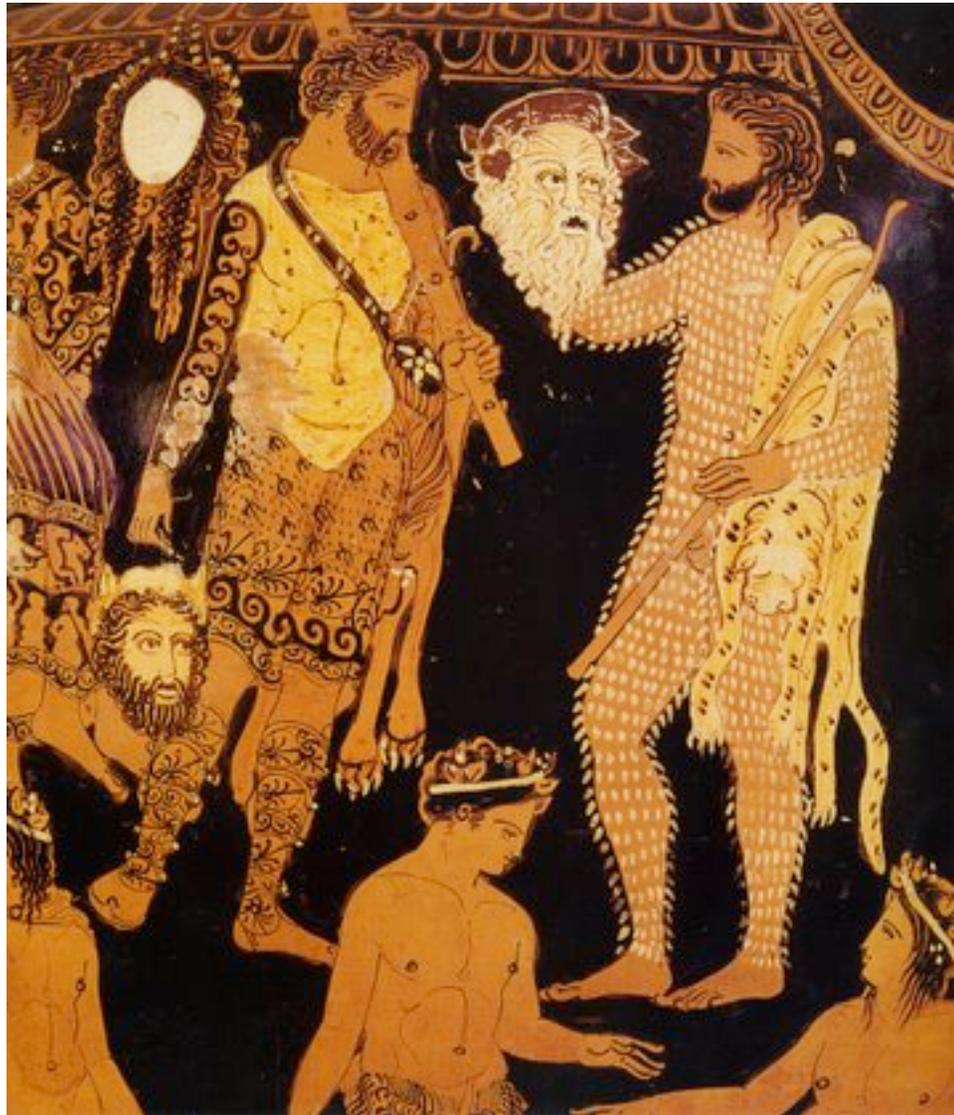


a Victorious Chorus from a Satyr Play





Dionysus
and Ariadne

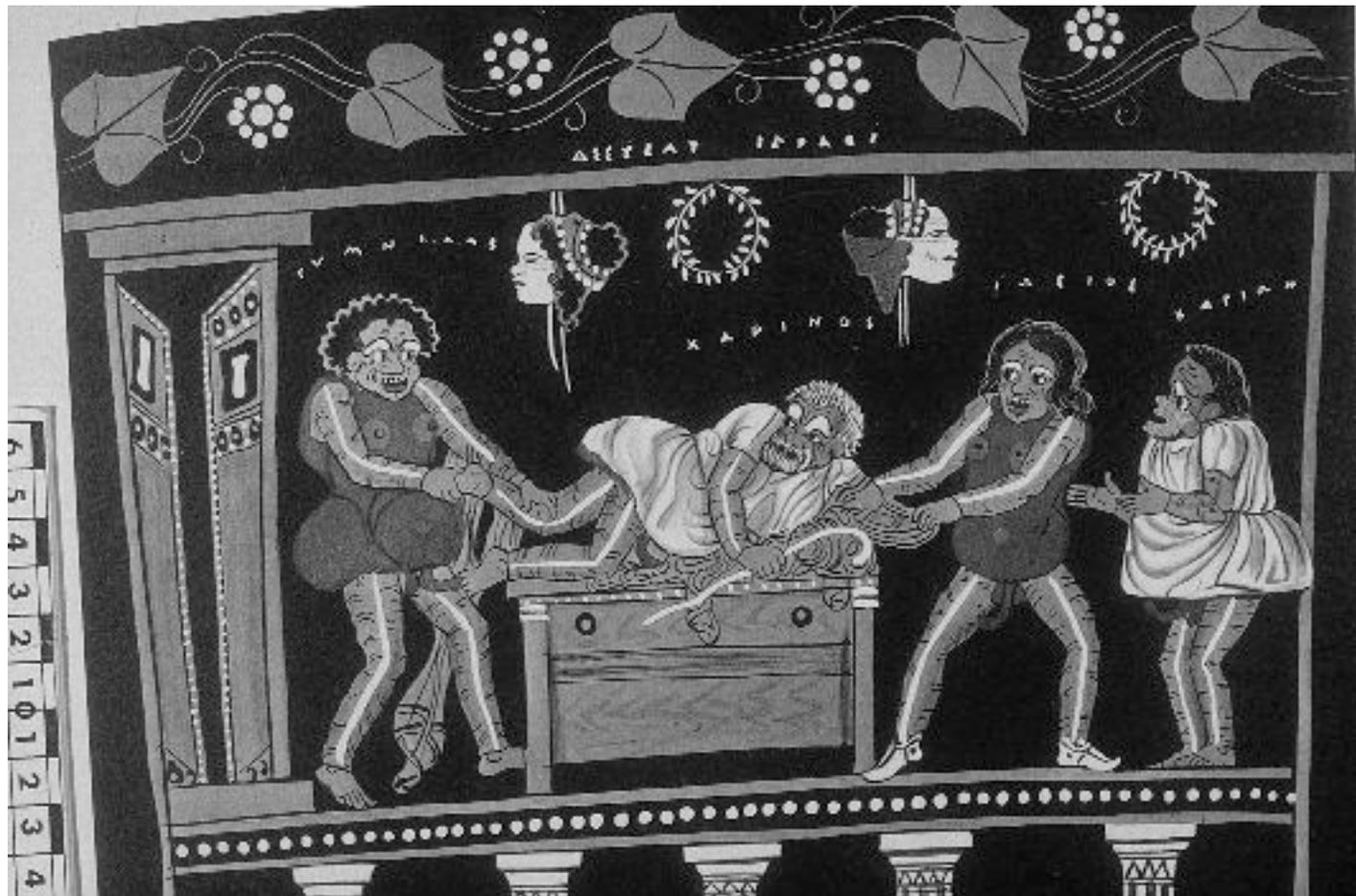


Herakles and
Silenos

Satyr-Chorus member



Vase Painting of Comic Actors



Depiction of *Birds* chorus?



Ruins of the Theater of Dionysus as seen from the Acropolis



Orkhêstra: “dancing ground”

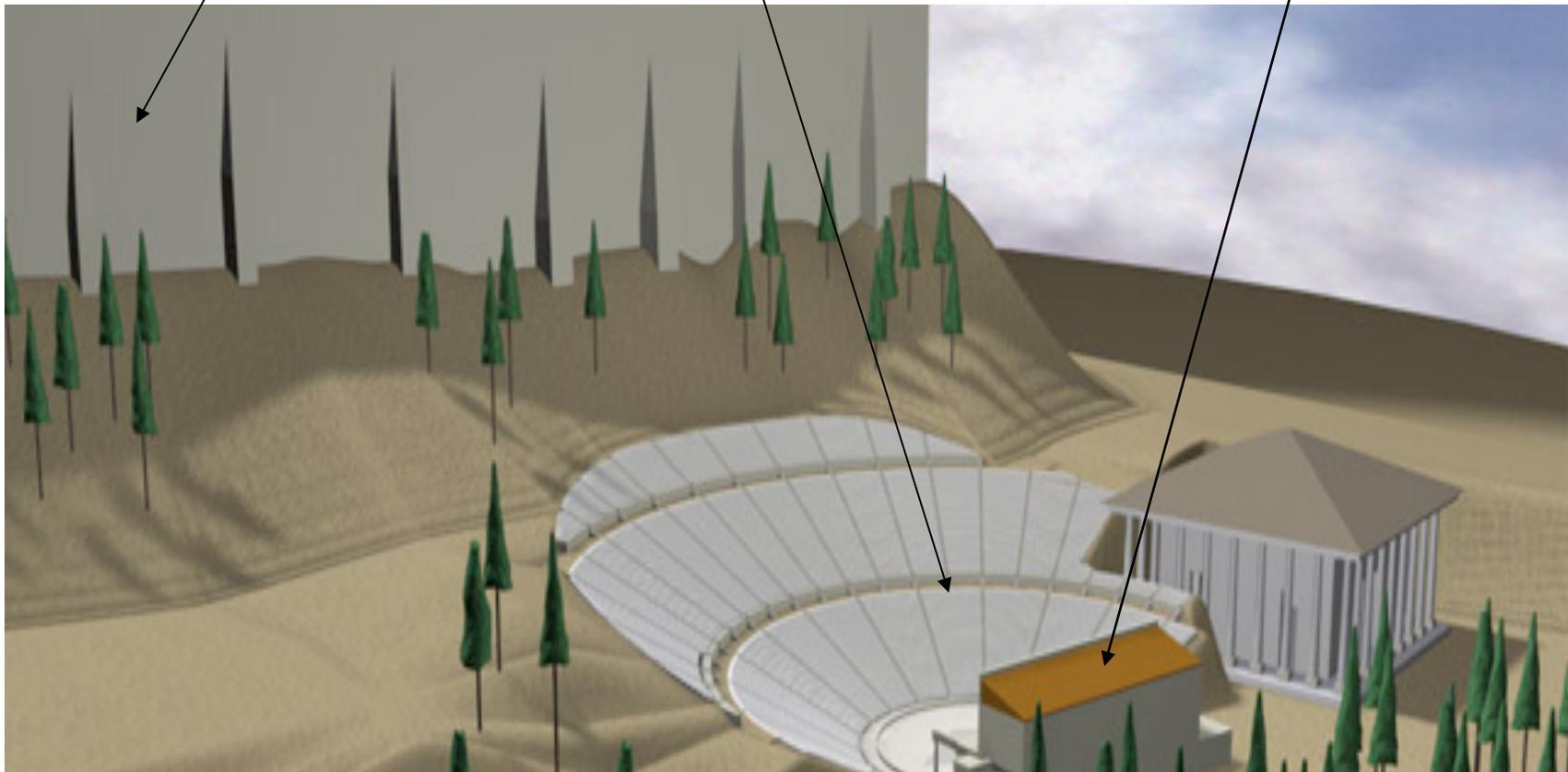
Computer Model of the Theater

Wall of Acropolis

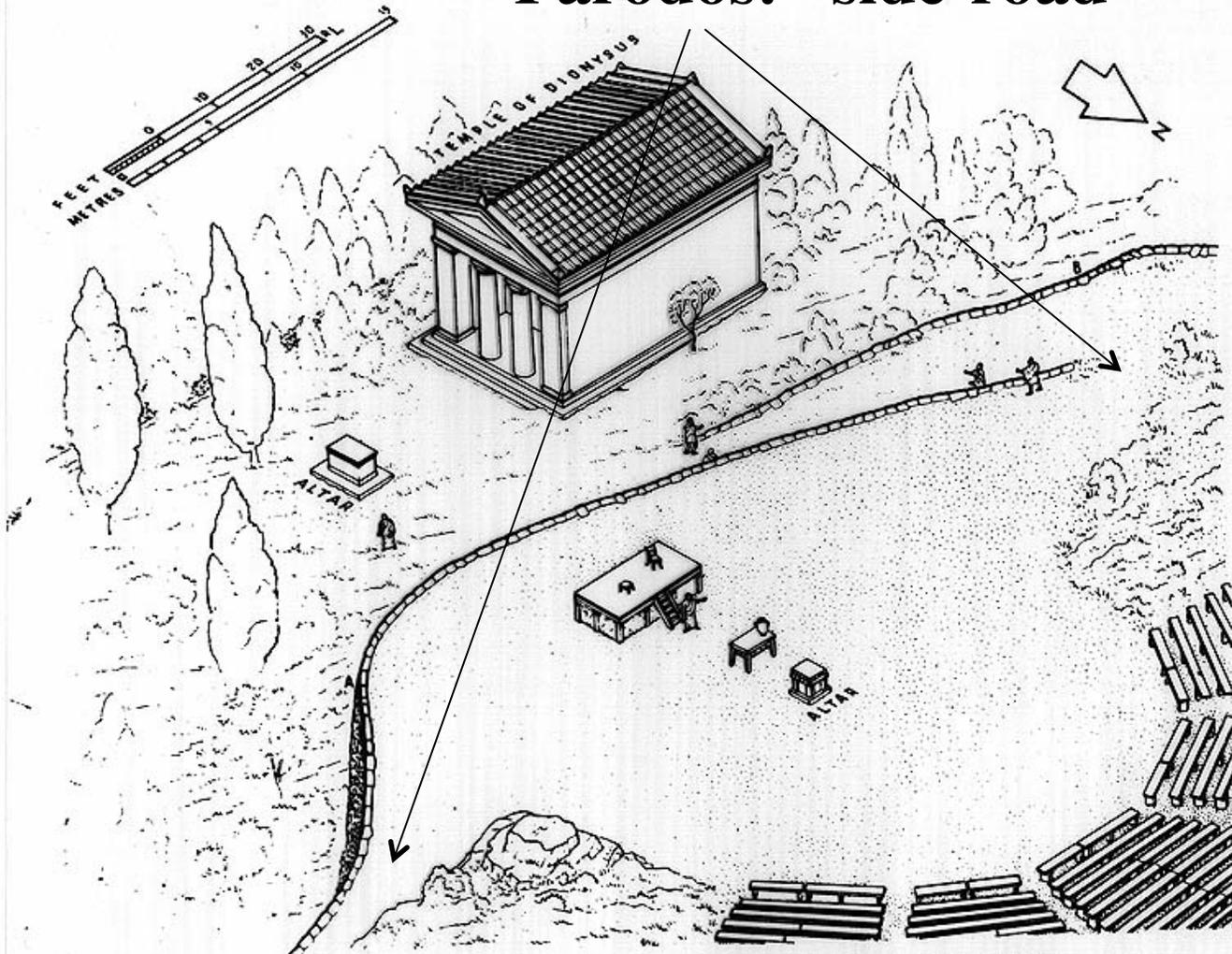
“Theatron”

Or “Seeing place”

Scene building

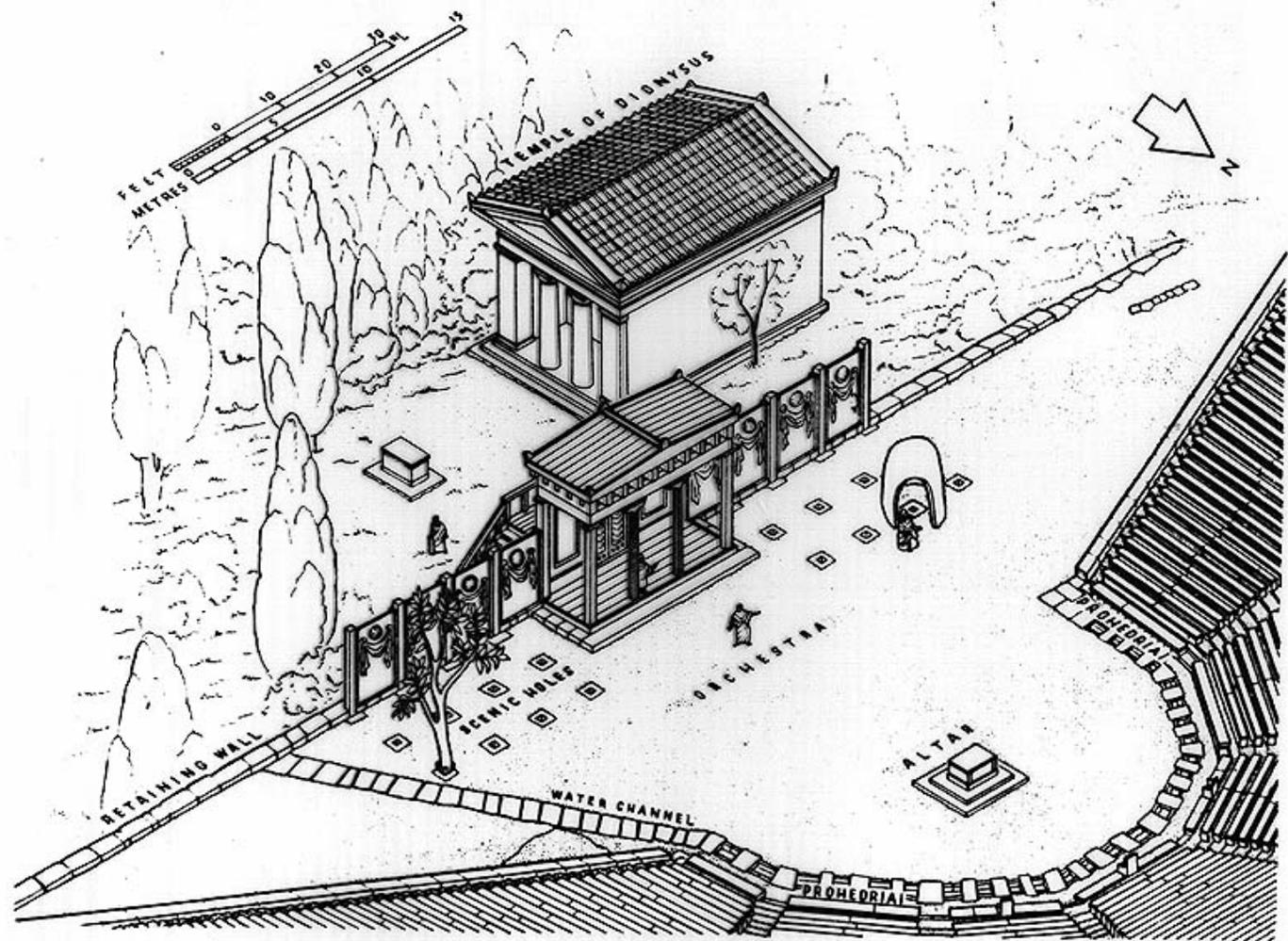


Parodos: “side-road”



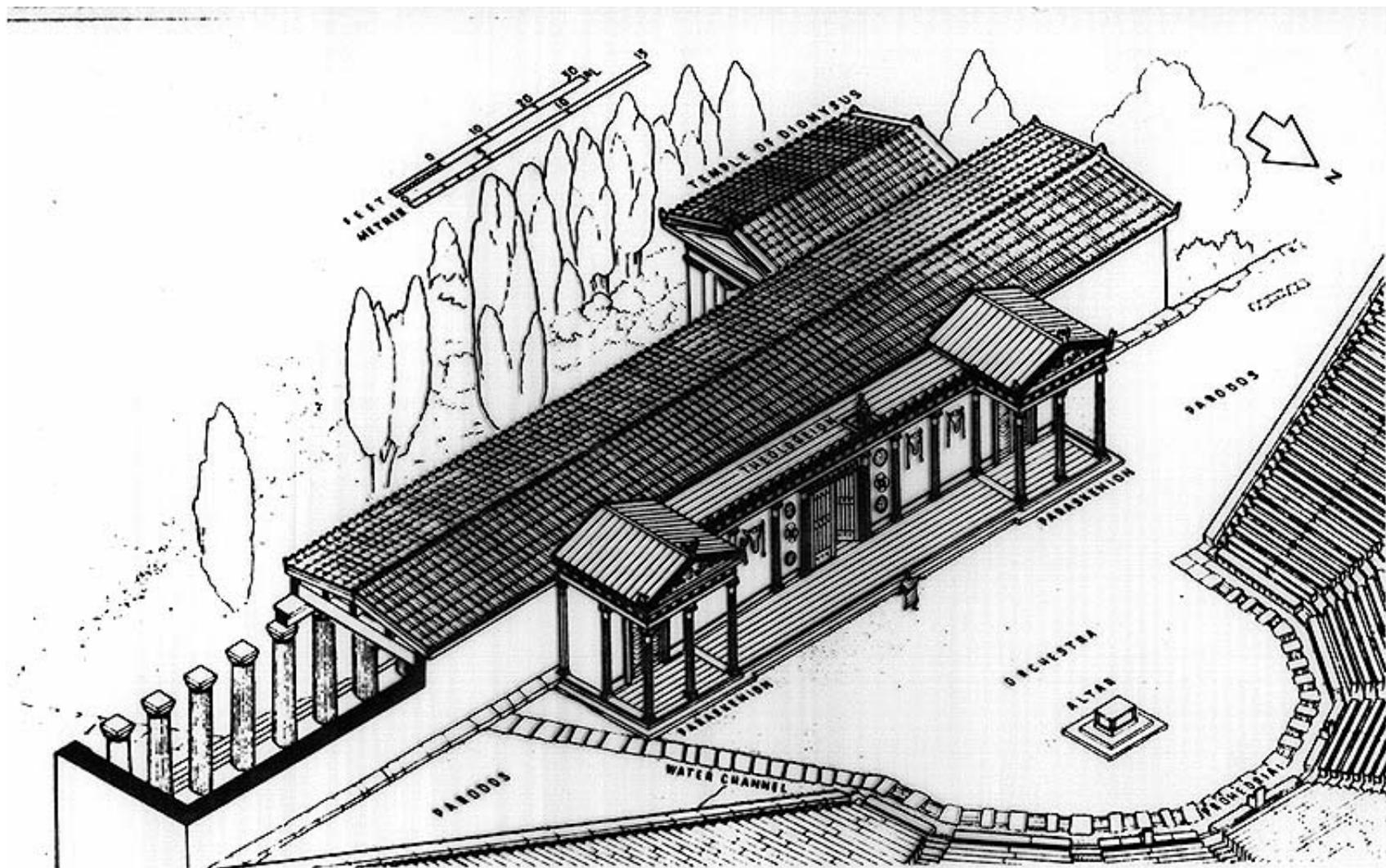
18 Theatre of Dionysus, Athens, phase I





Athens, phase II





28 Theatre of Dionysus, Athens, phase III



Tragedy vs. Comedy

- Tragedy came first.
- Tragic poets compose tragedies and satyr plays, not comedies.
- 3 tragedies + 1 satyr play = 1 poet's entry
- Tragedies are almost never about contemporary events
- Comic poets only produce comedies, only 1 per festival
- Comic choruses comprise 24 members (tragedy 12-15)
- Comedies are often about current events and name real names.

Parts of a Tragedy

- prologos (exposition)
- parodos (choral entrance song)
- epeisodion (dramatic dialogue) ← **Repeat**
- stasimon (choral ode, standing) ←
- **exodos (finale)**