CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

PART I

THE ATHENIAN DIONYSIA

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

A Timing and Structure

Introduction

In Athens the word 'Dionysia', unqualified, by Classical times, meant the festival of Dionysus Eleuthereus. This may seem paradoxical, as Athens had older festivals, once apparently called simply 'Dionysia', for Dionysus of the Marshes (Limnaios) and Dionysus Lenaios, but the festival of Dionysus Eleuthereus so surpassed the other festivals in magnitude and magnificence that it quite naturally came to be thought of as simply *the* Dionysia *tout court*. Thucydides 2.15 distinguishes the festival of Dionysus in the Marshes as 'the older Dionysia', apparently only one day of what was later identified as the Anthesteria (**II Introduction**), while the festival for Dionysus Lenaios came to be known as 'the Dionysia at the Lenaion', and then by the third century simply as 'Lenaea' (**II Ai**). The Dionysia in Attica were also simply called 'Dionysia', locally, and in Piraeus, where the Dionysia most resembled the Athenian model, the name 'Peiraia' was eventually adopted. When it was necessary to distinguish the festival of Dionysus Eleuthereus at Athens from the Dionysia in the demes, the former sometimes acquired the name 'the Dionysia in the City', τὰ Διονύσια τὰ ἐν ἄστει (**Aiv 24a**, **Av 4a–c**, **Av 4g**, **Avi 1**, **Avi 15**, **Aix**, **Cii 5**), which at some later date could in the right context (for example a didascalic record) simply be referred to as 'in the City', ἐν ἄστει (**Avi 5m**, **Avi 8a–b**, **Avi 12a–d**, **II Aii 2–3**; cf. the adjectival usage which saw 'a city chorus' (**II Axi 3**) and 'city victories' (**Bi 8**) appear later still). The same priority was extended to Dionysus himself: the name 'Eleuthereus' is scarcely attested before Roman times (**Aiii 4**), but this is because 'Dionysus' in Athenian discourse, when used in expressions like 'the temple of Dionysus' or 'the sanctuary of Dionysus', meant the temple and sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus. Specification was only needed if some other form of Dionysus was in question.

The earliest attestation of the qualifier 'Great' for the Athenian Dionysia seems to be in 323/2, in a decree awarding the People of Sicyon a gold crown in Athens 'at the contest of the [Gr]eat [Dionysia]', καὶ ἀνειπεῖν α[ὐτ]ὸν [Διονυσίων μεγά]|λων τῶι ἀγῶνι (*IG* II^3 1, 378, ll. 25–6). This may to some extent reflect 'Lycurgan' refashioning (**VI I**). For marking a distinction with other Athenian Dionysia, the epithet is clearly otiose in a way that it is not for the quadrennial Panathenaea, but as a purely rhetorical enhancement it ranks the festival among the Great Panhellenic festivals (which like the 'Great Panathenaea', are quadrennial or biennial festivals). Perhaps there is an element of interurban rivalry here as well. At any rate in later times other cities emulated the style: Naxos had a 'Great Dionysia' by ca. 280, as did Paros somewhat later (**IV Dx**). Lycurgus also appears to have created a 'Great Amphiareia' which was quadrennial (**IV Ci**).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

Dionysus Eleuthereus: A Different God

For a long time, scholarship supposed that some historical truth lurked behind the myths that present Dionysus arriving suddenly in Greek cities for the first time from elsewhere. Some, like Walter Otto (1933, 74–80), complained of this naively historicist reading: these stories, he said, expressed an essential characteristic of Dionysus, he is the god who comes, *der kommende Gott*: he appears suddenly, affects the community with his madness and then disappears just as suddenly. These views are not necessarily mutually exclusive: the myths could contain some historical, in addition to symbolic, truth. But in the years following the decipherment of Linear B, all historical readings of the myths lost credibility. Dionysus' name was found on fourteenth- to twelfth-century Greek tablets (Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 127, 411; Hallager et al. 1992, 75–82; Melena 2000–2001, 357–60; Killen 2024, 310–11). This proved that Dionysus was not the foreigner that (Orientalising) nineteenth-century comparative religion had supposed. He had deep roots in Greek prehistory.

Finding the name of Dionysus in Linear B was indeed an advance, but the lesson learned is often overstated. There is a tendency, namely, to retroject almost all we know of Dionysus from later times and to suppose that with his name was inherited, at least in some primordial form, the full portrait of the deity we know from later cult, art and literature. There is a danger, in other words, that we have thrown history out with the myth-historicising bathwater. Religion requires that gods were always what they are. Scholarship should all the more resist the assumption that the god never changed or, if he did, simply grew into a more developed version of what he always was. Religion, gods and myths, like all other aspects of culture, are the precipitate of potentially voluble discursive and social practices. If names survive from Mycenaean Greece to Classical times, their reference is likely to be no less different than the people who spoke them.

Scholars used to worry about the fact that Dionysus has a very small role to play in the Homeric epics: he is mentioned incidentally and briefly only five times, and mostly in connection with death. Recent assessments are, however, less troubled by this general absence from Homeric epic. Renate Schlesier, for example, argues that 'in fact, the Homeric passages contain many of the god's aspects known from later tradition'. She does parenthetically name exceptions: 'with the exception of the realm of theater, mask, and mysteries, as well as, more surprising, of wine…' (2011, 210). These are not trivial exceptions. But her words indicate that some side of Dionysus, at least, may have a history. We will argue that an important side of Dionysus does have a history and that this history is in part recoverable. Not only did Dionysus in time become qualitatively different, he became, in a sense, quantitatively different: from being an obscure minor figure on the fringe of the cultural and religious landscape, he became the most popular of all gods, or at least the one most present in ancient art, song and literature.

It was in Athens that Dionysus attained his earliest and greatest success. Athens knew several forms of the god, chief among them Dionysus Eleuthereus (**Aiii 4**). Here it was well known that some Dionysian cults were older than others. The Temple in the Marshes was notoriously 'the oldest temple of Dionysus' (D. 59.76; Philostr. *VA* 3.14). Thucydides tells us that, before the synoecism of Theseus, Athens comprised only the Acropolis and the area

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

south of the Acropolis (2.15, **II Introduction**). Among the proofs he offers is the number of old sanctuaries south of the Acropolis, including 'that of Dionysus in the Marshes (viz. Limnaios)'. To corroborate its antiquity, he states that it is there that 'the more ancient Dionysia' is performed, and notes that the Ionians 'who originate from Athens' observe the 'ancient Dionysia' on the same date (12 Anthesterion). In saying this he clearly means to emphasise the great antiquity of Dionysus Limnaios and thus Anthesterian ritual: both predate the Ionian migration.

Thucydides' material and historical evidence for the greater antiquity of Dionysus Limnaios are generally accepted today (**II Introduction**). The Ionian tradition he appeals to is an independently verifiable index of Limnaios' antiquity: a winter month named Anthesterion is both exclusive to and widespread among Ionian cities and is often known to coincide with their Dionysia. This is easiest to explain by supposing that the Dionysus who came to be known as Limnaios formed part of the common religion of Athens, before Athens colonised the Aegean in the great 'Ionian Migration', now generally dated ca. 1000. But, by the same rationale, Dionysus Lenaios must also be very old. Ionian cities generally name their months after the principal festivals held during them and they often also have a month of Lenaion at roughly the same time of year as Gamelion, when the Athenian Lenaea takes place. Another sign of the antiquity of Dionysus Lenaios is that his festival fell to the responsibility of the King Archon. Aristotle tells us that the King Archon dealt with ancestral festivals and sacrifices (**II Aiv 1**). The Dionysia of Dionysus Eleuthereus, by contrast, was organised by the Eponymous Archon, who looked after what were called 'additional' festivals.

Dionysus Lenaios and Dionysus Limnaios are not only earlier than Eleuthereus, but different in character. It is not easy to grasp their personalities, because the character of their festivals only really enters the light of history after the success of the competition of the Athenian Dionysia for Dionysus Eleuthereus had encouraged the Athenians to add dramatic competitions to the Lenaea around 440 (**II Aiii**) and comedy to the Anthesteria a century later (**II B**). In other words, we only begin to learn about the character of the older urban forms of Dionysus when they have lost their individuality to assimilation to the much more successful Eleuthereus. But many aspects of Eleuthereus seem never to have been fully transferred to Lenaios or Limnaios and many aspects of Lenaios and Limnaios resisted assimilation. For Dionysus Eleuthereus, as we will see, it was the experience of his festival that gave him his defining characteristics, and even more than drama, it was the experience of the Parade (**Aiv**) that began the Dionysia that forged Eleuthereus' specific connection with pipe music, choruses, costume, masks, phalloi, lavish pageantry and transgressive behaviour.

The Lenaea did have a procession, but this was a minor and far more traditionally religious event. It was organised by the King Archon, whose chief role is to look after the Eleusinian mysteries, and the Overseers of the Mysteries (**II Aiv**). Indeed the whole Eleusinian apparatus, and particularly the powerful priestly families of the Kerykes and Eumolpids, seems to have had a controlling interest in the procession of the Lenaea, extending to both organisation and finance (**II Aiv 1–4**). There are indications (**II Aiv 3–4**) that the style of the procession was a good deal more Eleusinian than what we would think of as 'Dionysian' (as one understands the term from the imagery and descriptions of the Dionysia), and

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

even extended to the assimilation of Dionysus Lenaios to the hitherto obscure Eleusinian deity, Iacchus (**Aiv 4**; the Eleusinian Dionysia practised a similar syncretism: **III H**). But the procession appears to have remained a minor event in the religious calendar and in any case the financial accounts indicate that the sacrifices in which the procession culminated were far more modest than those of the Dionysia (**I Cii**; **II Aiv 2**).

The Anthesteria had no formal publicly sponsored procession at all. As Robert Parker states 'the central day was given to parties held in private houses … This was not a festival of public pomp and expenditure' (2005, 290). Only two inscriptions relate to sacrifice in connection with the Anthesteria: the accounts of *epistatai* of Eleusis (**II Aiv 3** l. 266) mention a disbursement of wine and a small sacrificial animal (goat?) to sixteen public slaves and their foreman, which confirms the general practice of holding private parties (Parker 2005, 294); and the sacrificial calendar from the deme of Thorikos, which does seem to have made public sacrifice during the Anthesteria, but in this case only a goat (*SEG* 33, 147, ll. 34–5). There may have been a procession to bring Dionysus to the Boukoleion to a sacred marriage with the wife of the King Archon, but it was not a sacrificial procession, nor really a proper wedding procession (since the bride, not the groom, is the one who should be transported to the location of the ceremony).

These important differences between the Dionysian festivals have generally been obscured. Our Classical and Early Hellenistic sources speak of the Dionysia frequently, the Lenaea rarely and the Anthesteria hardly at all. This doubtless reflects the different impact these festivals had on the lives and consciousness of Classical Athenians. 'The Lenaia is a blank sheet on which we may inscribe whatever fancy dictates', says Robert Parker (2005, 290). Most of what is thought to be known of these minor festivals is based on the testimony of late-ancient scholarship, or on the inferences of modern (particularly late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century) scholarship, that attributed to the Lenaea and Anthesteria characteristics that are more properly ascribed to the Dionysia: including such things as ship-carts (**Aiv 15**–**20**) and wagons full of revellers shouting abuse (**Aiv 21**–**2**; **Avii 2h**). More recent authorities, most conscientiously Parker, have done an important service in clearing away the deposits of scholarly fantasy from what is actually known of the minor festivals, but many arbitrary and ill-founded attributions are deeply embedded in modern discussions.

One persistent distortion arises from the nineteenth-century notion that Dionysus was essentially a fertility god. Fertility was indeed once assumed to be the original role of almost all gods, but Dionysus was a particularly obvious candidate, so nineteenth-century anthropology thought, because of his phallic nature (**Aiv Introduction**). Yet here at least is a key to an essential difference among our Dionysoi: over more than a century scholars have insisted that there is no direct evidence for phallic themes of any sort at the Lenaea (or Anthesteria), even if many of them felt obliged to theorise its presence in conformity with prevailing theories of how Dionysus evolved (Farnell 1909, 210; Deubner 1932, 127 n.1; Parke 1977, 109; *DFA*^{2} 36; Spineto 2005, 144).

It is harder to distinguish Dionysus Eleuthereus from the Dionysoi of the various Attic Rural Dionysia (**III A**). The default assumption of scholarship has long been that the Rural Dionysia existed in more or less the same form from time immemorial, and that the city Dionysia was simply an upgrading of a local festival or a new creation in imitation of the

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

Rural Dionysia. This was an attractive option to scholarship, particularly nineteenth-century scholarship, because the one thing we think we know of the Rural Dionysia is that they had phallic processions. Early comparative anthropology was confident that phallos worship was the most primitive of all fertility cults, indeed thought by many to be a universal first stage of all human religion and culture (**Aiv Introduction**). Early comparative anthropology was also confident that there was very little intellectual difference between peasants and primitives. It followed that the Rural Dionysia were conservative relics of the earliest phase of human civilisation, and that phallic rituals had been practised in the countryside of Attica since the earliest times (even if Dionysus only came much later to acquire an attachment). But scholarship has lost its former faith in the automatic association of genital worship, country people and savagery, and it is worth noting that there is no evidence whatsoever to support these once-confident assumptions. There is, on the contrary, evidence to lead one to suppose that the phallic processions in the Attic demes, indeed the whole character of their Dionysus worship, was created in imitation of the Athenian Dionysia (though sometimes with modifications, as at Eleusis, in conformity with the resident cults of other deities).

The few forms of Dionysus that we do find in the Attic demes appear to have no connection with their Dionysia; this is true of Dionysus Anthios in Aixone, Myrrhinous and Phlya, and Dionysus Melpomenos and Dionysus Kissos in Acharnae (**III A Introduction**; **Aiii 3**). The demes do not draw upon these older forms of Dionysus for their Dionysia. In at least one case we can see, on the contrary, that the demotic form of the Dionysus worshipped at the deme Dionysia is a doublet of Eleuthereus: in Piraeus the form of the City Dionysia is replicated almost exactly in honour of the not-very-archaic-sounding 'Dionysus in Piraeus' (**Aiii 1**; **III A**; **III Vviii**). Indeed, the name reveals an attempt to distinguish this Dionysus from the Dionysus (Eleuthereus) in Athens of whom he is otherwise a carbon copy. The evidence of the ephebic inscriptions suggests that the icon carried in the Piraean Dionysia may even have been taken from the Temple of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Athens and, if this is correct, it is doubtless the same icon as appeared in the Theatre at the Athenian Dionysia. In another case, the Dionysia at Eleusis, we have seen (above) that the personality of Dionysus Eleuthereus was grafted onto Iacchus, a previously minor local deity. The assimilation of Iacchus to Eleuthereus can be dated to after ca. 440, immediately after drama was extended to the Eleusis-dominated Lenaea (**II Aiv 4**; **III H**). More tellingly, several demes lodged Dionysus, as a newcomer, in the sanctuaries of very different local deities, just as in the case of Eleusis (**III H**). At Sphettos, and possibly Halimous too, he was attached to a pre-existing cult of Demeter (**III X**; **III L**). At Halai Araphenides, Dionysus found accommodation with the long-standing resident Artemis (**III K**). At Ikarion, Dionysus was housed in the local sanctuary of Apollo Pythios (**III M**). The deme Dionysia, moreover, seem to be well co-ordinated on separate days of the month of Posideon, a fact that suggests their original creation belongs to a period of strong centralised government in a unified Attica, something that could not have existed before the sixth century. Even the few myths that link local Attic heroes with Dionysus, so far as we can tell, post-date the creation of Dionysia in these regions (**III Av**; **III M**) and, by a wider margin, that of the City. Outside of myth, Attica nowhere yields evidence of a cult of Dionysus that was older than the city, and in many cases we can date the foundation of cult sites to the fifth and fourth

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

centuries BC. What we know of the Attic Dionysia suggests that the demes each borrowed, and adapted to their means, both the structure and contents of the City Dionysia. It looks like Dionysus was in most parts of Attica unknown or, where known, of little importance before the Athenian Dionysia created a model for a festival that all Attica wished to imitate.

The Historical Background to the Dionysia

When, then, did Dionysus Eleuthereus appear in Athens? If we cannot easily find real history in myths, where can we find evidence? The material remains offer the only secure indications. Though much utilised by historians of Dionysian cult, the material record has been underused for mapping the history of Dionysian religion. In Athens it provides good evidence both for dating the creation of the Dionysia and for dating the establishment of the dramatic competitions.

For a long time, it was believed that Dionysus first appeared in Greece in the eighth or seventh century because there is no trace of him before the latter part of seventh century (e.g. Wilamowitz 1932, 61: 'sein Kampf um die Zulassung, sein Sieg und der Beginn seiner Hellenisierung muß um 700 angesetzt werden'). In the literary record Dionysus was named by Archilochus (fr. 121 W.) in the second half of the seventh century and in the two notoriously difficult-to-date Homeric hymns to him, which may or may not be earlier than the sixth century (Faulkner 2011, 9–10, 14–15). Corinthian art portrayed Dionysus very rarely and only after ca. 595 at the earliest (Carpenter 2007, 44–6; Csapo and Miller 2007, 20–1). It is in Athens that he first emerged as a figure of importance. From 575 Dionysus and Dionysian subjects suddenly became the favourite subject matter of Attic black-figured pottery (Carpenter 1986; Hedreen 1992, 155–70; Shapiro 1995, 84–100; Csapo and Miller 2007, 22–4; Smith 2010, 116). Not only did Dionysus appear for the first time in Attic art around 575, but so did satyrs. Despite a tiny number of examples in Corinth and Boeotia around the same time or at most a few years earlier (Simon 1997, 1132; Isler-Kerényi 2004, esp. 7–18; Csapo and Miller 2007, 21; Smith 2007, 66–9), satyrs are virtually the creation of the Athenian imagination – they appear on more than 7,000 Athenian vases, and from the beginning they were the regular companions of Dionysus (Lissarrague 2013, 17–18; Hedreen 1992).

In art-historical terms this is no minor event. Dionysus suddenly and irrevocably transformed Athenian art. We may infer that he did so because, with equal suddenness, he became a privileged fixture within the Athenian cultural imagination. The Dionysian 'Big Bang' has distinctive features that help us locate Dionysus not only in Athenian thought but also in the Athenian ritual landscape. Dionysian art contains several major exceptions to the 'rule' that Greek art depicts myth. One is ritual. Although mythic frames are obviously never entirely absent in paintings of Dionysus and satyrs, ritual sometimes intrudes upon and even dominates the iconography from the earliest depictions. Most of the early scenes of Dionysus and satyrs are processional. The very earliest scenes (570s) are the procession of guests to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (Carpenter 1986, 1–12) and the Return of Hephaestus. The Return of Hephaestus immediately became the enduring favourite: there are at least forty-nine representations on sixth-century Attic pottery, of which some twenty appear before mid century (Carpenter 1986, 13–29; Hedreen 1992, 13–30, 183–4). In a

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

number of the earliest depictions of the Return we see not only a procession with music and dance but, contrary to the myth, a sacrificial procession. It is indeed just around the time of our early cluster of scenes of the Return of Hephaestus (560s) that we get our first more or less realistic depictions of cultic sacrificial processions generally – the earliest is a scene of the Panathenaic procession dated ca. 560 (Van Straten 1995, 203 V55, fig. 2; Shapiro 1992, 54 fig. 33). Athena is less of a party animal than Dionysus and perhaps her festival is less readily presented in the guise of well-known myths. But the remarkable thing about the Returns of Hephaestus is that the mythic event is often buried – indeed lost – within a festival procession. At times it is very much less a 'mythical' scene than a festival scene with some mythic content. On a dinos of about 550 (name vase of the Painter of Louvre E876, *BAPD* 300837), for example, a large part of a frieze on the shoulder appears to offer a connected narrative, including a sacrificial procession in which the actual mythic narrative of Dionysus and Hephaestus is embedded, but has to be sought out like a Where's Wally in a sea of figures. The procession combines humans and satyrs, oxen and goats as sacrificial victims, and even includes a man with a big head that suggests a mask. It ends, like the Dionysian Parade, in a huge public feast. Many would argue that part of this frieze depicts the subject of a choral performance (Webster 1954, 584; Hedreen 1992, 136), but most of these features can be found in other Return of Hephaestus scenes, and the broader iconographic context seems to us to offer a mythic Dionysian parade expressed through imagery associated with a real Dionysian parade, and, in this particular instance, overwhelmed by it (Hedreen 2004; Csapo 2013b, 16). The difference between mythic Dionysian processions and real Dionysian processions erodes to the point that by 540 satyrs can cease to behave like wild animals and appear, against their feral nature, in orderly, regimented processional choruses (Hedreen 2007).

With the satyrs we have our first evidence of the characteristically phallic aspect of Dionysus Eleuthereus. But a depiction of the signature moment of the Parade of the Dionysia, the processing of a phallos by a chorus of *phallophoroi*, also belongs to the first generation of Dionysian imagery in Attic vasepainting (**Aiv 7a**). And other processional choruses appear around this time, most notably the series of some twenty choruses that are clearly human, but wear elaborate costumes and sometimes masks (Green 1985; Csapo 2003; Hedreen 2013). These have been called 'proto-comedy' or, with perhaps more justice, 'precursors of comedy'. But the processional nature of the scenes precludes any possibility of the kind of extended narrative that is a defining feature of comedy (even of the comparatively loose narrative of Attic Old Comedy: duBois 2022). We should refer to them rather as '*komos* vases'. They depict a spectacle of some sort: this is apparent from the lavishness of the costume and the mimetic qualities of the dance movements that the choruses make as they advance in procession. They are all different kinds of 'funny walkers', either because they walk on stilts, on their hands, imitate animals, pretend to ride on animals or adopt the exaggerated gait of men mimicking women. Like processional dithyrambs or phallic choruses, they are sometimes led by an *exarchos*: a man distinguished by costume who does not dance but saves his breath and concentration to improvise lines of song, to which the chorus sing a refrain (Csapo 2006–2007b). These are groups that the ancients would call *komoi*, since the word *komos* implies a group moving in procession, usually to music, usually drunken and usually in high spirits. But their song is a simple refrain.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

Though the performance could perhaps be called a *komoidia*, literally '*komos* song', it is no 'comedy' as we understand the term, and in many ways may be more closely connected with dithyramb. One of the *komos* vases even gives us a snatch of the song: every one of the six dolphin riders on a psykter by Oltos has letters representing the words of the song emanating from his mouth: they sing 'on a dolphin' and this effectively says it all (New York MMA 1989.281.69, *BAPD* 275024). They are all character and no plot, as a chorus in a carnival procession must be, for they pass by long before riding a dolphin, walking on stilts or walking on one's hands could ever acquire the cause or consequence that would construct even a minimal narrative.

We have therefore a cluster of iconographic 'firsts', all of which belong to the Dionysian sphere, all of which reflect a processional format, and all of which contain elements that we know (from later textual sources) formed part of the Parade of the Dionysia. The details of these new iconographic subjects contain material echoes of a Dionysian procession and the only possible candidate at this date is the Parade for Dionysus Eleuthereus. We can therefore date the establishment of the cult of Dionysus Eleuthereus to the 570s or earlier. Indeed the sudden proliferation of Dionysian imagery so strongly suggests an instant success, that we probably need look no earlier than the 570s for the creation of the Athenian Dionysia.

There is another set of material remains that clusters, this time in the decades on either side of 500. Unfortunately, no archaeological dating of the first theatron or orchestra of the Theatre of Dionysus is possible. The first theatron was built of wood. Recent excavations under the surviving fourth-century BC stone Theatre of Dionysus have uncovered the ground-surface of the previous phase of the Theatre. The surface reveals the remains of the postholes for the wooden stands of seating (Papastamati-von Moock 2015, 56). Continuing excavation in the Theatre offers hope of finding new evidence for dating the earliest theatron. Happily, a decision to stop exploration and prioritise restoration of the Lycurgan Theatre above it was, after ten years, recently reversed. The conventional dating, ca. 540–ca. 500, is based on modern interpretations of Hellenistic notices about the activities of Thespis (**Avii 2**) and on a confused historical anecdote preserved by the Suda (**V Hv 9**; Csapo 2020b). In this case, as in all others regarding the sixth-century history of the festival, the material evidence is far more reliable than the Hellenistic reconstructions. The earliest use of the theatron cannot be dated, but the earliest stone building in the adjacent Sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus can. Maria Magnisali's recent study of the architectural remains of the Old Temple of Dionysus dates the architectural features to ca. 500 (2016, 189, 193). George Despinis, in a study of the Temple's sculptures, dates them stylistically also to ca. 500, or 480 at latest (1996–1997, 205–6). For a long time, a tympanon block found in the Sanctuary served as principal support for a mid sixth-century date. The block shows dancing satyrs and maenads, and clearly belonged to a Temple of Dionysus. As reconstructions of the Old Temple found no place for this block, Despinis decided it could be something other than a tympanon block. He suggested an altar and was content to date it around 540–530, partly out of respect for the traditions concerning Thespis (1996–1997, 213). Hans Goette has persuasively argued that it is indeed part of a temple pediment, that it represents the remains of the Temple of Dionysus that was destroyed by the Persians in 480 (hence a first phase of the Old Temple), and that there is no reason to date the block any

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-0-521-76552-7 — A Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC
Volume 1: The Theatre Festivals of Athens: Documents with Translation and Commentary
Eric Csapo , Peter Wilson
Excerpt
More Information

earlier than 500 (Goette 2020, 205–8; Goette 2025). In sum, there is no reason to suppose any major development of this part of the south slope of the Acropolis before ca. 500. This does not mean that the area was not used, but it does suggest that there was nothing that was identifiable as a theatre.

Vasepaintings confirm that theatre competitions first captured the imagination of local artists ca. 500. We know of fifty-one Attic vasepaintings that show the distinctively long and slender tripods given as prizes to the dithyrambic choruses that competed in the Theatre of Dionysus (**V Fv 1**). Most of these vases show the tripods being delivered by Victories or Erotes or show them already mounted on choregic monuments being decorated by Victories who often also bring bulls as symbols of the prizes that were given for the winning lyric choruses at the Dionysia (**Avii 1**). These images range over a century and a half of Athenian vasepainting, but only begin ca. 500. It is ca. 500 that experts, such as Guy Hedreen and Ralf Krumeich, see the first indications of the influence of satyr play on the depictions of satyrs in Attic vasepainting (**Avi 5**). Only a few years later our first representations of tragic choruses appear in art (**V Evi 1**–**2**). Also ca. 500 is the most plausible reconstruction of the beginning of the *Fasti* (**Avi 4**). This is a fragmentary list of all victors at the lyric and dramatic competitions of the Dionysia in Athens. Its information is detailed and often confirmed by other sources, all based on Aristotle's *Didaskaliai* or *Dionysian Victors*. There are various and good arguments for supposing that the original monument had two inscribed columns before the earliest preserved fragment. One earlier column of text is certain and would take us back to 486. A second earlier column is highly probable and takes us back to 503, supposing that all three contests (men's and boys' choruses and tragedy) were all there from the beginning. If, however, we imagine that not all the contests were simultaneously introduced, the earliest contest could have been a few years earlier. Indeed, it makes quite credible the 508 date preserved on the Parian Marble for the first victory in men's dithyramb in Athens, especially since it was won by Hypodikos of Chalcis, who, so far from being a mythicised figure (like Thespis), is not known from any other source, and, with his unusual name and non-Attic origins, is not a likely fiction: he is most probably known from the first record of the Dionysian competition in the Athenian Archive (**Avi 3**). In sum, the material record strongly supports the view that the competitions of the Dionysia were introduced by the new Athenian democracy.

The material remains therefore put into relief two time periods when the cult of Dionysus Eleuthereus inspired newly creative activity in Athenian art and architecture: in the 570s to 560s and at the end of the sixth century. The first burst of activity is our earliest evidence of Dionysus Eleuthereus and, we believe, reflects the earliest impact of the Parade of the Athenian Dionysia. The second burst of activity relates to the creation of the Theatre and the addition to Dionysus' festival of musical and dramatic competitions.

In this we offer a significantly different chronology from that usually offered on the basis of the Parian Marble's mention of Thespis (**Avii 2a**). This now lost line of the Parian Marble served for a long time as the fixed point for all surveys of Dionysian chronology, starting from a time, indeed, when scholarship had nothing else to work with. This portion of the text is now completely illegible, but it was in part legible in the first half of the seventeenth century when a number of Hellenists made transcriptions. Even so, the transcriptions were so varied and the results so problematic that many scholars arbitrarily configured the text

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org