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Greek Religion
A Sourcebook

Valerie M. Warrior

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CONTENTS

Figures and Maps	vii
Preface	ix
1. Introduction	1
2. The Gods in Hesiod's <i>Theogony</i> and Homer's <i>Iliad</i>	13
The gods in Homer's <i>Iliad</i>	22
3. Family and Community	35
From birth to early adulthood	36
Betrothal, wedding, and marriage	41
Marriage contested	46
Death and death rituals	48
Epitaphs	54
4. Prayer and Sacrifice	55
Blood and other sacrifice	57
Ritual purity and pollution	69
Some ancestral practices	73
5. Divination	75
Oracles	78
Divination in time of war	89
6. Sanctuaries of the Gods	95
Sacred space	96
Custom and regulations	102
Incubation and healing	107
7. Festivals	113
Organization and regulation	114
The Anthesteria	118
The Thesmophoria	125
The Panathenaea	129

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Cover: Macron Vasepainter. Young man pouring a libation on an altar. Center medallion of a red-figured cup (around 480 BCE) Inv. G 149. Location : Louvre, Paris, France. Photo Credit : Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY. Background image © istockphoto / Peter Zelei.

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The *hieropoioi* together with the cattle-buyers, when they have purchased the cows using the 41 minas [4100 drachmas] rent from the Nea and dispatched the procession for the goddess, must sacrifice all these cows on the great altar of Athena, except for one that they have pre-selected from the best quality cows; this they must sacrifice on the altar of Nike.⁶⁴ After they have sacrificed them to Athena Polias and Athena Nike, they should then distribute the meat from all the cows purchased using the 41 minas to the Athenian people in the Ceramicus as in the other distributions of meat.⁶⁵ They should distribute the portions to each deme according to the number of participants in the procession that each deme sends.

For the expenses of the procession, the butchering, the decoration of the great altar, and all the other necessary expenditures for the festival and the all-night celebration, 50 drachmas are to be provided. The *hieropoioi* who administer the annual Panathenaea are to make the all-night celebration as splendid as possible for the goddess. They should dispatch the procession at sunrise, punishing those who do not obey orders with punishments according to the laws.

⁶⁴ The temple of Nike (Victory) is to the right of the Propylaea (the entrance to the acropolis) as one approaches the Parthenon.

⁶⁵ *Ceramicus*: the Potters' Quarter which is located at some distance from the acropolis, across the agora and beyond the temple of Hephaestus.

COMPETITIONS IN HONOR OF THE GODS

- 8.1 THUCYDIDES 5.18. With regard to the common sanctuaries, anyone who wishes may, without fear, offer sacrifices, consult the oracles, and attend as a spectator according to the ancestral customs, both by land and sea.

This religious stipulation, reaffirming the sacred truce (*ekechairia*), was the very first clause in the Peace of Nicias between Athens and Sparta in 421 BCE. The sacred truce, a temporary cessation of hostilities among warring Greek states, allowed safe travel to a common sanctuary for celebration of a panhellenic festival.

The four most famous panhellenic festivals were the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games.¹ There were athletic and sporting contests at all four festivals, and musical contests at all except the Olympic games. The games at Olympia were celebrated in honor of Zeus. The Pythian games held at Delphi were in honor of Apollo, the Isthmian at the isthmus near Corinth were in honor of Poseidon, and the Nemean at Nemea between Corinth and Argos were also in honor of Zeus.

From the eighth century BCE onward people came together at fixed times to such sanctuaries from cities throughout the Greek world, mainland Greece itself, Asia Minor, the Black Sea area, Italy, and Sicily, and also from Egypt and Cyrene to offer sacrifices and either compete in "games" or contests honoring a particular god, or to be spectators.

Festivals involving contests are often referred to as "agonistic," from the Greek *agon*, struggle or contest. These competitions were for prizes offered for races, boxing, wrestling and many other strenuous physical contests but also music, poetry, and drama which involved both music and dance.

The traditional date of the foundation of the Olympic games is 776 BCE, the date from which the Greeks reckoned their calendar. Events were said

¹ On Olympia and the games, see Swaddling 2004. For discussion of all four sites and games, see Miller 2004 a. Both works include illustrations.

to have occurred in a specified year of a specified Olympiad, each Olympiad consisting of four years. Likewise the Pythian games were held every four years, in the third year of an Olympiad. The Isthmian and Nemean games were celebrated every two years.² In the first year of an Olympiad, the Isthmian festival was held in April/May, followed by the Olympic festival in July/August. In the second year, the Nemean festival was celebrated in July/August. In the third year, the Isthmian festival in April/May was followed by the Pythian in July/August, and the Nemean festival was celebrated in July/August of the fourth year. These four festivals were known as “crown games,” since the victorious contestants were awarded crowns, that is, garlands or wreathes made from branches or plants.³

Statues commemorating the victors were set up on the site of the games, and also in the native cities of the victors to commemorate their triumphal return. References in Pausanias and a list of Olympic victors indicate that the competitors came from Greek cities throughout the Mediterranean world. Some of the more illustrious victors had special victory (epinician) odes composed as a further memorial. These odes were sung at the festival itself and/or later in the victor’s home town. Pindar (c. 518–c. 446 BCE) and Bacchylides (c. 520–450 BCE) composed victory odes commemorating the victories of Hiero, the ruler of Syracuse, at both Olympia and Delphi.⁴

The Olympic games

Herodotus tells how Tritantaechmes, who belonged to the Persian army which had just defeated the Spartans at the battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE, was surprised to learn from some deserters that the Greeks were celebrating the Olympic games and the prize was a mere olive wreath, not money.

- 8.2 HERODOTUS 8.26. A few deserters came, men who had nothing to live on and wanted to work. When they were brought before the king, the Persians asked what the Greeks were doing. One individual asked the question on behalf of them all. The deserters told them that the Greeks were celebrating the Olympic games and watching athletic contests and chariot races. He then asked what was the prize for which they were competing. They replied that the gift was a crown of olive-leaves.... When Tritantaechmes learned that the prize was a crown, not money, he could not keep silent but said before everyone, “O dear! What kind of men have you brought us to fight

2 The Pythian games were established in 586 BCE, the Isthmian in 580 BCE, and the Nemean in 573 BCE.

3 The prize at Olympia was a wreath of wild olive; that at Delphi, of laurel (a plant sacred to Apollo); at the Isthmian Games, pine branches; at the Nemean, wild celery. In most other contests monetary prizes were awarded.

4 Pindar, *Olympian* 1 and Bacchylides 5 both celebrate Hiero’s victory in the chariot race at Olympia in 476 BCE; likewise Pindar’s *Pythian* 1 and Bacchylides 4 celebrate his victory in the chariot race at Delphi in 470 BCE.

against, Mardonius, men who compete not for material things but for excellence?”⁵

In contrast to foreigners, the Greeks exercised naked, although this was not the original practice.⁶

- 8.3 THUCYDIDES 1.6. The Spartans were the first to bare their bodies, strip openly, and rub themselves down with oil after exercising. In early times, even in the Olympic games, they wore *diazomata* around their genitals in the contests;⁷ and it is not many years since they stopped this practice. Even today many non-Greeks, especially in Asia, wear *diazomata* in boxing and wrestling contests. Indeed one could show that the early Greeks had many other customs that are like those of the non-Greeks of the present day.

Two later sources, one writing in the late first century BCE and the other in the late second century CE, agree on a date for stopping use of the *diazoma*, but attribute the innovation to different men. The dating of this innovation, however, is considerably earlier than Thucydides’ statement that it was not long before his own time.

- 8.4 DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS 7.72. The first Greek to strip and run naked was Acanthus the Spartan in the fifteenth Olympiad [720 BCE]. Before then all the Greeks were ashamed to appear at the games with their bodies entirely naked, as is clear in Homer, the most reliable and earliest of witnesses, when he has the heroes girding up.
- 8.5 PAUSANIAS 1.44.1. Near the tomb of Coroebus is buried Orsippus who won the *stadion* at Olympia [720 BCE]. While the other athletes in the competition wore *perizomata* in accordance with the ancient practice, he ran naked... I think that he deliberately let the *perizoma* slip off at Olympia, realizing that a nude man can run more easily than one who is girt.

Pausanias notes the re-establishing of the Olympic festival after consultation with the Delphic oracle and the institution of the sacred truce (776 BCE). He also reports traditions that the gods held contests with each other at Olympia. Finally he reports the beginning of the documented Olympic festivals and the introduction of the various contests.

- 8.6 PAUSANIAS 5.4.5–6. Later Iphitus, who was descended from Oxylus, and a contemporary of Lycurgus who wrote the laws of the Spartans, arranged the games at Olympia and re-established the Olympic festival and instituted the sacred truce.⁸....

5 *Mardonius*: commander of the Persian infantry who was defeated and killed at the battle of Plataea in 479 BCE.

6 The word “gymnastics” derives from the Greek *gymnos*, naked.

7 *diazomata*: the word *diazoma* and its variant *perizoma* are generally translated as loin cloth or girdle.

8 *Lycurgus*: the traditional founder of the Spartan constitution. *sacred truce*: the Greek *ekecheiria*, literally a holding of hands, symbolized an agreement for all Greeks to cease hostilities for a certain period. For the crown games a truce was declared for a period of one month before the games to ensure safe travel for athletes and their entourage.

At this time Greece was being destroyed by tribal strife and by plague. It occurred to Iphitus to ask the god at Delphi for a cure for these troubles, and they say that the Pythian priestess said that Iphitus himself and the people of Elis should restore the Olympic games.⁹

- 8.7 PAUSANIAS 5.7.10. Some sources say that Zeus wrestled here for the throne with Cronus himself,¹⁰ whereas others say that he celebrated the games in honor of his victory. Among the victors, Apollo is said to have outrun Hermes and beaten Ares in boxing. Because of this, they say, the Pythian flute is played for the jumping in the *pentathlon*,¹¹ since the flute is sacred to Apollo, and Apollo won Olympic victories.
- 8.8 PAUSANIAS 5.8.6–9. When the unbroken recorded tradition of the Olympiads began, there was first the foot-race (*stadion*), and Coroebus of Elis was the victor [776 BCE]. There is no statue of Coroebus at Olympia, but his grave is on the borders of Elis. Later, at the fourteenth festival, the double foot-race was added [724 BCE]. . . . At the eighteenth, the pentathlon and wrestling are recorded. . . . At the twenty-third festival, they restored the prizes for boxing. . . . At the twenty-fifth they admitted the race of full-grown horses. . . . At the eighth festival after this they acknowledged the men's *pancratation* and the horse-race.

There were thirteen contests for males, held over a period of five days, ten for adults and three for youths. The oldest and most prestigious contest was the *stadion*, a foot race over the distance of a stade (approximately 600 feet). The winner of this race received the title *Olympionikes* (Olympic victor), and the entire Olympiad was identified by his name. Two of the most grueling contests were the *pentathlon*, and the *pancratation*, a form of all-out wrestling in which virtually no holds were barred.

Writing in the mid-third century CE, Philostratus describes the dangers of the *pancratation*.

- 8.9 PHILOSTRATUS, *PICTURES IN A GALLERY* 2.6. Pancratiasts practice a dangerous kind of wrestling. They have to suffer backward falls which are not safe for the wrestler, and learn holds by which one can still win even if one has fallen. They must have skill in various methods of strangling; they bend an opponent's ankle and twist his arm, throwing punches and jumping on him. All these practices are permitted in the *pancratation*, except for biting and gouging.
- 8.10 PAUSANIAS 6.4.1. There is a statue of a man from Sicyon, a pancratiast, named Sostratus. His nickname was Acrochersites [Fingerman], because he would grab his opponent by the fingers, bending them and not letting

9 Elis: a city-state some 22 miles northwest of Olympia; its citizens presided over the Olympic games.

10 *wrestled here for the throne*: an allusion to Zeus' overthrow of Cronus; see Hesiod's *Theogony* lines 492–506 (2.6).

11 *pentathlon*: a contest comprising five different events: the discus, standing jump, javelin, *stadion*, and wrestling.

go until he knew his opponent had surrendered. He won twelve victories at Isthmia and Nemea combined, three at Olympia, and two at Delphi.

Epictetus, the mid-first to second century CE philosopher, describes the rigors and risks involved in training for the Olympic games.

- 8.11 EPICTETUS, *DISCOURSES* 3.15.2–5. You say, "I want to win at Olympia." Well, consider the preliminaries and the sequel. When you have done that, set to work if it's good for you. You must submit to discipline, follow a strict diet, keep away from desserts, train under compulsion, at a fixed time, in heat or in cold. You must not drink cold water or wine whenever you want. You must hand yourself over to a trainer exactly as you would to a doctor. Then, in the contest, you have to dig in beside your opponent.¹² Sometimes you will dislocate your wrist, sprain your ankle, swallow mouthfuls of sand, and be flogged. And, after all, that there are times when you will be defeated. After you have thought about all this, enter the games if you want.

The Olympic contests were under the jurisdiction of *Hellenodikai* (male judges or umpires of the Greeks). These *Hellenodikai* lived at Elis for ten months in a special building in the marketplace where they were instructed by the *nomophylarchoi* (guardians of the law).¹³

Two days before the Olympic festival began, a procession set out from Elis for Olympia. The procession was led by the *Hellenodikai* and other officials including the Sixteen Women, followed by the athletes and their trainers, then horses and chariots along with their owners, jockeys, and charioteers. After stopping overnight, they paused as they crossed the boundary between Elis and Olympia to sacrifice a pig and perform purification rites at the fountain of Pieria.

- 8.12 PAUSANIAS 5.16.8. Whatever ritual is established for the Sixteen Women or the *Hellenodikai* to perform, is only performed after they have purified themselves with a pig that is suitable for purification and with water.¹⁴ The purification takes place at the spring of Piera which is on the road as you come along the level road from Olympia to Elis.

Before entering the contest, the athletes, their fathers, brothers, and trainers swore a solemn oath before a statue of Zeus Horkios, the oath god.

- 8.13 PAUSANIAS 5.24.9–11. Of all the images of Zeus, the Zeus in the Bouleuterion [Council house] is most likely to strike terror into the hearts of wrongdoers. He is named Horkios and in each hand he holds a thunderbolt. Beside this image it is the custom for athletes, their fathers and their brothers, as well as their trainers, to swear an oath upon slices of boar's

12 *dig in*: a technical term that probably refers to the preliminary exercising in sand or mud.

13 Pausanias 6.24.3.

14 The Sixteen Women were a board of elderly women from Elis who supervised an Olympic festival in honor of Hera, see 8.24.

flesh that in no way will they commit a violation of the Olympic Games. The athletes in the men's category also swear that they have kept strictly to their training for ten successive months. Those who judge the ages of the boys and the foals that are entering the race also take an oath that they will judge fairly and without taking bribes, and that they will protect and not divulge what they learn about the candidate, whether accepted or not.

I forgot to ask what they customarily do with the boar after the athletes have taken the oath. The ancient custom of dealing with victims was that humans should not eat the flesh on which an oath had been sworn. Homer makes this quite clear. For the boar, from which slices were taken for Agamemnon to swear that he had not slept with Briseis, was thrown into the sea by the herald.¹⁵ ...

Such was the ancient custom. In front of the feet of Zeus Horkios is a bronze plate inscribed with elegaic verses, the intent being to strike terror into the those who foreswear themselves.

Thucydides tells how a Spartan competitor falsely identified himself as a Boeotian and was publicly whipped because Spartan competitors were debarred in that year.¹⁶

- 8.14** THUCYDIDES 5.50. The Spartan Lichas, the son of Arcesilaus, was given a beating on the course by the attendants of the umpires. When his chariot and pair won, it was announced that Lichas belonged to the Boeotian people, since he had no right to enter the contest. He had then come onto the course and put a headband on the charioteer in order to show that the chariot belonged to him.

Pausanias records two Olympic victories of Euthymus of Locri. One was awarded after the judges disqualified the victory of Theagenes, his opponent, who was given a heavy fine because of his spitefulness.

- 8.15** PAUSANIAS 6.6.4–6. Euthymus was born in the land of the Locrians in Italy; they live near the Zephyrian cape. His father was called Astyles, but the locals say that Euthymus was the son, not of this man, but of the river Caecinus, which divides the territory of Locris from that of Rhegium...¹⁷ Although Euthymus won the victory in boxing in the 74th Olympiad [484 BCE], he did not win at the next Olympiad. For Theagenes of Thasus wanted to win both the boxing and the *pancratation* at the same Olympiad. He beat Euthymus in the boxing but did not have enough strength to win the olive crown in the *pancratation* because he was already exhausted by his fight with Euthymus. The umpires penalized Theagenes with a fine of one talent to

¹⁵ Homer, *Iliad* 19.266–268.

¹⁶ The Spartans were debarred from the Olympic games of 420 BCE because they had not paid a fine that had been imposed on them according to Olympic law; see Thucydides 5.49–50.

¹⁷ *son...of the Caecinus river*: a legend that probably developed after his heroization, see 8.16 with note.

be paid to Zeus, and another talent to be paid to Euthymus for the harm done to him.¹⁸ They judged that Theagenes had entered the boxing contest merely to spite Euthymus. Because of this, they condemned him to pay the extra fine privately to Euthymus. At the 76th Olympiad [476 BCE] Theagenes paid in full the fine to Zeus... and, as compensation to Euthymus, he did not enter the boxing. Euthymus won the crown for boxing at this festival and at the following one.

An inscription on the base of his statue at Olympia indicates that Euthymus was posthumously heroized.

- 8.16** INSCRIFTEN VON OLYMPIA 144.

Euthymus of Locri, son of Astycles, after winning three times at Olympia,

set up this statue to be admired by mortals.¹⁹

Euthymus of Locri Epizephyri dedicated it.

Pythagoras of Samos made it.

Despite his disqualification in the games of 484 BCE, Theagenes went on to win several victories and was later heroized by his fellow citizens. Pausanias tells the story of how his statue was thrown into the sea and the Delphi oracle ordered the people of Thasus to worship the athlete as a god.

- 8.17** PAUSANIAS 6.11.5–9. The total number of crowns that Theagenes won was one thousand four hundred. After he died, one of his enemies came every night to his statue in Thasus, and whipped the bronze image as if he were flogging Theagenes himself. The statue stopped this outrage by falling upon the man and killing him; whereupon the sons of the dead man prosecuted the statue for murder. The people of Thasus threw the statue into the sea, in accordance with the laws of Draco, who, when he wrote the homicide laws for the Athenians, imposed banishment even upon inanimate objects that fell and killed a person.

In time, however, when the earth did not yield the Thasians' crops, they sent envoys to Delphi, where Apollo instructed them to recall their exiles. Obeying his word, they restored the exiles, but this did not cure the famine. They went to the Pythia a second time, saying that although they had followed the instructions, the anger of the gods was still remained. The Pythia replied: "You do not remember your great Theagenes."

The Thasians were at a loss, unable to think how to recover the statue of Theagenes. They say that fishermen who had put to sea in search of fish happened to catch the statue in their nets and brought it back to land. The Thasians put the statue back in its original position and now they sacrifice to Theagenes as if he were a god. I know of many places, both among the

¹⁸ *talent*: a large sum of money that was equal to 6000 drachmas.

¹⁹ *admired by mortals*: Miller 2004 a: 162–164 notes that these words are a later addition to the inscription, suggesting that Euthymus' heroization was posthumous.

Greeks and barbarians, where statues of Theagenes have been set up and the natives worship and honor him as a healing power.

A daughter of King Archidamus of Sparta (ruled 469–427 BCE) was heroized in her home town as the first woman to own racehorses and win the chariot race at Olympia.²⁰ Her statue was also set up at Olympia; the inscribed statue base has survived.

- 8.18 PAUSANIAS 3.15.1. Cynisca, the daughter of King Archidamus of Sparta, has a hero's shrine in the Plane-tree Grove. She was the first woman to raise horses and the first to win a chariot race at Olympia.
- 8.19 PAUSANIAS 6.1.6. At Olympia, beside the statue of Troilus, is a stone ledge with a chariot and team and a driver and a statue of Cynisca herself by Apelles,²¹ and there is an inscription about Cynisca.
- 8.20 *INSCRIFTEN VON OLYMPIA* 160.
Kings of Sparta were my fathers and brothers.
I, Cynisca, won with a team of fast horses
and erected this statue. I proclaim that I am the only woman in all
Greece
to win this crown.

Although women were forbidden to attend the Olympic games on certain days, *parthenoi* (virgins, as opposed to married women) were permitted as spectators and a priestess watched the games from her seat on an altar.²²

- 8.21 PAUSANIAS 5.6.7. Along the road from Scillus to Olympia, before you cross the river Alpheus, there is a precipitous mountain with high cliffs. It is called Mount Typeion. From here it is the law of the Eleians to hurl down any woman whose presence is discovered at the Olympic games, or even on the other side of the river Alpheus, on the forbidden days.
- 8.22 PAUSANIAS 6.20.8–9. At the end of the row of statues made from the fines imposed on the athletes, there is an entrance called the Hidden Entrance. Through it the umpires and also the competitors enter the stadium. The stadium is a bank of earth, and on it is seating for the presidents. Opposite the umpires is a white marble altar; on this a woman sits and watches the Olympic games, the priestess of Demeter of the Ground, an office awarded by Elis from time to time to different women. Virgins are not barred from watching the games.

On days that were not forbidden, virgins and women were allowed to sacrifice on the lower level (*prothesis*) of the altar of Zeus.²³

20 As in the case of Lichas (8.14), the owner of the equestrian team was honored, not the driver of the chariot.

21 *Apelles*: famous artist of the late fourth century BCE.

22 On women and athletics, see Dillon 2002: 131–32 and Miller 2004 a: 150–159.

23 On this altar, see 6.7.

- 8.23 PAUSANIAS 5.13.10. There are stone steps leading from either side to the lower levels, but those going from the lower to the upper part of the altar are composed of ash. Virgins and married women are permitted to go as far as the lower level at times when they are not excluded from Olympia; but only men are permitted to climb from here to the top of the altar.

At the Heraea, a festival in honor of the goddess Hera that was supervised by the Sixteen Women, virgin girls competed in footraces.

- 8.24 PAUSANIAS 5.16.2–3. Every four years the Sixteen Women weave a robe for Hera, and the same women hold the games that are called Heraea. The games are foot-races for virgin girls. These girls are of different ages: the youngest are the first to run, after them come the next youngest, and the last to run are the oldest maidens. They run with their hair loose and their tunics a little above their knees; their right shoulder is bared as far as the breast. The course for the race is the track of the Olympic stadium, less about a sixth of its length. They give the winners crowns made of olive-branches and a share of the cow sacrificed to Hera; and the girls are permitted to dedicate statues inscribed with their names.

Athenian drama festivals

Each year the Athenians celebrated three drama festivals: the City or Great Dionysia, the Rural Dionysia, and the Lenaea, each in honor of the god Dionysus. By the early fifth century BCE, there were annual competitions for the performance of tragedies, satyr plays, dithyrambs and, after 487/6 BCE, comedies.²⁴ Drama competitions, like the athletic and musical contests that we have examined, were enacted in a religious context.

The most important of these festivals, the City or Great Dionysia, was celebrated in the month *Elaphoboleion*, at the end of winter and the beginning of the sailing season when a large number of people would have been free

24 *dithyrambs*: special hymns in honor of Dionysus performed by two choruses, one of fifty men and the other of fifty boys. *satyr plays*: in the fifth and early fourth centuries BCE, a satyr play followed the performance of three tragedies, all four plays being written by the same author. The chorus consisted of satyrs, legendary wild men displaying animal features (horse's ears and tail) and a phallus, whose wanton and often lascivious behavior was in sharp contrast to that of the tragic chorus. Two satyr plays have survived, Euripides' *Cyclops* and part of Sophocles' *Ichneutae* (Trackers), together with numerous fragments. Since Aristotle, *Poetics* 4.17, reports that tragedy developed from the *saturikon* (some kind of performance by satyrs), it is suggested that satyr plays were introduced into the festival when tragedies included non-Dionysiac material; see OCD entry on satyr plays.

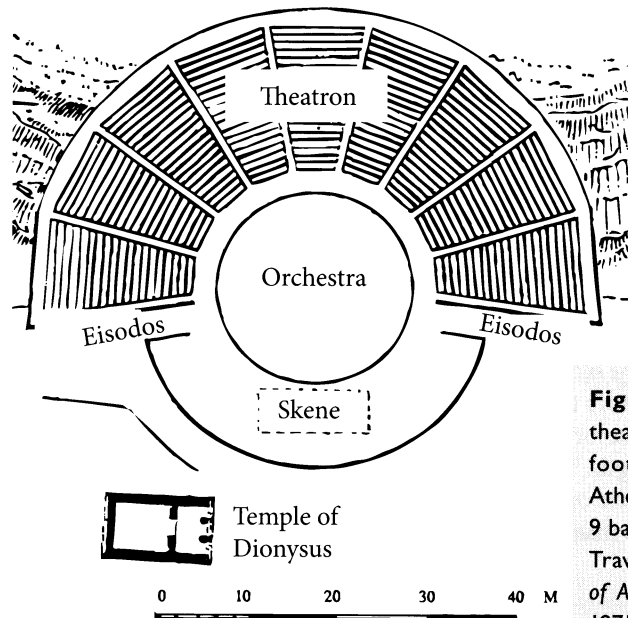


Figure 8.1. Diagram of theater of Dionysus at the foot of the acropolis in Athens (from Blondell 2002: 9 based on the sketch by J. Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* [London 1971] 540.)

to attend.²⁵ This festival is generally considered to have been established, or at least elaborated, during the rule of the tyrant Pisistratus (c. 560-527 BCE). Like the Panathenaea, it became an occasion for the city to showcase itself to the Greek world.

After c. 500 BCE dramatic performances were held in the open-air theater of Dionysus that was located within the god's precinct at the foot of the acropolis. The audience was seated on the slopes of the *theatron*, probably originally on the ground, looking down on the *orchestra*, the dancing area where the chorus performed the choral odes. At the front of the *theatron*, on a level with the *orchestra*, were carved stone seats for the judges, the priest of Dionysus, other religious and civic dignitaries, public benefactors, and distinguished foreign visitors. The chorus entered and exited via the two *eisodoi*. The action took place on the *skene* (usually translated as "stage," though it literally means "tent" or "hut") in front of a backdrop that usually represented a palace or house with one or two doors through which the actors entered and exited.

²⁵ Scholars have long been divided on the question of whether women were spectators at the plays. The arguments for their presence of Henderson 1991: 133-147 are opposed by Goldhill 1994: 347-369. Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 177-184 maintains that "respectable Athenian women" were present at the theatrical performances and that they participated in all parts of the City Dionysia, except for the *komos*.

At the Great Dionysia the performances took place over three or more days. Three tragedians were chosen to compete, each offering three tragedies and a satyr play. Most tragic dramas were based on well known myths. Five comic poets each offered a single play. The ten tribes competed with each other, offering two dithyramb.

The Chief Magistrate (Eponymous Archon) was in charge of the organization of the festival. He selected the playwrights whose plays were to be performed and appointed the citizens who were to be financially responsible for the production of these plays. The *choregus*, or impresario, was a wealthy citizen who undertook the expense of equipping and training both the chorus and actors. This task, known as a "liturgy," was viewed as a civic duty and a mark of honor for the *choregus* and his deme. Since the producers were competing with each other, it was in the interest of the *choregus* to do the best possible job, regardless of expense, for the deme, himself and, of course, the god.

The orator and politician Demosthenes was acting as *choregus* for the performance of a dithyrambic chorus of fifty men. He brought a prosecution against Meidias who, he alleged, had tried to ruin his preparations. Demosthenes emphasizes the desecration of the equipment he had commissioned.

- 8.25 DEMOSTHENES, *AGAINST MEIDIAS* 16. The sacred garment—indeed, I regard as sacred everything that is being prepared for the festival until after it has been used—that garment and the gold crowns that I was having made for the chorus to wear, he plotted to destroy, gentlemen of Athens, by a night raid on my goldsmith. And he did destroy them, but not completely.

A few days before the festival, the archaic cult statue was taken in a procession from Dionysus' temple near the theater and placed in a small shrine in preparation for the procession into the city.

- 8.26 PAUSANIAS 1.29.2. Outside the city ...near the Academy²⁶... there is a small temple, into which every year on fixed days they carry the image of Dionysus Eleuthereus.

This ritual reflects the story of the initial rejection of the cult, the god's revenge, and his eventual acceptance on the recommendation of the Delphic oracle.

- 8.27 SCHOLION TO ARISTOPHANES, *ACHARNIANS* 243. Pegasus of Eleutherae (Eleutherae is a *polis* in Boeotia) came to Attica, bringing the statue of Dionysus. The Athenians did not receive the god with honor, but he did not depart from those who took this decision without exacting a price. For the god became enraged and struck the male sexual organs with an incurable disease. Exhausted by the disease, which proved stronger than any human magic and skill, sacred ambassadors were sent to consult

²⁶ *Academy*: the public gymnasium in Athens, from which derives the name of the school established there by Plato. It was outside the city, near the Dipylon Gate and the small hill of Colonus.

Apollo. When they returned, they said that the only cure was to introduce the god with all honor. Persuaded by these reports, the Athenians made phalluses privately and publicly, and with these they venerated the god in commemoration of the disease.²⁷

The statue of Dionysus was taken from the temple near the Academy to the altar of the Twelve Gods in the Agora where a *xenismos*, a ritual reception and entertaining a guest or foreigner, was celebrated. An escort of ephebes, accompanied by revellers, then took the statue to the theater probably by night.²⁸ The statue was placed in the orchestra, the circular space in which the choruses danced as they sang the choral odes.

On the following day, 10 Elaphobolion, there was a public procession to the sanctuary. The myth of Dionysus' revenge for his initial rejection was represented by men carrying models of giant phalluses. Marching in the procession were civic officials, representatives from the different areas of the city, metics (resident aliens) dressed in purple, the producers or impresarios of the plays (*choregoi*), bearers of sacrificial offerings, a young maiden carrying a basket (*kanephoros parthenos*) with the first fruits (*aparchai*), and attendants bringing the sacrificial victims, which would have included at least a bull and cattle probably led by ephebes. The procession was followed by a great sacrifice and a banquet, with the sacrificial meat being distributed to all. The drama competitions took place in the following days, with the statue of Dionysus in place as a spectator at the performances held in his honor.

²⁷ *phallus*: an image of the penis, often as erect, that was displayed in rituals generally associated with fertility.

²⁸ See Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 69–100 for full details of this reconstruction of the ancient evidence.

THE GODS AND JUSTICE FROM HOMER TO AESCHYLUS

9.1 HOMER, *ILLIAD* 24.524–533.

There is no gain to be had from chilling lamentation;
 this is how the gods have spun the thread of fate for us wretched 525
 mortals, to live in grief; but they do not know any sorrow.¹
 Two storage-jars stand full of gifts in the storeroom of Zeus,
 one of them holding the evils he gives and the other one blessings.
 If Zeus who hurls the thunder-bolt gives someone a mixture
 of both he sometimes meets with evil and sometimes with good. 530
 But if he gives someone only woeful gifts he degrades him;
 evil starvation drives him over the splendid earth,
 and he wanders deprived of honor from gods and mortals alike.

At the end of the *Iliad*, Achilles attributes to Zeus the ultimate responsibility for the allocation of good and evil to mortals. At the beginning of the *Odyssey*, however, the poet emphasizes the gods' support for retribution or justified revenge, a concept that becomes a unifying theme of the poem.² Zeus deplores the way in which mortals blame the gods for sending evil, remarking that mortals make their troubles worse through their own criminal folly.

9.2 HOMER, *ODYSSEY* 1.26–47.

While he sat there enjoying the feast, the rest of the gods
 were assembled together within the halls of Olympian Zeus.
 The father of men and gods was the first to speak among them;
 for in his heart he thought of what happened to splendid Aegisthus,

¹ *spun the thread of fate*: an allusion to Klotho, one of the three Fates; see 1.19.

² On the different moral climate between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, see Lloyd-Jones 1983: 28–32.