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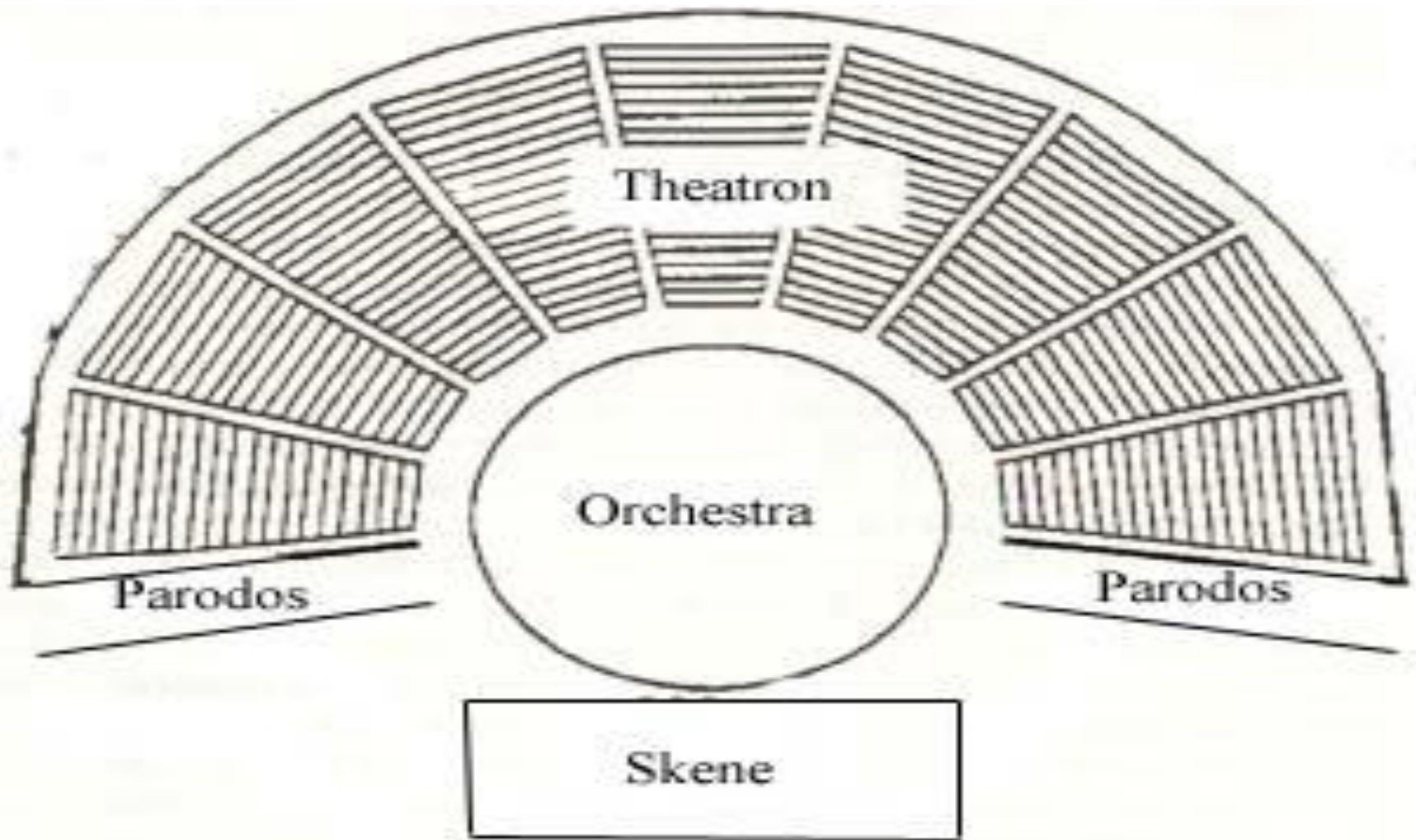
MEDEA

Greek Theatre

Theatron

Orchestra

Parodos

Parodos

Skene

Parts of a Greek Theater

A few things...

- Flourished between c. 550 and c. 220 BC.

- The city-state of Athens, which became a significant cultural, political and military power during this period, was its centre.

- It was created as part of a festival called the Dionysia, which honoured the god Dionysus.

- Tragedy, comedy and the satyr (tragicomedy) play were the three dramatic genres.

- Theatre's were built on a large scale to accommodate the large cast and about 14,000 audience members.

Theatron ('seeing place'):

- the slope of the theatre produced a natural *theatron*, which literally meant "watching place".

Orchestra ('dancing place'):

- The semi-circular performance space for the Chorus.
- The chorus danced and sang.
- The chorus was about 50 men.
- The Choregos was the leader and could interact with the play members.
- The orchestra had an average diameter of 78 feet, and was situated on a flattened terrace at the foot of a hill below the Theatron

Skene ('tent' or 'hut'):

- The word 'scene' derives from this Greek word.

- In 465 BC a backdrop or scenic wall began being used, which hung or stood behind the orchestra.

- It also served as an area where actors could change their costumes.

- The death of a character was always heard behind the *skênê*, for it was considered inappropriate to show a killing in view of the audience.

- In 425 BC a permanent stone scene wall, called a paraskenia, became more common.

- A paraskenia was a long wall with projecting sides, which may have had doorways for entrances and exits.

- Just behind the paraskenia was the proskenion. The proskenion ("in front of the scene") was columned.

Scenic elements

There were several scenic elements commonly used in Greek theatre:

- *machina*, a crane that gave the impression of a flying actor.
- *Ekkyklema*, a wheeled wagon used to bring dead characters into view for the audience
- Trap doors, or similar openings in the ground to lift people onto the stage
- *Pinakes*, pictures hung to create scenery
- *Thyromata*, more complex pictures built into the second-level scene (3rd level from ground)
- Phallic props were used for satyr plays, symbolizing fertility in honor of Dionysus.

Masks:

- In a large open-air theatre, like the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens, the classical masks were able to bring the characters' face closer to the audience.

- Exaggerated facial features and expressions.

- Enabled an actor to appear in several different roles, thus preventing the audience from identifying the actor to one specific character.

- Helped the audience to distinguish sex, age, and social status,

- Also helped to reveal a change in a particular character's appearance, i.e. Oedipus after blinding himself.

- Unique masks were also created for specific characters and events in a play.

- Worn by the chorus, the masks created a sense of unity and uniformity.

Costumes:

The costume was probably an elaborately-decorated version of everyday clothing worn. The garments included:

- *chiton* (robe or tunic)
- *chlaina* (overgarment)
- *chlamys* (short cloak)
- *kothurnus* (short lace-up boots)
- *himation* (overgarment)
- *peplos* (cloak)

- The costumes worn gave the audience an immediate sense of

character-type, gender, age, social status and class.

Costumes:

Onkos:

- headdress which was used to elevate height and make them more visible to the audience.

Female costumes:

- Male actors played female parts because women weren't allowed to participate in the theatre.
- The male actors wore a "prosterneda" (a wooden structure in front of the chest, to imitate female breasts) and "progastreda" in front of the belly.

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Seating arrangements:

- It was divided in two **Diazoma**: the upper and lower.

- Staircases separated the theatron into wedge shaped sections.

- The front seats were called **Proedria** and were reserved for officials and priests.

- The most honourable spectator of the theatre was the priest of Dionysus, who was sitting in a throne made of marble.

- There was a special block of seats reserved for members of the *boulê* (the 500-member Executive Council of the Assembly).

- Ordinary citizens might have been assigned seats on the basis of the ten Attic tribes.

- Theatre tickets were often stamped with a Greek letter that apparently referred to a specific wedge of seats.

- The audience were primarily adult male citizens of Athens, with perhaps a sprinkling of resident foreigners (*metics*);

Euripides

- Born in Salamis in 480 - 406 BC
- last of the three great tragedians (Aeschylus and Sophocles).
- wrote ninety-five plays (approx); 18/19 have survived (more than other two!)
- reshaped the structure of tragedy by portraying strong female characters, intelligent slaves and by making fun of many heroes of Greek mythology.
- First competed in City Dionysia in 455BC (3rd!).
- 441BC - came first (won four times altogether).
- Despite being not as successful in winning (Aeschylus = 13; Sophocles = 18) his plays were more popular.
- Euripides' greatest works include *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Trojan Women*, and *The Bacchae*.
- Euripides focused on the realism of his characters, for example Medea is a realistic woman with recognisable emotions and is not simply a villain – we understand her actions.

'Medea' by Euripides

- Based on the myth of Medea and Jason.

- Medea is the lead role (protagonist) and a barbarian (aggressive and uncultured).

- Medea has been betrayed by her husband and the play focuses on her revenge.

Jason and the Golden Fleece

During his quest to gain the Golden fleece, Jason had to complete three tasks put to him by King Aeetes. Realising that he would fail, Jason fell into a depression. The Gods intervened and made Aeetes daughter, Medea, fall in love with Jason.   She helped him complete the tasks and when they had acquired the fleece, Jason returned to Corinth, taking Medea with him. Aeetes chased them, so Medea killed her brother and threw bits of his body into the sea to distract her father.   Medea and Jason escaped and were married in Corinth.

Medea

- Jason betrays Medea by abandoning her for another woman.
- He leaves her to marry Glauce, the daughter of King Creon.
- Creon, fearing what Medea will do, tries to send her into exile.
- Medea begs him to stay, which he allows.
- Medea begins plotting her revenge on Jason by deciding to kill King Creon, Glauce and her own children.
- Glauce is killed by a poisoned dress; Creon dies by the same poison as he tries to help her.
- Medea murders her children (off stage).
- At the end of the play, Medea faces a distraught Jason.

Structure of a Tragedy

- **Prologue:**
  - an opening to establishes the setting and background.
  - Can mention an earlier story that ties into the main one e.g. Jason and the Golden Fleece; Jason's betrayal.

- **Chorus and Choral Odes:**
  - communicate in song and altogether.
  - Chorus are used as a final curtain – they signify the end of the play/scene.
  - Choral odes (songs sung by the chorus) separated each 'scene' (episode).
  - These songs were known as a STASIMON and talked about what has happened in the episode before.

- **Entrance of chorus:**
  - **Enter chanting a song called the PARADOS.**
  - **The Parados repeats what has been said in the prologue.**

- **Episode:**
  - Each Greek tragedy is split into 3-5 episodes (scenes).

- **Agon:**
  - **an AGON is a formal debate between the main characters (e.g. between Jason and Medea).**
  - **The chorus act as a judge.**

- **Messenger's speech:**
  - **This speech describes off stage action e.g. any deaths, mutilations etc that can't be seen on stage.**
  - **A messenger will inform us about the violent action that has taken place off stage.**
  - **It is the only way an audience would know what has happened.**

Ready to read?