

Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Overview of Greek Drama

- Tragedy and Satyr Plays emerge at the same time in late pre-Classical Athens
 - but in retrospect, Tragedy seems to come first
- the works of only three Major Classical Tragedians survive:
 - Aeschylus (525-456 BCE)
 - Sophocles (495-406 BCE)
 - Euripides (485-406 BCE)

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Overview of Greek Drama

- the earliest known type of comic drama is the Satyr Play
- “Old Comedy” is first presented at the Dionysia in 486 BCE
- first extant Old Comedies are by Aristophanes (mid-400’s – 386 BCE)
 - Cratinus (active from 440’s-420’s BCE)
 - Eupolis (active ca. 429-410 BCE)

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Overview of Greek Drama

- in the post-Classical period (after 404 BCE) tragedy begins to decline
- comedy dominates Greek theatre
 - Middle Comedy (390's- 320's BCE)
 - New Comedy (after the 320's BCE)
- the greatest playwright of New Comedy was Menander (344-291 BCE)
 - but his work survives largely on papyrus

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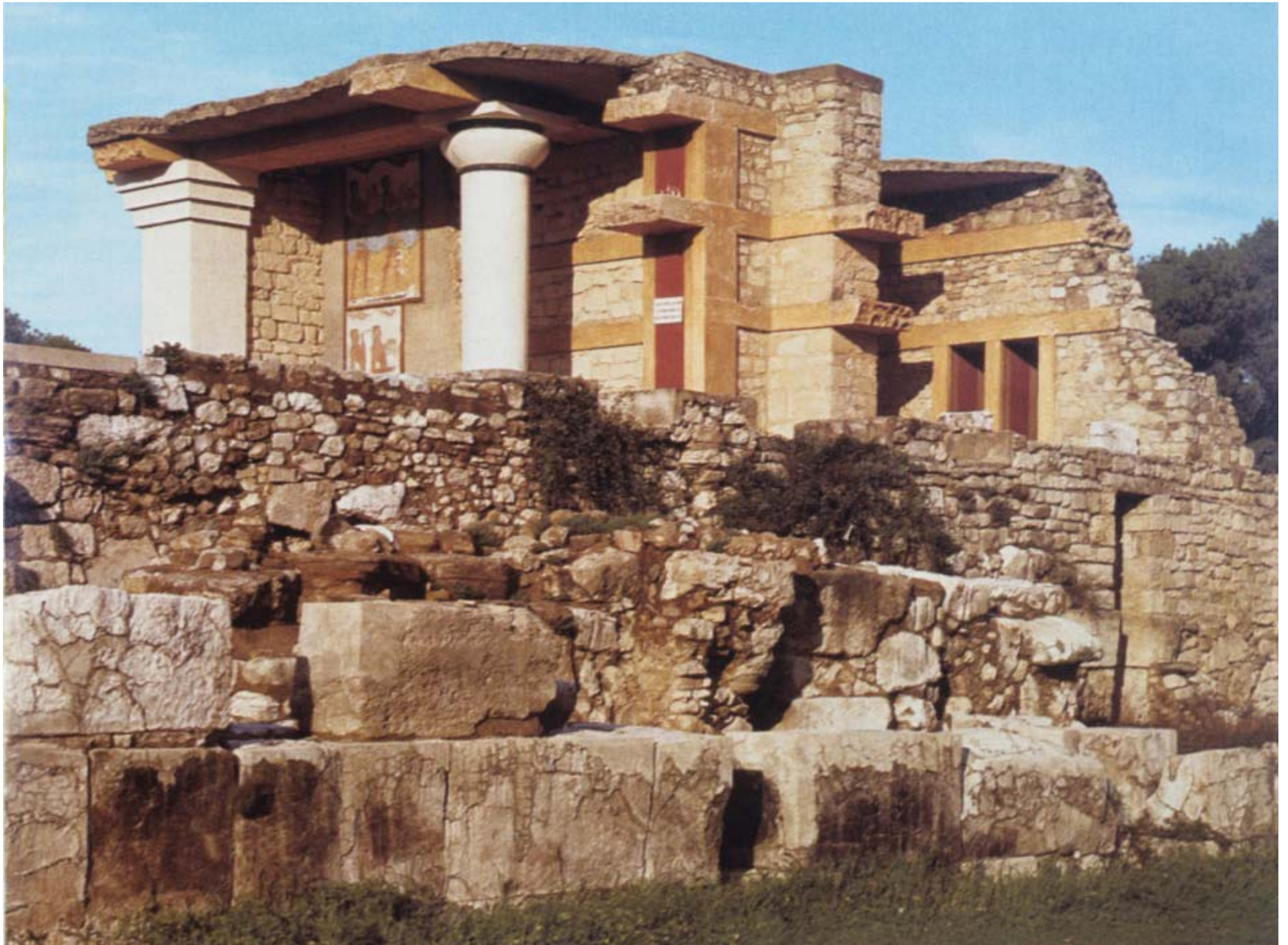
Where were plays produced in antiquity?

- Can we expect to find specially built “theatres” for the earliest dramas?
- What should we look for in early venues where drama might have happened?
 - space for acting/impersonation
 - space for seating/viewing

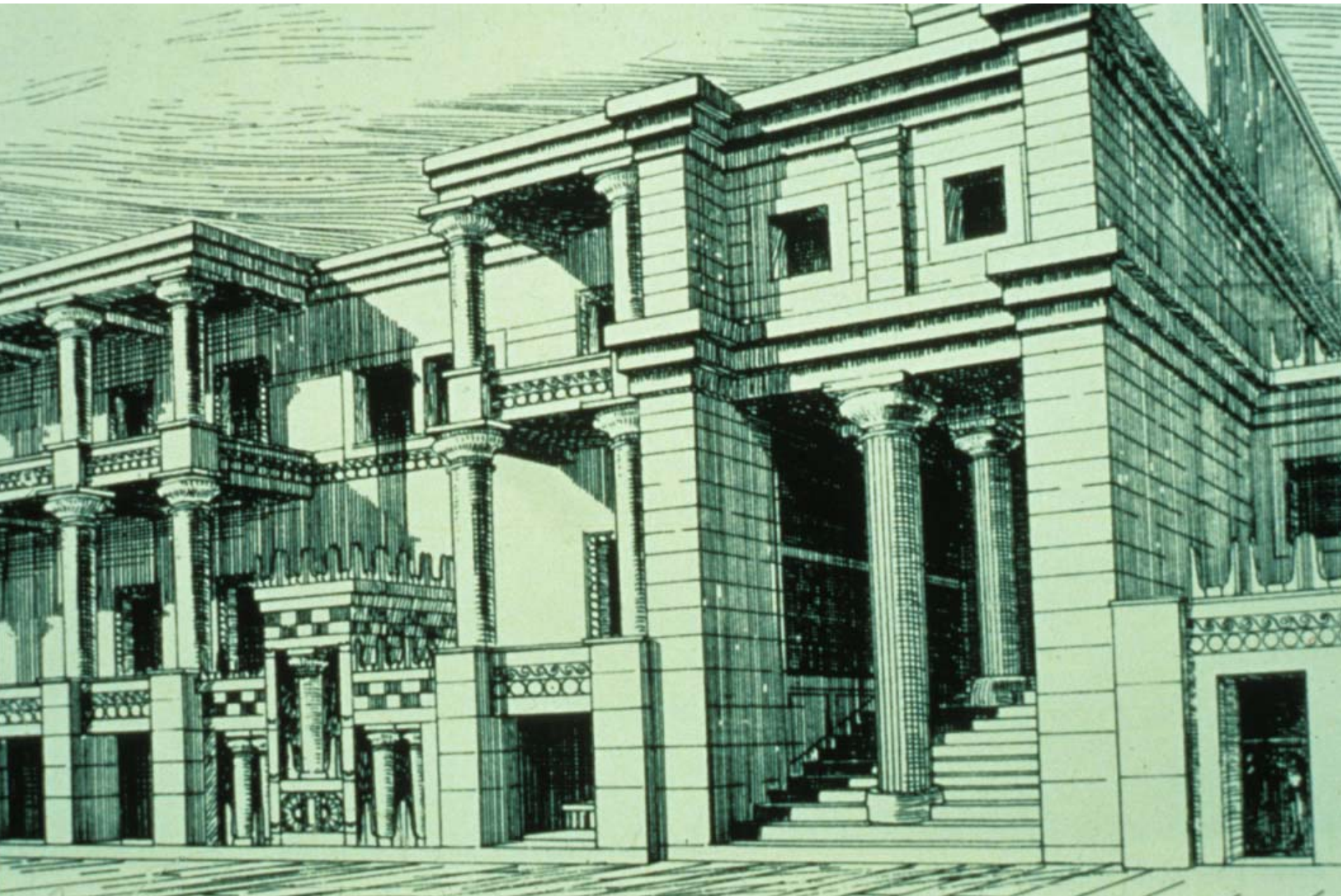
Knossos (Crete)



Knossos (Crete)



Reconstruction of Knossos



Open Space at Knossos



Open Space at Knossos

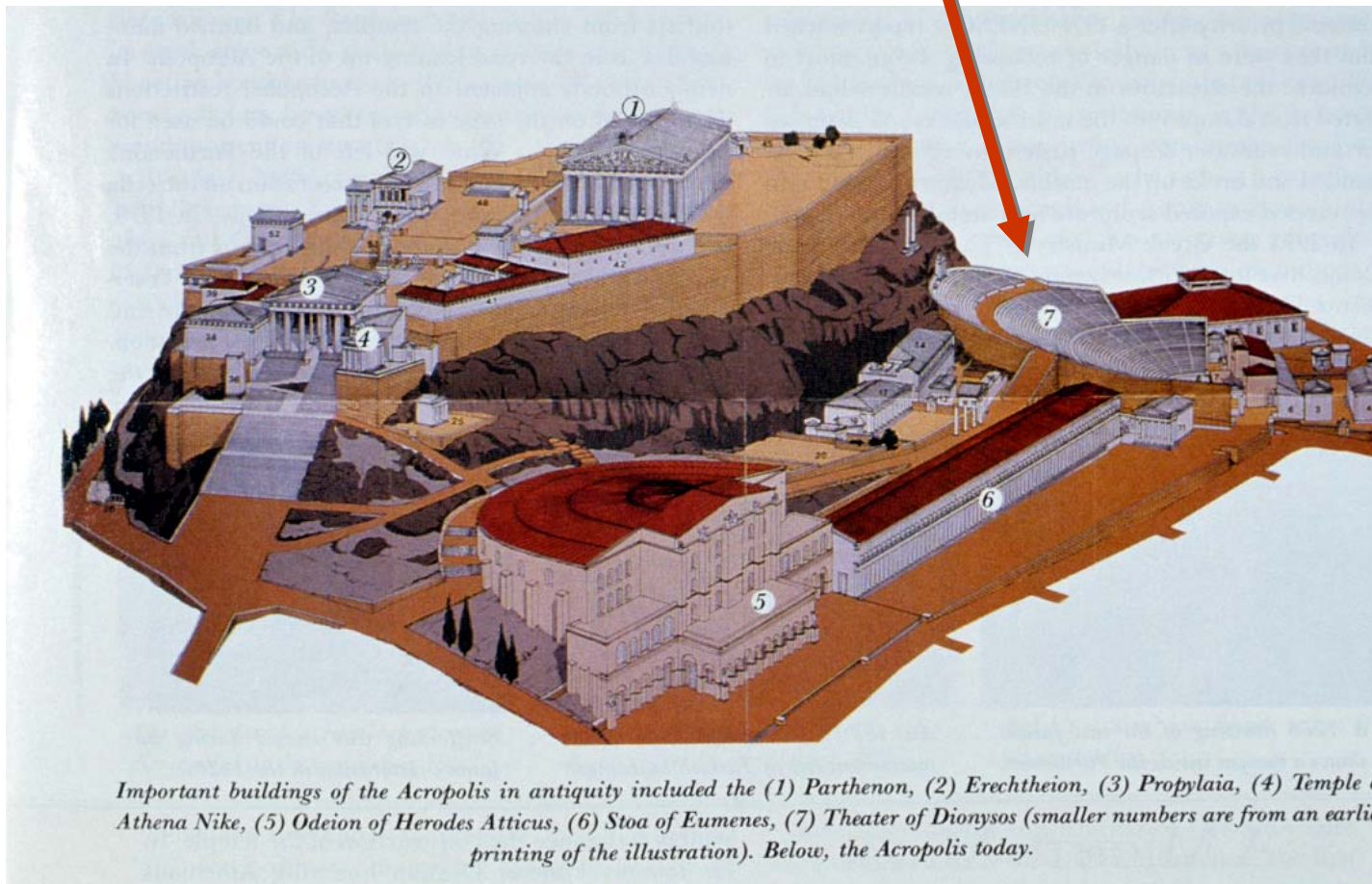


Open Space at Knossos



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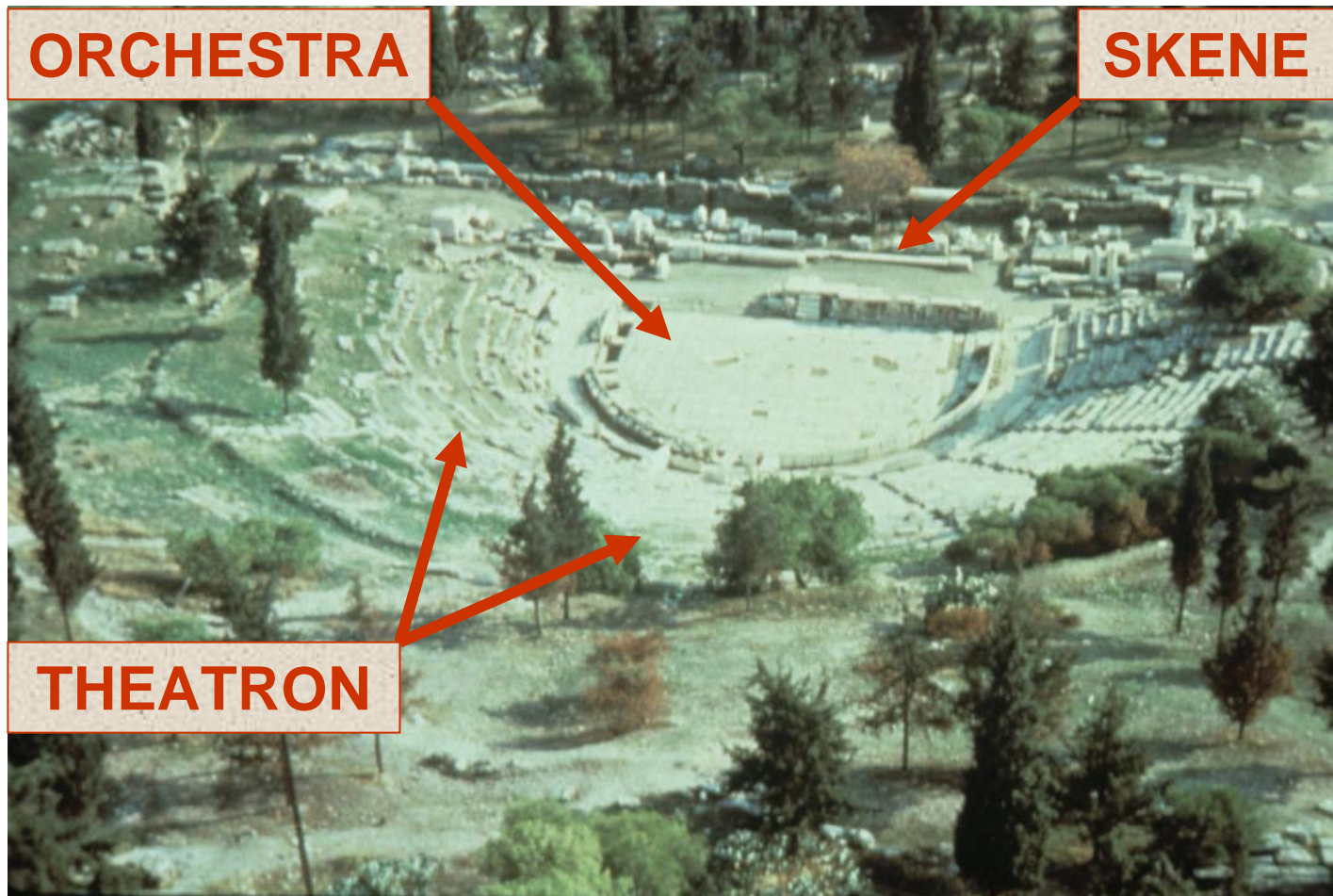
Theatre of Dionysus (Athens)



Important buildings of the Acropolis in antiquity included the (1) Parthenon, (2) Erechtheion, (3) Propylaea, (4) Temple of Athena Nike, (5) Odeion of Herodes Atticus, (6) Stoa of Eumenes, (7) Theater of Dionysos (smaller numbers are from an earlier printing of the illustration). Below, the Acropolis today.

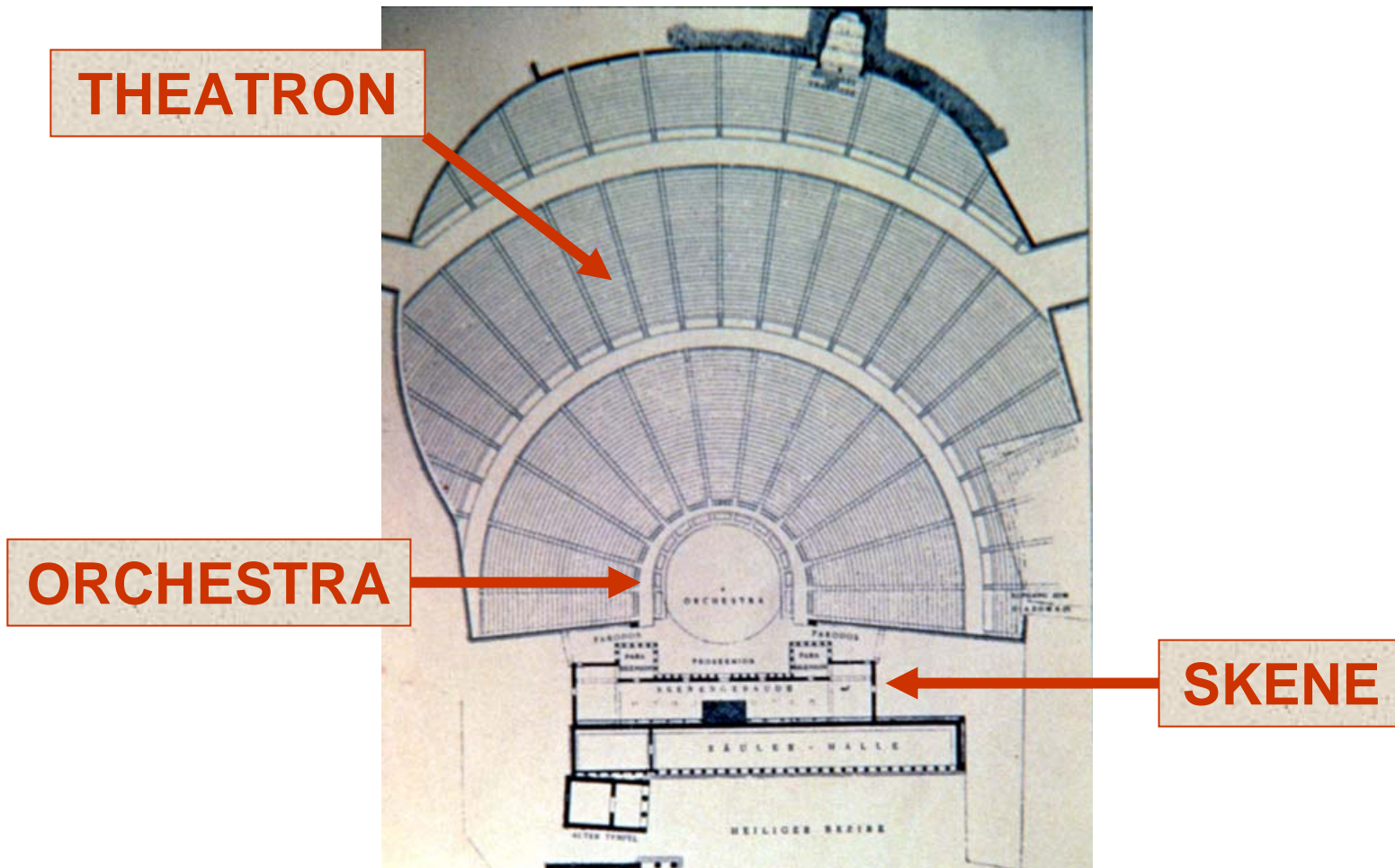
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Theatre of Dionysus (Athens)



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Theatre of Dionysus (Athens)



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Theatre of Thorikos (orchestra)



Fig. 26. View of Theatre at Thorikos

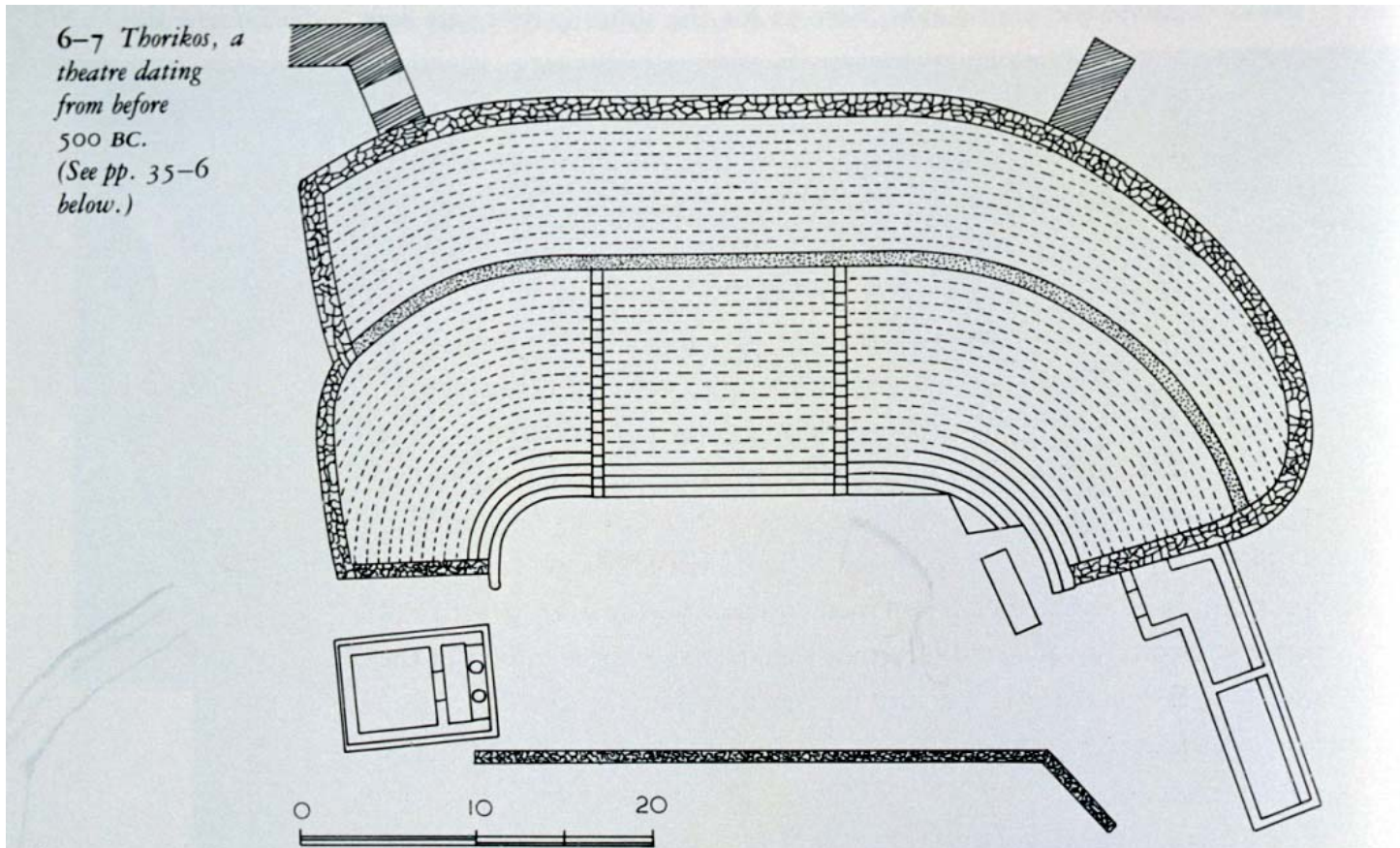
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Theatre of Thorikos (orchestra)



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Theatre of Thorikos (orchestra)



Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Dionysus (*theatron*)



Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Dionysus (*theatron*)



Chapter 6: Greek Classical Theatre

Theatre of Dionysus (*theatron*)



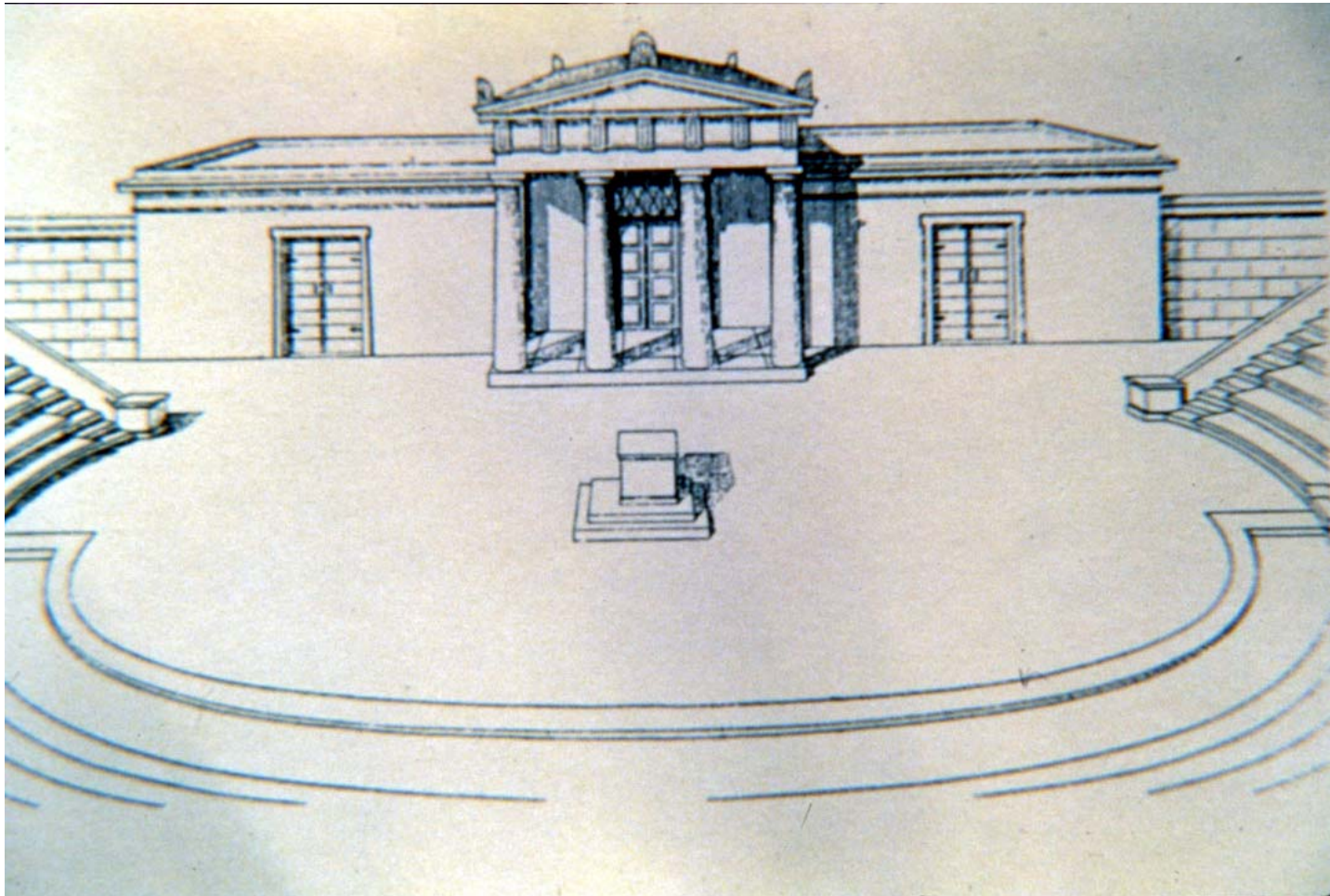
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Skene



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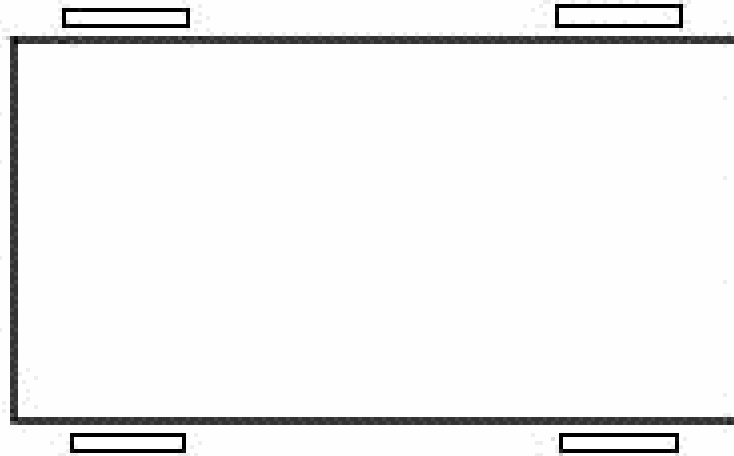
Skene



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Special Effects

Ekkyklema: a rolling platform



ΕΚΚΥΚΛΗΜΑ

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Special Effects

Mechane: a crane used to lift actors into the air and fly them across the stage

- not necessary in plays until the 420's BCE
 - but the end of Euripides' *Medea* (431 BCE)?
- how did it work, e.g. actor twisting on rope?
- when not in use, was it hidden from view?
 - i.e. how illusionistic was Classical Greek theatre

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How were Greek tragedies presented?

- How many at a time?
 - **Trilogies**
 - actually tetralogies: 3 tragedies + satyr play
- In what style?
 - Little opportunity for **Interiority**
 - **Presentationism**
 - cf. **courtroom trials**

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How were Greek tragedies presented?

- Who paid for the production?
 - **Choregos** (“producer”)
 - a rich man required to do public service
- What was the playwright’s job?
 - **Chorodidaskalos** (“chorus-teacher”)
 - i.e. he taught the songs/dances to the chorus
 - and originally he acted in the play himself

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Masks



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Masks

- masks allow for **multiple-role playing**
- **three-actor rule**
 - **protagonist**
 - **deuteragonist**
 - **tritagonist**
- why only three?



PLATE 5. Peiraieus actors' relief.

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Voices

- must have been the actor's principal tool
 - cf. modern opera singers
- how difficult would it have been for the audience to know which actor was speaking at any moment?
 - with masked actors at some distance
 - thus, few **trialogues**, and all are found in later Classical tragedy

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Stichomythy (“line-talking”)

- predictable pattern of conversation based on poetic meter
- e.g. Euripides’ *Hippolytus* (347-352)

Phaedra: What thing is this that men call love?

Nurse: It’s sweetest, child, and bitter too.

Phaedra: I’ve only known the latter, Nurse.

Nurse: What’s that? Oh, you’re in love? With whom?

Phaedra: That man, born from an Amazon . . .

Nurse: Hippolytus? . . .

Phaedra: . . . Quoth you, not I!

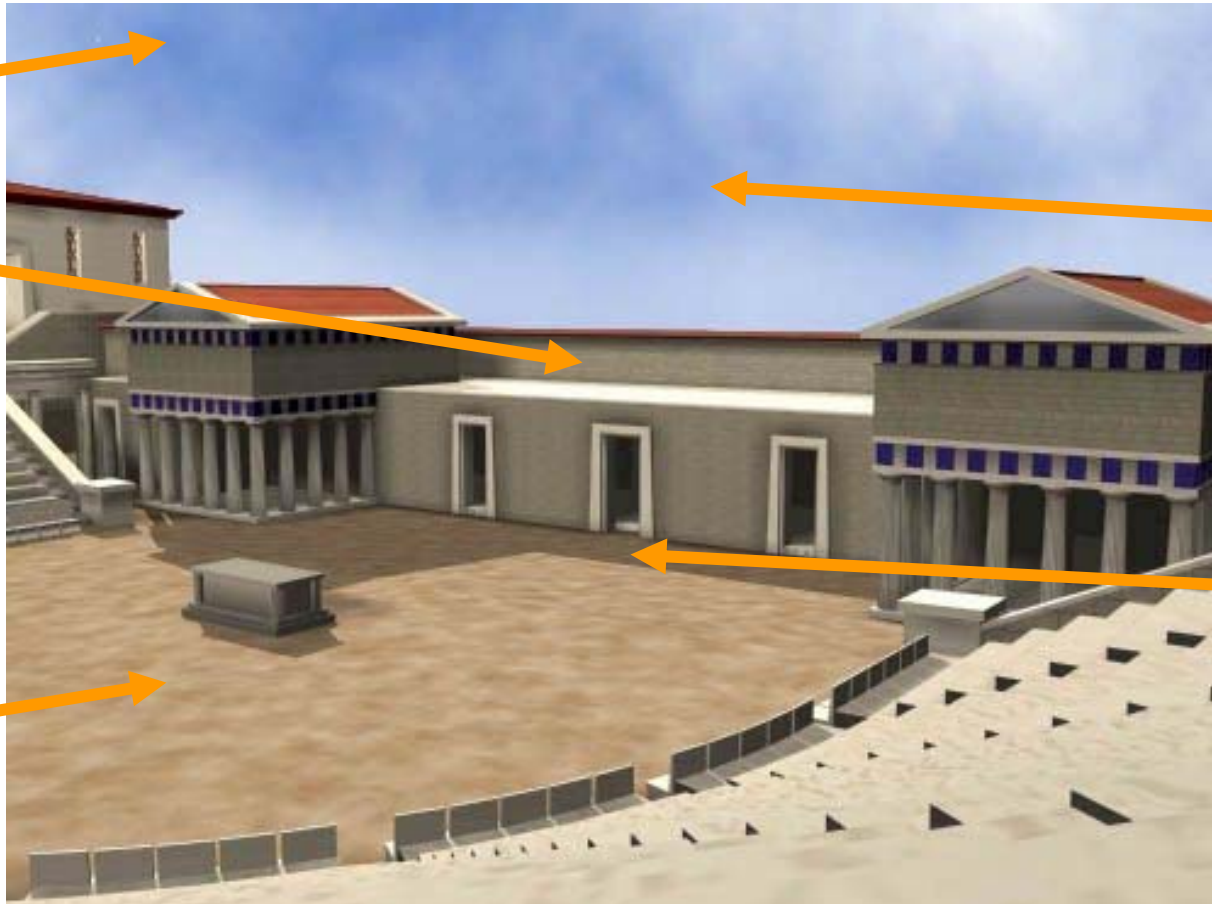
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The Finale of Euripides' *Orestes*

Apollo
(the sun)

Orestes
on roof
of *skene*,
with mutes
playing
other roles

Chorus in
Orchestra



Apollo on
mechane,
with mute
Helen

Menelaus
on stage,
with army
(secondary
chorus)