Early Theatre: Greek, Roman and Medieval

Resources

Text...

Wilson and Goldfarb. *Theatre: The Lively Art*, 7th edition. Chapter 11.

Plays: Greek...

Aeschylus. *Prometheus Bound*
Sophocles. *Oedipus, Antigone*
Euripides. *Trojan Women*
Aristophanes. *Lysistrata, The Birds*

Plays: Roman...

Plautus. *The Menaechmi*
Seneca. *Oedipus*

Plays: Medieval...

Wakefield Cycle. *"The Second Shepherd's Play"*
The Passion Play
Everyman

[Greek Theatre](#) | [Roman Theatre](#) | [Medieval Theatre](#)

Greek Theatre

What has survived from the Greek and Roman era?

We have 33 Greek plays, 36 Roman plays and more than 400 Greco-Roman Theatres in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia -- anywhere the Roman Empire established a protectorate.

1. How did religious ritual evolve into Greek theatre?

There were four major celebrations, in honor of the Greek god Dionysus. Three of these celebrations-- the *City Dionsyia* in the spring and the *Lenaia* and *Rural Dionysia* in the winter --would involve drama. One of the elements of these celebrations was the [dithyramb](#), a choral ode song to the gods. [Aristotle](#) tell us that Greek tragedy grew out of the dithyramb.

2. What was the relationship between Greek mythology and early Greek drama?

Greek mythology is the legends and stories behind the Greek gods. The earliest Greek dramas, especially those by Aeschylus (525-456 BCE), drew their **plots and characters** from these myths.

3. The first tragic dramas were performed in honor of which Greek god?

Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, fertility and revelry.

4. At which dramatic festival were these dramas first performed?

The City Dionysia.

5. Where was this festival held? When?

Athens, in the early **spring** (March).

6. What was a dithyramb?

The dithyramb was a lengthy "hymn" or **choral ode** in honor of Dionysus which was sung by a chorus of fifty men.

How did it evolve into drama?

Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, tells us that one of the choral leaders, Thespis (6th Century, BCE), left the chorus, jumped on to the alter, and assumed the role of "the god".
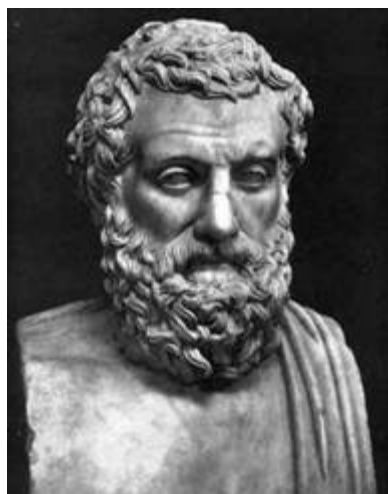
7. Who was the first actor?

Thespis.

The first playwright?

Also, **Thespis**. He won the first Greek tragedy contest in 534 BCE.

8. What type of dramas did Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides write?

Tragedies.

### 9. Which of these three was the first playwright whose work has survived?

Aeschylus (525-456 BCE) won thirteen Tragic Contests. We have seven of the approximately 80 plays he wrote, including the only complete trilogy: *Oresteia* (458 BCE) -- *Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*, and *Eumenides*..

Aeschylus

10. What was Aeschylus' major contribution to the art of playwrighting?

He **added the second actor**, creating the possibility of dramatic dialogue. Thespis' tragedies utilized only one actor and the chorus.

11. What is Sophocles' (496-406 BCE) most important drama?
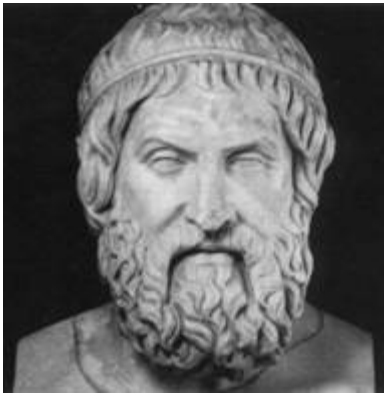
Sophocles

Oedipus Tyrannos (430-425? BCE), also known as *Oedipus Rex* or *Oedipus the King*. Sophocles won eighteen Tragic Contests. Like Aeschylus, only seven of the more than 120 plays he wrote have survived. See the Play Synopsis on page 411 of *Wilson and Goldfarb*.

How does it rank among world dramatic literature?

Oedipus is considered **one of the great tragedies**. It is ranked with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.
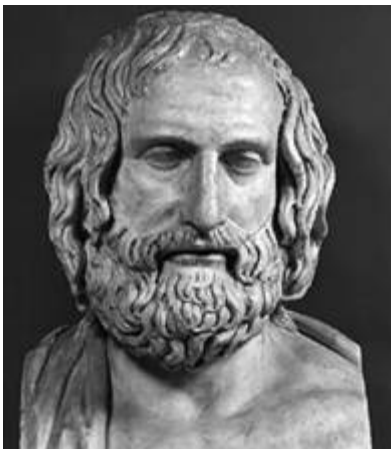
12. According to Sophocles, who was the Greek king who murdered his father and married his mother?

Oedipus.

13. What was Sophocles' contribution to the art of playwrighting?

He added the **third actor.**

14. Why do we have more plays by Euripides than we do of both Sophocles and Aeschylus combined?

Euripides

Because the **Romans**, who eventually over throw Greece's Macedonian rulers (168 BCE), **considered Euripides** (ca. 480-407 BCE) **a greater playwright**, hence taking better care of his manuscripts. He won only five Contests, but we have seventeen of his approximately 90 tragedies. About 3.5% of the tragedies written during Greece's Golden Age (from 534 to 400 BCE) have survived. All were written by these three playwrights.

15. What is *deus ex machina*?

It is a Latin expression which literally means: *God out of the machine*. It is a playwriting term used to describe a **contrived ending**. It means that the dramatic problem is not solved by playwright's characters, that a solution is forced upon them by the playwright. In Greek tragedy, when a playwright was unable to solve the problem he would often use a *machina*, a crane like device mounted on the roof of the *skene* (scene house) to lower a god into the action to solve the character's problem.

With which Greek playwright is this term associated?

Deus ex Machina

Euripides. Contrived endings have been used by other playwrights-- see, for example, Moliere' s solution to Orgon's dilema in the last act of *Tartuffe*.

16. What is a trilogy?

A trilogy is a set of **three short plays** tied together by a common plot line, character, or idea. Each tragic playwright, when he entered the competition for performance at the *City Dionysia*, would submit four plays, a trilogy (3 tragedies) and a satyr play. Aeschylus, the earliest of the three tragic playwrights, built his trilogies around a common plot line. Euripides, the last of the three, usually built his three plays around a common idea. Only one complete trilogy has survived: Aeschylus' *Oresteia* ("Agamemnon," "Libation Bearers," and "Eumenides") The **satyr** play is generally believed to have been a comic treatment of the serious material covered in the tragedies. Only one satyr play, *The Cyclops* by Euripides, has survived.

17. Which structural pattern was used by the three Greek tragic playwrights: Climactic or Episodic?

Climactic.

18. What was the major difference between Old and New Greek Comedy?

Old Comedy was written before 400 BCE, **New Comedy** was written after 400 BCE. *Old Comedy* was mostly political satire. *New Comedy* dealt with domestic affairs: Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy get's girl back again. *New Greek Comedy* is the beginning of the "SitCom." The reason for the change is that the new political rulers -- the Macedonians who united the independent City States under the leadership of King Philip II (382-336 BCE) and his son: Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) -- would no longer accept criticism, hence playwright's stopped writing political satire.

Aristophanes

### 19. Who is the only Old Greek Comedy playwright whose work has survived?

Aristophanes (ca. 448 - ca. 380 BCE)

20. What type of comedies did he write?

Political satire, high comedy

21. What is the title of one of his major works?

He is best remembered for the four plays titled after the chorus: the *The Clouds* (423 BCE), *The Wasps* (422 BCE), *The Birds* (414 BCE), and *The Frogs* (405 BCE). Probably his most often revived script is *Lysistrata* (411 BCE), the story of the women of Athens and Sparta who bring an end to the long war between these two city states through a sex strike.
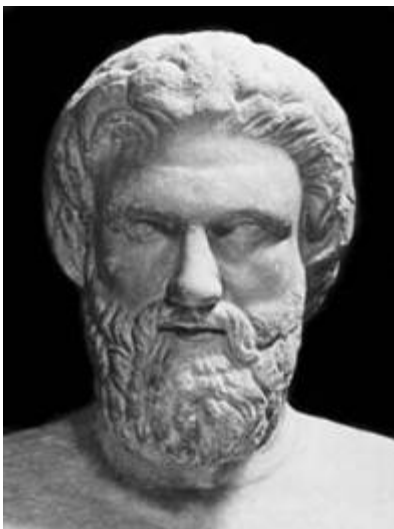
22. How many New Greek Comedy scripts have survived?

We have fragments of only **one** play, *The Grouch*, also known as *The Grumbler* (316 BCE), found in 1959. In contrast, we have eleven (of the approximately forty) Old Greek Comedies by Aristophanes.

Who was its author?

Menander (ca. 342 - 292 BCE)

Menander

23. Which structural pattern was used by Greek comic playwrights: Climactic or Episodic?

Episodic.

24. At which dramatic festival were comedies performed?

Although one day of the *City Dionysia* was alotted for the performance of five comedies, the Dionysian festival at which comedies were the feature was the ***Lenaia***.

## 25. In which city, and during which season did this festival occur?

In **Athens**, during the **winter** (January).

The Fifth Century Greek Theatre

The theatre of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, was a **temporary wooden structure** built for the festival (the *City Dionysia*) and dismantled when the celebration was concluded. The audience probably sat on wooden benches (*theatron*) and the actors and chorus performed on a flat, roughly circular (85' diameter) dirt floored acting area (*orchestra*). The *skene*, a tent or small wooden hut was probably added in the middle of the fifth century. The first permanent theatre was built under Macedonian rule in the middle of the fourth century BCE.
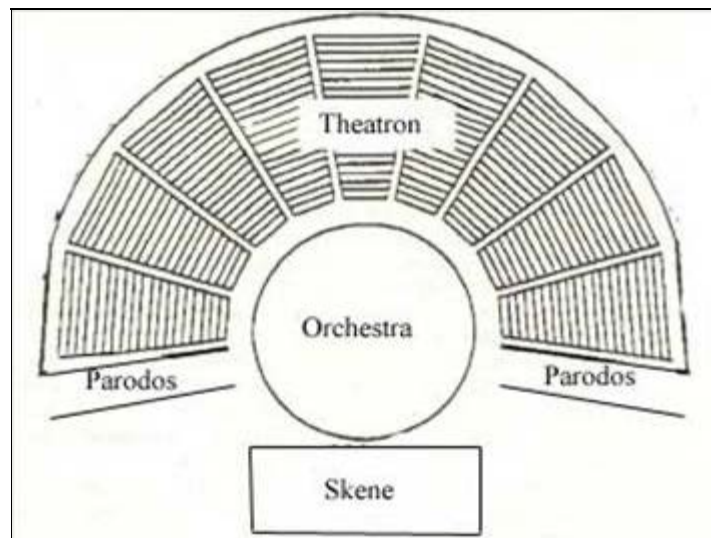
Ground Plan of a Greek Theatre

To the left is the ground plan of a typical Greek Theatre as published by William Smith in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1875). The drawing reflects a 19th century understanding based on an examination of the ruins of a fourth century BCE theatre as remodeled by the Romans during the first century BCE.. Note the circular ***orchestra*** with its **alter** (*thymele*), the ***theatron*** which enfolds approximately 60% of the central playing area, and the ***skene*** -- with its three "doors" -- which just touches the edge of the *orchestra*. Note the differences between this plan and the drawing on page 228.
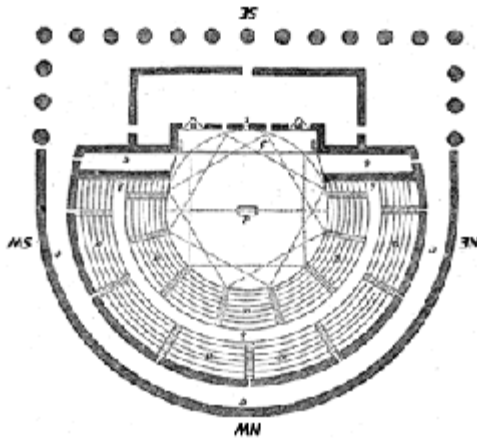
Theatre of Dionysus, Athens

To the left is a view of the ruins of the *Theatre of Dionysus*, the fifth century home of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and the comedies of Aristophanes. This permanent Greek theatre was built between 342 and 326 BCE (approximately 100 years after *Oedipus* was first performed); remodeled to fit the Roman ideal during the reign of Nero (61 BCE), and last used for a theatrical performance during the 4th century CE. This historical site was discovered during the 18th century and excavated during the 19th. Note the *orchestra* (as altered by Romans), the remains of the *theatron* and the footings of the *skene*.

Ground Plan of a Typical Greek Theatre

26. In the classical Greek theatre, what was the <u>theatron</u>?

The *theatron* was the **semi-circular seating area** in the classical Greek theatre. It was generally (but not always) carved out of the side of a hill. It is the source of our word: theatre. Rough English translation: Seeing place.

The <u>orchestra</u>?

Was the **circular acting area** at the foot of the hill, where the chorus (and actors) performed. It was located between the *theatron* and the *skene*. In the center of the orchestra was an alter (or *thymele*). Rough English translation: Dancing place.

The skene?

The *skene*, the source of our word: *scene*, was the **palace** (or **scene house**) at the rear of the acting space. It was introduced in the middle of the fifth century BCE and probably did not exist for Aeschylus' early tragedies. It had at least one, and perhaps as many as three openings (doors?) which could be used as entrances. Rough English translation: Tent or booth. See the diagram on page 228.

The Parodos?

The chorus' **entrance** into the *orchestra*.

27. What was the seating capacity of a typical Greek theatre?

During the 4th century BCE, when the temporary wooden benches were replaced with stone slabs, the 78 rows of the *Theatre of Dionysus* would seat between **15,000 and 16,000** people -- approximately one third the population of Athens. In contrast, a large Broadway theatre, designed primarily for musicals, seats about 1,200.

28. What was the mechane (machina)?

A **crane** mounted on the roof of the *skene*. See the diagram on the bottom of page 228.

How was it used?

It was used to **lower the gods** into the action of the play. Hence the term *deus ex machina*-- God out of the machine.

29. How many actors were used in a Greek tragedy?

Statue of a Greek Actor

Two in the plays of *Aeschylus*, **three** in the works of both *Sophocles* and *Euripides*.

In Greek comedy?

There was no limit. Aristophanes *Lysistrata* has a cast of eleven: seven men and four women plus five choruses: Young women, old women, old men, Athenian men and Spartan men.

30. Did women perform on the Greek stage?

No.

31. What was the social rank of a Greek actor?

Acting in the Greek culture was considered an **acceptable** profession. As we move through theatre history, we will discover the social rank of the performer will vary from accepted to rejected.

32. What was the function of the chorus in a Greek drama?

Painting of a Greek Chorus

1. They were a **character** in the play, usually the townspeople. This character was sympathetic to the protagonist.
2. They presented the **writer's point of view**.
3. They were the **ideal spectator**, their reaction to a scene would cue the audience on how they should react.
4. They **broke the drama into dramatic scenes** (or *episodes*), each scene was separated from the next by a choral interlude (or *ode*).

33. Who was the major critic of Greek drama?

Aristotle.

When did he live?

384 to 322 BCE. He wrote about 100 years after Sophocles major tragedies were produced.

What is his most significant work?

The ***Poetics***, the source of the six elements of dramatic structure.

Roman Theatre

34. Who were the two Roman <u>comic</u> playwrights whose works have survived?

Plautus

Although both tragedies and comedies were written during the period of the Republic (500-27 BCE), the work of only two comedy playwrights has survived -- Titus **Plautus** (254 to 184 BCE) and Publius Terentius Afer, better known in English as **Terence** (185 to 159 BCE). Plautus is remembered for his farcical comedies. We have 21 of the more than 100 plays he may have written. On the other hand, Terence's six plays, because of their simple style and high moral tone, were used as the literary models by the colleges and universities of the Renaissance.

35. What was the "source" of Plautus' comic plots and characters?

Most of his plays were based on **New Greek Comedy**.

36. What is Plautus' most often produced play?

The Menaechmi, also known as the *Twin Menaechmi*, or simply *The Twins*. It is the story of twin brothers who are separated at birth. One travels with his father to Syracuse, the other with his mother to Epidemus. After his twenty first birthday, the Syracuse boy sets out in search of his long lost brother. They finally meet after two hours of misunderstandings and mistaken identity.

37. How did he influence later comedy writers such as Shakespeare and Moliere?

Shakespeare and Moliere **"borrowed" plots and characters** from Plautus' comedies. Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* is based on *The Menaechmi* and Moliere adapted Plautus' *Pot of Gold* into *The Miser*.

38. List seven stock characters Plautus used in his comedies .

Old Man meets Braggart Soldier

1. An **old man**, probably a miser.
2. A **young man**, possibly the miser's son, who rebels against authority.
3. Usually a pair of **slaves**. One smart, the other less smart. The two slaves are the source of most of the humor.
4. The **parasite**. The eternal brother in law, he comes for a visit, and stays forever.
5. The **courtesan**. The live in maid who knows how to "put out."
6. The **slave dealer**. Often trades in women. Today we would call him a pimp.
7. *Miles Gloriosus*, the **braggart soldier**. He talks a mighty battle, but runs at the first sign of conflict.

39. What is the setting of a typical Roman comedy?

Model of a Roman Stage

On a **street** in front of **three houses**.

40. Who was the major tragic playwright of the Roman theatre?

Lucius **Seneca** (ca. 5 BCE - 65 CE), a tutor and advisor to Nero (37-68 CE), was the major playwright of the Empire (27 BCE - 476 CE). Nine of his tragedies have survived.
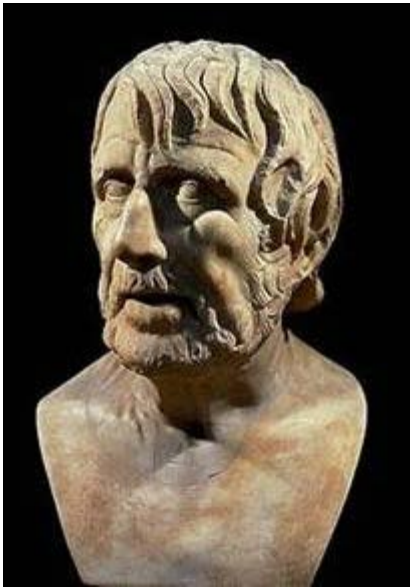
41. On which Greek author were his plays based?

Primarily **Euripides**, but he also "borrowed" from Aeschylus and Sophocles.

42. Were his plays ever produced?

No. At least we don't think so. His works may have been declaimed, that is-- recited to an audience, but were probably not staged with realistic effects.

43. Why is he important to the study of dramatic literature?

Seneca

Because Renaissance (1550 to 1700) playwrights used his tragedies as their primary model.

44. List six major characteristics of his dramas.

1. He divided his plays into **five acts** with choral interludes. The interludes were not part of the play's action.
2. He used **elaborate rhetorical speeches**. His characters debated, they didn't converse.
3. He was a **moral philosopher**. He believed that drama should preach a moral lesson.
4. His tragedies involved much **violent action**. They were filled with murder, torture, dismemberment...
5. His tragedies respected the **unity of time** (plays action unfolds within 24 hours) and **place** (the plays actions unfolds at one location).
6. Each of his characters was **dominated by one passion** (love, revenge, ambition, etc.) which brought about their downfall.

45. What is the difference between a soliloquy and an aside?

In a **soliloquy**, a character, on an empty stage, speaks directly to the audience. In an **aside**, a character also speaks to the audience, but the other characters on stage, because of the "magic of theatre," do not hear him. Probably the most famous soliloquy from dramatic literature is the "To be or not to be..." speech from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

46. What is the function of the confidant?

To **listen** to and **advise** another, usually more important, character.

47. Who was the "Roman Aristotle?"

Horace (65 to 8 BCE). In his *Ars poetica (The Art of Poetry)* (19 BCE) he argued that comedy and tragedy should be distinct forms; that tragedy should draw its characters from the noble class while comedies should deal with the middle class; and that the function of drama was not only to entertain but to teach a moral lesson. These ideas will be incorporated
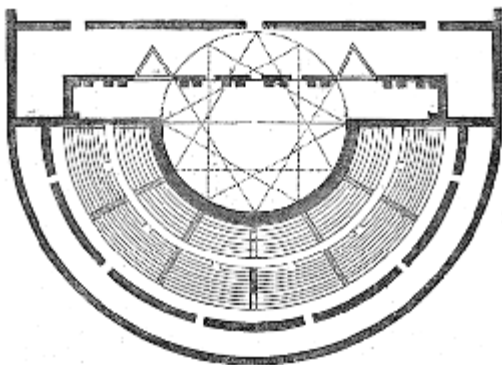
into the *NeoClassical Rules* during the Renaissance.

Horace

Roman Theatre, Merida, Spain

Ground Plan of a Roman Theatre
To the left is the ground plan of a typical Roman Theatre as published by William Smith in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1875). Note the semi-circular *orchestra* and *cavea*, the narrow **stage** (*pulpitum*), the *scena frons* with 18 columns and five **openings**, and the **arcade** which surrounded the *cavea*. Smith suggests that two of the five openings contained *periaktoi*, the three sided rotating prism that the Greeks may have used to indicate a change in location. Also note that there are no entrances into either the *orchestra* or the *cavea*. Compare this plan with the photograph of *Teatro Romano di Volterra* below.

Teatro Romano di Volterra
Roman Theatre of Volterra.
To the left are the ruins of one of the better preserved Italian Roman theatres. Note the three sections of the semi-circular *cavea* and

orchestra, the footings for the narrow **stage** (*pulpitum*), and the remains (including seven white columns) of the two story *scena frons*. This structure, unlike *Teatro Marcello* (See Question 53 below), was carved out of the very rocky hillside. For obvious safety reasons, only a small portion of this excavation (or *scavi*) is open to the public.

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48. How did the Romans change the basic structure of the Greek theatre?

They **cut the orchestra in half**, from a circle (in Greek times) to a semi-circle. They also cut the seating down to a semi-circle, and added a narrow stage which was attached to the flat part of the orchestra. See the photograph of the *Roman Theatre at Orange* on page 235 and the diagram (ground plan) on page 237 of *Wilson and Goldfarb*.

49. How did they use the orchestra?

The orchestra was primarily used as a **seating area**.

50. Was there a stage, as we know it today, in the Roman theatre?

Yes, the stage was probably between 60 and 100 feet long and about 20 feet deep.

51. How many entrances were in the Roman scaena?

Five. There were three entrances along the back (upstage) wall, and one on each side wall. The three rear entrances usually represented three houses, the two side entrances were to different parts of the town.

52. What was placed behind each of these entrances?

We don't know. When Renaissance architect's began to re-create small Roman theatres in the late 1500's, they built perspective vistas of Roman streets behind each of the entrances. The entrances became ornate arches framing the street scenes behind.

### 53. What was the seating capacity of an average Roman theatre?

Teatro Marcello

The seating capacity of Rome's *Teatro Marcello*, the largest theatre in the Roman Empire, was approximately **12,000**. The *cavea* (the semi-circular bank of seats) would hold another **2,000 standees**, bringing the total to about 14,000. The theatre was begun in 46 BCE under the reign of Julius Caesar and dedicated to Claudius Marcello by Augustus Caesar between 13 and 11 BCE. The outside diameter of the *cavea* was about 425 feet. The theatre, which still exists, became a fortress during the middle ages, the *Pallazo Savelli* [designed by architect Baldassare Peruzzi (1481-1537)] during the Renaissance, and is presently an upscale apartment complex. Obviously the remains of this theatre are not open to the public.

A Rear and Satellite View of *Teatro Marcello*, Rome

54. Was the theatre structure enclosed, or unified?
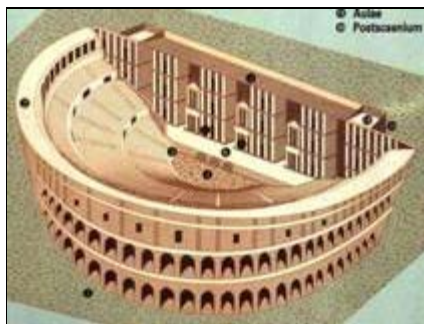
Roman Theatre

Enclosed. Although the theatre was an open air structure, it was architectually enclosed or unified.

55. Were the Roman theatres carved out of a hillside, or built on level ground?

In rugged country Roman architects, like their Greek predecessors, carved their theatres out of the hillside. On flat land the *cavea* was typically supported by two or more tiers of Roman arches.

56. What is the difference between a Roman theatre and a Roman amphitheatre?

Anfiteatro di Flavio

A Roman **theatre** has a stage (*pulpitum*) on one side of the *orchestra* and the audience (*cavea*) on the other. An **amphitheatre** has the audience completely surrounding the "stage space." They were huge arenas used primarily for sporting events -- gladitorial combat, mock sea battles (*naumachia*) and wild animal hunts. The largest (Seating capacity: 87,000 - Outside dimensions: 620' by 513') and most famous amphitheatre in the Empire was Rome's ***Anfiteatro di Flavio*** (Amphitheatre of Flavius) which was completed in 80 CE and is more commonly known as the ***Colosseo*** (Colosseum). See the photograph of the *Roman Colosseum* on page 232 of *Wilson and Goldfarb*.

A Satellite view of the Roman Colosseum -- The *hypogeum* (underground) below the arena floor

The **third largest amphitheatre in Italy**, capable of holding 30,000 spectators when it was built in 30 CE is the *Arena di Verona*. Unlike the Roman Colloseum which is primarily a tourist attraction, the arena in Verona is still used as a performing space. During the summer it is the home of the *Verona Opera Festival*. The photo below (right) shows a production of Verdi's *Aida* being presented in the **Verona di Arena**.

Below the floor of a Roman arena was an underground network of tunnels and cages, the *hypogeum*, where gladiators and animals were held before the contests began. Vertical shafts provided access to the arena floor for caged animals and scenery pieces. Hinged platforms provided access for elephants and other large animals. Tunnels connected this underground maze to a number of points outside of the amphitheatre. Animals and performers (gladiators) were brought to the arena through these tunnel from nearby stables and barracks. This underground network can be clearly seen above, in the bottom right image of the *Colosseum*.

The arena floor of the *Anfiteatro Campano* in Capua, 16 miles north of Naples, the second largest amphitheatre of the Empire with a seating capacity of 60,000, has been restored and visitors to these archaeological ruins can freely explore this underground network of tunnels.

The Arena Floor of the *Anfiteatro Campano***, Capua**

The underground tunnels below the *Anfiteatro Campano***, Capua**

57. What were the three major forces which led to the downfall of the Roman theatre?

1. The **decay of the empire** began when Constantine I (Emperor: 306-337 CE) established two capitals in 330 CE and moved the court from Rome (the western capital in central Italy) to Byzantium which he renamed Constantinople, (now known as Istanbul), the eastern capital in what is now Turkey. Rome (and the Western Empire) fell in 476 when the western emperor was unseated by Odoacer, a Germanic barbarian. The Eastern Empire (which included most of Greece) lasted another 977 years, finally falling to the Ottoman Empire (Turks) in 1453.
2. The **barbarians** who came down from the north (France and Germany) and plundered the cities of the western empire. The people scattered, buildings were abandoned, and soon there were no large centers of culture in what had been the mighty Roman Empire. The population of the city of Rome dropped from approximately four million at the height of the Empire to under twenty six thousand in the fifth century.
3. The **hostility of the Christian church**. The theatre was considered the shrine of Venus (a Roman god). By the fifth century (the 400s) actors were excommunicated. This ruling held in parts of Europe until the 18th century.

58. In what century was the last Roman performance given?

The **sixth** century. 533 CE, 1066 years after Thespis won the first Greek Tragedy Contest.

Medieval Theatre

59. What medieval institution is credited with the rebirth of western theatre?

The Christian church.

60. What was a *tropes*?

The *tropes* was a verbal (sung or chanted) embellishment, an **insertion into the liturgical text** of the Mass. The most significant of these short embellishments was *Quem Quaeritis*, (925) "Whom Seek Ye," which was probably originally sung, antiphonally in Latin, by two sections of the choir. The four lines of text comes directly from the New Testament, (*The Gospel of St. Luke*, Chapter 24).

Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, O Christicole? Whom seek ye in the sepulchre, O Christian women?
Jesum Nazarenum crucifixum, O caelicolae. Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified, O heavenly one.
Non est hic, surrexit sicut praedixerat. He is not here; He is risen, as he foretold.
Ite, nuntiate quia surrexit de sepulchro. Go, announce that He has risen from the sepulchre.

Within approximately 40 years, this short playlet is being performed not by the choir, but by *four brethren* (priests) -- three representing the women who have gone to the tomb to anoint Christ's body with oil and the fourth representing the Angel. Bishop Ethelwold (912-984) of Winchester, England, not only includes the text of *Quem Quaeritis* in *Regularis Concordia* (ca. 970), a book of rules and advice for the English Benedictines, but gave directions on how to stage the action.
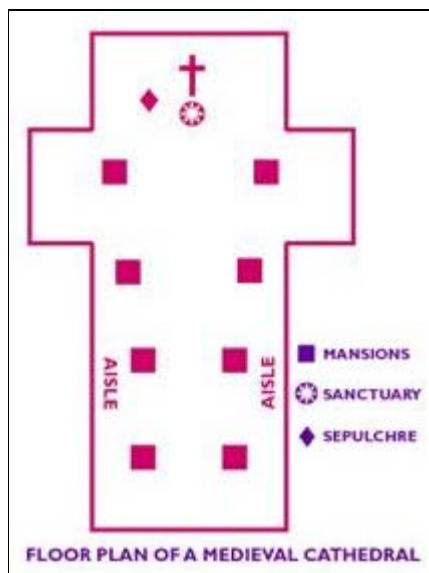
61. During which Christian festival were these early playlets performed?

Quem Quaeritis was inserted into the **Easter Mass**. Within a short period of time, similar playlets were added to the **Christmas** and **Epiphany** services.

62. What was the source of the stories which were dramatized?

The *Bible*.

63. How were these plays staged inside the church?

Floor Plan of a Medieval Church

Quem Quaeritis was presented near the high alter (*sepulchre*). As the playlets were extended and additional scenes were added, they were staged on a number of small "platforms" (or *mansions*) distributed around the perimeter of the church. Both the performer and the audience (the congregation) would move from one "platform" (or scene) to the next. Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337) used the same basic concept when he painted the twenty-three scenes of the *Life of Christ* on the walls of the *Cappella Scrovegni* in Padua.

64. What was a *mansion* or *station*?

The *mansion*, or *station*, was the **scenic facade** used to locate the action of the play.

The *plateau*?

The *plateau* was the **neutral playing area** in front of the *mansion* on which the actors performed.

65. Who were the actors?

The priests.

66. Why, during the 13th century, were these plays moved out of the church?

As the plays became longer and more complicated, it became more and more **difficult to stage** them indoors. There was also the feeling that the action in some of the plays, such as the *Slaughter of the Innocents* from the *Ordo Rachelis*, an *Epiphany Play*, was **too violent**, too non-Christian, to be presented within the church. When the dramatic production moved out doors, the plays were presented (spoken, not sung) in the *vernacular* (the language of the people) by laymen. Although the dramas were still religious, they were no longer a part of worship.

67. Who produced these plays after they left the church?

The **trade guilds**. These medieval unions provided the money and personal needed to present the plays. The church continued to provide the scripts and directorial leadership.

68. What is a pageant wagon?

Pageant Wagon

A pageant wagon held the *mansion*, the *plateau*, and a dressing area on one structure. This **wagon stage** would then be moved from one gathering of audience to the next, much like a float in a parade. See the illustrations of a *Pageant Wagon* on page 242.

In which country was it used?

England.

69. How were these plays staged on the European continent?
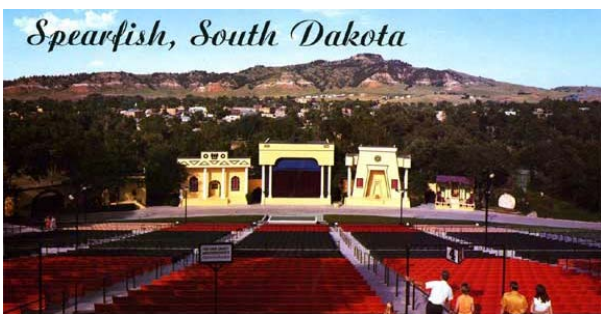
Setting of the *Spearfish Passion Play*

The *mansions* were arranged in a **line**, creating a "street," at the rear of a long narrow platform. At one end (stage right) of the street was the *Entrance to Heaven* or *Paradise* and at the other end (stage left) was *Gate to Hell*, the *Hellsmouth*. The *Spearfish Passion Play* used the continental approach to staging. See the illustration of the *Outdoor Stages at Valenciennes* on page 244.

70. What is the difference between a mystery play, a miracle play, and a morality play?

Mystery play: The plot and characters were **drawn from the books of the *Bible*.** It was the major form of Medieval drama. The best examples are the cycle plays of England. *The York Cycle* (14th century) contained forty-eight short plays and took approximately 14 hours to perform. Of the forty-eight plays, eleven deal with the *Old Testament* (from Creation to the crossing of the Red Sea), thirteen cover the period from the Annunciation to Palm Sunday, twenty-three cover the final week of Christ's earthly life and His Assumption into Heaven, and one describes Judgement Day. The last known medieval performance of the *York Cycle* was in 1569.

Miracle play: Built its plot around the **lives and the works of the saints**. They were usually performed on the saint's feast day. Some of the scripts were biblical, others were not.

Morality play: These dramas were based on the **spiritual trials of the average man**. They formed a bridge between the Medieval religious plays and the secular dramas of the Renaissance. The plays were **allegories** about the moral temptations which beset every man. The location was every man's soul. The action of the drama was the battle between good and evil to posses man's soul.

71. Give a specific example of a mystery play? Of a miracle play? Of a morality play?

Mystery play: *The Second Shepherd's Play* (mid 15th century) from the Wakefield Cycle or ***The Passion Play*** which dramatizes the last week of Christ's life -- from His triumphal entry on Palm Sunday through His Ascension into Heaven. Probably the most famous *Passion Play* is the *Oberammergau Passion Play* which has been presented every ten years in the small Bavarian village of Oberammergau in south east Germany since the middle of the 17th century. The last performance was during the summer of 2010. It will again be performed in 2020.

Oberammergau Passion Play

Miracle play: The four St. Nicholas plays from the *Fleury Play-Book* (13th century France) -- *Tres Fili* (Three Daughters), *Tres Clerici* (Three Scholars), *Iconia Sanctus Nicholaus* (Image of Saint Nicholas) and *Filius Getronius* (Getron's Son). These plays were presented, in Latin, on St. Nicholas Day -- December 6th.

Morality play: *Everyman* (late 15th century). Everyman is visited by Death. He is told that he can take one friend with him on his long journey. He approaches Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Goods, Knowledge,

Discretion, Strength, Beauty, and Five Wits. All refuse. Only Good Deeds will join him on his journey. The moral is obvious.