

Theatre of the ancient greece



This research paper investigates the influence of literature on the Greek Theatre. It spans through its history of origin and the modifications that have been possible during the different periods of history. According to the literature, the Greek Theatre has shaped the theatrical cultures of the world and even to a larger extent, the people's social culture especially in the West. Further, this art grew with great contributions of people whose names appear into this culture thousands of years since they lived. These include Thespis who was credited with the tragedy aspect of the Greek theatre together with his colleagues who are referred to us the tragedians. In light of this, the research paper proposes a greater conservation of this culture so that our generation can bequeath an even better theatrical culture to the future generations (Vervain, Chris and David Wiles, 2004).

The Greek Theatre was a culture that largely began to thrive during the time between 550 BC and 220 BC in the city of Athens which had become the centre of political as well as cultural centre of the time. This culture was subsequently institutionalized into the Dionysia festival in the honor of the god then popularly known as Dionysus. With time the dramatic genres of this theatre emerged as satire, comedy and tragedy. It is from Athens that Greek distributed the culture to several of its colonies as well as allies in the global arena in an attempt to promote their cultural identity. As a matter of fact, Western Theatre that looks very popular in this century originated from Athens. Notably, the drama culture from Athens has had a significant influence on the entire culture of the Western society. (McDonald, Marianne, Walton & Michael, 2007)

The various components of the Greek theatre had a significant historical importance attached to them. Tragedy, for instance, originated in Athens sometime before 532 BC, at a time when the only recorded actor was Thespis. Thespis was therefore considered the leader of dithyrambs, an art that was largely performed in Attica. His popularity from winning the first theatrical contest had seen the dithyramb evolve from the remote cult it had previously been into a more organized art (Vervain, Chris & Wiles, 2004). This is the reason Thespis is recognized as the “ Father of Tragedy” as a component of the Greek Theatre. Nonetheless, history disputes his supposed importance to the Greek Theatre as more credit seems to be given to a larger group of tragedians including the statesman by the name Solon. Solon is said to have come up with the type of poetry whereby the characters actually speak with their own voices to give recitations of Homer’s epics that were the order of the day at around 534 BC. This draws the contribution of Thespis to the historical periphery although his name remains engraved in the face of Greek Theatre to the extent that an ordinary performer is often referred to as a Thespian. Meanwhile, tragedy remains a significant theatrical feature in Greece as well as in most of the theatrical works around the world. (Brockett & Oscar, 2000)

It is historically recognized that drama and performances were very significant to the people of Athens. For instance, quite early in their history they had began to organize contests as well as festivals on tragedy aspect of the Greek Theatre as a way of fostering the unity among the ethnic groups of Attica. This was as early as 508 BC, a time when written drama was still alien to the society of the Greek. Indeed, much is known till this day about the

people who triumphed in these competitions further exemplifying the much historical significance they attached to it that it has stood the test of time this long. For instance, Phrynuchus who won the first contest and later went on to produce tragic dramas on themes that were relevant to the golden age is still very well known across Greece. In the global arena, he is recognized as the first poet to have dwelled on a historical theme in his poem “ Fall of Miletus” that appeared after the town of Miletus was attacked and conquered by the Persians. The fall of the Miletus drew so much emotion among the people of Athens to the extent that its first production saw the entire theatre fall into tears. As a result, Phrynichus was heavily fined for reminded the people of such magnitude of a calamity and the performance forbidden from the theatres altogether. Although the negative aspect of his career seems to have thrown him into the historical arena, there are a lot more goodies that history has come to associate with him. For instance, he was the first person to use women characters in his productions although not of course female performers. The Greek theatre no doubt has a rich and robust history of all times. (McDonald, Marianne, Walton & Michael, 2007)

With the passing of time, several new inventions have occurred in the face of the Greek Theatre especially during the Classical Period. This was after the destruction of Athens that was carried out by the Persian Empire around 480 BC. Immediately thereafter, people embarked on massive re-building of the town where they later formerly adopted theatre as an institution. This development showed that Greek Theatre is seen more as a source of pride that the Athenian culture could make a certain bounce back into the limelight after their fall and saw it more as a part of their culture (Brockett,

Oscar & Ball, 2000). This period that later became popularly known as the Golden Age of Greek theatre showed that comedy plays also introduced as a separate genre from tragedy. Satirical plays can also be placed in this age. However, they purely dealt with the subjects to do with mythology in tragedies portraying them in a more comic manner. Indeed, these genres of performance have remained alive till this era with a great deal of their aspects being incorporated into modern arts. It is widely acknowledged that these genres have the glue that keeps the audience transfixed of the stage performance without losing interest for a minute (McDonald, Marianne, Walton & Michael, 2007).

The Greek theatre reverted back to the performance off the old tragedies after the chilling defeat by the Spartans. Their military as well as financial power has significantly gone down from this war of the Hellenistic period. The theatrical performances of this time slowly evolved into what could not be purely defined as tragedy but rather “ new comedy” whereby episodes of comic nature touching on the everyday lives of normal citizens took the center stage. There were not many playwrights during this period which are known to the present society. In fact, Menander may be claimed to be the only extant playwright of the moment because he helped to shape up the Roman type of comedy to the extent that his contributions remain visible in the existing performances of people like Plautus among others. (Brockett & Oscar 2000)

The Greek Theatre had unique characteristics that have been used to identify it well into this period. The theatres were initially built with the intention of giving accommodation to a large number of people on the

<https://assignbuster.com/theatre-of-the-ancient-greece/>

audience as well as on the stage. The design of the theatre was quite scientific so that the voices of the actors would be heard all across the theatre up to the very top seats of the theatre. They achieved this with varying amounts of acoustics including but not limited to the modern microphones. Besides this, the theatres had a point of entrances for the groups of actors as well as the members of the chorus team. The points of exit were also located somewhere in between the tall arches that marked the points of entry. Furthermore, there were other developments in the Greek theatres with time. For example, the playwrights begin to use the scenic wall that was behind the orchestra that also served as their changing rooms. In addition, any unfamiliar or uncultured aspects of the play like death of a character were performed behind the scenes as it was considered inappropriate to be done in front of the audience (Brockett, Oscar & Ball, 2000).

The scenic elements that have marked the face of Greek theatre are quite as diverse as the historical moments it has waded through. For instance, there was a special wheeled platform that served as the only means of bringing the deceased characters into the view of the audience after they were killed in the background. Other notable features that have remained relevant till this day are the cranes that lifted characters thereby giving an impression of flying the performers across the stage; trap doors that were used to carry the performers and deliver them onto the stage to the amazement of unsuspecting audience and the Phallic props that often found their way into satirical performances where they acted as a symbol of glory to the gods. The use of masks in theatres has always remained common feature over the

historical times. This has been associated with their ceremonial rites as historical evidence suggests that they began as early as the 5th century when the first mask showing a god suspended from trees was discovered. The Greek no doubt contributed significantly to the invention and growth of theatrical works. (Vervain, Chris & Wiles, 2004)