

Free research paper
about greek and
roman theater
buildings



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

The remains of ancient theaters of the Roman and Greek world are today scattered around the Mediterranean. The Greek theaters were not only very large, but also open-air structures built on the slope of a hill. On the other hand, the Romans theaters had different features from those of the Greeks. For instance, they were built on foundations which provided a strong anchorage for them. This paper exclusively compares and contrasts the Greek and Roman theater building structure and how they changed and developed. It does this by focusing on the features of the Greek and Roman buildings, comparing their similarities and contrasting their differences. The paper will as well look at the effects that the theater play had on the Greek and Roman theater stage.

Features

Both the Greek and Roman theatres had lots of features which both resembled and differed from the other. They were both products of intelligent men who dedicated their time and resources to construct theatres that later greatly impacted on the society. Precisely, the Greek theatres were characterized by acoustic designs and were mostly located on the hill tops. Besides, they were quite spacious and had enough room to accommodate as many as 14, 000 fans (Bryhim and George, 2001). In addition, they were surrounded by wooden seats and partitioned by a proskenion, an 'In front of the Scene' which separated the stage from the auditorium. More importantly, it had a logeion and paradio which made it easier for the performers to thrill their fans. On the other hand, the Roman theatres were entirely man-made and based on constructed concrete foundations. At the same time, they had <https://assignbuster.com/free-research-paper-about-greek-and-roman-theater-buildings/>

a semi-circular design composed of a podium, orchestra and auditorium (Ramage, 1991). However, like the Greek theatres, they had entrances which would be used by the performers and fans during the plays, orations and other choral events which were prominently featured in these theatres.

Similarities

There were lots of similarities between the Greek and Roman theatres. To begin with, they were both made in such a way that all recognized tradition plays could be held there. As for the Greek traditions, there performances employed a chorus with different number of actors. The chorus mainly consisted of ordinary citizens who did not necessarily have to be practiced actors. Paraskenia and skenes in the Greek theatres is a clear proof of how keenly these theatres were designed to meet the Greek rich culture plays. For instance, the chorus which was the most common play served several functions. The included offering a sense of rich spectacle in the play; contributing the essential summary and background information to enhance the audience's ability to follow the performance; giving ample space between scenes in order for the principle actors to relax; modeling ideals so that audiences can respond to the unfolding drama; and commentary on the themes appearing in the action. All this was made possible by the use of paraskenia and skenes (Ducate 98). This was the same tradition that was practiced by Romans.

Besides, the Greek theatre also had scenic elements that were specifically designed to improve the display of theatre productions. The Greek theatres used several scenic elements such as Machina. This was a mechanical crane that was designed to give the audience an illusion of flying. This is where the

term Deus Ex Machina. Another scenic element that was used in most Greek theatres was Phallic perhaps. This scenic element was mainly used in honor of the Greek god of fertility called Dionysus commonly during the satyr plays. The other scenic elements are Ekyklema (which is a carriage that is used in bringing deceased characters in sight of the audiences), and trap doors used to lift people onto the stage (Ostenfeld 34). Natural theatron also contributed to better performance in the Greek theatres provided the audience with a clear view of the performance in the stage. It is said that members on the far edge of the theatre were able to hear and see the rhythmic dance and chants of the chorus. The main objective for constructing theatron was to arbitrate the physical space that was designed to separate the audience and actor. This is where many researchers' today maintain that Greek drama tended to teach moral lessons which evoked the visionary experience while the Romans did it mainly for entertainment. This is also exhibited in the way the Romans designed their theatres.

Despite the fact that the Greek theater used soliloquies and asides, the Roman theatre was the first to use them. In addition, the Roman Theater also used violence and graphic blood in their presentations. In order to make sure that all this play and performances were done comfortably, the Romans build their theater in such a way that all kinds of plays and performances were done to the perfection. It was after the introduction of soliloquies and asides by the Roman theatre that the Greeks also decided to add the same in their theaters. It's for this reason that some old Greek theaters do not have soliloquies and asides. Only the Greek theaters that were built after the invention of soliloquies and asides by the Roman theaters have soliloquies and asides (Franko 56).

<https://assignbuster.com/free-research-paper-about-greek-and-roman-theater-buildings/>

All productions in the Roman theaters were paid for by both wealthy citizens and the state. This is because both the local citizens and the national government appreciated the good work that was done in as far building the Roman Theater is concerned. The officials in charge of the Roman theaters were called Praetor/Aedile. The officials were in charge of contracting with the overall manager of a theatrical company. This is because he was the one responsible for all details of the production (Epsicokhan, 2010). In other words, the manager of a theatrical company was the one who chooses to have his own group perform the plays. At this time, acting companies had come up and were good great job in Roman theaters.

Elaborate landscapes were painted upon the scaenae in order to show the location of the play. This is the reason why the term scenery was used to describe the landscape. Eventually, with time the elaborate landscapes were incorporated in the whole structure. In addition, the Roman theatre had a separation stage called orchestra. Additionally, there was a seating section called the auditorium. It is important to note that the Greek Theater did not have auditorium. Nevertheless, instead of the orchestra been used by only actors and the chorus like in the Greek theatre, this place was normally occupied by eminent people and such as the senators. This made it easier for the Romans to distribute a chorus in general. In the Roman theatres, there was place labeled as Vomitoria. These were doorways that served as both entrances and exits. Vomitoria were built to be used mainly by the audience to “ take it in” after celebrating during a performance (Cary 67). Vomitoria were therefore created to allow the actors to go in and out of the theater at ease. This design was complemented with the actor’s garments because they all wore colored garments in order for the audiences see them

<https://assignbuster.com/free-research-paper-about-greek-and-roman-theater-buildings/>

clearly. This why when comparing and contrasting Greek and Roman theatres it is clear that the Roman theatre was not influenced by religion like the Greek theatres. On the contrary, the Roman theatres were mainly influenced by culture and habits (Easterling 45).

The other similarity between these theatres is that they both had similar dramatic styles. It is clear that both Roman and Greek dramatic performances were regularly shared in their individual building techniques. In addition, in both theaters the actors use similar costumes. Both the Greek and Roman actors used mask when performing a play something that made the actors' roles easier. Additionally, in both the Greek and Roman cultures, women were not used as part of the actors. Studies have shown that reek stage productions involved mainly tragedy actions with some comedic or satyr type plays. On the other hand, there were several types of plays performed the Romans including dramas, comedies, tragedies, pantomimes, and commentaries. One thing that is worth noting at this point is that the Roman theatres were designed to host all these types of plays. At no point was there an incidence where there were claims that a certain type of play cannot be acted in Roman theatres as they were designed to host anything. Roman theatre design was a clear depiction that, the Romans did not use a chorus unlike the Greeks. This is proved by the fact that the theaters did not have paraskenia and skenes that were a must in the Greeks. Generally, the Roman theatrical performances heavily relied heavily on the use of musical accompaniment. This was accompanied by use of scenic and imagery and scenic elements in order to help in the setting of the drama. This is why all Roman theatres had Vomitoria. This is because when compared to their Greek counterparts, Roman actors are very vigorous when it comes to their <https://assignbuster.com/free-research-paper-about-greek-and-roman-theater-buildings/>

actual performance and acting.

When compared to the Greek theater, Roman Theater is today indebted to the heritage established by ambitious and diverse empires. Particularly in light of being erected some 500 years before Christ, looking at Roman theaters, one can only stand in admiration of the splendor and majesty of Roman civilizations constructions. There are so much of the concepts and terminologies employed within the Roman theatre. It will therefore be right to say that today the Roman theater is derived from theatrical ancestors. Romans thus owe their theatrical ancestors a rousing ovation (Bieber 23).

Differences

Despite their similarities, these theatres had lots of differences. The first major difference between the Greek and Roman theatres is their location. Whereas the Greeks theatres were located on the hills, the Romans constructed their theatres on foundations. For the Greeks, the location did not necessarily have to be man-made, but on the hill tops. The hillside location also had to be religious. This location had to have a proper profile that allowed the Greeks to fashion an open space with a three quarter circular arenas. This was done in order to allow all people in the theater to have a sweeping view not only in the surrounding countryside but also for their fellow members. On the other hand, the Romans are said to be hardworking engineers and it is for this reason that Roman theatres were built on a foundation. Unlike three quarter circular arenas used by the Greeks, Roman hardworking engineers had a different idea when it comes to theatre shape. Their theatres were constructed with enclosed sides and in a semicircular fashion. The city-state of Athens is where the theater originates

and used mainly in religion festivals to honor the gods. Some of the most worshiped gods include Dionysus (Franko 50). In addition, the famous Athenian satyr plays, tragedy, and comedy were also held at the theaters. When it comes to philosophical in spirit, the Romans were a little bit less than the Greek. They also wanted more entertainment comprising of lots of excitement and laughs. But all this depends on how the theaters were built (Franko 52).

Another difference between Greeks and Roman theatre building is the kind of materials used. The Greeks used stones in their construction techniques. In addition, the Greeks used hillside built magnificent seating. The Greeks also employed higher mathematics when it came to achieving the science of audibility. This was done by constructing seats in such a way that they were in an inclined gradient. This allowed members in the very top rows to be able to hear the actor's voice. Unlike the Greeks theatre, the Romans had a different way of doing things. To start with, they went for wood instead of stones like the Greeks. However, the Roman wood construction was short-lived and disassembled after a few days of construction (Wilson 12). This shows the Greeks choice of material was better when compared to that of the Romans. This practice was due to a proscription on long-lasting theatre constructions that carried on until 55 BC. It was during this year when the Pompey, who was the sitting emperor, initiated the Theatre of Pompey. This theatre was constructed with the use of stone and concrete. This was the first time any Roman theatre was constructed using stone and concrete making this the first permanent Roman theater. In addition, the Theatre of Pompey had a temple to sidestep the law. After the completion of this theatre, the Greek theatres held only 15, 000 people, the Roman theatres as <https://assignbuster.com/free-research-paper-about-greek-and-roman-theater-buildings/>

many as 40, 000 people (Wilson 34). The fundamental designs of Roman theatres were acquired from the Theatre of Pompey which was the first permanent Roman theatre. This theatre is said to have hosted activities such as lectures, plays, and pantomimes. The scaenae frons of the Roman theatres comprised of a tall stern wall that was placed on the stage floor with supporting columns. The leading edge of the stage was supported by the proscenium wall to the sides. This was to serve as a picture frame for actors and chorus performance. Contrary to the Greek theatre, the Roman theatre had a podium that was built in order to support the scaenae frons columns. Originally, the Romans did not build the scaenae as part of the building itself. This was just done in order to make sure that there is a backdrop for the people in the stage acting (Cary 64).

Moreover, the other different between the Greeks and Roman theatre building is about their structures. The Greeks used a circular stage presentation area when constructing their theatres. This circular space was called the orchestra and was built in level with the skene. By skene, we mean that the Greeks made a stage that was a three-dimensional structure. The actors and choruses sang and danced in the orchestra. The Greek theatre was built in such a way that the orchestra was on a level terrace at the base of a hill. Behind the orchestra of Greek theatre, there was a skene. The skene was also used to denote the location of the plays. In the Greek traditions a plays location was usually set in front of a palace or house. Normally, the skene was just set as a tent used solely for religious festivals only. In plays that had scenes that involved killing of a character, the sound was always heard behind the skene commonly called " ob skene". An ob skene is basically off-stage. This is because in the Greek traditions, it was <https://assignbuster.com/free-research-paper-about-greek-and-roman-theater-buildings/>

believed to be inappropriate to show people killing each other to the audience. On the other hand, the Roman presentation area was a spectator area which was semicircular in shape. When compared to the Greeks theatron, the Roman stage was larger and elevated five feet. The stage back plummeted by a 2-3 stone tall façade (Sear 62). The skene was not used for long as it was replaced by the use of paraskenia. This was a stone scenic wall which was just an extension to skenes that were previously used in the theatres. A paraskenia was a prolonged wall with sides sticking out. A Paraskenia was useful in the Greek theatres as it provided doorways for both exit and entrance. In addition to paraskenia, there was proskenion that was just behind the paraskenia. In the Greek theatres, the proskenion was the same as the latter-day proscenium and columned. The Greek theatres were built with entrances called paradoi. These served as doorways for the chorus members and actors and chorus members. Paradoi were built in such a way that they looked like tall arches opening onto the orchestra, where acting took place (Dilke 78).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper concurs that despite the fact that the Roman Theater has some structural designs borrowed from the Greek theater, there is still a big difference between the two theaters. The Greeks when constructing they used existing landscape while the Roman theatres were built on a foundation. The Greeks used stones in their construction techniques while on the other hand the Romans went for wood. This paper extensively explored these differences and many others in comparing between Greek and Roman Theater building structure and how they changed

and developed. Meanwhile, it has also discussed the differences between the Greek and Roman theater building and the effects that the theater play had on the Greek and Roman theater stage.

Work cited

Arnott, Peter D.. The ancient Greek and Roman theatre. New York: Random House, 1971. Print.

Ashby, Clifford. Classical Greek theatre new views of an old subject. Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1999. Print.

Bieber, Margarete. The history of the Greek and Roman theater. 2nd ed. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1961. Print.

Bryhim, Shawn, and George Fredric Franko. Greek and Roman comedy: translations and interpretations of four representative plays. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001. Print.

Cary, M.. The geographic background of Greek & Roman history. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949. Print.

Dilke, Oswald Ashton Wentworth. Greek and Roman maps. Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985. Print.

Epsicokhan, Jamahl. " Confessions of a Closet Trekkie." Jammer's Reviews. N. p., 20 Feb. 2004. Web. 15 Mar. 2010.

Ramage, Nancy H., and Andrew Ramage. Roman art: Romulus to Constantine. New York: Abrams, 1991. Print.