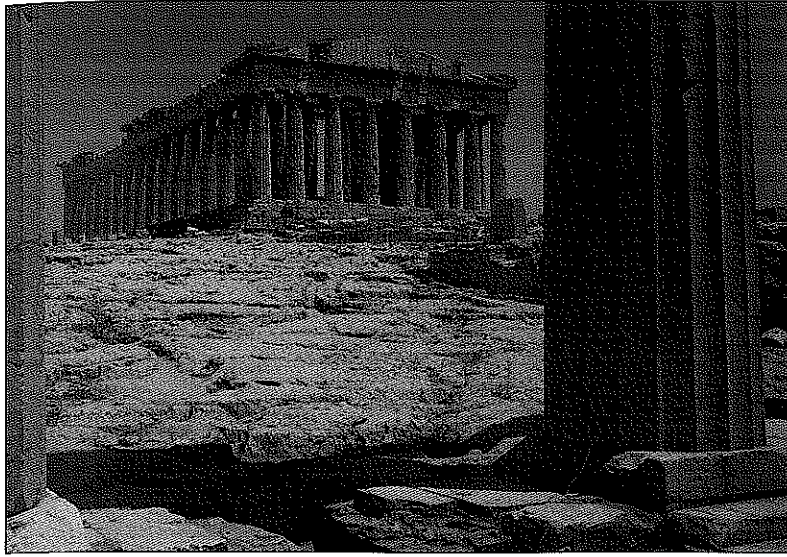


Station 2: Greek Drama



The Parthenon Each year, armies of tourists invade Athens to gaze at the temples on the Acropolis. These buildings have been battered by 2,500 years of weather, war, and pollution. Yet they stand as proud monuments to the Greek quest for order and beauty. The most revered temple on the Acropolis is the Parthenon, shown here. **Continuity and Change** Based on this picture, what modern buildings were influenced by the style of the Parthenon?

Architecture. The most famous Greek temple, the Parthenon, was dedicated to the goddess Athena. Its builders sought to convey a sense of perfect balance to reflect the harmony and order of the universe. The basic plan was a simple rectangle, with tall columns supporting a gently sloping roof. The delicate curves and placement of the columns added dignity and grace.

Greek architecture has been widely admired for centuries. Throughout the United States today, you can see buildings that have adopted various kinds of Greek columns.

Sculpture. In ancient times, a towering figure of Athena, covered in gold and ivory, stood inside the Parthenon. Though this statue has not survived, many other works from this period show Greek sculpture at its best.

Early Greek sculptors carved figures in rigid poses, perhaps imitating Egyptian styles. By 450 B.C., Greek sculptors had developed a new style that emphasized natural poses, such as athletes in motion. While their work was realistic, or lifelike, it was also idealistic. That is, sculptors carved gods, goddesses, athletes, and famous men in a way that showed individuals in their most perfect, graceful form.

Painting. The only Greek paintings to survive are on vases and other pottery. They offer intriguing views of Greek life. Women carry water from wells, oarsmen row trading ships, warriors race into battle, and athletes compete in

javelin contests. Each scene is designed to fit the shape of the pottery perfectly. (See the picture on page 111.)

Poetry and Drama

In literature, as in art, the ancient Greeks set the standard for what later Europeans called the classic style. Ever since, writers and artists in the western world have studied the elegance, harmony, and balance of Greek works.

Greek literature began with the epics of Homer, whose stirring tales inspired later writers. Other poets wrote about the joys and sorrows of their own times. Sappho sang of love and of the beauty of her island home. Pindar's poems celebrated the victors in athletic contests. (See page 102.) Perhaps the most important Greek contribution to literature, though, was in the field of drama.

The beginnings of Greek drama. The first Greek plays evolved out of religious festivals, especially those held in Athens to honor Dionysus (di uh NĪ suhs), god of fertility and wine. Plays were performed outdoors in large theaters gouged out of the sides of hills. There was little or no scenery. Actors wore elaborate costumes and stylized masks. A chorus responded to the action by singing or chanting commentary between scenes.

Greek dramas were often based on popular myths and legends. Through these familiar

stories, playwrights discussed moral and social issues or explored the relationship between people and the gods.

Tragedy. The greatest Athenian playwrights were Aeschylus (EHS kuh luhs), Sophocles (SAHF uh kleez), and Euripides (yu RIHP uh deez). All three wrote tragedies, plays that told stories of human suffering that usually ended in disaster. The purpose of tragedy, the Greeks felt, was to excite emotions of pity and fear.

Aeschylus drew on tales of the Trojan Wars in *The Oresteia* (ohr eh STEE uh). This series of three plays unfolded hideous crimes of murder and revenge within a powerful family. The plays showed how pride could bring misfortune and how the gods could bring down even the greatest heroes.

In *Antigone* (an TIHG uh nee); Sophocles explored what happens when an individual's moral duty conflicts with the laws of the state. As the play opens, Antigone's brother has been killed leading a rebellion against the city of Thebes. King Creon forbids anyone to bury the traitor's body. When Antigone buries her brother anyway, she is arrested. She tells Creon that duty to the gods is greater than human law:

“For me, it was not Zeus who made that order. Nor did I think your orders were so strong that you, a mortal man, could overrule the gods' unwritten and unyielding laws.”

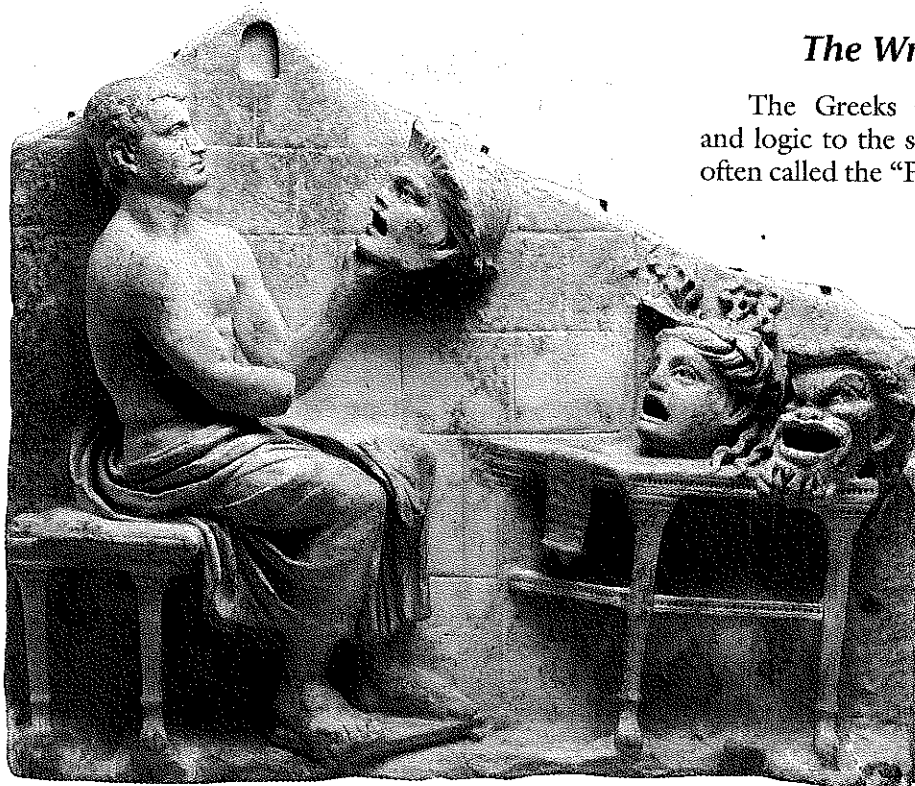
For her defiance, Antigone is put to death. Creon, too, is punished when his actions lead to the deaths of his wife and son.

Both Sophocles and Euripides survived the horrors of the Peloponnesian War. That experience probably led Euripides to question accepted ideas. His plays said little about the gods. Instead, they suggested that people were the cause of human misfortune. In *The Trojan Women*, he stripped war of its glamour by showing the suffering of women who were victims of the war.

Comedy. Other Greek playwrights composed comedies, humorous plays that mocked people or customs. Through ridicule, they criticized society, much as political cartoons do today. Almost all surviving Greek comedies were written by Aristophanes (ar ihs TAHF uh neez). In *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes tells what happens when the women of Athens together force their husbands to end a war against Sparta.

The Writing of History

The Greeks applied observation, reason, and logic to the study of history. Herodotus is often called the “Father of History” in the west-



Comic Masks In this marble relief, the playwright Menander looks at the masks used in one of his comedies. The masks, with their exaggerated facial features, enabled those sitting far from the stage to recognize the characters. A small mouthpiece inside the mask helped project the actor's voice. **Art and Literature** What emotions do you see in each of these masks?