

BLACKWELL GUIDES TO CLASSICAL LITERATURE



# A GUIDE TO ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA

Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan

SECOND EDITION

WILEY Blackwell

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## **Praise for *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama, Second Edition***

“The discussion of the contexts of ancient Greek drama, its performance, ancient and modern, is thoroughgoing and scholarly. The synopses of the plays and interpretations are invaluable tools – a must on any scholar's bookshelf.”

*Robin Bond, University of Canterbury*

“Covering all the genres of Greek drama, and bringing in what is known about lost plays as well as those that we have, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama, Second Edition* is comprehensive, balanced, up-to-date, reliable, and readable. It presents a huge amount of information, but in a distinctive and winning voice.”

*Ruth Scodel, University of Michigan*

“With revised sections on Sophocles and politics, and new discussions of Reception and vase-painting, the second edition of this handbook will be helpful to both students and scholars.”

*C.W. Marshall, University of British Columbia*

## **Praise for the first edition**

“This thoughtfully designed guide not only provides background, play summaries, critical analysis, and bibliography, but also surveys modern approaches to Greek drama. Comprehensive, reliable, and enlightening, it will be a boon to students and their teachers.”

*Justina Gregory, Smith College*

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# A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama

Second Edition

*Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan*

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Dedicated to the memory of  
Kathryn (Kate) Grace Boshier  
(1974-2013)

# Preface to the First Edition

In this Guide we have attempted to provide an introduction to all three of the genres that comprised ancient Greek drama. Many critical studies focus solely on tragedy or on comedy with only a nodding glance at the other, while satyr-drama often gets lost in the glare of the more familiar genres. We begin with a consideration of the aspects and conventions of ancient Greek drama, so like and at the same time different from our own experience of the theater, and then discuss the connections that it possessed with the festivals of Dionysos and the *polis* of Athens. Was attending or performing in the theater in the fifth and fourth centuries a “religious” experience for those involved? To what extent was ancient drama a political expression of the democracy of the Athenian *polis* in the classical era?

We consider first tragedy, the eldest of the three dramatic sisters, both the nature of the genre (“serious drama”) and the playwrights that have survived, most notably the canonical triad (Aeschylus, Sophokles, Euripides), but also some of the lesser lights who entertained the spectators and won their share of victories. We have given satyr-drama its own discussion, briefer to be sure than the others, but the student should be aware that it was a different sort of dramatic experience, yet still part of the expected offerings at the City Dionysia. As Old Comedy is inextricably bound up with Aristophanes, much of the discussion of that poet will be found in the section on Old Comedy proper as well as the separate section devoted to Aristophanes. A short chapter addresses how one should watch or read (and teach) Greek drama and introduces the student to the various schools of interpretation. Finally we have provided a series of one-page synopses of each of the forty-six reasonably complete plays

that have come down to us, which contain in brief compass the essential details and issues surrounding each play.

We would thank our students and colleagues at Trent University, who over the years have been guinea-pigs for our thoughts on ancient Greek drama. Martin Boyne, in particular, gave us much useful advice as the project began to take shape. Kevin Whetter at Acadia University read much of the manuscript and provided an invaluable commentary. Colleagues at Exeter University and the University of Canterbury in New Zealand have also been sources of ongoing advice and support. Kate Bosher (Michigan) very kindly gave us the benefit of her research into Epicharmos. Karin Sowada at the Nicholson Museum in Sydney has gone out of her way to assist in providing illustrations for the book. We have enjoyed very much working with the staff at Blackwell. Al Bertrand, Angela Cohen, Annette Abel, and Simon Alexander have become familiar correspondents, responding unfailingly to our frequent queries.

Drama is doing, and theater watching. We both owe much to the Classics Drama Group at Trent University, which since 1994 has sought to bring alive for our students the visual and performative experience of ancient drama. This volume is dedicated to them, with admiration and with thanks.

# Preface to the Second Edition

Commenting on the revision of Eupolis' lost comedy *Autolykos* (420 BC), an ancient scholar defines the technical term "revision" as: "when a book is rewritten from the original version, having the same plot and most of the same text, but with some things removed from the previous version, some things added, and some things altered." This might well serve as an apt description of the second edition of our guide to ancient Greek drama. Much of the presentation of basic facts about the production of ancient plays, information about the dramatists, and details of the dramas themselves, has remained as it was in the original edition, taking into account the significant studies of the past ten years. However, in the first chapter we have conflated into one sub-section ("Drama, Dionysos, and the *Polis*") the discussions of the connections of Greek drama to its patron god Dionysos and to the city (*polis*) in which most of the dramas that we have were produced, Athens. In so doing we are trying not to create artificial pigeon-holes in which to insert discussions of drama as "religious" or "political," but to see the overall experience of all concerned (poets, performers, officials, spectators) as one that directly affected their lives and identities as member of ancient Greek *polis*.

Similarly in [chapter 2](#) we have for the most part reproduced the original descriptive material, but the section on Sophokles and the *polis* has been expanded considerably. Whereas for Aeschylus and Euripides it is possible to see specific contemporary issues reflected in their dramas, Sophokles seems to be dramatizing the issues of the *polis* more subtly, showing how matters of general import are worked out on and by individual men and women. We

speculate whether Sophokles should not be considered the most politically engaged of the three extant tragic poets. To [chapter 4](#) (“Greek Comedy”) we have added two new discussions: one on the comic poet, Alexis, who had somehow slipped between the two stools of Middle and New Comedy, and the other on the so-called *phlyax*-vases, some of which are now regarded as illustrating scenes from Athenian comedy, both Old and Middle. We have also expanded our discussion of later comedy, in part to take into account the excellent recent treatments by Arnott (2010), Ireland (2010), and Traill (2008).

[Chapter 5](#) (“Approaching Greek Drama”) has been almost entirely recast. We have retained most of the approaches outlined in the previous edition, but re-organized them into groups with related themes. “Formal Criticism” includes textual criticism and commentary, the “New” criticism by which ancient dramas are read as works of literature, and the comparative approach (or “version”). Within “Interdisciplinary Approaches” we have grouped structuralist readings, drama and ritual, gender-based studies, and psychological analyses. A third category, “Visual Interpretations,” includes both the conventions of ancient stagecraft and also the depiction of scenes from tragedy, comedy, and satyr-drama, principally on vases and in the form of terracotta statuettes. A final section, “Reception Studies” comprises the “classical tradition” as applied to drama and what we now call “performance studies.”

To the appendices we have added a “Timeline,” providing in three parallel columns: military and external events having to do with the ancient Greek world, political and social events (principally at Athens), and the development of Greek drama. These cover the period from roughly 600 BC to 300 BC. The other major change in the second edition will be found in the area of “Further Reading.” The presentation

of bibliography in the first edition in various sub-sections proved to be cumbersome in appearance and difficult to use. At the end of each chapter we now provide a short series of “recommended reading,” usually five or so annotated entries on each of a number of topics raised in that chapter. At the end of the volume will be found a full list of “Further Reading,” covering both works cited in the text and our suggestions for other books, articles, and collections of essays that will (we hope) be of use to both student and instructor.

We would again like to thank our students and colleagues at Trent University and the University of Otago, who have often been the first recipients of our thoughts on ancient Greek drama and have in turn offered many insightful comments. The Classics Drama Group (the Conacher Players) at Trent University, now in their twentieth year, continues to flourish and provide us with opportunities to examine how ancient plays were (and can still be) performed. Dr. Martin Boyne (Trent) gave us a great deal of advice as the project first developed and has done so again for this second edition. We are especially grateful to those who reviewed the first edition and provided a wealth of useful suggestions on how to improve the second. We would acknowledge with thanks the support from James Morwood (Oxford), Eric Dugdale (Gustavus Adolphus), Robin Bond (Canterbury), Toph and Hallie Marshall (UBC), George Kovacs (Trent), and Donald Sells (Michigan). We have enjoyed very much working (again) with the staff at Wiley-Blackwell. Haze Humbert, Rebecca du Plessis, and Ben Thatcher have become familiar correspondents, responding unfailingly to our frequent queries. Many thanks also to Bryn Snow for doing the index to this edition.

Finally and on a very sad note, we acknowledge the contributions to both editions made by Kathryn (Kate) Boshier (Northwestern), who gave us the benefit of her

expert knowledge of Epicharmos and the tradition of drama in the Greek West. Kate's early and unexpected passing in March 2013 shocked and dismayed her many colleagues and admirers. This revised edition of our guide to ancient Greek drama is thus dedicated to her memory.

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# Abbreviations and Signs

- IG* i<sup>3</sup> Lewis, David M. & Lilian Jeffrey, eds. 1981–94. *Inscriptiones Graecae, i<sup>3</sup>. Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis Anno Anteriores*, 2 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- IG* ii<sup>2</sup> Kirchner, Johannes. 1916–35, ed. *Inscriptiones Graecae: voluminum ii et iii editio minor*, 2 vols. Berlin: Reimer.
- PCG* Kassel, Rudolph & Colin Austin, eds. 1983–2001. *Poetae Comici Graeci*, 8 volumes. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter.
- POxy.* *The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus*
- Σ Scholia, ancient commentaries that have been transmitted along with the classical texts themselves.
- SEG* *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*
- TrGF* Snell, Bruno, Richard Kannicht, & Stefan Radt, eds. 1971–2004. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 4 vols. in 5. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

“F” designates the fragments of the dramatic poets. For tragedy these are cited from the volumes of *TrGF*, and for comedy from *PCG*. Several volumes in the Loeb Classical Library contain the text of most fragments with an English translation and some notes: Sommerstein 2008 vol. 3 (Aeschylus), Lloyd-Jones 1996 vol. 3 (Sophokles), Collard & Cropp 2008 (Euripides), Henderson 2007 vol. 5 (Aristophanes), Storey 2011 (the other poets of Old Comedy), and Arnott 1990 (Menander). “D” designates a play performed at the City Dionysia at Athens; “L” a play performed at the Lenaia at Athens.

All dates are BC, unless otherwise indicated. Except for some names which have become too familiar to alter (Homer, Aeschylus, Plato, Aristotle, Menander ~ more properly Homeros, Aischylos, Platon, Aristoteles, Menandros), we have used Hellenized spellings (“k” to represent Greek *kappa*, endings in “-os” rather than the Latinate “-us”). Among other things it does allow the student to distinguish a Greek author (Kratinos) from a Roman one (Plautus).

**Map 0.1** Map of the Eastern Mediterranean.



**Map 0.2** Map of Greece.



# Aspects of Ancient Greek Drama

## Drama

While ancient Greek drama appears first during the sixth century BC and can be traced well down into the third, most attention is paid to the fifth century at Athens, when and where most of the nearly fifty plays that we possess were produced. In this study we shall introduce the three distinct genres of Greek drama: serious drama or tragedy (traditionally instituted in 534), **satyr-drama** (added ca. 500), and comedy (formally introduced at Athens in the 480s, but which flourished at the same time in **Syracuse**).

Drama is action. According to **Aristotle** (*Poetics* 1448a28) dramatic poets “represent people in action,” as opposed to a purely third-person narrative or the mixture of narrative and direct speech as found in **Homer**. We begin appropriately with the Greek word δράμα (*drāma*), which means “action” or “doing.” Aristotle adds that the verb *drān* was not an **Attic** word (“Attic” being the Greek dialect spoken at Athens), Athenians preferring to use the verb *prattein* and its cognates (*pragma*, *praxis*) to signify “action.” Whether this was true or not does not matter here – that *drān* is common in Athenian tragedy, but not in the prose writers, may support Aristotle's assertion. Both **Plato** and Aristotle, the two great philosophers of the fourth century, defined drama as a *mimēsis*, “imitation” or “representation,” but each took a different view of the matter. *Mimēsis* is not an easy word to render in English, since neither “imitation” nor “representation” really hits the

mark. We have left it in Greek transliteration. For Plato *mimēsis* was something disreputable, something inferior, something the ideal ruler of his ideal state would avoid. It meant putting oneself into the character of another, taking on another's role, which in many Greek myths could be a morally inferior one, perhaps that of a slave or a woman. Plato would have agreed with Polonius in *Hamlet*, "to thine own self be true." But Aristotle considered *mimēsis* not only as something natural in human nature but also as something that was a pleasure and essential for human learning (*Poetics* 1448b4-8): "to engage in *mimēsis* is innate in human beings from childhood and humans differ from other living creatures in that humans are very mimetic and develop their first learning through *mimēsis* and because all humans enjoy mimetic activities."

Drama is "doing" or "performing," and performances function in different ways in human cultures. Religion and ritual immediately spring to mind as one context: the elaborate dances of the Shakers; the complex rituals of the Navajo peoples; the mediaeval mystery plays, which for a largely illiterate society could provide both religious instruction and ritual re-enactment as well as entertainment. Drama can also encompass "science" - the dances of the Navajo provide both a history of the creation of the world and a series of elaborate healing rituals. Dramatic performances can keep the memory of historical figures and events alive. Greek tragedy falls partly into this category, since its themes and subjects are mainly drawn from an idealized heroic age several hundred years in the past. Some of the subjects of Greek tragedy are better described as "legendary" rather than "mythical," for legend is based on historical events, elaborated admittedly out of recognition, but real nonetheless. The Ramlila play cycles of northern India were a similar mixture of myth and history, and provided for the Hindus the same sort of cultural

heritage that Greek myths did for classical Greece. An extreme example are the history-plays of Shakespeare, in particular his *Richard III*, which was inspired by the Tudor propaganda campaign aimed at discrediting the last of the Plantagenets. Finally humans enjoy both acting in and watching performances. Aristotle was right to insist that *mimēsis* is both innate to humanity and the source of natural pleasure. We watch plays because they give us the pleasure of watching a story-line unfold, an engagement with the characters, and a satisfying emotional experience.

Another crucial term is “theater.” *Thea-* in Greek means “observe,” “watch,” and while we tend to speak of an “audience” and an “auditorium” (from the Latin *audire*, “to hear”), the ancients talked of “spectators,” and the “watching-place.” The noun ***theatron*** (“theater”) refers both to the physical area where the plays were staged, more specifically to the area on the hillside occupied by the spectators, and also to the spectators themselves, much as “house” today can refer to the theater building and to the audience in that building. Comedians were fond of breaking the dramatic illusion and often refer openly to *theatai* (“watchers”) or *theōmenoi* (“those watching”).

Modern academic discussions make a distinction between the study of “drama” and “theater.” A university course or a textbook on “drama” tends to concentrate more on the words of the text that is performed or read. Dramatic critics approach the plays as literature and subject them to various sorts of literary theory, and often run the risk of losing the visual aspect of performance in an attempt to “understand” or elucidate the “meaning” of the text. The reader becomes as important as the watcher, if not more so. Greek drama slips easily into a course on ancient literature or world drama, in which similar principles of literary criticism can be applied to all such texts.

But the modern study of “theater” goes beyond the basic text as staged or read and has developed a complex theoretical approach that some text-based students find daunting and at times impenetrable. Fortier writes well here:

Theater is performance, though often the performance of a dramatic text, and entails not only words but space, actors, props, audience, and the complex relations ... Theater, of necessity, involves both doing and seeing, practice and contemplation. Moreover, the word “theory” comes from the same root as “theater.” Theater and theory are both contemplative pursuits, although theater has a practical and a sensuous side which contemplation should not be allowed to overwhelm.\*

The study of “theater” will concern itself with the experience of producing and watching drama, before, during, and after the actual performance of the text itself. Theatrical critics want to know about the social assumptions and experiences of organizers, authors, performers, judges, and spectators. In classical Athens plays were performed on a public occasion, supported from the state treasury, in a theater placed next to the shrine of a god and as part of a festival of that god, in broad daylight where spectators would be conscious of far more than the performance unfolding below – of the city and country around them and of their own existence as spectators.

Ours is meant to be a guide to Greek *drama*, rather than to Greek *theater*. Our principal concern will be the texts themselves and their authors and, although such an approach may be somewhat out of date, the intentions of the authors themselves. But we do not want to lose sight of the practical elements that Fortier speaks of, especially the visual spectacle that accompanied the enactment of the recited text, for a picture is worth a thousand words, and if we could witness an ancient production, we would learn incalculably more about what the author was doing and how

this was received by his original “house.” Knowing the conventions of the ancient theater assists also with understanding why certain scenes are written the way they are, why characters must leave and enter when they do, why crucial events are narrated rather than depicted.

## **Drama and the poets**

Homer (eighth century) stands not just at the beginning of Greek poetry, but of Western literature as we know it. His two heroic epics, *Iliad* (about Achilles, the Greek hero of the Trojan War) and *Odyssey* (the return of Odysseus [Ulysses] from that war), did much to establish the familiar versions of the myths about both gods and men. Homer is the great poet of classical Greece, and his epics, along with what we call the “epic cycle” – lost poems, certainly later than Homer, that completed the story of the Trojan War, as well as another epic cycle relating the events at Thebes – formed the backdrop to so much later Greek literature, especially for the dramatists. Much of the plots, characters, and language come from Homer – **Aeschylus** is described as serving up “slices from the banquet of Homer” – and the dramatic critic needs always to keep one eye on Homer, to see what use the poets are making of his seminal material. For example, Homer created a brilliantly whole and appealing, if somewhat unconventional, character in his Odysseus, but for the dramatists of the fifth century Odysseus becomes a one-sided figure: the paragon of clever talk and deceit, the evil counselor, and in one instance (**Sophokles'** *Ajax*) the embodiment of a new and enlightened sort of heroism. Homer's Achilles is one of the great examples of the truly “tragic” hero, a man whose pursuit of honor causes the death of his dearest friend and ultimately his own doom, but when he appears in **Euripides'** *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, we see an ineffectual youth,

full of sound and fury, and unable to rescue the damsel in distress.

Of the surviving thirty-three plays attributed to the tragedians, only two dramatize material from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (Euripides' satyr-drama *Cyclops* [*Odyssey* 9] and *Rhesos* of doubtful authenticity [*Iliad* 10]), but we do know of several lost plays that also used Homeric material. Homer may be three centuries earlier than the tragedians of the fifth century, but his influence upon them was crucial. Homer himself was looking back to an earlier age, what we call the late Bronze Age (1500–1100), a tradition which he passed on to the dramatists. Both Homer and the tragedians are depicting people and stories not of their own time, but of an earlier idealized age of heroes.

In the seventh and sixth centuries heroic epic began to yield to choral poetry (often called “lyric,” from its accompaniment by the lyre). These were poems intended to be sung, usually by large choruses in a public setting. Particularly important for the study of drama are the grand poets Stesichoros (ca. 600), Bacchylides (career: 510–450), and Pindar (career: 498–440s), who took the traditional tales from myth and epic and retold them in smaller portions, consciously reworking the material that they had inherited. They used a different meter from Homer, not the epic hexameter chanted by a single bard, but elaborate “lyric” meters, sung by large choruses. No work by Stesichoros has survived intact, but we know he wrote poem on the Theban story, one of tragedy's favorite themes; an *Oresteia*, containing significant points of contact with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*; and a version of the story of Helen that Euripides will take up wholesale in his *Helen*. Poem 16 by Bacchylides tells the story of Herakles' death at the hands of his wife, much as Sophokles dramatizes the story in his *Trachinian Women*, and it is not clear whether Bacchylides' poem or Sophokles' tragedy is the earlier work. Pindar in *Pythian* 11