

Lesson 1

Greco-Roman Period

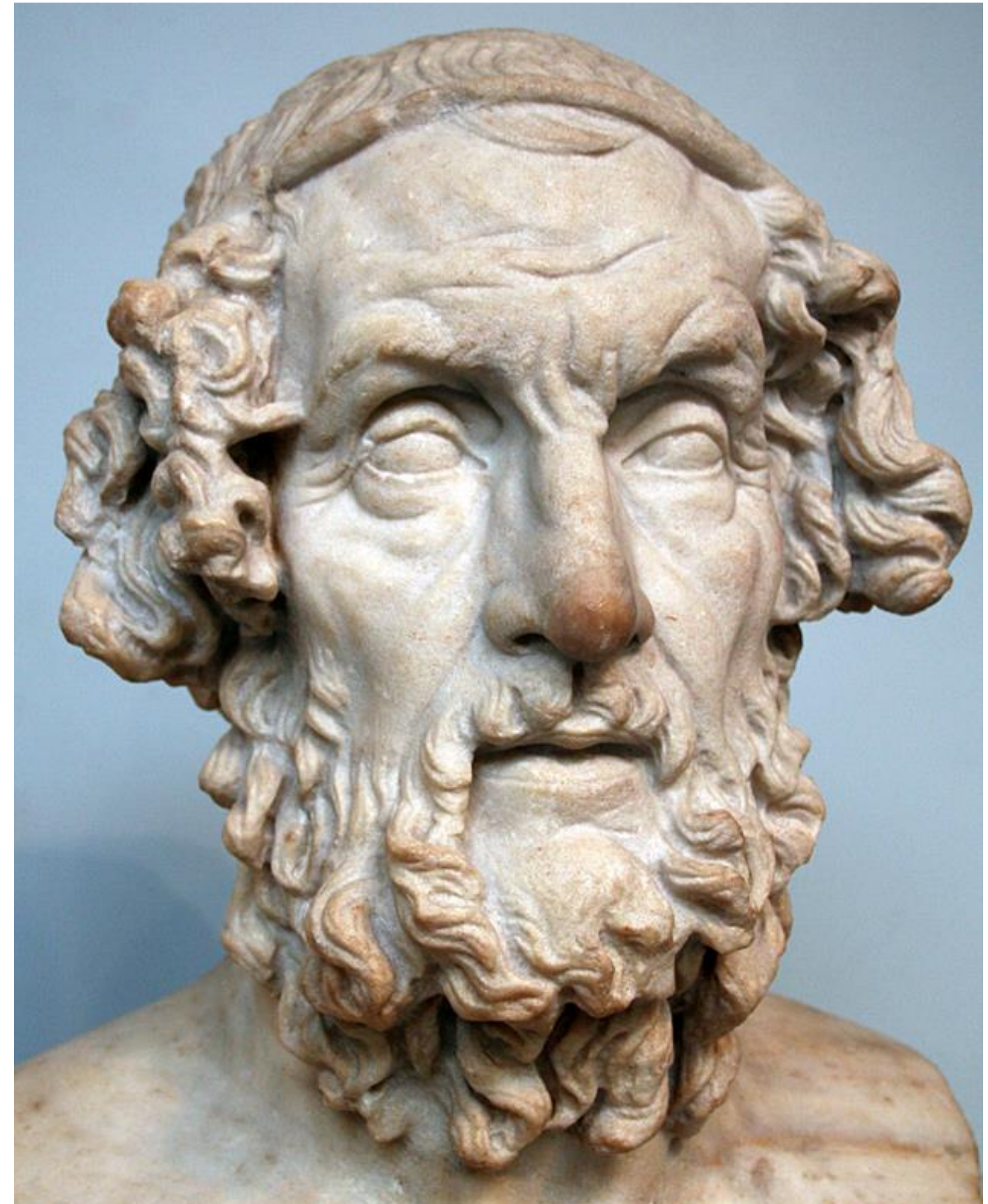
Dr Kalyani Vallath

Ancient Greece

- Three periods:
 - Archaic
 - Before the Archaic period, it was the Greek Dark Ages, characterized by ignorance, injustices, and various kinds of misery
 - Classical
 - Hellenistic

Homer (8th century BC)

- The Iliad
 - Epic
 - One of the oldest extant (existing) works in Western literature
 - Set against the Trojan War
 - Deals mainly with the fighting between Agamemnon and Achilles
- The Odyssey
 - Sequel of The Iliad
 - Depicts the journey of Odysseus or Ulysses back home to Ithaca, after the fall of Troy

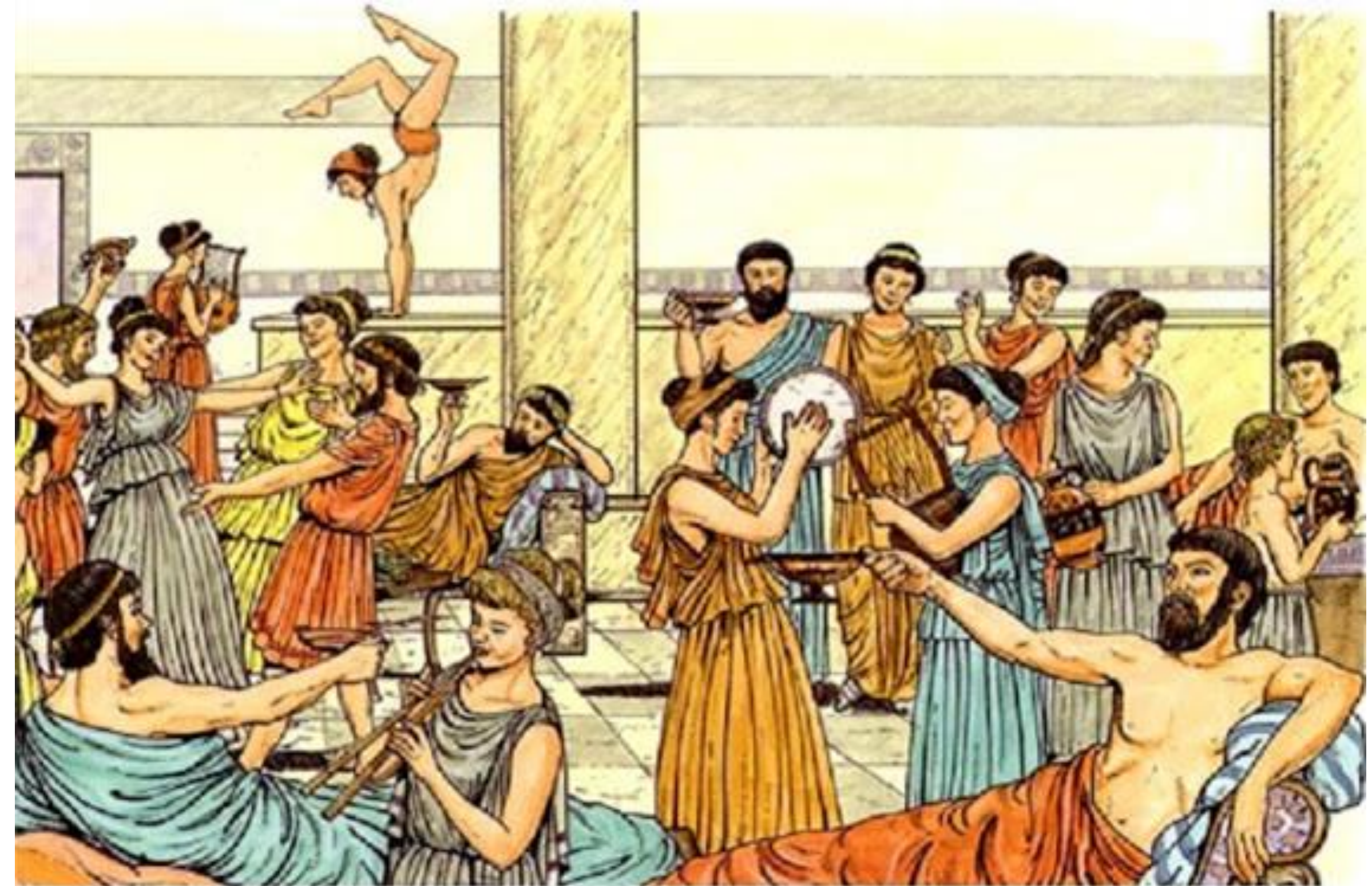


Classical Period

- 5th-4th century
- Athens
 - Athens emerged as the most powerful of the Greek city-states
 - Ruled by the famous ruler, Pericles
 - Tremendous flowering of the arts and letters
 - Disciplines such as political thought, aesthetics, physics, ethics, linguistics, biology, logic and mathematics developed

Classical Drama

- Tragedy
 - Emerged in Athens in the late 6th century BC
 - As a part of religious festival Dionysia
 - Dionysus is the god of wine and ecstasy
 - Known as Bacchus among the Romans
- Comedy
 - Developed later in association with the “satyr play”
 - Usually based on mythological subjects



Greek Theatre

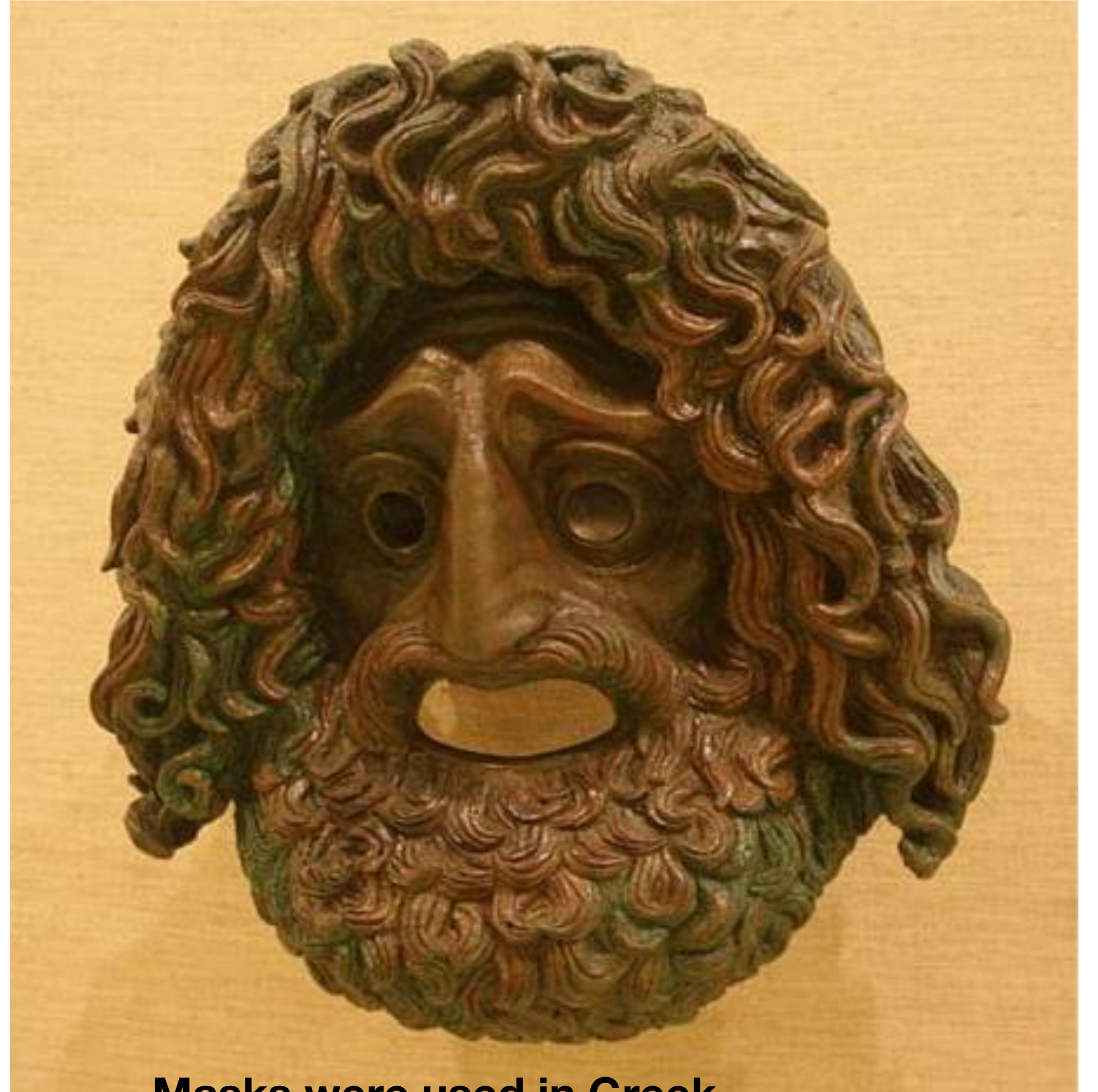


- Koilon or Theatron
- Orchestra
- Thymele
- Scene or Skene
- Proscenion or Proscenium
- Diazoma



Greek Tragedy: Structure

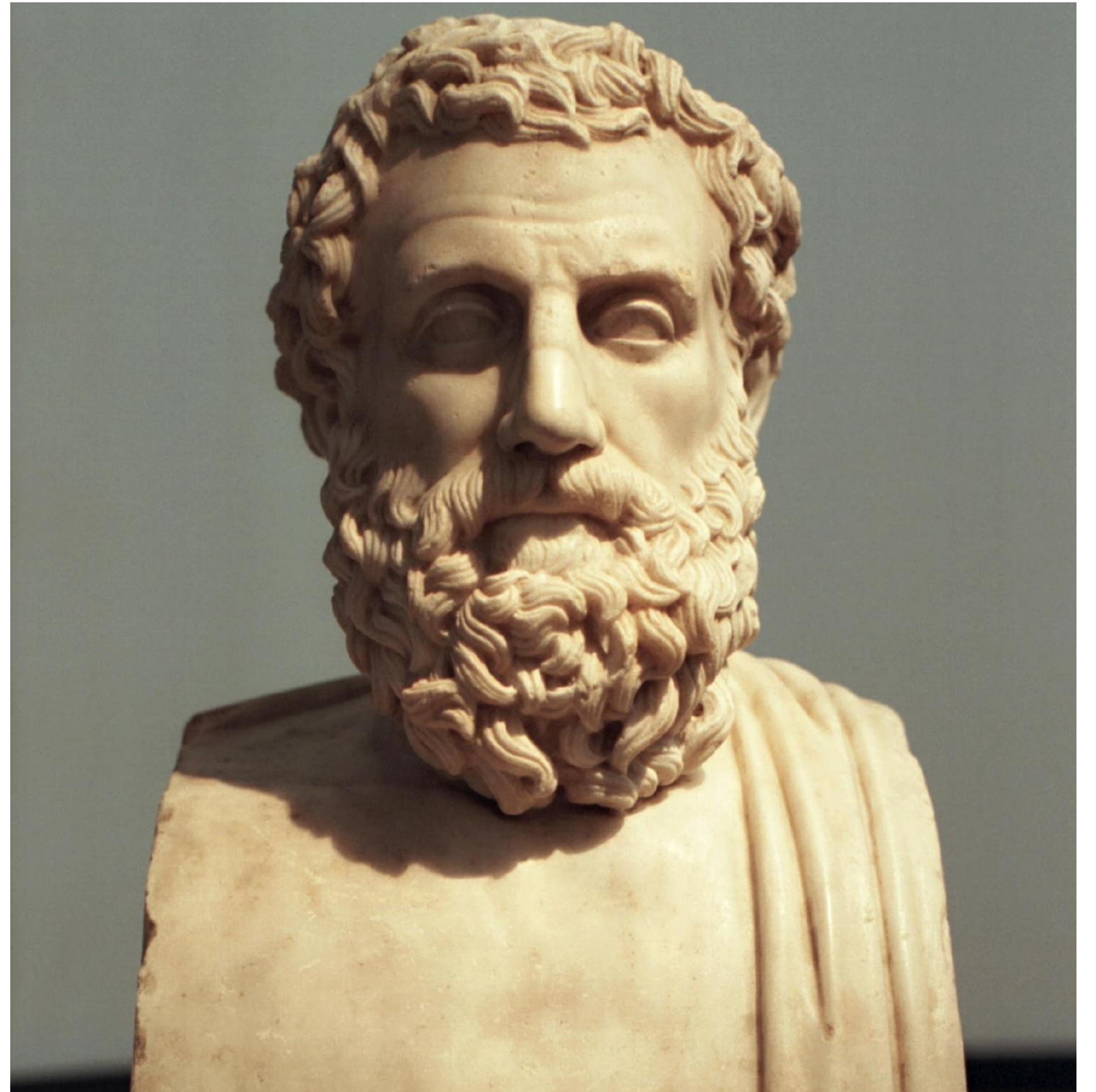
- Prologue
- Parados
- Episodes and Stasimon
- Exodus



Masks were used in Greek Tragedies

Aeschylus

- Father of tragedy
- In the competitions held at the festival of Dionysia, Aeschylus always won the first prize
- His plays had a strong moral and religious basis
- Most famous work is the trilogy The Oresteia
- Another important play The Persians
- Prometheus Bound attributed to him





The Oresteia

- The only ancient Greek trilogy to have survived to this day
 - Agamemnon
 - The Libation Bearers (Choephoroi)
 - The Eumenides
 - Originally included a satyr play called Proteus, now lost but for a line



The Oresteia



- Story of the Greek hero Agamemnon of the House of Atreus, who is killed by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus
- Clytemnestra is the twin sister of Helen of Troy
- Helen and Clytemnestra were born of the “double egg” laid by Leda, the swan, who was raped by Zeus
- Agamemnon’s children Orestes and Electra take revenge upon her
- Orestes kills Clytemnestra, his mother
- Orestes is haunted by the three snake-haired Eumenides (or Erinyes or Furies), as a punishment for committing matricide

Sophocles

- Also won prizes in dramatic competitions
- Believed to have written over a hundred plays; most of them lost.
- Initially imitated Aeschylus, but later developed a style of his own.
- Characters are more developed and individualistic than those of Aeschylus
- Theban Trilogy:
 - Oedipus Rex (Oedipus the King)
 - Oedipus at Colonus
 - Antigone



Oedipus Tyrannus (in Latin, Oedipus Rex)



- When Oedipus is born to Laius and Jocasta, the King and Queen of Thebes, the Delphic Oracle prophesizes that he will kill his father and marry his mother
- Oedipus's parents sent the child to be killed, but he is brought up by a childless couple
- Oedipus eventually comes to know of the prophecy
- One day, he quarrels with a man and kills him, without knowing that he is his father, Laius
- By solving the riddle of the sphinx, Oedipus becomes the King of Thebes, marries the widowed queen, Jocasta, and has children by her
- When the truth is revealed by another prophecy, Jocasta kills herself and Oedipus blinds himself



Reading Assignment



Read the text of
Oedipus the King

Antigone



- Antigone is the story of Oedipus and Jocasta's daughter
- She has a tough decision to make – to let her brother Polynices's body remain unburied outside the city walls, exposed to the wild animals, or to bury him and face death
- She chooses to bury him and then commits suicide

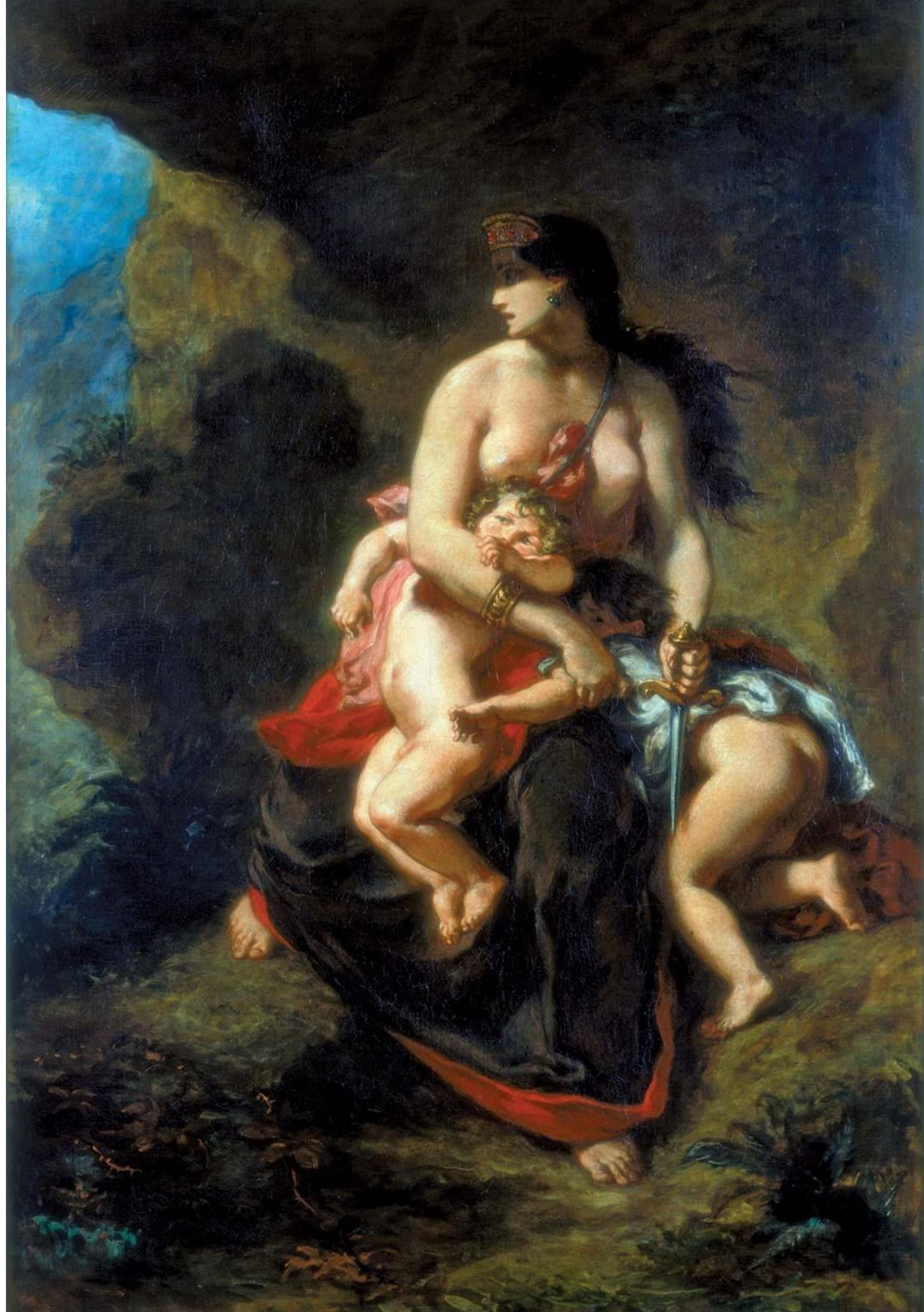


Euripides

- Author of over ninety plays
- Took the major step of depicting mythical heroes as ordinary people with inner lives and motives
- In his intellectual daring, Euripides is often compared to Socrates. (Neither of them cared much for accepted conventions and advocated unconventional and new ideas)
- Comic poets like Aristophanes lampooned Euripides as well as Socrates in their plays.
- Euripides's most famous play is Medea



**Dr Kalyani
Vallath**



Aristophanes

- 5th century BC
- Stalwart of comedy, which came to be known as Old Comedy, in contrast with the New Comedy of Menander
- The Clouds
 - Cruelly caricatured Socrates, which led to the philosopher's trial and death according to Plato
- The Frogs
 - Here, Dionysus himself, dressed in an absurd fashion, goes to Hades to bring back the best playwright from death
 - There is a famous scene in the play between Aeschylus and Euripides, regarding who is the better poet.
- Lysistrata
 - A woman ends the Peloponnesian War by getting women of the land to deny sex to their men





Menander

- 4th century BC
- Associated with New Comedy
- More generalized situations and stock characters
 - In contrast to Old Comedy of Aristophanes, which satirized real individuals and local issues
- Menander's New Comedy eventually led to the development of Comedy of Manners



Pindar

- 5th cent BC poet, at the beginning of the Classical Period
- Odes
 - Encomiastic
 - Accompanied by music and dance
 - Bold and formal language
 - Three types of stanzas in each ode, based on choral dance positions: strophe, anti-strophe and epode
- A major group of Pindar's odes are the "Victory Odes"
- A variation of the Pindaric Ode, called Irregular Ode, was developed by Abraham Cowley

Plato (c. 428 BC-c. 348 BC)

- Born of an aristocratic family in the island of Aegina near Athens in 428 BC
- Real name was Aristocles, which means “glorious” and he was called Plato, meaning “broad-shouldered”
- Received excellent education, which aroused in him a respect for tradition and a keen political sensibility
- By the age of 20, like all young men of Athens, Plato came under the influence of Socrates

The Academy

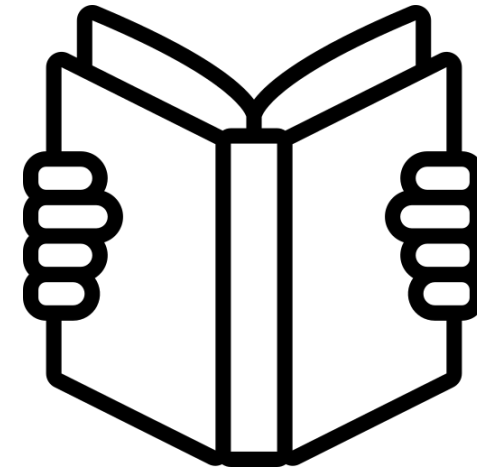
- After the death of Socrates in 399 BC, Plato left Athens and travelled to Italy, Sicily and Egypt
- Later, he returned to Athens
- In 387 B.C. Plato, along with the mathematician Thaetetus, founded the philosophical school, the Academy
- The Academy became very famous due to the Neoplatonists, and functioned until A.D. 526, when it was closed down by emperor Justinian for its pagan orientations
- At Plato's Academy, subjects like mathematics, philosophy, astronomy, biology and political theory were taught
- At the gate of the academy was written: "Let no one without mathematics (geometry) enter."
- Aristotle was a student at the Academy, and later teacher



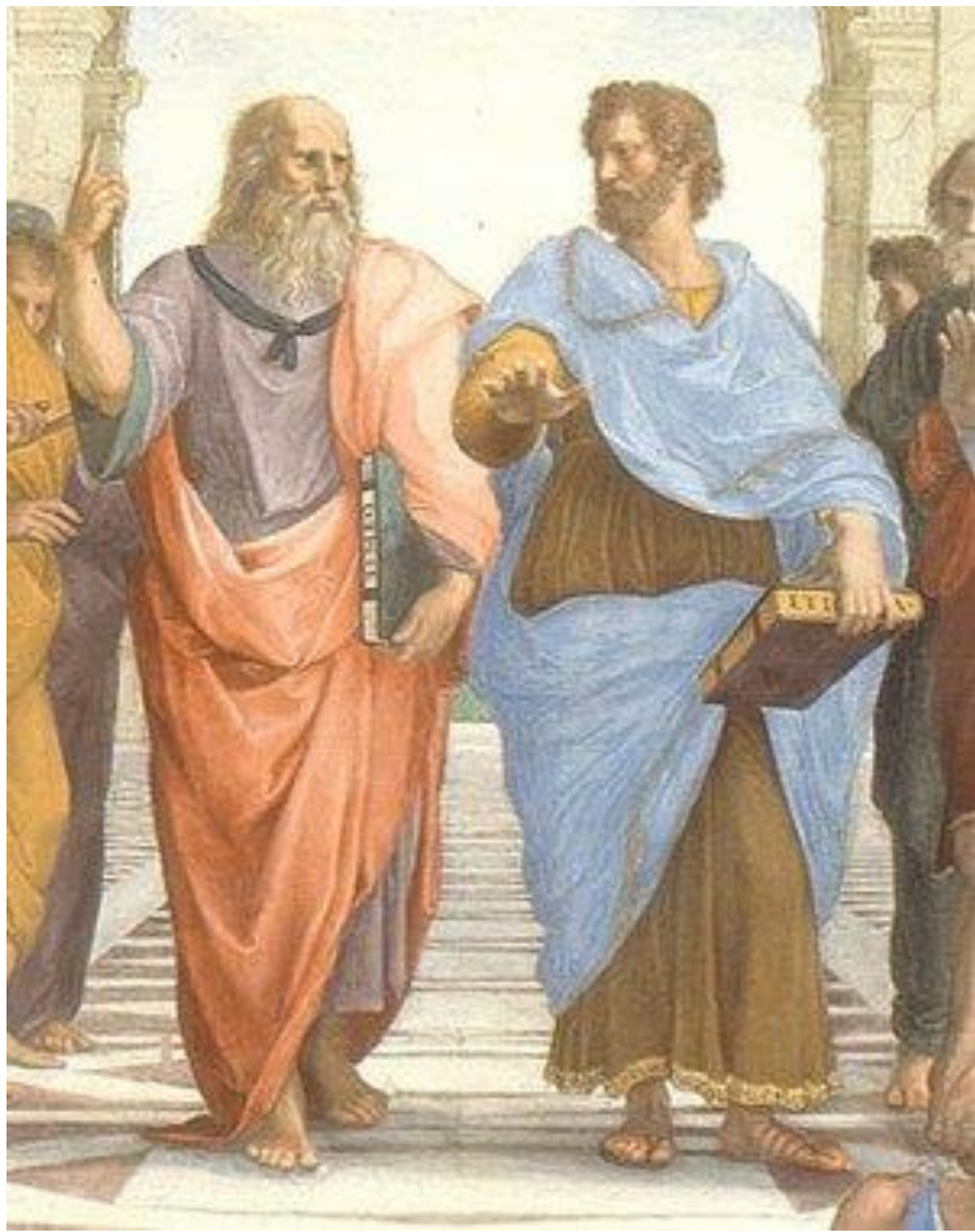
The Dialogues

- Much of Plato's philosophy is in the form of dialogues, usually between Socrates and someone else
 - Called Socratic Dialogues
 - Deal with some moral or philosophical problem
- 36 Dialogues, including
 - Republic, Protagoras, Apology, Gorgias, Ion, Phaedrus
- Republic is a vindication of the idea that good life is possible only in an ideal state. And the aim of a good life is justice.
- Never wrote a single work on poetry. His ideas on poetry have to be extracted from various Dialogues

Reading Assignment



Read a summary of
Republic



Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC)

- Aristotle was born of a well-to-do family in the Macedonian town of Stagira in 384 BC
- His father, Nicomachus, was a physician
- In 367, when Aristotle was seventeen, his uncle sent him to Athens to study at Plato's Academy
 - Spent 20 years there, as a pupil and as teacher
- After Plato's death Aristotle left the Academy

Life away from Athens

- Joined the philosophical circle of Hermeias in Assos, in Asia Minor, where Hermeias was the tyrant
- When Hermeias was killed by the Persians, Aristotle moved to the island of Lesbos in the eastern Aegean
- Joined another former Academic, Theophrastus in biological studies
- Philip of Macedon invited Aristotle to serve as tutor to his thirteen-year-old son Alexander.

Lyceum and After

- Back in Athens, founded his own school, Lyceum
- Most of his great works written during this period
- Under his direction, his students and associates carried out research on philosophical and scientific topics
- In 323 BC, Alexander died
- Aristotle once again left Athens and took refuge in his mother's birthplace, Chalcis
- He died in 322 at the age of sixty-two

Aristotle's Works

- What the Westerners know of Aristotle today was left to them by Arab philosophers such as Averroes in the twelfth century
- The works known in Aristotle's own lifetime were some 27 dialogues modelled on those of Plato, but these are now lost
- Surviving works include Poetics, Rhetoric and Nichomachean Ethics
- Poetics
 - Written for serious students in the manner of notes for lectures
 - First edited by Andronicus in the first century BC

Reading Assignment



Read online on
Aristotle's contributions to
Philosophy and Literary Criticism

Hellenistic Period

- The period is from the time of Alexander the Great
 - Alexander died in 323 BC
 - Alexander's successors established Greek cities and kingdoms in Asia and Africa
- Upto the Roman annexation of Greece in 146 BC (2nd cent.)
 - After this, "Roman period" in Greece
- Rise of Roman Empire during this period
 - Rise of Roman Classicism

Early Roman History

- In Rome, monarchy was overthrown and replaced by the republic in the 6th century BC
- 1st cent. BC: Transitional period, Republic was transforming into an Empire
- Caesar, Pompey and Crassus formed First Triumvirate
- Julius Caesar rose to being dictator (equivalent of emperor)
- On the Ides of March, that means the 15th of March, 44 BC, Julius Caesar was assassinated by the republicans (people who supported the republic against the empire)
- Civil War broke out between republicans and Caesar's supporters

The Roman Empire

- In the Civil War, republicans were defeated
- Antony, Octavian and Lepidus formed the Second Triumvirate
- Another Civil War broke out between Octavian and the combined forces of Mark Antony and his beloved, Cleopatra of Egypt
 - This was the Battle of Actium of 31 BC, the final war of the Roman Republic
 - Antony and Cleopatra died
- Octavius Caesar won and became the first emperor of Rome. And he took the title Augustus Caesar



Roman Classicism

- Profoundly influenced by Greek philosophy, culture and literature
- Stoic philosophy
 - Duty, discipline, political involvement
- Epicureanism
 - Pleasures of everyday life
 - As in the expression “Carpe Diem”
- Skepticism
 - Loss of belief in higher values
 - Beauty is fleeting
- Roman Classicism influenced European Renaissance

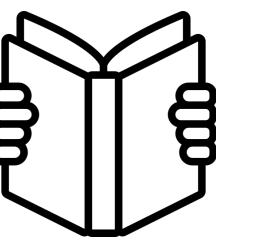
Virgil (70-19 BC)

- Author of Aeneid
 - Epic poem about Aeneas's founding of Rome
 - Became a great influence on renaissance literature in Europe
- Also wrote pastoral poetry
 - Theocritus and Virgil are fathers of pastoral poetry
 - Eclogues (Bucolics)
 - Georgics



Horace (65-08 BC)

- Roman classicist who lived in the first century BC
- Odes
 - Homostrophic (same stanza throughout the ode)
 - Calm, meditative, colloquial
- Satires
 - Speaker is an urbane, witty, tolerant man of the world
 - Aimed “to laugh people out of their follies”
- Epistles (Letters)
 - Ars Poetica (Epistle to Piso)



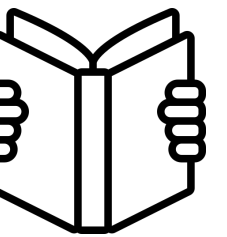
Ovid (43 BC-c. AD 17)

- Witty, sophisticated love poems
- Ars Amatoria (The Art of Love)
 - Scientific, didactic work on how to find and keep a lover
 - Humorous satirical style
- Metamorphoses
 - Narrative poem beginning with the creation of the world and ending in Ovid's time
 - The greatest source of mythology for Renaissance writers
- Augustus Caesar banished Ovid to an isolated island and he died in exile



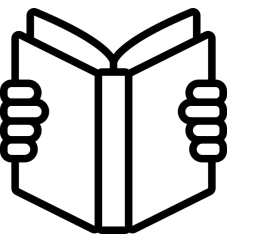
Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC-AD 65)

- Roman statesman, dramatist, poet and Stoic philosopher
- Emperor Nero's teacher and confidant
 - It is legendary that Nero played the fiddle while Rome burnt
- Seneca committed forced suicide at Nero's orders
- Upheld the principles of Stoicism, Cynicism & Epicureanism
- Tragedies of Blood
 - Intense, violent melodramas in rhetorical language
 - Famous: Thyestes
- Senecan revenge tragedies rediscovered by Italian humanists in the mid-16th century; became the models for tragedy on the Renaissance stage



Plautus (c. 254 BC-184 BC)

- Wrote comedies that are versions of Greek New Comedy
- Stock characters: young men in love with slave girls, mistaken identities, cunning servants, deceived masters
- Amphitryon
- Menaechmi
- Rediscovered in the Renaissance, Plautine plots furnished the basis for hundreds of comedies in every European language
 - English Restoration Comedy is Plautine in form and spirit



Terence (c. 195 BC-159 BC)

- Younger contemporary of Plautus, who wrote comedies that are the earliest intact works of Roman literature
- Slave who was later freed
- More refined style of expression
- Plays are Latin versions of Greek plots
- All his 6 comedies have survived
- Most famous play: The Eunuchs