

Julius Caesar
March 15, 44 BC
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J E #5

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Why were the Greeks the first civilization to 'invent' theater as we know it today?

The Greeks used theater as a religious rite. They were the first civilization to invent the theater, as we know it, by utilizing the natural hillsides near their polis or city-states. By placing marble or granite seating on the sides of a hill with a stage area or orchestra at the bottom of a hill, the Greeks were able to project their voices up the hill. Everyone could hear an actor speaking his lines. The Greeks used the drama or plays at yearly religious festivals. Everybody was expected to attend. The earliest plays were held to honor the Greek god, Dionysus, the god of sex, drinking, and debauchery. Music, called dithyrambs, was sung by the local priests of Dionysus to honor him. The songs were eventually evolved into 'spoken drama' in the form of Tragedy and Comedy. Athens was the most famous 'polis' for sponsoring the Dionysus festivals, including prizes to be given to the best playwrights.

Why is Sappho considered the best writer of Lyric poetry, in all of Greece?

Sappho, (lived around 612 BC), was an educated woman, married with 3 kids, who lived on the Greek island named Lesbos. Little is known about her and little of her writings have survived. All we have are fragments of her poetry. Lyric poetry was a new kind of literature invented by the Greeks in which the poet would try to express their inner feelings, emotions, & ideas in poetic form. It was sung, usually to the accompaniment of the Lyre (a small, portable Harp). Most likely, this is why it is called Lyric poetry. Later, in Greek history, a famous thinker and philosopher from Greece named Aristotle (356-287 BC) decided to help classify many of the great things that the Greeks have done. He gathered all of the famous Greek poetry, examined it, read it, and then classified it. In doing so, Aristotle told us the greatest lyric poet in all of Greece was Sappho.

Why is the Battle of Salamis important for all of Western Civilization?

The Battle of Salamis was the last important battle of the drawn out Persian Wars (499-479 BC). It seems that the largest empire in the world, the Persians, led by Xerxes, wanted to incorporate the smaller Greek city-states into the Persian Empire, as well as, punish the Greeks for defying Xerxes, who thought he was a living-god. The Greeks outsmarted Xerxes by cornering his ships at the Straights of Salamis, destroying his army at sea. The Greeks wanted to keep their freedom and independence. By doing so, they kept all of Greece from becoming 'Easternized' – thus, we say that Western Civilization begins with the Greeks.

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