

<i>ACTA CLASSICA</i> <i>UNIV. SCIENT. DEBRECEN.</i>	<i>LXII.</i>	<i>2026.</i>	pp. 99–113.
--	--------------	--------------	-------------

LENAION, IKRIA, AND THE OLD AGORA: THEATRICAL SPACES IN ARCHAIC ATHENS

by Gyula Lindner
University of Pécs
lindner.gyula@pte.hu
ORCID 0009-0002-2163-3475

Abstract: The research of recent decades has made the topography of archaic Athens increasingly clear. However, there are some questions in the 7th/6th century cityscape that even the ongoing excavations cannot answer. One such unclear point concerns the theatrical spaces used before the construction of the Dionysos Theatre: it is not clear where the sanctuary area called Lenaion, or the *orchestra* and *ikria* mentioned by the lexicographers were located. It is also unclear whether in Athens, besides the theatre on the southern slope of the Acropolis, there were other venues for theatrical performances and choral competitions. The study examines the above issues in the context of the topographical problems of archaic Athens through the available literary, archaeological and epigraphic sources.

Keywords: Agora, Lenaia, theatre of Dionysos, *orchestra*, *ikria*, archaic Athens

The topography of archaic Athens is obscured at many points. One such controversial issue concerns the location of old drama performances, about which quite a few ideas have emerged in recent decades. It can be assumed that there were performances not only in the Theatre of Dionysos in Athens, but also elsewhere before the theatre was built, and even after its construction there may also have been dramatic performances in other places, not only in the theatre. The Theatre of Dionysos was erected in the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus on the southern slope of the Acropolis at the end of the 6th century, but dramatic competitions were held earlier on the City Dionysia: from 534 onwards. This means that from the first victory of Thespis there had to be a venue that hosted the Athenian drama until the end of the 6th century.¹ The problem, as we will see below, can be linked to another Athenian festival, the so-called Lenaia, which also hosted drama competitions. Moreover, according to Pollux (4,121), in addition to the Theatre of Dionysos, there was also a ‘Lenaian theatre’ in Athens, but Pollux says nothing about its location.

¹ Pickard-Cambridge 1989, 124. For Thespis and the date (534) see Pickard-Cambridge 1962, 66; 77–78; 88.

Lenaia was the winter festival of Dionysos in Athens, which was held in the month of Gamelion (circa January/February) and which, according to Aristophanes (*Acharn.* 501–508), was attended exclusively by Athenians (foreigners could hardly travel to Athens for drama performances in winter due to the difficult navigability of the sea).² It was the older feast of Dionysos in Athens, and accordingly the *archon basileus* was responsible for organizing it. It consisted of a procession (*pompe*) and a competition (*agon*).³ There were also performances of tragedies and comedies in the Lenaia, as in the City Dionysia, and the *choregos* who paid for the training and equipment of the chorus could be recruited from among the Athenian metics (metics could also be among the *choreutai* of tragedies and comedies in the Lenaia).⁴ This practice was in stark contrast to the City Dionysia, where only Athenian citizens or their children born of legal marriage could dance in the chorus and only citizens could be the *choregos* of the chorus.

We have a great deal of information about the Lenaia, but we still face a number of contradictions about the venue of this festival. The statement that the competitions of the Lenaia were held in the so-called Lenaion is problematic. It is unlikely that these competitions were held before the middle of the 5th century: state-directed and funded comedy and tragedy competitions only began around 440 at the Lenaia.⁵ This means that in the 6th century there may have been Lenaia in Athens, but dramatic performances were not part of them, and only sacrifices and other rituals were presented in honor of Dionysos. Later, under the influence of the City Dionysia, dramatic competitions could also be introduced to the Lenaia, and later, as Lenaia existed in the Athenian public consciousness as an older festival of Dionysos, Lenaia's dramatic competitions were also considered more ancient, e.g. according to lexicographers and scholiasts.⁶ It can be assumed that the venue of the Lenaia, without dramatic performances, was the so-called Lenaion, the location of which is still uncertain, and from the 440s onwards, the Theatre of Dionysos also hosted the dramas performed at the Lenaia.

Unsurprisingly, the Lenaion, as the venue for Lenaia, is mentioned by these lexicographers. According to Hesychius, the Lenaion was surrounded by a *peribolos* in the city and housed the sanctuary of Dionysos Leneios, where the competitions of the Lenaia took place before the theatre was built. Photius makes the same claim: the Lenaion was a large *peribolos* within which the sanctuary of Dionysos Leneios was found, and dramatic competitions were held here before the construction of the Theatre of Dionysos. However, Photius did not in-

² On Athenian theatrical spaces see Di Napoli 2021, 319–330.

³ *AP* 57.1. On sources concerning the Lenaia see Csapo – Slater 1995, 132–138.

⁴ *schol. Ar. Plutos* 954. Four surviving dramas by Aristophanes were also performed at the Lenaia (*Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Wasps*, *Frogs*).

⁵ *IG II²* 2325; Pickard-Cambridge 1989, 125.

⁶ Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 121.

dicare whether one should look for the Lenaion in the city. In the *Etymologicum Magnum*, we also read that drama competitions were held in the Lenaion, and the Lenaion was also where the sanctuary of Dionysos Lenaios was found.⁷

There are two other possibilities for the location of the Lenaion: Aristophanes-scholia (*Acharn.* 202; 504) suggest the rural attachment of Lenaia, although the play is about the organization of a Rural Dionysia, which the scholiast is likely to confuse with the Lenaia.⁸ Stephanus Byzantius also says that the ‘*Lenaïos agon*’ was held ‘*en agrois*’ (i.e. in the field), so in this case, we must look for the festival not within the city walls but in the countryside.⁹ On the other hand, it was also suggested that the sanctuary should be connected to the Dionysion ‘*en Limnais*’ (in the swamp). Thucydides reports that the sanctuary of Dionysos Limnaïos was located south of the Acropolis, in the oldest inhabited part of the city.¹⁰ He mentions this Dionysion in the company of the Olympieion, the Pythion, and the sanctuary of Ge, so we should look for it to the south of the theatre, somewhere on the banks of the river Ilissos.

The cultic epiclesis of Dionysos (‘*en Limnais*’) also refers to a wetland: the riverbank may have been something of a wetland in winter. In his speech against Neaira, Apollodorus said of this shrine that it was the oldest sanctuary of Dionysos and that this shrine was only open on the twelfth day of the month of Anthesterion (Apollod. *In Neaeram* 76). Thucydides and Aristophanes also allude to the relationship between the sanctuary of the Anthesteria and Dionysos ‘*en Limnais*’: in Aristophanes’ play *The Frogs*, we encounter a chorus of frogs that fit perfectly into a swampy area.¹¹ Interestingly, the *scholion*, written for line 961 of the *Acharnians*, claims that Orestes arrived in Athens during the feast of Dionysos Lenaïos after the assassination of his mother on the second day of the Anthesteria, i.e. on *Choes*. Based on the above information, we can say that the Anthesteria was the feast of Dionysos Lenaïos, who was worshipped in the Dionysion ‘*en Limnais*’ on the banks of the Ilissos.

Archaeologists, however, have not found this sanctuary. Nor is it clear whether it was the place of worship that lexicographers call the Lenaion: the Anthesteria as the festival of Dionysos Lenaïos can therefore be linked to Limnaion, but that does not mean that the Limnaion would have been the same as the Lenaion mentioned in late sources.¹² If the Limnaion was only open on a

7 Hesychius E 4933 s.v. *epi Lenaio agon*; Phot. L 221. s.v. *Lenaion*; *Etym. Magn.* 361, 39–41 s.v. *Epilenaio*; cf. Bekker *Anecd. Graeca* 1,278 s.v. *Lenaion*.

8 Deubner 1932, 123–124; Slater 1986, 258.

9 Steph. Byz. s.v. *Lenaïos*.

10 Thuc. 2.15. Archaeological excavations in the Ilissos area have also revealed traces of an archaic settlement. See Travlos 1980, 289–290.

11 Thuc. 2.15; Ar. *Ranae* 216–219.

12 Dörpfeld believed that Limnaion lay at the southwestern foot of the Acropolis, but his opinion has since been refuted by other scholars: Dörpfeld 1895, 161; 368–370. Dörpfeld points

single day of the year, the dramatic competition and other rituals could hardly have been held there, thus it seems unlikely that it was the Lenaion. Furthermore, the sources do not link Limnaion to theatrical performances, only to the festival Anthesteria, which did not involve such performances.¹³

So we have two sanctuaries connected to Dionysos, the Lenaion and the Limnaion (latter of which is located to the south of the Acropolis), but the relationship between the two raises further questions: were the two identifiable with each other; was the festival of the Lenaia held in the Limnaion (according to our sources, the Anthesteria can be more reliably connected to this shrine); was the Lenaion in the city, as reported by lexicographers; if so, where? All we can say with complete certainty is that the Athenians did have a festival called Lenaia, but it is not clear where it was held in the 6th century. After the introduction of dramatic competitions as part of the Lenaia (around 440), the competitions were held in the Theatre of Dionysos (as has been persuasively argued in the secondary literature), and we do not have to assume the existence of a separate Lenaian theatre, where e.g. the comedies by Aristophanes were performed.¹⁴ Of course, other rituals held as part of the Lenaia may have taken place in the Lenaion, but this cannot be answered at present.

The picture is even more confusing if we take into account the statements made by the lexicographers according to which dramatic competitions before the construction of the Theatre of Dionysos were held in the Agora, and even a so-called *ikria*, or wooden platform, provided a place for the audience. Pollux knows (7.125) that the *ikriopoioi* were the persons who made this platform around the Agora. In Hesychius, we read of a black poplar tree (*aigeiros*) on which those who could not afford a spot on the *ikria* climbed (the tree was next to the *ikria* before the construction of the theatre). According to the *Suda*, before the theatre was built, spectators sat on the *ikria*, and this wooden platform could also be used in the Assembly. Photius and Eustathius also confirm this information, but other sources, other than Pollux and Photius, do not mention the Agora as the site of the *ikria*.¹⁵

Based on the above, seemingly confident but late sources, the *ikria* may have served as a stand for the spectators at the music competitions of the Pana-

out, however, that the sanctuary of Dionysos '*en Limnais*' is never called 'Lenaion' by the sources (368). Cf. *LSJ* s.v. *limne*, according to which Limnai was a part of Athens and was located near the Acropolis, where the Lenaion was also located.

13 On the Limnaion see also Isae. 8.35 (who says of a house near the Limnaion that it was in the city, or *en astei*, while this area was located outside the city walls); Phanodemus *ap.* Athenaeus 465a. For theatrical performances at the Anthesteria see Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 121.

14 Thompson – Wycherley 1972, 128.

15 Hesychius A 1695 s.v. *aigeiru thea*; P 513 s.v. *par' aigeiru thea*; *Suda* I 275 s.v. *ikria*; *schol.* Ar. *Thesm.* 395; Phot. I 106 s.v. *ikria*; Eustat. *Od.* 3.350. According to Wilamowitz, the common source of the lexicographic information about the *ikria* was Eratosthenes: Wilamowitz 1886, 597–598.

thenaia from 566 onwards and for tragedies and comedies of the City Dionysia from the 530s until the end of the century.¹⁶ Sources mentioning the *ikria* are supplemented by the opinions of lexicographers and scholiasts who refer to the so called *orchestra* as part of the Agora (the name can be compared to the dance floor of the Theatre of Dionysos and also refers to the performance and dance of the choruses).¹⁷ Plato noted that books could be bought in the *orchestra*, and according to Timaeus Sophistes' explanation concerning the Platonic text, the *orchestra* was the area where the statue of the tyrannicides, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, stood.¹⁸ The latter statement is illuminated by Pausanias (1.8.5), who reports that the statue of the tyrannicides stood between the *odeion* of Agrippa and the temple of Ares in the classical Agora. However, the information from Timaeus is problematic, because the original statue was erected in 510 and taken away from Athens by Xerxes (Pliny *N.H.* 34.17). As we will see below, the construction of the classical Agora can only be traced back to the first decades of the 5th century, so the original group of sculptures may have stood elsewhere, not in the classical Agora.

It is questionable whether we can connect the information given above: were the *orchestra* identified as part of the Agora and the sanctuary of Dionysos Lenaia (the Lenaion) located at the same place, and can we identify the two with each other? One argument against this is that none of the lexicons indicate that the Lenaion was on the Agora, only that it was within the city walls.¹⁹ It is also noteworthy that the excavations on the classical Agora have so far found no trace of a shrine suitable for theatrical performances. A rather corrupted Demosthenes-*scholion* indirectly links the Lenaion to the Agora, but this passage should be treated with reservations for several reasons.²⁰

16 Shapiro 1996, 218. Cf. Plut. *Per.* 13. Later, the Odeum of Pericles was the venue for the music competitions of the Panathenaia, and the so-called *Proagon* of the City Dionysia also took place here.

17 Phot. O 351 s.v. *orchestra*; Suda P 2230 s.v. *Pratinas*. On the *ikria* and the *orchestra* see Pickard-Cambridge 1946, 11–15; Thompson – Wycherley 1972, 126–129; Hammond 1972, 401–403; Siewert 1982, 64–66; 152. On the sources concerning the *ikria* and *orchestra* see Wycherley 1957, 163.

18 Plato *Apol.* 26 d–e; Timaeus Soph. *Lexicon Platonicum* s.v. *orchestra* ad Plato *Apol.* 26 d–e: „Ορχήστρα. τὸ τοῦ θεάτρου μέσον χωρίον, καὶ τόπος ἐπιφανῆς εἰς πανήγυριν, ἐνθα Ἀρμοδίου καὶ Ἀριστογείτονος εἰκόνες.”

19 The connection between Lenaion, *orchestra*, *ikria*, and Agora is emphasized by Schnurr 1995a, 131–138 and Schnurr 1995b, 139–153. However, Schnurr locates them in the archaic Agora, not in the classical one (see below). *Contra*: Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 123.

20 *schol.* Dem. 18.129; Schnurr 1995b, 142–143; Thompson – Wycherley 1972, 128 (reading ‘*en agrois*’ instead of ‘*agora*’ seems correct). The great *peribolos* mentioned by the lexicographers would hardly have disappeared from the Agora without a trace. It would have left some archaeological trace still discernible today: Thompson – Wycherley 1972, 129. It seems likely that the lexicographic information, e.g. the details provided by Pollux, did not refer to the Agora of the Classical Age (see below), but the notion that they might refer to the Agora of the Roman Age is hardly ten-

However, there is another possibility: the notion that the Lenaion and the orchestra were located in the Agora is conceivable if we look for them not in the Agora excavated today, but in the old/archaic Agora of Athens. Excavations of the classical Agora (i.e. the Agora near the Kerameikos, next to the hill of Kolonos Agoraios) began in 1931, but it was assumed much earlier that this was not the archaic city centre.²¹ The classical Agora was used from the late 6th century onwards, from the time when democracy was founded. With the establishment of the new political structure, important public buildings were erected in the new Agora, but many experts suggest that there must have been a former city centre in the time of Draco, Solon, and the Peisistratids which is to be found elsewhere.

The earliest public buildings of the Agora cannot be dated before the second half of the 6th century, and some historians have suggested that they were erected only in the first half of the 5th century. In this case, the construction of the Agora must be brought forward to the Greco-Persian wars, even to the period after the destruction of Athens by the Persians and the battle of Salamis.²² If, on the other hand, the classical Agora was formed so late and the structure of the Theatre of Dionysos can only be dated to the end of the 6th century, the lexicographers may be right that the *ikria* and the *orchestra* were found in the Agora, not the classical Agora, but rather in the older centre of the city.

The existence of the archaic Agora is made probable by Apollodorus quoted by Harpocration, who writes in his work *Peri theon* that the sanctuary of Aphrodite Pandemos was located next to the old Agora (*archaia agora*), where people once held their assemblies (*agorai*).²³ According to Pausanias (1.22.3), this sanctuary area can be localized to the west-southwest side of the Acropolis, under the so called Nike-parapet, but as we will see below, most scholars do not look for the archaic Agora here. Thucydides' famous text (2.15), which places the city's original centre to the south of the Acropolis, also does not solve the problem, because Thucydides is not talking about the old Agora, just the Prytaneion and the council house. But these are exactly the kind of build-

able. The Roman Agora to the east of the Classical Agora was built using funds donated by Caesar and Augustus and was basically a commercial place. For the Roman Agora, see IG II² 3175: „ὁ δῆμος ἀπὸ τῶν δοθεισῶν δωρεῶν ὑπὸ Γαίου Ἰουλίου Καίσαρος θεοῦ. καὶ Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος θεοῦ υἱοῦ Σεβαστοῦ (...).” Pausanias sees the Roman Agora (1.17.1–2), not the archaic Agora (see below). This is convincingly demonstrated by Dickenson 2015. Contra Schmalz 2006.

21 For a brief history of the scholarship see Dickenson 2015, 723–726.

22 Papadopoulos 2003, 295–296; Dickenson 2015, 723–724. For the archaic buildings and monuments (Altar of the Twelve Gods; Southeast Fountain House; Building F) on the classical Agora see Papadopoulos *loc. cit.* The later date for the construction of the classical Agora can be corroborated by the boundary stones of the Agora which are dated to c. 500.

23 Harp. s.v. *Pandemos Aphrodite* = Apollodorus FGrH 244 F113: „Ἀπολλόδορος ἐν τῷ περὶ Θεῶν, πάνδημον φησὶν Ἀθήνησι κληθῆναι τὴν ἀφιδρυθεῖσαν περὶ τὴν ἀρχαίαν ἀγοράν, διὰ τὸ ἐνταῦθα πάντα τὸν δῆμον συνάγεσθαι τὸ παλαιὸν ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, ὥς ἐκάλουν ἀγοράς.”

ings we would expect to find in an agora, so Thucydides indirectly supports the argument that the archaic city centre was in this area.²⁴

In the middle of the 20th century, different ideas began to arise concerning the location of the old Agora: Martin, Wycherley, and Thompson localized it to the west of the Acropolis, in accordance with the contention made by Apollodorus and Pausanias. In contrast, Oikonomides placed the former city centre on the southern slope of the Acropolis, and Travlos claimed it was found on the north-western side of the Acropolis, between the Acropolis and the Peripatos, near the urban Eleusinion. Today, the old centre of the city is sought on the eastern side of the Acropolis, and most recently the south-eastern side of the Acropolis, the later site of the Odeion of Pericles, has also been suggested as a possibility.²⁵ Either way, it is conceivable that the *ikria* were in the old Agora, part of which could be identified as the *orchestra*, and that the old Agora could host the musical competitions at the Panathenaia and most of the city's musical competitions and drama performances until the end of the 6th century. The assertion made by Timaeus Sophistes (and quoted above), according to which the statues of the tyrannicides stood next to the *orchestra*, may also refer to the old centre of the city.

We will see below that there are several arguments in favour of locating the archaic Agora to the east of the Acropolis. The archaeological and epigraphical evidence found here points to this direction, to the area around the Street of Tripods, which features the choregic monuments of the City Dionysia. Excavations in this area started in the 1920s and found a number of tripus-bases in the area of the Monument of Lysikrates built into the houses of the modern Odos Tripodon, which roughly follows the trail of the ancient street to the north of the Monument of Lysikrates and in the area between the monument and the theatre.²⁶

According to Pausanias (1.20.1), the Street of Tripods started from the Prytaneion and it may have led to the entrance of the sanctuary of Dionysos

24 According to Dickenson, the existence of the archaic Agora was not present in Athenian collective memory in the classical age, and it can even be argued that the *archaia agora* mentioned in Apollodorus was in fact another name for the classical Agora (as Melanthius in the 5th century calls the Agora of the classical era the Agora of Kekrops; cf. Plut. *Cimon* 4). At the same time, it is conceivable that Apollodorus himself did not know where the archaic city centre was located and connected it to Aphrodite Pandemos because he knew of this cult that it had been founded by Theseus (cf. Paus. 1.22.3). It is striking that classical and Hellenistic epigraphic sources often mention the classical Agora but make no reference to the archaic Agora. See Dickenson 2015, 755–760.

25 Martin 1951; Oikonomides 1964; Thompson – Wycherley 1972, 19; Travlos 1980, 1; for the archaic Agora see further Schnurr 1995a; Robertson 1998; Camp 2001, 257; Papadopoulos 2003, 2; 280–288; 296; Schmalz 2006; Neer – Kurke 2014; Dickenson 2015, 723–725; Camp 2021, 87–88; Di Napoli 2021, 321. Kolb 1981, 20–58 denies the existence of the archaic Agora and locates the Lenaion in the classical Agora; cf. Doronzio 2011; 2012; 2018.

26 See for example Miller 1970, 223–227; Travlos 1980, 566.

Eleuthereus and a little higher up to the eastern *parodos* of the theatre. Its length is difficult to estimate. Traces of the ancient street can be followed for some 150 meters based on the excavated tripus-bases.²⁷ The Street of Tripods was the most important boulevard in Athens, with its width of six and a half meters and its spectacular monuments which glorified the choruses and their *choregos* in the City Dionysia. It is no coincidence that Athenian aristocrats, e.g. Demetrius of Phaleron, also preferred to march here, where he was gazed upon by the astonished youth of Athens (Athenaeus 543a). At the same time, as we will see below, it can be argued that the Street of Tripods connected the old (*orchestra*; *ikria*) and new venues (Theatre of Dionysos) of the dramatic competitions.

The Prytaneion originally functioned as the headquarters of the archon.²⁸ It housed the city's common hearth (*koine hestia*), where a flame was always burning, and certain officials and honourable citizens could eat here at the expense of the state (*sitesis*). Solon's laws were also on exhibit here.²⁹ Numerous festive parades started from here to the south-south-eastern part of the city, e.g. to the sanctuary of Apollo Delphinios, or to the Pythion, to the cult place of Artemis in Agrai, and to the Festival of Bendis in Piraeus.³⁰ The *archon eponymos* (the magistrate responsible for organizing the City Dionysia) dispatched the procession of the festival from here. The Prytaneion was founded by Theseus and was the centre of the city during the reign of the aristocracy. Near the Prytaneion stood the most important political buildings of the city, Bukoleion, Epilykeion, Thesmotheteion, all of which can be connected to the archons (*AP* 3.5).³¹ Prytaneion remained the symbolic centre of the city until

27 On the Street of the Tripodes see Travlos 1980, 566–569; Schnurr 1995b, 139–153; Wilson 2000, 209–213.

28 For the location of the Prytaneion see Schmalz 2006; cf. Kavvadias – Matthaiou 2014, 52–54.

29 On the *hestia* see Pollux 1.7; 9.40; schol. Arist. 13.103. For *sitesis* see *AP* 24.3; 62.2; Rhodes 1985, 308; on Solonian laws exhibited in the Prytaneion see Plut. *Sol.* 25; Paus. 1.18.3; statues of the Prytaneion: Paus. 1.18.3; 9.32.8; Ael. *VH* 9.39. Prytaneion as court: Paus. 1.28.10.

30 Robertson 1998, 299; Wilson 2000, 212. Prytaneion as starting point of festive processions: IG II² 1006.6–9: „ἐπειδὴ οἱ ἔφηβοι οἱ ἐπὶ Δημητρίου ἄρχοντος θύσαντες ταῖς ἐγγραφαῖς ἐν τῷ πρυτανεῖῳ ἐπὶ τῆς κοινῆς ἐστίας τοῦ δήμου μετὰ τε τοῦ κοσμη[η]τοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἱερέως τοῦ δήμου καὶ τῶν Χαρίτων καὶ τῶν ἐξηγητῶν κατὰ τοὺς νόμους καὶ τὰ ψηφίσματα τοῦ δήμου ἐπόμπευσαν τῇ Ἀρτέμει τῇ Ἀγροτέρῃ.”; see also IG II² 1008.4–7; IG II² 1011.5–7; IG II² 1028.5–8; IG II² 1283.7; Plut. *Thes.* 18. On the connection between the archon eponymos and the City Dionysia see *AP* 56.2–3. According to Schnurr 1995b, 148–149, the list of the winners of the dramatic competitions at the City Dionysia (IG II² 2318, i.e. the *Fasti*) was exhibited in the Prytaneion. Contra: Robertson 1998, 287, note 25. The festive procession of the City Dionysia is not to be confused with the procession on the eve of the festival, during which the statue of Dionysos was taken out to the Academy and then brought back to the theatre or the sanctuary (see below).

31 Rhodes 1985, 103–106. On the connection between Theseus and the Prytaneion see Thuc. 2.15; Plut. *Thes.* 24.

the most important political offices (e.g. the *bule* and the buildings of the archons) were moved to the classical Agora around 500.

According to Geoffrey Schmalz the location of the Prytaneion is now clearly identifiable: he claims that the remains of the building are to be found beneath Agia Aikaterini Square in the Lysikrates Street.³² From Pausanias we know that the Prytaneion was close to the sanctuary of Aglauros (Paus. 1.18.2) and concerning the location of the Aglaurion we have a definite argument which also puts the topography of archaic Athens on a whole new footing. An inscription stele carrying an assembly decree honouring the priestess of Aglauros was found under the cave of Aglauros on the east side of the Acropolis in 1980.³³ Based on the inscription, the Aglaurion was located on the east slope of the Acropolis, and below it, based on Pausanias (1.18.2), was found the Anakeion, the sanctuary of the Dioskuri and not far from it the Prytaneion.

This localization is reinforced by dedications and inscriptions from the 4th c. BC to 4th c. AD in the adjoining area (near the Monument of Lysikrates) that are related to the political and religious function of the Prytaneion: e.g. a sculpture base in one of the houses of the Odos Tripodon, which mentions the *epimeletes* of the Prytaneion, a Hestia-dedication at the proposed site of the Prytaneion (the central hearth of the polis was located in the Prytaneion) and well-preserved archon lists (the Prytaneion served as the office of the *archon eponymos*).³⁴ Using the argument of Pausanias and the testimony of these archaeological and epigraphical finds, we can safely conclude that the Prytaneion stood not in the classical Agora, but on the east/southeastern side of the Acropolis. And since Aglaurion and Prytaneion were close to each other, it is conceivable that several other archaic public buildings (Bukoleion, Epilykeion, Thesmotheteion, i.e. the headquarters of the *archon basileus* and the *thesmothetai*) are also covered by the Plaka-district of modern Athens, to the east of the Acropolis.

Near the Prytaneion stood another important building, the so-called Bukoleion. The Bukoleion was the seat of the *archon basileus*, about which the author of the *Athenaion politeia* claims that the symbolic union of Dionysos and the wife of the *archon basileus* (*basilinna*) took place here during the festival of the Anthesteria. The latter information is important, because Anthesteria is considered by some ancient sources to be the festival of Dionysos Lenaios (see above). The Anthesteria may have connected the Bukoleion with the Sanctuary of Dionysos Limnaios, for, according to Apollodorus, the law concerning the wife of the *archon basileus* was to be exhibited at the altar in the Limnaion.

32 Schmalz 2006; cf. Robertson 1998, 285; 288; 298–299; Kavvadias – Matthaïou 2014, 52–54.

33 IG II³, 1.1002 = SEG 33.115; Dontas 1983, 48–63.

34 Schmalz 2006; IG II² 2877 (1st century): „Θεόφιλος Διοδώρου Ἀλαεὺς ἐπιμε[λη]τῆ[ς] γένόμενος πρυτανεῖο[υ].”; Hestia-dedication: IG II² 3185; archon lists: IG II² 1717–1719; 1723; 1727.

In addition, the name ‘Bukoleion’ fits well with the figure of Dionysos, who is often recalled in the form of an ox or a bull and is even given the *epiclesis* ‘Bukolion’ on one occasion.³⁵

It cannot be ruled out that the Bukoleion, as an important building of the archaic Agora, was located in the vicinity of the Lenaion, the sanctuary of Dionysos Lenaios, in which case the Lenaia is not to be found in the Limnaion on the banks of the Ilissos (see above), but in the old city centre near the Prytaneion. Thus, the *archon basileus* could easily keep an eye on the Lenaia, which were organized by him. The Bukoleion’s connection to the old Agora and to its parts, the *orchestra*, and *ikria* is probable based on the above line of reasoning, but further archaeological excavations under the modern Plaka district may confirm this hypothesis. Until this has been done, we can only present sporadic archaeological finds that testify to the relationship between the Bukoleion, the Lenaion, and the archaic Agora.

The connection of the City Dionysia to the archaic Agora can also be traced: the festival was originally under the authority of the *archon eponymos*, who could dispatch the procession from his own seat, i.e. from the Prytaneion.³⁶ We also have to look for the original performances of the City Dionysia in the orchestra on the old Agora, in the neighbourhood of the Prytaneion and the Bukoleion. This means that from the 530s until the construction of the Theatre of Dionysos, the competitions were held here. The procession route of the City Dionysia later changed considerably, and it also went to the new Agora after the theatre was built.³⁷ The *pompe* going on here is probable by Pindaros, who in his dithyramb written to the Athenians refers to the altar of the twelve gods, which he calls the smoking navel of the city, and the Agora, to which he calls the Olympian gods. The altar is described by the adjective *pandaidalos*: perhaps it refers to the newly built Agora which the Athenians had recently taken possession of?³⁸

Based on the above argumentation, the following reconstruction seems possible: the classical Agora was not a significant public space in Athens until the

35 *AP* 3.5; Suda A 4119 s.v. *archon*; Apollodorus *In Neaeram* 73–78; Pollux 8.118; *Ar. Vesp.* 9–10; *Eur. Bacch.* 100; 618; 920–922; 1017; 1159. Dionysos and the cultic epiclesis of ‘Bukolion’: Nonnus, *Dion.* 15.377. Miller argues that a bull-relief found in the Roman Agora may allude to the bull-form of Dionysos and the Bukoleion. See Miller 1970, 227–231.

36 For the procession that was held on the eve of the City Dionysia and the *pompe* that was part of the festival see Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 269–290. Sourvinou-Inwood argues that Dionysos’ foreign status is indicated precisely by the fact that his statue was taken to the Prytaneion in the old Agora and hosted there (*xenismos*), just as foreign ambassadors were hosted in this building. See Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 279.

37 *Xen. Eq. mag.* 3.2.

38 *Pind. fr.* 75.3: „Δεῦτ’ ἐν χορόν, Ὀλύμπιοι, ἐπὶ τε κλυτὰν πέμπετε χάριν, θεοί, πολύβατον οἷ τ’ ἄστεος ὀμφαλὸν θυόεντ’ ἐν ταῖς ἱεραῖς Ἀθάναις οἰχνεῖτε πανδαίδαλόν τ’ εὐκλέ’ ἀγοράν.” Cf. Neer – Kurke 2014.

last quarter of the 6th century: there were few buildings on it, so the contentions made by the lexicographers, who claimed that the Agora had been the site of drama competitions before the theatre was built, could hardly have been intended to refer to the classical Agora. It is more likely that the drama competitions took place in the old Agora, but after the construction of the new city centre, it was also possible to move the portable *ikria* and even hold 5th century choral performances in the classical Agora. This led lexicographers and scholiasts to link the *orchestra* and the *ikria* to the Agora of the classical era, while they were originally located in the old city centre. The same portable *ikria* also served as the stands of the Panathenaia-procession in the classical Agora, and archaeological traces of them were found. Athenaeus also reports (167f) that there was an *ikria* near the Herms in the classical Agora, erected by a certain Demetrios.³⁹ Plato also speaks of such portable *ikria* in his ideal state, much as the *Suda* said that *ikria* were used in the Assembly.⁴⁰

The Dionysian character of the old Agora has thus been preserved, i.e. it passed from the archaic to the classical Agora: the new procession of the City Dionysia reached the new centre of the city (instead of going in the old Agora near the Prytaneion), choruses danced next to the Altar of the Twelve Gods, and the Panathenaia-procession also went through the new Agora. The Agora was always an area suitable for theatre and other performances, as in many poleis, e.g. in Corinth, Troizen, Mantinea, Argos, Syracuse, and Megalopolis, we also come across the relationship (i.e. topographical proximity) between the theatre and the marketplace. In light of this, the case of Sparta is particularly interesting, where, according to Pausanias, the agora was called *Choros* (Dance Square).⁴¹ The bronze statue of Pindaros may also have stood in the orchestra of the classical Agora: the Athenians honoured the poet with this statue for a dithyramb performed by a chorus next to the Altar of the Twelve Gods.⁴² The Dionysian character of the Agora and the theatrical tradition here have survived: the *odeion* of Agrippa was built at the site of the classical *orchestra* at the end of the 1st century and the authors in the Imperial period often mention the traces of Dionysos in the classical Agora.⁴³

39 Thompson – Wycherley 1972, 126.

40 Plato *Leg.* 817 b–c; *Suda* I 275 s.v. *ikria*.

41 Paus. 3.11.9; on the possible connection between the agora and theatre see Kolb 1981; Siewert 1982, 152 localizes the dithyrambic contest of the City Dionysia in the classical Agora.

42 The statue stood near the Stoa Basileios. See Ps-Aeschines *Epist.* 4.3.

43 Philostratus describes the ancient *odeum* of Agrippa as the ‘theater in the Kerameikos’: *VS* 571. Kerameikos in the works by Philostratus and Pausanias (1.2.4; 1.3.1; 1.14.6; 1.20.6; 8.9.8) can be identified with the classical Agora, while the word ‘agora’ is associated with the Roman city centre. (Paus. 1.17.1–2; cf. note 20). Imperial authors (e.g., Plutarch, Harpocration, Athenaeus, Arrhian, and Lucian) consistently understood the Agora of the classical period as Kerameikos. See Dickenson 2015, 749–755, who claims that Pausanias could not see the archaic Agora, nor did contemporary sources mention it. *Contra*: Robertson 1998, 286, according to

Behind the transformation of the celebration of City Dionysia, we must seek not only the construction of the theatre but also the introduction of the choral contests around 500 to the festival: this is indicated by the fact that the list of winners at the City Dionysia (the so-called *Fasti*) began in 502/501, while the Parian marble chronicle dates the first contest in which men's choruses (*choroi andron*) competed against one another to 509/508. As an aftermath of the democratic reforms by Cleisthenes, the reorganization of the festival around 500 may have been linked to the construction of the Agora near the Kerameikos (see the aforementioned Pindaros fragment) and the relocation of the *ikria* from the old to the new Agora. So the *ikria* of the old city centre did not become superfluous, as contests could be held not only in the theatre but also in the orchestra relocated to the new Agora.⁴⁴ If we accept the information of the *Suda*, the collapse of the *ikria* at the time of the 70th Olympics (between 500 and 497) could have further encouraged the Athenians not to perform theatrical and choral performances at the wooden stands in the old Agora, but in the newly built theatre and on the new Agora (though also on wooden platforms).⁴⁵

The mythical tradition links the founding of the City Dionysia to the event when the statue of the god arrived in Athens from Eleutherai (a small village on the border of Attica and Boeotia). In Eleutherai, the cult of Dionysos was founded by the eponymous hero, Eleuther, after his daughters were afflicted with madness by Dionysos. Later, the statue of the god was taken to Athens by Pegasus of Eleutherai. The Athenians received the god hostilely, so Dionysos inflicted a disease on them, from which, according to a prophecy, only a *phallophoria* organized in honour of the god brought healing (schol. Ar. *Thesm.* 243). The increase in the importance of Eleutherai for Athens may have been related to the fact that after 506, after defeating the Boeotians and Chalkis, Eleutherai itself applied to be included in the Athenian political structure.⁴⁶ However, Eleutherai was not part of the demos-structure of Attica: this also indicates that the border municipality had not yet played a role in the original reforms by Cleisthenes. It only later joined Athens.

whom Pausanias describes the archaic and not the Roman Agora; cf. Schmalz 2006. For the traces of Dionysos in the classical Agora see Paus. 1.2.5; Philostr. *VS* 549; Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 284–286.

44 The *ikria* and the orchestra were probably found in the archaic Agora according to Miller 1995, 219; cf. Di Napoli 2021, 322. Oikonomides 1964, 77–78 erroneously places the *ikria* on the southwest side of the Acropolis, in place of the later Odeum built by Herodes Atticus. He also locates the old Agora here, on the southern slope of the Acropolis.

45 *Suda* P 2230 s.v. Pratinas. Sourvinou-Inwood (2003, 91) claims that the pottery found in the theatre also suggests that the theatre began to be used around 500. Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 277. On this dating of the theatre (around 500) see also Thompson – Wycherley 1972, 127.

46 Paus. 1.38.8; Hdt. 5.77. After the Peisistratids' policy of friendship with the Boeotians ended, it was natural that with the fall of tyranny, Athens' relationship with Boeotia would change. See Connor 1990, 7–12; Schnurr 1995b, 149–150.

During the reorganization of the City Dionysia, a procession held the night before the festival (*eisagoge apo tes escharas*) may have become customary around 500, during which the statue of the god was taken to Akademos' grove on the road to Eleutherai, and after a sacrifice had been performed on an *eschara* (altar), it was taken back to the sanctuary or the theatre.⁴⁷ The procession (*eisagoge*) passed back from the Academy through the Dipylon Gate, then, touching the new Agora, bypassed the Acropolis from the east and passed through the Street of the Tripods to the sanctuary of Dionysos. But all this was possible only after the new Agora had been constructed, i.e. after the end of the 6th century.⁴⁸ The reorganization of the program and the relocation of the venue of the City Dionysia coincided, in my view, with a change which, in the time of Cleisthenes, put the political structure of the polis on a whole new footing.

Based on the above argumentation, it is conceivable that the orchestra was originally located in the old Agora and for the earlier part of the 6th century provided the site for Attic drama. With the reorganization of the City Dionysia, the construction of the theatre, and the loss of the significance of the old town, the orchestra moved to a new venue and included a new kind of competition among choruses of the ten Attic *phylai*. The new venue was the new Agora and the Theatre of Dionysos. However, the Athenian boulevard, later called the Street of the Tripods, has survived in its old location and was enriched in the 5th century with choregic monuments and tripod-bases. But it has preserved something from the old days, as it connected the old and new places of worship of Dionysos, the Lenaion and the theatre in the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus on the southern slope of the Acropolis.

Bibliography

- Camp 2001 = Camp, J. M.: *The Archaeology of Athens*. New Haven – London.
 — 2021 = Camp II, J. Mck.: The Agora: Public Life and Administration. In: Neils, J./Rogers, D. (edd.): *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Athens*. Cambridge, 86–97.
 Connor 1990 = Connor, W. R.: City Dionysia and Athenian Democracy. *C&M* 40, 7–12.

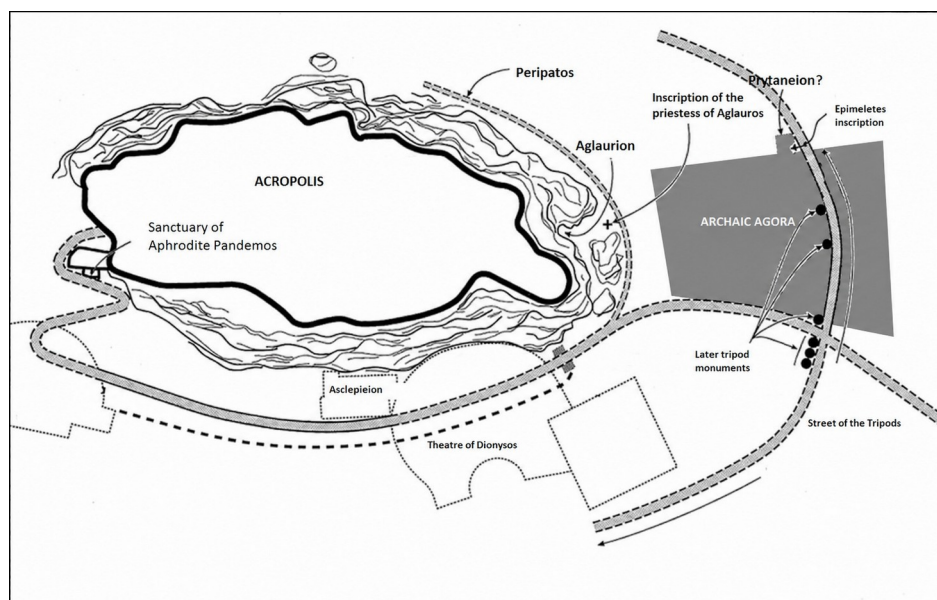
⁴⁷ The sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus is located in the grove of Akademos according to Paus. 1.29.2. The statue of the god is taken to this sanctuary on certain occasions each year. On sources of the *eisagoge*-ritual, see Csapo – Slater 1995, 110–111. Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 92–95 thinks that the *eschara* is not located in the Academy, but in the north-western part of the classical Agora, next to the altar of the twelve gods. The earliest sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus on the southern slope of the Acropolis is to be dated to the period of Peisistratus or his sons (Travlos 1980, 537), according to Connor (1990, 24–26) around 500. On the sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus see Papathanassopoulos 1995, 36–47. Papathanassopoulos considers the archaic temple to be dated to the 6th century. According to Pausanias (1.20.5) it was the oldest temple of Dionysos in Athens, but he is certainly wrong, as Apollodorus calls the sanctuary of Dionysos '*en Limnais*' the oldest (see above): *In Neaeram* 76. Cf. Wurster 1993, 24.

⁴⁸ Robertson 1998, 290.

- Csapo – Slater 1995 = Csapo, E. – Slater, W. J.: *The Context of Ancient Drama*. Ann Arbor.
- Deubner 1932 = Deubner, L.: *Attische Feste*. Berlin.
- Dickenson 2015 = Dickenson, Chr. P.: Pausanias and the ‘Archaic Agora’ at Athens. *Hesperia* 84, 723–770.
- Di Napoli 2021 = Di Napoli, V.: Theatrical Spaces. In: Neils, J./Rogers, D. (edd.): *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Athens*. Cambridge, 319–330.
- Dontas 1983 = Dontas, G. S.: The True Aglaurion. *Hesperia* 52, 48–63.
- Doronzio 2011 = Doronzio, A.: L’Archaia Agorà di Apollodoro e Melanzio. Considerazioni su un problema topografico dell’Atene di età arcaica. *Numismatica e Antichità Classiche* 40, 15–85.
- 2012 = Doronzio, A.: Per una ricostruzione della topografia di Atene in età arcaica: riflessioni in margine a Tucidide II 15 e Pausania I 3–20. *Numismatica e Antichità Classiche* 41, 11–43.
- 2018 = Doronzio, A.: *Athen im 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr. Räume und Funde der frühen Polis*. Berlin.
- Dörpfeld 1895 = Dörpfeld, W.: Die Ausgrabungen am Westabhange der Akropolis. *AM* 20, 161–206; 368–370.
- Hammond 1972 = Hammond, N. G. L.: The Conditions of Dramatic Production to the Death of Aeschylus. *GRBS* 13/4, 387–450.
- Kavvadias – Matthaiou 2014 = Kavvadias, G./Matthaiou, A. P.: A New Attic Inscription of the 5th Century B.C. from the East Slope of the Acropolis. In: Matthaiou, A. P./Pitt, R. K. (edd.): *ΑΘΗΝΑΙΩΝ ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΙΟΣ. Studies in Honour of Harold B. Mattingly*. Athens, 51–72.
- Kolb 1981 = Kolb, F.: *Agora und Theater, Volks- und Festversammlung*. Berlin.
- Martin 1951 = Martin, R.: *Recherches sur l’agora grecque: Études d’histoire et d’architecture urbaines*. BÉFAR 174. Paris.
- Miller 1970 = Miller, S. G.: Old Discoveries from Old Athens. *Hesperia* 39, 223–231.
- 1995 = Miller, S. G.: Architecture as Evidence for the Identity of the Early Polis. In: Hansen, M. H. (ed.): *Sources for the Ancient Greek City-State*. Copenhagen, 201–244.
- Neer – Kurke 2014 = Neer, R. T. – Kurke, L.: Pindar Fr. 75 SM and the Politics of Athenian Space. *GRBS* 54, 527–529.
- Oikonomides 1964 = Oikonomides, A. N.: *The Two Agoras in Ancient Athens: A New Commentary on their History and Development, Topography, and Monuments*. Chicago.
- Papadopoulos 2003 = Papadopoulos, J. K.: *Ceramicus Redivivus. The Early Iron Age Potters’ Field in the Area of the Classical Athenian Agora*. *Hesperia Supplement* 31. Athens – Princeton.
- Papathanassopoulos 1995 = Papathanassopoulos, T. G.: *The Sanctuary and Theater of Dionysos. Monuments on the South Slope of the Acropolis*. Athens.
- Pickard-Cambridge 1946 = Pickard-Cambridge, A. W.: *The Theatre of Dionysos in Athens*. Oxford.
- 1962 = Pickard-Cambridge, A. W.: *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*. Oxford.
- 1989 = Pickard-Cambridge, A. W.: *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*. Oxford.
- Rhodes 1985 = Rhodes, P. J.: *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia*. Oxford.
- Robertson 1998 = Robertson, N.: The City Center of Archaic Athens. *Hesperia* 67, 283–302.
- Schmalz 2006 = Schmalz, G. C. R.: The Athenian Prytaneion Discovered?. *Hesperia* 75, 33–81.
- Schnurr 1995a = Schnurr, Ch.: Die alte Agora Athens. *ZPE* 105, 131–138.
- 1995b = Schnurr, Ch.: Zur Topographie der Theaterstätten und der Tripodenstrasse in Athen. *ZPE* 105, 139–153.
- Shapiro 1996 = Shapiro, H. A.: Democracy and Imperialism: The Panathenaia in the Age of Perikles. In: Neils, J. (ed.): *Worshipping Athena. Panathenaia and Parthenon*. Madison, 215–225.
- Siewert 1982 = Siewert, P.: *Die Trittyen Attikas und die Heeresreform des Kleisthenes*. München.
- Slater 1986 = Slater, N. W.: The Lenaeon Theater. *ZPE* 66, 255–264.

- Sourvinou-Inwood 1994 = Sourvinou-Inwood, Chr.: Something to Do With Athens. Tragedy and Ritual. In: Hornblower, S./Osborne, R. (edd.): *Ritual, Finance, Politics. Athenian Democratic Accounts Presented to David Lewis*. Oxford, 269–290.
- Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 = Sourvinou-Inwood, Chr.: *Tragedy and Athenian Religion*. New York – Oxford.
- Thompson – Wycherley 1972 = Thompson, H.A. – Wycherley, R.E.: *The Agora of Athens. The History, Shape and Uses of Ancient City Center*. Princeton.
- Travlos 1980 = Travlos, J.: *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens*. New York.
- Wilamowitz-Möllendorff 1886 = Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, U. von: Die Bühne des Aischylos. *Hermes* 21, 597–622.
- Wilson 2000 = Wilson, P.: *The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia. The Chorus, the City, and the Stage*. Cambridge.
- Wurster 1993 = Wurster, W.W.: Die Architektur des griechischen Theaters. *Antike Welt* 24, 20–42.
- Wycherley 1957 = Wycherley, R. E.: *The Athenian Agora. III. Literary and Epigraphical Testimonia*. Princeton.

Figure



Map of the Acropolis and the proposed location of the Archaic Agora. Adapted from Robertson 1998, fig. 1, p. 285. Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

DOI 10.22315/ACD/2026/5
 ISSN 0418-453X (print)
 ISSN 2732-3390 (online)
 Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0