

The Lenaian Festival at Classical Athens in Sociocultural Context

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For citation: Karpyuk S. G., Kulishova O. V. The Lenaian Festival at Classical Athens in Sociocultural Context. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History*, 2022, vol. 67, issue 1, pp. 92–101.

<https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu02.2022.106>

This article covers the Lenaia (Λήναια) which was an important part of social and political life in Classical Athens. Our understanding of how dramatic agones in Athens were organized primarily comes from the accounts of the Great (City) Dionysia, while other festivals have been studied less thoroughly. The unique nature of the Lenaia manifested itself both in the purely theatrical and in the social aspects of the event. Regarding the leading theatrical genre, tragedy, the Lenaia remained in the shadow of the City Dionysia, playing the role of the “small stage”. The comic agones at the Lenaia, on the other hand, were staged to a very high standard, to which the social aspect further contributed since the audiences at the Lenaia were much more down-to-earth, animated and active than at the Dionysia. The Lenaia was held during the coldest part of the year. It was precisely in winter when peasants from different parts of Attica, who constituted the majority of the Lenaian audience, were less busy with farming; unlike the Great Dionysia, the Lenaia was not attended by foreigners. The Lenaian festivals were held on a less lavish scale, their organization was entrusted to less significant magistrates, and their performances were much less costly than the Dionysian ones. The Athenians must have considered the Lenaia a predominantly peasant festival, inaccessible to outsiders. Lenaian performances were but little affected by “political correctness”, their earthy humour at times evolved into biting political satire. All of the above created a special atmosphere that became the background of Aristophanes’ best comedies.

Keywords: Ancient Greece, Athens, Lenaia, theatre, religious festivals, Aristophanes.

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Исследование выполнено при финансовой поддержке РФФИ в рамках научного проекта № 20-09-00455 (О. В. Кулишова).

The reported study was funded by Russian Foundation for Basic Research, project No. 20-09-00455 (O. V. Kulishova).

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Ленейские праздники классических Афин в социокультурном контексте

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Для цитирования: *Karpyuk S. G., Kulishova O. V. The Lenaian Festival at Classical Athens in Socio-cultural Context // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета. История. 2022. Т. 67. Вып. 1. С. 92–101. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu02.2022.106>*

Статья посвящена Ленеям (Λήναια) — важной части культурно-политической жизни классических Афин. Наши представления об организации драматических агонов в Афинах, как правило, строятся на свидетельствах о Великих Дионисиях, в то время как другие театральные праздники, сведения о которых не столь многочисленны, изучены гораздо меньше. Специфика Ленейского праздника проявлялась и в чисто театральной, и в социальной составляющей этого фестиваля. Ленеи, очевидно, воспринимались современниками как менее значимое событие театральной жизни, они уступали городским Дионисиям, то есть ведущему театральному жанру, каковым была трагедия. В этой сфере они играли роль «малой сцены». Зато ленейские комедийные агоны проходили на самом высоком уровне. И этому в немалой степени способствовала социальная специфика: ленейская публика была существенно более простой, живой и активной, нежели дионисийская. Ленеи проводились в самый холодный период года, до открытия сезона навигации, и иноземцы (прежде всего речь идет о представителях союзных полисов) там не присутствовали. Крестьяне из разных регионов Аттики составляли большую часть зрителей именно зимой, когда они были мало задействованы в сельскохозяйственных работах. Ленейский фестиваль был существенно менее пышным, к его организации были причастны менее значимые магистраты, ленейские постановки обходились существенно дешевле дионисийских. Для афинян Ленеи были, вероятно, по преимуществу крестьянским, закрытым для чужаков праздником, способствовавшим преодолению зимних невзгод. Политическая корректность лишь в малой степени затронула ленейские постановки, их простонародный юмор перекликался с острой политической сатирой. Все это создавало особую атмосферу, которая стала фоном лучших комедий Аристофана. Недаром большинство известных нам побед поэта было связано прежде всего с Ленеями, а не с Великими Дионисиями.

Ключевые слова: Древняя Греция, Афины, Ленеи, театр, религиозные празднества, Аристофан.

The initial period of the Peloponnesian War, the 420s BC, coincided with the time of the quick rise and remarkable success of the first comedies written by the famous Athenian playwright Aristophanes. His plays “Acharnians”, “Knights” and “Wasps” won prizes in drama contests, i. e., agones. The question *why* Aristophanes’ comedies enjoyed such popularity has been raised by many researches, whereas few have posed the question *where* and *when* the young Athenian playwright achieved success. It should be noted that Aristophanes’ triumphs known to us were linked not with the Great Dionysia — the most famous festival where dramatists competed but rather with the Lenaia — another Dionysian festival of great importance in Athens.

The Lenaia (Λήναια) is a significant, although so far insufficiently studied, aspect of the cultural and political life in Classical Athens. Our knowledge of the organization of dramatic agones in Athens mainly stems from the accounts of the Great Dionysia, while other theatrical festivals remain in the shadow of this elaborate and large-scale event for researchers. Obviously, there are underlying objective circumstances — in comparison to the Great Dionysia, the information on the organization and structure of the Lenaian festival even in its heyday in the last third of the 5th century BC is rather scarce.

Dramatic agones were first held at the Lenaia almost half a century later than at the Great Dionysia. In all likelihood, both contemporaries and subsequent generations viewed them as a lesser event in theatrical life. However, the Lenaia became renowned for its comedy performances, and it was at this festival that Aristophanes won most of his victories that we know of. Drawing on these characteristic features of the Lenaian festival, we will attempt to study its seasonal nature related to the time when it was held, as well as the specifics of its history which were determined by the situation in Athens. The Lenaia took place in winter, not the most comfortable season for spectators; and its golden age, which is traditionally, and not without cause, associated with the name of Aristophanes, coincides with the intense and destructive Peloponnesian War. Taking into account the last two factors may help to gain more revealing insights into the nature and specifics of the Lenaian festival.

The Lenaia was a major festival, second in importance to the Great Dionysia, that was held in Athens on a citywide scale; whereas the Lesser, or Rural, Dionysia took place in demes. Apparently, theatrical performances were once held during the Anthesteria, which was another festival of Dionysos, but over the course of time the practice was discontinued, so comedy performances at the Anthesteria were only resumed in the second half of the 4th century BC.

A succession of “theatrical” festivals in Athens started in late autumn and continued until spring¹: The Lesser, or Rural, Dionysia was held in the month of Poseideon (Ποσειδεών, December/January); the Lenaia (the Lenaian Dionysia) took place in Gamelion (Γαμηλιών, January/February); the Anthesteria (the Older Dionysia) was celebrated in the like-named month of Anthesterion (Ἀνθεστηριών, February/March); the Great, or City, Dionysia was in Elaphebolion (Ελαφηβολιών, March/April). Therefore, within the festival calendar of Classical Athens between December and March there existed a festive mini-cycle in honour of Dionysos — τὰ Διονύσια².

The above-mentioned difference in the nature and style of the two main theatrical festivals can be clearly deduced from our sources. While the Great Dionysia was a grand event, and the annual payment of phoros by the allies was timed to coincide with it, so there were a considerable number of guests (non-Athenians) present, the Lenaia, compared to the “international” Dionysia, was a local festival, partly because of the difficulties seafarers would experience travelling in January and February.

It has already been mentioned that on the whole the accounts of the Lenaia are much less detailed than those of the Great Dionysia. There is scanty information that can be found in theatrical records, mainly in the so-called victor lists, didaskaliai, etc.³ However,

¹ *Mommsen A.* Feste der Stadt Athen im Altertums: geordnet nach attischem Kalender. Leipzig, 1898. S. 308–322, 349–353, 372–382, 428–448; *Fauth W.* Lenaia // *Der Kleine Pauly*. Bd. III. 1969. Sp. 557; *Parke H. W.* Festivals of the Athenians. Ithaca, 1986. P. 100–102; *Cartledge P.* Aristophanes and his Theatre of the Absurd. Bristol, 1990. P. 6–7; *Latyshev V. V.* Ocherk grecheskikh drevnostei. Ch. 2: Bogoslužebnye i stsenicheskie drevnosti. St Petersburg, 1997. P. 134 sqq.; *Marinovich L. P.* Grazhdanin na prazdnike Velikikh Dionisii i polisnaia ideologija // *Chelovek i obshchestvo v antichnom mire*. Moscow, 1998. P. 296; *Scrzhinskaia M. V.* Drevnegrecheskie prazdniki v Ellade i Severnom Prichernomor'e. St Petersburg, 2010. P. 155–162; et al.

² To a certain extent, this festive mini-cycle compensated for the interruption of the vegetative cycle typical of the winter period in the Mediterranean (*Cartledge P.* Aristophanes... P. 7).

³ See the recently published special edition of epigraphic evidence of dramatic agones in Athens: *Inscriptional Records for the Dramatic Festivals in Athens. IG II² 2318–2325 and Related Texts* / eds B. W. Millis, S. D. Olson. Leiden; Boston, 2012 (here and throughout IRDF).

the Lenaia is often associated with the intriguing imagery of vase painting⁴: the so-called “Lenaia vases” (a group of about 70 vases which show scenes from Dionysian rites). They were termed “Lenäenvasen” by A. Frickenhaus who attempted to prove the existence of a connection between the images depicted on these vases and the Lenaia⁵. However, apart from the Lenaian festival, whose rituals are most often thought to have been represented on the vases⁶, the other Dionysian festivals — the Anthesteria or even the Rural Dionysia — are sometimes mentioned as possible candidates⁷. But the most important source proves to be the written tradition — the drama of the Classical period, such as Aristophanes’ comedies, first and foremost, many of which were performed precisely at the Lenaia; the works by other writers of the 5th–4th century BC; and also the late written tradition, scholia.

The name of the festival — Λήναια or Διονύσια τὰ ἐπὶ Ληναίῳ (the latter, apparently, was the official one) — is often linked with the word ληνός (“winepress”, “vat for crushing grapes”) and λήναιον (“place for crushing grapes and storing the wine until it is ready”)⁸, but the majority of researchers, especially over the last few decades, have dismissed this explanation in favour of another theory of the origin of the name — that of the title stemming from λήνη, pl. λῆναι (“lenai, maenads, female followers of Dionysos” (Heracl. fr. 14. 15; Hesych., s. v.)⁹.

One of Dionysos’ epiklesis was Lenaïos (Diod. III. 63)¹⁰. The official name of the festival Διονύσια τὰ ἐπὶ Ληναίῳ indicates that in Athens there was a precinct sacred to Dionysos — the Lenaion — where certain rituals of the Lenaia were initially performed. In the ancient sources, this sanctuary is termed as ἐν ἄστει — “within the city”, i. e., a city sanctuary (Hesych., s. v. ἐπὶ Ληναίῳ ἀγών), but also as ἐν ἀγροίς — “in the rural area” (Schol. Aristoph. Ach. 202)¹¹. The highly controversial nature of the written accounts concerning the

⁴ Over the last few decades vase painting has been actively used as a source of information on the history of theatre, see: *Karpyuk S. G., Kulishova O. V. Khory v atticheskoï vazopisi VI–V vv. do n. e. // Aktualnye problemy teorii i istorii iskusstva. 2017. Vol. 7. P. 69–77.*

⁵ *Friickenhaus A. Lenäenvasen. Berlin, 1912.*

⁶ *Ibid. Esp. see: S. 27 ff.; Deubner L. Attische Feste. Berlin, 1956. S. 123–124.*

⁷ On the complex and contradictory nature of this source, see: *Fauth W. Lenaia. Sp. 557; Nilsson M. P., Croon J. H. Lenaea // Oxford Classical Dictionary. Oxford, 1970. P. 594; Finogenova S. I. Mif o Dionise (po vazovym risunkam VI–V vv. do n. e.) // Zhizn’ mifa v antichnosti. Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii “Vipperovskie chteniia — 1985”. Vol. 16, issue 1. Moscow, 1988. P. 126–134; Pierce S. Visual Language and Concepts of Cult on the ‘Lenaia Vases’ // Classical Antiquity. 1998. Vol. 7, issue 1. P. 59–95.*

⁸ *Roscher W. H. Lenai; Lenaïos // Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie. Bd. II. Abteil. 2. Leipzig, 1897. Sp. 1939–1942; Kerényi K. Dionysos: Proobraz neissiaakaemoi zhizni. Moscow, 2007. P. 189.*

⁹ *Mommsen A. Feste der Stadt Athen im Altertums. S. 376 f.; Friickenhaus A. Lenäenvasen. S. 28–29; Deubner L. Attische Feste. S. 126; Frisk H. λῆναι // Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch. Bd. II. Heidelberg, 1970. S. 117; Nilsson M. P., Croon J. H. Lenaea. P. 594; *Scrzhinskaia M. V. Drevnegrecheskie prazdniki... P. 156; Le Guen B. Lenaea // The Encyclopedia of Greek Comedy. Hoboken, 2019. P. 492.**

¹⁰ *Cartledge P. Aristophanes... P. 7; Latyshev V. V. Ocherk grecheskikh drevnostei. P. 136; Scrzhinskaia M. V. Drevnegrecheskie prazdniki... P. 156.*

¹¹ *Deubner L. Attische Feste S. 124; Pickard-Cambridge A. The Dramatic Festivals of Athens. Oxford, 1973. P. 37; Fauth W. Lenaia. Sp. 556; Nilsson M. P., Croon J. H. Lenaea. P. 594. — On the two sanctuaries, see also: Kerényi K. Dionysos. P. 189. — In his opinion, the city Lenaion apparently was close to the agora; under these circumstances, a second Lenaion might have been established outside the city because of a large number of people. These sanctuaries also had wine presses serving as “model” wineries where the religious ceremonies were conducted in order to consecrate the wine-making process in the numerous strictly utilitarian lenaions throughout the state. For more on these discussions, see: *Slater N. W. The Lenaeon Theatre // Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik. 1986. Bd. 66. P. 255–264; Habash M. Lenaeon Theater // The Encyclopedia of Greek Comedy. Hoboken, 2019. P. 493–494.**

location of this sacred precinct has led to a scholarly debate, which, as a modern researcher puts it, “is likely to continue until irrefutable archaeological evidence is discovered”¹²

Festivals in honour of Dionysos Lenaios existed in other parts of the Greek world (e. g., on Delos), but only in Athens the Lenaia included dramatic agones — for both comic playwrights and writers of tragedies. Aristotle notes that in Athens the Lenaia was entrusted to the archon basileus, while the Great Dionysia was supervised by the eponymous archon, and the Lesser Dionysia was the responsibility of the demarchs in their demes (Ath. pol. 57. 1). According to Aristotle, the Lenaia included a solemn procession in honour of the deity — a pomp — and agones in the shape of drama contests (cf.: Aristoph. Ach. 1164–1155; Demosth. XXI. 10; Plat. Prot. 327 d). The ritual procession to the sanctuary of Dionysos was the main religious rite at the Lenaia and the Dionysia; the performance of dithyrambs in honour of the god played an important role. It should be noted that during this festival, as well as the others held in honour of Dionysos in Athens, it was prohibited to collect debts, which is mentioned by Demosthenes in his oration “Against Meidias” (XXI. 10).

Certain rituals were conducted exclusively by women; we may gain an insight into the process of libations to Dionysos and bacchae’s dancing at the Lenaia by studying the imagery of the so-called “Lenaia vases”, especially stamnoi — vases specifically produced for such ceremonies. Currently, in the discussion about whether the images of female followers of Dionysos derive from myth or reflect actual religious practice¹³ the prevailing view in the last few decades has been that the imagery can be viewed as visual evidence of the ritual as seen by the artist who supplemented it with mythological features¹⁴.

We turn now to the history of dramatic agones at the Lenaian festival. The contests between comic poets-playwrights in Athens were included in the program of dramatic agones at the Great Dionysia in 486 BC or around that time; then, 40 or 50 years later they became a permanent feature at the Lenaia¹⁵. The starting date of comedy competitions at the Lenaia can be deduced with the help of the extant opening part of the victor lists of comedic playwrights at this festival (IG II² 2325E = IRDF 2325. 116–189) in the following way: the inscription has eight names of victors up to Eupolis, who, according to other sources, first won in 426 BC, then there is a lacuna, and the first of the absent names should have been Aristophanes’ (who won at the Lenaia with his “Acharnians” in 425 BC). These eight poets before Eupolis won 20 victories altogether, but it is not quite clear whether all these victories took place before 426 BC; therefore, by way of rough chronological deductions the resulting time frame is calculated to have been between 450 and 435 BC, most probably, the end of 440s BC¹⁶.

¹² Habash M. *Lenaean Theater*. P. 493.

¹³ Powers M. *Athenian Tragedy in Performance: A Guide to Contemporary Studies and Historical Debates*. Iowa City, 2014. P. 134, note 51. — Apart from the sources mentioned in footnotes 8–10, see also: Rothwell K. S., Jr. *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy. A Study of Animal Choruses*. Cambridge, 2007. P. 15 (about masks in the cult of Dionysos).

¹⁴ Pierce S. *Visual Language...* P. 59–95.

¹⁵ On the chronology of Attic comedy of the 5th–4th century BC and the beginning of comedy competitions at the Lenaia according to epigraphic sources, see: *Broken Laughter. Select Fragments of Greek Comedy* / ed. by S. D. Olson. Oxford, 2007, p. 1; App. 1, esp. p. 386–388; IRDF. P. 178–179.

¹⁶ IRDF. P. 178; Habash M. *Lenaean Theater*. P. 493; Le Guen B. *Lenaia*. P. 492; Ruffell I. A. *Conservative and Radical: Aristophanic Comedy and Populist Debate in Democratic Athens // Aristophanes and Politics: New Studies*. Leiden; Boston, 2020. P. 69; Kyriakidi N. *Aristophanes und Eupolis: Zur Geschichte einer dichterischen Rivalität*. Berlin; New York, 2007. S. 9.

Regarding Aristophanes' predecessors in Lenaian victories, as well as those who submitted their plays for the contest at this festival in the 5th century BC, only their names that have survived on victor lists are often known although sometimes the titles of their comedies and fragments from them can be found in literary sources. The above-mentioned victor list contains the names of Xenophilos, Telekleides, Aristomenes, Kratinos, Pherekrates, Hermippos, Phrynichos, Myrtilos, Eupolis (IG II² 2325 E = IRDF 2325. 116–126). Some of them are known to have been victorious at the Great Dionysia (IG II² 2325 C = IRDF 2325. 39–87bis): Kratinos, Pherekrates, Eupolis (four times victorious), Phrynichos¹⁷.

Initially, drama contests were probably limited to the comedy competition which was held at the same scale as agones at the Great Dionysia, that is, five poets competing. Apparently, at a later date tragedy was included in the program (IRDF 2319 col. III), but this competition, unlike the main “theatrical” event, entailed the participation of merely two (later three) poets, each of which submitted only two plays¹⁸. There was another important difference in the program and organization of this festival: the Lenaia did not have the competition of dithyrambic choruses (the only known exception concerns the 3rd century BC: IG II² 3779).

Therefore, the choregoi only prepared dramatic choruses for comedy and tragedy performances. Although there is no exact evidence of the first occurrence of choregia at the Lenaia (the inscriptions mention the choregoi of tragedies and comedies without naming the festival), Aristophanes' writings contain an important reference to the presence of choregia there¹⁹. The poet mentions Antimachos (Ach. 1150) who at the previous Lenaia (i. e., in 426 BC) did not fulfill his duty as the choregos to hold a banquet for the troupe after the performance (1154–1155: ὄς γ' ἐμὲ τὸν τλήμονα Λήναια χορηγῶν ἀπέλυσ' ἄδειπνον). At the Lenaia choregia could have been assumed by metics, while at the Great Dionysia it was the prerogative of full citizens²⁰. Regarding the judging procedure at the Lenaia, we can only surmise that it apparently resembled the system adopted at the Dionysia. However, there are assumptions that the judges at the Lenaian agones could have included Eleusinian daduchoi²¹.

Literary sources, works of art and inscriptions testify to the fact that drama contests at the Lenaia, as well as the Great Dionysia, still existed in the Hellenistic period. That applies primarily to comedy — competitions took place at least until the mid-2nd century BC, as attested by the extant parts of the victor list of comedic playwrights (IG II² 2325 E = IRDF 2325. 116–189)²². There is almost nothing left of the lists of winning tragic playwrights (IG II² 2325 G = IRDF 2325. 235–246), but based on the victor lists of tragic actors

¹⁷ IRDF. P. 178–192.

¹⁸ *Le Guen B.* Lenaea. P. 492–493. — On the structure of dramatic agones at the Lenaia, see also: *Nikitin P. V.* K istorii afinskikh dramaticheskikh sostiazanii. St Petersburg, 1882, P. 56; *McLeisch K.* The Theatre of Aristophanes. London, 1980. P. 26; *Cartledge P.* Aristophanes... P. 7; *Marinovich L. P., Koshelenko G. S.* Antichnaia demokratiia v svдетельstvakh sovremennikov. Moscow, 1996. P. 351 note 2; *Latyshev V. V.* Ocherk grecheskikh drevnostei. P. 276; *Scrzhinskaia M. V.* Drevnegrecheskie prazdniki... P. 156.

¹⁹ See also: Schol. Aristoph. Plut. 953.

²⁰ *Reisch E.* Χορηγία // RE. Bd. III. Hbhd. 6. Stuttgart, 1899. Sp. 2409–2410; *Davies J.* Demosthenes on Liturgies: A Note // Journal of Hellenic Studies. 1967. Vol. 88. P. 33–40; *Bondar' L. D.* Afinskije liturgii V–IV vv. do n. e. St Petersburg, 2009. P. 54; *Le Guen B.* Lenaea. P. 493.

²¹ *Nilsson M. P., Croon J. H.* Lenaea. P. 594; *Le Guen B.* Lenaea. P. 492. — On the connection between Dionysos Lenaios and the daduchoi, see: *Fauth W.* Lenaea. Sp. 557.

²² *Sharnina A. B.* O sud'be tragedii i komedii v ellinisticheskuiu epokhu // Drevnii mir i my: Klassicheskoe nasledie v Evrope i Rossii: Al'manakh, vol. III. St Petersburg, 2003. P. 108–109; *Broken Laughter.* P. 1,

(IG II² 2325 H = IRDF 2325. 247–318) it can be surmised that tragedy competitions existed at least until the end of the 3rd century BC²³.

Dramatic agones at the Lenaia, as well as the great Dionysia, were held at the theatre of Dionysos in Athens which could accommodate, by various modern estimates, from 14,000 to 17,000 spectators. The difference between the potential Lenaian audiences from the Dionysian ones has been mentioned above: the Lenaia took place in the dead of winter, before the opening of the navigation season, so foreigners (mostly representatives of the allied poleis) could not be present there. The fact helps to interpret the famous passage from “Acharnians” by Aristophanes in which the author uses Dikaiopolis as his mouth-piece to describe the Lenaia as a strictly domestic, Athenian event (504–505: Αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἐσμεν οὐπὶ Ληναίῳ τ’ ἀγῶν, / κοῦπω ξένοι πάρεισιν....)²⁴. However, contrary to certain researchers’ beliefs²⁵, there were metics among those present (507–508), and they could even act as choregoi, which has been mentioned above.

Since dramatic contests at the Lenaia, as well as the Dionysia, were held in the open air, at the theatre of Dionysos (Athen. X, p. 464a), the number of potential spectators could have been limited at times by unfavourable (by Greek standards) weather conditions²⁶. It has already been mentioned that the Lenaia was held in Gamelion (Schol. Hes. Op. et dies 502). The month of celebrating the Lenaian festival (January/February) is the coldest time in mainland Greece²⁷. Among many Ionians (and also in Attica in the most ancient times) this month was called Lenaion (Ληναίων), named thus after the festival; this name is mentioned by Hesiod: the poet, resident of the neighbouring Boeotia, calls it the hardest month of winter mentioning bitter frost and the north wind Boreas (Op. et dies 504–508)²⁸.

The writings of the authors of the 5th–4th centuries BC can provide evidence that the Greeks associated the time of the Lenaian contest with cold winter²⁹. Snowfalls were not infrequent: Theoros, a character from “Acharnians”, mentions the cold winter of 429/428 BC (138–140), the bellicose general Lamachus also curses the snowfall (1141). Sometimes in winter it can snow in Athens; most certainly, it happened in the past as well — for instance, in the winter of 404/403 BC a part of Attica was snowed in, according to Xenophon (Hell. II. 4. 3). How did one manage to remain unaffected by the cold while spending several days watching theatrical performances? Hesiod in his “Opera et dies” describes numerous pieces of clothing meant specifically for this time: a warm coat and a long tunic, thick leather boots and a felt cap (536 sqq.).

Therefore, regarding the participants’ and spectators’ comfort, one may say such conditions were rather harsh for Athenians. Such circumstances could have shaped both the

390–391; IRDF. P. 178–192. — The lists of winning actors at the Lenaia are in a very poor state of preservation (IG II² 2325 F = 2325. 190–234). See: IRDF. P. 193–203.

²³ Pickard-Cambridge A. The Dramatic Festivals of Athens. P. 42; Sharnina A. B. O sud’be tragedii i komedii... P. 108–109; IRDF. P. 204–221.

²⁴ See also: Ruffell I. A. Conservative and Radical. P. 69, note 42.

²⁵ See: Scrzhinskaia M. V. Drevnegrecheskie prazdniki... P. 156.

²⁶ For more on this, see: Karpyuk S. G. Klimat i geografiia v chelovecheskom izmerenii (arkhaicheskaia i klassicheskaia Gretsiia. Moscow, 2010. P. 87–90.

²⁷ K. Kerényi, in line with his general interpretation of the festival, emphasizes that wine needed cold weather for its final clearing. See: Kerényi K. Dionysos. P. 190.

²⁸ See also: Latyshev V. V. Ocherk grecheskikh drevnostei. P. 136; Burkert W. Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche. Stuttgart, 1977. S. 345.

²⁹ See: Karpyuk S. G. Klimat i geografiia... P. 85–86.

atmosphere of the event and the nature of its audience — sturdy Attic peasants who, due to January and February being the “low season” in agriculture, were not busy with farming, so they constituted the majority of the Lenaian audiences.

Besides, although it is known that many festivals that included dramatic agones were still held during troubled times and wars, e. g., the Peloponnesian War, but since these celebrations were an essential part of the annual cycle of festivals, at least during those times hostilities were normally ceased.

Therefore, the Athenians probably viewed the Lenaia as a festival predominantly for peasants, off-limits to strangers; and overcoming hardships (inclement weather) could have contributed to the festive atmosphere that the poet himself vividly described in “Knights” (547: θόρυβον χρηστὸν ληναίτην). Apparently, it was these circumstances (among other things) that determined the length of the festival — while the Great Dionysia lasted 4 or 5 days³⁰, the Lenaia took 3 or 4, starting from the eighth day of Gamelion³¹.

The Lenaia included both comedy and tragedy performances, however, it appears that from early on comedy was preferred over tragedy at the festival³². The argument in support of this view may be that the ratio of comedy to tragedy was different at the two most important “theatrical” festivals (the Great Dionysia and the Lenaia). Traditionally, the number of comedies that were performed during either festival was five, as has already been mentioned, but it could dwindle to three, e. g., because of the war. Apparently, that happened during the Peloponnesian War between 423–414 BC at the Great Dionysia and between 425–405 at the Lenaia. At the Lenaian festival, two tragic playwrights presented two plays each (thus, the ratio of tragedy to comedy was 4:3), while at the Dionysia three tragic playwrights submitted four plays each (the ratio of tragedy to comedy was 12:3)³³. Perhaps, because of the colder weather each day allocated to tragedy performances at the Lenaia was shorter.

Besides, the time frame and the nature of the festival undoubtedly affected both the manner in which different dramatic genres were presented and the audiences’ perception. Tragedies written by famous playwrights that were performed at the Great Dionysia served as a kind of self-presentation for Athens on the Pan-Hellenic or even international scale³⁴. For instance, the Athenian version of Pan-Hellenic myths could have been spread and popularized by means of tragedy, which was an essential part of ideological propaganda in the context of Athenian imperialism³⁵. Regarding tragedy, the Lenaia had always been viewed as a second-tier event, intended solely for the Athenian audiences. The Lenaian festival might have been an opportunity for novices to try to have their tragedies performed³⁶, while “obtaining a chorus” at the Great Dionysia was much more difficult for such authors.

³⁰ *Kulishova O. V.* Antichnyi teatr: organizatsiia i oformlenie dramaticheskikh predstavlenii v Afinakh V v. do n. e. St Petersburg, 2014. P. 59–74.

³¹ On the dates and duration of the festival, see: *Mommsen A.* Feste der Stadt Athen im Altertums. S. 135; *Nilsson M. P., Croon J. H.* Lenaea. P. 594; *Cartledge P.* Aristophanes... P. 7; *Le Guen B.* Lenaea. P. 492.

³² *Nilsson M. P., Croon J. H.* Lenaea. P. 594. Cf.: *Le Guen B.* Lenaea. P. 493.

³³ *McLeisch K.* The Theatre of Aristophanes. P. 26–27.

³⁴ *Wiles D.* Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction. Cambridge; New York, 2000. P. 53.

³⁵ *Kulishova O. V.*: 1) Afinskaia demokratiia i teatr // Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History. 2010. No. 1. P. 32–38; 2) Tema demokratii v afinskoj drame // Ibid. No. 4. P. 31–35.

³⁶ *Wiles D.* Greek Theatre Performance. P. 172.

The same is not true for comedy. While the Great Dionysia was famous for its tragedies, the Lenaia had a reputation for comedy performances specifically meant for the local Athenian audiences. It is clearly not a mere coincidence that the most stinging political criticism can be found in “Acharnians”, “Knights”, “Lysistrata” and “Frogs” — Aristophanes’ comedies that were performed at the Lenaian festival which obviously was not premised on “political correctness” typical of the Great Dionysia.

According to researches’ estimate³⁷, each of the great tragic playwrights who submitted a tetralogy at the Great Dionysia would normally start writing another set of plays in a year’s time. Apparently, they had a firm conviction that their plays would be accepted, although a case is mentioned in a comedy when the plays submitted by Sophocles were rejected (Cratin. ap. Athen. XIV, p. 638 d). Aristophanes wrote one play a year on average, but this work could have been presented either at the Great Dionysia or at the Lenaia two months earlier; occasionally he would write for both festivals. We know about 44 comedies created by the playwright during his career that spanned approximately four decades.

In conclusion, it is possible to identify the distinctive features of the Lenaian festival; its nature manifested itself both in the purely theatrical and social aspect of this “entertainment event”. Regarding the leading theatrical genre, tragedy, the Lenaia remained in the shadow of the City Dionysia, playing the role of the “small stage”. The comic agones at the Lenaia, on the other hand, were staged to a very high standard, to which the social aspect further contributed, since the audiences at the Lenaia were much more down-to-earth than at the Dionysia. Attic peasants constituted the majority of the Lenaian audience since in the winter time they were less busy with farming, while foreigners were not present at the event, unlike the Great Dionysia. The Lenaian festival was not rich in pomp (in the most literal sense of the word); its organization was entrusted to less significant magistrates, and its performances were much less costly than the Dionysian ones. Lenaian performances were marginally affected by “political correctness”, their earthy humour at times evolved into biting political satire. All of the above created a special atmosphere that became the background of Aristophanes’ best comedies.

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³⁷ For more information, see: Wiles D. *Greek Theatre Performance.* P. 53.

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Статья поступила в редакцию 16 сентября 2021 г.

Рекомендована к печати 17 декабря 2021 г.

Received: September 16, 2021

Accepted: December 17, 2021