

HISTORY OF THEATRE

EGYPT

The background of the slide is a composite image of ancient Egyptian monuments. On the left, the massive head of the Great Sphinx is visible, showing its characteristic features like the eyes and the nemes. In the center and right, several golden-yellow pyramids are scattered across a desert landscape under a clear blue sky. In the bottom right corner, a smaller sphinx is perched atop a pyramid. The overall scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

A passion play performed annually
at Abydos from about 2500 BC to
about 550 BC

**...dealt with the
death and
resurrection of
the god Osiris**



The background of the slide is a composite image of ancient Egyptian monuments. On the left, a large, weathered stone head of a sphinx is visible, with some blue and gold paint still on its face. In the center, a large pyramid rises against a clear blue sky. To the right, a smaller sphinx is perched atop a pyramid. The overall scene is set in a desert landscape under bright sunlight.

Despite the advanced civilization that developed in ancient Egypt, theatrical activity never progressed beyond ritual, pageantry, burial ceremonies, and commemorations of dead pharaohs.

GREECE

Greek philosopher
Aristotle (4th
century BC)
claimed that
theatre began
with hymns to
god Dionysus
presented at an
annual festival.



According to
tradition
Dionysus died
each winter

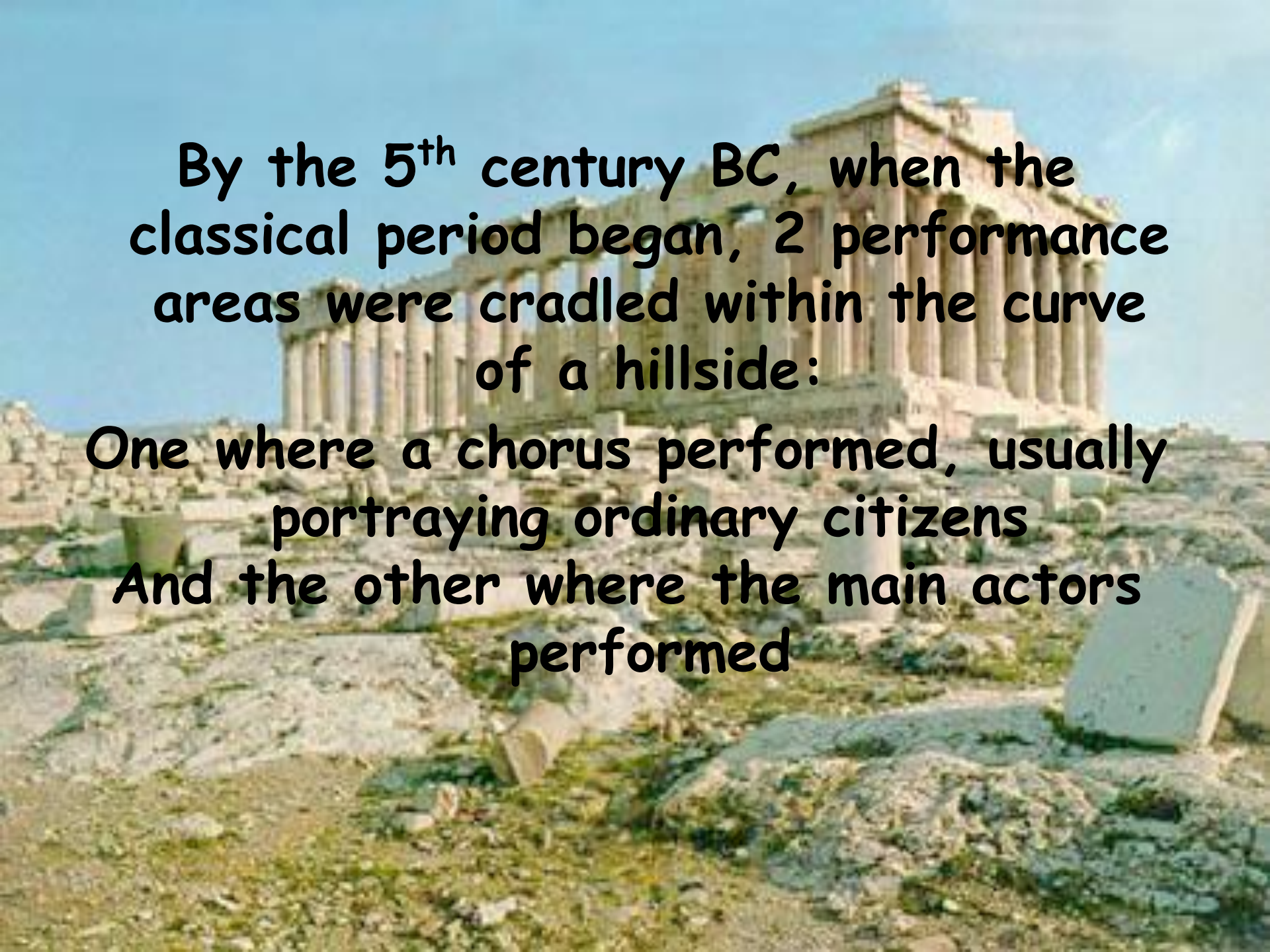


and was reborn
each spring



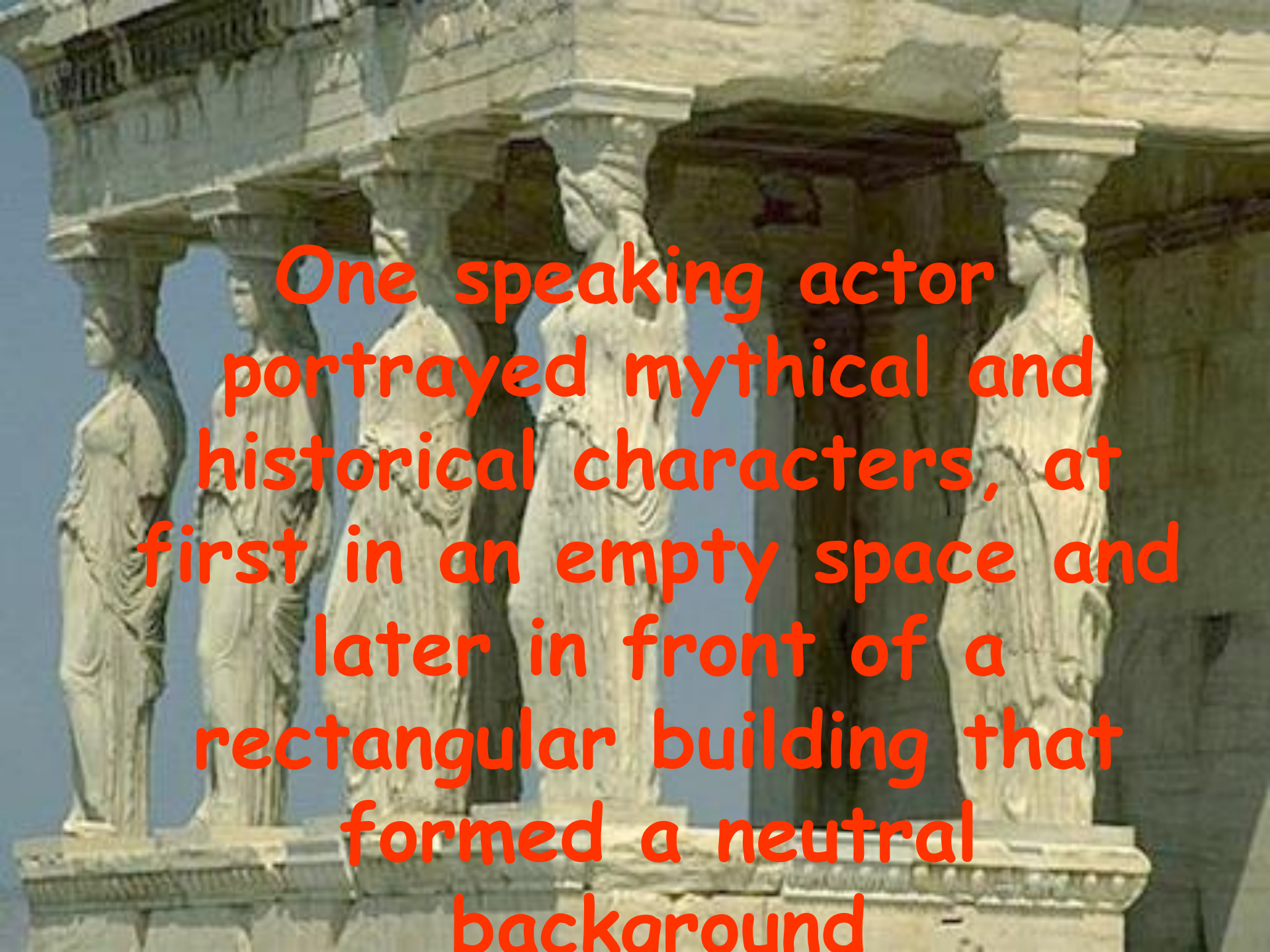
Greece's earliest
theatre
architecture took
its form from the
threshing circle - a
round, flat circle at
the base of a
hillside that was
used for separating
wheat from the
chaff



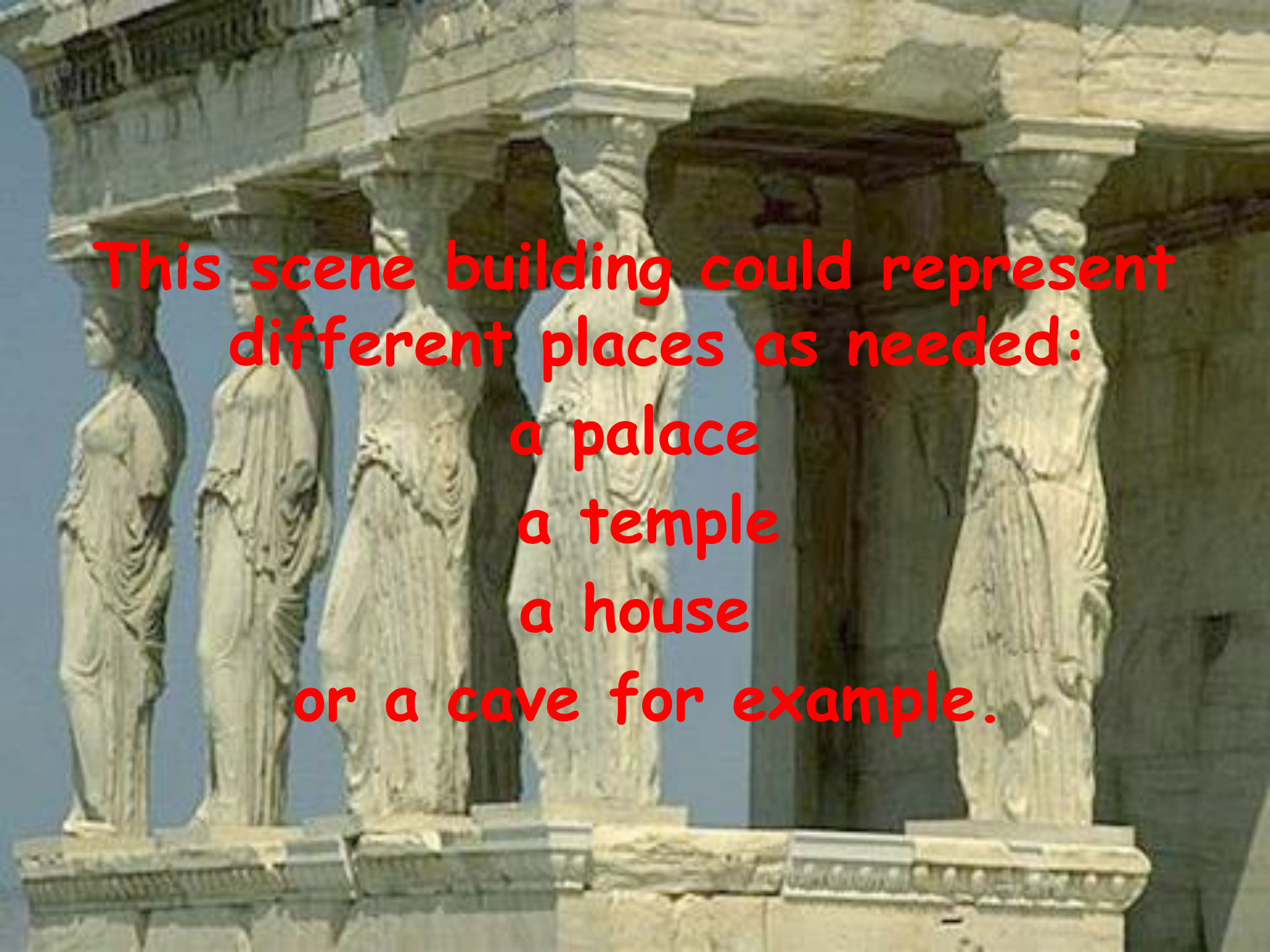


By the 5th century BC, when the classical period began, 2 performance areas were cradled within the curve of a hillside:

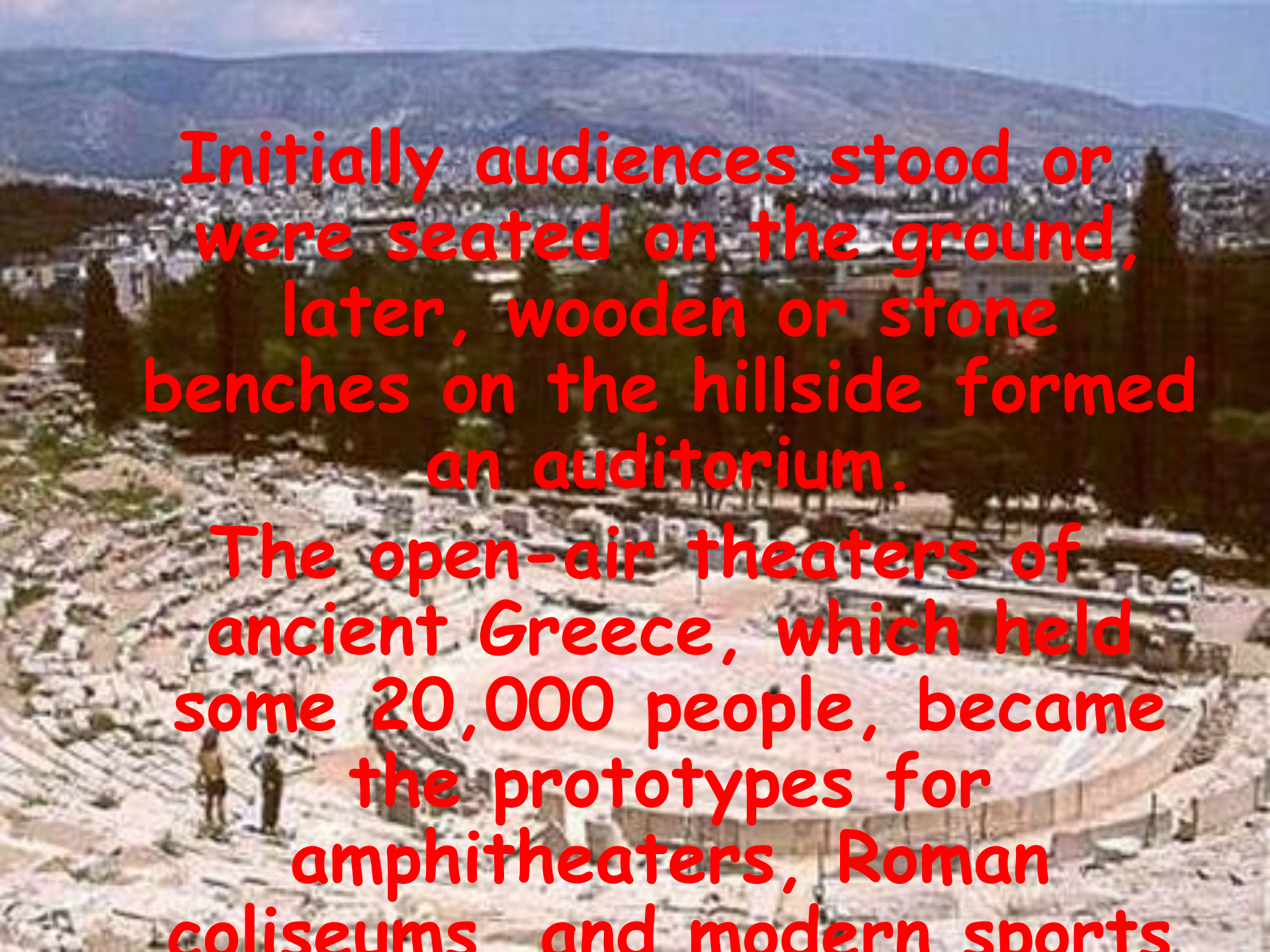
One where a chorus performed, usually portraying ordinary citizens
And the other where the main actors performed



One speaking actor portrayed mythical and historical characters, at first in an empty space and later in front of a rectangular building that formed a neutral background



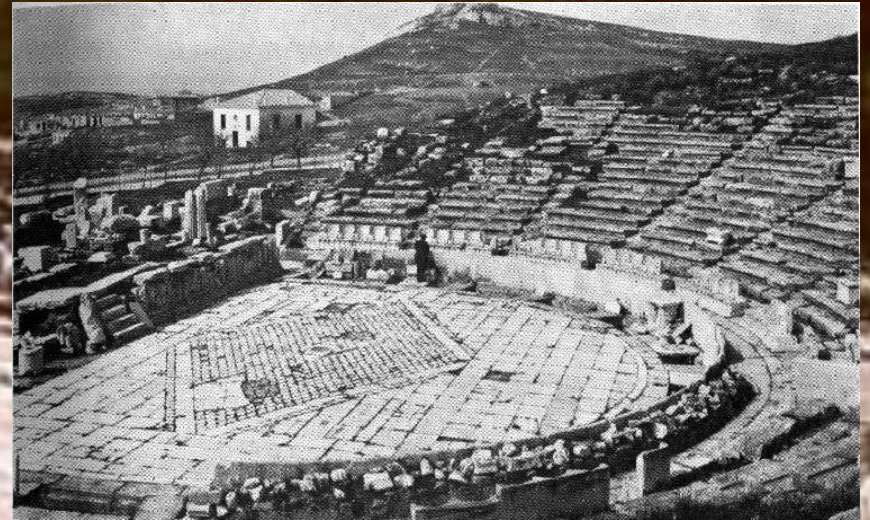
This scene building could represent
different places as needed:
a palace
a temple
a house
or a cave for example.

A photograph of an ancient Greek theater built into a hillside. The theater's semi-circular stone seating is visible in the foreground, with a few people standing on it for scale. In the background, a modern city is built on a hillside, and mountains are visible under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid in red on the image.

Initially audiences stood or were seated on the ground, later, wooden or stone benches on the hillside formed an auditorium.

The open-air theaters of ancient Greece, which held some 20,000 people, became the prototypes for amphitheaters, Roman coliseums and modern sports

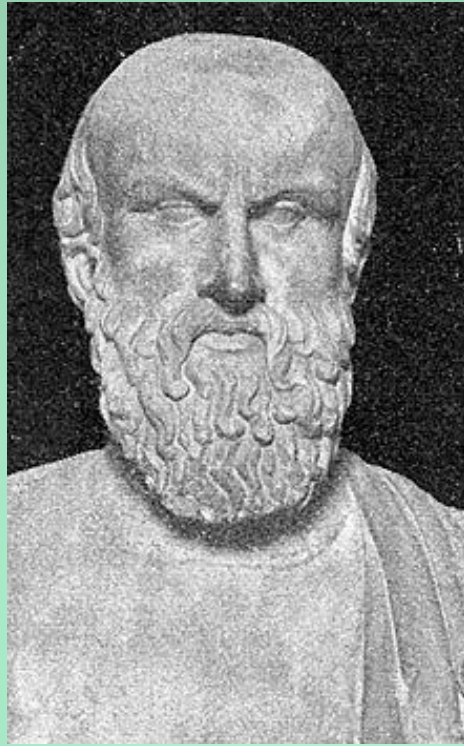
The most celebrated theater of classical Athens, the theater of Dionysus, was located on the slope of a hill below the Acropolis



The four Greek playwrights whose work has survived, wrote for annual dramatic festivals held there:



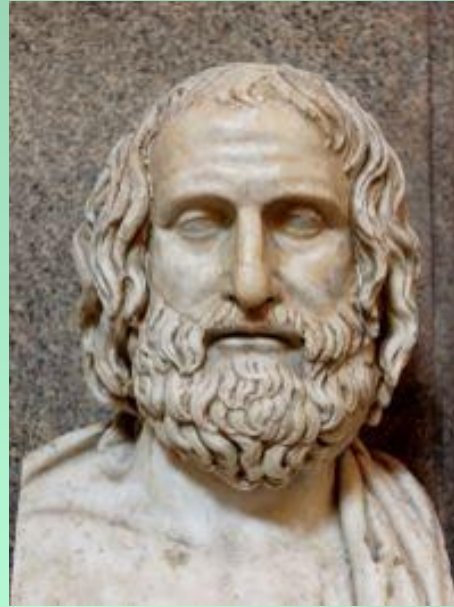
Aeschylus



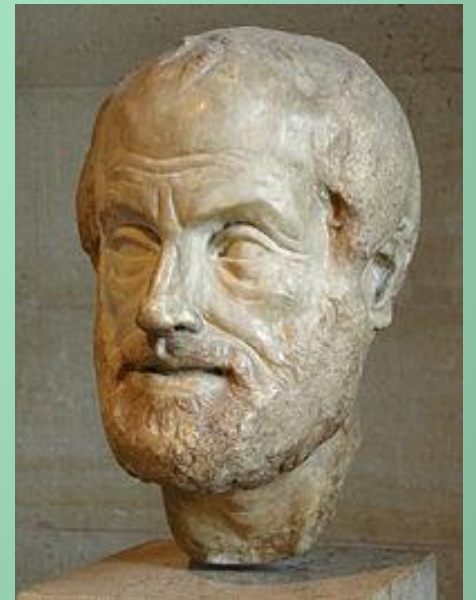
Sophocles



Euripides

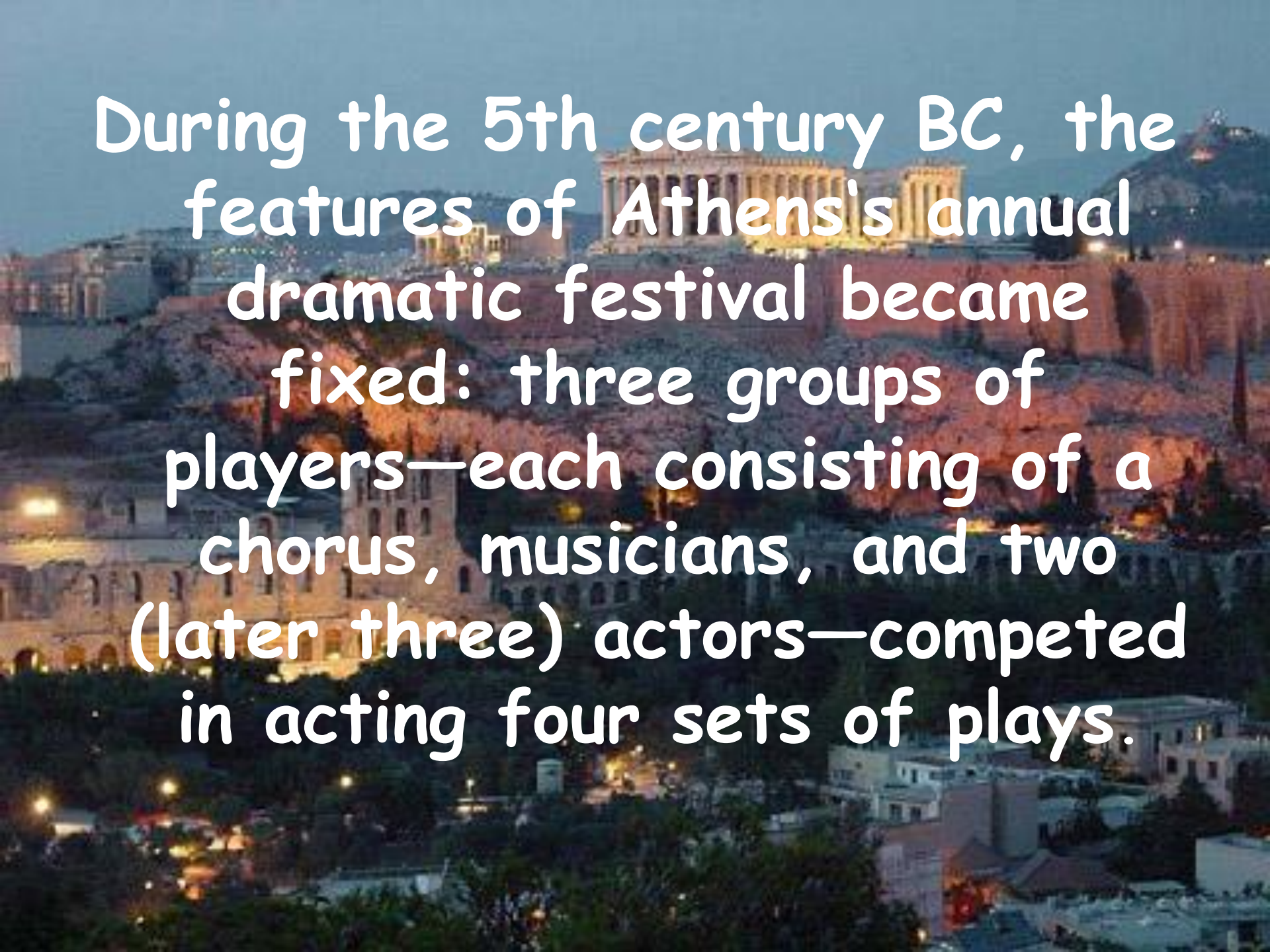


Aristophanes



Their plays expanded and interpreted the characters and stories of legend and history



An aerial night photograph of Athens, Greece, showing the Parthenon on the Acropolis illuminated against a dark sky. The city lights and other ancient ruins are visible in the foreground and middle ground.

During the 5th century BC, the features of Athens's annual dramatic festival became fixed: three groups of players—each consisting of a chorus, musicians, and two (later three) actors—competed in acting four sets of plays.




Each set contained three tragedies and a *satyr play*, a burlesque of Greek myth that served as comic relief

Costumes were richly decorated, masks elaborate, and physical action restrained.

In the 4th century BC, theaters throughout the Greek world grew more elaborate.

ROME



The first drama was performed outdoors at annual games dedicated to the gods, and Roman theatre maintained a circus-like atmosphere

Works by only two Roman writers survived till today:

Plautus



Seneca

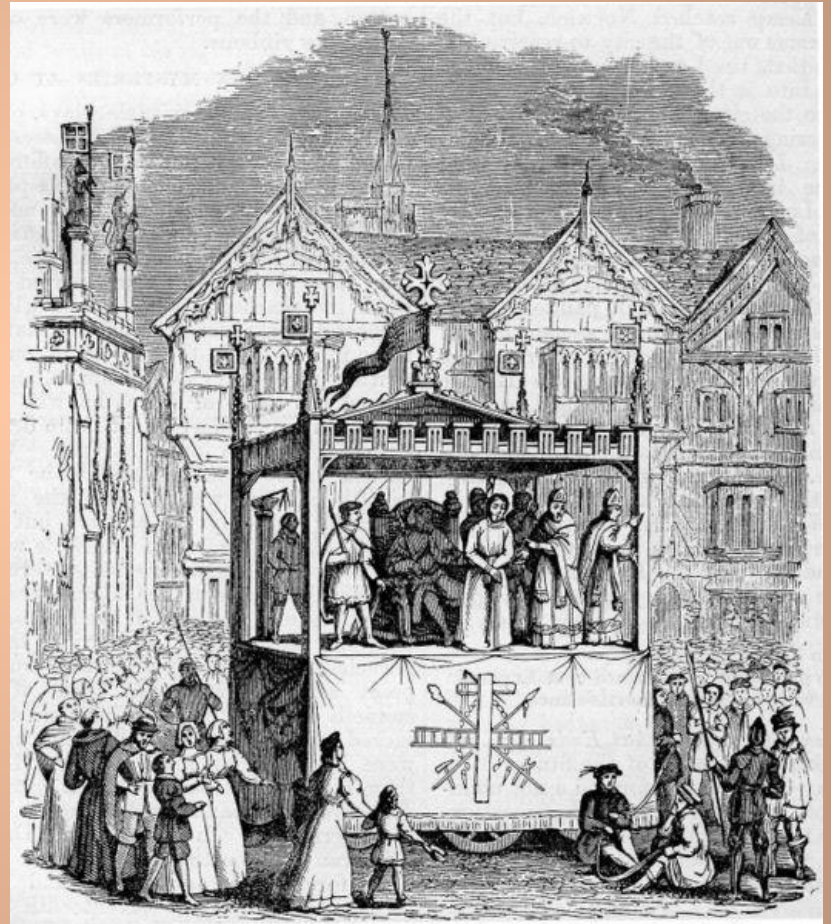


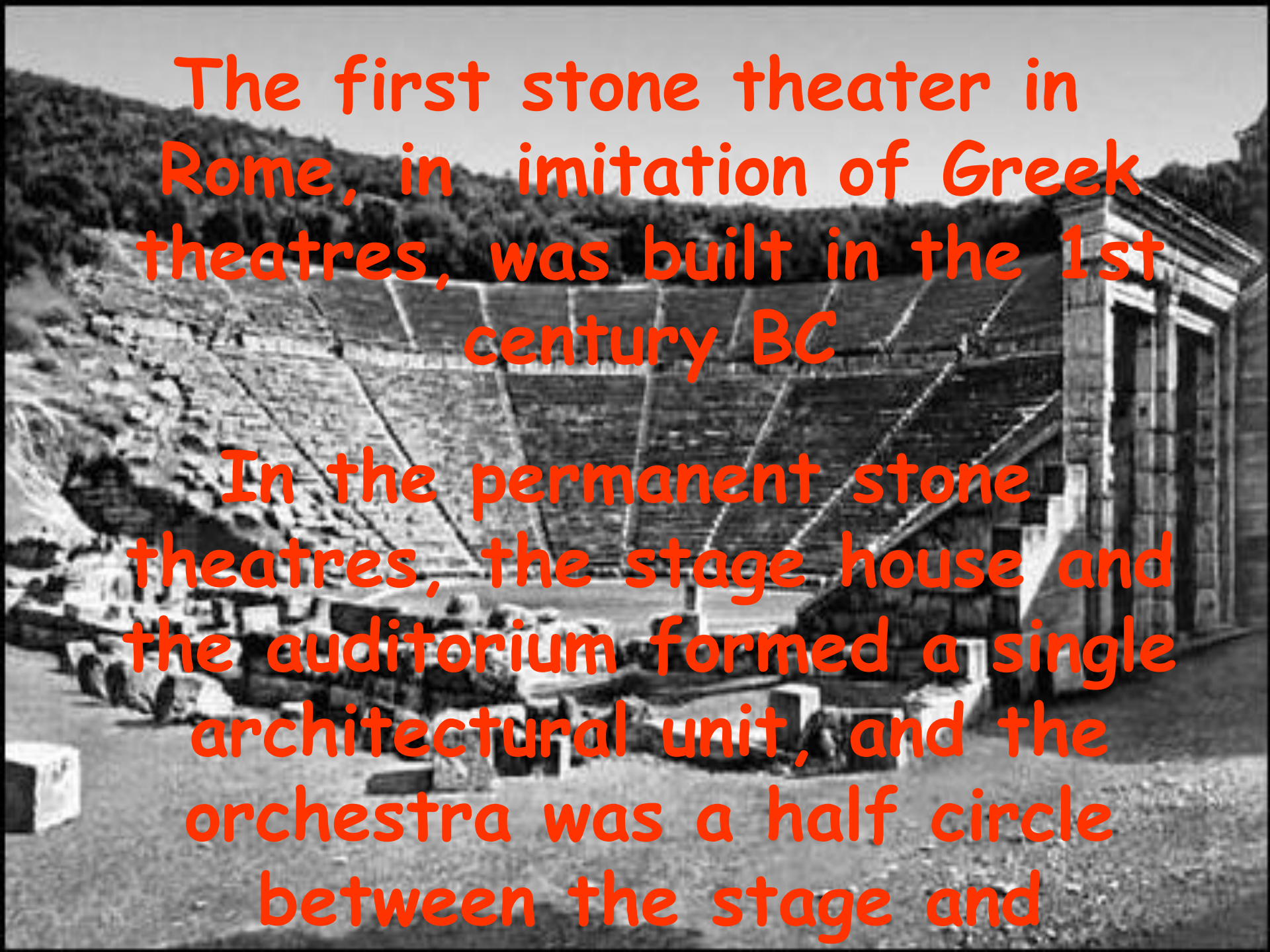


Early Roman stages were temporary narrow platforms of wood approximately 30 m (100 ft) long.

The stage house was decorated with columns, statues, niches, and porticoes, and covered with a roof.

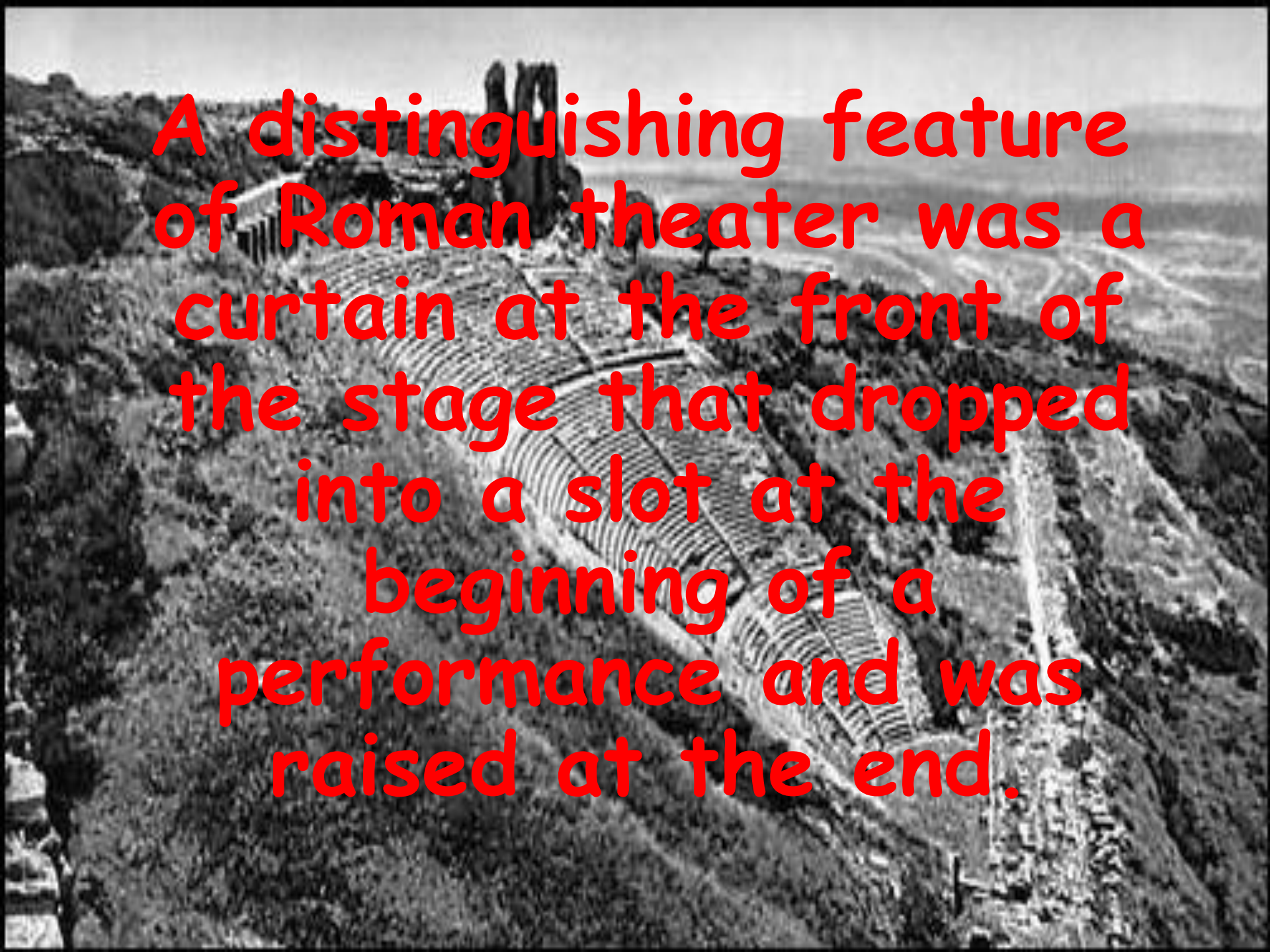
The platform served as a street, where the dramatic action occurred, and openings in the back wall served as doorways into fictional houses that bordered the street.





The first stone theater in Rome, in imitation of Greek theatres, was built in the 1st century BC


In the permanent stone theatres, the stage house and the auditorium formed a single architectural unit, and the orchestra was a half circle between the stage and



A distinguishing feature of Roman theater was a curtain at the front of the stage that dropped into a slot at the beginning of a performance and was raised at the end.

Roman actors
wore thin
sandals,
garments of
the time, and
masks that
were useful for
playing multiple
roles





By the 1st century AD, these spectacles had become increasingly bloodthirsty . The last recorded performance in Rome occurred in 533AD.

The ruins of many Roman theatres erected in Europe, Asia and Africa may still be seen today. Theatre reemerged in religious festivals of medieval Europe.

