

Determining the composition of the Athenian theater audience is crucial for the study of ancient drama. It is thus striking that in an age in which the social and political force of drama has become so prominent many aspects of the audience remain understudied. In light of recent work on the size of the fifth-century *theatron*, which indicates that it would have held between 3,700 and 5,500 spectators (e.g., Dawson 1997, Travlos 1971, Korres 2002) and not around 15,000 as traditionally assumed (e.g., *DFA* 263, Moretti 1999-2000:395), a re-evaluation of the audience is both necessary and timely. Whereas previous studies have generally focused on the presence of women and perhaps obscured the existence of other social groups in the audience, this paper considers the presence of poorer residents. It argues that a fifth-century theater-dole (*theorikon*) and the “view from the poplar,” a free viewing spot above the *theatron*, enabled those who could not afford admission or who were unable to get a spot in the small *theatron* to watch the performances. The paper also helps to unpack the group of (male) citizens that is frequently asserted to be the target or intended audience of Athenian drama (e.g., Winkler 1990, Goldhill 1997, Henderson 1991, McClure 1999; but cf. Sommerstein 1997 on metics).

Recent studies favor a 4th century date for the introduction of the *theorikon*. They tend to follow Beloch’s later argument (1922:343; cf. 1884:178) favoring those sources attributing the *theorikon* to Eubulus, since Old Comedy and oratory down to the middle of the fourth century do not explicitly mention it (e.g., Ruschenbusch 1979, Rhodes 1981). In contrast, Wilson (1997) tentatively suggests that there is a connection between admission costs and the *theorikon*, which he considers in its role of “subsidizing civic participation.” Several late sources (e.g., Harpocration *s.v. theorika*, ΣLucian *Timon* 49, Ulpian on Dem. *Ol.* 1.1, Photius *s.v. theorikon*) do in fact explicitly connect admission costs with the *theorikon*. This connection deserves more attention. The cost of admission was paid to those who leased the theater and were responsible for building wooden bleachers (*ikria*) for the spectators (cf. *Agora* 19 (1991) L13). Old Comedy in fact refers to the theater-lessee (Ar. *PCG* 575, c. 400; cf. Nicarchos *POxy* 4502) and the *ikria* (e.g., Ar. *Thesm.* 395); with the foundations of the stone seating in the theater correctly dated to c. 350 (Goette 1995), the earlier *theatron* must have been wooden. The price of admission is likely referenced in Dionysus’ praise of the “two-obols” (*Frogs* 141; cf. Dem. 18.28), but it may also refer to the theater-dole (cf. [Dem.] 13.10). Evidence for admission costs and their connection with the *theorikon* support the existence of a fifth-century theater-dole attested in other sources (Plut. *Per.* 9, ΣAeschines 3.24, Philochorus *FGrHist* F33; cf. *Gorgias* 515e). Since the dole provided funds to all citizens (ostensibly to pay for admission), it is unlikely that the audience was “on average” wealthy (*pace* Sommerstein 1997:68).

The poor could also watch the performances from the proverbial “view from the poplar” (e.g., Eustathius ε 64, Cratinus *PCG* 372). This group has been ignored in studies of the audience. Despite the apparent confusion in the sources, it seems that this free viewing area was located on the south slope of the Acropolis (Scullion 1994:53-7). Poor metics, slaves and women, all of whom were ineligible to receive the theater-dole; and poor citizens, who may have needed to use their theater-dole for other purposes (cf. Ulpian on Dem. *Ol.* 1.1), likely watched for free from the poplar. Although comedy does address the “noise of the *ikria*” (Cratinus *PCG* 360; cf. Pollux 4.122: *pternokopein*), spectators by the poplar are also likely to have influenced the performance. Much like the actually present but in general conceptually absent non-citizen males in the audience, those by the poplar who did not have to pay for admission are infrequently mentioned in comedy. But if the audience was supposed to voice its support for the play and to influence the judges (e.g., *Clouds* 575-6, Aelian *V.H.* 2.13), the clamor of the mob’s “unmusical shoutings” (*Laws* 700c) need not and likely did not refer only to those seated in the *ikria*. For if the “rod-holders” were responsible for maintaining order in the *theatron* (ΣPeace 734, *Laws* 700c), those by the poplar may have had more freedom to cluck, hiss, and threaten to disrupt a performance (e.g., *Poetics* 1455a21-9; Dem. 19.337, 21.226; Pollux 4.122). The presence of these other groups provides a fuller picture of the audience and may be useful for discussing social divisions other than civic status that determined the function of drama.