

How ancient Greek plays allow us to reconstruct Europe's climate

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The open air plays of the ancient Greeks may offer us a valuable insight into the Mediterranean climate of the time, reports new research in *Weather*. Using historical observations from artwork and plays, scientists identified 'halcyon days', of theatre friendly weather in mid-winter.

"We explored the [weather conditions](#) which enabled the Athenians of the classical era to watch theatre performances in open theatres during the midwinter weather conditions," said Christina Chronopoulou, from the National and Kapodestrian University of Athens. "We aimed to do so by gathering and interpreting information from the classical plays of Greek drama from 5th and 4th centuries B.C."

Ancient Athenians would enjoy the open theatre of Dionysus in the southern foothills of the Acropolis and when possible they would have watched drama in the middle of winter between 15 January and 15 February.

From Second World War bombing raids, to medieval Arabic writings historians and climatologists continue to turn to surprising sources to help piece together the climate of our ancestors. In this case the team turned to the writings of 43 plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes and several were found to contain references about the weather. Greece enjoys long, hot, dry summers, yet in contrast the rare theatre friendly 'halcyon days' of clear, sunny weather during winter appeared to be especially noteworthy.

"The comedies of Aristophanes, often invoke the presence of the halcyon days," concluded said Dr. Chronopoulou. "Combining the fact that dramatic contests were held in mid-winter without any indication of postponement, and references from the dramas about the clear [weather](#) and mild winters, we can assume that those particular days of almost every January were summery in the fifth and maybe in the fourth centuries BC."

More information: Christina Chronopoulou, A. Mavrakis, 'Ancient Greek drama as an eyewitness of a specific meteorological phenomenon: indication of stability of the Halcyon days.' *Weather*, [DOI: 10.1002/wea.2145](#)

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