

**THE RELATIVE POSITION  
OF ACTORS AND CHORUS  
IN THE GREEK THEATRE  
OF THE FIFTH CENTURY**

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The Relative Position of Actors and Chorus in the Greek Theatre of the Fifth Century by John Pickard

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BY  
JOHN PICKARD, PH. D.

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## THE RELATIVE POSITION OF ACTORS AND CHORUS IN THE GREEK THEATRE OF THE V CENTURY.<sup>1</sup>

### PART I.

#### CONSIDERATION OF THE EXTANT THEATRES.

##### THE GREEK THEATRE.

It has been assumed, and by many writers on the subject it is assumed to-day, that the great Athenian dramatists, Vitruvius, all the grammarians, lexicographers and scholiasts had before their eyes the same Greek theatre, which remained practically unchanged from the time of Aischylos to the days when Nero and Hadrian were spectators in the theatre of Dionysos. The 'Vitruvian stage' has been accepted as *the* Greek stage for the entire period of the Greek drama, and the description of the Greek theatre by the same authority has been used as a Procrustes bed to which all plans of theatre ruins must in some way be made to conform.

Within the last decade, however, the revolt against the writers of post-classic times as authorities on the theatre of the V century has been rapidly spreading. The excavations in the theatres of Athens, Epidauros, Sikyon, Oropos, Megalopolis, and Eretria have yielded results of the highest importance. With the knowledge gained from these excavations, with the carefully drawn plans of these theatres before us, the older works dealing with the construction of the Greek theatre, and plans such as are found in Wieseler's 'Theatergebäude' must be considered as antiquated. Therefore, before entering upon the discussion of the extant dramas, we will consider the Greek theatre as described in classic

<sup>1</sup> The substance of this paper has already appeared under the title 'Der Standort der Schauspieler und des Chors im griechischen Theater des fünften Jahrhunderts. (Inaugural-Dissertation.) Mit dem Accessit gekrönte Preisschrift. München, 1892.' Contrary to the usage of the Journal, the paper is reproduced here as a necessary introduction to the new matter which will be embraced in the subsequent article.—B. L. G.

literature and as it actually exists in the more recent and more important excavations.<sup>1</sup>

*Theatre of Dionysos at Athens.*<sup>2</sup>

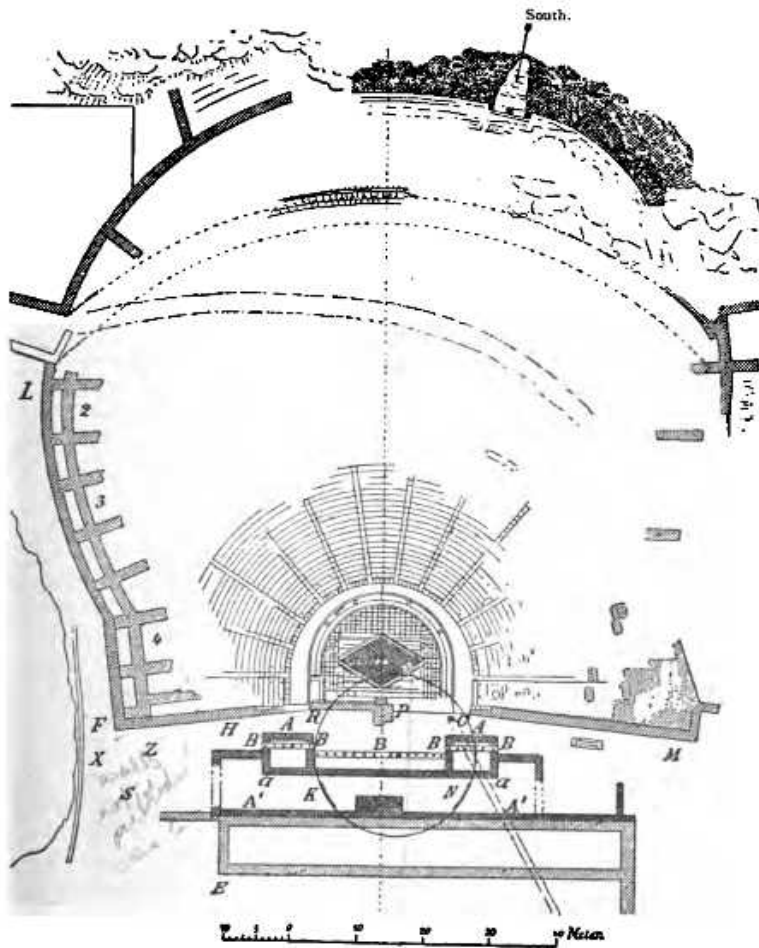
Oldest of the existing ruins are the remains of the ancient orchestra, *KNO* (vid. Fig. 1). All stage-buildings of which traces still exist were built over a portion of this circle. A glance at the plan shows that the present cavea has no connection with it. At *O* the Acropolis rock was cut away in order to make room for this circle; so the level of this entire orchestra could not have been lower than the rock at *O* is to-day. At *N* and *K* are still *in situ* portions of the circular supporting wall, whose character can best be studied at *N*. It is built of roughly shaped pieces of Acropolis limestone, which is the oldest building material in Athens, and was not used later than the V century. This is plainly a supporting wall; the outside was intended to be seen, but the inside is rough, just as the stone was broken from the quarry. The bottom of this wall at *N* is 5 or 6 ft. lower than *O*. Therefore the level of the earth within the orchestra circle at *KN* was originally at least 5 or 6 ft. above the level of the ground outside the circle at these points. This fact alone is fatal to the theory of Wilamowitz (*Hermes*, XXI, S. 597 ff.) that the audience to the earlier plays of Aeschylus stood or sat in a complete circle about this orchestra. Furthermore, at the time when this orchestra was constructed no stage-building<sup>3</sup> could have existed. For, if present, its front must have been nearly tangent to the circle on the south. In that event the level of the orchestra must needs have been continued to the entire front of the stage-building, the outer surface of the wall *KN* would not have been carefully dressed, and, in fact, this wall would not have been necessary at all. It has also been urged that a 'stage' 10-12 ft. high was

<sup>1</sup> Some of the more important discussions are: Höpken, *De theatro Attico saeculi a. Chr. quinti*. A. Müller, *Bühnenalterthümer*, and *Philol. Anz.* XV 525 ff. Wilamowitz, *Hermes*, XXI, S. 597 ff. Haigh, *Attic Theatre*. Dörpfeld: in A. Müller's *Bühnenalterthümer*, S. 415 ff.; on Haigh, *Attic Theatre*, in *Philol. Wochenschrift*, 1890, S. 461 ff.; on Hartzmann, *Quaestiones Scaenicae*, *ibid.*, S. 1658 ff.; on Oehmichen, *Bühnenwesen*, *ibid.*, S. 1532 ff. Kawerau, in *Baumeister's Denkmäler*, S. 1730 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The facts concerning the Athens theatre are from the lectures of Dörpfeld in the theatre itself during the winter of 1890-91.

<sup>3</sup> As a matter of convenience, 'stage,' 'stage-buildings,' etc., will be used, though the writer is convinced that no stage existed in the V century.





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necessary in order to give room underneath for the disappearance of an actor, as in the Prometheus. Since there was a difference of 6 ft. between the level of the orchestra and the level of the earth under the supposed 'stage,' a height of 10-12 ft. for this would cause the actor to drop 16-18 ft.! Suidas (v. Πρατίνος and Αισχύλος) informs us that the wooden seats having broken down under the weight of the spectators, a stone θέατρον was built by the Athenians in Ol. 70. In this connection may be mentioned some walls not yet published on any plan and not on Fig. 1 because of the lack of accurate measurements. These walls, at  $XZ$ , are not parallel with  $FH$ , and from their direction could hardly have had anything to do with the orchestra belonging with the extant cavea. Whether these walls belonged with the θέατρον erected after the Pratinas-Choirilos-Aischylos breakdown can perhaps not be fully decided. They at least take us back a step nearer to that oldest stone cavea.

The walls of the oldest stage-buildings are represented on Fig. 1 by the shaded lines  $AAA'A'$  and are of the same age and method of construction as are the supporting walls of the cavea, e. g.  $FL$  2, 3, 4. Wherever these walls were not exposed to view, as in the inner supporting walls of the cavea at 2, 3, 4 and in the lower foundations of the stage-buildings, they are constructed of breccia of the same size, shape and method of working throughout. If exposed to view, as in the outer cavea wall  $LF$  and in the upper courses of  $AA'$ , Peiraieus limestone was used. Where any portion of the superstructure remains the Peiraieus limestone is covered by Hymettos marble. The entire similarity of construction proves that these oldest foundations of stage-buildings and the cavea belong to the same period of building. But no ruin is known in Athens constructed, in the manner just described, of breccia, Peiraieus limestone and Hymettos marble which dates prior to the IV century B. C. At  $H$ , on a stone in the supporting wall of the cavea, are found  $\alpha$  and  $\sigma$ , the former of the shape in use after the time of Eukleides. At the corner  $F$  is to be seen the inscription published in CIA. I 499. The stone is in its original position, and was formerly covered by two courses of stone, which were between it and the corner  $F$ . The inscription, then, could not have been added after the stone was placed in its present location, but was placed there when the stone was in some previous position. It is variously dated from the middle of the V century (Julius) to 408 B. C. (Kirchhoff). The stone was

surely not removed from the earlier structure and built into this cavea wall immediately after this inscription was added. These two inscriptions, then, render the construction of the cavea walls, and hence of these oldest stage-buildings, before the end of the V century impossible. For all students of the theatre of Dionysos agree that these walls represent one and but one period of construction. Haigh (*Attic Theatre*, p. 123) contends that these inscriptions date the construction only as late as the end of the V century. Dörpfeld (*Wochenschrift*, 12. Apr. 1890, S. 423) well replies: "Dieser Einwand kann kaum ernstlich gemeint sein: denn wer die Geschichte Athens kennt wird niemals glauben, dass die Athener am Ende des fünften Jahrhunderts ein grosses steinernes Theater errichtet haben." The extant cavea and the oldest stage-buildings were constructed, then, in the IV century. In this century we know of one and but one great period of theatre-building; that mentioned in connection with the orator Lykourgos (cf. Müller, B.-A., S. 86). Such important construction could hardly have been completed before his time and have passed unnoted by classic authors. In that event, too, nothing would have remained to be done by Lykourgos of sufficient importance to merit the attention which his work on the theatre has received. Hereafter, therefore, we shall refer to the cavea and the foundations *AAAA'* under the name of Lykourgos.

The stylobate *BB* is later than the time of Lykourgos. When it was built the fronts of the paraskenia *AA* were cut back so that they ended beneath this stylobate. The original foundations of the paraskenia are still *in situ*. The upper course of *BB* is of Hymettos marble, but this marble rests directly on a rough, poorly constructed foundation largely made up of breccia. In IV-century construction in Athens this never occurs. A course of Peiraius limestone was in this period always placed between the breccia and the marble. Upon *BB* stood full columns whose diameter, .50 m., can still be measured. These, with the epistyle, would, at the time they were constructed, be about 12 ft. high. So this proskenion would in height correspond very nearly with the one in Epidaurus. The upper surface of *BB* is exactly on a level with the pavement of the present orchestra, and the front of the slabs which compose this stylobate is worked out to receive the edges of slabs of a similar pavement. Therefore the surface of *BB* was on a level with the orchestra circle existing at the time of its construction. In Epidaurus, Oropos and Eretria the pros-