

**THE QUANTITY AND
MUSIC OF THE GREEK
CHORUS DISCOVERED**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649260546

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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BY
THE REV. W. WILLIS MOSELEY, A.M. LL.D.

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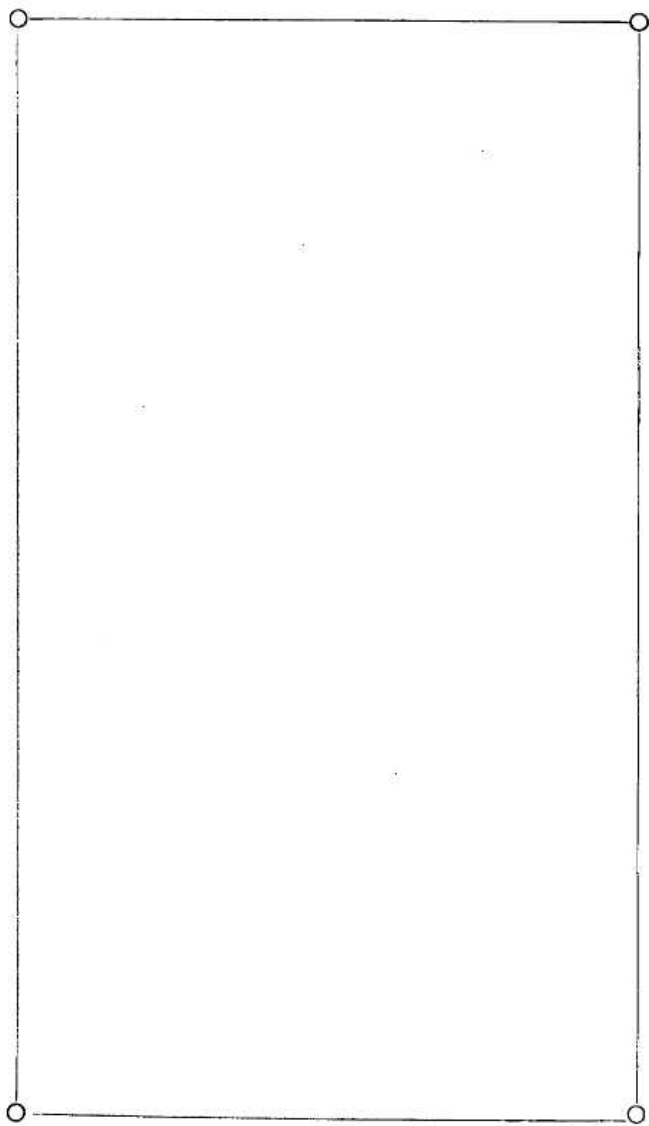
Printed by T. Combe, Printer to the University.

SOLD BY J. H. PARKER.

CAMBRIDGE: DRIGHTONS. LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL,
AND CO.; AND T. OLLIVIER, PALL MALL.

MDCCLXVII.





THE QUANTITY AND MUSIC
OR
THE GREEK CHORUS.

THE Choruses of the Greek dramatic writers are among the most obscure peculiarities of ancient literature^a.

At first the Chorus constituted the chief part of the performance of the Greek stage; but at last it sunk into a despised appendage. "It is curious," says Twining, "to trace the gradual extinction of the Chorus. At first it was all; then relieved by the intermixture of dialogue, but still principal; then subordinate to the dialogue; then digres-

^a Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry, by Twining, p. 158.

sive, but still connected with the piece; then borrowed from other pieces at pleasure^b.”

But although the Greek Chorus continued for many centuries to afford theatrical amusement to the inhabitants of that once great but fallen country, we, and our fathers before us, have been for nearly two thousand years ignorant of the *measure, music,* and original manner of performing it^c.

To untie this Gordian knot, to cast a ray of light upon this dark subject, to explain the things which past ages have found inexplicable, are bold but not presumptuous undertakings.

Choral odes were at first common to the comic and tragic performances of the Greek stage. *Τραγωδία τὸ παλαιὸν ἦν ὄνομα κοινὸν καὶ πρὸς τὴν κωμῶδιαν*^d. “Constat sane primis temporibus ignoratum fuisse discrimen inter Tragœdiam et Comœdiam^e.”

^b “Erat multiplex officium chori, interdum consolatur, aliquando luget, simul reprehendit, præsagit, admiratur, judicat, admonet, discit ut doceat, eligit, sperat, dubitat, &c.” *Scaliger*.

^c “Modern critics have never known what to make of the Chorus; and this is the less wonderful, since even Aristotle comes to no satisfactory conclusion on this point.” *Greek Theatre*.

^d Aristotle.

^e Casaubonus, de Sat. Poet. lib. 1. And Scaliger says, “Tragœdiæ vere et comediæ genus unum commune, unum nomen.” *Poetices*, lib. 1. cap. 5.—“Anciennement le nom de tragédie

Comedy and Tragedy originated in motives that entitled them to commendation. Comedy was designed to correct the imprudences and vices of private life, by publicly holding them up to ridicule. "In vicis et compita ex omnibus locis læti alacresque veniebant, ibique cum nominibus, singulorum vitam publicabant[†]." Tragedy was invented to purify the passions, and promote a mild and merciful morality, by exhibiting the cruelties and miseries which resulted from family quarrels. "Ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας, μέγεθος ἐχούσης, ἡδυσμένῃ λόγῳ, χωρὶς ἐκάστου τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαινούσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν[‡]."

The Chorus, which formed the basis of Comedy and Tragedy, was for many ages, prior to its association with theatrical per-

étoit commun à la comédie. En effet ce n'était qu'un seul et même poème où l'on mêlait le ridicule et le sérieux: le grave et le sérieux fut pour la tragédie, et la comédie eut pour son partage le ridicule et le plaisant." *Œuv. d'Horace*, par Dacier, l'ép. 1. liv. 2.

[†] Donatus de Trag. et Comœd.

[‡] "Le Chœur favorisait toujours les gens de bien, et de la manière dont il parloit on peut dire que le théâtre étoit alors une école où l'on apprenoit mieux que dans les temples la justice et la piété." *Œuv. d'Horace*, par Dacier, tom. ix. 351.

[§] Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry, cap. vi. 2.

formances, the chief part of the religious ceremonies of the Greeks.

At the feasts of Bacchus, which were celebrated three times in the year, in the meadows adjoining every village and town in Greece, the priests and people walked in procession, crowned with ivy, carrying a vessel of wine, holding up a basket of figs, and leading a goat by the horns¹. When the procession had arrived at the altar, the goat was slain and skinned, and placed upon the blazing fire.

The wine was then poured upon the ground, and while the smoke of the sacrifice was ascending, the priests, who encircled the altar, sung hymns in honour of the idol god they adored¹.

At the conclusion of these professedly religious solemnities mirth followed, not only with its usual train of drollery, but with drunkenness and debauchery. They turned the skin of the goat, filled it with wine, and having sewn it up, and rubbed it with fat and other unctuous articles, the assembled multitude commenced their sports by com-

¹ Et ductus cornu stabit sacer hircus ad aram.

Virg. Georg. ii. 395.

¹ In Synopsi Vitæ Aristoph.

peting with each other which could hop on and remain longest on the inflated skin^k. Successive trials, followed by an equal number of failures, (perhaps falls,) created a variety of mirth. Open barrels of wine supplied additional stimulants, and a golden crown was the reward of the man who drank the most.

" Non aliam ob culpam Baccho caper omnibus aris
Cæditur, et veteres ineunt proscenia ludi :
Præmiæque ingenii pagos et compita circum
Thesaidæ posuere : atque inter pocula lati
Mollibus in pratis unctos saliere per utres !"

The feasts, therefore, which were begun by a sacrifice and choral hymns to Bacchus; with a religious but vain hope of prevailing on the god of wine to give them an abundant vintage; ended in the lowest prostitution of the priests and people.

Meadows, towns and villages having for many years been the scenes of these Bacchanalian revels, Susarion^m, to draw their attention to more rational amusements, instituted

^k This sport was called ἀκροαδίζεν. *Aristoph. Plut.* p. 103. 293. 417. 419. 422.

^l *Virg. Georg. ii.* 380—4.

^m Susarion was a native of Icaria, a district in Attica. It was there, and not at Athens, he performed his first comedy. *Clem. Alex. Ζουσαπίων Ἰκαριεύς* Strom. i. Marmor. Arundel. et ad ea *Selden.*