

**THE ATHENIAN
STAGE; A HANDBOOK
FOR STUDENTS**

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The Athenian Stage; A Handbook for Students by August Witzschel & R. B. Paul & T. K. Arnold

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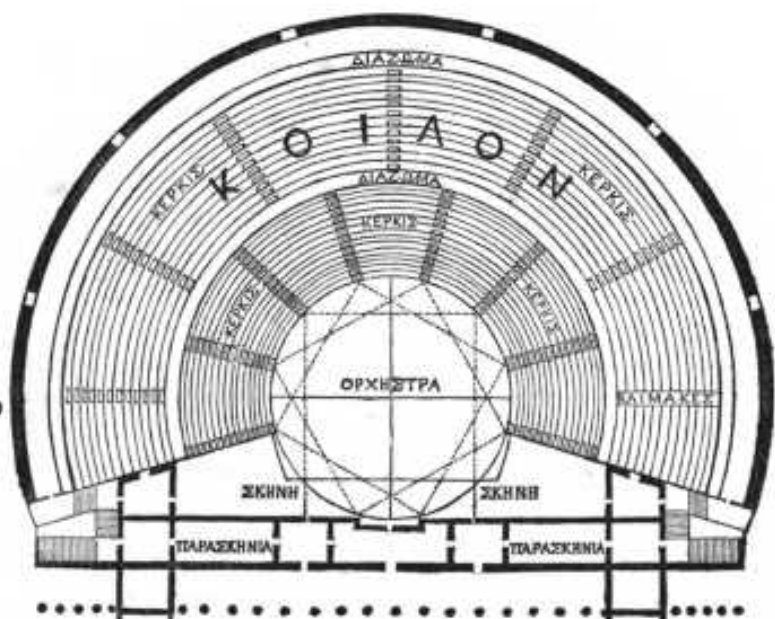
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AUGUST WITZSCHEL & R. B. PAUL & T. K. ARNOLD

**THE ATHENIAN
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PLAN OF A GREEK THEATRE.

(From "Pompeii.")

THE ATHENIAN STAGE;

Handbook for Students,

BY

AUGUSTUS WITZSCHEL.

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THE
ATHENIAN STAGE,

&c.

PART I.

ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF ATTIC TRAGEDY.

§ 1. *Its origin.*

OUR knowledge of the origin and growth of Attic tragedy 1 is exceedingly confused and imperfect, derived as it is A from notices in ancient writers, which are not only rare, but in most instances very brief also, and so vaguely expressed as to admit of various interpretations.

For the most part they consist either of short occasional 2 disquisitions, or of extracts selected with very little judgment or critical skill by the grammarians and lexicographers of a later period; or even of mere conjectural fillings up of a broken and ill-defined outline. Under such circumstances, instead of wondering at the contradictory theories advanced by different writers, we are rather forced to acknowledge the extreme difficulty, not to say impossibility, of tracing with even tolerable accuracy the different steps by which Attic tragedy gradually attained perfection. Instead, therefore, of attempting a complete history, we B shall content ourselves with using such materials as we possess, without entering on the discussion of questions, the solution of which, however desirable, seems scarcely possible with our limited means of information. The parent

- (2) of tragedy, according to the unanimous testimony of all the
 A ancient writers who have employed themselves in tracing its origin, was the dithyrambus, a hymn in honour of Dionysus [Bacchus], which was sung in very ancient times at the festival of that deity (probably by mummers fantastically dressed), but without any very strict attention to regularity or arrangement. At a later period however, chiefly by the exertions of Arion, in the 40th Olympiad, the dithyrambus was elevated to the rank of a poetical composition, which was chanted by an organized choir, and accompanied with appropriate and *mimetic* gesticulations.
- B The style of these choral songs was probably from the very first exceedingly animated (in accordance with the character of the Dionysiac worship), giving expression to the extremes of human passion—boisterous joy or frantic grief.
- 3 Thus the dithyrambic odes were either of a jovial or of a solemn and melancholy character. The former were sung at the commencement of spring, when men read the history of their god's birth in the universal fruitfulness of nature; the latter at the approach of winter, which typified his captivity and sufferings. It is in the winter-dithyrambic that we must, of course, expect to
 C find the germ of tragedy. Perhaps we may venture to ascribe its origin to Arion, who is called by Suidas "the inventor of the tragic mode" (*εἰρηθεὶς τραγικοῦ τρόπου*); but neither this expression, nor the passage from which it is extracted, is so clear as to be altogether free from ambiguity. One thing, however, seems tolerably evident, namely, that the words in question were, at least, intended to express the grave and melancholy character imparted by Arion to those choral songs, in which the perils and sufferings of Dionysus were narrated, in contradistinction to the light and joyous tone of the spring-dithyrambic.
- D And this view is confirmed by a passage of Herodotus, in which he tells us that in Sicyon, in the time of the tyrant Cleisthenes (Ol. 45, B.C. 600), the tragic choruses were solemnly sung, not in honour of Dionysus, but in commemoration of the sufferings of the hero Adrastus, and that they were restored by Cleisthenes to the worship of Dionysus. In this passage the expression "tragic" is clearly used in the sense of "melancholy," "pathetic," such being the meaning universally assigned to the term in