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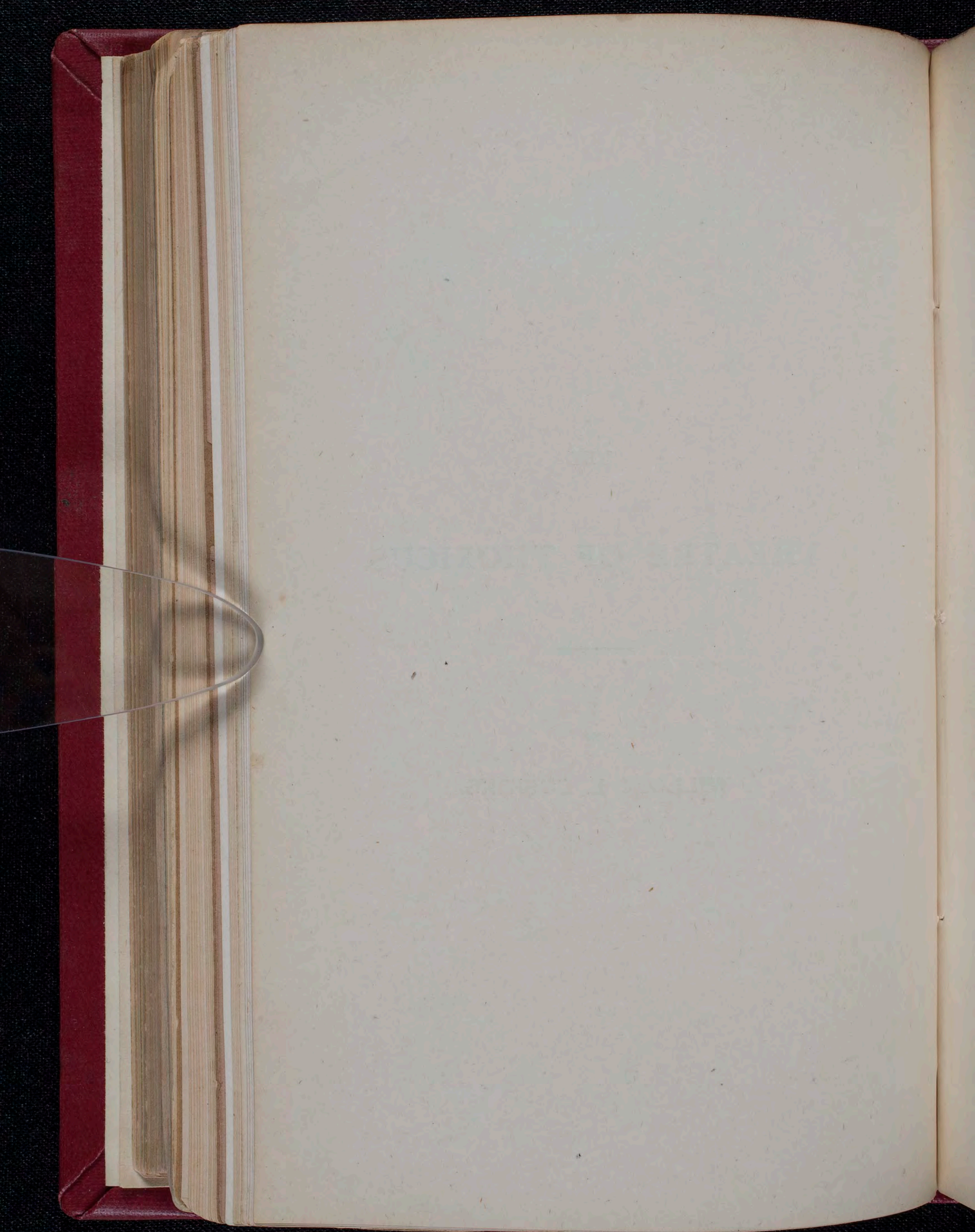
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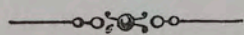
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THE
THEATRE OF THORICUS.

BY
WILLIAM L. CUSHING.



THE THEATRE OF THORICUS.



SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT.

THE following extracts from the reports of archaeologists who have discussed the Theatre of Thoricus, while describing its situation, show the unsettled state of the opinions heretofore held in regard to its peculiarities, and suggest some of the problems which it was the object of the excavations to solve.

For differences in drawings made on the spot by former travellers, see Plate I. Fig. 1.

From Dodwell's *Classical Tour through Greece* (1819), Vol. I., page 534:—

"This place, which was in the tribe Akamantis, retains its ancient name; the port is called Porto Mandri. It was one of the twelve Attic cities in the time of Cecrops, and the birthplace of the lover of Procris. It was probably a place of strength at an early period; and we know that about the twenty-fourth year of the Peloponnesian war Xenophon recommended that it should be fortified and become one of the safeguards of the neighbouring silver mines. In another place he says, the Athenians did fortify it in the ninety-third Olympiad. It is not noticed by Pausanias; indeed it was ruined before the time of Mela, who says, 'Thorikos (*sic!*) et Brauronia, olim urbes; jam tantum nomina.' The present remains are interesting and extensive. The city, which was of an irregular form, was surrounded by a wall with square projecting towers, and apparently about two miles and a half in circuit. The Acropolis was on a pointed hill above the city. The ruins are all of white marble of an inferior kind, veined with gray. It was cut on the spot, as the rocks are of the same materials. The grain is close, but does not sparkle like most of the Grecian marbles,

and is moreover of a brittle and decomposing quality. The walls, though not in the Cyclopian or polygon style, are nevertheless systematically irregular; and the stones, though generally quadrilateral and placed in horizontal layers, are of various dimensions, and their angles seldom rectangular. . . .

"The foot of the Acropolis presents the remains of a curious and magnificent theatre. The seats are preserved, and fifteen layers of blocks of the exterior *Koilon*, in the construction of which some trifling irregularity occurs, but not so much as what is seen in the walls of the city, to which a more remote antiquity may reasonably be ascribed. The form of this theatre is distinguished by the singular circumstance that one of the sides is much longer than the other. A passage seems to have led round the exterior of the *Koilon*. A pointed gate of the Cyclopian or Tirynthian style is attached to this part of the wall, but it is considerably buried. Inscriptions might probably be discovered at Thorikos by a diligent search; but the ruins are overgrown with bushy evergreens, particularly the lentiscus."

From Wordsworth's *Athens and Attica* (1836), page 212:—

"The view of the ancient theatre at Thoricus affords an agreeable relief to the dismal dreariness of this district. It is a vestige, one of the few which remain, of the pleasures which an Attic village enjoyed in the cheerful seasons of the year. The agreeable landscape which has remained to us of an ancient Italian audience collected on the sloping sides of a rural theatre (Juvenal III. 178), might have been supplied with a Greek counterpart here. The mimicry of the village Dionysia which Aristophanes exhibited in his *Acharnians* was doubtless a frequent reality in this place. Here also we are reminded of the scene which Virgil has sketched from the antique life of the Attic peasantry:—

'The ancient games are ushered on the stage,
And in crossways and towns the Attic swains
Strive for the scenic prize, and, cheer'd with wine,
Leap 'mid the swoll'n, smear'd skins on meadows green.'

(Virgil, *Georg.* II. 381.)

—a scene which no doubt has often enlivened with mirth and laughter the now void and silent sides of this hollow theatre.

"A theatre was an appropriate edifice at Thoricus, for it was in

the port of this place that Dionysus, the deity of the Athenian drama, first landed in Attica.

"The outline of this theatre is not of a semicircular form; it is of an irregular curve, nearly resembling the fourth of an ellipse,—the longer axis commencing with the stage, and the seats beginning from the lesser axis, and running in tiers rising above each other concentrically with the curve. They faced the south. The curved outline of the *κοῖλον* of the theatre formed part of the town wall; this irregular form was perhaps adopted as more defensible than any other.

"In the wall near the theatre is an old postern, surmounted by a pointed arch formed in approaching horizontal courses, in the same manner as the arches in the galleries at Tiryns. . . . The style and massiveness of this postern . . . afford clear evidence of the great antiquity and local importance of Thoricus."

From Fiedler's *Reise durch Griechenland* (1841), page 41:—

"In this plain of Mandri, extending as far as the range of limestone, stood old Thoricus, one of the twelve oldest cities of Attica, now Theriko. On the lowest declivity of this hill an old theatre of roughly dressed marble blocks is found. It shows little art."

From Vischer's *Erinnerungen und Eindrücke aus Griechenland*, (1856) page 67:—

"On the south slope of this hill appear extensive ruins of the former prosperity of the district. The most conspicuous are the remains of the theatre, whose periphery wall is fairly well preserved in a very irregular curve, and with two abutments. Of the seats nothing now remains. To the west are the ruins of an ancient square tower, ten feet high. Meagre remains of a stoa are still to be seen. Old Thoricus appears to have spread over a considerable portion of the valley besides."

From Bursian's *Geographie von Griechenland* (1862), Vol. I. page 353 (see Plate I. Fig. 1):—

"Of the fortifications made in the twenty-third year of the Peloponnesian war remains are still found on the crest of the hills surrounding the plain, especially on the hill to the north of the bay,

which served as the Acropolis, on whose western slope a square tower about ten feet high still stands. On the south slope is the theatre, built like the tower of the gray marble of which the hills here consist. The cavea, unique on account of its odd shape, is preserved, though the seats are gone."

From Fergusson's *History of Architecture in all Countries* (1876), Vol. I. page 215:—

"The Pelasgic races soon learned to adopt for their doorways the more pleasing curvilinear form with which they were already familiar from their interiors [of beehive tombs]. The gateway in Thoricus shows its simplest and earliest form."

Compare the actual form, Plate II. Fig. 1.

From the *Archaeologische Zeitung* (1878), page 29, in a report of the meeting of the Archaeological Society in Berlin, Jan., 1878:—

"Herr Peltz spoke of the antiquities to be seen at Thoricus, submitting a sketch of the theatre, the diameter of which was fifty-four metres. He explained its remarkably irregular outline, and referred to the peculiar construction of the outside wall surrounding the tiers of seats, — a construction which occurs also in a square tower on the plain, and which leads to the conclusion that these structures belong to a very high antiquity. The seats, of which only a few traces are preserved, follow the natural slope of the hill. Nothing remains of the stage structure. In the neighborhood of the theatre are scanty remains of an apparently later marble building, consisting of one corner of the foundation and four roughly dressed drums without flutings, eighty-two centimetres in diameter."¹

From Baedeker's *Griechenland* (1883), page 117:—

"The ruins are in great part at the foot of the mountain-peak on its south side. . . . The most important are the ruins of the theatre. . . . The auditorium faces the south, and has an oval form which is unique of its kind, and was undoubtedly determined by the formation of the ground here.

¹ The lime kiln, shown at the right in Plates V. and VI., must be held responsible for the total disappearance of these remains.

"It lies between two spurs of the hill, and is enclosed by a wall of military style, which is composed of marble blocks of different sizes. The seats are formed of broad stone slabs, in great part destroyed. The additions northwest and northeast on the outside of the surrounding wall probably served as foundations for flights of stairs, by means of which the spectators ascended to the top of the wall and thence gained the auditorium.

"The northwest addition is in a fair state of preservation. To save material without loss of strength it is pierced by a low passageway, the roof of which is made by corbelling.

"Whether the quadrangular chamber, cut into the rock, and opening toward the auditorium before the east end of the main wall, was a side building connected with the stage must remain unsettled."

A. Müller, in *Die Griechischen Bühnenalterthümer* (1886), briefly designates the form of the theatre at Thoricus as "utterly irregular," and refers to the report of Peltz already quoted.

THE work of excavating the Theatre of Thoricus, described by Mr. Miller in his Preliminary Report, was suspended on the second of June, 1886. It was resumed in the autumn of the same year by other members of the American School at Athens. This supplementary work consisted in thoroughly excavating the temple at the west end of the orchestra and the orchestra floor in front of the temple, and in a general examination, by means of a number of shafts, of the various walls entering into the construction of the theatre, with reference to their purposes and limitations. The later excavations served to establish the correctness of most of Mr. Miller's opinions and to settle some questions which were before in doubt, while a few explanations that had been suggested in the absence of necessary evidence were found to be unsatisfactory.

THE MAIN OR OUTER WALL (*AA'A'*, Plate I.).—This wall is built of "rock-faced" or "quarry-faced" ashlar. Its construction is distinguished by the so-called "broken range" work. The abutting

joints are of irregular inclination. The bed-joints are "random" or "rambling," a portion of the upper surface of a stone being often cut away in order to make a true bed for the stone of the next course, breaking joints. See the Frontispiece (Plate VII.), and Plate II. Fig. 5. The backing is rubble work, the joints of which were very wide and were filled with mud, which in process of time has crumbled away at exposed surfaces. In respect to careful and artistic workmanship this wall is far in advance of the inner parts of the theatre. Examples of the same construction are found at Ephesus, in the fortifications built by Lysimachus; Messene, founded by Epaminondas; Eleutherae, fortified by Epaminondas; Oeniadae of Acarnania, fortified by Philip; Psophis, near Elis, conquered by Philip; Orchomenos in Boeotia, restored by Philip or Alexander; Plataeae, restored by Alexander; at Mazi, Corinth, and Sikyon; and also at Norba, Cora, Setium, and Terracina in Italy. In none of those walls is there a precise resemblance to the Thoricus walls; but all have irregular abutting joints and a tendency, though in a much less degree than at Thoricus, to the use of rambling bed-joints. The military tower, a few rods to the west of the theatre, furnishes the only other known example of construction which corresponds identically with that of the wall under discussion, though the exposed surfaces of the tower have suffered considerable abrasion, while the stones of the theatre appear unharmed.

No exact conclusion as to age can be drawn from this kind of workmanship. It seems to be a transition from the polygonal to the quadrangular style of masonry, confined to no particular epoch. Its motive is the effort to secure greater solidity by the use of horizontal courses, and at the same time to avoid waste of material, such as is involved in cutting all stones to the same dimensions. We can only say that while broken range work was employed by the Greeks and Italians generally before the second century B.C., the time of its most extensive use seems to have been about the fourth century, judging by those walls of which the builders are known with some certainty.

The similarity of workmanship in the theatre wall and the military tower suggests that both structures were built by the same architect. But assuming that they are of the same age, it cannot be proved that the tower is a remnant of those fortifications mentioned by Xenophon

(*Hellen.* i. 2, 1) as having been built by the Athenians in the Peloponnesian war. Attempts, therefore, to fix the date of the theatre by that allusion in the *Hellenica* depend upon a defective chain of evidence.

The passage through the west abutment is built with the skill which is characteristic of the general work of the main wall, and the converging sides of the stones which form the arch are trimmed accurately to form a smooth surface. This interior finish, as well as the height of the passage, forbids the conjecture that it was designed merely as a culvert. A plain lintel might have terminated it, but greater sustaining power was secured, and at the same time the comparatively slender buttress, built against but not bonded to the main wall, was strengthened, by adopting the common device of extending successive courses of masonry toward each other until the space was covered at the desired height. The expensive and unstable voussoir arch was discarded here, as it was in all Greek masonry, not subterranean, which is known to us.

THE INNER WALL, *BB'B''* (see also Plate V.), discovered by Mr. Miller, is made of thin, unhewn slabs laid evenly in clay. Its construction is the same as that of the retaining wall *CC*, and cannot be said to characterize any particular time or race.

This wall marks the limits of the original theatre, which was subsequently enlarged by means of the outer wall. This proposition, aside from the impossibility of finding a motive for reducing the original dimensions, is established by the following considerations:—

1st. If the theatre had been contracted to a shorter radius, there would have been no need of an inside wall unless the outer one had been demolished.

2d. It is not credible that, if the outer wall were to be rejected, the architect would have allowed so much good material for a new structure to go to waste.

3d. At the west end, where the main wall meets the inner wall at *B*, no traces have been found of an original continuation of the main wall inside.

THE ORCHESTRA.—No vestiges of a stage structure have been brought to light. The long, straight wall (marked *CC* in the diagram) was merely for the purpose of retaining the artificial mass of earth

forming the orchestra floor, which on its outer side was raised sixteen feet above the natural slope of the hill. Below the wall was found a stone block containing a square hole four inches wide and six inches deep. (Plate II. Fig. 6.) This looks like a socket of some kind, and may have been part of a temporary scene-frame, or of an ordinary railing along the edge of the retaining wall. The floor of the orchestra was formed of red earth well beaten down.

It seems easy to believe that this orchestra was intended for the production of Dionysiac choruses and for other festal celebrations which needed only a dancing floor. The absence, however, of foundations for a stage building in this theatre cannot safely be adduced as negative evidence in favor of the theory of Höpken and Dörpfeld, that actors and chorus in dramatic representations performed on the same floor. For the inference is reasonable that the rustic community of Thoricus, standing alone among their fellow-Greeks in the open violation of almost every law of architecture in the construction of their theatre, could have had little appreciation of the conventional niceties and sobriety of the Greek drama, and hence made no arrangements for its production.

THE TEMPLE. — At the west end of the orchestra and lying parallel with the parodos wall are found the ruined foundations of a small temple, *K*. (See also Plate II. Fig. 3.) At its west end the stylobate is cut in the native rock. The entrance was at the east end, where the lowest of the three steps is *in situ*. In the northwest corner, on a level with the stylobate, a pavement is preserved, formed of pebbles set in mortar. Portions of the cella wall, nearly five feet in height, are still standing on the north and west sides. It is composed of roughly dressed blocks of the inferior white marble found in this locality, and in the details of its construction it exactly resembles the outer wall of the theatre. Parts of the marble cornice and a section of a marble architrave, all Ionic and roughly dressed, were discovered near these foundations (see Plate II. Fig. 2), together with numerous pieces of tiling and antefixae of terra cotta. The outlines of the antefixae are moulded in the form of the honeysuckle, and the same pattern is painted on their outer surface.

The position of the cella wall and the character of the architectural fragments show that this was an Ionic temple *in antis*. Nothing what-

ever was found on the orchestra floor which could have come from the temple, except a thumb of life size in Pentelic marble.

In a joint of the cella wall was found a bronze coin of Athens. If, as seems probable, it was deposited there during the construction of the wall, an important clue is thus furnished for determining the date of the edifice. Bronze coins were first struck at Athens in the archonship of Kallias (406 B.C.), but these were soon demonetized, probably in 394 B.C. In 350–322 B.C. bronze money began for the first time to be reissued in larger quantities.¹ The latter period corresponds with the conjectured age of the main wall of the theatre (page 28), to which time also belongs the only inscription discovered by the excavations, ΔΙΟΝΥΞΩΙ, on the head of a broken stele. (See Plate II. Fig. 8.)

THE ROCK CHAMBER. — (See Plates III. and IV.) It is not possible to prove that this rectangular cut in the natural rock served any purpose connected with the performances of the theatre. On the contrary, the magnitude of the labor involved in hewing out the solid rock so as to form a smooth wall fifty feet long and ten feet high — a work out of all proportion to the general character of the theatre proper — opposes such a theory. The remains of another “chamber” of the same kind are seen at the base of the military tower. Both resemble the artificial workings in the rock city at Athens.

THEORIES AS TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE THEATRE. — As one approaches the theatre from Laurium, the spot is seen, at some distance up the valley on the left, where, in the early part of this century, the British Society of Dilettanti excavated a Doric stoa. Here, half buried in alluvium, are numerous unfinished drums; these are without flutings, except in the case of those which formed the top or bottom of a column, where the flutings are merely begun as guide marks. Not far from the stoa, on two low foot-hills, rude remains of an ancient civilization are visible, — roughly hewn stone blocks, and traces of a circular wall of upright slabs. Directly from the plain at this point rises on the northeast a conical hill, the west slope of which is covered with a confusion of walls, mostly of rude and weak construction. The southern slope is thickly strewn with chips of white

¹ Head, *Historia Numorum*, page 315.

marble which partially hide numerous graves and a plain sarcophagus. In this desolate field, at the lower edge of the hillside, stand the well-built walls of the theatre and of the watch tower.

The sense of this ancient community's poverty of taste and resources, which impresses the visitor when viewing the ruins in the plain and the crude work of walls and graves on the hillside, is now only deepened by an investigation of the theatre and the irregular and mean workmanship of its interior. The cavea is provided with but two stairways, and these are narrow and misshapen. The seats and the parodos walls are made of unhewn slabs. The original configuration of the hillside has not been so modified as to allow the usual curves in the lines of seats or to make symmetrical terminations in the ends of the rear walls. In the later enlargement the old seats were unchanged, and stone chips instead of masonry were used as foundations for the new seats in the extension. The temple is coarsely finished, and the art remains are very scanty; these consist—besides the stele, the architectural fragments, and the thumb already mentioned—of a lion's claw in marble and a few potsherds of fine workmanship.

Under these circumstances it seems reasonable to attribute the irregularities in the construction of the theatre to the want of means or want of taste under which the remote rural deme of Thoricus labored. The people, desiring to celebrate their vintage festivals in the usual way, selected this natural hollow, at the bottom of which a good deal of filling in was required in order to make a suitable floor for the performance of choruses and buffoons. A retaining wall was built of flat, unhewn stones laid in mud mortar,—the prevailing construction of the walls in other parts of the hill. The least possible work was devoted to correcting irregularities in the natural shape of the hill in making the auditorium. Tiers of seats were made to rise one above another, and some digging and filling in must have been necessary that a rough symmetry might be secured in the succession of parallel lines. But the striking of a true circle was not thought of. The middle section of seats shows almost no curvature, and the two flights of steps which bound it are nearly parallel.

The two end sections were formed in sharp curves, so as to bring the spectators at those points into the most favorable position for viewing the orchestra. At the rear a supporting wall was built, fol-

lowing the line of the topmost seats. At the west end this wall terminated in some coarse slab work. At the east, an ancient perpendicular cut in the solid ledge relieved the builders of considerable labor, and they so arranged the seats that by finishing them in a line with its face they had ready-made the second parodos wall. It thus happened that the curve described by the original rear wall took the form of a sickle, the sharpest part of the curve being at the west end.

At some later time the theatre was enlarged. The existing auditorium was untouched, the plan calling not for reconstruction, but merely for extension. The new tiers were carried up at the same inclination with the old (Plate II. Figs. 4 and 7), set in a bed of small stones,¹ and retained by a high wall. On the construction of this wall much care and labor were spent; but in running his lines the architect was governed solely by the situation of the old theatre as he found it. Hence the inside and outside walls of the cavea are parallel for the greater part of their course, and the peculiar shape of the latter is largely due to the same causes which gave the inside wall its irregular form.

The extremities were finished in an independent and utterly unconventional way. At the eastern end the builder brought the wall around in a sharp curve so as to form a continuation of the old parodos wall along the edge of the rock chamber. At the west end he was obliged, for some reason, to stop his work abruptly, and, being trammelled by no inconvenient laws of symmetry, he simply closed up the space by bending the wall nearly at a right angle so as to meet the old wall. The new theatre, therefore, was mutilated of part of its rear western section.

The auditorium thus increased needed additional means of ingress and egress, the cornice of the rear wall being some fifteen feet above the ground. Hence two inclined planes were constructed, *Y* and *Z*, leading to the topmost row of seats. That on the west side crosses a depression between the ledges of the hill, is pierced by the "Tiryns Arch," and continues along an elevated terrace for some distance to

¹ The soil which covered the seats and orchestra was mixed with stone chips, which made the work of pick and mattock unusually difficult. Between the two rear walls these small stones form a solid mass.

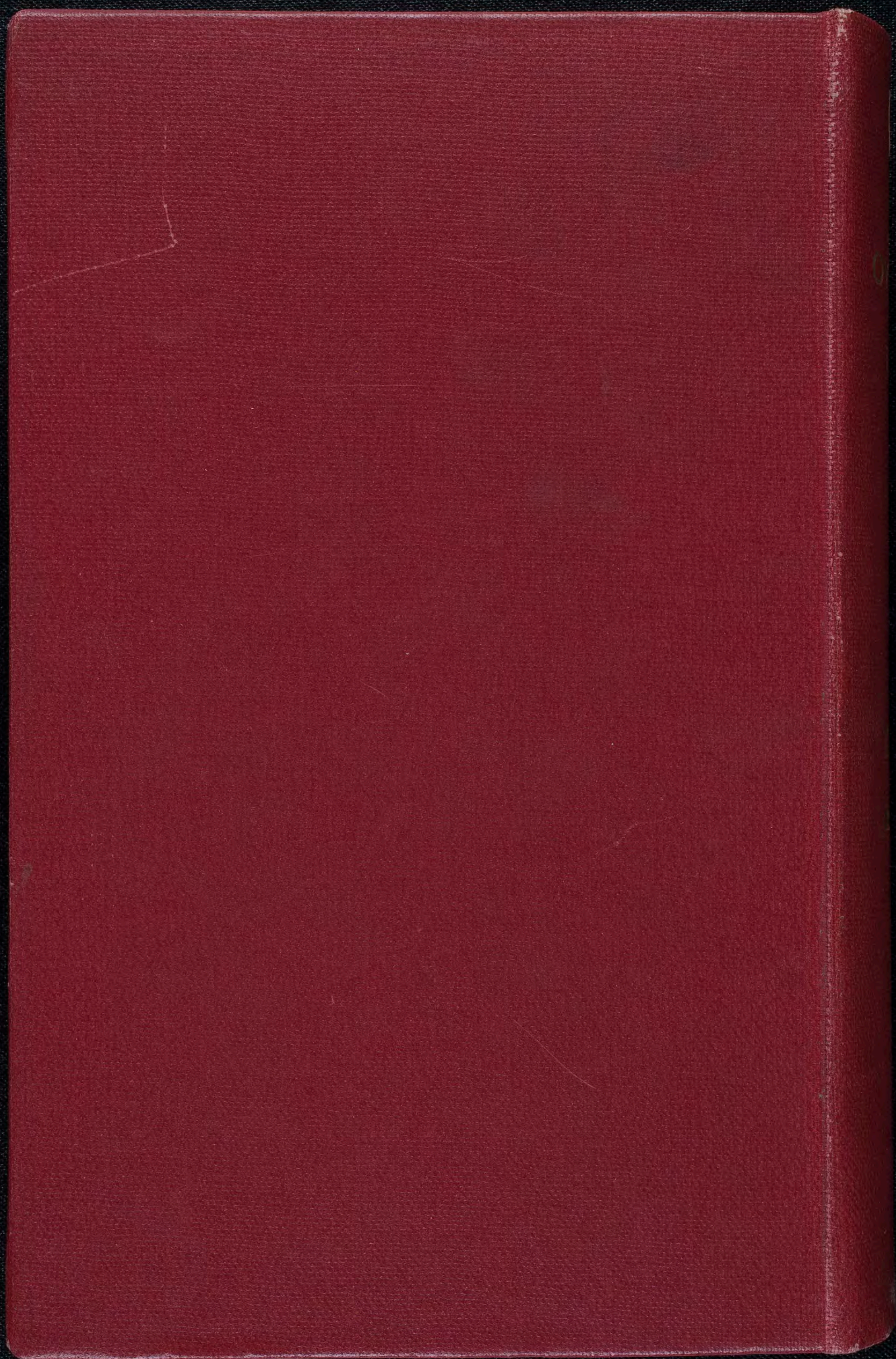
the west. (See Plate II. Fig. 1.) As the people approached the west end of the theatre from their homes in the plain, some entered by the west parodos; others, whose places were so assigned, ascended by the special terrace and viaduct $Y'Y$; while those who were to use the other rear entrance took the path which skirted the wall, passed under the arch, and so, with little extra effort, found their seats. The formation of the steep, rocky hillside, the raised walk at the west end, and the situation of the necropolis at the rear made no other approach possible. As the tide of theatre-goers always came from the west and went no farther than the second abutment or inclined plane Z , this abutment was not provided with a passage-way underneath.



NOTE.—This fragment was found by the writer within the theatre. It is apparently a portion of an unguent vase. It is about three inches high. The decoration is in glazed black upon a brown ground. The front bears the lower portion of three figures, all clad in the himation or, possibly, in the chiton and chlamys, and advancing in the same direction. The vine-branches pendent before each figure indicate a Dionysiac subject. The back bears no figures.

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