

THE STAGE OF NEW COMEDY

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GREEK THEATRES, considered as monumental architecture, are hardly older than the middle years of the fourth century. Before the Hellenistic period the architectural development of the Greek *skene*, or stagehouse, is particularly obscure; the archaeological evidence, all very tenuous, comes from the theatres at Athens, Corinth, Isthmia, and Eretria. Only at Athens and Corinth does there seem to be evidence for a *skene* built before the end of the fifth century;¹ in neither case is there any sign of a stage, low or high, in front of the early *skene*.

The earliest Athenian *skene* was probably a temporary structure, perhaps erected for each festival, and capable of being modified from day to day. The back wall is thought to have consisted of boards fastened to posts anchored in sockets cut in the top of the long terrace-wall on the downhill side of the orchestra; the roofed shed, or *skene*, in front of this wall, enclosed at least part of a rectangular platform of masonry (commonly known as Platform T), ca 7.50m. wide and 3.26m. deep, projecting forward from the terrace-wall on the north-south axis of the orchestra. Even less is known about the form of the earliest *skene* at Corinth, for which the only evidence is a series of cuttings in the hardpan intended to receive the wooden uprights of the structure.

The construction of the Athenian and Corinthian *skenai* has generally been dated to the late fifth century. P. Kalligas, however, dates the stoa behind the early Athenian *skene* to the later fourth century; and J. Travlos wishes to assign to the orator and statesman Lykourgos (ca 325) both the stoa and the arrangements for a wooden stagehouse that had previously been dated to the late fifth century. The construction of the first stone *skene* with its projecting *paraskenia*, long associated with Lykourgos, should in his view be moved down to the end of the fourth century.² The basis for this revised chronology is the

The substance of this article was contained in a paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of Canada at Montreal, at the end of May, 1980.

For convenience of reference the following abbreviations are used in the notes:

Arnott, *Introduction*: P. D. Arnott, *An Introduction to the Greek Theatre* (London 1959); Arnott, *Conventions*: P. D. Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions in the Fifth Century* (Oxford 1962); Bieber²: M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*² (Princeton 1961); Dinsmoor³: W. B. Dinsmoor, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece*³ (London 1950); *Guide de Thasos*: École française d'Athènes, *Guide de Thasos* (Paris 1966); Travlos, *PictDictAthens*: J. Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (London 1971); Webster, *Bühnenaltertümer*: T. B. L. Webster, *Griechische Bühnenaltertümer* (Göttingen 1963); Webster, *GTP*²: T. B. L. Webster, *Greek Theatre Production*² (London 1970).

¹Dinsmoor³ 207–211, Webster, *GTP*² 5 ff, *Bühnenaltertümer* 22–24, on the theatre at Athens; R. Stillwell, *Corinth 2: The Theatre* (Princeton 1952) 15–21, 32–40, Webster, *Bühnenaltertümer* 36, on Corinth.

²P. Kalligas, *Δελτιον* 18 (1963) *Chron.* 12–18; see Travlos, *PictDictAthens* 537.

discovery by Kalligas of pottery associated with the breccia foundations of the new temple of Dionysos. These pottery deposits indicate that the foundations of the temple, or at least parts of them, were not laid until some time after 350. These foundations had previously been dated ca 420 on the basis of the new cult statue which is said (Paus. 1.20.3) to have been made by Alkamenes.

It is not clear to me that the downdating of the new temple of Dionysos necessarily requires a similar downdating of all other breccia foundations in the area of the theatre. Travlos and Kalligas are arguing in effect that breccia was never used in Athens before the middle of the fourth century; and this theory seems to go far beyond the available evidence. Indeed it is directly contradicted by abundant evidence from the excavations in the Athenian Agora. Moreover, their theory involves the view that the whole history of Athenian drama during the fifth and earlier fourth centuries unfolded without any substantial provision for dressing-rooms, stage-machinery, and mounting of scenery (including, in comedy, representations of three separate houses, each with its practicable door). Such a view seems very difficult to reconcile with the evidence of extant plays and fragments.

In this paper, however, I am less concerned with the *date* of the surviving foundations of "Skenai I and II" in the theatre of Dionysos, than with the *form* of the *superstructure* erected on those foundations. No matter which chronology we adopt for these two *skenai*, it remains true that both Skene II and the latest wooden forms erected on the Skene I foundations served during the period 330–300 and afterward for productions of New Comedy. Contemporary archaeological wisdom holds that the permanent removal of the scene of action from a location at or near orchestra-level to a high proskenion-stage was a Hellenistic development, originating outside of Athens, and appearing there only ca 200 (cf. Dinsmoor³ 298–302). Yet students of theatre have increasingly inclined to the view that this development took place in the later fourth century, *even at Athens*.³ The thesis of this paper is that when supposed "archaeological fact" fails to harmonize with the evidence of ancient texts it is probably not "fact" at all, and that the remains of the Athenian theatre actually support the theory of the introduction of a high *proskenion*-stage ca 325, or even earlier.

First, we must review the form and function of Skene I at Athens. The T-platform of this *skene* was designed, according to the traditional view, in the late fifth century, to provide for mounting painted scenery or a wooden columnar façade in front of a wide doorway, and for the use of such staging devices as the *ekkyklema* and *geranos*, or crane (also called simply the *mechane*, or "machine").⁴ The wooden *skene* supported by the vertical posts mounted in the sockets on either side of the T-platform must also have been substantial

³Webster, *Bühnenaltertümer* 20, GTP² 173–174 (21). Travlos, in his summary in *PictDictAthens*, seems to take no account of Webster's view.

⁴Webster, GTP² 8–9, 11–13, *Bühnenaltertümer* 20.

enough to permit the mounting of painted backdrops on its front wall, for painted scenery was introduced by Sophokles (Arist. *Poet.* 1449a), i.e., after his first production in 468, and probably not later than the thirties of the century Agatharchos of Samos executed for a play of Aischylos (presumably a revival since Aischylos died in 456) a "scene" that evidently included the representation of buildings in perspective.⁵ All scholars agree that these milestones in the history of Greek scenic design pre-dated the construction of the T-platform and other elements of Skene I, which was presumably at least as substantial as the experimental *skenai* that preceded it.

The platform that supported the *ekkyklema* and *geranos* could also have carried across its front a wooden floor supported on joists and raised one or two steps above the orchestra. This "stage-floor" could even have extended in front, and beyond the flanks, of the T-platform, as T. B. L. Webster and P. D. Arnott have suggested.⁶ Such a low wooden platform for the actors would certainly have been more satisfactory, both scenically and acoustically, than having actors as well as chorus stand on the packed-earth floor of the orchestra; and in fact the existence of a low wooden stage is well attested in the dramatic tradition of the Western Mediterranean during the fourth century.⁷

From ca 300 onward, high *proskenion*-colonnades of stone undoubtedly appeared in many parts of the Greek world. This development can be easily explained only on the assumption that the scene of action had now shifted definitively from at or near orchestra-level to a high stage located on the flat roof of the *proskenion*. Such a stage is perhaps attested as early as ca 325 in Skene II at Isthmia, and perhaps also at Trachones near Athens; from ca 300 examples are increasingly common, e.g., at Thasos (ca 300), Ephesos, and Miletos (both probably of the early third century, or at least no later than ca 250).⁸ Moreover, von Gerkan always maintained the existence of an early Hellenistic *proskenion* at Priene; and he subsequently showed, conclusively to my mind, that a *proskenion*-stage, with ramps and *parodos*-gates, was not only planned but actually built at Epidauros ca 300–280.⁹ Von Gerkan, it is true, regarded these early *proskenia* as designed for appearances in midair or on rooftops, with the main action still confined to the orchestra; and many scholars still espouse this view. I believe von Gerkan's interpretation to be

⁵Vitruv. 7. *Praef.* 11; cf. Webster, *GTP*² 13–14.

⁶Webster, *GTP*² 7; Arnott, *Introduction* 32–45 and 35 fig. 2, *Conventions* 8–18.

⁷Bieber² 129–146 and figs. 483b, 485, 488–489, 491–492, 507–509, 514–515, 517, 519.

⁸On Thasos: *Guide de Thasos* 50–54. On Miletos: F. Krauss, *Milet 4.1: Das Theater von Milet* (Berlin 1973). On Ephesos and Asia Minor theatres in general, see D. De Bernardi Ferrero, *Teatri classici in Asia Minore* 1–3 (Rome 1966–1974). On the deme-theatre at Trachones near Athens, see below, note 17; on Isthmia, see Elizabeth R. Gebhard, *The Theater at Isthmia* (Chicago and London 1973).

⁹A. von Gerkan, *Das Theater von Priene* (Munich 1921); *Das Theater von Epidauros* (Stuttgart 1961).

mistaken, at least as far as New Comedy is concerned; but the mistake about function does not affect the force of the arguments with regard to date.

I shall set out at greater length, in my monograph on Hellenistic architecture, the archaeological reasons for accepting von Gerkan's chronology for Priene and Epidauros; here my chief concern is to show that early stone *proskenia* served as high stages, and that the high stage was introduced in Athens soon after 350. It seems to me absurd to question Athenian leadership, either in dramatic composition or in techniques of production, at a time when Athenian New Comedy was at its height, with its greatest exponents bringing out almost 300 plays in some seven decades.¹⁰ If we take account of the work of other poets as well, the total number of New Comedy plays produced between 340 and 270 must have been at least 600,¹¹ of which the great majority may be assumed to have been staged for the first time at Athens. In this period of intense activity, it passes belief that the innovation of a high *proskenion*-stage, so advantageous for the staging of New Comedy, was made, not in Athens, the centre of New Comedy, but in some deme-theatre, or in Thasos, or some city in Asia Minor, or perhaps at Epidauros; and further, that Athenian producers, during most of the third century, failed to appreciate the advantages of this innovation.

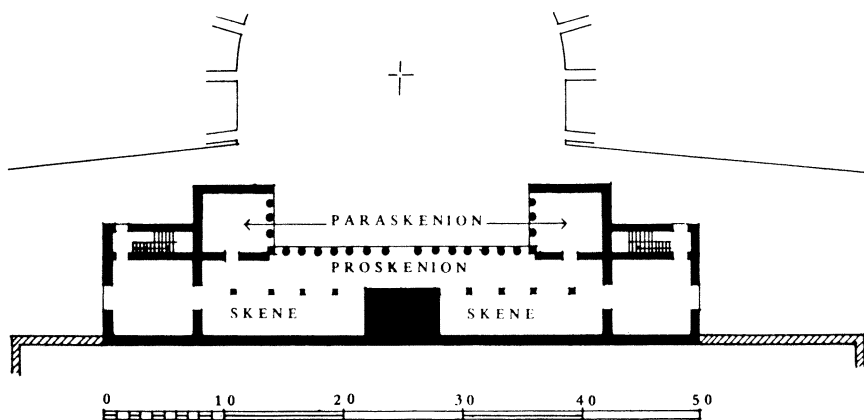
The dominant role of Athens in the history of Greek drama suggests a rather different conclusion. Perhaps as early as the late fifth century Athenian designers had experimented with a low wooden stage, framed on either side by projecting wings, or *paraskenia*, which provided a much sharper visual focus for the action of the play. When the *skene* of the theatre of Dionysos was rebuilt in stone in the later fourth century (whether under Lykourgos or ca 300), the projecting wings, or *paraskenia*, of the earlier wooden experiments were retained; the fronts and the flanks of these wings, whatever their form, were probably used for mounting painted wooden panels, or *pinakes*.¹² (See the plan on page 42.)

¹⁰Menander: over 100 in thirty years; Philemon: 97 in a long life; Diphilos: 100.

¹¹An ancient source on the history of Greek Comedy states (*Anon. on Com.* 15) that there were 64 New Comedy poets, of whom the most famous were Philemon, Menander, Diphilos, Philippides, Poseidippos, and Apollodoros; these six alone, together with the younger Philemon, probably produced a total of some 400 plays from ca 325 onward.

¹²The *paraskenia* with colonnaded fronts, shown in most restorations of the Athenian stagehouse of the later fourth century, are based, not on actual remains, but on the extant colonnaded *paraskenia* of the Hellenistic reconstruction of the stagehouse. In actual fact, the theory that the extant columns originally stood over the front foundations of the earlier *paraskenia* is unsupported by any concrete evidence; the columns could just as easily have belonged to the inward-facing flanks of the *paraskenia*, or even to a *proskenion*-colonnade between the *paraskenia* (see below).

It is not clear exactly what form of stagehouse Webster envisaged in his later discussions, when he spoke of "the new facade with marble columns and entablature," having "wings (i.e., *paraskenia*) and three doors between them" (*Bühnenaltertümer* 20); he may in fact have been advancing the same view as is espoused in this article, although his remarks in *GTP*² 173–174 (21) seem to refer only to the introduction of a *proskenion* in the first rebuilding of the Lykourgan stagehouse.



Plan of Lykourgan Stagehouse at Athens (paraskenia with solid front walls)

The new Athenian *skene* was evidently a two-storeyed structure; a row of pillars along the length of the interior provided support for the upper floor. It is usually assumed that the *skene* was two-aisled in both storeys. However, the upper storey may have been only about half the depth of the ground-floor, i.e., it may have been confined to the area between the row of pillars and the back wall of the building. Above the front half of the ground-floor there would have been a long, narrow "roof-platform," on which the actors could appear at a higher level when required. This "roof-platform" was doubtless called the *proskenion*, i.e., the "structure in front of (the upper storey of) the *skene*." A Delian inscription of 290 seems to use the word in the same sense, i.e., to describe a one-storeyed wooden structure in front of the two-storeyed wooden *skene*.¹³

Most scholars have held that along the front of this new Athenian *skene* there was a plain wall with three doors. Dörpfeld, however, believed that the colonnades of the inner flanks of the *paraskenia* were continued across the front of the *skene* in the form of a column-screen and entablature set against the outer face of the front wall, i.e., facing the orchestra.¹⁴ Dinsmoor reasonably points out (248 note 4) that the foundations of the front of the *skene* are too narrow to support both a wall and a row of columns, as proposed by Dörpfeld; yet Dörpfeld may have been at least partly correct in believing that the columns of the *paraskenia* continued across the front of the *skene*. Webster and Arnott have suggested that some sort of removable wooden stage was erected

¹³ Webster (see preceding note) had already suggested provision for a high stage, apparently in stone, by about 300 or a little later; Dinsmoor³, 291–299, speaks only of wooden *proskenia*, but also believes that the earliest examples dated from this period. On the Delian theatre inscriptions, see *IG* 11.2.105–133, 142–291; on their significance see the summary in Webster, *Bühnenaltertümer* 41, Bieber² 110–112.

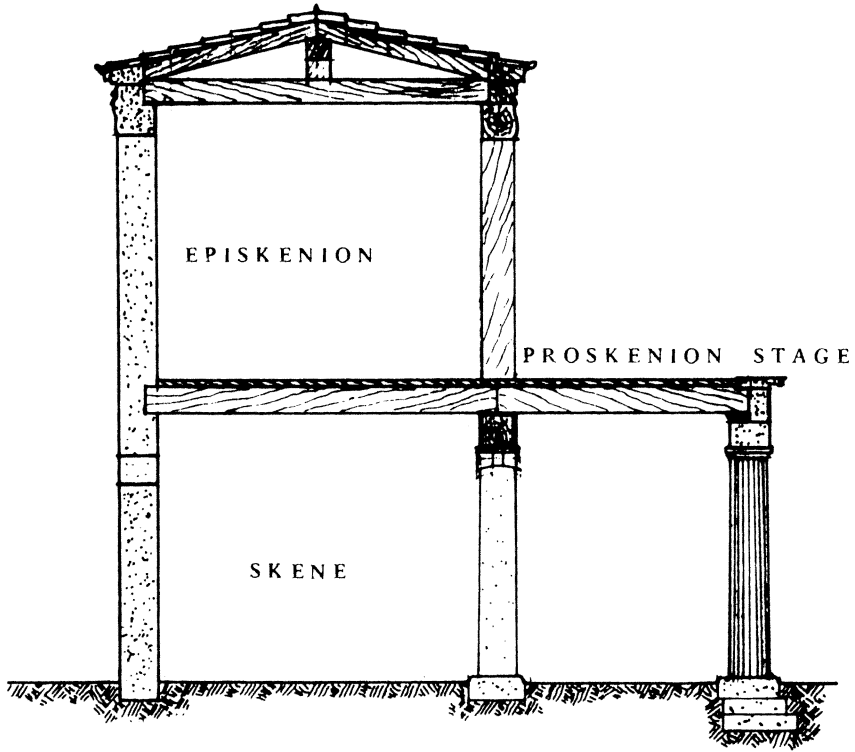
¹⁴ See W. Dörpfeld, E. Reisch, *Das griechische Theater* (Athens 1896) pl. II.

between the late fourth-century *paraskenia* for each year's performances; certainly such a stage would have been as useful in the new stagehouse as in its wooden predecessors.¹⁵ Assuming the existence of a low wooden stage between the *paraskenia*, I would suggest that the foundations across the front of the *skene* supported, above the front part, the uprights for the rear of the wooden stage, and above the back two-thirds a row of wooden columns forming a *proskenion* in front of a one-aisled *skene*. Dinsmoor, to be sure, argued that such a colonnade could not have existed, since it would have required a different triglyph-spacing (and thus a different axial span) from that actually found in the members re-used in the later rebuilding of the *paraskenia*. This objection, however, assumes a uniform size for triglyphs and metopes throughout *proskenion* and *paraskenia*; while such an assumption may be valid in dealing with classical temples, it is clearly not valid for late fourth-century and Hellenistic stagehouses, as the published data for the theatres at Peiraieus and Thasos plainly show.¹⁶

The intervals of the proposed *proskenion*-colonnade would doubtless have been closed by painted wooden panels, except for the three used as practicable doors. In short, the theatre of Dionysos may well have had, by the later fourth century, a two-aisled stagehouse of stone, the front aisle of which formed a "proskenion" with a colonnaded façade and a flat roof, while above the rear aisle there was an upper storey, or *episkenion*, of wood (see the section on page 44). All productions of New Comedy would have taken place on the roof of the *proskenion*, with the wooden *episkenion* serving as the backdrop. A low wooden stage (in front of the *proskenion*) would have been needed only for older plays with a chorus; thus it was unnecessary to include it as a permanent fixture. The new stagehouse, which allowed for stages at different levels, was no doubt inspired, like the projecting *paraskenia*, by earlier experiments carried out within the framework of the earlier wooden stagehouse (Skene I in the traditional view, a predecessor of Skene I according to Travlos and Kalligas). These experiments probably took place from the middle of the fourth century onward, and were so successful that the designers of the stone *skene*, whether Lykourgan or of the next generation, made provision for both types of performance in the design of the new stagehouse. As a matter of fact, the row of bases for interior piers, which we have interpreted as supports for the front

¹⁵ Webster, *GTP*² 20–21; Arnott, *Introduction* 35 fig. III, *Conventions* 40–41; cf. Winter, *Phoenix* 19 (1965) 109.

¹⁶ Thus the columns of the Peiraieus *proskenion*, at least as presented in the original Greek publication (P. Philios, *Praktika* Jan. 1880–Jan. 1881 [Athens 1881] plan following p. 70), were not by any means set out with completely regular spacing; and the French photographs and restorations show similar irregularities in both triglyph-metope units and column-spacings at Thasos (*Guide de Thasos* 52–53 figs. 18–19). As a matter of fact such irregularities are a commonplace in later Greek architecture, whether religious or secular, since the designers of later periods were primarily concerned with overall visual effects, and were thus indifferent to irregularities so slight as to be virtually unnoticeable without careful measurement.



Section of Lykourgan stagehouse with single-aisled, two-storeyed *skene* behind a one-storeyed *proskenion* with colonnaded facade.

wall of the late fourth-century *episkenion*, may even have been laid in conjunction with one of the earlier experiments; for there is absolutely nothing to indicate their chronological relationship to the remainder of the *skene*.

Nothing in the theatre of Dionysos contradicts the above theory of development, which also makes good dramatic sense. The series of inscriptions relating to work in the theatre at Delos, and running from the late fourth to the early second century (above, note 13), shows that there was a "*proskenion*" of some sort there as early as 290, and that, as we have proposed at Athens, painted wooden panels were set in the front both of this *proskenion* and of an upper storey of the *skene*. From 274 onward *skene*, *proskenion*, and *paraskenia* were gradually rebuilt in stone, but still with extensive use of painted wooden panels. The inscription recording work in 279 refers to the *logeion* or "speaking-place;" this term may refer to a stage on the roof of the *proskenion*, but could also be used of a wooden stage set in front of the *proskenion* (and between *paraskenia*?) and raised one or two steps above the orchestra, as suggested for the Athenian theatre.

The advantages enjoyed by actors appearing on the roof of a one-storeyed

proskēnion were quickly appreciated by Greek authors and producers. On the one hand the chorus, performing in the orchestra, had ceased to fill any dramatic role in later Greek plays; on the other, the visual effect of the performance would obviously be much enhanced if all the action took place at the higher level. The low stage in front of the *proskēnion* could then be dispensed with entirely, unless required for the revival of an old play in which the chorus was a "dramatic person;" and the stone or wooden architecture of the *proskēnion* and *paraskēnia* could be treated simply as a decorative front for the stage. Not surprisingly, the new Athenian stagehouse was soon copied elsewhere, e.g., in the theatre at Thasos, where the French have dated the stone *proskēnion* ca 300.¹⁷

The subsequent construction at Athens of the new stone *proskēnion*-colonnade in front of a two-aisled *skēne*, a change that is generally dated ca 200, really tells us nothing of the situation for which the plays of Menander and his contemporaries were written. The normal scene of action in New Comedy may, as we have suggested, have been on the roof of some sort of "proskēnion" from the time of Lykourgos onward. This change in the scene of action of course required that there be mounted on the front wall of the upper storey, or *episkēnion*, the same sort of scenery as had previously been provided on the front of the earlier single-storeyed *skēne*. This scenery was doubtless set into large openings, or *thyromata*, like those of Hellenistic *episkēnia* in stone, e.g., at Priene, Ephesos, and Oropos.¹⁸ The spacing of the pillars that stood on the

¹⁷Above, note 8. If we accept the French date for the stagehouse at Thasos, it probably provides additional evidence in the favour of the traditional Lykourgan date for the first stone stagehouse at Athens, and against the suggestion of Travlos, who presumably believes that the Athenian stagehouse was contemporary with what I regard as a later Thasian imitation. The so-called *proskēnion* in theatres with sunken orchestra, e.g., as in Skene I at Isthmia of ca 400 (Gebhard [above, no 8] 17–26), is really the equivalent of the early wooden *skēne* at Athens; to describe it as a "proskēnion," especially when, as at Isthmia, there are no traces of any "skēne" above and behind it, is misleading. In any event there is no suggestion that the Isthmian structure served as a stage; Skene II at Isthmia, on the other hand (Gebhard 29–60 and 48 pl. VII) in all probability was used as a stage for Comedy, following the method of staging recently introduced in Athens. The relevance of the stone *proskēnion* in the deme-theatre at Trachones, discovered in 1973 (cf. *BCH* 101 [1977] 531 s.v. "Trachōnes") is still not entirely clear. A date in the second half of the fourth century was originally suggested, on the basis of the letter-forms of inscriptions in the *proedria*; and the theatre is now stated to be definitely ca 350 in date (*AJA* 86 [1982] 542; I have not yet seen *Ergon* 1980, published 1981). Of course the *proskēnion* cannot be firmly dated on the basis of inscriptions in the *proedria*; without data more specifically related to the *proskēnion* a date as early as 350 would be questionable. Nevertheless, even if later than the seats of the *koilon*, the structure still demonstrates the existence of stone *proskēnia* in Attica at the time of its construction. Typologically, the Trachones *proskēnion* should be hardly earlier than ca 300, and represents a later phase of development than the theatres at Athens, Peiraieus, and Epidauros.

¹⁸The evidence is clearest in the case of Oropos, thanks to the surviving inscriptions on various parts of the façade of the stagehouse; but there is no reason to doubt the existence of *thyromata* at Priene, Epidauros, Ephesos, and elsewhere.

bases inside the ground floor of the Athenian *skene* perhaps indicates the width of these openings.

At some later period, which we cannot determine with certainty,¹⁹ the whole Athenian *skene* became two-storeyed, and a new stone *proskenion*-façade was built in front of it, in the space between the old *paraskenia*. This Hellenistic *proskenion* is dated around 200 simply because there was a *proskenion* in the Hellenistic stagehouse of the theatre at Peiraieus, the existence of which is attested in an inscription of no later than ca 160–150 (*IG* 2² 2334). The Peiraieus theatre bears such a close resemblance to the theatre of Dionysos at Athens that the design is thought to have been based on that of the Athenian building. The Peiraieus theatre inscription, however, tells us only that at the time at which it was cut, a certain number of people made contributions toward the expense of decorating, or redecorating, the Peiraieus *skene*; there is no mention of a *proskenion* being built at this time. Thus, while the stagehouse, including the *proskenion*, at Peiraieus cannot be later than 150, it may in fact be somewhat, perhaps even a good deal, earlier. If some sort of *proskenion*-stage had been used in the Athenian theatre at least as early as, and perhaps even before, the time of Lykourgos (as we have argued above), the decision to build a stone *proskenion* in front of a two-aisled *episkenion* may have been taken at almost any time from the early third century onward. The fact that at Athens the columns of the late fourth-century stagehouse were apparently re-used as far as possible in the course of this remodelling may even suggest that the new addition followed fairly quickly on the heels of the extensive rebuilding of the *skene* only a short time before, and was therefore carried out as economically as possible.²⁰

Alternatively, the "Hellenistic *skene*" at Athens may actually have been built in two stages. First, the function of the *paraskenia* having been largely eliminated by the introduction of the *proskenion*-stage, the *paraskenia* were rebuilt with a reduced projection. This in fact is substantially the form of the theatre at Peiraieus, which quite definitely does *not* reproduce the *proskenion* with vestigial *paraskenia* found in the latest phase of the stagehouse at Athens. If the rebuilding of the Athenian *paraskenia* took place in the early third century, the Peiraieus theatre should not be much later, and certainly earlier than the construction of the existing *proskenion*-colonnade at Athens, which virtually eliminated the *paraskenia*. This colonnade, formed by moving the

¹⁹Scholars in general agree that the builders of the new *proskenion* with its vestigial *paraskenia* re-used *as far as possible* stylobate-slabs, columns, and entablature from the preceding phase of the stagehouse; in my view the rebuilt early Hellenistic *skene*-*proskenion* consisted almost entirely of secondhand material. In either case the extant architectural members can tell us nothing about the date of the reconstruction; and up to the present time, at least, there are no reports of chronologically significant material from the foundations.

²⁰Webster, following the generally accepted mid-Hellenistic date for the Athenian *proskenion*, ca 200, originally drew a very different conclusion from the rebuilding, i.e., that "this was a major reconstruction, which is unlikely to have been undertaken soon after the Lykourgan theatre was completed" (*GTP* 1st ed. 21); but he later abandoned this view completely, as I myself have done (cf. this article with *Phoenix* 19 [1965] 107–108).

earlier columns forward some 2.50–2.75 m. to their present position, would have been the second, and final, Greek modification of the period after ca 300; it has no structural connection with the already-reduced *paraskenia* but served to make them no more than vestigial as at Epidauros, while providing a larger and more substantial *skene* and *episkenion*. It should be noted that von Gerkan (above, note 9) found evidence for two similar phases, ca 300–280 and ca 200 or a bit later, in the *skene-proskenion* at Epidauros.

At Thasos, as in most Hellenistic theatres in Greece and Asia Minor, the *proskenion*-colonnade, probably built not later than the very beginning of the third century, extended straight across the whole width of the *skene*. At Priene, indeed, where actors entering from the wings came on from the rear corners of the stage, the *proskenion* even extends beyond the ends of the *skene*. In fact, the *proskenion*-stage without *paraskenia* should be regarded as the final phase in the development of the Greek stagehouse. It was this type of building that Vitruvius regarded as the typical Greek theatre; he seems to have thought that the width of the stagehouse was generally not much more than that of the open side of the horseshoe-shaped orchestra (5.7.1-2).

Many students (including myself, initially)²¹ have rejected von Gerkan's view that the theatres at Epidauros and Priene had stone *proskenia* as early as ca 300, and were simply remodelled in mid-Hellenistic times. Yet von Gerkan's view seems in fact to be confirmed by the evidence of the theatres at Isthmia, Thasos, Miletos, and elsewhere, and perhaps also by the Delian inscriptions of the second quarter of the third century. If his dating of the first *proskenion* at Epidauros is correct, that structure and the one at Thasos are among the earliest extant examples of substantial *proskenia* in stone, the Epidaurian stagehouse still including the vestigial *paraskenia*. The *proskenion* with a straight façade may have been an early Hellenistic innovation of the cities of Asia Minor, where many new theatres were built from the early third century onward; yet it was also a natural form in theatres with a sunken orchestra, as at Isthmia. The straight *proskenion* at Thasos was perhaps inspired by one or other of the buildings in Asia Minor. Yet whatever their form, all Hellenistic *skenai* with *proskenia* that survive east of the Adriatic were in some sense, I believe, derived from the Athenian stagehouse of the later fourth century, i.e., from the original home of New Comedy, where the standard staging conventions of this form of drama were first developed. In revivals of older plays, actors of Hellenistic times doubtless still performed, at least for a while, in the orchestra; but by the late first century Vitruvius states unequivocally that "tragic and comic actors perform on the (high) stage (*logeion*), while other artists [i.e., choral singers and dancers] give their performances in the entire orchestra" (5.7.2).

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²¹Cf. *Phoenix* 19 (1965) 107–109.