SCENE (ΣΚΗΝΗ, SCAENA)

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Greek Theatre.

Of the three structural parts that contributed to space distribution in ancient theatre (the others being the *koilon* and the orchestra), the *skené* was the last to acquire a specific architectural form. The almost uninterrupted lack of archaeological research until shortly after the middle of the 5th century BC, the multiple uses of the term, ranging from the *skené* as a rectangular building, a complement to the orchestra, a backdrop and background, a dressing room, an equipment storage area, and more theoretical references to scenic action, all show that the term has often been used to indicate specific topographical situations and performance contexts. The *skené* does not always refer to a theatrical building but to poly-functional complexes or sanctuary localities in which, generally, there were no, or, not only literary or dramatic representations but also, as I. Nielsen (2002) pointed out, the ritual representations of local worship cults.

Since its removable structure was initially built with light, perishable materials during the archaic period, archaeological evidence alone is not enough to coherently explain the *skené* as one of the essential elements of theatrical activities: hence the need for a cross-reading of literary tradition, epigraphic documentation, and figurative testimonies which were often represented by vase paintings.

Unlike other technical terms coined specifically for the new architectural forms, the term *skené* (tent), whose origin may perhaps be connected to *skiá* (shadow), which is related to Indo-Iranian forms, and is derived from everyday language. The term, somewhat exotically, appears for the first time in the *Persians* of Aeschylus (472 BC) – Homer, for example, uses κλισίη (*klisíe*, hut) – which spread as a synonym of 'military tent'. According to an old hypothesis of Oscar Broneer (1944, pp. 305-12), taken up again in more recent times (Polacco 1990, p. 161; Camp 2001, p. 101), its first use in technical language could be related to the tent of the Persian king Xerxes which was left to Mardonius, and which, after the defeat of Mardonius at the battle of Plataea, ended up as booty to be shared out among the Greeks. It could have been brought to Athens and placed in the sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus on the southern slopes of the Acropolis given the flat nature of the site and the heterologous cult of the god. Pausanias (1.20.4), in speaking of the *Odeion*, built by Pericles to the east of the theatre for the musical agonies, refers to the king's tent that inspired the Periclean building. Possibly used in representations of the Phrynichus' *Phoenician Women* (476 BC) and by the *Persians* themselves, the Persian *skené* is thought to have been replaced by a structure that maintained some of the s*kené's* most salient characteristics. As late as the 4th century BC, Xenophon BC recalls the imposing wooden poles that characterized the contemporary *skené*, comparing them to Cyrus's siege towers (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 6.1.54).

Since it changes space on the stage, the introduction of the *skené* represents a turning point in dramatic representation. For the Athenian theatre, its presence is believed to have been agreed on from at least 458 BC, the year of the representation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, whose dramatic development presupposed a flexible structure required to complement and integrate the development of its narrative action (see below). Whether it was in use before this time is debated. Aeschylus' refined use of it in the *Oresteia* has led to the assumption that it existed even earlier (Pöhlmann 2003, pp. 31-40; Bakola 2014, pp. 1-36; Moretti 2014, p. 199). It is therefore likely that in the theatre of Dionysus, at least from the time of the Aeschylus trilogy (which represents a turning point), there was a simple wooden structure to the south of the terrace of the old orchestra, perpendicularly to the koilon (Gogos 2008, p. 45). Used for changing costumes and masks as well as for the performance itself, it was probably parallelepiped in shape and covered by a flat roof with openings both towards the orchestra and the rear, which allowed the passage of the actors and their

possible entrance from the side entrances (Moretti 1999-2000, pp. 397-98; Moretti 2000, p. 298). The flat roof, almost an anticipation of the future *logeion*, served as an additional performing space when required by the action, as in the case of the nuncio informing Queen Clytemnestra of the king's arrival by sea in the Agamemnon. The flexibility of the structure, able to present with appropriately painted elements setting up the scene, was meant to facilitate changes in the stage setting. Perhaps the experience of Aeschylus itself contributed to giving stable form to the stage building.

Pericles' intervention towards to middle of the 5th BC in the area on the southern slopes of the Acropolis, retraced by recent investigations (Papastamati-von Moock 2014, Papastamati-von Moock 2015), was not limited to the construction of the adjacent *Odeion*. It also involved the ancient wooden theatre in the sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus, and included, in an unfinished project, some use of stone material. Up to this point, it was believed that both the *skené* and the entire theatre building, had reached a complete, lithic form by the period of Lycurgus, i.e. in the second half of the 4th century BC. The case of Cyrene instead confirms the early lithification of the *skené*: here, in the so-called Greek Theatre, new research has demonstrated the existence of a lithic *skené* already in the middle, if not in the second quarter, of the 5th century BC. (Ensoli 2011, p. 80, fig. 4; Ensoli 2012, p. 111, fig. 3).

In Athens, the reinterpretation of the archaeological data makes the existence of a stable structure plausible in the final phase of the period of Pericles. This structure was partly built with non-perishable and inexpensive materials, with a superstructure, perhaps made of bricks, an open door in the rear, and a façade with wooden and terracotta elements. A fragment of a goblet krater of Tarentine origin from around 350 BC, preserved in the M. von Wagner-Museum, inv. H 4696, in Würzburg (Beazley Archive Pottery Database 1007015), which shows a portico with Ionic columns, a Doric frieze, and a coffered ceiling on the inside of which one can glimpse an open double-leaf door, gives an idea of how it must have appeared. Xenophon's reference confirms that at least until about 360-55 BC, when the *Cyropaedia* was written, parts of the *skené* were still made of wood. Moreover, it cannot be excluded that there were *paraskenia*, lateral foreparts, projecting over the orchestra during this phase. It is indeed probable that, given the modernization climate in which late classical theatre developed, when the old tragedies were regularly performed, the texts of the three tragedians canonized, and their statues erected, the material components of that theatre, at least in their essential forms, were also preserved at the time of the reorganization. Wooden panels probably brought together the set of painted elements that made up the backdrop, where references to the stage setting were briefly shown, contributing to the dramas' stage setting variations.

The late classical *skené*, beginning around 350 BC, and completed during the rule of Lycurgus, exploited the rear wall of the Periclean scene and the foundation on which the scenic machine was positioned. It had a parallelepiped shape with a flat roof, a façade that consisted of a central section without a colonnade but containing three doors on which protruding *paraskenia* were connected with pillars connected with columns with capitals, and topped by a Doric frieze of which fragments remain. The opening identified between the back wall of the *skené* and the adjacent stoà separating the theatre and sanctum areas must have been functional to the scenic machine's movement (Papastamati-von Moock 2014; Papastamati-von Moock 2015; Papastamati-von Moock 2018, pp. 100-6).

In the final decades of the 4th century BC, a *skené* with a more articulated plan became more widespread beyond Attica. Its origin can perhaps be traced to Argolis or Macedonia, from where a renewal in the architectural forms of the theatre in the second third of the 4th century BC appears to have originated (Moretti 2014, pp. 107-37). As recorded on vascular paintings, this typology comprises a two-story building connected to a wooden or stone *proskenion* [προσκήνιον] in front of the stage and sometimes framed by lateral projecting structures such as at Epidaurus or Sycion. An anticipation of the two-level typology, due not to performative necesities, but to the orographic contingencies of the site that required the lowering of the orchestra and the construction of a wooden *skené* on two levels with a

narrow proto-*proskenion*, if one follows the reading of Elizabeth R. Gebhard (2015, pp. 111-12, figs. 8-10), might be found in the Pan-Hellenic sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia, already at the end of the 5th century BC.

The proliferation of theatrical buildings in the Hellenistic period reveals a wider and more varied series of forms and structures, and the new type of *skené* becomes an integral, though not exclusive, part of the theatre complex. The different ground floor layouts in the preserved examples, which may include one or more rooms, indicate the scant importance of the interior for theatrical performance in this phase. Lack of substantial evidence makes it more difficult to define the second level. However, it can be imagined as a space enclosed on three sides by walls and communicating with the upper floor of the *proskenion* through three or five openings. The well-documented 41.5m long and 11m wide 2nd century BC *skené* in Ephesus has a long corridor on its lower floor, accessible through three openings from the *proskenion* from which six of the eight rooms, divided into two blocks by a narrow passage, could be accessed: the two lateral sides were equipped with stairs; the upper floor, which has not been preserved, probably included three large central rooms which also opened onto a corridor and two smaller rooms at the ends where the stairs were located (Hofbauer 2015). In Dodona, on the other hand, during the first phase at the beginning of the 3rd century BC, was a rectangular-shaped space, approximately 6m deep, delimited by four pillars on its façade. At the ends of these two *paraskenia* were positioned; on the opposite long side, to the south, was a Doric portico with octagonal pillars (Dakaris 1960, pp. 26-7; Dakaris 1971, pp. 59-62). The presence of a wooden proscenium in this phase, as initially proposed by Sotirios Dakaris, has been questioned as has the original layout of the external portico (Gogos 1989, pp. 120-5; Gogos 2008, pp. 76-77; Dieterle 2007, p. 145). At the end of the 3rd century BC, an Ionic portico, a second floor, and two further small *paraskenia* were added on the front.

The new construction built in Athens is less sophisticated than the previous one and includes a *proskenion* and perhaps a second level. At Delos, on the three free sides of the building, a Doric portico of the same height as the *proskenion* was later inserted (Fraisse-Moretti 2007, pp. 65-68). In Sicion, where another example of a "sunken" orchestra is found, a ramp allowed access to the upper level of the *skené* and the *proskenion* at a height of about 3 m. An example of mobile *skené* can be found for example in Messene. Here the stage building, which did not have lithic structures before the 1st century AD and were still made of wood in the 2nd century BC, was wheeled along tracks when necessary and, when not in use, housed in the *skenotheke* used for its storage (Themelis 2015, pp. 207-9; Yoshitake 2016, pp. 119-33).

The Augustan period represents the transition from the now traditional forms to the new widespread imperial age models when the *skené* was extended, reducing the orchestra space.

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[ALEXIA LATINI]

The stage, as the space where the dramatic action unfolds, is a convention. Even if the separation between stage and public, or the presence of spectators as in a modern global participatory *happening* were abolished, this would still be a constant in any modern or older realization, regardless of theatrical location. A constant element of realism in the theatre of antiquity is the fact that the scenic convention always refers to an open space, in front of a palace, a temple, a house, and never represents an enclosed place, or only and exclusively the interior of a building. As understood in its broader current sense, the modern term 'scene' is derived from a specific architectural structure of ancient Greek theatre which, at the time of its first realization and use, contributed to revolutionizing both the dramatic text and all ancient theatrical techniques. The term σκηνή (Pollux *Onomasticon*, 4.123) was introduced into Italian, probably through Etruscan, from the Latin *scaena* and is not entirely identifiable or superimposable on the English *Stage* or the German *Bühne* which initially referred to an elevated structure such as the λογεῖον [*logheion*] in the Hellenistic theatre, i.e. a raised platform on which the actors act now without close contact with the chorus. Even before being a poet and writer, the ancient author was already active in the theatre where he recited, directed, and, in a manner of speaking, "performed directly on the stage", and was well aware of the functionality with which this structural element could and had to interact in the dramatic text, and which, in turn, conceived, created and seen directly in *performance*. However, to understand what precisely the σκηνή (*skenè*) was, and identify its functional versatility as it changed over time, it is necessary to obtain and collate information from different sources: archaeological data of the excavations of the theatre both in and beyond Athens (see *above*), limited source derived information, and, above all, the texts of the tragedies and ancient comedies.
Since most of the city's theatrical festivals in the classical period took place in the theatre of Dionysus in Athens, while the more than 200 ancient stone theatres present a very late Hellenistic - Roman structural *facies*, *i.e.* when the theatre was also used for events other than dramatic performances, only the convergence of the texts with the archaeological record of the Athens theatre will be examined (see *above*). The initial, provisional construction, which would later become the σκηνή (*skenè*), served only a somewhat limited logistical purpose, i.e. it was a rectangular building, in all probability little more than a shack containing equipment such as objects and ornaments for performances and used as a place where, above all, actors could change their costumes. Not only could the actors change, but they also had to. While for ancient comedies we have to assume a larger number of characters, including the silent ones and extras, all tragedies and from Aeschylus to Euripides needed no more than a maximum of three actors. Even though images depicting members

of a chorus do not all refer to theatrical representations with absolute certainty, the changing of actors or their costumes is well documented in vascular iconography of mostly Attic origin dating from the middle of the 5th century (Pickard Cambridge [1968] 1996, pp. 191-215, figg. 32-35). It is thanks to Wilamowitz (1886 = 1935, pp. 148-72, Taplin 1977, pp. 452-59, Medda I 2017, pp. 140-47, but see also Libran Moreno 2002) that the birth of the *skenè* in ancient theatre has been identified in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, preformed in 458 BC. The first and second plays of the trilogy, respectively the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephori*, have the façade of the palace of the Atreidae at Argo as the backdrop, which was not simply an actual or imaginary backdrop, but a physical rectangular construction reminiscent of the palace itself and where, at the end of the plays (*Agamen*., v. 1372 ff.; *Choeph*., vv. 973-1076), Agamemnon and Cassandra were murdered by Clytemnestra and Aegystus in the first, and Clytemnestra by Oreste in the second.

While in the third play, the *Eumenides*, the interior does not appear to be active as a dramatic space; only the temple of Apollo at Delphi appears in the background, where Orestes went to obtain instructions on how to purify himself from matricide: this space, i.e. the whole scenic space, would seem to represent both the exterior and the interior of Apollo's temple, which in vv. 65-234 is described as fully visible (Di Benedetto 1987, Di Benedetto 1995, pp. 160-61, Di Benedetto-Medda; 1997, pp. 87-95, differently Taplin 1977, pp. 362-74, Brown 1982, Scullion 1994, pp. 77-85). In addition, in both of the first two plays the events inside the royal palace of the Atreidae were clearly heard by the chorus located outside, in the orchestra, and which commented on the killings and cries coming from the house (*Agamemnon*, vv. 1343 ff., *Choeph*., vv. 870 ff.). However, the previous Aeschylean tragedies (Pickard Cambridge 1946, pp. 30-47, Di Benedetto Medda 1997, pp. 79-100, Libran Moreno 2002), from the *Persians*, where Atossa arrives on the scene in a chariot (Di Benedetto-Medda 1997, pp. 80-81), to the *Suppliants* and *Seven against Thebes* all took place in an open space and did not presuppose any building whose interior contributes to the definition of drama. Lending itself to be used in such a way that the action performed inside was either told or made visible to the spectators, the *skenè* ceased to be a merely static element of the architecture of the ancient theater and interacted with the dramaturgical creation of the text itself. The *skenè*, as in Leopardi's *Infinito*, amplifies the imagination by allowing the space traditionally dedicated to dramatic action in the background to expand and be integrated into the imagination itself; in addition, all the other dramatic spaces, as well as the characters acting within them are characterized differently. With the invention of the skené, therefore, not only was the action horizontally distributed over several spaces (the roof of the building was also used vertically, cf. *supra* and *infra*) and the internal space enhanced, but they also completely severed the limits imposed by natural topography of the ancient stone built outdoor theaters since an interior could now be used in realistic scenic conventions. Furthermore, it was now possible to interact or communicate an interior, whether visible or not, with an outside represented by the orchestra and visible to the spectators, as well as with an extra-scenic outside the theater, beyond the *eisodoi* (the exits), beyond which one imagined the space outside the visible performance from where the chorus, and sometimes the characters, entered and exited. In short, the *skenè* constituted a scenic form which revolutionized the dramatic space, the composition, and the realization of an ancient drama. In the *Oresteia*, but especially in the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus built his entire tragedy around the dramatic novelty of this interior space: in the final exodus he gets Cassandra to evoke, before entering the house and finding death in her disconnected alteration as a prophetess, the vision of the imminent deaths in the palace of the Atreides, and also makes her retrace the old family massacres that had already occurred in the same place (*Agamemnon*, vv. 1072-330), thus anticipating the sinister value of the house and of the background which now also takes on a temporal dimension. From the house, i.e. from the skené, the characters enter and exit: Clytemnestra enters it in the *Agamemnon* but does not leave again (v. 1673), unlike Oreste who, in the *Choephori*, leaves immediately after the matricide for Delphi and then to Athens to save and purify himself (vv. 1050-64); at the level of theatrical semiology, therefore, these entrances and exits are charged in a profound

way with negative omens, above all when they occur in the direction of the palace. For example, in *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra prepares to take revenge and she casts her deceptive net over her husband, Agamemnon, the victorious hero of Troy, now exhausted from the all the grief and mourning he has endured. The devious and alluring wife entices him into the Palace and by stepping on the royal purple clothes of oriental splendor, not as a Greek sovereign, but as the Asian Priam (in the classical conception) almost forcing him to commit an act of *hybris,* a sort of contemn towards Gods (vv. 914-44). After his suffering and understanding the vanity of glory and wealth Agamemnon hesitates before giving in to his wife's deception. In a sign of respect and ritual purity, he removes his shoes. Defenseless against pitfalls, i.e. without the foot protection from which an ancient hero would never separate himself, he advances across the carpets and enters the palace (vv. 914-44, see Medda I 2017, pp. 161-62, Bonanno 2013). The last remaining image of the king is his solemn walk towards the bloodbath for which he is destined, while the red of the purple clothes beneath his feet guides him into the palace, evoking the premonition of his imminent death. It was thanks to the presence of the *skenè*, at a distance of more than 50 meters from the most distant spectators and within the full view of the orchestra and the available scenic space, that the meaning and value of the action, where what was seen, sight (ὄψις), cooperated in the decoding of what was said and heard, the voice.

While the disruptive meaning of the *skenè* in ancient dramaturgy is evident, its practical use appears much less clear. In the *Agamemnon* (vv. 1372-98) Clytemnestra appears in the house, in the place where she had committed the crime, first showing the corpse of her husband next to her (still in the bathtub in which she had killed and covered him with the net she had used to trap him, v. 1379), and then, immediately afterwards drawing attention to the second corpse, that of Cassandra, his concubine, (vv. 1338-47). In the *Choephori* (vv. 973-1043) instead, it is Orestes who appears inside, near the corpses of his mother and Aegisthus, beside which he lays out the blood-stained robes of his father. In both plays the interior of the *skenè* became clearly visible to the spectators, even though the ancient text gives no indication of how this could have happened; a scholium to the *The Choephori* (schol. vet. **M** in *Choeph*. 973) states that in the scene of this tragedy the *skenè* was opened and the bodies were taken out with the ἐκκύκλημα (*ekkyklêma*), a machine equipped with a rotating carriage on a roller which allowed objects and people to be visible by taking them outside. However, use of this device is only documented with certainty in the last thirty years of the 5th century (Medda I 2017, pp. 140-47, Belardinelli 2000, Lucarini 2016). The dramatic sequence of the *Agamemnon*, with the inside of the *skenè* visible to the audience, is rather long and on several times Clytemnestra insists on the presence of corpses next to her (moreover Agamemnon is still in the bathtub where he had been killed). Therefore, once the use of the *ekkyklêma* is excluded as being unlikely, as it seems to make reference to a later staging of Aeschylus' drama, it should be either admitted that the *skenè* could allow for a timely and rapid opening, which was also quite wide and visible and not limited to that of the central door, or, it is necessary to hypothesize that the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra, above all in the *Agamemnon,* but also those of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in the *Choephori* (where, however, the following recited section is shorter and Orestes immediately leaves the house, see Garvie 1988, pp. xli-liv), were carried out by attendants so as to be clearly visible to the spectators (differently Medda I 2017, pp. 140-47). In the case of the *Agamemnon,* the hypothesis, although complex, could find only one element of support in the text, because Clytemnestra, after claiming to be at the exact spot where she had stabbed Agamemnon and facing what she had accomplished (v. 1379), first, with timely deictics to the chorus, draws attention to the corpse of Agamemnon in the bathtub (vv. 1404-6), then, to the corpse of Cassandra, (vv. 1439-44) shortly after some verbal exchanges with the chorus. In general, in this period it is quite likely to imagine a *skenè* structured with a façade facing the orchestra, with removable or easily interchangeable wooden panels as may be required for any dramaturgical and scenic necessity (Di Benedetto 1984, Medda I 2017, pp. 140-47). The problem, in fact, of the opening of the skenè (only the central door? Or a wider portion? How and by how much could it be opened to allow clear visibility of the

inside?) comes up again in the second half of the 5th century when it was no longer just a wooden construction, but already had masonry foundations: in the *Heracles* of Euripides (datable between 426 and 419 BC), where it is assumed that its opening (or still the removal of the external panels) involves the visibility of an extended interior, described in detail, according to a manner that is difficult to reconcile with the opening of the central door alone: even if the action is foretold by the story of the messenger (*Heracles* vv. 921-1015), with the opening of the *skenè* (vv. 1029-30, in which the order to open the skenè by removing the door latches and making the recesses of the house visible is explicitly stated, while in other dramas the Greek verb for opening doors ἀνοίγω/διοίγω 'to open the doors' is used; cf. Di Benedetto-Medda 1997, p. 133) the bodies of Megara and the sons of Heracles could be seen, brutally killed by him in a fit of a madness, while the hero appeared tied to a column inside a house, described as half destroyed and collapsed (see vv. 1035-56), so much so that at first neither the terrified chorus nor Amphitryon enter. In fact, they do so only after realizing that Heracles has now come back to his senses and is harmless (see vv. 1081-124). From the time when the *skenè* becomes a fixed architectural structure in the ancient theater, functional to the dramaturgy, probably it must also be more or less presupposed in all the dramas following the *Oresteia* (cf. *supra*); it seems surely compatible with the tragedies and the comedies that have been transmitted in full and, in settings where the drama was performed in an open field rather than indoors. In cases where the *skenè* did not appear dramaturgically active, it is very likely that panels painted with the desired scenography were used. According to what remains, evidence would seem to confirm the sources, in which for the most ancient times, there was a close collaboration between Aeschylus and the painter Agatarco of Samo, author of a treatise on the perspective (see Vitruvius VII, praef.10); while Aristotle (*Poet*. 1449 a 15) attributes the invention of scenography to Sophocles, although the philosopher's statement is without further explanation, it is certain that *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus* open with the almost pictorial description of a painting, that is, a group of characters positioned on stage and the evocation of a backdrop (cf. Di Benedetto-Medda 1997, pp. 105-6; Cozzoli 2019). On the basis of this reconstructed hypothesis (the removal of the panels), least until the first half of the 5th century BC, (removal of panels), the speed of scene changes within the same drama would be much better explained, as for example, the *Eumenides*, which was first staged in front of the temple of Apollo in Delphi (see v. 235), then in front of that of Athena in Athens, and later in the exodus on the Acropolis. An analogous change of scene is attested in Sophocles' *Ajax*: the drama opens in front of the tent of Ajax, the inside later made visible with the carcasses of the dead animals, when Tecmessa gives way to the choir (vv. 344-47) which the hero, blinded by madness, confuses the Atreides, while between v. 814 and 815, with the departure of the choir and all the other characters, the place of action moves to a grove where the protagonist will commit suicide and his body will be found (among other things not immediately by Tecmessa, Teucer and the choir looking for him): in the second part of the play this is the only dramatically active place, while Ajax's tent seems offstage (Di Benedetto-Medda 1997, pp. 103-5, Finglass 2011 pp. 11-22, Medda 2015, Maduit 2015, pp. 47-74, diversamente Scullion 1994, pp. 89-128, Scullion 2015, pp. 75-110, in generale Most-Ozbek 2015). With several performances following each other in rapid succession and ranging from tragedies, satyr dramas, replicas of the works of Aeschylus, and comedies, the conditions of ancient Festivals would not have allowed for the easy dismantling of a partially masonry-built structure. However, more limited scenographic interventions could be possible from a simplified, fixed base construction; or, as in the rather problematic case of *Ajax*, when we are unable to establish whether the skenè was still made of wood, the backdrop of the set depicting an open space could have been equipped with temporary accessory constructions, such as tents of military camps, which could be easily removed from the spectators' view for immediate scene changes. Therefore, even in open-air environments such as *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles (406 BC), or even the earlier *Hecuba* (424 BC) and the *Trojans* (415 BC) ca.) of Euripides, whose background is the Argive camp, or, more specifically, Agamemnon's tent, the existence of such a

construction must be presupposed. It should also be noted that the Greek term used to indicate the tent had by now consistently become either στεγαί [*stegai*] o μέλαθρον [*melathron*] (roof, house), οἶκος [*oikos*] (house), and never κλισίη [*klisie*] (Homeric term for tent); this last word now rarely appears and when it does it is usually in the plural and used, in a very general way, to indicate a camp. The presence of the *skenè* is sometimes problematic, as in the *Hecuba*, where two tents are mentioned in the scenography of the drama: that of Agamemnon, and the one from which Hecuba would call Polyxena (v. 171), announcing that she was to be handed over to the Greeks to be sacrificed on the tomb of Achilles. However, here the Greek term used αὐλαί refers to an open courtyard, a fence, or a porch, which could be part of a king's tent (see Homer *Iliad* 24, vv. 671-76). In the *Trojans* (v. 297), Talthybius, having come to carry out the Greeks' orders on the prisoners, sees the glow of a fire through the tents and is afraid that women might set fire to it and burn themselves to death. It must therefore be assumed that the *skenè*, apart from sounds coming from inside (at least in the first *skenè* period cf. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1342-72), also allowed for the perception of visual effects, according to an analogous situation that is also documented in the *Orestes* of Euripides (408 BC), where it does not represent a tent but once again the palace of the Atrides (v. 1543). In addition to the wider central door, the *skenè* was certainly equipped with a second side door, which already appears in the *Choephori* as a place in the house reserved for women (see v. 885); the second door is exploited above all in comedy, for example in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, where the it corresponds to the house of the protagonist, Strepsiades, the other being at the entrance of the Socratic School (the *Phrontisterion*). The second door could also have been active in the *Hecuba* and the *Trojan Women*, where several tents from which the characters appear, are mentioned. This would be fair to assume based on the words used, στεγαί or μέλαθρον, οἶκος, unless these tents are real temporary tents on the background of a *skenè*, generically painted to represent encampment (cf. Di Benedetto-Medda 1997, pp. 129-30, pp. 137-39); nor is it unusual that Euripides, in the more frequent use of the second door, was inspired in some cases, but not in all of them, by the staging of the Comedies. It is however, unlikely that the second gate can be identified in the *Andromache* with the area of the altar and the temple of Thetis, next to the Neoptolemus Palace, since the initial and central part of the drama takes place against this backdrop and the tragedy could certainly not have been performed for the most part on only one side of the orchestra, obscuring the view to half of the spectators (Di Benedetto-Medda 1997, pp. 127-29).

The upper part of the *skenè*, accessed via a staircase on the non-visible side, could be used in various ways: *ex machina* divinities appeared there, and, unless it was an accessory construction next to the palace (as has also been proposed cf. Medda II 2017, pp. 9-10), so did temporary constructions, such as the turret from which, in the *Agamemnon*, the lookout lit the fire signals announcing the victorious return of the king and the army (vv. 1-38). Antigone, with a servant, climbs on the roof of the *skenè* in Euripides' *Phoeniciae* to see the Thebans and Argives lined up at the Seven Gates of Thebes (vv. 99-105). The cavern where Philoctetes lives alone in Sophocles' tragedy of the same name must have been raised on the roof (vv. 26-28). Evadne plausibly hurls herself from the top of the cavern onto the pyre of her husband Capaneo in Euripides' *Suppliants* (vv. 980-1024), and Strepsiades climbs onto the roof in the finale of the *Clouds* to set Socrates' School (the *Phrontisterion*) on fire (vv. 1503-4). The skenè could also be equipped with a window from which actors appeared and which appears most probably to have been used in the *Clouds* (v. 1485) and perhaps in the *Assembly Women* (v. 330 ff., v. 877 ff.). Some tragedies, in particular *Ion* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* of Euripides, present the detailed description of the friezes that adorned the façade of the temple represented by the *skenè*: in the *Ion* this is entrusted to the chorus (vv. 175-217), and in the prologue of *Iphigenia in Tauris* Orestes and Pylades comment with horror on the remains of human victims hanging under the temple cornice like macabre trophies (vv. 66-122). However, the visible façade of the *skenè* could hardly represent such detailed representations, and in both cases, we are probably dealing with simple ekphrasis verbal descriptions of the spectator's memories or figurative fantasies of well-known monuments

or myths (Basta Donzelli 2010, Ieranò 2010). While the use of the *skenè* is less sophisticated in satirical drama, which is, by nature, pastoral and foreign to the city, in comedy it appears more imaginative and fantastical than in tragedy. In comedy the *skenè* is more generic and less restrictive (as in *Peace* and in *The Frogs*). While the backdrop remains unchanged, the virtual change of location is understood through purely verbal descriptions by one or two actors or even by an extension of the dramatic section ('refocusing of the scene', cf. Belardinelli 2023, pp. 118-21). Already in *Peace* (421 BC), the protagonist Trygaeus, on the wings of a giant beetle, moves from his home, which is represented by the *skenè* at the beginning of the drama, to then land at the dwelling of Zeus, which coincides with *skenè*, and, which is, in fact, the only house to be depicted in the background. In the *Frogs* (405 BC), through the gags of Dionysus and his servant Xanthius, a fantastic journey to the afterlife, filled with monstrous and wondrous encounters, make their first stop at the house of Heracles, depicted on the skenè, after which the spectators are then brought, or rather, brought back, through a totally virtual itinerary imagined by the orchestra, to the front of the same house, which, however, in the second part of the comedy now becomes the palace of Pluto and Persephone. The dramaturgical role of the skenè became stagnant and eventually underwent a period of crisis in the 5th century (Cozzoli 2019). In Euripides' last work, the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, produced posthumously by his son in 405 BC, the *skenè* depicts a tent in Agamemnon's encampment in Aulis where the entire play takes place; characters enter and leave the tent with its ostentatious metatheatrical link to *Orestea* representing the Atreides palace before it becomes the Aeschylean 'backstage' (since the dramatic events concern the previous moment of the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aulis). However, in the later tragedies, the *skenè* had a completely different function. It was no longer the place of tragic and dramatic action never visible to the spectators and where characters experienced their dramas and passions, which were then externalized in dialogues or songs on the orchestra. It is inside the skenè, hidden from sight, that Agamemnon is assailed by doubts and torments and where he writes a second letter asking his wife and daughter not to join him (vv. 1-164); here Clytemnestra gives vent to her pain and reflects on past events that led to her marriage with Agamemnon, her relationship with her husband, before openly reproaching them: it is here that Iphigenia would like to return to, in order not to show herself publicly to Achilles, her false promised groom, and where she hides and bursts into her tears after learning the real reason why her father summoned her for the sacrifice to Artemis (v. 1340); inside, in a way that is neither visible, not narrated, but only intuited, she then the reflects and begins to voluntarily accept the sacrifice, even if the manifestation of the decision takes place (and can only do so) outside, on the external stage (vv. 1098-102 and 1475-531); and, it is from the *skenè* that the servant who had delivered the first letter to summon Clytemnestra and Iphigenia suddenly bursts out, and from where he should have brought the second letter to reveal the arcana of the 'backstage', nullifying the devious secrets and deceptions of death (vv. 855-95). It would seem that Euripides (or others, if the tragedy, as is generally believed, was completed to be represented after the poet's death) had dismantled the typical scenic function that the *skenè* had fulfilled since the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, perhaps rearranging it only because, by representing previous mythical events, it was unsuited for the demonic value of the Aeschylean background: it therefore no longer acted as dramaturgically active but only as a psychological moment where motions of the soul and mind, doubts and painful torments, and the emotions of ancient heroes were acted out.

By now, the end of the dramaturgical function of the skenè, without pre-established realistic settings, had become a hybrid foreshadowing of modern stage conventions. The architecture of the ancient theatre coincided with its evolution as a complete artistically elaborated ornamental stone backdrop devoid of any dramatic meaning; one notes in the same period, on the threshold of the 4th century BC, with the peripatetic technicalization, an expansion of the semantic field of the term *skenè*. It ceases to indicate a particular structural element of the theatrical building, and means, as it still does today, everything that occurs, is visible, or acted, 'on stage', as denoted by a rather widespread idiomatic expression ἐπὶ σκηνής (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1460 a 15 and Polybius, 30.13).

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Latin Theatre.

The inescapable starting point for studying the *scaena* of the Roman theatre are the well-known passages from Vitruvius' *De architectura* in which the difference with its counterpart in the Greek theatre and its articulation is explained (5.3.1-3 and 5.3.6). These matters have been widely discussed since the first studies on the Roman theatre and taken up in the modern scientific literature (among others: Bieber 1961; Frézouls 1982; Courtois 1989, pp. 9-14; Sear 1990; Gros 1994).
According to Vitruvius, the planimetric construction of the two types of layout is based on equidistant geometric figures inscribed in the circle given by the diameter of the orchestra: in the case of the Greek theatre, they are three squares, in the Roman theatre, four triangles, determining – with very different outcomes – the reference points for the location of the main constituent elements of the theatre. If dealing with the Roman theatre, the base of the triangle placed on the axis of the theatre determines the location of the stage, the seven vertices of the triangles facing the cavea identify the position of the *scalaria*, while the three central vertices on the opposite side define the axes of the three stage doors: *valva regia and hospitaliorum*.
Research for practical applications of this Vitruvian planimetric scheme has been almost a constant both in studies of specific monuments and in more general works on theatre architecture. However, there have been no closely matching correspondences to the text, since in the same monument, some parts of the position may coincide with that suggested by the treatise writer, while others are entirely different.
Because of the inconsistencies between Vitruvius' text and the archaeological evidence (together with the not infrequently exasperated desire to identify more or less absolute design models), there has been no lack of proposals for alternative schemes (Small 1983; Amucano 1991), based on more or less complicated elements. However, even these theorisations do not prove convincing and applicable to all Roman theatres, whose already considerable number (see Ciancio Rossetto-Pisani Sartorio 1994-1996; Tosi 2003; Sear 2006) is bound to increase with new investigations.
Apart from design-related aspects, Vitruvius proposed for the stage of the Roman theatre an articulation of podium (*pulpitum*), stage (*proscaenium*) and front of stage (*scaenae frons*), a scheme which, although with some variations, would almost constantly reappear later.
Undoubtedly, this recurrence of the stage in the various Roman theatrical complexes was in many ways conditioned by the new interpretation of the performance space and the substantial change – from a functional point of view – of the accesses. The gap between the auditorium and the stage, which in the Greek theatre corresponded to the *parodoi* (uncovered and providing the entrance to the chorus) in the Roman theatre disappeared, giving way to the *aditus*: covered passages built within the same structure as the cavea. In this type of building, what had been the centre and focal point of the Greek theatre (the orchestra) is now a *résidu géométrique*, according to the felicitous expression coined in Frézouls 1982 (p. 368): almost a cleared space between spectators and actors, but which, clearly, could be used during classical performances.

Representational needs and a different relationship between the most frequent performances and the spectators were probably the reason for the stage's height, which was decidedly lower (about 1.5 m) than that found in Hellenistic theatres in Greece and Asia Minor and, perhaps, closer to those of the stages of the theatres of southern Italy in the 4th century BC, as seems to be deduced from some phlyax vase paintings. In any case, in Roman theatres, the front of the stage, now firmly constructed in masonry, is initially rectilinear and then enlivened by niches (rectilinear and/or curvilinear), adorned by elaborate architectural decorations and, not infrequently, embellished with sculptural reliefs showing cycles of Dionysus (as in Athens) or genre motifs together with others belonging to imperial propaganda (e.g. in Sabratha).

The curtain arrangements (*aulaeum*), found archaeologically, especially in Italy and in the western provinces, are highly innovative in Roman theatre. These were complicated mechanisms, of which almost only the lithic recesses for wooden poles remain; these supported the curtain sheets, which, unlike in modern theatres, were raised from the bottom upwards with elaborate systems of ropes and counterweights (Formigé 1923; Ducaroy-Amable 1960; Fincker-Moretti 2010).

The articulation of the front of the stage proposed by Vitruvius for the elevation is undoubtedly more in keeping with the architectural traditions (both contemporary and later) than the scheme proposed for the general plan of the theatre. For the front of the stage, the indications offered by the author start from different assumptions, with two fixed parameters: the height of the *proscaenium* (which must not exceed five feet) and the length of the stage (which must be twice the diameter of the orchestra). The vertical articulation of the *frons scaenae* depends on the diameter of the orchestra. It is essentially dictated by aspects of harmony and balance, providing for the superimposition of two orders (to which a third order may eventually be added) of different heights, whose individual compositional parts are limited by well-defined dimensional relationships.

There are still uncertainties about the origins of the front of the stage of the Roman theatre, which essentially consisted of a colonnade on one or more storeys. It is entirely different from the form and conception of that of the Greek theatre. It probably derived from the theatre of Hellenistic Sicily, developed in Campania in the 2nd century BC, from the theatres built in the republican age in the sanctuaries of central Italy, and subsequently from the temporary theatres that distinguished the performances in Rome between the 2nd century BC and the middle of the 1st century AD (Sear 2006, p. 83). Unfortunately, these hypotheses are not supported by material evidence, as the oldest phases of the scenes in the Campania theatres were subject to restoration and reconstruction, thus cancelling the original aspects. With regard to the scenes of the temporary urban theatres, literary sources note their magnificence, which could be manifested in coverings in precious materials, such as silver for the scene of the theatre of Gaius Antonius Hybrida, gold for that of Marcus Petreius and ivory for that of Quintus Catulus (Valerius Maximus, 2.4.6). In addition, columns formed an architectural backdrop, a solution probably adopted for the first time with the edict of L. Licinius Crassus in 105-102 BC (Pliny, *Natural History*, 17.1; 36.3), and becoming progressively more and more consistent until reaching impressive numbers, as in the case of the theatre erected in 58 BC by M. Aemilius Scaurus (Pliny, *Natural History*, 36.2; 36.50).

What is certain is that already with the first stable theatre in Rome, the Theatre of Pompey, dedicated in 55 BC (and therefore the only one to have been seen completed and in operation by Vitruvius), the stage and its *frons* must have reached a final form. This is confirmed not only by the subsequent urban theatres (Marcellus', used for the first time in 17 BC, and Balbus', dedicated in 13 BC), but above all by the many theatres of the Augustan age investigated in Italy and in the western provinces (Bejor 1979a), which offered, though with some variations, very similar articulations. If we exclude the theatres built in the Roman period in the Asian provinces (with the peculiarity of having five stage doors instead of the usual three), the most significant difference in the front of the theatres

can be found in their layout, which can be rectilinear, with the *valva regia* framed by a large niche, or animated by large niches (Sear 2006, pp. 83-91).
Closely related to the *scaenae frontes* are other aspects that characterise this structural part of Roman theatres. Among these, the material used is not secondary. Besides the cases in which locally quarried stones were used, the use of imported marble and granite, not infrequently granted by the emperor or his *entourage* in order to promote the monumental qualification of urban centres or as an act of evergetism in the context of new constructions or restorations, is also relevant (Pensabene 2005; Pensabene 2007). This connection is also evident in the sculptural decoration of the stage buildings, which mostly consisted of single representations or entire cycles of statues of the dynastic family (Bejor 1979b; Fuchs 1987) and was used for imperial propaganda.

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