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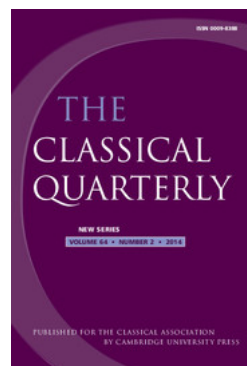
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James Turney Allen

The Classical Quarterly / Volume 1 / Issue 2-3 / July 1907, pp 226 - 228

DOI: 10.1017/S0009838800005140, Published online: 11 February 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009838800005140

How to cite this article:

James Turney Allen (1907). On the Costume of the Greek Tragic Actor in the Fifth Century b.c.. The Classical Quarterly, 1, pp 226-228 doi:10.1017/S0009838800005140

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ON THE COSTUME OF THE GREEK TRAGIC ACTOR IN THE FIFTH CENTURY B.C.

‘IN forming our estimate of tragedy, let us first consider its externals—the hideous appalling spectacle that the actor presents. His high boots raise him out of all proportion, his head is hidden under an enormous mask; his huge mouth gapes upon the audience as if he would swallow them; to say nothing of the chest-pads and stomach-pads with which he contrives to give himself an artificial corpulence lest his deficiency in this respect should emphasize his disproportionate height.’¹

These words of Lucian, written at least 150 years after Christ, have been accepted by most modern writers on the Greek drama as a substantially accurate description of the tragic actor even in the time of Aeschylus and Sophocles. This is due, no doubt, to the virtual unanimity among late writers in naming Aeschylus as the inventor of all or most of the features of the tragic costume, such as painted and awe-inspiring masks, high-soled boots and garments of great magnificence and stateliness.²

‘So successful and appropriate were his innovations,’ we are told, ‘that the tragic dress, as designed by him, continued without intermission for nearly eight hundred years to be the conventional costume of the Greek theatre.’³

The evidence for the use of the mask in the fifth century B.C. is, happily, abundant and convincing; for the high-soled boot, however, there is no such evidence, as has been made clear recently in an admirable discussion of the subject by Mr. Kendall K. Smith.⁴ After an exhaustive examination of the evidence to be gathered from literature and art, both contemporary and later, Mr. Smith sums up the results thus: ‘We have found that this boot is first represented in art at the close of the second century B.C. and then appears as a symbol of tragedy, that it is first mentioned in literature of the Imperial period, and that its use in this period is certain. We cannot be so positive with regard to the Hellenistic period, but the literature that we have knows no name for such a boot. For the fifth and fourth centuries we have more than a plausible argument against the use of such a boot. The literature of the period has no name for any special tragic boot; the drama is full of lively action which the six-inch and higher sole we are asked to believe in almost precludes; the art of the period never pictures it either as a symbol of tragedy with the mask or as the footwear of actors, and the most positive piece of evidence on either side of the question, the Piraeus Relief, represents actors with

¹ Lucian, *Περὶ Ὅρχ.* 27 (trans. of F. G. Fowler), compare also *Zeus Trag.* 41, τὰ πρόσωπα τῶν θεῶν αὐτὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐμβάτας καὶ τοὺς ποδῆρεις χιτῶνας καὶ χλαμύδας καὶ χειρίδας καὶ προγαστρίδια καὶ σωματῖα καὶ τᾶλλα, οἷς ἐκείνοι σεμνύνουσι τὴν τραγῳδίαν, ὅπερ γελοιότατον οἶμαι.

² Hor. *Ars. Poet.* 278; Suidas, *Λεξικόν*; Athen.

21 E; Philostr., *Apoll. Tyan.* vi. 11; *Vita Aeschyl.*

³ Haigh, *Trag. Drama of the Greeks*, p. 68, so also Müller, *Gr. Bühnenall.* S. 229.

⁴ The use of the high-soled shoe or buskin in Greek tragedy of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. *Harvard Studies in Class. Phil.* xvi. (1905), pp. 123 sqq.

natural, ordinary boots.¹ On the ground of this evidence the writer concludes that 'the high sole was the invention of centuries after the classical period.'

In contrast with the theory of Prof. Robert, upheld by the dubious support of four or five hypotheses,² that the Greek tragic actors employed high-soled boots in the fifth century, discarded them during the fourth century, and restored them to use again later, the conclusion reached by Mr. Smith is irresistible,³ and one grants ready acquiescence to his words when he writes: 'Who, when he thinks of the majestic simplicity of Aeschylus and the sweet beauty of Sophocles, does not feel a shrinking in his heart at the thought of their being represented by such hideous disproportionate, padded creatures as these of Robert's picture, and turn with relief and contentment to the beautiful, simple dress of the three actors on the Piraeus Relief!'⁴

But one wishes that Mr. Smith had treated this last point more fully and had stated with greater clearness the corollaries that follow his conclusion. The first of these is that, if the high-soled boots were not worn in the classical period, neither did the tragic actor pad his body in the manner and for the purpose stated by Lucian, and as shown in the familiar ivory statuette, of late date, found near Rieti.⁵

Haigh (*Gr. Theatre*,² pp. 268, 272, 280), Jevons (*Gard. and Jevons, Man. Grk. Antiq.*, p. 698), Müller (*Gr. Bühn.* S. 230), Oehmichen (*Das Bühnenwes.* S. 255), Navarre (*Dionysos*, p. 169), Opitz (*Schauspiel u. Theaterwes.* 194), and others⁶ meekly accept the description of Lucian, and cite as additional evidence the statements of Photius, *σωματεῖα τὰ ἀναπλάσματα οἷς οἱ ὑποκριταὶ διασάπτουσιν αὐτούς· οὕτως Πλάτων*, and of Pollux. iv. 115: *καὶ σκευὴ μὲν ἡ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, στολή. ἡ δ' αὐτὴ καὶ σωματίον ἐκαλεῖτο*. Unfortunately, however, neither of these statements proves anything for tragedy. Indeed the reference to Plato suggests comedy, rather. In any case, they prove nothing for the fifth century B.C.

What a ridiculous spectacle Agamemnon would have presented after the removal of his high-soled buskins,⁷ if in the manner of Lucian's actor his figure had been padded out with stomachers and chest-pads, *ὥς μὴ τοῦ μήκους ἡ ἀρρυθμία ἐν λεπτῷ μάλλον ἐλέγχοντο!*

Lucian would have held his sides for laughter at the incongruous transformation; quite as certainly, we may believe, would Phidias and Pericles have

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 163 sq.

² Based upon a plaque-painting from Herculaneum; see *Hallisches Winckelmannsprog.* 22, p. 14 sqq. The painting is published also by Wieseler, *Theatergeb. u. Denkm.* Pl. XI. 5.

³ The objections offered by Mr. H. Richards, *Class. Rev.* Mar. 1906, pp. 129 f., are not really cogent.

⁴ *Harv. Stud.* xvi. p. 162.

⁵ Published in *Mon. Ined.* xi. 13; Haigh, *Gr. Theat.*² p. 273.

⁶ Bethe (*Proleg. z. Gesch. d. Theat.* S. 320 sqq.) believes that the high-soled buskin was used in the fifth century; but one cannot follow him when he

says: 'aber unangenehm auffallen konnten diese hohen Schuhe schwerlich, da die Zuschauer ihre Blicke auf Kopf und Arme, nicht auf die Beine richten.' High soles imply a padded figure.

⁷ Aesch. *Agam.* 944 sqq. I agree with Mr. Smith (*Harv. Stud.* xvi. p. 142) who says with reference to Professor Robert's hypothesis 'that there was here only a show of taking off the shoes, and that they were kept on in reality. This hypothesis is not the natural one: it is rather the result of prejudgment of the point at issue. To one not concerned about the tragic boot the lines would certainly mean that the shoes came off; and if they came off, they could not have been high-soled.'

exclaimed in horror and derision at the sight. Yet we are asked to believe that 'however unwieldy and unnatural it [a costume like that described by Lucian] may have appeared on a closer inspection, its magnificence and dignity were especially appropriate to the ideal figures which move in the dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles'¹ and this even more absurd statement that 'the bolsters and pads were worn by tragic actors to lend dignity to their persons and were worn by comic actors for precisely the opposite purpose'²

The monuments of contemporary art, furthermore, such as the Piraeus Relief³ and the Andromeda crater,⁴ would never of themselves have suggested anything so artificial.

The second corollary follows naturally: that if the actor was not raised on high-soled buskins, nor his bulk increased by padding 'to prevent his seeming thin in comparison with his height'⁵ neither was his mask provided with an enormous onkos as in the days of the Empire (πρόσωπον ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς ἀνατενόμενον, Luc. περὶ Ὀρχ. 27). It is inconceivable that the refined aesthetic sense of the Athenian of the days of Calamis and Phidias would have permitted any such monstrosity on the tragic stage, though doubtless this was common enough in comedy, as is made clear by a glance at the two statuettes of the fifth or early fourth century, representing comic actors,⁶ and especially the vase painting of the early fourth century showing three comic actors holding their masks, one of which is of enormous size.⁷ The masks depicted on the Piraeus Relief, on the other hand, are small and of beautiful proportions.

One marvels at the persistence and prevalence of the belief, that the selfsame Greeks to whom the world stands indebted 'for the simple beauty, the sanity, the healthfulness of the ideal element'⁸ of their art—that these same Greeks could have tolerated, much less created such ungainly figures as those of the Rieti statuette and the plaque from Herculaneum. The spirit of the fifth century was that of simplicity, directness, refinement, as typified by the Apollo of the west pediment on the temple of Zeus at Olympia or the charming grave relief of Dexileos. Lucian's tragic actor, like that of the Rieti statuette, belongs, rather, to the tasteless age that saw in exaggeration a suitable expression of the imposing and the superhuman, as in the case of the Farnese Heracles by Glycon.

JAMES TURNER ALLEN.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,

Nov. 19, 1906.

¹ Haigh, *Gr. Theatre*² p. 284. Usually explained also as due to the vast size of the theatre; but we have no evidence that the theatre in the fifth century was so large.

² Jevons, *Man. of Gr. Antiq.* p. 699.

³ *Athen. Mitt.* vii. Pl. XIV; also Haigh, *Gr. Th.*² p. 271.

⁴ *Jahrb. d. deutsch. Arch. Inst.* 1896, S. 292, p. 2

and Engelmann, *Arch.-Stud. z. Trag.* Fig. 20.

⁵ Haigh, *Gr. Th.*² p. 280.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 290; also *Jahr. d.d. Arch. Inst.* 1893, S. 78, 80.

⁷ *Compte Rendu de la Com. Imp. Arch.* 1870-1871, Pl. IV. 1; also Haigh, *Gr. Theatre*² p. 289.

⁸ P. Gardner, *Gram. of Gk. Art*, p. 18.