CHAPTER XXII

THE SMALL THEATRE

The names of the builders of the Small Theatre are known from an inscription which is found in duplicate in different parts of the building: C. Quintius C. f. Valg[us], M. Porcius M. f. duovir[.] dec[urionum] decr[eto] theatrum tectum fac[iundum] locar[unt] etdemg[n] prob[arum]. — 'Gaius Quintius Valgus the son of Gaius and Marcus Porcius the son of Marcus, duumvirs, in accordance with a decree of the city council let the contract for building the covered theatre, and approved the work.' Later the same officials, when, after the customary interval, they had been elected quinquennial duumvirs, built the Amphitheatre 'at their own expense' (p. 212).

When two magistrates set up an inscription in duplicate, ordinarily the name of one appears first in one copy, while that of the second is put first in the other. In all four inscriptions, however, two at the Small Theatre and two at the Amphitheatre, Valgus has the first place. The reason in the case of the Amphitheatre is not far to seek: Valgus was the man of means, who furnished the money for the building, but allowed his colleague and friend to share in the honor. We may also believe that, while the Small Theatre was erected 'in accordance with a decree of the city council,' and hence presumably at public expense, a part of the funds was contributed by Valgus, who on this account received honor above his less opulent colleague.

The son-in-law of this Valgus, Publius Servilius Rullus, has been undeservedly immortalized by a speech of Cicero in opposition to a bill brought forward by him in regard to the division of the public lands. From the same oration we learn that Val-
gus, a man without scruples, had taken advantage of the reign of terror instituted by Sulla to acquire vast wealth, particularly in the way of landed property. Among his estates was one in the country of the Hirpini, near the city of Aeclanum (south of Beneventum), which made him its patron and for which, as shown by an inscription, he repaired the walls destroyed in the Civil War. He was undoubtly one of the leading men in the colony founded by Sulla at Pompeii, and very likely sought by large public benefactions to cast his former life into oblivion.

The Small Theatre must have been built in the early years of the Roman colony, not long after 80 B.C.

A covered auditorium in the immediate vicinity of a large unroofed theatre was not uncommon. About the time of the destruction of Pompeii the poet Statius, praising the magnificence of his native city Naples, speaks of 'twin theatres in a single structure, one open and one roofed,' — geminam molem nudi tectique theatri. Our only clue to the special use of such a building, however, is derived from the one erected at Athens by Herodes Atticus, in the reign of Hadrian. This was called an Odeum, that is, according to the derivation of the word, a room for singing; musical entertainments were held there, especially, we may assume, those musical contests which had so important a place in ancient festivals. The purpose of the roof was doubtless to add to the acoustic effect.

The plan of the Large Theatre has been discussed at so great length that a few words will suffice in relation to that of the smaller structure (Fig. 66). That it might be possible to cover the enclosed space with a roof, the upper rows of seats were reduced in length, and the whole building — cavea, orchestra, and stage — was brought into an oblong shape; only the orchestra and the lower rows of seats in the cavea form a complete semicircle. The pyramidal roof was supported by a wall on all four sides; in the upper part of the wall, between the roof and the highest row of seats, there were probably windows.

The seating capacity of the building was about fifteen hundred. The lowest section of the cavea, as in the Large Theatre, consisted of four low, broad ledges on which the chairs of the decurions could be placed. Above these is a parapet, behind which is a passage accessible at either end by semicircular steps. The broad range of seats above was divided into five wedge-shaped blocks by flights of steps; only two of these, however, extended as far as the passage running along the upper side, which could be reached from the alley at the rear of the building by means of stairways connecting with outside doors.

The seats were of masonry capped with slabs of tufa about seven inches thick. They had depressions in the side and in the top, as may be seen in the accompanying section (Fig. 68). They were thus made somewhat more comfortable, the person in front being less subject to disturbance from the feet of one sitting on the next seat behind; a saving of room was also effected — an important consideration in the construction of a small auditorium.
The tribunals (3, 3) differed from those in the Large Theatre in that they were shut off entirely from the seats of the cavea by a sharply inclined wall, and were entered only from the stage, by means of narrow stairways; in this way the exclusive character of the seats was made still more prominent. Besides the platform itself, measuring only about 11 by 9 feet, three seats above each tribunal were set off with it by the same division wall and were available for the occupants.

The sloping wall between the tribunal and the cavea on each side ends with a kneeling Atlas (Fig. 69); large vases probably stood on the two brackets supported by these figures. The end of the parapet on either side is embellished with a lion's foot of tufa (Fig. 70). These rather coarse sculptures illustrate the character of the art that was brought to Pompeii by the Roman colony. The workmanship is by no means fine, yet the muscles of the figures are well rendered, and the effect is pleasing.

The pavement of the orchestra (seen in Fig. 67) consists of small flags of colored marble. An inscription in bronze letters informs us that it was laid by the duumvir Marcus Oculatus Verus pro ludis, that is instead of the games which he would otherwise have been expected to provide.

At the ends of the stage, as in the case of the Large Theatre, there were two broad entrances. The wall at the rear, which was veneered with marble, had the customary three doors, and in addition two small doors, one near each end. The long dressing room behind the stage had likewise two broad entrances at the ends, besides four at the rear. Apparently the two narrow doors near the ends of the wall at the rear of the stage, and the two doors corresponding with them at the back of the dressing room, were for the use of those who had seats on the tribunals; they could thus enter and leave their places even when the large side doors of both stage and dressing room had been shut—as undoubtedly happened immediately after the procession (pompa) had passed across the stage.