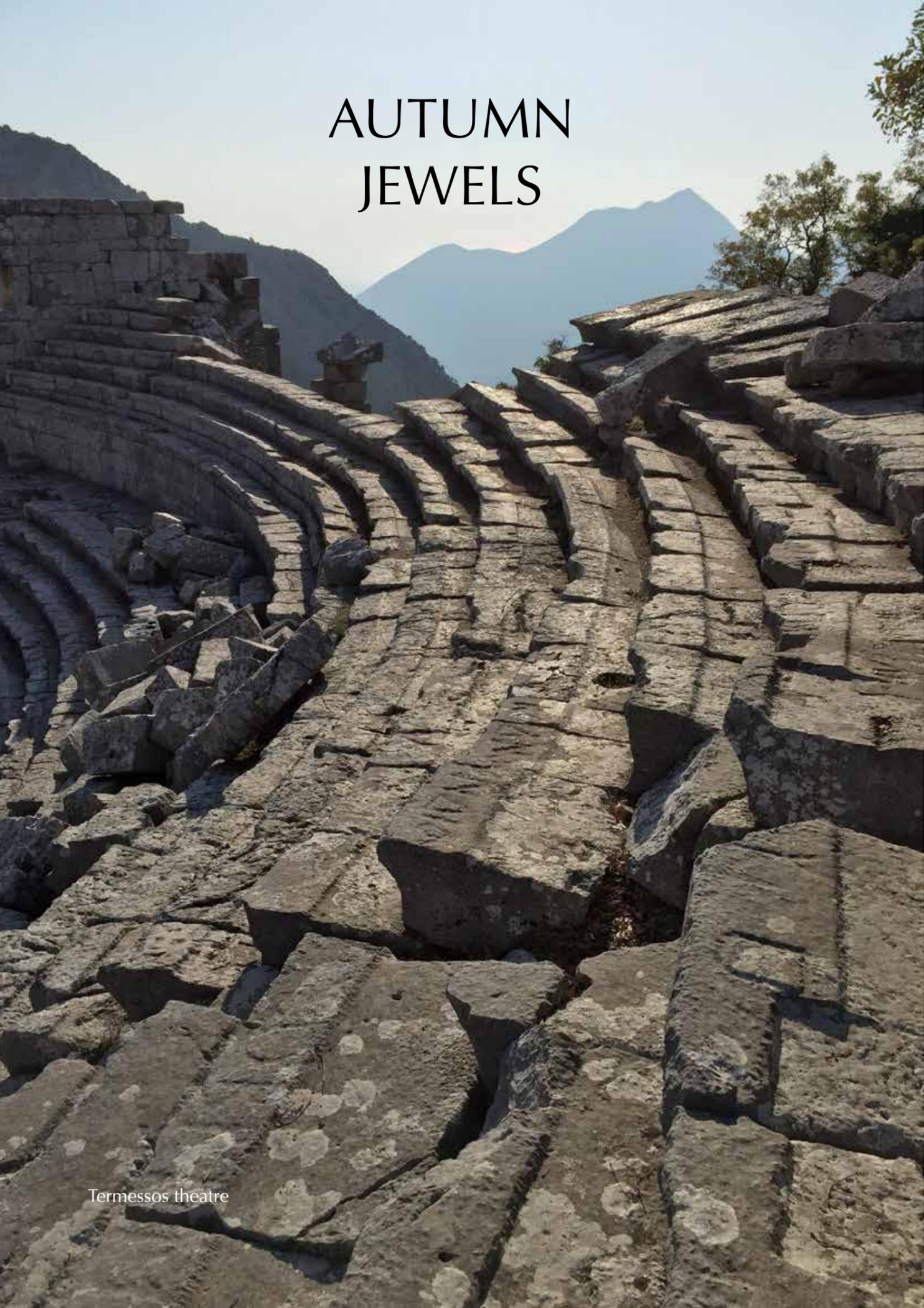


AUTUMN JEWELS



Termessos theatre



Colchicum baytopiorum

Pandora's box is finally open. The nexus of the Aegean and south-west Turkey provides the richest array of autumn-flowering geophytes in the Mediterranean and the next two posts will feature the prime areas of both; the ancient land of Lycia (more prosaically the Teke Peninsula) and the land of Sparta - the Greek Peloponnese. Each has their beauties, and beasts.

As you probably all know by now one of our favourite ancient ruins is Termessos, with its incredibly positioned theatre and immense sarcophagi amongst other things. It is also the best location to see the regional endemic; *Colchicum baytopiorum*. Though similar to other colchicums in flower at this time, it does show quite a variation in the shape of its tepals and flowers throughout October into early November.

A somewhat smaller species; *C. decaisnei* appears in open areas including graveyards (and our own garden), sometimes growing with the only autumn-flowering orchid in the Med; *Spiranthes spiralis*, a rather slim little plant, best viewed close up to enjoy the whimsical twist of its flower spikes. Other much larger orchids will appear in a couple of months, as the Med prepares itself for another explosive spring season.



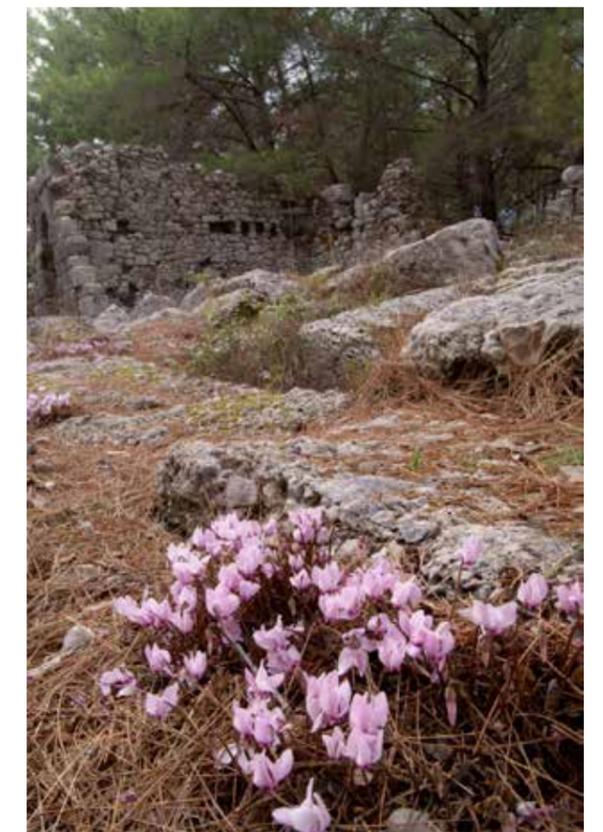
Spiranthes spiralis



Crocus speciosus



Colchicum sanguicolle



Cyclamen maritimum



Side valleys lead to immense plane trees, beneath which grow the pure white, nodding flowers of *Galanthus peshmenii*, each tipped with lime-green. One or two local gardens are simply awash with them at this time. It has a similar Greek counterpart; *G. regina-olgae*, but apart from other differences, *G. peshmenii* has a tendency to form large clumps. Descending to the coast, pine woods will still have plentiful *Cyclamen maritimum*, which again has a Greek doppelganger; *C. graecum*. Indeed, they are so alike that until recently both were subspecies of *C. graecum*. They share exquisitely marbled leaves, each unique and lovely. *C. maritimum* is a locally abundant and common autumn treasure, and the photograph here is from Phaselis one of the many historical sites that fill Lycia.

The limestone ramparts of Tahtali Dag rise quickly from the warm shallow seas around Phaselis to its 2335-metre summit. Among the cedars that clothe its flanks we find the stunning *Crocus speciosus*, each flower crisply decorated with fine violet lines and feathery orange-red styles. Adjacent open sites have *Colchicum sanguicolle*, one of half a dozen species that flower now. These have characteristic blood-red tunic-collars - hence the name.



Galanthus peshmenii



Crocus mathewi



Biarum marmarisensis

And then there is this beauty. The sumptuous ivory goblets of *Crocus mathewi* have deep purple-stained throats, showing off the striking red styles and yellow anthers to good effect. They are a local endemic, occurring in the more westerly Taurus, where they rub shoulders with their rather ordinary cousin *C. cancellatus* subsp. *lycius* in cedar forests high above the coast. In spring the very same rocky tops are lit with the scarlet of *Tulipa armena*. We can think of only one other *Crocus* species to match *C. mathewi* in our area and that is Antalya saffron; *C. wattiorum*, but this wonderful flower does not appear until early November.

On the lowland limestone below are the small buff spathes of endemic *Biarum marmarisense*, a delightful little aroid that favours limestone crevices and rocky slopes. It is both very localised and hard to see in the first place. The same can't be said for its brasher relative, *B. pyrami* an altogether more obvious species with large velvety spathes that emit the most wretched odour!

It is very much the beast in this particular play.



Biarum pyrami