

The background image shows the ruins of an ancient theatre, likely in Ephesus, Turkey. The stone seating tiers are visible, with a person sitting on one of the lower steps. The upper part of the image shows the remains of the stage building, including a large stone archway and a sculpted head (telamones) in the frieze. The sky is clear and blue. Overlaid on the image are several white decorative lines with circular endpoints, creating a modern, graphic feel.

A JOURNEY

TO ANCIENT THEATRES AND ODEIA

OF THE WORLD



Fig. 1: The Roman theatre of Aspendos, Turkey, 2nd c. A.D.

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ISBN: 978-960-386-225-3

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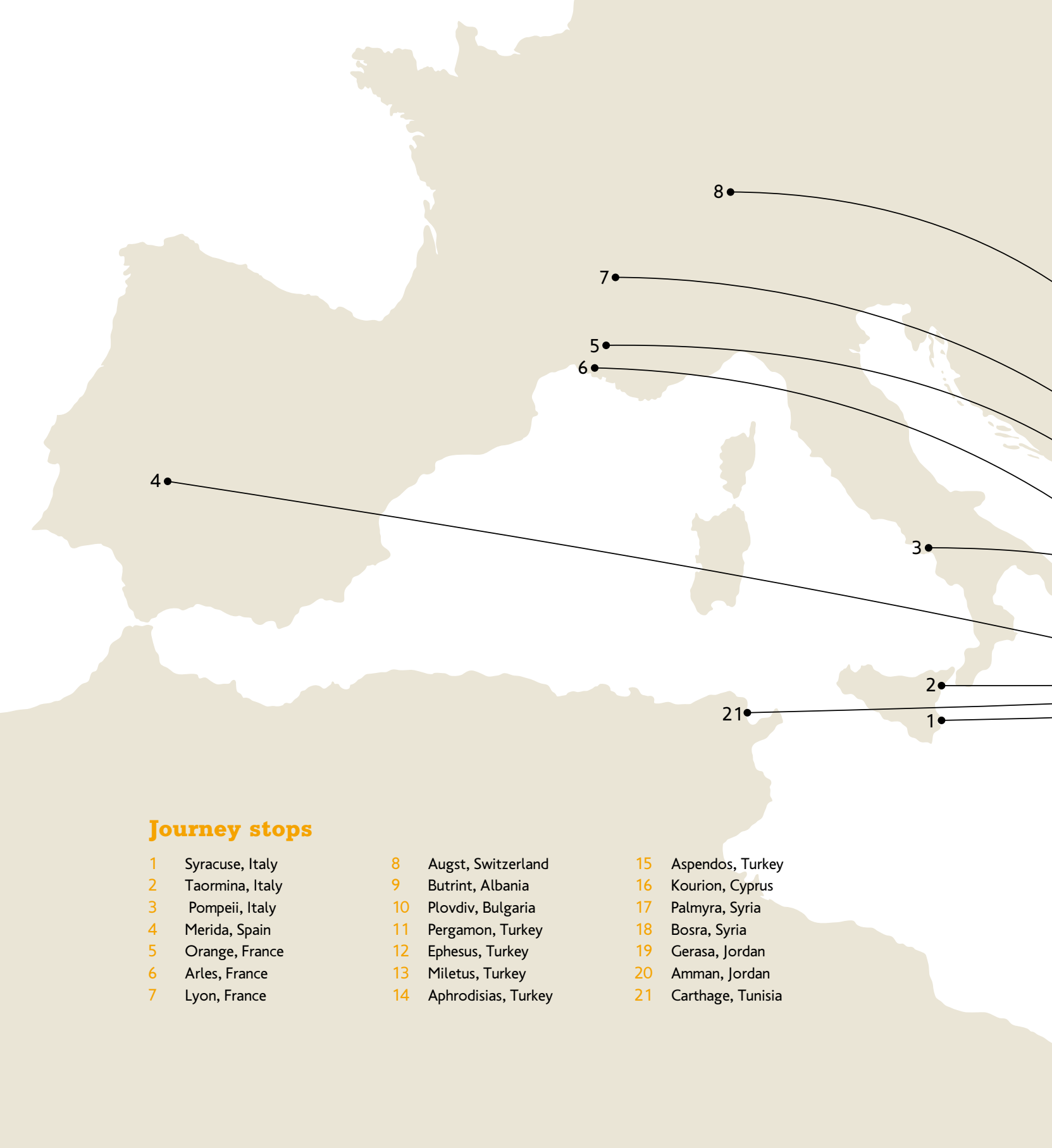
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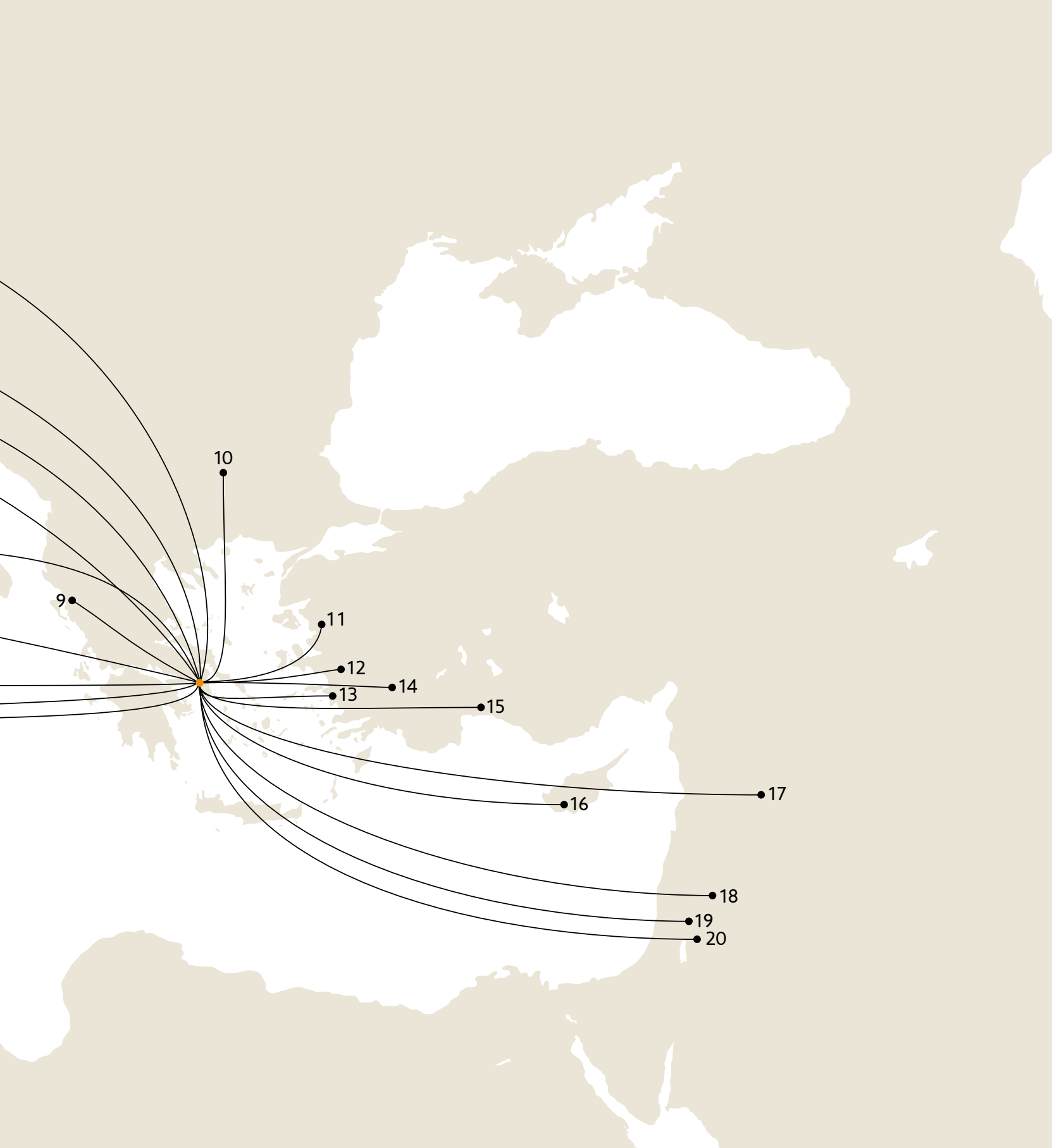
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Journey stops

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A journey to ancient theatres and odeia of the world...

If you went on a journey around the world, to the four corners of the earth, in which countries do you think you would find ancient theatres and odeia? Are there any ancient theatres in Spain or in Switzerland, in Tunisia or in Iran? It may seem unbelievable, but the truth is that in ancient times the Greek and Roman theatres spread in several regions: from Afghanistan (East) to Portugal (West) and from England (North) to Egypt (South). In other words, they are found in all areas where the Greek and Roman culture expanded. Most of them though were built in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, where these two cultures flourished.

Not all ancient theatres and odeia have the same state of preservation. Some have been restored and remind of what they used to be, hosting artistic events even today. Others have either been completely destroyed by various causes, or only a small part of them still survives.

Of course, in the following pages you won't find all ancient theatres and odeia; some representative examples have been chosen in order to demonstrate the range of their expansion as clearly as possible. Most of them are well-preserved, helping people understand their form and use when they were still full of life. Moreover, certain theatres and odeia were chosen due to their special characteristics and the stories that connect them with the area where they were built.

Fig. 2: View of the Roman theatre in Arles, France, 1st c. B.C.





Fig. 3: The ancient theatre of Dionysus, Athens, 4th c. B.C.

...starting from Athens

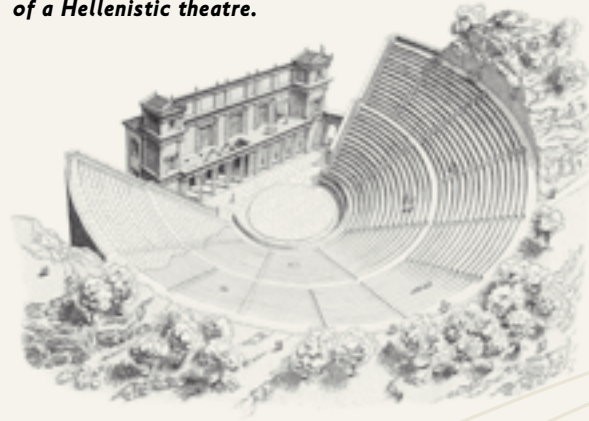
The theatre and the odeion are two types of buildings created in Athens in the 5th century B.C. to host the theatre and music competitions held in the framework of festivals, such as the Great Dionysia and the Panathenaea. Particularly the theatre was very quickly expanded all over Greece and even further. More theatres were built later on by the Romans throughout their empire.

All ancient theatres, Greek and Roman, consisted of three main parts: a) the *skene* (scene building), where the *hypocrites* (actors) got prepared before the performance, b) the *orchestra*, a circular or semicircular space in front of the *skene*, where the performance took place, and c) the *cavea* (or *koilon*), the seating area for the spectators.

Similar was the structure of the odeia, which hosted music events and concerts, and comprised a central playing area, surrounded by the audience seats. The main difference between a theatre and an odeion is that usually the latter was roofed. The odeia spread mainly during the Roman times, and very often they were built right next to the theatres.

Naturally, as centuries went by the structure of both theatres and odeia changed in order to adapt to the needs of every period. These changes are more visible in the theatre buildings which took different forms in different times. Moreover, different types of theatre buildings types of theatre buildings emerged depending on the area where they expanded.

Fig. 4: Reconstruction drawing of a Hellenistic theatre.



The theatre in the Hellenistic period (336-31 B.C.)

In the late 4th century B.C. the theatre flourished and some very important changes were made in the theatrical building, affecting its further development. In particular, the *skene* became a two-storey building while until then it only included one floor, and a columned stoa (*proskenion*) was built in front of it. The most significant change was that the actors no longer appeared on the

orchestra, but on the *logeion*, the platform supported by the *proskenion*. This change is due to the increasing importance of the actors, which resulted in their moving higher at the theatre building, so that the audience could better see them performing on the raised *logeion*. Thus, for the first time, in the Hellenistic period, the *skene* was used for the appearance of the actors, as it happens today.

The expansion of the Greek theatre

From the 4th century B.C. and during the whole Hellenistic period, theatres were erected in every area of Greek colonial expansion. In the West, many Greek colonies of the Magna Graecia (southern Italy and Sicily) acquired their own theatre. Besides, the Greek settlers had already manifested their interest in the tragedies and comedies. Theatres were also built in the East, at the Asian Hellenistic kingdoms, founded after the conquests of Alexander the Great. Theatres also spread in other countries and today we can see Greek

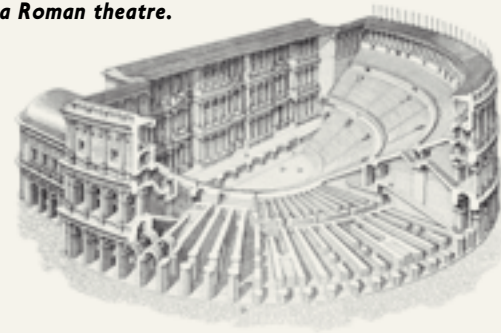
theatres in countries such as Egypt, Cyprus, Albania, and Lebanon.

The theatres built in areas outside Greece greatly followed the model of Greek theatres and were usually carved out of natural hillsides. However, new elements were added to their architecture, which influenced the form of the Roman theatre that developed later on. The most characteristic example is that the *skene* of the Minor Asia theatres became multi-storied, establishing a trend that was then adopted by the Romans.



Fig. 5: The ancient theatre at the Asklepion of Epidauros, late 4th c. B.C.

Fig. 6: Reconstruction drawing of a Roman theatre.



The theatre in the Roman period (30 B.C. - 324 B.C.)

The theatrical building was very popular among the Romans as well, who maintained the essential parts of the Greek theatre (*skene*, *orchestra* and *cavea*) but slightly altered them. The Roman theatres were quite different from the Greek ones which had openings between the *skene* and the *cavea*: the *skene* was joined to the *cavea* and rose to the same height, forming a building enclosed all around. One more difference is the location and construction of the Roman theatres: while the Greek ones were normally built on hillsides, the Roman theatres were erected on flat surfaces. To support the *cavea* (seating area), the Romans used to build a substructure of walls which connected through arches and arcs. Thus, various openings on the exterior wall of the *cavea* were formed, as well

as roofed passageways and staircases in the interior that facilitated the circulation of the spectators. On the exterior, the Roman theatres were tall, impressive edifices with several floors, but their interior was also very imposing because their multi-storied *skene* was lavishly decorated. The *logeion* was also maintained, although at a lower level than the Greek one.

During the Roman period, not only did the structure of theatres change but also their use. They were not used as much for theatrical performances, as for other kinds of spectacles, like mime and pantomime shows. What is more, during the Roman times many theatres were converted to arenas to host gladiator and wild animal fights, the most popular forms of mass entertainment at the time.

The expansion of the Roman theatre

The Romans maintained many of the Greek theatres, but made some modifications to their original plans. They also erected many new theatres in all the areas of their empire, from East to West, largely contributing to the spread of the theatrical building, which was a priority in the Roman cities, after the construction of the Forum. So, even small, poor or uninhabited towns in Roman

provinces of Asia and Africa acquired impressive marble theatres. Today, Roman theatres can be seen in the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, FYROM, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Luxembourg, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and U.K.



Fig. 7: The Roman theatre of Aspendos, Turkey, 2nd c. A.D.

Similar theatres but also different!

The construction of the Roman theatres followed three different courses, depending on the geographical region. In the West, mainly in the provinces with no tradition in theatrical buildings (e.g. France and Spain), the theatres erected were clearly of the Roman type: their *skene* was joined to the *cavea* and they were enclosed edifices all around. On the contrary, in the eastern provinces which already had theatrical buildings (e.g. Asia Minor), the Romans maintained many elements of the Hellenistic theatre. They built theatres that differed from the typical Roman type, because their *skene* wasn't unified with the *cavea*, and had the form of the Hellenistic model. The scholars named this architectural style "Roman-Asia Minor" because it combined Greek and Roman elements. A third, different type of theatre spread in the eastern Mediterranean provinces -Arabia, Syria, Palestine, and in areas at the south part of Asia Minor, such as Pamphylia and Cilicia. A combination of elements from both Roman and Asia Minor theatres can be seen in these areas, but they also comprise unique characteristics that make them distinctive.

Odeia everywhere...

A part from the theatre building, the Romans also developed and spread the *odeion*, a building which normally co-existed with the theatre at the centre of the Roman cities. The Roman odeia were not only spaces for concerts and music events, but they also hosted various shows and spectacles, such as poetry recitations and lectures, mimes and pantomimes, as well as gatherings of city council members. Numerous odeia are preserved nowadays in many countries, outnumbering the theatres! They are usually found in the most developed areas of the Roman Empire, as the events they hosted were addressed mainly to the high society, and generally to a selected audience.





The journey begins...

Using all this information as our luggage, let's begin our imaginary journey to some of the ancient theatres and odeia of the world. Our starting point is Italy, where the first theatres outside Greece were built during the Hellenistic period. From there, we will cross Europe traveling from west to east, we will continue to Asia Minor and Cyprus, we will pass through Near East and end up in Africa. Happy journey!



Fig. 8: View of the Roman theatre of Bosra, Syria, 2nd c. A.D.

THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF SYRACUSE





Fig. 9: View of the ancient theatre of Syracuse.

An outstanding city

The city of Syracuse is located on the eastern coast of Sicily and it was the most important of all the Greek colonies of Magna Graecia. It was founded in the 8th century B.C. as a Corinthian colony and it became very rich and powerful. When the Athenians attacked it during the Sicilian Expedition (415-413 B.C.) the Syracusans repulsed them. Thanks to its geographical position, the harbour of Syracuse was one of the most active ones in the Mediterranean Sea, facilitating the cultural development of the city. Syracuse maintained its power during the Roman period, and according to the Roman statesman Cicero, it was the most outstanding and beautiful Greek city.

Tragic poets famous in Syracuse

From the ancient writers we learn that plays by Aeschylus and Euripides were staged in Syracuse. Aeschylus visited the city several times, after an invitation of the tyrant Hieron I, to present plays such as the “Persians” in 472 B.C. He also wrote his tragedy “*The Women of Aetna*” while he was there, in honour of the neighboring city Aetna, founded by the tyrant. The Syracusans also appreciated very much the plays of Euripides. According to ancient written sources, many of the Athenians who were defeated in 413 B.C. by the Syracusans managed to survive because they knew Euripides’ works. However, the plays of the two poets were not performed in the large theatre we see today, but probably in an earlier theatrical building, which was smaller and has been unearthed at a small distance from the large one. The earlier theatre must have been rectangular or trapezoid and we assume that it was built in the 5th century B.C. because of its resemblance with Greek theatres dating to the same period.

The theatre overlooking the harbour

The great theatre of Syracuse was built during the Hellenistic period, between 238 and 215 B.C., when Hieron II was tyrant of the city. Initially, it had the characteristic form of the Greek theatres, but later it was reconstructed by the Romans. Located on a hillside, it offered the spectators panoramic view of the city and its harbour (fig. 11).

This is the largest Sicilian theatre and its estimated capacity was 14,000-17,000 spectators. The *cavea* is not preserved to its full height; in Roman times it was unified with the *skene* and the theatre was enclosed all around.

The *orchestra* was initially horseshoe-shaped, as in the Greek theatres, but during the Roman period



Fig. 10: Aerial view of the theatre

it became semicircular and was covered with marble slabs. Almost in the centre of the orchestra there is an opening where ended the **Charon's staircase** (fig. 10, 11). From there appeared the actors who impersonated *Charon* (ferryman of Hades) and the persons related to the Underworld. This opening led to the *skene* through an underground corridor.

Only the foundation of the *skene* survives today. According to the scholars, the *skene* of the Roman period was made of marble and its façade was probably decorated with statues. When it was necessary, a curtain was used, which was handled by a mechanism kept in a trench between the *orchestra* and the *skene* (fig. 12).

Fig. 11: The view from the theatre.

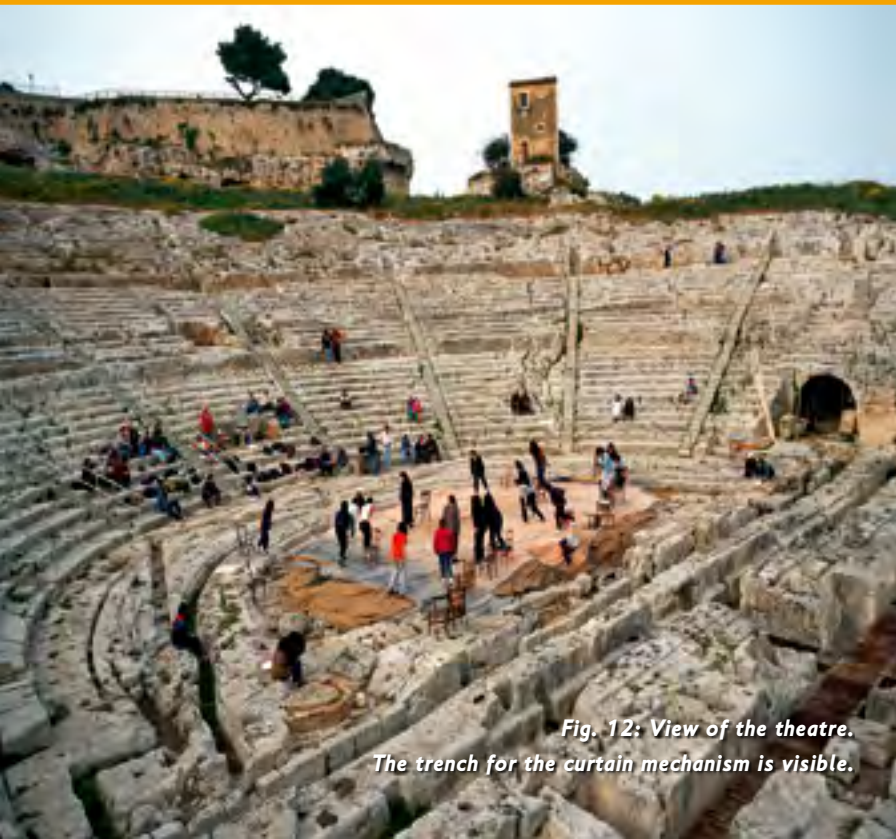


Fig. 12: View of the theatre.
The trench for the curtain mechanism is visible.

Performances are taking place today

The *skene* was completely demolished in 1526 and its building material was used in subsequent buildings. Around the same period the seats (*edolia*) were removed from the upper part of the *cavea*, to build the city walls. The theatre started being used again in 1914 and today it continues to host ancient drama performances. These performances are organized by the National Institute of Ancient Drama (INDA), an international organization for the promotion of the ancient theatre. Moreover, the theatre is protected by UNESCO, as a monument inscribed on the World Heritage List.

THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF TAORMINA





Fig. 13: View of the city of Taormina with the ancient theatre on the hilltop.

The city on the hill

Taormina is a small town located on the northeastern coast of Sicily. Its history began in the 8th century B.C., when many Greek cities founded colonies in southern Italy and Sicily. Settlers from Chalkis came to the area and founded a city called “Naxos”, which was destroyed in 403 B.C. by the tyrant of Syracuse Dionysius I. After that the city was rebuilt -not next to the sea but- on the hill Taurus, therefore, it was initially called Tauromenium and later on Taormina.

During the Hellenistic period, although Taormina was under Syracusan rule, it was a rich and lively city, claimed by the Carthaginians because of its geographical position. It greatly flourished during the Roman period, when it became an ally of Rome.

Fig. 14: The view of the Mount Etna volcano from the cavea of the theatre.



Overlooking the volcano

This is the second largest theatre of Sicily, after that of Syracuse. In Taormina's theatre one can clearly see the criteria which determined the choice of a theatre's location in ancient times: suitable ground inclination, natural beauty and panoramic view of the city.

From this theatre, the spectators could not only see the city and the sea, but also the whole coastline and even the Mount Etna volcano (fig. 14). Even the spectators who sat at the highest seats must have been hearing the actors very clearly, as the theatre was famous for its acoustics.

It was built during the second half of the 3rd century

B.C., under Hieron II, tyrant of Syracuse, but its form changed several times during the Roman period. Its *cavea* became semicircular and unified with the *skene*. Thus, the theatre became enclosed all around as the typical Roman theatres and its capacity increased to 10,000 spectators. The *cavea* was divided into three parts by two horizontal corridors, the *diazomata*. Its lowest part was accessible through two exterior openings on the *skene* wall, which led to the *parodoi*, the two roofed corridors at both ends of the *cavea* (fig. 14, 15). The spectators who would sit in the highest rows of seats entered the theatre from the back of the *cavea*, through an exterior, also roofed, corridor (fig. 15).



Fig. 15: View of the ancient theatre. The Charon's staircase is visible.

The skene and the orchestra

Only the ground floor of the *skene* is preserved today. In the antiquity it used to be two-storied or even three-storied. Its façade was decorated with granite Corinthian columns and it had three doors; the middle one has been destroyed. The two rooms on either side of the *skene*, are the *paraskenia*, where the actors prepared and changed, and the necessary costumes or items of the performance were kept. Between them there was the *logeion*, the slightly raised -in comparison with the orchestra- platform where the actors made their appearance. An underground corridor that led from the *skene* to the orchestra was discovered under the *logeion*: it is the *Charon's staircase*, the opening at the orchestra. Charon, the ferryman of Hades, carried souls of the newly deceased across the rivers Styx and Acheron that divided the world of the living from the

world of the dead. The Charon's staircase was used by those who played Charon or persons who went to or came from the Underworld (fig. 15). It seems that the theatre hosted theatre performances until the 2nd or the 3rd century A.D. It was then modified into an arena for gladiator and wild animal fights, spectacles that necessitated more space. Thus, the first rows of the *cavea* were removed and a corridor was formed around the orchestra.

During the same period, a second underground corridor was added, vertical to the *Charon's staircase*, used for moving the wild animals into the arena (fig. 15). Today, the theatre of Taormina is very well preserved. The *cavea* and parts of the *skene* have been restored and it hosts performances, concerts and cinema festivals.

THE THEATRE AND ODEION OF POMPEII





*Fig. 16: Aerial view of the Roman city of Pompeii.
In the middle there is the theatre and the odeion.*

The city under the lava

Pompeii, the historical city of southern Italy, lies near Naples, in the region of Campania. It was built in the 6th century B.C. at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, and it thrived as a wine production centre. During the Roman period Pompeii was a renowned resort thanks to its location and climate; the wealthy Romans used to build their holiday villas there, which they decorated with wall paintings and works of art. The city was destroyed in 79 A.D. by the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius that buried it under tones of lava. At the time Pompeii had a population of nearly 20,000 people! The excavations of the 18th and 19th century uncovered this rich Roman city, which was largely preserved thanks to the volcanic material. Today visitors can see the forum, the temples, the baths, the houses, the shops, as well as the theatre and the odeion of the ancient city.

The theatre of Pompeii

The theatre of Pompeii was erected in the 2nd century B.C. in the form of the Greek theatre: the *cavea* wasn't unified with the *skene* and the *orchestra* was horseshoe-shaped. However, in the 1st century B.C., under the emperor Augustus, the *cavea* was expanded and joined to the *skene* building through the roofed *parodoi*. Thus, an enclosed theatre building was formed, in accordance with the Roman model. The *skene* was a two-storey building, made of mudbricks. On the ground floor, parts of which are still preserved, there were three doors, where the actors appeared (fig. 17). The *cavea* of the theatre was made of marble and it included approximately 3,500 seats. On its upper part, sockets for the supports of an awning have been discovered, which protected the spectators from the sun and the rain. The orchestra was horseshoe-shaped and around it there were four low steps with the seats for the officials (*thronoi*).

A guest room behind the theatre

Behind the *skene* there was a very large yard with stoas in its four sides (fig. 16, 17). The spectators gathered there during the interval or at the end of the performances. Its use changed after an earthquake in 62 A.D., when two-storey rooms were built around the yard in order to host the gladiators. This was at the period when the theatre of Pompeii was used mainly as an arena for gladiator and wild animal fights. Traces of hydraulic installations connected with a reservoir have been discovered under the orchestra. The most probable explanation is that the installations served for filling the orchestra with water so that the Romans could enjoy one of their favourite spectacles: the mock naval battles.



Fig. 17: View of the theatre of Pompeii.





Fig. 18: View of the Roman odeion of Pompeii.

The odeion of Pompeii

In 75 B.C., the odeion of the city was built right next to the theatre. Like most odeia, it was roofed and, according to scholars, its seating capacity was 1,500-1,850 spectators. Its shape reminds of a rectangle, because it was surrounded by four thick walls that supported the roof; these walls still survive today, unlike the roof. The first four rows of the *cavea* were reserved for the officials. From then upwards it was divided in wedged-shaped sections, the *kerkides*, with steps between them. In order to adapt the *cavea* to the rectangular shape of the odeion the last *kerkida* of each side was smaller than the others (fig. 18). Furthermore, the walls that supported the two ends of the *cavea* were

decorated at their lower part with statues (fig. 19).

On the still surviving wall of the *skene*, there were three doors that connected the interior of the *skene* with the wooden platform in front of it, the *logeion*, where the actors appeared. The *logeion*, which is not preserved, is assumed to have been raised in comparison with the orchestra, from which it was separated by a low wall. The orchestra of the odeion was semicircular and covered with coloured marbles.

The odeion of Pompeii was used for music events, concerts, poetry recitations, mime and pantomime performances. These events were not addressed to all the citizens, but to a selected audience. Generally, the Roman odeia were spaces mainly for the high society, this is why we find them in the most developed areas of the Roman Empire, one of which was Pompeii.

Normally, the construction of the odeia was funded by wealthy citizens, while most of the times they were situated next to the theatres, creating a building complex for the entertainment of the public.

It is likely that the odeion was also used as a space where the local officials gathered, since one of its advantages was that it was roofed and so it protected people in case of bad weather.

From the volcanic eruption to date

After the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D. the odeion and the largest part of the theatre were covered with lava. It seems though that some parts of the *cavea* remained visible. Afterwards, the area was used as a quarry for many centuries, until the excavation of the theatre in the 18th century. Today the theatre and the odeion are used for theatre and music performances, and they are both protected by UNESCO, as well as the whole of the ancient city which is inscribed on the World Heritage List.



Fig. 19: View of the *cavea*.

THE ROMAN THEATRE OF MERIDA





Fig. 20: The Roman theatre of Merida.

The city of Augustus and of the Roman soldiers

Merida is a city in southwest Spain, very close to the borders with Portugal. In 25 B.C., the Roman emperor Augustus founded there the colony *Augusta Emerita*. The city was named after him and after its new inhabitants who were sent there by the emperor. They were veterans, as the Latin word *emeritus* means, that is, they were former soldiers of the legions of the Roman army. Merida was the largest city of the Iberian peninsula with great military and commercial importance for the Romans due to its geographical position. Thus, it became capital of the Roman province of Lusitania, as well as economic and cultural centre of the region. Several imposing public buildings were erected at the time, such as the aqueduct, the hippodrome, the forum and the theatre of the city. Merida is today one of the best preserved Roman cities in the world.



Fig. 21: View of the theatre. The roofed parodoi that led to the orchestra is visible.

A micrography of the theatres of Rome

The theatre of Merida was inaugurated in 16-15 B.C., that is, a few years after the foundation of the Roman colony. According to the inscriptions found there, the theatre's construction was funded by the Roman politician and military man Marcus Agrippa. During the Roman period and later on, in the 4th century A.D., additions and alterations were made on the original construction. Its design was a micrography of the large theatres of Rome, which were enclosed edifices: its *skene* was unified with the *cavea* through the roofed

parodoi. Above them, there were seats reserved for the officials, the so-called *tribunalia* (or *theoria*) (fig. 21), from which the view of the orchestra was quite good.

The most important persons of the city, the magistrates, priests and generals, sat in the *thronoi*-seats of the three lower rows around the orchestra (fig. 21). The estimated capacity of the theatre was 6,000 seats. The spectators entered the theatre through the entrances at the exterior wall of the *cavea*, and followed interior corridors and steps to arrive to their seats.



Fig. 22: Statue of Pluto
on the façade of the skene.

The skene and the orchestra

The theatre's *skene* is quite well preserved. Its façade is two-storied and decorated with Corinthian columns. The actors passed through the three doors on the wall of the *skene* to appear on the *logeion* (fig. 20). The central door is the largest one and is flanked by two tall columns. A low wall with niches separates the orchestra from the *logeion* which is slightly raised. The orchestra, covered with coloured marble, is also impressive (fig. 21).

Gods and emperors

Among the columns of the *skene* there were statues of gods and emperors (fig. 22). The habit of the Romans to place statues depicting emperors was a medium of propaganda for imposing their rule to the peoples they conquered. Besides, the theatre of Merida –as many more Roman theatres– was connected with the imperial cult, which explains the room dedicated to the worship of the emperor in the yard behind the *skene* (fig. 20). In 105 A.D., when Trajan was the emperor of Rome, one more sacred space dedicated to the emperor was created in the first rows of the *cavea*.

The theatre today

Nowadays, the *cavea* has been restored, as well as some other parts of the theatre. The theatre hosts every year the Merida Classical Theatre Festival, and the monument as well as the whole ancient city of Merida are inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

THE ROMAN THEATRE OF ORANGE





Fig. 23: The skene of the Roman theatre of Orange.

The city of the veterans

Orange is a city in Provence, southeast France. This area was very important to the Romans as they founded there their first colonies outside Italy. In 36 B.C., the Roman city Aurasio (modern Orange) was founded by veterans, that is, former soldiers of the Roman army, who belonged to the legions of Augustus. The new inhabitants were added to the local population in order to assimilate it and contribute to the expansion of Roman culture.

The installation of veterans in the Roman colonies was a very common policy used by the Romans at the areas they conquered. In the following years, Aurasio became a very rich city, where the buildings that were necessary for the Romans' public life (e.g. forum, theatre) were built.

A theatre that endured over time

The theatre of Orange stands out because it is one of the best preserved Roman theatres of the world. One can clearly see the enclosed form of the Roman theatres, according to which the *skene* is unified with the *cavea* through the roofed *parodoi*. We do not know exactly when its construction was completed, but we estimate it was built between 27 and 14 B.C., when Gaius Octavius was emperor of Rome and had been granted the title of Augustus.

So, it is one of the first Roman theatres ever built, and then remodeled in the 2nd century A.D., under

emperor Hadrian.

According to various scholars, the theatre could host from 5,850 to 7,300 spectators, who could enter the gates of the *cavea*'s exterior wall and arrive to their seats through interior corridors and steps (fig. 26).

Around the orchestra there were three low steps which do not survive today. These were the seats (*thronoi*) for the members of the Senate, the highest class of the Roman society. From the inscriptions found on the *cavea* we learn that in the following three rows sat the Equites, the second highest class after the Senators.

The most beautiful wall of France

This is how the French king Louis XIV called the *skene* of the theatre of Orange! Indeed, it is impressive as it is still preserved in its original size (fig. 24). It is three-storied, with 103 metres length and 37 metres height. On its façade there are three doors; the central one is the largest and is called the "King's door". Through it the actors appeared on the *logeion*, the raised platform today covered with wood for protection.

The *skene*'s façade was decorated with statues, marble columns and sculptures. In an apsidal niche, above the central door, there is the surviving statue of Augustus, almost 3.5 metres high (fig. 23, 24), which was used for propaganda purposes. The theatres were often connected with the imperial cult, as shown by the temple dedicated to Augustus, which has been discovered next to the Theatre of Orange.

On either side of the *skene* there are two rectangular buildings, the *paraskenia*, used for the preparation of the actors and the storing of the performances equipment. Doors on these buildings led to the *logeion* (fig. 25), above which there was a wooden roof that protected the actors from the bad weather conditions, and improved the acoustics of the theatre. The roof burned down by a fire in the 4th century A.D. Today, in its place there is a modern awning (fig. 24). The fire also caused much damage to the *cavea*, which originally had the same height with the *skene*, so the theatre was abandoned.

Unlike the *cavea*, the *skene* still survives, perhaps due to the fact that its wall supported the houses that were built in the interior of the theatre after it was abandoned and for many centuries (13th - 19th c. A.D.).



Fig. 24: View of the theatre. The *paraskenia* and the modern awning are visible.

The theatre today

Today the *cavea* has been restored and every summer the theatre hosts the international opera festival “Chorégies d’Orange”, which took its name from the ancient Greek institution of *choregia* (sponsorship). The theatre of Orange has been inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List thanks to its historical and architectural value.

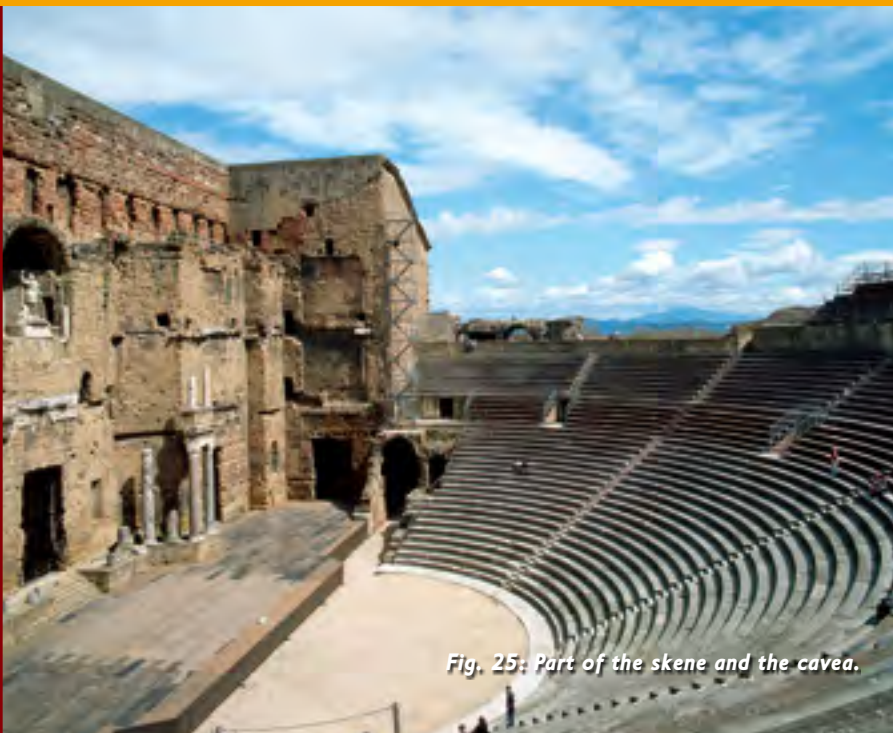


Fig. 25: Part of the *skene* and the *cavea*.



Fig. 26: Interior passageway that led to the *cavea*.

THE ROMAN THEATRE OF ARLES





Fig. 27: View of the Roman theatre of Arles.

A Roman colony in Provence

Arles is in Provence, southeast France. Provence was one of the first areas conquered by the Romans, when they started expanding their empire outside the Italian peninsula. Arles became a Roman colony in 123 B.C., and the Romans constructed a canal that connected the city with the Mediterranean Sea, which facilitated its commercial development. The city became even more powerful in the 1st century B.C. –especially under Augustus– when its main rival, Marseille, was weakened. The buildings erected during the Roman period demonstrate the wealth of Arles at the time. Today, the visitors can see a very well preserved Roman city with forum, amphitheatre, hippodrome and theatre.

Fig. 28: View of the theatre.



Fig. 29: Part of the exterior view of the theatre.



The theatre of Arles

The theatre of the city was built in the 1st century B.C., under Augustus (27-14 B.C.), and is one of the world's earliest Roman theatres. It was bigger than it looks today (fig. 27), as according to archaeologists, the *cavea* had between 5,800 and 7,250 seats. However, it does not survive today in its full height, while the orchestra is very well preserved, with semicircular shape and covered with coloured marble slabs (fig. 27).

The *skene* was a three-storey building, but only some of the columns that decorated its façade survive today (fig. 27). Apart from the columns, there were also sculptures and statues depicting Augustus, as well as gods, such as Aphrodite and Zeus. Another god who was included in the theatre's decoration was Apollo, the god of music and poetry, particularly honoured by Augustus.

The spectators entered the theatre through the arched openings on the exterior wall of the theatre (fig. 29) and walked the corridors and steps inside the *cavea* to arrive to their seats. Only a very small section of the exterior wall survives today, which resembles to a tower (fig. 28, 29). Indeed, in the Middle Ages, it was used as a defensive tower for the protection of the city.

The theatre of Arles has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It has been restored and is used for theatrical performances, concerts and projections in the framework of the festivals organized in the city every summer.

THE ROMAN THEATRE AND ODEION OF LYON





Fig. 30: The cavea of the Roman theatre of Lyon.

The capital of Gaul

Where Lyon lies today, in southeast France, a Roman colony called Lugdunum, which belonged to the Gaul, was founded in 43 B.C. Gaul was the historical region that comprised many modern countries of the western Europe, such as France, Belgium, western Switzerland and parts of Holland and Germany. This vast area was divided in three provinces after its conquest by the Romans. Initially, Lyon was the capital of one of these provinces, and in 27 B.C. it was designated as the seat of the Roman administration of Gaul. Thus, the new capital of Gaul hosted the council of the Gauls every year. These conditions facilitated the development of the city which became rich. The centre of the Roman Lyon was at the top of the Fourvière hill, where the theatre and odeion of the city were built.



Fig. 31: The orchestra and the skene of the theatre.

The theatre of Lyon

This is one of the earliest Roman theatres of France. It was built around 15 B.C., under Augustus. Initially, its capacity was 5,000 spectators, but at the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. the *cavea* expanded and the capacity increased to 10,000 seats. The orchestra was covered with coloured marble slabs, with four low steps surrounding it (fig. 31) where the *thronoi* were placed for the high officials. These seats were separated by the rest of the *cavea* by a corridor.

In front of the *skene*, which isn't preserved today, there is a trench for the curtain mechanism, one of the most interesting elements of the Roman theatre. The curtain did not function as today: as the ancient theatres did not have roofs, the curtain was raised from bottom to top.

The theatre of Lyon presents a particularity in comparison with most Roman theatres: the *parodoi*, the corridors on both ends of the *cavea*, weren't used by the

spectators, but by the actors, because the corridors led backstage, to the *paraskenia*, where the actors got prepared. In order for the spectators to enter the theatre, they used the exterior staircases which started from the two ends of the *cavea* and led to entrances at the back of the wall surrounding the *cavea*.

During the Roman period, it is probable that the theatre hosted political gatherings apart from performances. When it rained, the audience was protected by a cloth awning that covered the *cavea*. Sockets for the awning supports have been discovered on the upper section of the *cavea*.

The theatre was abandoned in the 4th century A.D. but today the lowest section of the *cavea* has been restored and it is used for theatre and music performances, within the framework of the festival "Nuits de Fourvière", held every summer in the city. The theatre as well as the whole city of Lyon is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The odeion on the hill

The Roman odeion of Lyon lies on the Fourvière hill, right next to the theatre. It was built in the 2nd century A.D., under emperor Hadrian, with a capacity of 3,000 people. It was used for music events and poetry competitions, and it is likely to have hosted political gatherings. When it was built it had a wooden roof which is not preserved. The orchestra was specially decorated with coloured marble slabs forming geometric patterns (fig. 33). The three low steps around the orchestra with the seats of the city's high officials, were also made of marble.

The spectators could enter the odeion in two ways. The first was to use the *parodoi*, the corridors on either side of the *cavea*. The second was to go up the exterior staircase from the one side of the odeion which led to entrances at the back of the wall surrounding the *cavea*. Some parts of this surrounding wall can still be seen today (fig. 32), while only the foundation survives from the *skene* building. We know though that its façade was decorated with sculptures and was covered by a curtain, when needed.

The odeion was abandoned in the 4th century A.D. Today it has been restored and every summer it hosts various events within the framework of the festival “Nuits de Fourvière”. It is also protected by UNESCO as inscribed on the World Heritage List.



Fig. 32: View of the cavea of the odeion of Lyon.



Fig. 33: The Roman odeion of Lyon.

THE GALLO-ROMAN THEATRE OF AUGST





Fig. 34: The Gallo-Roman theatre of Augst.

A Roman city

Augst is a small town of Switzerland, about 20 km east of Basel. The Roman colony *Augusta Raurica* was founded there in the 1st century B.C., and was named after Augustus. It was one of the first Roman colonies in the area, its position being strategic for the expansion of the Roman Empire in territories of modern Germany and Austria. As *Augusta Raurica* lied on the banks of the Rhine, it became an important commercial centre in the Roman period. Most of the public buildings were erected at the time, such as the forum, the aqueduct and the theatre. Today, Augst is a town-museum with trails that connect the Roman monuments.

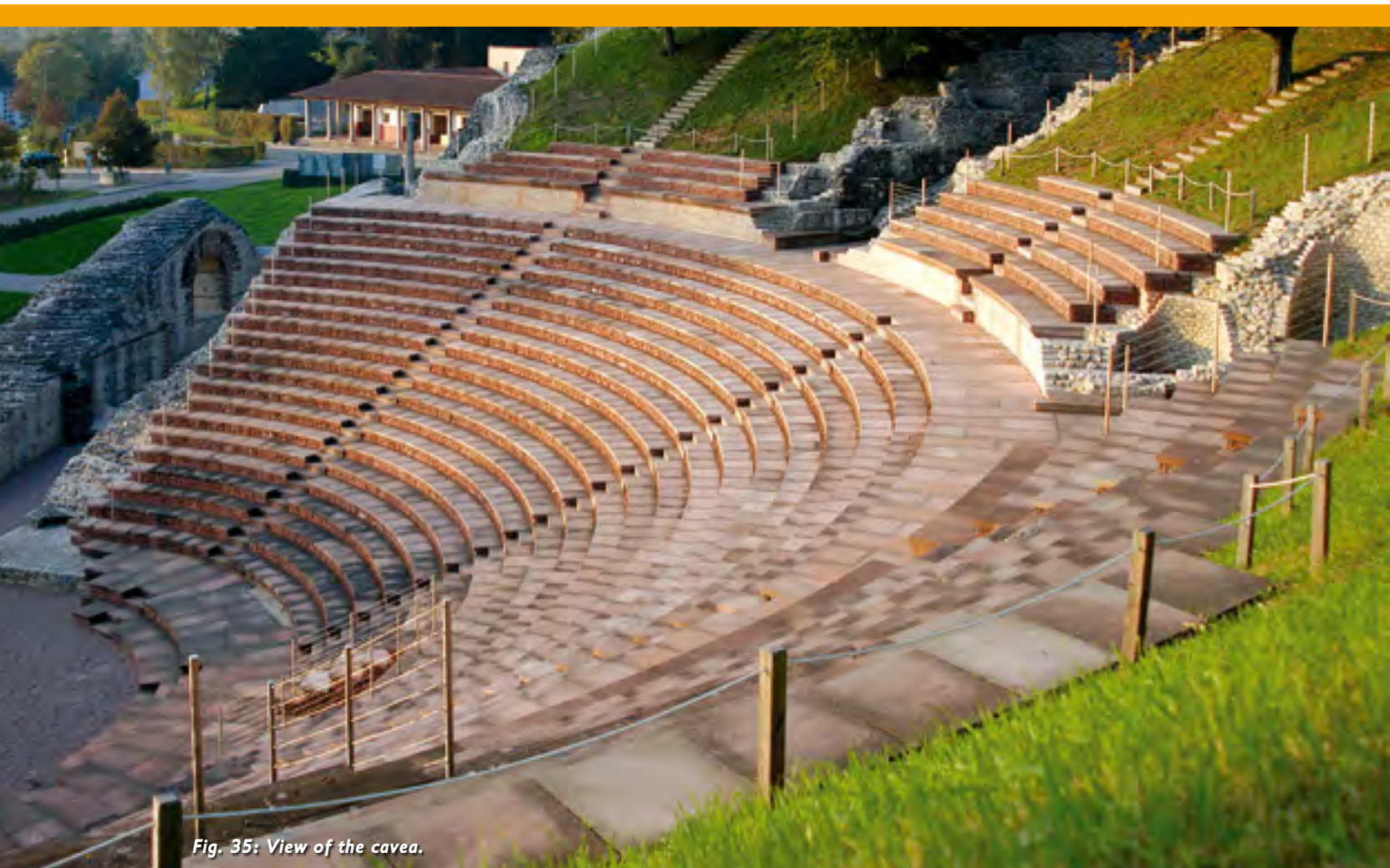


Fig. 35: View of the cavea.

The theatre of August

It was built in 43 B.C., right after the foundation of the Roman colony. In the 1st century A.D. it was transformed into an amphitheatre, and in the 2nd century A.D. it became a theatre again. Although it is built on a hillside, a strong wall surrounding it offers even more support. Its estimated capacity was almost 10,000 spectators. The first two rows of seats seem to have been reserved for the officials, such as the priests, magistrates and generals.

The theatre of August differs from the theatres we have described until now. It belongs to the Gallo-Roman theatre type that is normally encountered in the Gaul, whose part used to be August. The Gallo-Roman theatres were enclosed edifices, like the Roman ones, that is, their *skene*, was unified with the *cavea* by the roofed *parodoi*; however, their architecture was generally less complex than that of the Roman theatres.



Fig. 36: The orchestra of the theatre.

A cult building

No traces of the theatre's *skene* have been found. It is noteworthy though, that on a small hill behind the point where the *skene* would be, traces of an ancient temple were discovered, which was built in the 2nd century A.D. This is why the scholars assume that in the place of the *skene* there was a wall, open in the centre, so that the temple could be seen in the distance. The theatre and the temple probably formed one building complex, and the

audience could watch the cult events that took place in front of the temple, from their seats on the *cavea*. These theatres, like the one in Augst, which are structurally connected with a cult building are called "cult theatres".

In the Middle Ages, the theatre of Augst was gradually abandoned and destroyed. Today, the largest part of the *cavea* has been restored and the space is used for theatre and music events.

THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF BUTRINT





Fig. 37: Aerial view of the ancient city of Butrint.

A city in the lagoon

Butrint is located on the southwest coast of Albania, across Corfu. It is an area of natural beauty and rich vegetation as it is surrounded by the Butrint lagoon. According to the myth, the city was founded by Helenus, son of Priam, the king of Troy. In ancient times it was an important commercial harbour of the Mediterranean Sea which flourished in the 4th century B.C. During this period, a sanctuary of Asklepios, god of medicine, was founded in Butrint which functioned as a healing centre and received visitors from various areas of the ancient world. During the Roman period, the city borders expanded and new buildings were erected. Centuries later, in the 15th century A.D., the city started being covered by water, because of the extremely humid soil of the area, and it was abandoned. Today, the ancient city of Butrint has been established as Albania's National park and recognized as a Wetland of International Importance.



Fig. 38: View of the ancient theatre of Butrint.

A theatre for god Asklepios

The theatre was built in the sanctuary of Asklepios during the Hellenistic period, in the 3rd century B.C. It was quite small because its dimensions and shape had to adapt to the remaining free space. So, the western side of the *cavea* did not have the same height with the eastern side, as it was limited by the wall that protected the temple of Asklepios.

The theatre was closely connected with the sanctuary as it hosted the religious ceremonies watched by those who came to the Asklepieion to be healed.

Besides, the money for its construction was gathered by donations of the god's worshipers to the sanctuary. Right next to the theatre there was the *thesauros*, a building where the items dedicated to god Asklepios were kept.

It is also interesting that on the wall between the theatre and the *thesauros* many inscriptions have been discovered with names of slaves who were freed. This was common in every Asklepieion and it was within the priests' jurisdiction.



Fig. 39: View of the theatre with the wooden platform on the orchestra.

Changes in the Roman period

During the 2nd century B.C., the theatre was rebuilt in accordance with the Roman model and the *cavea* expanded so it hosted up to 1,500 spectators. The *cavea* was divided in two sections and between them there was a horizontal corridor, the *diazoma*. The spectators entered the theatre through a gate at the western side of the *cavea* and walked on a staircase that led them to the *diazoma*. During the same period, a two-storey *skene* was constructed, whose façade had three arched doors,

still visible today, and was decorated with statues, many of which have been brought to light.

Today the theatre is well preserved thanks to the restoration works that have taken place, bearing in mind the special soil composition. In place of the orchestra there is a special wooden platform with small corridors that lead to it (fig. 39). The theatre, and the whole ancient city of Butrint, is protected by UNESCO, as it has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF PLOVDIV

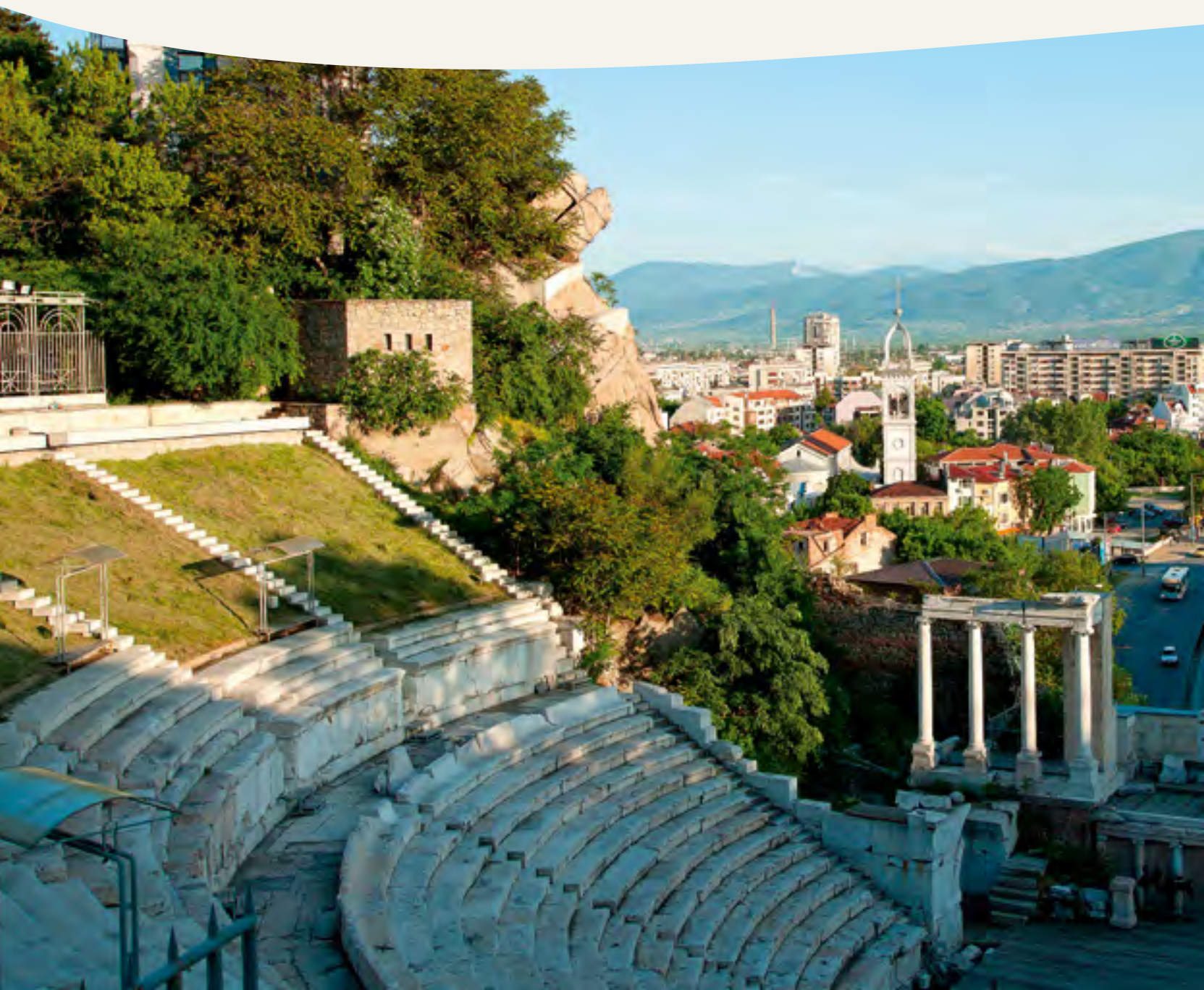




Fig. 40: View of the theatre of Plovdiv.

The city of Philip

Today, Plovdiv is the second largest city of Bulgaria, after Sofia. It is located north of the Rhodope Mountain range, on the banks of the river Evros, which is called Maritsa in Bulgarian. It is one of the oldest cities of the Balkans, and used to be called *Eumolpias* after the mythical king of Thrace, Eumolp. Then it was named Philippopolis after Philip II of Macedon, who conquered it in 342 B.C. During the Roman period it was the crossroads of many military and trade routes, thus it turned into a rich and lively city with many beautiful buildings; according to the ancient writer Lucian, these buildings made it radiate from afar. One of the most important public buildings of the ancient city was the theatre.

The theatre of Plovdiv

Today's form of the theatre dates to the first half of the 2nd century A.D. when Hadrian was the Roman emperor. Nevertheless, some scholars believe that in the same place there might have also been an earlier theatre, dating to the Hellenistic period.

The *skene* is special because it combines architectural elements of the Roman and the Hellenistic theatre (fig. 42). It was two-storied and was decorated by Ionic and Corinthian columns (as it was common in the Roman theatres), but it was raised in comparison with most of the Roman theatres because the *proskenion*, a columned stoa with three openings towards the orchestra, was on the ground floor. The *proskenion* is a typical element of the Hellenistic theatres, where the openings between the columns were empty to receive the paintings; however, in the theatre of Plovdiv there are walls connecting the columns and no openings, in accordance with the Roman models.

On the wall of the *skene* there were three doors through which passed the actors who would appear on the *logeion*, the wooden platform on top of the *proskenion*.

Today, the floor of the *logeion* has been restored, as well as the floor of the orchestra which is semi-circular and surrounded by a low wall.

Fig. 41: The theatre of Plovdiv.



Fig. 42: The skene of the theatre.



Fig. 43: Preparation before a music event at the theatre.



From yesterday to today

The position of the theatre on the hillside offered the spectators panoramic view of the city. The capacity of the marble *cavea* was up to 7,000 spectators. The citizens of Philippopolis were divided in tribes and it is noteworthy that Greek inscriptions have been discovered in the theatre with the names of the city's tribes. So, it seems that all the tribes had

equally contributed to the funding of the theatre's construction, and their leaders sat in specific places on the *cavea*. The theatre was burned down by a fire at the end of the 4th century A.D. and it was then abandoned. Today, it has been restored and is used for theatre performances and music events, such as the annual Verdi Festival of opera.

THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF PERGAMON





Fig. 44: The ancient theatre of Pergamon.

A city built on the model of Athens

Pergamon, an ancient Greek city of Asia Minor, was built on the banks of the Caicus River. Remains of the city are still found today to the north of the modern city Bergama, west Turkey. Pergamon was conquered by the Macedonians after the battle of the Granicus River in 334 B.C. and turned into one of the most influential Hellenistic kingdoms of Asia Minor. Alexander the Great fortified it, and in the following years the city was ruled by the Hellenistic dynasty of the Attalids (281-133 B.C.). The economic and cultural wealth of Pergamon is reflected in the buildings of the period, such as the temples, the theatre and its library, which -although smaller- rivaled the fame of the Library of Alexandria, the largest of the ancient world. Pergamon gave its name to the parchment (via the Latin *pergamenum* and the French *parchemin*), a membrane of processed animal skin which was firstly used by the citizens of the city for writing. The Attalids aspired to establish their city as cultural centre of the Greek world, following the model of ancient Athens. Most of the public buildings of Pergamon, as well as the palace, were located on the hillside and on the slopes of the citadel (fig. 47). Pergamon maintained its power during the Roman period, when it became the administrative centre of the Roman province of Asia and played a decisive role in the political and economic life of the whole region.

The theatre “hanging” from the hill

One of the most important buildings of the citadel of Pergamon was the theatre, constructed in the late 3rd century B.C. on the south slope of the particularly steep citadel hill. It is considered as the steepest of all Hellenistic theatres (fig. 44).

Within the framework of the city’s remodeling and expansion under the rule of Eumenes II (197-159 B.C.) there were changes in the theatre that increased its capacity to 10,000 seats. However, the very steep ground made the expansion of the *cavea* in width impossible, the only solution being its expansion in height, which resulted in covering the whole hillslope. It was also divided in three horizontal zones by two corridors, the *diazomata*.

The seats of the spectators were made of local stone, while marble was used exclusively for the seats of the officials (*theoreia*) in the *cavea*, at the beginning of the first and of the second zone. At both ends of the *cavea*, there were thick walls for more support, parts of which are still preserved today (fig. 46). The wall on top of the *cavea* that looks like a tower was built much later, during the Byzantine period (fig. 45).

The location of the theatre was ideal for the panoramic view to the valley and to the city, but because of it there were limitations in its construction: it is possible that due to the lack of space, the theatre did not have stone *skene* at first, but a wooden structure that could adapt to the needs of the performances. A stone *skene* was built around 100 B.C. and was maintained during the Roman period; today, only its foundation is visible. It was a relatively narrow *skene*, not joined to the *cavea*, as normally in the Roman theatres, so the theatre had the open form of the Greek theatres.

Fig. 45: View of the *cavea*.



Fig. 46: The theatre and part of the temple of Dionysus.



Fig. 47: Model of the ancient city of Pergamon at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.
To the left there is the temple of god Dionysus.



Living part of the city

At the back of the *skene*, there was an oblong plateau surrounded by stoas, where the city residents used to stroll and meet. The west *parodos* of the theatre led to the temple of Dionysus, whose remains are still preserved, at the one end of the square (fig. 46, 47). So, the theatre was integrated in the everyday life of the city thanks to its location. Perhaps the residents may have sat on the *cavea* to enjoy the view, even without a scheduled performance.

During the Roman period, the theatre was trans-

formed into an arena and hosted gladiator and wild animal fights. For the needs of these events, the first rows of the *cavea* were removed and the orchestra expanded. Later though a new Roman theatre was built in the lower city and the theatre on the citadel was mainly used for political gatherings.

Today the monument is well preserved and restoration works have taken place mainly in the *cavea*. The site receives visitors but is not used for performances.

THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF EPHESUS





Fig. 48: Exterior view of the ancient theatre of Ephesus from the Arcadian road.

Crossroads of East and West

Ephesus, an ancient Greek city of Ionia in the eastern Aegean Sea, is situated near the modern Turkish cities Selçuk and Kuşadası. In ancient times it was a wealthy city dedicated to goddess Artemis. There stood the imposing temple of the goddess which is considered as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. During the Hellenistic period, in particular in 294 B.C., Ephesus was conquered by Lysimachus, one of the successors of Alexander the Great. The city then expanded and flourished. Its harbour became one of the most active economic centres of Asia Minor, thanks to its commercial contacts with the countries of the East. During the Roman period, it was the third most important city of the empire, after Rome and Alexandria, because of its geographic position between East and West. In 125 B.C., it became capital of the province of Asia, and during its history many important buildings were erected, the best preserved one being the theatre.

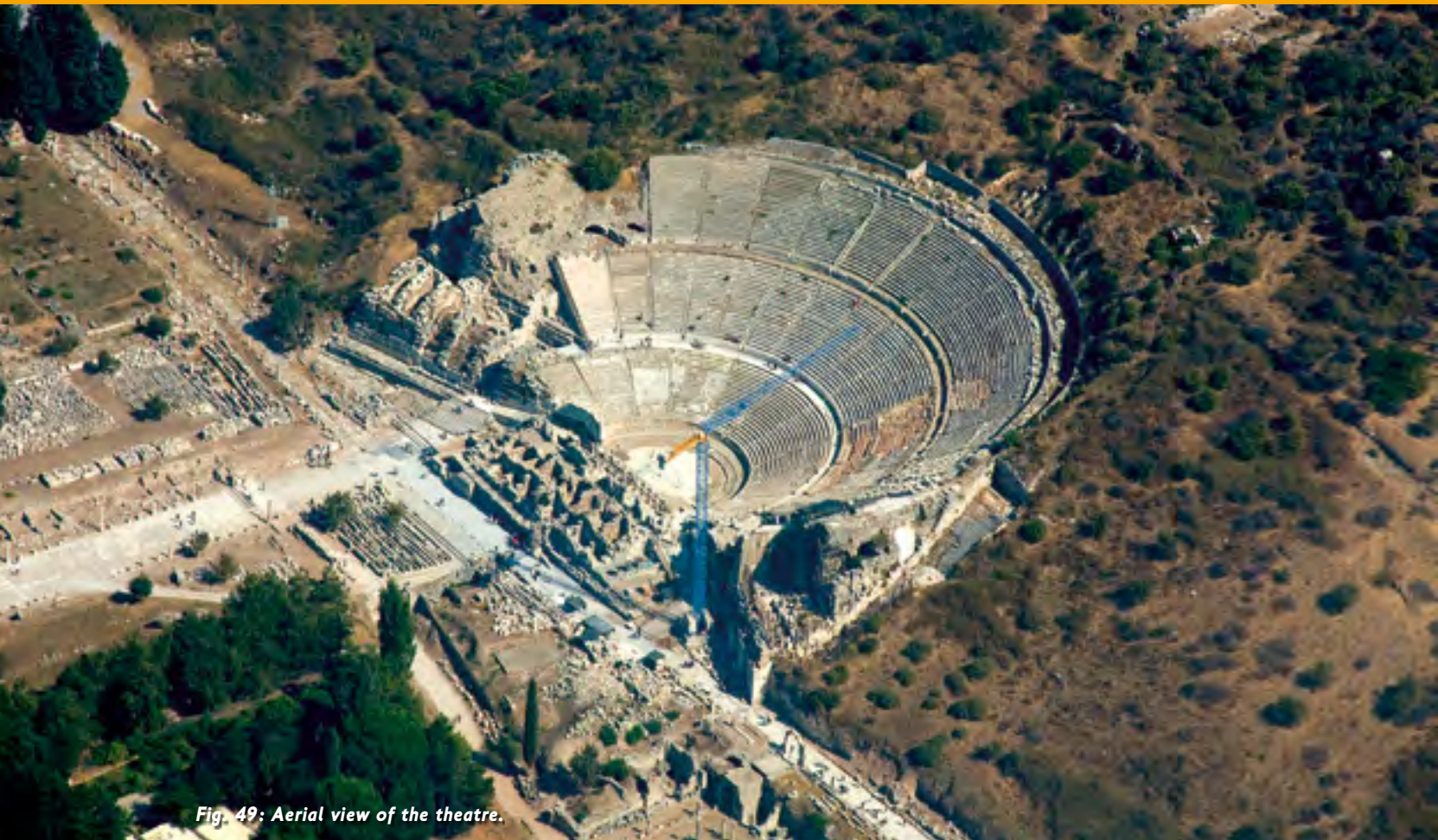


Fig. 49: Aerial view of the theatre.

An impressive theatre

It is the largest ancient theatre of Asia Minor and one of the largest in the world, with a capacity of 21,000 spectators! It was built during the Hellenistic period, in the 2nd century B.C., but initially it was smaller. It acquired the impressive size we see today during the Roman period and specifically in the 1st and 2nd century A.D. The location of the theatre on a mountain slope and the big height of the *cavea* offered the audience

the limitless view of the city and the harbour of Ephesus (fig. 51).

The theatre was very important for the city. It was situated on the crossroads of its two more central roads: the Arcadian road, which led from the harbour to the theatre (fig. 48, 49), and the Theatre road, the main commercial road of the city with stoas and shops (fig. 49).



Fig. 50: View of the theatre.

The cavea

The *cavea* of the theatre was carved into the slope and followed the ground inclination. Its both ends had to be supported by thick walls (fig. 49) through which passed roofed passageways and staircases for the access of the spectators to the *diazomata*, the two horizontal corridors that divided the *cavea* in three parts.

As in most ancient theatres, there were special

seats reserved for the officials. It is interesting that in this theatre there were also special seats for all spectators, depending on their social status, rank and age. Thanks to inscriptions we know that there were seats for the members of the city council and the senate, the priests and the adolescents. In case of rain or much sunshine the *cavea* was covered by a large awning that protected the audience.

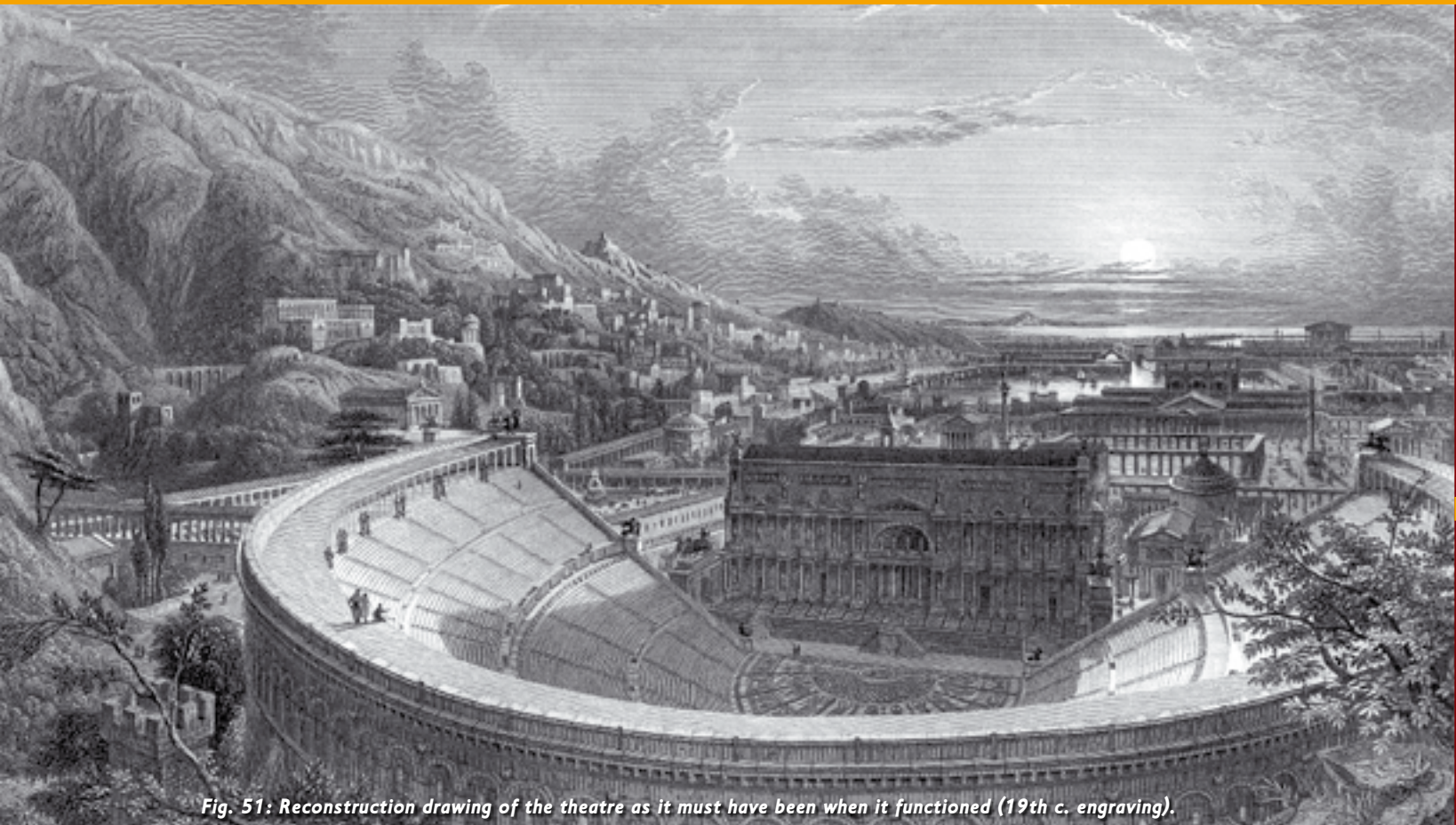


Fig. 51: Reconstruction drawing of the theatre as it must have been when it functioned (19th c. engraving).

The skene and the orchestra

In its final phase, the *skene* was three-storied with a quite elaborate façade, lavishly decorated with columns, sculptures and statues (fig. 51). It was a model for many of the theatres of Asia Minor, and of course it included depictions of goddess Artemis, patron of Ephesus. According to an inscription, in the theatre there were images and statues of the goddess made of gold and silver. The low square pillars in front of the *skene* supported the *logeion*, the platform where the actors appeared (fig. 50).

The orchestra was semicircular, covered with marble slabs, with a channel around it that carried away the rainwater (fig. 50). It also had a particularity: although in most ancient theatres the *parodoi* led to the orchestra, this wasn't the case for the theatre of Ephesus, probably due to changes made on the theatre during the Roman period. The *skene* expanded thus covering a part of the orchestra, and closed the *parodoi*. So, to enter the theatre the spectators used the steps from the two ends of the *cavea* that led to the *diazomata* (fig. 52).

From yesterday to today

In the 2nd century A.D. the theatre was transformed into an arena. The five first rows of the *cavea* were removed and a wall was built around the orchestra to protect the audience from the wild animals that took part in the wild animal fights. Towards the end of the 3rd century A.D. the orchestra was turned into a shallow pool, where the very popular naval battles and water dances took place.

The theatre of Ephesus did not only host performances and popular Roman spectacles. It was also used for political gatherings and religious events. Moreover, it was the theatre visited by the apostle Paul in the 1st century A.D. to teach and disseminate the Christian

ideas in Ephesus. It is said that his visit displeased the metalworkers of the city, who earned a living by selling gold and silver statues of goddess Artemis, and saw the new religion as a threat to their job.

The theatre was used until the 5th century A.D. and then it was abandoned. Nowadays, the *cavea* and the orchestra have been restored. The theatre is filled again with life thanks to the performances and the concerts organized within the framework of the Selçuk-Efes Culture, Art and Tourism Festival, held every summer.

In 2015, the theatre, as well as the whole ancient city of Ephesus, was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.



Fig. 52: Panoramic view of the theatre.

THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF MILETUS





Fig. 53: The ancient theatre of Miletus.

The powerful city of Ionia

Ancient Miletus was a coastal city of Ionia whose remains are found today in southwestern Turkey, near the modern town of Balat in *Aydin Province*. It was one of the most important cities of Ionia. Because of its geographic position it was a meeting point between East and West and the most powerful naval and commercial power of the region. Built on a peninsula, the city had three harbours and its contacts ranged from Sybaris, Italy, to Naukratis, Egypt. Already since the 8th century B.C. the Milesians had founded many colonies, mainly in the Black Sea.

Arts and sciences flourished in the city, and most of all philosophy. One of the Seven Wise Men of the antiquity, Thales, was from Miletus, as well as Hippodamus, the father of city planning. It seems that after the sack of the city by the Persians, in the 5th century B.C., it was rebuilt based on the Hippodameian system, that is, divided in equal building blocks, each one containing six houses.

During the Hellenistic period, Miletus was a rich city with impressive buildings, like the theatre, the stadium, the *Bouleuterion* (Council house) and the agora. In the Roman period the buildings adapted to the Roman models, while new ones were constructed, such as large public or private baths. Today, the best preserved building of ancient Miletus is the theatre.

The imposing theatre of Miletus

It was built during the Hellenistic period, just after the middle of the 3rd century B.C., and initially its capacity was 5,300 seats. It changed during the Roman times, from the 1st to the 3rd century A.D., when the theatre adapted to the characteristics and needs of the new era. The *skene* became three-storied and its façade was decorated with coloured marble, columns and sculptures.

In front of the *skene*, on the *logeion*, the actors made their appearance. Only the supporting pillars of the *logeion* survive today, and the wall that separated it from the orchestra (fig. 55). During this period, the theatre's capacity increased to 15,000 people, according to some scholars, and to 18,000, according to others.

Despite the new elements, the theatre maintained some characteristics from the Hellenistic period: it remained open, that is, the *skene* was not unified with the *cavea* and the *parodoi* were not roofed. The latter, like in the theatre of Ephesus, did not lead to the orchestra, but to the *logeion*.

The *cavea* was divided in three horizontal sections by two corridors, the *diazomata* (fig. 55). For better support, thick exterior walls were built at the *cavea*'s two ends, where was the beginning of the staircases that led the spectators to roofed passageways, inside the *cavea*. These passageways ended up at the arched openings that can be seen today and led the people to the *diazomata* (fig. 54).

What is more, a special seating place for the emperor was constructed (the so-called "Imperial box") in the first rows of the *cavea*. It was distinguished from the rest of the *cavea* by the roof which was supported by four columns still surviving today (fig. 55).

Fig. 54: Detail of the *cavea*. One of the arched openings that led to the *diazoma* is visible.



Fig. 55: View of the theatre. The columns of the Imperial box are visible on the cavea.



From yesterday to today

During the Roman period, the theatre was turned into an arena that hosted the favourite spectacles of the Romans: gladiator and wild animal fights. The first rows of the *cavea* were removed to enlarge the orchestra and in their place a low wall -the *thorakion*- was built, which protected the audience from the wild animals (fig. 55).

In the interior side of the *thorakion* there were several rectangular niches, probably used as shelters by

those who fought or reserved for the tamers.

During the Byzantine period the highest part of the *cavea* was incorporated into a fortress. This explains why only half of the *cavea*'s height is preserved today. As regards the *skene*, only its foundation and the lowest part of its walls survive.

The theatre was excavated at the beginning of the 20th century. Today it is restored but it is not used for performances.

THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF APHRODISIAS





Fig. 56: The ancient theatre of Aphrodisias.

The city of Aphrodite

Aphrodisias was an ancient Greek city of Asia Minor. Its remains can be seen today in southwest Turkey, in *Aydin Province*, in the modern town Geyre. It had been inhabited since the prehistoric times and it was named after the sanctuary of Aphrodite, which was there already since the 6th century B.C. Although it was a small city, since the first years of the Roman Empire it sided with the Romans and gained their favour. Thus, in the 1st century B.C. it was declared free and independent and was exempted from taxation, while Augustus became its protector. Thanks to the benefactions of the subsequent Roman emperors as well, the city acquired wealth and prestige. These conditions also facilitated its cultural development and one of the most renowned schools of sculpture in antiquity was founded there. Apart from the theatre and music competitions that took place in Aphrodisias, there were also sculpture competitions. The city's prosperity was demonstrated by the public buildings that were erected or remodeled during the Roman period, such as the *Bouleuterion*, the forum, the stadium and the theatre.



Fig. 57: The scene of the theatre with the Roman logeion and the Hellenistic proskenion.

The gift of a former slave

Aphrodisias was built in the second half of the 1st century B.C., between the Hellenistic and the Roman period. From an inscription discovered in the theatre we learn that the construction of the theatre was funded by Gaius Julius Zoilus, who donated it to the citizens of Aphrodisias and to Aphrodite, their patron goddess. He used to be a slave who was freed

by Augustus. Freedmen were common in the Roman period, especially under Augustus. Gaius Julius Zoilus managed in some years to become so rich that he funded the construction of public buildings in his city. The first construction works at the theatre were carried out between 38-28 B.C., but during the Roman period there were additions and alterations.

The skene and the cavea

At the time of Zoilus, the form of the *skene* followed the Hellenistic model: in front of it there was a stoa, the *proskenion*, which is still preserved today (fig. 57). It is possible that paintings were placed in the openings between the columns. On the roof of the *proskenion*, which does not survive, there was a wooden platform, the *logeion*, where the actors made their appearance.

During the Roman period, the theatre adapted to the model and the needs of the new era. Right in front of the *proskenion*, a lower *logeion* was formed in the 2nd century A.D. (fig. 57, 58), while the Hellenistic *proskenion* was maintained as well. This is quite interesting because despite the changes made on the theatre by the Romans they kept one essential element of the Hellenistic theatre and adjusted it to the new form of the edifice.

Behind the *logeion* there was the façade of the *skene* which is not preserved. It was two-storied and decorated with columns and wonderful statues by the famous sculptures of the city. Today one can see the scene building which was elongated and divided in five rooms. The largest of the doors of the *skene* was the central one, which was arched and flanked by smaller doors. The actors appeared through them on the *logeion*.

Only the lower part of the *cavea* survives today, which was carved into the bedrock. Its upper part was supported by thick walls, which do not survive. Its shape follows the rules of the Asia Minor theatres and it is somewhat larger than a semicircle, while in the first row there were marble *thronoi*, reserved for the officials (fig. 57).



Fig. 58: The *logeion* and the *cavea*.

From a theatre... to an arena

At the end of the 2nd century A.D. the theatre was transformed into an arena for gladiator and wild animal fights. The first rows of the *cavea* were removed to enlarge the orchestra and in their place a low wall (the *thorakion*) was built (fig. 57), with railings that protected the audience from the wild animals. Three small doors were opened on the wall that separated the *logeion* from the orchestra, which were connected through an interior corridor under the *logeion*. The animals went out to the orchestra passing through these doors (fig. 57). In the middle of this wall, a small staircase was added, so that the winners would access the platform and be honored.

During the Byzantine period, in the 7th century A.D., the theatre was transformed into a fortress and it was incorporated into the walls that protected the city. Today it is quite well preserved and it forms part of the archaeological site of Aphrodisias.

THE ROMAN THEATRE OF ASPENDOS





Fig. 59: The Roman theatre of Aspendos.

A wealthy city

Aspendos was an ancient city in Pamphylia, Asia Minor. Its remains are found in southwestern Turkey (modern name Belkiz), almost 50 km east of Antalya. It was built in a fertile valley, on the banks of Eurymedon River. Aspendos' wealth was based on the export of many agricultural and livestock products, and it was the most important trade centre in Pamphylia. For a long period of its history it belonged to the Persian Empire, while in the 4th century B.C. it was conquered by Alexander the Great and his successors. Aspendos flourished during the Roman period; its population increased and several public buildings were erected, the most distinguished one being the theatre, which is also the best preserved Roman theatre in the world.

An imposing theatre

It was built in the 2nd century A.D. when Marcus Aurilius and Lucius Verus were co-emperors (161-169 A.D.). From the beginning of its construction it had the typical form of the Roman theatres, thus differing from the other theatres of Asia Minor, which were built during the Hellenistic period and later on adapted to the Roman model. As it is so well preserved, it constitutes an excellent example for understanding the enclosed form of the Roman theatres, where the *skene* is unified with the *cavea* (fig.59). From inscriptions we learn that the name of its architect was Zenon, son of Theodore, from Aspendos, and that the construction of the theatre was funded by two wealthy Romans.

A skene like a work of art

The skene was a very well-constructed elongated building. Its front wall, that is, what the audience saw, was divided in two storeys, and was lavishly decorated with columns, sculptures and statues in its niches. On the ground floor there were 5 doors, the central one being the largest of all (fig. 59). Such elaborate decoration needed protection from the weather conditions, so, a wooden inclined roof was constructed, which also improved the acoustics of the theatre. The *logeion*, the platform in front of the *skene* where the actors appeared, was also wooden (fig. 62). The tall rectangular buildings at both ends of the *skene* were the *paraskenia*, for the preparation of actors before the performances (fig. 59).

Fig. 60: View of the cavea.



Fig. 61: The stoa on the upper part of the cavea.





Fig. 62: View of the theatre from the stoa on the upper part of the cavea.

The impressive cavea

The capacity of the *cavea* was 6,100 spectators, according to some scholars, and up to 7,650, according to others. It was carved into the bedrock, and its both ends were supported by thick walls with gates through which the spectators entered the theatre. Then, they would follow corridors and staircases that led to the orchestra and to the *diazoma*, the corridor that divided the *cavea* in two parts (fig. 60). The officials sat in the first rows of the *cavea*, as in most theatres.

There was another part of the *cavea* reserved for the officials, the generals and the priests: the seats over the two roofed *parodoi* of the theatre, called *tribunalia* –or *theoreia*– (fig. 62). The simple citizens mainly sat on the highest part of the *cavea*. For facilitating the spectators' circulation there was a stoa running around the highest part of the *cavea* (fig. 60), whose roof -which was quite wide- was possibly used by more spectators as a seating area (fig. 59).

From a theatre... to a palace

Almost 100 years after its construction the theatre was transformed into an arena and hosted gladiator and wild animal fights. It went on being used during the Byzantine period, while it became a palace around 1200 A.D., at the time of the Seljuk Turks.

Today, it is excellently preserved and it hosts music and dance performances within the framework of the Aspendos International Opera and Ballet Festival, held every year in the city.

THE ANCIENT THEATRE OF KOURION





Fig. 63: The ancient theatre of Kourion.

A city with rich history

To the south of Cyprus, near the village Episkopi, in Limassol province, is located the ancient Kourion, an area with long history. The fertile valley of the River Kouris was inhabited already since 10,000 B.C., and was connected with the sea and with the areas of the island that were rich in copper. Besides, Cyprus was famous in ancient times for its copper mines. So, a very important source of income for the settlements in Kourion during the 2nd millenium (1650-1050 B.C.) was the copper trade in eastern Mediterranean. Gradually, the centre of the area was transferred to a hill, the citadel of Kourion, where until the 5th century B.C. a rich and powerful city with its own coinage was developed. According to Herodotus, its inhabitants considered their city as a colony of Argos. During the Hellenistic period (4th c. B.C.) the Kourion, as well as the whole of Cyprus, became part of the Macedonian state and was then ruled by the Ptolemies of Egypt. It maintained though a relative administrative independence and had trade contacts with other cities of Cyprus and Egypt, exporting copper and timber. It thus went on developing financially and culturally in the 3rd and the 2nd century B.C. and some of the public buildings still preserved today (e.g. the theatre) started being constructed at the time. However, most of them date to the Roman period and were built after 58 B.C., when Cyprus became part of the Roman Empire.

The theatre overlooking the Mediterranean Sea

The first theatre on the citadel of Kourion was built during the Hellenistic period, in the 2nd century B.C., with a circular orchestra and a raised *proskenion*, like the theatre of Philippopolis.

During the Roman period, many alterations took place: the *skene* was joined to the *cavea*, in accordance with the Roman model, and the orchestra became semicircular. Thus, in the 2nd century A.D. the theatre's capacity was around 3,000 spectators. During the same period the *skene* became quite imposing as its façade was decorated with marble. Unfortunately, only the foundations of the scene building survive today.

The *cavea* is better preserved, and it offers a beautiful view of the Kourion valley and the Mediterranean Sea (fig. 64).

The cavea

The *cavea* was carved into the hillside, but its two ends were supported by thick walls. When the theatre functioned, the *cavea* was much taller and divided in two sections by a horizontal corridor, the *diazoma* (fig. 64). Today only the low part is preserved. Over the upper part there was a stoa all around, where the spectators arrived from the entrances of the exterior wall of the *cavea*. Five interior corridors with steps started from this stoa and led the spectators to the *diazoma* and from there to their seats.

Fig. 64: View of the *cavea*.



Fig. 65: The orchestra and the cavea.



From yesterday to today

At the beginning of the 3rd century A.D. the first three rows of the *cavea* were removed and replaced by a low wall because the orchestra was used as an arena for gladiator and wild animal fights and the audience needed to be protected. Moreover, some chambers were discovered under the *cavea*; according to scholars they were auxiliary spaces for the animal fights. In the late 3rd century A.D., the theatre started being used again for

theatre performances, the first rows of the *cavea* were rebuilt and the orchestra took its previous form. The theatre was completely abandoned in the 4th century A.D., probably after a devastating earthquake.

Nowadays, a large part of the *cavea* has been restored and completed with modern building materials and the theatre is used for theatre performances and other cultural events.

THE ROMAN THEATRE OF PALMYRA





Fig. 66: The Roman theatre of Palmyra.

A city in the heart of the desert

In an oasis of the desert of central Syria there are the remains of a great ancient city. Since the prehistoric period, the caravans coming from Mesopotamia and going to the Mediterranean have been stopping here. The city was initially called Tadmur, as the modern city that lies there today. It was named Palmyra during the Hellenistic period, when it came in contact with the Greek civilization, after the campaign of Alexander the Great (4th c. B.C.). Its main source of income was the taxation paid by the passing caravans, which transported products from East to West. So, in the 1st century B.C., Palmyra became a very rich and powerful city. It was located on the “Silk Road”, an enormous network of trade routes that connected China with India, the Middle East and Europe. The city thrived when it became part of the Roman Empire, in the 1st century A.D., and in the following two centuries. Around 270 A.D., Palmyra’s queen Zenobia threatened Rome with her expansive politics, which led to the destruction of Palmyra in 274 A.D. Then, the city was conquered by the Byzantines and in the 7th century A.D. by the Arabs.

A theatre in the heart of the city

During the Roman period, several imposing buildings were erected in Palmyra, such as the temple of the Syrian god Ba'al, the forum, the theatre, and an impressive stoa 1,000 m long, the “avenue of the columns”. The theatre was probably built in the 2nd or 3rd century A.D., under Hadrian (117-138 A.D.) or the Severan dynasty (196-235 A.D.). It seems though that it was unfinished, which explains the small size of the *cavea*, with only 13 rows of seats, that could host a small number of spectators. Perhaps, the *cavea* capacity would be increased with the addition of wooden seats.

The theatre was situated at a very central point, as the “avenue of the columns”, which was the largest street of the city, passed behind its scene building. What is more, at the back of the *cavea* there was a large semicircular square with stoas that must have contained shops.

The skene and the orchestra

Although the scene building was unfinished, its façade was elaborate and two-storied. Only the wall of the ground floor survives today, which is not straight, but forms niches and is decorated with Corinthian columns (fig. 66). On this wall there are five doors –the largest one being in the centre– in contrast with most of the Roman theatres which included three doors. In front of the *skene* there is the *logeion*, where the actors made their appearance (fig. 68).

The orchestra was covered with slabs and separated from the *logeion* by a low wall decorated with niches. Another wall built around the orchestra protected the audience during the wild animal fights (fig. 66). It is possible that sports competitions also took place in the theatre, in honour of the local god Ba'al.

Today, after its restoration, the theatre hosts

Fig. 67: Detail of the skene.



music, dance and other events in the framework of the Palmyra Festival and the annual Silk Road Festival.

Both the archaeological site and the theatre of Palmyra are inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

However, after the recent actions of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria, both the theatre and the whole city are severely threatened.

Fig. 68: The skene and the logeion.



THE ROMAN THEATRE OF BOSRA





*Fig. 69: Panoramic view
of the Roman theatre of Bosra.*

A city with an ancient name

Bosra is located in south Syria, around 140 km to the south of Damascus. It is a city with a long standing history, as its name is found for the first time in the “Letters of Amarna”, discovered in Egypt. These “Letters” were clay tablets dating to the 14th century B.C. which reflected the correspondence of the Egyptian Pharaohs with other ancient peoples, such as the Amorites who lived in the territory of modern Syria. Much later, Bosra formed part of the Arab kingdom of the *Nabataeans*, conquered by the Romans in 106 B.C. Then, it became a Roman city and finally the capital of the Roman province of Arabia. This meant a new era for Bosra which became very rich, since it was situated on the crossroads of many trade routes and it produced its own cereals. During the Roman period, many important buildings were erected, the most distinguishing one being the theatre. In the following centuries the city was ruled by the Byzantines and then by the Arabs, while it remained an important station for the caravans and for the Muslim pilgrims on their way to Mecca, their sacred city. Today the archaeological site of Bosra is one of UNESCO’s World Heritage sites.

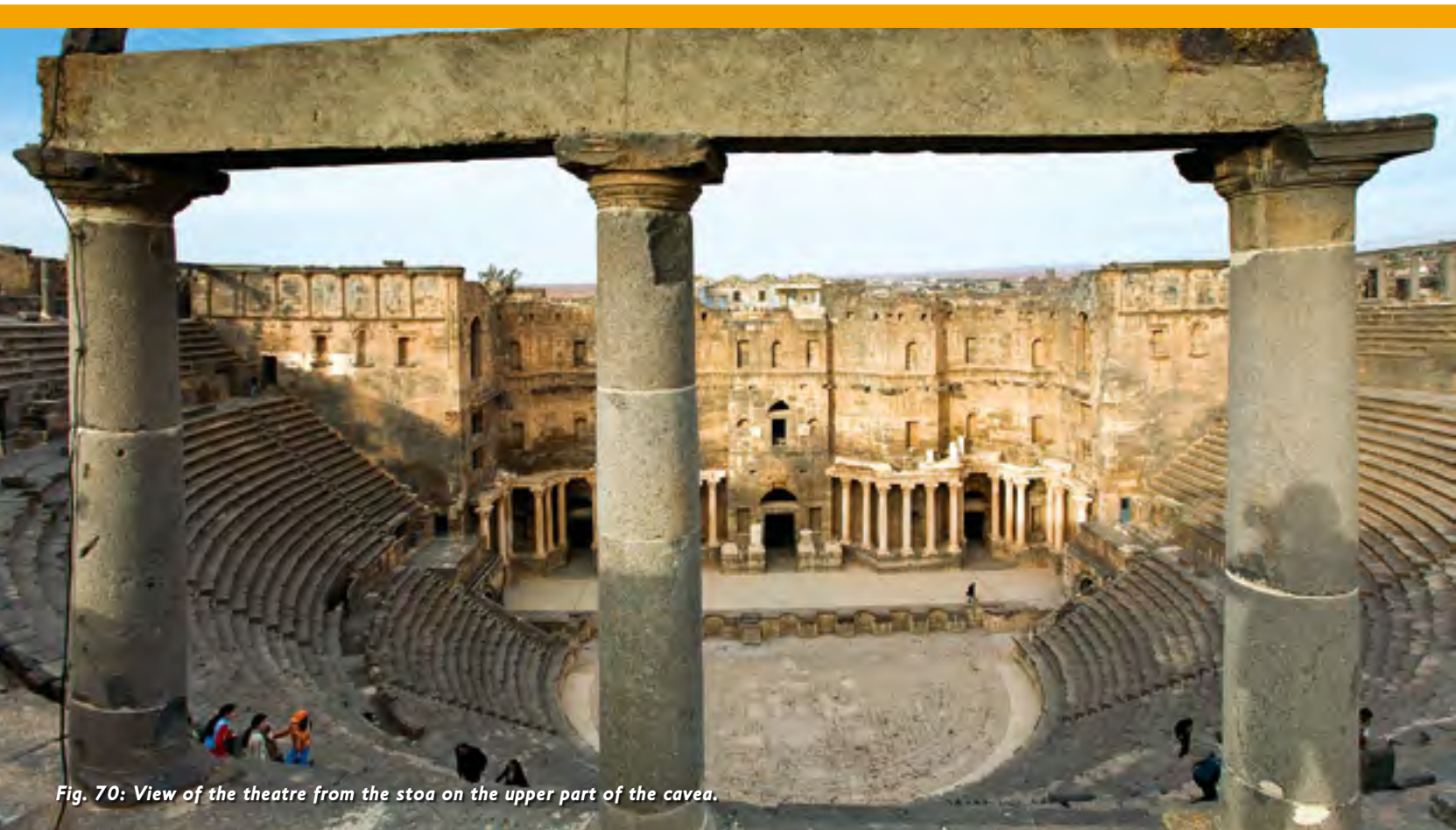


Fig. 70: View of the theatre from the stoa on the upper part of the cavea.

The theatre that became a castle

The theatre of Bosra was built in the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan, in the 2nd century A.D. Looking at it from the exterior, one sees a castle, but in its heart there is a hidden theatre (fig. 69). In fact, it is one of the best preserved Roman theatres in the world because it was transformed into a castle when the city was conquered by the Arabs, in the 7th century A.D.

Its *skene* is impressive and survives in its full height (26 m). It is three-storied and its façade was decorated with marble Corinthian columns, from which only

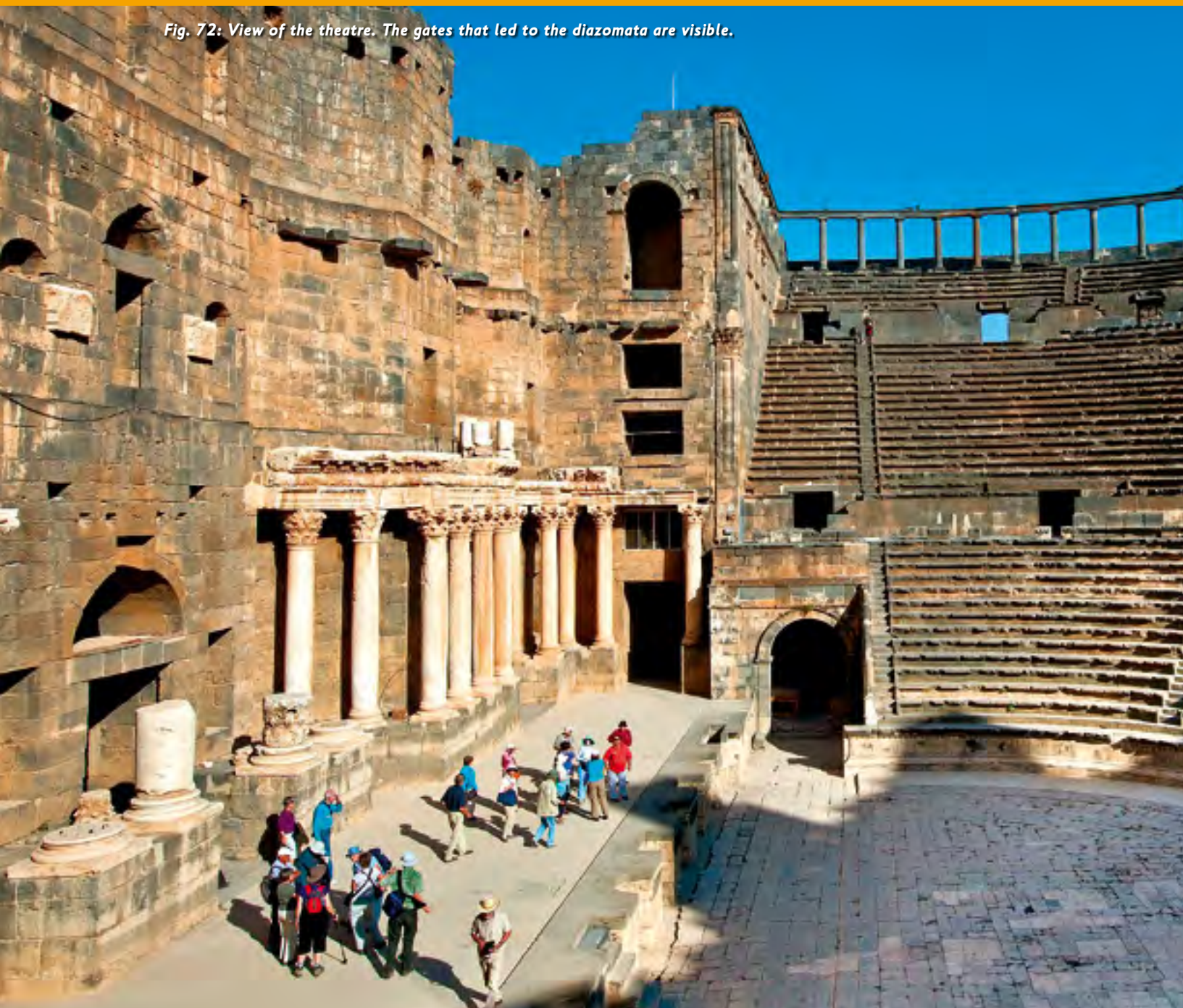
those of the ground floor are preserved (fig. 71). The wall of the scene building was not flat, but it had niches and protrusions. It also had 3 doors through which appeared the actors on the *logeion*, the raised platform in front of the *skene*. The *logeion* is separated from the orchestra by a low wall decorated with semicircular and rectangular niches.

The orchestra functioned as an arena also and hosted popular events for the Romans, such as gladiator and wild animal fights, and parades of wild animals.



Fig. 71: The skene and the orchestra.

Fig. 72: View of the theatre. The gates that led to the diazomata are visible.






Fig. 73: Passageway in the interior of the cavea.

The cavea that endured through time

Different scholars have different opinions on the capacity of the theatre: some believe there were around 9,000 seats, while others up to 15,000!

The *cavea* was divided in three sections by the *diazomata*, the two horizontal corridors with openings on their walls (fig. 72). The spectators arrived there through interior staircases and passageways which started from the arched openings on the exterior wall of the *cavea* (fig. 73). On the top of the *cavea* there was another passageway for the spectators' circulation, where only some columns stand today (fig. 69). If we observe the seats, we will notice that the higher on the *cavea*, the more inclined they were. It is also possible that during the performances a cloth awning protected the spectators from the weather conditions.

Another interesting piece of information from the written sources is that the Romans sprayed the theatre with scented water so that it would smell good during the events!

From yesterday to today

When the Arabs conquered Bosra (7th c. A.D.), they closed all the arched openings of the exterior wall of the *cavea* thus transforming the theatre into a castle for the defense of the city. In order to protect themselves from the Crusaders (11th -13th c. A.D.), they built an extra wall around the theatre and reinforced it with defense towers (fig. 69).

During the Arab rule, changes were made in the interior of the theatre as well. Today, centuries later, the monument has been restored and hosts again theatre performances and other artistic events.

THE ROMAN THEATRES OF GERASA





Fig. 74: View of the south theatre of Gerasa. In the background there are the remains of the Roman city and modern Gerasa.

A small Rome away from Rome!

On the northwestern part of Jordan, around 50 km to the south of Amman and near the borders with Syria lies today the city Jerash. Next to the modern city one sees the remains of Gerasa, the ancient city built on the banks of the river *Chrysorhoas*. The area was fertile and it seems that it has been inhabited since the Prehistoric times. Gerasa became an important city during the Hellenistic period, after the campaign of Alexander the Great around 332 B.C., and it thrived after its conquest by the Romans, in 63 B.C. It was one of the cities of Decapolis, the coalition of ten cities in the region of Syria and Palestine. These cities, although they belonged to the Roman province Syria, they largely maintained their independence. So, in the Roman period, Gerasa was a very wealthy city with much commercial activity. Under Trajan (98-117 A.D.), a street network was built around the city, which facilitated even more the trade and the movement of the inhabitants. The emperor Hadrian visited Gerasa some years later, in 130 A.D., and for his reception a triumphal arch was built. The arch is still preserved, as well as many public buildings erected in the 1st and 2nd century A.D. Thus, visitors see today one of the best preserved Roman cities of the Middle East with a forum, a hippodrome, temples and two theatres.

The south theatre

The oldest of the two Roman theatres of Gerasa is situated in the south part of the city, next to the temple of Zeus. Its construction was completed around 90-92 A.D., under the emperor Domitian. Its estimated capacity was 4,000-5,000 spectators. The *cavea* is divided in two large horizontal sections by a *diazoma* and in vertical wedged-shaped sections (*kerkides*) by steps between them (fig. 75). The spectators entered the theatre through the *parodoi* or through the entrances on the exterior wall of the *cavea* that led to the *diazoma*. Above the *parodoi* there were seats reserved for the officials (fig. 75). Moreover, on the two side *kerkides* of the *cavea*, the seats bear incised numbers from 1 to 300, as well as Greek inscriptions with the names of the tribes of Gerasa. This reveals that there were specific seats depending on the origin of every spectator, while certain scholars believe that perhaps the spectators could book their seats!

The decoration of the skene

Only the ground floor and its impressive façade with the Corinthian columns survives today from the two-storey skene (fig. 75). The façade has three doors that led from the interior of the *skene* to the *logeion*; between them there were decorative niches with statues. It is noteworthy that all three doors have the same size, in contrast with most theatres where the central door was larger than the rest ones. Today the *cavea* and the orchestra have been restored and the theatre is used for music and theatre performances held in the framework of the Jerash Festival.





Fig. 75: The skene, the orchestra and part of the cavea.



*Fig. 76: View of the north theatre of Gerasa.
Behind the skene there are the remains of the stoa.*



Fig. 77: View of the cavea.

The north theatre

The second Roman theatre of Gerasa is located on the north part of the city and it was built after the south theatre, around 165 A.D. It took its final form after the alterations that took place between 222 and 235 A.D. Then it doubled in size and it could host up to 1,600 spectators. The names of the tribes of Gerasa are incised on the seats of the *cavea*, like in the south theatre. It is possible that this theatre was not only used for performances, but also for political gatherings.

Its *skene* was two-storied and elaborate. Today, only the ground floor of the *skene* and the *logeion*, which is covered with a wooden floor for protection, are preserved (fig. 76). The columns of the façade were made of marble and not of stone as most of the theatre parts.

The orchestra is also impressive, as it is covered with coloured marble slabs (fig. 76). An element that makes this theatre special is a stoa behind the *skene*, where the spectators gathered during the intervals or in case it rained (fig. 76). The Corinthian columns that supported the roof of the stoa still survive, as well as the two fountains used by the spectators for drinking water. A long staircase that started from a central road of the city led to the stoa, so, it is possible that this space was also used as entrance to the theatre as well as the *parodoi* and the entrances of the exterior wall of the *cavea*. The north theatre was abandoned in the 5th century A.D. Today, it has been restored and it hosts, as the south theatre, the performances of the Jerash Festival.

THE ROMAN THEATRE IN AMMAN





Fig. 78: The cavea of the Roman theatre of Amman.

The city that endured through time

Amman, the capital of Jordan, is a city with a long standing history. It has been inhabited since the Bronze Age, and according to the Bible it was the capital of Ammonites -the ancient Semitic people- around 1200 B.C. In the following centuries it was conquered by the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Ptolemies of Egypt. It was Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283-246 B.C.) who gave his name to the city: Philadelphia. As one of the cities of Decapolis it flourished during the Roman period, since the 1st century B.C. Decapolis was a coalition of ten cities in the region of Syria and Palestine that were favoured by the Romans. So, the city managed to largely maintain its independence. It was located on a central point of the Roman province of Arabia, on the trade routes that connected the Mediterranean Sea with China and India. During this period, the city was transformed into a purely Roman city with temples and public buildings, like the theatre that dominates today the centre of the modern city. It was called Philadelphia until the Byzantine period, but in the 7th century A.D. the Arabs named it Amman.



Fig. 79: Panoramic view of the theatre with the modern Amman in the background.

A theatre in the heart of the city

From an inscription referring to Antoninus Pius, many scholars believe that the theatre was built when he was emperor of Rome, that is, between 138-161 A.D. However, others believe that it was constructed in the 1st century A.D., under Augustus, and that in the reign of Antoninus Pius it was remodeled and took the form we see today.

It is a large theatre with three zones in the *cavea*, whose estimated capacity was around 10,000 seats (fig. 78). It was built in the heart of the Roman city, next to the forum and the odeion. The *cavea* was

carved into a hillside, but it was also supported by thick walls in its two ends (fig. 78). From there started the staircases that led the spectators to the two *diazomata* through interior passageways. In the lowest zone of the *cavea* there was a *theoreion* reserved for the emperor or for a local governor, while on the upper part of the *cavea* still survives a small sanctuary with a vaulted roof, also carved in the hillside. The door next to the sanctuary's entrance was connected with an exterior passageway running around the back of the *cavea*.



Fig. 80: View of the cavea from one of the skene doors.

The skene and the orchestra

Only part of the elaborate façade is preserved from the scene building. It was decorated with marble columns and statues placed in niches.

Slits have been found in the back wall of the façade, which were probably used for the **crane** that brought into the scene the actors that impersonated the gods (*deus ex machina*).

Three doors led from the interior of the *skene* to the *logeion* which is today covered with a wooden floor for protection (fig. 79).

The orchestra was covered with slabs and was separated from the *logeion* by a low wall, decorated with niches. In the centre of the orchestra there was an opening connected with the *skene* through an underground corridor. According to the archaeologists, it was either a drainage channel or the *Charon's staircase* from which appeared the actors who impersonated Charon (ferryman of Hades) or the persons who came from the Underworld.

Today the theatre is well preserved, it has been restored and it is used for performances, concerts and other events.

THE ROMAN THEATRE OF CARTHAGE





*Fig. 81: The Roman theatre of Carthage
after the restoration.*

Carthage, the great enemy of Rome

Just outside Tunis, capital of Tunisia, there are the remains of ancient Carthage. The city was founded at the north coast of Africa in the end of the 9th century B.C. by Phoenician traders from Tyre, an ancient city in modern Lebanon. According to the myth that survived thanks to the Roman historian Justin, the first queen of Carthage was Elissa -also known as Dido- from Tyre. Carthage was a coastal city with two harbours, at a strategic position between eastern and western Mediterranean. In the following centuries (6th-3rd c. B.C.) it became a great naval and commercial power that controlled the North Africa, the coasts of Sardinia and Corsica, as well as a large part of Spain. During the 5th and 4th century B.C., the Carthaginians fought many times with the Greeks over Sicily. The continuous effort of Carthage to expand in Sicily and south Italy in general led to a series of wars with Rome in the 3rd and 2nd century B.C. and ended in the sack of Carthage in 146 B.C.



Fig. 82: The view from the archaeological site of Carthage.

The adventures of a city

After 146 B.C. the Romans didn't want to deal with Carthage again. However, they could not ignore the importance of the city's location for the control of North Africa. Thus, in 44 B.C., under Julius Ceasar, Roman citizens were installed there and a while later, in 29 B.C., a Roman colony was set up by Augustus. Soon, Carthage became the capital of the whole Roman province of Africa, one of the largest cities of the Roman Empire and a significant commercial harbour.

So, Carthage reached again a point where it competed with Rome in terms of wealth and grandeur. During

this period, a series of Roman public buildings were erected, such as the forum, the hippodrome, the odeion and the theatre that revived the city.

Carthage went on being an important city during the first centuries of Christianity, as it became the seat of the Christians of Africa. In 439 A.D., the Vandals conquered it and made it their capital. In 637 A.D. it was sieged by the Arabs who destroyed the city once again. Despite all these adventures, many of the monuments of the ancient city are preserved and since 1979 they have been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

The theatre of Carthage

Virgil, the Roman poet of the 1st century B.C., writes in his “Aeneid” that in Carthage there was a theatre already since the time of Augustus. This has not been confirmed by research yet, as the study of the archaeological finds demonstrates that the first theatre was built in the 2nd century A.D., when Trajan was the emperor of Rome (117-138

A.D.). In the following centuries (3rd and 4th c. A.D.) several additions and changes were made in the theatre. Today’s form is the result of an extensive restoration that took place in 1969. However, according to the excavations, the theatre in the Roman period must have been quite different from what we see today.

The cavea and the skene

The *cavea* was divided in three horizontal zones, the lowest being the largest one. Among these zones there were passageways, the *diazomata*, which facilitated the circulation of the spectators. Staircases divided each of the zones in vertical sections, the *kerkides*. The *cavea* was not carved into the hillside, but it was supported by a series of walls that formed corridors, stoas and staircases. The spectators entered the theatre through the *parodoi* and, following these interior passageways, they reached the *diazomata*, and then their seats. The estimated capacity of the theatre was up to 5,000 spectators.

The *skene* of the theatre must have been very impres-

sive. Its façade was three-storied and was decorated with statues of ancient Greek gods, such as Apollo, Athena, Hermes and Dionysus. The decoration was completed by columns, as well as linings of different kinds of marbles that made the building look luxurious.

The wall of the ground floor had three large semi-circular niches for the doors that led from the interior of the *skene* to the *logeion* (fig. 83). On the *logeion* the actors made their appearance, and it was raised in comparison with the orchestra, so, there were steps in its both ends. The orchestra was covered with marbles slabs, and around it there were two low steps for the seats (*thronoi*) of the officials.



Fig. 83: The orchestra and the scene building of the theatre after the excavation.

From yesterday to today

The theatre was destroyed by the Vandals in the 5th century A.D. and was then abandoned. It was uncovered by the excavations conducted between 1904 and 1906, and it was restored in 1969. Unfortunately, after its restoration only a few of its ancient parts remain visible (fig. 81). Today the space is used for theatre performances that take place every year in the framework of the International Festival of Carthage.





How to use the handbook

What is it?

Through this document one can mentally travel to ancient cities of the world, with long standing history, and visit beautiful theatres and odeia which are still preserved. It is a reason for starting an “imaginary journey” from Athens with stops all over the world.

Taking a glance at the introductory map, one realizes that different cities-stops have been chosen, which have in common the ancient theatres and odeia that still adorn them today. Many of these monuments are inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List and of course could not be omitted from this document. Some others may not be so well preserved, but they have been chosen because they were constructed in cities of special historical significance (Carthage, Syracuse etc.), as they flourished during the Hellenistic and Roman period.

To whom is it addressed?

Mainly to the teachers, who want to use it as a tool to enrich the teaching in the classroom. An effort has been made to present the history of each ancient city concisely, as well as the political and social conditions under which the theatres and odeia were erected. The text is written in a way that it would also be understood by pupils over 14 years old.

How can it be used?

In many ways, with main criterion the enjoyment of the reader. Every theatre or odeion constitutes a separate “journey” that does not presuppose reading the whole document. The teacher may use it in combination with the curriculum, depending on the goals, means, time and interests of the pupils.

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Fig. 1-2, 7, 9-10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21-27, 30, 33, 37-38, 41-42, 46, 50, 52, 56-57, 59-61, 64-69, 71, 75-76, 78, 83: Corbis/SmartMagna.com

Fig. 3: Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens

Fig. 4, 6: Ciancio-Rossetto, P. & Pisani-Sartorio, G. (ed.) (1994-1996). *Greek and Roman Theatres. At the roots of acted language*. Torino: SEAT

Fig. 5: Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolida

Fig. 8, 13, 40, 44-45, 63, 70, 72-74, 79: Laif/www.iml.gr

Fig. 11, 15-16, 18, 20, 28-29, 31-32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 47, 49, 53-55, 58, 62, 77, 80-81: Age/www.iml.gr

Fig. 35: Augusta Raurica, Photo Susanne Schenker

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The book "A journey to ancient theatres and odeia of the world" was created by the Directorate of Museums of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, within the framework of the project "Design and production of educational material towards the promotion of the importance of theatre in antiquity and nowadays" (code MIS 339817) which is implemented in the framework of the Operational Programme "Education and Lifelong Learning" and is co-financed by Greece and the European Union.



HELLENIC MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS
GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF ANTIQUITIES AND CULTURAL HERITAGE
DIRECTORATE OF MUSEUMS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AND COMMUNICATION

ISBN: 978-960-386-225-3