



RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT
OF ANCIENT THEATRES IN TURKEY
methods | research | results

Edited by

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CONGEDO EDITORE

THE WEST AND NORTH THEATRES IN LAODICEA

Laodicea is located on the western edge of Phrygia (Map 1), 6 km north-east of the modern city of Denizli, between the villages of Eskihisar, Goncalı and Bozburun¹. One of the most important cities in the valley of the Lykos, it was founded in the mid 3rd century BC (261-253 BC) by the Seleucid king Antiochus II, who named it after his wife Laodice².

The chosen location was on an important transport route linking western Anatolia with the central and southern regions. Ancient sources (Pliny the Elder, N.H., V, 105; Strabo XII, 8, 16) tell us that the city was built near the sanctuary of Diospolis/Rhoas³. It was built to a Hippodamian plan⁴ on a tableland bounded by three rivers: to the north-east the Lykos (today Çürüksu), to the south-east the Kapros (Başlıçay) and to the south-west the

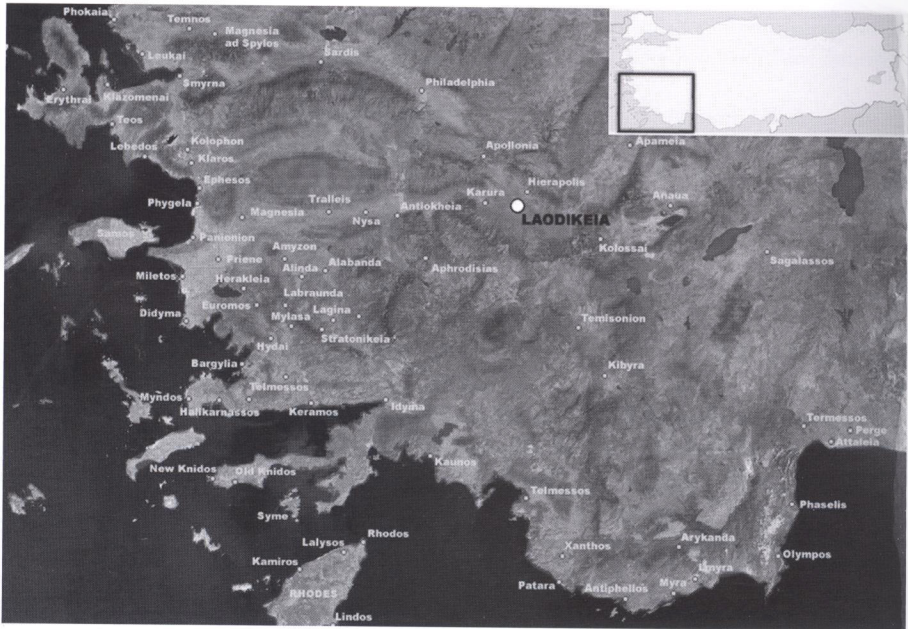
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¹ There are many cities of Hellenistic foundation that bear the name of Laodicea; the city described here is sometimes specified as *Laodicea ad Lycum* due to the nearby river. See: RUGE 1924, 722; GAGNIERS 1969, 1; TRAVERSARI 2000, 11; WEBER 1898, 178-179; SEVIN 2001, 203.

² RAMSAY 1895, 32; HEAD 1911, 678; HEAD 1906, lxxiii; RUGE 1924, 722; GAGNIERS 1969, 1-2; *ASIE MINEURE: DESCRIPTION GÉOGRAPHIQUE*, 383; BEJOR 2000, 15-16; BEAN 1980, 213; MAGIE 1950, 127, 986-987, (no.23); ANDERSON 1897, 409-410; BUCKLER, CALDER 1939, x; BELKE, MERSICH 1990, 323.

³ *ASIE MINEURE: DESCRIPTION GÉOGRAPHIQUE*, 383-384; HEAD 1906, lxxiii; RUGE 1924, 722; RAMSAY 1895, 35; GAGNIERS 1969, 1; BELKE, MERSICH 1990, 323; BEAN 1980, 213. The name Diospolis – *City of Zeus* – is a reference to the city's most important divinity and protector, Zeus Laodikeios; Rhoas is an ancient Anatolian toponym. The excavations that we have conducted in the western part of the ancient city on the hill of Asopos I-II have brought to light ceramics, flints and objects in obsidian dated to between the late chalcolithic age (3500 BC) and the late bronze age (3000 BC). See ŞİMŞEK 2007b, 455-456, fig. 2; ŞİMŞEK 2009, 409-411. The black-painted ceramics of the 4th century BC found in the western part of the city and the coins dated to the 4th century discovered in the excavations confirm the information handed down to us by Pliny the Elder.

⁴ The *insulae* that line both sides of the Syria Street and are delimited by secondary roads measure 42x51m.



Map 1: The ancient settlements of south-west Anatolia.

Asopos (Gümüşçay)⁵ (Fig. 1). Trade, particularly in textiles, is believed to have been one of the city's most important resources⁶.

Laodicea was struck by earthquakes many times over the centuries: a serious episode dated to the period of the emperor Focas (602-610 AD) was particularly destructive, to the point that the city was abandoned and rebuilt in the area of the current Kaleiçi, Denizli (near Hisarköy and Asartepe), a site characterised by a large number of springs on the slopes of Mount Salbakos (today Babadağ)⁷.

In its thousands of years of history, Anatolia has seen the development of a number of different civilisations that have left an important artistic and monumental legacy. Some of the most valuable surviving examples of ancient architecture are without doubt the theatres. In Asia Minor these buildings have particular characteristics that distinguish them from other Mediterranean regions and even from the models described by ancient

⁵ The rivers Asopos and Kapros flow into the Lykos to the north near the village of Korucuk.

⁶ Recent excavations in the area surrounding Laodicea show that in addition to textiles an important role was also played by the trade in wine and worked marble.

⁷ ŞİMŞEK 2005, 310, 312-313; ŞİMŞEK 2006, 420-424, 426; ŞİMŞEK-CEYLAN 2003, 155; ŞİMŞEK-BÜYÜKKOLANCI 2006, 91.

LAODIKEIA KENT PLANI



Fig. 1: Plan of the excavations of Laodicea.

sources such as Vitruvius. The theatres were not only structures for spectacles and games, but also served an essential function as meeting places for citizens' assemblies and public institutions.

In the Roman age, the increase in population was matched by growth in the number and size of these buildings: in the imperial age numerous theatres of the Hellenistic period underwent refurbishment or enlargement, particularly of the cavea and passageways for spectators⁸.

⁸ DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 130-133.



Fig. 2: Aerial view of the west and north theatres.

Laodicea differs from many other ancient cities in that it had two theatres⁹: the west theatre, located in the north-west area of the city, and the north theatre, looking on to the valley of the Lykos (Figs. 1-2).

1. West theatre (Figs. 1-8)

The west theatre is the most ancient in the city, datable to the Hellenistic age. The steeply sloping cavea¹⁰ is excavated directly from the bedrock, in a position perhaps chosen in order to make the most of the breeze that blows in the afternoon¹¹ (Figs. 1-4). The building has a capacity of 8000¹². The space for the spectators is subdivided by 8 flights of steps into 9 *kerkides* or

⁹ ŞİMŞEK 2007a, 207-220, figs. 71-74; SPERTI 2000, 81-91, figs. 42-51; 2007a, 206-220, figs. 71-74; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, figs. 16-17, 35, 172, 197; YILMAZ 2009, 191-193.

¹⁰ For the design of Hellenistic and Roman theatres, in addition to the text by Vitruvius (V.6/1-9, 7/1-2), see LEPIK 1949, 1-25, pls. I-VI.

¹¹ The theatres of Herakleia, Pinara and Ephesus also face west. See DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 28.

¹² ŞİMŞEK 2007a, 207-213, fig. 72a-e; ŞİMŞEK 2006, 422-423, figs. 1, 6-7; CHASE 2002, 119. The theatre of Aphrodisias has a capacity of about 8000. ERIM 1986, 79.



Fig. 3: West theatre. Aerial view after the excavations.

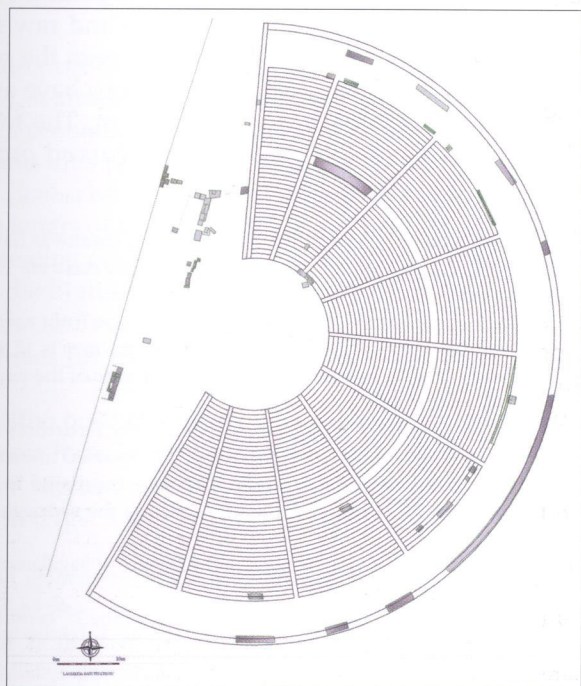


Fig. 4: West theatre. Plan.

*cunei*¹³. The *ima cavea* is organised into 23 rows of seats and the *summa cavea* into 19¹⁴ (Figs. 3-4). The diameter of the highest row is 85 m, and that of the *analemma* is 98.5 m¹⁵. The surveys conducted by the Italian Archaeological Mission under the direction of G. Traversari did not record the presence of the median *diazoma*; the first and last *kerkides* of the *cavea* are narrower, about two thirds the width of the others¹⁶. The form that arises goes significantly beyond a semicircle, showing the still markedly Hellenistic derivation of the architectural model¹⁷.

The recent general cleaning of the steps made it possible to bring to light the wall of the *diazoma* (width 1.80 m, height 1.00 m) in the northern part; the operation also made it possible to clarify that a single median *diazoma* was envisaged for the *cavea* (Figs. 3-4). The *diazoma* and the seating of the *ima cavea* are separated by a parapet formed from slabs 0.30 m wide and 0.05 m thick¹⁸. The seating of the *ima cavea* and the decoration of the stage building are made of marble, while the seating of the *summa cavea* and the other walls are made of local limestone (Figs. 3, 4, 7). This can be explained with reference to the fact that initially the theatre was of smaller dimensions, being subsequently expanded in the imperial age using cheaper materials. The seating above the line of the median *diazoma*, in limestone, is in a good state of conservation. This is not the case for the lower part, in marble, of which little remains: the marble structures of the ancient city, already damaged by the earthquake in the reign of the emperor Focas (7th century AD), were used as a source of building materials and raw material for the production of lime until the 1990s¹⁹. The steps between the seating blocks vary in width from 0.64 m and 0.75 m (Fig. 5). The steps have an overall depth of 0.80 m to 0.90 m and an average height of 0.40 m. The front of the seating blocks is characterised by a fillet and a simple curved profile that enlarges the space

¹³ Frank Sear describes the *cavea* of the west theatre as having a diameter of 100 m, of which 9 *cunei* (*kerkides*) and 16 rows of seats of the *summa cavea* are visible. SEAR 2006, 340.

¹⁴ ŞİMŞEK 2007a, 207, fig. 72b.

¹⁵ The distance from the median *diazoma* to the front row of the *cavea* is 16.30 m, and from the median *diazoma* to the back row of the *summa cavea* is 12.60 m. The *analemma* is 1.00 m thick.

¹⁶ In the drawing by Italian researchers the ratio of the widths was estimated to be 1:2. SPERTI 2000, 88–91, figs.47-49.

¹⁷ The walls *in situ* of the *analemmata* and the structures adjoining the stage building were brought to light by the recent excavations. This enabled researchers to verify the width of the two end *kerkides*, which are 11.50 m wide at the top, compared to between 17.70 and 18.30 m for the others (the variability is a probably the result of the slippage of the blocks caused by the earthquakes).

¹⁸ A similar solution can be seen in the theatre of Sagalassos. See: VANDEPUT 1992, 99–100; SEAR 2006, 374-375, plan 396.

¹⁹ For the phase of destruction that began in the 7th century, see ŞİMŞEK 2007a, 21-24, 31, 325-328, figs. 5ab, 6ab, 7b, 125a-c, 126-127; ŞİMŞEK 2007c, 40, 43, figs. 5-8; BÜYÜKKOLANCI 2007, 51-53; DAVIS 2006, 73; ASIE MINEURE: DESCRIPTION GÉOGRAPHIQUE, 278, 383-385.



Fig. 5: West theatre. Seating and steps between the *kerkides*.

for the spectators' feet, while on the horizontal plane the seating area is clearly delimited²⁰ (Fig. 7-8). A small groove along the front edge of the underside of the seating blocks probably serves to maintain their position with respect to the block below and thus prevent them from slipping.

After the cleaning of the *summa cavea*, the seats of the south-west part were observed to be marked with letters of the Greek alphabet (Α, Β, Γ, Δ, Η, Θ, Κ, Λ, Μ, Ν, Σ, Τ, Υ) indicating the seating assigned to the various tribes²¹ (Fig. 7).

On the horizontal plane of the highest row of seats of the *summa cavea* there is a groove for positioning the slabs of the parapets (Fig. 7), which alternated with small pillars. Square holes for the bases of the latter have been identified at regular intervals.

Along the upper *diazoma* the positions of the square bases that supported the gallery of the *summa cavea* have been recognised; from the distance between the *analemma* and the highest row of seats, the width of the gallery has been calculated as 5.80 m (Figs. 3-4).

²⁰ In this way, the spectators had about 0.50 m of space for their feet, and 0.40 m for sitting. See the theatre in Miletus: KRAUSS 1973, 85-86.

²¹ On some seats three letters are carved. A similar numbering pattern is also seen in the north theatre. ŞİMŞEK 2007a, 211.



Fig. 6: West theatre. The situation of discovery of the podium blocks of the orchestra and the *proedria*.

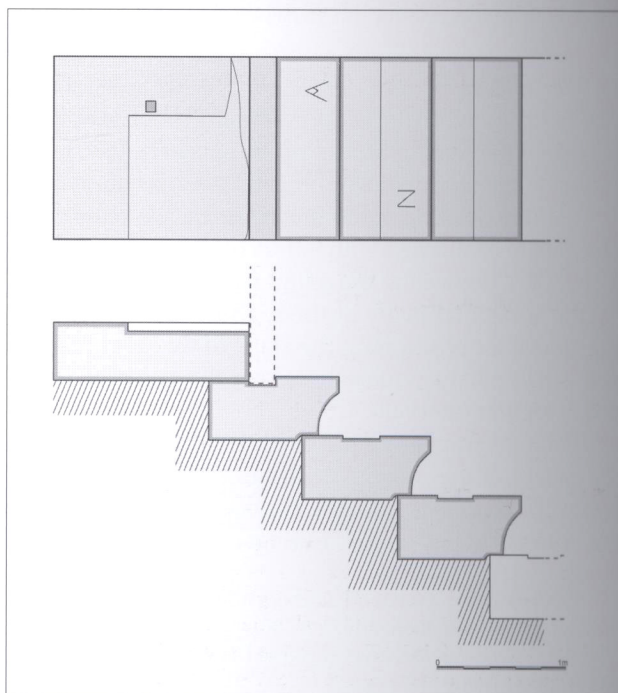


Fig. 7: West theatre. Plan and cross section of the seats of the *summa cavea*, with relative inscriptions and square holes for the parapet of the *diazoma*.



Fig. 8: West theatre. Inscriptions on the front fillet of the steps of the *summa cavea*.

Following the recent work the diameter of the orchestra was estimated at 24 m (Fig. 4). The blocks of the orthostats found inside it show traces of work associated with the lowering of the floor of the Hellenistic orchestra carried out in the imperial age. In the original building, the *proedria* seating was arranged in accordance with a model similar to that of the theatre in Priene²² and marked

²² DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1970, 14; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 82-84, figs. 109, 117-118, 141; RUMSCHEID 2000, 161-177, figs. 145-157; VON GERKAN 1921, 20, Abb.1, Taf. I-V, VIII-XI, XIV, XVII, XXX, XXXII, XXXIV-XXXV; VON GERKAN 1960, 97-108; SEAR 2006, 349-350, plan 354, pl. 121; CHASE 2002, 34-35. Similar solutions are visible in the theatres of Tralles (SEAR 2006, 355-356, plan 364), Aphrodisias (DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, fig. 228; SEAR 2006, 328-329, plan 320, pls. 112-113; CREMA 1939, 303-306, fig. 61; ERIM 1986, 80-89), Nysa (SEAR 2006, 345-346, plan 346), Metropolis (SEAR 2006, 343; CHASE 2002, 148-149), Aizanoi (SEAR 2006, 325-326, plan 316; ROHN 2001, 303-317, Abb. 1-3, 12), Miletus (KRAUSS 1973, 5, Abb. 9-10, 12, 28, 63, 122; SEAR 2006, 343-344, plan 342, pls. 118-119; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, figs. 119-120), Stratonikeia (CHASE 2002, 42), Troy (SEAR 2006, 356-357, plans 365-367), Aspendos (SEAR 2006, 366-367, plan 383, pls. 122-124), Termessos (SEAR 2006, 378-379, plan 403, pl. 132; CHASE 2002, 85), Kaunos (DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, fig. 154), Perge (SEAR 2006, 372-373, plan 392, pls. 129-130; İNAN, ATİK, ÖZTÜRK, ALANYALI, ATEŞ 2000, 285-340, Abb. 1-4) and Side (SEAR 2006, 377, plan 401). See ROUECHÉ 1991, 99; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1970, 110. On the Hellenistic and Roman theatres of Anatolia, see ISLER 1999, 683-694; SEAR 2006, 325-381; CHASE 2002, 2-167, 622-633. In the Hellenistic phase, the *proedria* delimiting the orchestra had a depth of 0.75 m and a height of 1.02 m. The width per person of the seats is 0.55 m. On the

the lower limit of the cavea²³ (Fig. 6). As a result of the subsequent modifications the *proedria* seating was eliminated and reused in the first row of seats of the *ima cavea* (Fig. 6).

The blocks discovered inside the orchestra (architrave, *geison-sima*, ceilings, column shafts and bases) show that the front of the *proscenium* had a hypostyle decoration with niches, statues and sculptural reliefs. The Corinthian capitals, dated to the 5th to 6th centuries AD²⁴, show that the theatre was used from the Hellenistic epoch until the late-Roman period, undergoing rebuilding and repair on numerous occasions.

2. North theatre (Figs. 1-2, 9-18)

The north theatre faces north-east, towards the valley of the Lykos and the bed of the ancient lake²⁵, and is excavated directly in the natural slope of the hill, occupying an area of 1600 m² (Fig 1-2, 9-10). The location was thus chosen in order to exploit the natural orography of the tableland of the ancient city and, at the same time, the panoramic view over the surrounding countryside and towards the nearby city of Hierapolis²⁶. The building is horse-shoe shaped, in accordance with the Hellenistic tradition and respects the geometric construction of Vitruvius (V, 3, 1-2); both the decoration of the *frons scaenae* and the seating of the cavea are in marble.

The earliest information on the theatre is found in the drawings by John Thomas Serres following his visit in 1781: these drawings show the *ima cavea* with 9 *kerkides* and 21 rows of seats and the *summa cavea* with 16 *kerkides* and 25 rows²⁷. Basing himself on the account by the 19th century traveller Richard Chandler, Frank Sear recorded an overall diameter of the *analemma* of 138.5 m (111.5 m for the part occupied by the seating); the *ima cavea* is described as having 9 *kerkides* and 21 or 22 rows of seats, and the *summa cavea* 16 *kerkides* and 26 rows; the diameter of the orchestra was 42 m and the capacity was an estimated 10,000 spectators²⁸.

The restitution of the *scaenae frons* published by Walton has three orders and a large central niche decorated with *lacunaria* and flanked by four aedic-

sides of the seats of the *proedria* are grooves for seating the slabs of the balustrade, 0.72 m high and 0.20 m thick.

²³ On the geometrical relationships of the Hellenistic and Roman theatres with reference to the *proedria*, see LEPIK 1949, 26-38, pls. VII-X; SEAR 2006, 24-36.

²⁴ SPERTI 2000, 90, figs. 50-51. On the decoration of the proto-Byzantine capitals, see GINOUVÈS 1969, 108-110, No. 648, 1739, pl. LVI/1-4.

²⁵ On the topography of the Valley of the Lykos, see SCARDOZZI 2007, 82-85, figs. 18-19.

²⁶ ŞİMŞEK 2007a, 213-220, figs. 71, 73, 74.

²⁷ ANTIQUITIES OF IONIA II, pls. XLIX, L-LI.

²⁸ SEAR 2006, 340, plan 337 (See ANTIQUITIES OF IONIA I, 2, pl. XLIX).



Fig. 9: North theatre. Aerial view after the excavations (2009).

ulae with pediments; five doorways open on to the *logeion*, which correspond to five openings on the second storey framed by broad arches²⁹.

In the drawing by Leon De Laborde the stage building still has three rows of blocks in place and the seating of the cavea appears to be in an excellent state of conservation³⁰ (Fig. 11). In the mid 19th century, Charles Texier described the two theatres together with other well-conserved buildings; he reported the modern inhabitants' habit of removing building stone from the ancient city to be used in new constructions³¹.

In her treatment of classical theatres in Asia Minor, Daria De Bernardi Ferrero builds on the plan drawn by Serres, showing a *summa cavea* with 16 *kerkides* and an *ima cavea* with 9³².

More recently, from 1995–2002 the city of Laodicea was the subject of a survey headed by Gustavo Traversari: the study of the north theatre was conducted by Luigi Sperti, who published a new plan, confirming the presence

²⁹ WALTON 1962, 404–412, pl. 124a.

³⁰ DE LABORDE 1838, 86–87, pl. XXXIX-83.

³¹ *ASIE MINEURE: DESCRIPTION GÉOGRAPHIQUE*, 278, 383–385.

³² DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1966; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1969; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1970; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1974; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990.

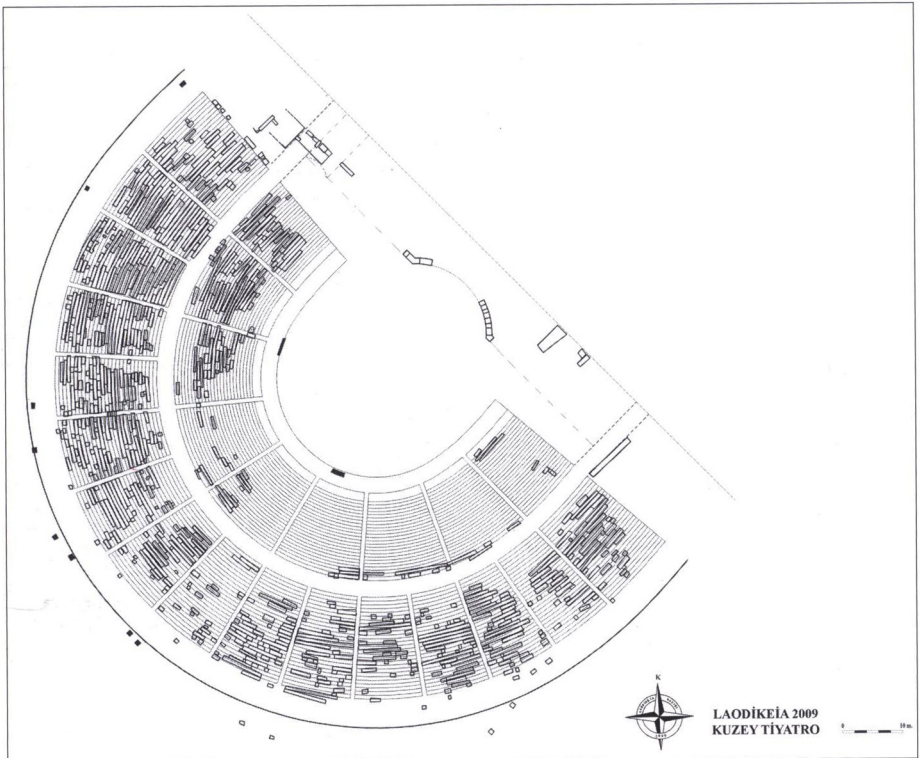


Fig.10: North theatre. Plan.

of a single diazoma, 16 *kerkides* in the *summa cavea* and 9 in the *ima cavea*³³.

Lastly, thanks to the recent work conducted by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Laodicea it was possible to verify that the cavea is divided into 9 *kerkides* below the *diazoma* and 16 above it; there are 23 rows of seats in the *ima cavea* (of which 8 rows are still conserved) and 26 in the *summa cavea* (15 rows conserved) (Fig. 10).

Whereas the terminal *kerkides* below the *diazoma* correspond exactly to those above it, in the rest of the cavea each *kerkis* in the lower part corresponds to two in the upper part. A similar arrangement is attested in the theatres of Aigai, Assos, Aspendos, Xanthos³⁴, Limyra³⁵ and Miletus³⁶.

³³ SPERTI 2000, 83–88.

³⁴ SEAR 2006, 325, 330, 366–367, 380–381, plans 315, 322, 383, 407; CHASE 2002, 8–9, 14–15, 70, 91.

³⁵ DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1974, pl. 5; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 178–179; SEAR 2006, 369, pl. 388; BORCHHARDT, 1999, 100–104, figs. 41–42.

³⁶ KRAUSS 1973.

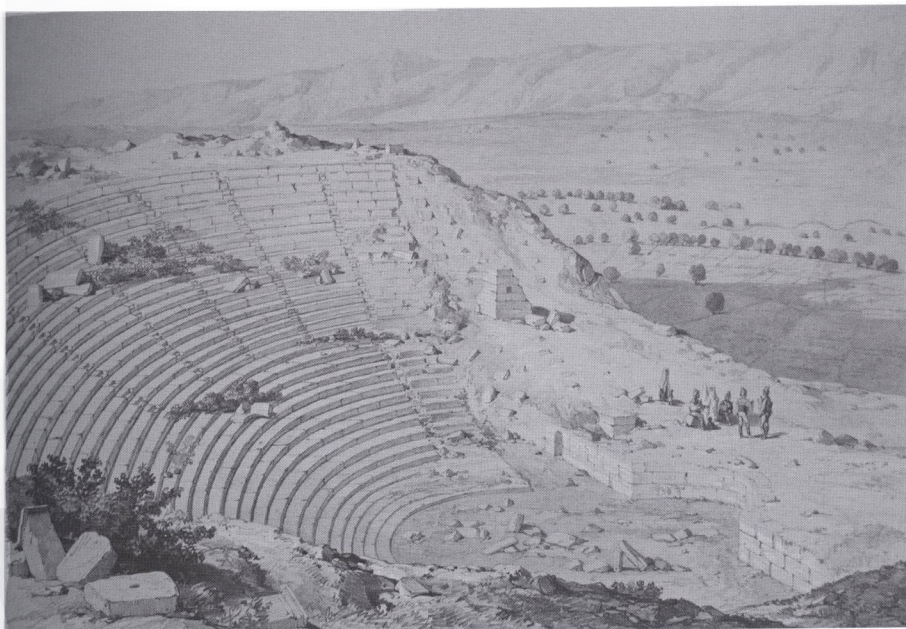


Fig.11: North theatre. The plan drawn by De Laborde (1838).

The diameter of the area for spectators is 112 m, and 121.5 m including the *analemma*. The cavea of the theatre goes beyond a semicircle, thus replicating the model of the theatres in Hierapolis³⁷, Nysa³⁸ and Patara³⁹. The diameter of the orchestra is 39.5 m.

The upper corridor of the building has a width of 5 m; the flooring is made of small stones and lime mortar which presumably supported a pavement of stone slabs.

The remains in the *analemma* wall show that there were segmental arches in the barrel vault of the corridor of the *summa cavea*, which architecturally enriched the structure, as well as making it more stable⁴⁰.

It was not possible to determine whether this covering was built of cemented blocks. However, at least in the eastern part there must have been ropes for drawing the *velaria* used to protect the spectators from the sun and

³⁷ DE BERNARDI FERRERO 2007, 17, figs. E-F, pls. V-XVI, XXI-XXIII; SEAR 2006, 338-339, plan 334; YEGÜL 2006, 150; D'ANDRIA 2003, 148, fig. 130; D'ANDRIA 2007, fig. 10; MASINO, SOBRÀ 2010, fig. 9.

³⁸ KADIOĞLU 2006, 163; SEAR 2006, 345-346, plan 346.

³⁹ ALANYALI 2005, 1, fig. 2; SEAR 2006, 371-372, plan 391.

⁴⁰ The pillar supporting the structure of the vault has a width of 0.83 m and a thickness of 0.75 m. The approach followed here is similar to that of the theatre of Aspendos (See BIEBER 1961, 208-210, figs. 700-706; CHASE 2002, 91).



Fig.12: North theatre. Corinthian corner capital dated to the late Hadrianic – early Antonine period.

to limit the acoustic reverberations⁴¹. This is confirmed by the presence of a number of limestone seating blocks with circular holes for the wooden posts that supported the canvases⁴² (Fig. 13).

The orthostats of the wall of the median *diazoma* alternate with small pillars. Judging by the height of the orthostats and the coping stone on the top, from the corridor, spectators accessed the seats of the *summa cavea* via flights of six steps.

⁴¹ For the system used to cover the theatres of Aspendos and Limyra with *velaria*, see DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 90-91, 142-143, figs. 192-194. For the large theatre in Pompeii, see CARPICECI 2004, 86-87. For the coverage of the small theatre building of Segóbriga in Spain there is assumed to have been a single roof over the stage building: ABASCAL, GORBEA, CEBRIÁN 2007, 10-11, 30-31). For a detailed discussion on the theme of the *velarium*, see DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 142-143, figs. 191-194; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1974, 132-133.

⁴² Blocks of this kind were found in the eastern part of the theatre and also in the 5th century walls where they had been reused. The blocks are almost square in cross section and measure 1.85 x 0.78 x 0.71 m; the holes for the posts have a diameter of 0.395 m and a depth of 0.36 m. Also found were holes for securing the ropes used for the canvas covering of the seating area in the ninth *kerkis* of the *ima cavea*, on the first and second row of seats: the holes have a diameter of 0.12 and 0.16 m. On the system of *velaria* used in the theatres of Limyra, Rhodiapolis and Antiphellos,



Fig.13: North theatre. Blocks with holes for seating the wooden posts for supporting the *velaria*.

The recent excavations have clarified the relationship between the level of the orchestra, the lower *diazoma* and the first rows of seating of the *ima cavea*⁴³ (Fig. 14). The flooring of the orchestra is composed of limestone slabs of a late period, of different sizes with respect to the ones used for the level of the lower *diazoma*, which were also limestone⁴⁴ (Fig. 14).

The remains of a layer of reddish impermeable mortar and calcareous deposits show that the theatre was used for aquatic spectacles by transforming the orchestra into a *kolymbethra*⁴⁵.

see DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 143, figs. 121, 194; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1974, 84, 133, figs.121, 194; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1969, 165, 168, figs. 240–241; BORCHHARDT 1999, 103, fig. 42.

⁴³ For a comparison with the theatre of Hierapolis, see DE BERNARDI FERRERO 2007, pls. IV–VIII, XXI, figs. 3, 15, 21–22; D'ANDRIA 2003, 148, 150, figs. 130–131, 134; MASINO, SOBÀ 2010, 373–383; SEAR 2006, 338–339, plan 334; CHASE 2002, 117.

⁴⁴ Dimensions of the podium: width 0.48 m; height 2.70 m; height with coping stone 3.00 m. The coping stone helped prevent water from spilling out during the spectacles. A similar approach to the one followed in Laodicea is also seen in the coping stone of the basin of the *nymphaeum* of Septimius Severus (*nymphaeum* A). See ŞİMŞEK 2007a, 149, figs. 55e, 55i; ŞİMŞEK 2006, 420, figs. 1, 5.

⁴⁵ On the aquatic games in the theatres, see DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 72, 162–163. On the related building work to enable them in the theatres of Hierapolis, Myra, Side, Miletus and Eph-

Work on the stage building has so far been limited to cleaning. Today the upper row of conserved limestone blocks is visible, showing that in the pro-Byzantine period (early 5th century AD) it was used as a fortification wall, as was the case with the theatre of Side⁴⁶. Five doors open on to the stage, three of which lead to backstage rooms and the other two side doors lead directly outside.

The large central *exedra* of the stage shows that the *scaenae frons* was not rectilinear: analogies with this architectural design can be found in Anatolia in the theatres of Aizanoi, Miletus and Pessinus⁴⁷. Other comparisons can be made in Italy with the theatres of Bovillae, Herculaneum, Pompeii, Tibur, Urbs Salvia, Iguvium and Volterrae⁴⁸; in the Balkans with the theatres of Salona and Virunum⁴⁹; in Spain with the theatres of Carthago Nova, Saguntum⁵⁰ and Augusta Emerita⁵¹; in France with theatres of Vienne⁵², Arausio⁵³ and Arelate⁵⁴; in north Africa with the theatres of Carthage, Leptis Magna, Sabratha, Sufetula, Thubursicum Numidarum and Thugga; in Greece with the theatre in Lyttus⁵⁵; in Israel with the theatres of Caesarea Maritima and Scythopolis⁵⁶; in Syria with the theatres of Bostra, Apamea and Palmyra⁵⁷.

Numerous architectural blocks belonging to the decoration of the *scaenae frons* can still be found in the area of the orchestra, including fragments of column shafts – some fluted, others smooth; blocks of architrave-frieze; pillar capitals; ceilings decorated with rosettes; moulded and smooth blocks. Of these, one block of the architrave-frieze was attributed to the Antonine epoch; a Corinthian capital of a semi-column with a lateral protrusion, found to the South of the large central *exedra*, is also datable on a stylistic basis to the late Hadrianic or Antonine period⁵⁸ (Fig. 12).

esus, see D'ANDRIA 2003, 151; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1993, 146–147, 154, 162–163. Unlike the theatres of Sagalassos, Selge and Rhodiapolis, no evidence of gladiatorial games or *venationes* has yet been found in the north theatre (see DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 155–161).

⁴⁶ MANSEL 1978, 210; CHASE 2002, 95.

⁴⁷ SEAR 2006, 326, 343–344, 363–364, plans 316, 342, 377; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 147–148.

⁴⁸ SEAR 2006, 121, 124, 130–131, 140, 158–159, 160, 170–171, plans 5, 12, 22, 32, 61, 63, 79; CHASE 2002, 486.

⁴⁹ SEAR 2006, 256, 258, plans 220, 223.

⁵⁰ SEAR 2006, 267, 269, plans 235, 238.

⁵¹ BIEBER 1961, 202, figs. 680–684; SEAR 2006, 264–265, plan 230.

⁵² SEAR 2006, 252, plan 217, pl. 76.

⁵³ SEAR 2006, 245–246, plan 208.

⁵⁴ SMALL 1983, 56, 62; SEAR 2006, 247–248, plan 209; CHASE 2002, 223.

⁵⁵ SEAR 2006, 277–278, 281–287, 298–299, plans 251, 255, 257, 259–261, 276, pls. 83–86, 89–90.

⁵⁶ SEAR 2006, 302–303, 306–307, plans 280, 285; CHASE 2002, 170.

⁵⁷ SEAR 2006, 308–309, 317–318, 321–322, plans 288, 304, 310, pls. 98–101, 111.

⁵⁸ The Corinthian capitals of the *frons scaenae* are characterised by two rows of leaves that conceal the *kalathos*; the leaves of the upper crown emerge from the base of the *kalathos* itself and are rather long, presenting helices and highly developed volutes. The stems are evident and in relief. The upper extremities of the leaves, between which broad empty areas of the *kalathos* can be seen,

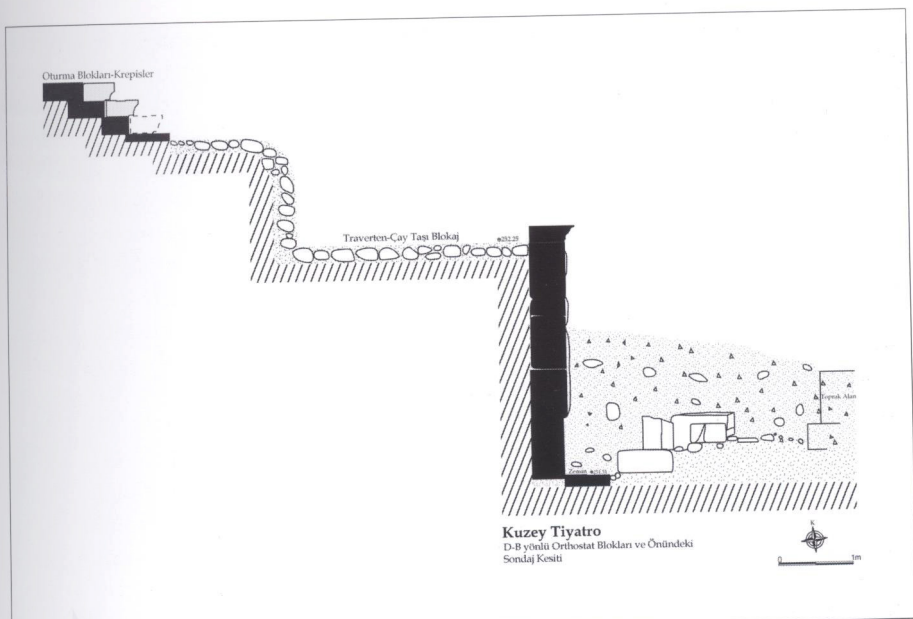


Fig.14: North theatre. Cross section of the *ima cavea* showing the seating, lower *diazoma* and perimeter wall of the orchestra.

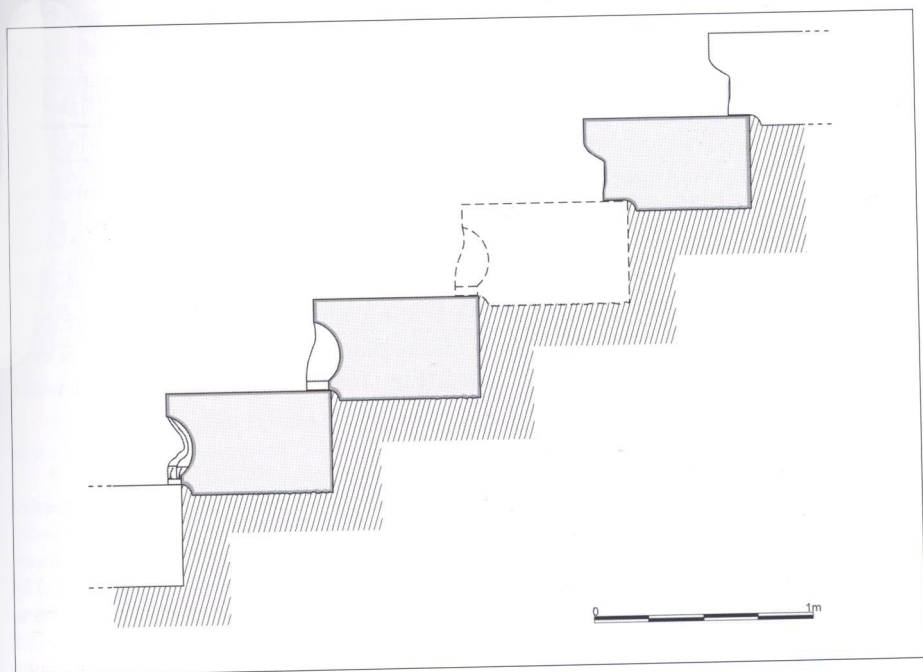


Fig.15: North theatre. Cross section of the seating with lion's paws.



Fig.16: North theatre. Upper surface of the seating with inscriptions from various periods and christograms.

Despite the restitution presented in the 18th century drawing, which also shows an Ionic order, the current state of the studies does not allow for a definitive evaluation of the characteristics of the decoration of the *scaenae frons*.

Visible at the two ends of the stage are walls built of identical limestone blocks that closed off the *parodoi* that ran between the straight *analemma* walls and the stage building (Fig. 9); on the western side this distance was 3.71m.

After the cleaning conducted in the theatre and particularly in the cavea, it emerged that the dimensions of the seating blocks were highly variable, and their production seems to have taken place in various periods. Some seating blocks appear to be unfinished (Fig. 16) and others are made with reused materials⁵⁹.

are protrusive, while the veins on the leaf and areas of shadow are deeply carved. These characteristics make the capitals similar to those of the Stoa-Basilica of the agorà in Hierapolis (ROSSIGNANI-SACCHI 2007, 384-393, figs. 24, 26-30), the temple of Antoninus Pius in Sagalassos (VANDEPUT 1997, 72-73, 172, pl. 26.2-4), the Baths of Hadrian in Aphrodisias (VANDEPUT 1997, 72-73, pl. 75.1) and some capitals discovered in Israel dated to the late Hadrianic – early Antonine period (FISCHER 1990, 29, 31-34).

⁵⁹ A similar situation is seen in the *theatron* of Magnesia. See BİNGÖL 2005, 65a-c, 148, 152a-e; BİNGÖL 2004, 105, fig.162; BİNGÖL 1998, 83, fig. 111.

Given the presence of a seismic fault running below the theatre, it is likely that earthquake damage required the repair and substitution of elements on many occasions (Figs. 9, 18).

The construction of the *cavea* made use of the natural orography of the hill, regularising the natural curvature: the seating blocks either rest directly on the ground, or – where necessary to ensure stability – on a bed formed from various materials (limestone chips, off-cuts of building stone, pebbles, tiles) bound by lime mortar (Figs. 15-18). Specifically, the blocks on the western edge of the *summa cavea* required more extensive work in terms of substruction.

On the opposite side, to prevent the seating blocks from slipping down the hill, the lower front edge of each block had a groove into which fitted the upper rear edge of the block below (Fig. 15, 17).

As was mentioned earlier, the seating blocks show a range of stonework techniques. Specifically, in one part of the *summa cavea*, some of the seating blocks have lion's feet, sculpted with great care in some cases, while others are roughly hewn. Since this characteristic is not seen elsewhere in the building, we must assume that this sector had some special function⁶⁰ (Fig. 15).

The mouldings on the front of the seating blocks also reflect a variety of models. In the first type they are deep and curved, while in the second type they are more superficial (Fig. 15, 17). In addition, in some cases the line marking the division between the space for the feet and the seat of the row below is very clear while in other cases it is very faint or traced only roughly, perhaps reflecting repairs that took place at different times (Fig. 16, 18).

Many of the seats have numbers, letters or names in Greek, indicating their allocation to a certain association, social group or family⁶¹ (Fig. 16-17).

Some inscriptions on the seating blocks are irregular or show overlapping names inscribed at different times. This indicates that the allocation of seats was valid for a certain period, at the end of which the places could be reassigned⁶².

In contrast, the inscriptions of an institutional type are more regular. Of particular interest are some that were found on the top surface of seating

⁶⁰ Daria De Bernardi Ferrero describes this type of stonework as typical of the *period of transition* and the imperial period. See DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 80.

⁶¹ ŞİMŞEK 2007a, 213. The cleaning of the conserved seating made it possible to identify 709 inscriptions on the blocks of the *summa cavea* and 49 inscriptions in the *ima cavea*; these inscriptions were detected by the epigraphist Prof. Francesco Guizzi and are currently being studied. For a general description of the practice of inscriptions on the seating blocks, see DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 139–140. On the inscriptions of the theatres in Hierapolis and Aphrodisias and the stadium in Aphrodisias, see RITTI 2006, 33, 115–118; CHANIOTIS 2008, 201, figs.1–2; WELCH 1998, 561–563.

⁶² ŞİMŞEK 2007a, 213. On the corporations and associations, see CORSTEN 1997, 74–78, 29–35. On the textile corporations in Laodicea, see ERTEKİN 2007, 33–34, 39.

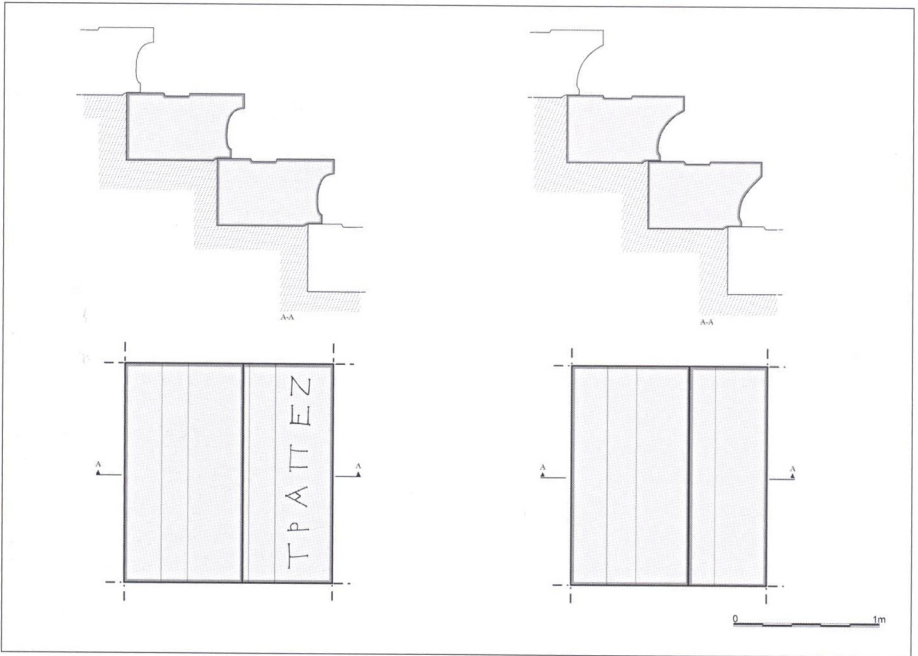


Fig.17: North theatre. Plan and cross section of the seating showing the different profiles and inscriptions on the upper surface.

blocks in the *ima cavea* that read: “ΤΡΑΠΕΖΟΠΟΛΕΙΤΟΝ”, “ΕΡΓΑ[ΙΑ]...” and “ΕΡΓΑ[ΙΟΝ]...” (Fig. 17). This tells us that some seats may have been reserved for the Trapezopolitans, others for citizens of nearby cities (Attouda, Hierapolis...), others still for the most important members of associations or corporations.

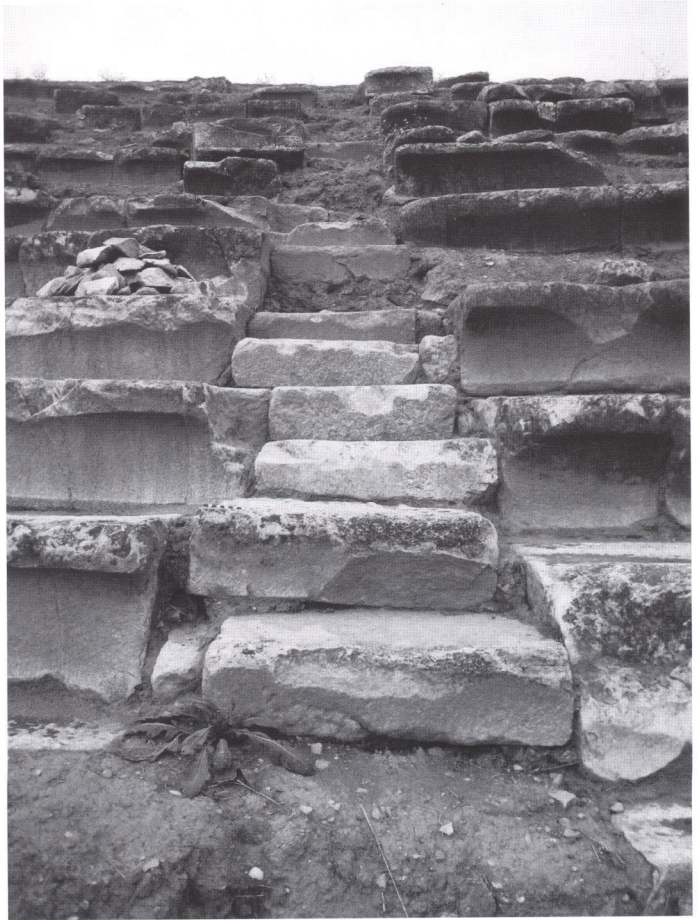
Knowing the regional importance of the city of Laodicea, it may be surmised that perhaps it was precisely in this theatre that assemblies with representatives of the various cities of the Lykos valley were held⁶³.

Epigraphic studies have ascertained that the purple dyers’ corporation⁶⁴, known to have financed part of the decoration of the theatre of Hierapolis and some other buildings of the city, had its headquarters precisely in Laodicea. It was also possible to identify some special seats reserved for vintners and civic notables (including Aristotle, Varus and Paulinus) as well as consuls.

⁶³ On the use of the theatres not only for games and spectacles but also as meeting places for public assemblies, see DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 129. On the political functions of the theatre of Aphrodisias, see ROUCHÉ 1991, 102.

⁶⁴ D’ANDRIA 2003, 149, 154; D’ANDRIA 2001, 111; RITTI 2006, 121.

Fig.18: North theatre. Seating and *klimakes*.



As we have already seen in the west theatre, the fillet on the front of the seating blocks above the curved moulding bears inscriptions indicating specific tribes⁶⁵. The numbers from 1 to 3 carved on the concave surface served as reference marks for the stonemasons.

The christograms and the crosses dated to the period of the emperor Justinian I (527-565 AD) show that the theatre was still active in the early Byzantine age. Specifically, the presence of the crosses carved on the seats and the type of character used by the epigraphers, some in a late style, prove that the building was used until the 7th century.

In this regard, Daria De Bernardi Ferrero stressed the presence of a block of the *sima*, today situated in the western part of the *ima cavea*, whose deco-

⁶⁵ For a comparison with the theatre in Hierapolis, see RITTI 1985, 118- 122, pls. 18-19, 20.b.

ration with stylised plant motifs may be dated to the 7th century AD. She associated it with the theatre's final phase of use⁶⁶.

The definitive destruction of the building took place in the 7th century AD, and the subsequent removal of material continued until the 1990s. Indeed, almost all the blocks of the *ima cavea* appear to have been removed, in order to be reused in the construction of buildings in the surrounding area⁶⁷. Not even the chips were spared, as shown by the tombstone decorated with a *turban* found in the orchestra⁶⁸.

3. Conclusion

The north theatre and the west theatre of Laodicea are evidence of the city's artistic and cultural vitality in the Roman era, a period of strong demographic and economic growth. Similar to what is attested in many theatres of the ancient world, the late imperial epoch was a time of repair, restoration and transformation, but also of significant losses⁶⁹.

Indeed, the growing assertiveness of Christian communities led to strong limitations on the spectacles that could be shown in the theatres, fuelling the ostracism of the actors themselves; this led inevitably to the definitive cessation of theatrical activities⁷⁰.

In terms of construction techniques, both theatres were built by excavating the natural slope of the hill.

The cavea of the west theatre, built in the Hellenistic period, was initially made entirely of marble and was smaller than the current one. Due to changing needs it was subsequently expanded with the addition of a limestone *summa cavea*.

In the imperial age the stage building, of the Hellenistic type, and the orchestra underwent transformations that brought the theatre closer to the western model. A marble *scaenae frons* was built behind the new *proskenion*, presumably with two orders.

Despite this extension, the west theatre was probably insufficient for the growing population, and the decision was taken to build the nearby north theatre.

This second building, facing on to the green valley of the Lykos and towards the lake, is larger and has more sumptuous decoration, thereby reflecting the great wealth that characterised the city in the first century AD.

⁶⁶ DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 164, fig. 227; DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1974, 151, fig. 227.

⁶⁷ The excavations in Temple A conducted in 2009 have shown that numerous seating blocks were reused in the late phases.

⁶⁸ DAVIS 2006, 73; *ASIE MINEURE: DESCRIPTION GÉOGRAPHIQUE*, 278, 383–385.

⁶⁹ DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 162–163.

⁷⁰ DE BERNARDI FERRERO 1990, 172–175.

Apart from the walls of the stage building and the *versurae*, marble was extensively used throughout the *frons scaenae*, the *proskenion* and the seating for the spectators.

The height of the cavea and remains of the walls indicate that the decoration of the *frons scaenae* was applied on three orders.

The north theatre appears to have been used for spectacles, games and celebrations, but also for assemblies of the cities of the region, and subsequently for aquatic spectacles (with the building of the *kolymbethra*).

Although the building partly reflects the Hellenistic tradition, it is broadly Roman in character. In any case, there is currently no evidence that it was built over a structure pre-dating the imperial age. This tends to confirm the hypothesis that building began in the late Hadrianic period and was concluded in the early Antonine period.

Both theatres show signs of restoration work undertaken in the early Severian period, in the age of Diocletian and even in the proto-Byzantine epoch (after the earthquake of 494 AD)⁷¹; the *caveae* of both buildings show clear signs of severe damage as a result of seismic events.

The inscriptions discovered on the seating blocks also provide information of great interest on the city's notables, citizens' associations and the structure of the tribes.

The fortification walls of the city built at the beginning of the 5th century made use of the structures of the two theatres, incorporating the north-west *analemma* of the west theatre and the north-east *analemma* and stage building of the north theatre.

The theatres continued to undergo repairs and restoration until the late period, and their use is attested until the beginning of the 7th century AD, when they were definitively destroyed by an earthquake. From this moment onwards, they were used as a source of building materials and marble for the production of lime.

The planned future activities of the Italian Archaeological Mission include the continuation of the work in both theatres, where, once the stage buildings have been completely unearthed, conservation projects for the structures will be initiated.

New, more reliable data that will help us achieve a better understanding of the *scaenae frons* may also be gathered from the archaeological excavations.

⁷¹ For the effects of the earthquakes on the theatres of Laodicea, see KUMSAR et al. 2009, 85-87, fig. 24.

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