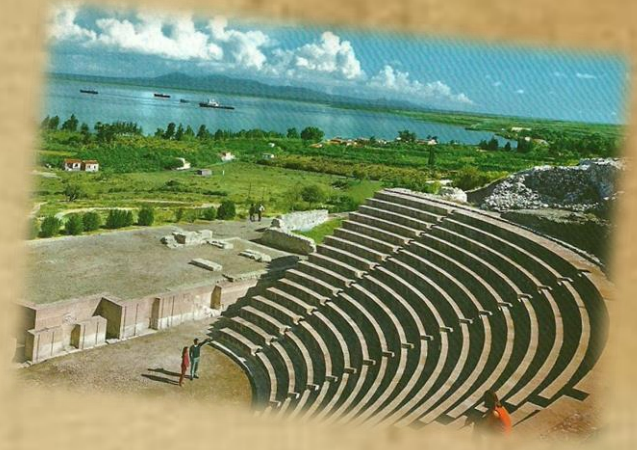


THE THEATRE OF SOLOI

Herodotus mentions that the city of Soloi was founded on the advice of Solon the Athenian and hence the city was named in his honor. Soloi was one of Cyprus' ancient city-kingdoms and in 498 B.C. it took part in the revolt against the Persians. Later on, Soloi sent help to Alexander the Great during his campaigns in the east. The city flourished during the Hellenistic, Roman and early Byzantine periods. The city of Soloi was located at the top of a hill overlooking one of the most fertile areas in northwestern Cyprus.

The Roman Theatre at Soloi was excavated in 1929 by the Swedish Archaeological Mission and it dates back to the 2nd or the 3rd century A.D. The Theatre was built on the north side of the hill very close to the coast and occupies the site of the original Greek amphitheatre. The stage had two storeys, covered with marble panelling and decorated with statues. The auditorium, which was partially visible at the highest point of the hill's downward slope prior to the excavations, had been dug in the rock of the hill. Unfortunately, it had been completely destroyed and was therefore reconstructed in 1962-1964. Between the years 1962-1964 the auditorium was entirely rebuilt. The auditorium has a 52m diameter and it had limestone seats. The semicircular orchestra was 17m in diameter and was separated from the auditorium by a low parapet of limestone slabs. Its floor was of cement resting on a substratum of pebbles. The stage was rectangular (36,15 X 13,20m) and only its platform survives today. Two entrance passages (parodoi) provided access to the auditorium. Its semi circular auditorium had an excellent acoustic system and had a capacity of almost 4000 spectators. The hollow is characterized by the main theatre and the epitheatre with 17 and 13 series comprises respectively.



THE HELLENISTIC-ROMAN THEATRE OF PAPHOS

The theatre of Paphos in western Cyprus lies in the north-eastern corner of the ancient town, diagonally opposite the harbour. It seems to have been built early in the life of the town, in the last years of the fourth century BC. It survived until the late 4th century AD. At its peak, under the Roman Antonine emperors, in the mid-second century AD, the stage building façade was in marble. The theatre measured 90 m from side to side and had a cavea with seating capacity for over 8000 spectators and angle of rise of 26.5 degrees. By the end of the third century AD, probably after the devastating earthquake of 365 AD, the theatre was abandoned and much of the stonework was robbed and reused elsewhere in the town. After a period of abandonment, the site of the ancient theatre sees renewed activity in the 12th and 13th centuries AD, when the harbour of Paphos became once again a major economic point of activity, this time for the Crusaders on their way to the Holy Land.

The theatre was built there, as an element of the urbanization of the new city. As so often in the ancient world, it was located towards the edge of town, in this case in the north-east corner near one of the main gates. It was built against the southern face of a low hill, known since the Middle Ages as Fábrika, and positioned so that those sitting in the auditorium were able to look across the town to the harbour and beyond. The theatre seems to show close links with the architecture of Alexandria, as one would expect, given that Paphos was the Ptolemaic capital of the island, and there is every chance that it reflects the style of the theatre of Alexandria, which is no longer preserved. The earliest chronologically speaking- of all the theatres in Cyprus -Paphos theatre had colorful flower expressions in the wall remnants of the western passage and ceiling.

It seems to show several features that are important to the evolution of ancient theatre design, not least its semicircular form. The theatre is only partially built into a hill and the rest was built up with an artificial earthen embankment on which stone seating was placed.

Essentially semicircular in plan, is divided by seven radial stairways of which the outer two run along by the side support walls and the middle one up the centre line.

Behind the marble stage facade there was an intubation system, draining underground water in the orchestra from a source on the hill called Fabrica. From the holes at the top of the tubes one may conclude that there was some sort of fountain in the colorful marble floor foreground.

At ground level between the curve of the seating and the stage-building is a flat area, known technically as the orchestra. This literally means the dancing area and it was the space in which the chorus of Greek drama sang and danced. It was a vital element of the performance space of any Greek theatre, and it was taken over into Roman theatres, for different purposes.

A well-preserved feature too is a tunnel, constructed of well-cut stone, running from the stage-building under the orchestra along its central line. It allowed performers to move unseen from below the stage to the further part of the orchestra for surprise appearances.

The most radical of all the later reconstructions occurred under the Antonines in the middle of the second century AD. The stage-building itself was two storeys high and clad with a marble veneer. The stage front was also given a marble veneer. The final major alteration occurred sometime in the middle of the third century AD and involved converting the orchestra for combats and water spectacles. The marble pavement was removed and the orchestra was resurfaced with pink-colored waterproof cement. Around it was placed a barrier wall approximately 1.1m high and the entries from the side were partially blocked off. Water spectacles were hugely popular at the time.

If we ask about the sorts of performances staged during the life of the theatre, it is not easy, in the absence of definitive records, to give a clear answer. Tastes changed enormously through time. In the earlier years, such a theatre would have craved the sorts of dramas staged in other centers across the Greek world. This would certainly have included works of Euripides, whose work had achieved classic status during the fourth century BC. Another feature of contemporary theatre was the star status of the leading actors who could earn sums of money equivalent to what we give to pop stars and prominent sportsmen.

By the earlier part of the Roman Empire, other forms of entertainment were also becoming popular. Musical items were to be found at all times, but they came to take a more important place. Another genre which took an ever more important place was that of so-called Pantomime in which a single actor played a series of roles (changing his mask appropriately), not speaking or singing, but miming to the sound of music with gestures that conveyed the meaning and the emotions involved.



THE THEATRE OF KOURION

Kourion was an important city-kingdom in antiquity and stands as one of the most impressive archaeological sites in Cyprus. Its theatre - located on the southern end of the abrupt hill on which the city is built - is of great significance.

The theatre was constructed at the end of the 2nd century BC, but took its current dimensions during the 2nd century AD. Consisting of a semicircular orchestra that is surrounded by seats of the cavea (subterranean cells), it was enclosed to the south by the building of the façade of the scene that must have reached the height of the cavea, though today only the foundations remain. On either side of the stage were two vaulted parodoi (corridors) from where the audience entered the theatre. The theatre could seat up to 3,500 spectators.

In the beginning of the 3rd century AD modifications were made, and the theatre was transformed into an arena that was used for fights with wild animals. At the end of the 3rd century AD, the arena spectacles declined and the theatre reassumed its proper purpose.

Excavations began in 1933, conducted by the University of Pennsylvania, whilst many other University Archaeological Missions - as well as the Cyprus Department of Antiquities - continued the excavations.

Today, it is the scene of many cultural activities and theatrical performances, especially during the summer season. The theater of Kourion is one of the most important archaeological sites in Cyprus and is well known to tourists.

The central axis of the hollow of the theatre had a domed shelter space, obviously for beasts or beast tamers, when the theatre was reconstructed into an arena. Excavations revealed architectural parts of decoration from the front of the stage, the upper floor of which seems to be based on rotatable colonnade of marble columns with Corinthian capitals. On its south external side, the stage building was surrounded by five rooms and two probably storage areas. The theatre was supplied by water through clay pipes to the lower tier.

The Greek Roman theatre is remarkable with unique acoustic qualities. Try the coin test from the chorus and you will be amazed! Have a friend sit at the very top of the amphitheatre and another one drop a coin at the stage area. The acoustics at the Kourion are so remarkable you will hear the sound of the coin falling!



THE THEATRE OF SALAMINA

Salamis was the capital of Cyprus for a thousand years and according to Homeric legend was founded by Teucer, son of Telamon, king of the island of Salamis in Greece and warrior that participated in the Trojan War. Although long abandoned, the city of Salamis serves as a reminder of the great cities. Located on the eastern side of the island of Cyprus, it was considered a very important port city. Ships arrived from all over the world, making it a major hub of activity. At one point during the Roman period Salamis was the largest city on Cyprus. According to historical accounts, the city was built and destroyed several times due to earthquakes. The ruins evident today are mostly of the Roman time.

Of the three excavated theaters thus far in Cyprus (Kourion, Soli and Salamis), this one is the largest. During antiquity this theatre was one of the largest theatres in the eastern Mediterranean when it was first constructed during the first century BC, during the reign of Roman emperor Augustus and completed during the years of Hadrian and Trajan. The theatre had 50 rows of seats and accommodated 15,000 spectators. A city's population back then was determined by multiplying the theater's capacity by four. Thus, Salamis' population was about 24,000 when the theater was constructed. Two centuries later during the second century AC, a three-foot high wall was built around the orchestra and filled with water to provide sea re-enactments. Earthquakes destroyed the theater and it was not rebuilt until 1959 by the Dept. of Antiquities.

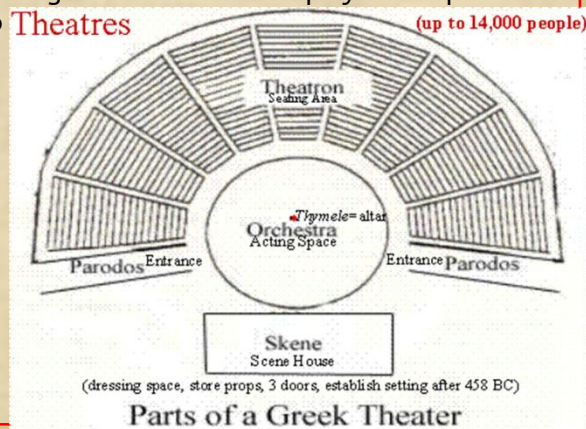
The theatre has a large semi-circular orchestra (diameter: 27.50m) which was originally paved with marble and at its center is the thymele (the altar dedicated to Dionysus). The stage building's façade (proscenium) was decorated with statues and columns. The statues are missing their arms and heads. The Christians could not accept that there were still people who believed in the 12 Gods of Olympus; so they destroyed many of the statues as a type of retaliation. Further, the destruction of the statues was also the result of many Arab invasions. The Theatre's cavea (seating area) was constructed out of stone and supported by arches. Only a few of the original limestone seats survive today and they can be seen in the lower rows. From the summer of 1974 and onwards, the north part of the island has been under Turkish Cypriot administration, and therefore all activities taking place in the Salamis archaeological site were put to a halt. In the last 42 years ancient Greek plays were not performed at this ancient theatre, until the Cyprus Theatre Organization (THOC) from the Greek Cypriot side and the Famagusta City Walled Association (MASDER) from the Turkish Cypriot side presented last September the tragedy by Euripides "Hippolytus", under the auspices of the Bi-communal Technical Committee on Culture.

The detailed description of the sculptural decoration of the stage front with the headless statues of Apollo musician, the Muses, Roman emperors and Roman and Greek deities is unique. Salamis was characterized as one of the most important archaeological sites in the Mediterranean.



The importance of theatres and theatre performances in the ancient world cannot be overestimated. For one thing, a drama festival was one of the few times that the community came together as a whole. There would have been not only the dynamic we are used to, for example major football matches, but they were also opportunities to see one's extended family, friends and acquaintances. They were a chance to observe city officials and ceremonies, to be conscious of one's own community. Theatre festivals were also religious occasions. The plays were put on in honour of a god, most often Dionysos who was also

god of wine, of good times and happiness. The festivals involved religious processions with all the heightened consciousness, the opportunities for display and the pleasure that go with them. We should add to all this the innate human enjoyment in seeing drama played out, the vicarious pleasure of witnessing other people's lives in action, whether in a comic or a serious-dramatic mode, in a way that we ourselves experience in books, theatre, television and cinema. For the ancients, theatre was the only way to have such an experience.



B' Regional Gymnasium of Nicosia