

Nathalie de Chaisemartin and Dinu Theodorescu, in collaboration with d'Anca Lemaire and Yann Goubin, **Le théâtre d'Aphrodisias. Les structures scéniques**. Aphrodisias. Results of Excavations at Aphrodisias in Caria, volume VIII. Conducted by New York University. Publisher Dr. Ludwig Reichert, Wiesbaden 2017. XVIII and 349 pages, 66 colour illustrations, 481 figures black and white as well as 3 maps.

This truly impressive monograph presents decades of meticulous research of the ancient theatre of Aphrodisias in the region of Caria in present day Turkey. As is often the case with huge ancient monuments, as theatres also are, the study and ensuing publication of this building have been divided between a number of scholars with the result that publication happens piecemeal. The volume under review here contains most of the structural remains of the theatre at Aphrodisias, except for the cavea, which is to be issued at some later stage. The high level of preservation of the structures published

here, with their architectural details, the fact that comparable theatrical structures erected at late Hellenistic or early Imperial times are very few indeed, as well as the quality of the research and presentation, they all mean that the book brings research in the area of ancient architecture intended for dramatic representations significantly forward also in general terms. The as yet missing presentation and analysis of the *cavea* does not constitute a problem of any significance, most of all because the scene structure on the one side and the *cavea*-orchestra on the other represent fairly independent elements of the architectural conglomerate which an ancient theatre was – even if this is more true of Greek than of Roman theatres. In addition, essential observations pertaining to the relation between orchestra and *cavea* and the scene-building are of course commented on in sufficient detail in this work.

The book is a classical thorough presentation of all the important aspects of the building including first a chapter (pp. 1–10) on the present state of preservation of the theatre, and a second one (pp. 11–16) with focus on its research history. Typically for a theatre, its existence did not escape the attention of the early travellers, since even being completely overbuilt by houses of the eighteenth century village, the huge cone-shaped cavity of the *cavea* still showed, and remains very easy to spot when first visitors knew what to look for.

Systematic excavations, however, did not happen until the nineteen-sixties, when from 1965 to 1972 they were initiated under the direction of the legendary Kenan T. Erim. A beautiful schematic overview of when what was done is provided (p. 13 fig. 3). The third chapter (pp. 17–23) is dedicated to a restricted part of the excavations, the results of six trenches dug in 1988 and 1989 in and around the scene building and in the northeast corner of the orchestra, and directed by the authors themselves. These trenches uncovered vital information about the structural principles and architecture of the theatre. The remainder of the excavation results are reserved for later publications.

Chapter 4 (pp. 29–47) treats building phases and the transformation of the edifice. It is essential that the four main phases identified by the study of the vast epigraphical remains relating to the theatre, correspond to the phases identified by the analyses of the architecture. These are (1) 30–27 B. C., (2) about A. D. 50, (3) A. D. 50–75 or last third of the first century (4) about A. D. 150. The various phases are clearly described and accompanied by necessary and very well made plans and elevations (figs. 16–23b).

Chapter 5 (pp. 49–69) describes the first level of the scene building, which is extraordinarily well preserved. The detailed account of the elements of

the architecture is accompanied by very clear and masterfully made illustrations, such as the relationship between the base and frieze of the Ionic storey of the *scaenae frons* (p. 88 fig. 46) with overview of the location of all catalogued fragments of this element of the scene. A number of notable observations are worth mentioning, such as that the wooden terrace (*logeion*) of the *proskenion* is one of largest identified in the Hellenistic world. The west wall, interestingly, is provided with lines etched into the stone, to guide the builders.

Chapter 6 (pp. 71–117) is dedicated to the *scaenae frons*. Again, much material is preserved for the investigations so that a very reliable reconstruction of this impressive part of the theatre was possible. An estimated 85 percent of the structure is preserved as fragments found nearby. These have been meticulously assembled, in sections, by the aid i. a. of computer graphic restoration. The main conclusion of this truly impressive scholarly work, is that Carian architecture was actually at the forefront, also compared to what happened in Rome in early Augustan times.

Chapter 7 (pp. 119–140) is an analysis of the architectural decoration of the scene building. Many decorative motifs are paralleled in late Hellenistic and Roman architecture of North Africa and the Middle East, and the design shows so much baroque inspiration that its closest equivalents are to be found in Pompeian wall painting rather than in other architectural monuments.

Chapter 8 (pp. 141–153) treats the iconographic program of the decoration of the scene building. The various decorative elements are convincingly interpreted as reflecting key elements of the history and identity of the city of Aphrodisias, and the many restorations undertaken until late Antiquity, instead of a series of veritable rebuilding, may support the view that the monument was cherished as local heritage, also symbolically.

Chapter 9 (pp. 155–173) is an assessment of the architectural study, some sort of conclusion on the significance of the stage construction as compared to other theatres. The theatre of Aphrodisias is of great importance because it is a very rare example of Late Hellenistic theatre architecture, it is very well preserved and the phases extraordinarily securely dated.

The last and tenth chapter (pp. 175–182) is presented as the conclusion with emphasis on the functionality and the role the building played for the city's identity. The vast number of inscriptions related to performances held there attest to mime and pantomime having been performed, which forms no surprise since these were very popular forms of performance at the time, pantomime in particular from the time of Augustus. Even though the pantomime inscriptions date to the third cen-

tury, it is tempting to view them as a continuation of a tradition perhaps already introduced at the time of the erection of the theatre in 30 until 27 B. C. and therefore in close connection to the freedman Gaius Julius Zoilus with whom an important part of the theatre originated as a dedication. It has been claimed that performances other than mime and pantomime were not cherished in the eastern empire, but there is evidence to the contrary, and at Aphrodisias the architecture itself, with the continuous existence of the Greek style orchestra, suggests, but in strict terms does not prove, the continued performance of Greek plays in the Roman period. The main development of and genre changes in drama in the Roman world can be traced in the rebuilding phases of the theatre until late Antiquity.

Four appendices (pp. 183–215) present catalogues of inscriptions fully quoted and provided with translations (and reference to ›Inscriptions of Aphrodisias‹ with previous bibliography) and of course the catalogue of architectural members. The book is provided with generous summaries in English and Turkish (pp. 217–240), vast bibliography and general index (pp. 241–262) and is concluded with eighty handsome plates with black and white photographs.

One of the remarkable aspects of the theatre of Aphrodisias is the amount of information we have about its construction and changes to this, documented first of all by epigraphy from the first century B. C. to the second century A. D., but also well beyond. The theatre formed a central part of the history of Aphrodisias for more than seven hundred years, situated at the very heart of the city, close to the agora, the prytaneion and the bouleuterion. Once again we are reminded of the rich but also complex life constituted by a central public building as a theatre was. The rich structural remains as well as the just as impressive amount of inscriptions provide us with detailed evidence for the dedicators – who they were and what they contributed towards the construction or further monumentalization of the complex. We get insights in the building process; we are informed about when which elements were added; we know to some degree precisely what kinds of performances were presented and roughly in what period. This richness of sources – monumental, iconographic and epigraphical – is a general characteristic of Aphrodisias (see the previous publications in the Aphrodisias series http://aphrodisias.classics.ox.ac.uk/p_monographs.html). Of particular importance is the high amount of remains found in situ.

It is of great significance that – despite the existence of many hundred Hellenistic and Roman theatres all over the ancient world – not a single theatre of any architectural significance, apart from

the theatre of Aphrodisias, can be dated to the time around the end of the Hellenistic period and beginning of Augustan times.

The results of the investigation, mainly presented in the fifth to eighth chapter, are many and it is impossible to comment on or discuss all of them in this review. Thus, I shall only mention a few.

Of great significance are the observations of the project (here principally Theodorescu) linked to the original layout of the theatre (design and proportions) and correspondence with the ideal models of the Greek and Roman theatres presented by Vitruvius. The relationship between the identified monuments described by scholarship and the architectural theory provided by Vitruvius in his *De Architectura* has been a central aspect of theatre studies since the emergence of modern scholarship on ancient architecture. This exercise is of the highest significance in the case of Aphrodisias, since the date of its first phase is very close to early Augustan times in which Vitruvius composed his treatise on architecture.

And, the connections between the dedicator Zoilus and Augustus constitute a further indication towards the possibility that Vitruvius would have known the Aphrodisias theatre and had written his treatise with this theatre in mind. We skip the relations found pertaining specifically to orchestra and cavea since this book has its focus on the scene building. A relation is found between the original orchestra diameter (master diameter) and the stage building in a complex diagram combining the Greek and Roman (Latin) layouts. The module suggested here to have been the one used by the builders to establish the proportions for the various elements of the scaenae frons is the lower diameter of the Ionic columns of the first level (0,48 meters). This diameter is exactly one thirty-sixth of the diameter of the original orchestra (17,68 meters equalling sixty Aphrodisian feet). Reviewing the various elements in relation to Vitruvius it is found that the first (Ionic order) level register is only slightly higher than the proportion recommended by Vitruvius, whereas the columns in themselves are slightly smaller. The Corinthian order of the second level is three quarters the height of the Ionic below, which fits the recommendations of Vitruvius about the scaenae frons, and so the detailed comparison goes on (chapter 5).

The monument also contains a number of interesting details on the idiosyncratic level. The preservation of the Hellenistic proskenion may be interpreted as a conservative feature of the first phase. On the other hand, it proves the role that the Classical and Hellenistic Greek dramas still played in the late Hellenistic world and early Empire. Guide lines incised on the west wall of the stage building, interpreted as instructions made by

the architects to the builders, is one of a number of observations offering valuable information about ancient building practises (p. 52).

Undoubtedly due to the rich amount of information pertaining to the structural remains, in situ as well as retrieved from the monument itself and those around it, not much is said about small finds made in the course of the many excavation campaigns. This fact does not decrease the value of the present work and an inclusion in this publication of finds of pottery, glass and coins and others would probably only have delayed its appearance in the monograph series considerably. On the other hand, the many excavations carried out in the theatre must have generated so many contexts related to the, by other means, well dated building phases, enabling a number of comparisons to dated small finds from those contexts. Hopefully studies and publications of the small finds are to issue in the future from this significant project.

Dinu Theodorescu unfortunately passed away while the manuscript was being written up, and the tandem work had to be finished by Chaisemartin alone. The book represents an enormous amount of carefully studied details, which are brought together in very well thought through contextualized conclusions. We must thank Theodorescu and Chaisemartin first for all the many hours of field work and ensuing documentation, and then for the just as time consuming effort of bringing it all together in such a clear and comprehensible form. This book is a must-have for any scholar, student or library interested in classical archaeology, architecture, art history and, not the least, theatre studies.

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