

ANCIENT THEATER OF ACHARNAE

Two very important inscriptions of the second half of the fourth century BC give evidence for the existence of the theatre of Acharnes. An votive inscription, which, if it does not come from the area of Agioi Saranda, is otherwise of unknown origin, found many years ago, mentions income from rent that private individuals paid to the theater, to enable the production of tragedies and comedies. The money was used for the religious and cultic needs of the town.

A further stele bearing two decrees was discovered in 1987 by Maria Platonos. Reused as a tube cover, it was found during the excavation of a Roman bath behind the church of Agios Ioannis on Liossion St., only some 150 m from the theatre. These two decrees mention the tamias (town treasurer), the demarchos (chief official of the demos) of Acharnes and the epimeletes (overseer) of the festival of the Dionysia , who are publically praised and honoured with an ivy wreath. The public ceremony involving the awarding of the wreaths would have taken place in the theatre of the municipality. The honorands and their grandsons were to enjoy the life-long honour of the proedria (that is, of sitting in the front row) for life, during the festival of the Dionysia . The stele with the decrees was to be erected by the demarchos in the sanctuary of Hippias Athena and the expenses would be met by public funds.

The ancient theater of Acharnes itself was found at 21 Salaminos St., near the intersection with Liossion Street, in the centre of the modern municipality, during the excavation of a block of private land preparatory to the construction of a three-storey building

It was immediately evident that the courses of orthogonal limestone blocks laid out in the shape of a theatre and forming rows of seats were part of the koilon, or cavea, of the ancient building. Construction work was stopped immediately and a rescue excavation of the plot was begun at once, funded by a special grant from the

Ministry of Culture and a gift from an anonymous donor. The Municipality of Acharnes provided two workers.

So far excavation has revealed a whole kerkis (cuneus), which consists of 11 rows of seats, 5 m wide at their west section and 22 m wide at their east and constructed of limestone courses, which were very probably transported there from some local stone quarry. The presence of chips of hewn stone indicates that the final working of the stone was made on the spot. A small part of another kerkis has been excavated, to the north of the first one, which probably continues intact, Ms. Platonos believes, under the foundations of a new café, built above the level of the theater. In addition, half of another kerkis was excavated to the south of the first one and continues under the pavement of Salaminos St.. A very small part of the orchestra was revealed to a depth of 2.3 m. It is obvious that the rest of the koilon, the parodoi (passageways), the orchestra and the skene building are to be found under the buildings to the north and the street. It is hoped that they will be revealed as soon as the excavation starts again. This ceased in 2007, due to lack of finance, but will restart, when the compulsory purchase of the nearby plots is complete, as the Central Archeological Council has recently decided.

The orientation of the theatre is west/north-west. The kerkides are built on the slightly sloping ground to the east. On the rear of the limestone courses there is a roughly shaped overhang, which was constructed very probably to allow the viewers seated above to rest their feet. The width of the seats is relatively small (0,22 m. – 0,40 m.) and the distance between them varies, as they have moved, whilst some areas of the seating are missing, mostly from the south kerkis. Under the corridor, between the orchestra and the first seats, there seem to be courses laid in a radiating fashion and covering the rain channel There is a similar feature in the theatre at Sicyon near Corinth and the theatre at Herculaneum in Italy dating to the late 4th and early 3rd century BC.

The diazoma was situated between the tenth and the eleventh row of seats, but was unfortunately destroyed in the past by

ploughing. Only a small part at the north side of the theater is preserved. On the east side of the plot, in the area when the upper part of the theater would have stood, the damage from ploughing and construction activity do not allow us to draw clear conclusions about the form and the material of the epitheatron, which was possibly made of wood.

Five limestone courses of different sizes were found on the perimeter of the orchestra. The side of the courses visible to the audience is more meticulously worked than the others. A little deeper, a small part of the graveled floor of the orchestra was found. Various pieces of worked marble found in the area, many of them arch-shaped, probably come from the marble thrones of the proedria.

Two vertical ramps were excavated between the three kerkides. Two steps of a stairway, constructed of compressed soil and small stones, were found to the south. The fact that none was found in the north stairway suggests either that they were destroyed or that at this particular time there was a ramp between the kerkides instead of stairs.

The area on which the theater was built seems to been inhabited from 3000 BC. This is evident from the presence of prehistoric sherds and pieces of obsidian . The finds also include twelve somewhat corroded coins. A few of these date to the period of the Frankish occupation, whilst the most recent one dates to the reign of George I of Greece.

The construction of the theater cannot be assigned with certainty to any specific period. However, the inscriptions that mention the theater date to the 4th century BC, which indicates that the theatre was already in use at this time.

After research and study of the excavation material, which is still at an early stage, is complete, it is hoped that the date of construction of the theatre, the period in which it was in use and its building phases will be determined with more accuracy. It is also hoped to gain more

information regarding the precise shape and size of the koilon and the orchestra.

Maria Platonos

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