KIATO & SIKYONIA

Ancient Theatre of Sikyon



The Ancient Theatre of Sikyon is considered one of the largest theatres in ancient Greece. Ancient Greek theatres followed a broadly common layout: orchestra, cavea and stage building.

HOW TO GET THERE

From Kiato, following the road towards the inland of the prefecture, one passes through Sikyon. The Ancient Theatre is located a little further down on the hill of Vasiliko (about 4 kilometres southeast of Kiato), which is a village after Sikyon.

THE ORCHESTRA

It is the main theatre, that is, the part from which the audience sees the play performed on stage and the action of the dance in the orchestra. The rows of seats were placed in the “orchestra” so as to form “continuous semicircles and concentric superimposed on each other. Ladders arranged as radii and brought up to the height from the centre and intersected the concentric rows of idols, separating them into wedge-shaped sections called “bleachers”. The theatre of Sikyon was divided into 15 wedges (bleachers), with 16 stepped aisles from the orchestra to the top. Ancient Greek architects, as a general rule, constructed theatres in such a way that the “Orchestra” had a view to the north.

The theatre of Sikyon had a view towards the plain of Corinth, the Corinthian Gulf, and the opposite mountains of Roumeli, providing the audience with a magnificent view during the intermissions of the performance. The “hollow” of the theatre of Sikyon has a width that exceeds 122 m. Most of the seats of the theatre were carved into the rock on the western side of the “hollow,” and some have been uncovered. In the front row were the seats of the officials (priests, aristocrats, generals, etc.). These seats were made of limestone, and some of them were decorated. This row of seats was called the “presidency.” In addition to the “presidency” seats, there were also other seats for certain classes of citizens. Special seats for women were located towards the upper tier. There is a great controversy over whether women were allowed to attend the performances. The seats (thrones) were divided into three zones, aisles, for the convenience of the audience’s circulation. Each aisle in the Theatre of Sikyon had twenty rows of seats. Spectators entered the theatres from the passages (corridors), on the right and left. In the middle and upper aisle of the Theatre of Sikyon, they entered through two arched entrances (arcades), on the right and left, which had width. The chorus entered the orchestra from the lower passages. In the excavations that were carried out, six rows of seats were revealed in the centre of the first aisle. It would be of great interest if the attention of those responsible was

directed towards the continuation of archaeological research in the theatre and the adjacent stadium of ancient Sikyon. The orchestra is the second part of the theatre. It is the space where singers and dancers performed. The orchestra of the theatre in Sikyon is a semicircle, slightly larger than half the circumference of an imperfect circle. Its diameter is 24.04 metres. A remarkable feature of the orchestra is its drainage system (which is still visible today), consisting of a trench covered with plates that runs around the semicircular perimeter of the orchestra in front of the seats of the officials. The trench is 1.25 metres wide and 1 metre deep. At each end of the semicircular trench, there is another trench parallel to the stage wall. This last trench pours water into another trench that runs through the centre of the orchestra, perpendicular to the stage, and ends in one of the lateral channels. In the centre of the orchestra, there is a square basin. From there, an underground passage started that passed beneath the stage and ended up behind it in a staircase, some of which still survive. The underground passage was used by actors to move unseen. In most ancient Greek theatres, the orchestra was a “flat circular space,” a whole circle whose diameter varied according to the size of the theatre. The orchestra of the Theatre of Epidaurus, for example, is circular and its diameter is 24.32 m. The orchestra of the Dionysus Theatre (Athens) is also circular and has a diameter of 22.50 m and is paved with flagstones. The orchestra of the Theatre of Sikyon, as we saw, was semi-circular and its floor was covered with packed earth. The two side “parodoi” (corridors) led into the orchestra from the right and left. Both parodoi were closed with doors framed with three Corinthian pilasters. In the centre of the orchestra stood the altar of Dionysus. This altar had the general name “thymele paratō thyēin” (Suïda “Lexikon” at the word skēnē). Formerly it was called “eleos” (table where animals destined for sacrifice were slaughtered).The Stage
The third part of the theatre, where the actors performed, was the Stage. “The part of the stage and the actors” (Aristotle, “Poetics” XXIV). It was the place where the action unfolded. The first form of the stage was the “eleos,” with the shelter behind it that served for the actor (hypocrite) to change clothes and makeup. When a single actor appeared in the poetic plays, the “eleos” was sufficient, but when a second actor was added later (possibly by Aeschylus), the need arose to expand the “eleos,” which together with the shelter formed the stage. The stage in all ancient Greek theatres had a rectangular shape, with its length varying depending on the extent of the entire theatre, and its depth (width) ranging from two to three metres. The stage consisted of two or three floors (the stage of the theatre of Sikyon had two floors), and behind and to the sides of it, there were compartments that were used for the actors’ changing rooms (kamarina) and storage. At the back, the stage was closed off by a wall called the proskenion or backstage. In front of the stage was the main proskenion or logeion. The actors spoke on this stage. The logeion was also called the bema.

The Scene

The third part of the theatre, where the actors played, was the Scene. “The part of the Scene and the actors” (Aristotle’s “Poetics” XXIV). It was the place where the action took place. The first form of the Scene was the “eleos”, with the shelter that was behind it and was used for the actor (hypocrite) to change clothes and mask. When a hypocrite appeared in the poetic plays, the “eleos” was sufficient, but later when a second one was added to the plays (possibly by Aeschylus), the need arose to expand the “eleos”, which together with the shelter formed the Scene. The Scene in all ancient Greek theatres had a rectangular shape, whose length varied according to the size of the entire theatre, and its depth (width) varied from two to three metres. The Scene consisted of two or three floors (the Scene of the theatre in Sikyon had two floors), and on its sides and back there were compartments, some of which were used for the actors to change (dressing rooms) and others for storage. At the back, the Scene was closed with a wall called the proscenium or backstage. The main stage or logeion was located in front of the theatre. The actors spoke from it. The logeion was also called the okribas and the bema. In some theatres, the stage was wooden, and in others, it was made of stone. Stone bases were found in the stage of the theatre of Sikyon, and holes could be distinguished along their entire length. Researchers claim that the stage of the theatre of Sikyon was wooden, and the beams supporting the stage were placed in the holes seen in the stone bases. The interior of the stage communicated with the orchestra through a door, and its floor communicated with the orchestra through a

staircase. The stage floor in all theatres was made of boards. Two entrances (parodoi), one on the right and one on the left, led to the stage. These entrances were covered with arches. The height of the stage of the theatre of Sikyon was 3 metres and 25 centimeters, and its depth was 10-12 feet. The exact date of the construction of the building complex of the stage of the theatre of Sikyon is unknown. Some archaeologists place the date between 251 and 168 BC, while others place it before the city's transfer to its new location by Demetrios Poliorketes (303 BC). In the stage of the theatre of Sikyon, there was a statue of Aratos, which was placed there during his generalship, as a sign of gratitude from the Sikyonians for his service.

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