Chapter 7

Architectural Analysis and Proposed Reconstruction

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Introduction

The architectural analysis and proposed reconstruction of the Southern and Severan Theaters in Nysa-Scythopolis presented here is based on the stratigraphic and excavation results and the finds revealed in the excavations of Applebaum in 1960–1962 and the IAA in 1986–2002 (see Chapters 1–6). Prior to the detailed description of the reconstructed theaters, we attempt to present the development of Roman theaters, and their integration into the civic centers of the *poleis* of the Roman East, as an on-going process of construction and renovation that corresponded with the urban development and prosperity of the cities, from the late first century BCE to the mid-third century CE (see Plans 1.1–1.4).

Terminology

The term 'theater' is derived from the Greek *theatron* and the Latin *theatrum* (place for seeing, viewing performances) and usually refers to the entire building, although occasionally to the cavea only, as, for instance, in an inscription from the southern theater at Gerasa that recorded the consecration of its ima cavea in 90 CE and referred to it as the *theatrum* (Pouilloux 1977; 1979). Despite minor misinterpretations, most ancient sources, as well as publications of modern scholars, generally apply the term to the entire theater, while its various parts have well-defined and specific terms in both Greek and Latin (see Plan 3.1).

We believe that theater-like complexes should be divided into three types based on cultural function, only the first two of which are relevant to Nysa-Scythopolis. The first group includes urban theaters, like those at Nysa-Scythopolis; the second, odea, which were small roofed auditoria that could also have functioned as bouleuteria; and the third, an assemblage of ceremonial auditoria, often part of asclepia and naumachia complexes (Nielsen 2002), ritual spa centers, or Nabatean ritual and burial centers.

History of Research

It is generally accepted, as first established by Frézouls half a century ago (Frézouls 1961:65–66) and since then unchallenged, that no Hellenistic *polis* in Coele Syria possessed a theater prior to the Herodian period. Rather, theaters as aspects of the Greco-Roman cultural and architectural phenomenon were first introduced into the region by King Herod. Historical records and archaeological evidence testify to his having erected theaters in Damascus, Sidon, Caesarea, Jerusalem and Jericho, while the theater in Sepphoris was built either by Herod or his son Herod Antipas (Fuks 1983:125; Weiss 1994; Segal 1995:106). Another theater, presumably built by Herod Antipas, was revealed in Tiberias (Atrash 2012). In the same period, theaters were also constructed throughout the Nabatean realm, and to date three Nabatean auditoria are known: one theater (Hammond 1965) along with two odea (McKenzie 1990:110; Joukowsky 2001) in Petra, a theater in Elusa (Arubas and Goldfus 2008:1713–1714) and another in Sahar (Segal 1995:108). In the Roman period, over 35 theaters were built in most of the Greco-Roman cities (Roman, Jewish and Nabatean) in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire, including three at Nysa-Scythopolis, during the late first century BCE to the mid-third century CE (Segal 1995).

Traditionally, scholars researching theater construction in the Roman East have not recognized an organic development in the process, preferring to focus rather on stages. Fuks (1983:125–128), while discussing the Severan Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis—with no knowledge of its predecessor, the Southern Theater—pointed to three stages of theater construction. His first stage includes the theaters built by Herod and his son, Herod Antipas, along with those erected in the Nabatean realm by Hartat IV at Petra and Elusa (4 BCE–27 CE). His second, intermediate stage, dated to the late first–early second centuries CE, includes the southern theater at Gerasa and the theater at Bostra.

His third stage, which seems to reflect the peak of the process and dates from the later years of Antoninus Pius to the time of Septimius Severus and Caracalla (c. 150–215 CE), represents a period in which most of the theaters in the region were built.

Weiss (1994) defined two main construction stages. The first was marked by Herod's enterprises at Damascus, Sidon, Caesarea, Jerusalem and Jericho, and later by his son Herod Antipas at Berytus and presumably at Sepphoris. To his second stage, Weiss attributed all other theaters, further divided into substages beginning with the southern theater at Gerasa and the theaters at Philadelphia and Nysa-Scythopolis (Southern Theater) in the first century CE, continuing with the theaters at Gadara and Diocaesarea at the turn of the century, and those at Neapolis, Aelia Capitolina and Caesarea (Stage Two) in the first half of the second century CE. The rest of the theaters in the region are attributed by Weiss to the period between the second half of the second and the first half of the third centuries, when the theater at Caesarea in its second stage was renovated, the Severan Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis was built, and the northern odeum at Gerasa was enlarged and converted into a theater. Also in this period, the pulpitum and scaenae frons in the theaters at Philadelphia and Diocaesarea were renovated.

Segal (1995:106–124) divided the post-Herodian theaters in the region into three groups. His first group matches Fuks' second-stage theaters, his second group dates to the Antonine period and includes the theaters at Kanawat, the northern theater at Gerasa and that at Philadelphia, while his third group, dated to the Severan period, includes those of Ḥammat Gader, Dor, Nysa-Scythopolis, Neapolis, Pella and others. He did not include the Southern Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis, although it had already been discovered at that time.

Magen (2005:91), while discussing the theater at Neapolis, also presented three stages of theater construction. His first stage spans the late first to mid-second centuries CE and includes the theater at Neapolis, which he dates to the first half of the second century CE. His second stage stretches from the mid-second to the early third centuries and includes the theaters at Caesarea (Stage Two), Dor, Nysa-Scythopolis, the northern theater at Gerasa, Philadelphia, and others. His third stage, dated to the third century CE, includes the theaters of Sebaste and Philippopolis. He omitted the Southern Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis with both its phases dated to the first century CE, as well as the Northern Theater, both of which had been discovered by then.

Short History of Entertainment Facilities at Nysa-Scythopolis

Excavations at Hellenistic Nysa-Scythopolis revealed no evidence of a Hellenistic-period theater on either the Bet She'an mound or at Tel Iẓṭabba.

In the early first century CE (Roman II), presumably during the reign of Tiberius, the relatively small Southern Theater with an ima cavea was erected along the southern side of the civic center, south of the first-century CE forum, on the southern edge of the Naḥal 'Amal basin (Phase I; see Plan 1.1). Toward the end of the first century CE, the elevated political status of the city and its increasing economic sources apparently enabled its *boule* and *demos* to adorn their city with monumental complexes (Avi-Yonah 1962). The Southern Theater was thus enlarged (Phase II), presumably during the Flavian Dynasty, with the addition of a summa cavea and a two-story-high scaena with an adorned scaenae frons.

During the Severan Dynasty (Roman III), a new and larger theater was erected over the former one. The phenomenon of building a larger theater over an earlier one was not uncommon in the region, as, for instance, the southern theater at Gerasa, below which were partly revealed the remains of an earlier theater (Kraeling 1938:19–21). Enlarging existing theaters was also common, as, for instance, the northern theater at Gerasa that was first built as an odeum and later enlarged and converted into a theater in the second century CE (Clark et al. 1986), a change that is attested by several inscriptions.

The Northern Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis was revealed in several probes by the IAHU expedition, and its hard-limestone architectural elements, including seats, podium elements and some of the scaenae frons entablature elements, were analyzed by Atrash (2006:68–71, 126–138) and dated to the second century CE. This theater was built at the northeastern end of a colonnaded street, into the southwestern slope of Tel Bet She'an and therefore faced southwest, an unusual direction for a theater, which in most cases face north. Its monumental postscaenium was reached

from the northern piazza of the colonnaded street via a magnificent propylaeum (see Plan 1.3).

The odeum, erected along the southern porticus of the caesareum during the years 130–150 CE, was part of the imperial-cult quadriporticus (*Bet She'an* I). It was active until the mid-fifth century CE, when it was almost entirely dismantled and later partly built over by the sigma in 507 CE. An odeum as an additional auditorium alongside the existing theaters is known at other cities in the region, such as the northern theater at Gerasa (the first stage), Philadelphia, Petra and, according to Malalas, at Caesarea as well (Levine 1975:23–26; *Bet She'an* I:207–224).

In the mid-fourth century, the hippodrome, first erected to the south of the civic center in the second century, was converted into an amphitheater.

Theater Construction as a Reflection of Urban Development and Prosperity

In light of the recent discoveries at Nysa-Scythopolis, re-evaluation of the data suggests that theater construction and renovation represent a continuous process that cannot necessarily be defined by stages. It now seems clear that the Southern Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis, first built during the reign of Tiberius, was later enlarged during the Flavian Dynasty, and finally replaced by a monumental theater during the Severan Dynasty. This process reflects, and corresponds with, the urban growth of Nysa-Scythopolis from a relatively small, but steadily growing *polis* during the first century, into a large and wealthy metropolis throughout the second–early third centuries CE. This development is clearly evident in the city's urban plan, and the monumental architectural enterprises constructed during this prosperous period throughout the city in general, and in its civic center in particular (see Chapter 1). A similar process is echoed at Gerasa, in the vast monumental architectural enterprises, including two theaters, that enriched the urban plan during the first–mid-third centuries CE (Kraeling 1938:41–59; Welles 1938; Barghouti 1982; Parapetti 1983–1984; Seigne 1992).

Increasing stability in the empire in general, and in the East in particular, was the result of the Augustan policy in the East, the continuous flourishing of the eastern trade network, and the resultant wealthy economies (Rostovtzeff 1932). The first and second centuries CE are considered the Roman Empire's golden age, characterized by political stability (*Pax Romana*) and economic prosperity. This period has been termed the 'Imperial Peace' by Cooke, Adcock and Charlesworth (1936:606–634), and the 'High Empire' by Bowman, Garnsey and Rathbone (2000:679–740). It witnessed the flourishing of the eastern provinces (Mazor 2004:5–12), as well as those of Spain (Vandeput 1997:35–40) and North Africa (Bieber 1961:65–69). Urbanism throughout the empire in general, and the East in particular, achieved unprecedented architectural qualities, as the civic centers of the Greco-Roman *poleis* everywhere were adorned with monumental complexes, including newly built or renovated theaters (Segal 1997), some of which were lavishly adorned with precious imported marble.

The Flavian Dynasty, in particular, witnessed vast construction projects. At Nysa-Scythopolis, the Southern Theater was enlarged and in the civic center at Gerasa, the southern theater was built (Browning 1982:126). At Bostra and Gadara, cities that had re-established their autonomous political status and practiced minting rights, the monumental complexes included municipal and cultural institutions and theaters (Jones 1971:277–281).

Hadrian's visit to the region in 130 CE, and the systematic political, economic and strategic reorganization of the region that took place during the visit, must have triggered an additional economic boom for all the *poleis* in the region, as reflected in the monumentalizing of their civic centers in general and the construction or renovation of their theaters in particular (Mazor 2004).

It therefore seems clear from the above discussion that the analysis and dating of the theaters in any city in the region, within the framework of each city's individual development, will probably reveal that their construction or renovation corresponded with the economic, social and political development of the city; thus, theater construction within these cities cannot be arranged into well-defined groups or dated stages. Also, judged by the same criteria, the abrupt cessation of construction of new theaters in the mid-third century CE can be attributed mainly to the economic and political decline at that time, followed only by periodic renovation work on existing theaters.

Development of the Nysa-Scythopolis Civic Center and the Integration of Its Entertainment Facilities

The theater type that was first introduced by Herod to the region, as represented by Phase I of the Southern Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis, corresponds to the type that gained dominance in the Roman West from the reign of Augustus and was widely adopted throughout the Roman Empire, including in the Roman East (e.g., Caesarea in its first stage, see Frova 1965:57–195; Levine 1975:23–26; Ringel 1975:47–51), although it is difficult to determine whether its origins were in the West or East (Lyttelton 1974:200–2003). The theaters at Nysa-Scythopolis, like almost all the theaters in the Roman East, were built into hillsides, a phenomenon characteristic of theater construction in the region that was rarely adopted in the rest of the Roman Empire and may have been an Herodian innovation. The incorporation of the theaters within the city-plan, as in Nysa-Scythopolis and the various other *poleis* in the region, clearly indicates their being a crucial component of the monumental development of the civic center and the establishment of Roman urban-planning *koine.*

Based on the remains of the civic center of Nysa-Scythopolis from the first half of the first century CE (Roman II), one can conclude that by this time the urban plan of the city was already well-established. The civic center evolved around the forum that housed a grand basilica and two temples. The forum was surrounded on all four sides by streets, and along its southern side stood the Southern Theater (see Plan 1.1). The entire civic center was connected by paved streets to the various city gates (see Plan 1.2). This plan, with the forum as its nucleus, has no parallels in the region and was relatively uncommon in the East, and it seems to have been influenced by urban planning trends that originated in the Roman Republican West.

The original choice of location for the Southern Theater created planning discrepancies with both the axial line of the forum and the civic center's street network (see Plan 1.1). The levels of the Southern Theater (-154.50 m) and the forum (-161.30 m) differ by 6.8 m. As both complexes continued to develop independently, the discrepancies were carried into the later periods as well. The second-century CE civic center and the newly erected Severan Theater did not alter or solve these problems, but to a certain extent even deepened them.

The excavations at Nysa-Scythopolis and the research results point to the second–early third centuries CE, from Hadrian's reign to that of Septimius Severus, as the epoch of architectural flourishing in the city, during which the construction of the various theaters was no doubt an essential part. The odeum was integrated into the southern porticus of the grand caesareum in the first half of the second century CE *(Bet She'an* I:193–206). The integration of the Northern Theater into the colonnaded street as part of the monumental urban plan would suggest, according to Mazor, an early or mid-second century CE date for its construction (*Bet She'an* I:xiii), or a Severan date, according to Atrash (2006:68). Apart from the theaters, the hippodrome was also constructed in the second century CE, to the south of the civic center. Finally, the Southern Theater was dismantled and built over by a new theater during the Severan period.

In the mid-fourth century, at a time of decline in economic prosperity, the hippodrome was converted to an amphitheater. In the late fourth century CE, when the forum temples and basilica were dismantled and covered to obtain a higher elevation for the forum, a better integration was achieved between the Severan Theater and the forum. At this time, the southern part of the forum was separated from the main part, and became a wide, irregular, paved piazza that stretched in front of the theater's facade, and its northeastern corner was adorned with a nymphaeum. The theater's facade was now well connected to the piazza by a magnificent porticus built of *spolia.*

It seems, therefore, that the renovation of the Southern Theater, and the construction of the odeum, the Northern Theater, and the Severan Theater and its subsequent renovations, indicate, as observed in many other *polei*s in the region, an organic process of construction and reconstruction.

The construction of the theaters and other entertainment facilities, such as the hippodrome, were part of the monumentalization of the civic center and its surroundings, and reflect the city's wealth, political status, pride and economic capabilities.

The Southern and Severan Theaters of Nysa-Scythopolis: Architectural Analysis and Proposed Reconstruction

In his preliminary report, Applebaum distinguished six non-consecutive stages in the architectural development of the Severan Theater, based on the coins and the pottery from various strata (Applebaum 1978:88–95). According to him, the theater went out of use several times for considerable periods of time. He had no knowledge of the earlier Southern Theater, which was revealed years later by the IAA expedition.[1] Applebaum's stages of the Severan Theater are as follows:

Stage 1: Construction of the theater during the Severan Dynasty in the late second–early third centuries CE.
Stage 2: Theater goes out of use in the late third century CE.
Stage 3: Reconstruction stage in the second half of the fourth century CE.
Stage 4: Theater goes out of use again in the second half of the fifth century CE.
Stage 5: Second reconstruction stage in the early sixth century CE (Justinian I).
Stage 6: Theater goes out of use in the early seventh century CE and is destroyed in the earthquake of 749 CE.

The renewed excavation of the Severan Theater and the wide-scale excavations of the civic center during the years 1986–2002, followed by extensive research, have resulted in a revised chronological chart outlining the city's historical events and architectural strata (see the Bet She'an Archaeological Project Chronological Chart, p. xiii). The discovery of the earlier Southern Theater during renovation works, and a more precise definition of the development of urban planning and the architectural stages of the civic center, have produced a far more detailed and accurate stratigraphic table for the stages of the Southern and Severan Theaters (Table 7.1), and a clearer picture of their relationship with the development of the city in general and the civic center in particular.

In the following discussion, the architectural remains of the two phases of the Southern Theater in Stratum 13, and of the Severan Theater constructed in Stratum 12 and its renovations in Strata 11 and 9, as revealed in Applebaum's excavations and the renewed excavations of the IAA, are analyzed and a reconstruction is proposed. Measurements of most of the architectural elements appear in Appendix 9.1.

Table 7.1. Development Stages of the Southern and Severan Theaters

Stratum	*Period*	*Date*	*Theater Construction–Reconstruction Stages*
Southern Theater			
13	Roman II	14–37 CE (Tiberius)	Erection of a small theater with an ima cavea adjacent to the southern part of the forum (Southern Theater Phase I)
13	Roman II	c. 80–96 CE (Flavian)	Addition of a summa cavea and enlargement of the scaenae frons of the Southern Theater (Phase II)
Severan Theater			
12	Roman III	193–211 CE (Severan)	Contstruction of a new, larger theater over the former
12	Roman III	c. mid-3rd century CE	Addition of a postscaenium and rebuilding of the versurae
11	Roman IV	Post-363 CE earthquake	Reconstruction following the earthquake; removal of collapsed remains of the summa cavea, and reduction of the scaenae frons
9	Byzantine II	6th century CE	Reconstruction work to reduce the media cavea and the scaenae frons; construction of the porticus along the northern facade
8	Byzantine III	7th century CE	Theater goes out of use
7	Arab-Byzantine	659 CE	Partial destruction of the theater in June 7, 659 CE earthquake
6	Umayyad I	Pre-'Abd al-Malik reform	Partial clearing of collapsed debris
5	Umayyad II	697–749 CE	Establishment of an Umayyad pottery workshop within the theater's premises; destruction of the theater in the January 18, 749 CE earthquake
4	Abbasid/Fatimid	Post-749 CE	Erection of flimsy structures and installations in several vomitoria
2	Late Islamic/Mamluk	1291–1516 CE	Erection of flimsy structures and installations in several vomitoria

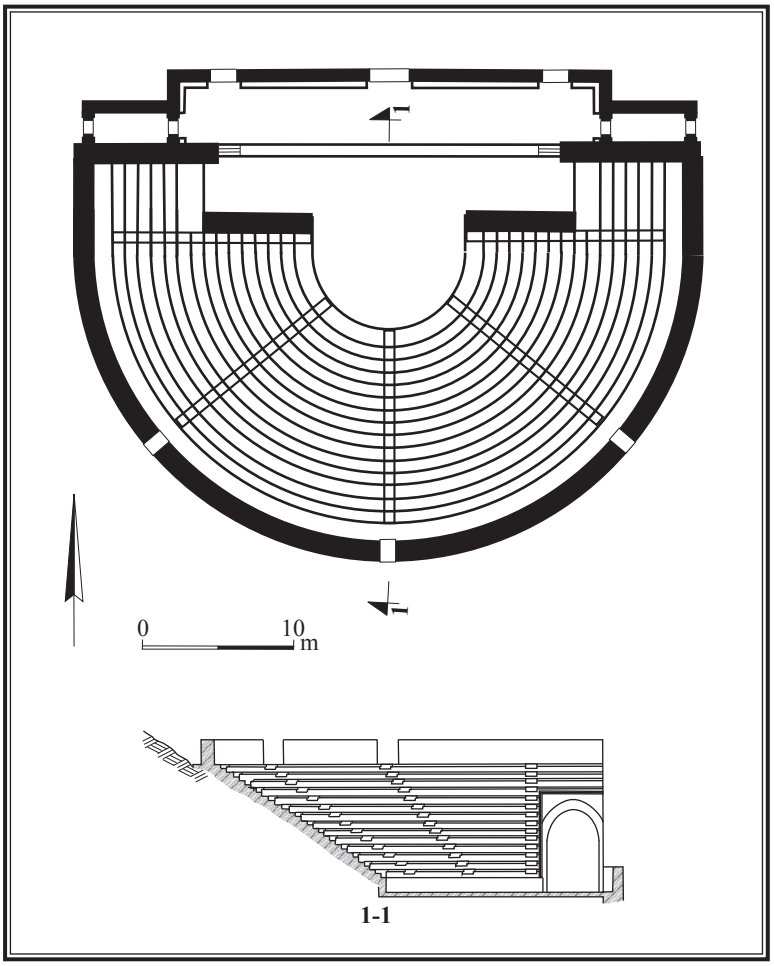
The Southern Theater (Roman II)

Phase I (Plan 7.1)

The Southern Theater in Phase I was a small theater, one story high, measuring 42 m in diameter and 32 m in depth, and it accommodated c. 1000 seats (Atrash 2006:144–145). Very little of this phase has survived, but based on the few wall remains (see Plan 2.1), the Southern Theater of Phase I can be reconstructed to a certain extent.

The cavea that faced north was built against the hillside, its circumference wall erected in a foundation trench hewn into the sloping bedrock. Prior to its construction, a foundation trench was hewn into the northern hillside for the foundations of the scaena and the eastern and western aditus maximi. Here, a large platform was erected to a height of 3.34 m, its lower foundation courses laid into the rock-hewn foundation trench, while its upper part was constructed in retreating courses, anchored at the corners by courses of headers and stretchers. Over its eastern and western ends, the aditus maximi were constructed, while in the center stood the scaena, of which nothing of the superstructure is preserved, as it was removed during the later construction of the Severan Theater, leaving only the foundation platform.

In the northeastern corner of the foundation platform, the foundation of the theater's circumference wall (W2206; see Plan 2.1), preserved up to ten courses, formed a corner with another foundation wall (W2205) that ran from east to west, which was revealed in several sections reaching a total of 24 m, 7.6 m wide, and preserved to a height of nine courses (Fig. 7.1). The foundation platform created here by the two walls carried the superstructure of the eastern aditus maximus.



Plan 7.1. Southern Theater: proposed reconstruction of Phase I.

The circumference wall of the theater was 1.2 m wide and must have been at least 1.4 m higher than the praecinctio level. There were no vomitoria in Phase I and the ima cavea was entered either from the aditus maximi and the orchestra, or from the praecinctio, which was presumably reached by stairs from outside the circumference wall.

The early phase of the rear wall of the scaena was the same length as the cavea diameter. At either end, the aditus maximi were covered with sloping barrel vaults of soft-limestone masonry. This was the common plan of Roman theaters in the region at the time, as observed on a larger scale in the Herodian Theater at Caesarea and the Nabatean Theater at Petra (Frova 1965:128–145; Hammond 1965). As in the Southern Theater, the cavea of the Herodian Theater at Caesarea, based partly upon the hill slope and partly on its ambulacrum, were integrated into the later stage.

The proscaenium was built along the northern side of the orchestra and aligned with the northern walls of the aditus maximi. There is no evidence for the existence of niches in the proscaenium facade in Phases I or II. During the first century CE, semicircular and square niches became part of the proscaenium decor in theaters in general and in the region in particular (Bieber 1961:167), although the earlier blank facade was still quite common. The number of niches varied and was usually dependent on the diameter of the orchestra.

Fig. 7.1. Southern Theater: Phase I, foundation platform, looking south.

The Herodian Theater at Caesarea had alternating semicircular and square niches in its proscaenium that were plastered and painted (Frova 1965:93–120). In the first century CE, the theater at Sepphoris (Weiss 1994:13–14), the southern theater at Gerasa (Fisher 1938:19–20; Sear 1994:226), and the theaters at Elusa (Negev 1982) and Petra (Hammond 1965:60–65) had a proscaenium with similar semicircular and square niches that were flanked by staircases leading to the pulpitum. On the other hand, the first-century theater at Sebaste had semicircular and square niches (Zayadine 1966:576–580, Fig. 2) without flanking steps, as did the theater at Herculaneum (Maiuri 1959:31–42). Later, during the second-century CE, theaters at Bostra (Brünnow and Domaszewski 1909:47–84, Figs. 928–982, Pls. L, LI) and Pompeii, built during Nero's reign (Maiuri 1959:26–30), display the same pattern of semicircular and square niches with flanking staircases. Hypothetically, based on the above examples, one could reconstruct the Phase I proscaenium of the Southern Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis with alternating semicircular and square niches flanked by two staircases, although there is no surviving evidence for such an arrangement.

The pulpitum was 24 m long, 4 m deep, and presumably had a wooden floor. The scaenae frons rear wall, probably of the type with a plain, straight facade, was 1.0–1.2 m wide and had the three customary entrances—the valvae regiae and the hospitalia—flanked on both sides by the itinera versurarum.

Based on what little was found of the architectural elements of Phase I of the Southern Theater, a reconstruction of the scaenae frons columnar facade is impossible. It was presumably adorned with soft-limestone columns of the Ionic order and plastered entablature elements, and reached a height of 6.5–6.8 m, which would correspond to the cavea 6.72 m in height (see below). However, the possibility of a basalt, Doric-order facade can also be put forward (see below).

The ima cavea of the Southern Theater was 13 m deep, sloped at an angle of 34˚, and was surrounded by a 2.5 m wide praecinctio. It had approximately 14

seat rows, each row 0.42 m high, to a height of 6.72 m. Between the ima cavea and the orchestra was a podium, similar to the one uncovered in the Herodian theater at Caesarea (Frova 1965:57–195). An unknown number of scalaria divided the ima cavea into cunei, but based on the theater's dimensions, we can assume there were five scalaria and four cunei (see Plan 7.1).

Vitruvius (*Architecture* V, 6, 2–3) suggested seven scalaria and six cunei in his ideal theater, a setting that is only found in the Herodian theater at Caesarea. In post-Herodian theaters, such as the northern (Clark et al. 1986) and southern theaters at Gerasa, and that at Philippopolis (Butler 1903:169–177), there were five scalaria and four cunei in the ima cavea, and the same number is seen in the odea of Antipatris (Kochavi 1989:103–109) and the cult-center theater at Birketein (Kraeling 1938:159–167, Fig. 2). In smaller odea, as at Kanawat, Pella, and presumably Nysa-Scythopolis, there were four scalaria and three cunei (*Bet She'an* I:207–224).

The aditus maximi were 7.25 m long and c. 2.9 m wide. The southern wall of the eastern aditus maximus (W2190) was erected over the foundation platform (see Plan 2.2: Section 1-1), and stood parallel to W2205. A segment of its original length was uncovered running from west to east, preserved up to the vault's spring course (see Fig. 2.5). The wall was built of soft-limestone masonry and as the courses of its eastern end protruded, it seems that the wall was originally connected to the theater's circumference wall. Although only a section of the southern wall of the eastern aditus maximus was preserved, and the northern wall was later dismantled, based on the building technique and the diagonal spring course, the original length and width of its barrel vault can be calculated. The barrel vault probably rose in a 7º slope from west to east, 4.51 m high at its eastern end and 3.62 m high at its western end. The southern walls of the aditus maximi were 0.8 m wide, furnished with a diagonally rising banister, and the tribunalia were presumably built over both passages.

A unique engineering construction technique was observed in the eastern aditus maximus foundation. The soft-limestone courses of the superstructure were not constructed directly upon the basalt foundations, as in an earthquake they would slide over the rough basalt stones and crumble. Therefore, as an earthquake-resisting technique, the first one or two courses of the superstructure were always constructed of well-cut and dressed basalt stones, followed by the soft-limestone masonry. This allowed for a certain sliding flexibility essential for withstanding earthquakes by cutting the vertical forces and reducing the impact of horizontal ones. It would seem that the architects in the early first century CE were well experienced in special construction methods for large monuments in earthquake-threatened regions. This unique technique was also observed in second-century CE monuments in the city, such as the northwestern and northeastern city gates (Mazor 2004), the piers of the Ḥarod Bridge, and the foundations of the Severan Theater (see below).

The diameter of the horseshoe-shaped orchestra is unclear, as the exact location of the podium of the ima cavea is unknown. Vitruvius (*Architecture* V, 6, 6) defined the orchestra diameter as being half the scaena length, although in most theaters in the region the orchestra diameter is only about one third to one quarter of the scaena. Its floor could have been plastered as was customary in the Herodian period, and perhaps even painted with a floral design, as observed in the Herodian stage of the theater at Caesarea (Frova 1965:93–120). In all theaters of the post-Herodian period in the region, the orchestra was paved with either limestone or marble slabs. The orchestra may have been surrounded by bisellia, as in the southern theater at Gerasa (Schumacher 1902: Figs. 13–17) and at Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975: Fig. 2). In the theaters in this region, no banister separated the cavea from the orchestra, as opposed to the theater at Timgad in North Africa where there was a banister (Lachaux 1979).

Phase II (Plan 7.2)

During Phase II, the Southern Theater was a medium-sized theater, two stories high, measuring c. 83 m in diameter and 57 m in depth. Remains of the southern walls of both aditus maximus passages (W2191, W2221) were revealed, as well as section of the cavea's circumference wall (W70727; see Plan 2.1). When the theater was enlarged, a summa cavea was added, and the earlier scaena and its pulpitum, the aditus maximi and, to a certain extent, even the orchestra and ima cavea, were re-planned.

Within the hyposcaenium of the Severan Theater, the scaenae frons foundation wall of Phase II (W2109), 3.75 m wide, was revealed parallel to W2205 of Phase I (see Fig. 2.6). Its northern and southern faces were built of roughly cut basalt stones with a core of large basalt stones between them, laid in leveled

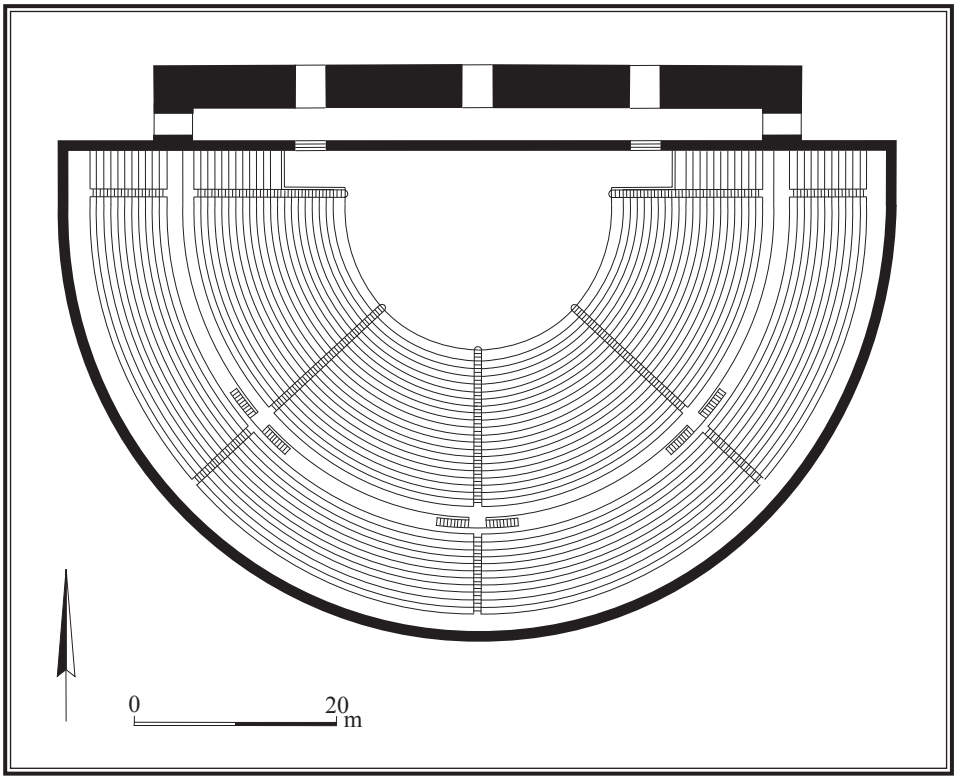
courses, each course sealed with a layer of smaller stones mixed with mortar. The northern side, set deeper into the bedrock, was preserved to seven courses that rose toward the south against the bedrock slope, reaching the same level as the southern face that was preserved to two courses.

The scaena was c. 65 m wide and 9 m deep (Plan 7.2). The space between the earlier foundation platform (W2205) and the later foundation wall (W2109), 3.75 m wide, served as the hyposcaenium, while the proscaenium was erected over the earlier foundations.

The scaenae frons in Phase II may have had a central semicircular exedra, resembling those of the post-Herodian theater at Caesarea, and that at contemporary Petra (Frova 1965:128–145, Fig. 147; McKenzie 1990:143–144).

The ima cavea was 16 m wide and somewhat enlarged, as four seat rows were added. Above it, a c. 12 m wide summa cavea was added, bordered by W70617 and W60762 on the north and W70727 on the south. A 1.2 m wide praecinctio separated the ima and summa caveae. The hill slope was further hewn for the summa cavea foundations and its entrance vomitoria. Of the vomitoria, segments of two parallel walls (W70643 and W70644) were exposed (see Plan 2.1), running south to north under the vomitorium wall of the Severan Theater, where they were integrated into the circumference wall (W70727; see Plan 2.4:3). There were probably three vomitoria, an adequate amount that seems to fit the theater's dimensions. In the Herodian theater at Caesarea there were six, and in the southern theater at Gerasa four, both of which were somewhat larger than the Southern Theater.

None of the auditorium seats were revealed, perhaps buried below the compact foundation fills laid by the builders of the Severan Theater, which contained a variety of soft-limestone architectural members, presumably *spolia* of the Southern Theater.



Plan 7.2. Southern Theater: proposed reconstruction of Phase II.

Over the Phase I foundation platform, the new superstructure of the enlarged aditus maximi was built, replacing, but not dismantling, those of Phase I, which were simply buried. The new aditus maximi walls stood c. 2 m to the north of the earlier ones, and they were naturally longer and wider to correspond with the larger diameter of the cavea, now granted a summa cavea.

The excavation of the eastern aditus maximus revealed a 13.2 m long section of the southern wall (W2191) of Phase II that was built some 0.85 m to the north of the earlier wall (W2190). It rose in stepped courses from west to east and its eastern end terminated in protruding courses indicating that it was connected to the praecinctio foundation wall (W2192; see Plan 2.2, Fig. 2.7). The lower part of W2191 was built of basalt masonry, laid in six courses of headers. The rest of the wall was built of seven soft-limestone courses, which were most probably plastered. The northern face of the wall was well constructed, while its southern, inner face, covered with the cavea foundation core, was irregular. Wall 2191 was not fully preserved, and based on its basalt foundation that gradually rises diagonally eastward, it was covered with a barrel vault like its predecessor. The northern wall of the passage was entirely dismantled when the Severan Theater was built. The preserved part of W2192 must have served as a doorpost for the eastern entrance to the passage.

The southern wall (W2221) of the western aditus maximus passage was preserved running east to west under the ima cavea of the Severan Theater, while its northern wall was dismantled when the passage of the Severan Theater was built. Part of the southern wall of the Severan Theater's aditus maximus had collapsed, thus exposing three limestone-masonry courses of the northern face of the earlier wall. The two southern walls of the Southern Theater's aditus maximi were constructed in the same method, of the same masonry, and must have had the same dimensions; thus, its plan could be easily reconstructed.

Two sections of the summa cavea's podium wall foundations revealed along its curving route (W70617, W60762) continued the corners attached to the walls of the aditus maximi (W2192, W2221; see Plan 2.1). The foundations of the podium wall, 1.5 m wide and built into a foundation trench, were constructed of two courses of roughly cut, medium-sized basalt masonry with an inner core of small basalt stones without mortar. The superstructure, 1.2–1.4 m wide, was built of well-cut and dressed basalt masonry in its lower courses, and soft-limestone masonry in the upper courses.

The Southern Theater: Summary and Conclusions

The enlargement of the Southern Theater in its second phase seems to reflect the gradual increase in the population and the growing prosperity of Nysa-Scythopolis. In its second phase, the theater was still connected to the forum, as these two complexes did not share the same orientation or level. It had no postscaenium and was therefore not approached from the forum, its main entrances being the aditus maximi and the vomitoria. Hypothetically, there may have been a narrow passage along its northern facade, separating it from the forum and providing access to the theater's aditus maximi from the north. As the two temples of the forum were unrelated to the theater, no cultic or ceremonial functions can be associated with the latter and it seems to have been a regular city theater (Segal 1995:107–111). A similar setting was observed in the southern theater at Gerasa, which stands in close proximity to a contemporary sanctuary (Zeus Temple), but had no cultic or ceremonial relationship with it (Schumacher 1902:141–145).

The length of the scaenae frons, which bordered the pulpitum on the north, corresponded to the ima cavea's diameter. The proscaenium was probably adorned with evenly spaced, alternating semicircular and square niches flanked by staircases.

Most of the evidence concerning the architectural nature of the scaenae frons of both Phases I and II comes from scattered, soft-limestone (*nari*) elements and fragments revealed in fills during the excavations of the cavea and hyposcaenium foundations of the Severan Theater. This rather meager assemblage consists of column drums, capitals of the Ionic and Corinthian orders, and architrave and niche elements. The pilaster capital (see Chapter 9), the only datable element of the assemblage, is attributed to the reign of Tiberius (14–37 CE). It seems that these elements decorated the scaenae frons of the Southern Theater in its first phase.

The scaenae frons columnar facade of Phase II was apparently two stories high. The first floor was adorned with a Corinthian order, and the second with an Ionic order. No bases for the column drums of the first-floor order were found. An architrave is the only entablature element of the Corinthian order revealed. If all the missing parts are added, i.e., base, frieze and cornice, the order composition would presumably have reached a height of 6.6–6.8 m. Elements recovered from the

second-floor order composition consist of column drums erected over a base, with an Ionic capital and an architrave. Together with the missing parts of the entablature (frieze and cornice), this second-floor order composition would have reached 6.2–6.4 m, for a total height of 12.8–13.2 m. Corinthian pilaster capitals may also have been incorporated into the columnar facade of the second phase.

A composition comprised of a first floor in the Corinthian order and a second floor in the Ionic order was relatively common in the first century CE, mainly in the west. Other first-century CE complexes at Nysa-Scythopolis had similar architectural orders executed in soft limestone, such as the basilica (Foerster and Tsafrir 1992:3) and temples (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1996:8–10) of the forum. All of these complexes had basalt foundation courses and soft-limestone superstructures, which seem to have been plastered.

The newly added summa cavea was built partly against the rocky hill slope and partly over the new vomitoria. The ima and summa caveae must have had soft-limestone seats, and the arrangement of the scalaria and cunei of the ima cavea was probably continued into the summa cavea as well.

In Phase II, the orchestra was enlarged, and it may have been paved in this stage. The new aditus maximi were constructed of two wide walls erected upon the southern and northern sides of a basalt foundation platform. The passage walls were constructed of soft limestone, presumably plastered, and covered with a sloping barrel vault constructed of soft-limestone masonry.

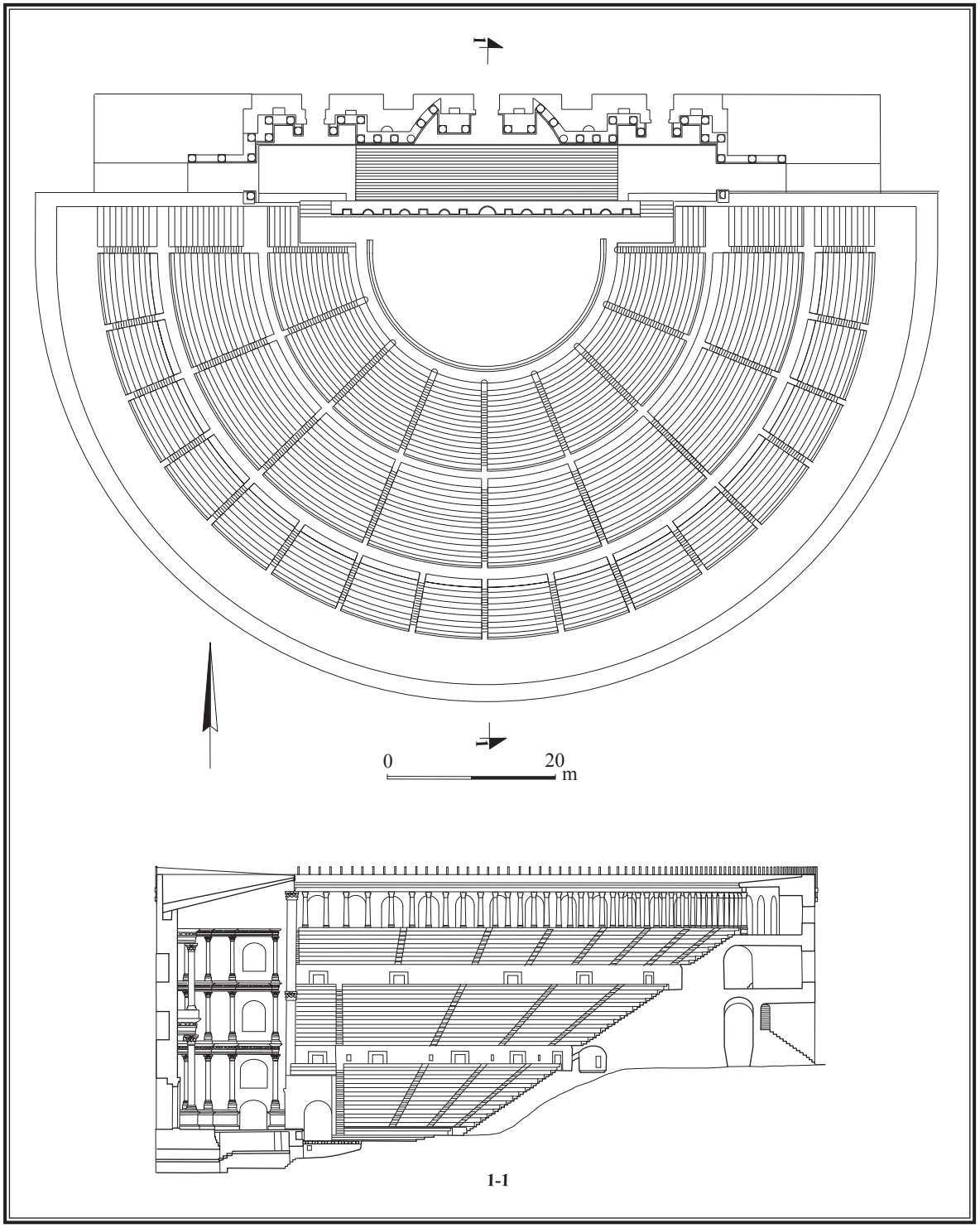
Two types of stone were thus used in the construction of the two phases of the Southern Theater. Basalt originating from the region between Naḥal Ḥarod and Naḥal Tabor (Nir 1989:49) was used for foundation walls and platforms, while soft limestone (*nari*), abundant in the eastern Bet She'an Valley (Nir 1989:66), was used for superstructures. The limestone superstructures were set upon one or two flat courses of well-cut and dressed basalt stones, but not bonded, as an earthquake-resisting technique. It seems that all soft-limestone walls and architectural members were plastered, as observed in the well-preserved remains of the first-century CE forum temples, where remains of plaster and painted frescos are discernible on walls (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1996:8). It would be reasonable to assume that the walls of the scaenae frons and perhaps even the orchestra of the Southern Theater in both phases were plastered and even painted, as observed in the Herodian theater at Caesarea (Frova 1965:93–120; Patrich 2011).

It should be noted that the excavation of the forum temples (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1996) revealed a number of basalt architectural elements of the Doric order reused as *spolia* in the second-century CE phase of the temples. The homogenous assemblage included a pedestal, four bases, fifteen column drums, two capitals and a lintel. It seems that this Doric order, which certainly dated to the early first century CE or even earlier, reached a height of about 7.5 m. According to its date, it preceded the soft-limestone order of the forum temples and the second phase of the Southern Theater's scaenae frons. As the original provenance of these basalt architectural elements of the early civic center is obscure, the possibility that they originated in the first phase of the Southern Theater's scaenae frons should be considered, although no evidence of a relationship with the theater could be established.

The Severan Theater

Toward the end of the second and in the early third centuries CE (Stratum 12), a new enlarged theater, 109 m in diameter and 74 m in depth, was superimposed over the earlier one, putting it out of use. Constructed over the same location, it faced north and accommodated about 9800 spectators (Plan 7.3). It was renovated soon after, still within Stratum 12, due to constructional faults. Additional renovations took place in Stratum 11, following the earthquake of 363 CE, and in Stratum 9, when the theater was reduced in size. The following discussion concentrates mainly on the original construction in Stratum 12: the scaena and its various units (with specific emphasis given to reconstruction of the columnar facade of the scaenae frons), the cavea and its units (including the porticus), the aditus maximi and the orchestra.

The excavations conducted by Applebaum in 1960–1963 revealed the collapsed layer of the scaenae frons' first floor, the result of the earthquake of 749 CE, scattered over the pulpitum and the orchestra. All these architectural elements were removed from the theater by Applebaum to an area north of the theater, where they remained for a quarter of a century. When excavation in the theater was resumed by the IAA expedition, all these elements, supplemented by the newly discovered ones, were transferred to a new area, sorted according

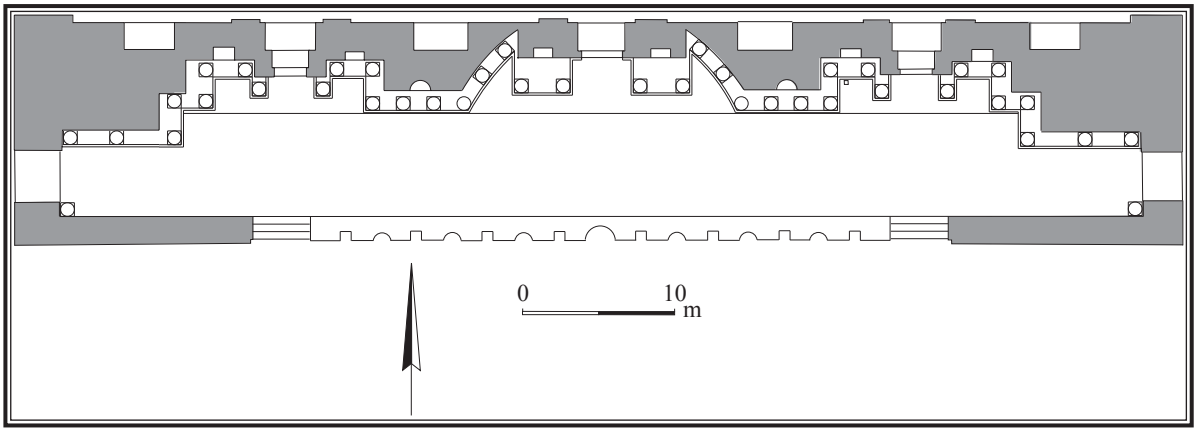


Plan 7.3. Severan Theater (Stratum 12): reconstructed plan.

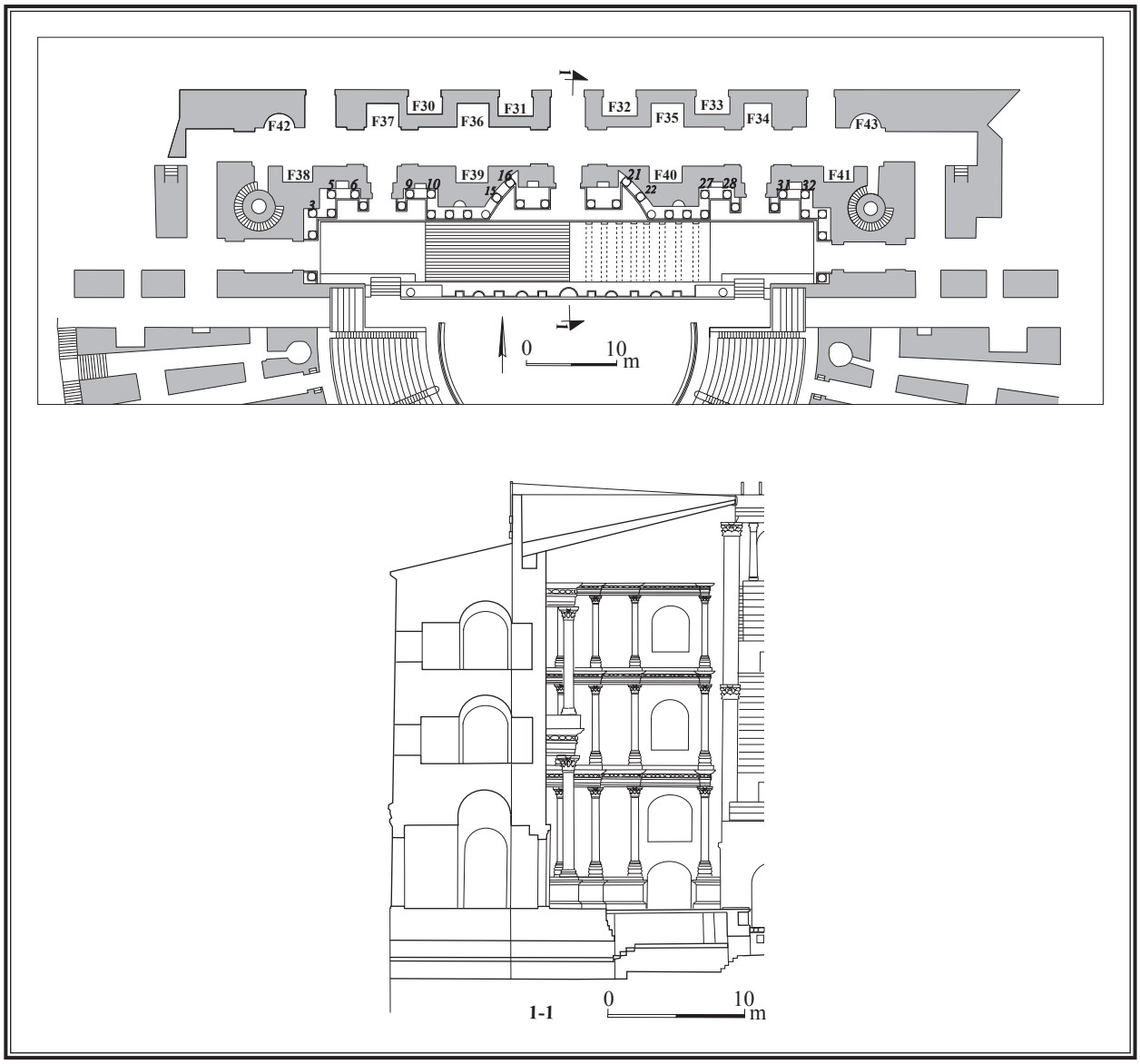
to types and materials, and fully recorded. The inventory of scaenae frons elements includes podium elements, pedestals and bases, column shafts of yellow and light gray marble and green cipollino, and red and gray granite, Corinthian capitals, entablature elements, architrave-friezes and cornices of light gray marble, as well as various types of limestone lintels, cornices and archivolt elements. Additional pedestals, bases, column shafts and column drums, capitals and entablature elements of limestone presumably originated from the cavea's porticus, while richly decorated frieze lintels, consoles and cornices had adorned the postscaenium's northern facade entrances.

Scaena

The three-story-high columnar facade of the scaenae frons corresponded in height with the triple division of the cavea (ima, media and summa caveae). The scaenae frons was rectangular in shape and enclosed the pulpitum on three sides (Plan 7.4). It was 92 m long and 13 m wide, flanked on both sides by the versurae. In its original plan, the theater had no postscaenium, and the scaenae frons, which served as the theater's northern facade, was pierced by three entrances—the valvae regiae and the two hospitalia. Shortly after its construction, the theater's cavea, which was based on the hillside and the remains of the earlier cavea of the Southern Theater, began to slide down the slope due to constructional failure. Evidence of this was witnessed in the walls of the aditus maximi and the scaenae frons podium that had been pressed by the cavea's weight and thus leaned slightly to the north. In order to avoid further sliding, a postscaenium was added (Plan 7.5: Section 1-1). It was erected upon a basalt-masonry foundation of 18 courses constructed deep into the rocky gorge of Naḥal Amal to a depth of 8.5 m, which acted as a huge wedge-shaped foundation. The postscaenium, flanked by newly built versurae, widened the scaena to 23 m. Technically, the scaena can be divided into various units from south to north: proscaenium, pulpitum and hyposcaenium, scaenae frons, versurae and postscaenium (see Plan 3.1).



Plan 7.4. Severan Theater: original scaena (Stratum 12).



Plan 7.5. Severan Theater: scanea.

Proscaenium

The proscaenium in its original stage was 38 m long, 1.6 m wide and 1.3 m high, flanked on both sides by the pulpitum staircases (see Plan 7.4). It was adorned with 15 alternating rectangular (8) and semicircular niches (7), including a larger, semicircular niche in the center of the wall that divided it into two symmetrical parts. The niches were lined with marble slabs attached to the soft-limestone walls with bronze nails, and had decorated marble floors. Some of the floors bore inscriptions. Their upper contours of the niches were covered with marble cornices that protruded c. 0.3 m (see Fig. 9.111).

Proscaenia adorned with niches were common in the Roman East and elsewhere in this period, although plain, straight facades were not unusual. The number of niches differed from one theater to the other, a result of the theater's dimensions (Frova 1965). The arrangement of a proscaenium wall with alternating rectangular

and semicircular niches flanked by staircases can be seen in the theaters at Bostra (11; Finsen 1972:79–80), Sebaste (13; Zayadine 1966), and the later phase in the southern theater at Gerasa (12; Sear 1994:226). This design is also known in the West, for example in the theaters at Pompeii (Bieber 1961:173–174) and Miturnae (Ruegg 1988:52–64), both with five niches flanked by staircases built into rectangular niches, and at Ostia (Calza 1927:74–84), with nine niches and staircases built into rectangular niches. In North Africa, at Timgad, Dugga, Djemila, Sabratha (Bieber 1961:202–206) and Carthage (Frézouls 1952:46–1000), five niches were flanked by narrower staircases inset into rectangular niches, a custom apparently also adopted sporadically in the Roman East, as, for example, at Sepphoris (Weiss 1994:13–14), Elusa (Negev 1982) and Petra (Hammond 1965:60–65).

Upper cornices of imported marble or local stone are preserved in several theaters in the Roman East, such as Tiberias (Atrash 2012:85), the eastern theater at Gadara (W. Atrash, pers. obs.), Sebaste (Crowfoot, Kenyon and Sukenik 1942: Figs. 24–28; Zayadine 1967–1968), and Neapolis (Magen 2005:107).

Thus, it is clear that there was a design concept for proscaenia throughout the Roman world, although the details varied from theater to theater.

In the mid-third century CE, when the postscaenium was added and the versurae rebuilt, the proscaenium wall was somewhat shortened, and now had five semicircular and six rectangular alternating niches (see Plan 7.5). Two of the original semicircular niches on either end were partly blocked when the staircases were rebuilt, now with six steps (see Fig. 3.11).

The renovated pulpitum staircases that ascended from the aditus maximi were now flanked by podia constructed of three limestone masonry courses with a base and cap molding and an intermediate dado. The outer podia were attached to the walls of the aditus maximi, and the inner to the proscaenium wall. These flanking podia protruded from the proscaenium wall, but once the marble plating of the proscaenium niches was added, the proscaenium and podia faces were aligned.

During the following renovation phases (Strata 11, 9), the proscaenium and its flanking staircases were left unchanged. In the Byzantine period (Stratum 9), in the sixth century, the pulpitum flanks were separated from the pulpitum by railings, and additional staircases were constructed in two rectangular niches, as had been done elsewhere in North Africa and the Roman East (see above). The new staircases had five steps that were 0.6 m wide, 0.25 m high and 0.25 m deep, as reported in Applebaum's field report before being dismantled by him.

Pulpitum and Hyposcaenium

In Stratum 12, the pulpitum, 55 m long, 8.4 m wide, was entered via the three entrances of the scaenae frons, the valvae regiae and the hospitalia, and from both sides through the itinera versurarum on the east and west. Two wide staircases mounted the pulpitum from the aditus maximi at either end. The pulpitum floor was supported by a system of abutments and arches, constructed within the hyposcaenium, a support system that was altered several times (Strata 11 and 9, see below). In Stratum 12, the pulpitum was floored with wooden planks (Fig. 7.2).

In Stratum 9, the pulpitum, now 30 m long, was entered from the valvae regiae, while its flanks were entered from the hospitalia. Staircases separated the flanks from the pulpitum and descended from north to south into the hyposcaenium (see Plan 3.6). In this stage, the pulpitum was paved with limestone slabs, while the central drainage channel was covered with a wooden floor (Fig. 7.3).

The hyposcaenium was 53 m long, 5.0–5.2 m wide at its western and eastern ends and 6.0–6.2 m wide in the center. It was enclosed on the east and west by the foundation walls of the versurae, on the north by the scaenae frons foundation, and on the south by the northern foundation walls of the aditus maximi and the proscaenium foundation that stretched between them. The foundation walls of the versurae were constructed of five courses of dressed basalt masonry built into foundation trenches, and they protruded 2.5 m below the superstructure, thereby providing a base for the scaenae frons. The scaenae frons foundation was constructed of eleven basalt-masonry courses. It was capped by a course of flat, limestone slabs, over which the scaenae frons rear wall and podium were erected in an earthquake-resistant construction technique that permitted a certain sliding flexibility (see above, p. 280). The foundation wall narrowed upward in stepped courses that served the abutment system supporting the pulpitum pavement (see below).

The southern enclosing wall of the hyposcaenium comprised three segments. At the eastern and western ends, the aditus maximi walls were constructed of large

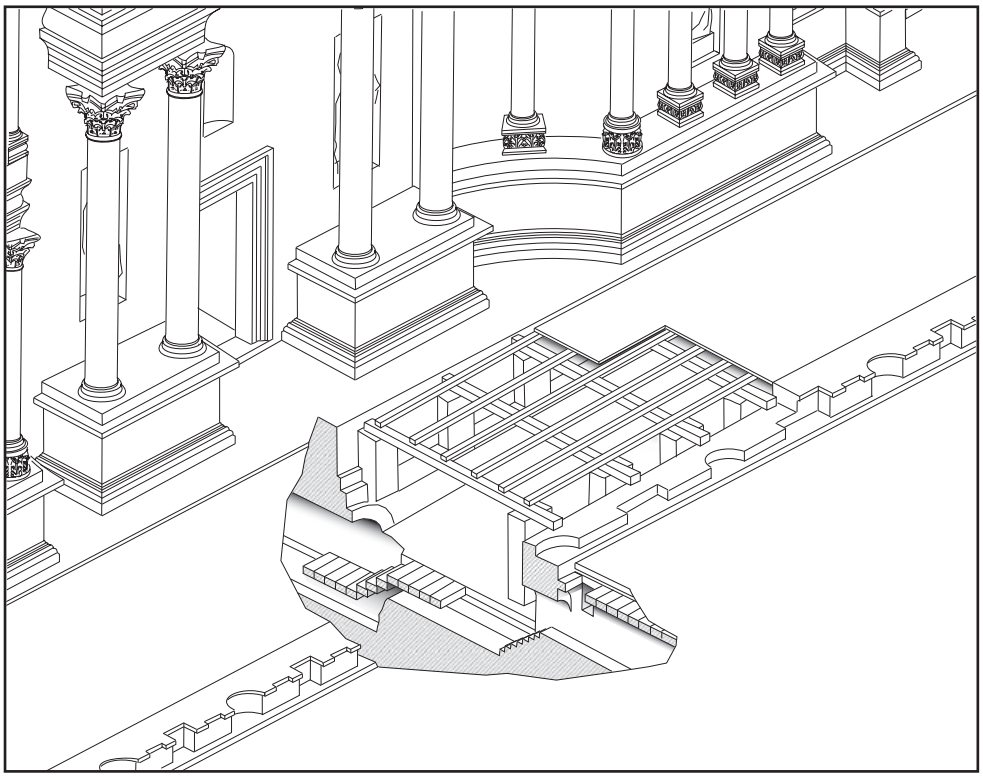


Fig. 7.2. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of hyposcaenium (below pulpitum floor) containing pilasters and central drainage systems (Stratum 12).

basalt masonry with dressed edges. Over them, the pulpitum staircases were built. The central segment, the foundation wall of the proscaenium, was bisected in the center by the main drainage channel that entered from the orchestra through an arched opening. This segment was constructed of three different stone types: four lower basalt courses, a hard-limestone course that also served as the floor of the proscaenium niches, and the upper part of soft limestone that has recently been fully restored (see Chapter 8). Above the northern face of the hard-limestone course, a line of protruding basalt consoles was integrated into the soft-limestone courses to serve the hyposcaenium's support system.

Within the subterranean space of the hyposcaenium, two parallel rows of abutments were constructed, one over the stepped southern face of the scaenae frons foundation, the other over a wide foundation wall about 0.8 m from the proscaenium foundation with its line of basalt consoles. This abutment system carried the wooden beams that supported the pulpitum's wooden floor (see Fig. 7.2). This pulpitum support system has parallels in the Roman East in the theaters at Sepphoris (Waterman 1937:11), Antipatris (Segal 1999: Fig. 119), and the northern theater at Gerasa (Clark et al. 1986:209), in all of which, slots were observed in the scaenae frons and proscaenium foundations for insertion of wooden beams. Such a system is also evident in North African theaters such as Timgad, Dugga and Djemila (Bieber 1961:203–205).

The level of the hyposcaenium floor, of which nothing is preserved, can be determined by the protruding foundation course of the proscaenium's inner face, and by the level of the central drainage channel's covers, which are at the same level (-156.30). Although no remains of staircases that entered the hyposcaenium in its original stage were discovered, their existence can be presumed. While there is no clear evidence for the use of this subterranean space, it is reasonable to assume that it served the actors and performances in some way. Applebaum (1978) assumed that it also contained the curtain mechanism (*aulaeum*), although no traces of such a device have been found in any theater in the region. In the theaters at Pompeii and Syracuse in Italy, a narrow ditch was discerned in front of the pulpitum that may have served the curtain (Bieber 1961:179–180, 203–206), while in the theaters at Timgad and Dugga in

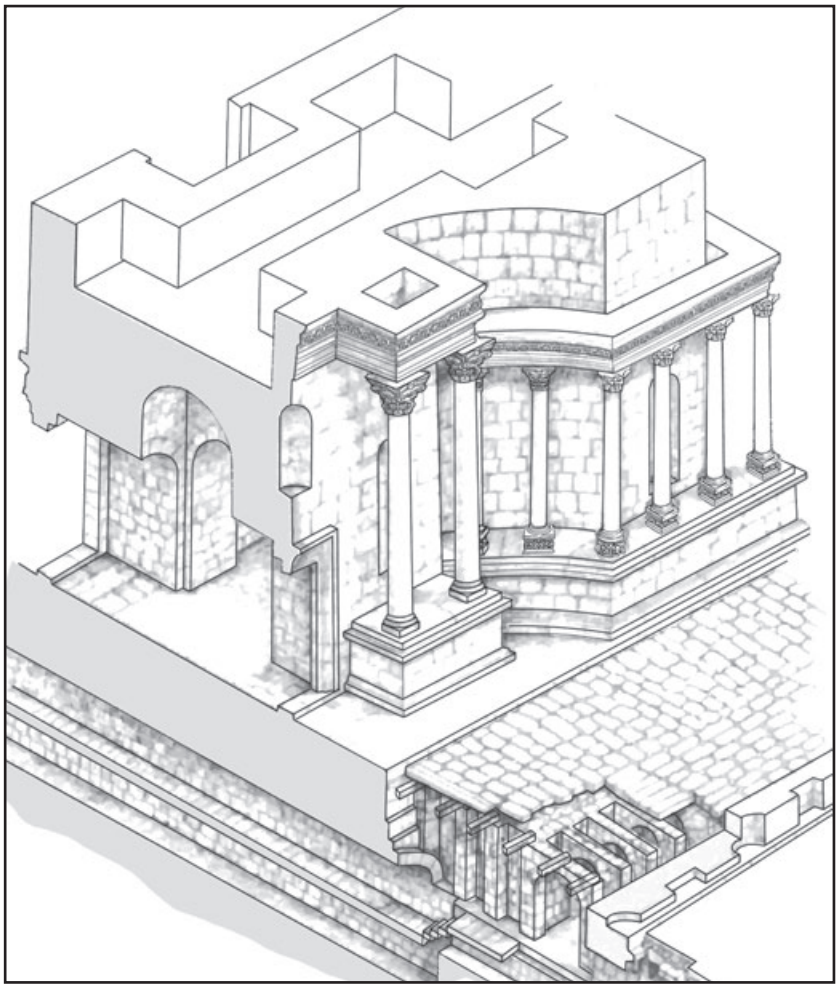


Fig. 7.3. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of pulpitum and section through hyposcaenium (Stratum 9).

North Africa, square depressions in the proscaenium's upper surface may have held a curtain device (Bear 1968:267–274; Brockett 1968:72; Frézouls 1982:381–382; Brothers 1989:108).

At its center, the hyposcaenium is bisected by the main drainage channel (T6), constructed within a subterranean vaulted tunnel that ran from south to north. It was composed of several sections, the southernmost under the orchestra's pavement, the next part that crossed the hyposcaenium, and two northern parts below the scaenae frons and the postscaenium foundations. It exited the theater from under the northern facade (see Plan 3.11), and drained into the civic center's *cloaca maxima*.

The vaulted tunnel over the main drainage channel presumably facilitated maintenance of the drainage system. This tunnel was constructed when the postscaenium was added to the original scaenae frons. The southernmost section of the drainage system was built during the theater's original construction stage and its walls were found twisted, indicative of the substantial pressure inflicted on that part of the theater's foundations when the cavea slide occurred. The walls of the northernmost section, added soon after, show no signs of subsequent earthquake damage.

The side channel, T1, added in Stratum 11, entered the hyposcaenium from under the western versura and drained into the main drainage channel, T6. Channel T1 was apparently covered with a barrel vault. The channel walls were constructed of basalt stones and its floor was plastered with dark gray mortar.

In Stratum 9, the hyposcaenium was divided into five sections. In the center ran a 2 m wide passage from south to north, covered with a wooden floor that was borne by square pilasters. Under it ran the main drainage channel. On either side of the channel were identical southern and northern sections. In the two southern sections, the arch system supported the pulpitum's limestone pavement. Each section contained 28 arches between two parallel walls—the proscaenium foundation and a wall that was constructed along the hyposcaenium's central west–east axis (see Fig. 7.3). The northern sections of the hyposcaenium comprised construction cases enclosed by the scaenae frons foundation in the north, the side walls of the central tunnel and the staircases, and the arches' supporting wall in the south. These cases were filled with compressed soil, over which the pulpitum's stone pavement was laid.

Under the eastern pulpitum flank, Tunnel T7 was constructed as an entrance corridor into the hyposcaenium (see Plan 3.10). It began at the western face of the eastern versura foundation wall, where it was entered via a shaft, and it was roofed with basalt slabs. This corridor, in turn, widened and from that point was covered with a barrel vault slightly lower than the flat roof. It seems that Tunnel T7 was originally longer, and was shortened in Stratum 9 by the construction of the corridor and the entrance shaft. The walls of the tunnel have no foundations and rest upon a layer of hard-limestone collapse, presumably the result of the earthquake of 363 CE, suggesting that the tunnel was first constructed in Stratum 11.

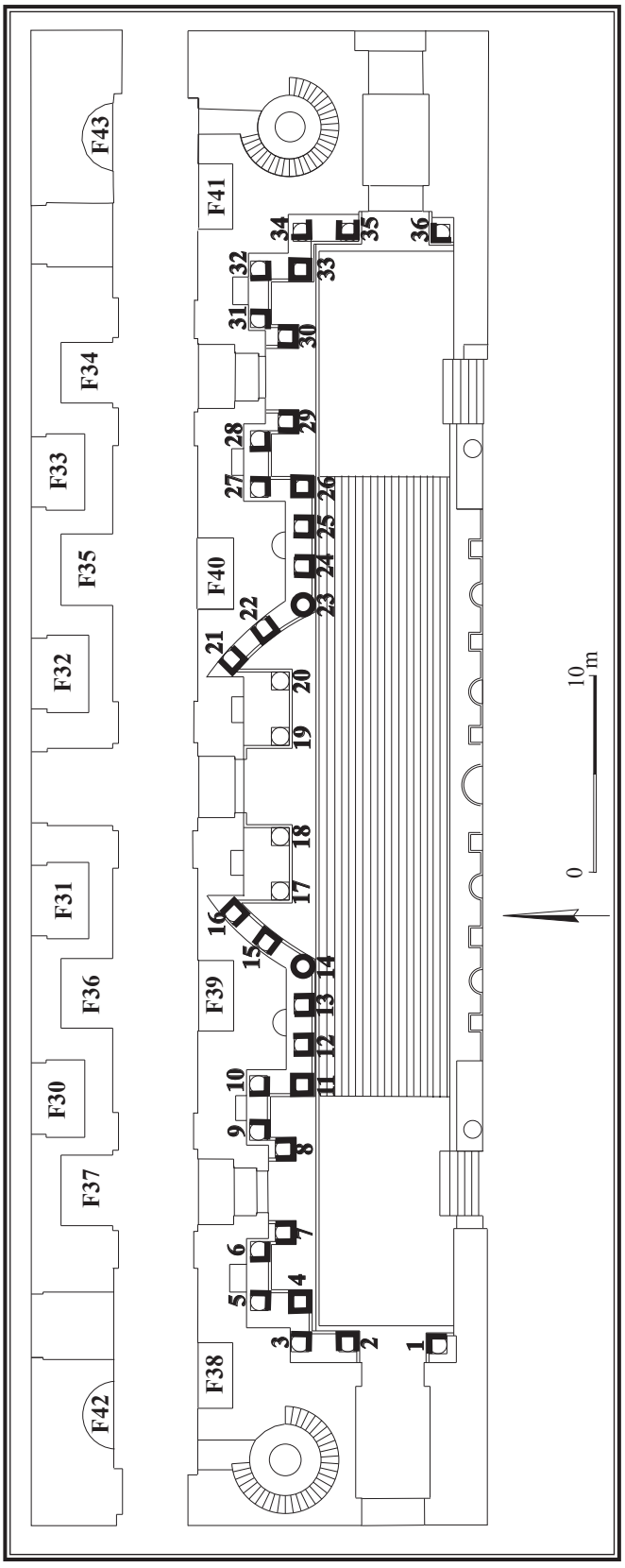
Scaenae Frons

The northern face of the scaenae frons was 89.9 m long. It had nine entrances along its route, three in the soft-limestone central section (52 m long), and three in each of its flanking versurae. Between each entrance was a rectangular, barrel-vaulted exedra, 5.5 m high (see Plans 7.5, 7.6: F38–F41; see also Plan 3.14). The northern walls of the versurae on either side were constructed of basalt masonry and had three entrances. The first entrance led into the arched versura staircase, the second into the postscaenium side corridors that carried barrel vaults, and the third to another staircase that mounted the aditus maximi and entered the summa cavea.

In the central soft-limestone section, erected over two basalt foundation courses, were three entrances—the valvae regiae in the center, and the hospitalia on either side. The valvae regiae, 3.1 m wide, had hard-limestone door jambs that were integrated into the wall and narrowed the entrance to 2.7 m. The entrance was 5.35 m high and had a lintel made of two side segments, preserved *in situ*. The two hospitalia were identical, 3.7 m high with a 0.6 m high lintel, and 3.1–3.3 m wide with hard-limestone door jambs that narrowed the entrances to 2.2 and 2.4 m. Attached to the lintels were soft-limestone double arches, the first beginning at the lintel's lower level, the second 0.4 m higher (preserved in the eastern hospitalia; Fig. 7.4). In the second- and third-floor walls there were probably somewhat smaller, rectangular exedrae vertically aligned with the entrances.

The composition of the northern facade of the scaenae frons resembles that of the theater at Orange (Bieber 1961:201).

Fig. 7.4. Severan Theater: reconstructed eastern hospitalia, looking south.



Plan 7.6. Severan Theater: scaenae frons, pedestal and column numbers.

The southern face of the scaenae frons rear wall screened the pulpitum on the north and was lined with colorful marble slabs in *opus sectile* patterns and pierced by semicircular and rectangular niches that housed statues. Its central, soft-limestone section was 58.2 m long, and with the northern walls of the versurae it reached a length of 79.2 m. The wall was 4 m wide, and in front of it was a 2 m wide limestone podium. At either end, the scaenae frons facade turned to the south to adorn the itinera versurarum, also flanked by segments of podia. Five entrances opened into the pulpitum, the valvae regiae in the center, the two hospitalia on either side of the main scaenae frons facade, and the itinera versurarum of the flanking versurae facades (Fig. 7.5).

In the center of the scaenae frons, the rear wall curved to create a large semicircular apse, 18.8 m in diameter, with the valvae regiae at its center. The walls on either side of the apse, 5 m in length, contained semicircular niches at mid-height, 1.3 m in diameter and 0.7 m deep. The walls then retreated by 2.1 m to create two 13 m long rectangular exedrae with the hospitalia at their center. Above both entrances were rectangular niches in the wall. The hospitalia, aligned with the northern walls of the aditus maximi, were clearly visible from the cavea.[2]

The three-story-high scaenae frons columnar facade was no doubt the most grandiose and richly decorated scenic element of the theater decor (see Back Cover). It was founded upon the podium and connected to the rear wall. The podium, as customary in the western type of scaenae frons facade, was divided along its route into separate podia sections that flanked the five entrances, those on either side of the central entrance larger than those on either side of the secondary entrances. The three floors of the columnar facade consisted of

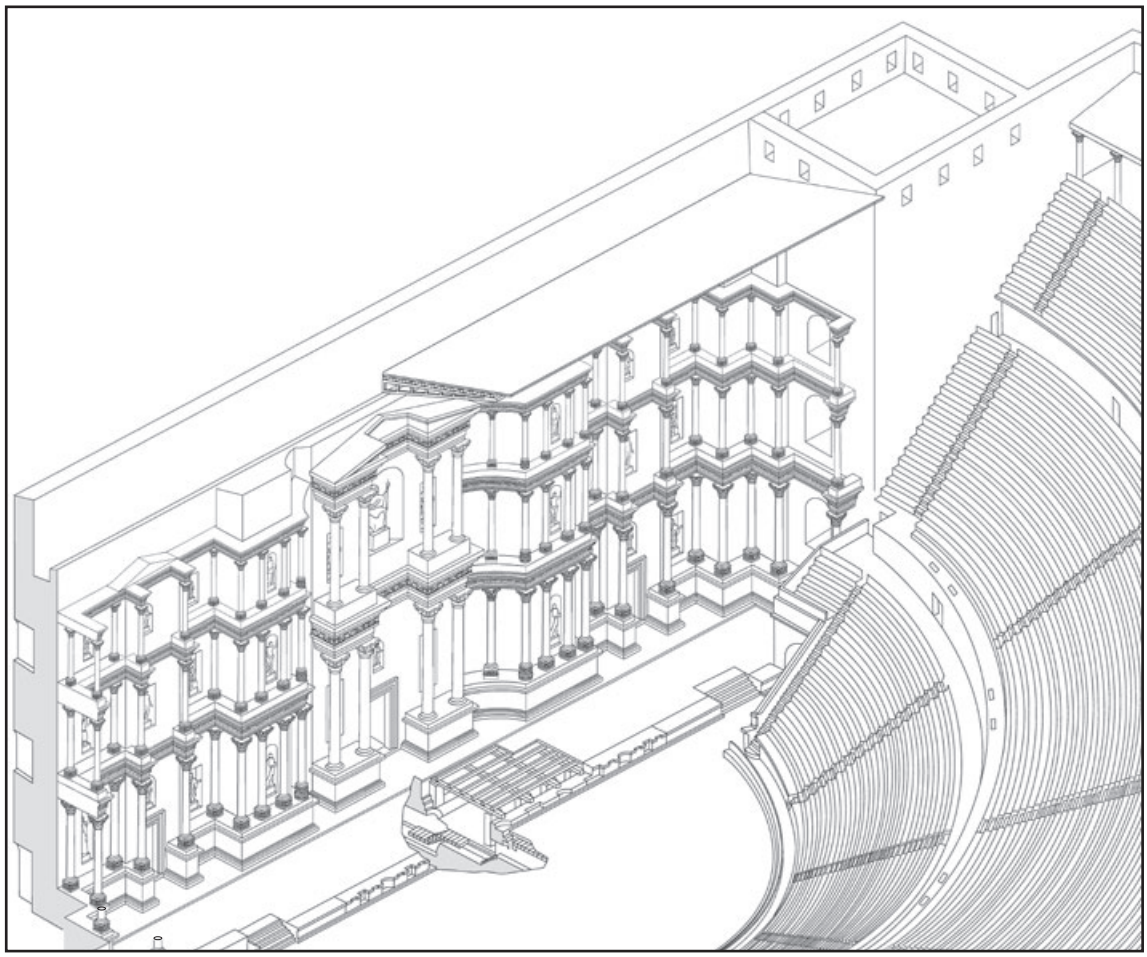


Fig. 7.5. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of scaenae frons, three-storied columnar composition.

columns and entablatures of the Corinthian order made of imported marble and granite. The marble pedestals of the first floor, decorated with acanthus leaves in high relief, carried marble bases that were surmounted by alternating red and gray granite column shafts. Marble capitals bore a marble entablature, the frieze was adorned with rich acanthus scrolls inhabited by animals and eroses in hunting scenes, and it was crowned with a marble cornice. The second and third floors repeated the order, and each floor diminished slightly in height (see Fig. 7.5). The facade of the valvae regiae, divided into two floors each with four columns, reached the same height as the three floors of the columnar facade. The protruding and retreating line of the colorful columns and entablatures created a curtain of freestanding columns in front of the colorful *opus sectile* lined wall in the background. The richly decorated niches in the rear wall were flanked by a small, secondary order of columns carrying a decorated entablature and pediments, and they housed marble statues representing gods and goddesses of the Greco-Roman pantheons, such as Hermes, Aphrodite, Tyche, etc., which were visible in-between the columns. One of these statues was found by Applebaum in the western pulpitum flank where it had presumably fallen from its rectangular niche (Figs. 3.86, 10.1). They were probably all of similar dimensions, and apparently stood in the niches until the early sixth century CE, as indicated by the excavation results.

The setting of the three entrances within a semicircular apse in the center and flanking rectangular exedrae resembles those, for instance, in the theaters at Pompeii and Herculaneum in Italy, and Dugga and Djemila in North Africa (Fiechter 1914:100–115).

By placing columns at a relatively short distance in front of a wall (0.5 m), they lost their constructional *raison d'être* and became a decorative facade, retreating and advancing from the line of the wall to achieve a deep perspective and a rich effect of light and shade (MacDonald 1986:183–207). The entire columnar composition created a baroque-style facade, characteristic of second-century CE imperial architecture and a common feature of theater decor, in particular during the Severan Dynasty.

This elaborate western-type composition was developed during the late first century BCE (Lyttelton 1974:200–203; Ward-Perkins 1981:260) and rapidly spread throughout the Roman Empire during the first and second centuries CE. In the Roman East, it adorned the theaters at Caesarea (Frova 1965:128–145) and Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975:392–393). In the West, it is seen in the theaters at Corinth, Ferento, Gubbio, Lyons and Merida (Frézouls 1982), Pompeii, Herculaneum and Orange, and Dugga, Djemila (Fiechter 1914:100–115) and Sabratha (Sear 1990b) in North Africa.

Proposed Reconstruction of the Scaenae Frons First Floor

The following is a detailed reconstruction of the Stratum 12 scaenae frons columnar facade, based on the analysis of its architectural elements, taking into consideration the later renovations. Toward the end of the fourth century CE (Roman IV), as a result of the severe earthquake in 363 CE (Russell 1980), the scaenae frons was reduced in height to two floors and many of its column shafts were replaced by hard-limestone ones, presumably taken from its upper porticus, which was not rebuilt. However, most of its other marble architectural elements were reinstalled. In the latest stage, dated to the early sixth century CE (Byzantine II), when the scaenae frons was reduced to the height of one floor, some of its marble and granite column shafts were replaced by limestone ones, although most of its other components were still those of the original stage.

The Stratum 12 scaenae frons elements were comprised of imported light gray marble from the Proconnesian quarries, light yellow marble from Aphrodisias, and gray Troad granite, all from Asia Minor, as well as green cipollino from Carystos in Euboea, Greece, and red Syene granite from Egypt (see below).

The original Stratum 12 podium was found *in situ*, 2.2 m high, constructed of four courses of hard-limestone masonry with profiled base and cap moldings (see Fig. 9.16). The podium followed the outline of the scaenae frons wall, retreating along its semicircular apse and rectangular exedrae and protruding as the flanking podia segments of the entrances. Although the podium was affected by constructional problems shortly after its completion, resulting in a slight lean toward the north, it was not replaced or renovated, and continued to serve the scaenae frons columnar facade throughout its renovation stages, with leveling adjustments achieved by minor cuttings of the lower surfaces of pedestals and bases.

The scaenae frons columnar facade was erected upon the podium, and its first-floor order composition reached a height of 7.6 m (9.8 m including the podium). The second floor was erected over a 1.4 m high podium, almost corresponding to Vitruvius' instructions that the podium of the second floor be half the height of that of the first (*Architecture* V, 6, 6), and its columns and entablature reached a height of 6.05 m (7.45 m including the podium). The third floor reached a height of 5.6 m and was covered by a sloping roof, c. 1.6 m high. Thus, the scaenae frons reached a height of c. 24.8 m, almost the same height as the valvae regiae, whose order composition reached a height of 23.9 m. The first floor of the valvae regiae, including the podia, was 12.9 m high, and its second floor, including its podium and its crowning pediment (c. 1 m), was 11 m high. Together, the entire height of the original scaenae frons in Stratum 12 was approximately the same height as the cavea porticus, 23.5 m (see Fig. 7.5). In Stratum 11, the first and second floors reached a height of 17.25 m opposite the ima and media caveae at a height of 19 m, while in Stratum 9 the scaenae frons was c. 10 m high.

The columnar facade had four columns in each floor of the valvae regiae, while the flanking scaenae frons had 32 columns in each of the three floors, for a total of 104 columns (see Fig. 7.5). The valvae regiae columnar facade, erected over the protruding podia, included four red granite columns in its first floor. The entablature they carried encircled both podia and continued along the semicircular apse. The scaenae frons three-storied columnar facade on either side of the valvae regiae consisted of alternating columns of red and dark gray granite.

The columns of the valvae regiae first-floor were erected upon light yellow marble bases without pedestals (0.50—0.53 m high; A6244, see Fig. 9.23:1, A6263, A6753), in contrast to the rest of the scaenae frons first-floor columns that stood on adorned pedestals. In the recent reconstruction at the site (Chapter 8), they were regrettably replaced by newly carved hard-limestone bases.

Four red granite column shafts were mounted over these bases (7.10–7.15 m high), three of them were preserved (A6272–A6274, see Fig. 9.25:1; see also Fig. 3.44). Field photographs from Applebaum's excavations indicate that they had collapsed over the pulpitum in front of the valvae regiae. The columns were crowned with light yellow marble capitals of the Corinthian order, of which one complete capital (1.07 m high; A6183, see Fig. 9.28:1) and fragments of others (A6179+A6217, A6180, A6217) were recovered.

The entablature of the valvae regiae consisted of joint architrave-frieze plating slabs and cornices. The entablature connected both pairs of columns standing on the two side podia, and was integrated into the scaenae frons rear wall at a 90° angle. The plating slabs (A6044+A6055+A6059+A514+A79, A6045, A6050, A6051+A6054, A6052, A6053, A6056, A6057, A6268, A6472, A6573, A6703, see Figs. 9.58–9.60) were 1.12–1.14 m high and only 0.35 m thick, presumably to save costly marble blocks. Since they were not as thick as the other architrave-frieze elements, they broke easily into small fragments when they collapsed.

The valvae regiae crowning cornices were 0.82—0.88 m high (A25 see Fig. 9.90, A6094, A6095+A6104, A6096–A6098, A6100, A6101, see Fig. 9.88, A6102, A6099+ A6103+ A6106+A6108+A6143, see Fig. 9.89, A6104, A6105, A6107, A6132, A6142, A6144+A6473, A6701). Two of the cornice elements had inner corners and must have belonged to either side of the valvae regiae, while two of the four outer-corner elements were recovered.

The podia cornices of the valvae regiae were mounted by a 1.1 m high, hard-limestone masonry podium that resembled the lower podium in its cap and base molding, and carried the second-floor order composition.

On the upper podium stood four light yellow marble bases (0.41–0.42 m high; A6227, A6228, A6229, see Fig. 9.23:2, A6230), and upon them were erected four light yellow column shafts reaching a height of 6.24 m (A6389, see Fig. 9.27:1, A6391–A6396, A6416–A6421, A6423, A6425, A6621, A6622), which contrasted with the red granite column shafts and light yellow capitals below. They carried four capitals of light yellow marble (0.81 m high; A6181, A6184, A6185, see Fig. 9.28:2, A90152). Although no architrave-frieze elements or cornices of the second floor were recovered, they can be reconstructed to a height of c. 1 m and 0.45 m respectively. The four columns carried a pediment that was c. 1 m high with a 25° angle. It would have resembled the pediments preserved in the theaters at Orange and Lyon in France (Wuilleumier 1940).

On either side of the valvae regiae were the two flanking sections of the scaenae frons columnar facade, three floors high (see Fig. 7.5). In the first floor,

32 light gray marble pedestals stood on the podium (A6120, A6121, see Fig. 9.17; A6122, A6123+A6131, A6124, see Fig 9.18; A6125+A5126, A6127, see Fig. 9.19; A6128, A6129, A6130, see Fig. 9.20; AX, see Fig. 9.21; A90124). They had a profiled base and cap molding and a convex dado adorned with upright acanthus leaves and acanthus scrolls in high relief on two, three or four sides, while the one or two sides that faced the rear wall were left in their original, crude convex shape. The number of decorated sides was determined by their location on the podium. Pedestals decorated on four sides would have been placed on the podium at outer corners with a 90˚ angle (Column Nos. 4, 11, 26, 33; see Plan 7.6). Pedestals decorated on three sides had a wall behind, corresponding to the hospitalia's flanking podia and the straight facade sections (Column Nos. 2, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, 22, 24, 25, 29, 30, 35). Pedestals decorated on two sides fit inner corners (Column Nos. 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 16, 21, 27, 28, 31, 32, 34, 36).

The phenomenon of placing pedestals on a podium is rare in Roman architecture. The only parallels were found in the Hellenistic architectural tradition of Asia Minor. In one reconstruction of the scaenae frons in the theaters at Termassos and Sagalassos, similar pedestals were set upon the podium (Lanckoroski, Niemann and Petersen 1892:161–172, Pls. X, XI, XIII, XIV), although in de Bernardi Ferraro's reconstruction of the same theaters (de Bernardi Ferraro 1969: Pls. II, VIII), he puts the pedestals on the second floor at Sagalassos, and on the first-floor podium at Termassos. In the theaters at Selge and Kibyra, pedestals were also reconstructed upon a podium (de Bernardi Ferraro 1966: Pls. VIII, XIII). As most of these theaters were not excavated, these proposed reconstructions should be regarded with caution as later, undated renovation stages may be involved. However, it seems that this unusual order composition had its origins in the Hellenistic architectural tradition in the East, where it appeared sporadically during the Roman period, although it was definitely not favored in the West.

The connection between the straight facade and the curved apse (Column Nos. 14, 23; see Plan 7.6) created obtuse angles. As square pedestals would either protrude or create problems at the entablature level, this could be solved in two ways: using pentagonal pedestals or round foliated column bases. A foliated column base that matched both the dimensions and the decor pattern was found in the theater's element inventory and seems to indicate the chosen solution (A6571; see Fig. 9.22). Thus, foliated column bases were presumably set at the connections between the curved apse and the straight facade sections.

In some theaters with the same kind of curved apse, where pedestals were not used, the problem still had to be solved at the base level. In the theater at Palmyra, Weigand (1932) proposed reconstructing pentagonal bases at these points. In another reconstruction of the same theater at Palmyra, Browning (1979:145–148) used a round base with no plinth. We believe that here also, a round foliated base should be reconstructed.[3]

In some structures where obtuse angles were created, as in the civic center of Nysa-Scythopolis, and at two intersections of colonnaded streets—Valley Street and Silvanus Street, and Palladius Street and Northern Street (see Plan 1.2)—pentagonal pedestals were employed. Also in the round Temple of Venus at Baalbek, with its semicircular exedra-shaped podium, pentagonal pedestals were used at the acute angles, and Lyttelton remarked that the use of such pedestals was unusual (Lyttelton 1974:237–238, Pl. 4). Pentagonal pedestals were also found in both southern gates at Gerasa (Kraeling 1938: Pls. XVI, LXIV, LXV), although their *raison d'être* was decorative, not constructive.

However, the use of round, foliated column bases between the base and the column shaft was a more elegant solution to create a higher, but still-slim column shaft. According to Lyttelton (1974:54–61), this unique architectural solution had its origins in Hellenistic Alexandria, from where it spread and was adopted into Roman imperial architecture in the Roman East and Asia Minor. In Nysa-Scythopolis, in addition to the Severan Theater scaenae frons, it was employed in the western propylaeum of Palladius Street (Atrash 2006: Fig. 102).

On the first-floor pedestals of the scaenae frons were bases of light gray marble, the plinths of which matched the pedestal dimensions and their diameters matched the column shafts (0.28—0.34 m high; A6220–6223, A6224, A6225, A6226, A6231–A6235, A6240, A6242, A6243, A6245, A6651, A6652, A6696, A6860, A80137, A100219, A120147). The 32 column shafts erected in the first floor had no anchoring devices attaching them to the bases or the capitals

Of the eight red granite column shafts that flanked the hospitalia and itinera versurarum, two complete ones were found (4.73 m high; A1128, A6441), along with fragments of others (A6442–A6449, A6670, A6671).

The inventory contains five lower parts and three upper parts, which, together with the complete examples, total seven of the eight required column shafts.

Apart from the red granite columns that flanked the five entrances, the columnar facade of the first floor consisted of gray granite column shafts. Five complete gray granite column shafts were found (4.66–4.82 m high; A415, A450, A460, A14076, A75507) along with five fragments (A1225, A1507, A64636, A80617, A85541).

Of the first-floor, light gray marble capitals, 15 complete and six fragments of others were found (A6160–A6172, A6176, A6196, A6173, A6177, A6187, A6191, A6192, A6197).

Most of the architrave-frieze elements of the first-floor entablature, constructed on a single block, are preserved (A6001–A6006, A6010–A6019, A6022–A6042, A6048, A6149, A6674). In addition, seven frieze elements and their architraves were carved in separate elements (A6020+A6039, A6021+A6267, A6046, A6043+A110107). Over the entrances, the blocks were replaced by thin plating elements.

The architrave-friezes of the first-floor entablature, adorned with floral designs and inhabited scrolls, were the most elaborate and richly decorated elements of the order. The entablature followed the line of the podium along the semicircular apse, rectangular exedrae and protruding podia. Each block extended from one capital's center to the next. While the architrave-frieze elements were originally connected to the rear wall by the wedge elements, in the later renovation stages, when some of the architrave-frieze elements were re-cut and lost their original precise fittings, iron connecting rods were required, a technique that was unnecessary in the original setting. Most of these connecting rods are remarkably well preserved.

The original location of each element along the facade was reconstructed here according to its collapsed location based on excavation photographs taken by Applebaum, as well as its type and the connecting iron rods on the upper surfaces. In this reconstruction, the architrave-frieze elements were divided into types according to their proposed location (Fig. 7.6). Six console elements were decorated on three sides (see Fig. 7.6:1), while the fourth side was anchored to the wall. Four of these belonged to the podia flanking the hospitalia (A6002, A6005, A6003, A6004) and two to the itinera versurarum southern podia (A6001, A6006).

Three facade elements had a decorated left-side corner, while the right side was diagonally cut (Fig. 7.6:2; A6031, A6014+A6047, A6033).

One facade element had a left-side corner, cut straight to mid-block on the right side and then further diagonally cut (Fig. 7.6:3; A6032).

Two facade elements had a right-side corner, with the left side diagonally cut (Fig. 7.6:4; A6025+A6058, A6021+A6267).

Three facade elements were straight cut on both sides to mid-block and then diagonally cut inward (Fig. 7.6:5; A6038, A6016, A6028).

Five facade elements were diagonally cut outward on the left side and straight cut on the right (Fig. 7.6:6; A6017, A6030, A6029+A6042, A6013, A6019).

Three facade elements had a left-side straight cut and a right-side diagonal cut outward (Fig. 7.6:7; A6026, A6034, A6023).

Two facade elements had a left-side straight cut to mid-block, then a diagonal cut inward, and a right-side with a corner (Fig. 7.6:8; A6015, A6022).

Five concave elements had both sides straight cut to mid-block and then diagonally cut inward. Three of them are regular elements (Fig. 7.6:9; A6011, A6012, A6043+A110107) and two were inserted into the wall on one side (A6036, A6020+A6039).

One concave element had both sides straight cut to mid-block and then diagonally cut inward, the right corner decorated (Fig. 7.6:10; A6035).

Six were wedge-shaped elements (Fig. 7.6:11; A6027, A6041, A6048, A6040, A6037, A6018).

The architrave-friezes and cornices of the first floor were fully recorded and studied and a reconstruction proposal was prepared by the author. In the second phase of the research, the architectural elements were laid out on the ground over a wide area in their actual proposed architrave-frieze reconstruction (see Chapter 8). The following description of the proposed reconstruction begins in the southwestern corner, with Column No. 1, and continues to the southeastern corner, to Column No. 36 (Plans 7.7, 7.8; Figs. 7.7, 7.8).

Column No. 1 carried architrave-frieze A6001 (see Fig. 9.41). Its rear end was inserted into the wall and its upper surface was cut by a 5 cm step during the Stratum 11 renovation for better fitting of its cornice. On its right side, the profiled moldings were cut diagonally to meet the next element at a 90° angle. Over the

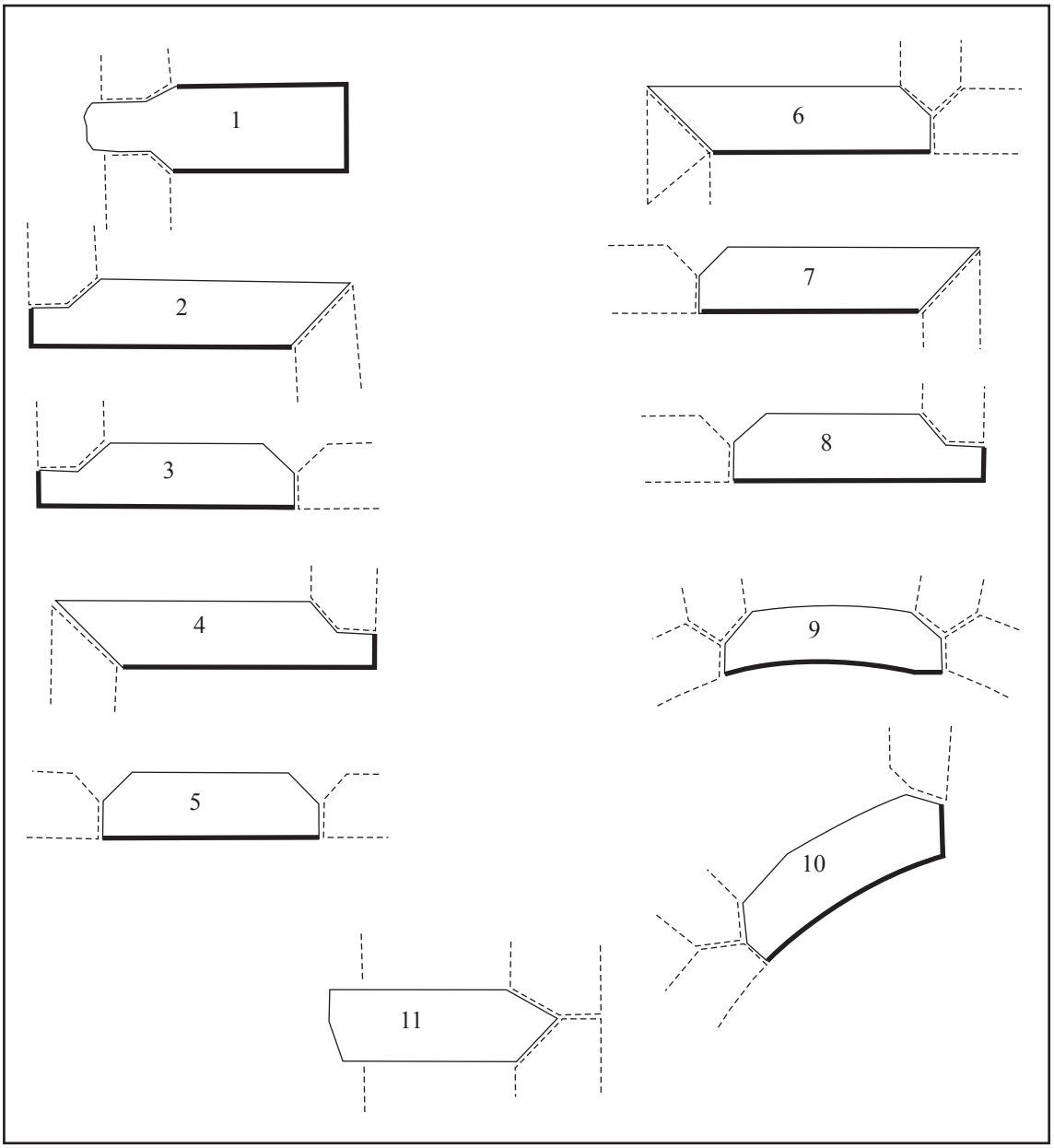
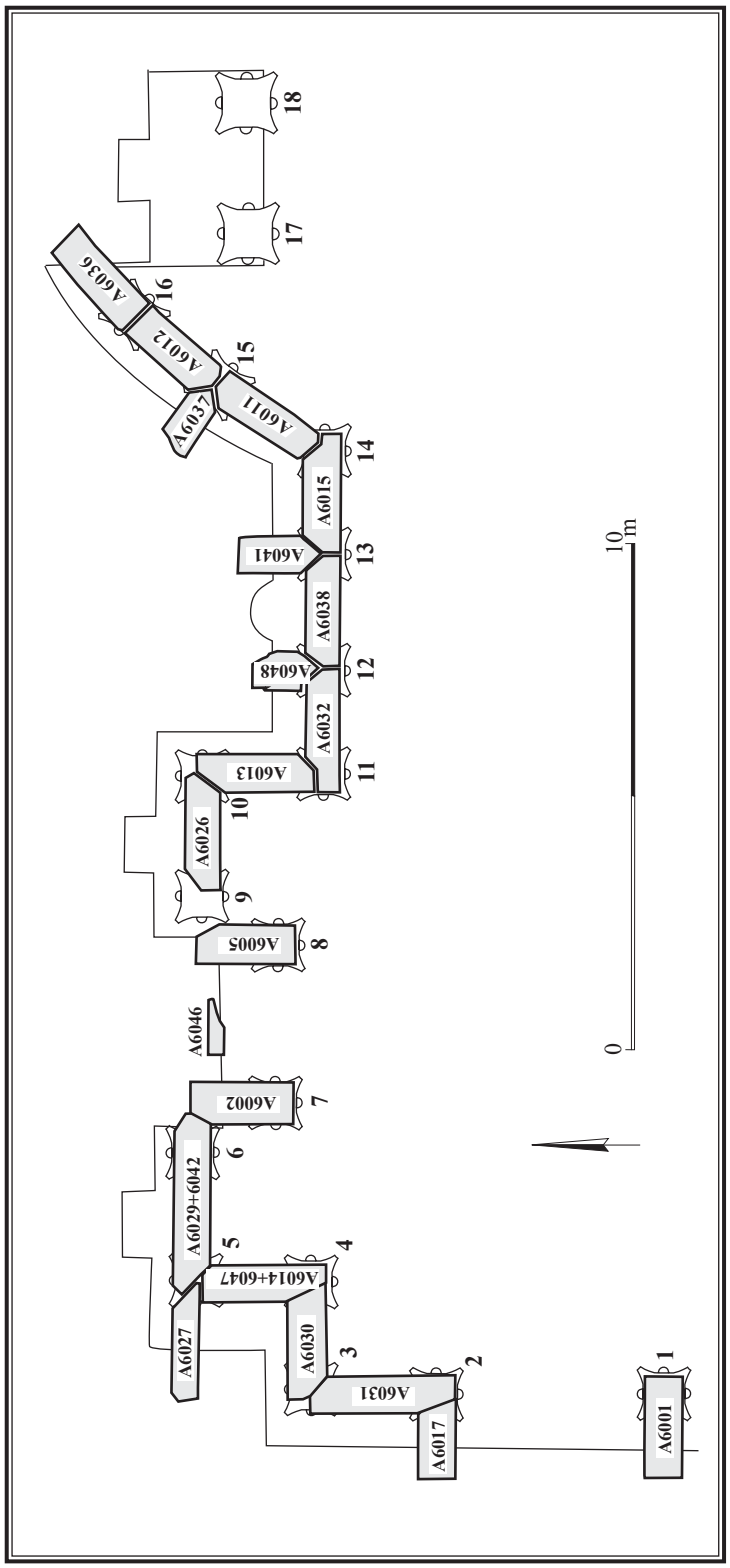


Fig. 7.6. Severan Theater: architrave-frieze types.

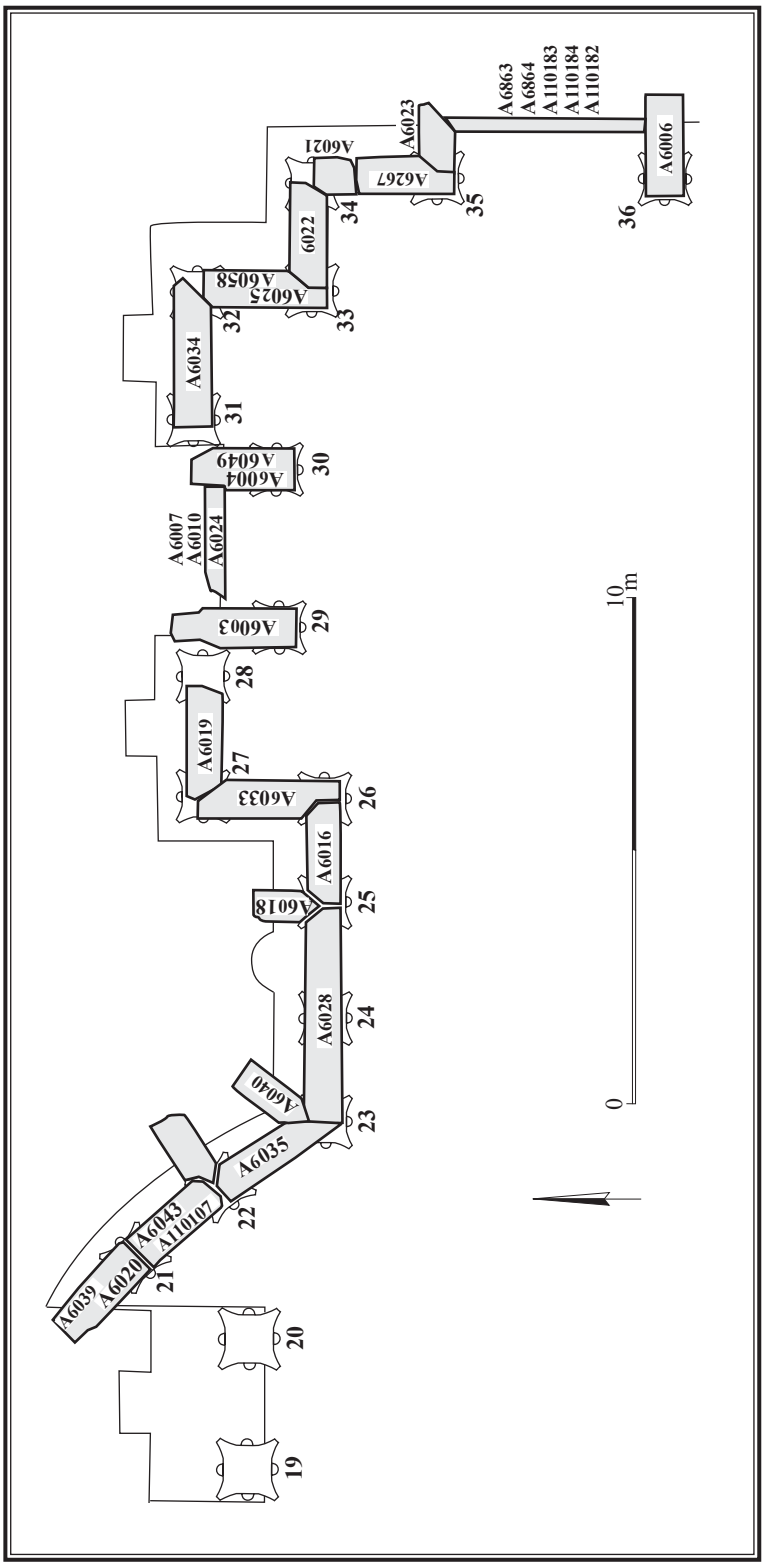
itinera versurarum, only fragments were found of the architrave-frieze plating slabs.

Column No. 2 carried architrave-frieze A6017 (see Fig. 9.42). The element was straight cut on its right side at a 43˚ angle toward the back. The left side was diagonally cut in a 27˚ angle. Its left end was inserted into the wall and it was connected to the itinera versurarum plating slabs by an iron rod (Fig. 7.9). Its right side was connected to the next element by two connecting iron rods.

Column Nos. *2–3* carried architrave-frieze A6031 (see Fig. 9.43). It had a decorated corner on its left side and the left corner was straight for 0.25 m and then cut at an obtuse angle of 138˚ all the way to the back for its connection to A6017 (see Fig. 9.42). Two iron rods connected the two elements and another rod was



Plan 7.7. Severan Theater: western part of scaenae frons, architrave-frieze display.



Plan 7.8. Severan Theater: eastern part of scaenae frons, architrave-frieze display.

Fig. 7.7. Severan Theater: reconstruction of the western architrave-frieze, laid out on the ground.

Fig. 7.8. Severan Theater: reconstruction of the eastern architrave-frieze, laid out on the ground.

Fig. 7.9. Severan Theater: reconstruction of connection between architrave-frieze elements A6017 and A6031 over column No. 2.

found on its right side, which was diagonally cut at a 45˚ angle. Alternative locations for this element over Column Nos. 4–5, Nos. 26–27 or Nos. 33–34 did not fit, as the decorated section was too long.

Column Nos. 3–4 carried architrave-frieze A6030 (see Fig. 9.44). Its left side was diagonally cut at a 44˚ angle. Alternative locations over Column Nos. 10–11 or Nos. 32–33 were too long. Its decorated section, 1.75 m long, when added to the corner of the next element that was 0.25 m long, furnished the required 2 m length. The connecting rod on its left side fit perfectly with that of A6031 (see Fig. 9.43), for which a 90˚ angle was created. On its right side were two more connecting rods.

Column Nos. 4–5 carried architrave-frieze A6014+A6047 (see Fig. 9.45). It had a left corner and its right side was diagonally cut at a 35˚ angle. The left-side corner was 0.25 m long, cut in the back to a depth of 0.4 m and then at an obtuse angle all the way to the back. Technically, it could have fit Column Nos. 2–3 or Nos. 26–27, although it would have been too short for Nos. 33–34, where the connecting rods would not fit. In the location suggested here, its length fits well, as do its connecting rods on the left side (Fig. 7.10). On its right side, diagonally cut at a 35˚ angle, two additional rods were found, one connecting to the next element,

Fig. 7.10. Severan Theater: reconstruction of connection between architrave-frieze elements A6030 and A6014+A6047 over Column No. 4.

the other to a wedge-shaped element, A6027, at the back (see Fig. 9.79).

Column Nos. 5–6 carried architrave-frieze A6029+A6042 (see Fig. 9.46), which was 3.33 m long. Its left and right sides were diagonally cut at a 45˚ angle. It could fit Column Nos. 31–32 or Nos. 27–28 in the eastern part of the scaenae frons, although it was found by Applebaum on the pulpitum's western side. It would also fit in length over Nos. 9–10, but its sides would not. Thus, the preferable location is over Column Nos. 5–6. The right side was cut to a length of 0.2 m only and then diagonally inward all the way to the back. On this side it connected to A6002 (see Fig. 9.47) at a 90˚ angle, and on the left side it was diagonally connected to A6014+A6047 (see Fig. 9.45). The left-side iron rods connected with the adjacent element and the wedge-shaped element A6027 (see Fig. 9.79). For some reason, the latter was not used in the original stage, and was only later converted into a wedge. As such, its rear end was inserted into the wall, while its front end was cut diagonally at a 50˚ angle. It was inserted over Column No. 5 and its upper iron connecting rods fit both A6014+A6047 and A6029+A6042 (see Figs. 9.45, 9.46).

Column No. 7 carried console element A6002 (see Fig. 9.47). A possible alternate location over Column No. 29 was ruled out due to the perfect connection with A6029+A6042 (see Fig. 9.46). The western hospitalia had an architrave-frieze of plating slabs, of which a section was found that continued the entablature over the entrance lintel (A6046; see Fig. 9.48).

Column No. 8 carried console element A6005 (see Fig. 9.49), which connected to the hospitalia's right-side plating element.

Column Nos. 9–10 must have carried an element that was diagonally cut on its right side and straight on its left, and architrave-frieze A6026 matched the requirements (see Fig. 9.50). Architrave-frieze A6034 (see Fig. 9.72) also fit, but it was found on the eastern side of the pulpitum and therefore most probably belonged to Column Nos. 31–32.

Column Nos. 10–11 carried architrave-frieze A6013 (see Fig. 9.51), its left side diagonally cut at a 43˚ angle, its right side straight cut to a depth of 0.25 m and then diagonally inward. Two other elements could tentatively fit this location: A6025+A6058 (see Fig. 9.73) was too long, while from A6021+A6267 (see Fig. 9.75) only the frieze was preserved and it was better integrated in the eastern side. A symmetry was recognized in the scaenae frons in which elements with a left corner belonged to the western side, and those with a right corner, such as A6025+A6058 and A6021+A6267, belonged to the eastern side. Two other possible locations for A6013 were also ruled out: Column Nos. 32–33 would have required a right-side corner, and it would have been too long for Column Nos. 3–4. It best fit the current location in both length and corner, as well as the connecting rod on the right side.

Column Nos. 11–12–13–14 carried the longest architrave-frieze section on both scaenae frons sides (6.6 m), set above four columns and connected to the valvae regiae exedra (Fig. 7.11). The entablature elements had two corners: the left had a 90˚ angle and the right, which connected with the curved apse, required an obtuse angle. The only element with such a corner on its right side is A6015 (see below). On the left side, A6032 had a left corner (see Fig. 9.52), and

Fig. 7.11. Severan Theater: reconstruction of long architrave-frieze section over Column Nos. 11–14.

Fig. 7.12. Severan Theater: reconstruction of connection between architrave-frieze elements A6032 and A6038 with wedge member A6048 over Column No. 12.

the appropriate cutting on its right side that connected to a wedge element (A6048) and to the adjacent element (Fig. 7.12). The right side was straight cut for 0.24 m and then diagonally cut inward at a 38˚ angle. On the left-side surface were two connecting rods that matched those of A6013 (see Fig. 9.51). On its right side were two additional rods, one connected to the next element, the other to the wedge element (see Fig. 9.81:1).

Architrave-frieze A6038 (see Fig. 9.53) was identically cut on both sides, first straight to a depth of 0.23–0.30, then diagonally inward at a 20–40˚ angle. On its upper surface were two iron connecting rods that fit those of A6032, while the rods on the right side were not preserved. The wedge A6048 had collapsed in this location. Its rear end that was inserted into the wall was straight cut, while its opposite end was wedge shaped. It was placed over Column No. 12 between A6032 and A6038 (see Fig. 7.12). On its upper surface were two iron rods.

Architrave-frieze A6015 (see Fig. 9.54), above Column Nos. 13–14, had a rounded, decorated right-side corner that was 0.23 m long, while its left side was straight cut to a depth of 0.2 m and then diagonally at a 52˚ angle. On its upper right surface was a connecting rod and two others on its left side where the wedge element A6041 was inserted (see Fig. 9.80). The rear end of wedge A6041 was straight cut for 0.3 m and then had an inward diagonal cut of 62˚. Its wedge-shaped end was inserted between A6038 and A6015 with a perfect connection, although its upper part was broken, so no remains of connecting rods were found. It seems that it was originally intended to be part of the facade, but at some stage was reused as a wedge element.

Column Nos. 14–15 carried A6011 (see Fig. 9.55), its left side was cut diagonally at a 10˚ angle inward, its right side at 30˚. On its upper left surface was an iron connecting rod that attached to A6015 (see Fig. 9.54).

Column Nos. *15–16* carried A6012 (see Fig. 9.56), its left side straight cut to mid-block and then diagonally inward at 50˚, while its right side was straight cut. On the inner left side of its surface was an iron rod that connected to wedge A6037 (see Fig. 9.81:3), and on the right side were two rods that connected to A6036 (see Fig. 9.57). Wedge A6037 (see Fig. 9.81:3) was decorated on one side. Its rear end, inserted into the wall, had a 70˚ cut, while its opposite end was wedge shaped and inserted between A6011 and A6012 over Column No. 15.

Column No. *16* carried A6036 (see Fig. 9.57), its right end inserted into the wall, its left end straight cut. On its upper left surface, two iron rods fit those on A6012.

Column No. *21* carried A6039+A6020 (see Fig. 9.61). Here, the architrave and frieze were carved on separate blocks, the frieze block also including the cornice's lower part. Its left side was inserted into the wall, while its right was straight cut.

Column Nos. *21–22*. Here also, the architrave and frieze were carved on separate blocks. The architrave element was not found, but it presumably resembled A6039+A6020. The broken frieze element, of which two parts were found (A6043+A110107; see Fig. 9.62), had the cornice's lower part carved on top.

Column Nos. *22–23* carried A6035 (see Fig. 9.63). Although broken on its right side, a small section of its corner was preserved. On its left side it had a straight cut and then an inward diagonal cut at 13˚.

Column Nos. *23–24–25* (see Fig. 7.8) carried A6028 (see Fig. 9.64), an unusual composition in which a single element crossed over three columns. Its right end had a straight cut and then an inward diagonal cut at 30˚. Its left end had a straight cut and then an inward diagonal cut at 75˚, with a 0.14 m ledge for wedge A6040 (see Fig. 9.81:2). On its upper surface, on both the right and left sides, were iron rods. Between A6035 and A6028 and above Column No. 23, rested A6040, a wedge element that connected both to the rear wall without connecting rods. It was crudely carved, its rear end, inserted into the wall, was straight cut, while its opposite end was wedge shaped.

Column Nos. *25–26* carried an architrave-frieze element with a right corner. One such element is A6025+A6058 (see Fig. 9.73), although, as it was cut diagonally on its left side, it does not fit. Architrave-frieze A6016 (see Fig. 9.65) is the only element that would fit, although it had no right-side corner. Both sides had straight cuts, then inward diagonal cuts of 40˚. According to Applebaum's photographs, it was found nearby. On both sides of its upper surface were iron rods that fit the adjacent elements. Wedge A6018 (see Fig. 9.81:4) was inserted between A6028 and A6016 (Column No. 25). Its rear end, inserted into the wall, was straight-cut, then diagonally cut inward at 63˚, while the opposite end was wedge shaped. It had three connecting rods (Fig. 7.13).

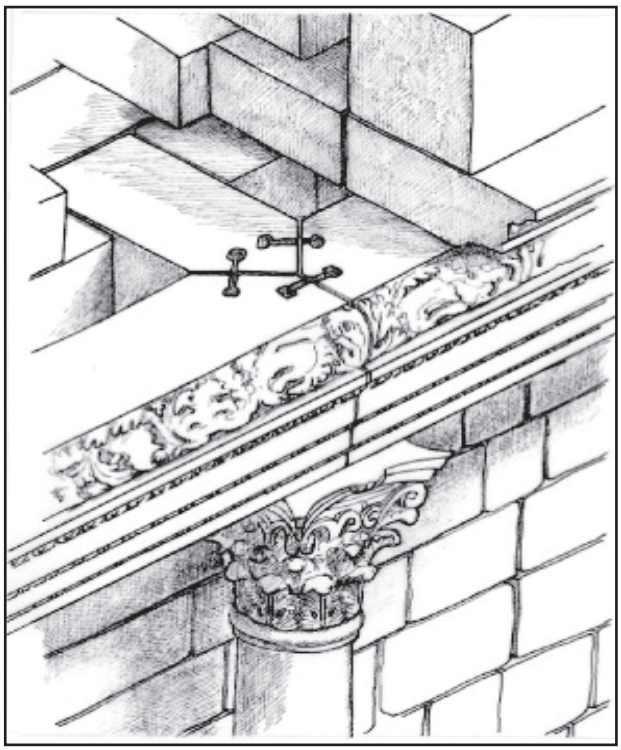


Fig. 7.13. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of architrave-frieze elements A6028 and A6016 with wedge A6018.

Column Nos. *26–27* carried an architrave-frieze element with a left corner and an outward diagonal cut on its right side. Three such elements were found, two of which were already integrated into the western side (A6031, A6014+A6047, see Figs. 9.43, 9.45). The first was ruled out as it was too long, while the iron rods of the second did not fit. Element A6033 (see Fig. 9.66) fit both the length and the connecting rods. It had a straight, then diagonally cut left corner that connected to A6016. An iron rod on the left fit A6016 (see Fig. 9.65).

Column Nos. *27–28* carried architrave-frieze A6019 (see Fig. 9.67), its left side cut diagonally outward and its right side straight. Between A6019 and the following

A6003 (see Fig. 9.68), a small wedge element must have been inserted, although it was not found.

Column No. 29 carried console element A6003 (see Fig. 9.68), its rear end inserted into the wall. Its facade was broken and its two decorated sides were of different lengths. An iron rod on the upper right surface connected to the hospitalia's plating slab A6024 (see Fig. 9.70). Slab A6024 was not an original part of the entrance plating, but was placed here during Stratum 11, and it was connected by iron rods to both flanking console elements A6003 and A6004+A6049. The original eastern hospitalia plating slabs A6007+A6010 (see Fig. 9.69) were also connected to A6024.

Column No. 30 carried console element A6004+A6049 (see Fig. 9.71), whose rear end was inserted into the wall. Its facade was partly broken and repaired during the restoration works. On its upper left surface was an iron rod that connected to the hospitalia's plating element A6024.

Column Nos. 31–32 carried A6034 (see Fig. 9.72), the upper part of its frieze missing. It was cut diagonally outward on the right side and straight on the left. Its length and cuts correspond to this location, and Applebaum's photographs indicate that it had collapsed here. On its upper right surface was an iron connecting rod.

Column Nos. 32–33 carried A6025+A6058 (see Fig. 9.73) that had a decorated right corner, while its left side was cut diagonally outward. It had iron rods on both sides of its upper surface that fit the adjacent elements perfectly. According to the photographs, it was found in this location, so possible locations over Column Nos. 3–4 or Nos. 10–11 on the western side were ruled out. The architrave-frieze elements were connected over the inner corner (Column No. 32) and outer corner (Column No. 33) with iron bars (Fig. 7.14).

Column Nos. 33–34 carried A6022 (see Fig. 9.74), its left-side corner, diagonally cut, connected to A6025+A6058, while the diagonally cut right side connected to A6021+A6267, of which only the frieze was preserved (see Fig. 9.75). Element A6021+A6267, carried by Column No. 35, was cut diagonally outward on its left side and had a decorated, broken right corner. The left-side diagonal cut was adjusted on top and bottom to connect to the adjacent element.

Column No. 35 carried A6023 (see Fig. 9.76), which was integrated into the rear wall at its right end, while its left side connected to A6021+A6267. It

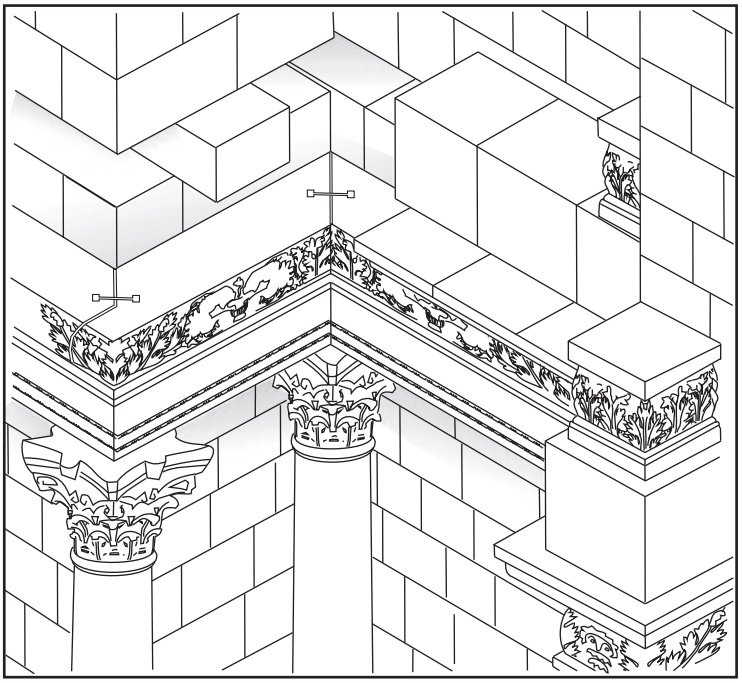


Fig. 7.14. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of connections of inner and outer corners of architrave-frieze elements.

also connected to the itinera versurarum slabs above the entrance's archivolt. Only fragments of the frieze slabs were found (A6863, A6864, A110182, A110183, A110184, see Fig. 9.77:1–5), and it is clear that they were separate from the architrave.

Column No. 36 carried console element A6006 (see Fig. 9.78) that was integrated into the wall. Its left side was connected to the itinera versurarum plating elements.

While the architrave-frieze of the scaenae frons first floor was almost completely preserved, some of its figurative reliefs had been deliberately defaced, probably by Byzantine or Islamic iconoclasm. The original composition of the architrave-frieze was slightly altered during its renovation stages (Strata 11, 9), as several elements changed locations and others were re-cut; however, in spite of these renovations, the original composition was remarkably retained. All the architrave-frieze elements, apart from the consoles, had soffit strips on their lower surfaces that did not always fit the intercolumniation.

The cornices that crowned the Corinthian order composition of all three floors of the scaenae frons created, together with the architrave-frieze, a richly adorned entablature.

The light gray marble cornices of the first-floor were carved of smaller blocks than the architrave-friezes, and it was not necessary to connect them with iron rods as they were held firmly in place by the second-floor podium that was erected over them. Only some of the console elements had iron rods. The cornices protruded from the friezes by 0.3 m and nearly all their elements (51) were found (Plans 7.9, 7.10).

The cornice elements were divided into types according to their location (see Figs. 9.91–9.97):

Console cornices decorated on three sides (A6111, A6450, A6112+A6114+A6070 = A6114, A6110, A6087, A6113+A6154);

Straight cornices straight cut on both sides (A6089, A6065, A6079+A6153, A6119, A6151, A6081, A6063, A6078, A6451);

Straight cornices straight cut on the left side (A6069, A6082);

Straight cornices straight cut on the right side (A6061+A6066 = A6061, A6068, A6074, A6080);

Straight cornices cut diagonally outward on the left side (A6072+A6092, A6073+A6118, A6093+A6109, A6062+A6064, A6115);

Straight cornices cut diagonally outward on the right side (A6078+A6672);

Straight cornices cut diagonally outward on both sides (A6071+A6088);

Straight cornices with an inner corner (A6086+A6067);

Straight cornices with an outer corner (A6060, A6075, A6084, A6085, A6090; A6653);

Concave cornices (A6083+A6076, A6077, A6478, A6091, A120122, A6146).

The proposed reconstruction follows the same order as that of the architrave-friezes, beginning with Column No. 1 in the southwest, to Column No. 36 in the southeast.

Column No. 1 carried cornice A6113+A6154 (Fig. 7.15). The cornice was decorated on three sides and had an inner corner, the longer right side of which passed over the plating frieze of the itinera versurarum. Over the southern side of the western itinera versurarum was cornice A6068 connected to A6113+6154.

Column Nos. 2–3 carried cornice A6653, which had an outer corner.

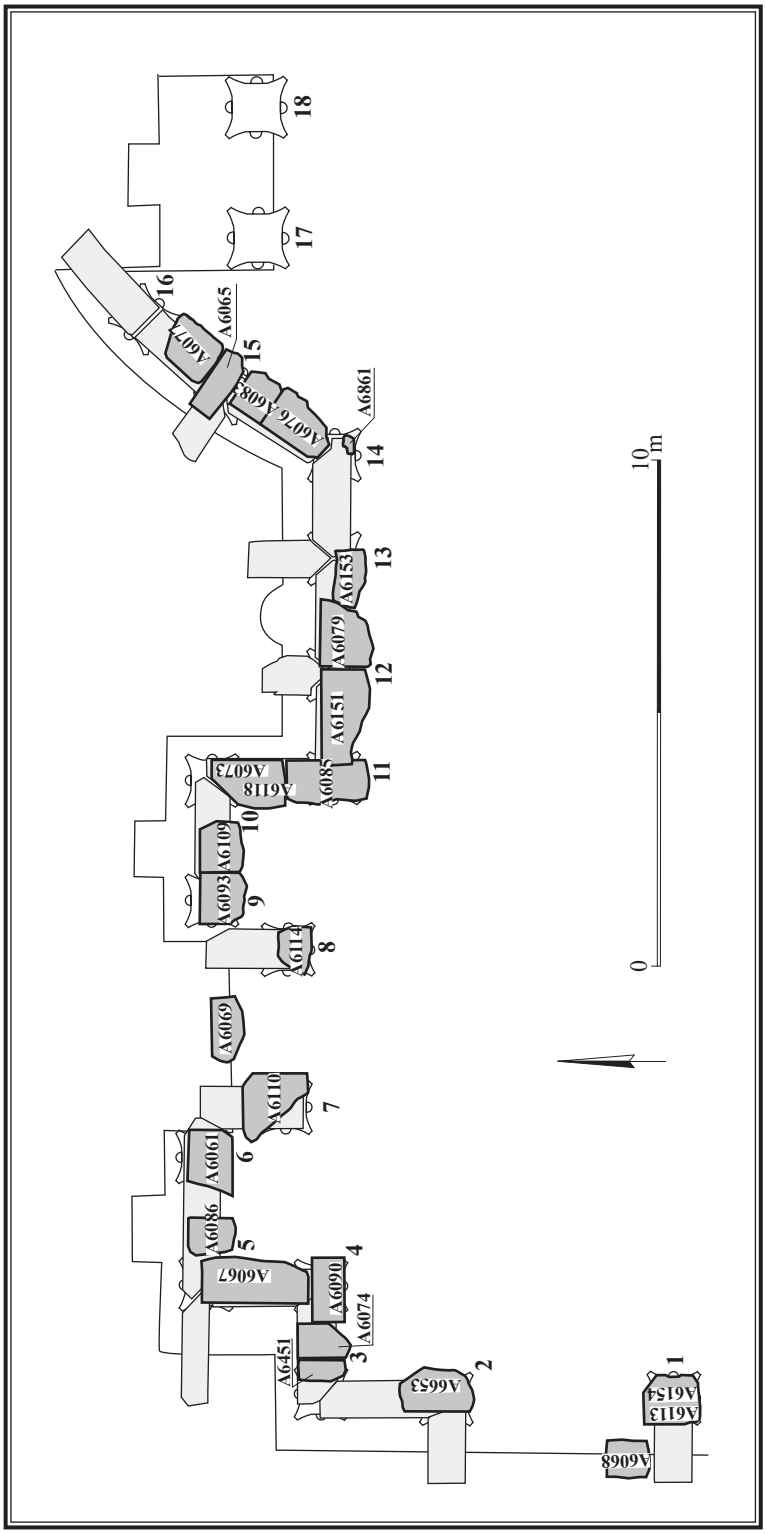
Column Nos. 3–4 carried cornices A6074 and A6451. The first had its left side diagonally cut. It was discovered close by in the collapsed debris, and therefore probably belongs here. Attached to it on the left was cornice A6451, both sides of which were straight cut.

Column Nos. 4–5 carried cornice A6090 (see Fig. 9.93:2) with an outer corner. It was connected to cornice A6086+A6067 (see Fig. 9.94), which had an inner corner. These two connected cornices created two corners, an outer one over Column No. 4 and an inner one over Column No. 5. Their lower surface fit onto frieze A6014+A6047 (see Fig. 9.45).

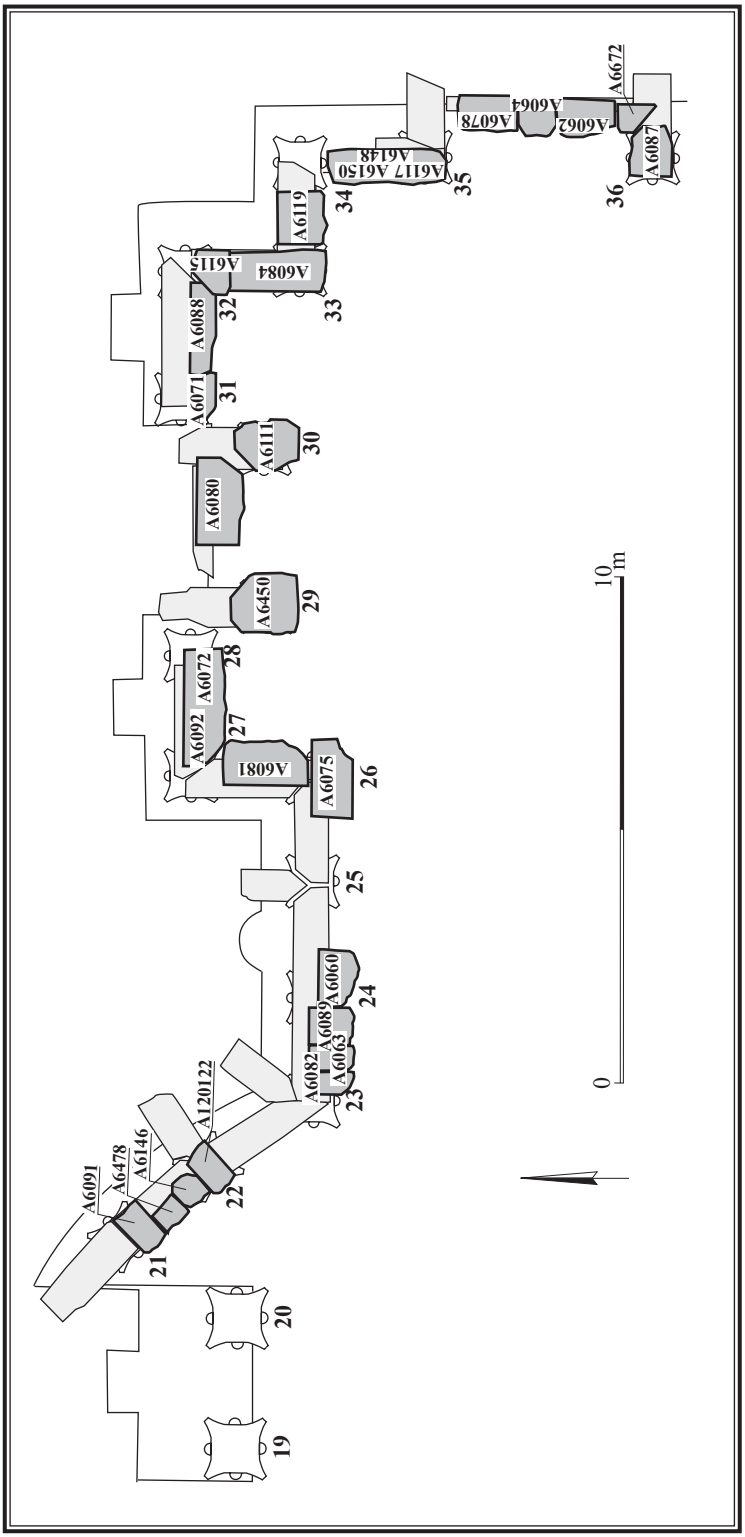
Column Nos. 5–6 carried cornice A6061, with an outer diagonal cut on its right side. Together with cornice A6086+A6067, it created a cornice section that matched frieze A6029+A6042 (see Fig. 9.46).

Column No. 7 carried console cornice A6110, decorated on three sides, its left side partly broken. Cornice A6069 rested over the hospitalia frieze A6046.

Column No. 8 carried console cornice A6114 that was composed of three parts (see Fig. 9.91:1). The first and second parts were found in the area. The third part (A6112) joined them from the back and had an inner corner on the left side and an inner diagonal cut on the right. Its left inner corner connected to the western hospitalia entablature.



Plan 7.9. Severan Theater: western part of scaenae frons, cornice display.



Plan 7.10. Severan Theater: eastern part of scaenae frons, cornice display.

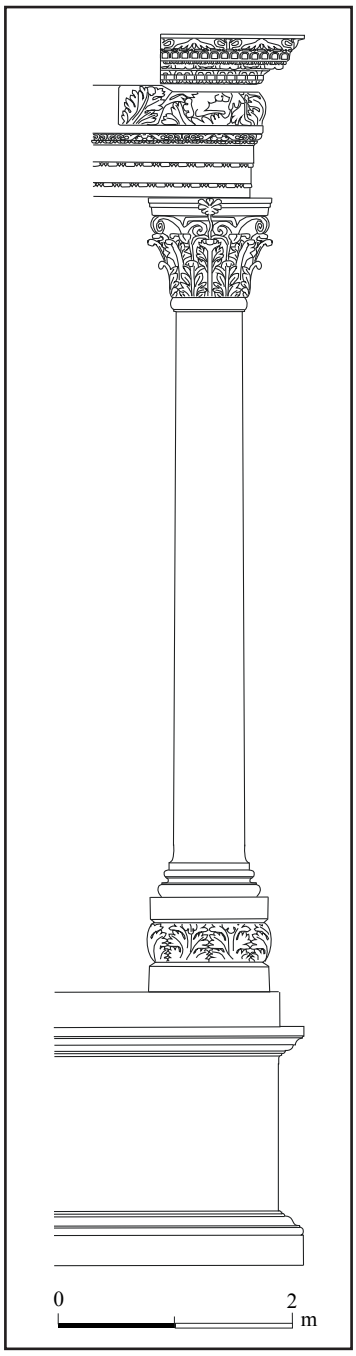


Fig. 7.15. Severan Theater: reconstruction of Column No. 1 and entablature, with cornice A6154.

Column Nos. 9–10 carried cornices A6093 and A6109, connected along a straight cut, and both fit this location in length, height and connection.

Column Nos. 10–11 carried cornices A6118+A6073 and A6085 (see Fig. 9.92:2). The first was cut diagonally on its left side so it fit the connection over Column No. 10 with the previous cornice (A6109). Together with A6085, which had an outer corner, they fit the location over frieze A6013 (see Fig. 9.51).

Column Nos. 11–12–13–14 carried a straight facade section that connected with the curved apse to the right of it. It began with cornice A6085 (above) and joined on the right to A6151, A6079 and A6153, all regular cornices cut straight on both sides. Their decorated profiles match, and A6151 was identified in photographs where it had collapsed next to Column Nos. 11–14.

Column Nos. 14–15–16 carried concave cornice elements A6861 (see Fig. 9.97:3), A6076+A6083 (see Fig. 9.97:1), A6065 and A6077 (see Fig. 9.97:2). Their connections fit perfectly.

Column Nos. 21–22 carried concave cornice elements A6091, A6146, A6478 and A120122. The lower 7 cm of the cornices were integrated into frieze elements A6020+A6039 (see Fig. 9.61) and A6043+A110107 (see Fig. 9.62).

Column Nos. 23–24–25–26 carried a straight facade section connected to the semicircular exedra on the left by an outer corner, comprised of cornices A6082, A6063+A6089 (see Fig. 9.96:2), A6060 (see Fig. 9.96:1), a gap of a missing cornice, then A6075 (see Fig. 9.93:1). Their total length was 5.35 m. Some of the cornices were found in this area and could successfully be joined.

Column Nos. 26–27 carried cornice A6075, its outer corner attached to A6081 on the right.

Column Nos. 27–28 carried cornice A6092+A6072.

Column No. 29 carried console element A6450 (see Fig. 9.91:2). Both its decorated sides were diagonally cut. It had an iron connecting rod on top, uncommon in cornice elements. According to Applebaum's photographs, it was found in front of the eastern hospitalia.

Between Column Nos. 29 and 30, over the eastern hospitalia, is cornice element A6080. It also had two iron rods on its upper surface, which connected perfectly with those of the two flanking consoles on either side (A6450, A6111). It was found in this area, as indicated by Applebaum's photographs.

Column No. 30 carried console A6111 (see Fig. 9.91:3), its decorated sides diagonally cut to different lengths to fit the connections on either side. Its general dimensions match well the frieze underneath. On the right side of the upper surface was an iron rod that connected with cornice element A6071+A6088 (see below).

Column Nos. 31–32 carried cornice A6071+A6088 (see Fig. 9.95:1), which was cut diagonally inward on both sides. It included the upper 0.1 m section of the frieze (A6034, see Fig. 9.72), and on its left end was a step that matched frieze A6004+A6049 (see Fig. 9.71). It was found in the area, next to frieze A6034, which it matched both in connection and pattern.

Columns Nos. 32–33 carried cornice A6115 that was connected to A6084 over Column No. 33 (see Fig. 9.92:2); A6084 had an outer decorated corner on the right, while A6115 had a diagonal cut on the left. They fit perfectly both the location and the connections.

Column Nos. 33–34 carried cornice A6084 and A6119 (see Fig. 9.96:3), the latter vertically cut on both sides. Cornice A6119 fit its location and was found in the area.

Column Nos. 34–35 carried cornice A6117+A6150+A6148 with an outer corner on the right side. It was found in the area. An alternative location over Column Nos. 32–33 was ruled out as they are somewhat too long. Over the eastern itinera versurarum, this cornice was joined to cornices A6672, A6062, A6064 (see Fig. 9.95:2) and A6078 (see Fig. 9.95:3). The last four elements fit their location well.

Column No. 36 carried cornice A6087 (see Fig. 9.92:1), with a diagonal cut on its left side and a vertical cut on its right side, which fit both the location and the connections.

Order Composition of the Scaenae Frons Second Floor

The scaenae frons second floor was rebuilt after the earthquake of 363 CE (Stratum 11) and dismantled in the early sixth century CE (Stratum 9).

Like the first floor, the second floor entablature was also composed of imported, light gray marble, green cipollino and gray granite. Over the cornices of the first floor, another podium, 1.4 m high, was erected that spanned the space between the freestanding columnar facade and the rear wall, sealing the first-floor entablature and anchoring it to the rear wall. The second-floor order was not erected on pedestals and its bases with square plinths were placed directly upon the podium (Fig. 7.16). Of the 32 light gray marble bases of the second floor, 22 were recovered (0.51–0.64 m in diameter, 0.24–0.36 m in height; A6236–A6239, A6241, see Fig. 9.24:2, A6246, A6251, A6650, A31113, A 41155, A60108, A60635, A80122, A80131, A80629, A81102, A100236, A100663, A100674, A100680, A120117).

Of the 32 column shafts of the second floor, 14 sections of light gray marble column shafts were found (0.53–0.58 m in diameter, restored column shaft height c. 4.1 m; A6323, A6327, A6329, A6341, A6344, A6345, A6347, A6349, A6350, A6367, A6368, see Fig. 9.27:3, A6369, see Fig. 9.27:2, A6695, A40645), as well as five complete gray granite column shafts (0.54–0.60 m in diameter, 4.09–4.14 m in height; A1233, A6862, A70619, see Fig. 9.26:2, A80619, A100648) and 15 sections of gray granite shafts (A216, A306, A584, A1216, A1219, A1222, A1224, A1231, A6402, A64014, A65202, A65203, A100618, A100652, A101138). The light gray marble and gray granite columns were most probably alternately placed. The column shafts carried Corinthian capitals of light gray marble, of which twelve complete examples (0.41–0.47 m in diameter, 0.54–0.60 m in height; A14, A97, see Fig. 9.39:4, A976, see Fig. 9.40:3, A6174, A6175, see Fig. 9.35:1, 2, A6190, see Fig. 9.37:1, A6193, see Fig. 9.35:3, A6194, see Fig. 9.37:2, A80623, see Fig. 9.36:1, A100607, A110122, see Fig. 9.37.3, A110633) and six fragments (A478, A60622, A80153, A80626, see Fig. 9.38:1, A81109, see Fig. 9.36:2, A110650, see Fig. 9.38:3) were discovered.

The second-floor architrave-friezes were presumably fluted. Two elements were found (A102, A103, see Fig. 9.83), along with plating elements (A90143, A100162, see Fig. 9.84). The second-floor cornice (0.27–0.32 m high; A41165, A50606, A120623, A121135, see Fig. 9.99:3, A232, A132, see Fig. 9.100:3, 4) was covered with the third-floor podium. The height of the second-floor order, including the podium, reached 7.45 m.

Order Composition of the Scaenae Frons Third Floor

The scaenae frons third floor collapsed in the earthquake of 363 CE (Stratum 11) and was not rebuilt. Not all the architectural elements of the third-floor order composition were found in the theater, as they were reused during the Byzantine renovation stages of the civic center monuments.

The third floor was also constructed of imported stone. The podium was probably c. 0.7 m high (Vitruvius, *Architecture* V, 6, 6) and had no pedestals on it, the light gray marble bases with a plinth placed directly upon it. Of the 32 bases, 10 were found (0.30–0.43 m in diameter, 0.14–0.21 m in diameter; A31145, A31146, A31147, A31196, A60603, A60634, A100608, A100627, A100633, A100712).

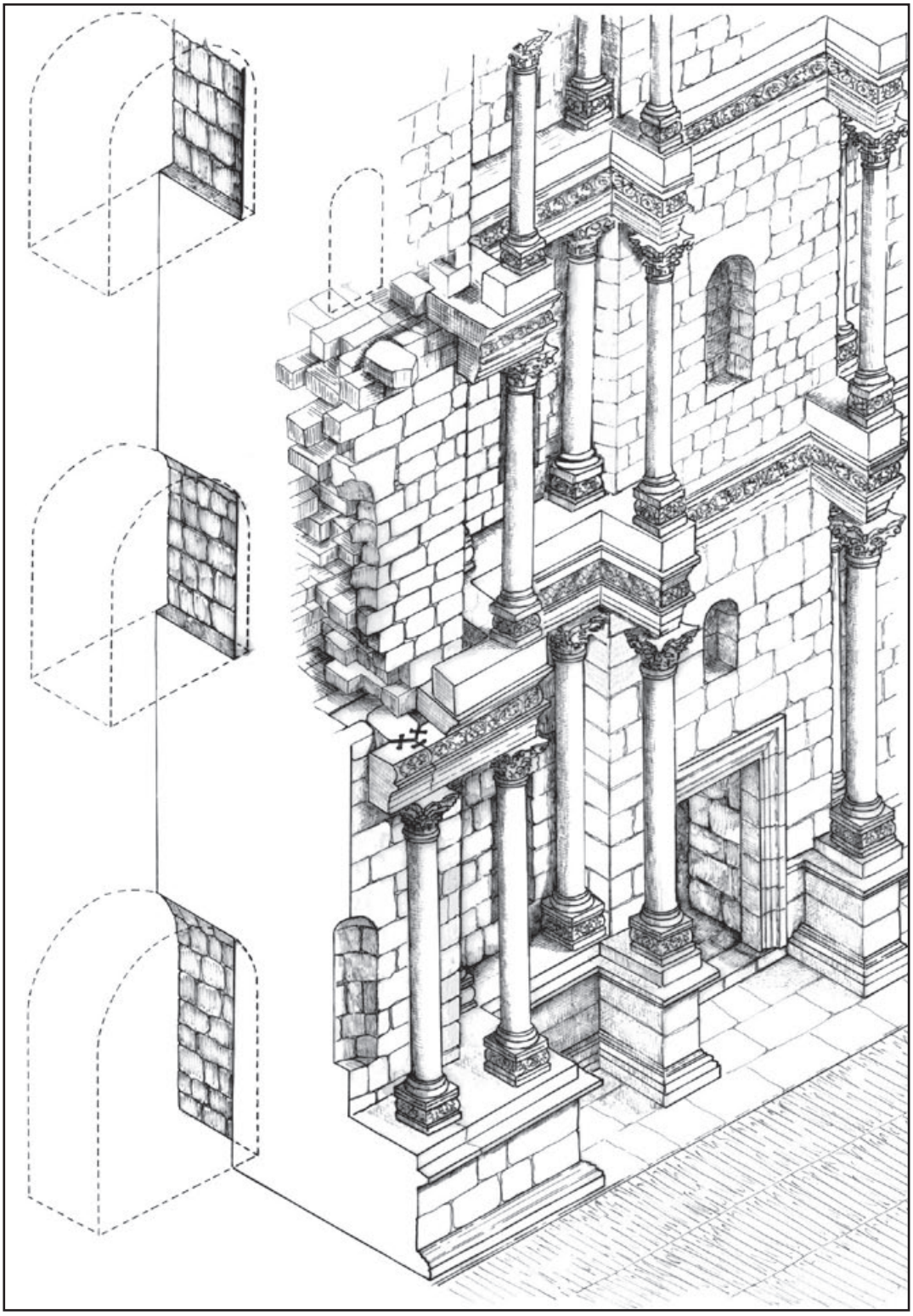


Fig. 7.16. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of scaenae frons three-storied columnar composition.

Three types of column shafts were used, light gray marble, gray granite and green cipollino. Of these, 22 fragments of light gray marble column shafts (A44, A574, A575, A6281, see Fig. 9.27:5, A6303, A6305–A6307, A6321–A6322, A6324–A6326, A6328, A6342, A6343, A6348, A6428, see Fig. 9.27:4, A6690, A6692–A6694), five complete gray granite columns (3.53–3.57 m; A44307, A44322, A65096, A85096, A110114, see Fig. 9.26:3), 43 gray granite fragments (A26, A41, A501, A606, A1021, A1159, A1217, A1218, A1221, A1223, A1226, A1228, A1229, A5590, A6388, A6398–A6401, A6403, A6404, A6413–A6415, A6426, A6427, A6429, A6435–A6437, A26190, A40612, A41164, A64635, A65097, A65098, A61532, A61533, A65179, A65200, A65207, A90103, A91140) and nine fragments of cipollino column shafts of the same height as the complete gray granite columns (A6280, A6282, A6283, A6299–A6302, A6304, A6691) were recovered.

Nine light gray marble Corinthian capitals of the third floor were found (0.30–0.53 m high; A574, A631, A632, A665, A976, see Fig. 9.40:3, A65125, A636, A678, A80622, see Fig. 9.39). A few fragments of the entablature elements were identified, as they were reused elsewhere and cut. The architrave-frieze must have been 0.46–0.52 m high, and may have had fluted decor. Seven cornice elements of this order were found in secondary use outside the theater (0.18–0.24 m high; A100, A101, see Fig 9.98, A231, A31189, see Fig. 9.100:1, 2, A31188, A90148, A100127). The height of the third floor, including its podium and the roof, thus reached 5.6 m. A limestone course, c. 0.35 m high, was erected over the third floor cornices. It must have carried the scaenae frons' sloping tile roof (1.58 m).

Materials of the Scaenae Frons and Their Acquisition

Stable isotope analysis of the light gray marble (Pearl and Magaritz 1991) indicated that this marble, composing the main bulk of the scaenae frons composition, originated in a single crop from the Proconnesian quarries, and was probably ordered directly from the quarry rather than from a marble yard that would have held blocks originating from numerous crops. Rather smaller, though more costly, amounts of light yellow marble came from Aphrodisias in Asia Minor, gray granite from the Troad quarries in Asia Minor, red granite from Syene in Egypt, and green cipollino from Carystos in Euboea, Greece. The colorful *opus sectile* plating and the white marble statues of the rear wall decor presumably came from Aphrodisias. This grand scenic composition must have been meticulously planned and ordered, then quarried and carved according to the precise block measurements and inner profiles of the acquisition order. In the case of the architraves, their soffits were also completed in the quarry. As almost no surplus elements were found, the acquisition orders must have been quite accurate. The assemblages were then shipped from the different ports presumably to Caesarea, and transferred by land to Nysa-Scythopolis (Mazor and Atrash, forthcoming), where large workshops of talented artisans carved all of the richly decorated pedestals, bases, capitals, architrave-friezes and cornices of the Corinthian order that composed the magnificent facade.

Comparanda and a Short History of Development of the Baroque Scaenae Frons

The remarkably rich and elaborate columnar facade of the scaenae frons (see Fig. 7.5) finds close parallels in both the Roman East and West. The two-floor composition of the valvae regiae resembles those erected in the theaters at Caesarea (Levine 1975:25) and Bostra (Frézouls 1952:69–79), while the entire composition of the scaenae frons and its rear wall, constructed of soft limestone and plated with colorful *opus sectile* geometric patterns in different types of marble, resembles that in the theater at Orange, dated to the reign of Hadrian. This theater also had a two-floor-high columnar facade of the valvae regiae, with alternating granite and marble column shafts and a statue of the emperor in a niche above the entrance. The flanking columnar facades were of three floors, 103 m long and 36 m high (Atrash 2006: Fig. 352). The scaenae frons of the theater at Sabratha, built during the reign of Septimius Severus (200 CE), was also three floors high and had three semicircular exedrae adorning its entrances. These were flanked by columns of alternating white, purple pavonazzetto and green cipollino and gray granite (Bieber 1961:206). In the theater at Leptis Magna, dated to the Severan period, the scaenae frons was three floors high and constructed of marble. On the podium, within the central semicircular apse and the flanking rectangular exedrae of the hospitalia, stood alternating column shafts of white-red breccia and green cipollino (Bieber 1961:206). The scaenae frons of the theater at Palmyra most closely resembles the Severan Theater of Nysa-

Scythopolis and is also dated to the Severan period. It was 45.26 m long and had a central semicircular apse incorporating the valvae regiae, and two flanking rectangular exedrae incorporating the hospitalia. The scaenae frons was three floors high, flanking the valvae regiae that had a higher columnar facade of four columns (Fourdrin 1989:171–174).

The grand scaenae frons composition, characteristic of the baroque style, was achieved by its scenic and richly decorated facade and emphasized by its Corinthian order and its elaborately adorned frieze decor in high relief. The use of light gray and light yellow, red and gray granite and dark green cipollino in alternating sequences granted the facade a remarkably rich and multicolored appearance, while its background wall with colorful *opus sectile* plating and niches inhabited by marble statues provided the columnar facade with an appropriate background. It was a costly monumental enterprise and as it was the highlight of the theater, it was designed to impress, and no doubt to reflect the importance, wealth and prosperity of the city and its rich citizens, who presumably contributed most of the funds.

The rich, elaborate baroque decor of the scenic facade developed out of the simply decorated theaters of the Early Roman period, which became even more 'overloaded' during the Severan period, a phenomenon generally termed the 'Flavian renaissance'. This 'renaissance' did not exclude theaters of the eastern provinces in general, and in Syria-Palaestina in particular (Tsafrir 1984:191–193). In the early years of the Roman Empire, new imperial architectural trends were gradually developing throughout the empire, reaching their peak during the second half of the first and the second centuries CE. Widely based on Greek classical traditions, the new imperial architecture tended to be far more innovative. Traditional architectural vocabulary and the familiar orders, in particular the Corinthian so widely favored by Roman architects, as well as Greek ratios of columns and entablature, were faithfully retained in the newly invented assemblages. The Roman architects honored old traditions and respected their familiarity, while exploring new boundaries. For example, the column, traditionally used as a constructional element supporting a roof in Greek temples, facade and porticus, rapidly lost all of its constructional meaning as its innovative Roman use indicates.

The trend of using a variety of different-colored marbles seen in the Severan Theater dominated other columnar facades, such as the far more grandiose example at Miletus (Kleiner 1986:116, Fig. 85). Colored marbles in columnar facades were also used in thermae halls, as in the imperial-cult marble court in the thermae at Sardis (Yegül 1986:152–169), in library facades, as in the library of Celsus at Ephesus (Scherrer 2000:161), and even in arches and city gates (Mazor 2004:183–188).

Versurae

On either side of the scaena, the floor levels of the versurae corresponded to the floors of the scaenae frons on one side and the three floors of the cavea on the other. Their original plan cannot be restored, as they were renovated in the mid-third century CE, when the postscaenium was added and the scaena somewhat shortened. The renewed versurae and scaena were built upon a foundation platform, 109 m long and 8.5 m wide (see Plans 7.4, 7.5). The rectangular versurae (16 × 13 m), identical in plan, were integrated with the northern walls of the aditus maximi in the south, and with the scaenae frons in the north.

The versurae had two passages at ground level, the itinera versurarum, leading to the pulpitum, and the postscaenium side corridors connecting the postscaenium northern corridor with the aditus maximi. The decorated facades of the versurae that faced the pulpitum were integrated into the scaenae frons decor. The itinera versurarum, 16.5 m long, 3.5 m wide, and roofed by vaults, ran parallel to the aditus maximi between the pulpitum at one end and the postscaenium side corridors at the other. On the northern side of the versurae, spiral staircases were constructed within rounded, silo-shaped shafts that were entered through arched entrances (Figs. 7.17–7.19). These spiral staircases ascended the versurae's floors and entered the first- and second-floor rooms over the itinera versurarum, and the third-floor room of the porticus level (Fig. 7.19). The rooms over the itinera versurarum were covered with barrel vaults. From these rooms, the media and summa cavea were

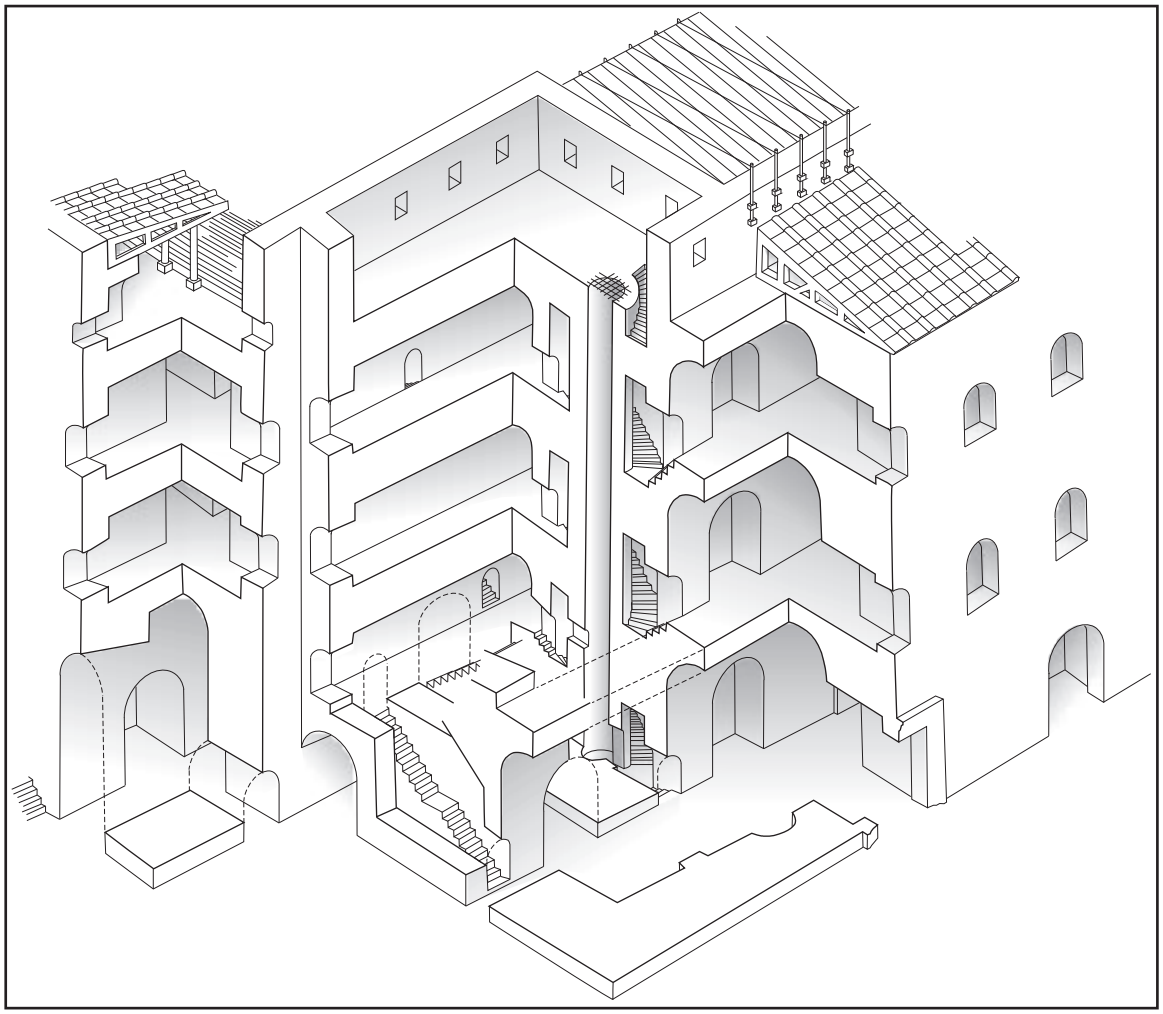


Fig. 7.17. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of section through versura.

accessed via staircases erected over the aditus maximi vaults that led into the lower and upper praecinctiones. The versurae are therefore the functional passageways between the cavea and the scaena (Fig. 7.18).

Over each itinera versurarum were second- and third-floor rooms with arched windows crowned with an architrave-friezes and cornices, overlooking the pulpitum. A staircase in the center of the southern wall of the second- and third-floor rooms, with 11 steps and a sloping, soft-limestone barrel vault, ascended over the aditus maximi vaults to the cavea (Fig. 7.19).

The stairwells housing the spiral staircases were square shaped on the outside and silo shaped on the inside, constructed of basalt masonry. From the entrances in the northern wall, barrel-vaulted corridors of basalt masonry, c. 2 m long, led to the staircases. The inner wall of the spiral staircases was thus shaped as a chimney shaft surrounded by spiral steps, with an outer circular wall.

Along the entire height of the central shaft, wedge-shaped windows were installed for light and air, and covered with basalt slabs over which the staircase roof was installed (Fig. 7.19).

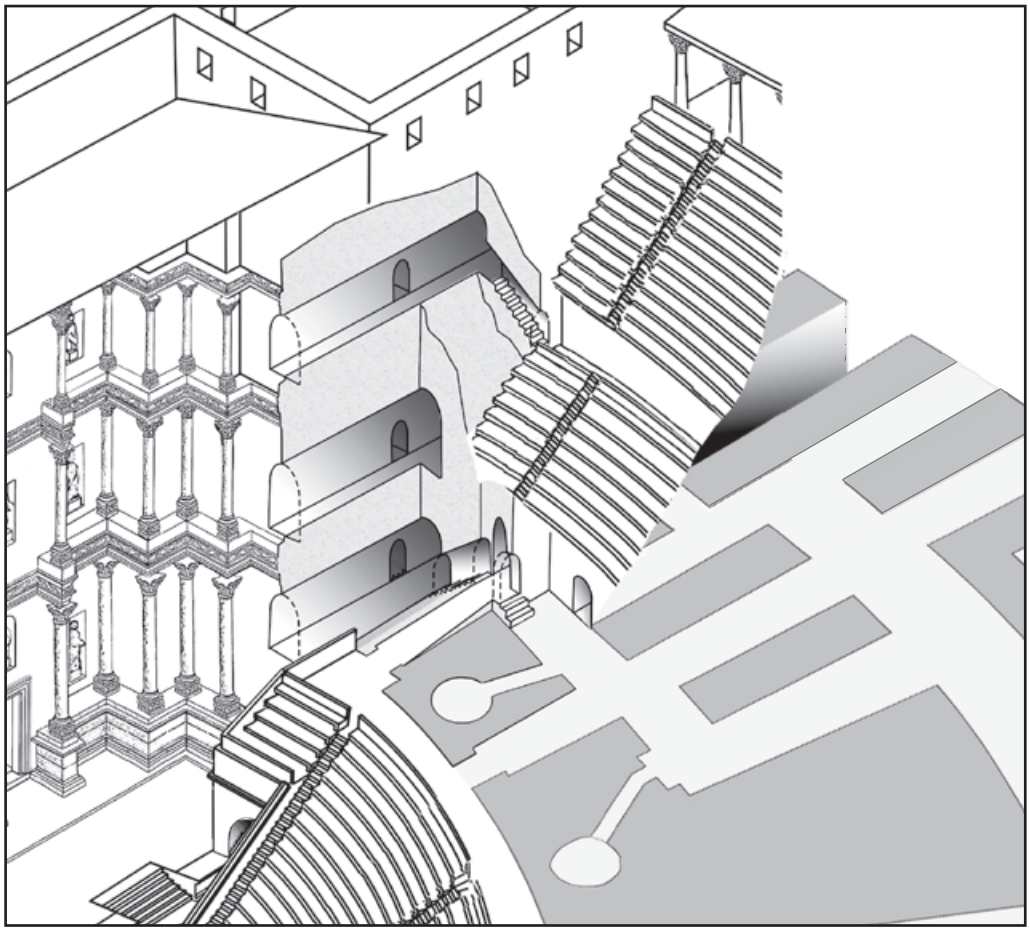


Fig. 7.18. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of the media cavea's northeastern corner and its connection to the versura.

The wedge-shaped steps were integrated into the rounded, inner and outer walls. The staircase roof began at the sixth course of the outer wall and was constructed of similar, wedge-shaped slabs, narrower on the inner side and wider on the outside, laid in sections of differing width that also rose in steps. The customary construction technique of spiral staircases in Roman architecture, in which the upper steps served as the roof for the lower ones, without roof slabs, was not used here, and an intermediate cover was constructed to serve as the roof.

Versurae with staircases appear in Roman architecture in two versions: spiral staircases in round towers and square staircases in a square towers. In the theater at Aizanoi in Asia Minor (de Bernardi Ferrero 1970: Pl. XXXVI), spiral staircases were installed within round towers, as in our case. A square staircase in a square tower with a central square pilaster was the more common type, seen, for instance, in the theaters at Philippopolis in Syria (Coupel and Frézouls 1956:57–61) and Aspendos in Asia Minor (Bieber 1961:208; de Bernardi Ferrero 1970: Pl. XXXI). Square staircases similar to those at the last two sites were also used in city gates, propylaea, temples and even bathhouses, as in the southwestern corner of the tepidarium in the eastern thermae at Nysa-Scythopolis (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1994:127–129) and the Temple of Bacchus at Baalbek (Wiegand 1921–1925 I: 77–99). Some scholars link the origin of the square staircase to Nabatean architecture (Negev 1973), although their well-rooted Hellenistic origin seems to predate their appearance in Nabatean architecture (Mazor 2004:165–167).

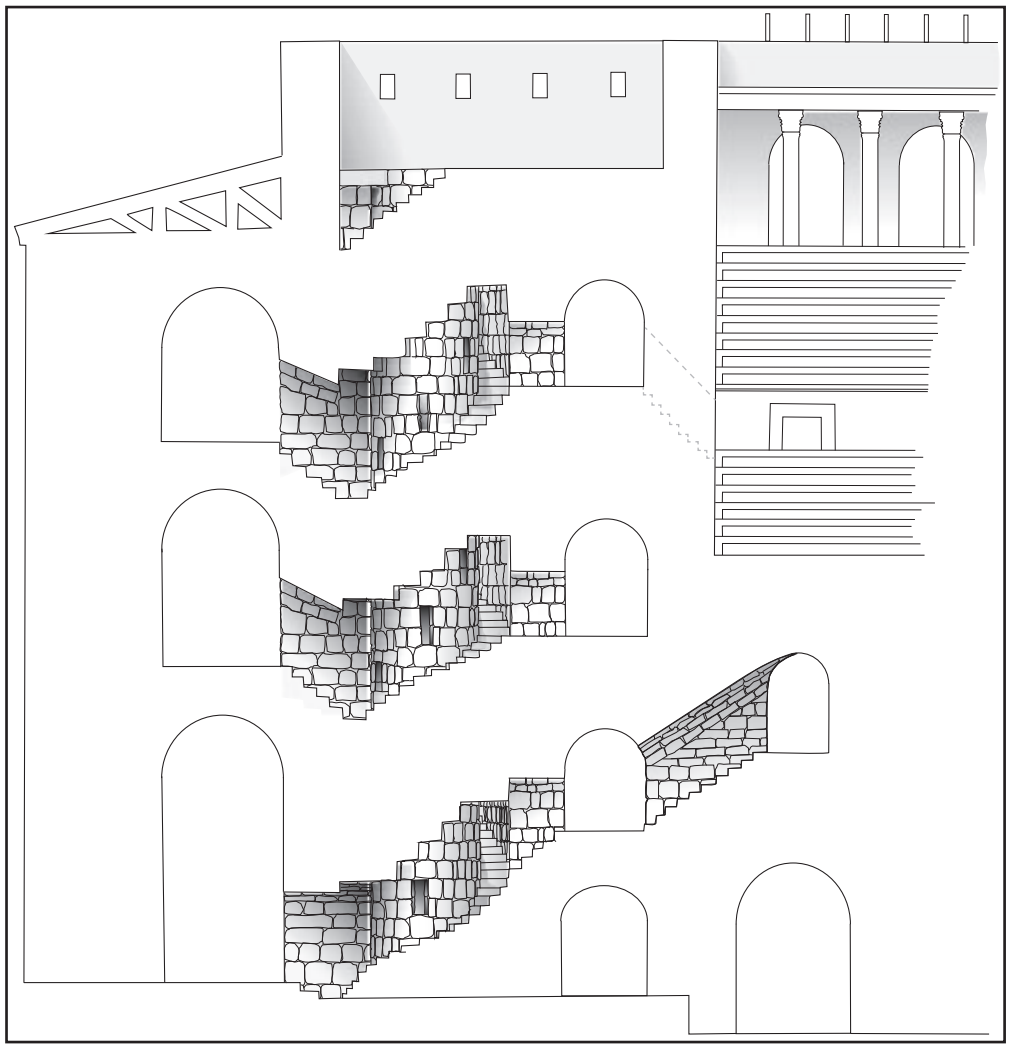


Fig. 7.19. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of section through versura inner staircases.

Postscaenium

Shortly after the completion of the theater, presumably around the mid-third century CE, a postscaenium was added to the theater due to constructional problems. The three-storied postscaenium was attached to the rear wall of the scaenae frons by a system of arches and barrel vaults creating northern, eastern and western inner corridors (Figs. 7.20, 7.21).

The postscaenium superstructure was constructed upon a basalt foundation platform inserted into a foundation trench cut deep into the sloping rock and attached to the scaenae frons foundation. In the east, the foundation ended in an obtuse angle, as it was attached to an existing Roman temple (see Plan 3.1) that predated the Severan Theater (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1996:8–10).

The first floor of the postscaenium's northern facade was divided by three entrances into four symmetrical sections (see Plan 7.5). In between were four rectangular exedrae (F30–F33; see Plan 3.20) constructed of basalt masonry in the lower courses, and soft-limestone in the upper courses. They were roofed by soft-limestone barrel vaults, their entrances carried arches, and the

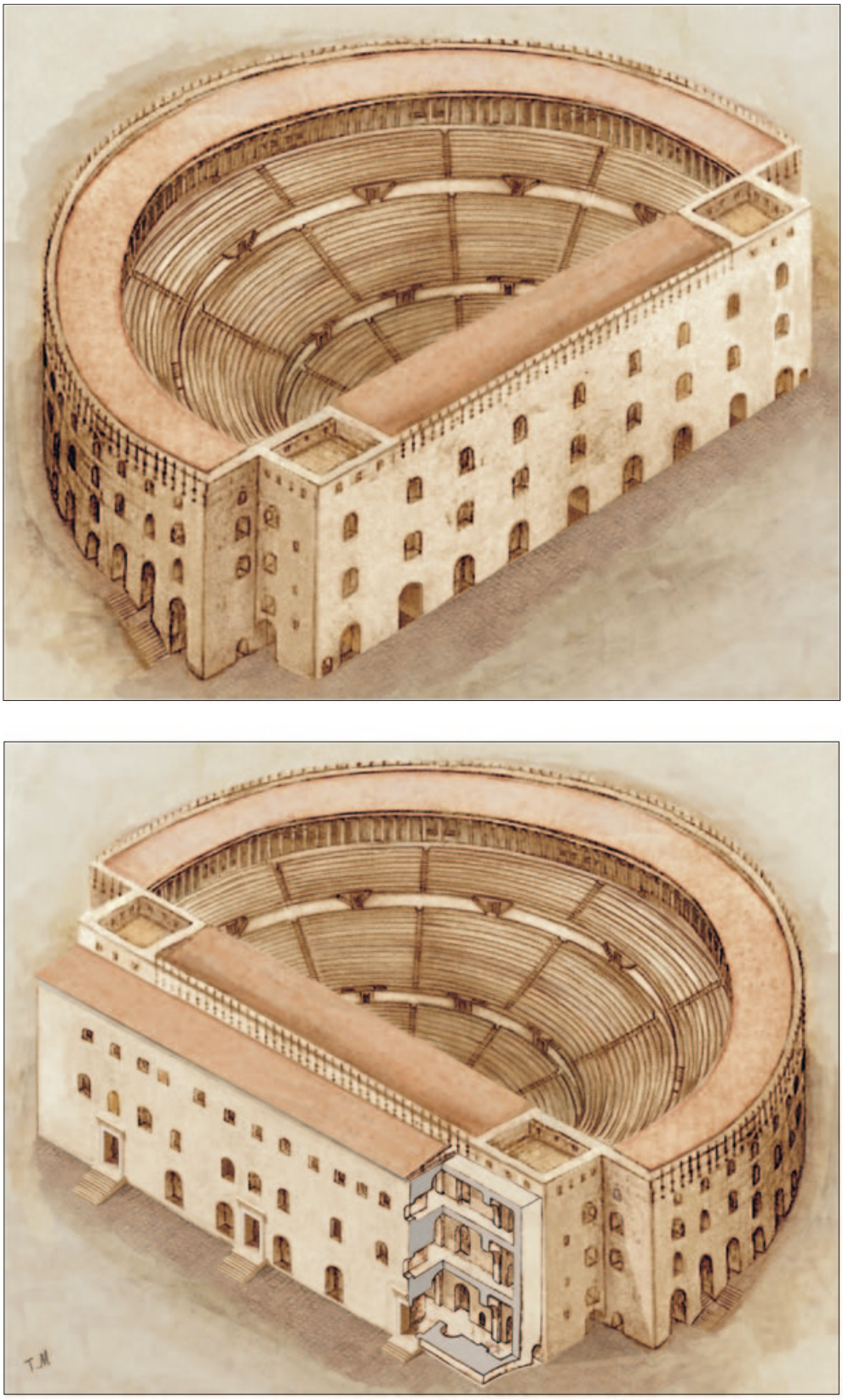


Fig. 7.20. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of scaena and postscaenium.

floors were plastered. These exedrae may have served as taverns. Along the southern face of the wall, facing the inner corridor, the four sections held similar rectangular exedrae (F34–F37) with two semicircular exedrae at either end (F42, F43), and these six exedrae may have served as changing rooms for the actors or as equipment storage rooms. Two of the rectangular exedrae, F37, F34, stood opposite the hospitalia, the other two, F36, F35, opposite the exedrae that flanked the valvae regiae (F39, F40). The semicircular exedrae stood opposite the versura staircase entrances.

In the second and third floors of the postscaenium, in both the northern and southern facades, these rectangular rooms were repeated in each floor with

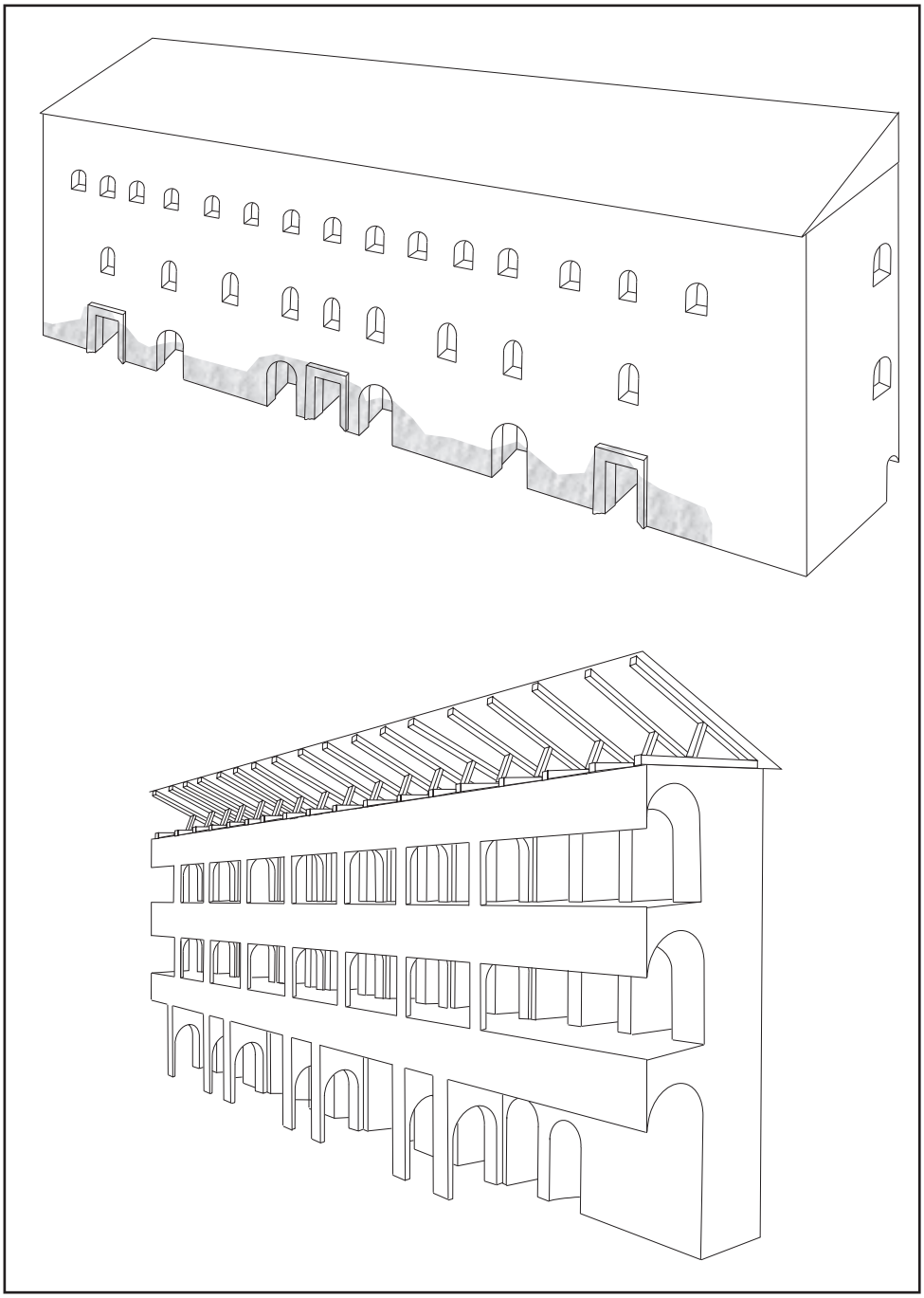


Fig. 7.21. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of postscaenium added in Stratum 12.

arched windows over the entrances. The three floors of arched openings resembled the honeycombed facade of the theater's circumference wall, which lent the heavy complex a somewhat more airy appearance (see Fig. 7.20).

Postscaenium Northern-Facade Entrances

The central entrance of the postscaenium, 3.63 m wide, 4.7 m high and 4.1 m deep, had doorposts of hard-limestone masonry that somewhat narrowed the entrance. The walls of the inner passage were built of hard-limestone masonry on the north and basalt masonry on the south. The entrance and the threshold attached to it were paved with limestone slabs and there was a barrel vault over the inner passage. The entrance was adorned with a limestone lintel (A6213, see Fig. 9.7:1), whose frieze was decorated with acanthus scrolls inhabited by floral motifs that resemble those of the scaenae frons. On either side, the lintel was supported by decorated, s-shaped consoles. Over the frieze was a richly decorated cornice, also resembling that of the scaenae frons (Fig. 7.22).

Fig. 7.22. Severan Theater: reconstruction of central entrance of postscaenium.

The western and eastern entrances, 3.5 m and 3.36 m wide, had doorposts that somewhat narrowed them. The entrance walls were constructed of limestone masonry on the north, and basalt masonry on the south. The entrances and the thresholds attached to them were paved with large, hard-limestone slabs and the inner passages were covered with barrel vaults. On either side, rectangular sockets were hewn for wooden-door hinges. On the northern face, the entrances had decorated lintels (western, A6212+A6711, see Fig. 9.7:2; eastern, A60116+A6214+A6602, see Fig. 9.7:3) supported by two decorated, s-shaped consoles. The lintel friezes and cornices were richly carved, like those of the central entrance. As all three entrance cornices were preserved, they could be entirely reconstructed.

Postscaenium Northern Inner Corridor

Between the scaenae frons and the postscaenium, a three-story-high corridor was created, covered with a system of arches and vaults carried by the side walls and protruding pilasters (see Fig. 7.21). The postscaenium's southern face had eight integrated basalt pilasters located on either side of the central entrance and the exedrae beside the hospitalia, and opposite the versurae staircase corners. Facing them, on the northern face of the scaenae frons, were opposing limestone pilasters, attached to the wall but not integrated into its limestone courses.

These pilasters carried the arches that served as constructional ribs for the 2 m high barrel vault, which was intersected by the cross-section barrel vaults of all three entrances and flanking exedrae. Upon it, the second floor of the postscaenium corridor was identical in design and construction, with a barrel vault 7.5 m high. Above the first-floor exedrae and entrances was a second row of vertically aligned exedrae with windows that opened to the north. The third floor was identical, with a barrel vault 5 m high and similar windows. The three floors of the postscaenium reached a total height of 22 m (see Fig. 7.20).

Cavea

In most theaters of the western type, the audience seats were built over the ambulacra—a sophisticated network of semicircular vaulted passages, several floors high—or in the eastern provinces, partly over a hill slope and partly over a vaulted system of ambulacra divided by vomitoria (see below). The cavea in larger theaters was usually separated into three horizontal sections, the ima, media and summa caveae, which were further divided vertically into wedge-shaped cunei, separated by radial scalaria, and equipped with rows of seats. These terms were referred to by Vitruvius (*Architecture* V, 6, 3). Ancient sources and inscriptions indicate that the various parts of the cavea were occupied according to status (Sear 2006:2–7).

In the Roman East, large theaters with triple-segmented caveae were relatively common, as at Sepphoris (Weiss 1994:13), Bostra (Finsen 1972:3–4), Neapolis (Magen 2005:103) and Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975), in Asia Minor at Ephesus (Scherrer 2000:158–161), and in North Africa at Sabratha and Leptis Magna (Caputo 1959: Pl. 72; Sear 1990a).

The cavea of the Severan Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis was three stories high, divided into three horizontal sections—the ima, media and summa caveae—separated by two praecinctiones. The ima and the lower part of the media cavea were built against the hill slope upon the remains of the earlier Southern Theater, while the upper part of the media and the summa cavea were erected upon an elaborate vault system, a construction combination used also at Sepphoris (Waterman 1937:6–12), Ḥammat Gader (Sukenik 1935:27–30), the western theater at Gadara (Weber 1989), Caesarea (Frova 1965:73–80), Sebaste (Crowfoot, Kenyon and Sukenik 1942:57–61), Neapolis (Magen 2005:93–103), the southern theater at Gerasa (Austen and Harrison 1927) and Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975:388). The cavea in the Severan Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis was built at a 34˚ angle (see Plan 7.3: Section 1-1), which was the customary angle, also seen in the theaters at Bostra, Neapolis and Philadelphia (Segal 1999:110–114; Atrash 2006:90).

Balteus

Between the ima cavea and the orchestra stretched the balteus, bordered on one side by the cavea podium and on the other by the backs of the curiale seats (see Fig. 3.92). It was a 1.6 m wide passage paved with large trapezoidal slabs, and was entered through a wide entrance in the center and from both ends. In most places the original pavement was preserved, occasionally replaced by smaller slabs during the Byzantine period; for instance, on its northeastern side a section was repaved with limestone and basalt slabs. The balteus was a common element in Roman theater

design, and a similar, well-defined balteus bordered on both sides seems to have existed also at Tiberias (Atrash 2006:82) and Neapolis (Magen 2005:116, Plan 21).

Ima Cavea

The ima cavea had 15 rows of seats. The number of rows varied in theaters in the region, and there were 18 rows in Neapolis, 14 in Gadara, the northern theater at Gerasa and Birketein, 13 in Caesarea, Bostra and Philadelphia, 10 in Petra and 9 in Philippopolis (Atrash 2006:90, n. 252).

The seats, carved from a single limestone block, had a profiled cap molding that protruded slightly. At both ends of the cuneus, the seats were separated from the scalaria by a vertical molding (Fig. 7.23; see Plan 3.21: Sections 1-1, 2-2, Fig. 3.96). The seats resembled those of the theater at Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975:388), and the seats in the amphitheater at Nysa-Scythopolis, which presumably originally belonged to the hippodrome, although their profiles differ slightly. The upper row in the ima cavea consisted of curiale seats with a high back, presumably reaching a height of c. 0.96 m, although the back was nowhere completely preserved (see Plan 3.21: Section 1-1; see also Fig. 9.119:1). Similar curiale seats were also constructed around the orchestra, where their high backs also served as a banister for the balteus.

Curiale seats varied in size in the theaters of the Roman East. In the southern theater at Gerasa, curiale seats had a general height of 0.87 m, and at Philadelphia the seats reached a height of 1.08 m. At Gadara (Atrash 2006:90, n. 255) and Ḥammat Gader (Sukenik 1935: Fig. 7; Hirschfeld 1987; Sear 1994:225), the curiale seats, each carved from one basalt stone, had a general height of 1.12 m and were presumably carved by the same artisan. At Neapolis, 96 scattered curiale seats were 1.15 m high, and were assumed to have been placed along the praecinctio that bordered the ima cavea (Magen 2005:116–119).

In the upper row, the curiale seats on either side of the scalaria had profiled foot moldings, a type of curiale seat that was relatively common in Roman theaters and exedrae with benches. In the Roman East, they were found in the theaters at Bostra (Brünnow and Domaszewski 1909: Figs. 928–982; Finsen 1972), Neapolis (Magen 2005:16–119) and Pella (Smith and Day 1989:26–33), and in Asia Minor at Selge (de Bernardi Ferrero 1966: Pl. VII), Termessos, Cibyra and Sagalassos (de Bernardi Ferrero 1969: Pls. 11–14, 41–47, 65).

Nine scalaria divided the ima cavea into eight cunei. All the scalaria start with a semicircular step in the balteus. The central scalarium ascended along the theater's central axis, the northeastern and northwestern ones were attached to the aditus maximi, while the other six were evenly spaced, three on each side of the central axis (see Plan 3.21). All nine scalaria were aligned with the axes of the acoustic cells (see below). Every two steps equaled the height of a seat, and the two steps and the seat of alternating sides were carved from a single limestone block, a system that integrated the cuneus seats and scalaria into a solid construction (see Fig 7.23). The banisters that ran along the northwestern and northeastern scalaria (I and IX; see Plan 3.21) were diagonal and sprang from profiled pedestals at the balteus level, which were decorated on their facades with, for example, a human figure (a priest?) in high relief (see Fig. 9.116:3).

On the northeastern and northwestern ends of the ima cavea, over the aditus maximi barrel vaults, two tribunalia, flanked by Scalaria I and IX, held four seat rows each (Figs. 7.24, 7.25; see Plan 3.21: Section 2-2, Fig. 3.61). They crowned the walls of the aditus maximi at their entrances into the orchestra. The northern sides of the tribunalia were bordered by sloping banisters with profiled cap moldings. The northern sloping section displayed a depression marking the connection with the rows of seats, thus supplying the data for the reconstruction of the tribunalia rows of seats. In front of the first row was a passage, and along the facade was a horizontal banister (see Fig. 7.25; Fig. 9.116:1). The same arrangement can be seen in the well-preserved theater at Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975:388).

Both tribunalia collapsed in 749 CE. The eastern one was recently reconstructed when the eastern aditus maximus was rebuilt (see Fig. 3.150; Chapter 8).

The scalarium arrangement and the number of cunei in the Severan Theater does not correspond to the design suggested by Vitruvius (*Architecture* V, 6, 1–3), nor do they match any other theater in the region. In the northern theater at Gerasa (Clark et al. 1986:211) and that at Birketein (McCown 1938:164), the ima cavea had four cunei, while the ima cavea at Gerasa had eight and at Philadelphia nine (el-Fakharani 1975: Fig. 2). It seems that at Nysa-Scythopolis, the asymmetrical

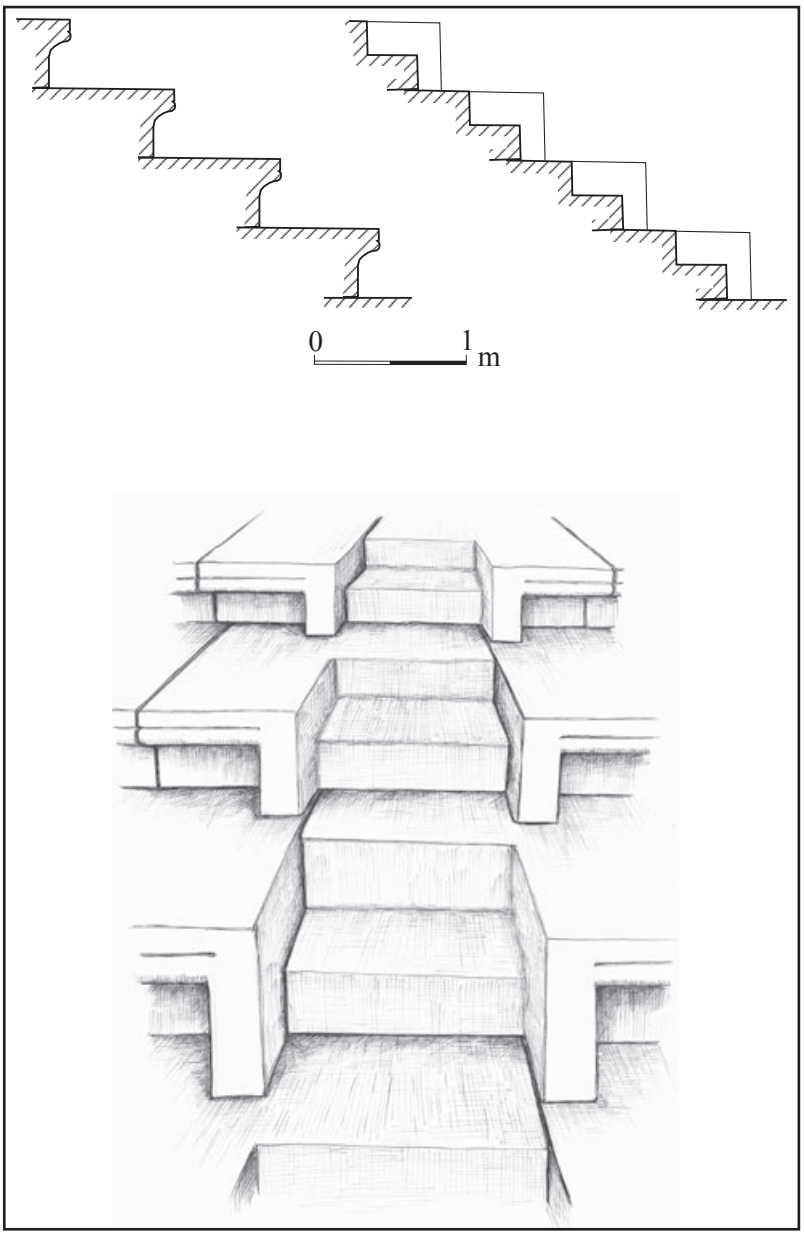


Fig. 7.23. Severan Theater: isometric section of seat rows and scalaria of ima cavea.

number and locations of the scalaria and cunei were determined by the necessity for an open channel along the axis in front of each acoustic cell for acoustic purposes (see below).

In contrast, symmetrical arrangements of scalaria and cunei characterized most of the theaters in the East and West. Asymmetrical settings with no scalaria over the main axis of the cavea were found at Bostra, Sebaste and Philadelphia in the Roman East (Segal 1999: Figs. 42, 110, 126), at Aspendos and Ephesus in Asia Minor (Bieber 1961:167–220), and at Pompeii and Taormina in Italy and Sicilia.

In front of the ima cavea, a podium constructed of two limestone blocks encircled the balteus (see Plan 3.21: Section 1-1), similar to the podia at Bostra (Brünnow and Domaszewski 1909: Figs. 928–982, Pls. L, LI) and Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975: Fig. 2). At Nysa-Scythopolis, the podium was crowned

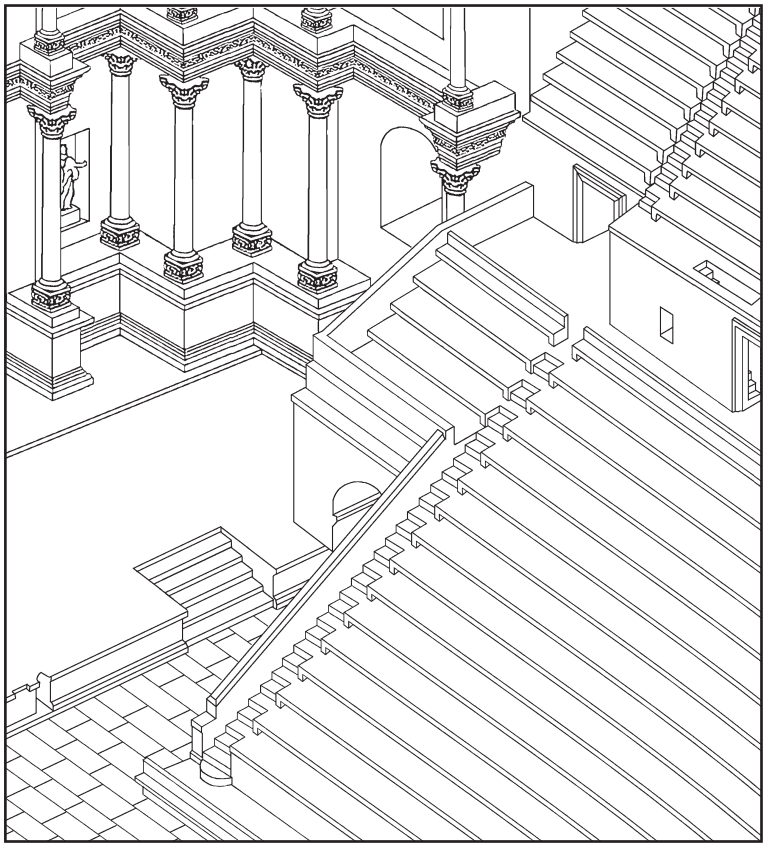
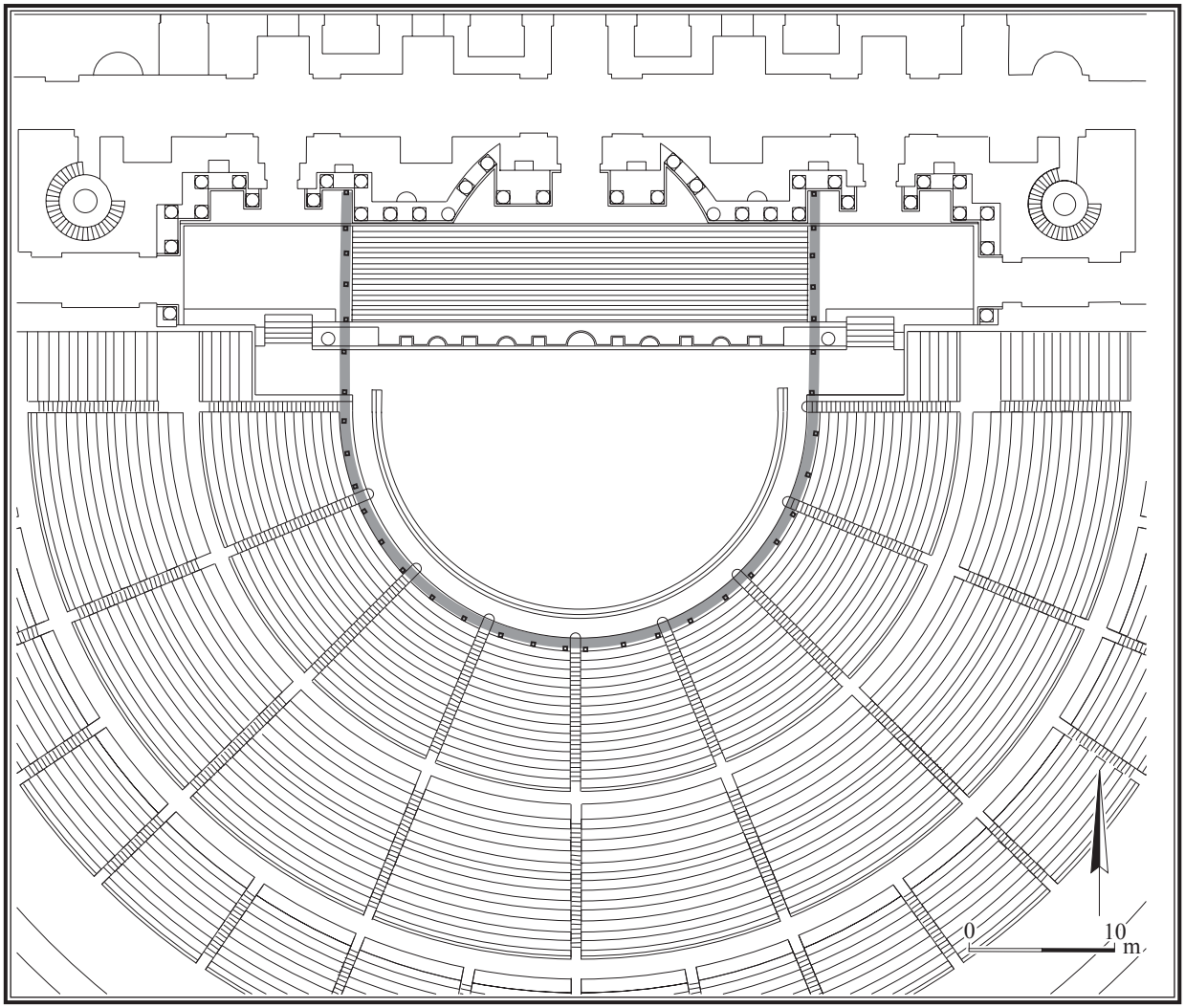


Fig. 7.24. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of eastern tribunal.

Fig. 7.25. Severan Theater: eastern tribunal after reconstruction, looking east.

with a cap molding that resembled in profile that of the seats, and was segmented by the nine scalarium entrances that ascended from the balteus. A similar design is seen in the theaters at Sepphoris (Waterman 1937:6–12, Figs. 3–5, Pls. XI–XX), Caesarea (Ringel 1975:73–80), Sebaste (Zayadine 1966) and Neapolis (Magen 2005:98–99).

On the surface of the podium, a row of 36 square sockets were set at a distance of 0.13 to 0.15 m from the first row of seats, forming a horseshoe pattern surrounding the orchestra (Plan 7.11). The locations of these sockets were well planned, with an average distance of 2.1 to 2.5 m between them. The sockets continued in a straight line alongside the scaenae frons podium, the pulpitum and its flanking staircase podia, and on both sides of the valvae regiae. In the aditus maximi, similar sockets were found enclosing the passages on their inner sides. Square wooden poles, c. 2 m high, were apparently installed in them to hold up a strong fence, thus creating closed animal cages to a height of 3.5 m (Fig. 7.26). These sockets were apparently added around the mid-third century CE, when the theater was also used as a provisional amphitheater with removable devices that could be easily set up and taken down, as required (Atrash 2006:92–93). During the Stratum 11 (Roman IV) renovations, following the earthquake of 363 CE, this system went out of use, and an amphitheater was



Plan 7.11. Severan Theater: socket system of Roman arena in ima cavea podium and pulpitum.

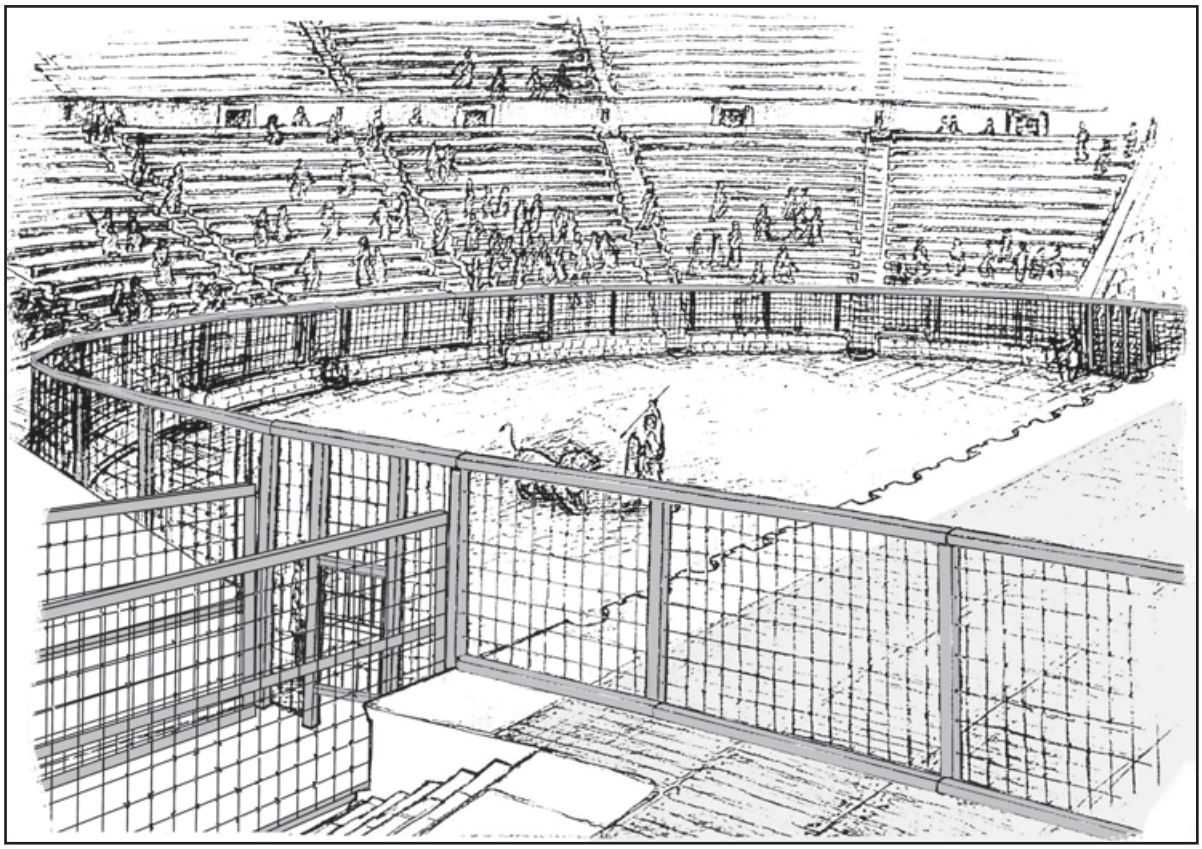


Fig. 7.26. Severan Theater: reconstruction of the fence that converted the orchestra into an arena.

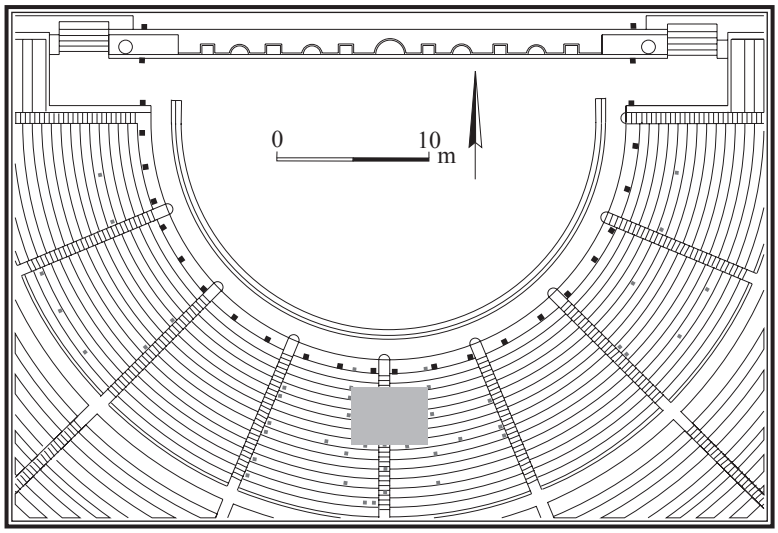
erected on the plateau south of the civic center (Tsafrir and Foerster 1997:134, Figs. 17, 18).

In the region, sockets of the same type, presumably for this specific purpose, were observed in the theaters at Tiberias (Atrash 2012:84), Neapolis (Magen 2005:104), and the southern theater at Gerasa (Atrash 2006:93).

Some scholars assumed that in the eastern provinces there was no conclusive evidence for the use of a theater's orchestra as an arena, as no podia were higher than 1.5 m, which would have been too low to screen the audience from the beasts (Golvin 1988:239–247; Weiss 1994:72). However, the evidence from the theater at Nysa-Scythopolis suggests that the podium and the pulpitum could have been fenced in to a height of 3.5 m, and the theater used as an active arena (Atrash 2006:92–93).

However, it should be noted that evidence for the use of orchestras as arenas does exist in the region, although until now not recognized as such. In the region, sockets of the same type, presumably for this specific purpose, were observed in the theaters at Tiberias (Atrash 2012:84), the eastern theater at Gadara (Bührig 2009), Capitolias (Jum'a al-Shami 2005), Neapolis (Magen 2005:104), and in the southern theater at Gerasa (Atrash 2006:93). In Asia Minor, sockets of this kind were observed in the theaters at Troia (Rose 1991), Stobi (Bieber 1961:217) and Philippi (Modona 1960:233; Bieber 1961:17), while in other theaters, such as Priene, Ephesus and Miletus (Atrash 2006:93, No. 269), a c. 2.6 m high podium surrounded the orchestra, probably for the same purpose. These features reflect a multi-purpose system that allowed the use of the auditoria as both theaters and amphitheaters with minor, removable adjustments.

Other sockets that were found in seats of the ima cavea (Plans 7.11, 7.12; see also Plan 3.21) served for the securing of the velum with ropes and wooden poles during the Byzantine period (see Chapter 3).



Plan 7.12. Severan Theater: Byzantine tribunal in the center of the ima cavea and the sockets for its railing, and the Byzantine velum socket system in the ima cavea.

Lower Praecinctio

The lower praecinctio ran between the ima and media caveae, bordered by the media cavea podium and the backs of the curiale seats (see Fig. 3.106). It was 1.5 m wide and paved with large limestone slabs laid in the same pattern as those of the balteus (cf. the southern theater at Gerasa, Sear 1994:225).

Media Cavea

The proposed reconstruction of the media cavea presented here is based on the preserved foundation core, the height of the media cavea podium, the assumed angle of the seats and the location of the first row of seats behind the podium of the media cavea.

The media cavea was founded over 19 vomitoria roofed by sloping barrel-vaults, and nine acoustic cells, all covered with a massive foundation core of roughly cut basalt stones set in radiating steps at an approximate angle of 34˚ and held in a dark gray mortar (see Fig. 3.111). The media cavea, 10.4 m wide, was presumably built at the same angle as that of the ima cavea, although its seats were entirely robbed prior to the earthquake of 749 CE. It was divided by nine scalaria into ten cunei (see Plan 7.3), continuing the same design as the ima cavea. According to Vitruvius, there should be six scalaria and seven cunei in the media cavea, each scalarium centered in between those of the ima cavea (*Architecture* V, 6, 2–3), a plan also not employed in the theaters at Gadara, Bostra, Caesarea and Sebaste (Segal 1999: Figs. 27, 42, 73, 110).

Each cuneus had 15 rows of seats, as in the ima cavea, and those at the northern ends above the tribunalia and connected to the versurae had a rectangular shape (Fig. 7.27). At Gerasa, the media cavea in the northern theater had eight rows and in the southern theater, 15. At Bostra, there were nine rows and at Philadelphia, 14 (Segal 1999: Figs. 42, 92, 100, 128).

In front of the podium of the media cavea and in the upper part of the media cavea, the backs of the curiale seats served as the banisters of the lower and upper praecinctiones.

The first foundation course of the media cavea was laid into a foundation trench that was cut into the cavea's foundation core. Its upper level protruded some 0.12 m from the wall face and was integrated into the praecinctio pavement and the thresholds of the vomitoria entrances. The podium wall had a cap molding that protruded c. 0.14 m. The suggested reconstruction of the podium reaches a height of 2.6 m (Figs. 7.28–7.30), as is also the case in the northern theater at Gerasa (Clark et al. 1986: Pls. I–XXXII) and that at Sabratha (Caputo 1959: Pl. 72). In some well-preserved theaters in the East, the podium of the media cavea reaches heights of 2.0 to 2.9 m, as in the northern theater at Gerasa (Clark et al. 1986: Fig. 3), at Bostra (Brünnow and Domaszewski 1909: Figs. 928–982; Finsen 1972:3–7), and at Selge and Sagalassos (de Bernardi Ferrero 1969:41–47).

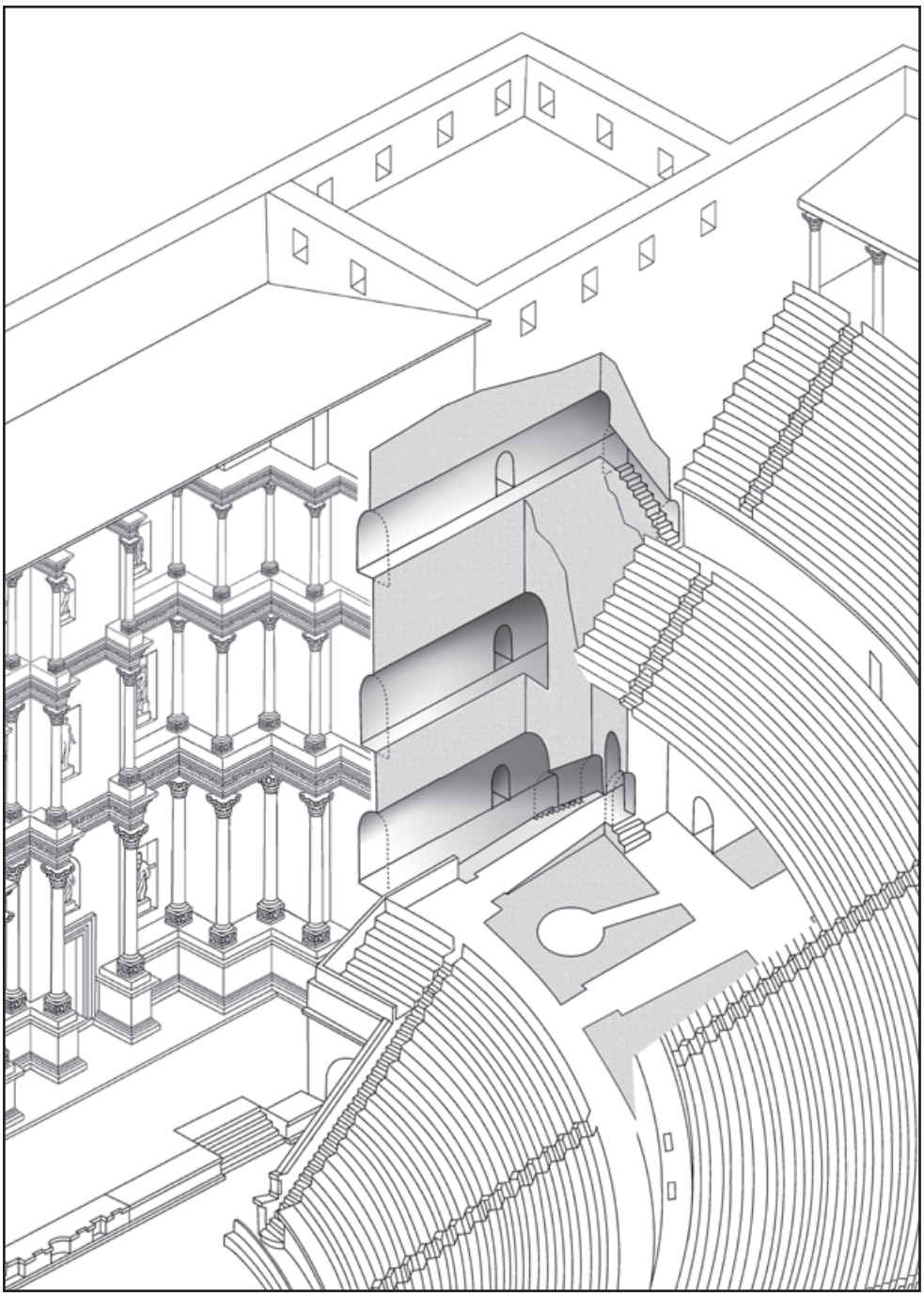


Fig. 7.27. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of the cavea's northeastern corner and its connection to the versura.

Fig. 7.28. Severan Theater: media cavea podium with vomitorium entrance and flanking staircases, looking east.

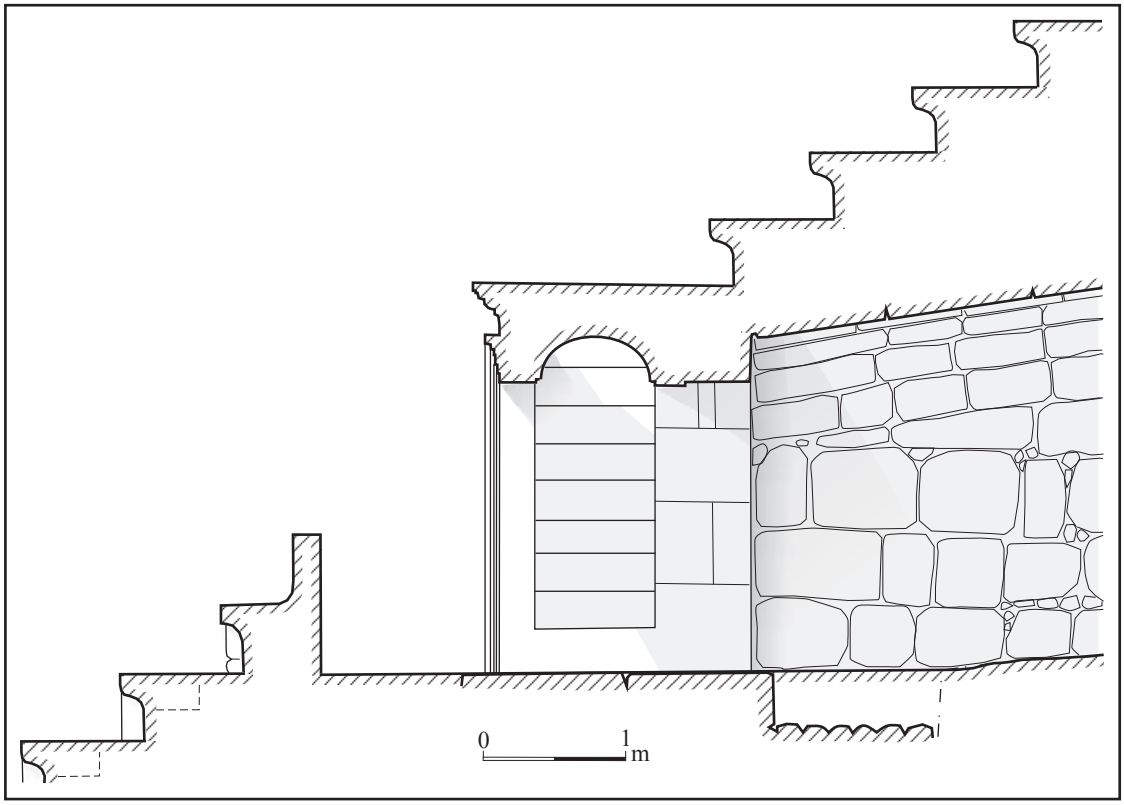


Fig. 7.29. Severan Theater: reconstructed section through media cavea podium, several seat rows and a vomitorium.

Eight vomitorium entrances were installed within the podium of the media cavea, dividing it into nine segments (see Plan 7.3). Flanking each vomitorium entrance were staircases that rose in 12 steps on either side to the media cavea, where they met the scalaria (Figs. 7.30, 7.31). The podium courses and the stairs were well integrated, and within each limestone course two steps were carved, as was observed in the ima cavea's scalaria (see Fig. 3.108). The rear wall of the podium was connected to the vault of the vomitoria (Fig. 7.32).

The vomitoria entrances were narrowed by the limestone door jambs, which carried an arch upon which the entrance lintel rested (see Fig. 7.28). The inner lintels over the staircases flanking the vomitoria entrances had a concave shape, while their outer facade was adorned with a profiled cap molding that extended over the door jambs as well (see Fig. 9.120).

The vomitorium entrances and their flanking staircases carried a lintel adorned with the same profiles as those of the praecinctio cap molding, which it continued. Over the staircase entrance, the lintel and its inner barrel vault functioned as the staircase's ceiling (see Figs. 7.29, 7.30). Similar vaulted lintel sections over podium staircases are well preserved in the northern theater at Gerasa (Clark et al. 1986:211–215). The wide podium of the media cavea, the result of the staircases installed within it, resembles those in both the southern (Schumacher 1902: Figs. 13–17) and northern theaters at Gerasa (Clark et al. 1986:211–215; Sear 2000). The northern theater was first erected as an odeum and later enlarged into a theater during the second century CE by adding a summa cavea. The high podium with its vomitorium entrances belonged to the original odeum stage, while the podium staircases were integrated in the second stage, when the summa cavea was added.

The western theater at Gadara (Weber 1989), the theater at Bostra (Butler 1907: Pl. IV; Finsen 1972: 3–7), the theater at Philippopolis (Coupel and Frézouls 1956:11–19), and both the theater and the odeum at Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975: Fig. 2; Almagro 1983: Figs. 22, 24) also had staircases within the media cavea podium, although they were not roofed and their

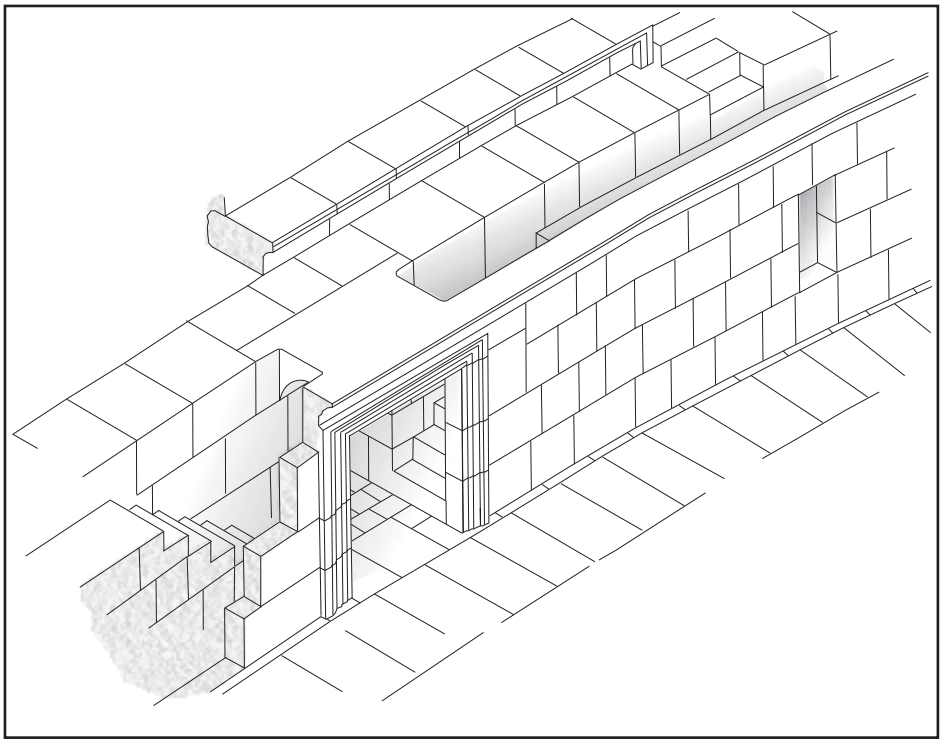


Fig. 7.30. Severan Theater: reconstruction of media cavea podium with vomitorium entrance and flanking staircases.

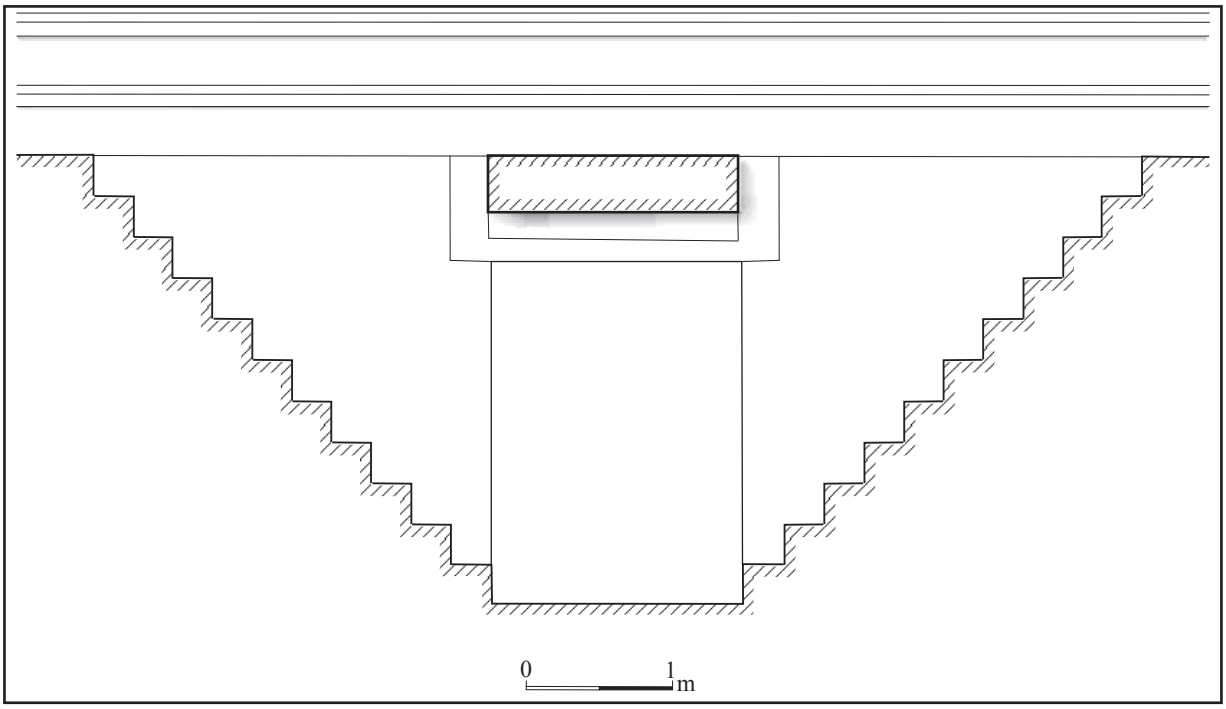


Fig. 7.31. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of section through staircases within media cavea podium.

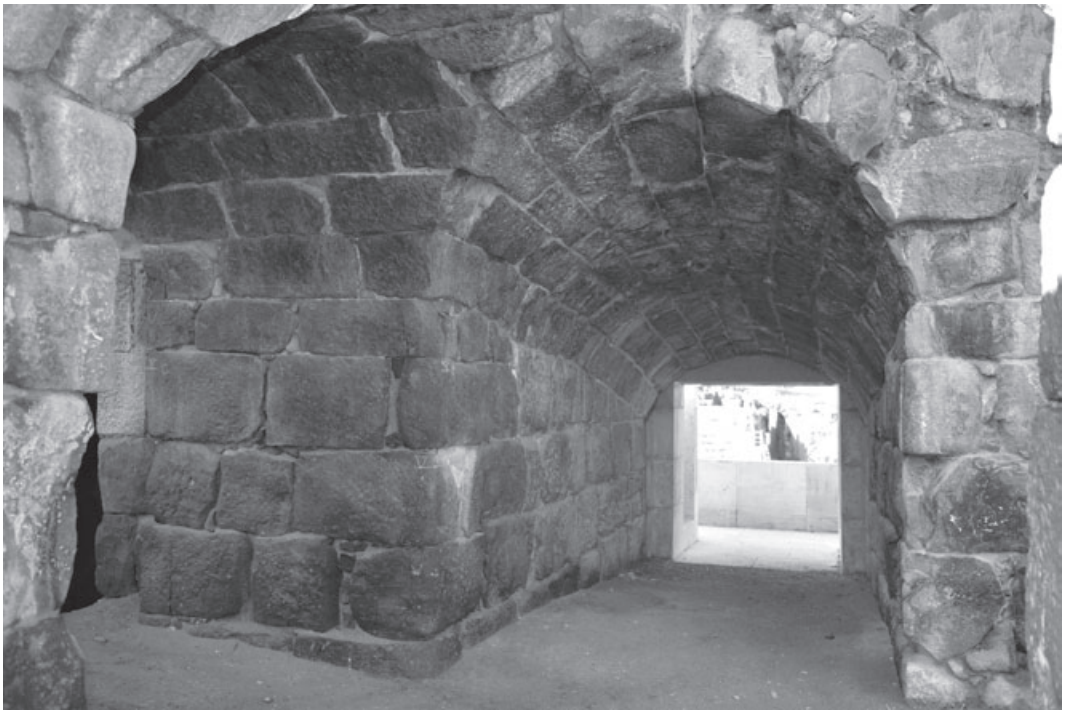


Fig. 7.32. Severan Theater: connection of vomitorium vault with rectangular inner entrance, looking west.

vomitorium entrances had no lintels. In Asia Minor, the theater at Sagalassos (de Bernardi Ferrero 1969:44–47) had a similar podium with inner steps.

In general, two heights could be distinguished in the media cavea podia of theaters in the East: in theaters with vomitorium entrances furnished with lintels, the podium rose to a height of 2.9 m, while in those without lintels, the podium usually did not surpass 2.5 m. The lintel-furnished type at Nysa-Scythopolis best resembles the northern theater at Gerasa (Clark et al. 1986: Fig. 3) and the western theater at Gadara (Weber 1989). The lower type of podium, in which the vomitorium entrances into the praecinctio had no lintels, was observed in the theaters at Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975: Fig. 2), the southern theater at Gerasa (Austen and Harrison 1927: Pls. I, II), and that of Bostra (Segal 1999: Fig. 43).

The northern ends of the podium were connected to the versurae in a well-planned setting that has no parallels in other theaters (Fig. 7.33). Elsewhere, the podium of the media cavea was connected to the corners of the versurae in a straight line, while in our case, the podium did not continue straight northward but retreated inward about 1.2 m, creating a rectangular exedra, 5 m wide, over the vault of the aditus maximi. In the center of this exedra was the vomitorium entrance, without the flanking staircases leading up to the media cavea. Two architectural elements of this entrance were found, representing the lower door jamb and the complete lintel, which had the same profiled molding as all the other vomitorium entrances (see Fig. 9.120).

The two exedrae at the northern ends of the media cavea podium created the entrances to the tribunalia of the ima cavea; they were surrounded by a banister and the backs of the curiale seats. Thus, each tribunal was entered either through a 1.2 m wide entrance from the praecinctio, or by a passage under the media cavea that connected to Vomitoria 1 and 19. Similar tribunalia were found in the theaters at Sabratha (Caputo 1959: Pl. 72) and Syracuse (Polacco and Anti 1980), where the ima cavea rows of seats continued over the vaults of the aditus maximi as in our case, and the tribunalia were part of the ima cavea.

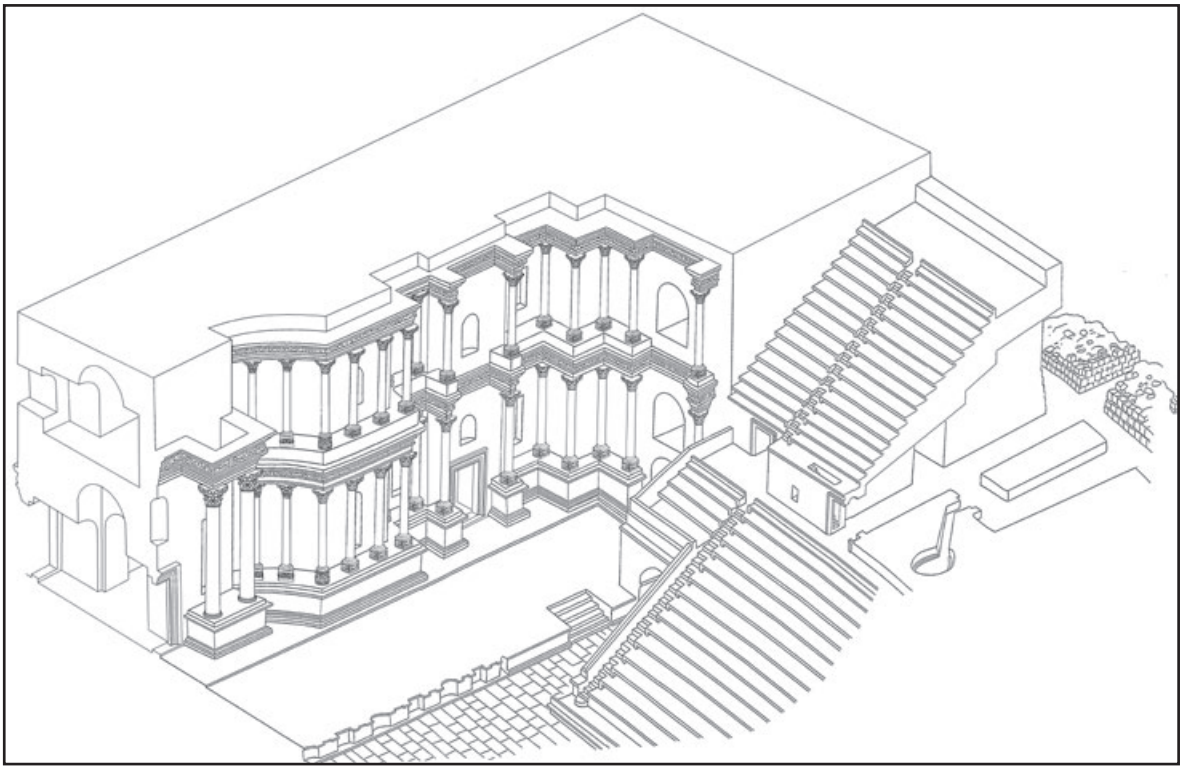


Fig. 7.33. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of the cavea and scaena during the Late Roman period (Roman IV).

Vomitoria

Vomitoria were designed to reduce crowd flow in and out of the theater. The Nysa-Scythopolis theater had 19 vomitoria comprising eight sets that led from the outer circumference wall of the theater into the praecinctio between the ima and media caveae and also, via narrow corridors, into nine acoustic cells. The vomitoria were paved with large basalt slabs, some of which were preserved *in situ*. They were roofed by barrel vaults, most of which were also well preserved, and at the intersections with transverse passages, by cross-section barrel vaults that rested on pendentives at the corners (see Fig. 7.32; see also Fig. 3.23). The vomitoria were arranged in sets: seven double, one triple and two singles, each set connected internally by transverse passages. The irregular arrangement of the end vomitoria was the result of the acoustic-cell system, in which each cell related to an axial scalarium, apart from Cells 1 and 9, which were located south of their associated scalaria. The vomitoria over the aditus maximi (the two singles) were added to the vomitoria on both northern sides, in essence creating irregular sets of three in the northwest and four in the northeast. The vomitoria are described from northwest to northeast.

Vomitoria 1/2/3 composed a single set. The northwesternmost Vomitorium 1 ran over the western aditus maximus and led to the tribunal, the central Vomitorium 2 ran through a narrow corridor into an acoustic cell, while Vomitorium 3 led into the praecinctio (Fig. 7.34; see Plans 3.23, 3.24).

Vomitorium 1 was intersected twice by transverse passages and reached the tribunal. It rose in the east from its floor at the tribunal level toward the west in three steps. Its sloping barrel-vault roof rose toward the west and intersected with the cross-section barrel vault of the first transverse passage. Over this vault section the seats of the media cavea were erected. The western end of Vomitorium 1 was blocked by a wall equipped with a window. A staircase covered by a barrel vault led from Vomitorium 1 into Vomitorium 2. Vomitorium 2 was also roofed by a barrel vault constructed in rising sections that rose toward the west.

The wedge-shaped wall between Vomitoria 1 and 2 (W20) had two entrances, the eastern of which connected the two vomitoria. The vault connecting the passage between Vomitoria 1 and 2 was carried by pendentives at the corners of the passage walls (see Fig. 7.34). It mounted the barrel vault of the western aditus maximus in three steps and reached the level of Vomitorium 1. From there a sloping staircase descended nine steps into the second-floor room of the versura.

At the eastern end of Vomitorium 2 was a small entrance that led via a straight corridor into an acoustic cell (see Fig. 7.34). From Vomitorium 2, two entrances connected it with Vomitorium 3, which led into the praecinctio. The barrel vaults of Vomitoria 2 and 3 are reconstructed based on the better-preserved vomitoria. They would have carried three graded sections of barrel vaults that rose to the west, corresponding with the media cavea's angle, each section higher than the previous one. At the transverse passages, horizontal barrel vaults intersected them.

Vomitoria 4–15 were composed of pairs of parallel vomitoria (Fig. 7.35). Both vomitoria of each pair were roofed by three graded sections of barrel vaults constructed of eleven basalt-masonry rows (see Plan 3.25: Sections 1-1, 2-2, 3-3, 4-4; Figs. 3.116–3.121).

The section of the barrel vault nearest the praecinctio was constructed at a 15˚ slope, the barrel vault of the outer section that reached the ambulacrum had a 10˚ slope, while the mid-section had a 12˚ slope.

The right-side vomitorium ran from the theater circumference wall and entered the praecinctio through a rectangular entrance flanked by staircases on both sides that led to the media cavea (see above). The vomitorium walls were constructed of basalt masonry, apart from the limestone praecinctio door jambs and lintels that were integrated into the media cavea podium (see Figs. 7.29, 7.32). The inner and outer barrel-vault sections were connected to the transverse passages from the left vomitorium and the ambulacrum by horizontal barrel vaults carried on pendentives erected at the corners (see Figs. 7.32, 7.36).

The left vomitorium ended at a wall in which a small entrance was pierced that led to the left through a narrow corridor at an obtuse angle, into a pear-shaped acoustic cell.

Vomitoria 16/17/18 and 19 in the northeast presented a different arrangement. In this set of four vomitoria, Vomitorium 19 extended over the eastern aditus maximus, as Vomitorium 1. Thus set connected with two acoustic cells, and led into the praecinctio. All four vomitoria were connected by transverse passages (see Fig. 7.18).

At the end of Vomitorium 16, a diagonal corridor led to an acoustic cell located to its right and a passage

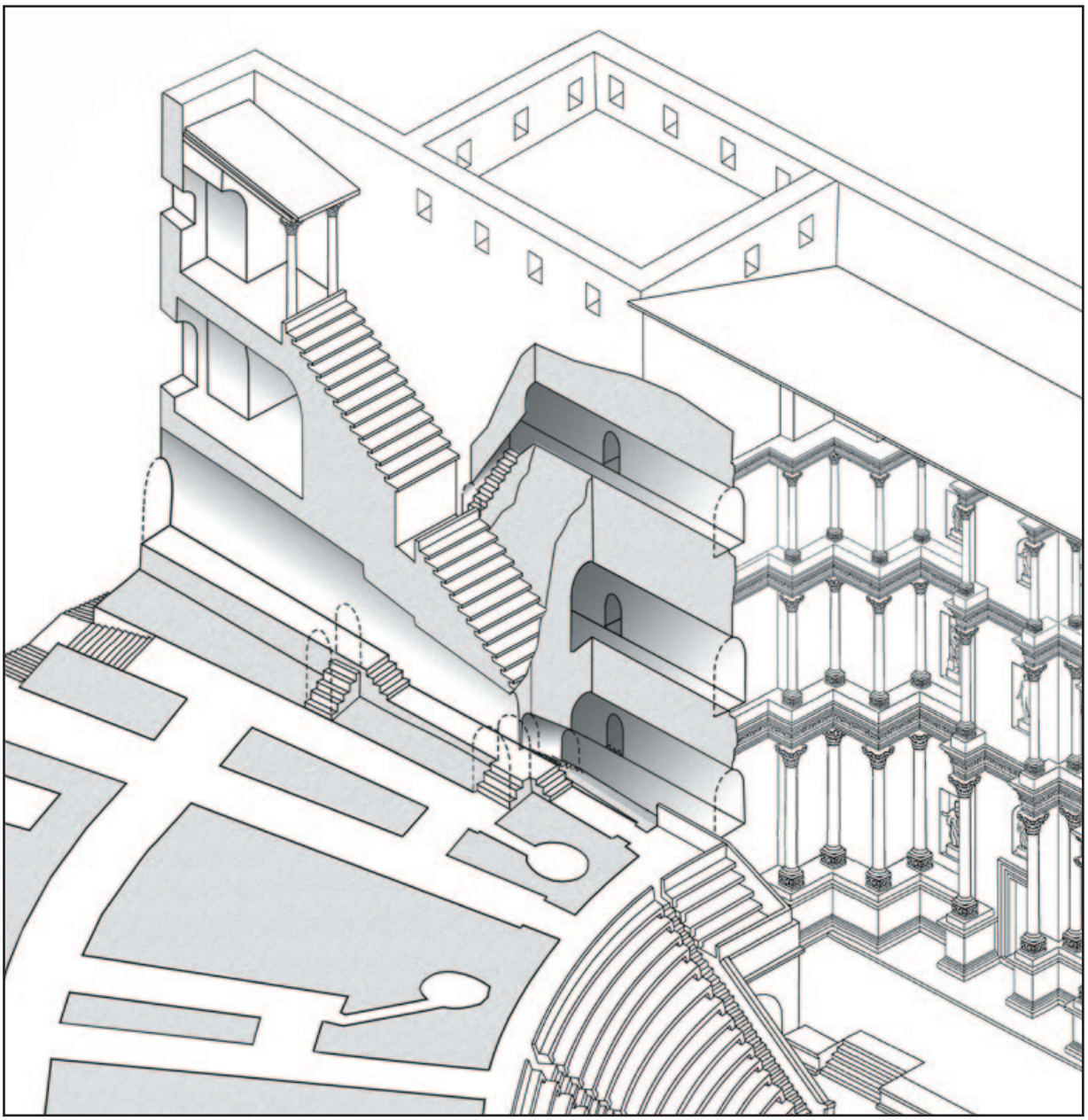


Fig. 7.34. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of Vomitoria 1/2/3.

connected it to Vomitorium 17. The barrel vault over the transverse passage between Vomitoria 16 and 17 was fully preserved. It was built of ten rows and sprang from the wall's fifth course. Vomitorium 16 had three graded barrel vaults that rose from west to east. The passages connecting Vomitoria 16 and 17, and 17 and 18 had cross-section barrel vaults that were connected to the main vomitorium vaults. Vomitoria 17/18/19 resemble Vomitoria 1/2/3 in their layout, dimensions, construction method and vaulting system.

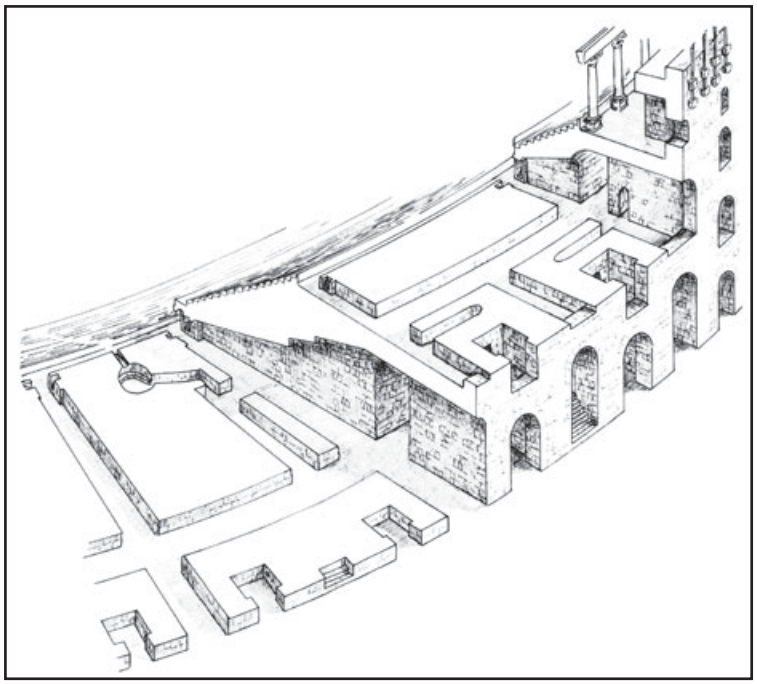


Fig. 7.35. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of section through Vomitoria 4–15, media and summa caveae.

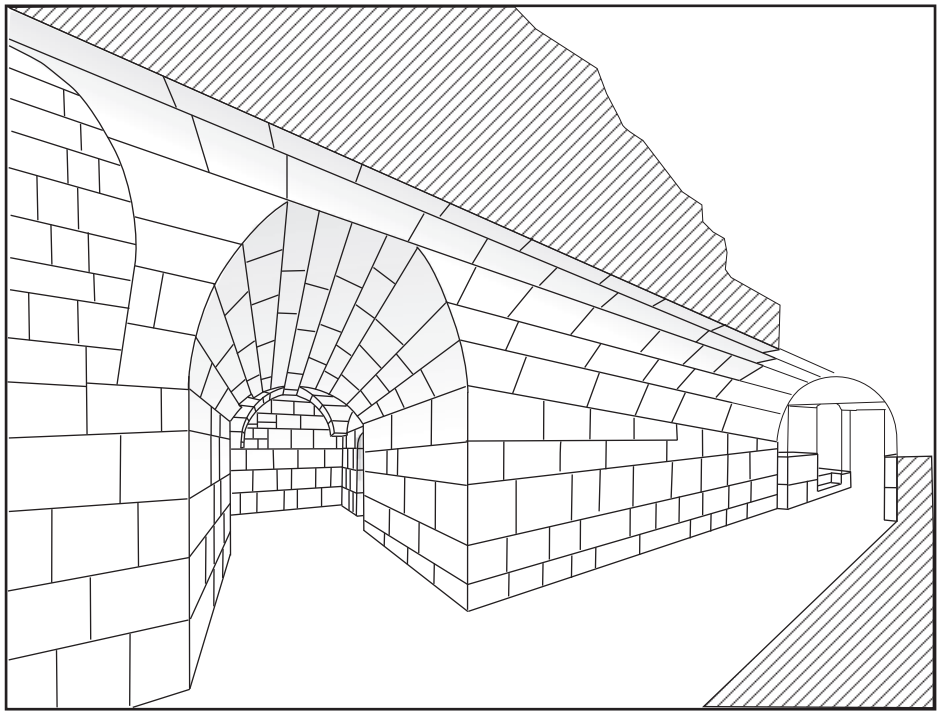


Fig. 7.36. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of section through vomitorium connecting passage.

Below the summa cavea, ten vomitoria led from the upper ambulacrum to the upper praecinctio. They were 4.7 m long, covered with sloping barrel vaults that were 2.2 m high in their inner section and 3.5 m high in their outer section (see Fig. 7.35).

The vomitorium system was intended to reduce the pressure of audiences entering and exiting the theater; however, the system in the Severan Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis with the integration of acoustic cells is unique in plan and function, with no parallels in other Roman theaters. Similar vomitorium systems, but without acoustic cells or inner corridors, are seen in theaters in the region, for example in the western theater at Gadara (Schumacher 1890:49), at Philippopolis and at Bostra (Segal 1999: Figs. 4, 40). In the theater at Caesarea, the system partly resembles that at Nysa-Scythopolis, with six vomitoria, four of them double, one of each pair leading into the praecinctio, while the other was blocked mid-way (Frova 1965:183–184). In North Africa, in the theaters at Sabratha (Caputo 1959) and Leptis Magna (Caputo 1987), a vomitorium system existed, although their inner plans and functions differed. The theater at Sabratha had as many as 25 vomitoria, evenly placed around the theater's circumference wall, but only six of them led into the cavea, the rest serving as staircases to the summa cavea (Caputo 1959: Pl. 71). In contrast, in the theater at Nysa-Scythopolis, the staircases to the summa cavea were entered from the circumference wall and had no connection with the vomitorium system (see below). It seems that the vast variation in vomitorium design indicates the latitude granted to theater architects and the consequent versatility of their architectural solutions.

Acoustic Cells

No less unique were the nine pear-shaped acoustic cells built under the media cavea, behind its podium. The entire division of the cavea segments, both horizontal and vertical, was a result of these unusual cells, which were important enough to influence the inner plan of the cavea as well as the number, location and design of the vomitoria. They were accessed by narrow corridors that were entered from the left-side vomitorium of each pair (see Plan 3.23). Cells 2–8 were approached via a bent corridor that entered on the right side of the acoustic cell, which was located on the axis line of the scalaria, while Cells 1 and 9 had straight corridors and were not aligned with the scalaria.

The pear-shaped cells vary slightly in dimensions (2.7–3.6 m long and 2.4–2.7 m wide), and were constructed of basalt masonry, their walls well integrated with the corridor walls and enclosed in front by the podium wall of the media cavea. The narrow corridor leading to the cell was roofed with basalt slabs and paved with small basalt stones in a dark gray mortar. A step descended to the cell floor, also made of small basalt stones in a gray mortar. The irregular, dome-shaped roof of the cell had a higher, rounded part in the rear then sloped diagonally toward the more pointed front of the cell at an angle that matched the slope of the media cavea. At the rear, the roof sprang from the fifth course, and in the front, it was incorporated into the lower three limestone courses of the media cavea's podium.

A window can reasonably be reconstructed over the first course of the media podium, immediately below the spring course of the dome (see Figs. 7.28, 7.35), along the cell's central axis in line with the scalaria (see Fig. 3.23), and measuring the width of the scalaria. Regretfully, the media cavea podium was not preserved to this height and therefore there is no conclusive evidence for the existence of such windows. In the past it was stated that remains of a window in Cell 8 were observed (Ovadiah and Gomez de Silva 1981–1982:85–95), although no signs of such were seen by the IAA expedition.

The contours of the cells were irregular and the walls were erected upon foundations that in most cases did not match the wall contours, as they ran in straight lines and protruded into the cells. These cells were well preserved on the rear side up to the height of the dome (see Fig. 3.122). Although there is no definitive evidence for such, it can be assumed that the cells were designed to improve the theaters' acoustics.

Over the years, numerous scholars have described and studied the acoustic cells in the Nysa-Scythopolis theater. The British traveler and researcher James Bankes was the first to draw attention to these cells when he visited the site in 1818 and made an accurate plan of the media cavea, its vomitoria and acoustic cells, and associated them with Vitruvius (Segal 1999:51–52, No. 80, Fig. 52). Irby and Mangles (1823:302), Robinson (1856:328) and Guérin (1874:286), all of whom visited Nysa-Scythopolis and described the Severan Theater in the nineteenth century, assumed that these were acoustic cells in which brass vessels were placed, constructed according to Vitruvius'

instructions (*Architecture* V, 5, 1). Conder and Kitchener (1882:101–104) also prepared a detailed plan of the theater and its unique cells on behalf of the PEF. In their description of the cells, they followed Robinson, Guérin, Irby and Mangles and stated: "the oval recesses half way up [were] intended to contain brass sounding-tubes," a suggestion that was strangely changed some paragraphs later, where they refer to them as "cages where the wild beasts were no doubt placed."

In his report of his excavations in 1960–1963, Applebaum described them as *tholoi*, found them difficult to explain and suggested they may have provided entry to the praecinctio and from there, access to the flat platforms built over them for *"honoratiores of the peregrini"* (Applebaum 1978:86–87). However, the architectural analysis of the cells seems to rule out any entry into the praecinctio. Their corridors were clearly not meant for distinguished guests to squeeze into, the steps leading to the media cavea had no relation to the cells and left no room for platforms over them. Applebaum cited a reference to the cells in the theater at Autun in Gaul, dated to the reign of Vespasian (Applebaum 1978:87, n. 15), although this refers to the media cavea steps, and there was only one cell in that theater. Fuks (1983:135–136) raised various options for the cells' function but concluded that their purpose remains obscure. Some scholars have argued for the acoustic function attested to by Vitruvius (Ovadiah and Gomez de Silva 1981–1982; Plommer 1983), while others reject this theory as "romantic nonsense" or "… the legendary Vitruvian sounding vessels" (Izenour 1977:39–40).

Sear (2006:8–9) devoted a paragraph to the phenomenon in his monumental work analyzing Roman theaters, in which he leans toward an acoustic function for the cells. He relates them to the sloping wooden roof over the stage, remains of which were preserved in the theaters at Bostra in Syria, Arausio in France, and Aspendos in Asia Minor, and the wooden doors in the scaenae frons (valvae regiae, hospitalia and itinera versurarum) in all the theaters, all of which served an acoustic purpose to lend resonance to the actors' voices. According to Sear (2006:8–9), Onorio Belli, who described a number of theaters in Crete in 1586, mentioned acoustic vases in the theater at Lyttus (see also Falkener 1854:18), while Maufras (1847:5, n. 65) stated that Cuningham noticed nine cavities, 0.49 m wide and 0.65 m apart, in the theater at Saguntum Italy. In the small theater at Nemus Aricinum in North Africa, a number of small, semicircular niches, 0.5 m in diameter, were discerned in the rim of the cavea (Sear 2006:8–9). Sear also mentioned several cases in which amphorae were embedded in niches in the proscaenium or in the tenth row of seats, while terracotta tubes, 0.14 m wide, were installed in the podium facing the audience in the theater at Gioiosa Ionica in Calabria. In the theater at Hippo Regius in North Africa, channels were installed under the pulpitum, inside which were *dolia*, 1.2 m in diameter (Lachaux 1979:73–77), and in the theater at Nora in Sardinia, four large *dolia* were observed behind the proscaenium within the hyposcaenium (Pesce 1965:359–365). All of these phenomena may have been designed, according to Sear, to amplify sound.

Vitruvius, in dealing with the laws of acoustics and their application in theaters, devoted a chapter to sounding vessels used in theaters (*Architecture* V, 5), and states: "In accordance with the foregoing investigations on mathematical principles, let bronze vessels (called *echeia* by the Greeks) be made, proportionate to the size of the theater, and let them be so fashioned that, when touched, they may produce with one another the notes of the fourth, the fifth and so on up to the double octave. Then having constructed niches in between the seats of the theater, let the vessels be arranged in them in accordance with musical laws, in such a way that they nowhere touch the wall, but have a clear space all round them and room over their tops" (*Architecture* V, 5, 1). He further refers to the location of the niches that accommodated these vessels: "If the theater be of no great size, mark out a horizontal range halfway up and in it construct thirteen arched niches with twelve equal spaces between them" (*Architecture* V, 5, 2). However, Vitruvius admits that if asked in which theaters these sounding vessels were employed in his time (late first century BCE), "we cannot point to any in Rome" (*Architecture* V, 5, 2). He further notes that Lucius Mummius brought back to Rome bronze *echeia* from Corinth in 146 BCE, a statement for which the excavation results of the theater at Corinth did not provide any supporting evidence (Stillwell 1952:2). So one must conclude that in theaters throughout the Roman Empire there are no clear archeological remains of such systems, apart from the well-designed system in the Severan Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis, and several possible minor devices cited by Sear (above).

Ambulacrum

The lower semicircular ambulacrum, 5.3 m high and 3.3 m wide at floor level, passed between two walls, the inner wall built of 12 basalt-masonry courses, at which point the vault's spring course was preserved in several places (Figs. 7.37–7.39). The outer wall, together with the summa cavea, collapsed in the earthquake of 363 CE, and they were never rebuilt. The inner wall was divided into 16 sections by the entrances of the 17 vomitoria, and in the center of each of the seven wide sections was a niche (see Fig. 7.37). Each of the lower six courses of the ambulacrum's inner wall retreated by 0.10–0.14 m from the one below, and from the seventh course they were constructed vertically. This construction technique resulted in the widening of the upper part of the ambulacrum's wall at barrel-vault level (see Fig. 7.38). The ambulacrum vault sprang from the eleventh course and the remains of the vault courses of both the ambulacrum and the intersecting vomitoria supplied the data for the proposed reconstruction.

All the inner vomitorium vaults (under the media cavea) were connected to the ambulacrum vault by half cross-section vaults. The outer sections of the vomitoria (below the summa cavea) were also covered with half-cross-section vaults at their intersections with the ambulacrum vault (see Figs. 7.37, 7.38). At its northwestern end, the ambulacrum vault was also connected to Vomitoria 1/2/3 and 17/18/19 by two cross-section vaults.

The upper ambulacrum had the same dimensions as the lower one, and was roofed by a barrel vault and half-cross-section vaults where it connected with the peripheral rooms and staircase vaults. At its northern ends it was connected to the scaena side corridors. Ten vomitoria should be reconstructed that connected with the upper ambulacrum (see Fig. 7.35) and led to the upper praecinctio of the summa cavea (see Plan 7.3: Section 1-1).

Summa Cavea

The summa cavea was constructed over the barrel vault of the ambulacrum that intersected the vomitorium vaults, forming cross-section barrel vaults. The seat section had nine seat rows divided by 16 scalaria into 18 cunei. Nine of the scalaria continued the lower ones of the media, while the other seven were set in between (see Plan 7.3; cf. Bostra, Segal 1999: Figs. 40, 42). In front of the summa cavea and bordering the upper praecinctio was a 2.6 m high podium, into which ten vomitoria opened, their entrances flanked by staircases that mounted the summa cavea and were constructed within the podium wall. The upper row comprised the curiale seats, their backs serving as the porticus banister. This composition resembles that of the media cavea in context, dimensions and decor (see Fig 7.35).

The design and sloping angle of the seat rows are the same as those observed in the northern theater at Gerasa (Segal 1999:94) and in that of Sabratha (Caputo 1959).

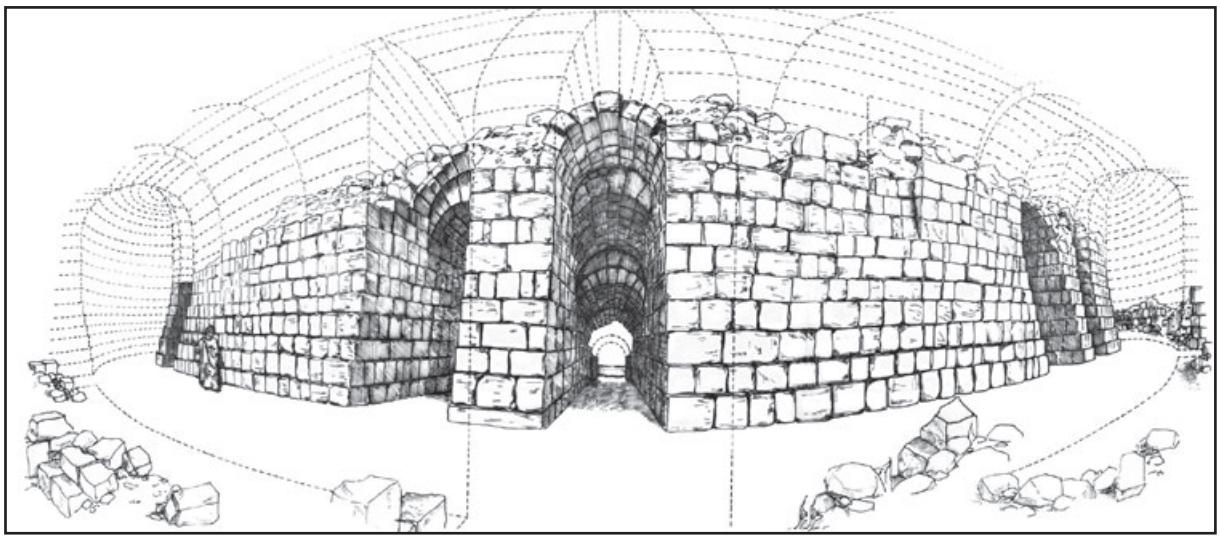


Fig. 7.37. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of vomitoria and ambulacrum barrel-vault connections.

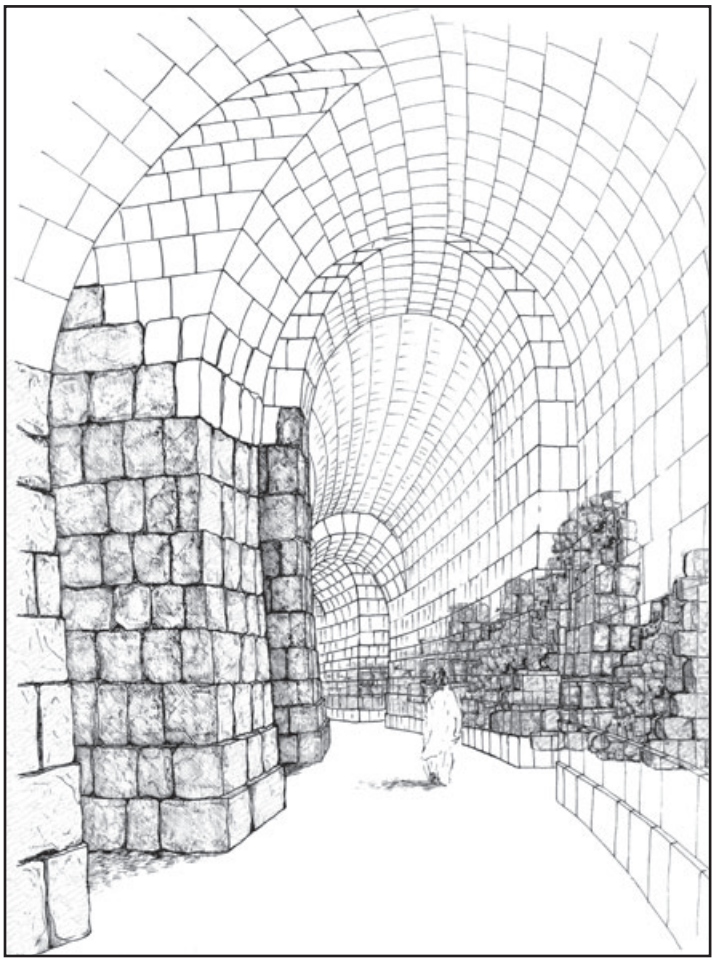


Fig. 7.38. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of the lower ambulacrum.

The Theater's Semicircular Circumference Wall

The semicircular circumference wall of the theater, the ambulacrum's outer wall, presents a symmetrical, well-balanced, multi-storied facade (see Figs. 7.20, 7.39) that reached a height of 23.49 m including the porticus. The circumference wall had a unique plan of vomitorium entrances and a staircase system constructed within the wall, rather than in the vomitoria as was customary in other theaters (e.g., at Sabratha, see Caputo 1959), making good use of the rows of arched openings in the facade, characteristic of Roman theaters and amphitheaters.

In its first floor were the arched entrances of the vomitoria and the staircases, 7.2 m high. Over them, on the second floor, were similar arched openings vertically aligned with the entrances below, 5.3 m high, and on the third floor were smaller 2 m high windows (see Fig. 7.35 right side). Flanking the staircases of the first floor were 14 rooms with arched entrances, 2.3 m wide and 5 m high, and above them, the second-floor rooms had similar windows that were 3.6 m high, and on the third floor were niches 1.4 m wide and 3 m high. Over both sides of the niches were the porticus windows, and above them the wall continued 2 m higher to hold the beams that supported a velum (see Figs. 7.35, 7.40).

At ground level, the circumference wall was divided into nine units (I–IX) separated by the arched vomitorium entrances (see Fig. 7.39, Plan 3.23). Seven of the units (II–VIII) were similar in shape, consisting of a central staircase flanked by two rooms that opened onto the alley that encircled the outer wall of the theater (see Fig. 7.35). The staircases turned within the

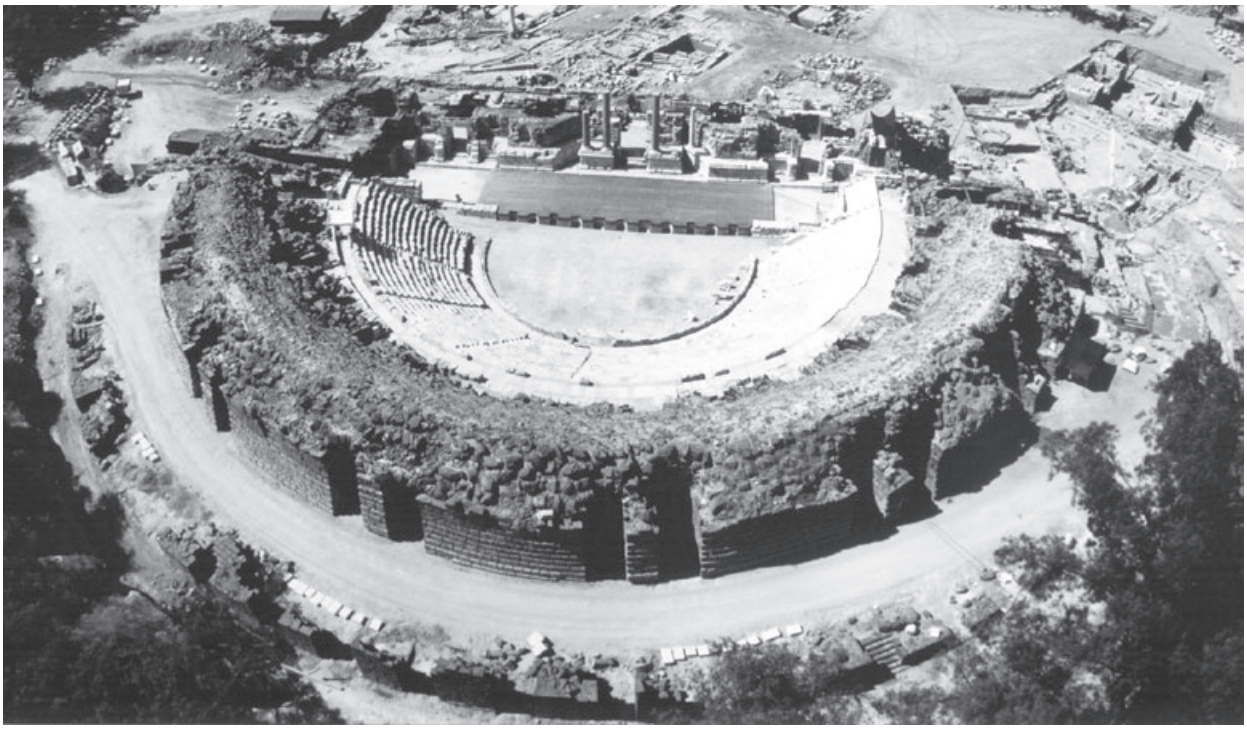


Fig. 7.39. Severan Theater: semicircular circumference wall and ambulacrum, looking north.

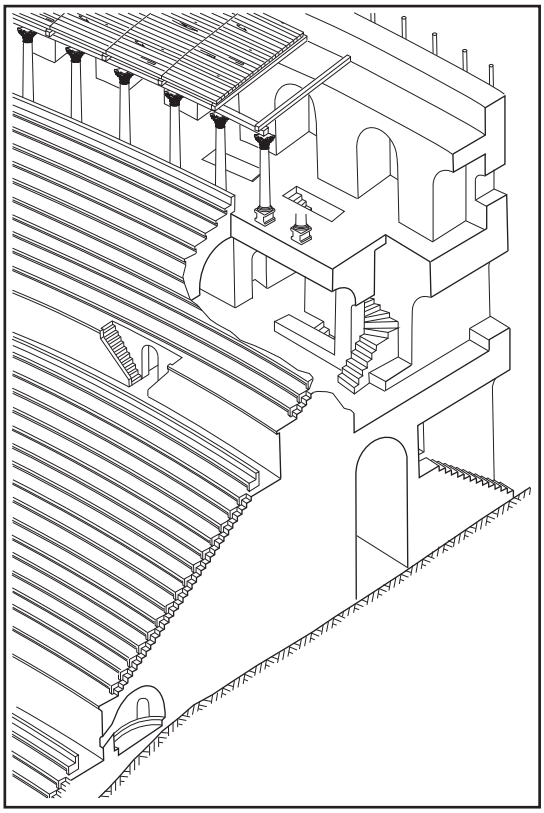


Fig. 7.40. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of section through ambulacra and porticus.

circumference wall to the right and left at a 90˚ angle and ascended to the summa cavea.

The northwestern and northeastern units (I, IX) represent a different type of structure. Unit I in the northwest, dismantled during Roman IV, consisted of a room that opened to the west at Vomitorium 1; next to it, at Vomitorium 2, was a staircase that mounted eastward to the summa cavea, while Vomitorium 3 ran into the praecinctio. Although the northeastern unit was dismantled, it may be reconstructed based on preserved foundations revealed under the eastern staircase of Stratum 11, and it apparently resembled that on the northwestern side, with an additional vomitorium.

The seven staircases in Units II–VIII had 16 steps that ascended to a landing, from which two staircases of 11 steps turned to either side. These staircases reached a second landing in front of an entrance from which eight additional steps led up to the summa cavea. The staircases were covered with sloping barrel vaults (Fig. 7.40).

The 14 rooms on the first floor flanking the seven staircases were roofed by barrel vaults. Similar rooms on the second floor were reached by the staircases at the first landing.

The third-floor rooms were identical to those of the second-floor, with barrel-vault roofs and a window; on the facade, between the windows, were niches (see Fig. 7.40). There was another set of staircases about 1 m wide to either side of the rooms' entrances leading up to the porticus on the fourth floor. They would have turned at a 90° angle as they rose toward the outer face of the circumference wall, then they would have turned again at a 90° angle to either side, in the same design as the lower staircases, to reach the porticus (see Fig. 7.40). The first flights had nine steps, of which the first two may have been built into the upper ambulacrum level. The split staircases had no landings and three steps turned the corner. The second flight had 18 steps to reach the porticus floor through arched entrances. These staircases were roofed by the porticus floor slabs.

The three floors of rooms constructed within the theater's circumference wall were later copied in the postscaenium's northern facade, which contained the three monumentally decorated entrances (see above). This design, more typical in the West, was the natural outcome of Roman theaters and amphitheaters constructed on a flat terrain, utilizing the multi-storied structure of high vaults, passages and arches. It was, however, also applied in the East, despite the fact that in the East, theaters were often built partly over hill slopes, as was the Severan Theater at Nysa-Scythopolis, as well as the theaters at Philippopolis, Gadara and Bostra (Segal 1999: Figs. 7, 28, 43).

Porticus

In the earthquake of 363 CE, the theater lost its summa cavea along with its crowning porticus, neither of which were restored, and some of the porticus column shafts were reused in the post-363 CE scaenae frons renovation stage in Stratum 11 (Roman IV; see above). The porticus probably resembled those of the theaters at Aspendos (de Bernardi Ferrero 1970: Pl. XXXII) and Sabratha (Caputo 1959: Pl. 72).

The porticus, 8.5 m deep, was divided into two parts. In the rear wall were 32 rectangular exedrae (2.0 × 2.8 m), similar to those in the lower part of the circumference wall. In the front, the porticus was 4.4 m wide (see Figs. 7.35, 7.40). The exedrae were 2.7 m apart, and each was roofed by a barrel vault. The rear wall of the porticus rose higher than its roof. It had arched windows, 1.3–1.4 m wide and 2 m high, which continued the pattern of the vertically aligned entrances and windows in the circumference wall. On top of the outer face of the wall was a row of protruding pairs of consoles to hold the wooden poles of the velum—the lower consoles had round recesses, the upper ones were pierced through (see Fig. 7.35). A similar system of consoles is well preserved in the theaters at Aspendos and Sabratha (Graefe 1979:52–53).

The 5.65 m high Corinthian colonnade of the porticus had 64 limestone columns, two columns in front of each exedra, erected upon pedestals with a 1.4 m wide intercolumniation. On the northeastern and northwestern ends, the porticus reached the versurae (Atrash 2003).

The three-sided pedestals were attached to the backs of the curiale seats. They were surmounted by bases, 0.25 m high with a plinth, column shafts 3.5 m high, and crowned with capitals 0.65 m high. The entablature consisted of an architrave, 0.5 m high, and a plain cornice, 0.25 m high (see Chapter 9 for descriptions). The entire order was thus 5.65 m high and carried a tile roof.

Aditus Maximi

The aditus maximi were an essential element in every Roman theater, as they architecturally connected the cavea with the scaena (see Figs. 7.25, 7.34). They usually led from both sides into the orchestra and were in most cases covered with sloping barrel vaults, which occasionally rose in steps in accordance with the cavea's slope. Their inner sections, usually below the cavea and tribunalia, had a steeper slope than the outer sections near the circumference wall, and in some cases they intersected passages connecting the cavea to the versurae.

The aditus maximi in the theater of Nysa-Scytholpolis (see Plan 3.33), each 31.15 m long and 3.3 m wide, were roofed by sloping barrel vaults. The walls and vaults of the inner sections were constructed of hard-limestone masonry, while the outer sections were of basalt masonry. The northern walls had two entrances, the smaller one entered the versura passage, while the larger one entered the postscaenium side corridor. In their southern walls were opposing niches, a small one and a larger (see Plan 3.33, Figs. 3.153, 3.154). In the large niche of the eastern aditus maximus was the lower part of a channel opening with a considerable

amount of travertine coating its wall. Apparently, a spring had been exploited by the theater's architect to create a nymphaeum within the niche (see Fig. 3.154). A similar phenomenon was observed in the theater at Ephesus, where a nymphaeum was integrated into the postscaenium northern facade (Akurgal 1990:158). The aditus maximi were paved with basalt slabs, beneath which an elaborate drainage system of channels and clay pipes connected to the theater's central drainage channel in the orchestra (see Plan 3.36).

The sections of the southern walls constructed of limestone that sloped toward the orchestra were crowned with a banister that enclosed the ima cavea's northern scalaria (see Fig. 3.155).

The barrel vaults of the aditus maximi were constructed of four sections that differed in height and slope angle, the innermost of limestone masonry and the three outer ones of basalt masonry (see Fig. 3.157). The two entrances into the orchestra had limestone arches with 13 profiled archivolt elements (see Fig. 9.113). Their arches sprang from the fifth course and were adorned with profiled, cap-molded cornices that protruded from the face of the walls. The cornices continued around the corner of the wall's northern face and reached the scaenae frons' southern podium (see Fig. 3.155).

The first vault section, constructed of eleven limestone masonry rows, was attached to the facade arch at a 20˚ angle, springing from the walls' seventh course and reaching the tenth course. The second vault section, c. 0.4 m higher than the former, at a 12˚ angle, had nine basalt masonry rows. The third section, of nine basalt masonry rows at a 14˚ angle, was 1.5 m higher than the second. The fourth section, also of nine rows of basalt masonry, at a 5˚ angle, was higher than the former by 0.6 m.

The floors of the aditus maximi were laid at the level of the base molding of the pulpitum's podium staircases (see Fig. 3.171). The excavations revealed differences in floor levels along the passages (see Chapter 3), indicating either a moderate slope or four steps along their route.

During Roman IV–Byzantine I (Strata 11–10), floor pavers were periodically repaired or replaced. In Byzantine II (Stratum 9), the eastern aditus maximus was separated from the theater by the construction of a wall at its western end and the closure of the entrance from the north. A black and white geometric mosaic floor was laid in the passage, now defined as a long, narrow hall whose function in the still-active theater has not been clarified.

The Western Staircase of the Aditus Maximi

A staircase was built at the southwestern end of the western aditus maximus, leading from the aditus maximus to the ambulacrum (see Plan 3.24, Figs. 3.178–3.180). Its first flight mounted from north to south and reached a landing in front of Vomitorium 2. It then split, one flight turning to the east into the northwestern end of the ambulacrum, while another flight continued southward from the landing to reach the passage along the theater's circumference wall. This staircase provided additional access from the civic center into the ambulacrum, the vomitoria and the upper levels of the cavea. From its integrated construction with various walls of the theater, it is obvious that it belonged to the theater's original construction stage. However, it was never completed. The bedrock to the west of it was hewn in preparation, but the enclosing wall of the lower part of the staircase was never built. This corresponds to the uncompleted state of the theater's northwestern corner, where the ends of the western aditus maximus walls were left with protruding courses (see Fig. 3.167). For some obscure reason, this corner was planned and prepared, but left unfinished. Probes conducted in the area indicated that the foundation courses were not continued any further in this area, and the western street that ran between the theater and the western therma seems to cut the northwestern corner of the theater.

This unfinished northwestern corner suggests that the constructional problems shortly after completion of the theater in the mid-third century CE, when the cavea began to slide downhill, occurred before the corner was completed and properly integrated with the street. However, access into the western aditus maximus and its adjoining staircase was fully functional throughout the theater's long life, until the early seventh century CE.

It can be assumed that a similar staircase was constructed in the northeastern corner of the theater with the same function as that in the west, although no evidence of such is preserved. It may have been dismantled prior to the vast changes conducted in that area during Stratum 11, presumably following its collapse during the earthquake of 363 CE. A new circumference wall was built here in Stratum 11

and along it a wide staircase (the eastern staircase, see Chapter 3) was erected. It provided convenient access from the east to both the orchestra and the cavea through the eastern aditus maximus on one hand, and the northeastern vomitoria on the other.

Orchestra

The orchestra, somewhat larger than half a circle, 27 m in diameter and 17.9 m in depth, was entered from the aditus maximi and had the same floor level. It was paved with marble slabs and had three bisellium steps (see Plan 7.3: Section 1-1) that were bordered by a row of curiale seats and divided by three entrances into the balteus, on both sides and in the center. Wide bisellium steps for wooden chairs of honorable citizens were a common component of Roman theaters in the region, as in the theaters at Philadelphia (el-Fakharani 1975:388–394), Shuni (Shenhav 1990:60), Neapolis (Magen 2005:102–103) and the southern theater at Gerasa (Fisher 1938:20). The backs of the curiale seats in our case also served as a banister for the balteus and therefore no extra banister was necessary, as was found in the theaters at Sebaste (Zayadine 1966:578–580, Fig. 3) and Neapolis (Magen 2005:102–103).

In the pulpitum's western flank, an altar was found during Applebaum's excavations, with a dedication to Dionysus by Germanos (Lifshitz 1970; Applebaum 1978:94–95; Applebaum, Isaac and Landau 1978:139–140; Fuks 1983:132). The altar may have originated in the orchestra, where it was customary to place altars, as in the theater at Philadelphia (Almagro 1983), as well as at Arelate–Arles in France (Sear 2006:7), Italica and Merida in Spain (Fuchs 1987:146), and Leptis Magna in North Africa. In the theaters at Shuni (Shenhav 1990:60) and Bostra (Segal 1999: Fig. 42), a recess in the center of the orchestra pavement held such an altar, although in both cases the altar was not preserved.

Under the orchestra pavement, a network of drainage channels and clay pipes was revealed (see Plan 3.36, Figs. 3.185–3.188). In the center, the main channel (T30604) ran from south to north, continuing under the hyposcaenium and the postscaenium, and exiting the theater at its northern facade, where it connected with the *cloaca maxima* of the civic center. The channel floor was comprised of small basalt stones held in dark gray mortar, both the floor and walls were plastered, and it was covered with basalt slabs. All other channels and pipes of the orchestra drainage network drained into it, for example, Channels T30601 in the east and T30605 in the west that ran below the proscaenium. The drainage network was well constructed and coated with dark gray mortar and plaster, and over it the orchestra's marble pavement with its small manholes was laid. A drainage system of this kind must have existed in every theater, as by their nature theaters tended to become large catch basins, which, unless properly drained, would have been flooded by winter rains. In the theater at Caesarea, a drainage channel was uncovered surrounding the orchestra (Frova 1965:86–88), in the theater at Sepphoris lead pipes were found (Waterman 1937:10), and in the theater at Philadelphia a large drainage channel was discovered in the center of the orchestra (el-Fakharani 1975:390–391).

Renovations Undertaken in the Severan Theater during Strata 11 and 9

The cavea of the theater was reduced in size twice. In 363 CE (Stratum 11) the summa cavea collapsed, leaving partial remains of its outer circumference wall without ambulacrum vaults or staircases, while in Stratum 9 the theater lost its media cavea. In accordance with the reduced cavea, the scaena was twice reduced as well, first to two floors and then to one floor.

In Stratum 11, the ima and media caveae continued in use, now approached from the vomitoria, and the cavea's scalaria (see Fig. 3.111). A new staircase was built at the back, within the ambulacrum area over Unit IV, east of Vomitorium 9, which ascended from the southern rocky hillside into the upper part of the media cavea. It consisted of a large podium (see Plan 3.30, Figs. 3.138, 3.139), upon which a large pilaster was erected that carried a bridge with a staircase constructed over a vault. According to Applebaum's report (1978), its basalt masonry courses and inner fill contained some limestone architectural elements, presumably of the collapsed upper porticus. Based on several clay figurines that were found around the podium, Applebaum mistakenly interpreted the bridge podium as the remains of a temple, and compared it to temples that were attached to various theaters, mainly in the West (see, e.g., Hanson 1959). Applebaum concluded that it was added to the theater in the Late Roman period, ignoring the Byzantine-period pottery that was found there according to his own report, and the fact that it was erected within the

ruined ambulacrum and circumference wall that had collapsed in 363 CE.

Also in Stratum 11, the eastern staircase was erected, which led from a new piazza near the northeastern corner of the theater and entered the theater's cavea via the eastern aditus maximus and the ambulacrum (Fig. 7.41; see Plan 3.32). It was 3 m wide at its northern entrance, near the nymphaeum, widening to 5.3 m at its southern end. It first entered the eastern aditus maximus and then continued south along the new circumference wall. It was composed of ten wide landings alternating with nine pairs of steps constructed of basalt masonry and basalt pavers. At its southern end, it turned at a right angle toward the west, forming an L-shaped staircase. This first mounted westward, and then turned northward at the fifth step. These steps entered the ambulacrum passage and vomitoria in the theater's circumference wall (for detailed description, see Chapter 3).

In Stratum 9, about a hundred years after Nysa-Scythopolis became the Christianized capital of *Provincia Palaestina Secunda,* the city gained prominence and wealth, and the Severan Theater seems to have had a final chapter of glory. The theater was reduced in size, as it had by now lost its media cavea, a process that apparently began in the early sixth century CE and accelerated during the sixth to early seventh centuries, finally leaving the media cavea with only its foundation core. The scaenae frons second floor was reduced, but the ima cavea was entirely preserved in Stratum 9; in addition, it was largely unaffected by both the 660 and 749 CE earthquakes, apart from the two northern-end cunei and scalaria that collapsed in the later event. The fact that none of the ima cavea seats were dismantled and that the pulpitum was retained testifies to the active use of the theater as late as the end of the Byzantine period. The nature of this activity is rather obscure, although public gatherings at

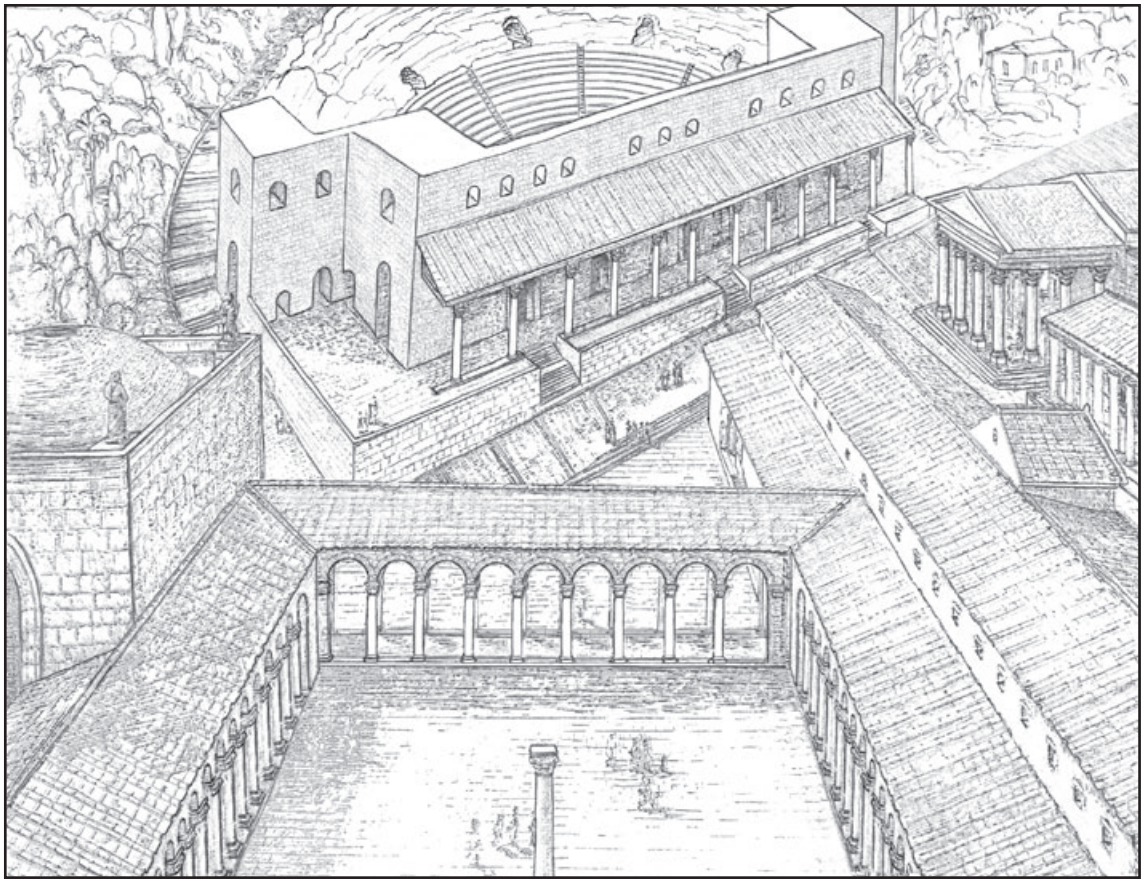


Fig. 7.41. Severan Theater: isometric reconstruction of the theater in Stratum 9, with northern porticus and plaza.

non-theatrical events of either ecclesiastic or municipal nature would be a reasonable assumption. Its reduced size accommodated a far smaller audience (c. 2000).

In the early sixth century CE (Stratum 9, see below), a monumental and lavishly adorned tribunal was built in the ima cavea for the governor or bishop, and the pulpitum and hyposcaenium were renovated, while the reduced-in-height but still impressive scaena frons adorned the scaena. The new tribunal was built over Cunei 4 and 5 and Scalarium V, on the central axis of the ima cavea. Applebaum (1963:88), who excavated the tribunal and regretfully entirely dismantled it, stated in a preliminary report that it was apparently surrounded by an iron railing (see Plan 7.12). Four columns with a crowning entablature were presumably erected over the tribunal corners, with an intercolumniation of 1.6–1.9 m. They probably carried a roof, the nature of which was not detailed by Applebaum. Over the balteus, between Cunei 3 and 6, a marble-paved platform was built, presumably with steps on either side ascending from the balteus. In the seats on both sides of the tribunal, sockets for the iron railings can be discerned (see Plan 7.12). In Applebaum's photographs, a number of architectural elements can be seen scattered around the tribunal's eastern side, for example an *in situ* base, and next to it a fallen Corinthian capital. The architectural-element inventory of the theater includes three hard-limestone bases (A6249, 6252, 40610; see Appendix 9.1) and three hard-limestone Corinthian capitals (A6203, see Fig. 9.108:1, A6208, see Fig. 9.108:3, A6210, see Fig. 9.107:1) that presumably originated in this tribunal. The column shafts can be reconstructed as being 4.1 m high. Architrave-frieze elements and cornice fragments were also found by Applebaum. The Corinthian order that surrounded the tribunal would thus have reached a height of c. 6 m. Applebaum (1978) assumed that the tribunal served as a ceremonial focal point for ecclesiastical purposes. A similar tribunal was recently revealed in the theater at Tiberias; during the Byzantine period, the tribunal was erected in the same location as in the Nysa-Scythopolis theater (Atrash 2012:86).

It seems that in this late stage (Stratum 9), the ima cavea of the reduced auditorium was shaded with a velum, the wooden beams of which made good use of the original velum sockets along the seat rows (see Plan 7.12). In the northern theater at Gerasa, similar sockets were found, apparently for the same purpose (Clark et al. 1986:215). The use of velum in theaters was common during the Roman and Byzantine periods, although preliminary excavation reports of most theaters regretfully refrain from mentioning any concrete evidence for such (Graefe 1979).

During both renovation phases, in Strata 11 and 9, the plan and function of the forum were altered. In the late fourth or early fifth century CE (Stratum 11), the forum temples and basilica were dismantled and the temples were covered with a fill. The forum, stripped of its cultic and state functions, could for the first time be architecturally and functionally connected with the theater. A grand, paved piazza, irregular in shape, was erected in front of the theater's northern facade. Its northern part was rhomboid, paved with bitumen slabs, and approached from the north by a staircase, 45 m wide, parallel to the theater's facade. This staircase had two steps in the east and five in the west, corresponding to the levels of the piazza and the theater. Along the theater's facade, a porticus was built and in front of it ran a new paved street. At the theater's northeastern corner, over the forum's eastern temple, another irregular piazza was paved with basalt slabs. This piazza was connected to the theater's eastern staircase, also erected in Stratum 11.

During the Byzantine period (Stratum 9), the civic center was again renovated, and the two thermae were enlarged and refurbished, becoming richly adorned, monumental complexes that advertised the capital's wealth and importance. In the early sixth century CE, a basalt retaining wall, 29.5 m long, was built along the northeastern side of the theater. It was connected to the eastern end of the eastern aditus maximus' northern wall and continued northward over the covered forum temple. It separated the relatively low level of the eastern piazza from the theater at a higher level. In the north, it turned westward along the theater's facade for another 70 m, gradually integrating with the level of the northern piazza and serving as a retaining wall that supported the porticus and the street along the theater's facade that had been erected in Stratum 11 (see Fig. 7.41). A stylobate wall for the porticus, built along the theater's facade from reused architectural elements, carried c. 25 columns of the Corinthian order that stood on octagonal pedestals. The hard-limestone order composition was rather eclectic and included *spolia* of the second and the first half of the third centuries CE, originating from dismantled complexes, perhaps also from the theater. The order composition reached a height of 7.36 m, creating a porticus 72 m long and 4 m wide,

whose floor was paved with basalt slabs. To the north of the porticus, and bordered by the above-mentioned retaining wall, a basalt-paved street was laid, c. 70 m long and 4 m wide. It opened in the west onto an irregular, basalt-paved piazza, from which Palladius Street extended to the northeast, and another paved street ran westward along the western thermae.

Thus, the Severan Theater, with its long lifespan, had to wait until the sixth century CE when architectural changes were conducted in the civic center, to be well-integrated into the forum, with a suitable connection to Palladius Street. This renovation stage in Stratum 9 added a monumental new northern facade to the theater, in front of which a spacious, paved piazza was equipped with approaching alleyways, a nymphaeum, and access to a public latrine.

Notes

[1] Based on Applebaum's results, it was argued that the Severan Theater was never completed (Ovadia and Gomez de Silva 1981–1982; Ovadiah and Turnheim 1994:21); however, in light of the later excavations conducted by the IAA expedition, this hypothesis lacks any supporting evidence, and should therefore be rejected.

[2] Applebaum (1978:93) assumed that the hospitalia were partly hidden by the walls of the aditus maximi. He argued that the scaenae frons was larger than required by the cavea, and that this indicated a discrepancy in the theater's basic plan. However, his claim is not validated by the theater's proportions, nor is it supported by comparison with other theaters. The scaena frons is in proportion to the cavea, as seen, for example, at Palmyra (Frézouls 1982) and Orange (Fiechter 1914:100–115), and represents a well-planned and balanced complex.

[3] Other publications of such theaters simply ignored the problem, for instance in the southern theater at Gerasa with its three apses (Schumacher 1902:141–145; Fisher 1938:19–20; Kirkbride 1960; Browning 1982:123–127), and in the theaters at Bostra (Frézouls 1952:69–79), Philadelphia (Butler 1919:47–50; el-Fakharani 1975) and Petra (Hammond 1965:55–65), with similar apses, square bases were reconstructed at the connection points.

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