

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Architecture of the Ancient Greek Theatre*. Edited by RUNE FREDERIKSEN, ELIZABETH R. GEBHARD, and ALEXANDER SOKOLICEK. Monographs of the Danish Institute at Athens, Vol. 17. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2015. Pp. 468. Hardcover, \$70.00. ISBN 978-8771243802.

The last two decades have been an exciting time in the study of the architecture of the Greek theater. In addition to the work of scholars in the field of Greek drama, the Greek theater building itself has received a great deal of attention, especially through syntheses of older excavations, alongside new excavations.<sup>1</sup> Within Greece, in the last ten years alone, there has been a surge of interest in examining and restoring Greco-Roman theaters, such as sites like Nikopolis (Epirus) and Aptaera (Crete).<sup>2</sup> Given this increased interest, the edited volume reviewed here finds a welcome home in understanding the development of the Greek theater.

Stemming from a 2012 conference at the Danish Institute at Athens, the editors have pulled together 26 different contributions, primarily from archaeologists and architectural historians. The primary focus of the volume is to examine more fully the form and function of the Greek theater on the Greek mainland, Sicily, and Asia Minor, from the 5<sup>th</sup> century/early 4<sup>th</sup> century through the Hellenistic period, along with discussions of Greek theater forms in the Roman period.<sup>3</sup> The evidence

<sup>1</sup> There are many notable studies of the last two decades weaving a variety of evidence together, such as *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama* (edited by E. Csapo and M.C. Miller, Cambridge, 2007) and most recently *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century B.C.* (edited by E. Csapo et al., Berlin, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The theater of Nikopolis has recently reopened to visitors after extensive restorations. The monument has recently been published by the archaeological team there, led by Konstantinos Zachos (*The Theater of Nicopolis*, Athens, 2015). The ancient theater of Aptaera was studied and renovated, with a full presentation of the results on-site to the public, with funds provided by the Hellenic Republic and the European Regional Development Fund. There is also the Diazoma Association in Greece ([www.diazoma.gr](http://www.diazoma.gr)), which aims to engage the more general public in becoming interested in ancient theaters, in turn spurring some to help with restoration efforts, in addition to finding ways to make theaters more accessible to the public (e.g., theatrical productions on ancient stages).

<sup>3</sup> The number of sites is impressive and cannot be treated fully here. Among the sites included in the volume as case studies are (in alphabetical order): Aigeira, Aphrodisias, Apollonia (Illyria),

presented for the most part is derived from either new excavations or work on excavation archives and old finds. The results are tantalizing, and range from illustrating single monuments, providing data sets to show regional trends (e.g. Boeotian theaters and Roman theaters in Asia Minor), to demonstrating the development of certain parts of the theater (e.g. the semicircular orchestra). The volume successfully illustrates the dynamic nature of the Greek theater—as it developed over the course of centuries over a wide geographical area, oftentimes with unique results, while still retaining common elements throughout the Greek world.

While the volume is not organized into specific sections, a number of themes emerge from the collection of essays, ranging from early theater forms and their development, the use of theatral space, and the notion of ‘traditional’ design elements. In considering early theater design, the so-called elephant in the room is, of course, the Theater of Dionysus in Athens. A number of essays engage the complex and (until now) poorly understood history of the theater in some way. Christina Papastamati-von Mook demonstrates through recent archaeological work of the presence of the wooden precursor (often described as *ikria*, wooden bleachers) to the Lycurgan Theater we know today; such evidence, while still new, will revolutionize our understanding of the early Theater of Athens. Other scholars, such as Rune Frederiksen and Alexander Sokolicek, engage with issues of form and function. While they may disagree on some fundamental reasons why there was a rise of the built theater form in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there is agreement on the fact that form seems to have followed function;<sup>4</sup> spectator space, rather than performance itself, drove the evolution of Greek theater designs, thus supporting the work of previous scholars, such as Hans Goette.<sup>5</sup> Many of the scholarly debates in the volume stem from the early theories of Wilhelm Dörpfeld—with some modern scholars agreeing or disagreeing with his views on the development of the Theater

Athens, Corinth, Dodona, Ephesus, Halikarnassos, Iasos, Isthmia, Kastabos (Asia Minor), Maroneia, Messene, Nea Paphos (Crete), Patara, Selinunte, Sikyon.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Rune Frederiksen illustrates the change in shape and size of theaters (especially to larger, semicircular structures) to be the product of making viewing angles more comfortable for spectators, while Alexander Sokolicek states that the change was not visibility and acoustics, but to house the greater number of people associated with the rise of the various leagues of the 4<sup>th</sup> century that might have used these spaces.

<sup>5</sup> See: Hans Goette, “Griechischer Theaterbau der Klassik—Forschungsstand und Fragstellungen,” in *Studien zur Bühnendichtung und zum Theaterbau der Antike*, edited by E. Pöhlmann, 9-48 (Frankfurt am Main), especially 34.

of Dionysus (Hans Peter Isler) and the development of the raised stage (Arzu Öztürk).<sup>6</sup>

The volume also illustrates nicely the variety of uses theatral forms could take in the Greek world. As has been alluded to, by the 4<sup>th</sup> century, many theater spaces were also used for not only dramatic performances, but also spaces for large assemblies of men to meet, such as at Athens and Sikyon (Chris Hayward & Yannis Lolos). Further, theatral areas could allow for religious pilgrims to view ritual dramas, such as at Selinunte, in connection with Demeter Thesmophoros (Clemente Marconi & David Scahill).<sup>7</sup> There were also a number of 'traditional' Greek (Classical and Hellenistic periods) theater design elements that were also adapted for use in Roman era theaters. Valentina Di Napoli illustrates the early Augustan transition of theaters in Greece, showing that while some structures used old and new features, the spaces were used not only for the new Roman-style entertainment forms, but also traditional Greek entertainment—a fact that is also being demonstrated by other scholars in other building types of the same period.<sup>8</sup>

The work on the whole is impressive, especially the illustrations and plans. No glaring errors or omissions have occurred, save for an occasional typographical mistake. One issue to note, however, is the problem with the vocabulary of the Greek theater, which is addressed in Jean-Charles Moretti and Christine Mauduit's essay. Due to the difficulty in finding the precise meaning of terms (which can fluctuate over time and by source, whether text or inscription), this is still a fraught issue, which the Moretti and Mauduit promise to resolve in a forthcoming volume. Throughout the remainder of the present volume, certain terms are used interchangeably by different authors (e.g., *koilon* vs. *cavea*), which might have been clarified in an appendix to guide the reader. The volume, however, will

<sup>6</sup> For more on the early theories of Dörpfeld, see his co-written volume, with Emil Reisch, *Das griechische Theater: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Dionysos, Theaters in Athen und anderer griechischer Theater* (Athens, 1896), along with Hans Peter Isler's chapter in the present volume on the historiography of Greek theater research.

<sup>7</sup> The use of monumental staircases, which this example at Selinunte seems to mimic, is part of a wider phenomenon most recently explored by Mary Hollinshead (*Shaping Ceremony: Monumental Steps and Greek Architecture*, Madison, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> See the recent essay that shows how Greek stadia, while they were transformed into amphitheater shapes (by closing off the open end of the structure) to allow for new Roman games, still used the *hysplex* for the running contests traditionally held in the space: Barbara Dimde, "The Anatomy of a Stadium's Racetrack: Bilateral Starting-Lines, Unilateral *Hyspleges* and Amphitheatrical Installations," in *ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝ*, Essays Presented to Stephen G. Miller, 67-88 (Athens, 2016).

be welcomed by not only archaeologists, but also scholars of ancient drama wanting to understand the use and development of dramatic space better. While editors do not provide a concise summary at the end, illustrating the new developments of architectural features and regional trends, one still comes away with a deeper understanding of the Greek theater. But that is the work of the next generation of theater scholars (some of whom are included in this volume): to continue this work and to synthesize it into an overarching narrative of the development of the architecture of the Greek theater.

DYLAN KELBY ROGERS

*American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, [dylan.rogers@ascsa.edu.gr](mailto:dylan.rogers@ascsa.edu.gr)