



Università Iuav di Venezia

DIPARTIMENTO DI  
CULTURE DEL PROGETTO

**IR.IDE**  
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## Greek and Roman Theatres in Mediterranean area International Seminar

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> June | Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2019  
Palazzo Badoer, Aula Tafuri

**Chiara Chiasera, Cesare Sartori, Vincenzo Zappia**  
**The Roman Theatre of Altino**

Within the framework of cataloguing the theatres of the X Regio we analysed the case of Altino. Altino was a Roman town of the Venetian lagoon area.

We decided to present this theatre from a methodological point of view, in order to describe an appropriate approach to the analysis of an inaccessible cultural heritage. The theatre is in fact still entirely underground: the site has never been excavated. The existence of the theatre was still a hypothesis until a decade ago, when the use of the modern technology of the remote sensing proved the presence of roman architecture.

It is important to underline the fact that today the theatre is entirely underground, together with the whole roman urban structure of the city.

The Theatre is currently buried with other Roman ruins at a depth of 3m under the fields of the countryside of Altino. By observing the fields pattern, the roman centuriation is still visible. The city was directly linked to other Roman cities by the via Annia. Today via St. Eliodoro leads to Altino. The archaeological area lays between the river Zero, the S. Maria canal and the Siloncello canal.

The hypothesis of a theatre was first indicated by some direct and indirect evidences.

By describing pantomimes, two inscriptions suggested that some people were involved in the theatre life in Altino. Hence the necessity of an architectural structure that could host these activities. The first inscription is a quadrangular urn without the lid reporting the word PANTOMIMUS. This find dates back to the I Century A.D..

The second inscription was witnessed in Venice in the 16th Century by the famous venetian humanist Pietro Bembo, and then lost. This inscription was devoted to Plotiae Felicitas by the pantomime Marcus Ulpus Castresis, underlining theatre practices even in post – Traianum era, in the II Century A.D. circa. The third evidence consists in a piece of the front block of the theatre. This is a block built in stone and decorated with floreal and acanto leaves patterns. It was found around 1950 in Campo Rialto, an area near Altino. Experts affirm that this piece could have been built between 20 and 40 A.D.. Thanks to this information it is possible to assume that also the theatre was built in the I Century A.D. circa. This element is one of the first example of its genre in the Veneto region and perhaps also in the whole North of Italy.

In the summer 2007 the geomorphologist Paolo Mozzi and his team took several areal photos of the site in several wavelengths of visible light and in near-infrared, with a resolution of half a meter. The remote sensing offered a much more clear image of the urban plan of Altino. In particular it confirmed the presence of an important theatre related activity, showing clearly both a roman theatre (north – west) and an odeion in front of it; outside the city walls also an amphitheatre was recognizable.

Thanks to the remote sensing several infrastructures are notable inside the walls: the Roman theatre, an Odeon, the Forum, several residential buildings. The city was probably crossed by two artificial canals linked with the Siloncello, the S. Maria canal and the Zero river.

Comparing the remote sensing image with an ortophoto experts determined the theatre's dimensions. The radius of the cavea was about 45 meters, while the radius of the orchestra was about 15 meters.

Since the lack of information of this case, we decided to create a graphic representation of the possible theatre architectural plan, trying to emphasize the different shapes and relations between the principal elements. By looking at the orchestra an interesting element emerges: a wall that crosses it. This may suggest the fact that the theatre was used in other ways after its building date, witnessing possible stratifications during the centuries.

We would like to end our presentation showing our scientific bulletin and its peculiarities. Because of the very few information about the theatre, not every field could have been properly filled and analysed in deep. The lack

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of information concerning the theatre makes it hard to give value to this activity, fully developed in the Roman Age. This is the reason why we would like to suggest a new museum set-up permitting everybody to understand and visualize this underground theatre. Nowadays there are 2 archaeological museums in Altino. Even though the new Archaeological Museum replaced the old one, not every find has been transferred. For instance, the new museum hosts the burial inscription PANTOMIMUS, while outside the old one there is the front decorated block previously mentioned. These two different collocations do not give the right value to the evidence of theatre life in Altino. Gathering all the finds related to this activity, together with a hypothetical 3D reconstruction of the site, may provide a proper set-up to appreciate the value of this cultural heritage. Concerning this topic we would like to show a couple of images of the exhibition that was held in Padua few months ago, where a 3d model of the Roman city of Altino was built.