



Greek and Roman Theatres in Mediterranean area International Seminar

Tuesday 11th June | Wednesday 12th June 2019
Palazzo Badoer, Aula Tafuri

Jacopo Barbon, Marco Bonotto, Allegra Sieni The Theater of Asolo

We are working on the Roman theatre of Asolo. The building is currently located in the historical centre of Asolo, in the botanical garden of a private house Villa Freya. The ruin current state of conservation is quite good: of the cavea the wall with which it concluded at the bottom and seven radial walls were highlighted. At the south-western corner of the complex there are traces of a sort of buttress, while blocks of brick from the stands were found for spectators. Of the frontescena wall only three quadrangular recesses remain for the heads of the beams that were to support the proscenium planking. Only a 1.1m wall of the hyposcenio is preserved, with three quadrangular recesses housing the beams that were to support the proscenium planking. The orchestra is one of the most degraded parts. Currently (June 2019), the building is accessible by reservation to visitors of the archeological area. It is partially covered by a structure made by wood. It is assumed that originally the theatre auditorium had a capacity of around 1000 seats or even 2000 if the upper part was built in wood. Today the total number of seats in the theatre cannot be defined as there are no limits linked to security restrictions. The number of places and people is decided directly by the owners of Villa Freya in which garden the theatre complex resides. Given the fragmentary state of conservation of the architectural decoration and considering that the recognized decorative motifs were used over a long period of time, it is difficult to formulate a precise dating, between I and III century A.D.

The area to the north of the stage structures was an important place, to the point of having a porch and a terracing to the valley constituted by powerful substructions. It therefore seems natural to imagine that this imposing structure, as well as the consequent arrangement of the upper space, were destined for a significant and certainly public function. It would not be excluded that what emerged from the excavations in the garden of Villa Freja is pertinent to the city's forensic square.

THE VENETIAN PHASE Thanks to the archaeological intervention it has been possible to bring to light part of the protohistoric evidences, datable around the middle of the second millennium BC. The most clearly legible and interpretable structural evidences came to light in the western sector of the site, where the remains of a structure are recognizable: there is the track made of yellow silt of an ancient wall connected to the dig of a wood pole. The limits of the structure were affected and, consequently, deductions on its morphology, orientation and dimensions are impossible, but maintenance seems to be accurate and iterated. Of particular interest is the presence of a votive deposit in a pit about 80 cm in diameter, sealed by the floor slab, connected to the seat of a pole.

THE ROMAN PHASE The Roman construction phase can be dated around the first century BC. As found by the excavations, the back wall of the theatre stage was subsequently built against the outside face of the southern part of the cryptoporticus. A channel about 30 cms wide was left between them to carry away the rainwater. The building was composed by the stage with its elaborate architectural backdrop (scaenae frons), the orchestra, and the cavea where the spectators set. The theatre was built against the hill slope to have a better orientation and to avoid that the sun disturbed the actors. The orchestra, that is badly preserved, was, perhaps, originally paved in opus sectile. The cavea was built on arched supports. It was surrounded on the south, east and west sides by rectangular porticoes divided by rows of pilasters running along the centreline. The angles probably had zig zag walls behind them to help retain the soil/earth filling. On the western side there were some tabernae; they faced on the street at the point it entered the town.

ABANDONMENT The site of the Roman theatre experienced a phase of agricultural use. The data currently available do not allow us to define precisely when this agrarian use began, but the stratigraphic situation leads us



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to believe that the area was not affected, after the abandonment of the Roman plant, by new building phases. There was no other uses of land than for agriculture or pasture until the second half of the nineteenth century. MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY PHASES The site did not have to undergo substantial transformations until the most recent stage of the theatre's life, which became a private garden-park for two adjacent properties (Villa Serena-Da-Riòs to the east, Villa Freya to the west). From the late nineteenth century began a gradual transformation into a garden of the area. The later interventions caused irreparable breakdowns to what of the theatre was still surviving in elevation. During the twentieth century, the Stark family (the owner of the site) destined this space of the garden for the construction of a tennis court and, probably, on this same occasion some Roman walls found in the nineteenth century archaeological excavations (managed by Scomazzetto) were destroyed.

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