

# Designing the *cavea* of the theatre at Stobi

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The long history of excavation of the theatre at Stobi has yielded much information about the chronology, construction and usage of the building, as well as about post-theatre occupation of the area.<sup>1</sup> Archaeological investigations in the 1970s and new excavations which began in 2009 have shown that construction of the theatre was initiated at the end of the 1st c. A.D. on the model of a western Roman theatre, as a building with a semicircular *cavea* and a scene building with an indented *scaenae frons* similar to the *Augusta Emerita* (Mérida) type.<sup>2</sup> Construction was then interrupted for a certain period for unknown reasons. In the first half of the 2nd c. A.D. it was finished according to a different concept, one that resembled the Roman theatres of Asia Minor. In its final appearance the building included a *cavea* that exceeds a semicircle, a high podium around the orchestra, open *prodoi*, and a rectilinear *scaenae frons* (figs. 1-2); in its final form it incorporated the *cavea* from the first phase, whereas the scene building was completely remodeled.<sup>3</sup>

Although the theatre is not fully excavated, there is enough information to permit a thorough analysis of its plan that can elucidate the design process. The present goal is to understand the geometry of the building and illustrate one of the possible methods of planning it. The method to be applied, which derives from analysis of the remains and the symmetry of the building, is simple and easily testable. The suggested plan is the ideal and should resemble the one which the architect had in mind but it should not be expected to display an absolute match with the actual state plan.<sup>4</sup> This approach allows one to discern potential mistakes and deviations which occurred as a result of the construction process, including the transfer of the plan to the chosen terrain. The design of the scene building is not treated in this paper since a detailed study of its features, based on the results of the investigations of the 1970s, is being prepared by E. R. Gebhard.

## The first phase

Presumably the architect started to develop a model according to the requirements of the benefactor, one that was compatible with the spatial characteristics and configuration of the chosen terrain. In the first phase, he chose a model typical of theatres in the Roman West<sup>5</sup> in which the *cavea* is semicircular, with vaulted corridors that give access to the

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1 The theatre has seen several archaeological campaigns, of which most important were the excavations between 1924 and 1928 by V. Saria ("Позориште у Стобима," *Годишњак музеја Јужне Србије* I [Скопље 1937]), those of 1970-80 by E. R. Gebhard ("The theater at Stobi: a summary," *Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi*, vol. III [Titov Veles 1981] 13-27; and "The *scaenae frons* in the theater at Stobi," *ibid.* 197-203), and those from 2009 onwards by the present author (G. Pavlovski, "The *cavea* of the theatre at Stobi — results from the excavations in 2009, 2010 and 2012," *Studies in the antiquities of Stobi* IV [Skopje 2018]).

2 E. R. Gebhard, "Discovery of the first theater at Stobi," *Folia Archaeologica Balkanica* II (Skopje 2012) 325-46.

3 Gebhard *ibid.*; Pavlovski (*supra* n.1).

4 Some reasons for mistakes and inconsistencies in Roman buildings are discussed by M. Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman architecture* (New Haven, CT 2000) 11-14. Ideal plans of the Zeus-Asclepius temple at Pergamon and the Verona amphitheatre, with the differences from their actual state, are illustrated *ibid.* 60-61.

5 F. Sear, *Roman theatres: an architectural study* (Oxford 2006) 24.