

The Roman odeion at Epidaurus

Klimis Aslanidis

Out of the more than 900 known ancient theatres, only 48 can be securely identified as roofed theatres or odeia. A full understanding of them first requires the detailed publication of individual monuments. Because many such sites have been rebuilt in modern times in order to host cultural events, we should pay particular attention to odeia which preserve the best evidence. The odeion at Epidaurus is one such, and constitutes a fairly typical example of a small Roman roofed theatre. It is a rather small building of limited aspirations but its spatial organization and its main features are clear. Although built in a much later period, its general shape is reminiscent of Hellenistic assembly-halls; to some extent this is the result of the fact that it was integrated within the peristyle court of a Hellenistic building. Through its successive phases it also reveals aspects of the history of the sanctuary of Asklepios.

The odeion was first studied by P. Kavvadias in an invaluable report¹ that preserves evidence since lost, including photographs taken immediately after its excavation that show it in a considerably better state than it is today (see figs. 2-3 and 7 below). His drawings comprise a plan of the whole building (fig. 1) which does, however, contain some minor errors, a fine plan (fig. 8 below) of the mosaic of the orchestra (which is now covered over), and two sections. Other scholars have discussed the building subsequently and have added some details.²

Description

Spatial organisation

The Odeion was erected within the peristyle court of a Hellenistic 'gymnasium' or banqueting hall³ of the late 4th c.⁴ after it had fallen, at least partially, into dereliction (figs. 1 and 4). The centre of the 'gymnasium' was occupied by a square court with a Doric colonnade surrounded by rooms of various sizes. The Roman odeion incorporated the whole of the N and W and part of the E colonnades of the court (fig. 1), using the stylobate of the earlier building (fig. 5) as a foundation for 3 of its 4 main walls, and re-using the columns of the peristyle (fig. 6a, c-d). Economy was doubtless the reason for erecting the odeion in this particular location. That would not have been possible if the Hellenistic building had not been destroyed or abandoned since the odeion completely changed its architectural design and re-used many of its architectural members for building its walls and buttresses.⁵ It is possible that the N and W wings of the Hellenistic building remained in use simultaneously with the odeion, as the pottery seems to suggest.⁶ R. A. Tomlinson suggested that perhaps only the peristyle roof had to be demolish-

- 1 P. Kavvadias, *To ιερὸν τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ ἐν Ἐπιδαύρῳ καὶ ἡ θεραπεία τῶν ἀσθενῶν* (Athens 1900) 150-54.
- 2 R. Meinel, *Das Odeion. Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden* (Frankfurt am Main 1980) 225-28; G. Lzenour, *Roofed theaters of classical antiquity* (New Haven 1992) 119-25; H. P. Isler in C. Rossetto and G. Pisani Sartorio, *Teatri greci e romani, alle origine del linguaggio rappresentato* (Rome 1994) vol. 2, 127-28; N. Faraklas, *Ἐπιδαυρία* (Ἀρχαίαις Ἑλληνικαῖς Πόλεις 12; Athens 1972) 71; R. A. Tomlinson, *Epidaurus* (Austin, TX 1983) 83; J. Delorme, *Gymnasion* (Paris 1960); R. Gmounès, *Le théâtre à gradins droits et l'odéon d'Argos* (Études Péloponnésiennes V, 1972); V. Kyriaki, L. Paleokrassa and K. Giote, "The Propylon of the Gymnasium," in *The Propylon of the "Gymnasium" and the Tholos in the Asclepion of Epidaurus* (Athens 1988) 21-34 and 44.
- 3 Kavvadias (supra n.1) 143-48 expressed the view that the building served athletic purposes, and this was followed by Delorme (supra n.2) 95-99, but the prevailing view today is that it was originally a banqueting-hall (Tomlinson (supra n.2) 78-84).
- 4 Kyriaki et al. (supra n.2) 23.
- 5 Kavvadias (supra n.1) 150; id., "Περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἐπιδαυρία ἀνασκαφῶν," *Prakt* 1904, 62; Kyriaki et al. (supra n.2) 44.
- 6 Kyriaki et al. (supra n.2) 32-33. Kavvadias (supra n.1) 148-49 claimed that the Propylon of this building