

The aqueduct at Aspendos and its inverted siphon

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1. Introduction

The ruins of Aspendos are among the most impressive that are preserved in Pamphylia, and none stand more elevated than the hydraulic towers of the aqueduct. Situated some 50 km east of Antalya about 12 km from the south coast, the Aspendos acropolis lies about 60 m above sea level, near the light green waters of the ancient Eurymedon river. It occupies an oval, flat-topped hill with steep slopes on all sides at some 30 m above the surrounding plains.¹ The mountains begin at c.1.5 km to the north. An extensive description and plan was published in 1890 by K. Lanckoronski.² Today the skyline of Aspendos is dominated by the remains of the façade of the nymphaeum (2nd-3rd c. A.D.) (fig. 1) and of the monumental entrance hall of the basilica, both towering some 15 m high. The Roman theatre (capacity 7500), built against the slopes of the E side of the acropolis, claims to be the best preserved theatre of antiquity,³ probably due to its use as palace by the Selçuks who carried out necessary repairs.⁴

The city, founded as a colony of the Argides who called it Estvedys, was already known as Aspendos by Thucydides and Xenophon.⁵ In 133 B.C. it came under Roman rule, and its heyday occurred during the 2nd and 3rd c. A.D., when extensive building projects were realized, including the aqueduct. By its location, Aspendos commanded the land-traffic that frequented the coastal road from Antalya to Side. On the *Tabula Peutingeriana* the road from Perge and Sillyon to the east crosses the Eurymedon near Aspendos, probably by means of a bridge from early times.⁶ The river was navigable up to Aspendos, making it an important inland port, as Strabo reports,⁷ from where salt, wheat, wool and oil were exported.⁸ Ships must have been able to pass the bridge to reach Aspendos. Across the river a road branched off on the E side of the Eurymedon, towards Selge and the Pisidian regions; for it the Romans constructed an impressive

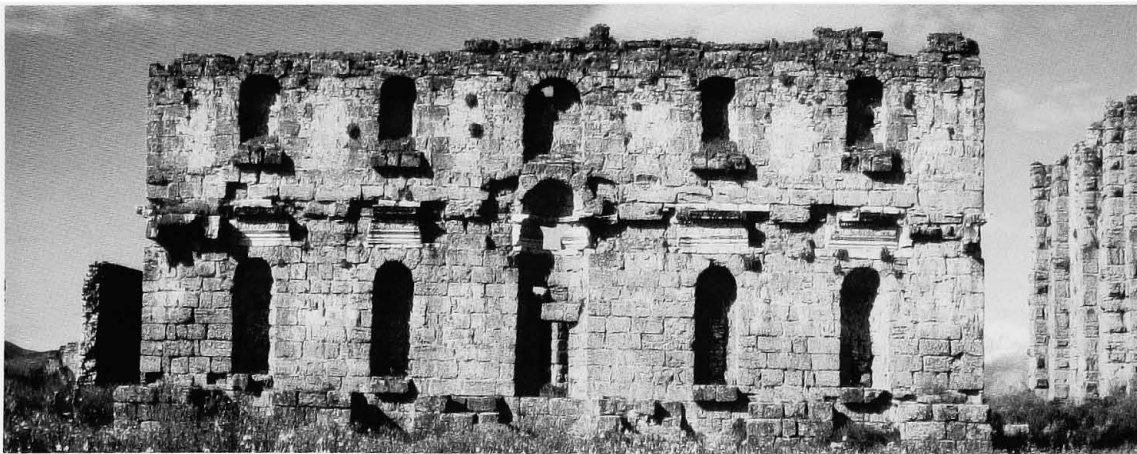


Fig. 1. Nymphaeum.

1 Ward-Perkins 1955, 115-23.

2 Lanckoronski 1890, 85-124.

3 Akurgal 1970, 334-35.

4 Wagner 1986, 178.

5 Lanckoronski 1890, 85.

6 A Seljuk bridge crosses the river 2 km south of the acropolis. It was built on the ruins of an earlier Roman bridge; see Grewe, Kessener and Piras 1999.

7 Strabo 15.4.2.

8 Pliny, *NH* 31.73.