

This is the first page only. On how to acquire the full article please click this link.

A new proposal for the restoration of the theatre at Ferento

Frank Sear

PATRIZIO PENSABENE, *IL TEATRO ROMANO DI FERENTO. ARCHITETTURA E DECORAZIONE SCULTOREA* (L'Erma di Bretschneider, Roma 1989). Pp. 211, 117 plates, 15 pages of plans and drawings, 79 fig. Lit. 250.000.

This handsomely produced work documents in considerable detail the important Roman theatre at Ferentium (Ferento) in northern Latium. The publication is particularly welcome because, although the theatre has been the subject of scholarly interest for some 500 years — Peruzzi, Sangallo and Serlio have all drawn its remains —, it has never been analysed in such detail. In 1901 Rossi Danielli excavated parts of the scene building and the orchestra and found much architectural sculpture. The first methodical excavations were conducted by the Soprintendenza in 1909; further excavations took place in 1925. As a result of these excavations it became clear that the theatre is Augustan (Pensabene dates it to the first two decades A.D.). The *scaena* was rebuilt in the Severan period and the niches adorned with a series of statues of the Muses and of the Severan family. Minor repairs to the theatre were made in the 4th c.

The book is well illustrated with 117 pages of photographs of high quality and 15 pages of plans, sections, elevations and reconstructions (unfortunately, none of the latter are fold-outs). The text is divided into a general and an analytical part. The first 3 chapters place the theatre in its urban context and describe its history from the Middle Ages to the present day. In the fourth chapter, which describes the theatre's structure and design, Pensabene unsuccessfully applies the design theory of Small.¹ This theory is invalid, as I have argued elsewhere,² although I was gratified to observe that the alternative method I have proposed works extremely well (see my fig.1).

The analytical part of the book deals in detail with the structure of the theatre, its sculptural and architectural decoration, and the inscriptions. The first chapter deals systematically with the various parts of the theatre, *cavea*, seating, orchestra, *pulpitum*, etc. In this section Pensabene attempts a reconstruction of the building. It is items 14 and 15, Pensabene's reconstruction of the *scaenae frons* and its columnar decoration, which I find most difficult to accept. I have had long and most cordial discussions with Prof. Pensabene and the architect, Ezio Mitchell, Director of the Centro di Catalogazione dell'Amministrazione Provinciale, on this matter, and my reservations about their reconstruction are offered in a spirit of friendship and goodwill.

Firstly, I am unhappy about the reconstruction of 4 columns on each of the 4 projecting podia which flank the 3 doorways in the *scaenae frons* (Tav.V). Pensabene has pointed out to me that his reconstruction is on the analogy of the theatre at Augusta Emerita (Mérida), where there are 4 columns in these positions.³ However, the effect at Ferento is too crowded and the inner pair of columns obstructs the niches. My examination of those podia which were sufficiently

1 D. B. Small, "Studies in Roman theater design," *AJA* 87 (1983) 55-68.

2 F. B. Sear, "Vitruvius and Roman theater design," *AJA* 94 (1990) 249-58.

3 One must remember that, although the theatre at Mérida is Augustan, the *columnatio* is certainly Flavian (J. Menéndez-Pidal Alvarez, "Algunas notas sobre la restauración y atención prestadas a los monumentos emeritenses," *Augusta Emerita* (Actas del simposio internacional conmemorativo del bimilenario de Mérida) [Madrid 1976] 206-11).