

# Students guide students to the ancient theaters of Epirus

## Cultural route of the ancient theaters of Epirus



## **Students guide students to the ancient theaters of Epirus**

### **Cultural route of the ancient theaters of Epirus**

The cultural route of the Ancient Theaters of Epirus includes 5 archeological sites, 344 km of Route and 2,500 years of history.

In particular, this route passes through:

- Ancient Theater of Dodoni.
- Ancient Theater and Bouleuterion (or Small Theater) of Kassopi.
- Ancient Theater and Conservatory of Nikopolis.
- Ancient Theater of Gitanes.
- Ancient Theaters of Amvrakia, the small theater of Amvrakia and the large theater of Amvrakia.

Four of these theaters are connected with the kingdom of Pyrrhus and one, the theater of Nikopolis with Octavian Augustus.

Four of them are located in cities which had at their time the role of a political, economic and religious center of a wider area, while the fifth, that of Dodoni, in the sanctuary of Zeus and of Dione.

They were places of mass gathering, for religious, political or recreational purposes. It is also noteworthy, that they express, with their architecture, in the most obvious way the democratic conception of life and the strong sense of community that characterized ancient life.

### **Ancient Theater of Dodoni**

It is the largest ancient theater of the cultural route of Epirus and is located in the narrow valley between Tomaros and Manoliasa, 22 km south of Ioannina. At the same time, it is one of the largest and best-preserved ancient Greek theaters, with a capacity of approximately 15,000-17,000 spectators. It was part of the sanctuary of Dodoni and as the visitor of the ancient world arrived from the south, it was the most prominent monument, with its curved surfaces and imposing retaining walls. The ancient theater and the performances that took place there were associated with the celebration of "Naia" (the Temples), a celebration in honor of "Naiu Dios" (Zeus of the Temple). The Greeks seem to have honored Zeus with performances and track tournaments by performing "Naia", probably every four years, which included naked (sports) races, dramatic tournaments (tragedy and comedy performances) and probably also music, equestrian and chariot races.

The theater was built at the beginning of the 3rd century BC, during the reign of Pyrrhus (297-272 BC) in order to reform the pan-Hellenic sanctuary and give it a monumental character.

In modern times, the monument was first excavated by archaeologist K. Karapanos, in 1875-1878. Later, the professor of archeology D. Evangelidis and S. Dakaris (1929-1932) explored the site and continued their excavation activity after the Second World War, contributing to the restoration of the theater.

Today the access is made through the Egnatia Odos. Moreover, in the summer months, the Dodoni Festival is held for the last five years, which includes events, which are hosted at the Ancient Theater and in other areas of Epirus with natural beauty. It should be noted that nowadays restoration work is being done on the monument.



Ancient Theater of Dodoni



The restoration works of the seats are obvious, they will gradually take on the color of the monument



### **Ancient theater of Kassopi (small or Vouleftirion)**

The Ancient Theater of Kassopi (small or Vouleftirio) is located at the Agora, on the east side of Kassopi and in contact with the main road that crossed the city. It is the first monument we see as soon as we enter the city, on the left. It dates back to the 3rd century BC. Its capacity is about 300-500 people. Probably this building, which is constructed in the type of Theater and has been considered as a small Theater or Conservatory of the city, was part of the political, administrative and religious center of the city. According to others, it served as a Vouleftirion, the meeting place of the Kassopians.

### **The Grand Theater of Kassopi**

The Kassopi Theater was built at the foot of the highest hill of the city, below the NW acropolis. The choice of orientation was not accidental as the spectators would enjoy in addition to the performances, the panoramic views to the Amvrakikos Gulf, the Ionian Sea and the island of Lefkada.

It was built in the 3rd century BC and had a capacity of about 2,500 people or according to some 6,000 people. It was used for theatrical performances and political assemblies. The impressive thing about this particular theater concerns its orchestra, which does not form a complete circle as was usual at that time, but a large semicircle.

The first experimental excavation at the site of Kassopi was made in 1951-52 by archaeologist Professor Sotirios Dakaris. Promotion and restoration projects are in progress.



The Grand Theater of Kassopi



3D Digital Representation

### **Large Ancient Theater of Amvrakia**

It was built, along with a smaller theater, when Pyrrhus moved the administrative center of the state from the hinterland to Amvrakia. Amvrakia prospered both economically and culturally during Pyrrhus reign. Nowadays the small theater of Amvrakia is the most popular of the two.

From the large Theater of Amvrakia few things came to light. Most of it is buried under the houses of modern Arta.



### **Small Ancient Theater of Amvrakia**

The so-called "small" theater of Amvrakia is the smallest of the ancient Greek theaters that have been discovered to date. It is located in the center of the ancient city. As shown by its general architectural form, it was built at the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd century BC, during the reign of Pyrrhus. Its role did not seem to be entertaining. Perhaps, minor theatrical and musical works were presented there, but mainly, assemblies were held. In the small Theater, the people of Amvrakia would discuss administrative and religious issues, everything that concerned the Great Epirus of King Pyrrhus.

Unlike most ancient Greek theaters, the small Theater of Amvrakia was not built on a natural hill, it stepped on an embanked slope.

Over time, the small Theater of Amvrakia was covered in turn by other buildings, Byzantine, perhaps, Ottoman and newer. It was brought to light accidentally by construction excavations, in 1976. The archaeological excavations were held by the archaeologist of the Ephorate Mr. Elias Andreou. With the works carried out in recent years, another important archaeological site will be created in the modern city of Arta.

Small Ancient  
Theater of Amvrakia  
in the modern city of Arta



The small theater of Amvrakia is today the most popular, in contrast to the big one that we know little about

### **Ancient theater of Nikopolis**

The ancient Theater of Nikopolis, in Proastio, north of the walled city, is an impressive building, built at the beginning of the 1st century. A.D. and it is kept in quite good condition. It is the first monument that the visitor notices when he comes to the area from the north. The monument has a southwest orientation with panoramic views to Nikopolis, the Amvrakikos Gulf and the Ionian Sea. Its construction was part of the building program of Octavian and is associated with the revival of Aktia. In fact, catalogs which have been found in the temple of Apollo, state that in the theater were held competitions of poets, sophists, comedians, tragedians, preachers, trumpeters, guitarists, phonologists, pipers and pantomimes. The monument is characterized by the peculiar combination of elements of Greek and Roman architecture.

In recent years, the monument has been restored.

### **Roman conservatory of Nikopolis**

The Roman conservatory, is one of the most important and best preserved monuments of Nikopolis. It is located in the center of the city, on the west side of the early Christian period wall, and borders the Roman forum. Speeches, literary and musical competitions, as well as theatrical performances were held there during the New Aktia, religious competitions held in honor of Apollo. The rest of the year it was probably used for political assemblies. It was built in the years of Augustus.

Today the monument has been completely excavated.



Ancient theater of Nikopolis



The Roman conservatory, one of the most important and best preserved monuments of Nikopolis, is a real architectural work of art



### **Ancient theater of Gitanes**

The ancient theater of Gitanes is located in Gitani of the Municipality of Filiates, in the prefecture of Thesprotia. The ancient theater was built in the most convenient location of the city of Gitanes, at the western foot of Vrisella mountain, on the rocky western slope of Gitan. It lies inside the hollow of the hill, outside the west side of the wall and facing the river Kalamas, from east to the west.

It is known today that the ancient theater was built in the middle of the 3rd century BC, a time of increased building activity in Epirus, during the reign of Pyrrhus, and a period of flowering of Gitanes, but was used sparingly after the Roman conquest (168/167 BC.). The Roman legions and Emilius Pavlos destroyed Gitanes along with the theater, as well as many cities in Epirus. Also, the theater was later damaged by an earthquake, which caused shifting of the seats and embankments. In addition, in the later years, the overflow of Kalamas and the grazing of herds within the archaeological site caused additional damage.

The excavations started only in 1996 by Mrs. K. Preka - Alexandri and until today only a part of the theater has been excavated. Today, after more than two thousand years, the theater comes to life again by hosting theatrical performances or modern performances of ancient theater plays during the summer, as is the case in other theaters of Epirus, e.g. ancient theater of Dodoni, ancient theater of Kassopi, ancient theater of Amvrakia, Nikopolis theater.



Ancient theater of Gitanes



The engraved name inscriptions that exist in these stone seats, give this theater a personal character and a different connection of the past with the present.

### **Bibliographic and Electronic Sources**

<https://diazoma.gr/>

<http://odysseus.culture.gr/>

<https://ancienttheatersofepirus.gr/>

<https://epirusforallseasons.gr/>

<https://el.wikipedia.org>

V. Lambrinoudakis (2009). We and the ancient places of viewing and listening in collective volume "Diazoma" ,citizens' movement for the promotion of ancient theaters, Diazoma Publications

The Guide to the cultural route of the Ancient Theaters of Epirus was developed as part of the framework of the educational programs of School Activities, during the school year 2021-2022 and in particular in the program of Cultural Issues: "The Cultural Routes of our place. Past and Present".

At the same time, cooperation was developed with the citizens' movement DIAZOMA and the educational action "Adoption of ancient theaters. Students guide students to the ancient theaters ", which aims to highlight the ancient places of viewing and listening.

Responsible Teachers: Amorgianioti Irini PE02, Poullos Christos PE81