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The Issue of Time and Reasons of the Theater of Chersonessus Decadence

*Problem czasu i przyczyny
dekadencji teatru w Chersoneszie*

ABSTRACT

Up to the 6th century the municipal objects providing entertainment in Byzantine Empire were the theaters. Analyzing the archeological reports and publications by O.I. Dombrovsky who discovered the theater of Chersonessus in 1954 and taking into account the historic situation in the 4th century, we come to the conclusion that the theater could not discontinue its functioning only as a result of Christianity introduction. The reasons of its vanishing were possibly the inner crisis of dramatic arts itself that happened in the 4th century as well as the administrative reform. Other than that, stratigraphic analysis of the architectural complex revealed that the most part of the theater probably had not been reconstructed during the 4th century and up to the 6th century. The performances here had been probably different at that time. And in Chersonessus the Christian temples were built on the site of the theater only in the 6th century, like in the other Byzantine cities.

Key words: Chersonessus theater, Byzantium, Early Middle Ages, administrative reform, Christianity

Byzantine theater as “a form of scenic play and performance”¹ having evolved from costume pageants to mime performances and pantomimes probably ceased to exist in the 6th century², although it should be noted that

¹ П.Е. Михалицин, *От Мельпомены ко Христу: судьба античного театра в Византии*, in: «Византийская мозаика»: Сборник публичных лекций Эллино-византийского лектория при Свято-Пантелеимоновском храме, Харьков 2015, вр. 3, р. 183.

² Ш. Руэше, *Развлечение, театр, ипподром*, in: *Оксфордское руководство по византистике*, ред. Э. Джеффрис, Дж. Хэлдон, Р. Кормак, Харьков 2015, вр. 2, pp. 710–716.

the issue remains controversial in the international Byzantine studies³. On the one hand, the traditional attitude of church had an influence on that. For example, the Council in Trullo held in 691 forbade mime performances⁴. But the decree of Justinian I which repealed public financing of theater performances was much more significant cause of theater decadence⁵. According to Walter Puchner⁶, a competent researcher of the Byzantine theater, at this very time the theater buildings started to be a source of *spolia* for new and renovated public buildings and a material for fortifications⁷. However, the researcher notes that such renovations were not recorded and could not be dated precisely. The decadence of the theater in the 4th–5th centuries had been a common viewpoint in archeology for a long time, and it was generally accepted that by this time theater buildings mostly vanished from the cities. In this regard W. Puchner and C. Rueshe indicate that “It is necessary to research the evolution of such buildings in the Early Middle Ages”⁸.

It is possible to trace the evolution by the example of the Chersonessus theater⁹. It was discovered in 1954 in the south-eastern part of the

³ Β. Πούχνερ, *Το Βυζαντινό θέατρο*, Athens 1984, pp. 13–94; G. Piana *The Byzantine Theater*, *Speculum Speculum. A Journal of Medieval Studies* 1936, 11/2, pp. 171–211; W. Tydeman *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1979, p. 35; W. Ruth, *Dancers and Demons; Performance in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2008, p. 135.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 710–716.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 710–716.

⁶ W. Puchner, *Acting in the Byzantine Theatre: Evidence and Problems*, in: *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, ed. P. Easterling, E. Hall, Cambridge 2002, p. 24.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 710–716.

⁸ Ш. Руэше, *op. cit.*, p. 714.

⁹ О.И. Домбровский, *Отчет о раскопках в Херсонесе в 1954 г. на участке «храма с ковчегом»*, in: *Архив НЗХТ*, d. 702, l. 6, 10; О.И. Домбровский, *Раскопки античного театра в Херсонесе*, „Археология” 1957, 10, pp. 94–101; О.И. Домбровский *Античный театр в Херсонесе (раскопки 1954–1958 гг.)* „Сообщения Херсонесского музея” 1961, 1, pp. 29–35; О.И. Домбровский, Е.А. Паршиной, *О раннесредневековой застройке территории античного театра*, „Сообщения Херсонесского музея” 1961, 1, pp. 36–42; О.И. Домбровский, Е.А. Паршиной, *Архитектурные детали античного Херсонеса* „Сообщения Херсонесского музея” 1961, 2, pp. 80–89; О.И. Домбровский, А.А. Зедгендзе, О.А. Махневой, *Раскопки античного театра в Херсонесе*, АО 1973, pp. 279–280; О.И. Домбровский, *Раскопки античного театра в Херсоне в 1970 г.*, in: *Тезисы докладов Крымской научной конференции, посвященной итогам полевых археологических исследований в 1970 г. в СССР*, Тбилиси 1971, pp. 164–165; О.И. Домбровский, *Раскопки античного театра в Херсонесе*, АО 1973, pp. 279–280; О.И. Домбровский, О.А. Махнева, Е.А. Паршина, В.А. Сидоренко, *Отчет о работах Херсонесского отряда Крымской комплексной экспедиции в 1975 году*, in: *Архив НЗХТ*, d. 1886/1, l. 2–3; О.И. Домбровский, Е.А. Паршина, В.А. Сидоренко, *Раскопки на участке античного театра в Херсонесе*, АО 1979, p. 291; О.И. Домбровский, *Раскопки античного театра в Херсонесе*

site of ancient settlement under the ruins of “Temple with ark” (№ 19) located to the north of the city gates¹⁰. The existence of the theater confirms that construction activity in the ancient Chersonessus was planned and disproves the supposition of lower level of municipal life in the city. The theater functioned from the end of the 3rd / the beginning of the 2nd century BC to the middle of the 4th century AD, according to the first publication by O. Dombrovsky, and the dates had not been changed during forty years of the site research. While the date of founding and reconstruction of the theater building became rhetoric¹¹, the time and reasons of its decadence remained a historical cliché¹²: “From the middle of the 4th century after declaration of Christianity as an official religion the theater was abolished”¹³. Soon the architectural complex became a source of construction material. *Theatron* possibly suffered more than other parts, but it was not reconstructed as dramatically as *parodos*, *proskenion* and *skene* which were used as housing and rebuilt many times¹⁴. There are no arguments confirming such usage of the theater building and the date of its collapse in any article of O. Dombrovsky. V. Kadeev noted this problem and mentioned that “more and more of new dates of the theater founding and reconstruction are being adduced in the publications on the excavations without any evidence or measuring”¹⁵.

The newest research of the theater site made it possible to correct the dating of the medieval buildings: thus, “Temple with ark”¹⁶ that had been dated by O. Dombrovsky to the 10th century “and possibly later” actually

АО 1974, р. 272; О.И. Домбровский, *Раскопки античного театра в Херсонесе в 1970–1971 гг.*, in: XV Научова конференція Інституту археології АН УСРС, присвячена 50-річчю утворення СРСР: Тез. докл., Одеса 1972, р. 240; О.И. Домбровский, *Стратиграфические наблюдения на участке раскопок античного театра в Херсонесе*, in: *Новейшие открытия советских археологов: Тез. Докл. сз. 2*, Киев 1975, pp. 74–75; О.И. Домбровский, *Средневековое купольное здание Судакской крепости*. „Археология Крыма” 1997, 2, pp. 125–129; О.И. Домбровский, *Работы на участке Херсонесского театра в 1991–1994 гг.* „Археологические исследования в Крыму” 1997; О.И. Домбровский, *Об одном из декоративных рельефов херсонесского античного театра* „Археология Крыма” 1997, 1, pp. 35–42;

¹⁰ В.И. Кадеев, *Херсонес Таврический. Быт и культура (I–III вв. н. э.)*, Харьков 1996, pp. 5–35.

¹¹ А.В. Буйских, *Пространственное развитие Херсонеса Таврического в античную эпоху*, „Материалы по археологии, истории и этнографии Таврии” 2008, Supplementum, 5, pp. 135–138.

¹² О.И. Домбровский, *Античный театр в Херсонесе*, р. 29; О.И. Домбровский, Е.А. Паршиной, *О раннесредневековой застройке*; *ibidem*, р. 37.

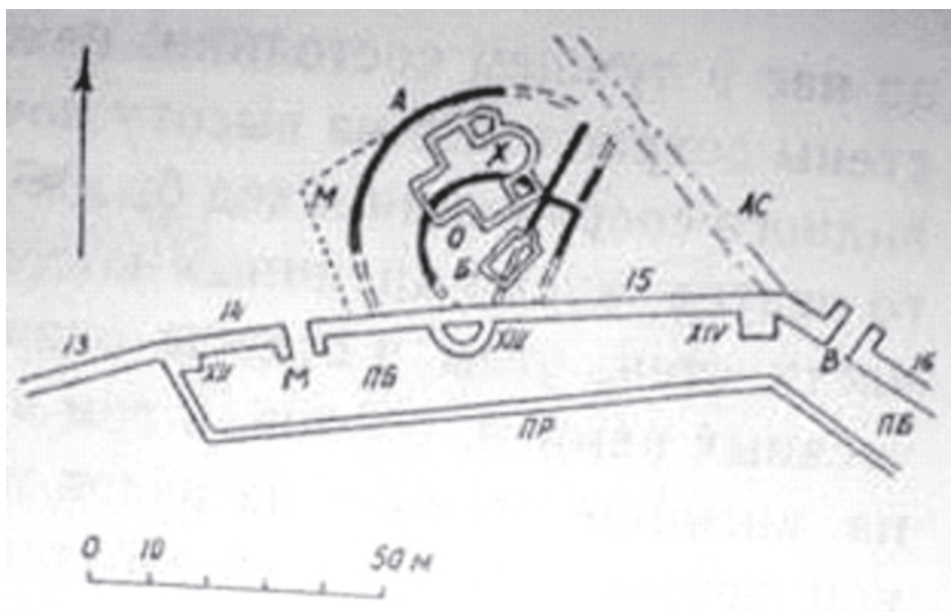
¹³ О.И. Домбровский *Античный театр в Херсонесе*, р. 36.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, р. 36.

¹⁵ В.И. Кадеев, *op. cit.*, р. 36.

¹⁶ О.И. Домбровский, Е. А. Паршиной, *О раннесредневековой застройке*, р. 40.

belongs to the 6th century, the temple of 1958 was also dated by researches to the 6th century¹⁷. According to this the issue of time and reasons of the theater decadence and deconstruction, together with the usage of its territory in the Early Middle Ages also should be reconsidered (Pic. 1–2).



Pic. 1. Location of the cross-shaped temple № 19 and “Temple 1958” on the site of the Antique theater at the South defensive wall: 13–16 – numbers of curtains of the defensive wall; XII–XIV – numbers of battle towers; ПП – proteichisma; ПБ – peribolos; Б – antique gates; АС – possibly the track of the antique wall (not discovered); X – “Temple with ark” (№ 19); Б – temple discovered in 1958; А – the amphilema; О – the orchestra; М – children’s burials (by Сорочан С.Б. *Византийский Херсон (вторая половина VI – первая половина X вв.) Очерки истории и культуры*, Харьков 2005, fig. 279)

Analysis of legislative and narrative sources of the epoch revealed that strengthening of Christianity as a legalized and subsequently dominating religion could hardly result in the vanishing of the theatres. On the contrary, the theater as an architect construction was protected by the law as “a pride” and “an ornament of the city”, the material embodiment of the Roman civilization superiority over the barbarian world: “Prohibiting the pagan sacrifices we nevertheless command to protect the public buildings and its decorations. And those who try to ravage them should not

¹⁷ С.Б. Сорочан, *Византийский Херсон (вторая половина VI – первая половина X вв.) Очерки истории и культуры*, Харьков 2005, p. 874.

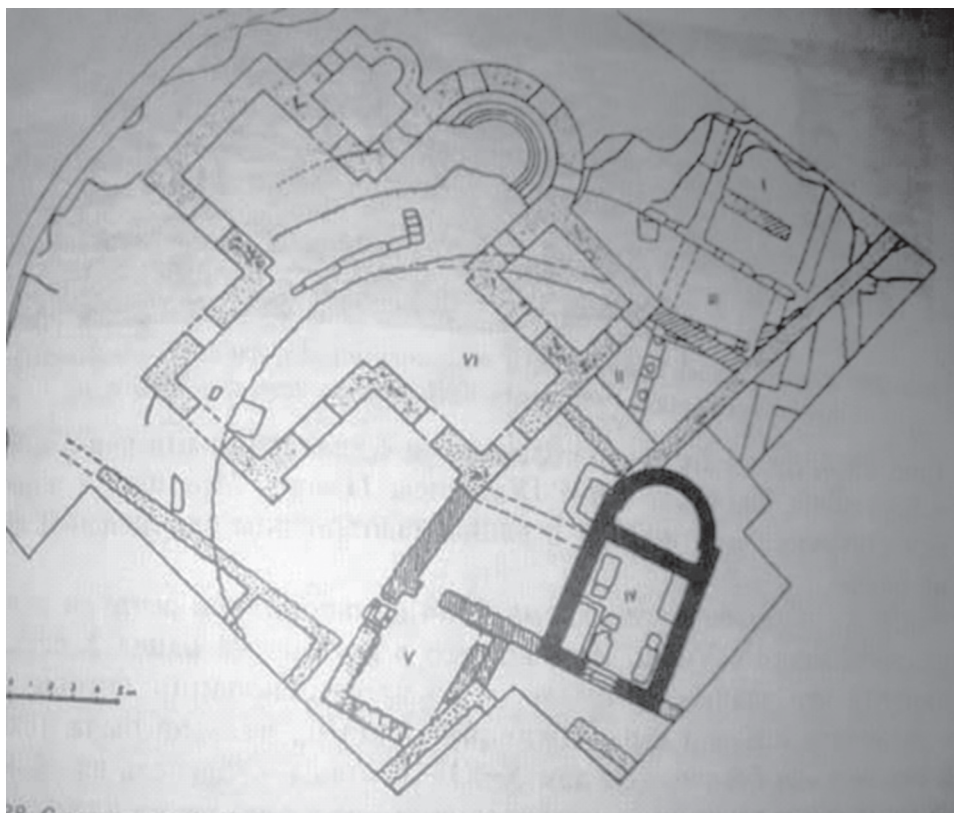


Fig. 2. General location plan of sacral constructions on the site of the antique theater. I – left parodos of the theater; IV – “Temple 1958”; V – 8–10th c. house; VI – temple № 19 (by О.И. Домбровский, Е.А. Паршиной, *О раннесредневековой застройке территории античного театра*, „Сообщения Херсонесского музея” 1961, 1, fig. 2)

be deceived – even if they provide any rescript or law act justifying their actions they do not have a right to act like this” (Codex Theodosianus. 16.10.15; 396)¹⁸.

The performances were protected by the same *Codex Theodosianus*. At any case, the forms theatrical performances took by the 4th century were clearly determined: “...nevertheless the festive gatherings of people that bring joy to everyone should not be scattered. So we decree: avoiding sacrifices and superstitions that should be condemned in every possible

¹⁸ Кодекс Феодосия «О язычниках, жертвоприношениях и храмах», „Научные ведомости Белгородского государственного университета” 2013, 15/27, pp. 38–47; A.H. Jones, J.R. Martindale, J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Volume I. A.D. 260–395*, Cambridge 1971, Maximus 48.

way, to arrange entertainments according to the old customs and take part in holiday feasts if that would be the wish of the people" (CTh.16.10.17, 399 r.). It is significant that we could not find the examples of theaters buildings destroyed by the authorities for the sake of the new religion. On the contrary, theaters, although seldom, are mentioned as an object of *Justinian I (483–565)* reconstruction activities, though later he repealed its financing. Moreover, *Procopius*¹⁹ (500–565) (De aed. 2.10.22) informs of reconstruction of the Antioch theater on the state cost, and only much later *John Malalas*²⁰ (491–578) (Malal. 18) reports about performances cessation. The new theater was built in the "exemplary" Justiniapol in the 6th century²¹ (Malal. 18). Theatrical performances in Thessaloniki in the 7th century are mentioned in the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius*²².

To sum up, there are no reasons to think that the theater of Chersonesus ceased functioning as a result of Christianization and it happened in the 4th century. As it is known, complicated process of Christianization in the city met with strong opposition of the Chersonesus bishops and local "Hellenistic" people²³. We could only take the liberty to presume that Christianity was approved in the city no earlier than the end of the 4th century after the arrival of bishop Kapiton with the empire war forces²⁴, but not in the middle of the 4th century.

It is more realistic to correlate the reason of theater decadence with the crisis of dramatic art itself in Late Antiquity. By the time of Christianization of the Roman Empire dramatic genres were in notably "lethargic" state. With the downfall of the Greek polis theatrical performances naturally lose their importance. In the second half of the 4th century Julian the Apostate and rhetorician Libanius, the prominent intellectuals of pagan-

¹⁹ *Procopii Caesariensis. Opera omnia*, vol. 1–4, ed. J. Hauray, G. Wirth, Leipzig 1962–1965.

²⁰ *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, ed. J. Thurn, in: *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 35, Berlin–New York 2000.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Чудеса св. Димитрия Солунского, in: *Свод древнейших письменных известий о славянах*, Москва 1995, р. 151.

²³ В.М. Зубарь, А.И. Хворостяный, *От язычества к христианству. Начальный этап проникновения и утверждения христианства на юге Украины (вторая половина III – первая половина VI в.)*, Киев 2000, р. 180; М.И. Золотарев, В.В. Хопаев, *Херсонесские святыни*, Севастополь, 2002, pp. 15–21; И.А. Завадская *Христианизация ранневизантийского Херсонеса (IV–VI вв.)* „Материалы по археологии, истории и этнографии Таврии” 2004, вр. 10, pp. 410–411; К. Цукерман, *Епископы и гарнизон Херсона в IV веке*, „Материалы по археологии, истории и этнографии Таврии” 1994, 4, pp. 545–561; С.Б. Сорочан, В.М. Зубарь, Л.В. Марченко, *Жизнь и гибель Херсонеса*, Харьков 2000, р. 151.

²⁴ *Синаксарное житие. Грузинское Житие епископов Херсонских*, in: *Нартекс. Byzantina Ucrainensis*, Харьков 2012, t. 1, р. 100.

ism, openly blame the modern theater for its degeneration and blunt immorality²⁵. The classic performances of partly sacral nature were replaced by primitive mimes or gladiator fights. S. Averintsev pointed that “hostile attitude towards theater from such a zealous pagans as Julian and Aelius Aristides is the most important evidence of the fact that the internal structure of the old Greek culture should have been reborn not only because of the outside pressure but on its own logic”²⁶.

Not everyone shared the view of the majority who considered the new forms of theatric performance as decadence: the apology of mimes in the “Speech for those who reform life in the theater” by rhetorician Choricus Gazaenus (the 6th century) confirms that²⁷. But still it is possible to affirm that at the period of Christianization of Roman Empire the antique theater was undergoing the reformation of its content, at the same time creating the premises for the new genres of dramatic art which demanded the new architectural forms²⁸.

The reason of the theater of Chersonessus decadence could also be seen in the reformation of the municipal government in the 4th century. As a result new buildings construction and old public buildings restoration were reduced²⁹. Formerly every city financed such works from its own budget which consisted of municipal taxes and gain on municipal possessions granted or inherited from citizens. Construction and maintaining of municipal building was financed by noble citizens – bouleuts³⁰. In the 4th century a part of municipal lands and funds was confiscated and placed at the disposal of empire officials³¹. Bouleuts of some cities move to prestigious Constantinople³².

“Lives of the bishops of Cherson” reflects the weakening of politi-

²⁵ П.Е. Михалицин, *op. cit.*, 3, pp. 193–194.

²⁶ С.С. Аверинцев, *Византийские эксперименты с жанровой формой классической греческой трагедии*, in: *Проблемы поэтики и истории литературы: (к 75-летию со дня рождения и 50-летию научной деятельности М. М. Бахтина): сборник статей*, Саранск 1973, pp. 255–270.

²⁷ П.Е. Михалицин, *op. cit.*, pp. 193–194.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ A. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, Oxford 1964, p. 757; J. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford 1972, p. 256.

³⁰ A. Levin, *Studi sulla città imperiale romana nell'Oriente tardoantico*, Como 1991, p. 134.

³¹ L. Di Segni, *The Involvement of Local, Municipal and Provincial Authorities in Urban Building in Late Antique Palestine and Arabia*, “*Journal of Roman Archaeology*” 1995, 14, p. 23, 317; H. Saradi, *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century: Literary Images and Historical Reality*, Athens 2006, p. 9, 174.

³² *Ibidem*.

cal and economic influence of municipal aristocracy in Chersonessus in the 4th century. The so-called “Manuscript 296” narrates about the exile of “five hundred men” from the city and confiscation of their lands and property because of religious fight³³. As a result of the same process throughout the empire many municipal buildings were abandoned and doomed to desolation. Soon they were replaced with housing or business buildings³⁴.

Notable is the fact that “squalid dwellings” appeared on the place of many municipal buildings³⁵. According to H. Saradi, appearance of the poor buildings on the place of municipal constructions was not a spontaneous process, at the beginning it was governed by the state and city councils³⁶. Influential members of city curia or state officials purchased emptied buildings at a low cost or illegally and later sold or rented it to many people³⁷. The same probably happened in Carthago Spartaria³⁸ and some other Byzantine cities³⁹.

Exactly the same process we could probably see in Chersonessus. Possibly, the chronology of reconstruction would be the following. After cessation of theatrical performances in the 4th century the site started to be built on in the 5th–6th centuries: “At first miserable housing appeared here, and their constructors tried to use the ruins of the theater. The oldest building was the stone hut of the 5th–6th centuries with the earthen floor and the hearth that was attached to the remains of the theater belonged to the 2nd–4th century. The layings of Late Antiquity was sort of built into the construction of the Early Middle Ages”⁴⁰. According to the published stratigraphic sections, only the left *parodos* and part of the *proskenion* were rebuilt into the housing in the Early Middle Ages. Theatron, orchestra, part of proskenion and right parodos remained unreconstructed and even not decomposed for spolias⁴¹.

Stones from the deconstructed theater, parts of antique pillars, blocks with rust were used in the “Temple with ark”: lower parts of its walls, cor-

³³ Руконисъ 296, in: *Нартекс. Byzantina Ucrainensis*, Харьков 2012, т. 1, р. 39.

³⁴ H. Saradi, *op. cit.*, pp. 188–207.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ J. Sánchez, *Carthago Spartaria, una ciudad hispana bajo el dominio de los milites romani*, in: *Recópolis y la ciudad en la época visigoda*, Alcalá de Henares 2008, pp. 338–362.

³⁹ J. Quiroga, *Early Byzantine Urban Landscapes in the Southwest and Southeast Mediterranean*, in: *International Congress of Byzantine Studies Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies: plenary papers: Belgrade, 22–27 August, 2016*, ed. S. Marjanović-Dušanić, Belgrade 2016, pp. 80–81.

⁴⁰ О.И. Домбровский, Е.А. Паршиной, *О раннесредневековой застройке*, р. 37.

⁴¹ О.И. Домбровский, *Античный театр в Херсонесе*, р. 34.

ners and slopes were constructed out of big well hewn stones and blocks including slabs of the theatron benches⁴². At the beginning the cross-shaped temple was circled with the fence – *peribolos*; the blank wall of *amphilema* at the back of the theatron had been located 2 meters to the north from the new temple and was used as the fence⁴³.

Thus, the fence of the temple was built above the cistern for fish salting; its earth backfill contents the material of the first centuries AD, excluding the part of the frescos with the remains of a Christian text⁴⁴. 94 particular glass stems of shifter-like vessels were found in the second cistern; their dating makes it possible to conclude that the cistern was filled up no earlier than the 6th century as a result of leveling the plot of land for the new construction⁴⁵. The north room – the baptistery – and the north part of the altar had been built on the foundation carved in the preliminarily planed natural rock; the other parts laid on the deep foundations in the trenches made in the leveling backfill with the material of the Early Byzantine time that covered the orchestra of the antique theater and was correspondent to the relief⁴⁶.

Stratigraphic analysis of the plot under the temple of 1958 testified that the temple was constructed on the site of *proskenion* – on the *skene* with the cellar of the first centuries and partly with use of their materials. For the temple construction some small older houses and the nearby five cisterns for fish salting “that were built no earlier than the second part of the 4th century” were leveled⁴⁷. It is displayed on the excavation plan that the *thymele* (altar) of the antique *theater orchestra* had been located under the temple foundation on the opposite of its altar⁴⁸.

The pit in the corner between the foundation of the 1958 temple apse and the edge of the *proskenion* pylon that goes under the apse foundation relieved the pithoses with the remains of salted fish, charcoal, tile and other material of housing of the 4th–6th centuries⁴⁹, as well as the remains of the foundation of a post, possibly belonged to a house, and construction waste⁵⁰. Backfill under the temple also contains the material of the end of

⁴² С.Б. Сорочан, *Бани византийского Херсона (VI–X вв.)*, „Древности” Харьков 2005, pp. 861–862.

⁴³ О.И. Домбровский, *Отчет о раскопках в Херсонесе*.

⁴⁴ С.Б. Сорочан, *Византийский Херсон*, pp. 867–868.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 873.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Отчет о раскопках в Херсонесе на участке античного театра и храма с ковчегом в 1970 г.*, in: *Архив НЗХТ*, d. 1411/ 1, l. 31, 38.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

the 5th–6th centuries. Materials of the same period were found under the layer of stone dust and mortar of 0.2 m width between the “Temple with ark” and 1958 temple⁵¹.

Excavations of the check layer in 1973 revealed that the latest finds were red glazed ceramics of “Late Roman C” type as well as the variants F and G that had existed up to *Constans II* rule (641–664)⁵². Therefore the *orchestra of the theater* was finally leveled not earlier than the end of the 6th century. After the porch of the temple 19 was removed, two spits of earth with material of 6th–8th centuries were dismantled⁵³. The roof of the skene collapsed in the same period; some construction elements of the skene were thrown in its cellar so that “heap of rocks covered the ruins, razed them and the theater site became the ground on which construction of Middle Ages started”⁵⁴.

Thus, the mixed 4th–6th century’s strata and the remained intact main construction elements of the theater make possible to assume that in the 6th century the remained part of the theater was covered with construction waste from the nearby ruins after the row of earthquakes of the 6th century. Therefore most part of the theater remained open and relatively intact from the 4th to the 6th century. With all the data as yet known it is impossible to say what had been the use of the theater, whether the mime or vagrant artists performances, or publics meetings, or festivals had taken place here. But it is also impossible to conclude that there had been an ugly dump in the traditionally significant cultural and public place visible to everyone who entered the city through the main city gates.

Excavations of the east *temenos* and *big agora* of Chersonesus revealed succession of sacral and public places even at times of total domination of Christian sacral complexes of the 6th–10th century. The cross-shaped “Temple with ark” itself, evidently constructed as a martyrrium on the spot of the theater with use of its spolia could be seen as a symbol of victory of the new Christian world over the pagan “idol plays”. It would not be relevant on an abandoned and forgotten site.

So, reconstruction of functioning of the theater site from the 4th to the 6th centuries could be seen as following. The theater of Chersonesus

⁵¹ Отчет о раскопках на участке античного театра в Херсонесе в 1971 г., in: Архив НЗХТ d. 1505/1, l. 9–10, 13, 45.

⁵² К.К. Орлов, Раскопки между «храмом 1958 г.» и «храмом 1897 г.», in: Отчет о раскопках на участке античного театра в Херсонесе в 1973–1974 гг. Архив НЗХТ, d. 1682/1, l. 1–12.

⁵³ О.И. Домбровский, О.А. Махнева, Е.А. Паршина, В.А. Сидоренко, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Отчет об археологических исследованиях «театрального участка» Херсонеса в 1989 году, in: Архив НЗХТ, d. 2933/1, l. 144.

continued functioning from the end of the 4th century to the 6th century, though the theatrical content had changed. At the end of the 5th century, when the fortification structures were reconstructed after the earthquakes as it noted in the inscription of *emperor Zeno (425–491)*, left parodos and a part of proskenion could be ruined and housing or domestic building was erected here and existed until the 6th century. Then, the residual architectural construction of the theater could exist from the end of the 5th to the 6th century up to the official repeal of financing by Justinian I and after that in the 6th century it collapsed, or, more precisely, began living a new life, as the most of Byzantine theaters.

In the similar way the theater site was reconstructed in Priene⁵⁵, Athens⁵⁶, Side⁵⁷ and Nicaea⁵⁸. The special attention is drawn to the architectural plot in Priene and Athens (Pic. 3–4). K. Bowes notes that in both cities the east parodos were reconstructed to the chapels of martyriums similar to the one in the “Temple 1958” in Chersonessus which was built on the site of theater proskenion and skene in the 6th century. There were no archeological or text proofs that the chapels had been dedicated to the cult of martyrs.⁵⁹ They were probably the private funeral chapels built for a member of urban elite and his family – which indirectly confirms the assumption that parts of Antique theater were privatized by the city elites. In Priene and Athens the entrance to the chapel was built not through the next street which would be more convenient but through the orchestra, in Durres the entrance was made through the arena as in the temple of 1958. In all three cases the circles of seats were the amazing view for any visitor of the chapel⁶⁰. According to K. Bowes, this deviation from expediency could be the key to their meaning. The silent rows of seats played the role of witnesses of the aristocratic families’ memory which gave the new mnemonic meaning to the theater site⁶¹.

In general, having analyzed more than twenty theater buildings in the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages in different corners of the By-

⁵⁵ T. Wiegand, H. Schrader, *Priene: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1895–1898*, Berlin 1904, pp. 478–479; A. Gerkan, *Das Theater von Priene*, Munich–Berlin–Leipzig 1921.

⁵⁶ J. Travlos, *Ἡ παλαιοχρῆστιανικὴ βασιλικὴ τοῦ Διονυσιακοῦ θεάτρου*, in *Αρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερὶς* 2, 1953–1954, fig. 2.

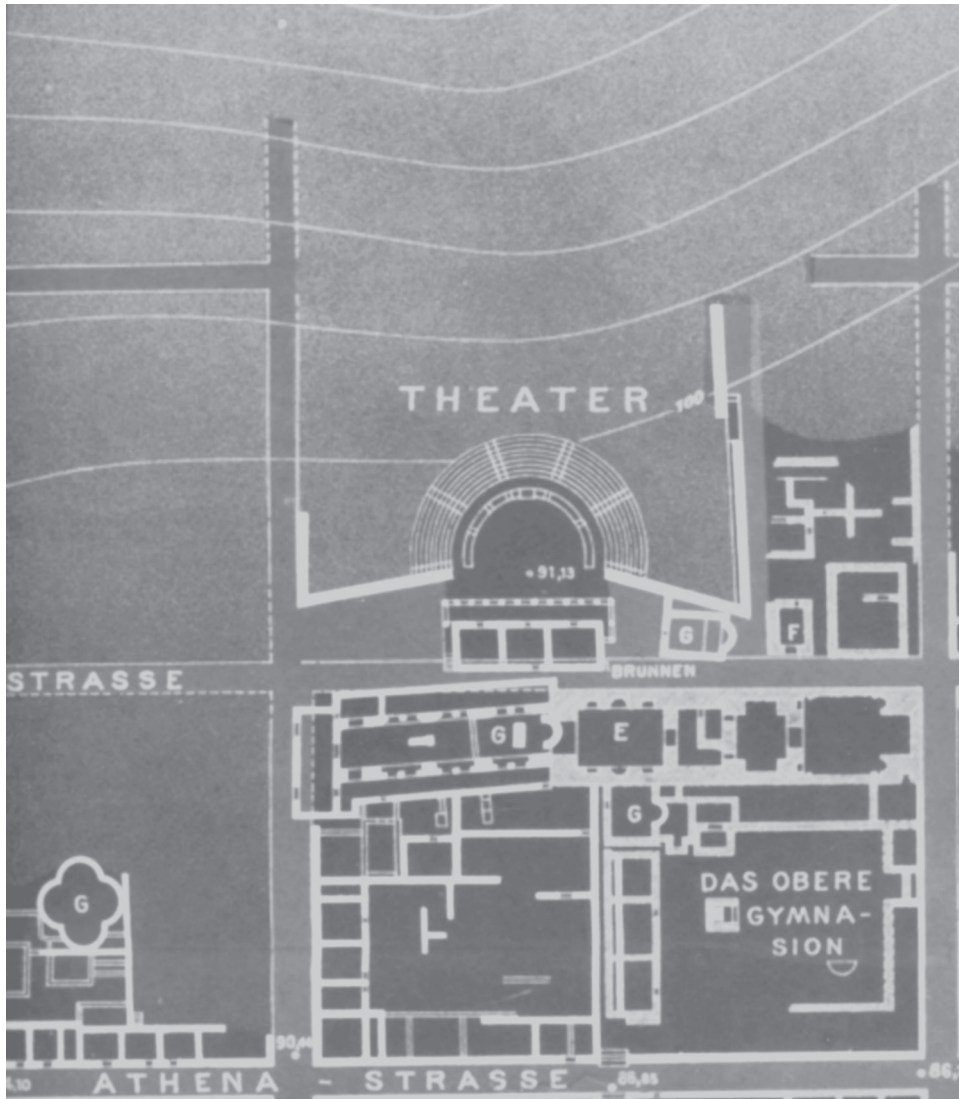
⁵⁷ M. Mansel, *Side. 1947–1966 yılları kazıları ve araştırmalarının sonuçları*, Ankara 1978.

⁵⁸ U. Peschlow, *The Churches of Nicea/Iznik, in Iznik through the Ages*, Istanbul 2004.

⁵⁹ K. Bowes, *Christians in the Amphitheater? The «Christianization» of Spectacle Buildings and Martyrial Memory*, „Mélanges de l’École française de Rome – Moyen Âge” 2014, 126/1, pp. 13–16.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.



Pic. 3. City plan, Priene, showing theater with associated chapel. Christian basilica lies to the south (by T. Wiegand, H. Schrader, *Priene: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1895–1898*, Berlin 1904, fig. 598)

zantine Empire, K. Bowes came to the conclusion that the reconstruction was connected with Christianization only in three cases⁶². Her studies of hippodrome arenas and amphitheaters in Asia Minor and Palestine confirm that the sacral constructions and theatrical performances there could

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 5.

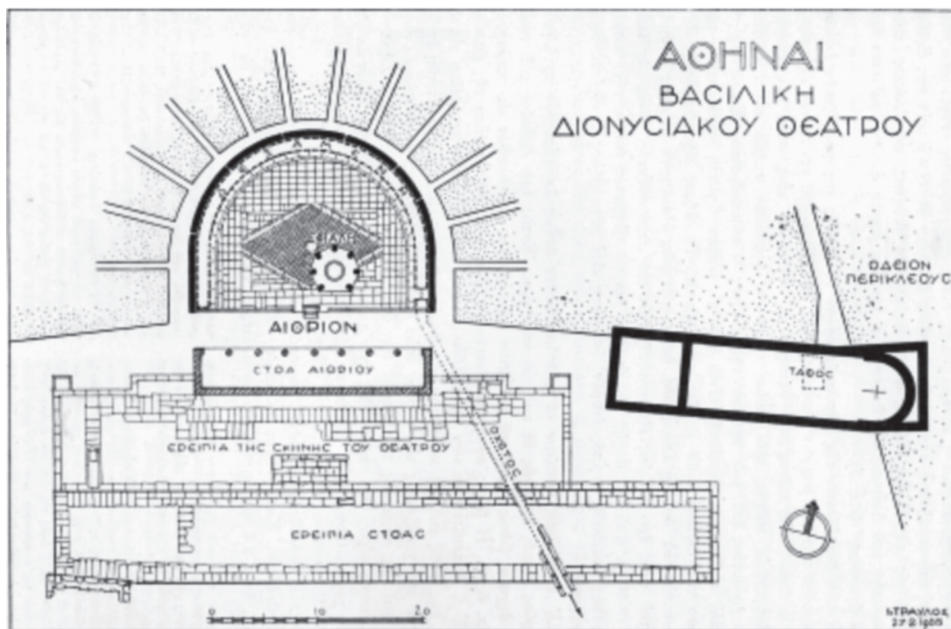


Fig. 4. Plan, church in the Theater of Dionysos, Athens (by J. Travlos, *Ἡ παλααιοχριστιανικὴ βασιλικὴ τοῦ Διονυσιακοῦ θεάτρου*, in *Αρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερὶς* 2, 1953–1954, fig. 2)

exist simultaneously. Thus, the Church in hippodrome complex in Herase was contemporary to the amphitheater, while on the rest of arena domestic houses had been constructed⁶³.

The orchestra in Priene had been used as construction material for the bishop catholicon; earlier in the Side theater two chapels had been built⁶⁴.

Thus, not the prohibition of theaters by the Christian church but the municipal reform of the 4th century was the main cause of reconstruction of the part of the Chersonessus theater. Analyzing the similar sites in other parts of the Empire, we could assume that non-reconstructed part of the Chersonessus theater could have been used for theatrical performances while on the other part domestic houses were built. Until in the middle – the end of the 6th century the temple complex at the South Gates was built.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, pp. 13–16.

⁶⁴ *Культура Византии IV – первая половина VII в.*, Москва 1984, p. 633.

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STRESZCZENIE

Aż po VI w. miejskimi obiektami dostarczającymi rozrywki w Imperium Bizantyjskim były teatry. Analizując archeologiczne raporty i publikacje O.I. Dombrowsky'ego, który w 1954 r. odkrył teatr w Chersonesie, a także biorąc pod uwagę sytuację historyczną w IV w., dochodzimy do wniosku, że teatr nie mógł zaprzestać swego funkcjonowania jedynie na skutek wprowadzenia chrześcijaństwa. Powodem jego zniknięcia był prawdopodobnie wewnętrzny kryzys samej sztuki dramatycznej, który nastąpił w IV w., a także reforma administracyjna. Ponadto, stratygraficzna analiza obiektu architektonicznego wykazała, że większa część teatru nie została zrekonstruowana w ciągu IV oraz do VI w. Przedstawienia w teatrze były prawdopodobnie inne w tym czasie. W Chersonesie świątynie chrześcijańskie zbudowano na miejscu teatru dopiero w VI w., podobnie jak w innych miastach bizantyjskich.

Słowa kluczowe: teatr w Chersonesie, Bizancjum, wczesne średniowiecze, reforma administracyjna, chrześcijaństwo

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