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RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL

DISCOVERIES IN ALBANIA

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Antiquity



177.
Roman Relief Bowl from Corinth, No. HD'09.5012.3, h. 4 cm, d.
5,7 cm, late 2nd/3rd century AD, AloA Gjiokastër

Hadrianopolis

Since 2005, the University of Macerata and the Institute of Archaeology of Tirana have collaborated in a first archaeological excavation of the Roman settlement of Hadrianopolis, situated near the modern village of Sofratika. This area, presently in the south of Albania, was part of the territory of Chaonia, and later of the territory of Epirus.

The investigations focused on studying the site and defining the architectural characteristics of the Roman town of Hadrianopolis. Between the 1970s and '80s the settlement, already known through ancient sources (Tab. Peut. VII, 3), was subject to investigations that focused on the study of the theatre. Recent investigations have shown that the Roman town grew above a previous settlement, probably of some importance, characterised by monumental public buildings. Only from the Roman period the settlement started to acquire proto-urban features. Its monumental form became evident from the early Imperial period with the construction of a small temple in opus quadratum, a circular structure which is now underneath the theatre and a waterway in the area occupied later by the thermal building. The latter, still visible near the limits of the area of

the excavations, has a rectangular plan and was paved with large limestone slabs; the entrance consisted of two steps leading to a colonnaded facade.

It is not possible to know what role the settlement had in the territorial organization of the region in this period. Its strategic position within the road network system suggests that the village played a predominant role in the surrounding territory, perhaps with specific social and economic functions. The latest investigations on the surroundings yielded interesting data concerning the model of settlement in this region: it is probable that in the 4th century BC, Hellenistic settlements, often fortified, concentrated on hill tops and high areas, their economy being based on sheep breeding and, to some extent, on other activities related to the valley's role as a communication route, such as agriculture and trade.

The main phase of the settlement, which saw the construction of the theatre and its adjacent buildings, can be dated to the period of Emperor Hadrian who was responsible for the promotion and refurbishment of the city. In this period, Hadrianopolis, main town and administrative centre

for the Roman nobilitas of Drina Valley and of the whole of Epirus, was equipped with buildings that were intended to provide an urban lifestyle, starting with the theatre and the bathhouse. The theatre is supported by an artificial structure composed of an external circular wall conserved at a high that ranges between 4 and 18 m, while the *cavea* measures 58 m in diameter. The construction material consists of stones and concrete. The construction of the *cavea* above a retaining structure rather than on the hillside and the direct connection between the *cavea* and the stage are indicative of the Roman theatre building tradition. On the other hand, the plan of the orchestra and of the *cavea*, which is larger than a semi-circle, and the dimensions and shape of the stage building - narrow and almost detached from the *cavea* - find parallels in theatres of the Greek-Hellenistic tradition. During the 4th century AD the theatre was restored, rearranged and transformed for venationes and, perhaps, gladiatorial combats. The bathhouse was built probably in an area previously occupied by a building of the same functions.

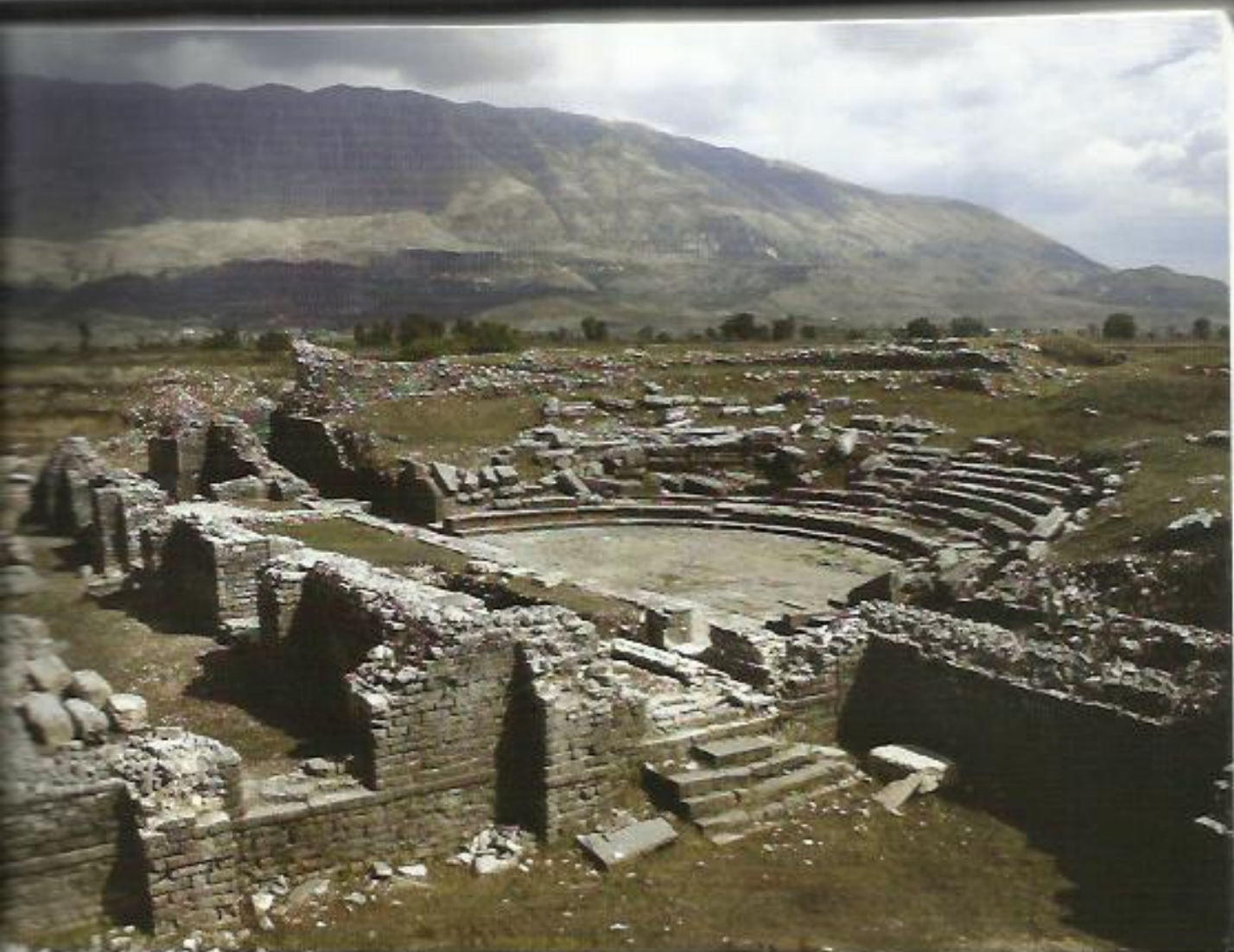
The phase of the building that can be presently observed is the one that in the 3rd century AD caused the resizing of the previous Hadrianic complex. Around a large courtyard accessed by a monumental entrance, there are several rooms, including the warm areas (*calidarium* and *tepidarium* with the *praefurnia* next to it) still in a good state of conservation and recently restored. The archaeological investigations assisted by geophysical surveys have revealed that the settlement extended over a rectangular area of 300-350 m E-W by 400 m N-S. In the urban grid pattern with streets crossing each other at

right angles, the theatre and the bathhouse occupied a position slightly offset to the south. Moreover, between the two buildings, to the north and west of the latter, we can assume the presence of an open area that perhaps functioned as the forum. Remote sensing has further located large peristyle houses organised around internal courtyards in the central plots of the town. These were probably accessible through vestibules and provided with large spaces for the storage of foodstuffs.

A necropolis, today at risk due to the expansion of the village of Sofratika, extends over a significant area beyond the urban limits. Already investigated by Dh. Budina, its main phase of use appears to date to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. Subsequent excavations brought to light six single inhumation graves, consisting of simple stone lined, cist burials, covered with gabled lids; also a funerary monument in the shape of a little temple which contained two burials was found.

The great quantity of pottery and other finds, and their quality show the significant commercial activity that took place at Hadrianopolis. It appears that between the 2nd-3rd and the 4th century AD Hadrianopolis was well integrated in the Mediterranean trade and played an important role thanks to its geographic location along a secondary branch of the Via Egnatia that led from Apollonia to Nikopolis.

Noteworthy is the presence of several Roman Relief Bowls from Corinth, African Red Slip Ware and amphorae, imported and locally produced glass, and bronze and marble artifacts. After a



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period of crisis that lasted at least until the end of the 5th century AD, the urban centre re-emerged in the Justinian period when for a short period of time it was known as Justinoupolis. In this phase, a worship structure, of which remain few architectural elements, was built within the theatre which had now lost its original function; the bathhouse was re-arranged into and converted into houses and shops; the small ancient temple built in opus quadratum was demolished and its remains incorporated into an articulate complex of buildings. Thus, the recent archaeological investigations suggest a residential rather than a cultural function (as previously proposed) of this area. This new phase was short-lived, however: already in the 6th century AD the signs of abandonment are evident and the city moved towards progressive ruralization until the wind covered the ruins in the area with more than two meters of silt.



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Hadrianic theatre, view from northwest

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Fragment of inscription, which mentions a procurator, No. HD/11.342.44, l. 8.3 cm, w. 9 cm, AlaA Gjirokastrë



180.



181.



182.

180
funerary monument

181
Opus quadratum building of the Trojan period.

182
Warm rooms of the Bath-house, from
South-East



183.

183
Marble bowl, No. HD'10.2379.297,
h. 14 cm, d. 28 cm, 2nd-3rd cen-
tury AD, AloA Gjirokastër



184.

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Cult related object, lead, No.
HD'09.2143.199, l. 6.7 cm, w. 1.6
cm, 2nd-3rd century AD, AloA
Gjirokastër

185
Glass balsamarium from the ne-
cropolis, No. 10222, h. 12 cm, d.
4 cm, 2nd-3rd century AD, AloA
Gjirokastër



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