
FLOOR MOSAICS FROM THE GRECO-ROMAN THEATRE AT NEA PAPHOS

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THE NEA PAPHOS THEATRE

The World Heritage site of the ancient city of Nea Paphos is within the boundaries of the modern city of Paphos/Pafos, a popular tourist destination on the southwest coast of Cyprus. Since 1995, the University of Sydney has been excavating the theatre adjacent to the ancient northwest gate. The theatre is substantial, with a final capacity to seat approximately 8,500 persons, and the site has become another of the city's many archaeological and cultural attractions. The partially reconstructed Roman theatre at Kourion, along the coast to the east of Paphos, provides a venue for theatrical events and, the Paphos Municipality has indicated an interest in using the ancient theatre of Paphos as a venue for future cultural events.

The theatre was originally constructed at the end of the 4th century BC, was reconstructed and enlarged following an earthquake in 15 BC by the Roman emperor Augustus, underwent another substantial reconstruction under the Antonines in the mid-2nd century and a Severan reconstruction a century later (see for example Barker 2007-2008, 2012; Barker and Stennett 2004; Green and Stennett 2002; Green 2003). From the late 4th or early 5th centu-

ry, the theatre was abandoned and during the 6th century it was extensively quarried. During the Mediaeval period, the site was occupied by an extensive rural complex and by the 18th century there was a sparse group of farm houses. Modern 20th century services have also cut into and through the fabric of the theatre. In situ mosaics are relatively uncommon in theatres and it was not anticipated that a mosaic would be discovered.

MOSAIC FLOORS IN THEATRES

There are 23 examples of theatres and *odeia*, with mosaic floors identified by Sear (2006) in his architectural survey of Roman theatres. The theatres at Beneventum (Italy), Bulla Regia (Tunisia), Cyrrhus (Syria) and Delos (Greece) have mosaic floors in the *parodoi* and adjacent rooms. At Argos (Greece), Arylicanda (Turkey), Byblos (Lebanon), Epidauros (Greece), Kırklareli (Turkey), Nora (Sardinia) and Simitthus (Tunisia) the orchestra floors are paved with mosaic. There are mosaics, predominantly on stage floors at Argos (Greece), Cos (Greece), Hierapolis (Turkey), Leptis Magna (Libya), Lugdunum (France), Sufetula (Tunisia), Thessalon-

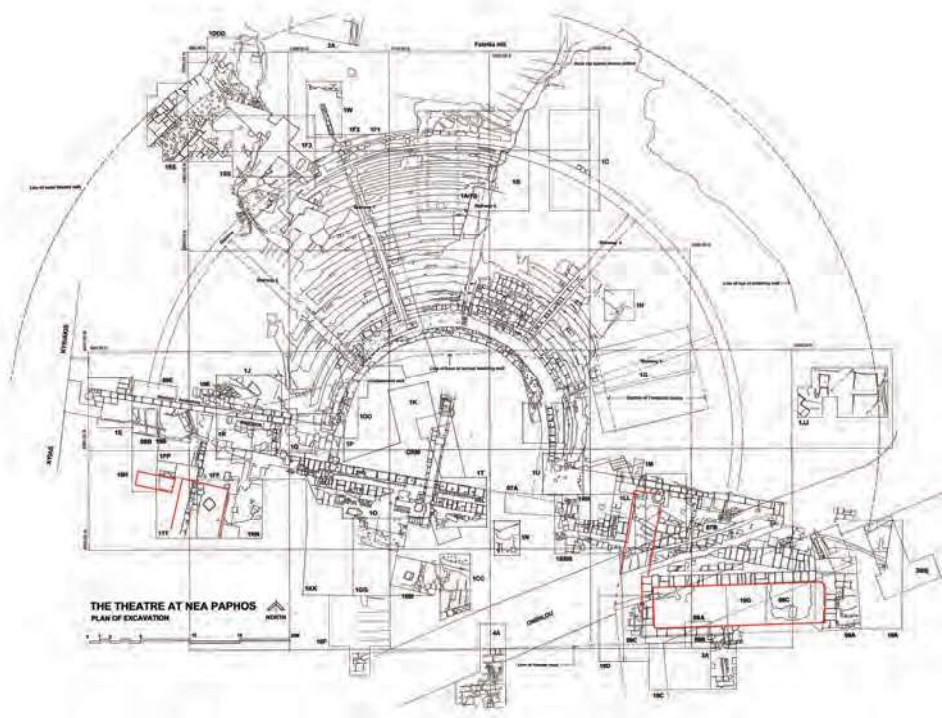


Fig. 1. Working plan of the Theatre at the end of the 2010 Season. The locations and currently known extent of each floor mosaic is outlined in red (drawing: Geoff Stennett)

iki (Greece), Thugga (Tunisia), Arausio (France) and Corinth (Greece).

THE NEA PAPHOS THEATRE MOSAIC FLOORS

The theatre of Nea Paphos appears to be particularly well endowed with extant mosaic floors. It was not until 2004 that the first in situ mosaics were exposed in the theatre. Subsequent seasons have revealed floor mosaics in four discrete areas of the theatre; the eastern *parodos*, the southern entries to the eastern and western *parodoi*, a nymphaeum adjacent to the eastern *par-*

odos, and a possible room to the west of the southern entry to the western *parodos* (Fig. 1). The mosaics likely represent two phases in the life of the theatre. The floor of the eastern *parodos* and its southern entry is covered in a fragmentary black/grey and white geometric mosaic, the largest extent of which is within the *parodos* and comprises large white lozenges with infill chequerboard on a black ground (Fig. 2). The mosaic floor of the nymphaeum is in a poor condition with evidence of efflorescence, delamination and a loss of integrity in the cement setting, likely due to the use of limestone for the white tesserae relieved



Fig. 2. The fragmentary mosaic on the floor of the eastern *parodos* and its southern entry. The damage caused by later activities is clearly demonstrated (photo: Bob Miller, 10 November 2010)



Fig. 3. South-west corner of the poorly preserved nymphaeum floor mosaic. Edges are chamfered and there are patches of burning (photo: Bob Miller, 10 November 2010)



Fig. 4. The room to the south-west of the western *parodos* patterned with intersecting circles and octagons. The damage was caused by smashing columns for the lime kilns after the theatre had been abandoned and was used as a quarry (photo: Bob Miller, 10 November 2010)

by a scatter of small black semis (Fig. 3). The floor of the western *parodos* is surfaced in a hard fine white plaster, scored to imitate large pavers, possibly marble. The plastered floor extends to the threshold to the southern entry where it meets the remains of what had been an expanse of predominantly black tesserae, the only discernible pattern being one white on black crosslet. These mosaics and those in the western *parodos* and nymphaeum have been dated to the Antonine refurbishment of the theatre in the mid-second century. The simplicity of design and lack of colour in the mosaics associated with the *parodoi* was likely offset by the colourful paintings decorating the vaulted walls and ceilings, for which extensive evidence survives from the western *parodos* (Wood Conroy 2003). Dating to the late fourth or early fifth century is a polychrome geometric mosaic on the floor of what may be a small room or corridor to the west of the western *parodos* southern entry (Fig. 4). Too little of the immediate environment of this mosaic has been excavated to be certain of a room function, or its ultimate size. However, this mosaic likely dates to after the abandonment of the theatre.

QUESTIONS OF INTERPRETATION AND CONSERVATION

The unexpectedness of the discovery of floors paved with mosaics associated with the theatre was such that no management strategy for mosaics was in place. Preliminary advice from the Department of Antiquities to cover the mosaics with textile and to bury them with clean fill has been followed. Prior to reburial, the mosaics were planned and photographed in detail,

and when re-exposed in 2010, there was no apparent deterioration of the fabric, or incursions by vegetation. The Australian team has a clear understanding of the significance of the mosaics as an important element of the fabric of the theatre site and is currently exploring avenues for the conservation of the mosaics, in consultation with the Department of Antiquities. Reconstruction of the theatre for staging public performances will have a major impact on the local environment where encroaching hotels, bars and restaurants have changed a previously largely rural landscape. Accommodation will have to be made for the associated infrastructure such as ticket boxes, toilet facilities, parking and the inevitable influx of souvenir outlets. To ensure that the heritage values and significance of the site are recognized and preserved, the reconstruction of the theatre will need to balance the heritage requirements with those of a modern performance space in consultation with the University of Sydney. The Australian team is currently developing an interpretation strategy, in accordance with the Verona Charter, to guide the preliminary use of the theatre as a local resource for tourism. The objective of the *Verona Charter on the Use of Ancient Places of Performance* (UNESCO 1997) is to “preserve a store of scientific information, manage the monuments in the perspective of development and, where circumstances permit, infuse ancient sites once more with their full role of places of artistic creation, shared enjoyment and emotion”. The conservation and interpretation of the theatre site needs to be an integral part of any future refurbishment of the theatre. The fabric of the theatre site; the evidence of its historical phases and modifications, the post-aban-

donment activities and the Mediaeval occupation, all contribute to an understanding of the heritage values of the site. As an integral part of the fabric of the theatre, the mosaics provide an insight into a particular aspect of its historical use, and as such need to be conserved and interpreted

in situ. The survival of a suite of geometric mosaic pavements within the theatre adds to our understanding of the importance of the theatre to the ancient city, and contributes to our understanding of the significance of Nea Paphos as the capital of Roman Cyprus.

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