

FIGURED RELIEFS FROM THE THEATRES OF ROMAN ASIA MINOR



ABSTRACT: This article offers a review of the figured friezes found in theatres of Asia Minor. It suggests both a reading of their development and possible interpretations for this category of evidence. The subjects of the figured reliefs are considered not only in the light of their potential meaning, but also within the context of each monument's entire decorative program and are compared to both eastern and western examples. Friezes displayed on architraves, that continue a Hellenistic tradition, are distinguished from friezes placed on the columnar podia of the façade, which may attest to the very early reception of a trend that started in the western part of the Empire. Furthermore, friezes located on the entablature of the *proskenion* constitute a peculiar category that is found in Asia Minor and in regions where an Asian influence is attested. From a diachronic perspective, friezes on architraves appear in the late Hellenistic period and then gradually diminish in frequency, while friezes on the podia of façades first appear in the early 1st century CE and then find their widest distribution in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. It is at this point that the most significant depictions appear, with a concoction of mythological tales and allusions to real events. Interpretation of the subjects within the wider contexts of competition between cities of Asia Minor, of civic euergetism, and of the influential presence of exponents of the Second Sophistic indicates a desire to express the city's identity through the use of myth and shared heritage.

THE HABIT OF DISPLAYING free-standing sculptures within theatres is attested in Greece beginning in the Classical period, but figured friezes do not appear before late Hellenistic times.¹ This late arrival is due to the fact that friezes require a permanent architectural frame, such as an architrave or the podium of a colonnade, features which develop only in a later period.² After appearing at first in just a few theatres, figured friezes rapidly gained popularity and acquired a special significance within theatre decorations, especially in Asia Minor. Despite its importance, however, this category of

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1. On sculptures in Classical and Hellenistic theatres, see Lampaki 2013.
 2. On the architectural development of the Greek theatre, see most recently the thematic bibliography in Frederiksen – Gebhard – Sokolicek (2015) 448–59.



Fig. 1. Map of Asia Minor showing the location of the theatres discussed in the text.

material has been seldom studied as a whole, in part because of the fragmentary state of the evidence.³ This article fills the gap by offering a review of the figured friezes found in theatres of Asia Minor (Fig. 1), where many examples have been preserved, and suggests both a reading of their development and possible interpretations. The subjects of the figured reliefs will be considered not only in the light of their potential meaning, but also within the context of each monument's entire decorative program and compared to both eastern and western examples. The extant evidence dates almost exclusively to the imperial period.

THE THEATRE AT PERGAMUM sits on the western slope of the acropolis and dates to the late 3rd century BCE. Construction work in the theatre in the early Roman period, and the later addition of a high wall around the orchestra for the performance of arena games, attest to the long history of the monument and its modifications over the centuries.⁴ Sculpted friezes in the theatre

3. On sculptural reliefs in theatres and their development, see: Sturgeon (1977) 124–29; Fuchs (1987) 132–40. See also remarks about some theatres of Asia Minor in Pellino (2005).

4. De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 3, 23–34; Sear (2006) 346–47 plan 349 pl. 120 (with bibliography); Radt (2011) 257–62. Pergamum also had a Roman theatre, built in

at Pergamum date to the late Hellenistic period and include centaurs fighting sea monsters, Erotes and winged Victories riding chariots pulled by goats and dolphins, and theatrical masks and garlands.⁵ These friezes decorated the architraves: this theatre had no permanent stage building and wooden structures served as the scene. The frieze with masks and wreaths in particular, dated to the end of the 1st century BCE, was undoubtedly displayed on the architrave above the northern *parodos*.

A frieze displayed on an architrave appears again in the theatre at Kyme, probably built in the late Hellenistic period.⁶ During the first Roman phase (1st–3rd century CE), the architraves of its façade included a frieze depicting wreaths alternating with heads of Satyrs and theatrical masks.⁷ A frieze with theatrical masks has also been found in theatre at Stratonikeia, built in the 2nd century BCE and provided with a rectilinear, three-storey *scaenae frons* in the Augustan period.⁸ At that time, the architrave of the second storey included a frieze depicting theatre masks alternating with garlands, while the architrave of the third storey displayed vegetal scrolls.⁹

Friezes on the architraves of the *scaenae frons* can be found in several other theatres. A frieze with garlands supported by bulls' heads and theatrical masks could belong to the first building phase of the theatre at Halicarnassus (late 2nd century BCE). At Aphrodisias, theatrical masks, vegetal scrolls alternating with Tritons, bulls' heads and acanthus leaves alternating with *paterae*, as well as Egyptian-style patterns, appear on the architraves of both storeys (Augustan period). Theatrical masks occur on the architraves of the theatre at Hieropolis-Castabala (Cilicia), a monument located near a central, colonnaded street (1st century CE). At Side (Fig. 2), architraves were

the 2nd century CE in the lower town as part of an ambitious building program that also included an amphitheatre and a stadium. The monument, however, has totally disappeared: Radt (2011) 262–66.

5. Frieze with Victories: Winter (1908) 294–97 no. 384 pl. 39; Schwingenstein (1977) 46. H. of the blocks: 0.24 m. Frieze with masks: Winter (1908) 294–99 nos. 384–85 pl. 39; von Gerkan (1972) (suggests a chronology in the Roman period).
6. Sear (2006) 334; Mancuso (2012) 64–69.
7. Mancuso (2012) 70 fig. 56, 104–06.
8. Johannowsky (1969–1970) 456–57; Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 424 (H. P. Isler); Mert (2002); Sear (2006) 354 plan 361; Mert (2008) 14–16, 30–34, 92–150; Söğüt (2013) 454–57 plan 4 figs. 7–9. The works of the Augustan period are part of a wider building program that also included the construction of a temple for the imperial cult. In this theatre, an over-life-size head of the Polykleitan Amazon and a female ideal head have been found: Özgan (1999) 99 no. K6 pl. 29c–d and 101–02 no. K8 pl. 30 c–d, respectively.
9. Mellink (1993) 125 and fig. 20; Mert (2008) 120–27 figs. 45–58.



Fig. 2. Theatre at Side: architrave blocks with theatrical masks. Photo courtesy Adem Yurtsever.

decorated by friezes depicting Medusa heads, masks, and vegetal patterns (2nd century CE). At Bargylia, architraves decorated with masks have been attributed to the decoration of the façade (middle imperial period). At Phrygian Hierapolis, theatrical masks, Erotes holding garlands, and heads of divinities embellished the entablatures of the second and third storeys (early 3rd century CE). Finally, at Perge, the architrave of the lower storey included a frieze depicting hunting Erotes within acanthus scrolls (late Antonine – early Severan period).¹⁰

In some cases, figured reliefs were displayed on the architrave of the *proskenion*. An example comes from the theatre at Pisidian Sagalassos, a huge building completed during the last two decades of the 2nd century CE.¹¹ The very high *proskenion*, located in front of the richly decorated *scaenae frons*, was provided with a central doorway and three lower openings at each side

10. Frieze from Halicarnassus: Lauter (1986) 174; Moretti (1993) 210 and fig. 5. Friezes from Aphrodisias: de Chaisemartin (2002) and (2011). Frieze at Hieropolis-Castabala: Verzone (1957b) 55. Friezes at Side: see below, 268 and n. 36. Frieze at Bargylia: La Rocca (1992) 73 fig. 3b; Moretti (1993) 210; Johannowsky (1969–1970) 456, who dates the theatre to the 2nd century BCE, refers to the first building phase. The frieze from Hierapolis is still unpublished. It is mentioned in Bejor (1991) 42, and photos appear in D’Andria (2003) 158 fig. 139, De Bernardi Ferrero – Ciotta – Pensabene (2007) 345–50, and Sobrà (2012) figs. 17–18; remarks in Pellino (2005) 64, who is in charge of its study (see 64 n. 4). Frieze at Perge: see below, 270 and n. 41.

11. De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 2, 35–58; Sear (2006) 374–75 plan 396 (with bibliography). Waelkens – Poblome – De Rynck (2011) 120, suggest that construction of the theatre probably started in the 120s but was completed only at the end of the century.

for wild beasts to escape into the arena.¹² Decorative panels adorned the entablature of this *proskenion*. Their poor state of preservation leaves much to speculation, but it is clear that the panels include Erotes engaged in hunting scenes and a Victory crowning a Tyche.¹³

A similar frieze location, on the front of the *logeion*, is found three more times in theatres of Asia Minor. At the theatre at Termessos (Augustan period), rectangular panels showing shields and peltas within frames decorated either side of the three doorways of the stage. A second example, similarly dated to the Augustan period, is the frieze with bulls' heads and garlands on the *proskenion* of the theatre at Aphrodisias. Finally, the frieze located on the architrave of the *proskenion* of the theatre at Perge, dating to the late Antonine age or the early Severan period, represents Erotes hunting wild animals.¹⁴

Podia of the colonnaded façades of theatres frequently displayed figured friezes. One of the earliest examples in Asia Minor can be found at Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia.¹⁵ The theatre of the 3rd century BCE was gradually transformed into a huge building by pushing back the *analemata* walls, adding a *summa cavea*, and replacing the Hellenistic scene building with a rectilinear *scaenae frons* with five doorways and a *pulpitum* before it. The three storeys of the façade, built in a single phase during the reign of Domitian,¹⁶ displayed a rich decoration that included statues of gods and emperors,¹⁷ as well as figured reliefs located on the podia of the columnar orders. An inscribed architrave boldly stated that the scene and the related ornamentation were dedicated to the Ephesian Artemis and the emperor Domitian.¹⁸ The reliefs displayed on the podia of the storeys of the *scaenae*

12. H. of *proskenion*: 2.69 m. The theatre façade was richly ornamented; it had a single storey, because construction was interrupted and never completed: Vandeput (1997) 107–12; Waelkens – Poblome – De Rynck (2011) 121.

13. De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 2, 54–55 figs. 91–92; Vandeput (1992) 102; Vandeput (1997) pl. 50.1 (relief with Victory crowning Tyche).

14. Termessos: De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 2, 23 figs. 23–24 (erroneously labelling the peltas as ‘*oscilla*’); Pellino (2005) 72–74 fig. 28; on the theatre, see Sear (2006) 379 plan 403 pl. 132, with bibliography. Aphrodisias: de Chaisemartin (2011). Perge: see below, 270 and n. 40.

15. Heberdey – Niemann – Wilberg (1912); De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 3, 47–66; Sear (2006) 334–36 plan 329 pl. 114; Öztürk (2010); Hofbauer (2015); Styhler-Aydin (2015).

16. See Öztürk (2010) for a recent revision of the traditional chronology of the building phases.

17. On the decorative elements in this theatre see below, pp. 276, 282–283.

18. *IvE* 2047; Heberdey – Niemann – Wilberg (1912) 157–60 no. 34; De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 4, 213–14 no. 13 (M. Gallina). See Halfmann (2001) 43 and Pellino

frons represent on the second storey hunting Erotes, Satyrs (one resting under a grape), Erotes bearing *kantharoi* and *rhyta*, and figures that can be probably identified with Tritons, and on the third storey masks and garlands.¹⁹

An even earlier example might be the frieze from the theatre at Tralleis, which should be dated to the Augustan period.²⁰ The extant slabs represent a young boy on a panther (probably Dionysus), a winged Victory, and a horse pulled by a male figure; their fragmentary state makes it difficult to establish both a precise date and interpretation.²¹ The theatre's poor state of preservation also hinders a reconstruction of its façade. However, because the total height of the slabs slightly surpasses 1 m., it is highly likely that they pertain to the podia of the storeys of the façade.²² A similar assignment to podia can be made for the tall slabs depicting garlands held by alternating male and female nude figures, probably herms, found in the theatre at Anazarbus (Cilicia). Architectural members of this poorly preserved monument suggest that the *scaenae frons* had columns of red granite, and its date has been tentatively fixed in the early imperial age.²³

The enormous theatre at Miletus, built in the third quarter of the 3rd century BCE, underwent many rebuilding phases until at least the late 3rd century CE.²⁴ One certain rebuilding phase begun in the Neronian period, thanks to the intervention of *Cn. Vergilius Capito*, and ended in the first quarter of the 3rd century; it included complete renovation of stage and cavea.

(2005) 53–4 for the attribution to Domitian instead of Nero.

19. H. of the reliefs: about 0.87 m. See: Hörmann (1923/24) 320–21 (attribution to the podium of the first storey); Eichler (1956–58) 15–18 figs. 7–10; Oberleitner et al. (1978) 62–63 nos. 42–46. Frieze with Tritons: Wood (1877) 76. Some unpublished fragments have been presented by M. Aurenhammer during a lecture held at the Austrian Archaeological Institute at Athens on March 2012, and I wish to thank her warmly for a fruitful discussion about the decoration of this theatre.
20. Humann – Dörpfeld (1893) 404–13 pl. 13; Cultrera (1924) 69 (423); De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 3, 109–12; Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 381 (H. P. Isler); Sear (2006) 355 plan 364.
21. Humann – Dörpfeld (1893) 400–01 (where the young boy on the panther is interpreted as an allegory of autumn); Mendel (1914) 51–52 nos. 290–91; Schwingenstein (1977) 45–46; Özgan (1995) 108–09 nos. TR. 63–65 pl. 30.3–4.
22. One of the slabs kept in the Istanbul Museum has a total height of 1.03 m.: Özgan (1995) 108.
23. Bent (1890) 232; Gough (1952) 102; Verzone (1957a) 22 and fig. 31; Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 361 (H. P. Isler); Sear (2006) 360.
24. De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 3, 85–95; Krauss (1973); Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 385–86 (H. P. Isler); Köster (2004) 49–56, 98–110; Weber (2005) (restoration works); Sear (2006) 343–44 plan 342 pls. 118–19.



Fig. 3. Theatre at Miletus: relief depicting the statue of Apollo by Kanachos.
Photo Valentina Di Napoli.

Later, during the last quarter of the 3rd century CE, the decoration of the scaenae frons was refurbished.²⁵ A remarkably large number of relief slabs has been found in this theatre representing Erotes fighting wild animals (bears, rams, antelopes, gazelles, and lions), maritime *thiasoi* including dolphins and Tritons blowing into shells, and divinities, with a special reference to local cults of Asia Minor (Apollo Delphinios, the statue of Apollo by Kanachos at Didyma, Apollo Phileios, and a hunting Artemis: Fig. 3).²⁶ The placement of the reliefs by some scholars on the entablature running on the upper external sides of the *postscaenium* does not find any parallel in Asia Minor. On the contrary, there is almost no reason to doubt that the friezes were originally placed on the podia of the three storeys of the *scaenae frons*: this position fits well their average height of about 0.80 m.²⁷ One might envisage that each subject would have found an appropriate location on a different storey, the Erotes alluding to the *venationes*, the deities to local cults, and the maritime themes serving more decorative purposes. The frieze alluding to local divin-

25. Herrmann (1986) 175–85 pl. 23. Cn. Vergilius Capito had been *praefectus* of Egypt during the reign of Claudius.

26. Kawerau – Rehm (1914) 410–11 fig. 101; Simon (1957) 38–46 pls. 7.1, 8.2–8.3; Kleiner (1968) 70–71 figs. 44–45; Altenhöfer – Bol (1989).

27. Altenhöfer – Bol (1989) suggested that they were placed on the architrave of the *postscaenium*; Pellino (2005) 68–70 disputes this reconstruction. A remarkable detail is that the slab depicting the cult statue of Apollo by Kanachos shows an Ionic *kymation*, a feature that does not appear in the other series of slabs.

ities could have been most appropriate above the *porta regia* and, perhaps, the *hospitalia* – that is, on the podium of the second storey.

The theatre at Aizanoi shows peculiar features because a stadium was adjacent to the back wall of its stage building.²⁸ The façade with five doorways and two storeys, built in the Hadrianic age, was completed during the second half of the 2nd century.²⁹ Recent research suggests that a frieze depicting hunting Erotes fighting wild animals (bulls, lions, boars, and deer) must have been located on the podium of the second storey, above the richly decorated architrave of the first storey.³⁰

The theatre at Myra, built immediately after the earthquake of 141 CE and paid for with the donation of 10,000 *denarii* by the Lyciarch Opramoas, had a rectilinear façade with five doorways and two storeys.³¹ A frieze with theatrical masks dated to the second half of the 2nd century probably decorated the podium of the upper storey of the façade.³² Later modifications of the monument, likely dating to the 3rd century, allowed performances of beast hunts and, perhaps later in the same century, gladiatorial games. A block from an uncertain location bears a roughly scratched representation of a fight between a bear and some type of cattle; it should be connected to this phase.³³

The theatre at the Lycian city of Tlos was built during the last quarter of the 1st century BCE and provided with a scene building only in the mid-3rd century CE. Belonging to the *scaenae frons*, which was of the rectilinear type with five doorways, are fragments of a frieze depicting a purely decora-

28. De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 3, 177–87; Naumann – Hoffmann (1985) 311–14 figs. 1–5; Rohn (2001); Sear (2006) 325–26 plan 316; Özer (2013) 330–31 figs. 10–11 (restoration works). Most of the auditorium was built in the third quarter of the 1st century CE, while the *summa cavea* and the staircases date to the mid-3rd century CE.

29. Rohn (2001) esp. 317.

30. H. of the frieze: about 0.75 m. See: De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 3, 183–84 figs. 220–21 pl. 38c (with bibliography); new fragments in Rohn (2001).

31. De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 3, 199–206; Borchhardt (1975) 57–59; Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 416 (H. P. Isler); Sear (2006) 370–71 plan 389 pls. 127–28. Inscription of Opramoas: *TAM* II no. 905; at around the same time (about 143/4 CE), another Lyciarch, Jason of Cyaneae, promised 10,000 more *denarii*: *IGRR* III no. 704.

32. Borchhardt (1975) 59–61 pls. 25–27; Moretti (1993) 211–12 figs. 11–12. I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Nevzat Çevik (Akdeniz University) for sharing with me his thoughts about this frieze.

33. Borchhardt (1975) 59 pl. 24a.



Fig. 4. Theatre at Nysa: relief depicting the Nymphs of Nysa and infant Dionysus.
Photo Valentina Di Napoli.

tive topic: triple garlands with fruits supported by herms; it was probably located on the podium of the lower storey.³⁴

Dionysian imagery appropriately occurs frequently in theatre friezes. An example is the theatre at Side, an enormous building centrally located in the city, probably dated to the second half of the 2nd century CE.³⁵ The façade, which had five doorways and, according to recent researches, three storeys, was not only decorated with a frieze of theatrical masks and acanthus leaves placed on the architrave, but also with a taller frieze located on the podia of the columnar storeys. Despite its poor state of preservation, depictions related to the myth of Dionysus and a Gigantomachy can be detected.³⁶

Dionysian imagery is prominent in the decorative program of the thea-

34. Bean (1978) 67; De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 3, 191–96; Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 527–28 (H. P. Isler); Sear (2006) 379–80 plan 405. The long inscription from the northern *parodos* that records a list of benefactors belongs to the first building phase of the theatre (*TAM* II 550–51); the other that mentions Opramoas' gift of 60,000 drachmas "for the construction of the theatre and the exedra in the baths", dated to 136 CE, must refer to the enlargement of the cavea (*TAM* II 579 = *IGRR* III 679).
35. De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 3, 135–43; Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 499–500 (H. P. Isler); İzmirligil (2002); Sear (2006) 377 plan 401; Alanyalı (2010) 94 figs. 1–2; (2013) 451–52; (2014) 289–90.
36. Mellink (1959) 80 pl. 21 figs. 3–4; Mansel (1963) 137–38 figs. 116–17; De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 3, 140 fig. 147; İzmirligil (2002) 269–70 figs. 11–14; *LIMC* Suppl. 2009 vol. 1, 174 add. 19 & vol. 2, 224 add. 17 (H. S. Alanyalı). Warm tanks



Fig. 5. Theatre at Perge: relief depicting the Tyche of Perge and local officials.
Photo courtesy Niels Hannestad.

tre at Nysa, one of the main cities in the Maeander valley. The building was first renovated in the period between the Hadrianic and the late Antonine ages, and then again in the early 3rd century CE.³⁷ The *scaenae frons* with five doorways, also with two renovations, displayed figured reliefs on the podia of the columnar orders. The reliefs represented different topics: scenes from Dionysus' life (Fig. 4), Dionysian themes (*komos* of Silens and Papposilens, Satyrs and Maenads, a dancing Pan), and myths and divinities of both Panhellenic and local origin, including personifications.³⁸

A Dionysian subject, in combination with other topics, occurs again in the theatre of the rich Pamphylian city of Perge.³⁹ Built in the (early?) 2nd century CE, in the Antonine and the early Severan periods this theatre had a tall, splendidly decorated two-storey *scaenae frons*, to which a third storey was added between the early and the middle Severan period. The ar-

go to Adem Yurtsever (Anadolu University), who generously shared his photos of the frieze with masks.

37. De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 3, 115–21; Sezer – Tuna – Peker (1988); Sezer – Tuna – Peker (1989); Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 505 (H. P. Isler); Sear (2006) 345–46 plan 346. An earlier theatre, attested by Strabo (XIV 1.43), is not confirmed by the archaeological record.

38. Sezer – Tuna – Peker (1989); Lindner (1994) 109–90. H. about 0.90 m.

39. De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 3, 147–57 (with bibliography); Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 357–58 (H. P. Isler); Inan et al. (2000); Sear (2006) 372–73 plan 392 pls. 129–30.

chitrave of the high *proskenion* was decorated by a frieze depicting Erotes hunting wild beasts; they appear variously as winged, totally naked, or even wearing gladiatorial attributes.⁴⁰ A similar frieze, where naked Erotes hunt wild animals among acanthus scrolls, occurs on the architrave of the first storey of the *scaenae frons*.⁴¹ Furthermore, the podia of the columns of the three storeys of the façade were decorated by friezes depicting scenes from the life of Dionysus (first storey), a Centauromachy (second storey), and a Gigantomachy (third storey).⁴² Finally, an extremely remarkable representation occurs on the architrave of the pediment located above the *porta regia*: a long procession of officials placed on both sides of the seated figure of the Tyche of the city (Fig. 5).⁴³ The officials are most likely members of the local elite and bring sacrificial victims toward the goddess that holds the cult image of Artemis Pergaia.

A likewise multifaceted decorative program was displayed in the theatre at Phrygian Hierapolis, built during the Flavian period to replace the Hellenistic, extra-urban theatre, and heavily remodelled during the first decade of the 3rd century CE.⁴⁴ The three-storey façade with five doorways was decorated by relief slabs on the architraves and the podia of the columnar orders.⁴⁵ The podium of the lower storey was decorated with a long frieze representing the myths of Apollo and Artemis, filled with references to Phrygian and Asian traditions; the other two storeys of the façade included relief slabs depicting Dionysian topics, a slab representing the abduction of Persephone by Hades, a relief with Demeter on a chariot, and a slab depicting a sacrifice in front of an altar.⁴⁶ A remarkable relief locat-

40. Inan et al. (2000) 317–18 fig. 43. That gladiatorial games were held within the theatre at Perge is attested both by the parapet that surrounded the orchestra and by the pierced marble screen that was later added above the parapet and was obviously meant to protect the spectators sitting in the first rows.

41. Inan et al. (2000) 310–13 figs. 33–34.

42. Inan et al. (2000) 322–30, 336–40 figs. 49–52, 57–58; Alanyalı (2012).

43. Inan et al. (2000) 331–36 figs. 53–56.

44. The date of the Severan building phase can be established with certainty to the years 206–207 CE thanks to the dedicatory inscription mentioning the proconsul of Asia Quintus Tineius Sacerdos: Ritti (1985) 108–13 pls. 14–16; T. Ritti in De Bernardi Ferrero – Ciotta – Pensabene (2007) 399–409. A date in the years 209–211 CE had been proposed by Petzl (1987) 795–96. On the theatre, see more recently: Sear (2006) 338–39 plan 334 pls. 116–17; De Bernardi Ferrero – Ciotta – Pensabene (2007); D'Andria (2012); Sobrà – Masino (2014) esp. 175.

45. On the reliefs decorating the architraves, see above, 263 and n. 10.

46. Stories of Apollo and Artemis: D'Andria – Ritti (1985); P. Pensabene in De Bernardi Ferrero – Ciotta – Pensabene (2007) 258–59. Dionysian topics: F. Winter in Humann



Fig. 6. Theatre at Hierapolis: relief frieze restored in its original location above the *porta regia*.
Photo MAIER archives, courtesy Francesco D'Andria.

ed above the *porta regia* (Fig. 6) symbolically represents the games of Hierapolis, the *Apolloneia Pythia*, performed before Septimius Severus and his family; numerous references and allusions are made through the use of personifications.⁴⁷

Finally, a problematic fragment must be mentioned that comes from the theatre at Prusias ad Hypium, in the province of Bithynia and Pontus. Built at the beginning of the 1st century CE and remodelled in the area of the *scaenae frons* during the first half of the 3rd century CE, this large theatre included a long stage and a long, rectilinear *scaenae frons* with five doorways.⁴⁸ Excavations revealed a small relief of the late Hellenistic period that depicts a Satyr seated in a rural landscape and a Nymph offering to him a drinking horn; the idyllic scene is provided with a frame, thus constituting a single panel.⁴⁹ Although some scholars⁵⁰ assign it to the decoration of the architrave of the stage, it is possible to consider the panel as a decorative element in the Neoattic tradition, and to disassociate it from the ornamentation of the theatre at Prusias.⁵¹

et al. (1898) 59–61 nos. 6–7; *EAA* 4 (1961) 27 fig. 35 s.v. Hierapolis (A. Giuliano); De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 1, 62 fig. 102; Verzone (1978) 432; P. Pensabene in De Bernardi Ferrero – Ciotta – Pensabene (2007) 259. Abduction of Persephone: Hierapolis (1987) 76; *LIMC* 4 (1988) 384 no. 111 s.v. Hades (R. Lindner); Lindner (1994) 153; P. Pensabene in De Bernardi Ferrero – Ciotta – Pensabene (2007) 259. Demeter on chariot: Verzone (1978) 432 fig. 47; D'Andria – Ritti (1985) 181; P. Pensabene in De Bernardi Ferrero – Ciotta – Pensabene (2007) 259. Slab with sacrifice (its restored position remains uncertain): Ritti (1985) 75–76 pl. 7a. All the reliefs are also illustrated in Çubuk (2008).

47. Ritti (1985) 59–77 pls. 1–6; Chuvin (1987); Di Napoli (2002). Further references in: Newby (2007) 213–15 fig. 12.8; Lichtenberger (2011) 329 figs. 267–68.

48. De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 3, 125–32; Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) 520–21 (H. P. Isler); Sear (2006) 359 plan 369.

49. H. 0.31 m., L. 0.43 m.: Blümel (1960) 27–28 fig. 3; Froning (1981) 47–48. The same depiction appears again on a Neoattic panel of the 1st century CE kept at the Fogg Art Museum (Cambridge, MA), inv. no. 1949.47.145: Froning (1981) 48 and n. 78 (with bibliography).

50. Froning (1981) 48–49 and n. 77 suggests that there was a Hellenistic theatre before the theatre of the 1st century CE and that this panel might belong to the decoration of the stage or of a *parodos*.

51. The theatre at Alabanda, one of the main centres of Caria, remains unpublished; probably built in Augustan times, it must have been refurbished in two phases: Bey (1905) 449–50 fig. 4 pl. 1; Cultrera (1924) 69 (423); De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 2, 205–18 figs. 290–306 pls. 32–33; Ciancio Rossetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 369 (H. P. Isler); Sear (2006) 326–27 plan 317. An unpublished frieze coming from this theatre is mentioned in Sturgeon (1977) 125.

From an architectural viewpoint, the development of theatres in Asia Minor lasted many centuries. The earliest buildings, which date to the 3rd century BCE, share similarities with the Greek prototypes: a cavea that exceeds a semicircle, the unroofed *parodoi*, the high stage, and the single-storey *episkenion* with openings on the front. These features already occurred in numerous theatres of the Greek mainland. The striking similarity demonstrates that the theatres of Asia Minor were intended from the very beginning to host performances linked to the *mousikoi agones*, as in Greece proper.⁵²

In the imperial period, when theatres built according to the western type spread widely throughout the whole Empire, the majority of Asian theatres had a rectilinear *scaenae frons* with two or three storeys, a trapezoidal scene, a very high *proskenion*, and converging *analemmata* walls; five doorways often pierced the lower storey of the façade.⁵³ The architecture of the theatres of Asia Minor evolved to suit changing uses. Thus, in many cases the orchestra was surrounded by a parapet and the first rows of seats were removed to accommodate beast hunts and gladiatorial games.⁵⁴ Sometimes, at a later date the orchestra was even changed into a waterproof pool for water spectacles.⁵⁵

This short review of the figured friezes found so far in the theatres of Asia Minor has shown that the occurrence of such decorative elements also depends on whether the architecture includes features to support them. The friezes embellished either the entablatures of several parts of theatres or the podia of the colonnaded façades. Nonetheless, friezes located on architraves stem from a Hellenistic tradition, while friezes decorating the podia of the *scaenae frons* are of Roman inspiration. For this reason, the friezes of the theatre at Pergamum, which are often cited as the earliest example of this category, are better seen within the context of a Hellenistic habit that continued even in the later imperial period, as the friezes from Side, Bargylia, Hierapolis and Perge demonstrate; and the same can apply for the late-Hellenistic frieze with garlands supported by bulls' heads and theatrical masks from

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52. On the architectural development of the theatres in Asia Minor: De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974); Moretti (1992); Gros (1996) 301–04; Sear (2006) 110–13; Isler (2015). Lists of theatres: Ciancio Rosetto – Pisani Sartorio (1994) vol. 3, 345–534; Moretti (2002) 158–59; Sear (2006) 325–81. On the decoration: Özren (1996); Pellino (2005).
 53. The description “theatre of the western type” follows the definition of Sear (2006) 24–36. On monumental façades in Asia Minor, see Berns (2002).
 54. Such modifications occurred e.g. at the theatres at Pergamum, Myra, Ephesus, Side, Perge, and Termessos.
 55. Berlan-Bajard (2006).

the theatre at Halicarnassus. Friezes located on entablatures usually display purely decorative patterns: vegetal scrolls, wreaths, small Erotes, Medusa heads, and masks, the latter a polysemantic element that is not exclusively found in theatres;⁵⁶ the occasional occurrence of Satyrs stresses the strong link between the theatre and the Dionysian world.⁵⁷ The small dimensions of such friezes, usually ranging between 0.20 and 0.30 m. in height, did not allow the spectators to decipher easily the depictions, making such elements more suitable for merely decorative subjects. Patterns of this kind appear in the theatres at Pergamum, Halicarnassus, Stratonikeia, Kyme, Aphrodisias, Hieropolis-Castabala, Side, Bargylia, and Phrygian Hierapolis; a Doric entablature with metopes decorated with theatrical masks was also located above the architrave of the vaulted eastern passage leading to the annular passageway of the cavea in the theatre of the Letôon at Xanthus.⁵⁸

Some friezes, however, had more complex depictions. In the theatre at Pergamum, the sea *thiasos* could allude to the serenity and stillness of sea, whereas the presence of marine figures and sea battles could hint at naval power, one of the elements of strength of Pergamene rulers.⁵⁹ The decorative patterns found on the architraves of the theatre at Aphrodisias reflect the spirit of the Augustan age: Egyptian themes (the basket of Osiris, snakes, the Isiac disk with horns and feathers, birds pecking plants) and Tritons could allude to the victory at Actium, while *paterae* and garlands refer to the *pietas* of the emperor, in the wider context of a decorative program that hints at the celebration of Apollo and the Golden Age.⁶⁰

A peculiar feature of the theatres of Roman Asia Minor is their very high stage, which continues –and enhances– a Hellenistic tradition, contrasting with the low *pulpitum* of the western type.⁶¹ Four Asian theatres display figured reliefs on the architrave of such high *proskenia*: Sagalassos, Termessos, Aphrodisias, and Perge. The interpretation of the depictions is clear. The Erotes engaged in hunting scenes in the theatre at Sagalassos allude

56. On masks as decorative elements, see Moretti (1993). A frieze of masks occurs e.g. on the architrave of the propylon of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias: Smith (2013) 15–17 pl. 3.

57. On the role of Dionysus in the Greek pantheon and on the Dionysian *thiasos*, see Schlesier (2011) esp. 299–369 (about the relationship with the world of the theatre).

58. De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 3, 80–81 figs. 92–93.

59. See Froning (1981) 120–25 for the suggestion that sea themes on reliefs allude to the serenity of sea. See also Junker (2003) about *Meerwesen* and Pergamene rulers.

60. For an interpretation of decorative patterns in the façade of this theatre, see de Chaisemartin (2011) esp. 87–89.

61. H. of some stages: 2.36 m. at Termessos; 3 m. at Tralleis and Perge; 3.25 m. at Phrygian Hierapolis.

to the arena games, thus reflecting the use of the monument, and the same must be true for the Erotes hunting wild animals that occur in the theatre at Perge. Inscriptions found at Sagalassos mention gladiatorial games and beast hunts performed in the city's theatre during the 2nd and the 3rd centuries CE.⁶² Furthermore, a statue of Nemesis set on the stage and reliefs of gladiators found in the theatre evoke this same subject.⁶³ The depiction including a Victory and a Tyche in the theatre at Sagalassos could hint at the self-promotion of the city, which was twice *neokoros* and is labelled in an inscription as "the first city of Pisidia, friend and ally of the Romans".⁶⁴ Bulls' heads and wreaths on the *proskenion* of the theatre at Aphrodisias, on the contrary, are ornamentations commonly found in many categories of artefacts across the Mediterranean world.⁶⁵ More unusual is the pattern of circular shields and peltas that appears on the front of the *proskenion* at Termessos. Decorative motifs inspired by the military world occur again in this same theatre: a slab attributed to the ornamentation of one of the *versurae* depicts an anatomic cuirass.⁶⁶ Weapons could recall not only the military sphere, but also the world of the gladiators; one might not even exclude an allusion to local mythology, as peltas are the main attribute of the Amazons, who were involved in the myth of the Lycian hero Bellerophon.⁶⁷ A comparable example for the location of decorative elements on the *proskenion* can be found on Greek mainland, in the Roman province of Macedonia: the theatre at Thasos, where in the 1st century CE sculpted metopes carved on the entablature of the *proskenion* depicted Dionysus with panther and a *kantharos*, the

62. An inscription dedicated by the corporation of dyers honours an *agonothetes* and high priest for offering gladiatorial games and *venationes* lasting four days, while another inscription honours a patron who sponsored games involving large numbers of gladiators and beasts: Robert (1971) 142–43 nos. 97–98; De Bernardi Ferrero (1966–1974) vol. 4, 200–02 nos. 5–6 (M. Gallina).

63. Waelkens – Poblome – De Rynck (2011) 121, 125 (figure of Nemesis: Burdur Museum, inv. no. 301.99.94).

64. Devijver – Waelkens (1997) 310–14 no. 6 (inscription mentioning *dis neokoros*); *IGR* III, 348 (inscription claiming that Sagalassos is the first city of Pisidia); see also Waelkens – Poblome – De Rynck (2011) 102–03 (with figure). On the integration of Sagalassos in the wider network of the Roman Empire, see Waelkens (2002).

65. Parallels in de Chaisemartin (2011) esp. 81–82.

66. De Bernardi Ferrero (1969–1974) vol. 2, 24 fig. 28; Pellino (2005) 72 fig. 29.

67. On peltas on reliefs: Polito (1998) 37–38, 44–45 (and 38 n. 57, with bibliography, for peltas on gladiatorial monuments). In Hellenistic times, the Termessians had been identified with the brave tribe of the Solymoi, who played a crucial role in the story of Bellerophon: Kosmetatou (1997); cf. Strab. XIII 4.16–17. On Termessian identity, see van Nijf (2012a).

Thracian hero on horseback killing a boar, and Ares in full armour.⁶⁸ At that time, the theatre at Thasos was used for both theatrical performances and gladiatorial contests; the presence of Nemesis, alluding to the arena games, was particularly strong in this theatre.⁶⁹

In most cases, figured reliefs with subjects of special significance were displayed on the podia of the columnar orders of the high, two- or three-storey façades. A very early example, dating to the Augustan period, might be the theatre at Tralleis, although its interpretation –and even location– remains dubious; themes related to the world of Dionysus were probably included. Most of the decoration of this monument is unfortunately lost; a Caryatid kept in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul probably decorated the front of the stage.⁷⁰ To this example, the early imperial frieze from the theatre at Anazarbus must be added; the pattern of garlands of fruits and flowers is merely ornamental, even if the presence of herms supporting the garlands could hint at the god who specialized in athletics and youth education.⁷¹ A few decades later, the reliefs placed on the *scaenae frons* of the theatre at Ephesus refer to traditional mythical figures, more or less related to the theatre (Satyrs, Erotes), or display purely decorative themes (garlands and masks). Surprisingly, allusion to the Ephesian Artemis is made only in the dedicatory inscription, despite the prominence of her cult in the city, which was the seat of the imperial procurator of the province and could boast the prized title of *neokoros*, or warden of the imperial cult. The decoration of the theatre featured statues of gods and emperors as well, including Artemis, Apollo, a copy of the Polykleitan Diadoumenos, and two statues of Domitian.⁷²

The friezes on the podia of the façades at Tralleis, Anazarbus, and Ephesus must be considered as very early receptions of a trend that was initiated in the western part of the Empire, namely, in Italy and Narbonensis. The theatre at Fiesole, in central Italy, displayed figured reliefs since its Augustan-Claudian phase; located on both the podia of the *scaenae frons* and on the *pulpitum*, the friezes depict Dionysian scenes, a sea *thiasos*, animal and vegetal

68. Sear (2006) 420 plan 446; Karadedos – Koukouli-Chrysanthaki (2007) 280–82 figs. 17–19; Grandjean – Salviat (2012) 134–39, with bibliography.

69. The goddess is depicted on a relief on the southern pier of the *proskenion*, while gladiators commissioned reliefs of Nemesis and inscribed their names on the walls of the stage building; Bernard – Salviat (1962) 596–603; *IG* XII 8, 371.

70. Mendel (1914) 257–60 no. 541.

71. Wrede (1985). Krämer (2001) deals only with iconographic issues.

72. Özren (1996) 124–27 nos. E1, E2, E37, E46, E48.

ornaments, mythical tales related to different sagas (Mars and Rhea Sylvia, episodes from Heracles' labours, madness of Lycurgus), and probable allusions to real events (military insignia, figures of barbarians).⁷³ During the 1st century CE, figured reliefs decorating the podia are also attested in southern Gaul: a slab depicting a dancing Maenad comes from the theatre at Arles, while friezes representing Maenads, Satyrs, and Silens decorated the podia of the façade of the theatre at Vaison-la-Romaine.⁷⁴ In such contexts, the topics mainly evoke the world of Dionysus, yet local tales and possibly even real events may find their place. The theatre at Orange, dated to the Augustan period, stands out for its peculiar combination of decorative motifs: a tall frieze depicting a procession of centaurs bearing animal offerings was located above the lower order of columns, while smaller slabs representing winged Victories riding chariots decorated the architrave of the second storey.⁷⁵ The two friezes allude to a triumphal *pompe* that is situated in a divine sphere and converges towards the centre of the façade; there, the statue of the emperor was displayed in the middle exedra, a symbolic allusion to the sky.⁷⁶

The early response to a western trend in the 1st-century CE theatres at Tralleis, Anazarbus, and Ephesus supports the opinion of those who tend to stress mutual influences between Asian and western theatres in the first decades of the imperial period.⁷⁷ These elements, but also the presence of a three-storey façade in the Augustan theatre at Stratonikeia or the fact that the decorative patterns in the theatre at Aphrodisias show patent conformity to the Augustan spirit, strengthen the suggestion that theatre conception in Asia Minor was not only extremely receptive to new architectural and cultural elements from the west, but also capable of elaborating new formulas. Maybe it is in the creative originality of the ornamentation and the inventiveness of the decorative subjects that the theatres of Roman Asia Minor can claim supremacy. As the following comments will show, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE figured friezes located on columnar podia of theatre façades found here very elaborate expressions.

In the Antonine period, the friezes that decorated the podium of the lower order of the façade in the theatre at Side display mythical tales. The Dionysian subject is illustrated with a wealth of detail and many episodes of the

73. Fuchs (1986).

74. Fuchs (1987) 133–35.

75. Sauron (2004); Badie et al. (2011). H. of friezes: 0.76 m. (centaurs), and 0.45 m. (Victories).

76. Sauron (2007) esp. 109; Rosso (2009) 101–08.

77. Moretti (1992) esp. 11–15; Sobrà – Masino (2014).

god's life are present: birth, infancy, *komos* and triumph, the abandonment of Ariadne, and even the involvement of Dionysus in the Gigantomachy; a reference to local legends can be detected in the presence of the nymphs of Nysa. The presence of Dionysus in theatres is a typical feature of the Greek world, while in the Roman tradition Apollo and the Muses are most frequently related to the arts and, therefore, the theatre.⁷⁸ In the specific case of the theatre of Side, it is worth remembering that a temple of Dionysus was located on the north side of the building, following a Greek habit attested already from the Archaic period onwards.⁷⁹

In the same decades or slightly later, the Dionysian subject found one of its most complete representations in the theatre at Nysa, a city with a renowned relationship to the legend of Dionysus. In contrast to other theatres, where the depictions are repeated twice, the stories of Dionysus form here a long sequence running from one end of the façade to the other.⁸⁰ All the most representative moments of the god's life are depicted (birth, infancy, the episode of Ariadne), and the scenes are filled with allusions to local myths and divinities, such as the nymphs of Nysa and the triad Persephone / Demeter / Hades, whose myth, according to a local tradition, took place in the area around Nysa. Furthermore, personifications frequently occur: river gods referring to local watercourses, nymphs alluding to the surrounding environment, and the city of Nysa itself.⁸¹ Subjects related to the world of the arts and drama were also repeated in the free-standing decoration of the *scaenae frons*, where at least two (but probably all of the nine) Muses and a statue of Dionysus were present.⁸²

Between the late Antonine and the early Severan period, the Dionysian theme is heavily emphasized in the decoration of the theatre at Perge. The frieze, located on the podium of the lower storey, stretched over the whole façade, reaching a total length of 65 m.; the tall slabs (H. about 1.20 m.) form an impressive narrative that was repeated twice, as they were displayed symmetrically from the edges of the façade towards its centre. The Dionysus frieze shows both traditional episodes of the god's life and more uncommon ones, such as the murder of king Pentheus. The theme is combined not only with more traditional narratives (Centauromachy, Gigantomachy), but also with the peculiar scene focusing on members of the local elite and the

78. Fuchs (1987) 185–86; Di Napoli (2013) 161–65, with full bibliography.

79. Alanyalı (2010) 97–98 fig. 7; (2013) 452.

80. See e.g. the cycle of Dionysus in the theatres at Perge and at Phrygian Hierapolis.

81. Interpretation and parallels in Lindner (1994) esp. 109–90.

82. Kadioğlu (2006).

personification of the city of Perge. Ritual solemnity and stillness dominate this representation, despite the fact that the officials are supposed to be moving towards the altar and the Tyche of Perge at the centre. The officials surrounding the Tyche are young men, or men in their middle age, or even older men; their features recall portraits. This aspect might hint at the fact that real members of the same family are depicted, probably with the aim of portraying three generations of the same family, therefore stressing the idea of continuity. One might think of a self-representation of the family of the Plancii, in charge of worshipping Artemis Pergaia and benefactors to the city for much more than a single generation.⁸³ The city of Perge boasted its own importance not only in this depiction, but also in the numerous references to local myths that can be found in this theatre: at each end of the Dionysus frieze, the personification of the river Kestros was flanked by a female figure representing the city of Perge; side pillars at both ends of the first storey bore figures in high relief of Artemis Pergaia and Nike; several local heroes such as Minyas, Mopsos, and Kalchas appeared in the Gigantomachy frieze; and the central niche of the third storey was crowned by a so-called 'Syrian pediment' decorated by two reclining fluvial gods that represent the environment of Perge, rich in waters.⁸⁴

The depictions of the friezes from the theatre at Perge are a bold assertion of the city's identity and demonstrate the use of images in a 2nd-century city of Asia Minor to articulate its relationship with the Greek past, in the context of a growing euergetism whose explosion is widely attested in Roman Asia Minor.⁸⁵ The relief with the procession of officials, strategically located at a focal point of the façade, might be the visual representation of what a long inscription records about the foundation of the *πανήγυρις* of the *Demostheneia* at Oinoanda; furthermore, many other elements in the ornamentation of this theatre assert the identity of Perge and promote its self-representation.⁸⁶ The emphasis put on the past and on mythical traditions

83. Inan et al. (2000) 334–35, with bibliography. The cult of Artemis Pergaia surpassed the borders of Pamphilia, reaching Phrygia, Caria, Rhodes, and even Syria: *LIMC* II (1984) 765–66 s.v. Artemis Pergaia (R. Fleischer); Inan et al. (2000) 331–34.

84. Inan et al. (2000) 323 (personifications of Kestros and Perge), 303–06 figs. 23–24 (pillars with Artemis Pergaia and Nike), 337–38 (local heroes in the Gigantomachy), 315–17 fig. 42 ('Syrian pediments'). See also Alanyalı (2012) for the Gigantomachy and Centauromachy friezes.

85. Berns et al. (2002); Schwertheim – Winter (2003); Ng (2007); Zuiderhoek (2009) & (2011).

86. On the *Demostheneia*: Wörrle (1988). On the use of images in public spaces at Perge: Bravi (2011). On the colonnaded road as an example of 'civic competition' in 2nd-century Perge: Heinzlmann (2003). On the relationship between *agones* and politics in imperial times: van Nijf (2012b).



Fig. 7. Theatre at Hierapolis: relief frieze located above the *porta regia*.

constituted a way of reactivating the memory of the origins, in an attempt to enliven local heritage and build through it a new relationship with the Roman power. This attitude reflects a pervasive habit of the cities of Asia Minor, in the wider context of a lively competition for supremacy in the eyes of the Roman power, especially at a time marked by the influential presence of exponents of the Second Sophistic.⁸⁷ The use of myth for stressing the place of a city in the unreal, imaginary world of the legend was then a means for locating the city itself within the real, historical hierarchy of contemporary events. In 26 CE, when eleven cities of Asia Minor competed for the honour of dedicating a temple to Tiberius, each appealed not only to its loyalty towards the people of Rome, but also to the ancientness of its race;⁸⁸ a 2nd-century CE treaty of *homonoia* between the Lycian cities of Tlos and Sidyma was justified by the fact that the two respective mythical founders were relatives, as an inscription on a wall of the agora of Sidyma explains.⁸⁹

87. Lindner (1994); Boffo (2001); Fontani (2002); Newby (2003); Barresi (2007).

88. Tac., *Ann.* IV 55: “*vetustas generis*”.

89. Chaniotis (1988) 75–85.



Photo MAIER archives, courtesy Francesco D'Andria.

This attitude finds emphatic expression in the reliefs that decorated the theatre at Hierapolis. The podium of the lower storey displayed the myths of Apollo and Artemis, with numerous references to cults of Asia Minor, such as the Ephesian Artemis or Apollo Delphinios; a slab depicting the nine Muses with Sappho and Apollo stressed once more the relationship to the world of the arts. On the podium of the second storey were two slabs representing the myth of Demeter and Persephone; this explicit reference to local cults, performed in the city's Ploutonion, was repeated in the statue of Hades included in the decoration of the *scaenae frons*.⁹⁰ The third storey was decorated by more conventional reliefs that illustrated the Dionysian subject, while the depiction above the *porta regia*, at the height of the podium of the second storey, bore special significance (Fig. 7). Here, the group of the imperial family (Septimius Severus, Julia Domna, and the two heirs Geta and Caracalla) is not located in the centre of the scene, but nonetheless

90. Statue of Hades: Bejor (1991) 3–6 no. 1 pls. 2–3. Hierapolis, “whose very soil is wedded to Pluto” (*Sibylline Oracles* V 317), was the seat of a famous Ploutonion: D’Andria (2013).

attracts the viewer's gaze. Solemnity characterizes this depiction. The emperor is crowned by a winged Victory, at both sides are Rome, Tyche, and personifications recalling the agonistic competitions and the city itself: Hierapolis holds the *agalma* of Apollo Pythios and the river Chrysorhoas is leaning on the ground. The lateral sides display figures related to the agonistic world; many personifications associated with the world of the games, the city's political bodies, and the concepts of universal and shared *agones* are displayed in a paratactic order on a neutral background. This complex, symbolic scene is paralleled by a slab, where personifications perform a common sacrifice appropriately labelled as *Synthysia*. The ornamentation of the façade was enriched by many free-standing sculptures that depict not only emperors, members of the local elite, and gods, but also, and most significantly, divinities of local importance such as Apollo Kareios, personifications, and the founders of the city, Eumenes II and Attalus I.⁹¹

The agonistic relief in the theatre at Hierapolis, a bold assertion of the relevance of the city and of its relationship with the emperor, must be understood within the wider context of the decoration of the building, which emphasized local traditions to stress the city's identity. Intense building activity took place at Hierapolis in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries: the *scaenae frons* of the theatre was rebuilt in 206/7 CE, and the nymphaeum at the Temple of Apollo and the nymphaeum of the Tritons were constructed around those same years.⁹² These buildings share features such as a monumental appearance and the use of decorative elements that assert the city's identity, and were located in prominent gathering places in each town. It has been convincingly argued that the Hierapolitan sophist Antipater might have played a crucial role in shaping local versions of well-known myths in the friezes of the theatre.⁹³ Furthermore, the theatre featured the busts of two *oikistai*, eponyms of two city tribes, to recall the origins of Hierapolis. Interesting parallels are not only the abovementioned decorations of the theatres at Perge, Side, and Nysa, but also the ornamentation of the theatre at Ephesus. Here, the 1st-century decoration featured purely ornamental patterns,

91. Bejor (1991) 1–46 pls. 2–25; Ritti (2011) 173–75 figs. 11.1, 11.2. Busts of Eumenes and Attalus: Verzone (1978) 433 figs. 56–57; Hierapolis (1987) 73; Ritti (2011) 177–79 figs. 11.5, 11.6. Marble slabs and polychrome mosaics completed the rich decoration: Verzone (1978) 433.

92. D'Andria (2001). On the two nymphaea, which date to the early 3rd century and to 222 CE, respectively, see most recently D'Andria (2011).

93. D'Andria – Ritti (1985); D'Andria (2011). See also Ritti (1988) on Antipater from Hierapolis.

including Satyrs, Erotes, masks, and garlands. Later, however (third quarter of the 2nd century CE), rectangular pillars were added, decorated with figures in very high relief of Satyrs, Dionysus, Amazons, and the personification of Ephesus in the guise of an Amazon.⁹⁴ These pillars, located on the *logeion* or more probably somewhere on the scene building,⁹⁵ not only refer to the world of the theatre by depicting Dionysus and Satyrs, but also (and primarily) boldly state the relevance of the city by displaying the personification of Ephesus and referring to its foundation myths, which involved the presence of the Amazons. The decorative elements in this building phase of the theatre reflect the same spirit as the *δωρεά* by Vibius Salutaris, who in 103/4 CE donated to Artemis and the city of Ephesus 29 gold and silver portable images to be displayed in the theatre and brought in procession on feast days.⁹⁶ These precious *simulacra* represented the goddess Artemis, the emperor Trajan and his wife, political personifications (the Roman Senate, the *Boule* of Ephesus, the *Gerousia*, the *Ephebeia*, and six tribes), mythical and real founders of the city (Androklos, the Hellenistic king Lysimachus, and probably Eunomos and Pion), and other subjects. References to the city's past (founders, mythical figures, deities) and present (political personifications) strongly emphasized the civic identity of Ephesus, while homage to Roman power was given in the figures of the emperor, his wife, and the Senate of Rome. A century later, in the Severan period, Ephesus celebrated its third *neokoria* by dedicating statues in the gallery *in summa cavea* that represented city personifications (211 CE).⁹⁷

Reference to a shared heritage through allusion to local cults, with the aim of strengthening civic identity, can also be detected in the theatres at Aphrodisias and Myra: at Aphrodisias, a relief depicting the Aphrodite of Aphrodisias, donated by a Theodoros, decorated a niche of the theatre façade or the *proskenenion*; at Myra, niches at the height of the central corridor of the cavea displayed depictions of Tyche and Artemis Eleuthera, the pa-

94. Eichler (1956–58) 7–14 figs. 1–6; Oberleitner et al. (1978) 64 nos. 47–49; Hartswick (1986) 128–32 figs. 1–7, 135–36; Beck – Bol – Bückling (1990) 578–80 no. 99a–c.

95. On the *logeion*: Hörmann (1923/24). On the *scaenae frons*: Pellino (2005) 55–56, with suggested comparison to Perge.

96. Rogers 1991. On memory in 2nd-century Ephesos: Fontani (2002). On popular assemblies in theatres: Vujčić (2009).

97. Inscribed bases attest the cities of Carthage, Cnidus, Kos and Nikaia: *IvE* 2053–56. Furthermore, a statue has been associated with a base that mentions the *Demos* of Ephesus: *IvE* 2052 (base); Aurenhammer (1990) 165–67 no. 146 pls. 100–01 (statue).

tron goddess of the city.⁹⁸ Also the reliefs from the theatre at Miletus, in spite of the prevalence of hunting Erotes, clearly refer to local traditions by displaying Artemis, Apollo Delphinios, the cult statue of Apollo by Kanachos, and the Apollo Philesios of Didyma; unfortunately, little of the free-standing sculptural ornamentation of this theatre is preserved, except for two archaizing Caryatids of the Hellenistic period, reused in the decoration of the scene during imperial times, and a fragmentary torso of Victory.⁹⁹ In the early 3rd century CE, the reliefs that decorated the front of the long *pulpitum* in the theatre at Sabratha displayed a very peculiar and symbolic allusion to both local cults and loyalty to Rome: theatrical masks, tools for the performances, gods and personifications, the Muses, and the judgement of Paris frame the central scene, where Septimius Severus and Caracalla perform a sacrifice in the presence of Rome and the tutelary gods of Sabratha.¹⁰⁰

The insistence on myth finds parallels in some of the few reliefs discovered in theatres in Greece proper. The friezes that decorated the Hadrianic *scaenae frons* of the theatre at Corinth depict the Gigantomachy, the Amazonomachy, and the Labours of Heracles.¹⁰¹ These topics are already present as decorative patterns in different categories of buildings, as well as in some Italian theatres of the late 1st and 2nd centuries CE, such as the theatre of Balbus at Rome and the theatre at Catania.¹⁰² The labours of Heracles also occur on the reliefs that decorated the *pulpitum* of the theatre at Delphi, with probable allusion to Nero's bravery, while the Hadrianic reliefs from the theatre of Dionysus at Athens, which depict episodes from the god's life, provide a good parallel to Asian friezes because of the numerous references to a local, Attic background.¹⁰³ The relief slabs that decorated the theatre at Kırklareli (Thrace), recently investigated and still unpublished, represent

98. Aphrodisias: Erim – Smith (1991) 81 no. 14 fig. 16. Myra: Borchhardt (1975) 58 pls. 23 c–d.

99. Schmidt-Colinet (1977) 37; Gulaki (1981) 179–80 figs. 128–128a.

100. Caputo (1959) 15–23 figs. 54–83 pls. 31–49.

101. Sturgeon (1977).

102. Theatres of Balbus (after the fire of 80 CE) and at Catania (Gigantomachy associated with references to military victories: trophy, barbarians): Fuchs (1987) esp. 139–40. Centauromachy, Amazonomachy, and Gigantomachy occur e.g. on the reliefs from the Agora Gate at Aphrodisias: Linant de Bellefonds (2009).

103. Despinis (2003) 75–91 figs. 241–60; Di Napoli (2013) 15, 148–50, 153, with full bibliography. The above remarks show that the reliefs from the theatre of Dionysus at Athens, despite their relevance, cannot be considered the earliest examples of the use of myth in theatre reliefs on which the tradition of Asian friezes depend, as argued by Pelino (2005) 67.

scenes from the stories of Dionysus and Apollo (Niobids), a Nike, and local figures (Thracian horseman), thus demonstrating once again the reference to both traditional themes and a shared, local, cultural milieu.¹⁰⁴ And even the 2nd-century relief slabs from the *porticus post scaenam* of the theatre at Philippi (Macedonia) emphasized local cults, namely, the pre-Macedonian cult of Dionysus, celebrated the tragic playwright Euripides who lived at the Macedonian court, and highlighted Panhellenic myths connected to the history of the city, which had become a Roman colony.¹⁰⁵ The wide use of myth for adorning public, secular buildings in Roman Greece and Achaëa in particular, to allude to the Classical tradition, stressed a special identity in the Greek panorama and preserved a shared memory at a time when political autonomy was lost.¹⁰⁶ In the theatres of Roman Greece, reliefs depicting mythological tales were frequently combined with statues representing noteworthy figures of the Greek, often local, history: poets, philosophers, men of letters, and past personalities such as generals or lawgivers.¹⁰⁷

Although the trend described above produced noteworthy results in theatres of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, it was not a common habit in the cities of Asia Minor. Not all middle-imperial Asian theatres displayed significant themes in the ornamentation of their façades. Thus, the podium of the second storey of the *scaenae frons* in the theatre at Myra was decorated with a frieze of theatrical masks, while the podium of the lower storey of the façade in the theatre at Tlos displayed the decorative pattern of garlands supported by herms. As for the theatre-stadium at Aizanoi, one of the most impressive public building complexes of the Roman city, the frieze depicting Erotes fighting wild animals clearly alludes to the *venationes* that took place in this edifice, where a high parapet surrounding the orchestra was meant to protect the spectators during performances involving dangerous beasts.¹⁰⁸ And, of course, many theatres might have had no relief ornamentation at all: less than 20 out of the more than 150 theatres of Asia Minor, built or refurbished in imperial times, show relief decoration of some significance. Such ornamen-

104. Ertuğrul (1998) 434–35 fig. 13; Sear (2006) 422. The reliefs were not in their original position, as they had been later reused for constructing a protective parapet around the orchestra.

105. Karadedos – Koukouli-Chrysanthaki (2007) 275–80, with full bibliography; Damaskos (2007) esp. 120–21.

106. Di Napoli (forthcoming).

107. Di Napoli (2013) 174–80.

108. On building programmes financed by local wealthy families at Aizanoi, see Wörrle (1992) and Jes (2007). Sear (2006) 113 discusses some cases of Asian theatres juxtaposed with a stadium.

tation must have implied an overall project and considerable financial means that could not have been available in every city; nonetheless, further studies and excavations might provide new data.

THIS REVIEW OF THE FIGURED friezes from theatres of Asia Minor has shown that two different categories of decoration must be distinguished, namely, friezes displayed on architraves and friezes placed on the columnar podia of the façade. The former category continues a Hellenistic tradition and usually displays purely ornamental patterns, with the occasional occurrence of more symbolic depictions; the latter is linked to an architectural feature of Roman origin and may attest to the very early reception of a trend that started in the western part of the Empire. Friezes located on the entablature of the *proskenion*, on the other hand, constitute a peculiar category that is found in Asia Minor and in regions where an Asian influence is attested (Thasos), and may have decorative patterns alluding to the function of the theatre as an arena.

From a diachronic perspective, it is remarkable that friezes on architraves appear in the late Hellenistic period (Pergamum, Halicarnassus) and then gradually diminish in frequency, while friezes on the podia of façades first appear in the early 1st century CE (Tralleis, Anazarbus, Ephesus) and then find their widest distribution in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. It is at this point that the most significant depictions appear, with a concoction of mythological tales and allusions to real events. Interpretation of the subjects within the wider contexts of competition between cities of Asia Minor, of civic euergetism, and of the influential presence of exponents of the Second Sophistic indicates a desire to express the city's identity through the use of myth and shared heritage, and to find a place both within the hierarchy of the province and in the Empire more generally.

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