Fig. 1. Amphitheatre, from SW. Lines of cavea seating are visible to left, as is chapel apse. N entrance gallery is in the background (copyright S. Diehl, 2002).

Fig. 2. Toçi excavations, showing excavation of the arena necropolis (courtesy A. Hoti).
An amphitheatre and its afterlives: survey and excavation in the Durrës amphitheatre

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Introduction

Dyrrachium (modern Durrës) lay at a true ancient crossroads. An important Adriatic port and one of the western termini of the Via Egnatia, it served as a nodal point binding Italy to the Balkans and Greece to Dalmatia. Yet despite its strategic importance, very little is known of its ancient fabric. A handful of textual sources, a tiny epigraphic corpus and a small number of known monuments provide only a vague impression of the Roman city.

One exception is the amphitheatre, one of the few standing structures and an important example of the building type (fig. 1). Extraordinarily well preserved, its general outlines were revealed by sporadic excavations over three decades. Those excavations also uncovered its most unusual feature, an array of post-Roman features. Both the massive necropolis discovered in the arena floor and two Christian chapels, decorated with wall-mosaics and frescoes, that were built into the amphitheatre’s galleries, bear witness to its conversion into a locus of Christian memory. However, its careful investigation by Albanian teams did not result in full publication; an accurate plan of the amphitheatre and the features it contained was lacking, and the date of its construction and despoliation remained unknown.

Loss and rediscovery: a brief history of the excavations

Most Roman amphitheatres in continuously occupied cities were utilized into modern times (e.g., Arles), or were rediscovered and excavated in the 19th or early 20th c. (e.g., Pola and Mérida). Durrës was different: no ancient source attests to its existence, and it made its only appearance in the annals of history in 1501, when Marinus Barletius penned a brief description of the city and its monuments.1 It then vanished beneath an accretion of Ottoman houses, invisible even to the probing eyes of Sir Arthur Evans, who went to Durrës in 1877 with a copy of Barletius in hand.2 Yet L. Heuzey’s map and aerial photographs of World War II clearly reveal its oval outline in the arrangement of houses and surrounding streets, a pattern still visible from atop the adjacent hillside.3 Nonetheless, it was not until May 1966 that local archaeologist V. Toçi rediscovered the amphitheatre and initiated its excavation.

Toçi carried out excavations here for nearly two decades, removing over a dozen modern and Ottoman houses from in and around it, and uncovered all of the now-visible arena and most of the galleries on the W side. He also revealed the larger of the two Christian chapels (Chapel 1) with its mosaics and frescoes, as well as a large necropolis in the area4 (fig. 2). The excavations were resumed from 1983 to 2000 by L. Miraj; with the assistance of NATO troops based nearby, she revealed a large section of its NE side, including the monumental N entrance. She also uncovered a second Christian chapel (Chapel 2) and its frescoes.5

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1 M. Barletius (transl. Z. I. Gentelman), The historie of George Castriot, surnamed Scanderbeg, King of Albane (London 1596) 488.
2 A. Evans, Illyrian letters (London 1878) 136.

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Topography and structure of the amphitheatre

The amphitheatre is located in W part of the modern town, flanked on its W side by the Late Roman city walls, and on its N by a mediaeval cross-wall which cut off the southernmost portion of the town (fig. 3). While the Roman city-centre is not known in detail, it is assumed to lie to the northeast, with the result that the amphitheatre would have lain at the W and perhaps also the S edge of the town, a common liminal location. However, Roman baths nearby and the recent discovery of the Early Roman wall near the harbour suggest an urban fabric extending around the amphitheatre to the north and south and thus a setting less than wholly marginal. It was recently suggested that the town centre migrated south over time. If so, the amphitheatre would have gained greater prominence in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, as is reflected in its rich post-Roman afterlife.

Topographic exigencies

The amphitheatre's location and orientation, as was typical, was dictated by efficient use of the terrain, in this case a hill on which its N half was built (fig. 1). In fact, the sections supported by the hill are irregularly disposed (about a quarter of the W side, and half that much again of the E side), a solution that sacrificed constructional symmetry in favour of maximum use of the hillside. In these areas the amphitheatre was laid directly on the hill, with only limited excavation and tunneling into the bedrock to create one stairway and the monumental N entrance. The areas laid directly on the hill are the best preserved: the actual seats have been robbed, but the shape of the cavea can still be seen. As the hill fell away towards the southwest and, more steeply, towards the southeast, substructures were used progressively to support the seating. The sections closest to the hill are partially supported by hill and partially by artificial substructures, and it is principally these 'transitional sections' that have been excavated.

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Fig. 4. Plan, Durres amphitheatre.
The specific topographic exigencies of these 'transitional sections' introduced a series of structural peculiarities that are not representative of the amphitheatre as a whole and which denied it a symmetry and regularity characteristic of most amphitheatre plans (fig. 4). For instance, the sections not laid directly atop the hill are supported by what Golvin calls 'creuse' (hollow) construction-technique, by which the seating is supported on a network of radially arranged walls, rather than on the terrain itself or on earth-filled boxes. In 'creuse' amphitheatre, laid on flat ground, passage to the interior is through flat radial passages, and access to upper levels is by staircases leading up from them. At Durres, the radial passages did not lead up from the exterior, but down from an exterior street level which, in the W sections, probably entered the amphitheatre at its second storey (fig. 5). The galleries in the preserved sections are similarly affected by the topography. The largest excavated section, on the W side, seems to include 4 galleries, yet directly to the south Gallery 1 seems to disappear and Gallery 2 shifts inward. Owing to the presence of the hill, not one of these 4 galleries offers unimpeded passage around the monument. Finally, there is some evidence that the structural supports for two galleries change with the topography. In the above-mentioned area Galleries 1, 2 and 3 are defined by long walls and separated from each other by radial walls. However, in the southernmost excavated parts of Galleries 2 and 3, piers seem to take the place of these walls, a phenomenon also seen on the unexcavated E side. Durres provides offers an important glimpse of how untidy the transition from natural hill to built supports might be.

Outer wall, dimensions, and capacity

The most vexing problem is the location and nature of the outer wall. Two massive fragments of wall were found on the building's E and W sides. As both are chunks of opus caementicum (the core used in all walls) and both follow the building's general curve, they may represent robbed-out sections of the outer wall. The nearby city wall may also be indicative. This wall, which dates to the later 5th or early 6th c., runs near to the W chunk of opus caementicum. It seems unlikely that the late-antique wall-builders would have gone to the trouble of cutting the amphitheatre; it is far more likely that the city wall was laid against the amphitheatre, so we should expect to find the amphitheatre's W wall adjacent to the fortifications — indeed, just where the large chunk of opus caementicum sits. Our plan includes an approximate line for this outer wall. Preliminary analysis of the amphitheatre's geometry, based on projections of the centre lines of radial walls, seems to indicate that it was laid out as an 8-centered oval. However, as the outer wall fragments have been heavily robbed, the articulation and materials of its façade are unknown. The preserved sections are too long to be piers, but both are located at the transition between built structure and hillside where a solid wall might be expected. It is still possible that the S stretches of the outer wall had a pier/arcade arrangement. The presence of a small projection on the E chunk of the opus caementicum fragment may possibly mark the base of an engaged column.

If our assumptions regarding the outer wall are correct, the amphitheatre would have had outer dimensions of c.118.6 x 98.4 m, an arena of c.60.6 x 40.3 m, and would have held between 16,000 and 23,000 spectators.

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8 Golvin ( supra n.6) 71.
9 Other amphitheaters displaying similar structural solutions to hillside construction are Pola, Salona and Tarragona: Golvin ibid. 172, 207 and 165.
10 Cf. the amphitheater of Salona: E. Dyggve, Recherches à Salone (Copenhagen 1933) vol. II, 55.
11 L. Rey, “Les remparts de Durazzo,” Albania 1 (1925) fig. 18, photographed a now-vanished piece of the amphitheater wall that ran perpendicular to the opus caementicum chunk and slightly south of it. This was almost certainly a radial wall, rather than a missing piece of the outer wall.
12 This trace is only approximate, given the fragmentary excavated remains. Further extrapolation of wall centres is necessary to prove this 8-centered design. Golvin ( supra n.6) 387-401 has suggested that most amphitheaters may have used variants on the 4-centered oval and that more complicated geometries are unlikely. M. Wilson-Jones (RomMitt 100 [1993] 417-18) agreed in principal although, unlike Golvin, he claims that the Colosseum was built as an 8-centered oval.
13 Golvin ( supra n.6) 219 erroneously claimed that the façade was built of opus quadratum.
14 The N wall section at Salona exhibits an excellent comparison, even though there the solid hillside-facing wall was actually the city wall: Dyggve ( supra n.10) vol. II, 62-63 and 124-35.
15 The range depends on the formula used [in what follows, sc = surface area of the cavea, of which 90% is assumed to be used for seating]: Golvin ( supra n.6) 380-81 has sc x 2.5; D. L. Bomgardner, The story of the Roman amphitheatre (London 2000) 234 n.40 has sc/ 0.28 (0.28 = average seat area of Roman amphitheaters). In both cases, lower figures (12,500-17,900 spectators) result if it is assumed that the amphitheater did not include a summa cavea (see below).
Fig. 5. Stairs, leading from Gallery 1 to Gallery 2 and vomitorium 6 (copyright S. Diehl).

Fig. 6. Gallery 3 from S, looking toward chapel area (copyright S. Diehl).

**Seating**

The *cavea* is preserved only in the NW and NE sections where it was laid directly on the hillside. The plan (figs. 1 and 4) displays only the NW quadrant of this seating. Only the *opus caementicium* base of the *cavea* survives, but the imprints of seats, *cunei*, and external staircases can be detected, giving an approximate idea of the *cavea*’s overall disposition.
Evidence for three divisions of seating are preserved: podium and ima and media cavea. The podium, closest to the arena, had a wide (1.34 m) base and probably 3 rows of seating. The next section, the ima cavea, is the worst preserved but seems to have held c.16 rows of seats. The ima cavea was separated from the media cavea by a well-preserved walkway, permitting circulation. The media cavea preserves the lines of its seats, stairs and curvi, and seems to have held 18-22 rows of seats.

No trace of a summa cavea has been preserved. Its original presence or absence is bound up with the question of the outer wall and possible peripheral gallery (see below). A summa cavea would have been located over the space between the outer line of radial walls and the outer wall. A poorly preserved set of stairs near the putative outer wall fragment evidently provided access to this area. A summa cavea built here could have held at most only c.10 rows of seats and would probably have been constructed of wood. Alternatively, this uppermost storey may simply have served as a walkway, as has been proposed for Salona and Pola.

Galleries and vomitoria

The largest galleries were the monumental entrances built along the N-S axis. Only the N entrance gallery, tunneled into the hillside, has been uncovered (fig. 1). Presumably a second entrance lay on the S axis. From this N entrance gallery an elliptical service gallery (G3a) led to the building’s W side, while, for reasons we shall discuss presently, two elliptical galleries (G3 and 3a) led to the E side.

In only one or two instances are the floor levels of the elliptical galleries known. The innermost gallery (G3a) seems to have run around the whole monument beneath the podium wall. Narrow and pierced by small windows, it was probably a service passage for arena participants and would have communicated directly with the arena. Gallery 3 (G3) was the widest elliptical gallery and gave access to the bottom of the podium (by way of vomitoria [V] 5 and 7) (fig. 6). Gallery 2 (G2) runs adjacent to Gallery 3, the two perhaps separated only by piers. Gallery 2 seems to have given onto the base of the ima cavea by way of 4 preserved vomitoria (V1, V3, V6, V10). Gallery 1 is preserved only in the W section; it contains a dogleg and it runs at different levels connected by 3 short flights of stairs. Gallery 1 connected the 3 sets of radial staircases leading to Galleries 2 and 3 and also provided access to the base of the media cavea (by way of V4 and V2). It seems probable that Gallery 1 was a feature only of the transitional W section of the building and did not continue in the S section. There access to the media cavea would probably have been by way of staircases from the radial passages.

It is not clear if the amphitheatre possessed a peripheral gallery, a feature that distinguished truly monumental amphitheatres of the Imperial age from their more provincial cousins. However, it seems likely such a gallery existed at least around the S portion of the amphitheatre, between the outer wall and the beginning of the radial supporting walls (labelled G1a on fig. 4). In order to accommodate the higher terrain in the N sections, this gallery may have had two storeys in the south and only one (the second storey) in the north.

Viewing box

Typically, the main viewing boxes were located along the minor axis. While no physical remains of boxes can be detected at Durres, the circulation patterns and staircases on the minor axis on the W side make it almost certain that a box existed there. Two closely-set vomitoria (V5 and 7) flanking the building’s W axis are

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16 Podium seat imprints averaged 0.66 m, while those of the media cavea averaged 0.51 m.
17 Based on an estimated width of the ima cavea of 6.78 m and an average depth of seat of 0.41 m. If we assume the same seat width as in the media cavea (0.51 cm), there would only be c.13 rows.
18 It is impossible to know if the highest preserved line of seats represents the top of the media cavea, or if the media cavea extended as far as the outer line of substructure walls. The range of seats represents calculations based on the former and latter possibilities, using an average seat width of 0.51 cm. Oddly, this average was c.10 cm deeper than in the ima cavea, a phenomenon which seems without precedent. However, the average for the ima cavea is based on sparse data and may be erroneous.
19 For Salona, see Dyggve (supra n.10) vol. II, 113-14. Golvin (supra n.6) 364., n.116, disagrees and proposes a summa cavea. For Pola, see S. Miškar, Das Amphitheatre in Pula (Pula 1971) 9, who reconstructs a summa cavea in lignis. Golvin does not include the summa cavea in his reconstruction, pl. 32.
20 It also seems likely that Gallery 2 ran at a higher level than Gallery 3 but, given the fragmentary floor levels throughout the amphitheater, this cannot be confirmed. The discovery of stairs within Gallery 2 on the E side suggest the differing floor levels would not have been greater than 1 m.
21 Golvin (supra n.6) 218 placed the Durres amphitheater in the category of amphitheaters with peripheral galleries, but he did not provide good evidence.
typical of access to a box. Centred directly above and between these two vomitoria is a third (V6). The many irregularities in Galleries 1 and 2 hereabouts probably derive from the need to provide access to this vomitorium and to the box. Small holes and hooks for marble revetment on two of the three vomitoria point to the decorative elaboration characteristic of entrances to boxes. This box would have been bounded by these three vomitoria, and its size can be estimated as the area between them (c.9.2 x 5.6 m).

Did a second such box exist on the E side? That axis lies beneath modern houses and a definite answer is not possible. However, we shall return to this question below.

Circulation and urban placement

As is clear from the discussion above, access seems to have been heavily weighted towards the high-status seating, with relatively little access provided to the upper seats. Of the 9 vomitoria revealed by excavation, two led to the base of the podium, 3 to the top of the podium or bottom of the ima cava, and only two to the bottom of the media cava. Tellingly, on the N side, where access beneath had to be tunnelled through the hillside, it was the ima cava that received a vomitorium. This bias is typical of most amphitheatres, showing that their function was as much one of upper-class entertainment and self-display as it was to placate the proletariat. The unusual pairing of the two inner galleries (G2 and 3) indicates that this bias is more pronounced at Durres than elsewhere.

Many amphitheatres display special patterns of circulation and building enhancements on the side facing the city. The main, N entrance at Durres was linked to the monument’s E side by two galleries (3 and probably 3a, the service gallery), while movement to the W side was possible only through the service gallery 3a. The E side seems to have had preferential treatment. The galleries leading to the W box are by no means exclusive, for along the way they include two access points to the media cava and one to the ima. It thus seems likely that the W box was the lesser of the two and that the amphitheatre’s E side reflected its position closer to the town center (fig. 3).

The relationship between the amphitheatre and the late-antique city wall also reveals something of the building’s place within the later town. As it passed nearby, the wall was elaborated by a postern gate and a tower (fig. 4; the gate lies off the plan to the south). The gate occupies an oblique angle to the wall, probably to accommodate an earlier street which would have been well placed to feed the amphitheatre’s S entrance. It thus seems that the street was still in use during the 5th c. The tower (‘E’), now destroyed, was built just north of the hypothetical junction of city wall and amphitheatre wall. A number of amphitheatres were converted to use as fortifications, and a further number were included within late-antique wall circuits. Given the position of Tower E and the proximity of the amphitheatre’s outer wall to the city wall, it is possible that the amphitheatre was incorporated in some fashion into the late-antique defenses.

Chronology of the construction and of the spoliation

The construction date remains a matter of conjecture. Previous literature placed the monument in the Hadrianic period but this was largely based on other evidence for Hadrian’s activities in the town. It was Trajan, however, who restored and repaired the vital Via Egnatia, and his programs in other Adriatic cities (e.g., Egnazia and Ancona) may have extended

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22 Comparative examples include the amphitheatres at Pola, Salona and Italicia (Golvin ibid. 357-58).
24 To my knowledge, this design feature is found only at Pola. See Golvin (supra n.6) 159 and 171-73, pls. 20 and 32.
25 For instance, Salona and Pola, both of the principal boxes of which were located on the side towards the city (Dyggve [supra n.10] vol. II, 112-13; Mrakar [supra n.19] 3 and 8).
26 Gutteridge, Hoti and Hurst (supra n.7) fig. 9.
27 On the use of amphitheatres in fortifications or as fortresses, see Dyggve (supra n.10) vol. I, 18; J. Formigé, “L’amphithéâtre d’Arles,” RA 2 (1964) 25-41; Bomgardner (supra n.15) 222. Examples include Salona, Pola, the Anfiteatro Castrense in Rome, and Arles.
28 Toçi 1971 (supra n.4) 40; Miraj 1986 (supra n.5) 166-67.
to Durres. The epigraphic and historical sources alone only favour a date in the High Empire, and the extant physical evidence seems to support this. Durres is one of only four amphitheatres to have been constructed almost wholly of opus mixtum (figs. 5 and 6). Amphitheatres built wholly in this technique seem to date to the 2nd or even 3rd c. The technique also appears in mid-Imperial additions and repairs to amphitheatres. If the Durres amphitheatre was built as a relatively complex, 8-sided oval, that may also be indicative of a later date, as there is some indication that the geometry became more complex over time. However, the use of formal indications to date amphitheatres is not a secure method.

We are somewhat better informed on the date of the amphitheatre’s abandonment. As the post-Roman phasing described below shows, it served a variety of functions well into the Ottoman period. Our excavations in one of its Christian chapels produced a stratigraphic sample of this post-Roman life, including evidence for its original spoliation (fig. 13 below, context 081). A robbing layer, composed of broken stairs, bricks and material from the building’s subfloors, was found directly on top of a set of partially robbed-out steps. The ceramics from this layer dated to the very end of the 6th and beginning of the 7th c. The growth of the necropolis in the arena may also date to this period (see below). We cannot be certain that this moment of spoliation also marked the end of spectacles or if they had ceased earlier. However, the amphitheatre’s continued use for important functions of some kind is suggested by its inclusion within the late Roman walls and by the positioning of the W postern gate to feed its S entrance.

Post-Roman afterlives

At Durres, as elsewhere, the foreclosure of traditional entertainments did not initiate the complete abandonment of the amphitheatre as a structure or as a local focus. Its monumental footprint continued to offer an attractive space for a multiplicity of new activities and functions. Durres is unusual, however, for the range and degree of preservation of its post-Roman histories, which seem to have continued for over a millennium. As in the post-Roman city itself, it was Christianity that made the deepest mark on the structure and meaning of the post-Roman amphitheatre. The galleries preserve a dialogue between Christians and their past, one that continued even after the passing of the Christian empire. Much of our work was aimed at elucidating the chronological and spatial dimensions of this later activity.

Necropolis

Seemingly the most extensive post-Roman activity to take place in the amphitheatre was burial. Graves were found throughout the arena and, to a lesser degree, within the various galleries. Togi excavated some 85 graves in the arena and in Gallery 3, where he focused on the area around Chapel 1 (fig. 2). He divided these graves into 3 phases: tile-lined; inhumations in earth capped by tiles laid ‘a cappuccino;’ and charnel graves. Traits common to all three were their E–W orientation, one skeleton per grave typically, and the rarity of grave goods. Miraj also excavated a number of graves, mostly within the galleries. While she dated all her

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31 On Trajanic activities in Ancona, see M. Moretti, Ancona. Regio V – Picenum (Rome 1945) 27 and 46-57. For Egnazia, see A. Donvito, Egnazia. Dalle origini alla riscoperta archeologica (Brindisi 1988) 135-46. The one epigraphic mention of gladiatorial games in Durres (CIL III, 607) is dated to the Trajanic period; see L. Robert, Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient grec (Paris 1940) 75.

32 The others are Tibur and Tusculum, which used opus reticulatum and brick bands, and Bordeaux, with opus vitatum and bricks: Golvin (supra n.6) 198, 209 and 217. At Durres there are thick (0.6 m) bands of opus incertum, alternating with 4-5 courses of brick (c.0.3 m thick), used in the radial walls, the gallery walls and the piers. The N entrance was constructed only of brick.

33 On the chronology of opus mixtum, see J.-P. Adam, Roman building. Materials and techniques (London 1994) 139-44. Opus mixtum is found in a group of central Italian amphitheatres (see Golvin [supra n.6] 111, 160, 163 and 196).

34 Dygge (supra n.10) vol. II, 127-30; Bomgardner (supra n.15) 198.

35 Context 081/082. Pottery included amphorae (Keay 61A; late Gaza; Carthage LRA 1), fine wares (Late Roman C 10A.2, ARS 61B), and some cooking pots related to Keesan 7th-c. types.

36 Miraj 1988 (supra n.5).
graves to the 7th c., based on the occasional presence of Komani-style jewelry, the many layers of graves in both arena and galleries point to a wider chronological range. A late Roman gravestone re-used in the altar of Chapel 1 and new evidence for Ottoman-period activity provide possible chronological termini. Given the difficulty in dating most of the graves, the relationship between this necropolis and the Christian chapels is unclear, and our new dating of the structural apparatus of Chapel 1 has exacerbated this problem.

Chapel 1

The largest chapel was built into the W side of Gallery 3, directly beneath the box. The chapel was laid across the gallery, making use of two flanking alcoves (figs. 7-9). In its current form, the chapel consists of a single nave with an apse lit by a bifora window. It is entered through two side arches that formed part of the gallery supports; its side walls are formed by the adjacent alcoves. In the W alcove, which forms the western end of the chapel, all three walls, as well as the ceiling, were decorated with frescoes, while the S and central alcove walls later received mosaic decoration atop the frescoes. On the chord of the apse lies the base of a rectangular masonry altar.

Various features associated with the chapel are preserved nearby. In the adjacent alcove to the south lies a large masonry tomb, excavated by Toçi. An ossuary (see below) was built into the next alcove to the south. North of the chapel, a small font with a shallow basin evidently served for baptisms.

In its Roman phase, chapel 1 was small with low ceiling, much like the surrounding alcove spaces. Two

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38 While many such spaces beneath boxes were given over to pagan sacelli, there is no evidence here for a
major Christian phases could be detected from the surviving material remains. The first was marked by removal of the opus caementicum vaults of the E alcove and box, extension of the side walls through this new space, and construction of the apse. The resulting space was presumably covered with a timber roof, since no evidence of vaulting could be found. The comitorium (V6) giving onto the box was left intact, creating a kind of second-storey platform on the west.

A second, minor phase is indicated by large beam-holes crudely cut into the chapel’s side walls (fig. 8) Too large for simple bracing, they seem to attest to the creation of a second floor. A third phase is attested only by photographs of the early excavations. One, taken before the chapel was fully excavated, shows a large, masonry altar and a slab floor c.2.5 m above the current floor, the altar so cramped by the vault of the apse that it is doubtful an officiant could have been accommodated (fig. 2).

A second photograph of the chapel from the exterior shows the apse window filled either with debris or rubble masonry. They suggest that, after the construction of the beam-supported second floor, the lower floor was abandoned and filled in (whether from the effects of time or deliberately), and a new altar and slab floor were laid in the second storey, effectively re-creating the now-defunct chapel.

cult function. Since these chapels were designed largely for arena participants and as there was probably no direct access to the arena, we should not expect to find a sacellum. See Golvin (supra n.6) 337-40.

39 Since the vaults supporting the box were removed in order to create the higher side walls, we cannot know whether the box was still in situ when the chapel was built, or had already been removed by robbing.


41 Institute of Monuments, photo no. 5014 (we are grateful to R. Gega providing this photograph).
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Fig. 10. Chapel 2, plan and section (D. Andrews).

While the relative structural chronology of Chapel 1 is straightforward, its absolute chronology is more difficult. Debate over the chapel's date has tended to focus on its mosaics, which have been variously dated from the 6th to the 10th c., recent work favouring the early 7th c. A terminus post quem for the chapel's abandonment seems to be provided by a coin hoard of 799 bronze coins, mostly issues of Alexios Comnenos (1081-1118), which Toçi discovered over the chapel floor. Our analysis of Chapel 1 favours a 10th- or early 11th-c. date for most of the structural and decorative features. Ceramic fragments possibly dating to this period were found built into the chapel's apse. In addition, our recent analysis of the chapel's decorative program has suggested that both frescoes and mosaics may belong to the post-iconoclastic period.

The implications of our revised dating may be significant. Normally the Christianization of ancient monuments is assigned to late antiquity. The meaning and purpose of Christianization in the Middle Byzantine

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43 Hoth 1994 (supra n.4).
period has not yet been given much attention.\textsuperscript{44} The similarities with late-antique loca sancta, such as the similar 7th-c. chapel in galleries of Salona’s amphitheatre,\textsuperscript{45} may point to a Middle Byzantine desire to imitate and perhaps even re-create late-Roman holy sites, and so to a mediaeval dialogue with late-antique Christendom.

\textit{Chapel 2 and ossuary}

Chapel 2 is located on the amphitheatre’s NE side,\textsuperscript{46} built into a stair-landing that led to Gallery 2 (fig. 10). The chapel was formed by two inserted walls, one (Wall 097) blocking a stair leading down from the building’s exterior, the other (Wall 028) built across Gallery 2 over a second staircase. The result was an irregular, T-shaped room, seemingly entered through vomitorium 10 and facing northeast, with wall 097 as the centre of focus. The corners and ceiling of the chapel, as well as the walls of the vomitorium, were cut back and covered with multiple layers of frescoes. No evidence for liturgical installations was found.

Our excavations in the S end of the chapel produced a sequence of post-Roman activity (fig. 11). A thick robbing layer lay immediately over the stairs leading to Gallery 2 and it is dated to the later 6th or early 7th c. Layers of silt then accumulated, probably due to water run-off rather than to the disposal of rubbish. Into these layers was dug the grave of an infant. By the 13th c. the gallery was apparently at least half filled with débris.\textsuperscript{47} When the builders came to construct the chapel, they seem to have cut through these layers, carving out sufficient headroom and cutting back the amphitheatre walls to permit light to enter what had become

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Late-antique chapels in amphitheaters include Tarragona (C. Godoy Fernández, “Basilica de l’amfiteatre de Tarragona,” in \textit{Del Romà al Romànic} [Barcelona 1999] 177-79) and Salona (Dyggve [supra n.10] vol. II, 108-10). More frequently, late-antique chapels were built into theaters: H. Saradi, “Aspects of early Byzantine urbanism in Albania,” in C. Gasparis (ed.), \textit{The medieval Albanians} (Athens 1998) 87-88. A Byzantine-period chapel was built into the theater at Chersonesos.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Dyggve (supra n.10) vol. II, 108-10. The mosaic panels find their closest formal parallels in the Church of S. Demetrius at Thessaloniki. For the comparison between Salona, Durres and S. Demetrius, see Buchhausen (supra n.42). For possible hagiographic borrowings between a martyred Durres bishop, who has been identified as the one commemorated in this chapel, and the martyrs of Salona, see A. Breyer, “Saint Asteios and the amphitheatre chapel in Dyrrihachion,” in \textit{THYMIA. Στι τυμή της Μνμονίας Μνμηναία} vol. 1 (Athens 1994) 41-45.
\item \textsuperscript{46} On this chapel, see Zeqo (supra n.3).
\item \textsuperscript{47} Context 080 (cut by infant’s grave): late 12th/13th-c. amphora. Context 045: 3 fragments of Otranto amphorae (12th-early 13th c.). Context 026 (not shown, lies behind wall 028 and seemingly cut by it): 12th-13th c. amphorae and a Fine Sgraffito dish with Kufic-style decoration.
\end{itemize}
basically a subterranean space. Material from beneath the chapel’s SE wall gave a *terminus post quem* of the early 13th c.\(^{49}\)

Christian activity in the amphitheatre did not stop in the 13th c. Adjacent to Chapel 1, another Christian structure, an ossuary, was constructed (fig. 7). A masonry wall, pierced by a single narrow opening, was built across one of the gallery’s alocves. This wall was decorated with a marble cross in relief and flanking brickwork (fig. 12). Earlier excavators had emptied the space of disarticulated human bones (and some animal bones), as well as knives, ceramics, and coins, including some of the 10th c., which led them to assign that date to the structure as a whole.\(^{50}\) Our cleaning and excavation of this space, however, produced a different and rather surprising chronology. Ottoman ceramics of the 16th c., mixed with Late Roman wares, were discovered below the ossuary’s well-built tile floor.\(^{51}\) While further excavation is required to confirm these dates, it would seem that the ossuary was built or at least modified during the Ottoman period. Given the earlier reports of 10th-c. materials and the jumbled positioning of the human bones, it is possible that during one phase the structure contained re-deposited graves. The most likely origin of such graves is the adjacent necropolis in the arena; thus, some of these burials may have been excavated and enshrined by Ottoman-period Christians.

A possible Ottoman date for this ossuary points to a much longer Christian presence on the site than was previously supposed. It seems possible that the later modifications to the nearby Chapel 1, particularly the elaboration of its second storey, may also have been of the Ottoman period. This re-erection of the amphitheatre’s Christian structures suggests a certain Christian prosperity; the disappearance of Venetian Catholic overlordship may have prompted a revival of Durres’ Orthodox church.\(^{52}\) In any event, the reconstruction of the chapel exactly on its earlier lines is in keeping with Ottoman legal proscriptions against church enlargements, while the possible enshrinement of the arena’s dead points to a meditation on the Christian past, made more urgent by an uncertain Christian present under Ottoman rule.\(^{53}\)

**Conclusions**

The amphitheatre seems to offer a rare glimpse of what was a common sight during the Middle Ages. Amphitheatres, as large structures with heavy attendant meaning for Christian communities, would have been natural foci for Christian cult space. Stripping by early excavators or continued use has removed post-Roman encumbrances from most amphitheatres. Durres is special because its early disappearance and the late date of its rediscovery protected it from such interventions. Although Durres retains physical signs of its post-Roman afterlives, texts associating it with a martyrbiological tradition are missing. Durres’ lone martyr, bishop Astius, is a possibility but his late *passio* contains no reference to an amphitheatre, and to pin centuries of Christian interactions on a specific martyr would be unwise. What is clear is that the loss and recovery of the spaces of the amphitheatre through ancient ‘excavations’ sparked a dialogue between local Christians and the past, a dialogue in which the ancient monument was not simply ‘Christianized’ but itself inspired meditations on the history and nature of Christianization.

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48 Layers behind and above the wall (not included in the published section) produced amphorae of the late 12th-13th c. As the material between these layers and the wall was removed by earlier excavators, their relationship could not be definitely determined, but it is likely that they represent original 13th-c. accumulation levels, cut to construct the chapel.

49 Context 050/075: late 12th-13th c. amphora. The discovery of fresco fragments within this layer may point to an earlier, now vanished, phase of chapel construction.

50 Billica 1987 (supra n.4).

51 Ottoman ceramics were also found above the floor in areas seemingly by-passed by earlier excavators. Contexts 007, 005 and 010 contained fragments of Ottoman ibriks, probably 16th c.

52 See M. Kiel, *Ottoman architecture in Albania* (Istanbul 1990) 22; id., *Art and society of Bulgaria in the Turkish period* (Maastricht 1985) chapt. 5. For the differing fates of the Orthodox and Catholic churches in cities like Durres, see ibid. 169.

53 Kiel (ibid. 190) cites one document from the Black Sea coast in which the church in question was actually measured prior to rebuilding in order to mitigate against over-zealous reconstruction.

54 *AASS*, Iul. II.6.
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