



Summary :

The Bouleuterion – Odeum of Ephesus is situated in the northeastern part of the Public Agora, next to the city's Prytaneum. It's a semicircular theatrical building with a dual functional role, which underwent several construction phases. The restoration program that took place in the area turned the monument into one of the best-preserved buildings in Ephesus and contributed to its tourist development.

Date

149/150 A.D.

Geographical Location

Ephesus

1. Location

The Bouleuterion – Odeum (Nr. 22) of [Ephesus](#) is situated at the foot of Panayır Dağ, near the eastern end of the [Embolos](#) (Nr. 36). It is a small theatrical building among the public and religious ones that constitute the [Public Agora](#) (Nr. 18), the political and administrative center of the city. More specifically, it is situated in the northeastern part of the agora, behind the Basilica (Nr. 21) and to the east of the [Prytaneum](#) (Nr. 24).¹

2. Architectural Design

The ground plan shows a semi-circular building of 46 m. in diameter and oriented towards the south. The Bouleuterion – Odeum of Ephesus is built on a natural slope, so it takes advantage of the soil formation, but it is also possible that it was also supported by radial vault constructions under the [cavea](#)². It is defined by a strong curved retaining wall³, which was reinforced by buttresses and portals/pilasters, while in the south of the architectural formation one can find the skene.

The cavea of the theatre-like edifice was semi-circular, constructed with well-made marble bricks⁴ and divided by a [diazoma](#) (praesinctio) into two vertical parts (maeniana). The bottom part of the cavea (ima cavea, theatron) is divided by 6 staircases (scalaria) into 5 tiers ([cunei](#)) of 14 rows of seats, while the upper part of the cavea (summa cavea, epitheatron) was divided by 11 staircases into 10 tiers of 10 rows of seats.⁵ The last seats in every tier end in lion paws. The total capacity of the building is approximately 1,500 spectators. On the upper ending of the cavea, red granite columns that supported an [entablature](#) decorated with ornaments of the Ionic and Doric order, constituted a portico (porticus in summa cavea, 1.5 m. wide).⁶

At the endings of the passageways, [arched](#) entrances lead to the interior of the building as well as to built staircases inside and vaulted passages (psalides or pselides, vomitoria), that facilitated the direct access of the spectators in the central diazoma and to the upper part of the cavea after that.



The **orchestra** was horseshoe-shaped and 9.20 m. in diameter. It was covered with rectangular marble slabs but, since the building was roofed, it wasn't surrounded with a concentration and removal of rainwater conduit (euripus). The level of the orchestra floor was lower (about 1 m.) than that of the skene and the lower part of the cavea. Rectangular marble **orthostates** constitute a high pedestal perimetrically around the orchestra. A separating slated passage –1.40 m. wide, used for the movement of the spectators– lay between the part behind the pedestal and down to the lowest row of seats in the cavea.

The inclining entrances through the passageways did not lead to the orchestra but straight to the skene. The passageways were 2.40 m. wide and were roofed with a semi-cylindrical dome (kamara), thus connecting the cavea with the skene. Above the passageways there were the **theoria** (tribunalia) where one could find the seats of the officials.⁷

The skene, which was rectangular in the ground plan, was 24 m. long. The orchestra was connected to the **logeion** (pulpitum) by two small stairways with four steps at each end of the **proskenion** (proscenium).⁸ The two-storey stage façade (**scaenae frons**) had opulent architecture and was plastically decorated with doorframes,⁹ probably **aediculae**, niches, columns – resting on socles–¹⁰ and statues, according to the Roman conception and aesthetics model for theatrical buildings.¹¹ The backside of the façade of the skene was supported with **pilasters**.¹² In between the main theatrical building and the **basilica** there was a narrow anteroom (vestibulum, 2 m. wide and 37 m. long).¹³ The door openings of the northern wall of the basilica allowed direct entrance from the part of the agora to the skene of the theatrical edifice.¹⁴

The roofing of the building can be compared to that of the [Aphrodisias Odeum](#) that had a similar wooden construction of the truss system, which allowed the covering of the building without any interior abutments.¹⁵ The buttresses of the retaining wall would also insure the support of the roof. A large number of loam roof tiles was found inside and around the building.

3. Construction phases

Different construction phases have been established in the Bouleuterion – Odeum of Ephesus. The original construction goes back to the 1st century B.C. and comprised the bottom part of the cavea, inscribed within rectangular walls. The second phase can be dated to the late 1st century A.D., and it is at this phase when the addition of the epitheatre, the built staircases that facilitated the direct entrance in the central diazoma, the skene and the curved retaining wall that surrounded the architectural entirety were made. During the third construction phase, in the middle of the 2nd century A.D., the passageways were roofed with domes and the elaborate façade of the skene (scaenae frons) was created. On an inscription of the epistyle Flavia Papiane is mentioned, probably with her husband P. Vedius Antoninus as sponsors.¹⁶ The façade of the skene was decorated with [imperial portraits](#) of the Antonine dynasty.¹⁷ The full-relief figures of the Muse Erato, of Heracles and of a Silinos, which were found in the area, were a part of the iconographic program of that period and constitute some of the most common figures in the decoration of Roman theatrical buildings.¹⁸ The completion of the Odeum coincided with the construction of the [Gymnasium](#) in the northern part of town, which was financed by P. Vedius Antoninus and his wife as well, and was dedicated to the emperor [Antoninus Pius](#). It is thought likely that the music competitions during the celebration of the seventh Hadrianeia, which took place



in Ephesus in 151/152 A.D., were meant to be held in the Odeum.¹⁹

In the construction phases that followed, the perimetric portico (porticus in summa cavea) was added to the ending of the cavea, as well as the arch-shaped entrances at the end of the passageways. During the early Christian times, the building was still in use, as the Christian symbols carved on the entrances suggest. Severe earthquakes struck the city in the 4th century A.D. and caused serious damage to the building.²⁰

4. Function

According to researchers, the Hellenistic edifice is identified as the **Bouleuterion** of the city.²¹ The architectural design of the building as well as the organization of the interior are similar to those of the **Bouleuteria** in **Miletus** and **Priene**. The location of the building in the Public Agora of the city, just next to the Prytaneion, leads to the conclusion that it was a Bouleuterion.²²

The alteration of the Bouleuterion to an Odeum was completed during the third construction phase, around the middle of the 2nd century A.D. The edifice got the architectural form of a mixed building type, Bouleuterion – Odeum, which evolved in Asia Minor in general during the 2nd century A.D. in order to respond to the social demand of the time. This combination was achieved thanks to the necessary architectural interventions and the appropriate adjustments that were imperative for the new functional role of the building and suggested by the increased demands of a wider audience. The Bouleuterion – Odeum of Ephesus had a double use because it served both as a place where political decisions were made and where local rulers gathered, and at the same time as a place of sophisticated entertainment and spectacles, where music and theatrical happenings and also recitations took place.²³

5. History of the Research and Current State

The Bouleuterion – Odeum of Ephesus was brought to light at the end of the 19th century.²⁴ The Austrian Archaeological Institute carried out the first excavation researches in the area at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1909 W. Wilberg published the ground plan of the edifice.²⁵

Extensive restoration work took place in 1970 and 1990 by the Ephesus Museum and as a result the building today stands out from the other ancient city monuments. The floor of the skene and the inclining entrances to the passageways are modern interventions. Restoration work has also been done in the staircases and in a large part of the cavea.²⁶

1. L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) p. 7. Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesus, The New Guide* (2000) p. 74. A. Kalinowski, "The Vedii Antonini: Aspects of Patronage and Benefaction in Second-Century Ephesos", *Phoenix* 56, (2002), p. 139-141.

2. See L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) p. 11.



3. More on the construction of the curved retaining wall that surrounds the cavea and the extensive alterations and interventions in it. See. L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) p. 11-12.
4. The cavea was constructed with stonework covered by marble slabs.
5. The bottom part of the theater had 14 or 15 rows of seats according to L. Bier and 13 according to R. Meinel. R. Meinel believes that the cavea had 23 rows of seats in total and that the last row of the bottom part of the cavea could be the prohedria, which was reserved for the officials, such as rulers and priests. L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) pp. 8-9. R. Meinel, *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden* (Frankfurt am Main 1980) p. 118.
6. The presence of a roofed arch at the upper ending of the cavea was first suggested by J. Wood, and more recently by L. Bier. On the contrary, R. Meinel questioned its existence and considered the red granite columns to have possibly been a part of the decorations of the skene's façade. See Wood, J. T., *Discoveries at Ephesos* (London 1877) pp. 50-52. L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) p.11. R. Meinel, *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden* (Frankfurt am Main 1980) p. 118-119.
7. The passageways were 2.40 m. wide, and their walls were made of limes. For details on the structure of the passageways, see Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) p. 13-14. R. Meinel, *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden* (Frankfurt am Main 1980) pp.118-119.
8. The inclining entrances of the passageways mentioned earlier also lead straight to the logeion.
9. The central door (porta regia) was 1.90 m. wide, and the side ones (portae hospitales) 1.10 to 1.30 m.
10. The door openings in the front of the skene were framed with six socles (podia), on which rested the first level columns of the richly adorned façade. L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) p. 13. R. Meinel, *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden*, (Frankfurt am Main 1980) p. 120.
11. The architectural parts of the scaenae frons were detached during the first excavation researches there by J. T. Wood, so today they are in their biggest part lost. Because of this a restored view of the front of the skene is not possible, nor has any scholar made any propositions of restoration until recently. L. Bier believes that the scaenae frons of the Aphrodisias Odeum, which has been kept in a good condition, can be used as a model for the hypothetical view of the Ephesus building. The rich sculptured ornamentation of the Ephesus Odeum is verified by the plethora of statue fragments that have been saved. L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) pp. 12-13. Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesus, The New Guide* (2000) pp. 82-84.
12. For the arrangement of the eight pilasters at the backside of the skene's façade, see Meinel, R., *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden* (Frankfurt 1980) p. 120.



13. This part of the skene is referred to as "Hinterbühne" by R. Meinel. A drainpipe, which was probably used for the gathering and the removal of rainwater that fell from the roof of the Odeum and the basilica, was found on its floor. See Meinel, R., *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden* (Frankfurt 1980) pp. 121, 125.
14. Five door openings formed in the northern wall of the basilica: a central one, which was framed on both sides with two smaller ones, that was on the same axis as the central door (porta regia) of the scaenae frons, and the side openings that were aligned to the side doors (portae hospitales) of the scaenae frons and lead to the passageways and the built staircases. See Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesus, The New Guide* (2000) p. 82.
15. These constructions are based on the principle of an unchangeable system of triangles. More on the roofing system of the Ephesus odeum, see L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesus: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) pp. 14-16. For a comparison of the roofing of the Ephesus Odeum to the Aphrodisias Odeum, see Gros, P., *L'Architecture Romaine du début du IIIe siècle av.J.-C. a la fin du Haut-Empire 1, Les Monuments Publics* (Paris 1996), pp. 315-116. According to R. Meinel the entrance-hall (vestibulum) had different roofing than the main part of the theatrical building. Details on the roofing of the building and the lighting of the interior, see R. Meinel, *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden* (Frankfurt am Main 1980), pp. 122- 124.
16. C. Börker, R. Merkelbach, H. Engelmann, D. Knibbe, *Die Inschriften von Ephesos II*, Nr 101-599 (IK 12, Bonn 1979) pp. 174-175, Nr. 460. A. Kalinowski, "The Vedii Antonini: Aspects of Patronage and Benefaction in Second-Century Ephesos", *Phoenix* 56, (2002), pp. 138-145.
17. On the imperial portraits of the façade of the Odeum's skene, see R. Meinel, *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden* (Frankfurt am Main 1980), p. 129. A. Kalinowski, "The Vedii Antonini: Aspects of Patronage and Benefaction in Second-Century Ephesos", *Phoenix* 56, (2002), pp. 143-144.
18. More on the statuary figures and the reliefs of the building, see M. Aurenhammer, *Die Skulpturen von Ephesos. Bildwerke aus Stein. Idealplastik 1, FiE X/1* (1990) pp. 75-76, 117.
19. For the relation of the building with the Hadrianeia, see R. Meinel, *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden*, (Frankfurt am Main 1980) p. 129.
20. More on the construction phases of the building, see R. Meinel, *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden* (Frankfurt am Main 1980) pp. 125-129.
21. Epigraphic evidence of the 1st century A.D. attests to the presence of a Bouleuterion. More particularly in a fragmentary inscription embedded to the wall of the Prytaneion, one with the name Zopyros, son of Valagros, who performed alterations to the Bouleuterion or possibly provided some kind of equipment, is being honored by the demos. See. H. Engelmann, D. Knibbe, R. Merkelbach, *Die Inschriften von Ephesos III*, Nr 600-1000 (Repertorium), (Bonn 1980), p. 136, Nr. 740b.
22. The structure was identified as a bouleuterion by E. Foss, "Zum sogenannten Odeion in Ephesos", in *Festschrift Fritz Eichler* (1967) pp. 72-81. On the contrary, according to W. Alzinger, the Hellenistic Bouleuterion should be sought



under the basilica of the Public Agora and have the form of a hypostyle hall. See. W. Alzinger, "Die Lokalisierung des hellenistischen Rathauses von Ephesos", in *Bathron. Festschrift für H. Drerup* (1988) pp. 21-29. The view of W. Alzinger was questioned using convincing arguments in the study of L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) p. 16.

23. On the functional role of the edifice and especially for the alteration of the Bouleuterion to an Odeum, see R. Meinel, *Das Odeion, Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden*, (Frankfurt am Main 1980) pp. 125-129, 315-319, D. Geisz, *Das antike Rathaus* (Wien 1990) pp. 166-171. L. Bier, "The Bouleuterion at Ephesos: Some Observations for a new Survey", in *Steine und Wege, Festschrift D. Knibbe* (1999) pp. 16-18.

24. Wood, J. T., *Discoveries at Ephesos* (London 1877) pp. 50-52.

25. W. Wilberg, "Stierkopfkapitell aus Ephesos", *Öjh* 12, (1909) pp. 212-213.

26. Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesus, The New Guide* (2000) pp. 82-83.

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	The Odeion at Ephesus http://www.whitman.edu/theatre/theatretour/ephesus%20odeion/introduction/odeion.intro1.htm

Glossary :



	aedicula
Small pedimental naiskos, either a free-standing construction or integrated into a larger building's facade.	
	anta or pilaster, the
A shallow rectangular feature projecting from a wall, having a capital and a base and architecturally treated as a column.	
	arch, the
A curved structure, as a masonry, that covers openings in the stonework and is capable to supports the weight of material over an open space, as in a bridge, doorway, etc. It is often used as a decorative element.	
	basilica
In ancient Roman architecture a large oblong type building used as hall of justice and public meeting place. The roman basilica served as a model for early Christian churches.	
	bouleuterion
Council house. An assembly hall for magistrates or members of the council.	
	cavea
The auditorium or audience sitting of a theater.	
	diazoma (lat. praecinctio)
The circular passage way between the lower and upper tiers of seats in an ancient Greek theater.	
	entablature, the
The upper part of the classical order, that rests on the columns, it consists of the architrave, frieze and cornice.	
	kerkides (lat. cunei)
A wedge-shaped section of seats between two stepped passageways in an ancient Greek and Roman theaters.	
	logeion (pulpitum)
A speaking place on the proscenium's roof. It was used by the performers.	
	orchestra
The performance space of the ancient Greek and Roman theatre, placed between the scene building and the cavea. It was usually semi-circular in shape and rarely circular.	
	orthostate
A course of blocks laid on edge, normally in the lower part of the wall of a building.	
	proscenium (or proscaenium), the
The colonnade added in front of the skene of the ancient Greek theatre. There the intercolumnar spaces were usually closed by doors or painted panels.	
	scaenae frons, the
The elaborate aedicular stage façade of the Roman theatres that bears a rich architectural and sculptural decoration.	
	tribunalium
A raised platform in a Roman Theatre where the magistrates sat; These seats of honor in theatre would normally be at the extreme sides of the cavea above the two side entrances to the orchestra.	