



## Summary :

The Ephesus stadium's first building phase dates to the Early Hellenistic period. The Hellenistic stadium was rather austere with a simple flat track and earthen banks. During the Roman period the structure undergoes changes and it is converted into a monumental stadium with luxurious gradines, a sphendone and monumental entrances. The monument was found in 1911, while systematic excavational research in the site begun in 1993.

## Date

Hellenistic, Roman periods

## Geographical Location

Ephesus

## 1. Location

On the northwest slope of Mt. Pion (Panayır), at the north part of [Ephesus](#), next to [Vedius' Gymnasium](#) (no. 106), an artificial cavity was dug into the ground, extending over an area of 3.3 hectares. The surviving traces, the dimensions and the elongated form of this structure allowed early on its identification as a stadium, with an E-W orientation.<sup>1</sup> However, excavations on the site, which will allow us to clarify the form and the ground plan of the monument, as well as its building history, have only recently begun and are still ongoing. Therefore, to date there is no overall study on the stadium of Ephesus.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Architectural Design

The Hellenistic stadium probably had the shape of a simple flat track, designed to hold gymnic games,<sup>3</sup> with earthen gradines for spectators.<sup>4</sup> One of its narrow sides was U-shaped, the so-called sphendone. Therefore the stadium exhibited a horseshoe-shaped ground plan, measuring 229 m. in length and 28 m. in width, like most of the Greek stadia. Already from the Hellenistic period, its west side featured a mechanism for starting races, the *aphesis*. During the Roman period, and more specifically in the reign of emperor [Nero](#) (54-68 AD), the stadium was expanded with the addition of seats for spectators on its north side. According to an inscription engraved on the south retaining wall, this refurbishment was funded by a wealthy citizen named C. Stertinus Orpex, his spouse Stertina Marena and their daughter.<sup>5</sup> The funds also covered the construction of vaulted substructures supporting the marble seating for spectators at the north side.<sup>6</sup> Spectators accessed the north side of the stadium via two outer staircases and a vaulted internal corridor, measuring 85 m. in length and 2.9 m. in width.<sup>7</sup> Six narrow entrances opened on this corridor, through which the spectators entered the upper seating rows of the north side. The seats were divided into *kerkides* by narrow stairways.<sup>8</sup>

We should note that in the NE section the seats were interrupted and a vaulted gateway was formed. It is argued that this was the entrance for the higher state officials, the notables, as well as the gladiators and the beasts that were kept in special spaces close to the stadium.<sup>9</sup>

In the southwest section of the stadium stood a monumental gate, which is still preserved in a rather good state.<sup>10</sup> The gate's arched opening is flanked by a wall made up of stone blocks in the *pseudo-isodomia* masonry system. Smaller arched gateways were formed at other points of the stadium's western façade; these lead to the vaulted corridors through which the spectators could reach their seats and move about within the stadium.<sup>11</sup>

The track was made up of compacted earth. Its length measured one *stadion*, i.e. approximately 184 m.<sup>12</sup> Vertically fixed *orthostatai* were placed on its periphery which bore relief decoration. The sphendone, i.e. the U-shaped end situated at the east section of the



structure, measured 50 x 42 m. In the Late Roman period it appears that this section acquired the form of a circular field; it was isolated from the rest of the stadium and was used for staging spectacles popular among the Roman troops of the region, like gladiatorial fights and beast-fights.<sup>13</sup> This means the area was converted into an arena measuring 48 m. in length and 40 m in width. With the advent of Christianity these gory games were suppressed and were replaced by athletic contests.<sup>14</sup>

Archaeological research has also brought to light a water pipes which were running through the south section of the stadium; apparently these pipes were connected to an aqueduct which supplied the city with water.<sup>15</sup> A possible explanation is that this space hosted *aquacades* (water ballets) or mock-naval battles, spectacles very fashionable during the Roman period.<sup>16</sup>

The 262 AD earthquake left many parts of the stadium in ruins. The north façade was never repaired; on the contrary, the southwest gate and parts of the west side were rebuilt using the monument's architectural members, while the area of the *aphesis* was also repaired.<sup>17</sup> The conversion of the sphendone into an arena for gladiatorial fights should be dated to this period. A series of earthquakes between 359 and 366 AD caused further damage to the monument.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD a Christian church was erected over the site of the stadium.<sup>18</sup> More specifically, the 1994 excavations revealed parts of a **peristyle**, which was recognized as the atrium of a church which during this late period occupied part of the stadium's northern section and remained in use until 1081.<sup>19</sup> In this period (5<sup>th</sup> century AD) the track had also fallen into disuse and was used as arable land, while a cemetery begun surrounding the wider area of the church, remaining in use until the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Dating

The Ephesus stadium dates to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and its construction outside the Hellenistic city is attributed to king [Lysimachus](#). It remained in continuous use during the Hellenistic and Imperial periods. It also remained in use up to Late Antiquity.

Throughout its history the stadium was repaired and underwent modifications. A large-scale refurbishment project was carried out in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and it was possibly related to the large earthquake that ruined many of the city's edifices. When Ephesus was abandoned in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD the stadium was allowed to become dilapidated. The locals begun ransacking the monument, and quarried it for architectural members that were used as building material or were melted in the area's lime-kilns.

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1. P. Scherrer (ed.), *Ephesus. The New Guide* (2000, transl. X. Bier-G.M.Luxon) p. 166.

2. On the excavational research on the Ephesus Stadium see R. Heberday, IX. Vorläufiger Bericht über die Grabungen in Ephesos 1907-1911, *ÖJh* 15 (1912) Beibl. pp. 180-181. S. Karwiese, Grabungen 1993, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 63, 1994, Beibl. 21-24. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1994, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 64 1995, Beibl. p. 23. S. Karwiese, Grabungen 1995, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 65 1996, Beibl. σελ. 18-20. S. Karwiese, Grabungen 1996, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 66 1997, Beibl. pp. 19-22. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1997, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 67 1998, Beibl. pp. 20-23.

3. The games that were held in the Stadium were 'gymnic', i.e. they involved running, long jump, javelin-throw, wrestling and pankration. Out of this events, the stadion course (a speed race of approx. 200 m.), the discus, the long jump, the javelin-throw and the wrestling event comprised the pentathlon.

4. It is believed that the spectators' seats were arranged only on the south side of the building, see. P. Scherrer (ed.), *Ephesus. The New Guide* (2000, transl. Bier-G.M.Luxon), p. 166.



5. On the inscription see R. Heberday, IX. Vorläufiger Bericht über die Grabungen in Ephesos 1907-1911, *ÖJh* 15 (1912), pp. 181-182. C. Börker, R. Merkelbach, *Die Inschriften von Ephesos Teil II Nr. 101-599* (Repertorium) (I.K. 12, Bonn 1979), p. 138, no. 411.



6. Because of a variance in the terrain's pitch, the spectators' seats on the south side were dug into the feet of Mt. Pion, while the seats on the north side rested on vaulted substructures. W. B. Dinsmoor, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece: An Account of Its Historic Development* (1973) p. 320.
7. On the construction of the vaulted corridor see J. B. Ward- Perkins, *Studies in Roman and Early Christian Architecture* (London 1994) p. 355.
8. Cf. S. Karwiese, Grabungen 1993, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 63, 1994, Beibl. 24. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1994, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 64 1995, Beibl. p. 23. G. Wiplinger, G. Wlach, *Ephesus, 100 Years of Austrian Research* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 1996) p. 159.
9. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1996, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 66 1997, Beibl. p. 20, pl. 16. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1997, Ephesos: Stadion *ÖJh* 67, 1998, Beibl. p. 21.
10. In 1995 sections from an earlier stylobate were unearthed in the western side of the Stadium. The stylobate measured approx. 24 m. in length and its construction dates to the Hellenistic Period, to the reign of Lysimachus. Cf. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1994, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 64 1995, Beibl. p. 23 and pl. 21. G. Wiplinger, G. Wlach, *Ephesus, 100 Years of Austrian Research* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 1996) p. 160, pl. 214.
11. P. Scherrer (ed.), *Ephesus. The New Guide* (2000, transl. Bier-G.M.Luxon) p. 166.
12. The Stadium measured 33 m. in width at the area of the *aphesis*; 45 m. at the centre and 42 m. at the sphendone. Cf. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1996, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 66 1997, Beibl. pp. 19-20, pl. 16.
13. Cf. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1996, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 66 1997, Beibl. p. 22. G. Wiplinger, G. Wlach, *Ephesus, 100 Years of Austrian Research* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 1996) p. 160.
14. C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge 1979) p. 48.
15. According to the excavator, however, these were clay water-pipes, unrelated to the original use of the structure, cf. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1993, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 63 1994, Beibl., p.24.
16. During the Roman Period these spectacles took place in specially arranged theatres, cf. for example M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theatre* (1961) p. 210, p. 215, for a description of similar aquatic shows in the Dionysian Theatre of Athens, M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theatre* (1961) p. 210, p. 217 for the similar case of the Corinth Theatre.
17. Coins discovered in the southern section date to 578 AD, which indicates that this part of the monument remained in used during this late period. S. Karwiese et al., Ephesos, *ÖJh* 63 1994, Beibl., p. 24.
18. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1993, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 63 1994, Beibl. pp. 23-24, pl. 17. A similar case is the Stadium of Sagalassus of Pisidia, where a Christian church was built as well, cf. J. Bolt, *Converting the Polytheist. The Persistence and Disappearance of Paganism in Early Christian Anatolia* (MA Dissertation, Leiden, 2007) p. 83.
19. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1993, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 63 1994, Beibl., p.24, and pl. 17, pl. 18.
20. S. Karwiese et al., Grabungen 1994, Ephesos: Stadion, *ÖJh* 64 1995, Beibl. p. 23. P. Scherrer (ed.), *Ephesus. The New Guide* (2000, transl. Bier-G.M.Luxon), p. 166.

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#### Glossary :

	<b>kerkides (lat. cunei)</b>
A wedge-shaped section of seats between two stepped passageways in an greek and roman theaters.	
	<b>orthostate</b>
A course of blocks laid on edge, normally in the lower part of the wall of a building.	
	<b>peristyle</b>
A colonnade surrounding a building or a courtyard .	
	<b>pseudo-isodomic masonry</b>
Masonry built of blocks of the same height within each course , but each course varying in height.	