



Summary :

The Geronticon of Nysa, mentioned by Strabo, is believed to be the Bouleuterion (Council House) of the city. It is a small building of theatrical type with a semicircular auditorium (cavea) enclosed within rectangular walls. It is dated to the late Hellenistic period while during the Roman Period was considerably altered. Today it is the best preserved building of the ancient city.

Date

2nd half of the 2nd century BC

Geographical Location

Nyssa, Caria

1. Architectural Description

Geronticon is the best preserved building of the city of [Nyssa](#) in [Caria](#). It is situated in the northwest corner of the Agora. It is a small rectangle building (27,45X23,50 m.) facing south. It consisted of the assembly hall, in the interior of which there was a semicircular auditorium (**cavea**). The auditorium (cavea) was based on an artificial terrace and contained 12 rows of seats, that were divided by 5 stairs into 4 tiers (cunei).

The **orchestra** was semicircular with dimensions 7,26 m X 5,10 m., covered with rectangular marble slabs. In its center there was a square "board" of 1.66 m length paved in **opus sectile**. In front of the orchestra there are 4 podia that belong to the two-storey stage (**scene**), the façade of (**scaenae frons**) which would have been decorated with **aediculae**.¹ Imperial portraits of the Antonine dynasty complete the sculptural decoration of the monumental façade of the stage.²

The walls were built with ashlar masonry (**opus quadratum**) while a wooden roof would have covered the building.³

2. Identification

According to [Strabo](#), there were two hills near the theatre of Nyssa. Below the one was the **gymnasium** for young people, and below the other was the agora and the Geronticon.⁴ The scholars have different views as to the meaning of the term Geronticon.⁵

According to the most prevalent view, it is considered that this term is attributed to the Bouleuterion (Council House) of the city, which is identified with the specific building. The arguments that lead towards this identification are the location of the building near the Agora, as well as the similarities of its architectural design with other Hellenistic **bouleuteria**.

The lack of a stage during its original building phase is yet another indication that the building served exclusively as a Bouleuterion. Later, with the addition of the stage, the building also functioned as an **odeum**. The combination of these functions and the development of a mixed type Bouleuterion-Odeum is an achievement of the Roman Period. Buildings of this type were simultaneously council chambers and places of refined amusement. A similar dual-purpose building is the bouleuterion of Miletus.⁶

3. Date

The original structure of the building is dated to the Late Hellenistic period, particularly around the second half of the 2nd century BC, based on the type of masonry and Strabo's citation. The preserved part of the auditorium (cavea) belongs also to this period. A second building phase is dated in the 1st century BC as the details of architectural components testify.



In the middle of the 2nd century BC the building underwent significant alterations, with the addition of the stage, while reconstructions were made in the auditorium (cavea) as well. The orchestra was constructed in a lower level. The renovation of the orchestras' floor belongs to this third construction phase and most probably can be traced in the period of [Antoninus Pius](#)' reign (141-151 BC). It is notable, however, that at the end of the 1st and during the 2nd century BC this intervention in the area of the orchestra, which was covered with marble slabs and revetments, was a usual reconstruction in [buildings of the theatrical type](#) in Asia Minor. Characteristically, we mention the theaters in [Ephesus](#), [Miletus](#), the [Odeum in Aphrodisias](#) and the Odeum in [Iassos](#). Additionally the votive inscriptions found in the area of the Gerontikon, the architectural characteristics and the details of the architectural and sculptural ornamentation indicate that the chronology of the third construction phase should be between 138 and 161 AD.⁷

4. History of Research and State of Preservation

The first archaeological research in the area was conducted by the German Archaeological Institute in the early 20th century. In 1922 the excavation was continued by a Greek team and the archaeologist K. Kourouniotis, who revealed a large part of the building.⁸ Remains of the walls and the orchestra, a considerable part of the auditorium (cavea) and also architectural components of the scenae front can be seen today.

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1. Mc Donald, W.A., *The political Meeting places of Greeks* (Baltimore 1943) p. 219-224. Gneisz, D., *Das Antike Rathaus* (Wien 1990), p. 339-340. Kadioglu, M., "Der Opus sectile-Boden aus dem Gerontikon-Buleuterion von Nysa ad Maeandrum", *Asia Minor Studien* 34 (Bonn 1999) p. 175-188. Κουρουγιώτης, Κ., Ανασκαφαί εν Νύση τη επί Μαιάνδρω, *ΑΔ* 7 (1921/1922) p. 1-87. Bean G. E., *Turkey beyond the Maeander* (London 1971) p. 215.
 2. Mc Donald, W.A., *The political Meeting places of Greeks* (Baltimore 1943) p. 219-224. Gneisz, D., *Das Antike Rathaus* (Wien 1990) p. 149-150.
 3. The colonnade of an earlier building was incorporated in the north wall. Gneisz, D., *Das Antike Rathaus* (Wien 1990) p. 339.
 4. Stabo, XIV 1.43 (C 649).
 5. There is an assumption that the Gerontikon could be identified with the gymnasium for older persons, as there was a gymnasium of youths recorded by Stabo. See Mc Donald, W.A., *The political Meeting places of Greeks* (Baltimore 1943) p. 223, footnote 266.
 6. Gneisz, D., *Das Antike Rathaus* (Wien 1990) p. 339.
 7. Gneisz, D., *Das Antike Rathaus* (Wien 1990) pp. 339-340. Kadioglu, M., "Der Opus sectile-Boden aus dem Gerontikon-Buleuterion von Nysa ad Maeandrum", *Asia Minor Studien* 34, (Bonn 1999) p. 175-188.
 8. Von Diest W., *Nysa ad Maeandrum*, (Berlin, 1913) p. 36-37. Κουρουγιώτης, Κ., Ανασκαφαί εν Νύση τη επί Μαιάνδρω, *ΑΔ* 7 (1921/1922) p. 1-87.

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Glossary :

	aedicula
Small pedimental naiskos, either a free-standing construction or integrated into a larger building's facade.	
	cavea
The auditorium or audience sitting of a theater.	
	gymnasium
The gymnasium was one of the most important centres of public life in Greek cities. The institution of the gymnasium, directly connected with the development of the Greek city, aimed to create virtuous citizens and gallant warriors. As educational institutions of public character, the gymnasia were intended for the physical and theoretical education of the young and consisted of separate spaces for special purposes.	
	odeum, the
Public building similar to the theatre, but roofed and with smaller dimensions, which was used for musical contests.	
	opus quadratum
Technique of wall construction, in which chiselled squared blocks of stone of the same dimensions were placed in parallel lines.	
	opus sectile, the
Technique of floor or wall decoration. Thin pieces of polychrome marble are carved or joined so that a decorative motif could be depicted.	
	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.	
	scaenae frons, the
The elaborate aedicular stage façade of the roman theatres that bears a rich architectural and sculptural decoration.	
	scene (lat. scaena -ae)
The stage building of the ancient theaters originally used for storage but provided a convenient backing for performances.	

Sources

Strabo, XIV 1.43 (C 649).