



Summary :

The Theatre Street extends from the north-east corner of the square in front of the theatre to the so-called Coressian gate, in a S-N direction. In Antiquity it was called "plateia in Coressus". It was a paved street with porticos and shops along both sides which testify its commercial importance during both the Hellenistic and Roman periods. During the Late Antiquity and despite the damage of the porticos it retained its role as Ephesus' main road. An excavation, conservation and restoration program of the street's surrounding area is in progress today, aiming at the site's tourist development.

Date

Archaic period – Byzantine times

Geographical Location

Ephesus, Ionia

1. Location

The Theatre Street (map no. 78)¹ extends from the north-east corner of the square in front of the [theatre](#) of [Ephesus](#) until the city's edge in a S-N direction. In fact, it is the extension of the so-called [Marble Street](#) and joins the theatre district with the city's northern exit, the Coressian gate. This, according to all evidence, was situated between the city's stadium (map. no. 104) and the [Vedius Gymnasium](#) (map no. 106). Thus, the Theatre Street occupies the root of the western slope of Panayir Dag (mountain Tracheia). Like [Embolos](#), the Theatre Street was not included in the town plan of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. On the contrary it seems than it followed the ground's natural relief as it ascended gently towards the city's exit. It first bends slightly to the northwest, then turns again to the north-east in the direction of the Byzantine Palace (map. no. 81). Approximately 15 m. to the south of the so-called Apsidal building (map. no. 80), the Theatre Street is intersected on its western side by an alleyway, which possibly began further west in the harbour area.

2. Location – Function

The area, where the Theatre Street is placed, is identified with the Ionian village of Coressus² which occupied the hill of the acropolis and the western slope of Panayir Dag. During Roman times, Coressus was one of Ephesus' most important quarters, while the street which led from the theatre to the Coresian gate to the north was possibly called Plateia in Coressus.³ This street, apart from its obvious commercial character explained by its proximity to the harbour, formed since the Archaic period – and before the establishment of new Ephesus – part of the Processional Way, as it connected the [Artemision](#) with the Triodos.⁴ Also, during the Archaic and Classical periods this natural route at the foothills of Panayir Dag provided access to the necropolis of later Embolos. Later, possibly out of respect for the area's history and sacredness, the "Plateia in Coressus" retained its old layout and was not included in the [Hippodamian](#) grid.⁵ During the Hellenistic and Roman periods moreover, the Theatre Street marked, together with the Coressian gate, the Sacred Way through which the city's adolescents accompanied the [Artemis](#) procession. Finally, during the same period, the Theatre Street was the only route towards the stadium – and later – towards the Vedius gymnasium on the city's northeastern edge.

3. Architectural Description – Monumental Topography



The Street's design, as it is revealed today, dates from the Late Imperial period and definitely after the destructive earthquakes of the 3rd century AD. During this last phase the "Plateia in Coressus" was approximately 650 m. long and had a maximum width of 7,70 m. Its surface was paved with marble. Porticos with shops flanked the road along its entire length. The colonnades along the façade were formed by columns of various types and sizes, which led to the creation of unequal intercolumnar spaces. The columns were possibly covered by arches. The porticos were 4,1 m. (east side) and 3,7 m. (west side) deep.⁶

The "Plateia in Coressus" begins in the corner formed by the square of the Theatre (map no. 72), and the [Arcadiane](#) (map no. 83). In the Imperial era the [Theatre Gymnasium](#) (map no. 79) was erected at this location, which has only partly been excavated. The building's architectural type combines both the [gymnasium's palaestra](#) (colonnaded courtyard to the south) and the [bathing facilities](#). Moreover, the central hall of the complex's northern wing was possibly dedicated to the [imperial cult](#).⁷ About 100 m. further north, always on the street's western side, after the intersection already mentioned, lay the Apsidal building (map. no. 80), 40 m. long, with a W-E orientation. Here were found marble bath tubs which came from the nearby thermae. Although the building looks like an early Christian basilica, it is more likely – according to the excavators – that it had a secular use.⁸

Further north, on the square's western side, is the so-called Byzantine Palace (map. no. 81).⁹ During the first construction phase in the Roman period, the building was orientated towards the Theatre Street and included bathing facilities. During the Late Antique, the baths were incorporated into a more extensive complex which included, among others, an oblong hall with two niches at its ends, and a central tetraconch room to the east, measuring 260 m². The identification of this building with the palace of the [proconsul](#) of Asia during the Early Christian era or the byzantine general of the area is quite plausible. Also on the street's western side and at a distance of about 20 m. a fountain (map. no. 102) with a peristyle court¹⁰ was erected during the Early Byzantine times.

On the road's eastern side, exactly opposite the fountain, is the impressive stadium complex (numb. 104).¹¹ This was of course the site of the Hellenistic stadium of which, however, very few elements survive. In its present form, the stadium was built in the mid 1st century AD with donation of the [freedman C. Stertinus Orpex](#), and was repaired and renovated after the 262 AD earthquake. The earthquakes which occurred during the following century possibly caused further damage, but the stadium's decline had begun with the rise of the new religion and was sealed with the erection of a church on its façade. During the Middle Ages the stadium area was used as a cemetery. The Coressian gate can be placed with great certainty between the stadium and the Vedius gymnasium (map. no. 106), which is dated during the reign of Antoninus Pius. It signaled both the northern entrance to the Hellenistic and Roman city and the intersection of the Processional Way which descended from the northeast and continued into the city. With the erection of the byzantine wall, they moved the Coressian gate further to the east, between the stadium's eastern edge and the gymnasium.

4. History of the Theatre Street

The street's history began before the planning of new Ephesus by [Lysimachus](#). The Coressus settlement, whose establishment dates to the years of [Ionian colonization](#),¹² extended to the wider area. During Archaic and Classical years the street received no artificial modulation; it was rather a natural passage between the hill of the acropolis and the western slope of Tracheia. Following the modulation of Tracheia it joined the road which came from the Artemision



to the east, feeding into the route of the processions which took place on celebrations in honour of Artemis and included the latter Embolos.

After the colonization of Hellenistic Ephesus, the initial Ionian village was naturally incorporated into the new hippodamian town plan and formed the Coressian quarter. Although the Theatre Street retained its initial course, we must assume that during Hellenistic times it acquired its monumental form through paving and the erection of porticos and shops (*tabernae*) along its route.¹³ Such a hall bore, according to inscriptions, the name of Stoa of Servilius. He is possibly identified with the consul Servilius who also served as governor of Asia during 46-44 BC. It is not unlikely that he funded the erection or renovation of the stoa which would perpetuate his name along one of the city's most important streets.¹⁴ At the end of the street to the north the Coressian gate was erected, which signaled the entrance of the Processional Way into the city. Almost nothing survives from the street's Hellenistic building phase; it is however certain that the stadium was built during this period at its northern end as was the theatre.

We also have little evidence about the street's Roman building phase. The theatre's gymnasium, at the beginning of the street, is the only Roman building, together with the theatre, which is preserved in good condition. It is certain that the architectural unification of the street occurred during the Early Imperial years with the erection of porticos along its entire length.¹⁵ These porticos offered access to rooms which were arranged behind them and functioned as shops and workshops. During the first half of the 3rd century AD, the asiarch and benefactor Publicianus Nikephoros funded the renovation (possibly after a fire) of another portico. He appears to have donated the space formed by two, three or more intercolumniations to commercial and craftsmen guilds as testified by a series of inscriptions on columns which originate from the portico. This area, which extended from the façade to the portico's rear rooms, was used by the various guilds for the production and display of their produce. The researchers who studied these inscriptions in depth confirm that they come from the 3rd century portico which was funded by Publicianus Nicephorus.¹⁶

Over the following centuries and despite the devastating earthquakes of the 4th century, the *plateia* of Coressus did not cease to form the main street of Ephesus, if we can judge by the edifices erected during this era (palace, fountain, church in the stadium, Apsidal building). On the other hand, the chronological limit for the deposition of the porticos can be pinpointed with the construction of the Byzantine walls which used building material from the street's ruins.¹⁷ This enclosure confined, during the 7th century, Ephesus to the Coressus area and the main S-N road remained the Theatre Street, stripped however of its old grandeur.

5. History of Research – State of Preservation

The route of the Theatre Street and certain adjacent monuments were already known during the first half of the 20th century. However, it is only very recently (1974) that excavations began on the street itself. The institutions involved are the Museum of Ephesus and the Turkish Archaeological Service.¹⁸ During the last few years, certain columns from the porticos have been revealed and restored. The research is focused on some of the porticos' inscriptions.¹⁹ Reports on the excavations of the "Plateia in Coressus" have been published, but there has not been a more comprehensive presentation of the subject. On the other hand, most monuments which are topographically associated with the street have been excavated and published at earlier times, probably segmentally, causing many problems connected to their identification and dating. Thus, although the Theatre Street is one of ancient Ephesus' most frequented areas it does not capture the interest of the city's visitors.



1. The numbers in brackets refer to the city plan of Ephesus found in the website.
2. For Coressus see Karwiese, St., "Koressos. Ein fast vergessener Stadtteil von Ephesos", in *Pro Arte Antiqua. Festschrift für H. Kenner* Bd.II (*SoSchrÖAI* 28, Wien 1985), p. 214.
3. Knibbe, D., *Ephesus. Geschichte einer bedeutenden antiken Stadt und Portrait einer moderner Großgrabung* (Frankfurt a.M. – Berlin – Bern – N.Y. – Paris, Wien 1997), p. 42.
4. At the point where the North Gate of the Tetragonos Agora was built, was the Triodos, the intersection of three streets; from the north came the road from the Artemision, the road to Ortygia led to the southwest, while the road which circled mountain Pion and mountain Tracheia, leading back to the Artemision opened out to the east.
5. Büyükkolancı, P. – Tüzün, D., "Theaterstrasse", in Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesos. Der neue Führer* (Wien 1995), p. 166.
6. Büyükkolancı, P. – Tüzün, D., "Theaterstrasse", in Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesos. Der neue Führer* (Wien 1995), p. 166.
7. For the Theatre Gymnasium see Thür, H., "Theatergymnasium", in Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesos. Der neue Führer* (Wien 1995), p. 164.
8. See Karwiese, St., "Apsidenbau" in Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesos. Der neue Führer* (Wien 1995), p. 166.
9. Karwiese, St., "Byzantinischer Palast", in Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesos. Der neue Führer* (Wien 1995), p. 188.
10. See Jobst, W., "Ein spätantiker Strassenbrunnen in Ephesos", in Feld, O. (ed.), *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst. F.W. Deichmann gewidmet (MRGZM* 10, Bonn 1986), p. 47-62.
11. For the stadium see Karwiese, St., "Stadion", in Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesos. Der neue Führer* (Wien 1995), p. 168.
12. For Coressus see Karwiese, St., "Koressos. Ein fast vergessener Stadtteil von Ephesos", in *Pro Arte Antiqua. Festschrift für H. Kenner* Bd.II (*SoSchrÖAI* 28, Wien 1985), p. 214-225.
13. Knibbe, D., "Der Asiarch M. Fulvius Publicianus Nikephoros, die ephesischen Handwerkszünfte und die Stoa des Servilius" *ÖJh* 56 (1985), p. 73.
14. Knibbe, D., "Der Asiarch M. Fulvius Publicianus Nikephoros, die ephesischen Handwerkszünfte und die Stoa des Servilius" *ÖJh* 56 (1985), p. 76
15. Knibbe, D., "Der Asiarch M. Fulvius Publicianus Nikephoros, die ephesischen Handwerkszünfte und die Stoa des Servilius" *ÖJh* 56 (1985), p. 73.
16. It is however logical to assume that initially this portico was destroyed by the 262 AD earthquake or even later. The portico's design, with its various types and sizes of columns matches more with the conditions which were in place during the second half of the 4rd and 4th centuries, rather than the opulent building activity of the Severan era. In this case the initial donation by Nicephorus did not cease to be valid and mentioned by the thankful guilds. See Knibbe, D., "Der Asiarch M. Fulvius Publicianus Nikephoros, die ephesischen Handwerkszünfte und die Stoa des Servilius" *ÖJh* 56 (1985), p. 75-76.
17. Knibbe, D., "Der Asiarch M. Fulvius Publicianus Nikephoros, die ephesischen Handwerkszünfte und die Stoa des Servilius" *ÖJh* 56 (1985), p. 72. For the byzantine fortification which walled in the area of Coressus see Karwiese, St., "Spätantike Stadmauer", in Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesos. Der neue Führer* (Wien 1995), p. 174.
18. Büyükkolancı, P. – Tüzün, D., "Theaterstrasse", in Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesos. Der neue Führer* (Wien 1995), p. 166.
19. See Knibbe, D., "Der Asiarch M. Fulvius Publicianus Nikephoros, die ephesischen Handwerkszünfte und die Stoa des Servilius" *ÖJh* 56 (1985), p. 71 which includes the relevant bibliography.



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	Knibbe D. , <i>Ephesus - ΕΦΕΣΟΣ Geschichte einer bedeutenden antiken Stadt und Porträt einer modernen Grossgrabung</i> , Frankfurt am Main 1998
	Jobst W. , "Ein spätantiker Strassenbrunnen in Ephesos", O., Feld (ed.), <i>Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst. F.W. Deichmann gewidmet</i> , Bonn 1986, MRGZM 10, 47–62
	Karwiese S. , "Koressos. Ein fast vergessener Stadtteil von Ephesos", W., Alzinger(ed.), <i>Pro Arte Antiqua. Festschrift für H. Kenner, Bd.II</i> , Wien 1985, SoSchrÖAI 28, 214–225
	Knibbe D. , "Der Asiarch M. Fulvius Publicianus Nikephoros, die ephesischen Handwerkszünfte und die Stoa des Servilius", <i>ÖJh</i> , 56, 1985, 71–77

Webliography :

	Ephesos- Gesamtplan
http://homepage.univie.ac.at/elisabeth.trinkl/forum/forum0897/04plan.htm	

Glossary :

	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.	
	freedman, the
a slave that was set free.	
	hippodamian plan
A town-planning system, developed by architect Hippodamus from Miletus. It was based on a grid-shaped plan which laid out roads and streets intersecting each other in opposite directions.	
	niche
Semi-circular recess on the surface of the wall.	
	palaestra
A colonnaded enclosure for athletic exercise. The palaestra functioned both independently and as a part of the Greek gymnasium. It was formed as an open court surrounded by colonnades with adjoining rooms.	
	proconsul, -lis
A quite high ranking official, vir spectabilis according to the rank of the senate, who was inequable only to the Domestikos of the Scholae and to the Magister Militum per Orientem. The proconsul usually served as a governor of the Imperial provinces (i.e. in Asia Minor the provinces of Asia and Cappadocia). The office was demoted from the 9th century onwards and the term was in use until the 12th century meaning a dignity.	
	stoa, portico, the
A long building with a roof supported by one or two colonnades parallel to its back wall.	

Chronological Table

6th- 4th century B.C. The later Theatre Street was a simple road between the Ionic Acropolis (west) and the western side of the Tracheia (east) in the wider region of the Ionian village of Coressus.



300-281 BC. The Theatre Street formed a part of the Processional Way inside the city walls of the newly founded Ephesus

3rd –1st century BC. Stoas were built along the Theatre Street, with presumably the Stoa of Servelius being one of them.

1st –3rd century AD. The Plateia of Coressus became a via colonnata, with porticos in its entire length.

First quarter of the 3rd century BC. the asiarch and city's great benefactor Dionysius Nicephorus funded the erection or the renovation of a portico in the Plateia of Coressus and donated to the city's craftsmen guilds certain locations for their activities

262 BC. A destructive earthquake caused damages to the Theatre Street.

4th –6th AD. The devastating earthquakes of the years 358-366 BC caused damages to the Theatre Street. Despite the general destruction, new buildings were erected, such as the Byzantine fountain and the Palace. The Plateia in Coressus was still one of the most important road arteries of the city,

7th century AD. After the confinement of the city of Ephesus in the region of Coressus, the Theatre street became the main artery of the new city. Nevertheless, this is when the porticos along the street were completely destroyed and part of their building material was used for the construction of the new city wall.