

Cultural heritage management

The British Institute at Ankara’s cultural heritage management project at Aspendos started in 2013 and remains ongoing. From its very early stages, the underlying philosophy of the programme at Aspendos has been to adopt a ‘people-based approach’ towards creating a model project in public archaeology in Turkey. After setting up the theoretical foundations of the project, our work in 2015 has concentrated on putting these plans into action.

One important success has been the approval of the first phase of the landscaping element of the project by the Antalya Regional Conservation Council in August 2015. This element, which has been prepared as part of the Aspendos Sustainable Development and Site Management plan by Hacettepe University and the BIAA, entails the construction of a new visitor centre at the entrance to the site (with meeting spaces available for various events for locals, children and visitors), the placement of new information boards and signs with directions, and the establishment of new walking trails around the site. The implementation costs will be covered by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the work is expected to start soon.

To enable a better presentation of the site, one of the interventions badly needed was the clearance of vegetation from around the monuments. After a series of meetings with the mayor of Antalya, the municipality decided to support this initiative by providing workmen and equipment this year and for several years to come. Since the involvement of local authorities is a crucial element in successful cultural heritage management, this new arrangement with the municipality is very important for the sustainability of the project.

Interviews with the local community, especially the workmen involved in the excavation and visitors, continued to be conducted this year. The overall aim is to incorporate the results of these interviews (that were also conducted in 2014) into the cultural heritage management plan for the site and also into the application for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List (Aspendos was added to the tentative UNESCO list in April 2015).

Two other events that are definitely worth mentioning are a meeting with local children and an ‘ask an expert’ day. The first of these events took place on 21 August in Camili, beneath the famous aqueduct of Aspendos. The idea was to meet with children from Camili and Belkis villages and to explain and show them what archaeologists do, how they work and why the work that they do is important. This was not intended as an education-oriented event; the basic motivation behind it was not to train the children or offer any formal education in history or archaeology, but rather to communicate with them, to make them feel that their

participation was all that mattered. The event involved activities in an ‘excavation pool’ which had been previously prepared by the excavation team and in which many artefacts were waiting to be discovered by the young archaeologists. The recovered but broken artefacts were taken to a restoration table and put together under the watchful eye of a professional restoration expert and parents. Additionally, the children made leather Roman pouches, painted theatre masks and had their photos taken with their heads popped through cut-outs of Roman characters. It was a memorable event, both for the excavation team and for the local children and their families. The presence of our professional photographer on the day made the event even more ‘memorable’!

On 2 September, we organised an ‘ask an expert’ day. As already mentioned, new information boards will soon be placed around the site; one of the common complaints regarding the information displayed on such boards is that it is too technical and fails to address the questions of the visiting public. Taking this into consideration, this particular initiative aimed to record questions from locals and potential



Children at the ‘excavation pool’ (photo by Gücügür Görkay)



Activities with local children (photo by Gücügür Görkay)

visitors regarding the site. We organised a trip to the site to enable them to raise questions or share their own knowledge about the landscape or the remains. The data gathered during this event are now being processed so that the contents of the information boards can be prepared based on input from potential visitors rather than being the product of the usual, one-sided ‘expert’ approach.

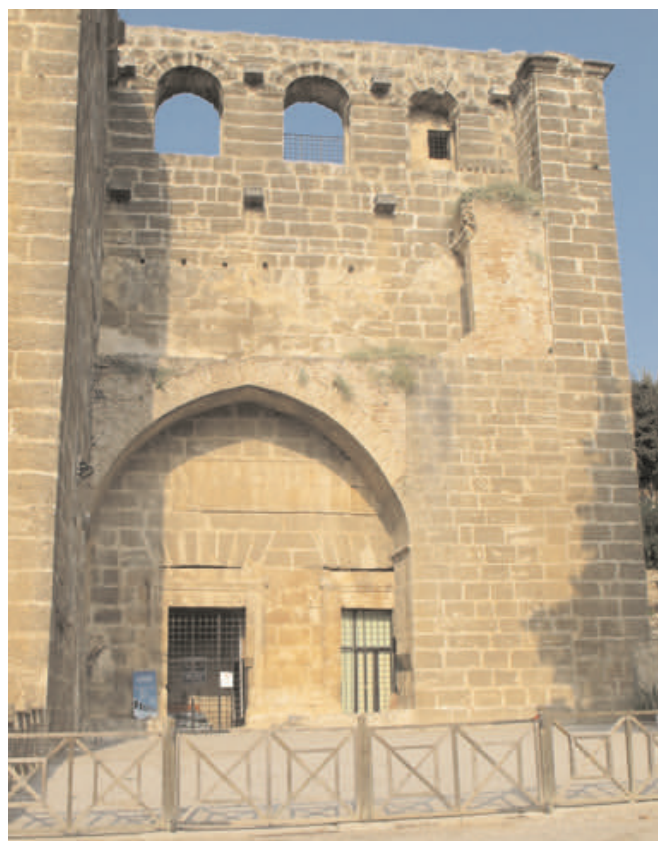
The theatre

As the main landmark of Aspendos and the primary ‘target’ of visitors to the site, the management of the theatre takes a central role in the cultural heritage plan of the site. However, as well as preserving the theatre and making it accessible, it is equally important to study the building and its history.

The theatre at Aspendos is particularly valuable for the study of ancient architecture because it is excellently preserved and, therefore, presents features that have been lost from theatres elsewhere. In addition, the majority of the *scaenae frons* and its decoration are largely preserved in situ and seem to belong largely to the original building phase, which is dated by inscription to the Antonine period. As a consequence, a thorough knowledge and publication of the building and its architectural decoration is important for the study of contemporary buildings elsewhere.

The results of the 2015 fieldwork indicate that the theatre may be the best-preserved ancient theatre in Turkey, and beyond, but that it may not have been the most richly-decorated example built in antiquity. Unlike the theatres of Perge and Side, for instance, elaborately-decorated doorframes giving actors access to the stage are not preserved; and the present remains do not offer any indication for their presence in an earlier phase. The study of the Aspendos theatre has also revealed clues regarding the conversion of the stage house (*scaenae*) and adjacent *versurae* or *paraskenia* (projecting side wings flanking the stage) into a Seljuk palace. At some point, for instance, the structures seem to have required measures to ensure their stabilisation. Reinforcement to the *scaenae* itself seems to have included the fitting of long rows of metal clamps to bridge cracks in the side walls of the structure. Buttresses on the external face of the wall of the *cavea* were enlarged and supportive arches added, which partially covered the dedication inscriptions above the main entrance doors and largely blocked a second entrance door (see photo top right). This, together with the shape of the arches, indicates that these adjustments must have been executed in preparation for the use of the structure as a Seljuk palace. Preserved patches of stucco covering the wall above the arches testify that the arches originally supported a covered corridor, but one which is unfortunately not accessible today.

With regards to the architectural decoration (see photo bottom right), the high degree of preservation allows insights into the decorative schemes of the region during the Antonine period. Comparisons with contemporary



Theatre of Aspendos: the external face of the *cavea* wall, with later changes (photo by Gücügür Görkay)



Theatre of Aspendos: architectural decoration of the entablature of the lower storey of the *scaenae frons* (photo by Gücügür Görkay)

monumental architecture in other cities in Pamphylia, such as Perge and Side, and also Sillyon and Antalya, not only contribute to the reconstruction of the development of architectural decoration in the region and beyond, but also to the study of settlement development in Pamphylia. The decoration of the theatre compares well with many less precisely dated monumental buildings in Perge and Side. Together, these buildings seem to indicate heightened construction activity in the Antonine period in Pamphylia.