The morphological resemblance of theatre façades and the façades of monumental nymphaea derives from a common language of consolidated architectonic forms and decorative types applied in civic edifices and has been used within the framework of the newly founded roman state to diffuse the idea of the imperium romanum throughout the empire.

The study is based on four parameters:

I. Form and Structure. The elaborate theatrical scenaes frontes are directly comparable with the monumental façade nymphaea, which diverge in semicircular nymphaea, nymphaea with apses and rectilinear nymphaea.

It often happens that public monuments of the same city present similar morphological features, both in their ground-plans and their frontages.

Water theatres: Nymphaea shaped as a theatrical cavea forming water cascades.

III. Decoration. Sculptural assemblages both on theatres and nymphaea diverge in idealistic/mythological: statues of the Olympian gods, minor deities, mythological figures, genre sculpture and personifications related to water and nature, leisure and spiritual exercise.

portrait sculpture (imperial and private): statues of the emperor and the imperial family, statues of prominent citizens (Roman and local office-holders, priests, military commanders, local aristocrats, personalities related to the past or present city history or related to arts, intellect, athletics.

Marine subjects appear in theatres

Theatrical subjects appear in nymphaea.

Fountain sculpture are present both in theatres and nymphaea.

Sculptural display programmes in both theatres and nymphaea supported the imperial propaganda, personal political ambitions and economic interests of the persons involved.

The aedicular façade which firstly appeared at the Augustan era and was formed during the Trajnic period characterizes the monumental architecture of the imperial period and was successfully applied in edifices of different use and function, i.e. theatres, odeia, bouleuteria, gates and arches, libraries, gymasia and baths, nymphaea, each time projecting their special features with grandiosity.

II. Function. Archaeological research has revealed numerous hydraulic installations in ancient theatre buildings.

Some nymphaea are either incorporated in theatre buildings, or adjacent to them.

The severan Perge theatre had a weak postscenaeum wall which necessitated supports. The monumental nymphaeum (F1) was built as an external abutment of the scene building to support it.

It consists of four semicircular exedrae bearing columns which support the entablature.

IV. Symbolism-Sacrality.

Both theatres and nymphaea obtain a certain degree of sacrality, they are organically connected to the water, the origin of life they are often built within a sanctuary or close to one

No imperial cult was exercised at nymphaea

Imperial or other cult exercise is detectable at theatres, where excavations have unearthed sacella, aediculae or exedrae used for such purposes.

Certain cult festivals were held both in nymphaea and theatres: The Syrian Maïmonas festival included water spectacles and was held in the Aphrodisias South Agora Gate Nymphaeum, the theatre-nymphaeum at Daphne (Antioch), the so called Birketein theatre at Gerasa, the theatre of Canatha in Syria.

Religious symbolization is defined in correlation with the monument’s location, sculptural decoration, epigraphic evidence.

Selected Bibliography


