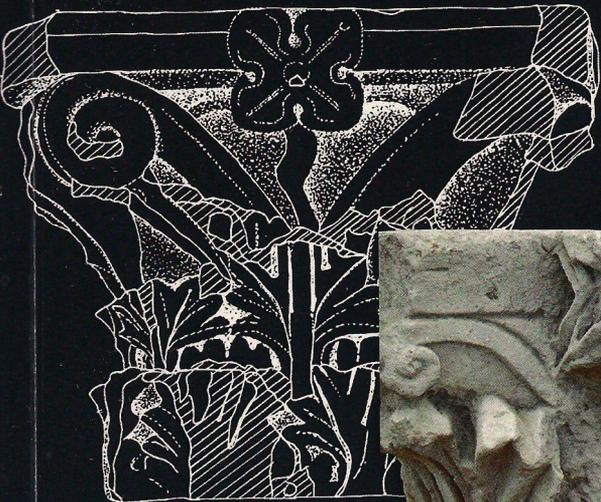
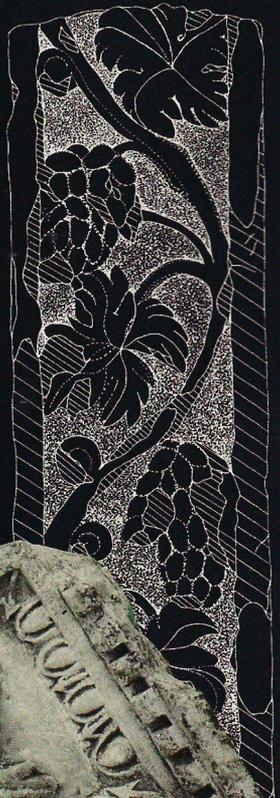


NOVAE. STUDIES AND MATERIALS VI

SACRUM et PROFANUM



Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

NOVAE

Studies and Materials VI

Edited by
ELENA JU. KLENINA

SACRUM et PROFANUM

Haec studia amici et collegae
Andrei B. Biernacki septuagennio dicant



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NOVAE, MOESIA AND THRACIA

**CHERSONESOS
AND BLACK SEA REGION**

PUBLIC SHOWS AND THE RELATED FACILITIES FROM THE ROMAN PERIOD ON THE NORTHERN AND NORTH-EASTERN COAST OF THE BLACK SEA

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Abstract

In the first centuries AD, Greek colonies scattered along the Black Sea coast were under the influence of the *Imperium Romanum*. During the Roman period, some of the Greek public buildings, including various theatrical facilities, continued to be in use. Information about such performances is provided in accounts written by ancient authors, through the material acquired during archaeological excavations and by observing the remnants of ancient buildings.

Key words: theatres, gladiators, the Roman period, Black Sea coast

INTRODUCTION

Facilities for public shows were among the most important public buildings in Greek and Roman towns and cities. They served the purpose of popularising culture and art, but also as a tool of imperial propaganda and a meeting place, as well as performing a religious function. Representatives of all the social strata, from the emperor and senators, full citizens and military men to slaves and matrons, would meet at the show venues.

Such facilities located on the northern and north-eastern coast of the Black Sea, or beyond the borders of the Empire, have never been published jointly. There are only a few studies of the Greek-Roman theatre from Chersonesus Taurica (Sevastopol/UA) (see below). Regional studies of theatrical facilities are quite frequent and have, for example, been prepared for the provinces of Mauretania Tingitana,¹ Africa Proconsularis,² Syria,³ Arabia,⁴ as well as for Sicily,⁵ Greece,⁶ Asia Minor,⁷ and the Gallic provinces.⁸

The purpose of the present study is an attempt at making a general presentation of theatrical buildings and places where public performances could be organised in the Roman period within the Pontic outskirts of the Mediterranean world. The selection of sites was dictated by the information contained in the accounts written by various ancient authors,

¹ Pichot 2011, 171–192.

² Lachaux 1978.

³ Frézouls 1952, 46–100; 1959, 202–228; 1961, 54–86.

⁴ Segal 1995.

⁵ Barresi 2002, 4–15.

⁶ Robert 1940.

⁷ Bernardi Ferrero 1966–1974.

⁸ Grenier 1958; Dumasy 2011, 193–222.

as well as in other categories of written sources and in publications providing the results of archaeological research. In the light of the subject matter, it is crucial to refer to the types of performances staged, as their choice depended on the spectators' preferences, as were the decisions concerning the construction or reconstruction of theatrical facilities. The systematisation of this information will make it possible to provide more details about the performances staged *extra fines Imperii* along the Black Sea coast.

TERRITORIAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL SCOPE

The towns and cities on the northern and north-eastern coast of the Black Sea were founded by the Greeks. The Roman period on the coast of Pontus began with Mithridates VI Eupator Dionysus's defeat, after which the Greek municipalities previously under his control came under the influence of the *Imperium Romanum*.⁹ In the 2nd century AD, *vexillationes* and Roman auxiliary units were stationed in the area extending from the mouth of the Danube to the eastern edges of the Pontic Mountains. The garrisons would disappear from the cities and forts on the northern and eastern Pontic coast in the mid-3rd century AD, to return later in a much more limited scope.

THE SUBJECT MATTER

Both the Greeks and the Romans constructed permanent buildings for public shows. Theatres and hippodromes were predominant in Greek cities, while theatres, amphitheatres and circuses (*hippodromes*) were preferred in Roman ones. It was common for Greek theatres to be reconstructed by the Romans in such a way as would enable, for example, gladiator fights and animal hunts. In the 1st–3rd centuries AD, separate amphitheatres began to appear, devoted exclusively to providing entertainment to the Roman army. These were built next to the permanent camps and in some cases were even much larger than the ones founded in cities. The best-known examples of such buildings are located in Aquincum (Budapest), Carnuntum (Petronell, Niederösterreich/A) and Isca Silurum (Caerleon, (Caerllion), Newport, (Casnewydd)/GB).

The discovery of the building itself or of various architectural elements is the best confirmation of public shows having been performed at a given spot. Other such evidence includes material items relating to the cult of the goddess Nemesis, curule seats or tokens indicating the spectator's seat on their reverse sides, which were all artefacts directly connected to such events. Aside from finds having direct links with the theatre, there are also those that do not univocally indicate the existence of facilities for public shows, such as theatre masks, figures depicting actors or gladiators, reliefs representing theatrical scenes or bloody duels, as well as paintings, mosaics and graffiti portraying such content.

Various types of public performances were staged in such buildings. Plays were staged in theatres, while poets and musicians performed in odea. Gladiator fights, animal hunts, sea battles and executions were organised in amphitheatres,¹⁰ while horse, biga and quadriga races were held in hippodromes. However, there were some departures from these rules.

Actors' performances, gladiator fights and races all required a permanent show area. Initially, the theatre stages were wooden; they were assembled before a play was performed and dismantled after it finished.¹¹ Performances also took place without the use of the *skene*.

⁹ Son 1993, 24; Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski 2015, 17.

¹⁰ Kubrak 2016, 52

¹¹ Vit. De arch. 5 V 7; Berthold 1980, 148.

According to ancient texts, gladiators fought not only inside the amphitheatres, but also at various banquets and in military camps. A Jewish historian writing at the turn of the eras, Nicolaus of Damascus, indicates the provenience of gladiator fights and the time and place of staging such shows. This practice was taken over from the Etruscans. The fights were organised during holidays, funerary ceremonies and at private events.¹² Suetonius in his *Lives of the Caesars* provides information that gladiator fights also took place in the Pretorian Guard camps.¹³ However, in all probability, these included only performances involving humans, while no fights with the participation of animals were organised; there is no information about any protective devices for the spectators.

The races and Roman riding shows only required a length of flat terrain.¹⁴ The part of the area that was intended for the audience was probably made of wood.

As a result, it can be assumed that in some cities we will not find any architectural remains of various theatrical and show facilities as no permanent buildings were constructed. The situation was quite the opposite in the case of hunts, for example, as they required additional security measures. These would have included a *podium* in the theatre or amphitheatre. The *balteus* would have constituted another protective element, placed in front of the *cavea* (e.g. in Dionysus' theatre in Athens) or on the *podium* (e.g. in the military amphitheatre in Aquincum).

Based on the accounts provided by various ancient authors, the available epigraphic artefacts and archaeological material, four places may be indicated in which various public shows were organised during the Roman period (**fig. 1**).

Borysthenes / Olbia (Parutyne, Ukraine)

Proof of the existence of a theatre in Olbia (Mykolajivska oblast/UA) comes in the form of a Greek inscription discovered in 1848.¹⁵ (**fig. 2**) It states that one Kallinikon, a resident of the Borysthenes, was awarded a prize of one thousand gold coins, which were given to him during the Dionysia in the theatre (verses 8–9). The inscription is dated to the mid-3rd century BC.¹⁶ Currently, the artefact is located in the Archaeological Museum in Odessa. Of course, this is testimony from a period earlier than the one discussed in this article. Some of the cities were abandoned after the invasion of the Getae,¹⁷ and it remains uncertain whether the above-mentioned theatre did not also fall into ruin.

Dio Chrysostom in his Borysthenic Discourse¹⁸ mentions public performances twice. The first refers to the conversation which the author conducted with the local poet Kallistratos:

Σκόπει, ἔφη, ἐπεὶ καὶ τοῦσδε ὄρᾳς πάντας ἐπιθυμοῦντας ἀκοῦσαί σου καὶ διὰ τοῦτο συνερρηκότητας δεῦρο πρὸς τὸν ποταμόν, καίτοι οὐ σφόδρα ἀθροῦβως ἔχοντας.¹⁹

This fragment indicates that the public debate took place by the river, at the spot where the building of the theatre was located. The next fragment describes the beginning of a council meeting:

¹² Nic. Dam. *Athl.* IV, 153.

¹³ Suet. *Claud.* 21.

¹⁴ Amon 2008, 227.

¹⁵ IOSPE I² 25; Levi 1953, 177–180; 1956, 96–97; Robert 1956, 145–146; Zawadzki 1957, 98–100.

¹⁶ Levi 1956, 97; Zawadzki 1957, 99.

¹⁷ Dio Chrys. Or. 36, 6.

¹⁸ Dio Chrys. Or. 36, 1–29; Zawadzki 1957, 101–117.

¹⁹ Dio Chrys. Or. 36, 15; ‘‘Pray do so,’’ said he, ‘‘since you can see that all these men now present are just as eager as I am to listen to you, and that for that very reason they have streamed together here beside the river, although in no very tranquil state of mind.’’ Trans. after J. W. Cohoon 1967–1968, 435.

ὡς δὲ τοῦτο εἶπον, εὐθὺς ὄρμησαν ἅπαντες εἰς τὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἱερόν, οὔτερ εἰώθασι βουλευέσθαι. καὶ οἱ μὲν πρεσβύτατοι καὶ οἱ γνωριμώτατοι καὶ οἱ ἐν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς κύκλῳ καθίζοντο ἐπὶ βάθρων· τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν πλῆθος ἐφεστήκεσαν. ἦν γὰρ εὐρυχωρία πολλή πρὸ τοῦ νεώ.²⁰

It can be assumed that the stairs and squares which functioned as spots where council meetings and public gatherings took place, also served as places at which various public shows were organised. The tradition of using stairs and large squares for such purposes goes back to the so-called proto-theatres from the Greek Bronze Age, e.g. in Cnossus and Phaestus.

The exact location of the ancient theatre in Olbia has so far not been identified. Researchers think that most probably the building was located on the slope east of the agora.²¹ (**fig. 3. 2**) The second mentioned spot at which public meetings took place, i.e. the Temple of Zeus, was discovered in the central part of the main square, west of Apollo's Temple and north of the portico and Zeus' altar.²² Even though some of the researchers think that the circle of temples continued to perform its role after the invasion of the Getae,²³ it seems that subsequent temples dedicated to Zeus and Apollo were located in the so-called citadel in the southern part of the city (**fig. 3. 1**) or beyond the settlement walls. Among the buildings first mentioned, there was a large square, which should perhaps be linked to the information provided by Dio Chrysostom. The theatre, currently not visible in the field, which Z. Gansiniec claims to have been located not far from the above-mentioned *temenos*, might also have been in use during the Roman period. It should be noted that the area where the theatre is hypothetically located has not been researched archaeologically.²⁴

Various small finds linked to public shows have also been discovered in Olbia. Two rhyta were found in the rural territory, one in the form of Dionysus' bust, the other depicting Silenus as a seated actor, as well as some terracotta theatrical masks.²⁵ Black-figure pottery shards were also found bearing a relief portraying the four incarnations of Dionysus in a circle.²⁶

Chersonesus Taurica (Sevastopol, Crimea, Ukraine)

The ruins of a theatre have been preserved in Chersonesus Taurica (Sevastopol/UA). The building was constructed at the turn of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, and later reconstructed in the Roman period in the 2nd century AD. The theatre functioned until the 4th century AD.²⁷

The complete reconstruction of the building aimed to adapt it to gladiator and animal fights. This is attested by the existence of the *podium* (**fig. 4. 1**), which provided protection for the spectators in many of the theatres throughout the entire Roman Empire, e.g. in Dreventum (Gallia Lugdunensis, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes/F), Grand (Gallia Belgica, Vosges/F), Tauromenium (Sicilia/I), Dodoni (Macedonia, periferiaki enótita Ioannínon/GR), Ephesus (Asia,

²⁰ Dio Chrys. Or. 36, 17; 'And no sooner had I made this suggestion than they all set out together for the temple of Zeus, where they are wont to meet in council. And while the eldest and the most distinguished and the officials sat on benches in a circle, the rest of the company stood close by, for there was a large open space before the temple', Trans. after J. W. Cohoon 1967–1968, 437.

²¹ Gansiniec 1962, 40.

²² Gansiniec 1962, 39.

²³ Kryżyckij et al. 2003, 454.

²⁴ In September 2017, specialists from Frankfurt initiated a project of scanning the eastern slopes of the municipal agora. It should be mentioned that during this same period the Expedition of the National Museum of Warsaw did a photogrammetric analysis of the entire town. The results of both studies might be helpful in determining the spots at which the theatre was located. The analysis results should be available next year.

²⁵ Kryżyckij / Krapivina 2003, 542.

²⁶ Kryżyckij et al. 1989, 213; Kryżyckij / Krapivina 2003, 542.

²⁷ Sear 2006, 324; Rozpędowski 2016, 316–327.

Lydia, İzmir ili/TR) or Hierapolis (Asia, Phrygia, Denizli ili/TR).²⁸ They were created through the removal of the first few rows of the *ima cavea*. Ukrainian researchers believe that additional nets were also installed due to the *podium*'s small height.²⁹ However, no technical openings have been found that would have been traces of this type of security measures.

The organisation of gladiator fights in the theatre in Chersonesus is indicated by two altars dedicated to the goddess Nemesis, one with a Latin inscription³⁰ (**fig. 5. 1**), the other with a Greek one.³¹ (**fig. 5. 2**) Both monuments are dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD.³² The first of the above-mentioned altars was discovered in the ruins of the *proscenium*.³³ The cult of the goddess Nemesis can be linked with gladiator fights.³⁴

A relief (a fragment of a gravestone?) was also found in the city, depicting a battle between two gladiators (**fig. 6**). The bas-relief shows a *Secutor* standing wearing a helmet made from a single fragment of metal of the *Secutor G* type with a shield and a sword, while his opponent is lying on the ground with his right hand stretched out as if asking for mercy and holding a sword in his left hand. An inscription bearing the name 'Ἐάνθος' was carved onto the bas-relief beneath the scene.³⁵ The artefact is currently in the Archaeological Museum in Odessa.

Sebastopolis / Dioscurias (Sukhumi, Abkhazia, Georgia)

Information about the organisation of public shows in Sebastopolis (Ap'khazet'is Avt'onomiuri Resp'ublik'a, Apsnytwi Avtonomiatwi Arespublika/GE) comes from Arrian's account entitled *Periplus Euxeinu Pontu*:

παραμείψαντες δὲ τὸν Ἀστελέφον ἐς Σεβαστόπολιν ἤκομεν πρὸ μεσημβρίας, ἀπὸ Χώβου ὀρμηθέντες, σταδίου εἴκοσι καὶ ἑκατὸν τοὺς ἀπὸ Ἀστελέφου, ὡς καὶ τὴν μισθοφορὰν τοῖς στρατιώταις δοῦναι τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας, καὶ τοὺς ἵππους καὶ τὰ ὄπλα ἰδεῖν καὶ τοὺς ἰπέας ἀναπιδῶντας ἐπὶ τοὺς ἵππους καὶ τοὺς κάμνοντας καὶ τὸν σῆτον, καὶ τὸ τεῖχος περιελθεῖν καὶ τὴν τάφρον.³⁶

The ancient author provided information about horse jumps, which were part of a show involving the Roman cavalry, i.e. the so-called *hippica gymnasia*. Arrian mentions this part of the show in his *Tactica*:

ἐπὶ τούτῳ μέντοιπηδήσεις ἐπὶ τοὺς ἵππους ὡς ἔνι ποικιλωτάτας ποιοῦνται, ὅσαις ἰδέαις καὶ ὅσοις σχήμασιν ἀναβαίνεται ἵππος ὑπὸ ἰπέως: καὶ τελευταίαν δὴ τὴν ἐνόπλιον πήδησιν ἐπιδεικνύουσι θέοντος τοῦ ἵππου, ἦντινα ὁδοιπορικὴν ὀνομάζουσιν.³⁷

²⁸ The subject of theatres used for gladiator fights was discussed in the present author's MA thesis. A full catalogue can be found in: Kubrak 2017, 65–142.

²⁹ www.chersonesos.org/?p=ct_map31&l=eng; accessed 12.05.2017.

³⁰ Solomonik 1960, 133–139; Hornum 1993, 314, no 280.

³¹ Solomonik 1973, no. 126; Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski 2015, 42.

³² Solomonik 1960, 134.

³³ Solomonik 1960, 138.

³⁴ Solomonik 1960, 137–138; Hornum 1993, 44, 50; Wittenberg 2014, 8–10.

³⁵ Carter 1999 303, no. 27

³⁶ Arr. *Peripl. M. Eux.* 10. 'In our course from the Chobus we passed by Astelephus, and got to Sebastopolis before noon; which last place is one hundred and twenty stadia from Astelephus. We spent the remainder of the day in distributing the pay to the soldiers, in reviewing the horses and the arms, and in observing the dexterous activity of the horseman in leaping upon their horses; in viewing the sick, and surveying the provision of corn, and the condition of the walls and of the ditch.' Trans. after W. Falconer 1805, 8–9.

³⁷ Arr. *Tac.* 43. 3–4. 'In addition they demonstrate the greatest possible variety of ways of jumping onto their horses using all the methods and styles in which a horse can be mounted by a horseman. As

Hippica gymnasia could take place on drill grounds or in the buildings used by the military for exercising (*basilicae exercitatoriae*).³⁸ The skills of the Roman cavalry were very often also presented on flat terrain located near the fort (fig. 7). *Hippica gymnasia* were similar to duels³⁹, but they had certain characteristics typical of public performances. They were organised, for example, to honour the visits of important dignitaries, such as the provincial governor.

Apsaros (Gonio, Ajara, Georgia)

The only piece of information about facilities for public shows in Apsaros (Ach'aris Avt'onomiuri Resp'ublik'a/GE) is provided by Procopius of Caesarea in *De bello Gothico*:

αὕτη πόλις ἦν τὸ παλαιὸν πολυάνθρωπος, καὶ τείχους μὲν αὐτὴν περιέβαλε μέγα τι χρῆμα, θεάτρῳ δὲ καὶ ἵπποδρόμῳ ἐκαλλωπίζετο καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν οἷσπερ πόλεως μέγεθος δείκνυσθαι εἶωθε.⁴⁰

The Late-Roman author provides information that a theatre and a hippodrome were located in the city. It is difficult to state where exactly these buildings were situated. Their locations may be determined by future excavations conducted in the vicinity of the fort. Procopius mentioned facilities that had functioned earlier, but which in his days had already fallen into ruin. This account is dated to 540 AD.⁴¹

SUMMARY

Facilities for public shows were important places for the public life of Roman cities and garrisons. There was a theatre, an odeum, an amphitheatre or a circus in most ancient towns and cities or just beyond the city walls. Thanks to the information provided by various ancient authors, we know that actors' performances, public speeches, gladiator fights and races did not require the construction of permanent facilities.⁴² So far only one building used for public shows has been discovered on the northern and eastern coast of the Black Sea: the theatre in Chersonesus Taurica, which functioned both in the Hellenistic and in the Roman period. In the case of other Greek cities and Roman military camps in the discussed area, there are no archaeological finds that would confirm the existence of similar structures. It seems almost certain that at least a makeshift theatre must have functioned in the discussed period in Olbia. The stairs in front of the Temple of Zeus might perhaps have performed such a role. Dio Chrysostom mentions meetings taking place at this spot; however, it remains uncertain where this building was located in the first centuries AD. It can be assumed that the stairs must have been situated on the slope linking the upper and lower town, with a view of the Southern Bug estuary. It is worth noting here that similar buildings as those in Chersonesus should also be found at larger municipalities, such as Tyras (Odeśka oblast'/UA) or Panticapaeum (Kerč'/UA).

As regards the territories located further to the east, there is mention within the texts written by various ancient authors of two places at which Roman garrisons were stationed.

a climax they demonstrate leaping in full armour onto a galloping horse, which some call the traveller's leap (*hodoiporiken*).’ Trans. after F. Brudenall and F. Walbank (Hyland 1993, 76–77).

³⁸ Amon 2008, 227.

³⁹ Amon 2008, 227.

⁴⁰ Procop. *Goth.* 8.2.14. ‘This was a populous city in ancient times, and a great expanse of wall surrounded it, while it was adorned with a theatre and hippodrome and all the rest of those things by which the size of a city is commonly indicated.’ Trans. after Deving 1928, 66.

⁴¹ Kakhidze 2008, 314.

⁴² Dio Chrys. Or. 36, 15; Or. 36, 17; Nic. Dam. Athl. IV, 153; Suet. Claud. 21; Vitruv. De arch. 5 V 7.

In Sebastopolis, riding shows did not require any structures, even though at times a parade stand might have been assembled for members of the audience. Procopius' account concerning Apsaros is quite mysterious. His claim about the existence of a building of a theatre, which finds no confirmation in any other source, requires verification through the conducting of excavations in the area. Perhaps these doubts will be resolved by future fieldwork outside the fort walls.

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- Vitr. De arch.: Vitruvius, *De architectura*

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Fig. 1. Map of the Black Sea basin with marked sites mentioned in the article (drawing by O. Kubrak).

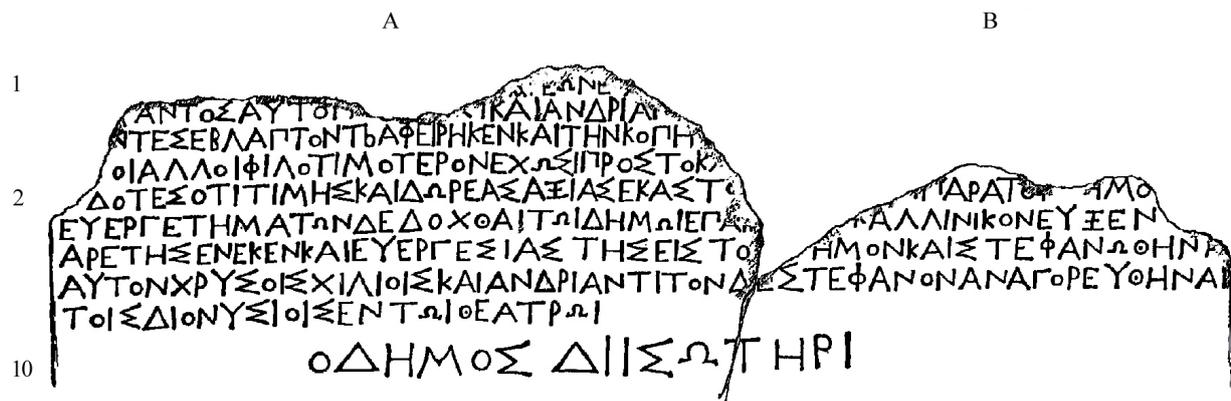


Fig. 2. Inscription from Olbia (drawing by O. Kubrak after IOSPE I² 25).

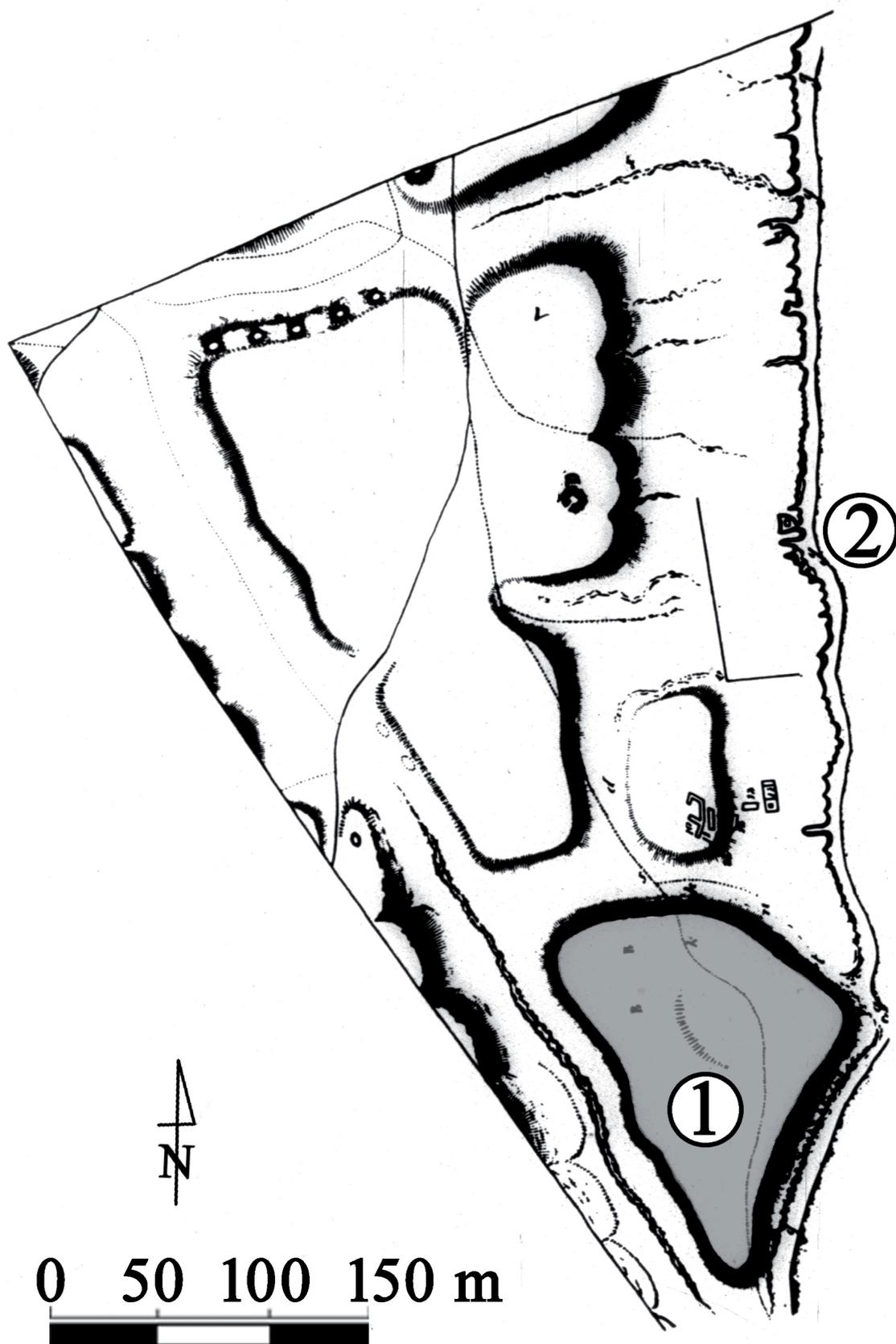


Fig. 3. Plan of Olbia; 1. Territory of the citadel marked in grey, 2. hypothetical localisation of the theatre (after Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski 2015: Fig. 59).



Fig. 4. Theatre in Chersonesus Taurica; 1. *podium* (photo by O. Kubrak).
(after Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski 2015: Fig. 59).



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Fig. 5. Altars dedicated to the goddess Nemesis from Chersonesus Taurica; 1. from the Latin inscription, <http://www.chersonesos.org/images/nemes1.jpg> (accessed 18.12.2016), 2. from the Greek inscription, <http://www.chersonesos.org/images/nemes2.jpg> (accessed 18.12.2016).



Fig. 6. Relief with a representation of a gladiator fight from Chersonesus Taurica, Archaeological Museum in Olbia (photo by R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski).



Fig. 7. Reconstruction of the *hippica gymnasium*, Hadrian's Cavalry in the Segedunum Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne (photo by O. Kubrak).