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Gladiatorial Spectacles in Crete*

Crete, in Roman imperial times had ca. 19 to 23 self-governing cities that were collectively organized in a confederacy (the Cretan Koinon),¹ but only three of them presented gladiatorial and associated spectacles: Gortyn, Knossos and Hierapytna. Additionally, there is the sixteenth century literary information provided by Onorio Belli,² supporting the presence of Roman amphitheaters

* This research was co-financed by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund-ESF) through the Operational Program “Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning” in the context of the project “Reinforcement of Postdoctoral Researchers - 2nd Cycle” (MIS-5033021), implemented by the Greek State Scholarships Foundation (IKY). I would like to thank M. Baldwin Bowsky for reading and commenting on earlier versions of the manuscript, A. Sarris and K. Welch for permitting me to reproduce their images, D. Chacón from L’Erma di Bretschneider for permitting me to reproduce the images from Di Vita’s book on Gortyn, A. Vidalis for producing the maps, S. Gallimore, G. Montali, D. Stewart and D. Stone, as well as the anonymous reviewers for *Τεκμήρια* for their useful comments and remarks.

1. For the Koinon, see Rouanet-Liesenfelt 1994; Cigaina 2020. For the number of the Cretan cities, see Karambinis 2022, 235 n. 17.

2. Onorio Belli was a doctor from Vicenza who in 1583 was appointed physician to the Proveditor General of Candia, Luigi di Antonio Grimani. Belli remained on the island for 16 years (1583-1599) and during his stay he conducted numerous archaeological and botanical researches on the island. In 1586 he had ready a two-volume geographical, historical and archaeological description of the island, which though remained unpublished. Moreover, the manuscript is considered lost since the 18th century. His observations on the antiquities of the island are basically known from an abstract of Belli’s two-volume manuscript made by the Venetian Apostolo Zeno (1668-1750), today in the Marcian Library at Venice; by comments that other readers of the manuscript left before its loss (e.g. F. Pigafetta, S. Maffei, O. Bocchi di Adria); by the letters that Belli sent to various persons of Italy, among them to his uncle Valerio Barbarano, today in the Ambrosian Library at Milan and in the Italian Archaeological School at Athens; and finally by a twelve-page summary of the two-volume manuscript written by Onorio Belli himself in 1591 and entitled “*Descrittione geographica del isola de Candia di Honorio De Belli*”

in Chersonesos and Kissamos (**Fig. 1**). Gortyn was the capital of the joint province of Crete and Cyrenaica and seat of the Cretan Koinon,³ Knossos was the only colony that the Romans founded in Crete,⁴ while Hierapytna, Chersonesos and Kissamos were in the Roman Imperial period among the most important harbors of Crete and of the eastern Mediterranean.

This article examines the epigraphic and archaeological evidence attesting the staging of the gladiatorial shows in the aforementioned Cretan cities. Furthermore, the article connects the staging of these shows and the presence of amphitheater(s) in Crete, to the position that the island held within the unprecedented level of connectivity that occurred in the unified Roman Mediterranean, and, specifically, to the urban trajectories of Gortyn, Knossos, Hierapytna, Chersonesos and Kissamos.

The paper is divided into four sections, with the first focusing on the presentation of inscriptions from Gortyn, Knossos and Hierapytna, all of which relate directly to gladiators and gladiatorial spectacles. The second section is about the buildings where these shows took place, and the third discusses the local evidence for gladiatorial spectacles in the wider eastern Mediterranean context. Finally, a presentation of the profile of the Cretan cities that presented gladiatorial spectacles is attempted.

Inscriptions

Inscription 1 (Gortyn):

Honorary inscription dedicated to the high priest of the imperial cult of the Cretan Koinon Titus Flavius Iulius Volumnius Sabinus, for organizing gladiatorial games and beast-fights.

Date: Third (–fourth) century CE

medico da Vicenza”, today in the State Archive of Venice. In his two-volume unpublished work Belli had prepared plans of numerous ancient monuments of Crete, of which only nine have survived in copies that provided in his letters: the small and the large theater of Hierapytna, the small and the large theater of Gortyn, the theater of Lyktos, the theater of Chersonesos, the civic basilica of Knossos and two temples in Lebena and in Lappa. The majority of these buildings have been archaeologically discovered (Falkener 1854; Spanakis 1968; Tsiknakis 1989-1990; Beschi 1999; Tsiknakis 2001).

3. Chevrollier 2016, 15; Lippolis 2016.

4. Sanders 1982, 14; Baldwin Bowsky 2002, 77.

I.Cret. IV 305; Robert 1940, 118 no. 63; Harrison 1993, 133-134; Carter 1999a, 324 no. 128; Carter 2015, 51.

Τ. Φλ. Ἰούλιον Βολούμνιον | Σαβεῖνον, τὸν ἀρχιερέα τοῦ | κοινοῦ τῶν Κρητῶν
τὸ β', | μόνον Κρητῶν ἔχοντα κατὰ θεῖαν | μεγαλοδωρίαν θεατροκυνηγεσίων |
ἡμέρας τρεῖς ἐν αἷς ἀποσφάζει θηρία | ὅσα αὐτὸς ἐβούλετο, σιδηροκοντρῶν δὲ
| ἡμέρας κατὰ τὸ ἐξῆς τρεῖς ὧν ἐν ἐκάστη | ζεύγη ἀπότομα δύο καὶ θηρία σφα-
κτά, | τὰς δὲ τῶν μονομαχιῶν ἡμέρας τέσσαρας | ὧν ἐν ἐκάστη ζεύγη ἀπότομα
τέσσαρα, | τὰ δὲ ὑπόλοιπα ζεύγη τῶ ὀξεῖ σιδή[ρ]ῳ, | τὸν οὕτω φιλοτειμησάμε-
νον μόνον Κρητῶν, | Αὐρ. Ἰουλιανός, Κλ. Νείκανδρος, Κλ. Πτολεμαῖος, | Αὐρ.
Ἑρμῆς, τὸν ἀσύγκριτον φίλον καὶ εὐεργέτην.

"Titus Flavius Iulius Volumnius Sabinus, the chief priest of the Koinon of the Cretans for the second time, who alone of the Cretans held by imperial *indulgentia* three days of beast hunts for the (amphi)theatre during which he was allowed to slay as many beasts as he wanted, and three continuous days of combats with iron spears, of which on each day two execution pairs (*ἀπότομα*) fought and the beasts were slaughtered, and four days of gladiatorial combats, during which on each day there were four execution pairs (*ἀπότομα*) and the remaining pairs (fought) with sharp weapons; this man alone of the Cretans who has thus acted as *munerarius*, Aurelius Iulianus, Claudius Nicandros, Claudius Ptolemaios, Aurelius Hermes honor their incomparable friend and benefactor."⁵

The inscription tells us that the high priest of the imperial cult of the Cretan Koinon, Titus Flavius Iulius Volumnius Sabinus, organized regional shows in Gortyn, the seat of the Koinon; this was a common phenomenon in the Greek East, especially in the provinces of Macedonia and Asia.⁶ The text gives us the duration of the shows that the sponsor (*munerarius*)⁷ offered: three days of beast hunts with iron spears⁸ and four days of gladiatorial combats. More interesting are the details for the paired matchups: concerning the four days of the gladiatorial combats, the text specifies ὧν ἐν ἐκάστη ζεύγη ἀπότομα τέσσαρα, | τὰ δὲ ὑπόλοιπα ζεύγη τῶ ὀξεῖ σιδή[ρ]ῳ.

5. Translation by Carter (2015, 51).

6. Nigdelis 2006, 73-93; Carter 2004.

7. For φιλοτειμησάμενον/φιλοτιμία, i.e. *munus* (line 13), see Robert 1940, 278.

8. For θεατροκυνηγεσίων, σιδηροκόντρων (lines 5 and 7), see Robert 1940, 311-312.

In contrast to what was once widely assumed, death in gladiatorial combat was infrequent, as the rules of the games usually prescribed that the gladiators should fight until one signaled surrender, by holding up his finger (fights *ad digitum*).⁹ Moreover, fights normally took place with blunted weapons. This reduced gladiatorial fatalities and consequently the costs of the associated shows, as the death of a gladiator would oblige the sponsor of the games to pay a large amount of compensation to the *lanista*, the person from whom he (usually) leased the fighters.¹⁰ There were, however, rare cases of fights that took place with sharp weapons (τοῖς ὀξεσί σιδήροις). This made the games especially dangerous and augmented the cost of the shows. In inscriptions commemorating these instances, the sponsor is especially praised because he offered something unusual to the people.¹¹ This is the case of the show that Sabinus provided in Gortyn, undertaken with imperial permission (θείαν μεγαλοδορίαν, lines 4-5).¹²

More problematic is the word ἀπότομα that is used for the other four paired gladiatorial combats. Zingerle and Robert thought that in the gladiatorial context this expression implied fights *sine missione* (without release), that is, fights that did not give gladiators an opportunity to surrender, but obliged them to continue fighting until one of the two was severely injured or dead.¹³ According to this interpretation the ζεύγη ἀπότομα τέσσαρα in the inscription from Gortyn (line 11) would indicate four fights to the death. Carter, however, doubts this interpretation of ἀπότομος, based on the term's application to beast hunts (in our inscription, ζεύγη ἀπότομα δύο καὶ θηρία σφακτά, line 9); animals could not 'surrender' in a beast hunt.¹⁴ Besides, the combats where the gladiators had to fight to the death were called περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς or ὑπὲρ ψυχῆς (for their souls/lives).¹⁵ Carter proposes a new tentative interpretation according to which ἀπότομος was an execution by combat, in which a convict

9. Carter 2006-2007, 102-103; Carter 2009, 155.

10. Ville 1981, 318-325; Carter 2006; Carter 2006-2007.

11. Carter 2006.

12. Robert 1940, 274-275. The formula appeared in the inscriptions from the 2nd cent. CE onwards; see Ville 1981, 209.

13. Zingerle 1930, 81; Robert 1940, 259-262. Cf. Carter 2015, 40-42.

14. Carter 2015, 42.

15. Gounaropoulou, Hatzopoulos 1998, 168-169 no. 69 (Beroia); Carter 2006, 173-174 (Miletos).

condemned to death was given basic gladiatorial training and armed, then sent to confront an experienced gladiator where he had little chance of survival.¹⁶ These events were presented as fights between two gladiators but were actually executions. In this light they were fights *sine missione* (to the death). According to Carter, these executions must have been characterized by excessive bloodshed and we should imagine the executioner (typically a gladiator) cutting and stabbing the victim in such a way as to produce as much bloodshed as possible.¹⁷ This would agree with the meaning of the verb ἀποτέμνω as “cut off, decapitate”,¹⁸ and it would explain the definition of ἀπότομος in the *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* as *crudelitas, ὀμότης*,¹⁹ which might also explain the application of the term to beast hunts.²⁰

This inscription from Gortyn informs us of an expensive amphitheater program that took place in the capital of Crete, including beast fights, gladiatorial games and perhaps public executions. Robert dated the inscription in the fourth century CE,²¹ but both Guarducci and Carter suggest a chronology in the third century CE.²² Moreover, our text finds parallels in inscriptions with similar texts (τοῖς ὀξέσι σιδήροις and/or ἀπότομα) from Sagalassos (late second–third century CE), Thyatira (222–235 CE), Smyrna (first half of the third century CE), Ephesos (180–220 CE) and Miletos (late second century CE).²³

Inscription 2 (Gortyn):

Honorary inscription for the organization of gladiatorial and beast fight games.

Date: Second–third century CE

I.Cret. IV 309; Robert 1940, 119 no. 64; Carter 1999a, 324 no. 129; Di Vita 2010, 307 n. 579.

16. Carter 2015.

17. Carter 2015, 50. The executions needed imperial authorization.

18. *LSJ* s.v. ἀποτέμνω. Cf. the beheading of St. John the Baptist, which in the Greek orthodox hagiology is called Ἡ ἀποτομή τῆς κεφαλῆς τοῦ Τιμίου Προδρόμου.

19. *CGL* II.118; Robert 1940, 260; Carter 2015, 41.

20. Carter 2015, 51.

21. Robert 1940, 118 no. 63.

22. *I.Cret.* IV 305; Carter 1999a, 324 no. 128.

23. Carter 2006, 172–174.

[---]δια'ω[---] | [--- Κορ]νηλίας Πλαυτίλλ[ας] | [---πρωτ]όκοσμος κατὰ τὰν [---]
| [---]ηγεσίους ἐφ' ἑκάστ[---]²⁴

Robert and Carter reconstruct lines 3 and 4 as κατὰ τὰν[--- | --- ἐπὶ (?) μονο-
μαχίας καὶ κυν]ηγεσίους.²⁵ Thus the text tells us that a magistrate of Gortyn
(πρωτόκοσμος, line 3) organized gladiatorial games and beast fights.

Inscription 3 (Gortyn):

Funerary inscription of a gladiator

Date: Second–third century CE

I.Cret. IV 373 (with photograph of the stone); *SEG* 28, 741 (with expanding read-
ings); Mann 2011, 219 no. 83.

[τὸν π]όδ' ἐνθ[άδε σ]τῆτε βραχὺ [...] | [--- ἐμ]ὸν [δ'] ὄνομα Νοσ[...] | [μνήμα
παρασκευ]ασθὲν ἐμ[οὶ] | [---] ὄνομα πολιῆ[ται]²⁶ Κο[...]. | [--- ἐ]ξ οἴκων Κ[α]
λανδίων[ος(?)] γεγένημαι· π]ατρὶς δέ μου Προσοδί[ται]. νῦν χθο]νὸς [Κρήτ]ης
πόλις Γορ[τύς με κα]τέχει μέγ[αν] ἐν σταδίοισι | [καὶ πολ]λὰ καμόντα καὶ [με]
γάλην πυ[γμῆν, ἦ]ν οὐχ εἶδοσαν Ἐκατοντοπολίται. | [τύχη ἔβαλ]ε γὰρ ἐμὲ ὑπό
τοὺς πόδας | [καὶ ἐνθάδ]ε δεῖτο ταφῆναι. Σπουδ[ι]ῆ φαμιλίας] μου καὶ συνεργα-
σίας | [ἐνθάδ' ὑπό]κειμαι. Παῦλα τέκ[νω] | [ἐποίησε μ]νείας χάριν.

“Stand by here for a while [...] my name is Nos[...] my grave has been prepared
by my countrymen whose names are Κο[...]. I belonged to the house of Kalandion
and my homeland was Prosoditai. Now the land of Crete and the city of Gortyn
have me, great in the *stadia*, after having done much and showing a determination
that the inhabitants of the one hundred cities [Cretans] have never seen before.
But fate beat me and I had to be buried here. My gladiatorial troupe took care of
my funeral. Paula and my children erected this in remembrance”.

The most interesting information in this inscription is the origin of the deceased
gladiator (lines 5–7). He was from Prosoditai (Προσοδίται/Προσωπί-
της νομός), a location attested by Ptolemy and identified at the south-south-
west of the Nile delta, in Egypt.²⁷ The gladiator belonged to the house of

24. No translation is possible for this fragmented text.

25. Robert 1940, 119 no. 64; Carter 1999a, 324 no. 129.

26. πολιῆ[τῶν]?

27. Ptolem. 4.5.12. See *RE* (Προσοδίται); <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/727206>
(accessed 5/11/21); *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, Map 74.

Kalandion.²⁸ In line 4 is used the term πολίτης, the Epic and Ionic form of πολίτης meaning fellow citizen or countryman.²⁹ The supplement of the text could be πολιη[τῶν], to say that the name of his countrymen is Ko[---].³⁰

The phrase ἐν σταδίοισι / ἐν σταδίοις (line 8) is standard for the gladiators and beast fighters in the Greek East. It is clearly borrowed from Greek athletics and it does not necessarily mean that a fighter fought in a stadium; it could have been another type of venue.³¹ The word πωγμή (lines 9-10) is also borrowed from Greek athletics, particularly boxing.³² In line 10 the Cretans are called Ἐκατοντοπολίται, a characterization that goes back to the epic tradition. In fact, it was Homer in the *Iliad* who described Crete as a land of 100 cities (ἐκατόπολιν).³³ It is interesting that this tradition remained alive until the Imperial period. In lines 11-12 our gladiator blames fate for his death. This is also common in gladiatorial epitaphs as their unwritten code dictated that in the case of death of a gladiator during the combat, the blame was not assigned to his opponent, but to his fate (μοῖρα, τύχη, βία).³⁴ The gladiator (if the reconstruction of the inscription is correct), belonged to a gladiatorial troupe (*familia*), attested in the western and the eastern part of the Empire.³⁵

Inscription 4 (Gortyn):

Funerary inscription of a gladiator

Date: Third century CE

Halbherr 1897: 236-238, no. 40 (with drawing of the stone); *I.Cret.* IV 374 (with drawing of the stone); Robert 1940, 122-123 no. 66; Harrison 1993, 134; Carter 1999a, 325 no. 131; Mann 2011, 218-219 no. 82; Kelly 2011, 80-81.

28. We do not know what the relation was with this house, unless he was perhaps a freedman.

29. *LSJ* s.v. πολίτης.

30. I thank M. Baldwin Bowsky for this suggestion.

31. Robert 1940, 21. Cf. the 1st cent. BCE – 1st cent. CE funerary epigram of a pankratiast from Kibyra (Acar, Kokkinia 2021-2022). For a recent discussion on the athletic terminology used in the gladiatorial funerary inscriptions, see Carter 2009, 158-165.

32. Robert 1929.

33. Hom. *Il.* 2.649.

34. Carter 2006-2007, 99; Coleman 2019, 13-16, 35-36. See also the next inscription (4).

35. Robert 1940, 55-57; Ville 1981, 346-347; Carter 2004, 66-68; Mann 2011, 97.

[---] | [---]—άμε | τέρου καμάτοιο | οὐ κότινος τὸ θέμα | ψυχῆς δ' ἔνεκεν μα-
 χό|μεσθα ☞ | οὔποτ' ἐ[λ]είφθην | <ἐ>κ τινος ἀντιπάλαιο | ἀλλά με Μοῖρ' ὀλοῖ
 | δαμασσαμένη πο|σὶ θῆκεν | *vacat* ἀντιπάλαιο δέμας | ὑπ' ἐμεῖο δαμέντος· | ἡ
 δὲ πατρὶς Τρωάς μοι | τὸ δ' οὔνομα [Γ]άϊος ἦεν | Ἀμμιάς ἐκ τῶ[ν] ἰδίων | αὐτοῦ
 μνείας χάρ[ιν].

“...of our labor. We do not fight for the olive crown but for our lives. I have never been overcome by any adversary but only by the deadly fate that placed me at the feet of my opponent after I had already overcome him in the body (physically). My homeland was Troas and my name was Gaius. Ammias (erected this) from her own funds in remembrance”.

This inscription provides interesting information for the procedure of the fight. The defunct gladiator was called Gaius and he was from the region of Troas (lines 13-14). The text starts with the common formula that the gladiators fought for their lives (lines 3-5).³⁶ Then it goes on to say that Gaius had not been overcome by any opponent but by fate (lines 6-9). This is again common, as the unwritten code of the gladiators dictated that in the case of death of a gladiator in combat, usually the blame was not assigned to his opponent, but to the fate or to the deceased's own choice.³⁷ The remainder of the text is more interesting, as, according to it, Gaius had already defeated his opponent before losing the battle and his life (lines 11-12). Knowing the rules of a typical gladiatorial duel makes this intelligible: combats were supervised by referees (*summa rudis* and *secunda rudis*) who had the right to stop the battle if they thought that one fighter was at risk of serious injury, but also they had the right to allow it to continue.³⁸ In the case of Gaius, the referee apparently allowed the duel to continue, even though –according to the words of Gaius– he had won, resulting eventually in his death. The closest parallel to this text is an inscription from Amisos in Asia Minor, in which the deceased gladiator Diodoros blames fate (Μοῖρ' ὀλοῖ) and the treachery of the referee, who apparently allowed the fight to continue.³⁹

36. Carter 2006-2007, 100.

37. Carter 2006-2007, 99; Coleman 2019, 13-16, 35-36.

38. Carter 2006-2007, 103.

39. Carter 2006-2007, 103, 110-111; Mann 2011, 257 no. 170.

Inscription 5 (Gortyn):

Inscribed sarcophagus of a gladiator (two fragments are extant).

Date: Late third – early fourth century CE

I.Cret. IV 375 (with drawing of the stone); Robert 1940, 119-120 no. 65; Harrison 1993, 131-132; Carter 1999a, 324-325 no. 130; Mann 2011, 219-221 no. 84.

Fragment A (it contains the beginning of two columns):

Column A

[---]ος Ἀντιοχεὺς ἐλεύθερος *vacat* Πόλω Ε.τ[---]κλείτω | [---]ησεν ☞

Column B

[--- πυκ(τεύων) Κορ]ύμβω νεικῶ | [---] πυκ(τεύων) Ἀχελώω νεικῶ | [---]

Fragment B (it contains the rest of column B in fragment A):

[εἰς Ἔφε]σον πυκ(τεύων) · Παρθενοπαίω νεικῶ | [εἰς] Τράλλεις πυκ(τεύων) ·
Ναρκίσσῳ νεικῶ λαμβά(νων)⁴⁰ | [εἰς] Ἔφεσον σχολάζω | [---]ος εἰς Λαδικίαν
πυκ(τεύων) Πακτωλῶ νεικῶ | [---]ης εἰς Ἀφροδεισιάδα πυκ(τεύων) · Τρυφερῶ
νεικῶ | [εἰς] Ἔφεσον πυκ(τεύων) · Ἰακλάτορι νεικῶ | εἰς Γόρτυνα πυκ(τεύων) ·
Ἡλίω νεικῶ|[---]ς εἰς Γόρτυνα πυκ(τεύων) Κέκροπι στάς | εἰς Γόρτυνα πυκ(τεύων)
[...].ρ[...]ω [ν]ε[ι]κῶ [---]⁴¹ | [εἰς] Γόρτυνα πυκ(τεύων) Τ[---]..εἰ[...].α.⁴²

“[---]os freeman from Antioch dedicated to Polos, son of [---]kleitos. In [---] I fought Korymbos and I won; in [---] I fought Acheloos and I won; in Ephesos I fought Parthenopeus and I won; in Tralles I fought Narkissos and I won; in Ephesos I took a respite/I became the leader of the gladiatorial school(?); in Laodicea I fought Paktolos and I won; in Aphrodisias I fought Tryferos and I won; in Ephesos I fought Iaklator and I won; in Gortyn I fought Ilios and I won; in Gortyn I fought Kekrops and the fight ended in a tie; in Gortyn I fought [---] and I won (brilliantly?); in Gortyn I fought [---] and I won (brilliantly?).”

The sarcophagus was dedicated by one gladiator, a freeman from Antioch, to another (Polos, son of [---]kleitos) (fragment A). The inscription provides a

40. For Robert (1940, 119-120 no. 65), Harrison (1993, 132), Carter (1999a, 324-325 no. 130) and Mann (2011, 219-221 no. 84) νεικῶ λαμπρῶς.

41. For Robert (1940, 119-120 no. 65), Harrison (1993, 132), Carter (1999a, 324-325 no. 130) and Mann (2011, 219-221 no. 84) νεικῶ λαμπρῶς.

42. For Carter (1999a, 324-325 no. 130), Harrison (1993, 132) and Mann (2011, 219-221 no. 84) νεικῶ λαμπρῶς.

catalogue of Polos' fights, arranged in a way that the place and the name of the opponent comes first, followed by the result of the combat. From the surviving text we learn that Polos fought at least 11 times: twice in an unidentified place, twice in Ephesos, once in Tralles, once in Laodiceia, once in Aphrodisias, and four times in Gortyn, where he died and was commemorated. The term $\pi\upsilon\kappa(\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omega\nu)$ (cf. $\pi\upsilon\gamma\mu\acute{\eta}$) that is used to represent the term 'fight', is borrowed from the world of Greek athletics, specifically boxing.⁴³ In most of the fights our gladiator participated in, he won. For Robert, Carter and Mann, once in Tralles and twice in Gortyn, Polos also won 'brilliantly', or with distinction (fragment B, lines 13, 20-21). Coleman disagrees with the reading $\nu\epsilon\iota\kappa\hat{\omega}$ $\lambda\alpha\mu\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ in line 13 (Tralles), since a squeeze of the inscription clearly shows $\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\alpha$, suggesting the reading $\nu\epsilon\iota\kappa\hat{\omega}$ + participle $\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega\nu$; as for the lines 20-21 (Gortyn), where the inscription is no longer legible, she accepts both alternatives: $\nu\epsilon\iota\kappa\hat{\omega}$ $\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega\nu$ or $\nu\epsilon\iota\kappa\hat{\omega}$ $\lambda\alpha\mu\pi\rho\acute{\omega}\varsigma$.⁴⁴ For Coleman, the expression $\nu\epsilon\iota\kappa\hat{\omega}$ on Polos' sarcophagus means that our gladiator won but the fight resulted in *missio*/ $\acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{o}\lambda\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ for his opponents (the defeated gladiators did not die), whereas the expression $\nu\epsilon\iota\kappa\hat{\omega}$ $\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega\nu$ implies that Polos' opponents lost their lives.⁴⁵

Moreover, the inscription informs us that in one combat at Gortyn neither of the two gladiators was able to defeat the other and the fight ended in a tie (*stantes missi*); in the inscription the term $\sigma\tau\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ is used, for the Latin *stans* (fragment B, line 19).⁴⁶ Of particular interest is line 14 in fragment B, $[\epsilon\iota]\varsigma$ $\Upsilon\phi\epsilon\sigma\sigma\omicron\nu$ $\sigma\chi\omicron\lambda\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$. In *LSJ* the translation of the verb $\sigma\chi\omicron\lambda\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ is "to be at leisure", but it would be strange to read that Polos did nothing in Ephesos in this commemoration. For Harrison and Coleman perhaps the fight where Polos participated in was cancelled or he lost. In the latter case the term $\sigma\chi\omicron\lambda\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ might be a euphemism for a *missio*, but as Coleman admits, in that case, just as in the list of victories, we would expect the names of his opponents to be also recorded.⁴⁷ According to Robert, the term in the inscription from Gortyn is an indication of a promotion, a recognition of the gladiator's career; namely that

43. Robert 1929.

44. Coleman 2019, 11 n. 19.

45. Coleman 2019, 11.

46. Robert 1929, 27; Robert 1940, 120; Carter 2006-2007, 106; Coleman 2019, 2-12.

47. Harrison 1993, 132; Coleman 2019, 11 n. 20.

our gladiator became the leader/instructor of the gladiatorial school (*ludus*) of Ephesos.⁴⁸ The term would be the equivalent of the Latin *doctor* that appears in inscriptions from the West.⁴⁹ The number of the fights and wins, the possible promotion to a leader of a gladiatorial school in Ephesos and the sarcophagus dedicated to him by his comrade, indicate a highly esteemed and well known gladiator of Asia Minor who also participated in spectacles at a regional level in Crete.

Inscription 6 (Gortyn):

Six fragments of one or more inscriptions with gladiatorial context.

Date: Third–fourth century CE

I.Cret. IV 452; Robert 1940, 123 no. 66A; Carter 1999a, 325 no. 132.

Fragment A:

ΓΙ[---] | ΕΝΘ[---] | ΟΕΩ[---]ΧΡΥΣΕ[---] | ΤΡΙΑ[---] | [---].[---] |[---]

Fragment B:

δαμασσομ[εν---] | ΗΕΙΛΕ[---]

Fragment C:

[---]C[---] |[---] νικήσας [---]

Fragment D:

[---].[---] |[---] ΕΩ[---] |[---] ΕΟ[---]

Fragment E:

[---].[---] |[---] ῥητιά[ριος ---] | [---] ἔξ ΕΦΗ[---] |[---] ω CIA[---] |[---] Δ[---]

Fragment F:

[---] |[---] Ι[---] |[---].ΕΙΚ[---] |[---] ΕΙ[---] |[---]

The six fragments do not necessarily belong to the same inscription; Guarducci dates them to the third–fourth centuries CE. In fragment C the word νικήσας (“having been victorious”) appears, while fragment E appears to preserve the word ῥητιά[ριος --] (*retarius*). This fragment has been interpreted by Robert and Carter as a funerary inscription of a *retarius*, dated generally in imperial times.

48. Robert 1929, 28.

49. Carter 1999b, 264.

Inscription 7 (Knossos):

An inscribed cylindrical column attesting the organization of a gladiatorial spectacle by a magistrate of the colony.

Date: Late first century BCE – late second century CE

CIL III 12042; *I.Cret.* I viii 51 (with drawing of the stone); Robert 1940, 124 no. 66B; Ville 1981, 180; Harrison 1993, 130; Carter 1999a, 325 no. 133; Welch 2007, 78 n. 16.

[---]dedit. in hoc muner[e] (denarii) D sunt quos e lege | coloniae pro ludis dare debuit

“...gave. Five hundred denarii are for this gladiatorial show, from the money which, according to the law of the colony, ought to be given for games”.

A magistrate of the colony, apparently a *duumvir*, gave a sum of which 500 denarii (2000 sesterces) were for the organization of a gladiatorial game. The inscription follows the formula of a decree of the decurions.⁵⁰ A similar obligation, for the same amount of money, is attested in the colony of Urso in Spain.⁵¹ Ville dated the Cretan inscription to 36 BCE and was followed by Welch, who dated it to 38 BCE; this chronology is based on the date of the *deductio* of Knossos as understood at the time. The colony, however, was founded soon after 27 BCE.⁵² There is, moreover, evidence for *duumviri* at Knossos as late as the late second century CE.⁵³ Consequently, the inscription can only be dated from the late first century BCE to the late second century CE.

Inscription 8 (Hierapytna) (Fig. 2):

Funerary inscription of a gladiator.

Date: Imperial period

I.Cret. III iii 51 (with drawing of the stone); Robert 1946, 116 no. 306; Carter 1999a, 325 no. 134; Mann 2011, 221 no. 86; Kelly 2011, 83-84 fig. 2.

[---] | [---] μέτοχος | [---]αί παρὰ τύμβοις | [---]ανειν ὡς ἥρωος κατέχω | [--- κα]τὰ κόσμον ἐνι | [---]ικεν : οἶδεν | [---]ο τέχνας. | [---]ς.

50. Ville 1981, 180.

51. Ville 1981, 180-181; Crawford 1996, 393-454, esp. 403 (nos. 70 and 71) translation in 423-424. Cf. Gregori 2002, 18 n. 23.

52. Sanders 1982, 5; Sweetman 2007, 67.

53. Chaniotis 1985, 182-183.

The plaque is broken but in its lower part (below the inscription) is carved the image of a gladiator. Only his upper part survives, but his helmet is the characteristic one of the *secutores*. According to the drawing of the plaque, the gladiator seems to hold a sort of spear, unusual for the *secutores*. To the left of the gladiator is depicted a palm branch.

Inscription 9 (Hierapytna) (Fig. 3):

Inscribed funerary stele of a gladiator.

Date: Third (–fourth) century CE

Davaras 1980, 11 no. 6 (with photograph of the stone); SEG 32, 879; Carter 1999a, 325 no. 135; Mann 2011, 221 no. 85; Kelly 2011, 81–83 fig.1.

Βίτων Μαργαρείτη | μνείας χάριν

“Biton to Margareites in remembrance”.

The stele was erected in remembrance of the gladiator Margareites by Biton, probably his comrade. The upper part of the panel is broken. The stele depicts a heavily armed gladiator (*secutor* or *murmillo*) striding to the left. He is bare chested, wearing just a loincloth (*subligaculum*) tied with a thick belt (*balteus*). His left calf is protected with a short greave and his right hand is protected by an arm-guard (*manica*). His left arm holds a large curved shield (*scutum*). In his right arm he holds a dagger. To the left of the gladiator is depicted a bird and to his right a dog. The bottom fillet of the panel bears the inscription, which is flanked by a palm branch to the right and a crown to the left. The name Margareites is also attested in gladiatorial inscriptions from Aphrodisias,⁵⁴ Claudiopolis of Bithynia, Ephesos,⁵⁵ or even in Rome,⁵⁶ another gladiator called Margareites is depicted on a mosaic floor from Kourion (Cyprus).⁵⁷

Spectacle buildings

Gortyn

In the imperial period Gortyn was a self-governing city, a provincial capital and the seat of the Cretan Koinon. This triple role demanded the creation of

54. Robert 1940, 170–171 no. 161.

55. Carter 1999a, 332 no. 174, 354 no. 285.

56. IG XIV, 1832.

57. Michaelides 1987, 23 pl. X.21.

corresponding public amenities (**Fig. 4**). Concerning the spectacle buildings in particular, in the Severan period (when the city reached its peak),⁵⁸ Gortyn had two theaters, two odeia, a stadium, an amphitheater and a circus. In the late second – early first centuries BCE the stadium was constructed in the eastern side of the late Hellenistic city.⁵⁹ Under Augustus an odeion replaced the Hellenistic *bouleuterion* of Gortyn, which received further modifications.⁶⁰ In the mid-second century CE or slightly thereafter, a second odeion was constructed next to the Pythion,⁶¹ and in the Severan period an entirely new theater was constructed in the Agora, which probably replaced a Hellenistic one.⁶² Between the second half of the second and the early third centuries CE, three more spectacle buildings were constructed in the eastern edge of the city: a theater (at Kazinedes), an amphitheater and a circus. At present, archaeological evidence suggests that three of these buildings staged gladiatorial and associated shows: the stadium, the amphitheater and perhaps the Roman theater at Kazinedes.⁶³

The stadium at Gortyn

The stadium was discovered during excavations of the Italian Archaeological School in 1998-2000, which unearthed approximately 40 meters of its western side, as well as most of its northern straight side, where the entrance was located.⁶⁴ The date of the stadium was based, primarily, on the chronology of the gymnasium bordering the *praetorium*, the foundations of which partially overlay the western retaining wall of the stadium. The gymnasium was constructed in the first decades of the first century CE, so this offers a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the stadium.⁶⁵ Secondly, the excavation in the cavea of the stadium yielded ceramics dated to the late second – early first

58. Lippolis 2016, 171.

59. Lippolis 2004; Di Vita 2010, 137-141.

60. Di Vita 2010, 107-119.

61. Di Vita 2010, 287.

62. Barresi 2004, 564; Di Vita 2010, 272; Kanta et al. 2020.

63. Di Vita proposed that the odeion of the Agora in the late 4th cent. CE was transformed to a water pool (*kolymbethra*) for aquatic displays (Di Vita 2010, 112-113).

64. Lippolis 2004.

65. Lippolis 2004, 589.

centuries BCE, indicating a corresponding chronology for the construction of the building.⁶⁶

Geophysical research permitted approximate estimates for its dimensions: it was ca. 200-204 meters long and 32-33 meters wide, while the running track (*dromos*) was ca. 177 meters long and 26 meters wide.⁶⁷ In contrast to other pre-Roman stadia of the Greek East, which made use of the natural terrain for the construction of their seating, the stadium of Gortyn was a freestanding structure built in a flat area. The cavea of the stadium (ca. 5 m width) was established on a strongly compacted fill of earth, stones and clay, without the use of mortar, in superimposed layers, retained by two parallel walls: externally by an isodomic wall and internally by the podium of the cavea.⁶⁸ This construction technique calls to mind freestanding Roman imperial stadia, which made use of vaulting to support the seating (e.g. in Nikopolis, Patras, Aphrodisias, Perge and Aspendos),⁶⁹ but it seems that in Gortyn an early type of this form of construction had already been employed in the late second – early first century BCE.⁷⁰

Another similarity of the stadium of Gortyn with the stadia of the Roman imperial period is identified in the podium. Many stadia that were constructed or renovated in this period had podia ca. a meter high wall separating the track from the seating (e.g. Delphi, Athens, Messene, Miletos, Perge, Aphrodisias).⁷¹ The podium in the stadium of Gortyn is 1.04 meters tall.⁷² More significantly, in the front face of the podium of the Gortynian stadium there are holes ca. 0.07-0.08 meters in diameter, set at intervals of 1.53 meters (from the first to the second) and 2.57 meters (between the second and the third) (**Fig. 5**).⁷³ A similar arrangement is identified in the stadia of Perge and Aphrodisias (**Fig. 6**).⁷⁴ In Aphrodisias the holes are 0.04 meters wide and spaced

66. Lippolis 2004, 589.

67. Pucci 2004; Di Vita 2010, 137.

68. Lippolis 2004, 573-585; Lippolis 2016, 166-167.

69. Welch 1998a, 120; Petropoulos, Pansini 2020; Zachos 2015, 69-73.

70. Lippolis 2004, 590.

71. Welch 1998a, 123,137. The podium in the stadium of Aphrodisias was higher: 1.60 m (Welch 1998b, 551, 558).

72. Lippolis 2004, 581; Di Vita 2010, 139.

73. Lippolis 2004, 576 n. 6.

74. Welch 1998a, 125; Welch 1998b, 559.

about two meters apart.⁷⁵ It has been convincingly argued that the holes in the stadia of Perge and Aphrodisias were destined for tension ropes that sustained a system of nets to protect the audience during beast-fights.⁷⁶ The same explanation was given for the holes in the stadium of Gortyn.⁷⁷ We can deduce that in addition to athletic games, the stadium of Gortyn staged also beast-fights and possibly gladiatorial combats.

It has been assumed that the holes in the podium of the stadium of Gortyn do not belong to its initial building phase but that they were created at an unspecified time during the imperial period.⁷⁸ This is not, however, based on archaeological evidence but assumed from the dates of the inscriptions, which record gladiatorial and beast-fight spectacles in the city only in imperial times.

Towards the end of the third century CE, the race track of the stadium was raised up to the top of the podium, thus making the protective system of the net useless. The use of the building after this transformation remains unknown but in the early fourth century CE the stadium was abandoned.⁷⁹

The Roman theater at Kazinedes, Gortyn

Until the 1980s the theater at Kazinedes was thought to be the amphitheater of Gortyn, based on the erroneous identification of Onorio Belli in the sixteenth century.⁸⁰ In the nineteenth century the British vice-admiral Thomas Spratt, following Onorio Belli, misconceived the theater at Kazinedes as the

75. Welch 1998b, 559.

76. Welch 1998a, 125; Welch 1998b, 559.

77. Lippolis 2004, 594; Di Vita 2010, 140-141.

78. Lippolis 2004, 594; Di Vita 2010, 140-141.

79. Lippolis 2004, 596; Di Vita 2010, 141.

80. In A. Zeno's abstract of Belli's manuscript (Falkener 1854, 22-23; Beschi 1999, 78), a description of the building is given which better fits the theater at Kazinedes (Montali 2006, 36-40). More significantly, in both the abstract of A. Zeno and in the *Descrittione geographica* of 1591, Belli does not mention any active houses or other buildings over the monument, although today we know that the amphitheater is under the village of Agioi Deka and that the medieval church of the village was built in the middle of the arena of the amphitheater. After commenting on the "amphitheater" Belli speaks of the village and its church as in a different location from the amphitheater (Falkener 1854, 22-23; Beschi 1999, 78; Tsiknakis 1989-1990, 218).

amphitheater of Gortyn and he produced an archaeological map of the city with the amphitheater in that location.⁸¹ The misidentification continued even after the excavations of the Italian Archaeological School began on the site in 1911.⁸² When the real amphitheater was identified in 1984 in the village of Agioi Deka,⁸³ a re-examination of the building at Kazinedes took place that included a detailed surface examination and excavation trenches.⁸⁴

The research revealed a large free-standing theater which could accommodate between 5500 and 6200 spectators.⁸⁵ The construction technique dates the monument between 150 and 180 CE (between the reign of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius),⁸⁶ but the architectural decoration suggests that work continued until the early third century CE.⁸⁷

The building is not fully excavated and at present there is no architectural evidence suggesting that the Roman theater at Kazinedes was also used for gladiatorial and associated spectacles.⁸⁸ A relief, however, coming most probably from this theater (in the British Museum since the nineteenth century), raises questions.⁸⁹ The relief depicts the goddess Nemesis standing on a supine figure; on her left is depicted a griffin and on her right a large serpent (**Fig. 7**). Nemesis, along with Mars and Victory, were the protective deities of the gladiators.⁹⁰ Nemesis especially, in the Roman imperial period, acquired a special, if not exclusive, association with the Roman *munus* and *venatio*. This is attested through dedications and new cult places for the deity in this period, which are

81. Spratt 1865, II 28. Cf. Montali 2006, 42 fig. 6; Di Vita 2010, 8 fig. 11; Kelly 2021, 134 fig. 6.

82. Montali 2004, 710; Montali 2006, 43-51.

83. Di Vita 1986-87.

84. Montali 2006, 52-55; Di Vita 2010, 289.

85. Montali 2006, 291-302.

86. Montali 2006, 110, 297.

87. Montali 2004, 724; Montali 2006, 236, 298-299; Di Vita 2010, 291.

88. Montali 2006, 196.

89. In the catalogue of sculptures in the department of Greek and Roman Antiquities of the British Museum, the relief is attributed to the "amphitheater of Gortyn" (Smith 1892, 366 no. 794). Given that, at that time, the amphitheater of Gortyn was identified with the theater at Kazinedes, most probably the relief originates from the latter location (Montali 2006, 194-195).

90. Robert 1940, 306.

found almost exclusively in or near amphitheatres, theaters and stadia, that is, in venues that staged these kinds of shows.⁹¹ In the theater of Philippi, for example, after the transformation of its orchestra into an arena in the late second – early third centuries CE,⁹² reliefs of Mars, Victory and Nemesis were carved on the north and south pilasters of the western *parodos* of the theater. The reliefs were dedicated by Zosimos, the priest of Nemesis, in the name of an association of fans of beast fighters active in the city (ὑπὲρ φιλοκονηγῶν τοῦ στέμματος).⁹³ A cult place of Nemesis was probably located west of the theater.⁹⁴

The orchestra of the theater of Thasos was converted into an arena in the mid-second century CE.⁹⁵ In this building phase the central architrave of the *proscenium* was decorated with reliefs of Dionysos, a Thracian rider and a male figure interpreted as Mars. Furthermore, the excavations at the theater revealed three reliefs depicting Nemesis (considered to have derived from the pilasters of the *proscenium*), most probably dedications of gladiators.⁹⁶ A dedication to Nemesis is also identified in the theater of Mytilene,⁹⁷ which in the second century CE was transformed into an arena,⁹⁸ recently a cult place of the goddess has also been identified next to the venue.⁹⁹ In the theater of Dionysos at Athens, a venue which staged gladiatorial combats since the first century CE,¹⁰⁰ an inscribed altar was dedicated to Nemesis in the imperial period.¹⁰¹ Finally in Patras, 100 meters west of the stadium that staged gladiatorial and associated shows, a relief of Nemesis (of an iconographical type similar to that of Gortyn) has been identified.¹⁰²

91. Hornum 1993, 43-62.

92. Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, Karadedos 2012, 195-203.

93. Robert 1940, 86-87 nos. 23-24; Hornum 1993, 198-200 nos. 84-86.

94. Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, Karadedos 2012, 202.

95. Sear 2006, 420.

96. Salviat 1960, 314-316.

97. Personal observation.

98. Karambinis 2020, 77-80.

99. Pavlos Triantafyllidis pers. comm. 10 Nov. 2019.

100. Welch 2007, 165-178.

101. Hornum 1993, 192-193 no. 71.

102. Papapostolou 1989, 368-378.

It is therefore possible that the theater at Kazinedes hosted gladiatorial and associated spectacles as well as dramatic performances, given the evidence presented above.

The amphitheater at Gortyn

The amphitheater of Gortyn was identified in the 1980s in the village of Agioi Deka.¹⁰³ The venue was located at the eastern end of the ancient city, in a suburb separated from the town by a Roman necropolis. The village of Agioi Deka was built over the remains of the amphitheater, and followed the elliptical plan of the underlying ancient structure: houses and streets are constructed in an annular manner around the church of Agioi Deka, which occupied the eastern part of the arena of the amphitheater (**Fig. 8**).

The venue is unexplored but remains of it can be identified north of the church. They consist of four segments of an elliptical wall extending for 70 meters, which can be traced among the houses.¹⁰⁴ The wall is 0.90 meters thick and is more than 4.25 meters high. The base of the wall is made of rectangular limestone blocks, followed by a string course of *bipedales* (i.e. two foot long brick), while the upper portion of the wall is faced with more regularly sized brick (*pedales*) (**Fig. 9**).¹⁰⁵

The amphitheater of Gortyn was a free-standing structure. Di Vita and Ricciardi ascribed a date in the second half of the second century CE, based on its construction technique using *opus testaceum*.¹⁰⁶ The study of its reconstruction suggests that it was of medium dimensions, reaching a maximum of 120x91 meters (arena 68x39), with a capacity of ca. 18-19.000 spectators.¹⁰⁷ Based on the structure and dimensions, Ricciardi compares the amphitheater of Gortyn with those of Carnuntum, Carthago (first phase), Ariminum, Tarraco, Aquincum, Cimiez, Interamna Nahars and Augusta Emerita.¹⁰⁸ If the reconstruction of the amphitheater of Gortyn is correct, its dimensions are comparable

103. Di Vita 1986-87; Ricciardi 2000; Di Vita 2010, 294-298.

104. Ricciardi 2000, 140.

105. Di Vita 2010, 294-296. In addition to the wall, a rescue excavation of the local Ephorate of Antiquities north of the church, revealed probably part of a *cuneus* (Di Vita 1986-87, 331-335).

106. Di Vita 1986-87, 345; Ricciardi in Di Vita 1986-87, 349 n. 9; Ricciardi 2000, 145.

107. Ricciardi 2000; Di Vita 2010, 294-298; Lippolis 2016, 171.

108. Ricciardi 2000, 144, 152 fig. 5.

particularly to those of Carthage (first phase), Leptis Magna and Sabratha.¹⁰⁹ But there are several other important differences between the Cretan and the North African amphitheatres: the latter are more rounded in shape, their arenas are cut into the physical rock, and, significantly, they are of an earlier date.¹¹⁰

The amphitheater of Gortyn might be the place where the Holy Ten Martyrs of Crete (the *Agioi Deka*) were executed under Decius (249-251 CE): although there is no textual evidence mentioning specifically the amphitheater as the place for their execution, the eight-century hagiographical account (possibly based on an earlier version) mentions that this happened outside Gortyn, to a place that was still called *Alonion* and situated in a small distance from the city ("Ἐξῶθεν δὲ τῆς πόλεως ἀπαχθέντες εἰς τὸ καλούμενον μέχρι τοῦ νῦν Ἀλώνιον—ἀνωτέρω δὲ τοῦτο μικρὸν τυγχάνει τῆς πόλεως).¹¹¹ In the 1700s, J. Pitton de Tournefort identified the village of Agioi Deka as the place where the Ten Saints were martyred, the *Alonion* of the hagiographical text.¹¹² Furthermore, *Alonion* is thought as a variation of *Aulon*, a toponym that appears in an early fifth-century BCE honorary decree¹¹³ and placed by Guarducci at the village of Agioi Deka.¹¹⁴ The location of ancient *Aulon* has not been questioned and both the *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* and *Pleiades*, locate *Aulon/Alonion* at the village of Agioi Deka.¹¹⁵

The discovery of Gortyn's amphitheater in the 1980s supported the aforementioned hypothesis and indicated this amphitheater as the venue where the martyrdom took place. It also correlated the church of Agioi Deka, which today occupies the eastern part of the ancient arena, with the martyrdom. The pavement of the church is 1.35 meters lower than the level of the ground

109. Carthage (phase I): 120x93m; Leptis Magna: 100x90m; Sabratha: 104x90m (Bomgardner 2000, 121-182).

110. Montali 2015, 228-231, 309, 361, 383, 387.

111. Franchi de' Cavalieri 1962, 377. Cf. Cigaina 2020, 139-140; Kelly 2021, 127-128.

112. Tournefort calls the place *Alone* (Tournefort 1717, 60).

113. *ICret.* IV 64.

114. *ICret.* IV p. 30-31. Guarducci thought *Aulon* as a suburb of Gortyn, but Perlman identified it as a dependent polis of Gortyn (Perlman 2004, 1152-1153. Cf. Kelly 2021, 127 n. 16).

115. *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, Map 60; <https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/589721> (accessed 5/11/21).

outside and according to Di Vita the level of the church floor aligns with the level of the arena of the amphitheater (**Fig. 10**).¹¹⁶ On the basis of the wall-paintings, Di Vita suggested a thirteenth – fourteenth centuries CE chronology for the present church,¹¹⁷ proposing, though, that the standing church probably replaced an early Christian shrine that was erected at the place where the Ten Martyrs were executed.¹¹⁸ In fact, the erection of an early Christian church over the arena where the saints were martyred was a common practice. In the amphitheater of Tarragona a Visigothic church was erected to commemorate the martyrdom in 257 CE of Fructuosus, Eulogius and Augurius,¹¹⁹ while the chapel of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas was constructed in the amphitheater of Carthage, in the false belief that they were martyred there.¹²⁰

The execution of the Ten Saints in the amphitheater and the consecration of the area with a shrine in early Christian times, are reasonable hypotheses; both, however, are far from certain. Kelly, in a recent analytical study of the evidence, concludes that –at present– there is no archaeological clue supporting a chronology of the church earlier than the 13th century; moreover, she puts forward the hypothesis that the medieval church, which gave the name to the village, prompted the identification of *Alonion* with the site of Agioi Deka by the travelers and early scholars.¹²¹ A definite answer to this subject must await a future research.

Hierapytna

The ancient city of Hierapytna lies below the modern town of Ierapetra, which has significantly expanded from the mid-twentieth century onwards,¹²² covering almost all of the ancient remains. Consequently, data concerning the layout of the ancient settlement are very fragmentary and are provided by the rescue excavations that commenced in the late 1960s.¹²³

116. Di Vita 1986-87, 338; Di Vita 2010, 297.

117. The 13th-14th cent. wall paintings cannot exclude an earlier chronology of the building.

118. Di Vita 2010, 297.

119. Golvin 1988, 164-165.

120. Golvin 1988, 122-123; Bomgardner 2000, 128-129, 142-143.

121. Kelly 2021, esp. 151.

122. Gallimore 2015, 7.

123. Gallimore 2015, 7.

Invaluable information for the monuments and the topography of the ancient city is offered by Onorio Belli who visited the site in the late sixteenth century and by the British Vice-Admiral Thomas Spratt who explored the antiquities of the city in the nineteenth century. Belli reported the existence of temples, thermae, aqueducts, two theaters (one small and one large) of which he also provided detailed plans, an amphitheater, as well as a *naumachia* (a lagoon for mock naval battles), still visible in the southwest edge of the modern town.¹²⁴ Spratt created a rather detailed map of the area indicating also the exact location of the two theaters, the amphitheater and the *naumachia* reported by Belli (**Fig. 11**).

Recently, there has been an attempt to identify the spectacle buildings attested by Belli and Spratt through geophysical techniques (**Fig. 12**).¹²⁵ This exercise confirmed that the larger theater of ancient Hierapytna is today situated inside the urban fabric of the modern city, leaving us Belli's description and plan as the sole source of information for the building. The small theater is situated in the western area of the city. Visible archaeological ruins had already been identified as the remains of the theater, something which has subsequently been confirmed by geophysical investigation.¹²⁶ In 2013 excavations began at the site that revealed a structure of small dimensions (cavea diameter: 64m; orchestra diameter: 12m), able to accommodate ca. 1.500 spectators. The small dimensions suggest that the structure should be interpreted as an odeion rather than as a small theater, built in the second century CE, as the building technique and the pottery found in the excavation suggest.¹²⁷

It is impossible to know if gladiatorial spectacles took place in the large theater, while current published archaeological evidence does not leave any clue that this happened in the small theater or odeion either. As for the *naumachia*, there is no archaeological or other evidence confirming its existence. Lehmann-Hartleben refuted its existence, suggesting that the lagoon should

124. Falkener 1854, 11-14; Tsiknakis 1989-1990, 211-212; Beschi 1999, 71-72. The *naumachia* is attested only in the abstract of Belli's manuscript made by A. Zeno (Falkener 1854, 11). Belli adopted the characterization of this lagoon by the Italian antiquarian Cyriacus of Ancona, who in the mid-15th century described a lagoon east of the old town of Ierapetra as a *naumachia* (Bodnar 2003, 189).

125. Papadopoulos et al. 2012.

126. Papadopoulos et al. 2012, 1962-1968.

127. Sofianou, Gallimore 2019.

be probably identified with the Hellenistic harbor of Hierapytna.¹²⁸ More recently, Gallimore cast doubt on the existence of such a unique feature as a *nau-machia* in Hierapytna, and suggested that the lagoon was probably a darsena or protected inner harbor for smaller ships.¹²⁹

The amphitheater at Hierapytna

According to S. Maffei, who read the now lost manuscript of Onorio Belli,¹³⁰ the amphitheater of Hierapytna was located between two low hills with six buttresses at each end to complete the oval shape of the building. It was bonded with mortar and partially faced with white marble.¹³¹ Spratt concurred with Belli's account of the site of the building, locating it in his map between two hills (**Fig. 11**).

The geophysical investigation concerning the spectacle buildings of Hierapytna identified the exact place where, according to Spratt's map, the building should be located. (There are no visible ruins that can be associated with the amphitheater at the site). After digitizing and overlaying the plan of the amphitheater from Spratt's map on the satellite image, the maximum dimensions of the building were estimated along the south-north and east-west directions at 107 and 87 meters respectively (**Fig. 13**).¹³² These dimensions are close to the amphitheatres of Gortyn, Carthage (first phase), Leptis Magna and Sabratha.

The geophysical investigation faced difficulties in identifying traces of the amphitheater, because of the high level of 'noise' generated (a) by the nearby buildings and modern structures and (b) by the remains of the Minos factory, which covered the area from 1911 to 1974, and which was demolished in the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹³³ Moreover, according to the overlaid image, the supposed building seems to extend further to the south crossing the main road, while towards the northern side lies under a huge pile of back-filled soil. The geophysical investigation concentrated in the central part of the supposed building due to these restrictions.

128. Lehmann-Hartleben 1923, 201.

129. Gallimore 2015, 14-15.

130. See above, n. 2. According to Maffei, Belli had executed a plan of the building, now lost (Falkener 1854, 9).

131. Falkener 1854, 14.

132. Papadopoulos et al. 2012, 1971.

133. Papadopoulos et al. 2012, 1968.

The geophysical methods, applied up to three meters below the surface, identified an almost semicircular area (*Amph 1*) with northeast-southwest direction that could be correlated with the western side of the arena of the amphitheater. Another anomalous area was detected to the east of *Amph 1* and it could be identified as the eastern side of the arena, along with part of the cunei. No evidence for the seating is available, which according to Papadopoulos et al. fell victim of the construction of the Minos factory (at least the upper rows of it).¹³⁴

The high levels of contamination that affected the geophysical measurements, masked anomalies that could provide safe indications of the building, leading Papadopoulos et al. to admit that “the detected anomalies can only be considered as potential indications of the ruins of Ierapetra’s amphitheatre.”¹³⁵

Knossos

Although epigraphic evidence confirms that gladiatorial spectacles took place in Knossos, the venue where these shows occurred is unknown. We know very little about the public buildings of the city in general, as none is systematically excavated. Knossos seems to have had a large enigmatic building, interpreted as a Civil Basilica,¹³⁶ an aqueduct¹³⁷ and public baths.¹³⁸ Concerning the spectacle buildings in particular, in the sixteenth century Onorio Belli identified foundations of a theater, or another building of great size, 100 meters to the northwest of the Roman Civil Basilica.¹³⁹ Hood and Smyth hypothesized that the structure that Belli attested could be a stadium or amphitheater,¹⁴⁰ but

134. Papadopoulos et al. 2012, 1971.

135. Papadopoulos et al. 2012, 1971.

136. Sanders 1982, 67-68; Paton 2004, 453; Sweetman 2010, 349.

137. Kelly 2022.

138. Sanders 1982, 152-153; Paton 2004, 453-454.

139. Falkener 1854, 24; Tsiknakis 1989-1990, 220. It is perhaps significant that the alternative of “a theatre or other building of great size” is provided only in Zeno’s abstract of Belli’s manuscript, which unfortunately Falkener (1854, 24) provides directly in English translation. In the *Descrittione geographica* of 1891 Belli himself speaks only of a theater: “*Nondimeno si conoscono li fondamenti di un teatro et di una basilica*” (Tsiknakis 1989-1990, 220 lines 605-606).

140. Hood, Smyth 1981, 23, 42 no. 110.

Sanders interpreted the building as a theater.¹⁴¹ Rescue excavations in this area revealed sections of the structure, but their size was not enough to provide a secure identification for its building type. Specifically, the rescue excavations revealed sections of masonry consisting of undressed stones bonded with white chalky mortar.¹⁴² One of the walls runs north-south in front of the supposed cavea of the theater and it may indicate the line of the *parodos* wall. Another section of a massive wall (7.5-8m wide) was interpreted as a foundation wall for the northern end of the theater. The recovered pottery indicates an early imperial date for the building (first-second centuries CE).¹⁴³

A geophysical survey recently carried out in the area made things clearer: the results of the magnetometry do not permit the identification of the building definitely as a theater, but they certainly refute its interpretation as a stadium or an amphitheater; the combination of streets and associated built structures revealed by the survey do not leave room for a structure larger than a theater there.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the location where this structure lies is identified as the civic center of the city.¹⁴⁵ The presence of an amphitheater (or even of a stadium) in the middle of the city would be extremely strange, as these buildings were always located in the edge of, or outside the city. On the contrary, the presence of a theater would be fully compatible with imperial urban planning.

The absence of an amphitheater in the center of the city does not rule out the future identification of an amphitheater in Knossos, but there are no obvious locations visible in the current topography of the city.¹⁴⁶ Based on the current evidence, the gladiatorial spectacles held in Knossos took place in a thus far unknown venue, or in the structure identified as a potential theater in the middle of the city.

Chersonesos and Kissamos

In a letter to his uncle Valerio Barbarano in 1586, Onorio Belli writes that

141. Sanders 1982, 152; Paton 2004, 453.

142. Sweetman 2010, 360-361.

143. Sweetman 2010, 360.

144. Bennet 2015-2016, 33; Daniel R. Stewart pers. comm. 20 Jan. 2020.

145. Sweetman 2007, 73.

146. Daniel R. Stewart pers. comm. 20 Jan. 2020.

Chersonesos had a theater and an amphitheater.¹⁴⁷ The information is repeated in his *Descrittione geographica* of 1591,¹⁴⁸ as well as in the abstract of Belli's lost book by A. Zeno.¹⁴⁹ Belli provided a plan of the theater.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, in the abstract of Belli's lost book, A. Zeno notes that Kissamos too had a theater and an amphitheater,¹⁵¹ but in his *Descrittione geographica* Belli mentions only the theater.¹⁵²

The theater of Chersonesos has been archaeologically identified and is currently under investigation. It seems that was built in the first century CE, while subsequently its orchestra was transformed to a water pool (*kołymbe-thra*) for aquatic displays.¹⁵³ As for the theater of Kissamos, suggestions for its possible archaeological trace,¹⁵⁴ have been essentially based on a large column that was found in second use in a third-century CE house, a column which according to Tzedakis should belong to the theater of the city.¹⁵⁵

Concerning the amphitheaters, none of the two buildings reported by Onorio Belli has been identified. Belli's comments on amphitheaters are the only indications for gladiatorial spectacles in these cities and thus must be approached with caution. Above, we saw that the amphitheater of Hierapytna that Belli reported only potentially has been confirmed, while in Gortyn

147. "La città di Chirosoniso era piccola [...] ma sebene era piccola haveva nondimeno un anfitheatro, un theatro che ora vi mando non molto grande et molte fabriche" (Beschi 1999, 73; cf. Falkener 1854, 16).

148. "Nondimeno si vedono rovine di un theatro piccolo, di un anfitheatro similmente piccolo, di un bagno, del aquedotto, et altre rovine, che non ho potuto conoscere" (Tsiknakis 1989-1990, 217 lines 480-484).

149. Falkener 1854, 15.

150. Beschi 1999, 47.

151. Directly in English translation: "It had a theatre and an amphitheatre" (Falkener 1854, 26).

152. "Havea belli edificii, come un theatro, un tempio, aquedotto, et un porto artificiale, molto grande, con un molo fatto di pietre grandissime, che hora è tutto atterrato ma si vede benissimo ancora" (Tsiknakis 1989-1990, 224 lines 751-754).

153. Mandalaki 2015. Only part of the cavea and part of the stage building have been so far explored; dimensions of the entire building are not available.

154. Sanders 1982, 172; Markoulaki et al. 2004, 366; Sear 2006, 298; Di Napoli 2010, 815.

155. *ArchDelt* 25 (1970), B'2, 471.

the Italian antiquarian mistakenly identified the Roman theater at Kazinedes as an amphitheater. Moreover, it is suspicious that until now there is no epigraphic support for gladiatorial and associated shows in Chersonesos and Kissamos. Despite that, the information that Belli provides cannot be easily dismissed, given that the reports that he offered on the antiquities of the island, in most cases, have been verified by modern research. The existence of an amphitheater in these cities would not be a surprise, as both of them developed significantly in Roman times, to become important port cities on the north coast of the island (see below).

Cretan evidence for gladiatorial spectacles in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean

The epigraphic record attesting gladiatorial and associated spectacles in Crete is relatively poor in comparison to other regions of Greece and the eastern Mediterranean. Single cities provide numbers of gladiatorial inscriptions that are equal to or larger than those for the whole island of Crete. In Thasos, for example, ten inscriptions are attested,¹⁵⁶ in Thessaloniki 21,¹⁵⁷ in Beroia 30,¹⁵⁸ in Patras 13,¹⁵⁹ in Kos ten,¹⁶⁰ in Smyrna more than 30,¹⁶¹ in Ephesos 40,¹⁶² in Miletos 14,¹⁶³ in Aphrodisias 31.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, taken together, the few inscriptions from Crete and the even scarcer data from the spectacle buildings, provide surprisingly rich evidence for the staging of gladiatorial and associated spectacles on the island.

The epigraphic and archaeological record suggests that the shows on the island began in the second century CE onwards, particularly in its second half.

156. Carter 1999a, 308-310 nos. 53-62.

157. Carter 1999a, 315-317 nos. 86-96; Nigdelis 1996; Nigdelis 2006, 73-93, 233-248; SEG 49, 818; IG X 2.1 307, 572.

158. Gounaropoulou, Hatzopoulos 1998, nos. 68-69, 117-118, 374-390, 495, 497; Nigdelis, Stefani 2000; Allamani-Souri 2014, 446-460 nos. 149-165.

159. Rizakis 1998, nos. 51, 162-172; Carter 1999a, 321-323 nos. 112-126.

160. Carter 1999a, 328-329 nos. 154-161; Karampelias 2001; Bosnakis, Hallof 2008, 224-228 no. 30.

161. Carter 1999a, 340-346 nos. 210-245.

162. Carter 1999a, 346-354 nos. 246-285.

163. Carter 1999a, 355-357 nos. 287-300.

164. Carter 1999a, 367-372 nos. 356-386.

The only clue for a possible earlier occurrence is provided by the inscription from Knossos (no. 7), which attests that a magistrate of the colony organized gladiatorial spectacles sometime between the late first century BCE and the late second century CE. Additionally, given that we do not know when exactly the post-and-net system in the stadium of Gortyn was implemented, it remains possible that this happened earlier than the second century CE.

The second–third century date is a common chronological framework for gladiatorial spectacles in the East. Of the approximately 300 epigraphic monuments published by Robert in 1940, most have been dated to the second and third centuries CE, with some exceptions from the first century.¹⁶⁵ Recent research has not altered the situation, with epigraphic and archaeological evidence for the first century CE less abundant. At present, in Asia Minor there is evidence for gladiatorial displays and beast-fights in the first century CE or earlier, in Ephesos, Magnesia, Aphrodisias, Laodiceia, Xanthos, Lydai, Mylasa, Cyzicos, Ancyra, Pessinos, Antioch-on-the-Orontes and perhaps Anazarbos; in the Aegean islands, there is evidence from Delos, Kos, Mytilene and Thasos; and, in mainland Greece, from Athens, Corinth, Patras, Nikopolis, Larissa, Beroia and Thessaloniki.¹⁶⁶

Although this chronological distribution might represent a historical reality, it must be also approached with caution. The precise dating of the modifications that occurred in Greek theaters and stadia in order for these buildings to stage gladiatorial and associated spectacles is fraught with difficulty and it is possible that later alterations obliterated earlier provisional interventions. Additionally, amphitheaters are too few in the East to offer chronological clues for the staging of these spectacles. As for the inscriptions, the majority of them are funerary stelae of the fighters and they primarily attest the gradual introduction of the epigraphic habit in the world of the gladiatorial spectacles, according to the Greek athletic traditions of self-presentation.¹⁶⁷ Gladiators belonged to the lowest class of the Roman society; they were slaves, prisoners

165. Robert 1940, 264–265.

166. Karambinis 2020, 81–82 (and therein the rest of the bibliography). It was previously thought that the theater of Dodona was converted into an arena in the Augustan period (Sear 2006, 411–412; Pliakou, Smyris 2012), but recent evidence suggests a later date for this conversion (Georgoulas, Skalisti 2018).

167. Mann 2009, 288.

and poor people who with their participation in gladiatorial contests hoped to gain liberty, money and fame, and ultimately integration into society.¹⁶⁸ Consequently, it would be odd for people from such a neglected social group to leave their trace in the epigraphic record in the early phase of the gladiatorial phenomenon in the East. In fact, in the first century CE, and indeed earlier, inscriptions relating to gladiatorial shows and *venationes* concern the individuals who sponsored the shows; they are honorific inscriptions and refer to elite members of society, who, among others, organized these kinds of shows (an exception comes from Kos which is a gladiatorial funerary inscription). In contrast, epigraphic monuments from the Greek East, from the second and third centuries CE, tend to be funerary inscriptions of individual gladiators.

Furthermore, by contrast to the second-third century funerary inscriptions, where the gladiators proudly state their name, armament type and combat achievements, the first-century CE funerary inscription from Kos mentions 23 anonymous gladiators who fought and died in the games that L. Cossinius Kleumenidas organized; these gladiators most likely were buried together.¹⁶⁹ The inscription does not provide any other information about the gladiators, who are conceived as ‘consumables’ for the show that L. Cossinius Kleumenidas offered. This evidence suggests that gladiatorial and associated spectacles might have taken place more often in the Greek East in the first century CE, than the archaeological and epigraphic record implies.

Concerning the organization, administration and frequency of the games in Crete, we know very few things, but this lack of evidence applies generally across the Greek East. Inscription no. 7 indicates that in Knossos the spectacles were organized by a magistrate of the city, in the framework of the obligations that the *duumviri* of the colonies had; we should remember the parallel from Urso of Spain, where in 44 BCE the *duumviri* of the colony sponsored gladiatorial games there.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, inscription no. 1 tells us that in the third century CE a high priest of the Cretan Koinon organized a full amphitheater program in Gortyn, apparently at a regional level. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the gladiatorial games and the beast fights that the

168. Carter 1999a, 136-143; Carter 2009, 155-156; Mann 2009, 275.

169. Bosnakis, Hallof 2008, 224-228 no. 30.

170. Ville 1981, 180; Crawford 1996, 393-454, esp. 403 (nos. 70 and 71) translation in 423-424. Cf. Gregori 2002, 18 n. 23.

federal high priest organized formed part of the athletic and artistic games of the Koinon. Di Vita disconnects the two festivities,¹⁷¹ while Rouanet-Liesenfelt and Cigaina believe that the gladiatorial and associated spectacles should have taken place not during the federal games but during the annual meetings of the representatives of the Koinon.¹⁷² Although this suggestion is plausible, it is also hypothetical; none of the aforementioned scholars provide evidence supporting their argument. In reality, we simply do not know the exact context in which these spectacles took place. The only certainty is that the gladiatorial shows were associated with the imperial cult and organized by the local or federal (high) priests.¹⁷³

Despite the exact context of these shows, the epigraphic record testifies that some of the spectacles that took place in Gortyn were extraordinary and very costly. The show that Titus Flavius Iulius Volumnius Sabinus organized there in the third century CE (inscription no. 1) was a program including beast fights, gladiatorial combats with sharp weapons and perhaps public executions. The gladiatorial combats with sharp weapons made the games especially dangerous for the gladiators and possibly augmented the cost of the show.

We cannot be sure which way Titus Flavius Sabinus acquired his gladiators: by contracting with free gladiators (*auctorati*), by purchasing an entire gladiatorial troupe (*familia*), or, more commonly, by leasing them from a *lanista* (trainer) who managed a gladiatorial troupe.¹⁷⁴ The maintenance of a gladiatorial troupe was an expensive undertaking that few rich families could afford.¹⁷⁵ In the province of Asia, *familiae* of gladiators owned by the high priests or asiarchs, are known epigraphically in Kos, Mytilene, Cyzicos, Parion, Smyrna, Ephesos, Miletos, Temenothyrai, Tralles, Hierapolis, Laodiceia on the Lycos, Aphrodisias, Stratonikeia and Halicarnassos.¹⁷⁶ The successive high-priests of Asia had each purchased the *familia* from his predecessor in office and then sold it to his successor.¹⁷⁷ In Crete, the family of Titus Flavius Sabinus was certainly very wealthy and belonged to the elite class of the island; it originated

171. Di Vita 2010, 63 n. 246.

172. Rouanet-Liesenfelt 1994, 23; Cigaina 2020, 232.

173. Ville 1981, 207; Price 1984, 89; Carter 2004; Mann 2009, 279.

174. Carter 2004, 57.

175. Ritti, Yilmaz 1998, 455.

176. Carter 2004, 66-68 including further bibliography.

177. Carter 2004, 43-44.

from Lyktos, Gortyn or Hierapytna, and most probably acquired Roman citizenship in the first century CE.¹⁷⁸ The ownership of a gladiatorial troupe by Titus Flavius Sabinus and by other high priests of the Cretan Koinon, would not be surprising, but to date there is no epigraphic evidence for this. The only reference for a *familia* on the island comes from inscription no. 3, but the reference is related to the funeral of the gladiator (significantly, non-Cretan), taken over by the troupe. It does not prove that the *familia* was permanently based on the island, let alone, owned by a (high) priest.

If Titus Flavius Sabinus leased his fighters, the procedure would have been for the high priest to approach the *lanista* and agree to lease each gladiator at a fixed rate, according to his rank and as a percentage of the gladiator's overall value.¹⁷⁹ The *Senatus Consultum de Pretiis Gladiatorum Minuendis* (177 CE), which attempted to regulate the costs of gladiators across the Empire,¹⁸⁰ indicates that the overall values of the gladiators ranged from 3,000 to 15,000 sesterces. The lower price corresponds to gladiators of the lowest rank (*tirones*, who were professional gladiators fighting for the first time publically) and for *munera* of a low budget (30-60,000 sesterces). The higher price applies to senior gladiators of the highest rank and for *munera* of higher budgets (150-200,000+sesterces).¹⁸¹

We do not know the budget Titus Flavius Sabinus dedicated to his spectacle, but from inscription no. 1 we can assume that it did not belong to the lowest level mentioned above; the text mentions that this man alone of the Cretans has acted so generously (line 13). We should expect not only inexperienced and low-level gladiators, but also well-known and successful gladiators to participate in this show. In fact, another inscription from Gortyn, which is also dated to the same period, attests a highly esteemed and well-known gladiator of Asia Minor who fought and died in games held in Gortyn (inscription no. 5). The death of this gladiator was certainly a severe economic blow for the sponsor of the games.

178. Baldwin Bowsky 1994, 33; Cigaina 2020, 139.

179. Carter 2003, 111. The rank of each gladiator was determined by the so-called *palus* system (πάλος, when transliterated into Greek), see Carter 2003, 89-95; Mann 2011, 100-102.

180. *CIL* II 6278 = *ILS* 5163; Carter 2003; Potter 2010, 342-343.

181. Carter 2003, 97.

The games of Gortyn perhaps included public executions. Inscription no. 1 informs us that in his *munus*, Titus Flavius Sabinus probably involved particular and excessively bloodied executions, where convicts condemned to death were given basic gladiatorial training and armed, then sent to confront experienced gladiators. This was a rare type of public execution, attested apart from Gortyn only in Sagalassos¹⁸² and Smyrna.¹⁸³

The epigraphic record from Gortyn also confirms the phenomenon of rotating gladiators, attested generally in the East.¹⁸⁴ Apart from the highly esteemed gladiator mentioned above (inscription no. 5), who before Gortyn had fought in Ephesos, Tralles, Laodicea and Aphrodisias, inscriptions nos. 3 and 4 inform us about gladiators originating from Egypt and the region of Troas respectively, who fought in games held in Gortyn. The diversity of the origins of the gladiators participating in these games, in comparison to the small number of inscriptions, is perhaps representative of the high level of the spectacles that were held in the capital of Crete, attracting competent gladiators from different regions of the Empire.

Concerning the venues where these shows took place, we saw that in Gortyn they took place in the stadium, in the amphitheater and perhaps in the Roman theater at Kazinedes; in Knossos in an unknown spectacle building; in Hierapytna potentially in an amphitheater; and in Chersonesos and Kissamos possibly in amphitheaters. In Gortyn, the amphitheater and the theater at Kazinedes were built at the second half of the second century CE, while the stadium was in use until the end of the third century CE. We cannot be sure if the stadium hosted gladiatorial and associated spectacles after the second half of the second century CE, and the use of the theater at Kazinedes for gladiatorial spectacles is also tentative. However, if this were the case it means that both the stadium and the theater staged these kinds of shows even after the construction of the amphitheater, and that Gortyn had three venues fit for the staging of gladiatorial spectacles. Such a situation would not be unique: The best parallel to Gortyn is Corinth, the capital of the province of Achaia. From the time of its foundation (44 BCE), the colony was

182. Robert 1940, 142 no. 97.

183. Robert 1940, 205-206 no. 231.

184. Carter 1999a, 82-83; Mann 2009, 281.

equipped with an amphitheater,¹⁸⁵ while for the needs of the dramatic and musical performances the Romans renovated the Classical-Hellenistic theater of the city and in the first century CE built an odeion. In the first half of the third century CE, however, both the theater and the odeion were transformed into arenas,¹⁸⁶ and the city obtained three venues to stage gladiatorial and associated spectacles.

What is more interesting is the presence of certainly one and possibly four amphitheaters on the island. Considering the rarity of amphitheaters in the East, this is noteworthy (**Fig. 14**).¹⁸⁷ It has been argued that most of the cities that built amphitheaters in the Roman East were Roman colonies, provincial capitals, or Greek poleis with a substantial Roman presence.¹⁸⁸ Although this statement has some basis, it was not the rule. Some provincial capitals and colonies, e.g. Nikopolis, Patras, Thessaloniki, Philippi and probably Ephesos, did not have an amphitheater and presented gladiatorial and associated spectacles in stadia and theaters. Equally, many cities that hosted organized Roman communities did not build amphitheaters or did not present gladiatorial and associated spectacles at all (e.g. Maroneia, Thessaloniki, Beroia, Thespiiai, Argos, Mantinea, Megalopolis).¹⁸⁹

Another factor which may impact the distribution of the amphitheaters, is the connection of these buildings with the presence of the Roman army.¹⁹⁰ Some of the amphitheaters in the Balkans and Cyrenaica, for example, seem

185. Welch 2007, 178-183; 255-259.

186. Sear 2006, 392-394; Di Napoli 2013, 41-47.

187. Map redrawn after Dodge (2009, figs. 4.1-3) with the following refinements: I exclude Patras (the building was a stadium) (Petropoulos, Pansini 2020), Pisidian Antioch (the amphitheater was wooden) (Robert 1940, no. 92; Carter 1999a, no. 439), Canatha (the building was an odeion), Jerusalem and Jericho (the buildings that Josephus called 'amphitheaters' resulted that they were hippo-stadia) (Weiss 2014, 11-55). I add the two amphitheaters in Kissamos and Chersonesos (Crete) attested by Onorio Belli, an amphitheater in Pella, possibly attested in old aerial photographs (Storchi 2020), the recently discovered amphitheater at Mastaura (western Asia Minor), and the amphitheater of Palmyra (Weiss 2014, 65 n. 26).

188. Welch 2007, 182.

189. For the Roman communities of the aforementioned cities, see Zoumbaki forthcoming.

190. Bomgardner 1991; Welch 2007, 27-28, 79-82.

to have been linked to military establishments,¹⁹¹ while the erection of amphitheaters in Palestine in the second century CE is connected to the permanent settlement of Roman legions and many auxiliary forces in the province from this period onwards.¹⁹² Yet this argument cannot explain the presence of all the amphitheaters in the cities of the eastern Mediterranean: in Crete, for example, there was no military installation during the imperial period.

An oval amphitheater was an entirely new type of structure originating in the West, and its presence in a city of the East evinces at least an openness to innovation and the financial capacity to construct it. In Crete, up to now, only the presence of Gortyn's amphitheater is proven. But we do have indications for the existence of another three amphitheaters (in Hierapytna, Chersonesos and Kissamos). If that were to be confirmed, it would point to a phenomenon that could be explained in connection with a combination of factors, such as the administrative and juridical status of these cities, the level of their economic capabilities and other historical and social parameters; in short, in the entire profile of the cities.

The profile of the Cretan cities that presented gladiatorial spectacles

Gortyn, Knossos and Hierapytna, were among the most powerful city-states of the island since the Hellenistic period. The position of all the three cities was significantly strengthened after the wars among the city-states of Crete from the third century BCE onwards, in which they were the protagonists and significant winners.¹⁹³ After the wars, Gortyn, Knossos and Hierapytna increased significantly their territories, controlling the majority of the eastern Cretan lands.¹⁹⁴ These large territories apparently enhanced the economic position of these city-states and may have triggered a specialized agricultural production.¹⁹⁵

After the subjugation to the Romans, Crete was no longer “on the periphery of the Aegean, a sea troubled by wars and raids, but an island in

191. Dodge 2009, 37.

192. Weiss 2014, 63.

193. For the Cretan wars, see Chaniotis 2005, 9-12.

194. Bennet 1990, 202 table 3.

195. Hadjisavvas, Chaniotis 2012, 166.

the middle of the pacified eastern Mediterranean”,¹⁹⁶ developing complex networks of exchange. These networks included north-south trade patterns, linking Crete with mainland Greece to its north, and with Cyrenaica and Egypt to its south. Moreover, east-west exchange networks operated connecting Crete with Asia Minor and Italy.¹⁹⁷ Significantly, Crete’s ports functioned as transshipment stations for the grain trade between Alexandria and Italy, offering a significant boost to the island’s export economy.¹⁹⁸ Large quantities of Cretan amphorae are identified in Campania and Rome from the first century CE onwards.¹⁹⁹ The primary product exported was wine. Textual sources and *tituli picti* preserved on amphorae attest to this trade, which in modern scholarship is considered the backbone of the flourishing Cretan economy under Roman administration.²⁰⁰

The leaders of this economic activity were the Romans and Italians who, attracted by profit opportunities, migrated to the island from the first century BCE onwards from Delos and other places of the Greek East, from Campania and Italy in general, as well as local elites, many of them receiving the Roman citizenship and Roman names.²⁰¹ These elite families participated in the trade of the island, owned land and they held civic and provincial offices.²⁰² Although the presence of Italians was a phenomenon generally attested in early Roman Crete, in Gortyn, Hierapytna and Knossos, the presence of these foreigners seems to have been more pronounced. In Gortyn their number must have been large enough to enable them to form a distinctive community in the first century BCE. This is shown by two honorary Latin dedications by the *cives Romani qui Gortynae negotiantur*.²⁰³ According to Baldwin Bowsky, Gortyn was the location where the majority of the merchant families settled before

196. Chaniotis 2008, 83.

197. Gallimore 2015, 282; Baldwin Bowsky 2019, 12-13.

198. Gallimore 2015, 289; Baldwin Bowsky 2016, 31; Chevrollier 2016.

199. Tchernia 1986, 244, 298; Gallimore 2015, 289.

200. Chaniotis 1988; Marangou-Lerat 1995; Marangou 1999; Hadjisavas, Chaniotis 2012, 169.

201. Baldwin Bowsky 1999; Baldwin Bowsky 2011.

202. Baldwin Bowsky 2011, 439.

203. *I.Cret.* IV 290-291; Baldwin Bowsky 1999, 310.

spreading out to the rest of the island.²⁰⁴ In Hierapytna, Baldwin Bowsky lists ca. 50 locals having Roman names from the second half of the first century BCE till the third century CE, some of them descendants of Italian trading families.²⁰⁵ As for Knossos, the colony that Augustus established shortly after January of 27 BCE, was planted in an economically strategic location in order to gather inland goods from the north-central plain of Crete and to transship them from the port of Herakleion.²⁰⁶ In the first century BCE – first century CE local amphora production increased significantly, something which indicates transporting agricultural produce and consequently an agricultural surplus for export.²⁰⁷

In this inter-systemic economy the harbor-towns were particularly privileged. From the mid-second century BCE onwards Hierapytna started gradually to expand, reaching at its height during the Roman imperial period the extent of ca. 100 ha.²⁰⁸ The new harbor undoubtedly played an important role in this prosperity; it was possibly constructed under Claudius, in the framework of his program of Mediterranean-wide improvements to harbor facilities.²⁰⁹

Chersonesos was a coastal self-governing polis in the northeastern coast of Crete, which from the second century BCE onwards essentially served as a harbor of the inland town of Lyktos.²¹⁰ In Roman imperial times Chersonesos acquired a prominent role, functioning as the disembarkation point for the Lyktian wine, plentifully attested in *tituli picti* preserved on first century CE wine amphorae found at Pompei.²¹¹ Its harbor, constructed sometime during the first century BCE or first century CE, was a key facility.²¹² The prosperity of Roman Chersonesos is attested in its public infrastructure: apart from the amphitheater that Belli attests and the theater, the rescue excavations identified six baths for private and public use, a monumental fountain and massive

204. Baldwin Bowsky 2011, 432.

205. Baldwin Bowsky 1994, 39-44.

206. Baldwin Bowsky 2002, 77.

207. Trainor 2019, 7.

208. Gallimore 2015, 17 fig. 2.7; Scott Gallimore pers. comm. 13 Jan. 2020.

209. Gallimore 2015, 282; Gallimore 2019, 611.

210. Perlman 2004, 1155.

211. Marangou-Lerat 1995, 131-134; Gallimore 2019, 610.

212. Gallimore 2019, 611.

water cisterns yielding a capacity of 5,596.25 m³.²¹³ The water was brought to the city via a 14 km aqueduct constructed in the imperial period, possibly in the second century CE.²¹⁴ Worth mentioning are also the three rock-cut fish tanks, attesting a fish industry in the city, most probably led by businessmen residents in Chersonesos.²¹⁵

Finally, Hellenistic Kissamos was in the territory of and dependent upon Polyrrhenia, ca. 5 km inland, functioning as her harbor town.²¹⁶ By contrast to the meager pre-Roman archaeological evidence, the rescue excavations of the Hellenic Archaeological Service attest that from the first century CE onwards the small town started to develop according to the hippodameian system, with paved *decumanus* and *cardo maximus*, secondary streets, *insulae*, and a fully developed sewerage system.²¹⁷ Apart from the unidentified theater and amphitheater that Belli mentions, traces of a large paved colonnaded courtyard, possibly the Roman agora, has come to light.²¹⁸ An aqueduct possibly dated in the third century CE brought water to the city that ended at cisterns and distributed water to three or four public bath complexes.²¹⁹ In addition to the public buildings, rescue excavations have discovered numerous urban villas decorated with mosaics, all dated in the second half of the second and in the third century CE.²²⁰

The profile of the cities described above has shown that the three cities that certainly presented gladiatorial and associated shows in Crete (Gortyn, Knossos and Hierapytna), were among the most powerful towns of the island since the Hellenistic period, while the two that possibly did so (Chersonesos and Kissamos), were two newer important urban centers of Roman Crete. Additionally, Hierapytna, Chersonesos and Kissamos, were perhaps the three most important harbors of the island under Roman rule. All five cities experienced significant public and private building activity, reflecting the

213. Grigoropoulos et al. 2008; Mandalaki 2001.

214. Oikonomakis 1986.

215. Francis 2010, 259-260.

216. Perlman 2004, 1182; Markoulaki et al. 2004, 357.

217. Markoulaki et al. 2004, 357, 360-363.

218. Markoulaki et al. 2004, 365.

219. Sanders 1982, 172; Markoulaki et al. 2004, 365.

220. Markoulaki et al. 2004; Sweetman 2013, 248-252.

wealth that was accumulated in these towns. More significantly, all five cities that certainly or possibly presented gladiatorial and associated shows, were strongly engaged in the empire wide trading system of the Roman Mediterranean. They were wealthy cities that could follow the economic and cultural developments of the new 'globalized' status of the empire. The leading cities and principal ports of the island involved in these complex networks were open to cultural influences, while accumulated wealth enabled the construction of several new spectacle buildings, among them the new type of spectacle building that appeared in the Mediterranean, the amphitheater, attested in Crete certainly one, and possibly four times.

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Summary

This article examines the epigraphic and archaeological evidence attesting the staging of gladiatorial and associated spectacles in Roman Crete. The evidence indicates shows held in the capital of the province, Gortyn; in the colony of Knossos, in Hierapytna, and possibly in Chersonesos and Kissamos. Some of the spectacles that took place in Gortyn were extraordinary and very costly, including beast fights, public executions and gladiatorial combats with sharp weapons. The cities that presented these spectacles were leading towns and principal ports for the complex trade networks in which the island was involved, and open to innovation. The wealth thereby accumulated enabled the execution of new public infrastructures in these towns, among them the new type of spectacle building that appeared in the Mediterranean, the amphitheater.

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει τα επιγραφικά και αρχαιολογικά τεκμήρια που καταδεικνύουν τη διοργάνωση μονομαχικών και άλλων σχετικών θεαμάτων στη ρωμαϊκή Κρήτη. Τα στοιχεία μαρτυρούν ότι τέτοιου είδους θεάματα έλαβαν χώρα στην πρωτεύουσα της επαρχίας, Γόρτυνα, στην αποικία της Κνωσού, στην Ιεράπυτνα και ίσως στη Χερσόνησο και στην Κίσαμο. Κάποια από τα θεάματα που πραγματοποιήθηκαν στη Γόρτυνα ήταν ιδιαίτερα και περιλάμβαναν θηριομαχίες, δημόσιες εκτελέσεις και μονομαχίες με αιχμηρά όπλα. Οι πόλεις που παρουσίασαν αυτά τα θεάματα είχαν ηγετική θέση στο σύνθετο εμπορικό δίκτυο, στο οποίο είχε εμπλακεί το νησί κατά τη ρωμαϊκή περίοδο και ήταν ανοιχτές σε καινοτομίες. Ο πλούτος που είχαν συγκεντρώσει τους επέτρεψε να εκτελέσουν σειρά νέων δημόσιων κτιριακών υποδομών, μεταξύ των οποίων τον νέο τύπο κτιρίου δημόσιων θεαμάτων που εμφανίστηκε εκείνη την περίοδο στη Μεσόγειο, το αμφιθέατρο.

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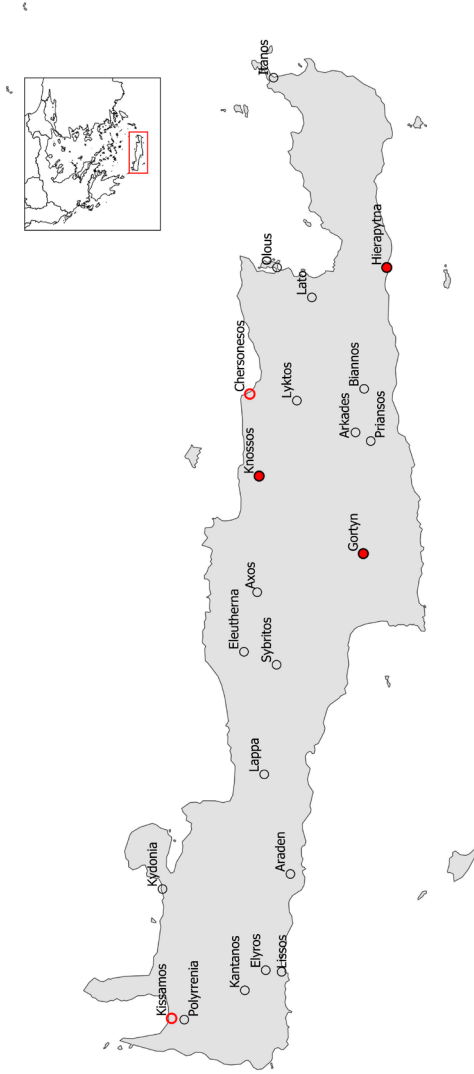


Fig. 1. Self-governing cities of Crete in the Roman imperial period. Red dots: Cities that certainly presented gladiatorial spectacles. Red circles: Cities that possibly presented gladiatorial spectacles, ©Michalis Karambinis 2023.

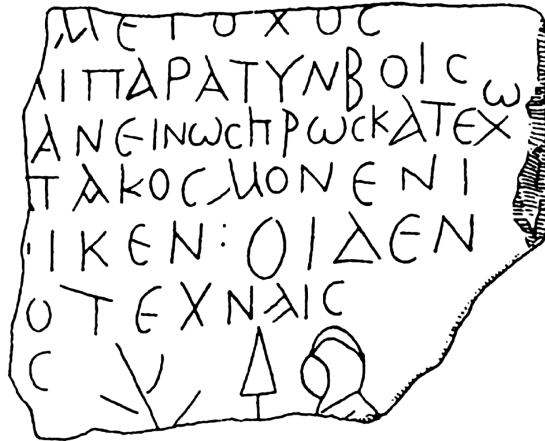


Fig. 2. Inscription no. 8 (after *I.Cret.* III iii 51).



Fig. 3. Inscription no. 9 (after Papadakis 1998, 81 fig. 515).

GLADIATORIAL SPECTACLES IN CRETE

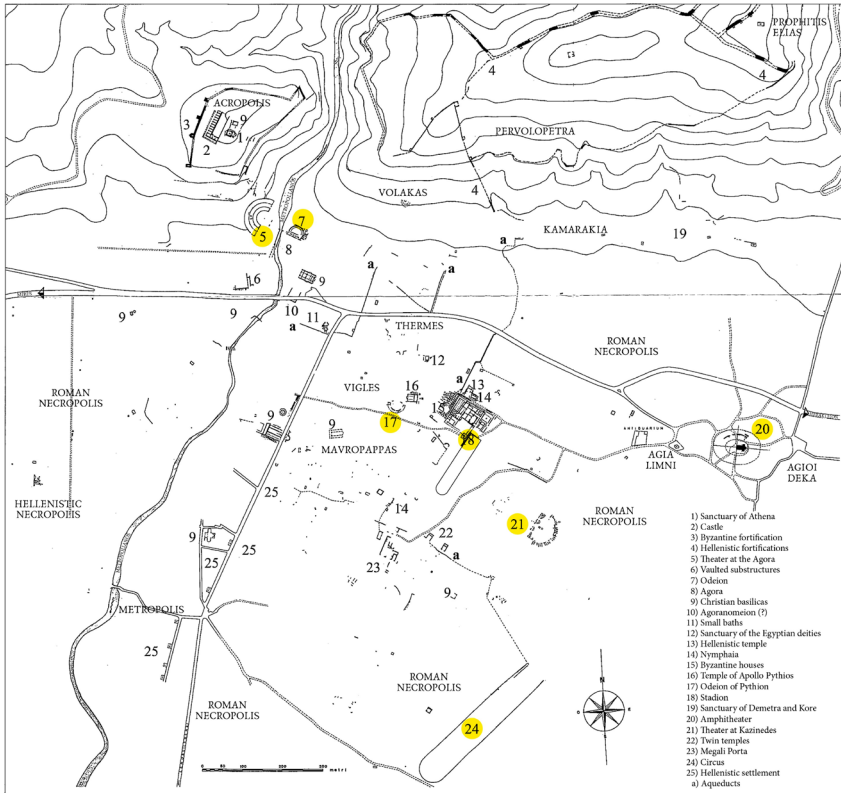


Fig. 4. Map of Gortyn (after Di Vita 2010, 5 fig. 7). Reproduced with permission of L'Erma di Bretschneider Publisher. [Numbers highlighted in the map: 5: Theater at the Agora, 7: Odeion, 17: Odeion of Pythion, 18: Stadion, 20: Amphitheater, 21: Theater at Kazinedes, 24: Circus].



Fig. 5. The stadium of Gortyn during excavation. View of the western side of the cavea. Holes for the tension of ropes to sustain the system of nets are discernible (after Di Vita 2010, 138 fig. 182). Reproduced with permission of L'Erma di Bretschneider Publisher.



Fig. 6. Perge, the stadium. View of the podium bearing holes for the tension of ropes (after Welch 1998a, 124 fig. 7). Reproduced with permission of K. Welch.



Fig. 7. Relief depicting the goddess Nemesis standing on a supine figure, most probably from the theater at Kazinedes (Gortyn), today in the British Museum (after Di Vita 2010, 294 fig. 431). Reproduced with permission of L'Erma di Bretschneider Publisher.

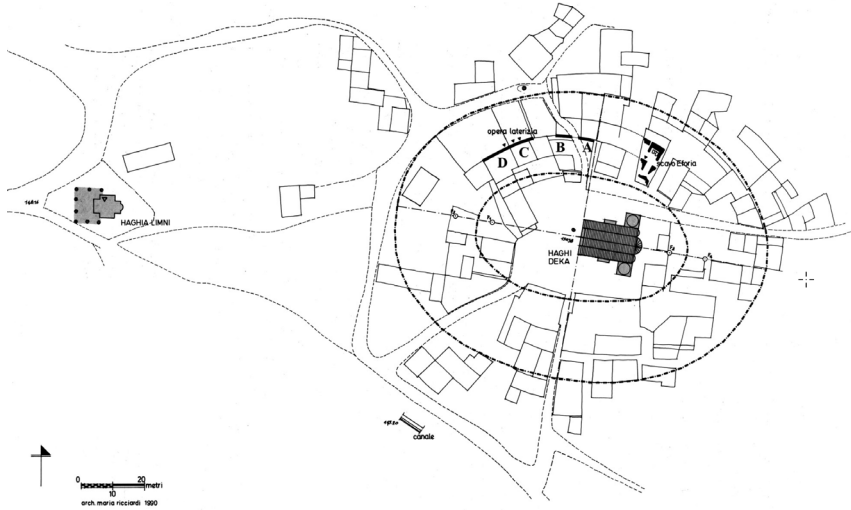


Fig. 8. Gortyn: plan of the amphitheater (after Di Vita 2010, 294 fig. 432).
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Fig. 9. Gortyn: view of the wall of the amphitheater (after Di Vita 2010, 296 fig. 435).
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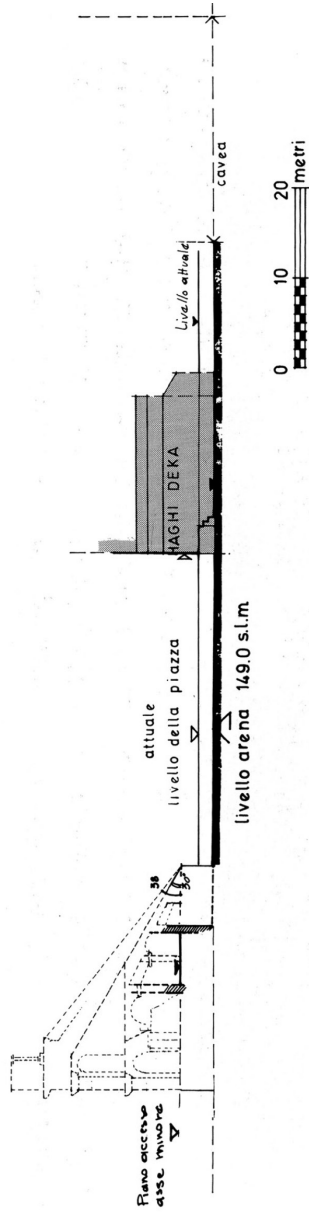


Fig. 10. Gortyn: section of the amphitheater and of the church of Agioi Deka (after Di Vita 2010, 296 fig. 437).
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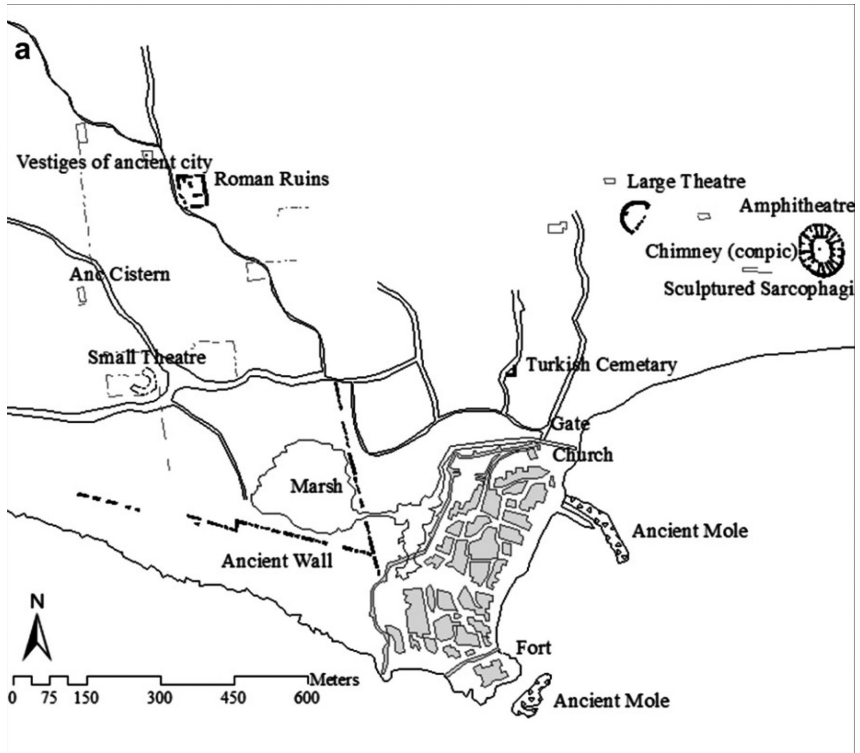


Fig. 11. Reproduction of the geo-referenced and digitized Spratt's map where the location of the monuments he visited are shown (after Papadopoulos et al. 2012, 1963 fig. 2a). Reproduced with permission of A. Sarris.



Fig. 12. Rectified satellite image of the modern city of Ierapetra where the locations of the smaller (at west) and the larger (at northeast) theaters and the amphitheater (at east) have been superimposed, based on the map of Spratt (after Papadopoulos et al. 2012, 1963 fig. 2b). Reproduced with permission of A. Sarris.



Fig. 13. Diagrammatic interpretation of strong GPR reflections and high resistivity anomalies of the area where the amphitheater of Hierapytna is located (after Papadopoulos et al. 2012, 1971 fig. 13c). Reproduced with permission of A. Sarris.

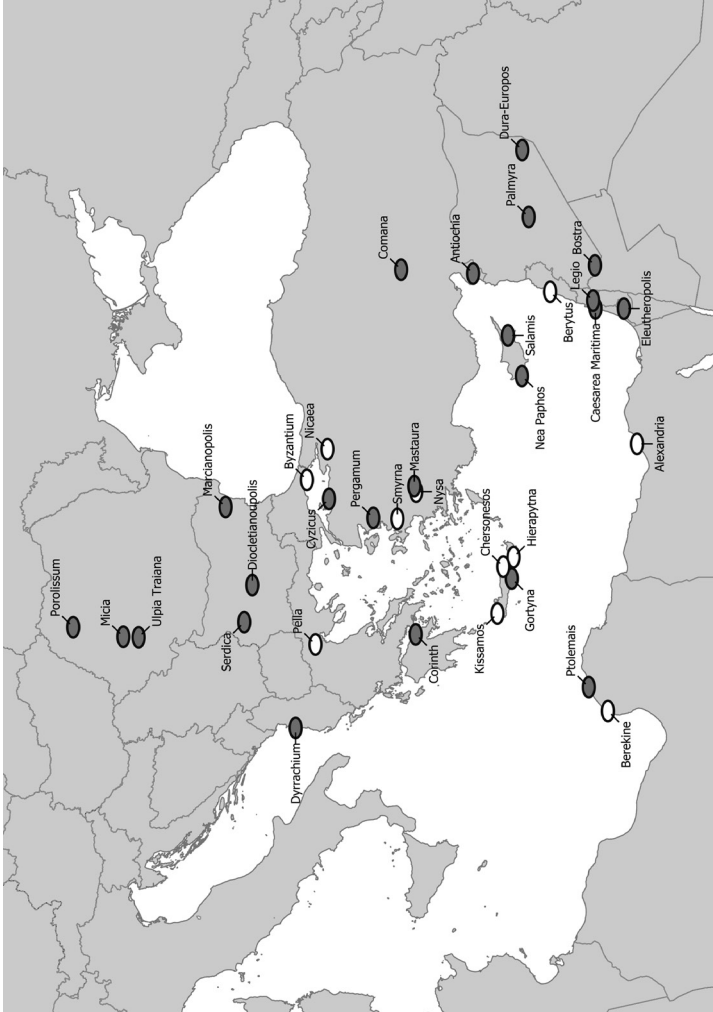


Fig. 14. Amphitheaters in the Roman East, ©Michalis Karambinis 2023. Grey symbol: Amphitheaters attested archaeologically. White symbol: Amphitheaters attested in literary and other sources. Map adopted from Dodge 2009, figs. 4.1-3. For further information, see n. 187.