

situated on the summit of the acropolis hill, above the *koilon* (auditorium) of the theatre and was closely associated with the city's public and military life. Evidence of the cult on this site exists since the 8th c. BC, before Athena of the acropolis was proclaimed patron goddess of the city.

The sanctuary was at its peak in the 5th c. BC and it was abandoned along with other buildings on the acropolis during the 4th c. BC when houses were built in its place.

Surviving today are its south wall and parts of those in the east and west, with which it forms an angle.

The Archaic Stoa (9)

It is situated between the south wall of the Athena Chalkioikos sanctuary and the ancient theatre. Part of the monument's north wall and west wall are preserved, as well as five porous column bases with a shallow hollow on their surface, perhaps for the support of a wooden colonnade.

The Theatre of ancient Sparta (10)

The existence of a theatre in Sparta is testified by ancient writers in the 5th c. BC and was related to the celebration of sacred festivals. Today's surviving theatre dates from between 30 to 20 BC and is situated on the south slope of the acropolis hill, facing south towards the valley of the river Eurotas and the town.

The theatre is made of local white marble, the diameter of its *koilon* is 141m and it is estimated to have a seating capacity of 17,000 spectators.

Notable features of the theatre are its huge retaining walls and a wooden mobile *skene*. The latter served the need for free space required for public gatherings, festivals and games.

At the end of the 1st c. AD, the emperor Vespasian replaced the mobile *skene* with a monumental, permanent one, made of marble. The retaining wall of the east *parodos* has a marble façade on which lists of Spartan state officials are recorded (2nd c. AD), constituting a rare inscribed monument of Greek antiquity.

With modifications and repairs, the theatre functioned till the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th c. AD. A Byzantine settlement (10th–14th c. AD) was built in the *koilon* area, after a period of abandonment.

Marble benches, porous stone bases and other architectural and functional elements of the theatre were used as building material for the houses.

With the founding of modern Sparta (1834), the theatre was once more plundered, this time to contribute towards the construction of the town's modern buildings.

Front cover: Torso of a hoplite. The statue is known as "Leonidas", 480–470 BC. Archaeological Museum of Sparta. Photo: V. Georgiades.

Ground plan of the archaeological site: Guide of the project "Protection, Configuration, Enhancement and Connection of the Archaeological Sites of Sparta". Archive of EPH.A.LAK./Plot plan: G. Mourgi, G. Giaxoglou.

Below: View of the theatre of ancient Sparta.



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You can tour the site by using the ground plan. To listen to or download the file of the audio-guide, scan with your cell phone the QR code on the left or type in the link: https://www.archaeology.wiki/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Sparta_ixitiko.mp3

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ANCIENT SPARTA

Hara Giannakaki



The archaeological site includes the acropolis and the agora of ancient Sparta and extends across a beautiful olive grove, to the north of the modern town. In this area there is evidence of uninterrupted and systematic human activity from the Geometric up to late Byzantine times. Stone and marble architectural members, belonging to earlier buildings of the region, were used extensively in later times as building material. The lack of monumental and luxurious buildings reflects the absence of luxury in Classical Sparta. Nevertheless, next to the impressive buildings and monuments of the Roman period, Pausanias praises shrines and buildings of the Archaic and Classical city.

The Late Roman Fortification Wall (1)

It is the first monument encountered by the visitor when entering the site from the south. Sparta's first fortifications date from late 4th and 3rd century BC, since the city had no walls in Classical times. The late Roman fortification of the acropolis and the agora is most probably related to the invasions by the Eruli (267 AD) and Alaric (396 AD).

The Roman Stoa (2)

It is situated at the southeast part of the archaeological site, near the south entrance. The stoa, an impressive building (125–150 AD), with a W–E orientation and a total length of approximately 187m, has Doric colonnades on its façades and originally had two storeys on most of its south side and one storey on its north façade.

The west part of the stoa almost touches the Round Building. A series of arched rooms, which were probably shops, were located to the east.

The Round Building (3)

It is a monument of the Archaic times (circa 600 BC) in the area of the ancient agora, dominating the southeast and lower section of the archaeological site. It was configured around a natural low hill by constructing a strong retaining wall that followed the mound's contour. This wall was made up of a three stepped base upon which rested tiers of large conglomerate stones with marble bands between them.

The monument that was used till the Byzantine times, has been identified either as the Circular Building of Epimenides or as the Skias.



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04

- 01 The Round Building before the enhancement work. (Guide of the project "Protection, Configuration, Enhancement and Connection of the Archaeological Sites of Sparta". Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lakonia (EPH.A.LAK.) / Photo: V. Georgiades).
- 02 Head of the statue of Julia Severa (220–222 AD). National Archaeological Museum, Archive of NAM.
- 03 Detail of the Damonon stele, 2nd half of 5th c. BC. Archaeological Museum of Sparta. Archive of EPH.A.LAK. / Photo: V. Georgiades.
- 04 Sculpture of wild boar from the theatre of ancient Sparta, late Hellenistic period. Archaeological Museum of Sparta. Archive of EPH.A.LAK. / Photo: V. Georgiades.

The Byzantine church to the west of the Round Building (4)

The middle Byzantine church (10th century AD) was built on the site of an earlier circular construction, which formed an angle with the west part of the Round Building's retaining wall. The structure is almost square in plan, with an entrance on its west side and three segmental apses in the east part.

The Stoa (The "Agora") (5)

To the north of the Round Building, in the area where the ancient city's agora is located, a monumental stoa (4th or 3rd c. BC), known as the "Agora", has been brought to light. Only the southwest corner of this large stoa has been excavated, which most probably had two storeys on the southeast side and one storey on the northwest. Its walls are constructed from porous blocks in the polygonal style, whereas their upper part is made of limestone in the pseudo-isodomic way.

Opinions differ as to its identity. Is it the Persian Stoa (5th c. BC) or did it perhaps belong to some larger stoa complex with two storeys, that defined the agora area to the southwest?

The Basilica of "Osios Nikon" (6)

The three aisled basilica (2nd half of 6th–7th c.), whose sanctuary has three sections, is situated to the left of the paved path leading from the agora area to the acropolis hill. The basilica is part of an impressive early Byzantine building complex. The church had initially been identified as the church of Christ the Saviour, built by Osios Nikon the "Metanoite" (late 10th c.). Today it is considered to be the cathedral of Lacedaemon.

The Two-niched Building (7)

It is situated in the east part of the acropolis hill, between the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos and the basilica. The original construction consisted of a large rectangular room and two smaller ones, each with a semicircular niche on its east and west sides. It was constructed after the final period of the theatre's operation (4th c. AD) and it was in use until the middle Byzantine times. The building's function may at some point have been related to the adjacent basilica of "Osios Nikon".

The Sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos (8)

The most important sanctuary in the district is