

Archaeological Sites and Monuments of Andalusia



HISTORY

The origins of what would later become the Roman Malaga hark back to the 7th-6th centuries BCE with the Phoenician city of Mlk.

After the city was incorporated into the Roman Republic, it continued to maintain the urban and cultural identity of its oriental origins, especially in the early period of Roman dominance. This can be seen in the pottery and coins minted in the city in the Roman period, which still included Phoenician writing and iconography.

↓ Flooring of *opus spicatum*.



One of the few documented buildings of this period is a bath complex. A floor of herring bone pattern or *opus spicatum*, buried under the theatre is the only remaining feature of the building.

The early Imperial period saw the commencement of many public building projects such as new bath complexes, buildings for public entertainment administrative complexes, etc. The city became a reflection of a new political, economic and religious way of life. The Roman Theatre lies within this context as part of a process of conversion of public spaces into monuments that would continue up to the first half of the 2nd century CE.

The theatre operated as such for about two centuries, although shows were few and far between by the end of the 2nd century CE. It was finally abandoned at some time in the 3rd century CE.

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A period then followed where all the space in the theatre was occupied by structures used in the salted fish industry. A new urban model was therefore put in place in which economics took precedence over theatre. The extent and size of these industries give an idea of the commercial importance they represented in the city of Malaga at that time.

Use of the area changed once again in the 5th century CE. The space occupied by the theatre was turned into a necropolis, where excavations have brought to light a number of burials with a tiled gable roof design. Some of the tombs are conserved at a higher level than the theatre to the west of the interpretation centre.

↓ Remains of tombs.



After the 16th century the entire area of the theatre was built over to become a district of houses built using a system of terraced walls, part of which was demolished in the early 20th century to make way for the construction of the Casa de la Cultura and its surroundings.

THE ROMAN THEATRE

The Roman Theatre of Malaga is the most important remaining feature of the Roman presence in the city. The theatre itself is of medium sized dimensions, built in the first years of the Empire (1st century CE). Well preserved parts of the theatre include a large portion of the seated section or *cavea*, the orchestra, richly decorated with large marble slabs, and the *scaena*, which now has a wooden floor to represent the flooring when it was in use.

The stage elements closed the rear with an ornamental facade decorated with openings, columns and sculptures, some of which have been recovered.

For centuries the Roman Theatre of Malaga was hidden under the streets and houses on the slopes of the Alcazaba hill. In 1940, building work commenced on what was to be the Palacio de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos de Málaga, more commonly known as the Casa de la Cultura, on land at the start of Alcazabilla street. In 1951, gardening work opposite the main entrance to the building revealed a monumental construction that was initially interpreted as one of the gates of the Roman walls. Terraced seating arranged after an arch was then found, which led the excavators to conclude that it was in fact a Roman theatre, and that the vaulted construction was an *aditus maximus* while the seating was the *cavea*. The rest of the theatre was under the foundations of the Casa de la Cultura.



A period of several decades then followed with excavations, consolidation and constant debate, which concluded with the demolition of the Casa de la Cultura in 1995, more extensive excavation of the whole site and restoration and development of the site itself for public viewing.



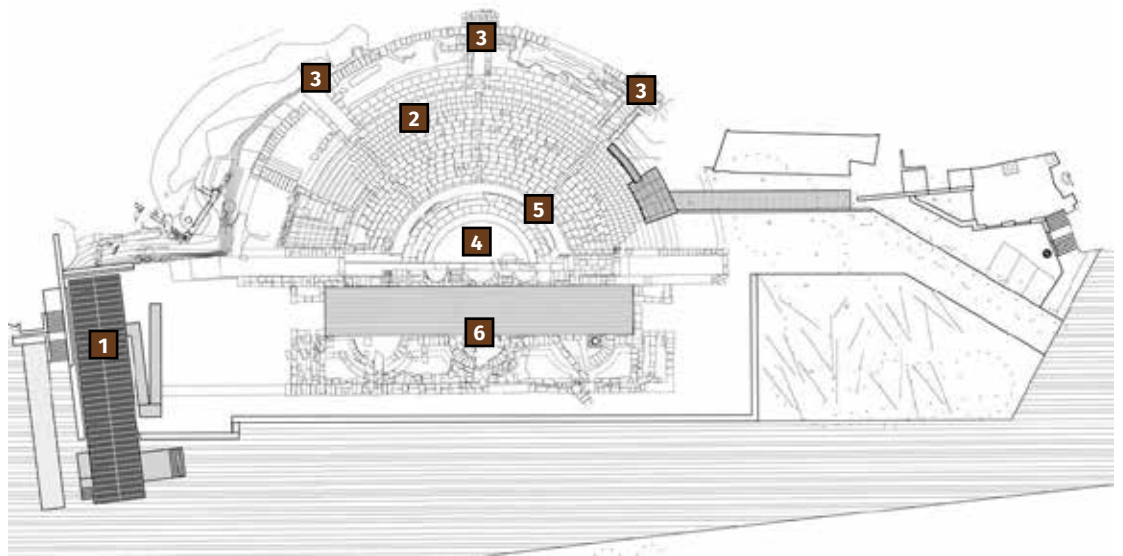
Junta de Andalucía

Consejería de Cultura y Patrimonio Histórico

AGENCIA ANDALUZA DE INSTITUCIONES CULTURALES



- 1** Interpretation centre
- 2** Cavea
- 3** Access stairs
- 4** Orchestra
- 5** Proedria
- 6** Escaena



The construction of the theatre used two methods to support the structure: one uses part of the slope of the hill to support a large part of the *cavea* in the style of Greek theatres, while another section rests on artificial foundations.

1 Interpretationszentrum

The interpretation centre of the Roman Theatre is a modern building with a depiction of the municipal laws or *Lex Flavia Malacitana* on its outer walls. The centre functions as a reception area for visitors, and some original pieces from the excavation carried out at the theatre are also on display along with information to give more context to the visit.

2 Cavea

These were the stands where the public sat to watch the play. They were divided into three sections: the *Ima*, *Media* and *Summa cavea*. Access to each sector depended on a person's social, political and legal status.

The lowest part was the *Ima cavea*, which was reserved for high-ranking military officers, army veterans and public officials. There are also 14 stands reserved for one of the property-owning classes of the time called the *Ordo Equester*.



The *Media cavea* was the central seating area where most of the commoners sat, while the poorest plebeians, women and slaves sat in the top part called the *Summa cavea*. Slaves, who were permitted to go to the theatre, were only allowed seating space if any was left over.

The *Summa cavea* is not visible in the Roman Theatre of Malaga but three access routes with stairs can be seen at the top of the *cavea*, which would have been covered by barrel vaulting to support this final level. **3**

At the top there would have been the *porticus in summa cavea*, which was a circular corridor in the form of an arcade with columns, which is no longer visible here.

4 Orchestra

This consists of a large semi-circular space between the stage and the seating. It is richly decorated with marble slabs, and its outer perimeter holds the *proedria* **5**, which are three slightly elevated seating areas reserved for members of the aristocracy and senators. One of the marble seating areas can still be seen in the Roman Theatre of Malaga.

The *proedria* was separated from the *Ima cavea* by a small marble parapet called the *balteus*. The *balteus* was not just a structural element but also had an ideological function, since it physically and visually reinforced the separation between the areas and the spectators who sat in them.

Access to the *orchestra* was via the vaulted side passages (*aditus maximus*) that ran below the seating sections.

Between the *orchestra* and the stage there is an inscription dated to the Flavian dynasty

← Access stairs.



↑ Balteus.



↑ Two views of the *aditus maximus*. →

curtain was raised upwards in Roman theatres).

At the back of the stage in the backdrop was the *frons escenae*. This was a stone facade of two or three levels decorated with columns, openings and a *valva regia* (main entrance) and two *valvae hospitaliu* located symmetrically on each side of the main entrance. The height of this structure would have been the same as the *porticus* in *summa cavea*.



↓ The theatre at night.

carved out in 23-centimetre-high letters. The inscription makes reference to three persons who may have been local magistrates.

6 Escaena

The *escaena* is the rectangular space where the theatrical shows took place.

It is higher than the *orchestra* and this raised section, called the *frons pulpiti*, is decorated with recesses and stairs that connected both spaces. Behind the *frons pulpiti* is a ditch where the curtain was kept (the

