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ANCIENT HISTORY

HISTORICAL REFERENCE POINTS OF ANCIENT LARISSA

Abstract: The historicity of the entire Greek territory is indisputable; however, some places, even today, face a lack of academic and archaeological research and historical oblivion. One such case is observed in central Greece and, more specifically, in the city of Larissa. If something differentiates this city from all the others in Greece, this is its antiquity, along with Argos in the Peloponnese. In the mosaic of its past, the most important tessera is the first ancient theater, which is also the central emblem of the city due to its great importance. Although the restoration and maintenance processes have not yet ended, the monument continues to this day to update information about the past of the city, contributing to a very large extent to the configuration of Larissa's cultural identity. Since emphasis has been given to the conservation and preservation of the ancient theater, the paper moves in the opposite direction and aims at a holistic depiction of the city's history based on the data so far, mainly through Larissa's antiquity and the first ancient theater, covering an era from prehistory to the Roman occupation. The difference about this specific theater is that its function was complicated and varied, offering even an innovation on the level of state organization, filling thus a literature gap regarding the history of ancient Larissa overall.

Keywords: *Larissa, ancient theater, antiquity, federalism.*

Vasileios SPANOS

University of Western Macedonia, Greece
aff00194@uowm.gr

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LARISSA: NOT JUST ANOTHER GREEK CITY

The earliest archaeological evidence for the human presence in the area that includes the Prefecture of Larissa goes back to its distant past prehistory, in the Paleolithic Period and has been proven with the help of surveys of the German prehistorian archaeologist Vladimir Milošević.¹ The distant ancestors, the Pelasgians, paved the rich plain of Pineios River in order to set up the first crops. They named the left clean lands “Argos”—Pelasgian Argos is the first name of Thessaly—and near them, they built their citadel with cyclopean walls, which they used to call *Larissa*.² The riverbeds of Pineios River were responsible for the demarcation of the Paleolithic sites since there, the hunters were led by the animals that wanted to quench their thirst. With a total length of 205 km, Pineios River is still today the main conduit of a complex hydrographic network that covers almost the entire Thessalian area, draining an area of 7,081 m².³ In the Middle Paleolithic Period, the Neanderthal (*Homo Sapiens Neanderthalensis*) lived in Thessaly with the typical processing technique of the tools which existed at that time. Older, as well as newer research, confirm the presence of Paleolithic humans in the wider area. The stone tools were associated with mobile groups of

¹ ZIAZIAS 1994, 22–25.

² MUNICIPALITY OF LARISSA 2022, 7.

³ ROUSKAS 2004, 7–9.

Neanderthals and also modern humans (*Homo Sapiens*), who hunted on the banks of the Pineios River during the period 60,000 BC–30,000 BC.⁴

About 30,000 years BC, the Neanderthal disappeared from Thessaly, for reasons that cannot yet be adequately explained. A time gap of several thousand years followed until the Neolithic Age in the 7th millennium when the first agricultural settlements appeared in the region of the Prefecture of Larissa and Thessaly in general. The identification of Neolithic settlements in 7,000 BC and related archaeological findings in the whole area lead to the conclusion that the city was inhabited continuously for at least 8,000 years.⁵ During the 9th century BC, Larissa was already an organized community and its location in the center of the Thessalian plain was a key advantage for the social and economic life of Thessaly in general. This uninterrupted habitation for 8,000 years⁶ makes Larissa, along with Argos in the Peloponnese, the two oldest ancient cities in Greece and probably in the whole of Europe.

In ancient Thessaly, the establishment of cities in general was not a sudden and autonomous event but the product of a long process and activity of the people who lived there thousands of years ago.⁷ A first attempt to render the administrative and social geography of the Thessalian plain is contained in Homer, specifically in Rhapsody II (681–759) of the *Iliad*, where nine kingdoms and twenty-nine cities are mentioned.⁸ However, the first detailed reference to the Thessalian cities is much later, through Pseudo-Scylax in the 4th century, who listed the geographical boundaries of Thessaly and also a list of the Thessalian cities of that time.⁹ Other sources in the classical times that mention the organization of Thessaly into cities are the lyric poet Pindar,¹⁰ Aeschylus,¹¹ Thucydides¹² and Xenophon.¹³ Later, the most detailed description of the Thessalian plain and its cities is recorded by the geographer Strabo, in the 2nd century BC.¹⁴

Larissa held a dominant position in the region of Thessaly and it was built in the area that today is called “*Phrourio*”, which means “*fortress*”. Its most likely first settler was Larissos, son of Pelasgos or, according to other sources, Pelasgos himself, who named the ancient city in honor of his daughter, Larissa. A third point of view, which probably gathers few possibilities, is the one that presents Acrisius, father of the first king of Larissa, Teutamos, as its first settler. Etymologically, the name “*Larissa*” is of Pelasgian origin and means “*acropolis*” or “*hill-elevation*”.¹⁵ Yet, this is a fact that does not correspond to the earthy hill of the acropolis of Larissa, about 25m high, and it possibly indicates an earlier location of its original core near a mountainous ledge of the land. For this reason, it is not surprising at all that Homer

does not mention the city, but he does not do the same for the nearby Argissa.¹⁶

The personality of the nymph Larissa seems to have played a catalytic role as she satisfied the local pride of Larissa’s residents and, for this reason, she was an emblem of their coins in the 4th BC.¹⁷ In any case, this place inspired many charming ancient Greek myths,¹⁸ including the gods of Mountain Olympus, the Titanomachy, the Lapithes, Leto, Daphne and Apollo, Erysichthon, etc. The plain of Larissa was, and is still today, the most fertile part of Greece; it should be taken into consideration that the oracle of Delphi and many ancient writers, such as Euripides, Scymnus, Horatius, spoke with admiration regarding the extraordinary euphoria and the mythical wealth of the whole territory.¹⁹

From early on, Larissa of historical times and at least from the archaic years took the lead among all the Thessalian cities because of its central geographical position and the economic prosperity owing to its fertile soil. In all the years which followed, its hegemony could not be marginalized. In the battle of Tanagra between the Spartans and the Athenians in 457 BC, the Larissaeans, among others, participated with their excellent cavalry, a fact that decided the outcome of the battle in favor of the Spartans. During the Peloponnesian War, the Larissaeans took the part of the Athenians and sent troops against the Spartans in 404 BC, while at the end of the 5th century BC, the city experienced strife and rivalries²⁰ until the advent of Philip II and then, the Roman occupation. The cohesive link at this point is none other than the first ancient theater of the city, the importance of which will be analyzed below.

FIRST ANCIENT THEATER OF LARISSA: AN UNSTOPPABLE WITNESS OF THE PAST

In Greece, 125 ancient viewing and listening areas have been preserved to this day, of which some are preserved in good condition while others are preserved in fragments. The previous number does not include 35 theaters known only from travelers’ testimonies and inscriptions. The ancient theaters, apart from their well-known function, were simultaneously conservatories, halls of parliament, places of assembly, entertainment, worship and dialogue.²¹ A very special case for the entire Greek area and for various reasons is that of the first ancient theater of Larissa which can very easily be characterized as the telephone directory of its time, giving a lot of information about the history not only of the monument itself but also of Larissa and Thessaly. For this reason, its association with the Macedonian and Roman periods, on the one hand, is very important and on the other hand, it creates a smooth transition on a historical level that forms a complete picture of the past. Unfortunately, the conservation, restoration and maintenance processes of the ancient theater are moving at a very slow pace and the information that has come onto the surface is enough but could

⁴ RUNNELS/TJEERD 1993, 299–303.

⁵ GALLIS 1973, 45.

⁶ BATZIOU-EFSTATHIOU 2008, 15–39.

⁷ NIKOLAOU 2012, 11.

⁸ MAVROPOULOS 2010.

⁹ KRAVARITOU 2012, 13.

¹⁰ MAVROPOULOS 2008, 310–328.

¹¹ MAVROPOULOS 2007, 70–100.

¹² GIAGKOPOULOS 2006, 31–39.

¹³ RAPTIS 2005, 18–30.

¹⁴ THEODORIDIS 1994, 200–230.

¹⁵ OIKONOMOU 2007, 3.

¹⁶ NTASIOS 2012, 105.

¹⁷ TZIAFALIAS 1990, 50.

¹⁸ PSYRRAS, 2008.

¹⁹ HELLY 1985, 140.

²⁰ NTASIOS 2012, 106.

²¹ DERVENI/SOFIKITOU 2011, 1.

be more. In any case, even the existing information attests to its range both locally and regionally, something quite rare for the Greek area.

About a decade ago, most of the main part of the theater was under private plots and homes, but excavation work in recent years has uncovered almost all of it. It is a huge monument, built almost exclusively of marble, with rich decoration, proving in this way the economic strength of the wider region at that time. The diazoma (landing), a two meters-wide corridor, divided not only the cavea into the lower section that has to do with the main theatre, but also the upper section that is the epitheater. The major part of the latter has been unfortunately destroyed, but it is known that it was divided by 20 staircases into 22 *cunei*, comprising 14 to 18 rows of seats each. The epitheater was narrower on the sides, thus providing enough space for a ramp or staircase. In turn, the main theater was divided by ten staircases into 11 *cunei*, each *cuneus* counting 25 rows of seats.²²

The first ancient theater of Larissa was built in the first half of the 3rd century BC, in the years of the Macedonian king Antigonos Gonatas, as after the death of Alexander the Great and during the Hellenistic era, Thessaly was part of the Macedonian Kingdom. Its location, on the southern slopes of the hill of the acropolis, was dictated by the location of the city and, for this reason, it was not consistent with the directive of the Roman architect Vitruvius for the selection of the location of the theaters, who considered that care must be taken so that the theater should not be exposed to the south because the air trapped in the hollow when the sun fills the semicircle of spectators circulates there and is heated.²³

Regarding antiquity, information about the first ancient theater of Larissa derives only from a fragmentary inscription of the first half of the 2nd century BC that was found in the city of Larissa. This is a text that includes a court decision and in the corollary of this decision is mentioned for the first time, the ancient theater as a fixed landmark for defining the boundaries of a private estate near the Pineios River. Thus, it enabled the archaeologists to have an *ante quem* element for the dating of its construction. In recent years, the first reference is linked to the traveler Ussing, who visited Larissa in 1846 under Turkish occupation and who, in a book of his that was published in 1857, described the stands of the ancient theater.²⁴ It seems that only some rows of benches of the main theater must have been visible at that time.

Its construction is directly linked to the worship of the god of wine, Dionysus. Such claim can be easily substantiated through the numerous findings, both inscriptions and sculptures, presented by the excavations. It functioned for about six centuries, until the end of the 3rd or the beginning of the 4th century AD. An earthquake at the beginning of the 3rd century destroyed the second floor of the stage with its Doric superstructure as well as a part of the amphitheater. A second powerful earthquake in the 7th century resulted in the further destruction of the monument. In the Middle Byzantine period, the site was used as a cemetery.²⁵

This theater was always the center of the political and

social life of the ancient Larissaeans. This is proven by a multitude of findings, mainly inscriptions and sculptures, that have been attributed by the archaeologists to its excavation. In addition to staging theatrical and musical performances, it hosted the meetings of Larissa's citizens, which in ancient Larissa were called "*Agora*." In this market stood the temple of "*Kedroos Apollo*," which must have been built at the beginning of the 4th century BC. The most important resolutions and judgments of Larissa's municipality were taken at the place of the sacred shrine while the citizens spent votive offerings in honor of the god. The votive offerings established on the sanctuary included the column of Theotimos, a Thessalian rider who was defeated in the battle of Tanagra in 457 BC, as well as a possible honorable declaration for Chrysogonos of Edessa who had protected the Thessalian cities from the Aetolian's invasions in 217 BC. The latter was awarded the title of "*Citizen of Larissa*" and was given the right to acquire land and property in the city. After the battle of Cynoscephalae in 197 BC, the city's rulers adopted Roman-friendly politics and the new dominants in Greece started to offer them special privileges. At this time, an honorary resolution was erected at the sanctuary for the two servants of King Eumenes II of Pergamon, who had paid a visit to Larissa accompanied by his brother Attalus I in 171 BC. The honored attendants participated in the negotiations for the alliance between the citizens of Larissa and those of Pergamum and the Romans against the Macedonians.²⁶

In the 1st century BC, the theater was transformed into a Roman arena, exclusively aiming at the performance of notable celebrations, duels, animal fights, mimic representations of clowns, wizards and much more. Combats of professional gladiators were very popular spectacles during the Roman occupation and Larissa was well known for this kind of fights. This information derives from three funerary steles with relevant representations from Larissa, dated back to the 2nd and 3rd century AD. At the same period, the ancient citizens initiated the second theater's erection, simply because the first theater was converted into an arena.²⁷ The second ancient theater was intended, apart from theatrical performances, for other spiritual events. It is quite possible that the transformation of the brilliant first theater into a Roman arena made the Larissaeans hold philological, dancing and musical competitions in the second ancient theater of the city. The ancient inscriptions advocate this, as they clearly state that during the period of Roman rule in Thessaly, at the great Panthessalian festival of Larissa, the "*Eleftheria*" in honor of "*Zeus Eleftherios*," along with equestrian competitions, philological, dancing and musical competitions were taking place.²⁸

The fame of "*Eleftheria*" was so big that it exceeded the borders of Thessaly, and every time, famous athletes and artists from all over the ancient Greek world, including Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrna, Sinope, etc.) as well as Italy, arrived in Larissa, in order to participate in these games. Trumpeters, preachers, pipers and guitar players took part in the musical competitions. The winners of these competitions, which

²² HELLENIC MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS 2012.

²³ MUNICIPALITY OF LARISSA 2024a.

²⁴ KARAGKOUNIS/TZIAFALIAS 2014, 7.

²⁵ EPHORATE OF ANTIQUITIES OF LARISSA 2024.

²⁶ SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE OF HELLENIC MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS 2014, 2.

²⁷ TZIAFALIAS 2006, 208.

²⁸ TZIAFALIAS 2011, 29.

preceded these nudist and equestrian events, had the honor of subsequently declaring the winners of the rest of the program of “*Eleftheria*.” However, it seems that the competition of the “*Taurotheria*” had the greatest impact. Young men on horseback would chase bulls and at the right moment, they would jump off the animal, grab the bull by the horns and the fight would begin. The goal of the athlete was to subdue the bull, turn the head of the exhausted animal to the ground and place its horns on the earth. In the end, the now vanquished bull was sacrificed on an altar.²⁹ Concerning the first ancient theater, it was remodeled in the times of the Roman Emperors Octavian Augustus and Tiberius, as inscriptions in honor of both were found across the cornice of the proscenium.³⁰

Of all the ancient theaters located in Greece, the first one of Larissa has three features that make it unique. After all, this is also the reason why it has been the reference point of the city for several years after the archaeological survey brought it to the surface. In fact, the sign of the Municipality of Larissa changed in some way since the ancient theater was added to its main previous emblem (coin with a horse)—which was until some years ago the main symbol of the city—and this is proof of its significance for and acceptance by the residents of Larissa. First of all, it is the only ancient theater that is located within an urban fabric (modern Athens is an exception since, in the present, it has expanded to a great extent). It is located in the heart of the city, with its residents having the opportunity to admire it every day since the surrounding area has been pedestrianized. Secondly, the first ancient theater of Larissa stands out for its capacity of approximately 10,000–12,000 spectators. Its capacity was large enough since the ancient theaters with a larger capacity than that of Larissa’s were those of Epidaurus (14,000 spectators), Dodona (17,000 spectators), Argos (20,000 spectators), Megalopolis (20,000 spectators) and Sparta (20,000 spectators).³¹

THE FIRST ANCIENT THEATER AS THE EPICENTER OF FEDERALISM

The symbol of the modern city of Larissa is the main witness of the history of Macedonian and Roman rule. It had a lifespan of six centuries, from about the beginning of the 3rd century BC until the end of the 3rd century AD. After the 2nd century BC, in addition to theatrical performances it was also a venue for open-air meetings of the highest governing body of Thessaly, the famous “*Koinon of Thessaly*” or “*Thessalian League*.”³² The most important leader was Jason of Pherae in 371 BC, who was one of the first leaders—like Agesilaus of Sparta—to envision a pan-Hellenic campaign against the Persians in order to eliminate this constant danger for the Greeks,³³ before Philip II and Alexander the Great. Names of congressmen representatives of the city-states that participated in the federation of Thessaly are inscribed on the pews of the ancient theater. This is how the representatives

of ancient Trikki, the cities of Perravian Tripoli (Pythion-Azoros-Dolichi), Gyrtioni, Hypati, Falanna, Krannonas, Metropolis, Scarfeia and others are known. At the meetings of this Thessalian council, very serious decisions that involved matters of defense and foreign policy were taken in the ancient theater. Cases were also undertaken to determine the geographical boundaries of city-states, as well as issues of common worship in Panthessalic sanctuaries. The decisions of the Thessalian League were written in stone columns erected in the passages and in the foreground of the ancient theater. From the number of the decisions that have been found in the excavations, it can be concluded that the meetings of the representatives of the Thessalian cities at the epicenter of the Koinon (=common), in Larissa, were held at regular time intervals, in the ancient theater of the city. In other words, the glorious monument was the official parliamentary of the Koinon of Thessaly.³⁴

The final settlement of the Thessalians in the fertile plain that took their name was probably completed in the 7th century BC. The presence of several kings coming from Thessaly, which are listed in the Homeric epics, is an indication that during the time of the composition of the epics (750–650 BC), the Thessalian territory was divided into small kingdoms, the centers of which controlled larger or smaller areas in their periphery.³⁵ From these Homeric kingdoms arose in the 7th century BC an idiosyncratic organization, which has established itself in the newest and modern bibliography to be called Koinon of Thessaly, as mentioned above. This Thessalian League is considered to be the oldest system of federal organization and administration in relation to similar structures which developed later not only in central Greece, such as the Boeotian League, but also in the Peloponnese, such as the Achaean League. Regarding the creation and way of organizing the Thessalian League, the elements provided by the ancient written sources are scanty, especially for the early period. The basic source, upon which theories of existence and organization of the Koinon were based, are two excerpts from the lost work of Aristotle’s school, “*Thessalian State*”. These excerpts were saved as comments, interspersed in later entries by lexicographers who certainly knew Aristotle’s work. The first fragment survived by Harpocration and commemorates the division of Thessaly from Aleuas in lots and quads,³⁶ something that Euripides also admits,³⁷ as well as the number of hoplites and horse-men that each city and quad were expected to provide to the Thessalian army.³⁸ The second passage makes reference to the imposition of a tax on the neighboring people, tribes on the borders with Thessaly that were under the control of Thessalians. The amount of this tax was to be defined by Scopas.³⁹ In the work of Herodotus, there are several elements that imply the existence of collective political organization in Thessaly at the end of the 6th and at the beginning of the 5th century BC, when the Thessalian cavalry helped the Athenian tyrant Hippias against the Spartan

²⁹ BATZIOU-EFSTATHIOU 2008, 30–38.

³⁰ MUNICIPALITY OF LARISSA 2024b.

³¹ SPANOS 2017a, 1–4.

³² TZIAFALIAS 2011, 23.

³³ SPRAWSKI 2003, 203–210.

³⁴ KARAGKOUNIS/TZIAFALIAS 2014, 7.

³⁵ HELLY 1995, 70–96.

³⁶ MORGAN 2003, 21–23.

³⁷ TSOKOPOULOS 1910, 85.

³⁸ PRENTZAS 2013, 163–164.

³⁹ RAPTIS 2005, 18–30.

king Cleomenes.⁴⁰ At this point, the existence of a collective institution is evident, which represented the whole Thessaly and had the authority to decide on the behalf of all the Thessalians, to participate in a war away from the homeland as well as to choose the leadership of the military forces.

In all probability, at that time, this collective institution was choosing the supreme lord of the Koinon, granting him extraordinary powers, which exclusively concerned the recruitment and leadership of the Thessalian army in periods of war mobilization.⁴¹ During the 5th century BC and at the dawn of the 4th century BC, there does not seem to be any dramatic change regarding the political level. Shortly before the Persian War, the first coins were minted in Thessaly; they bore local types and were issued mainly by Larissa.⁴² After the Persian War, this common coinage ceases to exist at all, and every city creates coins with its own types. As late as the middle of the 5th century, coinages with common types reappear, demonstrating a separation of the Thessalian public into two parts.⁴³

After the Peloponnesian War, Thessaly is presented by the sources divided into, at least, two parts; on the one hand, lies a loose union of cities in which Larissa superficially held the leading role, with the aristocratic family of Aleuades having the control and the power, and on the other hand Pherae, which shortly before the end of the war had a tyrannical government imposed by Lycophron. The fact is that at the beginning of the 4th century BC, the Koinon ceased its operation, but this situation drastically changed when Jason took power in Pherae. With the use of political and diplomatic means as well as more powerful choices, Jason managed to impose his authority all over Thessaly.

His successor, named Alexander, formulated an aggressive policy against the Thessalian cities, which were at a disadvantage because they could not stand against him. For this reason, the Thessalians requested the intervention of Thebes through Pelopidas, who, in 369–368 BC, imposed a political organization called the “*Koinon of the Thessalians*”, which was more like a military organization, without taking into account Alexander of Pherae, as the latter did not serve Pelopidas’ interests, following the doctrine of the territorial expansion of Thebes while at the same time Alexander proceeded to increase his military strength and this move was translated as a threat to the rest of the Thessalians. Pelopidas’ capture from Alexander in an earlier battle cannot be marginalized in the context of their bad interpersonal relationships.⁴⁴ Philip II revived the traditional division of Thessaly as in the times of Aleuas, but moving beyond the geographical division, he upgraded the quads in administrative regions. After many disturbances, the Koinon ceased to exist and was re-established during the first phase of its federal expansion in Thessaly, after the end of the Second Macedonian War, the defeat of King Phillip V and the liberation of the Thessalians from Macedonian occupation, in 197 BC, waiting for a more prosperous era⁴⁵, while for a

year, absolute anarchy prevailed until the election of the first general, Pausanias from Pherae, in 196 BC.⁴⁶

The first inscriptions of the Koinon that included resolutions, honors and lists of winners, date back to the first decade of its existence. In 194 BC, Flamininus organized the state of Thessaly by making property the criterion for participation in the political and judicial authorities of the cities.⁴⁷ During the 1st century BC, the Koinon of Thessaly bore the brunt of the successive wars of the Romans as the fertile soil of Thessaly was the most suitable source of sustenance for the Roman army (the first Mithridatic War and the conflict between Caesar and Pompey are two typical examples).⁴⁸ The production of grain, in the first place, must have been, for many reasons, a major attraction. The Thessalian plain is considered, by tradition, the granary of the Greek area. In an inscription from 151–150 BC, Thessaly, though it never appeared to form one of the fixed sources of grain supply for Rome, was obliged to supply the capital. This fact—which was essentially part of the general policy of Rome—of the imposition of taxation in kind or the compulsory contribution of the “allies” or vassals suggests that the surplus production of Thessaly could opportunistically be the object of some commercial activity as well.⁴⁹ But the main issue is that even limited grain production in Thessaly could decisively solve the problem of uninterrupted supply of the Roman troops operating in the rest of Greece, ensuring a relative, if not absolute, supply sufficiency.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that the Thessalians supported Pompey, Caesar, after his victory at Pharsala, understanding the importance of Larissa, did not punish it but declared it a free city, like all Thessaly.⁵¹ Shortly afterwards, Augustus confirmed the city’s importance by awarding it the title “*Augusta*”, which means “*respectable*.”⁵² The public of Thessaly included all the cities of the Thessalian area, the “*tetrades*” (=quads) (Pelasgiotis, Estiaiotis, Thessaliois, Phthiotis) but also the surrounding areas that were gradually integrated into it. The cities for which there are testimonies that they participated in the Koinon of Thessaly are thirty-nine.⁵³

At this point, the most important institutions are attested for the Thessalian League. First, the “*Common Lords*”, who made up the whole of the officials. Second, the “*General*”, who was the Head of the Council of Thessaly in Larissa, responsible for writing and sending letters to foreign cities (for example, transporting wheat to Rome), on the top of the federal army, and who probably had jurisdictional responsibilities as well.⁵⁴ His tenure lasted one year, renewable up to four times but not consecutively.⁵⁵ Third, the “*Congress*” was the most important decision-making body for all of Thessaly while it welcomed foreign delegations, in the framework of strengthening international relations. Additionally, it was related to the administration of justice on the federal

⁴⁰ SYNTOMOROY 2007, 200–230.

⁴¹ HATZOPOULOS 1996, 485.

⁴² KAGAN 2004, 79–84.

⁴³ LIAMPI 1996, 107–112.

⁴⁴ PRENTZAS 2013, 176.

⁴⁵ CHANIOTIS 2005, 227–233.

⁴⁶ KRAMOLISCH 1978, 7–9, 45.

⁴⁷ BOUCHON 2005, 48.

⁴⁸ MARTIN 1975, 40–41.

⁴⁹ GARNSEY 1988, 182–186.

⁵⁰ PAPAGEORGIADOU-BANI 2004, 54.

⁵¹ BOUCHON 2005, 33–35.

⁵² ZACHOS 2021, 20.

⁵³ ZACHARAKIS 2024, 75–82.

⁵⁴ ZACHARAKIS, 82–85.

⁵⁵ BOUCHON/HELLY 2015, 241.

level, acting as a court, hiring foreign judges or appointing a mediator.⁵⁶ It was a representative institution, where the number of representatives of each city was proportional to its population size.⁵⁷ The core of all the above was the capital of the Koinon, Larissa, and, more specifically, the ancient theater.⁵⁸ Larissa was by far the most important city of the Koinon since it elected 80 Generals.⁵⁹ Last but not least, the Thessalian League had a pair of sanctuaries; of Athena Itonia at Philia in Western Thessaly and of Zeus Eleftherios at Larissa.⁶⁰ The community of Thessaly had a common calendar and every year, in the month of Itonius, there was a festival in honor of the goddess (Athena) as well as military ceremonies which were connected to the (martial) character of the goddess.⁶¹ During the imperial era, Larissa was a center of imperial worship, with games in honor of the emperors.⁶² Again, the epicenter was the first ancient theater of Larissa.

CONCLUSIONS

Larissa is a city that, in the present, continuing its 8,000 years of existence, tries its best to shape its cultural identity based on its antiquity and the unknown treasures of its past that rise up to the surface, both on the level of monuments and information.⁶³ While there are quite significant cultural assets in the city, such as the Diachronic Museum⁶⁴ and Hippocrates⁶⁵—though it needs a lot of work to be done—the first ancient theater is the core of all this effort. Taking into consideration that there are not many ancient sources that have survived about the city and its history, this monument is a prime opportunity to scrutinize the past since it provides a great amount of information. Thus, the monument makes itself a witness of the broader past, which demonstrates its major differentiation from all the other ancient theaters in Greece, underlying its huge local and regional caliber simultaneously, forming—via federalism—an innovative way of governance whose genesis still preserves a historical primacy, at least, until now.

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⁵⁶ LARSEN 1968, 209–210.

⁵⁷ BURRER 1993, 14.

⁵⁸ BOUCHON 2005, 33–58.

⁵⁹ KRAMOLISCH 1978, 24.

⁶⁰ GRANINGER 2011, 43.

⁶¹ MILI 2015, 225–234.

⁶² CAMIA 2011, 30.

⁶³ SPANOS 2014, 59–104.

⁶⁴ SPANOS 2019.

⁶⁵ SPANOS 2017b, 54–66.

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