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THE BASILICA AS A RARE ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURE IN ROMAN THEATERS AND THE EXAMPLE OF NICAEA (IZNIK)

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Abstract

Basilicas are among the most important and magnificent structures of ancient cities and represent a significant architectural element of Roman urbanism. Generally characterized by a long, narrow architectural plan divided into three aisles by two rows of columns, these structures served functions such as churches or forums. In addition to the common type, they are also known to have been used in different architectural forms and functions, such as in theaters. In Roman theaters, basilicas (Basilicae Theatrum) were positioned at the two side wings of the scaena and served as entrance halls to welcome visitors. Since Roman theaters in Anatolia were generally constructed by revising Hellenistic Period theaters or following the Hellenistic tradition, basilica structures are typically not encountered. However, studies conducted at the theater of the ancient city of Nicaea (Iznik) have revealed that the structure surrounding the colonnaded galleries at the side wings of the scaena is a basilica. This basilica, integrated with the scaena and featuring two-story colonnaded galleries within, constitutes the only known example of its kind in the Roman Empire. The aim of this project is to produce a comprehensive restitution of the crowded Iznik (Nicaea) theater by comparing the architectural pattern surrounding the colonnaded galleries in the Iznik (Nicaea) theater with analogical examples.

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Keywords: Roman, Architecture, Nicaea, Theater, Basilica

ROMA TİYATROLARININ AZ RASTLANAN MİMARİ YAPISI OLARAK BAZİLİKA VE NİCAEA (İZNİK) ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

Bazilikalar antik kentlerin önemli ve gösterişli yapılarından biridir ve Roma şehirlerinin önemli mimari unsurudur. Genellikle ince uzun, iki sütun sırasıyla üç nefe ayrılan mimari plana sahip yapılar; kilise, forum gibi işlevlerle kullanılmıştır. Bilinen yaygın tip dışında, tiyatrolardaki gibi farklı mimari tip ve işlevlerde kullanıldığı da bilinmektedir. Roma tiyatrolarında bazilikalar (Basilicae Theatrum) scaena'nın iki yan kanadında konumlandırılmıştır ve geleni karşılamaya yönelik giriş salonu olarak kullanılmıştır. Anadolu'daki Roma tiyatroları genellikle Helenistik Dönem tiyatrolarının revize edilmesi ya da Helenistik gelenek ile yapıldığından, bazilika yapılarına rastlanmaz. Nicaea (İznik) antik kenti tiyatrosunda yapılan çalışmalarda, scaena'nın yan kanatlarında sütunlu galerileri saran yapının, bazilika olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Scaena ile birleşen bazilika, içerisindeki iki katlı sütunlu galeriler ile birlikte Roma İmparatorluğu içerisindeki tek örneği oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışmada amaç; İznik (Nicaea) tiyatrosunda sütunlu galerileri saran mimari örüntüyü analogik örnekler ile karşılaştırarak bir bütün halinde tanımlamak, İznik (Nicaea) tiyatrosu için restitüsyon önerisi sunmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Roma, Mimari, İznik, Tiyatro, Bazilika.

1. Introduction

Located in the Iznik district of Bursa province, on the shores of Lake Iznik—referred to as *Ascania Limne* in antiquity—the ancient city of Nicaea has largely lost its original urban fabric due to successive historical destructions and the stratification imposed by modern settlement. Within this context, the Nicaea Roman Theater stands out as one of the rare extant monumental structures that dates back to the Roman period and reflects the city's architectural character.

Measuring approximately 102,32 x 79,04 m, the *ima cavea* of the theater is supported by 7 trapezoidal vaults, while its *media cavea* is sustained by 10

barrel vaults integrated into this structural system. The third tier, positioned at the upper limit of the *media cavea* and projected to function as either a colonnaded gallery or a *summa cavea*, rises upon 28 piers. Although remains regarding the architecture of the *scaena* remains highly limited, the substructure layout indicates an Anatolian-type design, characterized by 5 doorways opening onto the *pulpitum*. With an estimated monumental height of approximately 20 meters including all structural units, the theater reflects the general characteristics of typical Roman theatrical architecture; nonetheless, as its *orchestra* exceeds 180 degrees, it simultaneously maintains the architectural traditions of the Hellenistic period (Kardoruk & Öz, 2025b)

The most comprehensive written data regarding the structure is obtained from the letters addressed to the emperor by *Plinius Secundus*, a statesman and historian who served as the governor of the Bithynia province during the reign of the Roman Emperor Trajan. In Pliny's accounts, the lines focusing on the colonnaded galleries of the theater, and relatively on the surrounding architectural pattern, are of paramount importance (Pliny, *Epistulae*, X. 39, 40).

A restitution proposal was made based on studies of the colonnaded galleries located on the two side wings of the *scaena* in the Iznik Roman Theater (Kardoruk & Öz, 2025a). However, during later excavation carried out in and around the galleries, new architectural pattern surrounding the galleries was revealed. When compared with the theater plans, built within the borders of the Roman Empire, these remains have shown that they belong to basilicas, which were used within the original architecture of Roman theaters.

Basilicas are known to have been integrated into many structures. They were used in palaces, treasury buildings, baths, courtrooms, marketplaces, forums,

and at the double entrances of public roads (Gordon, 1931: 375). The halls of some houses and palaces, underground burial chambers, and the structural units located on the two side wings of the *scaena* in theaters were also referred to as basilicas (Gordon 1931: 365-366). Sometimes, depending on their function or architectural form in the places where they were used, they took names such as Market Basilica, Stoa Basilica, or Palace Basilica (Öztaner, 2006: 128-129; Öztaner, 2010: 115, 129; Öztaner, 2014: 522). Consequently, basilicas, which are among the long-standing and important structures of Roman architecture, serving as the most important public buildings of the city. A structure similar to these basilicas was also used in Roman theaters. Basilicae Theatrum, on either side of the *scaena*, arched entrances and corridors separated by columns served as a public entrance hall or gathering place (Isler, 2017: 496).

This study aims to propose a comprehensive architectural restitution of the monumental Roman Theater of Nicaea (İznik). To achieve this, a comparative and analogical analysis will be conducted, focusing on the spatial and structural relationship between the theater's colonnaded galleries and its surrounding urban/architectural layout in comparison with contemporary architectural counterparts.

2. Functions and Examples of Basilicas in Roman Theaters

It is noted that the term “basilica,” used to describe theater halls, first appeared in an inscription found at the Iguvium/Gubbio Theater (Sear, 2004: 193). Frank Sear (2006: 9) has focused on the possibility that “basilica” might be the most appropriate term for these spaces. Concurrently, Hans Peter Isler (2017: 46) notes that these halls were occasionally conceptualized as *parascaena*. However, from structural and functional standpoints, *parascaena* differ significantly from basilicas; the former are characterized as small, narrow

chambers situated on the lateral wings of the *scaena frons*, serving either as access points to the stage or accommodating staircases for upper-tier circulation in multi-story configurations. Furthermore, *parascaena* were primarily utilized as administrative or organizational spaces for theatrical performances (Isler, 2017: 494). Architecturally, the integration of *basilicas* into the lateral wings of the *scaena* inevitably necessitated a structural reorganization of the pre-existing *parascaena* (Isler, 2017: 475). The basilicas also located on either side of the *scaena* should not be confused with the *versurae*. While the *versurae* serve as doors providing access to the *scaena*, the basilica is the room situated above the *versurae*.

One of the most significant factors in the emergence of basilicas must have been the elimination of the horseshoe-shaped *analemma* surrounding the *cavea*. In the earliest examples of theater architecture, the open *parodos*—which provided access either from beneath the audience seating or from a section extending from it—was developed using arch and vault technology; this allowed the stage wings to remain unobstructed (Sear, 2006: 25). Over time, as the *cavea* wings were also retracted and fixed at a full 180 degrees, a suitable environment for basilicas was created (Isler, 2017: 482). In the theater, these spaces, which are thought to have served as entrance halls, may feature elaborate decorations and be further embellished with sculptures, much like basilicas used for public functions (Sear, 2006: 15). Given their rich decoration, they were likely areas used by spectators rather than actors (Sear, 2006: 104; Isler, 2017: 496). There were passages from the *basilicas* to the *scaena*, the *tribunalia*, the *aditus*, the *porticus post scaena*, the *parascaena*, and to the outside of the theater. These passages are significant as they indicate that the basilicas served as reception halls.

The best-preserved examples representing basilicas within the borders of Italy are the theaters of Augusta Bagiennorum, Augusta Taurinorum, Beneventum, Bovillae, Ferentium, Helvia Ricina, Herculaneum, Iguvium, Ostia, Pola (large theater), Pola (small theater), Suessa, Tergeste, Urbs Salvia, Volaterrae, Venafrum, and Minturnae. The only example on the island of Sicily, near Italy, is the theater of Tauromenion. In addition, the theaters of Grumentum, Copiae, Faleria, Marcellus, Pompei, Firmum, Verona, Sidicinum, Arretium, Civitas Camunorum, Scolacium (Malacrino, 2005, fig. 8), Albanum, Casinum, Lanuvium, Gioiosa, Pietrabbondante, Asculum, Carsulae, Spoletium, Faesulae, Albintimilium, and Augusta Praetoria, whose underground plans are not very well preserved but where basilicas are mentioned in sources, can also be included among the Italian examples.

In the region encompassing France and the western part of Europe, basilicas were used in the theaters of Arausio, Arelate, Forum Lulii, Lugdunum, and Vienna, whose substructure plans are well-preserved. However, theater examples like Alba Helviorum, Apta Julia, Augustodunum, Vasio Vocontiorum and Aquae Segetae, where remains are not well-preserved but basilicas are mentioned in sources, can also be included in this group. Basilica plans can be observed in the theaters of Acinipo, Merida, Baelo, Clunia, Regina, Saguntum, Segobriga, Bilbilis, Metellinum, Tarraco and Carthago Nova, which are located within the borders of Spain and have well-preserved substructure plans, as well as the Malaca theater, where the substructure plan is not clearly traceable. In the Balkans, the existence of basilicas is known in the theaters of Herakleia Lynkestis Issa, Salona, Scupi and Virunum.

Theater examples featuring basilicas are also encountered in North Africa and the Levant region. The best-preserved examples with a plan represented by basilicas are the theaters of Bulla Regia, Cillium, Cuicul, Leptis Magna, Thugga

and Tipasa. Furthermore, basilicas were also used in the theaters of Caesarae, Calama, Civitas Pophthensis, Hippo Regius, Sufetula (?), and Thamugadi. In addition to these known good examples, the theaters of Althiburos, Madaurus, Sabratha, Thubursicum Numidarium, Gortyn, Hierapytna, Cyrrhus, Gerasa and Philadelphia also used basilicas. Especially in the Roman theaters located in the Syrian region, the *cavea* did not exceed 180 degrees, and the *analemma* extended parallel to the *scaena*. Therefore, there was no need to shorten the *scaena*, and a suitable environment for basilicas was provided in the side wings. However, the general character of the Levant region shows more Greek than Roman features.

Due to the different developmental paths taken by the theaters located within the borders of Greece and Anatolia, examples of theaters possessing a basilica are pretty rare. In this theater, which were generally constructed during the Hellenistic Period, the *parados* situated between the *orchestra* and the *scaena* were not covered, and the *analemma* being very close to the *scaena*—in other words, the *cavea* exceeding 180 degrees—did not provide a suitable environment for a basilica (Sear, 2006: 25, 65). In these regions, Hellenistic Period theaters were reorganized with additions made during the Roman Period, and continued to be used. In these theaters, known as *Graeco-Roman* style, the new additions were typically made to the *scaena*. The theaters were not constructed as a building complex entirely in accordance with the Roman imperial understanding; although they partially exhibited a Roman character, they mostly retained Hellenistic features. Most examples of this type in Asia Minor are actually found within the borders of the island of Cyprus, which is close to the Eastern Mediterranean region. The existence of basilicas can be mentioned in the following theaters: Troia (Blegen, 1932: 446-448; Blegen,

1934: 246-247; Korfmann, 1992: res. 9; Korfmann, 1994: res. 10b; Rose, 1991: fig. 1, 3) and Smyrna (Canpolat, 1954: 23; Ersoy et al., 2017; Ersoy et al., 2019; Ersoy & Alatepeli, 2018) in Anatolia; Soli (Isler, 2017: 720; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 412) and Salamis (Isler, 2017: 678; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 411) in Cyprus (which can be considered within the borders of Asia Minor); and Corinth (Small, 1983: III.13; Sturgeon, 2004: pl. IIa), Buthrotum (Isler, 2017: 180; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 432), and Lemnos (Isler, 2017: 329; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 338) within the borders of Greece.

The existence of basilicas is mentioned in the Great Theater of Troia and the theater of Smyrna, which are located within the borders of Anatolia. It has been stated that the square-planned structures situated on the sides of the *scaena* in the Great Theater of Troia, which was constructed in the Hellenistic Period and saw some renovations in the Roman Period, are basilicas and are dated to the Augustan Period (Isler, 2017: 623; Sear, 2006: 112). It is mentioned that the theater of Smyrna, another important theater, also features basilicas on its side wings, and that these structures share similar features with the Great Theater of Troia (Isler, 2017: 636). The theater of Smyrna (Ersoy et al., 2026) has been dated back to as early as 100 BC, and it is noted that the structure underwent revisions during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian (Alatepeli, 2009: 19-27, figs. 14, 16, 28; Ersoy, 2022: 8-9). In both theaters, the *cavea* did not exceed 180 degrees; they were built in the Hellenistic Period, and some additions were made in the Roman Period. The structural units characterized as basilicas must have been added during the new additions made in the Roman Period. Although the Great Theater of Troy and the Theater of Smyrna within the borders of Anatolia do not convey the impression of a fully developed Roman theater basilica in terms of plan type when compared with external examples and the Theater of Nicaea, they can nevertheless be evaluated as the initial and pioneering examples of this architectural form in the Anatolian geography.

3. Theater Basilicas of Nicaea (Iznik), (Basilicae Theatrum)

During the excavation carried out around the colonnaded galleries (Kardoruk & Öz, 2025a) located on the side façades of the *scaena* in the Theater of Nicaea, the existence of particular walls encircling the galleries was detected, and it was understood that the galleries were not a standalone structural unit but were connected to the surrounding architectural pattern (Figure 1). Since the walls extended beyond the area designated and fenced off as an archaeological site, the full limits of the architectural remains could not be uncovered. Although not all architectural details were recovered, it was understood, when compared with contemporary examples having similar architectural plans, that the uncovered walls belonged to a basilica (Figure 2).



Figure 1: East And West Basilica Location (Excavation Archive)

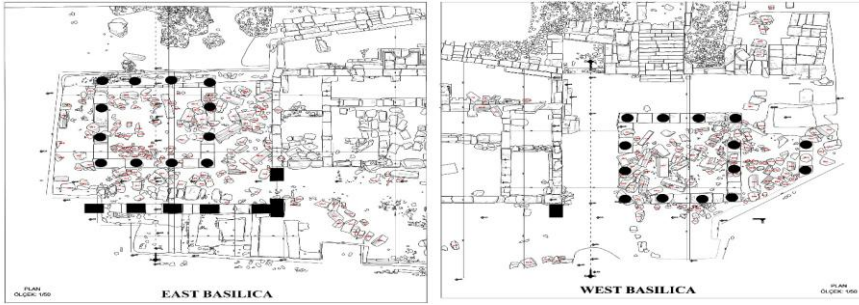


Figure 2: East and West Basilica Plan (Excavation Archive)

The colonnaded gallery found within the eastern basilica has a stylobate with a wall width of approximately 1.20 m. This width increases up to 1.25 m in some parts of the gallery. The dimensions of the structure are approximately 8.50 m in the east-west direction and approximately 9.50 m in the north-south direction internally. Externally, these measurements are approximately 10.92 m in the east-west direction and approximately 11.89 m in the north-south direction. The internal northwest-southeast measurement of the structure is approximately 12.67 m, while the external measurement is approximately 16.17 m. The northeast-southwest measurements are approximately 12.73 m internally, and reach approximately 16.07 m externally.

The colonnaded gallery, which has a square shape, is situated 5.42 m from the *scaena*'s eastern wall (the closest wall) at the southern boundary and 5.19 m from the northern boundary. The distance from the south side, which is adjacent to the *analemma* wall, is approximately 5.31 m at the eastern corner and approximately 5.28 m at the western corner. During the excavation carried out in a limited area to the east of the gallery, a few blocks belonging to the gallery and some architectural block fragments, thought to have been used around the gallery, were recovered. No architectural details that could be connected to the eastern side were found in the limited excavation area.

A wall extends parallel to the colonnaded gallery to the north. The distance of the gallery to this wall is approximately 5.20 m from the northeast boundary and 4.64 m from the northwest boundary. Square blocks, measuring approximately 1.10 x 1.19 m, were found in situ on the wall, constructed in the exact alignment as the postaments located on the northern wall of the colonnaded gallery. The section of the wall extending to the west ends at the eastern wall boundary of the *scaena* and joins it with a 0.90 m wall extension towards the *scaena*, i.e., to the south.

Between the northern wall of the colonnaded gallery and this wall, which runs parallel to the east-west extension of the gallery, large, sequential stone blocks covering a drainage channel approximately 7 m long were uncovered. From the traces on these blocks covering the channel, it was evident that this area had been used as a road or passageway. During the work carried out outside the gallery and within the wall surrounding it, a floor composed of stone fragments and mortar was reached. Due to the large number of marble fragments recovered during the excavations, it was understood that the floor, which was damaged in places, was originally covered with marble, and the mortar was intended to secure these marble slabs in position.

The colonnaded gallery found within the western basilica has a foundation wall with a width of approximately 1.20 m. The dimensions of the structure are approximately 8.50 m in the internal east-west direction and approximately 9.50 m in the internal north-south direction. Externally, these measurements are approximately 10.92 m in the east-west direction and approximately 11.90 m in the north-south direction. The internal northwest-southeast measurement of the structure is approximately 12.72 m, while the external measurement is

approximately 16.08 m. The northeast-southwest measurements are approximately 12.78 m internally and approximately 16.20 m externally.

The gallery, which was built in a square form just like the eastern example, has an average distance of 5.24 m from the *scaena* wall located to its east. Its average distance from the *analemma* wall, which is adjacent to the south, was measured as 5.30 m. The work carried out at the northwest corner was conducted within a limited area. During the excavation undertaken in the area designated as an archaeological site, surrounded by fences, no architectural remains were encountered, except for the architectural blocks belonging to the colonnaded gallery. Even if there are architectural remains in the area, they remain outside the working area.

A section of the foundation wall, which runs parallel to the gallery's western wall in the west and on which postaments are located, has been uncovered. The wall located to the west of the gallery has a distance of approximately 5.19 m from the gallery at the northern corner and approximately 5.50 m at the southern corner, with a width of approximately 1.18 m. The postaments found on this wall, which runs parallel to the gallery in the west, were constructed on the same axis as the postaments on the western wall of the colonnaded gallery. Since only a very small section of the wall was uncovered, the existence of only two postaments was determined. Although Ottoman Period ovens cover a section of the wall on its southern extension, it is understood from the recovered arch blocks and the northern-facing arch abutment at the starting pier that it joins the pier supports, which are thought to have carried the theater's *summa cavea* or the *portico* surrounding it.

The only information regarding the floor pavement in and around the basilica comes from the excavation results in the area between the *scaena* and the

eastern wall of the colonnaded gallery, where a floor mixed with stone fragments and mortar was uncovered. It is believed that the floor, which was damaged in places, was originally covered with marble, as evidenced by the large number of marble fragments recovered during the excavations. The same type of floor and marble slab fragments were also encountered in the work carried out in and around the eastern basilica.

The colonnaded galleries located within the basilicas are square-planned structures, measuring approximately 11.87 m x 11.10 m. Considering the preserved walls, the basilicas surrounding the galleries measure approximately 22x23 m. The first floor of the galleries contained within them is estimated to be approximately 5.96 m high, and the second floor approximately 9.35 m. The roof pediment is thought to have been approximately 1.50 m high. Thus, the total height of the colonnaded galleries within the basilicas is determined to be approximately 17 m. It should be assumed that the basilicas surrounding the galleries were at least this height. Taking these measurements into account, it is evident that this was a magnificent basilica, measuring approximately 22 x 23 m in width and at least 17 m in height, rivaling the basilicas of contemporary theaters.

During the excavation carried out in and around the eastern basilica, the east-west extending wall remnant of the basilica, which runs parallel to the colonnaded gallery, was uncovered. The wall, for which detailed information could not be obtained as its eastern extension extended beyond the fence boundary, continued westward and joined the wall projection located on the *scaena*'s eastern wall, adjacent to the east colonnaded gallery. It is observed that the east-west extending wall was joined with the *scaena* to form an

enclosed space, and a passage into this area was provided by an arch. Since the arch remains had fallen neatly one on top of the other during the excavations, detailed information about the arched doorway for the passage could be obtained. This architectural design, seen on the east-west extending wall in the eastern basilica, is also observed on the north-south extending wall to the west of the colonnaded gallery in the western basilica. Unlike the wall extending perpendicularly to the north-south wall, octagonal postaments were used instead of square piers, similar to those on the first floor of the galleries. Although remnants of the east-west extending wall were not traced in the western basilica, the presence of the same wall projection on the *scaena*, as in the eastern basilica, indicated that the western basilica was similarly joined to the *scaena*. In theaters, basilicas have easy access from outside the theater, thanks to the help of arches and columns. This feature of the Nicaea Theater shows similarities with the theaters of Beneventum (Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 36), Arausio/Orange (Antunes, 2017: Illust. 26; Bieber, 1961: fig. 675; Fiechter, 1914: abb. 78a), Arelate (Small, 1983: III.7; Moretti et al., 2010: fig. 20), Sabratha (Kandilzaied & Rehan, 2019: fig. 1, pl. 1; Lopez, 2017: pl. 1), Herculaneum (Fiechter, 1914: abb. 73; Schlüter, 2003: abb. 3), Tergeste (Malacrino, 2005: fig. 25), Ferentium/Ferento (Tuccini, 2012: 32), Iguvium (Sear, 2004: fig. 1), Helvia Ricina (Isler, 2017: 327; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 59), Pola (large theater) (Isler, 2015: fig. 1), Vienna (Anderson, 2013: 162.98; Hanson, 1959: Illust. 32), Salonae (Isler, 2017: 679; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 220), and Corinth (Small, 1983: III.13; Sturgeon, 2004: pl. IIa).

The arch abutments on the east-west extending wall of the eastern basilica that joins the *scaena*, and the octagonal postaments located on the north-south wall of the western basilica, were constructed on the same axis as the postaments located on the colonnaded gallery. The postaments and arch abutments, which are positioned opposite each other, show that the gallery was connected to this

architectural remnant, and that access to the galleries was provided by the spacing between the two postaments, coinciding with the spacing between the arches. Although a colonnaded gallery, as found in the Nicaea Theater, is not present in all examples, a similar usage pattern is observed in colonnaded or arched examples added to the basilica interior with a different approach. This architectural concept is seen on the basilica wall joining the quadriporticus in the Pompeii theater (Hanson, 1959: Illust. 19; Small, 1983: III.6), at the entrance to the basilica in the Marcellus theater (Fiechter, 1914: abb. 71; Parker, 1999: fig. 4), on the inner and outer walls of the basilica in the Thamugadi theater (Nielsen, 2016: abb. 7), and on the inner wall parallel to the *cavea* wall in the single basilica of the Leptis Magna theater (Bomgardner, 2016: fig. 5; Small, 1983: III.3).

The remnants of the north boundary wall, which runs in an east-west direction in the Eastern Basilica, and the west boundary wall, which runs in a north-south direction in the Western Basilica, are clearly visible. The north-south wall line in the east for both basilicas, and the east-west wall line in the west, extend beyond the surrounding fence boundary and enter private property. Since both colonnaded galleries are symmetrical to each other and have the same structural plan, a similar architectural concept must have been intended for the basilica as well. The missing wall remnants of the two basilicas can be completed by assuming symmetry between them. Examples of basilicas where two walls were constructed open to the exterior using columns and arches are also found in the architectural plans of the theaters of Pompeii (Hanson, 1959: Illust. 19; Small, 1983: III.6), Iguvium (Sear, 2004: fig. 1) Arausio (Antunes, 2017: Illust. 26; Bieber, 1961: fig. 675; Fiechter, 1914: abb. 78a), Arelate (Moretti et al., 2010: fig. 20; Small, 1983: III.7), Vienna (Anderson, 2013: 162.98; Hanson,

1959: Illust. 32), and Saloniae (Isler, 2017: 679; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 220). This situation indicates that on the ground floor, the north wall in both the Eastern and Western Basilicas, the east wall in the Eastern Basilica, and the west wall in the Western Basilica exhibited an open architectural design.

The presence of columns within theater plans featuring a basilica is known from examples such as Marcellus (Fiechter, 1914: abb. 71; Parker, 1999: fig. 4), Merida (Cruz & Pizzo, 2018: fig. 4), Clunia (Gros, 1980: fig. 349), and Venafrum (Malacrino, 2005: fig. 17). In these examples, the columns are independent of each other and are connected to the basilica rather than being a different structural unit within it. The architectural design in these theaters gives the impression that the supports are primarily intended to increase statics or to carry the upper floors of the basilica, rather than for aesthetic decoration. In the Nicaea Theater, unlike these examples, there is a colonnaded gallery within the basilica that can be described as a separate structure, and a similar example is seen only in the Theater of Bostra (Segal, 1981: fig. 23; Segal, 1987: abb. 20-21). Unlike the Bostra example, which is a single-story, unroofed structure built in the Doric order and accessible only on the ground floor, the Nicaea Theater's gallery gives the impression of a separate, two-story structure with a pediment and a roof. The unroofed gallery in the Bostra example, while showing rich decoration on the ground floor, also functions as a load-bearing element supporting the upper floor of the basilica, as in the other examples. The colonnaded galleries in the Nicaea Theater were also likely used to divide the basilica into stories. Indeed, a parapet wall composed of a series of Herms is located between the columns on the upper floor of the galleries (Kardoruk & Ekin-Meriç, 2024). This situation suggests the idea of a portico surrounding it on the second floor of the basilica. The fact that there is a niche of approximately 0,30 m in height in the geisipodes blocks on the first floor of the galleries supports this idea.

The basilicas located on the east and west of the theater, which are thought to be identical in architectural plan, show differences and similarities when compared with other theater examples. The outermost boundary wall of the western basilica ruins joins the piers that support the theater's third story to the south. This plan indicates that the basilica follows the outermost wall line that defines the theater's boundary. With this feature, it shows similarities with the theaters of Albanum (Hesberg, 2006: fig. 9-10), Bovillae (Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 5; Isler, 2017: 174), Herculaneum (Fiechter, 1914: abb. 73; Schlüter, 2003: abb. 3), Beneventum (Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 36), Helvia Ricina (Isler, 2017: 327; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 59), Iguvium (Sear, 2004: fig. 1), Ferentium (Tuccini, 2012: 32), Albintimilium (Astori et al., 2002: fig. 2), Metellinum (Mateos & Picado, 2011: fig. 4), Carthago Nova (Isler, 2017: 205; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 235), Baelo (Casasola et al., 2016: fig. 1), Segobriga (Abascal et al., 2006: fig. 3), Bostra (Segal, 1981: fig. 23; Segal, 1987: abb. 20-21), Hierapytna (Gallimore, 2015: fig. 13), Augusta Bagiennorum (Bendea et al., 2007: fig. 12; Ward-Perkins, 1970: fig. 3), Pola (large theater) (Isler, 2015: fig. 1), Tergeste (Malacrino, 2005: fig. 25), Augusta Taurinorum (Taborelli & Gabuci, 2007: fig. 11-13), Verona (Valluzzi, 2015: fig. 1.17), Lugdunum (Gros, 1980: fig. 347), Arausio (Antunes, 2017: Illust. 26; Bieber, 1961: fig. 675; Fiechter, 1914: abb. 78a), Arelate (Moretti et al., 2010: fig. 20; Small, 1983: III.7), Forum Lulii (Moretti et al., 2010: fig. 18; Small, 1983: III.17), Vienna (Anderson, 2013: 162.98; Hanson, 1959: Illust. 32), Issa (Isler, 2017: 365; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 219), Bulla Regia (Courtois, 1998: fig. 4), Cillium (Isler, 2017: 214; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 253), Leptis Magna (Bomgardner, 2016: fig. 5; Small, 1983: III.3), Madaurus (Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 256), Sabratha (Kandilzaied & Rehan, 2019: fig. 1, pl. 1; Lopez, 2017: pl. 1), Sufetula (Isler, 2017: 740; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 259), Salonae (Isler, 2017: 679; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 220), and Philadelphia (Segal, 1987: abb. 26). The key point here is that the wall, which

joins the pier foundations, forms a harmonious whole with the galleries and the surrounding architectural remains, connecting the structure to the ambulatory level at the base of the *cavea* and creating a circulation corridor. This architectural design has been identified in the theaters of Pompeii (Hanson, 1959: Illust. 19; Small, 1983: III.6) and Urbs Salvia (Antinori et al., 2016: fig. 13), and in only one basilica of the theaters of Beneventum (Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 36), Ferentium (Tuccini, 2012: 32), Pola (large theater) (Isler, 2015: fig. 1), Tergeste (Malacrino, 2005: fig. 25), Arausio (Antunes, 2017: Illust. 26; Bieber, 1961: fig. 675; Fiechter, 1914: abb. 78a), Arelate (Moretti et al., 2010: fig. 20; Small, 1983: III.7), Salonae (Isler, 2017: 679; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 220), Tipasa (Hanson, 1959: Illust. 23), and Herculaneum (Fiechter, 1914: abb. 73; Schlüter, 2003: abb. 3), and in the basilicas of the theaters of Bulla Regia (Courtois, 1998: fig. 4) and Sabratha (Kandilzaied & Rehan, 2019: fig. 1, pl. 1; Lopez, 2017: pl. 1).

The most common plan for basilica structures is one in which the nave is typically built to the same depth as the apse. However, besides these typical examples, exceptional cases are also encountered, such as the theaters of Thamugadi (Nielsen, 2016: abb. 7), Suessa (Chausson, 2008: fig. 2), Saguntum (Hernandez et al., 1993: 29), Thugga (Bejor, 1979: 42.9; Fiechter, 1914: abb. 80a; Hanson, 1959: Illust. 24; Small, 1983: III.16) and Corinth (Small, 1983: III.13; Sturgeon, 2004: pl. IIa), which exceed the depth of the *scaena*. The basilica of the Nicaea Theater, like the exceptional examples mentioned above, is also among the rare examples that exceed the depth of the *scaena*. Here, we noted that during the excavation carried out in and around the eastern gallery, the east-west extending wall joined the projection that extends outward from the *scaena* wall, and that an arched doorway remnant was found there. Consequently, it is seen that, together with the northern wall that joins the *scaena* wall, it exceeds the *scaena* depth by approximately 6 m (Figure 3).

The Basilica as a Rare Architectural Structure in Roman Theaters and The Example of Nicaea (Iznik)

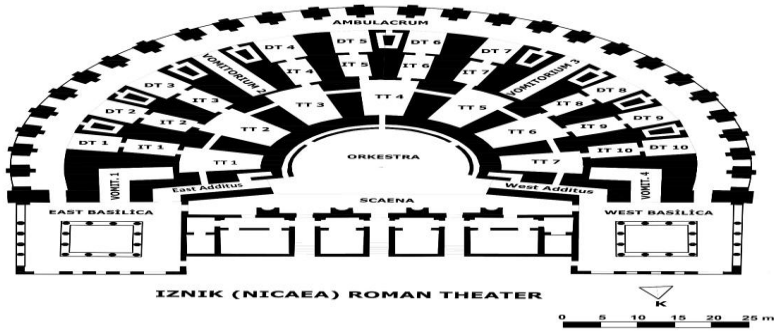


Figure 3: East And West Basilica Plan (Excavation Archive)

In most examples where the *scaena* depth is exceeded, the basilicas are connected to the *porticus post scaena*, creating a passage between the two structures. Since the basilicas in the Nicaea Theater also exceed the *scaena* depth, this strengthens the possibility that a *porticus post scaena* existed in front of the structure. Numerous late period structures, related to the use phases from the 4th century AD and later, are found on the north side of the theater, where the *porticus post scaena* should be located. No structural remnants of a *porticus post scaena* have been found in the excavation carried out. However, it should be noted that, if it existed, the construction phase of the aforementioned late-period additions may have destroyed this structure. At the same time, the fact that the theater was used as a source of spolia for a long time may have accelerated this destruction. Furthermore, the excavated area to the north covers a very narrow space within the section fenced off as an archaeological site. There is also the possibility that the remains of a potential *porticus post scaena* structure might lie outside the fence, depending on its size. However, given that the majority of examples extending beyond the depth of

the *scaena* are integrated with a *porticus post scaena*, it is highly probable that a *porticus post scaena* was also incorporated into the Theater of Nicaea.

The basilica architecture, which provides access to many surrounding units within the theater, is related to various theater units, including *aditus*, *parascaena*, *versurae*, *cavea*, *pulpitum*, and *ambulacrum*. In most theaters constructed throughout the Roman Imperial Period, the basilicas are connected to the *aditus*. Examples of basilicas connected to the *aditus*, which is built as a straight line between the *scaena* and the *cavea*, form the predominant group. However, when the galleries and surrounding structures in the Nicaea Theater are considered part of the basilica, they reveal a difference, as seen in the examples of Urbs Salvia (Antinori et al., 2016: fig. 13) and Clunia (Gros, 1980: fig. 349). In these theaters, as in the Nicaea Theater, passages were provided through the basilica by an opening on the *analemma* wall and were covered with vaults. Basilicas also have a circulation passage between them and specific units of the *scaena*. Basilicas are generally also connected to the *parascaena*, a structural unit located between the basilica and the *scaena*. No such passage is observed in the Nicaea Theater, and this feature is similar to the Urbs Salvia example. In the Urbs Salvia theater entry to the *parascaena* is provided from an entrance behind the *scaena*, whereas in the Nicaea Theater, it is provided from within the *scaena*. There is a direct passage from the Nicaea Basilica to the *pulpitum*, as in the theaters of Albanum (Hesberg, 2006: fig. 9-10), Pompei (Hanson, 1959: Illust. 19; Small, 1983: III.6), Bovillae (Isler, 2017: 174; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 5), Helvia Ricina (Isler, 2017: 327; Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 59), Iguvium (Sear, 2004: fig. 1), Pola (small theater) (Sear, 2006: cat. pl. 94), Tauromenion (Sear, 1996: fig. 2), Virunum (Groh, 2007: 94.10), Segobriga (Abascal et al., 2006: fig. 3), Bulla Regia (Courtois, 1998: fig. 4), Thugga (Bejor, 1979: 42.9; Fiechter, 1914: abb. 80a; Hanson, 1959: Illust. 24; Small, 1983: III.16) and Pietrabbondante (Regina, 1978: tav. 273). However, the Nicaea Theater differs

from these examples in that, despite having a *parascaena* unit, the connection is made directly to the *pulpitum* and not via the *parascaena* connection. None of the mentioned examples has a *parascaena*. Examples that do have a *parascaena* unit generally had the connection to the *pulpitum* made through the *parascaena*.

4. Conclusion

As one of the magnificent monumental elements of the urban fabric in the Roman world, basilicas displayed a wide range of functional diversity, finding a place in various public and civic architectural programs such as palaces, treasury buildings, baths, courtrooms, forums, marketplaces, and theaters. In the literature, this typological diversity has been conceptualized through designations based on functional characteristics, such as Market-Basilica, Stoa-Basilica, Palace-Basilica, and Church-Basilica. Consequently, the use of the term “Theater Basilica” (*Basilicae Theatrum*) for this architectural plan, which has been established as a structural and spatial component of Roman theater architecture, is considered essential for resolving the semantic and typological confusion surrounding this architectural form in the literature.

As a characteristic element of Imperial Period theater architecture, theater basilicas exhibit a more developed plan compared to their early prototypes. These structures are architectural components that complement the *scaena* building from the lateral axes, ensure spatial integration between the different circulation units of the theater, and functionally serve as monumental welcoming and gathering spaces. Although they are generally designed in a square form in accordance with the principle of symmetry within the context of plan typology, exceptional variations with rectangular plans, apsidal forms, or

asymmetrical organizations are also encountered. These modifications in the plan schemes were shaped by topographical obligations and exceptional conditions brought about by architectural programs. Developed examples of theater basilicas are frequently encountered, particularly in settlements across Italy, Gallia, North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Conversely, their limited presence in the terminology of Greece and Anatolia stems from the fact that the Roman Period theaters in these regions largely exhibited a plan scheme bound to the Hellenistic architectural tradition (Graeco-Roman typology).

Comprehensive documentation studies conducted on the colonnaded galleries located on the lateral facades of the *scaena* in the Theater of Nicaea have enabled the development of a concrete restitution proposal for these structures. Recent excavations have demonstrated that the galleries in question were not independent structures, but were instead directly related to their surrounding architectural remains as part of an integrated architectural program. The combination of wall remnants, arches, and column openings identified on-site presents the impression of a composite architectural order in which circulation corridors and interior colonnaded galleries are harmoniously blended. When Roman period structures of similar typology are examined, it is evident that Theater Basilicas—as monumental elements of imperial theater architecture—were utilized within the architectural plan of the Theater of Nicaea. Compared with contemporary monumental structures, the Theater of Nicaea (Iznik), constructed in the 2nd century AD during the reign of Emperor Trajan, stands out as the sole example within the borders of Anatolia that reflects a fully developed Theater Basilica architecture.

The complete architectural boundaries of the basilicas constructed adjacent to the eastern and western wings of the *scaena* could not be fully documented

due to their extension beyond the borders of the 1st-degree archaeological site and the presence of protective site fences. On the other hand, the analysis of the architectural remains traceable in both basilicas demonstrates a typological parallelism between the structures. The similarities in the plan scheme through which both units articulate with the *scaena*, along with the identical plan layouts of the colonnaded galleries within their interiors, strongly support the restitution hypothesis that these structures were designed based on a principle of bilateral symmetry.

Although comprehensive data regarding the substructure plan of the basilicas has been obtained, definitive archaeological evidence concerning their superstructure architectural arrangements and story organizations remains insufficient. However, analogical comparisons of architectural elements recovered from the structure's area, such as architraves, friezes, and column drums, indicate that the basilicas rose in a multi-storied architectural layout. Restitution studies conducted on the colonnaded galleries, also taking the existing substructure data into account, confirm a monumental, square-scaled Theater Basilica model for the eastern and western basilicas, with a minimum height of 17 meters and dimensions of approximately 22 x 23 meters.

In conclusion, when compared with examples in contemporary Roman theater architecture, the basilicas of the Theater of Nicaea incorporate many standard planning features. Parallel to the prevalent trend in the imperial architectural repertoire, the structures were designed in accordance with a square plan layout and the principle of bilateral symmetry (Figures 4–5). Conversely, the size of the structure extending beyond the *scaena* depth positions it as one of the few exceptions within this typology. Covering the passage corridors (*aditus*,

aditus maximus, versurae) between the *cavea* and the *scaena*—the two main components of the theater—these basilicas serve as monumental welcoming and gathering spaces within the circulation scheme, just as in analogous examples. The fundamental element that distinguishes the Nicaea example and renders it unique from its contemporaries is the two-story colonnaded gallery arrangement integrated into its interior spatial design. In addition to adding a plastic and decorative richness to the interior, the galleries in question assumed a structural load-bearing function in the story organization of the building. Considering this spatial configuration, the Theater of Nicaea constitutes the sole example within the borders of the Roman Empire to feature a two-story colonnaded gallery in its interior, standing as the unique representative of fully developed theater basilica architecture in Anatolia.

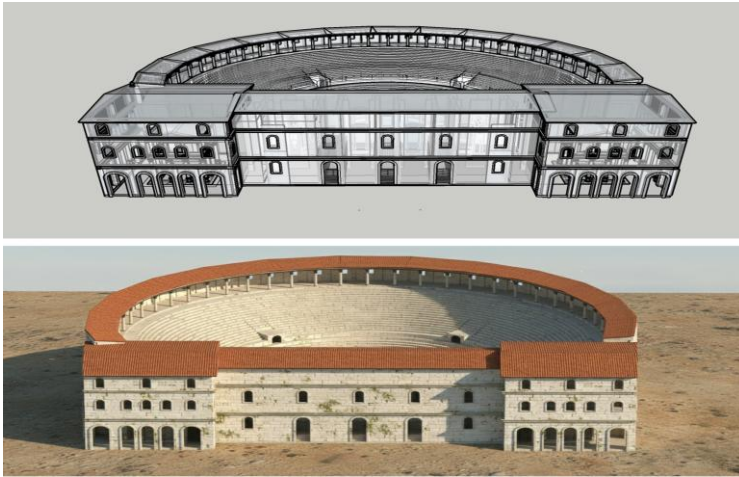


Figure 4: Earth and West Basilica West Façade (Excavation Archive)

The Basilica as a Rare Architectural Structure in Roman Theaters and The Example of
Nicaea (Iznik)

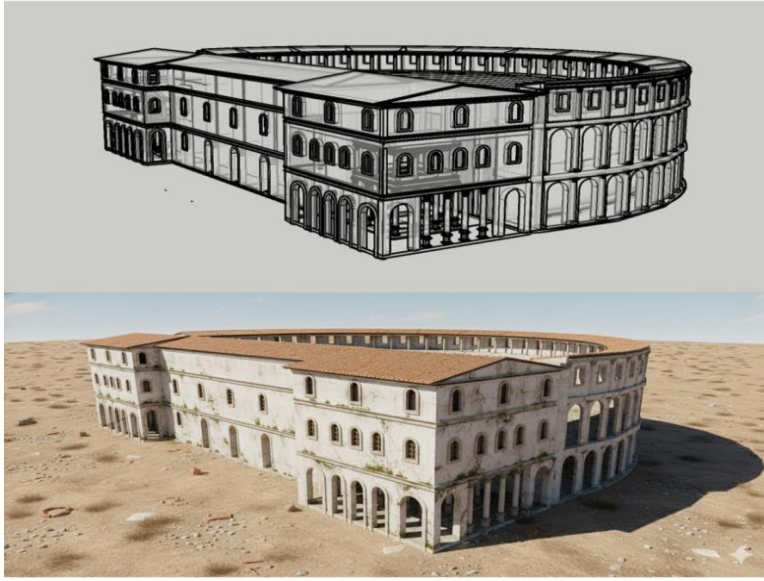


Figure 5: Earth and West Basilica North-West Façade (Excavation Archive)

Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest for the study.

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Ethics Committee Approval:

This research does not require approval from an ethics committee

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Giriş

Bursa ili, İznik ilçesinde yer alan Nicaea antik kenti, antik dönemde Askania Limme (Iznik Gölü) olarak bilinen gölün kenarında konumlanmıştır. Kent modern döneme kadar sürekli iskân gördüğü için daha önceki medeniyetlere ait kalıntılar günümüz yerleşimi altında kalmıştır. Roma Dönemi kalıntılarının da çoğu modern yerleşim altında kalan antik kentte, bu dönemi temsil eden önemli yapılardan biri Roma Tiyatrosu'dur. MS 2. yüzyılda Traianus Dönemi'nde inşaat çalışmaları devam eden tiyatro hakkındaki en kapsamlı bilgiler, dönemin Bithynia Valisi Genç Plinius'un imparatora yazdığı mektuplardan alınmaktadır. Mektuplarda *scaena*'nın iki yanına finansörlerin yardımı ile portiko inşa edildiğinden bahsedilmektedir. Yapılan kazı çalışmalarında mektuplarda belirtilen ve portiko olarak bahsedilen sütunlu galerilerin yapı kalıntıları ortaya çıkarılmış ve iki katlı olduğu tespit edilerek restitüsyon çalışmaları tamamlanmıştır. Sütunlu galeriler ve çevresinde yapılan son dönem kazı çalışmaları galerilerin tek başına bir yapı birimi değil, çevresinde ortaya çıkan mimari örüntü ile ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir. MS 111 yılında kesin yapım aşamasında olduğunu bildiğimiz galeriler ve çevresindeki mimari kalıntıların Roma imparatorluk sınırları içerisinde sıklıkla kullanılan ancak Anadolu'da örneklerine rastlanmayan bazilikalar (Basilicae Theatrum) olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Bu mimari örüntüyü bir bütün halinde anlamak için analogik örnekler ile karşılaştırılarak işlevi, mimari düzeni, sütunlu galeriler ile bağlantısı ve olası restitüsyon önerisi çalışmamızın ana hatlarını oluşturmuştur.

Metot

Nicaea Roma tiyatrosu Anadolu sınırları içerisinde tonoz ve kemer teknolojisi kullanılarak yerden tamamen bağımsız inşa edilmiş bir tiyatrodur. Ayrıca bünyesinde barındırdığı bazı mimari özellikler de Anadolu'da bulunan tiyatrolardan oldukça farklıdır. Anadolu sınırları içerisinde inşa edilen tiyatrolar yamaç eğimi kullanılarak inşa edilmiş, genellikle Helenistik dönem tiyatrosu özelliklerini yansıtan yapılardan oluşmaktadır. Helenistik dönemde yapılan tiyatrolar Roma döneminde tekrar revize edilerek özgün Helenistik karakterinden uzaklaşmıştır. Revizyon sırasında yapılan eklemeler genellikle *scaena* üzerinde olmuş ya da yan kanatlara, genişleyen *cavea*'ya tonoz ve kemerler eklenerek giriş-çıkış sirkülasyonu genişletilmiştir. Bu tiyatrolarda *cavea* 180 dereceyi aştığından dolayı *scaena*'nın yan kanatlarında bazilika yapısı için uygun alan oluşmamıştır. Anadolu sınırları içerisinde Roma döneminde yapılan

tiyatroların çoğu da Helenistik üslupta yapılmaya devam etmiş ya da *cavea* Roma dönemi karakterini taşıyacak şekilde 180 derece yapılırsa da bazilikalar eklenmemiştir. Nicaea Roma tiyatrosu Roma döneminde Anadolu'da yer alan birçok antik tiyatrodan olduğu gibi Helenistik köklerine bağlılığını gösterecek birçok özelliği bünyesinde barındırmasına rağmen birçok açıdan Roma tiyatro geleneğine göre inşa edilmiştir. Hibrit mimari plana sahip tiyatrodan roma tiyatrolarında neredeyse gelenek haline gelen bazilikalar *scaena*'nın yan kanatlarına eklenmiştir. Nicaea tiyatrosu bu özelliklerinden dolayı Roma İmparatorluk sınırları içerisindeki özellikle Anadolu dışında çağdaşı diğer tiyatrolar ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Frank Sear (2006) ve Hans Peter (2017) tarafından yapılan araştırmalarda dünyada gün yüzüne çıkarılan tüm antik tiyatroların katalog çalışması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Temel olarak kullanılan bu referanslarda bazı tiyatroların güncel planlarının olmadığı fark edilmiş, bu yüzden güncel yayınlara ulaşılarak Nicaea tiyatrosu ile plan şeması olarak karşılaştırılmıştır. Çalışma kapsamında analogik örneklerle yapılan karşılaştırmalarda Nicaea tiyatrosunda *scaena*'nın iki yanında konumlanan sütunlu galeriler ve çevresindeki mimari kalıntıların Anadolu dışında hemen hemen tüm tiyatrolarda kullanılan bazilika yapısı olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Roma İmparatorluk sınırları içerisinde bazilikaya sahip tüm planlar incelenmiş, Nicaea tiyatrosu ile benzer ve farklı yönleri tartışılmıştır.

Bulgular

Bazilikalar Roma'da Geç Cumhuriyet, Erken İmparatorluk Dönemi'nden itibaren kullanılmaya başlanmış, zamanla Roma şehirlerinin önemli bir mimari unsuru haline gelmiş ve geniş bir işlevsel çeşitlilik göstererek saray, hazine binası, hamam, mahkeme salonu, forum, pazar yeri ve tiyatro gibi farklı kamusal/sivil mimari programlarda yer bulmuştur. Bu çeşitlilik; işlevsel niteliklerine göre bazen Çarşı-Bazilikası, Stoa-Bazilika, Saray-Bazilikası ve Kilise-Bazilikası gibi adlandırmalarla kavramsallaştırılmıştır. Tiyatro bazilikalarını yaygın bilinen genel plandan ve işlevlerden ayırmak adına Tiyatro-Bazilikası (Basilicae Theatrum) gibi bir adlandırmanın daha uygun olacağı anlaşılmıştır. Tiyatrolarda bazilikadan *scaena*'nın ve *cavea*'nın tüm birimlerine geçiş sağlanabiliyordu. Bu yüzden *scaena*'nın iki yan kanadında konumlandırılmıştır. Genellikle kare şeklinde ve birbirlerine simetrik olarak inşa edilen bazilikaların, dikdörtgen, apsisli ya da birbirine simetrik olmayan nadir örnekleri de mevcuttur. Mimari plan olarak *scaena* derinliği ile aynı ölçüde yapılan bazilikaların bu derinliği aştığı ya da aşmadığı örnekler ile de temsil edilirler. *Scaena* ile aynı yükseklikte yapılan bazilikalar çok katlıdır ve katları bölmek için sütunlar ya da payandalar gibi farklı destekleyici mimari unsurlar kullanılmıştır. Nicaea tiyatrosunda yapılan çalışmalarda *scaena*'nın yan kanatlarında yer alan ve iki katlı sütunlu galerileri saran mimari örüntünün analogik örnekler ile karşılaştırıldığında bazilika olduğu

anlaşılmış ve geleni karşılamaya yönelik giriş salonu ya da toplanma alanı olarak kullanılmıştır.

Sonuç

Nicaea tiyatrosunda bazilikaların hangi işlevlerle kullanıldığını ve planını ortaya çıkarmak ve restitüsyon önerisini sunmak için güncel kaynaklar ile birlikte ayrıntılı bir çalışma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çağdaşı tiyatrolar ve Nicaea tiyatrosu işlev, plan tipi gibi özelliklerle karşılaştırıldığında benzer ve farklı bazilika özelliklerini bünyesinde barındırdığı anlaşılmıştır. Diğer tiyatro bazilikaları gibi Nicaea tiyatrosu bazilikaları da *scaena* ve *cavea*'ya ulaşımı sağlayan *pulpitum*, *versurae*, *aditus*, *aditus maximus*, *parascaena*, *tribunalia*, *ambulacrum*'a giriş ve çıkışların üzerini kapatan geleni karşılamaya yönelik giriş salonu ya da toplanma yeri olarak kullanılmıştır. Mimari plan tipi, en çok kullanılan kare plan şeklinde yapılmış ve nadir örnekler arasında sayılan *scaena* derinliğini geçmiştir. Bazilikalar içerisine katları bölmek ya da statik amaçlı yapılan eklemeler Nicaea tiyatrosunda farklılık göstermektedir. Sütunlar, payandalar ya da duvarlara birleşik şekilde yapılan payeler yerine, içerisine iki katlı Korinth düzeninde inşa edilmiş ve ikinci katında hermelerin yer aldığı sütunlu galeriler inşa edilmiştir. Bazilikalar içerisinde kullanılan iki katlı sütunlu galerinin bir örneği yoktur ve Roma imparatorluk sınırları içerisinde bu plan şeması ile tek örneği temsil etmektedir.