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Professor S. Dakaris characterized Gitana as “a privileged settlement for its beauty and fortification.” He was the first to start bringing Gitana to light. Today’s visitors searching for ancient traces is also privileged to find themselves in this paradise in Thesprotia, 1.5km from the Kalama dam.

Another capital, the capital of ancient Thesprotia and seat of the Thesprotian *Koinon* (League), estimated to have been founded in the middle of the 4th century B.C. or briefly thereafter, was destroyed by the Romans as planned, in 167 B.C.: Gitana. Although life in the city continued at least until the end of the 1st century B.C., the destruction was devastating. Its ruins bear indisputable witness to the strength and importance of Gitana, which consequently presented an obstacle to the conquerors’ plans.

Gitana is a town with the enigmatic name indeed. Did it come from “gitea,” or “itia,” meaning willow, due to the many willow trees which grow in the area? Maybe from “Titani,” or “titanus,” meaning mortar, plaster, white colour, because the soil in the region contains titanic, or plaster? Or it might have derived from Titan, son of Lycaon and brother of Thesprotus? Whatever it was, the founders had no difficulty in choosing a location to build it around 335-330 BC. The ideal place was already there for the model state in an area of dazzling beauty, which also provided

natural protection. The ancient Thesprotians built a fortress-city. It was protected by the rocky bulk of Mt. Brysellas in the northeast and this was where their acropolis was built. The River Kalamas (Thiamis in ancient times) surrounds the town on the three remaining sides.

Kalamas was precious not only for its water, the fertile delta-shaped plain formed by its silt or the natural protection it provided, but also because it was navigable down to its estuaries of the Ionian Sea, allowing the residents of Gitana to widen their horizons, fill their storerooms with rich products and enrich their minds with new ideas that were transported easily and freely. This is proved by the minting of coins between 335 and 330/325 BC. It was the only coin minted by the Thesprotian Assembly, which perfectly combined tradition with a new age: it used the symbol of Elea, the first capital of Thesprotia, which was a link between our world and the underworld - the head of Persephone and the three-headed Cerberus - and replaced the national Elea with THE(SPROTON).

The Thesprotian League (*koinon*) had a brief lifespan, as it joined the Apeiros (Epirus) coalition in 33/323, a coalition composed of the Molossians and the Thesprotians and subsequently, between 232 and 167 B.C., the Epirote League (*koinon*).



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FOLLOW A ROUTE TO HISTORY



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
Ministry of Culture and Sports

EPHORATE OF ANTIQUITIES OF THESPROTIA



GITANA

Gitana was fortunate to be founded at a time when the experience of city-building and city-living had been already defined. Forty-five walled settlements, such as Dimokastro, Elina, Fanoti etc., and the dominant settlement of Elea, were organized on natural rock mounds which ensured their vigil of the wider region of the unfolding fertile plains with the bountiful river waters. This backdrop was valuable material for those who designed Gitana and decorated it with impressive public buildings and comfortable private houses. Life was following the rhythm that suits to a city state which is the political, administrative and financial centre

Gitana had the good fortune of being founded at a time when the experience of constructing cities and most importantly living in them had matured. An excellent example is the fortified settlement of Elea, founded just before the middle of the 4th century B.C., which appears to have been the seat of the Thesprotian League for a number of decades. Elea, with its strong polygonal walls and exceptional city planning and building layout, appears to have served as a valuable blueprint for Gitana's planners, who decorated the city with impressive public buildings and comfortable private residences.



Archaeological excavations have revealed a 76m long alley, which formed the Agora boundary on the north side. A series of 26 Doric pillars at the front and 14 Ionic pillars in the interior support the roof which provided shade and protection from the rain. On the south side of the Agora, there was a complex of scores of square shops where a part of the trade was carried out.

Of all the public buildings, the most distinguished is a monumental, luxurious building with meticulous rooms arranged around a central courtyard. Three of these rooms were actually meeting rooms with incredibly beautiful mosaic floors, portraying themes from the sea. Inside the building, *Archaeologists* discovered three thousand clay seals in its interior. Some of them bear the inscription "GITANA" in the Doric dialect. This find led specialists to believe that the building was used as the town Registry. Amongst the public buildings is a small religious building with a vestibule, nave and a paved yard in front of its entrance.

During the town's heyday, a dividing wall separated the public area and religious buildings from the Agora and the direct access to roads leading to the Agora. It seems that this was a symbolic separation of political and religious life from economic life.

The daily life of the residents had many cultural features. The Hippodamian town plan was used in Gitana and this ensured easy movement along broad roads (4-6m wide), which were intersected by three large roads going from north-west to south-east. The town plan defined built spaces and blocks with beautiful functional houses. A fourth large road led residents and visitors out of the settlement to a charming place on the banks of the River Kalama. A beautiful theatre with a capacity of 4,000-5,000 spectators was standing there.

The theatre auditorium nestles in the arms of three mounds Mavronoros to the west, Smertos to the north and Sinani to the south. This was where residents of Gitana enjoyed fine tragedies and witty comedies. The Thesprotian Assembly also met here. The theatre's use as a parliament venue not only for locals but also for Epirotes from other areas, dictated its architectural design so that it would draw the same admiration just as the surrounding area, which had a verdant variety of trees and bushes due to the River Kalamas below the theatre. Its significance is indicated by the rampart which protects its vulnerable side, whilst the other sides were protected naturally by the river.

Local limestone was used to build the theatre. The orchestra forms a complete circle, with an engraved square-shaped design in the middle, and is crossed by the proscenium whose pillar (15.5m long and 50m wide) survives today. The stone stage is rectangular and measures 15.5x5.5m.

Inside the stage, excavations revealed pilasters of seven upright columns. It is obvious that these pilasters supported the roof. The floor was made of gravel and pressed earth. In the centre of the stage there was a door which allowed actors to enter and exit.

If the stage belongs to the actors and the orchestra to the chorus, then the spectators to these wonderful dramas as well as the members of the Epirote Assembly who met here, sat on carefully constructed limestone seats in the auditorium. It comprised twenty-eight seating rows arranged in two sections, the upper cavea and the lower cavea. Eight *klimakes* (stairways) separate the cavea into seven kerkides (seating sections). In his poem

"Ancient Theatre," famous Greek poet Yiannis Ritsos talks of an unsuspecting handsome young Greek who stands in the middle of an ancient theatre and lets out a cry "not out of admiration; he felt no admiration at all; and even if he did, he would not show it; it was a simple cry of the untamed joy of youth or just to test the acoustics of the place." Today's sensitive visitors may or may not react like that young man, but they will surely hear the cries, voices and whispers, the breaths of those who sat on these seats centuries before. They will surely feel close to these ancient spectators when they read the names of those who had them engraved on the front of many seats.

Research at the theatre has not yet been completed. However, the picture up until now is promising in anticipation of the discovery of more finds: the biggest part of the auditorium in the upper tier (at the southern part of the auditorium below the tier), parts of passages and retaining walls, as well as various structures (whose function has not yet been explained) south of the stage which were detected in investigatory digs in 1997.

The coins found in the theatre date back to 234-168 BC, in a period when members of the Epirote Assembly met here. Also found here was a coin from the reign of the last king of Macedonia, Perseus (178-168 BC), who was defeated by the Romans in the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC. • From this point onwards, the theatres slowly fades into oblivion, Gitana along with it.



The Roman conquest of Epirus in 167 B.C. did not mark the end of life in Gitana. Excavation finds show that a large part of the city continued to be inhabited. Indeed, the discovery of 1st century B.C. Italian commercial amphorae indicates that commercial activity did not entirely cease. The final decades of the 1st century B.C. ought to be viewed as the end of the city. That is when the curtain fell on powerful, significant Gitana. **Twenty centuries later, life would return in the form of archaeologists bringing the city to light and visitors awed by its glorious past.**

