



"Peristyle house" and amphitheater in the Archeological Area of Amiternum



Relief with gladiators from Amiternum (2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BC). Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo dell'Aquila



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## The Archeological Area of Amiternum



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The city of Amiternum stood at the center of a vast district located between the present-day towns of Barete and Scoppito and the city of L'Aquila. The area, inhabited by Sabine populations before the Roman conquest, was incorporated into the Roman Republic at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and became the monumental administrative center of a dispersed settlement. Recent investigations have confirmed the presence of prominent buildings, including the still-visible remains of the theater, the amphitheater, the city's main road, known as the Via Cecilia, and a large public structure referred to as the peristyle house.



The theater of Amiternum. 1: stage backdrop; 2: curtain; 3: staircase; 4: seating area; 5: road.

Archeological excavations at the theater of Amiternum were carried out starting in 1878 by Angelo Leosini. Semicircular in shape, it could accommodate approximately 3,000 people. During the excavations, large statues were recovered: among them was a female figure shown in the exhibition area, along with several fragments of the architectural decoration in limestone coming from the area of the stage backdrop.



Objects from Amiternum and surrounding areas (theater exhibition area)

Recent excavations have made it possible to date the beginning of the theater's construction between 50 and 25 BC.

At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the building underwent modifications with the addition of the stage backdrop (no. 1) and a mechanism for the curtain (no. 2).

Other decorative elements were found in a large pool in front of the theater, now buried. These include fragments of statues and a wellhead showing a bull's head and a gladiator, which can be seen in the exhibition area.

A staircase and brick columns were added at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (no. 3).

The structure was used until the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century AD, as evidenced by an inscription mentioning performances still being held in the theater at that time.

Later, the building lost its function: its construction and decorative materials were recycled, while houses, a cemetery (5<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> century AD) and a road bordered by stone walls (15<sup>th</sup> century AD, no. 5) were built over the seating area (no. 4).

The theater area was connected to the amphitheater by the Via Caecilia, the road that crossed Amiternum, a short section of which is visible at the end of the visitor route.

In this part of the city, recent excavations have brought to light the remains of a temple that faced this important roadway.



The amphitheater of Amiternum. 1: supporting structures for the seating areas; 2: central performance area. To the left the so-called peristyle house (3) [© Nicola Genovese].

A short distance away, the remains of the amphitheater are preserved. They have remained visible throughout the centuries and were fully brought to light at the end of the 1960s.

The building was constructed in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and could accommodate approximately 5,000 people. The structure has an elliptical shape and was built on three levels of arches and vaults, made primarily of bricks, which supported the seating for spectators (no. 1).

In the arena—the central space designated for performances—gladiatorial combats and wild animal hunts took place (no. 2). The northern façade of the structure was restored during the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

Traces of interventions dating to the early Middle Ages indicate that the building remained in use until that period.

Next to the amphitheater, a large building known as the peristyle house (no. 3) has been identified. Its function is still debated: it may have been a marketplace, the headquarters of a professional guild associated with the amphitheater or a gladiators' corporation.