

The theater of Beth-Shean originally seated about 8,000 spectators. The stage, to the right of the long trench that runs from upper left to lower right in this view, measures 270 feet long, while the distance from the stage to the back of the outer wall opposite the stage is about 190 feet. Immediately behind the stage is the *scaenae frons* (with partially standing columns), which served as a backdrop for performances. Beyond it (to the right) is a street. Originally the building was lavishly decorated with marble--relief carving, statues and Greek inscriptions--many of which can still be seen. The theater was erected during the second century C.E. It fell into decay during the third century, but was renovated again during the sixth century, probably under the emperor Justin I (518-527 C.E.). During this period the substructure of the stage was rebuilt so that water ballets or water games could be introduced.

The theater was excavated by Shimon Appelbaum from 1959 to 1961 and by Avraham Negev in 1962 under the auspices of the Israel National Parks Authority and the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums.