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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on my Ph.D. dissertation topic, which was defended on May 2009 in the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens. The goal of this study is to present with a critical view the ideological aims of the monument management and the urban planning in the historic city of Rhodes during the Italian occupation 1912-47. The topic of this dissertation deals with issues as the management of monuments and their surrounding environment, including monuments in the greater vicinity of the historic city of Rhodes, the inclusion of monuments and newer buildings into existing urban structures, and the transition from the concept of the monument as a unit to monument as a whole. The more than thirty years Italian occupation of the Dodecanese has left to the Greek administration a distinguished monumental complex which, although it was deliberately emphasized through specific interventions the Latin appearance, kept at several points the complex form. Bequest but can also be seen as the responsibility to its conservation, which was aware of the Greek authorities in the earliest years of the incorporation of the Dodecanese in Greece (1948). It also seems the Italian occupation contributed decisively to give the meaning of the monument at that location, ahead of the rest of Greece, urban dimension. Over the next decades of the ‘60s and ‘70s the restored monuments and sections of the medieval city of Rhodes, such as the Knights’ Street and the Grand Master Palace, became stable, representative images of the tourism product, necessary for the stimulation of the ascending stream of visitors. Therefore, the form that these buildings had attained by the Italian interventions crystallizing as the landmarks of the city.

INTRODUCTION, EXPERIMENTAL, RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In the morning of May 4th 1912, the Italian troops landed in Rhodes and until the end of that month they occupied the rest of Dodecanese islands under the official justification of creating a diversion for non-recognition by the Ottoman government of Italy’s decision to annex a large part of then Turkish-occupied Libya. Although Italy had thought long time ago to transfer the center of hostilities in the Aegean, it is worth noting that the islands of the Archipelago had previously never got into the heart of Italy’s agenda. Instead, by exploiting the potential disintegration of the erstwhile dominant in the Ottoman Empire, Italy was pushing strongly for a zone of influence in Asia Minor. So although in principle the initiation of this convulsive seizure of the islands was only to prevent the transport of troops and munitions in the continuing war in Libya, one can not exclude that it might be thought, after the course showed that they could easily be a kind of “base” to control the region, but also to claim territories in Asia Minor.

During the first period of the thirty five years Italian occupation of the Dodecanese, which covers the first decade (1912-1923), although marked both by the uncertainty of the stay of the Italian troops in the region and the unstable global political environment, the foundations of “all constructions” that would be built during the next two decades were laid. In this line of argument moved both the archaeological activity, and the restoration of monuments, which focused on
enhancing the remains of Knights’ architecture. This restoration activity very soon after was used in order to strengthen the Italian aspirations in the region.

Italy, on the edge of the 19th and 20th century, was between the leading countries in the fermentation of the first theories about the monument restoration. In this country have been designed theories that tried to reconcile the two conflicting currents that have characterized the 19th century. In those years in Italy have been formed the so-called “philological” and “historic” schools of restoration with the main representatives of Camillo Boito and Luca Beltrami respectively, which adopted an approach that is inserted between the “doctrine” of stylistic restoration of Viollet le Duc and Anti-Restoration Movement of John Ruskin. Alongside the first two decades of 20th century, mainly thanks to the outstanding figure of Gustavo Giovannoni, they have been approached the theoretical aspects of the protection not only of individual monuments but also of the surrounding of these as well as the character of the historic part of the cities, which because of changing urban landscape of those years were under constant threat.

Along with the occupation of the islands, the new “conquerors” operate a mechanism according to which the medieval-latin past of Rhodes is given an ideological coating. A few months after the military takeover the Italian Ministry of Education sends the medievalist Giuseppe Gerola to the island in order to record the monumental wealth of the Dodecanese. Gerola, in his texts will several times highlight the Italian contribution to the achievements of the Knights Hospitallers in the region with the aim to underscore the historical continuity of the Italian presence on the island and therefore to show that the occupation is something perfectly normal. He won’t miss however to express his views about the need to preserve the historic character of the town of Rhodes, noting that this city not only possess...
important monuments but is also a monument in herself [1]. In January 1914 he will interfere in the restoration of the Hospital of the Knights, the first project to be carried out by the Italian administration in the fortified town of Rhodes. This building (Fig.1), the most representative of the monastic order, is located in one of the most focal points of the town. Gerola’s interference in the works will mark the turning of the adverse international climate that had developed during those first months towards the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese, and above all, will be crucial to the progress of future interventions at the medieval monuments of the town. In 1914, Gerola established the permanent Archaeological Mission of Rhodes headed by a young archaeologist, Amedeo Maiuri, and provided the new use of Hospital of the Knights after its restoration. The building was decided to accommodate the Archaeological Museum of Rhodes, use which it retains to date. The Hospital of the Knights, construction of the first half of the 15th century, seems to have lost its original function from the early years of Turkish occupation. Having remained uninhabited for a long time, in the mid 19th century was converted into barracks, which provided most of the changes, both in its structure and its external and internal facades that the Italians inherit by the Turks (Fig.2). Gerola, in the short time he stays in Rhodes, restore the monument to its original form (Fig.3), moving between philological research and stylistic influences, as an expert in medieval architecture. It is worth noting, however, that although he completed the restoration in the main, east façade of the building, he maintained the later arcade upstairs [2]. The work was continued and completed by Maiuri, so that the Archaeological Museum to begin operating in January 1915. Maiuri, as epigraphist, although non-specialist to restorations of medieval architecture, restored the building falling in with the wider trend that characterized the interventions on the monuments at the time.
The monument after the removal of all subsequent additions and alterations, regained the tight-closed monastic style (Fig.4). The additions in parts of the façade and its internal space, although imitated real forms of both the monument itself and the neighbouring buildings, they aimed to restore the knights’ style that had been disturbed and often covered by later alterations. This intervention was not only the starting point of the Italian restorations in the medieval town of Rhodes, but also the guide for whole sections of the urban structure which were to regain a single style: the knights’ style [3]. Almost simultaneously with the works at the Museum, Maiuri began what could be called “the restoration of an image”. Interventions on the facades of the Auberges of different langues in Knights’ Street, the most important axis of Collachium (the internal Castrum of medieval town) were introduced to a specific plan of enhancing this Street as an entity of unparalleled beauty and artistic value hidden beneath the many additions and alterations of the last years of Turkish rule (Fig.5). But what certainly confirms the strong stance of the Italians towards the integral preservation and enhancement was the legislative regulation of that issue through a special Decree (1920) of the “Zona Monumentale” preserving the very significant residues of the fortifications of Rhodes (Fig.6). “Zona Monumentale”, with all the commitments entailed, was declared free area around the walls which was occupied by Ottoman and Jewish cemeteries. This free of buildings monumental zone still standing today, although it has become a park, turns the town of Rhodes into a unique for the Greek standards case of a town having a inner city green area [4].

During the next period of Italian occupation, 1923-1936 the plan for the creation of the “Italian Rhodes” is implemented. The ultimate Italian dominance on the Dodecanese islands, as well as the change of the political scene in Rome proved to be the determining factors for the implementation of the above plan. The political choices and will of the first governor Mario Lago that the new fascist government of Rome appointed, proved to be equally important for the city’s new image. Lago, probably imitating the governors of other Italian colonies, soon decided to take Rhodes out of the “isolation margin” by transforming it into an important tourist destination, as well as a world renowned cultural center. The determination of the framework of the construction of the “New Rhodes” was a top priority for Lago and led to the
establishment of the city’s Master Plan which was based on the preservation of the integrity of the wall-fortified town and the enhancement of its latin-knight character. Meanwhile, well known architects of the regime arrive in Rhodes and they collaborate both with the Office of Public Works and the longer established Ephorate of Monuments and Excavations of the Dodecanese, at which in 1924 the young archaeologist Giulio Jacopich is appointed head of. I refer to Florestano Di Fausto, Pietro Lombardi, Rodolfo Petracco, Armando Bernabiti and Oriolo Frezzotti who plan new buildings, but interfere also in the medieval town.

Although the restoration of the Hospital of the Knights was completed in 1918 with the south extension of the building, the constant growth of the archaeological collection that has been resulted in the years 1928-29, led two more rooms to be opened to the public, which were dedicated to the necropolis of Ialyssos and Kamiros, and also to transfer the ethnographic collection at an adjacent building (the Fr. Diomede Villaragut building). This knight building, after the necessary intervention it has been decided to host permanently the above collection. The gradual development of the collections of the Museum has increased the request for an arrangement of the surrounding area. By the late 20s the Archaeological Museum Square has not a uniform character as an entity, although the interventions both in the Hospital and in the Auberge of the langue of England (1919) were completed over a decade ago.

The Church of S. Maria del Castello (the Latin Cathedral), which constitutes the northern front of the square, after having been converted it into the Mosque of Enderum, acquired in the main façade a small porch and a minaret built over its bell tower. The minaret had a dominant position in this part of the town. And in the other fronts of the square there were knights’ buildings with visible deterioration of the last years of Turkish rule.

The arrangement of the Archaeological Museum square occurred in the late 20s as one of the key options of Lago. In his letter to the governor, Amedeo Maiuri, among the necessary arrangement in the medieval town, proposes an arrangement of the Museum square as requisite “…for a more decent consistency in the monumental surrounding of the building…” [5].

The outset for the arrangement of the surrounding area of the Archaeological Museum, was aiming not only to the restoration of the original character of the building, but also to a reconciliation of two opposite aspirations: the desire of Italians to create a space that resembles the “familiar” environment of an Italian city, and the intention of the local government to acquire a site within the wall-fortified town, symbolically charged and suitable for the promotion of authority. From the

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Figure 7: The proposal for the arrangement of the Archaeological Museum square. (A. Bernabiti 1928)
mid-20s the constructed scenery of the Archaeological Museum began to be used for official ceremonies and for the celebration of various anniversaries.

The project for the arrangement of the square is assigned to Armando Bernabiti, architect of the Department of Public Works (Fig.7) [6]. Bernabiti, in his first contact with the monumental environment of the historic city of Rhodes, proposed the rehabilitation of the Hospital’s surrounding area by harmonizing buildings around it to “strict” style of the main east façade and by retaining the most important elements of the square that reminded the multicultural character of the place. In his proposal, Bernabiti included the restoration of the so called residence of the Knight Guy de Melay, at the NE corner of the square, the original structure of which had been distorted by the fragmentation of many properties (Fig.8). In this case Bernabiti redesigned the building in order to house a branch of Banco di Roma, restoring the main façade with the addition of elements such as a loggia, which probably previously never existed. In autumn 1930 the Banco di Roma began to operate in this small building of the Archaeological Museum square. The reconstruction (Fig.9) of this building aimed to endow the area with a knights’ building “harmonized with its surrounding and in consistency with the neighbouring buildings” [7]. The interventions however in the surroundings of the museum affected a greater zone, since they have prepared for what would occur within three to four years in this part of the fortified town. It’s about the extension of the Museum square to the north by the enlargement of the narrow street from the Archaeological Museum to the vaulted passage of the Auberge of the langue of Auvergne (Fig.10). The “intact” of the medieval core, such as the principles of the Master Plan (1926) raised, was disturbed with an irreversible manner mainly because, apart from the authenticity of the site, its picturesque character, as had been consolidated after the period of Ottoman rule, was also offended. These are the first pre-thought out deliberate modernization planning interventions that the urban structure of the fortified town underwent within the first five years of the ‘30s. These interventions led to the demolition of the later buildings and the redesign of

Figure 8: The so called Guy de Melay residence at the NE corner of the Museum square during its restoration (1928)

Figure 9: The so called Guy de Melay residence after its restoration as branch of Banco di Roma (1930)
the two fronts of the street by the erection of new buildings in knights’ style. These buildings housed uses compatible with the politics of promoting Rhodes as a tourist product. In these interventions the architect Bernabiti seems to have played a leading part. The intervention started with the formation of the west front of the street, opposite the church of S. Maria del Castello, which was simultaneously the north eastern edge of Knights’ Street, where the architect designed the new building of the ceramics company ICARO (1932) (Fig.11), and then with the building to the north of the church, where two new companies were housed (one of them was SAITIR, a carpet company and the other one Bottega del Vino) (Fig.12). During these interventions the south façade of the Auberge of the langue of Auvergne, was also restored, while the porch and the minaret of S. Maria del Castello remained in their positions. This project, taking into consideration the central role of this part of the town, was meant to satisfy two basic interrelated issues, the accentuation of its touristic character and the intonation of medieval environment which was translated to the redesign of the town in accordance with the Italians standards. This intervention could be understood in the framework of the technique of urban rehabilitation of the historic cities according to “diradamento” theory of Gustavo Giovannoni, but certainly was part of the operations of government, where the urban planning amounted to modernization, which this administration represented.

During the last period of the Italian occupation 1936-1947, the political preferences and directions of the administration affected substantially the management of the monuments, as well as the urban planning in the medieval town of Rhodes. The presence of Cesare Maria De Vecchi in the islands’ administration coincides with the period during which the Rome regime adopts a more totalitarian character, and its common threads with the glorified years of Roman Empire become more pronounced. The outrageous promotion of everything associated with the Roman Empire age,
labelled as “romanità”, inevitably touched the island of Rhodes and influenced the decisions for the monument restorations.

In 1940 the restoration of S. Maria del Castello was decided, intervention in which the architect of the Ephorate Mario Paolini seems to have an active participation. As illustrated in a sketch of the architect, the monument appears with its main façade restored, free of the muslim additions, to a form which in the architect’s opinion the monument had in mid 14th century. Moreover, the sketch depicts an image of the town, which after the interventions of the ’30s is not at all reminiscent of Rhodes with its successive historical stages as they were imprinted on its urban structure [8]. The decision therefore of the “purification” of the area of the “outlandish” elements through the above intervention, completed formally the plan of the street enlargement, as well as unification with the Archaeological Museum square (Fig.12). This project, when it is finally implemented, namely in the middle of World War II, under the governor Inigo Campioni, could probably function as the unique implementation of the ambitious Master Plan of rehabilitation of medieval town of Rhodes in 1942, which although was vanishing fully the ideas of the first years of Italian occupation regarding the preservation of the entire fortified town, was following closely everything that had occurred just a few years earlier in several historical centers of the Italian peninsula. (Fig.13)

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing we can say that through this example examined, it appears that the Italian presence in Rhodes and the rest of the Dodecanese islands was not random and coincidental, as the political climate of those times suggested. Before their arrival at the island of Rhodes, the Italians knew to a great extent its uniqueness and potential. They knew that under the Ottoman additions and alterations of the medieval

Figure 12: The street after the interventions of the mid 30s. The east front with the new building of the carpet company SAITIR and S. Maria del Castello after its restoration in 1943

Figure 13: The Master Plan of rehabilitation of the medieval town of Rhodes (1942)
architectural heritage lay the irrefutable traces of the Hospitaller period, which could easily be identified and enhanced, as well as the potential for substantial tourist growth that the Italians simply pointed-out and promoted. The case of Rhodes certainly cannot belong in a generalized colonial concept. Perhaps it is more reasonable to compare with similar practices followed within the national boundaries of Italy and thus arrive to the conclusion that just because it was an overseas acquisition there were the boundaries for probable (or not) divergences from the general line followed. In any case, Rhodes gave the Italians the possibility to verify Italy’s role in the Eastern Mediterranean via their constructions on the island. For them Rhodes symbolized the “military base” of the West in the East, and that is what they tried to underscore in any possible way. It’s hard to dispute the extent of the projects completed by the Italian administration of the Dodecanese islands during that period. The Greeks recognized it right after incorporating the islands to the rest of the country. This legacy is also recognized today, sixty years after the great annexation event to Greece. Besides, the aim of the Italian’s work was to promote the visual traces of their projects as undisputed proof of all works accomplished during those 35 years, as well as to serve as a reminder that all accomplishments resulted from specific political choices.

REFERENCES