

Italian Architecture and Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Islands of Rhodes-Kos-Leros

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Abstract

This study examines architecture during the Italian occupation in the Dodecanese, a period where cultural imposition and integration of the area was attempted from 1912 to 1945. Italy sought to highlight the Dodecanese as its colonial province, before and after the declaration of the Empire in 1936. The research focuses on the spatial, urban planning and architectural interventions in the region. The Italian occupation of the Dodecanese brought about a significant change in the urban landscape of the islands, with interventions including the restructuring of historic centres, the improvement of the road network and the development of the urban fabric. These changes were linked to the Italian need to assert their dominance in the region, while certain infrastructures served military and tourist purposes, as in Leros and Rhodes respectively.

Keywords: Rhodes, Leros, Kos, Italian Monuments, Tourism, Cultural Heritage.

Introduction

Italian architecture in the Dodecanese is a remarkable cultural resource, reflecting the history of the region during the Italian occupation (1912-1943). It can be distinguished in two main phases, reflecting the different approaches of the two general commanders, Mario Lago (1924-1936) and Cesare Maria de Vecchi (1936-1941). During the first period (1924-1936), a particular style with historical references was adopted, aiming at a revival of western architecture inspired by the Hippiocratic period. The second period (1936-1941), on the other hand, was characterised by the adoption of the fascist architectural style prevalent in Italy at the time [1].

The Italian architectural heritage in the Dodecanese left behind important buildings that demonstrate the strong Italian presence in the region. These buildings are important parts of the cultural heritage of the Dodecanese and should be preserved in order to highlight the history of the islands. Italian architecture in the Dodecanese today is a cultural treasure that deserves to be exploited to promote the historical identity of the islands [2].

As part of Italy's colonial policy, the Dodecanese were occupied by the Italians in 1912 and remained under their occupation until 1943, when Italy capitulated. During this period, the Italians left a strong imprint on the architecture of the islands, as they made significant interventions in both the public and private sectors [3].

Italian architecture in the Dodecanese flourished during the Italian occupation, and the urban interventions carried out included the reconstruction of the historic centres, the improvement of infrastructure and the reconfiguration of the urban fabric [4]. The aim of the Italian administration was to construct public buildings with a strong symbolic value and immediate visibility, which would serve as emblematic landmarks in the cities. The evolution of Italian architecture in the Dodecanese can be distinguished in two periods, which reflect the different approaches of the governors general Mario Lago (1924-1936) and Cesare Maria de Vecchi (1936-1941) (Colonas, V., 2002).

Mario Lago (1924-1936) and Cesare Maria de Vecchi (1936-1941)
Italian architectural creation in the Dodecanese can be divided into two periods, which reflect the different concepts and choices

in the field of architecture of two general commanders, Mario Lago (1924-1936) and Cesare Maria de Vecchi (1936-1941). (Colonas, V., 2002).

1st period (1924-1936)

During this period, Italian architecture sought to revive and interpret Western architecture, influenced mainly by the Knight-hood. An important project of this phase was the commissioning of Florestano Di Fausto to draw up a regulatory plan for the city of Rhodes, with the aim of zoning public buildings and areas for Italian settlers. Di Fausto designed buildings that combined neoclassical and Mannerist elements, such as the Administration Building, the Bank of Italy, and the Palace of Fascism, and was also influenced by Venetian and Islamic architecture. These buildings combined traditional and modern elements, incorporating influences from the city's Byzantine and Islamic past. The Rose Hotel (1925-27) is a prime example of this architectural trend [5].

2nd Period (1936-1941)

With the arrival of the new governor, De Vecchi, architecture in the area entered a period of "purification". De Vecchi, influenced by Mussolini's policies, sought to remove oriental elements and promote a pure "modern classicism", with an emphasis on symmetry and monumental scale. The new architecture expresses the strong influence of the Roman Empire and the Fascist regime, yielding rigour and grandeur. Important projects of this period include the Puccini Theatre (1936-37) and the reconstructions of important buildings such as the Rose Hotel and the Courthouse, which were purged of previous decorative elements and acquired strict lines and simplicity [3].

Italian Architectural Monuments

This dual phase of architectural evolution in the Dodecanese demonstrates the transition from a historicism with various influences to the purity and monumentality of fascist rationalism, while at the same time capturing the political and cultural agenda of the Italian occupation.

The withdrawal of the Italians from the Dodecanese bequeathed to the islanders their rich architectural work. Most of it is to be found in Rhodes, Kos and Leros, which were the centres of the Italian occupation. The main ones are the following:

In Rhodes.

- The present Casino of Rhodes was built in 1927 as the "Grande Albergo delle Rose" by Florestano Di Fausto (lit. Florestano Di Fausto) and Michele Platania (lit. Michele Platania).
- The present Metropolitan Church of the Annunciation in Rhodes was built in 1925 as the Catholic Church of St. John by Rodolfo Petracco.
- The current Prefectural Palace in Rhodes was built in 1927 as the 'Palazzo del Governatore di Rodi'.
- The current National Theatre of Rhodes was built in 1937 as the 'Teatro Puccini'.
- The current settlement of Kolymbia in Rhodes was built in 1938 as "San Benedetto" for the Italian settlers.
- The present settlement of Eleousa in Rhodes was built in 1938 as 'Campochiaro' for the Italian settlers.

- The present settlement of Kalamonas in Rhodes was built as 'Peveragno' for the Italian settlers.
- The present settlement of Agios Pavlos in Rhodes was built as 'San Marco' for the Italian settlers.
- The current Town Hall of Rhodes was built in 1939 as the "Casa del Fascio di Rodi".

In Leros

The current settlement of Lakki in Leros was built in 1938 as a "Portolago" for the Italian settlers. The most extensive urban intervention of the Italians in the Dodecanese took place in Leros, due to its strategic location and the need for military bases. On the island, a naval station was constructed in the bay of Lakki, the largest natural harbour in the Mediterranean. To house the military and their families, the town of Porto Lago was created, with an urban plan that placed the central functions in the centre and the residential zones on the periphery. The architects R. Petracco and A. Bernabiti designed the town with Mediterranean rationalism, combining modern style with local Aegean elements. The buildings of the administrative centre are representative examples of this architectural trend, highlighting the importance of colour and materials [6, 7].

Other important constructions in Leros include:

- The Anti-Aircraft & Naval Battery of Muplogourna PL906
- The primary school of Rodolfo Petrakos
- The Gianni Rossetti Air Force Base (at Lepida in Lakki)
- The Apitiki - Tunnel of the Italian Lago Battery
- The circular market with the clock tower
- The former Roma complex, by Armando Bernabiti
- The Catholic Church of St. Nicholas
- The caserma di Regina (royal barracks)
- The Italian Town Hall
- The Tax Office
- The FASCIO (offices of Fascism and the headquarters of the Political Secretary)
- The Youth Club
- The Inkhouses
- Rooms with games, known as DOPO LAVORO
- The post office (POSTA) on the ground floor
- The Italian Pharmacy
- Mussolini's Fascist Guard - the MILIZIA

In Kos

The buildings built in Kos are divided into two categories: the pre-seismic ones, e.g. the Town Hall, which is an example of eclecticism, and the post-seismic ones, e.g. the Municipal Market of 1933, which have elements of racialism and fascist architecture [8].

- The Roman Odeon. The Roman Odeon was built in the 2nd century AD and is located in the centre of Kos town. It is considered one of the most important public buildings of ancient Kos. It was discovered in 1929 by the Italian archaeologist Luciano Laurenzi, and during the Italian occupation, the Italians started its restoration.
- The Palace of the Government (Palazzo del Governo). The Palace of the Government, built in 1927-1928 by Fausto Di Florestano, today houses the Town Hall, the Court of First Instance and the Police of Kos.

- Casa del Fascio Teatro (House of Radiation).
- The building in Liberty Square, built between 1934 and 1935.
- Gelsomino Inn, built in 1928-1929 by Petracco.
- The Egli-Casa del Fascio/Teatro (Egli-Casa del Fascio/Teatro). The impressive Egli building in Liberty Square was built between 1934 and 1935 by Bernabiti.
- Built by the Knights from 1436 to 1514, the Castle of Kos was restored by the Italian Archaeological Service during the Italian occupation.
- The only Catholic Church of Kos, built by the Italian Catholic Missionary Society, is located near the Catholic cemetery, which was blessed in 1935.
- The Municipal Market (Mercato delle Erbe). In 1934-1935, the Municipal Market was built by Rodolfo Petracco.
- The excavations of the Ancient Market and Port were carried out by the Italian School of Archaeology between 1935 and 1942. Despite restoration efforts, the work was stopped due to the Second World War.
- Asclepieion. The Asclepieion of Kos is located on a hillside near the ancient city and is one of the most important archaeological sites due to its connection with Hippocrates. Excavations were carried out in 1935 by Italian archaeologists.
- Town Hall. The Town Hall of Kos is the work of Di Fausto (1925-1930), built around an atrium with porticos. On the west side is the Mayor's apartment, while on the east side there are shops.
- The General Hospital was built in 1912 and renovated in 1926-1930 by Italian doctors. Today, the hospital bears the name "Hippocrates".

Cultural Entrepreneurship and Tourism Development

In modern times, the buildings bearing the Italian architecture in the Dodecanese are an important part of the cultural heritage of the region. This heritage is recognised as the totality of cultural remains - both tangible and intangible - which are considered to be of particular social value and importance. The term 'cultural heritage' is associated with the monuments, works of art, traditions and values that derive from the history of a place or culture, defining its identity and authenticity [2, 9].

Cultural heritage is not only limited to the material dimension of buildings, but also extends to the intangible dimension, including traditions, language, religious and social practices associated with the culture of a place. The authentic element is of crucial importance in contemporary society, as it is intertwined with the recognition and appreciation of the past as an integral part of contemporary identity. The interest in monuments and cultural resources reflects the need to connect with roots and origins, but also to enhance cultural communication between generations and peoples (Gantzias, 2008) [10].

Recognition of the past, origins and cultural communication also constitutes a factor in creating humanity, as it is culture that defines and highlights human existence through time. This global interest in cultural heritage is not limited to the European perspective, but has a global dimension, as each people wishes to preserve and maintain the points of connection with its historical and cultural past (Colonas, 2002). The business and tourism

exploitation of Italian cultural heritage in the Dodecanese, concerns the integration of cultural heritage in the local economy and the development of tourism, while at the same time is linked to the need for sustainable tourism development [11, 12].

Monuments, buildings and public works constructed during this period, such as Venetian and Italian towers, public buildings in the city of Rhodes, and infrastructure projects, are valuable tourist and cultural points of interest. The further exploitation of Italian cultural heritage offers significant opportunities for the development of cultural tourism. Business initiatives focusing on the preservation and promotion of Italian monuments, as well as the organisation of cultural events, exhibitions and educational programmes, can enhance tourism development in the Dodecanese [13, 14].

The sustainable use of cultural heritage requires strategies that respect and protect the environment and the local community. Investment in infrastructure that highlights the cultural heritage of Italians without harming the natural heritage or the local community is critical. Educating and raising awareness of the local population about the value of cultural heritage contributes to the effective management of these resources [15-17]. Cooperation with international and local organizations, such as cultural institutions, tourism associations and universities, can create a set of strategies to better exploit cultural heritage. Moreover, cross-border partnerships, such as the joint promotion of cultural routes between Italian and Greek regions, strengthen the connection and exchange of cultural and tourism activities [18, 19]. The use of new technologies, such as digital mapping and virtual reality, can offer new possibilities for the promotion of Italian cultural heritage in the Dodecanese. The development of digital applications and platforms offering information about the monuments, the stories behind them and cultural events could enrich the tourist experience [20-27].

Conclusions

"Cultural Heritage" refers not only to specific monuments or architectural ensembles, but also to entire groups of buildings and spaces that have aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological, or anthropological value. This term thus encompasses a form of heritage that holds undeniable value and must be preserved to ensure its transmission to future generations.

For the effective protection and preservation of Italian cultural heritage in the Dodecanese, a comprehensive approach is required, which goes beyond merely the economic management of these legacies. Cultural heritage management includes a range of activities such as: research and study of cultural remains, excavations, recording and documentation of elements, conservation and restoration of monuments, as well as ensuring legislative protection. Equally important is the promotion of cultural heritage through presentation and exhibition methods, aiming for its exploitation, including tourism and economic activities that arise from it. The strategy for the entrepreneurial and tourist utilization of Italian cultural heritage in the Dodecanese must combine the protection of heritage with the needs of the modern tourist market, while simultaneously strengthening the local economy and the cultural identity of the islands.

In general, cultural heritage management requires a combination of protective, preservation, and utilization strategies that

will allow the maintenance of cultural assets for future generations, while simultaneously enhancing the social and economic well-being of the regions that host them.

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