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Η παλαιοχριστιανική αρχιτεκτονική ως πηγή έμπνευσης για ναούς του 11ου αιώνα στα νησιά του Αιγαίου

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Some churches on small Aegean islands demonstrate an effort to revive Early Christian architecture. Hagios Mamas near Potamia on Naxos and the church of the Episkopi on Santorini are inspired by known sixth-century churches. A similar trend is evident in the church of Hagioi Apostoloi at Argos on Kalymnos. This attempt is characteristic of the ideology of the era, but is limited to few examples, not succeeding in changing the local expression of architecture.

Keywords
Middle Byzantine Period; 11th century; Byzantine architecture; Aegean islands; Naxos; Santorini; Kalymnos.

Byzantine church architecture is characterized by continuous change alongside retrospect. Early Christian architectural features that appear during the Middle Byzantine period may in some cases have survived through the centuries, but often also an intention to revive the past. A return to older archetypes, sometimes referred to as a “Renaissance” 2, is common in 11th-century churches. On the Aegean islands, this tendency is best illustrated by the katholikon of Nea Moni on Chios, which clearly demonstrates architectural trends in Constantinople during the reign of the Macedonian dynasty and has been related to Early Christian models 3. This paper focuses on such attempts on smaller Aegean islands, where, although architecture is not comparable to this outstanding monument, a similar trend can be detected in certain notable churches.

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Naxos, Hagios Mamas

Hagios Mamas near Kato Potamia on Naxos is the most important Middle Byzantine church of the island. The building differs significantly from local architecture, which is generally characterized by the evolution of Early Christian tradition, with a gradual reduction of sizes, decline of construction technology, simplification of forms and gradual disappearance of okler architectural features. It is a large cross-in-square church, with a later narthex. It demonstrates an attempt to deviate from local trends and create a monumental building, inspired by an Early Christian prototype. This is evident in the six-meter wide dome, pierced by eight large windows and the large double-light windows on the church's facades, which provide abundant light to the interior (Fig. 1), as well as the wide semi-circular sanctuary apse, originally pierced by a large triple-light window. Unlike contemporary churches on Naxos, whose arched or rectangular windows are small and simple, the church's double and triple-light windows have marble mullions, made of reused Early Christian colonettes. The window arches are made of slightly recessed carved voussoirs and are surrounded by a brick band.

The exact date of the church is unknown. The dedicatory inscription of the church has preserved the name of the ktetor, Bishop Leon. The same name is also mentioned in the inscription on the original templon of the church of Protothronos at Chalki, on the same island, dated to 1052. The similarity of a templon epistyle which certainly belongs to the templon of the diakonikon of Protothronos at Chalki, dated to 1052, evokes a possible similar date of the Hagios Mamas church.

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5 Aslanidis, op.cit. (n. 4), 358-361, 374-393.


7 Dimitrokañllís initially dated the church to the last quarter of the 9th century, Dimitrokañllís, op.cit. (n. 4), 111. Much later he revised his view, dating the church after the reconquest of Crete (961), G. Dimitrokañllís, Βυζαντινή ναοδομία στη Νάξο, Athens 2000, 30 note 26.


Fig. 2. (a) Naxos. Hagios Mamas near Potamia. South window arch. (b) Paros. Katapoliani. Main church. Apse window arch.

Fig. 3. (a) Naxos. Hagios Mamas near Potamia. Barrel vault. (b) Paros. Katapoliani. Main church. Barrel vault.

Fig. 4. (a) Naxos. Hagios Mamas near Potamia. Dome. (b) Paros. Katapoliani. Dome
written in an archaizing style of expression, namely to replace a small, dilapidated building with a larger, graceful, elaborate church: «τὸν πρὶν βραχύν τε καὶ κατηυτελισμένον...δόμον...κρείττονα, εὑρέθη τε καὶ [το] κολλασμένον»12. Such intentions justify a return to Early Christian prototypes for inspiration. The large Early Christian basilicas of Naxos, had, however, already been destroyed. By contrast, the imposing Justinianic church of Katapoliani on the nearby island of Paros13 had survived. A comparison of certain forms and details of construction, namely the window arches made of carved voussoirs and surrounded by brick bands (Fig. 2), the vaults made of carved voussoirs of volcanic stone (Fig. 3), the dome with eight windows (Fig. 4) and the extensive use of marble blocks from earlier buildings, provides additional reasons for dating the church to the mid-eleventh century and leads to the conclusion that the ktesors of the two churches were most probably identical11.

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Kalymnos, Hagioi Apostoloi

A comparison of the church of Hagioi Apostoloi at Argos on the island of Kalymnos with that of Hagios Mamas reveals many similarities. The plans of the two churches are of almost identical layout and size, differing only in the exact form of the supports of the dome (Fig. 6). In Hagios Mamas, the dome is supported by walls pierced by arched openings, whereas in Hagioi Apostoloi the dome rests on four arches, which spring from L-shaped pillars. The wide semi-circular apse with the triple-light window of Hagioi Apostoloi (Fig. 7), as in Hagios Mamas, clearly imitates Early Christian examples. M. Kappas, who published the church dating it to the late tenth or eleventh century, has also compared the wide, pendentive dome (Fig. 8) to Early Christian examples. The support of the dome by arches is also characteristic of churches built before 1000.

Although the church belongs to the “transitional” variation of the cross-in-square type. However, it resembles churches of the simple tetrastyle variation, due to the solid and void proportions of the walls supporting the dome, Kappas, op.cit (n. 11), vol. 1, 254.


Fig. 7. Kalymnos. Hagioi Apostoloi at Argos. East view.

Fig. 8. Kalymnos. Hagioi Apostoloi at Argos. Southwest view.
the church upon which Hagioi Apostoloi was modelled cannot be specifically identified, the survival of Early Christian baptisteries on the Dodecanese islands in the Middle Byzantine period has been proposed by M. Kappas as a possible source of inspiration for the founders of the church on Kalymnos. Unfortunately, modern plaster covers all surfaces of the building; therefore, it is impossible to draw further conclusions and some reservations regarding the date of the church are not unjustifiable.

Santorini, Episkopi

A third example, perhaps even more characteristic of the same trend, is that of the Episkopi in Mesa Gonia on the island of Santorini. The church has provoked a debate regarding its date and whether or not it is the result of the transformation of an Early Christian basilica. A. Orlandos, who first published the church in 1951, thought that the original plan of the building is due to a pre-existing basilica, whose middle columns were removed in Middle Byzantine times in order to construct a dome. However, several observations, most importantly the larger diameter of the columns supporting the drum, lead to the conclusion that the church was originally built as an octastyle inscribed cross, namely with additional columns between the dome and the east and west walls (Fig. 9). Later, it was proven that he had miscalculated.

Fig. 9. (a). Santorini. Episkopi in Mesa Gonia. Reconstructive plan. (b) Santorini. Hagia Eirini at Perissa. Reconstructive plan of the second construction phase.

Δυτικὴν Στερεὰν Ἑλλάδα καὶ τὴν Ἐπειρον ἀπὸ τοῦ τέλους τοῦ 7ου μέχρι τοῦ τέλους τοῦ 10ου αἰώνος, Θεσσαλονίκη 1975, 21992, 148, Aslanidis, op.cit. (n. 4), 282 note 753.

22 A. Orlandos, “Ἡ 'Πισκοπή τῆς Σαντορήνης”, ΑΒΜΕ 7 (1951), 186-90.
24 The term was introduced by Vocotopoulos, op.cit. (n. 19), 112-116.
25 According to this reading of the inscription, the founder of the church was Alexios Comnenos and the date 685 AD. G. Hofmann, “Vescovadi cattolici della Grecia V. Thera (Santorino)”, OrchAn 130 (1941), 94.
26 Orlandos, op.cit. (n. 22), 181 note 2.
the date and a date of 1181 was proposed\(^\text{27}\). However, trying to date the church based on an erroneous reading is very risky and it is wiser to employ a stylistic approach, which leads to a possible date in the late 11th century, during the reign of Alexios I Comnenos, who was the founder of the church according to the lost inscription\(^\text{28}\) and tradition\(^\text{29}\). Many features demonstrate its attempt to imitate architecture of the past. These are the emphatic re-use of marble architectural members, the elongated plan, indeed reminiscent of a basilica and the wide semi-circular apse with the triple-light window (Fig. 10). The model for the church of the Episkopi must have been the massive basilica of Hagia Eirini at Perissa on the same island, the second largest Early Christian basilica in the Cyclades, after Katapoliani. The Perissa basilica was transformed into a domed cruciform structure, possibly in the second half of the 6th century\(^\text{30}\). The dome was supported by four massive piers. Two pairs of

\(^{27}\) Α. Τσιοουρίδου, “Επισκοπή Σαντορίνης. Ίδρυμα του Αλεξίου Α’ Κομνηνού ή του Β’;”, Αμητός. Τιμητικός τόμος για τον καθηγητή Μανόλη Ανδρόνικο, Β’, Θεσσαλονίκη 1987, 917-921.

\(^{28}\) Hofmann, op.cit. (n. 25), 94.

\(^{29}\) F. Richard, Relation de ce qui est passé le plus remarquable à Sant-Erini isle de l’archipel, Paris 1657, 31.

\(^{30}\) Ε. Γερούση, “Η παλαιοχριστιανική βασιλική της Αγίας Ειρήνης
smaller piers were also added to the east and the west of the dome in order to support the barrel-vault that covered the nave. It is not known whether there were galleries. Thus, the plan of the Justinianic church is very similar to churches of the octastyle variation of the cross-in-square type (Fig. 9). In the Middle Byzantine period Hagia Eirini was only partially preserved, but there is evidence that parts of it were still in use. Admiration for this church in the Middle Ages was such that the name of the church, Saint Irini, became synonymous with the island itself. Two specific characteristics demonstrate deliberate reference of the Episkopi to the great Justinianic church: the peculiar common plan arrangement (Fig. 10) and the unusual support of arches by columns attached to walls in both churches (Fig. 11). Influence from older models has also been observed in the decorative repertoire of the marble templon of the Episkopi.

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13 Gerousi, op.cit. (n. 30), 31.
14 In the case of the Episkopi, this arrangement may belong to a somewhat later construction phase, Aslanidis, op.cit. (n. 22), 110.
General remarks

These three monuments offer valuable evidence for the impact of eleventh-century ideology in the Aegean islands. The effort to revive architecture of past times is undoubtedly associated with the return of prosperity to the region in the late 10th century, after the definitive elimination of the Arab threat, which had provoked an enormous economic decline, especially after the installation of Andalus Arabs in Crete. What is particularly interesting is that in the small and somewhat isolated islands of the Aegean, the churches that served as models for this revival were also from the Aegean islands. Some imposing churches of the Justinianic period had not only escaped total destruction, but continued to be admired as creations of a glorious past that was being reborn. Reference to local models demonstrates a certain isolation of the islands but also perhaps a certain localism at least until the mid 11th century.

With the exception of Chios, where the illustrious katholikon of the Nea Moni reveals direct introduction of models from Constantinople, the small aspirations of ketrors on the smaller Aegean islands were realized with limited technical means and local craftsmen. For instance, although Hagios Mamas and Episkopi make extensive use of marble, the works of new marble seem to be limited to the templon and floor; all other architectural members such as columns, capitals, colonettes, string courses etc. are made of ancient or Early Christian marble pieces. Although this does reveal an antiquarian taste, which may be connected to a tendency to return to the past, it appears that marble carvers were only called upon after the buildings were completed, demonstrating the absence of local marble workshops and hence enormous limitations placed on the design and execution of the church decoration. Thus, it is possible to conclude that despite the ambitious intentions of the ketrors, the churches were executed by local masons, who interpreted models according to their capacity and available means. Therefore, the cases analyzed above are not comparable to the known examples of more or less exact copies in Byzantine architecture as imitation was confined to certain elements only and the final result resembled the model only faintly. A closer imitation of an Early Christian model appears again on the island of Naxos probably at a much later date.

In some other cases, churches built on the site of Early Christian basilicas also reflect a revivalist trend. For instance, the cross-in-square church of Hagia Eirini at Kampos on the island of Ikaria, although apparently

40 Ohnesorg, op. cit. (n. 6), 190-194.
41 Also see K. Aslanidis, “Η μεσοβυζαντινή πολιούχος στην Άνδρο και οι σχέσεις της με την περιφερειακή Ελλάδα και τα νησιά”, DChAE 24 (2003), 119-130. Bouras, op. cit. (n. 3), 107-108.
43 In a similar way to the depiction of buildings in Byzantine art, where the representation was confined to certain features of the building, E. Chatzityphronos, “Παραδείγματα και αναπαραστάσεις της αρχιτεκτονικής στα βυζαντινά μνημεία”, Ζητήματα σχεδιασμού στη βυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική, DChAE 24 (2003), 119-130.
44 It is, however, worth noting that in both churches of the Episkopi and Hagia Eirini the ratio of width to length (including the narthex) is 1:1.69.
45 The chapels attached to the 7th-century church of Panagia Drosiani near Moni copy the church's triconch plan arrangement as well as its square dome and two-light bema apse window. In this case the copies were right next to the model and the imitation could be much more faithful; however, they are significantly inferior to the model. Mamiloukos, op. cit. (n. 42), 127-128. Aslanidis, op. cit. (n. 4), 39-40.
46 Ch. Bouras, “Middle Byzantine domed cruciform churches on the Greek islands”, Ζητήματα σχεδιασμού στη βυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική, DChAE 24 (2003), 119-130.
not following an Early Christian model, is built on the ruins of the basilica in the ancient settlement of Oinoe\textsuperscript{47}, making use of spolia and demonstrating ambitious intentions. A quite similar case is that of the basilica of Hagios Stefanos at Aggidia on the island of Naxos, rebuilt as an cross-in-square church in the Middle Byzantine period\textsuperscript{48}.

The trend analyzed above is not generalized. The eleventh-century tendency in the Aegean islands to revert to Early Christian models did not succeed in changing the provincial expression of local architecture. There are small churches on Naxos and Kalymnos that most probably copy Hagios Mamas\textsuperscript{49} and Hagioi Apostoloi\textsuperscript{50} respectively, as was also the case for more important buildings, such as the katholikon of the Nea Moni in Chios\textsuperscript{51}. In the case of Santorini, a similar conclusion cannot be drawn, as the Episkopi is the only surviving Middle Byzantine church of the island, which suffers from earthquake activity and has undergone major changes over the subsequent centuries\textsuperscript{52}. Although the existence of copies affirms the impact of these important churches on local architecture, the copies themselves do not reflect a similar intention to revive architecture of the past. It appears that this remained the desire of a local elite with constrained resources, which did not find followers.

\textsuperscript{47} For Oinoe, see: M. Viglaki-Sophianou, “Ikaria”, A. Vlahopoulou (ed.), Archaeology: Aegean Islands, Athens 2008, 150-152.


\textsuperscript{49} The most characteristic case is that of Hagios Georgios Diasoritis. Aslanidis, op.cit. (n. 4), 378-379. For the church in general see M. Achemastou-Rotami, Άγιος Γεώργιος ο Διασορίτης της Νάξου: Οι τοιχογραφίες του 11ου αιώνα, Athens 2016.

\textsuperscript{50} Hagios Theodoros in Voukolia. Kappas, op.cit. (n. 17), 64, fig. 9.

\textsuperscript{51} For Santorini, a similar conclusion cannot be drawn, as the Episkopi is the only surviving Middle Byzantine church of the island, which suffers from earthquake activity and has undergone major changes over the subsequent centuries. A significant number of Post-Byzantine churches are preserved in Santorini: I. Koumanoudis, Η λαϊκή εκκλησιαστική αρχιτεκτονική της νήσου Θήρας, Athens 1960.

Illustration credits
Figs 1-5, 6a, 10, 1a: photos by K.I. Aslanidis. Fig. 6b: Kappas, op.cit. (n. 11), fig. 1. Figs 7, 8: photos by M. Kappas. Fig. 9a: Gouvi, op.cit. (n. 30), fig. 3. Fig. 11b: photo by S. Mamaloukos.
ως κτήτωρ ο επίσκοπος Νάξιας Λέων, ο οποίος μπορεί να ταυτιστεί με τον αναφερόμενο στην επιγραφή του επισκόπου του Θόλου του 1052. Στον Άγιο Μάμαντα είναι εμφανής η προσπάθεια κατασκευής ενός μνημειώδους κτηρίου, εμπνευσμένου από ένα παλαιοχριστιανικό πρότυπο. Η πρόθεση του κτήτορος εκφράζεται με σαφήνεια στην έμμετρη κτητορική επιγραφή του ναού, η οποία είναι γραμμένη σε αρχαίζον ύφος. Ορισμένες μορφολογικές και κατασκευαστικές λεπτομέρειες φανερώνουν ότι ως πρότυπο για την ανέγερση του ναού πρέπει να λειτουργήσει η ιουστινιανή βασιλική της Καταπολιανής της Πάρου (Εικ. 2-5). Ο σπουδάστης ναός, ο μεγαλύτερος που κτίστηκε στις Κυκλάδες, εξακολουθεί να εντυπωσιάζει στη μέση βυζαντινή περίοδο, όπως αποκαλύπτει και ο βίος της οσίας Θεο κτίστης της Λεσβίας. Ο κτήτορας του Αγίου Μάμαντος, εμπνευσμένος από το σπουδαίο αυτό κτήριο του παρελθόντος, δημιούργησε έναν ναό, που, αν και ασφαλώς απέχει πολύ από το πρότυπο, εμφανώς διαφοροποιείται από την αρχιτεκτονική της περιόδου στο νησί.

Τα παραπάνω μνημεία φανερώνουν την τάση ανάβιωσης του ενδόξου παρελθόντος στα νησιά του Αιγαίου, η οποία ασφαλώς θα πρέπει να συνδεθεί με την ανάκαμψη του νησιωτικού χώρου μετά την οριστική εκδίωξη των Αράβων από την Κρήτη. Ωστόσο, σε αντίθεση με το καθολικό της Νέας Μονής Χίου, όπου η τάση αυτή συνδυάστηκε με την εισαγωγή προτύπων από την Κωνσταντινούπολη, στους ναούς που εξετάζουμε, χρησιμοποιήθηκαν πρότυπα από τα ίδια ή γείτονικά νησιά και τοπικά συνεργεία μαστόρων με περιορισμένες τεχνικές και οικονομικές δυνατότητες. Αν και ορισμένοι μικροί ναοί της Νάξου και της Καλύμνου φαίνεται πως αντέγραψαν τόσο τον Άγιο Μάμαντα όσο και τους Αγίους Αποστόλους, η πρόθεση ανάβιωσης του παρελθόντος δεν είχε γενικότερη διάδοση και δεν επηρέασε την εξέλιξη του τοπικού νησιωτικού αρχιτεκτονικού ιδιώματος.

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