

# GREECE

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## Re-use of a vernacular mansion complex in the medieval castle of Naxos

The objective of this study is to restore and draw attention to two remarkable historical vernacular buildings in the medieval castle of the city of Naxos and particularly to convert them into a Byzantine museum.

### Historical and geographical overview

The island of Naxos is the biggest and most fertile of the Cyclad Islands, situated in the centre of the Aegean Sea with a mild climate. Its history goes way back to the pre-historic age. There is a large number and great variety of monuments from all historic periods. Those of particular interest date from ancient Greece and Byzantium, of which we see many buildings, mainly churches and monasteries, but remains of dwellings as well. A large number of Byzantine and post-Byzantine icons (many of which well-preserved but awaiting the completion of the museum) are of particular interest.

One must not forget the profound influence of the Venetian domination (13th century), which introduced a new socio-political status to the area. The whole of the Aegean Sea was under the influence of Venice, which controlled the sea-routes, especially those to Constantinople (Istanbul). The duchy of Naxos as the capital of the Archipelago played a primary role – after the island of Crete – in the exceptional policy that Venice exerted in its relations with the area. Naxos was only loosely attached to the metropolis, so that during the Middle Ages it functioned as a private and largely independent central spot, a safe station in an area suffering from piracy. These are the general conditions under which the castle of the city of Naxos expanded from the 13th century onwards.

It is the largest in the Cyclades and of an exceptional structure. It refers to the city planning, without necessarily indicating that the synthesis of the castle was planned in advance. It was the seat of the duke and as such a political, religious, financial and administrative centre. It was built on a hill, at a short distance from the sea, a position enabling the surveillance of both the sea and part of the interior of the island. Constructed on the model and structure of the medieval cities of Western Europe, its defensive capacity is based on the closely built houses that form the external ring and the defensive wall at the same time. One can also see a second internal ring, which alongside the radial alleys forms the interior network and communication of the castle. Although we find indications in the literature of the existence of three gates, today there are only two while there is a particular structure that allows us to suggest the possible location of the third. The defensive system of the settlement is reinforced by the towers covering the entrances as well as by the central tower (Donjon) as the last resort in case of siege. The dwellings are outstandingly large mansions with interesting ground plans, structure and function. There are also five churches.

In comparison to the other castles in the Cyclad Islands it shows particular regal characteristics, starting with its size, sec-

only the size of the mansions and last but not least the number of its churches and monasteries.

Its significance and singularity, again in comparison to other castles in the Hellenic dominion, has to do with the fact that although being small (approximately 150 metres diameter) it is considered the largest medieval fortified city of the Cyclades. Also the 20th century has left it relatively unaffected. This is mainly due to the fact that very few buildings have changed their original use, namely habitable mansions.

The buildings chosen to house the Byzantine Museum of Naxos are a vernacular house complex near – and in a way – above the central gate of the castle.

The noted tower of the castle with a characteristic round tower, nowadays considered as the local symbol, is a remarkable monument, a great mansion in the outer ring. It dominates the castle, while in the past it used to protect one of its gates. The other building of the complex is an old mansion in the interior. These two buildings now belonging to the Greek Ministry of Culture offer a good opportunity for a new use as a museum since they adjoin and are suitable in terms of situation and architecture. The overall plans indicate the relations between the buildings and their sizes. The connection between the buildings, however, is not on the ground, but on a level above it. This peculiar situation, the result of successive constructive stages, creates a very interesting structure. In the site plan the exact location of the complex in the castle as well as the area it covers proportionately are indicated.

After a fire in the interior of the tower had caused extensive damages, fixative and consolidation works were carried out between 1970 and 1975, that is, a partial reconstruction of parts of the tower as well as a completely new construction of floors, using concrete instead of the traditional light construction of wooden beams, boards, earth and slates of marble.

As architects of the Ministry of Culture we undertook the project to conserve the complex as well as to convert it into a museum. The study aimed at integrating two buildings that should function together as a museum, taking into account the interventions that had already been carried out, which were in no way reversible. However, one of the architects did research on the architectural and historical background of the castle and thus provided essential information to help realise the study.

The project is presently in the phase of consolidation and securing the stonework, since serious damage was discovered when plaster was removed.

### The premises

Apart from the exhibition rooms the museum will also house the necessary auxiliary space, such as store rooms, rooms for the personnel and the public, a studio for the conservation and maintenance of movable works of art as well as a small guest-house.

## The principles of synthesis

The architectural proposal has respected the more general frame and the principles that are internationally valid for the protection of monuments. The choices basically aim at a harmonious coexistence of the remarkable shell and the valuable exhibits to bring out the quality of both.

## Setting off the building

The buildings on their own are objects to be exhibited and – after the completion of the works – should give an idea of the era they represent. It has been suggested that each building should be restored appropriately, so as to preserve its specific characteristics and style as much as possible. The proposal is mainly based on the use of the remaining old materials. New materials will be used only where it is necessary, especially for securing and completing.

## Setting off the exhibits

Ensuring areas for exhibiting large objects of particular shape and size was considered necessary and as such it formed part of the study. For these exhibits neutral areas were chosen in the building-shell so that on one side the eye of the visitor could focus while on the other the exhibits would not get into conflict with powerful architectural elements. Four exhibits significantly affected the architectural solution. For them permanent locations were chosen. The exhibits are:

- a) The original painted decoration of the dome of the church of Protothroni in Chalki on Naxos, which has been transferred to a frame in the shape of a dome (height 2.10 metres and diameter 3.96 metres).
- b) The three layers of frescoes from the quarterspheric of the apse from the church of Panagia Drossiani near the village of Moni. Each layer has been transferred separately to a frame in the shape of a quarterspheric of an apse with respective dimensions (about 1.50 metres to 3.0 metres).

In the parts of the building that are of architectural interest, it has been suggested that only movable objects of relatively small size should be exhibited (frescoes in frames, Christian sculptures etc).

## Joining the buildings

The connection of the two buildings was done in such a way that on the one hand the result would be an integral part of the morphology of the existing character of the settlement while on the other the good functioning of the Museum would be ensured.

## Ensuring good function

To ensure the good functioning of the building, it was necessary to make suggestions for secluding the areas of a different operation (e.g. administration, lab for the preservation of works of art, guesthouse, store rooms etc.). Through the suggested solution the museum has the potential to function either united or in wings. The exhibition rooms are in a sequence prompting visi-

tors to stroll around. In this way they get the benefit of understanding the architectural structure of the building as a whole.

## Functional analysis

### A. Areas for the public

#### 1. Entrance Hall

The existing old main entrance to the tower-building has also been selected as main entrance to the museum. It carries the coat of arms of the Barozzi family, while on the inside of the main entrance and above the door to the great hall one can see the coat of arms of the Crispi family, both prosperous noble Latin families during the Frankish domination and later on of Naxos). The entrance hall which is the junction between the two buildings is designed with interventions as indicated on the plans. In the same part of the building is the area for selling tickets and cards. This area surveys the main entrance as well as the two wings of the museum. On the same level the public restrooms are located (in the same location as the existing sewerage).

#### 2. Exhibition areas

According to the principles of synthesis and as required by the building programme, it has been suggested that the exhibition rooms should extend and cover all the important areas so that the visitor has the chance to stroll around the buildings on all levels. In the main mansion, the construction of a new staircase will allow vertical communication between the exhibition areas on three levels.

### B. Personnel

#### 1. Administration

The administration should be situated centrally but independently of the public. It should include offices and a waiting room and should provide access to the restrooms for personnel.

#### 2. Guesthouse

The guesthouse should be located in the mansion on two levels. It consists of two apartments with kitchen, has an entrance of its own and is secluded.

#### 3. Museum store rooms

The dark areas on level B are to house the necessary museum store rooms which can be isolated from the rest of the building. There is the possibility of provisioning and service through an independent access straight from the road.

#### 4. Areas of mechanical installation

These areas were planned to shelter the necessary electro-mechanical installations because of their location in the building

(immediate access from the street with no communication with the rest of the building, lack of light and air, size, shape).

## 5. Workshop for preserving works of art

The workshop operates on level A with an outside entrance. It is to be organised with the necessary auxiliary areas.

### Technical description

#### 1. Bearing construction

Structural stability is provided by the existing stonework. This should be repaired and reinforced where necessary. The concrete slabs constructed during the previous renovations of the buildings shall be preserved. It has also been considered necessary to construct concrete slabs at the point where the two buildings join, since in order to accomplish the necessary integration some of the existing walls have to be demolished. The old beams and boards will remain and be used as wood-forms. In general all wooden ceilings (beams, boards or canes) will remain and be preserved while worn parts will only be replaced where considered necessary.

#### 2. Openings

Openings that have recently been repaired or replaced shall remain. New openings should be constructed only if the old ones cannot be repaired and of course similar to the old existing ones.

#### 3. Floors

It has been suggested that the existing old marble floors as well as the new ones constructed during recent repairs should be preserved. Some areas that have not been covered and remain with concrete floors, will be paved with slabs of marble (dimensions: 30/30 cm). The remaining areas will be covered with rectangular slabs of slate.

#### 4. Marble door-frames and coats of arms

All marble doorframes as well as both coats of arms (above the main entrance and the door to the great hall) shall be cleaned and preserved.

As far as the security of the museum is concerned, the installation of an electronic security system has been planned because of the numerous existing openings, while the natural lighting of the areas will be supplemented by necessary artificial light.

### Epilogue

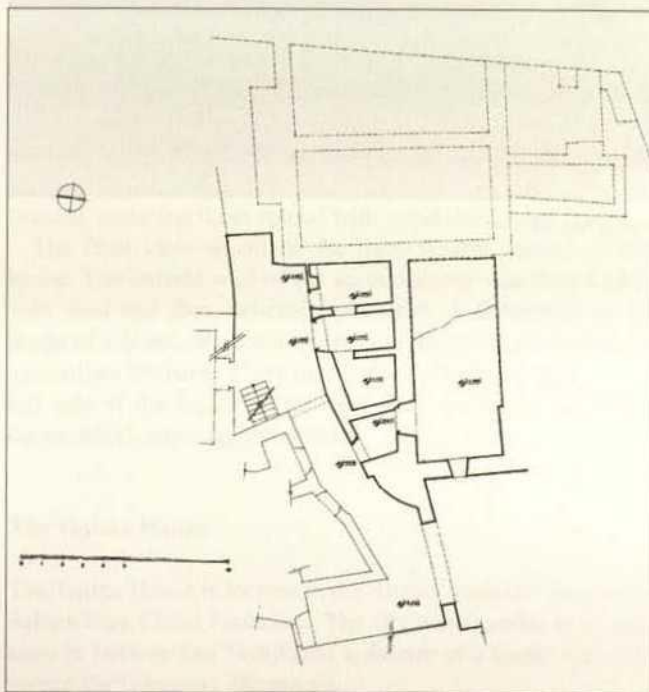
Finally one has to mention that in this particular study the original character of the vernacular building complex is being stressed together with the challenge to preserve as much of its character as possible in the conversion. It was also done to underline the importance of restoring and converting buildings for

new uses, to set off their architecture, to extend their life and to show the possibilities of using historical spaces for public purposes.



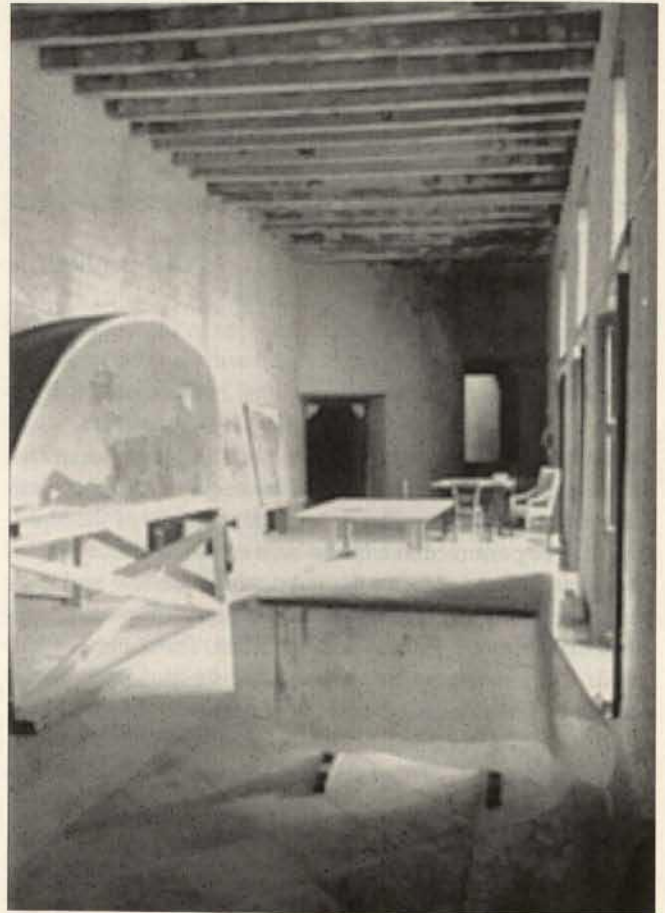
Part of the complex

Floor plan level B (old situation)





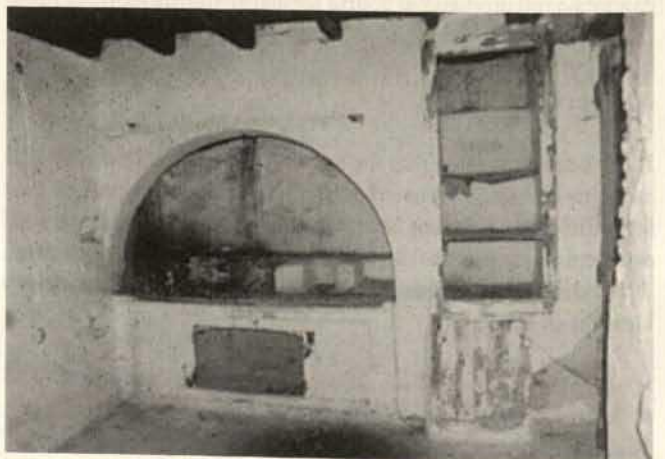
Main entrance of the complex



Room No. 5



Room No. 14



Room No. 9

