

Urban and architectural planning of the historic center of Corfu

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Abstract

This paper is speaking about the urban planning and architecture during the period of the Venetian Domination in the Ionian Islands and especially in Corfu. Corfu passed through many dominants such us the first domination of Venetians (1207-1214), the Despotate of Epirus (1267-1386), the Anjou-Neapolitan domination (1267-1386), the Second domination of Venetians (1386-1797), French republicans(1797-1799), the occupation of the Russian – Turkish (1799-1807), French empire (1807-1814) and the British protectorate (1814-1864). But the responsible of the actual form of the urban structure was the Venetians who they have introduced new methods of urban planning in relation to the defence of the city.

Keywords

Corfu Islands, History, Architecture, Urban planning, urban space, Road system, churches, Methods of construction.

Introduction

Corfu has been center of attraction for many invaders due to his strategically position. Its geographical location is very important: it is in the entrance of the Adriatic Sea, closer to Italy than any

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other Greek area and is very close to the Greek and Albanian coasts, from which it is separated by a narrow channel, but also is an open window to the east. There was many that they have tried to conquest the island of Corfu, but the most important dominants who left history and highlighted the island was the Venetians and the British.

Venetian Period

The Venetian period, which begins essentially in the Ionian Islands in 1386 AD, with the subjugation of Corfu, is a very important chapter of modern Greece. At that time, Greece was enslaved, freed from 'oppression of the Turks while the Ionian Islands and in general all the Greek regions of Venice, following the history of the West, developed a significant independent culture in which a local cultural component is a particularly strong. The different trend from the rest of Greece is mainly due to the different condition of the oppressors Venetians. The high level of culture and the relations of "protection" against vassals, allow you to create favorable conditions for the development of their culture. So, while Greece, inserted to the fall of Byzantium (1453 AD) in a long period of darkness, these areas had become centers for storage and transmission of art and Greek culture.

In the late fifteenth century, the Venetians had already established their dominance in the Ionian Islands, with the conquest of the 'island of Cephalonia and Ithaca. The Ionian Islands in that time have established a special bond with a single Venetian administration, which offered protection without oppressing orthodoxy. Another historic event helps the development of the Ionian Islands. That is, after the fall of Crete, in 1669 AD, the Cretan refugees, scholars and artists, brought their rich Byzantine tradition, from which the Ionian islands were temporarily removed. The deep religiosity for the Ionian islands reinforced by the art of the Byzantine Cretans, offers abundant fruits in painting, developing the spirit of the Ionian leading the nineteenth century to create one of the most important chapters of modern Greek literature.

The peculiar culture of the Ionian, owes its development to those happy historical circumstances, a mix of art and Byzantine tradition that has had considerable success in all fields of literature and art in order to contribute significantly to the art of the post-Byzantine and Orthodox and Greek literature.

The architecture, a significant segment of the culture of the Ionian Sea, has not yet been studied as it deserves. The monuments were previously little known in detail, because the prevailing opinion was principal of Western influence, while it seems no less intensely supported by a local stamp. Professor K.Dionysis Ziva through the study of the architecture of Zakynthos has made a fundamental change in the recognition of the value already experienced in recent years (Greece 1970).

Given the present study, as part of the Ionian architecture we can't forget the architecture of Corfu Town, the principal center of the Ionian Sea. The island's capital, with its churches, castles and houses, now is a complete example and vibrant culture of an important period, especially after the disaster of 1953, which affected almost entirely two neighboring centers, Zakynthos and Cephalonia. The importance of Corfu and its contribution to the history of the architecture is precious and unique. Created during the Venetian period, even in times of prosperity of the Venetian metropolis, Corfu has now satisfactorily the urban form, buildings and fortresses, in a unique way throughout the Greek world, an architectural heritage of incalculable value and a source of knowledge for the study of the history of the architecture in modern times. The most important architectural elements are the 'autonomy and the strong presence of' local element. Although the island had suffered for four centuries the Western influence, is independent and consistent with the Greek idea, making the connection between the Greek and Western architecture. The architectural elements Westerners are changes to be acquired as Greeks. The buildings, while following the Western morphology are built by local workers according to the needs of the country. The style and rich simplified to be highlighted by the Greek culture. The forms are removed from the concepts of the Renaissance and Baroque. In the overall structure of the city, one of the virtues characteristic of the Greeks' settlements are the

fascinating overview and freedom of the composition.

Equally important in the history of the architecture is the fact that the Venetians monuments of Corfu, which are the contraction of success of different elements of Greek and Western architecture, while providing a smooth transition to Neoclassicism. Thanks to these, it renews the action to research in every change and the development of architectural form. The traditional buildings of the period of British occupation, which came shortly after the Venetian rule (1814-1864), fit perfectly into the surrounding environment, creating a homogeneous set of continuity, contrary to what had happened in other centers of the province.

Due to its location and its natural wealth is the most important and populous of the Ionian Islands, although its extent is not very big (not exceeding 592 Km²). His figure presents an extension to the North, which coincides with the maximum elevation of the mountain (Pantokrator: 906m above sea level). In the South ,instead, reduces and flattens, showing only low hills. Almost the entire western coast is rocky, while the eastern part of the island is flat and is home to many ports. This happens in almost all the islands of the Ionian Sea, (turning his back to the sea), whose western shores are steep and sunk because of the large size of the fault lines of the Ionian Sea. For this reason the inhabitants of Corfu have chosen this side of the island for the construction of cities and ports.

In addition to the morphological interest, Corfu is valuable to study the evolution of urban residence, being the first Greek city, with buildings of more floors. Corfu has organised this type of construction, using very soon an horizontal system of property. To appreciate the importance of this, just think that the Athenians, the inhabitants of the capital of the new Greek state considered incomprehensible to live in a house with no yard and garden, they have been adapted the same system to construction of houses with more floors after the first two decades of the twentieth century. Corfu is the northern of the Ionian islands.

Urban and architecture culture

Compared to the soil morphology, the structured area is divided into three broad areas which are determined by the three hills (Campiolo hill, the Holy Fathers, and Holy Athanasius). These three sectors are divided into 10 other smaller areas that are characterized by internal organisation and their morphological planning.

We can easily notice the differentiation of the draft regulation before and after fortification (1576-88). From one part of the city the urban planning is patchy and irregular with a road system full of intricate intersections with occasional small areas of open spaces (small squares - local centers) that highlights practices of precedent urbanization even before fortification. On the other side of the Espianade area in front of the old fortress there is a normal regulation with regular and notable radial expansion of the building blocks in roads previously fixed. The urbanization that has been effectuated at the same time with the fortification, that has transformed the previous organization of the periphery, which then probably was applied after deforestation for reasons of defense and ideological whose purpose, was to appoint the old fortress as the center of military control and power of the city.

In both cases, the shape of the urban fabric is determined by repetitive and linear building blocks that are repeated in order to create a residential complex with the tradition of late medieval Western Europe, as required by both local property structures and processes of fabrication for the urban space. While the urban structure in the hills become very intricate and complex due to their morphology.

It is assumed that the first form of urban structure was created around the old churches, which worked like a magnet for population stabilization, setting the stage for a first organization of space in the form originally independent of the urban plan. In this way they have been created the older neighborhoods (contrada - district) in the area outside the fortified city. It is claimed that the fortification concluded 24 districts, which they took their name from their church (Contrada S. Salvatore,

Antivouniotissa, Chieropula etc). Campiello is one of the favorite areas that attracts a large number of churches, besides what is in the entrance of the medieval city and is a strategic defense of the city.

The first town plan is characterized by the construction “a borgo - of village”, this occurs for the gradual density of the urban districts. The construction as village is marked by the construction of the buildings placed one acanthus at the other in linear way in relation of the soil morphology, to create an imaginary wall that served for the defense and protection of the city. The continuous increase of the people within the districts has resulted in the construction of buildings in varying sizes (different types and levels), linear and in series.

Another town plan has created because of the properties of the church because the inhabitants were building their structures around these properties. The characteristic of this urban plan are the great buildings in irregular shape and in series, an example of this phenomenon is the church of Kremasti. The continuous development around the church has created a double imaginary wall that helped to protect the church and the whole district. Another primary urban plan that has traces visible to the area of Campiello. In contrast to other urban plans, this one is formed with houses with courtyards attached to the side, which was organized by an auxiliary system of roads.

The dominant residential type was determined because of its closed urban form of the fortified city and the limited space. The buildings are composed of small domains arranged in rows representing above all the age and architecture of Venice. These types of buildings are examples of austere architecture that determine civil or popular buildings, while in contrast to this, the monumental architecture that is expressed by the public palaces, mansions and churches have a structure with bigger dimensions and impressive. In the nineteenth century, there is a big change related to the building architecture. Is the first time that they are forming different facades from those existing and the lands are joined together to create larger buildings. It is estimated that about 70% of the existing buildings of the twentieth century are reconstructions of English empire.

Another thing to note is that in the old town of Corfu there is the existence of districts divided according to the criteria of class but there is a Jewish ghetto. Because of this we do not find an area exclusively for the nobles or great entrepreneurs. The different categories of accommodation (nobles, merchants, artisans³) are mixed together and reinforced the survival for centuries of houses in series (with individual variations), in the biggest part of the city. So we can say that there are areas – or better - roads with commercial character and other roads that are characterized by typical buildings with workshops on the ground floor and other areas exclusively residential as it happens to Campiolo.

Transformations of the nineteenth century and those of the modern times, they have not set a different urban system within the Old Town. The shape of the urban fabric of the city, although it has had renovations on the majority of roads and the open areas still remembers the little medieval times.

In contrast, the construction of the nineteenth century have defined the regulatory plan of the city and made up regularly, prospective monumental and classical rhythms in favorable points as the main roads or the perimeter in front of Spianadas - Mouragia - Porto and streets Zampeli and Ionian Academies. So the feeling of three-dimensional space with compared to the architectural style of the buildings that are dominating with Mannerist style and Renaissance elements, baroque and neoclassical. These characteristics express the medieval period.

In the general framework of the historical center there have not been significant changes, in fact over the demolition of the walls of the fortified city, everything else has not suffered interventions. The architectural scale and a large part of the urban fabric are gone because of bombardments of World War II and post-war reconstruction of the regulatory plan. Also they have been disappeared buildings of great significance of the typical urban fabric, for example in sections of St. Athanasius and St. Fathers but most significant is the alteration of the Royal Road.

Road network importance

The main road system of the old town of Corfu depends on its closed morphology of the fortified city, where the streets are determined as simple routes and not as a road network.

Routes based the Gates (Porte): The two main streets of the city that there were before the fortification of the city, were placed between three hills and was ensuring the main communication from the Old Fortress to the port, also passing through the Royal Gate and the Gate Spilias you can reach the inner city. Also it is interesting to note that the projections of the two roads, lead a path to the Gate of the old fortress, a path (formed with combinations of other roads) that ensured the connection to two other Gates (St. Nicholas and Raymond). The whole system was completed with alternative routes and secondary connections.

Some parts of the main roads were collecting the main functions of the city: the trade center was located between the road Mix. Theotoki and square Braxlioti, two free zones, that later became two centers, which represented symbolically Nobles and Venetian administration (XVII, XVIII century). The trade center was called Piazza della Loggia or Theater that today corresponds to the square Mix.Theotoki. Instead of piazza del Banco that initially picked symbols of the Orthodoxy, later symbolized the rising of the urban class (XVIII, XIX century).

Venetian Methodology of Fortification

A typical element in the composition of the image of the city, is the rocky point of the east side, which is called “the island in ‘Island” controls the sea passage and was made by the marine engineer SAMICHELI. Illustrates meanwhile the imposing Venetian fortifications, in possession of three successive terraces, simple and massive buildings of the English domination.

The communication with the city is made through a bridge of stainless steel, 60 meters long, which is replaced by the old drawbridge over a sea moat (Contra - Fossa). The complex

entrance consists of a central corridor with cupola and two rooms which they are also with cupola on both sides. The unique entrance arch, which is formed externally with a monumental composition, still maintains its old wooden nailed door, the holes through which passed the chains for amortization of the drawbridge.

In parallel to the external sea fossa/pit, there is a dry ditch 22m wide, which has been filled by a stone arch bridge (1603 AD), from where also starts the main building of the fortress. Currently In this place it imposes a visible long brick building, from the English period, also the access to other sites will be accomplished through three corridors with cupola, which formed the base of the building. Perpendicularly to the passage there is the retaining wall of the upper floor, where the niches in shape of arc, collect prizes of the most important men of the Venetian state. Two symmetrical stone staircases lead to the highest level, while on the right it forms the open space of Versiadas, with a Doric temple of St. George in the background. On the left side, through a tunnel inclined you can reach the dry ditch, and after several consecutive open spaces and small inclines with galleries with cupola, you can lead to a small door in the perimeter walls of the port of Mandraki. From this point begins the underpass leading to the fortified promontory called Kavosidero.

The highest level of 'Akropoli includes two fortified peaks, the "Tower of the Earth" and the "Tower of the Sea" and the space between them, it was called "the Citadel." This is where it saved the construction of the Venetian prison, on which was still added an extra floor by the British. Also at this, there was a large building that was used as barracks by the British government, with the roof shaped very attractive.

From that, a narrow uphill road, with the surrounding rock environment, with the consequent introduction of a tunnel at multiple levels, (formerly secret), provides access to the top of rock. The Old Fortress accommodate the archives of the Prefecture of Corfu, the services of the public library, the Ministry of Culture, the Colleges of the Ionian University,

galleries and events and generally everything acts as an open monumental space.

The new Fortress was built during the first phase of the walling of Borgo or Xopoli (the settlement –city) that was outside of the Old Fortress. This first phase lasted twelve years from 1577 until 1588 under the supervision of the Venetian engineer Francisco - Ferdinando Vitelli. The entire walling of Borgo, which was an enormous project at the time, was the decision of Loredan and for its implementation, stones and materials from Paleopoli were used. In order for space to be opened for the walls, 2.000 houses were demolished and thousands of golden Venetian ducats were spent.

The new Fortress is organised in two levels. The lower level, which protected the new harbour, includes a pentagonal rampart, an additional rampart and the small fortress “Punta Pepretura”. There is a three floor impressive building of 19th century here that accommodates a naval base. In the highest level of fortification, that protected the side of the countryside, there are two ramparts in the west, which are called ramparts of the “Seven Winds”. They support a three-floor impressive building which was Barracks during English domination (1854), with marvelous interior that today accommodates exhibitions and a municipal refreshment stand. In almost all the magnitude of the Fortress, in the interior of ramparts and fortresses, there is an extensive network of underground galleries that were occasionally used as shelters.

Venetian method of Constructions

The architecture of Corfu as we have already said is an integral part of the Ionian architecture. So the technique of building is substantially equivalent to other islands in the Ionian and follows the course of the Italian seventeenth and eighteenth century.

The materials for the buildings are generally the same in the whole area of the Ionian Islands: stone, brick and wood. With the difference, which depending to the circumstances, predominates one to the other. So for example in Corfu because

of the height of the buildings were used more bricks on the walls of the upper floors while the ground floor was used bearing walls of stones. The basic building blocks are in abundance in the island, but it is only a further import of wood, used in floors, partitions, doors, stairs and roofs, as well as iron for the construction of railings, accessories and rods. From the book of H. Scrofani Sicilian, the only economist who visited the Ionian islands during the eighteenth century, we learned the sources of origin of the imports of the materials. Planks of wood (wood fabricate) from Trieste and Venice and the rest of the building from Ragusa. The Iron even in slabs and in plates and other metals (tin, aluminum etc.) came from Venice and Trieste, while the small architectural pieces of art from other Italian cities as Livorno. The stone quarries of the island, mainly located in the northern part of the island (to Pantokrator), provides the residents of Corfu with stone, the most important material for the constructions. Indeed during the Venetian period, was used the stone named *siniotika* (from the quarries of the village *Sinies*), which is a hard limestone, with shades of white and red panels, which were used in the walls of bossage, in tiling, stairs and balconies of stone. The stone was also provided by *Nisaki St. Panteleimon*, *Agni* and *Varypatades* as well as from *Paxos* and *Trieste*.

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of British dominion was used limestone from *Kanakades* for lintels - architraves and sills - soft material, yellowish, like mortar slab that disintegrates with the time. Corfu has many other types of rock, sandstone, dolomite, etc., as well as marble. The most important rock was from *Spartila* with ribbons, pink, yellow, white that was also used to decorate the interior of the church of *San Iasonos* and *Sosipatros* and also in Italy to build the palaces of *Napoli*. In addition to the rock there is also the sand, chalk and clay in abundance which are materials for the manufacture of bricks, tiles and binders.

The stone were used for the construction of the lower floors. The technique was bearing walls of stone materials (stone assigned randomly) and were always plastered. Often it is mixed masonry consisted of bricks and stones from materials of

quarries or collected. There are many walls, built of mud, but of course the best masonry construction was made with lime mortar (for plaster). In general, the load-bearing walls, but for the most part, the construction of the old town are not of good quality and this was because of the low economic level of the houses and for the provincial character of the area. The stones which were used for the building of a second sort, because the good quality, of course, was used for the construction of the fortifications, which were the most important issue for the city of that time. Obviously they have been constructed remarkable buildings. The more formal structures are characterized by a more elaborated aspect and the quality of the construction was much better, which proves the existence of remarkable artisans. The technique of lower construction was mainly applied to the Ionian Islands and has contributed significantly to the destruction of the earthquakes of 1953. Note that later, under the British dominion, the administrative management required for the entire State of the Ionio, statutory norms for constructions, stipulating the thickness of external walls in proportion to the height of the building, ways of construction of masonry bearing stone or mixed (stone and brick), the composition of plaster etc. This method has led to the same basic materials of construction with much higher quality. Stones rusticated from limestone and tuffo stone were commonly used in some parts of the building depending on the importance of the building, or to decorate or make the usual impressive facade plastered. The corners of the outer buildings were usually made of carved stones of angular shape for strength and other ornaments. The combination of bearing walls of stone and plastered often found in buildings of the Renaissance (Book: Durm, "Renaissance" pag.231). In many cases, the angles were also made with a small cut (at a height of 1-2 floors) or rounded. Cutting usually ends up on top with some decoration, and also appears on the corners plastered. The construction of the frame moldings, balconies and arches was done with rusticated stone constructions richest. In buildings of bad quality some architectural members can not be clothed with plaster.

One other characteristic of the architecture of Corfu which is also found in the other Ionian islands are the arcs - "volta". The Corfiots was calling volta all the constructions with arcs. The most interesting use of the arcs are usually appears in the most commercial streets or separately for some of the buildings, thus giving a more particular architecture in the city. The use of the cupola also occurs often enough to cover the ground floor of some buildings. The ceilings of the galleries are mostly domed pavilion of stone or brick. Even vaulted ceilings often are mainstays of the stone stairs of the richest homes and landings of the latter are covered with vaulted pavilion. In rare cases (palace Kompitsi) found cupola in upper floors.

There are many Domes in this period with the exception of the Catholic Church of Our Madonna di Tenedo, which has a dome with ribs and a high light, characteristics of the Renaissance. Smaller domes are even, in some campanile (church).

Conclusion

This work has been devoted to investigate the importance of the Venetian influences during the period of their dominance. Their opinions about architecture and urban planning was very progressive for that period but they were assimilated from the rest of the Greece the next years. The actual urban form of the island is structured with priority to defence but with high level usability. For the first time in Greece it has been applied the model, of building houses with more floors without private gardens and yards, as a result, it was the necessity to create public spaces. This are the elements of the first urban planning that together with the necessity to defense the city, was the motivating power to create the actual urban, close, form of Corfu.

The architecture element of that period are still visible and they are preserved in time. The Venetians tried to use the artisans from the local community disseminating there culture and strengthening the local element by using materials derived from Corfu. In this way they have influenced the culture of the

Corfiots with elements of their culture but not under the regime of impose but they achieved to marriage the two cultures.

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