

VENETIAN COLONIAL SECULAR ARCHITECTURE IN THE IONIAN ISLANDS

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Ionian Islands off the western, and southern, coasts of Greece have a unique place in the cultural history of Western Europe. They were the boundary between East and West for over four hundred years. The islands were where Renaissance Europe, in the form of the powerful and wealthy Venetian Republic, met the the Ottoman Turkish Empire that occupied Greece and the Near East. The seven Ionian Islands were a political creation and are thus a group for historical and not geographical reasons.

Venice, in the process of expanding its influence and territories in the Eastern Mediterranean, took over the then strategically located Ionian Islands of Kerkyra (Corfu) and Paxos in A.D. 1386, Zakynthos in 1485, Ithaka in 1499, and Kefalonia in 1500. Lefkada was acquired much later (1684) and Kythera, off the south coast of the Peloponnese, even later (1717). The ports of this linear group of islands, along with others in the Peloponnese and Crete, were important as staging points in Venice's vital trade routes to the East. For the Ionian Islands to perform their function the Venetian authorities provided incentives for the islands' repopulation, productive means for their self-sufficiency and exports to Venice, payment of taxes, building of fortifications, and the establishment of local administrative centers. The Venetians spared no effort to protect the islands from invasion by the Turks as they were of great importance for Venetian supremacy over trade with the Levant.

The centuries of Venetian rule in the Ionian Islands created conditions of peaceful stability. Population grew and was accompanied by economic development and cultural advancement. This in turn led to an increase in the number of urban and rural settlements, the majority of which still exist today. Venice imposed its usual aristocratic-oligarchic constitution that provided for self-government and introduced a class system of nobles, a bourgeoisie, and the common folk over the Byzantine feudal system. The wealth accumulated by the Ionian nobility and wealthier merchants enabled them to send their sons to Italy for their education, and to build large private mansions and impressive public edifices. There were theater buildings in the towns of Kerkyra, Argostoli in Kefalonia, and Zante (as the capital of Zakynthos was then known). In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century Kerkyra was the intellectual center, the hub of learning and literature, of Greece. During the period of Venetian rule in the Ionian Islands, in contrast, most of the remainder of Greece was enslaved under the Ottoman Turks. The Venetian occupation came to an end when the Republic

surrendered to General Napoleon Bonaparte in 1797 and the islands were occupied by French troops. Venice left a considerable legacy which is still evident today.

TRANSFER OF CHARACTERISTICS

As implied above, political, social, educational and intellectual, as well as cultural characteristics were transferred from the "Old World" of Venice to the "New World" of the Ionian Islands. As can be expected the local architecture also underwent major changes. The transformations to Ionian society have been fairly well recorded but architectural developments hardly at all.

There are difficulties in documenting Venetian architecture in the islands. Existing studies of this architecture in Greece are all very sketchy (Bouras, 1970) and so far has not been studied to the extent it deserves (Zivas, 1984). Furthermore, the wealth of private and public documents available have not been fully examined as yet (Zivas, N.D.). While much information can be gathered from existing buildings of the Venetian period the actual number of structures that have survived the earthquakes that plague the islands is relatively small. The disastrous earthquake and accompanying fires of 1953 destroyed much of Zakynthos (Zante) and Argostoli, the capital of Kefalonia, and required that these towns be almost entirely rebuilt. The best surviving examples of Venetian inspired architecture are thus restricted to the town of Kerkyra, Fiscardo, a small port town on the northern coast of Kefalonia, and isolated mansions. Architectural studies need to rely to a large extent, then, on the descriptions, drawings, and maps made at the time, and old photographs.

VENETIAN AND IONIAN ISLAND SECULAR ARCHITECTURE

The fine and magnificent palazzi along the Grand Canal of Venice are the unlikely models for the mansions of the Ionian Islands. These palazzi were just too grand and out of context with the natural, social, and economic environments of the Ionian Islands. The more likely models for design and construction characteristics were other parts of Venice and its surrounding territory. A preliminary study conducted by the author would indicate that extensive architectural and urban space similarities existed between the Ionian Islands and "Venezia Minore" (Trincanato, 1948), areas of Venice such as that of the Rio Marin, the S. Pietro quarter and the area around the Arsenal, as well as the central core of the town of Chioggia. Furthermore, the Venetian architect Michele Sanmicheli worked on the fortifications of Chioggia (Concina, 1977) and Kerkyra (Agoropoulou, 1983). Irrespective of location the principles of the differentiation and layout of floors and of facade composition appear to permeate the architecture of virtually all

residences for the Venetian upper classes. To identify adaptations to local conditions that created a style of architecture entirely peculiar to the Ionian Islands (Zivas, 1975), it would be useful to review first, extremely briefly, an outline of Venetian architecture.

The characteristic Venetian building types evolved in the Middle Ages as an expression of the socio-political structures and to suit the city's economic functions (Howard, 1981). The total lack of fortifications in palazzi, for instance, was due to the internal stability and external security of Venice. In general the main features of the early mansion (*casa fondaco*) was a three storey structure with storerooms on the ground floor, entertainment areas on the first floor or *piano nobile*, and bedrooms on the upper floor. Buildings took a slightly different form away from the canals in that the ground floor usually had shops fronted by large stone piers and wooden lintels. The main living quarters were still located above. After the fourteenth century architectural changes were mainly decorative reflecting new tastes, internal developments in Venetian society, and the personalities of the architects (Howard, 1981).

The tripartite front facade was prevalent throughout and became the main vehicle for owners to express their wealth, status, and taste. The design of the front facade was rarely carried to the sides of a building as they were usually hard to see. Until the late fifteenth century palazzi facades had an asymmetrical arrangement of windows, balconies and decorative features, the lack of vertical alignment of elements, richly carved surfaces, and the sometime contrasting treatment of each storey (Lieberman, 1982). This approach was replaced by perfect symmetry, Classical vocabulary, and a more uniform treatment of facades. A major characteristic of Venetian mansions was the use of arcades, loggias and balconies to overcome the lack of space for gardens and courtyards on the confined, usually narrow-fronted, building sites, to moderate the damp heat of summer, and to provide a vista for the secluded females (Masson, 1966).

By the fourteenth century the first floor facade had a standard triptych arrangement of the open loggia of the *sala* in the center flanked by walled wings, each pierced by two windows. The upper story followed the triple division but in simpler fashion. Often the stuccoed front facade would have colored painted patterns. In the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century balconies began to appear with handrails supported by spindle balusters. Roofs were generally of a low hipped form, sometimes capped by a *belvedere* (*altana*). Chimneys tended to have elaborate shapes and were more often along the side than the front. The major difference between the *palazzo* and the smaller *palazzetto* was that the latter did not have the triptych facade arrangement but two divisions - a loggia and a single wing (McAndrew, 1980).

The three major Ionian Island dwelling types are urban mansions and country villas, town houses, and village and farm houses. The description of Venetian features in and the identification of the unique characteristics of Ionian secular architecture is difficult on account of the differences between the islands themselves. This was due to military, natural, economic, and political factors. The three towns of Kerkyra, Argostoli, and Zante serve as case examples (Zivas, N.D.). The Byzantine town of Kerkyra was selected by the Venetians as the capital of the islands and the headquarters of the naval commander of the Eastern Fleet and thus had to be heavily fortified to resist Turkish attacks. As the population of the city grew the confining walls and large Spianada square led to cramped conditions with six or seven storey buildings, narrow irregular streets and lanes, and few open spaces. These spaces were small and generally located in front of churches, and are somewhat like the Venetian *campi* with their small stone fountains (Agoropoulou, 1983). Also some of these squares were entered from typically Venetian vaulted passageways (*sotoportega*).

Argostoli was originally a "settlement outside the city walls" of the fortress of St. George which was located six kilometers inland from a large bay. The town developed on and then spread along the coastline until in the late eighteenth century it assumed its final form with commercial activities, private houses, public and other buildings. The old fortress became a village on the outskirts of the new center of Kefalonia. In Zante, in contrast, the settlement grew along a narrow strip of coastal land at the foot of a fortified hill that enabled the administrative center to remain in the adjacent castle settlement. Eventually the town became famous, its architecture admired, and it was immortalized in song as "Zante, Zante, fior di Levante" (Zante, Zante, flower of the Levant). Both Argostoli and Zante grew horizontally instead of vertically like Kerkyra, they had free open spaces and squares, and there were many views of the sea from the streets that ran at right angles to the shore. The absence of massive fortifications and gates gave these two cities additional aspects that distinguished them from Kerkyra, with its individual tall buildings and characteristic Venetian chimneys, and other Venetian colonial towns.

The bulk of the residential buildings in Kerkyra were multi-storied and occupied by the middle and lower classes. The following are some examples of Venetian inspired features and local characteristics that persisted through the centuries. Buildings covered virtually the whole of their small lots and rarely had a garden or courtyard. Ground floors normally contained shops or storerooms. Balconies were extensively used and are a distinct characteristic of the multi-storied dwellings of Kerkyra. The mansions of the upper classes, however, were two or three storeys in height with a projecting arcaded gallery on

the ground floor that provided for a balcony on the floor above (Agoropoulou, 1983). Other facade features included the rhythmic placement of windows, bands that separated floors, and stone portals, balusters, carved corbels, and cornices. The wealth of the owner was usually indicated in the extent to which the portals were decorated. The corbel is a common Venetian motif and was used to support flower pots.

In Argostoli and Zante buildings were seldom more than four stories high. Each of these towns possessed a number of stately mansions and town houses, but there were more of these in Zante due to the greater concentration of wealth in Zakynthos. Venetian influences are apparent in the internal layout of these buildings and their facade arrangements, but they differed in size and scale and were tempered by the Greek trend towards simplicity and moderation (Zivas 1984). Features of Zante, as with Chioggia, were the arcades that ran almost the entire length of **Plateia Rouga**, the principal street, and the fine residences that flanked it.

A notable Ionian Island characteristic was the wider balconies that used iron railings instead of stone balusters. Another influence was the use of Venetian red as a color on the plastered wall of the facade, although ochre was also locally used. Roofs were of a hipped, or sometimes gabled, tiled form.

Country mansions in the Ionian Islands were built by the ruling families to serve both as a summer residence and the center of their farming property. There is an affinity between these country mansions and Venetian examples. The island types, however, differed in scale, were more modest and simple, but were still based on the same principles of composition (Zivas 1984).

IMPACT OF A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Although conclusions about what constitutes vernacular Ionian Island architecture cannot be made yet due to the lack of extensive studies, it is justified to term this island architecture as Ionian as there are indications of local adaptations to Venetian features (Zivas N.D.). As the Greek government has enacted a law to preserve the country's "traditional settlements" there is added urgency to the completion of studies of the important and significant vernacular architecture of the Ionian Islands.

The Greek government has enacted a city planning law that delineates the country's "Traditional Settlements" and lays down conditions and limits to property development (Greek Republic, 1978). In the list of settlements covered by this law are forty six on the island of Kerkyra, three on Paxos, Vathi the capital of Ithaca, two (including Fiscardo) on Kefalonia, and two on Leucada. In practice new buildings in other Ionian Island

settlements that are not listed also appear to be subject to the same rules. Article 2 of this law covers minimum site dimensions, and limits on site coverage, storey and building height, and building lines or setbacks. In Article 3 requirements regarding composition, building layout or arrangement, and morphological types are set down, and include matters relating to scale, massing, roof form, elevations, building materials, balconies, windows and external doors, chimneys, fencing, signs, TV aerials, and paving. These requirements when non-specific (roof pitch, for example) rely on, firstly, what is termed "traditional models" and, secondly, on the judgment of a local "Commission Exercising Architectural Control". What would be extremely helpful in the case of the Ionian Islands, and elsewhere, is the recognition for and the production of a set of architectural and development guidelines on the **specific** vernacular of each place. As outlined above there are differences between the islands in the Ionian although the common factor is that their traditional architecture is largely, but not entirely, Venetian influence. The guidelines would not only be useful to decision-makers but also to architects preparing designs for buildings. The guidelines would represent an agreement as to what constitutes vernacular attributes and provide a basis for reducing disagreements and conflicts. The preparation of the guidelines, though, will require the immediate completion of extensive studies so as to ensure the correct and proper intergration of new development and redevelopment into the unique vernacular architecture of the Ionian Islands.

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ABSTRACT

The seven Ionian Islands (Kerkyra, Paxos, Leucada, Ithaca, Kephallonia, Zakynthos, and Kythera) off the western and southern coasts of Greece have a unique place in Western cultural history. The islands were the boundary between West and East for over four hundred years. They were also where Renaissance Europe, in the form of the powerful and wealthy Venetian Republic, met the Ottoman Turkish Empire that occupied Greece and the Near East. The islands were in a desolate and poor state when Venice took over the first of the islands, Kerkyra, from the declining Byzantine Empire in A.D. 1386. In contrast, when Venice in turn handed over the islands in 1797, she left a considerable legacy which is still evident today. On taking possession of the strategic Ionian Islands at the beginning of the sixteenth century the Republic instituted major socio-economic and political transformations. The architecture of the increasing number of new buildings naturally also underwent major changes. The transformations have been fairly well documented but not the architectural changes.

The purpose of the paper will be to outline the characteristics of Venetian architecture and identify the local adaptations in the Ionian Islands as an example of secular Venetian colonial architecture. That is, architectural principles of the Old Culture of Venice are applied to the New World of the Ionian Islands. The three major island dwelling types of urban mansions and country villas, middle income town houses, and village and farm houses are distinguished. An attempt is made to describe what was transferred from Venice and what was locally determined and influenced by national characteristics.

As the Greek government has enacted a law to preserve the country's "traditional settlements" there is added urgency to the completion of studies of the important and significant vernacular architecture of the Ionian Islands. The paper calls for the recognition and the production of a set of architectural and development guidelines applicable to the specific vernacular of each place. The immediate completion of extensive studies is required so as to ensure the correct and proper intergration of new building development and redevelopment into the unique traditional architecture of the Ionian Islands.

ARCHITECTURA SECULAR COLONIAL VENECIANA EN LAS ISLAS JONICAS

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ABSTRACTO

Las siete Islas Jonicas (Kerkyra, Paxos, Leucada, Íthaca, Kephallonia, Zakynthos, y Kythera) a distancia de la costa oeste y sud de Grecia ocupan un lugar unico en la historia cultural de Occidente. Las islas fueron el limite entre el Este y el Oeste por mas de 400 años. Fueron ellas tambien donde el Renacimiento Europea, en la forma de la poderosa y rica Republica Veneciana, se encontro con el Imperio Turco Otomano que ocupaba Grecia y el Cercano Oriente. Las islas se encontraban en un estado pobre y desolado cuando Kerkyra, la primera de las islas, fue tomada por Venecia del declinante Imperio Bizantino en 1386. En contraste, con esto cuando Venezia devuelve las islas en 1797 deja un legado considerable, todavia hoy evidente. Al tomar posesion de las estrategicas Islas Jonicas al comienzo del siglo XVI la Republica instaura importantes transformaciones politicas y socio-economicas. La arquitectura del numero creciente de nuevos edificios naturalmente sobrellevo grandes cambios. Las transformaciones han sido bastante bien documentadas pero no asi los cambios arquitectonicos.

El proposito de este ensayo sera el de esbozar las carateristicas de la Arquitectura Veneciana. Asi como de identificar las adaptaciones locales en las Islas Jonicas como un ejemplo de arquitectura secular colonial Veneciana. Esto es como principios arquitectonicos de la Cultura Antigua de Venecia son aplicados al Nuevo Mundo de las Islas Jonicas. Los tres tipos residenciales principales de las Islas, mansiones y villas rurales, casa urbanas de ingresos medios, y casa de pueblo y granjas son distinguidas. Intentando describir que fue transferido de Venecia y que fue determinado localmente e influenciado por carateristicas nacionales.

La importancia y significacion de estudios urgentes de la arquitectura vernacular de las Islas Jonicas es pararela la intencion del Gobierno de Grecia de preservar los "asentamientos tradicionales" del pais. El ensayo convoca alreconocimiento y produccion de un conjucto de pautas arquitectonicas y de desarrollo, aplicables a ejemplos vernaculares especificos de cada lugar. El cumplimiento inmediato de estudios extensivos es requerido para asegurar la correcta y justa integracion de nuevos desarrollos edificios y reconversiones dentro de las singular arquitectura tradicional de las Islas Jonicas.