

# Church of Taxiarches

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District of Marmara, Merkez Neighbourhood	Construction period/date: <b>1884-1889</b>
	Current status: <b>Abandoned</b>
GPS: 40°35'10.7" N 27°33'25.8" E	Ownership status: <b>Private ownership</b>
Registration date and number: <b>Bursa KTVKKBK 15.1.1996 - 4904, 28.11.2015 - 5175 KGB-1</b>	

## History

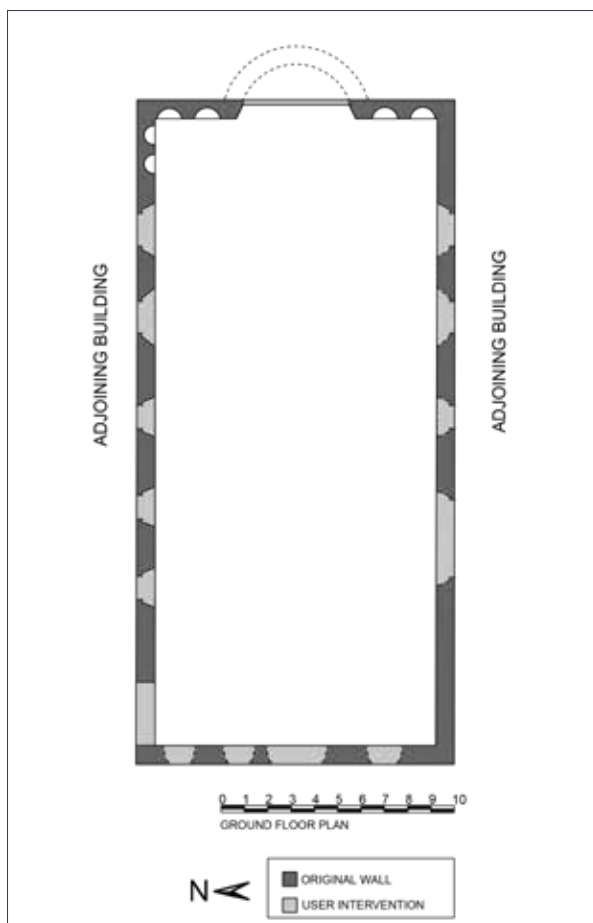
The history of the Church of Taxiarches is directly correlated with that of the town of Marmara. The town expanded from the Koliass Cape (Kole Burnu) in the west to the Ottoman *loggia* (square) next to the mosque from the Byzantine period until the beginning of 1600s. Both the cape and the town's southern shore were inside the walls built by the Latins in 1204, when they occupied Marmara Island after the Sack of Constantinople. A tower,

part of the Latin fortification that survived up to the 1930s, was situated at Cape Koliass. Its ruins were used by the Christian community as the belfry of the church of Panagia of Pyrgos (built in early 18<sup>th</sup> century and no longer in existence).

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the town progressively expanded eastward. This included the Jewish quarter, located around



Fig. 1: Western Façade



the synagogue in the north, and the Ottoman quarter, which expanded along the shoreline. The Greek community inhabited the western side of the hill behind Koliyas Cape. This area was also home to the oldest churches of the village, namely Agios Isidoros and Agioi Theodori, which are no longer in existence. The eastward expansion of the town and the construction of the mosque circa 1610, allowed the Greek community to spread between the mosque and the Christian cemetery, which was next to the Pantelidia Greek School for Girls and the Chapel of Agios Ioannis Prodromos (non-extant).

According to the Oral Tradition Archives (Folder B73), there used to be a smaller chapel in place of Taxiarches that was replaced by a larger church in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to answer the growing needs of the Christian population in the east of the town of Marmara. The church was dedicated to the archangels Michael and Gabriel (and for this reason called 'Taxiarches' and 'Ai-Stratigos'), and built between 1827 and 1835, according to Theofanidis (1947). Gedeon (1895, 97) saved a very important note of Dionysios, the

contemporary abbot of Agios Ermolaos Monastery, that reads: '1836, the Archistratigos Church in Marmara was inaugurated.' The new building also gave rise to the *loggia* of Taxiarches, defined by a big fountain as well as Greek coffeeshops on the periphery. Inside the church one could find several ancient and Roman inscriptions used as construction materials and decoration. It is possible that some of these inscriptions may have been part of the smaller chapel that was destroyed in order to build the church.

There was a fire in the town of Marmara on 20 July 1884. The flames began in the Taxiarches neighbourhood and damaged part of the Ottoman quarter to the east and west of this area. The church was also destroyed. According to the extant inscription above the main entrance of the church: 'The Church of Taxiarches burnt down in 1884 and was reconstructed in 1889' ('Ο ἐν ἔτει 1884 ἀποτεφρωθεὶς ναὸς τῶν Ταξιαρχῶν ἀνωκοδομήθη τῷ 1889'). The church had three aisles separated by two colonnades. There was no belfry; the church bell hung from the tree next to the entrance. Two priests were appointed to Taxiarches.

In 1900, the congregation of Taxiarches requested the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul to transfer the seat of the Metropolis of Proconnesus to the town of Marmara. The seat had been at the village of Aloni on Paşalimanı Island for centuries, but the town of Marmara was the richest and most populous among the villages of the ecclesiastical province. The request was partly satisfied: The Patriarchate decided that Aloni and Marmara would share the seat of the Metropolis. Thus, the Metropolitan of Proconnesus would spend six months at Aloni and six months at Marmara (Nestoridis 1992, 129-131). Taxiarches Church was announced as the Metropolitan Church of the Province of Proconnesus, a title it retained until October 1922 (Pl. IV.17).

The church was looted and partly destroyed after its abandonment in 1922. A few decades later, it was transformed into an oil press that functioned until 1992. This adaptation caused severe alterations to the structure and the interior layout of the building. The ruins of Taxiarches are the only existing traces of a church in the town of Marmara.





Fig. 2: Inscription on the western façade



Fig. 3: Eastern Façade

### Architecture

The function of Taxiarches Church is noted as 'Yağhane' (meaning "oil workshop" in Turkish) in the lot-based inquiry system of the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre. Sardunya Street, leading to Atatürk Avenue, lies to the east of the building while Şehit Kanibey Street lies to the west. Ada Palas Hotel adjoins the building's southern façade, and other, abandoned structures about the northern wall, beyond which is a narrow alley. The current entrance of the building is through a door in the west that is thought to be a later addition. The building covers an area of approximately 250 m<sup>2</sup>, with a 11.90x20.60 m floor plan. The apse in the eastern interior wall was cut and flattened. This intervention is probably associated with the adaptation to an olive oil workshop.

The building's south façade was damaged due to the adjacent hotel structure. There is an annex close to the north corner of the western façade (Fig. 1). The annex has a timber double-winged door with a top window, as well as a timber window on the upper floor. The older sections of the façade contain door and window openings that were later closed. Since the walls are not plastered, the building materials are visible. Different building elements such as rubble, lime mortar with brick powder (*khurasan*), brick, marble and a reinforced concrete beam were observed on the western façade. The marble inscription panel, which denotes the construction date of the building, is in the southern part of this façade (Fig. 2). The arched opening under the inscription panel was closed off. The marble moulding in this section of the eave provides clues about the original entrance of the building. The arched

opening between the two engaged columns with Doric capitals near the modern annex on the western façade was also later closed off. Ornamented marble pieces were used as spolia in the masonry. There are two levels of reinforced concrete bands at the roof level and approximately 1m below it.

Traces of the apse, which was cut and flattened, are still visible on the original main wall of the eastern façade (Fig. 3). There is also a square window in this section. The façade has alternating rows of brick and stone. The pattern of three rows of brick between rubble masonry changes in the apse. Spolia marble is used in this wall, similar to the style of those in the western wall. There is also an adjacent, single-story building in the southern part of the facade.

Only certain sections on the upper levels are legible on the northern façade. These include the rubble masonry wall, reinforced concrete beam, and original anchor elements of the roof elevation. On the interior, there are six window openings at the ground level that were later closed or altered in size. A thick reinforced concrete lintel sits above the opening near the west end. On both sides of the apse are two niches, which are approximately 1 m wide and 60 cm deep (Fig. 4). On the south façade, which can only be defined from the interior, there are four arched openings, two of which were later filled.

In terms of general construction techniques, the church is a masonry structure. Solid bricks are used in conjunction with the rubble masonry technique. Pink basalt is noted on the northern façade. There are double timber bands in

the main walls of the building as well as anchors connected to the tension beam of the roof's timber truss. The cross sections of the timber bands measure 12x20 cm and 12x25 cm. The remaining part of the original apse wall has a thickness of approximately 86 cm. Three different types of brick are observable in the building. The dimensions of the relatively old ones are 25x25x5.5 cm and 14.5x3 cm, while the bricks in the altered sections measure 21x9.5x5.5 cm. The original tension elements, also called anchors, are visible on the northern façade. These structural elements that connect the tension beam to the roof truss are placed at approximately 4 m intervals.

An additional reinforced concrete frame can be seen inside the building. This system was most likely built for the spatial arrangement of production spaces during the functional shift, but it affects the original walls and flooring of the building.

### Current Condition

It was noted that the building has been abandoned for a long time during the on-site investigations. There was no observable structural damage in the main walls; however, the loss of roofing and flooring makes the building susceptible to external conditions such as rain, wind, and vandalism. In addition, the loss of the building's original function, its subsequent use as an olive-oil workshop, the residential buildings surrounding the building and the adjacent hotel structure in the south resulted in the alteration and loss of the original building materials. The original window and door openings were altered, reinforced concrete bands were added, the interior layout was modified, and the apse was rebuilt. The mechanical installations for the hotel next door, such as ventilation units, are visible in the historic church structure. Trees grow inside the building. Plants damage the masonry structure and its foundation.



Fig. 4: The niches in the eastern wall of the church

### Risk Assessment and Recommendations

The building should be cleansed of the additions that damage its architectural, aesthetic and structural features. A restoration project, including scientific and planned conservation methods as well as a detailed restitution study, should be prepared and implemented. The building is one of the rare religious structures on Marmara Island that have survived with a traceable plan. Furthermore, the inscription panel, spolia, construction techniques, and structural details constitute significant historical evidence.

Considering its location in Marmara's Central District, the transformation of this building with a socio-cultural function will provide a holistic approach for its sustainability. The building's usage should be determined by all stakeholders in accordance with participatory conservation principles.