

# Panagia Kastrel(l)a Monastery

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| District of Marmara,<br>Asmalı Neighbourhood      | Construction period/date: <b>Before 1680</b> |
|   | Current status: <b>Not in use, ruinous</b>   |
| GPS: 40°37'55.9"N 27°44'06.6"E                    | Owner: <b>Unknown</b>                        |
| Registration date and number: <b>Unregistered</b> |  |

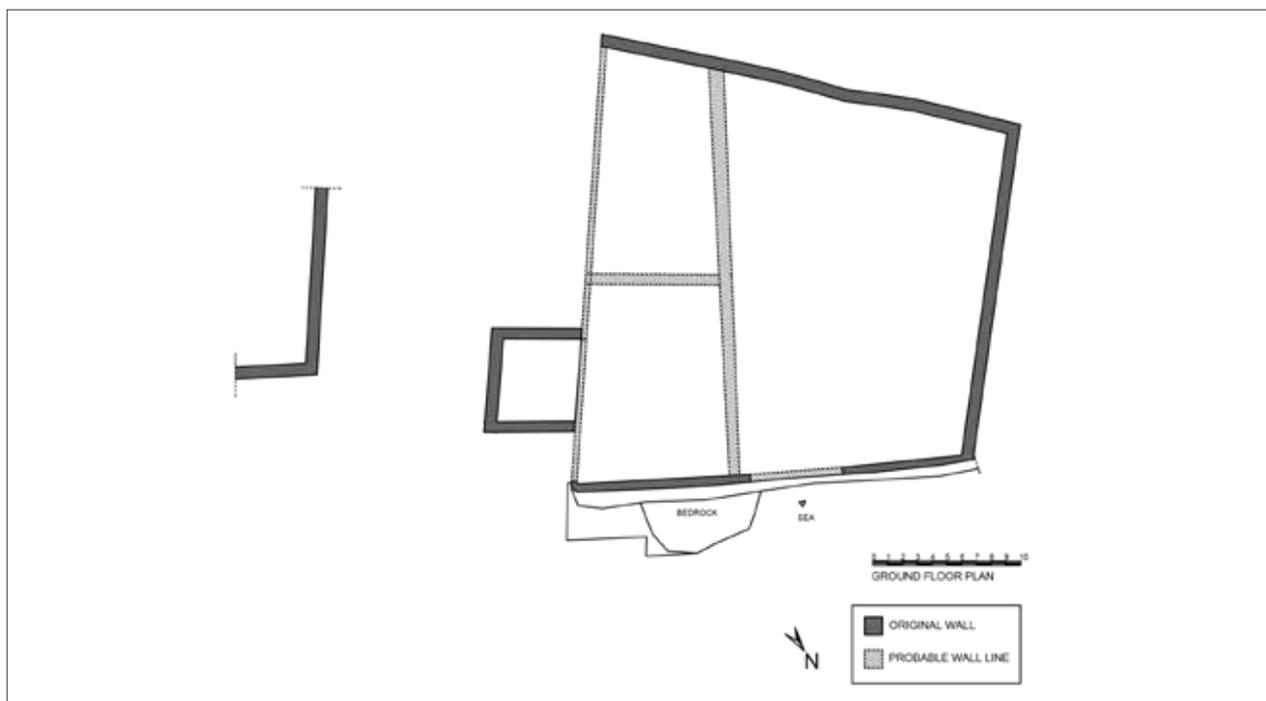
## History

According to a common tradition for many monasteries of Marmara Islands, the Panagia Kastrel(l)a (Παναγία Καστρέλ(λ)α) Monastery was built during the Iconoclastic Controversy. The epithet 'Kastrella' may be a reference to the eastern wall. This wall was most probably erected to protect the monastery from pirates, since it rendered the lights of the monastery invisible from the sea during the night. The eastern wall makes the monastery look like a castle, thus the inhabitants of Asmalı (Afthoni) gave the epithet 'Kastrella' (deriving from the Italian word 'castello') to Panagia and the monastery. However, the oral tradition of Marmara Island offers a different explanation

about the epithet. It is said that an icon of Panagia was thrown in the Sea of Marmara from the walls of Constantinople (Pl. V.24). The icon travelled to the shores of Marmara Island and was found by a fisherman from Asmalı who had dreamed the night before that a woman was swimming in the sea asking for help. He brought the icon to the Church of Panagia (Κοίμηση της Θεοτόκου, Assumption of the Virgin) in Asmalı, where they decided to build a monastery on the location of the discovery (Pl. V.22). Since then, Rum Marmarians celebrate Panagia Kastrella (the Birth of the Virgin) on September 8<sup>th</sup> (Pl. V.23). The oldest mention of the monastery appears in the codex



Fig. 1: Southern section of the eastern wall



of the Archdiocese of Proconnesus (1651-1833) in the year 1684. The same document reveals that the monastery offered 15 *qurush* as the salary of the Archbishop of Proconnesus in 1798. Gedeon (1895, 111-112) notes that the door of the monastery's church featured the following inscription: Κύριλλος | ιερομόναχος | ἀπὸ χώρας τοῦ | [...] | ἐπιμελητῆς | 1804, meaning 'Kyrillos, ordained monk from the land of [...], curator 1804'. In 1812, the monastery owned vineyards with 30.000 vines and two fields in the region of Yenna (Γέννα). At this point, the monks produced honey from the thirteen beehives in their possession, as well as keeping seven horses and donkeys, two cows, and eighty goats. The monastery also possessed a great number of farming tools and over 200 plates for the believers who would gather there for three days during the feast of Panagia. Finally, we know that the church of the monastery contained icons and religious books in addition to a silver box containing relics of saints, namely of Agios Lazaros of Tripoli, Agia Paraskevi, Gregorios the Great of Armenia, Gregorios of Nazianzus, and Agios Alypios. In 1842, Kastrella Monastery was offering 230 *qurush* per year as the salary of the Archbishop of Proconnesus.

Kastrella Monastery was abandoned between 10 and 15 October 1922 when the Greeks of Marmara Island left for Greece. Afterwards, the monastery was looted and large sections of it collapsed during the earthquake in 1935.

### Architecture

Panagia Kastrella Monastery complex is located on the shore of a gulf in the northeast of Marmara Island, just west of the Beyaz Burun, known as Aspros Pountos in Greek. The eastern wall facing the sea looks like a castle fortification, hence the name for the monastery. Today, only the foundations of the complex are traceable except for two sections of the eastern wall. The eastern wall makes a corner leading west at its southern tip and leading east at its northern tip (Fig. 1). The northern wall section is linear and stands on top of the rocks rising vertically from the pebbly beach (Fig. 2). The southern wall section rises from the beach and tapers upward. The gap between the two wall sections corresponds to a rocky projection towards the sea. Based on the historical photographs, it seems that the wall went around the projection.

The rest of the building survives only at foundation level. From this, two main sections are discernable amidst overgrowth (Fig. 3). The western wall is 0.80 m thick and reaches a length of about 30 m, while the eastern wall by the sea comprises a southern section that is almost 12 m and a northern section that reaches almost 9 m with a gap of about 6 m in between. The northern wall by the hillside is over 22 m in length and the southern wall by the creek valley measures about 33 m. This quadrangular area is divided in two by a wall



Fig. 2: Northern section of the eastern wall

that is about 1 m in thickness and lies in the east-west direction. Amidst the overgrowth and heaps of stones, only one more wall of 0.70 m thickness could be identified in the southern part, closer to the east. Projecting from near the eastern end of the southern wall is a room that is 7x6 m with wall thicknesses of 0.70 and 0.80 m. The walls were built with coursed rubble and lime mortar with brick inserted here and there.

The historical photographs show a two-story building with a small annex in the front, to the right (southeast). The main entrance to the complex is to the left of the ground floor. To its right are three or four slit windows, as well as two or three rectangular windows. On the upper floor, there are thirteen or fourteen rectangular windows. Five chimneys are rising over the roof on this side and the pitched roof seems to be arranged in several sections. On the right, the slanting wall – extant today – rises to the upper floor and is topped by a windowed-wall of this storey. The wall on the rock projection looks like that of an apse, but this is far from certain.

Another historical photograph depicts people dancing in a yard enclosed by two-story walls with windows on the upper level. This was probably taken during the celebrations of the Birth of the Virgin on Sep. 8. The photograph suggests an open courtyard within the complex, but it is not currently possible to locate or identify such a space. Oral Tradition Archives reveal that there were seventeen rooms in the complex; the church was in



Fig. 3: General view of the foundations

the middle and surrounded with monastery rooms. There was an oven for baking bread and on the southern side there was an open basement to house a boat and beehives.

### Current Condition

The building is entirely in ruins and difficult to access. Official museum staff discovered a priest's tombstone that was partially exposed after heavy rains during a visit that followed KMKD's on-site investigation. During the latter, experts noted a couple of high-quality, glazed, ceramic pieces from the Ottoman period. The biggest disadvantage of the site is that the neighbouring beach is often covered by garbage carried from Istanbul by the currents.

### Risk Assessment and Recommendations

The only surviving walls by the beach are doomed to collapse in an earthquake. Several illicit digs were also noted. Stone pine trees were planted on the surrounding hillsides, which implies that workers will be around the site to pick nuts at certain times of the year in the near future. The site is exposed to the external risks – both of natural causes and of human origin.

Basic site cleaning and some very basic excavations will certainly yield a lot of information; such activity may be followed by primary protection measures. The site has potential to attract visitors even though access is only by the sea; it should be remembered that on the feast day in September all the Greeks of Asmalı, Saraylar and the other villages of the island used to visit this church for three days.