

Agios Georgios Monastery

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District of Marmara, Avşa (Türkeli) Neighbourhood, Manastır Cape	Construction period/date: 1638
GPS: 40°29'55.6"N 27°28'56.5"E	Current status: Archaeological site
	Ownership: Unknown
Registration date and number: Bursa KTVKKBK 18.08.1990 - 1294, Çanakkale KTVKKBK 23.05.2003 - 2014	

History

The Agios Georgios Monastery on Avşa Island appears to be the only surviving monastic structure on the island, which was known for its several monastic units during the Byzantine era. The monastery was built next to the sea on 3/15 August 1638 by the ordained monk Symeon. Gedeon (1895, 65) visited the monastery in 1892 and recorded an important inscription about its history, placed inside and above the door of the church:

Ἱστορήθη καὶ ἀνηγέρθη ἐκ βάθρου σὺν τοῦ

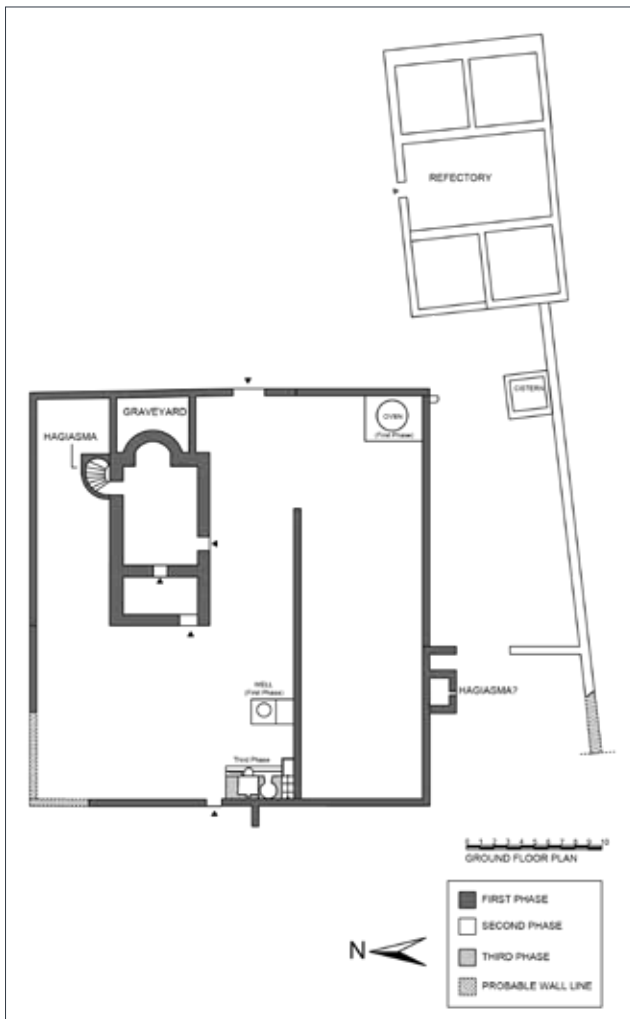
νάρθηκος | ὁ θεῖος οὗτος καὶ πάνσεπτος ναὸς τοῦ
ἀγίου καὶ ἐνδόξου μεγαλο | μάρτυρος Γεωργίου
τοῦ Τροπαιοφόρου διὰ συνδρομῆς καὶ ἐξόδου | τοῦ
πανοσιωτάτου καὶ πνευματικοῦ πατράσιν
Λεοντίου ἱερομονά | χου καὶ ἡγουμένου· ἅμα δὲ
καὶ Συμεὼν ἱερομονάχου τοῦ προκεκοιμηθέν | τος
καὶ πρώτου κτιτόρου· ἅμα δὲ καὶ Ἰεζεκιήλ
ἱερομονάχου, Σεργίου μοναχοῦ, | Κωνσταντίου
μοναχοῦ, καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀδελφῶν τῶν
συναθροισθέντων καὶ κοπιασάντων αὐτήν· (νῦν



Fig. 1: General view of the monastery from the sea.

δὲ ἀνακαινισθὲν παρὰ τοῦ προηγουμένου Ἀνθίμου ἱεροῦ | μονάχου· ἐν ἔτει 1856¹). Ἐπὶ ἔτους ‚ΖΡΜζ‘, ΑΠΟ Χριστοῦ δὲ ‚ΑΧΛΗ‘, ἐν μηνὶ ἀγούστῳ ΙΕ΄, ἰνδικτιῶνος ζ΄.

‘The divine and most sacred temple of the Holy and Glorious Great Martyr Georgios the Trophy-Bearer was decorated with paintings and reconstructed along with the narthex with the help and the expenses of the most holy and pneumatic of fathers Leontios, the ordained monk and abbot; along with the ordained monk Symeon who has died already and was the first founder; and along with the ordained monk Ezekiel, the monk Sergios, the monk Konstantios and the rest of the gathered and striving brothers; (now renovated by the abbot and ordained monk Anthimos in the year 1856(*sic*)). In the year 6146, 1638 CE, 3/15 August, 6th *indiktion*.’



The monastery rapidly became a big religious centre for the region. Among other facilities, it had a library with manuscripts, liturgical books, and ecclesiastical music books. The complex was abandoned before 1789, after a fire that also burned down the library. Gedeon (1895, 74-75) mentions that the building complex became a *metochion* of Vatopedi Monastery in Agio Oros on 6 February 1789, under the condition that they would pay six and a half *florins* (eighteen *qurush*) per year to the Archbishop of Proconnesus. In 1834 the abbot of the monastery, Anthimos Koutalinos (Panagiotou), began restorations financed and supervised by the Vatopedi Monastery. In 1836, Anthimos constructed the monastery’s fountain and planted the plane tree. Agios Georgios Monastery was annually paying 200 *qurush* to the Archbishop of Proconnesus in 1842.

During the 19th century, the monastery owned lands and fields. Its affluence has been commented on by Gedeon as being ‘contradictory’ to the poverty of Avşa’s inhabitants. The monastery was abandoned in October 1922. Since then, it has become a ruin due to factors such as the sea waves that destroyed the sea-facing walls of the complex, the earthquake of 1935 that caused severe collapses in buildings, as well as illicit digs (Pl. XII.46).

Excavations were conducted by G. Polat on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2003 and 2004. Subsequently, protective roofs were built and other measures were taken to protect the monument (Polat 2005).

Architecture

The entire complex covers an area of 2712 m², enclosed with walls. All the walls were built with unworked rubble and granite blocks without any clear order, using mud mortar and brick fragments at places. Lime mortar was attested and belongs to the period of renovations in 1834 (Polat 2005, 206). The arrangement of the structures creates two groupings – the main group encompasses the *katholikon* (main church of a monastery) surrounded by a courtyard on three sides, which is further surrounded by various annexes.

¹ The correct date must be 1834, as indicated in the handwritten note of Anthimos, cited by Gedeon (1895, 67).



Fig. 2: Water tank in the outer courtyard



Fig. 3: View of the refectory (trapeza) from the southwest



Fig. 4: "Hagiasma?" in the outer courtyard and the wall fragment to its east

The main group is flanked to the east and south by the southeastern group, which also includes an outer courtyard and some annexes.

Southeastern Group: Along the southern side of the main group runs a straight enclosure wall in the east-west direction. It joins the western wall of a large building in the east. Near the western tip of the extant part stretches a north-south wall, seemingly in the same direction as another fragment extending southward from the south wall of the main

group. Further east, almost across from the southeastern corner of the main group, there is a square construction (3.10x3.10 m) adjoining the wall on its north side. This construction made of granite rubble has survived at a height of about 1.30 m and has waterproof plaster on its interior, suggesting a function related with water storage, probably a cistern (Fig. 2). The large building in the southeastern corner of the outer courtyard has survived only at the foundation level and measures 24.52x12.00 m (Fig. 3). Its entrance was in the middle of its northern wall, opening into a large hall flanked by two rooms each to the west and east. Repairs in the western wall may suggest another entryway in the middle. The building was identified by Polat as the *trapeza* (refectory) and, along with the cistern, it is attributed to the renovations in 1834 (Polat 2005, 208-209).

A projection from the western part of the southern courtyard wall corresponds to a shorter one extending from the east of the rectangular construction adjoining the southern wall of the main group. These two projections seem to meet and bound the southern area on the west. Also, there is a small wall tongue in poor condition by the southeastern corner of the main group. The rectangular construction (1.94x3.12 m and 1.42 m tall) adjoining the southern wall of the main group has an arch at the bottom of its southern wall. The excavations led to its floor that mildly slopes down toward the arch. Polat proposed it to be a *hagiasma* (p. 209) from the first construction phase; however, there is nothing to confirm this proposal yet (Fig. 4).

Main Group: Surrounded by a 1.30-m-thick encircling wall, the main group of buildings covers approximately 900 m². The encircling wall has survived to a certain height only on the northern side, and it features timber bands on its interior surface. It is accessed via a main doorway of 2.40 m width on the eastern side and a second doorway of 1.20 m width on the western side. Polat states that the double-winged main door was dismantled and sold after the abandonment (2005, 206). Traces around the main group suggest that there were other structures to the west, and that the outer courtyard possibly extended further in this direction.



Fig. 5: View of the inner courtyard's northern part and the encircling wall from the east

The main group's encircling wall (Fig. 5) contained baths, a *katholikon*, *hagiasma*, winery, kitchens, workshops, well, monks' cells, cemetery, and more. The baths, entirely in ruins today, are located between the northern encircling wall and the *katholikon* church (Fig. 5). The basins uncovered on the inner and sea sides of the northern encircling wall by Polat (p. 210) are not discernible today. In this part, the outer shell of the stepped *hagiasma* projects from the northern wall of the *katholikon* church. This curving and descending corridor with eight steps leads down to a small basin.

The *katholikon* church is an oblong structure that lies in the east-west direction, with a protruding semicircular apse to the east and a narthex to the west (Fig. 6). It is accessed via a doorway at the southern end of the western wall of the narthex and another doorway at the western end of the southern wall of the naos. The narthex is paved with baked clay bricks and opens into the naos via a doorway in the middle of its eastern wall (Fig. 7). Excavations brought to light numerous fragments of roof tiles and painted Ottoman wares of the 19th century as well as fresco fragments (Polat 2005, 208).

The naos is oblong and some parts of it are paved with Maltese blocks or bricks, but most of it is left as compressed earth. The apse is paved with bricks. There were no *pastophorion* rooms but rather niches. Burials were uncovered in the apse and one by the south wall of the naos (Polat 2005, 207-208). The atrium by the narthex, as described by Polat, is not discernible today. The area between the apse and the eastern encircling wall is bounded by



Fig. 6: General view of the *katholikon* church



Fig. 7: Narthex

walls. The uncovered burials indicate that this area had a cemetery function.

The inner courtyard extending along the southern and western sides of the *katholikon* church is paved with granite and marble blocks. Along the southern side of the inner courtyard extends a large rectangular area housing the work areas and communal kitchen to the east (Fig. 8); on its non-extant, timber upper floor was likely to have been the monks' cells. The communal kitchen still has the lower part of a domed oven (Fig. 9). The area from the oven to the inner courtyard is also paved with stones. This large indoor area is accessed via an opening to the east. At the southwestern corner of the inner courtyard there are the stairs, cooking stove (Fig. 10), winery tank, and discharge basin (Fig. 11); there is a round well (with a diameter of 0.90 m) within a paved square area measuring 1.40x1.40m. to its east (Fig. 12). The cooking stove has bricks marked KII in Greek and the bench in front was built with bricks marked AXMET ΑΛΗ ΠΑΣΣΑ, ΜΥΡΙΟΦΥΤΟΝ, i.e. Ahmet Ali Pasha, Myriofyton (modern Mürefte) (Fig. 13).



Fig.8: Large area housing the communal kitchen and workshops

Ahmet Ali Pasha of Mürefte was initially an *armateur*, who eventually went into brick and roof-tile manufacturing. The earliest records of him are from the first decade of the 20th century. Therefore, the construction with his bricks should belong to this decade. On 9 August 1912, a severe earthquake hit the region followed by a tsunami and with WW I, the entire industry was devastated. Fortunately, the region recuperated somewhat after the National War of Independence, but never again reached its former glory, yet Ahmet Ali Pasha remained in the sector (Eldem 2018, 445 Table 17.5). Bricks with KII are not noted in Eldem's study; however, they may be proposed as local, handmade production.

Thus, to the known two documented construction phases of the complex, namely the original construction in 1638 with mud mortar and that in 1834 with lime mortar, a third phase can be added: around 1910, either before or after the earthquake of 1912, at least a cooking stove was built with local bricks marked KII, and a bench was built with the bricks of Ahmet Ali Pasha.



Fig. 9: Domed oven



Fig. 10: Stairs and stove



Fig. 13: Bricks inscribed with “Ahmet Ali Pasha Myriophyton”



Fig. 11: Winery tank



Fig. 12: Well in the inner courtyard

Current Condition

Fortunately, the area was fenced off following the rescue excavations in 2002 and 2003; protective roofs were built over the kitchen, oven, and *hagiasma*; a supporting wall was built on the seaside to prevent sea waves from eating away the encircling wall. Since then, the fence has been deformed and broken at places; the supporting wall by the seaside has been destroyed by the elements, thus allowing parts of the north encircling wall to be washed down; the protective roofs have rusted and are in urgent need of maintenance. The walls need maintenance, and the site is overgrown with vegetation. There is no information board for visitors or the locals, even though the complex is situated by the main road and easily accessible.

Risk Assessment and Recommendations

The site is easily accessible and open to the elements, including illicit diggers. The rusted protective roofs need to be replaced as soon as possible; otherwise, they will collapse on the remains causing more damage. The supporting wall on the seaside must be rebuilt. The entire site needs to be maintained to prevent further damage. After all these are accomplished, an information board must be installed.

The site is the only surviving historic monument on Avşa Island, which is losing its historic identity due to overwhelming domestic tourism. Maintaining the site and making it officially accessible to visitors will enrich the touristic qualities of Avşa.