

Agios Ermolaos Monastery

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District of Marmara, Gündoğdu Neighbourhood, Köyüzeri Locality	Construction period/date: 17th century
	Current state: Abandoned
GPS: 40°35'04.3"N 27°35'50.8"E	Ownership status: State Treasury
Registration date and number: Unknown	

History

Agios Ermolaos Monastery was situated on Mt. Prioni (Meşelik) above the village of Gündoğdu (Prastio). It was one of the biggest monasteries of Marmara Island. Its construction date is not known but there is evidence indicating that the monastery was active before the 17th century. The islanders used to gather for the feast of Agios Ermolaos on July 27, the name day of Agios Panteleimon, instead of on July 26, which is Agios Ermolaos's name day. Panteleimon, a student of Ermolaos in Izmit (Nicomedia),

was tortured to betray the name of his Christian teacher. The pagans arrested and killed Ermolaos on July 26 and his student Panteleimon the next day. The feast of Agios Ermolaos was among the important ones in the religious culture of Greek Marmarians.

The complex was encircled by a wall. The building had two floors with many rooms for the monks and guests. The inner courtyard of the building contained the small Church of Agios Ermolaos. The external courtyard of



Fig. 1: General view of the rectangular space in the east

the monastery was circumscribed by many trees and flowers. The monastery owned vineyards and fields around the complex as well as 300 *stremmas* (acres) of fields next to Gündoğdu village (Pl. VIII.33). Gedeon (1895, 93-100) refers to a letter from the Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysios IV in 1678 showing that there were several monks living in the monastery. The same year, Dionysios IV declared it 'free' from the local Archdiocese of Proconnesus, which mismanaged it. Gedeon found an inscription on a marble bearing a cross in the basement of the monastery that is the oldest known chronological evidence: 'ΗΓΟΥΜΕΝΕΒΟΝΤΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΠΑ ΚΥΡ ΠΑΛΑΣΙΟΥ ΕΠΙ ΕΤΟΥΣ 1650. ,ΖΡΝΗ'', which translates as 'On the abbacy of sir Papa-Palasios, in the year 1650'. Rallakis from Prastio (Gündoğdu) was the abbot of the monastery in 1791. He ordered a copy of Agios Ermolaos's liturgical text by the ordained monk Gedeon of Koutloumousion Monastery in July 1791. Abbot Rallakis was succeeded by Abbot Gedeon, who in turn was succeeded by Dionysios from Andros. Dionysios arrived at the monastery in 1815 and became the abbot in January 1822, as we learn from his notes on the liturgical book that were copied by Gedeon in his book (1895, 96-99). Dionysios' notes reveal that Agios Ermolaos Monastery was partially restored in 1805 and that this was written above the church door. On 4 November 1831, there was a further restoration of the monastery and the icons of the church. Gedeon met only a young ordained monk named Polykarpos when he visited the monastery in 1892. At the beginning of the 20th century, three monks lived in the monastery.

It seems that the last attempt to restore the monastery was in 1831. Thereafter, it gradually abandoned, only a few ruins remain from the complex today.

Architecture

The remains of the monastery are in Köyüzeri Locality, approximately 300 m north of Gündoğdu Neighbourhood. The lot is approximately 16 decares of olive groves situated on a southward-descending forestland. The site is reached by taking a path leading south from a road about 350 m further north. During the fieldwork, only the terrace walls and

other surviving walls in certain sections could be investigated.

The monastery's plan organization could not be discerned due to dense vegetation and losses of building elements. The walls around some spaces are traceable in the sloping parts. Three terraces were identified, but the original number is likely higher. In general, the architecture is terraced and extends in the east-west direction. The spaces that constitute the main volume of the monastery are located on the second terrace and covered by dense vegetation. This terrace ends in a steep slope towards the west. There is an opening at the level where the slope ends, which probably

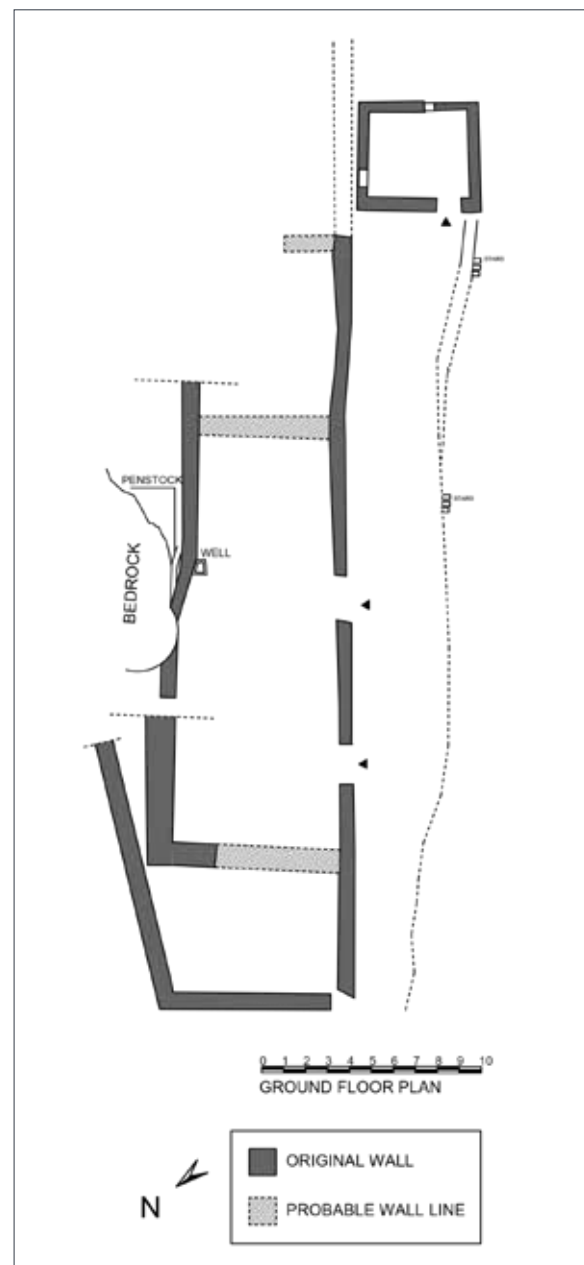




Fig. 2: Remains of the wall



Fig. 3: Stairs (West)

provided access to the main volume. There is a rectangular space on the eastern end, which lies outside of the vegetation (Fig. 1). A rectangular window with a flat lintel and a niche in the wall have survived in this space. Moreover, a door that provides passage between spaces is also noted. There is an original stairway on the southern wall of the terrace above that connects different levels.

The traceable walls are built in rubble and brick masonry (Fig. 2). Mortar is not noted in the retaining walls of these terraces. However, lime-based mortar is attested in spaces whose plans are discernible.

While the thickness of the wall in the remains of the southern terrace is 70~80 cm, the wall thickness of the rectangular space to the east is 110 cm. There are two stairs on the upper terrace (Fig. 3). These are each formed by four stone, cantilever steps supported by rubble

walls. The width and riser heights of the stairs vary. The riser height of the eastern stairs ranges between 26~40 cm. The width narrows down from the wall towards the tips—from 26~30 cm down to 15~20 cm. The thickness of the stones is 6~9 cm. On the other hand, the riser height of the western stairs varies in a wider range, between 17~46 cm. While the width is 23~40 cm near the wall, it decreases to 15~34 cm towards the tip. The thickness of the stones not only vary from step to step but also throughout the length of the stone.

Current Condition

Although the remains at the site are architectural heritage artefacts, it is not currently possible to make evaluations about the structure as a whole. Deteriorations attested in the remains are loss of material, surface weathering, effects of environmental conditions, vegetation, and illicit digs. Dense vegetation not only affects the visibility of the building elements but also changes the physical and mechanical properties of the building. There is no information panel related to the monastery in or around the site. Even though access to the area is difficult, the buildings faces a high risk of degradation due to its exposure to environmental factors and uncontrolled illicit digging.

Risk Assessment and Recommendations

In order to prevent natural degradation in the monastery and its surroundings, cleaning and excavation works should be carried out under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Thus, a reliable assessment about the date of construction can be made based on the architectural and decorative pieces that may be unearthed.

After extensive research on the architectural features of the remains, the area should be opened to visitors with a strategic plan involving all the stakeholders on Marmara Island. This plan will not only increase the visibility of the multi-layered character of the island, but also assist the transfer of this cultural heritage site to future generations.