

Church of Agios Nikolaos

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District of Marmara, Abroz Neighbourhood, Yana Locality	Construction period/date: repaired in the 19th century
GPS: 40°38'56.5"N 27°42'10.2"E	Current status: Abandoned
	Ownership status: Unknown
Registration date and number: Bursa KTVKBK 18.08.1990 - 1293	

History

The Church of Agios Nikolaos (also known as Agios Nikolaos of Genna) is situated on the eastern coast of Marmara Island, to the south of Saraylar village (Palatia), in a little valley called Genna (i.e. 'birth', because the valley is fertile). The church was the *katholikon* of a small monastery. It is identified as the place where the Ecumenical Patriarch Arsenios was imprisoned after being exiled from Constantinople

by the Emperor Michael Palaeologus VIII in May 1265, as Georgios Pachymeres –who visited Arsenios in exile– writes in his chronicles.

Gedeon claims that the church is not older than the 12th century and points out that the adjacent spaces and the encircling wall date from the early 19th century. He also notes that the dome of the church collapsed in the



Fig. 1: General view from the south

beginning of the 19th century and was later restored. Gedeon saw inside the church an icon dating from 1616 and two Gospels published in Venice in 1728 and 1737 respectively (1895, 112-114). Hasluck describes the church as follows (1909, 14): “The plan (e.g. of the church) is a reduced version of the type with apsidal transepts particularly common at Athos: the customary columns in the narthex are rendered unnecessary by the small scale of the building. The dome is octagonal, standing on a square base” (Pl. VI.28).

The christians of Marmara Island used to organize a feast at the monastery to celebrate St. Nicholas’s Day (December 6). The church survived the earthquake of 1935 and it is the only church that entirely kept its original structure in the Southern Marmara Islands.

Architecture

Agios Nikolaos Church is located approximately 3.5 km east of Saraylar Neighbourhood, 100 m away from Marmara Sea and 10 m north of the highway connecting Saraylar to the central settlement of Marmara Island. The building is located on a terrain ascending from north to south. The level difference in the area is rearranged by terracing with dry rubble stone walls. The building’s courtyard is reached from the highway by going down a set of stairs.

On the western façade of the building is a doorway with a lintel, which provides access to the narthex. The narthex is a rectangular space covered by a barrel vault. The naos is accessed through another door with a lintel that is topped by a relieving arch. The centre of the cruciform naos is surmounted by a dome with a diameter of about 4 m; the northern and southern arms of the cross have apsidal ends, which are covered by half domes, and the eastern and western arms are covered by barrel vaults (Fig. 4). A half-domed apse is attached from the east to the bema that is also covered by a barrel vault. Pendentives are used as transition elements from the square-planned naos to the circular drum (octagonal on the exterior) of the dome in the centre.

The central dome with a high and octagonal drum reaching approximately +9.00 m, the arms of the cross plan and the barrel vaults

covering these sections at +5.00 m, and the narthex and apse sections rising up to +4.00 m are seen from the outside (Figs. 2, 3). Three different sections of the building are perceptible on the western façade (Fig. 3). At the foremost is the narthex section, which is plastered over, with the entranceway in the centre and crowned by a triangular pediment. Further behind is the gable that rises from the superstructure of the narthex and separates it from the western arm of the church. In the middle of this gable is a concrete panel added after the 1954 repairs. The octagonal drum of the dome covering the main space is seen at the back. The northern facade includes the narthex, the western arm of the cruciform, the transept, the bema and the apse (Fig. 2). The northern façade does not have any openings except the transept’s arched window, which was later closed. On the eastern façade are the semi-circular apse wall, the gable of the bema wall, the protruding northern and southern transepts, and the dome’s drum visible (Figs. 1-2). The apse wall has a circular window, which

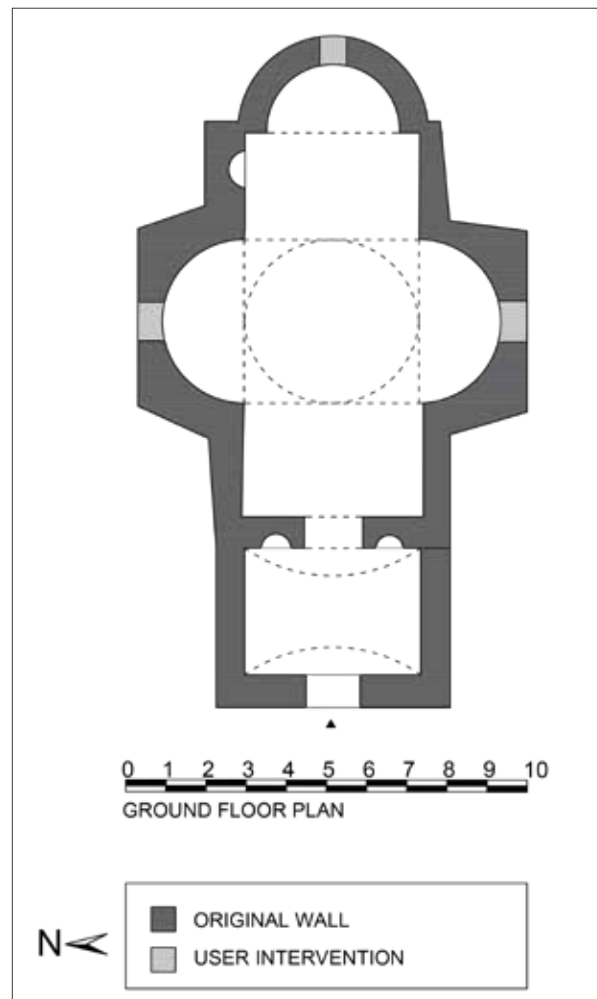




Fig. 2: General view from the northeast

was later closed. On the southern façade, the narthex currently lies under the ground level, while the southern transept, the main walls of the western half, and the dome's drum are partially visible (Fig. 1). There are window openings of 60x120 cm on the drum, facing the cardinal directions, to illuminate the naos.

The building is stone masonry structure. Its load-bearing elements comprise the masonry walls, superstructure –such as the dome or vaults–, drum, and pendentives. The loads of the dome and vaults are transferred to the main walls first, then to the ground via the foundation. The main walls are 65 cm thick and composed of rubble masonry. White, lime-based mortar acts as the binding material. Larger stones are used in the corners of the building as quoins in an alternating manner.

The narthex vault is constructed in half bricks. Bricks of different sizes and thicknesses were used in the vault coursing, indicating former repairs. Brick coursing is also seen where plaster is lost in the dome, drum, and pendentives. Different materials and coursing are seen on



Fig. 3: General view from the northwest

the exterior surface of the dome's drum due to past repairs. Traditional bricks that measure 26.5x4 cm (the other dimension could not be measured) were used in the drum, as well as rubble stones and solid bricks, which measure 21x6.5x10 cm, that are probably related to recent interventions. All window openings have brick arches. There are not any timber or iron ties, lacings or rings identified in the building. The roof is covered with a 4-5 cm thick, cement-based material.

Today, only a few paintings are visible on the walls of the church, like the head of an angel



Fig. 4: Naos, eastern view

above the western window and sketches of (Corinthian) columns to the south of the apse (Figs. 5-6). It is likely that there were graves inside the walls of the monastery, in the area between the church and the sea.

Current Condition

The photographs of the church from the beginning of the 20th century show that the building was well-maintained, that its façades were plastered and possibly painted, and that the roof was covered with over-and-under tiles. According to on-site observations, the building has not been used for a long time and it has been neglected. No structural damage was attested on its main walls. Interventions/repairs and loss of material are noted on the dome's drum. Plant growth is seen on the roof and in the main walls, which can damage the wall coursing. It is noted that incompatible materials were used and the windows were closed with hollow bricks in the course of past repairs. During the visit, it was noted that work was underway to pave the naos's floor with new material.



Fig. 5: Naos, traces of wall paintings



Fig. 6: Naos, traces of wall paintings

Risk Assessment and Recommendations

At present, there is not any severe structural damage to the building that can cause losses. However, improper repairs implemented in the past have damaged the authenticity of the building. Until comprehensive restoration works can take place, unsupervised and improper implementations should not be permitted, penetration of rainwater from the superstructure should be prevented, and the vegetation on the roof should be removed. This way, the current condition of the building will be sustained and material decay will not intensify.