

EXHIBITION OF THE BYZANTINE COLLECTION IN ARCHONTIKO ALEXOULI AT AGIA IN THESSALY

General information

Agia is considered to have been an affluent settlement from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century. The chief manufacturing activity was the textile industry and related sectors as was the case with the cooperative of Ambelakia. Agia had approximately 800 families and an organised social structure with upper and middle class. The temporary economic boom resulted in the impressive growth of the city and its image with the creation of many new mansions, from which only one stands today, Archontiko Alexouli. Within the broader region it was a significant town and a "cultural oasis" according to the written account of the traveler Poucheville. The golden age of Agia and the red thread and cotton trade ceases after 1810, along with the decline of the golden age of Ambelakia. Today Agia is one of the picturesque small cities which has survived of the recent wave of the urbanistic intervention which has affected other regions.

Mansion Alexouli

Alexouli mansion is one of the more important buildings of Agia, as it is located in the town's historical center and is connected with the Alexouli family and its manufacturing enterprises. The mansion's typology is characteristic of that of the Ambelakia mansions, as the communities followed a common development model.

It was built around 1800, according to the information given by Kalypso, the daughter of Kleanthis Alexoulis, who donated it for the Greek state. According to the evidents, the Hadjiioannou brothers had created a manufacturing cooperative for the exporting of the red thread and cotton production, co-owned with the Rizos brothers from Melivoia. The Hadjiioannou family was renamed Alexoulis and the mansion is attributed to Dimitrios Alexoulis, the first one to bear this name. Kleanthis, the grandson of Dimitris Alexoulis is responsible for the revitalization of Agia's cottonseed industry and its export, after 1860.

Description of the mansion

The mansion (archontiko) is a complex building, composed of the main house and its auxiliary buildings. This complex is delineated by a high perimeter stone wall within which exist two yards. The main building consists of ground floor, first floor and a small underground storage space. The square floor plan forms recesses on each of the four sides, with the deeper one in the main façade (2 meters). The ground floor consists of a central hall (hayatti) from which one proceeds diagonally to the four corner rooms. These rooms were reception and work spaces. The first floor layout plan is similar to the ground floor having a central space and four corner rooms which were also used as working and living space during the summer. However, the first floor rooms have more window openings, therefore a

brighter space and the exterior walls are thinner than the ground floor. The floors are of wood construction and the ceilings are decorated with recessed panels and carved rosettes. The building has a four-sided sloped roof with wooden structure covered with byzantine roof tiles. Its architectural character follows the Epiro- macedonian morphology which can be found throughout the southern Balkans. The auxiliary buildings at the rear of the main building are lower structures for secondary uses which are in a ruinous state today

Proposal

Historical and archaeological information center - Museum

The desire of the local community and the Ministry of Culture to make the most of this imposing building leads us to propose a complex role for it, after its restoration, leading to the presentation not only of the outstanding family of Alexouli, closely connected with the recent period of the town but also of the history of the region as a whole, as it houses an important archaeological collection. The beginning of this collection dates to 1930 and consists of a wide variety of finds, gathered from all the major archaeological sites of the district. Therefore, an information center related to the general history of the region will be available, a history that this family admired so much as to donate the house in order to serve as an archaeological museum. Thus, an institution can be shaped in order to function as a Museum of Agia through the centuries, while a part of it will recall the historical use of the house as the home of the original owners with authentic furniture, general decoration, and personal belongings of Alexouli family.

The byzantine collection of Agia

This collection consists of the excavation and scarce finds from the large amount of byzantine monuments that existed in the area. These form two large categories, finds from the monastic union of the Mountain of Cells (Kissavos), where more than forty monasteries of 11-12th cent. are found and the ones from the byzantine sites in the fertile plain of Agia, mostly Agia – Vathirema- Aetolophos, which formed part of the bishopric of Vesaina. The majority of them are architectural sculptures, relating to churches, but there also exist ceramic objects and small finds referring to daily life during the byzantine period.

Organization of the Museum space

Ground floor

The ground floor is presently subdivided into two sections with continuous stone wall at the end of which there are two staircases leading to the first floor. This wall is proposed to be demolished so as to unify the stone paved central space as it was originally. In general terms the marble exhibits should be placed on the

ground floor for static reasons and specifically in the central space and NE rooms. The exhibition will begin in the NE room which will display objects from the prehistoric and historic period whereas the north space will display byzantine period findings. As one enters to the left, a reception area with an information desk is proposed. The left corner room is to become a museum shop, while the SW room that served as the living room of the last tenant Calypso Alexouli is proposed to remain intact, with information's signs where necessary. In this room one can find the archives and the library of the Alexoulis family.

First floor

A variety of different thematic groups of archaeological objects will be displayed in the corner rooms and the smaller intermediate spaces which occupy the first floor. A big part of the exhibited objects will be portable and will be placed in display cases constructed with strict specifications. The eastern room is proposed to be transformed into a projection and multimedia space. The central space will be occupied with authentic furnitures of the Alexouli family which is currently housed within the mansion so as to maintain the original atmosphere.

Outdoor space (yards)

In the main outdoor space a lot of architectural fragments, that presently are scatterd in different rooms of the house can be arranged in order to create an open air exhibit. Part of it can be used for the discreet placement of the building air-conditioning installations

Auxiliary buildings

The auxiliary buildings to the rear of the main building will also be reconstructed to the original state and uses so that they will be accessible to the visitors and will have original objects and utensils on display referring to the domestic and manufacturing activities of the Alexouli family.

June 2013

Dimitris Koutsojiannis

Architect - restorator