

International Symposium on the Conservation of Monuments in the Mediterranean Basin

(2024)

Proceedings of the 11th MONUBASIN (2024)



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doi: [10.12681/monubasin.8170](https://doi.org/10.12681/monubasin.8170)

To cite this article:

Apostolopoulos, A. L., Apostolopoulos, A., Apostolopoulos, C., Diamantakos, D., & Kaldis, N. (2024). Preliminary Restoration Proposal for the Holy Monastery of “Kokkini Ecclesia” (Red Church) in Lefkada. *International Symposium on the Conservation of Monuments in the Mediterranean Basin*, 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.12681/monubasin.8170>

Preliminary Restoration Proposal for the Holy Monastery of “Kokkini Ecclesia” (Red Church) in Lefkada

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Abstract. The Holy Monastery of “Kokkini Ecclesia”, a significant cultural and religious heritage site in Platystoma, Lefkada, presents a unique architectural and historical challenge for restoration and conservation efforts. The abstract outlines a preliminary restoration proposal based on detailed historical research, architectural analysis, and structural assessment conducted on-site.

The Monastery complex, characterised by its enclosed polygonal shape and central chapel, encompasses four wings, each housing various functions and structures. Historical sources provide fragmented information on the specific uses of these spaces, necessitating careful deciphering and interpretation through onsite investigation.

Through a thorough study of historical records and physical examination of the monument, the architectural configuration and original functions of the Monastery spaces have been elucidated. The Eastern wing housed administrative functions such as the Abbot guestroom, the “*Archontariki*” (monastery reception hall), and storage areas. The Southern wing accommodated storage and animal facilities on the ground floor and monks' cells on the upper level. The Western wing comprised guest rooms, a furnace chamber, possibly a kitchen, and the Monastery's refectory. The Northern wing exhibits remnants of buildings with undefined boundaries and configurations, posing challenges in determining their historical uses.

Based on the findings from historical research and onsite exploration, a proposed restoration plan, in a preliminary stage, has been formulated to preserve and revitalise the Holy Monastery of “Kokkini Ecclesia”. The plan includes the following key components in brief:

1. Restoration of the Eastern wing (3-storey): Conversion of existing spaces into a library/archive room, prayer room, and administrative offices while preserving original architectural features.
2. Restoration of the Southern wing (2-storey): Adaptation of the ground floor for food storage and animal husbandry storage purposes, a bookshop, and reinstating monks' cells and Abbot's cell on the upper level.
3. Revitalization of the Western wing (2-storey): Recreation of the “*Archontariki*” (monastery reception hall), auxiliary kitchen facilities, guest rooms, and other Monastery facilities to accommodate modern needs while respecting historical integrity.
4. Interpretation of the Northern wing (2-storey): Integration of archaeological findings and historical research with the goal of add some of the missing services of the old Monastery, such as the Monastery's refectory and main kitchen and the synodal room.

This preliminary restoration proposal aims to strike a balance between preserving the historical authenticity of the Holy Monastery of “Kokkini Ecclesia” and ensuring its relevance and sustainability for future generations. By addressing the complex architectural and historical layers of the monument, this paper seeks to safeguard and give prominence to the rich cultural heritage of Lefkada's religious landmarks.

Keywords: Preliminary Restoration Proposal, Holy Monastery of Kokkini Ecclesia, Architectural Heritage, Historical Research, Structural Assessment

PART A: HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

1 Introduction

In this paper, an attempt has been made to highlight and present the preliminary restoration proposal of The Holy Monastery of “Kokkini Ecclesia” (Red Church), a significant cultural and religious heritage site in Platystoma, Lefkada, based on detailed historical research, architectural analysis, and structural assessment conducted on-site. The execution of this preliminary phase was deemed necessary to create the fundamentals for the next Phases (Preliminary - Final - Implementation).

The Holy Monastery of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary belongs to the region of the village Platystoma, on the slopes of Mount Skaros in the “basin” that constitutes the end of part of the mountainous mass in Lefkada [1]. The location of the Monastery combines the wild natural landscape, tranquillity, and isolation, but also has short access to nearby destinations and the sea. All these elements contributed to the establishment and development of the Monastery over time, resulting today in its long history. The sobriquet of the Monastery “Red Church”, probably comes from the stone and red clay with which the monastery church was built in the past [2].

The Monastery has been declared an archaeological site by Ministerial Decision 15904 (-ΦΕΚ- Government Gazette Β', 473 / 17.12.1962). The decision mentions it as “*Monastery of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary or Kokkini Panagia*”. Today, the Katholikon (Church) has been restored in a previous restoration stage, but all the other buildings of the Monastery remain in ruins. On the 11th of July, 2023, The Central Archaeological Council (CAC-KΑΣ) accepted the preliminary restoration proposal.



Fig. 1. Historical photograph, 1960s.



Fig. 2. Recent photograph, 2020.

2 Historical Overview of The Monastery

The timeline and historical overview of the Monastery [3] provide a comprehensive glimpse into its rich past, tracing its origins, significant events, and transformations over the centuries. Through this chronological framework [4], we delve into the intricate tapestry of the Monastery's history, shedding light on its cultural, architectural, and spiritual evolution, serving as a testament to its enduring significance and legacy [5]. Below a historical timeline, brief is followed:

- **(12th – 13th century)** | First historical references to the existence of the Monastery.
- **(1478)** | Reconstruction and expansion of the Monastery with new structures in 1478 after the destructive earthquakes of the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries.
- **(1704)** | Collapse of the Katholikon (Church) and some structures of the Monastery after the earthquake of 1704.
- **(1722)** | Reconstruction of the Monastery and the Katholikon in 1722.
- **(1743)** | During the plague of 1743, the residents, affected by the disease, donated all their property to the Monastery, resulting in a sharp increase in its wealth and the imposition of heavy taxation by the Venetian authorities.
- **(1803)** | Taxation of the Monasteries was intensified in 1803 to support public education.

- **(1804-1805)** | The decree of 1804 proposed the confiscation of the property of wealthy Monasteries, and with the decree of 1805, the dissolution of the wealthy Monasteries was enacted.
- **(1810)** | In 1810, it was decided to return the property to the Monasteries by the British Administration (1810-1864).
- **(1817)** | In 1817, a decree was issued for a lower number of personnel/monks in the Monasteries.
- **(1821)** | In 1821, the Monastery became a stronghold of the leaders of the Greek Revolution, making a significant contribution to the National Struggle.
- **(1829)** | The Monastery retained 11 glebes (*metochia*) with significant property in 1829.
- **(1850)** | In the mid-19th century, there was a major economic and moral crisis in Greece, leading to significant repercussions for the Monasteries, such as encroachments on the Monastery's property, and a decrease in the number of monks and workers.
- **(1866)** | The Church of the Ionian Islands is incorporated into the Church of Greece in 1866 [6].
- **(1869-1890)** | The problematic management of Bishop Hieromonk Vissarion Katokhianos (1869-1890) led to the dismantling of the Monastery, reaching the brink of dissolution.
- **(1911)** | The period of hegemony of Hieromonk Sophronios Katopodis in 1911, during which the Monastery had an upward trajectory in all areas.
- **(1925)** | The 1925 Law on the Expropriation of rural land in favor of landless cultivators and the Law on the Organization of Administration of Ecclesiastical and Monastic Property contributed to the shrinkage of the Monastery's property and ultimately to its complete dissolution [3].
- **(1940)** | In the last years until 1940, there were 2 monks living, and until 1945, one layman. Since then, it has been completely deserted, and decades have led to its current state of abandonment.
- **(2003-2006)** | After the earthquake of 2023, the monastery suffered significant damage. However, rescue interventions were carried out in 2006 to prevent possible collapses, as a temporary activity.
- **(2002)** | In 2022, “Prothesis Office -Architectural and Civil Engineering Firm-” undertook the Preliminary Restoration Proposal for the Holy Monastery of “Kokkini Ecclesia” (Red Church) in Lefkada.

3 Pre-Existing Architectural Facilities of The Monastery Complex and Survey

3.1 Pre-existing architectural facilities of the Monastery complex

The complex of the Monastery had a closed polygonal shape, surrounded by the 4 wings in the outline within which the Katholikon (Church) exists. There were structures and other facilities around the closed premises, but historical sources provide confusing information about these uses.

The study of historical sources and references [7], combined with on-site research at the monument, led to the decryption of the architectural layout of the existing spaces and the estimation of the specific uses that developed in the past.

The **Eastern wing** (wing 1), a three-storey building, housed administrative functions such as the Abbot guestroom, the “Archontariki” (monastery reception hall) and storage areas.

The **Southern wing** (wing 2), a two-storey building, accommodated storage and animal facilities on the ground floor and monks' cells on the upper level.

The **Western wing** (wing 3), a two-storey building, comprised guest rooms, furnace chamber, possibly a kitchen, and the Monastery's refectory.

The **Northern wing** (wing 4) exhibits remnants of buildings with undefined boundaries and configurations, posing challenges in determining their historical uses.

A characteristic image, taken by German Wilhelm Dörpfeld (in 1903), shows the Eastern and Southern wings on their original form, before the abandonment of the Monastery. The Western wing appears almost in its current state (as a ruin) and the Katholikon at the center. This image serves as evidence for the design decisions made during the preliminary restoration proposal.

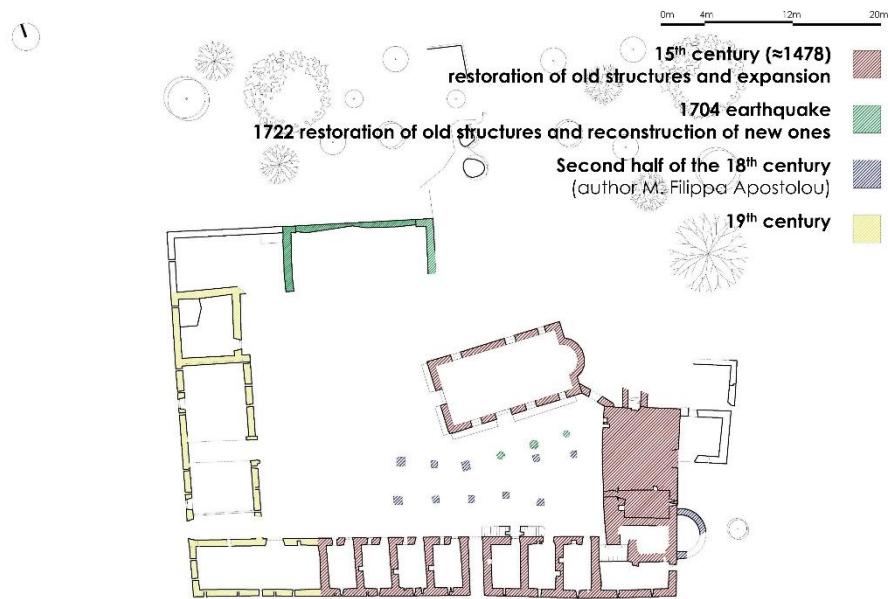


Fig. 3. Structural phases diagram of the Monastery [7].

3.2 Detailed survey on the Monastery complex

Surveying the ruins and premises of The Holy Monastery of “Kokkini Ecclesia”, presented several significant challenges and complications. One of the primary difficulties we encountered was the state of deterioration and degradation of the structures over time, such as crumbling walls and collapsed roofs. Thick foliage and overgrown vegetation obscured many areas of the Monastery, making it challenging to navigate and conduct measurements, effectively obscuring many architectural details.

Furthermore, accessing certain areas for comprehensive measurement and assessment proved to be challenging. Thick vegetation and accumulated debris hindered the progress, requiring extensive clearing and cleanup efforts before the team process to the survey of the site.

Moreover, the complex layout of the monastery, with its interconnected wings (on the interconnection of the Eastern and Southern wings), added another layer of complexity to the surveying process. Navigating through the maze-like corridors and identifying distinct architectural features demanded meticulous attention to detail and thorough documentation.

Additionally, the lack of historical records on the Northern wing further complicated our task. Without comprehensive documentation from previous surveys or original architectural plans, we had to rely heavily on on-site measurements and comparative analysis to reconstruct the footprint of the Northern wing accurately.

Despite these challenges, the team persevered, dedicating significant time and effort to overcome each obstacle. Through careful planning, coordination, and collaboration with experts in historic preservation and architectural restoration, the Office



Fig. 4. Axonometric diagram of the existing Monastery.

was able to conduct a thorough survey of The Holy Monastery of “Kokkini Ecclesia”. The commitment to preserving this monument of cultural heritage drove the team to surmount these difficulties, ensuring that future generations could continue to appreciate and learn from its rich history.

PART B: ARCHITECTURAL PROPOSAL

4 New Architectural Program

The architectural program of the Holy Monastery, according to the proposal of the Preliminary Phase and with respect to the Monastery's history and the findings regarding the pre-existing architectural program, is structured as follows:

4.1 Eastern wing [3-storey building]

Reliquary- Sacristy room and MEP (Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing) space (GF) 120 m²
 (staircase/elevator, WC, reliquary-sacristy room, MEP room [boiler room, machinery room, water supply room, fuel tanks, and generator room])

Library and Prayer room (1st floor) 120 m²
 (staircase/elevator, WC, reception area, offices, library, lobby, prayer room)

Library, living room, and office (2nd floor) 120 m²
 (staircase/elevator, WC, library, living room, office)

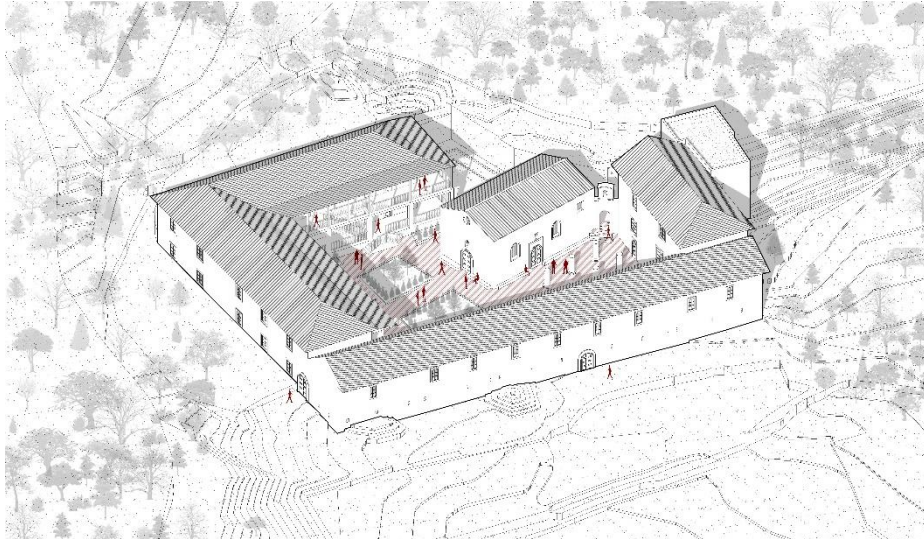


Fig. 5. Axonometric diagram of the new Preliminary Proposal.

4.2 Western wing [2-storey building]

“Archontariki” (Monastery reception hall) and kitchen (GF) 140 m²

(Outdoor staircase, WC, auxiliary kitchen facilities in the north of the Western wing)

Bishops’ cells and Synodal kitchen (1st floor) 140 m²

(Outdoor staircase, WC, 2 cells/dormitories, 2 Bishops’ cells, living room, Synodal kitchen in the north of the Western wing)

4.3 Southern wing [2-storey building]

Bookshop and storage spaces (GF) 200 m²

(Outdoor staircase, food storage and animal husbandry storage purposes, laundry-dryers on the western side of the Southern wing)

Abbot’s and monks’ cells (1st floor) 200 m²

(Outdoor staircase, the “diabatikon” (vaulted passage), Abbot's cell near the Eastern wing, 8 autonomous monks’ cells [13 m² with 1 bed, desk, wardrobe, and bathroom])

4.4 Northern wing [2-storey building]

Kitchen and refectory for 50+ people (GF) 140 m²

(Outdoor staircase, WC, kitchen and food storage, refectory (dining hall) for monks and pilgrims for over 50 people)

Synodal refectory for 50+ people (1st floor) 140 m²

(Outdoor staircase, WC, Synodal refectory (dining hall) for 50+ people)

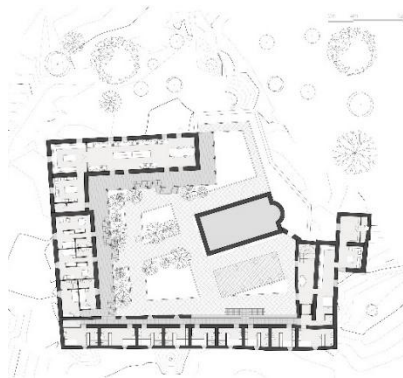


Fig. 6. Ground Plan, Preliminary Proposal

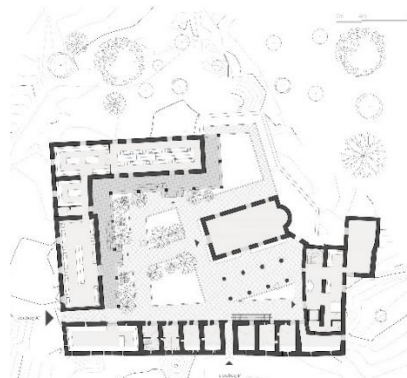


Fig. 7. Floor Plan, Preliminary Proposal

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8. Photographs taken from the "Preliminary Restoration Proposal for the Holy Monastery of Kokkini Ecclesia (Red Church) in Lefkada" ©, Lefkada, (2022).

