

Ioanna-Irini Papazoglou

Heraklion, modernity and material culture from the beginning of the 20th century to 1970: the monastery of St Peter of the Dominicans at Bedenaki as a profane place

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to highlight the ambivalent relationship between the city of Heraklion and the material culture of the past, when, with the advent of modernity at the beginning of the 20th century, the city was required to define its Greekness in relation to the present through the choosing of the “expedient past”. The rediscovery of Minoan Crete is used by the authorities as the important symbolic resource for the construction of national identity and the struggle for the union of Crete with Greece. The Minoan current also affected archaeological knowledge, since all places that bore Ottoman elements were categorized as sites that were not in need of protection and promotion.

This field of study is explored based on the case study of the Venetian monastery of St Peter of the Dominicans at Bedenaki, Heraklion, one of the oldest and largest monasteries of the period of Venetian rule in Crete, that today, restored, dominates the north side of the walled city of Heraklion within the Venetian fortifications. The monastery of St Peter of the Dominicans, from the beginning of the 20th century up to the early 1970s, is converted from a holy place (a Venetian monastery and a mosque during Ottoman times) to a place of trivialized and profane use (Douglas 1966) (cinema, ice factory, carpenter’s shop).

The time period this paper aims to describe is “thick” (Geertz 2009): the period from the beginning of the 20th century, when the Cretans, having an autonomous status, found themselves fighting to merge with the independent Greek state, up until the 1970s, when the local authorities and the local Ephorate of Antiquities urged the restoration of the historical building for the first time, a powerful bureaucratic practice which would allow St Peter of the Dominicans to be classified as a valuable, collectively legible place.

KEYWORDS: modernity, Crete, monument, material culture, profane place, collective memory, Greek national identity, archaeology, anthropology

HERAKLION, MODERNITY AND IDENTITY

With the coming of Modernity, Heraklion was required to define its Greekness in relation to the present by choosing from the palimpsest of the past. The historical, political and social conditions impelled Heraklion and Greece in general to perceive two political imperatives unsuccessfully: being Greek-like and becoming modern (Παπάζογλου 2013, 163).

More specifically, at the beginning of the 20th century, Cretans, having an autonomous status, found themselves fighting to merge with the independent Greek state. The situation appeared to be particularly pressing.

For the Cretans, the concrete proof of Greekness was not the symbol of the Parthenon, but Knossos. The archaeological finds of the complex economic and social organization that distinguished Minoan society constituted a reference point of the modern, of Europeanness and elegance. The Western-style landscaping of Knossos with the restoration and layout of the site with symbolic planting of trees, undertaken by Arthur Evans, the excavator himself, turned Knossos into that emblematic landscape which charmed the diplomats, intellectuals and bourgeoisie who engaged in the study of the past (Solomon, 2001). To them, Knossos constituted a place historically preceding the creation of their society, the lost origin of a common heritage; it justified, however, European superiority over the East. This correlation constituted the strongest diplomatic card, the merging of Crete in the Greek national backbone.

In parallel to Greekness, the Cretans must also be modern; they had to remodel the city according to the standards of modern European cities. Up to the dawn of the 20th century, Heraklion was a “city-castle”, mostly resembling a Turkish city. This picture emerges from the descriptions of Manolis Dermitzakis in his books *Ανιστορήματα [Tales]* (1960) and *Απ’ όσα θυμούμαι. Το παλιό Κάστρο. Μια βόλτα στο Ηράκλειο των αρχών του 20ού αιώνα [The Great Castle. From What I Remember]* (2008). These books by the “Barber Poet” (Καρέλης 2009) are a priceless source of information for us to understand the Oriental appearance of the city. Through the following text emerges the picture of the Great Castle before the interventions:

“... an entirely Turkish city and an Oriental dancer, the old Great Castle of 1900 to 1920. Its narrow roads with its winding cobbled streets did not allow the tall Venetian Walls to lie further than the inside part of their embankment. At some points of the cobbled streets stood their small houses, most of them single-storey, low-roofed, with their roundish little doors, dark and sunless. In places rose the big houses of the Turkish beys and the aghas, with their slatted kiosks. Twenty-five thousand Christian and Turkish souls resided in it. The markets, the coffee houses of the Castle, were the same, narrow and long, single-storey, covered with clayey soil, built with no particular order or plan in their pavements.

The roads of the markets were cobblestoned. At a certain distance on the street from the one side of the markets to the other were the small, round fountains where people and animals quenched their thirst.

Over the roofs of the markets and the neighborhoods rose the mosques, with the height of the minarets and the two bell-towers of the great church of Saint Minas in the centre of the city.

The main road that ripped the width of the Castle in half was as it still is today. It started on the west side of the city, at the Venetian Chania Gate, with the markets of the Yeni Mosque, Kamaraki or Sevri Tsesme, the Wide Road, Meidani and the big Kisla (barracks). From Meidani, on the right, as we head towards the Three Arches, started three roads. ...”

(Δερμιτζάκης 1960, 12)

The Oriental appearance of the Great Castle is incompatible with the national visions which early-20th-century Heraklion gazes at. The city authorities want Heraklion to become a city of European standards. The neighborhoods, the narrow alleys, the mosques, the joints and the kiosks had no place in the urban structure of the city.

The period of the Cretan State coincides with the huge effort for reconstruction of the city. The spatial scale of modernization is obvious in the infrastructure projects, unprecedented for the place and time. In the name of the modernization of the city, the authorities of the Cretan State, with the help of the municipal authorities of the time, proceed to demolish parts of the Venetian Walls, pulling down buildings with elements of Ottoman and Balkan architecture (Τζομπανάκη 1996, 517). In their place, important infrastructure projects, etc., are planned. An essential prerequisite for the highlighting of the projects of the new era from 1912 to the Second World War was the demolition of the old symbols. Most of the coastal Venetian Walls disappear, while the Little Koules and the dockyard gate with its staircase are demolished to make way for the construction and expansion of the port, in order for the city to acquire a windward and a leeward mole. The mosques, outdated and ecclesiastical buildings, are flattened, so that they would not be a keepsake of the sordid past of the city. On the site of the Monastery of St Francis, for instance, is built the first archaeological museum of Heraklion.

Most of the ecclesiastical buildings that were preserved were sold to private individuals as real estate, while others were rented out for commercial use and others were demolished, either as derelict or as declassified monuments (Τζομπανάκη 2006). The perception of that era regarding the medieval and Ottoman monuments defined, as was only to be expected, the fate of the Monastery of St Peter of the Dominicans.



Fig. 1. Gerola: the south side of St Peter.

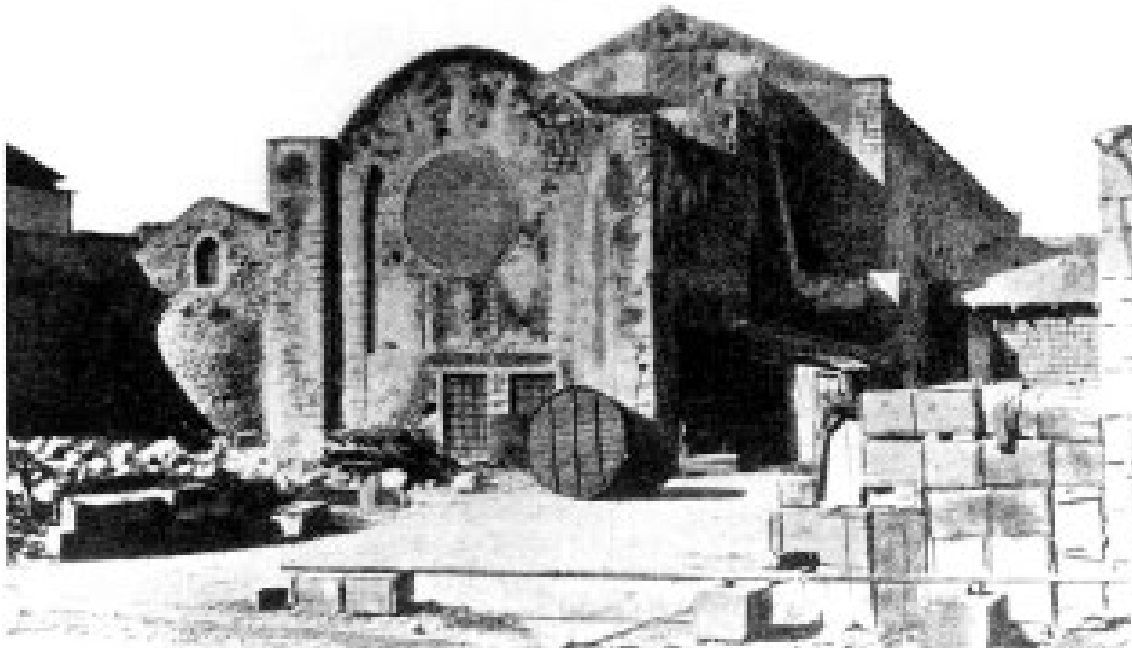


Fig. 2. Gerola: the east side of the monastery .

MODERNITY AND THE SUBSEQUENT PROCESS OF SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT

During the Ottoman occupation of Iraklion, the Monastery of St Peter of the Dominicans was transformed into a mosque dedicated to Sultan Ibrahim. According to Starida (2016, 211), the building was ruined in the 19th century, after the earthquake of 1809. Furthermore, with the coming of Modernity and the subsequent process of disciplining of space and people, the categorization of the building as an emblematic part of the Ottoman identity of the city defined its fate as a sordid element, which should be marginalized in people's collective memory. This view is demonstrated by the photograph of the Dominican monastery taken at the beginning of the 20th century by the Italian G. Gerola, head of the scientific mission (see Figs 1 & 2) organized by the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti to record the Venetian-era monuments. Specifically, the east side of the building is cluttered with barrels, wooden boxes and general rubbish from the neighboring factories.

From the end of the 19th century onwards, an early industrial nucleus developed on the north coastal front, where the historical building was located. The industrial area initially included tobacco and carob processing, the beverage industry and pasta production, while later, during the inter-war period, new units were built, focusing on the production of alcohol, electricity and raisin and olive processing (Πανταζής, 1999).

The monumental size of the central aisle, where the sometime Candian monastery and later mosque was located, is defined in relation to the industrial character of the area. The



Fig. 3. St Peter of the Dominicans (1970s), before the demolition of the minaret.

monumental building escaped being demolished due to the functional form of the monastery church, a place that could host some kind of craft activity. The building was transformed into the first ice factory, the Pagopieio¹ of Kokevis,² operational as early as 1917. Electricity generators that provided direct current were placed inside. The electrical installations also provided power to the owner's second business, the Aglaia Cinema, which was located where the post office is today. On the northeast side of St Peter, where the Castella was later built, was the Loulakakis wine cellar. On the northeast side, next to the Pagopieio, was the iron-foundry of the smith Petros Siritakis.³

The scholars researching the monument (Chronaki & Kalomoirakis 2004) argue that St Peter was used as a cinema. Perhaps this was the open-air Crete Cinema that operated in Bedenaki in 1911, as Tsagarakis notes. However, this identification is uncertain as our data are incomplete. Furthermore, Chronaki & Kalomoirakis (2004) mention that after 1915, an ore foundry, constructed during the Ottoman period, was demolished, while part of the original northeast chapel became a water cistern.

¹ Chronaki and Kalomirakis mention that the site on the northeast side of the church was turned into the Koniordos bottling plant.

² The information was retrieved by a long-term resident of the historical centre, G. Karras, who was told by a German textile factory owner in the region of Mesambelies, who was in Heraklion in 1917.

³ The information on the activities taking place in St Peter's Monastery and the surrounding area was provided by the long-term resident of the historical centre G. Karras.

THE MONASTERY OF ST PETER OF THE DOMINICANS BETWEEN SACRED AND PROFANE

After the collapse of the Asia Minor front, Heraklion was one of the cities that received quite a large number of refugees. For the resettlement of the refugees, the National Bank, starting in May 1925, undertook the divestment of the Muslim properties, which had passed into the ownership of the Greek State, with the collection of rents. The National Bank also proceeded with auctions, through which most Muslim properties passed into the ownership of individuals and city institutions. It was then that many churches and secular buildings changed owners and ended up in the hands of private individuals. Regarding the monastery of St Peter of the Dominicans, the west part of St Peter, according to the oral information provided by a long-term resident of Heraklion, was rented as a piece of urban real estate to a local man named Anagnostakis, to use as a carpenter's shop (Παπάζογλου 2013, 196).

The period before the Second World War constitutes a period of economic flourishing of the city. Heraklion is recognized as the centre of the southeast Mediterranean. Concurrently, the doubling of the population of Heraklion, with the coming of the refugees, creates new housing and socioeconomic conditions. Apart from the important industrial and cultural infrastructures developed (Archaeological Museum, Pananeio Hospital, Library, Commercial School, Ergotelis Football Ground), the city also obtains its own airport in 1939.

Heraklion has begun its transformation into a major urban centre. Its geographical exclusion due to its insular character is alleviated. Access to the city is now easy for travelers who can afford the fares. Despite the development of craft and cultural infrastructures, the urban structure and organization of the city continue to refer back to its Ottoman past. The old buildings of the city constitute sources of danger after three powerful earthquakes that hit the island, from 1926 to 1930, causing irreversible damage to the city (Τζομπανάκη 1996).

Heraklion was now turning into a city of decrepit and dangerous buildings. In 1936 a development plan was drawn up, intended to increase the population capacity inside the city by providing a high building rate and opening up roads, which, however, presupposed the declassification of monuments, and their destruction in the name of the modernization of the city. Regarding the case of St Peter, the urban plan of 1936 planned for the opening of Mitsotaki Street, running along the south side historical monumental complex, and consequently the destruction of a part of the building. This intervention, however, was not carried out (Παπάζογλου 2013).

For the Greek state, during the interwar period and the German occupation, St Peter of the Dominicans continued to be an undervalued building because of its connection to the Ottoman past. The Archaeological Service had never investigated it, since in the formal state records of exchangeable property up to 1943 St Peter is recorded as the Sultan Ibrahim Mosque, its function during the Ottoman occupation.

On March 23 1943, the former Candian monastery of 2,293 square meters is sold as exchangeable property by the Department for the Management of Exchangeable Muslim Properties by the name Sultan Ibrahim Mosque to the parish of Saint Dimitrios for 2 million

(depreciated) drachmas. The notarial act is ratified at the head office of the Service for the Management of Exchangeable Muslim Properties (Υ.Δ.Α.Κ). The transaction is witnessed by the then mayor of Heraklion. The building, as recorded in the contract, is bought “by the Holy Church of Saint Dimitrios represented by the above Church Council”. Among the contributors, the exchange takes place under the following terms (see 6018/23-3-1943 in Παπάζογλου 2013, 197):

“The property sold will be used by the buyer exclusively as an *Orthodox Christian Holy Church*. In case of different use by a different person to whom it is transferred, the ownership of the building reverts to the Department for the Management Exchangeable Muslim Properties and the buyer is refunded the paid-up amount interest-free. The materials of the building belong to the Department for the Management of Exchangeable Muslim Properties, which is entitled to proceed to auction.”

The building remains in a semi-abandoned state even after being sold as a piece of real estate to the parish of St Dimitrios. At the same time, it continues to operate as the Anagnostakis carpenter’s shop. The establishment and the circumstances under which the building was allocated remain unclear. We do not know, for instance, if the owner paid a fee to the church for the use of the site.

Four years after the sale of St Peter to the Church, the monastery is recognized as a historical building of medieval heritage with a preservation order placed on it by royal decree in 1947 (Παπάζογλου 2013, 197). Simultaneously, with a state decision, the city council decides to declare St Peter, which was operating as carpenter’s shop, a preserved building among other remaining medieval monuments in the city. We read:

“Of the buildings referred to as historical monuments in the Decree of 1947, the Committee decides the preservation of the following: 1. *Saint Peter (Dominican Monastery, Anagnostakis carpenter’s shop)*, 2. *Virgin of the Crusaders (Monastery, Markou Mousourou St.)*, 3. *Saint Catherine (Sinaite Monastery)*, 4. *Little Saint Minas*, 5. *Saint Paraskevi*, 6. *Saint Dimitrios*, 7. *Saint Matthew*, 8. *Saint George Dorian (Saint Johann of the Armenians)*, 9. *Bembo Fountain (Kornarou Square)*, 10. *Morosini Fountain (Eleftherios Venizelos Square)*, 11. *Priuli Fountain (Bodosakeio Square)*, 12. *Fidik Fountain (Pediados St.)*, 13. *Turkish Fountain (Konstantinou Palaiologou St.)*, 14. *Haniali Fountain (Zografou St.)*, 15. *Melek Ibrahim Pasha (small market)*, 16. *Underground cisterns of Saint George Polistilos (Zourari)*, 17. *Underground cistern near Saint Titus (Mistiloglou)*, 18. *Underground cistern near Saint Titus (Agricultural Cooperative)*. For all the other buildings referred to as historical monuments by Decrees, including *Saint Mark (Minoas cinema-theatre, for which there is an objection by the Archaeological Service)*, *the committee proposes to the city council to provide 50,000 drachmas annually for the maintenance and use of the preserved historical monuments of the area.*”

(see Παπάζογλου 2013, 198)

THE 1970S: XENIA HOTEL AND THE MONASTERY OF ST PETER OF THE DOMINICANS IN THE SHADOW OF MODERNITY

The researchers of its building history mention that at the beginning of the 1950s there were no attempts to restore St Peter. The only protection guaranteed by the 1947 Decree was that it would not be demolished, unlike a large number of buildings that were not on the list, historical remains of the Arab, Byzantine, Ottoman and Venetian periods (Τζομπανάκη 1996,533). The application of the urban plan of 1936 generally proposed the abolition of protective orders on post-classical monuments, for the construction of new buildings in the city, new roads, etc. (see Περτσελάκης 1998, Τζομπανάκη 2006).

During the two first postwar decades the city welcomed the ever-increasing flow of internal migration, which resulted in the creation of huge residential stress. The neighborhood of St Peter, as well as the historical building itself, was underrated in the eyes of the newcomers to the city. This is obvious in the narration of Mr Korpis, a member of the Catholic community of Heraklion who resided in the area during the 1960s. Moreover, it is highlighted that the area was of no interest to archaeologists, while for some inhabitants the area still had a religious character. He also mentions that structurally, St Peter is identical to Gerola's description. Saint Peter's neighborhood was a sordid place:

"Over here, the place then called the Machala, was a place of fishermen's houses, of low economic strata. Do not forget its vicinity to the Hebrew quarter, something that automatically devalued the area. During the 60s, apart from the people who were porters at the harbor, the barrel-makers, it was a quarter with a bad reputation. This means that there were also girls who did what they did. In general, it was a totally degraded built environment, open on its northern side.

This city, as well as others in the Mediterranean, usually turned its back on the north, because in older times, up until '85, winters were much harsher than now. I mean that they did not even walk on that street. The (...) spray from the sea and the wind. Those little houses faced north, indicating that they belonged to people who could not live in a better location. A totally degraded area.

During the 60s, Saint Peter is of no interest to the archaeologists. They are focused on reconstructing the Loggia and St Mark in the centre of Heraklion. The edges of the medieval-Venetian city are of no interest yet. So, Saint Peter does not deteriorate at an increased rate, but still loses something from its initial shape every year. In other words, if you compare Gerola's pictures with pictures from the 80's, you will see degradation. Meanwhile, people living around here, and I am referring to the residents of this machala and those of no cultural interest, are poor people ..., poverty. They still consider it a holy place. There are some people of the neighborhood, not Catholics, who go and light a candle. They retain a religious sentiment. At some point that stopped and I came to live in the building there, so I kept lighting it."

The degraded image of the monument is also highlighted in Stergios Spanakis's exhibition on the endangered monuments of the city, in 1965, where St Peter becomes a modernization landfill, since this is where the building rubble of the newly constructed buildings ends up.



Fig. 4. St Peter after the restoration, June 2010: the east side of the monastery.

“The many windows on the northern side are visible in two rows. The lower row is not well discernible because of the subsidence that the main body of the church has suffered and the accumulation of rubbish and useless material from the demolition of buildings around the church.”

(Patris, 9/8/10)

The intention for the utilization of the coastal area and more specifically tourist utilization had already appeared after the war. This progression is connected to the directions of national economic policy during the 1950s and 1960s, which focused on tourism as well as building activity (the Greek National Tourist Organisation – GNTO program of technical services for the planning and construction of hotels across the whole country, the well-known Xenia Hotels). On the coastal front of the city, next to the industrial units, are businesses and services such as restaurants, entertainment facilities and the Heraklion bus station.

Simultaneously, the construction of the modern Xenia Hotel in 1960 on the sea walls of the north front, opposite the dilapidated monastery of St Peter, demonstrates the direction of the renewal and modernization of Greece. The Xenia Hotel constitutes the new urban symbol of the city. The adjacency of St Peter to the Xenia Hotel, together with the redevelopment of the area from an industrial area to a place of service-based facilities and functions - entertainment, passengers, transportation – will contribute significantly to the renegotiation of its historical significance. For the first time, local authorities and the local tax office express a request for



Fig. 5. The interior of the monastery church: the first religious service in honor of Ss Peter and Paul, to whom the monastery was rededicated as an Orthodox church (29 June 2010).

restoration, a powerful bureaucratic practice with the application of which the Monastery of Saint Peter of the Dominicans would enter the list of valuable, collectively readable monuments (Παπάζογλου 2013).

Up to that point, the Monastery of St Peter constituted not just a place of threadbare activities, such as the carpenter's shop, but a place of dirty, impure practices, as Douglas would say about the body. The building was turned into a urinal by passers-by, a public health hazard as well as a threat to the sophisticated profile of the city. The dismissive attitude of the locals and the ignorance of the owners about the building is shown in a letter sent by the Department of Tourist Police of Heraklion to the owner of the building, the Church Council of Saint Dimitrios, dated 27 March 1968. The perplexity and anxiety of the authorities regarding the impression gained by the tourist tenants of the urban symbol, the Xenia Hotel, is also emphasized. The letter reads:

“We have the honor to inform you that opposite this particular Xenia Hotel stands the dilapidated church of Saint Peter, which, having no doors, has been transformed into a place where passers-by urinate and you can understand what an impression this makes on foreign visitors. The Archaeological Service informs us that you are responsible for dealing with the present situation.”

(see Παπάζογλου 2013, 201)



Fig. 6. The west side of St Peter.

During the same month, the then curator of the Heraklion Archaeological Museum files a request to the Ministry of Coordination, to *“include the consolidation study of the sublime medieval church of Saint Peter of the Dominicans ... which is in disastrous state and is in danger of collapsing”* (document no. 5776/18-3-1988). A request for the restoration of the building is also filed by the Regional Development Service of Crete (see no. 1634/10-7-1968).

While studying the archives of the 13th Byzantine Ephorate of Antiquities, we traced letters in which the restoration of the monument appears as a practice for self-presentation to foreign visitors. Another first is the emergence of the policy of connecting official archaeological knowledge to local economic interests. According to the letter sent in 1970 by the local Ephorate of Antiquities to the Directorate General of Antiquities of the Kingdom of Greece:

“The church of St Peter, formerly the monastery church of the Dominicans, was built in the 14th century as a wooden-roofed, single-aisle chapel, adherent to the south side of the sanctum. That was housed under Gothic groin vaults and constitutes a surviving part of the original church, taking into consideration the fact that the church was repaired during the Renaissance. The immediate adjacency of the monument with the Historical Museum and the Xenia Hotel and our intended tourist development of the area necessitates the use of this monument as soon as possible ...”

(see Παπάζογλου 2013, 202)

In this letter, the intention of the local Ephorate to reuse the site after its restoration as a museum exhibiting Byzantine wall paintings is stated for the first time: “which can also be used as an art gallery for Byzantine wall paintings removed from the walls of the many Churches of the Island”. The call to consider the site a museum directly alludes to a strategy for the negotiation of the city’s identity by the scholars of the self-portrayal of domestic affairs to Western tourists.

The first installment (a million drachmas) for drawing up a restoration study for the monument was disbursed in 1971 by the Greek National Tourist Organisation fund (see GNTO decision 223.111/236). The subsidy was managed by the church council under the supervision of the Archaeological Service (see file no 2335/29-12-1970). The reconstruction lasted until 1976, when it stopped due to lack of funds. Work resumed in the 1990s, marked by the government’s attempt to give the Castella area to a private individual for the construction of a multi-storey building, and was completed at the end of the first decade of the 21st century (Παπάζογλου 2013, 171).

CONCLUSIONS

The relationship of Heraklion with the material culture of the past evolves through time, reflecting the adventures of its identity, its continuities and discontinuities. We saw that the beginning of the 20th century finds the city, and the island in general, fighting for the formation of the Greek national identity. In this setting, the formation of a collective memory, with the Minoan civilization as expressed by scholars at its core, and the aversion towards later historical periods, constituted the most important procedures for the establishment of formal historical memory. This aimed to turn farmers and workers into informed citizens, to make them contribute to the feeling of belonging and empower the relationship between citizens and nation. In this context we see that the Monastery of St Peter of the Dominicans is considered a profane element (Douglas 1966) for the city up until 1970, when the first attempt at reconstruction begins, intended to make it a symbol of consumption. These choices clearly allude to relations outside national borders, since they were affected by the special position of Greece, between East and West (Herzfeld 1987, Παπάζογλου 2013).

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