

Structures of the Traditional agricultural life

1. *The Greek folk architectural tradition and some means of agricultural production*

Amorgos is one of the 22 inhabited islands that surround the sacred land of Delos. Each of these islands gets its own unique meaning as a cultural entity, only if considered as part of the Cycladic distinct cultural unity.

The rich cultural background of the above mentioned islands has been resulted out of necessity to overcome difficulties derived from barren land and isolation. Those adverse conditions have –inevitably– led the farmer, the fisherman, the mason, the dweller, to innovative solutions. The residents of those islands with almost no means have managed to cultivate the rocky, windswept land, to open themselves to distant ports with their vessels, and, on their way back, to import food, materials, socio-cultural influences and knowledge.

(2) They used their limited know-how and the poor range of materials offered by their arid land, to build their homes.. Their dwellings-cells have formed dense, picturesque complexes (3) of small-scaled white cubes, our well known traditional settlements -Chora- and traditional villages.

After the fall of Constantinople (1453), up until the Frankish era- the end of 17th century, Venetians became the masters of those islands. (4) They built the fortress towns and influenced the structure of their domiciles. It is probable that under their influence, we have the development of manors, with a reception room, called Sala, which has both functional and aesthetic value, especially when the architecture of Sala is dominated by a stone arc that supports the flat roof made of soil (5).

In almost all Cycladic settlements, the flat roof, called Doma, is the dominant roof type. (6). However, in Santorini, the use of the local volcanic soil called

“Thiraiki Gi”, has led to the formation of the dome as the local, dominant roof type, a tradition that expanded in the neighbor island of Anafi.

- The agricultural unit_ (7).

The typical agricultural unit is the small scaled, ground floor, and most often single unit residence, where multiple secondary spaces were added (such as storage, oven and, in several occasions, the barn, the threshing floor, the wine press, and rarely a small church. The climate favored lots of outdoor activities.

(8) Inside the extremely limited dimensions of the single space residence, all functions of everyday life were organized with exemplary ergonomics.

This basic form of residence is divided function-wise to the day-area with built benches next to the fire corner, and the sleeping area, formed as a raised, wooden surface from side to side. Storage space is found under this attic, or , sometimes, an underground tank-called *Sterna*- which was used to collect rainwater from the flat roof. Nooks on the walls were used as shelves and cabinets.

2. Buildings and constructions of the rural agriculture, for the production of raw material used for basic food needs.

Of all constructions that support the production of food, extremely important are the rubble walls (9), the low, dry stone walls that support the valuable soil and the water in the infertile hillside, thus forming an almost flat cultivable land. This method of landscape formation, which dates back to antiquity, is still considered as the cheapest and most “natural” alternative to avoid soil erosion. Those rubble walls are a part of the Cycladic identity.

The image of the agricultural landscape is formed by those drywall networks placed amphitheatrically, by single room cells at the edge of each land parcel for occasional occupancy from farmers, by the round stone surfaces threshing floor called “Alonia” (10), always located where the strong wind blows, to facilitate the separation of the hay from the heavier seeds, by the wells as well as the paths, the bridges and the fountains. Usually one has to

observe closely, in order to discover those elements as they blend discreetly in harmony with the natural elements.

However, the above image is interestingly disturbed by larger structures, different from the typical residences in terms of form, as they follow a more special function and are situated in points that best serve their purpose. Such are the dovecotes, the windmills, and the watermills. These structures are inextricably linked to their surroundings and the prevailing climatic conditions.

We will shortly discuss those building types

- **DOVE-COTES(11)**, Specific, prominent structures, built in wind-protected areas, near running water. Those structures, one of the most typical landmarks, were used for hosting and breeding pigeons that offered their meat to feed the inhabitants and as fertilizer for the crops.

The systematic pigeon breeding was brought to the islands by the Venetians, during the Frankish era, when the owning of dovecotes was considered a privilege of the feudal lords. When the islands were seized by the Turks, the Greek farmers were allowed to own dovecotes, becoming thus a symbol of wealth and prosperity.

(12) Their dimensions, usually are about 3x3x5m or bigger. The upper part of their walls is formed by small openings for the pigeons to pass. Those openings are surrounded by fragments of shale or ceramic that protrudes out the wall around 10cm and create an elaborate, decorative form with geometric shapes and motifs as well as with schematic representations of the sun, cypress trees, rose ornaments etc. The ground floor could be used as residence, storage, barn or even stable.

From the beginning, Dovecotes were considered great samples of the art of masonry that served a specific function and, at the same time, they had uniquely elaborate forms. In Andros, and especially in Tinos, dovecotes have a great architectural value.

- **WINDMILLS. (13)**. It is known that since antiquity, cereals (grains) were considered the basis of nutrition. Flour and its compounds, such as bread and

rusk played a central role in the family meals. The milling of the cereals up until the beginning of industrial revolution was being done in mills. (14) Watermills were built in areas with abundance in water (in Andros exist a network of 29 watermills); Most islands however, with their drought climate and the intense, persisting winds throughout the year, have windmills instead.(15). These were built next to villages, or in prominent sites, rarely isolated and most often in groups of three or four.

Certain information mentions that windmills were found in Greece even before the Byzantine era. However, as with dovecotes, they were widely disseminated during the Frankish era, mainly in Aegean. Dr. I.Koumanoudis, an expert in the field, suggests that "windmills are works of the Greek aesthetics and mentality, since identical forms cannot be found in any other area, apart from the Turkish areas of Asia Minor and Istanbul, where Greeks resided.

The Windmill is considered as the first "Industrial building" of pre-industrial era in Greece, wisely taking advantage of natural energy sources, namely wind energy, to produce flour. This building type is a witness of the high level of organization and product development of a place.

(15) Its design requires broad technical knowledge. Windmills were constructed by groups of specialized craftsmen that belonged to professional guilds. Their interior is highly functional. The stone stairway to the upper three levels is adapted to the cylindrical shape of the structure. Apart from the main entrance, there is a window placed high, facing the side with the weakest prevailing wind. The upper level is where the milling mechanism is, the system that transmits the movement of the external wind wheel to the internal millstones. The wind wheel, or "Fteroti", consists of twelve wooden antennas that hold the 5-15m long and 1-3m wide sails. The middle level, the attic, was used to gather the flour that fell from the mill stones. The ground floor is where the product gathering is held, as well as weighing and storage. The outdoor of the windmill, where the residence of the miller and the secondary spaces are placed, is a space with social character. Not only is where the raw material is gathered to be milled, but also a space for social

interaction, information and occasionally, a place where traditional matchmaking, the "proxenio", was held.

Apart from the mills that functioned with a vertical axial movement, there were, in rare occasions, mills that functioned with horizontal movement and a different mechanism than the aforementioned. One such mill was found in the island of Serifos.

The construction of mills was complex and costly, which suggests that their owners must have been wealthy. A mill costs as much as a large sailing vessel, although this is not the reason why we call the windmill a "ship of the land". Their antennas were being sold, or rent.

Windmills have been declared national heritage monuments and are protected by law.

CONCLUSION

These structures, with their ergonomic interiors, their materials, shapes, forms and their sense of place, are considered as the built expression of the local, popular wisdom.

The traditional rural architecture of the Aegean islands is a great part of our cultural heritage, since it is the collective expression of social and technical tradition with distinct local characteristics. These are the last, aging samples of a centuries-old tradition, a tradition that formed the unique Cycladic civilization, a tradition that highlighted the wisdom of minimalism in what is functional and necessary, the morality of modesty and austerity, and has become the starting point of artistic inspiration. It is definitely worth the preservation.

Yet, how many are actually overwhelmed and want to learn from this heritage? New generation of workers, new production methods and tools, contemporary requirements for speed and quantity, new commercial regulations and agreements cannot coexist with the traditional means of agriculture and farming. The fate of what intrigues us, old traditional buildings and landscapes of unique beauty and indisputable value, seems predetermined. Abandonment, as well as excessive tourist development, is both against them.

(16) What remains to us today, is the urge to preserve what is left, by getting to know it, conserving it even reviving it. There is hope. Here in Amorgos, the first attempt was held, to document 2.500 spots (rural residences, stables, olive mills, churches etc.) This material, in digital form, could be the beginning of the rescue of a plethora of significant buildings and monuments.

It is proven that through the preservation of our cultural heritage and the traditional agricultural environment not only can a socioeconomic development be achieved, but also the integration of the local population in the contemporary means of everyday life.

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