

THE TRADITIONAL SETTLEMENT OF KASTRO ON THASSOS

The history of Thassos during the first two centuries of Turkish domination remains obscure. Two sixteenth - century travellers, Bordonne (1502) and Porchacci (1572), inform us that Thassos was a prosperous, densely populated island with three fortified towns¹. On the basis of information provided by Piacenza at the end of the seventeenth century, Apostólos Vacalopoulos identifies these towns with the three fortified sites of Limena, Kastro, and Alyki². People from Constantinople are known to have formed colonies on the island shortly after the city's fall, and Ottomans also came to the island during the first years of Turkish domination³. However, there is no evidence of any permanent establishment of Moslems on Thassos.

The French cleric Braconier gives more precise information of great interest, having visited the north Aegean islands in 1707. According to him the inhabitants of Thassos numbered no more than 7,000-8,000, occupying twelve to fifteen coastal and inland villages⁴. In Braconier's time there was a revival of piracy in the Aegean⁵, and the coastal settlements were ravaged. Insecurity forced the inhabitants to abandon the coast and establish themselves inland. The island's impoverishment was aggravated by a poll - tax and various other levies which were imposed in 1760⁶, as well as by the destruction of the forests at the hands of

1. A. Vacalopoulos, *Ίστορία τῆς Μακεδονίας 1354-1833*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1969, p. 156, note 3.

2. A. Vacalopoulos, *Thasos, son Histoire, son administration de 1453 à 1912*, p. 28.

3. A. Vacalopoulos, *Ίστορία τῆς Μακεδονίας... op. cit.*, p. 40.

4. Le R. P. Braconier, *Relation d'une mission qu'un Père de la Compagnie a faite à la Cavalle et dans l'isle de Thasse avec la description du voyage, l'an 1707, dans Omont, Missions archéologiques françaises en Orient au XVII^e et au XVIII^e s.*, vol. II, Paris 1902, pp. 1035-1037.

5. P. Kontojannis, *Οἱ πειραταὶ καὶ ἡ Θάσος*, Ἀθῆναι 1915, pp. 33-36; G. Perrot, *Mémoires sur l'île de Thasos*, Paris 1864, pp. 60-61; N. Schinas, *Ὀδοιπορικαὶ σημειώσεις Μακεδονίας, Ἑπείρου, νέας ὁροθετικῆς γραμμῆς καὶ Θεσσαλίας*, Ἀθῆναι 1887, pp. 849-850; I. Mertzos, *Μνημεῖα Μακεδονικῆς Ίστορίας*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1947, pp. 331, 396-397.

6. Guide de Thasos, ed. *École Française d'Athènes*, Paris 1967, p. 18.

the Russians, who for four whole years (1770-1774) obtained all their timber from the island for the needs of their fleet⁷.

The lack of organisation in the Ottoman Empire and the impossibility of providing any degree of security isolated Thassos from the outside world, brought trade to a standstill throughout the eighteenth century, and the island gradually began to decline. The reforms brought about by Selim III⁸ improved the situation somewhat. It was no accident that at the beginning of the nineteenth century some of the island's communities were able to build large three-aisled churches, which were rarely encountered up till then⁹.

The traditional settlement of Kastro is situated in the middle of the island at a height of 500m. above sea level (fig. 1). All the other hill settlements on Thassos are much lower - 200-400m. above sea level. At the south-east end of the settlement there is a naturally fortified position, where, according to early fifteenth-century inscriptions, the inhabitants who had come from Constantinople built a fortress (in Greek, *kastro*) from which they could survey the island's south side. This fortress—from which it is believed that the settlement took its name—like the rest of the island passed from one conqueror to another until it was finally occupied by the Turks under a treaty in 1479¹⁰. These inscriptions are on the south wall of the settlement's church and attest to the history of the fortification¹¹.

During the centuries which followed, we do not know whether there was an organised settlement in this area or if the abandoned settlement was used only by shepherds as seasonal shelter. The post-Byzantine potsherds discovered on this fortified site and in the pass which con-

7. A. Vacalopoulos, *Ίστορία τῆς Μακεδονίας... op. cit.*, p. 302; A. Komninou-Ypsilantou, *Τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν (1453-1709)*, Κωνσταντινούπολη 1870, pp. 571-572.

8. A. Vacalopoulos, *Ίστορία τῆς Μακεδονίας... op. cit.* p. 313.

9. Haghii Apostoli at Megalos Prinos (1803-1804), Haghios Georgios at Mikros Prinos (1810), Haghios Dimitrios at Kallirachi (1804), Taxiarches at Maries (1803), Haghios Athanasios at Kastro (1804), Haghios Dimitrios at Theologos (1803). See S. Angeloudi, *Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀθανάσιος Κάστρου Θάσου, Ἐκκλησίες στὴν Ἑλλάδα μετὰ τὴν Ἀλωση*, ed. EMII., Ἀθήνα 1979, p. 29.

10. Ch. Bakirtzis, *Trois inscriptions de Kastro, Thasiaca BCH Supplement V*, 1979, pp. 455-466; *Guide de Thasos...* *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

11. Ch. Bakirtzis, *op. cit.*, fig. 1, 4, 5; A. Conze, *Reise auf den Inseln des thrakischen Meeres*, Hannover 1860, p. 37, pl. III.

nects it with the settlement do not provide enough evidence for us to express any definite opinion¹².

The first evidence for the existence of a settlement dates from the time of Selim III, who endeavoured by means of successive firmans in 1791 and 1792 to settle disputes which had arisen between the inhabitants of Kastro and the two neighbouring communities of Theologos and Mareies over the boundaries of the pasturelands¹³. In these documents the settlement is referred to as Neon (New) Kastro (Yeni Hissar). The term «New» may have been due to the migration of inhabitants from the southern regions of the island to this higher position in the mid - eighteenth century when piracy increased considerably. We do not yet know the sites of the older settlements from which the inhabitants of Neon Kastro moved their households. There are indications of remains of an older settlement lower down. At any rate, it soon ceased to be considered «new», for in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was referred to simply as «Kastro»¹⁴, and later on at the beginning of the twentieth century as «Palaiokastro» (Old Kastro)¹⁵; by this time the inhabitants had moved to the coastal area near Limenaria, where they had previously had their huts. This new village in turn was called Neo Kastro¹⁶ or Kalyvia (huts) to distinguish it from the older settlement, which was virtually abandoned.

Today the hill settlement of Kastro, the lowland settlement called Kalyvia, and Limenaria itself together comprise the community of Limenaria¹⁷ (fig. 1), which according to the 1971 census had 2,354 inhabitants, of whom only twenty were still living in the old village. The inhabitants of Kastro see no point in maintaining their houses, which, now abandoned, are in a state of collapse (fig. 2). On the other hand, its great distance from the new village of Kalyvia (fourteen kilometres away) was the main reason the settlement was maintained at

12. Ch. Bakirtzis, *on. cit.*, p. 457.

13. A. Vacalopoulos, *Thasos... op. cit.*, pp. 89/Doc. No 4 (Dec. 1791), 90/no 5 (May 1792), 91/No 6 (July 1792), 93/No 7 (July 1792), 94/No 8 (July 1791), 95/No 9/July 1792), 96/No 10 (July 1792).

14. A. Vacalopoulos, *op. cit.*, pp. 122/No 35 (Febr. 1874), 138-142/No 48 (Aug. 1894), 157-173/No 58 (July - Oct. 1901). The Turkish name Yeni Chisar is used by Conze in 1859; see A. Conze, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 35.

15. *Στοιχεία συστάσεως και εξελίξεως τῶν δήμων καὶ κοινοτήτων*, ed. Κεντρικῆς Ἐνώσεως δήμων καὶ κοινοτήτων τῆς Ἑλλάδος, No 20, Ἀθήναι 1962, pp. 14-15.

16. A. Vacalopoulos, *Thasos... op. cit.*, pp. 185-186/No 66 (Febr. 1908).

17. ΕΣΥΕ, Ἀθήνα 1971, p. 92.

all, because it was not worth the inhabitants' while to transport building materials from their old homes to their new ones. This was not the case with other villages on Thassos which were closer together, for when a shorter distance was involved the inhabitants would first take the slates off the roofs, slate being particularly difficult to quarry, and then transport the building timber.

The settlement of Kastro lies on a steep mountain side and is roughly triangular in shape and covers an area of 2.5 hectares (fig. 3). The present - day axis cuts through the settlement and ends up at the fortified rock which is the site of the village cemetery and cemetery church. The gardens lie outside the settlement to the east and are terraced with supporting walls¹⁸. Most of the houses are built parallel to the slope of the ground and very few across it facing the sea. The extent of the destruction makes it very difficult to trace the road network, which was dictated by the irregularities of the terrain. There is no paving at all, but anyway it was not necessary because the ground was stony and the houses were widely scattered, without the closed Macedonian courtyards to be found in other villages on Thassos, where the courtyards were combined with subsidiary areas.

The church with its bell - tower and the school dominates the centre of the settlement on a natural plateau, surrounded by a high enclosure. A pavilion is attached to the east end of the enclosure; it is a recreation area connected to a wide open space north of the church — the village square, once surrounded by shops and coffee - houses (fig. 3). There were shops in the village's various neighbourhoods too. According to Schinas, when the settlement was flourishing it had twenty shops and a plentiful supply of good water¹⁹. The Gonati spring, some five minutes north - east of the village was famous for its water, any surplus being channelled to the gardens. Another spring at the west end of the settlement served the needs of the lower neighbourhoods. At one point this spring dried up and a new well was constructed a few metres higher up as the water appears to have risen there. The spring also served a mill, the millstones of which still exist. There were a number of ovens scattered around the village, which, for reasons of economy, were for public use.

18. For this terracing, the term *skales* or *skaloudes* is used in Thassos.

19. Schinas, *op. cit.*, p. 864.

The large school beside the church was built in 1897. Before this the education of the village children had traditionally been conducted in the upper gallery of the church and in the neighbouring houses. The church is believed to have been built in forty days with the help of the villagers. It is the oldest dated building in the settlement and the inhabitants of Kastro are deeply attached to it. Twice a year on the feasts of St. Athanasius²⁰ (but particularly on 18 January), a great festival is held: all the churches of the community are closed and despite the inclement winter weather the inhabitants climb up to Kastro to honour their saint. An unusual custom has prevailed since older times — «the raising of the saint's icon» — which is combined with an auction. Whoever offers the most has the right to raise the icon while the whole congregation passes underneath it.

The houses of Kastro vary in size, shape, and type. Built of timber and stone, they preserve all the aspects of the development of traditional architecture from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. Each generation organised its own household according to the needs and demands of the time, building new houses or renovating the old ones they inherited from their forebears. In some houses, which had formerly served the needs of one family, various modifications were carried out, such as interior partitions, additional staircases, new openings and equipment, and the indispensable hearths and fireplaces, for the comfort and convenience of the occupants. Sometimes the whole framework of a house would be altered. It is hard to recognise the authenticity of the old houses, and each one requires a detailed individual study if we are to understand them properly. We receive a partial impression of the settlement from what remains of its peak of development in the last quarter of the nineteenth century: stone houses with timber frames, slate tiles on the roofs, external stone staircases, small wooden balconies here and there, and a few oriels — all constitute a unity which blends in with the particular character of the hilly landscape (fig. 4, 5, 6).

The Thassiot house, as described by A. Conze, who visited the island in the middle of the nineteenth century, is typical of the first houses in Kastro; we reached this conclusion after an on - the - spot study and analysis of their morphological and typological characteri-

20. January 18th and May 2nd (removal of relics).

stics²¹. It is worth quoting the German archaeologist's description in full²².

«Most of the houses on Thassos comprise a ground floor and an upper floor; the walls and roof are of stone, while timber is used on the upper floor to construct the open area [i.e. the verandah], which is supported on pillars and provides shade and shelter from the sun for the occupants (fig. 8). The living room, which is at the back, has a beautifully worked timber ceiling with a carved decoration [rosette] in the centre (fig. 9). A built-in cupboard takes up one side of the room (fig. 10); its open shelves are framed with simply decorated wood and covered with colourful hand - embroidered runners in the local style, upon which stand the valuable utensils of the house. In some houses they hang their clothes on a line in front of the cupboard. Frequently there is a high perimetric shelf upon which kitchen utensils are placed (pl. 10, 11). A fireplace with a grate at floor level and a projecting mantelpiece, a few mattresses and cushions on both sides of the room to sit on, a place of honour near the fireplace, one or more wooden chests, and finally the lampion hanging in front of a small recess in the wall (fig. 11), which contains wooden icons carved or painted on Mount Athos: these complete the interior decoration of a fully equipped Thassiot house. At meal times the occupants sit in this room around a low round table [known as a *sofras*], and at night the mattresses are spread out on the floor to sleep on. In summer they prefer to sleep on the verandah».

Conze goes on to provide information about the everyday lives of the inhabitants: «The men frequently go to the coffee house which every village has, where discussions take place the main subject of which is money, always money. The women do not live in the same seclusion as the Turkish women do, but nevertheless they are very much attached to the home in accordance with the Greek way of life».

Houses of the main type described by Conze still exist in Kastro, but with the significant difference that the verandahs were closed off in a later period. A typical example is the Kanaras house, (fig. 12) which was later divided into two, and more recently into three, parts. The openings and entrances in the outer walls belong to these later stages. Initially the undivided area at the back of the house was illuminated by a small window giving onto the verandah, which was converted into a cupboard.

21. About the house of Thassos see S. Angeloudi «*Ένα λαϊκό σπίτι από το Παχώνι της Θάσου*». *Η Καβάλα και η περιοχή της*, Α' τοπικό Συμπόσιο, Θεσσαλονίκη 1980 (ed. Inst. for Balkan Studies), pp. 213-233.

22. A. Conze, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

House no 49, also rectangular, is of a later stage because initially it had two rooms at the back which were likewise illuminated by windows which looked onto the verandah (fig. 13). Both rooms have a fireplace and are separated by a large fitted cupboard which opens into the best room (the *oda*). In addition to this cupboard, the shrine, and the perimetric shelf, right and left of the fireplace there are also small recesses flanked by large wooden cupboards (fig. 15). The best room is smaller than the living room next door. A stone wall divides the ground floor into two equal parts: the back part is underground and was used as a storeroom; in the front part there is an opening through which the upper floor could be reached by means of a wooden staircase leading to the verandah. At the back of the house on the same level as the upper floor there was another entrance, which led directly into the living room.

In other houses, such as no 111 (fig. 14), which dates from 1843 (fig. 16), the best room has been transferred to the front of the house, thereby reducing the size of the verandah. The large living room remains at the back. This re-location changes the form of the house from rectangular to L-shaped. In house no 78, which is of exactly the same style as no 111, the approach, unlike in the previous examples, is from the narrow side of the verandah; a small stone staircase leads to the verandah, while the ground - floor entrance is retained to serve the lower rooms (fig. 20).

Finally, in the original nucleus of house no 86 the length of the verandah remains the same despite the re-location of the best room to the front. In this way the house becomes T-shaped (fig. 17). Here also the approach is via an external stone staircase which occupies part of a projecting arm. This house, which has been extensively studied, gives us an idea of the successive stages and changes which took place in the houses of Kastro²³.

In the older houses, both visitors and loaded animals used the same door. This meant that the entrance had to be wide and of a suitable shape. The frequently encountered arched shape proved satisfactory in terms of both form and function (no 118, fig. 18). Later, when two separate entrances were created, the ground - floor entrance of necessity retained its width, but the arch was replaced by a straight wooden lintel

23. House no 86 has been studied by S. Angeloudi in her diplome work. There is a full copy in the department of the History of Architecture in the University of Thessaloniki.

(figs. 7, 8, 19). The occupants came and went through the special entrance on the first floor, which was reached by a small exterior stone staircase. The arch - shape survived in this smaller door, thus lending emphasis to the main approach (figs. 4, 5, 17). As a rule, the exterior doors and those of the back rooms were secured with a wooden bar, and there was a wooden trapdoor in the floor for communication inside the house.

As well as the types already mentioned — that is, large houses with verandahs — the surface area of which could be as much as 150m.², there are also simpler, cheaper houses with an area of 50-70m.² distributed over two floors. As in the large houses, the storeroom was below and the area in which the occupants spent the day was above. In one of these houses, dating from 1850, instead of a verandah there was a small wooden balcony at the front, which served as a landing for the external stone staircase (figs. 21, 24). This house too has a wooden trapdoor for internal communication. The upper floor was later divided into two or three rooms (hall / kitchen and best room). All these houses date from the middle of the nineteenth century. There were not many of them. According to the traveller G. Perrot²⁴, in 1860 there were sixty houses in all, which brings the population of the settlement to 500 at most. Thirty years later there were more than 1,400 inhabitants, according to Schinas's census²⁵. In other words, the number of households had more or less tripled. Housing needs increased and the previously sparsely inhabited settlement became more densely populated. At the end of the last century, in the north and east parts of Kastro the houses were built in terraces, while in the older west part the houses increased in number and narrow spaces were left between them for the drainage of rainwater. Most of the large old houses had already been adapted with the building of interior partitions, new openings, closing-up of the verandahs, and other additions, so that they could be used by two or three families.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century very few large houses were built with a surface area of more than 100m.² (fig. 22). There were storerooms or a shop on the ground floor, while the upper floor was used as a living area with two rooms and a small kitchen around a room which the Thassiots call the *saloni* (sitting room) or *salonoud*

24. G. Perrot, *Mémoire... op. cit.*

25. N. Schinas, *op. cit.*, p. 864.

if it is only small. This room essentially replaced the old open verandah, thus following the tradition of Macedonian town houses²⁶. These houses even have the characteristic oriel at the front. Here we should emphasise the close similarity to the houses of Chalkidiki with regard to the verandahs and oriels (fig. 23)²⁷.

A large number of new households were accommodated in even cheaper two- or three - roomed houses with a hall, a kitchen, and one other room on the upper floor and a storeroom on the ground floor (fig. 25). The surface area was usually around 70m.² distributed equally over the two levels. We may say that this type of house originated from the few small houses without a verandah built in the early days of the settlement.

Much later new houses appeared — the «twin» houses or *adelfomiria* as the inhabitants of Kastro call them (fig. 26). A twin house comprises a single frame which is divided in half by a partition and is shared by two brothers, as the name suggests (*adelfos* = brother; *mira* = share / portion). This type of house was particularly cheap because the partition could be constructed of wattle and daub and also the single roof reduced the cost of materials and labour. The division of the upper floor into two parts continued down to the storerooms on the ground floor. Usually each half of the house has its own stone staircase. The size of the twin houses varies. Each half may have one, two, or at most three rooms according to family needs, financial situation, and available space.

The time at which these twin houses were being built coincided with the decline of the settlement. Many people went down to Limenaria to work in the German mines and lived temporarily in the huts which until then had been used only during the olive harvest. Gradually they started to build new houses and to settle down there permanently. The «twin» type of house was repeated here on exactly the same lines as the Kastro models, and it was not long before a new thriving community had developed — Neon Kastro or Kalyvia — at the expense of the old village. The inhabitants returned to the village during the Second World War, but a return under such unfavourable circumstances cannot be considered a true revival of the settlement; besides, it was very short - lived.

26. N. Moutsopoulos, *Μακεδονική 'Αρχιτεκτονική*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1971, pp. 167, 223, 225, 247, 255, 374.

27. N. Moutsopoulos, *Σπίτια της Χαλκιδικής*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1979, pp. 27-42.

they had only used seasonally for the gathering of the olives. Gradually they begin to built new houses and to settle down permanently. The twin-types of Kastro are brought here unchanged and a new settlement full of life, the New Kastro or Kalivia is not slow in organising itself to the detriment of the old village. A certain short of the inhabitants to go back to the old village during the war year of 1940 cannot be considered as a revival against these unfavourable conditions; besides this return was of a small duration.