Contested heritage. International cooperation for the bicomunal preservation and enhancement of the Αχειροποίητος monastery in Cyprus

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Abstract
A close analysis of the Αχειροποίητος monastery in Cyprus shows the superimposition of different constructions. The existing domed church, built on a central plan in late Byzantine times over the ruins of an early Christian basilica, was enlarged by the addition of three successive narthexes, and therefore transformed into a longitudinal type basilica. The name Αχειροποίητος, literally made without hands, was referred most probably in the origins of this church to an icon “made without hands”, so probably one of the numerous images of Christ or the Virgin that are referred in history. The name, through several wrong writings and therefore misunderstandings survives to this day, telling us in an immaterial way a part of the history of this building conceived, and therefore named, to host a sacred icon. All around the church a walled enclosure contains the monastery, built in different phases with several additions, bearing a complex history. The formation process of the monastery can be therefore traced from the late antique three naves basilica, built in the V century in the suburbs of the ancient city of Lapithos, all the way down to the transformation of the site into military barracks in the 1970’. Recently the monastery has been assigned to the Girne American University for restoration and hence its condition requires urgent preservation interventions. Therefore the management of this site, hence the political situation of northern Cyprus, represents an interesting case study on the contested heritage issue. During the international workshop “Reading and designing the area of Lambousa, Karavas” (Sapienza-Girne American University), held in Cyprus in November 2014, several activities were accomplished: such as a laser scanner survey of the monastery, the documentation of its mosaics, spolia and wooden artifacts, the study of the different masonry phases of the building, also different conservation project proposals were experimented. The international workshop was essential for the wider international cooperation framework and an essential prerequisite for the preservation and continuation into the future of the monument within bicomunal organs. Nevertheless, the heritage management in Cyprus, for the complex political situation of the island, bears more difficulties than in other UE countries, but we should consider that every heritage site has someway a contested character.

Keywords: Heritage; Morphology; History; Preservation; Design.
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