

ASPECTS OF REGIONALISM IN LATE CYPRIOT ARCHITECTURE AND THE CASE OF ALASSA

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Abstract

Bronze Age architecture is but a fraction of the long story that according to Norwich “*began when early man first fashioned for himself a settled habitation... Long before that process was complete, he had become not only a builder but an artist*”.¹

In the long sequence of events, already described by Norwich, Late Cypriot architecture reached a significant stage of development, as it had to accommodate a complex society, at a time when the specialization of labour was accomplished and the means for its realization were at hand.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout antiquity, but also in traditional societies the building techniques in any one region developed on some common factors such as: the climate, the available material and the skills of the people involved. On the other hand the concept of space, which is the meaning of architecture, depends, or even is dictated by the character of the economy and the standard of living of any society. Regionalism in architecture could, one way or another, be included in some of the eight issues earlier discussed by Frankel.² However, on an island, even the size of Cyprus, one should expect only slight variations in the architectural form of each region depending mainly on the available resources.

REGIONALISM OR SIMPLY VARIATIONS?

As mentioned above the climate is one of the factors dictating the architectural form. The Mediterranean climate of Cyprus is characterized by a hot, dry, long summer and a short, mild winter. A similar situation is anticipated for the Bronze Age. Therefore, the everyday world of the majority of the people was played outdoor, a fact verified in the archaeological record in the form of courtyards and outdoor facilities. Examples of domestic architecture from Enkomi, Kalavassos, Episkopi, Maa, the lower site of Alassa,

and elsewhere, show that the houses were built along a street or around a larger open space, where two or more streets meet. The habitation units are made of a few rooms, usually built on one or more sides of an inner court or in relation to some open space, which forms an integral part of the dwelling. LBA domestic architecture is not characterized by any abrupt break from the tradition of the earlier periods and is similar all over the island.

Any clear cut regional variations should therefore be looked for in the communal buildings, in particular the so called ashlar buildings. The appearance of these building in the LBA, though a gradual development in the long tradition of Cyprus, signals a breaking point in the history of Cypriot architecture. Both the sophisticated design and costly building techniques present the most obvious manifestation of the elite in the stratified LBA society of Cyprus. While the ashlar buildings found earlier in the coastal towns have been identified as residences or sanctuaries, the recently discovered buildings were identified as administrative centers for the control of certain agricultural products and, perhaps, for the control of copper production. Their relation with agricultural products is straightforward, due mainly to the presence of large facilities for their storage in the buildings themselves or in subsidiary ones. The involvement with the control and trade in copper is suggested by the proximity of some of the buildings to the cupriferous zone of the Troodos massif. The accumulation of goods and imported prestigious items, often demonstrated in rich burials³ in the hands of the elite, is most probably the result for the exchange for copper.

A definition of the administrative buildings in architectural terms is still lacking in Cypriot archaeology and therefore these buildings should be described in the wider context of an urban design concept. With few exceptions their outer limits are hardly defined, thus blended with the fabric of the remaining part of the town. A mere comparison of the architec-

¹ NORWICH 1984.

² FRANKEL this volume.

³ SOUTH 2003.

ture of the ashlar buildings in coastal towns with those of the hinterland will result to the observation of some interesting variations. In the first case these differences are mostly confined to the integration of the buildings within the urban landscape and the lack of large storage facilities in the buildings themselves, which in many cases are housing industrial activities as well. One may anticipate that the presence or absence of storerooms, that to a great extent defines the architectural form of the building, depends on the nature of the economy of the site. An architect, however, could see much more differences in the zoning of the various functions of the building, which eventually would define its form, while a civil engineer would find much more differences in the structural elements and materials used. In urban terms these variations include the circulation of people, the boundaries of the building, the placing of the doors, the orientation of the facade and much more. These last observations, however are possible only in settlement sites, which have been excavated in a quite a large scale such as Enkomi and Kalavassos but not at Maroni and Alassa.

The three ashlar buildings recently excavated at Maroni, Kalavassos and Alassa in urban terms share some common characteristics, which could justify a special classification.⁴ All three stand out of the ordinary settlement architecture. They are built on high commanding positions at the northern end of the settlements. In addition they are provided with some spacious rooms and considerable storage facilities. In at least two cases the buildings are somehow related to the production of olive oil while all of them were storing this most precious commodity. The thickness of the walls in all cases is suggestive of at least, a second storey most probably used as residence for the upper class, administering the wealth stored or produced in the ground floor or in subsidiary buildings. Having pointed out the similarities between the three ashlar buildings recently excavated on the island, lets now point out some of the variations, which could justify the presentation of this paper in the workshop on regionalism.

MARONI

At Maroni-*Vournes* the Ashlar Building is aligned southeast northwest and measures about 30.5m along its main axis by about 20.5m along the south facade narrowing to about 18.5m further north.⁵ It is partly

built of finely dressed ashlar blocks, while many of the internal and some of the external walls are of mud bricks originally covered with white plaster to resemble ashlar masonry. This practice was employed in regions where stone is missing, such as in the Great Syrian desert, including the Middle and Late Bronze Age town of Ebla (Personal observation).

The building has a tripartite plan (Fig. 1). The East wing is occupied by a succession of seven rooms including the Room of the Olive Press. Most likely the east wing formed the industrial quarters of the building. At least two long and narrow rooms were used for storage purposes and the stone stands recovered are in favour of this suggestion. It is possible that a staircase leading to the upper floor was associated with the narrow rooms. Probably the most centrally located room may have been a space open to the air. In this case this is the only open space, perhaps acting as a lighting shaft in the building and presents one of the basic differences in comparison to the other ashlar buildings at Kalavassos and Alassa, where the central court present an important feature of Building X and Building II respectively.

The main entrance, which opens to the south, resembles a veranda with a large central pillar base. The north part of the building is occupied by a number of rooms symmetrically arranged and most probably was intended for domestic use. A side entrance communicates with a 4.50m wide street which separates the Ashlar Building from the West Building, which may have acted as its subsidiary.⁶ The aisled plan is suggestive of a storeroom, although pithos fragments are rare. This fact, however is not surprising having in mind the continuous use of the building well into the Hellenistic period.

In the case of Maroni the architecture of the Ashlar Building was dictated by the need to combine both living and industrial quarters under the same roof. Its subsidiary West Building, was used as a storeroom, hence the aisled plan.

KALAVASSOS

At Kalavassos-*Agios Dimitrios* the ashlar building designated as Building X occupies a commanding position at the northernmost quarter of the settlement on the west bank of the Vasilikos River. It is by far the largest building at the site and the only one with ashlar masonry.⁷ The main part of the building is

⁴ HADJISAVVAS 2000.

⁵ CADOGAN 1989, 46.

⁶ CADOGAN 1992, 57.

⁷ SOUTH 1984, 25.

square each side measuring about 30.5 m with a tripartite plan around a central square courtyard. The various components of the building are symmetrically distributed around the courtyard. Two north-south corridors are flanking the courtyard both of which run the length of the building. The east wing is occupied by a series of rooms which run parallel to the east corridor. The north wing is occupied by two pairs of rooms. The largest architectural unit is a rectangular hall occupying most of the west wing of Building X, used as a storeroom to house at least 47 pithoi (Fig. 2).

The main entrance to the building lies in the centre of the south side and is 3.50 m wide. It opens into a vestibule leading straight into the central courtyard which is paved with pebbles. Ashlar masonry was used on exterior and important interior areas. Ashlar blocks up to 3.20 m long many with drafted margins were used. Ashlar masonry also occurs in the form of monolithic stone pillars and rectangular pillar bases mostly in the Pithos Hall.

Another storage area called the North Pithos Magazine occupies the north of the western half of Building X. This storeroom is formed by the north outer wall of Building X and an enclosure wall at the northernmost limit of the settlement. The massively constructed foundations sometimes up to 2 m thick suggest the existence of an upper storey accessible via a staircase near the main entrance. Most of the rooms have only one floor and in general the building underwent little change.

There is little doubt that the major preoccupation of the tenants of Building X was the control of production and storage of olive oil. According to the excavator, the function of Building X could be that of an administrative centre or “residence for elite members of the society who had some control over the economic life of the community”.⁸

As in the previous case of Maroni, the architecture of Building X was to a great extent dictated by the character of the economy of the site. The entire space of the West wing was occupied by the main storeroom, while additional storing was provided to the north of the building. Otherwise the tripartite plan is reminiscent of the majority of the LBA communal buildings all over the island. Little attention was paid thus far to the central open space in the form of an inner courtyard. As mentioned above in the case of domestic architecture, the open spaces play an

important role in the everyday life of the Cypriot people.

ALASSA

The most recently discovered ashlar buildings were excavated at Alassa-Palaiotaverna, located on the foothills of the Troodos massif on an altitude of 258 m, which makes it the uppermost LBA settlement of urban character on the island.

The site of Palaiotaverna forms the upper quarter of the settlement where three ashlar buildings have been excavated. Building I is the lower one and the most damaged. It is situated south of a 4.30 m wide street, which runs the length of the excavated area for 43 metres. Only the foundation of the wall facing the street was saved at floor level. To the south of the wall two square blocks were sunk in the floor, while the pits originally holding at least two more blocks have been excavated. They have sides of 1.10 m and most probably formed the bases of pillars in a hypostyle hall, similar to the large storeroom at Kalavassos-Agios Dimitrios. The almost complete destruction of its floors is a negative factor towards its identification, but it could have acted as a subsidiary structure to Building II (Fig. 3).

The upper one, designated Building II, is better preserved, though badly affected by deep ploughing. The structure is of palatial character covering an area of 1410 m². Its solid construction, large inner spaces and extensive storage facilities provide evidence of its communal character. Masses of rock had to be excavated from the slope of the hill in order to prepare an even surface for its erection. At the same time the lower part of the hill was elevated by addition of hard “havera”. The plinth of the northern part of the building rests directly on the bedrock, while on the southern part large stones were used as foundations. In both cases, the plinth is made of huge ashlars one of them weighing nearly 3 tons. The plinth is decorated with drafted margins. The lifting bosses, meant to be underground, were left on the stones.⁹

The north outer wall preserved two courses of orthostats built in the shell-wall technique with protruding plinth inside and outside. The orthostats are decorated with drafted margins inside and outside. The bosses on the outer face are left in places where the wall was not visible from the streets. The superstructure was built of mud bricks made of terra rossa. The surface was painted in red and this is indicated

⁸ SOUTH 1989, 322.

⁹ HADJISAVVAS 1994.

by some pigment preserved on mud bricks found in the trench between the north outer wall and the excavated bedrock.

Building II, though of a tripartite plan, presents a number of architectural elements not familiar in other parts of the island. It was built on three sides of a large rectangular courtyard having the shape of the Greek letter Π with a unique, thus far, portico on the eastern inner side, which most probably formed its main façade. It is perfectly square with a side of 37.70 meters, which makes it one of the largest LBA buildings on the island. There is little doubt that this centrally placed court played an important role in the life of the community. It was actually the focus for the layout of the Ashlar building as it was not simply enclosing the façade, but also provided access to the only large storeroom of the building and in addition was storing a line of pithoi along the south wall of the storeroom. The long portico provided not only a spectacular two storey façade but also a soft gradation between the built, the sheltered and unbuilt space, which is so typical in Minoan architecture.¹⁰

The north and west wings are elevated in relation to the south wing. For this reason a 2 meter-thick wall, which acted as a retaining structure was built between the inner courtyard and the south wing. The south wing communicates with the street through a lateral entrance. Building II was provided with a sophisticated drainage system constructed in the NW corner of the building. The rain water was collected through a vertical shaft incorporated in a wall and was then conveyed through a hollowed stone into an open channel outside the building. The collecting lowest stone, the channel and the spouted stone closely resemble the drainage system of the palace of Knossos. The sophisticated drainage system of Building II at Palaiotaverna, thus far unseen in other communal buildings on the island, was most probably dictated by the location of the site on the mountains and the expected higher rainfall.

The North wing is fully occupied by a storeroom which held at least 16 large storage pithoi. Additional storage area was provided between the north wall and the vertically cut bedrock, which was used as a cellar, being the coolest area of the building. At least four fragmentary pithoi, different from those found in the main storeroom, were leaning on the bedrock. At least eight more pithoi were found in the courtyard outside the south and east walls of the storeroom. The west part of the storeroom was paved with large

rectangular slabs. All remaining floors of the building were cemented.

Of special interest are the internal arrangements of the south wing which occupies a rectangular space of 200 m². The two extremities are occupied by a pair of small rooms symmetrically attached to the north wall. The divisions are made of much thinner shell walls.

Building III is situated east of Building II and was probably used as its subsidiary. The building techniques are the same employed for the first two Ashlar buildings already described, but not as fine. It is interesting to note that the fill of the shell walls contains red mud, a material otherwise not present in the close proximity of the site. Red mud was also used for the manufacture of mud bricks, at least used for the superstructure of Building II. Although badly damaged its architecture could easily be reconstructed. The ground plan is trapezoidal, the sides tapering northwards. The south wall is 26 m long and the north 22 m. It seems, however that both the west and east walls continued further to the north. The original plan shows that the building was roughly divided in two parts. The east part was made of three aisles. Two of them are almost identical with inner dimensions 16 × 3.50 m built to the north of the largest south aisle, which measures 17.50 × 5.50 m. The first two aisles are constructed on the same level, while the southernmost on a lower level, following the variations of the ground. The west part of the building is made of at least two rooms, most probably added at a later stage in the history of the building. The east aisles were separated in smaller rooms with the addition of dividing walls not bonded to the original thick walls of the building. The lower series of rooms is of considerable interest. In the easternmost room there is a semi-circular structure, its surface covered with pithos sherds embedded in hydraulic plaster. This structure is connected with a pit through a channel cut in the leveled bedrock. The rock-cut channel is at first uncovered for a length of about two meters, suddenly disappears under a separating wall and then opens into the pit. The whole arrangement is suggestive of a wine press. The presence of a stone counterweight at the eastern side of the room further strengthens this suggestion. On the northern part of the building, a large pithos entirely sunk in a rock-cut pit was found. The pithos is nearly two meters deep, its interior stained with a brownish-red colour, most probably the organic residue of wine.

Finally, let us take Alassa as a case study to test the

¹⁰ PALYVOU 2008, 41.

validity of my initial statement, concerning the relationship between the architectural form and the character of the economy. Some critical innovations, observed in the last habitation period of the site, indicate the change of function of the principal and subsidiary buildings in relation to a possible new character of the economy. The innovations that occurred at the very beginning of the LC IIIA period include the addition of the north wing of Building II in order to house the large storeroom and the alteration of Building III to house industrial activities related, among others, to wine production and storage. These changes coincide with the modification of the south wing of Building II with the addition of two pairs of symmetrically arranged rooms at its extremities. It also coincides with the appearance of a freestanding hearth and a strange sunken construction in the cen-

tral, larger hall of the south wing probably used for grain storage. Of particular interest is the presence of a fully equipped bathroom located in the easternmost room of the south wing. These last modifications, could have aimed at the satisfaction of the needs of new inhabitants of the building, most probably strongly influenced by the Aegean world.¹¹

Whether these new inhabitants, having a special taste in wine, have changed the previous character of the economy in order to meet their needs, is something we are going to investigate in the near future by analyzing both the remains of the installations and the contents of the pithoi. What has already been established is that any local variations in the architectural form depended on one hand on natural factors and on the other on the desires, taste and above all the possibilities of the people involved.

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¹¹ HADJISAVVAS and HADJISAVVA 1997.

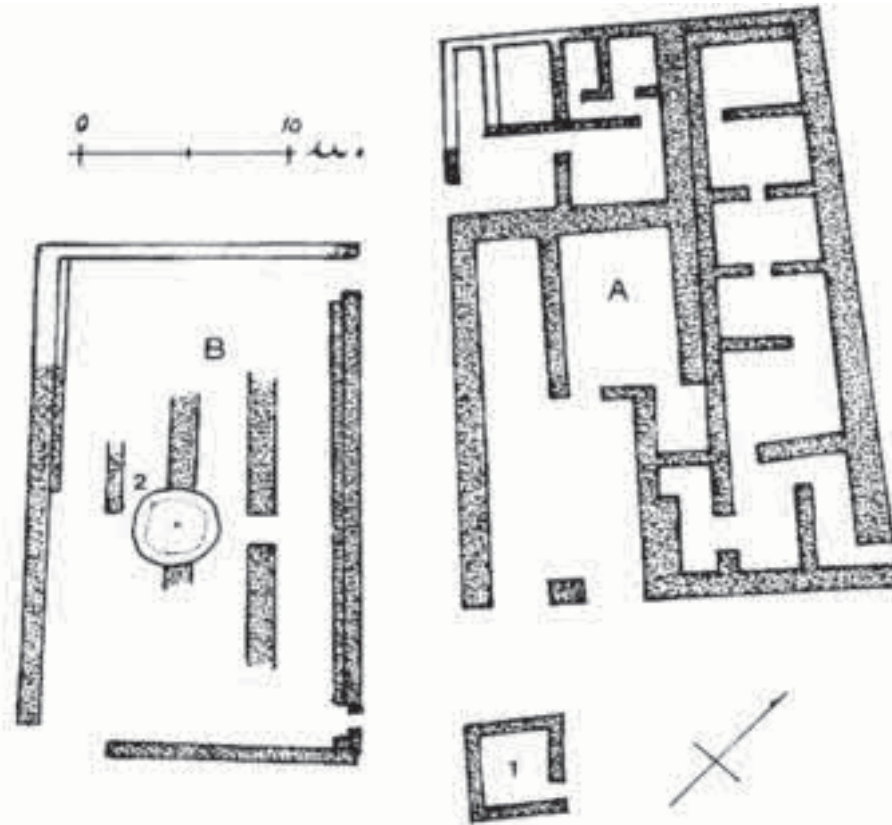


Fig. 1 Maroni -Vournes. The Ashlar Building and the West Building

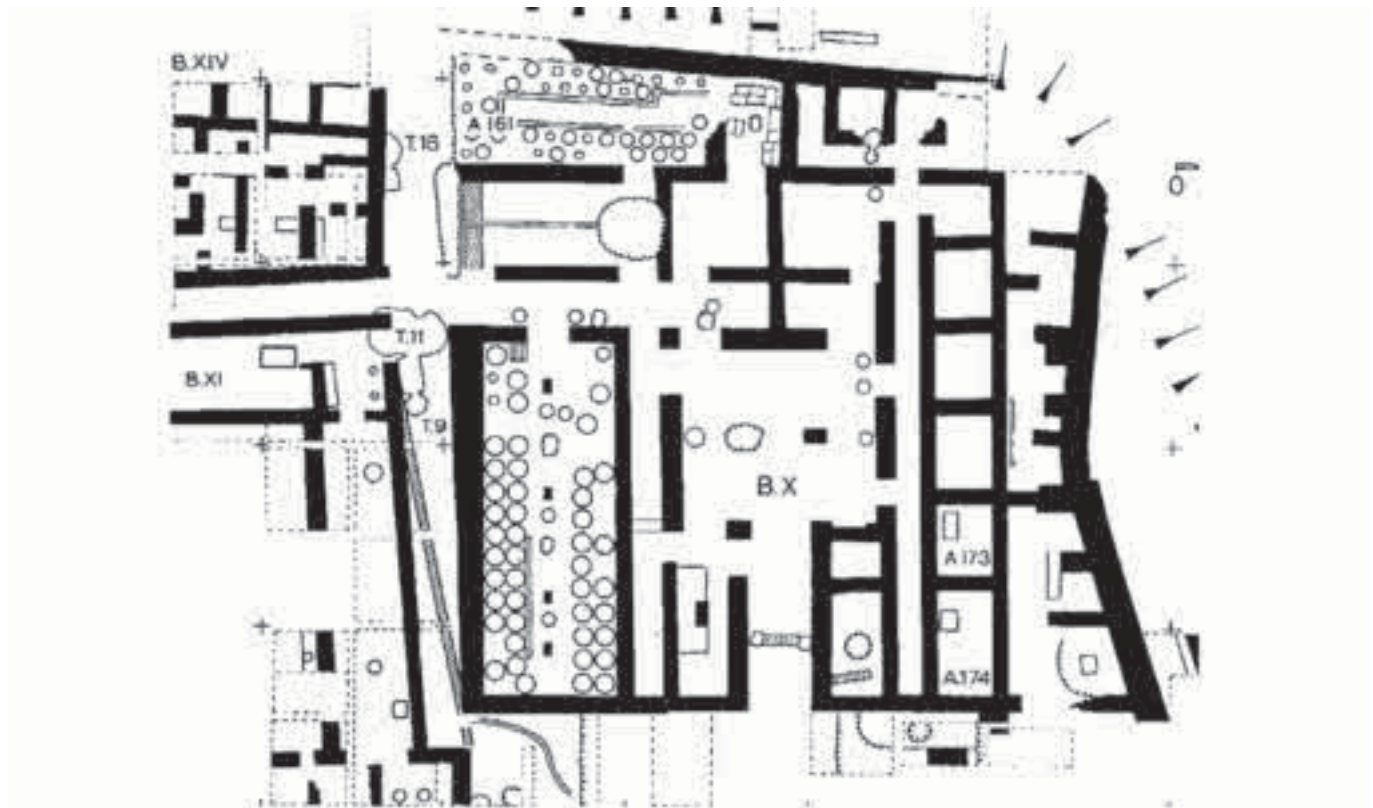


Fig. 2 Kalavasos-Agios Dimitrios. Building X and subsidiary Building XI to the west



Fig. 3 Alassa-Palaitaverna. Building II and the subsidiary Building III to the east

