

SUMMARY

The Hodegetria of Agrafoi in Corfu Pieces of its long history

Agrafoi village is situated in the northern part of Corfu at a distance of 31 kms from the capital of the island. Its name can probably be traced back into the byzantine times or into the first years of the Angevin occupation of the island and has to do with the “agraphoi” or unregistered villagers who were free from any tax obligation towards the state.

The church of the Hodegetria which is today the parish church of the village, has a very long history and its beginning, if we are to consider the data in the sources as precise, can be found in the 13th century. The oldest information about the church comes from copies of documents from the years 1286, 1400 and 1401 respectively. In these documents one can find interesting information on the foundation of the church, the organization of its group of founders, and the special honours paid to the Virgin Mary.

The oldest founders of the church constituted a confraternity. The fraternity of the church is the oldest known sample of a fraternity of founders in the area of Corfu and its uninterrupted existence can be traced until the end of the seventh decade of the 20th century, adapted since the 18th century to the statal decrees that defined the function of all confraternities in the wider Ionian area.

The church of the Hodegetria was turned into a monastery after a verdict of the confraternity in 1744 and came into existence as such in 1746, after many regressions and changes due to the resignation of the elected first prior and organizer of the new monastery. The fact that the monastery operated is confirmed until the beginning of the 19th century, however already on the dawn of the new century and

despite the existence of a prior, it seems that a monastic brotherhood didn't exist. Despite all the efforts and the interest on the part of the monks, during the third decade of the 19th century the monastery had in fact ceased to operate. The only thing that remained of it was the inclination of the brothers to elect the parish priest from among the priest-monks' order.

The church was part of the parochial network of the local Church; during the venetian occupation and until the island was united to the greek state (1864) this network was defined by the possession of a burial monument in a church, as well as by the participation of the owner of this monument in the rituals that took place in the church. Parishioners of the church could become the members of its brotherhood as well as other persons through heredity or through the purchase of a burial monument in the church or in the area around it. The presence of parishioners, as a clearly distinct group, is confirmed in the year 1528. After that their presence is not registered, however it is certain that they existed and supported in their own way the correct operation of the church and its regular ministrations. The conversion of the church into a monastery didn't bring any essential difference neither to the relation of brotherhood and church nor to the church's parochial status.

Today the church has the shape of a large single-naved basilica of the standard type that can be found in the Ionian islands. The access to the church is achieved through a long corridor, paved with stones. The church is surrounded from its northern and southern sides by arched narthexes. On the south-western side there is a bell-tower with pierced walls and autonomous seating.

In the courtyard of the church the main element is the monumental central western entrance with its elaborate decoration and the frescos of Saints Peter and Paul on the right and on the left. In the interior, the church has a templon of three friezes and a two-storeyed matroneum. The church as it is today, was erected or renovated in 1677 by the master workmen Spyros Koustas and Zapheiris Vassilakis who carved their names and the construction date on a cornerstone of the eastern side of the church. The church is decorated with important icons of the 18th and 19th centuries on the templon, on the walls and on the ceiling, as well as with frescos of the 18th-19th centuries

in the Holy Altar or Ierón (Prothesis and central apse) and on the templon.

In the present study, the subject is developed in eight units that refer to the first existing evidence about the church; to the confraternity of the church, its composition and operation; to the founding of the monastery, its organization and its break-up; to the parochial character of the church, its architecture and its icons, its library and archives, its dependencies (metochia). In the end, there are published the most noteworthy documents that regard the church and the monastery.