



BYZANTINE MUSEUM OF ARGOLIS

The Byzantine Museum of Argolis is housed in a listed building complex of historical value at Argos, known as the "Kapodistrias Barracks", that occupies a large area in the centre of the town. Its original building phase dates back to around 1700, whereas between 1828 and 1829 it was reconstructed at the behest of Ioannis Kapodistrias under the supervision of the architect Lampros Zavos in order to lodge the Cavalry of the nascent Greek state.

The complex consisted of four wings, in which the ground floor served as stabling (the horse feeders are still preserved within the museum space) and the upper floor housed the soldiers' dormitories, whereas the upper storey of the north wing, which has not survived, contained the command post and the officers' quarters. During the 1970s strong pressures were exerted for the demolition of the complex, but the coordinated efforts of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, the Cultural Association of Argos and sensitized citizens resulted in its rescue. The complex was declared a listed monument in 1978 and its west wing was intended to accommodate the Byzantine Museum in 1992.

The main purpose of the Museum is to showcase representative aspects of Argolis from the 4th century AD to

later years through exhibits which were unknown to the general public, and also to form a cultural hub in Argos and the wider region.

The exhibits, mainly pottery and sculpture, as well as coins, mosaics, wall paintings and a variety of smaller artefacts, come primarily from rescue excavations conducted by the Greek Archaeological Service across the town of Argos. Simultaneously, finds recovered from other areas of Argolis are presented, such as Nauplion, Andritsa, Kefalari, Chonikas, Plataniti, Merbakas, Tiryns, Ligourio, Tracheia, Ermionis and the islands of the Argolic Gulf.

The gallery space occupies the entire upper floor of the west wing of the complex and the permanent exhibition is divided into four main unities.

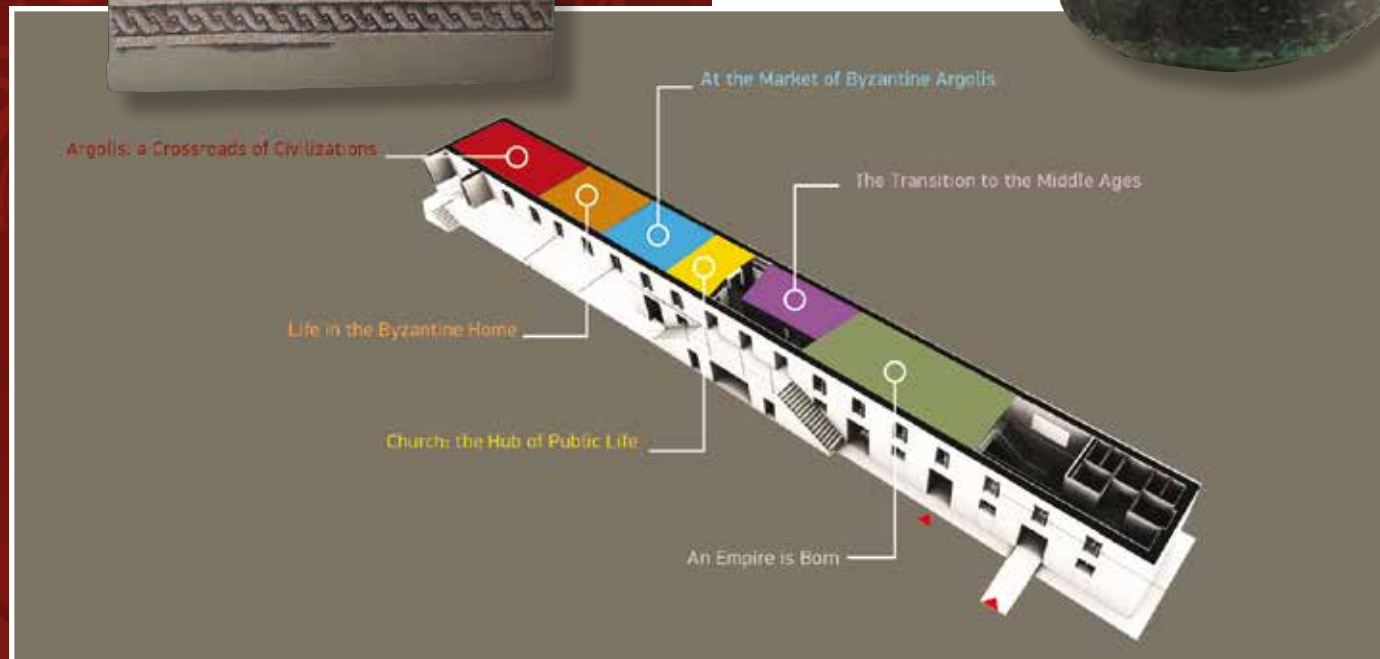
An Empire is Born

The first unity entitled "An Empire is Born" presents the new empire through the Byzantine Emperor and also Christianity, the new religion, with its symbol, the Cross, and its places of worship, the basilicas. The central exhibit consists in the recreation of the Holy Bema of an early Byzantine basilica. Concurrently, the continuation of structures of Antiquity in key aspects of daily life, as in the case of the luxurious residences, is conveyed through the mosaics that depict the personification of Autumn and a triumphal chariot that constitute notable exhibits, and also in burial practices in which the perpetuation of ancient traditions is evident, with displays from the early Byzantine cemeteries of Argos.



The Transition to the Middle Ages

The second unity considers the transition to the Middle Ages and the environment of insecurity that prevailed from the 7th to the 9th century. A hoard of coins from Argos and lead seals of Byzantine dignitaries, found on the islands of the Argolic Gulf, are displayed, whereas the most prominent ensemble is comprised of finds from the Cave of Andritsa, a unique archaeological discovery that dates back to the so-called "transitional" period.



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The third unity, entitled "Middle Byzantine Argolis" is the "heart" of the exhibition that brings together the greatest part of the exhibits. It is articulated in three large sub-units, of which the first centres on the church which in medieval life becomes the focal point not just of public worship, but of public life in general, thus substituting the ancient Agora. The space has been arranged into a small chapel with significant ktetoric and dedicatory inscriptions at its entrance, marble members and murals that decorate its interior.



Life in the Byzantine Home



In the third sub-unity the Byzantine home life is presented with objects –mostly ceramics– used for storing, cooking and serving food. Two large display cases contain artefacts related to clothing, personal adornment and entertainment, made of metal mainly, used by men, women and children. The sub-unity is supplemented with objects associated with how a household is run and the way the multiple needs of the occupants of a house are met (weaving, piety, security, lighting).

At the Market of Byzantine Argolis

The second sub-unity, titled "At the Market of Byzantine Argolis", deals with the activities of professionals in a Byzantine city, placing emphasis on the builder, the painter and the potter, whereas artefacts that were used in a variety of transactions and trade, such as balances, weights (*stathmia*) and coins have been included in the exhibits. The sub-unity is completed with the "conveyors" of sea trade, which are no other than the amphorae, whereas an iron ring attached to the rim of the wooden wheel of a cart functions as evidence of land trade.



Argolis: a Crossroads of Civilizations

In the fourth and final unity entitled "Argolis: a Crossroads of Civilizations" attention is drawn to the convergence, coexistence and, in certain cases, integration of different cultures in the Argolic land by presenting distinctive elements of their material and non-material culture.

The sub-unity dedicated to the Slavs displays tools, clothing items and jewels that come mainly from the Slavic cemetery of Makri in Arcadia that was excavated in 2009 by the 25th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities. The display is completed with the characteristic hand-made or wheel-thrown vessels (slow wheel) from Tiryns, Argos and the Slavic cemeteries of Arcadia (Asea and Makri).

The hoard of Frankish coins that was recovered at Argos and also the typical Italian Proto-Maiolica and Archaic Maiolica Ware found in territories under Frankish rule hold a prominent position in the sub-unity of the Franks.

The Venetians are represented by the winged lion and coats of arms of dignitaries, coins and pottery that all come from Nauplion, the great centre of the time period.

The Arvanites are presented through their intangible heritage with the aid of an interactive application that focuses on Arvanitic surnames and songs as well as on typical Arvanitic recipes of Argolis.

The unity is concluded with the Ottomans calling attention to two daily habits that have their roots in the 17th century: smoking, illustrated by the characteristic *lula* smoking pipes, and coffee drinking, represented by the small cups produced in the workshops of Kütahya.



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