

STONE CARVING OF
THE HOSPITALLER
PERIOD IN RHODES

DISPLACED PIECES AND
FRAGMENTS

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*This study is dedicated to the memory of Gregorios Konstantinopoulos,
archaeologist, administrator and man of letters
(1921-2001)*

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For the stone shall cry out of the wall...
Habakkuk 2:11

Introduction

‘Rhodes of the Knights’ - this is how most visitors remember the island which, for 213 years, was ruled by the most unusual conquerors of the Latin East. And not without reason. The graceful aspect of the fortified town of the Knights of Saint John confronts anyone approaching the port by sea; this is but a prelude to what he is going to encounter once he sets foot on land. The historic centre of the town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, preserves its medieval street plan while hundreds of the buildings contained within its walls date, at least in part, from the 15th century or even earlier. On the landward side, the medieval town is protected from the encroachment of the modern conurbation by its solid Hospitaller fortifications, whose moat cuts deep into the underlying ancient Greek city, and by a barrier of wooded parks. Further afield, the countryside is dotted with castles and watchtowers, and the occasional ancient chapel whose frescoes may contain a heraldic shield or two.

A thorough acquaintance with the medieval monuments of the town and the island is required for their protection and enhancement. Anyone privileged to serve this World Heritage site has been marked by the experience. The remnants of the medieval period are not all equally comprehensible because, apart from other difficulties, they display localized cultural elements. Archaeological exploration and the interpretation of its findings, restoration projects, the mounting of exhibitions and the organization of heritage classes, and the strategies of conservation, all need any tool which may provide additional information on the period and its geography. The understanding of certain types of evidence requires the contribution of specialist studies: the systematic examination of a particular field may provide the key for the interpretation of specific features on individual monuments.

It is hoped that the present study¹ will contribute to a fuller appreciation of the form and function of stone carvings² of the Hospitaller period, whether still *in situ*, reused or derived from excavations. It is based on comparisons between displaced pieces and fragments with reference to similar examples still in their original location. Its interpretations also draw from research on related works from elsewhere, and from the character of medieval civilization in general.

¹ Originally an MA Thesis in Greek at the University of Athens, 2010. Current English translation by the author, with a few emendations.

² The term is used to cover a wide range of work, which would have required different levels of skill, much of which cannot be dignified by the word ‘sculpture’. In the Middle Ages a wide range of terms designated craftsmen working in stone: hewers, marblers, image-makers, paviors etc. Coldstream 2004: 19.

The first part of the work (Part One, chapters I to III), examines the historical, topographical and cultural background; in Part Two (chapters IV, V, VI and VIII), displaced pieces and fragments are examined according to type and function: architectural pieces, wall heraldry, and parts of funerary monuments. As the role of epigraphics is essential in the review of the latter, a chapter devoted to this subject on Rhodes (chapter VII) is interpolated between the chapters on Heraldry (VI) and funerary monuments (VIII). The analysis closes with a summary of the problems encountered in handling the material, and some conclusions derived from its examination (IX). After the bibliography and three appendices intended to help the reader, the work closes with the catalogue of 230 displaced pieces and fragments in the inventory of the Ephorate of Antiquities in Rhodes; this includes 31 plates with photographs of the entries arranged according to type for ease of reference.

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Gregorios Konstantinoploulos, a man of remarkable perception and diplomatic skill who succeeded in safeguarding the multicultural heritage of Rhodes in the difficult years of the colonels' junta (1967-1973). It was his earnest urging to the author, conveyed over an excellent lunch in Athens sometime after his retirement, that inspired this endeavour to present the stray Hospitaller stone carvings of Rhodes as a distinct *corpus* of material.