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# At the periphery of the Empire: urban restructuring and architectural transformation in Ottoman Rhodes

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## Abstract

In 1522 Rhodes was conquered by the Knights of St. John and became part of the Ottoman Empire. The town retained economic prosperity but lost all strategic roles, reverting to a provincial rank. For these reasons and because of lacking sources, scholars little studied the Ottoman town of Rhodes, but travel reports and urban analysis suggest interesting remarks. The Turks reused pre-existing architectures and occupied the walled town, while Greek and Latin people were forced to live in suburbs. Relevant architectural changes, as seen through the sources and unpublished recent photos, concerned religious buildings: Latin churches were adapted to *Djami*, *mesdjid* or warehouses and Greek ones became houses. Inside the walls “Ottomanization” was carried out through few interventions occupying leading points of the town, while other important functions (such as the government seat and cemeteries) were moved outside the walls. The hypothesis proposed is Rhodes model of Islamic city, based on the market as an “empty center” with public buildings around it (Friday Mosque, *bedesten*, *madrassa* and *hammam*) and applied exploiting the existing sites. The Friday Mosque and a *madrassa* with *hammam* were built on top of the slope of the medieval market street, where there was a Christian monastery, and a *bedesten* may have been placed in a medieval building near the present *Bezesten Djami*. In addition, five new mosques were founded becoming new urban polarities. Rhodes was almost certainly divided in *mahalla*, residential units usually centered on a mosque: a *mahalla* worked as a self-sufficient district, generally extended from ten to few hundreds homes. This subdivision changed Rhodes urban structure, for streets gradually became *cul de sac*. It’s not yet possible to outline the borders of Rhodes *mahalla* or identify their central mosques, but the sources attest that each *mahalla* had the name of its reference mosque. These considerations allowed drawing a first scheme of Rhodes urban fabric and its new polarities. The town can be considered a relevant example of Ottoman urban policy outside the motherland and could be taken as a reference in the study of other cities at the periphery of the empire, as a part of a larger comparative analysis.

## 1. Introduction

There is a considerable bibliography concerning Rhodes which explored its political conditions and socio-economic dynamics, art and architecture. Studies about the medieval period, when the island was ruled by the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (1309-1522), are more numerous, however a clear picture of

medieval and modern architecture in Rhodes comes from older works (de Belabre, 1908; Maiuri, 1921; Gabriel, 1923) which became a reference for later studies. They testify the condition of buildings and fortifications before the Second World War and before recent restorations through interesting photographs and measured architectural drawings. On the

contrary, literature is quite sparing of monographic contributions about the four centuries of Ottoman rule on the island (1522-1912): the political-economic situation of Rhodes can be estimated from general studies on the Ottoman Empire (Mantran, 1984; Raymond, 1985; Panzac, 1991; Arnaud 2004, 2005), as well as from some important works about the peripheral imperial territories and the parts of new Ottoman cities (Bierman, 1991, 2005; Vatin and Veinstein, 2004). Some studies about Rhodes examine its demographic conditions and maritime economy in the eighteenth century (Efthimiou-Hadzilacou, 1984; Aloï, 2008) but urban events in Rhodes are little explored, also because to the lack of written sources. Information about architecture are equally scant and the more recent works (Directorate of Byzantine and Post Byzantine Antiquities, 2008, 2009) propose an indexing of the main Turkish founded buildings in Rhodes, referring to valuable older studies (Balducci, 1932). An important contribution queries Ottoman sources (Zeki Çelikkol, 1992) but it was generally neglected by more recent Western studies.

Remarks derived from historiography contributed to partially reconstruct the puzzle of Rhodes urban transformations during Ottoman rule. Through the analysis of Rhodes urban organism this study wants to systematize the fragmentary information about the town, exploring aspects of Islamization process and the mutual relationships between new architectural and symbolic features, referring to the more recent works about other cities at the periphery of the empire<sup>1</sup>. Rhodes took the character of a typical Islamic city, with the market and the Friday Mosque in central position and a succession of residential neighborhoods around them. The article finally proposes a first scheme of Rhodes urban fabric with its streets and new polarities until the

seventeenth century, when Islamic elements completely crystallize.

The article is structured in three sections. The first summarizes the political and socio-economic framework in order to understand the place of Rhodes in the Ottoman empire. The island preserved a certain trade prosperity, but its peripheral position led to a progressive exclusion from commercial routes between East and West: Rhodes lost all strategic roles reverting to a provincial rank and went through a phase of decline. The second section details Ottoman urban policy, observing how the transformation of existing buildings and new planning works contributed to the Ottomanization of medieval town. Turks widely reused pre-existing buildings and the most relevant architectural changes concerned religious buildings: Latin churches were mostly adapted to *djami* or *mesdjid* while Greek ones became houses. New buildings, above all mosques, *madrassa* and *hammam*, were part of religious foundations offering welfare services and economically supported both by the government and the town market. The third section explains how Ottomanization was completed from the physical-symbolic and administrative point of view and changed Rhodes urban structure: the street-square of the market was transformed into *çarşı*, the town was almost certainly divided into districts (*mahalla*) and several *cul de sac* streets were formed. In the light of these analyses I proposed a plan of Ottoman Rhodes, representing the last urban phase of the walled town since its formation, and a map with a hypothesis of *mahalla* subdivision.

## 2. A second magnitude star

In 1522 Rhodes became part of the Ottoman Empire, which reached its maximum expansion in Europe, the Balkans and Near

East in the late sixteenth century. Territories were hierarchically divided into provinces (*eyâlet*), districts (*sancak*) and sub-districts (*nahiyes*). The government was structured in administrative, legal and military power: the governors were charged of local security and collection of taxes; the judges (*kadi*) held legal authority and attended all levels of rule up to minority communities; finally there were the imperial military bodies, Janissaries and additional armed forces.

The Aegean islands never had a great strategic significance in the empire, except for the larger ones and those closer to the Anatolian coasts. However they retained a role of connection among Greece, the Balkans and Asia Minor: they procured precious goods (pearls from the Red Sea, roses from the Danubian islands, mastic from Chios, sponges from Symi, fruit from Rhodes and Kos, marble from Marmara) but they imposed a continuous supply of grain and high costs for their control. Moreover the conquest of Rhodes and Chios withdrew much of the incomes from trade with Western Europe. Because of the imbalance between distance and opportunity respect to Istanbul, the Ottomans approved a flat tax system in the poorest islands and introduced an extensive Ottomanization process in the more important ones, while areas considered of little value were left to themselves<sup>2</sup>. In 1534 the Aegean islands merged into Archipelago *eyâlet* and Rhodes became its capital from 1546, before transferring the role to Gallipoli in the seventeenth century. The sources also attest that in the sixteenth century the Ottomans carried out a tax census and a provincial legal code (*kânûn*), with details on land ownership and tax system<sup>3</sup>.

After the conquest about three thousand Jews, Greeks and Latins left Rhodes but most of them remained, so in 1577 there were 20.000 inhabitants on the island, of which 15.000

Greeks. The Ottomans granted Jews freedom of worship and the possibility of having schools and synagogues<sup>4</sup>, facilitating the rooting of a large community of artisans and traders. Greeks were also tolerated, with the recognition of their Patriarchate's religious authority, but the walled town was prevented them after sunset and they were forced to live in the suburbs. The same treatment was reserved to Latin and Armenian Christians, but important foreign colonies and a Venetian consulate survived in the town<sup>5</sup>. Such a policy towards non-Muslim people (generally defined *reâyâ*), considered lower but placed under Ottoman protection, allowed controlling minorities and was accompanied by a strict tax system<sup>6</sup>.

In mid-sixteenth century Rhodes was still among the most important Aegean islands. It kept the record of second level military port after Cyprus and Chios: Rhodian arsenal was enlarged and an imperial admiral was elected *sancakbeyi* of the island. The town also retained an economic prosperity throughout the seventeenth century, thanks to the ceramics trade with Anatolian coasts and to its role in pilgrimage routes to Christian and Muslim holy places. However Rhodes was ousted by the maritime trade between East and West, giving Thessaloniki and Izmir the role of new ports of call. The town reverted to the rank of a provincial center: travel narratives also report of a little populated island in 1687, partly because of a plague epidemic that had forced many people to move to the villages or to leave the island.

During the eighteenth century, in conjunction with a serious political-economic crisis all over the Ottoman Empire because of the confrontation with European powers, Rhodes became a place of exile for political prisoners and intellectuals: also for this reason the attentions from central government became

weaker. Taxes, economic stagnation and political corruption aggravated the already precarious situation, increasing degradation and depopulation; many plague epidemics hit the Mediterranean and Rhodes in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and the island faced a deep crisis, forcing many inhabitants to move to Egypt and Anatolia. However the harbors of Rhodes and Lindos retained a certain prosperity and economic activities were based yet on trade: Rhodes exported fruit, olive oil and wine, silk, textiles and carpets to Egypt, importing rice, coffee, flax and salt; it imported almost all raw materials from Istanbul and Izmir in exchange for fruit, rubber and sponges. There was a still active trade with Malta, Livorno and Marseille, where Rhodes exported Egyptian grain; ships were built with wood imported from Karamania and thanks to the work of craftsmen and skilled French and Turkish workers.

In 1839 the empire established the *Tanzimat*, a new law code that meant to change the government structure in order to oppose caste system and nepotism, but pressures from Europe and administrative inadequacy made it very difficult to achieve. In 1836 territories were reorganized into provinces (*vilayet* headed by *wâlî*), districts (*sancak* governed by *mutassirif*), sub-districts (*kasa* with *kaimakan*) and rural cantons (*nahiye* controlled by *mudir*, the equivalent of *kadı*). In 1852 Greek lands were divided into five *vilayet*: Thessaloniki, Ioannina and Archipelago (including Rhodes), Sporades, Crete, Samos and Athos. Rhodes was a seat of a *wâlî* and then of a *sancak*. In 1874 the Ottomans established a land office where properties were recorded and divided into five categories: public lands (*miri*), religious foundations (*vakıf*), private (*mulk*) and public properties (*metrouke*), inalienable lands (*mevkoufe*) and uncultivated grounds

(*mevat*) like mountains, rocks and wetlands, susceptible of drainage to become *miri*<sup>7</sup>.

During the nineteenth century several factors worsened the impoverishment on the island. Fiscal pressure degenerated into retaliations and forced the inhabitants to leave villages or escape from the island; moreover, there were various epidemics and natural disasters such as two earthquakes in 1851 and 1863. To the eyes of travelers Rhodes appeared to be an unsafe and backward place and remained like largely unexplored. In 1856 in the island there were about 27.000 people, of which 6.000 Turks, 1.000 Jews, 20.000 Greeks and a few hundred European Catholics: this situation was confirmed by the results of the first Ottoman census of 1830, according to which population should not exceed the 30.000 inhabitants and in the town of Rhodes lived just fewer than 5.000 people, of which 3.500 Turkish and 1.000 Jews<sup>8</sup>.

In 1912 the island's population was estimated at 28.344 people. Rhodes had 13.500 inhabitants, of which about 6.000 Orthodox Christians, 5.000 Muslims and 4.000 Jews, all living poorly: the lack of cultivable lands (those subjected to *vakıf* were the three quarters of town lands), depopulation and climate inconstancy influenced the production, requiring massive imports of grain in exchange for cotton, fruit and vegetable mostly produced around Rhodes<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. The reuse of the medieval city and the creation of new urban polarities

With their minarets and painted domes, the Ottomans spread over the town of Rhodes an air of "Turkishness" that delighted European travelers: Rhodes suffered great changes that appeared evident for peculiarity and beauty at the dawn of the Italian occupation<sup>10</sup>. The town preserved for four centuries the original division into *castrum* (reserved to monks and

members of the Order of St. John) and *burgus* (with a Latin neighborhood separated from the Jewish quarter by present *odos Pythagora*), which both took the name of *Kastro* in Ottoman age<sup>11</sup>. However, as we saw, Greeks and Latins were turned away from the walled city to the advantage of Turks, who settled in the *castrum* and in the western part of the *burgus* approximately coinciding with Latin Medieval quarter (known today as “Turkish quarter”).

Jews continued to live in their neighborhood and occupied several buildings built by the Knights, but the more beautiful mansions belonged to the Ottomans<sup>12</sup>. They reused most of the existing buildings and adapted them to their housing model: residences in Rhodes, for the most part lacking of internal courtyards and built on several levels, suffered super elevations and courtyards became gardens. There was also a widespread reuse of fragments from ancient, Byzantine and Medieval monuments: lintels, capitals, drums of columns and tombstones bearing coats of arms were placed in new civil and religious buildings. At last new windows, *mashrabiyya* and wooden surfaces were added and walls were covered with layers of plaster, giving streets an oriental look. The following Figs. 1, 2, 3 and 4 clearly represent architectural transformations in the medieval Street of the Knights during the Ottoman period until today, after Italian and French twentieth-century restorations.

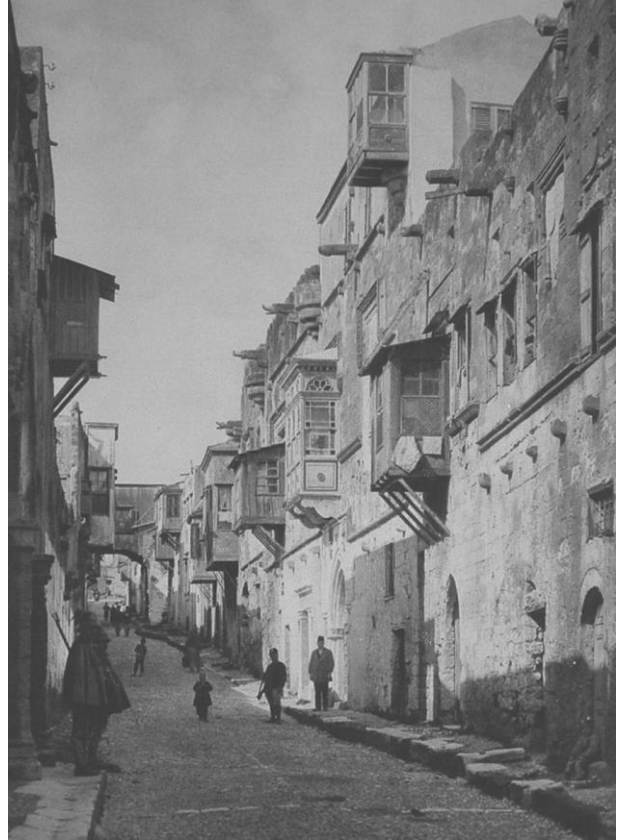


Fig. 1: The Street of the Knights looking west at the beginning of the twentieth century (Faccioli, 1913)



Fig. 2: Today Street of the Knights looking west (photo taken by E. Maglio, 2009)





Fig. 3: The Street of the Knights looking west, from an engraving made by E. Flandin in 1844 (*Clara Rhodes VIII*, 1936)

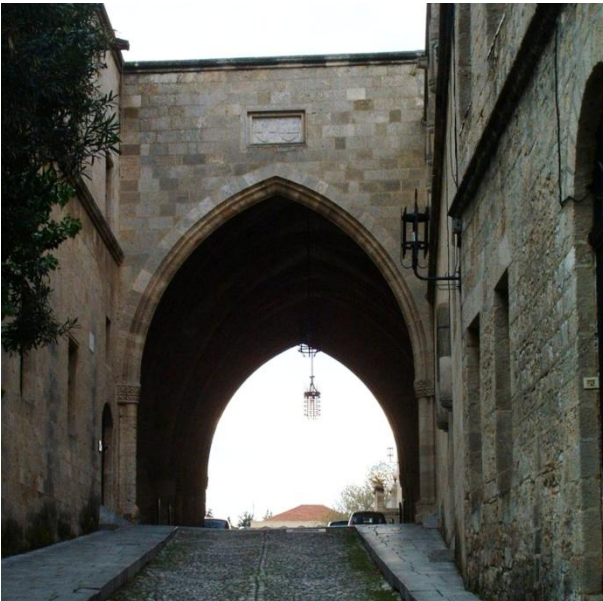


Fig. 4: Today Street of the Knights looking west (photo taken by E. Maglio, 2009)

The Ottomans provided to the maintenance of the commercial and military harbors and restored medieval fortifications, reconstructing collapsed walls and closing St. Athanasius gate in the south-west of the city<sup>13</sup>; even the towered walls between the *castrum* and the

*burgus* were preserved until the early twentieth century<sup>14</sup>. As confirmed by travel reports, the number of town gates was reduced for security reasons: in 1576 there were four gates, namely the Sea gate, the gates of the Arsenal, of Grand Master d'Amboise and of St. John. In 1854 the town had five gates: the Sea gate (*Bahr-Capou*), the Bazaar gate (*Bazaar-Capou*, former Sea gate) and the gates of the Arsenal (*Tershaneh-Capou*), d'Amboise (*Eyri-Capou* or *oblique*, for its development in *chicane*) and St. John (*Guzel-Capou*)<sup>15</sup>. These data are not supported by sixteenth-century iconographical sources, since pictures reflect little or no knowledge of places and imitate fifteenth-century views.

In 1523 Rhodes had assumed the typical features of Islamic cities and appeared as a well-fortified town with great towers and harbors<sup>16</sup>. The first essential architectural and symbolic operation was the appropriation of Christian places of worship. In the Latin quarter churches were converted into mosques by constructing a *mihrâb*, a *minbar* and a minaret: the greatest churches were turned into *djami*, like *Demirli Djami* (the former Greek Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel, in Fig. 5) and *Kantouri Djami* (the Latin Cathedral of St. Mary of the Castle), while all the others were converted to *mesdjid*, that is small neighborhood mosques<sup>17</sup>. Some of them were abandoned or later used as houses or stores, such as *Hamza Bey Djami* and *Bab-ou-Mestoud Mesdjid*; others were included in religious foundations, like the old church of St. George of Cappadocia (which became the center of *Kourmaly Medresse*, in Fig. 6) and *Sykynty Mesdjid* that was integrated into an *imâret*. The Turkish quarter probably extended beyond the present *odos Pythagora* up to *odos Perikleous*, since here two churches were turned into mosques: those of the Holy Trinity (*Dolaply Mesdjid*, in Fig. 7) and St. Catherine (*Ilk Mihrâb Mesdjid*).

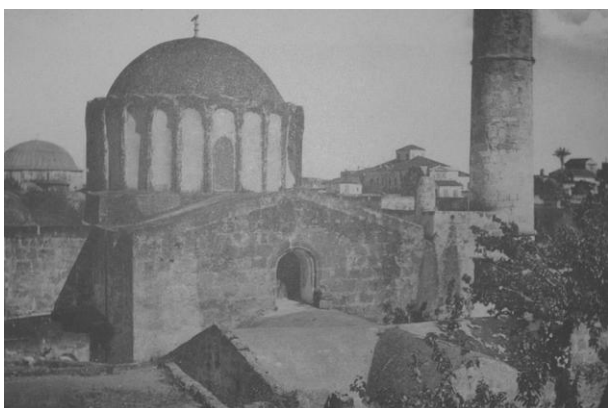


Fig. 5: The Greek Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel, become *Demirli Djami*, in 1921 (Gabriel 2, 1923)



Fig. 6: The Greek church of St. George of Cappadocia, decorated *mihrâb* in 1977 (Archives of the IV Ephorate, n. 4481-5)



Fig. 7: The church of the Holy Trinity, become *Dolaply Mesdjid*, in 1923 (Gabriel 2, 1923)

The Jewish quarter, according to the travelers, was turned into a kind of *ghetto* and it was the only place to stay for Jews in the town: here churches were still used as places of worship before being converted into houses, as various

eighteenth-century travel accounts testify. In particular the Latin parish of St. Mary of the Bourg was literally saturated with houses in the apsidal part and with private gardens in correspondence of the aisles.

In the *castrum*, which became the Ottoman headquarter, the main civil and religious monuments built by the Knights were adapted to the needs of new occupants. The Grand Master's Palace was used as a prison for political exiles, as attested in the second half of the sixteenth century, but already in 1856 the building was in ruin and unfit for use. The monastery church of St. John the Baptist, west in the *castrum*, was looted, abandoned and reduced to a poor building with remains of frescoes hidden by plaster and Koranic writings<sup>18</sup>: in 1856, after an explosion in a nearby munitions depot, the remains of the church were totally destroyed and its foundations were used to build a *madrassa*, then used as a school. The monumental Street of the Knights, which was originated in Byzantine times as a processional street, showed more than any other place the signs of transformations: it was the first place for travelers to visit in the town and in the mid-nineteenth century it appeared as a quite desert street with Turkish and Jew mansions<sup>19</sup>. Medieval Hospitaller buildings of the Tongues became Ottoman houses, as seen in previous figures, and all the courtyards were occupied by gardens. Little France Chapel was converted in *Khan Zadè mesdjid* and the little St. Demetrius chapel, built further north on the foundations of an ancient Roman *tetrapylon*, was turned into a house and variously altered during the following centuries. At the foot of the Street of the Knights, the fifteenth-century Hospital retained its function until the early nineteenth century, when it was converted into a *madrassa* for *imam* and later into a barrack for the Ottoman garrison. Finally, the nearby Cathedral of St. Mary of the Castle became



*Kantouri Djami* and was endowed with a minaret and a porch with reused columns.

An example of symbolic reuse was Murād Re'īs *türbe*, a religious complex surrounded by a walled garden (*rausa*) and consisting of a mosque, a fountain, a lodging for dervishes (*tekke*) and a cemetery (*türbe*). It was built from 1622 at the north coast of the island, on a site occupied by the medieval church and cemetery of St. Anthony assigned to the monks of the Order. Together with Murād Re'īs's tomb, the founder, there were many monumental tombs and sarcophagi belonging to Muslim intellectuals and exiled died in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the *rausa* there are at present numerous funerary monuments, decorated steles with inscriptions (*mezar*) planted into the ground, on a marble slab or a tomb<sup>20</sup>. The Turkish cemetery too, according to Muslim custom to have burial areas extending indefinitely until the exhumation of bodies, was placed outside the medieval fortifications starting from the moat.

It is important to underline that during the Ottoman period some public functions were generally moved outside the walls: a common phenomenon in Arab towns under Ottoman rule was the migration of political center in peripheral position for a more convenient settlement of *sancak* governmental court and military troops. In Rhodes the area near the military harbor (*Tersaneh Liman*) continued to host arsenals and in the second half of the seventeenth century the governmental seat developed next to this area, along the seaside out of the northern walls of the town. In particular the governor's mansion (*Konak*), today disappeared, was described in the mid-nineteenth century as a great not monumental building, very similar to the style of many eighteenth-century houses and schools in the town.

As for the new urban-scale transformations in the walled town, the Ottomans occupied some

strategic points and released few urban interventions. At first they founded several large mosques or *djami*: the Friday Mosque or *Suleimāniyyeh Djami*, *Ibrahim Paşa Djami*, *Redjep Paşa Djami*, a mosque on the site of later *Sciadrevan Djami* and after *Murād Re'īs Djami*, *Sultan Mustafa Djami*, *Hamza Bey Djami* and *Mehmet Agha Djami*. Almost all of these mosques have got a typical Ottoman plan: one or more squared domed rooms preceded by a porch (*rewak*), that was the extension of the prayer hall and was decorated with small *mihrâb*; beside or behind the *rewak* there were one or more minarets<sup>21</sup>. In Fig. A it is possible to observe all medieval transformed buildings and new founded buildings in the walled town.

New monuments and complexes were built within pious foundations originated through the *vakıf* system and including mosques with adjacent structures: *madrassa*, *hammam*, caravanserais for travelers, kitchens and canteens for the poor, hospitals and fountains, dervish *tekke* or Christian monasteries. A typical religious foundation was the *imâret*, derived from an ancient Middle Eastern tradition and adopted by the Ottomans: in Rhodes the most important *imâret* was centered on *Suleimāniyyeh Djami* and was placed on the site of the monastery church of the Holy Apostles. It consisted of facilities for the poor, a *madrassa*, schools and a library. Other foundations spread throughout the town were the fountains (*çesme*), allowing the water supply in addition to the pits placed in every household: fountains consisted of a marble slab decorated with drawings and inscriptions and had one or more taps with a small collecting basin below. Public baths in the town also constituted foundations: the sources report that *Yeni Hammam* and *Sultan Mustafa Djami* were part of the same *vakıf* in the central part of the Turkish neighborhood.

#### 4. New urban institutions: *çarşı* and *mahalla*

The *Vakıf* system, beyond its philanthropic aim, represented an economic opportunity for the Ottoman state, which helped to create and maintain them with charitable offerings and production facilities, and for founders to obtain significant rights for themselves and their heirs (goods and lands were inalienable). The role of *vakıf* was also related to what A. Raymond called “great urbanism”, which in the case of larger foundations led to an actual remodeling of an entire neighborhood around a mosque or a market.

The town of Rhodes already gravitated around its market from the Byzantine period, when the first shops were installed along the street-square of the market placed between the *castrum* and the *burgus*: it became medieval *magna et communis platea*, often represented in iconography (Fig. 8). In Ottoman times the market retained its role as center of gravity, but it was completely re-planned and became a symbolically and physically independent neighborhood. Islamic cities were generally based on an empty center, represented by the market district (*çarşı*) and the Friday Mosque to which *madrasa*, *hammam* and a *bedesten* were often added. So it was a strategic and obliged choice to build the *Suleimāniyyeh Djami* on top of the slope of the medieval market street (Fig. 9), clogged with shops on both sides since the sixteenth century.

Further west it was the *Kourmaly Medresse*, centered on the church of St. George and associated to the Friday Mosque *imâret*. A *bedesten* was generally located in the center of the largest markets for storing clothes and precious goods: my assumption is that it might have been found near the small mosque known as *Bezesten Djami*, in the medieval building named *Castellania*, and that Ottomans used its high pointed arches at the ground floor<sup>22</sup>. The *hammam* was then in the middle of *çarşı*, north of the shops: it was the *Eski Hammam*,

distinguished from the more recent *Yeni Hammam* and founded, according to tradition, shortly after Ottoman conquest<sup>23</sup>.

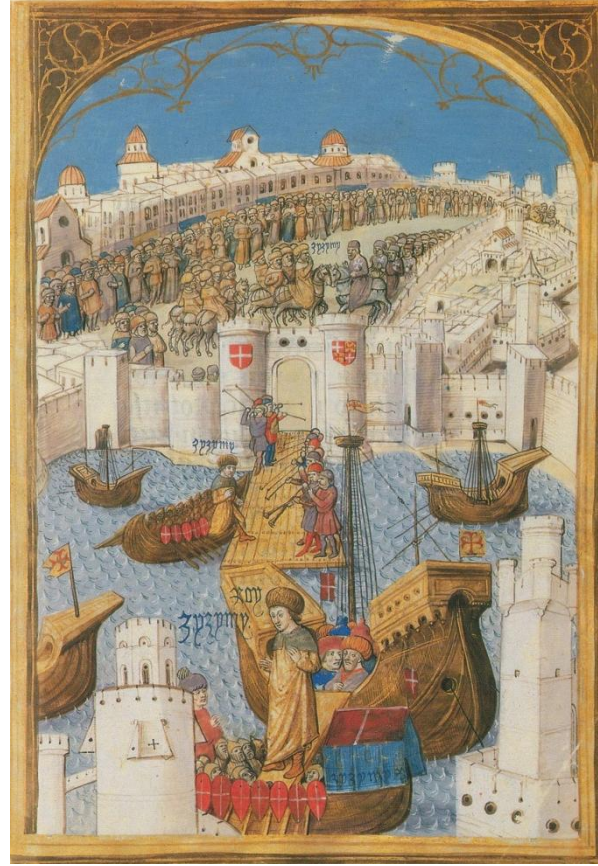


Fig. 8: CAOURSIN, G. (1482). *Obsidionis Rhodiae urbis Descriptio*. Ms. Lat. 6067, f. 175(Vatin, 2001)



Fig. 9: *Suleimāniyyeh Djami*, view from *odos Sokratous* (photo taken by E. Maglio, 2009)

Punctuated by such public buildings, *çarşı* stretched east-west of the town, from the Friday Mosque through the Bazaar gate (*Bazaar-Capou*) to the Sea gate (*Bahr-Capou*). *Çarşı* reflected the same logic as the North African *souk*, that of a veritable enclosure only opened inside and possibly closed by wooden doors, which grew for subsequent additions of shops: with their regular pattern, shops built the shopping street's front and constituted the economic center of the town<sup>24</sup>.

Ottomanization process at urban level was completed with the town division into sectors, as well as the breakdown among different ethnic groups mentioned above. First, although there are no sources attesting it with certainty, it can be assumed that in Rhodes too, as in most cities of the Ottoman empire, residential neighborhoods were organized in successive strips, progressively more distant from the market: the largest houses of rich artisans and merchants were probably placed closer to it and gradually farther away there were the less wealthy and smaller houses, up to the poorer ones that were located near or outside the walls and were closer to a rural housing type. Scholars also argue that the Ottomans carried out a division of Rhodes urban fabric into several neighborhood units (*mahalla*), residential areas centered on a mosque, more rarely on a school, a coffee, a fountain, an open space or a tree (in smaller units). It was a very old urban structuring, in which each *mahalla* worked as an elementary district protected by a door and provided with the necessary everyday life functions: one or more places of worship, schools, fountains, food shops, possibly a *hammam* and a library, though these buildings were not always all standing<sup>25</sup>. A single *mahalla* could be also inhabited by Muslims and non-Muslims together, a fact that in Rhodes is not excluded because of the presence of Jews and Turks.

*Mahalla* system was born with a religious character, so that until 1829 each of them was ruled by the *imam* of the corresponding mosque. In the case of more than a mosque in a short mutual distance, then, limits became more uncertain and sizes also could be very narrow, allowing to identify an area ranging from a few tens to a few hundreds of dwellings, that is from 1 to 5 acres.

The structuring in *mahalla* had to relate with Rhodes regular urban fabric and determined its transformation, largely because of residential expansions. For these reasons there was an increasing number of *cul de sac* routes, for gradual clogging of open spaces or secondary road sections, and many covered passageways for vertical clogging with new tower houses. In this way the town division into a commercial public center (*çarşı* with its representative buildings) and residential areas (provided with essential services) became clearer. At the same time, the system of paths remained almost unchanged and it is still possible to find the urban structure dating back to the Byzantine period from which medieval Rhodes developed<sup>26</sup>.

Because of the substantial absence of Ottoman documents, there are still no studies about the possible distribution of *mahalla* in Rhodes, nor here one can speculate about the definitive borders of each *mahalla*. A comparative analysis with similar urban fabrics in the Aegean area, generally little known, also could help in define it. The only data offered by historiography states that each *mahalla* in Rhodes had the name of the reference mosque, although it is not specified whether the *mahalla* center was represented by each *djami* and each *mesdjid* or only by the *djami* inside the walled city. However, it seems plausible to assume that at least each of the new founded *djami* have been the center of a *mahalla*, whose borders were to be largely determined by the major urban streets, and that this role

was also assigned to some of the most important *mesdjid*. This hypothesis and the following description are depicted in Fig. B at the end of this article.

In the *castrum* area the large *Kantouri Djami* was probably a center of a *mahalla* occupying the eastern part of the quarter. In the western part, instead, *Khan Zadè mesdjid* was too small to accommodate all the inhabitants of the nearby and was probably used as a prayer hall; at the center of *mahalla* it may have been the former church of St. John the Baptist (its name during the Ottoman period remains unknown), described by nineteenth-century travelers as one of the central mosques in Rhodes despite its very poor appearance. Nevertheless, after the collapse it was no longer rebuilt and inhabitants of the neighborhood may have been associated to the Friday Mosque. The two *mahalla* probably extended up to present *odos Agesandrou*.

In *çarşı*, *Suleimāniyyeh Djami* was with no doubt the religious hub for the Turkish community living in the western part of the town. It can be assumed that its *imâret* constituted the center of a *mahalla* extended up to the western walls and, after the collapse of the monastery church, probably also up to the western part of medieval *castrum*. Further along *çarşı* street, the present *odos Sokratous*, it can be assumed the existence of two *mahalla* focused on *Mehmet Agha Djami* and one between *Sciadrevan* and *Bezesten Djami*; but it is possible that there was only one *mahalla* before the foundation of nineteenth-century *Mehmet Agha*.

In the Turkish district, south of present *odos Timokreontos*, *odos Menekleous* and *odos Demokritou*, I based the hypothesis of *mahalla* structure on the presence of an orthogonal street grid and on the quite regular distribution of new founded mosques in the urban fabric. *Hamza Bey Djami* may have been the focus of a *mahalla* extended to the western part of the

*burgus* up to present *odos Ippodamou*, although before its foundation in the eighteenth century the role could have been assigned to the church of St. Paraskeva (*Takkedji Mesdjid*). Further east, in the area between present *odos Ippodamou* (west), *odos Fanuriou* (east) and *odos Andronikou* (south), the Ottoman buildings of *Sultan Mustafa Djami* and *Yeni Hammam* were part of the same *vakıf* and may have been the center of a same *mahalla*. Further south, beyond present *odos Andronikou* and up to the southern part of the walls, the monastery church of St. Nicholas (*Abdul Djelil Mesdjid*) may have been the central mosque of a same named *mahalla*, whereas the small church of St. Athanasius (*Bab-ou-Mestoud Mesdjid*) was used as a warehouse in the late Ottoman time. More, east of present *odos Fanuriou* there were some other most considerable *djami*: the Greek Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel (*Demirli Djami*), a likely religious center of a *mahalla* bordered by present *odos Ilektrionis* (east) and *odos Filita/Aristofanous* (south); *Redjep Paşa Djami*, the most remarkable example of Ottoman mosque in Rhodes that was a likely center of gravity of a wider *mahalla*, bounded by present *odos Pythagora* (east) and medieval walls (south); further east the church of the Holy Trinity (*Dolaply Mesdjid*) may have been the focus of another *mahalla*, directly adjacent to the Jewish quarter and bounded by present *odos Kleouvoulinis* (north); finally *Ibrahim Paşa Djami*, the second oldest mosque in the town after *Suleimāniyyeh Djami*, may have formed the religious core of a *mahalla* delimited by *çarşı* (north) and present *odos Perikleous* (east), *odos Kleouvoulinis* (south) and *odos Ilektrionis* (west).

Such religious buildings, many potential centers of *mahalla*, undoubtedly became new polarities in the urban fabric and, in the case of founded *djami*, they led to the remodeling of

surrounding blocks: the orientation of mosques, which was different from the strictly orthogonal urban structure of medieval town, made necessary to create small squares or open spaces (with a plane tree and a fountain for ablutions) by the forced collapse of corner buildings.

### 5. Concluding Remarks: the application of an urban model

This study aims to shed light over one of the urban realities at the periphery of the Ottoman Empire, rather neglected in recent literature. Travel accounts, iconographic contributions and material sources provide interesting information about it: they were associated to the analysis of Rhodes urban organism, which developed starting from new urban polarities, and to the study of architectural transformation and new planning carried out by the Ottomans. My hypothesis starts from the assumption that the model of Islamic city, generally based on the market as an empty center with public buildings around it (Friday Mosque, *bedesten*, *madrassa* and *hammam*), was applied to Rhodes exploiting the existing sites and polarities. Friday Mosque and a *madrassa* with a *hammam* were built on top of the slope of the medieval market street, where there was a Christian monastery, and a *bedesten* may have been placed in a medieval building near the present *Bezesten Djami*. In addition, five new mosques were founded and became new urban polarities, determining the remodeling of surrounding blocks to accommodate the new places of worship.

Rhodes was almost certainly divided in *mahalla*, residential units usually centered on a mosque. A *mahalla* worked as a self-sufficient district, generally extended from ten to few hundreds homes: this subdivision changed Rhodes urban structure, already modified by the gradual clogging of streets into *cul de sac*. It is not yet possible to outline with certainty

the borders of Rhodes *mahalla* or identify their central mosques, but the sources attest that each *mahalla* had the name of its reference mosque. So I proposed a hypothesis of division based on the presence of an orthogonal system of streets, which presumably might have facilitated a regular subdivision of *mahalla*. They may have been centered on some of the principal *djami* or *mesdjid* obtained by transformation of existing churches and on the main new founded *djami*: in some cases these latter were the core of an *imâret* (*Suleimâniyyeh Djami*) or part of the same *vakıf* (*Sultan Mustafa Djami* and *Yeni Hammam*), so they became centralizing polarities for most part of the surrounding inhabited area.

The hypothesis proposed is far from being confirmed: new studies, starting from a search of Ottoman written sources and a comparative study, will probably give more reliable data. In conclusion all the considerations made in the course of the analysis allowed drawing a first scheme of Rhodes urban fabric and its new polarities in Ottoman period: it represents an attempt to explain how the Ottomanization process changed the urban organism giving it a new content in terms of urban space (the division into *mahalla*, the formation of *çarşı*) and symbolic elements (the creation of new places of worship and new visual references of imperial power). The town of Rhodes can be considered a relevant example of Ottoman urban policy outside the motherland and could be taken as a reference for studying other cities at the periphery of the empire, starting from the other Aegean islands, as a part of a comparative and cross-cultural analysis about urban and architectural history from medieval to modern age.



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Fig. A: Urban plan of Ottoman Rhodes: reused and new founded buildings in the walled town (E. Maglio)



Fig. B: Urban plan of Ottoman Rhodes: new polarities, identification of cul de sac and hypothesis of division in mahalla (E. Maglio)





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<sup>1</sup> Some important works about Damascus, Aleppo (Syria) and Candia (Crete) are a reference in studying peripheral urban realities in the Ottoman empire. See: Boqvist, M. (2011). Visualizing the Ottoman presence in Damascus: Interpreting 16th century building complexes. In Özdalga, Özervarli, Tansug (Ed.). *Istanbul as seen from a distance, Transactions* (121-138), vol. 20. Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute; Watenpugh, H.Z. (2004). *The image of an Ottoman city: imperial architecture and urban experience in Aleppo in the 16th and 17th centuries*. Leiden: Brill; Bierman, I. (1991). The Ottomanization of Crete. In Bierman, Abou-El-Haj, Preziosi (Ed.). *The Ottoman city and its parts: urban structure and social order* (53-76). New York: New Rochelle.

<sup>2</sup> Vatin, N. (2004). Iles grecques ? Iles ottomanes ? L'insertion des îles de l'Egée dans l'Empire ottoman à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. In Vatin, Veinstein, (Ed.). *Insularités ottomanes* (71-89). Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose. That islands like Patmos, Leros, Kalymnos, Stampalia, Symi, Halki and Castelrosso enjoyed privileges probably dating back to the Byzantine age, confirmed by the Knights and the Ottomans.

<sup>3</sup> Veinstein G. (2004), Le législateur ottoman face à l'insularité. L'enseignement des *Kânûnnâme*. In Vatin, Veinstein, (Ed.). *Insularités ottomanes* (91-110). Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose. The islands' known *kânûn* from the middle of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries concerned Cyprus, Crete, Eubea, Mytilene, Chios, Thasos, Imroz, Lemnos, Rhodes and Kos.

<sup>4</sup> The Italian cadastral map of 1928 identified five synagogues: *Ticun-Hassot* (in present *odos Gavalas*), *Kadosh Scialon* (the only one surviving today in present *odos Symmiou*), *Midrase* (in *odos Byzantiou*), *Grande* (in *odos Theseos*) and *Bet-Aronne* (near the Greek church of St. Pantaleon).

<sup>5</sup> Guérin, V. (1856). *Voyage dans l'île de Rhodes et description de cette île*. Paris: Durand. From the seventeenth century the Ottomans recognized the legality of Catholic religion, first performed almost furtively in the suburb of *Néochori*, and allowed the Franciscans to go to Rhodes to officiate the worship.

<sup>6</sup> *Ottoman Architecture in Greece* (2008). Rhodes: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Directorate of Byzantine and Post Byzantine Antiquities. Taxes levied on agricultural products, livestock and mills, customs, land rent, fines and confiscations, charges and loot.

According to a register dating 1667-78 and containing a subdivision of Greek cities based on judges' compensation (*kadi*), after a first group of cities there were Rhodes and other towns and in the lower categories and cities such as Miletus, Corinth and Athens.

<sup>7</sup> Maiuri, A. (1921). *Rodi*. Roma: Alfieri e Lacroix. Aloï (2008). *Rodi: un posto al sole?* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Roma Tre. The author reported that *kasa* and two *nahiye* were dependent from the island: Rhodes *kasa*, in particular, included the town and surrounding villages, north and south sides of the island (with Lindos and Castello), the islands of Halki and Castelrosso. Consistency of the properties in land register was defined in a so summary way to make impossible their placement and description, in the absence of measured architectural drawings and parcels classification. Theoretical division of property did not always correspond to truth: misappropriations, transfers, assignments, hereditary contrasts caused frequent discrepancies between the state of things and that of law.

<sup>8</sup> Aloï, *Rodi: un posto al sole?* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Roma Tre. The author crosses data from multiple fragmentary sources, in particular Pouqueville, I.C.H.L. (1840). *L'Istoria della Grecia dal 1740 al 1824*. Napoli and Malagoli Vecchi, M. (1841). *Il Mediterraneo illustrato, le sue isole e le sue spiagge*. Firenze. However a more recent work which was not considered from the author is Zeki Çelikkol, B. (1992). *Rodos'taki Türk Eserleri ve Tarihçe*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, reporting that in 1830 in the town of Rhodes there were 7.420 inhabitants, of which 3.095 Muslims; in 1890 the island's population numbered 20.250 Ottomans, 6.825 Muslims, 1.513 Jews, 546 Catholics and 14 Armenians, for a total of 29.148 inhabitants.

<sup>9</sup> Bocquet, D. (2005). *Une municipalité ottomane face au nationalisme et à la colonisation : Rhodes en 1912*. In Lafi, N. (Ed.). *Municipalités Méditerranéennes : Les réformes urbaines ottomanes au miroir d'une histoire comparée (Moyen-Orient, Maghreb, Europe méridionale)* (302-304). Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag. This was due to the lack of connecting roads towards the hinterland and to the presence of heavy duties on maritime transport.

<sup>10</sup> Celarié, H. (1933). *Iles de lumière: Rhodes et Chypre* (15). Paris: Jacques Haumont & Cie. The author wrote that « Avec leurs dômes peints, leurs minarets effilés,

[...] les Osmanlis ont répandu sur la vieille ville des chevaliers un air d'orientalisme et de "turquerie" qu'on n'attendait pas et qui ravit, qui enchante ».

<sup>11</sup> Guerin (1856). *Voyage dans l'île de Rhodes*. Paris: Durand. The author used the term *Kastro* indicating it as current. However, the two parties were often nominated *haute & basse Ville*, as it appears in a representation of the walled city by R.A. De Vertot (1742), where the Grand Master's Palace is identified as *Châu*.

<sup>12</sup> Even in 1912, despite the record of Greek inhabitants both in Rhodes and in the suburbs, two thirds of the buildings in town belonged to Muslims, as reported in Bocquet (2005), *Une municipalité ottomane*. In Lafi (Ed.). *Municipalités Méditerranéennes*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag. The author refers to the report of 1913 published by the Command of the 6th Italian Special Division: *Contributo monografico per lo studio politico ed economico dell'isola di Rodi*, 1913.

<sup>13</sup> Maiuri (1921). *Rodi*. Roma: Alfieri e Lacroix. After 1525 St. Athanasius gate was named *Bab-ou-Mestoud*, that is "closed door". Zeki Çelikkol (1992). *Rodos'taki Türk*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi attest that in a later period the *mesdjid* was used as a warehouse until 1921 and appeared partially destroyed.

<sup>14</sup> The reference is to the photography in *Rodi*. *Panorama della città dal Minareto della Moschea Suleimaniè* in Faccioli, A. (1913). *Le isole dell'Egeo occupate dalle armi italiane*. Como: Brunner.

<sup>15</sup> T. Zygomalas saw the four gates in 1576 and his tour is showed by Yerasimos, S. (1991). *Les voyageurs dans l'Empire ottoman (XIVe-XVIe siècles) : bibliographie, itinéraires et inventaire des lieux habités*. Ankara: Institut Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes. Instead in 1631 V. Stochove saw the gates of St. John and S. George (the latter was then subsequently closed), as reported in Borromeo, E. (2007). *Voyageurs occidentaux dans l'Empire Ottoman (1600-1644)* (vol. 2). Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose.

<sup>16</sup> Possot, D. (1532). *Le voyage de la Terre Sainte composé par Maitre Denis Possot et achevé par Messire Charles Philippe* (190). Paris Leroux: Ch. Schefer. He described « une belle, forte et puissante ville de tours, fossez, murailles, doubles chasteaulx et beau port ».

<sup>17</sup> Santelli, S. (1992). *Atlas des médinas tunisiennes*. Paris: Ecole d'Architecture de Paris-Belleville. *Mesdjid*, that unlike *djami* often consisted in a single room, were uniformly spread in the Islamic world. In Maglio, E. (2011). *Rodi. La lettura della città cavalleresca e ottomana dal medioevo all'età moderna. Le relazioni artistiche tra i paesi mediterranei*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bari was performed an overview of *djami* and *mesdjid* in Rhodes obtained by

transformation of existing churches, using the photographic collection of the archive of the Byzantine IV Ephorate: this allowed to shed light on many small architectural structures, that passed through recent restorations and were almost everywhere deprived of the Ottoman elements, and that are generally neglected in the recent literature.

<sup>18</sup> Berchet (1985). *Le voyage en Orient*. Paris: R. Laffont. Guerin (1856). *Voyage dans l'île de Rhodes*. Paris: Durand. Flandin (1862). *Voyage à l'île de Rhodes. Le Tour du Monde. Nouveau journal des voyages*. There were still the triangular pediment, the long windows with pointed arches and a few remains of the pillaged tombs of some Grand Masters. Near the façade a tall minaret was built on the remains of the existing bell tower.

<sup>19</sup> Berchet (1985). *Le voyage en Orient* (328). Paris: R. Laffont. The author defined it as « montueuse, déserte, remplie d'herbes et de pierres roulantes, [...] un amas de maisons turques ou juives ».

<sup>20</sup> Zeki Çelikkol (1992). *Rodos'taki Türk*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi fully lists all the tombs in the complex. Vatin, N. (1991). Les cimetières musulmans ottomans. Source d'histoire sociale. In Panzac, D. (Ed.). *Les villes dans l'Empire ottoman : activités et sociétés* (vol. 1) (149-164). Paris: CNRS. The funerary steles are variously characterized to describe the social condition of the dead: there are signs of membership to religious groups, turbans, military caps, women's hats decorated with flowers, fruits and necklaces.

<sup>21</sup> *Ottoman Architecture in Greece* (2008). Together with those of Ioannina, Serres, Athens and Thessaloniki, the first mosques in Rhodes are the most significant examples of the classical period of the empire (sixteenth-seventeenth century). A comparison among the founded mosques in Rhodes, looking rather simple and unadorned, and the most audacious imperial achievements witnesses in any case a lively movement of architects, artists and masons whose names remain unknown: the identification of structural and stylistic similarities with mosques built in Istanbul, Izmir and other cities in the same period showed the presence of a shared Byzantine influence together with probably Iranian and Seljuk elements.

<sup>22</sup> Luttrell, A. (2003). *The town of Rhodes: 1306-1356*. Rhodes: Office for the Medieval Town. The building probably housed the court of justice and the seat of the *commerchium* in the medieval city: its monumental covered *loggia* at the ground floor was probably used for meetings or for the exhibition of goods. In the Roman-Greek cities *bedesten* often took the place of the ancient *basilicas* and were surrounded by shops. That of

Rhodes was considered among the most important early Ottoman *bedesten* in Greece with those of Thessaloniki and Ioannina. In Yerolympos, A. (2007). Typologie et mutations des quartiers de commerce traditionnel dans les villes de la Méditerranée Orientale. In *Multicultural urban fabric and types in the South and Eastern Mediterranean* (241-264). Beirut: Orient-Institut the author explains that next to the *bedesten* there were also *khân* for traders: in Rhodes nothing is known about the existence of buildings constructed for this purpose, but it is possible that nearby preexisting structures were the seat for this function.

<sup>23</sup> Balducci (1932). *Architettura turca*. Milano: Ulrico Hoepli. *Eski Hammam* was added to an existing *hammam*, now disappeared, which was in the Street of the Knights and was built in a medieval building.

<sup>24</sup> Yerolympos (2007). Typologie et mutations des quartiers de commerce. In *Multicultural urban fabric*. Beirut: Orient-Institut. If *çarşı* was the main market there were also temporary markets (*pazar*, from the Persian *bazaar*) taking place out of town gates. One of Rhodes *pazar* may have been the weekly market still held at *Guzel-Capou* gate, likely heritage of a more ancient market: it is located along the road to Koskinou, one of the closer production sites for the supply of fruit and cereals.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond (1985). *Grandes villes arabes à l'époque ottomane*. Paris: Sindbad. Especially in Arab cities neighborhoods kept a constant structure served by a hierarchical road network, starting from the main path up to the private access routes (*cul de sac*).

<sup>26</sup> Maglio (2011). *Rodi*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bari, which contains a study of the historical phases of the town, in the light of an typological-morphological analysis of the urban fabric with its polarity and streets hierarchy.