

# CHRONOCITY

The Assessment of Built Heritage  
for Developable and Creative Change

Edited by Dimitra Babalis



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# REVITALIZING INDUSTRIAL BUILT HERITAGE THE CASE OF THE ISLAND OF LESVOS

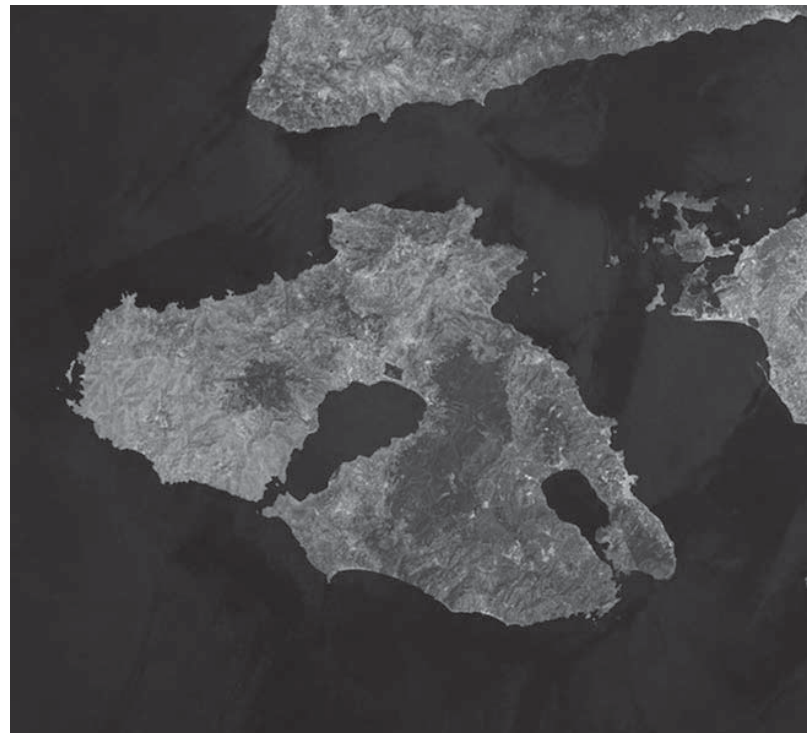
THOMOPOULOS DIMITRIS

Society and architecture community as part of it has been increasingly sensitive to the conservation and promotion of architectural heritage. This care is not confined only to individual buildings or historical sets but for larger sums and buildings as well, which feature prominently in the historical development of each place. Such a set is the olive press factories of Lesvos which are scattered all over the island indicate the economic growth in the late 19th century.

The history of island Lesvos is connected to the olive. Since now days, the cultivation and processing of olives is the main occupation of most of the approximately ninety thousand inhabitants of the island. The island being the third larger in Greece after Crete and Evia with an area of 1630 km<sup>2</sup> has several large plains in the eastern part, while the western part of the island is treeless. At the same time, the two large natural bays and the geographical position close to the coast of Asia Minor and the Black Sea helped develop trade. Thus, every corner of the eastern part of the island, even the steepest slopes of the mountains, is filled by some 11 million olive trees give an average production of 30 thousand tons of oil annually.

The first findings of Lesvos habitation are dating back to 5000bc during the prehistoric times. The inhabitants of Lesvos have created a tradition in the cultivation of olive trees from very ancient times, but the systematic cultivation started during the Ottoman rule. Thus with the flourish of maritime trade by the mid 19th century were able to develop industries of olive derivatives, mostly oil and soap. It is characteristic that in 1909 Lesvos had 125 plants of which 57 were olive presses and 35 soap factories.

The first factories were owned by private industrialists and traders, proof of their prosperity even today remain the villas on the outskirts of the capital Mytilene, built in western standards. Gradually however, smaller growers co-founded unions and build cooperative factories which con-





Previous page:  
*The ancient theater in Mytilene*

*Lesvos Island*

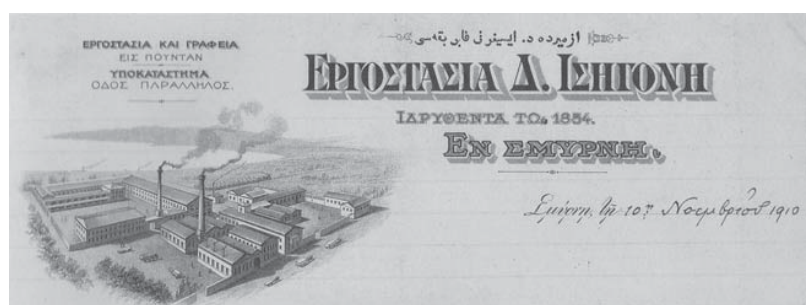
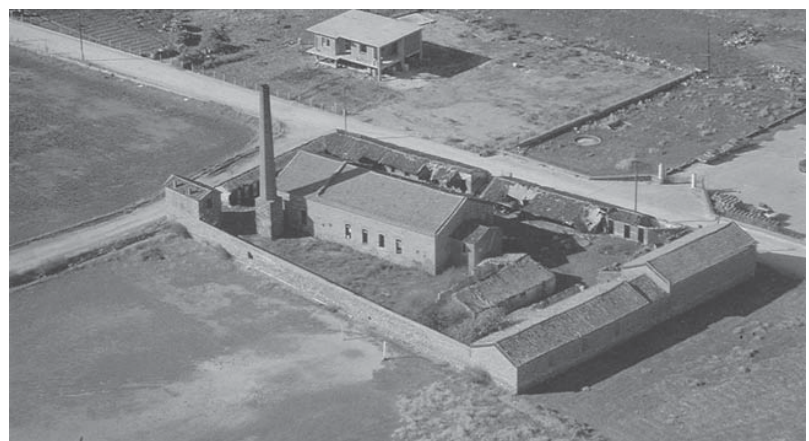
This page:  
*Villa on the outskirts of Mytilene*

*Factory of Pamfilla*

*"ISIGONI" factory in Smyrna*

tributed significantly to rural development. The olive presses of Lesvos are mostly large independent assemblies which occur only in some neighboring islands such as Samos and Chios. In the rest of continental Greece and the islands most mills are usually located on the ground floor of buildings used at the same time as residences. Similarities of oil factories of the eastern Aegean match with those of industries of respective Asia Minor, typologically and morphologically. Most plants of the region have been built under the instructions of English engineers, envoys of the companies supplying equipment for the operation. The factories of Lesvos were built some years later than those in Asia Minor, having the typical standards of the "ISIGONI" factory in Smyrna.

Most of the factories concentrated in the southeastern part of the island where the most fertile land and the larger ports are. The provinces of Mytilene (91 factories), Mythimna (39) and Plomari (26) have the majority of them. Of particular interest is the correlation of their position comparing with that of villages since their volume size and the height of the chimneys are landmarks for the region. Usually however, we find them close to the entrances of villages near the accesses of cultivate land or in the inner part of towns. In this case usual is the proximity to a stream that used to dispose the wastes from the processing of olives. Many plants are also found in the seaports of settlements, the so-called "skala", coastal industrial areas from which through sea was easier handling of products. Finally, rarely encounter plants in olive groves near the residence of the owners and sometimes the workers.



*Factory in Plomari*

*Factory in Agia Paraskeui*

### **Description of olive press complexes**

The evolution in the development of floor plan and the morphology of factories followed the evolution of media and processes of production from animal moving in steam engines and finally diesel plants with a corresponding evolution of all the machines.

The first olive press buildings were relatively small, mostly square in plan, built of stone walls with four direction roof and covered by Byzantine type tiles. Inside the building was the place of production and storage of raw materials and derivatives.

Since media and processes evolving, operational requirements of the floor plan of the premises evolve too. The use of steam powered equipment requires more space as well as increased production by the strongest engines require more storage space. Thus the volume of the plant is significantly increased and better organized to meet their respective needs. The production process of those factories reflects directly to the floor plan and the form of the buildings. The main factory building has orthogonal plan, usually in ratios 2 / 1 and in this area are placed all the machines connected to the production, the oil mill, the presses, the cistern with oil, etc. In a separate room inside the main building, is placed the steam boiler and outside but in direct contact with that the chimney. In some cases, likely due to the conversion of factories from animal moving into steam, chimney is placed with the boiler inside the building, in the same room with the other machines.

The presses are mainly ground-floor buildings of usually large height. During the evolution of production,

wooden lofts were added in order to throw the fruit into the oil press. Lofts added for storage of derived as well. The larger and more systematic production and the need for better

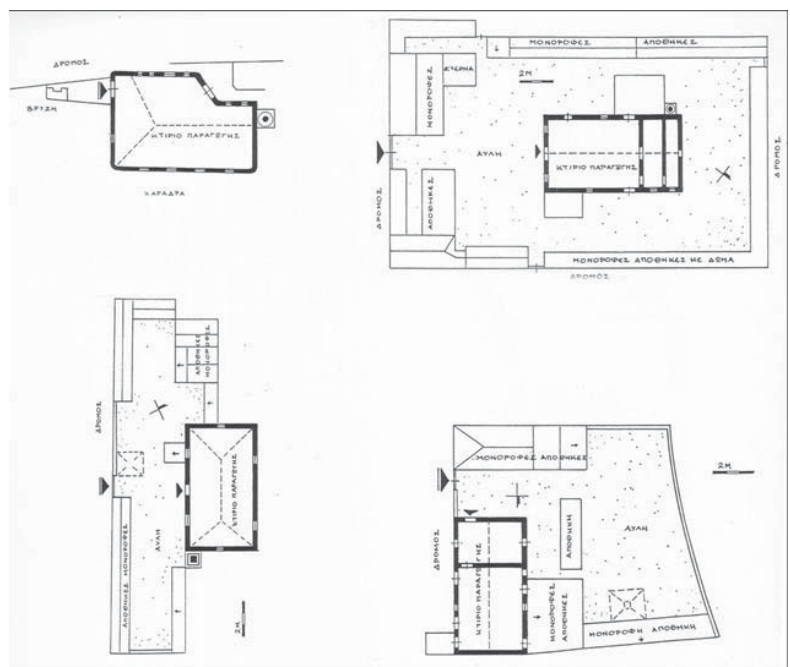


organization and increased storage, led to separate the storage rooms. Originally incorporated outside the building and then placed in the form of smaller and usually lower buildings in a spacious enclosure, around it or inside. The plan consists of small spaces arranged next to each other by organizing a single elongated, rectangular shape. Each room is separate and does not lead to others, having a single opening for storage. The yard which is usually around the factory is protected by tall well-built stone wall providing security against theft or sabotage that was very common against cooperative property. It's well and stable construction offered to support storage rooms often forming their outer side. By the entrance of the yard is often the existence of an outpost. Often, when the factory is private owned, it is directly related to the residence of the owner which is part of the unit or next to it. There are also cases where the press is related to the residences of workers or shops for the sale of products. Next to or near the factories which are located within the settlements, there are often cafes and in some cases in front of the building is formed a public square, indicative of the particular importance of the building in the town.



### Typological classification of olive press complexes

Most factories form a complex, which consists of production building, warehouses and the yard in which they are organized. These complexes except the differences in their sizes due to the size of production and general form of the floor plan taking shape as the shape of the plot, differences are marked to the internal structure between the elements of the complex. Due to this characteristic, we can make a classification of these complexes based on how they are organized, according to the relations between the production building, the warehouses and the exterior wall and also to the relation with the entrance to the complex and the surroundings. This typology organizes our study's





outcome material which consists of imprints of a total of 92 clusters and it is not exclusive as it could be differentiated on the basis of another characteristic.

From this enlistment we create four classification categories:

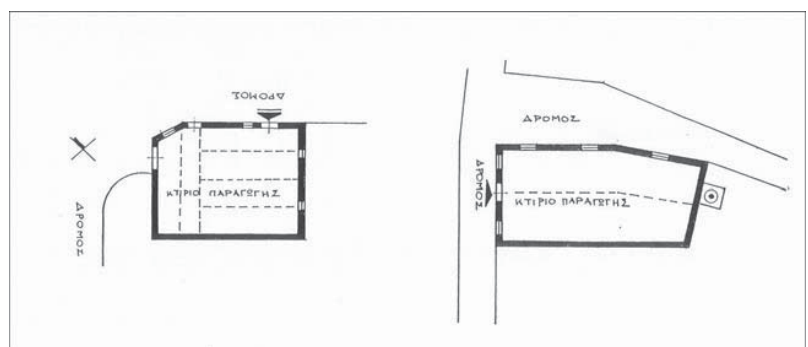
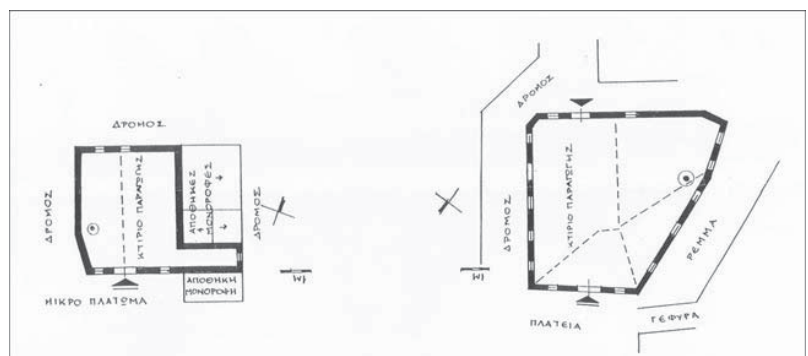
1. Single production buildings
2. Buildings complexes
  - a) Complexes with the production building within a perimeter wall
  - b) Complexes with the production building on the border of the yard to the road
  - c) Complexes with the production building on a different border of the perimeter wall



### 1) Single production buildings

Those buildings do not belong to any complex. The press consists only by a single building which is usually small, indicating respective production capacity and are mostly primer examples. Storage, if any, is either inside the building in the form of lofts or attached externally in the form of subsequent additions. The majority of single buildings are within the urban fabric of towns. Some of them are built in a continuous system with neighboring houses while others are placed freely usually to enlargements of urban fabric. Many times because of the continuous building system of settlements, the floor plan takes a similar shape.

In this category 10 buildings were imprinted, 11% of the buildings of our study.



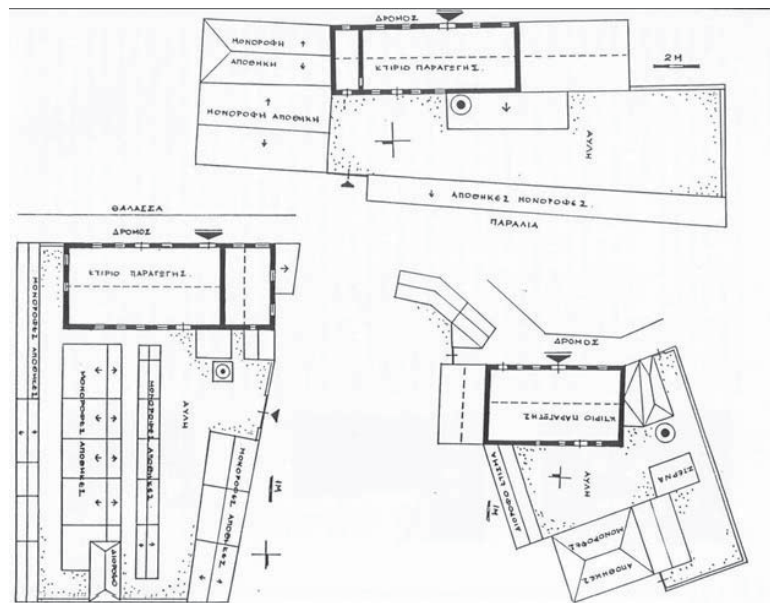
## 2) Buildings complexes

The factories consist of many buildings and placed in the countryside as well as into the settlements usually at the borders and rarely at their center. Their size and better internal organization is due to a larger and more systematic production and the majority is later examples.

### 2a) Complexes with the production building within a perimeter wall

The production building is inside the yard, unclosed all over and warehouses are located around the yard in touch or separate from the exterior wall. The entrance to the complex is either directly to the yard, which in this case is shaped as part of the complex in touch to the road, or to the production building which is located in the front, with a small interference of a yard lying between them. In this case, the main yard is formed to the back or besides the main building.

In this category 35 buildings were imprinted, 38% of the buildings of our study.





## 2b) Complexes with the production building on the border of the yard to the road

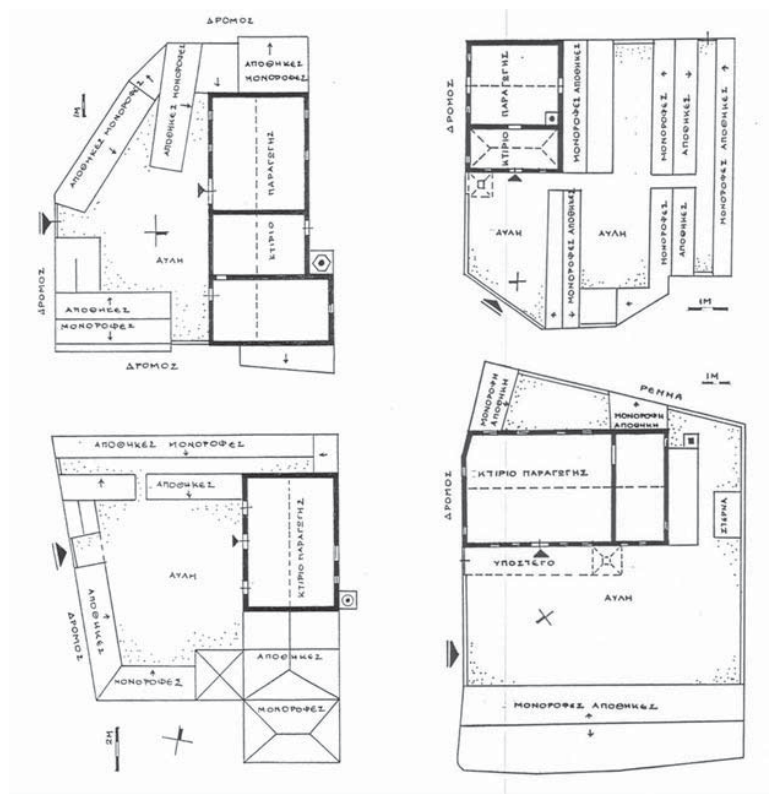
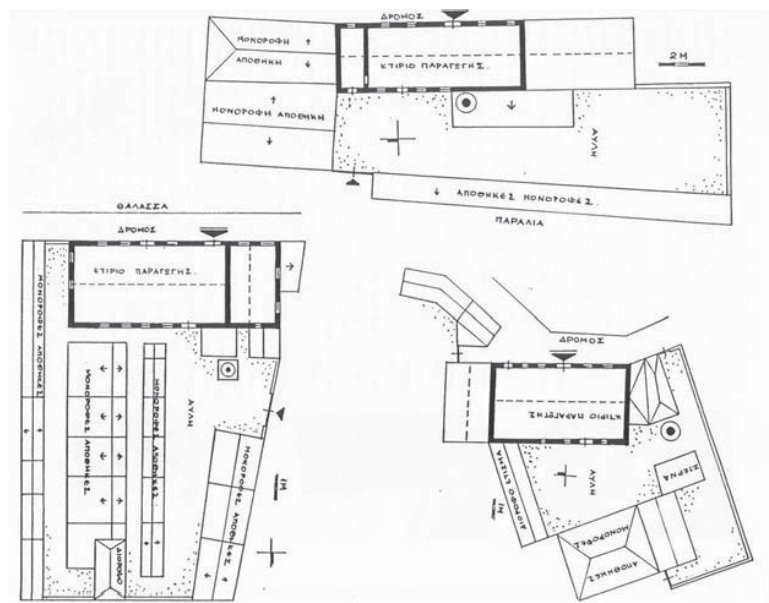
In this case the main building has the most direct relationship to the street and it is in touch to it. The yard with warehouses is formed behind or besides the building. The entrance is placed either directly to the production building usually combined with a secondary entrance to the yard, or more indirectly, initially in the yard and then to the building. Here are two distinct cases. First, the entry is into a small section of the wall originally leading to the entrance of the production building and then to the yard behind it. In the second case, the entrance is through the courtyard and then to the main building as the yard of the complex is in contact with the road.

In this category 22 buildings were imprinted, 24% of the buildings of our study.

## 2c) Complexes with the production building on a different border of the perimeter wall

Production building is not adjacent to the street but in another border of the enclosure. Often this border is the fields or a stream through which the wastes from the processing of olives are disposed. The yard is formed in front or besides the building. At the first case the entrance leads directly to the yard and then to the building. At the second case, the entrance leads to a small part of the yard in touch to the building and then to the main yard.

In this category 10 buildings were imprinted, 11%



*Restored factory in Molyvos, Tourist resort*

*Restored factory in Agia Paraskeui, Olive Museum*

Of the sum of 92 buildings that have been contained to our study, 15 cannot be classified in any of the previous four categories, 16% of the buildings of our study.

### **Current situation**

In the era of economic prosperity, every town and village of Lesvos had at least one cooperative or municipal mill and depending on the size of the region at least one private. Today however, most factories are privately owned and less cooperative and communal exists.

In 1986 there was a systematic inventory of existing olive press factories in the island. By the total of 170 counted plants, 85 were still operating normally, while 11 had changed use. In recent years there have been some attempts to rescue the buildings which have ceased to operate. Some of them have been restored and house new functions. Four buildings owned by the municipality have been restored on the initiative of the Prefecture and serve as assembly centers of the inhabitants of their region. Another has been converted into a museum and cultural center of Olive, while three others have become tourist resorts.

A tendency to use the former industrial buildings of the island already exists. The size although and the large number of buildings makes it difficult to make a rapid overall recovery. Experience of similar situations has shown that a close cooperation state among local authorities and individuals is essential. The objective remains the preservation and proper use of those buildings in order to regain their significant role in the life of the island, not as decorative reminders but as vivid shells with new suitable for nowadays uses.

### **REFERENCES**

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