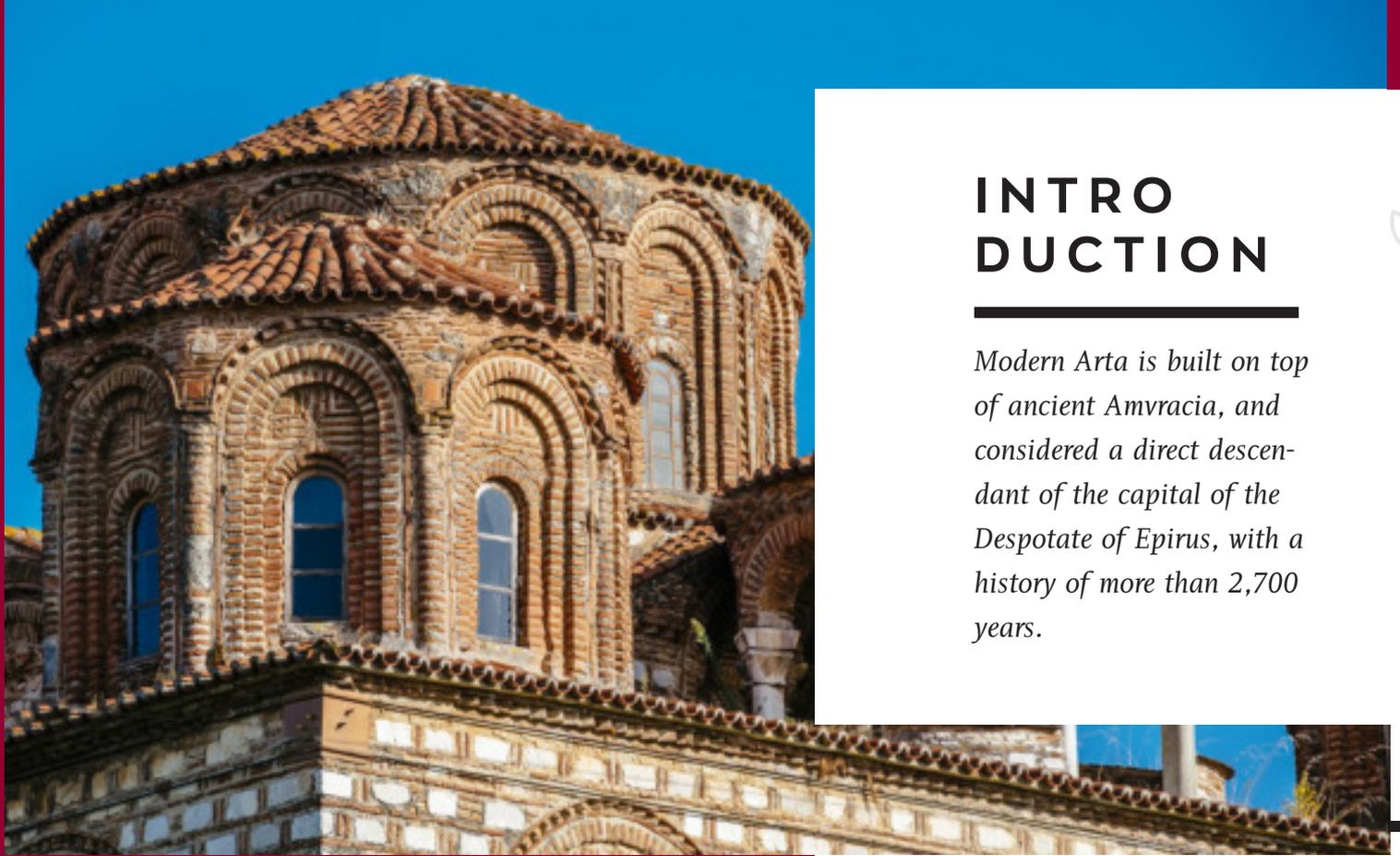




## Byzantine Monuments

CHURCHES . MONASTERIES

GREECE



## INTRO DUCTION

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*Modern Arta is built on top of ancient Amvracia, and considered a direct descendant of the capital of the Despotate of Epirus, with a history of more than 2,700 years.*



The Despotate of Epirus was founded by Michael I Angelos Komnenos Doukas after the conquering of Constantinople by the Franks in 1204. Michael I was an experienced military, commander of this Byzantine region and saw the Byzantine collapse as a great opportunity for him to become more powerful.

At its best, the Despotate included regions from Nafpaktos to Durrës and from the Ionian Islands to Thes-salia, having Arta as its capital. After a long period of containment and repossession of land in the area, in 1231 Michael II, son of the founder of the Despotate, became the ruler of the region.

He got married to Theodora Petrali-faina, who was declared a Saint after her death and is nowadays celebrated as the Patron of the city on the 11th of March.

In 1449 the Ottomans conquer Arta and the area around it.

In 1881, according to the Berlin Convention, Arta joined the rest of Greece. The border between the free city and the areas under the Ottoman rule was the famous Bridge of Arta.

This region gave birth to important historical figures that include Niko-laos Skoufas, Georgios Karaiskakis and Ioannis Makriyiannis. One of the greatest amongst them is Maximus the Greek – his real name being Michalis Trivolis, who was born in Arta and had a great contribution to the translation of the Holy Bible into Russian, winning him the name of “the Educator of the Russians” and the “Martin Luther of the East”.

The Byzantine influence can be

noticed everywhere in the city, while the plethora of Byzantine “treasures” places Arta on top of the regions in Greece with the most Byzantine monuments, after Thessaloniki and Mystras.

Arta – a modern city that respects its history and its heritage, is waiting for you to discover it! Come and see the capital of the Despotate of Epirus with tens of Byzantine churches, the hometown of the famous stone craftsmen and take a great journey back in time!

Cover Photo:  
Panagiotis Ziovas

ITS IMPRESSIVE DOME WITH THE UNIQUE WAY OF SUPPORT MAKES THE BYZANTINE CHURCH OF PANAGIA PARIGORITISSA ONE OF A KIND IN THE WHOLE WORLD. IT IS A 13TH C. CREATION OF KOMNENOS DOUKAS AND IT WAS USED AS A CONVENT.

# PANAGIA PARIGORI- TISSA

The Church of Parigoritissa is a unique Byzantine monument. Built at the end of the 13th c. (1285 to 1289) on the west side of Peranthi Hill, it is dedicated to the Annunciation of Virgin Mary.

The exterior of the church reminds of the style of Italian Renaissance. What is really impressive is the roof of the church with its five domes, the central of which is supported by double columns and gives the impression that it floats in the air.

Visitors should pay attention to the north arch with the fresco of the Birth of Jesus Christ and figures of saints, magi, shepherds, evangelists and prophets.

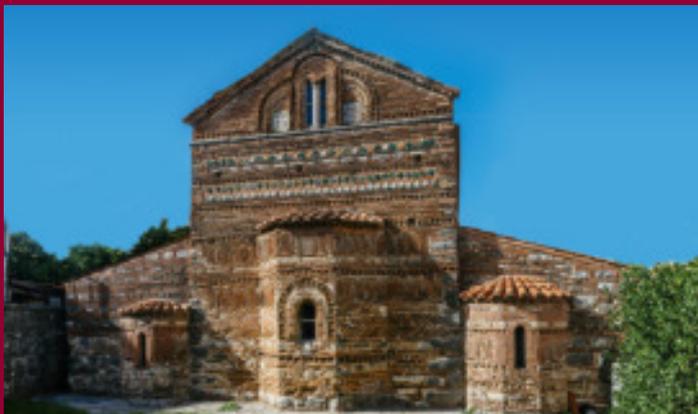


The size of the church is also impressive; the length of the sides and the height of the nave are more than 20 meters, while its dome has an outside diameter of 7 meters and a height of 3,5 meters.

According to the legend, the master builder and his assistant were quarreling on the roof when they fell off and their bodies turned into the two stones that we see today at the back of the church. Virgin Mary appeared in front of the mother of the young assistant to console her for her loss and that is how the church got its name.







# AGIOS VASILIOS OF AGORA

The Byzantine Church of Agios Vasilios was built at the end of the 13th c., judging by its similarities with other Byzantine monuments of the same period.

Sometime later the two chapels of Agios Grigorios Theologos and Agios Ioannis Chrisostomos were added to the initial temple, and that is why nowadays the church honours the Three Hierarchs.

It was called “of Agora” (Greek for market) because it is built in the district of the market but also to make sure it is not confused with the other temple of Agios Vasilios

of the Bridge.

From 1662 to 1821, in the courtyard of the church operated a Greek High School founded by the Kastorian furrier Filippos Manolakis. Great scholars of those times such as Sofronios Lichoudis, Paisios Metaxas and Gherasimos Paladas had the chance to teach here.

A unique feature of this church is the presence of the two glazed clay icons on the eastern pediment dating back to the 14th c.





# AGIOS NIKOLAOS OF RODIA



The Byzantine Church of Agios Nikolaos of Rodia is located in Kirkizates village near Arta and keeps almost intact its original form.

The temple dates back to the beginning of the 13th c., while excavations brought to light the foundations of an older building (belonging to the 9th or 10th c.) on top of which the newer temple was built.

The exterior of the temple is not impressive due to its size or decorations, but because of details that make up its overall unique form:

*THE FRESCOES ARE CONTEMPORARY WITH THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE REST OF THE TEMPLE, NAMELY THE BEGINNING OF THE 13TH C.*

its modest size, its shape and its dome.

The frescoes inside the temple are particularly interesting as their themes can only be seen in Mount Athos and the Vatican.

Equally rare is the fresco illustrating the best known miracle of Agios Nikolaos, when he calmed the sea and saved the ship he travelled with, on his way to Jerusalem.



# AGIOS VASILIOS OF THE BRIDGE



It is located near the historical Bridge of Arta from which it took its name (in order not to be mistaken for the Church of Agios Vasilios of Agora).

Due to the floods caused by Arachthos River, the temple was half-buried until 1969 – that is when the Ephorate of Antiquities of Arta organized excavations in order for this unique Byzantine monument to be saved and restored.

The most impressive feature of the temple is its dome as it is particu-

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*THIS TEMPLE WAS FOUNDED IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 9TH C. THAT MAKES IT ONE OF THE OLDEST PRESERVED BYZANTINE MONUMENTS IN ARTA, LONG BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE DESPOTATE.*

larly large compared to the size of the rest of the construction.

Visitors will also be impressed by the ceramic decorations and the distinctive frescoes inside which were realized in three stages (from the 13th to the 18th c.).



# AGIOS DIMITRIOS KATSOURIS

The Byzantine Church of Agios Dimitrios Katsouris can be found in Plisii village, just outside the city of Arta. Nobody knows how the name "Katsouris" appeared but the church has been bearing it since 1229.

It is built as a variant of a cruciform domed church. Remains of an older building were found under it and they were used for the construction of the church we see today.

The frescoes of the temple, judging by the technique used, date from the 17th or 18th

c. and cover two other layers of frescoes. The deepest layer consists of simple frescoes with strong colours and calm faces.

These elements remind of the technique used in the 12th and 13th centuries, thus being an example of the oldest frescoes in this region.

*IT IS PROBABLY THE OLDEST BYZANTINE CHURCH IN THE AREA AS IT WAS PROBABLY FOUNDED IN THE BEGINNING OF THE 9TH C.*



# MONASTERY OF KATO PANAGIA

*IT IS ONE OF THE THREE MONASTERIES BUILT BY MICHAEL II ANGELOS KOMNENOS DOUKAS AS A WAY TO WIN HIS WIFE'S – QUEEN THEODORA – FORGIVENESS FOR HIS IMPROPER BEHAVIOR.*

which depict scenes from the Second Coming of Christ and the Old Testament.

Inside the temple, the original decoration has not been saved so what visitors see is the second layer of frescoes which date back to the 18th century. What is of great interest is the image on the dome – instead of the usual image of Pantocrator there is a painting of the Ascension of Christ.



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The Monastery of Kato Panagia is located at the outskirts of the city, at the foot of Peranthi Hill. Inside the monastery there is a church dating from the middle of the 13th century dedicated to the Birth of Virgin Mary, called “Kato Panagia” as opposed to the Church of Panagia Parigoritissa.

It has the cruciform shape of a three-aisled basilica and was partially built with material taken from constructions in ancient Amvracia.

Its particularity is the 18th c. exterior frescoes





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# PANAGIA VLAHERNA



The Monastery of Panagia Vlaherna is located just opposite the city of Arta and took its name from the famous Temple of Panagia Vlaherna in Constantinople.

According to recent studies it was built in two stages; it was founded at the beginning of the 10th century as a three-aisled wooden-roof basilica and during the 13th century it was rebuilt and the domes were added.

The inscriptions on the two tombs inside the church suggest that members of the Komnenos Doukas family were buried there, or, according to other researchers, relatives of Queen Theodora.

Thus, the Church of Panagia Vlaherna became a mausoleum for the despots of Epirus in the 13th century.

The impressive mosaic in the middle aisle is decorated with five intertwined rings. The first and the last have mosaic decorations with various themes and the central one has a two headed eagle.

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*IT STANDS ON THE HILL OF KORONISIA VILLAGE FOR MORE THAN A MILLENNIUM, THUS BEING A TIRELESS GUARDIAN OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH.*

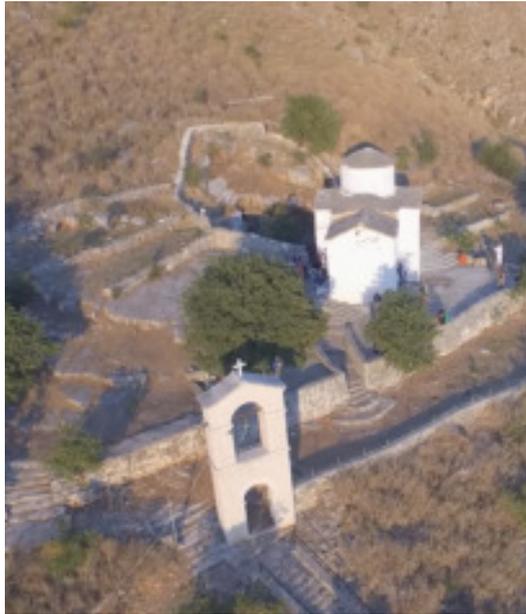
The Byzantine Church of Panagia Koronisia was built during the 10th century A.D. It honours the Birth of Virgin Mary and constitutes a religious treasure of the region.

It is mentioned as far back as 1193 as a monastery that offered shelter to many monks and had quite a large property. Close to it there is the Chapel of Agios Onoufrios - who lived there until his death in 1780.

What is really interesting about this church is the wooden carved iconostasis and its portable icons dating from the 19th century, as well as a silver coffin with the holy remains of Agios Onoufrios.



# PANAGIA OF KORONISIA



*THE PLACE HERE INSPIRES AWE TO VISITORS BECAUSE OF ITS ISOLATION AND ITS PARTICULARITY.*

# AGIA PARASKEVI OF THE DRAGON

The Byzantine Church of Agia Paraskevi of the Dragon is located in the district of Ambelia, Xerovouni. It was built in the second half of the 11th c. and is a typical architectural example of the pre-Despotate era.

According to the legend, the name of the church derived from the fact that Agia Paraskevi used the cave close by as a refuge, but also as a hiding place from which she killed the dragon that terrified the locals.

The church has a free cruciform

shape with a cylinder-like dome and although it does not seem to have any frescoes due to the time it was deserted, it still is one of the most important Byzantine monuments in the area, since it bridges the gap between the first examples of Byzantine architecture such as the Panagia Koronisia and the later masterpieces such as Parigoritissa.



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*ITS FRESCOS ARE CONSIDERED THE OLDEST  
IN GREECE.*

Close to Voulgareli village, 65 km from Arta, is one of the most important monuments of the reign of Komnenos Doukas.

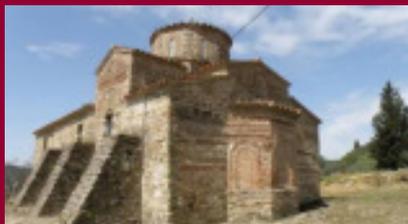
Its name comes from the red colour of the materials used for its construction and what we see today are the remains of an once impressive Monastery dominating the area around. The church has a cruciform shape and was built at the end of the 13th c., during the reign of Despot Nikiforos the 1st and his wife Anna.

Inside, the icons are characterized by naturalness and not so much by the usual Byzantine austerity, something that indicates the fact that they must have been done at the same time with the building of the church, namely between 1295 and 1296.

# THE RED CHURCH



# PANAGIA BRIONI



The Byzantine Church of Panagia Brioni - what is left of an once impressive Monastery, is located in Neochoraki village, a few km away from Arta, and honours the Dormition of Virgin Mary.

It was built in 1238 – in 1111, according to another source. It constituted a stravropegic monastery, and it is believed to have been inaugurated by the Patriarch Germanus II. The monastery was burned in 1821 by the Ottomans and was renovated from 1867 to 1871, acquiring its present form.



## CHURCH OF MAXIMUS THE GREEK

In June 2016 a temple dedicated to Maximus the Greek was inaugurated in the district Trigono in Arta. In the interior of the church the relic of the Saint is preserved.

It is the first church being built – its construction has not been completed yet – in honour of this great Saint. The importance of this undertaking is so great that exceeds the boundaries of Greece, if we take into account the size of the personality and the work of Maximus, who is called “the reformer of the Russians”.

### *OTHER IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS MONUMENTS IN THE AREA :*

**Arta:** Holy Church of Metropolis - Holy Church of the Transfiguration of the Savior - Holy Church of Agia Paraskevi - Holy Church of Agia Sofia - Holy Church of Kassopitra - Holy Church of Agii Anargiri - Holy Church of Panagia Faneromeni.

**In the area around:** Pantanassa – Monastery of Rovelisti in Kalentini - Monastery of Seltso in Piges - Holy Church of Agia Paraskevi in Rodavgi - Monastery of the Dormition of Virgin Mary in Skulikaria - Monastery of Agios Georgios in Vourgareli – Chrisopiliotisa in Gouriana - Monastery of Muhusti in Plaka - Monastery of Theotokio - Monastery of Evangelistria in Kipseli - Monastery of the Birth of Virgin Mary in Melates - Monastery of the Birth of Virgin Mary in Theodoriana – the Holy Churches of Agios Nikolaos and Agios Markos in Melissourgi – Holy Church of the Presentation of the Jesus at the Temple in Lepiana - Holy Church of Agios Georgios in Peta - Holy Church of Agios Georgios in Komboti – Holy Monastery of the Dormition of Virgin Mary in Selades - Holy Church of of Agios Georgios in Glikorizo.



**ARTA**

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