

## Museums of Byzantine History

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### Abstract

This article “Byzantine and Christian Museum”, “Byzantine Culture Museum”, “Byzantine Museum of the History of the Byzantine Empire” located on the Greek island of Zakynthos, “Byzantine Museum of Veria”, “Byzantine Museum of Antivouniotissa” in Corfu, “Byzantine Museum of the Holy Metropolis” in Paphos and provides information about the “Byzantine Museum” on the island of Rhodes.

**Keywords:** Greece, museum, pictogram, fresco, icon, island, reservoir.

### Introduction

The Byzantine Empire was the eastern part of the Roman Empire, which existed as an independent state from 395 to 1453. The term “Byzantine” was first used in 1557 by the German historian Hieronymus Wolf. Today, material objects, manuscripts, frescoes, icons, and pictograms related to the history of the Byzantine Empire are preserved and displayed in museums across Greece, Turkey, and several other countries around the world. This article focuses on the museums in Greece that exhibit the history of Byzantium.

The "Byzantine and Christian Museum" located in Athens is one of Greece's national museums. The museum contains more than 25,000 exhibits. The artifacts date from the 3rd to the 20th century AD, and their origins span the entire Greek world, including regions where Hellenistic civilization flourished [1]. The museum was established in the early 20th century (1914) with the goal of collecting, studying, preserving, and displaying the Byzantine and post-Byzantine cultural heritage of the Hellenistic region. The permanent exhibition is divided into two main sections. The first section is dedicated to the history of Byzantium from the 4th to the 15th century, featuring 1,200 exhibits. The second section presents 1,500 works of art from the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the 20th century[2].

In the port city of Thessaloniki, Greece, the “Museum of Byzantine Culture” is located, and its building was designed by the architect and artist Kyriakos Krokos. The museum has a total of 11 active galleries.

In 1913, by the decision of the Governor-General of Macedonia, Stefanos Dragumis, a decree was issued to establish the “Central Byzantine Museum” in Thessaloniki. However, the decision was not implemented, and the exhibits intended to be displayed there were transferred to the “Byzantine and Christian Museum” in Athens. After 80 years, in 1994, the “Museum of Byzantine Culture” was opened in Thessaloniki. By 2004, all 11 rooms of the museum were completed.

The Museum of the History of the Byzantine Empire is located on the Greek island of Zakynthos. Built in 1960, the museum is spread over three floors. Two of its rooms display wooden Byzantine icons, while the third and fourth rooms display frescoes from the 15th to 17th centuries. Two other rooms display works by artists such as Doharis, Koutouzis, and Kantouni, who worked in the 18th century[3].

During the reign of the Byzantine Empire, Veria was one of the main cities of Macedonia. In this city, there is the “Veria Byzantine Museum”, which was located in an industrial building in the early 20th century. The museum contained a cylindrical mill, which was later severely damaged by a fire. Recognizing the historical significance of this building as a monument that needed to be protected by the state, the Ministry of Culture restored it and transformed it into a Byzantine museum. It is located in the historic Kiriotis district, where the Markos mill once stood[4].

The “Byzantine Museum” in Kastoria was established in 1989 under the jurisdiction of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Kastoria. The establishment of the museum is the result of many years of efforts to preserve the wealth of Byzantine portable icons, which until now had been collected for protection in the church of Agios Spyridon. The establishment and operation of the Byzantine Museum have contributed to the systematic preservation, study and archiving of the portable icon collection, as well as to its presentation on loan at high-standard international exhibitions[5].

The Byzantine Antivouniotissa Museum in Corfu was founded in 1984 and is located in a 15th-century church in the historic part of the city. The museum's permanent exhibition includes a rich collection of icon paintings from the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods. Most of the icons on display date from the 15th to the 19th centuries. The most artistically and historically valuable icons that can be seen in the halls of the Byzantine Museum are created by masters such as Lombardos, Damascene, Tzanes, Avramis. The halls also feature frescoes from the 11th to the 13th centuries, which once adorned the ancient churches of Corfu. The museum's exhibition is complemented by manuscripts and ancient copies of the Bible, vestments of the founders of the temples, and other items[6].

The Byzantine Museum of the Holy Metropolis in Paphos is located in Geroskipou, next to the Church of Saint Paraskeva. The museum presents unique collections, among which is the oldest icon of the Orant type in Cyprus, decorated with scenes of his death. The museum has an extensive collection of church metalwork dating back to the 6th century: censers, lamps, candlesticks, miters, bowls and other rare and very valuable artifacts. The frescoes in the museum date from the 11th to the 12th centuries and were transferred from ruined churches. The collection of manuscripts and ancient books is extremely valuable. The collection of manuscripts and ancient books is extremely valuable, including Gospels from 1462 and 1604, 15th-century hymnals, Ottoman government decrees from 1853, music collections, and legal codes[7].

The “Byzantine Museum” on the island of Rhodes is located in the Byzantine monastery of Panagia tou Kastrou. This is one of the most magnificent buildings of medieval Rhodes, situated at the beginning of the Knights’ Street. The Byzantine church was built in the 11th century and became the main cathedral of Saint John on the island of Rhodes. Later, in 1523, the Turks converted it into the Enderum Mosque, also known as the “Red Mosque”. Even today, some important interior mural fragments from the Knights’ era are preserved on its walls. Since 1988, the church has been used to host exhibitions of Byzantine and post-Byzantine art[8].

The Yerebatan Sarnıcı that also known as Basilica Cistern was built during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, between 527-565 AD. Located to the west of the Hagia Sophia, this cistern was originally used to collect rainwater to meet the water needs of the city. Visitors can descend into the cistern via stone staircases leading underground. The columns inside the cistern give the impression of rising from the water, which is why this historical structure is referred to as the "Yerebatan Sarnıcı" (Basilica Cistern).

The cistern is 140 meters long and 70 meters wide, with a total of 336 columns, each 9 meters tall, appearing to rise toward the sky. Throughout history, the people of Istanbul relied on the cistern during sieges to meet their water needs. Covering approximately 9,800 m<sup>2</sup>, the cistern has the capacity to hold 100,000 tons of water. After Istanbul was conquered by the Ottomans, the cistern continued to supply water for a time. However, according to Islamic tradition, water that had stagnated was considered impure, and the cistern was eventually no longer used. Over the centuries, the cistern underwent several restorations, and today it has been converted into a museum, which is managed by the Istanbul City Administration[9].

In conclusion, the Greek government has placed significant emphasis on preserving, restoring, and exhibiting both material and immaterial artifacts related to Byzantium. This effort plays a crucial role in safeguarding the historical heritage of Byzantium and ensuring its transmission to future generations without alteration.

## REFERENCES

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