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“I am very happy and grateful to participate in this volume and the Conversation. This has not only allowed me to return, at least in thought, to places and research topics that are close to my heart and have shaped my education and research, but also to open new windows onto the history and lived experiences of a place with inexhaustible human richness. Have a great journey, all of us readers.”

Lucia Maria Orlandi

Hermes Balducci

The discovery and rediscovery of the archaeological and architectural heritage of the Dodecanese

Hermes Balducci contributed to writing a short but significant chapter in the history of Italian archaeological research in the Dodecanese. This paper presents his research and achievements, as well as his contribution to the study of the archaeological heritage of the Dodecanese, especially as regards the early Byzantine monuments.

Balducci is a figure that can rightly be described as multifaceted, owing to his training, his wide-ranging interests, and research and documentation activities conducted both in Italy and in the Dodecanese, which was at that time under Italian rule¹.

His work ranges from engineering applications to the history of architecture, from the masterly graphic documentation of monuments and decorative elements of antiquity, both ancient and more recent, to comprehensive historical studies that have often rescued so-called minor buildings and contexts from oblivion. Through his work, a significant part of the archaeological and architectural-artistic heritage in Italy and Greece has been recovered for memory and study, although often only in very recent times².

Balducci was born on October 27, 1904 in Fano, in the Marche region, into a bourgeois family; his father was an architect. He studied engineering at the Italian universities of Pavia, Padua, and the Politecnico in Milan, where he graduated in 1928³. A model student, he excelled in disciplines related to drawing and construction. From 1925 to 1933, he served as an assistant in the Chair of Drawing at the School of Ornament and Architecture at the University of Pavia, the institution where he would spend his entire academic career. In 1935, he was appointed Professor of Drawing⁴ at the Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Natural Sciences, a position he held until his sudden death on February 13, 1938⁵. Alongside his teaching, he conducted intensive research and engaged in professional collaboration in the study and restoration of monuments, particularly medieval and modern ones.

Much of Balducci’s work focused on the city of Pavia and its surroundings, where he documented numerous medieval religious buildings, initiated the restoration of the local Visconti Castle, and designed an ossuary for the fallen of the Great War⁶.

His research, documentation, and design activities in Italy likely stemmed from the experience and sensitivity he developed in the Dodecanese, where he lived and worked for long periods⁷ as a fellow and later as a collaborator of the F.E.R.T., the Italian Historical and Archaeological Institute

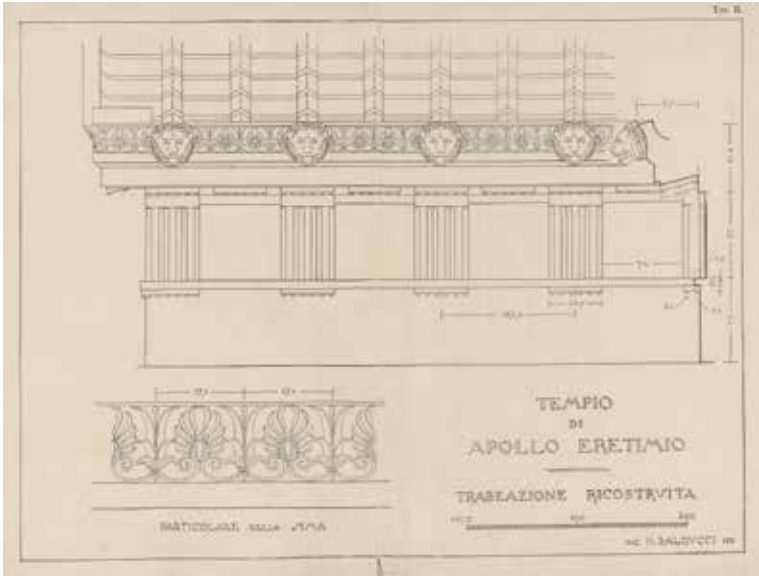
1 See for example, Doumanis 1997; Pignataro 2011, 2013 and 2018.
2 For an annotated bibliography and an extended biographic profile, see Orlandi 2019 and 2021.
3 ASUPv, Students’ files, file of Hermes Balducci.
4 Balducci 1930a.
5 ASUPv, Students’ files, file of Hermes Balducci.
6 See for example Balducci 1930b, 1932a, 1933a, 1933b, 1933e, 1935a, 1935b, 1935c, 1936b; see also Vicini 2016, p. 233-235.
7 Livadiotti, Rocco 1996, p. 40-42, 64, 67-68, 78, 81, 84, 94, 119, 141-144, 159-162, 240, 245; Livadiotti 2017, p. 151 and notes; Baldini, Livadiotti 2011, p. 80 and notes.

of Rhodes⁸. After a first stay in Rhodes in 1930, his scholarship was renewed for 1931, 1932, and again in 1937⁹.

During these particularly productive years, Balducci alternated between collaborating on major ongoing archaeological research projects in Rhodes and Kos — where he was responsible for the documentary and reconstructive survey of newly uncovered structures — and pursuing independent research initiatives.

Under the direction of Giulio Iacopi, then director of the Archaeological Superintendency of the Dodecanese and head of the F.E.R.T., Balducci participated in excavations on the hill of Filerimos, the ancient acropolis of Ialysos, between 1930 and 1931. This site had been investigated by Italian archaeologists in various missions since 1913¹⁰. Balducci studied the remains of the early Byzantine Basilica and the church built under the Knights’ rule, which occupied the site of the Temple of Apollo (5th–4th century BC) before the construction of the modern monastery (1932–1935)¹¹. He also published a general plan showing the relationships between the different phases of construction.

Between 1931 and 1932, he carried out surveys of the temple and theatre dedicated to Apollo Erethimios on the Acropolis of Rhodes (dating to the 5th/4th and 4th centuries BC, respectively)¹², reconstructing their dimensions and the typology of their architectural elements ().



Rhodes, Temple of Apollo Erethimios, reconstruction of the frieze, Balducci 1932a, Pl. II.

8 Advanced Studies in Medieval and Modern Architecture. On the origins of F.E.R.T., see Santi 2018, p. 204–210. F.E.R.T. awarded two six-month scholarships each year, one for a specialist in classical studies and one for a medievalist; women candidates were not admitted.

9 Santi 2018, p. 245, and note 324; p. 257 and p. 327

10 Livadiotti 1996a, p. 40–42.

11 Balducci 1931b; see also Livadiotti 1996a, p. 40–42.

12 Balducci 1932a.

Between 1930 and 1933, Balducci documented the finds at Kamiros, including the sanctuary of Athena and Zeus Poliades on the acropolis and part of the lower town, excavated by Iacopi between 1928 and 1933¹³.

During the same period, as a scholarship holder at F.E.R.T., Balducci focused on Rhodes’ artistic and architectural heritage of Rhodes adopting a perspective consistent with the political and cultural climate of the time¹⁴. In particular, his studies in the Dodecanese revealed him as a man of his era, and a supporter of the Italian regime, and, as such, a scholar fully adhering to the exegetical, ideological and rhetorical frameworks then prevalent in Italian academia and promoted by the Italian government, especially concerning cultural policies in a colonial context¹⁵.

The interest in the monuments of the Knights’ period in Rhodes and their study, to which Balducci was an active contributor¹⁶, was justified as an to recover and valorise the island’s “Italian” past, which the new ruling power ideologically reclaimed. From the beginning of the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese in 1912, the primary—though not exclusive—focus was on the remains of the Hospitaller period. However, during the Fascist regime, under the governor of the Italian Aegean Islands Mario Lago (1922–1936), and especially under his successor Cesare Maria De Vecchi (1936–1940), greater emphasis was placed on the classical and Roman remains in the area. Archaeological discoveries, along with their restoration and monumental presentation to the public, played a central role not only in promoting the region’s tourist potential but also in the propaganda and legitimisation policies of the Fascist regime. The latter positioned itself as the heir to the Roman imperial civilisation and sought to stimulate the “recovery of a Western consciousness” among the inhabitants of the Aegean after centuries of Ottoman rule¹⁷. The revival of architectural heritage—whether medieval, Renaissance or Turkish—was explicitly pursued to place Italy on an equal footing with other nations in the field of research¹⁸ and to establish a comparative framework that would serve as a basis for developing architectural expressions considered “overtly Roman”¹⁹.

Balducci studied the influence of the Renaissance, particularly the Italian Renaissance, on the architecture of the Knights, meticulously documenting examples of both civil and religious buildings²⁰. In 1932, he focused on the so-called House of the Admiral Costanzo Operti²¹, an

13 Balducci 1932–1933; see also Calò 1996, p. 64, and Di Vita 1996, p. 67–68; Santi 2018, p. 269.

14 Santi 2018.

15 On this topic, see for example Santoro 1996, Orlandi 2013, p. 533–534, with references.

16 Santoro 1996, *infra*; Santi 2018, p. 359–362, note 137.

17 Santi 2018, p. 325–332. As for the distinctly *Italian* influence on the architecture of the Hospitaller period, see for example the remarks of Vittorio Mesturino, the former Superintendent of Monuments of Piedmont, appointed in 1937 to oversee the restoration and transformation of the Grand Master’s palace in Rhodes into the seat of the Italian government. According to him, the palace complex was “fully in keeping with the architecture of the Savoy in Piedmont” (my English translation): Santi 2018, p. 362–364, note 156, with references.

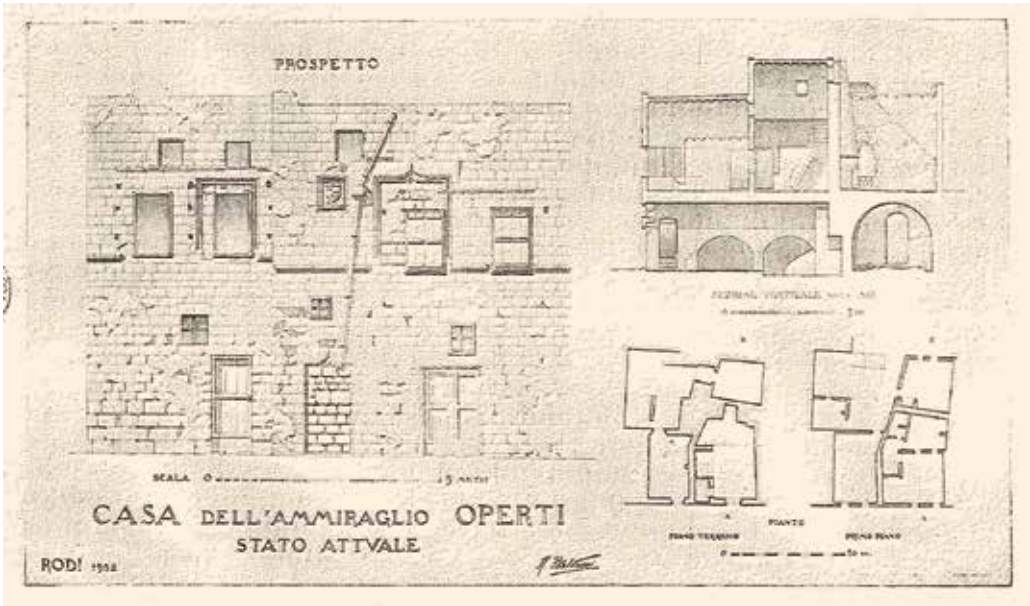
18 See G. Iacopi’s preface in Balducci 1932b; on Italy’s *national* contribution to archaeological science and, through the latter, to the legitimisation of Italian imperialist aspirations in the Levant, see the statements by Alessandro Della Seta, director of the SAIA 1919–1939, in Santi 2018, p. 449 and note 379.

19 Balducci 1932b, p. 190 (my English translation): “[...] if we believe that one of the main tasks of architecture in a conquered territory is to express the personality of the ruler in a tangible and lasting way, we must also recognise that these simple and, if you like, modest buildings have left a deep mark on the city of Rhodes: Therefore, if we are to draw valid advice for the future from the study of the past, we must come to a conclusion that is logical and to which I have already alluded in another way: The architectural art of Rhodes today must be systematically of purely Italian inspiration and feeling; we must give it the most overtly Roman imprint”.

20 Balducci 1931a.

21 Balducci 1932c.

important member and leader of the Order of Saint John between 1498 and 1517 (). His study, which served as a preliminary step to the restoration, received praise from the then-governor Mario Lago. Another monument to which Balducci dedicated his efforts was the Gothic church of Santa Maria del Borgo ()²², which underwent significant restoration.



Rhodes, House of the Admiral Costanzo Operti, façade, plan and section, Balducci 1932c, Pl. I.

In spite of the political and ideological context, Balducci's work is highly valuable because it generally provides comprehensive documentation. This includes not only the "normalised" drawings required for restoration projects but also precise records of the existing state, closer to archaeological surveying, which preserve crucial data for future research and conservation²³. He then extended his interest to local Ottoman architecture, producing a preliminary comprehensive study on the subject²⁴.

In addition to his work in Rhodes, his later studies in Kos are noteworthy.

Following the earthquake that struck the Dodecanese on April 23, 1933, Italian archaeological research focused on the island of Kos under the direction of Luigi Morricone, who succeeded Luciano Laurenzi as director of the Archaeological Service of Kos in 1935²⁵. During this period,

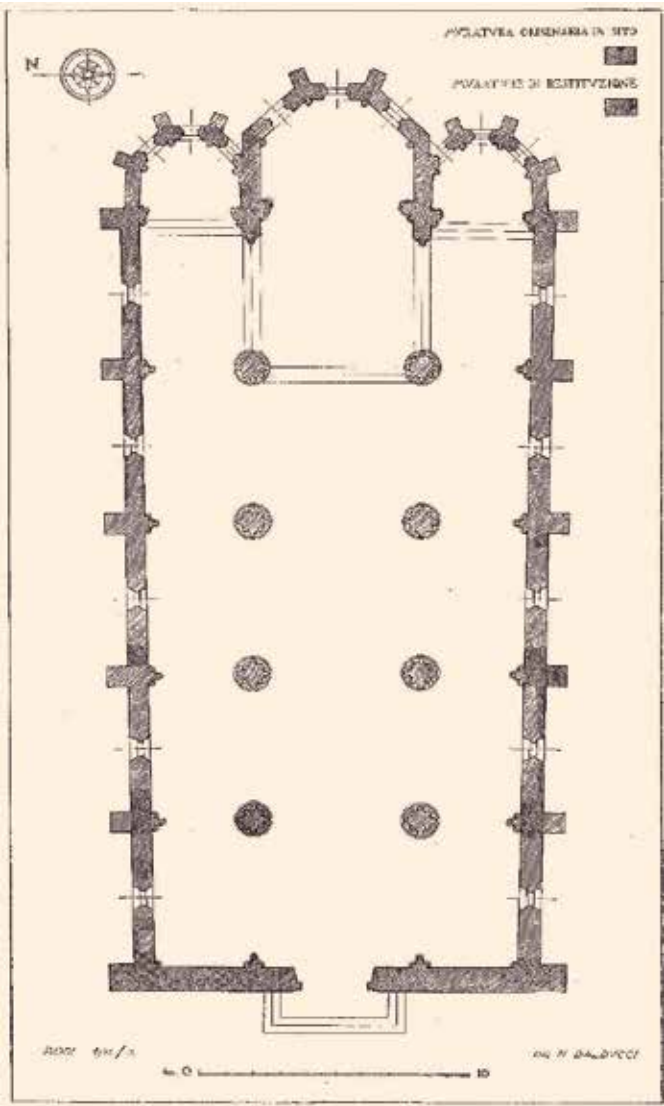
22 Balducci 1933a.

23 Santoro, p. 245.

24 Balducci 1932b; Balducci 1933b. See Luca Orlandi in this volume.

25 Morricone 1950.

Balducci surveyed and, in some cases, studied the structures that had been discovered²⁶, working in collaboration with the military topographer Virgilio Brighenti, who was responsible for the general plans of the site, and the painter Traiano Finamore, draughtsman for the Superintendence of Antiquities of Bologna, who was in charge of drawing objects, architectural details and reconstructions²⁷.

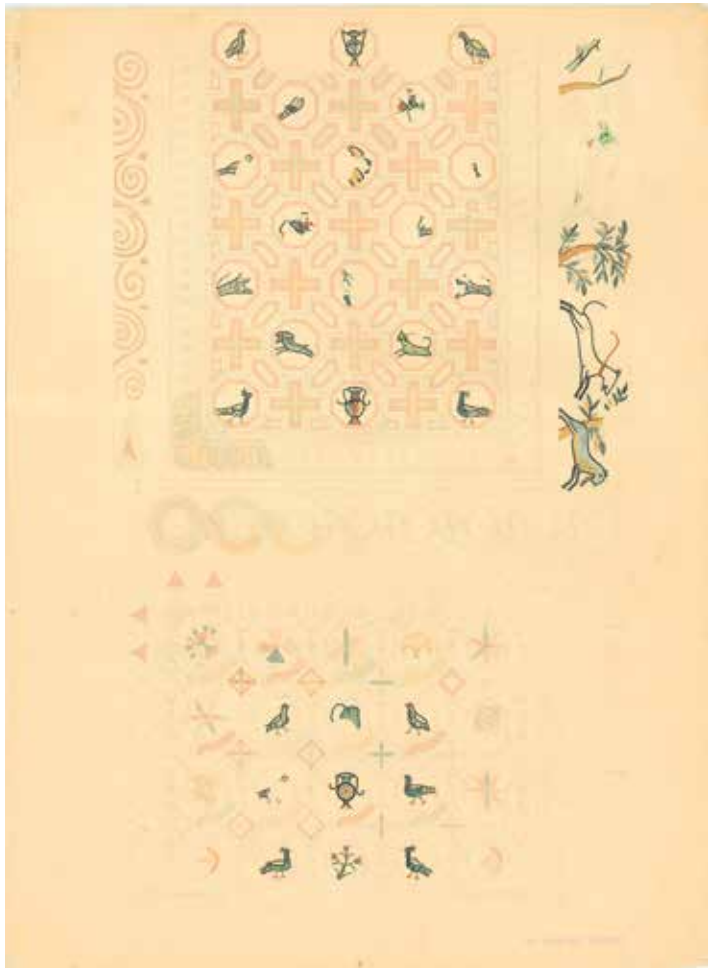


Rhodes, "S. Maria del Borgo", planimetric reconstruction of the original church. Balducci 1933a, Pl. IV, p. 37.

26 For Balducci's activity in the capital: Livadiotti, Rocco 1996, particularly fig. 201; p. 94; p. 119 and fig. 267; p. 141–144; p. 159–162; see also Santi 2018, p. 286, note 481.

27 Livadiotti 1996b, p. 94.

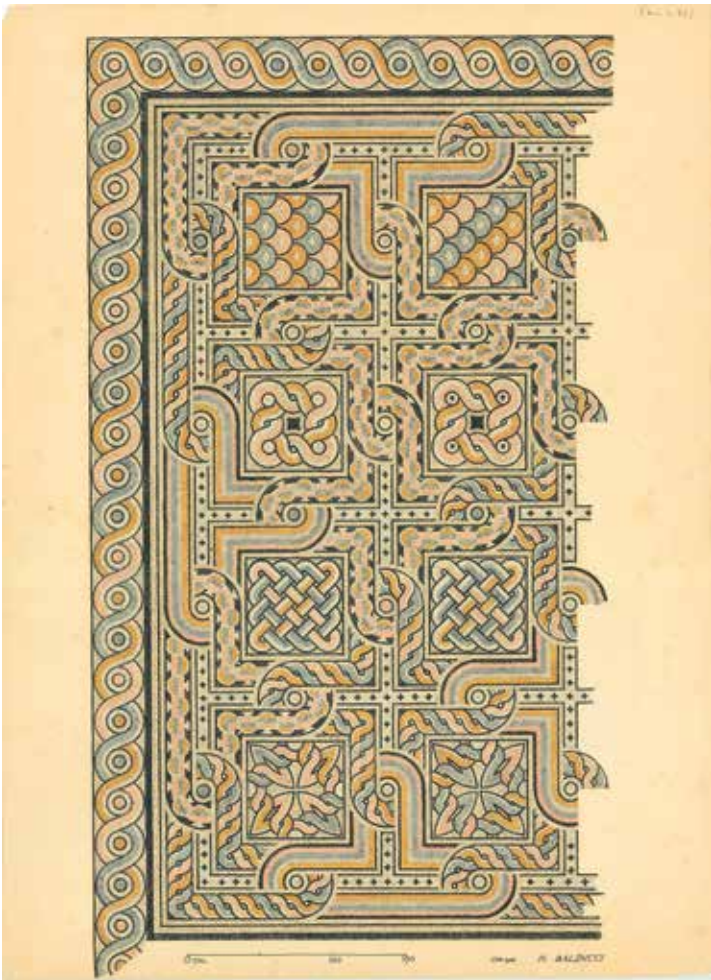
Among the discoveries of those years were Roman and Late Antique dwellings in the southwestern area of the capital, such as the *domus* of “Piazza Quadrata”²⁸ and the baths of “Via della Croce” on Odos Mitropoleos, for which Balducci produced drawings and watercolour reproductions of the mosaics²⁹. His 1:100 scale survey and some of his watercolour depictions of mosaics are also the only surviving records of another discovery made by Morricone in 1936 under the present Agios Theologos Square, where a richly decorated *domus* with significant mosaic ornamentation was found ()³⁰.



Kos, *domus* found in Agiou Theologou Square, plan and watercolour depiction of the mosaic floor. ©Archivi SAIA, Fondo Morricone, Balducci 108.

28 Rocco 1996 p. 159-160 and fig. 365.
29 Rocco 1996, fig. 367 and 368, p. 160-161.
30 Rocco 1996, fig. 369, p. 162.

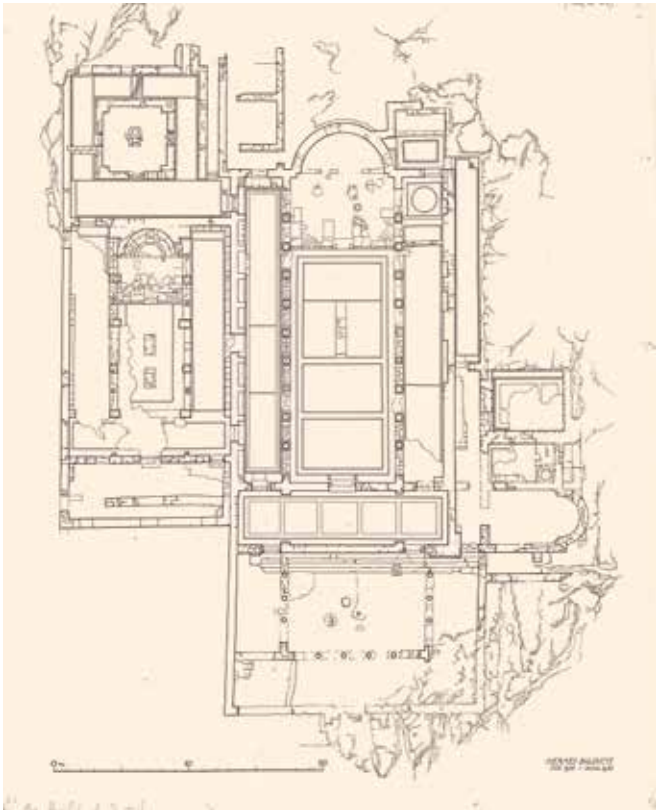
In 1936, a mid-to-late Roman imperial bath complex was identified in the Port area, in the Bozuktà neighbourhood, just outside the western section of the city walls, together with structures built after the earthquake of 469 AD, including some mosaic pavements³¹. Balducci also documented numerous mosaics found during the excavations carried out in 1936-1937 at the Western Baths, where, in recent years, the island’s 6th-century episcopal complex has been identified ()³².



Kos, Western Baths’ complex, plan and watercolour depiction of a mosaic floor (Room XIV, annex to the Basiica B). ©Archivi SAIA, Fondo Morricone, Balducci 72.

31 See Rocco, Livadiotti 1996, p. 95, fig. 201 (H. Balducci, 1936, watercolour on cardboard).
32 Baldini, Livadiotti 2015.

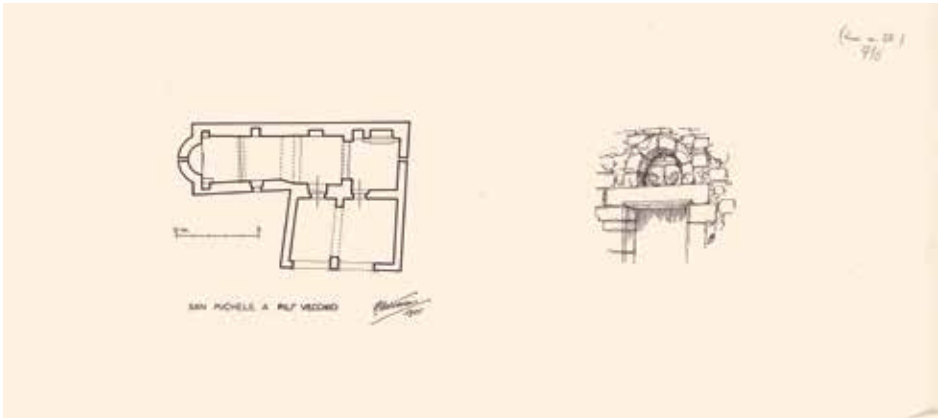
One of Balducci’s lasting legacies is his work on the early Byzantine basilicas of the chief town and the island’s hinterland. In 1932, Laurenzi, then director of the island’s archaeological office, discovered the great basilica of Agios Stephanos on the promontory that borders Kephalos Bay to the northeast ()³³. In 1935, his successor Morricone began a systematic search for early Byzantine religious buildings³⁴. During these years, Agios Gavril and “Punta della Sabbia” (Lampi/Skandariou) were found in the area of the capital, along with Agios Pavlos and Kapamà in the area of Asfendiù, and the small basilica of Kamari in Kephalos. Other finds from the Byzantine period were made at Antimacheia, in the area of Agios Theodoros, and at Linopoti, Kephalos, where a small funerary basilica was found near the basilica complex of Agios Stephanos and the small church of Agia Paraskevi. Morricone entrusted the study and graphic documentation of these monuments to Balducci, then a young engineer and fellow of the F.E.R.T. in Rhodes, who is also credited with the discovery of the Basilica of Kardamena³⁵.



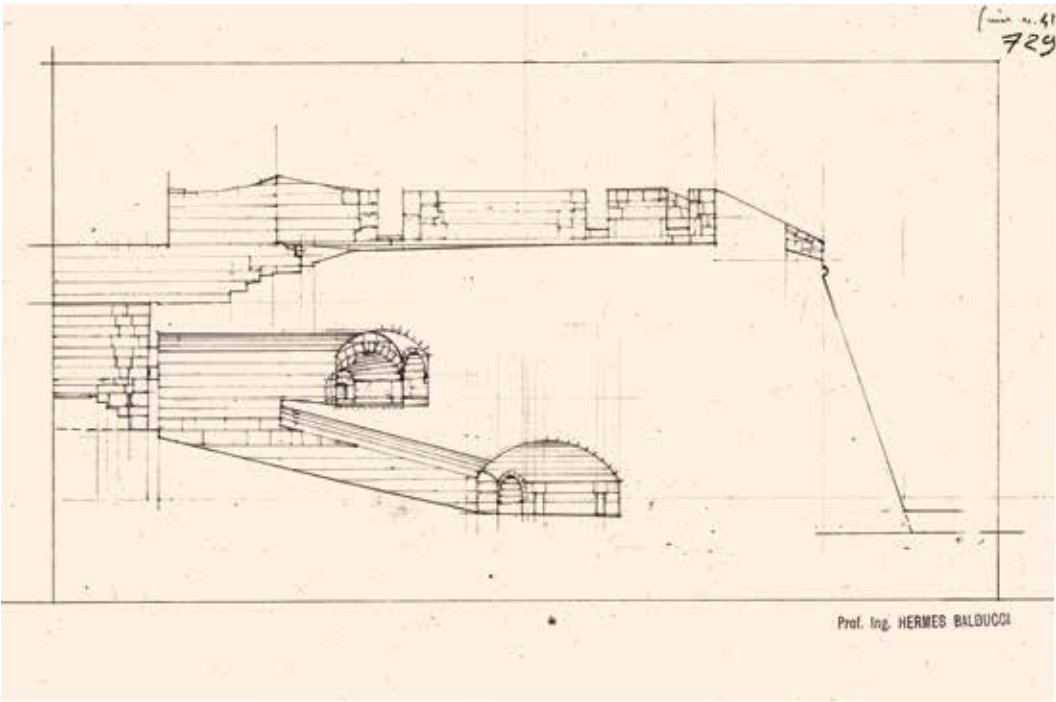
Kos, Kephalos, Basilica of Agios Stephanos, plan. ©Archivi SAIA, Fondo Morricone, Balducci 76.

33 The study of basilica of Agios Stephanos, published in Baldini, Cosentino 2021, take its cue from these first researches.
34 Rocco 1996, p. 78 e 81; Santi 2018, p. 283, and note 476, p. 293.
35 Rocco 1996, p. 81.

Balducci’s interest and documentation activities also extended to the later phases, as evidenced by his drawings of the mid- and late Byzantine churches in the city and on the island (), and of the Hospitallers’ castle of Nerantzia (), which dominates “Città Murata”, the ancient walled citadel in the centre of the Kos city.



Kos, Palaio Pyli, Church of Agios Michail, plan and detail of the entrance door.
©Archivi SAIA, Fondo Morricone, Balducci dis.716.



Kos, Castle of Nerantzia, section of the Great Master del Carretto’s bastion. ©Archivi SAIA, Fondo Morricone, Balducci dis.729.

The monograph on the early Byzantine basilicas of Kos³⁶, which compiles much of the graphic documentation produced by Balducci following his investigations of the monuments, remained for decades the only publication on the subject and served as an indispensable reference for all subsequent studies.

The most visually striking part of this rich documentation - which in some cases is the only surviving evidence - consists of the surveys and watercolours of the floor mosaics of the residential and religious complexes, true works of art both in their material and graphic representation ().

A corpus of fifty-five watercolour plates depicting mosaic pavements is currently preserved in the archives of the Italian Archaeological School in Athens³⁷ as part of a larger body of work that also includes architectural surveys and drawings of religious and civil buildings produced by Balducci during his years in Kos. Although they focus mainly on the mosaic layers and exclude the context of the elevations, these watercolours capture a snapshot of the moment of the discovery. This is particularly important for mosaics whose memory was lost in the turmoil of the Second World War, or those that were relocated, heavily restored and sometimes altered, to decorate the floors of the Palace of the Grand Master of Rhodes. This building underwent extensive renovations between 1937 and 1940 to become the seat of the Italian Governorate, and the mosaics are still preserved there today.

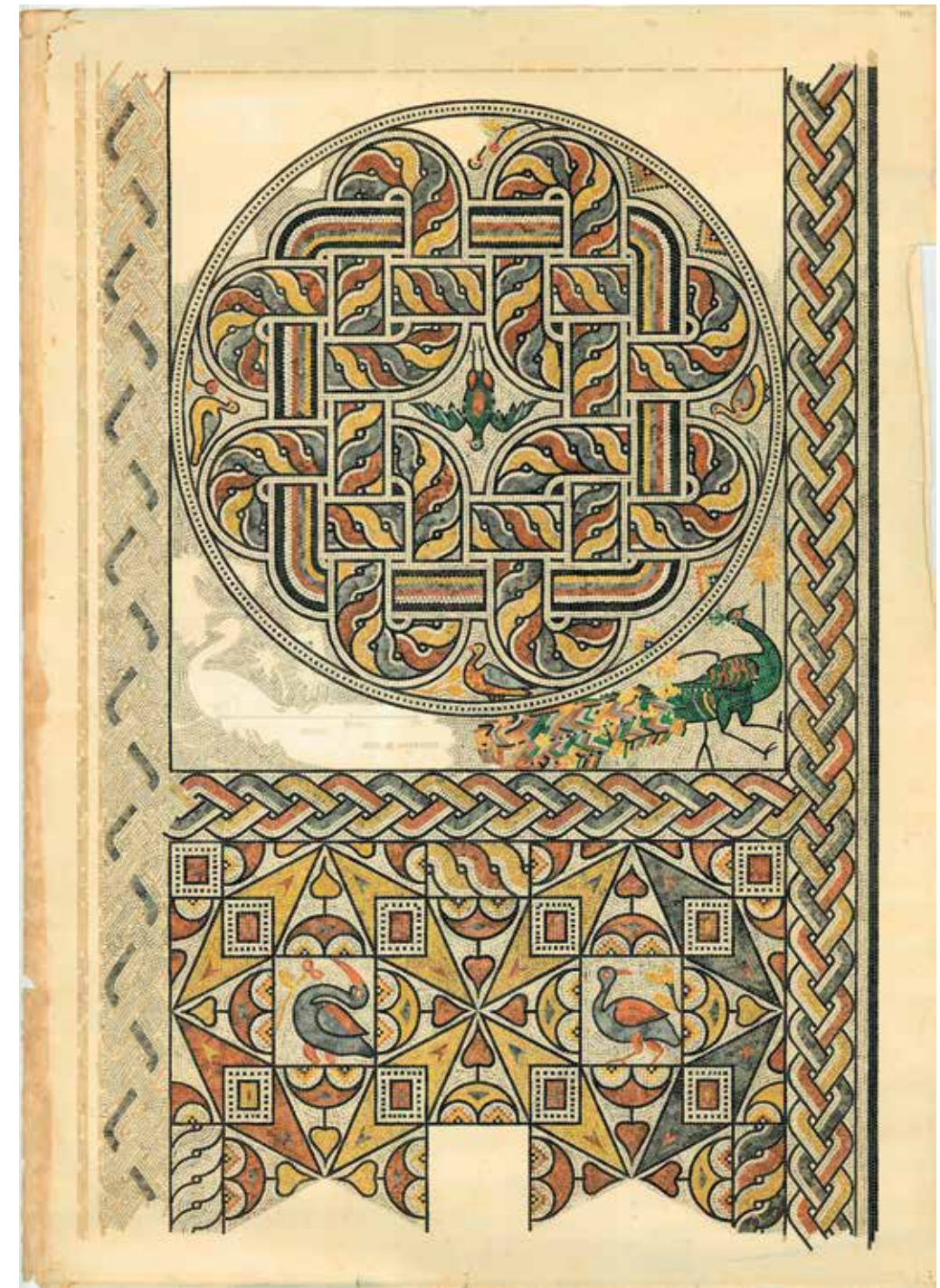
In spite of the historical-political context in which they are set, and regardless of the historical-political interpretations that can be derived from them, Balducci's studies on the Dodecanese (as well as those carried out in Pavia) reveal a genuine scientific interest that transcends mere rhetoric and develops in an encyclopaedic manner. His work ranges from construction techniques to architectural forms and the functional organisation of spaces, from artistic and epigraphic culture to archival sources. These aspects present the image of a curious and meticulous scholar, capable of combining historical synthesis with a rigorous and technical analytical approach to the study of monuments, who still resonates with us today:

«When we then see these ruins [of Agios Stephanos on the Bay of Kephalos] set against the evocative and picturesque background of the nature that surrounds them, with the peculiar violet reflections of the nearby mountains, with the dark blue of the sea that almost surrounds the rock on which they stand, with the islet of Agios Nikolaos rising steeply from the sea nearby, then we, who, instead of being cold surveyors and anatomists of the remains, must elevate ourselves to a higher sense of beauty – the sweet fulfilment of scientific endeavour – and must recognise in the ancient architects not only the builders of a monument but also the eminent users and creators of a landscape that we will never forget for the rest of our lives. Our soul goes into ecstasy as our imagination reconstructs volumes out of the mutilated masonry, and melancholy spreads from the columns that rise senselessly to the sky in a now fruitless effort.»³⁸

36 Balducci 1936; available online at <https://www.thiasos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Balducci-Basiliche-protocristiane-e-bizantine-a-Coo.pdf> (last access 03/04/2025).

37 Published in Michailidou, Papi 2019.

38 Balducci 1936, p. 15-16: “Quando poi noi vediamo questi ruderi inquadrati nello sfondo così suggestivo e pittoresco della natura che li avvolge, con gli speciali riflessi lacei delle montagne vicine, con il cupo azzurro del mare che quasi circonda la roccia sulla quale essi si ergono, con l'isolotto di S. Nicola che sorge scosceso dal mare lì presso, allora noi che, oltre essere freddi rilevatori ed anatomizzatori dei resti, dobbiamo elevarci al senso superiore del bello - dolce completamento della fatica scientifica - , allora dovremo riconoscere negli antichi architetti non solo i costruttori di un monumento ma gli esimi utilizzatori ed insieme creatori di una scenografia che per tutta la vita non potremo giammai dimenticare. Il nostro animo si immerge tutto nell'estasi mentre la fantasia ricostruisce i volumi dalle monche murature e la malinconia si spande dalle colonne che si ergono verso il cielo inani in uno sforzo ormai senza frutto.”



Kos, Kephalos, Basilica of Agios Stephanos, plan and watercolour depiction of a mosaic floor (Great Basilica, narthex, central section). ©Archivi SAIA, Fondo Morricone, Balducci 115.

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