



**Antiquity and Byzantine period**

In antiquity there wasn't a Castle but an impressive fortification wall made out of gigantic stones neatly put the one on top of the other. This ward was encircling the town of Ambracia (the predecessor of Arta) having a length of 4.5km. Later, in Byzantine times, in 1230, when Arta regained its prominence, in the north eastern part of this fortification, Michael II Angelos Doukas Komnenos built the Castle using the ancient wall as its foundation.

**Ottoman period**

In 1449 the Ottomans take over Arta and the new rulers made many alterations in the inside of the castle still visible today. For symbolic reasons they built a mosque in it that stood out. Once more in its history it served as a military and administrative centre. Much later (1796-1820) Ali Pasha made a lot of additions, repairs and tried to modernize the Castle by adding openings for canons and generally by making it accountable to the modern war techniques of the time. On the left of the gate there was an Acropolis which provided extra protection to the people as it was strongly fortified by thick walls, a complex system of entry and defense systems. This area was even used as a prison. Arta gained its independence from the Turks on 24/06/1881

**Modern times**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and until 1958 the castle was still used as a prison. For symbolic reasons again, after the liberation, the mosque was demolished and an orthodox church of All Saints was raised instead. By a Legislative Decree the Castle was given to the Greek Tourist Organisation to build a "Xenia" hotel as part of a programme aiming at the touristic development of the area. For this reason the prison and the church were demolished and the hotel was built in 1960, a fine example of Greek modernism. A new small church was also built. The surrounding area was turned to an impressive park. The hotel played an important role in the social life of the town until 1992 when it stopped working. Since its closing, the hotel was a cause of dispute between the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Arta.



**The history of the Castle of Arta** has been strongly intertwined with the history of the town since very early in time. Its presence shaped the fate of the area in the past, it was strongly related to the social life of the town in modern times until it was sadly abandoned and neglected.

Its location was cleverly chosen as it was naturally protected by the river Arachthos on the outer side. Town wise, all main streets directly led to it so that citizens could easily run to find shelter there in times of enemy attacks.

It was the administrative and military centre of the town encompassing the rulers' palace and the religious buildings of every ethnicity that ever got hold of it. Its prominence was obvious throughout history.

In modern times it was the favourite meeting place for adults to romantically stroll around, for children to play hide and seek on the bastions and battlements or explore the treasures of the leafy, luscious park, for teenagers to have their first timid dates in the well kept gardens. It was the centre of the social life of Arta where magnificent masque balls and crowded parties were held. And then all this bustling activity stopped.

Some time later just a small area of it, left of the central gate, in the Acropolis, was used as a makeshift theatre to host performances in the summers. And as it was expected even this small activity was embraced by the people of Arta.

But now we want to return it to its previous glory. We want to make it once again the gem of our town providing modern and compelling facilities to the residents of the town.

Energy efficiency and good environmental practices will be the compass of our designs and plans. We expect a lot from our future and we have a great sensitivity and respect to our past. We hope with this project we will bring the issue of the abandoned monument to the forefront once more and we may make suggestions of its reuse that maybe even authorities can find interesting, intriguing and plausible. Each one of us should do our best to celebrate our glorious past by bringing it into the present vivid and functional, rendering it useful to the citizens of the town, respecting the environment and cultural heritage.

