

The Cultural Monuments of the Italians in Rhodes and Their Use Today

Maria Manola, Anna-Irini, Tsatalbassoglou & Kleopatra Geronymou
University of Western Attica, Athens, GREECE
Department of Tourism Management

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Abstract

The island of Rhodes forms an exceptionally popular destination, which hosts thousands of visitors every year. Its natural beauty, together with its rich local history, have contributed to that, as it has been a landmark of many historical events. Great is the contribution of the Italian buildings in Rhodes' current image and function, which were constructed under the Italian occupation of the island during 1912-1948. The present paper is referring to the significance of the Italian monuments in Rhodes. Through a historical retrospection that has to do with the construction of the Italian buildings and the people who contributed to it, this paper focuses on a quantitative research through questionnaires and statistical analysis of the data regarding the review of the current condition of those monuments in Rhodes, as well as a presentation of the touristic interest on them. The assignment is enhanced with photographic depiction and subtitling of the monuments in their current state.

Keywords: Rhodes, touristic interest, cultural monuments, Italian occupation.

1. Introduction

Rhodes is located in the southeastern Aegean and is the largest island of the Dodecanese. The island, thanks to its geographical location, constitutes an important spot of the encounter of many different cultures, as well as commercial transactions, since it is located between the Aegean Sea and the Middle East Sea. It is also well known for its wines, figs and thyme honey. Main natural resource is the sea, where the extended coastline and the coastal environment, favor the development of different forms of tourism (Logothetis, 2004). It provides a stunning natural landscape that hosts many kinds of animals, such as the deer of Rhodes named Platoni and the small horse of Rhodes that is known to be the second smallest in size horse in the world. The Butterflies Meadow is of special interest, as the butterflies of the Panaxia *Quadrupunctaria* kind breed in beautiful green scenery with running waters (Manola, 2022).

Rhodes has fallen into the hands of many conquerors in the past. This is why it has had a lot of different names such as “The Island of the Knights”, due to the mark that the Battalion of Saint John’s Knights left behind, “The Island of the Sun” because of having sunlight during the whole year and “The Emerald Island” because of its shape that is similar to a gemstone (deepi.gr). The history of Rhodes can be divided as follows (Koutsochristos, 2017):

- Ancient times: The excavations show that the island had been inhabited in the Neolithic era (6.000-3.000 B.C.) and developed during the Minoan era, while in the middle of the 2nd millennium, it was inhabited by the Achaeans. During the Roman times the island became a significant commercial and economical force, and soon adopted/ welcomed the Christian Orthodox faith. In fact, it was one of the stops of the Apostle Paul, who taught in Lindos.
- The Knights' era: In 1399 the island was conquered by the Battalion of Saint John's Knights of Jerusalem. The aim of the creation of the battalion in the 12th century A.D. was the hospitalization and the medical care of the worshippers and the crusaders, but later on it turned into a military unit and conquered large land areas. After the retreat of the Battalion from Jerusalem and Cyprus, it established its base in Rhodes, thus acquiring a leading role in the Eastern Mediterranean. During the time of the Knights' stay, the island thrived.
- Ottoman Occupation: In December of 1522 the Knights, incapable of coping with the siege of Suleiman the Magnificent, they submitted into the convention of Rhodes in the South-eastern Aegean. Alongside with the Knights, 3.000 to 4.000 Greeks departed from Rhodes. The ones who stayed in the city were forced to settle out of the fortified part of it.
- Italian Occupation: Rhodes remained in the Turkish hands and in 1912 it was occupied by the Italians who built great constructions in the city, until the end of the World War II. The island came under the Greek territory, along with the rest of the Dodecanese in 1948.

2. Italian occupation and cultural monuments

The Italians took over the island of Rhodes in 1912 and in February 1923, Mario Lago takes on the administration of the island according to leader Mussolini's orders. At that time the Italians focused mostly on modernizing and organizing Rhodes, something they accomplished by creating road networks, public buildings for the administrative, economical and institutional organization and also houses for their needs (Louloudaki, 2016). The architects who participated in the construction of the Italian public buildings were Florestano Di Fausto, Cesare Maria De Vecchi and Armando Bernabiti. The architectural standards that were followed were the Renaissance, Gothic, Venetian, Baroque and Arabesque. Their work is the following (Farmakidis, 2020):

- ◆ Foro Italico (Di Fausto's work), meaning the administrative center of the city, which consisted of:
 - The New Market (1925-1926), in the Arabesque architectural style.
 - The Bank of Italy (1931-1933) in the Eclectic style.
 - Aktaion (1925-1927), which up until 1925 when the reconstruction begun by Di Fausto under the command of Mario Lago, was a building that used to house the Reformist Neo-Turks' Club of the Committee "Unity and Progress" that was fighting the Sultan.
 - The Courts (1927-1928), in monumental fascistic style.
 - The Administration (1926-1927) in the Eclectic style.
 - The Post Office (1927-1928) also in the Eclectic style.

A little further from the administrative center Foro Italico, begins a new sequence of buildings that this time have a recreational character. Those buildings are:

- ◆ The Sea Bathhouses Elli in the Eclectic style.
- ◆ The Sailing Club also in the Eclectic style.
- ◆ The Hotel of Roses (1925-1927) in the Arabesque architectural style.
- ◆ The Aquarium (1934-1935) by the architect Armando Bernabiti, in a global style, which lies in the cape.

In the cape, where the zone of recreation ends, lies the ellipsoidal square where eight roadways gather and where there are many residences of the Italian soldiers. Other works of Di Fausto were:

- ◆ The Building of the Archdiocese (1925-1929).
- ◆ The Housekeeping (1926) that was practically a school in which the nuns used to teach.
- ◆ The Port Authority (1926-1927).
- ◆ The Military Police School (1924-1926).
- ◆ The Annunciation (1924-1925) in cooperation with Bernabiti, which is a copy of Saint John of the Knights' Temple in the Medieval Town, that was ruined in 1853 as, according to witnesses, a lightning struck on it or next to it, where the Turks were keeping their ammunition.
- ◆ The Catholic, Muslim and Jewish Cemetery (1924).
- ◆ The Korona Villa (1927).
- ◆ The Public Square of the Big Fountain, as well as the buildings around it (1929-1930).
- ◆ The Female Orphanage (1923-1924).
- ◆ The Academy (1924-1925) in the Eclectic style.

In 1936 new administrator of the Dodecanese becomes De Vecchi, who transfers the administrative center in the Impero Square which is surrounded by the following buildings by the architect Bernabiti:

- ◆ The Puccini Theatre (1936-1937).
- ◆ The Military Administration Centre (1938-1939).
- ◆ The City Hall (1936-1939) Some more of his work is:
 - The Scouts Club (1932).
 - Saint Francis Church (1936-1939).
 - Kallithea (1928-1930) in the Eclectic style.

3. Monument renovations by the Italians

The Italians played an important role in the renovation of the monuments of the Medieval Town, in their effort to carry out the vision of restoring the magnificent architecture of the Knights in order to maintain their memory in the history too (Kollias, 2007). They rebuilt a part of the Knights' Street and a part of the Grand Master's Palace in the medieval style, removing the Turkish constructions that had preceded during the Turkish occupation. They repaired the Knights' Hospital in the Symi Square, the Mansion of Kastellania and the perimeter of the walls. They also managed to reconstruct churches and restore them into their original state. Representative examples of the Italian renovations are Panagia of Filerimos, the Knights' Hospital of the 15th century and the Grand Master's Palace (Proceedings 4th International Symposium, 1997).

3.1 *Panagia of Filerimos*

The Monastery of Panagia of Filerimos lies on the mountain Filerimos, south of Ialisos. In the beginning it was a citadel and then a castle, before it was turned into a church. With the arriving of the Knights the Monastery was on the hilltop, in a small temple devoted to Panagia as the core of the Monastery and many more chapels in touch with the temple (monastiria.gr). In 1953 it falls into the hands of the Ottomans and after the Turkish occupation, in the hands of the Italians. Thus, the Italians start a sequence of reconstructing actions of the temple. In 1934 they created a path which depicted the path the Jesus Christ followed to Calvary with engraved representations of Jesus Christ on the Cross. At the end of the path, they built an enormous 18-meter tall cross with internal stairs so that the visitors have access to it (Filippou, 2016).

3.2 *The Knights' Hospital of the 15th century*

The Hospital was built by the Knights as the battalion was initially created for medical care purposes, even though it later acquired a military character. A fact worth mentioning is that this hospital is the only one in the Mediterranean that is well preserved among the seats the Battalion of the Knights in the Eastern Mediterranean (Proceedings 4th International Symposium, 1997). According to descriptions of the 12th century, it was able to take care of up to one thousand patients, but in exceptional cases of invasions and epidemics, this number could double. The amount of the patients was supervised by four doctors and four surgeons, with the help of employees divided in the eleven male patient chambers and also the female patient chambers. In 1912 the Hospital falls in the hands of the Italians, who, right away, began the renovation procedures regarding the building. The first ones to engage in this were Giuseppe Gerola and Amedeo Maiuri. During the renovation procedures, a sign, which mentions that the date of the Hospital's establishment was 1440 and the donor was the Catalan Grand Master of the Antoni Fluvia Battalion, was accidentally discovered; it was then placed in the eastern main entrance, on the facade of the patients' chapel (Kollias, 2007).

3.3 *The Grand Master's Palace*

During the Knights' era, the Grand Master's Palace was a magnificent castle above the Medieval Town, which was well fortified and also used to constitute "a shelter of the people in case of occupation of the city from the enemy" (Kollias, 1994). As the time was passing, the castle was deteriorated by earthquakes and other disasters and, when it fell in the hands of the Turks, it was abandoned and started to fall down. When the Italians took on its restoration, managed, during De Vecchi's era, to reconstruct a great part of the palace. Special effort was needed for the upper

floor of the palace, which had fallen down in the middle of the 19th century and only a few data managed to be saved (Kollias, 2007).

4. Current state of the Italian monuments in Rhodes

Nowadays, some of the public buildings' function keeps being the same, but some others show a few changes in their function. The Italian architecture had a great effect on the island's order and the pattern, positively affecting the economy as well as the society. The current function of the Italian buildings and the social and economic contribution, as it has been shaped nowadays, is the following (Koltsikoglou & Als, 2022):

- ◆ The New Market maintains its initial function up until today.
- ◆ The Bank of Italy houses The Bank of Greece today.
- ◆ Aktaion that once used to house the Club, today it has turned into a pastry shop.
- ◆ The Courts have maintained their function up until today.
- ◆ The Administration now houses the Prefecture.
- ◆ The Post Office operates as ELTA (Greek Post Offices).
- ◆ The Hotel of Roses has turned into the Casino of Rhodes.
- ◆ The ellipsoidal square that lied in the end of the recreational zone is now the Charitou Square.
- ◆ The Puccini Theatre of Bernabiti today operates as the Municipal Theatre of Rhodes.
- ◆ The Kallithea Thermal Springs were, during the Italian occupation, a true jewel of Rhodes, with elaborate decoration and respect to the environment, thanks to the architect Armando Bernabiti, but when the springs fell into the German hands, they turned into a penitentiary with barbed wires and minefields. Several years later, it passed on the Greek hands, and in the course of time it was restored and now is a unique and modern group that hosts congresses and it is open to visitors (kallitheasprings.com).

The Italian Public Buildings affected the economy and the image of Rhodes in their current look. The cultural heritage that the Knights of Jerusalem's Battalion left behind after the renovation procedures by the Italians, played a decisive role for the projection and preservation of the city and its history. The Medieval Town had oft-times been hit by natural phenomena, invasions and occupations by enemies (Pachos, 2005). Thanks to the construction of all the aforementioned Italian Buildings, Rhodes developed and improved. The good administration, as well as the creation of a nice road network, contributed in the transformation of the island into a significant commercial center in the Mediterranean and the East. Thus, the commercial transactions brought economic boom as an external factor, and the recreational zone further form Foro Italico worked as an internal mechanism of money flow (Logothesis, 2004).

The Knights left their architectural seal, with the castles, the churches, the towers, and the customs they brought with their arrival in the island as well, for which the locals had a positive response. During their era, an artistic development was noticed in many fields, since the Knights brought new currents in sculpting as their elaborate sculptures would decorate the whole island, something that also affected the field of painting, literature and poetry giving a new inspiration (Manousaki, 2020).

5. Research regarding the tourist interest in the Italian Monuments nowadays

Below are cited the results of the quantitative research that was carried out through a questionnaire of 300 participants. The research showed that the two sexes were almost equal in number, with the females surpassing the males for a little bit reaching 55%. The biggest part of the participants belong in the age group of 18-25 years old (49%), while the second biggest amount concerns the age group of 37-47 years old (21%). When it comes to the educational level, the research showed that most of them were High School graduates (44%), followed by University graduates in 23%. Among the 300 respondents, the most seem to be university students (39%) surpassing a little the employees who reach the 37%. Additionally, almost half of them seem to have visited Rhodes (45%) but the rest 55% has not. According to the people's opinion, summer is the most suitable season to visit Rhodes (75.8%) and then spring (11%), while the most common reason to visit the island seems to be the sun and the sea, as well as, rest and recreation (69.2), while the museums and the excursions are also equal, reaching the 23.1%.

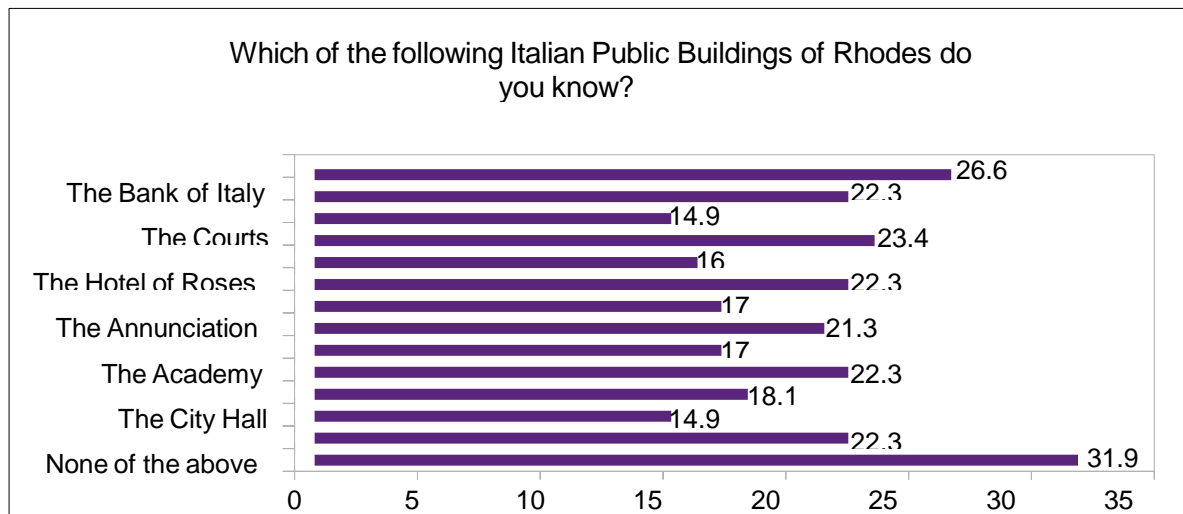


Chart 1.

Chart 1: According to the first chart, it is observed that the Italian Public Buildings are not completely unknown to the public, however, the answer: "None of the above" prevails (31.9%) but the most popular of the Italian constructions is the New Market (26.6%) and then the Bank of Italy, the Hotel of the Roses, the Academy and Kallithea (22.3%).

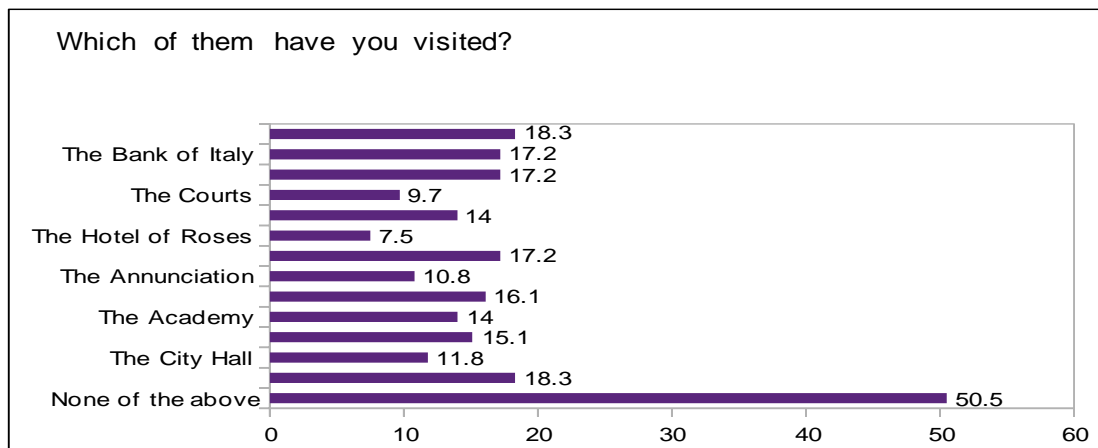


Chart 2.

Chart 2: The second chart shows that the traffic comparing to the popularity of the buildings do not agree, as most of the respondents have never visited them (50.5%). Nevertheless, the buildings with the most traffic are the New Market and Kallithea (18.3%).

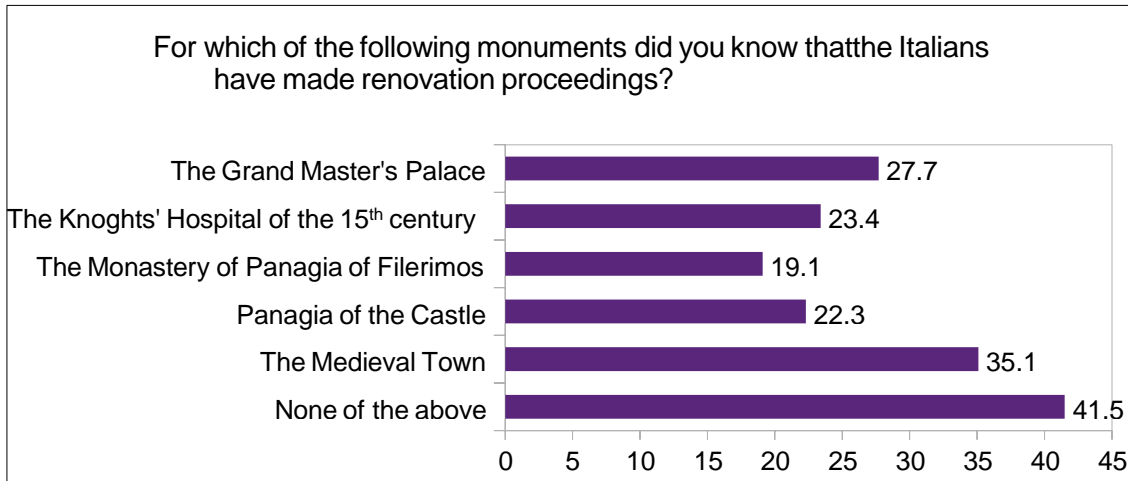


Chart 3.

Chart 3: The following question was about how many of the Knights' monuments which the Italians reconstructed are known to the people. The answers were satisfying enough because even though the answer "None of the above" still prevails (41.5%), there were many people who knew some of them. The most known of all seemed to be the Medieval Town (35.1%) and right after that comes the Grand Master's Palace (27.7%).

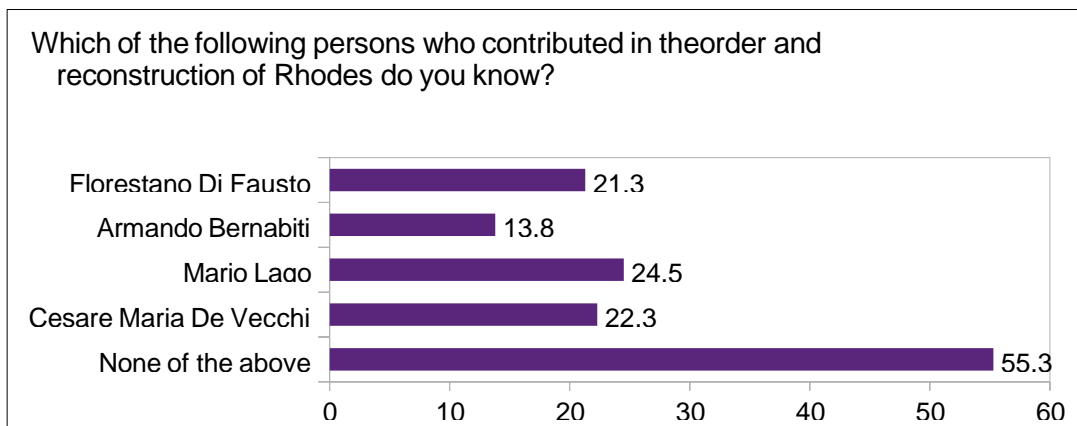


Chart 4.

Chart 4: According to the fourth chart, the most popular among the Italian figures are Mario Lago (24.5%), follows the commander De Vecchi and then the rest of them, while the 55.3% of the participants do not know them.

Chart 5: The penultimate question concerns which fields it is believed that the Italian architecture has affected the island of Rhodes and the results were the following:

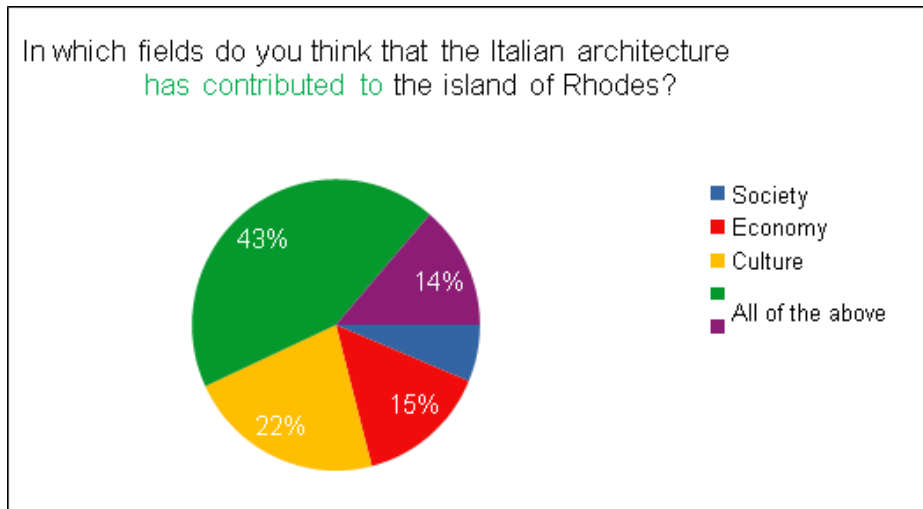


Chart 5.

Chart 6: The last question was regarding how much it is believed that the Italian architecture affects the island and the percentage shows that the Italian monuments have gained a lot of tourist interest, thus they work as a visitor's attraction, at both a national and an international level.

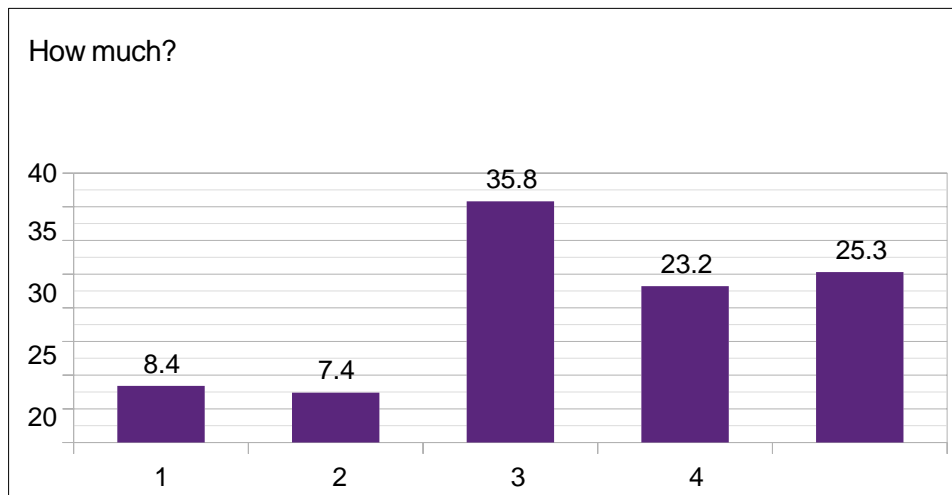


Chart 6.

6. Conclusion

Rhodes is an island rich in history, which reveals the cultural imprints of the conquerors. Since the ancient times, to the Battalion of Jerusalem's Knights, later to the Ottomans, then to the Italians until the liberation in 1948. The biggest architectural imprint was left by the Knights with the castles, the churches and the monuments that the Italians renovated later on. The Italians' contribution was of great importance as their constructions were a definite sign of the island's prosperity. According to the research, it was discovered that the presence of the Italians is apparent to the visitors and constitutes an attraction of tourists nowadays.

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The results from the research:

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