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MISTRA



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M I S T R A

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whom I hence thank.*

BRIEF HISTORY

When one arrives outside the walls of Mistra, one thinks that the way up the dead city must be very difficult. Yet, narrow paths winding themselves up the hill can bring one without his realizing it, to the top (621 m. altitude) crowned by the fort of Villehardouin built in 1249 to protect the valley of the Eurotas against the invasions of unmanageable slavonic tribes living in Taygetos (pl. 1).

It seems, though, that before the fort was built there was a little country chapel up there, ruined today, the earliest of Mistra's structures. One of its walls was later embodied in the fort.

The hill was called Myzithras, probably because it belonged to someone who made «myzithras» (a kind of cheese).

The hill is very steep, and therefore quite convenient for the erection of a fortress. Villehardouin did not hold the fort for long. A prisoner of the Byzantines after the battle of Pelagony (1259), Villehardouin was forced in 1262 to offer as ransom for his liberation the forts of Monemvasia and Mani and «τρίτον καὶ εὐμειρότερον τοῦ Μυζιθρά τὸ κάστρο» (the third and most beautiful the fort of Myzithras).

So, there came at last to Mistra a Byzantine general as governor. Yet, bitter struggles were continually carried on between the Franks and the Byzantines but without final effect.

The inhabitants of Sparta, which in the Byzantine times was called Lakedaemonia, suffered severely.

As a result they began to abandon their city and came to Mistra so that they could have the protection of the Byzantine general. In this way the city of Mistra was colonized and surrounded by a wall, which can be seen running round the hill and above the nunnery of Pantanassa enclosing the place where the palaces stand and ending on the north-western steep hillside.

Here, too, the seat of the Metropole of Lakedaemonia was moved.

In the course of time the new city grew and spread outside the wall. New houses and large monasteries, such as Vrontochion and Pantanassa, were built. All these new buildings, though, had to be protected and so a new wall was built, fortified with towers (pl. 2). This wall, weak as it was, was intended to allow the inhabitants the time needed to take shelter, in case of attack, in the second wall and especially in the fort. Of course the hill of Mistra was not fit for building a city up there. Hard times, though, forced the Greeks, persecuted by the enemies of the race, to take shelter, on steep places and erect cities which at the same time served as forts.

At first the authority of the Byzantine general lasted one year. Afterwards the generals were made permanent governors of the place. Later, Emperor John VI Kantakouzinus thought that if he connected Mistra directly with the crown, he would improve the administration and the whole situation in Mistra.

Therefore, he sent his second-born son, Despot Manuel, as governor.

Thus the Despotaton of Moreas was founded, in which lived during the 15th century the famous platonic philosopher Plethon Gemistos.

The Kantakouzinus dynasty was succeeded by the

dynasty of the Palaeologues. The perultimate Palaeologue Despot of Mistra was Constantine, an excellent sovereign, whose dream was to extend the Despotaton of Moreas all over the mainland of Greece.

He advanced victoriously as far as Pindos but was forced to retreat back to Peloponnese, being defeated by the Turks and forced to pay a certain tax to them.

After the death of his brother John VIII, Constantine was proclaimed in Mistra Emperor of Byzantium and from here he set out for Constantinople, which he heroically defended later, and the throne of which he washed in his blood.

Constantine's successor in Mistra was his brother Demetrius who, in 1460, was forced to hand Mistra over to the Turks. A little later, in 1464, the Venetians under the governorship of Sigismund Malatesta (governor of Rimini) tried to liberate Mistra but without effect. Only much later in 1687, was Mistra liberated by Francis Morozinis. The Venetians stayed there until 1715.

From statistics we know that by this time the city's population was 42.000. During the revolution of 1770 Mistra was burned down by the Albanians after which many families moved lower down to the new Mistra. The city was burned again in 1825 by Imbraim's soldiers.

The final blow to Mistra was brought about by the foundation of modern Sparta by King Otto. The most prominent families of the city moved to the new town. There were some 30 families left in the archaeological area of Mistra until 1952, when, at the expense of the Greek Archaeological Society, they were removed and left completely free for scientific inquiry Mistra, something really unique in Greece: the ruins of a whole city of the last years of the Byzan-

tine Empire, a Byzantine Pompeia. Narrow lanes are preserved as well as ruins of the fort, the walls, the houses, the palaces, the churches, the monasteries, the fountains. So the visitor can draw many conclusions regarding the way of life of the Byzantine residents of the city.

What makes Mistra hold, even today, an outstanding position in the study of Byzantine Art, is the fact that here we can see concentrated together so many different variations of Byzantine painting during the Palaeologue period.

But let us start visiting the monuments one by one.

[ST. DEMETRIUS

After entering Mistra through the gate that stands at the end of the motor-road (the gate of one of the towers of the outside wall) and turning northwards, we stand in front of the Cathedral dedicated to St. Demetrius.

It was built by Bishop Nikiforus Moschopoulos in the late thirteenth century.

The eastern wall, which we meet on our way, is built with great care of golden-yellowish poros stone harmonizing nicely with the red plinths that encircle them (pl. 3).

The windows are decorated with an indented ribbon and the side vaults over the arches with plates with marble applications.

At the corner rises the more recent steeple, as stoutly built as a Frankish tower. As we enter the group of the Cathedral Buildings (fig. 1) (which is surrounded by a wall and has assumed the form of a monastery), near a little door is a railing indicating the place where, according to tradition, in 1760 the Turks killed the Bishop

of Mistra Anania Lambardi, an active and clever man.

After crossing the outer courtyard we descend, by an imposing staircase, to the church of St. Demetrius.

On the right we see the fountain which Bishop Chrysanthus built in 1802.

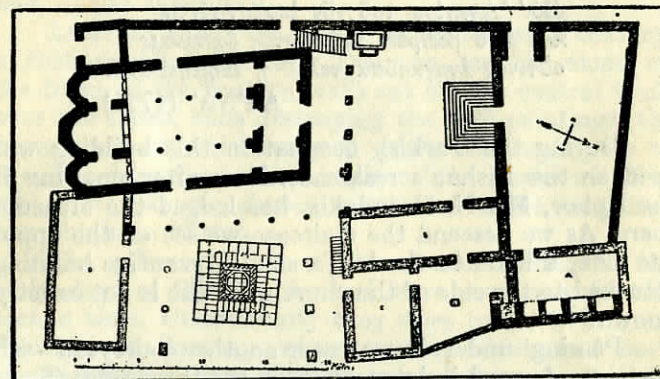


Fig. 1. Plan of the Cathedral buildings

Having ascended a small staircase which is near the fountain, we can see an inscription built in this outer southern¹ wall of the church. The inscription tells that the church was built by Nikiforus Moschopoulos with his brother's cooperation, in 1292 the time when Andronikus Palaeologue was king with his son Michael co-reigning.

Over the western door, in a dactylic inscription the founder Nikiforus is mentioned.

1. The terms southern, northern etc are conventional here because the churches of Mistra do not always have the sanctuary looking to the east. Here we call the sanctuary side eastern and the others accordingly.

Τόνδε δόμον πόδεσι, φίλος, ἐμβεβαῶς ἀγανοῦσι¹
μνώεο Νικηφόροιο δομήτορος ἀρχιερεῖος.

Lastly opposite to the fountain, there is a two-floor building. It was built by Ananias Lambardis in 1754, as the inscription indicates.

Οὐκέτι δόμοι καὶ πύλαι παλαιάφατοι²⁻³

ἀλλ' Ἀνανίου τοῦ νῦν ἱεραρχοῦντος

καὶ ἀπὸ βάθρων νεώσαντος δαπάναις

οὔτινος ἐνεγκοῦσα τελεῖ ἡ Δημητσάνα.

ΑΨΝΔ' (1754)

During the Turkish occupation this building was used as the Bishop's residence. Now after repairing it the Ephor, Mr. N. Drandakis, has lodged the Museum there. As we descend the staircase we see on the opposite side, a little to the left, a small Byzantine building attached to the side of the church. Its use is not exactly known.

Passing under it we enter another courtyard with porticoes, formed in later years, on the three sides. Their arches are slender and remind one of the Renaissance style. On the wall of the church facing the courtyard there were the portraits of the Bishops of Lakedaemonia. Very few of them are maintained to this day. There is a two-floor building attached to the one side of the sanctuary which is now used as office of the Archaeological Service of Mistra and as residence of the Ephor.

The church does not maintain its original style

1. When with chaste feet, Friend, this building you tread, remember Nikiforus founder, high priest.

2. The inscription is in the upper floor and we can see it from the balcony.

3. These buildings and gates are not old but Ananias, the present high priest, has from the foundations erected them at the expense which Demetsana has procured.

to this day. When it was first built it was a three aisled Basilica, the style they usually gave the Cathedrals. The side aisles have remained unchanged. The middle high vault had many windows on both sides over the colonnades, which afforded abundant light to the church. Two of its original windows can still be seen in the sanctuary.

Later, in about the middle of the fifteenth century, a Bishop called Matthew (we can see his name on the frieze of the western wall) cut off the central vault over the frieze, thus destroying the wall-paintings, the lower part of which only is preserved, and gave to it a five-domed cruciform style on the model of Afentiko, a well known church which had in the meantime been built in Mistra.

The pillar capitals of the church belong to the early days of Christianity and were used now for the second time. Undoubtedly they were taken from some Basilicas of Sparta, unknown still, which had been ruined by that time. On the ground there are beautiful marble coverings and a few mosaics. In the centre of the church, under the dome, there is a marble plate with the two-headed eagle of the Palaeologues carved in relief. According to tradition the Despot of Mistra Constantine Palaeologue was crowned Emperor of Byzantium on this plate. He was the last Emperor of Constantinople.

The marble icon-stands built in the two walls that divide the sanctuary into three parts are also beautiful. Their art is very delicate. The arch of the right one with the acanthus motif delicately made by drill, looks like lace.

The original marble templon is quite disfigured by repairs. The Byzantine templa consisted of small pillars connected on top by means of a frieze. At the bottom the gaps between them were closed with

marble engraved plates, the so called thoracia. Higher up, where today we place the icons, there were open spaces closed by screens. The wooden throne of the Bishop is more recent with a strong Baroque influence. The pulpit on the western wall is much more recent. It was built in the years of the Turkish occupation. On the southwestern pillar, there is an inscription going back to the year 1311/12 mentioning again the builder Nikiphorus and showing the lands with which he endowed the Church. There are similar later Bishops' inscriptions on other pillars too.

The wall-paintings of St. Demetrius are quite remarkable though their preservation is not very good. It seems that the painting began at the northern aisle. On the eastern side of the vault we have more scenes from the «Synaxarion» (book of saints' lives) of St. Demetrius than in any other earlier church dedicated to the great Martyr. Over the door the martyrdom of St. Demetrius is clearly portrayed. In the distance there is a sheer cliff in front of which stand the executioners with their legs crossed. St. Demetrius himself on a higher plane, set alone under a bow. These paintings strongly remind one of works of the 12th century. That is why many suppose that the church was built then. It is most probable though that these paintings were made by provincial artists who kept painting according to the old standards without having been acquainted with the new development of the art.

On the contrary, in the southern aisle the style of the wall-paintings is very different. The series of the full-figure disciples painted on the lower part, is one of the best of the paintings that are preserved in Mistra. The saints are drawn stout with a lively movement which is made still more vivid by the dim lines of the faces. The folds of the robes are expressive

and the colours chosen in such a way as to compose a harmonious whole.

These paintings express a realistic disposition of the artist and can be associated with the so called Macedonian school of Palaeologue painting. In the same aisle into the arch of the sanctuary, one can see a beautiful painting of a different style. It shows the preparation of the throne, but unfortunately it is not well distinguished. The wall-paintings of the Narthex though, are of the same style, all of which refer to Christ's Second Coming. Over the western door we have the subject of the preparation of the throne again. In the middle a throne symbolizes the Heavenly Father. On the throne the gospel and cross symbolize Jesus, and a pigeon hovering over it, the Holy Ghost. Adam and Eve are kneeling on either side of it while behind them two groups of angels stand symmetrically placed with their red wings raised upwards like flames. The style that marks the composition, the gentleness, the elegance, and grace of the angels are distinctive features of the idealistic school of Palaeologian times, usually called «Cretic School». On the western wall of the southern arch of the Narthex red entangled ribbons reminding tree-trunks in a forest represent the flames of Hell, and amongst them are painted those who led immoral lives, now undergoing punishment in after-death life (purgatory).

THE MUSEUM

Under the staircase leading to the balcony of St. Demetrius a door lets us in the ground-floor room of the Museum. Outside it there are reliefs of the early days of Christianity exhibited. The room as well as the inner yard (we pass to it through the room) is dedicated to decorative sculpture on stone. On the

western wall there are, for the most part, inscriptions exhibited. In the centre is shown the memorial inscription of St. Theodori builder :

«Ὁ θεῖος οὗτος ἀνεγέρχεται δόμος
τῶν Θεοδώρων, Δανιὴλ Παχωμίου
ἔχειν μονα[χοῦς...»

It is engraved on part of a cornice, the oblique side of which is carved with delicate carvings. A little above it there are the monograms of Despina «Ζαμπέα ντὲ Λεζηνάω» (Isabelle de Lusignan) engraved on two separate pieces (pl. 6). Isabelle was the wife of Despot Manuel Kantakouzinos.

A little to the right stands the memorial inscription of the builder of a little chapel of Mistra which used to be thought of as the chapel of Taxiarches, but turned out to be dedicated to the Saviour. It was built in 1455 by a nobleman named Loucani. Above the inscriptions, on a relief icon-stand, there are two birds represented. This engraved icon-stand as well as the symbols of Evangelists John and Mark, which we have on the opposite side—an eagle and a lion—come from the church of Mistra Pantanassa. On either side of a window and the door that lets us into the inner yard, there have been placed pieces of engraved door-frames. One can also see exhibited pieces of thoracia, of little templon pillars, of cornice, coverings of little window pillars, a decorative slab with engravings looking like embroidery, and opposite to it, on a roundcut piece of marble, an engraved imitation of a Byzantine decorative plate. In the centre of the eastern side a large engraved plate represents Jesus (pl. 7b). Of course its art is nothing extraordinary, but its importance is great because it is an example of the local sculpture of Mistra. It was placed in the church of Peribleptos.

In the inner yard there are articles not too well preserved or which are heavier. The one that is distinctive is a beautiful Byzantine capital on a pillar near the opposite door. It has engraved animals in the centre of each side. On one side of the yard there are Turkish and on the other Jewish inscriptions. Pieces of wall-paintings mainly dug out in chapels as well as other tiny artistic articles are to be exhibited in the hall upstairs.

EVANGELISTRIA

As we leave the group of the Cathedral buildings and we go northward we see standing on the left side the little church of Evangelistria (fig. 2). It is a di-

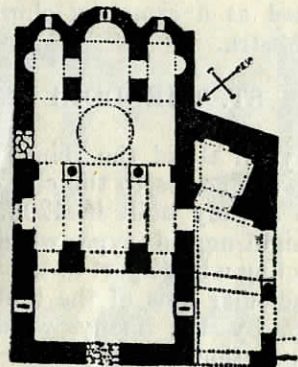


Fig. 2. Plan of Evangelistria

style, cruciform, domed church built probably in the late 14th century or at the start of the 15th. The dome is very elegant with four windows and four cavities between (pl. 8). The vault has ample tile decoration on

the north arm of the cross. The church has something unique among distyle churches: a two-story Narthex. On the western side of the Narthex there is another domed room like an outer Narthex. On the northern side the church has two gates, one of which, the older one, has now been blocked up. The other has an engraved door frame, which has come from the templon of the church.

Especially remarkable is the decoration in relief. By its close-knittedness it shows that it was made especially for this church and is an example of the sculpture-decoration in Mistra. The ornament of the capitals looks as though it were copied from a piece of folk embroidery. A few pieces of wall-paintings are saved that seem to be merely provincial work imitating mechanically better styles. The church of Evangelistria was used as a cemetery church for the last inhabitants of Mistra.

ST. THEODORI

A little way off stand the ruins of Vrontochion Monastery. First one comes to the church of St. Theodori which was already built in 1296. The church is of cruciform, eight-angled type which is noted for the big dome roofing a large part of the building (fig. 3).

The perpendicular axis of the building is emphasized externally by the many windows, imitation windows and imitation pillars of the dome. The horizontal axis too, is also emphasized on the eastern side by horizontal decorative zones. But on the eastern side the transition from the horizontal to the perpendicular axis is gentle and gradual, with stair-like roofs and with windows lower at the end, and taller towards the middle of the central arch (pl. 9). The Narthex must surely have been a later addition. The building

is of the same style as the Catholicon of the Monastery of Daphni, of St. Lucas of Levadia, of Virgin Saviour Lycodemou (Russian church) in Athens and St. Sophia of Monemvasia, on which the Mistra church is supposed to be modelled. But it is the stamp of the Palaeologian elegance and grace that has been put on this building.

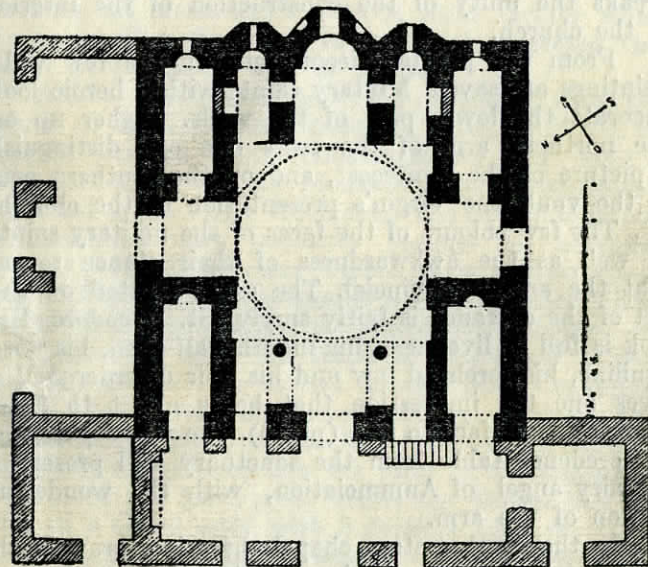


Fig. 3. Plan of St. Theodori

Inside, two pillars supported the dome on the western side.

They had been lost once and at a later reconstruction of the church they were replaced by two four-sided supports. The interior of the church has

a fine unity. The surface of the walls is unique. They are not cut even by a cornice (usually attached at the springing point of the arches).

In the four corners of the churches of this style (eight-cornered) there are usually four chapels. Here, the two eastern ones have very low doors leading into the church while the entrance of the western ones is outside the church in the Narthex. In this way nothing breaks the unity of the construction of the interior of the church.

From the painted decorations only a few wall-paintings are saved. Military saints with a heroic look decorate the lower part of the walls. Higher up on the northern arm of the cross one can distinguish a picture of the Pentecost, and on the southern arm of the vault the Virgin's presentation to the church.

The few colours of the faces of the military saints as well as the awkwardness of their stance reveal that the art is provincial. The saint painted on the left of the entrance is fairly surely St. Theodore. His look is full of liveliness, his mouth half-open, his nose aquiline, his forehead low and his hair disordered. He gives one the impression that he is about to fight against danger face to face (pl. 10). The wall separating the credence table from the sanctuary still preserves the airy angel of Annunciation, with the wonderful motion of the arm.

In the north-eastern chapel there is a grave with remains of the dead man's portrait near by, who, on his knees, is praying to the Virgin. His name is preserved in an inscription, Manuel Palaeologue. It has been thought that it was the Emperor Manuel II Palaeologue, but the conjecture is not right because we know that the Emperor died in 1425 and was not buried in Mistra. Outside the church there are the ruins of the Monastery's dinning-hall. The task of

revealing the cells now rests with the spade of the archaeologist.

AFENTIKO

To the enclosure of St. Theodori Monasteri is attached the Monastery of Hodigitria. On entering the enclosure we notice on the right many arched doors marking the Monastery's cells. A little farther stand the ruins of a five-story tower which protected this corner of the outer wall of Mistra.

Abbot Pachomios was not satisfied with the church of St. Theodori; therefore, later, in 1310, he brought masons from Constantinople and built a new Catholicon of the Monastery of Vrontochion dedicated to the Virgin Hodigitria. The church is known as Afentikon very probably because an «Afentis» (Despot) of Mistra was buried there, prince Theodore II Palaeologue. Pachomios had established libraries in his Monastery and so helped poor scholars. He was connected with the Imperial Court and it was not difficult for him to call masons from Constantinople. The church was surrounded by porticoes and chapels on the model of churches of the Capital (pl. 11). Internally the church has the form of a three-aisled Basilica on the lower part. Above the church has the form of a Greek cross with 5 cupolas. (fig. 4).

The combination possesses a great perfection which shows that the first tests of this style were not made here. The side aisles are not adequately lighted, and their dim semi-light, as it offers a contrast to the abundant light of the central space, heightens the importance of the latter.

Everything in the church is wisely calculated. The curves of its arches were rightly called melodious. The church combines orthomarmarosis (marble plate

applications) with wall-paintings on the lower walls up to the cornice. This combination of orthomarmarosis and wall-paintings is not met in any other monument. In the arch of the sanctuary stands the Virgin (Platytera). On either side two most elegant angels bend down in expression of their respect to Christ's Mother.

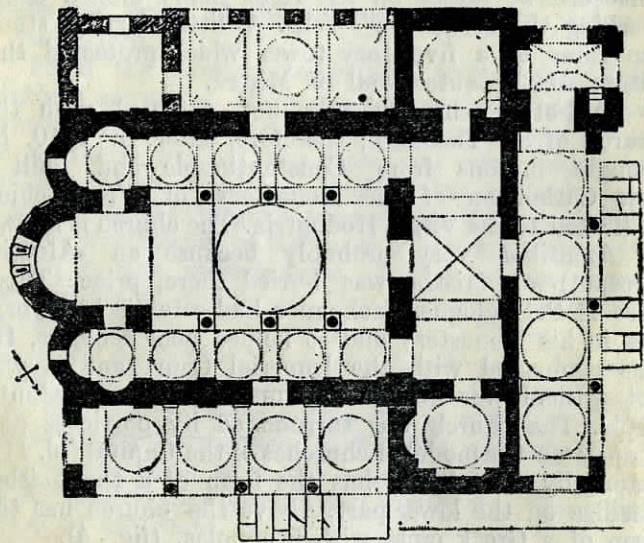


Fig. 4. Plan of Afontiko

The gentle curves that their light, slender, with no weight bodies form are wonderful. On their robes the cool olive-green colour is enriched by reddish-brown shades. Lower down in the Holy Communion of the Apostles the rhythm is maintained in the movement and counter-movement of the Apostles' heads.

The head of the first of the five Apostles for instance of the group on the right is depicted full-face, of the second one is reverted, of the third looks in front and so on (pl. 12). Lower down are the hierarchs (official clergymen), the pillars of the church, and indeed the perpendicular folds of their tunics resemble pillars. They are holding open elitaria (manuscripts) and are depicted celebrating, in a way, the mass with the priests who every time offered the holy Eucharist on the altar of the church (pl. 13a). On the arch above, is the Ascension with the Apostles divided into two groups. On the left part of this picture the Apostles, with all their holiness, are making brisk gestures. They still possess a strong sentimental expression; at the end the Virgin, elevated above the angels, is entirely motionless; the angel, with his gentle, princely gesture points to the rising Christ, and so he serves as a bridge connecting the stillness of Christ's Mother with the lively movement of the Apostles.

On the long walls of the side aisles we see, on the upper part, pairs of martyrs with a very strong expression¹. There are figures of hermits on the arches joining these walls with the pillars. With their spiritualized figures and the depth of their look they resemble pictures of El Greco (pl. 13b). On the southern side of the church there was an open arcade which was closed later and formed a chapel and side-Narthex where there are some graves. On the arcossolion of the western grave is painted a couple wearing the clothes of the time. A little above it stands the Virgin having received the message that she is going to meet Christ in Heaven. The Apostles are painted on clouds, coming

1. These saints as well as the other wall-paintings of the church which were covered with many salts, were cleaned by the nun Kali Christacou. She is devoted to the worship of the Virgin, living in the Convent of Pantanassa.

to be present at the Virgin's funeral. A little farther we see the death of the Virgin while over the door is the Virgin's funeral, and on the eastern wall the burial. In the little chapel, which Abbot Cyprianus added to the end of the portico in 1366, is his grave. In the Narthex are painted scenes from Christ's miracles such as the curing of Peter's mother-in-law, of the blind man, of the hydropic man, the miracle in Cana, Jesus with the Samaritan woman. Most probably these wall-paintings are connected with works from Constantinople, as is shown by the Virgin, painted over the central gate leading from the Narthex to the Naos, which reminds one of the figures of Kahrieh Djami. The faces are unrealistic, the movement is sluggish. In the chapel standing at the north-western side of the Narthex, in the western grave, Abbot Pachomios was buried. In the other, the Despot Theodore II Palaeologue. The latter is depicted over his own grave in his Despot's garments. On his head he is wearing a crown looking like the mitre of a contemporary Orthodox hierarch. On the left he appears as a monk and as the inscription near it says, he is «ὁ διὰ τοῦ ἀγγελικοῦ σχήματος μετονομασθεὶς Θεοδώρητος μοναχός»¹.

The decoration of the chapel refers to the future life. There are groups of saints marching slowly, praying to the Pantocrator to rest the souls of those who are buried in the chapel.

The painter cleverly shows that their prayers were well accepted, because he presents a numerous group of angels who have come down and surround Pachomios' grave.

Among the groups of saints the martyrs are outstanding, over Pachomios' grave. They are dressed in

pearl ornamented garments with folds that fall almost straight down and really belong to idealized figures (pl. 14). On their side stands Apostle Paul. His body is excessively tall and wavy like a flame, to show perhaps the flaming zeal that was burning in the heart of the great Apostle. On the other end of the Narthex there is a dark room from which one goes up to the women's apartment. Four chrysovoula are painted on its walls, that is orders of the Emperors of Constantinople ensuring lands and privileges to the monastery. The angels painted on the ceiling display a wonderful sense of movement. The paintings of the women's apartment reveal an artist skilful in colouring. On the eastern side of the southern arch very few colours compose the bright picture of the baptism. We find the impressionistic display of contrasted colours stronger in the figures of the 70 Apostles. The folds remind one of ancient statues and the performance a liberty unusual to the Byzantine painter. We can justly call this painter a colourist.

Outside the church, on the southern side of the western portico, which is destroyed now, rises the bell-tower. The tower as well as the whole church have been very successfully reconstructed now by Professor Orlandos. This light structure is thought of as the most beautiful of the Byzantine bell-towers that have been saved. A little way back stand the ruins of the kitchen which was similarly covered with a dome, and near it the dining-room covered now partly with ivy. The church of Afentiko impressed greatly and influenced the architecture of the churches that were built later. Pantanassa was built on its model, the cathedral was altered according to its style, and St. Sophia was enriched by porticoes just like the church of Afentiko.

¹ «He, who by the angelical form, was called Theodoritus monk».

THE GATE OF MONEMVASIA

From Afentiko we go up to the palace. We pass through a gate of the second wall called the gate of Monemvasia, because through this door passed those who wanted to go to Monemvasia. The door-sides, covered with sheets of iron, could be raised and closed by means of a slot, and until recently the people called it «sideroporta» (the iron gate). Here starts a street which was the main street of the city and passed by the square of the palace and ended at the gate of Nauplion standing on the opposite side of the wall.

THE PALACE

As we come to the square we can see that the big buildings standing on two of its sides in the shape of a corner (└) are indeed a palace (pl. 15). The building (A) (fig. 5) at the end of the right side is called the «palace of Kantakouzinios» but there is also a probability of its being a structure of the Franks, because the arches of its windows are pointed, and the decoration of its interior resembles the ruins of Frankish palaces still existing in Peloponnese.

At the same time some other buildings (B) were also built on the same side, which later were joined to the building (A) by means of a tower (Γ). Contemporary with building (Γ) is a two-story building (Δ) at the other end of the same side. It had several upper rooms which served as residence of the prince and his family. From the beautiful balcony of the palace, which is still called by the people the «palace of the princess», the Frankish princesses of Mistra looked over the Eurotas valley and felt homesick for their far away countries. Near the balcony stand the remnants of the apse of the palace chapel as well as remnants of a wall-painting.

The other wing of the palace, erected by the Palaeologues, was built in later times and forms an adjoining three-story building (E). In front of it rose a two story portico which is destroyed now (fig. 6).

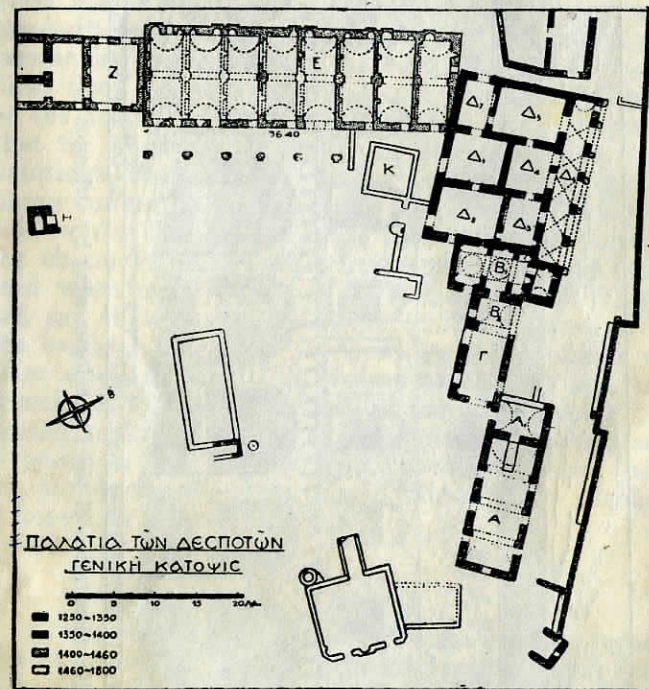


Fig. 5. Plan of the palaces by Orlandos

The lowest story consists of semi-underground apartments used fairly surely as store-rooms. In the eight separate rooms of the middle story, the State Services were probably lodged. The upper floor consisted

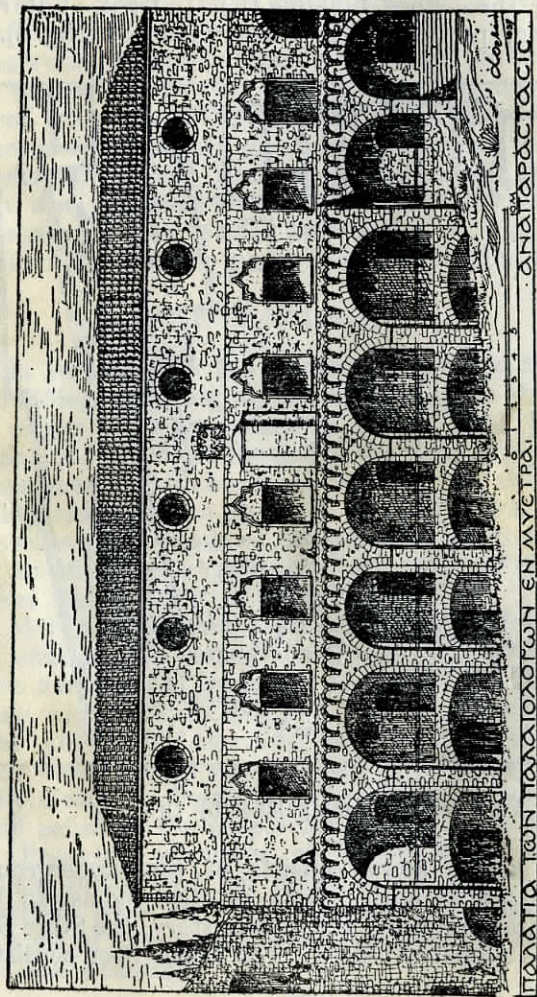


Fig. 6. Representation of the Palaeologue wing by Orlandos

of one only huge room, 36,30 m. long by 10,50 m. wide, used as the throne room. The position where the throne stood is marked by a cavity made halfway along the wall overlooking the square. The windows are broad. They had wooden pane-stands and low-built seats for the ladies to sit on and watch the ceremonies carried on in the square. Over the windows there is a row of large round openings. The roof of the room was wooden and angular. It is supposed that the inside of the walls was decorated with wall-paintings. But no such remains were found. The fire-places (one in each downstairs room), were lighted on cold winter days and by the smoke passing through the chimneys of the western wall the room was warmed when some ceremony was taking place. So we can say that there is here one of the forerunners of the radiator. Attached to these buildings stands an older small building (Z). Behind the palace was the quarter of the courtiers, and on the other side of the square, on the slope, many noblemen's mansions, one of which, a long narrow building with a tower, over the post-Byzantine great domed church of St. Nicolas, is known as the «small palace» (fig. 7).

ST. SOPHIA

Going upward by the street crossing the palace square, we see on the left, ruins of a small church with remains of very good wall-paintings of about the middle 14th century. It was completely buried and was found in the excavation of 1951.

The narrow road upwards leads to the church of St. Sophia, erected by Manuel Kantakouzinos in the middle of the 14th century and is considered as catholicon of the monastery of Zoodotis (pl. 16). The church is of the distyle type with a Narthex on the western and

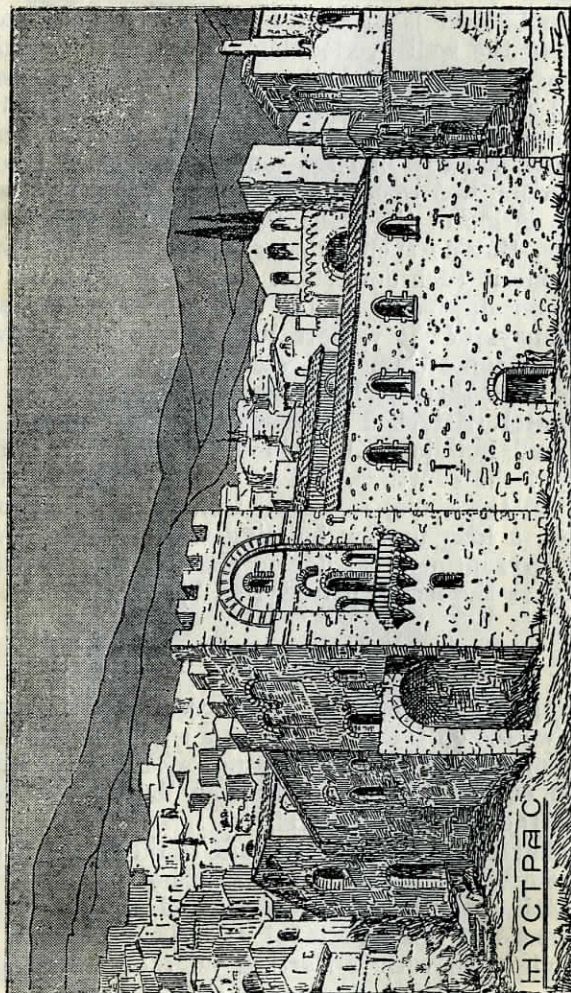


Fig. 7. Representation of the «small palace» by Orlandos

southern side, with porticoes and many chapels, attached to the main body of the church, built apparently in different times (fig. 8). What characterises the church, is the stress on the perpendicular axis, a tendency for height unusual to the Byzantine architecture, but perhaps owing to western influence. This kind of thing is particularly obvious in the inside (where the

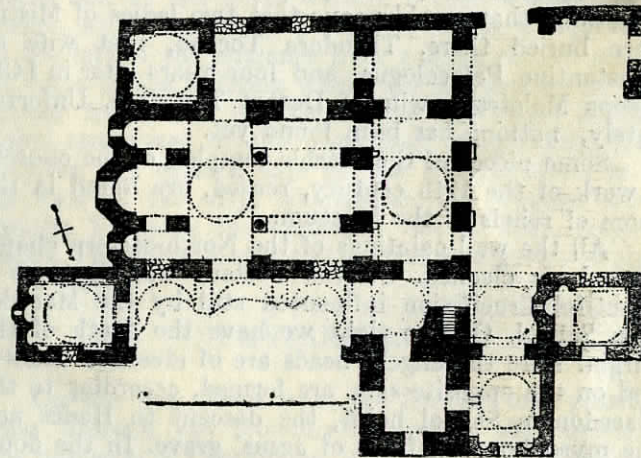


Fig. 8. Plan of St. Sophia

space is narrow and high with the light coming only from windows¹ high up on the dome and on the arms of the cross) and outside on the eastern side of the church. The dome of the Narthex is unique for its kind.

In the church there are on capital-tops monograms of the founder «Μανουήλ Κατακουζηνός Παλαιολόγος, δεσπότης, κτίτωρ»¹. At the end of the northern arch stands the once three-story bell-tower, the two stories

1. «Manuel Kantakouzinus Palaeologue, Despot, founder».

of which have been recently re-erected. The church was used as a church of the palace of the Despots and during the Turkish occupation it had been converted into a mosque. That's probably why the cleaning (1952) of the few remaining wall-paintings which had been carefully whitewashed was very difficult. In the porticoes as well as in the church itself many graves were excavated on the purpose of bringing to light something that would prove that two ladies of Mistra were buried there, Theodora Toccou, first wife of Constantine Palaeologue, and four years later in 1433 Cleopa Malatesta, wife of Despot Theodore. Unfortunately, nothing has been found yet.

Some pieces of the marble templon of the church, a work of the 12th century, reused, are found in the room of reliefs of the Museum.

All the wall-paintings of the North-eastern chapel have been cleaned. On the western wall there is a beautiful Crucifixion influenced still by the Macedonian School. On the right we have the death of the Virgin. Here the angels' heads are of idealized beauty, and on the opposite side, are formed, according to the Macedonian School habit, the descent to Hades and the myrophores in front of Jesus' grave. In the dome we see Christ and on the arches there are paintings of the Apostles and the Prophets, apparently by a different painter. High beside the arch stands the angel of the Annunciation (pl. 17). The wall-paintings with obvious signs of idealization make a transition from Afentiko wall-paintings to the decoration of Peribleptos. In the south-eastern chapel was cleaned a huge but very mild figure of Christ, and the Virgin birth-scene with many figures, including women dressed like ladies of Mistra who offer presents to the woman in child-bed (pl. 18). Opposite Jesus appear the remnants of the face of a Virgin similar to Christ.

THE FORT

Following the path running over St. Sophia we come to the castle of Villehardouin. Up to the later years of the Turkish occupation it was used as a fortress. Therefore many repairs were made which is why there are only a few remnants from Byzantine times there today. In the fortress itself there are many ruins of houses and at the north-western corner a second enclosure, which served as a place of refuge in the fort. To the left of the entrance over a large cistern stand the ruins of the building where the commander of the fortress lived, and a little farther the ruins of the chapel mentioned at the beginning. Overlooking Mistra from the eastern side of the fortress there is a full view of the city, whereas on the western side, towards Taygetos the landscape lies in calm magnificence. The hill of Mistra on this side rises quite steeply.

PANTANASSA

On the way down from the fortress and passing again through the Monemvasia gate is the convent, now nunnery, of Pantanassa. Here there still exists and flourishes the ancient Greek and Byzantine tradition of hospitality, practised now by the nuns of the nunnery, who still preserve the flame of Christian faith and Greek tradition. The convent of Pantanassa is one of the last structures in Mistra (pl. 19a). The church was inaugurated in 1428 as an inscription formerly found on the slate of the altar said. The builder of the church was John Frangopoulos, Prime Minister of Mistra, bearing the title of Protostrator. His monograms can still be seen in the church and his name is referred in an inscription on the dome of the Narthex.

Πολλῶν τυχῶν σου τῶν χαρίτων Παρθένε
 μικρὸν κομίζω σοι δῶρον ναὸν τόνδε
 Ἰωάννης Φραγκόπουλος πρωτοστράτωρ
 θεοπρόβλητος ἐν δεξιῷ τυχεῖν θέλων¹.

The church (fig. 9) was built on the model of Hodigitria (Afentiko). It had an arcade on two of its sides. Today only the one on the side overlooking the Eurotas valley is left (pl. 19b). It is the only one of the church-

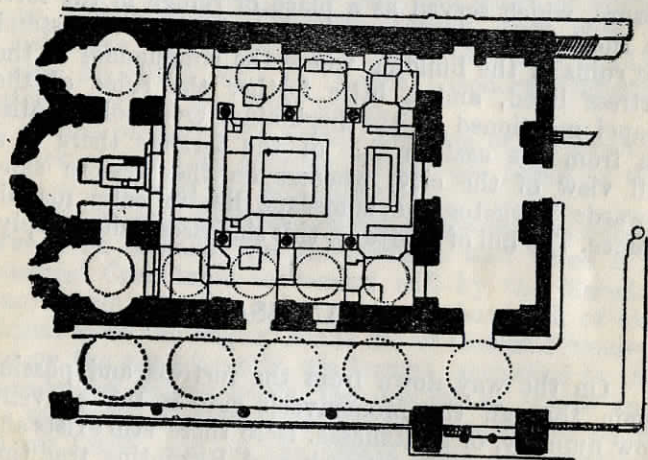


Fig. 9. Pantanassa. Plan of the ground-floor

ches of Mistra in which an entire arcade has been preserved. It enables us to understand what arcades meant in the churches of the city. Not only did they represent a revival of the ancient Doric, peripteric

1. Having received, oh Virgin, many graces from you, I bring you this church as a small present. I, John Frangopoulos Protostator chosen by God-wishing to be sit on his right.

church but also they offered rest and coolness to the worshipers in the summer months. The very alternation of light and shade that they created gave the church a mystical tone. The bell-tower shows a strong Frankish influence in the queer dome with little towers standing at its corners, sharp arches enclosing the triple openings, and small clover-shaped windows. One can discern a western influence also on the eastern side of the church which is divided in three zones. The lower zone is not decorated. The decoration of the upper zone possesses a clearly Byzantine, even Constantinopolitan style, whereas the decoration of the middle zone with the little pointed poros arches and the garland of little reversed arches, shows a strong Frankish influence.

Externally, the decoration has no unity; yet, the monument does not fail to be one of the most beautiful representations of the Byzantine tradition. Especially to those who look at the church from below, the slender curves, that the arcade, the building and the dome form, make a wonderful impression.

The internal painting decoration has no unity either. The wallpaintings in the lower part of the church were destroyed and repainted in the time of the Turkish occupation. Only the paintings in the upper part are Byzantine and are outstanding because of their beautiful and pleasant colours. The painters here are chiefly decorators. So, in the Hypapandi of Christ painted in the western arch, they have filled the background with a lot of buildings while in the middle they have painted a huge vestry. It is so big that one does not know whether this is what the painter really wanted to paint and not the Hypapandi with the tiny figures.

A little farther in the southern arch, the scene of Annunciation is carried on in a yard paved with pink marbles. In the middle there is a very picturesque

detail: a fountain and two partridges who bend down and drink water from it. There are many more picturesque details in the scene of the Entry into Jerusalem painted in the eastern arch, over the sanctuary. The painter imitates a similar scene existing in the Peribleptos. But while in the Peribleptos painting Christ is painted in the middle of the scene, here he is put aside on the left with the Apostles crowded behind him. On the right there is a wide space where Jews are depicted wearing colourful robes quite fit to decorate a surface. Also in the distance two cities have been painted, Jerusalem and Bethany. On the lowest part of the representation there are many children in various stances. On the opposite side we have the Descent to Hades. We are impressed by the very beautiful colours of the sarcophagi. In the apartment for women the painter of the 70 Apostles imitates corresponding paintings of Afentiko, but in a way which shows that he didn't quite understand the style of those paintings. The painters of Pantanassa have in mind previous paintings of Mistra and imitate those that they consider better. So, in the interior also the unity of the decoration is broken.

The paintings have been performed with much, perhaps too much, diligence. One can distinguish two (2) painters here. The one who painted the single saints, and the other the scenes of the gospel. The single saints remind one strongly of panel post-Byzantine icons. In the Narthex there is a grave, considered to be the grave of Theodora Toccou first wife of Constantine Palaeologue. In the arcossolion of another grave is the picture of another nobleman of Mistra Manuel Laskaris Khatjikis. His dress and hat are interesting.

FRANGOPOULOS' HOUSE

Leaving Pantanassa through the southern gate we come to a house a little farther down the road. It stands opposite a chapel and, as it is reported by tradition, its owner was the founder of Pantanassa the Prime Minister of Mistra Frangopoulos. The house is built from east to west vertically to the declivity of the hill, and has in front, looking towards the valley, the usual balcony which is decorated, rather than supported, by small arches. The family living here probably sat in this balcony during the warm summer evenings to refresh and cool themselves¹. Besides this house there is another one comparatively well preserved, which according to tradition, was owned by Lascaris. It stands by the street that leads from St. Chistopher to St. Demetrius.

PERIBLEPTOS

Lower down at the south-eastern corner of the outer wall we come into the place lying outside the wall of Peribleptos monastery through a large gate. Its Catholicon is dedicated to the Virgin Peribleptos. The church was named after a famous church in Constantinople bearing this name, and had been built in the time of Empress Zoi. Exactly when Mistra's Peribleptos was built and who its founders were is unknown. Its wall-paintings possess a unique style. Comparing them with similar, dated wall-paintings preserved in Serbia, we conclude that they must have been made around 1380. The church was probably built also at that time. But the outer gate of the monastery is more recent. An inscription engraved on it under two lions mentions the name of Panagiotis Theveos and the date 1714. The

1. Professor An. Orlandos has made a very good study on the houses and Palaces of Mistra.

middle arch of the church has from old times been ornamented with a lily and two rosettes. Professor Xyngopoulos guesses they come from a tower of strong Frankish character, standing behind the church and usually called a restaurant. This tower was perhaps a structure of the Villehardouins and the ornaments of the arch come perhaps from the coat of arms of Villehardouin which is unknown to us. The church of Peribleptos is attached to the side of the cliff and as two chapels have been built in front of it in later times, it looks as though it were suspended in the air. In this church one can admire the way the architect took advantage of the formation of the ground to make a picturesque and graceful building (pl. 22). Peribleptos is a distyle cruciform church with a dome. On the western side it adjoins the chapel of St. Catherine. On the southern side of the church was a kind of arcade which was later turned into a side-narthex (fig. 10). On its floor many graves have been dug out.

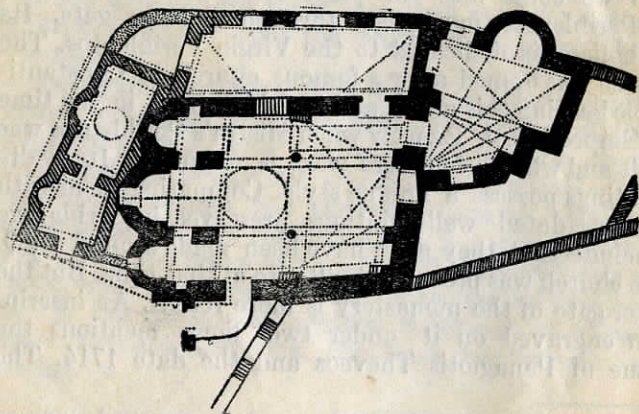


Fig. 10. Plan of Peribleptos

The peribleptos wall paintings are world famous. Some think they were made by four, others by only two painters.

On the lower part there is a series of military saints reminding one of the paintings of Kahrieh Djami in Constantinople. Over them the three circles of icon-painting, the Holy Communion circle, the Evangelical circle and the narrative one, are mixed together. The Peribleptos is the only church of Mistra that has preserved the decoration of its cupola. In the middle of the cupola, in a circle, there is the face of the Pantocrator (pl. 23a). He is sweet and mild; you almost think he caresses the souls of the suffering people who stand below him and beg for his help. In the Peribleptos and in those other churches at Mistra which have a limited space, the worshiper feels that God is quite near him. Round the Pantocrator are the Prophets in rather too stressed postures. Their dresses have beautiful combinations of colour. In the southern arch a wall-painting representing Christ's birth is quite outstanding. The elegance and grace of the Virgin is so much stressed that her body has lost its materiality. On her face is spread a slight melancholy, just as in the figures decorating the dome, which is perhaps a reflexion of the melancholy of the people of those hard times, being uncertain of the obscure future. It is probably this uneasiness again that is represented by the rocky scenery in the background. One of the rocks has cold and the other warm colour. Directing them obliquely towards the background, the painter is trying to give the conception of space.

On the opposite side, in the wall-painting of the Baptism, what impresses one most is the picturesque scene of the people who swim in the Jordan. In the northern arch we have The Incredulity of Thomas and the Pentecost. Among the decorations of the western

arch the pictures that are especially outstanding are the Last Supper, Entry into Jerusalem (this is the scene that the Pantanassa painter imitated, with several deviations) (pl. 24) and the Transfiguration with a most beautiful Christ. In the arch of the south-western part of the church, Christ's head in the scene of the Descent from the cross, is very beautiful (pl. 25). Over the altar in the painting of Ascension, four angels in their light coloured dresses, shine out from the dark background and hover round Christ's «doxa».

In the arch below the Platytera we have the Holy Mass with two angels and two hierarchs. On the left stands St. John Chrysostomus. His countenance looks as though consumed by his holy zeal. Only his lips are painted more vividly, just to stress the fact that the streams of wisdom came thence.

In the arch of the prothesis the Angels' Mass is painted (pl. 26). In the centre behind the altar, Christ dressed in a hierarch's vestments stands motionless. A procession of Angels has started from his right hand. The first ones of the procession have already reached near the Saviour's left side. It is the moment of the Great Entrance. On the left three angels dressed like deacons and another three like priests are holding the sacred gifts. They are wearing white silk robes which offer a contrast to their dark faces, penetrated by a secret trembling. They are on tiptoe, and with their bodies forming curves inside each other, express very clearly the prevailing style of the composition. There stands in front of us a vision of a different, superior world in which harmony and order prevails. The wall-paintings of Peribleptos are the most attractive representative of the conservative disposition that Byzantine painting acquires after the middle of the 14th century.

They are distinguished by this: they convey to the painting on walls the characteristics of the panel icons, and then present this conveyance as an independent school of painting.

It is to be wondered at, how those people, on the Eve of Byzantium's fall, had the nerve to create such masterpieces. It is by this way that they show their potentiality and the greatness of their faith in Christ.

CHAPELS

Except of the large churches mentioned before there are in Mistra about twenty (20) chapels scattered around. They were of private use and contained many graves. Two of them—St. George and St. Christopher—have been recently reconstructed.

St. George. A little way from Peribleptos stands the reconstructed little church of St. George with a most elegant portico.

St. Christopher. Near the gate of Marmara another chapel has been reconstructed. According to tradition it is dedicated to St. Christopher. Recent work that was done there¹ revealed—on the wall which existed before the reconstruction—a few but most beautiful wall-paintings related to those in Peribleptos; St. John Chrysostomus enthroned, figures of Apostles, and the head of a saint—probably St. Christopher's—over the opening of the southern door (pl. 28a). The paintings suggest the work of an outstanding artist. The construction of the chapel walls is poor. Those who built it were probably not very rich; Yet they contrived to find an excellent painter to decorate it. So great was the sensitivity of the people of Mistra.

1. See: N. V. Drandakis, Τοιχογραφίαι ναύσκων τοῦ Μυστρά. Πεπραγμένα ΙΧ Βυζαντ. Συνεδρίου Θεσσαλονίκης τ. Α, 1955.

Ay-Yannakis (St. John). This stands outside the wall, near Marmara. It is considered to have been built at the beginning of the 15th century. Some of its wall-paintings are still existing (but they are not whole) like the Annunciation, the Crucifixion, the Last Supper, the Assumption.

In the western cavity of the southern wall is painted the founder «Κυρά Καλή ή Καβαλασέα ή διά τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀγγελικοῦ σχήματος μετονομασθεῖσα Καλλι- νίκη μοναχή σὺν τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτοῖς»¹.

2. «Lady Cali Cavallassea, who by the divine and angelical form was named nun Kalliniki, with her children».

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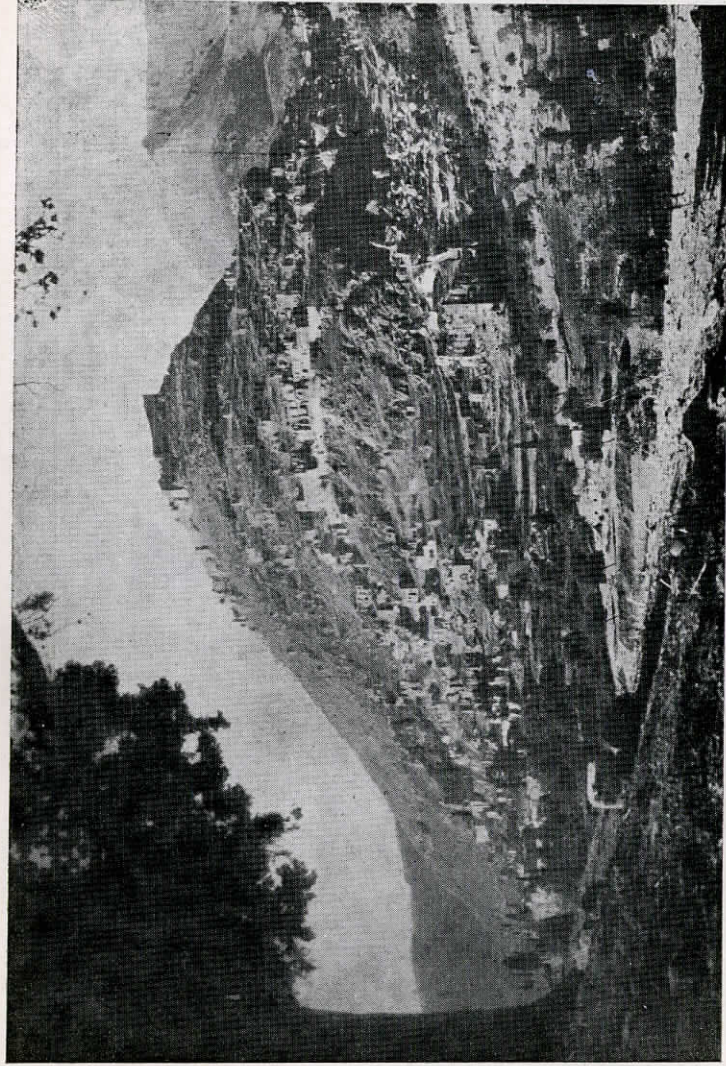
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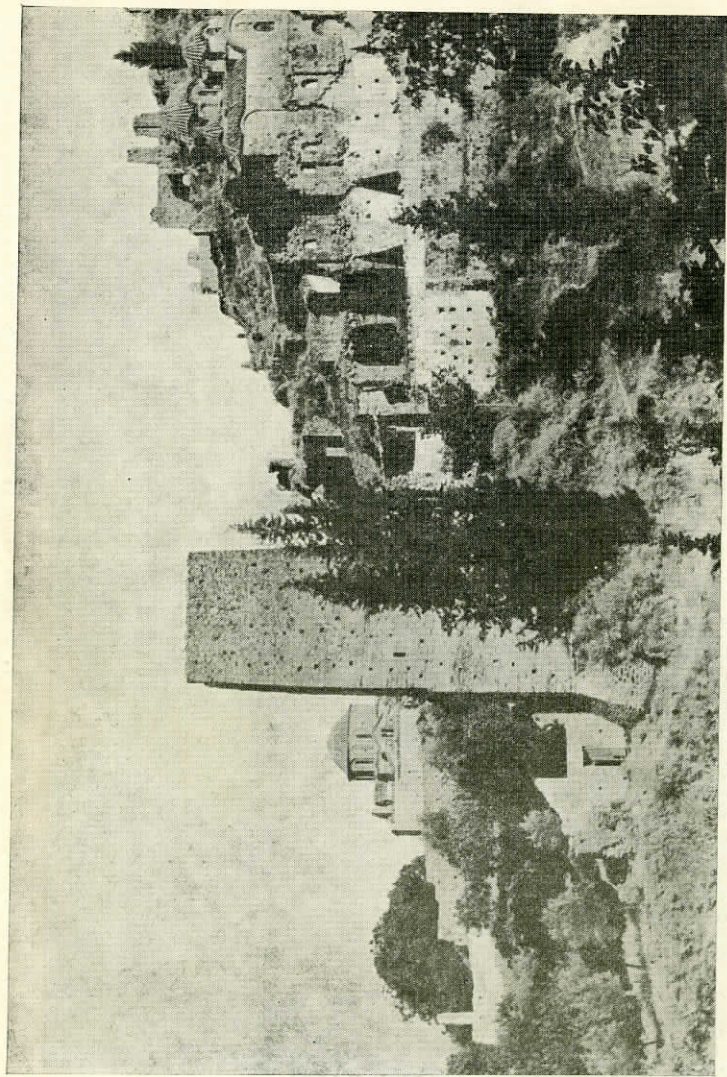
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100. Pantanassa. The birth of the Virgin (detail)

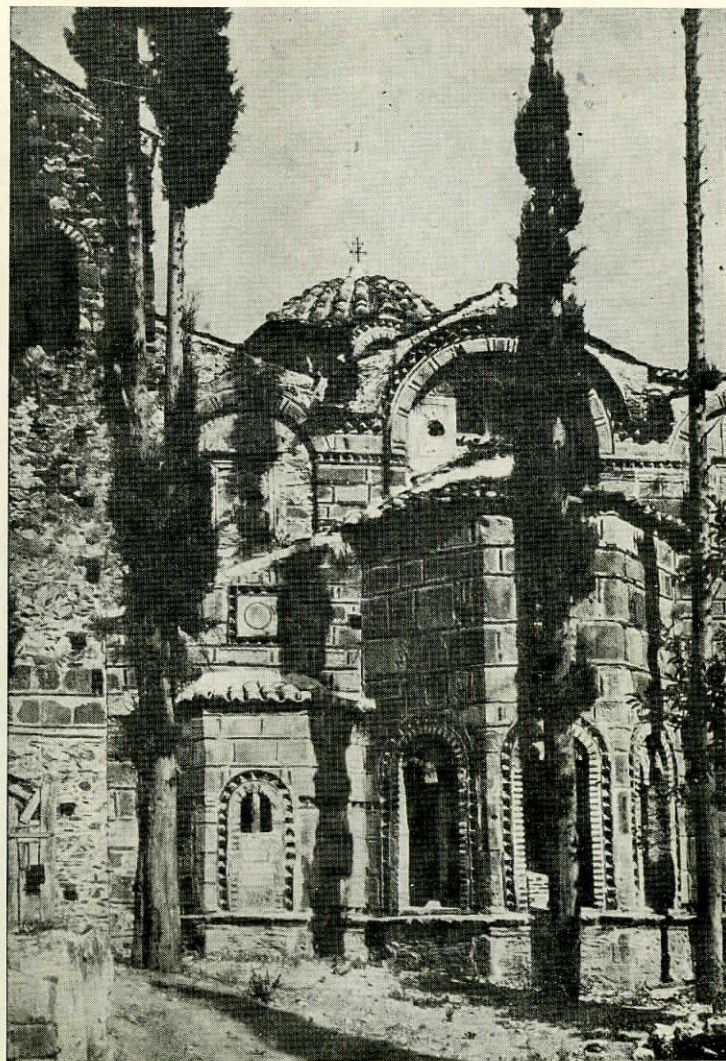
Of the above photographs No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, belong to the collection of the National Museum, Athens.



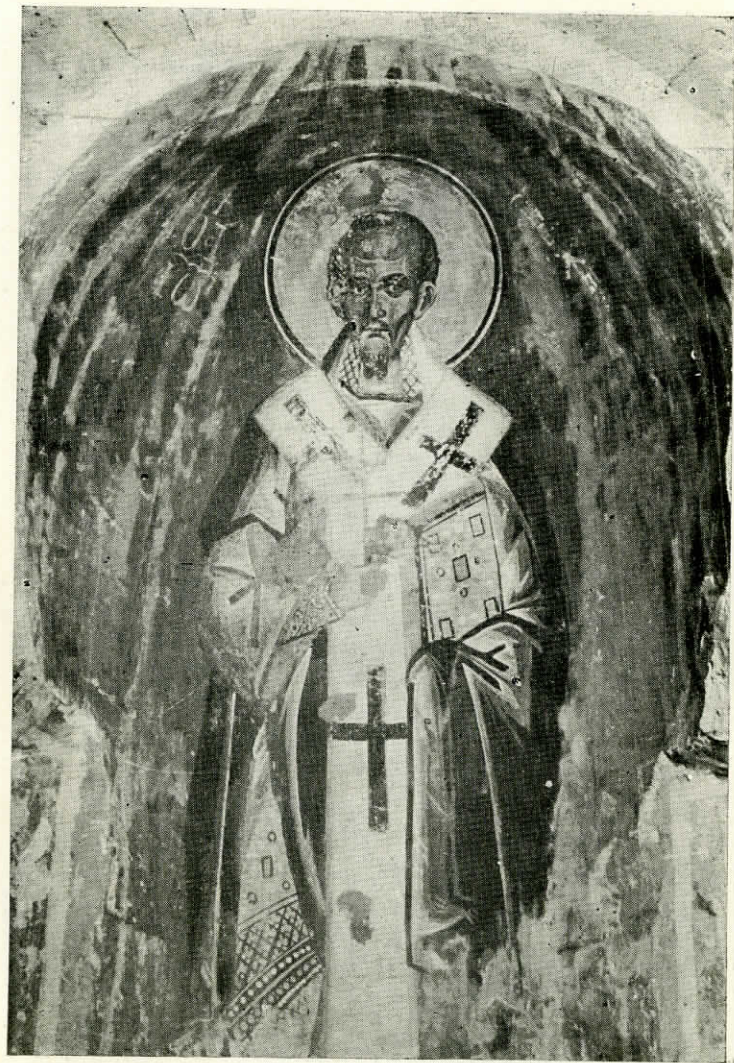
1. General view of Mistras



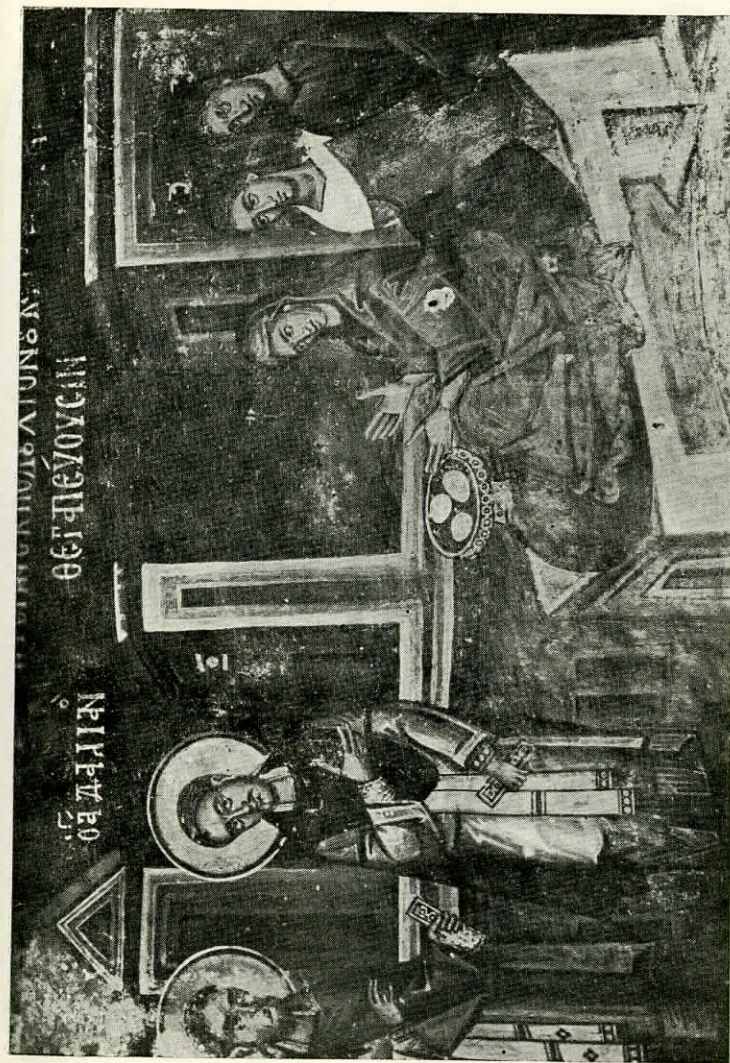
2. Tower of the external wall of Mistra



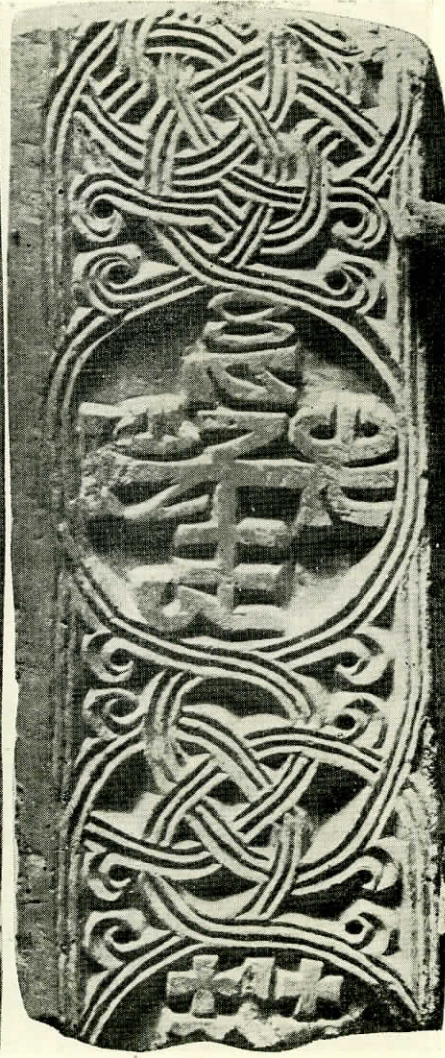
3. The church of St. Demetrius. Eastern side



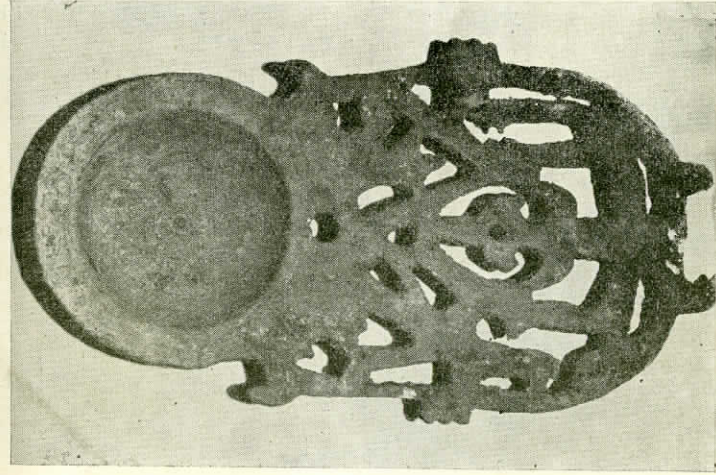
4. The church of St. Demetrius. Saint John Chrysostome



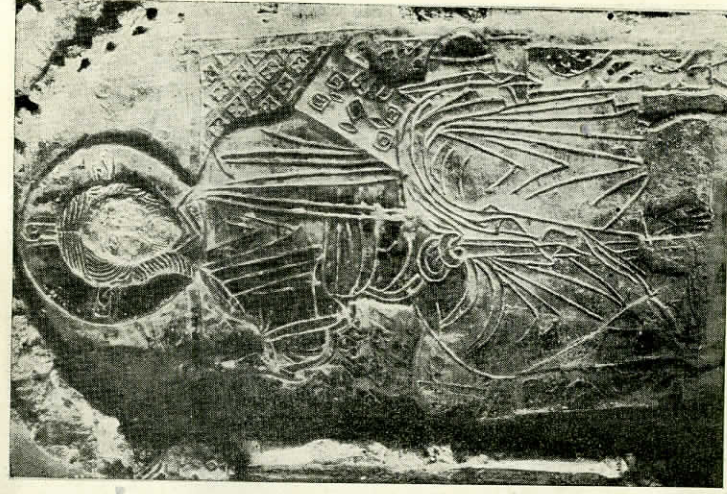
5. St. Demetrius. St. Anargyri



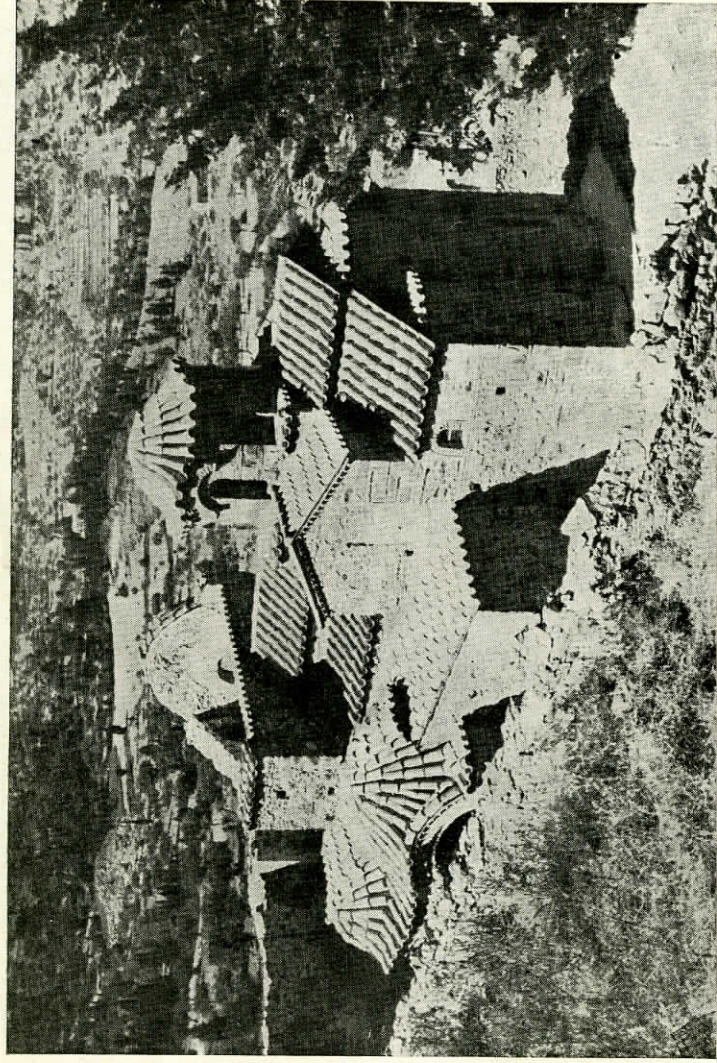
6. Museum. The reliefs of monograms of Despina «Ζαμπέα ντὲ Λεζγάω»,



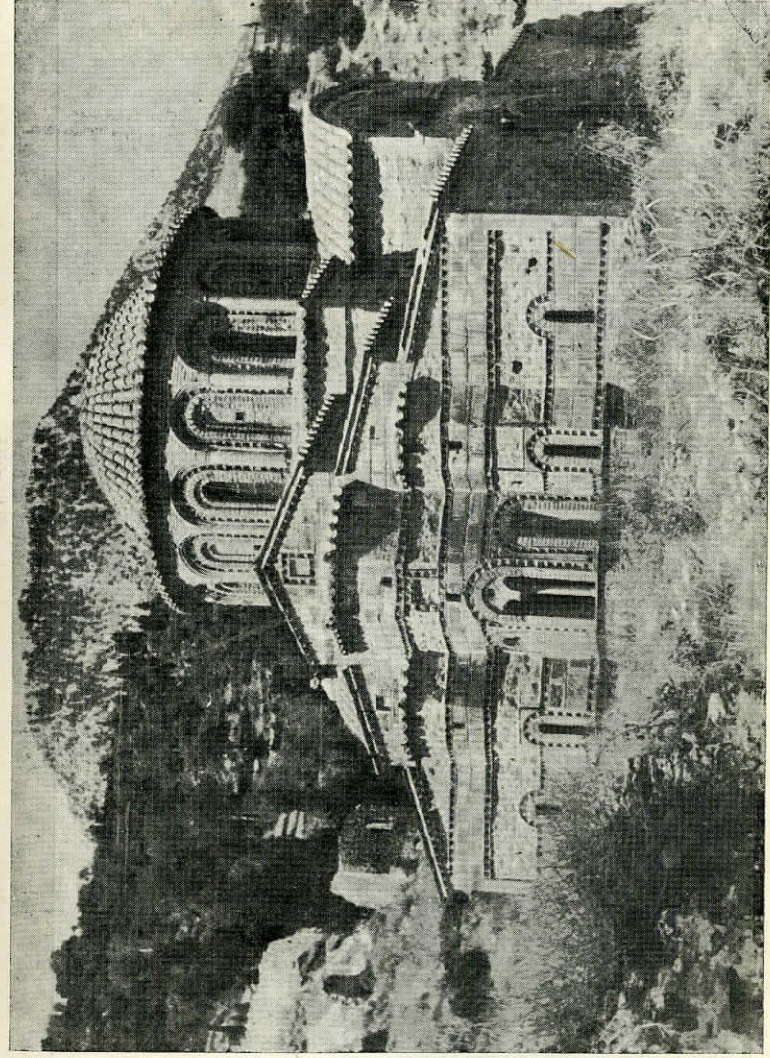
7. a) Museum. Censer



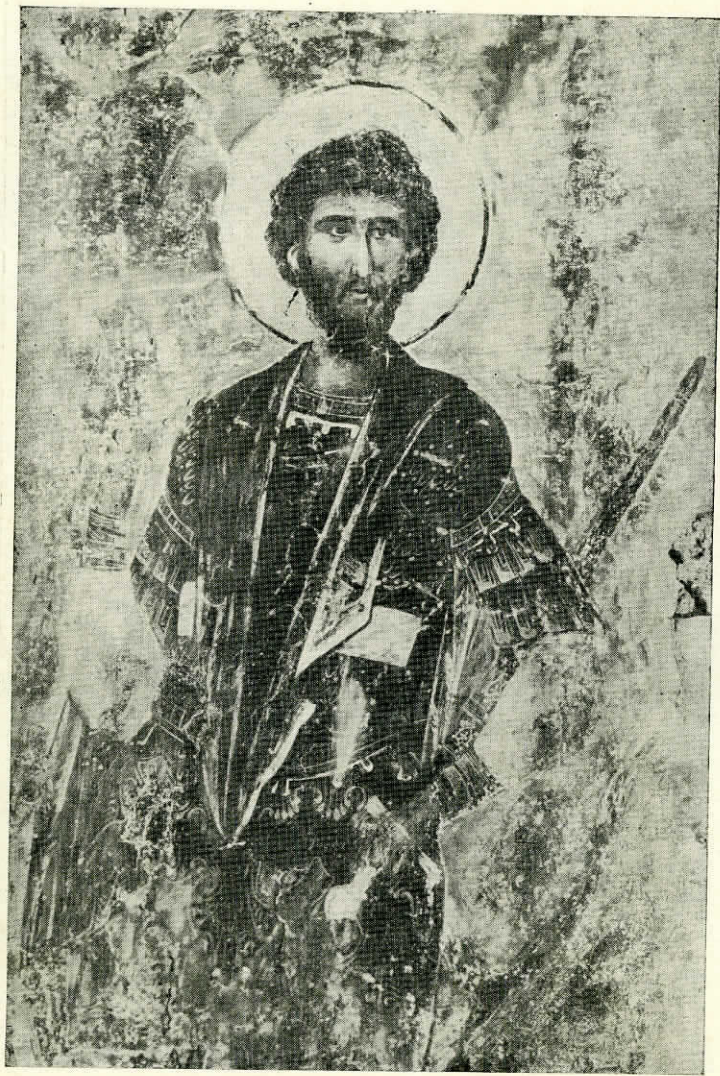
b) Museum. Relief representing Jesus



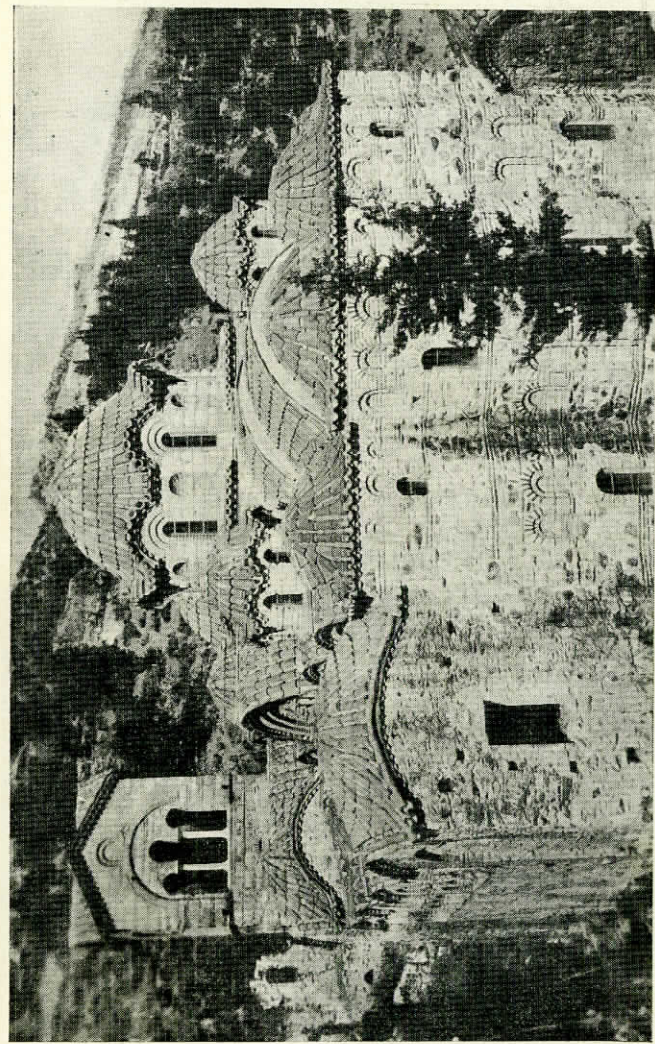
8. Evangelistria.



9. St. Theodori



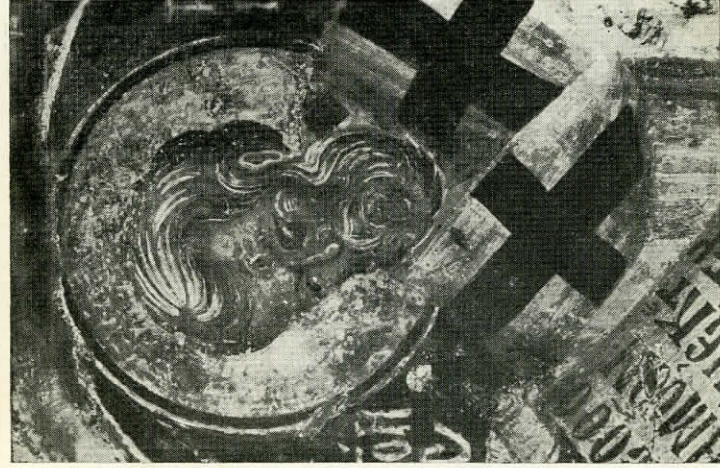
10. St. Theodori. Fresco of St. Theodore



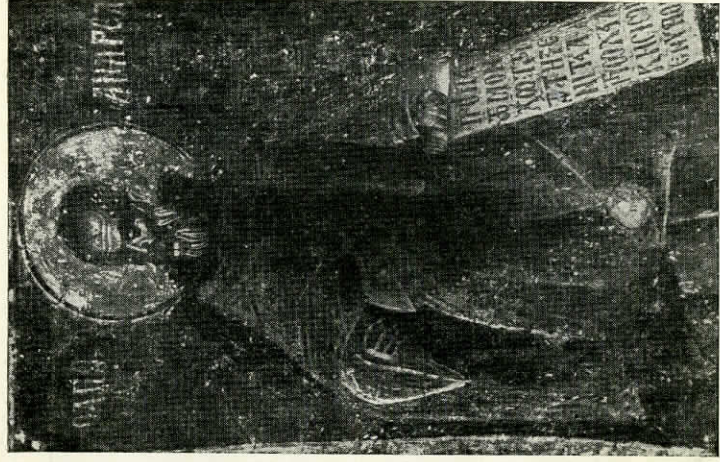
11. Afentico



12. Afentico. The Holy communion of the Apostles (detail)



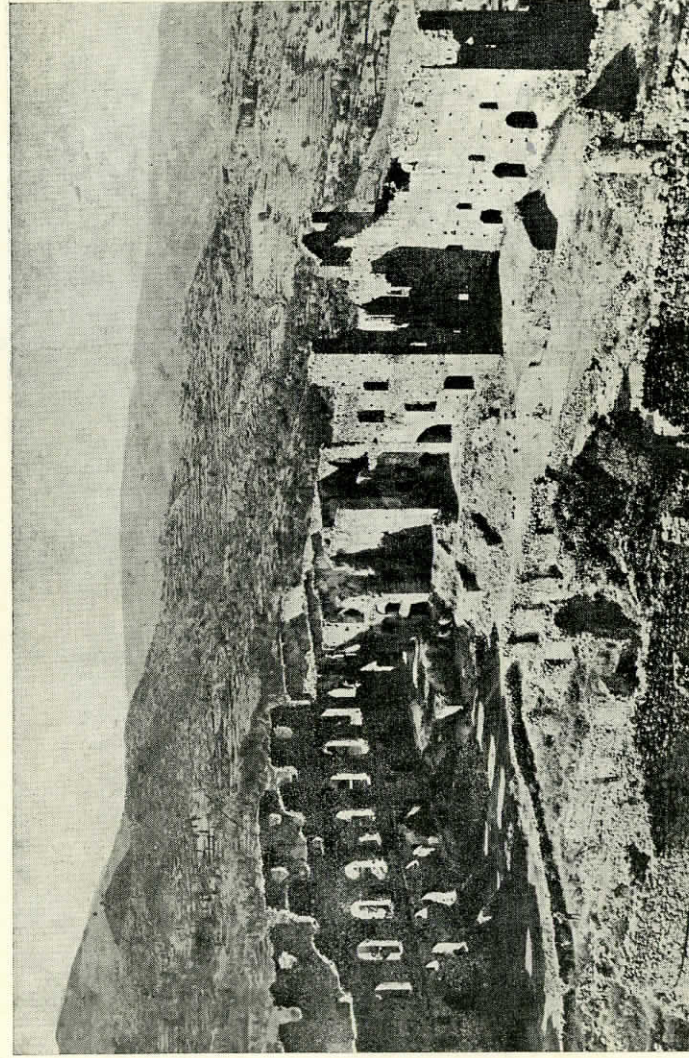
13. a) Afentico. Hierarch



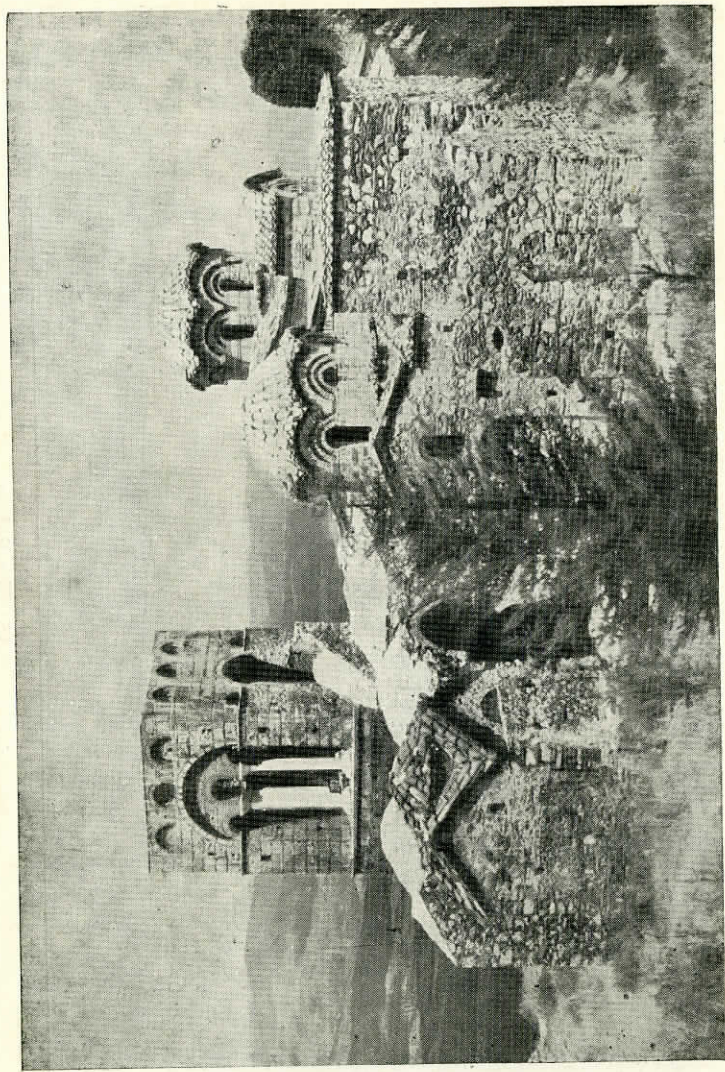
b) Afentico. Saint Andrew



14. Afentico. Martyrs



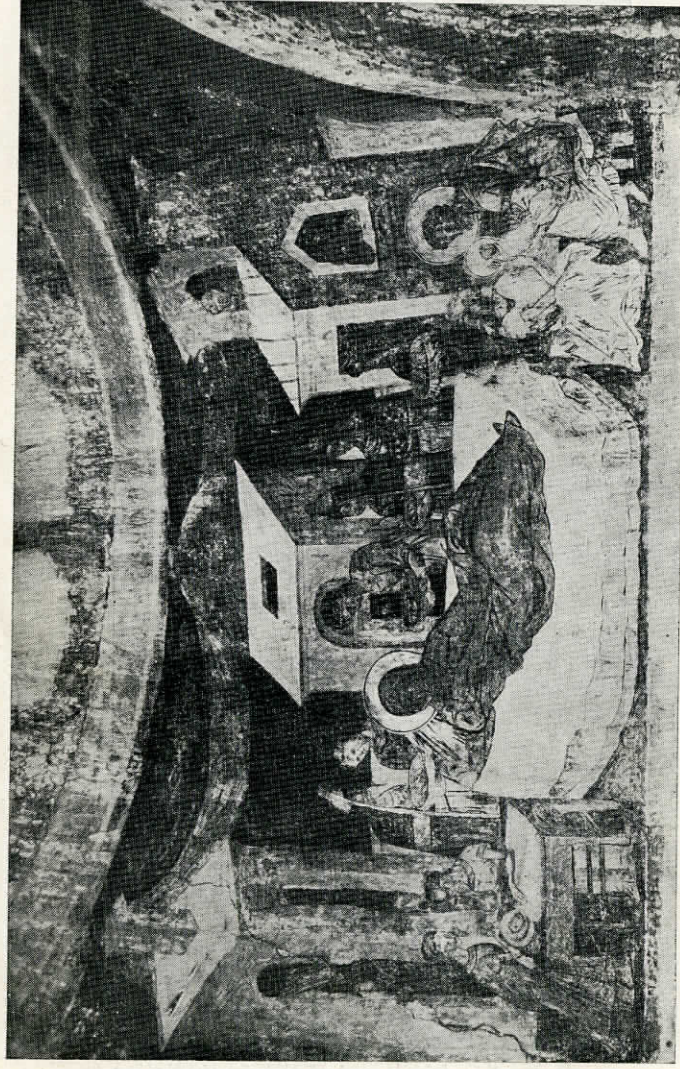
15. The Palace



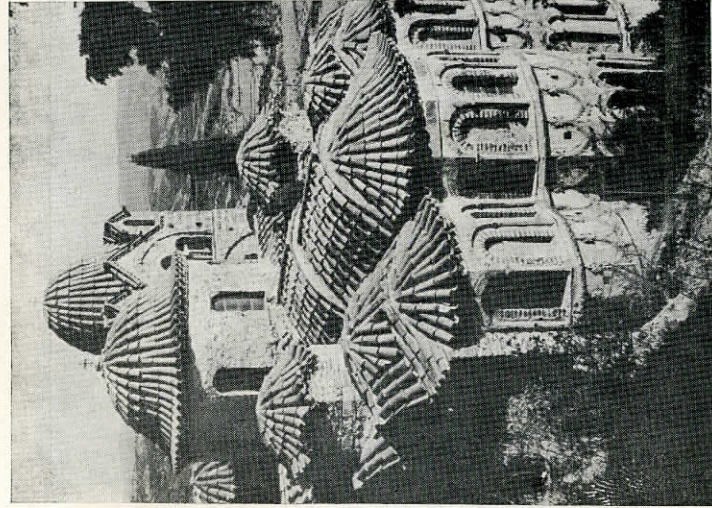
16. St. Sophia



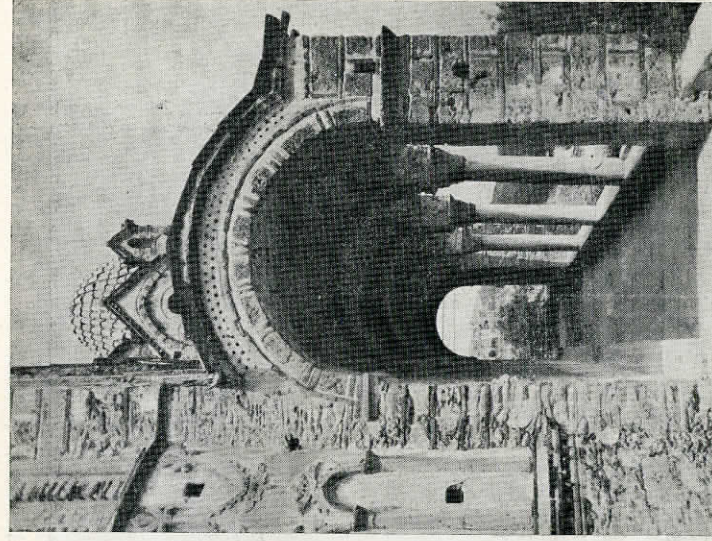
17. St. Sophia. The Angel of the Annunciation



18. St. Sophia. The birth of the Virgin



19. a) Pantanassa



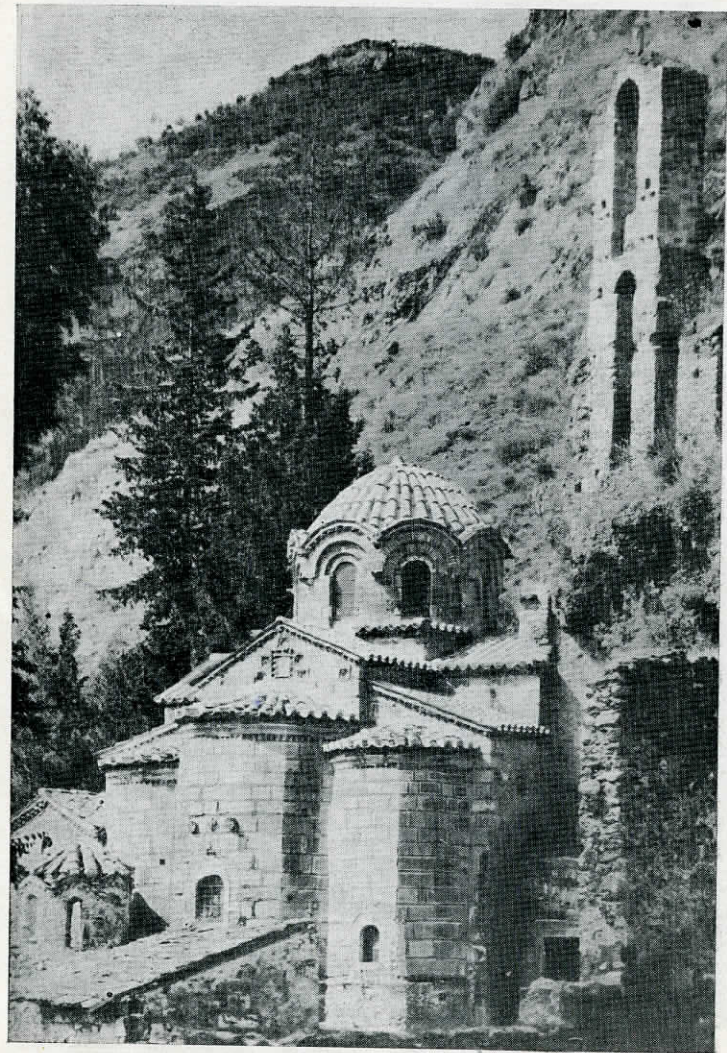
b) Pantanassa. The portico



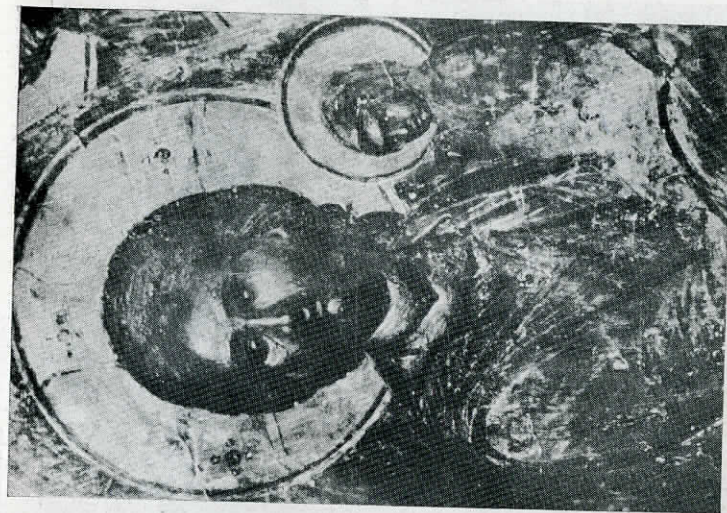
20. Pantanassa. Ascension (detail)



21. Pantanassa. Prophet

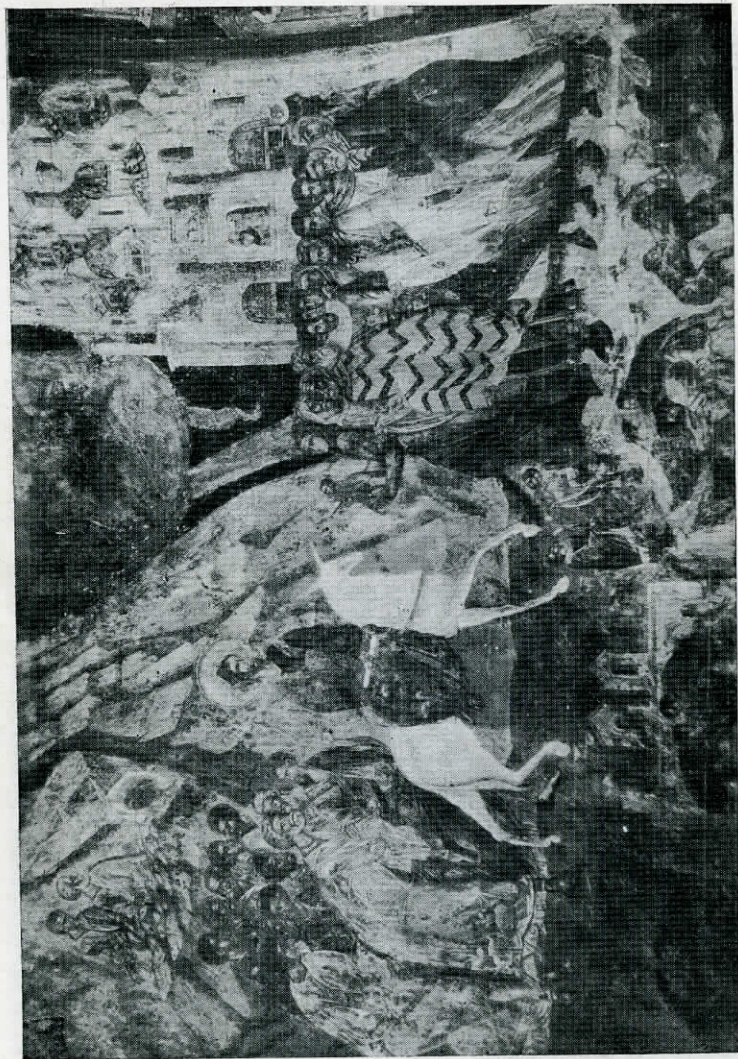


22. Peribleptos



23. a) Peribleptos, Pantocrator

b) Peribleptos. The death of the Virgin (detail)



24. Peribleptos. Entry into Jerusalem



25. Peribleptos. Descent from the Cross (detail)



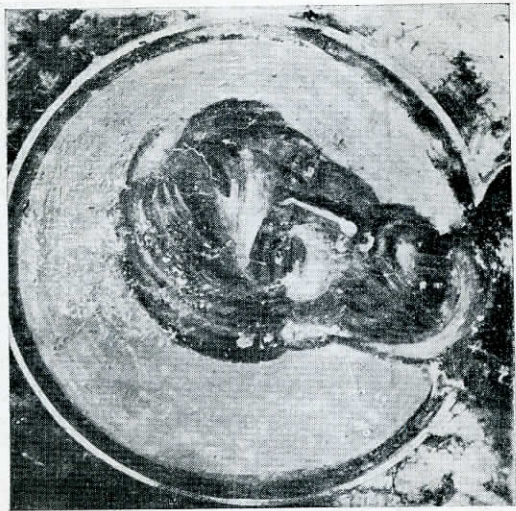
26. Peribleptos. Angels' mass (detail)



27. Peribleptos. The birth of the Virgin (detail)



28. a) St. Christopher. St. Christopher's (?) head.



b) Ay-Yannakis. Saint Diacon.

