



The Byzantine part of the church after the restoration project

scene in the bema conch, fragments of a narrative scene on the north wall of the bema, fragments of hierarch frontal portraits on the walls of the bema and the diakonikon, two scenes from the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane in the diakonikon conch, monks and saints in the prothesis conch, a fragment of a youthful figure (angel?) below the central dome, and decorative motifs on the south wall of the main church.

A Deësis scene on the bema conch, and a fragment from an Ascension scene on the north art of the bema apse, might also be associated with the renovation of the monastery by the monk Sophronios Sepsis in the early 16th century.

The subsequent, 18th century painted decoration layer is attested by the discovery of frescoes throughout the interior of the Byzantine nucleus apart from the diakonikon. Surviving fragments of this decorative layer include a depiction of the Holy Trinity on the bema conch, the scene of the Man of Sorrows and an upright full portrait of Christ on the prothesis conch, scenes from the Twelve Great Feasts, such as the Adoration of the Magi, the Nativity of Christ, the Presentation at the Temple, the Entry into Jerusalem, Anastasis (Harrowing of Hell), and the Ascension in the surviving conches below the central dome, and images of the forefathers of Christ in the pendentives. An iconographical innovation is found in the south-east conch where Saint George Slaying the Dragon is depicted. These scenes are framed with abundant relief decoration in drawn stucco.

The 19th century painted decoration layer that covered the entire interior of both the Byzantine and more recent parts of the church, are highly ornamental. In it we find both colorful and monochrome floral motifs, as well as imitation marble revetment, combined with round medallion images of saints.

The Restoration Project The restoration project, officially named "Restoration of the Holy Church of Saint George Sykousis in the settlement Saint George Sykousis in Chios", funded by the the North Aegean Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework 2014-2020 (ESPA 2014-2020) was carried out between 2014 and 2019. The project included the removal of modern concrete mortar renders from the façades, the completion and consolidation of the brickwork decoration, the consolidation of the masonry walls etc. and the conservation of the wall paintings in the north aisle and on the western part of the church, as well. The project was carried out under the supervision of the Directorate for the Restoration of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Monuments.

The Ephorate of Antiquities of Chios undertook and directly supervised the part of the project that pertained to the exposure and conservation of the surviving wall paintings on the Byzantine part of the church. Oil paints and modern mortar renders were removed, the painted decoration that appeared to be in need of immediate attention was consolidated, a comprehensive conservation study was prepared, and subsequently, the 18th and 19th century painted decoration layers were detached, the decoration substratum was consolidated with the use of micro-grouting, fastening of the perimeter of the painted surfaces, and consolidation of the pigment layer, and finally, the wall paintings were cleaned using chemical and mechanical methods.

The restoration project of the church of Saint George contributed to the consolidation, but also the enhancement of one of the most important monuments on the island of Chios, which dates all the way back to middle Byzantine times.

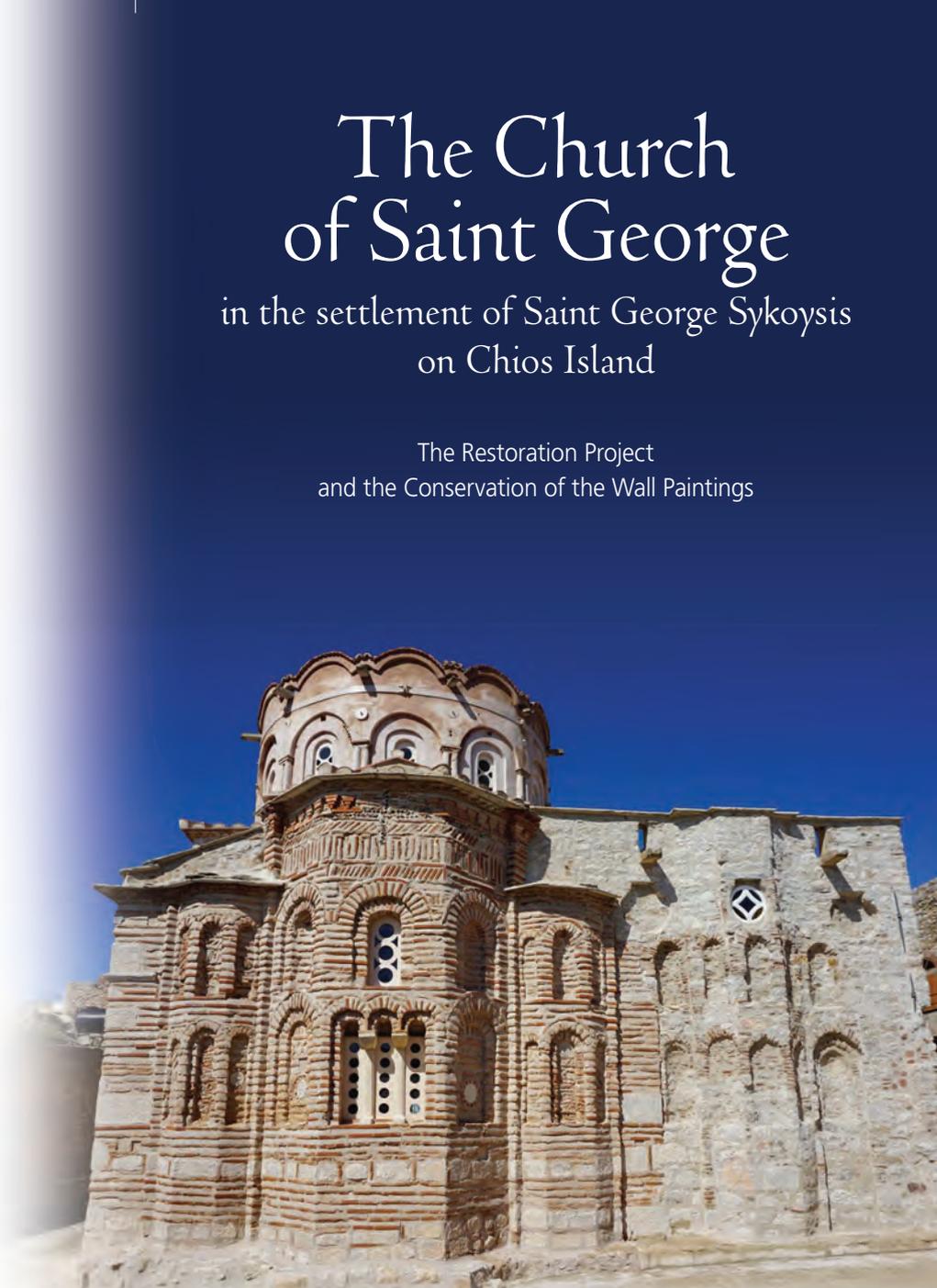
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The Church of Saint George

in the settlement of Saint George Sykoysis on Chios Island

The Restoration Project
and the Conservation of the Wall Paintings

MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS
EPHORATE OF ANTIQUITIES OF CHIOS



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History The settlement of Saint George Sykousis in central Chios is built on a natural mound and offers spectacular views towards the fertile Kampos plain and the coastline of Asia Minor across the sea. The church of Saint George is the parish church of the settlement. The original nucleus of the church was first erected as a monastery katholikon in the middle Byzantine period, most probably in the 12th century. It is already mentioned in the mid-13th century, namely in the year 1259, in a gold-sealed monastery foundation document (chrysoboulon) signed by Byzantine emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos as a dependency of the monastery of Nea Moni.

In 1518, monk Sofronios Sepsis restored the, by that time, ruined church, and congregated the first inhabitants of the settlement of Saint George Sykousis.

In the early 19th century the church was radically modified with the addition of spaces on the south and north, resulting in the transformation of the original Byzantine nucleus, as is also attested by a marble plaque with a relief of Saint George Slaying the Dragon, installed over the main entrance to the church on the west façade. The inscription on the relief plaque records the renovation of the church and the date 1815.

The church also suffered considerable damage during the Chios massacre in 1822, when it was burned down by the Ottoman Turks. It was subsequently repaired, with funds collected from

the settlement inhabitants according to a document by Chios metropolitan bishop Sophronios, written in 1842. The noteworthy wooden altar screen (templon) found in the Byzantine part of the church, dated June 1st 1836, according to an inscription on it, must be attributed to this repair project.

Architecture The church belongs to the architectural type of the so-called “insular” domed octagon, and differs with respect to its prototype, namely the Katholikon on Nea Moni monastery (1042) in terms of the east support of the central dome. In Saint George a heightened barrel vault constructed over the bema apse bears the loads of the central dome, while at Nea Moni these loads are transferred

directly onto a rather shallow bema conch.

The 19th century repairs altered the original architectural type considerably. It was at that time that the west and north walls of the church were demolished, a barrel-vaulted aisle was added to the west, and another aisle to the north; this latter aisle was covered by a series of cross vaults that rest on the colonnade that replaced the original north wall.

The church survived to the present day heavily altered, mostly due to the strong concrete renders that completely covered its façades, and thus hid the unique morphological elements of an outstanding middle Byzantine monument.

The previous restoration project, complete in 2012-2013, focused on the repair of the roofing of the church, and revealed that the twelve-sided dome, which, up to that point, was thought to have had collapsed during the 1881 earthquake, was in fact the original one, constructed in the distinctive recessed brick masonry technique.

The removal of all modern concrete renders from the church’s façades in 2017 revealed all those elements that link this monument to the so-called architectural “school of Constantinople”, such as the recessed brick masonry technique, blind arches, shallow conches, brick arches, and the extensive use of decorative brickwork, and ceramic quatrefoils. The various repairs and modifications that the monument underwent throughout



Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, detail



Deësis, detail of Saint John the Precursor

its long history are now evident on the exposed façades; these include the alteration of the original arched end of the south façade, as well as a number of subsequently sealed openings. Traces of a rose-hued mortar render were also discovered in the construction joints between the original Byzantine masonry and that of the more recent additions, evidence that may indicate that the initial church was covered in render either right from the start, or at some subsequent building phase.

The Wall Paintings The removal of oil paints and mortar renders on the interior of the Byzantine nucleus of the church revealed four consecutive layers of wall paintings, which, however, survive mostly in fragments today.

The first layer of painted decoration can be dated to the Byzantine period and was mostly found in the tripartite sanctuary. The meager findings that have survived from the Byzantine wall paintings included a small fragment from an Ascension