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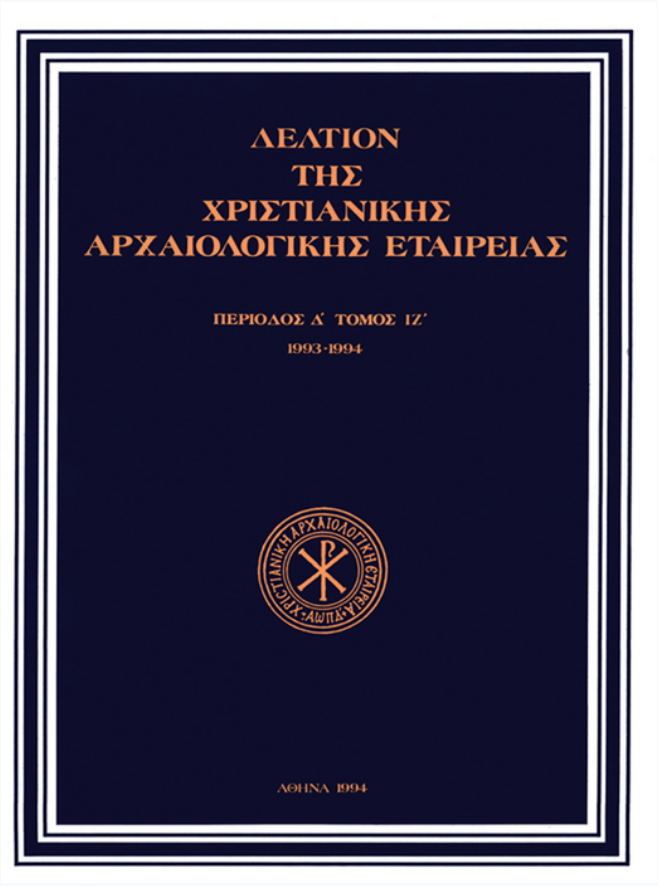

Οι χριστιανικές τοιχογραφίες στον Παρθενώνα: Ερμηνεύοντας ένα χαμένο μνημείο

Antony CUTLER

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ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

The Christian Wall Paintings in the Parthenon: Interpreting a Lost Monument

Antony CUTLER

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Anthony Cutler

THE CHRISTIAN WALL PAINTINGS IN THE PARTHENON: INTERPRETING A LOST MONUMENT

This paper is written not only as an anamnesis for a good friend but to fulfill an invitation accepted nearly a quarter of a century ago. In 1970, when Doula Mouriki had returned to Athens from Princeton with a recent doctoral degree, we spent much time together studying the traces of the Christian church that had been installed in the Parthenon[1]. We compared what little survived of the wall paintings with the printed versions of the watercolours that the Marquess of Bute had commissioned in 1885 and which were published by Westlake two years later[2], and with the commentary on these that was the heart of A. Xyngopoulos' study of 1920[3]. Not yet the preeminent student of Byzantine painting in Greece of her generation that she would become, Mouriki generously suggested (since I had finished my dissertation on wall painting, while hers was on manuscript illustration) that I try my hand at a new assessment of the sad relics about us. I agreed, on the condition that we find some old, detailed photographs. A small group, made probably in the 1950s, was supplied through the kindness of Manolis Chatzidakis. But I was too distracted by other things to take advantage of this precious information. Only now — alas, too late in many respects — do I return to this neglected topic.

To the best of my knowledge, only one photograph of the paintings has ever been published, and this without commentary of any sort[4]. At the end of the twentieth century publication of such photos as exist is still a desideratum and the first aim of the present study. To the group of mid-twentieth-century pictures I have added some older, general views[5], known to, but insufficiently exploited by, Xyngopoulos, and others that I took in 1970-1971. These, when combined with the accounts of L. de Laborde[6] and Westlake, are probably all we shall ever know of the painted decoration of the church[7]. But this limited information is only one of the difficulties that faces us. Art historians, nonetheless, have reduced the problem essentially to a matter of chronology and patronage: were there one or more layers of painting, or campaigns of decoration?[8] When were these achieved? And who was repronsible for them? Since Westlake's suggestion that the murals were "probably as early or earlier than the tenth century"[9], their supposed date has slipped generally downward. Laborde and, following him, Gregorovius[10] sought to connect them with Basil II's triumphant entry into Athens in 1017 after his Bulgarian victory. Xyngopoulos proposed a late-twelfth century date, and associated the painting with the verses in which Michael Choniates, metropolitan of Athens from 1182 to 1204, speaks of his offerings to the church[11]. G. Soteriou, like

1. R. Janin, Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins (La Géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin, III, 2), Paris 1975, p. 316-320. The dedication of the church to the Mother of God is attested only from the tenth century. The best modern account of the physical development of the church remains a section in the doctoral dissertation of A. D. Norre, Studies in the History of the Parthenon, University of California at Los Angeles 1966, p. 30-40. Here, too, the most useful collection of testimonia.

2. N. H. J. Westlake, On Some Ancient Paintings in Churches of Athens, Archaeologia LI (1888), p. 173-188 (hereafter: Ancient Paintings). See esp. pls V and VI. I have hunted vainly for these watercolours both on the Isle of Bute and at the Society of Antiquaries in London of which Westlake was a Fellow. My thanks to Ruth Macrides who continues the search. One of Westlake's watercolours was reproduced in O. M. Dalton, Byzantine Art and Archaeology, Oxford 1911, fig. 179.

3. A. Xyngopoulos, Παρθενῶνος βυζαντιναί τοιχογραφίαι, AE 1920, p. 36-53 (hereafter: Τοιχογραφίαι). Here the older literature on the topic.

4. R. J. Hopper, The Acropolis, London 1971, photo on p. 210 (our Fig. 1).

5. Made in 1910 and 1912 by Frédéric Boissonas for M. Collignon, Le Parthénon. L'histoire, l'architecture et la sculpture, Paris 1914, pls 120, 131A, 135A, 135B.

6. Les chrétiens et les musulmans dans l'Acropole d'Athènes, RA IV (1847), p. 49-62, esp. p. 50-55 (hereafter: Les chrétiens), where are to be found what would appear to be the oldest reproductions of the paintings. On Laborde, see now J.-M. Spieser, Hellénisme et connaissance de l'art byzantin au XIXe siècle in: Ἑλληνισμός. Quelques jalons pour une histoire de l'identité grecque. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, ed. S. Said, Leiden 1991, p. 346-347.

7. The medieval and early modern testimonia do not mention the wall paintings.

8. Laborde, Les chrétiens, p. 55, suggested a first layer of painting that fell into disperair during Iconoclasm and not replaced until the time of Basil II. The existence of two distinct (contemporaneous?) styles was first proposed by Sp. P. Lambros, Αἱ Ἀθῆναι περί τά τέλη τοῦ δωδεκάτου αἰῶνος, Athens 1878, p. 39-40.

9. Westlake, Ancient Paintings, p. 180.

10. F. Gregorovius, Geschichte der Stadt Athen in Mittelalter von der Zeir Justinians bis zur türkischen Eroberung, 3rd ed., Stuttgart 1889, I, p. 164.

11. Xyngopoulos, Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 50; A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Ἀθηναϊκά ἐκ τοῦ ΙΒ΄ καί ΙΓ΄ αἰῶνος, Ἁρμονία III (1902), p. 284-285. On the interpretation of this text, see below.

Xyngopoulos, evoked the mosaics of Daphni as a stylistic parallel, and cautiously suggested a date at the end of the eleventh or biginning of the twelfth century[12]. M. Chatzidakis defended a late twelfth-century date[13], while most recently M. Korres has left the range of the paintings' chronology and sponsorship open enough to accommodate either Nicholas Hagiotheodorites, metropolitan of the city from 1166 to 1175, or Michael Choniates[14].

As is apparent, the landscape of the Parthenon church's historiography is marked by a succession of attempts to connect its decoration with particular individuals and even with particular occasions, as if no unknown figure could be responsible for a body of painting that today is itself unknown[15]; and as if only a major event could explain the embellishment of a building whose Christian inscriptions date back to 693 when it was already the cathedral of Athens[16]. The city's prosperity developed incrementally from the tenth to the eighth decade of the twelfth century[17], that is, throughout the period encompassing the various dates that have been suggested for the painting. Even if economic affluence could be shown to be a precondition of artistic activity, no one occasion stands out as uniquely providing the circumstances in which the cella of the Parthenon could receive Christian decoration; if there were more than one campaign, the attempt to identify a period of economic grounds becomes even more supererogatory. Not is it necessary to suppose that the enrichment of the church in one respect requires that all such embellishment was contemporaneous. Thus Michael Choniates' couplet

> "I have decorated your church, [my] first labour
> and bring worthy fittings and utensils"[18]

which has been made to bear so much weight, says nothing of mural decoration. The history of Byzantine patronage is full of instances where the offering of σκεύη alone was considered a sufficient gift[19].

In short, it is surely time to admit that we can neither date the wall paintings precisely nor identify them with a particular sponsor any more than we can the mosaic that is known to have occupied the apse of the church in the Parthenon[20]. Following Xyngopoulos' article, scholarly consensus has arrived at the belief that the murals are work of the second half of twelfth century and I have no reason to oppose such a view. But it must also be remembered that, since 1920, we have learned much about wall painting in Attica and elsewhere in Greece. With the few exceptions noted below, these discoveries offer no remarkable analogies to the content or arrangement of the murals in the Parthenon. Furthermore, in the last century, these paintings have suffered so much from repeated reconstruction and consolidation of the

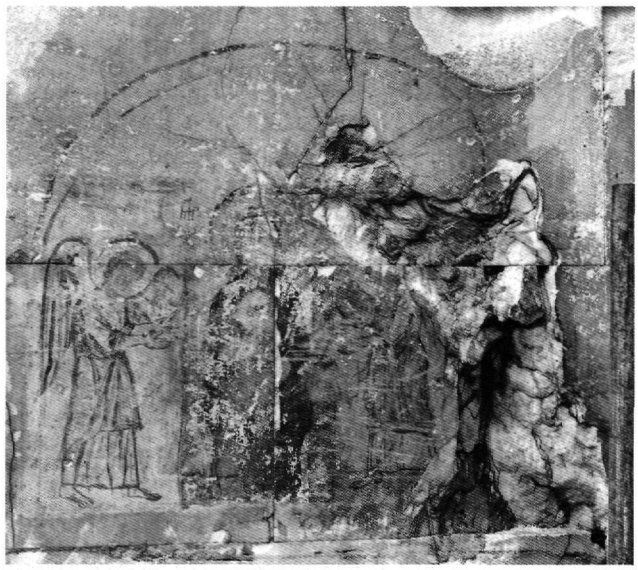

Fig. 1. Virgin and Child between angels. Parthenon church, exonarthex (photo: courtesy of the Benaki Museum).

Fig. 2. Head. Parthenon church, exonarthex (photo: courtesy of the Benaki Museum).

walls[21] (not to speak of the effects of recent restoration and air pollution) than any attempt to suggest stylistic parallels on the basis of the vestiges that appear in our photos would be more vain than when Bute saw them "in a lamentable state of decay, and additionally marred in consequence of having been plastered over by the Turks"[22]. The loss of the murals likewise means that we cannot interrogate them on points more interesting than that of their chronology. Did their singular setting, for example, encourage a parallel freedom in their content? Did local traditions and liturgical uses have an impact on the nature of the decoration? Such questions, alas, are now unanswerable. There are, however, others that concern Byzantine culture of the period both in general and the Parthenon church in particular. These must wait until we have seen what was visible between fifty and one hundred years ago.

* * *

The best known, and today the only reasonably well preserved, painting of the entire church is situated on the southern portion of the east wall of the ancient opisthodomos which would seem to have been used by the Byzantines as an exonarthex[23]. Set some five metres above the pavement, it depicts the Virgin, enthroned with the Child in her lap, between two angels who turn

12. EMME, I. Ἀθηνῶν, Athens 1927, p. 39-40.
13. In: E. Melas, ed., Alte Kirchen und Klöster Griechenlands, Cologne 1972, p. 171.
14. Der Parthenon bis 1687. Reparatur, Kirche, Moschee, Pulvermagazin in: Die Explosion des Parthenon, Exhibition Catalogue, Berlin 1990, p. 23. Why these two figures, rather than such metropolitans as George Bourtzes, whose death in 1160 is recorded in an inscription on the Parthenon, should be considered candidates is not made clear in this brief survey.
15. In March 1993, the only paintings that revealed themselves to close inspection, apart from the Virgin between angels in the narthex (Fig. 1), were the raised arms of a figure on the adjacent wall; the remains (faint drapery and possibly the head and nimbus) of the Virgin of the Crucifixion on the north wall; the merest traces of paint (a garment?) on the north portion of the west wall; a red patch the corner with the south wall, high up on the west wall; and one vertical red stroke on the south wall. I am grateful to Tasos Tanoulas and Alexandra Christopoulou of the Office for the Preservation of the Acropolis Monuments for helping me in this inspection.
16. A. Orlandos and E. Vranoussis, Τά χαράγματα τοῦ Παρθενῶνος, Athens 1973, p. 34.
17. Ch. Bouras, City and Village: Urban Design and Architecture, JÖB 31.2 (1981), p. 625-627. Evidence for devotion in the Parthenon in the first quarter of the tenth century is provided by the Life of the young Blessed Luke who was taken to the Church of the Mother of God in Athens. See D. Sophianos, Ὅσιος Λουκᾶς. Ὁ Βίος τοῦ ὁσίου Λουκᾶ τοῦ Στειριώτη, Athens 1989, p. 166, lines 26-28. For the political and economic circumstances in the late twelfth century — "the region was by no means poverty-stricken" — and the role of metropolitans, see J. Herrin, Realities of Byzantine Provincial Government: Hellas and Peloponnesos, 1180-1205, DOP 29 (1975), esp. p. 256 and 259-266 (hereafter: Realities).
18. Ἐκάλλυνά σου τὸν ναόν, πρῶτος πόνος· / ἔπιπλα τιμήεντα καὶ σκεύη φέρω. See note 11, above.
19. To cite only a relevant example, Zonaras, Epitome historiarum, ed. L. Dindorf, III, Bonn 1870, p. 566, speaks only of Basil II's precious gifts to the Parthenon church. Michael Choniates' offerings were possibly necessitated by the action of a provincial governor who, under the guise of worshipping at the church of the Theotokos (the Parthenon?), "had stripped the city of supplies, requisitioned the domestic animals, and refused to leave until special money gifts were made" (Herrin, Realities, p. 269).
20. The mosaic ("ein Marienbild mit Jhesu in den Armen") is first mentioned by Reinhold Lubenau in 1588-1589. See Norre, Studies (note 1, above), p. 226. In 1848 the British Museum acquired from Thomas Burdon, who had long resided in Greece, a group of tesserae that are labelled "From the Ceilling of the Parthenon when a Greek Church — before the taking of Athens by the Turks". These 188 fragments (mostly of glass, some of it gilded on both sides, but also ox-blood and emerald-coloured stones) are kept in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities as accession no. TB 1075.
21. Reconstruction of part of the cella walls in 1842-1844 and replacement of some of the brick of the west wall with new marble in 1915 is noted in ΑΔ, παράρτημα 1915, p. 49. It may be in connection with this latter campaing that J. Arnott Hamilton, Temples and Churches, Scottish Ecclesiological Society Transactions 13.2 (1940-41), p. 5, recalled that "in the course of the winter of 1913-14 a scaffolding was erected around them (*scil.* the paintings) to enable them to be retouched".
22. John, Marquess of Bute, Some Christian Monuments of Athens, Scottish Review VI (1888), p. 95-96. On Bute's activities in Greece, see now R. J. Macrides, The Scottish Connection in Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, St. Andrews 1992.
23. This role is suggested both by the traces of the Last Judgement, discussed below, and the font observed in this area by travellers. The latter was described by D. I. Pallas, Ἡ φιάλη τοῦ χριστιανικοῦ Παρθενῶνος, BNJ 10 (1933-1934), p. 185-198, as a phiale. But Slobodan Ćurčić kindly pointed out to me that, given the problem of supplying such equipment with water high on the Acropolis, the font could well have belonged to a baptistery as is found, e.g., in the exonarthex of the church of the Virgin at Studenica.

Fig. 3. Details of the Last Judgement. Parthenon church, exonarthex (photo: author).

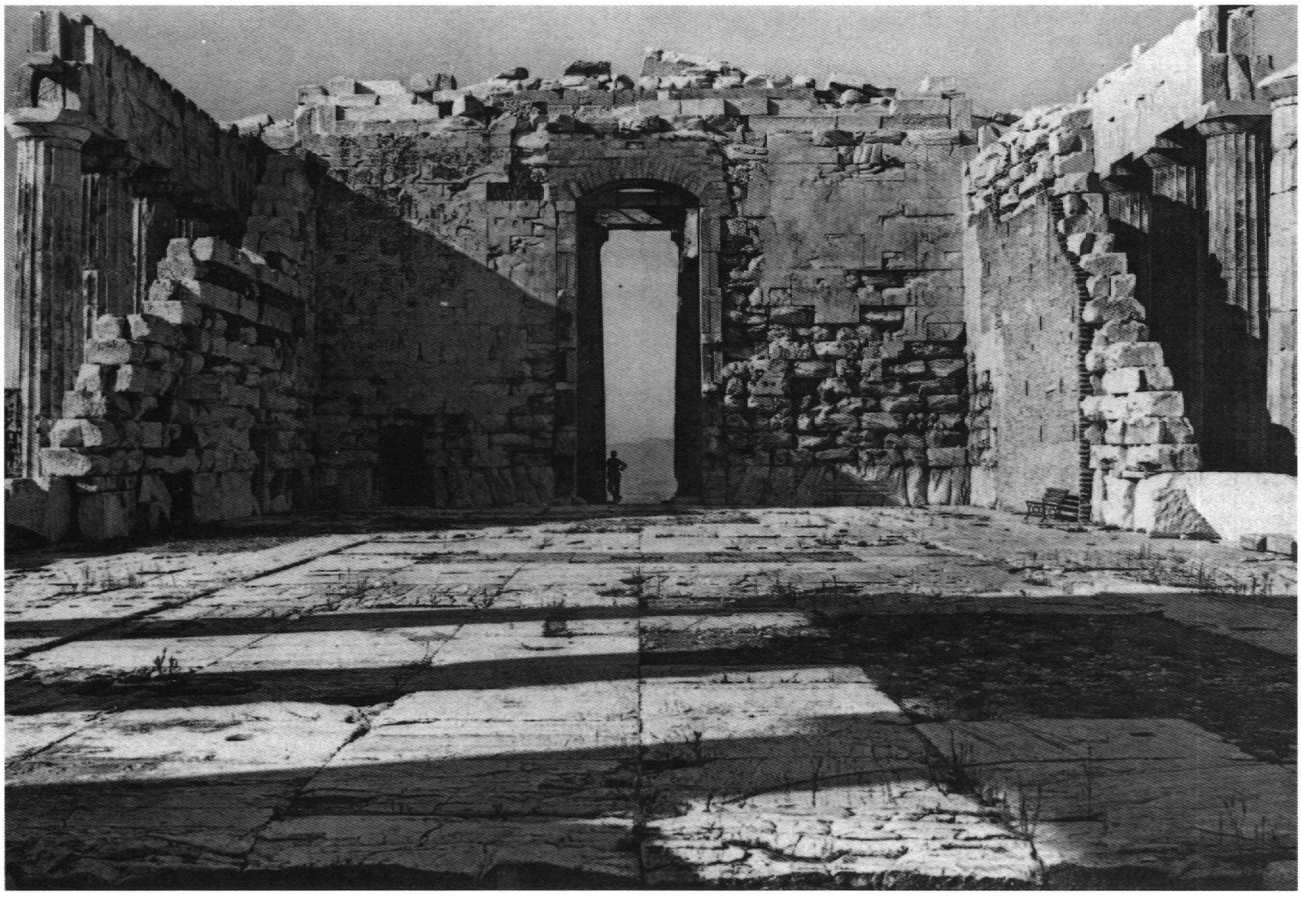

Fig. 4. West end. Parthenon church (photo: after Collignon, pl. 130).

toward her in supplication (Fig. 1). She is neither shown in an orans attitude nor is her son enclosed within a medallion on her breast[24], although one feature that lends the scene a certain distinctiveness is the arch above the group[25]. Like the figures themselves, this survives in dark red outline painted directly on the marble. Whether or not this image was designed as a discrete icon depends upon its relation to the paintings above it and on the adjacent south jamb of the opisthodomos where Xyngopoulos rightly saw traces of a Last Judgement. Only later, however, did he sketch (but not comment on) the head, now of somewhat Tatar aspect (Fig. 2)[26], that is preserved on the block above and to the right of that with the enthroned Virgin. Its lower portion disappeared with the half-moon-shaped section of the marble but, even had this not happened, it is hard to imagine the relationship intended between the head and the scene below; nor can we determine the priority of the two drawings. Here immediately, then, we may be faced with paint layers of different date, a phenomenon which Xyngopoulos encountered on the north and south wall and one that was undecidable already in 1920[27].

In 1970 I photographed the motley vestiges of painting on the southern face of the opisthodomos where it abuts the east wall. These occupied four courses of masonry below the level of the enthroned Virgin but, with two exceptions, are too faint to reproduce (or even to identify specifically). The first is "a little man hurrying to the left with hair standing up and violently throwing his hands behind him", a figure the drawing of which offended Xyngopoulos[28]; the second, a larger scene below that he failed to notice (Fig. 3), is a frontal figure riding on a monster whose scaly skin was clearly apparent two decades ago. Pointing to the creature's tail is a detached hand, with its palm turned outward. Fragmentary members and supplicant gestures of this sort occur frequently in images of the Last Judgement and are particularly evident in frescoes damaged by time and/or human intervention[29]. There is reason therefore to see the paintings on both walls in this corner of the exonarthex as thematically related. On a celebrated icon of the elev-

enth or twelfth century at Mount Sinai[30], the lower right side of the panel shows the damned driven into a zone inhabited by a scaly monster, while to the left the Virgin sits enthroned without the Child but between two angels. It has recently been made clear how painters of Hell scenes in the twelfth century understood the role of the Mother of God not only as the antithesis of Eve, as in homiletic literature of the time, but as the instrument by which humankind, freed from this fate, could find eternal life[31].

The Last Judgement is, of course, an ordinary component of the decoration of nartheces. But as soon as we enter the church proper the distribution of paintings in what was its west end (Fig. 4) radically departs from the norm. On the south side of the west wall, i.e. at the base of the "Frankish bell-tower", ran a series of scenes of the Passion, some of which were still identifiable a quarter of a century ago. A photo of the 1950s shown even more clearly, in the south-west corner of the cella, the massive cross-bar of the Crucifixion and below, to the left, the standing figure of the Virgin (Fig. 5). Her feet rest on a ground line that extended to the right past the hillock in which the cross is planted, and sufficiently far to accommodate another vertical figure. Other fragments of paint below this level suggest some sort of "dado" decoration but their nature cannot be made out. Yet the photo records enough detail for the iconographical analogies proposed by Xyngopoulos to be sustained. Mary's raised right hand, almost touching the large oblique fracture in the marble, is approximately midway between the Golgotha and the cross-bar, while Christ's arms hang from rather than run along this bar: both are features of the Crucifixion mosaic at Daphni[32]. Although what appear in the photo to be details of Christ's chest are in fact damage to the marble, the modelling of his right arm and the outline of his left, clearly articulated at the elbow, are still in evidence. Xyngopoulos' sketch of the scene suggests that he could still recognize the Lord's inclined head and the edge of John's nimbus[33]. If this were so in his time, these details had gone the way of all paint by the 1950s.

The right side of the same photo records a dense network of lines, the reading of which is not made easier by the veining of the marble in this area. Unremarked by all previous commentators, they could be parts of figures, like the centurion, attending the Crucifixion. But far too little survives for any assurance on this point. Certainly these fragments did not belong to the next scene[34], the Epitaphios Threnos (Fig. 6) painted directly above the grille that secures entry into the bell-tower. Xyngopoulos' observations are important because, even in the 1950s, there remained only traces of figures at

Fig. 5. Crucifixion. Parthenon church, west wall (photo: courtesy of the Benaki Museum).

24. Thus the epithet Platytera, ascribed to her by Xyngopoulos, Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 46, is inappropriate. On the problems involved see N. P. Ševčenko, s.v. Virgin Blachernitissa in: Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, New York 1991, p. 2170.
25. A comparable Virgin and Child, though apparently without the flanking angels, is the "fresco-icon" which stood to the north of the templon screen at Hagia Sophia, Ohrid. See R. Hamann-Mac Lean and H. Hallensleben, Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien vom 11. bis zum frühen 14. Jahrhundert, Giessen 1963, fig. 1 (hereafter: Monumentalmalerei).
26. A. Xyngopoulos, Ὁ μεσαιωνικός πύργος τοῦ Παρθενῶνος, AE 1960, p. 12, fig. 10.
27. Xyngopoulos, Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 39, 48.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 46 and fig. 15 (line drawing).
29. Thus, e.g., in the south porch of Hagia Sophia at Trebizond (D. Talbot Rice, The Church of Haghia Sophia at Trebizond, Edinburgh 1968, pls 68A and B, fig. 119).
30. G. and M. Soteriou, Εἰκόνες τῆς Μονῆς Σινᾶ, I, Athens 1956, fig. 151.
31. I. Hutter in: Das Marienhomiliar des Mönchs Jakobos von Kokkinobaphos. Codex Vaticanus graecus 1162, Einführungsband, Stuttgart 1991, p. 36-38.
32. G. Millet, Le monastère de Daphni, Paris 1899, pl. XVI.
33. Xyngopoulos, Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 39, fig. 3.
34. The images on the west wall were distinguished from each other by

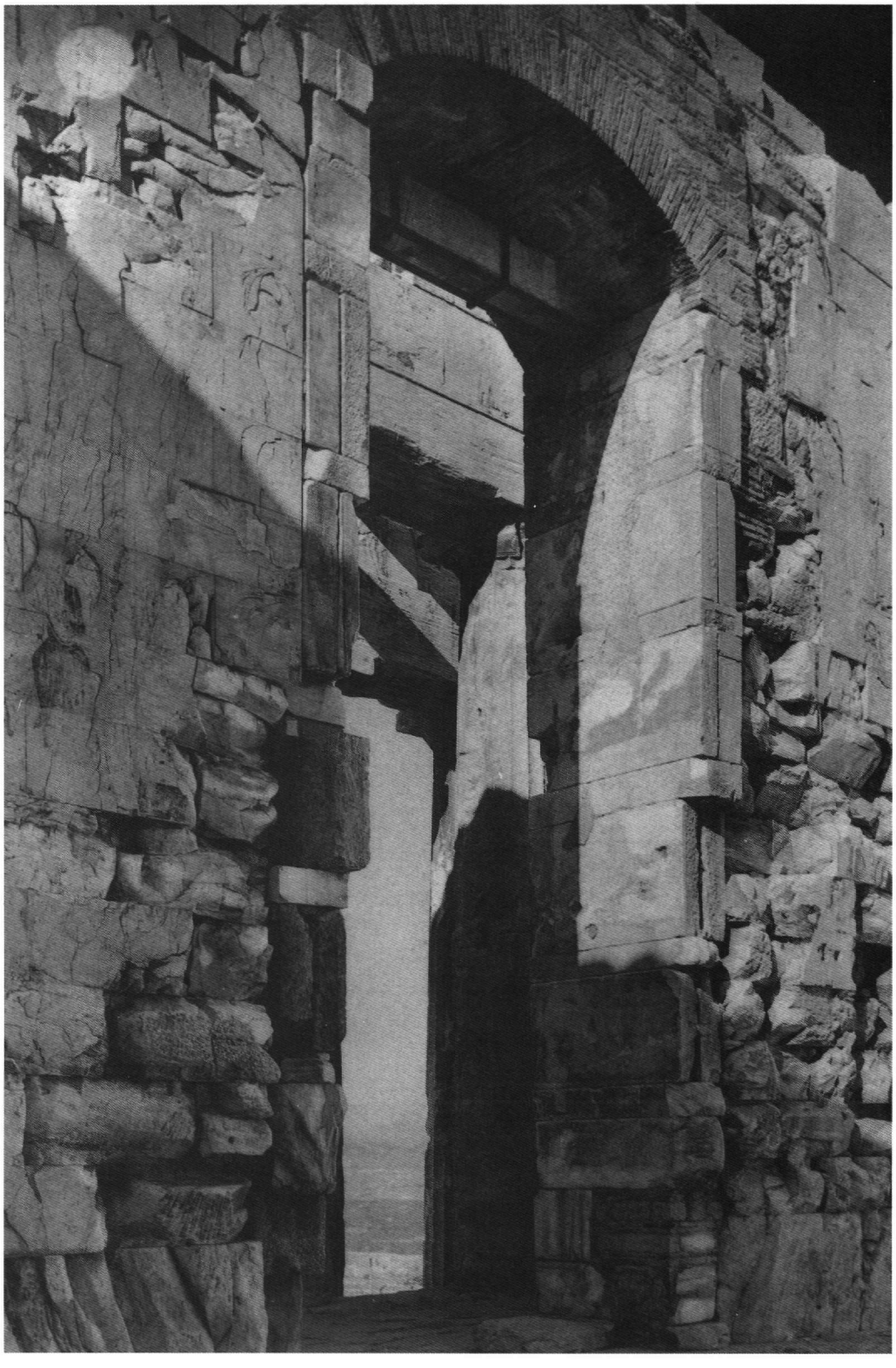

Fig. 6. Angel at the Tomb. Parthenon church, west wall (photo: after Collignon, pl. 131A).

either end of the mattress, immediately below a keyhole-shaped cleft in the revetment. He identified the Virgin standing beside the head of the deposed Christ, the hand of John at the Lord's knees, and Joseph of Arimatheia beside the bare feet. These details, however, are unverifiable, if only because of the great variety in the ways the Lamentation was depicted in Middle Byzantine art. While John and Joseph occupy these positions in, for example, the Hagioi Anargyroi at Kastoria[35], Mary and Joseph bend toward the body rather than stand erect, as does the figure beside Christ's feet. In versions such as Nerezi[36], apostles rather than Joseph stand at the foot of the bed.

Completing the Christological series was the figure of the angel who encounters the Myrrhophoroi. The women are invisible even in a photograph of 1910 (Fig. 6). But showing the area to the south of the west door of the cella, this picture presents the figure not in the contrapposto attitude described and drawn by Xyngopoulos[37], i.e. with the right arm crossing the body and pointing, but rather directed toward the angel's right; both hands, in fact, are raised in front of the body, one pointing to the women who would be to the spectator's left, the other possibly holding a staff. This disposition of the limbs, it is true, is an older type than that of the angel on the gilded silver reliquary plaque in the Louvre with which Xyngopoulos compared his reading. But the simpler arrangement survived into the thirteenth century, as the fresco of the Women at the Tomb in the Church of the Virgin at Studenica demonstrates[38].

Whether or not Xyngopoulos was tempted by the setting of these images into imposing a more "antique" attitude on the angel, any impression of classical unity is shattered by the painting to the north of the door. Here the narrative sequence of events after Christ's passion was abandoned[39], and replaced by an uncertain number of parallelograms each subdivided into vertical (and possibly one horizontal) rectangles. These were apparent in 1910 (Fig. 4), although the photograph also shows the loss of almost all of the marble facing in the lower third of the wall. This invalidates Xyngopoulos' claim that he could see traces "probably belonging to other full-length representations of saints"[40] below the roundels under the parallelograms. In a detail-photo taken in 1912 four interlocking roundels can be seen in the vertical channel between the frame and the north wall, as well as the remains of one beneath its lower border (Fig. 7). This suggests that the northern portion of the wall was subdivided into framed "icons". The two that survive, as I could confirm in 1970, portrayed sainted bishops. The overall design is closer to that of book illumination[41] than to any other part of the church's decora-

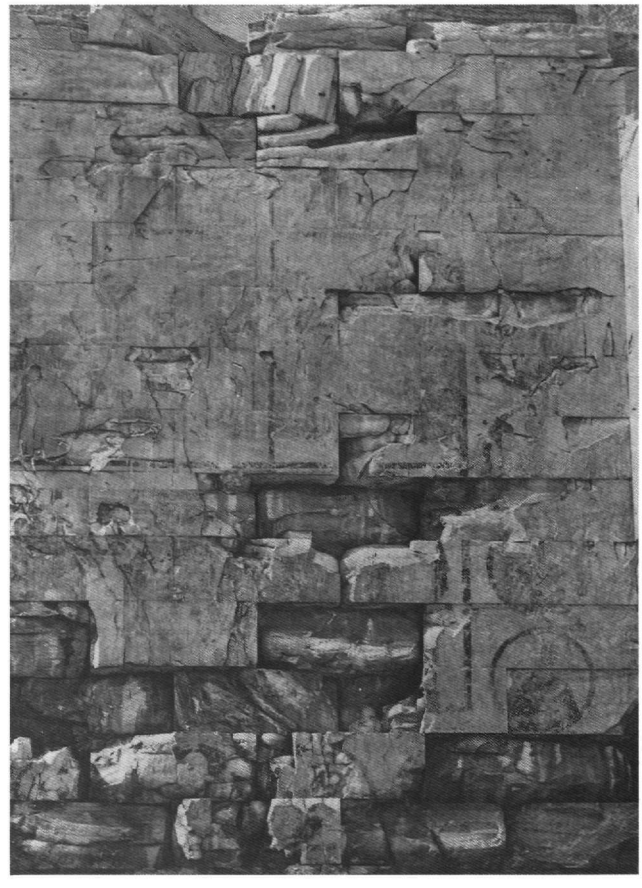

Fig. 7. Bishops in roundels. Parthenon church, west wall, north end (photo: after Collignon, pl. 135B).

their ample spacing. In 1970 no trace remained of the red ταινίαι and λωρίδαι that for Xyngopoulos, Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 39, divided this part of the wall into distinct scenes.

35. S. Pelekanides, Καστορία, I, Thessalonike 1953, pl. 17b.

36. Hamann-MacLean - Hallensleben, Monumentalmalerei, fig. 36.

37. Τοιχογραφίαι, pl. 41 and fig. 7.

38. Hamann-MacLean - Hallensleben, Monumentalmalerei, fig. 68.

39. Xyngopoulos, Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 41, hesitantly suggested that traces of the Virgin presenting the Christ Child in the temple might be visible in the first parallelogram on the north side of the door. If this were the case, its existence would still disrupt the flow of the narrative on the southern portion of this wall and bear no evident relationship to the "iconic" portraits that survive on its north side. The narrative order of the three scenes on the lower part of the southern portion of the west means that we can only speculate on the content of any such images as may been painted above them. The Entry into Jerusalem, the Agony in the Garden, Christ's Betrayal by Judas, and the Last Supper are all possible candidates.

40. Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 42.

41. Thus, e.g., the imperial portrait flanked by military saints in the Psalter of Basil II (A. Cutler, The Aristocratic Psalters in Byzantium, Paris 1984, fig. 412).

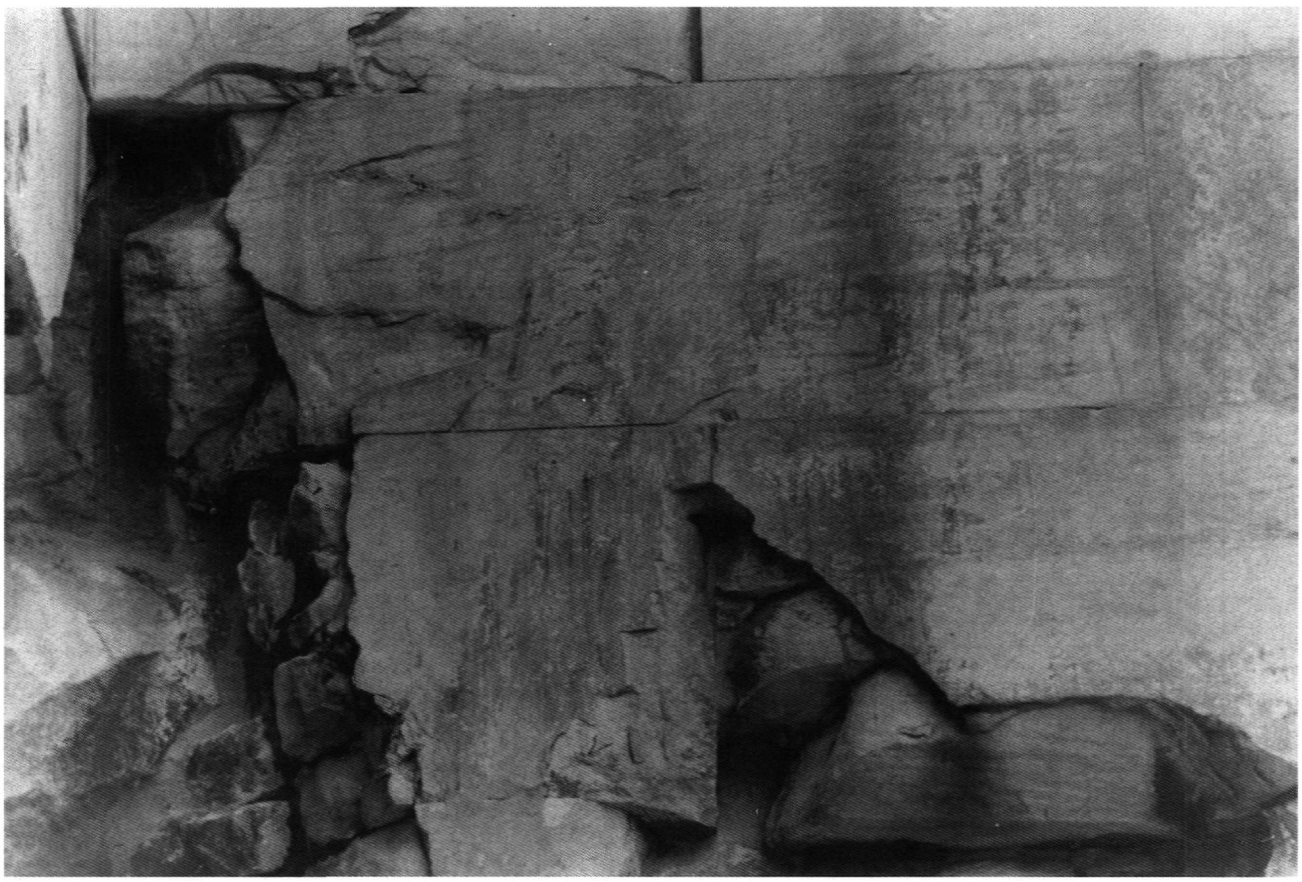

Fig. 8. Standing Saints. Parthenon church, north wall, west end (photo: author).

tion. Yet the use of single figures in framed interlocking medallions was common in monumental decoration in the twelfth and thirteenth century, as in exemplified by the Pentecost mosaic at the Cappella Palatina in Palermo[42] and the episcopal portraits in the apse of the Panagia at Chrysapha near Sparta[43].

The gallery of saints, represented however in a quite different manner, continued on the north wall of the church. To judge by Westlake's comments and drawings[44] and Xyngopoulos' observation that these paintings, although preserved only in outline, offered a "uniquely sober and majestic decoration"[45], this would seem to be the area of greatest loss in the present century. The contrast between their condition, even in 1970, and the coloured engravings published by Laborde[46] is pathetic. Apparently none of the twelve full-length saints still recognizable in 1920 was judged to be worthy of photography in the 1950s. In 1970 I was able to discern no more than three of the figures in the middle row (Fig. 8), i.e. below the group that Xyngopoulos suggested was a Deesis group[47] and above the chevron ornament that separated the saintly queens from the male bishops above them. If the first of these hierarchs, immediately to the right of the ruptured masonry in the north-west corner, holds a rotulus, as Xyngopoulos reported, it was not recognizable after fifty years; the codex said to have been held by the bishop-saint beside him is perhaps faintly perceptible; the third and all subsequent figures leading to the alleged relatively huge Virgin enthroned[48] are visible to the eye of faith alone.

Like the saints above and below it, the horizontal band of chevron ornament has today disappeared. But in 1970 traces of this ornament were still apparent near the south-west corner of the cella and, in a photograph of 1912, these reveal themselves, below the brick repairs to the wall, as a complex of three dentillated strips set between dark bands (Fig. 9). This invaluable photo argues for a relationship, at least in matters of ornament, not only between the south wall and that on the other side of the church, but also with the west wall: perpendicular to the chevron band at many points are vertical borders that serve as framing devices for figures

or scenes that even 80 years ago could not be made out. Xyngopoulos observed that below the dentillated band "may be discerned certain traces of colour, which may be considered as belonging to upright, standing figures"[49]. In at least one case the likelihood that saints were depicted in this area is confirmed by the presence of the nimbus that occupies the centre of the lowest course in our photo. Given the loss of all but the outline, it is pointless to suggest analogies. But there is no lack of parallels for chevron ornament in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Since Alison Frantz's suggestion that the chevron never became popular in Byzan-

Fig. 9. Chevron and spindle ornament. Parthenon church, south wall, west end (photo: after Collignon, pl. 135A).

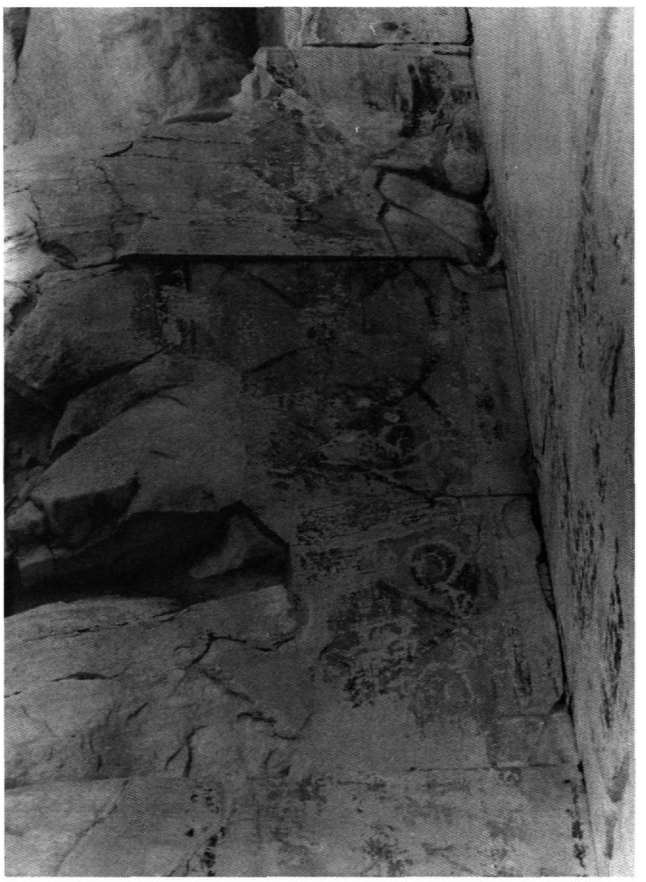

Fig. 10. Spindle ornament. Parthenon church, south-west corner (photo: author).

tine art[50], a host of specimens has been discovered. Datable examples include the apsidal arch at Kurbinovo (1191)[51] and, in the same situation, at Elmalı kilise in Cappadocia (*ca* 1190-1200?)[52]. In Attica itself a band very similar to ours occurs in the Last Judgement in the church of St. George at Kalyvia Kouvara[53].

Even more widerspread are versions of the more elaborate, vertically disposed orgament at the extreme right side of our photo. In the protected situation of the angle between the south wall and the tower, it was still clearly apparent in 1970 (Fig. 10). This consists of interlocking spindle-shaped motifs the circumferences of which touch the centres of identical forms above and below them; within the lateral arcs created by this overlapping are circlets that look like the "eyes" on a butterfly's wings. Now interlocking circles are a commonplace of late antique and early Byzantine floor mosaics on both the Greek mainland[54] and in the islands. With "eye" motifs at their points of intersection, they are found in the pavement of the Metroon on the west side of the Athenian Agora[55]. Xyngopoulos reported that he could

42. O. Demus, The Mosaics of Norman Sicily, London 1949, p. 15.
43. V. J. Djurić, La peinture murale byzantine, XIIe et XIIIe siècles in: Actes du XVe Congrès International d'études byzantines, I, Athens 1979, pl. XVII, fig. 32.
44. Ancient Paintings, p. 174-177, pls V and VI.
45. Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 38.
46. Les chrétiens, pl. 64.
47. Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 43-44.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
50. M. A. Frantz, Byzantine Illuminated Ornament. A Study in Chronology, ArtB 16 (1934), p. 49.
51. L. Hadermann-Misguich, Kurbinovo. Les fresques de Saint-Georges et la peinture byzantine du XIIe siècle, Brussels 1973, I, colour pl. A and p. 296-298, where the form is referred to as an "accordion motif".
52. M. Restle, Byzantine Wall Painting in Asia Minor, Greenwich, Conn. 1968, II, pl. 160.
53. Ch. Bouras-A. Kalogeropoulos-R. Andreadi, Ἐκκλησίες τῆς Ἀττικῆς, Athens 1971, fig. 167.
54. For examples, see M. Spiro, Critical Corpus of the Mosaic Pavements on the Greek Mainland, Fourth-Sixth Centuries, New York 1978, II, pls 71, 78, 107, 110, 154, 208, 313, and *passim*.
55. H. Thompson in: Hesperia 6 (1937), p. 198-199, figs 121-122.

find no parallels for this ornament[56] and it is true that in Middle Byzantine painting such complex chains of spindles are rare. But in sculpture of the tenth to twelfth centuries they occur on the vertical members of templon screens both in Phrygia[57] and, especially close to our scheme, in Euboea[58]. As with all the other fragments we have examined, it is not so much their sources as their distribution in their own time and their peculiar application in the space under consideration that raise the most interesting questions about the Parthenon church.

* * *

Even with the invaluable aid to earlier testimony, we have been able to put together a picture of the church's painted decoration that can at best be described as minimal. Yet the Byzantinist is accustomed to working with fragmentary evidence, a state of affairs that is a given and one that can lead to findings other than those of traditional antiquarian and philological scholarship[59]. Looking at the Christian Parthenon, we are faced with a fascinating set of antitheses. The presence of complex ornament at the ends of the walls (Fig. 10) strongly indicates that less marginal areas were no less richly decorated: there is thus a clear contrast between their present barren state and their former elaboration. Such painting as we know in turn suggests radical differences between the usual manner in which a Middle Byzantine church was adorned and that in the Parthenon: the scheme normally perceived as consisting of the liturgical "Great Feast" cycle[60], supplemented by hagiographical portraits, is here rejected in favour of scenes from the Passion of Christ and its aftermath unconventionally displayed on the west wall, while the north and south walls were in the main given over to images of saints frontally disposed as in panel- and book-painting.

This reading is inevitably dependent upon what little survives or is recorded of the western part of the church. Nothing is known of the decoration of the eastern half, other than that the apse contained an image of the Virgin and Child. The very distance of this mosaic from the painting discussed above represents another major antinomy between the Parthenon church and contemporary churches built and embellished on a much smaller scale. The difference in magnitude, is, of course, a function of the antique site in which the church was housed. The use of this site itself indicates a *decision,* the choice that was made to house a Christian naos within the temple of Pallas Athena. Yet, apart from the fact that the murals were painted directly upon the marble, in antique fashion[61], no deference was paid to the church's ancient container. The decoration was unremittingly Christian; those who entered the church passed by the painted statement of the κρίσις, the Judgement that is entailed by the Parousia. This narrowly focused ideological stance contrasts with the emphasis on the site's former glories celebrated by Michael Choniates and Euthymios Tornikes[62], yet the difference between their literary laments and the building in which they worshipped is one of genre, not of essence. The recognition of paradoxes within a single culture does not oblige us to interpret them as contradictions.

It is possible that the diversity between the decoration of the Parthenon's walls, as between these and those of other shrines, denoted different uses of the spaces below them. It may be that only portions of the church were in normal use, a "miniaturisation" of the huge setting as we know to have taken place in the cathedral inserted into the temple of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias[63]. What is clear is that the murals, whatever their original extent, must have been only one aspect of the church's decoration. As at St. Catherine's at Mount Sinai[64], Hosios David in Thessalonike[65] and many other religious structures, wall painting joined with mosaics, portable icons, and liturgical paraphernalia accumulated over centuries to form a total environment hardly perceptible in the bare shell that is the Parthenon, now that is has become an object of worship rather than a place of worship. Empty as it is, it can be partially recuperated. Anamnesis is in the nature of our profession.

56. Τοιχογραφίαι, p. 38.
57. N. Firatli, Découverte d'une église byzantine à Sebaste en Phrygie, CahArch 19 (1969), fig. 121.
58. A. Orlandos in: ABME E′ (1939-1940), p. 12, fig. 9.
59. See A. Kazhdan and G. Constable, People and Power in Byzantium, Washington, D.C. 1982, p. 162-178.
60. For a critique of this standard reading, see T. F. Mathews, The Sequel to Nicaea II in Byzantine Church Decoration, Perkins Journal 11, July 1988, p. 11-21.
61. Compare the painting on plaster in the Church of the Asomatoi and the later Omorphe Ekklesia, as well as in the cave chapels on Mount Pentele.
62. See the latter's monody on an unknown metropolitan of Athens in Papadopoulos-Kerameus, 'Αθηναϊκά (note 11, above), p. 216-223 and, on the Parthenon in particular, p. 222-223.
63. R. Cormack, The Temple as Cathedral in: Aphrodisias Papers. Recent Work on Architecture and Sculpture, Ann Arbor 1990, p. 75-88.
64. For the paintings on marble pilasters on either side of the apse at Sinai, see G. Forsyth and K. Weitzmann, The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Church and Fortress of Justinian, Ann Arbor 1973, p. 16-17, pls CXXX-CXXXIII.
65. On the late twelfth-century frescoes in the south vault, as against the much earlier apse mosaic, see E. Tsigaridas, Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τῆς μονῆς Λατόμου Θεσσαλονίκης καί ἡ βυζαντινή ζωγραφική τοῦ 12ου αἰώνα, Thessalonike 1986.