

The Monastery of St. Chrysostomos at Koutsovendis (Cyprus) and Its Wall Paintings Part I: Description

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PREFACE

The following report is based on fieldwork carried out as long ago as 1963 and 1968–69 with the objective of conserving, cleaning, and studying the wall paintings of the north church of the Chrysostomos monastery. A preliminary account of our first campaign was published in *DOP* 18 (1964), 333–39. The conservation of the paintings was largely completed in 1968, followed in 1969 by a campaign of photography, measurement, and study. It was hoped to return to the monument in order to verify certain details of our documentation, but other commitments prevented the undersigned from doing so in the following few years. The Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus in 1974 created a further obstacle. The monastery, because of its strategic location, was turned into an army post, and all our attempts to be permitted to visit it remained fruitless.

In order not to delay any further the publication of this important monument, we resolved to present *tels quels* the materials gathered by us from 1963 to 1969. Of the present condition of the wall paintings we have no personal knowledge. According to a recent report by Dr. R. Cormack, presented to the Committee on Culture and Education of the Council of Europe (Doc. 6079, 6 July 1989, p. 25), most of the paintings have been whitewashed up to a height of about 2 m. Higher up the walls, sheets of paper have been pasted over representations of human figures. It appears that no serious mutilation of the paintings has taken place.

Our publication will be in two parts. Part I contains a description of architecture, sculpture, and

paintings. Part II, which we hope to complete in the very near future, will be devoted to a discussion of the history of the monument, certain significant features of its architecture, and the iconography and style of the paintings. Both parts will then be issued as a monograph. For an understanding of Part I, it is sufficient to bear in mind that the south church was built in ca. 1090, and that the north church was added to it in ca. 1100.¹ All available evidence indicates that the paintings pertain to a single period and that they, too, were executed in ca. 1100.

The supervision of our work in the monastery was carried out by Mr. E. J. W. Hawkins, who is also responsible for the "Technical Observations" on pp. 93–94. Most of the cleaning, conservation, and photography was in the able hands of Mr. Yannis Makridis. The descriptive notes on the paintings were taken in 1969 by Miss Susan Boyd. The architectural drawings, based on measurements by the undersigned, are by Mr. Richard Anderson.

We should like to express our gratitude to the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem, to whom the monastery belongs, and to successive abbots for their hospitality; to Dr. V. Karageorghis, Director of the Department of Antiquities, Republic of Cyprus, and Mr. A. Papageorghiou, Curator of Monuments, for their help and support throughout the period of our work on the island; to Mr. A. H. S.

¹In our preliminary report we expressed some doubt whether the north church should be attributed to ca. 1100 or ca. 1110–15. On further reflection we now favor the earlier date.

Megaw, who initiated our project, for sharing with us his profound knowledge of the monument; to Miss Joyce Plesters, lately of the National Gallery, London, for an analysis of paint samples; and to Mrs. Hilda Hawkins for her active participation in our work and making our sojourn in the monastery more comfortable.

Finally, special thanks are due to the A. G. Leventis Foundation for a generous grant toward the production of the color plates reproduced here.

C. M.

The monastery of St. John Chrysostom, or simply Chrysostomos, is situated on the southern slopes of the Pentadaktylos mountain range, about seven miles as the crow flies northeast of Nicosia. The most convenient way of reaching it (before 1974) was via the highway leading to Kythrea. At the large village of Mia Milia (representing the fief of Enia Milias under the Lusignans),² one turned left along a minor road that runs almost due north, a distance a little more than four miles, to the oddly named village of Koutsovendis, said to have been once inhabited by Maronites (elevation 325 m, population 163 in 1960).³ As one proceeds uphill from the village to the monastery, a further distance of about one mile, one sees on the left two small Byzantine churches that are joined together. They are traditionally identified as those of Panagia Aphendrika (the somewhat larger north church) and St. Savior (the south church) and have been roofless for several centuries. The south church contains notable remains of twelfth-century paintings, including a well-known Lamentation.⁴

The monastery (elevation 380 m) affords a magnificent panorama of the Nicosia plain (Fig. 1). It forms a rectangle, with residential wings on two sides and a gateway to the east. The living quarters are not of great antiquity, and may have been built,

in whole or in part, after a fire in ca. 1675 (see below). In the middle of the central courtyard stand two joined churches. The southern one, which until recently was used for religious services, was reconstructed in a nondescript style in 1891. The northern church, originally dedicated to the Holy Trinity, is a Byzantine building and contains the wall paintings discussed below.

Towering above the monastery at a height of about 1,000 m is the medieval castle of Buffavento.

I. EARLY DESCRIPTIONS

The earliest European traveler who left an account of the monastery (in 1683) appears to have been the Dutchman Cornelis van Bruyn.⁵ He describes it as surrounded by a good wall and containing several rooms of modern style, rebuilt a short time previously, following the destruction of a great part of the building by fire. The church, divided into two parts, was 48 ft long and 28 wide.⁶ One of the two parts [the south church] was covered by a small dome containing a half-length painting of Christ [i.e., a Pantokrator] and, all round, other figures, nearly all effaced. The dome was supported by eight pillars, fastened to the walls. The altar [i.e., iconostasis] was adorned with gilded foliage, done not more than five years earlier [ca. 1678]. In that church was buried a princess, the same who built the ruined edifice on the top of the mountain [Buffavento Castle]. Two of her slaves were buried next to her, one on each side. Fourteen steps led above that church,⁷ where was to be seen a grotto, in which, it was said, the Turks had found a coffer full of gold. In that monastery there was also a small ruined chapel.⁸ The room used as the kitchen [perhaps the refectory] was 36 ft long and 18 wide. The community consisted of an abbot, three priests, and eleven monks.

There follows a story about the princess, which we find repeated over and over again with minor variations. She lived in Buffavento Castle in order to escape the violence of the Templars and was, furthermore, afflicted with an ulcer. A little dog, to which she was much attached, contracted the same disease. Every day it would run down the moun-

²See L. de Mas Latrie, *L'île de Chypre* (Paris, 1879), 191, 407, 421. Called Νία Μηλά του Ρομαννού (or Ρομαγγού) in the colophon, dated 1337, of Cod. Oxon. Auct. E. 5. 10: J. Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Eglise*, I, OCA 165 (Rome, 1962), p. vii.

³See J. C. Goodwin, *A Historical Toponymy of Cyprus*³ (typewritten, Nicosia, 1985), I, 874.

⁴See A. and J. A. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus* (London, 1985), 463–67. The frescoes of the south church were “cleaned and preserved” by Monica Bardswell in the 1930s: “A Visit to Some Maronite Villages of Cyprus,” *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 3 (1938–39), 307–8.

⁵*A Voyage to the Levant* (London, 1702), 267–68. The original Dutch edition was published at Delft in 1698. The passage that concerns us is reproduced (from the French trans. of 1714) by C. D. Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria* (Cambridge, 1908), 237–38.

⁶These dimensions apply reasonably well to the south church.

⁷The meaning of this statement is not entirely clear. Cf. below, note 28.

⁸Perhaps the north church.

tain and return in an improved state of health. Upon inquiry it was discovered that the dog bathed in a nearby fountain. Thereupon the princess, too, bathed in it and was cured of her disease. As a sign of gratitude, she built a monastery there and dedicated it to St. John Chrysostom. Van Bruyn adds that people still came to the fountain every day to regain their health.

Van Bruyn drew two sketches of the monastery, of which we reproduce one (Fig. 2).⁹ It shows the juxtaposed domes of the two churches, the main residential wing on the south side and a crenelated west wall. The ruins to the right appear to represent the two chapels of Koutsovendi.

Next (in 1735) came the Russian pilgrim Vasilij Grigorovič-Barskij, who spent four days in the monastery and drew an attractive sketch of it (Fig. 3). He was told by the abbot and by old monks that the monastery had first been founded in the name of the Holy Trinity and later rededicated to St. John Chrysostom. Its origin was due to a princess, who lived in the days of "ancient Christianity" and suffered from leprosy. She built a palace on top of the mountain [Buffavento Castle] in order to escape the heat of the summer and also because of her illness. Once, in a vision, she was directed to go down and bathe in a spring of flowing water. She did so and was cured; the spring still existed inside the monastery. As a sign of gratitude she built a monastery of the Holy Trinity with stone walls all round. The [north] church, very old, appeared ready to fall down. Attached to it was another church, built later, dedicated to St. John Chrysostom. Covered by a single dome, it was small, but beautifully decorated with different kinds of marble and porphyry, like the churches of Mount Athos. In it were four marble columns, smooth like a mirror, one and a half *sažens* [ca. 3.20 m] in height and no thicker than a man's neck. Their preservation was worthy of note seeing that the Turks had smashed and removed many pieces of marble in search of treasure. Even so, Barskij was quite impressed by the ornaments that had remained and the beauty of the marble floor. In the [south] church were six door surrounds and thresholds, one set to the north, one to the south, three to the west, and one on the west side of the narthex. The iconostasis and the lamps were very fine, and the church was painted from top to bottom. It was built of squared stone blocks alternat-

ing with strong tiles. The monastery itself had five or six cells and as many monks. Originally it had been much bigger and was subject to the archbishop [of Cyprus], but it passed under the authority of Moslems, who sold it to a Christian. The latter held it for many years and, after going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, donated it to the Holy Sepulchre, so that now it belongs to the Patriarch of Jerusalem. From St. Chrysostomos Barskij proceeded to the nearby monastery of Apsinthiotissa, which he found inhabited by a single *hieromonachos* and one novice; it was subject to the abbot of St. Chrysostomos.¹⁰

Three years later, in 1738, the monastery was visited by Richard Pococke, who confirms that it belonged to the Holy Sepulchre and repeats the anecdote about the "queen of Cyprus."¹¹ "The monastery," he continues, "has been a very large building, though great part of it is ruined; there are two churches, one of which, called Saint Helena [the north church] is ruinous, the other is covered with a dome, and painted all over within; it is dedicated to St. John Chrysostom. Before it is a handsome portico [i.e., narthex], from which there are three doors with fine marble door-cases, that do not seem to be very antient; two scepters were formerly deposited behind the folding doors, the figures of which are painted on the wall, and at the bottom there is a place where the crown was kept. All the account they can give is, that they belonged to some queen, and that they were taken away by a pasha of Cyprus. It is possible that the regalia of Cyprus were kept here."

We learn less from Alexander Drummond, British consul at Aleppo (visit in 1750), who speaks of "a large though mean building; some parts are of good marble, well wrought, and tolerable mosaic of variegated stones, with a great deal of gilding and painting; but nothing is of a piece. The superior had no records, which indeed none of them have, but he told us it was founded by the king's daughter, who built the Spitia tis Regina [*sic*], upon the top of an almost inaccessible rock, two miles farther up in the mountains."¹²

In 1767 Giovanni Mariti came to the monastery from the northern shore of the island by way of

⁹*Stranstvovanija Vasil'ja Grigoroviča-Barskago*, ed. N. Barsukov, II (St. Petersburg, 1886), 245-48.

¹¹*A Description of the East and Some Other Countries*, II/1 (London, 1745), 222 = Cobham, *Excerpta*, 260.

¹²*Travels through Different Cities of Germany, Italy, Greece and Several Parts of Asia* (London, 1754), 273-74 = Cobham, *Excerpta*, 300-301.

⁹The other (fig. 196) is a distant view of the monastery from the southeast with Buffavento Castle above it.

Sicorudi (Sykari) and the Maronite village of Vouno. He found ten or twelve monks in residence. He writes:

Questo Monastero aveva avuta la sua origine fino dal tempo de i primi Imperatori Cristiani; e siccome la Chiesa mi pareva fabbrica più moderna, mi disse uno di quei Religiosi esser questa fatta posteriormente da una nobile Signora Cipriotta, che aveva anche amplificato il lor Monastero. La Chiesa è piccola, con pavimento di marmi, e dipinta alla maniera Greca. Nell'atrio vi è una lapide sepolcrale, sopra la quale i Greci tengono continovamente un lume, dicendo esser questo il deposito della stessa nobile Signora, che fondò questa Chiesa; accanto alla quale sono sepolte due schiave, che erano sue favorite, e che alla morte loro le volle appresso di se, per benemerito della sofferenza, che avevano avuta nell'assistarla, e curarla nell'ultima sua malattia. Appresso a questa Chiesa ve n'è un'altra più piccola, ed antica, ma non è ora ufiziata, nè considerata come Tempio, servendo per ricovero degli animali.¹³

The pseudonymous Ali Bey (Domingo Badia-y-Leyblich) visited our monastery in 1806 and drew a summary sketch of it, but wrote no description. In discussing Buffavento Castle (Palace of the Queen) he does, however, refer to the claim that the queen in question had also founded the monastery and that she was portrayed on an old picture, painted on wood. He continues;

This Princess is represented at prayers before an image of the Virgin Mary. The painter has executed the face of the Queen very prettily, but he has dressed her in a modern Greek costume. At the bottom of the picture is written the pretended name of this Queen, who is called Maria, daughter of Philip Molinos, &c. but it is half effaced. The monks pretend that they have preserved an ancient manuscript in their convent, which attests that this sovereign was their protectress; but no one has seen this manuscript, and the comparison of the two buildings [the castle and the monastery] discovers the anachronism. It is very certain that at the period when the Queen's palace was built, the Marias, the Philips, and the Molinos, were unknown, and still more so, the monks of the monastery of St. John Chrysostome.¹⁴

The icon, mentioned here for the first time, is still in existence.¹⁵ A mediocre work of the sixteenth century, it represents a portly Italian lady and, presumably, her young son kneeling in front

¹³ *Viaggi per l'isola di Cipro*, I (Lucca, 1769), 132–34; trans. C. D. Cobham, *Travels in the Island of Cyprus* (London, 1909), 57–58.

¹⁴ *Travels of Ali Bey*, I (London, 1816), 279–82 = Cobham, *Excerpta*, 399–400. For the identification of Maria di Molino with the queen, see S. Menardos, 'Η Πριγκίπισσα, Δελτ. Έτ. Έλλ. 6 (1902), 121.

¹⁵ Reproduced in color by A. Papageorgiou, *Icons of Cyprus* (Paris-Geneva-Munich, 1969), 104.

of the Virgin and Child, who are seated on an elaborate throne. The dedicatory inscription, placed above the donors' heads, was read in the last century as: 'Η δέησις τῆς δούλης τοῦ Θεοῦ Μαριάς τοῦ (Φιλίππου) Μολίνου καὶ Ἀντωνίνου τοῦ Φιλίππου Μολίνου.¹⁶ Since that time about half of the inscription has flaked off, leaving only:

Ἡ δέησις τῆς δ(ού)-
λις τ Μαριάς
τ(οῦ) ινο
κ (ου)
. Μολινο

Standing behind Maria di Molino and Antonino is a saint in bishop's vestments, who is identified, not as St. John Chrysostom, but as St. John the Almoner, ὁ ἅγιος Ἰω(άννης) ὁ ἐλεημο [*sic*], that is, the patriarch of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 610–619). We are left, therefore, in some doubt whether the icon was indeed dedicated to our monastery and whether the Almoner was confused with Chrysostom.

In 1816 the monastery was visited by Otto Friedrich von Richter, who also drew a sketch of it (Fig. 4). On the inside, he says, it was surrounded by galleries, which gave access to rooms. The church was built of long, flat bricks. Its original main entrance was on the side of the garden and was usually closed. As one entered a vaulted vestibule [the narthex] one saw three fine doors of gray and white marble that led into the nave. The iconostasis, carved and gilded, was in two tiers. Next to the three doors and above them (*neben und über den drei Thüren*),¹⁷ as well as in the pavement, one could see remains of old mosaic made not of glass paste, but of different kinds of stone, among which a pair of natural configurations resembling figures or letters were pointed out as marvels by the monks. The dome of the church rested on semicircular piers engaged in the walls. The visitor could not discern in the dark whether the figures of saints on the ceiling were painted or of mosaic. Next to the main nave was a second one [the north church] covered with a smaller dome.¹⁸

In 1889, shortly before the original south church had been pulled down, came a certain Chr. Papadopoulos, who reports seeing the icon of Maria and Antonino di Molino and "their tomb," which was within the church. The library of the

¹⁶ J. Hackett, *A History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus* (London, 1901) 357.

¹⁷ Possibly referring to panels of opus sectile framing the doors rather than to wall mosaics.

¹⁸ *Wallfahrten im Morgenlande* (Berlin, 1822), 317–18.

monastery, he continues, contained many important manuscripts "going back to the time of its foundation as well as property registers together with some ecclesiastical books. In addition, there are many official documents and deeds relating to the privilege of tax exemption of this monastery, which until the British occupation did not pay any tax whatever."¹⁹ We may well doubt that Papadopoulos saw any old manuscripts. None survive today.

To summarize such travelers' accounts as we have been able to collect, we may point out in the first place that the true origin of the monastery had been completely forgotten by the seventeenth century. The legend of the queen appeared to be connected with a tomb that was in the narthex of the main church, probably one of those "Gothic" funerary slabs bearing an incised figure of the deceased, that are so common in Cyprus. The tomb was that of a lady and she may well have been flanked by two small figures of her children,²⁰ the latter mistaken for her slaves. In fact, a small fragment of such a tomb still survives in the monastery (Fig. 186), but it is not clear whether it represents a man or a woman. It may be noted that a similar funerary slab, that of an anonymous lady married to the *archon* Leontes, existed in the narthex of the nearby monastery of Apsinthiotissa.²¹ It came to be regarded as representing the Panagia, and liturgy was celebrated on it on the feast of the Presentation.²²

The dedication of the two churches is given correctly only by Barskij, who, knowing Greek as he did, was in a better position than the western travelers to understand properly what he had been told by the monks. The north church, if it is indeed the chapel mentioned by van Bruyn, was already ruinous by the late seventeenth century, and by the mid-eighteenth it was used as a shelter for animals. As for the south church, its main ornaments were seen to reside in its mosaic (i.e., opus sectile) pavement, its marble door frames and its carved iconostasis of ca. 1670. The wall paintings receive little comment except for the mysterious "scepters" noted by Pococke.

¹⁹ Περιγραφή μονῶν τινῶν τῆς νήσου Κύπρου, Σωτήρ 13 (1890), 318–19.

²⁰ For comparable slabs see T. J. Chamberlayne, *Lacrimae Nicossiensis* (Paris, 1894), pl. II, no. 9; pl. xxvi, no. 272.

²¹ A. K. Indianos in *Κυπρ. Σπουδ.* 4 (1940; publ. 1942), 31–32 and pl. VIII.

²² Timotheos of Jerusalem, *Αἱ ἐπωνυμῖαι τῆς Παναγίας, Νέα Σιών* 48 (1953), 10.

II. ARCHITECTURE

A. The South Church

The original south church, which constituted the *katholikon* of the monastery, was for the most part demolished and rebuilt in 1891, as stated in the following inscription placed over its southwest door (Fig. 16)

+ ΕΠΙ ΤΗΣ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΕΙΑΣ ΤΟΥ ΙΕΡΟ-
ΣΟΛΥΜΩΝ
ΓΕΡΑΣΙΜΟΥ ΤΟΥ Α' ΚΑΙ ΤΗΣ ΗΓΟΥ-
ΜΕΝΙΑΣ ΑΡΧΙ-
ΜΑΝΔΡΙΤΟΥ ΚΥΡΙΑΛΛΟΥ ΚΑΡΑΓΕ-
ΩΡΓΑΚΗ
ΑΝΕΚΑΙΝΙΣΘΗ Η ΙΕΡΑ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΤΟΥ
ΘΕΙΟΥ ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΜΟΥ ΕΠΙ ΤΩΝ ΑΡ-
ΧΑΙΩΝ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΘΕΜΕΛΙΩΝ
ΕΝ ΕΤΕΙ ΣΩΤΗΡΙΩ 1891 ΑΩΥΙΑ
ΚΑΤΑ ΝΟΕΜΒΡΙΟΝ ☩²³

That is: "During the patriarchate of Gerasimos I of Jerusalem and the abbacy of the Archimandrite Kyrillos Karageorgakis, the holy church of the divine Chrysostom was made new on its ancient Byzantine foundations in November of the year of the Lord 1891."

Of the Byzantine structure there remain the three semicircular apses, of which the southern is masked by the bell tower built in 1957, most of the north wall, which is common to the two churches (Figs. 36, 38), and the projecting north apse of the narthex, preserved to a height of only about 0.40 m above ground level (Fig. 9). The masonry is of neatly coursed and squared limestone blocks, separated by very narrow joints (0.5 to 1 cm) of white mortar with an admixture of gray grit. The courses are, for the most part, between 25 and 30 cm high. Only the double voussoir rings of the three windows of the central apse and the spandrels between the windows are of brick (Fig. 8).²⁴ A projecting cornice (now forming the top border of the painting of the Anastasis) ran on the exterior of the north wall at a height of 3.95 m above original ground level (Fig. 86, top left corner).

Our knowledge of the original south church is in large measure due to a plan made some time before 1891 by W. Williams, district engineer of Cyprus, and published by G. Jeffery (Fig. 7).²⁵ It

²³ The final sign is probably the mason's signature.

²⁴ Restored in 1958. See *Annual Report of the Director of Antiquities* (hereafter *RDAC*) for the Year 1958 (Nicosia, 1959), 15.

²⁵ *Proc. of the Soc. of Antiquaries of London*, 2nd ser., 28 (1915–16), 115, fig. 3A.

shows a rectangular nave very nearly 10 m from east to west and about 8 m from north to south (internal measurements), covered by a dome about 6.30 m in diameter. The dome was supported on eight rounded piers, the two eastern ones being freestanding and the rest engaged in the walls. It may be observed that the space between the eastern piers was slightly narrower than the opening of the central apse, so that the arches linking the piers to the apse must have diverged toward the east, a peculiarity that is also observable in the roofless church of St. Hilarion's castle.²⁶

Communicating with the nave by three doors was a deep narthex, terminating in semicircular apses to north and south. The wall of the south apse is shown abnormally thick by Williams, possibly as the result of the addition of a skin of masonry on the outside. The vaulting of the narthex had clearly been altered in the Gothic period, as also happened in the Apsinthiotissa monastery.²⁷ Examination of the extant portion of the north apse shows that it originally had an axial door, 1.40 m wide. On its west jamb were observed two renderings of painted plaster, the earlier one having a black horizontal line on a yellow background at a height of 35 cm above the original floor level, while the later one was green. The door was filled in connection with the insertion of a Gothic rib, and another door, 1.25 m wide, was cut through the wall immediately to the east of the rib (Fig. 9). The north apse stands on a rectangular platform, which appears to be original.

The Williams plan shows two subsidiary structures attached to the south wall of the church, namely, a small chapel with an apse and some sort of chamber (not measured on the inside), with an open passage between the two, terminating in a semicircular flight of three steps. There was also a porch, containing a staircase, built against the west wall of the narthex.²⁸

The new church, a rectangular structure of three bays without narthex, is covered by pointed cross-groined vaults. It was built directly on the foundations of the old church except for the projecting apses of the narthex, which were left outside its perimeter.

²⁶Plan in G. A. Soteriou, *Tà βυζαντινά μνημεῖα τῆς Κύπρου* (Athens, 1935), fig. 13.

²⁷See A. Papageorgiou, 'Ἡ μὲν Ἀψινθιωτίσσης, *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, 1963* (Nicosia, 1963), 75 and pl. xi, 2.

²⁸Possibly, the mysterious "fourteen steps" mentioned by C. van Bruyn (above, p. 64) were in the porch.

Other surviving elements of the original church include:

1. Pavement

The semicircle of the central apse is covered with an over-all pattern in opus sectile consisting of little hexagonal plaques joined at their corners by diamonds (Fig. 10). This was repaired and reset by the Department of Antiquities while our work was in progress. To the north and south of the modern altar table is an incomplete rectangular panel of pink marble within a double border of opus sectile (Figs. 11, 12). The large square frame in the middle of the nave also appears to be original. It is of white Proconnesian marble with figure-8 corner insets in verd antique. The paving within the frame, including a small section of opus sectile (Fig. 14), probably taken from elsewhere, is, however, modern. A comparable square frame in the contemporary church of Veljusa in Yugoslav Macedonia is filled with interlace.²⁹

We saw, furthermore, a loose fragment of opus sectile, 44 cm square (Fig. 13), decorated with an intricate pattern based on eight-pointed stars. It is made of white, gray, black, and yellow marble, red stone, and one small piece of green porphyry.

2. Marble Door Frames

Three door frames of Proconnesian marble are preserved, being inserted: (1) in the west door of the south church (Fig. 15); (2) the southwest door of the same (Fig. 16); and (3) the west door of the north church (Fig. 17). None is in its original position, and No. 3 was only put to its present use when the west wall of the north church was restored by the Department of Antiquities in 1947. As noted above (p. 65), Barskij claims to have seen six door surrounds, whereas Pococke and von Richter mention only three, namely, those pertaining to the three doors that led from the narthex into the nave. It is highly likely that those are the three surrounds that have survived. The biggest frame, No. 1, measures 2.66 × 1.57 m (outside dimensions, including edging of dentils) and has an opening of 2.50 × 1.25 m. The corresponding dimensions for No. 2 are 2.06 × 1.24 and 1.93 × 0.96; and for No. 3, 2.06 × 1.25 and 1.94 × 0.97. Nos. 2 and 3, which form a matching pair, are surmounted by a splayed lintel decorated at the top with a double row of dentils that would be at home in a Byzantine monument of the eleventh

²⁹See P. Mil'ković-Peppek, *Veljusa* (Skopje, 1981), 140-42 and fig. 25.

century.³⁰ No. 1 has a more elaborately decorated lintel (Fig. 18) with a twisting vine stem issuing from two small amphoras placed at the corners. The central twist of the stem encloses a "leaved cross" and each of the others contains a leaf with prominent veins and a bunch of pointed grapes. Although the motif is of Early Christian origin, the rather finicky carving does not appear to us Byzantine and resembles that of the two strange capitals which are now in the templon of the north church (Fig. 41). Whether this is Crusader work or later is a question we must leave open for the present.

3. Carved Wooden Door

The remarkable wooden door, consisting of two valves, is now placed within the outer western entrance, but since it fits door frame No. 1, it is reasonable to assume that it originally stood in the central opening leading from the narthex into the nave. Although the study of this door did not form part of our program, we consider it useful to reproduce a few photographs of it (Figs. 20–23). It recalls in its construction Islamic examples from the Near East and may well date from the late eleventh century.

B. The North Church

Equal in length to the south church, but appreciably narrower, the north church is a specimen of what may be termed the "compressed cross-in-square type." While its plan is sufficiently regular, the west door is noticeably off axis. This is due to the projection of the preexisting north apse of the narthex of the south church. For the same reason the narthex of the north church was built in an asymmetrical form (Fig. 6).

The north church is constructed largely, though not exclusively, of brick. Stone courses have been introduced at the springing of the main arches and at irregular intervals elsewhere. The bricks, which are of poor quality and brittle to the touch, measure 35 to 39 cm on the side and are 4 cm thick. They are separated by weathered joints, about 5 cm wide, of white mortar containing gray grit. The construction of the dome differs somewhat from that of the rest of the building, probably for decorative effect. Above a plain cornice of cut stone, the drum consists of two courses of roughly squared

stones, followed by three courses of brick and two more of stone, reaching up to the springing of the dome windows. In places bricks have been placed vertically between individual stone blocks. Above the voussoir rings of the windows, which are of brick, as are also the spandrels between them, there are three more courses of stone which form the beginning of the inward curve (Fig. 47). The corresponding zone on the exterior of the drum is also of stone, each block neatly framed by bricks in the manner of the *parement cloisonné* so common in Greece. The calotte of the dome is built not of brick, but of pan tiles (29 to 36 cm long) having raised ridges on their sides (Fig. 51).

The dome appears to have been built without centering. Eight putlog holes above the voussoir rings of the windows (four on the cardinal points and four on the diagonals) indicate that a wooden platform was placed here in the course of construction.

During its long history the north church underwent a number of changes that are, unfortunately, all but undocumented. At an unknown date a major effort was made to reinforce the whole fabric by thickening the four main piers and underpinning the arches by an inner ring of masonry. The two western recesses (including the window of the north recess) were simultaneously filled up, as were some, if not all, of the dome windows and, possibly, the north door. Perhaps at the same time the roof line of the vaults, which form a cross at the base of the dome (assuming it was originally rounded, as it has since been restored), was altered to a gabled shape. This operation was carried out with some care, seeing that the east gable (Fig. 30) was constructed of fairly well cut blocks of stone, and a stringcourse, also of stone, was carried all round the building (except on its unexposed south side), defining the east, north, and west gables. Finally, an exterior buttress (since removed) was built against the east end of the north wall (Fig. 31).

It may be conjectured that these extensive repairs were carried out during the Lusignan or Venetian period. The fact that nearly all the wall paintings have disappeared from areas that were not covered with added masonry indicates a long period of neglect and exposure to the elements following the consolidation measures. Furthermore, we have seen from travelers' accounts that the north church was ruinous by the first half of the eighteenth century and possibly in the late seventeenth. During the period of abandonment, a big breach was broken through the apse down to

³⁰Cf. the framing elements of the marble revetment of Nea Moni: Ch. Bouras, *Ἡ Νέα Μονὴ τῆς Χίου* (Athens, 1981), figs. 66–67, 77, 134.

ground level,³¹ most of the narthex collapsed, and the original pavement, which must have been of marble, was probably robbed.

The first repairs, in 1942, consisted in the rebuilding of the apse (Fig. 30). In 1947 the west facade was restored (Fig. 32). This involved the insertion in the door opening of one of the marble frames from the south church and, above it, of a perforated gypsum grille, replacing the brickwork fill under the arch (possibly original), which was found to be in a precarious state. An intrusive rectangular window under the west gable was also filled up.

The general repair of the church was completed in 1956–58.³² A concealed collar of reinforced concrete was carried round the whole building, with crossties east and west of the dome base (Fig. 33). A similar collar was inserted at cornice level of the dome. The structure having thus been made secure, the interior reinforcements, which we have attributed to the Lusignan or Venetian period, were removed, revealing such wall paintings as survive. The blocked dome windows were opened, as was also the original north door. The exterior buttress was dismantled. The masonry was made good, and all parts of the roof, including the dome, were retiled. In 1963 a new floor was laid in the church, and the marble columns of the iconostasis were set up,³³ though probably not in their correct position.³⁴ Finally, in 1970 parts of the walls were plastered to afford better protection to the paintings.³⁵

Such, in outline, is the structural history of the church. Now for some points of detail.

1. South Wall

As already indicated, the cut stone wall extending some 2 m from the southeast pier belongs to the original phase of the south church. The rest of the wall, however, is of nondescript rubble construction and contains a considerable number of broken bricks (Figs. 36, 38). It may have been made in 1891, when the south church was rebuilt. Note that the present door leading into the south church is not in its correct place; originally it must have been closer to the southwest pier like the corresponding north door.

³¹ Photograph in Soteriou, *Μνημεία*, pl. 29b.

³² *RDAC* for 1956, 15 and figs. 31–33; for 1957, 13; for 1958, 15 and figs. 16–17.

³³ *RDAC* for 1963, 11.

³⁴ See below, p. 71.

³⁵ *RDAC* for 1970, 13.

2. West Wall

The wall, both on the inside and the outside, is of a regular brick construction up to a point a little above the springing of the door arch, but from there on it is of rubble with occasional brick courses (Figs. 26, 40). The presence of small fragments of fresco in the area of rubble and brick construction seems to indicate that the latter is original.

3. North Wall

Nearly the entire surface of the wall that is not covered with fresco is made up of rough rubble construction that cannot be original and looks, in fact, rather recent (Fig. 37). The primary brick construction is visible at the bottom of the wall, underneath the fragment of the Crucifixion, and, on the west side, near the springing of the arch. One can only conclude that at some time the greater part of the wall was broken through and later filled. One may further note that the Williams plan (Fig. 7) shows a fairly wide, filled door in the center of the wall and Soteriou's plan of 1933 likewise a central door, though somewhat narrower.³⁶ As to the present door, it is certainly original, though it may have been a few centimeters narrower than it is now; its east jamb is a modern restoration.

The most curious feature of the north wall is, however, the molded cross that is built into the exterior, directly under the eaves (Fig. 29). Its central, sunken part is now filled with cement, which did not allow us to ascertain whether this was originally a window with slit openings or merely an ornamental element. If it was a window, it is not in its original position because the upper arm of the cross overlaps the thickness of the north arch, while the horizontal bar and foot, if open, would have cut into the painting of the Betrayal on the inside. Even if it was not a window, one is left wondering when it was placed here, for the cross gives the impression of having been part of a building of cut stone. In the absence of any pertinent parallel on the island,³⁷ we cannot decide whether the cross was removed from the south church, which, as we have seen, was built of stone blocks of com-

³⁶ *Μνημεία*, fig. 33.

³⁷ The cruciform window in the west gable of Panagia Kanakaria is quite dissimilar. See A. H. S. Megaw and E. J. W. Hawkins, *The Church of Panagia Kanakaria at Lythrankomi in Cyprus* (Washington, D.C., 1977), 34, who attribute it to the 12th century. Carved stone crosses on the exterior of churches are, of course, common in medieval Georgian and Armenian architecture.

parable size, or whether it pertains to the "Lusignan/Venetian" repair of the north church.

4. The Narthex

Deeper than it is wide, the narthex is not bonded into the north church. Judging by the brickwork, however, it appears to have been built approximately at the same time. Originally it was covered by a single cross-groined vault springing from small corner pilasters, which were reinforced with rough rubble masonry at a later date. Today the following elements survive:

The north wall to its full height. It is pierced by a central door and has a tall window on either side (Fig. 184). The construction is of brick except for the lunette, which contains both brick and rubble.

Of the west wall very little remains. Part of a marble slab, placed vertically, appears to indicate the north jamb of the entrance door. Next to it is a small area of plaster rendering, meeting the original floor.

The southeast corner forms the negative impression of the projecting apse of the narthex of the south church (Fig. 27). It was built in two stages. First, the west wall of the north church was brought against the apse, with a jog at an obtuse angle. Second, a pier was built within that angle. This pier survives up to the springing of the vault it carried. The construction is again mostly of brick, with some stone. An earthenware pipe is embedded at a considerable height in the jog of Stage I construction.

5. The Templon Screen

Six slender columns of Proconnesian marble with a wooden beam laid over them were erected by the Department of Antiquities in 1963 to form the skeleton, so to speak, of a templon screen in the bema (Fig. 35). Six is certainly too many for the width of the bema opening (4.50 m), which, in our opinion, would call for a maximum of four. The evidence regarding these columns may be set out as follows:

i. Barskij records four of them as being in the south church. He does not say exactly where he saw them, but since the carved wooden iconostasis was already in place by the time of his visit, they could not have been in the templon.

ii. In the early years of the twentieth century, G. Jeffery noted: "The iconostasis [of the north church] is curious as having been constructed with two slender marble columns which remain *in situ*, but they are now filled in with clumsy woodwork

of a later period. Two marble columns of the same design as those supporting the iconostasis are inserted as angle shafts at each side of the apse. Although these columns have leafage capitals of a very Byzantine character they are perhaps work of the Venetian period."³⁸

iii. Some time thereafter the four columns were taken out of the north church and reappeared in the courtyard of the monastery as six columns (of which one was incomplete) with six capitals and five bases. Tsiknopoullos³⁹ asserts that two of them had been used to support a shed and gives the number of bases as four. Examination of the surviving elements indicates that whereas all six columns must have had nearly the same height, four of them constitute a set, while the remaining two are of a different design. Our notes, taken in 1963 before the erection of the templon screen, give the following particulars:

Shafts

- A: Molded necking and narrow fillet at base. Height 2.52 m, top diameter 0.15, bottom diameter 0.17.
- B: Different molded necking; narrow fillet at base. Height 2.54 m, top diameter 0.17, bottom diameter 0.18.
- C: No necking, wide fillet at base (0.09 m high). Height 2.56, diameter top and bottom 0.15.
- D: Similar to C. Height 2.61 m.
- E: Similar to C. Height 2.63 m.
- F: Fragment, 1.42 m high. Similar to C, D, E.

Capitals

- A,B: Very strange, pseudo-Corinthian capitals with a single row of acanthus leaves, inverted volutes and decorated bosses on the abacus (Fig. 41). Height 0.21 m, top 0.225 square, lower diameter 0.155.
- C: Single row of carelessly executed acanthus leaves; square top (0.29 m on each side) with projecting bosses (Fig. 42). Height 0.185, lower diameter 0.15.
- D: Single row of acanthus leaves. Viewed from the top, the sides (0.28 × 0.29 m) are concave, with projecting bosses. Wide abacus with a ruling in the middle (Fig. 43). Height 0.175, lower diameter 0.155.
- E: Single row of acanthus leaves; square top (0.28

³⁸A *Description of the Historic Monuments of Cyprus* (Nicosia, 1918), 273.

³⁹Ἡ ἱερά μονή τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου τοῦ Κουτζουβένδη (Nicosia, 1959), 82–83.

- × 0.29m), no bosses (Fig. 44). Height 0.15, lower diameter 0.16.
- F: Single row of acanthus leaves curling over at the corners. Sides at the top 0.29 m, slightly concave with projecting bosses (Fig. 45). Height 0.145, lower diameter 0.15.

Though C,D,E and F are all slightly different from one another, they all exhibit the same style, whereas A and B are *sui generis* and cannot be regarded as Byzantine work.

Bases

We recorded only three:

- A,B: Octagonal plinth 0.045 m high, 0.26 square. Total height 0.13, upper diameter 0.165 and 0.18. Cutting on one side for insertion of parapet slab.
- C: Square plinth 0.05 m high, 0.26 square. Moldings taper toward the top. Height 0.14, upper diameter 0.165. Cuttings on two sides for insertion of parapet slabs. Bases D and E, which we did not describe, also have a square plinth. The sixth base is a modern reproduction.

Whatever trust we may wish to place in Barskij's testimony, we can hardly doubt that Jeffery recorded correctly what he saw at the beginning of this century. Seeing that he refers specifically to "leafage capitals of a very Byzantine character," he must have had Nos. C–F in mind. His observation that two columns remained in situ, whereas two similar ones had been inserted "as angle shafts at each side of the apse" may be explained on the hypothesis that originally they were placed in the order:

|C—D E—F|

When the bema opening was reduced by about 1 m following the insertion of a supporting arch some time before the Turkish conquest of the island, the two end columns, which had been placed next to the north and south piers, respectively, had to be moved; that is why Jeffery saw them at each side of the apse. By way of corroboration it may be noted that a beam hole was visible on the south face of the northeast pier at a height of 2.93 m above the modern floor of the bema. That corresponds closely to the combined height of base, shaft, and capital.

We may conclude, therefore, that columns and capitals C–F did form part of the templon of the north church.⁴⁰ The form of the shafts, which

⁴⁰A possible objection is that each base would have required on our hypothesis only one cutting for the insertion of a parapet slab. Yet we have seen that at least one of the square bases has two cuttings, one on each side.

seems to correspond to the Byzantine term *λεπτοκάλαμος*,⁴¹ is not, it is true, particularly suited for such use, since it does not lend itself to the slotting-in of parapet slabs, as a normal pier-colonnade does. Slender columns of circular cross-section would have been more appropriate for a ciborium, for supporting a staircase, and other uses that did not involve carrying a heavy load. Possibly, they were obtained at second hand in the late eleventh century and used in the templon in the absence of more appropriate marble elements.

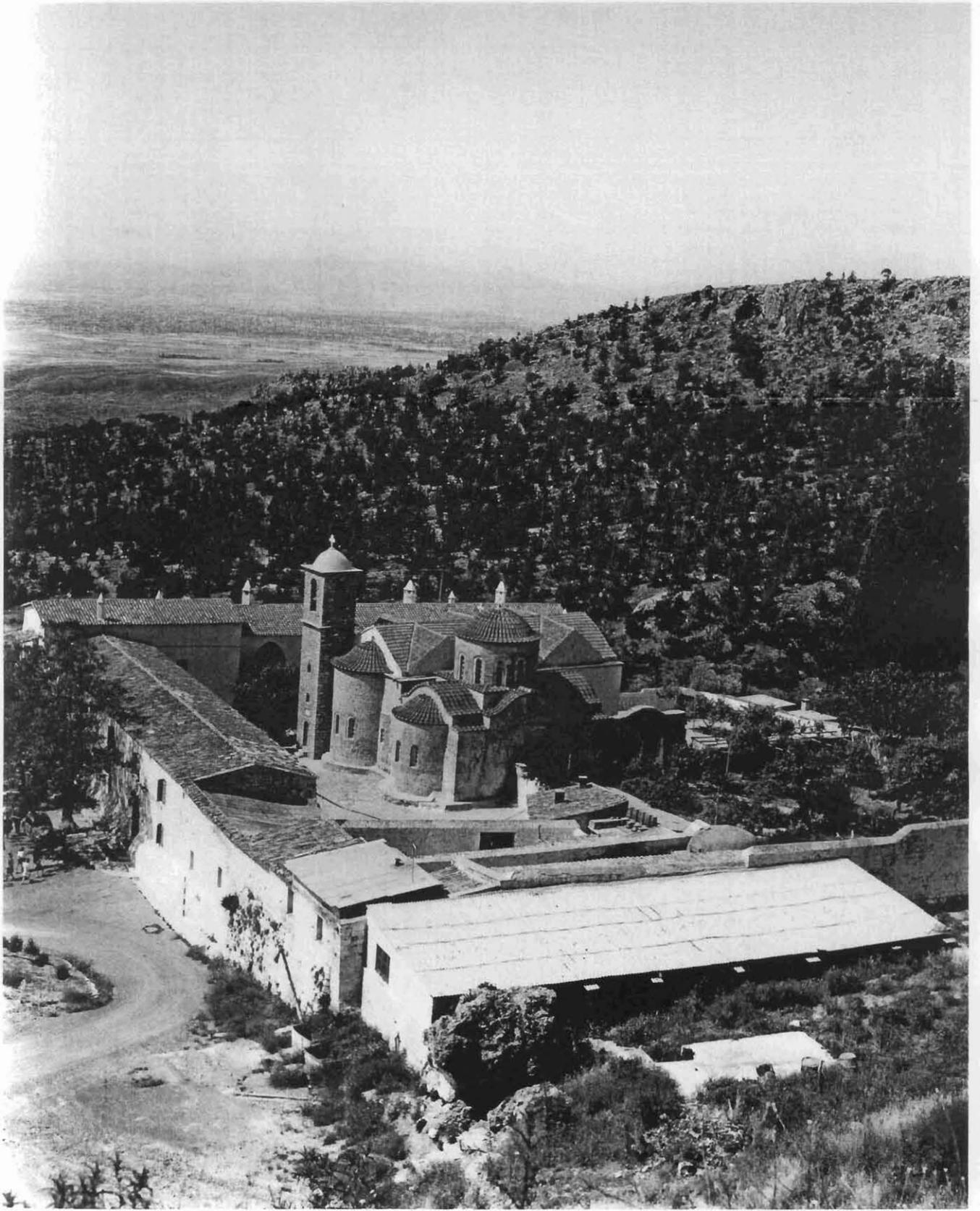
We are left with columns and capitals A–B unaccounted for. Presumably, they came from the south church, and there could well have been four or more of the same kind, so that Barskij need not have been mistaken.

Among various fragments of stone preserved in the monastery was a broken parapet slab, 0.83 m high (Fig. 46). When complete, it would have been very nearly 1.00 m wide. It is only 3.5 cm thick, but appears to have been re-cut on the back and used, perhaps, as a table top. The decoration on the front is of an Early Christian type, consisting of a medallion, from the bottom of which issues a twisted rope, its ends terminating in an ivy leaf(?). Inside the medallion is a six-pointed star, while a three-petaled leaf is placed diagonally in the upper right-hand corner of the panel. In view of the dimensions of the slab, it may have been part of a chancel screen. Another fragment—a marble beam decorated with interlace—is immured above the entrance gate of the monastery (Fig. 19).

III. DESCRIPTION OF PAINTINGS

It should be noted that dimensions of panels and compositions are given exclusive of the red borders. In the case of fragments, we have quoted maximum dimensions.

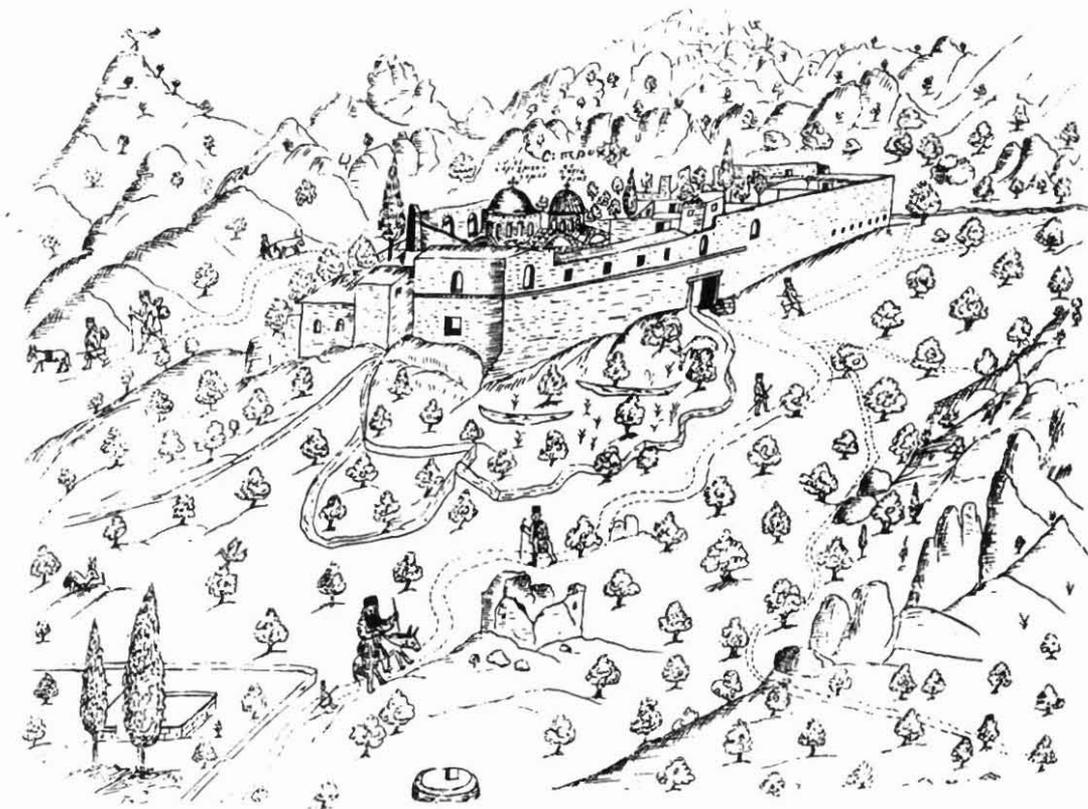
⁴¹As in Theophanes Cont., Bonn ed., 141.19, with reference to a decorative arch (τροπική) ὑπὸ δύο λεπτοκάλαμων κίωνων ἐστηρικμένῃ. See also the inventory (A.D. 1202) of the house of Botaniates that had been ceded to the Genoese (F. Miklosich and J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi* (Vienna, 1860–90), III 55–57) and the Latin trans. of an earlier deed (A.D. 1192), *ibid.*, p. xi ff; slightly different version in *Codice diplomatico della Repubblica di Genova*, III (Fonti per la storia d'Italia, 89), 68 ff. The ciborium (καταπέτασμα) of the church attached to the house of Botaniates is described as being supported διὰ λεπτοκάλαμων τεσσάρων (a *quattuor columnis subtilibus*), whereas the templon was upheld by pier-colonnades of verd antique, διὰ στιμονόρων (*de stimonariis*) τεσσάρων πρᾶσίνων. Other *leptocalami* are mentioned in the same documents as being in the south annex of the church and as holding up the ceiling of various chambers.



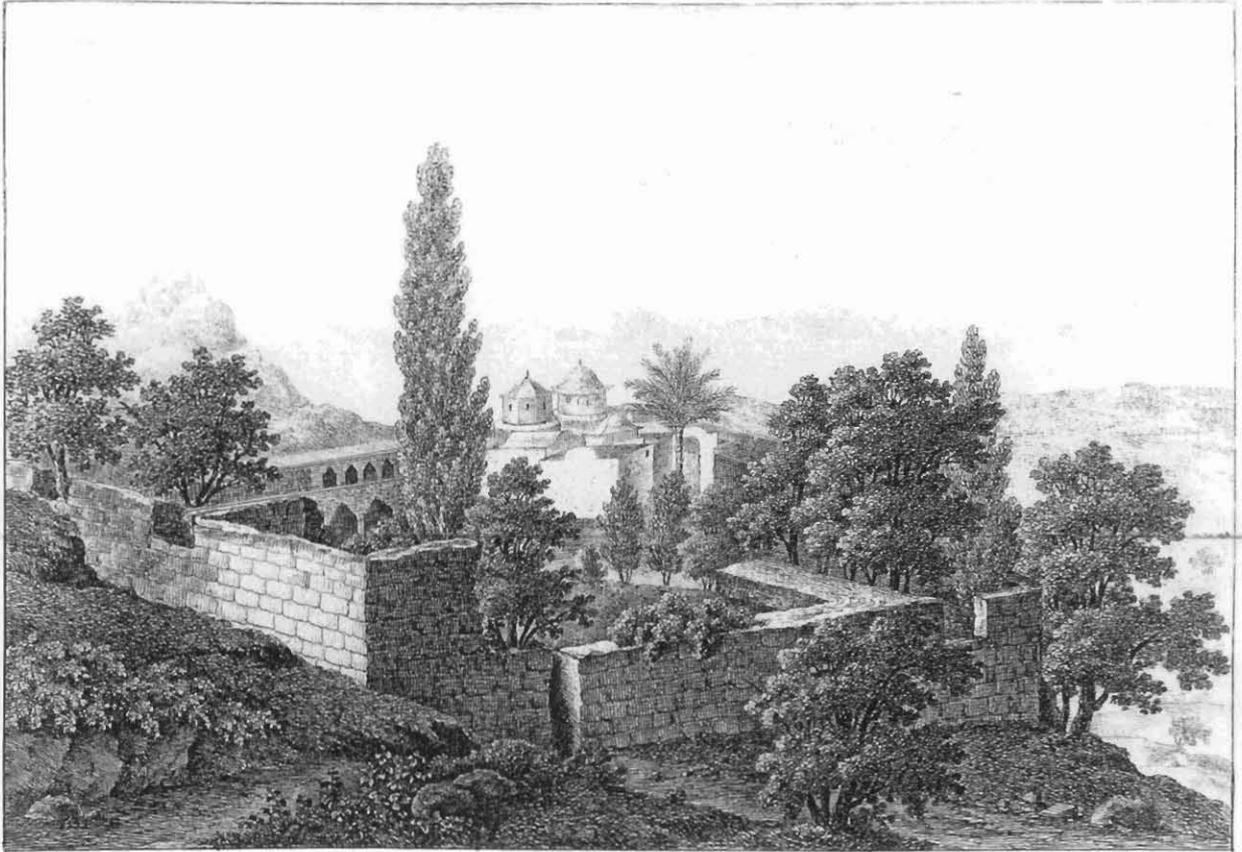
1 General view of the monastery from the northeast



2 The monastery in 1683 (after C. van Bruyn)



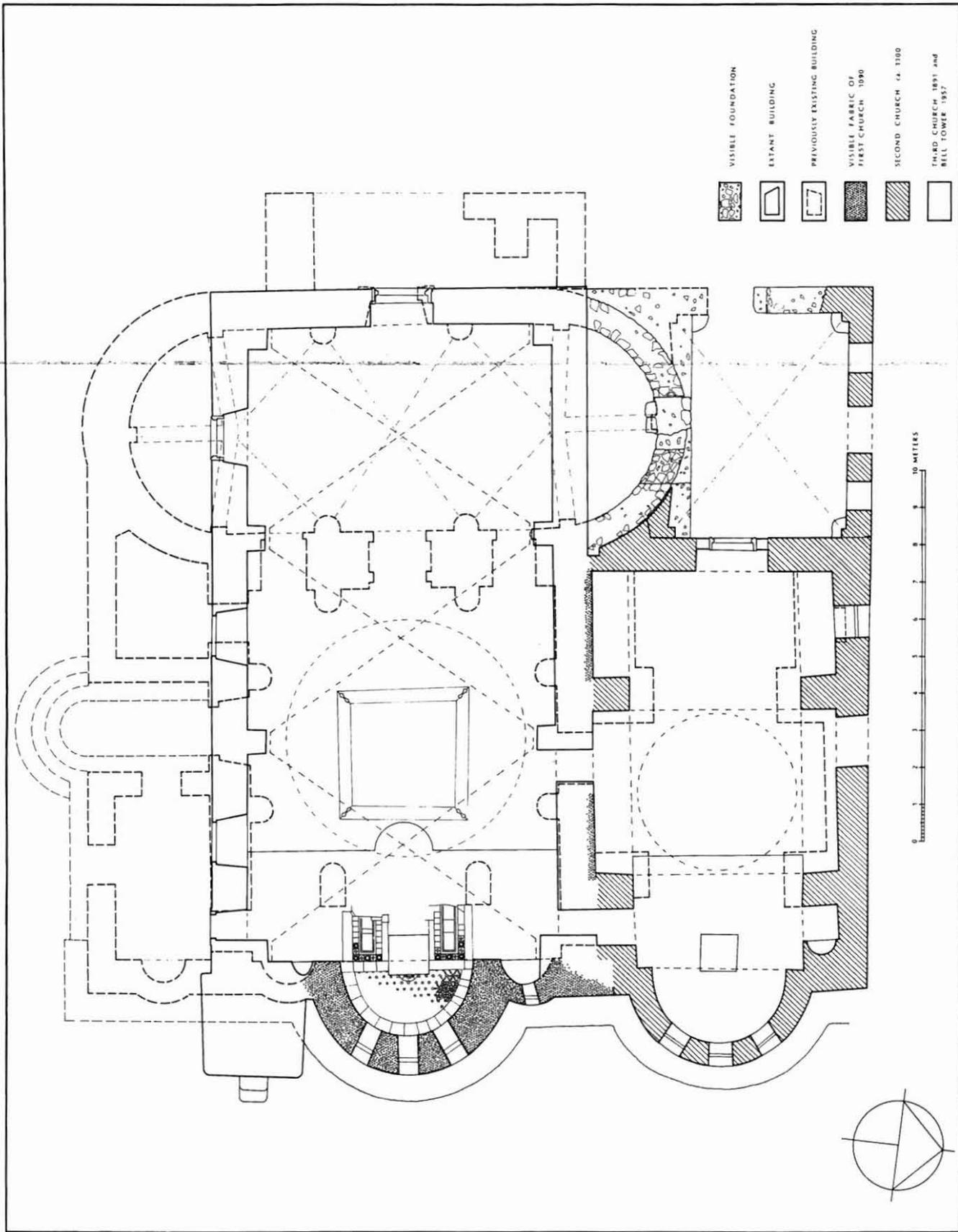
3 The monastery in 1735 (after V. Grigorovič-Barskij)



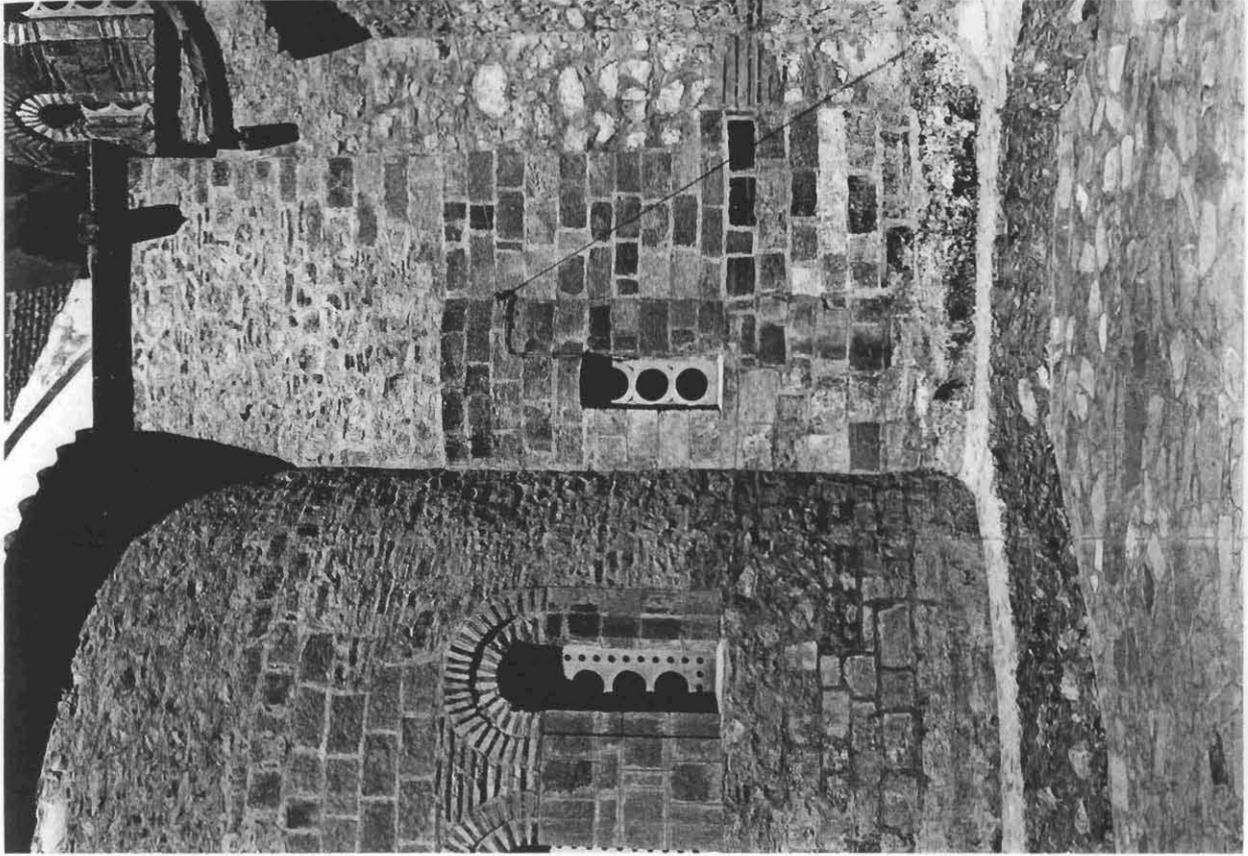
4 The monastery in 1816 (after O. F. von Richter)



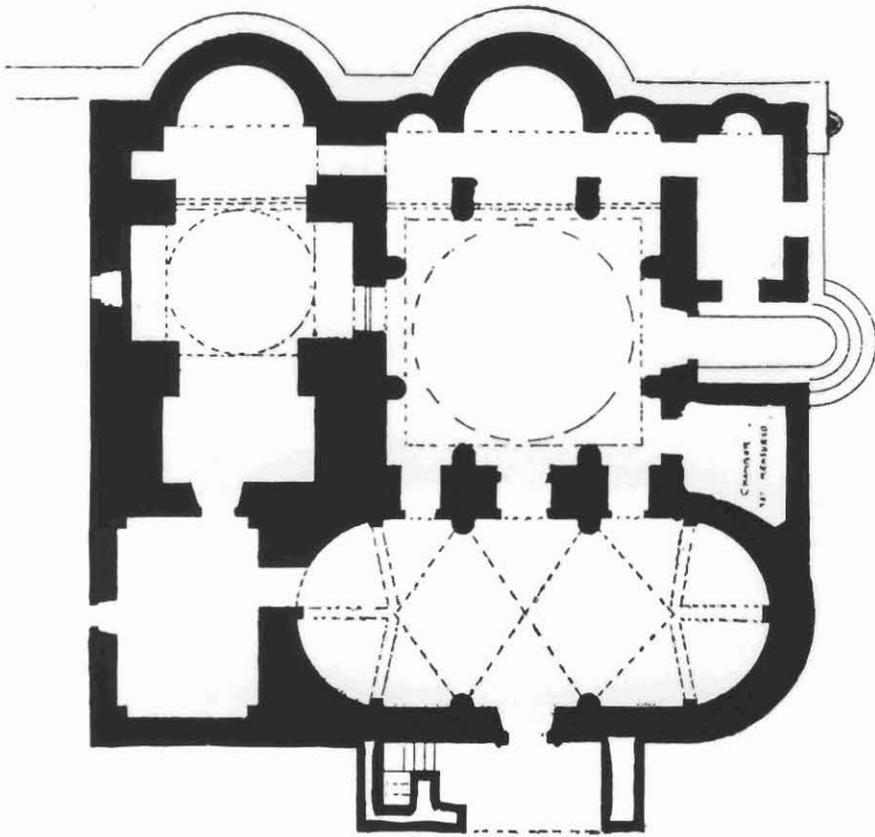
5 General view of the two churches from the northeast



6 Ground plan of the two churches (drawing: Richard Anderson)



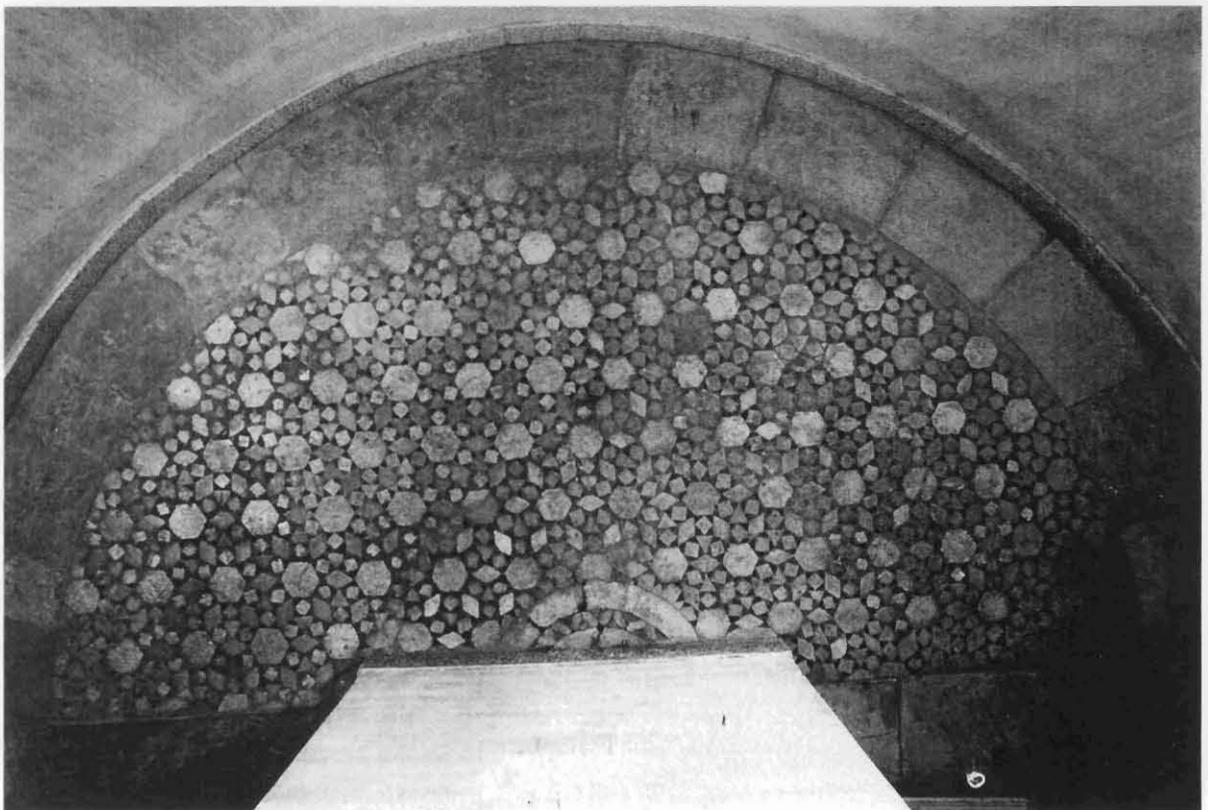
8 South church, central and north apses



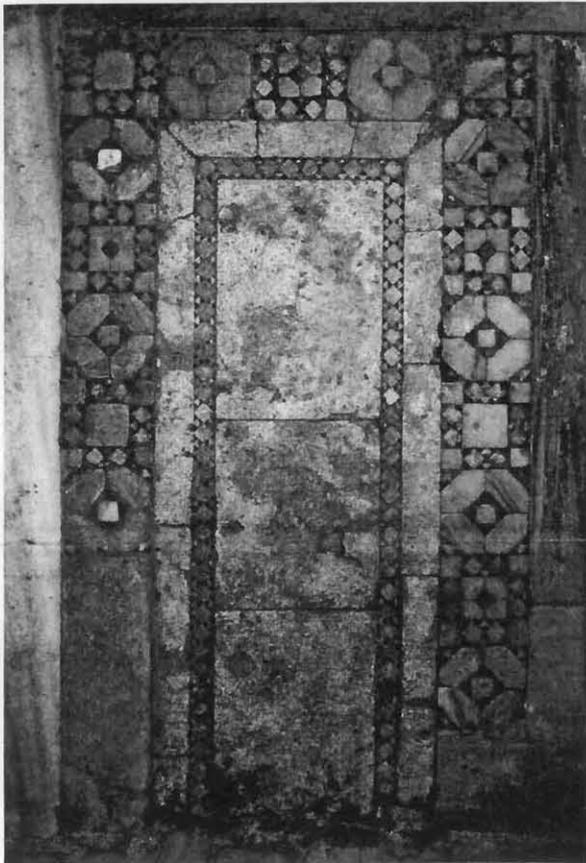
7 Ground plan of the two churches, before 1891 (after W. Williams)



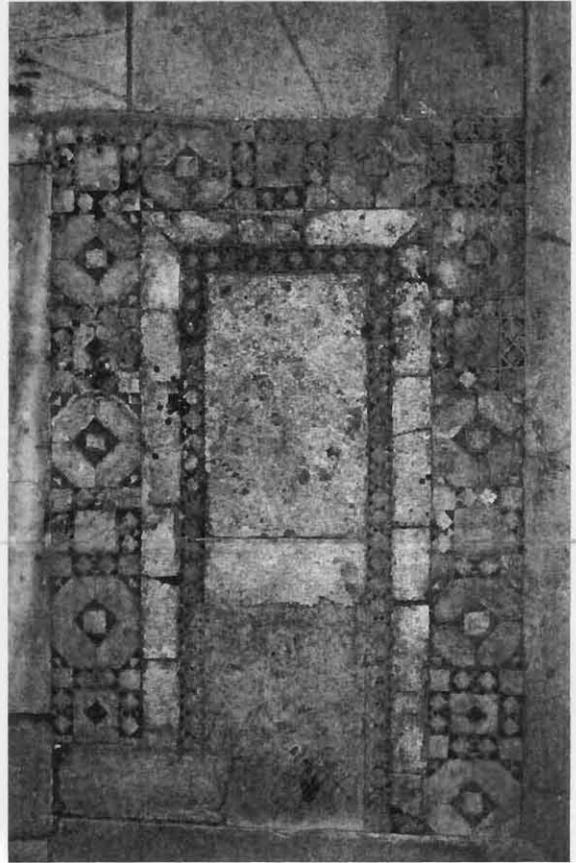
9 South church, remains of projecting north apse of narthex



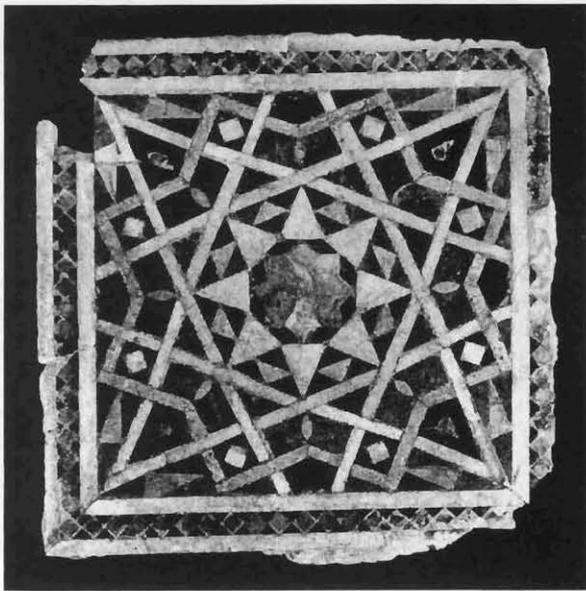
10 South church, opus sectile pavement of central apse



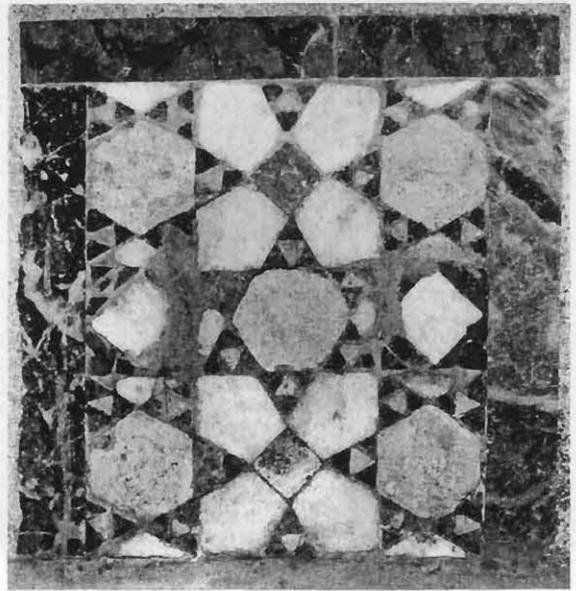
11 South church, opus sectile pavement north of altar table



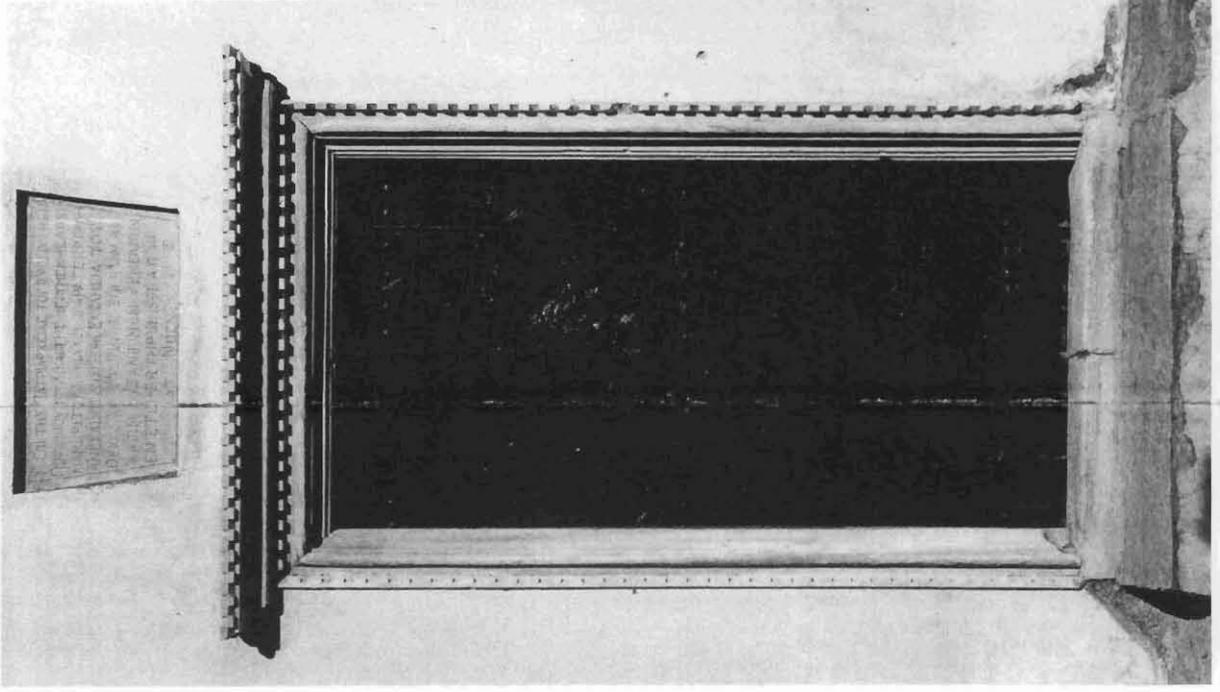
12 South church, opus sectile pavement south of altar table



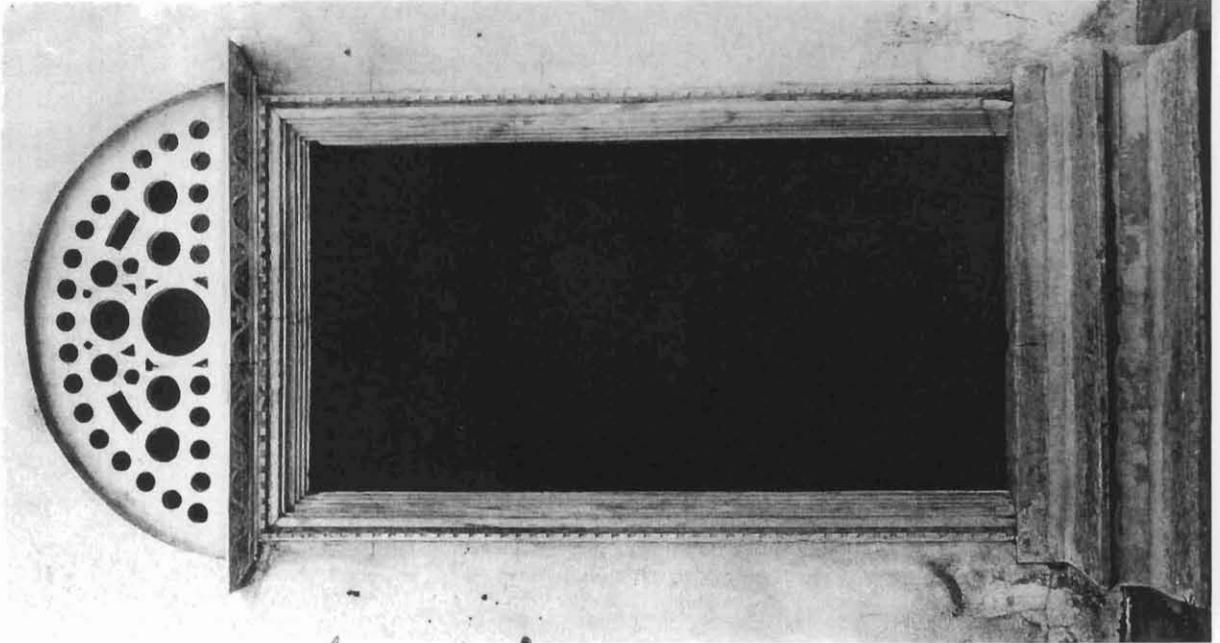
13 Loose panel of opus sectile



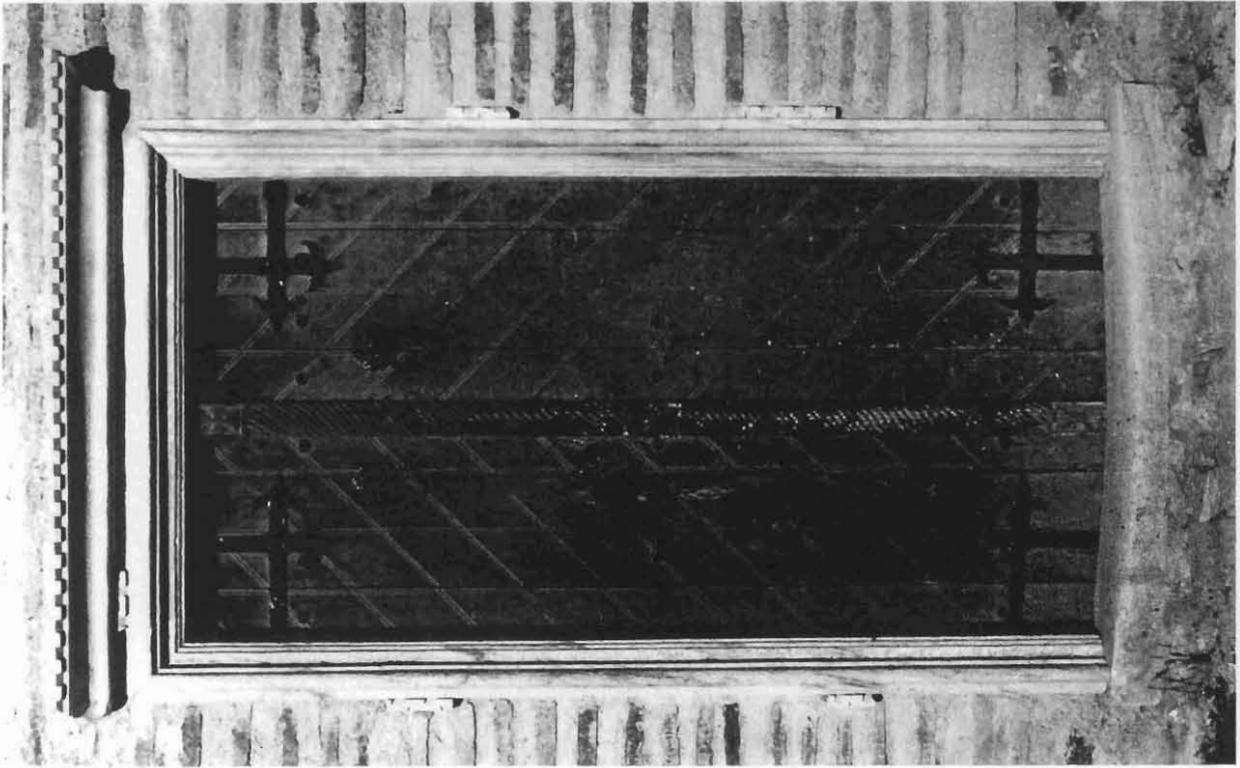
14 South church, fragment of opus sectile in central square of pavement



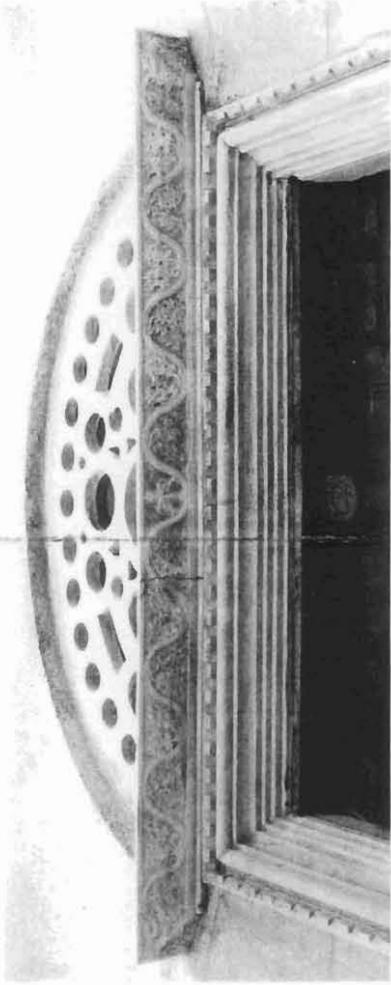
16 South church, southwest door



15 South church, west door



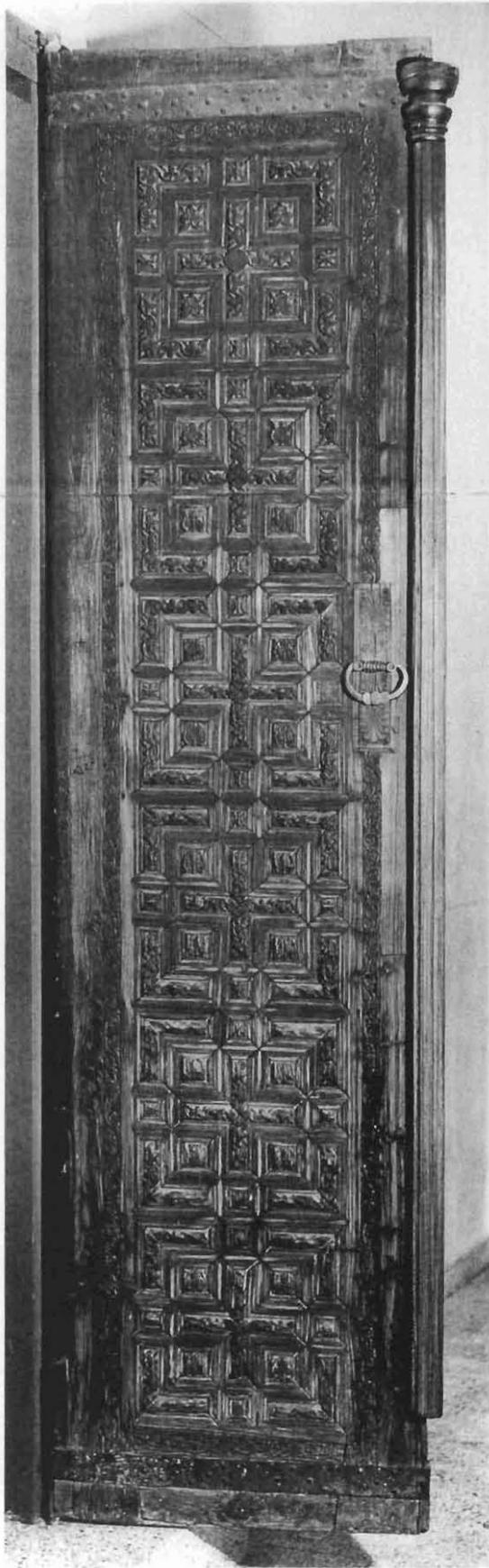
17 North church, west door



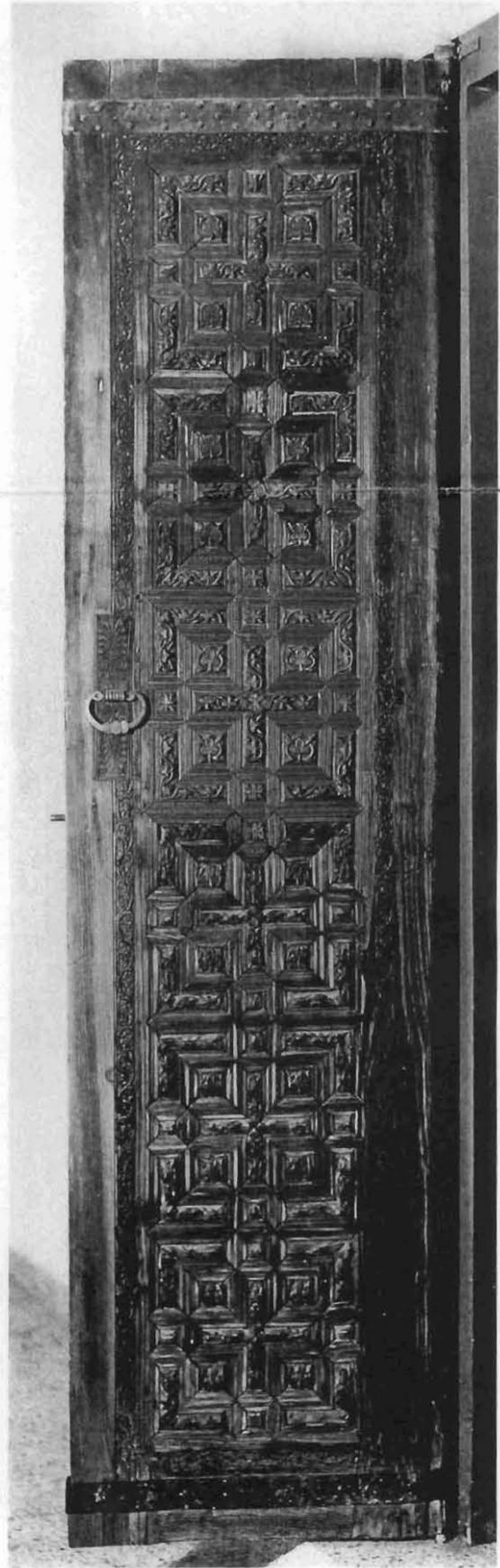
18 South church, lintel of west door



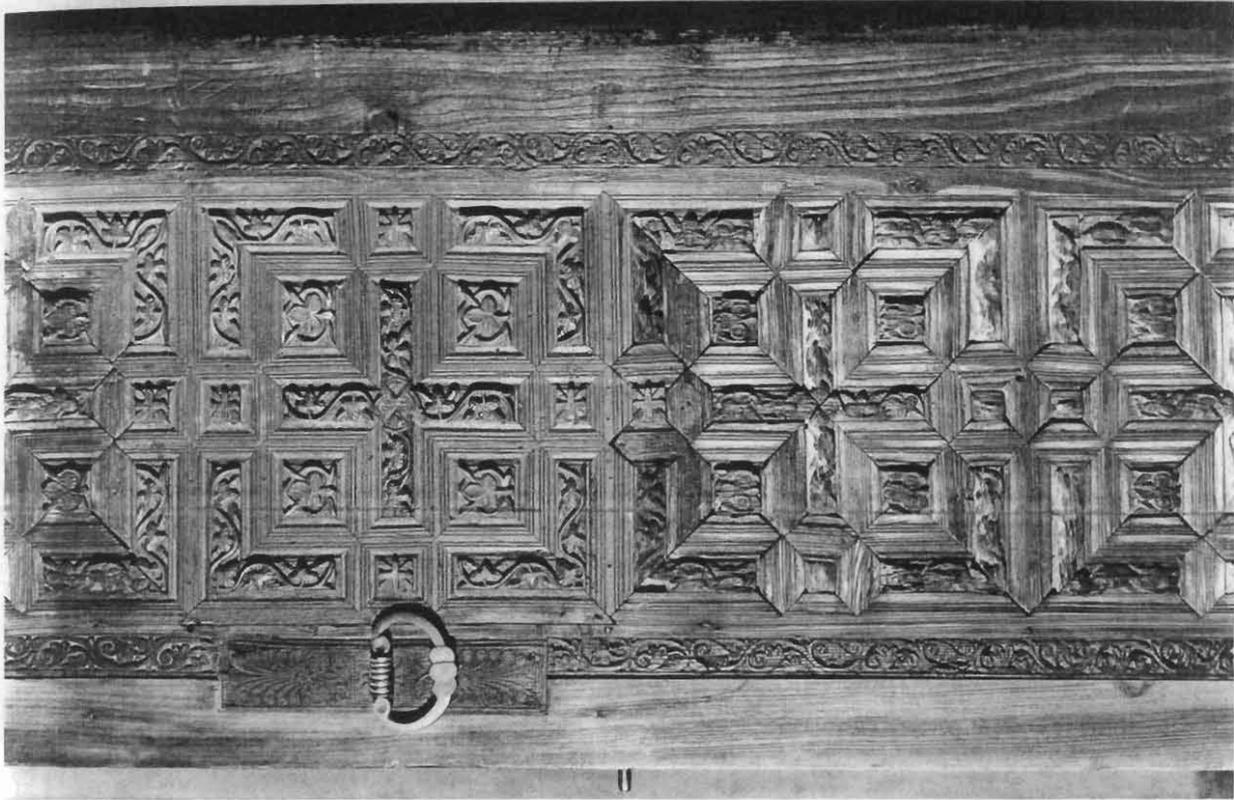
19 Fragment of sculpture above monastery gate



20 South church, wooden door



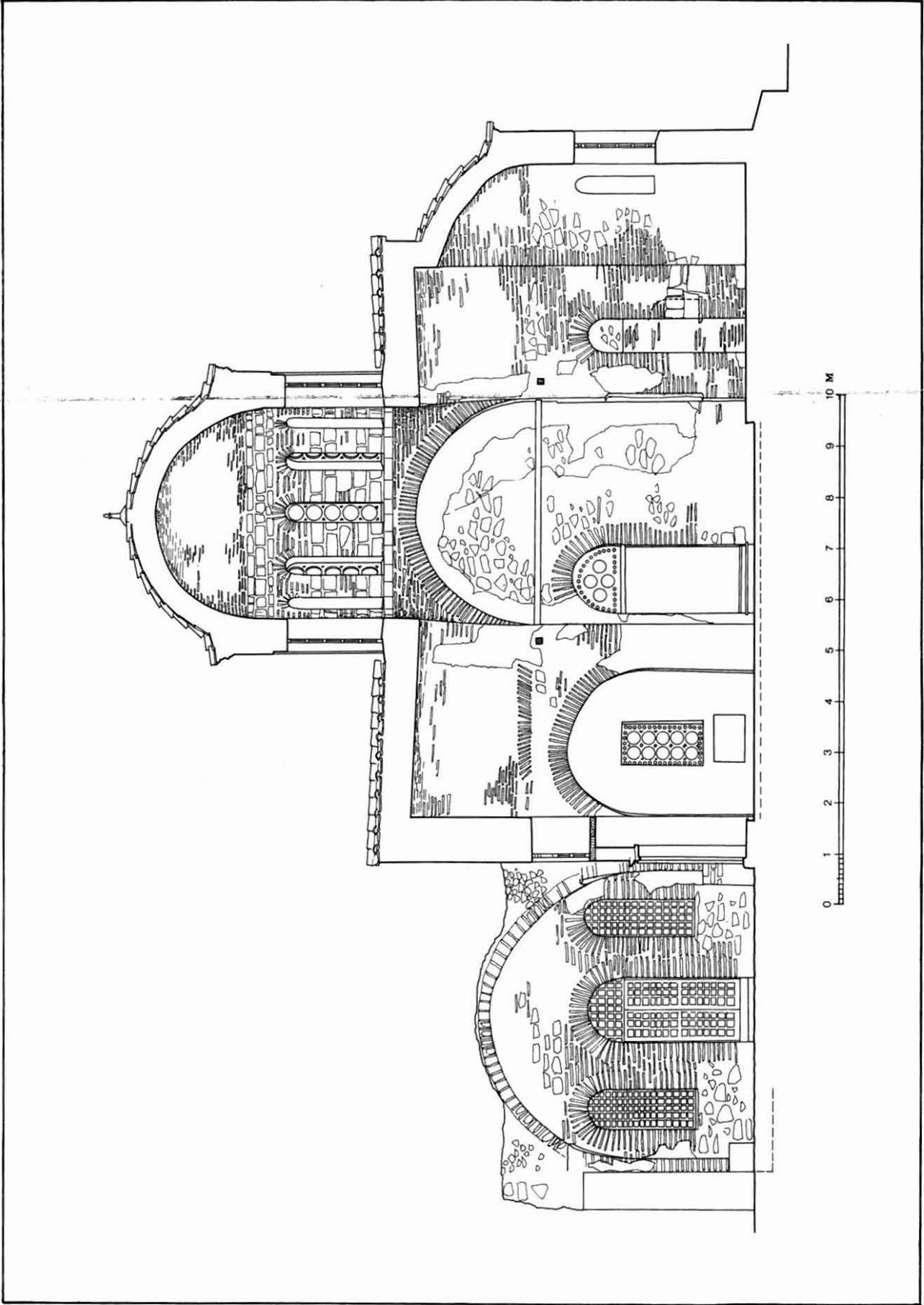
21 South church, wooden door



23 Detail of Figure 21

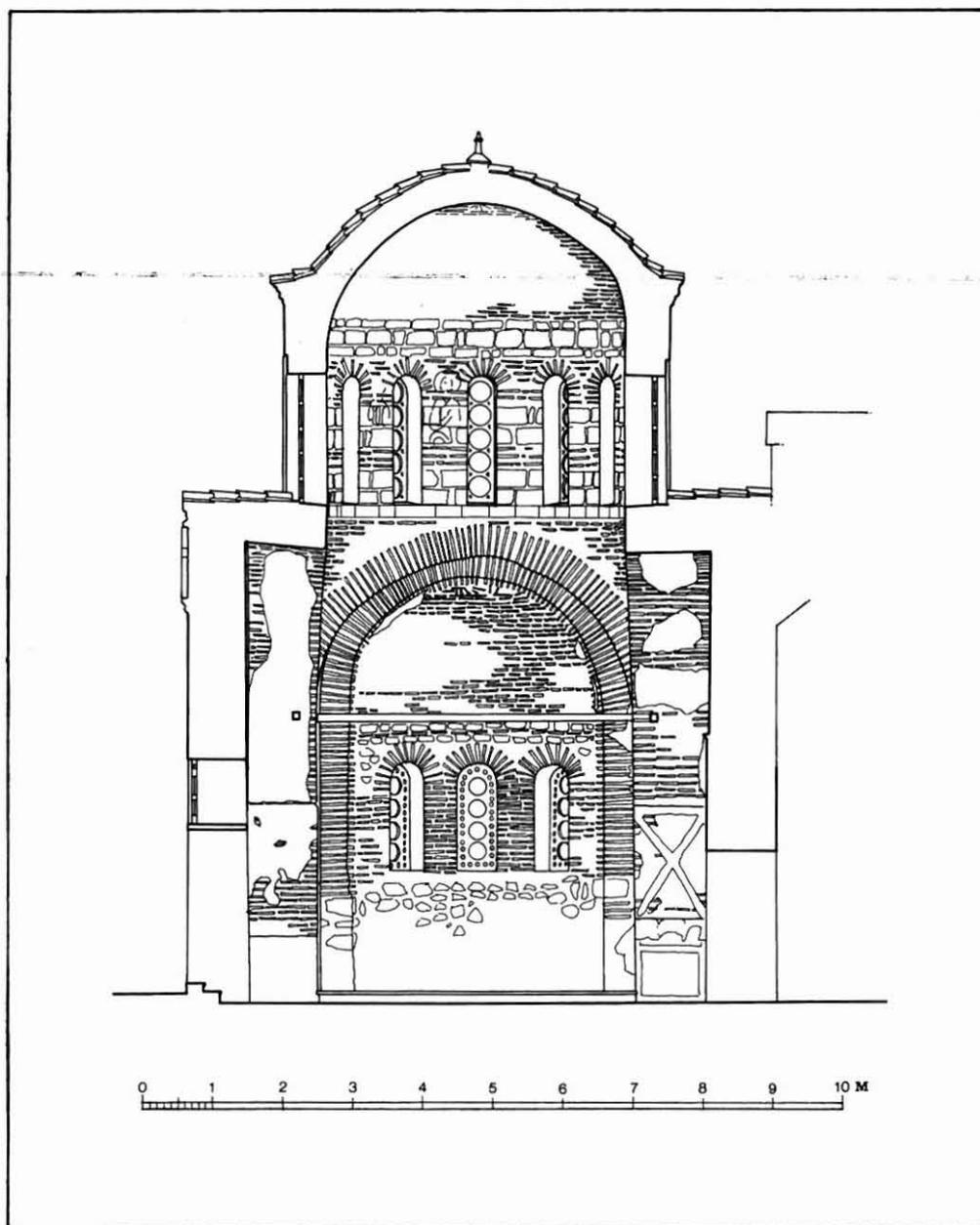


22 Detail of Figure 20

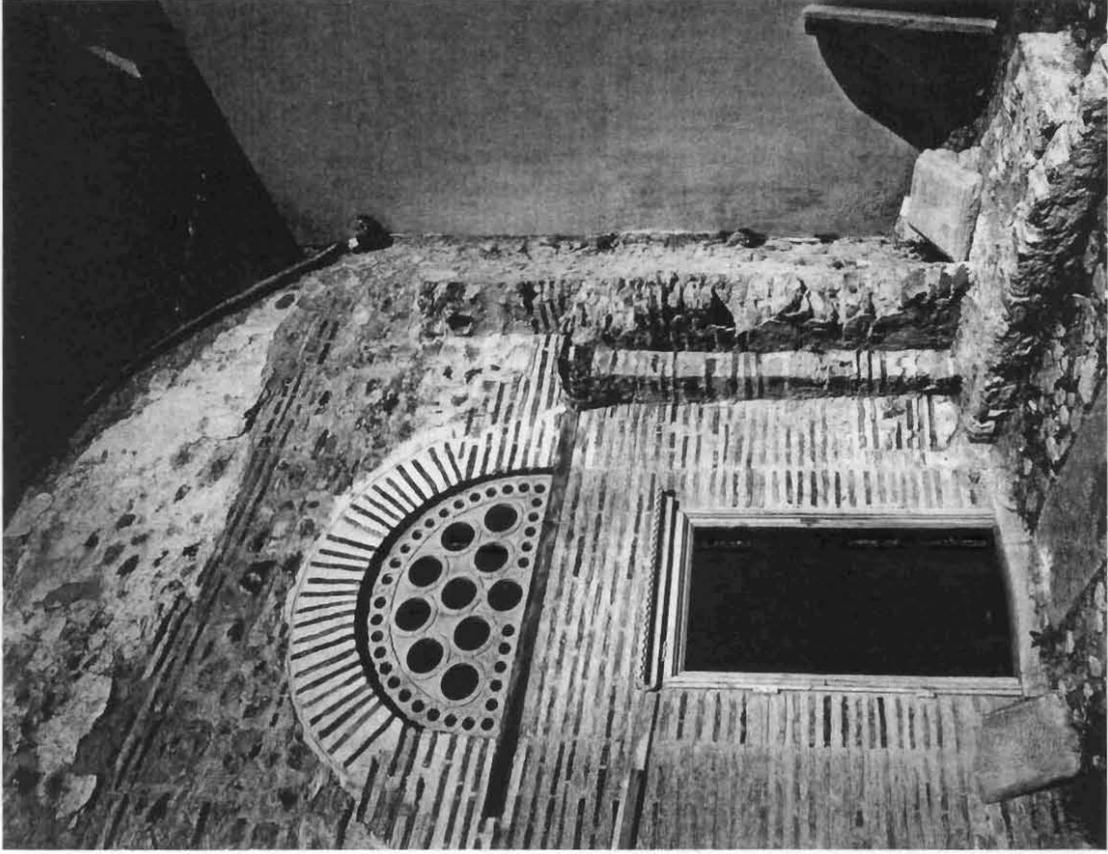


24 Longitudinal section looking north (drawing: Richard Anderson)

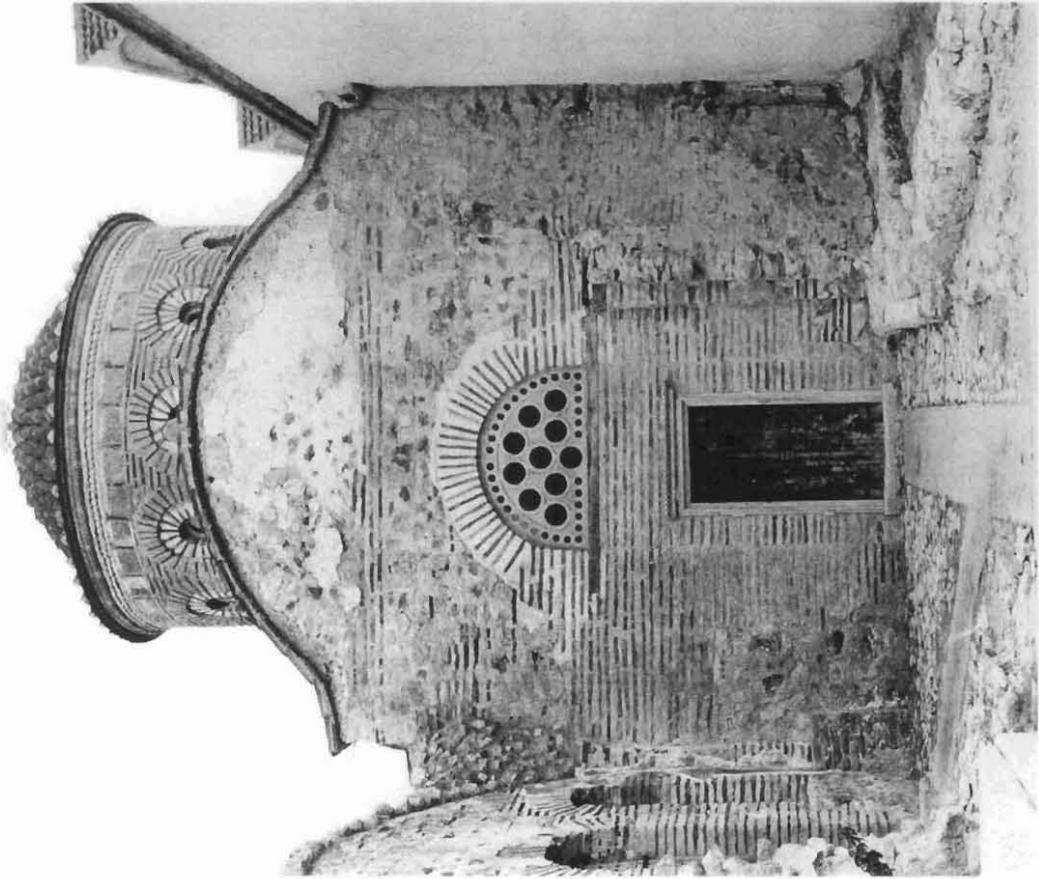
North Church (Figures 24–185 and Color Plates 1–8)



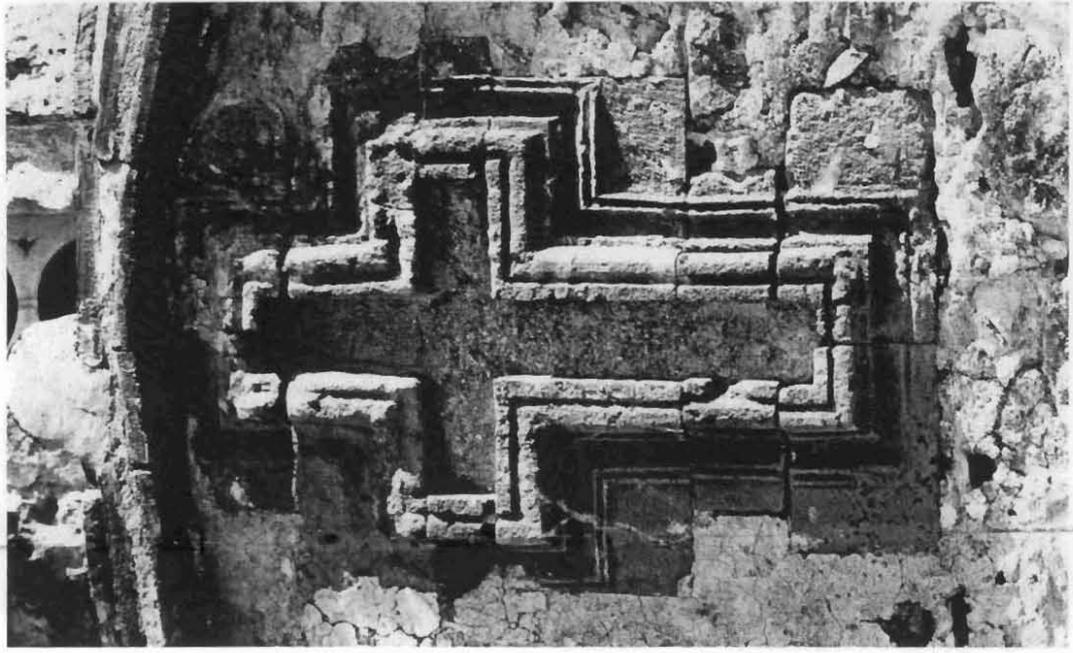
25 Transverse section looking east (drawing: Richard Anderson)



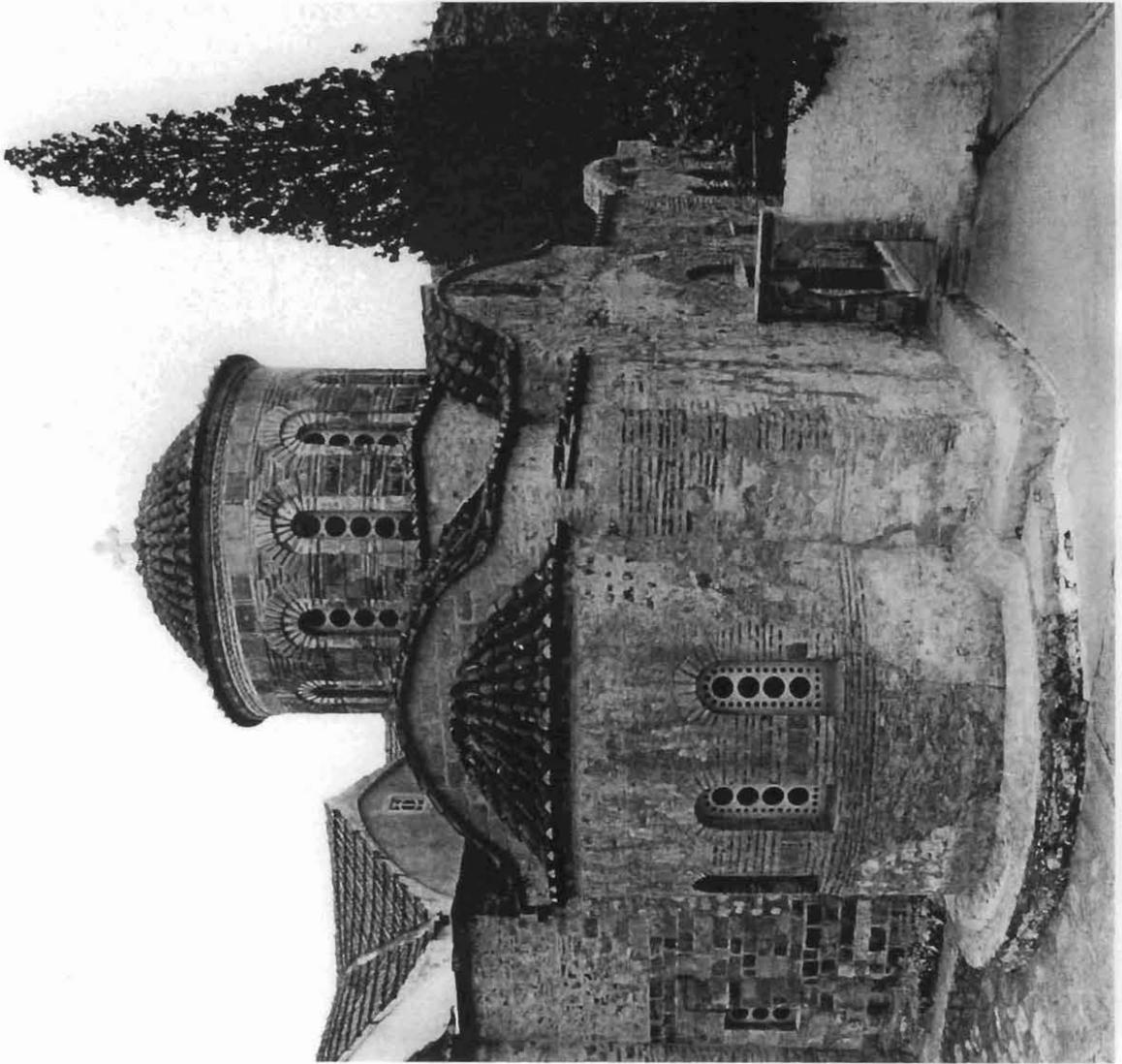
27 Juncture of west facade to narthex of south church



26 West facade



29 Ornamental cross on north facade



28 Exterior view from northeast



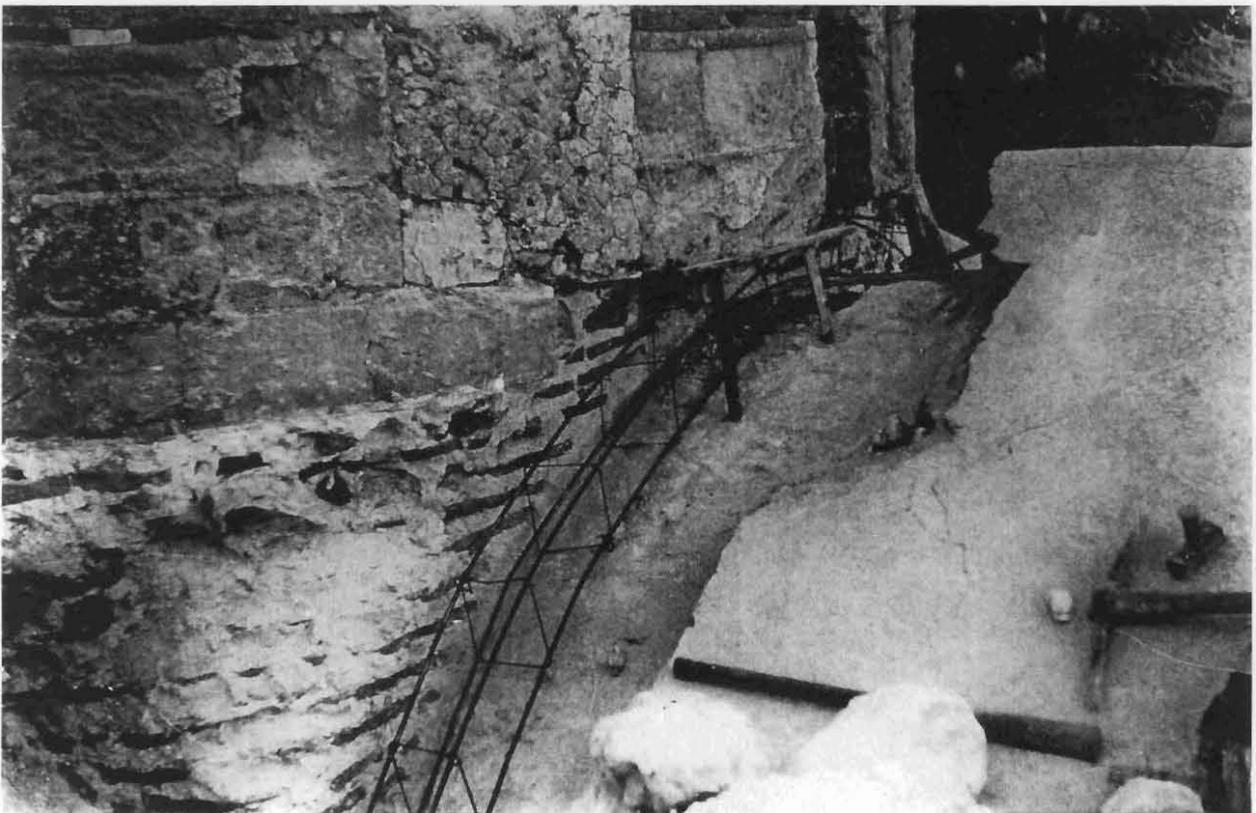
30 Apse in the course of rebuilding (1942) (photo: Department of Antiquities, Cyprus)



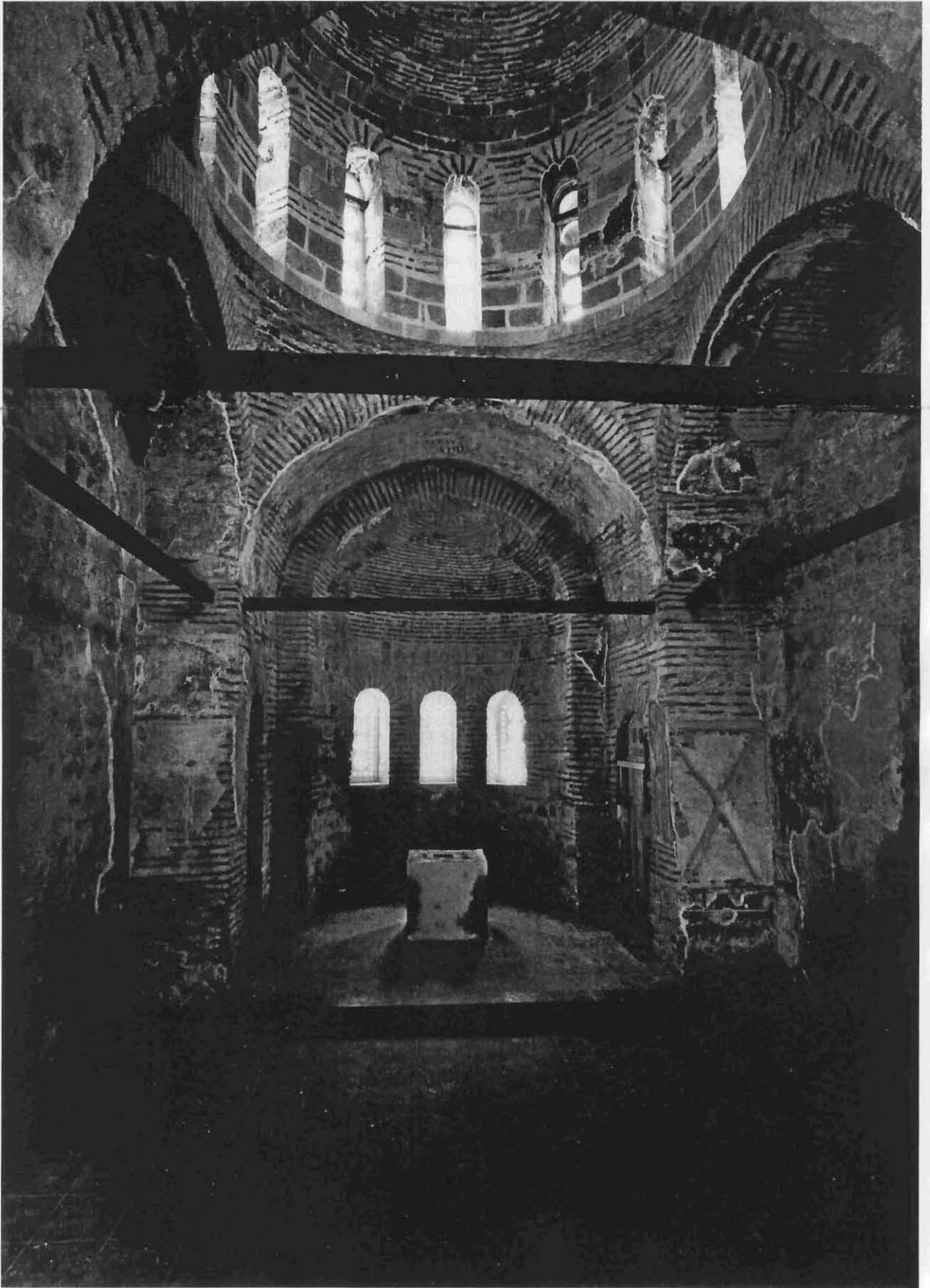
31 North facade before restoration (photo: Department of Antiquities, Cyprus)



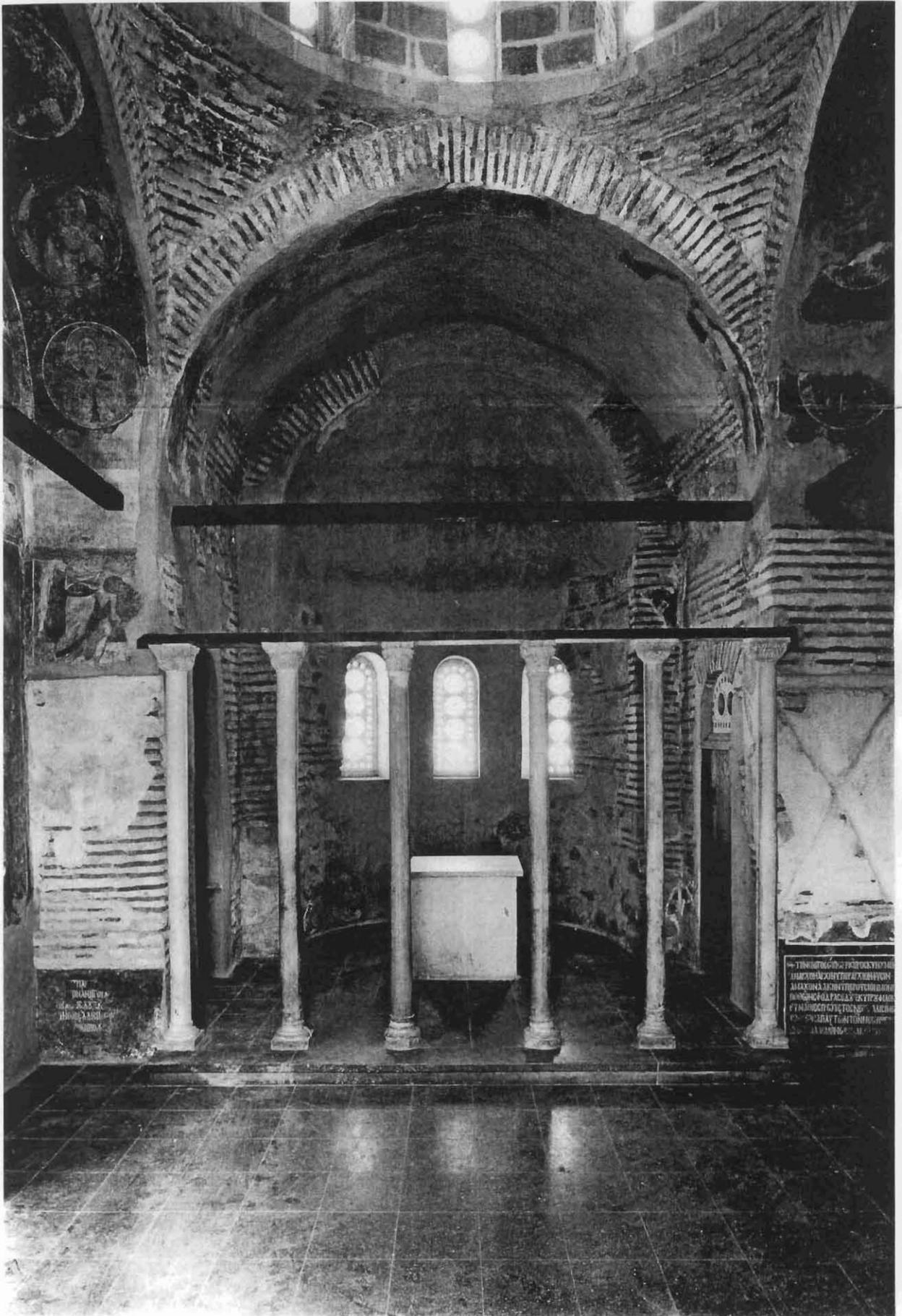
32 West facade and north wall of narthex before restoration
(photo: Department of Antiquities, Cyprus)



33 Insertion of reinforced concrete collar over bema vault (photo: Department of Antiquities, Cyprus)



34 Interior looking east (1963)



35 Interior looking east, after insertion of templon screen

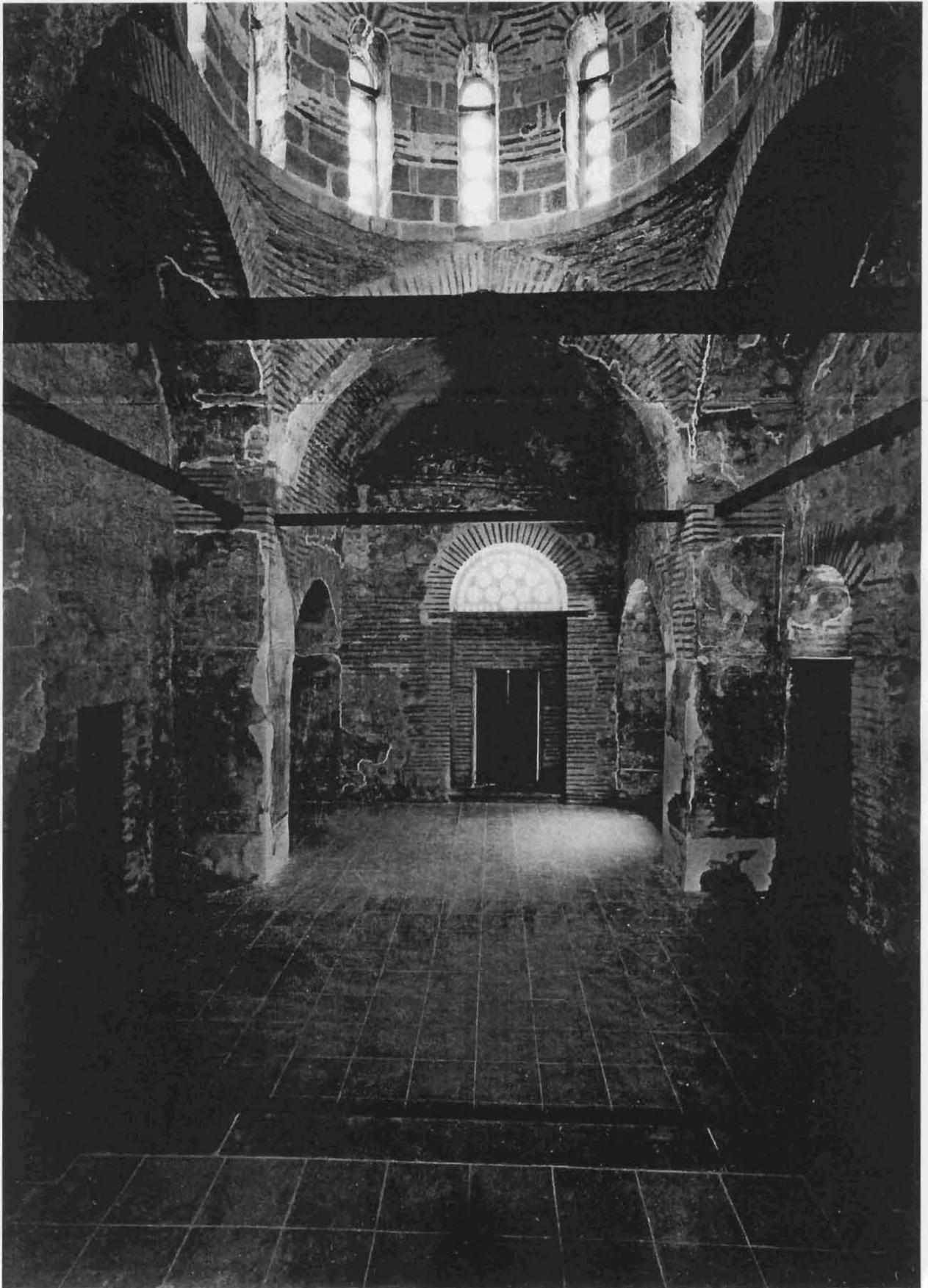


36 Interior looking south (1963)

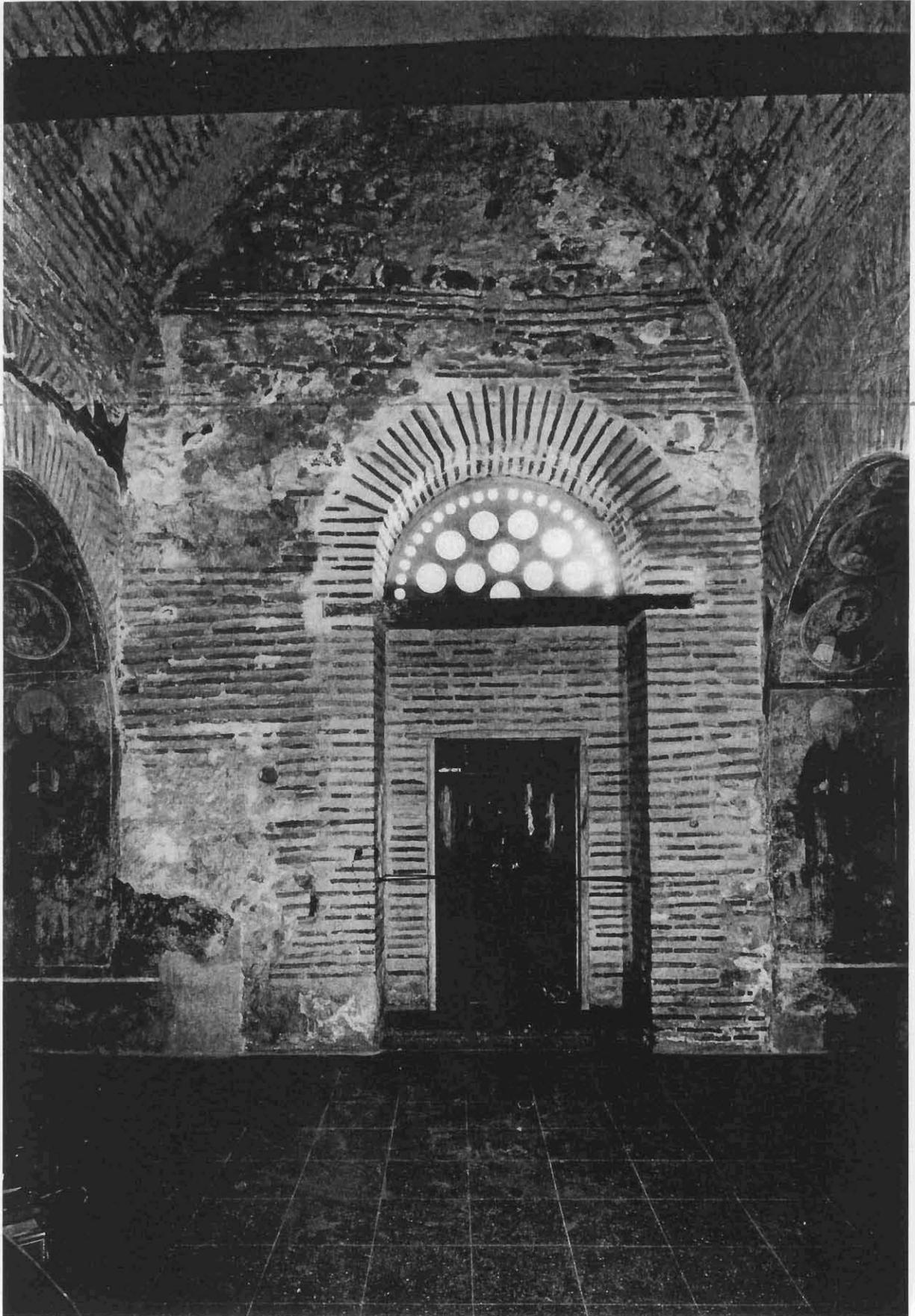


37 Interior looking north (1963)





39 Interior looking west (1963)



40 West wall



41 Templon screen, Capital A



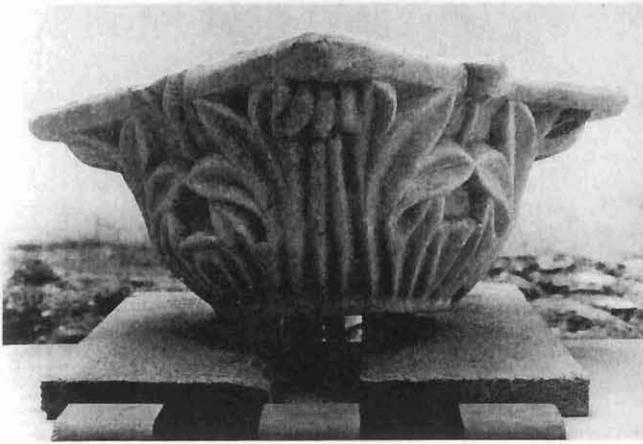
42 Capital C



43 Capital D



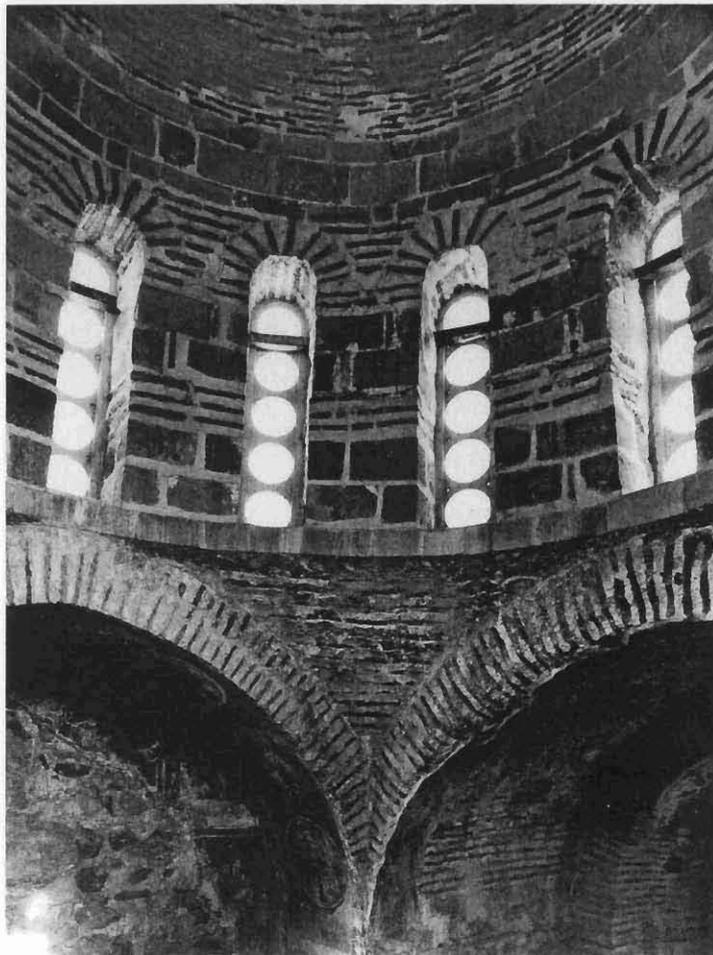
44 Capital E



45 Templon screen, Capital F



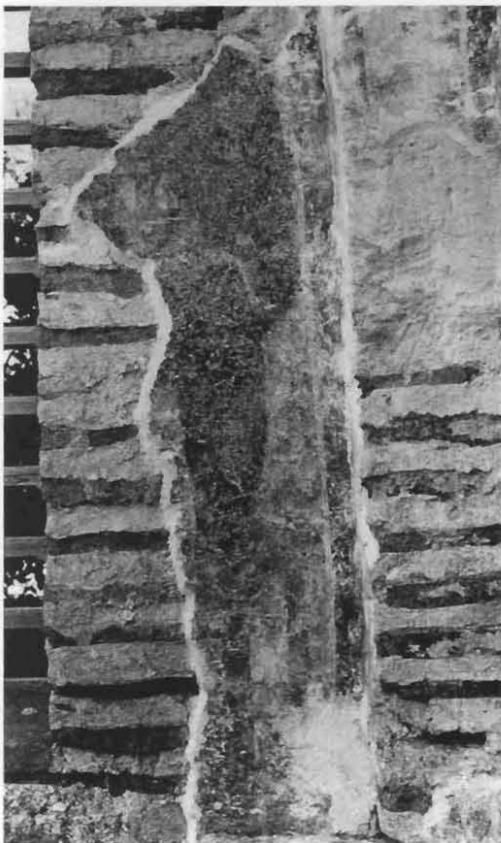
46 Fragment of parapet slab



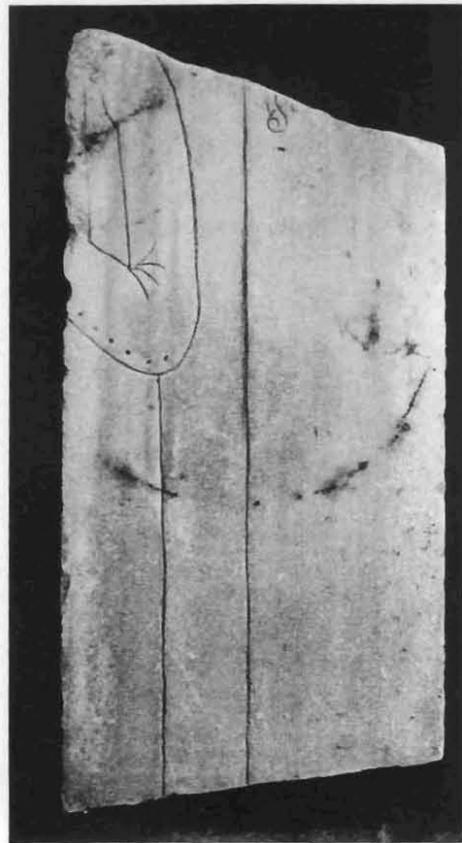
47 Dome and pendentive looking northeast



184 Narthex, north wall



185 Narthex, north wall, fragment of seated monk



186 Loose fragment of funerary slab