

A REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE BYZANTINE INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, 1958

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Early in April, 1958, the Byzantine Institute of America again took up its work in Istanbul with the authorization and cooperation of the Department of Ancient Monuments and Museums of the Ministry of National Education. The Institute has been engaged in carrying out projects in four Byzantine Monuments, Hagia Sophia, Kariye Camii, Fethiye Camii, and the Martyrium of St. Euphemia. It has also been engaged in searching for still other works of Byzantine art and in preserving frescoes and other objects from various sites.

AYASOFYA MÜZESİ (Hagia Sophia)

In Hagia Sophia, two large scaffolds were built early in the season at the west end of the nave. One of these is directly over the imperial doorway and is being used to restore the beautiful inlaid marble panels which were in danger of falling—in fact a few small pieces of inlay did fall this year before this work was begun. These panels were executed in “opus sectile”. In order to reattach the loose sections, a procedure was devised whereby the supporting pitch could be softened by heat without damage to surrounding areas. Five of these panels have been cleaned and restored and have revealed forms and colors in sectile which were previously unknown. The beautiful black, white and red central panel just below the cornice level depicts a sanctuary with two handsome crosses, one of which was elaborately jewelled. The representation of two birds also emerged through restoration. Two other panels are composed of red and green porphyry arranged in geometric designs. Just below these are two

very fine panels of revetment which depict dolphins and sea life in colors of red, white, green, and yellow marble, with some outlines in mother-of-pearl and colored glass. Structural weaknesses in the wall complicated the treatment of these marbles, a steel reinforcement had to be provided at their base.

Below these revetments is the great imperial doorway with its bronze lintel and jambs. The Byzantine Institute has been cooperating with the Istituto Centrale del Restauro of Rome, in the cleaning of this and all the bronze doors of Hagia Sophia. These newly cleaned doors now once again reveal the varied colors of metal inlay through the use of bronze, copper, silver, and gold.

In the south aisle, the west bay is being restored to its original brilliance by cleaning the mosaics and marbles. The mosaic represents beautiful jewelled crosses in the vaults and on the walls above cornice level. Coarse cement fills which had been placed in areas of loss, and heavy layers of paint which were applied over the crosses during the 19th century, are now being removed. The intricate sectile panels below the cornice level are now cleaned and restored and the result is a sparkling lacv arabesque pattern of crosses, plant and bird forms, in black, white, and red marbles and turquoise-colored glass.

Recently the Byzantine Institute has made the most important discovery of a new mosaic in Hagia Sophia. Mr. Robert Van Nice, during a recent trip to Bellinzona, Switzerland, to look at the Fosatti papers discovered new information which led to the location of the monumental stand-

ing portrait of the Emperor Alexander who ruled with his brother Leo VI from 886 - 912 and alone until his death in 913. This mosaic has been discovered in a niche high up over the cornice of the great north - west pier in the north gallery. Until now it was assumed that this mosaic had been lost in earthquake damages during the 19th century. Preliminary examination and testing seem to indicate that the figure remains in excellent condition, although it is now covered with paint and plaster. This important addition to the gallery of imperial portraits at Hagia Sophia will be uncovered and consolidated during the 1959 season.

KARIYE CAMII (The Byzantine Church of the Monastery of the Chora)

At the Kariye Camii the restoration of the magnificent cycle of frescoes in the Parecclesion was carried forward to completion. This year saw the uncovering of 10 standing figures of saints of heroic proportions, most of them warrior saints. Their state of preservation was found to be excellent and they make a great addition to the frescoes in the Parecclesion. With the completion of their restoration, the whole chapel can now be seen as a unit.

In the narthexes of the Kariye Camii, the final touches have been applied to the mosaics which represent the life of Christ. These masterpieces of Palaeologan art, after twelve years of painstaking treatment, are now rapidly becoming one of the greatest attractions in İstanbul.

The marble revetments which were polished last year are now being repaired with antique marbles of matching colors. These were presented by local museum authorities and were prepared by cutting up fragment of columns which had been found in various parts of the city. Only small areas of loss are being replaced. Where large areas are missing, the brick work has been repaired and pointed and revetments will not be restored.

The architecture of the Kariye Camii has been receiving considerable attention. Nearly all steel reinforcements in the walls are now in place. The minaret, which was in danger of falling has been rebuilt in part and reroofed and resurfaced, and the pinnacle gilded with gold leaf. The north and west facades have been cleaned of layers of paint, plaster, and improper fills and are being rebuilt in parts where stone and bricks are missing, decayed, or broken. New windows have been designed and installed in the west facade, which not only provide much better light for the mosaics of the outer narthex, but also greatly enhance the appearance of the building as one approaches it. The large windows in the main apse of the church have been cleared of their 19th century fills, and their structure has been strengthened with a thin band of steel and concrete which also serves as a support for the new window frames.

This year has also seen the completion of the cleaning of the sculptures in the Kariye, many of which still had areas of their original surface paint in gold and blue. The various tomb niches have received their final treatment. This has consisted of rebuilding the walls two of which in modern times had been opened to from passage ways. In another the mosaics were removed so that the collapsing arch which supported them could be rebuilt. These mosaics are now back in place. All of the eight arcosolia (arched tombs) in the building have been put in their final condition.

Although large areas of the original 14th century marble floors are wonderfully preserved, those of the Parecclesion, outer narthex, and other smaller areas are now covered with comparatively modern brick tiles in a deteriorated condition. In some places their removal has revealed the pattern of the lost original marble slabs. We are now engaged in replacing these tiles with an appropriate flooring.

With the completion of these projects,

the Kariye Camii will take its rightful place as one of the finest and best preserved 14th century monuments in the world.

FETHIYE CAMII (The Byzantine Church of the Virgin Pammakaristos).

At Fethiye Camii much has been accomplished since last year. At the end of last season, much of the interior brick work was uncovered by removing disfiguring and falling plaster. Some modern structures in the south-east chapel were taken down to restore the architectural form of the apse of the chapel. During these explorations some fragments of important frescoes were discovered as well as bits of sculpture. Fragments of mosaic were also located in the south aisle of the main church.

In the south-east chapel (the chapel built for Michael Glabas Tarchaniotes after his death in 1315) work continues in uncovering the magnificent mosaics buried beneath thick layers of plaster. The apse mosaic has now been completely cleaned and consolidated. The entire mosaic area is in excellent condition and has been reattached to the wall with copper clamps, hidden beneath the surface, and with casein glue administered with hypodermic syringes. This mosaic represents Christ enthroned in the half dome of the apse, while niches just in front of this, in the bema, depict the standing figures of the Virgin on the left and John the Baptist on the right, thus forming a single composition of the Deisis. This is an interesting variation of the Deisis composition mosaic among those which have been found and restored previously by the Byzantine Institute - the two at Hagia Sophia, and at the Kariye.

At the time of this report, the dome mosaic in Fethiye Camii is being treated and the figures of prophets there beneath the medallion of the Christ Pantocrator

are proving to be among the most brilliantly colored of any Byzantine mosaics. Exploratory investigations have been made in all areas of this chapel and no less than 15 figures of saints still lie buried beneath the plaster on the vaultings.

SAINT EUPHEMIA:

St. Euphemia, a Byzantine Martyrium located to the west of the hippodrome, had been excavated by the German Archeological Institute under the direction of Professor A. M. Schneider. One of the exedras of the church was found to be covered with a series of fresco panels of fine quality depicting scenes from the life of St. Euphemia. Since their discovery, these frescoes had received no treatment to preserve them and as a result, parts of them have fallen from the wall. Also large areas of paint were beginning to flake away. By agreement with the German Archeological Institute and the Director General of Ancient Monuments and Museums of the Ministry of National Education, the Byzantine Institute has undertaken their conservation this year and has already set down all loose paint and has reattached loose areas of frescoes to the walls. Holes in the paintings have been filled with gesso. Their treatment is being completed by cleaning and consolidating the surfaces. These little-known frescoes should then be objects of considerable interest to both scholars and tourists.

OTHER ACTIVITIES AT VARIOUS SITES:

Two frescoes have been removed from the unsafe walls of Byzantine ruins and have been prepared for exhibition in Hagia Sophia. One of these is a conch fresco of the Virgin and Child of the Blachernitissa type symbolizing the Incarnation. It was found while excavating for the foundations of a modern hospital and was removed in sections and reassembled in a newly constructed half-

dome. This Virgin with her large rounded eyes, pale green flesh tones and brilliant blue mantel is a fine example of Byzantine painting.

From the excavations of a church located between Hagia Sophia and St. Irene, a fragmentary but fine fresco was uncovered several years ago. Since it was deteriorating in situ, it has been

removed and reattached to a new support. Cement which covered much of the surface has been cleaned off and losses have been compensated in harmonious tones to complete the treatment of this very interesting representation of six small standing figures-a Deisis group on the left (Mary, Christ, and John the Baptist) and three church fathers at the right.