

AN UNKNOWN CHAPEL IN OBA-ALANYA

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INTRODUCTION

In the town of ıplaklı in Oba near Alanya Castle¹ on the southern coast of Turkey (See: Map), there is a single-naved chapel with highly-interesting non-figurative wall paintings². This small building is so-called "**Resimli Kilise**" (Painted Church) by the inhabitants of the region.

The chapel is abandoned and "ruined" a large part of its vault. It is currently in danger of complete collapse due to urban renewal activities initiated in the vicinity especially because of the heaps of the earth and stone accumulated from the excavation of the new construction's foundations. Red oil paint has been applied on some parts of the wall paintings and some diggings were made inside. It is necessary to take immediate action for conservation and structural reinforcement³ to prevent the building from deteriorating any further.

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¹ Alanya had several names through the ages. The oldest name of the city according to Strabon, was *Coracesium*. In Byzantine age, the city was called *Kalonoros*. During the Middle Ages, the Latins called it Candelore, Lescandelour and Galanorum. The present name Alanya was given by Alâeddin Keykubat I, the Anatolian Seljuq Sultan. See: Lloyd 1989, ix-1,2. ; İbn Bibi 1996, 16.

²As a member of The Excavation and Conservation Team of Alanya Castle, I have official permission of studying on this chapel, depending on the correspondence of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritages and Museums. Members of the team documented the chapel in 1999, which is performed under direction of Prof. M. Oluş Arık, during the surface investigations conducted together with METU in the project "*Alanya Castle/ The Analysis of Tiles and Ceramics found in Seljuk Palace*".

³ The chapel was registered in 1997 by the Alanya Museum. Its ruined condition, which is threatening the building, was reported by the author to the Directorate of the Antalya Regional Conservation Council of Cultural and Natural Heritage, with a letter dated November 26, 2004. The directorate has addressed a letter, dated December 30, 2004, number 1056, accompanied by a resolution dated December 23, 2004/178, giving to the author the information that the works around the chapel was stopped and it was decided that a retaining wall should be constructed on the east side.

ARCHITECTURE AND WALL PAINTINGS

The chapel is oriented to the east-west direction. It has an irregular rectangular plan, measuring 5,36 x 4,31 m. on the exterior and 3,57 x 2,10 m. on the interior (fig.1-pl.1). The nave is covered by a barrel-vault which is 2,90 m. in height and 0,35m. thick. The semi-circular apse is framed with a rectangular wall structure on the outside. On the inside of northern wall, there is a small round-arched niche. There are two round-arched windows - one on the east end of the apse and another one the south wall. The door is situated on the western façade, but is so ruined (fig. 2-3).

The chapel's walls and its barrel-vault are covered with non-figurative wall paintings starting from ground level. The paintings on the north and west walls are now extensively destroyed. However, the wall paintings on the surface of the apse, vault and south wall are in a better condition that enables us to recognize the contents to a great extent (fig. 4).

East Wall

A large cross (*Crux gemmata*)¹ is painted within a medallion in the half-dome of the apse. This composition is outlined in purple red on a light beige background. The arms of the cross are decorated with precious stone and pearl-drop motives (fig. 5). The medallion is outlined in blue on the inside and in purple red on the outside. Between them, there is a stylized pattern, which is difficult to determine. On the light beige background of the medallion, purple red lines are radiating between the cross-arms emanating like sun rays (fig.6).

Around the medallion on the surface of the apse is covered with a geometric composition that has a two dimensional effect and is delineated in purple red, blue and light beige colours. The pattern arranged symmetrically on the two sides of the window delineates an eight-cornered star by two superimposed squares. Bands of double lines create knotting motives and circles in and around these squares⁵ (fig.7). On both sides of the apse-niche are symmetrically placed interlocking sparse circles arranged

¹ For other samples of *Crux Gemmata*: Gökkaya in Latmos, Hagios Apostoli Church (11th c.) See: Wiegand 1913, 92-93; Yanartaş in Antalya-Chimera Church in Yanartaş (dated iconoclastic period) See: Ruggieri 1994, 475 and Ruggieri 1995, 367-380.

⁵ (fig.20) An exactly similar composition to this one is seen in the Hagios Ioannis Theologos Church at Adisarou. See: Chatzidakis 1989, 55, fig.4-5 ; Osterhaut 2001, fig.16.

in vertical bands and acting as the pseudo-columns of the apse-arch. On the semi-circular apse-arch, three bands coloured in purple red outline the surface. A geometric composition with two-dimensional effect is repeated on the inner band. The middle and outer bands include inscriptions.

On the intrados of the arch in the upper row, the remains of "...A Ω _ O C _ _ _ O..." letters measuring 5 cm. and on the middle row "...X _ A C _ A € T Ī N O _ O..." letters measuring of 8 cm. are to be seen. The inscription is written on a beige background, the letters are worn out (fig. 8-9).

South Wall

The drawings on the south wall consist of six square panels on the bottom and four rectangular panels on the upper part extend to the vault. The latter are arranged upright, with one on the east and three on the west side of the window. The bands that encircle the lower part of each panel are decorated with wavy lines in purple red on a beige background. The inner surfaces of these panels are filled with a design that imitates marble and is drawn on a beige background (fig. 10).

The four rectangular panels have frames in purple red. Each one has a Latin cross (Crux gemmata) at the center. The floral motives extending from the lower parts of the arms of the cross symbolize the so-called "living cross" in Byzantine iconography. The tips of the arms on all of the crosses are decorated with a string of pearls and their inner surfaces are filled with representations of precious stones. Each of these panels has an adornment band in the form of a broken arch with wavy lines at the top (fig. 11).

On the south wall, the panel on the east of the window, which is in the best condition, is decorated with a brown cross, outlined in black on a beige background. The inner surface of this brown cross is decorated with pearl drops and precious stones. There are floral motives springing from the lower ends of the cross (fig. 12).

The second, third and fourth crosses are deteriorated but what remains resembles the first cross. The only difference is the remains of some of the letters above the lateral arms of the crosses in the second and the third panels.

These remains of letters are "...A M..." in the upper row and "...N C..." in lower row of the second and "...N T..." on the third panels. Each of these letters measured 5,5 cm (fig. 13-14-15). The lower part of the window between the panels is decorated with a grid pattern outlined in purple red. The inner surface of the window is decorated with purple red lines.

North and West Walls

The paintings on the north wall are deteriorated. However, there are weak signs indicating floral motives reminiscent to the crosses on the south wall, a broken arch form and a panel imitating marble. Furthermore there are also traces of letters which are no longer legible (fig. 16-17). The decoration around the niche is unclear. On the two sides of the door on the west wall, there are also traces of imitating marble panels.

Vault

Symmetric, closed joints form the cross that completely covers the surface of the vault. It is painted with black contours and decorated with representations of white pearls. The thick band of interlocking sparse circles frames the skirt of the vault (fig. 18). Between the arms of the cross on the rectangular surfaces there are twelve lobed rosettes outlined in black (fig. 19).

CONCLUSION

Small chapels like the Oba Chapel, which are typically rubble-stone structures built on a rectangular plan, single nave, and covered with vault in observance of local traditions, are a group of structures commonly encountered in Anatolia, Greece and the Aegean islands⁶. However, such types of structures have not yet sufficiently been the subject of in-depth scientific studies. It is common knowledge that some of the single nave chapels to be discussed in this group are sometimes built into an older and ruined basilica. Indeed, E. Rosenbaum has found that an example of this type had been found in Selinus in the Cilicia region⁷. A similar observation has also been made for chapels in Paros. O. Feld reports that all of the three

⁶ Rosenbaum 1967, 67-68; Winfield 1962, 157-158; Bryer 1985 (I), fig.76, 96, 99; Feld 1975, 422; Miller 1993, 83-84.

⁷ Rosenbaum 1967, 34-35, 67.

chapels on the island are built on early basilicas⁸. R.M. Harrison has also found that there existed a small chapel in Lycia region, Sura built in a church in the late period⁹.

On the other hand, there are other examples like the Oba Chapel built singularly on simple and local architectural traditions. This group of chapels can be given many examples from Pontus¹⁰, Cilicia¹¹, Myra-Lagune¹², Kyenai¹³, Greece¹⁴, and the Aegean islands¹⁵. Despite controversy about their building dates, some single-naved "military chapels" identified by R.W. Edwards¹⁶ in the Cilicia region are, undoubtedly, examples within the coverage of this group.

Generally attributed to the Byzantine Era, there is controversy on which period such structures actually belong. Although, considering the simple constructions and decorations of these small and unpretentious buildings, one thinks that they are built in Middle Byzantine¹⁷ or towards the ends of Byzantine era¹⁸, some other comments are also heard saying that they might belong to a later time. Indeed, A.Orlandos believes that the single-naved chapels in Paros are built in the late period (17-18th centuries)¹⁹. There are claims that some single-naved chapels in the Black Sea region are built under the Ottoman rule and in the 19th century²⁰.

This reveals that such group of structures including the Oba Chapel has great uncertainties with regards dating. One can especially claim that such uncertainties also exist about the interior walls of buildings.

⁸ Feld 1975, 422.

⁹ Harrison 1963, 143.

¹⁰ Ballance 1960, 151, 166, 168, 170; Winfield 1962, 157; Edwards 1982, fig.115; Bryer 1985 (I), fig.76, 96, 99.

¹¹ Rosenbaum 1967, 67-68.

¹² Feld 1975, 419-424.

¹³ Miller 1993, 84-85, Abb. 50-51.

¹⁴ Feld 1975, 422-dpnt.469.

¹⁵ Feld 1975, 422-423.

¹⁶ Edwards 1982, 175.

¹⁷ Feld 1975, 423.

¹⁸ Rosenbaum 1967, 67.

¹⁹ For Orlandos's comments: See: Feld 1975, 422-dpnt.467.

²⁰ Ballance 1960, 169; Winfield 1962, 158.

As commonly known, some examples such as Oba Chapel with non-figural wall paintings are generally associated with the iconoclastic period²¹. However, the relationship of such wall paintings seen in many structures in Crete²², Naxos²³, Cilicia²⁴, Cherson, Georgia, Greece, Turkish Thrace and Anatolia and sometimes discussed under the title of “*aniconic decoration problem*”²⁵ with the iconoclastic period is still a controversial topic. However, it is also known that such wall paintings are, from a stylistic point of view, different from those in Greece and Cappadocia²⁶. Perhaps due to this reason, after considering the wall paintings in Naxos churches, Dimitrokallis is convinced that structures with aniconic decoration in Greece, Aegean Islands, Anatolia and Cappadocia should be reviewed²⁷. Osterhaut also reports that the dates proposed for examples accepted as belonging to this period are unreliable²⁸. As a matter of fact, the date proposed for the wall paintings of Antalya-Chimera church in Yanartaş has not been accepted by Hellenkemper-Hild²⁹, with claims that the kreuzblumen, cross decorations and horizontal tile examples on wall paintings might have been built in later times, such as the 17-18th centuries.

All such information demonstrates how major a problematic is the dating of Oba Chapel although it is included in the group of single-naved structures and it has a similar decoration.

Actually, considering the stone masonry used in Oba Chapel as well as its single nave and simple plan with a barrel vault, meaningful analogical connections may be established with chapels in the near vicinity in Alanya³⁰,

²¹ Osterhaut 2001, 5.

²² For Hagios Nikolaos Church in Merambello dating second half of 10th century. See: Gallas 1983, 81-422, fig. 102-395.

²³ Hagios Ioannis Theologos Church at Adisarou, St. Kyriake at Apeiranthos and St. Artemios Churches at Sangri dating 9th century. See: Dimitrokallis 1968, 283-286 ; Melas 1976, 138 ; Chatzidakis 1989, 50-64. I am mostly so grateful to Dr.B. Pitarakis for drawing my attention to Naxos.

²⁴ For Al Oda Church in İçel-Mut dating 8-10th centuries; See: Gough 1957, 159-160; Eyice 1971, 120; Koroğlu 2000, 393.

²⁵ See: Dimitrokallis 1968, 283-286; Lafontaine-Dosogne 1987, 324, 329, 333; Osterhaut 2001, 24-25.

²⁶ Lafontaine-Dosogne 1987, 329; Chatzidakis 1989, 56-57, 62-63 ; Osterhaut 2001, 24-25.

²⁷ Dimitrokallis 1968, 286.

²⁸ Osterhaut 2001, 5.

²⁹ Hellenkemper-Hild, 2004, 504.

³⁰ Lloyd 1989, 39.

Iotape³¹ and Cilicia³², and even with sole architectural examples claimed to belong to the Byzantine Era in the Black Sea region; however, on the other hand, it has to be assumed that simple structures with such plans and not requiring too much architectural knowledge and skills, which may therefore be built also by those living in rural areas out of city centers, might have been made in subsequent periods rather than during the Byzantine Era. However, after the Byzantine Era, historical, social and archaeological data with regards the buildings of Christian population in Anatolia during the late Ottoman period and their repairs or modifications are not yet been the subjects of a systematic study, except for Istanbul and Cappadocia.

One can say that the wall paintings in Oba Chapel contains many decorations and compositions encountered in many structures starting from early Christian-Byzantine Era until the late periods. It is remarkable that no figures are used in wall paintings. Though there are script remains among them, from an epigraphically, it is not possible to make meaning out of them. In return, considering the said script remains, it has been possible to conclude that they may not belong to a date earlier than the 11th century³³.

Although looking at the "*crux gemmata*" included in the wall painting program of the Chapel, one can date the building back to the 11-12th centuries³⁴ comparing it with similar structures in Latmos-Gökkaya and Yanartaş-Chimera in the same region, considering the political history of the Byzantine Era, it may be claimed, conjecturally, that this may not be quite possible³⁵.

Likewise, post-10th century Byzantine Era history of the Byzantine Kalonoros (today's Alanya) where the Chapel is located and its vicinity

³¹ Rosenbaum 1967, 38.

³² Edwards 1982, 164-176; Edwards 1983, 130-146; Hild 1984, 4: 182-356; Hellenkemper 1986.

³³ I consulted to Prof. D. Feissel for the translation of the inscription. The information that comes from him is that: "Though the lettering in itself doesn't provide a secure basis for datation, I'd hardly date this type of script (especially the letter A with an horizontal stroke on the top of it) earlier than the eleventh century. Besides, I'm still unable to offer a restoration even of a single word of the longest fragment." In this connection, the character of letter it seems impossible to date before 11th century. Prof. Sencer Şahin also agrees to him.

³⁴ I am mostly so grateful to Prof. H. Hellenkemper for his helps on dating problems.

³⁵ However, Rott did not sure from İçner Castle Chapel and "Arap Evliyası" in Alanya which are dated to Byzantine Era. See: Rott 1908, 71.

remains to be uncertain. Actually, it is also a controversial issue whether or not there was a Byzantine rule in the region after the 10th century. Indeed, Byzantine coins found in archaeological excavations in Alanya Castle date back as far as the rule of Leo VI (886-912)³⁶. This demonstrates that the Byzantine rule in this part of the region (east of Pamfilia) has terminated latest during the early 10th century. The situation of Alanya and environs during the 11-12th centuries is dark. Perhaps, during this two-century period, it had the same fate with *Sattalia* (today's Antalya), one of the most important ports of Byzantium located to its immediate west. As a matter of fact, *Sattalia* has also been the subject of a continuous military and political struggle between the Byzantium and the Turks since the 11th century when the central authority of the Empire started to disappear; and not only this city but also the southern shores of Anatolia has transformed into an insecure region. Compared to a "fire spot" by İdrisî, claims exists that *Sattalia* was a place of ruins during the 11th century³⁷. Such a comparison may also be made for the Byzantine *Kalonoros*. If this can be verified, one can say that the city was to a great extent abandoned during these ages, with a smaller population left in the city. From Islamic and Armenian sources, one can say that the *chaos* caused by the epidemics has a major role in it as well as the earthquakes that have occurred in the Mediterranean coastal line starting from the 11th century³⁸.

In this regard, it is rather high to date the structure looking at its architecture and interior wall paintings. It is but possible to enlighten this doubt and hesitation to a certain extent.

As it is known, Christian history of Anatolia is mostly limited to the Byzantine Era; and except for those built in Istanbul, Cappadocia or Trabzon (Pontus), not too much focus has been put on *local* architectural techniques and the traditions of the art of painting during the Ottoman era starting from the 16th century in rural Anatolia but mainly until the end of 19th century (even until the exchange in 1922). However, as it is known, Anatolia also has a Christian history and art, which has continued under Ottoman rule.

³⁶ Arık 2001, 529; Arık 2004, 2.

³⁷ Yılmaz 2002, 108.

³⁸ Duggan 2004, 127; Duggan 2005, 357-396.

On the other hand, although almost all of the wall paintings frequently seen mainly in Alanya and in the near vicinity, it is surprising that the examples in Oba Chapel still survive; this cannot be associated with the fact that they were secluded for centuries. Again, considering the destructions in the Chapel after 10 years after its registration, it is possible to say that a structure that has been built during the Byzantine Era should have not reached today in such an intact state despite the centuries in between and in a settlement that has been continuously inhabited since the Seljuk Era. However, although it belongs to the Byzantine Era, this does not mean that the structure has never functioned during the late periods or the structure has not been interfered. In this regard, one may claim that many settlements and structures in the near vicinity survived because they continued to be used during late periods or were already built during late periods. Some written memoirs³⁹ left behind by the Christian population who have left here during the exchange are clear indications that Alanya Castle and many structures in its environs were used by them at that time. It is known that some members of the Christian population of Alanya held some functions in the local government⁴⁰ until the exchange in 1922.

With this at hand, although there is insufficient archaeological and historical data, it also has to be taken into account that Oba Chapel might have been built in a late period and during the Ottoman Era.

If we can fully perceive the art language formed, perhaps creating regional differences and styles in parallel with the period's fashion, by local architectural traditions and some iconographic memoirs on the Christian population of Anatolia, we can place architectural phenomena like Oba Chapel into a more historical frame. It is expected that systematic surveys to be conducted in this region of Turkey shall reveal the memoirs of near ages more realistically, with deviating to some implied adoptions and stipulations.

2004

³⁹ Voyacoğlu 2002; Koçak 2004.

⁴⁰ Bilici 2003.

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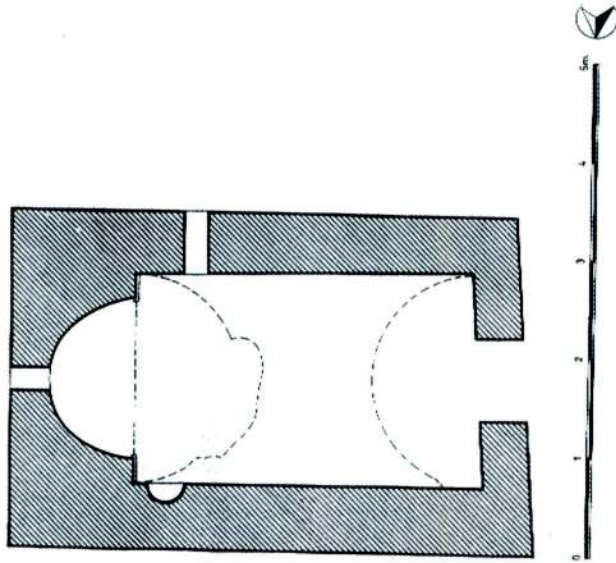


Map 1 - Alanya - Oba (H. Helenkemper - F. Hild 2004)



Fig.1 - External view of the chapel (from north-west)

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Pl.1 - Plan of the building



Fig.2 -Internal view (from west to east)



Fig.3 - Internal view (from east to west)

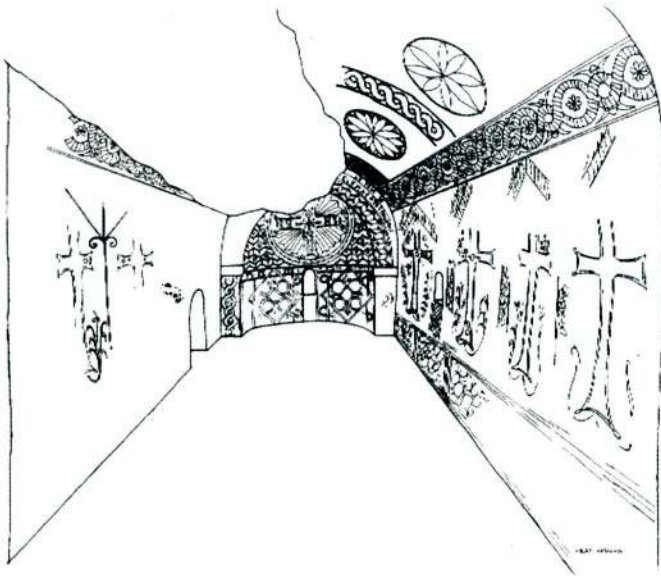


Fig.4 - Drawing of the wall paintings (from west to east) (N. Karakaya)



Fig.5 - The Grek crosses in the medallion decorated with precious stones on the apse.

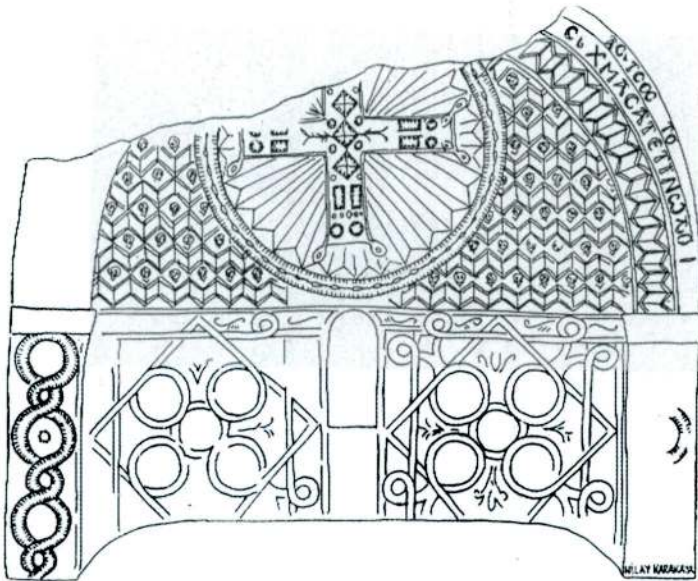


Fig.6 - Drawing of the wallpaintings on the apse (N. Karakaya)



Fig.7 - "Eight-cornered star" motive on the apse wall.



Fig.8 - The letter remains and the motive "two-dimensional effect".



Fig.9 - Drawing of the letters remains on the apse arch (A. Kök).



Fig.10 - The wall paintings on the apse and south wall.

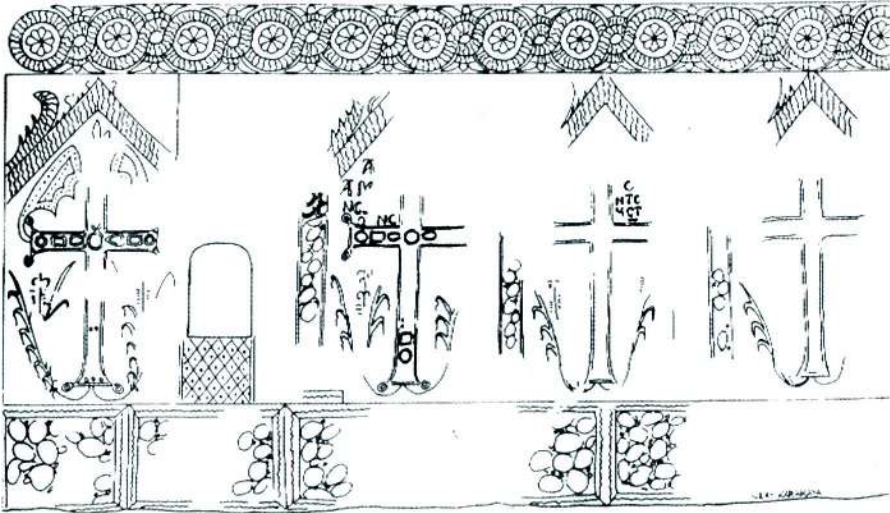


Fig.11 - Drawing of the wall paintings on the South wall (N. Karakaya).



Fig.12 - The detail from "eight-cornered star" motive and the south wall.

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Fig.13 - The letter remains on the second cross arm of the south wall.



Fig.14 - Drawing of the letter remains on the second cross arm of the south wall (A. Kök)

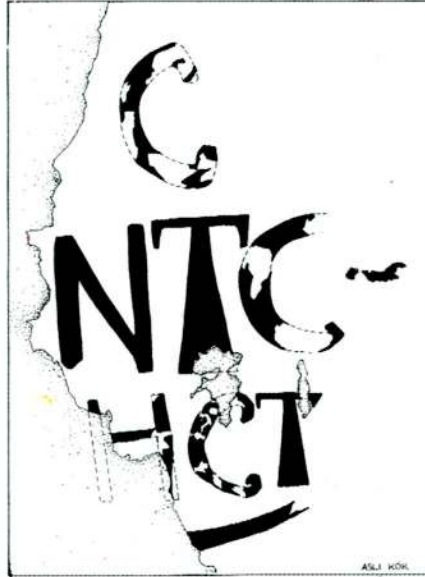


Fig.15 - Drawing of the letter remains on the third cross arm of the south wall (A. Kök).



Fig.16 - The letter remains on the North wall.



Fig.17- Drawings of the letter remains on the North wall (A. Kök).



Fig.18 - The motive decorated with interlocking sparse circles surrounded vault.

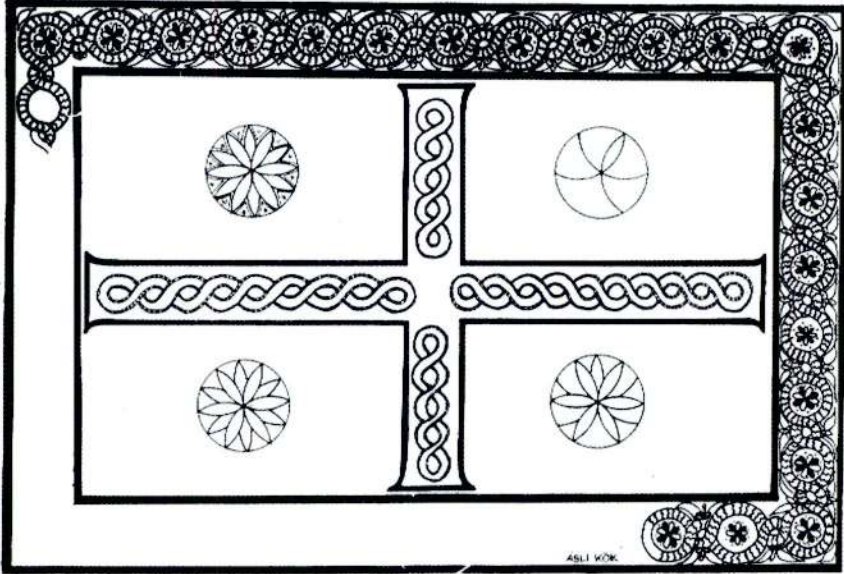


Fig.19 - Drawing of the cross covered on the vault (A. Kök).



Fig.20 - Naxos-Hagios Ioannis at Adisarou. Aniconic decoration in apse.
(M. Acheimastou-Potamianou 1989).

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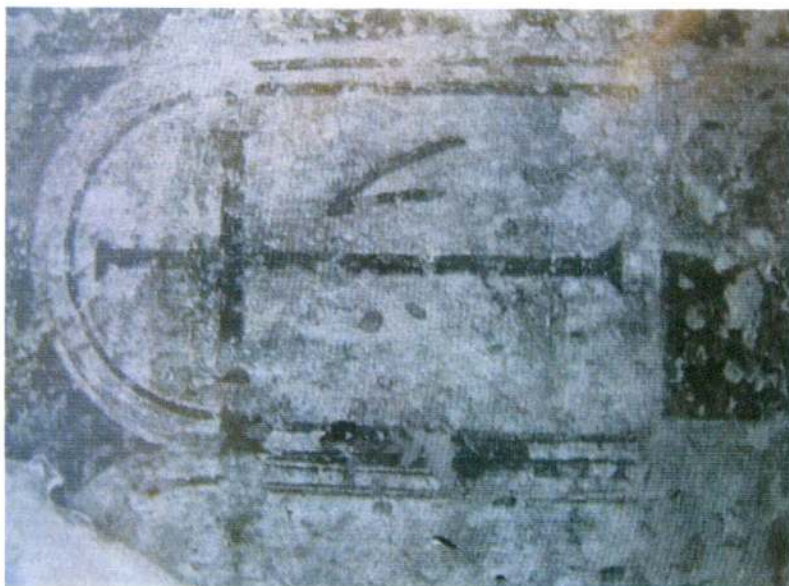


Fig. 21 - Panagia Protothrone at Chalki. Aniconic decoration. (N. Zias 1989).

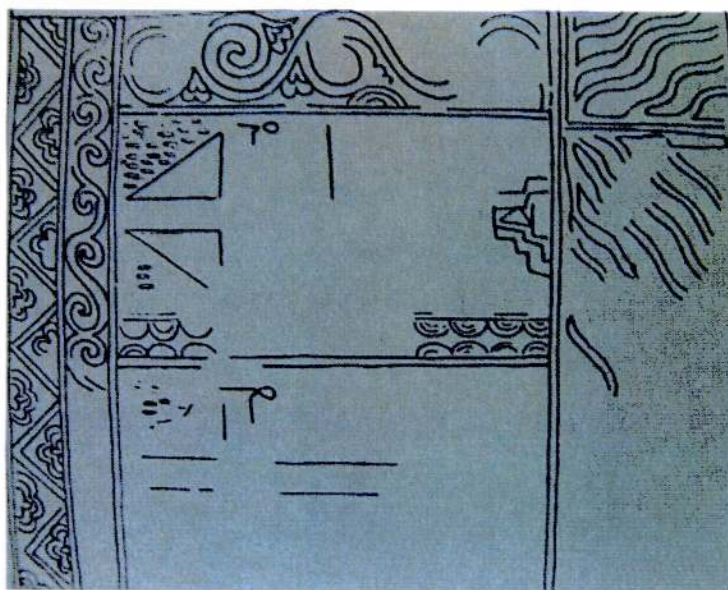


Fig. 22 - Naxos-Hagia Kyriaki (J. Lafontaine-Dosogne 1987).