

ΟΣΑ ΛΗΕ ΚΑΙ ΓΙΑΔΡΑΝ ΣΤΟΥΡΜ

ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑ  
ΓΟΡΓΟΕΠΗΚΟΟΣ

ÅSA LIE AND JADRAN STURM

PANAGIA  
GORGOEPIKOOS

Texts, photographs and layout  
by Åsa Lie and Jadran Sturm,  
Copenhagen 1993.

Afterword 'το σπίτι μου — My House'  
by Nick Defour and Lotte Beckwé,  
Brussels 2021.

to Yannis and the Natsios family





## PREFACE

The relevance of our work with the Middle Byzantine church Panagia Gorgoepikoos is defined in the 4 texts which follow this preface.

Monuments in other places could have served the same purpose, because this building and its details are not unique. There are 41 photographs from the reliefs of Panagia Gorgoepikoos, followed by a photo index and a short historical summary to show the underlying grounds on which our work is built. Finally there is a list of persons with whom we discussed and talked.

Copenhagen 25th of December 1993

Åsa Lie & Jadran Sturm



## 20TH CENTURY ART

The art of the 20th century has been mainly occupied with gazing on, and idolatry of, the object. Amongst the representatives of that tendency are generally well-known artists and isms such as Marcel Duchamp with the urinal or the bicycle-wheel. Arte Povera which focused on “poor” materials and industrial or agricultural tools and products. The monochrome paintings and sculptures of Yves Klein. Minimalism, which displayed and organised mass production. Joseph Beuys; felt, fat, animals. Pop art working with the supermarket culture, commercials and mass media. Finally Postmodernism displayed all the above mentioned objects in a more superficially perfectionized manner.

The modules which artists took from the past often originated in the Ancient Greek, Roman and Etruscan periods. This shows that the general education in our culture, and the specialised education of artists, art historians, curators etc., has concentrated on those eras of European history. Artists also increasingly lacked knowledge and consciousness about the symbols and archetypes they used. Perhaps that is why much of the object art of the 20th century became a nagging repetition of repetitions. Which resulted in both artists and art critics trying to make an artistic point of repetition as a quality in itself.

The photos we show from a Middle Byzantine church display a similar interest in the object, originating from a wider geographical view. Each stone left behind its representation as part of a certain wholeness and holiness. In their new existence they represented the unknown monuments and created another perception which was not disturbed by the ideals of different cultures. The concept of their composition was to balance the political and religious struggles between Christian and other religious ideologies.

## THE POLITICAL SITUATION OF EUROPE

The Byzantine Empire and today's Europe have much in common. Europe is in a complex period. The borders between east, central and west have become nearly invisible. The economic hierarchy between north and south is minimalised.

It was during and through the Byzantine Empire that Europe became Christianized, and the knowledge of our Christian heritage is growing. From the time of Christ until the beginning of the 20th century, the most financially important cities of Europe were populated by various ethnic groups such as Latins, Slavs, Romanies, Huns, Arabs, Franks, Hellenes, Jews, Lombards and so on. They lived in economical, historical, cultural and political coexistence.

After the Peace of Westphalia in Osnabrück and Münster in 1648 and the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15, Europe moved towards a strong identity of national sovereign states and kingdoms. Later, it became significant which ethnic groups had first achieved the status of a nationality. Every nation has also rejected or rewritten historical time periods when they were occupied and persecuted by other powers, and glorified its own narrow way to freedom, flag and language. We are, and always were, just as much influenced from the outside of Europe as from within.

## SCIENTISTS, THE PHOTO MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

Scientists have a poor relationship to the photo media. Preoccupation with certain points and the photographic displaying of them has become a short sighted way to reach a goal. By shortsighted, we mean, when the only function of photos in dissertations is the empirical. The information is near to nothing.

It is demanded of a researcher to be a specialist. The broadness and complexity of every field has resulted in concentration on limited areas and time periods. Communication problems exist between different fields. Many scientists we met, have not understood the relevance and significance of mingling their and our knowledge.

## THE NOT-DOING

The intellectuals of Byzantium believed in the fulfilment of each individual's capacity. To become through manifold, as complete or Godly as possible.

This book gives a glimpse of the art, art history and society of Europe in the 12th century.

We approve, and see the necessity of expanding the not-doing in the future. To not-do cannot be described as anti-art or not-art, and it does not even relate solemnly to art or a personal point of view.

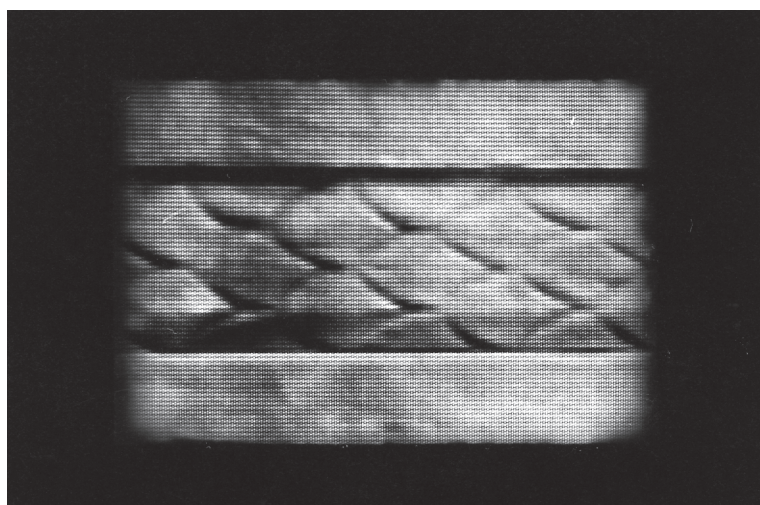
PHOTOGRAPHS FROM  
THE MIDDLE BYZANTINE CHURCH  
PANAGIA GORGOEPIKOOS



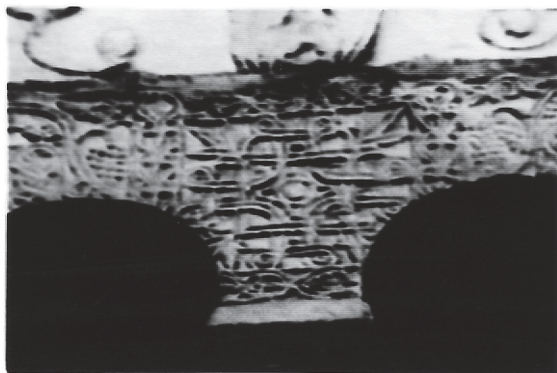






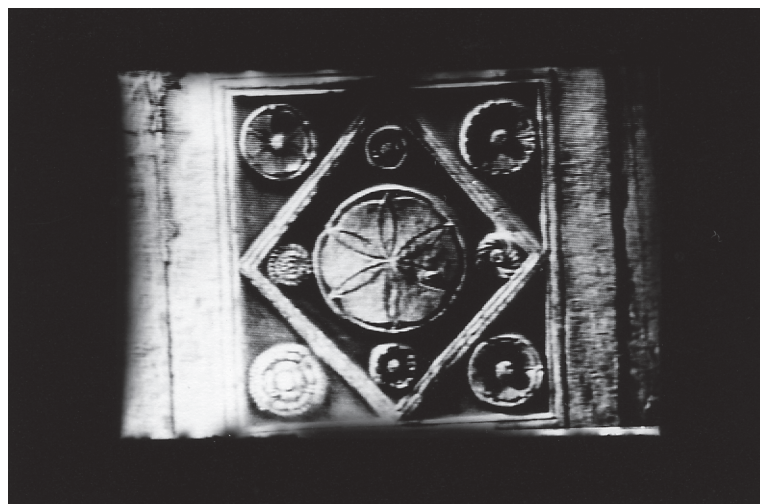






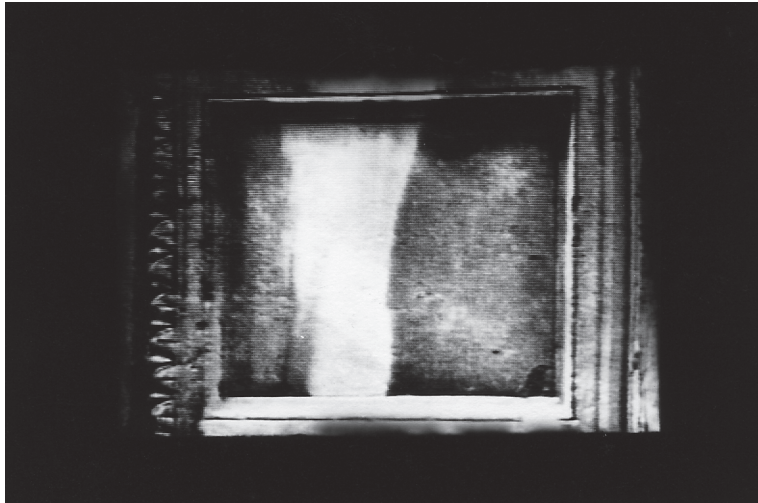
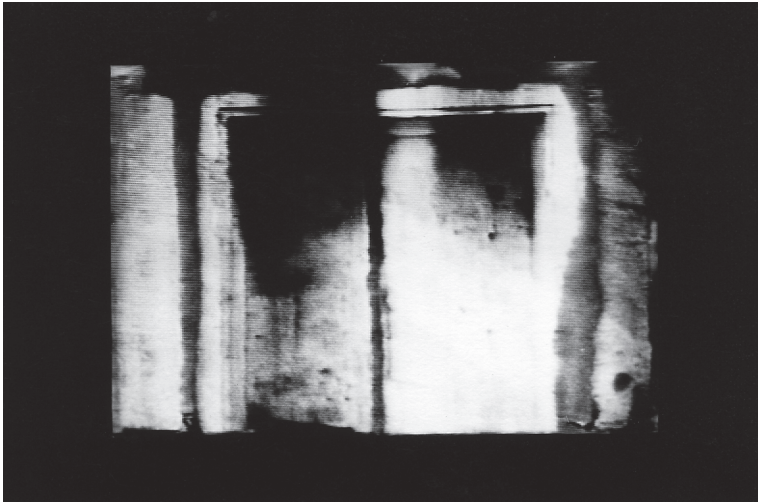




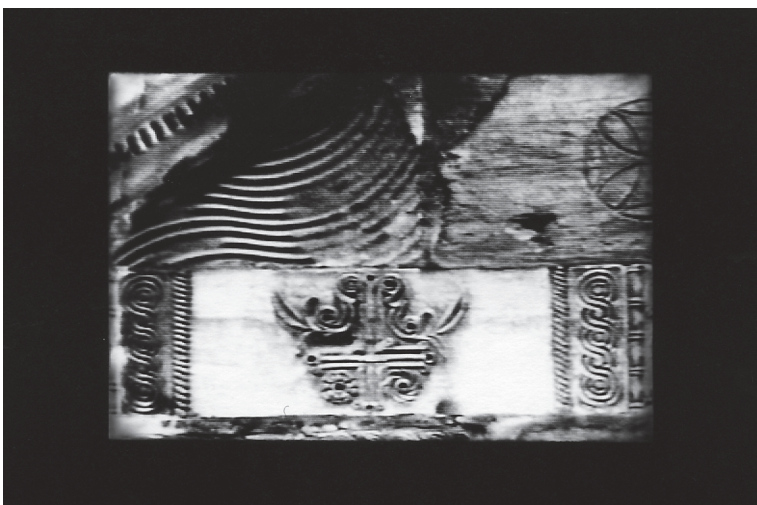










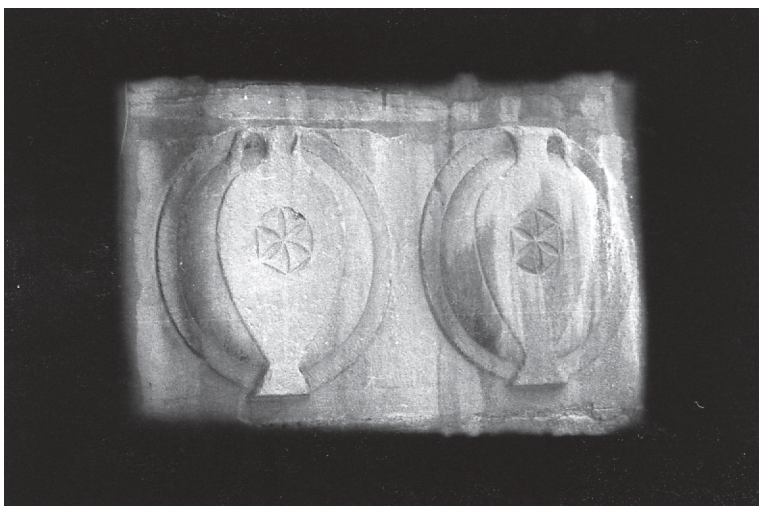










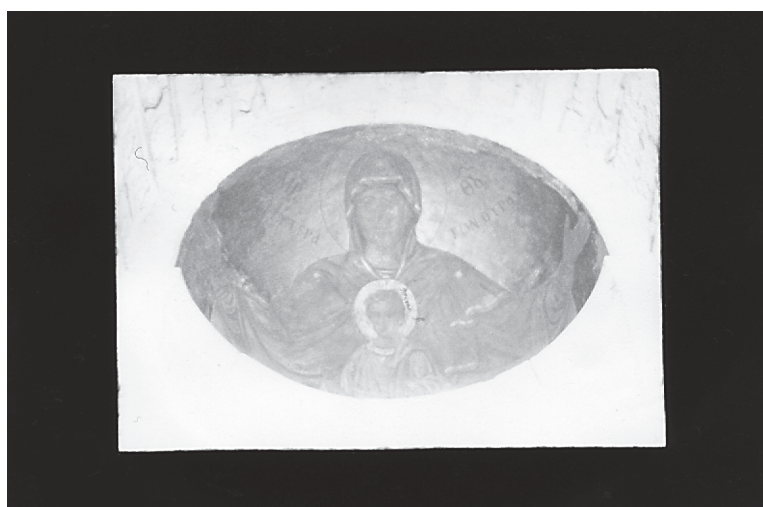






























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Photo No. 12      South wall. Christian.  
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Photo No. 13      East wall. Christian.  
Ancient Oriental influence.  
This type of marble slab, upheld by pilasters,  
was used as part of a screen from the 4th  
century onward, to separate the chancel from  
the body of the church. This developed into the  
iconostasis.

Photo No. 14      East wall. Christian.  
Ancient Oriental influence.

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Photo No. 15 and 16

South wall. Antique or Christian.  
Framed screens. Orthodox influence on  
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Photo No. 17

North wall. Antique. Roman.  
Part of an inscription which is a series of names  
in codified form. The text was previously part of  
a Roman imperial building and refers to the  
contributors, who belonged to a certain  
Athenian community.

Photo No. 18

South wall. The upper stone is antique and  
Jewish. The bottom stone is Christian.

Photo No. 19

South wall. The upper, left stone is probably a  
sarcophagus fragment, antique or Christian.  
The motif symbolises sound or colour waves.  
In Christian theology there are ideas about the  
rays of colour and precious stones. In ancient  
Greece a symbol for Apollo's lyre. The strings  
represent heavenly forces which sing in  
different tones. Together they create spherical  
harmony.  
Bottom stone. Christian.  
Leaved cross with a strong Mesopotamian  
influence.

**Page 24 and 25**

Photo No. 20 to 25

West. Front facade. Antique Greek frieze.  
Athenian and Attic calendar with signs of the  
Zodiac, personifications of the Attic months and  
representations or symbols of the festivals.  
Christians carved 3 crosses on top of the  
original motifs, and the calendar is not complete.  
Our photos show parts of the frieze. The names  
of the months are Attic.

Photo No. 20

Leo. Under him a dog representing Sirius, the  
symbol of hot summer. Woman with wings.  
Personification of the last summer month,  
Metageitnion. Heracles.

## **Page 24 and 25**

Photo No. 21

The 6 masculine figures represent:  
Summer. The summer month Thargelion.  
Gemini. The summer month Skiraphorion.  
The Bouphonos, a cult official, in the main rite  
of the Dipolieia.

Photo No. 22

The spring month, Mounychion.  
A goat, and Artemis who was celebrated on the  
16th.

Photo No. 23

Sagittarius.  
The winter month, Poseidon.  
The woman Theoria.  
Three men who are judges in a contest.

Photo No. 24

In the winter month, Maimakterion, the sacred  
plowing and sowing was performed.  
This is one of the festivals of Demeter.

Photo No. 25

The autumn month, Pyanopsion.  
A boy is carrying the Eiresione, in the  
procession of Apollo or Helios and the Horai  
who were vegetation deities.  
Dionysos is pressing grapes.  
Woman with a basket containing secret objects,  
which was carried to the altar of Demeter.

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Photo No. 26

West. Front facade.  
Antique relief with a Christian double cross.  
The antique relief might have been a gravestone.

Photo No. 27

North wall.  
Antique figure with Christian crosses.

Photo No. 28

North wall. Christian.  
Bottles for the sacramental wine.  
The stone was perhaps part of an altar.

## **Page 28 and 29**

Photo No. 29 to 32

North wall. Christian frieze.  
The stone is possibly a sarcophagus fragment  
from the 5th or 6th century.  
Paradise birds, crosses and acanthus leaves.

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Photo No. 33

Inside. Fresco on the ceiling of the octagon cupola.  
Jesus the Pantocrator.

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Photo No. 34

Inside. Fresco on the apsis ceiling.  
Mother Mary with Jesus the child.

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Photo No. 35 and 36

South wall. Antique (Greco-Roman) frieze.  
Two triptychs and metopes with ritual objects used  
under the Eleusinian feast. This stone was probably  
part of the Eleusinian altar or temple of Athens,  
sited on the west slope of Acropolis.

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Photo No. 37 and 38

East wall. Antique. Roman.  
Military signs of honour.

Photo No. 39

North Wall. Antique and Christian.  
Ancient Greek or Roman gravestone.  
The cross with the inscription I XP NIKA  
around it, was carved by Christians.

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Photo No. 40

West. Front facade. Christian. Persian sphinxes  
with a pine tree. The pine tree has been  
regarded as a mysterious tree of life.

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Photo No. 41

“The catch.” East wall. Antique.

## A SHORT HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Panagia Gorgoepikoos is a small, Middle Byzantine church from the 12th century, located in Pláka, the centre of Athens. Bishop Michael Akominatos (1150-1210) was the founder, and he wanted this church to be a monument over Ancient, early Christian and Byzantine art.

The building is a puzzle constructed of deconstructions, since the reliefs were parts of other monuments or buildings in the past. There are about 100 marble and sandstone slabs built into the exterior walls, dating from 300 before to 1200 after Christ. There are symbols, images, inscriptions and ornaments from different times, areas and cultures, such as Mesopotamia, Persia, Ancient Greece, The Roman Empire and Jewish, Coptic, Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic. Panagia Gorgoepikoos, also called Hagios Eleutherios, is built upon the site of an ancient Greek temple which was dedicated to the goddess Elitheia, the protector of pregnancy and birth.

The church has several names. Panagia Gorgoepikoos means the one who fulfils your prayers quickly. Hagios Eleutherios is the saint and protector of pregnant women, birth and children. Katholikon was the name Frankish Catholics used while they ruled in Attica, and for a short period after 1863 the church was called Sotiros — The Saviour. Today Mikri Mitropoli — The Small Cathedral is most common.

The church was part of the monastery H. Nikolaos and used by the bishops of Athens as a private chapel. During the occupation of Athens in 1827, the monastery and church was ruined. In the 1830's a major restoration was carried out. The bell tower was removed, and inside, the four light monolithic marble columns, which supported the octagon cupola, were replaced by heavy square pillars. Also the window frames are new. From 1839 to 1842, Mikri Mitropoli was used as a municipal library, (the forerunner of the National Library). After another restoration the building was used as a church from 1863.

Panagia Gorgoepikoos is built in the Greek cross-domed octagon plan with a narthex and measures 7,32 x 12,25 x 11,30 meters. The interior of the church was covered with frescoes and there were icons, marble armchairs, candelabras, lamps and censers. Only two frescoes are left, Jesus the Pantocrator and Mother Mary with Jesus the child.





**During our work with Panagia Gorgoepikoos,  
we met and discussed various aspects of this church with**

Dinos Christianopoulos  
Poet, gallerist, publisher  
Thessaloniki

Petros Vassiliadis  
Professor of The New Testament, author  
Department of Theology, University of Thessaloniki

Jorgos Antorakis  
Professor of Byzantine Church History  
Department of Theology, University of Athens

Nikolaos Chronis  
Professor of Philosophy  
Department of Philosophy, University of Athens

Stefanos Avramidis  
Orthodox priest  
The church of Agios Haralabos, Athens

Markos Vidalis  
Catholic priest  
The Roman Catholic church St. Denis, Athens

Yannis Natsios  
Theology student  
University of Thessaloniki

M. Voytyras  
Professor of Ancient History  
Department of Archaeology, University of Thessaloniki



## ΤΟ ΣΠΙΤΙ ΜΟΥ — MY HOUSE

Diogenes was right. His her her his legacy could have emancipated the lot of us. Critique on it seems strange nowadays. Especially when the sun is shining. We are in the middle, much has happened, much ahead. Every little thing is the possible centre of the universe.

The double lion standing at the entrance of a palace, temple or alone at the backside of this book, they do not have the desired frightening effect on us. Because we can know the stones, images and languages. In between stratigraphy and magic we turn the given once more.

For the love of a fake Greek idiom that we shall not surpass.

Nick Defour and Lotte Beckwé, 2021

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