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Material Memory: The Church of St. John in Keria, Mani

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Art History

by

Nicolyna Marie Enriquez

2019

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Material Memory: The Church of St. John in Keria, Mani

by

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Master of Arts in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Sharon Elizabeth Gerstel, Chair

The Mesa or Inner Mani lies at the southernmost point of the Mani peninsula of Greece. In this region, stone structures, medieval and modern, domestic and ecclesiastical, are barely distinguishable from their rocky surroundings. Stone, quarried in this region from antiquity through the Byzantine period, was used both as building material and as carved ornamentation for churches and homes. When carved for use in a church, stone held particular importance for the families and communities that banded together to support the construction. This symbolic value can be seen in its reuse, over generations, in local churches. While many buildings incorporate the remains of decorative sculpture to enliven wall surfaces, one church in the region, St. John in Keria, which incorporates an unusually large number of ancient and medieval dressed stone and carved reliefs, forms the basis of this thesis.

The thirteenth-century church of St. John is one of four churches in the modern village of Keria. Sculpted reliefs from earlier buildings, both ancient and medieval, are immured on the west, south and north walls of the church. Columns, capitals and carved relief sculpture are also in second use inside the church. Like the stonework, the monumental decoration also belongs to several phases of the building's history. In this thesis, I examine the immured sculpture and the monumental decoration of St. John in Keria as well as the alterations to the fabric of the church in the centuries since it was built. In exploring not only the life of the building itself, but also the lives of the individual stone carvings before their incorporation onto the walls of St. John, I consider the community's sustained relationship with their past, from the thirteenth century to present day.

The thesis of Nicolyna Marie Enriquez is approved.

Bronwen Wilson

Lothar von Falkenhausen

Sharon Elizabeth Gerstel, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

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The Mani peninsula, the southernmost point of the Taygetos mountain range, descends gracefully into the Aegean Sea at the tip of the Greek Peloponnese. The southern part of the peninsula, the Mesa or Inner Mani, is characterized by small villages, often dominated by tower houses and surrounded by fields demarcated by stone fences. This is an unforgiving landscape where stone is a prominent feature. In the built environment, the exclusive use of stone in defensive, domestic and ecclesiastical architecture, gives the buildings a local character. Because the stone is quarried or collected from the immediate region, buildings constructed from it are barely distinguishable from the rocky outcrops of the surrounding landscape. Beyond its primary use as building material, stone was frequently carved with ornamental decoration to adorn churches and homes. The inscribed names of stone carvers attest to the pride they took in their craftsmanship.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the inclusion of the names of church donors on stone lintels and epistyles demonstrates the desire of local families to be memorialized in a durable material.<sup>2</sup> Once carved, stone held particular importance for the families and communities that banded together to support the construction of village churches. The symbolic value of stone can be seen in its reuse, over generations, in local buildings. Many of the churches, towers, and houses in the Mani incorporate the remains of decorative sculpture from earlier buildings, mostly small elements that enliven wall surfaces. However, one church in the region, St. John in Keria,

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas B. Drandakes, “Άγνωστα γλυπτά της Μάνης αποδιδόμενα στο Μαρμαρά Νικήτα ἢ στο ἔργαστήρι του,” *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 8 (1975): 19–23; For more information on workshops in Byzantium, see Maria Panayotidi, “Village Painting and the Question of Local ‘Workshops’,” in *Les Villages dans l’empire byzantin (IVe-XVe Siècle)*, Réalités byzantines, XI, ed. J. Lefort, C. Morrisson, and J.-P. Sodini (Paris: Lethielleux, 2005), 196–99.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas B. Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης* (Athens: The Archaeological Society at Athens, 2002), figs. 1; 17–19.



incorporates an unusually large number of ancient and medieval dressed stones and carved reliefs, and thus merits particular study (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

The thirteenth-century church of St. John is one of four churches in Keria.<sup>4</sup> Crowned by a high dome, the church towers over the other low, vaulted chapels in the village. Today, the church is only open on its feast day and for special liturgical celebrations. At some point in its history, however, the church served as the *katholikon* of a monastery, a function confirmed by the presence of a building to the northwest — perhaps the residence of a monk —, the enclosure wall, and the painted *brebion* in the *prothesis* chamber, which lists the names a hieromonk and a date in the 1750s. A.H.S. Megaw initially dated the cross-in-square church to the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup> In a forthcoming article, however, Angeliki Mexia argues for a date in the second half of the same century.<sup>6</sup>

The modern-day community of Keria, further up the road from St. John, is likely not the location of medieval Keria. This is indicated by the arrangement of churches, the location of the threshing floors, of which six have been tentatively identified,<sup>7</sup> and the position of the mule path.

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<sup>3</sup> For an initial bibliography, see A.H.S. Megaw, “Byzantine Architecture in Mani,” *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 33 (1932): 160; E. Κουνουριότου, “Μεσαιωνικά Μνημεία Πελοποννήσου,” *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 23, Β’1 (1968): 204, 205; P. L. Vocotopoulos, “The Concealed Course Technique: Further Examples and a Few Remarks,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 28 (1979): 257, 260; Ch. Bouras and L. Boura, *Η Ελλαδική ναοδομία κατά τον 12ο αιώνα* (Athens: Commercial Bank of Greece, 2002): 186-7; Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, 49-51, 134-35; Angeliki Mexia, “Βυζαντινή ναοδομία στην Πελοπόννησο. Η περίπτωση των μεσοβυζαντινών ναών της Μέσα Μάνης” (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Athens, 2011): I, 313, II, 115-18; Angeliki Mexia, “The Synthesis of the Façades of the Church of St. John at Keria in Mesa Mani: The Role of the Marble Spolia Built into the Walls,” forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> The other churches are St. George, St. Demetrios, and the Taxiarches.

<sup>5</sup> Megaw, “Byzantine Architecture in Mani,” 160.

<sup>6</sup> Mexia, “The Synthesis of the Façades,” forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup> A ground survey would be required to confirm the identification of the threshing floors.

A satellite image shows a layout of the village with these areas marked (fig. 2). The mule path likely ran through the main area of the medieval village and appears to connect Keria to the nearby town of Dri which lies closer to the coast. By contrast, threshing floors are usually located on the outskirts of the village, closer to the fields.<sup>8</sup> Although on-site confirmation is required, it is likely that the area parallel to the modern road was the original site of the medieval village. The church's location on the outskirts of the putative medieval village may indicate that it originally had a funerary function;<sup>9</sup> a modern graveyard is situated immediately to the north of the church.

Sculpted reliefs from earlier buildings are immured in the west, south, and north walls, giving the church exterior an unusual appearance. The exterior of the church is not the only frame for the display of earlier carvings, however. The interior of the church also incorporates columns, capitals, and carved relief sculpture in second use. Mirroring the mix of sculpted works, the monumental decoration also belongs to several phases of history. Now in poor condition, the wall paintings date to the late thirteenth and eighteenth century (fig. 3).

In this paper, I examine both the sculpture and monumental decoration of St. John in Keria. I argue that the careful selection and placement of earlier sculpted reliefs, as well as later alterations, blends temporal layers and manifests the community's sustained relationship with — and ultimately its need for agency over — the past. The community's urge to connect to — or its

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<sup>8</sup> Sharon E. J. Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 119-121.

<sup>9</sup> Sharon E. J. Gerstel, "The Byzantine Village Church: Observations on its Location and on Agricultural Aspects of its Program," in *Les villages dans l'Empire byzantin (IVe-XVe siècle)*, Réalités byzantines, XI, ed. C. Morrisson, J. Lefort, J.-P. Sodini (Paris, 2006), 165-78.

desire to disconnect from — the past is shown through the re-use of sculpture, but also through the addition and effacement of the church's monumental decoration.

## INCORPORATING THE SACRED

The walls of the church of St. John are constructed from dressed stone and relief sculpture framed by rows of thin red brick. The exterior of the church is decorated with both ancient and Middle Byzantine reliefs and architectural components. Most of the re-used sculpture dates to the Middle Byzantine period, particularly to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Although we do not know the provenance of these relief sculptures, they were likely taken from churches in the area surrounding Keria. Analysis of the sculpted components suggests that they derived from at least four churches, where they formed parts of templon screens.<sup>10</sup> In many small churches in the Mani the templon screen consists of two low panels, or closure slabs, set between the piers of the east end of the church (fig. 4). These closure slabs were sometimes covered by a crowning, or a narrow horizontal band of carved relief placed just above the upright panels. Framing the doorway into the *bema* are posts, or piers, surmounted by small columns and capitals which support an epistyle. The epistyle often runs the length of the east end of the church, marking the entrances to the *prothesis* and *diakonikon*.

At St. John, nine re-used closure slabs are set around the exterior of the building. Six of these closure slabs form pairs and thus once belonged to the same screen. Of these pairs, one set

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on Byzantine templon screens, see Sharon E. J. Gerstel, "An Alternate View of the Late Byzantine Sanctuary Screen," in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2006), 135–61; Christopher Walter, "A New Look at the Byzantine Sanctuary Barrier," *Revue des études byzantines* 51 (1993): 203–28.; G. Pallis, "Inscriptions on Middle Byzantine Marble Templon Screens," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 106 (2013): 761–810.

is located on the westernmost corner of the north wall and another set is on the westernmost corner of the south wall (fig. 5, 6). The final set appears on the west façade, but the reliefs are divided, one to the north and one to the south (fig. 7). Two of the remaining closure slabs, one of them fragmentary, are positioned on the west façade to either side of the door. The final closure slab, also fragmentary, is located on the east side of the large window on the south wall, an opening that was originally a doorway. A majority of these closure slabs are decorated with a knot pattern motif with a Maltese cross in the center and whirls and stars in each corner. This pattern appears frequently in Maniot sculpture of the eleventh and twelfth century.<sup>11</sup> Similar examples of re-used closure slabs of the same period can be seen at the church of Saints Theodore at Tsopaka which, like St. John, dates to the last quarter of the thirteenth century (fig. 8).<sup>12</sup>

Because of their number, size and decoration, the closure slabs immured in the walls of St. John are visually striking. Their exclusive incorporation on the façade and on either side of the narthex windows indicates the power these sculptures provided in framing passageways and openings between the terrestrial and heavenly realms, between human and divine time.<sup>13</sup>

Crownings, which once belonged to templon screens, are incorporated around the single-light window on the west façade (fig. 9). These crownings are carved with a *champlevé*

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<sup>11</sup> See examples at St. John, Kounos; St. George, Briki; and St. Philip at Ano Poula in Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, figs. 32, 45, 78, 79, 80.

<sup>12</sup> Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, 300–306; For wall paintings and their date at Sts. Theodore at Tsopaka, see Nicholas B. Drandakes, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης* (Athens: The Archaeological Society at Athens, 1995), 29–53.

<sup>13</sup> These concepts are imaginatively explored in Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961).

technique popular in the Mani in the Middle Byzantine period.<sup>14</sup> Their decorations include checkerboard patterns, vegetal ornamentation and rinceaux with palmette leaves. Two examples also incorporate animal motifs such as birds and small quadrupedal animals (fig. 10, 11). On the façade two crownings are placed to either side of the base of the single-light window. The crowning on the north side of the window has elliptical shapes surrounded by acanthus leaves. The crowning on the south side of the window has palmette decorations surrounding an eagle with its head turned to the left. Below the window, a third crowning positioned just above the arch of the doorway shows two animals, a bird spreading its wings and a quadrupedal animal in motion. These animals appear on a checkerboard pattern with two Greek crosses. A similar example with animal motifs is incorporated into the templon screen at St. John at Mina in Mesa Mani (fig. 12).<sup>15</sup>

Piers and colonnette capitals of the Middle Byzantine period often incorporate knot patterns with floral motifs such as palmettes and acanthus leaves.<sup>16</sup> These colonnettes can either be circular or octagonal and sometimes incorporate small bosses with floral or whirl motifs. On both the north and south side of St. John, small columns and capitals have been reused as window mullions. Both are undecorated except for a circular motif running around the top portion of the column. Since they are both identical, it is likely that they came from the same screen.

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<sup>14</sup> See examples at Sts. Theodore Kafiona and St. Philip at Ano Poula in Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, figs. 38, 49, 50, and 51.

<sup>15</sup> Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, fig. 300.

<sup>16</sup> See the example at St. Basileios at Stavri in Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, fig. 66.

Fragments of templon piers are incorporated on the north side of the church to the east of the double-light window (fig. 13).<sup>17</sup> Both include circular patterns with star motifs, whirls, and crosses. The lower pier still retains part of its colonette just above a large Latin cross. These piers have been turned on their side and used as banded decoration. A possible fragment of a colonette capital is also incorporated on the façade. It is placed on its side with the top facing to the north.

Piers and colonettes were also incorporated into the church masonry sometime after the thirteenth century. Two narrow, templon screen piers block the *bema* window on the east end. A column and capital form the bilobe opening of the belfry. A colonette with a knot of Herakles, likely dating to the twelfth century or later, is also included on the north end of the belfry.<sup>18</sup>

The tympanum of the western portal has a large central cross with four Greek crosses in roundels at each corner (fig. 14). The central cross is flanked on either side by two vertical bands of rinceaux with palmette leaves which are, in turn, flanked by two acanthus leaves on each corner. A similar tympanum can be seen above the southern portal of the Church of St. Barbara in Eremo (fig. 15), which shows a large cross with foliate decoration flanked by two birds. The tympanum on the southern portal of St. John is a pierced closure slab that has been trimmed to fit the semicircular opening (fig. 16). The piercings of this closure slab follow a dog-tooth pattern; there is a narrow band of interlace on the edge.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See the examples at St. Philip at Ano Poula in Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, figs. 47 and 48.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine Vanderheyde, "The Carved Decoration of the Middle and Late Byzantine Templa," *Mitteilungen zur Spätantiken Archäologie und Byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 5 (2007): 78.

<sup>19</sup> See examples at the church of the Asomatos at Kako Vouno and at Taxiarchis at Glezou in Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, figs. 111, 177.

On the exterior of the south and north wall a series of ceramic bowls, often called *bacini*, were immured (fig. 17).<sup>20</sup> Although only six of the original ten bowls remain in situ, Mexia used these bowls as evidence for dating the church to the latter half of the thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> These sgraffito bowls belong to the category of monochrome glazed pottery which became popular in the late thirteenth century.<sup>22</sup> The bowls are unadorned except for an incised circular pattern. Of the six bowls that survive, only two have a green glaze. All of the bowls were framed by brick and mortar and the impression where the missing bowls were located is still visible. It is possible that bowls were also immured into the exterior walls of the dome since depressions in the plaster are still evident.

Decorations on the reused epistyles typically fall into two categories: a row of arches framing floral motifs or bands and geometric knot motifs. These types of decoration best suit the long and narrow space of the epistyle. The low reliefs are often punctuated by rounded bosses carved with a cross or a whirl pattern.

A number of epistyle fragments are used throughout the exterior and interior of St. John. On the façade, two fragments of epistyles are in second use as lintels for the west doorway of the church (fig. 18). The lower lintel, which has three unadorned bands, likely dates to the late antique period. The second lintel incorporates a row of arches framing palmettes. These arches

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<sup>20</sup> Immured bowls are commonly found in churches in the Mani. On immured bowls, see Anastasia Yangaki, "Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa, Kitharida, Crete," in *Glazed Pottery of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea Region, 10th-18th Centuries*, ed. S. Bocharov, V. François, and A. Sitdikov, vol. 2 (Kazan: A. Kh. Khalikov Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, 2017), 135–64.

<sup>21</sup> Mexia, "The Synthesis of the Façades," forthcoming.

<sup>22</sup> For more information on Late Byzantine sgraffito pottery, see Demetra Papanikola-Bakirtzis, "Serres Ware," in *Materials Analysis of Byzantine Pottery*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1997), 135.

are interspersed with two offset bosses with floral motifs.<sup>23</sup> North of the doorway a highly stylized fragment of an epistyle incorporates three Greek crosses with floral motifs.

The epistyle inside the church is formed from two separate reused chancel beams (fig. 19). The segment above the entrance to the *diakonikon* appears to be from one epistyle while the segment over the *prothesis* and *bema* are from another. The upper course of the north epistyle segment incorporates an undulating line of opposing acanthus leaves with an inscription: “Remember Lord your servant Gabriel... the priest. Chanters, pray for him, Amen”:  
Μνή(σ)θ(ητι) Κ(ύρι)ε τοῦ δούλου σου Γαβριήλ[.]ΕΗ[... ]ου πρ(εσβυτέρου). ἡ ψάλοντες ἔβχεστε αὐτοῦ ἀμήν.<sup>24</sup> The first few letters of the formulaic inscription are built into the wall of the church and are partially concealed. The lower course has a variety of decorations alternating between rows of arches over acanthus leaves and circular knots with crosses and floral motifs. Fragmentary bosses and raised acanthus leaves are interspersed at intervals along the epistyle. The segment over the *diakonikon* has a figure-eight decoration with acanthus leaves above a row of arches. Two bosses, one fragmentary, are included in the lower course.

Nicholas Drandakes, in his monograph on Byzantine sculpture in the Mani, ascribes the north segment of the epistyle to Niketas Marmaras, a sculptor active in the region in the last quarter of the eleventh century.<sup>25</sup> Although Niketas is not named in the inscription at St. John,

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<sup>23</sup> See similar examples at Sts. Theodore at Kafonia and St. Basileios at Stavri. Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, figs. 33, 34, 64a-b.

<sup>24</sup> Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, 49-51.

<sup>25</sup> Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, 49-51. The marble carver Niketas left his signature on several of his carvings from the last quarter of the eleventh century. Drandakes has posited that segments of the epistyle on the interior of St. John at Keria is by the hand of Niketas, as are some of the closure slabs, because of their similarity to other work attributed to him. For more information on Niketas, see Nicholas B. Drandakes, “Άγνωστα γλυπτά τῆς Μάνης ἀποδιδόμενα στὸ μαρμαρᾶ Νικῆτα ἢ στὸ ἐργαστήρι του,” *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικῆς Αρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας* 8 (1975-76): 19-23.



many of his other sculptures in the region incorporate both his name, the date, and the names of the donors.<sup>26</sup>

The epistyle segment over the south portal is also possibly the work of Niketas (fig. 20).<sup>27</sup> This fragment mentions a donor, his wife, and a daughter (or possibly children). Similar to the epistyle inside the church, the upper course of this fragment has an undulating pattern with opposing acanthus leaves. The lower course decoration alternates between rows of arches and circular knot patterns containing Greek crosses. Two bosses and two raised acanthus leaves are interspersed along the lower course.

The jambs of the door leading from the narthex into the nave are made of fragments of earlier medieval stone carving and have supplicatory inscriptions (fig. 21, 22). The north jamb, an epistyle fragment, is inscribed: “Remember Lord, [the] Servant of God, Nikolaos.” The southern jamb is inscribed with a tetragram, ΦΧΦΠ or “The Light of Christ shines over everyone.”<sup>28</sup>

From medieval times until the modern day, extended families in the Mani have donated and participated in the construction, decoration and maintenance of village churches. St. John, for example, is associated with the Achranis family in Keria as noted by the inscribed plaque on

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<sup>26</sup> For examples of his work, see in particular the closure slab reused as an altar in St. Nicholas, Milea which includes the names of the donors Staninas and Pothos, son of Sirakos. Vanderheyde, “The Carved Decoration,” 90.

<sup>27</sup> I thank Sharon Gerstel and Panayotis Katsafados for their help reading this inscription.

<sup>28</sup> ΦΧΦΠ is one of the most frequently found tetragrams in Byzantine churches. These tetragrams tend to be placed around openings in the church walls where light penetrates the building. ΦΧΦΠ is an abbreviation of “Φως Χριστού φαίνει πάσιν.” In the example at St. John, the four letters are inserted into each of the four corners of a cross. This phrase is used in the liturgy and in monastic offices. See Sharon E.J. Gerstel and Michael W. Cothren, “The Iconography of Light,” in *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, ed. Colum Hourihane (New York: Routledge, 2017), 465–78. For a similar example, see the south jamb of the door at Sts. Theodore at Vamvaka.

the modern door of the church stating that the door was a donation of Basileios Th. Achranis in the memory of his mother Stamatoula (fig. 23). The inscribed names of medieval individuals on the sculpted reliefs and the modern inscription on the door demonstrates the importance of preserving the names of individuals and families recalled in ecclesiastical settings.

Although most of the immured carved reliefs were incorporated during the initial construction of the church, modifications to the fabric of the church continued throughout the following centuries.<sup>29</sup> The later addition of carved sculpture can be seen in its inclusion into the belfry which was likely added around the fifteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, a number of windows were filled in with mortar and, in the case of the windows of the *bema*, carved stone.

## INCORPORATING THE ANCIENT

The Mani region was quite prosperous during the Greco-Roman period.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the reuse of ancient sculpture is significant. Ancient spolia are gathered primarily on the south side of the west façade and inside the church. These reliefs and architectural components generally fall into three categories: columns, capitals and bases; funerary stelae; and miscellaneous cut blocks — for example, two table bases are immured in the west façade. It is also possible that some, if not a majority, of the dressed marble is also ancient. These sculptures were likely taken from a

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<sup>29</sup> The reuse of small sculptures can be seen throughout the Mani. For examples of both modern and Byzantine era reuse of medieval sculpture, see the lintel and later buttresses at the church of the Taxiarches at Glezou, Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, 101-115.

<sup>30</sup> Mexia, “The Synthesis of the Façades,” forthcoming.

<sup>31</sup> Leda Moschou, “Ruined Byzantine Rural Settlements in Lakonian Mani,” in *Settlements of Mani, Network of Mani Museums*, Catalogue of Exhibition (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2004), 30. For a detailed study of Hellenistic and Roman material culture in the Mani, see Chelsea A.M. Gardner, “The Mani Peninsula in Antiquity: An Archaeological, Historical, and Epigraphic Investigation into Regional Identity” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2018).

local site, possibly Hippola or Messe, although it is also possible that some of the architectural elements are in tertiary use at St. John (for a map of the region, see fig. 24).<sup>32</sup>

Typically, columns of a moderate height, like the ones at St. John, were attractive and were commonly reused in the medieval period. The four columns inside St. John, placed directly onto the floor, appear to be a set (fig. 25). The bases of these columns have been turned upside down and used as capitals. One base-capital, in the northwest corner, has a groove where a screen might have been inserted (fig. 26). If so, it is possible these bases came from an ancient temple or Early Christian church and might be in tertiary use at St. John. Although fragmentary, it still has traces of an abstract floral motif. Two, possibly three, matching Ionic capitals are incorporated on the south side of the façade. These date to the late Hellenistic-early Roman period and possibly correspond to the capitals found at the Church of the Asomatos in Tainaron (fig. 27).<sup>33</sup> One is placed upside down, another on its side — framing the edge of the wall — and the third is base forward. Only the capital on its side reveals its egg-and-dart pattern.

Ancient funerary memorials and relief plaques were easy targets for spoliation since they tended to be relatively small and therefore fairly easy to transport.<sup>34</sup> None of these stelae were

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Greenhalgh, *Marble Past, Monumental Present: Building with Antiquities in the Mediaeval Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 170.

<sup>33</sup> M. Bruno et al., “White Marble Quarries and Architectural Marbles of Cape Tainaron, Greece,” in *ASMOSIA V. Interdisciplinary Studies on Ancient Stone. Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of the Association for the Study of Marbles and Other Stones in Antiquity, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, ed. J.J. Hermann Jr., N. Herz, and R. Newman (London: Archetype, 2002), 40; Gardner, “The Mani Peninsula in Antiquity,” 309. For more information on the site of the Church of the Asomatos and its relationship to ancient Tainaron, see D. Ogden, “The Ancient Greek Oracles of the Dead,” *Acta Classica* 44 (2001): 167–95; N. Papachatzis, “Ποσειδῶν Ταϊνάριος,” *Ἀρχαιολογική Ἐφημερίς*, 1976, 102–25; W. Cummer, “The Sanctuary of Poseidon at Tainaron, Lakonia,” *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts. Athenische Abteilung* 93 (1978): 35–43; R.W.M. Schumacher, “Three Related Sanctuaries of Poseidon: Geraistos, Kalaureia and Tainaron,” in *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches*, ed. N. Marinatos and R. Hägg (London: Routledge, 1993), 62–87.

<sup>34</sup> Greenhalgh, *Marble Past*, 205.

modified through the addition of crosses or other religious symbolism before insertion.<sup>35</sup>

Originally, three relief plaques were incorporated into the façade of St. John. The only one still *in situ* is a funerary stela of a hunter holding his catch with a dog at his side. Traces of an inscription is visible to the right of his head (fig. 28).<sup>36</sup> This funerary relief stylistically dates to the Roman period (first century BC to third century AD). The two other ancient reliefs at St. John were pried out of the church wall in 1968. Only one has since been recovered. The one that has been lost showed a horseman holding a round shield. A hound and a snake are represented below the horse.<sup>37</sup> This small stela was originally located to the left of the entrance (fig. 29).

The final relief is much larger and is now kept in the Gytheion Archaeological Collection following its recovery in 1997 (fig. 30).<sup>38</sup> This relief shows two pairs of male and female figures clasping hands within a *naiskos*, a small temple. The work dates to the second century BC.<sup>39</sup> Along the bottom two urns flank a rosette. The stela is inscribed with the names *Καλλικρατίδας, Γοργίδα, Ὠφελία, Νικόι Χαίρετε*.<sup>40</sup> The relief, turned on its side, was located to the right of the

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<sup>35</sup> For more information on the modification of ancient reliefs in Byzantine buildings, see Bente Kiilerich, “Making Sense of the Spolia in the Little Metropolis in Athens,” *Arte Medievale* 4 (January 2005): 95–114; and Henry Maguire, “The Cage of Crosses: Ancient and Medieval Sculptures on the ‘Little Metropolis in Athens,” in *Θυμίαμα στη Μνήμη της Λασκαρίνας Μπούρα* (Athens: Benaki Museum, 1994), 169–72.

<sup>36</sup> The visible letters on the right are: Row 1: ΦΙΛΟ, Row 2: (possibly) ΝΗΚΟ. However, the orthography does not appear to be correct, it should be φιλονικω (ΦΙΛΟΝΙΚΩ) or in the dative φιλονικη (ΦΙΛΟΝΙΚΗ). I once again thank Panayotis Katsafados for his help deciphering this inscription.

<sup>37</sup> Mexia, “The Synthesis of the Façades,” forthcoming; A.S. Delivorrias, “Ειδήσεις εκ Λακωνίας,” *Αρχαιολογικά Ανάλεκτα εξ Αθηνών* 1 (1968): 119–20.

<sup>38</sup> Similar thefts and illegal excavations with the intent to steal have plagued other churches in the region, including Sts. Theodore in Vamvaka only a short drive from Keria.

<sup>39</sup> Volker Michael Strocka, “Volkskunst im klassischen Griechenland,” in *Πρακτικά του XII διεθνούς συνεδρίου κλασικής αρχαιολογίας* (Athens, 1985), 286–92.

<sup>40</sup> Mexia, “The Synthesis of the Façades,” forthcoming.

main entrance to the church (fig. 31). A similar grave relief of the same period was originally immured in the neighboring church of the Asomatos in Keria (fig. 32). This relief plaque is now housed in the Sparta Archaeological Museum. It shows two women within a *naiskos* with an inscription recording their names (Πολυκρατίς Νικανδρία χαίρετε). The figure on the left, Polykratia, is standing, while the figure on the right, Nikandria, is seated. They are accompanied by two attendants.<sup>41</sup> Another fragmentary funerary relief, of a similar scale, is immured in the south wall of St. Demetrios at Kepoula (fig. 33).<sup>42</sup> The relief at Kepoula, placed on its side, displays two figures, one seated, wearing long chitons. It is likely that the reliefs at Keria and Kepoula all derived from the same ancient cemetery.

According to Cyriac of Ancona, who visited the church during a trip to the Peloponnese from July 30, 1447 to April 17, 1448, one of the three reliefs originally at St. John was part of an ancient altar. He notes:

The next day...at the village, called Kharia, about ten stades away, in the sacred church of [John] the Baptist, the most holy Forerunner, we found an ancient altar bedecked with images, which had been removed by later inhabitants from ancient structures to adorn the same church.<sup>43</sup>

It is likely that the relief of the men and women at Keria is the ancient altar described by Cyriac of Ancona.<sup>44</sup>

The interior of the church is dimly lit and has both fragmentary late- thirteenth-century frescoes in the vaults and badly damaged post-Byzantine frescoes on the templon screen and in

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<sup>41</sup> For more information, see Gardner, “The Mani Peninsula in Antiquity,” 313-315.

<sup>42</sup> For information on the church, see Drandakes, *Βυζαντινά γλυπτά της Μάνης*, 260, fn. 123.

<sup>43</sup> Cyriac of Ancona, *Cyriac of Ancona: Later travels*, ed. Edward W Bodnar (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2003), 313.

<sup>44</sup> Gardner, “The Mani Peninsula in Antiquity,” 312.

the apse. The thirteenth-century frescoes are located along the south aisle and around the *bema* vault. The frescoes in the *bema* vault represent the Ascension (fig. 34). The faces of the apostles on the northern section of the vault are shown looking up at Christ whose right hand and part of his brown robe are still visible. The partial remains of two angels in green and red robes hold the light blue mandala. On the south section of the vault, only the legs and feet of the remaining apostles are visible. The astonished expressions, rosy cheeks, long, delicate hands, and vivid colors represent the regional painting style of the Palaiologan period. The post-Byzantine frescoes, associated with the renovation of the church in the 1750s, are primarily located on the templon screen, in the *prothesis* chamber, and in the apse of the *bema*. Both artist and date appear on the masonry templon screen. The inscription, located under the foot of the Virgin, reads: “By the hand of Christódoulou, 18 November, 1754” (fig. 35). Frescoes of St. Demetrios on horseback and the Virgin enthroned are to the left of the central entrance to the sanctuary. To the right is the Enthroned Christ and St. John the Baptist. A *brebion* of the same date, located in the *prothesis* chamber refers to the church as a holy monastery (“αγίας μονής”) and lists the names of members of the community — including the hieromonk Dionysios — who were to be remembered in prayer so that “they live through eternity” (fig. 36).<sup>45</sup>

After the construction of the church in the thirteenth century, minor alterations were made both to the interior and exterior of the church. Some modifications are dated, like the repainting of parts of the church interior. However, most alterations are undated; these include small graffiti, the change of the south entrance, and the closing of the windows. These alterations, including the eighteenth-century renovation, are indicative of the ongoing relationship between the Church of St. John and its surrounding community.

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<sup>45</sup> I am very grateful to Panayotis Katsafados for reading this inscription with me on site.

## THE PAGAN PAST AND THE SACRED LANDSCAPE

The incorporation of these sculpted reliefs both ancient and Middle Byzantine in the church of St. John establishes, as noted by Ludovico Geymonat, “a relationship — whether deliberately or not — with visual and architectural remains from the past.”<sup>46</sup> This relationship at St. John is enacted through the intentional incorporation of carved stone from both the ancient world and the more immediate sacred past. The overall effect is one of deliberate use as if the patron, or possibly patrons, were looking to display these reliefs. Significant trouble was undertaken to select, transport, cut and place these relief sculptures into the building.

The reuse of both pagan and Early Christian spolia was common throughout Byzantine history. Scholars, over the decades, have advanced numerous explanations as to the function of spolia. Initially viewed as apotropaic devices, recent scholarship connects the works to processes

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<sup>46</sup>Ludovico V. Geymonat, “The Syntax of Spolia in Byzantine Thessalonike,” in *Approaches to Byzantine Architecture and Its Decoration: Studies in Honor of Slobodan Ćurčić*, ed. Mark J. Johnson, Robert Ousterhout, and Amy Papalexandrou (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), 47; For a general bibliography on spolia, see Beat Brenk, “Spolia from Constantine to Charlemagne: Aesthetics versus Ideology,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 103–9; Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney, *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine* (Farnham, Surrey, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011); Anthony Cutler, “Reuse or Use? Theoretical and Practical Attitudes toward Objects in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Ideologie e Pratiche del Reimpiego nell'alto Medioevo* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1999), 1055–83; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Die Spolien in der spätantiken Architektur: vorgetragen* (München: Beck, 1975); Michael Greenhalgh, *The Survival of Roman Antiquities in the Middle Ages* (London: Duckworth, 1989); Amy Papalexandrou, “Memory Tattered and Torn: Spolia in the Heartland of Byzantine Hellenism,” in *Archaeologies of Memory*, ed. Susan E. Alcock and Ruth M. van Dyke (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2013), 56–80; Amy Papalexandrou, “On the Shoulders of Hera: Alternative Readings of Antiquity in the Greek Memoryscape,” in *Archaeology in Situ: Local Perspectives on Archaeology, Archaeologists, and Sites in Greece*, ed. A. Stroulia and S. Buck Sutton (Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 2010), 53–74; Amy Papalexandrou, “Conversing Hellenism: The Multiple Voices of a Byzantine Monument in Greece,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 19 (2001): 237–54.

of memory and the formation of identity.<sup>47</sup> Amy Papalexandrou argues that the re-use of sculpture is a visual statement of local identity where the interaction between the ancient and the sacred past are incorporated into the “indigenous narrative” of the landscape.<sup>48</sup>

Although, in the Mani, St. John is unusual for its abundance of embedded spolia, numerous Byzantine churches across Greece incorporate both ancient and Early Christian spolia. The most famous example is the Panagia Gorgoepikoos, or the Little Metropolis, in Athens (fig. 37).<sup>49</sup> Generally believed to have been constructed in the twelfth century under the patronage of Michael Choniates, the Metropolitan of Athens, the dating of the church is still a matter of debate.<sup>50</sup> The Little Metropolis is composed entirely of stone with dressed marble along the bottom half of the building, and reused sculpted decoration from the ancient and Early Christian period above. Although seemingly a random collection, many scholars have argued that the spolia were selected and placed with an eye both to aesthetic qualities, but also to content and function. Many of the reused pagan sculptures were modified through the addition of crosses. This Christianization of the pagan reliefs led Henry Maguire to conclude that this modification served an apotropaic function.<sup>51</sup> He argues that pagan imagery in the Byzantine period were seen

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<sup>47</sup> For a foundational study on Byzantine attitudes towards the pagan past, see Helen Saradi, “Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 47–61; For a thorough bibliography regarding the study of spolia in Byzantium, see Amy Papalexandrou, “The Architectural Layering of History in Medieval Morea: Monuments, Memory, and Fragments of the Past,” in *Viewing the Morea: Land and People in the Late Medieval Peloponnese*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Publications, 2013), n. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Papalexandrou, “The Architectural Layering of History,” 39.

<sup>49</sup> For more information on the Little Metropolis and issues concerning its dating, see Kiilerich, “Making Sense of the Spolia”; Maguire, “The Cage of Crosses.”

<sup>50</sup> For the original dating of the church, see Manolis Chatzidakis, *Monuments byzantins en Attique et Béotie. Architecture, mosaïques, peintures murales* (Athens: Editions d’Athènes, 1956), 23.

<sup>51</sup> Maguire, “The Cage of Crosses,” 172.



as sources of danger but this danger could be overcome by marking the sculptures with the sign of the cross, a “wise precaution” in a city full of pagan statuary.<sup>52</sup> By contrast, Bente Killerich argues for a much later dating of the church, possibly in the fifteenth century, during a period which actively looked to the past. In doing so, Killerich argues that the church forms a link for the patron between their present and the glory of the ancient Greek past. The function of spolia at the Little Metropolis and its modification has been incorporated into an ongoing debate, issues of which have been discussed with other buildings of this type.

However, not all churches with an abundance of ancient spolia include the addition of crosses to the pagan reliefs. For example, the Church of the Koimesis at Merbaka (modern day Hagia Triada) near Argos also includes both ancient and Early Christian sculpture (fig. 38).<sup>53</sup> The ancient reliefs, along with dressed stone, were taken primarily from the ancient site of Argos. The church is tentatively dated to the thirteenth century and has been associated with the Dominican cleric William of Moerbeke. A Latin scholar, possibly the intellectual rival of Thomas Aquinas, Moerbeke played an active role in the ongoing attempts to rejoin the two faiths. A gifted linguist, he translated numerous philosophical texts from Ancient Greek into Latin including Aristotle’s *On Memory and Reminiscence* which likely fueled the late medieval interest in memory in the Latin West.<sup>54</sup> Thus, as both Papalexandrou and Guy Sanders argue, it is

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<sup>52</sup> Maguire, “The Cage of Crosses,” 172.

<sup>53</sup> For more information, see Guy D.R. Sanders, “Use of Ancient Spolia to Make Personal and Political Statements; William of Moerbeke’s Church at Merbaka (Ayia Triada, Argolida)” Conference Presentation. *Being Peloponnesian: Cohesion and Diversity through Time* (University of Nottingham, 2007); Papalexandrou, “The Architectural Layering of History.”

<sup>54</sup> Papalexandrou, “The Architectural Layering of History,” 35; For a more general look at memory in the medieval West, see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); For information on memory in Byzantium, see Amy Papalexandrou, “The Memory Culture of Byzantium,” in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 108–22.

possible that the inclusion of pagan sculpture was not only a deliberate decision, but a personal statement of his own connection to and interest in the past.<sup>55</sup>

The Little Metropolis and the Koimesis, located in or close to larger metropolitan areas, are often associated with patrons of a certain intellectual class. Because of this association these churches have warranted much attention over the decades and have become part of the larger intellectual narrative of the Late Byzantine period. However, the reuse of ancient and early medieval sculpture in more rural churches is often viewed as the result of straitened circumstances. Although this is very possible, the sheer number and size of the reused sculpture at St. John, in addition to their intentional placement, point to a more significant role. The numerous reliefs immured in the walls of St. John are not intended to plug a hole or simply to provide a decorative flourish. From the outset, the church was designed to display the immured works, which must have been systematically collected. The design indicates that the reliefs were selected and placed with forethought. The reuse of sculpture at St. John should not be seen as the result of economic hardship, nor as apotropaic, nor as a display of triumphalism or nostalgia.<sup>56</sup> Rather, the use of these reliefs brings the past to bear on the present, creating, on the walls of the church, a sense of local identity which connects the church to the surrounding landscape.

The Mani has had a long history of habitation, which is attested in the Neolithic rock paintings found in the Glifada caves in Díros Bay.<sup>57</sup> In classical times, the region was closely linked with

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<sup>55</sup> Papalexandrou, “The Architectural Layering of History”; Guy D.R. Sanders, “William of Moerbeke’s Church at Merbaka: The Use of Ancient Spolia to Make Personal and Political Statements,” *Hesperia* 84, (2015): 583–626.

<sup>56</sup> Kiilerich, “Making Sense of the Spolia,” 104.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Greenhalgh and Edward Eliopoulos, *Deep into Mani: Journey to the Southern Tip of Greece* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985), 18–19. These rock paintings were found in 1967 by John and Anna Petrochilou along with many artifacts indicating human habitation.

Sparta and continued to thrive throughout the chaos that dominated the Peloponnese from the fourth to second century BC.<sup>58</sup> The eventual defeat of Philip V of Macedon by the Roman Titus Flamininus saw the rise of the League of the Free Laconians. Under this administration, the region continued to prosper well into the third century AD.<sup>59</sup> Along the west coast of the Inner Mani, however, the archaeological evidence from the Hellenistic and Roman period is limited.<sup>60</sup> There is, though, some textual evidence regarding the existence of ancient Hippola and ancient Messe in and around modern-day Kepoula and Ano Poula (Cavo Grosso/Makryna Ridge). Although Hippola appears to have been a ruin by the second century AD, both sites are mentioned by Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*:

From the point of Taenarum Caenepolis is distant forty stades by sea. Its name also was formerly Taenarum. In it is a hall of Demeter, and a temple of Aphrodite on the shore, with a standing statue of stone. Thirty stades distant is Thyrides, a headland of Taenarum, with the ruins of a city Hippola; among them is a sanctuary of Athena Hippolaitis. A little further are the town and harbor of Messa.<sup>61</sup>

These various sites, dating to different periods of Maniot history, could be the original locations for the numerous reliefs and ancient dressed stone presented at St. John. Indeed, ancient reliefs, columns, and capitals have been found at numerous churches on the Ano Poula ridge, along the plateau, and in the valley below. This includes reused ancient sculpture at St. Demetrios in the

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<sup>58</sup> Greenhalgh and Eliopoulos, *Deep into Mani*, 20–21.

<sup>59</sup> Greenhalgh and Eliopoulos, *Deep into Mani*, 21.

<sup>60</sup> Gardner, “The Mani Peninsula in Antiquity,” 307–8.

<sup>61</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. W.H.S. Jones, Litt. D., and H.A. Ormerod (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), 3.25.9. Pausanias uses the alternative, Doric spelling Messa. For more information on the textual evidence for Messe, see Gardner, “The Mani Peninsula in Antiquity,” 445–47.

village of Kepoula which is likely close to the actual site of ancient Hippola (the distance between Kepoula and Keria is roughly 4km on foot today, see fig. 24).<sup>62</sup>

At St. John, we see both ancient architectural elements and relief sculptures immured in the walls of the church. Although, the use or reuse of architectural material, such as columns, is structurally unavoidable, the various Greco-Roman stelae and capitals immured in the walls speak to an intentional connection to the past. Both the stelae and the capitals are placed into the wall of St. John in varying directions and are congregated primarily around the south side of the west façade. These sculptures would have been among the first things one sees ascending the road to Keria.<sup>63</sup>

In the broadest sense, the presence of funerary imagery around the narthex is not surprising. If a church interior included burials, primarily of the patrons or of clergymen, they were sometimes buried in the narthex.<sup>64</sup> However, the imagery on all three stelae can be read in ways that move beyond connections to the dead.

In the mid-thirteenth century, following the fall of Constantinople, the Mani, along with the surrounding region, came under the control of the Franks. Their tenuous control over the Mani region was short-lived. William II, Prince of Achaea, was defeated by Michael Palaeologus in 1261 and the castle of Maïna was handed over in 1262. As Sharon Gerstel notes, the period of Latin rule in Byzantium, especially around the thirteenth and fourteenth century, saw a rise in the depiction of equestrian saints in areas under Crusader control including the Morea, Cyprus and

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<sup>62</sup> It is important, however, to remember that the actual site of ancient Hippola has yet to be identified. Until located, there can be no definite provenance assigned to these various objects.

<sup>63</sup> The wall and the ruined building along the north wall, which currently obstruct a clear view of the church, are post-Byzantine.

<sup>64</sup> As of today, no burials are visible in the narthex because it is currently used as a storage location.

the Holy Land.<sup>65</sup> This emphasis on equestrian saints should be understood both as a response to danger and as an absorption of Western chivalric customs.<sup>66</sup> Although much of the thirteenth-century interior decoration of St. John has been lost, it is possible that the ancient equestrian relief of a horseman trampling a snake with a dog at his side was acceptable to the Christian community at a time when there was an interest in the representation of equestrian or military saints. Indeed, the church of St. George in Keria, only a short walk from St. John, preserves an image of such a saint (fig. 39).

Set on its side just to the right of the main entryway, the use of the word *χαίρετε* on the large stela would have strong connections for both laity and clergy alike. The word *χαίρετε*, beyond simply a greeting or a farewell, and beyond its numerous uses in both the gospels and in the letters of St. Paul, was a word repeated numerous times by both clergy and laity during the recitation of the Akathistos hymn.<sup>67</sup> This hymn, still sung during Lent, was represented in church decoration of the Late Byzantine period.<sup>68</sup> The hymn is divided into four main parts in which there are 24 stanzas. Every odd-numbered stanza ends with the refrain “Rejoice (*χαίρετε*), O Bride Unwedded.” Because of the frequency with which this word is heard and spoken, it is possible that both literate viewers, such as the priest, and unlettered viewers would recognize the

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<sup>65</sup> Sharon E. J. Gerstel, “Art and Identity in the Medieval Morea,” in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Publications, 2001), 270.

<sup>66</sup> Gerstel, “Art and Identity in the Medieval Morea,” 271.

<sup>67</sup> Sharon E. J. Gerstel, “Art and Devotional Practices in the Byzantine Village: The Long View,” Presented at the Seminar in Comparative Medieval Material Culture (Bard Graduate School, October 9, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> For more information on the Akathistos hymn in church painting, see Alexandra Pätzold, *Der Akathistos-Hymnos: Die Bilderzyklen in der Byzantinischen Wandmalerei des 14. Jahrhunderts (Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und Christlichen Archaologie)* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1989); Ioannis Spatharakis, *The Pictorial Cycles of the Akathistos Hymn for the Virgin* (Leiden: Alexandros Press, 2005).

word and associate it with this popular anthem to the Virgin. Thus, the combination of the figures, the offerings, and the presence of the word *χαίρετε*, creates a new function for this ancient funerary marker in the thirteenth century.

The hunter with his dog, however, visually connects to a more secular aspect of daily life in the village.<sup>69</sup> Hunting and fishing were always crucial aspects of everyday life, and this continues to be the case in the Mani. The incorporation of this stela at St. John shows the continuation of this activity throughout time. In this stela the activities of the ancient past are visually connected to the community's present.

Although at St. John it cannot be argued that patrons were deliberately associating the church with its ancient past, the patrons could, as Papalexandrou has argued in regards to other churches in the Peloponnese, be evoking a more general past that gives the new church a temporal connection to the local landscape, both sacred and profane.<sup>70</sup> It could be that the inclusion of both the Early Christian and pagan sculptures acts as an *aide-mémoire*, recalling the memory of the local community within the archive of the church walls.

Beyond the ancient sculptures and architectural elements, most of the remaining immured carvings are from templon screens that once belonged to churches in the surrounding area. These fragments should be understood both as relics taken from the most sacred area of the church and as markers of memory. The use of various templon screens gathered at St. John could be seen to

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<sup>69</sup> Gerstel, "Art and Devotional Practices."

<sup>70</sup> Helen Saradi, "The Use of Ancient Spolia in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 3 (1997): 419; Papalexandrou, "The Architectural Layering of History," 31.

make the church a *lieu de mémoire* or a site of memory.<sup>71</sup> St. John, thus, becomes a site which is vested with the historical, religious and communal memory of Keria. This performance of memory can be seen through the almost exclusive use of templon screen fragments and the preservation of donor names.

The templon screen divides the altar from the rest of the church, establishing a sacred hierarchy.<sup>72</sup> These divisions were the subject of numerous theological works in Byzantium, in which spatial divisions were metaphorically connected to the body and the soul. The seventh-century theologian Maximos the Confessor, for example, equated the divisions of the church to parts of the human body: “Its soul is the sanctuary; the sacred altar, the mind; and its body the nave.”<sup>73</sup> The templon screen thus physically and visually separates the most sacred area, the mind and the soul, from the rest of the church, the body. In doing so it augments and alters the faithful’s visual experience of the church.<sup>74</sup>

At St. John, the incorporation of these sculptures onto the exterior walls extends the sacred area to encompass the entire church. The reliefs surround all entrances to the building and create a permeable barrier between the profane and the sacred, the earthly and the divine. To the

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<sup>71</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24; For the larger theoretical approach to memory and time, see Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1988); Henri Bergson, “The Multiplicity of Conscious States. The Idea of Duration,” in *Time and Free Will [1913]* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001), 75–139.

<sup>72</sup> Ronald L. Grimes, “Sequestering Sacred Space,” in *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 87–99.

<sup>73</sup> Sharon Gerstel, “Introduction,” in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. Sharon E.J. Gerstel (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006), 2.

<sup>74</sup> Gerstel, “Introduction,” 2. For more information on liturgical space and the Byzantine sanctuary, see Sharon E. J. Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries: Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary* (London: College Art Association, 1999); Vasileios Marinis, “Defining Liturgical Space,” in *The Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (London: Routledge, 2012), 284–302.

viewer, both Byzantine and modern, these carved sculptures are in a constant state of flux between the memory of their former role inside the church and their current role as the wall of the church. This liminal zone is a boundary, a permeable line which, when crossed, draws the viewer into a sacred space.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, inscriptions on three of these sculptures refer to various people, eleventh- or twelfth-century members of the communities whose stone memorials are enshrined in the church. Nikolaos is inscribed on the north jamb of the entrance into the nave, Gabriel is cited along the main epistyle inside the church, and finally an unnamed donor, his wife and possibly children are named on the epistyle reused as a lintel on the south entrance. The preservation of these names blends temporal layers between the inscribed people and the thirteenth-century community. This blending is best seen in the inscription over the *prothesis* noting a priest (πρ[εσβυτέρου]) named Gabriel. The memory of this priest, and of all the priests who have entered and exited the *prothesis* chamber during the Liturgy of Preparation, is continually enacted in daily service.

The call for prayers for the deceased, including both the inscription on the main epistyle and along the north jamb of the door (Remember Lord, [the] Servant of God, Nikolaos), demonstrates a desire by the community to remember their dead, long after the active memory of that specific individual was lost. This longing both to remember and to be remembered is further acted out in the eighteenth-century *brebion* of the church where a hieromonk and lay members of the community are mentioned. These inscribed names, recalled in The Prayers of the Living and

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<sup>75</sup> This movement between the sacred and the profane is underscored by the number of foliate crosses around the façade and flanking the entrance from the narthex into the nave. Foliate crosses were often applied to liminal spaces such as the area dividing the nave from the sanctuary. They demarcate sacred areas. The cross's additional associations with the passion and the salvation add to the vision of the threshold as a movement into salvation. See Sharon E. J. Gerstel, "An Alternate View," 146.



the Dead, connect generations of individuals who have gone by those names and so therefore the retention of older inscribed names is significant.<sup>76</sup> The eighteenth-century archon Nikolaos Katzibadatos, whose name is recorded in the painted *brebion* in the *prothesis*, would have recognized the name, Nicholas, inscribed to the left side of the entrance from the narthex to the nave. Thus, the presence of these names at St. John draws associations between the inscribed individual and later men (and women) who share the same baptismal name. Ultimately though, these individuals are not just connected on the earthly plane, but are joined by name to the archangel and the saint respectively.

Although today we do not know the origin of the templon screen reliefs, the thirteenth-century patron and builders likely knew their provenance. It is possible that the original churches were in a state of ruin much as the church of St. Philip in Ano Poula or St. John in Mina. But regardless of why these reliefs were reused, their intentional placement into the walls of St. John archives the community's shared history and memory over centuries in the creation of this church. In this way the church becomes, for the thirteenth-century patron and the surrounding community, a *lieu de mémoire*.

## ALTERING AESTHETICS

The alterations to St. John over time continued to draw together the local community and the church. These modifications vary from small, undated graffiti to larger interventions to the exterior of the church. As a religious site, the church has been the focus of both renewal and destruction. In this final section, I will look at the changes to the church after its construction until today to understand the ongoing relationship between the church and its community over

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<sup>76</sup> Gerstel, "Art and Devotional Practices."

time. Some of these changes uphold the layers of the past while others appear to negate, disconnect or dismantle it. I will look specifically at four of these alterations: the presence of graffiti, the restoration of the church in the eighteenth century, the alteration of the south entryway, and the defacement of the church in the twentieth century.

Three small graffiti are carved into the stone and plaster of St. John. Undated and of simple design, these small markings should not be understood as vandalism, even though they are informal in nature.<sup>77</sup> Made by members of the lay or monastic community, they interact both with the church as a sacred space and with the unchanging nature of the material on which they are inscribed. They are visible connections between their creator and the site.<sup>78</sup> Beyond the simple act of touching the stone, these marks were made with a desire to, as Veronique Plesch writes, “leave a tangible mark for posterity [which] is at the core of any interaction on a wall.”<sup>79</sup> These small markings are typical imagery for graffiti. Since they lack any date or name these small interventions can easily be overlooked, but they enforce the connection between individuals in the community and the church. Just as the names of donors from past churches were retained in the new church, these anonymous carvings become yet another layer of interaction between both the past and present, the sacred and the profane, on the walls of the church. This is visible in the location of these graffiti.

One graffito, a vertical sundial, is located on the south side of the church where the sun passes overhead (fig. 40). Although the hole where the sundial’s gnomon would have been

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<sup>77</sup> Veronique Plesch, “Beyond Art History: Graffiti on Frescoes,” in *Understanding Graffiti: Multidisciplinary Studies from Prehistory to the Present*, ed. Troy Lovata and Elizabeth Olton (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2015), 50.

<sup>78</sup> Plesch, “Beyond Art History,” 33.

<sup>79</sup> Plesch, “Beyond Art History,” 54.

placed is visible, the gnomon itself no longer survives. With ten radiating lines, the sundial at St. John splits the day into eleven hours, with the horizontal line along the top representing the horizon. Similar sundials, albeit carved, are found both at the Monastery of Panagia Skripou (fig. 41) and at Merbaka (fig. 42).<sup>80</sup> All three divide the day into eleven hours where, at true solar noon, the shadow, which would normally fall on a centrally placed line, falls between the fifth and the sixth line, if counted from the left. It is likely that this graffito told the time to members of the clergy or parishioners entering the church through the south entrance. If so, the dating of this graffito likely preceded the alteration of the south entryway into a window. This graffito's functionality, thus, becomes a point of connection between the daily lives of the community and the church by interweaving the solar and liturgical hours.

By contrast, another graffito, a cross in a rectangle, was placed on the exterior of the *prothesis* chamber (fig. 43). Located just below where the eighteenth-century *brebion* is painted inside the church, this small graffito speaks to the connection through contact between its maker and the divine. By placing his (or her) work in direct contact with the location where the bread and wine were offered to the church. This act of inscription immerses the creator into the body of the church.

The third, and final, graffito, located on the northwest wall of the nave, is shallow and difficult to see (fig. 44). Crudely drawn, it might show a man on horseback. A human figure is indicated by a man's face and body — with the torso and leg forming a single unit. A diagonal

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<sup>80</sup> For more information on sundials in Byzantine Greece, see Mary Lee Coulson, “Ηλιακά ρολόγια στη βυζαντινή Ελλάδα: ανάλημα η ανάθεμα,” *Αρχαιολογία* 75 (2000): 46–54. For more information on the sundial at the monastery of Panagia Skripou, see E. Theodossiou and V.N. Manimanis, “The Vertical Sundial of the Monastery of Panaghia Scripou,” 848, 1 (AIP Conference Proceedings, College Park, MD: AIP Publishing, 2006), 934–38; Amy Papalexandrou, “The Church of the Virgin at Skripou: Architecture, Sculpture, and Inscriptions in Ninth-Century Byzantium” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1998); For more information on the sundial at Merbaka, see Sanders, “William of Moerbeke's Church at Merbaka,” 613.

line, possibly the neck of the horse extends up to the left of the man's torso. Additional lines indicating hair could be the horse's mane. As with the other graffiti, no date or name accompanies the image.

The restoration of the eighteenth century marks a time when the entire community came together to renew the church. During this restoration new frescoes were added inside the church both on the templon screen and in the apses. It is quite likely that these mid- eighteenth-century frescoes cover the same subjects painted in the thirteenth century.<sup>81</sup> It is notable, however, which areas were not covered by the eighteenth-century restoration, including the frescoes in the *bema* vault which today are in extremely poor condition. The Mani region in the 1750s, like the rest of Greece, was under Ottoman rule.<sup>82</sup> It was, however, one of the most prosperous areas of the Peloponnese as the Ottomans found the warlike nature of its population hard to control and thus placated them with freedoms not seen elsewhere in Greece. Regardless of these freedoms, the region rebelled frequently, eventually becoming the catalyst for the Greek Revolution in 1821. Although it is most likely that the *bema* vault paintings were in acceptable condition in the eighteenth century, for the restorers to actively leave the thirteenth-century paintings untouched suggests a deliberate desire to highlight these traces of the past.

By the twentieth century, the rise in communism would alter this relationship once again. Upon entering the church today, the most striking imagery is not the frescoes but the effacement of the eighteenth-century paintings on the templon screen (Fig. 45). These violent cuts, made by local members of the Communist KKE party in Greece during the Civil War from 1946-1949, cover large areas of the frescoes and convey a powerful sense of emotion towards the images. In

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<sup>81</sup> Gerstel, "Art and Devotional Practices."

<sup>82</sup> There was a period from 1684 until 1715 when the Peloponnese was under Venetian rule.

marking the surface so thoroughly and including the name of their party, the KKE members appropriated the site, attempting to erase or negate the religious imagery underneath. However, as Veronique Plesch states, “the presence of graffiti bears witness to these paintings’ continued relevance, and indeed of their power and of their use.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, this turn in the mid-twentieth century away from religious beliefs, as espoused by Communism, adds yet another layer to the history of the church. This desire to disconnect from the Greek Orthodox church should not be seen as vandalism, but a testament to how the community was grappling with their religion and ultimately with their past. Just as the Greco-Roman imagery of the horseman spoke to the militaristic world of the thirteenth century, the effacement of these frescoes marks the upheaval, revolution, and the changing political climate of the twentieth century.

The change to the status of religion in the twentieth century continues to mark the relationship between St. John and its community. The theft in 1968 of the two Greco-Roman stelae is also part of this changing relationship. The thieves removed both reliefs from the walls of the church and refused to surrender one of them to the local Ephorate until the police became involved.<sup>84</sup> The other relief has never been recovered. The removal of these stelae disrupted the link between the past and the present. Like the effacement of the frescoes inside St. John, it is difficult to see beyond the sense of destruction caused by this theft. Indeed, the holes from which the stelae were pried appear like a puncture wound on the outside of the church. Whether extracted to be sold to decorate someone’s home, could the removal of these stelae signify an apathy towards preserving the past? Human time may be transcended inside a church, however churches themselves are not immune to the ravages of time or the whims of the local community.

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<sup>83</sup> Plesch, “Beyond Art History,” 55.

<sup>84</sup> A.S. Delivorrias, “Υστεροαρχαϊκὸν ἱερὸν Ἀφροδίτης ἐν θέσει Δίχοβα,” *Αρχαιολογικὸν Δελτίον* 23.2 (Chronika) (1968): 153.

Churches, like St. John, are sites of memory not only when the urge is to connect to the past but also when that past is dismantled.

Stone throughout the medieval period, both carved and dressed, held a connection to the communities who used it. Albertus Magnus, the thirteenth-century Dominican bishop, in his *Book of Minerals*, refutes the idea that a stone can have a soul. Albertus writes:

Democritus and some others say that things made of elements have souls, and that these [souls] are the cause of the production of stones; and therefore he says that there is a soul in a stone. ... But we have shown elsewhere that this [statement] cannot stand... since [stones] do not use food, or [have any] senses, or [even] life, as shown by any vital activity.<sup>85</sup>

Albertus's firm denial of the ensoulment of stone speaks to the lithic-human connection present throughout ancient and medieval discourse. Yet, even today, there is a desire to attach a *living* quality to stone. Stone in the Mani has a social life.<sup>86</sup> Not simply a passive building material, stone and its reuse over generations is connected to the lives and the histories of the people who use it. Like cellular material being left behind on a touched stone, the reused stone, inscriptions, graffiti and even effacement remains as testament to the generations who have come before and their desire to have agency over their past.

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<sup>85</sup> Albertus Magnus, *The Book of Minerals*, trans. Dorothy Wyckoff (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 20.

<sup>86</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ed., "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63.

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