

ST. SPYRIDON: THE EARLIER FRESCOES

The discovery of a frescoed wall representing an earlier period of the church of St. Spyridon, and the chronological evidence for it, have already been noted.¹ The photographs on the following pages (Figs. 2-8) give the complete record of the newly discovered paintings, and the plan (Fig. 1) illustrates the relationship of the two buildings. The upper part of the wall was broken away, also the back of the apse. The scheme of decoration as preserved is as follows: in the upper register, to left and

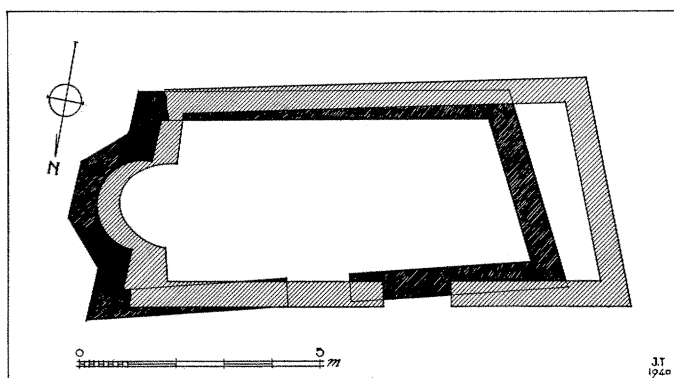


Fig. 1. The Church of St. Spyridon. The Darker Shading Represents the Earlier Walls

right of the apse respectively, the angel of the Annunciation (Fig. 3) and the Virgin (Fig. 4). The head of the angel is missing; of the Virgin, who stands on a higher level, only the lower half is preserved. Both stand before a low decorated wall. In the lower register the upper parts of two panels remain: to the left of the apse, St. Stephen (Fig. 5), beardless, carrying an incense box (?) in his left hand; his missing right perhaps carried a censer. His tunic is decorated with ornamental letters. In the corresponding panel to the right of the apse is St. Blasios (Fig. 6), bearded, in bishop's vestments. His scroll carries a quotation from the liturgy and may be read as follows: καὶ καταξίωσον ἡμᾶς Δέσποτ[α] μετ[ὰ] παρ[ρ]ησί[ας] ἀ[κ]ατακρίτως τ[ο]λ[μ]ᾶν [ἐπικ]αλεῖ[σθαι].

¹ *Hesperia*, IX, 1940, pp. 293-294.

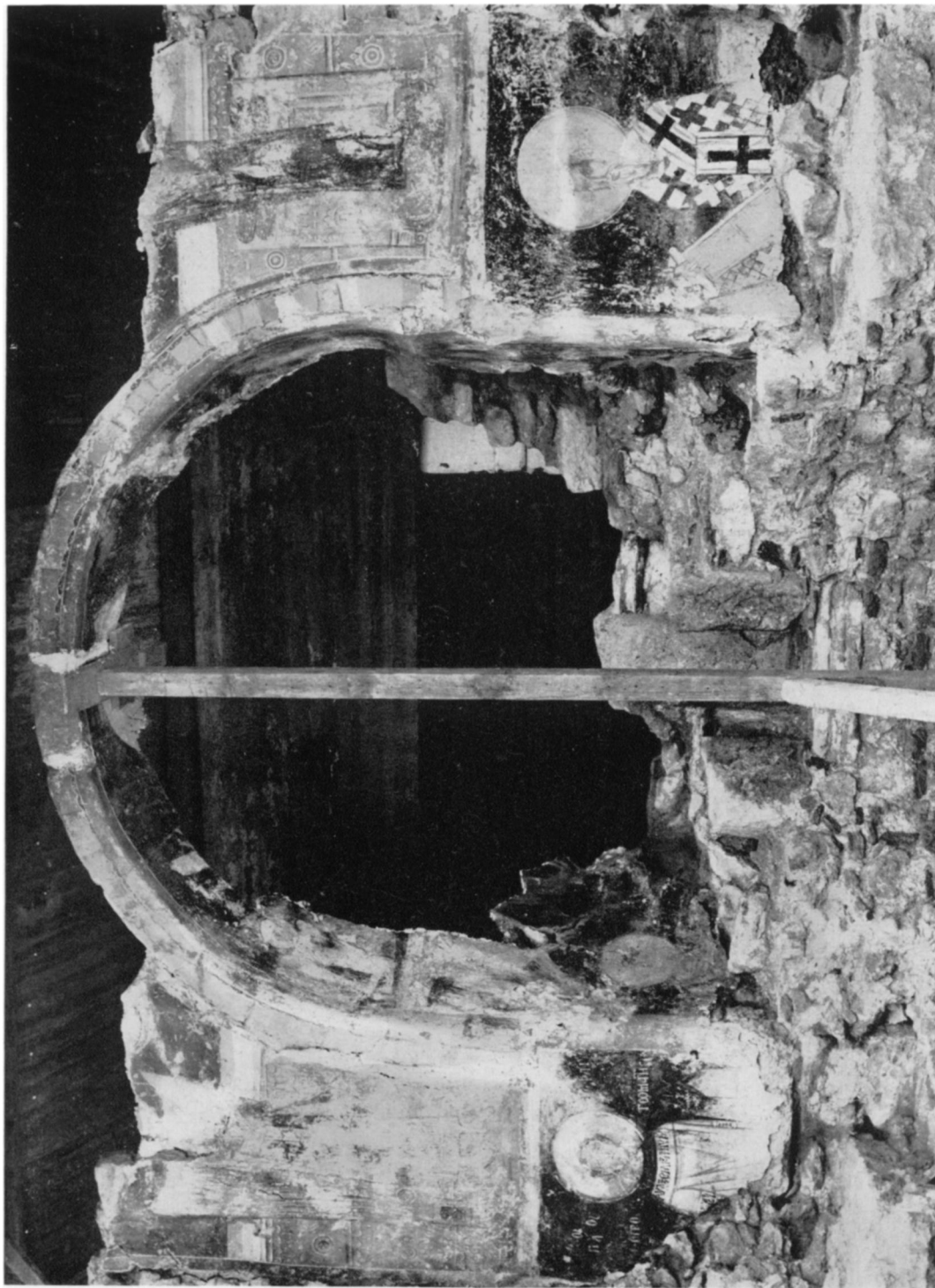


Fig. 2. Earlier Frescoes of the Church of St. Spyridon



Fig. 3. The Angel of the Annunciation



Fig. 4. The Virgin of the Annunciation

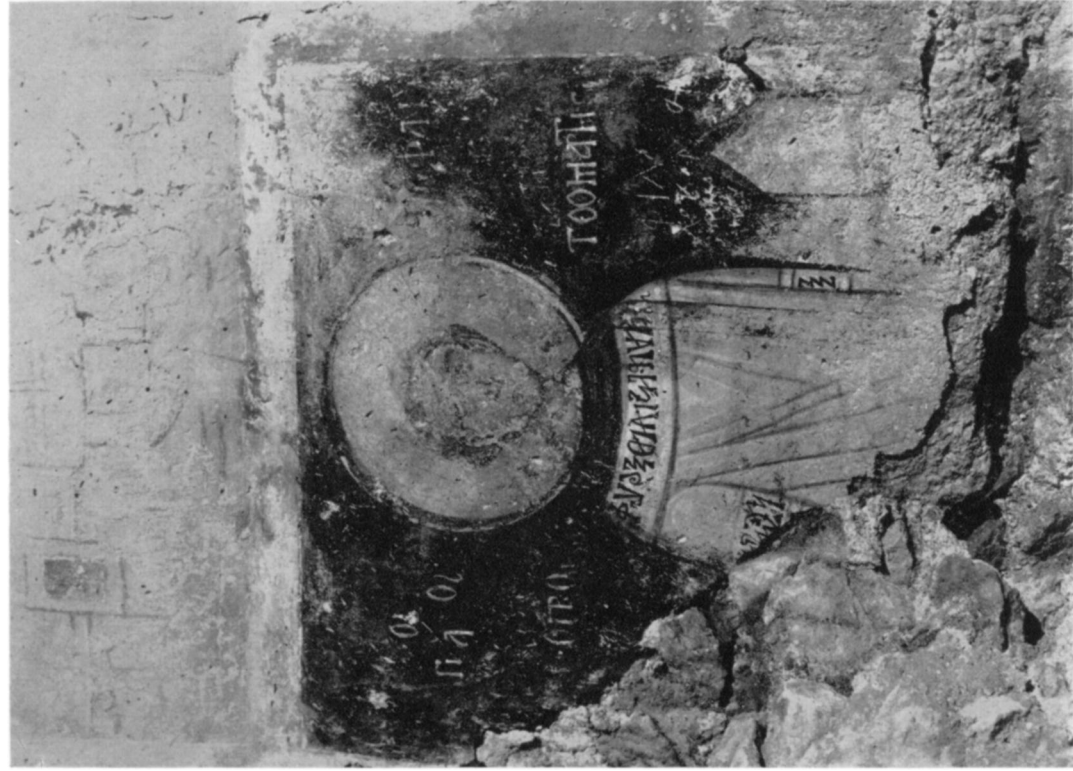


Fig. 5. St. Stephen

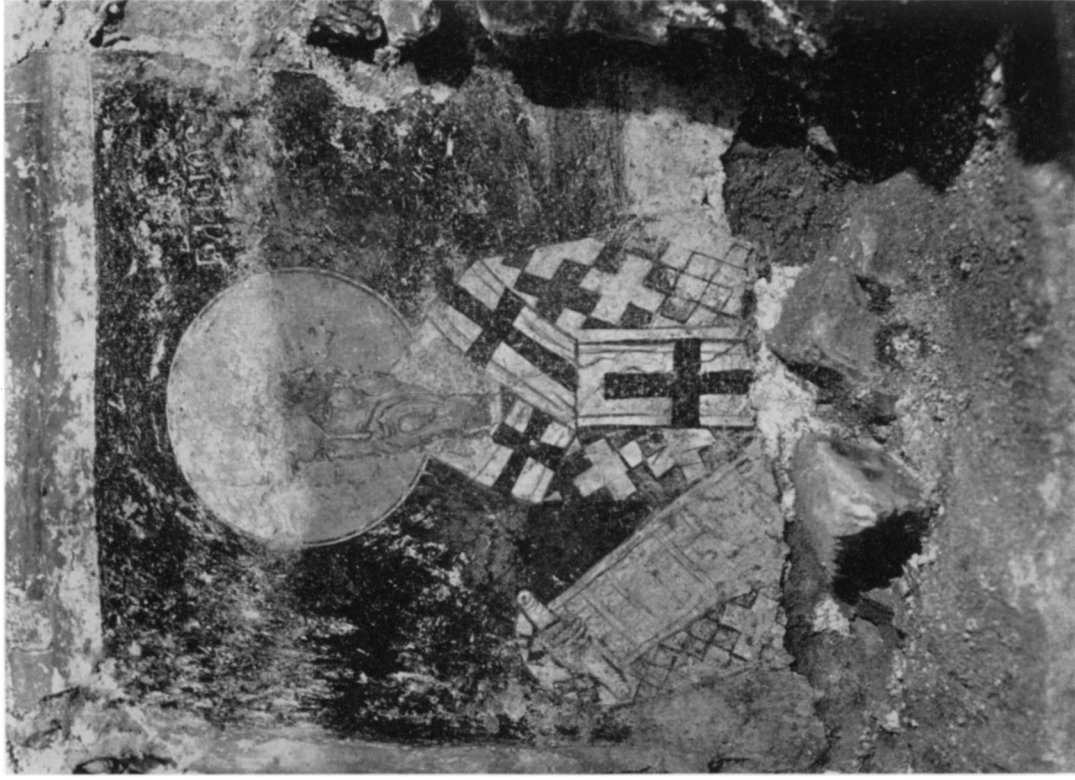


Fig. 6. St. Blasios



Fig. 7. Detail of the Apse



Fig. 8. Detail of the Apse

The apse has suffered seriously. There remain the much worn figures of two little kneeling angels (Fig. 7) flanking the central figure of the Virgin, of whom only the top of the nimbus and the tips of the upraised hands are preserved (Fig. 2). In the lower register are traces of a procession of bishops with cherubim above their heads (Fig. 8).

The date of 1613 for the probable erection of the later church ² gives a *terminus ante quem* for the frescoes of the earlier building. The green underpainting which is particularly noticeable in St. Stephen's face is suggestive of much of the painting at Mistra. There is a strong similarity between our Stephen and the same saint in the Catholicon of the Hagia Lavra at Mt. Athos, dated 1535.³ A date not far from this would allow a reasonable period for the life of the early church before it fell into disrepair and was succeeded by the later building in 1613.

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² *Loc. cit.*, p. 293.

³ G. Millet, *Monuments de l'Athos*, pl. 121.