

MOVING PICTURES IN COLOUR OF PORTRAITS IN MOSAIC OF SAINTS IN THE CHURCH OF HAGHIA SOPHIA IN CONSTANTINOPLE

A moving picture in colour presents newly uncovered portraits of saints on the North tympanum wall in the Church of Haghia Sophia in Istanbul. The film shows the conditions, methods and results of the work undertaken by the Byzantine Institute of America.

Through the description of several direct witnesses such as Fossati, Murav'ev and Salzenberg, it was known that about a century ago niches under the windows of the North & South tympana walls contained life-size portraits of some Fathers of the Church and Saint Patriarchs of Constantinople.

Their names were listed as :

Ignatios Theophoros, Dionysios Areopagites, Gregorios of Nea Caesarea, Athanasios of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianze, John Chrysostom, Nicholas of Myra, Gregory the Armenian, Anthemios, Methodios and Ignatios the New Saint.

Some of these portraits were hurriedly sketched by Fossati during the work of restoration of Haghia Sophia, ordered by Sultan Abdul-Mecit II (1847-1849), others were swiftly copied by Salzenberg, from Fossati's sketches, and published in 1855 in his Album of Haghia Sophia.

At the close of Fossati's work of conservation a thick layer of plaster was used to conceal these figures, which remained thus concealed until 1939. The Byzantine Institute, entrusted by the Turkish Government to uncover, consolidate and study the mosaics of Haghia Sophia, undertook the systematic tests of the seven niches on the North and South tympana in order to ascertain what portraits had survived.

Preliminary investigations brought the sad evidence that nothing remains, except some small fragments scattered here and there, of the mosaics on the South side of the Church. Tests on the North wall gave better results : three of the niches were found to contain more or less undamaged mosaic portraits — the four remaining panels shared the fate of those on the South wall.

The three portraits that are preserved represent St. Ignatios Theophoros, St. John Chrysostom and St. Ignatios the New Saint.

Considering the order of portraits reproduced by Salzenberg in his Album and by Fossati in his unpublished sketches, we may presume that the four lost mosaics on the North Wall represented Gregory of Nea Caesarea, Cyril and Athanasios of Alexandria, and Methodios, the Predecessor of Ignatios the New on the throne of Constantinople.

The difficult problem of raising the scaffolding on the narrow passage running over the second Gallery at a height of more than 23 m. was successfully solved by the Istanbul Engineering Company. The scaffolding, as will be shown in the pictures, was suspended by steel bars passed through the windows of this tympanum.

The work of uncovering was naturally interrupted by the war and resumed only in the summer of 1946. The Institute is happy to present today to the honourable members of the VIth International Byzantine Congress this film showing in colour the result of their efforts to unveil and preserve these incomparable specimens of Byzantine portraiture.

The Saints are represented full-face and life-size on a gold and silver ground. Each niche is framed by a rich multicoloured mosaic ornamental border. A similar ornament forms the base of the niche. The inscriptions carry the name and citations of the Saints in black-violet letters as an organic part of the portraiture.

All are uniformly vested in grey-white *phelonia* and chitons, with claves. Bishop's *omophoria* bear large crosses in red and gold. They all hold in their left hand a jewelled Book of the Gospels, while the right is raised in the gesture of Blessing.

The features are individual and the technique of execution is different in each face. The idealized face of the mighty Ignatios, the God-bearer, the ascetic, intellectual features of St. John, the ever young face of Nicetas, the emasculated son of the Emperor Michael I Rhangabe, here standing as the Patriarch Ignatios the New, differ in their presentation from the dry schematic iconographical formulae we see in the almost contemporary portraits of the saint bishops in the Church of Haghia Sophia in Kiev. A detailed study of these incomparable specimens of the Byzantine Art of portraiture is the subject of a forthcoming Report on the Mosaics of Haghia Sophia in Istanbul.

The film which we show is an attempt to reproduce the portraits in their architectural setting of light.

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