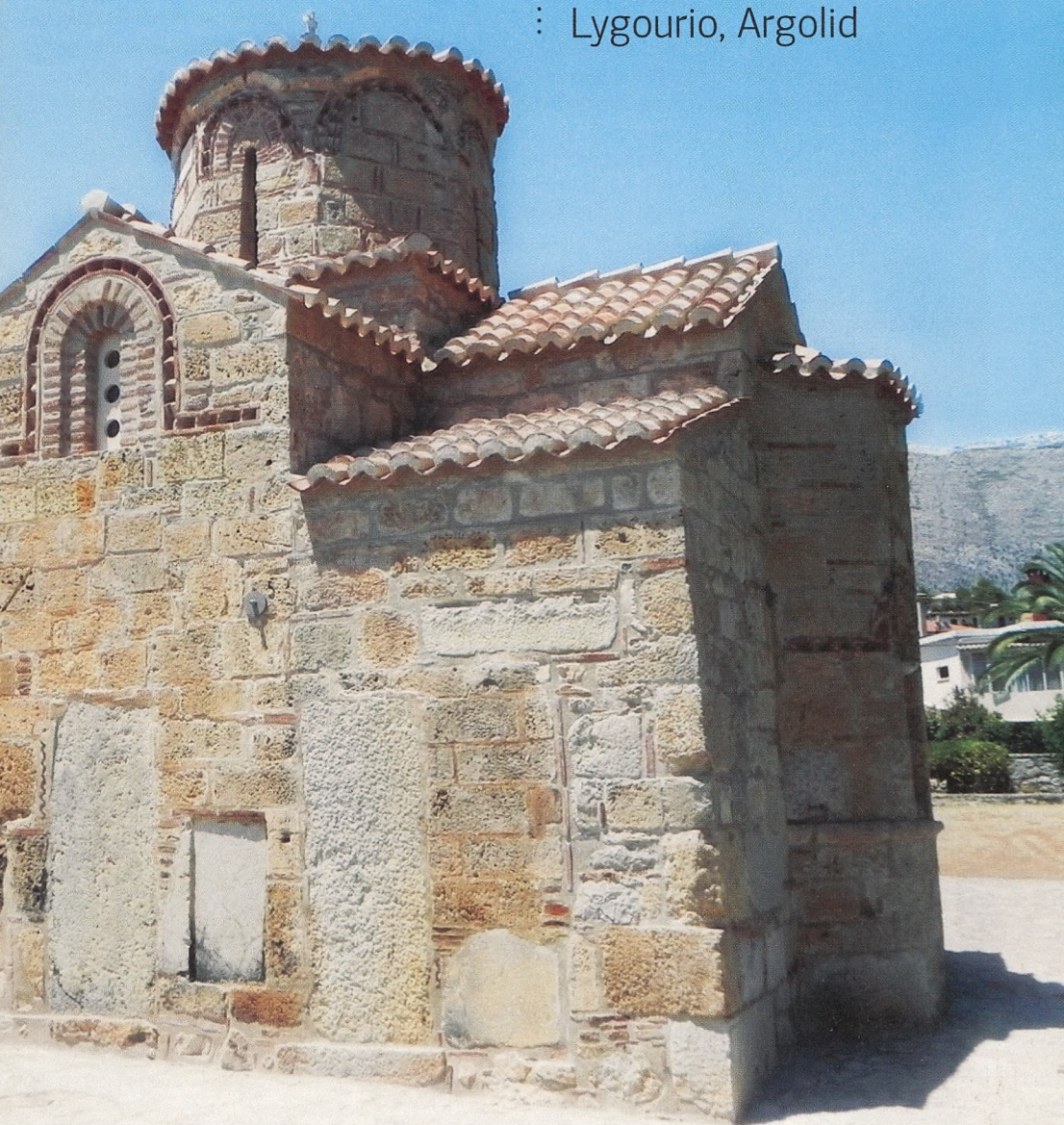




ELLINIKI ETAIRIA
Society for the Environment
and Cultural Heritage

Holy Church of St. John the Merciful

Lygourio, Argolid



Holy Church of St. John the Merciful

The work of restoration
of the Holy Church
of St. John the Merciful
(St. Constantine)
at Lygourio, in the Argolid



Ceramic decoration

The Church of St. John the Merciful (or of St Constantine as it is more usually called by local people) is situated on the eastern outskirts of Lygourio on the edge of the village's small plain. Today the monument is completely incorporated into the fabric of the settlement, which in recent years has grown considerably.

The church belongs to the most common type of Byzantine Church Architecture in southern Greece, known as 'two-column domed cross-in-square'. On the west side of the church is a narrow narthex. From the point of view both of its construction and of its morphology, the Church of St. John is a typical example of the so-called Greek School of Byzantine architecture. The walls of its facades are constructed out of ancient material in second use, which came mainly from the Sanctuary of Asclepius, and dressed porous stone. Bricks are placed in a free arrangement or surround dressed stone, in accordance with the cloisonné structural system. The facades of the original church are decorated over a limited area with *qualitatively remarkable ceramic decoration*. For the construction of the door and window openings dressed stone and bricks have been used. The church had a *marble iconostasis and doorways*, of which some fragments have been preserved. The interior of the church is decorated with *remarkable frescoes*, of which parts have been preserved.

On the basis of its morphological and constructional characteristics, the Church of St. John the Merciful has been dated to *the early 12th century*, while the narthex is considered to be somewhat later. Two inscriptions carved on ancient parts incorporated into the facades of the church refer to a certain Stephanos and to the 'builder' Theophylactos from the island of Kea, who was probably the church's architect. Further details of the history of the church are not known. In more recent times the church seems to have suffered significant damage, probably from earthquakes. The result of the quite extensive work which has been done on



The church before the restoration



The church after the restoration

the building at various times has been the destruction of various secondary elements, such as the marble iconostasis and the alteration of others such as the floor, the openings, the dome and the roofs.

The church came down to our days in a bad state of preservation, facing serious structural and aesthetic problems. In 2008, on the initiative of the *Architectural Heritage Council of ELLINIKI ETAIRIA – Society for the Environment and Cultural Heritage*, a study of the conservation and restoration of the church was carried out by the Office for Special Architectural Studies –Monument LTD, Stavros Mamaloukos– Anastasia Kampoli Mamaloukou & Colleagues. It was completed and amended in 2010, under the supervision of the *25th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities*.

The work of restoring the monument was carried out between the years 2011 and 2012 under the supervision of the 25th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities and was superintended by the Architectural Heritage Council of ELLINIKI ETAIRIA – Society for the Environment and Cultural Heritage, with the support of the Municipality of Epidaurus. The restoration work was carried out by Mnemiotexniki LTD under the supervision of Stavros Mamaloukos and was made possible by the generous financial support of the **A.G. Leventis Foundation, Andreas Symeon, the Demetrios, Christos and Georgios Liatas families and other residents of Lygourio.**

The work included the strengthening of the walls and the vaulting with the application of grouts and a system of stainless steel tie-rods, the limited reconstruction of damaged parts of the facades, the reconstruction of the roof using the old handmade tiles, the conservation and partial restoration of the floor, the construction of a new marble iconostasis and doorways into which the remnants of the original ones were incorporated and the construction of new ones.



Byzantine inscription referring to a certain Stephanos



Ceramic decoration and use of spolia



The monument during the restoration works



The ELLINIKI ETAIRIA – Society for the Environment and Cultural Heritage –a non-profit NGO– has since 1972 been active in the fight for the preservation of the cultural heritage of our country (historical, artistic and architectural), for the protection of ecosystems and the ecological balance of the landscape and for the promotion of the sustainable use of the natural and energy resources of the country.

During the last 40 years the ELLINIKI ETAIRIA has fought many battles. Among the major ones which met with success we must include the establishment of the Marine Park of Alonissos, the saving of Plaka (a struggle that continues to this day), of the Delphi landscape, the Southern Saronic Gulf, Pylos, the Prespa lakes, part of the area of Marathon, the ancient tower of Kea and of historic villages, such as those of Hydra and many Aegean islands. At the same time dozens of monuments throughout the country have been saved from demolition, decay and abandonment.

And all this thanks to the contributions and cooperation of sponsors, scientists, volunteers, members and friends.



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