

# St. George Church in Kaleiçi



St. George Church (also known as Aya Yorgi Church), located in the historic Kaleiçi district on Kocatepe Street in the Barbaros neighborhood, is one of Antalya's monumental cultural assets. It is currently part of the complex of Kaleiçi Museum owned by Koç University AKMED.

Very little is known about the church apart from the fact that, according to the restoration inscription, it is dedicated to St. George. St. George was a martyr who was killed during the persecution of Roman Emperor Diocletian (AD 284-305).

The structure has a rectangular plan and a single nave, and is covered with vaults and topped with a tiled wooden roof. The lower part of the church walls is constructed with cut stones, while the upper part is made of unprocessed rubble stones. The walls and ceiling feature simple penwork and plaster decorations. The door lintels are adorned with marble reliefs, and the main relief depicts St. George, one of the equestrian saints of Christian iconography.

The church building is one of the historical Orthodox churches that has survived to the present day in Antalya. However, it lost its sacred function when the Orthodox community left

Antalya during the population exchange. In Kaleiçi, Aya Ioannis Theologos Church (Yivli Minaret Mosque), Aya İrini Church (Kesik Minare, now Cumanın Mosque), and Panaya Church (Sultan Alaaddin Mosque) were all converted into mosques.

The Aya Yorgi Church building was initially used as a military depot and later as a privately owned storage facility for cotton and wheat. The church had a large icon of St. George, but the iconostasis, some wooden elements, and the stairs leading to the pulpit all disappeared in subsequent uses. It is known that two St. George icons from the 19th century, now in the Demre Museum, did not come from St. George Church in Kaleiçi.



The building was acquired by Suna and İnan Kır    in 1991, and then underwent restoration between 1993 and 1995 with a project prepared by architect Sinan Genim. To restore it according to its original plan, the added reinforced concrete structure in the western courtyard was removed. Since the original staircase leading to the gallery in this courtyard was unknown, a modern staircase was added during the restoration. The penwork decorations were renewed. The building was opened as an exhibition hall for cultural activities in 1996.





Under the umbrella of the Ottoman Empire, when many ethnic groups coexisted, the nations were defined according to the Millet system. The Karamanlis were an ancient community with Turkish as their native language but having Orthodox faith and considered members of the Orthodox Greek millet. They lived in Central Anatolia in the provinces of Konya, Niğde, Nevşehir, Kayseri, Yozgat, Kırşehir, Isparta, and Uşak, as well as in the Mediterranean region around Antalya, Mersin, and Adana. The Karamanlis were also uprooted from their homeland as part of the population exchange and had a church belonging to them. According to the observations made by Karl Graf von Lanckroński in 1811, Antalya had 10 mosques, 8 Greek Orthodox churches, 1 Armenian church, 1414 shops, 13 guesthouses, and 13 Turkish baths. During his visit to Antalya in the early 19th century, Francis Beaufort wrote the following about the Antalya Greeks who belonged to the Christian faith: "Some of their prayers have been translated into Turkish, but the main part of their rituals is repeated in Greek by the priests. However, most of these priests are as unaware as their congregations about the meaning."

From the inscription on the eastern door of St. George Church, written in Karamanli Turkish using the Greek alphabet, it is understood that the existing structure underwent repairs in 1863. The church was renovated after the Antalya earthquake of 1858 or the Rhodes earthquake of 1859. The entrance portals on the eastern and western walls of the church are adorned with reliefs and inscriptions depicting St. George. There is a long inscription on the main eastern entrance door and a short one on the western door.



The text on the eastern door is as follows:

**ΚΥΡ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΙΟΣ ΑΡΧΙΕΡΕΑΣ. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΣ. ΤΟΥΣΤΖΟΓΛΟΥ ΒΕ. ΟΥΣΤΑΣΗ. ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΚΙΟΣΟΓΛΟΥ. ΒΕ Π.Π. ΚΛΗΜΗΣ. ΧΑ. ΣΤΡΑΤΙ. ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΟΣ ΒΑΚΙΤΛΑΡΗΝΤΑ.**

Κύρ Καισάριος Αρχιερέας, οικονόμος Τουστζόγλου βε ουστασή Νικόλαος Κιοσόγλου βε π(ρωτο)π(ρεσβύτερος) Κλήμης Χα(τζη) Στρατί(ς), επίτροπος βακιτλαρηντα

The transliteration of the text into Turkish simultaneously presents a hierarchical list of individuals associated with the religious and secular affairs of this church structure, honoring them in some way.

*Respected Archpriest Kaisarios, oikonomos Tuzcuoğlu, his master Nikolaos Köseoğlu, and protos presbyteros (head presbyter) Klemes, during the time of the trustee Hacı Stratis.*

Below this inscription are sentences engraved on a rectangular marble plaque.

**ΠΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΑΣΙ ΜΙΝΕΛΚΑΤΙΜ ΒΑΡΙΤΙ ΧΑΡΑΠ ΟΛΟΤΖΕΓΙΝΤΕΝ  
ΑΤΤΑΛΕΙΑΤΑ ΠΟΥΛΟΥΝΑΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΛΙΓΙΝ ΙΓΙΑΝΕΣΙΛΕΝ ΓΙΑΠΗΛΜΙΣΤΙΣ.**

Που Άγιος Γεώργιος Εκκλησασι μινελκατιμ βαριτι χαραπ Ολοτζεγιντεν  
Άττάλεια'τα πουλουναν Χριστιανλιγιν ιγιανεσιλεν γιαπηλμιστις.

*This St. George Church existed since old times. It was built with the grace of Christianity  
in Attaleia, fearing its ruin.*





The inscription concludes on either side of St. George, slaying the dragon, just above the door

Ο ΜΕΓΑΛΟΜΑΡΤΥΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ

1863 ΙΑΝΟΥΑΡΙΟΥ 1.

Ὁ μεγαλομάρτυ(ρο)ς Ἅγιος Γεώργιος

1863 Ἰανουαρίου 1.

*Saint George, the chief martyr*

*January 1, 1863.*



The inscription is repeated on the western gate of the church as well;

1863

Ο ΜΕΓΑΛΟΜΑΡΤΥΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ.  
ΙΑΝ. 1.

1863

Ὁ μεγαλομάρτυ(ρο)ς Ἅγιος Γεώργιος  
Ἰαν(ουάριος) 1.

1863.

*Saint George, the chief martyr*  
*January 1.*



The scenes above the doors of the Church depict Saint George on horseback, slaying a dragon with his flying cloak and spear in hand. The relief on the Eastern gate differs in detail from the relief on the Western gate; A child holding a pitcher sits behind St. George on the horse. This symbolizes one of St. George's miracles - the rescue of a young servant who was captured by infidels. In threatened Christian communities, the miraculous rescue of the child by St. George as their celestial defender became a popular theme. The miracle has three different versions, with the oldest depictions dating back to the 11th-12th centuries. This depiction did not spread to Western European art but remained limited to art of the Eastern Church.



**LEFT:** Detail from the relief without the bas-relief. A young person with a pitcher in their hand and a service towel around their neck.

**RIGHT:** Detail from the icon of St. George from Lebanon (Sidon), dating from the second half of the 19th century.



It is possible to discuss a pair of miracles brought together in an eclectic approach. As seen from examples in Anatolia and the Balkans starting from the 14th century, the theme of a child accompanying the saint has been combined with the legend of battling a dragon.



These marble reliefs were seemingly once entirely painted. The reliefs on the western gate were most likely painted as well. A fragment of blue pigment representing the sky can still be observed around the relief of an angel (ἄγγελος) above the eastern door. There may be a tile-colored paint residue on the dragon as well.





These angels with a pair of wings on their backs are found above the eastern and western doors. They are generally referred to as cherubim (χερουβείμ / cheroubeim). However, here they are depicted differently, with one hand holding a trumpet (σάλπιγξ / salpinx) and the other hand holding a sword. While not belonging to any specific class, these angels may be depicted to convey a message or the impending judgment (Αποκάλυψη / Apokalipsi). The presence of the sword indicates that they belong to God's angelic host. The sun motif on the western door, along with the floral decorations resembling the Tree of Life on either side, may symbolize light and represent the celestial realm. The celestial beings depicted among the plants, with only their faces and six wings, are known as seraphim (σεραφεΐμ / serapheim). The number of wings is associated with their speed and their role as messengers. The triangular section beneath the cross likely represents Golgotha, the hill where Jesus was crucified. This symbolizes the sufferings of Jesus and the challenges of the Christian faith.



Indeed, during the time when the church had its congregation, there was a strong belief in St. George among the Orthodox Christians in Antalya. According to G. P. Pechlivanidis' book (ΑΤΤΑΛΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΑΤΤΑΛΕΙΩΤΕΣ, ΑΘΗΝΑ, 1989), he mentions that during religious holidays, families would spend the entire night in the church, worshipping and sleeping there. Also, when children had sores or blisters on their mouths and lips, they would bite the iron rings on the church door in hope of finding a cure. In the region, the Turks did not find the Greek festivals strange, and the Greeks did not find the Turkish rituals odd. They respected each other's beliefs. Pechlivanidis also mentions that some members of the Muslim community believed in the legends of the Christian community and tied pieces of cloth to sacred sites, hoping for their wishes to come true.



East entrance. Offerings tied to the window grilles. Year 1961 (Pechlivanidis 1989, 42).

The structure, in its current state after restoration, serves as an exhibition space following a modern approach. This includes the women's gallery on the upper floor, which showcases exhibitions and houses cultural artifacts from the Kaleiçi Museum Collection.

Church intermediate floor plan.

