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“Mixed” Shrines in the Late Byzantine Period

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In this paper, I would like to present some thoughts about the meaning and use of cult-places which happened to be deemed holy and worshipped by different religious or confessional groups in the Middle Ages. I am aware that this is a well-known phenomenon especially in the Holy Land, where it can be considered to be the final outcome not only of a centuries-old multicultural coexistence in that area but also of a sacred topography being shared (at least in some particular instances) by all of the three Abrahamic religions: obvious examples are Mount Sinai, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Ascension Chapel on the Mount of Olives, the Tombs of the Patriarchs at Hebron. To the history and impact of such holy places on Christian culture Leonid A. Beliaev has dedicated much of his ground-breaking research activity¹, but I will not honour him by following him on this path: I much more want to pay a tribute to his very individual method, that of a Christian archaeologist who never renounced to the pleasure of erudite research in the fields of Medieval and Byzantine history, art, and iconography, with a special emphasis on cultural exchange and convergences².

Whereas the celebrated *loca sancta* of Palestine owe their power to their role

¹ L.A. Beliaev, *Russian Pilgrim Art from the 12th to the 15th Century — Archaeological Elements and Problems of Romanesque Influence*, in «Journal of the British Archaeological Association» 151 (1998), pp. 203–219; idem, *Гроб Господень и реликвии Святой Земли*, in A.M. Lidov (ed.), *Христианские реликвии в Московском Кремле*, Moscow 2000, pp. 94–102; idem, *Пространство как реликвия: о назначении и символике каменных иконок гроба Господня*, in A.M. Lidov (ed.), *Восточнохристианские реликвии*, Moscow 2003, pp. 482–512.

² Among the publications which had a strong impact on my research, I would like to make reference to his *Русское средневековое надгробие*, Moscow 1996, which is of outstanding interest for anybody interested in the history of burial practices and the artistic phenomena they engendered, and *Христианские древности*, Moscow 1998, an invaluable guide to the historiography of Christian archaeology in its wider scholarly connections. As for his interest in cultural exchange, much important is the article published with Alexei Chernetsov, *The Eastern Contribution to Medieval Russian Culture*, in «Muqarnas» 16 (1999), pp. 97–124.

as mementoes of the most important events recorded in the holy books of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam³, other less famous shrines happen to be shared by different confessional and religious groups even if they have no connection to the charisma of the Holy Land. Probably the better known case is that of Our Lady of Saydnaya, not far from Damascus, a Melkite monastery which, in the Crusader and Mamluk periods, was continuously crowded with Christian, Muslim, and even Jewish visitors who sought the miraculous favour of the so-called 'Incarnated' icon of the Virgin and Child. Although located on the borders of the Holy Land, this shrine managed to prove appealing to pilgrims not because of the sacredness of the place itself, but as a consequence of public worship devoted to a powerful and charismatic cult-image⁴. It is meaningful that it is only outside Palestine that we find icons playing a role of protagonist in the shaping of a shrine's aura of sacredness: although we occasionally find references to worshipped images in the Holy Sepulchre or in the Basilica at Bethlehem, they never happened to function as the main foci of devotional life within the sacred spaces housing them⁵.

My focus here will be on some much humbler cult-places located in the culturally mixed societies of the Levant during the late Middle Ages. The first one I would like to discuss is a small masjid on the seacoast to the east of Kerynia, which is said to have been built after the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in 1570/71 on the exact spot where an official of the general Muawiyah, named Umar, and six of his soldiers had died in 648/9, during the first Arab raid against the island (Pl. XXVIII, I). This shrine is known in Turkish as the Hazreti Ömer türbesi, and is not different from many other like cult-places intended as tombs of venerable ghazis. Nonetheless, as soon as the beginnings of the 20th century, the same building was also known under the Greek name of Ἅγιοι Φανέντες, since the local Hellenophone population was used to visit and use it as a goal for pilgrimage⁶.

As is well known, such syncretistic phenomena were not uncommon in the Ottoman period, on Cyprus as well as in other areas of the Turkish empire, and proved to look odd only to Western eyes: well before F.W. Hasluck's famous book

³ See the classical remarks by M. Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre Sainte*, Paris 1941.

⁴ M. Bacci, *A Sacred Space for a Holy Icon: The Shrine of Our Lady of Saydnaya*, in A.M. Lidov (ed.), *Иеротопия. Создание сакральных пространств в Византии и Древней Руси*, Moscow 2006, pp. 373–387 (with previous bibliography).

⁵ The Holy Sepulchre was said to house the icon of the Virgin mentioned in the Life of Saint Mary of Egypt, whereas replicas of the Constantinopolitan Hodegetria were worshipped in the Monastery of the Virgin of Kalamon near the river Jordan and in the Basilica of Bethlehem: cf. M. Bacci, *The Legacy of the Hodegetria: Holy Icons and Legends between East and West*, in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2005, pp. 321–336, esp. 323–324.

⁶ R. Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus. A Guide to Its Towns & Villages, Monasteries & Castles*, London 1936, p. 198.

on *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*⁷, some travellers to the Levant had noticed that Greeks and Turks had much to share in the field of religious behaviour. For example, the Swiss pilgrim Peter Villinger, while visiting Candia in 1565, learnt how strict had been the punishment by the Orthodox clergy of two Lutheran immigrants, who had been obliged to keep an image of the Virgin and Child within their bedrooms; the Orthodox were so horrified by the Protestants that, as he was told by some Greek priests, they actually preferred the Turks to them, «since the Turks allow all kinds of Christians to live under them according to their own faith, and don't prevent them from either fasting and praying or worshipping saints and images. On the contrary, they themselves worship, by fasting and praying, our own saints, as is especially seen in Asia for Saint George and Saint John the Evangelist; while the Saracens of Egypt venerate Saint Anthony»⁸.

Such words reveal a positive attitude towards Islam and the religious politics of the Ottoman Empire which was rather widespread already in the last centuries of Byzantium. As Michel Balivet and Alain Ducellier have recently pointed out, this had been the final outcome of a centuries-old process of islamization of the former Byzantine areas which has been described as «a religious melting-pot and cultural *métissage*»⁹. Such a process had been enhanced by the role played in such mixed societies as that of the ancient Sultanate of Rum by charismatic figures of dervishes (like Mevlana, Hadji Bektash, Bedreddin) who had propagated deliberately syncretistic ideas and had been able to fascinate both Muslim and Christian believers. As is known that dervishes used to visit churches and other Christian cult-places, in the same way we are told by ancient sources that many Anatolian Christians attended the dervishes' ceremonies and venerated their tombs in a more or less disguised form¹⁰.

In Konya (ancient Iconium), for example, the monastery of Saint Platon

⁷ F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, Oxford 1929.

⁸ Peter Villinger, *Die Pilgerfahrt zu dem Heiligen Grab vnserrrs Herren vnnd Heylannds vnnd Sälligmachers Jesu Christi, beschechenn jm jar da man zalt 1565, sampt dem Schjffbruch, Gefangenschafft vnnd Erledigung vonn demm Türckhenn, ertlichenn beschrjebenn durch Petter Villinnger, gebürtig von Rot, Lucerner Gebiets, Pfarherrenn zuo Art jm Lanndt Schwjtz, der dise Reiss selbs verricht vnd die Gfangenschafft erlitten*, ed. J. Schmid, *Luzerner und innerschweizer Pilgerreisen zum Heiligen Grab in Jerusalem vom 15. bis 17. Jahrhundert*, Luzern 1957 ('Quellen und Forschungen zur Kulturgeschichte von Luzern und der Innerschweiz' 2), pp. 257–325, esp. 321.

⁹ M. Balivet, *Romanie byzantine et Pays de Rûm turc. Histoire d'un espace d'imbrication gréco-turque*, Istanbul 1994; Idem, *Islam mystique et révolution armée dans les Balkans ottomans. Vie du Cheikh Bedreddîn, le "Hallâj des Turcs" (1358/59–1416)*, Istanbul 1995; A. Ducellier, *Chrétiens d'Orient et Islam au Moyen Age. VIIe-XVe siècle*, Paris 1996.

¹⁰ On the phenomenon see my remarks in M. Bacci, *Artisti eretici ed eterodossi a Bisanzio*, in M. Bacci (ed.), *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale*, Pisa 2007, pp. 177–209, esp. 201–209. Cf. also S. Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh Through the Fifteenth Century*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1971, pp.

(Eflatun), known to have been located next to the Great Mosque, was a goal for pilgrimage for both Greeks and Turks, and for this reason it had frequently been visited by Mevlana himself¹¹. Because of their unconventional life and valuable deeds, both Christian monks and Islamic dervishes were often attributed a special prestige and a charismatic power. A fifteenth century painting on paper, perhaps made in Central Asia by a Timurid artist after a Seljuk or Arab archetype, displays a picturesque view of a Christian monastery, illustrating how such holy places were perceived or imagined by Muslim beholders. The interior's most distinctive feature is the presence of murals lit by hanging lamps, and looking as if they were displaying a complete christological cycle. The scenes seem to evoke Christian iconography by freely combining schemes and formulas: for example, one is naturally led to believe that the first scene represents an Annunciation, but a closer inspection reveals that the role of the angel is performed by a blackbearded figure probably taken after the image of Christ. The holy space is inhabited by long-bearded monks wearing black or brown dresses covering their heads; most oddly, it also houses women, probably thought to be pilgrims or believers asking for protection and spiritual favors. Close to the group of seated monks in the ground floor is a black-skinned and half-naked figure who seems to be engaged in a conversation with them; since his attire and outward appearance strongly resemble such representations of itinerant dervishes as those used in the manuscript illustrations attributed to the 15th century Central Asian painter Muhammad Siyah Qalam, this image may witness that Muslim holy men were thought to be at home within Christian monasteries¹².

Besides the prestige of living holy people, Christians and Muslims in Turkish-ruled lands often shared cult-phenomena and spaces connected with the dead¹³. Such is the case of a cave shrine located in Divriği, which was described as a cult-place for both Christians and Muslims by the 'wandering dervish' from Mosul al-Harawî, writing at the beginnings of the 13th century. According to him, the entrance was located on the slopes of a hill, wherein one was supposed to

389–390, and E.S. Wolper, *Cities and Saints. Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia*, University Park 2003, pp. 78–79.

¹¹ As mentioned by his biographer Dêms-ed-Dîn, known as Aflâkî, *Manâqib ul-'ârîfin*, ed. and transl. C. Huart, *Les Saints des Derviches tourneurs*, Paris 1918–1922, vol. I, p. 261; vol. II, pp. 67, 358. Cf. Hasluck, *Christianity*, vol. II, pp. 373–374; Balivet, *Islam mystique*, p. 21.

¹² E. Sims-B.I. Marshak, *Peerless Images. Persian Painting and Its Sources*, New Haven-London 2002, p. 190; D.J. Roxburgh, entry n° 219, in D.J. Roxburgh (ed.), *Turks. A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600*, exhibition catalogue (London, Royal Academy of Arts, 22 January–12 April 2005), London 2005, p. 432.

¹³ Such a phenomenon is referred to at some length by Wolper, *Cities and Saints*, pp. 79–80, with several examples from Sivas and Tokat. See also eadem, *Khidr, Elwan Çelebi, and the Conversion of Sacred Sanctuaries in Anatolia*, in «Muslim World» 90/3–4 (2000), pp. 309–322 (special issue devoted to *Sufi Saints and Shrines in Muslim Society*, ed. by J. Elias).

penetrate through the door of a tower; it was then necessary to proceed on one's hands and knees up to a wide open cave where a mosque and a «nice» church had been built up. From both buildings the Christian and Muslim believers could enter the holy cave where was housed a group of mummified corpses, thought to be either ancient Christian martyrs or fellow-soldiers of the second caliph 'Umar ben al-Hattâb¹⁴. Such a shrine was probably unknown outside Divriði, and it was only by chance that al- Harawî; it was mainly meant as a local holy place, whose charismatic power was connected to human bodies having miraculously escaped from decomposition and decay. The exceptional status of the cult-place was a consequence of an exceptional natural event and was not related to the specific cultural, ethnic or religious patterns intended to shape the identity of any of the groups living in that area.

In most cases, if a cult-place was said to be extraordinarily efficacious in such matters of universal interest as rain-compelling, averting dangers, or propitiating good luck, it was more likely to attract supplicants, pilgrims and devotees of different confessional identity. According to some Arab sources, the earliest Islamic cult-place built in Constantinople was worshipped and frequently visited by the Byzantines when they aimed at obtaining rain in times of drought. This was a masjid or small mosque built by the walls, on the spot where the general Abû Ayyûb al-Ansârî, a Companion of the Prophet, had been buried during the siege of the City in 668–669; it looked as a small building covered with a dome, and was thought to be the most ancient Islamic shrine in the Byzantine capital. Other Muslim cult-places were connected with the great Arab expedition undertaken by Maslama ben 'Abd al-Malik in 715–717: after the official request of Maslama himself, a mosque had been built up within the Praetorium, and two further tombs of fallen fighters for the faith had been erected by the town walls; however, none is said to have attracted the respect of unbelievers as had the tomb of Abû Ayyûb. By the way, Arab authors were convinced that the Byzantines' worship of this holy man was a divine sign foretelling the future Islamic conquest of the City¹⁵.

Christian and Muslim shrines sometimes happened to be directly connected and to share the charisma of the same sacred place. The German pilgrim Wilbrand of Oldenburg, writing in 1211–1212, witnesses that in the Cilician town of Tarsus the cathedral of Saints Peter and Sophia — most probably the ancient Greek metropolis — was the object of a widespread veneration since it housed an image of the Mother of God “painted by the hands of angels”. Accordingly, it was used to burst into tears when the town was going to face a danger; as far as I know, this is one of the first texts bearing witness to that category of ‘weeping icons’ so widespread in later practice. Wilbrand was told that it was the same image which had

¹⁴ J. Sourdel-Thomine (ed.), *Abû'l-Hasan 'Ali b. Abî Bakr al-Harawî, mort à Alep en 611/1215. Guide des lieux de pèlerinage*, Damas 1957, pp. 133–134.

¹⁵ N.M. El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, Cambridge (Mass.) 2004, pp. 63–64.

played a role of protagonist in the legend of the priest Theophilus, the narrative archetype of the story of Faust being often witnessed in Latin collections of Marian miracles since the 11th century. Most meaningfully, the text is explicit enough to attest that the icon functioned as a collective symbol of the multicultural population of Tarsus, being composed of Armenians, Greeks, Latins, Jews, Syrians, Arabs, and Turks. As told by the same source, the Islamic communities there had their own cult-place at an angle outside the door of the church, where one of the Prophet's sisters was supposed to be buried¹⁶.

Such "conglomerations" of cult-spaces and objects were not unusual in the *mélange* society of the Middle Eastern countries. An odd passage in al-Harawî's *Guide to the Holy Places* hints at a venerable tomb of a famous fighter for Islamic faith walled up into the exterior of a Cypriot church; an Arabic inscription read that 'Urwah bin Ṭābit was deceased there during the Ramadan of the 29th year after the Hegire (i.e. may 650): unfortunately, we lack any detail about the actual location of the building¹⁷. Cyprus was also reported to house other important Islamic cult-places, namely the sepulchre of the blessed Umm Haram, who had given birth to the Prophet's servant Anas ibn Malik and had been granted the privilege to be one of the first Muslim martyrs, since she was supposed to have died during Muhawiya's expedition against the island in 647 A.D¹⁸. In our days the tomb of Umm Haram is said to be preserved within the tekke of Hala Sultan on the shore of the Salt Lake near Larnaka, which is first witnessed in 18th century documents (Pl. XXVIII, 2). Previous sources included only generic references to this cult-place, as witnessed by al-Baladhurî's account in his history of the Islamic conquests, dating from the 9th century: the Arab historian writes that Umm Haram was buried on the spot where she had fallen off her mule, without adding any detail about the exact location of the tomb; nonetheless, he suggests that there was an enduring cult-phenomenon around the building, being known by local people as the sepulchre of the «honest woman». In the 14th-century the historian Ibn al-'Attar reaffirms that the Cypriots still worshipped Umm Haram's burial

¹⁶ Wilbrand of Oldenburg, *Itinerarium Terrae Sanctae*, chap. 1, 19, ed. S. De Sandoli, *Itinera Hierosolymitana cruce signatorum (saec. XII-XIII)*, Jerusalem 1979-1984, vol. III, p. 220. Cf. P. Halfter, *Eine Beschreibung Kilikiens aus westlicher Sicht. Das Itinerarium des Wilbrand von Oldenburg*, in «Oriens Christianus» 85 (2001), pp. 176-203, esp. 183-184, who supposes that the cult of the Virgin "painted by angels" was a legacy of the former Byzantine period of Cilician history, since Gregorian Armenians were hostile to cult-images; nonetheless, other miraculous icons, such as that in Korykos and another one in Anazarbo, are mentioned in Medieval sources: cf. M. Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista. Storia delle immagini sacre attribuite a san Luca*, Pisa 1998, pp. 206-207.

¹⁷ Sourdel-Thomine, *Abū'l-Hasan*, p. 126.

¹⁸ The most relevant sources are included in French translation within M.T. Mansouri, *Chypre dans les sources arabes médiévales*, Nicosie 2001, pp. 21 (Ibn Khayyat and al-Baladhuri, 9th c.), and 59 (Ibn al-'Attar, 14th c.); cf. also al-Harawî, ed. Sourdel-Thomine, *Abū'l-Hasan*, p. 126.

place and considered it to be the tomb of an anonymous "holy woman". This may be confirmed by a quick reference included in Constantine Porphyrogenetos's *Περί Θεμάτων*, where mention is made of the tomb of a Muslim lady dead on Cyprus during the first expedition against the island and wrongly identified with one of Caliph Abū Bakr's daughters¹⁹.

Although nobody is allowed to see Umm Haram's tomb in its present location, some old descriptions witness that it is nothing else than a prehistoric monument composed of two vertical and one horizontal stones. Even if the present-day cult-phenomenon probably does not predate the 18th century, when, according to the Italian traveller Giovanni Mariti²⁰, an itinerant dervish unearthed that dolmen and identified it with the burial place of the holy woman, one is struck by the fact that such an archaic holy place happened to be reused and revitalized after so many centuries. However, other like cases are known from Medieval Cyprus and, most meaningfully, they are known to have been shrines of universal appeal.

A case in point is a Cypro-archaic tomb (Pl. XXIX, 3), dating back to the 7th century B.C.²¹, in the area of the ancient town of Salamis-Constantia, which was used as a church in the Lusignan period and was thought to be either the school where Saint Catherine had received her education or the prison where she had been imprisoned by her father Costus, King of Constantia²². In this small cult-place both local believers and foreign pilgrims were accustomed to bring ex votos

¹⁹ The basic study on the shrine is that by Ai. Chr. Aristeidou, *Ο τεκέές της Χαλά Σουλτάν*, Nicosia 1982. See also C.D. Cobham, *The Story of Umm Haram*, Nicosia 1897; H. Luke, *Cyprus. A Portrait and an Appreciation*, London 1957, pp. 133–135; A.C. Gaziođlu, *The Turks in Cyprus. A Province of the Ottoman Empire (1571–1878)*, Nicosia 1990, pp. 278–280.

²⁰ G. Mariti, *Viaggi per l'isola di Cipro e per la Soria e Palestina fatti da Giovanni Mariti fiorentino dall'anno MDCCLX al MDCCLXVIII*, Firenze 1769, vol. I, p. 179.

²¹ V. Karageorghis, *Excavations in the Necropolis of Salamis*, Nicosia 1967–1978, vol. IV, pp. 11–13; J.-C. Courtois, *Η γεωμετρική εποχή (1050–τέλος του Η' αιώνας π. Χ.)*, in Th. Papadopoulos (ed.), *Αρχαία Κύπρος*, Nicosia 1997 ('Ιστορία της Κύπρου. Α' Α'), pp. 287–349, esp. 345; idem, *The Tomb of St Catherine at Salamis*, in «Antiquity» 40 (1966), pp. 45–48.

²² On the tradition, see S. Lusignano, *Chorographia et brevis historia universale dell'isola de Cipro*, Bologna 1573, ff. 12r e 25r, and idem, *Raccolta di cinque discorsi intitolati Corone, per comprender in se cose appartenenti à gran Re, et à Principi*, Padova 1577, *Corona Lusignana IV* (Catalogo di re e imperatori, regine, e imperatrici, con gli figliuoli di quelli, che sono tenuti per santi e beati, sotto a tutte le tre leggi, di natura, di Mosè e del Sacro Evangelio, brevemente raccolti per modo di memoria), f. 46v. Archmandrite Kyprianos, *Ιστορία χρονολογική της νήσου Κύπρου*, Venice 1788, p. 353; L. de Mas Latrie, *Histoire de l'île de Chypre sous le règne des princes de la Maison de Lusignan*, Paris 1851, vol. I, pp. 95–96; A. Sakellarios, *Τα κυπριακά*, Athina 1890, II, p. 175. On its origins and meaning, cf. H. Delehaye, *Les legendes hagiographiques*, Bruxelles 1955, pp. 54–55; D. Mouriki, *The Cult of Cypriot Saints in Medieval Cyprus as Attested by Church Decorations and Icon Painting*, in A.A.M. Bryer-G.S. Georghallides (eds.), *The Sweet Land of Cyprus. Papers Given at the Twenty-Fifth Jubilee Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1991*, Nicosia 1993, pp. 237–277, esp. 257.

and ask for spiritual benefits²³; since the Cypriots claimed that Constantia had been the real birthplace of Catherine, they tried to promote that church as a *must* step along the trip to the Holy Land, and pilgrims were then allowed to pin to their garments a token displaying half a wheel (this would have been substituted by an entire wheel only by those going as far as the Sinai monastery²⁴). The tomb-chapel is said to have been filled with murals chaotically scattered on its walls and displaying many coats-of-arms left there by Western pilgrims²⁵. In the present day, only a small cross sculpted over the door to the inner grave remains as a testimony to the centuries-old use as a Christian cult-place.

Unfortunately no text enables us to understand if the holy place was ruled by the Greek or the Latin clergy, but there are many reasons to think that the local

²³ The tomb of Saint Catherine is increasingly mentioned by Latin pilgrims in the Late Middle Ages: cf. Ludolph di Südheim (1335–1341), ed. F. Deycks, *Ludolphi, rectoris ecclesiae parochialis in Suchem, de itinere Terrae Sanctae liber. Nach alten Handschriften berichtigt herausgegeben*, Stuttgart 1851, p. 33; English anonymous (1344), ed. G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente francescano*, vol. IV, Quaracchi 1923, pp. 427–460, p. 447; Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Libro d'oltramare* (1346), ed. A. Lanza-M. Troncarelli, *Pellegrini scrittori. Viaggiatori toscani del Trecento in Terrasanta*, Firenze 1990, p. 151; Leupoldt the Reader (1377), ed. J. Haupt, *Philippi Liber de terra sancta in der deutschen Übersetzung des Augustiner Lesemeisters Leupoldt, vom Jahre 1377*, in «Österreichische Vierteljahrschrift für katholische Theologie» 10 (1871), pp. 511–540, esp. 539; Niccolò de' Martoni (1394–1395), ed. L. Le Grand, *Relation du pèlerinage à Jérusalem de Nicolas de Martoni, notaire italien (1394–1395)*, in «Revue de l'Orient latin» 3 (1895), pp. 566–669, esp. 632–633; Guillebert de Lannoy (1421–1423), ed. Ph. Potvin, *Oeuvres de Ghillebert de Lannoy, voyageur, diplomate et moraliste*, Louvain 1878, pp. 96–97; Steffan von Gumpenberg (1449–1450), in G. Grivaud, *Excerpta Cypria nova*, Nicosie 1990, p. 63; William Wey (1458), ed. G. Williams, *The Itineraries of William Wey fellow of Eton College to Jerusalem, 1458*, London 1858, p. 78; Anselmo Adorno (1470–1471), ed. J. Heers — G. de Groer, *Itinéraire d'Anselme Adorno en Terre Sainte (1470–1471)*, Paris 1978, p. 354; Ulrich Leman (1472–1473), in Grivaud, *Excerpta Cypria nova*, p. 88; Sebastien Mamerot (c. 1472), *ibidem*, p. 90; anonimo francese (1480), *ibidem*, p. 109; Pierre Barbatre (1480), *ibidem*, p. 100; Felix Fabri (1480), in C.D. Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria*, Cambridge 1908, p. 45; Jan Aerts (1481), in Grivaud, *Excerpta Cypria nova*, p. 111; Paul Walther di Guglingen (1482), *ibidem*, p. 113; Francesco Suriano, *Tractatello de le indulgentie de Terra Sancta* (c. 1485), ed. P. Golubovich, *Francesco Suriano. Il Trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente*, Milano 1900, p. 49; Joos Van Ghistele (1482–1483), in Grivaud, *Excerpta Cypria nova*, pp. 120–121; Georges Lengherand (1486), *ibidem*, p. 129; Konrad Grünenberg (1486), *ibidem*, p. 126; Nicolas Le Huen (1487), in Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria*, p. 51; Dietrich von Schachten (1491), in Grivaud, *Excerpta Cypria nova*, p. 134; Reinhard von Bemmberg (1493), *ibidem*, p. 142.

²⁴ As is first mentioned in 1485 and 1486 by Georges Lengherand (Marquis de Godefroy Ménilglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand, Mayeur de Mons en Haynaut, à Venise, Rome, Jérusalem, Mont Sinai & le Kayre—1485–1486*, Mons 1871, p. 110) and Konrad Grünenberg (ed. Grivaud, *Excerpta Cypria nova*, p. 126).

²⁵ As witnessed in 1523 by the German pilgrim Philipp von Hagen (ed. L. Conrady, *Vier rheinische Palaestina-Pilgerschriften des XIV. XV. und XVI. Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden 1882, pp. 230–289, esp. 278–279).

cult of Saint Catherine was a consequence of the extraordinary success enjoyed by this holy figure in Western Europe during the Late Middle Ages; by the way, some documents witness that Saint Catherine's cult was especially fostered by the Franciscan House of Famagusta²⁶. On the other hand, the Latin Cypriot population is known to have worshipped, honoured and often also appropriated the preexisting holy places of the island: such is the case with the monastery of Stavrovouni, preserving the cross of the Good Thief supposedly left there by the holy Empress Helene; since this most holy shrine was ruled by the Benedictines throughout the Frankish and Venetian period, one is led to think that the cross worshipped in the close-by Lefkara, see of the Greek Bishop of Amathous, might have been intended as a rival cult-phenomenon. From time to time the Latin and Greek clergy quarrelled about the authenticity of holy relics and places: in 1340, for example, a fierce debate arose when the Latins said that the holy cross preserved in the Greek monastery of Tochni was counterfeit²⁷. In general, however, the Frankish settlers in Cyprus, as well as in other areas of the former Byzantine Empire, were deeply fascinated by the holy places held by the Greeks.

The area around Famagusta was dotted with small shrines regularly visited and worshipped by both Greek and Latin Cypriots, as well as by pilgrims and seamen. The 'Madonna della Cava' church outside the walls, which had been handed down to the Sinai Monastery by Pope John XXII in 1328, was a cave shrine much appreciated by seafarers as it was supposed to protect them against the navigation dangers; the Blessed Virgin associated to that shrine was especially invoked by sailors during the crossing of the Gulf of Antalya, which often proved to be terribly dangerous because of storms and pirate-ships, and according to the 14th century pilgrim James of Verona its renown was second only to the Holy Cross of Mount Calvary. As soon as ships anchored in the harbour of Famagusta, the pious devotees went to the cave to hear the liturgy and leave their ex votos, usually candles and wax, but also murals and other works of art²⁸.

Rarely described in modern sources, this holy site may be identified with the

²⁶ Late Medieval pilgrims mention a chapel of Saint Catherine within the church of the Minor Friars, which was said to mark the spot where was originally built the school where the holy martyr had received her education; cf., e.g., an early 15th century Spanish anonymous's *Viaje de Terra Santa*, ed. by J.R. Jones, *Viajeros españoles a Tierra Santa (siglos XVI y XVII)*, Madrid 1998, pp. 109–243, esp. 142.

²⁷ For the relevant sources and all the previous bibliography on the crosses of Stavrovouni, Lefkara, and Tochni, see M. Bacci, *Vera croce, vero ritratto e vera misura: sugli archetipi bizantini dei culti cristologici del Medioevo occidentale*, in J. Durand-B. Flusin (eds.), *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, Paris 2004, pp. 223–238, esp. 229–234.

²⁸ James of Verona, *Liber peregrinationis* [1335], ed. U Monneret de Villard, Rome 1950, p. 17. On the connection with the Sinai Monastery cf. P.W. Edbury, *Famagusta in 1300*, in N. Coureas and J. Riley-Smith (eds.), *Κύπρος και οι σταυροφορίες/Cyprus and the Crusades*, proceedings of a symposium (Nicosia, 6–9 September 1994), Nicosia 1995, pp. 337–353, esp. 344.

underground cave located under the bell-tower of the Greek church entitled to the «Panagia Chrysospilotissa» (and presently used as a mosque under the name of «Ulu Camii»)²⁹. Its shape points to its original function as a grave, probably made in the Hellenistic period and not unlike the tomb located next to the Martinengo Bastion, which was also converted into a church in the Lusignan period³⁰. Access to it is still provided by a flight of thirty-six steps, which open into a small room which works as a kind of narthex or vestibule including a rather wide recess which may have been used as a burial-place for such unlucky pilgrims as the «many soldiers from England» mentioned in a mid-14th century text³¹. A small opening in the wall was probably meant to enable the crowds to give a look directly into the sanctuary, where the liturgy was being performed. The odd arrangement of the sacred space was probably meant to fit the needs of both Greek and Latin believers. Since the shrine was owned by the Sinai Monastery, we are led to imagine that it was regularly officiated by Greek monks; nonetheless, James of Verona witness that Latin priests were allowed to celebrate Mass, as he himself actually did: it seems rather unlikely, however, that they all celebrated at the same altar.

Some clues as to understand how this shared space worked are provided by the present setting of the chapel, which does not seem to have been considerably altered in the post-Medieval period. The room reserved to the laypeople is that covered with a large dome (Pl. XXIX, 4), which also served as a marker of the holy site from the outside, whereas the space of the clergy is located in the inner and lower room to the east, whose walls have been hollowed out in order to give shape to a series of liturgical structures, including both a small apse and altar (bearing remains of murals) flanked by two smaller niches and a taller niche-chapel with altar, thin brackets on the impost, and a keel-moulded arch (Pl. XXX, 5). Since the latter is provided with decorations which are known from other extant structures within the Latin churches of Famagusta³², we can infer that it was used for the Roman Catholic rite, whereas the other recesses can be interpreted as composing a miniaturized Orthodox bema with diminutive prothesis and diakonikon.

²⁹ This building is scarcely mentioned in scholarly literature: cf. G. Jeffery, *A Description of the Historic Monuments of Cyprus. Studies in the Archaeology and Architecture of the Island*, Nicosia 1918, p. 225; Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus*, pp. 454–455; A. Pavlidis, *Αμμόχωστος, δ. Μνημεία και αξιοθέατα*, in *Μεγάλη Κυπριακή Εγκυκλοπαίδεια*, Nicosia 1985–1996, vol. II, pp. 104–106, esp. 105.

³⁰ See Th. Mogabgab, *An Unidentified Church in Famagusta*, in *Report of the Department of Antiquities Cyprus*, (1936), p. 96; Th. Mogabgab, *Excavations and Researches in Famagusta, 1937–1939*, in *Report of the Department of Antiquities Cyprus*, (1937–1939), pp. 181–190, esp. 186.

³¹ *Itinerarium cuiusdam Anglici* [1344], ed. Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica*, p. 447.

³² Cf. the niche-chapels in Sts. Peter and Paul's (Sinan Pasha Mosque): Ph. Plagnieux and Th. Soulard, *Famagouste. L'église Saint-Pierre Saint-Paul*, in J.-B. de Vaire and Ph. Plagnieux (eds.), *L'art gothique en Chypre*, Paris 2006, pp. 271–285, esp. 281.

A high reputation was also attached to many other cave churches, like that of Agia Napa near Cape Greco, at the south-eastern edge of the island; at least in the 16th century it was mentioned as one of most venerated sites on Cyprus³³. Within the walls of a monastery built in Venetian Renaissance style in the second half of the 15th century³⁴ lays a church marking off the site where, according to tradition, a holy icon of the Virgin Mary had been found by a man who was digging in the ground in order to mark out the foundations of his house (Pl. XXX, 6)³⁵. According to a widespread topos of religious folklore, the holy place seems to have also been connected to a spring pouring curative water, now canalized within a fountain including a Roman wild boar's head (Pl. XXXI, 7). The original part of the church is the lower cave (Pl. XXXI, 8), where a bema has been delimited by means of a stone iconostasis including a green marble column from some ruined ancient building; according to the mid-16th century description of the Czech pilgrim Oldrich Prefat, this space was owned by the Greek Orthodox and housed the miraculous icon of the Virgin and Child, covered with a golden and silver revetment and located within a niche lit by a lamp³⁶.

On the upper level to the west of the bema was built, sometimes in the 14th century, a barrel-vaulted chapel intended for the Latin rite, which was officiated by Augustinian Friars in the 16th century (Pl. XXXII, 9). As the Czech pilgrim remarked, the church was completely filled with ex votos in the same way as in Italian shrines, i.e. with ostrich's eggs, wooden models of boats, and small painted panels. Of all such decorations is preserved only a late 14th century votive mural displaying Westernizing devices on the Eastern wall (Pl. XXXII, 10): in this fragmentary image, delimited by a Gothic border filled with floral ornaments, are still to be recognized Saint Barbara, Saint Lucy, and another crowned female saint, possibly Catherine; even if they are labelled with Greek inscriptions, the figures do exhibit the attributes enabling Latin beholders to identify them, and there is no doubt that St Lucy's cult had been introduced into the Levant by the Crusaders³⁷.

³³ As witnessed by Étienne de Lusignan [Stefano Lusignano], *Description de toute l'isle de Cypre*, Paris 1580, f. 64r.

³⁴ C. Enlart, *Gothic Art and the Renaissance in Cyprus*, ed. by D. Hunt, London 1987, pp. 317–318, 477–481; Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus*, pp. 189–192; D.D. Triantaphyllopoulos, *Βενετία και Κύπρος: σχέσεις τους στην τέχνη*, in Chr.A. Maltezos (ed.), *Κύπρος-Βενετία. Κοινές ιστορικές τύχες*, proceedings of the symposium (Athens, 1–3 March 2001), Venice 2002, pp. 315–336, esp. 322.

³⁵ For the legendary traditions of Agia Napa, see P. Papageorgiou, *The History of Ayia Napa*, Ayia Napa 2001; G. der Parthog, *Byzantine and Medieval Cyprus*, Nicosia 1995, pp. 239–240. On the area of Agia Napa, which is dotted with caves, grottos, and ancient tombs, cf. S. Hadjisavvas, *Agia Napa. Excavations at Makronisos and the Archaeology of the Region*, Nicosia 1997.

³⁶ Oldrich Prefat's description, dating back to 1546, is included in Greek translation within A. Pavlidis (ed.), *Η Κύπρος ανά τους αιώνες μέσα από τα κείμενα ξένων επισκεπτών της*, Nicosia 1993, vol. I, p. 302.

³⁷ An interesting parallel is the mural painting with St Lucy in the Panagia tou Kastrou in

One wonders what was the exact function of this chapel in relation to the sacred space as a whole. Was it supposed to be a separate space where the Latins were allowed to make their devotions without mingling with the Greeks? Should we think that they were not permitted to light candles and offer wax ex-votos within the most sacred part of the shrine? I don't think that this can make sense within the mixed society of Lusignan Cyprus, and, more generally, of Eastern Mediterranean countries. Major cult phenomena were usually shared by both Greeks and Latins, and we could easily add many supplementary examples. We could also mention other Latin chapels adjoining Orthodox shrines, like those in Saint Erakleidos's monastery in Kalopanagiotis or the Panagia Angeloktistos in Kiti³⁸. But, as far as I know, none of them is arranged in the exact way as in Ayia Napa, where a window opens directly onto the bema (Pl. XXXII, 9). Through this window, at least when it was not covered with veils, Latin believers enjoyed a privileged view of the liturgical rite, and obtained to be even physically closer to the most sacred part of the sacred space. Archaeological excavations will perhaps reveal that such desire for proximity to the holy was shared by both the living and the dead.

In sum, we have seen that, at least in some special cases, there existed some holy places which proved to be appealing to men and women of different creeds living next to each other in the same territory. This could be due either to the respect universally paid to distinguished and famous holy figures within their burial places, or to the charisma attributed to those fragments of the natural environment which were credited to be invested with exceptional curative and thaumaturgic powers. In any case, the wide success of such mixed holy places was a consequence of their power to meet universal and primary requirements, since the spiritual and even more the material benefits that believers expected to obtain in such shrines seemed to them so valuable and indispensable that they had no scruples about worshipping them, regardless of the fact that they belonged to other religious and cultural traditions. Let me end this paper with a final example from 14th century Constantinople: even if three-dimensional sculpture was usually condemned by the Orthodox tradition, the population of Constantinople didn't object to visit a Latin church in the Venetian quarter near the Basilike Market which preserved a wooden crucifix sculpted in the round; as we are informed by an anonymous Russian pilgrim³⁹, it was highly appreciated by believers suffering from teeth-ache, who recovered from their illness as soon as they touched its protruding nails.

Rhodes: cf. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Η εκκλησία της Παναγίας του Κάστρου της Ρόδου*, in «Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον», 23 (1968), Μελέτες, pp. 221–283, esp. 267–268; I. Kollias, *Η μεσαιωνική πόλη της Ρόδου και το Παλάτι του Μεγάλου Μαγίστρου*, Athens 1994, p. 117.

³⁸ Jeffery, *A Description*, p. 186; A.W. Carr, *Byzantines and Italians on Cyprus: Images from Art*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995), 339–57, in part. 345–46 nota 41.

³⁹ See the 14th century Russian anonymous' *Description of Constantinople*, ed. G.P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Washington, D.C., 1984, p. 151, and the commentary on pp. 355–356.

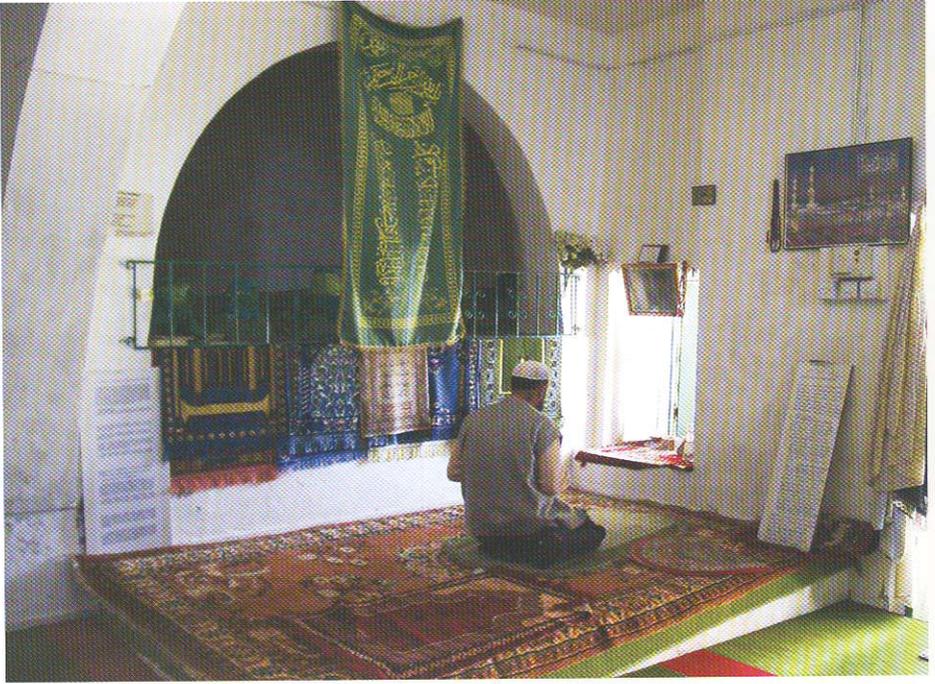


Fig. 1. The *türbe* of Hazreti Ömer, near Keryneia, 16th century



Fig. 2. The *tekke* of Hala Sultan, near Larnaka, 18th century

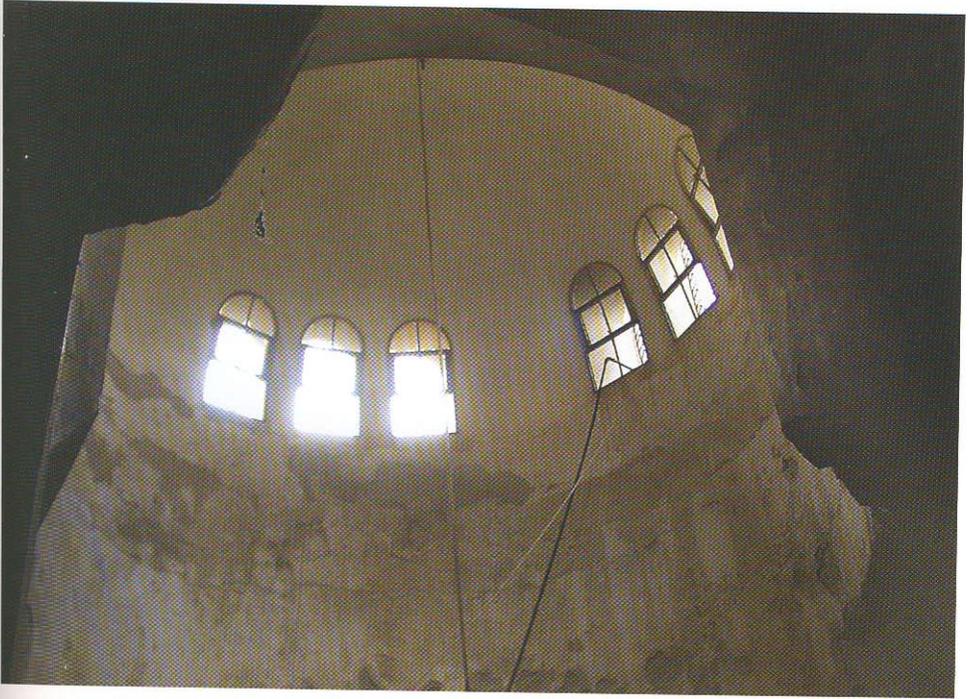


Fig. 4. Famagusta, Panagia Chrysospiliotissa, view of the dome, 14th century

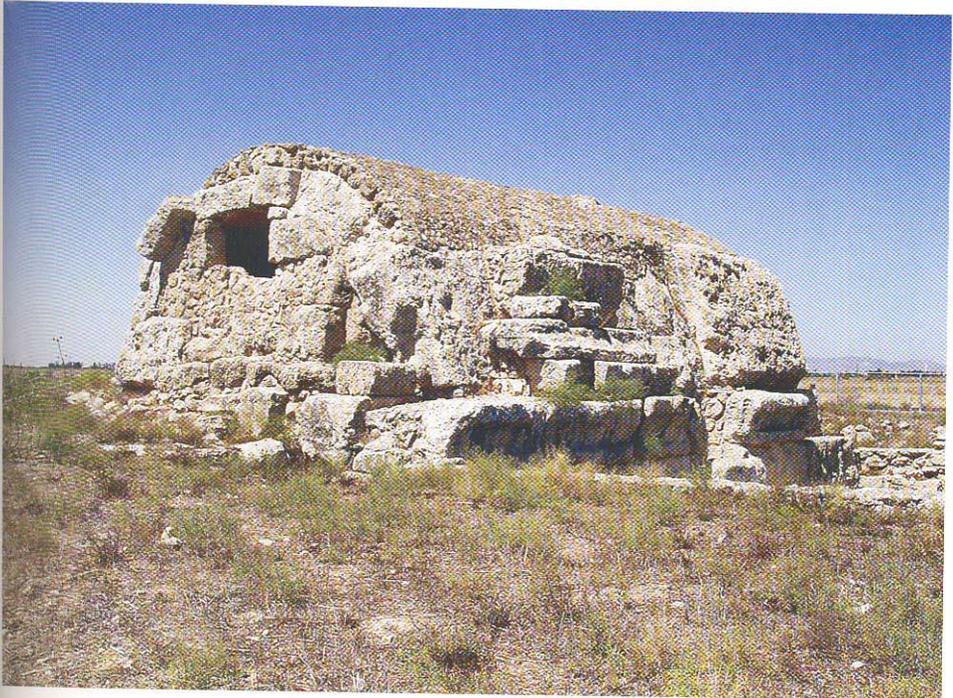


Fig. 3. The 'Prison of Saint Catherine', Cypro-archaic tomb, 7th century B.C., Salamis

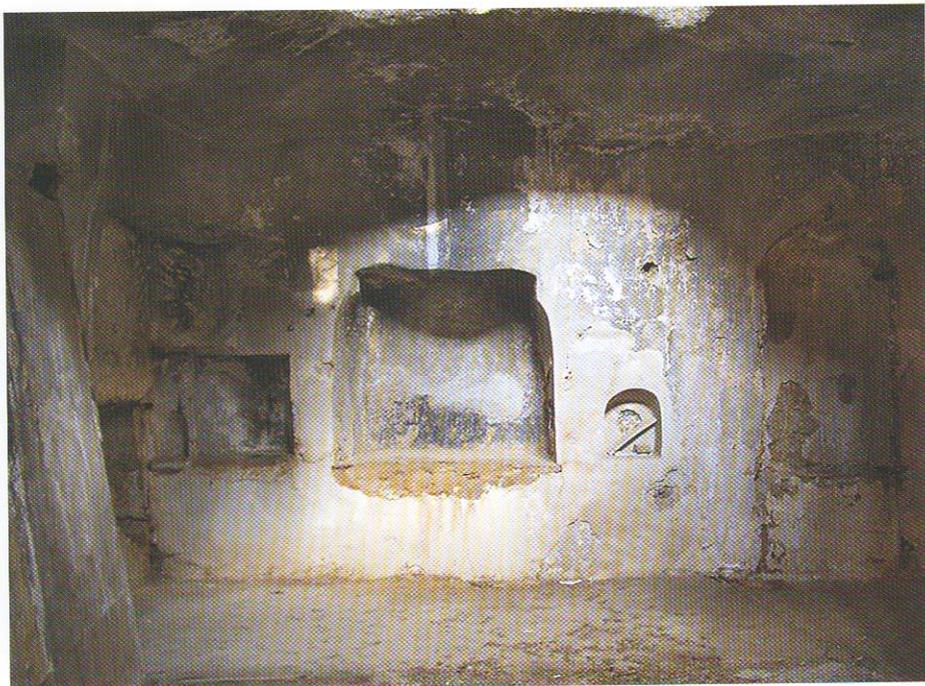


Fig. 5. Famagusta, Panagia Chrysospilotissa, view of the Eastern wall with the liturgical recesses, 14th century

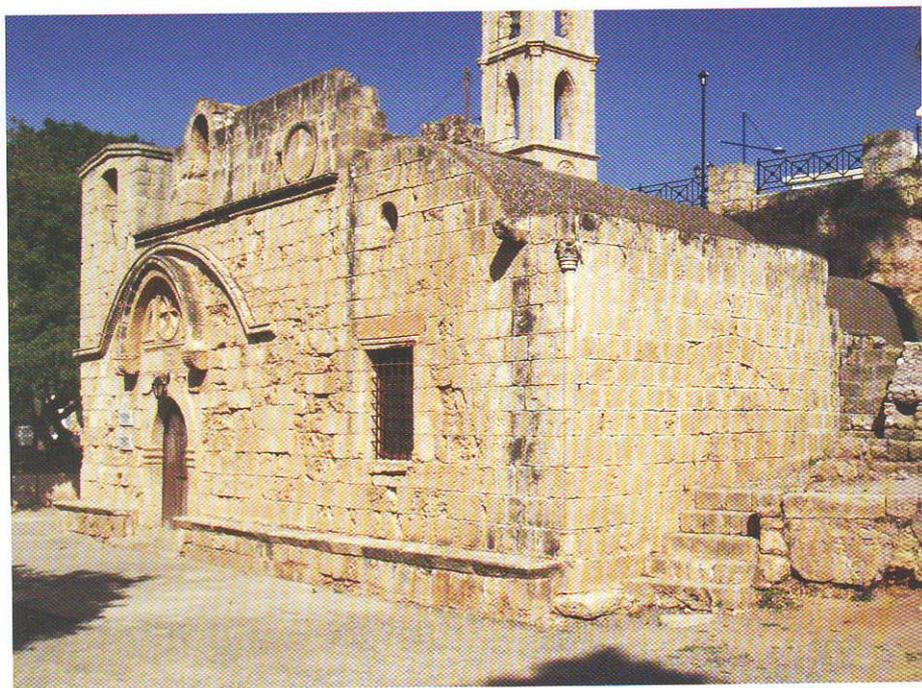


Fig. 6. Agia Napa, Monastery, Church of the Virgin Mary, 14th and late 15th centuries, view from the exterior

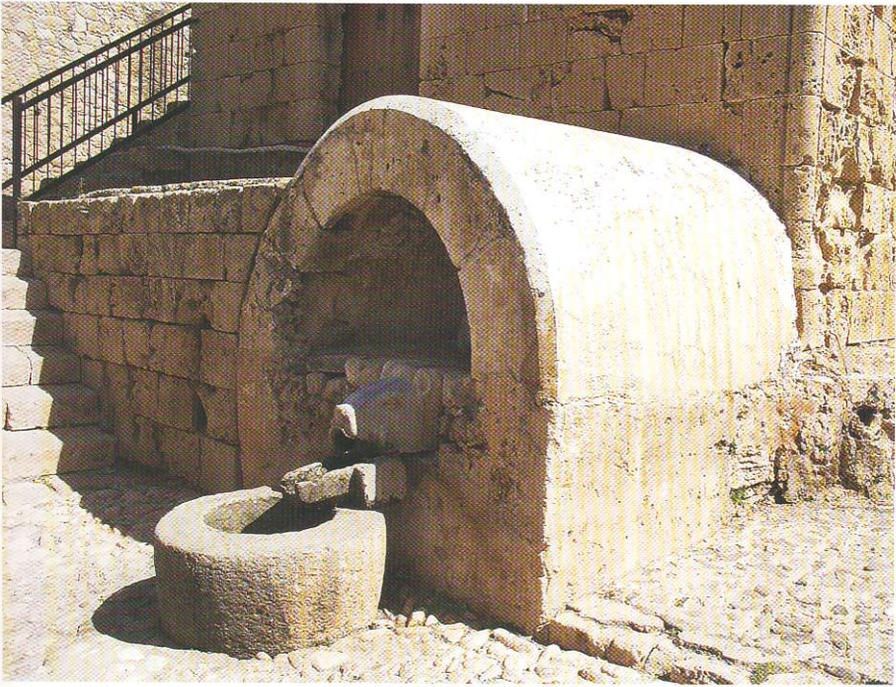


Fig. 7. Agia Napa, Monastery, fountain including a Roman wild boar's head

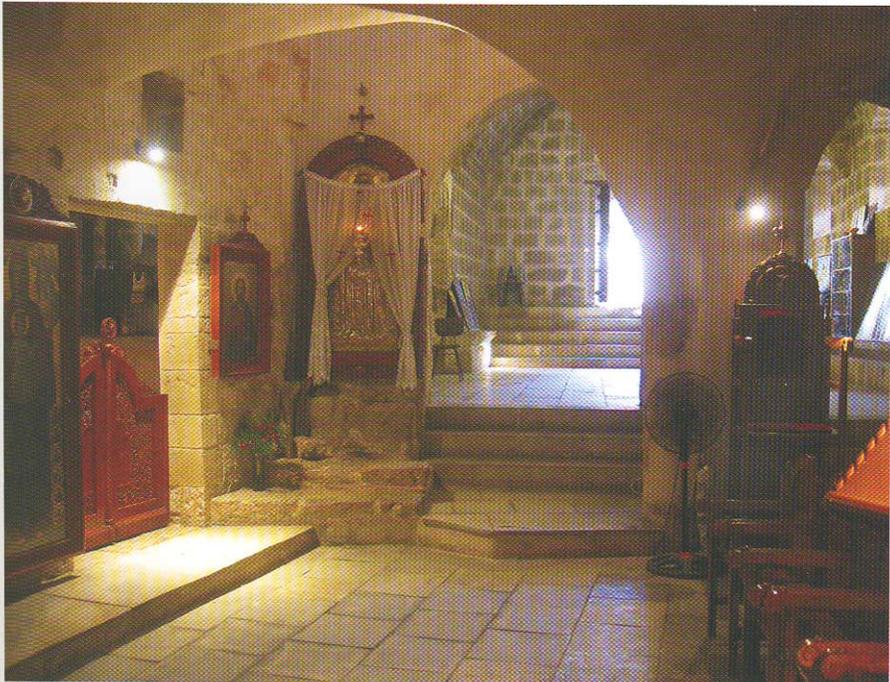


Fig. 8. Agia Napa, Monastery, Church of the Virgin Mary, deeper level with the iconostasis

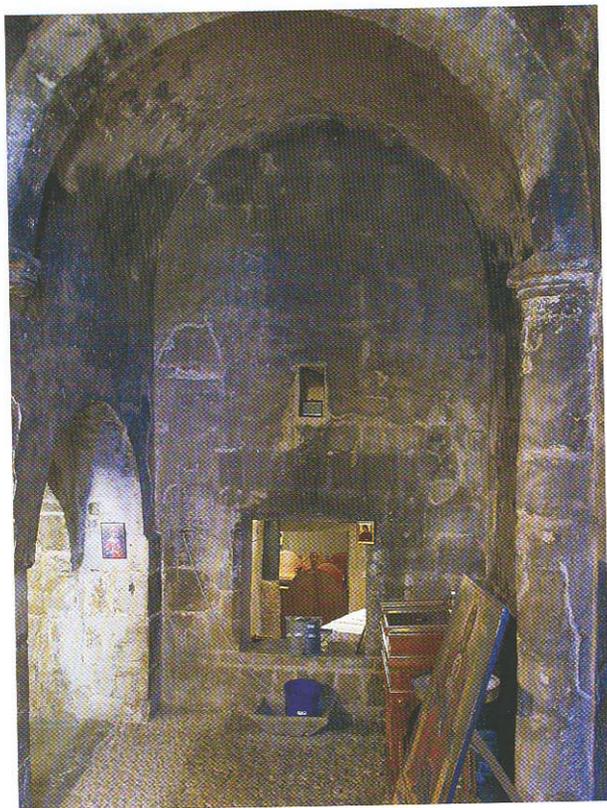


Fig. 9. Agia Napa, Monastery, Church of the Virgin Mary, the Latin chapel, 14th century

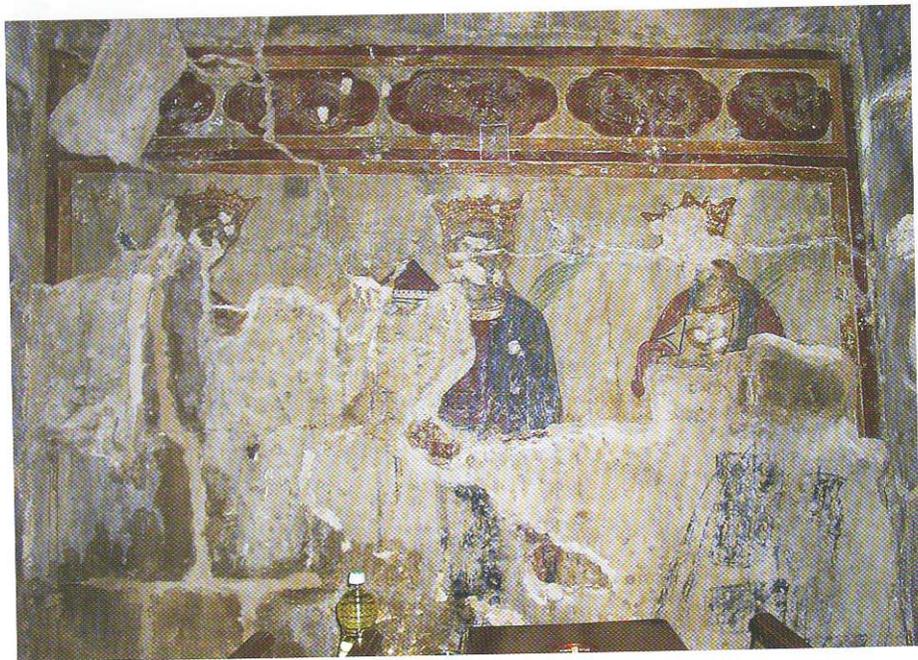


Fig. 10. Agia Napa, Monastery, Church of the Virgin Mary: *Sts Catherine (?), Barbara, and Lucy*, mural painting, late 14th century