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THE ARMENIAN CHURCH IN FAMAGUSTA AND ITS MURAL DECORATION: SOME ICONOGRAPHIC REMARKS

Within the walls of the old town of Famagusta, close to the Martinengo Bastion, lays a small ruined church (Fig. 1), whose architectural features and mural decoration still provide an important testimony to the conception of 14th century Armenian sacred spaces and may indirectly shed light on how their Cilician parallels looked like. Although known to scholars since 1899, when Camille Enlart first recognized it as pertaining to the Armenians,¹ it has been neglected for several decades, as a consequence of the troubled political situation on the island and especially of the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus in 1974, which caused it to be included within the boundary of

a military camp. Until four years ago, the north-west sector of the town, where the church is located, was inaccessible to visitors; still in 2004 the building was usually kept locked and presumably used as a storehouse for weapons or other materials, and it was not before 2005 that I managed, at last, to enter and take pictures of it.

At first sight the interior looks rather disappointing. Most of the old murals decorating the inferior portions of the walls have been whitewashed, and one can only hope that there be a chance, in the future, to remove the plaster that conceals them. On the upper portions of the north, east, and south walls some poor remnants of the original 14th century decoration is still extant, though in a very bad state of preservation. Nonetheless, the uniqueness of the building, and the mere fact that it still bears witness to the use of decorating Armenian churches with a well defined and comprehensive program of murals, deserve an accurate description and a tentative reconstruction of the original cycle.

Although the presence of Armenian groups on Cyprus dates back to at least the 6th century, their settling in the trade center of Famagusta was a direct outcome of the strong political, dynastic and economic connections of the island with the Kingdom of Cilicia in the late 13th and 14th centuries. After the fall of Acre in 1291, the role as major trade calls and exchange centres was inherited by Famagusta and Ayas, which then constituted the most important Christian ports in the Levant. A

¹ C. Enlart, *L'art gothique et la Renaissance en Chypre*, Paris 1899, here quoted after the English translation by D. Hunt, *Gothic Art and the Renaissance in Cyprus*, London 1987, pp. 286-288. Cf. also G. Jeffery, *A Description of the Historic Monuments of Cyprus. Studies in the Archaeology and Architecture of the Island*, Nicosia 1918, pp. 143-144; R. Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus*, Nicosia 1973³, pp. 101-102; K. Keshishian, *Famagusta Town and District*, Nicosia 1985, p. 58; Ph. Plagnieux-Th. Soulard, *Famagouste. L'Église des Arméniens (Sainte-Marie-de-Vert)*, in J.B. de Vaivre and Ph. Plagnieux (eds.), *L'art gothique en Chypre*, Paris 2006, p. 257-260. The murals of the Armenian church in Famagusta were the subject of an unpublished paper, delivered by Prof. Dickran Kouymjian on the occasion of the 15th International Congress of Byzantine Studies held in Athens in 1976, where a datation to the first decades of the 14th century was proposed. I thank the author for providing me with an abstract of his text and for many useful remarks.

flourishing Armenian community, though not as rich as other minorities like the Eastern Syrians, was well established in the Cypriot town by the beginnings of the 14th century, and was enlarged in the following decades by several groups of Cilician refugees fleeing from the Mamluk conquest of their country. A well known passage in James of Verona's *Liber peregrinationis*, dating back to 1335, describes a Westerner's emotion at seeing one thousand and half desperate Christian people disembarking from a ship that had just arrived from Ayas and bewailing their sad fate on the parvis of the Latin cathedral of Saint Nicholas.² By 1300 the new settlers had already grown enough to obtain a bishop under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the katholikos of Cilicia and owned two churches (Saint Sergius and Saint Barbara) and one cathedral.³

The latter, which was associated with an important monastery known for the production of manuscripts, was built in the 1310s under the auspices of King Oshin of Cilicia and took advantage from a Papal concession of indulgences in 1311; such circumstances bear witness to the importance of the local community and its involvement in the web of Armeno-Latin political and religious connections at the beginnings of the 14th century. Such a building, entitled to "Our Lady of Green" (Sainte-Marie-de-Vert), was already finished in 1317; old photographs documenting the now disappeared ruins of annexed monastic structures

enable us to recognize it with the now deserted building near the Martinengo Bastion.⁴

Though diminutive in size, the church has not been deprived of a certain elegance: as it lacks a gawit', a special emphasis is given to its façade, being embellished with small khač'kars included within circles or rectangles whose shape is reminiscent of a traditional scheme often encountered in Cilician churches (Fig. 2).⁵ The architectural features are rather simple: it consists of a one-bay nave which terminates at the east with small salients opening into a double-stepped bema with semicircular apse. This one is pierced by one embrasured window and includes a small niche in its lower portion; the semidome is separated from the absidal wall by a cavetto moulding (Fig. 3). Doors are present on the west, south, and north walls, that to the north being presently closed. The nave is covered by a square groined vault of stone, with short barrel vaults to east and west; parallel lines of masonry converge to the central key-stone carved with a rosette, so that they shape a monumental cross. Even if the groin vault, as well as the barrel vault opening into the apsidal semidome, may be interpreted as a legacy of the Crusader architecture in the Holy Land as is encountered in other Famagustan buildings, the church plan and most of its features (stepped bema, cornice moulding and embrasured window in the apse, salient corners at the east end of the nave, etc.) prove to be those generally employed in Cilicia for small chapels within fortified towns and castles;⁶ standard is, for example, the use of gabled roofs, even if they are most often extended to cover the absidal semidome, as well as of splayed windows with drip-course hood-moulds, which may be paralleled with those in the mid-thirteenth century church of Constable

² James of Verona, *Liber peregrinationis*, ed. U. Monneret de Villard, *Liber Peregrinationis di Jacopo da Verona*, Roma 1950, pp. 17-18.

³ On the Armenians on Cyprus and especially in Famagusta cf. G. Dédéyan, *Les Arméniens à Chypre de la fin du XIe au début du XIIIe siècle*, in *Les Lusignans et l'Outre-Mer*, Actes du colloque (Poitiers-Lusignan, 20-24 octobre 1993), Poitiers 1995, pp. 122-131; G. Grivaud, *Les minorités orientales à Chypre (époque médiévale et moderne)*, in *Chypre et la Méditerranée orientale*, Lyon 2000, pp. 44-70, esp. 45-48; N. Coureas, *Non-Chalcedonian Christians on Latin Cyprus*, in M. Balard, B.Z. Kedar, and J. Riley-Smith (eds.), *Dei Gesta per Francos. Études sur les croisades dédiées à Jean Richard*, Aldershot 2001, p. 349-360, esp. 352-353.

⁴ See Plagnieux-Soulard, *Famagouste. L'église des Arméniens*, p. 257-258.

⁵ See the analogous rendering of the cross in a sculpted lintel in Anavarza: R.W. Edwards, *Ecclesiastical Architecture in the Fortifications of Armenian Cilicia: Second Report*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers» 37 (1983), pp. 123-146, esp. 129 and fig. 24.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 164-165.

Smbat near the location of Barbaron (present-day Çandır).⁷

Some elements seem to be borrowed from Gothic tradition: with the exception of one chapel in the fortified island of Korykos,⁸ buttresses are never encountered in Cilicia, and the peculiar type employed in the Famagustan church (that of the contrefort à larmiers, i.e. with drip-mouldings) seems to imitate that used in the majestic rayonnant cathedral of Saint Nicholas, which was under construction in the same period.⁹ Moreover, the use of protruding apses is rare in Armenian tradition, and should be interpreted as a borrowing from Cypriot conventions. In the interior, the location of a niche used for storing vasa sacra on the north wall near the junction with the apse is in perfect accordance with its standard setting within Cilician chapels, but its embellishment with a moulded trefoiled arch is clearly taken after the model of Latin piscinae.¹⁰

If, as has been argued, the building was already finished by 1317, it was probably left undecorated for several decades. This is hardly surprising: frescoed cycles were rare within Armenian Gregorian churches, and at least for outsiders it was commonplace to state that lack of images was a distinctive hallmark of such buildings: «in their churches», remarked the German pilgrim Hans Schildtberger in ca. 1410, «they put only the cross and nothing else, [since] they say that it would be sinful to make more than one sacrifice of Our Lord within the same church; and they have no images on their altars...».¹¹ On the other hand, even if anyconic decorations were usually preferred because of theological opposition to the use of cult-images and the key-role played by

icons in Byzantium as well as of an intellectual emphasis on the emotional efficaciousness of empty spaces, we have some witness to the sporadic use of monumental painting throughout the Middle Ages, from the 7th century murals in Lmbat, Aruč, Koš, and T'alın to the later examples in Ani, Altamar, Tatev, Halbat and other centres of Greater Armenia: the traditional, though unsatisfactory, explanation for the existence of such cycles after the synodal decisions of Manazkert in 726 is their possible association with Chalcedonian patrons.¹² Evidence from Cilicia is also meaningful, though scarce: the murals once preserved in King T'oros I's chapel of Zoravac' at Anavarza included a theophanic image of Christ between seraphs and the four animals, which was probably reminiscent of the early Medieval representations of Prophet Ezekiel's vision in Armenia and Cappadocia, whereas an unidentified holy horseman was depicted on the west portion of the south wall.¹³

The murals in the tiny Famagustan church provide an interesting addendum to this short list. They constitute a rather extensive cycle, displayed on the three nave-walls and the apse. The inner façade, now completely white-washed, was decorated on both sides of the door with an image of Saints Helene and the Holy Virgin under an arcade and Saint George on horseback (Fig. 12), whereas the north wall was entirely covered with evangelic scenes, i.e. the Nativity and the Baptism (Fig. 10), as well as a Christ Pantokrator and an Akra Tapeinosis or Imago Pietatis (Fig. 10), on the lower register, and the Flagellation (Figs. 5-6), the

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 163 and fig. 8.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

⁹ Plagnieux-Soulard, *Famagouste. L'église des Arméniens*, p. 260.

¹⁰ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, p. 287.

¹¹ Hans Schildtberger, *Reisebuch*, chap. 65, ed. V. Langmantel, *Hans Schildtbergers Reisebuch nach der nürnberg Handschrift herausgegeben*, Tübingen 1885, pp. 107-108.

¹² L.A. Durnovo, *Očerki izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva srednevekovoj Armenii*, Moskva 1979, p. 137-154; N. Kotandjian, *Les décors peints des églises d'Arménie*, in J. Durand, I. Rapti and D. Giovannoni (eds.), *Armenia sacra. Mémoire chrétienne des Arméniens (IV^e-XVIII^e siècle)*, exhibition catalogue (Paris, Louvre, 21 February-21 May 2007), Paris 2007, p. 137-144. For the association of Armenian painting programs with Chalcedonian Christian patronage cf. A. Lidov, *The Mural Paintings of Akhtala*, Moscow 1991.

¹³ Edwards, *Ecclesiastical Architecture*, p. 159.

Carrying of the Cross (Fig. 7), the Crucifixion, the Deposition (Fig. 8), and the Entombment (Fig. 9) in the upper portion. On the opposite wall were displayed the Dormition of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 11) and a frescoed Vita-retable with Saint John the Baptist flanked by sixteen scenes of his life. The apsidal wall was embellished with two rows of holy portraits: from the extant fragments of painted surface it is possible to infer that the upper register included prophets (as is revealed by the presence of cartridges), whereas the lower one consisted of a sequence of full-figure saints presented within arcades, according to a solution of decoration of the bema which is rarely encountered on Cyprus and is much more frequent in the Christian East, as revealed, for example, by some mural programs in the Lebanon¹⁴ and in Greater Armenia.¹⁵

The original mural occupying the semidome has now almost completely vanished, with the exception of the figure of a white-clad suppliant (Fig. 4), kneeling before a now disappeared holy personage, possibly the Virgin Mary, to whom the church was entitled, or the Majesty of God as in Anavarza. The long robe with V-shaped décolleté and blue-red mantle covering her head and shoulders, which is recognizable at a closer inspection, reveal that this personage is a lay woman. The representation of donors is of course not unfrequent in Armenian art, which could boast an already long tradition of ex-voto and pro anima portraits in both monumental sculpture and manuscript illumination; much more surprising is the location of such a figure within the holy of holies, where women and laypeople were not admitted. In general terms, portraits were meant to visualize an individual's quest for divine favour in his or her present or future

life, and were usually confined to the westernmost parts of the church, which were reserved for the laity in both Western and Eastern Christian traditions. Nonetheless, their inclusion within the decorative program of the sanctuary sometimes did happen, even if it usually involved members of the clergy, such as the kneeling monks in the lower portion of the apse in Saint Herakleidios, Kalopanagiotis.¹⁶ In Byzantine tradition, only very seldom did members of both the clergy and the laity dare visualize their piety from such a privileged tribuna as the semidome, a meaningful exception being the aristocratic couple represented in the apse of the tiny church at Marathos in the Mani, Greece, whose construction and decoration had been financed by them in ca. 1300.¹⁷ In the West, not everybody was granted such a privilege, but the most eminent people could indeed be allowed to display their own portraits, coats-of-arms, and pro anima images within the sanctuary, if they proved to be major benefactors of the ecclesiastical institution or religious order officiating the church.¹⁸

The odd location of the Famagustan lady in the apsidal semidome may be interpreted as a Cypriot peculiarity, rooted in the social use of portraits as means to display an individual's desire to invest his or her economic power in pious actions (such as financing the architectural and artistic embellishment of church interiors), in order to obtain salvation in the afterlife; in return for such gifts and bequests, the donors were allowed to represent their kneel-

¹⁴ Notable examples are the murals in Kfar Qahel and Ba'deidat: cf. L. Nordigian and J.-C. Voisins, *Châteaux et églises du Moyen Age au Liban*, Beirut 1999, p. 250-251 and 254-256.

¹⁵ The most remarkable example is the late 9th century apse program with two rows of prophets within arcades in the church of Sts Peter and Paul of Tatev Monastery (Durnovo, *Očerki*, fig. 143).

¹⁶ A. Stylianou and J. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus*, Nicosia 1985, p. 295 and fig. 176

¹⁷ S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece*, Vienna 1992, pp. 34-35. The author stresses, however, that such representations may be stimulated by analogous Western or Crusader works of art.

¹⁸ On motif-forces of private sponsorship of the altar zone in the West, cf. M. Bacci, *Investimenti per l'aldilà. Arte e raccomandazione dell'anima nel Medioevo*, Rome-Bari 2003, pp. 130-132.

ing and supplicating images within the church, so that their souls might take advantage from a deeper involvement in the sacred space and from the physical closeness to the place where the holy liturgy was being performed. Such a religious pattern was followed by the royal family of the Lusignan, as is witnessed by the bowing figures of King Janus and Queen Carlotta in the Deposition scene on the east wall of the Chapel of Saint Catherine at Pyrga, painted in 1421,¹⁹ as well as by the rich merchants of Famagusta, as is evident from the sequence of kneeling male and female figures in the polygonal apse wall of the church of Our Lady of Carmel, just a few meters from the Armenian church.²⁰ This family group was probably responsible for the sponsorship of the extensive program of mural decoration in the sanctuary, consisting of a Passion cycle which included the Carrying of the Cross and the Crucifixion; less privileged donors also managed to sponsor the making of images meant

to visualize their quest for their souls' sake, such as the mural icons located next to their burial places in the westernmost space of the nave.

As a consequence of individual patronage during several decades, the decoration of Latin churches happened to display a distinctively chaotic sequence of scenes and holy portraits being unrelated to each other on stylistic, iconographic, and compositional grounds.²¹ This pattern was eventually appropriated by other Christian communities settled in Famagusta, as is evidenced by the extant murals in the so-called "Nestorian" church, where at least three different hands and stylistic traditions can be detected, as well as a great variety of typological schemes, such as the votive image with coats-of-arms on the border and the frescoed Vita-icon, consisting of a central portrait flanked by episodes of the saint's life and miracles. Such a compositional scheme is known from the late 12th century onwards in Byzantine icon-painting, where the central personage is most frequently encircled, rather than flanked, by hagiographic scenes.²² Frescoed versions are mostly known from Italian examples of the 14th and 15th centuries associated with the patronage of individuals who aimed at honouring their holy benefactors by promoting the public worship of images displaying their most famous deeds. A late Trecento image of

¹⁹ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, pp. 325-334; A. Papageorgiou, *The "Royal Chapel" of Pyrga. A Guide*, Nicosia s.d.; idem, *L'art byzantin de Chypre et l'art des Croisés: influences réciproques*, in «Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus» (1982), pp. 217-226, esp. 221; idem, *Crusader Influence on the Byzantine Art of Cyprus*, in *Η Κύπρος και οι σταυροφορίες/ Cyprus and the Crusades*, Proceedings of the international symposium (Nicosia, September 6-9, 1994), Nicosia 1995, p. 275-294, esp. 279; Stylianou and Stylianou, *The Painted Churches*, pp. 428-432; M. Emmanuel, *Monumental Painting in Cyprus during the Last Phase of the Lusignan Dynasty, 1374-1489*, in N. Patterson Ševčenko-Ch. Moss (eds), *Medieval Cyprus. Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki*, Princeton 1999, pp. 241-262, esp. 242-244; N. Gioles, *Η χριστιανική τέχνη της Κύπρου*, Nicosia 2003, pp. 177-178.

²⁰ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, pp. 267-274 and fig. 226; Jeffery, *A Description*, pp. 137-140; Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus*, pp. 100-101; M. Rivoire-Richard, *Η γοτθική τέχνη στην Κύπρο*, in Th. Papadopoulos (ed.), *Ιστορία της Κύπρου*, Nicosia 1995-, V, 1415-1454, esp. 1424. Cfr. also «Annual Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus» (1929) and «Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus» (1956).

²¹ M. Bacci, *Syrian, Palaiologan, and Gothic Murals in the "Nestorian" Church of Famagusta*, in «Δελτίον της χριστιανικής αρχαιολογικής εταιρείας», ser. IV, 27 (2006), pp. 207-220 (with earlier literature).

²² Mouriki, *Thirteenth-Century Icon Painting in Cyprus*, in «The Griffon», n.s., 1-2 (1985-1986), pp. 9-78, esp. 40-46; A. Papageorgiou, *Icons of Cyprus*, Nicosia 1991, pp. 46-55; idem, *Crusader Influence*, p. 278; A. Weyl Carr, *Art in the Court of the Lusignan Kings*, in *Η Κύπρος και οι σταυροφορίες*, pp. 239-274, esp. 241-243; J. Folda, *Crusader Art in the Kingdom of Cyprus, c. 1275-1291: Reflections on the State of the Questions*, ibidem, pp. 209-237, esp. 217. In general on the Vita-icon cf. N.P. Ševčenko, *The Vita Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers» 53 (1999), pp. 149-165.

the Franciscan Blessed Gerard of Valenza in Monticchiello, Tuscany, with the central figure flanked by a selection of his most renowned miracles and the border including the donor's coat-of-arms, may be pointed out here as a key-example.²³

Such a type of religious image, though never used in Byzantine and Eastern Christian tradition, is encountered twice in Famagusta: the first case is the odd painting of the Saint Anne Metterza flanked by scenes of the Virgin Mary's infancy in the already mentioned "Nestorian" (though more probably Melkite or West Syrian) church, dating back to ca. 1370-1380,²⁴ and the almost contemporary mural with Saint Catherine in the Carmelite church.²⁵ Another interesting instance is that of the slightly later image with Saint George slaying the dragon in the Holy Cross at Pelendri, a Byzantine-rite church which included a Latin chapel and took advantage from the benefactions of the Lusignan family.²⁶ As far as we can judge from the portion of painted surface which has not been whitewashed, the frescoed Vita-icon displaying the portrait and deeds of Saint John the Baptist (as we are informed by Camille Enlart's 1899 description)²⁷ was the most Italianate in character, as it was inscribed within a wide border including the donor's coat-of-arms.

The presence of individual portraits and heraldic emblems points out the involvement of lay benefactors in the decoration of the building. It is probable that, regardless of their

confessional identity, the rich merchants of Famagusta shared a feeling that the sponsorship of art, and the embellishment of cult-places with pious images, could work as an efficacious means to gain salvation.

Although lay donors were granted the right to include their individual hallmarks within the church murals, they probably had a scarce influence on the program, whose conception was more frequently a prerogative of the literate clergy who benefited from their sponsorship. The decision to focus on an evangelic cycle with a special emphasis on the events of Christ's Passion was enhanced by several factors, including competition with other religious groups. It is a matter of fact that extensive cycles of the Passion were executed in the second half of the 14th century in the most important town churches, like Our Lady of Carmel,²⁸ the Benedictine church of Saint Anne,²⁹ and the metropolitan church of Saint George of the Greeks.³⁰ The program of the latter was by far the more complete: oddly enough, it was displayed on the three apses, and consisted in an analytical narration of all the events taking place between the Entry into Jerusalem and the Holy Women at the Sepulchre, including the Derision, the Flagellation, Pilate washing his hands, the Carrying of the Cross, Jesus despoiled of his vestments, the

²³ Ibidem, p. 270-271 and fig. 227.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 277-279. The cycle, now seriously damaged, was never properly published; some photographs are included in A. Papageorgiou, *L'art byzantin de Chypre et l'art des Croisés: influences réciproques*, in «Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus» (1982), pp. 217-226, pl. XLIX figs. 1-2. B/N photographs of the murals are preserved in the Photographic Archives of the Department of Antiquities in Nicosia.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 257-258. For available reproductions, see Papageorgiou, *L'art byzantin*, pl. LIII, figs. 3-4 (Entombment and the Three Marys at the Sepulchre), and A.W. Carr, *Art*, in A. Nicolaou-Konnari and Ch. Schabel (eds.), *Cyprus. Society and Culture 1191-1374*, Leiden-Boston 2005, p. 285-328, esp. 318 and fig. 31 (Betrayal of Judas). Annemarie Weyl Carr is planning a thorough analysis of this cycle.

²³ Cf. M. Bacci, *Le bienheureux Gérard de Valenza, O.F.M.: images et croyances dans la Toscane du XIV^e siècle*, in «Revue Mabillon», ser. II, 12 (2001), pp. 97-119.

²⁴ Bacci, *Syrian, Palaiologan, and Gothic Murals*, pp. 212-214 and fig. 4.

²⁵ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, pp. 272-273.

²⁶ K. Gerasimou, D. Myrianthevs, K. Papaioakeim, Ch. Chatzichristodoulou, *Οι ναοί των Πελενδρίων. Ιστορία-αρχιτεκτονική-τέχνη/The Churches of Pelendria. History-architecture-art*, Lefkosia 2005, p. 92-97 and fig. on p. 91, with data-tion to the late 14th/early 15th century.

²⁷ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, p. 288.

Crucifixion, the Deposition, the Entombment, and the Anastasis. Compared to this one, the program in Saint Anne was much more synthetic, as it laid emphasis only on the Crucifixion, the Deposition, and the Threnos, whereas that in the Carmelite church focussed on the Way to Calvary and Christ on the Cross.

Strikingly enough, in the Armenian church up to five murals were devoted to the most dramatic events of the Passion: displayed in the middle register of the north wall, they were probably followed by a now disappeared story of Christ's Resurrection on both sides of the upper window, whereas the scenes of Christ's life up to the Entry into Jerusalem were possibly depicted on the opposite wall, although no traces of plaster are now to be seen on its upper portion. The scene of the Flagellation (Figs. 5-6) is represented against an architectural background meant to be an ideal view of the walls and buildings of Pilate's Praetorium. Christ is clad with a short perizoma, tied to a classicizing red marble column with basement and a foliate capital, which occupies the middle of the scene; two side-figures of Roman soldiers are shown in the act of whipping Jesus. The symmetrical arrangement of the composition echoes that used in the representations of the theme in 14th and early 15th century Palaiologan works of art, such as the icon with the Passion cycle in the Vlatadon Monastery in Thessaloniki and the murals in the narthex of the katholikon of Vatopedi monastery, as well as in Markov Manastir near Skopje and the Panagia church at Kapetaniana, Crete.³¹

³¹ G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile aux XIV^e, XV^e, et XVI^e siècles d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont-Athos*, Paris 1916, fig. 628 (Vatopedi); A. Tourta, entry n° 102, in H.C. Evans (ed.), *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, exhibition catalogue (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, March 23-July 4, 2004), New York-New Haven-London 2004, p. 182 (Vlatadon icon); G. Millet-T. Velmans, *La peinture du Moyen Âge en Yougoslavie (Serbie, Macédoine et Monténégro). Fascicule IV*, Paris 1969, tav. 97, fig. 177 (Markov Manastir); M. Bis-

The nearby scene, which is known to have represented the Way to Calvary, is presently so badly preserved, that it defies any accurate analysis. Nonetheless, the dynamic pose given to the partially readable figure to the left may hint at the common rendering of Simon of Cyrene carrying the Cross in 14th century Byzantine art (Fig. 7).³² The following image of the Crucifixion is in an even worse state of preservation: Christ's image has completely vanished, and only some remnants of the figures on the two sides are still readable, including the group of the weeping women to the left; apparently, one of the hands is holding the Virgin Mary, who was maybe shown fainting. Not better recognizable are the participants in the Deposition scene (Fig. 8): one can distinguish a prominent figure in dark garments and the silhouette of Saint John the Evangelist bowing his head over Christ's dead body. On the contrary, the last scene, representing the Entombment (Fig. 9), clearly displays John and Joseph of Arimathea carrying the body into the Sepulchre: Nicodemus is shown at the entrance of the rock-cut tomb, whereas the Virgin Mary bows to give the last kiss to Her son.

These remnants provide enough details to understand that the images were made according to contemporary Byzantine, rather than Armenian, patterns; the same proves true in connection with the other scenes, such as the Baptism (Fig. 10) and the Koimesis (Fig. 11). The selection of the Passion scenes and their narrative arrangement seem to echo the standard program of mid-14th churches in the Bal-

singer, Kreta. *Byzantinische Wandmalerei*, Munich 1995, fig. 191 (Kapetaniana).

³² Millet, *Iconographie*, pp. 362-379; G. Schiller, *Ikongrafie der christlichen Kunst*, Gütersloh 1966, vol. II, pp. 78-82; H. Laag e G. Jászai, *Kreuztragung Jesu*, in E. Kirschbaum (ed.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Rome-Freiburg-Basel-Vienna 1968-1976, II, pp. 649-652. The same scheme is often encountered also in Armenian illumination: cf. Th.F. Mathews and A.K. Sanjian, *Armenian Gospel Iconography. The Tradition of the Glajor Gospel*, Washington, D.C., 1991, p. 114-115.

kan peninsula, where the events of the Holy Week were usually displayed on the south and north walls of the nave in order to both enhance public piety and provide a visual counterpart to the pericopes read during the Vesperturgy of Maundy Thursdays.³³ This is essentially due to the fact that the Famagustan Armenians probably availed themselves of painters trained in the most updated currents of Palaiologan art, as is pointed out by the distinctive stylistic features of the murals, which find no direct parallels in the pictorial tradition of Cyprus, being essentially rooted in Late Comnenian conventions combined with Syrian and Western elements. The import of mature Palaiologan forms into the island is currently associated in the scholarly debate with a small group of mid- to late fourteenth century icons and the murals with the Evangelists in the pendentives of the dome in the church of the Holy Cross at Pelendri, possibly made in the 1360s, as well as the slightly later decoration of the east end of the north aisle, associated with the patronage of Prince John of Lusignan (d. 1375).³⁴

As suggested by Annemarie Weyl Carr, the royal court of Cyprus may have played a key-role in the introduction of the new style on Cyprus, as an outcome of its dynastic connections with the despots of Mystras in the second half of the 14th century,³⁵ another possibility is that teams of painters from one of the Byzantine metropolitan centres arrived in Cyprus

because of lack of patronage in the hard times of the Ottoman conquest of the Imperial territories. In any case, Famagusta seems to have played a major role in the dissemination of the new style, which can be detected in the decoration of the most important town churches, such as Saint George of the Greeks, the “Nestorian” church, Saint Anne, Our Lady of Carmel (in the row of holy bishops on the east end of the north wall), the Armenian church, and possibly Saints Peter and Paul (with its remnant of a mural displaying the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste).³⁶ In my previous study of the murals in the “Nestorian” church, I stressed the connections with the pictorial trend worked out especially in Thessaloniki in the 1360s through 1380s, in such programs as the Prophitis Ilias church and the Vlatadon monastery, which reinterpreted the “neohellenistic” style of the late 13th and early 14th centuries as a classicizing expressionism characterized by linearly-rendered heightenings and affected poses and movements, coupled with a strong realistic treatment of physiognomic details. The chromatic scale, consisting of secondary colours including violet, dark yellow, pale red, and light blue, as well as the rendering of the body with well proportionate heads, may hint at the same artistic context.³⁷

It may so be assumed that, almost in the same period, a painter or a team of painters from Thessaloniki (or possibly from Constantinople, whose role in art history in the second half of the 14th century is hardly known) was required to embellish the major churches of Famagusta, regardless of the different religious communities who ruled them. Just on the contrary, their unconstrained activity for Greeks, Latins, Armenians, and Syrians points out that their art, and the authoritative tradition that inspired it, were still appreciated by all the

³³ Cf. S. Dufrenne, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra*, Paris 1970, pp. 58-59; K. Kirchhainer, *Die Bildausstattung der Nikolauskirche in Thessaloniki. Untersuchungen zu Struktur und Programm der Malereien*, Weimar 2001, pp. 98-103.

³⁴ A.W. Carr, *Byzantines and Italians on Cyprus: Images from Art*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers» 49 (1995), pp. 339-357, esp. 344-346; eadem, *Art*, p. 317-319; I. Christophoraki, *Η τέχνη στην Κύπρο την εποχή του Α. Μαχαιρά και του Γ. Βουστρωνίου*, in *Πρακτικά Συμποσίου “Λεόντιος Μαχαιράς – Γεώργιος Βουστρώνιος, δύο χρονικά της μεσαιωνικής Κύπρου”* (Nicosia, Fondazione Leventis, 21 September 1996), Lefkosía 1997, pp. 87-96.

³⁵ Carr, *Art*, p. 318-319.

³⁶ Such cycles are still unpublished. I am currently working at a detailed analysis of the painted programs of the buildings pertaining to Latin and non-Chalcedonian Christians in Famagusta.

³⁷ Bacci, *Syrian, Palaiologan, and Gothic Murals*, p. 215-217.

groups composing the cosmopolitan society of the Cypriot port. An accurate study of the largest cycle of murals in the Greek metropolitan church will eventually give a new dimension to our understanding of the dynamics of transmission, emulation, and appropriation of Palaiologan patterns of monumental decoration in town. At the moment, be it sufficient to remark that, since we know that Saint George of the Greeks was still under construction in 1363,³⁸ its pictorial embellishment should have taken place a bit later; on the other hand, it is necessary to think if it might have been prosecuted long after the Genoese conquest of Famagusta in 1373, which is usually described as a catastrophic event actually marking the beginning of the town economic and cultural decline.³⁹

Be this as it may, it is worth emphasizing that, in this special context, the Byzantine masters were obliged to harmonize their compositional, narrative, and iconographic patterns to spatial and religious contexts being different from the standard Byzantine models. In the mixed and multicultural society of Famagusta even the Greek metropolis was built according to a Gothic basilican plan partially modified to accomplish the liturgical needs of an Orthodox church;⁴⁰ in general, the spatial arrangement of

the interiors, consisting of vaulted longitudinal rooms, prevented the painters to locate images in perfect accordance with the hierarchical criteria ruling domed central-planned buildings. Consequently, they accepted to display the Passion cycle, usually represented on the south and north walls of the nave, on the three apses of Saint George of the Greeks and at least in part in the polygonal east wall of Saint Anne; when working for the lay benefactors of the Carmelite or "Nestorian" church, they contributed to the rather chaotic decoration of the nave with mural icons meant to express an individual's quest for his or her soul's sake. Depending on the public they were working for, they also accepted to modify the iconographic schemes they had been accustomed to use, as is the case with the image of Saint Nicholas wearing Latin paraphernalia in Our Lady of Carmel.⁴¹ Moreover, their loyalty to Byzantine conventions in the rendering of evangelic scenes did not prevent them to make use of Italianate frames with Gothicizing quadrilobes, like those in the diakonikon of the Greek cathedral.⁴²

Which were then the solutions they adopted in order to respond to the requirements of their Armenian patrons? The extant murals suggest that they were asked to accomplish the needs of both the local clergy and some lay benefactor, as we hinted before. They included a lay woman's portrait in the semi-dome and painted a Westernizing mural icon with coats-of-arms on the south wall, though enframing it within a wider and homogeneous program consisting of holy portraits and evangelic scenes. The latter, with the special emphasis given to the events of Christ's Passion, may have been inspired by more specific considerations. It is worth emphasizing the oddity of replacing the popular scene of the Mocking of

³⁸ A testament date 8 February 1363 includes a bequest "for the building activities in the church of Saint George of the Greek bishopric" (*pro laborerio ecclesie Sancti Georgii episcopatus grecorum*); cf. C. Otten-Froux, *Un notaire vénitien à Famagouste au XIV^e siècle. Les actes de Simeone, prêtre de San Giacomo dell'Orio (1362-1371)*, in «Θησαυρίσματα» 33 (2003), pp. 15-159, esp. 41-42 doc. n° 4.

³⁹ On Famagusta in the Genoese period see, in general, C. Otten-Froux, *La ville de Famagouste*, in de Vaivre-Plagnieux, *L'art gothique en Chypre*, p. 109-118, esp. 115-118.

⁴⁰ Th. Soulard, *L'architecture gothique grecque du royaume des Lusignans: les cathédrales de Famagouste et Nicosie*, in S. Fourrier and G. Grivaud (eds.), *Identités croisées en un milieu méditerranéen: le cas de Chypre (Antiquité – Moyen Âge)*, proceedings of the international symposium (Rouen, 11-13 May 2004), Mont-Saint-Aignan 2006, p. 355-384, esp. 356-365; Ph.

Plagnieux and Th. Soulard, *La cathédrale Saint-Georges des Grecs*, in de Vaivre and Plagnieux, *L'art gothique en Chypre*, pp. 286-296.

⁴¹ Bacci, *Syrian, Palaiologan, and Gothic Murals*, p. 216 and fig. 7.

⁴² Unpublished.

Christ – which is often encountered in both Byzantine frescoed cycles and Cilician Gospel illumination⁴³ – with that of the Flagellation (Figs. 5-6): actually, the image of Christ tied to the column and whipped was well rooted in Western art, but in the 14th century it started being represented also in Byzantium, though sporadically, as the most important event preceding the Carrying of the Cross.⁴⁴ In Armenian art, it was always extremely rare, if one excepts the eclectic rendering of the scene as the “Mocking of Christ” in two manuscripts illuminated by T’oros Roslin.⁴⁵ The preference for this theme and for Passion events in general in the Famagustan church possibly bespoke awareness of the new topography of the Armenian Holy Places in Mamluk-ruled Palestine: since the end of the 13th century the Armenians had obtained to rule some of the most revered shrines of Jerusalem, including the formerly Latin church and monastery of Our Saviour on Mount Sion, which was identified with the House of Caiaphas and the site of the Flagellation. According to John of Würzburg’s description of 1160 ca. as well as later sources, the place was marked by a chapel which housed the relic of the whipping-column and was decorated with the images of both the Flagellation and Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross.⁴⁶

Liturgical considerations played a much more evident role in the shaping of the frescoed program. It proves meaningful that the portion of wall located above the Gothic niche

near the junction with the apse was decorated with the representation of the Akra tapeinosis or Imago pietatis (Fig. 10). The dead body of Christ, with His arms crossed on His chest, is shown emerging out of the sepulchre, with the Holy Cross and the main instruments of the Passion (the Lance and the Sponge) on the background. Both the location and the iconographic features reveal that the Palaiologan painters applied to that portion of wall a decoration pattern intended for the niche of the prothesis usually located in the northern pastophorium of Byzantine-rite churches. Several scholars have emphasized the liturgical meaning of the theme, being connected to the specific rite of the proskomidia, i.e. the act of setting forth the oblation, including the arrangement of the bread on the paten, the pouring of the wine into the chalice, and the veiling.⁴⁷ Already widespread in manuscript illumination and icons since the 12th century, the image of Christ’s ‘utter humiliation’ was worked out during the 13th and 14th centuries with the addition of several details which managed to visualize its eucharistic meaning even more efficaciously. The association with the sepulchre, being already hinted in the earliest representations, like one of the miniatures in the 12th century manuscript from Karahissar⁴⁸ and the 14th century silver cover of the Vani Gospel in the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi,⁴⁹ aimed at reminding beholders of the altar as the place where the sacrifice of Christ was reenacted;

⁴³ Mathews and Sanjian, *Armenian Gospel Iconography*, p. 113-114.

⁴⁴ Millet, *Recherches*, pp. 652-653.

⁴⁵ Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, W539 of ca. 1263 (S. Der Nersessian, *Armenian Manuscripts in the Walters Art Gallery*, Baltimore 1973, pl. 67, fig. 104), and Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art, Ms. 32.18 of ca. 1270 (S. Der Nersessian, *Armenian Manuscripts in the Freer Gallery of Arts*, Washington, D.C., 1963, pl. 48, fig. 125). I am indebted to Prof. Levon B. Chookaszyan for this and further informations.

⁴⁶ D. Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. A Corpus. III. The City of Jerusalem*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 365-372.

⁴⁷ The basic studies are those by D.I. Pallas, *Die Passion und Bestattung Christi in Byzanz. Das Ritus – das Bild*, München 1965; H. Belting, *An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers» 34 (1980-1981), p. 1-16; idem, *Das Bild und sein Publikum. Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion*, Berlin 1981.

⁴⁸ Saint Petersburg, Russian National Library, Ms. Gr. 105, ff. 65^r, 167^r. Cf. H.R. Willoughby, *The Four Gospel of Karahissar*, Chicago 1936, tavv. 34 and 106.

⁴⁹ E. Takaïchvili, *L’évangile de Vani*, in «Byzantion» 10, 1935, pp. 655-663, in part. 661-662 e tav. XLIV.

this meaning was made even more evident by means of the location of this variant in the semidome of the prothesis-chapel, as shown by a 13th century fresco in Gradac, Serbia,⁵⁰ or in the prothesis-niche, as in the Perivleptos of Mystras (3rd quarter of the 14th century)⁵¹ and the Zoodochos Pigi church in Geraki (1431).⁵²

Though the cross on the background proves to be a standard iconographic detail, the lance and the sponge are much more unusual in 14th century art. Nonetheless, their compositional arrangement on the horizontal arms of the cross is employed in contemporary representations of the Hetoimasia,⁵³ which may have influenced the special variant of the Akra Tapeinosis discussed here, as an outcome of the rhetorical parallelism of with the apocalyptic throne with Christ's sepulchre, made explicit by the Holy Saturday troparion "You up on the throne and down in the tomb".⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the presence of the lance and sponge in both solutions was mainly inspired by the liturgical symbolism of the Byzantine prothesis-rite, which availed itself of the holy spear to excise the lamb and the particles from the loaf as well as of a purificator not only to

cleanse the holy vessels but also to sweep together the particles on the paten. The association of the Imago pietatis with the Passion instruments was patently stressed in the now destroyed frescoed decoration of the prothesis in the church of the Dormition at Volotovo polje near Novgorod, painted in the 1380s, which showed Christ's dead body in the sepulchre next to the cross with the spear and the sponge.⁵⁵ According to Irina Shalina's stimulating interpretation, such a composition had been inspired by a performative, rather than iconic, model: it was meant to hint at the ritual exhibition of the Passion relics in the Blacher-nae church on Holy Fridays, when the sudarium bearing the image of the dead Christ was shown vertically and half-length outside its reliquary box, with the three main instruments of the Crucifixion on the background.⁵⁶

It is noteworthy that the Famagustan clergy adopted this imagery to decorate the recess to the north of the altar, which was the traditional Armenian location for the table of gifts (known as either *entsaraian* or *matout'saran*). The eucharistic emphasis on the sepulchre was especially enhanced not only by the iconography of the Akra Tapeinosis, but also by the upper scene of the Entombment. According to Armenian liturgical usage, the prothesis-rite was made inaccessible to lay attendants by drawing the sanctuary curtain.⁵⁷ This implies that the latter had to be fixed to an impending transversal beam located approximately in the middle of the nave, so exerting a strong impact on the beholders' perception of the whole painted program.

The images sharing the space reserved for the laity on this side of the liturgical barrier in

⁵⁰ Pallas, *Die Passion*, p. 262-267.

⁵¹ Dufrenne, *Les programmes iconographiques*, p. 14 and sketch n° 6. On the location of the *Akra tapeinosis* in or close to the prothesis-niche see eadem, S. Dufrenne, *Images du décor de la prothèse*, in «Revue des études byzantines» 26 (1968), pp. 297-310, as well as Pallas, *Die Bestattung*, p. 197-244, and D. Simić-Lazar, *Sur le thème du Christ de Pitié en Serbie à la fin du Moyen Age et dans le Balkans à l'époque post-byzantine*, in *Αφιέρωμα στον Μίλτο Γαρίδη*, Ioánnina 2003, pp. 699-701.

⁵² G. Dimitrokallis, *Γεράκι. Οι τοιχογραφίες των ναών του Κάστρον*, Athens 2001, p. 121-122.

⁵³ T. Papamastorakis, *Ο διάκοσμος του τρούλου των ναών της παλαιολόγιας περιόδου στη Βαλκανική χερσόνησο και στην Κύπρο*, Athina 2001, p. 91 note 52.

⁵⁴ Millet, *Recherches*, p. 483-488; M. Marković, *Prilog proučavanju uticaja kanona Velike Subote na ikonografiju srednjovekovnog slikarstva*, in «Zbornik radova vizantološkog instituta» 37 (1998), p. 167-179.

⁵⁵ M.V. Alpatov, *Frescoes of the Church of the Assumption at Volotovo Polye*, Moscow 1977, tav. 25.

⁵⁶ I. Šalina, *Relikvii v vostochnohristianskoj ikonografii*, Moskva 2005, p. 113-132.

⁵⁷ Cfr. the dispositions of the *Mystery-manual of the sacred oblation*, ed. F.E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western, Being the Texts Original or Translated of the Principal Liturgies of the Church*, Oxford 1896, pp. 418-421.

the westernmost part of the church were obviously invested with less sophisticated though more demanding meanings: they generally aimed at visualizing individual piety, stressing the necessity to purify oneself of the personal burden of sins, and opening some perspectives onto the afterlife. The image of the holy horseman on the side of the entrance (Fig. 12) on the inner façade is of special interest here:⁵⁸ the saint, wearing a short curly hair and clad as a Roman soldier, holds a Western-type shield and rides a dark horse, harnessed with saddle and bridle, while slaying a monstrous snake with his lance. The iconographic details allow us to identify this figure with Surp T'oros, i.e. Theodore Stratilates, one of the most beloved military saints of Armenia with Saint Sergius and Saint George. Their representation on horseback, while killing demoniac figures, was meant to fulfill apotropaic functions, as was already evident in the apse frescoes at Lmbat (7th century)⁵⁹ and in the 10th century reliefs of the church of Altamar,⁶⁰ in Cilicia, as mentioned before, the theme is encountered in the church of King T'oros in Anavarza, in a location not far distant from that in Famagusta, i.e. on the westernmost portion of the south wall. In the Late Middle Ages analogous meanings were attributed to such images almost throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, from the Morea to Cyprus and the Lebanon.⁶¹ The

Armenians participated thoroughly in this process and probably played a significant role in the dissemination of the theme of the holy rider: noteworthy is the case of the early 14th century mural with Saint Sergius on horseback in the church of San Matteo degli Armeni in Perugia, Italy (Fig. 13), which belonged to a community of the Cilician diaspora and was ruled by Uniat monks.⁶² Just as in the Famagustan church, the image is displayed close to the door and is explicitly meant to convey a group of believers' quest for salvation: among the horse's hooves are represented four supplicants, including a young lady and a bearded monk, who are shown presenting their patron saint with wax handcuffs, being a kind of ex voto conventionally intended to express individual liberation from illness or perils.

Paradoxically enough, a further element of analogy can be detected in the stylistic difference of the two riders in Famagusta and Perugia, which points out that diaspora communities throughout the Mediterranean tended to make use of local, instead of Armenian, painters for the decoration of their churches. In the mixed context of Famagusta, they asked the highly-reputed Palaiologan painters who had been responsible for the painting of the major town churches to adapt the standard Late Byzantine program of murals to the specific liturgical needs of a Gregorian church, but in the same time they wanted them to create special images, like the frescoed Vitapanel within frames displaying coats-of-arms and associated with the pro anima and votive purposes of some individuals, whose compositional and iconographic features were at least partly taken after Latin religious and artistic models.

⁵⁸ Presently whitewashed, it is known after an old picture preserved in the Photographic Archives of the Department of Antiquities in Nicosia (inv. B96984).

⁵⁹ Durnovo, *Očerki*, p. 140.

⁶⁰ S. Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, Cambridge 1965, p. 19, 24 and fig. 50.

⁶¹ S.E.J. Gerstel, *Art and Identity in the Medieval Morea*, in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, a cura di A. Laiou – R. P. Mottahedeh, Washington, D.C., 2001, pp. 263-285 (Morea); Ch. Chotzakoglou, *Βυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική και τέχνη στην Κύπρο*, in Th. Papadopoulos, *Ιστορία της Κύπρου*, vol. III, p. 465-787, esp. 601, note 1023 (Cyprus); M. Immerzeel, *Holy Horsemen and Crusader Banners. Equestrian Saints in Wall Paintings in Lebanon and Syria*, in «Eastern Christian Art in its Late Antique and Is-

lamic Contexts» 1 (2004), p. 29-60 (Lebanon). See also more generally Ch. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, Aldershot 2003.

⁶² Cf. G. Traina, *Materiali sulla presenza armena nella Perugia medievale*, in B.L. Zekiyan (ed.), *Ad limina Italiae. Ar druns Italioy. In viaggio per l'Italia con mercanti e monaci armeni*, Venice 1996, pp. 97-113.

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(Fig.1) *Famagusta, Armenian Church, view from south-east.*



(Fig. 2) *Khač'kars, early 14th century. Famagusta, Armenian Church.*



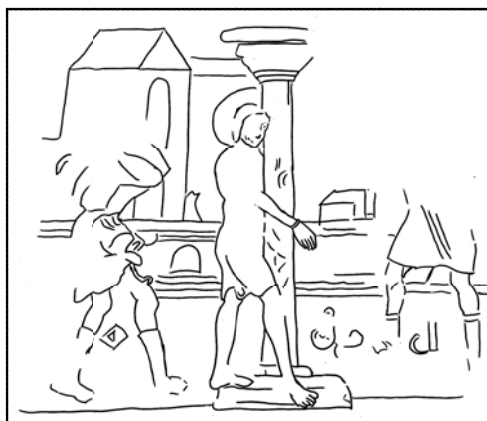
(Fig. 3) *Apsidal view.*
Famagusta, Armenian Church.



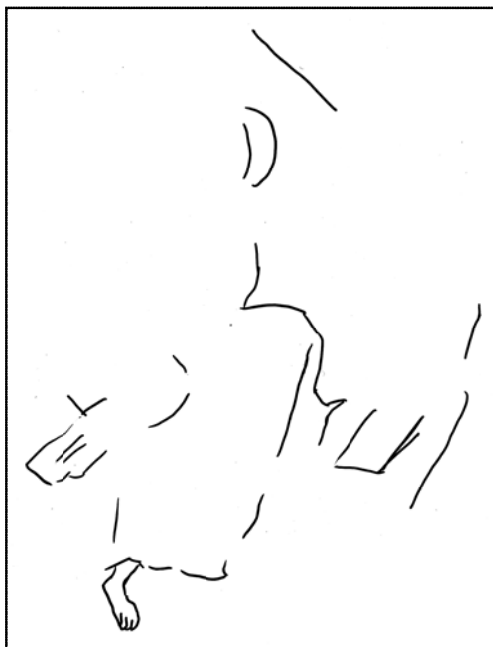
(Fig. 4) *Kneeling donor, fresco, XIVc.*
Famagusta, Armenian Church, Semidome.



(Fig. 5) *Flagellation, fresco, XIVc.*
Famagusta, Armenian Church, north wall.



(Fig. 6) *Sketch of the Flagellation in Fig. 5.*



(Fig. 7) *Sketch of the Way to Calvary on the north wall of the Armenian church in Famagusta.*



(Fig. 8) *Sketch of the Deposition on the north wall of the Armenian church in Famagusta.*



(Fig. 9) *Entombment, fresco, XIVc. Famagusta, Armenian church, north wall.*



(Fig. 10) *Sketch of the Baptism and the Akra Tapeinosis on the north wall of the Armenian church in Famagusta.*



(Fig. 12) *Saint Theodore on horseback, fresco, XIVc. Famagusta, Armenian church, west wall (courtesy of the Department of Antiquities, Nicosia).*



Fig. 11. Koimesis, fresco, XIVc. Famagusta, Armenian Church, south wall.



(Fig. 13) *Saint Sergius on horseback, fresco, XIVc.*
Perugia, San Matteo degli Armeni, west wall.