

# Approaching Cyprus:

*Proceedings of the Post-  
Graduate Conference  
of Cypriot Archaeology (PoCA)  
held at the University  
of East Anglia, Norwich,  
1st-3rd November 2013*

Edited by

Richard Maguire and Jane Chick

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-9477-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9477-7

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# TECHNIQUES AND DESIGNS OF CHURCH EXPANSIONS IN MEDIEVAL CYPRUS: A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON A BUILDING ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

THOMAS KAFFENBERGER

*Building archaeology tries to reconstruct the history of existing buildings, using direct observations of the building themselves. [It analyzes] materials, building techniques, continuousness and gaps, demolition tracks, the way a specific element sticks to the next one, etc. as significant traces of the passage of the monument throughout the different historical periods.*  
—Anna Boato, Daniela Pittaluga (2000)<sup>1</sup>

One of the often neglected fields of archaeology is building archaeology or *Bauforschung*.<sup>2</sup> Situated between the classical disciplines of archaeology and architectural history, it investigates standing structures with methods deriving from archaeology in order to provide a reliable, objective dataset. In short, it tries to answer the questions “When?” and “How?” through the investigation of a building’s fabric. The results, albeit not very spectacular in some cases—for example if the studied object is small in scale or modest in its artistic standard—gain their importance as the very ‘fabric’ of a framework within which the investigation of further socio-historical issues (i.e. the “Why?”) can take place. Changes in buildings can be a testimony to transforming societies, changing taste or practical needs as well as to disruptive events such as wars or natural catastrophes.

On Cyprus, few late medieval buildings have been examined according to the methods of *Bauforschung*, even less of the results have been published subsequently.<sup>3</sup> However, the often complex history of urban as well as rural churches promises interesting results. Over 300 churches erected or altered between 1191 and 1571 are still standing on Cyprus.

While some of them are famous for their exceptional painted decoration, the less ostentatious architectural features of rural churches remains widely unstudied. Many of the churches in question are modest in size and visibly go back to a single period of construction. These buildings are helpful for developing typological groups or studying regional distinctions. Others, however, are testimony to frequent changes, most notably expansions of an older core building. A recent survey undertaken by the author revealed a wide range of new perceptions that can be gained by using methods of *Bauforschung*. Previous mention in scholarly works rarely exceeds a few sentences, attributing the churches to one or other century and describing their overall character. This recurring practice of handling them as homogenous buildings is obviously highly problematic, as it completely excludes the concept of ‘transformation’—which is commonly accepted as one of the most interesting aspects to be investigated in any socio-historical as well as artistic context.

This chapter will focus on typological as well as technical aspects of church expansion between ca. 1200 and 1571. Based on the investigation of one of the most significant examples of medieval church architecture on Cyprus, the Orthodox Episcopal complex in Famagusta, it will attempt to create a rough typology of expansion techniques by referring to other, mainly rural, Cypriot churches. This approach is intentionally diachronic, as the complex question of dating the buildings will not be touched upon in this report—hence, only very approximate dates will be given. Furthermore, the selective character of the report needs to be emphasised—owing to the number of potential examples and its preliminary character, which limits in-depth analysis.<sup>4</sup>

### **A case study: the Episcopal complex of Saint Epifanios and Saint George of the Greeks in Famagusta**

Hardly any building on Cyprus presents the range of possible transformations better than the two adjacent ruined churches of Saint Epifanios and Saint George of the Greeks in Famagusta, which served as the Episcopal see between at least the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>5</sup> The complex consists of an immense basilica of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Saint George, which was added to a smaller, older structure (Figs. 13.1–2). This older structure of two naves with originally four domes is commonly known as Saint Symeon, but was probably dedicated to Saint Epifanios. Even in its ruined state, this building looks rather uniform on a first (external) glimpse: it is erected from mainly homogenous ashlar material and a thin, uninterrupted

cornice clasps the upper part of the wall. However, on closer examination the outside shows several building joints that indicate one of the most complex sequences of additions in Cypriot church architecture.



Fig. 13.1 Famagusta, Episcopal complex: Saint Epifanios and Saint George of the Greeks

This is further evidenced in the ruined interior, where the northern wall particularly shows a veritable palimpsest of arches, varying masonry and remains of vaulting (Fig. 13.3). The original church was rebuilt and enlarged at least four times. It is likely that this first, original building was a regular cross-in-square church, which probably originated around the year 1000 but was rebuilt on one or more occasions without changing the structural shape. Parts of this structure are included in the fabric of the northern aisle, namely the north wall, the eastern piers, and perhaps also parts of the bema area.

In a first phase of enlargement, probably during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, this building received a narthex. Parts of this narthex survive and allow for a quite precise reconstruction as a three-bay structure with a central dome. However, due to later changes, nothing is known about the way the two building parts were connected. One might have expected a simple, vault-high arch exposing the older western wall and portal.

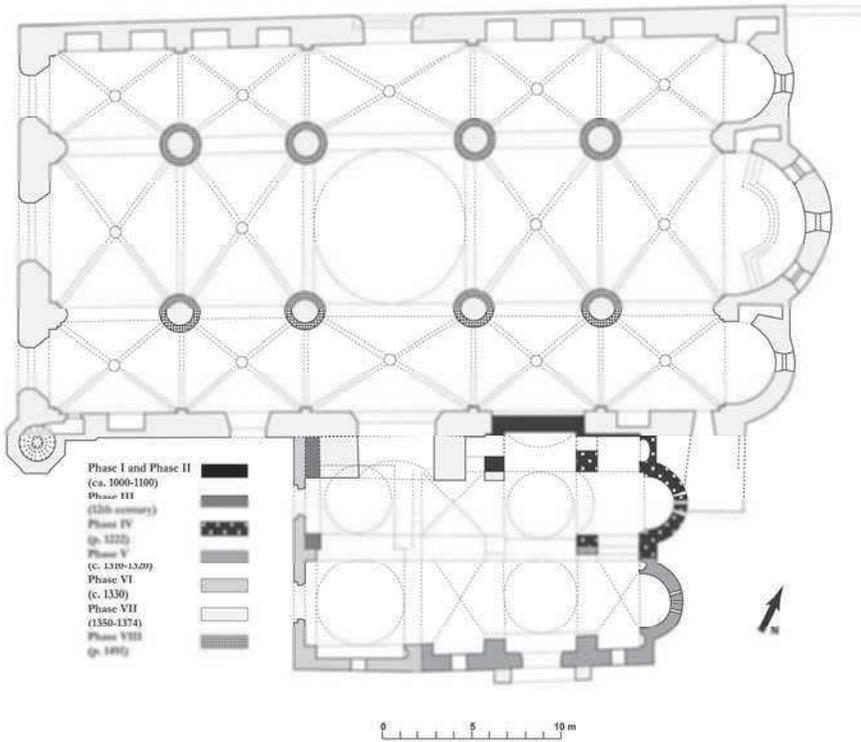


Fig. 13.2 Famagusta, Saint George of the Greeks and Saint Epifanios, ground plan



Fig. 13.3 Famagusta, Saint Epifanios, northern wall

The next phase brought an addition of a second nave to the original structure, mirroring the previous one in plan—except for the side aisle and the vault structure. The new aisle was a cross-vaulted, dome-hall-structure—so one could say it was a “compressed” derivation of the cross-in-square type. There is no visible hierarchy between the aisles as the height of the crossing arches of the older part defined the height of the new aisle (Fig. 13.4). The treatment of the connection between the old and new parts indicates a strong tendency to merge the old and the new nave into a single space. So, for example, the original barrel vault in the western bay was replaced by a cross-vault. This allowed a larger opening between the western bays—something that otherwise would only have been possible in the central, domed bay with its wide arches on all four sides.



Fig. 13.4 Famagusta, Saint Epifanios, north-eastern bays

The last expansion of the older church was the addition of a domed bay to the west of the southern nave. This bay followed the previous expansion in its design and measurements and is mainly marked by a conspicuous vertical joint on the outside of the southern wall. The new bay replaced the southern part of the older narthex, which was given up in this phase and completely incorporated into the building. This process followed the same

desire to create a unified interior space that was already visible in earlier expansion phases. At the same time, the façade of the new bay was mirrored onto the narthex, creating a symmetry of two identical portals, adding to the uniform appearance.

The final and most notable expansion of the complex was the addition of Saint George to the north of the older building. In this process, a new wall was placed on top of the older north wall, incorporating parts of it. The connection between both parts was created in the western bays of the old church, making a complicated transformation of the structure necessary.<sup>6</sup> After this phase, no further changes to the complex occurred, except for repair works and a progressive decay of the fabric from 1571 onwards.

### **Church expansions in Cyprus – a preliminary typology**

It is hardly surprising that the main Orthodox church in one of the medieval centres of the island shows these subsequent enlargements, both in order to adapt it to the increasing need for space and to make an impressive architectural statement. We find a similarly complicated situation in the supposed Orthodox cathedral of Nicosia, which is, however, too problematic in many aspects to discuss in depth here.<sup>7</sup> Anyhow, the development of the Episcopal complex in Famagusta is a showcase example for the range of expansion projects that are most typical for the later middle ages on Cyprus. The methods and patterns applied to the original church form an almost comprehensive list of what can be found throughout the island.

### **Rebuilding from a Core**

The first rebuilding of Saint Epifanios probably did not change the size of the original structure, which, strictly speaking, excludes it from this group of enlarged buildings. The replacement of destroyed walls or vaults is nevertheless an important type of transformation—especially in a region like Cyprus, where frequent earthquakes made repairs necessary throughout the Middle Ages. Furthermore, the technical approach to keeping certain parts of the fabric intact—especially parts of the centre of the building—while replacing lateral parts, can equally be used as a method of expansion. A prominent example for this type of transformation is the Metamorfosis-Church in Sotira, a dome-hall structure that was erected over the central nave of a Late Antique basilica in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century, but changed

profoundly in the subsequent centuries (Fig. 13.5).<sup>8</sup> Fragments of the 13<sup>th</sup> century painted decoration line the central bay and prove that, while the adjoining vaults and the dome have been replaced, the fabric of this bay goes back to the original church. In addition, the preservation pattern of the frescoes illustrates the constructive idea that defines most expansion projects in Cyprus: the “domed canopy”. The paintings are preserved on the inner sides of the four piers that carry the dome, as well as on the inner side of the four arches above. Thus, they mark the canopy-like static “skeleton” of this bay. Only the four piers and the arches are a static necessity, while the lateral walls only carry a small amount of the weight of the vault. This concept is only inherent in domed or cross-vaulted bays (Fig. 13.6). We will come back to the “domed canopy” and its advantages for expansion.

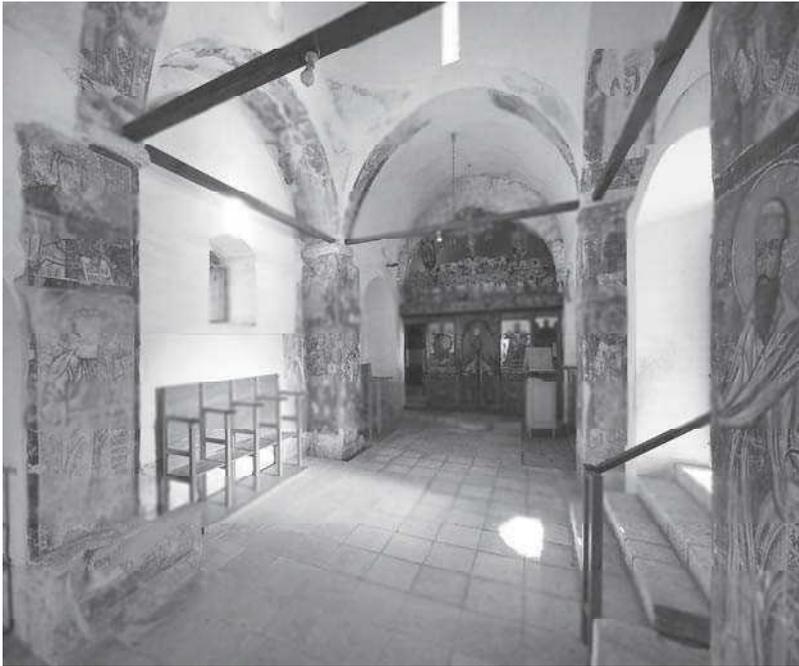


Fig. 13.5 Sotira, Church of the Transfiguration

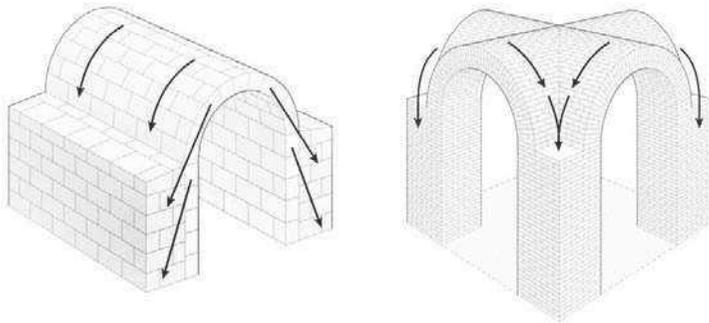


Fig. 13.6 Scheme of thrust lines in a barrel vault and groin vault.

### **Addition of a separate compartment—additive approach**

The addition of a narthex to the original structure in the second phase represents one of the most basic and simple processes of enlargement—albeit not the most common and widespread one.<sup>9</sup> It did not require fundamental changes to the older fabric, as this expansion type is additive and the added space is independent of the older parts. While many of these solutions have been transformed in later centuries, as happened in the case of Saint Epifanios, two churches in the vicinity of Famagusta demonstrate the concept quite unchanged. The Archangel church of Frennaros, today dwarfed by a monstrous successor which was built alongside it a few years ago, consists of a wide dome-hall *naos* with an added domed narthex—very like the one we might assume for Saint Epifanios—and an originally open portico (Fig. 13.7).<sup>10</sup> All three parts are clearly separated by vertical joints and form separate components. A similarly picturesque appearance can be found in the outskirts of Sotira, at the ancient site of Chortakia, where the church of Saint George was doubled in size by adding a second cross-in-square structure to the original building, following the same typology.<sup>11</sup> This odd solution remained unique, but it shows that the typological range of added compartments is not restricted to the classical narthex type.

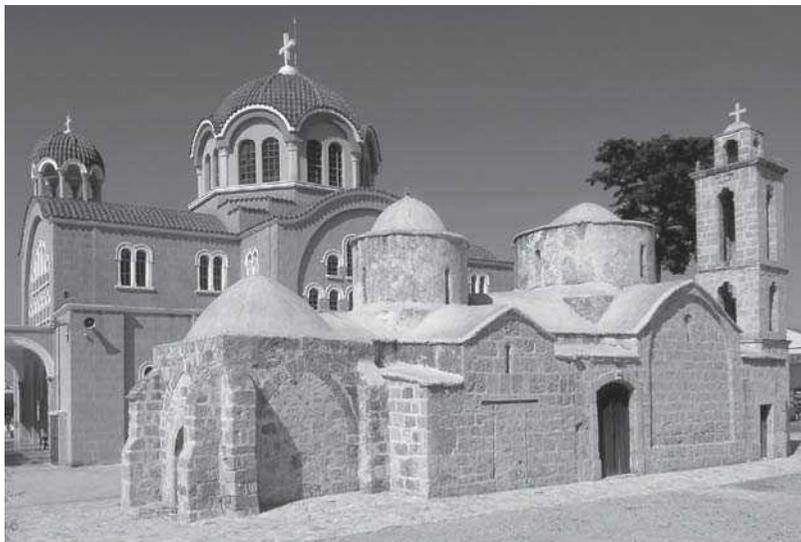


Fig. 13.7 Frennaros, Archangel Michael

More common is the addition of a side chapel to the *naos*. Unlike the case of the nartheces, which are always added according to a quite similar spatial concept (especially concerning access routes), very different solutions for added chapels can be found. Occasionally, an almost complete spatial separation underlines an additive concept behind the expansion, for example visible at the Panagia Angeloktistos in Kiti (Fig. 13.8).<sup>12</sup> There, the so-called Latin chapel connects with the middle Byzantine cross-in-square *naos* via a small doorway only—and is used as a narthex today. The cross vaults show that, with an additive approach, the typology of the added compartment is hardly relevant for the process of enlargement as both spaces retain their independence. However, there is no absolutely clear line between the additive concept of separate side chapels and the more integrative concept used for the addition of new aisles.

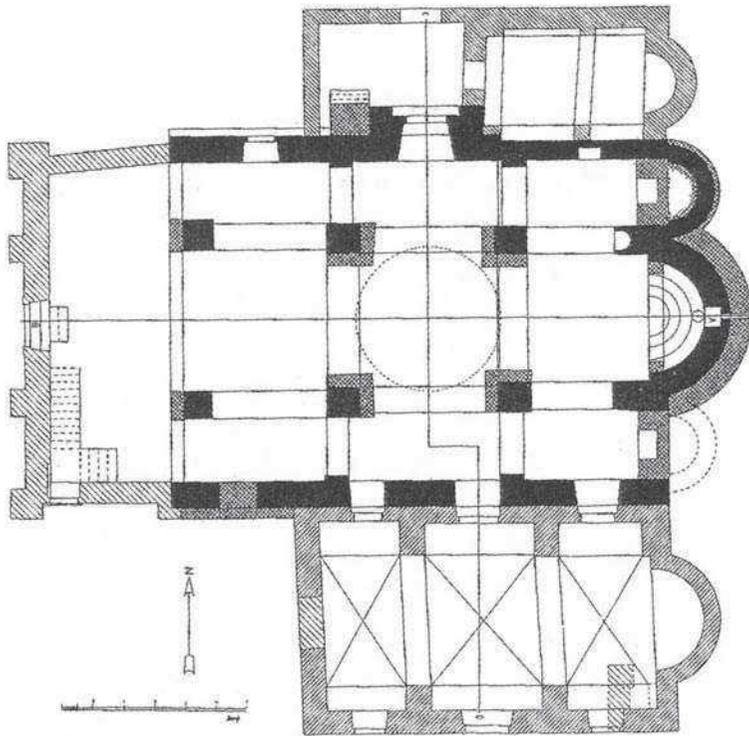


Fig. 13.8 Kiti, Panagia Angeloktisti, ground plan

### **Addition of a Second Nave – Integrative Approach**

The most common procedure of expanding churches on Cyprus is an integrative expansion through the addition of a side aisle. It is apparent that those expansions are the most interesting for today's *Bauforschung*, as the process usually leaves a large number of traces in the structure of the building as well as in its fabric. In Saint Epifanios we can observe, as mentioned above, one of the most sophisticated implementations of this concept. By taking away the southern compartments of the cross-in-square church and structurally mirroring its nave, the southern crossing arch became the new dividing arch between the naves. This process is best seen in the eastern pier of the bay which is divided by a vertical joint (Fig. 13.4). The choice of cross vaults for the bays flanking the central dome of the new aisle would have necessitated a change in the corresponding vaults in

the older structure. However, only the western bay received a groin vault while in the eastern bay a rather odd wall over a low archway illustrates the artistic problem that occurs if one nave is covered by a barrel vault, the other by a cross vault (Fig. 13.4).



Fig. 13.9 Tochni, Church of the Holy Cross

We can only guess why the western bay was changed, while the barrel vault over the eastern bay was kept intact—perhaps the full integration of the new aisle was not considered important in the eastern bay behind the iconostasis. A slightly different but comparable and even more elegant solution was applied in the Holy Cross church in Tochni, where the now-lost older part took the form of a dome hall church (Fig. 13.9).<sup>13</sup> Here, too, the original *naos* was structurally mirrored, but received a cross vault in the central bay instead of a dome. In consequence, the preservation of all the old vaults of the original *naos* was possible. It becomes obvious that all types of cross vaults as well as domed bays use the canopy system described above and thus are compatible with each other in an expansion plan that aims for the creation of large connecting arches.

Canopy-type bays do not necessarily require the filling walls below the arches, if enough counterweight rests on the corner piers. In enlargement projects, this counterweight was created by the new vaults. The process only becomes problematic if an exact mirroring of the nave is not possible for lack of space or not intended for artistic reasons. Then the canopy-principle no longer works, as the corner piers of the vault canopy have to be taken down too. A prominent example which shows a technically challenging solution to this problem is the Orthodox cathedral of Nicosia. Here it was not an enlargement but the insertion of a newly structured main nave, which made the changes of the earlier cross vaults in the aisle necessary. Unlike the regular, systematic examples in Famagusta and Tochni, here the vault springers were supposed to be on the same axis as the nave arcades (Fig. 13.10).



Fig. 13.10 Nicosia, Orthodox cathedral, vault of the southern aisle

The solution can hardly be considered elegant: the springers are bent sideways above the arches, making them look like a malleable, dough-like mass instead of a structurally relevant element. However, this example underlines the use of a sophisticated *reprise en sous-oeuvre*—in this case the replacement of large parts of the lower wall with arches, while the upper parts were not taken down. The *en sous-oeuvre* technique was applied throughout the island: the insertion of large new arches without taking down the vaults of the original structure was one of the most virulent problems for almost every church expansion project, no matter which type of vaulting the church possessed.

The simplest combination of vaulting types was a barrel vault in the old as well as in the new aisle. Here the vaults stabilize each other and the shared wall can be pierced quite easily with wide arches resting on one or two piers. As barrel vaults are the least complicated type of vaulting and most widespread on Cyprus, this type of construction—the double-aisled, barrel-vaulted church—can be found rather frequently in most areas of the island. As an example one might look at the small village church of Lapathos<sup>14</sup>—with two perfectly mirrored aisles—or the Panagia Eleousa, a church on the Carpas peninsula that received an integrated second aisle as well as an added narthex (Fig. 13.11).<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 13.11 Rizokarpasso, Panagia Eleousa, northern and southern nave

While the addition of a domed or cross vaulted structure to an older domed building is similarly unproblematic, as has been shown above, the adaption of simple, barrel-vaulted new compartments to an older, domed core building could pose a range of problems. Theoretically, a small archway, as wide as the older domed bay, could have been used, as the barrel-vaulted space does not possess fixed bay dimensions. However, during the later middle ages there seems to have been a certain preference for wider arches and undivided spaces, as can be seen in the case of Saint Epifanios. This problem was solved with wide, disproportionately flat arches, which did not disrupt the older vaults but neither adhered to the older bay division. The static implications in this aesthetically simple

solution were immense, as two examples from the area of Famagusta show. The Panagia church in Trikomo, which was extended by a second aisle to the north and an expansion to the west simultaneously during the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, shows a rather daring composition: the old dome rests on the new, wide arch, which was placed approximately where the north-western pier of the bay would have stood (Fig. 13.12).<sup>16</sup> As the top of the pointed arch was not aligned with the force line of the dome substructure, it is rather surprising not to find evidence of structural damage.

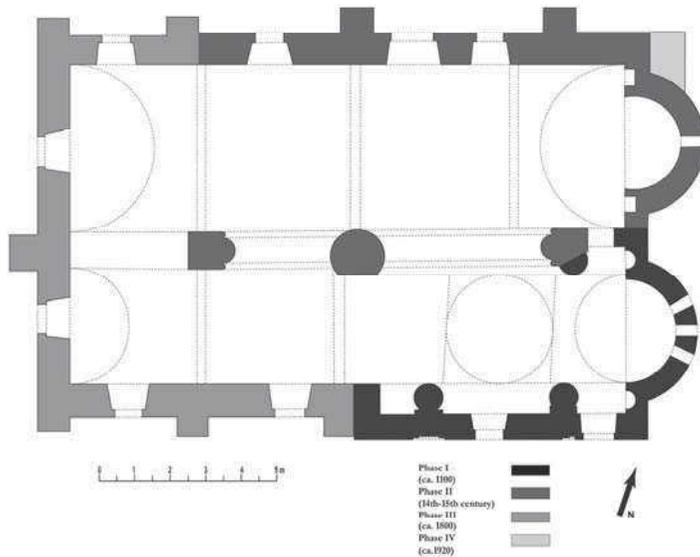


Fig. 13.12 Trikomo, Panagia, ground plan

There are similarly constructed connecting arches in several smaller rural churches, but most of them are only preserved in parts—for example the Panagia church in Kampyli, where the later extension is mainly traceable through the walled up connecting arch (Fig. 13.13). However, the arch itself seems not to have been the reason for the abandonment of the later aisle: the springers of a barrel vault above it are fully intact and nothing indicates any damage to the arch itself.<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 13.13 Kampyli, Panagia

This is supported by the evidence of the unpublished church of Saint Marina near Vitsada, where, apart from the southern apse, the connecting wall between the two aisles is the only remaining part of the otherwise ruined fabric (Fig. 13.14).<sup>18</sup> Apparently, the stability of the inserted wide arches was already perceived as a problem at that time: in the nearby church of Agios Sergios we encounter a *spoliata* column supporting the wide, new arch on the spot where the corner pier of the domed bay would have stood (Fig. 13.15).<sup>19</sup>



Fig. 13.14 Vitsada, Saint Marina

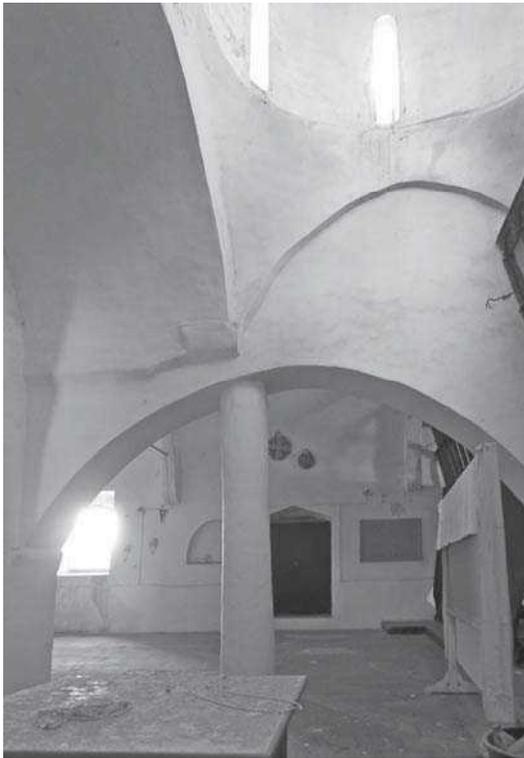


Fig. 13.15 Agios Sergios, Saints Sergios and Bacchos, domed bay with later arch supported by a column

### Multiple Additions—Clustering of Spaces

The church of Agios Sergios is the result of one of the most complex building sequences found in medieval Cypriot architecture; like Saint Epifanios, the church possessed a narthex before the expansion (Fig. 13.16).

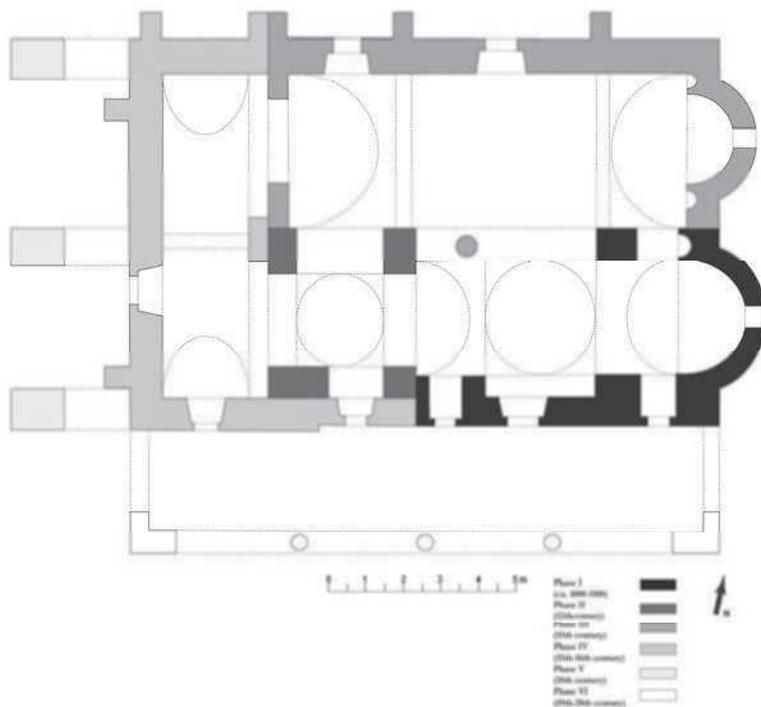


Fig. 13.16 Agios Sergios, Saints Sergios and Bacchos, ground plan

Here, the narthex was opened up towards the old *naos* and reduced to a canopy-like domed bay at the same time as the addition of the second aisle. In consequence, it was fully integrated into the *naos* itself. The whole structure with two naves then received a new narthex and a loggia on the south side. Like Saint Epifanios, the result is an agglomeration of building parts of very different epochs, a “clustering of spaces”, which are visually held together by the surrounding, and more homogenous, parts of the fabric. This brings us back to the importance of *Bauforschung*, especially in the context of church expansion and transformation. Many rural

churches that underwent frequent changes in the past, such as the Archangel Michael church of Peristeronopigi, have not been included in any scholarly study yet. This is probably due to their unspectacular appearance and the fully plastered exterior, which, on first glance, might indicate a building date in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fig. 13.17).



Fig. 13.17 Peristeronopigi, Archangel Michael

On closer inspection, however, the Archangel church seems to be the result of a complex process of expansion, similar to the much better known church of Saint Epifanios—concluding with a last, late phase in the Ottoman period (Figs 13.18–13.19).

### Conclusive view and outlook

This “clustering of spaces” is a very typical process for the island, but the results can vary profoundly. While the use of the integrative approach results in the creation of a unified space, the additive approach creates something we could call a “church family”, resulting in a group of independent spaces (such as in Kiti). Nevertheless, a few buildings show a different approach, maybe closer to ideas brought to the island by the Latins in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. One example is the “crusader style” church of Saint George Exorinos in Famagusta (Fig. 13.20). Here the central nave received two symmetrical side aisles, which, albeit integrated into the *naos*, clearly show a lower level of hierarchy and a certain amount of separation. This hierarchy is rarely present in the majority of the more common double-naved expansion projects.



Fig.13.18 Peristeronopigi, Archangel Michael

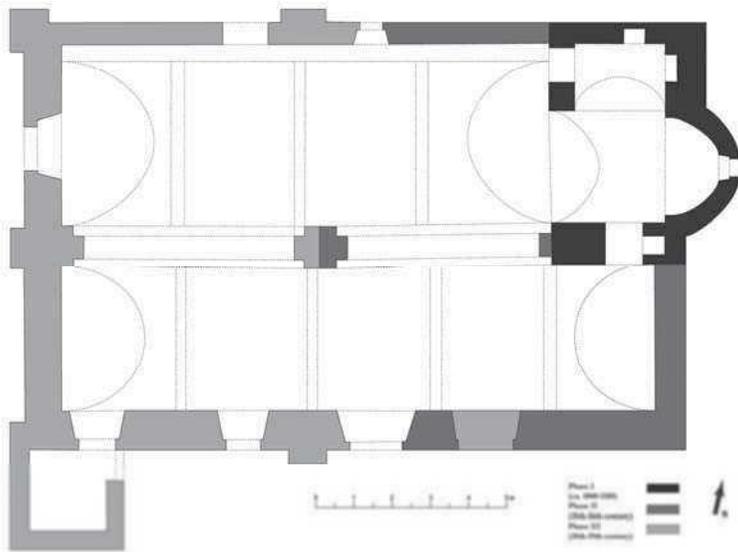


Fig. 13.19 Peristeronopigi, Archangel Michael, ground plan



Fig. 13.20 Famagusta, Saint George Exorinos

To conclude, it has become obvious that the variety of solutions for the expansion of church buildings shows a surprising knowledge of sophisticated techniques that has rarely been recognized by previous scholarship. Even if the typology of the new parts sometimes reacts in a very purposeful way to the older parts in order to facilitate integration, other examples underline an ability and willingness to make use of these more complicated techniques where necessary. As this is merely a first survey, which obviously omitted dozens of similarly important buildings, further studies have to be undertaken to get closer to the as yet unanswered questions of “When?” and “Why?”. The latter especially will be a priority for further scholarship, since, as explained previously, the transformation of architecture can prove a decisive marker for all types of external factors, social-historical as well as—in the case of churches-liturgical. We could ask why it was important to keep the often poorly built older chapels as part of the new building. Even more interesting, in multicultural medieval Cyprus, was the intended use of the building behind the choice of either large, connecting arches, or minor doorways? In the case of double-aisled buildings the thought of a shared place of devotion, used by Greeks as well as Latins, has already been suggested.<sup>20</sup> However, it remains unclear which type of connection between the aisles would have been necessary for a shared liturgical use. While this is not the place to further elaborate the problem, it shows the potential of the topic as well as the necessity of a thorough *Bauforschung* in order to reach resilient conclusions in the future.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Boato/Pittalunga 2000, n.p.

<sup>2</sup> For general remarks on the topic see Großmann 1993 and Von Winterfeld 2008.

<sup>3</sup> While most survey-like publications of the early 20th century, i.e. Enlart 1899, Jeffery 1918 and Gunnis 1936, merely give some very general, infrequent observations on phases etc. Recent scholarship puts an increasing focus on questions of building archaeology (see for example Olympios 2014 or Kaffenberger 2014).

<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive account will be given in my forthcoming PhD project “Tradition and Identity. Agios Georgios in Famagusta and the Orthodox ecclesiastical architecture under Lusignan, Genoese and Venetian rule in Cyprus”.

<sup>5</sup> Most recently Kaffenberger 2014, on which the chapter is based. See footnotes 4–8 there for a comprehensive bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed description of the transformation process see Kaffenberger 2014, 181–183.

<sup>7</sup> For this building see most recently Papacostas 2010. The structural analysis undertaken in the course of recent (infelicitous) restoration works has not yet been published.

<sup>8</sup> This important church is mentioned in Weyl Carr 2005, 296. A comprehensive study of the building, including its complicated architectural history, is currently in preparation.

<sup>9</sup> For the question of early nartheces in Cyprus see Papageorghiou 1982.

<sup>10</sup> Most recently, including rich plan material, Prokopiou 2006, 113–124.

<sup>11</sup> Papacostas 1999, II, 30–31

<sup>12</sup> For the church of Kiti, mainly investigating the late antique apse mosaic, see Fischer 2007. For the Gothic chapel see Enlart 1987, 334–335.

<sup>13</sup> Enlart 1987, 337–340.

<sup>14</sup> Gunnis 1936, 313 wrongly dates the church to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is otherwise unpublished.

<sup>15</sup> Enlart 1987, 313; Papageorghiou 2010, 369–370.

<sup>16</sup> Most recently, including rich plan material, Prokopiou 2006, 86–98 and Papageorghiou 2010, 229–240.

<sup>17</sup> Thus Langdale’s opinion that the arch was walled up as a result of structural instability and the expansion project abandoned subsequently seems rather unlikely (Langdale 2012, 194).

<sup>18</sup> Gunnis 1936, 457, only mentions the existence of a ruin without giving further information.

<sup>19</sup> Most recently Papageorghiou 2010, 31–33 and Langdale 2012, 181.

<sup>20</sup> For the case of Agios Sergios see for example Langdale 2012, 181. An immensely rich volume on Cretan ecclesiastical architecture, written by Olga Gratziou, toggles similar questions – albeit without reaching final, completely coherent results. (Gratziou 2010, esp. 127–183–on the problems of this study see Tsamakda 2011).

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