The image shows the ruins of an ancient stone building, likely a church or monastery, in Cyprus. The structure is built from large, weathered, light-brown stone blocks. In the foreground, there are two prominent arched openings, possibly doorways or windows, which are dark and shadowed. The walls are thick and show signs of significant age and wear. The background is a clear blue sky with a few wispy white clouds. The overall scene is one of historical significance and architectural grandeur.

# WORLD HERITAGE IN CYPRUS

history • myth • religion

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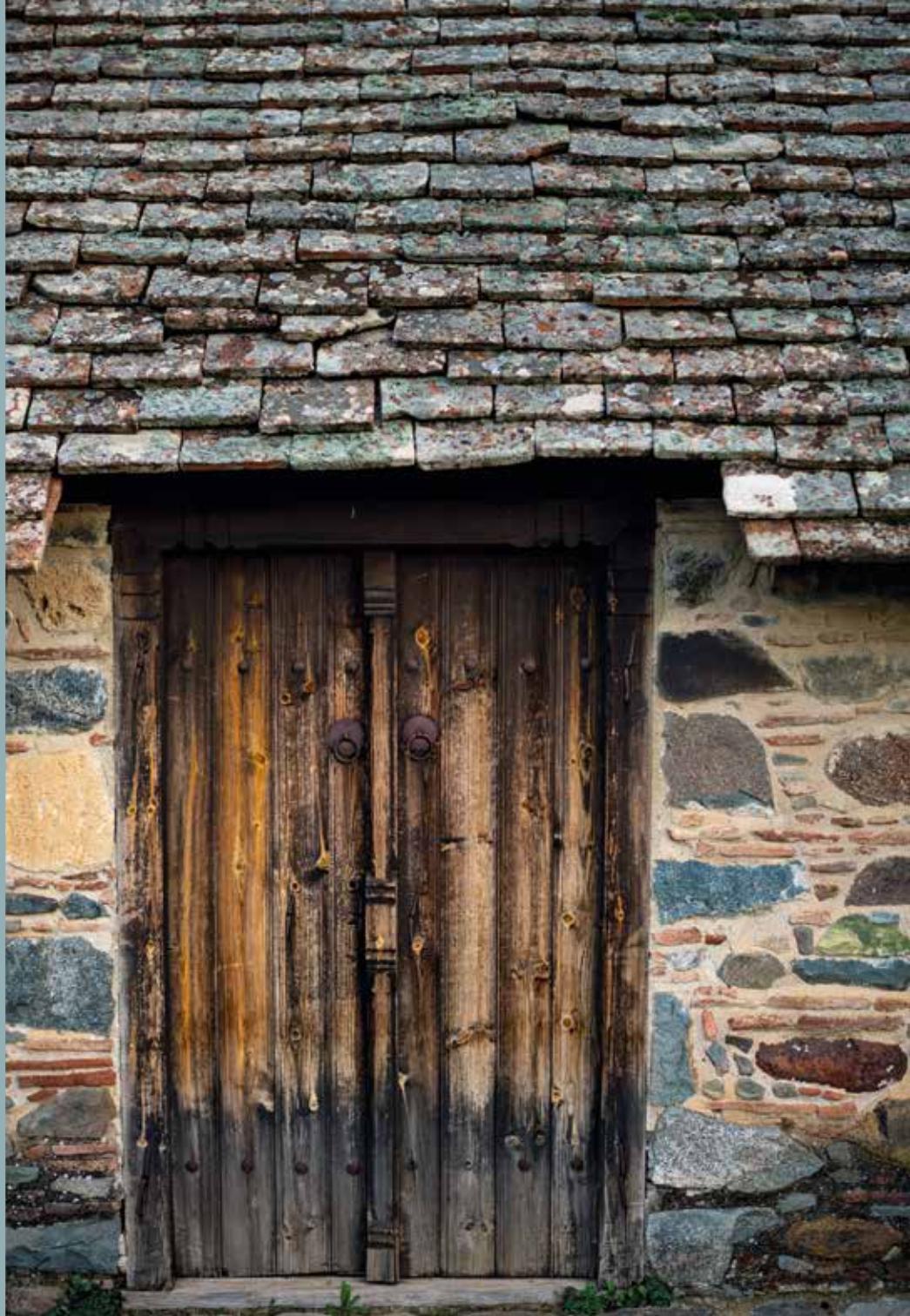
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# Introduction

Cyprus, situated at the crossroads of east and west, is scattered with monuments that bear witness to the island's uninterrupted human presence from prehistoric times to the present day. In these remnants—testaments to the creativity of both the locals and the visitors who left their mark on its cultural heritage—history, landscape, myth, and religion are harmoniously interwoven. Together, they reflect the island's turbulent journey through time and highlight its role as a hub of cultural interaction and exchange.

From the imposing ruins of the city-kingdoms of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC to the profound spirituality emanating from the art of the humble rural churches of the Cypriot countryside, the monuments of Cyprus form an integral part of the world's cultural heritage and of humanity's collective memory.

Cyprus' three inscriptions on the UNESCO World Heritage List are linked to key milestones in the island's historical and cultural development, as it evolved alongside other great civilisations of the Mediterranean. The Neolithic settlement of Choirokoitia, Pafos (Palaepafos and Nea Pafos), and the ten painted churches of the Troodos Mountains are among the most characteristic tesserae of Cyprus' cultural mosaic and rightfully hold their place on the world map of cultural heritage.

The study of these monuments' history reveals the dynamic coexistence of seemingly disparate elements, the constant interplay between mythology and religious faith, the inseparable bond between humans and their natural environment, as well as the transformation of existential anxieties, aspirations, and experiences into works of art.

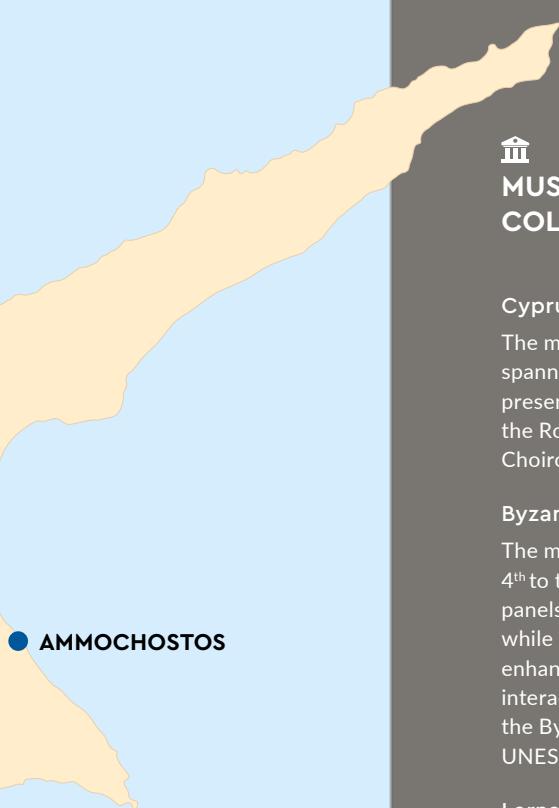
This publication invites you on a journey of discovery through Cyprus World Heritage cultural treasures—a path that not only evokes the past but also emerges as a source of inspiration for the future, drawing strength from the resilience and creative spirit of those who came before us.



# World Heritage Sites in Cyprus



- 1 Church of Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis (St Nicholas of the Roof), Kakopetria
- 2 Church of Panagia (Our Lady) Podithou, Galata
- 3 Church of Panagia (Our Lady) Forviotissa (of Asinou), Nikitari
- 4 Church of the Timios Stavros (Holy Cross) of Agiasmati, Platanistasa
- 5 Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour or Agia Sotira, Palaichori
- 6 Church of the Timios Stavros (Holy Cross), Pelendri
- 7 Church of Panagia (Our Lady) tou Araka, Lagoudera
- 8 Monastery of Agios Ioannis (St John) Lambadistis, Kalopanagiotis
- 9 Church of Panagia (Our Lady), Moutoullas
- 10 Church of Archangelos Michail (Archangel Michael), Pedoulas



## MUSEUMS WITH RELEVANT COLLECTIONS

### Cyprus Museum, Lefkosia

The museum displays archaeological finds spanning from the earliest evidence of human presence on the island (11<sup>th</sup> millennium BC) to the Roman period, including artefacts from Choirokoitia and Pafos.

### Byzantine Museum, Lefkosia

The museum's collections date from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Detailed information panels provide context for the exhibits, while modern digital media and QR codes enhance the visitor experience. Notably, interactive screens allow visitors to explore the Byzantine churches inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

### Larnaka District Archaeological Museum

The museum houses an extensive collection of artefacts from across the Larnaka District, including finds from the ancient city-kingdom of Kition, and the Neolithic settlements of Choirokoitia and Kalavassos-Tenta.

### Local Archaeological Museum of Palaepafos

The museum is housed within the archaeological site of Kouklia, in the eastern wing of the medieval Lusignan Manor. It displays artefacts uncovered during excavations of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, the urban residential areas, and the necropoleis of the wider region.

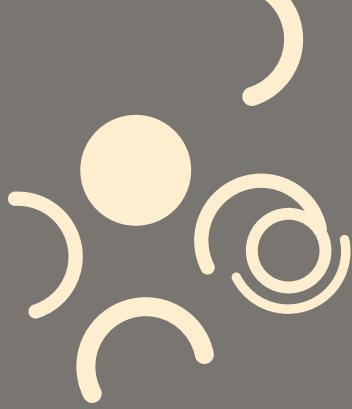
### Pafos District Archaeological Museum

The museum's collection features finds from the Pafos region spanning the Neolithic period to the Roman times (4<sup>th</sup> century AD). The exhibits originate mainly from Palaepafos (Kouklia), Nea Pafos, the Marion-Arsinoe area (Polis), as well as from Pegeia, Kissonerga, Lemba, Pano Arodes, Salamiou, Akourdalia, Pomos, Kidasí, and Geroskipou. Important finds from the Roman houses of Nea Pafos are also on display.

### Byzantine Museum of Pedoulas

The museum's collection comprises rare icons, sacred vessels, Byzantine manuscripts, and ecclesiastical books dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among its most treasured exhibits are the icons of the Virgin Hodegetria (13<sup>th</sup> century), the Virgin Eleousa (14<sup>th</sup> century), and St George the Dragon Slayer, accompanied by scenes from his life. Equally remarkable are the icons of the Cypriot iconographer Minas (ca. 1474), who also painted the interior of the Church of Archangel Michael.

● AMMOCHOSTOS



# CHOIROKOITIA

A window into  
the prehistory of Cyprus





During the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, an original Neolithic culture flourished in Cyprus, named after the site of Choirokoitia. It represents the outcome of a long trajectory. According to recent research, following repeated seasonal visitations of hunters during the 11<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, the arrival of settlers from the neighbouring mainland is attested by the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> millennium BC.

## A Neolithic village

The settlement of Choirokoitia, founded in the course of the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium, lies on the slopes of a hill partially surrounded by a meandering bend of the Maroni River. The village was enclosed by an impressive wall, including a system of access points. Inside this enclosure, habitations are crowded together.

The basic architectural element is a circular construction with a flat roof. The building materials used, separately or in combination, are stone and mud brick. A house consists of several circular constructions organised around an open-air 'courtyard' arrangement equipped with an installation for grinding grain.

## Daily life tools

Pottery-making was not known to the inhabitants. They used stone to make containers and vessels, numerous and varied in shape. Perishable materials such as wood, basketry or skins were undoubtedly used as well, but nothing remains of them. Stone was also used to make axes and hammers, grinding equipment, ornaments and anthropomorphic figurines. Tools also include flint blades and sickle elements, as well as bone needles and awls.

## Herding, hunting and farming

The area within the enclosure wall was reserved for humans. Animals such as sheep, goats and pigs were kept outside. Besides animal herding, the community's economy was based on hunting (fallow deer) and farming. Emmer wheat, einkorn and, to a lesser extent, barley were cultivated, along with vegetables such as lentils.



## Life and death

The dead were not separated from the living. They were buried in pits dug inside the house itself. In some cases, intentionally broken stone vessels were placed next to the deceased. Once the body had been laid to rest, the pit was filled in and the living could return to the house.



## A living experience

Today, visitors can explore the site and see reconstructions of five circular constructions and a section of the enclosure wall, together with an entrance to the village. These were built using traditional techniques and the same materials employed during the Neolithic period.

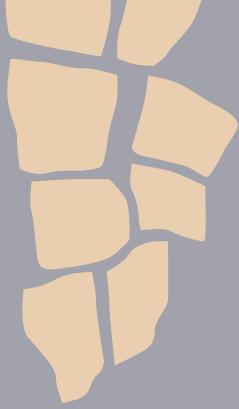
Immersive technologies were recently used to create a public virtual tour of the Neolithic village, introducing visitors to the core aspects of the settlement.

## Heritage of universal value

Choirokoitia was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1998, as it provides invaluable scientific insights into the beginnings of permanent human settlement in the Mediterranean and beyond, while also documenting Cyprus' crucial role in illuminating the unique trajectories taken by early human populations in responding to their environment.



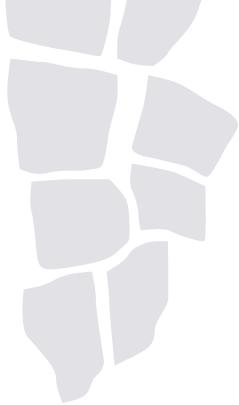




PAFOS

Place of myths  
and history





# PALAEPAFOS

Near the estuary of the Diarizos River, on the southwestern coast of Cyprus, lies the only site on the island whose history—from antiquity to the present—is captured in the three place names by which it is known: Pafos, Palaepafos, Kouklia. The modern community of Kouklia, whose name derives from the medieval toponym *Covocle/Couvoucle* (*kouvouklion*, meaning ‘cubicle’ or ‘chamber’), stands atop the ruins of only a small part of the ancient city of Pafos. Homer was the first to mention Pafos as the site of a famed sanctuary dedicated to the worship of the goddess Aphrodite (*Odyssey*, Book 9, lines 362-363), whom he even refers to as *Kypris* (*Iliad*, Book 5, line 330).

Pafos was founded as a trading port in the Late Bronze Age (1700 BC). A few centuries later, it developed into the first urban-administrative centre of southwestern Cyprus and remained the seat of the city-kingdom of Pafos until the end of the Cypro-Classical period. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the relocation of the port 11 kilometres further west led to the founding of Nea (New) Pafos, which became the new capital of the kingdom shortly before the abolition of all the independent city-kingdoms of Cyprus by Ptolemy I Soter in 300 BC. From then on, Pafos became known as Palaea (Old) Pafos—Palaepafos.



## The sacred place of *Kypris* Aphrodite

Palaepafos was the most significant centre of worship for the goddess Aphrodite in antiquity. The foremost monument of both Pafos and Palaepafos was the megalithic *temenos*, a sacred enclosure (from the verb *temno*, meaning 'to cut off' and render sacred) of the goddess *Kypris*. It was built in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century BC on a plateau overlooking the harbour. For the next 800 years, it functioned as the 'cathedral' of the royal dynasties of Pafos, whose rulers held dual authority: they were Kings of Pafos and Priests of the *Anassa*, essentially drawing their legitimacy from their close association with the divine cult. According to depictions on coins and amulets from the Roman period, the temple housed a tripartite *adyton* (inner sanctuary), at the centre of which stood a conical *baetylus*—the aniconic symbol of the goddess *Kypris*, who, according to myth, emerged from the foam of the waves on the nearby shore. The *baetylus* was discovered among the ruins of the sanctuary and is now on display at the Kouklia Museum.



## City, burial sites, and workshops

Palaepafos was not only a major centre of worship but also a vibrant city featuring workshops and rich burial complexes that, during the Late Bronze Age, coexisted with residential areas around the harbour. The *Evreti* residential area, located northeast of the sanctuary, housed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC the workshops of skilled craftsmen who worked with rare raw materials such as ivory.

From the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC onward, large communal cemeteries of rock-cut tombs were established beyond the urban environment, within a radius of five kilometres—from the east (e.g., the *Skales* necropolis) to the west (e.g., the *Plakes* necropolis). The grave goods from the Cypro-Geometric period (such as symposium vessels and weaponry) are among the richest found on the island and appear to accompany the burials of aristocrats and warriors. A bronze *obelos* (spit) from the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, found in a tomb at *Skales*, bears the earliest known Greek inscription in Cyprus to date, where the name *Opheltas* (in the Arcado-Cypriot dialect) is written in the Cypro-Minoan, the island's syllabic script.

During the Cypro-Archaic period, an impressive fortification was constructed on the *Marcello* plateau, north of the sanctuary. Part of it has been excavated, along with hundreds of broken statues and dedicatory stone inscriptions in the Greek syllabary, originating from a royal sanctuary. Representative examples are exhibited in the Kouklia Museum.





To the east of the sanctuary, new excavation data confirm that the *Hadjiabdullah* plateau and the nearby *Laona* mound were part of a walled citadel in the Cypro-Classical period. At *Hadjiabdullah*, next to a stone-built palatial structure, a large industrial complex has been excavated, where, in addition to oil production, evidence attests to royal investment in the production of purple dye. At *Laona*, sections of the wall are preserved up to 7 meters high, as they had been buried and preserved beneath a monumental tumulus, whose construction in the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, would have almost certainly required the assistance of Macedonian engineers.

## Palaepafos and its monuments from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods

The emblematic sanctuary of the Pafian Aphrodite experienced a second life during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, when it was elevated to the status of a Pan-Cypriot sanctuary and became the central site for the operations of the *Koinon Kyprion* (Confederation of the Cypriots), a council of the island's cities entrusted with the worship of the rulers. Cyprus had no Pan-Cypriot sanctuaries, equivalent to the Panhellenic ones. However, the Ptolemies, as part of a long-term strategy aimed at creating a unified political and religious environment, transformed the sanctuary at Pafos into the first Pan-Cypriot shrine, where the ruling Ptolemaic dynasty was worshipped alongside the goddess Aphrodite.



Almost all the monuments that now surround the sanctuary date from the Roman period. Despite the international fame the sanctuary gained during the Greco-Roman era, Palaepafos gradually shrank into a sacred township, centred on the plateau of the sanctuary, serving primarily the needs of pilgrims.

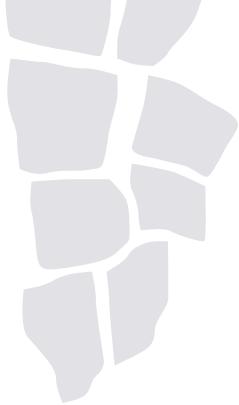
The longevity and uninterrupted operation of the sanctuary of Pafos and Palaepafos is remarkable: it was founded in 1200 BC and remained active until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, when it ceased to function due to the spread and dominance of Christianity.

## Kouklia and the medieval monuments

We do not know exactly how or when Palaepafos came to be called *Kouvouklion* (*Covocle/ Couvoucle*). Although the term suggests that it would have originated in the Byzantine period, the monument most closely associated with this name is the medieval manor of the Lusignan royal family. The manor, which today houses the Kouklia Museum, was constructed within the ancient sanctuary. Many of the temple's megaliths were repurposed as millstones in the production of sugar from the sugarcane plantations of the Kouklia feudal estate. A refinery complex, comprising a complete industrial sugar production unit, has been excavated on the coastal front of the Kouklia community, at the site of *Stavros*.







# NEA PAFOS

Nea Pafos was founded in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC by Nicocles, the last king of the city-kingdom of Pafos, in a strategic location on the western coast of Cyprus. The newly established city rapidly evolved into a major administrative centre and commercial port of the island. During the more than two centuries of Ptolemaic rule over Cyprus (294–58 BC), the city flourished, driven by its region's valuable natural resources—particularly copper and timber—as well as its port's proximity to Alexandria.

## Capital of Cyprus

By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, Nea Pafos had become the capital of the island, a role it maintained even after Cyprus was annexed by Rome in 58 BC. During the Severan period (late 2<sup>nd</sup>–early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD), the city reached the height of its prosperity. It was then given the honorary title 'Augusta Claudia Flavia Pafos, the sacred Metropolis of the cities of Cyprus', reflecting both its prestige and the imperial favour it enjoyed.

## The arrival of the Apostles and the first Christian governor

In 45 AD, the Apostles Paul and Barnabas visited Pafos to preach Christianity. Following the miraculous blinding of the sorcerer Elymas by Paul, the Roman proconsul Lucius Sergius Paulus embraced the new faith, making Pafos the first Roman province governed by a Christian official. Christianity gradually gained a foothold in the city, coexisting for an extended period with the traditional pagan religion. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, after the Edict of Milan, the first Christian churches began to appear in the city.

However, a series of devastating earthquakes during the same century prompted the relocation of the island's capital to Salamis, which was renamed Constantia. Although Pafos was rebuilt and adorned with impressive buildings, its political decline eventually led to its overall deterioration, particularly after the Arab raids of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD.



## The monuments of the city

The main archaeological sites of Nea Pafos include the Hellenistic necropolis, known as the 'Tombs of the Kings', the Roman houses with their exquisitely crafted mosaic floors, the Roman Agora with the Odeon, the Theatre, and the Christian Basilica of Chrysopolitissa.

## The Tombs of the Kings

The 'Tombs of the Kings' (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC–4<sup>th</sup> century AD) constitute the northern section of the necropolis of Nea Pafos, located beyond the city's fortified walls. Despite their name—bestowed to them because of the grandeur of their architecture—these rock-cut tombs were not definitively linked to royal burials until recently. Evidence suggests they served as the burial site for Ptolemaic officials and members of the local aristocracy of Pafos. The discovery of falcon



figures in front of a tomb chamber of distinctive architecture and decoration indicates that it may have belonged to a member of the Ptolemaic dynasty—possibly even the last king of Cyprus.

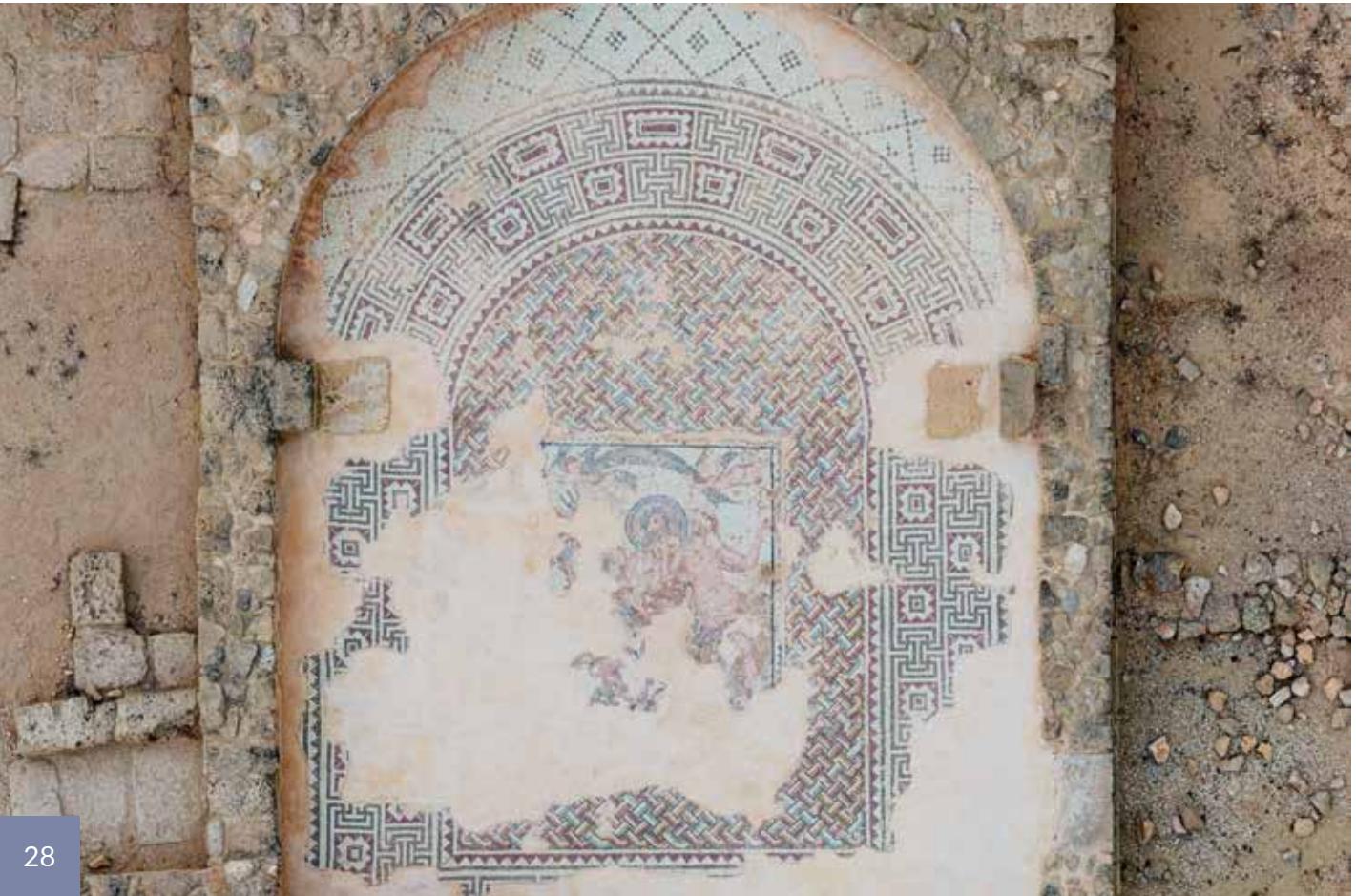
The large tombs, designed to resemble contemporary houses, are arranged around a peristyle courtyard (*atrium*), accessible via a stepped passageway (*dromos*). The deceased were laid to rest in burial niches carved into the walls of the tomb chambers, which were then sealed with stone slabs or built walls, sometimes painted to resemble wooden doors. The *atria* of the larger tombs, which were equipped with a well, remained open to allow for offerings (libations) to the dead, in accordance with Greek funerary traditions. In several cases, traces of burnt offerings have been found.

Monumental in scale and intended for the elite, the 'Tombs of the Kings' reflect Alexandrian influence and showcase the wealth and refined artistic development of the Hellenistic and Roman capital.



## The Roman houses with mosaic floors

Luxurious residences from the Hellenistic and especially the Roman period, clustered in one of the most prestigious quarters of the ancient city, now form part of the Archaeological Park of Kato Pafos. These dwellings are outstanding examples of the domestic architecture of their time, typically arranged around a central peristyle courtyard (*atrium*). They are distinguished not only by their architectural layout but also by their elaborate decorative elements, including sculptures, wall paintings, and mosaic floors. The surviving mosaics portray a rich array of themes, ranging from mythological narratives and scenes of everyday life to intricate decorative compositions with floral and geometric patterns. These works affirm Cyprus' role as one of the leading centres of mosaic production in the Roman world. Cypriot mosaic workshops developed a distinct artistic style of their own, rooted in the Eastern artistic traditions.



The **House of Dionysus** (2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century AD) is perhaps the most renowned of the residences, due to its well-preserved and extensive mosaic decoration. The mosaic floors, which cover one-quarter of the built area, depict mythological scenes, personifications of the four seasons, as well as vintage and hunting scenes, featuring representations of exotic animals. Among the most striking images are the 'Triumph of Dionysus', located in the largest room of the house—the *tablinum* (a reception and dining room)—and the story of Icarius and Dionysus in the western portico. At the entrance to the residence lies a pebble mosaic floor, originally from an earlier Hellenistic building (late 4<sup>th</sup>–early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) discovered beneath the Roman house. It depicts the mythical sea monster Scylla and is the earliest mosaic found on the island to date.



The **Villa of Theseus** (2<sup>nd</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century AD), the largest Roman residential building discovered to date in Cyprus—and one of the largest in the Mediterranean—includes over 100 rooms arranged around an *atrium*, and preserves more than 1,400 square meters of mosaic flooring. Particularly striking are the mosaics with figurative themes, such as the depiction of Theseus fighting the Minotaur inside the labyrinth, Poseidon and Amphitrite, as well as Achilles' first bath. These mosaics belong to different chronological phases.

The **House of Orpheus** (2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century AD), also a luxurious building from the Roman period, preserves mosaic decoration of exceptional quality. The most important mosaic depicts Orpheus seated on a rock, enchanting with the music of his lyre a multitude of animals which gather around him. Notably, the mosaic includes an inscription mentioning the name of the sponsor—very likely the owner of the residence: Titus or Gaius Pinnius Restitutus. Other mosaics from the same house depict Hercules and the Nemean lion, as well as an Amazon with a horse.



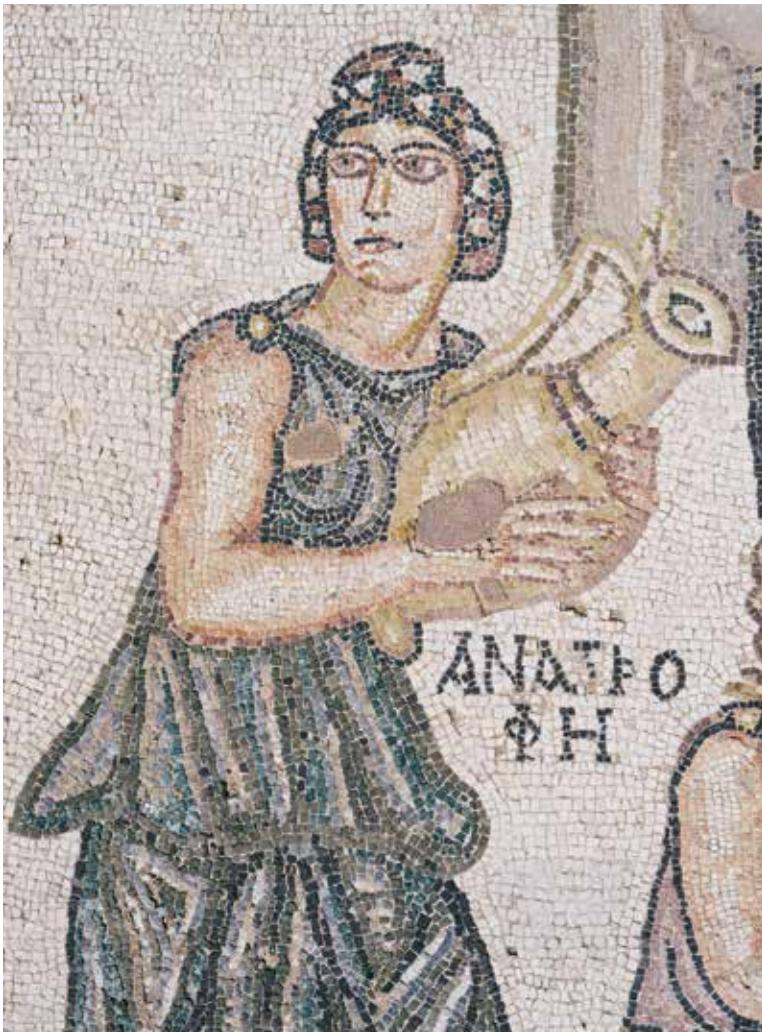


The **House of Aion** preserves the most impressive and iconographically significant group of mosaic scenes in Pafos, dating to around the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The mosaic floor of the residence's reception hall includes five panels depicting: the first bath of Dionysus, Leda and the swan, the beauty contest between Cassiopeia and the Nereids, Apollo and Marsyas, and the triumph of Dionysus. These are works of superior quality, featuring complex compositions, scenic elements that create a sense of depth, and an astonishingly rich variety of colours, which enhance the rendering of the figures' bodies and clothing.



## Crafting mosaics: materials, techniques, and artisans

The mosaic floors were made by well-organised workshops equipped with pattern books from which they copied or drew inspiration. The tesserae, small pieces of stone used for making the mosaics, were primarily made from locally sourced materials, though in rare cases imported marble was also employed. Additionally, tesserae in shades of orange, blue, yellow, and green were made from coloured glass. Despite being relatively inexpensive to produce, and mosaicists ranking among the lowest-paid artisans in the Roman world, such elaborate decorations remained beyond the financial reach of the lower social classes.



## The Roman Agora, Odeon, and Theatre

Significant Roman public buildings dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD have been discovered in the northwestern part of Nea Pafos. To the west of the remains of the four-winged Agora, stands the fully-rebuilt Odeon—currently the only known structure of its kind in Cyprus. Designed in the form of a small theatre and clad with hewn limestone blocks, the Odeon was used for musical and other performances. It may have also functioned as a council house (*bouleuterion*).

The Theatre of Nea Pafos was situated at the northeastern edge of the city, on the slope of Fabrica Hill. Archaeological evidence indicates that its construction coincided with the city's foundation around 300 BC, and it underwent many modifications over the centuries. During



the reign of the Antonine dynasty (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), the theatre was rebuilt to accommodate a larger audience. Around the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, it was further adapted to reflect changing tastes in public entertainment: the orchestra was transformed into an arena for beast hunts and gladiatorial contests, and it could even be flooded to stage reenactments of historical naval battles and myths performed on water. The theatre ceased to be used by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, and its architectural elements were subsequently reused in other constructions, including the nearby Chrysopolitissa Basilica.



## The Basilica of Chrysopolitissa

The spread of Christianity in Cyprus around the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD was marked by the construction of both large and smaller basilicas—rectangular church buildings divided into aisles by rows of columns. The Basilica of Chrysopolitissa, part of the city's episcopal complex, is the second-largest basilica excavated in Cyprus to date, surpassed only by that of St Epiphanius in Salamis. Originally seven-aisled, the basilica was built in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, extensively reusing marble and granite architectural elements from earlier, abandoned structures in the city, including the Theatre.

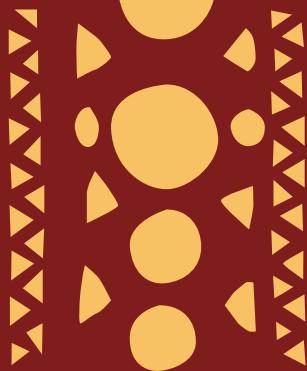
The basilica was lavishly decorated with wall and floor mosaics, frescoes, wall veneering with large rectangular marble slabs, and *opus sectile* (intricate marble inlays composed of small, shaped tiles in various colours). Its opulent decoration featured multi-coloured marbles sourced from various regions of Egypt, Asia Minor, and the Aegean.



## Heritage of universal value

Pafos has been recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, thanks to its pivotal religious and cultural role as a centre of worship for Aphrodite and other pre-Hellenic deities, as well as its significant contribution to the spread of Christianity. The rich archaeological remains of Palaepafos and Nea Pafos—including sanctuaries, residences, theatre, fortifications, and tombs—together with the renowned mosaics, counted among the finest in the world, shed a unique light on ancient architecture, mythology, and everyday life.





# THE PAINTED CHURCHES IN THE TROODOS REGION

Artistic testimonies of faith  
in the heart of Cyprus





In the central part of Cyprus, within the Troodos mountain range—the island's largest and highest mountainous area, known for its lush forests and unique geological and cultural features—lie scattered small, humble churches. These are important examples of rural ecclesiastical architecture, dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ten of these churches have been inscribed, as a group, on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Inside, they preserve wall paintings of inestimable value, blending elements of metropolitan Byzantine art with distinctive local characteristics. Through these artworks, visitors can gain insights into the history of faith, the island, and its artistic heritage over nearly a millennium.

### A unique architectural type

The distinctive type of single-aisled—or, more rarely, three-aisled—timber-roofed church is found almost exclusively in the Troodos region. While the timber roof may reflect some European influence, the single-aisled church with a pitched timber roof appears to be a local development. These buildings were produced by local, vernacular craftsmen who used materials from the immediate environment to create structures that align with the Byzantine aesthetic.

The steeply pitched roof is not merely an aesthetic feature; it is cleverly designed to protect the buildings from the region's rain and snow, to provide bioclimatic conditions, and to allow for easy maintenance. Its construction reflects a high level of technological knowledge and application in terms of timber joinery, structural stability, and seismic resistance. In essence, it is a remarkable synthesis of technology, art, and ecological design.



## Structures embedded in the landscape

The churches were built using materials abundant in the Troodos region: roughly hewn or unworked volcanic stones, small bricks, and tile fragments for the masonry; local timber and flat hooked tiles for the roof, made on site from red clay and arranged to overlap for waterproofing. Horizontal wooden beams (tie beams, called *xylodesies*) were inserted into the masonry as reinforcements, while wood was also used in the few openings and for the iconostasis.

## 'Speaking' painting

The interiors—and in many cases even the exteriors—of the ten churches are adorned with wall paintings of high artistic and theological value. Mural painters used natural pigments sourced from the very earth of the Troodos region: umber for brown, celadonite (green earth) for blue-green, hematite for deep red, malachite for deep green, and azurite for blue.

The paintings depict not only religious themes but also the evolution of artistic styles over the centuries. Taken as a whole, the murals in the ten churches reflect the various stylistic trends that appear in monumental painting from the end of the Middle Byzantine period (965–1191), through the Lusignan period (1192–1489), the Venetian era (1489–1571), and even later.





## Heritage of universal value

In 1985, nine of the churches were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a single group, with a tenth added in 2001. Their inscription was based on their authenticity, their value as monuments of rural ecclesiastical architecture preserved in excellent condition, and their significance both for understanding Byzantine and post-Byzantine art in the Mediterranean, and for documenting the relationship between Eastern and Western Christian art.

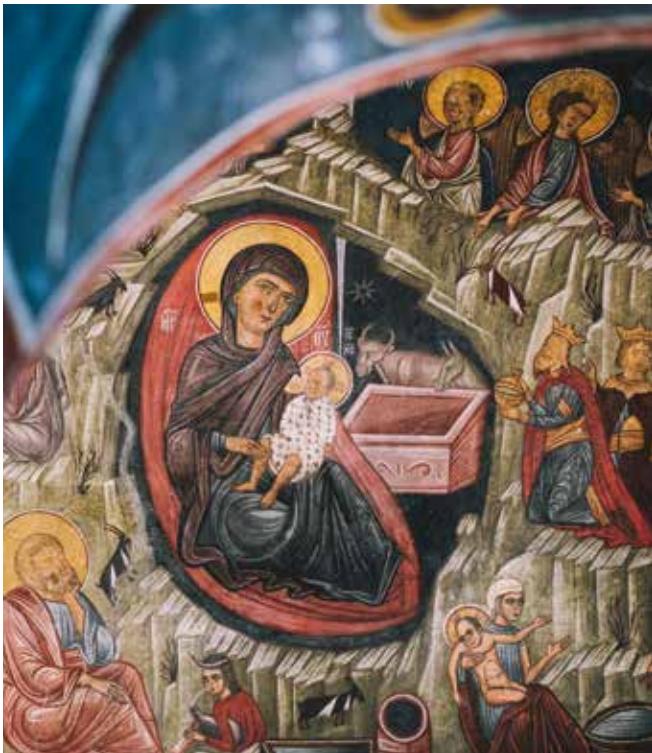


## Church of Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis (St Nicholas of the Roof) Kakopetria

The Church of Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis (St Nicholas of the Roof) is located near Kakopetria, in the northern part of the Solea Valley. It is the only surviving part of a monastery, likely founded during the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The monastery flourished during the Middle Byzantine period and the Lusignan era, but it ceased operation in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century after a long period of decline. The church, which dates to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, follows the architectural type of the domed cross-in-square church. Its timber roof, covered with hooked tiles, was added by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, giving the church the name 'of the Roof' (*tis Stegis*).

The church has aptly been described as a museum of Byzantine painting, as its wall paintings belong to various artistic phases spanning over 600 years. The earliest paintings, dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, form the most significant surviving group documenting the Byzantine art of that era in Cyprus. These include the Platytera between two angels in the sanctuary apse, the Ascension and Pentecost on the eastern vault above the sanctuary, the Transfiguration, the Raising of Lazarus, and the Entry into Jerusalem on the western vault, as well as the Dormition of the Virgin on the west wall. These scenes are characterised by coarseness, linearity and a limited colour palette, in addition to the strong expressiveness of the depicted figures. Among the 14<sup>th</sup>-century wall paintings, the Nativity scene stands out, depicting the Virgin seated and nursing Christ—perhaps under Western influence.

The post-Byzantine paintings date to 1633 and feature full-length depictions of apostles Peter and Paul. They adorn the eastern piers supporting the church's dome, near the iconostasis, which also dates to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These works were created by the iconographer Pavlos from Lefkosia.



## Church of Panagia (Our Lady) Podithou Galata

The Church of Panagia (Our Lady) Podithou is located near the village of Galata, in the northern part of the Solea Valley. According to an inscription, it was built in 1502 by the military officer Demetrios de Coron and his wife, Helen. It served as the *katholikon* of a small monastery that was abandoned in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The church is dedicated to the Virgin Eleousa. The later epithet 'Podithou' (from the verb *apodyomai*, meaning 'to remove one's vestments') may relate to a scene on the west wall showing Moses untying his sandals before the Burning Bush.

This single-aisled, timber-roofed church is surrounded on three sides by a later enclosed portico. The sanctuary and the interior and exterior of the west wall are adorned with notable examples of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italo-Byzantine painting. The fusion of Western—Late Gothic and Renaissance— influences with elements of Byzantine tradition became a stylistic trend in Cypriot painting during the Venetian period (1489–1571). Among the finest examples of Italo-Byzantine art on the island are the enthroned Virgin and Child high in the sanctuary apse, and, below it, the Communion of the Apostles. A strong western influence is also evident in the multi-figure composition of the Crucifixion on the west gable, distinguished by its dynamic, dramatic, and narrative character. A monk depicted in the lower left corner may represent the donor of the painting. A donor in similar attire also accompanies the founding de Coron couple in another wall painting on the west façade.

The wooden iconostasis, contemporary with the church, bears the de Coron family coat of arms—three red stars or spurs on a gold field. The winged lion of Venice is carved at the centre of the iconostasis' upper section.

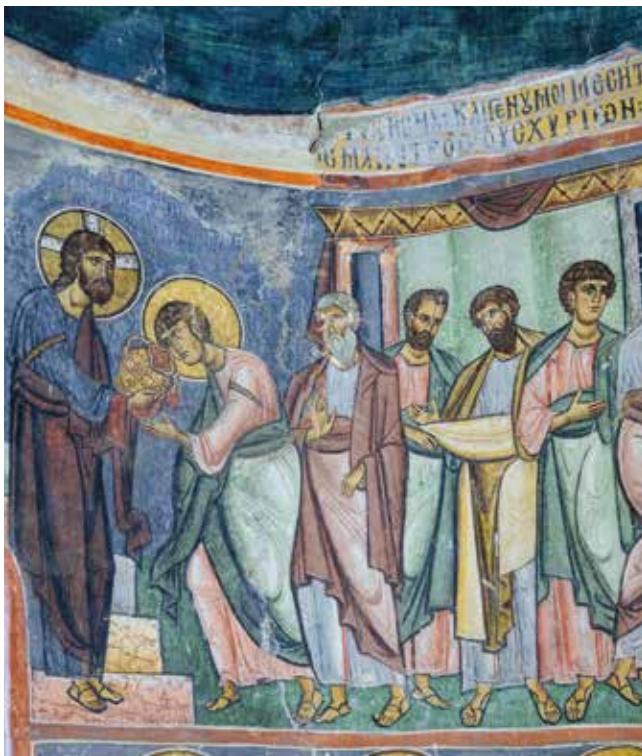


## Church of Panagia (Our Lady) Forviotissa (of Asinou), Nikitari

The Church of Panagia (Our Lady) Forviotissa (of Asinou) is situated near the village of Nikitari, on the northern foothills of the Troodos Mountains. It is the only surviving part of the monastery of the Forvii, which was founded between 1099 and 1105/6 by the magistrate Nikephoros Ischyrios, who later became a monk with the name Nikolaos. The monastery was abandoned in the late 18th century. The epithet 'Forviotissa' may refer to a horse and donkey breeding farm once located in the area, or to the euphorbia plant, of which many species grow in Cyprus.

This church, one of the most important Byzantine churches in Cyprus, is single-aisled and barrel-vaulted, and is also covered by a secondary timber roof with tiles. The western narthex is a later addition, dating to the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. The surviving wall paintings, which cover the





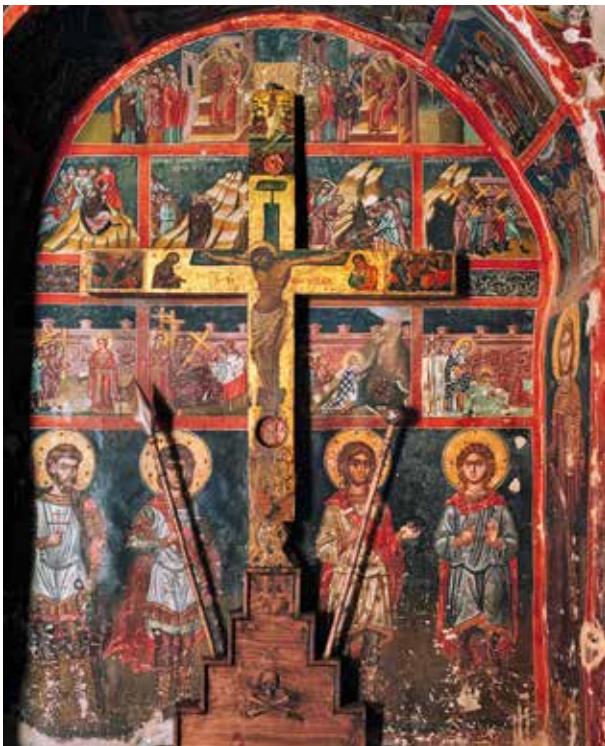
entire interior, date from various phases between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The most significant works belong to the earliest phase (1105/6) and are found mainly in the apse, along the west wall, and on the eastern and western parts of the north and south walls, as well as corresponding sections of the barrel vault. These early paintings are known for their colour harmony, restrained expression, elegance, spirituality, and rhythmic movement, and are believed to reflect the new tendencies of Komnenian painting, echoing the art of Constantinople—likely the artist's place of origin.

## Church of the Timios Stavros (Holy Cross) of Agiasmati, Platanistasa

The Church of the Timios Stavros (Holy Cross) of Agiasmati is located in the Pitsilia region, near the village of Platanistasa. It was the *katholikon* of a monastery built and decorated in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century—as indicated by inscriptions—under the patronage of Protopresbyter Petros Peratis and his wife, Pepani. The couple is depicted in a wall painting on the exterior south wall, offering a model of the church to Christ through the Virgin.

The single-aisled church has a timber roof and is surrounded across all sides by a later enclosed portico, making it unique in Cyprus. Inside, the church preserves one of the most complete iconographic programmes of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century on the island. The wall paintings in the sanctuary are attributed to the painter Minas from Marathasa. Most of the remaining scenes,





however, are the work of Philippos Goul, a Hellenised Syrian Orthodox painter of good education, who blended elements of Byzantine, Western medieval and Italian Renaissance art, with local folk traditions. Western elements are evident, for example, in the architectural settings of the scenes, while the rendering of the full-length standing saints in the lower zones of the north and south walls reveals a strong influence from Palaiologan art—the final phase of Byzantine painting. The images of Sts Mamas and George on horseback on the lower part of the west wall follow local iconographic traditions.

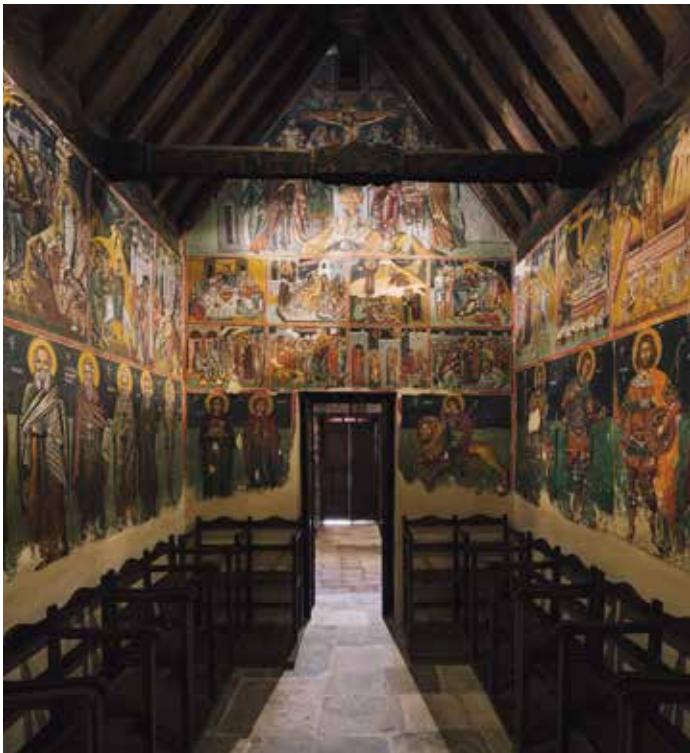
The church's decorative scheme extends to the horizontal beams that support the roof. The gilded wooden iconostasis is contemporary with the church.

## Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour or Agia Sotira, Palaichori

The Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour or Agia Sotira in Palaichori dates to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is a single-aisled building with a later Γ-shaped portico extending along the west and south sides. The date 1612, inscribed above the western entrance, refers both to the construction of the portico and to the wall paintings on the outer face of the church's western wall.

The fully painted interior preserves one of the most complete iconographic programs of the Venetian period in Cyprus (1489–1571), probably executed in the first decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is also the most important example of a group of works from this era that adhere closely to traditional Byzantine art, exhibiting minimal Western influence. Western elements can be observed, for example, in the scene of the Communion of the Apostles at the lower part of the sanctuary apse. Christ appears twice, flanked by all His disciples in both depictions: “Take, eat” on the left, and “Drink from it, all of you” on the right. In the same painting, the spatial organisation, use of single-point perspective, and architectural elements in the background all reflect aspects of Western art seen in other Italo-Byzantine wall painting ensembles in Cyprus.

Although the painter remains unknown, his work shares many similarities with that of Philippos Goul in the churches of St Mamas in Louvaras and Stavros tou Agiasmati near Platanistasa, as well as with the work of Symeon Aksentis in the churches of St Sozomenos and Panagia (Archangel Michael) in Galata. The notable iconographic parallels in scenes such as the Washing of the Feet and the Resurrection of Christ, when compared to the same scenes in the two Galata churches, may be attributed to the use of the same cartoons (full-size drawings used for design transferring).



## Church of the Timios Stavros (Holy Cross) Pelendri

The Church of the Timios Stavros (Holy Cross) in the village of Pelendri was built shortly after the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century and was originally a single-aisled structure with a dome. Its present three-aisled form is the result of later rebuilding, additions, and alterations that reflect the building's eventful history. The current roof is also a later feature and likely replaced an earlier pitched, sloping roof that once covered the dome as well. Of the original 12<sup>th</sup>-century structure, only the apse of the sanctuary survives.

During conservation work, wall paintings were uncovered in the apse which, according to a donor inscription, date to 1178. These paintings had been hammered to secure the preparatory layer for a later, 14<sup>th</sup>-century decoration. In the conch, a three-figure Deesis is depicted: Christ shown half-length and of monumental scale at the centre, flanked by the Virgin and St John





the Baptist, both rendered at a smaller size. Below, on the semi-cylindrical wall, officiating hierarchs holding open, inscribed scrolls are shown in groups of three on either side of the Holy Table. Both the subject of the Deesis and the provincial character of the execution—marked by schematic, linear drawing—distinguish these wall paintings from contemporary works in Cyprus and point instead to parallels in Cappadocia, the Caucasus, Crete, and other remote regions of Greece.

The main part of the church was decorated after its 14th-century reconstruction, carried out through the patronage of numerous donors. These were likely the same individuals who appear in the church's wall paintings in posthumous portraits, such as the presbytera Negkomia depicted beneath the Christ *Elkomenos* (dragged in chains to the cross) scene on the central blind arch of the north wall. The decoration of this period is the work of at least three painters, or their students, a fact evident in the stylistic variety of the paintings. Some compositions, such as the Pantokrator in the dome, follow the Palaiologan painting of Constantinople; others, such as the Prophets in the lower zone of the dome, are characterised by stronger linearity and schematic treatment; while a third group reflects the local Byzantine tradition enriched with foreign elements, the same tradition evident in the Panagia of Asinou, painted by the artist Leontios. This third group includes an extensive cycle depicting the Life of the Virgin, consisting of 15 scenes arranged on the western vault and the west wall. Based on the tradition of illustrated manuscripts, this cycle is comparable to those adorning major Byzantine monuments, such as the Chora Monastery in Constantinople.



## Church of Panagia (Our Lady) tou Araka Lagoudera

The Church of Panagia (Our Lady) tou Araka stands near the village of Lagoudera, in the Pitsilia region. The epithet 'tou Araka' derives either from the plant *arakas* (pea) or from a local legend recounting how a hawk (*ierakas*) miraculously revealed the Virgin's icon at the spot where the church was later built.

Originally a single-aisled domed structure, the church was constructed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, either as the *katholikon* of a monastery of the same name or as a private chapel. The monastery of Panagia tou Araka, whose foundation date remains unknown, continued to function until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. A restored two-storey building north of the church, which housed storerooms and monastic cells, formed part of the original monastic complex.





Later additions to the church include a narthex on the west side (13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century), rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the pitched tiled roof, possibly added in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike other Troodos churches, the dome here is covered by a second timber roof. Exterior wall paintings on the north and west sides belong to different phases dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

According to the dedicatory inscription accompanying the depiction of the Holy Keramion above the northern entrance, most of the interior paintings were constructed in 1192 and funded by Leon Afthentis (Lord Leon), a Byzantine noble. This is the most complete Middle Byzantine painting ensemble in Cyprus, executed in the late Komnenian style. The paintings are characterised by graceful figures, lively movement, serpentine drapery folds, vivid colours, mannerist details, and a calligraphic quality. Stylistically, they show affinities with wall paintings of the Enkleistra of



St Neophytos in Pafos, executed in 1183 by the skilled artist Theodoros Apsevdīs.

Particularly striking is the painting of the Virgin Arakiotissa and Kecharitomeni on the south wall. The Virgin stands before an elaborately decorated throne, holding the reclining infant Christ and gazing at Him with a mixture of tenderness and sorrow. Two angels flank her head, bearing the Instruments of the Passion: the cross, the lance, and the sponge. The composition is unique in both iconography and symbolism, strongly alluding to the sacrifice of the God-Man and the Holy Eucharist. A long inscription within the painted background records the donor Leon's personal and eloquently written supplication to the Virgin.





## Monastery of Agios Ioannis (St John) Lambadistis Kalopanagiotis

The Monastery of Agios Ioannis (St John) Lambadistis stands on the eastern bank of the Setrachos River, opposite the village of Kalopanagiotis in the Marathasa Valley. Its exact foundation date remains unknown, though it is believed to have been established toward the end of the Venetian period, around the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The monastery remained active until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has since functioned solely as a church.

The oldest structure in the complex is the *katholikon*, located on the northern side of the monastic courtyard. Its core, dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, is a domed cross-in-square church dedicated to St Herakleidios—a local saint, like St John Lambadistis. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a barrel-vaulted chapel dedicated to St John was added over his tomb on the north side of the church. Following its





destruction, it was rebuilt at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Around the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, the two buildings were joined by a common narthex to the west. In the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a second barrel-vaulted chapel, known as the 'Latin' chapel, was constructed north of the St John chapel. Its name derives from the mistaken belief that it once served the religious needs of the Latins.



The church's wall paintings correspond to its different construction phases. Fragments from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries survive in the apse and on the eastern wall of the *katholikon* of St Herakleidios, while the remaining surfaces bear later paintings. According to an inscription, the decoration of the narthex was executed by a painter from Constantinople who sought refuge in Cyprus either shortly before or after the fall of the city to the Ottomans in 1453. The painted decoration of the 'Latin' chapel, dated to around 1500, is of exceptional quality. This is the most complete surviving example of monumental painting in Cyprus in the Italo-Byzantine style, blending Byzantine elements with features of the Italian Renaissance art. A cycle of paintings illustrates the 24 stanzas (*oikoi*) of the Akathist Hymn, a masterpiece of Byzantine hymnography



in honour of the Virgin Mary. Each stanza begins with a successive letter of the Greek alphabet, from Alpha to Omega.

Displayed for veneration in a special niche at the arch between the two chapels is the skull of St John Lambadistis, kept in a silver-gilt reliquary donated by Archbishop Nikiforos of Cyprus (1644-1674). On the wall above the reliquary survive inscriptions and notes left by pilgrims and travellers who visited the monastery over the centuries, including the renowned monk Vasily Barsky (1701-1747).



## Church of Panagia (Our Lady) Moutoullas

The Church of Panagia (Our Lady), in the village of Moutoullas, dominates the northern view of the Marathasa valley. According to a donor inscription at the easternmost end of the northern wall, the church was built and decorated with wall paintings in 1280, funded by Ioannis Moutoullas or Gerakiotis and his wife, Eirene. Below the inscription, the two donors are depicted standing, full-length, holding between them a model of the church. The large scale of the depiction, and its placement within the sanctuary—where, according to Christian tradition, ordinary women were not allowed to enter—suggest that the donors were wealthy individuals of significant social standing. Written sources indicate that the church likely served as a family chapel and that, during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it was also used as a funerary church for members of the family of the cleric Stephanos the Reader.

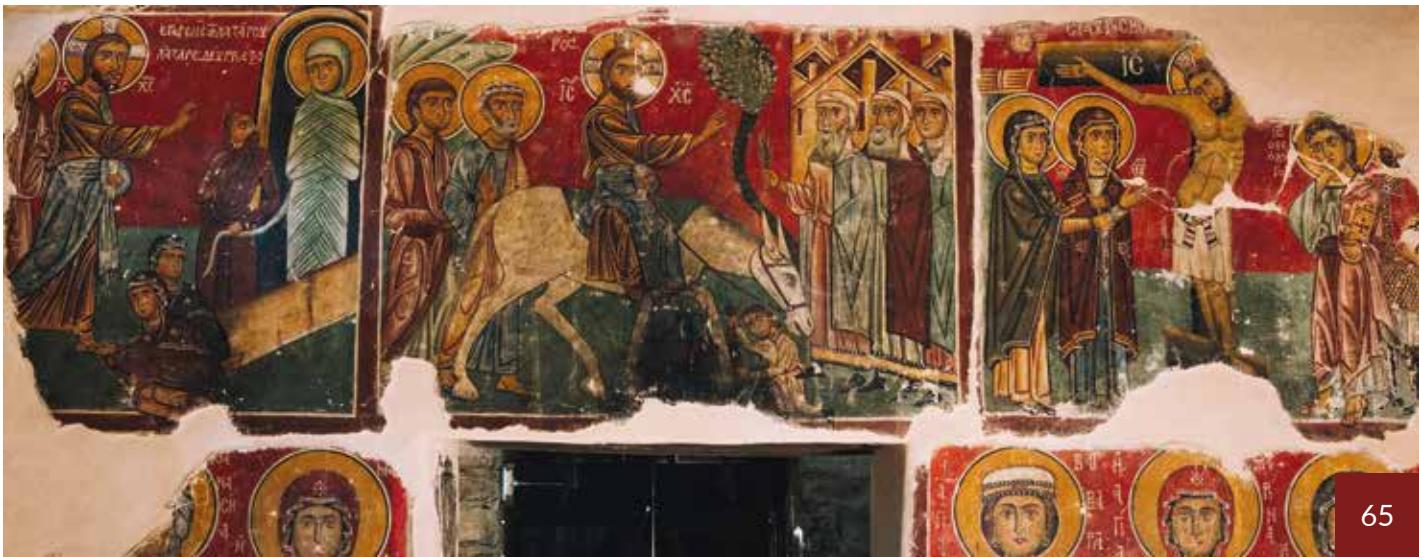
This small, single-aisled church is bordered on the north and west by later enclosed porticoes. Its interior is entirely covered with wall paintings which, despite significant damage, constitute the





only precisely dated monumental painting ensemble from 13<sup>th</sup>-century Cyprus. The iconography draws on Byzantine models from the preceding two centuries, while also incorporating elements of Western painting and artistic styles that emerged in the Crusader states of the East and in remote Greek regions. A particularly noteworthy feature—appearing for the first time in the painted decoration of Byzantine churches in Cyprus—is the extensive use of red backgrounds, which create an evocative, mystical atmosphere within the church.

The provincial style of the unknown painter is characterised by inaccurate proportions, a limited colour palette, linearity, naïve expressions, and rigidity or instability in the figures' movements, with the figures further distinguished by large heads and almond-shaped, wide-open eyes. These features are especially prominent in the scene of the Nativity, where the oversized, seated Virgin occupies nearly the entire vertical space, and in the scene of the Crucifixion. Of particular interest in both scenes is the depiction of traditional Cypriot woven textiles, featuring colourful bands against a white background.



## Church of Archangelos Michail (Archangel Michael) Pedoulas

The Church of Archangelos Michail (Archangel Michael) is located in the village of Pedoulas, in the Marathasa Valley. It was built before 1472, while the year 1474—recorded in a donor inscription above the north entrance—apparently refers to the execution of its painted decoration.

The church is a single-aisled structure with a later portico added on its west and south sides. Wall paintings cover its interior as well as part of the outer south wall surrounding the entrance. An inscription on the west wall, beneath the Crucifixion, identifies the painter as Minas, from the Marathasa region. This folk artist worked in the late Palaiologan style, integrating Western elements that reflect the artistic trends of his time.

Among the most prominent scenes is the imposing, full-length frontal depiction of the Archangel Michael in military attire, positioned east of the north entrance. The raised sword in his right





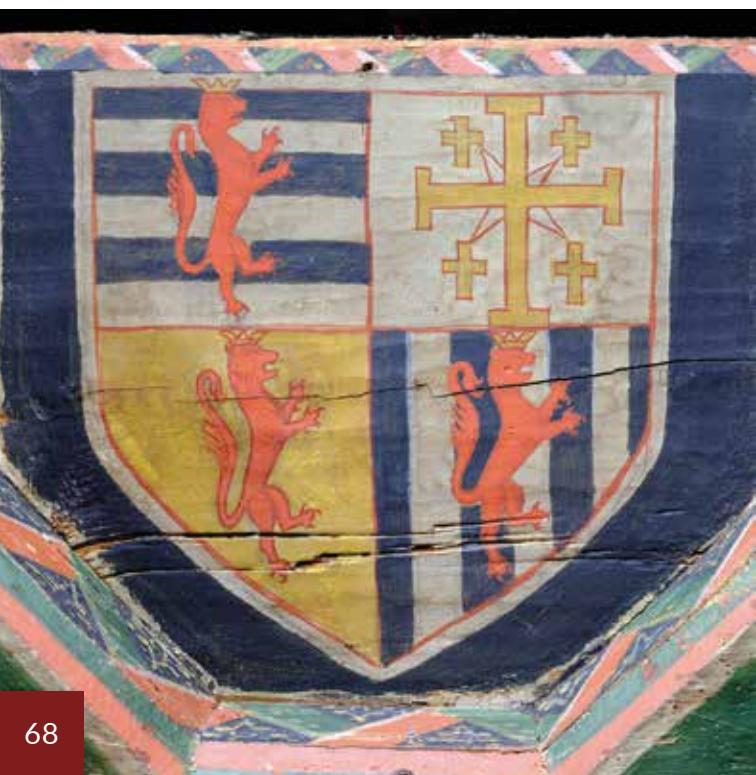
hand emphasises his role as guardian of the sanctuary. Also noteworthy is the depiction of the church's dedication above the donor inscription on the north entrance. The donor, priest Vasilios Chamados, is shown kneeling and offering a model of the church to the archangel, who appears flying in the upper right corner. The priest is accompanied by his wife and two daughters, dressed in richly embroidered garments believed to have been produced in the Marathasa region. Other figures—such as the slave in the scene of St George on horseback and the shepherd playing the flute in the Nativity, both on





the south wall—provide valuable insight into dress and Cypriot society at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The wooden iconostasis, contemporary with the church, is distinguished by its rich and refined painted decoration. It is one of the few surviving painted icon screens from the Lusignan period. A panel on the upper cornice displays the double-headed eagle of Byzantium, while another, above the Royal Doors, bears the Lusignan coat of arms: a shield with three upright lions and the Cross of Jerusalem. Another notable feature of the church's interior is its wooden choir stalls, among the oldest surviving in Cyprus with carved decoration. Similar examples can be seen at the Church of Panagia Chrysokourdaliotissa in the village of Kourdali.





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