



**CHURCH OF ARCHANGELOS MICHAEL
(THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL) IN PEDOULAS**

REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
DEPUTY MINISTRY OF TOURISM

The church of the Archangel Michael, which was built before 1474, is single-aisled of the steep-pitched roof type with an L-shaped narthex covering the west and south side. In older times, the narthex was used as a gynaikeion (place reserved to women) during the religious ceremonies due to the small size of the church.

The wall paintings of the church are preserved in a rather good condition except the Crucifixion in the west pediment and the Ascension in the east pediment. According to the dedicatory inscription on the west wall of the church, the frescoes were also made in 1474 and the painter was called Minas, originating from the region of Marathasa. He is also known for three of his icons which survived, one of them being in a museum and the other two in the nearby church of the Holy Cross in Pedoulas.

The style and iconography of the artist are influenced by the so called Macedonian School of the Palaeologue period, that is to say the last phase of the Byzantine painting, as it appears for example in the way that he attributes the clothing and the rather bulky bodies. Furthermore, he is distinctly influenced by the Western art as we shall see later on, in the thoraxes and the helmets of the soldiers in the Betrayal, for instance.

The painter uses the standard iconographic programme and separates the walls from the centre and above for the cycle with the Evangelical scenes, dedicating the lower half to the Saints.

The cycle opens with the Birth of the Virgin Mary on the south wall of the nave and ends with her Dormition on the north wall.

Therefore we start with the Birth of the Virgin Mary, where we see Saint Anna sitting up in bed attended by three girls bringing her victuals and Joachim standing by the head of her bed. We observe that one of the three girls holds a huge vase with two handles that is completely disproportional to herself as to the whole composition and shows its direct transfer from the folk art.

We pass to the Presentation of the Virgin Mary to the Temple and we notice that the daughters of the Hebrews are decreased from seven to three because of the lack of space.

The Annunciation comes next; the representation escapes from the Byzantine iconography as the Archangel delivers his message through an inscription while the enthroned Virgin replies via the open book that is on the wooden reader's desk.

We continue with the Birth and the Presentation of Christ. On the depiction of the Birth which is following a completely traditional theme, we distinguish the Virgin Mary who turns the head in order to meet the Magi, with a glowing expression on her face, very unusual in Byzantine painting. In the Presentation we also note that the artist has given haloes to Joseph and to Prophet Zachariah.

In the lower part of the south wall we see Saint George Diasoritis, Saint Paul the Apostle, Saint Mamas, Saint Paraskevi and Saint Onoufrius.

Moving to the west wall, we see the Baptism where the well-drawn with soft lines naked body of Christ contrasts sharply with the intense lines of the rocky banks and garments. Furthermore, Jordan is painted as a two-dimensional river reminding us one more characteristic of the artist's style that we find in other frescoes as well. Saint John also has a halo and so has one of the angels. The Entry into Jerusalem below is badly distinguished as it has been damaged by rain water.

The Betrayal comes next with the Christ ignoring Judas and turning to Peter below left. The soldiers who arrest the Christ have certain peculiar details in their appearance that might detract our attention from the substance of the work. Their colourful panoply and the knives and swords that are hanging from their belts refer to the Crusaders from where the artist seems to have been influenced. Their socks and boots however have Byzantine elements.

The Crucifixion of Christ in the pediment of the west wall has been destroyed and only in the two bottom corners are distinguished the prophets Jeremiah on the right and Isaiah on the left.

They are both depicted in medallions and have green haloes like the one we already have seen in the Presentation of Christ and the Baptism.

We also see Saints Andronicus and Anastasia to the south of the west entrance and Saints Constantine and Helena to its north.

We proceed finally to the north wall where in the upper zone the Lamentation of the Epitaph, the Resurrection of Christ and the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. are depicted.

In the Lamentation of the Epitaph we observe the inanimate body of Christ lying on a marble sarcophagus, as if it was the place of the burial. Of particular impression is the decoration of the sarcophagus with masks and leaves, as well as the attitude of the Virgin Mary with two friends holding her wrists to calm her down.

The Resurrection comes next, where the Christ is depicted with white garment which is not a usual colour. The rocky background that does not confine at all to Cyprus and it is represented once more just like in the previous wall paintings, in the Baptism for instance for which we have already spoken.

The last mural in the Christological Cycle is the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. Remarkable is the same rigid expression in the face of the attendants in such a sad event and the position of John leaning towards the legs of the Virgin Mary instead of the usual place near her chest. And while Peter with censer is by the head of the Virgin as usual, Paul is also holding a censer by the feet of the Virgin, but with his left hand. In the architectural background we see the windows with the iron bars like the cells of jailed. The painter is probably expressing the social condition of that period in Cyprus.

Above the north entrance the donors, the priest Basil Chamados with his wife and his two daughters are portrayed offering the church to the Archangel Michael.

In the lower zone of the north wall to the west of the entrance Saint Barbara, Saint Marina and Saint Kyriaki including each one of the days are depicted, Saint Theodore Stratelatis, Saint Demetrius and Saint Peter the Apostle while east of the entrance we see the oversized Archangel Michael.

In the Bema we see the Sacrifice of Abraham in the eastern part of the north wall behind the iconostasis and opposite on the south wall Saint Athanasius with the head damaged.

In the east pediment of the church we see the remnants of the Ascension above the arch and in the conch of the apse we see the Virgin Mary Blachernitissa with Christ in a medallion. A replica of this Virgin Mary was made by another painter 22 years later, in the church of the Timios Stavros (Holy Cross) of Agiasmati.

Below the Virgin Mary we have Saint Nicholas, Saint Epiphanius, Saint John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and Saint Spyridon.

Looking at the paintings as a whole, the elements of the painter's style are obvious in the continuous use of red colour and its shades, as well as in the breaking down of faces and landscapes into crooked geometrical lines. In spite of the lack of correct proportions of the human figures, the people however are comfortably placed in multi-persons wall paintings and there is depth in the scenes, even though the painter has not correctly attributed the volume and the third dimension, as we saw in details earlier on. Thus, these paintings have in general a charm of their own, especially the Saints.