



The Church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati (Platanistasa)

REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
DEPUTY MINISTRY OF TOURISM

The church was once part of the monastery dedicated to the Holy Cross, as appears on an inscription over its south entrance. Furthermore, in the southern side of the church there are ruins of the surviving cells of the monastery. It is not known when the monastery stopped functioning. The wall paintings of the church are a combination of Byzantine art and vernacular painting. It is estimated that the painting was completed around 1500, and precisely in 1494.

The church has three entrances, one in the northern, one in the southern and one in the western side.

In the main church there are only 4 windows, 3 in the apse of the Sanctuary and 1 on the eastern wall, through which the light enters into the main church.

The inscription above the south entrance mentions the name Phillip Goul as the painter of the church. The names of the founders are also quoted; they are depicted offering the church they erected to the Christ on a wall painting on the exterior side of the south wall. The church is single-aisled and is surrounded on its four sides by a portico.

The roof of the church is double, that is to say there are an internal and an external roof. The inner part of the roof is richly decorated and carved where the beams join in the shape of a cross. In the church there is the iconographic programme from the life of the Mother of God and from Jesus Christ, persons and scenes from the Old Testament, the Discovery and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

In the Apse is painted the figure of the Mother of God, in full length, in a medallion with Jesus Christ on her chest blessing. On her left and right are the Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

In the upper part of the Apse is the Holy Communion or the Communion of the Apostles. In the centre we see the Christ enthroned in front of the Altar which is laid with a local woven article of

that period. On the right and left of the Christ his disciples are depicted approaching Him to receive the Holy Communion. Further down we see eight Cypriot officiating prelates.

In the triangular pediment, on the eastern side of the church represents the Christ as the King of Glory and below the Annunciation of the Mother of God. On the right and left of the apse, the prophets foretell the coming of the Christ.

Looking to the left, above the Holy Prothesis, we see Saint Stephen and the Utter Humiliation in the niche.

In the Holy Bema, hymnists are pictured in the top zone of the north wall; below are Saint James and the Hierarch Peter of Alexandria with the Christ. The Sacrifice of Abraham is further down and in the following wall painting is Saint Andrew of Crete. We continue looking towards the Holy Bema at the top zone of the south wall where Saints and below Cypriot prelates are depicted.

In the nave the painting is divided into two zones: the top and the bottom one.

In the top zone we have the iconographic programme of the Mother of God, of the Christ and in the bottom one figures of Saints, soldier-Saints, Apostles and monks.

From the south to the north wall we have the New Testament cycle being completed with the figures of the four Evangelists.

On the south wall after the Evangelists Matthew and Luke, we have the Birth of the Mother of God, the Presentation where the Mother of God is accompanied by her parents to the temple, with Jerusalem at the background and an angel in the upper part offering bread to the Mother of God. Then we have the Birth of Christ, the Presentation to the Temple, the Baptism, the Raising of Lazarus, the Entry into Jerusalem and the Transfiguration, in which the depiction of the mountainous landscape and the use of earthy colours is characteristic.

The wall painting of the Birth of Christ is complete and certain figures are repeated such as the Magi, with many western elements. We stand for a while at the mural of the Birth where the

picture of the shepherds playing the flute is being considered as the earliest sample of Byzantine monumental painting reminiscent of west Christian art .

In the top zone of the west wall and below the Crucifixion we have the Last Supper, the Washing of the Feet, and the Prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, the Betrayal and the Christ before the Archpriests, where a Jewish servant raises the hand to strike the Christ.

In the Last Supper there is depth and perspective, where the Christ and his students are sitting around the round table and their monograms are inscribed above their heads.

In the wall painting of the Betrayal there are many persons, disciples and soldiers around the Christ who is in the centre of the picture.

In the pediment of the west wall, above the entrance into the church from the narthex, the crucifixion is portrayed together with the Holy Trinity. The Christ reclines his head to the left. On the right and left of the Cross are the Sun and the Moon in medallions. The four figures of the angels surrounding the Cross recall Renaissance pictures. The wall of Jerusalem with a very impressive decoration appears in the background. Next to the cross the prophets are depicted the Road of the Martyrdom and the Deposition. In the top zone of the north wall the cycle of Passion continues with the following scenes: Peter denying the Christ, Pilate washing his hands, the Mocking of the Lord, (a multi-persons composition with the depicted people playing various instruments and the Lord bearing an acanthine wreath on the head, holding a cane and wearing a red tunic), the Epitaph Lamentation, the doubting Thomas, the Ascension of the Lord, the Pentecost and the Dormition of the Mother of God.

Two soldier-Saints are depicted riding, in the zone below on the right and left of the west entrance from the narthex. Saint Mamas on a lion and Saint George on a horse. The picture of Saint Mamas on a manlike lion is popular in the religious painting in Cyprus during the Medieval Period. Continuing, next to them on either side, on the north and south wall are series of Saints holding scrolls with religious inscriptions and prayers.

The Dormition of the Mother of God is also a multi-persons representation with the Christ holding the soul of His Mother in his hands. Above on the right, two women are crying on the depicted balcony, and in the lower part the angel cuts off the hands of the Jew who tried to upturn the relic of the Mother of God.

On the south wall, in the bottom zone in the rows of Saints, Saint John the Baptist is depicted opposite the Mother of God, both praying. The figures of the Christ, the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist are not together side by side, but on 3 sides of the church, (one on each side) symbolizing that they are everywhere around us, surrounding the faithful during the Holy Mass and during their prayer. Above Saint John the Baptist Zacharias and Elisabeth, are depicted and above the Mother of God are Joachim and Anna.

We are still at the south wall, in the blind arch of which is dominantly represented the imposing Archangel Michael. On the two edges of the blind arch are depicted the Saints Anargyroi, Cosmas and Damian, opposite each other. In the remaining inner part of the arch the Martyrs Artemius, Tryphon and Minas are pictured in medallions. Below we have 2 depictions of the Archangel Michael: in one of them he is diverting the water of the river away from his church and in the other one he is represented with Jesus of Navi. In the two triangles underneath the blind arch Mary of Egypt and Abbot Zosimus are pictured.

In the bottom zone of the south wall of the nave Saint Paul the Apostle and Saint Peter the Apostle are portrayed opposite him on the north wall.

On the side walls of the south entrance two Stylites Saints (Saints who spend their life on a pillar) are represented.

On the remainder of the south wall seven ascetics and a soldier-Saint, Saint Demetrius are depicted. The depiction of the Saints begins on the east of the south entrance with Saint Anthony being first, the founder of monasticism in Egypt. The monks Saint Theodosius, Saint

Arsenius, Saint Cyriacus, Saint Onoufrius and Saint Hilarion come next. On the side walls of the west entrance the monks Sozomenus and Andronicus are pictured.

In the bottom zone of the north wall the representation of Saints begins with Saint Theodore who is in correspondence with Saint Demetrius pictured on the south wall. Saint Stephan, Saint John, Saint Sabas and Saint Eftymius follow.

Next to the north entrance Saint Nicholas, Saint Andrew the Apostle and Saint Peter the Apostle are pictured.

Look carefully in the blind arch of the north wall at the depiction of the Discovery and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, imported from the West and a rare theme in the Byzantine iconography.

Below the arch we have in three zones ten representations starting with the discovery of the Holy Cross by Saint Helena. Above on the left the arrival of Saint Helena is portrayed in Jerusalem requesting to locate the Jewish Judas whose forefathers knew the spot where the Cross was. In the next scene Saint Helena is interrogating Judas, who denies revealing the place of the Cross and is cast into a well for three days. The release of Judas comes next and the prayer of Judas on Golgotha. Then are the excavation and the discovery of the three Crosses, of Christ and the two robbers. In order to detect the Holy Cross, Judas puts it on a dying woman who is rising. Judas becomes a Christian and is pictured being ordained Bishop of Jerusalem and is renamed Cyriacus. Below pairs of Saints are portrayed.

At the top of the inner part of the blind arch, six scenes are depicted from the Exaltation of the Holy Cross with the Triumphal Entry of Constantine the Great into Rome being first, and then the scene with his vision when he looked up towards the sky and saw the "By This Conquer". The last scene represents the Exaltation of the Holy Cross into Heaven by the two angels.

On the two edges of the inner arch are pictured Saint Panteleimon and Saint John Lampadistis.

In the space around the portico there are surviving wall paintings on the external sides of the west and the south wall. These murals were also painted by Philip Goul.

In the drum of the blind arch above the entrance, on the external side of the west wall the Descent into Hades is represented and in the inner part of the arch are pictured various Apostles. In the bottom zone Saint Barbara, Saint Paraskevi and Saint Marina are portrayed. Next to the entrance is the Virgin Mary. Below Christ is holding a Gospel and He is blessing and on the right are Saint Constantine and Helena.

The representation of the Last Judgement at the top zone is very impressive. The Christ is surrounded by the Cherubim and Seraphim, by the Virgin Mary and by Saint John the Baptist.

Below the Christ there is the Preparation of the Throne and underneath the Apostles and Angels as well as the raising of the dead. Below on the right are the martyrdoms who were brought to Hell. Opposite Hell is Paradise, which is kept by Saint Peter.

In the blind arch above the south entrance the Virgin Mary holding the Infant Christ, is portrayed flanked by archangels and prophets.

Iconostasis, Portable Icons, Altar

The wood carved iconostasis is gilded and includes the icons of Saint John the Baptist, of Virgin Mary, of Christ which is in Evrychou and of Saint John the Theologian which is in the Byzantine Museum in Nicosia; they date from the end of the 15th century.

In the upper part of the iconostasis 11 Prelates are painted in medallions.

On the royal doors the Christ, the Annunciation and the 3 Prelates are depicted .

The Altar is also wood carved and gilded.

The beams of the roof are decorated as well.