



CHURCH OF TIMIOS STAVROS (THE HOLY CROSS) IN PELENDRI

CYPRUS TOURISM ORGANISATION

The church of the Holy Cross in Pelentri appears to be built shortly after the end of the 12th century and was decorated with wall paintings in 1178, according to the dedicatory inscription in the apse. The original church was single-aisled with a dome in the centre and arched recesses in the side walls. After a destruction of the church only the apse remained which was incorporated into the new church of the same type built at the beginning of the 14th century; it was decorated with wall paintings by at least three painters belonging to the same workshop.

Later in the same century, the church was extended to the north with the opening of a vault connected to the main church with Italo-Byzantine arches, but with a rectilinear east wall rather than an arch. At some point the north chapel's vault and north wall collapsed thus destroying the frescoes that decorated them leaving only the wall paintings on the west and south walls and on a part of the east wall.

A similar extension was made to the south at a later stage, probably in the 16th century. There was also an apse in this chapel, which however collapsed together with the south wall and its arch, possibly in the same period when a part of the north addition collapsed.

The two chapels were reconstructed at a later stage; the south one was rebuilt without its arch, however no frescoes were repainted thus resulting in the current three-aisled church with a dome in the eastern part of the central aisle with wall paintings of different periods surviving until today.

We begin from the main church to get acquainted with the murals and as Christ Pantocrator in the dome is rather damaged, we will see the narrow zone around him. We have here the Preparation of the Throne, the eminent symbol of the Last Judgement, as well as the symbols of the four Evangelists depicted in a complex: the angel for Matthew, the lion for Mark, the bull for Luke and the eagle for John. Sixteen Prophets are painted below between the spaces of the four windows in the drum of the dome and two Evangelists also survive in the northern pendentives.

In the north side of the east vault we see the Ascension of Christ and the remnants of the Deposition below it. In the opposite half of the vault, we have the Pentecost followed by the Entombment, where we see that although the body of Christ is lowered into the sarcophagus, Maria Magdalene has arms uplifted, a gesture which we usually observe in the representation

of the Lamentation. In the lunette above the conch of the apse we see the Christ prompting his students "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" and "Touch me Not" and on the east wall the Myrrh Bearers in front of the Empty Tomb; these scenes are all fine pieces of work, although they are not depicted in their traditional position.

However, the representation of the Enthroned Virgin with the attending Archangels in the western conch of the apse is less impressive.

In the western vault and lunette of the nave, a series of wall paintings describe with particular detail the cycle concerning the life of the Virgin Mary which is expounded in 14 compositions; when studying the character of these murals and the lettering of the inscriptions, we observe that this painter also created the frescoes in the central part of the church of Panagia Phorbiotissa of Assinou.

Generally speaking, the work of the three painters who decorated the church is to be distinguished through the proper style of each one of them, although they all belonged to the same workshop.

The first painter, following the Palaeologean School, painted Christ Pantocrator in the dome and the Evangelists in the pendentives, the Annunciation of Virgin Mary in the eastern half of the two central blind arches of the north and south walls, the Descent into Hades in the drum of the central blind arch of the north wall, the Ascension, the Pentecost, the scenes of "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations", "Touch me Not" and the Myrrh Bearers in front of the Empty Tomb.

The second painter, with a more linear and schematised style and perhaps with less perfection in his work, painted the Angels and the Preparation of the Throne around Christ Pantocrator, the Prophets in the spaces between the windows of the dome as well as the Holy Shroud and the Holy Tile in the base of the dome.

The third painter, following the local tradition of Byzantine painting of the 14th century with the influence of eastern elements, painted the western vault of the church with the cycle

concerning the life of Virgin Mary that we mentioned before, the Crucifixion on the west wall, the Dormition of Virgin Mary in the drum of the western blind arch of the north wall, the Betrayal, Christ before Pilate, the Mocking, the Via Crucis and Christ before Annas in the drum of the central blind arch of the north wall, the Washing of the Feet and Christ with the woman of Samaria on the north wall, and on the south wall the Last Supper, which is half destroyed and the Miracle of the Paralytic that is more distinct.

The oldest surviving wall paintings of 1178 are in the apse. We see an oversized Christ Pantocrator in the conch of the apse with Virgin Mary to the right and Saint John the Baptist to the left in the Deesis (Supplication) position. This subject is seldom met in Cyprus but is common in Cappadocia, Peloponnesus and Crete. It also appears that the style of the subjects has originated from these regions as it is not met on other wall paintings of the same period in Cyprus.