



Kolossi Castle

REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
DEPUTY MINISTRY OF TOURISM

Fourteen kilometres west of Limassol lies the Kolossi Castle, a three-storey limestone structure built during the Frankish period, in the early 13th century. In its current form it dates back to the 15th century, whereas extensions and modifications were made to it during the Ottoman occupation, from the late 16th to the 19th centuries.

This castle is one of the most significant Frankish fortification works that remain in free Cyprus. It is directly associated with the presence of monastic knight orders on the island – the Knights Templar and the Knights of the Order of St. John. The walls of the castle, or fort, as it is also known, contain an aqueduct, a sugar factory and the byzantine church of St. Efstathios. The castle is also associated with the production of fine wines, foremost among them being the commandaria, during the medieval and subsequent eras. The Kolossi Castle ranks among the other important fortification monuments of the period, the castles of Rhodes and Malta, and the Krak des Chevaliers in Syria.

Before letting our mind's eye roam through the castle, let us take a look at the historic events associated with its construction.

In 1190 A.D., King Richard the Lionheart of England, together with Philip Augustus of France and Frederick Barbarossa of Germany, participated in the Third Crusade (1189-1192). Richard and Philip travelled by sea, whereas Frederick went overland. Richard's fleet was caught in a storm and had to winter in Messini (other sources simply mention Sicily), where the king was engaged to the daughter of the King of Navarre, Berengaria. In spring, the fleet sailed out again, but once more it met with a storm. This time Richard was forced to head for Rhodes, whereas four of the ships sailed on towards Cyprus. Three of them were wrecked and only one managed to dock safely at the Limassol port. The King's fiancée, Berengaria, and her sister, Joan of Sicily were aboard that vessel.

Isaac Comnenus, the then Governor of Cyprus, had seceded from the Byzantine Empire during the reign of Andronicus I Comnenus and had proclaimed himself independent ruler of Cyprus. Upon being notified of the incidents, Isaac ordered that all castaways be captured. The belongings of

those who had perished at sea were confiscated and survivors were robbed. Isaac also tried to take Berengaria and Joan as hostages. His actions were caused by the fact that he had allied himself with Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt and Syria. Their agreement stipulated that Isaac would prevent crusaders from calling at Cyprus and would refuse to replenish their supplies. However, Isaac failed to deliver on that agreement as approximately one month later Richard's fleet landed at Cyprus coming from Rhodes. Richard's emissaries tried in vain to obtain some explanation and to secure commensurate compensations. Isaac showed that he was not intimidated by Richard's military might and, according to chronicler Florio Bustron, he withdrew to Koilani village.

Richard captured Limassol without meeting any resistance and three days later he requested a meeting with Isaac at Kolossi. Isaac agreed and the meeting took place. Such was Isaac's fear, that he made all sorts of concessions, even allowing his only daughter to be kept hostage as a guarantee of the observance of the agreement, according to chronicler C.D. Cobham. Later, however, believing that Richard's army was not as strong as he initially had estimated, he sent Richard a message demanding his departure from Cyprus otherwise he would march against him.

This enraged Richard, who ordered his cavalry to follow him. With a force of six hundred men he marched on Kolossi, where Isaac had gathered his own army. Isaac was eventually defeated and forced to withdraw to the capital, Nicosia. Richard returned in victory to Limassol, where tradition has it that on 12 May 1191, he wedded Berengaria at the St. George chapel, in the present mediaeval castle of Limassol. (Many scholars rule out this possibility on the grounds that the castle had not yet been built at the time. In all likelihood, that chapel was in some other part of Limassol.) It was an extraordinary event since it was the first time a princess was crowned queen of England outside the country, as stated by G. Jeffery.

Richard embarked on a relentless pursuit of Isaac, who had amassed a considerable force of foot-soldiers and cavalry in Messaoria. Taking the coastal road eastwards, Richard conquered Famagusta, which was

undefended, and after a battle with Isaac's army at Tremithounta, he forced Isaac to withdraw.

Richard went on to capture the capital and the Pentadactylos castles (St. Hilarion, Buffavento and Kantara). In the meantime, Guy de Lusignan, Richard's ally, conquered the castle of Kyrenia and held Isaac's wife and daughter in custody there, for their own safety. Isaac's pursuit continued until he was captured and ended up in shackles –silver or golden, as chroniclers have it– in the dungeons of the Markapos castle in Syria, headquarters of the crusaders of the Order of St. John. Isaac lasted only four years in those dungeons before breathing his last.

Richard's conquest of Cyprus proved very important to the crusaders, who had lost their domains in Acre and the Holy Land. After May 1191, Cyprus assumed great significance, becoming the crusaders' supply station and enabling them to undertake new campaigns against the Turks.

Before departing for Syria, Richard appointed two deputies, replaced local soldiers with his own men and imposed Frankish laws. In other words, he created fiefs by taking half the land from the locals and dividing it among his soldiers.

Eventually Richard realized that he could not keep Cyprus with his limited forces. Therefore he decided to concentrate on his main objective, the liberation of the Holy Land. Thus, he sold the island to the Knights Templar for the sum of 40,000 gold bezants and an additional 60,000 to be paid in annual instalments.

However, the Templars also found it very hard to maintain their hold on Cyprus because of the frequent uprisings of the Cypriot people. As a result, on the following year, 1192, they sold it to the Frank ruler Guy de Lusignan on exactly the same terms as they had bought it from King Richard, but they also undertook to settle their debt to Richard. Guy, who hailed from present-day Poitiers in France, became the founder of a dynasty which reigned in Cyprus for three whole centuries, i.e. until 1489.

During the Frankish period, Cyprus prospered, commerce flourished and the island became a transit trade area. In his chronicle, Leontios Machairas described Famagusta as the most important port and commercial centre not only of Cyprus, but of the whole Eastern Mediterranean.

In order to maintain stability and to avoid revolts, Guy attracted foreigners by offering them various privileges and fiefs in exchange for religious or military services. Among those foreigners were Augustinian monks, who settled in Pellapais, Dominican and Franciscan monks, who settled in Nicosia, Famagusta and Limassol, and Benedictine monks, who had their base in Nicosia and then acquired the Stavrovouni Monastery as well. The monastic military orders of the Templars and of St. John also responded to Guy's invitation.

The agreement which was concluded was based on the Assizes, a body of laws formulated in the 12th century on the basis of the kingdom's traditions and customs. Tradition has it that those laws were recorded for the first time in French in the 13th century by John of Ibelin and Philip of Novarre.

The Assizes were also translated into Greek during the 13th century, for the kingdom of Cyprus and certain regions in Greece under Frankish occupation. The chronicles of Leontios Machairas and Bustron follow on the Greek version of the Assizes of Jerusalem.

Let us examine how the Orders were formed.

The Order of Knights Templar (or simply, of the Templars) was founded in 1118 A.D. by French knights of Jerusalem in order to protect pilgrims travelling to Palestine against Arab attacks. The Templars (from the Latin word 'templum') took their name from Kubbat es-Sahkhra, the Dome of the Rock, i.e., the Muslim Mosque believed to have been built above or near the ruins of the Temple of Solomon. King Baldwin II of Palestine had given them space in that area for their settlement. Ten years later, they wrote up their charter and defined the hierarchy ladder within the order. Their leader held the title of Grand Master and ranked as a prince. In 1148, the Pope exempted the Order from the payment of taxes. The Templars acquired great power which

extended to Europe. They became owners of large tracts of land and of castles, and their ever-increasing resources helped them become bankers, initially serving the Palestine pilgrims. Later, however, they founded banks in Europe as well. It should be noted that they loaned monies even to the king of France. When the Crusaders captured Acre, the Knights relocated to Cyprus.

The Order of St. John is the oldest religious and military order. It was founded by Pope Gregory the Great in late 6th century A.D. in order to offer assistance to pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land. Members of the Order are also known as Knights Hospitaller, Hospitallers, or Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta. The order became active in the period 1048–1070, at which time it relocated its seat to Jerusalem and took the name “Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem”. The power of the order was enhanced as a result of the conquest of Jerusalem by the crusaders in 1099. It acquired a military character and relocated to St. John of Acre in Palestine. In 1291, the Hospitallers moved to Cyprus.

Let us now see how the Kolossi Castle is associated with the Templars and the Hospitallers.

The castle belonged to the Hospitallers, except for a brief period of time, when it came into the possession of the Templars. Other castles associated with the same orders are the ones at Khirokitia and Gastria, which are now in ruins. Whole regions in Paphos, Limassol, Nicosia, and in other areas of Cyprus were also once owned by those knights.

Until 1210, the Kolossi area belonged to one Garinus de Colos. However, it came into the possession of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem when King Hugh I purchased the area from its owner. That same year, according to historian Hill, a castle was built at Kolossi. Ruins of that structure are preserved to the east and west of the existing castle. The Knights Hospitaller had the right to have their grains milled at the Kythrea mills. They had already relocated to Cyprus, thus helping to maintain the Latin rule, especially when Amarlic (1194-1205), who had been crowned first King of Cyprus, managed to be crowned also King of Jerusalem by German Emperor Henry VI after wedding Isabella, widow of Henry I of Jerusalem. His duties often kept him

away from Cyprus, fighting against the Turks since he was trying to recapture the Holy City. Therefore, the Hospitallers' presence on the island was of paramount significance.

After the fall of Acre in 1291, the Hospitallers and the Templars moved their seats to Limassol, which they occupied jointly. The Kolossi castle was owned by the Hospitallers. In 1302, their Grand Master decided to establish Kolossi as the centre of all the activities of the Order, as was the case at Manoir, when the seat of the order was in Acre. Four years later, the castle came into the possession of the Templars, when Amarlic of Tyre, assisted by the Grand Master of the Templars, usurped the kingdom from his brother Henry II, who was supported by the Hospitallers. Taking advantage of the fact that Henry II was epileptic, Amarlic conspired with his other brother, Aimery, and many nobles and managed to be acknowledged by the Upper House as Governor of Cyprus. He ruled the island in a very tyrannical manner for four years until he was murdered in 1310, whereupon Henry II resumed the throne.

The Templars did not keep the Kolossi Castle for long. Because of their growing power in Europe they incurred the enmity of other monastic orders, as well as of the Pope and the King of France. They were charged with heresy and immoral practices. In Cyprus, in 1310 they were imprisoned in the castle of Kyrenia. Their trial lasted three years and eventually they were convicted to the capital punishment and were tortured and executed.

In 1310, the castle was given to the Knights of St. John, along with the Templars' property. Their Grand Master, Foulques de Villaret, relocated their headquarters to Rhodes, but they continued to maintain their supreme military commandment, the Grand Commanderie, in Cyprus, using Kolossi as their seat.

The Kolossi Commanderie was the most important one in the areas ceded to the orders of knights and was renowned for its great property. The largest part of that property was in the district of Limassol and encompassed sixty villages. The lands in the Kolossi area were of great value thanks to the production of wheat, cotton, sugar, oil and fine wines in great quantities. In

fact, in terms of irrigation the Hospitallers often had an advantage over their neighbours, the Cornaro family, who had sugarcane plantations in Episkopi.

The castle of Kolossi is also associated with the name of the sweet red wine, mentioned by Homer as the 'Cyprus Nama', i.e., the world famous commandaria. The wine was named after the Commanderie, the military command stationed in the castle. As connoisseurs of good wine and of its production techniques, the Knights Hospitaller expertly promoted the commandaria trade. The largest part of their production was shipped to England where it was greatly appreciated by the royal court. Since early 14th century, mentions of Cypriot wines, commandaria in particular, have been very extensive and interesting, according to Cobham.

Let us now walk through the area.

The massive castle dominates a verdant, fertile and idyllic land. As we approach the structure, we gaze admiringly at its gardens which are full of local and imported species. Among the most impressive plants are the sugarcanes opposite the warden's office and, farther down, two huge age-long trees, a cypress and a kind of acacia (machaerium), approximately 200 years old and 26 meters tall, according to the Department of Forests.

The existing castle dates back to 1454, when Louis de Magnac was Grand Master. It is built of limestone blocks and rises to a height of 21 meters. Each of its four exterior facades is 16 meters long, whereas their interior length is 13.5 meters. Ruins of the original 13th century castle lie to the east, south and southwest of the monument. The well stands out among those ruins. The castle was rebuilt after the damage it sustained during the attacks of the Mamelukes that lasted a full year, until 1426, according to Jeffery. The extant castle, finely constructed, was considered impregnable. The castle's main gate is accessible through a stone stairway and a drawbridge. Projecting high above it is a machicolation with murder-holes (or meurtrières), from which boiling oil or scalding water was poured on the attacking enemy.

The castle has three floors. The ground floor is divided into three vaulted halls which communicate through arched doors. There are openings in the floor

giving access to underground water cisterns. An interior stairway with 24 steps leads up to the second floor, which is divided into two halls. The western one has a huge simple fireplace, indicating the existence of a kitchen. The most impressive feature of the eastern hall is a mural on the south wall. It dates back to the 15th/16th century and shows the Crucifixion, with Virgin Mary on the left and St. John on the right of the cross. In the lower left-hand corner of the mural we see the fleur-de-lis of Louis de Magnac's coat-of-arms. The mural has recently undergone conservation work by the Cypriot Department of Antiquities and a protective glass plate has been placed over it.

An interior spiral stairway with 33 steps leads to the third floor, where there are two halls as well. The first likely served as a dining room and the second as a bedroom. Both feature large fireplaces with Louis de Magnac's coat-of-arms on the side. The fireplaces are beautifully decorated in a manner that resembles the Knights' buildings in Rhodes. Both rooms are very well-lit thanks to their eight windows. Each window has built-in seats, and in a recess of the north wall there is a toilet.

Another interior spiral stairway with 35 steps leads to the flat roof of the castle, with the murder-holes and the 19 crenels. The top of the castle offers a magnificent view of the vineyards, the citrus trees, the Limassol Salt Lake and the Mediterranean to the south. To the north lies the Kolossi village with the Troodos range in the background.

To the south of the main structure there is a walled court. On the southwest side of the building there are the ruins of an outbuilding which probably served as a store-room and stable.

Visitors must not miss an elaborately carved marble slab set into the exterior east façade of the castle. At the top of the large cruciform slab there is a crown and below it an escutcheon with the then full coat-of-arms of the Lusignans of Cyprus: a shield divided into four sections. In the upper left section we see the emblem of Jerusalem, a crutchstick cross between four smaller crosses. In the upper right section, there is the old Lusignan coat-of-arms, a striped rectangle and a rearing lion. In the lower left section we see the emblem of Cyprus, a rearing lion against a golden background. In the

lower right section there is the emblem of Little Armenia (an area in modern Cilicia) with a red rearing lion against a silver background. This coat-of-arms denotes that as from 1393, the King of Cyprus was simultaneously King of Jerusalem and of Little Armenia. The same coat-of-arms appears on coins minted by the Lusignan kings. The central escutcheon is flanked by the coats of arms of two Grand Masters of the Order of St. John: of Jean de Lastic (on the left) and of Jacques de Milli, who succeeded him in 1454 (on the right). Below the central escutcheon we see the coat-of-arms of Louis de Magnac, who built the castle.

There are not any other coats of arms in the castle, but Kolossi came under other Grand Masters, such as Englishman John Langstrother, after whose decapitation in England Nicola Zaplani became Grand Master of the Order. In 1488, according to French historian Mas Latrie, the castle came into the possession of the Cornaro family. First owner was George Cornaro, brother of Catherine Cornaro, last queen of the Franks.

For a long period of time, the Kolossi Commanderie was the richest property of the knights. This is also evidenced by the fact that with effect from 1468, the Commanderie was subject to an annual contribution of 4,000 ducats to the fund of the Knights in Rhodes. At the outset of the Venetian Administration (1489), the Commanderie still owned 41 villages producing an annual income of 8,000 ducats.

When Ottoman Turks conquered the island in 1571, the Cornaro family lost that property, but maintained the title of Grand Master. The Cornaro house ceased to exist in 1799, but count Motseningo, who wedded the heiress, continued to lay claim on the title even after that year.

On 18 September 1959, one year before Cyprus gained its independence from British rule, the Kolossi castle briefly relived its past glory. A magnificent ceremony took place in its court with the participation of 300 guests, including Sir Hugh Foot, Governor of Cyprus. The regalia of the Order were awarded by the Lord Prior of the Order of St. John. The trumpets sounded from the battlements and there followed an impressive ceremony. The Order has been

active in Cyprus since 1926 and offers its services to charities, in close cooperation with the Department of Medical Services.

The castle has been declared an Ancient Monument of the First Schedule and is in the jurisdiction of the Department of Antiquities, which is responsible for its annual maintenance. Excavations have been ongoing since 1992, mainly to the east of the castle, where there are the remains of the sugar factory.

The existing factory dates back to the 14th century and is an oblong vaulted structure of limestone blocks, with arched openings on the three sides. Its total floor area is around 150 square meters. To the north of this building there are the ruins of the sugarcane crushing mill and farther north are the remains of the aqueduct.

How did that medieval factory operate?

The mill was fed by the Kouris River through the medieval aqueduct. The water powered the millstone which crushed the sugarcane once it had been stripped of the leaves and cut into small pieces. According to L. Lazzarini, the same process was implemented in Venice. The sugarcane juice flowed into large cauldrons and was boiled. As explained by archaeologists, the juice (i.e., the molasses) was boiled two or three times, thus producing three qualities of sugar. The more it was boiled, the more light-coloured the sugar. This is also suggested by the different ceramic vessels. The sugar was poured into the small jars, using a clay “funnel”. The same process was applied in Kouklia, in Palepaphos and in the Episkopi-Serayia sugarmill.

Sugarcane was cultivated and thrived in Cyprus since the 10th century. However, from the 13th century onwards its cultivation increased significantly to keep up with the increased sugar production. A large part of the production was exported to Casa Martini in Venice. Powdered sugar was also produced in other areas in the East, such as Rhodes, Syria and Alexandria, but the Cypriot sugar was of superb quality and was considered the best, as stated by F. G. Pegolotti.

As a result of the Limassol earthquakes of 1567 and 1568, the factory sustained serious damage and was repaired by Murat Pasha in 1591, as

shown in an engraved inscription on the south exterior wall. The ongoing excavations lead us to surmise that over a certain period, during the Ottoman occupation and, perhaps, the English rule, the factory had been transformed into a flour-mill.

According to testimonies of foreign travellers, sugarcane cultivation continued through the first decade of the 17th century. Beyond that point, reports make reference only to cotton and silk. More specifically, Dutch traveller Cornelis van Bruyn, who came to Cyprus in 1683, mentions cotton plantations in Episkopi and the production of high volumes of silk and cotton in Kouklia.

Another remarkable monument lies within a short 100 meters from the castle. It is the small 12th century Byzantine church of St. Efstathios, which was modified in the 15th century. It seems that the church was the place of worship of the Knights of the Order of St. John, since according to R. Gunnis, in 1936 its apse still preserved the coat-of-arms of Louis de Magnac, Grand Master of the Order.