PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION ORGANIZED BY THE CYPRUS MUNICIPALITIES UNDER TURKISH MILITARY OCCUPATION

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION OF CYPRUS BY TURKEY

THE TRAGEDY GOES ON...

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The photographic exhibition is organized by the nine occupied municipalities of Cyprus: Ammochostos, Kyrenia, Morphou, Lysi, Lapithos, Kythrea, Karavas, Lefkoniko, and Akanthou.

The exhibition aims at sensitizing the broader public to the tragic consequences of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. An effort is made to trace, as much as possible, the pain caused by the war and the uprooting of tens of thousands of people from their homes. At the core of the presentation lies the systematic destruction of cultural heritage in the island’s occupied areas, which persists to this day as a result of ethnic cleansing and religious fanaticism. As proof of the above, damages to archaeological sites, ecclesiastical monuments and all non-Muslim cemeteries, as well as thefts intended to offer antiquities for sale at a profit, are showcased here. In some cases, photographic evidence which has been brought to light for the first time is put forth.

This exhibition is divided into thematic units which are separated from one another by their different colours. Each panel includes a title and a brief text, whilst being supplemented by pertinent ‘before and after 1974’ visual material.

The first unit introduces the nine occupied municipalities, with a historical outline, their most significant monuments and their present state. This is followed by the unit on the most important monasteries and the way they are being used by the occupying forces today. The remaining units give evidence of archaeological sites and the smuggling of antiquities, Orthodox churches and churches which have been desecrated and demolished by the Turks, as well as churches belonging to Maronites, Armenians and Latin Cypriots, cemeteries, and educational institutions. Special emphasis is placed on the medieval city of Famagusta inasmuch as the whole area constitutes a vast museum in itself. Both the archaeological sites and the monuments are in urgent need of special conservation and protection, which Turkey as the occupying force, refuses to provide.

THE SAVING OF THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IS AN URGENCY!
The 1974 Turkish invasion

On 15 July 1974, the Greek military junta then ruling Greece and its collaborators in Cyprus, staged a coup against the Cypriot President, Archbishop Makarios III. The Turkish side used the coup as a pretext to invade Cyprus in the early hours of 20 July 1974, violating the UN Charter, and initially gained control of Kyrenia.

In violation of the ceasefire, in August of the same year, Turkey continued to advance and went on to seize Famagusta, Morphou and Karpass.

The main consequences of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus have been as follows:

- Occupation of 36.2% of the Cypriot territory and de facto partition of the island by means of the “Attila Line” which divides Cyprus into the Turkish side.
- Approximately 750,000 refugees, namely 40% of the Greek Cypriot population.
- Thousands of casualties, either dead or missing.
- Three cities and 204 villages have been seized and illegally colonized by settlers from Turkey.
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  - Thousands of casualties, either dead or missing.
  - Three cities and 204 villages have been seized and illegally colonized by settlers from Turkey.
  - According to recent estimates and information, about 55,000 Turkish Cypriots remain in the occupied area today (approximately 120,000 in 1974), as the majority of them have emigrated because of the economic and moral destitution imposed on the area by Ankara through the settlement of hundreds of thousands of settlers whose number, according to recent evidence, rises to around 700,000.
  - 70% of the island’s wealth generating resources lie under Turkish occupation.
  - Today, fewer than 60,000 Turkish Cypriots and Maronites live in the occupied villages, amidst conditions of oppression, intimidation and want. In August 1974, 20,000 enclaved inhabited these villages, but were forced by means of inhuman methods to abandon their houses and properties.
  - Approximately 44,000 Turkish soldiers, fully equipped with state-of-the-art gear and backed by the Turkish Air Force and Navy are stationed in the occupied part, thus making it, according to the UN Secretary General, one of the most heavily militarized areas in the world.
  - In 1983, in an effort to consolidate their hold over the occupied part, the Turkish Cypriot side unilaterally declared that the area be called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”, recognized solely by Turkey and fully dependent on it.
  - The illegal regime in the occupied part has been methodically trying to obliterate every trace of Greek and Christian civilization dating back thousands of years, whilst place-names and names of cities and villages have been replaced by Turkish names.
Refugees

As soon as they seized the Northern part of Cyprus, the Turks violently expelled 170,000 Greek Cypriots, namely one quarter of the indigenous population. These people were forced to leave their homes and seek refuge to the free areas, as refugees in their own country.

Homeless and worn out, they stayed outdoors for a number of weeks before being temporarily housed in tented refugee camps set up for this particular end. The government’s long term policy has been the provision of better temporary lodging in refugee housings, whilst its permanent objective remains to this day the return of all refugees to their ancestral land. The inevitable result of this mass operating was the collapse of the social tissue.

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that Turkey violated articles of the European Convention on human rights pertaining to the right of Greek Cypriot refugees to return to their homes, and their right to have access to and make use of their property.

By means of relevant resolutions, the United Nations and other international organizations have demanded the urgent return of the refugees in safety. They also required the full restoration of the human rights of the Cypriot people, especially refugees. Yet, Turkey refuses to abide by these resolutions, in gross violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Greek Cypriots, including the freedom of movement, the freedom of settlement and the right to property.
Efforts made ever so often by UNESCO towards salvaging the cultural heritage in the occupied areas of Cyprus have stumbled over the intransigent denial of the Turkish occupying forces to collaborate and abide by international conventions.

The report composed in 1975 by UNESCO's special envoy, the Canadian architect Jacques Dalibard, on the state of Cyprus' occupied monuments, was suppressed following covert interventions by Turkey. The Turkish army refused to allow international observers access to the occupied areas, contrary to the decision made by the UNESCO General Assembly in Belgrade, in 1980.

The destruction by Turkey of cultural heritage in the occupied areas was condemned by the European Council sub-committee for the “architectural and cultural heritage of Cyprus” which met in Nicosia in October 1982, as well as by EUROPE NOSTRA by means of a resolution dated September 1987.

In 1989 a delegation of specialists from the European Council performed an eye-witness observation of specific monuments in occupied Cyprus. The relevant expert makes reference to the deliberate destruction of monuments and looting of medieval antiquities, alongside the need for the immediate commencement of conservation and restorative works on the monuments.

A series of International Treaties, Conventions and Protocols condemn the ongoing looting and pillage of the cultural heritage of Cyprus by Turkey. Turkey itself has co-signed but never abode by them. Some of these are mentioned below:

- the European Convention signed in London on 6 May 1949 for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage;
- the UNESCO Convention, article 2(2), 7 of 14 November 1970, which prohibits the illegal import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property;
- the International Convention of 16 November 1972, on the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage;
- Paragraph 53 of 1977 of the Protocol Additional to the 1949 International Geneva Convention, which prohibits any acts of hostility directed against the historic monuments which constitute the cultural or political heritage of peoples;
- GATT Regulation, paragraph 18, on restrictions on trade and taking measures for the protection of national treasures of art, historic and archaeological value;
- the Rome Convention of 14 June 1995, on the illegal export of objects of cultural heritage;

In 2007, the USA and the Republic of Cyprus co-signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) concerning the eradication of the illegal trade in antiquities dating from ancient times down to the 16th century. The Memorandum was renewed in 2012.

The head of the Archangel from the church of Antifonitis (12th c.) was cut off by the Turks.
The Smuggling of Antiquities

The Greek history of Cyprus and a wealth of evidence collected in a span of three millennia were meant to be amputated, plundered and destroyed at the hands of the Turkish invaders in the summer of 1974 and the years that followed the invasion.

More than 580 churches of various Christian doctrines in the occupied territory of Cyprus are reported to have been subjected to the fury of the invaders. Notable archaeological sites were located in these areas, e.g. Engomi, Salamina, Sal, Lemporou, the Monastery of the Apostolos Faneromenos, the church of St. Mamas in Mavrops, the Church of St. George in Chrysochousa, the Monastery of St. Epiphanius in Famagusta, the Monastery of St. John Chrysostom in Kouris etc.

The ethnic cleansing launched the wave of looting and devastation either by organized antiquities smuggling rings, such as that of the Turk Aydin Dikmen, only random destroyers and rapists of a rich civilization. From as early as the 22nd of November 1974, the first arrest of a Turkish dealer in illicit antiquities was reported by Great Britain, trading in icons and ancient vessels from occupied Cyprus. Regrettably, this was only the first in a long series of acts of cultural destruction of immense dimensions: the obliteration of the mosaic of Panagia Kyra (7th c.) in Livadia, Famagusta; the dismantling and sale of the mosaics in Panagia Kanakaria (6th c.) in Lythrangomi; the wall-paintings of St. Solomone in Koma tou Gialou (9th c.); of the wall-paintings of St. Ephemianos (Themonianos) in Lysi (13th c.), repatriated in 2012 owing to the efforts of the Church of Cyprus and the Republic of Cyprus – are but a few among hundreds of tokens of systematic looting and unlawful exploitation.

Cypriot works of art, violently and illegally extracted from their natural settings, are being traded in international contraband markets and museums abroad.

A number of mosaics, wall-paintings and icons from the occupied areas of Cyprus have been taken into custody by the Munich Police, in Germany.

1. Terracotta figurine of a bear (760-750 B.C.) and
Zoomorphic rhyton of clay (1100-1050). From the Christakis Hadjiprodromou private collection in Famagusta.
3. St Mark the Evangelist. From the destroyed mosaic on the apse of Panagia Kanakaria Church in Lythrangomi.
4. The icon of Panagia Hodegetria (19th c.) repatriated in 2012.
5. The icon of Christ from the church of St Charalampos in Kontea was returned by the British singer Boy George to the Church of Cyprus.
6. Ancient torso of a statue, available for sale at an antique shop in the occupied areas.
Archaeological sites

The 1974 Turkish invasion proved the most devastating blow to the Department of Antiquities, which at that time was in its 40th year of operation.

Pervasive archaeological sites and findings, e.g. Engomi, Salamina, Soloi, Karpasia, are now located in the areas of Acheiropoieta Monastery, Kyrenia, Agios Epiktetos, Apostolos Andreas, as well as monuments of traditional architecture, have been looted or even obliterated by the occupying army.

A total of 197 ancient monuments, proclaimed as in accordance with the Law on Antiquities, and listed in the occupied area. Hundreds of additional archaeological sites and monuments, located in the course of preparations for the Archaeological Sites Protection Index, have not been included in the Law, as research was still in progress when the Turkish invasion took place.

The notables were performed by the Department of Antiquities and foreign archaeological delegations on the Northern part of Cyprus was interrupted, after the area was seized by the Turkish army. Archeological excavations in Salamina, Engomi, Soloi, Acheiropoieta, Apostolos Andreas, and elsewhere were brought to a halt, their findings robbed. Archaeological sites and monuments had suffered extensive damages on account of random bombing by the Turkish air force, e.g. the renowned Paphos mosaics, even though the area had been spared armed fighting with the Turkish invaders.

The preservation and protection of cultural heritage in the occupied areas is a joint aim of the Republic and the Church of Cyprus, and persists to this day across different levels, albeit in adverse conditions.
The looting and denuding of churches of their mobile items and anything reminiscent of their Christian identity, the use of churches as storehouses, stables, workshops, latrines, and recreation halls, provide undeniable evidence of the lack of culture and a modicum of respect on behalf of the Turkish invaders. A considerable number of churches have been converted into mosques. By contrast, the preservation and safeguarding of Muslims sacred places in the jurisdiction of the Republic of Cyprus readily exposes a stark difference in conduct.

The destructions of churches to their very foundations (Monastery of Panagia Avgasida in Milia, Famagusta; St Habbakum in Rizokarpaso; St Catherine in Yerani, St Thomas in Skyros; the Prophet Zacharia in Dilione; St Wells in Velediza etc), the absence of even a basic provision of protection, and the willful abandonment of monuments of exceptional artistic and historic value to the mercy of time, weather conditions and forgers of antiquities – all have dealt a serious blow to world civilization.

Demolished Orthodox Churches

The chapel of the Prophet Habbakuk in Rizokarpaso, before its demolition by the Turks.

The site of the chapel of the Prophet Elijah in Lysi, after the building’s demolition by the Turks.

Right: The medieval Monastery of Panagia Avgasida, Famagusta district, was destroyed by the Turks after 1974.

The church of St Thekla before its demolition by the Turks.

Above: The mosaic with the Virgin Orans (7th cent.) from Panagia Kyra church in Livadia was destroyed completely by the Turks.

The lost wall-painting of Christ Pantokrator from the church of Avgasida.
Cyprus has always been a place of convergence of different religions and civilizations. Apart from the major Greek Orthodox community, the island has for centuries now been inhabited by adherents of other religions and Christian denominations, e.g. Jews, Muslims, Syriacs, Abyssenians, Copts, Armenians, Maronites and Latins. Despite the fact that through the centuries the peaceful coexistence of all religions and denominations was an accomplished fact, immediately after the Turkish invasion and the ensuing ethnic cleansing, the monuments and sites of veneration of these groups were subjected to irreverent treatment.

Notable monuments, such as the prominent Sourp Magar Armenian Monastery (St. Makarios) in Chalefka, were left to ruin. The most important monastery of the Maronites in Cyprus, the Prophet Elijah in Agia Marina Skyllouras, was bombed and plundered. The Latin church of St. Antony in Asia has collapsed. The Armenian church of Our Lady of Kantzvor in the medieval city of Famagusta was for years being used as a warehouse of the Turkish army, whilst the Cathedral of Sourp Asdvadzadzin (Our Lady of the Armenians in Nicosia) was subjected to impious treatment. The result has been extensive damage to the churches’ medieval wall paintings and theft of their precious relics.

Maronite, Armenian and Latin churches
The destruction of non-Muslim cemeteries in the occupied area is perhaps the most extreme demonstration of nationalistic hatred on behalf of the occupying forces. No cemetery has remained intact, as destruction acquired an almost systematic character, attesting to a devastating mania for obliterating anything reminiscent of the lawful inhabitants of these areas.

When a number of checkpoints opened in 2003, Greek Cypriots who visited their villages and cities witnessed with their own eyes the extent of barbarity and devastation, especially in Kyrenia, Yialousa, Rizokarpaso, Genagra, etc. Similar treatment was meted out to the Jewish cemetery in Kyrenia, which was desecrated in a grossly irreverent manner.

The pain and anguished astonishment of the Greek Cypriot refugees were immense, as all of them wondered: “What did the dead do wrong?”
The edifices that were built during the Ottoman rule (1571-1878) were humble, whilst those built under British rule (1878-1960) were closer to the classic models. Regardless of their style, their main feature is the extensive use of the local porous stone, then the prevalent construction material used in both public and private buildings. Especially impressive were their neoclassical façades, imitating those of Ancient Greek temples.

The more recent school buildings were built at the end of the British rule, mainly after the island’s independence. These buildings, considered modern for their time, stand out for their functionality, correct orientation and typical repetition. After the Turkish invasion, some of these remained in use as schools by the occupying authorities, whilst others were maliciously altered, e.g., the Morphou High School. The remaining school buildings, after being looted, have been left to ruin, e.g., the private Silvestros Commercial School in Nicosia and the Elementary Schools in Kakopetria and Stylianos, Paralimni.

In the fenced-off city of Famagusta, many elementary and high schools remain pillaged and left to waste, e.g., the historical Famagusta I Greek High School, the Technical School, the Elementary school of Chrysi Akti, St Memnon I and II Elementary School and the fine marble building of the Lyceum Ellinidon Ammochostou (Lyceum of Greek Women of Famagusta).

School Buildings

The school and educational buildings in the occupied cities and communities of Cyprus were tokens of the Greeks of Cyprus’ love for belles-lettres and their will to educate themselves in harsh times, as the periods of the Ottoman and British Dominion.
Tradition relates that there were in Famagusta a total of 365 churches, one for each day of the year, which points to the wealth of its inhabitants. Even to this day, despite the overall devastation, its walled area is probably the most beautiful medieval city in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its solid wall, which survives almost in its entirety, but also its harbor, had made the city a safe and ideal meeting place for mercantile transactions involving many different countries. Its cosmopolitan air is readily perceived by means of a simple walk around the city, during which one can see a multitude of churches of different denominations and religions: the Gothic Cathedral of St Nicholas (14th c.), or the striking church of St George "of the Greeks", which was bombed and deserted during the grueling 11-month siege of Famagusta by the Ottomans in 1571. Adjacent to the north of St George is the small church of St Symeon (12th c.) where, according to tradition, the icon of St Epiphanius was seen to breathe. Across the city stands the Armenian church of Our Lady Kantzvor (14th c.) against the elegant, single-aisled church of St George (14th c.) was used by the Turkish occupying army as a warehouse. Near to St George’s we find the elegant, single-aisled church of St Anna (14th c.) whilst further east, the so-called Twin Churches of the Knights Templar and Hospitallers are now used as pubs!

The medieval city is effectively a vast open-air museum in need of urgent and essential care, given that its numerous museums have been barred from any conservation works since 1974 when the competent Department of Antiquities was denied access to them. The Global Heritage Fund has listed the city in the 12 most important archaeological sites threatened by extinction. Efforts made by the Municipality of Famagusta towards collaborating with the Turkish Cypriot city hall for the conservation of the monuments of the medieval city, have not yielded the desired outcome.
Some of the most significant Byzantine monuments of Cyprus have, after the summer of 1974, been turned into military camps of the Turkish occupying army, namely:

- The Monastery of Panagia Acheiropoietos in ancient Lambousa (5th, 11th-12th c.). The monasteries' relics and notable icons have been stolen, whilst a small icon depicting the Exaltation of the Holy Cross was located in Germany, in the storehouses of illicit Turkish dealer Aydin Dikmen.

- The Monastery of St John Chrysostom in the village of Koutsoventis, built in the 11th c. and known for its significant Comnenian wall-paintings, has been desecrated. The only visit to the monastery by an expert was carried out in 1989, when Professor R. Cormack, member of the European Council delegation, ascertained that some of the wall-paintings had been whitewashed, whilst other had suffered damages.

- The Monastery of St Spyridon (18th c., built on the ruins of a basilica of the 4th-5th c.) in the village of Tremetousia, where an Icon Conservation Centre belonging to the Church of Cyprus was in operation until 1974. After the invasion, the church was turned into a military camp, its icons stolen, whilst the condition of its notable Palaeo-Christian mosaic floors remains unknown. Evidence is also lacking about the fate of the saint's Palaeo-Christian sarcophagus.
The Monastery of Apostolos Andreas (St Andrew the Apostle) belongs to the jurisdiction of the suffragan bishopric of Karpass and is located on the homonymous cape in Karpass. It is one of Cyprus' most important and popular sites of veneration.

According to the local tradition, the Apostle Andrew had passed by the region where the monastery was to be built, and miraculously carved a spring into the rock. In the area of the monastery stands a medieval gothic church, built on the source of agiasma or holy water. The more recent katholikon, looming over the sea landscape, was constructed sometime before 1867. Monasteries and other auxiliary rooms had been erected in the monastery’s square, to meet the needs of pilgrims who used to arrive by the thousands from all over Cyprus in order to celebrate the saint’s feast day on 30 November but also on 15 August.

Numerous Turkish Cypriots from various places around Cyprus were among those visiting the monastery, bringing with them votive offerings as tokens of respect for the Apostle. Even today, brochures published by the occupying regime for the Apostolos Andreas Monastery refer to it as being “a sacred place for Turks and Greeks alike”.

From 1974 and for the next 30 years, the Apostolos Andreas Monastery was inaccessible to the Greeks because of the Turkish occupation. When a number of checkpoints opened in 2003, the faithful began revisiting the monastery, and still do so to this day. In the harsh years of enclavement, the few Greek-Cypriots enclaved in Karpass remain its only keepers.

From the belfry of the katholikon the cross has been removed, whereas the precious silver gilt icon of the Apostle Andrew and other valuables have been robbed. Also, the marble bust of the proprietor priest Ioannis Nikola Diakou, placed above his grave, has been ruined.

The monastic buildings and the katholikon have suffered serious damages, due to long abandonment and lack of maintenance on behalf of the occupying authorities. Even though several studies focusing on the building's conservation and restoration have been made, and despite international interest in this matter, nothing has been materialized, as every effort stumble over the Turkish intransigence.

The renowned monastery of Apostolos Andreas in a derelict state.

The renowned monastery of Apostolos Andreas in a derelict state.
The Monastery of St Panteleimon is located at 28 km to the southwest of the city of Kyrenia, in the occupied village of Myrtou. Until 1974, when it was occupied by the Turkish troops, the village was one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in Cyprus.

During the years of the Ottoman rule the Monastery was renovated by Chrysanthos, the Metropolitan of Kyrenia, whereupon it acquired a two-storey complex to the south and west so as to meet the needs of the monks and the Bishopric of Kyrenia, which until 1917 had its See there.

Its katholikon consists of a two-aisled vaulted construction adorned by abstract wall-paintings,重要内容 after 1974, and by a carved wooden gilt iconostasis of exceptional artistry, made in 1743. Notable post-Byzantine icons, stolen by the Turks, were placed on the iconostasis. Of them, two icons depicting St Panteleimon were of special note. The first, meant for public veneration, had a silver revetment (the work of Ioannis Kornaros, 1798) and was always replete with votive offerings by the faithful. The other, a proprietary one, depicted St Panteleimon, with Chrysanthos, the Bishop of Kyrenia, kneeling on his left (1778).

In the early 20th century, the monastery was inhabited by 10 monks, the last of whom was Sophronios Michaelides, one of the enclaved in Myrtou. After the 1974 Turkish invasion, the Turks went on to use the village of Myrtou as a military base. The Monastery of St Panteleimon was converted into barracks for the Turkish occupying army. Not only did the invaders desecrate and loot the Monastery, steal and destroy its relics and treasures, they also literally ravaged the monastic buildings, some of which they demolished.

Today, albeit vacated by the Turkish army, the Monastery of St Panteleimon lies in a derelict state, on the brink of collapse.
Until 1974, the Monastery of St Mamas in Morphou was one of the holier sites of worship for the Christians of Cyprus. The church of St Mamas (16th c.) is built on the remains of at least three different architectural phases (5th-6th, 7th, possibly 12th c.). It belongs to the Franco-Byzantine style, a combination of a Gothic three-aisled basilica with a Byzantine domed church.

In the middle of the north wall, a dated richly elaborated carved decoration marks the marble sarcophagus of St Mamas dated to the 3rd A.D. The carved wooden ciborium which covers the holy altar, perhaps the most important ciborium surviving in Cyprus, has been dated to circa the mid 16th century.

In 1974 the church was seized by the Turkish troops and converted into a “museum of icons.” The silver decorated gospel book of the 18th c., the 19th c. reliquary with the remains of St Mamas and other saints, and the holy paten have been stolen from the church. In 1994, the cross was removed from the dome, whilst the belfry at the northeast corner is in need of conservation, just as the church’s wall paintings and icons. Also, problems of statics have manifested themselves on the monastic buildings on the north and east side of the church.

Since 2004, Neophytos, the Metropolitan of Morphou, officiates Vespers and the Divine Liturgy in the Turkish-occupied church on 1 and 2 September, on the feast of St Mamas, patron saint of Morphou.
Prior to the 1974 Turkish invasion, Famagusta was the most developed city in Cyprus, thriving in tourism, commerce and culture. It also boasted the most important harbor on the island. A wealth of significant archaeological monuments, the Lyceion Ellinidon Ammochostou (Lyceum of Greek Women of Famagusta), the Municipal Art Gallery, the Scientific and Philological Association of Famagusta, the 'Evagoras' Sports Club, the football and sports clubs of Ammochost and Nicosia, its 34 hotels, but above all the inhabitants of Famagusta themselves, progressive, cosmopolitan and diligent, had elevated their city to a true jewel, an enviable tourist destination, but also a wonderful place to live in.

After the second phase of the invasion, in August 1974, a large part of Famagusta was singled out and fenced off by the Turkish occupying army, placed under its immediate administration and control. Its rightful inhabitants are barred admittance to the city, in a unique example of barbaric conduct. Upon its conquest, the city was savagely looted, its houses, shops, and churches stripped of their belongings and relics. Famagusta became a ghost-city, left to die a slow death, decomposing year over year, whilst its lawful, proud inhabitants perish one after the other, with the longing and the pain of injustice and displacement.

The ruined church of St Paraskeve.

The interior of the church of Chrysospiliotissa, today.

The church of Chrysospiliotissa has been converted into a mosque.

View from the Famagusta Municipal building.
Kyrenia

The smallest yet most picturesque city of Cyprus was Kyrenia, a name owed to the homonymous ancient Achaean city, whence hailed the heroes of the Trojan war who, according to tradition, were its founders.

Its historical roots are as ancient as its name. The city of Kyrenia had three parishes: the Archangel Michael (Lower Kyrenia), St George (Upper Kyrenia) and Thermeia. The Municipality of Kyrenia was founded after 1856. Kyrenia was rich in antiquities dated to the Neolithic era and onwards. Its Christian monuments are significant, with their most ancient remnants having been located here, such as the tomb in Eleftheria street (4th c.) and the cemetery of Chrysokava. Of course, the city’s most distinctive monument is undoubtedly the Byzantine Medieval castle which towers above it. It is within this castle that the renowned ancient Hellenic ship of Kyrenia is exhibited (circa 300BC). After the second Turkish invasion in 1974 the occupying authorities collected icons from the desecrated churches and stored them in appalling conditions in the interior of the castle. The strikingly white cathedral of the Archangel, looted and destroyed in its interior, now converted into a museum of icons, still stands as a symbolic monument. The church of Panagia Glykiotissa, a significant site of veneration for the inhabitants of Kyrenia, on the west side of the city, was badly looted and turned into a Muslim mosque immediately after the invasion. The Medieval church of Panagia Chrysopolitissa, near the port, has collapsed, whereas the imposing Metropolitan Palace was pillaged and then put to the service of the Turkish occupying army. Kyrenian refugees have even been deprived of their right to exercise their religious duties since 1974.

In the last years before the 1974 invasion, economic growth was remarkable and manifest in every aspect of the city’s social life. The well-known Dome hotel was used by the Turkish army as an area for gathering the Greek-Cypriot hostages immediately after the city’s capture. For a few months following the massacre it turned as an Elementary School. The 1974 Turkish invasion brought to a halt the city’s progress and development, whilst its inhabitants were violently displaced and scattered all over Cyprus and abroad. Today, against all odds, the inhabitants of Kyrenia join efforts to keep the memory of their occupied, much-praised motherland alive, in the hope of returning and reconnecting with their roots.
Morphou

The thriving town of Morphou was on its way to becoming the seventh city of Cyprus. In 1883, it was proclaimed a municipality by the colonial government. In 1973, the Bishopric of Morphou was founded on the See, of the long spoken of, bishopric of Soloi. But alas, everything was brought to a halt in 1974.

Morphou was divided into four parishes: Agios Mamas, Agios Georgios, Agia Paraskeve and Chryseliou. The Morphou region was one of the most prosperous and advanced in Cyprus due to the growing cultivation of citrus fruit and vegetables in recent years. In the areas of Karavostasi and Xeros copper was extracted from the Skouriotissa mines.

There are, in the wider Morphou region, important archaeological sites, such as Petra tou Limnite (7,000–5,310 BC), Tseviou tou Skourou (16th – 12th c. BC), the ancient city of Soloi etc. At the initiative of the Bishopric of Morphou and the Republic of Cyprus, the basilica of St Auxibius (4th – 7th c.), one of the largest basilicas in Cyprus, adorned with important mosaics, was cleaned with financial assistance from USAID. The remaining area of the archaeological site has regrettably been left to ruin.

In August 1974 Morphou and its villages were occupied by the Turkish troops, then illegally colonized. The cathedral of St Mamas was desecrated and turned into a museum of icons, whilst the Metropolitan Palace was converted into an archaeological museum, also featuring stuffed animals. The church of St George was denuded and converted into a dance hall; the church of St Paraskeve was turned into a mosque and the church of Soteros at Chryseliou into a morgue! The city was renamed Güzelyurt by the Turks.
Lysi was one of the major townships of the Famagusta province. It has been under Turkish occupation since the summer of 1974. At the wish and decision of its inhabitants, Lysi was proclaimed a municipality in 1962. Part of the town’s expanse falls within the territory of the British Base Area of Dhekelia.

Lysi was renowned for its notable achievements in sports and belles-lettres, aside from its successful farming and livestock rearing practices, owing to which it ranked among the richest townships of Cyprus. In fact, the first grass football field was created in Lysi. The imposing, elaborately crafted church of Panagia looms over the township. The church took ten years to complete, with voluntary work by all the inhabitants of Lysi. It was finally finished in 1888.

After the 1974 Turkish invasion, a few Turkish Cypriots from the free areas took up residence in the township, together with settlers from Turkey. In their effort to obliterate the Greek character of the township, the Turks renamed it Akdogan. A large part of Lysi is used as a military camp by the Turkish occupying army. The renowned church of Panagia was converted into a mosque, its Christian cemetery ruined. Prior to 1974, a Palaeo-Christian basilica was excavated in the Lysi area. Its rural churches have been pillaged. The most important among them is St Ephemianos (Themonianos). Its wall-paintings (13th c.) have been dismounted by Aydin Dikmen, a Turkish smuggler of antiquities, and sold abroad, in particular to the Menil Foundation, Texas. Upon the coordinated efforts of the Church of Cyprus and the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus, the wall-paintings were repatriated in 2012, and are now temporarily kept in the Byzantine Museum of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation in Nicosia.
Lapithos

Lapithos is one of Cyprus’ most beautiful townships, with a rich history and traditions that reach deep in time. Leaned against the slopes of Pentadaktylos, with running water and fertile soil, it captivated visitors at first sight. Lemon trees and orange trees flourished in the area, dominating the landscape.

The Municipality of Lapithos was founded in 1878 by the British colonial government. Prominent personalities of Cypriot history hailed from Lapithos, e.g. Georgios the Cypriot (1241-1289) who was to become the Ecumenical Patriarch, the intellectual and philosopher Georgios Lapithis (14th c.), general Ioannis Tsaggarides (1887-1939), the entrepreneur and benefactor Gogos Paraskevaides (1916-2007) as well as the historian Costas Kyrris (1927-2009).

A rich tradition but also the love of the inhabitants of Lapithos for it, is reflected onto a multitude of churches and chapels, erected in its wider district. Unfortunately, after 1974 these monuments were desecrated, some converted into mosques, e.g. the parish church of St Paraskeve, or left to the mercy of time and weather, e.g. the chapels of St Marina and St Mamas, whereas the church of the Archangel Michael has collapsed. The whole complex of the parish church of St Anastasia has been converted into a hotel, whereas the chapel of St George “Xorinos” has been turned into construction company premises.

After 1974 the township was renamed Lapta, whilst the illegal exploitation and unruly construction of residences and tourist accommodations on Greek-Cypriot land has greatly distorted the area.
Kythrea

The township of Kythrea lies on the south slope of Pentadaktylos, at 15 km from the capital city of Nicosia, gazing at the lowland of Mesaoria.

In 1974, Kythrea was inhabited by approximately 4,500 Greeks and included six parishes: Syrkania, Chardakiotissa, Agios Georgios, Agios Andronikos, Agia Marina and Chrysida. The Municipality of Kythrea was founded in 1915 by the colonial government.

The well-known Kefalovryso, renowned across the whole of Cyprus, watered not only Kythrea but its neighboring villages too; sometimes its water reached as far as ancient Salamis. After the town’s conquest by the Turkish troops in 1974, Kefalovryso dried out, which in turn led to the desiccation of the green growth covering the whole of Kythrea.

After 1974 the Greek-Cypriot inhabitants of Kythrea became refugees and moved either to free Cyprus or abroad. Its churches have been pillaged and abandoned. Panagia Chardakiotissa and the church of St Anne have been turned into mosques, whilst the church of St Andronikos was first pillaged, then set on fire. A large part of it has now collapsed. The Church of St George serves today as a storehouse for military equipment, and that of St Marina as a dance studio. The renowned monastery of the Theotokos has been demolished. The church of St Antony, in Syrkania, belonged to the Maronite Church.

The Municipality of Kythrea has been trying in diverse conditions and in diverse ways to keep the flame of return burning, but above all to imbue the young generation with love for their ancestral land.
The township of Karavas, together with its neighboring Lapithos, formed a beautiful complex which adorned the foothills of Pentadaktylos. The natural wealth of the land was aptly reflected on an array of elegant edifices.

The municipality of Karavas was founded in 1884. Folk art and handicraft flourished in the area as a result of an ongoing, age-long living tradition cherished by the inhabitants of Karavas. In the last years before the invasion, tourism started to develop in the area, offering visitors a rich package of natural beauty and vigorous tradition.

Unfortunately, the 1974 Turkish invasion violently interrupted a history of thousands of years and forced the townships legal inhabitants to scatter across the whole of free Cyprus. There were, in the township and its wider region, three parish churches and fourteen chapels. The church of St George (1843-1854) was first desecrated, then left to ruin, just as the church of St Irene (1894). The impressive church of the Lady Evangelistria (1906-1917) has been converted into a mosque. The historical monastery of Acheiropoietos (6th, 11th century), St Eulalios (6th-7th, 15th c.) and the small rock-cut church of St Eulambios stand within Karavas’ municipal boundaries, and attest to the region’s affluent past. Today they are inaccessible as they lie within a military area.

After 1974 the township was illegally renamed Alsancak (red area).
Lefkoniko

The township of Lefkoniko was one of the largest rural centers in the Famagusta province. Prior to 1974 its population numbered approximately 3,000 inhabitants. In 1939, the colonial government proclaimed the area a municipality. The Lefkoniko high school, erected in 1938 in the Neoclassical style, was one of the most beautiful edifices in the area.

Notable personalities of Cypriot history hailed from Lefkoniko:

Kyprianos Oikonomides, the Metropolitan of Kition (1833-1886), a fervent advocate for the rights of poor farmers; his nephew, Ioannis Oikonomides (1864-1934), who pursued his uncle's struggles and went on, in 1909, to found the Cooperative Bank of Lefkoniko.

N. Michaelides (1914-1919), author of the epic poem "The 9th of July 1821" in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The foundation of the Bank led to the introduction of cooperative banking in Cyprus, which greatly aided the island’s economic growth. But the most prominent among the learned men who were born in Lefkoniko was the national poet of Cyprus, N. Michaelides (1849-1919), author of the epic poem "The 9th of July 1821" in Nicosia, Cyprus.

However, history and tradition were violently interrupted by the 1974 Turkish invasion of the island. The township was settled with Turkish Cypriots and settlers from Anatolia, its character altered. Its most important church, the Archangel Michael (possibly 14th c.) has been desecrated and lies today on the brink of collapse, whereas the church of the Saviour has been converted into a mosque. In their effort to obliterate the Greek history of the occupied areas, the Turks renamed Lefkoniko Geçitkale.

The church of the Archangel Michael is on the brink of collapse.

The church of the Saviour has been converted into a mosque.
Akanthou

Akanthou, a township in the Famagusta province and the seat of the homonymous municipality, has a splendid amphitheatrical location along the northern foothill of Pentadaktylos. Founded in 1908, it is one of the earliest municipalities in Cyprus.

Oil production flourished in the community. The great expanse of the township provided the basic factors required for a noteworthy tourist development, but the 1974 Turkish invasion cancelled all the targets and dreams of Akanthou’s forward-thinking inhabitants.

Akanthou was renowned for a wealth of more than twenty ecclesiastical monuments. The most prominent among these is the church of Chrysosoteros, which used to be one of the most significant and popular sites of veneration for the Cypriots. The church was converted by the Turks into a Muslim mosque, after being stripped of its furnishings, portable icons, and crosses from the dome and belfries. The miraculous icon of Chrysosoteros (13th c., with 16th c. additions) was located in 2009 in Turkish-occupied Morphou and is found today in the church of St Mamas.

After the Turkish invasion, Turkish Cypriots from the free areas as well as settlers from Anatolia took up residence in Akanthou, altering and destroying the traditional character of what used to be a beautiful township, now renamed Tatlisu.
Organization: Committee of Cyprus Occupied Municipalities

Scientific consultation and texts by: Dr Christodoulos Hadjichristodoulou, Dr Andreas Foulias

Coordination: Yiannis Papaioannou, Mayor of Karavas

Planning-Design-Graphics: Anna Kyriacou

Translations: Despina Pirketti


Contributors to the photographic exhibition

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