

1. Late medieval Greek churches in Cyprus: investigating buildings of ‘no importance’?

“Alle Stilarten Südeuropas [...] gaben sich hier ein Stelldichein und mischten sich wahllos mit Nachahmungen verjährter Formen, byzantinischer so gut wie frühgotischer, bis endlich Venedig auch künstlerisch die Oberhand gewann”¹
Georg Dehio (1901)

When Georg Dehio, one of the most influential architectural historians of the late 1800s in Europe, discussed the architecture of Cyprus in his ‘Die kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes’, his struggle to name and classify its characteristics became more than obvious. Apparently, Dehio was only familiar with those buildings studied by the French scholar Camille Enlart previously, so the large urban Latin structures and very few rural churches.² Nevertheless, to someone like him, a person who had been well trained in describing the ‘pure’ styles of France and Germany, these buildings must have looked strangely diverse and unfamiliar. In spite of this – or perhaps as a result – he does not fail to recognize one of the central characteristics of Cypriot history in his attempt to name a multitude of what he describes as ‘influences’: the island’s function as a crossroads, a place of exchange, mixture and blending.³

Both geographical position in the Eastern Mediterranean and political changes during the late Middle Ages and early modern times had created a probably unique social environment on the island, a multi-cultural society consisting of Byzantines, Franks and (mainly Christian) Levantines, subdivided by a multitude of different religions and denominations. In particular the Latin conquest of the island in 1191 and the subsequent establishment of a Latin kingdom on the island played key roles, as these political changes led to an important role for Cyprus in the Crusades as well as in Levantine trade, attracting people of the most varied ethnic backgrounds. The artistic production was naturally deeply affected by this multifaceted, ‘hybrid’ composition of society, causing the diverse overall image apprehended by

1 Dehio, Bezold 1892–1901, II, p. 440. Transl.: ‘here, all styles of Southern Europe came together as if for a jolly gathering and were mixing indiscriminately with imitations of outdated forms, Byzantine as much as Early Gothic, until Venice finally prevailed artistically as well’.

2 It is not impossible that he also was in contact with the German architect Friedrich Seeßelberg, who at the time prepared a never-published comprehensive volume of the Cypriot Gothic (see the introduction to his dissertation on Bellapais Abbey: Seeßelberg 1901, p. 1–10).

3 The notion of ‘artistic influence’ was avoided in this study, due to the problematic connotations and the scholarly bias connected to it.



Fig. 1 View of Famagusta with Latin, Greek and Syriac Churches, Postcard (ca. 1940)

Dehio.⁴ Nevertheless, his dichotomous opposition of ‘pure’ and ‘arbitrarily mixed’ styles failed to recognize the importance of exactly those mixed buildings for the understanding of the Cypriot society of the late Middle Ages – many parameters of which still remain unclear or disputable, even after a further century of research.

As Dehio already underlined, the 13th and 14th centuries were certainly one of the heydays of Cypriot church building: The splendid Latin cathedrals of Nicosia, capital of the island, and the harbour city Famagusta, the main political and economic centres of the island throughout Frankish rule, were erected during this period, as well as numerous congregational churches in both cities (Fig. 1). However, none of these were intended to serve the Greek population of the island, which was much larger in numbers than the smaller groups of Latins, who only came to Cyprus from the late 12th century onwards. Following Dehio’s argumentation, the Greeks started to copy the Gothic buildings from the mid-14th century on (in which way they built their churches before, he does not tell us).⁵ The largest

4 Slightly less problematic but equally disputed as ‘influence’ is the notion of ‘hybridity’. As the term is largely avoided in this study, the discussion will not be repeated here. See in particular Schiel et al. 2010 and Burkhardt et al. 2011.

5 Dehio, Bezold 1892–1901, II, p. 438. “Nach Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts hörte die unmittelbare Einwirkung der nordischen Kunst auf [...] Daneben aber beginnen die Einheimischen die gotischen Bauten der älteren Zeit nachzuahmen.”



Fig. 2 Famagusta, Greek and Latin Cathedral, Postcard (ca. 1900, J. Foscolo)

and most remarkable of these buildings – and apparently the only one, which caught Dehio’s interest – is the cathedral Saint George of the Greeks in Famagusta [77]. Erected in the second half of the 14th century, it is not only the most ambitious late medieval Orthodox church in the Eastern Mediterranean but also remarkable for its use of specifically Gothic elements of decoration. These, however, provoked Dehio to dismiss the church as a mere copy of the Latin cathedral (Fig. 2); an opinion, which was surprisingly still perpetuated in rather recent scholarship. Nevertheless, Dehio adds further on that Saint George might show more of a ‘translation’ than a ‘transcription’ of the Gothic style of the Latin cathedral.⁶ Here the opposition of linguistic terms instead of usual artistic ones is of some interest.⁷ A translation usually means the rendition of a text into another language, which requires an active understanding of the style as well as content of the original, while a transcription does not necessarily require any understanding of the content or the meaning. In the case of Saint George, the term refers to the translation of the Latin style of sacral architecture into a new artistic language. This concept reveals that

6 Dehio, *Bezold 1892–1901*, II, p. 439. “[...] aus der Abschrift ist unversehens eine Uebersetzung geworden.”

7 For a similar replacement of art historical with linguistic terminology, see for example Schmidt 1999, p. 30, who argues for using ‘idiom’ instead of ‘style’ – an option that was, however, not followed in this study.

Dehio sensed already that, instead of copying the Gothic buildings rather bluntly and without understanding, the process of adapting elements of the ‘new’ style for Greek churches must have been based on purposeful consideration.

While the Latin buildings of the island, admittedly much better documented in the sources, have received considerable scholarly attention (see below), the same cannot be said about the Greek churches. This now sets the first cornerstones for the research in this thesis: the cathedral complex of Saint George of the Greeks in Famagusta – including the adjoining older church of Saint Epifanios – as central monuments of the Greek church architecture of the island; as well as the possible implications embedded in the choice of their style. However, researching a building in an isolated way, even if it is of high artistic quality, can only lead to incomplete results. Especially the scarceness of historical sources directly referring to the erection of church buildings makes it necessary to widen the view on the side of the material legacy. Dehio certainly did not feel this need, as he was interested in writing a compendium of only the most important and influential buildings, which left little space for further detailed research. As mentioned above, he seems to have based his thoughts on Camille Enlart’s ‘*L’art gothique et la renaissance en Chypre*’, which had been published shortly before, in 1899.⁸ In this volume, only those buildings were included, which Enlart considered to be sufficiently ‘Gothic’, while especially later rural ones were dismissed as of minor quality. Thus, it is hardly surprising that also Dehio did not recognize the later, mainly Greek church architecture to be of any interest: “Für den Kirchenbau aber hat das 15. und 16. Jahrhundert keine Bedeutung mehr.”⁹ While this verdict was certainly based on his central European viewpoint, it is certainly not true for the research of the specific situation in Cyprus. In particular the period of Venetian rule between the late 15th century and the final loss of the island to the Ottoman Empire in 1571, saw a second wave of church building at the very fringes of the late medieval period. A second wave, as will be shown, which produced several remarkable structures that are not less revealing about the genesis of Cypriot church architecture than the earlier buildings in Famagusta. Furthermore, perceiving a culture through its ‘minor’ works of art adds a further dimension to the occasionally rather flat image created by the study of nothing but the ‘high culture’ objects.¹⁰

8 Enlart 1899.

9 Dehio, Bezold 1892–1901, II, p. 440. Transl. ‘For the church building, however, the 15th and 16th centuries were of no further importance’. Enlart did indeed acknowledge the exuberance of Greek churches on the island and the importance of their painted decorations but, referring to his lack of time for on-site studies, generally excluded them from his book. (Enlart 1899, p. XX–XXI.)

10 For a review of the scholarly misperceptions of the buildings, see also chapter 1.3 on the question of the ‘francobyzantine’ style. On general thoughts of the relation between central and minor works of architecture as well as questions of style already Möbius 1988, esp. p. 7–9.

Therefore, it is the inclusion of exactly those churches – largely neglected by scholarship until today – and their comparison with the key monuments of the respective periods, which adds the necessary depth to the following investigation. Even if more questions will be raised than can be answered, the awareness of these questions should be seen as a step forward towards a better understanding of one of the most fascinating as well as puzzling places in the artistic networks of late medieval and early modern Mediterranean.

1.1 Early appraisal, long negligence, recent rediscovery. The research history

As already mentioned, Dehio was not the first well-known scholar who dealt with the historic monuments of Cyprus. In fact, the island with its historical connections to France (as the origin of its kings of the Lusignan dynasty) and England (as administrative power from 1878 on) provoked a high scholarly interest in the late 19th and early 20th century. Claude Delaval Cobham's 'Attempt at a Bibliography of Cyprus' comprehensively summed up this first main phase of research, which was succeeded by a phase of increased restoration activities following the creation of the Cypriot Department of Antiquities in 1934.¹¹ An updated bibliography can be found in Tassos Papacostas' article 'Gothic in the East' from 2006, which underlines the more recent new interest in the material testimonies of Cyprus and comprehensively sums up the main protagonists and phases of research up to this point in time.¹² Nevertheless, a brief summary of these bibliographical accounts, supplemented by the rich output of the past decade, is necessary at this point to highlight the position of the late medieval Orthodox churches within the general frame of scholarship.

All early studies also function as primary sources for the – already then gradually deteriorating – historic buildings. It is therefore often difficult to draw a line between primary sources and secondary literature. Among the early scholarly literature we find mainly historical overviews, most notably Louis de Mas Latrie's 'Histoire de l'île de Chypre sous le règne des princes de la maison de Lusignan' from 1852–1861.¹³ This compendium contains "the most comprehensive collection of documentary sources on Frankish Cyprus",¹⁴ but only covers a small part of the period to be investigated here. Cypriot archaeology emerges around the same time and its origins are closely connected with Luigi Palma di Cesnola, who was the

11 Cobham 1929; on the Department of Antiquities Roueché 2001.

12 Papacostas 2006b.

13 De Mas Latrie 1852–1861.

14 Beihammer 2008, p. 10.

United States' consul in Cyprus between 1865 and 1877.¹⁵ During this time on the island, he excavated several sites and published 'Cyprus, its ancient Cities, Tombs and Temples'.¹⁶ This book, even if it was rather intended to be a travel guide, apparently triggered further interest in the island.¹⁷ A paper by the Victorian architect Edward L'Anson on 'Medieval and other buildings in the island of Cyprus', published in 1883, starts with the remark: "Having read a recent work written by the Chevalier di Cesnola [...], I determined to visit the island [...] to see if I might not discover some fragments of Grecian architecture; but in this expectation I was disappointed."¹⁸ What he and his travel companion Sidney Vacher discovered instead were – in addition to some excavation sites and the fortifications of Famagusta, Nicosia and Kyrenia – the medieval churches. Even if the focus of the study lies on the Latin, 'Crusader' churches erected by the Lusignan, L'Anson and Vacher already mention Saint George of the Greeks as "Church A" and also refer to a small number of other, mostly unnamed Orthodox churches on the island, even if in a rather random and general way.¹⁹

The long article and probably the adjoining, detailed drawings of the buildings made such a strong impact on scholarship that from the 1880s onwards Cyprus appeared in a number of general publications on medieval church architecture.²⁰ This tendency came to a culmination with Camille Enlart's already mentioned 'L'art gothique et la renaissance en Chypre', a comprehensive analysis of buildings with a detailed consideration of historical sources.²¹ This study, even if incomplete and biased in some respects, still provides the first access for a scholarly treatment of the buildings.²² However, his distinctly French viewpoint strongly influenced

15 Cesnola is one of the most controversial personalities connected with the research of the historic legacy of Cyprus. The fact that he commissioned the findings of his excavations to be sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York right before becoming its director exposed him to accusations of looting. See also Davis 1989, p. 164.

16 Cesnola 1877.

17 Already before L'Anson's publication several travellers interested in the architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean visited the island, resulting in – among other accounts – the magnificent drawings of Edmond Duthoit from the 1860s. However, most of the accounts remained unpublished – the Duthoit drawings until the 1990s (see Bonato 1999 and Bonato, Severis 1999). For this early phase see also Papacostas 2006b, p. 513–516.

18 L'Anson, Vacher 1883, p. 13.

19 The 'early church' in Famagusta is the multi-domed building adjacent to Saint George of the Greeks, Saint Epifanios; Church B in Famagusta is the building known as Saints Peter and Paul today. Chapel D 'on the heights between Larnaca and Famagusta' is "typical of many in the island" and certainly means Saint George of Angonos in Ormideia [175]. Chapel E, a small dome-hall with west extension cannot be identified with certainty and was probably destroyed during the past century [LIII]. (L'Anson, Vacher 1883, p. 24–25)

20 See for example Corroyer 1893, p. 121–127.

21 Enlart 1899.

22 The importance of this publication led to a reedition in English (Enlart 1987).

his perception of the Orthodox churches, which he deemed either ‘French in style’, like Saint George of the Greeks, and thus discussed to some extent, or dismissed as irrelevant for his study. This book nevertheless already shows that a study of the late medieval Orthodox churches of the island is almost inseparably connected with remarks on the Latin, Gothic churches. At the same time, the German architect Friedrich Seeßelberg undertook extended studies of the Cypriot medieval architecture, of which only his dissertation on Bellapais Abbey was ever published.²³ In his foreword, he shows distinct awareness of the methodological restrictions of Enlart’s study, which, appropriately for the historical period, he did not fail to underline, in order to devaluate the Frenchmen’s study.²⁴ Nevertheless, his interest in the Greek churches was not more developed either: with reference to the French Gothic he attests the Greek churches on Cyprus “manche ziemlich belanglose Akkomodationen”.²⁵

The next valuable contribution to scholarship was published soon thereafter by George Jeffery, Curator of Ancient Monuments in Cyprus between 1903 and 1935. He not only rescued many of the neglected buildings during his over 30 years in charge of the antiquities on the island, but he also compiled the first thorough topography of Cypriot monuments: ‘A Description of the Historic Monuments of Cyprus’.²⁶ Here as well as in his numerous articles and reports, which were often overlooked by later scholarship,²⁷ Jeffery does not fail to mention the medieval Orthodox buildings of the island, even though his interest was initially rather directed towards the elegant Gothic churches – again apparently because of their stylistic ‘purity’. However, especially his early study of Saint George and the adjacent older church, which includes the only previous attempt at a visual reconstruction of the ruined complex, and a survey of ‘Byzantine’ churches between the Middle Ages and the 19th century provide not only important factual information but also a number of plans and sections.²⁸ While Enlart’s study was highly selective and

23 Seeßelberg 1901. It is not certain, why Seeßelberg had to abandon the project, but it seems possible that Enlart’s publication made it somewhat obsolete in the early 1900s. Later, he became a well-known professor for architecture and controversial founder of the nation-conservative ‘Werdandi-Bund’. A last attempt to publish his manuscript was undertaken in 1948–49 (!), but an increasing dementia and subsequent death in 1956 seem to have prevented him from finishing the work, of which only some image plates prepared for publication are preserved in the archive of the Technische Universität Berlin.

24 Seeßelberg’s expedition to Cyprus in the late 1890s has not been studied yet, but the author is preparing a more detailed study of Seeßelberg’s work on Cyprus.

25 Seeßelberg 1901, p. 9. Transl. ‘[...] some rather insignificant appropriations [...]’

26 Jeffery 1918. For Jeffery’s life and achievements as well as a comprehensive bibliography see Pilides 2009.

27 See for example Plagnieux, Soulard 2006a; Soulard 2006a and Soulard 2006b, where no reference to the early studies of Saint George of the Greeks by Jeffery is made.

28 Jeffery 1904, Jeffery 1916.

strived to embed the Cypriot architecture into a wider context, Jeffery attempted towards the end of his life to include every monument regardless of its period of origin and topographical context, which led to the first – and due to subsequent destructions often only – descriptions of numerous rural monuments. However, his remarks show how many buildings, especially in rural regions, had been already replaced by ‘uninteresting buildings without architectural character’.²⁹

During the 1930s, the number of scholars dealing with Cypriot antiquities was rising steadily, mainly concerned with questions of preservation and sustainable protection of the monuments. The immense state of decay in which many monuments were at that time – and which led to a number of collapses³⁰ – triggered the interest of mainly British scholars and architects as well as wealthy aristocrats. A large number of detailed reports were compiled, by the Directors of Antiquities John Hilton (1935–1936) and Arthur Megaw (1936–1960), the Deputy Director of Famagusta Theophilus Mogabgab, and by the newly founded Cyprus Committee for the Protection of Ancient Monuments.³¹ The reports were mainly published as ‘grey literature’ and only distributed among government officials and members of the Cyprus Committee, with the exception of those included in the printed annual ‘Report of the Department of Antiquities’, starting in 1936.³² While these reports contain valuable factual information about damage and repair works, they hardly contributed to a better understanding of the buildings.

The same can be said of Rupert Gunnis’ ‘Historic Cyprus’, a publication with similar qualities of a gazetteer as Jeffery’s ‘Historic Monuments’, but thought of as an inventory of historic buildings as well as a travel guide, which was written during the author’s tenure as Inspector of Antiquities between 1932 and 1935.³³ No

29 See for example Jeffery 1907. This small volume, which only covers the Kyrenia district, was thought to be the first of a series of six. Apparently, the other volumes of this intended gazetteer were never printed, and the information mainly included in Jeffery 1918. A later continuation of the series under a slightly changed title focused solely on the key monuments: Jeffery 1931–1937.

30 The collapse of the dormitory at the abbey of Bellapais was probably the biggest loss in the 20th century, while the fall of the southern wall of Unidentified Church 18 in Famagusta [84] in 1935 might be one of the latest incidents before renovation works started on many buildings (the collapse is mentioned in a Letter of John Hilton, kept in the King’s College London Archive).

31 The Cyprus Committee published conference proceedings in 1934, immediately after its creation, and from 1935 on a short annual report, which seems to be largely identical with the then unpublished, internal reports of the Department of Antiquities to the colonial government.

32 Some reports are preserved in the National Archive KEW, even if they were apparently not filed systematically. For the year 1936 see for example KEW CO 67–272–13. The contributions to the RDAC: Hilton 1936; Megaw 1939; Megaw, Mogabgab 1951; Mogabgab 1936; Mogabgab 1939b; Mogabgab 1951.

33 Gunnis 1936. The edition used for this study was Gunnis 1956, an exact reprint. For remarks on Gunnis’ life and time in Cyprus see Symons 1987 and Knox 2004.

other publication until today has included a similar number of remote Byzantine churches, especially of the late medieval times – to an extent that a dozen completely vanished churches are only documented in Gunnis’ book. However, Gunnis was not formally trained as an art historian and thus his occasionally hazardous datings and interpretations of the churches have to be treated with considerable care.

Already some years earlier, the British architect William Douglas Carøe had planned the publication of a thesis on the fusion of architectural styles on the island, but sadly the manuscript appears to have been lost in the fire of the Government House in Nicosia in 1931, which was a consequence of a public uproar against the British colonial regime. Nevertheless, the short article published as a summary of the lost thesis – although not influential for subsequent scholarship – provides some very intriguing first ideas on the impact of Gothic and Renaissance ideas on the local architecture.³⁴

The first comprehensive study focusing on the ‘Byzantine’ churches was started around the same time by Georgios Soteriou, but of this study, entitled *Βυζαντινά Μνημεία Της Κύπρου*; only the volume of plates was published in 1935.³⁵ Two shorter articles from 1931³⁶ and the detailed captions in the 1935 publication nevertheless reveal a good part of his thorough work, accomplished apparently in cooperation with Theophilus Mogabgab, who seems to have been responsible for some datings as well as stylistic remarks.³⁷ It was Soteriou’s work that introduced the term ‘francobyzantine’ into Cypriot scholarship for all those Orthodox churches erected after the Latin conquest and showing a certain stylistic dependence on the Latin buildings of the 13th and 14th centuries. Even if this term is rather problematic, as will be discussed in detail below, Soteriou’s work paved the way for most of subsequent research into the ‘Byzantine’, i.e. Greek churches of Cyprus.

Subsequently, research into the late medieval buildings of the island, Greek as well as Latin, was interrupted for several decades. Apart from the Second World War an important reason for this interruption might be the anti-colonial struggle of the 1950s, resulting in the Cypriot independence in 1960. This caused a restructuring of the Department of Antiquities and a strong turn towards research into those periods of Cypriot history, that were considered specifically Greek – i.e. the Classic

34 Carøe 1931. Carøe also designed several important buildings in Cyprus, most notably the Anglican church of Saint George in the Forest near the modern resort of Troodos. For this and his general achievements as an architect see Freeman 1990.

35 Soteriou 1935.

36 Soteriou 1931a; Soteriou 1931b.

37 The plan of Saint George, drawn by the architect Perikleous, disclosed a detailed study of the phases of building, so it is most certainly the only published record of Mogabgab’s excavation works in the church in the 1930s. (Soteriou 1935, p. 55)

and Byzantine periods.³⁸ Also foreign scholars rarely found Cypriot churches worth mentioning, especially after the Turkish occupation of the northern half of the island in 1974, which made the study of most key monuments impossible for several decades. One important exception is Thomas Boase's posthumously published study of the 'Ecclesiastical Art in Cyprus' from 1977.³⁹ Even if this article is rather a summary and faulty in some respects, it marks the beginning of a rather slowly evolving, supranational rediscovery of the monuments. Furthermore, his work – which includes both late medieval Orthodox cathedrals in Famagusta and Nicosia – is remarkable for its methodological approach, which saw the whole of Europe (not only France) as the origin of the Latin styles in the crusader countries, and also “proposed the idea that there was give and take, a genuine exchange of artistic ideas”.⁴⁰ While these thoughts of course refer to a genuinely different group of buildings than the one to be studied in this thesis, they also indicate a slowly emerging willingness of western scholars to include the late medieval Greek churches of Cyprus, the product of the dynamic exchange evoked by Boase (and later Folda), into their considerations.

However, with Athanasios Papageorghiou it was a Cypriot scholar who, in succession to Boase, first studied 'L'art Byzantin de Chypre et l'art des Croisées' in 1982 – not only surveying the Orthodox cathedrals of Famagusta and Nicosia, but also the churches of Agios Sozomenos, Morfou and the Neofytos Monastery. His attempt to create a well-defined 'francobyzantine' group of buildings, 'combining the gothic basilica with a Byzantine dome and choir', is not entirely convincing, as will be discussed below.⁴¹ Nevertheless, unlike most of the early 20th century scholars, he does not reduce the monuments to their 'Gothic' elements and thus opens the ground for a better-balanced discussion. This discussion did not start, though, before the mid-1990s, when Papageorghiou published his results again in a more international context, the proceedings of the conference 'Cyprus and the Crusades'.⁴² The same volume contains other remarkable papers on the topics of cross-cultural exchange between the native Orthodox community and the Latin settlers, even if the focus lies on the first centuries of the Latin domination and thus

38 The intense repair of the buildings, most notably of Saint George of the Greeks, continued until 1960, whereas in the 1960s and 1970s only the most necessary maintenance was secured. The general turn towards the 'Greek' heritage – i.e. excavation sites and Byzantine monuments has to be seen as part of the political affiliation with Greece after 1960. Furthermore, the Latin key monuments were partly inaccessible during the 1960s as they were located within Turkish occupied territories.

39 Boase 1977.

40 Folda 2005, p. 12. See here for a more comprehensive record of Boase's contribution into research on 'crusader art'.

41 Papageorghiou 1982a, p. 222. See chapter 1.3 for the further discussion of the term 'francobyzantine'.

42 Papageorghiou 1995.