



*The Royal Chapel at Pyrga:
Art, Agency, and Appropriation in
Fourteenth-Century Cyprus*

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The Royal Chapel at Pyrga: Art, Agency, and Appropriation in Fourteenth-Century Cyprus

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Abstract: Scholars have traditionally dated the Royal Chapel at Pyrga, Cyprus to the year 1421 and attributed it to the patronage of the island's Latin ruler Janus de Lusignan (r. 1398-1432). However, more recent stylistic, iconographic, and epigraphic analyses present a convincing argument for dating the chapel to the mid-fourteenth century. Ironically, though the chapel is most frequently associated with the death of Janus's wife Queen Charlotte, the portraits of a Latin king and queen both appear as living, albeit anachronistic, attendants at Christ's death in the chapel's decoration. Their prayerful attitude at the base of the Cross on Golgotha, in conjunction with programmatic emphasis on sickness/death, salvation, and intercession, implies that the foundation was intended to be something other than a memorial funerary chapel for a specific royal person. This article, which supports a mid-fourteenth-century date, will argue that the chapel instead functioned as an ex-voto or visual prayer for the salvation of the Cypriot people from an outbreak of plague on the island. Evidence points to King Peter I de Lusignan (r. 1358-1369) and Queen Eleanor as likely patrons of the chapel and the role of St. Peter Thomas—monk, papal procurator, and bishop—as instigator of royal penitential display as a means of countering the spread of plague. Important to this revised date and context is the clear invocation of the True Cross—relic and palladium par excellence of the Crusades—that held special importance in the religious culture of Cyprus and for its royal dynasty.¹

Keywords: Pyrga; Cyprus; Lusignan; art; Crusades; relics; plague

In 1192, Guy de Lusignan (c.1150-94) founded a Crusader royal dynasty on the island of Cyprus that would rule until the last of the family line, King James III de Lusignan, died as a child in 1474 leaving no direct claimant to the throne.² Despite nearly three hundred years of Lusignan domination, impressive architectural remains

¹ The author is indebted to the entirely selfless encouragement and support of Drs. Slobodan Curcic (1940-2017) and Nancy P. Sevcenko—this work is dedicated to them.

² The Lusignans arose as a noble family in the province of Poitou, the political heads of which by the Third Crusade (1189-92) were the Angevins of the House of Plantagenet who inherited their status as the Counts of Poitiers through Eleanor of Aquitaine. For a brief historical account of Guy and the Lusignan dynasty, see P.W. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191–1374* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1-38; Peter W. Edbury, "Franks," in *Cyprus: Society and Culture 1191-1374*, eds. Angel Nicolaou-Konnari and Christopher Schabel (Boston: Brill, 2005), 64-67. For a history of the island, see the ongoing publication of Theodoros Papadopoulos, *Ιστορία της Κύπρου* (Nicosia: Hidryma Archiepiskopou Makariou 3/Graphion Kypriakes Historias, 1995-2018; and George F. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, 4 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010 [1948]), which remains an important source in the English language.

notwithstanding, demonstrably Latin artistic production and consumption on medieval Cyprus have remained somewhat elusive and therefore marginalized on the scholarly stage until only recently.³ The Royal Chapel at Pyrga is no exception to this historiographical oversight though it has long been recognized as a Latin monument and one of undeniably royal Lusignan patronage.⁴ The figures depicted in a frescoed scene of the Crucifixion on the interior east wall of the chapel both wear pearl-encrusted, pointed crowns and European-style voluminous purple robes decorated with bands of pearls and vair linings colored green and ivory (Figures 1 and 2). Despite the generalized androgynous style of the couple, the royal figure to the right may be identified as female by her diaphanous veil.⁵ In addition, the frescoed coats of arms of the Kingdom of Jerusalem alternate with those of the Lusignan Cypriot royal dynasty on the polygonal profiles of the three transverse ribs of the vault (Figure 2).

³ For an overview of Latin artistic patronage on Cyprus, see Jannic Durand and Dorota Giovannoni, eds., *Chypre entre Byzance et l'Occident IV^e-XV^e siècle* (Paris: Musée du Louvre/Somogy éditions d'art, 2012), 182-292; Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Art in the Court of the Lusignan Kings," in *Cyprus and the Crusades: Papers given at the International Conference "Cyprus and the Crusades," Nicosia, 6-9 September, 1994*, eds. Nicholas Coureas and Jonathan S.C. Riley-Smith (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre/SSCLE, 1995), 239-274. Important new studies focus on the art and architecture of Famagusta in particular. See Annemarie Weyl Carr, ed., *Famagusta: Art and Architecture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014); Michael J.K. Walsh et al., eds., *The Harbour of all this Sea and Realm: Crusader to Venetian Famagusta* (Budapest: Department of Medieval Studies and Central European University Press, 2014); Nicholas Coureas et al., eds., *Medieval and Renaissance Famagusta: Studies in Architecture, Art and History* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

⁴ The first and only extensive study of the monument is Jens T. Wollesen, *Patrons and Painters on Cyprus: The Frescoes in the Royal Chapel at Pyrga* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010). See also Athanasios Papageorgiou, *The "Royal Chapel" at Pyrga: A Guide*, trans. Andreas Stylianoy [sic] (Nicosia: Office of the Republic of Cyprus, n. d.). Prior to Wollesen's monograph, the monument had received only limited attention within the context of broader studies of medieval Cypriot art and architecture. See Jean-Bernard de Vaivre, "La chapelle royale de Pyrga," in *L'art gothique en Chypre*, eds. Jean-Bernard de Vaivre, et al. (Paris: Institut de France, 2006), 297-304; Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Art," in *Cyprus: Society and Culture 1191-1374*, ed. Angel Nicolaou-Konnari and Christopher Schabel (Boston: Brill, 2005), 325-326; Melita Emmanuel, "Monumental Painting in Cyprus during the Last Phase of the Lusignan Dynasty, 1374-1489," in *Medieval Cyprus: Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki*, eds. Nancy P. Sevckenko and Christopher Moss (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 241-244; Andreas Stylianou and Judith A. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus: Treasures of Byzantine Art*, 2nd ed. (Nicosia: A.G. Leventis Foundation, 1997), 428-432; Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Byzantines and Italians on Cyprus: Images from Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 347-348; Camille Enlart, *Gothic Art and the Renaissance in Cyprus*, trans. David Hunt (London: Trigraph/A.G. Leventis Foundation, 1987 [1899]), 325-334.

⁵ On depictions of female costume in the period, see Annemarie Weyl Carr and Andréas Nicolaïdès, eds., *Asinou Across Time: Studies in the Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Cyprus* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2012), 124-128. Given the tendency toward more generic, rather than veristic, portraiture in the period, the argument concerning the beards and body weights of particular Lusignan rulers as per historical descriptions and coinage seems forced. Cf. Wollesen, *Patrons*, 7, n. 24, 104-106. Stephen Perkinson suggests that physiognomic accuracy as a defining feature of European "portraiture" is a construct of the mid-fourteenth century and later. Stephen Perkinson, *The Likeness of the King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).



Figure 1: Crucifixion with Royal Figures, c. 1361-2, fresco, east wall, Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Cyprus (Photo: author).



Figure 2: Passion Cycle, c.1361-2, fresco, east wall, Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Cyprus (Photo: author).

A fragmentary painted inscription at the Pyrga chapel—in white lettering on a green background—described by Camille Enlart in 1896 but now lost, recorded a date of 1421 and stated that the chapel “praised the honor of God and the Passion of Our Savior.”⁶ On the

⁶ Enlart describes the inscription painted in the chapel’s interior, white majuscules on green, beneath the window on the west wall: “.....ai / l’an de Nostre-Sei- / gneur M.CCCC et XXI / s.[a] III. [jour]s de / s[e]ncoumësée / ceste chappele/[en] ‘onor de Dieu et de / l[a] P[a]-ssi[on] de nostre [Seigneur] / Mar.....en sui / e

basis of this inscription and the presence of royal portraits, most scholars date the foundation of the chapel to 1421 and thus identify the donors as Janus de Lusignan, who reigned as King of Cyprus, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (titular), and Armenia from 1398 to 1432 and his second wife, Charlotte de Bourbon, whom he married in 1411. However, the veracity of Enlart's report and the date of 1421 has been called into question by James Schryver and Christopher Schabel who state:

Although no longer legible, there are the remains of an inscription in the tympanum above the door, on the west façade, also in white letters on a green background. It is unlikely, but still possible given Enlart's confusion [elsewhere]...that Enlart misread his notes and that this inscription on the exterior is in fact the commemorative inscription he placed on the interior of the west wall.⁷

Attributing the Pyrga chapel to Janus's patronage is also problematical in that the frescoes resemble neither fifteenth-century artistic trends in painting in Europe or on the island nor reflect the Gothic-inspired style prevalent in the Latin ecclesiastical architecture and sculpture of urban Cyprus.⁸ The resulting scholarly characterization of the chapel as a unicum of the early fifteenth century has enjoined rather lackluster consideration of its place in the history of art. Enlart's characterization of the frescoes as "thoroughly mediocre" foreshadowed recurring assessment of Pyrga's paintings as a dismal pastiche of outmoded and misunderstood Byzantine styles. They have been described as "peculiar" and "disjunct," as well as displaying a "rather less classy Byzantine style" and "maladroitness" in the painters' attempt to render Byzantine forms.⁹ Such comments reveal clear aesthetic biases, but they also reflect the perplexing eclectic and *retardataire* combination of imagery and artistic style in the chapel *if* a fifteenth-century date is upheld. To a certain extent, the choice and placement of imagery in the chapel adhere to Orthodox church decorative schemes on the island—narrative scenes of

/.....ere." Cf. Wollesen, *Patrons*, 7. The chapel is today associated with St. Catherine of Alexandria, perhaps in reference to the image of a well-dressed figure, part of a half-length triad of female saints above the main entrance on the west wall. See Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 328; and Carolyn L. Connor, "Female Saints in Church Decoration of the Troodos Mountains in Cyprus," in *Medieval Cyprus: Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki*, eds. Nancy P. Sevcenko and Christopher Moss (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 211-228.

⁷ James G. Schryver and Chris Schabel, "The Graffiti in the 'Royal Chapel' of Pyrga," in *Report of the Department of Antiquities Cyprus 2003* (Nicosia: Tmema Archaioeteton, 2004), 327, n. 3. Cf. Wollesen, *Patrons*, 7.

⁸ Though the chapel closely resembles Gothic-inspired Latin architecture of the fourteenth century on Cyprus, incorporating such details as pointed windows and ribbed vaults, it displays in its overall form the characteristically squat proportions of traditional Orthodox church architecture on the island. The chapel at Pyrga may be compared to the Carmelite church (today Panagia Karmiotissa), Polemidia, c.1352-59. See Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 345-348.

⁹ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 330; Emmanuel, "Monumental Painting," 243; Carr, "Byzantines," 347; and Carr, "Art," 285. Even Wollesen's recent monograph on the chapel describes the painters who worked at Pyrga as having "various capabilities and levels of training." Wollesen, *Patrons*, 93. The phonetic spelling of French words at Pyrga, as well as the clear citation of historically Byzantine artistic forms, suggest that the painters of the chapel were in fact from the local Greek population. See Schryver and Schabel, *Graffiti*, 328, ns. 6-8; Stylianou and Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, 432; and Wollesen, *Patrons*, 85-89.

the lives of Christ and the Virgin drawn from the Gospels and extra-Scriptural texts fill the vault, while iconic images of saints occupy the lower walls (Figure 3).¹⁰

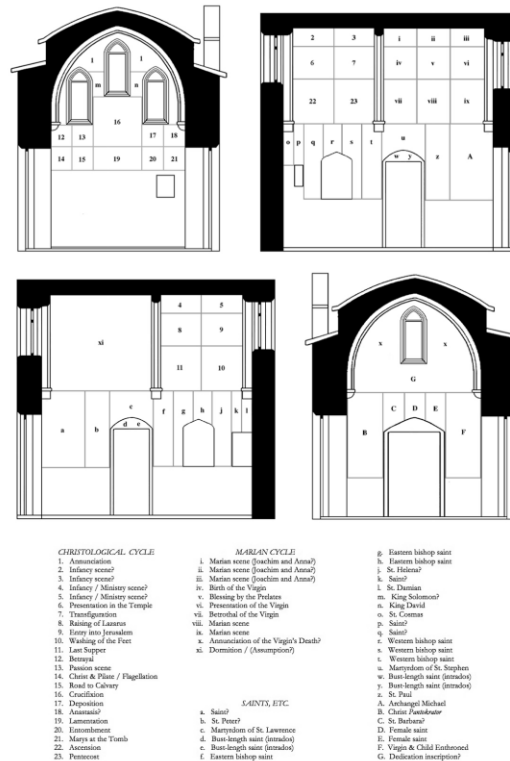


Figure 3: Fresco Program, c.1361-2, Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Cyprus (Drawings after Athanasios Papageorgiou).

However, certain iconographic and programmatic peculiarities uncommon in Orthodox contexts—notably the large scale and focal image of the death of Christ that includes contemporary Latin “portraiture”—is, in addition to stylistic evidence, key to placing and understanding the chapel within a royal and specific devotional context of the mid-fourteenth century under the patronage of King Peter I de Lusignan (r. 1358-69).

The Question of Style and Dating

Cyprus is home to extraordinary examples of painted churches dating from the twelfth through sixteenth centuries. In 1985 UNESCO designated a core group with the most

¹⁰ For a full description of the fresco program, see Wollesen, *Patrons*, 21-29. Inscriptions initially accompanied all of the frescoes at Pyrga; most *tituli* are now destroyed or illegible, yet the extant scenes and figures can in large part be identified (if only in a general sense) on the basis of their iconography. The Royal Chapel at Pyrga’s paintings have suffered from neglect and depredation over the centuries; only half of the original frescoed surface survives intact. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of the frescoed surface was salt-encrusted and defaced by abrasions and hastily scratched graffiti. See Schryver and Schabel, “Graffiti,” 327-334. On restoration campaigns, see Wollesen, *Patrons*, 8, n. 25.

complete and well-preserved decoration as a collective world cultural heritage site.¹¹ The surviving monuments are historically Greek Orthodox foundations, though nearly all belong to a period of Latin political and ecclesiastical domination of the island.¹² Still, the style and iconography of their frescoes preserve a long and tenacious history of Byzantine artistic influence.¹³ Though not included in the UNESCO group, the Royal Chapel at Pyrga is very much part of this tradition of Cypriot medieval painting. For instance, the general composition and iconography of the Last Supper at Pyrga finds its ultimate roots in the art of the Byzantine Comnenian period (1081-1180) (Figure 4).¹⁴ On Cyprus, the scene most closely resembles an example from the early-twelfth century on the upper west wall of the *naos* at the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou.¹⁵ However, St. Paul's drapery in the scene of the Dormition at Pyrga displays a volumetric, angular-edged style that belongs to Palaiologan period developments in Byzantine art that can be most successfully compared with Cypriot icons and frescoes dating to the second half of the fourteenth century (Figure 5).¹⁶ This stylistic dichotomy has led at least one scholar to suggest the likelihood of two discrete painting campaigns at Pyrga.¹⁷

¹¹ The "Painted Churches in the Troodos Region" included nine sites in the original designation, with a tenth added in 2001. While a number have been the focus of monographic studies, the most complete aggregate source to date remains Stylianou and Stylianou, *Painted Churches*.

¹² In this article, the term "Latin" will be used to refer to individuals or people who claimed allegiance to the Roman Church as well as Western European heritage and, to varying degrees, cultural affiliation. The term "Greek" will be used similarly for individuals or people who claimed allegiance to the Greek Orthodox Church on Cyprus and constituted the bulk of its indigenous population. The heritage and cultural affiliation of the latter belonged to the broad cultural ambit of the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire. See Edbury, "Franks," 63-64; and Angel Nicolaou-Konnari, "Greeks," in *Cyprus: Society and Culture*, 13-17.

¹³ The term "Byzantine" will be used to characterize the historical artistic forms and developments traditionally associated with the Eastern Roman Empire. The Hellenic roots of Cyprus may be traced back to the Bronze Age and the island's Byzantine heritage to the initial formation of the Eastern Roman Empire in 395 following the death of Theodosius I. Though control of the island was highly contested owing to frequent Muslim incursions throughout the early Middle Ages, stability and imperial hegemony were restored under Nikephoros II Phokas in 965. During the Third Crusade, Byzantine control was again disrupted with the defeat of the island's governor Isaac Comnenus by Richard I of England who soon after, in 1192, sold Cyprus to his liegeman, Guy de Lusignan. For an artistic overview of Cyprus, see Stylianou and Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, 19-42.

¹⁴ See also Wollesen, *Patrons*, 74-75. In the broader Byzantine artistic ambit, the scene may be compared with its counterpart in the mosaics dating to the later twelfth century at the Cathedral of Monreale, Sicily. See Eve Borsook, *Messages in Mosaic: The Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily, 1130-1187* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), Pl. 107.

¹⁵ On the earliest frescoes at Asinou, see Marina André Sacopoulou, *Asinou en 1106 et sa contribution à l'iconographie* (Brussels: Eds. de Byzantion, 1966).

¹⁶ Carr, "Art in the Court," 238-274. According to Carr, the earliest datable example of Palaiologan-style art on Cyprus is the funerary icon of Maria Xeros, 1356. See Annemarie Weyl Carr, "A Palaiologan Funerary Icon from Gothic Cyprus," in *Cyprus and the Devotional Art of Byzantium in the Era of the Crusades*, ed. Annemarie Weyl Carr (Burlington, VT: Ashgate/Variation, 2005), 599-619. See also, Sophocles Sophocleous, *Icons of Cyprus 7th-20th Century* (Nicosia: Museum Publications, 1994). Carr, in numerous articles, also discusses the mid-fourteenth-century figures of the Evangelists on the pendentives of the dome of Timios Stavros, Pelendri as key examples of Palaiologan artistic style on Cyprus, and they too may be attributable to a Latin donor. Wollesen's dating of the Pyrga chapel to the reign of Henry II (1285-1324) places it in a period far too early for the likely arrival and use of this style on Cyprus. The Palaiologan forms at Pyrga may also be compared with Balkan paintings of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Cf. The Lamentation scene at the church of the Theotokos Peribleptos, Ochrid, Macedonia, c.1295. John Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University



Figure 4: Last Supper, c.1361-2, fresco, northeast vault, Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Cyprus (Photo: author).



Figure 5: Dormition, detail, c.1361-2, fresco, northwest vault, Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Cyprus (Photo: author).

Press, 1979), 305, figure 270. The parallel—sharply delineated folds and bold white highlights—undermines Enlart’s misinformed descriptions of the drapery style as “Giottesque”. See Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 327. Wollesen’s comparison between the figures of St. Paul in the Dormition at Pyrga and the figures in the Dormition at the monastery at Sopocani, Serbia (1259-70) is not convincing. See Wollesen, *Patrons*, 71-72, 93-94.

¹⁷ Cf. Christina Spanou, “Η τέχνη στη μητροπολιτική περιφέρεια Κιτίου από του 6^ο έως το 15^ο αι. Μνημειακή ζωγραφική και φορητές εικόνες,” in *Η κατά Κίτιον αγιογραφική τέχνη*, eds. Kostas Gerasimou, et al. (Larnaka: Hierá Metrópolis Kitiou, 2002), 49-51. Examination of the frescoed surfaces by the author detected no obvious disconnect over the frescoed surface.

A statement by Annemarie Weyl Carr summarizes new trends in the study of Cypriot art:

The shift [in the approach of new studies] has brought, in turn, a more nuanced perception of patronage, requiring historians to examine not merely the ways built structures divided groups, but the ways in which images, styles, and portable goods—all more volatile than buildings—moved within and between groups...With this, finally, the old orientalist expectations of cultural dualism have receded. Only rarely can one ever speak of an artifact as belonging ‘purely’ to one or another pole of cultural identity ... An image of two cultures in rigid opposition has been displaced by a dynamic one of multiple cultural groups.¹⁸

Comnenian stylistic traits likely reached the island through a late medieval composite visual tradition of Syro-Palestinian, Byzantine, and Western sources in the Eastern Mediterranean, reductively referred to as “Crusader” art.¹⁹ The terminology, which privileges the Western European heritage of some participants, is perhaps now better defined in terms of ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse artistic workshops and patrons acting within a broadly inclusive multicultural ambit.²⁰ Indigenous Greek workshops on the island were not entirely uninspired in their appropriation, and the development of a so-called *maniera Cypria*—a local reimagining of the dominant stylistic tradition of the Eastern Mediterranean in the twelfth through thirteenth centuries—reached its culmination in church frescoes on Cyprus dating to the first half of the fourteenth century.²¹ It is within this artistic tradition—a heritage from which both the island’s Latin rulers and Greek ruled drew inspiration—that the frescoes of the Royal Chapel at Pyrga are best understood. Indeed, Carr attributes much of the invisibility of non-architectural Latin patronage on Cyprus to these shared visual traditions, whether broad or localized.²² The adoption of the local pictorial tradition of the *maniera Cypria* in the frescoes at Pyrga should by no means be viewed as uninspired parochialism on the part of its royal Lusignan donors but rather as evidence of a conscious and meaningful choice of indigenous artistic vocabulary, a point that will be discussed below.

By the middle of the fourteenth-century, the vernacularization, dramatization, and refinement characteristic of Palaiologan Byzantine style had come to enrich the more hieratic

¹⁸ Carr, “Art,” 286.

¹⁹ Carr, “Art,” 286-310. Cf. the general iconographic similarities between the scene of the Last Supper at Pyrga and the scene in the Melisende Psalter dated 1135. (British Library, Egerton MS 1139, f. 6r). Jaroslav Folda, *The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1098-1187* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 137-163, Pl. 6.8k. For a concise understanding of a “Crusader” mode of artistic expression, see Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art: The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1099-1291* (Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2008). For an alternative viewpoint, see Jens T. Wollesen, *Acre or Cyprus?: A New Approach to Crusader Painting around 1300* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013).

²⁰ Carr, “Art,” 285-287.

²¹ Doula Mouriki, “The Wall Paintings of the Church of the Panagia at Moutoullas, Cyprus,” in *Byzanz und der Westen. Studien zur Kunst des europäischen Mittelalters*, ed. Irmgard Hutter (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), 171-213. Cf. Carr and Nicolaïdès, *Asinou*, 195-206, 302-310; Carr, “Art,” 310-313.

²² Again, not including architectural traditions. Carr, “Art,” esp. 294-306. Cf. Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Correlative Spaces: Art, Identity, and Appropriation in Lusignan Cyprus,” *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 14/15 (1998-1999): 59-80.

pictorial forms of the *maniera Cypria*. Carr argues that the appearance of the style is due to the aristocratic, cosmopolitan impulse of the island's elite.²³ At Pyrga, Palaiologan derived drapery forms appear only in the scenes of the Crucifixion and Dormition, both of which include contemporary portraits of royal and clerical individuals who were likely directly responsible for the promotion of the new style on Cyprus.²⁴ In comparison, the soldiers that appear in the Arrest scene in Pyrga's Passion cycle show the same visual treatment of patterned armor and pointed helmets with mail neck guards as the fourteenth-century scene of the Road to Calvary in the *naos* vault at the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou. While the general iconography of the Crucifixion scene at Pyrga resembles that at Asinou as well, the latter is depicted in the same style (*maniera Cypria*) and scale as the other Passion scenes in that church and lack Palaiologan elements.²⁵ While it seems that Pyrga's painters looked to local Cypriot narrative cycles for the majority of Pyrga's decoration, the intrusive style of the Crucifixion and Dormition scenes may point to the use of non-frescoed—and very much contemporary—sources as models underscoring Carr's contention for an artistic "volatility" that was the result of free access to portable objects.²⁶

Prior to the publication of Jens Wollesen's monograph, the fifteenth-century date of the Royal Chapel had never been called into question in any sustained way.²⁷ Wollesen's stylistic analysis rightly suggests that the paintings in the narthex and *naos* at the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou and the frescoes of the *naos* at the church of Timios Stavros, Pelendri provide the closest local parallels to most of the frescoes at Pyrga.²⁸ This article cannot recreate the many apt comparisons that Wollesen presents. However, for the sake of argument and context, it is appropriate to reproduce one of Wollesen's stylistic analyses in text and image (Figures 4 and 6):

The faces of the young men at Pyrga, such as the apostles as they appear in the scene of the *Last Supper*...[conform] *nearly* exactly to the faces of the apostles in the narthex spandrels in Asinou...The

²³ See above, n. 16.

²⁴ A similar pendant for cosmopolitan forms may be seen in Ayyubid/Mamluk-style copper alloy vessels bearing the Lusignan arms that have been dated to the early part of the reign of King Hugh IV de Lusignan (r. 1324-58). See, Barbara Drake Boehm and Melanie Holcomb, eds., *Jerusalem 1000-1400: Every People under Heaven* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 48-49, cat. 19a and b.

²⁵ Carr and Nicolaïdès, *Asinou*, 276-277, figure 6.42.

²⁶ See above, n. 18. A thirteenth-century panel from Sinai shares the iconography, if not the artistic style, of the fresco at Pyrga. See Helen C. Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power 1261-1557* (New York/New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Yale University Press, 2004), 367-368, cat. 224. As is the case with the style of the Dormition at Pyrga, the style of the Crucifixion fresco is more closely related to fourteenth-century examples from Macedonia/northern Greece, for instance an icon of the Crucifixion in the National Museum, Ohrid, Macedonia, and a fresco of the Crucifixion, c.1312, from the Katholikon, Vatopedi, Mount Athos, Greece.

²⁷ Annemarie Weyl Carr has only recently entertained a fourteenth-century date for the chapel. Carr and Nicolaïdès, *Asinou*, 307, n. 360.

²⁸ Wollesen, *Patrons*, 8-9, 35-41, 90-101. However, Wollesen goes on to compare the frescoes with a chronologically and culturally vast number of monuments. Bizarrely, he concludes that Pyrga's frescoes are "ambivalent" and the product of "a workshop probably of French origin...." This conclusion seems a product of oversimplification in the face of overwhelming data, very tenuous formal comparisons, and a less than convincing argument for an appropriate historical context that leads him to associate the chapel with Henry II (r. 1285-1324).

vertical highlights on the forehead, the bridge of the nose, the nostrils, the highlights of the upper lip, the curvature of the lower lip and the pony hair—they all seem to be identical.²⁹

In a recent volume on Asinou, the date of the latest phase of frescoes in the narthex assures a *terminus post quem* of 1332-1333 based on an inscription.³⁰ The repainting of most of the original frescoes of 1105-1106 in the *naos* at Asinou fall into two categories: those that may have been restored following a series of earthquakes in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century³¹ and a more comprehensive repainting of mid-fourteenth century date.³² The frescoes at Pelendri have also been dated to a mid-fourteenth century time frame based on stylistic comparison with Asinou as well as a *terminus ante quem* of c.1375 for frescoes in the north aisle addition.³³ However, as Annemarie Weyl Carr has pointed out, the chronology of works on Cyprus dating between the historically vital years of 1348-73 is difficult to establish.³⁴



Figure 6: SS. Simon, James, and Phillip, c.1332-3 or later, fresco, northeast pendentive, narthex, Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou, Cyprus (Photo: Courtesy of Xenophon Hasapis).

²⁹ Wollesen, *Patrons*, 95. Wollesen goes on to discuss differences in the treatment of the eyes, a distinction that I find to be inaccurate and forced. It is significant that the stylistic treatment of the heads of the royal couple makes for a close comparison as well, dispelling any notion of multiple decorative interventions.

³⁰ Carr and Nicolaidès, *Asinou*, 131-179.

³¹ Carr and Nicolaidès, *Asinou*, 64-65, 115-131, 211-223.

³² Carr and Nicolaidès, *Asinou*, 223-310.

³³ The series of paintings in the north aisle may have been commissioned by Jean de Lusignan, lord of Pelendri from 1353-1374/5. Ioanna Christoforaki, "Cyprus between Byzantium and the Levant: Eclecticism and Interchange in the Cycle of the Life of the Virgin in the Church of the Holy Cross at Pelendri," *Ερετηριδα. Κεντρο Επιστημονικων Ερευνων* 22 (1996): 215-255; Ioanna Christoforaki, "An Unusual Representation of the Incredulity from Lusignan Cyprus," *Cahiers archéologiques* 48 (2000): 71-87. Cf. Carr, "Art," 317-319.

³⁴ Carr, "Art," 325.

If we accept a model of stylistic change over time on Lusignan Cyprus, the idea of which is supported in most scholarship to date, we should expect to find significant differences between fourteenth-century Cypriot painting and the frescoes at Pyrga heretofore dated to 1421. Wollesen's comparisons suggest otherwise, and it is his opinion that these similarities are indicative of a singular workshop tradition amongst this group of monuments.³⁵ The artistic eclecticism at Pyrga, once the subject of scholarly disdain, can now be fully appreciated within a more nuanced understanding of fourteenth-century Cypriot art. At the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou, the artists' attempt to emulate earlier layers of painting certainly affords a degree of visual continuity. However, the most recent study of the church at Asinou acknowledges—if it does not emphasize—the lack of stylistic cohesion throughout the building as a whole, or even within adjacent, and supposedly coeval, paintings.³⁶ The frescoes at Pelendri display a similar lack of stylistic unity, and the dating of each campaign is still chronologically problematical. Thus the matter of visual dissonance by accretion as seen at Asinou and Pelendri versus a single “disjunct” campaign at Pyrga is not what has kept the monuments apart. It is instead the result of an unwillingness to part with Enlart's date of 1421, Pyrga's ruinous nature, and/or a qualitative set of criteria that seek to exclude a Latin monument from its Greek/Byzantine, or more accurately pan-Cypriot, artistic ambit of the mid-fourteenth century.

Programmatic Themes

The lack of scholarly consensus regarding the formal qualities, sources, or dating of the frescoes at Pyrga has also problematized any discussion of the intended function of the chapel. Indeed, the building has been described as a royal funerary monument,³⁷ a visual expression of royal Lusignan legitimacy vis-à-vis their Crusader heritage,³⁸ and finally a private memorial referencing Christian salvation—the decorative program of which was perhaps inspired by Franciscan devotion and/or authorship.³⁹ All three conclusions are in fact merely conjecture informed by relative dating rather than any sustained scholarly examination of the crucial differences between Pyrga's paintings and its Orthodox Cypriot relations. This article will refute none of these potential interpretations, because the chapel's program does in fact resonate with all of them on a general level. However, no one of these explanations is able to accommodate all of the idiosyncrasies of Pyrga's fresco program, particularly in terms of unrecognized or misread iconographic features.

Unlike Orthodox examples on Cyprus, which feature an image of the Virgin in the apse on the east end of the church, the Royal Chapel at Pyrga has as its focus a sequence of ten

³⁵ While it is possible that such remarkable visual similarities could span a generation, say twenty to thirty years, it is difficult to imagine that these exact stylistic formulae could survive over the course of seventy to eighty years if we accept the traditional dating of 1421 for Pyrga. Carr suggests workshop connections between Asinou and Pelendri. Carr, “Art,” 316-317.

³⁶ Carr and Nicolaïdès, *Asinou*, 195-208, esp. 196.

³⁷ Emmanuel, “Monumental Painting,” 243.

³⁸ Annemarie Weyl Carr, “The Holy Icons: A Lusignan Asset,” in *France and the Holy Land: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades*, eds. Daniel H. Weiss and Lisa Mahoney (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 313-315.

³⁹ Wollesen, *Patrons*, 49-50, 77, 80-82, 103-104.

Passion scenes, visual emphasis being given to a hieratic central pairing of the Crucifixion and the Lamentation (Figure 2). Four scenes to the left of this pair, read left to right, top to bottom, may be partially reconstructed: the Betrayal, a lost scene, Christ before Pilate or the Flagellation, and the Road to Calvary. The Crucifixion is depicted as the largest and centermost scene of the Passion cycle. Only the lower half of the scene is preserved today, showing John the Evangelist and a centurion on the right and the Virgin fainting toward at least two female figures on the left. A green crenellated wall articulated by a series of inset panels and cornices forms the backdrop. At the foot of the cross and flanking a rocky outcropping with a small cave containing the skull of Adam are two smaller royal figures kneeling with hands held in prayer who gaze upward at the figure of Christ on the Cross—the royal donors. Directly beneath the Crucifixion is the scene of the Lamentation (Figure 7). Christ lies upon a rectangular slab of mottled stone. A female figure and the Virgin sit at his head, while John the Evangelist bends over the body of Christ at center with two standing figures behind him. As in the Crucifixion, there is a contemporary intrusion: a Latin bishop, small in scale wearing a red pallium and white miter, grasps the feet of Christ. To the right of the Crucifixion and Lamentation are four additional Passion scenes: the Deposition, a scene too faint to identify, the Entombment, and the Marys at the Tomb.



Figure 7: Lamentation, c.1361-2, fresco, east wall, Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Cyprus (Photo: author)

Death is also a feature of two paintings depicting scenes from saints' lives—St. Lawrence at the moment of his martyrdom on the grill and St. Stephen immediately before his death by stoning—located above the north and south entrances respectively. The chapel contains two Annunciation scenes: one flanks the central window on the upper east wall and the other, the window on the upper west wall. The scene on the east wall is generally

understood to be the first Annunciation to Mary regarding her conception of Jesus given its location adjacent to the Christological cycle that fills the eastern half of the vault. The scene on the west wall may be the Annunciation to St. Anne; a separate identification seems merited given the division of the chapel vault into two narrative programs, the western half of which is the Life of the Virgin, and the improbability of duplication within such a small building. Another possible interpretation is the second Annunciation to the Virgin that concerned her impending death based on early Christian apocryphal sources but most popularly disseminated in the later Middle Ages by the account in the *Golden Legend*.⁴⁰ The placement of this scene, adjacent to the Dormition of the Virgin in the western vault of the chapel, supports this reading.

In late medieval art, it is uncommon to find the Crucifixion and Lamentation placed on a vertical pictorial axis as seen in the frescoes at Pyrga, and even more rare to find the juxtaposition as the focus of a singular work of art. Interestingly, the majority of surviving examples that arrange the scenes in this way were employed as private devotional artworks owing to their diminutive scale—underscoring the possibility of a portable object as a model for the scenes at Pyrga. One steatite Byzantine icon from the twelfth century and two small Italian panel paintings from the early fourteenth century are the closest comparisons to the central pairing of scenes in the Royal Chapel.⁴¹ However, the two focal scenes are often used independently in known funerary contexts on the island and elsewhere in the medieval period.⁴² At the twelfth-century monastery of St. Neophytos in Paphos, for example, the Crucifixion was depicted within the saint's own cell, the sleeping niche of which later came to serve as the saint's tomb.⁴³ In mosaic, the Crucifixion appears in a lunette above the sarcophagus of Doge Michele Morosini (1382) in the Church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.⁴⁴ Crucifixion iconography also appears in monumental funerary sculpture from Latin-

⁴⁰ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. W. Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 2:78.

⁴¹ Steatite icon of the Crucifixion and Lamentation, twelfth century, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom, eds., *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843-1261* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 158-159, cat. 105. Panel of the Crucifixion and Lamentation by Taddeo Gaddi (c.1290-1366) Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol, UK; panel of the Crucifixion and Lamentation, Barna da Siena (c.1320-1360) Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford, UK. Cf. Wollesen, *Patrons*, 81.

⁴² On the east wall of the burial chapel of the royal family of Castile—the Panteón de los Reyes—at San Isidoro, León, a painting dated between c.1100 shows posthumous portraits of King Ferdinand I and Queen Sancha in *proskynesis* before the Crucifixion. See Rose Walker, "The Wall Paintings in the Panteón de los Reyes at León: A Cycle of Intercession," *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 2 (June 2000): 200-225. Cf. the wall paintings of the Deposition and Entombment in the Holy Sepulcher Chapel at Winchester Cathedral, c.1235 that present a program of death and resurrection in a Paschal, liturgical context. See David Park, "The Wall Paintings of the Holy Sepulcher Chapel," in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Winchester Cathedral* (Leeds, UK: British Archaeological Association, 1983), 38-62.

⁴³ Cyril Mango and Ernest J.W. Hawkins, "The Hermitage of St. Neophytos and Its Wall Paintings," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 119-206, figures 105-106; and Dimitria Kotoula, "The Decoration of the Burial Chapel of the Founder in the Byzantine Monastery, Charity and the Quest for Posthumous Salvation: the Case of the Koutsovendis and the Pammakaristos Chapels," in *The Kindness of Strangers: Charity in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean*, ed. Dionysios Stathakopoulos (London: Centre for Hellenic Studies, 2007), 49-69.

⁴⁴ Debra Pincus, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 158-165, figures 121-122.

ruled Cyprus.⁴⁵ On the façade of the church of St. John the Evangelist of Bibi in Nicosia is a sarcophagus frontal depicting an elaborate architectural arcade that contains the Crucifixion of Christ flanked by the Virgin, John the Evangelist, and two kneeling Latin donors in attitudes of prayer.⁴⁶ Lamentation iconography was employed in private funerary contexts in the Byzantine East, as seen in the tradition of *epitaphioi*—woven textiles depicting the Lamentation used to cover the altar during Holy Week—that were commonly dedicated to the memory of recently deceased noble patrons.⁴⁷ *Epitaphioi* often conflate the narrative of the Lamentation with contemporary liturgical elements (censers, flagella, ciboria, etc.). The small figure of a Latin bishop who appears in the scene at Pyrga bears examination in this regard. His presence adds a Latin liturgical cast to an otherwise standard iconographic scheme.⁴⁸ An additional diminutive Latin bishop, also wearing a red pallium and white miter, appears in the large composition of the Dormition of the Virgin in the northwest quadrant of the vault at Pyrga.⁴⁹ While the presence of Eastern bishops at the Virgin's death might be accounted for by theological writings of the early Byzantine period, the presence of a Latin prelate lends a note of contemporary, if anachronistic, actuality to the scene.⁵⁰ Contemplation of the Crucifixion and consideration of Christ as the model of behavior in the face of suffering and death were well-known concepts and frequently the focus of deathbed ritual in the late Middle Ages.⁵¹ The actions of the two bishops, both of whom reach out to touch the bodies of Christ and the

⁴⁵ Pierre-Yves de Pogam, "L'art funéraire en Chypre à l'époque gothique," in *Chypre entre Byzance et l'Occident IV^e-XV^e siècle*, eds. Jannic Durand and Dorota Giovannoni (Paris: Musée du Louvre/Somogy éditions d'art, 2012), 242-255.

⁴⁶ Durand and Giovannoni, *Chypre*, 237, cat. 110, 246, figure 5.

⁴⁷ See Slobodan Curcic, "Late Byzantine 'Loca Sancta'? Some Questions Regarding the Form and Function of Epitaphioi," in *The Twilight of Byzantium*, eds. Slobodan Curcic and Doula Mouriki (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 251-261. Cf. Evans., *Byzantium*, 312-318, cats. 187A-191. A frescoed example can be found within the sanctuary and over the altar at the church of St. George, Kurbino, c.1191. See Sharon E.J. Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries: Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 146, Pl. 3, 166-167, figures 25-26.

⁴⁸ For the medieval development of the image, see Iohannis Spatharakis, "The Influence of the *lithos* in the Development of the Iconography of the Threnos," in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. Doula Mouriki (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 435-441. On the Dormition, see Ioanna Zervou Tognazzi, "L'iconografia della Koimesis della Santa Vergine, specchio del pensiero teologico dei Padri bizantini," *Studi e ricerche sull'Oriente cristiano* 8 (1985): 21-46, 69-90.

⁴⁹ At the monastery of St. Chrysostomos at Koutsoventis, c.1100, an oversized scene of the Dormition and a Marian cycle were painted in adjacent vaults as at Pyrga. See Cyril Mango et al., "The Monastery of St. Chrysostomos at Koutsoventis (Cyprus) and Its Wall Paintings. Part I: Description," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 86-88, Colorpl. 6b, figures 130-137.

⁵⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 70, ¶ 681 C, D; and Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 2:79. For a discussion of the Dormition of the Virgin as the archetype for Christian death in the Byzantine tradition, see Christopher Walter, *Art and Ritual in the Byzantine Church* (London: Variorum, 1982), 140-144. Though less popular than Christological choices in funerary programs, the Dormition appears in relief on the tomb chest of Doge Francesco Dandolo (1329-39) in the Chapter House of the Church of the Frari in Venice. See Pincus, *Tombs*, 105-120, figure 81.

⁵¹ Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 29-47.

Virgin, do invoke medieval funerary ritual practice—Last Rites or Extreme Unction—perhaps best illustrated by Rogier van der Weyden's *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* from the 1440s.⁵²

The contemporary portraits of royalty and clergy at Pyrga differ from traditional Latin and Orthodox practice on Cyprus in which donors—whether in funerary or non-funerary contexts—typically appear in atemporal and spatially ambiguous relation to holy figures.⁵³ Farther afield, on the continental *Parement de Narbonne*, dated between 1364-78, the royal donors Charles V and Jeanne de Bourbon do not function as actual participants in sacred events, a notion underscored by their placement within separate architectural compartments on the textile.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the presence of prayer books and their distant gazes suggest that the Crucifixion is a theophany resulting from their pious readings and thoughts. Alexa Sand contends that such imagery was developed in late medieval private devotional manuscripts in the thirteenth century.⁵⁵ She considers what she terms “owner portraits” as quite distinct from a long tradition of medieval donor portraiture in which figures are shown actually holding the object being donated.⁵⁶ Instead, the image of the owner, in which the material act of donation is a missing element, focuses on devotion and, for a viewer, the role of the owner as a model for pious behavior. The contemporary figures at Pyrga take this a step further in that their intimate spatial and sensory (sight and touch) association with holy figures casts them as effective mediators that “stress supplication and the personal, affective nature of the relationship between the supplicant and the representative of divinity.”⁵⁷

The appearance of the Latin Cypriot king and queen *within* the scene of the Crucifixion at the feet of the crucified Christ at Pyrga not only asserts their piety and role as intercessors, but also implies an actual or surrogate presence at the site of Calvary itself marking them as visitors, or more precisely, pilgrims. Thus, the chapel at Pyrga may be understood as a displaced *locus sanctus* that echoes the commemorative foundations of the Holy Land; at least

⁵² See Ralph E. Giesey, *The Royal Funerary Ceremony in Renaissance France* (Geneva: E. Droz, 1960), esp. 19-40; and Binski, *Medieval Death*, 29-47, 58-63. The motif of a prelate kneeling at the feet of the deceased is also seen on the early thirteenth-century floor tomb of Pope Lucius III in Verona Cathedral. See Geraldine A. Johnson, “Activating the Effigy: Donatello’s Pecci Tomb in Siena Cathedral,” in *Memory and the Medieval Tomb*, eds. Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 105, 124, figure 4.4.

⁵³ For a detailed discussion of donor portraits in the churches of Cyprus, see Andreas Stylianou and Judith Stylianou, “Donors and Dedicatory Inscriptions, Supplicants and Supplications in the Painted Churches of Cyprus,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 9 (1960): 97-128. For Western trends, see Corine Schleif, “Hands that Appoint, Anoint and Ally: Late Medieval Donor Strategies for Appropriating Approbation through Painting,” *Art History* 16 (1993): 1-32. For Byzantine trends, see Nancy P. Sevcenko, “Close Encounters: Contact between Holy Figures and the Faithful as Represented in Byzantine Works of Art,” in *Byzance et les images. Proceedings of the Lectures held at the Musée du Louvre from October 5 to December 7, 1992*, eds. Jannic Durand and André Guillou (Paris: Louvre éditions, 1994), 255-285. A later Cypriot example related to Pyrga and in a Latin context can be seen at the Timios Stavros, Pelendri dated to the third quarter of the fourteenth century. See above, n. 33.

⁵⁴ Susie Nash, “The Parement de Narbonne, Context and Technique,” in *The Fabric of Images, European Paintings on Fabric Supports, 1300-1500*, ed. Caroline Villers (London: Archetype Press, 2000), 77, figure 1.

⁵⁵ Alexa Sand, *Vision, Devotion, and Self-Representation in Late Medieval Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. 1-26.

⁵⁶ Sand, *Vision*, 86-107.

⁵⁷ Sand, *Vision*, 7.

two other examples, which employ similar visual strategies, exist on medieval Cyprus.⁵⁸ Earlier comparanda support the contention that Pyrga's imagery captures the iconographic sensibility of pilgrimage. The origins of the anachronistic inclusion of laity at events/sites in the Holy Land can be traced as far back as the sixth century in Palestinian pilgrimage art.⁵⁹ Souvenir receptacles for oil or earth, *ampullae*, allowed pilgrims to carry back to their homeland tangible material infused with the power of holy sites for use as spiritual and bodily prophylaxis. Scenes of the Crucifixion that commonly adorn the flasks often include two small kneeling figures, with hands held in prayer, at the base of the Cross (Figure 8).⁶⁰



Figure 8: Pilgrim's Ampulla with Scene of the Crucifixion (front), c.600. Byzantium, Palestine, early Byzantine period, early 7th century. Tin-lead alloy with leather fragments; overall: 6.3 x 4.6 x 1.5 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund 1999.46.a.

⁵⁸ Natalia Teteriatnikov, "The Relic of the True Cross and Jerusalem *Loca Sancta*: The Case of the Making of Sacred Spaces in St. Neophytos' Enclustra, Paphos," in *New Jerusalem: Hierotropy and Iconography*, ed. Alexei M. Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 409-433; and Annemarie Weyl Carr, "The 'Holy Sepulcher' of St. John Lampadistes in Cyprus," in *New Jerusalem: Hierotropy and Iconography*, ed. Alexei M. Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 475-499.

⁵⁹ On this issue in general, see the seminal study of Kurt Weitzmann, "*Loca sancta* and the Representational Arts of the Palestine," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974): 31-56.

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the surviving monuments, see André Grabar, *Les ampoules de Terre Sainte* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1958); Gary Vikan, "Byzantine Pilgrim's Art," in *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Church in Byzantium*, ed. Linda Safran (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1998), 229-266; and Cynthia Hahn, "Loca Sancta Souvenirs: Sealing the Pilgrim's Experience," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 85-96.

Traditional liturgical practices in Jerusalem may account for the development of this iconography, specifically the adoration of a relic of the True Cross preserved at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.⁶¹ Small scenes from the Life of Christ linked with important pilgrimage sites decorate the reverse side of many of these *ampullae*.⁶² The programs provide analogies to the satellite disposition of narrative in the frescoes at Pyrga, where the Crucifixion forms a focal point with ancillary scenes extending outward on the east wall and into the eastern half of the chapel's vault.⁶³

But one need not seek pilgrimage models for the fresco program of the east wall at Pyrga in the art of the remote past. Twelfth-century pilgrims John of Würzburg and Theodorich recorded a mosaic of the Crucifixion with adjacent scenes from the Passion of Christ, likely from the eleventh century, decorating the walls of the Calvary Chapel within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.⁶⁴ The source may explain the large scale and focal placement of the Crucifixion scene at Pyrga and its deviation from standard Cypriot Orthodox church decoration. Additional iconographic development and programmatic emphasis of the Passion cycle likely originated in the Western artistic ambit, though ideas certainly flowed in both directions.⁶⁵ In particular, Franciscan focus on the Cross and narrative emphasis in Franciscan art in general may have provided an additional impetus for the form and content of the decoration of the chapel at Pyrga's east wall. However, the evidence presented here suggests that Franciscan devotional practices—despite their widespread popularity—were not the only guiding principle behind this aspect of the decorative program.⁶⁶

A little known monument, of unknown northern French/Low Country provenance, at the Cloisters Collection in New York suggests that the pilgrimage context at Pyrga may be

⁶¹ The practice is attested to by the fourth-century pilgrim Egeria. See Egeria, *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, trans. George E. Gignas (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), 110-113. An example of a liturgical manifestation of the image is Charles the Bald kneeling in *proskynesis* before the Cross in a manuscript dated c.846-69 (Munich, Schatzkammer der Residenz). Cf. Robert Deshman, "The Exalted Servant: the Ruler Theology of the Prayerbook of Charles the Bald," *Viator* 11 (1980): 385-417.

⁶² Grabar, *Les ampoules*, Pl. 5.

⁶³ A similar disposition may be seen on a sixth-century reliquary box now in the Vatican Museum. Lawrence Nees, *Early Medieval Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 138, figure 80.

⁶⁴ For John of Würzburg and Theodorich, see *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099-1185*, ed. and trans. John Wilkinson (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1988), 259, 286. For the mosaic program of the chapel, see Folda, *Art of the Crusaders*, 233-245.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of iconographic movement from West to East, see Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies and the Levant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12-27, esp. 24-27. The theme also appears in St. Francis's particular devotion to the Cross. See Nancy Thompson, "The Franciscans and the True Cross: The Decoration of the Capella Maggiore of Santa Croce in Florence," *Gesta* 43, no. 1 (2004): 61-79, esp. 64.

⁶⁶ Derbes discusses alternative sources for Passion imagery in the period. Derbes, *Passion*, 16-24. Cf. Wollesen, *Patrons*, 49-50. It is worth noting that a least some of the imagery in Pyrga's Passion cycle finds close parallels in Cypriot Orthodox contexts. For instance, compare the soldiers' armor in the frescoes at Pyrga (Wollesen, *Patrons*, figure 29c) and the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou (Carr and Nicolaidès, *Asinou*, 278, figures 6.43, 6.44).

expanded to include direct reference to crusading.⁶⁷ Two relief sculptures, once part of a single object, display images arranged in a frieze format with architectural surrounds depicting scenes from the Byzantine-Sasanian War, including the siege of Jerusalem in 614, and the event that sparked the Third Crusade, Saladin's siege of Jerusalem in 1187. One scene in the preserved cycle depicts the emperor Heraclius and his triumphant return of the relic of the True Cross to the city of Jerusalem in 630.⁶⁸ In a separate niche to the right of this scene is the Crucifixion of Christ with a female and male donor kneeling at the feet of the cross with hands held in prayer (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Scene from the Legend of the True Cross, second half 14th century, stone, 49.5 x 70.5 cm, The Cloisters Collection [25.120.529]

The armored male figure to the right appears with an escutcheon-shaped shield; the unadorned surface of which was likely painted originally with a family coat of arms. The Cloisters sculptures are dated on the basis of style to the mid-fourteenth century, and their closest pictorial parallel is the slightly later predella of the *Tempziner Altarpiece* dated 1411.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁷ Cf. Maria Paschali, "Crusader Ideology, Propaganda, and the Art of the Carmelite Church in Fourteenth-Century Famagusta," in *The Harbour of all this Sea and Realm: Crusader to Venetian Famagusta*, eds. Michael J.K. Walsh et al. (Budapest: Department of Medieval Studies and Central European University Press, 2014), 140, n. 17.

⁶⁸ Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 192-228. Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. Lee Preedy (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 133-193.

⁶⁹ Helmut Nickel dates the reliefs to c.1350 based on the style of equestrian armor. Helmut Nickel, "Sir Gawayne and the Three White Knights," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 28, no. 4 (December 1969): 177-178, figures

Crucifixion scene with donors is a striking parallel to the image at Pyrga. Jerusalem had been lost to the nomadic Khwarazmians in 1244, rendering the Lusignans' claim to the royal title of the Latin Kingdom nominal at best. Introduced under King Hugh IV in 1324, the Cypriot kings were crowned first at the capital of Nicosia with a second coronation at the cathedral of Famagusta; the latter ceremony conferred the title of ruler of the Latin Kingdom. Famagusta was likely chosen because it was on the southeast coast, and was therefore the metropolitan center closest to Jerusalem. The coat of arms of the Kingdom of Jerusalem on the transverse arches in the Royal Chapel underscores the continuity of this claim. In this way, the royal portraits within the Crucifixion may also reference the paramount desire of the Crusades to claim the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem—a highly appropriate ambition given the Crusader heritage of the royal family of Cyprus and, more specifically, the actions of King Peter I de Lusignan.⁷⁰

The frescoed decoration at Pyrga clearly contained a more complex visual message for its medieval viewers than has been suggested before—one that focuses on prayer and supplication, and perhaps sacramental and penitential action. Regarding the latter, it is important to consider that one common impetus for medieval pilgrimage was penance, and sickness was commonly perceived in the Middle Ages as a manifestation of sinfulness. An additional feature of the decoration at Pyrga underscores this reading. The images of SS. Cosmas and Damian flanking the east wall recall the Greek Orthodox practice of depicting the doctor saints as guardians of a tomb, one most likely related to the use of apotropaic devices to heal and to ward against infection, a function also shared by *ampullae* from the Holy Land (Figure 10).⁷¹ The pointed east wall of the chapel, with SS. Cosmas and Damian at either side, resembles the decoration and form of Orthodox tomb monuments on Cyprus. The saints are depicted, for example, on either side of a tomb dating to the 1440s at the Palaea Enkleistra near Kouklia.⁷² At Pyrga, the saints are visually related to the Passion narrative by their placement, and to the royal couple by their elaborate imperial court costume. The so-called Philotheos *staurotheke* dating to the twelfth-century provides an interesting parallel.⁷³ SS. Cosmas and Damian, depicted in silver *repoussé* amidst a tendril design, stand on either side of a recess for a relic of the True Cross. Above, on either side of the cross recess, are two roundels depicting SS. Cyrus and Panteleimon. The four saints are all revered for their healing powers, and within the context of the reliquary program, are linked to salvific and prophylactic qualities of relics, in this case, the wood of the True Cross. These connections are echoed in

12-13. The *Templer Altarpiece* was commissioned by John Schelp for the Antoniter-Präzeptorei and is now in the Staatliches Museum, Schwerin, Germany. Baert, *Heritage*, 216-226, figures 47c, d.

⁷⁰ Cf. Carr, "Holy Icons," 315-316.

⁷¹ See Gary Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 65-86, esp. 84-85. Compare the presence of similar doctor saints at the Panagia tou Chalkeon, Thessaloniki, Greece, c. 1028, also intended as a burial chapel. Gerstel, *Beholding*, 80-82.

⁷² Georgios A. Soteriou, *Ta Byzantina Mνημεια της Κυπρου* (Athens: Akademia Athenon, 1935), 1: Pl. 76. See also Stylianou and Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, 398. The frescoed cave chapel is dated after 1442. Similarly, Latin tomb monuments on Cyprus commonly take the form of a gabled *arcosolium* in which was placed a sarcophagus with relief sculpture. Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 366-372, figure 332; and Le Pogam, "L'art funéraire," 244, figure 3.

⁷³ Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, 80-81, cat. 39. The position of SS. Cosmas and Damian parallels the placement of SS. Constantine and Helena on a comparable twelfth-century *staurotheke* in the Louvre. Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, 398-399, cat. 264.

monumental church painting on the island of Cyprus, albeit of a much later date. On the north wall of the church of Stavros tou Agiasmati, Platanistasa, c.1494-1500, an arched niche displays a narrative cycle of the Legend of the True Cross flanked by depictions of SS. Panteleimon and John Lampadistis.⁷⁴ Similarly, a narrative cycle of the Legend appears at the church of Timios Stavros, Kyperounda dated 1521 in which SS. Cosmas and Damian are depicted below the right arm of a painted representation of the True Cross.⁷⁵



Figure 10: St. Damian, c.1361-2, fresco, north wall, Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Cyprus (Photo: author).

The recurring reference to the True Cross in Pyrga's decoration is most strongly suggested by the presence of another figure. In the frescoes, SS. Cosmas and Damian join an additional ten standing saints, each with a raised plaster halo, that appear on the lateral walls of the east half of the chapel. Eight are nearly life-size, while those closest to the east wall are diminutive in comparison. The accompanying inscriptions are, for the most part, absent or illegible. On the south wall, reading right to left (eastward), three figures are recognizable as Western bishops: the first by his red chasuble alone, the second and third by their red chasubles, miters, and palliums. Their counterparts on the north wall, reading eastward are three Eastern bishop saints: the first wears a gold *sticharion* (alb), black *epitrachelion* (stole) and

⁷⁴ Stylianou and Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, 186-218.

⁷⁵ Stylianou and Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, 219-222.

reddish-brown *phelonion* (chasuble) and holds a crozier, while the second wears similar dark monastic/episcopal garb and holds a crozier and a manuscript, the third, a metropolitan bishop, wears a red patterned *phelonion* and *omophorion* (pallium) (Figure 11).⁷⁶ On the south wall, the row continues eastward with what seems to be a female saint wearing a white maphorion over a blue and gold robe. The figure's pendant on the north wall wears Byzantine imperial garb. A highly damaged (north wall) and destroyed (south wall) pair of saints follows, both of whom are depicted as half the size of the previous eight saints due to the placement of storage niches lower on the walls beneath them.⁷⁷ The final pair of saints, located beneath the corbels of the easternmost transverse rib, is even smaller and identified by surviving inscriptions—St. Damian on the north wall and St. Cosmas, his brother and companion in life, in the corresponding position on the south wall.



Figure 11: Saints, c.1361-2, fresco, north wall, Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Cyprus (Photo: author)

The figure fourth from the left on the north wall—preserved from its upper waist to lower legs—may be partially identified by its elaborate imperial Byzantine costume—a deep red robe worn with a gold *loros* (Figure 12). The arrangement of the *loros*, in which the horizontal sash rises to fold and partially cover the figure's left hand, allows for the lining to be

⁷⁶ Cf. Wollesen, *Patrons*, 66, 76.

⁷⁷ Cf. Wollesen, *Patrons*, 76. Wollesen stakes much of his contextual argument for the chapel on Franciscan devotional practices and identifies this figure on the north wall as St. Francis. Though poorly preserved, the chief color of the figure's robe is gold with red highlights, not "brown" as Wollesen indicates. So too, the red coloration around the figure's head that extends to its shoulder more closely resembles a maphorion. Cf. the maphorion worn by St. Irene in the narthex of Asinou (Carr and Nicolaïdès, *Asinou*, 164, figure 5.34).

seen—an elaborate black on white textile, the framed roundel pattern of which has its closest analogues in aristocratic Eastern fashion of the fourteenth century.⁷⁸ The lining is the same pattern worn by the figure of the Archangel Michael on the south wall at Pyrga, but the apparent absence of wings on the saint on the north wall suggests an earthly identity for that figure.

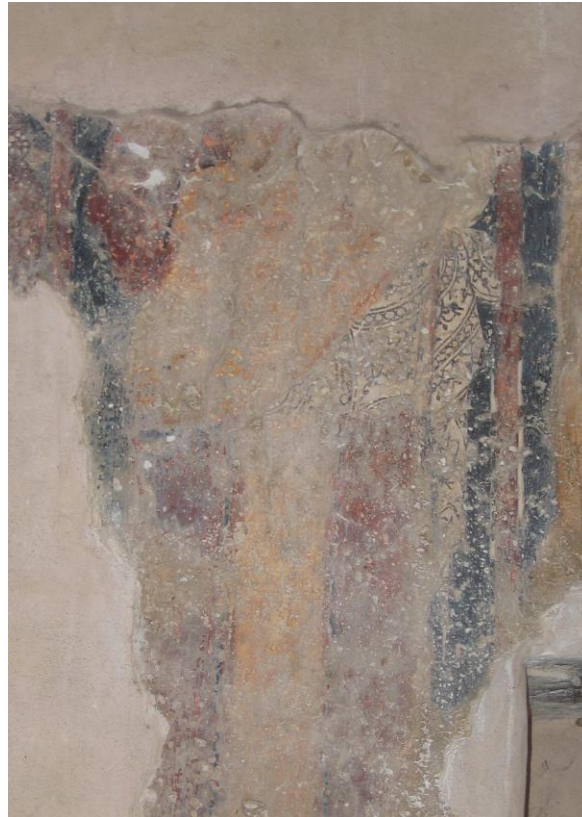


Figure 12: Imperial Figure (St. Helena?), detail, c.1361-2, fresco, north wall, Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Cyprus (Photo: author).

A previously overlooked iconographic feature may further narrow down the figure's identity—a large white orb held in the figure's left hand. An orb, often surmounted by or decorated with

⁷⁸Cf. a fresco of the Serbian royal family, early fourteenth century, Orthodox Patriarchal Church, Pec, Serbia and Montenegro (Evans, ed., *Byzantium*, 393, figure 12.6). A comparison may be made between the Pyrga figure and that of Anna of Savoy (1306-65), wife of Andronikos III Palaiologos (Stuttgart Württembergische Landesbibliothek, cod. hist. 2° 601, 4r). Iohannis Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), figure 181. The pattern of repeating roundels had been a staple of Byzantine imperial garb from an early date, but seems to make a resurgence from the thirteenth century onward. See Evans, *Byzantium*, 26-27, cat. 2, portrait of Alexios Apokaukos, c. 1338 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, cod. grec 2144, f. 11r). The gender of the figure at Pyrga cannot be determined from the lack of a *thorakion*, as it had gone out of imperial female fashion by the thirteenth century. Wipertus H. Rudt de Collenberg, "Le thorakion. Recherches iconographiques," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 83 (1971): 263-361.

a cross design or inscription, is part of the regalia of Christian emperors and empresses from an early date. Its form represents the triumph of Christianity and Christ's world dominion as upheld by his earthly, secular representatives. There is one Byzantine imperial figure that is featured alone with an orb in three other examples of fourteenth-century Cypriot church art—St. Helena.⁷⁹ As at Pyrga, these surviving examples locate her adjacent to or in the sanctuary of a church, and perhaps Helena's association with Bishop Macarius of Jerusalem could account for her placement adjacent to Orthodox bishop saints in the program at Pyrga. Helena's veneration ultimately depends on her role in the Legend of the True Cross—most popularly disseminated in Latin circles through Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* of the mid-thirteenth century.⁸⁰ Indeed, it has been suggested that the image of an isolated Helena is directly related to the cult of the True Cross vis-à-vis her image, now destroyed, attested to in the twelfth-century mosaic program of the Calvary Chapel at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.⁸¹ However, images of the empress appearing alongside her son, the emperor Constantine, existed as early as the fourth century, though the standard iconography of the pair flanking the True Cross seems to be an invention of the post-Iconoclastic period.⁸² The pairing of Constantine and Helena may also relate to the liturgical feast of the Exaltation of the True Cross that is attested to as early as the fourth century in the East and the late seventh century in the West.⁸³ It is not until the late fifteenth century that a cycle of the Legend of the True Cross survives in Cypriot monumental art at the church of Stavros tou Agiasmati, Platanistasa, c. 1494-1500.⁸⁴ The narrative of the Legend was clearly influenced by Western artistic examples; prior to that time, an iconic pairing of SS. Constantine and Helena flanking the True Cross would have brought to mind the Legend, as well as the liturgical feast of the Elevation (14 September in the Orthodox calendar).⁸⁵ The image of Constantine and Helena flanking the True Cross was

⁷⁹ Naoi, Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou, thirteenth-fourteenth century (Carr and Nicolaïdès, *Asinou*, 240-241, figure 6.17; and Sacopoulo, *Asinou*, 91-93). Apse, Carmelite Church, Famagusta, 1350-1370 (Paschali, "Crusader Ideology," 135-137, figure 3; Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 271) and west wall, Armenian Church, Famagusta, fourteenth century (Michael J.K. Walsh, *The Armenian Church of Famagusta and the Complexity of Cypriot Heritage: Prayers Long Silent* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 111, figure 4.6; and Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 288). Paschali attributes the appearance of an isolated image of Helena to a Western sensibility, though the image at Asinou suggests perhaps a shared Cypriot understanding of the empress amongst Latin and Greek patrons.

⁸⁰ On the early development of Helena and her legend, see Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (New York: Brill, 1992).

⁸¹ Paschali, "Crusader Ideology," 137, ns. 6-7; and Folda, *Art of the Crusaders*, 234-239.

⁸² The earliest example may be the mosaic fragments dated to the 870s in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople. See Natalia Teteriatnikov, "The True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena: A Study in the Light of the Post Iconoclastic Re-Evaluation of the Cross," *Δελτιον της Χριστιανικης Αρχαιολογικης Εταιρειας* 18 (1995): 169-188. Cf. Christopher Walter, *The Iconography of Constantine the Great, Emperor and Saint* (Leiden: Alexandros Press, 2006), 35-52. Wollesen incorrectly identifies the figure as a military saint. Wollesen, *Patrons*, 76.

⁸³ Louis van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross: Toward the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2000), 17-73.

⁸⁴ Stylianou and Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, 186-218. Paschali mentions that that Helena's image in the Carmelite church in Famagusta may have resembled a *vita* icon with scenes from the Legend. Paschali, "Crusader Ideology," 136, n. 4.

⁸⁵ Stylianou and Stylianou suggest that the image of the Elevation (*Hypsosis*) in the Legend cycle painted in the church of Timios Stavros, Kyperounda, 1521, was likely inspired by the former liturgy of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople that was itself inspired by the actions of St. Macarius in Jerusalem when he recognized the veracity

widespread in the Byzantine world, and it became a particular choice in Orthodox church decoration in medieval Cyprus. The image appears in a least two Cypriot contexts of the twelfth century both of which may have had a funerary function.⁸⁶

The True Cross, Cyprus, and the Lusignan Dynasty

The pictorial references to the True Cross at Pyrga are not merely a casual manifestation of a medieval iconographic trope. Instead, they are deliberate additions to the program that reflect Lusignan royal prerogative and historical actuality. A full narrative of Helena's finding of the True Cross and her intimate association with Cyprus appear together in a somewhat late account—Leontios Machairas's history of the island written in the fifteenth century.⁸⁷ He relates that Helena stopped at the port of Limassol on route to Jerusalem and again landed there on her return home in 327. Then, in a dream, a young man told Helena to build churches on the island to be dedicated to and founded upon the relics that she had brought from the Holy Land. The two monasteries were located on Mount Olympos (Stavrovouni) and at Tochni; the narrative states that the smaller fragments of Christ's Cross—the *suppedaneum* or footrest—were joined in some way with the crosses of the Good and Bad Thieves.⁸⁸ Medieval pilgrims attest to both Helena's association with the island, as well as early and recurring actions attributed to the cross relics including their ability to float in the air, affect healing, and banish malignant spirits.⁸⁹

Machairas's account of St. Helena and the relics connects with a series of events that took place on Cyprus in the first half of the fourteenth century and in which the Lusignan royal dynasty of Cyprus was very much involved.⁹⁰ In 1318, one of the fragments was stolen from the Orthodox monastery at Tochni by a Latin priest named John Santamarin, who then attempted to flee the island but was turned back by a violent storm. Perhaps afraid of its power, he stripped the relic of its begemmed decoration and discarded the wooden relic in a tree. A young Greek slave named George who had a vision leading him to its hidden location rediscovered it years later in 1340. The relic identified itself immediately as the relic of the True

of the relic. Stylianou and Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, 219-222, figure 128. Cf. Baert, *Heritage*, 142-143, figure 26 for a tenth-century version of the scene in the Menologion of Basil II (Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica, cod. gr. 1613, fol. 35).

⁸⁶ See Teteriatnikov, "True Cross," 180-182. The frescoes are in the Hermitage of St. Neophytos adjacent to an image of the Deposition (Mango and Hawkins, "Hermitage," 151, 159, figure 35) and in the *naos* of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou adjacent to an image of the Dormition and the commemorative inscription recording the foundation of the church in 1105-1106 (Carr and Nicolaïdès, *Asinou*, 30, 53, 236, figure 6.15).

⁸⁷ Leontios Machairas, *Recital Concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus, Entitled "Chronicle,"* ed. and trans. Richard M. Dawkins (New York: AMS Press, 1980 [1932]), 1:§4-8. Cf. John Hackett, *A History of the Orthodox Church in Cyprus* (London: Methuen, 1901), 433-435; Simos Menardos, "Η αγία Ελενη εις την Κυπρον," *Λαογραφία* 2 (1910): 266-298.

⁸⁸ The matter of division, allocation and placement is rather difficult to unravel. In the fifteenth century, Machairas (*Recital*, 1:§67) records that Stavrovouni held the "Great Cross" and Tochni, the "Little Cross".

⁸⁹ C.W. Wilson, ed., "The Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel in the Holy Land, 1106-1107 A.D.," *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society* 4 (1888): 8; and Denys Pringle, "Wilbrand of Oldenburg's Journey to Syria, Lesser Armenia, Cyprus and the Holy Land (1211-12): A New Edition," *Crusades* 11 (2012): 109-137.

⁹⁰ Machairas, *Recital*, 1: §67-74. Cf. Carr, "Holy Icons," 313-315.

Cross by working healing miracles on twelve Greek Cypriots, and as a result of this the local Latin bishop appropriated the cross from the slave George and brought it to King Hugh IV. However, after a dream of ill omen, Hugh returned the relic to George.⁹¹

Machairas's account includes a description of the tensions between indigenous Greek and foreign Latin populations, fueled by Latin clergy and their dismissal of Orthodox belief in miraculous imagery and relics:

And because the Latins envy the Greeks, they hide the miracles that are worked by the icons and by the pieces of the Holy Wood in the churches of the Greeks: not because they disbelieve, but because they are envious. For this reason, the Latin churchmen used to say that the Cross is not of the Holy Wood, but the miracles are worked by craft.⁹²

Such skepticism and bias eventually led one Latin cleric to order a test of authenticity on the cross relic in question. It was subjected to fire, and when it was removed from the fire unscathed a miracle occurred in which the wife of Hugh IV, Queen Alix d'Ibelin—whose stroke-like symptoms had denied her of the ability to speak clearly for three years—proclaimed with a free tongue “Men of unbelief! I believe, O Lord, that this Cross here is of the wood of the Cross upon which Christ the Son of God was hanged, who was crucified for us.”⁹³

As a direct result of the Queen's recovery, her aunt—advised by the monk Gabriel (the former slave, George) and with King Hugh's permission—founded a church outside of Nicosia dedicated to the “Cross made Manifest.” The church became the centerpiece of a Greek monastic complex ordered by Queen Alix, who paid for the architecture and furnished it with icons, liturgical vessels, and books.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Ignatios II, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, took the relic and placed it—with the relics of many saints—inside a larger cross constructed of walnut wood with the intent that “when there is a plague...they shall make a procession and bring out the cross, which is called the Cross made Manifest...and God will remove His wrath....”⁹⁵ Earlier in his historical account, Machairas relates that the selfsame Ignatios once advised King Hugh IV to have an icon of three saints painted and given to the village of Palokythro to save them from a plague of locusts.⁹⁶ In this process of cultural symbiosis, Latin royalty adopt the Greek Orthodox tradition of icon veneration, yet this is attested to earlier in the Lusignan period in elite Latin-sponsored icon painting and decoration in Greek churches.⁹⁷ However, the Lusignans were particularly interested in venerable and

⁹¹ Machairas, *Recital*, 1:§71.

⁹² Machairas, *Recital*, 1:§72.

⁹³ Machairas, *Recital*, 1:§74.

⁹⁴ On the foundation, see Machairas, *Recital*, 1:§75-76.

⁹⁵ Machairas, *Recital*, 1:§77.

⁹⁶ Machairas, *Recital*, 1:§40.

⁹⁷ Cf. Carr “Art,” 317-319. For instance, the thirteenth-century icon of St. Nicholas with Latin donors from the Monastery of St. Nicholas tes Steges and the fourteenth-century frescoes in the narthex at the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou. Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium*, 397-398, cat. 263; Jaroslav Folda, “Crusader Art in the Kingdom of Cyprus, c. 1275-1291: Reflections on the State of the Question,” in *Cyprus and the Crusades: Papers Given at the International Conference “Cyprus and the Crusades,” Nicosia, 1994*, ed. N. Coureas and J. Riley-Smith, (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre/Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East, 1995), 219; and Carr and Nicolaïdēs, *Asinou*, 122-131.

formerly Orthodox-held *palladia*, such as the relic of the True Cross, to which miraculous events had been attributed. The Lusignan acquisition and *imprimatur* of miracle-working objects to affect their cause—in this case healing of royal illness—is first noted in the events of 1340. During the reign of Hugh's son, Peter I (r. 1359-69), the cause was expanded to include military conquest—a miracle-working icon of the Virgin at Korykos (Gorhigos), Cilicia, was responsible for protecting the occupying Frankish troops in 1360, and another miracle-working icon of the Virgin from Myra in Lycia was brought to Famagusta in 1362.⁹⁸ The Royal Chapel at Pyrga, given the argument for redating it to this exact period, may be reevaluated within the context of these formerly Greek *apotropaia* and Lusignan royal prerogatives. It is worth noting that Stavrovouni, the Mountain of the Cross with its monastery founded and relics left by Helena, looms over the chapel at Pyrga, which is only one mile to the northwest as the proverbial crow flies.⁹⁹ Not only are the Latin royal couple displayed *in the presence* of a representation of the True Cross in the frescoes, they have taken the programmatic place of Constantine and Helena with the relic so common in Cypriot Orthodox church decoration.¹⁰⁰ The image of the isolated St. Helena on the north wall takes on a reflexive relationship with the royal portraits in reference to their intimate connection with the relic of holy wood beginning in 1340.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Machairas, *Recital*, 2:§114-115, §127; Carr, "Holy Icons," 317-319.

⁹⁹ Stavrovouni was given into the care of the Benedictine order in the mid-thirteenth century. Chris Schabel, "Religion," in *Cyprus: Society and Culture*, 188-189, 212-214. Pyrga is located just off the main road linking the capital, Nicosia, with the southern ports of Limassol. The site is historically obscure, receiving only one possible mention in the fifteenth-century chronicle of Machairas, where it is recorded that Janus de Lusignan passed through "Pyria" in 1426 en route to Khirokitia to meet the Mameluke invasion. Machairas, *Recital*, 2:§674.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. A tenth-century Byzantine ivory triptych with diminutive figures of Constantine and Helena at the base of the cross. Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des Médailles. Teteriatnikov, "True Cross," 185-186, figure 17 (Note: the figure label is incorrect).

¹⁰¹ The ruinous state of the frescoed Imperial figure will always defy definitive identification. However, considering it is an Imperial figure holding an orb, there are only two alternatives that deserve consideration. The first would be Constantine himself, though there are no similar isolated images of the emperor in Cypriot contexts, and he was not revered as a saint in the Latin church. Paschali, "Crusader Ideology," 136. The other possibility is St. Catherine of Alexandria. Folda states that "(t)he orb and loros is Crusader iconography for Catherine, essentially found only in Crusader icons." Folda, *Crusader Art*, 338. Nancy Sevcenko suggests Catherine's imperial garb can be traced to the tenth century and the rewriting of her vita by Symeon Metaphrastes. Nancy P. Sevcenko, "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine," in *The Celebration of the Saints in Byzantine Art and Liturgy*, ed. Nancy P. Sevcenko (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 7. Catherine also appears in imperial garb in the eleventh-century mosaics at Hosios Loukas in a grouping of female saints pendant to a depiction of Constantine and Helena with the True Cross. Connor, "Female Saints," 229, figs 1-2. In a diptych of St. Prokopios and the Virgin Kykkostissa, St. Catherine (with orb and imperial garb) appears in the lower frame of the right wing flanked by Constantine and Helena, late thirteenth century (Evans, ed., *Byzantium*, 355-356, cat. 214; and Carr, "Art," 306-307). On Catherine's connection with the island of Cyprus, see Lorenzo Calvelli, "Cypriot Origins, Constantinian Blood: The Legend of the Young Saint Catherine of Alexandria," in *Identity/Identities in Late Medieval Cyprus Papers given at the ICS Byzantine Colloquium, London, 13-14 June 2011*, eds. Nicholas Coureas and Jonathan S.C. Riley-Smith (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2014), 361-390.

The Patrons of the Royal Chapel at Pyrga

However, it remains to be determined who the royal patrons depicted at Pyrga actually were. One final piece of evidence in the decoration may provide the answer. Unlike the other contemporary figures in the chapel, the Latin bishop who appears at the side of the Virgin's bier in the Dormition is, in fact, labeled by name in Gothic uncial—GUI.¹⁰² Gui does not correspond to the name of any Cypriot bishop known to be active during the reign of Janus and Charlotte in the early fifteenth century.¹⁰³ There are, however, two Latin bishops from Lusignan Cyprus with the name of Gui, both of the d'Ibelin family: one at Famagusta (d. 1308), the other at Limassol (d. 1367).¹⁰⁴ Given the evidence, the second Bishop Gui d'Ibelin of Limassol is the most likely candidate for inclusion in the decoration given the argument above that supports a mid-fourteenth century date for the chapel's decoration. He rose to the status of bishop of Limassol in 1357 during the final years of the reign of King Hugh IV. His appearance in a Lusignan royal foundation is all the more plausible in that he came from the prominent Outremer d'Ibelin family who had on numerous occasions intermarried with the Lusignan kings and held positions of high rank within the Cypriot court.¹⁰⁵ On 24 November 1358, Bishop Gui crowned Peter I de Lusignan as king of Cyprus at the cathedral of St. Sophia in Nicosia.¹⁰⁶ Given Gui's dates as bishop of Limassol, the chapel at Pyrga was likely constructed between the years 1357-67. But what specific event, if any, would have prompted the foundation of a chapel with such complex associations during this period?

The themes of prayer and intercession, the allusion to sickness and death, the penitential context of pilgrimage, and the Cypriot royal prerogative to cite and invoke the efficacious nature of relics of the True Cross point to a single event in this period of Cypriot history—an outbreak of plague on Cyprus in the years 1361-62. In a fascinating twist of history, we actually know more about this particular outbreak than its more famous and devastating predecessor in the years 1347-49 during which half of the island's population perished.¹⁰⁷ Our knowledge of the events of 1361-62 is recorded in the biography of Peter Thomas that was penned by King Peter's royal chancellor Philippe de Mézières.¹⁰⁸ Peter Thomas, the Papal Legate to the East and Bishop of Patti and Lipari, arrived on Cyprus 8

¹⁰² Wollesen makes an egregious and unfortunate oversight by misreading the name as a fragment. Wollesen, *Patrons*, 71, 107-108. He also suggests that the bishop is the same in both the Lamentation and Dormition scenes and that said bishop is the "co-patron" of the chapel.

¹⁰³ Hackett, *History*, 536-588.

¹⁰⁴ Hackett, *History*, 573, 579. On the latter, see Jean Richard, "Un évêque d'orient latin au XIV^e siècle, Guy d'Ibelin, O. P., Évêque de Limassol et l'inventaire de ses biens," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 74 (1950): 98-133. The possible confusion between the individuals Guy de Giblet and Guy d'Ibelin in Machairas's account of Cyprus does not signify in this case. Machairas, *Recital*, 2:§90, n. 1.

¹⁰⁵ On the family in general, see P. W. Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁶ Machairas, *Recital*, 2:§90.

¹⁰⁷ Machairas devotes only one sentence to the so-called "Black Death" of 1348. Machairas, *Recital*, 1:§66.

¹⁰⁸ Philippe de Mézières, *The Life of Saint Peter Thomas*, ed. Joachim Smet (Rome: Institutum Carmelitanum, 1954), 97-101. Other sources record a plague in 1363, though it is likely an outbreak in addition to that of 1361-62. Machairas, *Recital*, 1:§135. See also Frederick J. Boehlke, Jr., *Pierre de Thomas. Scholar, Diplomat, and Crusader* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 181-203; and Schabel, "Religion," 157-158.

December 1359 and immediately became a close confidant of the king. Indeed, Peter Thomas presided at Peter's coronation as King of Jerusalem in Famagusta, 5 April 1360.¹⁰⁹

The royal response to the plague was deeply influenced by this newcomer to the Cypriot court. According to Philippe de Mézières, Peter Thomas orchestrated mass penitential acts in 1362 as means of ridding the island of plague—what he termed the “scourge of God.”¹¹⁰ In addition to fiery public masses and sermons that preached repentance for sin, he directed the royal court to fast on bread and water, and process barefoot wearing simple garments through the capital of Nicosia.¹¹¹ Upon arrival at the cathedral, the citizens of Nicosia fell upon their knees before an image of the Crucifixion of Christ, and all present began to cry and beg mercy from Heaven as they listened to the legate's sermon.¹¹² Afterward, Peter Thomas went on to the chief port city of Famagusta—that “*fornace pestilentiae et mortalitatis*.”¹¹³ In recalling the events there, Philippe de Mézières states that the tears of the people, the legate's prayers, and God's mercy caused the pestilence to recede from the island. As such, we may have a personality for the image of the Latin bishop shown in the scene of the Lamentation. Given his key role in saving the island, it is only fitting that Peter Thomas be displayed on the main wall of the chapel adjacent to the Lusignan royal couple.

I contend that King Peter I de Lusignan had the chapel at Pyrga built and decorated within the context of these events. In the frescoes, the royal couple and the two contemporary Latin bishops are depicted as intercessors through their close physical connection with the figures of Christ and the Virgin. The artistic display is a visual parallel to the role of king and clergy as intercessors in the public rituals that took place in Nicosia and Famagusta in 1362. The Cypriot (rather than European) nature of its decoration—perhaps even to be seen in the pendant pairings of Greek and Latin bishop saints—speaks to the shared experience of the plague despite cultural differences. The possibility of Peter I as patron at Pyrga seems all the more likely given the events that followed. He left the island for Europe in October of that year to rouse the West into joining him on a new Crusade.¹¹⁴ According to Guillaume de Machaut, in his poetic history of Peter's Crusade titled *La Prise d'Alixandre* composed after 1369, the king was inspired to take the cross while praying before the miraculous relic at

¹⁰⁹ De Mézières, *Life*, 91-2. Machairas, *Recital*, 2:§104.

¹¹⁰ “flagellum Domini”. De Mézières, *Life*, 97.

¹¹¹ Cf. Michael E. Goodich, *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1-24.

¹¹² De Mézières, *Life*, 98. “*Et ecce legatus pontificalibus indutus, cum omni clero et diversarum nationum Christianorum associatus, omnibus nudis pedibus, cum processione in ecclesia obviam regi ivit, et congregantes insimul coram crucifixo, omnibus genibus flexis...*”

¹¹³ De Mézières, *Life*, 99.

¹¹⁴ Peter W. Edbury, “The Crusading Policy of King Peter I of Cyprus, 1359–1369,” in *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades*, ed. P.M. Holt (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1977), 90-105; and Peter W. Edbury, “Machaut, Mézières, Makhairas and *Amadi*: Constructing the Reign of Peter I (1359-1369),” in *Philippe de Mézières and His Age: Piety and Politics in The Fourteenth Century*, eds. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kiril Petkov (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 349-358. On Peter Thomas's role in the Crusading ambitions of Peter I, see Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Phillippe de Mézières's Life of Saint Pierre de Thomas at the Crossroads of Late Medieval Hagiography and Crusading Ideology,” *Viator* 40, no. 1 (January 2009): 223-248.

Stavrovouni on Good Friday.¹¹⁵ In the Cloister relief mentioned above, the juxtaposition of scenes from the Legend of the True Cross with a scene of the Crucifixion, in which the male donor is depicted in armor, resonates with Peter's call to Crusade during his visit to the West. So too, it is suggestive of the potential Crusader/pilgrimage sensibility invoked by the presence of Cyprus's king and queen in the Crucifixion image at Pyrga—a vicarious reality of the ultimate Crusader *locus sanctus* of Calvary. The efficacy of the True Cross, now wielded and invoked by the Latin rulers and Church on the island, is brought to mind by the king and queen's proximity to Christ's salvific death and resurrection—the events that empowered the relics Helena brought to the island. The immediate physical context of the Royal Chapel remains unclear. Enlart attests to remains in the area that suggest it was part of a larger architectural complex, though there has been no systematic archaeological investigation of the area to date.¹¹⁶ Still, the Royal Chapel's location beneath Stavrovouni and its powerful relics—co-opted by the Lusignans—in addition to the emphatic quotation of indigenous Cypriot traditions of art and legend, make for a compelling visual statement of a particular time and place in the history of the island.

¹¹⁵ Guillaume de Machaut, *The Capture of Alexandria*, trans. Janet Shirley (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 24. De Machaut is the only source that records the event, and he imagines it in Famagusta though the reference to "...a cross that stands alone and unsupported on the air. The good thief died on it." at which the king prayed is a clear citation of relic at Stavrovouni.

¹¹⁶ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 327.