

Historical Overview - Step through time in Famagusta

Ottoman Period (1571-1878)

The Ottomans arrived in 1570 and had conquered all of Cyprus by 1571. Nicola Kallitachis was the last ruler of the Lusignan Kingdom. Famagusta was the site of the final battle between the Ottomans and the Lusignans in 1571. Nicola Kallitachis was the last ruler of the Lusignan Kingdom. Famagusta was the site of the final battle between the Ottomans and the Lusignans in 1571.

Byzantine Period (AD 324-1191)

Amochostos, which means "buried in the sand" in Greek, is first mentioned as a place name in the 7th century. Although the material evidence is lacking, it seems likely that the island's only natural deep-water harbor—the area of Famagusta—would have been a fishing port of the eastern coast. No monuments or churches from this early period survive. However, the small, much-altered Franco-Byzantine church known as St. Symeon Chapel possibly stands on earlier foundations dating to the Byzantine period.

Early Frankish Period (1191-1192)

Latin rule in Cyprus begins in 1191 with the arrival on the island of England's Richard I (1157-1199), better known as the Lionheart. As the story goes, Richard was traveling by sea to the Holy Land during the Third Crusade when the ship of his younger sister Joan and fiancé, Brevintia of Navarre, was forced ashore by a storm. Smothered and harassed by the island's self-appointed ruler, Isaac Cornutus, Richard famously came to their rescue, defeating the rogue emperor in a near-bloodless battle and conquering the island.

Lusignan Kingdom (1192-1489)

The island was then sold to the French Crusader Guy de Lusignan, former King of Jerusalem. With Guy's death in 1194, his older brother and successor Aimery was quick to secure the legitimacy of his reign. A Latin Catholic hierarchy was installed over the Greek Orthodox Church and an archbishop was installed in Nicosia with bishops in Paphos, Limassol and Famagusta. Aimery was then crowned as the first ruling monarch of the new Kingdom of Cyprus.

British Colonial Rule (1878-1960)

The history of modern Cyprus begins in 1878, the year the Ottomans gave the island over to British control as a diplomatic move in exchange for their support against Russian encroachment in eastern Anatolia. The island was officially annexed in 1914, becoming a Crown Colony in 1925. The modern period brought important social changes, such as improved health and welfare, an increase in life expectancy, and new opportunities for education. However, it is a matter of opinion as to whether historic Famagusta benefited in any way from British investments in reviving the city's ancient harbor—indeed turning it into a modern industrial port—and constructing Cyprus' first railway linking Famagusta to Nicosia and Morphou. Sadly, the railway was short-lived and industrialization meant dramatic alterations needed to be made to Famagusta's medieval fabric. A number of new gates were cut through the ancient walls in order to access the port and accommodate traffic. Ancient and medieval stonework—which had been piled up around the town since the Ottomans had taken over 300 years before—was collected and shipped off to Egypt to be used in the construction of the Suez Canal. Britain's principal concern and interest in the region, indeed, a vast quantity of already cut stones, as well as precious marbles were looted from the island during this period, including the first antiquities laws protecting Cyprus' fragile cultural heritage.

In 1960, Cyprus became an independent state.

Early History

Built on or near the settlement known in antiquity as Astinoo, the small fishing village that became Famagusta may have been founded by Phoenician Philadelphus of Egypt around 285 BC.

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Walking Tour of Famagusta



Famagusta

Explore an outdoor museum...



Famagusta

Explore an outdoor museum...



Appreciating Cyprus' multicultural past is one way of ensuring a more peaceful future. This brochure was developed to highlight Famagusta's unique place in the region's history and to increase the awareness of residents and visitors alike regarding the importance of preserving its rich cultural heritage for future generations. It was developed by the Supporting Activities that Value the Environment (SAVE) project. SAVE works to build local capacity to better protect and manage Cyprus' cultural and natural resources. SAVE is implemented by International Resources Group (IRG) and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).



www.save-irg.com

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www.save-cyprusheritage.com



Trace the steps of heroes and villains...
Learn the lessons of history...
Explore a multicultural past...



Photos by: William Rensen, Müge Şevketoğlu, Hüseyin Küçüközü, Ahmet Aslier, Patrick Godeau, Hasan Bilgehan, Jaana Loring, Curt Cottle and Allan Langdale.

'It is the richest of all cities and her citizens are the richest of men.'

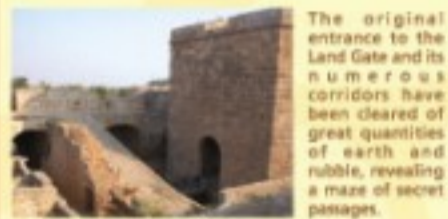
Ludolf von Sudheim, De Terra Sancta, 1336



Famagusta Historic Trail

1. Venetian Fortifications: Land Gate and Ravelin
2. Kızıl Hamam (Scarlet Bath)
3. Kuru Çeşme (Dry Fountain)
4. Nestorian Church
5. Church of St. Anne
6. Tanners' Mosque
7. Carmelite Church
8. Armenian Church
9. Martinengo Bastion
10. Kertikli Hamam (Notched Bath)
11. Diamante Bastion
12. Church of St. Fotu
13. Church of St. George of the Latins
14. Citadel / Othello's Tower
15. Sea Gate
16. Hospital of St. Anthony
17. Canbulat Gate and Bastion
18. Church of St. Zoni
19. Church of St. Nikolaos
20. Church of St. George of the Greeks / Church of St. Symeon
21. St. Nicholas Cathedral / Lala Mustafa Paşa Mosque
22. Namik Kemal Square
23. Venetian House
24. Twin Churches
25. Ağa Cafer Paşa Hamam
26. Franciscan Church & Monastery
27. Venetian Palace
28. Ağa Cafer Paşa Çeşme (Ağa Cafer Paşa Fountain)
29. Namik Kemal Prison & Museum
30. Church of Sts. Peter and Paul
31. Venetian / Chimney House
32. Unknown churches

1. Venetian Fortifications: Land Gate and Ravelin



The Venetian walls and fortifications that surround the historic town are a superlative example of Renaissance military architecture. They were built between 1495-1564, incorporating the existing medieval Lusignan walls and towers, which were dramatically reduced in height, remodeled and strengthened. The great bastion of the Land Gate—also known as Limassol Gate—was one of two original entrances to the walled city (the other, the Sea Gate to the northeast, offers access from the port). It is protected by the impressive ravelin, inside which is a labyrinth of ramps, steps and rooms. The Land Gate was renamed Akkule or the 'White Bastion' by the Ottomans, as it was from here that the Venetians waved the white flag of surrender at the end of the siege of 1570-71.

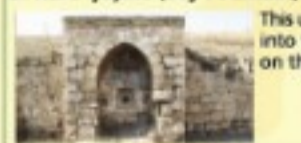
It is said that in 1571, after weeks of battling and tunneling under the walls, the Ottomans finally managed to gain access to the ravelin. The Venetians, determined to withstand the advance, blew up their own secret passage under the walls, burying a thousand Ottoman soldiers in the rubble, as well as 100 of their own men.

Visitor info: The tourist information office is housed in the masjid (Muslims often refer to the mosque by its Arabic name, masjid).

2. Kızıl Hamam (Scarlet Bath)



3. Kuru Çeşme (Dry Fountain)



4. Nestorian Church



The church was built in the mid-14th century and greatly enlarged not long after by the addition of two side aisles and apses to the north and south. Note on the northwest side the rather European-looking belfry arcade. Although structurally enhanced in the 1930s, the church has remained intact throughout the centuries.

The Nestorians of Cyprus arrived after the fall of Acre in 1291 and were mainly merchants. They were reportedly Famagusta's richest class of the time.

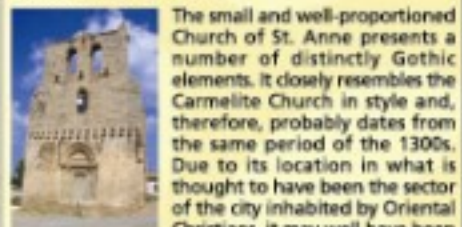
The foundation of this 16th century Ottoman bathhouse, or hamam, are visible to the right at the corner of Suphi Ezel Street, on the way to the Carmelite and Armenian Churches.

This unrestored 17th-century Ottoman fountain is incorporated into the Venetian walling, just down from the Kızıl Hamam on the opposite side of Kuru Çeşme Street.

A short detour off the main road and across the small parking lot to the right, leads to the so-called Nestorian Church. The identification of this building as such is based solely on medieval sources which testify to the extraordinary wealth of the Nestorian merchant community of Famagusta. Syriac inscriptions associated with the church's remaining wall paintings would appear to support this. However, no surviving document directly identifies the edifice as belonging specifically to the Nestorian community.

The building appears to have been little used throughout the Ottoman period which may partly account for its present fine condition. During the British period, the church was given over to the Orthodox community and re-dedicated to St. George the Exiler (Agios Giorgios Exorinos). The celebration of the liturgy was held once a year as was permitted. However, on all other days the medieval building served as a camel barn. Today, it is used as a cultural center.

5. Church of St. Anne



The small and well-proportioned Church of St. Anne presents a number of distinctly Gothic elements. It closely resembles the Carmelite Church in style and, therefore, probably dates from the same period of the 1300s. Due to its location in what is thought to have been the sector of the city inhabited by Oriental Christians, it may well have been a Maronite church. However, it is well documented that there was also a Benedictine nunnery of this name in medieval Famagusta, and so it is also very possible that this is the remains of their church.

6. Tanners' Mosque



This 15th century former church is known today as the Tanners' Mosque. Judging from its location in the Oriental sector, it likely originally belonged to one of the groups of Oriental Christians, such as the Melkites or Jacobites. It was converted into a mosque by the Ottomans. It presents a mixture of local Cypriot Gothic and regional Crusader styles.

7. Carmelite Church



In a field across the road from the Tanners' Mosque are the ruins of the Carmelite Church. It is here that St. Peter Thomas, Patriarch of Constantinople and papal legate to the East, was buried in 1366. Fragments of the church's medieval paintings are still visible, showing, where discernible, Latin rather than Orthodox influences. The earliest sections of the church are believed to date from the second quarter of the 14th century.

8. Armenian Church



Adjacent to the Carmelite Church is the smaller, better preserved Armenian Church. Judging by the style, it appears to date from the 1360s. Fragments of medieval wall paintings survive inside, as do Armenian inscriptions on the exterior walls.

9. Martinengo Bastion



A short walk up the rampart just behind the Armenian Church takes visitors to the top of the Martinengo Bastion. Here one has a sweeping view of the dry moat and modern town.

10. Kertikli Hamam (Notched Bath)



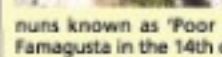
Heading back to town, along Nami Efendi street, one passes through a residential area. The Kertikli Hamam is a 16th-century bathhouse which was built by the Ottomans not long after their arrival. Evidence suggests that it was built on the foundations of a medieval structure. Although ruinous, its six well-proportioned domes are still intact.

11. Diamante Bastion



The Diamante Bastion is situated at the northern corner of the town, where the walls of Famagusta turn to face the sea. Climb here—with caution—for a view of the harbor.

12. Church of St. Fotu



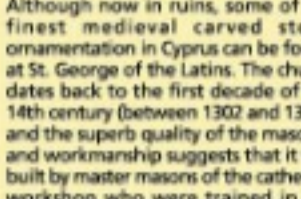
Turkish legend calls this site St. Fotu, a name associated with 'light'. The name suggests a reference to the Church of St. Clare, which was tied to a convent of Franciscan nuns known as 'Poor Clares' which existed in Famagusta in the 14th century.

13. Church of St. George of the Latins



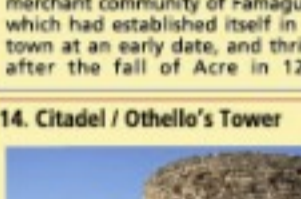
Although now in ruins, some of the finest medieval carved stone ornamentation in Cyprus can be found at St. George of the Latins. The church dates back to the first decade of the 14th century (between 1302 and 1307), and the superb quality of the masonry and workmanship suggests that it was built by master masons of the cathedral workshop who were trained in the Cologne tradition. Note the intricately carved capitals and remains of the church's once elegant vaulting. It is likely that this was a Genoese church, belonging to the influential Genoese merchant community of Famagusta, which had established itself in the town at an early date, and thrived after the fall of Acre in 1291.

14. Citadel / Othello's Tower



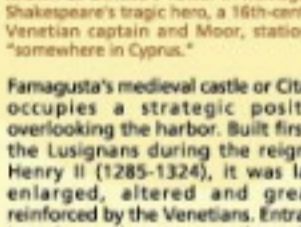
Famagusta's medieval castle or Citadel occupies a strategic position overlooking the harbor. Built first by the Lusignans during the reign of Henry II (1285-1324), it was later enlarged, altered and greatly reinforced by the Venetians. Entrance is at the southwest corner through an arched gate adjacent to what is known today as Othello's Tower, so-named for Shakespeare's tragic hero.

15. Sea Gate



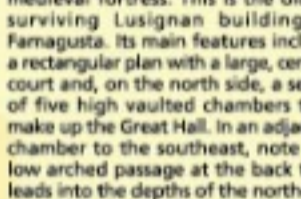
A commemorative plaque dated 1496 and naming the Venetian Captain of Famagusta, Nicola Priolo, decorates the Sea Gate's exterior entrance to the town. The present iron-clad wooden gate is an Ottoman replacement, whereas the heavy iron portcullis, which could be raised and lowered by chains, is original and dates back to the Venetian period.

16. Hospital of St. Anthony



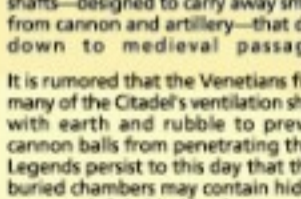
Just south of the Sea Gate and adjacent to the city walls are the remains of the Hospital of St. Anthony. Massive granite columns taken from nearby Salamis can be seen broken and scattered about the grounds.

17. Canbulat Gate and Bastion



This gate is named after Canbulat, the Bey of Kitis, one of the heroes of the Ottoman siege of Famagusta. It houses the hero's entombed remains and has become a place of pilgrimage for modern-day Turks visiting Cyprus. Legend maintains that a fig tree grew up over the tomb, the fruits of which were believed to promote fertility in the women who visited. The gate also houses a small museum with displays of artillery, traditional costumes, Ottoman tiles and Venetian pottery.

18 & 19. Church of St. Zoni & Church of St. Nikolaos



Heading northwest from Canbulat Gate, on the way back to the center of town are two small and closely situated Franco-Byzantine-style churches. To the north are the ruins of St. Nikolaos; to the west is the better-preserved St. Zoni. Both are typical of Orthodox churches built in the later medieval period, incorporating elements of regional Gothic architecture into their otherwise Byzantine forms. Note, for example, the pointed arch of the south door of St. Zoni. Both churches may well stand on earlier foundations, though archaeological evidence confirming this has yet to be uncovered. It is very likely that these sites were abandoned or used for other purposes in Ottoman times, as contemporary authors tell us that Christians were excluded from the walled town during this period. However, the Greek Cathedral and the chapel of St. Symeon continued to be owned by the Greek church.



Be sure to see the marble plaque above the entrance gate to the Citadel. It shows in carved relief the winged lion of St. Mark—symbol of the Venetian Republic—standing adjacent to one of the original Lusignan towers that protected the town prior to the Venetian fortifications. It commemorates 1492, the year the Citadel was enlarged and remodelled and names the then prefect of Famagusta, Nicola Foscarini.

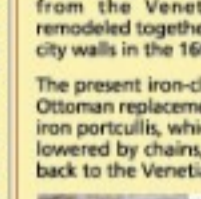
Visitor info: There is a small fee for admission to the site.

20. Church of St. George of the Greeks / Church of St. Symeon



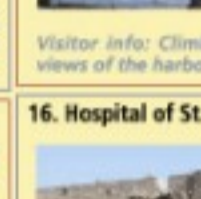
Due to its location, the church was heavily bombed during the siege of 1570-71. Note how the exterior of the apse has been pitted by cannon balls.

21. St. Nicholas Cathedral / Lala Mustafa Paşa Mosque



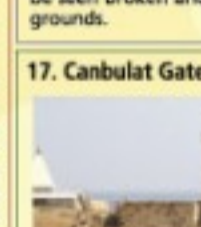
The cathedral marks a departure in style from the plainer and more solid forms of the 13th century that are exemplified by Nicosa Cathedral and Salpaak Abbey Church. It set a decorative and architectural standard of building which was followed throughout the island from the 14th century onward.

22. Namik Kemal Square



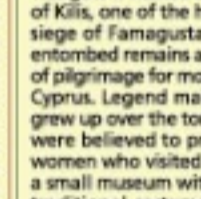
Famagusta's picturesque central square has witnessed much history. Here, during an outbreak of the plague in 1362, the papal legate, Peter Thomas, led his procession of barefooted followers from the cathedral into the town. In 1372, a large number of Genoese were killed in a riot that took place at the coronation of Peter II—an incident that ultimately led to Cyprus' war with Genoa. That same year, St. Bridget cursed first the Latins for their excesses, and then the Greeks for remaining outside the Catholic faith. And in 1571, when the Ottoman general, Lala Mustafa, finally took Famagusta, the Venetian Captain Marcantonio Bragadino was publicly executed in the main square in front of the cathedral.

23. Venetian House



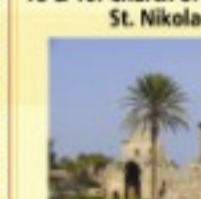
This house is one of the few domestic buildings in Famagusta that retains sections dating from the Venetian period. Its north-facing entrance and facade present a solid and orderly appearance typical of the Italian Renaissance. It has been known in the past as the Queen's house as it is believed that the last Queen of Cyprus, Caterina Cornaro, lived here just prior to her abdication in 1489.

24. Twin Churches



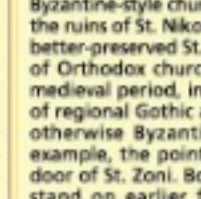
Built unusually side by side, it has been traditionally assumed that these two churches once belonged to the two military orders of the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller. Their identification is based on the singular evidence of a coat of arms—a shield with a cross resembling the heraldic device of the knights of St. John—which has been added above the south door of the smaller of the two buildings. This identification, however, has recently been called into question, as the churches could be assigned to one or more of several Latin nunneries or other churches in the city, or possibly to a private Genoese family.

25. Ağa Cafer Paşa Hamam (Ağa Cafer Paşa Bath)



This early Ottoman hamam was built by Ağa Cafer Paşa in 1601 within the grounds of the Franciscan monastery; the changing-room is part of an earlier medieval building, distinguished from the later construction by a distinctly Frankish cross-vault.

26. Franciscan Church and Monastery

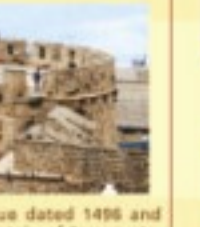


Dating with some certainty from the late 13th century are the ruins of the Franciscan Church, one of the earliest of the Latin ecclesiastical buildings in Famagusta. The site, immediately north of the Venetian Palace, was once a substantial complex of buildings, which together comprised a monastery covering a generous area within the city. The plan of the present church resembles that of the slightly later Carmelites, with its three-sided apse and later added side chapels that extend north and south from the central bay of the nave. Note the medieval stonework piled up outside the west door.

The Franciscans formed one of the oldest and most important Latin religious orders in Cyprus. It is believed that they were already established in Nicosa by about 1230. St. Francis himself visited Cyprus on his voyage to the Holy Land during the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221).

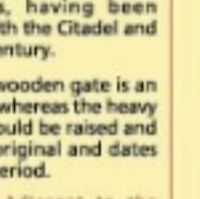
Overall, the church's architecture is simple, yet elegant. Its interior plan consists of a nave with two aisles leading to a central apse and two apsidal chapels. The aisles are divided into five bays each. It appears that this church was already out of use during Venetian times, which is thought to have contributed to its fine state of preservation, having been spared from destruction by the conquering Ottoman militia.

27. Venetian Palace



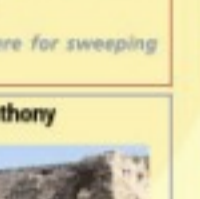
When the building was converted to a mosque, it received the dedication to Lala Mustafa Paşa which is how it is known today.

28. Ağa Cafer Paşa Çeşme (Ağa Cafer Paşa Fountain)



In the northwest corner of the square is an elevated bronze bust of the Turkish poet Namik Kemal. Kemal's patriotic writings became a source of inspiration for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the 20th century leader of the Turkish nationalist movement and founder of the modern republic of Turkey.

29. Namik Kemal Prison & Museum



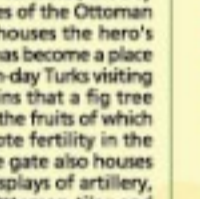
This site is known as both the Venetian House and the Chimney House. Although its exterior walls are Venetian, its interior is distinctly Turkish. Within the spacious courtyard is a renovated Turkish hamam.

30. Church of Sts. Peter & Paul



It is one of the largest, and best preserved of the regional Gothic-style churches in Famagusta, closely resembling the Greek Cathedral in plan, and dating with a high degree of certainty from the same decade of the 14th century (c.1360). The north portal to the nave is clearly from an earlier building, and possesses some positively splendid 13th-century carved stone ornamentation. Although the east-end enclosure wall is contemporary with the church's original construction, the south-wall buttressing appears to have been added at a later date. Two elegantly carved, white marble Ottoman tombs can be found on the building's south side. These are 18th-century.

31. Venetian / Chimney House



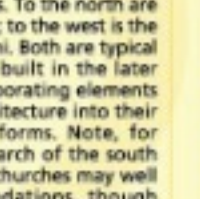
This was the second church after the cathedral to be taken over, becoming the Sinan Paşa Mosque in 1572. In British and more recent times it has been used as a storage depot and even a library.

32. Unnamed Churches



In the 14th century, Famagusta boasted half a dozen Latin nunneries, each of which would have possessed a small Gothic church. Very little is known about these unnamed churches, but it is very probable that one or more are linked to the Cistercian or Benedictine convents that are known to have been active in the city during the medieval period. Beautiful Gothic details still remain, and a quick glance is well worth it.

33. Church of Sts. Peter & Paul



Installed in 1597, Ağa Cafer Paşa was a well-known, 16/17th century Ottoman governor who set out to improve freshwater distribution to the inhabitants of Famagusta. The Roman sarcophagus is thought to have come from Paphos, moved to the palace by the Venetians.

Today, the square is named after the 19th century Turkish poet Namik Kemal (1840-1888), considered by many to be the Shakespeare of Turkish literature.